



The Best Stops on the Apache Trail Scenic Drive in Arizona

History of the Apache Trail

In 1903, a 64-mile wagon road was constructed from Mesa to the site of the current Roosevelt Dam. It followed along the footpath of an old Apache trade route that traversed through the rough terrain of the Superstition Mountains.

The Mesa-Roosevelt Road was a huge undertaking with much of the construction being done by hand using pick axes, shovels, and dynamite.

The purpose of the road was to allow easier access for the construction of the Roosevelt Dam. However, the 42-mile portion of the road from Apache Junction to Roosevelt Lake (State Route 88) quickly gained the reputation for being one of the most scenic drives in the Southwest.

In 1913, the *Arizona Good Roads Association* tour book described the drive as "one of the best and most delightful scenic routes in the whole of the mountain regions in the United States".

Theodore Roosevelt was even quoted as saying, "The Apache Trail combines the grandeur of the Alps, the glory of the Rockies, the magnificence of the Grand Canyon, and then adds the indefinable something that none of the others have. To me, it is the most beautiful panorama nature has created".

In 1915, the Pacific Railroad Company began promoting the road as a tourist attraction and coined the name, "The Apache Trail". Tour companies even started selling tickets for scenic automobile tours along this road.

In 1988, the Apache Trail was designated as the first "Historic and Scenic Highway" in Arizona and it is still one of the most beautiful drives in the state today!

Goldfield Ghost Town

As you head out of the small town of Apache Junction, the first stop you'll come to is Goldfield Ghost Town.

Gold was first discovered in the Superstition Mountains in the late 1800s, and mining towns began popping up soon after.

Goldfield was one of the largest mining towns in the area, but after 5 years the mine veins faulted and this boomtown was abandoned almost as quickly as it was constructed.

Today, the town has been reconstructed as a tourist attraction. The buildings aren't original but have been reconstructed to look as the town once did during its heyday.

Visitors can tour the mine, grab a bite to eat at the saloon, ride on the narrow gauge railroad, watch a gunfight, go on a short zipline, and explore the dusty streets of this old Wild West town.

Lost Dutchman State Park

The Lost Dutchman State Park is one of the most scenic state parks in Arizona and is located just across the road from Goldfield Ghost Town. It is home to the craggy Superstition Mountain Range which holds immense beauty and mystery.

According to the legend of the [Lost Dutchman](#), the Peralta family from Northern Mexico had discovered a gold mine in the Superstition Mountains. The family was ambushed by the Apaches and all but one or two family members were killed.

For years, many gold-seekers attempted but failed to locate the mine. With the help of a descendant of the Peralta family, Jacob Waltz "The Dutchman" finally found the mine and began working it with his business partner. They stored caches of gold in the mountains before his partner was mysteriously killed.

Waltz almost took the location of the mine and the hidden gold to his grave, but he revealed the whereabouts to a neighbor while on his deathbed in 1891. Despite countless attempts to find the gold, its location remains a mystery to this day.

Visitors can stop by the [Superstition Mountain Museum](#) to learn more about the history of the area including its Native American roots, early Western settlers, gold mining history, and even the role it played in the movie industry.

The museum is small, but you can find a few displays and exhibits, including reconstructed buildings, a petting zoo, and a large-scale model train.

One of the highlights is the "Elvis Chapel". It was once part of the Apacheland Movie Ranch and was used as a prop in the 1969 movie, *Charro* starring Elvis Presley.

The Superstition Mountains also boast some of the most scenic hiking trails in Arizona. A few of our favorites include [Flatiron](#), Massacre Falls, and Canyon of the Waterfalls. See our guide [11 of the Best Hikes in Phoenix](#) for more details and recommendations.

Canyon Lake Vista

As you continue driving, the road becomes more scenic as you wind your way up the mountain toward Canyon Lake. Keep your eyes open for bighorn sheep that can often be seen climbing along the rocks.

Make a quick stop at Canyon Lake Vista where you'll get a great view of Canyon Lake from above. You'll also find informational panels detailing the history and construction of the Apache Trail scenic route.

Canyon Lake

Canyon Lake is one of Arizona's most beautiful lakes with towering canyon walls and a ribbon of water winding through the gorge.

This is also a popular lake for recreational activities. Visitors can swim at the beach, kayak, take a scenic boat cruise on the Dolly Steamboat, or rent a boat at the Canyon Lake Marina or through [Boatsetter](#). There is also a campground and numerous hiking trails around the lake.

Canyon Lake is part of a chain of lakes formed by the Salt River Project. The Salt River flows into Roosevelt Lake and then continues through the canyon where dams have been built to create Apache Lake, Canyon Lake, and Saguaro Lake.

Canyon Lake and Saguaro Lake are the two most popular recreational lakes in the Valley. See our [Saguaro Lake Guide](#) for more information and recommended activities.

Tortilla Flat

A few miles past Canyon Lake, you'll come to Tortilla Flat. Seven stagecoach stops were constructed along the Apache Trail, and Tortilla Flat is the oldest and only operating stagecoach town that still exists in Arizona.

Tortilla Flat is also the smallest town in Arizona with a current population of 6. It even has its own post office and voter's precinct. This one-road town also has a saloon, a general store, and a schoolhouse museum.

The town was established in 1906, but unfortunately, many of the original structures were burned down during a devastating fire in 1987.

The saloon was one of the buildings destroyed in the fire but it was rebuilt a year later. You can still find the same saddle seats at the bar, and the interior is still wallpapered with dollar bills and currency from around the world. It is amazing to see how many visitors from around the globe have come to this tiny town!

After your meal, stop by the Country Store to get a scoop of ice cream and pick up some homemade fudge for the road. The walls of the Country Store are also plastered with money!

Then head to the general store to shop for Western-themed souvenirs before stopping in to check out the schoolhouse museum.

The tiny one-room Tortilla Flat Schoolhouse was established in 1932 and had 14 students. The schoolhouse has been rebuilt in its original location and now serves as a museum.

The inside of the schoolhouse is lined with photos, newspaper articles, historical documents, and personal stories from the people who lived here. It's fascinating to catch a glimpse of what life was like living in such a small desert town!

Fish Creek Vista

The drive starts getting even more scenic as you continue past Tortilla Flat. There are a few lookout points where you can pull over to take in the sweeping views. You'll be able to see across the valley to a horizon layered with hills and mountains.

After a few miles, the paved road turns into a dirt road and remains a dirt road until reaching Roosevelt Lake. The road is well-graded at this point and the Fish Creek Vista is accessible by all vehicles.

The Fish Creek Vista is one of our favorite stops on the Apache Trail and is one of [Arizona's hidden gems](#).

From the parking lot, take a short paved trail to a viewing deck where you'll be spoiled with panoramic views of the stunning Fish Creek Canyon. You'll find layers of folded canyon walls for as far as the eye can see, it's a miniature version of the [Grand Canyon](#)!

We have lived in Arizona for over 20 years and I am shocked that I am just now learning about this beautiful spot! I would recommend coming to the lookout during golden hour and sunset for the most breathtaking views.

The overlook is located about 7 miles after Tortilla Flat. There are restrooms available at the parking lot.

Apache Lake

The road is currently closed after the Fish Creek Vista due to the Woodbury Fire in 2019 and subsequent flooding. The flooding washed out about 5 miles of road and it is taking an extensive and expensive recovery effort to make the road conditions safe again.

The hope is to have the road at least open to high-clearance 4WD vehicles by the end of 2024. Check the [AZDOT website](#) for updates.

Once the road does reopen, travelers can continue along the Apache Trail. This portion of the drive offers beautiful views, but you'll also find a narrow dirt road with hairpin turns and steep drop-offs.

A high-clearance 4WD vehicle is necessary and you do not want to tow a camper or trailer along this portion of the road.

Until the lake reopens, Apache Lake can be accessed if you go around through Globe to Roosevelt Lake. From Roosevelt, the dirt road to Apache Lake is well-graded and is passable by most vehicles.

Apache Lake isn't nearly as crowded as the other neighboring lakes and is a great place to enjoy a quiet weekend away from the crowds.

[Apache Lake Marina & Resort](#) offers lodging, a restaurant, and boat & watersport rentals. The accommodations are basic and calling it a "resort" may be a bit of a stretch, but it still makes for a fun weekend getaway!

Reavis Falls

Reavis Falls is a beautiful hiking trail located between Apache Lake and Roosevelt Lake.

The strenuous 12.8-mile out-and-back hike has an elevation gain of 3,316 feet. The trail is exposed with little shade and you'll need to do some bushwhacking in areas where the trail isn't clearly marked.

However, the nearly 200-foot seasonal waterfall will make the effort worth it! The best time to visit is in the early spring, check [AllTrails](#) for current trail conditions and to see if the water is flowing.

Roosevelt Lake

Theodore Roosevelt Lake is the largest lake in Arizona, aside from [Lake Powell](#) that is shared with the state of Utah. The nearly 34-square-mile lake is also the third largest man-made lake in the world, with Lake Powell being the largest and Lake Mead the second largest.

From 1905-1911 the Roosevelt Dam was constructed to create this massive man-made reservoir. The Apache Trail drives right by the dam, but you can also get a good view of it as you drive over the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge.

The best way to experience Roosevelt Lake is by boat, you can rent one at the Marina or through [Boatsetter](#). It is one of our favorite lakes to boat on because there is so much space that it never feels crowded, even on a holiday weekend.

There are limited amenities at Roosevelt Lake, and the nearest town is Globe about 40 miles away so plan accordingly.

The Roosevelt Marina has a restaurant (Ffinch's Waterfront Restaurant) and a small marine store. The Dam Grill & Chill and The Stagecoach Bar & Grill are the only other food options near the lake.

As for accommodations, there are a handful of [vacation rentals](#) but if you are planning to spend the night, I recommend camping. We like to camp at Windy Hill Recreation Area. The campsites are well-maintained and it has easy access to the main boat ramp.

Driving Back Through Globe

The Apache Trail ends at Roosevelt Lake. From here, you can either turn around and drive back along the Apache Trail or make it a loop drive and go back to the Valley through Globe. I would recommend driving back through Globe as there is still so much to see!

Tonto National Monument

Tonto National Monument is located near Roosevelt Lake where visitors have the chance to view Salado-style cliff dwellings.

The visitor center and Lower Cliff Dwelling are open to visitors during select hours. The Upper Cliff Dwelling can only be visited while on a guided tour. See the [National Park Service](#) website for visitor information.

See our guide, [5 of the Most Accessible Indian Ruins in Arizona](#) for more recommendations.

Salome Jug Trail

If you are feeling adventurous and have extra time, I highly recommend the Salome Jug Trail which leads to a mile-long natural waterpark filled with rock slides and pools.

There are certain things you need to know before attempting this hike, see our [Salome Jug Guide](#) for more details and information.

Globe

There is not much to see in the small town of Globe, but I recommend stopping and grabbing a bite to eat at Nurdberger. It's a funky spot known for having the best burgers in town!

Cibecue Falls

If you have time, [Cibecue Falls](#) is an incredible waterfall hike about one hour northeast of Globe.

You'll need to secure a permit before your hike, but the 4-mile out-and-back trail leads to a gorgeous waterfall that reminds us of a mini Havasu Falls.

Boyce Thompson Arboretum

Boyce Thompson Arboretum is a beautiful oasis hidden in the middle of the Sonoran Desert. The 135-acre botanical garden was founded in 1924 and is the largest and oldest botanical garden in Arizona.

You'll find 5 miles of trails that lead through desert plants that have been transplanted from 13 different countries and regions around the world.

Different [events](#) are held throughout the year, like walking tours and stargazing. Boyce Thompson Arboretum is also one of the best places to see [fall leaves in Arizona](#). Since it is at a lower elevation, the fall leaves tend to peak in color around the end of November and the beginning of December.

Gold Canyon

Gold Canyon is located on the opposite side of the Superstition Mountains from the Lost Dutchman State Park.

It offers equally impressive hiking trails, including the [Hieroglyphic Trail](#), Wave Cave, and the Peralta Trail to Weevers Needle.