

Wasson Peak

DISTANCE: 7.7 miles

ELEVATION GAIN: 1900 feet

ROUTE TYPE: Loop

Wasson Peak is the tallest mountain in the Tucson Mountain District of Saguaro National Park. This loop hike travels along ridges with grand desert vistas and through some of the thickest Saguaro forest in Arizona. The top of the mountain has nice views of Tucson, the Santa Catalina Mountains, and beyond!

Getting to the Trailhead

From Phoenix, get on the I-10 heading East toward Tucson. Take exit 236, turn Right onto N Sandario Road, then right onto W Marana Road. Continue on W Marana for 1 mile, then turn left onto N Sanders Road, continue for 4 miles, then turn Left onto W Avra Valley Road. Continue on W Avra Valley for 1 mile, then turn right onto North Sandario Road and continue for 9.1 miles. Following the visitor center sign, turn left onto N Kinney Road and if you haven't paid the entrance fee already, stop at the visitor center after 1.8 miles. Continue another mile beyond the visitor center and turn left to continue on N Kinney Road. Go another 1.1 miles and the dirt parking lot for the King Canyon Trailhead will be on your left.

There is parking for about 15 cars, and the lot fills up in cooler months. The trailhead has a dirt parking lot with no toilets or water, so stop at the visitor's center if either are needed.

Hiking Wasson Peak

From the parking area, start hiking up the broad path. There is a split almost immediately at which you should stay right and continue through a gate after about another 200 feet. The trail is rocky but wide and lined with beautiful ocotillo, prickly pear, and saguaro, of course. Around mile 0.6 there is a ledge on the left that offers a great view up the canyon, toward the peak. After another couple tenths of a mile, the trail starts to go downhill and you'll see a picnic area out to the left. Eventually you'll come to a sandy wash and three-way intersection. Go straight through the intersection on the King Canyon Trail, staying in the sandy wash.

At the 1.0 mile mark is a turn that is very easily missed. The wash forks, and you should stay left, but then immediately turn right up the dividing ridge. There are man-made steps, but they are hidden in the bushes.

Go up the steps and follow the trail through all the beautiful desert plants there to distract you from the steady climb. This stretch continues up to mile 2.2, where you reach a saddle and intersect with the Sweetwater Trail. As the trail sign says, turn left towards the peak. The trail starts to climb the ridge, passing some prickly pear with a sign in front of it that says "Foot Trail Only: No Stock". If you've brought a burro, you'll have to stop here.

The burroless may continue up this ridge of switchbacks, which is the steepest climb of the hike. The trail levels out just under the crest of the ridge, takes two more short switchbacks, and reaches another intersection at the 3.1 mile mark. Turn right at this intersection and follow the final ridge out to the top of Wasson Peak.

From the top you can see all of the Tucson Mountains, the city of Tucson, the Santa Catalina Mountains, the Rincon Mountains, and if you've already hiked Picacho Peak, you should be able to pick out its distinct shape out to the northwest.

To get back to the trailhead, return to the last intersection about 0.3 mile back. From here you can go left and return the way you came, or go right and use the following directions to make it a loop. The loop is about a mile further than doing it as an out-and-back, but you get to see new things!

If you are doing the loop, go right onto the Hugh Norris Trail when you get back to that last intersection near the peak. According to the sign at that intersection, it is the trail in the direction of the Sendero Esperanza Trail. There are some steeper switchbacks at first, then mellows out and passes just south of Amole Peak. Continue following the relatively direct trail, making an occasional short switchback until you reach the intersection with the Sendero Esperanza Trail. Go left at this intersection, following the sign for the Mam-A-Gah Picnic Area.

The trail descends about one mile to the junction with the Gould Mine Trail. Just before the intersection, you'll pass by a covered up mine area and the foundation of an old building. Turn right at the intersection, following the sign towards the King Canyon Trailhead. After a little more than a mile, you'll be back at the trailhead.

