

# DESTINATION: TUBAC

Golfing, relaxing at a spa, shopping for one-of-a-kind-artworks, learning to cook gourmet meals ... you can enjoy all that and more in a village just 40 miles south of Tucson.

BY WENDY ODEN

When *National Geographic* puts a place on the map, you know it has something going for it. In 2007, Tubac was one of 80 points-of-interest highlighted on a Geotourism MapGuide of the Arizona Sonoran Desert Region for its historical and cultural significance. The Village that has long been known as the “place where art and history meet,” won out for its mix of scenery, wildlife, history, arts, music, crafts, food and festivals.

For centuries, Tubac — located in the valley between the Tumacacori, Santa Rita and San Cayetano Mountains — was a stop along the dusty route traveled by Native Americans, Spanish missionaries, military troops, colonial settlers, cattle ranchers, miners, artists and other wayward souls. Arizona’s first European settlement in 1752 has gone from being a military garrison, to deserted ghost town, to mining boomtown, to thriving arts colony.

For the past few decades it has been known mostly as a stop along the highway from Tucson to Nogales for arts collectors, cultural enthusiasts and history buffs.

Today, it’s emerging as a complete destination experience where you can spend several days exploring a variety of vacation themes: arts and heritage, spas and relaxation, hiking and birding, health and healing, shopping and browsing, creating culinary delights, golfing, or just exploring Santa Cruz County.

In addition to the more than 100 shops and galleries for which Tubac is known, you can now find two spas, a fitness facility and yoga classes; massage therapists, acupuncturists and herbalists; a local grocery market and organic produce suppliers; and a cooking school.

In earlier times, the shops in Tubac would close from May to October. Now, a year-round local economy is taking hold. Overnight accommodations and guest services have expanded to a point where you can park your car, sleep in town, stay a few days, and still not be able to experience all that the destination has to offer.

I recently spent a three-day holiday in the Village of Tubac, exploring some of the town’s newest offerings and enjoying this distinctive place.



ABOVE Tubac Country Inn is set in the heart of this historic village.  
Photo by Sandra Baenen.

## Accommodations

The destination experience in Tubac is being enhanced by an increasing number of overnight accommodations in town, from the \$40 million renovation of the **Tubac Golf Resort & Spa** to the furnished town homes at **Embarcadero de Tubac**. I stayed at the **Tubac Country Inn**, in an idyllic setting in the heart of the historic village. Five spacious and distinctive rooms/suites reflect the rich culture of the Southwest.

The Inn is owned and operated by Ivan and April Drechsler, seasoned hospitality professionals who took it over in 2005. Their talents are apparent in the quality of service and fresh breakfast basket delivered each morning to your door.

Each room looks out onto a lavish garden of mesquite trees, spineless cactus, rose bushes and other greenery. A handmade rock sidewalk winds past private seating areas, birdfeeders, a trickling fountain and a chimenea deck perfect for stargazing or sipping wine.

Other places to stay include **Posada Linda**, **The Anza Inn**, the **Pocket Sanctuary at Kenyan Ranch**, **Tubac Secret Garden Inn** and **Tubac Trailer Tether**, an RV park.

## Cooking Program

At 6 p.m. at the **Tubac Culinary School** in Plaza de Anza, 16 place settings were lined up along a granite countertop, china sparkling and wine glasses ready. Dinner guests entered and took their seats, each facing the chef. Viking appliances glimmered throughout the ultra-modern demonstration kitchen while the gourmet cooking station was set. The spotlight was on Chef Noah Aguilar and his “dinner-tainment.”

We’ve gathered for an intimate evening of companionship, expert cooking instruction and elegant dishes paired with fine wines, “just for the fun of it.” Chef Noah, the executive chef in charge of the Tubac Culinary School’s cooking program, personally teaches his guests how to prepare, present and serve some of the world’s finest cuisine.

Each dinner starts with a champagne toast and is specific to a particular cuisine, exploring the culinary joys found within that genre. Dinner ran from 6 to 9 p.m. and cost \$86 per person, plus tax. The School also has partnered with Tucson-based Sunset Limousine so that for an added fee you can be picked-up in luxury at a pre-selected location, enjoy champagne on the ride to Tubac, have dinner with the chef, and be returned to your point of embarkation.

The Culinary School also offers “Lunch with the Chef” featuring different cuisines and culi-



nary avenues from 12 to 1:30 p.m., Monday-Saturday. Throughout the month, numerous “workshops” are offered at a cost of \$75 per person, plus food fee. Topics range from Weekly Meals for Two, 30-Minute Meals for One or Two, Spices and Herbs, Appetizers, Desserts, Vegetarian Meals and more.

## Relaxation and the Healing Arts

My pedicab dropped me off at **The Spa at Tubac Golf Resort**, where I relaxed on a comfortably heated and well-cushioned massage table. Three chimes on a copper singing bowl signaled the beginning of the ultimate mind-body transformation, the Tui-Na Five Elements ▶

**TOP** Many styles of rooms are available at Tubac Golf Resort & Spa, including Spanish Colonial-style hacienda suites. Photo by Balfour Walker.

**ABOVE** Larry Bahill mans the stove at Tubac Culinary School, under the direction of Executive Chef Noah Aguilar. Photo by Nicholas Bahill.

Massage. The Spa's signature treatment draws on ancient Chinese techniques to balance the body's meridians using soft tissue manipulation enhanced by moisturizing balm and a specially designed granite stone.

The Spa is tucked into the center of the resort, surrounded by lush manicured grounds, winding brick pathways, trickling fountains and the Santa Rita and Tumacacori Mountain ranges. The facility has six treatment rooms, men and women's locker rooms with sauna and steam, a tranquil lounge and outdoor garden patio with a soothing whirlpool.

Massage services include energy balancing techniques such as Chakra gemstone and mineral therapy, reiki and reflexology.

**SpaZen** offers a second option for healing body, mind and soul. It goes beyond pampering by combining the art of traditional Chinese medicine with refreshing and balancing skincare and body treatments. Integrating Eastern and Western approaches, the facility offers acupuncture, massage therapies, advanced skincare and aromatherapy, as well as a variety of other body treatments.

"Both Chinese and Japanese healing practices utilize knowledge of the five elements — fire, earth, metal, water and wood — to bring balance to the body's organs through these transformative energies via an intricate meridian system," said owner Cera Lynn, who is a licensed aesthetician and holistic healing practitioner.

Advance skincare treatments include microcurrent technologies, microdermabrasion, lymphobiology, advanced peels and organic skin care lines. Acupuncture facelifts address anti-aging from a different perspective. A medical doctor administers Botox and Restylane. SpaZen also has a complete Chinese herbal apothecary with raw herbs, capsules and liquid extracts.

## Workshops with Artists

The next morning, as I entered the studio workshop at **Los Reyes Gallery**, three students were putting brush to canvas under the watchful eye of artist Rick Wheeler. Wheeler, an illustrator, graphic designer and painter, is well known for depicting nature and subject matter pertinent to U.S. National Parks and Monuments.

Now a resident of Tubac, he shares his knowledge of drawing, scratchboard and painting techniques with local followers and visitors at the Los Reyes Workshop Center, which has relocated to 26A Tubac Road, at the Shops at Tubac Plaza.

The Workshop Center offers everything from half-days with an instructor to one full-day on a weekly basis, or two- day, three- day or five-



day classes focusing on a particular medium taught by specific artists. Interested participants can "drop-in" on a class or sign up for a multi-day series of instruction.

If you'd like to get your hands dirty for the day, perfect your throwing technique or create something to be fired, **Clay Hands Studio & Gallery** is the place to be. Owner/potter Diane Lisle's specialty is the potter's wheel. Her studio facilitates half-day, full-day, and multi-day workshops for groups or individuals. The workshop studio is equipped with eight potter's wheels and several firing kilns.

Clay Hands also is a specialty gallery featuring more than 25 ceramic artists and potters. The gallery's sole focus is clay. Artists explore different techniques with the medium — from porcelain and raku, to crystalline pottery and functional pieces.

## Other New Additions

**Stables Restaurant at Tubac Golf Resort** is showing off a new look as it makes a transition from fine American cuisine to upscale steak house. USDA-prime beef is seared to perfection in a new 1600 degree infrared broiler and certain cuts, like the beef tenderloin and New York strip, are dry-aged onsite. Dry-aged beef is hung in a refrigeration unit, open air, for varying lengths of time. The process breaks down certain enzymes and proteins, resulting in a prod-▶



**TOP** The Spa at Tubac Golf Resort & Spa features a wet room with a Vichy Shower, in which seven showerheads move back and forth to create a rain-like effect. Photo by Jerry Racicot.

**ABOVE** A ride in a Pedi-cab is a fun and eco-friendly way to find your way around Tubac. Spirit Steps Tours provides driver-guides who are both fit and informative. Photo courtesy of Spirit Steps Tours.

uct that has a more concentrated flavor and is exceptionally tender.

“By dry-aging it ourselves, we are able to offer a steak at a more reasonable price and avoid the middleman,” said Jeff Clock, director of food and beverage at Tubac Golf Resort. Stables will continue to serve its popular favorites as nightly, all-inclusive specials.

The white dome structure visible from the I-19 freeway has had many lives since its initial construction in the 1970s. Today, it houses the **Terra Flora Garden & Landscape Design Studio**, which provides complete landscape design services and carries everything needed to complete a design (pods, fountain, plants, special order catalogues and more). The nursery sells plants that won't grow in Phoenix or Tucson, but that thrive in the cooler climate of Tubac. “Being a gardener, having to go to Tucson or Green Valley when you need one more thing is really inconvenient,” said Ellen Cooper, co-owner. “We really needed something down here.”

**Yard Woman** has moved its location to the new La Entrada de Tubac shopping plaza, next to the official Tubac-Santa Cruz Visitor Center. The store emphasizes the art of healthy living by featuring bulk dried-herbs, homeopathic tinctures, herbal supplements, teas, essential oils, non-chemical cleaning products and organic foods.

Yard Woman is a popular place for learning about options for healthy alternatives or tapping into local holistic practitioners. By spring, the store plans to offer classes on food and nutrition, and sell soups and salads to go, made from locally grown ingredients.

**La Entrada de Tubac Phase II** expansion is nearing completion. A new entrance on the I-19 Frontage Road features towers and architecture reminiscent of historic Tubac. When completed, the project will be a Tubac destination of more than 50 galleries, specialty shops, restaurants and offices.

Some of Tubac's well-established galleries have relocated to **The Shops at Tubac Plaza** along Tubac Road and Will Rogers Lane, including Los Reyes Gallery & Workshop Center and Z Forrest Gallery, which focuses on American crafts nationwide and local fine art.

The building, originally constructed in the 1960s, has undergone significant improvements in the past year and will eventually house eight tenants. “Our goal is to create an area that pulls together all the retail shops on Tubac Road,” said Project Manager, Kristi Gall. “This helps to complete a primary road in Tubac and integrates the buildings into more of a sense of community.” **TL**



Tubac State Park is often the site of re-enactments of historic events. Here, corn is being ground by hand. Photo courtesy of Arizona State Parks.

## 2008 Calendar of Events

### Art Walk

March 15 & 16, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Explore the working artist's studios and fine art galleries for which Tubac is renowned during this annual walking tour.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Taste of Tubac

April 5

A tasting of savory cuisine from area restaurants paired with fine wines, sponsored by the Tubac Rotary to benefit local non-profits.

#### Fourth of July Celebration

July 4

Old fashioned family fun! Enjoy free games and crafts for the kids.

#### Juan Bautista de Anza Days

Oct. 18 & 19, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Celebrate the Indian, Mexican and Spanish Colonial periods in Tubac including a reenactment on horseback of Juan Bautista de Anza's exploratory expedition. Living history and military demonstrations, period costumes, folklorico dancers, mariachi music, food and children's activities.

### Tubac: An Art Experience

November, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Visitors get up close and personal with the artists of Tubac. Artists create works right before visitor's eyes throughout a weekend celebrating the creative process.

### Luminaria Nights - Fiesta de Navidad

December, Sunset to 9 p.m.

The village streets are lined with traditional luminaries and the stores stay open until 9 p.m. during this annual celebration of the holiday season. Join locals for great gift ideas, homemade food, homespun music and Santa!

### Tubac Festival of the Arts

February 2009, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Arizona's longest running art festival, the 49th Annual Tubac Festival of the Arts showcases the work of hundreds of visiting artists, craft persons and musicians from around the country. Horse-drawn trolleys, roving entertainers and a food court enhance the festival atmosphere.