

Once you reach the basin of Prescott Valley, follow the signs to Whiskey Row in the city's historic downtown district. Don't be surprised by the Victorian-style homes. Oddly enough, this western frontier town is noted for its late 19th-century New England architecture.

The Palace Hotel is across the street from the stately elm-shaded Courthouse Plaza. Back in July 1900, the hotel was destroyed by a fire that ripped through the wood-framed buildings along the raucous saloon-filled street.

As the story goes, thirsty patrons took their drinks across to the courthouse square and watched their downtown burn. As the fire approached the Palace Hotel, patrons carried the massive, mirrored 1880s Brunswick back bar into the street and carried on drinking with the other salon patrons.

The Palace Hotel reopened a year later and has since been restored to its 1901 grandeur.

Today you can follow the local urban cowboys through the swinging saloon doors and order up a drink at the original bar where mineral claims were bought and sold more than 100 years ago, or sit down for lunch at the wooden blackjack table.

While you're there, check out the many glass-encased artifacts around the restaurant. There's even a replica of the extra-long-barrelled six-gun revolver Earp is said to have used, framed on the wall next to the open safe.

Stroll down Whiskey Row where many of the historic buildings have been converted into boutiques, art galleries, bookstores, antique stores and restaurants. The influence of the Old West can be seen in galleries and museums throughout Arizona, and local artists in this area continue to celebrate the cowboy way of life through paintings and metal and bronze sculpture.

With nearly 600 buildings and sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Prescott is steeped in history. But it's the infusion of history and legendary heroes like Earp that will keep this Wild West forever alive.

IF YOU GO

Getting there: By car, drive northwest from Phoenix via the I-17 to AZ 69. The Greyhound bus runs between Prescott and the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

The big event: Prescott has been hosting cowboy contests since 1888 and is home to the world's oldest rodeo. The popular annual Frontier Days event runs June 28 to July 4, 2010.

Climate: Prescott has four seasons but the climate is moderate. The best time to visit is between May and October, when temperatures range from 23-32 C. It's normally about 10 degrees cooler than Phoenix.

Outdoor recreation: There are five lakes and 720 kilometres of recreational trails. You can bike, hike, kayak, horseback ride, canoe and fish all year. Golfers can play year round. There are six golf courses within the city limits, and another 90 public holes in surrounding areas. Culture: If you have more time to experience the heritage of the Old West, visit the Sharlot Hall Museum of Living History and the Smoki Museum of Native American Heritage for displays of the area's early settlement.

Accommodations: For hotels and bed and breakfast information, phone 1-800-266-7534 or go to visit-prescott.com.

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