

# Best Practices for Amazing Outdoor Adventures in Arizona

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## Adventure Safely

### **Plan for Weather**

Check the forecast and then check again. We rarely get rain outside of monsoon season but it can cause dangerous conditions like lightning, slippery rock or surfaces, and flash floods. Consider using an app with weather alerts. Keep in mind, we may not always have cell service.

Always be prepared for the possibility of extreme or unexpected weather. Consider carrying a poncho, bringing an extra layer, or an emergency blanket. During the warmer months in Arizona (March-October) stick to early mornings. It's important to know your temperature limit and get outside during those hours. Don't go out during extreme weather warnings. Becoming dehydrated or suffering from heat exhaustion or heat stroke will leave us confused and unable to make good decisions.

### **Dress Appropriately for Weather**

Wearing layers is always a good practice. As we gain and lose elevation or take on a challenging climb, temperatures may change. We may sweat and get wet or a cool breeze may come through. A light colored long sleeve over shirt and an undershirt offer some protection from the sun. Consider long pants or ankle guards for areas with a high risk of snake encounters (rocky areas and areas with tall grass). We should always wear a hat to protect the top of our head and eyes. Consider sunscreen as many Arizona outdoor locations offer little shade. Don't forget the bug repellent!

We should protect our eyes with a hat and sunglasses. A wide brim hat is important for protecting your head, eyes, face, neck and shoulders from overexposure to the sun. Some hats may even have UV protection built in. Be sure to use sunglasses with UV protection. Remember the sun reflecting off water increases exposure. The most important factor in footwear is comfortability. After that, be sure your tread is in good condition and that your shoes can offer protection from cacti. It's always a good idea to take new shoes out for a test run before long adventures.

### **Stay Hydrated**

There is no exact formula to determine how much water we should bring on a hike, rather there are several factors to consider. Start with about a liter per hour, then consider factors like temperatures, duration, and intensity. We should consider our current hydration, electrolyte and mineral levels. It's best to hydrate before, during, and after your adventure but also be sure to bring extra water. It's best to turn around before you've consumed half your water supply and bring a trail snack to sustain your energy.

### **Plan Your Route**

Use directions, a map, and a compass to plan and execute your route. You can also use an app like [All Trails](#) but keep in mind, you may not always have cell service. Be sure to use a topographic map, which will include elevation changes. Take the opportunity to reach out to the local park ranger station prior to your trip for helpful tips specific to your plan. If the trailhead you're using has a sign in, be sure to use it. This allows park rangers to be sure everyone who started here has returned. Lastly, share your plans with someone.

Once you're on the trail, confirm directions as you go and stick to your plan. Don't be afraid to ask other hikers, they want to help. Don't hesitate to call 911 in the event of an emergency, including snake bite, being lost, or physical injury. If you feel lost, stop. Go back to your map and compass to get oriented. Don't forget to use nature to determine direction. A sun exposed compass cactus (fishhook barrel) will usually lean south. Bright green lichen will form on the North facing side of a rock. You can also use familiar landmarks and mountain ranges.

### **Personal safety**

Always carry a first aid kit. Be sure to include tweezers, disinfectant wipes, bandages, and hand sanitizer. Consider carrying an emergency kit as well. Learn CPR if you have not already. Always let someone know where you are going, and when you plan to be back. The longer the adventure, the more detail you should provide.

Always hike with your valuables, and don't leave anything in your vehicle (visible or otherwise). Be alert and don't hesitate to act if you feel unsafe. Don't use earbuds and don't be distracted when someone passes you on the trail. Hiking alone is a personal decision. My guidelines for hiking alone include hiking in a location I know well, hiking a populated location, and telling someone your plans

### **Encountering Wild Animals**

Most wildlife around us will never be seen, so encounters are special. I encourage you to simply take in the moment. Some of the animals you may encounter include coyotes, javelina, a desert tortoise, a variety of lizards, snakes, and rabbits. We have big cats but you will likely never see them.

Humans have been a part of our local mountains for hundreds of years, however, it's vital for all wild animals to have a healthy fear of humans, so always keep your distance. Watching them from a distance is the best way to "interact" with wildlife. Feeding them could cause a dangerous situation, so avoid feeding any wild animals. Photos are never worth the risk, being in the moment is always better.

Keep in mind, Rattlesnakes are not aggressive, just defensive. They are cold blooded - meaning they can not generate their own heat. Therefore they must change locations to regulate body temperature. Winter is usually too cold for them to operate, so typically they stay underground. They are not hibernating but are much less active.

Rattlesnakes are much more active during the warmer months (March through October). Our best protection is not to startle them. When they know we are coming they will likely stay quiet and hide where they are safely concealed, rattle to communicate that you need to give them space, or simply slither away without you knowing. vibrations from our footsteps and hiking poles are usually enough to make them aware of our presence.

The danger comes when we surprise them. Avoid shady, rocky areas and tall grass. It's not likely that you will see a rattlesnake, as they are masters of disguise, so it's important to listen. If you hear a rattle, stop, identify where it's coming from and leave slowly in the opposite direction. In case of a rattlesnake bite, stay calm, stay where you are, call 911, use cold compress if available.

### **Adventure Respectfully and Sustainably**

#### **Inclusivity**

The outdoors are for everyone and we all deserve to benefit from nature; however, discrimination and inequality exists in the outdoors as well. It's important to keep in mind that they may experience the

outdoors very differently and we can support them by being an ally. Say hello, greet them on the trail, make them feel welcome. Support them if we identify an inappropriate situation. Offer help, only when it's requested.

### **Stay On The Trail**

It's tempting to explore off trail but when we stay on trail we're often protecting the vegetation that brings an entire web of wildlife. When there is vegetation there are often insects, which bring small birds, and then reptiles.

### **Yield to Uphill and Faster Hikers**

This is simply because it's more difficult to get started again when we're going uphill and it establishes a system, we'll always yield to those going uphill and those moving faster than us on the trail.

### **Pack Out What You Pack In**

Be sure to leave with everything you bring to the outdoors. I prefer the phrase "Leave Nothing but Footprints and Take Nothing but Photos" but the sentiment is the same. In a park or preserve everything is protected. Leave what nature has provided for others to enjoy. This includes picking flowers, touching petroglyphs. In Arizona most native plants are protected by law, including our Saguaros.

Make a plan for the litter you'll accumulate on your adventure, this includes food waste like banana peels and orange peels. Bathroom breaks on the trail should always take place at least 200 feet from any water source. Remember to pack out your paper.

### **Enjoy Nature's Soundtrack**

If you're interested in seeing wildlife, avoid playing amplified music and keep conversations low. Playing amplified music may not be allowed or may require a permit, so check local regulations.

### **Leash Your Dog**

Dogs are required to be leashed in wilderness areas for the protection of the dog, other hikers, and wild animals. Be sure to clean up after your dog. Leaving doggie bags on the side of the trail is known to attract animals that are prey for rattlesnakes. This can increase rattlesnake encounters along the trail.

### **Look Out for Your Fellow Adventurers**

One thing you'll likely notice on the trails is the good mood everyone seems to be in. Take advantage of it. Smile and say hello when you pass someone. Let them know about the snake you saw ahead of them on the trail. Give directions when you can.

## **Hiking**

### **Best Ways to Get Started**

The best way to get started hiking is to make a plan and pick the right hike for you. Consider your abilities, total distance, total duration, any elevation gain. Learn from joining a group hike, becoming friends with a hiker, or use an app like All Trails.

## **Helpful Gear**

You don't need much gear to get started hiking but after your safety items however, there are a few things that can really make your trip. If you could use some assistance with balance or if you experience joint pain going down hill, trekking poles could be helpful. Keep in mind, they are lighter than you imagine and you can always use just one. Always bring a map of the route you're taking as well as a simple compass. A hydration system (similar to a CamelBak) that doesn't require you to stop for water is very helpful. A head lamp is helpful for sunrise and sunset hikes.

## **Best Locations**

The Phoenix metro area has about 41,000 of desert mountain preserves. A few local favorites include South Mountain, Camelback Mountain, and Piestewa Peak. The Superstition Wilderness is just outside the metro area.

South Mountain Park and Preserve is 16,000 acres of Sonoran desert wilderness and is one of the largest city parks in the nation. The park contains over 400 petroglyph sites. Camelback Mountain is a scenic and iconic Central Phoenix mountain. Note that both Cholla and Echo are rated Extremely Difficult.

The Summit trail on Piestewa Peak is very popular and offers amazing views from the top. The Superstition Wilderness is part of the Tonto National forest and includes Lost Dutchman State Park. The Supes are great for adventurous day hikes, backpacking, and water activities. Some of my favorite trails include Lost Dutchman Trail, Cholla Garden Trail, and Siphon Draw to Flat Iron.

## **Birding**

### **Helpful Gear**

You can certainly be a birder without using any instruments however, binoculars will exponentially increase what and how much detail you can see. Grab a small paperback field guide that's specific to the places you'll go birding, or use an app as your field guide.

### **Best Ways to Get Started**

Birding is simply the observation of birds in their natural habitat as a hobby. It's virtually free and can be done most anywhere there are birds in viewing distance. It's also a great way to practice mindfulness. The best way to get started is mindfully looking and listening. Head to a green space with trees, or an area with water. Sit quietly and observe. Consider body shape and color, wing shape and color, head shape and color, beak shape and color, any outstanding patterns. Take note of what sounds it makes.

Then use a guide or app to look up the bird you may have seen. Once identified, keep practicing. You can also examine a field guide about your local area and start looking for the birds that frequent it. The only gear you'll need are binoculars and a field guide or app.

### **Best Locations**

Thanks to Arizona's rich riparian habitats, the state is a top destination for every birdwatcher. Birders can marvel at an array of exotic and rare species, from tiny hummingbirds to giant California condors. Any place with a water resource would be a great option. Consider your back yard or neighborhood green space. Some of my favorite spots include the Riparian at Gilbert, Saguaro Lake, and the Tucson area.

## **Stargazing**

### **Helpful Gear**

You can certainly star gaze with the naked eye, but binoculars or a telescope will enhance what you see. Consider adding them to your gear list. You'll also need a night sky field guide, red (filtered) flashlight and a star map app or planisphere.

### **Best Ways to Get Started**

To get started as a stargazer, use your field guide or App to learn what will be in your field of view. Next, locate the brightest stars first then Identify planets along the ecliptic. Finally see if you can identify the Milky Way. to learn more, consider taking an astronomy lab class or joining a group so you can learn from others.

### **Best Locations**

All the best locations for stargazing are rural. When selecting a spot consider avoiding city lights. The Grand Canyon hosts an annual star party in June each year. Mature astronomers travel from all over the world to let the public enjoy their amazing telescopes.

## **Rockhounding**

### **Best Ways to Get Started**

If you can't pass by a rock without picking it up, you might be a rockhound or a rock and mineral hunter. It's a great way to engage your brain and be physical outdoors. To get started, decide what type of collector you are. Will you take things home or leave them after you've identified them?

If you plan to take materials home keep in mind there are some materials like petrified wood and certain minerals you can collect, but there are still restrictions on the amounts you may collect. Also, what you collect may not be bartered or sold.

It's always a good practice to learn the laws, rules, and regulations governing collecting on the land you're visiting. Check in with your local ranger district for rules and regulation. Respect all public and private property. Do your best to make as little impact as possible on the land. Leave all collecting areas free of litter and avoid areas marked as archaeological sites.

### **Helpful Gear**

If you're interested in taking home the rocks you find, you may find the following to be helpful tools: Jeweler's Loupe, Rock Hammer, Rock Chisel, Screen, Black Light for minerals, Pry bar, Brushes, Safety Goggles, and Gloves. If you only want to document your find but leave them for others to discover, consider a digital camera and notes to create an online journal.

### **Best Locations**

Arizona has many great locations for rockhounding. Check out [rockhounding.com](http://rockhounding.com) for 54 Amazing Arizona Rockhounding Spots.