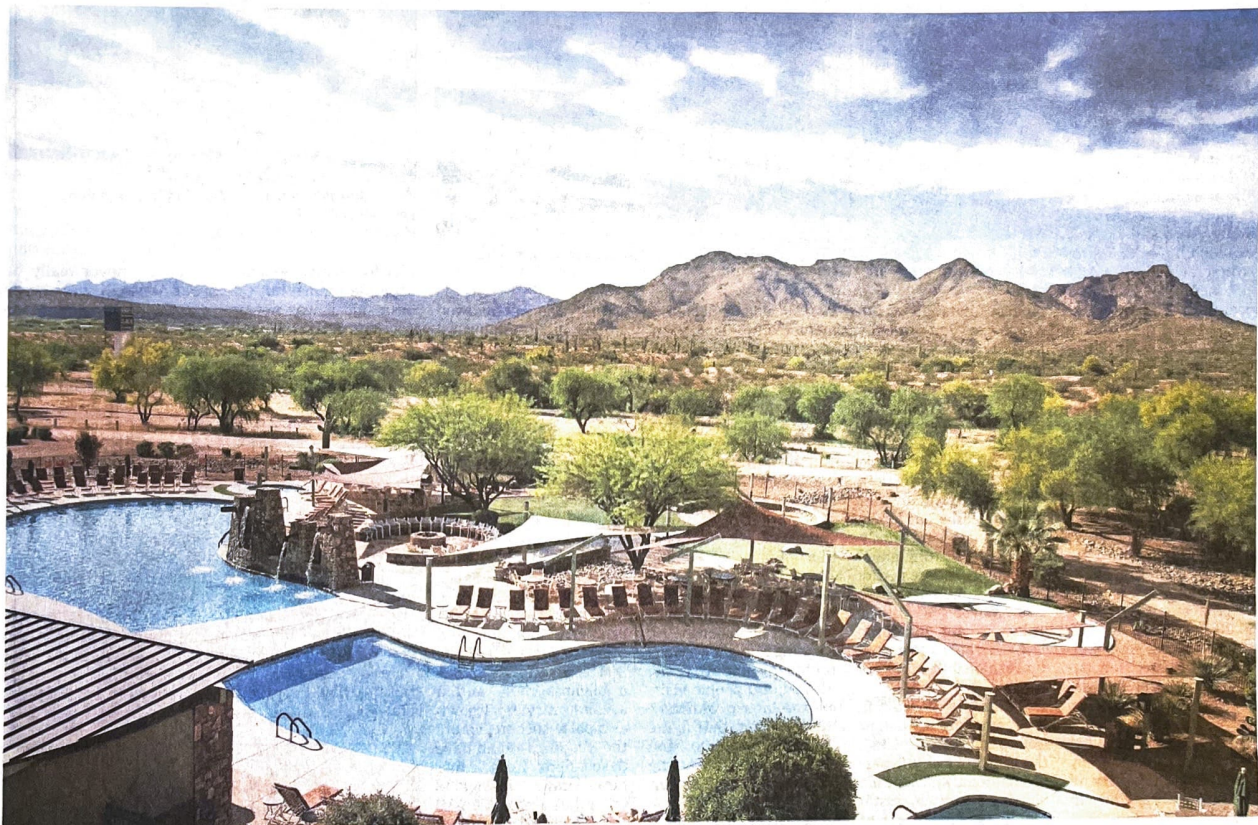


# TapTravel



The view at the back of the We-Ko-Pa Resort includes a pool, desert and mountains. STEVE SLOSAREK

## Relaxation and adventure

Steve Slosarek Special to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

**F**rom Tempe and Sun City to Chandler and Maryvale, the Milwaukee Brewers and their fans have spent spring training in the Phoenix area for nearly 50 years. After nearly a half century of Cactus League travel, faithful followers from Wisconsin have fewer and fewer “hidden gems” to discover. ■ One such place is the We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center, part of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, northeast of Scottsdale. ■ We-Ko-Pa boasts resort amenities at hotel prices, a casino, golf courses, private-trail jeep tours, Segway tours and horseback riding in the Sonoran Desert, Verde River kayaking, and riverboat cruises across Saguaro Lake. ■ The American Indian-owned We-Ko-Pa Resort is Yavapai for four peaks and refers to the sacred Four Peaks mountains on the 28,000-acre reservation. ■ Despite its tranquil locale, the resort is easy to reach off Arizona State Highway 87 within a 30-minute drive of Phoenix’s Sky Harbor International Airport. **See ARIZONA, Page 7E**

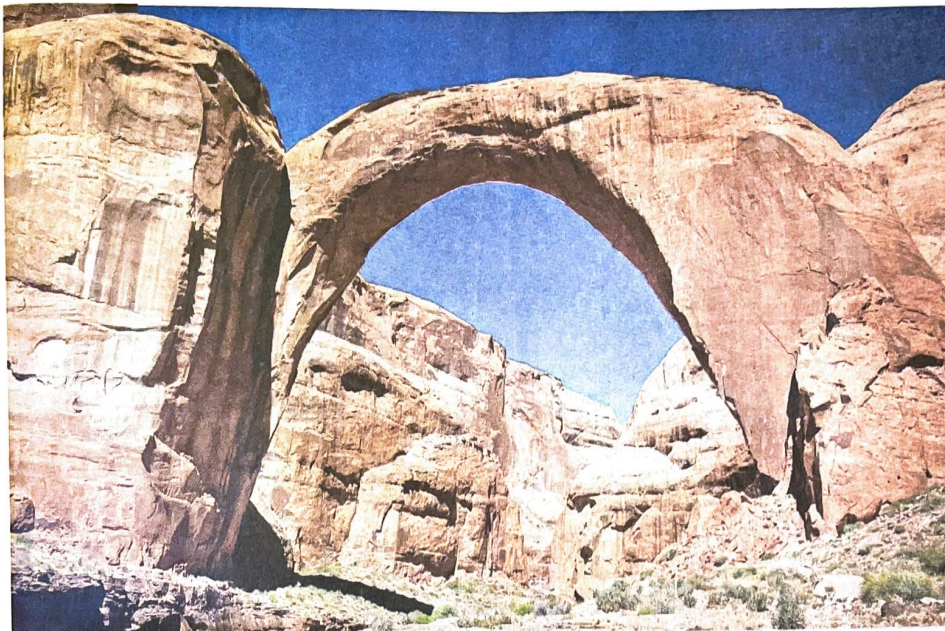


Impressive cacti greet visitors on the Green Zebra Desert Jeep Tour, which includes stops for information about the vegetation by the lead-vehicle guide. STEVE SLOSAREK



The lobby of the We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center, just northeast of Scottsdale. WE-KO-PA RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER





Rainbow Bridge National Monument is one of the world's largest natural arches, measuring 275 feet across. STEVE SLOSAREK

**Rainbow Bridge**

On a baseball off-day, fans should check out another under-the-radar gem: Rainbow Bridge National Monument, accessible via a boat ride from Lake Powell Resort in Page, Ariz.

Rainbow Bridge is one of the world's largest natural arches. The sandstone arch soars 290 feet above and 275 feet across Bridge Canyon.

Lake Powell Resort takes advantage of its location on Wahweap Marina with 348 lakeside rooms that provide stunning views of deep-blue water, mesas and buttes. The lake, the second-largest man-made lake by surface area in the United States and considered a reservoir on the Colorado River, is 186 miles long with nearly 2,000 miles of shoreline. The resort offers boat tours or dinner cruises of various lengths and destinations.

One of those is a 50-mile, seven-hour Rainbow Bridge Boat Tour. The cruise reveals a series of deep sandstone gorges, mesas and buttes along the zigzagging and narrow Lake Powell. The final mile includes the payoff of a meandering canyon before stopping .75 miles short of Rainbow Bridge.

A tranquil, 1.5-mile roundtrip hike along a winding trail through the canyon puts visitors in an anticipatory state of mind when, suddenly around a bend, the spectacular arched bridge reveals itself.



Rainbow Bridge National Monument viewed from the front. STEVE SLOSAREK



Trail rides through private acres of the Sonoran desert include crossing the Verde River. WE-KO-PA RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER

**Arizona**

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Reverence to the natural world is evident at the resort. A river mosaic in pavement and flooring extends from the pool behind the resort, flows through the lobby, continues along the parking lot and meanders to the We-Ko-Pa Golf Club across the street. The mosaic symbolizes the Verde River, a lifeline for the Yavapai throughout history and Arizona's only Wild and Scenic River.

Other Yavapai-inspired nuances at the AAA Four Diamond property include wood-wall treatments that mirror basket weaving and lighting fixtures that evoke water elements.

Aside from relaxing at the pool, which features an adjoining five-hole putting green and horseshoe area, guests may luxuriate inside with a massage, facial or saion service at the onsite spa. Elsewhere, abundant outdoor lounging on cushioned furniture around large tables offers the perfect setting for socializing.

The resort boasts seven dining options. Surrounded by cacti, the Ahnala Mesquite Room offers outstanding Arizona cuisine with a Southwestern twist for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Diners may choose to eat outdoors under a large covered area.

**Desert adventures**

These types of amenities may be standard fare for the resort-rich Scottsdale area, but what sets We-Ko-Pa apart are the proprietary activities on the land owned by the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation.

Fort McDowell Adventures offers a range of adventures. The Green Zebra Desert Tour is a blast, featuring a tour of private acres of the pristine Sonoran desert by Tomcar, an off-road utility vehicle. The varied terrain includes gripping climbs and daring descents, safely led by a lead-vehicle guide, who shares tales, historical details and vegetation information during stops. Participants can even see the 300-foot water fountain, which shoots up every hour, in the distance in nearby Fountain Hills. Despite the desert environs, the guide assured us that, no, it wasn't a mirage.

If four hoofs are more your thing, the company offers 90-minute or two-hour horseback rides. City

Slicker Cattle Drives are also an option; participants help the cowboys keep the cattle moving forward, or just enjoy the scenery at the back of the pack. Groups may tack on Dutch oven-style cookouts for a true cowboy experience.

Segway tours on these private trails have become popular, and guided mountain-bike and hiking tours also are options.

Though located in the desert, the private land features abundant water. Fort McDowell Adventures offers guided kayaking, rafting and stand-up paddle board activities, which begin at the Lower Salt River. Desert Belle cruises prove an ideal way to witness canyon walls and desert vistas from the comfort of a riverboat. The 90-minute narrated tours showcase the somewhat hidden Saguaro Lake.

Two celebration venues, perfect for group or family activities, add more luster. Rosa's Ranch includes multiple fire pits, a custom copper bar and temperature-controlled saloon. La Puesta del Sol is more event-based; the large venue (100 to 1,200 guests) features 360-degree views of surrounding mountains and retractable sidewalls offering indoor dining with a saloon.

Back near the 246-room resort, the We-Ko-Pa Golf Club is home to traditional and target-style courses with a clubhouse and restaurant. Both courses boast panoramic desert and mountain scenery, with no homes, condos or townhomes lining the fairways or interrupting the views.

Steps away from the resort's lobby is Fort McDowell Casino, where guest may indulge in 24 hours of gaming machines, live table and poker games, and table-side food service.

Even if they end up losing in the casino, Cactus League-goers can say they found a winning destination.



Flowers and cacti are part of the charm of the We-Ko-Pa Golf Club. STEVE SLOSAREK



Segway tours through private acres of the Sonoran desert have risen in popularity among We-Ko-Pa Resort guests. WE-KO-PA RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER

tion in We-Ko-Pa Resort. **More information:** The We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center is at 10438 N. Fort McDowell Road, Fort McDowell, Ariz. For more, call (480) 789-5300 or see [wekoparesortandconferencecenter.com](http://wekoparesortandconferencecenter.com).