

# Natural High

Hike the red-rock beauty that is Sedona

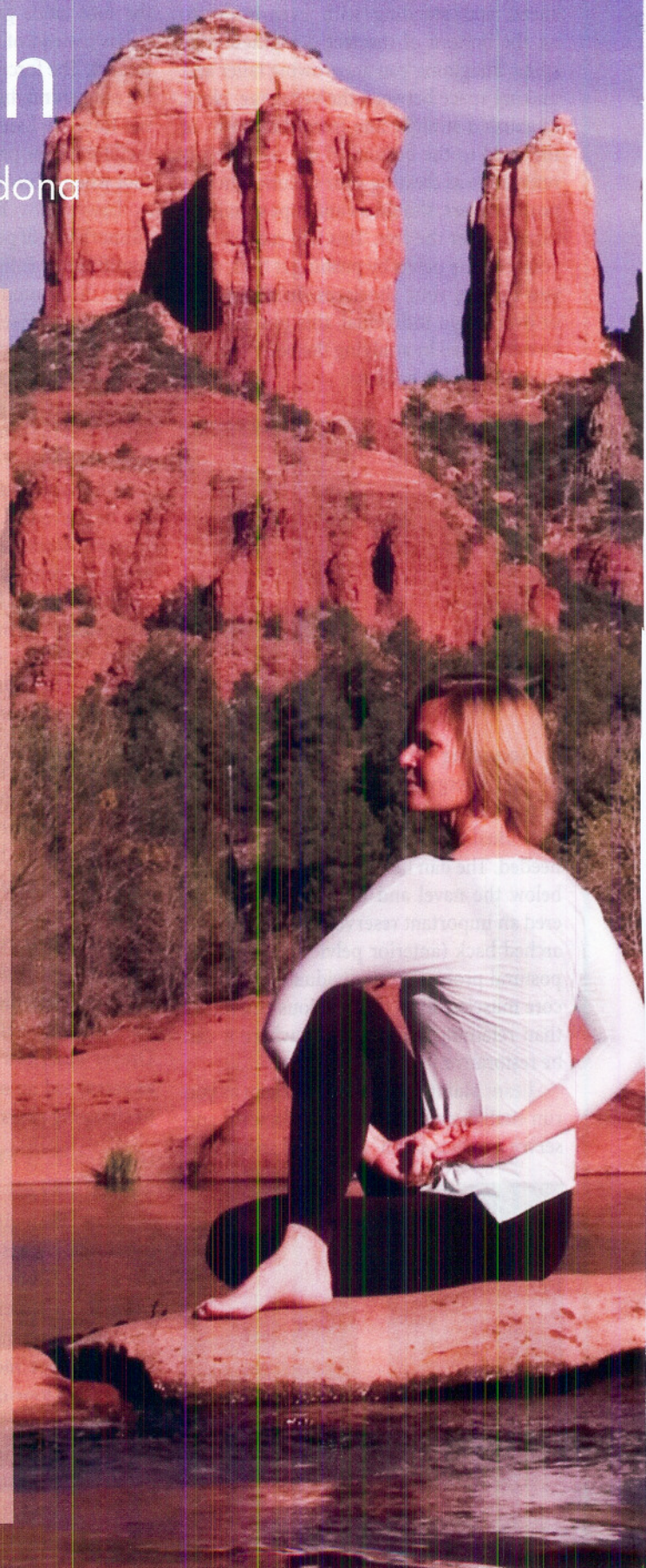
BY LINDA BALLOU

Do vortexes, those funnels rising from Mother Earth's belly, recharge the batteries of all they draw near? Is the sound of your own footfall on trails through unpremeditated beauty the most beneficial meditation for body and soul? Will I get bored in a spot where the heavens are the biggest show in town? These were the questions this computer-weary writer asked herself as she sailed across the Arizona desert driving toward a spectacular cluster of red rock formations.

Sedona is a 25-mile enclave of sandstone spires eroded by wind, rain and sun, nestled among vast stretches of wilderness preserves. The entire region lies in the Coconino National Forest, which includes more than 60,000 acres. Uptown Sedona, the springboard to adventures in the region, offers great eateries, high-end art galleries and deep discounts in shops. It sits at the "Y" of Highway 179 and 89A intersection, which spins travelers off to more modern West Sedona, Oak Creek Village to the south, and scenic Oak Creek Canyon to the north. While you are there, make arrangements to take the famous Pink Jeep Tour to get the lay of the land. You can also rent mountain bikes or all-terrain vehicles to explore the endless miles of trails.

Moderate year-round temps and easily accessed, well-groomed trails through glorious scenery make this trekker Mecca. Sprinkled throughout Sedona are points of power that were recognized by the ancient ones and rediscovered in the 1970s by New Agers. It hasn't been proven that the electromagnetic energy here is significantly greater than anywhere else, but testimonials of thousands of visitors keep the belief alive. Millions flock from around the globe to absorb subtle, rejuvenating properties. No special effort is needed to enjoy the calming effects of Sedona, but those who seek out recognized vortexes and meditate while sitting on one increase their chance of amplifying desired effects. Books giving directions to vortexes are in all the shops. If that is not enough, Earth Wisdom offers a vortex tour.

Soldier Pass Trailhead in West Sedona connects with a half dozen less-traveled paths. The beauty of the cliffs pulled me forward on the undulating trail through the juniper-piñon forest. I lunched in a quiet canyon protected by an amphitheater of stone faces. The twitter of a mob of bushtits in the chaparral, the lilt of the canyon wren, and the deep-throated croak of raven rollicking overhead kept me company on the powder-soft trail. Wildlife here includes 180 species of birds, bobcat, mountain lion and coyote, diamondback rattlers, and javelina—wild pigs.



## WHERE TO EAT

**Breakfast and Lunch:** Coffee Pot Restaurant, home to 101 omelettes. 2050 W. State 89A

**Lunch:** Café Bliss, delightful, eclectic, raw vegetarian creations. 1595 W. Hwy 89A

**Lunch and Dinner:** The Heartline Café, pecan-crusted trout is their specialty. 1610 W. HWY 89A

Picazzo's Gourmet Pizza and Salads, hiker-friendly bar and restaurant. 1855 W. HWY 89A

## WHERE TO STAY

Sky Ranch Lodge at the top of Airport Road in West Red Rock Country is an overlooked gem with tremendous views, quiet gardens and a handy restaurant. [www.skyranchlodge.com](http://www.skyranchlodge.com)

## HOW TO GET THERE

Rent a car (or shuttle) at Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport and drive two hours north on I-17. Get off on 179.

Once aloft Brins Mesa, a meadow carpeted with yellow grass, I could see Coffee Pot Rock (named for its unique coffee pot shape) and Capital Butte. At eye level with these sandstone marvels, I felt removed from time. Three hundred fifty million years ago this region was covered by ocean. Successive movement of inland seas deposited minerals and soil. The rocks are red because they contain iron, an attribute unique to Sedona. A steep descent from the top of Soldier Pass took me to an easy amble along a dried stream bed. In spring the creek is full, the red rocks wet with run-off turn dark amber and the forest bursts with urgent new life. The Devil's Kitchen, a dramatic sinkhole, marks the end of the track.

After the eight-mile loop, I needed a little pampering. Everything from healing through the soles of your feet at Lovejoy's Enchanted Cottage, to "free soul offerings" from Living in Balance are offered here. I chose the Sedona Hilton Spa, a full-tilt resort with hot and cold pools, steam bath and sauna—anything an aching body could desire. The Full Circle massage is "all about you," my masseuse informed me as she asked me to sniff a selection of scents for my treatment. She smoothed hot rocks up and down my back and along the backs of my legs, melting away my muscle tension. Hot rocks are said to pull toxins to the surface of the skin where they are further reduced and eliminated by massage. This, topped off with a little cranial work, foot reflexology, chakra balancing, and a facial to restore my sun-ravaged skin, and I was good to go.

Word is out. West Fork trail in Oak Creek Canyon shaded by cottonwood and ponderosa pine, spiked by bright red leaf maple in the fall, is not to be missed. This mama bear run tracing the creek calls to nature lovers of all stripes. Hikers enjoy shady glens with maidenhair ferns wedged in the clefts of burnt orange cliffs. A roaring wind tossed the pines high overhead, but it was calm on the "floor of the sky" the day I rock hopped my way upstream.

Kachina Woman, a solitary rock pillar standing tall at the head of Boynton Canyon, marks a vortex. Boynton trail hugs a craggy canyon wall and leads to the cliff dwellings of the Sinagua Indians, ancestors to the Hopi, who lived here in about 1250 A.D. Nearby, are the Palatki Ruins where a wall of petroglyphs stretches back 6,000 years. In Pueblo creation stories, kachinas are the spiritual guides who lead the Hopi people in the right way of living. With one last effort, I climbed Vista Trail, planted myself at the feet of Kachina Woman and gazed upon the green forested valley framed in red spires illuminated by a setting sun. A bold-faced moon rose in a pink sky. With energies restored, heart clear, mind at rest and my questions answered, I turned toward home. AF

**LINDA BALLOU** *was blessed with a double dose of genetic wanderlust, and lived in Alaska for many years. She earned a degree in English literature from Cal State Northridge. Today she is a freelance writer, based in Los Angeles, specializing in adventure travel. Visit [www.LindaBallouAuthor.com](http://www.LindaBallouAuthor.com) to read more of her articles.*