

# A Visit to Sedona

I just spent a day in Sedona, Arizona, and found it everything I expected: A joyous journey into lunacy. There are energy vortices everywhere, crystal shops galore and people talking about spirituality or astrology on nearly every street corner. Shops offer "Vortex Information" and tour companies promise to take you in jeeps to the most sacred sites. The density of psychics is probably the highest in the world. You can't take a hike anywhere around town without finding pilgrims meditating or beating drums. I love this place! Nothing is subtle here. Being "spiritual" isn't the main goal; The most important thing is to loudly display and talk about your spirituality. This place is a "must" in any anthropological tour of the Southwest.

While I cannot speak about the spiritual aspects of Sedona, here are the facts:

Sedona is about two hours north of Phoenix. It is situated in one of the West's most scenic valleys, surrounded by stunning red rock buttes and pinnacles. Psychic energy is obviously attracted to a place of such beauty. This is a mecca for hiking, horseback riding, four wheeling and mountain biking. At about 4500 feet, the weather is mild: Summer temperatures are not too hot, while snow is rare in the winter.

By ordinance, the buildings are all tastefully discreet, in subtle earth tones resembling the terrain and reeking of money. Even the local McDonalds claims "the world's only Teal Arches." Real estate is obviously very expensive here, and you probably won't find any affordable lodging. A better place to stay is Flagstaff, less than an hour north through a scenic canyon.

Sedona is separated by the terrain into several villages. The shops for the tourists are along the main route from Flagstaff to Phoenix (Routes 89A and 179). The more routine businesses like supermarkets and fast food are in West Sedona (west on 89A). I visited several bookstores-slash-crystal shops -- which inevitably also sell incense and sacred oils. One interesting one is the Crystal Castle in a house near the Sedona Bridge. I was amazed at the number of books available that seemed to say nothing at all. I looked at the UFO sections in each book store, and found very few books that dealt with anything concrete -- no talk of specific events, just spiritual contact with aliens. Not surprisingly, the surrounding area is a hotbed of UFO activity, and several books seek to explain the spiritual factors that draw the aliens here.

The best place to view the town is from the road to the airport, which is situated on the top of a high mesa in the middle of town. About halfway up this road is a small parking area. Here you will find the Airport Saddle Loop Trails. A five minute hike gives you a fine view of most of Sedona. There is also a vortex in the saddle. I knew it was a vortex because there were about 20 people holding hands in a circle around it. They were there for almost an hour. Hand-holding meditation was interspersed with the beating of drums, Indian-like whoops, and rhythmic chants and song. One phrase that sticks in my memory was, "United.... We are love," sung over and over.

I can't remember if this was a feminine, nurturing vortex or a masculine, creative one. People were meditating on surrounding rocks, and back at the parking area a crystal vendor displayed her wares on a blanket. To eavesdrop on conversations here is fascinating:

"It's so spiritual."

"Ever since I got here, my head has been spinning like a compass."

"Can you do the circular breathing?" said one young woman in dirty sandals and ratty clothes. Her disheveled appearance suggested to me the symptoms of schizophrenia.

I felt at home here, because the banter reminded me of how gamblers talk in Las Vegas: The rewards they seek are based on a distorted logic that assumes they are the center of the universe and that everything that happens in Sedona/Las Vegas is a message from the gods to them. The free-wheeling entrepreneurship in Sedona also reminds of a busy market in the Third World, just outside a holy shrine, where fakirs, soothsayers and vendors of religious icons

hawk their services. Nearly every business selling crystals, tours and psychic services is a mom-and-pop operation. Money flows freely, but competition is intense and every vendor works very hard to talk the New Age talk that will make the sale. Most of what is being sold is hokum, of course, but that only adds to Sedona's charm.

-- Glenn Campbell, 1/25/97

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File Created: Jan 25, 1997