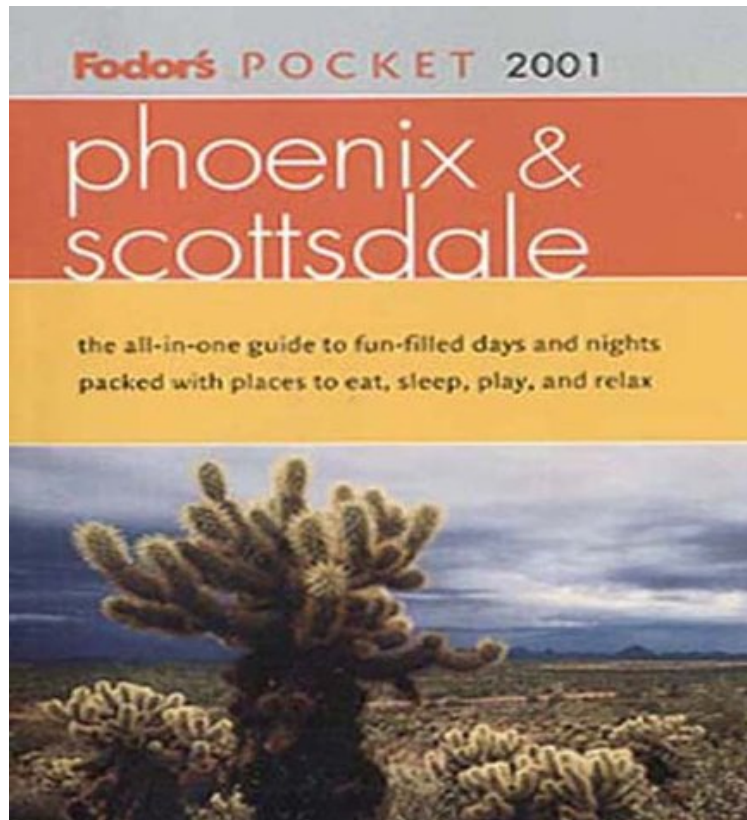


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Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introducing Phoenix and Scottsdale The ever-widening Phoenix metropolitan area is a melding of 22 communities and, with a population of more than a million people, the sixth-largest city in the United States. America's fastest-growing urban center provides a tremendous variety of activities -- from golfing on championship courses and hiking on some of the country's most popular trails to dining on the ultimate in Southwest cuisine and luxuriating at world-class resorts. Scottsdale and the college town of Tempe are packed with great boutiques and art galleries. Outside of metropolitan Phoenix, Wickenburg is an authentic Old West town, and the Apache Trail drive is one of the most scenic routes in America. Phoenix and Scottsdale lie in the heart of central Arizona in the Valley of the Sun -- named for its 330-plus days of sunshine each year and giving metro Phoenix its nickname, the Valley. This 1,000-square-mi valley is the northern tip of the Sonoran Desert, a rolling expanse of prehistoric seabed that stretches from central Arizona deep into northwestern Mexico. The landscape of the valley can be surprising for those who don't realize just how lush the desert can be. It's studded with cacti, palo verde trees, and creosote bushes, crusted with hard-baked clay and rock, and scorched by summer temperatures that can stay above 100°F for weeks at a time. But its dry skin responds magically to the touch of rainwater. Spring is a miracle of stately saguaro cacti crowned with white flowers, gold and orange poppies, scarlet blossoms bursting from the dry spikes of the ocotillo, hills ablaze with bright yellow creosote, reddish lavender dotting the antlers of the staghorn cholla, and tiny blue flowers clustering on the stems of the desert sage.