

Prescott AZ

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Arizona is a conservative, rural state favored by rugged individualists. Many E.I.s come to Arizona for its dry desert climate. In this article I will describe one Arizona town, giving a comprehensive view including quality of life issues not limited to the environment and chemicals.

Prescott is located in Arizona's central mountains at an elevation of 5,400 feet, 100 miles northwest of Phoenix. It is surrounded by the 1.2 million acre Prescott National Forest, which contains the largest stand of Ponderosa Pine in the world. It is Yavapai County's seat of government and its most populous town with more than 40,000 people, 93 % of which are Caucasian. It's high mountain desert climate means it is generally 20 ° cooler than Phoenix, with an average July high temperature of 89° and a low of 57°, and an average January high of 49° and a low of 19°. The air is dry and the days sunny. July and August usually mark the monsoon season with afternoon thunderstorms, and there is precipitation at other times of the year, but these patterns are now erratic due to the drought.

Even though Prescott is one of the fastest growing areas in Arizona, it still remains a small town in a rural setting that offers very low crime rates and outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, biking, fishing and golfing. It is primarily a retirement town offering volunteer and other services to seniors, a newly expanded library, the largest hospital in north central Arizona, as well as a V.A. Hospital.

The cost of living index is 104.8, which means it is 4.8% higher than the national average. It features one mall with Dillards, Sears, The Gap, and JC Penney; a shopping center with Target, Ross and Home Depot; two Wal-Marts and a Costco. A municipal airport, an aeronautical university and two colleges are also in town. Locally there are two television stations, nine radio stations, and one newspaper.

Prescott began as a mining town in 1863 and was the first capital of the Arizona Territory. It retains its western flavor with rodeos, western art shows, local collections maintained by three museums, and 700 buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. The Yavapai Prescott Indian Reservation is situated in the middle of town and owns various properties including two casinos. Prescott residents voted to ban smoking in bars and restaurants, but this does not apply to reservation owned businesses.

Prescott is part of a quad-city area (Prescott, Chino Valley, Prescott Valley, Dewey-Humboldt) comprising about 100,000 people. Residents of the other three towns regularly come into Prescott to do their shopping. Prescott offers one health food store

which carries a good selection of organic produce and a lesser selection of meats, as well as two vitamin shops, one of which has a Co-op.

There are no E.I. Doctors in town, and no conventional doctors who understand MCS. (multiple chemical sensitivity). There are, however, many naturopaths and chiropractors to choose from, but they have limited experience with E.I. Patients. Their understanding of clean environments is lacking and therefore safe medical offices are hard to come by. To find appropriate medical care one may have to travel to Phoenix, Tucson, or out of state. The town hospital is familiar with MCS and will accommodate special requests.

The public library has a wonderful homebound volunteer program. One can have books delivered at home by a volunteer, and thus avoid the toxicity at the library.

Safe housing is not readily available. Most E.I.s living here have either built their own house, or have cleaned up and detoxified an old house. Problems with old houses include pesticides, termiticides, mold, fragrance and gas heating systems.

One unexpected problem is the spring pollens. Juniper trees are the worst offender due to their preponderance, but there are various other trees and bushes growing at various elevations of the forest and the surrounding landscape. Pollens are spread more easily by dry conditions and winds, both of which are natural to Arizona but made much worse by the ongoing drought of the last dozen years or so. This translates into a much longer spring pollen season than normal, such that one can suffer from allergy symptoms at any time between January and May.

Another problem is the prescribed burns due to the extreme fire danger resulting from the drought. The U.S. Forest Service implemented a program of prescribed burns to reduce fuels in case of wildfires, as well as to prevent them. This means that every year, starting towards the end of summer and all through fall and winter, weather conditions permitting, certain areas of forest are deliberately burned, causing smoke to drift into town. The impact of this varies, depending on location and size of the burn and the direction of the wind. Luckily, E.I.s can sign up to receive telephone notification of upcoming burns and a hot line is available for updates.

In the wintertime, wood smoke from neighbors using fireplaces can be an issue as well. The environmental consciousness of neighbors varies greatly.

In regards to pesticide and herbicide spraying, the town, the county, the Forest Service and Department of Transportation all spray at various times and locations. Hot lines are available for this information.

There is no established MCS support group or newsletter at present. For those desiring connection, there is an extremely loose network, which may or may not work for everyone. For those needing additional assistance or help, there are various organizations designed primarily to assist seniors and the disabled, which may be able to offer help. For E.I.s who are relatively healthy and able to drive, access to Phoenix metropolitan area allows for a more rounded experience. For those who are ill and unable to drive, living in Prescott can be a challenge.

I interviewed several E.I. Prescott residents and now list all positive and negative aspects from their points of view.

Positive:

- good air quality
- good health food store
- other E.I.s
- alternative practitioners
- climate
- small town atmosphere
- outstanding library system
- open spaces
- very good overall place for E.I.s

Negative :

- pollens
- smoke -one resident would not recommend Prescott either to E.I.s or non-E.I.s for this reason
- no E.I. doctors/safe medical offices
- no cohesive community
- no safe housing
- limited access
- not warm enough
- expensive

References

1. Prescott Chamber of Commerce 1-800-266-7534 www.prescott.org
2. Arizona Department of Commerce (602) 771-1100 www.azcommerce.com
3. City of Prescott 1-866-878-CITY www.prescotted.com

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