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Hippies, Hikers and Luxury Travelers All Agree Sedona Is the Place to Be

The city might have a reputation for out-there New Age thinking, but it also welcomes vacationers with world-class hiking and indulgent resorts.

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ROCKS OF AGES Natural formations such as Merry-Go-Round Rock are popular with hikers visiting Sedona. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

YOU'D THINK the eye-popping topography of Sedona—the ancient roseate cliffs, the red-rock spires—would be its main draw. But the sparsely populated, high-desert Arizona city, located halfway between Phoenix and the Grand Canyon, has taken on a reputation as a hub for all things New Age. Believers say mystical energy “vortices” in the desert will cure what ails you.

And yes, state highway 89A running through town is lined with tchotchke shops selling crystals and votive candles, but I found it hard to notice anything but the stunning backdrop to such touristic honey pots. First-time visitors will scramble to find worthy superlatives to describe it.

Fewer than 10,000 people call Sedona home, but every year around 3 million visitors converge on this destination that can be some 20 degrees cooler than big sister Phoenix. As the hospitality industry works to keep up with that demand, new and renovated resorts are continuing to offer yogis what they've come for while highlighting the region's other attractions, most notably the 400 miles of hiking trails and wide-open wilderness to explore.

For day-hikers, checking into the 70-acre [Enchantment Resort](#) by the glorious Boynton Canyon yields both aesthetic and practical benefits. The hotel's Trail House offers guided tours and pro-level equipment rentals. “Adventure advisers” can steer you to trails matching your experience and ability. At the [Mii Amo spa](#), book post-hike treatments like “intentional” aromatherapy massages—which sound much more appealing than unintentional ones. The “Labyrinth Walk” promises to “clear the mind” of anyone willing to silently pace in circles.





Clockwise from top: The wine bar at Enchantment Resort; the restaurant Forty1 spills out onto Ambiente hotel's pool deck; a patio at the hotel Sky Rock Sedona, which offers views of the surrounding landscape. JEFF ZARUBA (FORTY1 BAR)

Unlike bucolic Enchantment, which feels like a summer camp with its tennis and pickleball courts, the adults-only [Ambiente hotel](#) caters to a more subdued clientele. The year-old hotel sits astride traffic-snarled 89A but feels like another planet. All the cube-shaped rooms have private rooftop terraces and floor-to-ceiling windows that frame the Coconino National Forest. The deservedly acclaimed in-house restaurant Forty1 abuts the pool area, as does the Drifter, an Airstream trailer turned into a fully-equipped kitchen. Hiking trails beckon just steps from the entrance, along with free bicycle repair stations.

Next door to Ambiente, and at less than half the daily tariff, sits a former Best Western transformed as of this spring into [Sky Rock Sedona](#), which is trying its level best to woo the mantra-muttering contingent. The hotel offers a daily moonrise ceremony and the earnest services of Maia Kincaid, a local pet psychic supposedly able to commune telepathically with the quadruped of your choice.







Clockwise from top: Swinging for the hills at Sedona Golf Resort; Merkin Vineyards Hilltop Winery and Trattoria is one of a number of new vineyards transforming the area around Sedona into a wine destination; elk chops from Cowboy Club Grille and Spirits. GREG BERNSTEIN (MERKIN VINEYARDS)

Meanwhile, [Sedona Golf Resort](#)—and the recently facelifted [Hilton](#) next door—attracts those who prefer golf sticks to incense ones. Be warned: It can be tough keeping your eye on the ball given the views of encircling rock formations. Just around the bend, [Tlaquepaque Arts & Shopping Village](#) packs in more than 50 galleries and boutiques, including a nicely curated vinyl shop called Alt Books and Records. Afterward, tuck into upscale Mexican fare at nearby [Elote Cafe](#), where smoked pork cheeks are served in a rich cascabel chile sauce, tastiest when paired with a guava-and-serrano margarita.

At least 10 wineries call the Verde River Valley, just 30 minutes from town, home, including the hulking [Merkin Vineyards Hilltop Winery & Trattoria](#), owned by Tool lead singer Maynard James Keenan. Eat handmade pasta and crisp wood-fired pizzas while looking out over the countryside from the open-air terrace.

Back in Sedona, visit the venerable [Cowboy Club Grille & Spirits](#) in a rustic saloon that reportedly once welcomed Duke Wayne and Nicholas Ray. Menu items like rattlesnake sausage offer a heady whiff of the city’s rugged spurs-and-saddles beginnings. Clearly

marked vegetarian options—including a delicious strawberry-and-spinach salad—signal its evolution, seeming to say, “Come one, come all.”