

Seeking the mystery of Sedona's vortexes

By JOSEPH GEDEON
Associated Press

SEDONA, Ariz. — I suppose I shouldn't have taken the parking attendant's advice so literally.

"You'll know it when you feel it," he had told me when I asked where I'd find the vortex.

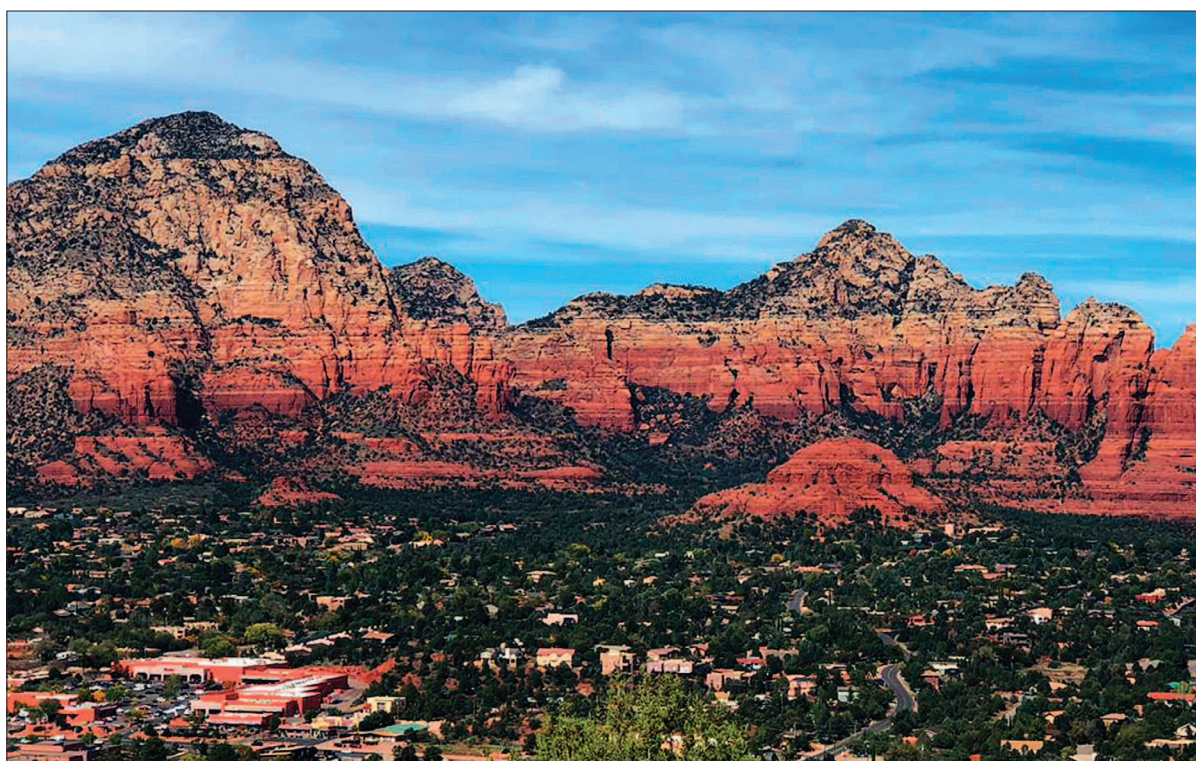
I had traveled to Sedona for a weekend to see if I would experience what many visitors come here to find: a static in the air, the "vortex."

Inside a steep, coral-colored canyon decorated with pine trees, this sleepy Arizona city has long been a quiet refuge for hikers, romantics and soul searchers. For many, it's a place of mystique and magic.

Walking past its earth-toned grocery stores, banks and restaurants, you'll find that Sedona's tourists and locals go into many of the same places. So much so that residents seem like former tourists themselves.

Crystal and incense shops sit prominently between visitor centers with pushy timeshare salesmen. Jeep tours that carry you to majestic points around the city — which is set amid glowing red rocks — bring convenience and modernity to what could otherwise be a still from an old Western. And the view is also picturesque from every hotel, bed and breakfast, and residential building.

To preserve its beauty, this city of just over 10,000 people has a strict building code and zoning laws: Structures can't grow too high, and must be colored in hues that complement the natural tones of the red rocks. Even the famed



The town of Sedona, Ariz., seen from the Airport Mesa Loop Trail. From left to right are Thunder Mountain, Sugar Loaf and Coffee Pot Rock.

golden arches at McDonald's are turquoise here, to enhance the desert's natural beauty.

But many visitors to Sedona come looking for something in addition to this beauty. Native American legend recounts a spot where the earth's energy is supposedly concentrated and crackling. Where you can experience a range of sensations that encourage self-healing and spiritual awakening. The vortex.

The supposed healing power of vortexes gained popularity during the late 20th century. In 1987, some

5,000 believers flocked to Sedona for what became known as the Harmonic Convergence. The event began as an interpretation of the Mayan calendar; tens of thousands of people around the world gathered around spiritual centers for meditation to protect the Earth from spinning away into space.

While praying for a global awakening, many of those who came to Sedona developed a feeling of deep, astral connection to the red rock formations. Word of Sedona's mysterious vortexes began to spread.

There are many trails through the rocks around Sedona that guide you to these coveted locations. On my recent visit, we chose to try the Airport Mesa Loop. While more strenuous than some, it's a great hike if you are looking for exercise and a spectacular view of town. Pack light in everything but water, as there is not much shade and some steep drops.

As the trail ascends, there are panoramic views of Elephant Rock, Courthouse Butte, Bell Rock and Cathedral Rock — Sedona's most visited landmarks. The trail circles

around two sides of the mountain, marked by a difference in both plant life and geological formations. Once you near the end, it becomes hard to believe you are on the same path.

Because of the trail's popularity, two parking lots are accessible to visitors. While the one lower down the mountain is closer to the official entrance of the trail, its small size made it too difficult to park in the afternoon. We drove to the very top of the Airport Mesa and took in views of the city before the parking attendant pointed us to a spot past a fence near the road, where we hiked down a mile-long trail that forked at the entrance of the Airport Mesa Loop.

Every few steps of the roughly 3.3-mile-long trail encourage you to give in to the natural setting. A heightened feeling — tingling fingers and velvet in the air — distracted me from the multiplying hikers and marriage proposals.

We walked for hours, and we felt a lot — aches, pain, wonder.

And it was only after we completed the loop and came back to the starting point of the trail when we discovered the vortex. Standing atop the mini-mesa elicited a more intense feeling than the one I had already felt in town. Red rock vistas transform to soaring pillars, as if you're inside a gothic cathedral. It's something that the New Age faithful preach about and even skeptics might buy into.

Once you wake up from your trance, you'll notice tourists and locals basking in the same feeling. It's a Sedona moment that can't be replicated.

Food bloggers bring Africa's rich cuisines to the world



AP Photo/Amelia Nierenberg

Filmmaker Tuleka Prah films chef Touty Sarr as she prepares a plate of thiebou dieune, a traditional Senegalese dish of spiced rice, inside a kitchen in Ngaparou, Senegal.

By AMELIA NIERENBERG
Associated Press

NGAPAROU, Senegal — In the quiet hours before lunch, two women worked side by side in an airy kitchen. One, a chef, cleaned fresh red snapper filets with a sharp knife. The other, a filmmaker, pointed her camera into a large pot of simmering vegetables.

"What would you say this is, low heat or medium?" Tuleka Prah asked, setting the camera aside.

Her pen poised over a lime green notebook, the 37-year-old Prah waited for the next step in the recipe for thiebou dieune, a traditional Senegalese dish of spiced rice, tender vegetables and fish. She came to this West African nation to document its four most popular dishes as part of My African Food Map, a

blog and film archive.

"Low heat," said 38-year-old Touty Sarr, who runs the kitchen of a popular cafe in Dakar. She turned to her daughter, who was watching her cook. "This one, if you put it on high, it would all get dry. That's one of the secrets."

Senegal was Prah's fifth destination since her project began in 2012. She hopes to show the care and skill that goes into African dishes, such as South Africa's fried dough amagwinya and Kenya's kachumbari, an onion and tomato salad.

"The idea, at its most basic, is to present the food how people who love it would prepare it," Prah said. "It's like a database or a digital vault where people can open the drawer, see recipes, see some ingredients."

Born in England to a Ghanaian father and a South African mother, she lived in six African countries during her childhood including Namibia, Kenya and what is now South Sudan. After finding no reliable recipes online for Ghanaian dishes — and no photos that made the beloved food look appetizing — she started My African Food Map.

She celebrates the cuisines of a continent often marred by negative stereotypes.

"Africa is often associated with poverty, with hunger, with failures of food in a political and nutritional sense," said James C. McCann, chair of the history department at Boston University and a specialist in African environmental history and cuisine. "It's an area of the world that has not been covered by the food craze."

AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

Morning buns combine richness of croissant with cinnamon bun



America's Test Kitchen via AP

Morning Buns as they appear in the cookbook "All-Time Best Brunch."

By AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN

Combine the rich layers of a croissant with the sweet swirls of a cinnamon bun and you'll have one of our favorite brunch pastries: morning buns.

For a simpler route to a yeasted, croissant-like pastry, we added a packet of yeast to a quick

puff pastry dough. We created long, thin pieces of flake-producing butter by adding chilled butter to the dry ingredients in a zipper-lock bag and rolling over it with a rolling pin. Orange zest and juice offered sweet, citrusy brightness.

We started our rolls in a hot oven for a rapid rise but later

dropped the temperature to impart gradual, even browning. If the dough becomes too soft to work with at any point, refrigerate it until it's firm enough to easily handle. Unrisen buns can be refrigerated for at least 16 hours or up to 24 hours; let buns sit at room temperature for 1 hour before baking.

MORNING BUNS

Servings: 12

Start to finish: 1 hour, 30 minutes (not including 1 hour, 15 minutes to 1 hour, 45 minutes freezing and rising time)

Dough:

3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

2 1/4 teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast

3/4 teaspoon salt

24 tablespoons (3 sticks) unsalted butter, cut into 1/4 inch slices and chilled

1 cup sour cream, chilled

1/4 cup orange juice, chilled

3 tablespoons ice water

1 large egg yolk

Filling:

1/2 cup (3 1/2 ounces) granulated sugar

1/2 cup packed (3 1/2 ounces) light brown sugar

1 tablespoon grated orange zest

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the dough: Combine flour, sugar, yeast, and salt in 1 gallon zipper-lock bag. Add butter to bag, seal, and shake to coat. Press air out of bag and reseal. Roll over bag several times with rolling pin, shaking bag after each roll, until butter is pressed into large flakes.

Transfer mixture to large bowl and stir in sour cream, orange juice, ice water, and egg yolk with wooden spoon until combined. Transfer dough to lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form smooth, round ball, about 30 seconds.

Press and roll dough into 20 by 12 inch rectangle, with short

side parallel to counter edge. Roll dough away from you into firm cylinder, keeping roll taut by tucking it under itself as you go.

With seam side down, flatten cylinder into 12-by-4 inch rectangle. Transfer to parchment paper-lined rimmed baking sheet, cover loosely with greased plastic wrap, and freeze for 15 minutes.

For the filling: Line 12 cup muffin tin with paper or foil liners and spray with vegetable oil spray. Combine all ingredients in bowl. Transfer dough to lightly floured counter and roll into 20-by-12 inch rectangle, with long side parallel to counter edge. Sprinkle with sugar mixture, leaving 1/2 inch border around edges, and press lightly to adhere.

Roll dough away from you into firm cylinder, keeping roll taut by tucking it under itself as you go. Pinch seam closed, then reshape cylinder as needed to be 20 inches in length with uniform thickness.

Using serrated knife, trim 1/2 inch dough from each end and discard. Cut cylinder into 12 pieces and place cut side up in muffin cups. Cover loosely with greased plastic and let rise until doubled in size, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

Adjust oven heat to middle position and heat oven to 425 F. Bake until buns begin to rise, about 5 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 325 F. Continue to bake until buns are deep golden brown, 40 to 50 minutes, rotating muffin tin halfway through baking. Let buns cool in muffin tin for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack and discard liners. Serve warm.