



# BILL ON THE ROAD

## AND AROUND THE WORLD

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Bill Clevlen | January 21, 2024

## Here Are 10 Free & Amusing Things To Do in Tempe

Tempe is located about 20 minutes southeast of Phoenix, Arizona. It's a wonderful location for a home base to explore all that the region has to offer. It's within easy driving distance from places like Mesa, Chandler, Glendale, Scottsdale, Gilbert, and of course Phoenix itself. I found that there are lots of things to do in Tempe – and many of them are free!

If you're looking for things to do in Tempe, the good news is there is more than enough to keep you busy! From outdoor activities to museums and even just areas to walk around and explore. There are also plenty of free things to do in Tempe or in some of the communities just a short drive away.



I recently spent two weeks visiting Tempe as I escaped the frigid winter weather in the midwest. I knew I wanted to be in Arizona and found an affordable AirBNB in Tempe that was my home base during my stay.

It was great to learn that the area has so many free things to do! I'm going to share with you some of my favorite experiences during my time in the area.

## 1. The Rose Garden at MCC

I've become a fan of plants and flowers as I've gotten older, so I had to check out this free rose garden that I spotted on Google Maps while I was driving around. Turns out, it's one of the largest rose gardens in the country and possibly the largest west of the Mississippi River! Over 10,000 bushes of roses can be found at the Mesa Community College Rose Garden.

The gigantic rose garden can be spotted right off Southern Avenue in front of the college. It's absolutely free to visit and if you're lucky, you'll run into one of the many great volunteers who help maintain it! If you enjoy flowers, this should definitely be on your list of things to do in Tempe!

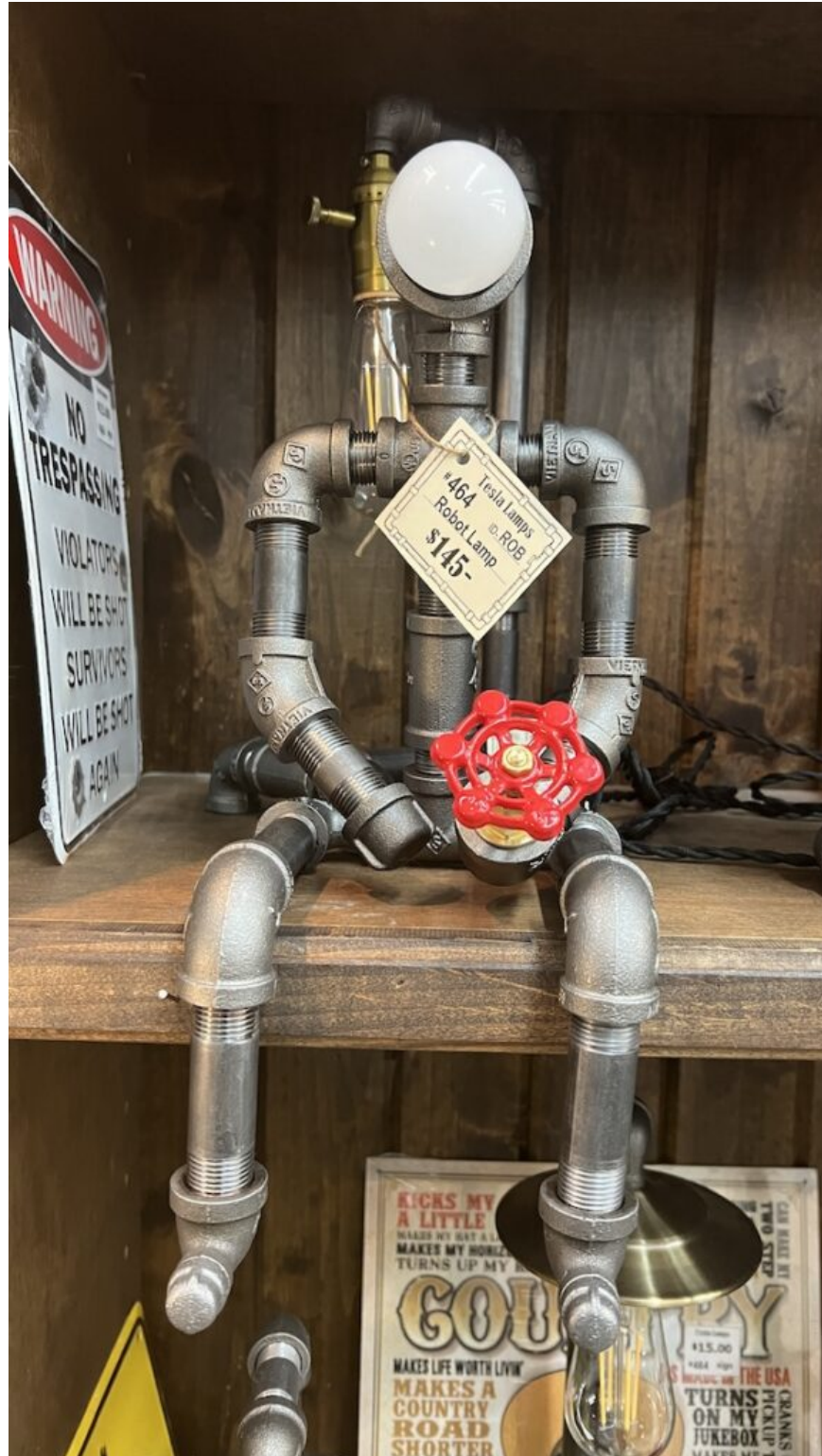


## 2. Merchant Square Antiques

I'm not normally that interested in [antique malls](#) but I found this place (by accident) and loved it! I went to have lunch at the American Way Smokehouse (which is incredible!) and there was an antique mall literally attached to the restaurant.

After I finished eating, I started exploring the mall and was blown away by the cool variety of stuff they had for sale. Everything from the old-school signs and things like the Bob's Big Boy statue at the front entrance made this place super fun!

It was a 10 minute drive from where I was staying in Tempe and is definitely worth checking out! Don't miss out on a smoked tri-tip sandwich for lunch at the smokehouse either!



### 3. Walk Around Downtown Tempe

One of my favorite things to do in Tempe was simply walking around the downtown area. There are lots of restaurants and little shops. I loved seeing the artwork (more on that in a minute) and enjoying the vibe you get from college towns.

Depending on the time of the year you visit, Downtown Tempe offers special events and promotions you can take advantage of. You can check out their website for a [calendar](#).



#### **4. Walk, Bike, or Boat at Tempe Town Lake**

I went for a walk along the Tempe Town Lake, a man-made body of water just outside of the downtown area. There are nicely paved trails where locals were biking and roller blading along the water. I saw people fishing as well as enjoying time in canoes and rowboats.

There are several bridges which can make for some nice photos of the downtown skyline. At the far end of the lake, there's a pedestrian bridge that can take you to the other side. While I was there, they were holding rowboat competitions – which was fun to watch!



## 5. Check Out Tempe's Cool Buildings

There are people that appreciate architecture way more than I do. But it's impossible not to notice that Tempe has so many beautiful buildings! So many of them are colorful and modern and really give life to certain areas around the city.

One that I noticed over and over was the beautiful ASU Gammage Performing Arts building. It was built in the 1960s and inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. The design was actually intended to be used for a building in Iraq! It seats 3,000 people and holds all sorts of concerts and shows.



## 6. Hole In The Rock

This is one of the most popular spots in the Phoenix area to view the sunset. It's called the "Hole In The Rock" – for obvious reasons as you see in the photo below. It'll be a short, ten minute hike up to the top. There's a parking lot below that can fill up closer to sunset.

It's also pretty crowded on nice days. There are other spots where you can hike and escape at least some of the crowds, but it's sort of a must-do if you're in the area. Just don't plan to be alone!



## 7. Enjoy The Great Public Art in Tempe!

There are some awesome murals in Tempe! Lots of great public art as well! There are so many things to see in Tempe, that the city actually made an "art" map for tourists to use while [navigating](#) around town.

Many of the murals are within minutes of each other making it super easy to hop around town and see them in a short time span. And chances are you won't need a map for many of them – you'll just spot them as you're out and about!



## 8. Tempe History Museum

Check out and learn all about the local history of Tempe at the Tempe History Museum. The museum has four different galleries to explore and a rotating exhibit area as well. Admission to the museum is absolutely free!

## 9. ASU Art Museum

It's not a huge art museum but it's a nice way to spend 30 minutes or so if you're looking for free things to do in Tempe. It's also a nice way to get out of the summer heat or wait out a thunderstorm. Speaking of which, there's

apparently a sculpture garden, which I wasn't able to see during my visit. Why? Because there was a "threat of rain" according to the guy at the front desk. Uhhhhh ok? (Newsflash – It never did rain that day.)

They also validate parking but make sure you park in the correct lot. I found out the hard way that they don't validate parking in the garage that's literally right next door to their building.



## 10. The Gravesite of Waylon Jennings

Pay your respects to one of the great country music icons ever! Waylon Jennings, who had hit songs like "Mama, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys" and "Let's Go To Luckenbach, Texas" – was laid to rest in Mesa,