

The Cruellest Journey: A Sahara Survival Epic
BY DEAN KING

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DAY 1 **THE FIRST RULE** of desert travel: Watch where you sit. Nowhere is that more true than in Saguaro National Park (www.nps.gov/sagu), near Tucson, Arizona, famed for its expansive, towering forests of the famous muttonpronged cactus. A seven-mile hike on the Douglas Spring, Three Trees, and Withrose Trails provides a perfect half-day and all-heel introduction. In the afternoon, head southwest to Faithful Caverns to catch the 4-15 a.m. tour of the Big Room (\$23; call 520-586-2283 to reserve a spot); a huge, otherworldly gallery newly opened to visitors. Camp 25 miles to the east at the tree sites near the Isle of You climbing area on the margin of Cochise Stronghold, in Coronado National Forest (520-364-3468).

DAY 2 **SPARKING OF COCHISE**, when the Apache chief fooled up hats to hide from the U.S. Army, he was probably too preoccupied to savor the granite domes. Too bad. Regionally, there's no better climbing spot than the Stronghold. Contact the Rocky Mountain Climbing School in Tucson (www.climbinazona.com) for information or to hire a guide (\$100). Later, hop on State Route 80, skip the (busted) Elro wilderness of Tombstone, and retire for the night to the '50s Mach of the Shady Dell RV Park (\$35 to \$70; www.theashadel.com) in Bisbee. Each trailer comes with period touches like leopard-print carpets and vintage 45s. Recommended: the 1940 Astorian.

DAY 3 **THE QUIRKY COPPER-MINING** town of Bisbee is (seriously) popular entirely by itself. Poppin', and artists, rub shoulders with those over intellectual of Main Street's Big Day Cafe (520-432-5025). On the way out of town, stop by the 900-foot-deep Lavender Pit mine, then motor 17 miles west to the birds' paradise of the San Pedro Riparian National



ALMORADO
Hiking through southern Arizona's Sycamore Canyon.

Conservation Area (520-438-6400), where more than 300 avian species have been spotted. Hike for a few hours before continuing west, past the red-painted mountains outside of Patagonia, to camp at the Sycamore Canyon trailhead at mile 17 on Ruby Road in Coronado National Forest (520-261-2296). Come prepared: Nighttime temperatures could hit the 30s; the next day, the mercury may well climb into the upper 90s.

DAY 4 **FEW HIKES HAVE BRAGGING** rights like Sycamore Canyon because few hikes wind five miles down a cottonwood-lined gorge to end at the U.S.-Mexico border. In February, the creek should be Sycamore's shimmering pools, but in spring it may be too hot to hop the barbed wire, wait until later and cross legally from Nogales, Arizona, to Nogales, Sonora. (If you intend it, a driver's license.) The highlight of the visit is a late lunch at Restauración La Roca, a Spanish colonial-style spot built into a cliff; it has the best carne asada that side of the border (+52-63131-20760). At the end of the day, cruise back to Tucson on I-19.

MILEAGE CHART

DAY 1	110 miles	2.5 hours
DAY 2	53 miles	1.5 hours
DAY 3	137 miles	2.5 hours
DAY 4	87 miles	2 hours



The best room in Bisbee



Cochise Stronghold