

Leap into Tucson: 29 fun things to check out on Feb. 29

By Jake Faigus

Today's leap day! Some may scream "Why?" when another day is added to the calendar; others may rejoice.

First, let's break it down. Why do we have an extra day?

"The total amount of time it takes the Earth to complete a revolution around the sun is not exactly a whole number of days," said UA's Renu Malhotra, regents professor in the department of planetary sciences. "It falls about six hours short of that. So, every four years we add a day to compensate."

There's always a "but."

"Every 100 years, with some exceptions, we don't do a leap year," Malhotra explained. "If that year is divisible by 100 but not 400, we skip it."

For those planners, the years 2100, 2200 and 2300 will not be leap years, but 2400 will be.

OK, let's move on. For those who celebrate, here are 29 things to do on leap day.

Mount Lemmon

520-749-8700

Go for a drive. The Catalina Highway Scenic Drive is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful in Arizona. It is the only road that takes travelers up Mount Lemmon to see more of the Santa Catalina Mountain Range. Visitors can stop by the Palisades Visitor Center along the drive. To reach the highway, take Tanque Verde Road east from Tucson to the Catalina Highway, which becomes Hitchcock Highway at the Forest Service boundary. From there, it leads to Mount Lemmon. Parking is \$8.

Mission San Xavier del Bac

1950 W. San Xavier Road, Tucson

520-294-2624

www.sanxaviermission.org

Attend Mass at 6:30 a.m. Known as the White Dove of the Desert, Mission San Xavier del Bac is just south of Tucson on the San Xavier Indian Reservation. The Mission provides great photo ops, and visits can be completed in around an hour. Check out the gift shop between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

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2021 N. Kinney Road, Tucson

520-883-1380

www.desertmuseum.org

Walk among the animals. The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum boasts a botanical garden, an aquarium and an art gallery in addition to the other animal exhibits on the property. Visitors can check out the Reptile, Amphibian & Invertebrate Hall; the Warden Aquarium; and Cat Canyon, among others. There are also 2 miles of hiking trails and three restaurants where visitors can eat and soak in the surrounding views of the desert landscape. The hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Pima Air & Space Museum

6000 E. Valencia Road, Tucson

520-574-0462

www.pimaair.org

Study the history of aircraft. The Pima Air & Space Museum houses over 400 air and spacecraft, making it one of the world's largest air and space museums. More than a few aircraft on display stand out with the Wright Flyer signifying the beginning of air travel to massive passenger planes like the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. However, the most impressive aircraft at the museum might be the Lockheed SR-71A "Blackbird," which was the premier spy plane that was commissioned by the CIA during the Cold War. The museum is 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Old Tucson

201 Kinney Road, Tucson

520-883-0100

www.oldtucson.com

Roll film! Old Tucson has been featured in 500 television shows and movies, the most notable being "Three Amigos," "El Dorado," "Joe Kidd," "Winchester '73" and "Tombstone." John Wayne, Paul Newman, Frank Sinatra, Clint Eastwood and Ronald Reagan have all been on the set as well. Customers can watch the Western Experience shows that try to replicate what life was like in the Wild West, take a ghost tour, see live concerts, and experience Nightfall and Yuletide, later in the year. Prices vary by activity, but historical walking tours are offered at 10:15 a.m., 11:30 p.m., 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., with each one lasting an hour a piece and cost \$14.

Biosphere 2

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32540 S. Biosphere Road, Oracle

520-838-6200

www.biosphere2.org

Visit the climate control godfather. The Biosphere was built in 1986 and is now owned by the UA. There are five biomes under the glass with an ocean, mangrove wetlands, a tropical rainforest, a savannah grassland and a fog desert. The name comes from the idea that Biosphere 1 is Earth. The structure was built and preserved as part of a way to create and study potential space colonization endeavors through self-sustaining technology. The facility is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and visitors can take guided tours. Tours last around 75 minutes.

Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

4455 E. Camp Lowell Drive, Tucson

520-881-0606

www.theminitimemachine.org

Go back in time. The museum was founded by Patricia and Walter Arnell. Patricia became interested in miniatures as a little girl in the 1930s. She moved with Walter to Tucson in 1979. They founded the museum to share their massive collection with others. The idea of the "mini time machine" was born out of the idea that visitors can be transported to different times and places by the stories and history behind the figures in each collection. The exhibits are massive, with art on the tip of a pencil to Americana depicted in miniatures. There is also an exhibit honoring the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$8 for children (4 to 17) and \$14 for adults.

Reid Park Zoo

3400 E. Zoo Court, Tucson

520-791-3204

www.reidparkzoo.org

Visit the baby giraffe at the Reid Park Zoo. More than 500,000 Reid Park Zoo visitors annually see 250 species of animals from elephants to jaguars, flamingos and rhinos. Guests can get up close and personal with giraffe feedings, ride the zoo train or carousel, and see zookeeper demonstrations. The zoo is open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$6.50 for ages 2 to 14, \$8.50 for ages 62 and older, and \$10.50 for adults ages 15 to 61.

Experience the Best 23 Miles of Mexican Food

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www.visittucson.org

Have a great Tucson-centric meal. Food tells the story of Tucson and it's no secret that the city's Mexican food offerings are a staple. The Tucson City Council designated an area around South Tucson the best 23 miles of Mexican food in the country. The area has more than 50 restaurants and each one has a unique dish. Many of the restaurants have been in Tucson for years, including 42-year-old Birrieria Guadalajara. The largest concentration of restaurants is along 12th Avenue.

Saguaro National Park

www.nps.gov/sagu/index.htm

Take a hike. The Saguaro cactus is one of the symbols of the American West, especially in Arizona. The park stretches across 92,867 acres. This National Park is full of them and sits near five mountain ranges with the Santa Catalina, Tortolita, Santa Rita, Tucson and Rincon Mountain ranges. The park is divided into two districts: The Rincon Mountain District, to the east of Downtown, and the Tucson Mountain District, to the west of Downtown each with its own visitor center. Don't want to hike? Try the Cactus Forest Scenic Loop Drive. Visitors recommend the Tucson Mountain side due to the beautiful sunsets. The park is open every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but those hours change to 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the summer. It is \$25 to park a vehicle, but it is \$15 if you walk or bike into the area.

Trail Dust Town

6541 E. Tanque Verde Road, Tucson

www.traildusttown.com

Take in a Wild West Show. Built in 1961, Trail Dust Town has become a Tucson favorite. It has two restaurants: Pinnacle Peak Steakhouse and Millie's Pancake Haus. Don't wear a tie to Pinnacle Peak, as the staff will cut it off. The Pistoleros Wild West Show performs at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. Friday to Sunday. Other activities include train rides through the Old West, on the Ferris wheel or carousel, and pan for gold, all for \$3. The shooting gallery is 50 cents per round. Shoppers rejoice! Check the souvenir, toy and chocolate shops. The town is a favorite among the Tucson community and operates mostly between Thursday and Sunday.

Visit the DeGrazia Gallery in the Sun

6300 N. Swan Road, Tucson

520-299-9191

www.degrazia.org

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See a thing of beauty. A work of art and beauty, the DeGrazia Gallery was the 10-acre retreat of the late artist Ettore "Ted" DeGrazia. The home has six permanent collections, and 15,000 pieces of rotating works. The Mission of the Sun is also on the property, an open-roof building constructed that has rock floors, wall murals, and made with adobe bricks that were forged on-site by DeGrazia. Guests can learn more about DeGrazia via a short film. Admission is \$8 for adults, \$5 for ages 12 to 18, and free for those younger than 11.

Visit Historic Fourth Avenue

<https://fourthavenue.org>

Get hip. Fourth Avenue is filled with locally owned and operated energetic businesses, restaurants and bars. Even the Dairy Queen has a local proprietor. Caruso's, an Italian restaurant, is the oldest restaurant on the street, having been established in 1938. The food choices range from Mexican at Boca, where tacos reign supreme, to burgers at Lindy's on 4th, and sandwiches at Bison Witches Bar & Deli. It is also home to Tucson's oldest bar, the Buffet Bar, which has been open since 1934. O'Malley's and the Hut are popular bars that both call Fourth Avenue home. Shopping is fun with clothing boutiques and antique and collector shops. Fourth Avenue hosts events throughout the year, most notably the spring and winter Fourth Avenue Street Fairs.

Experience the Tucson Food Tours

www.tucsonfoodtours.com

Explore the city's food scene. This experience was founded in 2012 by Tucson couple Bradner and Maria Lawrence after years of being asked, "What is there to do in Tucson?" There are three tours: Downtown, Main Gate/Fourth Avenue and Brewery Tour. Guests on the Downtown Tour will see a taxicab hub and a funeral parlor that were turned into restaurants and the country's longest continuously running Mexican restaurant. The four-hour tours start at 11 a.m. The Main Gate/Fourth Avenue Tour is similar but features five restaurants. The Brewery Tour focuses on beer flights and spirits, and patrons must be 21 or older. The food tours are \$69, while the Brewery Tour is \$85, with each one serving up to 12 people. Book tours online; starting points are revealed in a confirmation email.

Attend the UA Women's Basketball Game

1721 E. Enke Drive

www.arizonawildcats.com

Cheer on the Wildcats! Tucson is a basketball city and, thanks to head coach Adia Barnes, the women's games are marquee events. At 6 p.m. Feb. 29, UA will take on USC. With this game, the biggest story is how the Wildcats will defend the Trojans more specifically Juju Watkins, who is the top-ranked freshman coming into this season. Tickets start at \$14.

Tour Colossal Cave Mountain Park

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16721 E. Old Spanish Trail, Vail

www.colossalcave.com

Go deep. Colossal Cave Mountain Park was discovered in 1879 by the rancher Solomon Lick. Today, the cave is a huge tourist attraction with modern stairs and lights. Visitors have four tour options: classic cave, ladder, lantern and wild cave. The classic cave guided tour is almost an hour long and travels down six stories. Guests will learn about the cave's history, on top of some of the lore and myths surrounding it. The more adventurous ladder tour is 90 minutes of navigating through the tunnels on rock bridges and narrow pathways and one-time restricted areas. The lantern and classic tours are similar, as everyone receives a hurricane LED lamp, which shows the cave in a whole new light. The wild cave tour features unmarked areas of the cave. The park is over 2,400 acres and offers hiking and biking trails outside of it. Tours start at \$24. The cave's hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Feb. 29.

Curator's Talk at Tohono Chul

7366 N. Paseo Del Norte, Tucson

Learn about Lesch. Founded in 1966, the 49-acre is peppered with themed gardens, from the Hummingbird Garden to the Desert Oasis. The Alice Y. Holsclaw Performance Garden is used for concerts and lectures. The Bank of America Children's Garden also offers a creative and learning opportunities, like floating wooden boat down the stream or playing the xylophone wind chimes. There is also a revolving door of art exhibits that call Tohono Chul home. When it comes to shopping, there is a retail greenhouse and two other stores, where visitors can purchase art, books, food and antique items like jewelry and pottery. But from 10 to 11 a.m. Feb. 29, there's a curator's talk about William Lesch with James Schaub, Tohono Chul director of arts and engagement. The talk is free with admission, which starts at \$15, with discounts for children and seniors.

Experience Arizona Zipline Adventures

35406 S. Mount Lemmon Road, Oracle

www.ziparizona.com

Get your adrenaline on. Arizona Zipline Adventures has plenty of spots open on Feb. 29 for its zip-line ecotour. (The sunset zip-line experience is unavailable.) The five zip lines range from 400 to 1,500 feet. If you're not a nervous zip liner, there are ways to nourish yourself at the Peppersauce Kitchen, which is known for its burgers. The AZA General Store offers local goods and tourist items. The prices vary, with an average starting price of \$84, with discounts for children, seniors and military.

Hotel Congress

311 E. Congress Street

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www.hotelcongress.com

See a concert. The Historic Hotel Congress will be jumping on Feb. 29. The Century Room hosts Pete Swan Presents: Matt Wigler Band – A Blues Journey, while the spacious Club Congress sees Pittsburgh-born the Undercover Dream Lovers. Every Thursday, Club Congress also offers \$4 well drink specials, after the 7 p.m. main performance. There are five restaurants/bars offered on property, too. Indulge.

The Gaslight Theatre

7010 E. Broadway Boulevard

www.gaslighttheatre.com

Have a laugh. "Curse of the Pirates Gold" hits the stage on Feb. 29. Romance meets adventure as the buccaneers search the Spanish Main for the lost pirate's treasure. Tickets start at \$27, with discounts for children, seniors, students and the military.

Visit Sabino Canyon

5700 N. Sabino Canyon Road

www.fs.usda.gov

Take a few photos. Picturesque Sabino Canyon has 30 miles of hiking trails, opportunities to see bobcats or Gila monsters, and rides on the Sabino Canyon Crawler. The visitors center gives a little background and houses a bookstore with maps, gifts and souvenirs. The Visitor Center hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Parking is \$8 a day, and the shuttle is \$15 for adults and \$8 for children (ages 3 to 12).

Visit the Tucson Museum of Art

150 N. Main Avenue

www.tucsonmuseumofart.org

Take in the art. The Tucson Museum of Art is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. A plethora of exhibits dabble in American West, Asian, European, Latin and Indigenous art. Take a guided tour and experience the collections and galleries. Stop for a bite to eat and grab a souvenir during the visit. The museum is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays. General admission is \$15, with discounts for seniors and military.

Visit the MSA Annex

267 S. Avenida del Convento

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Shop quirky stores. An expansion of the Mercado San Augustin district, the MSA Annex is one of the more interesting shopping centers in Tucson. The businesses design, home goods, clothing shops and restaurants are housed in converted shipping containers.

Experience a Tucson Bike Tour

215 N. Hoff Avenue, Suite 101

Head out on a bike tour. Feb. 29 is available for all three tours: historic city, mural and taco bike tours, all of which vary length and duration. The company offers Civia Lowry bikes, which are perfect for cruising around a city like Tucson. Prices start at \$55.

Experience Cirque du Soleil "Crystal"

260 S. Church Avenue

www.ticketmaster.com

Get iced! Cirque du Soleil begins its run of "Crystal" on Feb. 29 at Tucson Arena. (It runs through March 3. So, if Feb. 29 is out of the question, we'll give you a pass.) Performed entirely on ice, "Crystal" is the story of a runaway who falls through the ice of a pond and travels to a world shaped by her imagination. It combines the amazing acrobats with the speed and skill of skating. Showtime is 7:30 p.m. Thursday; tickets start at \$50.

Visit the Tucson Botanical Gardens

2150 N. Alvernon Way

www.tucsonbotanical.org

Stroll through the gardens. Founded in 1964 by horticulturist Harrison G. Yocum, the 5.5-acre Tucson Botanical Gardens are worth a visit anytime. See roses, herbs, cactus, irises and plants used by the Tohono O'odham people. At Butterfly Magic, guests can see 30 to 50 species of the insect some of whom even land on visitors. Photography is allowed. Shopping and eat are keys here, too. Porter's Patio Cafe serves breakfast or lunch, and afterward, peruse the gift and garden shop. It is open 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. seven days a week, and Butterfly Magic is open 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. every day, too. Tickets start at \$19, with discounts for children, students, seniors and military.

Visit Sentinel Peak ("A" Mountain)

1001 S. Sentinel Peak Road

Get a 360-degree view of Tucson. "A" Mountain has been a signifier of the school since 1915, when UA students built the iconic letter on it. Its peak reaches 2,900 feet and sees hundreds of people walk, bike and drive on Sentinel Peak Road. The area is free to visit. Vehicles are allowed on Thursdays from 2 p.m. to sunset.

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Experience Tucson Adventure Rentals

3797 S. Kolb Road

www.tucsonadventurerentals.com

Get crazy. Tucson Adventure Rentals is just what it sounds like. Customers can rent Polaris ATVs like RZR's to take into the Sonoran Desert. Guided tours are available. The Polaris Slingshot is road permissible. Prices vary by vehicle and adventure, starting with the Sonoran Desert four-hour jaunt at \$285. Slingshot rentals start at \$150 for three hours and can climb to \$1,000 for a full seven days.

Visit the Yume Japanese Gardens

2130 N. Alvernon Way

Learn about other cultures. The Yuma Japanese Gardens is the living expression of an ancient Japanese heritage, conceived with a unique vision and a sensitive healing purpose. The landmark was conceived and designed by the founder and executive director, Patricia Deridder, who is from Belgium, in 2013. She wanted to show her appreciation of Japan and share it with others. Hours on Feb. 29 are 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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