

HISTORY

This Arizona town is older than the US. Here's how to visit it and 11 other old towns

Brenna Gauchat Arizona Republic

Published 6:00 a.m. MT Aug. 14, 2024 | Updated 8:47 a.m. MT Aug. 15, 2024

It's easy to feel jealous of the history of East Coast states. Historic homes in New England or courthouses in Maryland hold weighted American historical value. It makes some of us wonder: Where is Arizona's history?

World Atlas, a geography website, compiled a list of other old Arizona cities and towns ranging from former mining communities to cowboy territories.

When some of Arizona's earliest settlements, most nuanced landmarks and infamous graves can be found a few hours away from metro Phoenix, it beckons a road trip.

Here's everything you need to know before checking out some of Arizona's oldest cities.

Oraibi

The Hopi town of Oraibi is thought to be the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the U.S., according to Encyclopedia Britannica. Oraibi, which is located on Third Mesa in northeastern Arizona, has been occupied since 1150. It is still occupied by Hopi people today.

In 1890, some residents who sought a more modern way of life moved to the base of Third Mesa and founded lower Oraibi or Kyakatsmovi Village, which is sometimes called New Oraibi. Kyakatsmovi is the tribal seat and has a store, post office and school.

Wickenburg

Once rich in gold and silver, Wickenburg is a culturally rich town in Arizona. Henry Wickenburg was chasing the 19th-century promise of glittering glory when he joined fellow miners and hopeful ranchers and farmers in settling in the floodplains of the Hassayampa River. His namesake town was established in 1863 before it was incorporated in 1909.

Today, you can visit this former mining community located 65 miles north of Phoenix along U.S. 60 and attend its annual Gold Rush Days festival in February to commemorate the town's roots in riches.

Prescott

To harvest the area's mineral riches on behalf of the Union forces during the Civil War, Congress and President Abraham Lincoln founded Prescott — named after historian and author William Hickling Prescott — in 1864. It led the prospective state as Arizona's territorial capital until losing its spot to Tucson and then Phoenix in 1889.

The city's flourishing potential was temporarily stalled by "The Great Fire of 1900," which burnt down many of its wooden buildings. However, iconic sites like Whiskey Row, a series of saloons and restaurants, were rebuilt to emulate the original structures and are a must-see when visiting Northern Arizona.

Florence

Florence boasts a variety of architectural wonders, from a Victorian-style courthouse to multiple 19th-century adobe structures. Although the city was founded in 1866, many of its first important buildings and landmarks have been well-preserved over the past 150 years or so.

The Pinal County Historical Museum is the best place to learn about the town's expansive — and occasionally gruesome — history. There, you can see more than 25 nooses and a double

electric chair once used in executions as well as a tribute to Tom Mix, a Western silent film movie star who died in a car crash outside of Florence.

Show Low

"If you can show low, you win," said one early settler to another in a marathon poker game. "Show low it is," the other replied, thus Show Low became the name of this picturesque town in present-day Navajo County. At least that's what Show Low residents say happened, and the main street through town aptly named Deuce of Clubs in the legendary game's honor.

Show Low was officially founded in 1870 before being incorporated in 1953 and has developed more than a century of culture and community. June's annual Show Low Days — which includes a Derby Down the Deuce, arts and craft festival, wiener dog race and more — and July's Independence Day festivities are two of the town's most anticipated summertime events.

Globe

Globe, like many Western cities, was founded as a mining town in 1876. Chosen for its ideal location for distributing mining products, it became an important copper mining center for over a century. In the foothills of the Pinal Mountains, Globe is home to thousands of golden poppies that bloom every spring and miles of stairs that test visitors year-round.

Globe and Maimi, its sister community, are home to historic downtown courthouses and churches, as well as hillside cottages.

Best day trip from Phoenix: This city pops with wildflowers and public art

Tombstone

The spirit of the Wild West is still alive in the streets of Tombstone. Where modern men recreate gunfights between cowboys and tourists can join in the fantasy of living in a lawless

land. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, the remnants of 19th-century figures like Doc Holliday and the Earps can still be found lingering in historical landmarks.

The "Town Too Tough to Die" was founded in 1879 and is more than just its roots in cowboy boots. The Rose Tree Museum and Outlaw Zipline are just some of Tombstone's more modern landmarks that can be found after a gunslinging reenactment.

Jerome

The "Wickedest Town in the West" can be found in Yavapai County. With an abundance of copper and other mineral riches hidden in the mountains, Jerome became a prominent spot for Arizona settlers. The town was founded in 1876 by early prospectors traveling along the Black Hills of central Arizona in search of natural wealth.

While the town's mines have long since been abandoned, hotels, houses and hospitals are said to be haunted by some of the 20th Century residents who died in the town's early fires and violent crimes. You can feel the presence of Jerome's history in its winding streets and eerie architecture.

More: 6 scary stories every Arizonan should know from a haunted movie set to a ghostly ballerina

Camp Verde

Tucked away in the literal heart of Arizona — according to a gubernatorial proclamation and a determination from the Arizona Professional Land Surveyors that agreed this town was located nearest to the center of Arizona — Camp Verde is one of the state's hidden gems.

In 1865, Fort Verde — originally named Camp Lincoln — was founded as a military establishment around the same time neighboring cities like Jerome and Clarkdale were finding their footing. Growing beyond a military camp, the residents of Camp Verde now enjoy more than 18 miles of river that weave its way through lush greenery and scenic mountaintops.

Ajo

Maybe the earliest Arizona settlement, Ajo was founded in 1847 near what is now the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. A former mining town and current Southwest arts mecca, Ajo has a multitude of restaurants, galleries and historic buildings to explore.

The beauty of the Sonoran Desert allows you to interact with native agriculture, while the Ajo Historical Society Museum can teach you more about the city's culturally collaborative past.

Tubac

Tubac's history is as complex and multicultural and the people who reside there. Spaniards first recorded the existence of this town as they were establishing missions to baptize Indigenous people in 1726. Through its centuries of development, Tubac has been home to East Coast entrepreneurs, Hispanic communities and many other groups.

Its diverse culture has provided the ideal backdrop to a vibrant arts community where you can find creative pieces in mediums like oil, watercolors, charcoal, glass, ceramics, metal and wood. Visit the town's historic buildings or its equally iconic galleries.

Seligman

This small railroad stop in northern Arizona was officially realized as a town in 1886. Over a century later, Seligman has evolved into an inspiring and quintessential spot along Route 66.

Angel Delgadillo, a Seligman barber, is largely remembered for fighting to preserve the highway and forming the Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona. Because of Delgadillo's persistence, Seligman was designated as the Birthplace of Historic Route 66 in 1987 and is still the starting point of the longest surviving section of the iconic highway, which you can drive for 160 miles to Topock.

More: This diner was named the best in Arizona. Here's how to try it plus other spots to visit