



TUCSON, AZ

Two-Wheel Oasis

The Southwest crowns a new cycling capital BY KERIDWEN CORNELIUS

■ MOAB MAY RULE THE SINGLETRACK SCENE, but for road biking, the Southwest hot spot is Tucson (pop. 529,770), a former mining town sandwiched between Saguaro National Park and five mountain ranges. With more than a dozen local cycling groups and 475 miles of bikeways, there's a group ride nearly every day; and recent city policy dictates that bike lanes be included on all new roads and reconstructions. "We've had a steady push for the last 30 years to make Tucson more bike friendly," says the city's full-time bicycle and pedestrian coordinator, Tom Thivener. Come November, the mercury dips to a mild 74 degrees and the pros blow in to train. (Lance Armstrong used the 26-mile slog from town up 9,157-foot Mount Lemmon as a Tour de France primer.) Off the saddle, head to University Boulevard, where the college contingent and south-of-the-border flavors spice up an otherwise ocher Old Town. Tucson averages 350 cloud-free days a year, so grab a margarita at one of the outdoor pubs and soak up the sun.

DESERT SKYSCRAPERS: Saguaro cacti rise above the Tucson skyline (top). Above right: Communal cycling outside town.



BY THE NUMBERS

9,200

Number of cyclists expected to compete in the 25th annual Tour de Tucson on November 17

68.7

Average annual temperature, in degrees Fahrenheit

1,200

Number of guided climbing routes on nearby Mount Lemmon

WEEKEND SCOUTING TRIP



WHERE TO PLAY:

Pedal in Lance's tracks on the 26-mile ride up Mount Lemmon, or hit Fantasy Island for 19 miles of looping desert single-track on the east side of town (\$30 for a one-day bike rental; fairwheelbikes.com). Climbers can tackle the six-pitch, 5.8 Moby Dick route in Coronado National Forest's Cochise Stronghold (fs.fed.us/r3/coronado). Hike among anthropomorphic hoodoos dappled with chartreuse lichen on Chiricahua National Monument's seven-mile Heart of Rocks trail (nps.gov/chir).



WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK:

Cyclists fuel up for Mount Lemmon climbs with white-mocha coffee and fresh-baked baguettes at Le Buzz Caffe (lebuzzcaffe.com). Wind down with margaritas and Mexican fare at Mi Nidito; their spicy chile relleno was a favorite of President Clinton when he dined here in 1999 (minidito.net).



WHERE TO STAY:

The 1919 Hotel Congress houses two hopping watering holes (\$59; hotelcongress.com): Cup Café for breakfast burritos and joe, and Club Congress for live music and beer. Plusher adobe Arizona Inn is landscaped with citrus gardens (\$219, includes mountain bike use; arizonainn.com).

WANT TO LIVE HERE?



HOT PROPERTY:

One of a new crop of energy- and water-saving houses in eco-conscious Tucson, this three-

bedroom, 1,700-square-foot home (pictured), just 15 miles from Saguaro National Park, is listed at \$315,000.

REAL ESTATE LOWDOWN:

For \$200,000 you can land a condo in the spa-studded Catalina foothills or a three-bedroom house in the popular Civano district. Tucson's median home price is \$239,000.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY:

Home to research facilities for the National Optical Astronomy Observatory and to the University of Arizona, Tucson is a major hub for high-tech jobs, including electronics development and missile production. And within city limits, the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base employs 9,600. ▲