

TRAVEL

Tiny Tempe offers tantalizing lifestyle

Arizona city described as
'vibrant urban oasis'

By Mansoor Ladha

Ordered by Phoenix (pop. 1.6 million) on the west, Scottsdale (265,645) on the north, (247,477) on the south, and Mesa (484,587) on the east, Tempe (182,598) is a comparatively less-known city in Arizona. Its greatest name to fame is having the largest main campus of Arizona State University (ASU) with more than 55,000 students at the historic campus.

Tempe has lots of restaurants, shops and other amenities, mainly catering to the college crowd. Anywhere you go — in restaurants, coffee shops or shopping malls — you are bound to come across young people in jeans, shorts or T-shirt.

Describing it as “a vibrant urban oasis in the heart of metropolitan Phoenix,” Director of Communications with Tempe Tourism, Toni Smith, said Tempe has its own personality unlike its neighbouring cities. “Refreshingly offbeat, this college town also welcomes couples and families to enjoy the spirited lifestyle.”

Named after the Vale of Tempe in Greece, Tempe is easily accessible via four freeways, Valley Metro Rail and just 10 minutes from Phoenix Sky Harbour International Airport.

As soon as we checked into our hotel, our first introduction to Tempe life was when we stopped for lunch at Ncounter, a casual spot for breakfast, brunch and breakfast cocktails. It's a very different type of place with its own character. Customers have to order at the counter, then return to their tables and wait for the food to be brought. We had a few people in front of us but the order was taken pretty quickly. The line got very long behind us and the place was packed with, needless to say, what looked like ASU students. It's a must stop and a great choice for fresh and tasty food when in the ASU area.

Ncounter which serves as a bakery, coffee shop, bar, and an overall great place to have lunch, offers fresh-from-scratch pastries and allows customers to be creative with their Build-Your-Own breakfast sandwich.

Tempe tantalizes visitors with family-friendly events on the lake, desert hikes, aquarium and wave pools. We visited Temple Town Lake, a reservoir that occupies a portion of the dry riverbed of the Salt River as it passes through the city of Tempe. Amazingly, it has become a recreational haven situated adjacent to downtown Tempe, with five miles of pathways around the lake to explore on foot or on a bike. Tempe Beach Park, also on the lake, offers various family-friendly festivals such as Four Peaks Oktoberfest, Arizona Dragon Boat Festival and Arizona Aloha Festival to entertain both visitors and local residents.

The Town Lake Pedestrian Bridge has been dedicated to James Elmore, ASU's founding Dean of Architecture, whose passion led to the creation of Tempe Town Lake.

Downtown Tempe's main street, Mill Avenue, has over 100 unique shops, restaurants and cafes, offering pizzas to



PHOTOS BY MANSOOR LADHA

A general view of the Arizona State University campus, considered to be one of the top educational institutions in the U.S.

burgers to more sophisticated fare. If shopping is on your list, then one should visit Tempe Market Place, 1.3 million square feet of shopping, dining and entertainment complex. The Market Place's The District, a pedestrian-friendly gathering place with the Splash Pad for kids.

Another great place to visit is the 6th Street Market which showcases the uniquely fantastic selection of Arizona-made goods in Downtown Tempe. Local artists and musicians present an incredible array of talent available. More than 100 vendors participate in the market throughout the season and local musicians being featured at each weekly market.

To enjoy the beauty of the desert, we visited Desert Botanical Garden and found it true to its mission statement which read: “The garden is here to help you enjoy the beauty of the desert and care about it.” The garden has five different types of walking trails, plants from all over the world, different kind of cactus and plenty of events and learning experiences for the whole family.

As expected, life in Tempe revolves around ASU. Despite all the other tourist attractions and facilities that the city provides, it's ASU Tempe campus, which is the biggest landmark, providing energetic environment of the campus comprising broad pedestrian malls and eclectic architecture set amid subtropical landscaping. Among the ASU landmarks are its iconic, century-old Palm Walk; Old Main, the oldest original campus building; Sun Devil Stadium and ASU's other Pac-12 athletic venues; and the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Gammage Auditorium. The Tempe campus is the most solar-powered of any in the U.S., offering easy



Tempe's downtowns full of restaurants, shops and other amenities.

access to all of metropolitan Phoenix areas.

ASU's Sun Devil Stadium has been described as one of the most beautiful, dynamic and innovative collegiate stadiums in the nation. Sun Devil Stadium has played host to some of the best football games for more than four decades and its athletic complex, performing arts facilities and high-tech research space create a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Despite all the other attractive tourist attractions and facilities, Arizona State University, Tempe campus, is the biggest attraction of the city, providing energetic environment of the campus comprising broad pedestrian malls and eclectic architecture set amid subtropical landscaping. Among the ASU landmarks are its iconic, century-old Palm Walk; Old Main, the oldest original campus building; Sun Devil Stadium and ASU's other Pac-12 athletic venues; and the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Gammage Auditorium. The Tempe campus is the most solar-powered of any in the U.S., offering easy access to all of metropolitan Phoenix areas.

ASU Art Museum, renowned as a site for innovation and discovery, is internationally recognized as a leader in contemporary art, including contemporary art, Latin American and Latinx artists, ceramics and contemporary craft, and issues of art and sustainability.

Considered to be one of the top educational establishments in the U.S., ASU has been named the best graduate school in the U.S. by U.S. News and World Report, fifth in the nation for producing best qualified graduates by the Wall Street

Journal and number one public university chosen by international students.

Promoting diversity and inclusion, ASU welcomes students from 136 countries with more than 12,000 international students call ASU home, making it the No. 1 public university in the U.S. for hosting students from other countries, which includes China, India, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Saudi Arabia and even Canada.

On our last day, we patronized Culinary Dropout, a trendy gastropub with a large beer and cocktail menu, serving American comfort food with live music and games to play. It turned out to be the most interesting restaurant I have been to in years.

When you enter the place, it looks like a gigantic warehouse — too big, too noisy, too busy — but it all worked out. The first section of the restaurant was full so we ended up in the last section which has a bar seating, tables and couches. The half an hour-wait for our food to arrive was worth it. More of a college hangout and a great place for a large group. There was a significant portion of the crowd that were older and judging by our wait, it is really popular place both for tourists and residents. Culinary Dropout is worth a visit.

A Tempe trip should definitely be a worthwhile project for travellers to Arizona and a must popular tourist destination for the young and the old.

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based journalist, travel writer and author of “Memoirs of a Muhindi: Fleeing East Africa for the West” (University of Regina Press) and “Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims” (Detsling).



An area close to downtown Tempe with pathways around the lake provides recreation to bikers and other residents.