

Whenever senior travelers consider visiting Arizona, they think of the state capital in Phoenix, and the areas north to the Grand Canyon. However, Tucson, in the Southern Arizona desert of the Saguaro National Forest, is also a great destination. Springtime in the University of Arizona city of nearly a million people is from mid-February to mid-June.

The season boasts cool nights and mild, sunny days in the high 70s to low 80s. Summers are desert hot, often with noontime temperatures at 100 degrees. Savvy senior residents and visitors start their morning hikes, golf or jogs by six a.m., and make sure they're back into the shade by nine.

The desert Southwest summer heat has a unique benefit, because of very low humidity. When temperatures are 85 in New York, Philly and D.C., it feels very hot, sweaty and uncomfortable, as humidity rises to 90 percent. However, in Tucson, when the thermometer is at an even higher 95 degrees, it's still very comfortable because the humidity is below 10 percent. Additionally, the clean desert air helps make breathing easier for people with respiratory problems, and the low humidity is great for those who suffer from arthritis. The glorious flowering of the tall, stately saguaro, prickly pear and other cactus species adds glorious scenes to the desert beauty of the Southwest.

Another summer senior destination, and much more popular Southwest city, is Las Vegas. It's the world's most famous gambling joint, where visitors can indulge in posh resorts, great entertainment and all-you-can-stuff buffets. However, the midsummer heat in Sin City is as high as it is in Tucson. Las Vegas' blacktop streets and cement sidewalks during the day make the city not only fiery hot, but also potentially dangerous for seniors. The mistake they make is leaving the air-conditioned hotel and deciding to stroll along Las Vegas Boulevard, the famed Strip. In Tucson and Las Vegas, only mad dogs and clueless seniors go out in the noonday sun.

The desert heat can be very deceiving. At first, the blast of desert warmth is soothing after the artificial indoor air, but within just a few minutes' exposure, especially for the elderly, it can cause the sudden onset of heat exhaustion. Then, if the sunlight strolling continues, may evolve into dangerous heat stroke.

If you're careful to respect the weather, you'll certainly enjoy your summer desert vacation in the great Southwest desert areas, whether you prefer the quiet nature setting of Tucson or the lively action in Las Vegas.

