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## Vietnam's Floating Fish Shop

The adventure of a lunchtime on the South China Sea.

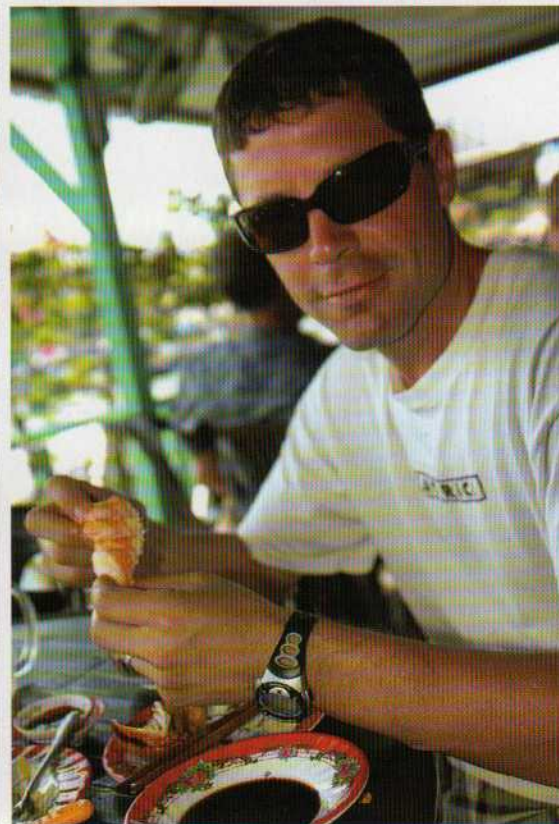
PLAYING TRAVEL AGENT has long been a favorite role of mine when planning a trip. My goal: to find experiences far from big, organized tour groups. So when my husband and I were in Nha Trang, Vietnam, on the South China Sea, I knew we needed to find our way to a tiny fishing village called Ba Mieu. It was there, I'd discovered in my chat-room research, that hungry boaters pull up to a floating dock to select a still-swimming lunch for preparation at an onshore restaurant.

We drove our hired speedboat to Ba Mieu after a morning of snorkeling. The dock was little more than a series of narrow wooden walkways surrounded by open water. In the center, big, clear-eyed fish swam in circles, trapped by submerged nets. We were drawn to colorful crustaceans in varying shades of blue and burnt red—especially the large blue clawless lobsters. But heeding the advice we got from a proud fisherman, we put aside our American “bigger is better” mentality and chose the smaller lobsters that appeared to have no legs at all. They looked like

nothing more than prehistoric tails with paddles—caricatures of a shellfish lover's dream.

Before we could eat, however, we faced another choice: how to get to the restaurant. The safer route was the hand-pulled “ferry”—a small floating dock that two locals pulled to shore with a rope. We opted for the more adventurous option and hopped into a round, woven boat that was paddled to shore by women who, despite the near 100-degree heat, wore conical hats, gloves, and long sleeves.

We grabbed a table at the busiest of the three restaurants and, with cold cans of Tiger Beer in hand, waited and watched as one woman scaled, cracked, and cleaned a variety of sea life for a large Vietnamese party using nothing more than a cutting board, mallet, and cleaver. At last, our meal arrived with all the accoutrements. We prepared a dipping paste from black pepper, salt, and fresh lime and dug in. The meal didn't disappoint—those little lobsters are really all tail. —STEFANIE MICHEJDA





## Geeky Tucson

Mad science thrives in the dry desert air.

By Sam Scholes

**Deserts are lonely, inhospitable places.** But the lack of humans is precisely what makes them ideal locales for science and experimentation. So when you think of Tucson, Ariz., don't just think of a barren landscape; think missile silos, airplane junkyards, stargazing scientists, and prototype space stations. Think geek heaven.

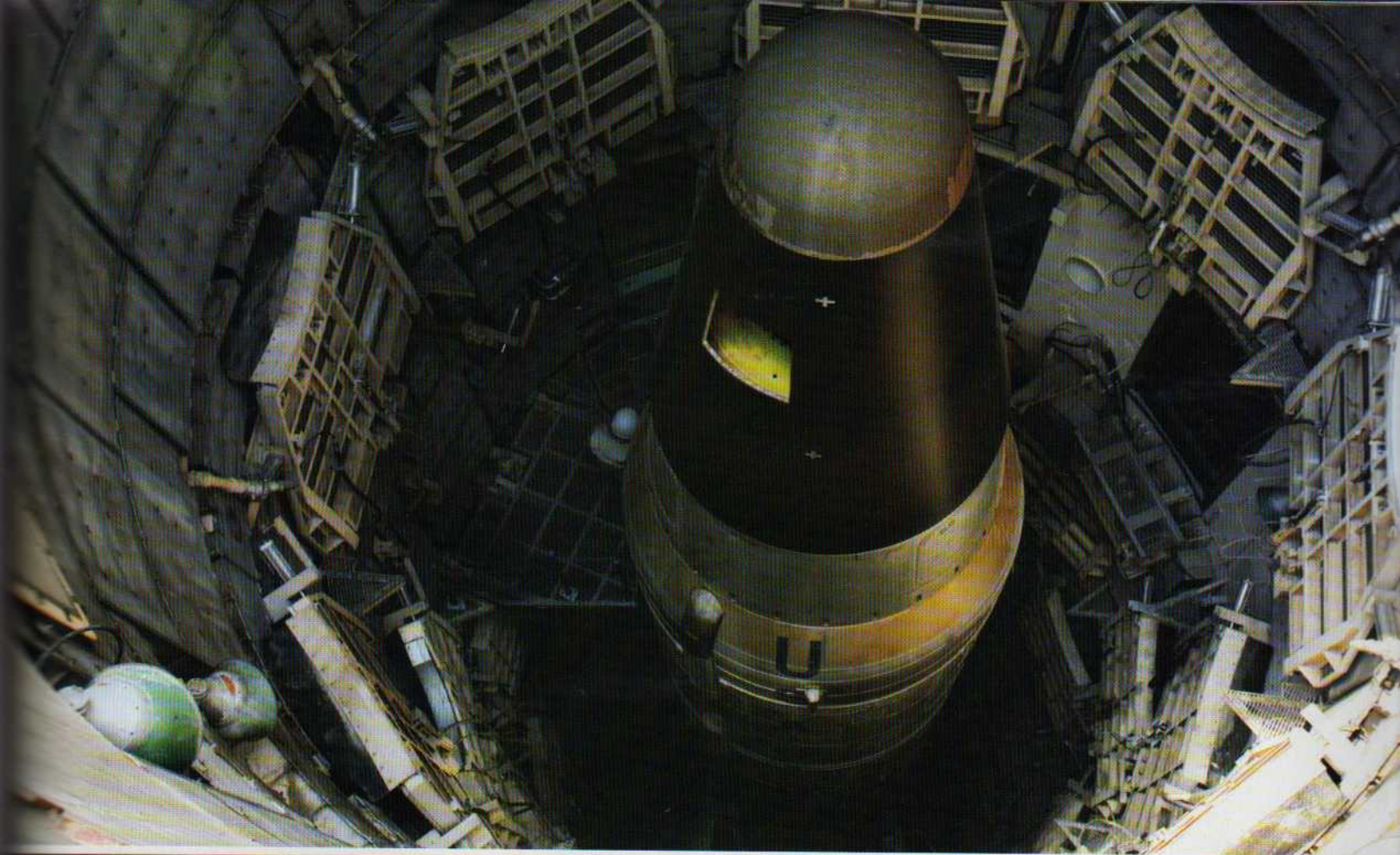
Start just south of Tucson, in the area known as Green Valley. There you'll find the Titan Missile Museum, home to the only remaining Titan II missile silo in the country. This was just one of 54 Titan II ICBM complexes built during the Cold War; there were 18 in Tucson alone. Each silo contained a nuclear-tipped missile that was hundreds of times more destructive than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The Titan Museum offers guided tours detailing the history and operation of ICBM bases, but the highlight lies more than 100 feet underground, through a locked gate and a three-foot-thick blast door: the missile control room. Inside, the guide selects someone to act as commander and turn the key that would have initiated a missile launch. It's fascinating—and chilling.

Tucson's desert climate is ideal for long-term aircraft storage, which is why the city is home to the massive aircraft graveyard at

### Flight Canceled

Aircraft in storage at AMARG and surrounding scrapyards.





the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group (AMARG) facility on the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. AMARG is a favorite backdrop for filmmakers and music video directors, and no wonder: On 2,600 acres of desert land, roughly 4,400 out-of-service aircraft from the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines are stored in endless rows lined up wingtip to wingtip in the hot, dry air. It's essentially a junkyard, but the aircraft housed at AMARG have a combined original purchase price of over \$34 billion, making it probably the most expensive junkyard in the world. To get inside, you have to take the tour that departs from the nearby Pima Air and Space Museum. To get an even closer perspective, visit some of the airplane scrapyards clustered along Kolb Road and AMARG's southern boundary—these are where the old planes

go to die, and if you ask nicely, the undertakers may let you wander around.

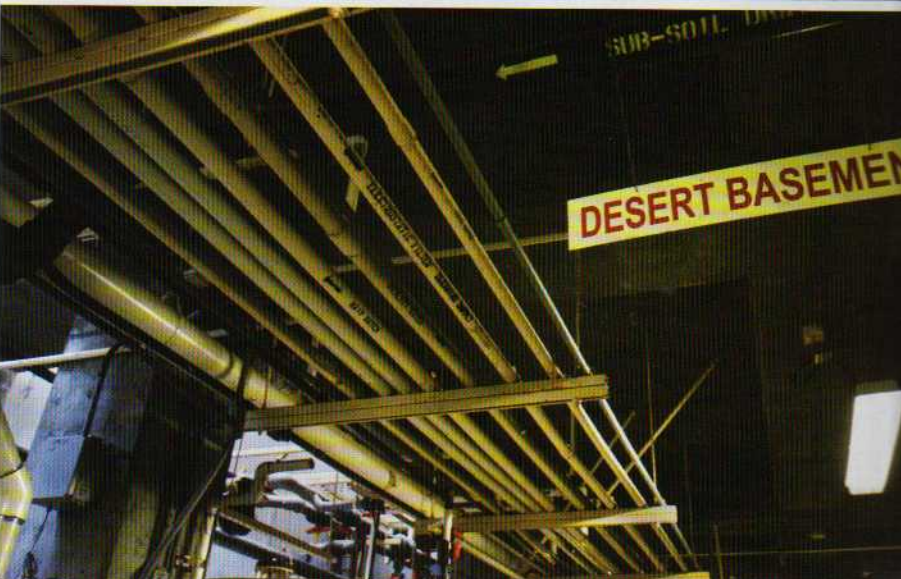
Stargazers flock to Tucson for the clear night skies and lack of light pollution. They cluster at the Kitt Peak National Observatory, which boasts the world's most diverse collection of astronomical telescopes. Kitt Peak is also famous for hosting the first telescope used to search for near-Earth asteroids and for calculating the probability that one of them might collide with Earth. Informative daily tours explore the observatory's most popular telescopes, including the Mayall four-meter telescope, with its beautiful 360-degree view of the surrounding landscape.

While Kitt Peak's telescopes observe far-off galaxies, another Tucson facility focuses on scientific problems closer to home. Thirty miles north of Tucson lies

#### Standing Down

A retired ICBM and the control room at the Titan Museum.

an ambitious project known simply as Biosphere 2. Opened in 1991, this engineering marvel was intended to be a closed ecosystem for modeling the earth's environment, with an eye toward creating life-supporting habitats for space colonization. In practice, however, after researchers sealed themselves inside the 3.15-acre space, scientific and personal disputes marred the effort, which ended in ignominy. But science's loss is tourism's gain. Today, while the University of Arizona continues to do onsite research, Biosphere 2 is open to the public. Daily tours explore the building's unique biomes, which include a tropical savanna, a 900,000-gallon ocean with coral reef, a mangrove forest, and a fog desert. For serious geeks, no less fascinating are the underground mechanical systems that control Biosphere 2. In a way, it's like Tucson as a whole: The appeal isn't obvious at first glance, but the deeper you explore, the more intriguing the place becomes.



#### Lost in Space

Biosphere 2 was a prototype habitat for space colonization.

### BLOGS TO READ

#### AMARC EXPERIENCE

A detailed overview and resource directory for Tucson's famous airplane graveyards.  
[amarcxperience.com](http://amarcxperience.com)

#### THE FIREFLY FOREST

An excellent nature guide and photo gallery documenting the flora and fauna of Southern Arizona.  
[fireflyforest.net/firefly](http://fireflyforest.net/firefly)

#### TUCSON QUERIDO

In Spanish, *querido* is a term of endearment, sort of like "darling." This blog talks about the influence of Mexican culture throughout greater Tucson.  
[tucsonquerido.com](http://tucsonquerido.com)

#### TUCSON SCENE

Southern Arizona is home to some great music, so if you're looking for some good nightlife, this is the site to find it.  
[tucsonscene.com](http://tucsonscene.com)