

SKY ISLANDS

Arizona's Sky Island Region

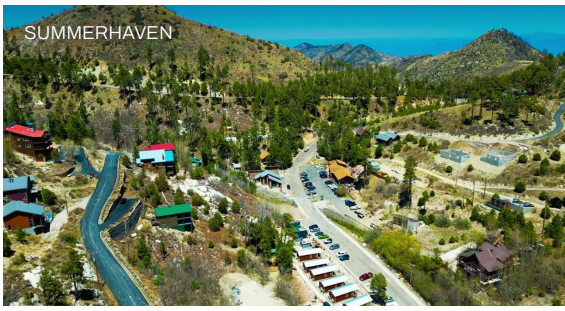
Named for the 1967 book *Sky Island,* by Arizonan nature author Weldon Heald, sky islands are isolated mountain ranges that rise sharply out of surrounding lowland desert and host significantly different habitats than the surrounding land. The Madrean Sky Islands stretch from southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico into northern Sonora, Mexico. This biodiverse archipelago includes the Santa Catalina Mountains, Rincon Mountains, Santa Rita Mountains, Huachuca Mountains and Chiricahua Mountains.

When you visit these sky islands, you can experience up to seven different biomes in just one long hike or scenic drive. Start the day in sere desert scrub and end it in fragrant fir forests. It's like visiting multiple countries while never leaving the state!


CATALINA HIGHWAY

1 DAY ONE – MOUNT LEMMON

Drive Tucson ➤ Summerhaven 1.5 hrs


SUMMERHAVEN

What to do

Drive north from Tucson and watch the thermometer drop. **Mount Lemmon** — or Babad Do'ag to the Tohono O'odham — crests the Santa Catalina Mountains at more than 9,000 feet (2,743 metres). Ski enthusiasts can get their southern snow fix in the winter. In the summer, city escapees relish cooler temps and great views, whether stopping on an overlook or riding the ski lift off-season.
https://www.visittucson.org/things-to-do/outdoors/mountains/mount-lemmon/

There are Mount Lemmon hiking trails through the Coronado National Forest to satisfy casual to serious trekkers and opportunities for outdoor adventures, from birders to mountain bikers to rock climbers, But don't miss a sweet souvenir stroll through **Summerhaven**, the quaint village on top the peak, as well.
https://www.visittucson.org/listing/mt-lemmon-summerhaven/25106/

For after dark, astronomy enthusiasts should book a SkyNights adventure at the **University of Arizona's Mt. Lemmon Skycenter:** You'll get a spectacular sunset and personalized skygazing with the largest public telescope in the region.
https://skycenter.arizona.edu


MT. LEMMON SKYCENTER

Where to stay

Mount Lemmon Lodge offers mountain-chic suites, rooms and cabins and serves as a social hub for Summerhaven with year-round music and cultural events. Created by a fourth-generation Summerhaven-er, **Mount Lemmon Lodge** was built after the 2003 Aspen Fire destroyed many of the area's original lodges. Guests will appreciate the many communal gathering spaces and the sauna, perfect for post-ski or -hike sessions.
https://mountlemmonlodge.com


MOUNT LEMMON LODGE

Where to dine:

Mt. Lemmon Cookie Cabin is famous for its face-sized cookies — get the S'Mores Brownie when it's in season for an extra special mountain treat. The locally beloved establishment was founded in the '90s and rebuilt in 2004. They serve pizza and chili, too, for mid-activity re-fueling! https://www.thecookiecabin.org

Sawmill Run Restaurant is run by the great-grandson of the man who last ran a sawmill on the land the restaurant now graces. Locals and tourists savor hearty, made-from-scratch dishes, including seasonal specials made from local beef and produce. https://www.sawmillrun.com


MOUNT LEMMON COOKIE CABIN

2 DAY TWO – TUMACÁCORI & PATAGONIA

Drive Mount Lemmon ➤ Tumacácori National Historical Park 2 hrs
Drive Tumacacori ➤ Patagonia 45 mins
Drive Patagonia ➤ Ramsey Canyon 1 hr

What to do

Start your Sky Island tour by driving south to Tumacácori National Historical Park, where the stories of the O'odham, Yaqui (Yoeme), Apache and more collide. Tour the mission **San José de Tumacácori,** which began construction around 1800, and hike a section of the Anza Trail, which follows a section of the 1775-76 route Juan Bautista de Anza and 300 immigrants took from Culiacán, Mexico to San Francisco. https://www.nps.gov/tuma/index.htm

Make the short drive to **Patagonia Lake State Park,** where need-for-speeds can catch air gravel biking while binocular heads can look out for Canyon Towhees, Inca doves and more. Hummingbird fans will want to make a stop at Patagonia's Paton Center to search for their favorite species. Did you know more than half of North America's bird species can be found in Arizona's Sky Island region? Then, hop back in the car to head to Sierra Vista's Ramsey Canyon Preserve, in the Huachucas, a favorite of hikers, birders and wildlife lovers alike. https://azstateparks.com/patagonia-lake/


TUMACÁCORI


PATAGONIA LAKE STATE PARK

Where to stay:

Raven's Nest Sanctuary Sky Islands Safari Camp: Glamp at a carefully built eco-camp inside a 42-acre nature sanctuary located beside the Sonoita Creek State Natural Area. https://www.visitarizona.com/directory/ravens-way-wild-journeys

Ramsey Canyon Inn: Spy more than 170 bird species outside your window at this inn's rooms, suites and 1930s guesthouse. Suite guests can even reserve a photo blind to get that once-in-a-lifetime snap! https://ramseycanyoninn.com


RAVEN'S NEST SANCTUARY SKY ISLANDS SAFARI CAMP

Where to dine:

Start your day with **tortillas sold outside the mission at Tumacácori** — a longstanding culinary tradition! Can't get your fill? The park sometimes hosts programs where you can learn to make your own.

Velvet Elvis at La Misión: Yes, this Patagonia favorite does feature a velvet portrait of Presley. The current location was a home, a long-running local bar, a venue and the residence of Velvet Elvis's proprietor before she moved the restaurant in. Come for designer pizzas and stay for the colorful atmosphere! https://velvetelvislamision.wpcomstaging.com


VELVET ELVIS AT LA MISIÓN

3 DAY THREE – KARTCHER CAVERNS, WILLCOX & CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL PARK

Drive Ramsey Canyon ➤ Kartchner Caverns State Park **40 mins**
Drive Kartchner Caverns State Park ➤ Willcox **50 mins**
Drive Willcox ➤ Chiricahua National Park **45 mins**

What to do

Get up early to do a nature double-header: Early birding in **Ramsey Canyon,** then hit the road to **Kartchner Caverns State Park** at the foot of the Whetstone Mountains. Beat the mid-day heat on a cave tour, check more species off your life list at the Hummingbird Garden, and stay late for a bat walk.
https://www.visitarizona.com/directory/nature-conservancys-ramsey-canyon-preserve-hiking-trails
https://azstateparks.com/Kartchner

If bats aren't your jam, continue on east through Willcox wine country for a vineyard tour or two before making your way to the **Chiricahua National Park,** where the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts meet. https://www.nps.gov/chir/index.htm

Take a scenic drive up to Massai Point, hike the trails and look for a glimpse of a Gould's turkey, which was successfully reintroduced into the region in the 1990s. End the day stargazing at this International Dark Sky-designated park or back in Willcox with a glass to toast the Sky Islands.

Where to stay:

Cave Creek Ranch: This birder's paradise in Portal is made for nature lovers seeking a remote outpost. A 90-minute mountain drive east of the Chiricahua National Park will land you on its 25 acres of wildlife watching. Bring your binocs, leave your laptop.
https://www.cavecreekranch.com

Tirrito Farm: Those seeking a more civilized experience can book luxury suites and geodesic domes at this vineyard and brewery in Willcox. Feast at The Kitchen, the on-site farm-to-table restaurant before retiring with one last glass under the stars.
https://www.tirritofarm.com

Where to dine:

La Unica Restaurant & Tortilleria: Margarita connoisseurs can fill up on house-made tortillas and other Sonoran dishes at this local favorite in Willcox.
www.yelp.com/biz/la-unica-restaurant-and-tortilleria-willcox

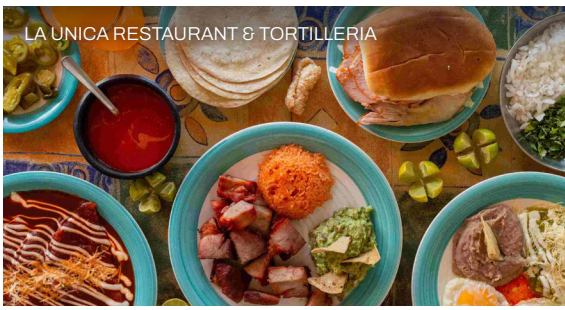
Olive's Vineyard Cafe: Plan a mid-summer visit to see the fields in full bloom at Rhumb Line Vineyard & Lavender Farm, but you can eat at this onsite locally sourced café —and taste award-winning wines — year-round. https://rhumblinevineyard.com


RAMSEY CANYON


KARTCHNER CAVERNS STATE PARK


CHIRICAHUA NATIONAL PARK


TIRRITO FARM


LA UNICA RESTAURANT & TORTILLERIA