

■ WEEKENDER | 48-hour getaways – where to go and what to do



PHOTO BY STEVE WARBLE

The essence of an enjoyable road trip is often in the serendipitous discovery of places that inspire return visits to distant locales. Just past Bisbee's famed Lavender Pit mine, beside State Route 80 in the city's historic Lowell neighborhood, the Bisbee Breakfast Club prepares memorable meals for a devoted following of regulars and travelers fortunate enough to find this not-so-secret spot.

Chilaquillas, a traditional Mexican breakfast dish comprised of layers of baked tortillas with eggs and cheese, and a California omelet with diced bacon, guacamole and Ortega chilies are just a pair of the of genuine gourmet staples dotting the menu.

The place really does have a club-like atmosphere, as everyone seems to know Heather Grimm, the charming and exuberant hostess, who, together with her husband Patrick, owns and operates the year-old establishment. The pair previously spent three years running Dot's Diner, which still sits in the shade of the nearby Shady Dell RV Park.

The Bisbee Breakfast Club is but one example of the unique charm that permeates this once booming, rough and tumble pioneer town now transformed to an artsy and quirky off-the-beaten-path tourist destination. Alongside Bisbee's narrow, European-style hillside streets and sidewalks are a wide variety of art galleries, jewelry shops, bookstores and cafés.

Originally founded in 1880, the town owes its name to Judge DeWitt Bisbee, financier of the historic Copper Queen Mine. At the time of the great gold and copper mining rush, Bisbee's mines produced more than 8 billion pounds of copper and nearly 3 million ounces of gold.

The pioneering spirit of the city's settlers remains evident in the personalities of its current entrepreneurs, like Bisbee native Tom Mosier who runs Lavender Jeep Tours of Bisbee. Formerly in the heavy machinery business, Mosier was inspired to become a professional tour guide after years of showing visiting friends and relatives around town. With three state-of-the-art touring jeeps and six different tours, Lavender Jeep Tours can run up to 12 tours a day. The Historic Old Bisbee Tour is an approximately hour and a half trip along the back roads and high trails of the town, complete with a running historical narrative.

Of course a trip to Bisbee would be incomplete without venturing into the now inactive Copper Queen Mine. A guided train tour burrows through the depths of the mine along some of the more than 2,300 miles of tunnels beneath the town's surface. Visitors to the mine are outfitted with hard hats, lanterns and slickers. Temperatures in the mine hover in the mid 40s. Most often, the tour guides are former miners who describe real life experiences.

By the mid 1970s, the copper mines that provided Bisbee with its primary source of revenue had been largely depleted and the city began its transformation into the eclectic tourist destination it is today. On a recent stay, we spent our first night at The Inn at Castle Rock, a charming 1890s boarding house with unique and comfortably appointed rooms like the exotic Sultan's Harem two-room suite (the second room being a single-bed nook). The Inn is decorated with an interesting array of knickknacks and sits on top of its own Eccentricities Restaurant where complimentary breakfast is served.

The next night we made a return visit to another favorite, the Bisbee Grand Hotel, a fun and charming combination of Victorian and Old Western architectural styles with seven uniquely themed suites. For the second year in a row, we chose the first floor Captain's Suite, adorned with all things nautical. In the evening the Bisbee Grand Saloon is among the town's most lively nightspots. In the morning, breakfast is served on the second floor patio with a view of Main Street.

We also returned to the one-of-a-kind Shady Dell, where you can spend the night in one of nine vintage travel trailers, a dry docked yacht or a tiki'd out bus. The trailers have been retro-restored and contain phonographs and .45s, as well as authentic period televisions (hooked to VCRs that run classic movies). Appropriately, we viewed *The Long Long Trailer*, starring Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz.

Of course, touring around the area can make you hungry. It's worth the 20-mile drive out to the Ranch 22 Restaurant at the remodeled Best Western Lookout Lodge in nearby Tombstone. Charismatic proprietor Inder Sandhu retired as vice president of sales for Hewlett Packard in San Francisco, picked up and moved to Tombstone to buy the hotel two and a half years ago.

Serving an eclectic blend on Indian and California/Southwest cuisine, the restaurant features main courses like Beef Buffad with basmati rice and mushrooms, Kashmiri Chicken and Baby Ribs. The Cheese Cake Flambé with bananas and strawberries in cognac is a dessert recipe Sandhu admits to poaching from a hotel in Japan, and is to die for. After dinner, guests gather around fire pits in a beautiful rock garden.

The next night we paid a visit to the excellent Café Roka. The building dates back to 1907, and was constructed using pressure fired bricks, thus surviving the disastrous Bisbee fire of 1908.

We began our meal with a succulent appetizer of Newfoundland mussels and a flight of red wines. Main courses on the regular menu include roasted half duck with a cranberry, honey, merlot sauce, and lobster ravioli with gulf shrimp, as well as an artichoke and portabella mushroom lasagna, salad and sorbet.

After dinner there's plenty of bar hopping to be done at Brewery Gulch, which in its heyday, boasted more than 45 saloons, a smattering of which still exist, some as shops, galleries or restaurants. With each trip to Bisbee we become more familiar and comfortable, and look forward to whatever pleasant surprises await us when we come back. ■

Like Coronado the explorer, author Charlie Vascellero has traversed southeastern Arizona from Tucson to Tombstone to Bisbee and the Huachuca Mountains to Ramsey Canyon and Kartchner Caverns in pursuit of scenic wonder and guilty pleasures.



PHOTO BY CHARLES VASCCELLERO

The Shady Dell

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Bisbee Visitor Center | 31 Subway St. | 520-432-3554 | www.discoverbisbee.com

DINING

Bisbee Breakfast Club
75A Erie St.
520-432-5885

Café Roka
35 Main St.
520-432-5153
www.caferoka.com

Ranch 22 Restaurant
Best Western Lookout Lodge
Highway 80 West, Tombstone

TOURS

Lavender Jeep Tours
#1 Copper Queen Plaza
45 Gila Dr.
520-432-5369

Queen Mine Tours
866-432-2071 or 520-432-2071
www.cityofbisbee.com

ACCOMMODATIONS

Bisbee Grand Hotel
61 Main St.
800-421-1909

The Inn at Castle Rock
112 Tombstone Canyon Road
520-432-4449

The Shady Dell
520-432-3567
www.theshadydell.com

The surrounding cities and towns of Cochise County contain many other natural and exciting outdoor attractions. Here are a few must-sees if you're in the area.

Kartchner Caverns

Nine miles south of I-10 off State Hwy. 90, exit 302
520-586-CAVE (2283) for reservations.

Ramsey Canyon Preserve

27 Ramsey Canyon Rd., Hereford
520-378-2785

Coronado National Memorial

4101 E. Montezuma Canyon Rd., Hereford
520-366-5515
www.nps.gov

Arizona Folklore Preserve

56 Folklore Trail, Hereford
520-378-6165
www.arizonafolklore.com