

TRAVEL PAGE



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Arizona's Valley of the Sun

by Pete McGarvey

People go home from Arizona's 'Valley of the Sun' aglow with warm memories. I will always remember it as a place I broke bread with General Alexander Haig!

The location was John Gardiner's swank Tennis Ranch, perched on the Camelback in Scottsdale. Here the rich and famous gather to do something serious about their volleys, overheads and forehands. The setting is clinic-like and their instructors are simply the world's best tennis pros. Between court times, the perspiring patrons nibble on the finest victuals available in the American southwest and bed down in luxury condos built on the hillside behind the courts.

I had landed-in for lunch on a January day of broken clouds and sunbursts, which are apparently rare in the valley. I found a table and cast my eye towards the groaning buffet board. Rain rattled against the windows and, suddenly, a score of guests burst through the patio door, calling for towels. First and foremost among them was the great man himself, General Alexander Haig ... former war commander, former Secretary of State and former rival to George Bush for the

presidential nomination. Cathy Green, the resort's director of sales and my hostess at lunch told me Haig was a regular guest and was here for a celebrity tournament to raise funds for cancer research.

Could I snap a picture or two? Maybe tape an interview?

"Not a prayer," Cathy explained. The celebs were available to the media at set times and places but the dining room offered them refuge and privacy from the press.

Oh well ... there was still the buffet to enjoy. A minute later I was moving along the table, feasting my eyes on treasures from sea and land and warming up my gastric juices. When I glanced up, there, immediately next to me was Haig. "Some spread, eh?", he said, flashing a bright smile. "You said it," I replied, smiling back. End of encounter.

Scottsdale and the Valley of the Sun have long been the favoured winter playground of the jet set. For openers, it boasts ninety golf courses and over a

thousand tennis courts. But, for the vast majority of the area's seven million annual visitors, sunshine and scenery are the prime attractions. And they cost nothing.

Greater Phoenix sits on the Sonoaran Desert where the sun beams down 86% of the daylight hours with almost no humidity. Visitors priorities are sunbathing, exploring and shopping.

The sun can be enjoyed anywhere, anytime. The sights can be appreciated in any number of ways. Jeep rides take you into the Painted Desert with stops at abandoned gold mines, ghosttowns and alongside the majestic saguaro cacti. Some rides include pistol shooting at the base of a remote canyon. This is your chance to play cowboy where the real cowboys lived and fought. A true highlight is a leisurely horseback ride through the Superstition Mountains, home of the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine.

Old West culture, custom and cuisine, a feeling of undisturbed frontier landscape that overwhelms the sense and the kindest climate in North American (or so the locals boast) make Phoenix and the Valley of the Sun a destination that could quickly become a habit.



photo by Pete McGarvey

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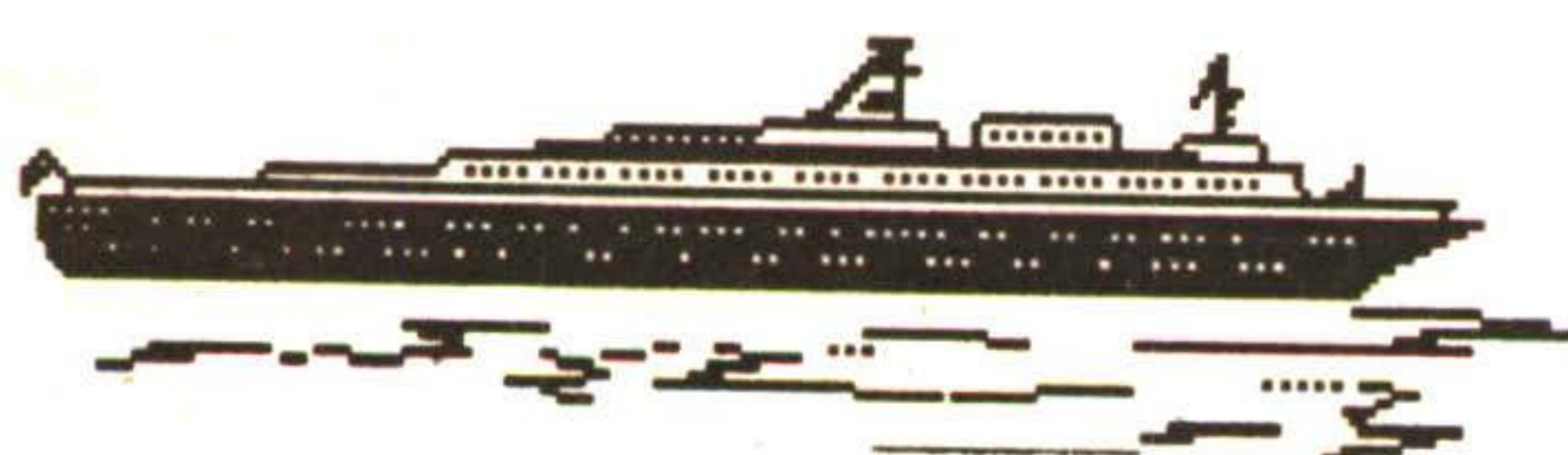
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