

Luxury in the Desert

Upscale Southwestern style pairs perfectly with sprawling Phoenix landscapes

To these East Coast eyes, Phoenix looks decidedly different from anywhere else on the planet.

The plants are prickly, the air is arid, and the regal resorts have so much growing room that they sprawl in all directions, embracing rocks, trees, hills, and acres of flowers that seem to blossom all year. Not surprisingly, romance resonates at several area resorts.

One of them, Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs, deserves its name: it is designed so well around existing natural barriers that it looks like it was part of the original landscape. The 584-room, all-suite property, distributed among 28 Mediterranean-style structures, sits on 400 acres below the North Mountains and next to the Phoenix Mountain Nature Preserve.

After a round of golf at adjacent Lookout Mountain Golf Course, guests cool down at Falls Water Village, home of a 40-foot waterfall, a 138-foot waterslide, and a photogenic rock garden that literally begs to be photographed. The main pool, one of eight at the resort, has a large boulder in the middle and some two-dozen cabanas around the periphery. Strong sunscreen and lots of liquid refreshments are recommended.

The restaurants at Tapatio Cliffs Resort

By DAN SCHLOSSBERG

Photos courtesy of Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs and The Phoenician



The Phoenician Cactus Garden



The Phoenician's entrance



The Phoenician's Northside pool



where torches negate the chill of the desert evening.

Southwestern-styled guest suites, featuring separate sleeping quarters, are also spacious and comfortable. All have patios or balconies plus proximity to pools, tennis courts, golf club, and a full-service spa. Hiking trails give guests a great way to work off those extra pounds acquired at the breakfast buffet adjacent to the golf club. For a more strident hike, the Piestewa Peak Summit trail network is not far away.

Sometimes described as a luxury resort for the budget-minded traveler, Tapatio Cliffs Resort attracts a diverse clientele that includes honeymooners, families, and both leisure and business travelers. It also has ample space for business meetings.

The Phoenician, which sits on the border between Phoenix and Scottsdale, is also stunning in its beauty and scope. A 250-acre property at the base of Camelback Mountain, its 645 units are divided into a main building, a ring of casitas, and The Canyon Suites, a boutique hotel-within-a-hotel with its own private pool. The artistry of the design and landscaping begin at the front entrance, where palms, flowers, water features, and a corner of its massive golf complex let visitors know they're arrived at a truly unusual property.

The resort is completing a massive, three-year renovation, the largest since the property opened 30 years ago. After guestrooms, casitas, and The Canyon Suites were redesigned, the property's public places, restaurants, and lobby followed with their own makeover last year.

Even the premier restaurants, a Euro-style cafe called The Marketplace and the Modern American Mowry & Cotton, have emerged as showplaces within a showplace.

Pool seating has been expanded, with a treehouse and 197-foot waterslide were added to the Kids Zone, and allows guests to reserve their spots for the first time.

Also new this spring is the three-story Phoenician spa, with rooftop pool, drybar, aroma design bar, and couples suite. Signature treatments range from harmonic bowl healing to gemstone healing facial.

Also opening this spring is the two-story Phoenician Athletic Club, home of seven tennis courts, two pickleball courts, a basketball half-court, and a game room replete with arcade, shuffleboard, and various video games.

The fitness center includes a movement

studio with fitness-on-demand technology and allows patrons to peruse the photogenic environs of the resort, Camelback Mountain, and the Valley of the Sun.

Rounding out the renovation project is The Phoenician Golf Course, which will be rerouted to 18 holes, creating a natural rhythm and flow in play. The new facility is expected to open in November 2018.

When the weather is agreeable, which is almost always in the Grand Canyon State, outdoor activities at the lavish resort also include hiking, biking, bird tours and s'mores & stargazing. The desert scenery is so stunning that guests would be remiss to leave their rooms without their cameras. The average temperature in April, by the way, is 85 degrees.

It's no surprise that The Phoenician has won hundreds of awards since its opening in 1988. In fact, both The Phoenician and The Canyon Suites have won five diamonds from the American Automobile Association for more than ten straight years. The Canyon Suites has also won multiple five-star awards from Forbes Travel (formerly Mobil). Other top honors between the two properties have come from *Travel + Leisure Magazine*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *TripAdvisor*, and *Andrew Harper's Hideaway Report*, among others.

In a world where travel has become increasingly uncertain, The Phoenician delivers on its immense promise. Guests can try everything from trapeze lessons to helicopter rides, with sunrise safari tours as a great way to start the day. The Funicians Club welcomes those from 5-12 years of age with a Night Owls Program that allows Mom and Dad some time alone from 9 to 9. If the Grand Canyon is nature's gift to Arizona, The Phoenician is the man-made counterpart: a slice of heaven on earth.

Life in the area was not always so opulent in the 48th state, especially before the advent of air-conditioning, cable television, and cell phones. Cowboys, Indians, and lawmen of the frontier forged a formidable legacy and horses still remain an integral part of the local lifestyle.

Today, however, horseback riding has taken a back seat to other recreational pursuits for visitors seeking to make maximum mileage from limited time. Flora from the Sonoran Desert is the featured attraction at the Desert Botanical Garden, where 50,000 desert plants prosper in a serene setting surrounded by red rocks.

Indian artifacts abound at the Heard Museum, a Phoenix staple since 1929. History also comes to life at the Musical Instrument Museum, home of 7,000 instruments from 200 countries. And Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West, the only National Historic Landmark in nearby Scottsdale, towers above a 491-acre campus with memorable views of the valley below.

Wildlife World, where 6,000 creatures reside, has a zoo, aquarium, safari park, and rides, a larger overall collection than the older Phoenix Zoo, a 125-acre enclave in Papago Park. Exhibits also change constantly at the downtown Museum of Natural History. Not far away is the smaller but impressive Wells Fargo Museum, which offers a true taste of the Old West. Another blast from the past is Old Scottsdale, a section of shops, galleries, and restaurants that recreates the sights, sounds, and smells of another era — albeit with 21st century prices.

Scottsdale is also the home of Don & Charlie's, a baseball-themed steakhouse where wall-to-wall memorabilia, much of it hanging from the ceiling, competes for attention with the food. Former Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is a Friday night regular during his winter tenure as a college history professor.

A light-rail streetcar system that is constantly expanding helps solve downtown traffic issues while linking the Phoenix suburbs of Mesa, Tempe, and Scottsdale. The rail network reaches to Sky Harbor Airport, negating the need for out-of-towners to rent cars. Numerous air carriers connect Newark and Philadelphia with Phoenix.

For further information, contact Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort, 11111 N. 7th St., Phoenix, AZ 85020, Tel. 602-866-7500, www.tapatiocliffshilton.com; The Phoenician, 6000 East Camelback Road, Scottsdale, AZ 85251, Tel. 480-941-8200, www.thephoenician.com or Visit Phoenix, 125 N. 2nd St., Suite 120, Phoenix, AZ 85004, Tel. 877-CALL-PHX, www.visitphoenix.com. ■

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