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25+ Free Things to Do in the East Valley and Beyond (<http://cadenceaz.com/blog/25-free-things-to-do-in-the-east-valley-and-beyond/>)

Posted January 2, 2017 by Cadence at Gateway

Scrambling for something local and entertaining to do with friends or family? We found more than 25 options for free fun in Mesa, the East Valley, and throughout Phoenix—with options for every age range and interest!

1. Act One Culture Pass

Love our local arts and attractions? Want to treat a special someone to a FREE trip to the Phoenix Art Museum, the Arizona Science Center or Desert Botanical Garden? Take advantage of the Act One Culture Pass.

Library cardholders can check out an Act One Culture Pass for FREE admission or tickets for two people at multiple participating arts and cultural institutions. (<http://www.act1az.org/find-a-culture-pass>) You may check out one pass at a time and there's a limit of two passes per month. Passes are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Culture Pass link (<http://www.act1az.org/culture-pass/>)

2. Library Events

Book discussions, code camps, story times, crafting, computer classes, author signings—local libraries have tons of free events for every member of the family. Seasonal reading programs are extremely popular for elementary-school age groups and feature activities and prizes.

Mesa Library link (<http://events.mesalibrary.org/evanced/lib/eventcalendar.asp?lib=ALL>)

Chandler Library link (<http://chandlerlibrary.libcal.com/calendar/events/?cid=3837&t=m&d=0000-00-00&cm%5B%5D=2213&cal%5B%5D=3837>)

Gilbert (search for specific library) link (<http://evanced.mclaz.org/evanced/lib/eventcalendar.asp?df=list&EventType=ALL&Lib=ALL>)

Queen Creek (search for specific library) link (<http://evanced.mclaz.org/evanced/lib/eventcalendar.asp?df=list&EventType=ALL&Lib=ALL>)

Apache Junction link (http://65.125.203.108/programs/public_calendar.php)

3. Mesa Dance Lessons

Brush up on your Boot Scootin' Boogie or learn the AZ Two Step at Denim and Diamonds, 7336 E. Main St., Mesa. Free dance lessons Wednesday and Saturday nights, doors open at 6 p.m., lessons start at 6:30 p.m. Denim and Diamonds link (<http://denimanddiamondsmesaaz.com/articles/view/schedule-50231885-629c-431b-8026-47730abbf87c>)

4. Sculpture Tour in Downtown Mesa

This is always a great place to take visitors to snap a few pics of them sitting next to Humpty Dumpty or draping their arm around any one of the 38 permanent sculptures scattered up and down Main St. in Downtown Mesa. Enjoy the shops and eateries along the way. Sculpture link (<http://www.downtownmesa.com/sculptures/>).



5. Mesa Desert Trails Park and East Valley Canal Loop for Bike Riders, Runners and Walkers

Desert Trails Park

([http://www.mesaaz.gov/things-](http://www.mesaaz.gov/things-to-do/parks-recreation-commercial-facilities/parks/desert-trails-park)

[to-do/parks-recreation-commercial-facilities/parks/desert-trails-park](http://www.mesaaz.gov/things-to-do/parks-recreation-commercial-facilities/parks/desert-trails-park)) is a neighborhood favorite at the northeast corner of McDowell and Recker in Mesa that has varied routes to explore. Young, inexperienced riders as well as experienced bikers love to hit the trails here. Plus, it makes a really fun short hike if you don't bring your bike, with a fantastic view of the entire city of Mesa. **The East Valley Canal Loop** is a 21-mile loop that begins at the Guadalupe Road/Greenfield Road area in Gilbert and extends north to McDowell Road in Mesa and back down again. You can find the loop on Mapmyride.com (<http://www.mapmyride.com/us/gilbert-az/east-valley-canal-loop-multi-use-trail-route-100866955>), a great resource to find information on the many bike trails throughout the East Valley.

6. Usery Mountain Regional Park in Mesa

On the east side of Mesa, Usery Mountain Regional Park consists of 3,648 acres adjacent to the Tonto National Forest. It's a hiker's and photographer's paradise, teeming with desert wildlife and a gorgeous place to watch a stunning Arizona sunset. Biking, hiking, camping, horseback riding—you name it, you can find it—on one of the 20 hiking trails. One of the most popular trails, the Wind Cave Trail, culminates in the Wind Cave, a natural feature formed by dripping water over thousands of years. The park holds many free, fun and informative lectures and activities at the Nature Center at the entrance to the park. Event link. (<http://www.maricopacountyparks.net/events/?ParkId=13>)

7. Mesa Bass Pro Events

Interested in learning more about fishing, archery and other outdoor sports? Let the crew at Bass Pro Shop at 1133 N. Dobson Rd. in Mesa help with tips on safety and enjoyment. They have a Kids Night event every Tuesday from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. that features live fish feeding and free popcorn. They also offer Boy Scout Merit Badge classes. Mesa Bass Pro event link (http://www.basspro.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/CFPageC?storeId=10151&catalogId=10051&langId=-1&appID=94&storeID=55&tab=3&cm_sp=Store044Apr2013_RD&cm_ven=redirect&cm_cat=mktg&cm_pla=bps&cm_ite=mesa)

8. Mesa Airport Viewing Areas

If you love planes, head out to **Falcon Field**, 4800 E. Falcon Drive in Mesa. The airport opened in 1941 and served as a World War II pilot training base. There are more than 700 aircraft based at Falcon Field, including fixed-wing single- and multi-engine aircraft, turboprops, jets and helicopters. Falcon Field Airport is home to a variety of aviation organizations and pilot groups who host a variety of events, from community pancake breakfasts to fly-ins, to share their aircraft and love of flying, mentor young pilots, and raise money for charity.

The public is welcome to enjoy two aircraft viewing areas at the Falcon Field Airport terminal building: a patio behind the terminal and a separate lawn area on the east side of the building. Both areas face the aircraft parking ramp and offer close-up views of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters on the ramp, taxiways and runways. Free binoculars are available in both viewing areas.

Free gliders can be obtained inside the terminal office during business hours that children can fly on the miniature runway in the lawn area. Pack a lunch and make an afternoon of it! Falcon Field Airport information (<http://www.falconfieldairport.com/my-community/tours-speakers-aircraft-viewing>).

9. Williams Gateway Airport Viewing Area on Power and Ray roads in southeast

Mesa. You can view the airport activity and many of the pilots have lunch inside. There's an area available with a viewing mound, gazebo and benches. Williams Gateway Airport Viewing Area (<http://phxspotters.com/spotting-at-kiwa-phoenix-mesa-gateway-airport>)

10. Sloan Park in Mesa

Thrill the baseball fan in your family by getting a major league player's autograph! Sloan Park (<http://chicago.cubs.mlb.com/chc/mesa/>), 2330 West Rio Salado Parkway in Mesa, is the spring training home of the Chicago Cubs, with games scheduled in March. Time permitting, players and coaches may sign autographs up until 30 minutes prior to the game. Fans seeking autographs following the game may have the opportunity to find players in the designated player walkway from the ballpark to the home clubhouse, located outside the Home Plate Gate.

baseball
training
camp
in
mesa

Connected to Sloan Park is Mesa Riverview Park, with an urban fishing lake, softball fields, fountains and other cool water features and a large playground for kids. The playground includes a 50-foot climbing tower, a 60-foot mesh rope climbing structure, restrooms, shaded picnic areas and lots of open play areas as well.

11. Mesa Community College Events

You don't have to be a college student to attend many of the free events and activities at Mesa Community College, 1833 W. Southern Ave, Mesa. For example, there's no entrance fee to MCC's Art Gallery, which features a wide range of works in painting, ceramics, photography and electronic media. And it's always great to take a stroll around The Rose Garden at MCC (<http://rosegarden.mesacc.edu/home.html>), home to 9,000 rose bushes, free and open to the public. For the starry-eyed, free "Astronomy Nights (<https://www.mesacc.edu/departments/physical-science/astronomy/planetarium/astronomy-nights>)" in the 52-seat, state-of-the-art Planetarium are held on the first Friday night of every month.

Interested in desert animals and endangered species? MCC's Red Mountain campus, 7110 E. McKellips Rd., Mesa, has a cienega that is a Wildlife Certified Habitat and home to endangered native desert pupfish and desert tortoises.

There's also a terrarium in the lobby of the Saguaro Building, with snakes, lizards and gila monsters! And throughout the year many sports, cultural and community-oriented events take place on both campuses. MCC Facebook event link (<https://www.facebook.com/mesacc/events>)



12. **Chandler-Gilbert Community College Events**

Chandler-Gilbert Community College, 2626 E. Pecos Rd. in Chandler, also hosts many events that are free and open to the public. For little to no cost, you can cheer on their soccer and volleyball teams, or attend a choir or orchestra performance. Many of the music performances take place at the Pecos Performing Arts Center. It's an enjoyable way to support young talent, many of whom are on their way to careers in the arts. And who knows, you might decide it's time to register for a couple of classes while you're there. Chandler-Gilbert event link (<http://www.cgc.maricopa.edu/community/Pages/activities.aspx#/?i=1>) or Facebook event link (<https://www.facebook.com/chandlergilbertcc/events>)

13. **Little Howlers Hockey Lessons**

Little Howlers Hockey is an on-ice youth hockey program hosted in cooperation with the Arizona Coyotes Hockey Development Program, Arizona Amateur Hockey Association, One Goal and local hockey rinks. The program consists of four free one-hour sessions designed to provide kids ages 4-8 a risk-free introduction to the sport of hockey. There's a program in Gilbert at AZ Ice Gilbert (<http://azice.com/gilbert/>). Little Howlers Hockey info (<http://coyotes.nhl.com/club/page.htm?id=86688>).

14. **IKEA Events for Kids**

The staff in the Children's IKEA department is full of fun craft ideas that they share with kids for no cost. Visit on the **First Saturday & Third Sunday of every month** from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. and find out what they're up to! Link to IKEA Info (<http://www.ikea.com/us/en/store/tempe/activities>)

15. **Home Depot Workshops**

Are you all thumbs when it comes to plumbing and other household repairs? Home Depot offers free home improvement workshops for do-it-yourselfers of all ages and experience. They even have special do-it-HERSELF and kids workshops. Kids get a kit, an apron and a certificate. All for free, usually on Saturdays or Sundays. Check the schedule for specific East Valley stores. Do-it-Yourself Workshop Schedule (<http://workshops.homedepot.com/workshops/home>)

16. **Lowe's Build and Grow Clinic**

Get your goggles on and your hammers ready! With clinics at several East Valley locations, kids can build great projects including race cars, school buses and coin banks. Watch your child's face light up with satisfaction as he or she completes a project from start to finish. Check specific location for dates and times. <https://lowesbuildandgrow.com/> (<https://lowesbuildandgrow.com/>)

17. **As You Wish Pottery Painting Place**

Design and decorate custom pottery at **As you Wish Pottery Painting Place** in two East Valley locations—Mesa and Chandler. They provide all the materials to help you keep your inner artist happy! Take note of their Specials page for free events and materials. As You Wish Pottery Specials (<http://www.asyouwishpottery.com/coupon/>)

18. **Arizona Car Shows**

Love cars? Get your engines started. Here's a link to Arizona Auto Scene's detailed listing of events relating to car shows, road racing, drag racing, drifting and other motorsport-related events. Many are in East Valley cities and take place on weekends at varied times. Arizona Auto Scene events (<http://arizonaautoscene.com/events/>)

19. **Gilbert Riparian Preserve Nature Events**

Have you attended the Gilbert Riparian Preserve's Butterflies and Dragonflies walk, Star Party or Bird Walk? If not, treat yourself to some time spent marveling at the wonders of nature. East Valley residents and visitors are fortunate to have such a treasure right in their own backyard. The preserve has diverse species of ducks, shorebirds and turtles in the ponds and hummingbirds, quail and woodpeckers along the trails. Learn about the importance of riparian habitats and water conservation in the Sonoran desert. Riparian Preserve Event Calendar (<https://www.gilbertaz.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/riparian-preserve-at-water-ranch/public-programs>)



20. **Schnepf Farms**

Walk away from city life and spend some time down on the farm. Schnepf Farms on Rittenhouse Rd. in Queen Creek is the East Valley's favorite place for picnics, birthdays, get-togethers and small town festivals. Families have tons of fun roaming the orchards, picking peaches and even camping on the farm property. There are train rides, a petting zoo and hay rides. Some events, such as the Pumpkin & Chili Party have a fee, but many activities are free. Schnepf Farms' activities (<http://www.schnepffarms.com/events-at-schnepfs/>)

21. **Freestone Park in Gilbert**

Described as 88 acres of pure fun for kids, this park offers play areas, volleyball, softball, tennis and fishing. For a small fee, there's also a train that winds through the park and a carousel. An added bonus—it's a great place to sit by the water's edge and watch the sun go down behind palm and willow trees, with birds periodically swooping by. Located east of Lindsay Rd. between Guadalupe and Elliott in Gilbert. Coupon for train ride at Freestone (<http://www.freestonerr.com/>)

22. **Dog Parks**