

QUIRKY
ARIZONA

THREE MUST-SEE TOWNS

by Rich Rubin

Photo: Nick Fox

Watson Lake in the Granite Dells of Prescott, Arizona



If you're looking for a new adventure when you're in Phoenix/Scottsdale, I have just the thing for you. Head north and you'll discover three quirky little towns, each with its own distinct character, that make for a perfect jaunt from the Valley of the Sun. I'm talking about Prescott, Cottonwood, and Jerome, about two thirds of the way from Phoenix to Flagstaff, and just a half hour from Sedona. They are destinations in their own right for those who love the offbeat, the unique, or the just plain different. So let's take a drive up north and see what these towns have to offer.

PRESCOTT: THE OLD WEST LIVES ON

After a drive of just under two hours, across miles of mountain chaparral, I arrive in Prescott. There's a lot to see and do in and around this unusual little town that wears its Western identity like a badge. "Prescott: everyone's hometown" proclaim the signs, and there is a down to earth quality here that makes it easy to come in and immediately feel at home. Well, if your home is a street known informally as "Whiskey Row" and boasts a huge number of saloons with a unique and colorful history. Not to mention there's some great food, fascinating museums, a ton of galleries, and shopping galore. What more could you ask?

I check into **The Motor Lodge**, which, like the town itself, is quirky, downhome, and fun. It's actually a vintage 1937 "motor court," with the rooms in a U-shape around the drive-in area and a private, covered carport for most rooms. My room features furniture from the late, great Stardust Hotel in Las Vegas, including an elaborate headboard topped by a pair of

gilt crowns. Best of all, it's just a few blocks from Whiskey Row and the heart of town, so I have all the convenience with none of the craziness.

After check-in, if you're like me you will head to **Whiskey Row** (aka Montezuma Street) and check out the variety of eating, drinking, and shopping options. Built after a fire in 1900 destroyed the block, it once boasted forty saloons where cowboys, gold miners, and all sorts of, shall we say, less savory types congregated (oddly, right across the street from the courthouse). You'll still see a goodly number of saloons lined up among the shopping options.

Since it's still early, I start by exploring some of the galleries and shops, some offering Western kitsch and some displaying really beautiful original artworks. **Van Gogh's Ear** offers a nice selection of jewelry, paintings, ceramics, and glass. I admire the creations and somehow manage to restrain myself from buying everything in the shop. The same applies at **Arts Prescott**, my favorite gallery in town and a co-op of local artists, where I marvel at lovely pottery, amazingly creative basketry, fiber arts, wood turning, and monoprints. **Mountain Spirit** has a range of paintings and sculptures on Western and Native American themes. **Artful Eye** and **Kikapoo Express** offer nice jewelry, and a block off Whiskey Row, on Cortez Street, **Ogg's Hogan** presents an immense array of antique Native basketry, jewelry, pottery, and other art and artifacts.

We'll come back later to explore the saloons, but first let's get a feel for some of the beauty of the area with a drive to the **Phippen Museum**, located among some stunning countryside about five miles out of town. It's as good a place as any to get a sense of Prescott's Western heritage, and presents wonderful paintings and sculptures by the big names in cowboy art: Solon Borglum, Ray Swanson, and George Phippen (who was, in fact, the first president of Cowboy Artists of America). You'll also see contemporary artists whose work fills a large gallery. It's beautiful creations, and the views from outside the museum are in themselves worth the trip. I probably spend as long standing outside the museum looking at the vast landscape as I do inside admiring the art.

More natural beauty awaits at **Highlands Center for Natural History**, about a ten-minute drive from town. I head out on the Stretch Pebble Trail and I'm soon in the middle of a wonderland of nature, low-lying shrubs, tall oaks and ponderosa pines. A lizard skitters across the trail. The distant hills stand out against intensely blue skies, a few large puffy clouds looking like they were put there by some master painter. A tree with scaly bark like a reptile. Butterflies meandering through the air. This too, is Prescott, and it's an experience I wouldn't trade for anything in the world.

Back in town, you'll also want to visit the **Museum of Indigenous People**, a small but lovely museum with a series of wonderful displays. I love the collection of Hopi and Zuni pottery, a large collection of katsinam, Apache Gaan (Mountain Spirit Dancers), elaborate Navajo baskets, and a nice exhibit of contemporary art. This little museum is chock-full of treasures, and it's well worth visiting. Also check out **Sharlot Hall**, where you'll find the history of the area displayed in a series of fascinating exhibits, from pre-history to aerial views of the town over the years to Yavapai basketry.

All this exploration makes me want one thing: coffee. Luckily, Prescott has not just one but two nice spots. At **Wild Iris Coffeehouse**, there's the immediate feeling: this is what a coffeehouse should be! Lots of wood, couches, marble-topped tables, and a patio for breezy Prescott mornings. They offer a nice selection of baked goods and (as the sign says) "food food" from quiche to panini. **The Porch** is also a comfy and welcoming coffeehouse. The commodious

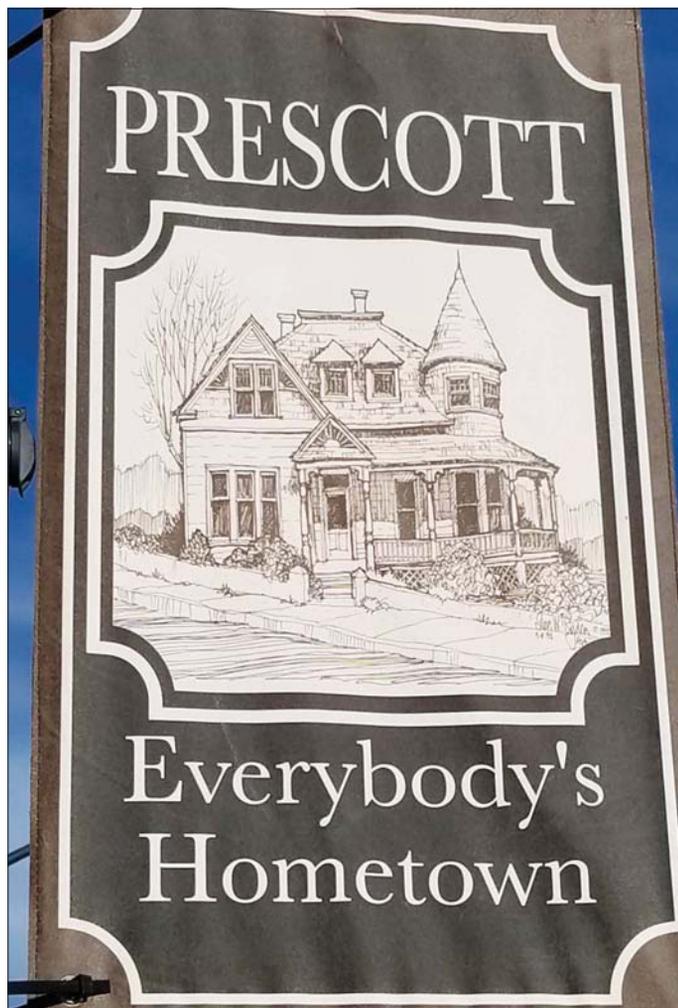


Photo: Rich Rubin

Paddleboarding in Prescott



Prescott, Cottonwood, and Jerome, about two thirds of the way from Phoenix to Flagstaff, and just a half hour from Sedona, are destinations in their own right for those who love the offbeat, the unique, or the just plain different.

space recreates an outdoor porch inside, with tin roofs, brick walls, and long wood tables where seemingly half of Prescott comes to hang out and relax on the “porch.”

For “food food,” there are some great choices. Let’s start with the best. I’m astounded that this Western-y little town holds a restaurant as great as **Farm Provisions**, where the food is amazing, the service gracious, friendly, and helpful, the setting refined and low-key. It’s as good a meal as I’ve had in I don’t know when, and I can’t recommend it highly enough. Familiar dishes are given a twist, like deviled eggs, which are coated in panko and topped with a bacon/caramelized onion jam, all sitting atop swirls of sriracha crème fraiche. The seabass is a particular specialty, as is the pork tenderloin, but pretty much every dish here is not only gorgeous to look at but gorgeous to eat. Am I raving here? Farm Provisions deserves the rave. I won’t let you go to Prescott without checking it out. End of story.

Well, not quite the end, because there’s also **El Gato Azul**, a wonderful tapas spot just off Whiskey Row. It’s a lovely place, with a small and bustling front room and a large patio, and their specialty is a global tapas selection. The BBQ scallops frita are coated in breadcrumbs and served alluringly in a martini glass with their homemade strawberry barbecue sauce. Chile Wontons span cultures gracefully, the wontons stuffed with

cream cheese and green chiles. Choose beet and blue cheese tacos, fried avocado with red pepper aioli, or many other delectable dishes.

For breakfast or early lunch **The Local** is a cheery place on the edge of town: bright, with azure and lime green walls, local art, and large letters on the wall proclaiming “EAT”—so I do! I also love **The Raven**, a super-nice spot with great food, coffee, and alcoholic potables. There’s a revolving display of local art on the walls and live music in the evenings. Their espresso is organic, their wine list is impressive, their service is friendly, and their food is great. Is it a coffeehouse? A tavern? A restaurant? Let’s call it “all of the above.” **The County Seat** is another winner, a clean-lined, modern spot above the Spice Traveler shop, where I get the sweet chili bowl I’ve been craving all day. It’s casual and appealing, with a nice counterculture feel here that’s just the low-key kind of place where I love to spend time.

Heading downstairs, what can I do but stop in **Spice Traveler**, a huge store with an astounding array of spices and more. Of course, there are spices galore, spanning the globe from Garam Masala to Hawaiian sea salt to jerk seasoning. There are also shelves lined with jars of local honey, a variety of jams, sauces, and more. Need some tamarind paste? Craving pickled quail eggs? In the mood for prickly pear salsa? You’ve come to the right place.



Photo: Visit Prescott

Time for Refreshments in Prescott

Then it's on to explore the real draw of Whiskey Row: the saloons. As I walk down the street, there seems to be live music drifting (well, more like blaring) from just about every drinkery, creating a cacophony of sound and a plethora of choices. **Matt's Longhorn Saloon** is a friendly and welcoming place in a 1901-vintage building, with live music, a huge oak dance floor, and memories galore captured in photos (it's been around since the 1960s). At the back of the Whiskey Row buildings, entered through an alleyway, is the aptly-named **Back Alley Wine Bar**, with its L-shaped corrugated metal bar, large seating area, live music, and a great selection of wines, including an "Arizona wine flight" (my suggestion). My favorite is **Jersey Lilly Saloon**, named after Lillie Langtree and with the only balcony overlooking Courthouse Square. I head up the stairs to an old-timey wooden saloon, live music playing and good spirits everywhere. I ask the friendly bartender for a house specialty, and she makes me (I kid you not) a PB&J Martini that's actually kind of incredible. I take it out to the balcony and look past stone columns to the courthouse. I feel like I could stay forever on this cozy balcony with my sweet/weird/delicious drink in hand and the sounds of the band wafting out. Western hospitality at its best, and that what it's all about, right?

One final word about Prescott: it's a pretty conservative place. As Arizona turns more blue politically, Prescott and surroundings remain a bastion of red. Yet, that doesn't seem to be a problem for its LGBTQ residents (or visitors), as is confirmed for me by a conversation with Zach Leonard and Joe Ficciaci, a married couple who have been living for a decade in Prescott. In fact, they were the first same-sex couple to be married in the city's famous courthouse.

They recall the wedding with a chuckle, from their certificate with the words "husband" and "wife" whited out, to the judge asking if he "did everything ok." While the conservative nature of the town is undeniable, they agree with my speculation that it's an Arizonan, Barry Goldwaterish, live-and-let-live conservatism. Says Joe, "we've never once had a problem or felt unwelcome anywhere." For them, it's all about the personal connections: "You meet the individuals," remarks Zach, "and everyone is so nice. Maybe," he comments with a smile, "it doesn't fit my biases." He continues: "So many people have come to us and said 'how are you boys doing?' The more you're involved with the community, the more you're rewarded with meeting people. There's a real connectedness, wherever you're from, whoever you are."

This welcoming attitude is immediately apparent when you arrive. While there's an undeniable kitsch to some of the saloon-y stuff, there's also real history behind it. It's certainly a town where a tourist won't lack for things to do, whether it's shopping for high art and tacky souvenirs, stopping in a museum, enjoying the many eating and drinking opportunities, exploring some of the nearby nature, or, preferably, all of the above. It's undeniably, proudly touristic, as it has been since the first saloons opened in the nineteenth century to cater to a very different kind of visitor. There's something kind of great about a town like that.

COTTONWOOD AND THE ALLURE OF WINE

The next day, I'm off to Cottonwood across an other-worldly landscape of red buttes and deep forest, with much of the drive through the Prescott National Forest. I think most people don't expect Arizona to be

so wooded, but as I navigate my way around switchbacks snaking through tree-covered hills, I realize that there's so much here that doesn't really fit the usual stereotypes of the Southwest, and a little exploration reveals a side of things that isn't simply the desert most people probably imagine.

This is wine country, with an important part of Arizona's growing wine industry based in this area. Cottonwood's Main Street holds a large collection of tasting rooms, and several wineries are within a few minutes' drive. While Cottonwood still has a small-town feel, it's right at the center of some important changes, and being just a short drive from Sedona doesn't hurt either!

I check into **Pines Inn and Suites**, and don't be fooled by the motel-like exterior, as the rooms are super-comfortable, nicely designed, and offer a good alternative to the crowds of Old Town (it's about a five-minute drive away). Dark wood, pale stucco walls, photos of those famous red rocks, and a green consciousness that's nice to see (the lobby, for instance, has a filtered water dispenser where you can refill a container). They also have the only saltwater pool in town!

Then, after an appealing brunch on the comfy patio of **Crema Craft Kitchen and Bar** (their take-out window, by the way, becomes my go-to spot for morning espresso and the best glory muffins in history), I start checking out tasting rooms: hey, it's never too early, right? The **Pillsbury Wine Company** tasting room has both couch and bar seating (I choose the latter). You can do all-red, all-white, or mixed flights. I particularly love their "Diva," a Syrah/Petite Syrah blend that's won awards in Arizona and California competitions. I also like the feel of **Carlson Creek**, where you sit at a wooden bar or high tables under rows of barrels, and who can beat the idea of wine and chocolate pairings? At **AZ Stronghold**, I take a seat on the patio under a red umbrella, and my wine flight ranges from crisp Malvasia Bianca and Chardonnay (a grape you actually don't see much down here) to a beautiful Syrah. Definitely stop by **Tantrum**, the nicest tasting room I've seen, with a mural creating an image of an exterior wall, comfy couches, portraits of



Merkin Vineyards Wine

various women (including the winemaker), chandeliers, twinkling lights, and a red tin ceiling. It's like the living room of your well-to-do but slightly eccentric aunt, and it's a treat to sip my smooth and rich Petite Syrah in the comfort of this room, with soft music playing and service that's as gracious as it gets.

The king of them all is **Merkin Vineyards Osteria**, which is as much a restaurant (one of the best in town) as a tasting room. It doesn't look like your traditional tasting room, but you'd expect that from a winery run by MJ Keenan, the Grammy-award winning singer from Puscifer, A Perfect Circle, and Tool. In addition to the wine, there's a large and appealing menu, the service is flawless, and the long room is bustling. I sample a variety of great wines: my favorites are Shinola Orancia, a 100% Malvasia Bianca with the bouquet of a sweet wine but a bone-dry flavor, and Chupacabra rosé, a GSM named after this Latin American shape-shifter, and indeed, the taste seems to shift even between sips! Le Verdure, roasted vegetables from Merkin's own farms, make a perfect starter, followed by an in-house favorite: a "Lasagna Cupcake," a little individual serving of lasagna (I choose chicken relleno, with smoked ricotta and bechamel for a dense richness, the roasted chicken and poblanos keeping it all real). For wine and food, Merkin can't be beat.



Historic Old Town Cottonwood

Photo: EQRoy



Crema



Wine Tasting Sign



Jail Trail River Walk

I've started with the tasting rooms because those are really what's brought fame to Cottonwood in recent years, but there's a lot more to do here. I look in **Cartwheels**, devoted to local arts and crafts, check out **Verde Valley Olive Oil Traders** (their chipotle olive oil is a must-have) and **Cat's Meow Antiques**. **Larry's Antiques** has literally acres of antiques and collectibles, and how can I pass up a store like **Art Glitter**, which claims to have the world's largest assortment of glitter? I stop for lunch at **Old Town Red Rooster Café**, which has a wonderful atmosphere, is well-known for being gay-friendly, and actually has a rainbow flag flying outside (the first I've seen in these parts). They serve breakfast and lunch only, like many places in town, and I get a black bean burger that's amazingly good, with a fabulous mango smoothie.

I refuel at **Firecreek Coffee Company**, a nice spot that's a wide-open, modern looking place with great coffee drinks and pastries. It feels like the local hangout, with people on laptops, in groups and pairs, relaxing on the couches or in heated discussion at one of the high tables; pretty much everything you'd expect from a coffee house.

Then I explore some of the surroundings. One must-visit is **Tuzigoot National Monument**, an amazing testament to the past (and the present). This former Sinagua Village was built about 1000 years ago. I keep reminding myself of this as I stroll up the path to see the still-standing stone walls of the village, after pausing in the visitors' center over a nice display of artifacts from the Sinagua people. At the top of the main building, I look out over fields, buttes covered in scrubby trees, and rock formations shaded from beige to dark red, the hills rising beyond. It's almost too much to take in: the elaborate structure, the delicate restoration, the magnificence of the surrounding scenery all combine for an experience you're not likely to forget.

Nearer to town is **Dead Horse Ranch State Park**. This large park offers various atmospheres and I take advantage of them all. First a walk along the Verde River, down tree-shaded paths, the cicadas making their usual racket and the trees reflected beautifully in the rippling waters. It's shady, cool, and peaceful. I also check out the lagoons, looking past the still pools of water to the hills in the distance. I climb a trail among boulders to look out over buttes and hills, the rock formations creating an otherworldly kind of beauty that's totally different from the shady and verdant atmosphere along the river. So many natural worlds to explore within this one park! Best of all, it's only about a five-minute drive from the heart of Main Street.

You can also walk there right from Old Town. **The Jail Trail** is a great little nature path, starting by the former jail and part of the Verde River Greenway. As you head towards Dead Horse Ranch, you'll soon be lost in a world of chirping birds, huge cottonwood trees and, of course, the ever-raucous cicadas. I'd suggest it for an early morning getaway, or after you've had a meal and want a little exercise, so you feel good rewarding yourself with a wine tasting.

Prefer to let them take you on a ride through the natural wonders? **The Verde Valley Railroad** is the way to do it. Kick back in as the vintage cars plunge into a wealth of scenery from wind-carved crimson and sienna cliffs to the rushing Verde River. Who knew Arizona contained such a cornucopia of ever-changing tableaus? Note: between the four-hour ride and the early check-in, it's likely to take most of your day, but I can't imagine a better way to spend it (and you'll get back to town in time for a wine flight before dinner).

Tuzigoot National Monument



Photo: Rich Rubin

While in Cottonwood, don't get so busy with the tasting rooms that you fail to visit the wineries themselves. Up on **Page Springs Road**, technically in Cornville and about a fifteen-minute drive from town, several wineries line up along the road. **D.A. Ranch**, with its glorious views, is the best in the area for some scenery-gulping with your sipping, as you gaze out beyond the vineyards to hills covered in green, under those overwhelming Arizona skies. There's **Oak Creek Vineyards**, a kid- and dog-friendly locale with live music, events such as "Flamingo Fridays," and, of course, great flights of wine just waiting for your palate. **Javelina Leap** is a boutique winery whose award-winning wines from Petite Syrah to Zinfandel, Riesling to Tempranillo, can be enjoyed in a saloon-style tasting room that just proclaims "Arizona."

My favorite is **Page Spring Cellars**, where I stop for a glorious wine-tasting and lunch. You can take a seat on one of the couches, surrounded by a nice collection of art, or (my choice) on the patio, where you look out over the vineyards that produced the wine you're drinking. I do a mixed red and white flight, and I'm impressed with the variety and the quality from this winery, one of the first to give a kickstart to the Arizona wine industry. It's not just wine, though, as their bistro has a wonderful menu that's a lot more extensive and interesting than the usual cheese plates: great food that's the perfect accompaniment to the wonderful wine selection.

I end my stay in Cottonwood with a fantastic dinner at **3 Kings Kasbar**, where the selection of small plates is enormously appealing, the setting is beautiful, and the service is the perfect example of what restaurant service should be. It's a glittery, fabulous place, with wood carvings, a hanging red kilim, lanterns, globe, and candles—the very definition of "eclectic." So is the menu, from a half avocado stuffed with tomato relish to wonderful shrimp in a chipotle cream sauce to delectable blackened

salmon tacos. Try the lamb meatballs or chicken adobo empanadas or...the menu is so wide-ranging that you're sure to find something you love. Since everything is excellent, it won't be difficult.

I'm glad I stumbled onto it, and I hope you'll stumble onto it also. I could say the same about Cottonwood. There's a charming sensation that Cottonwood is still a little surprised by the mantle of tourism it's acquired. It's not one of those tried-and-true tourist destinations (though it's quickly becoming one), and that's what I like the most about it. It combines the surprising and the expected, natural beauty and in-town pleasures, small-town ambience with burgeoning vacation appeal, and that makes for a winning combination.

JEROME: ONE OF A KIND

Then there's oddball, lovable Jerome, truly a must-visit little town if there ever was one. Perched on Cleopatra Hill just fifteen minutes or so from Cottonwood, this goofy and endearing village scatters across the mountains, sometimes so precariously you don't know how it stops from slipping into the Verde Valley below. In fact, as is evident from buildings such as the **Sliding jail**, it's not an entirely academic question. In this mile-high-or-so town, narrow roads overlook a broad panorama, the valley laid out below in all its splendor, Sedona clearly visible in the distance. Called "The Wickedest Town in the West" by the *New York Sun* in 1903, Jerome's streets are now lined with galleries, as the arts have transformed this town, but more on that later.

First, I check into **Hillside House Vacation Rental**, and I can't imagine a more comfortable place to spend your time in Jerome. With one entire floor of the house, you'll feel like you've moved to Jerome, if only temporarily. A large living room is the perfect place to relax and look out at the hillsides and distant mountains, while the bedroom is

The Rugged Skyline of Jerome, Arizona

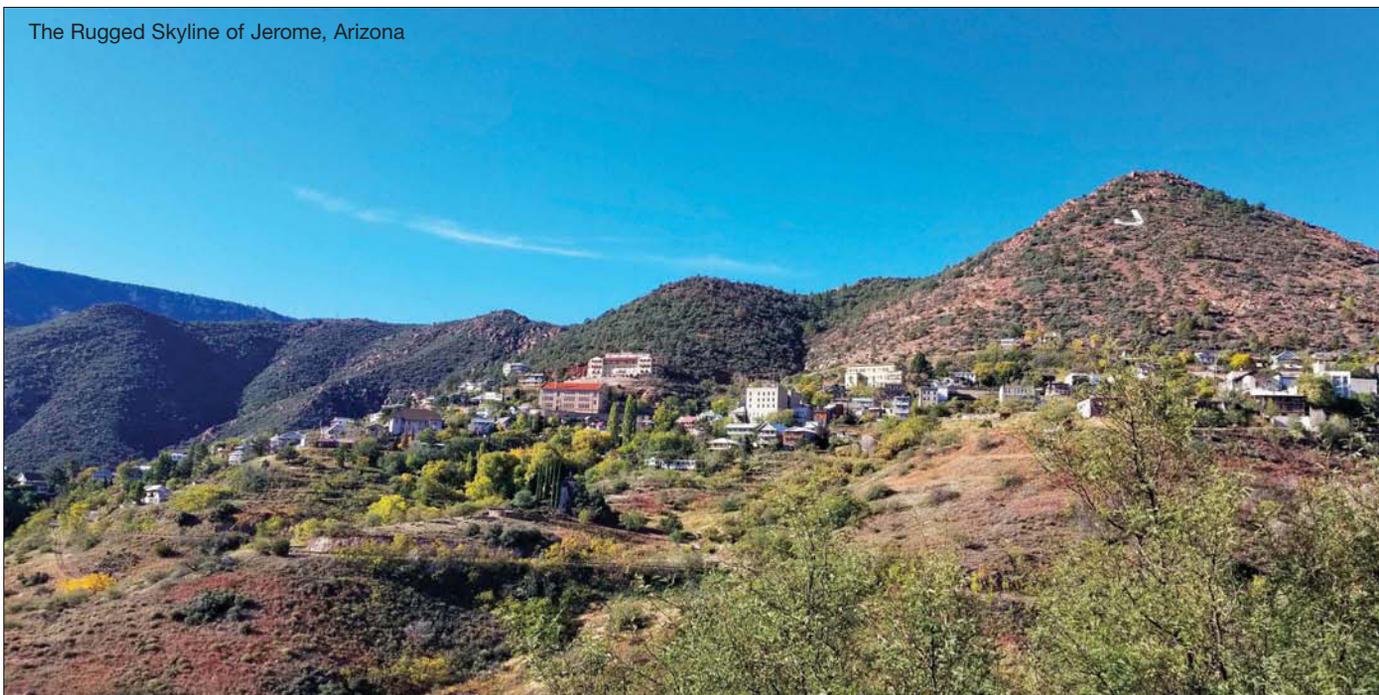


Photo: Rich Rubin

commodious and comfy. A small kitchen gives you everything you need to have your coffee or meal at home, while the flagstone patio out back lures you to sit forever gazing out over those vistas. It's just a fifteen-minute walk or so to town (it's pretty much straight uphill, but oh is that walk back home a breeze!). Another great choice, right on the edge of town, is the **Surgeon's House Bed and Breakfast**, with nicely appointed suites, gorgeous gardens, and equally gorgeous breakfasts.

The first order of business is coffee. Luckily, I find a nice little take-out place right on Main Street. **Coppertown Coffee and Gelato** produces the best espresso I've had in ages, which I enjoy sitting on a bench on a fairly deserted early morning Main Street. Nothing much is open yet, so I decide to follow up my espresso with a good breakfast, and for this I suggest the **Mine Café**, on a side street just steps off Main Street. With choices running the gamut from a Hippy Town Scramble to a Killer Cowboy Breakfast, you're sure to find something you like, and the two packed rooms show its popularity with both tourists and locals. Like most spots in town, it's open only for breakfast and lunch, and my Ole Verde Burrito (scrambled eggs, chicken, potatoes, guacamole) hits the spot and gets me going for the day.

While I wait for the galleries to open (one thing to know about Jerome is that many places open pretty much when they want to, and it's not surprising to see signs saying "Open 10-ish to 5-ish"), I head to the **Mine Museum**, which packs a ton of information about the town into a few tiny rooms. I honestly didn't expect the museum to be as interesting as it is, but when you're dealing with a history as wild as Jerome's, there's going to be a lot of great stuff. It's right on Main Street, in a building that once housed "the leading sporting house in all of Northern Arizona," with a stage for music, gambling, a bar that sold 150 kegs of beers in a week, and a separate room "for ladies and families."

Photos, minerals, narrative signage, and even a re-created mine tunnel tell the story of this unique town, built around the United Verde Mine and once a bustling mecca of saloons, brothels, and gaming joints. Named after Eugene Jerome (whose cousin, Jennie Jerome Churchill, was Winston's

mother), the town saw its heyday in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century when the mine was in full swing extracting copper, silver, and gold from the nearby hills. I find photos of noted madam Jennie Bauters with her "girls," admire cases of malachite, copper, and Apache gold mined in Jerome, see a copper towel warmer from a turn of the century local barber shop. At its height, Jerome was a thriving town, but the mine closure in 1953 changed all that, reducing the town's population to around fifty people. The revival came about, as it so often does, when the artists started moving in, and within a few years Jerome had a second life as an artists' mecca. As it's been reincarnated as a tourist/arts destination, it's amazingly busy for a town that still has under five hundred residents.

It also has a reputation as a haunted town, and you'll see this reflected in the **Jerome Ghost Tours** that are a tourist highlight. The hilltop isolation and wicked history seem ready made for spectral adventures, and the tours don't disappoint. You'll be given special ghost-hunting equipment while your guide takes you to all the famously haunted spots, regaling you with tales not only of the spooky goings-on but of Jerome's unique history. It's a little kitschy, a little informative, and a lot of fun!

You can find out more about this intriguing past at the **Jerome State Historic Park**, where the former Douglas Mansion (home of a mine executive) now holds displays on the history of the area, while the outdoor space gives you plenty of fresh-air moments and fabulous vistas back (or should I say, UP) to town. On the way, make a stop at the **Audrey Headframe Park**, where you can look down into the shaft of this mine (an extension of the United Verde mine), 1900 feet in depth (by comparison, a sign tell us, the Empire State Building is 1250 feet). The elevator contraption ridden by the miners is truly an eye-opener, as I think about a whole group of miners plummeting down in this tiny cage. It really gives you a sobering sense of just how difficult and dangerous this work was.

All right, I hear you say, enough of this history stuff (fascinating as it is). Let's do some shopping! I agree, it's time to hit the shops and galleries, which are the biggest pleasure in Jerome. In the **Artists Coop**, I find a beautiful selection of ceramics, glass,

paintings, and more. It's great to look through the windows of the gallery to the landscape that inspired the artists. Next door, Jerome **Ghost Pepper Company** carries art of a different kind, with a huge selection of hot sauces, salsas, and seasonings. Need some Carolina Reaper hot sauce? Habanero olive oil? You'll find it here! Next to a stage set-worthy façade, I see **La Victoria** studio, with its hand-blown glass and nice selection of ceramics. Upstairs from here, in my favorite spot in town, **Raku Gallery**, I admire two floors of glass, jewelry, wall art, and ceramics. I totally want the lidded, deep green glass vessel, the horsehair vase, and about fifty other things. (Can I get a raise? I have art to buy!) It's an absolutely stunning collection, and I never visit Jerome without stopping here.

There's even a **Puscifer** store, with memorabilia of these songmeisters from CDs and vinyl to wild masks and costumes—an unlimited supply of fantastic folly. Puscifer's MJ Keenan is also represented by the nice **Caduceus Tasting Room**, where you can sip flights of wine from the sister company to Merkin, whose wines we experienced in Cottonwood. In **The Rock Shop**, I drool (figuratively, of course) over tourmaline, jasper, and blue quartz, both carved and in more raw forms. In **Firefly** I admire a wide variety of housewares, jewelry, knickknacks and more inspired by nature and its forms. I make sure to save plenty of time for **Nellie Bly Kaleidoscopes and Art Glass**, where you almost won't believe the incredible variety of kaleidoscopes on display, from beautifully carved little wooden tubes to elaborate black onyx and tourmaline numbers, and even musical kaleidoscopes. I look through the various creations at stars and diamonds, two-sided bursts of color,

revolving pearls, and rainbow-hued swirls. It's a feast for the eyes, something that has to be seen to be believed (and yes, of course, I buy one!). More galleries await down a flight of steps into the New State Motor Company Building, a 1917 landmark (you can't miss it, it's the one with the car on top of a huge pole outside), where I also find the lovely **Canary Coffee Roasters** and marvel at the presence of two great coffee places pretty much across the street from each other. Well, it takes a lot of energy to do all this shopping!

Now, of course, we need to get some food in us. Options are surprisingly limited for such a tourist-driven place, but there are a few good choices. I love **Asylum**, located high above the town and offering not only amazing views but great food and some of the nicest service in town. Whether you go for roasted duck breast, charbroiled ribeye, or some of the lighter selections at lunch, don't miss their signature butternut squash soup, complete with a spidery crema design on top.

Right on Main Street, try **The Clinkscale**, a relaxing spot with a pubby feel, where you can enjoy some great food and creative cocktails at a table or (my choice) the bar. While my neighbor's Tort Mac & Cheese (tortellini with a creamy cheese sauce) looks amazing, I decide on a chicken pesto sandwich, made even more complex by brie and arugula, with a side of yummy tomato/poblano soup. I wash it down with a glass of wine, but you might want to try their craft cocktails like a Serrano Mango Margarita or Black Walnut Manhattan. Speaking of cocktails, I suggest end your night in the **Spirit Room**, a sociable spot just up Main Street (well, nothing's too



Photo: Nick Fox

far away in Jerome), where you'll find a selection of local beers, craft cocktails, friendly staff, occasional live music, with a Western feel under the large mural depicting Jerome's wild history.

There are all kinds of spirits in Jerome, from the kind served here at this friendly tavern to the type that haunts the town. Most importantly, though, is the spirit of the town itself: welcoming, a little (ok, a lot) eccentric, and oh-so-friendly. Don't count on dashing in and out of a gallery without spending twenty minutes in conversation with your new best friend behind the counter. Don't think that place will be open at 10 today just because it was yesterday. Don't think you'll hurry off to dinner, because you'll be distracted by the sun as it sets over the distant bluffs of Sedona and creates a kaleidoscope of color as beautiful and ever-changing as anything Nellie Bly's has to offer. From its perch on Cleopatra Hill, Jerome seems to float above the world, and yet there's a down-to-earth feeling that's belied by its lofty location. It really is (and I don't say this often) one of a kind.

So there you have it. You can do this exploration in any order you like: start in Cottonwood, then move on to Jerome and Prescott, start in Prescott, then do Jerome (you drive through it on the way to Cottonwood). Just remember that these three unique and very different towns are all waiting for you, only a couple of hours drive from Phoenix/Scottsdale. You really need to explore them all at some point, for their pleasures are undeniable and very different from each other. I'll leave the order up to you. Just get there! ■



Photo: Kevin Oke Photo

arizonaresources

INFORMATION

For information on all three towns and their surroundings, visit the Arizona Office of Tourism website: www.visitarizona.com

PRESCOTT INFORMATION

Your best source is www.visit-prescott.com.

LODGING

The Motor Court, 503 S. Montezuma St. Tel: 928-717-0157. Quirky, welcoming and fun redo of a vintage motor court lodging. www.themotorlodge.com

RESTAURANTS

The County Seat, 120 W. Gurley St. Tel: 928-515-3359. Upstairs from a spice shop, a great casual dinner spot. www.countyseataz.com

Farm Provisions, 148 N. Montezuma St. Tel: 928-776-3001. Amazing food, beautifully presented, and delicious (great service, too). www.farmprovisionsaz.com

El Gato Azul, 316 W. Goodwin St. Tel: 928-445-1070. A huge range of globally inspired tapas, imaginatively prepared and well worth checking out. www.elgatoazulprescott.com

The Local, 520 W. Sheldon St. Tel: 928-237-4724. Good (pardon the pun) local spot for breakfast or early lunch. www.localprescott.com

The Raven Café, 142 N. Cortez St. Tel: 928-717-0009. Great for morning coffee/pastries through lunch, dinner, and cocktails. www.ravencafe.com

COFFEE ETC.

The Porch Coffee, 226 N. Montezuma St. Tel: 928- 227-2790. Comfy, welcoming, and friendly coffeehouse. www.porch.coffee

Wild Iris Coffeehouse, 124 S. Granite St. Tel: 928-778-5155. The quintessential coffeehouse in Prescott. www.wildiriscoffee.com

ACTIVITIES

Highlands Center for Natural History, 1375 S. Walker Rd. Tel: 928-776-9550. Discover gardens, walking trails, and much more at this outdoor wonderland. www.highlandscenter.org

Phippen Museum, 4701 Highway 89 N. Tel: 928-778-1385. Beautiful look at a wide range of Western art, in a gorgeous setting. www.phippenartmuseum.org

Museum of Indigenous People, 147 N. Arizona Ave. Tel: 928-445-1230. Small but packed full of treasures from Arizona's indigenous people. www.museumofindigenouspeople.org

Sharlot Hall, 415 W. Gurley St. Tel: 928-445-3122. The history of the area in a fascinating in-town museum. www.sharlothallmuseum.org

NIGHTLIFE

Back Alley Wine Bar, 156 S. Montezuma St. Tel: 480-570-5131. Large wine selection and live music. www.backalleywine.com

Jersey Lilly Saloon, 116 S. Montezuma St. Tel: 928-541-7854. Creative drinks, friendly service, and nice balcony. www.jerseylillysaloon.com

Matt's Longhorn Saloon, 112 S. Montezuma St. Tel: 928-776-2974. Fun saloon with live music and dancing in a historic building. www.mattssaloon.com

COTTONWOOD INFORMATION

For information, visit www.visitcottonwoodaz.org.

Breakfast Lineup at The County Seat in Prescott



Photo: Rich Rubin

LODGING

Pines Inn and Suites, 920 S. Camino Real. Tel: 928-634-9975. Comfy lodgings just a five-minute drive from the heart of Old Town. www.pinesinnandsuites.com

RESTAURANTS

3 Kings Kasbar, 102 E. Pima St., Cottonwood. Tel: 928-639-4433. Fabulous atmosphere, great service, creative and delicious food. www.3kingskasbar.com

Crema Craft Kitchen & Bar, 917 N. Main St., Cottonwood. Tel: 928-649-5785. The best spot for a nice breakfast/lunch (with an invaluable takeout window for coffee/pastries). www.cremacottonwood.com

Merkin Vineyards Osteria, 1001 N. Main St., Cottonwood. Tel: 928-639-1001. Tasting room and restaurant with style, friendliness, and wonderful food/drinks. www.merkinvineyardsosteria.com

Old Town Red Rooster Café, 901 Main St. Tel: 928-649-8100. Friendly and all-welcoming breakfast/lunch spot. www.oldtownredroostercafe.com

Page Springs Cellars Bistro, 1500 N. Page Springs Rd., Cornville. Tel: 928-639-3004. Wine flights and creative cuisine at this esteemed winery. www.pagespringscellars.com

COFFEE ETC.

Firecreek Coffee Company, 677 E. Mingus Ave. Tel: 928-639-1234. Nice coffeehouse/local hangout. www.firecreekcoffee.com

Violette's Bakery Café, 900 Main St., Clarkdale. Tel: 928-821-6712. Charming outdoor café in nearby Clarkdale with great pastries and coffee. www.violettesbakerycafe.com

ACTIVITIES

Dead Horse Ranch State Park, 675 Dead Horse Ranch Rd. 928-634-5283. A getaway into the everchanging scenery of Arizona's awesome outdoors. www.azstateparks.com/dead-horse

Jail Trail, 1101 N Main Street. Nature right at the edge of town. www.verdebirdingtrail.com/birdsites/hotspot/jailtrail/index.php

Tuzigoot National Monument, 25 Tuzigoot Road, Clarkdale. Tel: 928-634-5564. Remarkable relic of past civilization, with astounding hilltop vistas. www.nps.gov/tuzi

Verde Canyon Railroad, 300 N. Broadway, Clarkdale. Tel: 800-582-7245. The perfect way to leave the driving to them and catch some incredible scenery. www.verdecanyonrr.com

JEROME INFORMATION

For information, see the Chamber of Commerce website, www.jeromechamber.com

LODGING

Hillside House Vacation Rental, 687 Main St. Tel: 928-821-2412. Your comfy home away from home in Jerome. www.hillsidehousejerome.com

Surgeon's House Bed and Breakfast, 100 Hill St. Tel: 928-639-1452. Nice suites and oh those gardens! www.surgeonshouse.com

RESTAURANT

Asylum, 200 Hill St., Jerome. Tel: 928-639-3197. Great food and panoramic views in this historic building. www.asylumjerome.com

The Clinkscale, 309 Main St. Tel: 928-634-6225. Right at the heart of town and perfect for drinks/dinner. www.theclinkscale.com/restaurant

Mine Café, 115 Jerome Ave. Tel: 928-639-0123. The go-to breakfast/lunch spot for visitors and locals alike in Jerome.. www.facebook.com/theminecafe

COFFEE ETC.

Canary Coffee Roasters, 110 Main St., Jerome. Nice little spot with great coffee, inside the historic Motor State Co. building. www.canarycoffee-roasters.com

Coppertown Coffee, 111 Main St. Takeout joint that's perfect for a pick-me-up just when you need it. www.coppertowncoffeeandgelato.com

NIGHTLIFE

Spirit Room, 166 Main St. Tel: 928-634-8809. Fun place for a drink or two (and one of the only late-night spots in town). www.spiritroom.com

ACTIVITIES

Ghost Tours of Jerome. Tel: 928-649-8998. A fun way to explore the haunted side of Jerome. www.jeromeghosttours.com

Jerome State Historic Park, 100 Douglas Rd. Tel: 928-634-5381. Jerome's history in a historic mansion, with a lovely setting. www.azstateparks.com/jerome

Mine Museum, 200 Main St. Tel: 928-634-5477. Fascinating little museum chock-full of relics from Jerome's wild past. www.jeromehistorical-society.com/museums-buildings/mine-museum

Audrey Headframe Park, 55 Douglas Rd. A glimpse into some of the harsh realities of the mining business in this outdoor park. www.jeromehistoricalsociety.com/museums-buildings/audrey-headframe-park