

Takin' it Easy...

Winslow, Arizona

By Jenna Vandenberg

AS I PULL OFF THE INTERSTATE AND CRUISE INTO WINSLOW, ARIZONA, it seems fitting to have "Take it Easy" by the Eagles blasting from the car stereo. That catchy tune about a man "standin' on a corner" who catches the eye of a young woman in a flatbed pickup truck may be the only time many people have heard the name of this little town. But a quick look around reveals that there's a charm, history and personality to Winslow far greater than the classic rock lyrics might suggest.

Standin' on the Corner Park

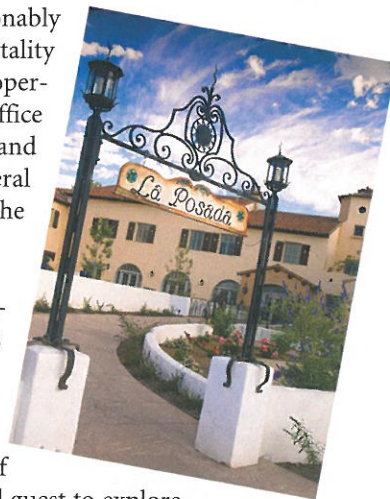
I head downtown to the famed corner of 2nd and Kinsley, where the official Standin' on the Corner Park features a mural of the truck-driving woman checking out a statue of that lonesome guitar-playing man. Across the street at the store of the same name, I trace my finger along a map of famed Route 66, still humming that Eagles song in my head. It's as good a place as any to check out all that Winslow has to offer.

A short stroll down Kinsley Avenue leads to the Old Trails Museum (www.oldtrailsmuseum.org), which offers an on-site reading room and an impressive collection of historical photos. Here you can explore life in Winslow through the ages, from the heyday of the Santa Fe railroad to Native American trade routes and much more. You can even view pictures of the famous La Posada Hotel – then head down the block to pay them a visit in person.

La Posada Hotel

This railroad station turned classic hotel has some of the most reasonably priced luxury rooms in the southwest. Originally built in 1929 by hospitality mogul Fred Harvey and architect Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter, the hotel operated until the late 1950s, after which the rooms were downgraded to office space. Allan Affeldt purchased and renovated the building in the 1990s and soon re-opened the property as a working hotel that now houses several museums and galleries. He even hosts a documentary film about the restoration, which you can view just off the lobby.

On site museums house the works of Affeldt's wife, Tina Mion, and a collection of sculptures by Dan Lutzick, the hotel's general manager. Mion's pieces cover a wide range of topics, from celebrity suicide to the wives of American presidents, while Lutzick's sculptures transform found materials such as broken lamps and old plywood into vibrant southwestern displays. In addition, the lobby holds a diverse collection of antique furniture and Native American art. You don't have to be a hotel guest to explore the galleries and stroll around the gorgeous environment, but if you'd like to make a room reservation, call 928.289.4366 or visit www.laposada.org.



The Turquoise Room

Once you've toured the grounds at your leisure, don't pass up a tasty bite at La Posada's Turquoise Room. This award-winning restaurant takes culinary cues from its southwest location and nearby native cultures. The piki bread with Hopi hummus is an authentic local delight that hails from the nearby town of Second Mesa, the hub of the Hopi Indian Reservation. Hopi women have been making this delicacy for thousands of years by mixing blue corn meal and the ash from juniper bushes with water, then baking on an oiled stone to create a distinctive treat.

Chef John Sharpe, a veteran of L.A.'s upscale restaurant scene, uses mostly Northern Arizona produce and stays involved in the local and sustainable food movements. His tomato salad features goat cheese from Black Mesa Ranch in nearby Snowflake, a site committed to humanely raising free range Nubian goats, which results in fabulous fresh cheese. Check out the ever-evolving menu at www.theturquoiseroom.net, and call ahead for reservations at 928.289.2888.



Homolovi Ruins State Park

For a taste of history that goes back even further, head five miles north on Highway 87 to visit the Homolovi Ruins State Park, whose name derives from the traditional Hopi term for Winslow. This "place of the little hills" preserves ruins of the ancestral Hopi people, also known as the Anasazi. The short drive out to the pueblo site offers a scenic look at the vast desert landscape. Visit just before dusk to watch the distant red mesas turn purple with the setting sun.

Though the site was abandoned in the 1400s, it remains sacred to the Hopi people, which gives the area a sense of quiet reverence. Scholars presume that this was one of many stops ancient people made as they continued their search for a homeland. Pit houses were first constructed here along the Little Colorado River in 750 AD, only to be left abandoned. Later visitors built massive pueblos with more than a thousand rooms. Travelers can stand inside the remains of these structures and peer over crumbling walls that once sheltered a long vanished civilization.





Evidence of ancient life doesn't stop there. The pathways between pueblo sites are strewn with pottery shards. While these relics may be predictably indicative of the Hopi culture, uncovered samples of foreign pottery suggest that this site was a trading center for people as far away as Mexico and the California coast. I was told I could pick up and examine these artifacts, but that I must leave the park as I'd found it. Removal of ancient treasures such as these can have serious consequences, both on the site's historical value and with local law enforcement.

Park admission costs \$7 per vehicle, which includes all related tours. You can also visit the park on your bike for \$3 or camp overnight for \$18 - \$25, which includes the park admission price. Morning tours through the pueblo sites are available on Saturdays throughout March. Call 928.289.4106 to reserve your spot ahead of time and be prepared to walk about a mile.

Clear Creek and McHood Park

Once you've spent enough time digging through the past, take a break for some outdoor recreation at McHood City Park on the Clear Creek Reservoir, located on the other side of Winslow. The park offers covered picnic spots, a free campsite and launch ramps for kayaks and canoes. With no white water or serious rapids, Clear Creek is ideal for novice paddlers. A trip through the canyon provides gorgeous views of the surrounding rock formations. Experienced climbers can often be seen engaging in deepwater soloing, where they crawl up the sandstone cliffs (sans ropes) and then dive back into the water. As with all river journeys, it's a good idea to call the Winslow Parks Department ahead of time at 928.289.5714 to double check conditions.

Inflatable kayaks can be rented on the way to Winslow in Flagstaff. Canyon River Equipment Outfitters (www.canyonreo.com) provides inflatable canoes (complete with paddles, life vests and air pumps) for \$35 a day. The charge only applies for the day you are using the equipment, so feel free to pick up your stuff a day in advance at no extra cost. Summit Divers and Watersports in Flagstaff (www.summitdivers.com) also offers kayaks and canoes and will include a kit to help secure the watercraft to the top of your car. Rentals here start at \$45 for the day, though you must return all your gear within 24 hours to avoid extra fees. It's a good idea to call either place several weeks in advance to ensure your reservation.

Back to the Corner

After a day of admiring hotel architecture, exploring tiny museums, kayaking and visiting Hopi ruins, I need a moment to relax, sit on a corner and take in the tail end of a southwest sunset. I head back to 2nd and Kinsley, and as I eat my ice cream cone from atop a park bench, strains of the Eagles' *Hell Freezes Over* album echo out from the corner store. Winslow residents may get sick of endless rounds of the band's signature tune, but for those of us just visiting, this is takin' it easy at its finest. ♦

