



MY KIND OF TOWN **SCOTTSDALE**

WHY SCOTTSDALE? It's a beautiful city in the middle of the Arizona desert, humming with high energy and filled with extreme light. Known for the famous cactus saguaros (top left) and with a fantastic panoramic view of the mountains, it is still an American city with all its extremes. I am new here and I love it.

WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST WHEN YOU'RE AWAY? The energy which comes from the pure light of the desert. It always nourishes my body and soul.

WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO STAY? The Sanctuary Hotel, Camelback Mountain (001 480 948 2100; www.sanctuaryoncamelback.com; doubles from £112), an amazing contemporary-style hotel clinging to the sacred Camelback Mountain. It's luxurious and sleek, with breathtaking views, and has the best spa in the valley. It also has a fun bar and restaurant, and is well known for drawing in funky people.



KAREN BENHAMOU RUIMY

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WHERE WOULD YOU MEET FRIENDS FOR A DRINK? The Sanctuary Hotel bar; or the restaurant and bar Cowboy Ciao, 7133 East Stetson Drive (946 3111; cowboyciao.com), in the old town centre, which has been remodelled with low-rise buildings and narrow streets. It has become a centre for modern and contemporary arts and for great galleries. You can also buy all kinds of cowboy and Native American pieces and artefacts there, including some fabulous turquoise jewellery and belts.

WHERE IS YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE FOR LUNCH? North of the city, in Cave Creek, is El Tonto Bar and Grill (488 0698; tontobarandgrill.com), a terraced restaurant on a golf green, where you can eat amazing taco sandwiches with a view towards the desert mountains.

AND FOR DINNER? I have three favourites – The Roaring Fork, 4800 N Scottsdale Road (947 0795; eddiev.com), an excellent mix of

cowboy-style food and modern cuisine; a great Japanese restaurant called Roka-Akor, 7299 N Scottsdale Road (306 8800); and Tarbells, in nearby Phoenix 3213 East Camelback Road (602 955 8100), which is the best bistro.

WHERE WOULD YOU SEND A FIRST-TIME VISITOR? I'd tell them to drive north on Scottsdale Road and watch the landscape change from a beautiful sunny American town to the real desert with stunning views, plants and animals – and real cowboys. Continue up the I-17 to Sedona. Sedona is "Red Rock Country", with an astonishing number of giant red sandstone formations, one of which resembles a cathedral, another a coffee pot. As you enter, you just feel your heart and eyes fill to the brim. It's a very emotive place, a sacred land for Native Americans.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM TO AVOID? Any of the obvious touristy ranches, with tourist park attractions.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT OR TAXI?

You are in the desert and although cabs exist they are not really practical. Rent a car, with or without a driver.

HANDBAG OR MONEYBELT? This is very safe country but you want to be ready to hike at anytime, so go for the moneybelt.

WHAT SHOULD I TAKE HOME?

Indian crafts or artefacts from Old Scottsdale, Sedona, or North Scottsdale, or Indian *kachina*, stylised religious icons, carved from cottonwood root and painted to represent figures from Hopi mythology, from the American Indian Heard Museum, 2301 North Central Avenue (602 252 8848; heard.org), in downtown Phoenix also turquoise or precious rocks and burning sage to clear your mind.

© Karen Benhamou Ruimy is the author of *The Angel's Metamorphosis* (Quartet Books, £12)