

Hoop dancer Derrick Suwaima Davis, Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market

Festive Arizona

Celebrate our state's top parties, festivals, art shows, and events

BY SAM LOWE

THE ARIZONA CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION IS ONLY A COUPLE OF MONTHS AWAY. In recognition of the occasion, *Highroads* asked readers to help select the 100 things they like best about Arizona. It wasn't hard for readers to come up with ideas, judging by the large response we received. Our three most recent issues covered Urban Arizona, Historic Arizona, and Quintessential Arizona. In this, the fourth and final installment, the top 25 Arizona festivities take center stage.

So put on your dancing shoes, haul out your camera, and get ready to sample salsa, turkey legs, and holiday cookies: It's festival time.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF HEARD MUSEUM/CRAIG SMITH

1 Heard Indian Fair

The Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market, the state's largest of its type, provides an outlet for more than 700 Native American artists and craftsmen. The three-day event draws participants from several nearby states who offer jewelry, pottery, kachina dolls, textiles, and fine art. More than 20,000 buyers and spectators attend every year, entertained by a variety of tribal dancers. A wide selection of food booths offers such delicacies as fry bread, posole, piki bread, and Hopi stew. Next year's fair is scheduled for March 3 and 4 at the museum in downtown Phoenix.

3 Apache Jii

Every year, around the middle of October, Globe's main street plays host to Native American dancers, tribal artisans, and princesses during the annual Apache Jii festival. The event, translated as "Apache Day" from the tribe's native tongue, started in 1983 and features Native American dancers from various tribes, including the renowned Apache crown dancers, who wear eagle feather headdresses while performing ancient steps honoring mountain spirits. Tribal artists demonstrate skills such as basket weaving while vendors tempt the palate with fry bread and acorn soup. The free event is held along Broad Street. Photography is allowed. The 2012 Jii is scheduled for October 15.

5 Glendale Glitters

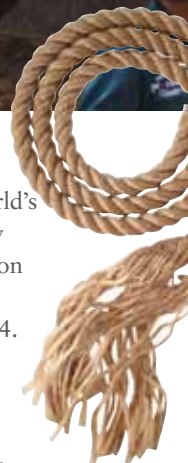
Historic Downtown Glendale glows brightly every night from Thanksgiving through mid-January. Glendale Glitters is a stunning display of 1.5 million lights illuminating 16 historic blocks, making for the largest free holiday light display in Arizona. Besides the lights, there are free shuttles to ferry visitors through holiday entertainment, food vendors, sellers of hand-crafted holiday gifts, and a children's winter wonderland. The event began in 1993 and now attracts more than 250,000 visitors every year. The party ends with a bang as more than 20 hot air balloons join the multitude of lights in the Glendale Glitter and Glow Block Party.



Payson Rodeo

2 Payson Rodeo

Payson has bragging rights as the world's oldest "continuous" rodeo. Others may trace their roots back further, but Payson lays claim to an unbroken string of 127 years of bronc-bustin' and bull-ridin', dating back to 1884. The rodeo, always held on the third weekend in August, now draws some 3,000 fans every year and was named the country's best small rodeo by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. The festivities also include a parade, dances, and food booths.



4 The Salsa Trail

The Salsa Trail in eastern Arizona is a splendid combination of Mexican food, easy motoring, and down-home friendliness. The trail is composed of a dozen Mexican restaurants, a tortilla factory, and a chile-growing operation spread between the towns of Safford, Pima, Thatcher, Solomon, Clifton, Duncan, Willcox, and York. The burgs banded together in the early 2000s to promote the food and atmosphere found along the scenic Old West Highway connecting the communities around Safford. Plan on an extended trip because eating a meal in all 12 restaurants in a single day is a gastronomic impossibility.



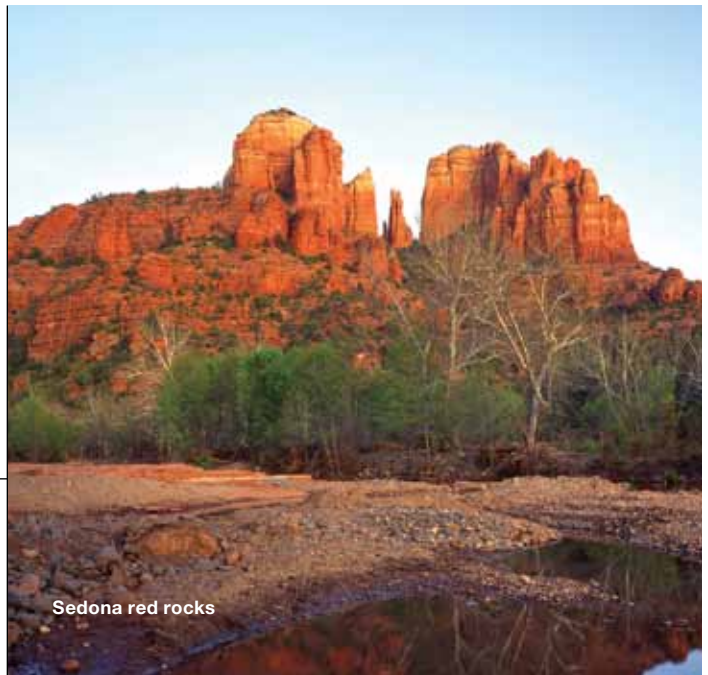
Salsa Trail fare



Arizona Renaissance Festival

6 Arizona Renaissance Festival

From mid-February through early April, a 30-acre patch of desert east of Apache Junction is transformed into a 16th century European country fair for the annual Arizona Renaissance Festival. The event is staged among replicas of early European buildings and offers rides, shows, comedy, music, street performers, and shopping. There is also plenty of food, including deep-fried turkey legs and roasted ears of corn, all to be eaten without utensils. The 2012 festival is set for February 11–April 1.



Sedona red rocks

7 Buzzard Days

Few things are as consistent as the annual arrival and departure of the turkey buzzards at Boyce Thompson Arboretum west of Superior. They show up in mid-March to spend the summer before heading south in late September. More than 100 of the magnificently ugly birds warm themselves on the magma cliffs and towering eucalyptus trees in the arboretum, then soar high above to scan the landscape for dead critters to snack on. Their arrival is dubbed “Welcome Back Buzzards Day” and their departure is called “Bye Bye Buzzard Day.” On both occasions visitors can participate in guided tours.

8 Sedona Jazz on the Rocks

Come October, the blues will echo down the canyons and off the red rocks of Sedona as the town stages its annual jazz festival. The event, which moved to the Sedona Golf Resort in 2010, has hosted Hiroshima, Los Lobos, Sahnas Brothers, Rippington, and Soulive. More than 5,000 jazz enthusiasts attend the 30-year-old event. Dates and performers for the 2012 production will be announced in early May.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE AZ RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL. ©ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK

9 Classic Cars

The annual Barrett-Jackson Collector Car Auction, scheduled for January 16-22 at Westworld in Scottsdale, features more than 1,000 valuable vehicles being sold to well-heeled collectors. The show attracts thousands of fans, most of whom window-shop without whipping out their credit cards. However, the 2010 auction recorded more than \$64 million in sales, including everything from a 1959 Porsche farm tractor to a replica of Tony Stewart's old NASCAR ride. Prior to the main event, spectators can watch some of the cars run the Scottsdale Road Rally.



10 Country Thunder

Some of the biggest names in country music show up out in the middle of nowhere for the annual Country Thunder music festival. The event is held rain or shine at the Canyon River Ranch near Florence. In recent years the foot-stompin' spectacular has attracted such names as Toby Keith, LeAnn Rimes, and Martina McBride to perform under the stars before thousands. There are few more "festive" scenes in the state than at the festival's campgrounds packed with fans camping out in trailers. The 2012 event is scheduled for April 12-15 and the list of performers will be announced early in the year.



Arizona State Fair

12 Arizona State Fair

The Arizona State Fair has been around a long time — it started as the Arizona Territorial Fair — and it endures because it has something for everyone. For a month, beginning in October, the skies over Phoenix glow with the light of the tens of thousands of tiny bulbs illuminating the State Fairgrounds on McDowell Road and 19th Avenue. Everyone from Snoop Dogg to rodeo clowns is there, sampling homemade pies, losing money at carnival games, gawking at livestock, and maybe even entering the arm-wrestling competition.

11 Running Wildly

In early January, the streets in Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Tempe get trampled by foot traffic during the annual P.F. Chang's Rock 'n' Roll Arizona Marathon and Half Marathon. More than 30,000 runners traverse the 26.2-mile course as it winds its way through three cities, beginning at Wesley Bolin Plaza near the State Capitol and ending at Tempe's Sun Devil Stadium. Along the way, runners are urged on by thousands of spectators, 70 performing bands, and more than 40 cheerleader squads. The winning times for the full marathon are usually around two hours and a few breathtaking minutes. The 2012 event is scheduled for January 15.



13 First Friday

When the nonprofit group Artlink started the First Friday art walk to promote Phoenix's fledgling downtown art scene in the late 1990s, only 13 spaces participated. The event, held on the first Friday of every month, now includes more than 100 galleries, studios, and shops. Spaces open to the public for self-guided tours are located in downtown Phoenix, stretching from Indian School Road to Buchanan Street and between 12th Street and 17th Avenue. Bring your best walking shoes but set out knowing that it's impossible to see everything in one night, even with the free shuttle service.



Grand Canyon Railway

14 Tubing the Salt River

When the heat of summer arrives, as it does every year, Arizonans have discovered that floating down the Salt River in an inner tube is a great way to cool off. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, tubers show up at the river by the thousands. The procedure is simple: Park your vehicle, take a shuttle bus upstream, rent a tube, and take a lazy cruise down the river. Keep your eyes peeled for mustangs, and other wildlife. Families should get an early start as the party tends to get a bit rowdy as the day wears on.

15 Riding the Rails

Those who yearn for simpler times and steam power should be interested in two Arizona railroads that chug, snort, and whistle their way into the past. The Grand Canyon Railway makes daily trips from the old depot in Williams to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. The 65-mile ride to the Canyon takes two hours, 15 minutes. The return journey is punctuated by staged shoot-outs and robberies. The Verde Canyon Railroad makes a leisurely four-hour trip from its depot in Clarkdale to Perkinsville and back at the rate of 12 miles per hour. Along the way, passengers may see bald eagles soaring above the Verde River below.

16 Rockin' in Tucson

The annual Tucson Gem and Mineral Show is the largest of its kind in the United States, attracting more than 250 retail dealers and thousands of serious geologic fanciers. The show, held in the Tucson Convention Center, offers an extraordinary assortment of gem, mineral, fossil, lapidary, and jewelry exhibits. It's always staged on the first full weekend in February.



17 Grape Stomping

Some people don't mind if their feet turn purple, and they're the ones who look forward to the Harvest Festival, held annually on the last weekend in July at the Sonoita Vineyards in southeastern Arizona. Grape-stompers can show off their footwork in the vineyard's vats, reenacting a famous *I Love Lucy* episode in the process. The vineyard, located off Highway 83 near Elgin, is one of the oldest in the state. Sadly, those who stomp won't get to taste the fruits of their labor because, according to a vineyard spokesperson, "we don't know where those feet have been." Instead, the crushed grapes are taken out to the fields and used as fertilizer. But guests are allowed to sip and savor properly produced wines paired with appropriate food.

18 Hometown Holidays

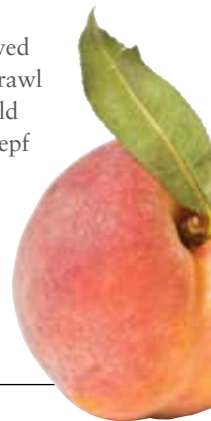
There may be bigger and longer Christmas parades in Arizona, but *Highroads* readers selected Flagstaff's Northern Lights Holiday as their favorite. The line of floats and musicians starts at the corner of Beaver and Elm streets, proceeding along Aspen Avenue down San Francisco Street. More than 50 entries, including marching bands, classic cars, and Santa Claus, strut their stuff while competing for applause and cash prizes. The parade is typically on a Saturday in early December.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF GRAND CANYON RAILWAY; ©PHOTOJETS.NET/THINKSTOCK; ©COMSTOCK/THINKSTOCK

19 **Parada del Sol**
Scottsdale bills itself as “The West’s Most Western Town,” and the Parada del Sol helps reinforce that image. Held every winter since 1953, the event is home to the world’s largest horse-drawn parade, featuring more than 150 equine and equestrian units (and an army of pooper-scoopers) all marching down Scottsdale Road. The event also offers a two-day rodeo and a running of the old Hashknife Pony Express route, with riders carrying U.S. mail 200 miles from Holbrook to Scottsdale. The 2012 parade is scheduled February 11 with rodeo events held March 2 and 3.

20 **Peachy Party**
Much of the East Valley’s fruit farming heritage has been plowed under to make room for the sprawl of suburban development. But there’s still some old time agriculture in Queen Creek, where the Schnepf family has run its farm for nearly 50 years. The farm’s Peach Festival in mid-May is a true treat as you can pick your own fruit, getting some of the very first U.S.-grown peaches available. The peach-pit-spitting and pie-eating contests add to the farm fun.



21 **Blooms at Picacho Peak**
Mother Nature prides herself on staging annual spectacles. A prime example is the wildflower displays that dot the desert each spring. One excellent viewing spot is Picacho Peak, a steep summit overlooking Interstate 10 between Phoenix and Tucson. The colorful show begins in mid-March and can continue through late May, depending on weather. Picacho Peak is also historically important because it is the site of the westernmost battle of the Civil War. The skirmish between a Union cavalry patrol and Confederate pickets took place on April 15, 1862.

22 **Fiesta Bowl**
Arizona’s annual bowl game is actually a triple-header. The Fiesta Bowl celebration combines two major college football games with a big-time parade and the largest New Year’s Eve party in the time zone. The Fort McDowell Fiesta Bowl Parade features more than 100 groups marching through central Phoenix on December 31. That evening, thousands gather on Mill Avenue in Tempe to usher in the New Year with music, fireworks, and confetti blasts. The football game is scheduled for January 5 this season.

23 **Prescott Pickin’**
The Prescott Bluegrass Festival started as a humble fiddle contest 30 years ago but has blossomed into a full-scale musical happening with two days of music and camping. Held every year on the last weekend in June, the free festival brings thousands of fans to Gurley Street to listen to the likes of the Titan Valley Warheads, Blue Highway, Just 4 Mama, and Lonesome Otis.

24 **Sampling Salsa**
Since salsa has become the nation’s No. 1 condiment, it’s only natural that salsa tastings would grow in popularity. One of the best anywhere is My Nana’s Best Tasting Salsa Challenge, a statewide culinary festival held in early April in Tempe’s Beach Park. More than 80 professional and amateur chefs prepare fresh salsa on site, imploring tasters to vote for the best in the hot and mild categories. The 20,000 salsa gourmets who attend every year are entertained by live music, and can wash the salsa down with cold beer and salty margaritas. The 2012 edition is scheduled for April 28.

25 **Chandler Ostriches**
Big birds played a big role in Chandler’s history and the annual Chandler Ostrich Festival honors their contributions to local industry. The festival, scheduled for March 9–11, 2012, features ostrich races, ostrich burgers, ostrich leather goods, and ostrich feather dusters. The festival, held in Tumbleweed Park, has been going on since 1989, and draws an estimated 300,000 fans every year.

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Other festivals receiving votes from members were Quartzsite’s Desert Gardens International Rock, Gem, and Mineral Show; the shootouts in Tombstone; the Scottsdale Film Festival; the Havasupai Peach Festival; and the Tucson Festival of Books.