

# PICK YOUR OWN DESERT

It's an understatement to say that when the desert calls out to me, I am powerless to resist. And you will be too. It's just a case of working out what type of desert will appeal to you most...

By Josephine Matyas

**T**ravelling across Arizona, I quickly fill my camera's memory cards, as I'm totally unable to resist snapping the endless mind-blowing vistas of red rocks and towering cacti, as well as the astonishing layers of the planet's geological timeline, which is on display like an exquisite *mille-feuille* pastry for all to see.

Large swathes of Arizona are desert, but they are definitely not barren—they are bursting with life.

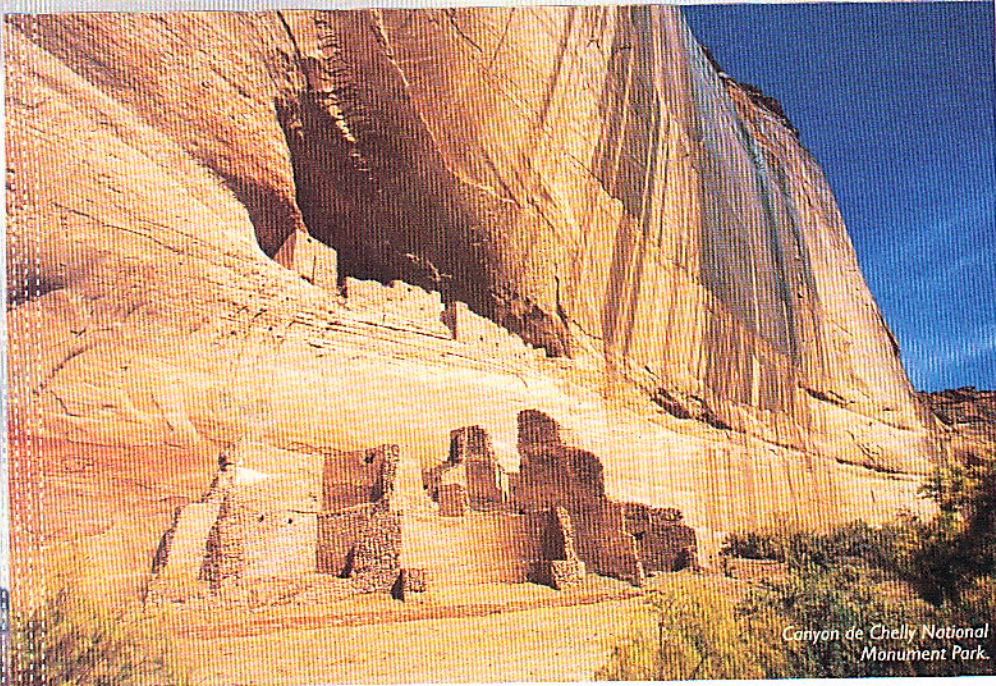
The Sonoran Desert in the south teems with energy and is home to critters like javelina and coyotes, snakes and spiders. There are also flowering shrubs, hardy trees and cacti that put on a show of blooms in the springtime.

To the north you will

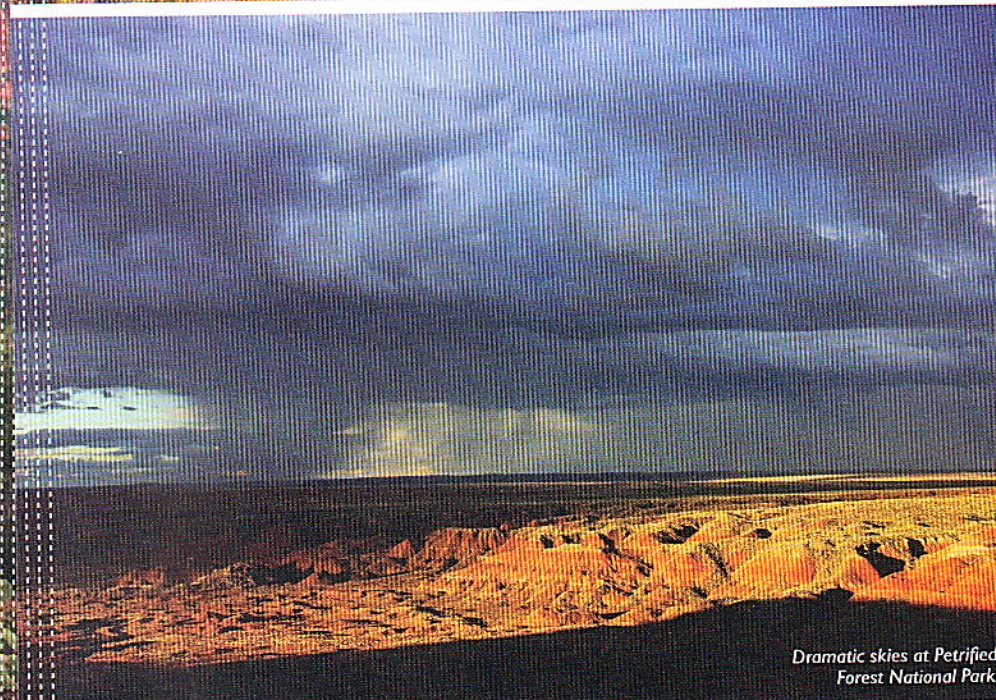
find a mesmerizing mix of high desert and forests on the Colorado Plateau—an expansive landscape of mesas, cliffs, mountains and dramatic canyons where more than 300 million years of layering are exposed. It's a remote region that boasts some of Arizona's most dramatic formations, many of which are considered to be sacred to First Nations tribes like the Navajo, Zuni and Hopi.

Arizona's deserts are wild and varied, so it's important to work out what kind of desert *suits* you—expanses of cathedral-like cacti, ink-black skies dotted with constellations or mighty red rocks that dwarf all the humans who wander in their direction. Just remember to take extra memory cards for your camera...

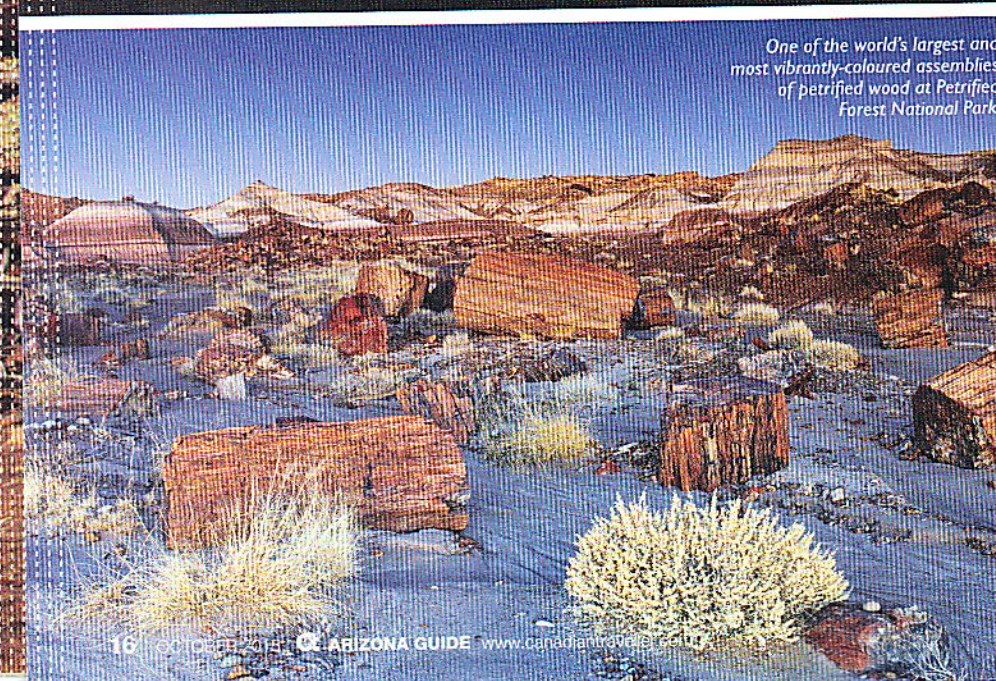




Canyon de Chelly National Monument Park.



Dramatic skies at Petrified Forest National Park.



One of the world's largest and most vibrantly-coloured assemblies of petrified wood at Petrified Forest National Park.

### *If you want... to explore iconic desert landscapes*

- Just under 200 kilometres south east of Tucson, the balanced boulders and rock pinnacles at Chiricahua National Monument rise out of surrounding straw-coloured grasslands. The Chiricahua Apache call this the 'Land of Standing Rocks'.
- The pastel-splashed escarpment of the Painted Desert in northern Arizona got its name because the hills look like they've been painted with the colours of the sunset.
- The canyons at Canyon de Chelly in the north east of the state are the spiritual centre for the Navajo. According to legend, Navajo women warn their children to be good or 'Spider Woman' will carry them off to her home on top the tall sandstone spire at Spider Rock.
- Monument Valley spans the border between Arizona and Utah and contains some of the most dreamlike landscapes in the US: immense sandstone buttes, beautifully-sculpted red mesas and towering spires. It has also been the backdrop for dozens of films and commercials.
- When the setting sun touches the red rocks of Sedona, the effect is magical. Hikes along Cathedral Rock Trail or Schnebly Hill Trail give incredible views of the red rock formations.

### *If you want... to see slices of geological time*

- In the north west corner of the state, the Grand Canyon—one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World—is a slash more than 1.6-kilometres-deep and 445-kilometres-long that has been formed by six million years of erosion. You can hike it, bike it, ride a mule through it, fly above it or raft through the bottom of it on the Colorado River.
- At Petrified Forest National Park in the north east of the state, the trees that grew 225 million years ago were buried in volcanic mud before they changed into multi-coloured fossils. They say that bad luck follows those who break the law and take pieces of petrified rock away from the forest.

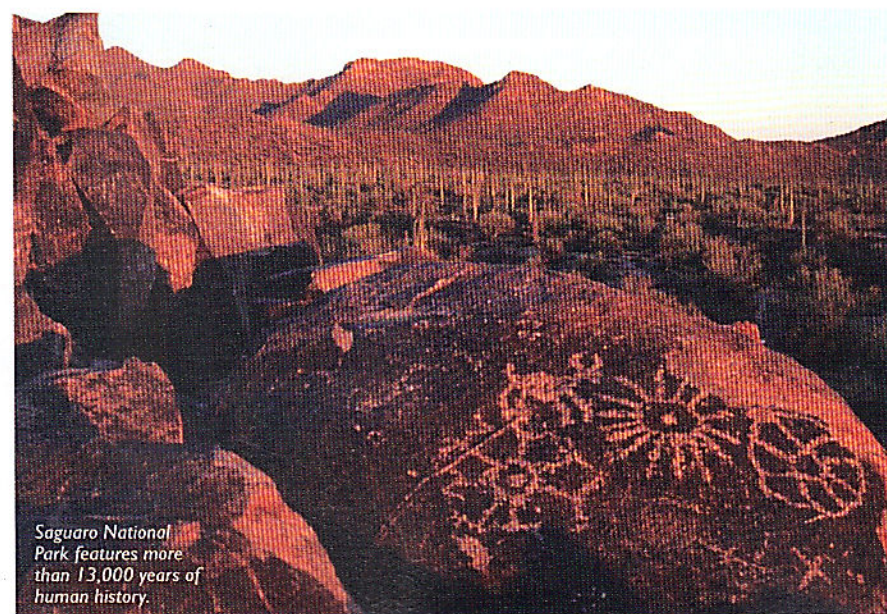




The McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope at Kitt Peak is the largest solar instrument in the world.



Dramatic clouds over the Painted Desert.



Saguaro National Park features more than 13,000 years of human history.

## *If you want... to gaze skyward*

- High in the Sonoran Desert, Kitt Peak National Observatory's night time interpretive program uses high quality binoculars and large telescopes to watch the darkening skies, planets and constellations.
- 'SkyNights' at the Mount Lemmon SkyCenter use Arizona's largest dedicated public viewing telescope to observe the wonders of the cosmos.
- At Flagstaff's Lowell Observatory—where Pluto was discovered in 1930—the original photographic telescope is still in operation.
- The skies above 3,220-metre-high Mount Graham in Arizona's south east corner are among the clearest and darkest in North America. Docents lead day-long tours to the 16-storey optical telescope that was used to discover a galaxy cluster more than seven billion light years away from earth.
- At Lost Dutchman State Park near Mesa, park rangers guide full moon hikes and monthly astronomy events. ✱

## SILVER SCREEN

### THAT LOOKS FAMILIAR: ARIZONA ON THE SILVER SCREEN

- Forrest Gump – Monument Valley
- Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom – Page
- Star Wars Return of the Jedi – Yuma
- Stagecoach – Monument Valley
- Contact – Canyon de Chelly
- Starman – Meteor Crater
- 2001: A Space Odyssey – Monument Valley



## WHERE TO LEARN ABOUT ARIZONA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Outside Tucson, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum's interpretive walking trails, hummingbird aviary and indoor displays provide a great insight into the arid environment of North America's hottest desert.

Saguaro National Park near Tucson is home to forests of towering Saguaro cacti, the multi-armed sentinel of the south west that's only found in the Sonoran Desert. The Tohono O'odham Indians will never burn a Saguaro as they believe it holds the souls of their ancestors.

A visit to the popular Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix provides a sweet stroll through the blooming plants of the Sonoran Desert. The winding paths, dense greenery and themed gardens offer a wonderful way to learn about desert vegetation.

The Grand Canyon could swallow up three CN Towers stacked from the canyon floor before the spire would peek over the rim. The crown jewel of the National Parks Service, the canyon's visitor centre explains the geological forces that have been at work for millions of years. At the South Rim, the National Geographic IMAX Theatre screens the award winning *Grand Canyon - The Hidden Secrets* movie on a giant six-storey movie screen.

About 50,000 years ago an asteroid travelling at 40,000 kilometres-per-hour collided with the earth, creating hurricane force winds on impact. The result is Meteor Crater, the best-preserved and first proven meteor impact site in the world. It's huge: downtown San Francisco would fit across the bottom of the 168-metre-deep hole.



### A MUST-SEE DESTINATION

Visit Phoenix's #1 Attraction



The World's Only Global  
Musical Instrument Museum®

# MIM

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM

MIM.org | 480.478.6000 | Open Daily

4725 E. Mayo Blvd., Phoenix, AZ 85050  
(Corner of Tatum & Mayo Blvds., just south of Loop 101)

Visit Northern Arizona to experience the Wonders of the World.  
Grand Canyon, Painted Desert, Petrified Forest and...

## The BEST preserved meteorite impact site on Earth!

Interactive Discovery Center  
Guided Rim Tours  
Gift & Rock Shop

Big-Rig Friendly  
RV PARK



EXPERIENCE THE  
IMPACT!

Open year round

Centrally located to several  
National Parks & Monuments

For more information visit our website:

MeteorCrater.com • 1-800-289-5898

Connect with us.

