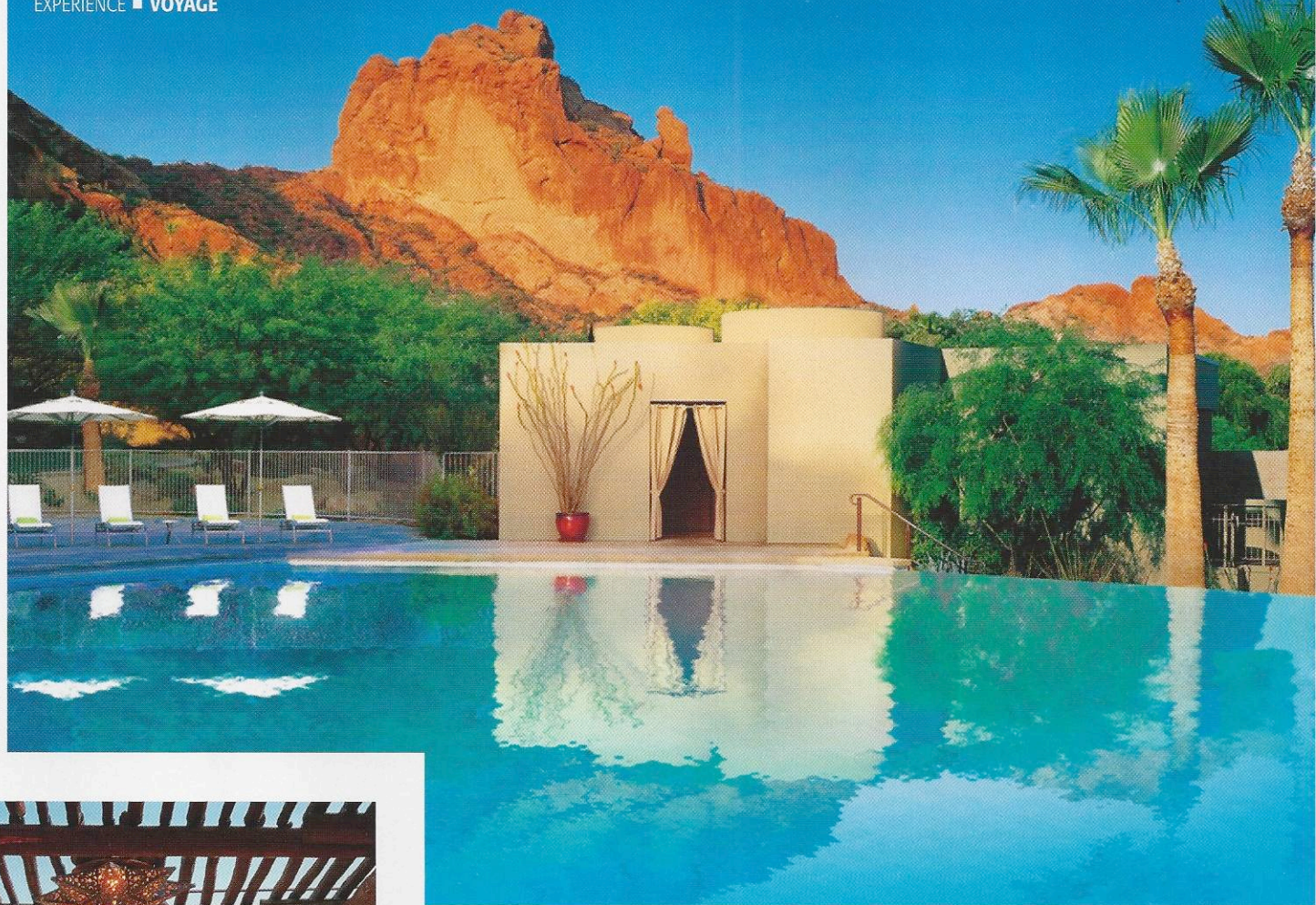


EXPERIENCE ■ VOYAGE

SCOTTSDALE SKIES

The southwestern city boasts dramatic desert scapes and more than a few ways to indulge.

by BEKAH WRIGHT



THERE'S SOMETHING MAGICAL ABOUT ARIZONA. FIRST CLUE—THE STATE CAPITAL OF PHOENIX GOES BY THE NICKNAME

Valley of the Sun. Which brings into question: If the sun resides in Phoenix, where does it go to vacation? For that matter, what about the moon, comet tails and shooting stars? Turns out, just around the corner, 16 miles away in Scottsdale, where the Sonoran Desert promises peace and quiet, and downtown is an urban oasis filled with sheer energy.

DESERT SOLITUDE

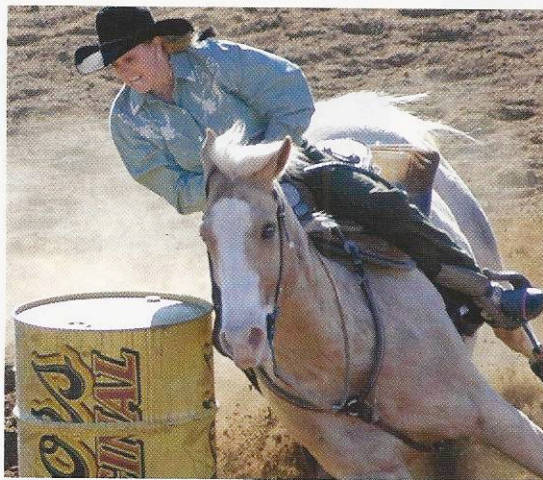
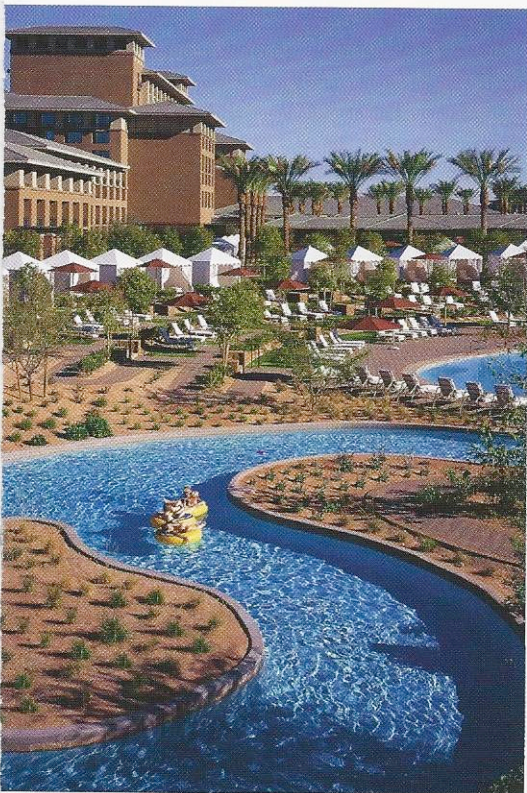
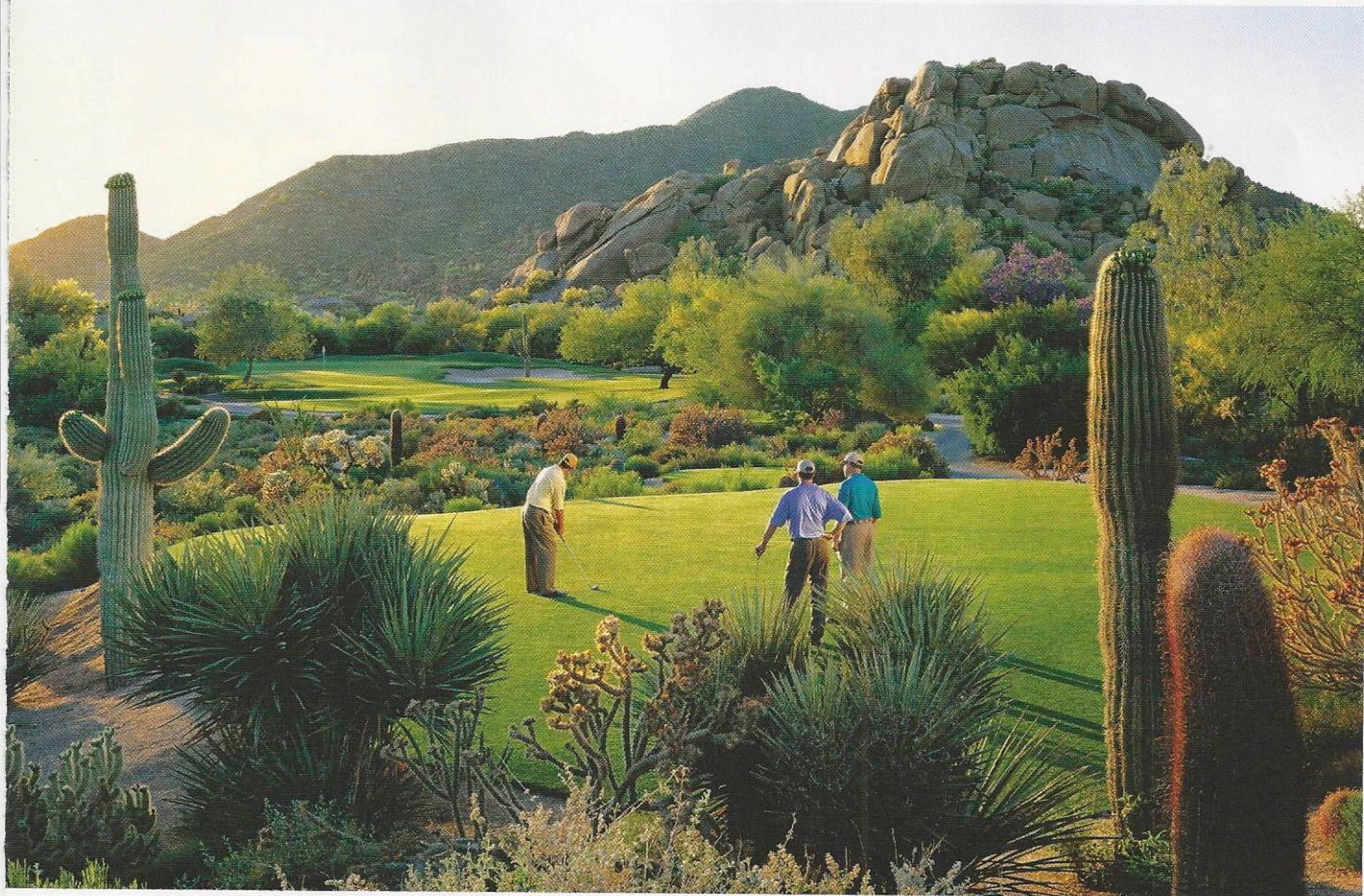
Captivating. Arrive in Scottsdale at sunset, and the word barely does the desert town justice. Where best to experience said sunset? There are plenty of options. Topping the list, though, is the Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North (fourseasons.com/scottsdale) from the terrace of Talavera restaurant over dishes like Executive Chef Mel

Mecinas' Buffalo Tenderloin. Order the Valhrona Soufflé in advance, timing its delivery for when twilight strikes, and Phoenix's city lights dot the horizon.

As beautiful as the light-studded vista is, it can't compete with the desert stars, readily accessible during overnight stays at the resort's adobe casitas. Lounging on their patios merits plenty of star-time, as well as hours allotted for sunrise and sunsets.

The quintessential way to greet the sunset? One that's definitely Arizona-style would be in a hot air balloon, 6,000 feet above the Sonoran Desert. Supplying such an adventure is Hot Air Balloon Expeditions (hotairexpeditions.com). Excitement begins at daybreak, when participants join the crew, who are already setting pilot balloons aloft to check for just the right launch site. Once that's determined, witnessing the inflation of the balloon is mesmerizing in itself. As the wicker basket lifts off, desert panoramas amaze. So, too, do

FROM TOP: PHOTO COURTESY SCOTTSDALE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU; PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN MORAN, COURTESY FOUR SEASONS SCOTTSDALE AT TROON NORTH, OPPOSITE: PHOTOS COURTESY SCOTTSDALE CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Boulders Golf Club boasts a spa and two 18-hole courses. Prada del Sol Rodeo is one of the oldest official rodeos in the U.S.; Lazy River at the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa is a luxurious boutique-style hideaway boasting picturesque views of Paradise Valley; Try the buffalo tenderloin and Valhrona soufflé at Talavera at Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North—a top restaurant to see the Scottsdale sunset.

other balloons appearing on the horizon. Spotted on the ground are crewmembers following the flight path. Their mission: to have champagne flutes filled and a gourmet breakfast waiting upon landing.

Back at the Four Seasons, there's time for teeing off at Troon North Golf Club's two championship courses, The Pinnacle and The Monument (troonnorthgolf.com).

The property surrounding the resort is also popular for hiking. One trek to consider is a guided, interpretive hike of Pinnacle Peak, offered through the resort Tuesdays through Sundays.

Afterward, an ideal escape is reclining poolside coupled with partaking in signature treatments at the Spa. Skin dried by the arid climate is soothed



At top, a casita guest room at Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North (*photo by Barbara Kraft, courtesy Four Seasons Scottsdale Troon North*); The Sagauo Scottsdale—the San Francisco Giants' home-away-from-home during Spring Training—mirrors desert hues with pops of bright colors throughout property, from the lobby and guest rooms to the menu and drink offerings the Distrito, the restaurant helmed by Chef Jose Garces (*photos courtesy The Sagauo Scottsdale*).



During a post-dinner walk, crackling chimineas greet you along paths leading to casitas. The emanating scent of juniper may arouse the urge to unleash one's inner cowboy. Luckily, the Four Seasons offers a Cowboy for a Day experience on Arizona Cowboy College's working cattle ranch. Students get plenty of one-on-one time with horses with lessons in everything from grooming to round-ups. Then, it's time to saddle up for a ride into Rio Verde. How the day ends? Under the stars, with a campfire dinner complete with tall tales and crooning from a bonafide cowboy.

CITY BUZZ

The spirit of the Old West taking hold, it's time to experience the city side of Scottsdale. En route, Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural gem, Taliesin West (franklloydwright.org), merits a stop. Myriad tours showcase the winter home/studio/architectural campus. Catch the Night Lights Tour,

with a Nighttime Repair Facial. The 80-minute Dream Weaver Massage evokes memories of the desert with clary sage-tinted essential oil. Later, a throwback dinner at Proof, an American Canteen where more soothing is on tap and via comfort food like Pulled Pork and Beer Can Chicken (proofcanteen.com).



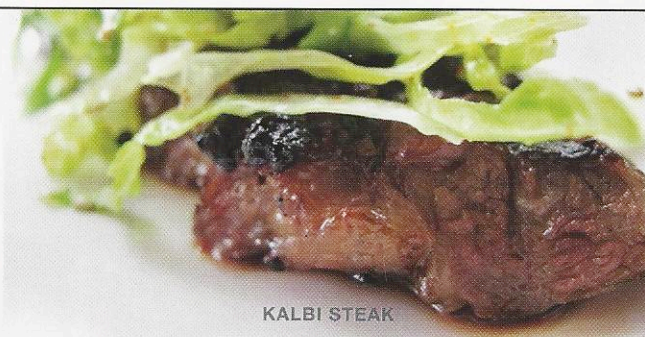
when the moon transforms Taliesin West into a "fire-breathing dragon."

Finely tuned ears will be led straight to Phoenix's Musical Instrument Museum (MIM), where 6,000 instruments from 200 countries and territories dwell (mim.org). There are exhibitions to see, concerts to hear, instruments being restored and others available for playing. Also to be discovered are instruments and wardrobe items from fan favorites, including John Lennon, Taylor Swift, Johnny Cash and Jake Shimabukuro.

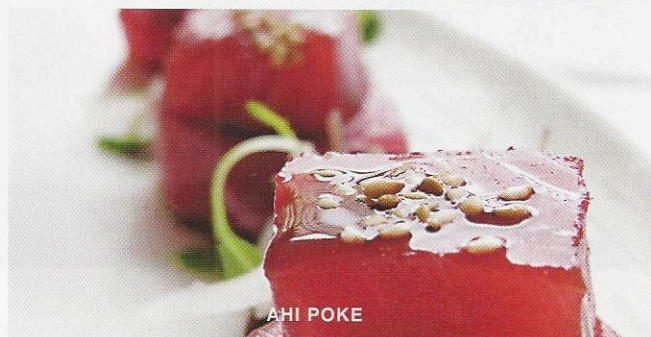
An excellent way to explore downtown Scottsdale is on foot. The perfect base camp for that pursuit is The Saguaro Scottsdale (thesaguaro.com). Mirroring desert wildflowers, The Saguaro makes a statement with hot color pops in pink and orange. This is the home of the San Francisco Giants during spring training. It's easy to see why. The hotel is close not only to Scottsdale Stadium, but Old Town Scottsdale's bounty of shops, galleries, restaurants and nightlife.

The Phoenix Area is also a sports Mecca, as evidenced by its recent hosting of three top sporting events: the NFL Pro Bowl, PGA's Waste Management Phoenix Open (WMPO) and Super Bowl XLIX. Hotspots to visit: University of Phoenix Stadium (universityofphoenix-stadium.com), and home to the Arizona Cardinals, and WMPO's TPC Scottsdale Stadium Course (tpc.com/scottsdale-the-stadium-course), which is now open to the public after a historic renovation.

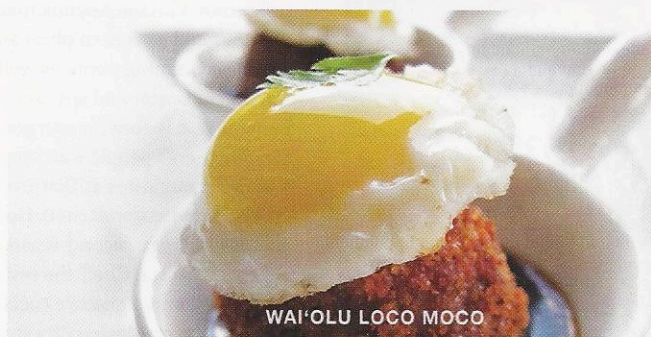
Back at The Saguaro, there's swimming to be done. Most of the hotel's 194 rooms hug two pools with cascading water features. Once a 1970s motel, the bones of The Saguaro lend



KALBI STEAK



AHI POKE



WAI'OLU LOCO MOCO

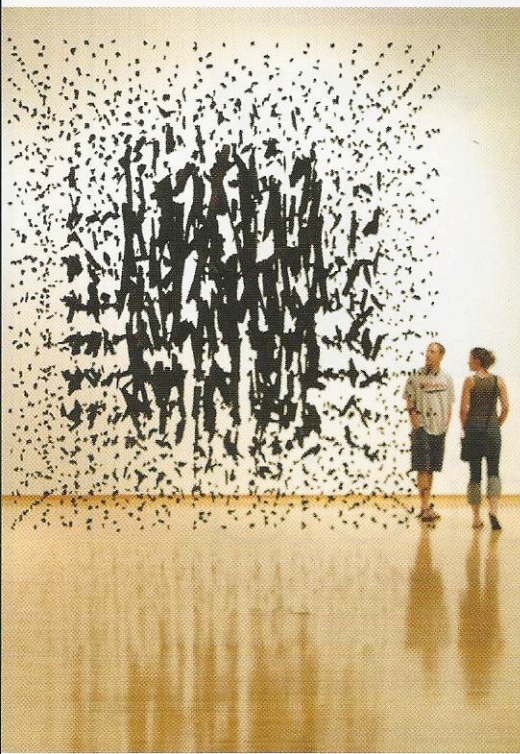
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FROM TOP: The Musical Instrument Museum features 6,000 instruments from 200 countries; Phoenix Art Museum, the southwestern United States' largest art museum.

themselves to décor that's sleek, yet utilitarian. Vintage Arizona magazines and tchotkes add a sense of place and fun.

The swimming pools, as well as the fitness center and spa, are ripe for hanging out. Before the sun goes down, though, there's people watching to be had over margaritas at Distrito (scottsdale.districtorestaurant.com). Helmed by chef Jose Garces, second-season winner of "The Next Iron Chef," the restaurant serves kick butt signature cocktails and palate-pleasing Mexico City street food.

Close out the evening with a short stroll through the 21-acre Civic Center Park to Scottsdale Performing Arts Center to catch a Broadway show, modern dance or big band performance (scottsdaleperformingarts.org). On the walk home, several itinerary-worthy sites can be spotted for the day ahead, including Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art with its 20th-century art and design exhibitions (smoca.org).

Skip breakfast the next morning. Here's why: Midday will be devoted to tasting the flavors of Scottsdale on an Arizona Food Tour (arizonafoodtours.com). All that's needed—comfy shoes and an appetite. Beyond the lunch tour, there are two more to choose from—Sip n' Sample and Dinner. Each offers up about six area restaurants for sampling and a healthy serving of Scottsdale history and stories.

The tour starts at the Little Red Schoolhouse, a.k.a. the Scottsdale

Historical Museum (scottsdalemuseum.com). The desire to detour into Old Town Scottsdale's shops, galleries and boutiques will occur, but the dishes that await sampling postpone the need.

The initial stop along Scottsdale's Wild West-themed Main Street is to the historic Rusty Spur Saloon (rustyspursaloon.com). Live music from groups like Psychobilly Rodeo Band contributes ambience most hours of the day. A slider is served up before the tour moves along for bites at locales like AZ88 (az88.com). This modern-day saloon brings with it delicious appetizers and great artwork to boot. Already filled to the brim, there are four restaurants to frequent and about a mile to cover before dessert.

Emblems on the sidewalk proclaim the route part of an ArtWalk (scottsdalegalleries.com). A self-guided tour of Scottsdale's art offerings can be taken. Even better—catching Thursday night's ArtWalk, a 40-year tradition that finds the city's 100 galleries staying open late for what's been termed "America's Original ArtWalk."

A free trolley ride transports the weary back to The Saguaro. Those still buzzing with energy can keep the fun going with an eye out for Scottsdale's 50 public art pieces. Another bit of magic to be discovered—along with the sun, moon and shooting stars, something else lives in Scottsdale. It's right there, in Civic Center Park ... Robert Indiana's apropos sculpture LOVE. After all, where else would LOVE live? ■