

Take the Avenging Angels Tour of Phoenix

Like in the Rock Chick books, I'm making my home in the Valley of the Sun a character in the Avenging Angels series. I'm doing this because, just as I loved living in Denver, I adore living in Phoenix. This city has an amazing vibe, and one of the best parts about it (outside no natural disasters), is that living here is like a treasure hunt. On the face of it, you just see brown and green, some mountains and a lot of strip malls. But there is buried treasure all around. Trust me (and read on!).

As such, in the Avenging Angels books, you get a wee tour of the city through the action. Many of the places mentioned in the books are real. I've been to them. I love them. And I recommend them.

So if you ever find yourself in Phoenix, you can't go wrong with any of these. Just give them a Google before you go to get more details or to make reservations.

One other note, Phoenix is a pretty casual city, and Arizona as a whole is the same. In recent years, however, I've noticed people sprucing up to go out on the town, but for the most part, smart casual is the way of the Valley of the Sun.

I will say, though, that some restaurants aren't big fans of tourists showing sunburned, sweaty and in baseball caps, and as such, have instigated dress codes (I'm not joking!). Therefore, at some of the nicer places below, do have a gander at their website to make sure you don't feel uncomfortable when you hit them up.

Book: Avenging Angel

Bosa Donuts

To this cop's daughter who has experimented widely with donuts on a variety of continents, Hilligoss in Brownsburg, Indiana is still (by far) the best. But Bosa far from sucks. Great selection, fresh and yummy. Many locations (they also have one in Prescott if you do a River Rain tour!). Worth a stop.

Vibe: Obviously, casual 😊

Desert Botanical Gardens

This is by far my favorite place in all of Phoenix. It's beautiful. It's usually bustling (yet peaceful). It has a great restaurant (Gertrude's). And it has a fantastic gift shop. Oh, and the Chihuly glass sculptures on the walkup to the ticket booths are extraordinary. Totally worth the price of admission. I've been a member for years, and I'll be a member for years to come. And if you're in town around Christmas/New Year's, get some tickets to their Luminarias nights.

Vibe: Comfortable and casual. Wear good walking shoes.

Hash Kitchen

If you want to eat brunch at what is essentially a loud club with a DJ, tables and hearty food offered instead of dancing, a bloody mary bar, plus a cocktail that has freaking cotton candy and glitter in it, go to Hash Kitchen. Sometimes the DJ is not playing and it's not loud, which is just a different vibe for a fun place because the food is always good. Be prepared to wait in line to get in.

Vibe: Casual.

Lon's at Hermosa Inn

For a special occasion, this is my go-to place. Located in the Hermosa Inn, Lon's has *the best patio* in Phoenix, but their bar and inside restaurant are also awesome. Full-on Southwest feel with great food. If you don't want to eat there, just go in for a drink at the bar, sit in a leather armchair by the fireplace and soak in the atmosphere. I love this place so much, I also gave it to Tom and Mika in *Making the Match*. And in case you're looking for this kind of thing, this place is very romantic. Book ahead!

Vibe: Nice night, dress smart.

Platform 18

This is a fake rail car with a bar in it. The cocktails are so finely crafted, you probably won't know half the ingredients in them. You must make a booking and pay a deposit (that deposit is taken off your final bill). You have a time limit on being there, and there is no food. And the "windows" all around show you trundling through a snowy mountainside or 1920s New York City (or other). Full disclosure: If you get motion sick, even if you aren't in motion, this might not be for you. More full disclosure: Last time I went, they packed us in like sardines, and it was excruciatingly uncomfortable. However, I'd been there several times before, and that was not the case. Perhaps it was a bad night.

Vibe: Fun night, but dress smart.

Rustler's Rooste

This is a place with a great view, decent food, and an almost carnival atmosphere. This is not about romance or culinary excellence. This is definitely a family place, fun for the kids, and just fun. It's been a very long time since I've been there, so take that into account. However, the line might be long to get in, just saying.

Vibe: Casual.

Vincent on Camelback

If I'm correct, Vincent was the first restaurant in Phoenix to win a James Beard award. I don't know who James Beard is, but I was suitably impressed. Especially after I ate their beef wellington. Or anything I've eaten here. The wait staff has been there for years and wander around like they're at home, hosting friends. The food is classic French with Southwestern ingredients. The atmosphere is laidback, again, like you're in someone's house at a dinner party.

I love it here. I suggest you get a reservation. I've never gone and not seen every table in this place filled.

Vibe: Excellent, pricey food, dress smart.

Special Note: **Sip Coffee and Beer**

The old Sip Coffee and Beer on Indian School is what The Surf Club was based on. I zhujzhed it up a bit, but yeah. Sip was my inspo. Since then, they carved out the middle so they could put 36 Below in the basement (if you read *Smooth Sailing*, that's where Diana and her girls go). This break in the space really effed up the feel of the place, imo. But 36 Below is super fun to give a go!

Book: Back in the Saddle

Brunch Snob

My family frequently does brunch, and this is my absolute favorite brunch spot we've discovered so far. To the uninitiated, Phoenix feels like a bunch of asphalt, strip malls and palm trees. The key is to know what hidden gems are in those strip malls, and Brunch Snob is one of them. I adore the girlie décor. My suggestion: get the poutine or the chicken fried steak. God, so good! Just to say, Phoenix on the whole is a brunch city, so if it's the weekend, you might have to wait to get in.

Vibe: Casual.

An aside: my acupuncture place, Modern Acupuncture, is next door to Brunch Snob. I've found acupuncture great for headaches, joint pain, and sleeplessness. But also, sitting in a comfortable, heated massage chair for thirty minutes with nothing but turtles swimming or waves lapping on a TV screen in front of you is hella relaxing. I'd rather do acupuncture than get a massage. Seriously. Worth a try if you're adventurous or have a pesky malady that Western medicine isn't helping.

Book: Tenderfoot

Binkley's

My niece and nephew-in-law are foodies. I'm a person who likes food and new experiences. Binkley's is consistently on the top restaurants of Phoenix lists. It's one of those one-seating, eat-what-chef-makes you places. I'd never done that, so we gave it a go and were blown away. It's very expensive. It's worth every penny. I don't think I've had a culinary experience like this in my life. This is 100% a special occasion place or for people who enjoy really, really good food crafted by an artist. If you're into that kind of thing, do this for sure, but go all out and get the wine pairings. Reservations essential.

Vibe: Fancy night, dress well.

Geordie's at Wrigley Mansion

This is one of the prettiest restaurants I've ever been in. The views are stunning. The décor is understated and gorgeous. And the food is insane. I had a salad here that was a work of art on my plate, and the taste of it on my tongue was a revelation. I've only been here once, but I've been dying to go again. When we were there, it was sunset, and that alone was stunning to watch...then we had a thunderstorm. With those views up at Wrigley Mansion, it was magical. Book ahead.

Vibe: Fancy night, dress well.

Joyride

This is just good Mexican food in a fun environment. Chill and laidback.

Vibe: Casual.

Le Amé

I'm not gonna lie, I'm in two minds about this place. My first mind is to share that the food is delicious. My second mind is that the atmosphere the single time I went was...wild. This restaurant is on the first floor of a very posh, very popular hotel where the rich and wannabe-rich/wannabe-seen hang out. For people watching, it can't be beat. Simply to check out the fashion, but anthropologists would find this whole thing fascinating. I know I did. But it's so loud, you can barely hear your dinner companions. So if you like that hip, swish, hunting-ground vibe, and want to eat good food while you're immersed in it, this is the place to go. You'll need a reservation, so plan ahead.

Vibe: Fancy night, dress well.

Mastro's

Just a very good steak restaurant. As in, expensive, but very good. Best to get a reservation.

Vibe: Fancy night, dress well.

Oceans 44

This restaurant, along with its sister restaurant, Steak 44, runs along the lines of Le Amé above. I've heard rumors that the Cardinals and Suns players hang out in these restaurants. The food is very good, the atmosphere is elegant, busy and happening. Some of the best seafood I've found in this landlocked city. Definitely get a booking first.

Vibe: Fancy night, dress well.

Randy's Donuts

I still rate Bosa as the best donuts in Arizona, but Randy's is a fun place to go because they have such a cool variety. Oh, and I love that crazy-ass donut at the front of the store.

Vibe: Casual

Sauce

Good local pizza. The best pizza in Phoenix is at Pizzeria Bianco, but if you have a night where you're in and you wanna place an order but don't wanna get Domino's, get Sauce.

Vibe: Casual

Zipps Sports Grill

I'm sure it won't come as a surprise that I'm not a sports girlie. But that doesn't mean I don't like a sports grill. Zipps' many locations are no-nonsense bar food, lots of TVs, but super popular sports bars that have great vibes because they're usually busy and fun. So if you're into that kind of thing, this is a good choice.

Vibe: Casual

Culver's/Freddy's/Cane's/Thai Chili 2go/Cava/Café Rio

I know different places have different fast-food restaurants, and I think many can get these all around the US. But these are my faves in Phoenix.

Vibe: Obviously casual 😊

Book: Bad Medicine

Beckett's Table

Willow explains it all about how great the comfort cooking is at Beckett's Table. I know, like many fantastic places in Phoenix, you'll swing up to this in a strip mall and think, "What the hell?" But trust the power of a Phoenician strip mall and head here. You'll be glad you did.

Vibe: This is a nice place. You can still be casual, though I wouldn't pitch up in a bathing suit or anything. 😊

Chelsea's Kitchen

Except for when I'm running late, I've never not had to wait to get a table here. And I hate waiting. I also hate lines. And I don't care I have to wait to get a table here. Totes worth it!

Vibe: Also a nice place, but as with many in Phoenix, casual. Not super casual, but casual.

Churn

I must admit, I haven't been here. I'm an ice cream fanatic, so I don't know why. I need to get on this. ASAP! However, I didn't want to reuse Frost for this book, so I did my research and it's on the "Best of..." lists, so I assume it's good!

Culinary Dropout

Now I've been here...a lot. Two words: pretzel bites. I don't think I've had a bad meal or a bad experience at Culinary Dropout. Plus, it's a got a bangin' vibe.

Vibe: Same as Beckett's and Chelsea's

Ingo's

This is an offshoot of Le Grand Orange (across the street, also worth a look-see), which is perhaps the most popular spot to mill about getting food, coffees, and gifts. Ingo's is just food though. Small menu. All good.

Vibe: Super casual.

Japanese Friendship Garden

This place is small, but incredibly beautiful. The price for entry is a little steep for how small it is, but when you get in, the utter care they've obviously taken in creating this serene space shows they use the entry fee for good things. Oh, and their gift shop is fun AF.

Vibe: Casual

Papago Park

This is not a hike that will kill you. This is a walk in incredibly gorgeous surroundings. You know you're in Arizona when you're at Papago Park. Definitely should be on your to-visit list if you come to Phoenix.

Vibe: Very casual

The Gladly

This is just good food in a fun atmosphere. There really isn't more to say. Except their chopped salad is insane. Simple and freaking *YUM!* I live very close to this restaurant and walk over to get this salad (and maybe some tots or sprouts) often.

Vibe: Same as Beckett's, Chelsea's and Culinary Dropout

The Henry

I think there are The Henry restaurants all over the place, not just Phoenix. Considering this is a super foodie town, there are just super foodie, good food, fab atmosphere restaurants all over the place. You could probably throw a rock from wherever you are in Phoenix and hit one (don't do that...and that might be a slight exaggeration). Oh, and their coffee counter at The Henry rocks!

Vibe: Same as Beckett's, Chelsea's, Culinary Dropout and The Gladly.

The Porch

This is a sports bar. Simple. With really good food that seems simple but is not. It's just delicious. I am not an overall sports person, but any time anyone asks me to go to The Porch, I'm all in. And not just because it's close to where I live.

Vibe: Casual.

Trevor's

Okay, bear with me here. Trevor's is a liquor store...with a restaurant attached. They have good pizza. They have pizza cookies. I can't say I hang at bars very often, and when I do, I go to Little Woody...or Trevor's. Perfection: have a drink, a pizza, then stock up on wine or whatever. What could be better?

Vibe: Casual.

*Have fun...
and Angels Unite!*