

GET Your Just DESERTS

The American Southwest is as vast as it is varied, with everything from deserts and canyons to Alpine lakes and Aspen groves

Writer Rob McGovern



Utah, Arizona and New Mexico make up a large part of the often loosely defined American Southwest. Totalling 320,478sqm (around 100 times the size of Hong Kong), the vast land is home to jaw-dropping natural landscapes, as well as an equally impressive range of places to lay your head after all the hiking, biking, riding, skiing or climbing you are sure to do.

The Southwest is also where the Old West comes to life, and is undoubtedly the best place to experience Native American culture with the country's 13 largest reservations, the greatest of which is the Navajo Nation, which is almost the size of Ireland and reaches into all three states.

ARIZONA: THE GRAND CANYON STATE

Home to the majority of the Navajo Nation as well as legendary towns from the Old West, such as *Tombstone*, *The Town Too Tough*

to Die, Arizona is probably most famous for the Grand Canyon. Though extraordinary, it is also worth visiting the much smaller but no less impressive Antelope Canyon. Located on Navajo land, the two incredibly beautiful slot canyons attract tourists from around the world, and the occasional wedding party, who come to photograph the incredible light show created as sunbeams bounce off the sculpted sandstone walls.

The state capital, Phoenix, and its relatively ritzy neighbour city Scottsdale are both known for warm weather year-round and their wealth of spas and golf courses. The latter is also known for Taliesin West, the winter home of architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

With incredible weather for a large part of the year (although some do complain about July when average highs are just under 40°C), outdoors activities are de rigueur. Golf is a big deal, but hiking among cactuses at sunrise or sunset is a fantastic and beautiful experience. Less than 10 miles south of downtown Phoenix is South Mountain Park, which is 16,000 acres and has over 50 miles of trails

PREVIOUS PAGE: The ultra-chic Amangiri offers an unparalleled design experience in the desert. THIS PAGE: Your own personal outdoor oasis of relaxation at Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North. OPPOSITE PAGE: The golf club at Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North stretches through natural ravines and foothills in the shadow of Pinnacle Peak



for horse riding, hiking and mountain biking. Just 20 minutes north of downtown is Camelback Mountain. Echo Canyon Trailhead is very popular.

FOUR SEASONS RESORT SCOTTSDALE AT TROON NORTH

For something closer and more easily digestible, particularly before dinner, Pinnacle Peak is a short walk from the Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North, which aside from being a mouthful, is one of the better resorts in the area. The 210-room property has 22 suites and an additional 44 residential units. The adobe-style architecture and a southwestern design scheme with colours inspired by the Sonoran Desert means it blends in effortlessly with its surroundings. While the area was originally the land of Hohokam Indians, it later became a finishing school before eventually transitioning into the five-star golf resort it is today, where small terraces overlook what looks like a cactus garden but is in actual fact just part of the natural landscape of Arizona, a particularly welcome sight in January when average temperatures are almost 20°C.

The resort's 14-room spa is designed in a similar vein to the hotel. Try the signature jojoba and prickly pear body polish for a full-body exfoliation that leaves the skin smooth and moisturised. www.fourseasons.com

Other properties in Arizona worth your consideration are L'Auberge de Sedona which is around 100 miles north of Phoenix; and Miraval,

which lays a similar distance south on the outskirts of Arizona's second city, Tucson.

Winter sport enthusiasts who find themselves in the Grand Canyon State during ski season might want to look into Flagstaff. Located at 7,000ft in the heart of the Coconino National Forest, Flagstaff has two ski resorts.

UTAH: THE BEEHIVE STATE

Arizona may have the Grand Canyon, but Utah has The Mighty 5 (which incidentally is a registered trademark) national parks. Almost 42 per cent of the state is public land of one kind or another. Canyonlands, Arches, Capitol Reef, Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks are all incredible, and make a visit to Utah worthwhile on their own.

Utah is named for the Ute Indians, some say after a failure in communication between native and Europeans, but it is sometimes known as 'The Beehive State' in reference to the settlers who called the originally proposed territory 'Deseret', which means honeybee. But the Utes aren't the only Native Americans to have called the region home, the Pueblo, Anasazi, Paiute, Goshute, Shoshone and Navajo have all contributed to the region's rich history.

People come from all over the world to visit Utah's staggering parks. The smallest of Utah's Mighty 5, Arches National Park is hard to beat. With over 2,000 stone arches, one that stands out is Delicate Arch, the largest free-standing arch in the park which is also the most visited. A three-mile hike which climbs 146m and passes a wall of Ute Indian petroglyphs to see Delicate Arch up close and personal is all but essential.



THIS PAGE: Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa features spacious and comfy studios; standing on the banks of Oak Creek, L'Auberge de Sedona boasts a beautiful location perfect for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. OPPOSITE PAGE: The wild is at your fingertips at Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa



SORREL RIVER RANCH RESORT AND SPA

Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa is located right on the banks of the Colorado River and a 20-minute drive to Arches National Park just outside Moab. A farm from 1903 until 1994, the property officially opened as the 160-acre Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa in 1999 and comprises spacious studios, suites and the expansive Ranch House. As Moab is a Mecca for outdoor enthusiasts, staff will call you before arrival to discuss what you might like to do during your stay to ensure timely bookings can be made.

On-property activities include horse riding (Missy is a gentle giant), live music and even a petting zoo. There are also plenty of complimentary activities such as yoga, movies under the stars and even cowboy poets telling their stories next to a roaring fire.

The River Grill practises farm-to-table dining, with much of the produce coming from the ranch's own gardens, and turns out fantastic dishes. Dessert is best served outside at the fire with a S'mores kit.

This past off season has seen the largest renovation in the property's history, with more promised, including a new spa. The current one however is perfectly good. In keeping in with the ranch feel of the property it is small but has all bases covered. For those who truly value privacy, you can buy out the entire ranch for US\$85,000 a night.

www.sorrelriver.com

AMANGIRI

For a very different experience head southwest towards the Arizona border. The ultra-chic Amangiri is part of the Aman empire of properties, that while small, is indeed mighty. Secluded to the point that it is easy to dive past the small sign, Amangiri's seclusion is part of the appeal and the experience.

Located on a 328-hectare estate in a sequestered valley, the resort offers both adrenaline-fuelled adventure out on the dunes, plateaus and ridges and a haven away from modern life. Rooms are a choice between beautiful suites or the four-bedroom Mesa Home that is close, but not too close, to the resort. If you opt for the home,

you can relax in the 50ft infinity pool and have your every desire catered to. The rest can enjoy suites which feature large living areas that open onto terraces and windows that frame the desolate and beautiful landscape.

The 2,322sqm spa at Amangiri looks to the Navajo for inspiration, using elements of earth, wind, fire and water for treatments such as the Desert Calm treatment using red Sedona clay.

Dining is as chic an affair as you might expect with local and seasonal ingredients taking pride of place. The open-plan kitchen is also occasionally host to demonstrations. Ask if they are doing the Native American fry bread demo if you visit.

At Amangiri it seems anything and everything is available, from guided hikes to a nearby cave, climbing expeditions to the nearby rock formations, hot air balloon trips over Lake Powell or a bespoke experience that may or may not include private helicopters.

Perhaps Amangiri is best summed up by what is likely a mantra at the property: No request is too great, and no detail too small.

www.aman.com

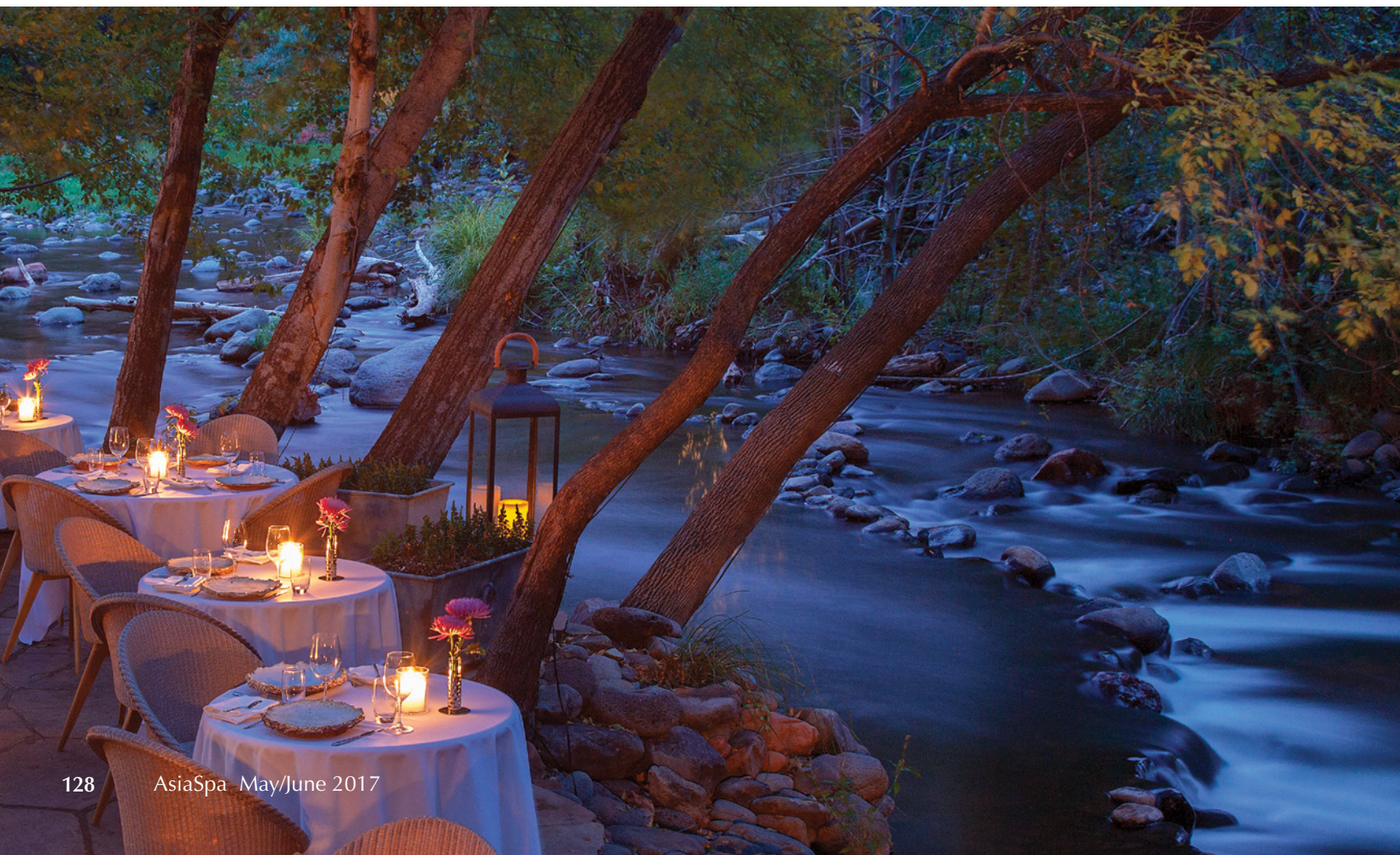
NEW MEXICO: LAND OF ENCHANTMENT

New Mexico has the second-highest percentage of Native Americans as a proportion of the population in the US with the Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache peoples being the major nations in the state, Spanish and Wild West frontier heritage are also strong in the state.

With a little over two million people, New Mexico is one of the least densely populated states, but its small population belies its popularity: in 2015 alone 33.4 million people visited the state.

Like Arizona and Utah, it is New Mexico's natural landscape that draws millions of those visitors to the state. Carlsbad Caverns, the state's only National Park, is home to 400,000 Mexican free-tailed bats. But it is its multitude of small rural communities that collectively bring millions to the state.

One of those small rural communities is actually the state capitol, Santa Fe. Arguably the state's most attractive and appealing



city, with less than 70,000 people, it was founded by Spanish colonists in 1610, and was originally named La Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco de Asís.

The arts are a big deal in Santa Fe and people come in droves to wander around the small streets to browse. Santa Fe is one of UNESCO's Creative Cities, and over the years has hosted a number of artists, writers and other purveyors of the arts, with artist Georgia O'Keeffe perhaps being the most well known. The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum has 140 O'Keeffe oil paintings, nearly 700 drawings, and hundreds of additional works dating from 1901 to 1984.

Elsewhere in New Mexico, Roswell is the global capital for extraterrestrial enthusiasts thanks to the Roswell UFO incident which turned out to be a weather balloon (or was it?), and in recent popular culture, New Mexico's largest city, Albuquerque, found notoriety through the TV show *Breaking Bad*. Fans of the show might want to visit Albuquerque's The Candy Lady and come home with some very legal Breaking Bad Candy.

INN AND SPA AT LORETTO

Inn and Spa at Loretto in the heart of Santa Fe is a quaint hotel just one block from Santa Fe Plaza, Palace of the Governors and Canyon Road arts district. The adobe architecture and local artwork are true to the spirit of Santa Fe. With 136 guest suites, an award-winning spa (the Sacred Journey treatment is highly recommended), and galleries

and boutiques in the building, it's a great way to complement a stay in Santa Fe.

Luminaria restaurant at Loretto has a small menu with less than a dozen entrées and even fewer starters. The tortilla soup was amazing, and whether a restaurant can perfect steak is a good test; Luminaria passed with flying colours.

www.destinationhotels.com

SUNRISE SPRINGS SPA RESORT

Fifteen miles southwest of Santa Fe is Sunrise Springs Spa Resort. More of a wellness retreat than a hotel with a spa, the somewhat isolated location and wide range of treatments, classes and experiences mean you won't need to leave for days at a time.

The area now inhabited by Sunrise Springs was for millennia home to Tano and Kere, before becoming *parajes*, or resting places, for travellers along El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, thanks mainly to the natural cold springs.

Casitas have a somewhat Scandinavian feel thanks to the light wood used throughout, and are spacious without being cavernous. With relaxation in mind, they are decorated sparingly with a fireplace as the centrepiece instead of a television. Sachets of ground coffee roasted especially for the resort by a local company and tea made from herbs grown on the property are nice touches.

The food at Sunrise is truly superb and thanks to the winning

combination of expert chef Rocky Durham and worldly-wise F&B director Fernando, dishes both surprise and delight.

The spa offers a very wide range of health and wellness treatments and classes that extend to making your own beauty products and puppy therapy. Yes, puppy therapy. Sunrise Springs basically has everything you could want at a spa resort. And a few things you didn't know you wanted.

sunrisesprings.ojospa.com



THIS PAGE: Inn and Spa at Loretto's design stays true to the spirit of Santa Fe (top); Sunrise Springs Spa Resort's isolated location and wide range of treatments and experiences means you won't need to leave for days at a time (bottom). OPPOSITE PAGE: A plush guest suite at Inn and Spa at Loretto, famed for its traditional adobe architecture