

Living in Green Valley

Green Valley was developed as a stand-alone or “full-service” community for retired persons in 1964. Green Valley is in Pima County, adjacent to the Santa Cruz River Valley in Southern Arizona. It is approximately equally distanced south of Tucson, Arizona, and north of Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. Green Valley aligns with the Santa Cruz River Valley and is bounded by the copper mines to the west, and the US Pacific Railroad to the east. Safety, law enforcement, and judicial services are provided by the Pima County Governmental Sub-complex located in Green Valley. Fire protection services are provided by the Green Valley Fire District.

Geography

Southern Arizona is in the Basin and Range Province, a physiographic area with mountain ranges trending north-south abutting desert basins. Green Valley lies at the base of the Santa Rita Mountain range at approximately 3000 feet. The Santa Rita Mountains extend for 26 miles, before merging with the Patagonia Mountains located further south. The highest peak in the mountain range is Mount Wrightson, at 9500 feet.

The Santa Rita Mountain range is one of about 60 Madrean Sky Islands found at higher elevations in northern Mexico and Southern Arizona. These Sky Islands feature pine-oak woodlands and are home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna. They sit in close proximity to one another, allowing species to migrate from range to range.

Three astronomical observatories are located within Southern Arizona, with two of the three being located within the Sky Islands. These are the Smithsonian Institution’s Fred Lawrence Whipple Observatory on Mount Hopkins, and the University of Arizona’s Steward Observatory, Catalina Station, located at the peak of Mount Bigelow. The University of Arizona, based in Tucson, also operates the Kitt Peak National Observatory in the Quinlin Mountains located on the Tohono O’odham Nation Reservation.

These observatories require low lighting at nighttime in the surrounding communities, so Green Valley is part of the Dark Skies at Night zone. These low light regulations are published by the Pima County government. There are few streetlights in the community, and if present, the lighting is limited to a downward-facing projection. Outdoor lights in Green Valley homes are also downward facing. Many residents carry pencil flashlights after dusk, even in retail park areas.

Climate

Due to its altitude, the weather in Green Valley is milder than other desert cities such as Phoenix, Arizona, and Palm Springs, California. The average high temperature for December through February is about 66 degrees Fahrenheit, and the average low is 37 degrees. Most winters see a few nights with either a soft or hard frost. June is typically the hottest month in Green Valley, with temperatures in July through September varying slightly due to the summer monsoons. Recent climate changes have affected the weather patterns so instead of several days of above 100-degree temperatures in the summer months, we now have several weeks. The monsoon pattern has also changed as the summer rainy season is highly variable in the amount and duration of the rainfall. The summer rainstorms have become more powerful, with higher winds and lightning. Higher temperatures and drier conditions in the summer, along with more powerful monsoons, have increased the danger of wildfires.

A “monsoon” is a season of increased moisture, and while awe-inspiring, can be extremely dangerous. Newcomers to the community need to be aware that it can rain so hard that visibility when driving can be severely impaired. Previously dry washes can become raging torrents of water in minutes, sweeping away vehicles and roadways. Even if the area appears to be dry, water from these storms drains through the entire length of washes in the community. If you are driving and see a sign that states “Do not enter if water present” obey it, since a small trickle of water can become a high wall of water in seconds.

The desert temperatures also present challenges. There is often a range of almost 20 degrees difference between the daytime and nighttime temperatures. High SPF sunscreen, hats, long-sleeve shirts, and plenty of fluids should always be carried with you. People unaccustomed living in a desert environment often underestimate how quickly a person can dehydrate during the summer months. Desert surfaces retain heat and are often too hot for people and pets to walk on. Children and pets quickly and easily succumb to the heat if left in cars or in non-shady areas outdoors.

The Sonoran Desert

The Sonoran Desert is a unique ecosystem that occupies the basins that are surrounded by mountain ranges in Southern Arizona. Although arid, the Sonoran Desert is green; it sports wildflowers in the spring, fruiting cacti in the summer, golden boughs in the fall, and snow-capped mountains in the winter.

The Sonoran Desert is one of the hottest, wettest, and most biodiverse deserts in the world. It is home to over 2000 plant species and over 500 animal species. The

Sonoran Desert is also home to over 350 species of birds and 150 species of reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Approximately 60 species of mammals can be found in the Sonoran Desert, along with many arthropods, which include scorpions, spiders, centipedes, and bees. The iconic Saguaro Cactus is only found in the Sonoran Desert. These majestic cacti can grow to over fifty feet in length, one foot in diameter, and can grow a dozen or more arms. They are very slow growing and can live for 150 to 200 years. Many desert species, including Saguaros, are protected by State and Federal laws.

Be aware of your surroundings. Picking up cacti spines when walking in the desert can be painful. Carry a comb to help remove spines from clothing and/or skin. Many animals in the Sonoran Desert are venomous, and can include scorpions, brown



recluse and black widow spiders, rattlesnakes, coral snakes, Gila Monsters, and centipedes. Be sure to monitor children and pets who may become curious. Other animal species can be a nuisance or become aggressive in certain circumstances.



Javelinas have large tusks and, while they may resemble pigs, look and act more like wild boars. Flower beds and new plantings around your home are inviting lures for late night snacking. Javelinas are also known to be aggressive if cornered or separated from their squadron. They often see dogs as an immediate threat and will often attack them without provocation. If you are out in the early morning or twilight hours, be extra vigilant. Above all, do not feed the wild javelinas, this will only encourage them to congregate around your home.

Green Valley History

The written history of Green Valley begins with the arrival of Spanish Conquistadors, Catholic Jesuits, and Franciscans to the area in the 16th century. Spanish presidios and churches built by these groups are still standing to this day. The Spanish Entrada occurred in Pimeria Alta located in Southern Arizona. This event resulted in prolonged conflict between the Native populations and the Spaniards, as the latter fought to expand their control over the Southwest region. Land Grants were awarded by Spain to settlers in the area to provide growth and protection for the early Spanish. The first land grants were issued in the early 19th century. In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and began issuing its own land grants. The Ortiz brothers, Tomás and Ignacio, received the first land grant of about 17,000 acres near present-day Green Valley. Twenty years later, the majority of the early land grants, and some of the Spanish missions, had been abandoned due to continued conflict with the Native peoples. In 1848, with the Gadsden Purchase, the United States determined that 20 land grants, totaling 116,000 acres, were valid. These grant properties were ultimately sold off to large companies, though some parcels remained in the hands of small ranchers.

Prior to that, Native American tribes had roamed and settled in the area approximately 10,000 years ago. Their remains and traces of formerly occupied settlements are mostly buried under the surface of the desert. Because of the abundance of historical remains, developers and State and Federal land trusts must survey and preserve historical archaeological sites.

Numerous diverse populations followed the Spanish into the area. Beginning in the early 19th century; explorers, settlers, miners, and soldiers found their way into the area now known as Green Valley. In the early 1860s Chinese immigrants arrived in Southern Arizona to work on the transcontinental railroads. Migrant workers moving north from Mexico began to emigrate around the end of the 19th century. Recent Latin American immigrants, now living in the area, make up a significant portion of the population of Arizona, and are an integral part of the culture and economy of the region.

Modern Green Valley

The history of the town of Green Valley began in 1964 when an early business owner opened a corner ice cream parlor and snack shop named Las Esquinitas in the area. That same year two brothers, Don and Norman Maxon from Chicago, purchased 2900 acres from the largest grower of pecans in the world. The land sold by the

Farmers Investment Company (FICO) was once known as historic Canoa Ranchland. The Maxon brothers built over 1000 housing units for retirees within two years. In addition to the housing, they built places for recreation, shopping, and medical centers. Soon after, low occupancy forced them to close their business until greater construction began in 1967. Green Valley spent the next 50 years growing to its current footprint. Within a total of 15 years, Green Valley had become what a highway sign had promised in 1953 “Live Now – Not Sometime – in an Established Community”.