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# meetings

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## *Making a Difference*

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### **Dose of Success**

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By Maria Lenhart

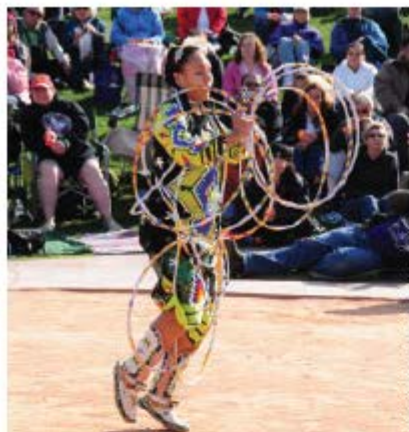
# Team Spirit

Arizona's distinctive natural and cultural attributes make for uplifting group experiences

**W**ith its rugged desert terrain, red-rock outcroppings and blend of Native American and Old West heritage, Arizona holds possibilities for teambuilding challenges and immersive activities unlike anywhere else. Whether it's taking part in a Navajo hoop dance, learning the art of horsemanship or helping preserve an endangered landscape, groups can come away from an Arizona meeting with lasting life skills and new insight.



ENCHANTMENT RESORT, SEDONA



HOOP DANCER, HEARD MUSEUM, PHOENIX

PAUL B. MOORE / SHUTTERSTOCK, INC.

What Arizona provides is in sync with what many organizations are now seeking in the way of teambuilding and other meeting objectives, according to Lindsay Curry, director of sales for the Enchantment Resort in Sedona.

"We're finding that groups coming in are moving away from traditional exercises and lectures in a meeting room," she said. "Instead, they are looking for authentic programs that give them something that can be carried throughout their lives."

Lauren Abbi, owner of Circa DMC, agreed, noting that demand for immersive activities is intensifying.

"We're doing a lot more teambuilding now than we did 15 years ago," she said. "Since the recession, meetings have taken a more serious twist. The teambuilding aspect should be fun, but it also needs to let the group walk away with a valuable experience."

### Tribal Traditions

As home to the Hopi, Apache, Yavapai and Navajo nations, among many others, Arizona holds opportunities for incorporating Native American rituals and principles into a meetings program. Doing so, however, requires a sensitive approach, according to Abbi.

"We want to share the culture that makes our state special, but we want to be respectful of that culture as well," she said. "One of our most iconic pieces of entertainment for

groups is the Native American hoop dance and it can be worked into a teambuilding program. The group can put their hoops together and learn how to weave a story in this way. It's teambuilding for the mind and soul."

With its setting in Boynton Canyon, a majestic red-rock landscape with spiritual significance for many Native American tribes, Enchantment Resort is a natural place for weaving indigenous traditions into meetings, Curry said.

"Native American culture is a big part of what we do—we might include a blessing before a program or presentations about the land and its legends and how people have long utilized this unique setting," she said. "With a hoop dance, you can make it participatory, with people joining in with the dance and with the drumming. You can also get people involved with sand painting and other traditional arts."

Groups meeting at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa in Scottsdale can participate in evenings that feature both Native American entertainment and traditional crafts, said Kathy Massarand, director of sales and marketing.

"We'll bring in local artisans featuring basketry, rug weaving and jewelry at different stations in an outdoor setting," she said. "There will also be hoop dancing with flute players and people talking about the history of Camelback and the surrounding area. Afterward, we will have a buffet featuring local farm-raised ingredients and views of Paradise Valley. People leave with a real sense of place."

### The Cowboy Way

Learning the art of horsemanship and ranch skills is another way that Arizona traditions are incorporated into meeting programs. Among the most popular is the Arizona Cowboy College, which provides customized programs for groups at a family-owned ranch in Scottsdale.

"While their programs typically go for a few days or weeks with people living in a bunkhouse, they can also do half-day or full-day experiences for groups," said Angela Hofford, director of sales for AlliedPRA Arizona.

"You can split the group up for different activities. A big part is horsemanship—not just learning to ride, but how to care for a horse and know your way around a barn or stables. We might set up cones where you guide the horses during a timed event. You can include a cookout. It's a real Arizona experience."

Another approach to horsemanship with a teambuilding twist is provided by Hunkapi Farms, a Scottsdale therapeutic riding school that began as a program at Arizona State University for children with autism and their families. Now offering adult programs, groups can participate in riding exercises designed to foster leadership and cooperation.



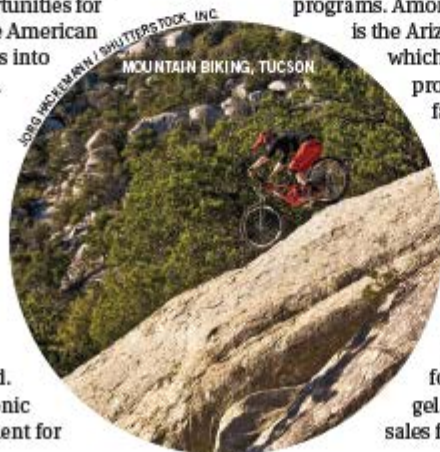
ARIZONA COWBOY COLLEGE, SCOTTSDALE

"People learn to take horses over hurdles without using verbal communication," said Lori James, president of AZA Event & Destination management, who has used Hunkapi as a corporate venue. "There is a real connection between horses and humans that is fascinating—it's a unique and different activity."

Equestrian teambuilding is also on the agenda at Hacienda del Sol Guest Ranch Resort in Tucson. According to Geoffrey Campbell, assistant general manager, activities in which attendees engage in egg and spoon races on horseback or guide horses through a keyhole obstacle course are effective ways to get people to connect with the horses, each other and themselves.

"These activities allow people to move at their own pace and they create an emotionally engaging and nurturing environment," he said.

Arizona's Old West heritage is another big part of teambuilding events. Among the most popular venues is Old Tucson, an outdoor entertainment and event site outside of Tucson that also served as a frontier town setting for countless Western



LONG MOUNTAIN / SHUTTERSTOCK, INC.  
MOUNTAIN BIKING, TUCSON



OLD TUCSON

TV shows and movies.

Old Tucson offers a roster of teambuilding challenges that include chili cook-offs, three-legged barrel racing and assembling a 3-D wooden horse puzzle. Groups can also enjoy trail rides, live shows and the chance to act in mini versions of their favorite Western movies.

Other possible events with a cowboy twist are those in which attendees are outfitted in custom-made Western wear such as hats, boots and belts.

"For evening receptions, we'll invite a local vendor, Saba's Western Wear, which is one of the original cowboy stores in Old

Town Scottsdale," Massarand said. "They come in and offer customized hats and boots to the group. Watching everyone walk around in their Western hats makes it a very fun event."

### Outdoor Adventures

Arizona's desert and mountain environment, as rugged as it is beautiful, also makes for distinctive teambuilding experiences. Even such standard activities as scavenger hunts and geocaching take on a unique feel in the desert landscape, according to Campbell at Hacienda del Sol.

"There are 24 national parks and forests in Arizona, which means we have a lot of protected land right outside of the major cities," he said. "One of the most popular activities we offer groups is a scavenger hunt with guides from Southwest Trekking. People ride mountain bikes up to a secluded site such as Manning Camp in the Saguaro Wilderness Area. Teams are given a puzzle and clues to follow, using a compass and maps. The puzzle can be related to the company logo or the conference theme."

Learning about Arizona's unusual flora and geology adds a layer of intrigue to

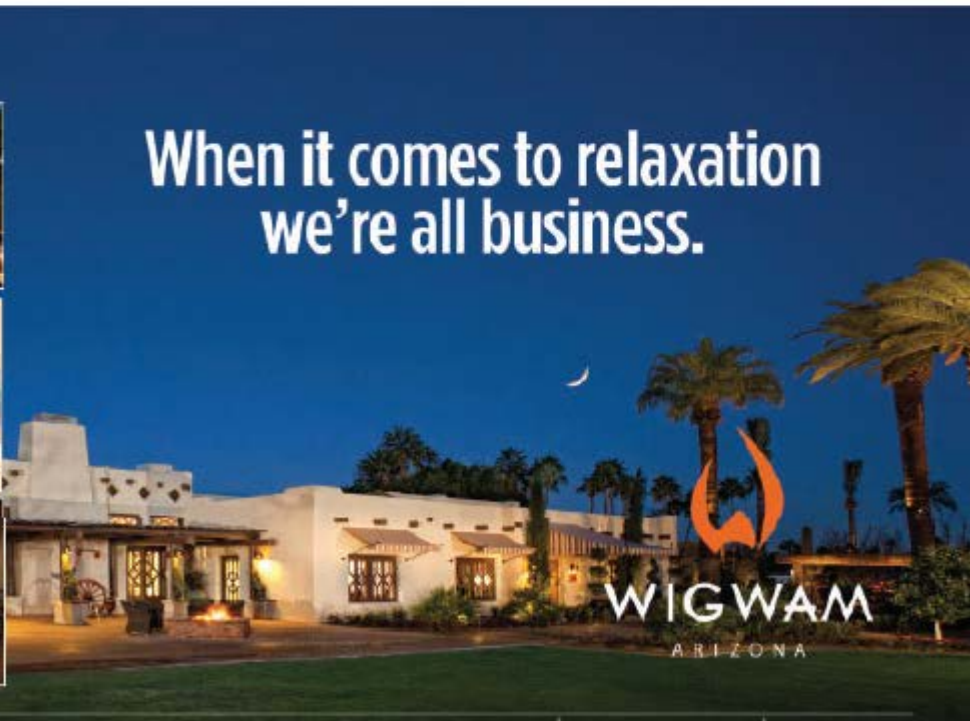
activities such as desert orienteering, where groups navigate their way through a pre-determined course on mountain bikes, horses or foot.

"The vegetation really fascinates people, especially the saguaro, which is the icon of our state," Abbi said. "When you go out into the desert and see hundreds of them, along with choyo and other plants, it really puts an Arizona stamp on things."

Getting into the desert within minutes of resort hotels is easy even in Greater Phoenix, where guided hikes up Camelback Mountain for sweeping views of the Valley of the Sun are a popular group option.

Among resorts that offer this is Scottsdale's Hotel Valley Ho, where guided hikes are among several teambuilding options offered through its VH Spa. Groups based at The Wigwam, a historic resort just west of downtown Phoenix in Litchfield Park, enjoy easy access to White Tank Mountain Regional Park with its 26 miles of hiking trails and opportunities for biking and horseback riding in a mountain and desert landscape.

Outside of Phoenix, the Salt River and Saguaro Lake add water elements to desert



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## Latest + Greatest

### CHANDLER

→ Construction is underway on the Cambria Hotel & Suites Chandler ([www.cambriahotelandsuites.com](http://www.cambriahotelandsuites.com)), scheduled to open later this year with 136 guest rooms, 1,300 square feet of meeting space, a swimming pool with cabanas and a fitness center. The hotel will be part of a mixed-use complex with offices, residences and retail shops.

### SCOTTSDALE

→ The former Marriott Mountain Shadows Resort is scheduled to reopen this month as Mountain Shadows ([www.mountainshadows.com](http://www.mountainshadows.com)). The completely rebuilt property will feature 183 guest rooms, restaurants and 12,500 square feet of indoor meeting space and 25,000 square feet of outdoor event space. The project also includes the redesign of the adjacent Mountain Shadows Golf Club.

→ The Canyon Suites at The Phoenician, A Luxury Collection Resort ([www.thephoenician.com](http://www.thephoenician.com)), a 62-room wing of The Phoenician resort, completed a renovation that included new contemporary furnishings and redesigned entryways. Canyon Suites also features new amenities, including The Canyon Lounge offering complimentary breakfast and a lending program providing backpacks, trekking poles and snacks for guests hiking the nearby Cholla Trail on Camelback Mountain.

### SEDONA

→ The 121-room Courtyard by Marriott Sedona ([www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)) opened in October near Tlaquepaque Village. The guest rooms feature rolling desks allowing guests to work anywhere within the room, plus private balconies with views of the Red Rock Mountains. The hotel also offers 1,400 square feet of indoor meeting space, outdoor event areas and an outdoor pool with a whirlpool spa, among other amenities.

### TUCSON

→ Hacienda Del Sol Guest Ranch Resort ([www.haciendadelsol.com](http://www.haciendadelsol.com)) completed an expansion that included 32 new guest rooms and suites, bringing its total to 59, each with patios and views of the Santa Catalina Mountains. The resort also added several new event spaces, including a pool deck with space for 100 guests.

→ The Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort ([www.hiltonelconquistador.com](http://www.hiltonelconquistador.com)) is wrapping up a property-wide renovation that includes all 428 guest rooms, lobby interiors and the swimming pool area.

### YUMA

→ The Homewood Suites by Hilton Yuma ([www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)) recently completed a renovation of its 108 guest rooms as well as upgrades to the lobby and public spaces.

tree canopies geared for various skill levels. Along with ziplines suspended up to 80 feet high in the Ponderosa pines, the challenge elements include rope swings, scrambling walls, hanging nets, wobbly bridges and suspended "surprises."


"Another thing you can do in northern Arizona is a road rally along the original Route 66, heading south from the Grand Canyon toward Phoenix," Abbi said. "We've done this with Harley-Davidsons and convertibles, making stops along the way."

### Giving Back

Arizona teambuilding can also be tied into benefitting local communities or the environment. A joint program between Enchantment Resort and Pink Jeep Tours encourages groups to "adopt" a wilderness trail and help in its maintenance and upkeep.

Other activities can include working with local organizations such as Alice Cooper's Solid Rock Teen Center, an Arizona-based foundation established by the rock icon to help at-risk youth through music and vocational programs.

"For a really fun event, we had the group build and decorate 20 guitars that were then donated to Alice Cooper's foundation," Abbi said.

In Yuma, groups can take part in culinary classes and demonstrations featuring locally sourced produce and Sonoran specialties at the Main Street Cafe. The classes are part of Cooking with Sabor, a program established to provide opportunities for women to train for culinary careers. 

teambuilding. One of AlliedPRA Arizona's offerings is the Lake Experience, which incorporates kayaking, river rafting and stand-up paddleboarding into desert activities.

"We love to share water elements, which comes as a big surprise to many people about Arizona," Hofford said. "Kayaking or rafting down the river is amazing—the cliffs rise hundreds of feet above you and you might see wild horses coming down to the water's edge. At Saguaro Lake there's a great little secluded bay where we can have beach games like volleyball and do cookouts that can include a grilling challenge."

Northern Arizona's forested terrain is also a backdrop for teambuilding adventures. At the Flagstaff Extreme Adventure Course, teams can choose from a variety of obstacle courses in the



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