

# 12 Cool Things To Do In Mesa, AZ, Even In The Summer

Connie Pearson, Updated October 18, 2022

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Dolly Steamboat at the Canyon Lake Marina. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

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*Arizona is understandably a winter destination as the snowbirds fly south in search of warm and sunshine. But even in the summer months, there are plenty of fun things to do in Mesa Arizona. The key is to find the INDOOR things to do. Or get up really, really early. Here are our favorite things to do in Mesa AZ, even in the summer.*

*The writer was hosted.*

If you visit Mesa Arizona in Maricopa County in the summer months, it will be hot. Very hot. Not the sticky, humid heat of the Southeast, but a drier heat where the temperatures and winds sometimes feel as if a space heater is blowing from all sides.

October to April are understandably more popular months to visit this part of the southwest and [Arizona](#), but there are plenty of things to see, eat, and enjoy in this Phoenix suburb while staying cool. Armed with sunscreen, hats, and an air-conditioned vehicle, here are 12 attractions and eateries that are highly recommended.

**Read More:** [Best Arizona resorts for families](#)





Dinosaur replica at Arizona Museum of Natural History. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

## 1. Imagine Prehistoric Times at the Arizona Museum of Natural History

Kids of all ages who are fascinated by dinosaurs will love the [Arizona Museum of Natural History](#) in downtown Mesa. Animatronic figures and life-size replicas appear everywhere you turn.

Once you have your fill of prehistoric creatures, you can enjoy a three-story waterfall, panning for gold, wandering through a recreated Sonoran Desert village such as the native cultures of Arizona once inhabited, or learning about Arizona history dating back to the time of the conquistadors.

Stand on the ground level in front of the falls, on the steps nearby, or on an overlook

on the floor above so you're in a good viewing position to experience the show at the waterfall. The show happens every 30 minutes and simulates a flash flood.

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**SheBuysTravel Tip:** *There is plenty of free parking near the museum. Take note that it is closed on Mondays and plan to spend an hour and a half to two hours when you visit.*

 things to do in mesa az - Humpty Dumpty sculpture in downtown Mesa  
Humpty Dumpty sculpture, which is an example of public art in Mesa. Photo credit: Connie Pearson



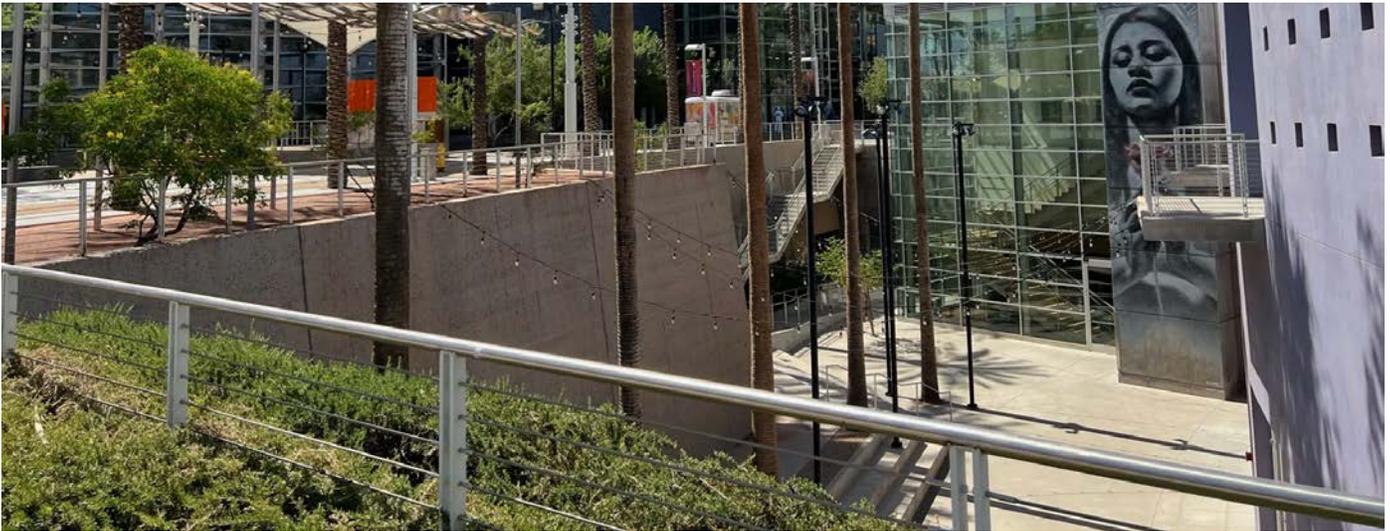
## 2. Admire the Public Art in Downtown Mesa

Starting outside the Arizona Museum of Natural History and extending for blocks in all directions, you can find the results of Mesa's commitment to revitalizing the downtown. It's filled with Instagram-worthy murals and whimsical sculptures.

Download the easy-to-use [digital public art guide](#). For a cool experience, go early in the morning or when temperatures drop in the evening.

Main Street is steadily increasing its number of coffee shops and restaurants. On weekends, you can follow the sounds of live music to find your favorite performers. Another perk is the presence of more than 5,000 free and convenient parking spaces!





Outside the Contemporary Art Museum at the Mesa Arts Center. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

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### 3. Attend an Event at Mesa Arts Center

Before you leave downtown Mesa, be sure to visit the [Mesa Arts Center](#), prominently located at 1 East Main Street. The striking architecture and versatility provided by four theaters, five art galleries and 14 working art studios combine to create a tremendous asset for the people of Mesa and visitors to the city. Here is a place where the visual arts and the performing arts combine.

The Store located a few steps from the Mesa Contemporary Arts Museum has beautiful, one-of-a-kind paintings, jewelry and décor items created by local artists.

During most of the hours of operation, an artist is on-site demonstrating their craft or talent. Artists can also be observed in their studios on the grounds of the center.

The four theaters are of various sizes which lend themselves to large-scale concerts or intimate theatrical performances.

***SheBuysTravel Tip:*** *The Store closes every summer in July and August for complete cleaning and restocking but is back in full swing by Labor Day.*



Tacos at Joyride Taco House in Gilbert, AZ. Photo credit: Connie Pearson



## 4. Sample Restaurants Offering Authentic Mexican Cuisine

Mesa and its surrounding towns have a wide selection of restaurants serving fantastic Mexican cuisine.

- [Macayo's Mexican Food](#) offers dishes using farm-grown, local products and ingredients.
- [Los Sombreros](#) has been going strong for more than 25 years, and its outdoor, misted patio is extremely popular.
- [Someburros](#) has been serving great food for more than three decades and has expanded to 13 locations across the state.

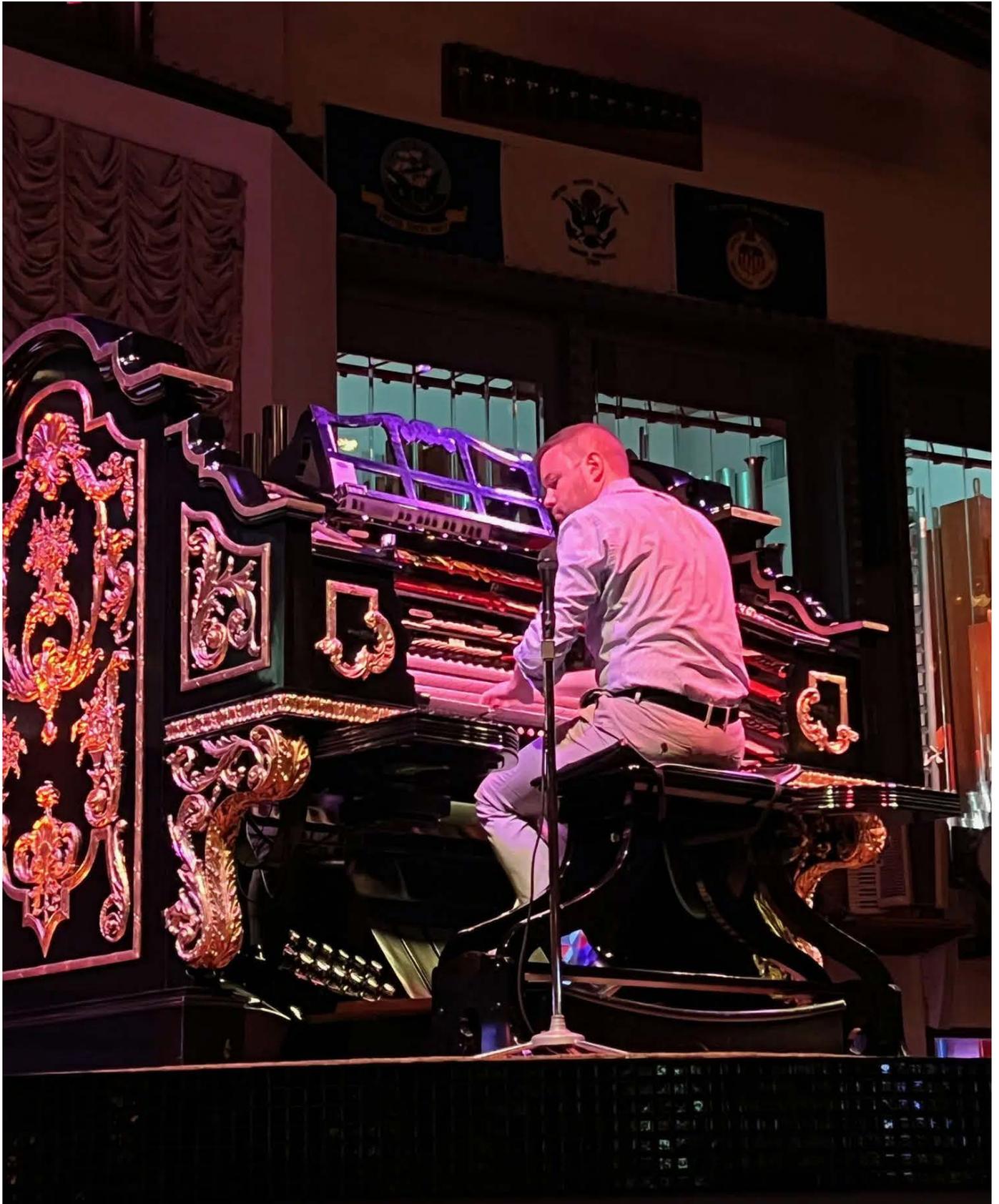
I was especially interested in the variety of tacos offered at [Joyride Taco House](#) in nearby Gilbert, AZ. Tacos definitely get top billing, but the burritos, churros and Mexican street corn are also big hits.

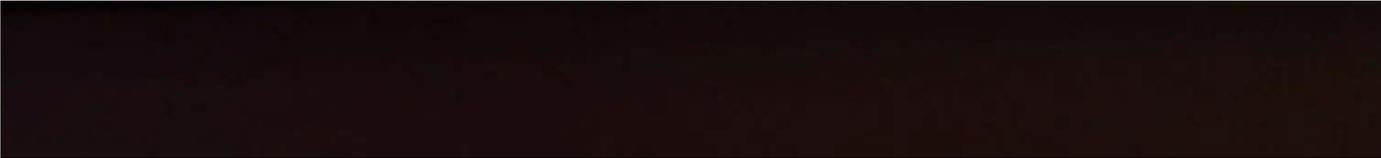
***SheBuysTravel Tip:*** *The churros covered in fruity pebbles, condensed milk, sugar, and cinnamon are kid favorites, as well as being colorful and fun.*





The menu is small at 10po, and this is a walk-up place with no indoor seating. You'll find pork or chicken burritos, street corn and soft-serve ice cream in either vanilla or prickly pear. Some say the prickly pear flavor is like strawberry, but I would urge you to try it and describe it for yourself.





Brett Valliant playing the organ at Organ Stop Pizza. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

## 6. Eat to Music at Organ Stop Pizza

The pizza served at [Organ Stop Pizza](#) is certainly good, but the entertainment is over-the-top.

Thirty minutes after Organ Stop Pizza at 1149 E. Southern Ave. opens for the evening, lights flash, music surrounds you and a giant organ slowly rises from the hidden pit of the stage. For the next 50 minutes or so, an amazing musician thrills the crowd by playing popular favorites and taking requests. Then the organ is lowered for a 10-minute break before emerging to play again.

This is no ordinary organ. It is, in fact, the largest Wurlitzer organ ever constructed. It boasts more than 6,000 pipes and is connected to dozens of percussion instruments with the flip of a switch. Throughout the evening, guests will see bubbles, a disco ball, a light show and dancing cat puppets, all in perfect time to the music.

My granddaughter and I were seated next to a couple in their late 80s who said they visit Organ Stop Pizza several times a year. Nearby were children from toddlers to pre-teens dancing and clapping to the beat. Clearly, this is a family-friendly place

for all ages to enjoy.



My granddaughter in the comfy seat at one of the FatCats Mesa theaters. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

## 7. Play in the Cool At FatCats Mesa

Another great place to be thoroughly entertained in air-conditioned comfort is [FatCats Mesa](#), a giant indoor complex offering food, bowling, arcade games, Glow-in-the-Dark Golf and eight movie screens.

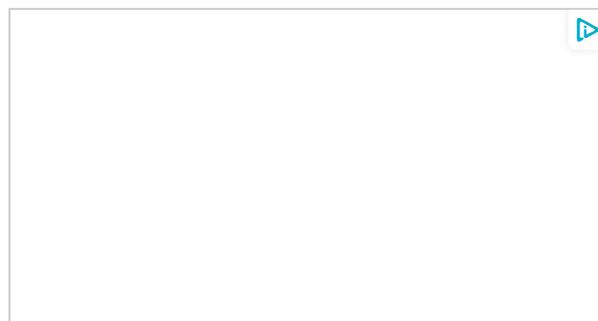
The theater seats are designed for maximum comfort, and the best part is having your meal delivered right to your seat while you watch the movie. When you pay for your movie ticket, you select your seat. Then that seat is noted when you place your order for food.

Before or after the movie, choose from 20 lanes for bowling or pick out your favorite arcade game. It might be sweltering outside, but you and the whole family can spend hours doing fun things in the cool.





Saguaro cactus in the desert landscape along the Apache Trail. Photo credit: Connie Pearson



## 8. Drive the Apache Trail Through the

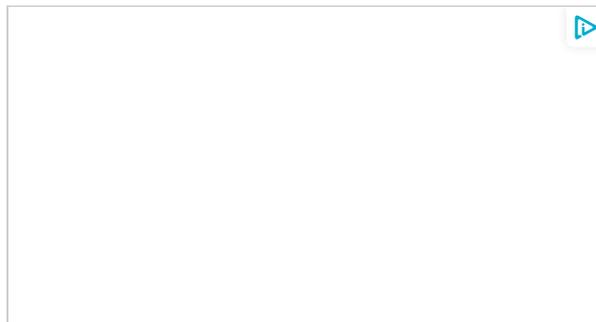
# Superstition Mountains

Mesa is synonymous with the distinctive scenery and the stark vistas that have been the setting for numerous movies and the source of many legends and tales. The best place to explore that scenery is along the Apache Trail, outside of Mesa, which winds through the Superstition Mountains and was used long ago by Native Americans.

Fill your water bottle and your gas tank and pay strict attention to the speed limit signs — the limits changes frequently according to the terrain. You will want to stop and take photos of the Sonoran Desert landscape everywhere, but it's best to stop at designated spots along the trail.

 Superstition Mountain Museum (grandmother and granddaughter in front of the museum)

My granddaughter and I posing in front of an exhibit at Superstition Mountain Museum. Photo credit: Connie Pearson



## 9. Learn the Superstitions at Superstition Mountain Museum

Elvis Presley may have “left the building” at [Superstition Mountain Museum](#), but a chapel named in his honor remains. “Charro!” was filmed here and is the only movie in which Elvis starred but did not sing. He did, though, shoot the steeple off of this chapel during one of the scenes.

Here in the foothills of the Tonto Natural Forest, you will find displays from an authentic Old West stagecoach stop, explanations about the mysterious gold miner nicknamed "the Dutchman," and artifacts from the Apache tribe and early settlers. It is easy to see why this area was chosen as the setting for so many Western movies of the past.

Visiting the general store is free, but the museum requires a small fee. Take note that it is only open Wednesday through Sunday in the summer.



My granddaughter at Goldfield Ghost Town. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

## 10. Step Back to Old West Days at Goldfield Ghost Town

Goldfield, aptly named because of the gold strike made in 1892, came to life when news of the discovery spread. The town thrived for a few years before hopes for striking it rich began to fade and people moved on to places with more promise.

Now, 130 years later, [Goldfield Ghost Town](#) is still a place where visitors can watch gunslingers have a shootout, take a ride on a narrow-gauge railroad, admire the grandeur and allure of the Superstition Mountains to the east and the Goldfield Mountains to the west, pan for gold, browse in shops or have dinner at the Mammoth Steak House & Saloon.

The open-air train ride lasts 20 minutes, and you can often spot some of the native wildlife. Be aware that there is air conditioning in most of the stores, but on hot days, it may not be particularly cool.

The underground mine tours on-site are popular (and cool). The tours last 25 minutes and are filled with facts about mining. Both the train rides and the mining tours charge an admission fee.





Dolly Steamboat at the Canyon Lake Marina. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

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## 11. Take in the Scenery on the Dolly Steamboat at Canyon Lake Marina

Canyon Lake is the smallest of the lakes formed by the Salt River, but it provides endless beauty and great fishing opportunities.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the lake is by taking a 90-minute cruise on the [Dolly Steamboat](#), which is air-conditioned with comfortable seating and large

windows for viewing.

With 28 miles of shoreline, there is ample time to see varieties of cacti, admire the rock formations and spot the birds, Big Horn sheep, deer and flowers as the boat slowly cruises past.

It is easy to step outside for better photography, and food and beverages are available for purchase onboard with cash only. Cruises leave from the Canyon Lake Marina. There are restrooms on the boat and at the marina.





Killer Chili and Prickly Pear Lemonade at Tortilla Flat Saloon. Photo credit: Connie Pearson



## 12. Eat A Bowl of Fiery Chili At Tortilla Flat Saloon

[Tortilla Flat](#) is a tiny town about a seven-minute drive from Canyon Lake Marina, boasting a population of six people.

It began as a stagecoach stop in 1904 and has withstood fires and floods to continue in existence. The best reason to visit Tortilla Flat, in my opinion, is to enjoy a meal at Tortilla Flat Saloon.

Several things set this eatery apart. One is the wallpaper, which consists of real dollar bills placed there by people who have visited from all over the world. Real saddles double as bar stools.

Certain menu items are standouts. Have plenty of water ready when you dive into a bowl of Killer Chili. It is notoriously spicy but so very tasty. You can buy spice mixes at the general store next door if you want to serve this when you return home. The chili is served either over cornbread or with cornbread on the side. The Prickly Pear

Chili is served either over cornbread or with cornbread on the side. The Sticky Feet Lemonade is a sweet, refreshing beverage to balance the fiery chili.

Each kids' meal comes with a complimentary cowboy hat – a guaranteed smile maker.



Western clothing inside the Superstition Mountain Museum. Photo credit: Connie Pearson

## More Fun Things to Do in Mesa AZ

The visit to Mesa that I shared with my granddaughter was short, but I've already noted some attractions I hope to see when I return.

We clearly needed time to go to Golfland Sunsplash amusement park and water park. I'd love to visit the Urey Mountain Regional Park, the Commemorative Air Force Museum, and take some younger grandchildren to the I.D.E.A. Museum.

If we can visit in the spring, I know my husband and some grandsons would love to go to Hohokam Stadium where the Oakland Athletics baseball team has spring training, and Sloan Park where the Chicago Cubs train.

I also know that the 9,000 rose bushes of the Rose Garden at Mesa Community College would be beautiful, and one of the Desert Belle Cruises on Saguaro Lake sounds extremely relaxing. I simply must spend some time savoring Arizona's Fresh Foodie Trail.

When the weather is milder, it would be fun to experience mountain biking, balancing on a paddleboard, Salt River tubing, kayaking, hitting a golf course, strolling through a botanical garden, lacing up my boots for a hiking trail, horseback riding, taking the Wind Cave Trail, taking part in the Mesa Market Place Swap Meet or other outdoor activities.

There clearly is so much more to do, see, and eat in Mesa, Arizona. I hope to get back there soon.