



Christian Petersen, Getty Images

Teams that head to Arizona for spring training include the Oakland A's and the Chicago White Sox.

# Arizona spring break a doubleheader

## Catch a Cactus League game before it's too late

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I played T-ball, tried my hand at baseball and played hours of catch with my dad, but I'm not a serious fan. I just don't make time for baseball. Until last weekend, when I heard a wooden bat crack against a leather-bound ball in a crowd of 12,000 of my newest and closest friends.

Out of left field, a Field of Dreams-type passion for the old ball game burst out of me like a home run.

I was experiencing Arizona's Cactus League Spring Training baseball, a yearly tradition every March that draws 15 Major League teams from across the United States to one place for one purpose — to play ball.

Walking down the steps to my eighth-row seat behind third base, I overheard a lady gush, "I come for the tight pants!"

The family in front of me was there for the love of the game, each child sporting a leather glove waiting for fly balls. The spectators behind me were serious fans — perhaps parents of one of the rookies — who yelled "Sit down! Ball in play!" when my group stood up at the wrong time (baseball faux pas). The ultra-bronzed locals to my right, who cracked peanuts with the precision of spring training regulars, even brought along their 80-year-old mother.

Everyone goes. Each for different reasons, most sporting their home team's jersey and ball cap. It's an all-ages party with the regular fixings — beer, pretzels, hotdogs and pop — and multiple games a day at 10 stadiums.

Some locals skip work for mid-week games; on the weekends there's no other question than "what field are we meeting at?" and "what time?" It's also a priority for out-of-town fans of teams like the Chicago White Sox, Colorado Rockies and Seattle Mariners who make the pilgrimage to boost their team's morale, see the prospects and root for their home team. Spring training is the perfect



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Mist is sprayed from the roof of the Scottsdale Stadium to keep fans cool during a spring-training baseball game.

## If You Go

### Stay

- If keeping the budget in check is more important than a specific hotel brand or exact location, bid on a room with Price line.
- Rent a condo via VRBO.com.
- Hip cats congregate at the Saguro. This recently opened hotel is like a contemporary artist's canvas, blending gallery whites with pops of colour — and it's within walking distance of Scottsdale Stadium.
- Bathe yourself in sun and history at the 1929-built, eight-pool, Frank Lloyd Wright-influenced Arizona Biltmore Hotel.

### Eat

- **Distrite:** One of Scottsdale's newest restaurants is helmed by Jose Garces, the Food Network's 2010 The Next Iron Chef winner. A fiesta of colours surrounds street-style Mexican food served on sparkly tables. Don't miss

excuse to escape winter. Who can resist an average March temperature of 23 C and cloudless skies?

Couple this with baseball tickets starting at \$8 and direct daily flights from Calgary to Phoenix hovering about \$350 return, and Arizona just pulled a Spring Break doubleheader.

- March's spring training happy hour specials daily from 3-7 p.m., plus get a free carnitas taco when you show your ticket stub.
- **True Food Kitchen:** An inventive and uber-healthy restaurant serving regional ingredients developed in partnership with holistic Dr. Andrew Weil.
- **The Mission:** One of Scottsdale's most hotly reviewed restaurants. Go on Sunday at lunch when they roast a pig and serve pork tacos until they run out. Pair it with an Aguate avocado-flavoured margarita for maximum southwestern flair.
- **Wright's:** Intimate, iconic and serious about food. Amuse-bouches whet your palate, servers wear white smocks and salad is delivered via trolley with a "mixologist" assembling ingredients at a ravenous pace.
- Visit [www.cactusleague.com](http://www.cactusleague.com) for Arizona's spring training schedule and tickets.



Plan your own Cactus League tour. Go to [calgaryherald.com/travel](http://calgaryherald.com/travel)



MEDITERRANEAN REPOSITIONING



# San Francisco Westin exudes stylish charm

## St. Francis renews character with \$40M renovation

STEVE MACNAULL  
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

The best thing about the Westin St. Francis Hotel on San Francisco's famous Union Square?

Running through the revolving front door with my nine-year-old daughter to catch one of the City by the Bay's signature cable cars that pass the elegant hotel.

We rode the cable car only a short way, but in the requisite way — hanging off the side, the wind blowing through our hair with traffic zipping by only inches away.

Then it was back to the hotel where our spacious room in the landmark section of the hotel features a sparkling crystal chandelier hanging from the high ceiling.

My daughter Grace admires it and talks of the logistics of hanging one in her bedroom back home.

The chandelier isn't the only thing that's crystal, all the door-knobs are, too. These are the kind of touches befitting the St. Francis, which just went through a \$40-million renovation that pays homage to its 108-year history but adds freshness and all the mod-cons.

"I know it's an overused word, but the St. Francis truly is iconic. It's so historic," says director of sales and marketing Meryl Kirschenberg.

"It's the only hotel right on Union Square, the cable car passes right in front and every U.S. president (19 in all) in office since we opened has stayed here."

A little history: The St. Francis's first renovation was in 1906, just two years after it opened. Although it survived the Great San Francisco Earthquake, it was gutted by the devastating fire that followed.

The St. Francis is a hybrid — 600 rooms in the original landmark 12-storey section that directly faces Union Square and 595 rooms in the 32-storey mod-

## If You Go

- Located at 335 Powell St. on Union Square, San Francisco; 415-397-7000. Rates start at \$313. Visit [westinstfrancisco.com](http://westinstfrancisco.com).
- Air Canada and WestJet have non-stop flights daily Calgary-San Francisco.

ern tower behind that was added in 1971.

But the property is linked with the soaring marble-pillared main lobby where reproductions of the four original beaded globe chandeliers hang from the wood-carved ceiling.

New York-based Rockwell Group oversaw the restoration and updating of the lobby, which also includes plush carpeting, cream walls, the original pink marble grand staircase and Great Magneta Clock, which made the trip from Europe to start gracing the lobby in 1907.

Black and white and colour photographs of celebrity guests and the hotel and San Francisco through the decades are everywhere.

Display cases designed by de Young Museum curator Bill White contain historic hotel menus, china and guest ledgers.

Rooms in the landmark section have traditional high ceilings and the aforementioned chandeliers, crown mouldings, deep baseboards, dark patterned carpets and neutral walls. There's a

37-inch flat screen TV, ergonomic chair at a granite-topped desk and Westin Heavenly Beds that guarantee a good night's sleep.

Bathrooms, which tend to be a little small, feature marble too as well as Westin's Heavenly Bath showers, tubs and bath products.

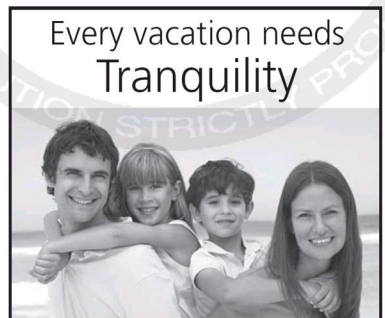
Rooms in the tower are more modern, but comfortable, with fewer embellishments.

Otherwise, all the bells and whistles of a luxury hotel are here — room service, spa and gym. Service is seamless and anticipatory from the doorman at the front and well-stocked rooms to a newspaper outside the door every morning and the milk and cookies that arrived for my daughter at bedtime.



Courtesy, Westin

The Westin St. Francis features the original 1904 landmark hotel in the front and newer tower of rooms in the back.



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