

Southwest weekend

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Day trip Prescott, Arizona

Why go now: In September, Prescott's art scene heats up. **Hot ticket:** A bunch of arts festivals kick off this month. Our picks: Faire on the Square (Sep 5–7) and the World Arts Festival (Sep 12; both at prescott.org), plus the Premier Art & Heritage Celebration (Sep 26–28; prescottarts.com). **Dress code:** Jeans and boots **The vibe:** A down-home feel that blends Old West with new (picture 1900s saloons alongside airy galleries). **Number of art galleries:** 25 **One to watch:** Mountain Artists Guild (228 N. Alarcon St.; 928/776-4009) sells oil paintings, ceramics, and handmade jewelry from more than 300 area artists. **Up-and-comer:** Plein air painter and Prescott local Bill Cramer. **Say it like a local:** The city's name is pronounced *Pres-kit* (think "biscuit"). **Taste of the Old West:** Grab a cold one at the Palace Restaurant & Saloon on Whiskey Row (\$\$; 128 S. Montezuma St.; 928/541-1996). **Silver screen kudos:** Prescott has starred in *Billy the Kid* and *The Karate Kid*.

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1. Free art walk

The **Yavapai College Sculpture Garden** is a lovely 5-acre native plant garden that's a 15-minute walk from downtown. Its nine contemporary pieces include *Helix*, a welded aluminum sculpture by local artist Tom McClure, and *Muse I* (pictured), a bronze work by Barbara Sorensen. Pack lunch and pick a sunny spot on one of the benches. *Free*; 1100 E. Sheldon St.; 928/776-2025.

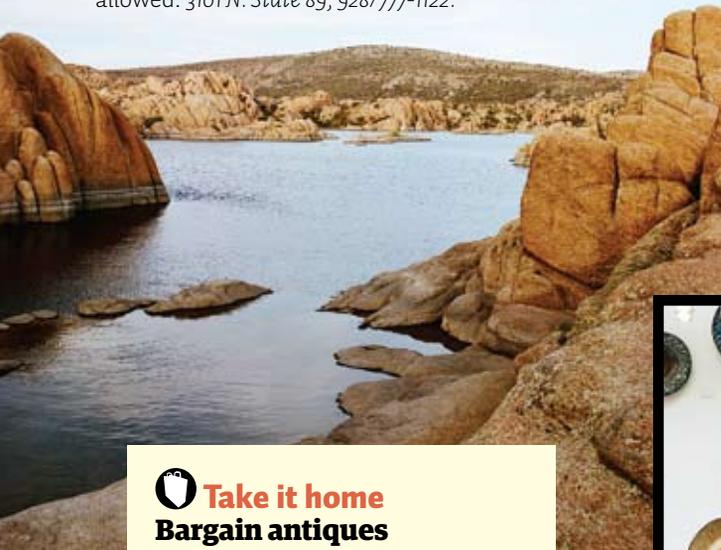


BY JENNIE NUNN | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID FENTON

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2. Escape to the lake

Watson Lake is only 4 miles north of downtown, but it feels a world away. The 300-acre reservoir has cobalt blue water ideal for kayaking and fishing (it's filled with catfish and largemouth bass), or you can spend the afternoon hiking or picnicking. Just don't bring your swimsuit—taking a dip isn't allowed. 3101 N. State 89; 928/777-1122.



Take it home Bargain antiques

Sister stores **Avalon Antiques** and **Mid-Century-Madness** are crammed with vintage pieces at likable prices. For small treasures like cameo earrings, lattice side tables, and beaded 1940s cloisonné handbags, head to Avalon. And for deals on midcentury pieces like sunburst wall sculptures and Scandinavian credenzas, go next door. 140 and 140½ N. Cortez St.; 928/778-0481.



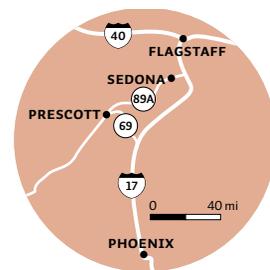
3. Margaritas on the patio

Kick back at **El Gato Azul**, an easy-going Spanish eatery decorated with starburst lanterns and vintage posters from Pamplona. The spicy chile carnitas and seafood paella are delicious—and best enjoyed at an outdoor table. On Fridays and Saturdays the restaurant has live music. \$\$; 316 W. Goodwin St.; 928/445-1070.



4. One-stop gallery shopping

Van Gogh's Ear Gallery, owned by four local artists, showcases Arizona art with a sprinkling of international finds too. Look for the display of hand-painted leather shoes by co-owners Cody and Mark Carter. Our favorite piece? An oak bed with a canopy made of hundreds of tiny branches. 156B S. Montezuma St.; 928/776-1080.



More things to do in and around Prescott



PHIPPEN MUSEUM

You'll find a to-scale diorama of cowboy artist George Phippen's studio from the 1950s and '60s, plus etchings, photography, and bronze pieces by Western artists like John Coleman and Joe Beeler. 4701 N. State 89; \$5, ages 12 and under free; 928/778-1385.

SWEETART CAFÉ

This French patisserie is the best sugar rush in town. Top choices are the blueberry brioche, creamy chocolate éclairs, and extra-tangy lemon tarts. \$\$; 123 N. Cortez St.; 928/443-8587.

HIGHLANDS CENTER FOR NATURAL HISTORY

An 80-acre site, between the Sonoran Desert and the Colorado Plateau, with hiking trails. Go on a self-guided hike to nearby Lynx Creek, or join a free Audubon bird walk (Sep 12). It's common to spot blue herons, red-tailed hawks, and bald eagles. 1375 S. Walker Rd.; 928/776-9550.

Getting there

From I-17, take State 69 west 35 miles until it turns into Gurley St., which will take you straight to the center of town.



SHARE YOUR WEEKEND FINDS. Favorite new restaurant? Local hike? Email your suggestions to the weekend guide editor at wgeditor@sunset.com