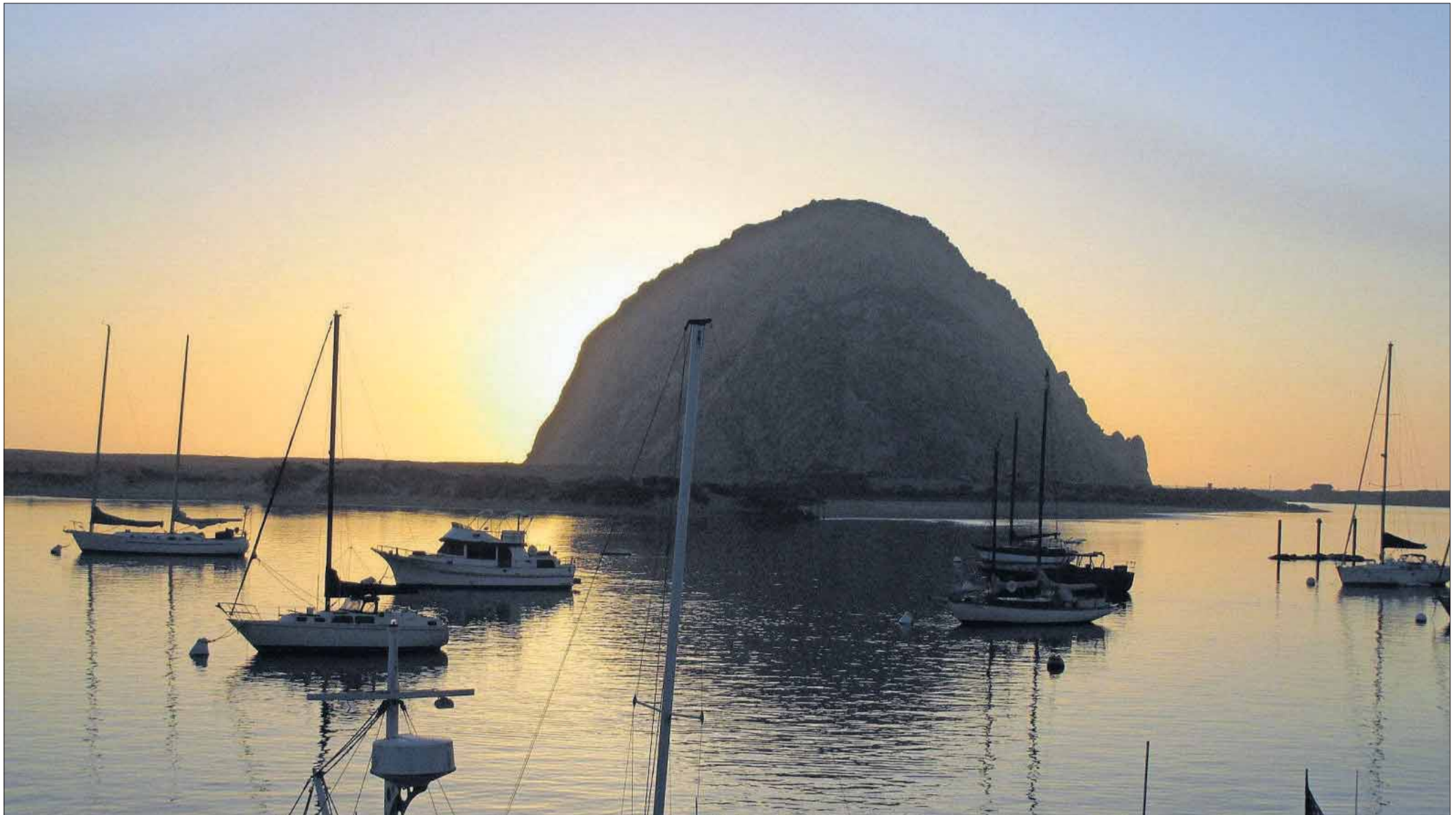


INSIDE

MIDEAST: Louvre Museum gets an outpost in Abu Dhabi **2K**
NEW YORK: Get a new view of Manhattan — from a kayak **4K**
SPAIN: Lounge in azure waters or a cave in Menorca **6K**

CALIFORNIA



Photos by Robin Soslow/Special Contributor

Morro Rock, just offshore in Morro Bay, Calif., is one of a chain of distinctive, ancient volcanic mountains in San Luis Obispo County.

Storybook wine country

Castles, enchanting vines and misty mountains enhance San Luis Obispo's charm

By **ROBIN SOSLOW**
Special Contributor

Booze-induced illusions, or the most awesome wine escape ever?

Free-range zebras, elephant seals, peacocks. Hilltop castles from world-wondrous to weird. Glittering ocean waves, dramatic cliffs and mist-shrouded

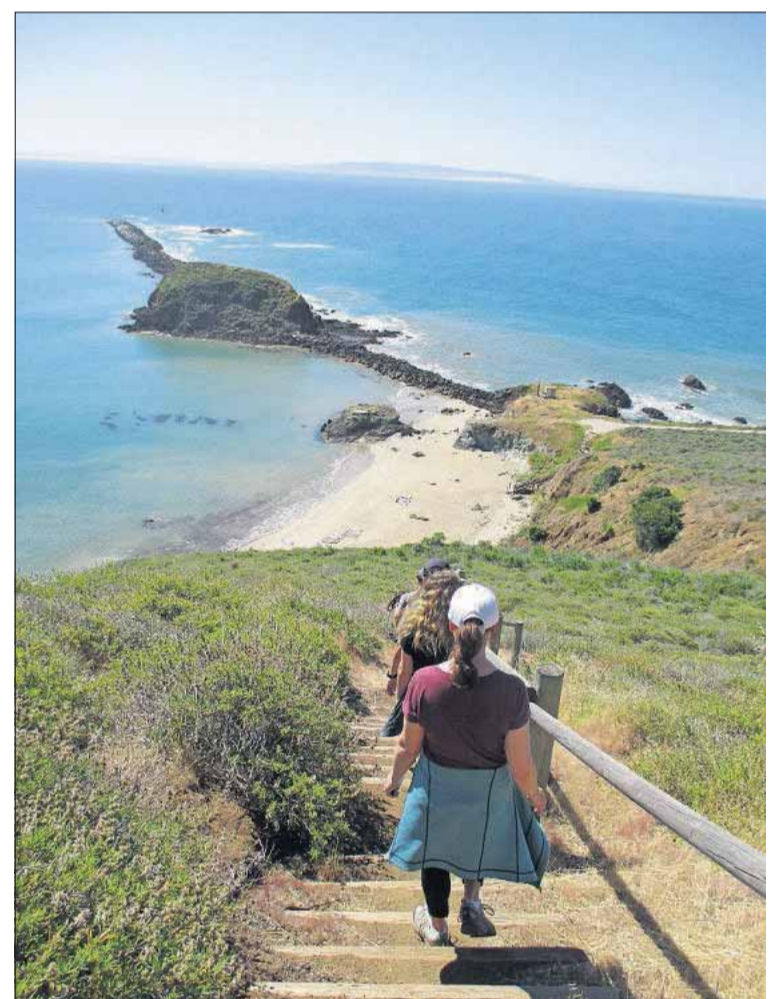
mountains. Ancient volcanic peaks you can hike. Old-fashioned beach towns and a quirky-hip city with contrasting charms. Tasting rooms in fantasy settings where distinctive wines dazzle your taste buds.

I swear on a stack of tasting notes that I encountered all this — and other episodes of peak euphoria — during three days in San Luis Obispo wine country, SLO for short. It hugs

California's central coast, smack-dab between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

No wonder this place is ranked among the world's happiest places. And now with global wine-lovers discovering its primo vinos, tasting rooms and hotels are gussying up to welcome them.

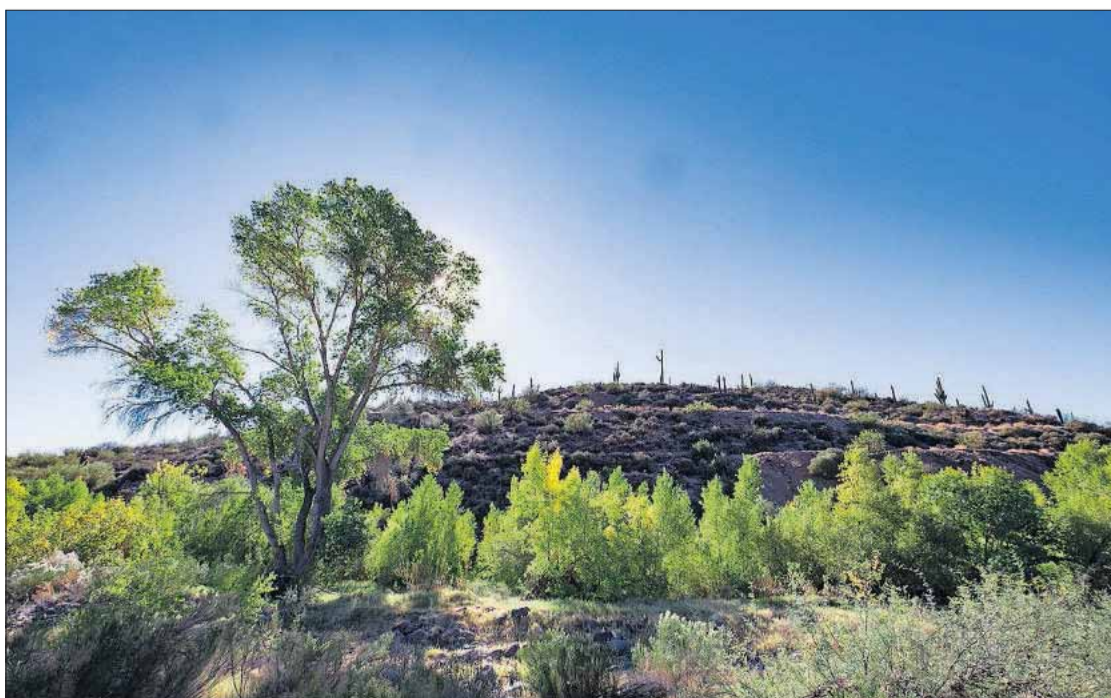
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Locals and visitors spend a morning on one of the free Pecho Coast Trail guided hikes on the bluffs by Avila Beach.

ARIZONA

See Scottsdale without spending a fortune



Jim Byers/Special Contributor

Spur Cross is a great area for hiking in north Scottsdale, Ariz. You'll find towering saguaro, deciduous trees and ancient petroglyphs.

If tony resorts aren't your speed, you can go hiking, find bargains

By **JIM BYERS**
Special Contributor

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — This Arizona city has more than its share of tony resorts with splashy spas and silky sheets. But there are tons of things you can do without taking out a new mortgage on your house. Here are a few worth checking out.

A river valley hike

There are tons of places in Scottsdale for great hiking, including the celebrated sunrise trek up Camelback Mountain and up at Pinnacle Peak, near the Four Seasons Troon North property. For something quite different, head to Spur Cross Ranch in northern Scottsdale, where an easy trail will take you down into a river valley with deciduous cottonwood, birch and alders, and (at times)

moving water. It's all a striking contrast from the desert scenery you might expect.

One of the routes will take you past an abandoned mine and another past ancient petroglyphs. You'll also find magnificent saguaros, which can live 250 years, and teddy bear cholla. The desert blooms are something to see in spring — an explosion of yellow and pink flowers.

Cost: There's no charge for hiking at Spur Cross. alltrails.com/trail/us/arizona/spur-cross-trail.

Listen to the music

The Musical Instrument Museum (technically just over the Scottsdale border in Phoenix) is billed as the world's only museum dedicated to musical instruments from around the world. You'll find an astonishing variety in the 10,000 or so instruments — lutes, pianos, strange instruments fashioned from sticks, wildly decorated electric guitars and something

See **HIKE** Page 5K

Find your happy place: San Luis Obispo

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Fabulous wine

Fog trapped between the ocean and Santa Lucia Mountains, mild sunny days, cool nights, volcanic and calcareous (calcium-rich) soil, a long February through November growing season that gives grapes time to mature — this perfect storm creates fruit with intensely concentrated, beautifully balanced flavors and bright acidity. Primary varietals here are chardonnay, pinot noir and aromatic whites.

Unlike high-profile wine regions, you're likely to meet the actual winemakers in SLO wine country's Edna Valley and Arroyo Grande Valley. Most of the 30 wineries are within 5 miles of the beach. You can even begin wine-tasting a minute south of the airport at Tolosa (try the chard).

The tasting rooms add to the region's distinction. SLO wine trail stops include Sextant, in a renovated Edna Valley stagecoach station; Silver Horse, in a reclaimed one-room schoolhouse; Biddle Ranch's hip mountain-facing vineyard terrace; and Chamisal's indoor-outdoor lounge (dig the wine cat art and grand piano).

Don't miss Kelsey See Canyon's slopeside orchard, which is bustling with live bands, gourmet food trucks, hide 'n seek games between vine rows, peacocks and surfboards painted with a sexy mermaid and diver couple that appears on the winery's labels. Another must is Cutruzzola's new tasting table, a lightning rod for wine geeks, just off seaside bike-hike trails in artsy Cambria. Visit slowine.com for more information.

Ocean and mountains

With so much great wine, you'll have energy to burn. Scenic places to do that run from easygoing boardwalks at old-fashioned surf spot Pismo Beach and Moonstone Beach, a quiet bluffside stroll.

Three mornings a week, you can join free guided hikes up Pecho Coast at Port San Luis, once famous for shipwrecks and oil trafficking. Glorious wildflowers and splendid views of the glittering harbor enchant you en route to a rope swing arcing out from the slope and a storybook lighthouse worth the \$5 tour.

How about a two- or three-hour climb up one of the SLO's nine morros? These ancient volcano peaks, resembling shrunken mountains, are distinctive to this region. Local favor-



Photos by Robin Soslow

When hiking the Pecho Coast Trail, explore the splendid lighthouse perched on a cliff.

ites edge downtown SLO: Cerro San Luis Obispo ("Madonna Mountain") and Bishop Peak Trail. Both summits reward you with 360-degree sea-to-Santa Lucia Mountain views. From downtown Morro Bay, hike around a spit of land to the base of Morro Rock, which juts from the ocean like a sci-fi landscape.

Opposing castles

Beholding the mountain and ocean views, it's clear why William Randolph Hearst built his hilltop Mediterranean revival-style Casa Grande and garden here. Now part of San Simeon State Park, the Hearst Castle's construction began in 1919, directed by architect Julia Morgan.

Centuries-old sculptures, paintings, tapestries, carvings, Persian tiles, bell towers, ornate church choir stalls, chandeliers and other artworks fill 165 rooms floor to ceiling. Both outdoor and gold-accented indoor pools elicit wows; a huge theater still screens home movies featuring early 20th-century celebrities. The 127 acres of hilltop gardens are flocked with Italian cypress, palms and softball-size fragrant roses of all colors. Bus rides go up and down past enclosures Hearst used for polar bears, kangaroos, antelope, leopards



Pismo Beach is an old-fashioned California beach town popular for surfing, cool shops and great restaurants.

and camels.

Eight miles south stands another state landmark. "The Anti-Hearst castle," guide Mike O'Malley's nickname for Nit Wit Ridge, looms on a steep hill in Cambria. Trash collector/architect Art Beal bought the lot in 1928, then spent a half-century constructing floors and terraces from salvaged junk, rocks, tires, beer cans and giant abalone shells. This palace's throne: a rooftop commode facing the ocean.

SLO sights range from migrating monarch butterflies to humpback whales spouting off-shore just beyond the surfers. Between Hearst Castle and Cambria, elephant seals sunbathe and frolic in the rock-flocked surf at the Piedras Blancas rookery edging Highway 1. There's plenty of parking at the overlook. In roadside cow pastures in San Simeon, descendants of Hearst's zebras quietly graze.

New farm- and sea-to-fork res-



Zebras, descendants of William Randolph Hearst's personal zoo, graze near Hearst Castle.



Staff Graphic

taurants with beautiful views include Oyster Loft in Pismo Beach oceanfront, which features fine local wine, five-star cuisine and cool marine-motif decor like undulating blue wave ceilings, and Mersea's, which anchors Avila Beach pier.

In downtown SLO, Novo serves Brazilian, Mediterranean and Asian dishes on a twinkly light-garlanded patio overlooking a creek. The creek-side path leads to Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa, founded in 1772. That's where SLO winegrowing got its start.

Downtown SLO lodging ranges from hip Granada Hotel & Bistro to Madonna Inn, a fantasy land of pink straight out of the 1940s. It's a fun place to stay, spa, swing dance and dig into its famous pink Champagne cake. At Pismo Beach's midcentury modern-esque SeaCrest Hotel, steep landscaped stairs lead down the bluff to ocean's edge.

On the way to the beach, two surfboards bookend a sign: "A bad day here is better than a good day anywhere else." I'll drink to that.

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Hike, learn or take a swing at golf in Scottsdale

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called a thumb piano.

Video brings many of the instruments to life, allowing you to hear a fiddler from the Canadian Maritimes as well as an Indian fellow playing a chaturangui (a slide guitar).

You'll find out almost as much about cultures on a visit here as you do the instruments themselves. I mean, did you know there's a style of bagpipe in Sweden called a sackpipa? I didn't think so. The museum also does special events such as children's activities and features regular concerts.

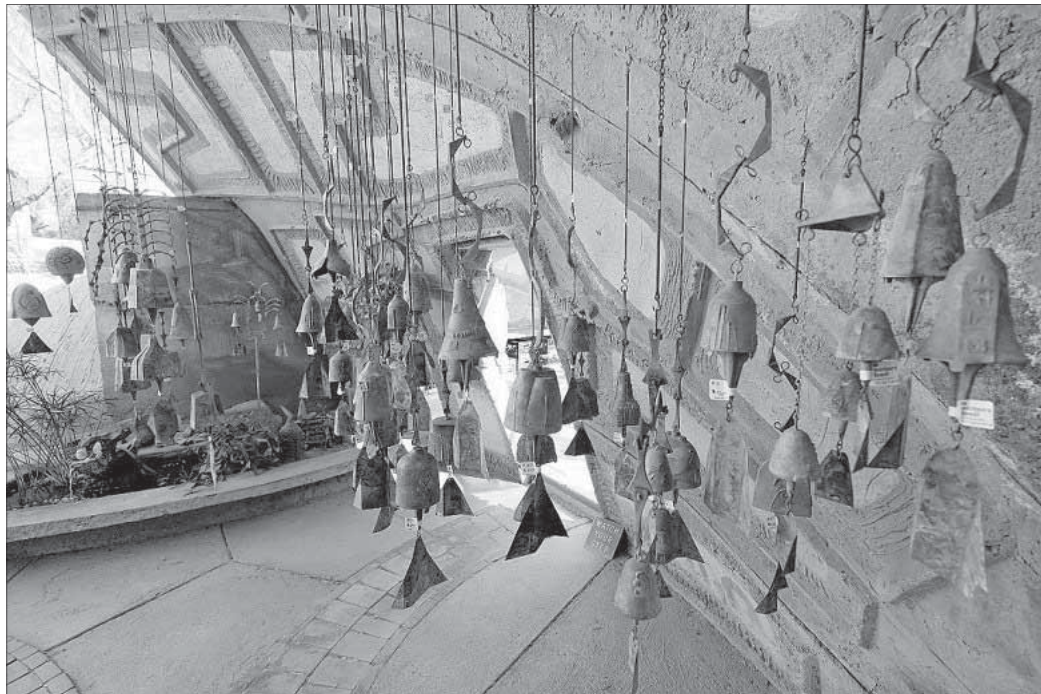
Cost: Admission normally runs \$20 for adults, \$15 for teens and \$10 for kids (children 3 and under are free). mim.org.

Ring your bell

Checking out the former residence and sculpture studios of renowned Italian artist Paolo Soleri is a great way to learn about art and the environment. You'll find freeform buildings with striking architectural notes (Soleri liked to use whatever he could find) and a working studio where they still make Soleri's famous bronze bells.

It's said that the folks who designed the original set of *Star Wars* were inspired by some of the elements found at Cosanti.

Cost: Guided tours can be



Jim Byers/Special Contributor

Handmade bells are a popular purchase at Cosanti, the working art center created in the Scottsdale desert by Italian artist Paolo Soleri.

set up in advance for \$10 per person. You also can try a tour with Ace Bailey, a Scottsdale ambassador who runs Ultimate Arts and Cultural Tours. arcosanti.org/cosanti.

Architectural marvel

Taliesin West, the desert home of renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright, is a real treat. His construction methods and use of natural products found in the area are quite interesting, as are his sharp angles and use of light.

Even cooler to my way of thinking is learning about his

personal life from the highly knowledgeable tour guides, who can talk about how Wright loved to race his cars around the desert at breakneck speeds.

There's also his strong-willed artistic sense. "One fellow he was working for kept sending back plans Wright had drawn up," my guide told me on a recent visit. "Finally, Wright wrote to him and said, 'What do you want, a chicken on its nest or an eagle in flight?'"

The man has fans all over the world. On my latest visit, a woman who told me she was 97 leaned back on one of the Taliesin beds in her best Mari-

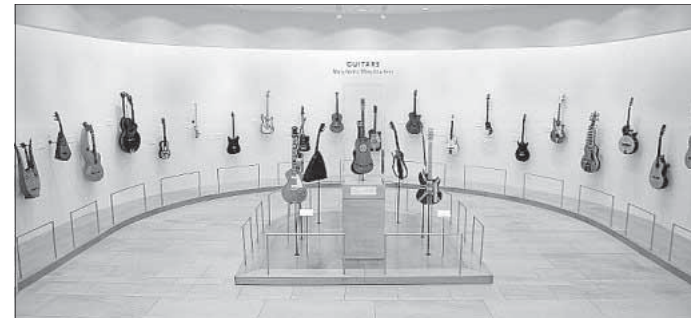
lyn Monroe pose and said, "Too bad Frank's not here."

Cost: \$34 for a 90-minute tour. franklloydwright.org.

Golf on steroids

Taking golf to a whole new level is Top Golf at Riverwalk, which is kind of a driving range meets nightclub meets video arcade. The Scottsdale version (there are others in Las Vegas, Dallas and elsewhere) features 100-plus climate-controlled hitting bays, with golf balls that contain microchips for tracking your shots.

There are a variety of games,



Scottsdale Tourism

The Musical Instrument Museum is one of the world's finest museums dedicated to music. You'll find everything from Swedish bagpipes to rock star guitars.



Staff Graphic

to \$45 per hour, with one to six players per bay. topgolf.com/us/riverwalk.

Where to stay

■ The new Andaz Scottsdale features excellent food and gorgeous low-rise units spread around a desert landscape. The resort features funky, local art. Rooms are bright and colorful, with showers big enough to hold the offensive line of the Dallas Cowboys. scottsdale.andaz.hyatt.com/en/hotel/home.html.

■ Hotel Valley Ho is a retro treasure, a midcentury modern design spot that has attracted celebrities and wannabe stars since the 1950s. Look for sleek rooms with playful touches in a hotel that's a short walk to downtown Scottsdale's best restaurants, bars and Arizona wine-tasting rooms. hotelvalleyho.com.

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but the basic idea is to get your ball closest to a target. Luckily for casual golfers there are no points for style, just results.

The Scottsdale version has more than 200 HDTV sets, so it's perfect for watching March Madness or other sporting events. They also have several restaurants and bars, free Wi-Fi and a rooftop terrace with a fire pit for those cool winter nights in the desert.

Cost: Prices for a driving range/hitting bay go from \$25