

# Colossal weekend by Tyson Hugie

“We’ll leave the light on for you.” So says the famous Motel 6 slogan. And I love Motel 6—for the most part. Accommodations are predictable, inexpensive, and (usually) liveable. But my friends and I showed up at a hotel earlier this year that not only didn’t leave a light on for us, it left us out on the street with the front door locked.

The time was about 7:30 pm, and we had just pulled up—tired and ready to settle in—after a 3.5-hour drive from the Phoenix area. We were standing at the door to the historic 1902 Hotel San Ramon in teeny Bisbee, Arizona, just 9 miles north of the Mexican border. And there was nobody there to let us in.

I dialed the phone number written on a piece of paper taped to the glass window in the door. “Welcome to Verizon Wireless. Your call cannot be completed at this time.” I tried again and got the same message. I looked at my road trip partners, Armando and Chris, with a bit of desperation. I already knew that vacancy was limited all over this little town of 5,000 people on a holiday weekend, and the chances of finding a backup plan were slim. Would we end up driving 50 miles to Benson to find a place to stay?

As a last ditch effort, I walked next door to

a Mexican restaurant called Santiago’s. “By chance do you know the keypad code to get into the hotel next door?” I asked the hostess. The girl disappeared behind a dividing wall and returned with a woman who was already on her cell phone trying to come to our rescue. Luckily, the two were able to get in touch with the hotel proprietor and find out our 4-digit entry code.

Moments later, we were lugging our bags up a flight of stairs to room 6. The hotel, as it turns out, only has six rooms in total. Aside from the check-in experience, everything else about San Ramon was positively charming. Our room was unlocked when we found it, with two keys on the dresser. Two small Valentine’s Day goody bags were on top, with a few chocolates, and silk rose petals were scattered on the floor. Eat that, Motel 6!

At about 450 miles, this overnight weekend trip was an opportunity to introduce two visiting friends to the sights, sounds and tastes of Arizona. After a delicious dinner at Santiago’s, Armando and I explored the night life for a little bit, while Chris decided to hit the sack.

Just steps away from the front door of San Ramon was the Stock Exchange Saloon. Its double doors and neon sign beckoned, so

Armando and I went over to check it out. This building, dating back to 1905, once housed a stock brokerage firm called Duey and Overlock. According to the employee behind the counter, who was born and raised in Bisbee, this was the only branch of the New York Stock Exchange outside of New York at the time. Today, the venue retains some of the original elements from those days, including its original tally board along the back wall, under plexiglass. Armando and I cued up a few hits on the jukebox, including “Walkin’ on Sunshine,” before calling it a night.

On Monday morning, I rolled open the wooden windows of the second floor hotel room and admired the perfect weather outside. It was President’s Day, and we departed the San Ramon to drive over for breakfast at Bisbee Breakfast Club (BBC), a mile and a half away in historic Lowell. If the streets of Bisbee were a snapshot of the 1880s, then Lowell moved us forward about 80 years to the 1960s. The entire main street was lined with classic cars, varying in condition from scrap heap to show-ready. We stepped inside and feasted on chiles rellenos.

The rest of our morning was filled with sights and sounds of the American Wild West. We stopped just briefly in Naco, Arizona, at the Mexican border—but not too close, as none of us had our passports handy, and we

didn’t want to chance an “accidental” international border crossing. On the way there, we saw more evidence of the mining industry that attracted settlers to the area in the first place. Bisbee’s strong heritage as a copper and gold mining town lives on, and I will surely be going back for a tour of the mine soon. The Queen Mine Tour runs \$13 for adults, and reservations via phone are required.

I knew we had a 1:00 pm cave tour to get to near Tucson, so by about 11:00 am, we said our farewells to Bisbee and headed out. Our last stop on the trip was to a large underground cave about 20 miles east of Tucson in Vail. Our talkative tour guide stretched a 45-minute walking tour (covering roughly a half mile and almost 400 steps) into about an hour and 15 minutes. Colossal is a “dry” cave that was inhabited up until about 1450 AD by the native Indian tribes. It was later discovered by a man named Solomon Lick in 1879, while he was looking for stray cattle. The Civilian Conservation Corps constructed a series of hiker-friendly pathways inside the cave, which continue to be used on today’s \$16 basic cave tour. Adventure-seekers will be pleased to know that there are other more involved hikes involving ladders and crawling through tight spaces, for those who want to pay a little extra.

We enjoyed having experienced some more of what Arizona has to offer, but were surely glad to surface for daylight at the conclusion of our tour. ■

