

Secret

PHOENIX

CELEBRATE

by Suzanne Wright

Valley Guide's 25th anniversary

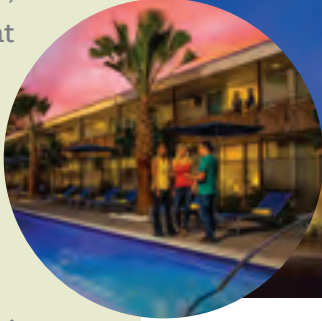
25th

(mostly) undiscovered treasures

JULIE FOSKETT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOTEL VALLEY HO

Golf courses. Spas. Year-round sunshine. When you think of Greater Phoenix, these are a few things that come to mind. Don't get us wrong—we love that the metro area is renowned for its beautiful golf courses, stunning saguaros, and inviting weather. But that's not all Phoenix is. Our fair city has its share of delightful secrets and weird and wonderful spots to visit. So, forget everything you've heard about this oasis in the desert, and prepare to be surprised by this roundup of little-known attractions.



{PARTY LIKE IT'S 1956}

Scottsdale's **Hotel Valley Ho** is timeless—as hip now as it was during the 1950s and 60s, when Hollywood's elite stayed there. It's also one of the nation's most stylish examples of mid-century modernism. For behind-the-scenes insight into the hotel's architecture and its

celebrity-infused past, sign up for the "Magical History Tour." The 90-minute tour grants you access to exclusive areas, including the rooftop with its panoramic views of Phoenix, Scottsdale, and the surrounding mountains. Contact the concierge for tour reservations. 6850 E. Main St., Scottsdale, 480-248-2000, hotelvalleyho.com



A CASTLE

LIKE NO OTHER

Phoenix architect Boyce Luther Gulley built **Mystery Castle** for his daughter in the foothills of South Mountain using a lot of imagination, a little humor, and plenty of found treasures that include railroad tracks, wagon wheels, bits of colored glass, rusty shovels, even a covered wagon. By the time he died in 1945, his 15-year labor of love had grown into an 18-room, 13-fireplace fantasyland. Now, officially designated a Phoenix Point of Pride, it remains open for public tours October–May. 800 E. Mineral Rd., Phoenix, 602-268-1581, mymysterycastle.com

🔑 Built from myriad found objects, Mystery Castle is like none other.



MARK SKALNY

At the DRIVE-IN



It's not a drive-in, it's more of a sit-in. Technicalities aside, it's an opportunity to catch a flick under the stars, which during Greater Phoenix's cooler months, guarantees an enjoyable evening. **Biltmore Fashion Park's** "Movies in the Park" happen in the fall and spring and feature classic films, from cult favorites to big-time award winners. Bring blankets and chairs and your own picnic, or indulge in nearby restaurants' pre- and post-film dining specials. Grassy seating is first-come, first-served. 2502 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix, 602-955-8400, shopbiltmore.com/events

BOOTLEGGERS & gin joints



Formerly a Prohibition-era speakeasy, the Mystery Room at the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired **Arizona Biltmore** hotel is open again after more than 80 years. Hours of operation are 8–11 p.m. on Sundays, and you'll need a password to gain entry. For the password, follow the hotel's Twitter account, @arizonabiltmore (search #speakeasy), or ask the concierge. Once you're in and enjoying your 1920s cocktail, look for the escape doors that law-dodging drinkers once used to flee police raids. 2400 E. Missouri Ave., Phoenix, 602-955-6600, arizonabiltmore.com





DENNIS LARSON

MUSIC *and more*

Dubbed “Walk-in Wednesdays,” the weekly open mic night at **Tempe Center for the Arts** features acoustic performances and poetry readings. There’s no cover charge to attend the event at this state-of-the-art venue, all ages are welcome (younger performers go on from 5–6 p.m.), and after the show, you can sit outside on the patio to enjoy views of Tempe Town Lake shimmering in the moonlight. 700 W. Rio Salado Pkwy., Tempe, 480-350-2829, tempe.gov



JULIE FOSKETT

GOOD DOGS

Ever heard of a Sonoran Dog? Mouth-watering and bacon-wrapped, this Southern Arizona hot dog specialty is coveted by foodies. Get yours from what many locals consider to be the most authentic place in town—**Nogales Hot Dogs**, a modest tented stand just off 20th Street and Indian School Road. Top your dog with beans, onions, mayo, and jalapeños, then slather with salsa for the full experience. 1945 E. Indian School Rd., Phoenix



Books, books & more books

Perched atop Schoolhouse Road in Cave Creek, with views of Black and Elephant Mountains, sits the privately funded **Desert Foothills Library**. You don’t need to be a resident to check out materials, just a book-lover. Snag a paperback from the volunteer-run used bookstore, sit a spell on the library’s back patio soaking up the desert vistas, or wander the trail on the library’s grounds. Don’t miss the library’s fun educational programs, which run the gamut from architecture to zoology. 38443 N. Schoolhouse Rd., Cave Creek, 480-488-2286, desertfoothillslibrary.org

JILL RICHARDS



WILD HORSES



A herd of nearly 100 **wild horses** roams the banks along the Lower Salt River and Verde Rivers in the Tonto National Forest, just east of Greater Phoenix. Some historians claim that their lineage dates back to the 17th

century; others say they wandered from the nearby Fort McDowell Reservation. Everyone agrees they are a natural treasure in an urban setting. Keep your eyes peeled to catch a glimpse of them from horseback, kayak, or hiking trail. saltriverwildhorses.com



PHOTOS BY JULIE FOSKETT

TABLE-at-FARM



Many are surprised to learn that Greater Phoenix has a farming past—and a farming present. To experience it firsthand, visit **Schnepf Farms** in Queen Creek. Four times a year, renowned local chefs prepare themed, four-course, wine-paired dinners in the farm's orchard. Dine at white-linen-topped, candle-lit tables nestled amid the trees, while you nosh on savory, fresh, and local foods. Cost is \$85 per person or \$150 per couple. 24810 S. Rittenhouse Rd., Queen Creek, 480-987-3100, schnepffarms.com

LIGHTS AND MUSIC



KAREN NEWHOUSE

It's a light show, it's a fireworks display, it's a bathroom! Yes—a bathroom. The 2nd- and 5th-floor bathrooms of Phoenix's **Burton Barr Central Library** feature color-shifting LED lights glowing from translucent walls, mimicking a spectacular fireworks show. So intriguing is this lights display, the *Travel Channel* recently ranked this bathroom second best on its list of America's 10 most outrageous bathrooms. Even if you don't have to "go," you should go check it out. 1221 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, 602-262-4636, phoenixpubliclibrary.org

CLASSIC FUN

Forbes named **Enchanted Island Amusement Park** one of America's top 12 city parks. Located in central Phoenix's Encanto Park, it began life in 1948 as Kiddieland. A tucked-away gem, this modest amusement park



COURTESY OF ENCHANTED ISLAND

still retains much of its classic and vintage allure. Take the family for a ride on the historic carousel, try your luck at arcade games, pedal-boat across a fish-filled lagoon, or hop aboard the C.P. Huntington Train. 1202 W. Encanto Blvd., Phoenix, 602-254-1200, enchantedisland.com

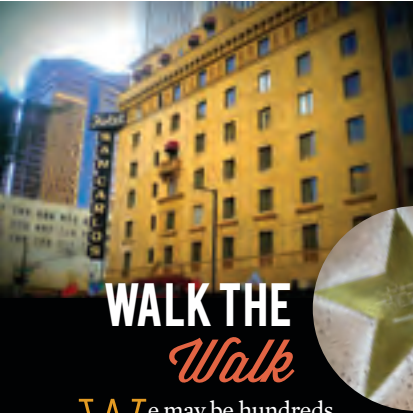


JEFF STEINSHORN

To the Batcave!

No superheroes here, just a jaw-dropping scene of bat flight. During their maternity season—spring through late summer—thousands of **Mexican free-tailed bats** take wing at sunset. The bats occupy an Arizona Canal Diversion Channel north of Camelback Road. Access the viewing deck off 40th Street by walking the path on the northern side of the canal to the tunnel, past office buildings and a parking garage. Not in town during bat season? Opt for the **butterflies** at the Desert Botanical Garden's Butterfly Pavilion. *Bats:* azgfd.gov; *butterflies:* dbg.org





WALK THE Walk

We may be hundreds of miles from the TCL Chinese Theatre, but Phoenix can boast its own Hollywood Walk of Fame. As Arizona's first air-conditioned hotel, the historic **Hotel San Carlos** became a Roaring 20s hangout for Hollywood stars, such as Mae West, Clark Gable, and Humphrey Bogart, during their "get away from it all" trips to the desert. Sixty-five years after opening in 1928, the Hotel San Carlos added the Starwalk on the sidewalk in front of the hotel.

Take a stroll to see the famous names, then pop inside the hotel's lounge for a cocktail.

202 N. Central Ave.,
Phoenix, 602-253-4121,
hotelsancarlos.com



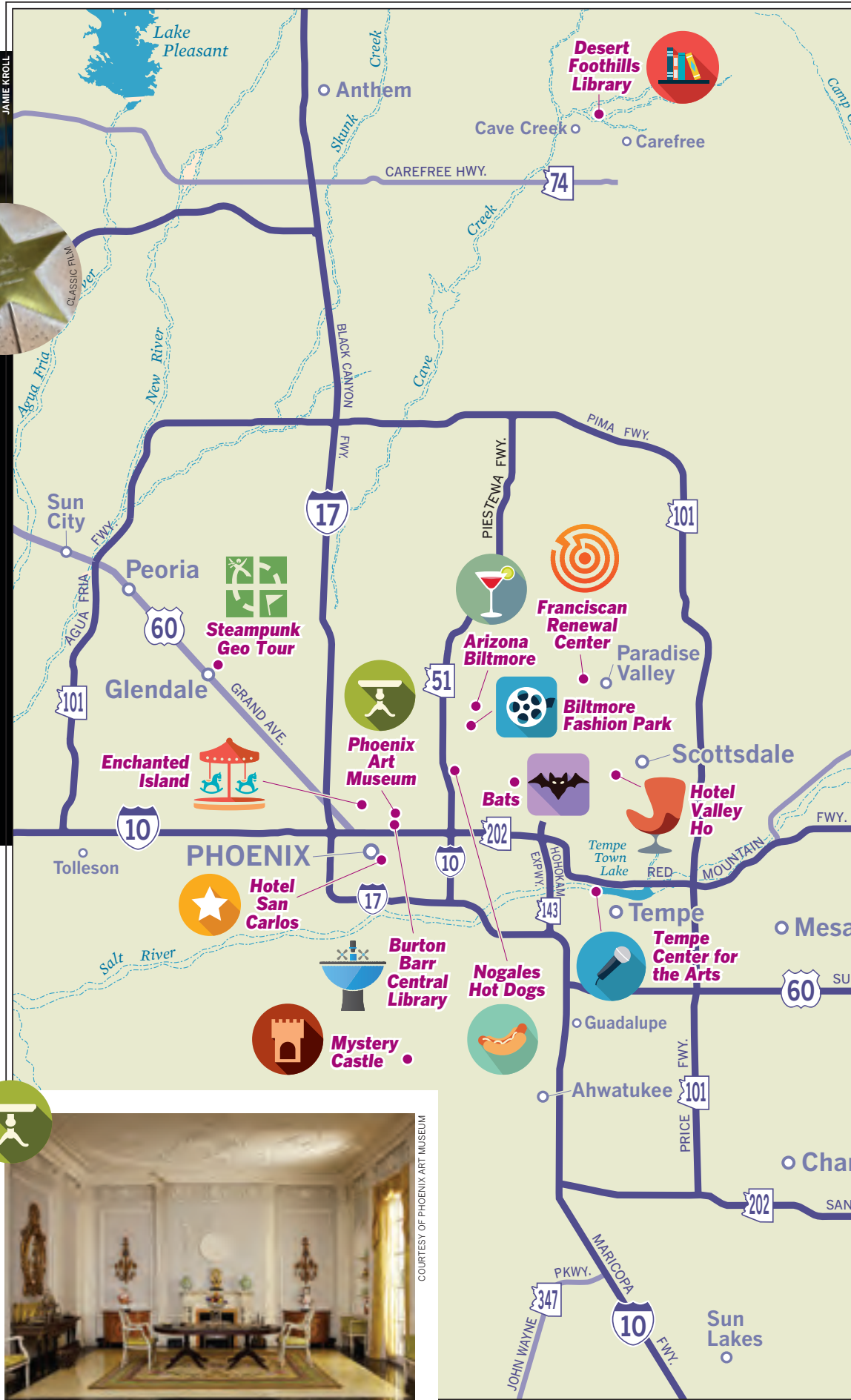
Size matters

Everyone can agree. Miniatures are cute. Tiny animals, tiny furniture, tiny books—all cute. For examples of really impressive miniatures, find your way to a secret corner of the **Phoenix Art Museum**.

Tucked in a cozy room behind the Dutch Gallery are the Thorne Miniature Rooms, a collection of tiny replicas constructed on a scale of one inch to one foot of famous homes from the US, Asia, and Europe. The houses span centuries—from the 13th to the 20th—and design styles, from Art Deco to French countryside. 1625 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, 602-257-1880, phxart.org



COURTESY OF PHOENIX ART MUSEUM





JIMMY SMITH

A place for peace

Lincoln Drive showcases some of the area's ritziest resorts, yet it's also home to the unassuming **Franciscan Renewal Center**, known simply as "The Casa" by locals. Whether or not you're religious, all are welcome to stroll the lovely grounds at no charge. Walking the full-size stone labyrinth with its up-close and unobstructed views of Mummy Mountain, you'll feel the solitude and spirituality of the Sonoran Desert. 5802 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale, 480-948-7460, thecasa.org



ELVIS LIVES!

The **Elvis Memorial Chapel** (at the Superstition Mountain Museum in Apache Junction) is both a movie memorabilia museum that screens flicks filmed at the now-defunct Apacheland Movie Ranch and a wedding chapel. Relocated and painstakingly reconstructed after surviving two fires, the chapel is open to visitors for touring and for weddings. 4087 N. Apache Trail, Apache Junction, 480-983-8888, superstitionmountainmuseum.org/elvis-chapel



ATTENTION, treasure-seekers

The **West Valley Steampunk Geo Tour** began as an interactive geocaching tour that explores the West Valley's STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Math) assets. Start your tech treasure hunt by downloading a free online passport and a list of the self-guided locations from Buckeye to Peoria; there are 30 geocaches in all. Once you've gathered 20 caches, show your passport to the Glendale Convention and Visitors



Bureau to claim a prize. *Glendale Convention and Visitors Bureau*, 5800 W. Glenn Dr., 623-431-0431, geocaching.com/adventures/geotours/west-valley-steampunk

Suzanne Wright is a freelance writer who has written for American Way, National Geographic Traveler, and USA Today. She is based in Cave Creek, a town so small she can't keep secrets.