

a e TRAVEL

Out in Tucson



BY MERLE EXIT

Javelina, Javelina, ugly little thing. Javelina oink, Javelina sing. Oh, Javelina, what's the difference if you are a hit. When you get too close to us, you smell like Tucson, Arizona. The Old West, the New West, and after all of that running around, I needed a "west!"

Why did I think that October would provide me with a temperature of under 90 degrees? But since the humidity was not to be dealt with, I spent much of the time enjoying the outdoor attractions. What grew and lived on the land made up most of what I was drawn to.

My sibling, Marlene, and I checked into a timeshare, which I have now renamed "Worstity" Club. For that, you can read my article, "Sleepless in Tucson." Marlene always wanted to be a cowgirl and is still too happy riding the range. But for me, the only range is the one in the kitchen. And so we rented a metal horse, gassed it up and off we went.

Rumor had it that the one place not to miss was the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, a world-renowned zoo, natural history museum and botanical garden, all rolled into one attraction.

We grabbed a map and proceeded along the paths. An Orientation Room taught us a bit about deserts, the Sonoran, in particular, and what it has to offer. There was this limestone cave exhibit that provided an optional tight passage experience ... yeah, right! I'll tell you later about the Kartchner Caverns.

As the path continued into the Mountain Woodland, there was an enclosed area for viewing Mexican wolf, black bear, white-tailed deer, mountain lion, owls, snakes and prairie dogs. Then a long desert loop trail took us sighting coyote, a cat canyon, and the infamous javelina, those small boar-like animals. Gardens, birds, reptiles, and whatnot. We needed at least two or three hours to take all of it in. There are

water fountains along the paths, but I was too pooped to loop. Whew! Oh. Fortunately there are a few routes leading to this museum as the one going took me along a mountain road where for those of us who have a fear of heights ...

It appears that the Reader's Digest terms Tucson Botanical Gardens as the Best Secret Gardens in America. Located just a bit northeast of the downtown area,

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on North Alvernon Way... start spreading the news! There were 12 different lush gardens with plants, flowers, fruit and vegetables. The most difficult part was avoiding the temptation to climb up a tree or shake the limbs of the grapefruit and lemon trees and sample each of them. Okay. There was a grapefruit within reach.

As each outdoor facility offered more variety, it was off to Tohono Chul Park, with more trails leading to gardens of cacti, trees and even demonstration gardens that introduce visitors to options available for creating your own desert oasis at home. That was wasted on me as I have a *black* thumb. A performance garden hosts spring and fall concerts and events and the Southwestern cuisine of the Spanish-style patio leads to the Tohono Chul Park Tea Room. Birdwatchers will also enjoy this park and you may even spot bobcats, coyotes and javelinas, oh my.

Outdoors and indoors, the attractions continued for another "don't miss," the DeGrazia Foundation on North Swan Road, also known as Gallery in the Sun.

The serene surroundings are nestled in the Santa Catalina Foothills, and is a collection of hand-made buildings and structures created by Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia, the Southwest's most famous mixed-media artist and self-taught builder. There are several up-close art exhibits sampling oils, watercolors, bronzes, enamels, ceramics, stone lithographs, serigraphs and jewelry all created by De Grazia, whose insignia is the wide-eyed children as you may view on the website.

Rise up early for family fun. Although there are indoor building replicas to check out, Old Tucson Studios attractions warrant the southwest air. It's a world famous Hollywood western film set, located near the Sonora Desert Museum. The best way to acclimate yourself to all its cowboy glory is by taking a ride on an historic C.P. Huntington locomotive. During the few hours spent we experienced gunfights, cowboy brawls, saloon-show musicals and high-flying stunt falls. It's worth the energy of a long day with your "younguns" at both facilities.

Hmmm ... now is it possible that Wyatt Earp visited the Stone Avenue Temple, the first Jewish temple in the American Southwest, located in downtown Tucson? Josephine Sarah Marcus-Earp, born to German immigrants, was an actress who loved adventure, saloons and gambling. She was introduced to a young Wyatt Earp who was working in Tombstone and it is said that they were secretly married in Tucson. The Stone Avenue Temple itself is full of tales and Jewish heritage. In fact, Eileen Warsaw will take you on a walking tour and explain both the full Jewish heritage and building of Tucson that goes along with the 95-year-old temple. The lecture itself is not only fascinating, but quite a piece of historic education in the way of women's history.

We took in another piece of history at the Hotel Congress, a facility that's been around since 1919 and the scene of a John

Dillinger shooting and capture. It's not only great as an ideal downtown location for accommodations, but a must for a visit and dinner at the The Cup. Either the Executive chef was indecisive or he wanted eclectic cuisine. It's a menu of Indian, Thai, Mexican, Japanese, Mediterranean and down home American food.

Now it's off to Tombstone. But, first a stop at the Kartchner Caverns. The Caverns were taken over by the State Parks for which they should be thanked. Although we could have spent some time at the visitor's center checking out the movie and exhibits, I just wanted to get down to the nitty-gritty of the caves. These Parks people are full of knowledge and will share it with you before the tour and on your way to the caves via tram. Just in case, there is an outhouse next to caves, if you think that the sounds of water might spark your kidneys.

It's all set out for walking along railed concrete paths and several "don't touch" lectures. All I can say is that the ending is awesome and that I suggest you call in advance. Incidentally, there are other Arizona state parks in the area well worth visiting and later, I'll give you the best website to find it all.

Well, unlike Old Tucson Studios, Tombstone is for real. Yes, it's a full working town with real folks. As we were driving into the area, we stopped at Boot Hill and checked out the legendary cemetery that also houses a special Jewish Memorial. But I don't think it had anything to do with Wyatt Earp's secret marriage. There it was, just as the movies depicted with the famous landmarked Bird Cage Theatre on the corner of Allen and 6th and the first place to catch Tombstone's history. Eerie. Okay, we walked enough. Time for more bygone beginnings as we hopped aboard the stagecoach to see more than Allen Street and get a glimpse of the OK Corral event at none other than the O.K. Corral!

There are five museums at the corral locale. A cowboy bunkhouse, the original corral office, Prostitute's crib ... not the baby kind ... oh. In 1881, prostitution was legal and they were called Soiled Doves. Whatever. The other two museums were C.S. Fly's Photo Studio and his boarding house. Now, there's a gunfight site with mechanical men depicting the 30-second shootout and the tale that goes along with it. But that's not all. There's a Gunfight Stage to catch the actors at 2 p.m. Some humor and great reenactment. Your ticket also gets you a copy of the 1881 Tombstone Epitaph with the original reports of the gunfight.

There appeared to be other gunfights being staged around the town, but that was enough cowboy killing for the day and it was back to Tucson for that much-needed "west!"

By the way, you may also want to visit the *very* artsy town of Tubac, located south of Tucson. Also, Tucson has its own Gay Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Now for that website:
www.tucsonattractions.com. ▼

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