

## **A Brief Introduction to Downtown Tucson, Arizona**

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### Heat

It gets so hot here in the summer that people drive their cars wearing oven mitts. It is difficult to touch anything made of metal. The trees provide little shade. You can feel heat from buildings and from the road. The air itself is hot and the breeze is also hot. Sometimes there are dust storms that come down the street in house-sized tornadoes and sound like an approaching herd of big animals. The dust storms collect branches and chairs and garbage cans and dump them somewhere else.

### Water

It is ill advised to walk very far without water. Water in bottles gets warm very quickly. Coldwater faucets produce warm water. There used to be a river but now there is no river or lake or stream or pond or creek or brook or puddle. The only water is what falls from the sky. Monsoon comes in mid-summer. Each day in late afternoon there are dark clouds and the sky gets black and yellow and red and heavy and everyone goes outside and looks at the sky and waits for rain. The storms are severe. Palm trees bend and the streets flood. Often it is impossible to drive through the flooded areas. Everyone loves monsoon. When it rains the air smells like creosote, which smells like soft brown sweet dirt musk.

### Architecture

There are three skyscrapers in the business section, which stretches about three blocks, and in midday the area is bustling, almost like a big city. But mostly there are short old adobe buildings painted with bright colors, which are peoples' houses. Many buildings also display mural work and many still have faded old painted signs of businesses like "Mercado" and "La Tortillaria." There are dusty colorful old cars and trucks resting on the sides of the roads.

### Jobs

Some downtowners work at the little market, some work at the nicer restaurants, and some work at the bike shop. There are some banks and other offices. You could work at the University or at Raytheon, which is a place where they make weapons. A lot of people seem like they don't have jobs, or like they have jobs that don't take up too much time. You can live well on very little here. No one cares if you're broke.

## Fashion

Lots of woman hipsters wear forties or fifties vintage dresses. Lots of men wear fancy pants, shirts, and shoes from thrift stores. A lot of people go totally ragamuffin and some go cowboy. There are a lot of tattoos, dyed hair, and ironic mustaches.

## Food

There are several cheap restaurants, and some middle, and a few upscale. The best Mexican is on the south side. There is one 24-hour diner. There is one international market and one organic co-op.

## Booze

Everyone drinks. There are always people you know in bars to drink with at all times of day and night. Even if you're broke you can get drunk. \$1 PBRs at Che's, \$1.50 Schlitz at Congress, \$1 High Life at the Grill. At the District you can get a High Life and a whiskey for something like \$4. Sometimes you end up getting drunk without meaning to. Entire days go by in bars. Entire weeks and months.

## Plants

Prickly pear cactus grows all over the place. It is very hearty. If you snap a pad off of one and stick it in the dirt, a new cactus will grow. People also plant barrel cactus and sometimes saguaro. Bougainvillea is a common vine flower. Its blossoms are bright pink and very striking. Some other flowers are Mexican Hat and Desert Poppy. Mesquite trees and Palo Verde trees are everywhere. So are palm trees, but they are not native. There is very little grass. Peoples' yards are just the dirt ground. Downtown is just minutes from the saguaro forest.

## Bugs

In the summer there is the palo verde beetle, which can be as long as someone's hand. They fly low in the air and crash into things and crawl around clumsily. There are tiny mosquitoes, which are not native and did not used to be here. There are poisonous spiders like black widows and brown recluses. There are bright green iridescent bugs. There are many kinds of cockroaches. There are tarantulas but it is rare to see them in the city. There are enormous grasshoppers that overpopulate certain areas. Sometimes when you are walking somewhere there will be dozens of enormous grasshoppers jumping all over the place.

## Animals

The desert has animals like coyote, javelina, jackrabbits, mountain lions, and rattlesnakes. In the city there are lizards, mice, lots of birds, some small rodents, and stray dogs. In some neighborhoods stray dogs travel in packs. They pretty much leave people alone, but cats have been known to be attacked and killed.

## Art

There is plenty of art. There are many art galleries and lots of public art, both sanctioned and unsanctioned. There is a guy that spray paints stencils of famous characters on the sidewalks and on sides of buildings and bridges and the train track. Some of the characters he has spray-painted are Audrey Hepburn, Max Headroom, and Mr. T. It is easy to know the well-known artists in town.

## Music

There is plenty of music. Almost every night of the week there is a local band playing in one of the bars. There is blues and bluegrass and lounge and rock and alt-alt country and more. Some of the bands tour the country and some tour Europe and some do not tour. It is easy to know the well-known musicians in town.

## Bicycles

Many people ride bicycles. There are serious bikers that wear spandex and helmets and have fancy skinny bicycles, and there are casual bikers that have vintage cruisers with baskets and bells. It is not uncommon for someone to only have a bicycle, no car. You must be careful when riding your bike across the trolley tracks on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It is easy to get your wheel caught.

## Trains

Cargo trains come through downtown about 150 times a day. The trains are long and the tracks bisect downtown. It is a bitch to get stuck because of one because then you're stuck for a long time. The trains always blow their whistles a lot while they go through. There is a rumor that the city once complained about the noise and so now the conductors blow their whistles just to be antagonistic. But no one seems to mind. The cars are yellow and say Union Pacific. They look beautiful in front of the mountains, like something someone imagined and painted.