



DISCOVER



1. Travelers soak in the scenery on the Verde Canyon Railroad. 2. Pesto makes perfect at Pizzeria Bocce. 3. Antelope—and campers—welcome at Dead Horse Ranch State Park. 4. A horse-back ride at the park. 5. Neapolitan pizzas take shape at Bocce.



A PERFECT DAY IN

COTTONWOOD, AZ

New restaurants and tasting rooms bring a touch of sophistication to a historic town in the heart of the Verde Valley. *By Nora Burba Trulsson*

The best pizza in the Verde Valley

Twelve years ago, Michelle and Eric Jurisin fell in love with Old Town Cottonwood, a mile-long stretch of Main Street with porticoes, red-tiled roofs, and weathered wooden façades.

The couple repurposed abandoned buildings to create two of the town's biggest food draws, **Nic's Italian Steak & Crab House** and the all-American **Tavern Grille**. Their latest eatery, **Pizzeria Bocce**, serves pizzas and

panzanella in a 1920s-era auto shop. "This channels my Southern Italian roots," Michelle says. The Neapolitan-style pizzas (from \$10)—topped with pomodoro or shrimp and hot peppers and fired in a wood-burning stove—are legit, as are

the ingredients; the Caputo flour comes direct from Italy. And the bocce court? You'll find it right on the back patio. *Nic's: 925 N. Main St.; nicsaz.com. The Tavern Grille: 904 N. Main; thetaverngrille.com. Bocce: 1060 N. Main; boccecottonwood.com. —>*



GETTING HERE

Cottonwood is 103 miles north of Phoenix. Take I-17 north to State 260 west.

A tasting room crawl

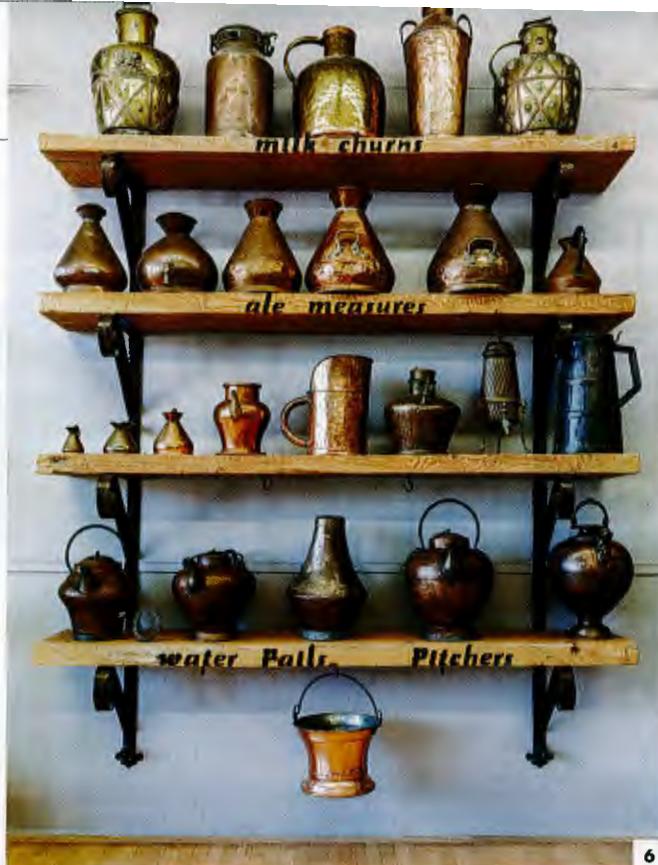
“Cottonwood was full of bootleggers and speakeasies during Prohibition,” says local vintner Sam Pillsbury. The town embraces that legacy today, with a slew of Main Street tasting rooms. Newcomer **Burning Tree Cellars**, opened in 2012, pours Rhône-style wines like The Bear, a fruity Syrah/Grenache blend. A few doors down, **Arizona Stronghold** lures tasters with comfy couches, live music, and flights that include such local favorites as the aromatic Tazi. At **Pillsbury Wine Company**, tipplers sip the winemaker’s high-desert vintages, like an intense Syrah blend. *Burning Tree: \$10 tasting; 1040 N. Main St.; burningtreecellars.com. Arizona Stronghold: \$9 tasting; 1023 N. Main; azstronghold.com. Pillsbury: \$10 tasting; 1012 N. Main; pillsburywine.com.*

A walk on the wild side

Despite its morbid moniker, nearby **Dead Horse Ranch State Park** bursts with life. Great blue herons, bald eagles, and black-chinned hummingbirds inhabit grass-ringed lagoons and shaded riverbanks. Mountain bikers also come in droves—newbies love the gentle trails, while hard-core cyclists use the park to access the Coconino National Forest. Circle back April 24 to 27 for the **Verde Valley Birding and Nature Festival**, featuring an owl prowl and beginning birding workshops. *Park: \$7/vehicle; 675 Dead Horse Ranch Rd.; azstateparks.com. Festival: From \$15; birdyverde.org.*

The shiniest museum in the West

Just 3 miles northwest of town, in Clarkdale, the new **Copper Art Museum** is a labor of love for Drake Meinke. The third-generation copper-antiques dealer refurbished the 1928 building himself. His 6,000-piece collection includes everything from a 1524 wine pitcher to a lobster pot that came out on *The Martha Stewart Show*. Don’t miss the intricately decorated shell casings engraved by trench-bound soldiers during World War I. *\$9; 849 Main St., Clarkdale; copperartmuseum.com.*



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6. A penny for your pots? The Copper Art Museum. 7. Neon marks the spot. 8. Wine at Burning Tree Cellars.

THE LOCAL LOWDOWN

“Cottonwood has an authenticity to it, this true Arizona feeling and texture. It draws people who want to live outside the norm.”

—MIKE FINNEY, VERDE VALLEY WINE TRAIL

An old-school train ride

Just around the corner, the **Verde Canyon Railroad** chugs out of the Clarkdale Depot. Built to haul copper, the railroad now takes riders on a 4-hour, 20-mile ramble into canyon wilderness along the Verde River. En route, the train passes sycamore

and cottonwood thickets, flaming red rocks, and ancient dwellings. Bring binoculars: March is a great time to spot migrating eagles. Onboard, you’ll hear about the valley’s history, sip wine, and rock to tunes from Johnny Cash and The Monkees. *From \$55; 300 N. Broadway, Clarkdale; verdecanyonrr.com.*