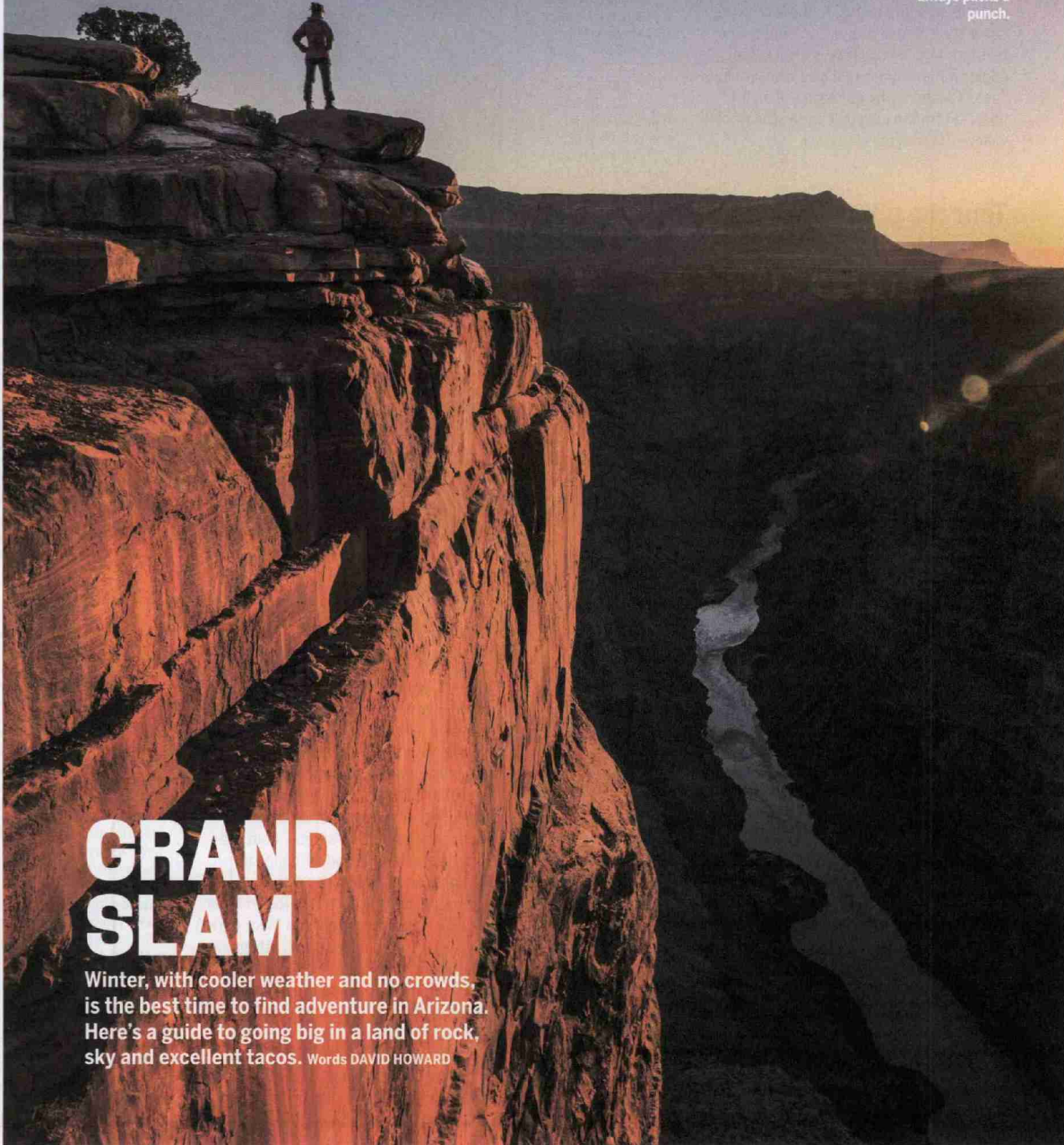


Get it. Do it. See it.

guide

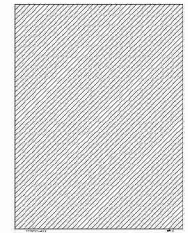
Sunset at the Grand Canyon always packs a punch.



GRAND SLAM

Winter, with cooler weather and no crowds, is the best time to find adventure in Arizona. Here's a guide to going big in a land of rock, sky and excellent tacos. Words DAVID HOWARD

GETTY IMAGES



Do it

PHOENIX IN 24 HOURS

Camelback Mountain doesn't loom in the distance; it's right in the heart of Phoenix. Bag the summit via the **Echo Canyon Trail**, a hike that's part walking, part rock scrambling and is so steep and technical you should figure on two to three hours to cover the 2.5-mile round trip. Bonus: The Instagrammable day hike is ideal in the cooler winter months. "It's so iconic," says Jason Glashan, who guides hikes on the peak. "From the top you can see the whole valley—360 degrees."

Tour the pitch-black desert in night-vision goggles and spy on the nocturnal wildlife.

For an unexpected excursion, kayak the **Lower Salt River** with Arizona Outback Adventures. It's mild Class I water, perfect for scanning the red-rock scenery beyond the lush riverbanks for bald eagles and wild horses. Cap off your day with one of Stellar Adventures' unique sunset excursions: You can buzz the **Sonoran Desert** on a UTV along 25 miles of unmaintained off-road trail and pair it with an astronomer-led stargazing experience. Or take a night-vision tour, driving out into the pitch-black desert wearing night-vision goggles, the better for spying nocturnal wildlife.



The stars in the southern Arizona sky are supernaturally awesome.

STAY Castle Hot

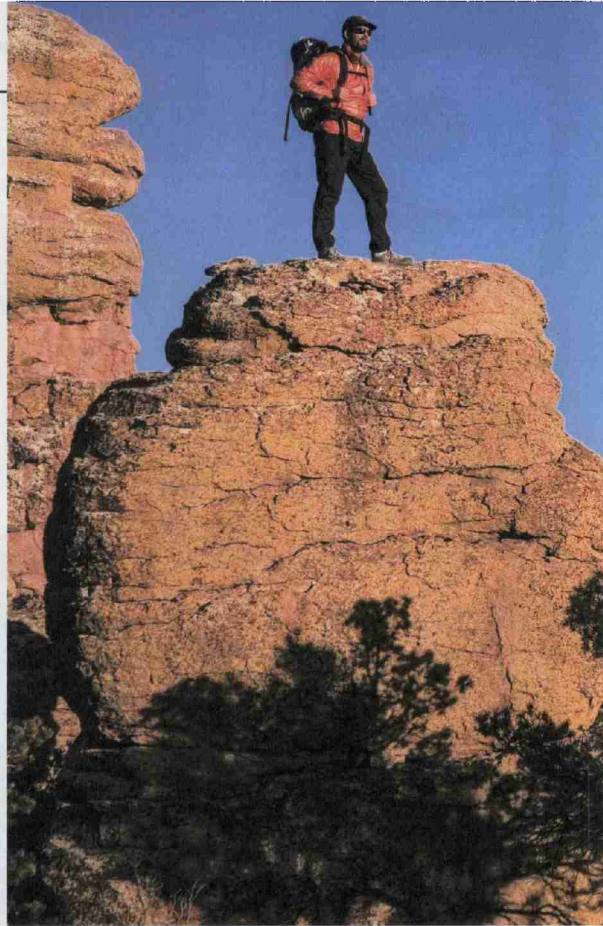
Springs was Arizona's first luxury resort, but a fire destroyed the main lodge in 1976. It just reopened with naturally heated pools and food harvested from its own farm. Or try a vintage Airstream RV at **Schnepf Farms** in nearby Queen Creek.

EAT Starlite BBQ.

a whiskey bar and eatery in Phoenix, offers smoked meats and comfort food like fried mac and cheese. At **Bri**, order slow-roasted duck in chili sauce. **Diego Pops** in Scottsdale is a colorful joint known for charred skirt-steak tacos and Brussels-sprouts nachos.

DRINK

Based out of an old warehouse in Phoenix, the **Black Orchid Jazz Club** is part of a quirky complex called the Duce, with ping-pong and cornhole. Over in Scottsdale, the **Buffalo Chip Saloon** serves brews in a rowdy wild-west experience that includes live bull riding on Wednesday and Friday nights.



TUCSON IN A LONG WEEKEND

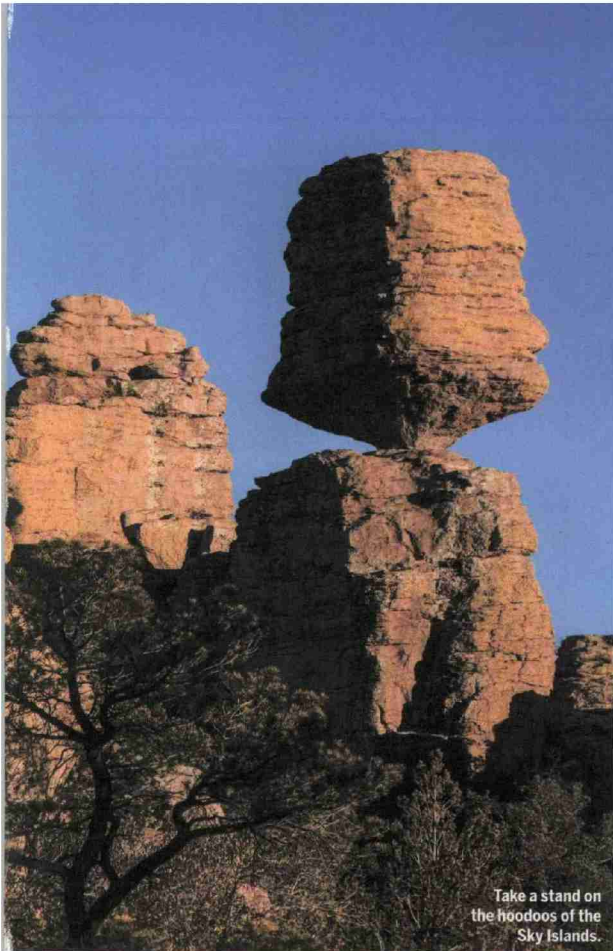
The completion last year of the **Loop Bike Path**—a 131-mile paved route that encircles Tucson—was a game changer for visitors: Now you can rent a bike and explore the city free of cars or traffic lights. It's one more plus for a city already notable for its manageable terrain, good weather and easy access to mountains. Do the Loop in one marathon day or spread it out over a long, leisurely weekend, stopping for overnights and sampling both the neighboring open spaces (the **Rillito River**, **Santa Cruz River** and **Pantano River** parks) and the city's munificent urban attractions.

The access to prime wilderness here is unlike in any other U.S. metropolitan area: **Saguaro National Park's** scenic trails lined with the park's namesake cacti lie just beyond city limits. Set off on the 6.5-mile **Kings Canyon Trail** to the 4,687-foot **Wasson Peak**, the highest in the Tucson Mountains.

STAY

No one will force you to say "glamping" if you stay at the newly opened **Tanque Verde Ranch**. Set on 60,000 acres in the Rincon Mountains and adjacent to Saguaro National Park, the property sports 26 safari-style canvas tents, some with private decks. A luxe option for astronomy nerds: A few nights a week a scientist from the University of Arizona drops by the **Loews Ventana Canyon** with a telescope. The **Hotel Congress** in downtown Tucson is old-world Arizona—it opened in 1919 but it's updated for maximum present-day comfort and hipness, catering to foodies, music fans, and cocktail lovers.

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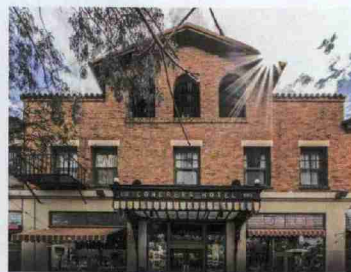


Take a stand on the hoodoos of the Sky Islands.

EAT Prep for tacos! Start with beef at **Tacos Apson**, named for the 1960s-era Mexican garage band Los Apson; the *rasurado* (roasted ribs) will unhinge your taste buds. **El Guero Canelo** started as a tiny taco stand in 1993 and quickly blew up into a Tucson staple.

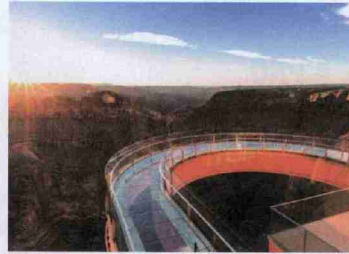
DRINK At **Downtown Kitchen & Cocktails**, order a Oaxacan Dream, made with serrano-infused tequila. **Westbound**, built from shipping containers, has a well-curated craft beer selection and a wine bar. Or order a star-themed cocktail and peer through telescopes at **Sky Bar**, a solar-powered lounge.

For a full-on road trip, head east to the **Chiricahua National Monument**, home to several "sky islands"—so named because they resemble alpine oases dropped in the middle of hardscrabble desert—and hike amid hoodoos, balancing rocks and other oddball geologic formations. En route, check out **The Thing**, an enduring piece of Americana that's part creepy, part comical but entirely perplexing.



Hotel Congress in downtown Tucson.

Arizona



It's fun to gaze into the abyss at the Skywalk.

FLAGSTAFF AND THE GRAND CANYON IN A WEEK

Northern Arizona has some of America's best road-trip terrain. Reason number 4,179 to do it now? It's the 100th birthday of **Grand Canyon National Park**. (The canyon itself, it turns out, is a bit older.) Wintertime is ideal; the crowds are minimal, and you can soak in high-desert afternoon sunshine after a morning of snowboarding.

Wait: Snowboarding? Yup. The **Arizona Snowbowl**, just 15 miles from Flag, offers downhill runs all winter. Or rent a fat bike at **Arizona Nordic Village** and bomb through the powder on two wheels. For something different, tackle the **Extreme Adventure Course**, a labyrinth of treetop rope swings, scrambling walls, hanging nets and unsteady bridges, among other tests of skill. Even in this intensely outdoorsy area, only a quarter of the participants finish the whole course, says owner Paul Kent. "We try to keep it doable, but normal people will have some sore muscles the next day."

Heading north to the **Grand Canyon**, you can either go to the **North Rim** for solitary views and crowd-free hikes or visit the **South Rim** for a more peopled interaction with the picturesque abyss. On the fringes of the latter destination, try the **Skywalk**, a 10-foot-wide horseshoe-shaped glass bridge that juts 70 feet out over the lip of the canyon. The newest way to see it: the **Zipline at Grand Canyon West**, which consists of two "quad" ziplines, with four steel cables running side by side in parallel formation, allowing groups to fly together at speeds approaching 40 mph.

If you have time, tack on a hike at **Tonto Natural Bridge State Park**, where you can walk through what's thought to be the world's biggest natural travertine bridge. The tunnel underneath it is 400 feet long and spans 150 feet at its widest point.

STAY At **Arizona Toy Camper Rental**, rent a tiny trailer that includes a long list of creature comforts. If you're hiking into the Grand Canyon, the historic **Phantom Ranch**, reachable only on foot or by raft or mule ride, is the only lodging below the canyon's rim. The Navajo Hogans at the **Shash Diné Eco-Retreat** have dirt floors and no electricity or running water, but you get nice linens and a breakfast of blue-corn hot cereal.

EAT **Shift Kitchen & Bar** serves innovative mountain cuisine like charred-corn risotto. For a splurge at Grand Canyon National Park, head to the **El Tovar Dining Room** (get braised lamb shank or vegan blue-corn tamales). Make a whistlestop at the kitschy **Haunted Hamburger** in Jerome.

DRINK You should hit all nine stops on Flag's craft brewery crawl, but if not, don't miss the relentlessly creative **Dark Sky Brewing**. For cocktails, head to the **Annex**, which takes its shandy very, very seriously.



The best way to reach these adventures is to fly into Phoenix or Tucson.