

# Beads from Tucson

Where the world meets for  
beads, stones and jewelry



Floor Kaspers



# Beads from Tucson

Where the world meets for beads, stones  
and jewelry

Floor Kaspers

Author

Floor Kaspers

Panoramic images

Peter van de Wijngaart



Marblings Publishing

ISBN 978-94-91311-01-7

© 2012 by the author of this book Floor Kaspers  
The book author retains sole copyright to her  
contributions to this book





Beads from Tucson



## Contents

In blue: interviews

### 1. Tucson Gem Shows

In Tucson, they pull out all the stops

#### 1.1 History

[Around the globe searching for beads](#)

#### 1.2 Selling at Tucson

##### 1.2.1 Wholesale sellers

##### 1.2.2 Retail sellers

[How can you not love this show?](#)

##### 1.2.3 Designers and artists

[A glass artist on a mission](#)

##### 1.2.4 Collectors and hobbyists

[On the lookout for the unique](#)

### 2. What to buy in Tucson?

#### 2.1 Beads

##### 2.1.1 Trade beads

[This show has everything](#)

##### 2.1.2 Stone beads

[Striped flint from Poland](#)

##### 2.1.3 Pearls

[Carefree in Tucson](#)

##### 2.1.4 Handmade glass beads

[A life of glass](#)

##### 2.1.5 Bulk glass beads

[A family on the road](#)

Left: tables with goods at the show

#### 2.2 Minerals

[Presenting with pride: minerals from Arizona](#)

#### 2.3 Jewelry

[From India to Tucson and back again](#)

#### 2.4 Gemstones

[My heart is in the stones](#)

#### 2.5 Fossils and meteorites

[Ancient fossils from Morocco](#)

#### 2.6 Various craft items

[Traveling the world to get the best](#)

### 3. Tucson as a meeting place

[Minerals from down under](#)

[Beads of courage](#)

### 4. Preparing for the Tucson Gem show

[Get your education here](#)

### 5. Do's and don'ts

[Traveling with 26.000 pounds of beads](#)

### 6. Getting around

[Driving you from show to show](#)

### 7. Resources

[The best tamales in town](#)

[At the fringe of the show](#)

## Introduction

'So you are going all the way to Tucson in Arizona. To go to a show that has beads and other stuff?' Yes, I will go all the way to Tucson from the Netherlands, simply for a show that has beads and other stuff. Tucson during the Gem Shows is a unique place. It is filled with people who are interested in all the things you're interested in. You can see beads and stones that you never knew existed, and then turn around and see even more. You can get baffled by the quality and the sheer quantity of fossils, stones and beads that can be found within a few square miles. You can learn more about the industry by just listening in on the conversations in the shuttles driving you from one show to another, than you can from any book or lecture. You can learn new techniques and get inspired by the greatest jewelry designers and bead collectors. And you can do it all in just a few weeks in the sunny city of Tucson. The Tucson experience is difficult to understand if you have never been there. And for a first-time visitor it can be pretty overwhelming. That is why I wrote this book. For those who want to know what it is all about. For those who are thinking about going for themselves for the first time. And for those who have been coming to the show for years, but may want to experience it through someone else's eyes.

The main part of this book consists of 22 interviews with some of the people who make the Tucson shows so unique. Dealers, buyers, collectors, artists, the shuttle driver and the sellers of tamales in a food stand. I have felt truly privileged to be able to talk to all of these people, and have them share their stories with me. It has taught me so much about the bead, gem and jewelry industry, but has also been inspirational. In the end, what makes the Tucson Gem show so special is not the stones or the beads. It is all the people who go and chase their dream. The people who decided to go into a difficult business, because it is where their heart takes them. The people who are willing to share their passion when the whole world comes to meet in Tucson. And it is to those people, that I dedicate this book.





Erlich Mars Lunar  
Meteorite Moldavit, Z



RESTROOM



JOHN D. OYER

ROOM 53  
MUSEUM

COLORS

GOALS

160-150

WISCONSIN

## 1. The Tucson Shows

"Think of the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show as the Hajj for jewelry and gemstone lovers. Every self-respecting jewelry lover, beader and rock hound should make it a point to make the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime.'

(From: [www.tucson-gem-show.org](http://www.tucson-gem-show.org))

The Tucson Gem show is a misleading name for the huge event that takes place every year for three weeks in Tucson. First of all, it is not all about gems. Second of all, it is not just one show.

Depending on who you ask, and what definition you use, the Tucson gem show consists of between 35 and 50 events that focus around gems, but also beads, fossils, minerals and jewelry. The variety in events and merchandise is huge. On one end you have the high-end show of the American Gem Trade association at the Tucson Convention centre where you can only get in with the right wholesale credentials. You can buy the best cut stones, diamonds and jewelry from top designers here.

At the other end of the spectrum is for example a show on North Oracle Road with nothing more than a handful of booths set up at a parking lot, selling huge Moroccan fossils and mixed minerals and stones. A completely different show again is the Best Bead show, where a lot of glass bead artists sell and show their handmade beads, alongside other crafts and those selling tools for beading. And then there is the African Art Village along the I10, where sellers from Africa sell African trade beads, cloth and wooden sculptures, together with West-African food. Some shows will only sell to the trade, others are open to all. Some shows are open for business 20 days, others only for a weekend.

If you visit only one show in Tucson, you will be amazed at all the beads and stones that are available. If you do what I did and visit 90% of the shows it is fair to say you will have seen pretty much all of the different stones, fossils and beads that are on the world market today.

Left: Dealers trying to attract attention



## **In Tucson, they pull out all the stops**

He has seen his share of bead shows, gives lectures on the history of beads and has been a collector of beads and designer of jewelry for several decades. However, Paul Johnson had never made it to Tucson. Until now, that is. And in short he says: 'Tucson, I love it!'

Paul comes from a small town in the Californian desert, Borrego Springs, home to only a few thousand souls. It is a great place to find beautiful nature, peace and quiet, and great minerals. Paul is an avid mineral collector, with a specific interest in agates. That's not what brings him to Tucson, though. Great stones are best found yourself, so he says. Just picking them up from a stand at a show is not nearly as satisfying as finding your own. 'I like to see where they come from'.

His Tucson trip is geared towards finding great African trade beads, for designing jewelry and as collectors' pieces. Previously, Paul would head towards Quartzsite, the other major show in Arizona for stones and beads. However, when the African sellers

stopped going there, Paul found himself without a good place to shop for trade beads that are beyond the ordinary. A lot of the sellers live in Los Angeles, and their stock can be found there and seen by appointment. Also, some sellers will visit people at home, when they have fresh beads from Africa. It is Tucson though, where they all gather at one time in the year. At the African Art Village, at the Gem Mall (most were previously at the other G&LW Venue at the Rodeway/Grant Inn) and at some of the smaller shows.

Even though Paul knew that the Tucson show was going to be bigger, and have a lot of good African trade beads to choose from, he still says: 'It was overpowering. Some sellers bring stuff here, they will not bring anywhere else. For Tucson, they pull out all the stops'. This is probably the reason that Paul spent his entire bead-buying budget in the first day. And he has some great beads to show for it; beautiful intricate Venetian beads, Bohemian wedding beads with a twist, and a strand of intriguing ancient stone beads with tiny specks of lead stuck to them.

The beads Paul bought in Tucson may find their way into the jewelry that he makes. He will be selling them, alongside raw material, on several shows a year.

From his purchases, it is clear that Paul has an eye for detail and for quality. He has learnt to look at beads up close, and will always bring his magnifying glass to really study the beads' surface and hole. He actually lectures on what you can tell from the holes of beads, which is a lot. How they were made, when they were made, and where they were made: many clues can be found in the hole of a bead. He recommends any collector to get acquainted with the different beadmaking techniques.

Another piece of free advice from Paul: document your beads well. A collection is much more interesting when all the information on them is kept in detail. So many collections and their historical significance gets lost because the one looking after it when the collector is lost does not have any knowledge of the beads, their value or their provenance. Paul himself keeps a handwritten catalog of every bead or piece of jewelry he acquires.



He'll document the date he purchased it, the price, where he got it from and any knowledge he or the seller has about it.

Paul has caught the Tucson bug, and that does not refer to the cold that everybody seems to get here from all of the world's germs flying around. When asked if he will be back next year, the answer is easy: 'Yes!' It is an expensive trip, driving down from California, and the hotel prices are inflated. But this is where the best beads are, so that is where Paul will be heading.



## 1.1 History

It is no coincidence that Tucson, Arizona, became home of the biggest Gem show in the world. Arizona is a state where the ground is rich in minerals, with a history of the mining of copper and turquoise and the finds of a variety of fossils. Nicknames of Arizona are the Grand Canyon State and the Copper State, both showing the rich geological history of Arizona.

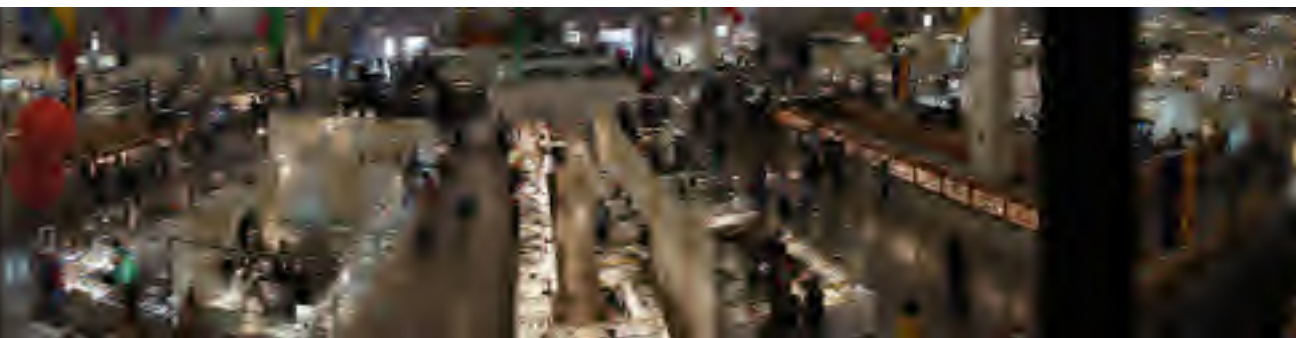
The Tucson Gem show started in 1955 when enthusiastic collectors from the Tucson Gem and Mineral Society (TGMS) set up a free exhibit at a local elementary school. In the 57 years that followed, the show grew from a single, small event to the biggest international show of stones, beads, jewelry and fossils. Currently an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people come to Tucson for the shows each year.

After the first successful TGMS show, it has changed locations several times, and finally moved to the Tucson Community Center in 1970. Since 1990 the show is held in the expanded and renovated Tucson Convention Center.

The TGMS was the show that started it all, and some refer to it as 'the main show' and to all the other shows as 'satellite shows'. That does not mean it is the biggest show in Tucson. The TGMS show has about 250 exhibitors, while the Gem and Jewelry Exchange (GJX) for example has over 700 booths. In the 1970's, the Tucson gem show started growing each year. From one show, to two, to five and to around 40 different shows today. In 1982, the first show by the American Gem Trade Association was held in Tucson. The Best Bead show started in 1996, and it was the first show to be completely geared towards beads and bead makers in Tucson. Currently, beads are a major part of the Tucson shows: stone beads, lampwork beads, pearls, glass beads and antique beads can be found at most shows. Some shows sell nothing but beads.

It is nearly impossible to keep track of all the shows, and all the venues. The shows change names, the hotels change names, the locations change, shows divide themselves up into two shows, new shows are set up but fail and disappear again.







## Around the globe searching for beads

When speaking to J-Me and Guy from Wild Things beads, it seems as if every aspect of their life revolves around beads. They have one rule: No seed beads in bed, and beyond that: beads are welcome anywhere, anytime. Listening to their anecdotes of their search for special beads around the world and selling in the US is like listening to a travel novel of the bead world waiting to be written. Stories of an old man eager to sell them walking sticks in Zimbabwe, driving around the Jablonec region of the Czech Republic looking for the workshops where beads were made, selling beads at the Tucson show until 2.45 AM (!) and ordering pizza for the customers who were strung for time.

J-me's bead adventure started when she was only 8 years old. She went with her grandmother to the Tucson Rock club show. The following year it became the legendary Tucson Convention Show. It was a small set-up then, with only two shows. She started learning beadwork from then onwards,

and it did not take her long before she was so hooked and went to Tucson again, to sell her own beadwork. 'With a backpack full of my beadwork and no cash, I went to Tucson to sell my work and trade for more beads.' It was 1978, and the Tucson show had grown from two to five different shows. A few years later again, she was back in Tucson, buying for her bead store in California. She was again carrying a backpack, but this time with 10.000 dollars in cash to buy beads. 'I would dress down, hoping nobody would imagine I could be carrying so much money'.

It was not easy to get into the Tucson show as a dealer. The Rodeway Inn was the place to be as a bead seller in Tucson. Every buyer would go there first. J-me waited for 7 years before she finally got the room at the Rodeway she wanted. The wall in the hotel room would be made into a 'wall of beads' with single strands of beads, and they would completely cover the bed in beads for sale as well.

J-Me: 'The bed was an amazing sight, all covered in Czech firepolish beads. I offered some people they could lay on the 'bed of beads' and I would take a

picture for them to collect the next year'.

They sold all single strands of beads, which was very popular because many designers and even bead stores did not want to buy such large volumes of a single type of bead. The first time she did have bulk beads to sell, she also made them available in smaller quantities, and she describes that show as if 'we died and gone to heaven'. A 'mass' of beads is 1200 beads, and while most sellers would not break up a mass, she would, selling them at bulk prices by  $\frac{1}{4}$  mass. 'In the first few hours after opening, we had sold so much we had already paid for our expenses. We were even worried if we had brought enough'.

It is not all bliss at the show, though. J-Me describes the hotel as one of Tucson's 'hooker hotels'. She remembers seeing all the mattresses stacked up by the garbage bins in the back, with a homeless guy sleeping on them. These hotels are cheap hotels during most of the year, and make their big profit on the Tucson gem shows. About 9 years ago, rumors were going around that the Rodeway hotel would close down. It was at the 'bottom of the barrel' of



hotels, a cockroach hotel, no parking, etc. Wild Things beads decided to move to the other show from the same show organizers, G&LW, the Gem Mall. Soon others followed. Finally in 2012, the Rodeway Inn (now called Grant Inn) was indeed scrapped as a location for the bead show. It's now home to a rock and mineral show. They will travel to the show in an RV, which serves as their home away from home when on the road. They are now set up for retail at the 22nd street show, and for bigger quantities at the Gem Mall. Wild Things Beads will not just sell

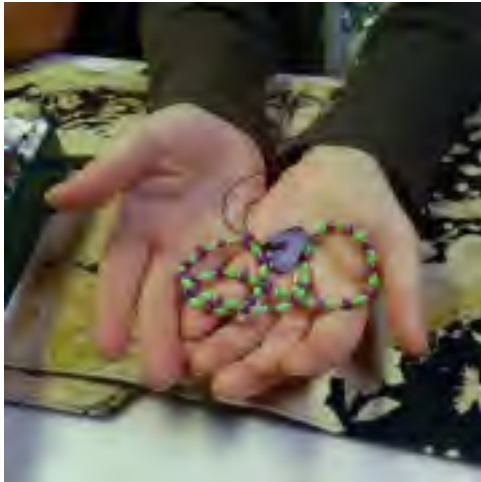


beads, they travel all around the world to pick and import their own beads. They sell both new and vintage beads, pearls, buttons, baskets, etcetera. Travel locations include Jablonec Nad Nisou in the Czech Republic, Neugablonz in Germany, Hongkong and the Philippines.

J-me and Guy got married in 1980. It was in 1998 they decided to make their first bead-buying trip to Europe. People would tell them: You do not want to go the Czech Republic yourself, you will not find anything, it is a closed business and no one speaks English. It did not

hold Guy and J-me back, and it turned out to be quite an adventure. Finding the beads in a town where so many of the world's beads are made, Jablonec, seems easy, but it is not. With the help of a local lady, Petra, going through all the roads and alleyways, asking around, and showing everyone what they were looking for, they eventually came to know the Jablonec glass industry pretty well. It helps to be both enthusiastic and knowledgeable, but also not being from Jablonec yourself: 'We have the advantage that we do not know the protocol of the local business culture. We can play the dumb Americans.'

They remember a set of lampwork beads they bought in the US. The person who sold them to J-Me had said they were very old, and they were no longer being made. Behold the surprise when J-Me was wearing the beads on their trip in Jablonec and she saw the exact same beads in the window of a workshop. The daughter of a family business was making these beads. And their luck did not end there: the parents would make the very best pressed beads. Many of the beads, both new and old, that Wild Things beads sells at Tucson have a story like this



attached to them. They travel to Jablonec now regularly and will take people around on bead buying tours, in both Jablonec and Hongkong.

J-Me and Guy introduced me to a way to describe something I had seen many times during the Tucson show: the 'beader's handshake'. Anyone interested in beads and jewelry will look at what beads you are wearing, and probably comment on them. It may seem inappropriate to others, but at bead shows, beads are your introduction.

'You can spend one million dollars in one hour in Tucson', Guy says. When you come to Tucson for the first time, 'bring a backpack, plenty of water and only the cash you can spend on that day. Do not bring your credit card or you will surely overspend. And write everything down, where you found something, what it cost. Collect business cards of the suppliers you wish to keep in contact with, and pick up a copy of the Tucson Show Guide. Otherwise, you will forget it'

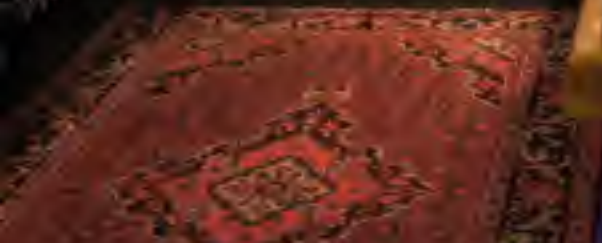
J-Me stresses the importance of preparing for the trip. 'Know what you want to buy, and take care of business first. After that, you can go and look at all the new stuff that you will find. If you do not take care of business first, you are sure to get sidetracked.'

Can't get enough of J-Me and Guy's stories? Have a look at their website for many articles on their bead buying trips at [www.wildthingsbeads.com](http://www.wildthingsbeads.com)

Left: Wild Things Beads booth at the 22nd Street Show



WILD THINGS  
BIKES & FOOTER







## 1.2 Selling at Tucson

It seems simple: sellers come to Tucson to sell, and buyers come to Tucson to buy. In practice, it is not that simple. Many people will both sell and buy in Tucson. A jewelry designer will sell his or her finished pieces, and will at the end of a successful show have enough profit to buy new stock materials. A turquoise miner will sell his turquoise stones at one show and buy his new tools at another show. A specialized bead shop will set up at a Tucson bead show to sell, and buy new stock at a wholesale show. A dealer of African trade beads will buy Chinese replica chevrons to sell at other shows and back in Africa.

There are different types of sellers that can be distinguished from each other: wholesale sellers, retail sellers, designers and artists, collectors and hobbyists.

### 1.2.1 Wholesale sellers

Wholesale sellers will often only sell at wholesale shows where you need a resale license to get into. They are

counting on selling large quantities or on meeting new vendors who will order large quantities later. Some will also sell smaller quantities, while others may have a \$100 or \$500 purchase minimum. A lot of the wholesale sellers are international sellers from around the world. They will often travel to several of the gem and jewelry shows, like the Mineralientage in Munich and the Hong Kong Jewelry fair. Amethyst sellers from Brazil, Fossil sellers from Morocco, Pearl sellers from China, all can be found here.

### 1.2.2 Retail sellers

Retail sellers are set up to sell to individual jewelry designers and collectors, and to those looking for smaller quantities of stones and beads. They may only sell at shows around the country, or they may also have a regular shop or web shop elsewhere. They usually have no minimum purchase amount and are often more willing to help out customers who have questions. Often they will offer discounts for wholesale buyers.



## How can you not love this show?

After ten years of traveling between Ghana, to buy beads, New York, his hometown and to shows all around the US, Abdul Karim Cham does not show any signs of getting tired of it. His stall in the African Art village is filled with a great variety of beads, from ancient stone beads to newly made Chinese glass beads. His favorite beads are also there: beautiful red, white and black chevron trade beads.

He learnt the business from his brother, sells at a variety of shows, and has been in this business for 20 years. He absolutely loves the Tucson show, and wonders 'How can you not love this show? Everything here is different, there are so many different items, so many different people'. He sells mostly at African shows, and to be at the Tucson show, introduced him to very different types of business: fossils, rare minerals, high-end gems and jewelry. When you are in Tucson, all these things surround you.

Another thing that sets the Tucson show apart? 'It is by far the biggest show anywhere.'







## A glass artist on a mission

At first glance, the work of glass artist Kevin O' Grady is simply beautiful. It is not until you take a closer look, and talk to him, that you get a sense of what an achievement his pieces are. The painstaking process of making pyrex vortex marbles that are unlike any you have ever seen, his fashionable glass bangles in animal prints, or his latest project of depicting the California missions in pyrex cane glass. Kevin O Grady set up in Tucson at the Best Bead show, alongside many other glass artists.

### 1.2.3 Designers and artists

Designers and artists show and sell their jewelry and beads in Tucson, made and designed by themselves. They usually sell one of a kind pieces, made from glass, stone and precious metals. Shows like the Best Bead Show and the Tucson Bead show are shows where a lot of designers and glass artists sell. Some artists will also sell without having a booth at a show. They will meet with buyers they know are interested, or sell outside the shows at places where many people meet.

Kevin started doing silver inlay work in 1989 and soon after that, he started working in glass. It felt like deja vu to him, like he had worked with glass before. 'It may sound weird, but it feels as if I used to be very good at this, and I am still catching up now.'

At that time, very few people were working in pyrex glass, and only a few colors were available. He got his first glassmaking equipment and glass from the warehouse of stuff being sold from Arno Roensch, glassblower at the Manhattan project in Los Alamos.



KEVIN



O'GRADY

2012

Kevin worked alongside Louis Wilson, another glass artist, for 8 years. Louis had found out how to make glass marbles on a torch, and together they taught others. This is also when he made his first vortex marbles. They show a vortex inside the glass marble that makes it seem as if the depth inside the glass is endless. 'Making marbles is like meditating to me', Kevin says. In all of his marbles, you will find a tiny mark, showing it is indeed a 'Kevin O Grady original'. Each marble contains his signature cane, with his name, and the year it was made.

Kevin specializes in bracelets, with animal patterns, but also intricate millefiori work and a variety of other shapes and patterns. He has also made chevron beads, being inspired by fellow glass artist and chevron bead maker Art Seymour. 'I was told I could not make chevrons from pyrex glass, and now I am the only dude to make them..... from pyrex.' He does not make the chevron beads by putting the different layers in a star shaped mold, like traditional chevrons.



Instead, he will take a gather of glass and indent it with a chisel to get the star-shaped pattern. After that, a second layer is added, and the process is repeated. He can only do two layers on one day. Some of his chevron beads go up to 12 layers and more. He does not make more than ten or twenty a year.

Kevin's latest project goes beyond your imagination. You would not believe it, unless you saw it with your own eyes. He has made a completely accurate





replica of the mission building of Carmel in California into glass cane. It consists of many elements that were made separately, and are a work of art in themselves. An example of this is the diamond shaped stained glass, above the mission door. It is made up of many glass colors, which look beautiful when held into the sun. The detail is unbelievable. However, in the finished products made from the cane, like earrings or a marble, the glass window is no more than 1 or 2 mm in size. It took him months and months to complete all the elements, and then to

set them together in a single cane. Upsetingly, the first time he assembled the cane, something went wrong. The inside became too curved, and the end result was not good enough. The crosses on the church were curved inwards. However, he did not give up, and started again, using many of the half finished elements he had made before.

Who is thinking this type of a project is a one-time event for Kevin, is mistaken. He intends to portray all 21 missions of California into glass. And he also wants to portray the founder, father Junipero Serra, in glass, all to mark the trail of these historical sights in California. It is his tribute to a remarkable period in history, where missions were a day's travel apart, and set the trail from New Mexico all through California.

Perhaps by the time he will have finished the last of the 21 missions, he will have become just as good as he once was.





### 1.2.4 Collectors and hobbyists

Collectors and hobbyist sellers will use selling at the Tucson show to fund their own collection or hobby. They will usually sell at the smaller shows and have a very specific set of goods to sell. Often they will sell from a hotel room. It may be a personal mineral collection, or handmade beads or jewelry. They are usually not at the show with the intent or expectation to make money from the show. For them the Tucson Gem show is about meeting like-minded people, showing their pieces, selling and swapping for new collectibles and tools. The collectors and hobbyists will often be eager to share their experience and knowledge.

Many sellers do not completely fit one category. Many retail sellers started out as collectors or hobbyists. And many collectors of beads will also design jewelry. However, when going through the shows, these basic categories may help you when trying to make sense of the variations between the different shows and sellers.

### On the lookout for the unique

Having not missed a single year of the Tucson show since 1973, calling Phil Fischman a Tucson show professional is not an overstatement. He arrived in Tucson at the age of 18, a freshman in college. He was supposed to move on, but fell in love with Tucson. The desert, the people, the spirituality and the beads kept him here for many years to come.

Working at a bead store, Phil was introduced to beads from all around the world. He found himself intrigued by Native American trade beads, such as chevron beads. As many bead collectors will say: history comes alive when studying these beads. Phil will put it even stronger: 'Chevron beads changed my life'. He designed his own jewelry, and remembers the first time he went to a Tucson swap meet on the edge of town for beads. Next to him on one side was a guy with a shotgun in his car, and on the other side a man carrying a handgun. 'Do I need to know something?' he asked. Tucson was not the well-organized city it is today. It was not until a few years after he

moved to Tucson that he found out about the Gem show. He was immediately hooked. At that time, the show was only running at the Tucson Convention Center and two other hotels, and only for three days. Since then, the show kept growing as one hotel after another joined in. Phil: 'My, how it has grown and sprawled'. He compares the Tucson show as a huge umbrella, under which a great variety of shows takes place each year.

There is a rather specific reason Phil thinks the Tucson shows are an amazing event: they take part during his birthday. 'Thank you, Tucson, for putting on the greatest birthday party I can imagine, and inviting the whole world'. 23 years ago, he enticed his wife Valerie to join him at the show. She told him to buy himself a birthday present from her at the show. He declined, saying that the best birthday present he could imagine would be to spend another day with her. And that would only be possible if she joined him on his treasure hunt at the show. She has been coming to Tucson ever since, only missing a single year. The first years Phil spent at the show were



about meeting people, collecting beads and stones and finding inspiration for making and designing jewelry. His budget at times was no more than 5 or 10 dollars.

Right now, Phil's Tucson trips are a highly efficient treasure hunt for his store, Beads, Crystals & More in Encinitas, California. He is on the lookout for unique beads, special craft items, and stones of the best quality. When asked if he had found something special in his first days at the show this year, he laughs. 'Of course I have, it is

my job to look and see everything. There is always something unique to be found, if you look out for it'. He does not do his shopping at a leisurely pace. He will not just browse, but go through everything: every show, every flat of minerals, every strand, and every box. All in order to get the most interesting items with the highest quality. 'You never know where the magic is, so I'd better see everything'. He recalls one time they did not make it to the Gem Mall until 1,5 hours before they needed to be at the airport. He did the quickest walk around of the show ever, but found what he wanted. Without any hesitation, he bought 500 strands of pearls in 10 minutes. Somehow, the Tucson show has never lost its magic for Phil. He is going with a purpose now, but still thoroughly enjoys meeting all the 'sweet souls'. He remembers some of the most remarkable sellers. One day, about 14 years ago, a small Mayan man with long hair came to his store in California to sell his beautifully handmade stone carvings. He bought a few pieces, including two turquoise beads carved in the shape of a cob of corn. Phil gave

one of the beads away, and kept one himself. He prayed to the universe to bring this man back to him, because he was so impressed with the beauty of his work. 'You don't know where the treasure is going to come from, there may be a reason a person is here'. It was years later, that Phil saw this man again: with a tiny table of carvings at the Tucson show. He did not recognize the man, but he did recognize the unique turquoise cob of corn bead around his neck.

'Tucson is the most work I do, and the most fun I have'. After 39 shows, he does feel that the rocks may be getting heavier. This may have something to do with the fact that he is not 18 anymore, he says. 'Being in Tucson is magical, being with Valerie is the best, and Tucson is heaven on earth'.

Right top: GJX show tent

Right bottom: Show on North Oracle Rd





## 2. What to buy in Tucson?

It's impossible to list all that can be bought at Tucson. Especially the last few years, the variety of items that are being sold appears to have become more diverse. However, there are a few categories of items on sale that can be distinguished: Beads, minerals, gemstones, jewelry, fossils and meteorites, tools, various craft items.

### 2.1 Beads

Beads are abundant in Tucson. There are several subcategories of beads that can be found in Tucson. The beads come from all around the world.

#### 2.1.1 Trade beads

Beads that have been traded from Europe to Africa, Asia and the Americas can be found in great quantity and quality in Tucson. They range from impressive chevrons from Venice to Bohemian made 'wedding beads' that were traded with people in Mali. Most of the trade beads for sale in Tucson have been made in Venice and Bohemia between 1890 and 1930 and were sold to Africa. The beads are usually sold by



the strand, with the exception of the rare beads that are sold loose. Prices can range from a few dollars for a strand of small plain Bohemian glass beads, to hundreds of dollars for a single bead. Most of the trade beads in Tucson are sold at the African Art Village and at the Gem Mall.





## This show has everything

The African art village in Tucson is like stepping into a West-African market, with the sunshine, booths filled with African trade beads, handmade sculpture, men dressed in colorful 'boubous' and the smell of African food.

Most dealers selling at this show, at the very end of the strip of I10 shows, are indeed from West-Africa and spends their days traveling between Africa, the US and Europe. Abdouli Jawneh is one of those dealers, who has had a booth in the African art village since it was set up 10 years ago. Venetian and Bohemian trade beads, African made beads, African art: all is abundant at his stall.

Abdouli comes from The Gambia and started his bead business in 1990 in Nigeria. He would travel to all the small villages in the countryside, buying beads. These beads could then be sold at a profit in the capital of Lagos. In 1994 he moved to Los Angeles and continues his bead and African craft business 'Jawneh Brothers Imports' from there.



There is no doubt in Abdouli's mind that this is the right business for him 'I love doing this, it is a powerful business. It is all I know, it is what I do, and will keep doing'. He will travel to a range of shows, such as the Santa Fe Bead Fest, Indiana friendship, beads shows all around the US and antique markets. Just like many dealers though, the Tucson show is his main event. 'All others shows are smaller. Tucson has everything'. Still, Tucson is not the big profit-making event it used to be. It has become a lot more expensive to



set up at a show, and with so many locations, fewer people will come to the separate shows. Abdouli is not too positive about the hotels in Tucson. 'They take advantage of people, and jack up the prices'.

Abdouli's advice for first-time visitors of the Tucson show is clear: 'Come to the African art village. You can buy everything here, everybody can just walk in, and we have great African food.'

Even though it may not be as easy as it used to be, Abdouli is quite positive about the bead business: 'It is a good business to learn, you will never get poor. I'm happy'.



### 2.1.2 Stone beads

A lot of different types of stone are made into beads. Most stone beads sold in Tucson are semiprecious stones like amethyst, quartz, jasper and turquoise. They are available in a great variety of shapes and price categories. Many stone beads come from China and India. A way to tell them apart is that the Chinese usually string their beads on nylon, while the Indians will more often string their beads on a colored piece of cord. The more expensive quality of stones, and the better quality cut are often from India and will be sold on short strands with a tassel of cord on the end. Stone bead strands start at about a dollar and depending on the type of stone and their quality, can go up to a few hundred dollars. Most stone beads are treated in some way. Sometimes the stone beads are dyed, and sometimes what appears to be stone, is not stone at all. Be suspicious of all beads that are labeled as turquoise without a price to match that of turquoise. The same goes for other deals on stones that appear just too good to be true. Stone beads can be found at almost all of the Tucson shows.



### Striped flint from Poland

When you love nature, you love rocks, and you have your own personal stash of a rare and beautiful stone to show and sell, what better place to visit than Tucson? That is exactly what Janusch Gradowski from Poland thought five years ago. He has been here every year since, selling at the Globex show at Days Inn. His pride material is Polish flint, a beautiful gray striped stone that can only be found locally in Poland.

It has been used since ancient times for making tools, and for making fire. Janusch loves this material, and it shows in the beads, cabochons and other items he has made from the stone. It is difficult to get the stone from the ground, with only a small quarry available. This makes it important to treat the material right, says Janusch. He has his stone cut by a friend, and he makes sure the pattern on the stone comes out just right in the finished piece. The Polish have a great tradition of cutting stones, but it can be done a lot cheaper elsewhere. At one point, Janusch had stone shipped to Hongkong, to be cut there. The first batch came out good. The second batch did not. He wonders if they love stone and nature as much as he does. Great attention and knowledge of the stone is needed to get good results.

Janusch holds people working with stone to a high standard. When people are selling something, they should make very clear what is, and what is not natural. Too often he sees treated stones being sold as completely natural, and that is just not right.



It is not just the stone dealers that can give the wrong impression. Crystal beads made in Europe can be made in all the colors of the rainbow. Often these beads will have the names of types of stone, like amethyst, citrine or smoky quartz. Janusch considers this a threat to the market of natural stone. It may look nice and shiny, but it is not real. He is very clear about this: 'Glass is not crystal, and Swarovski can make a 100 tons of glass, it still is not real'.

The Tucson show is not all about business, Janusch explains. 'We get to mix business with pleasure, and coming to the show is a great luxury'. Visiting nature parks, enjoying the great weather, catching up with friends and getting new rocks for his personal collection is what Janusch enjoys when they are in Tucson. In the end, nothing beats real natural materials, because 'Nature's gems are the real gems.'

### 2.1.3 Pearls

The quantity of pearls that is sold in Tucson is staggering. The bulk of the pearls are freshwater cultured pearls



from China. They come in a variety of shapes, (dyed) colors and qualities. Their prices start at about a dollar per strand for the cheapest ones. They are sold both by the strand and by the kilo. The more expensive South Sea pearls are also sold at many booths in Tucson. Freshwater pearls can be found in bulk at for example the Gem Mall, the Holidome and at the JOGS show. South Sea Pearls, and sometimes natural pearls, are more likely to be found at AGTA and the Gem & Jewelry Exchange (GJX).



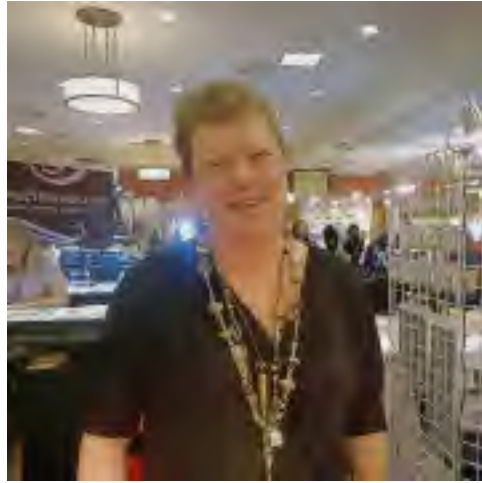
## Carefree in Tucson

If you live on the Rocking Chair Road in the small town of Carefree, Arizona, the Tucson gem show may be a bit of an overwhelming experience. That might be why Kathy Carey Tinkelenberg, from Carey's Creations, only goes to a few shows in Tucson each year. She is here to buy beads, tools and other equipment for her small business of custom hand beaded jewelry. What started with beadwork, evolved to include wire wrapping and now metalsmithing. She continues to

take classes, to improve and expand her skills. She easily admits: 'I have become addicted to beading'. It takes her no more than 2,5 hours to drive to Tucson, and she has been coming to the show for the last 5 years. She is only here now for the day, but will come back next week. It will be the first time her husband gets to come along. Kathy says; 'It is about time he sees it for himself, there is no way I can really explain all this to him'.

### 2.1.4 Handmade glass beads

In Tucson you can find a great variety of handmade glass beads, made by lampwork artists. It ranges from bead makers who have just started last year, to renowned glass artists who have been making beads for several decades. Either way, there will be focal beads and other beads for anyone's taste. It is a great opportunity to talk to your favorite bead maker, or get inspiration for your own work. Some of the shows in Tucson where handmade glass beads are sold are the Best Bead Show and the Tucson Bead show.



### A life of glass

Behind a booth at the Best Bead Show filled with exquisite glass beads sits Joanne Zekowski, a lampwork glass artist. Some of her beads are reminiscent of ancient glass and stone beads, while others are playfully called 'giblets'. These come in the colors of gilet gravy and mash, and why not 'name my favorite beads after my favorite taste?', Joanne says.

She started making beads 14 years ago, and quickly started selling them as well. She gives credit to being mentored by great bead makers, yet has her own unique style. She will work fulltime on the torch. It is the best way to be able to make a profit; working quickly and making sure you have enough inventory for the shows. She used to do 25 shows a year, but currently has slowed it down to just a few to take care of her elderly parents. She enjoys going to the shows, even



though it does get expensive to participate. Being with fellow glass artists and bead makers is 'like being with your family, Joanne says. Showing others how to work with glass is something she just started to do. Unafraid of the competition, she says 'The more people who enjoy working in glass, the better'. It is great to be able to let people experience for the first time how melting glass feels.

When working the torch, there is nothing else you can think about, it is as if time stands still. Joanne: 'Every bead is like a frozen moment in my life'. When people ask her how long it takes to make a bead, she will answer: '14 years'.

Joanne's beads are not the easiest to get hold of. She hardly does any self-promotion, and does not yet have a website yet. The only place to find her is at her house, and at bead shows. It is these types of finds that make people enjoy the bead shows in Tucson so much. And for Joanne, 'It sure beats working'.





### 2.1.5 Bulk glass beads

Glass beads in bulk can be found at many Tucson shows. They may be sold by the strand, or by weight. Most of the cheaper bulk glass beads being sold come from China and India. Other glass beads come from the Czech Republic and from the Austrian Swarovski Company. Examples are pressed beads in a variety of shapes, seed beads, lampwork beads and faceted crystal beads.



### A family on the road

The bead and jewelry business can be tough: long hours, major competition, and spending a lot of time on the road. Still the Akbari family chose this business with conviction. 'It is a headache, but I like it', states Khaled Akbari.

His brother, Nassar, explains how things got started. They came to the US from Afghanistan in 1982. The first thing that they did was learn English. A string of jobs followed. It was 15 years ago that they took the step to start the family business of selling beads and jewelry.

Most of their merchandise comes from China and India. Their round tent at the Days Inn is a feast for the eyes. The colors, the shapes and the materials: a great selection that they mostly sell to jewelry designers. Khalida Akbari is selling finished jewelry items just a few stalls further down.

They started out doing over 50 shows a year, but have slowed it down a bit to about 30 to 40 shows a year now. It still means they spend days driving, and it may be months on the road before they finally get home again.

The one who seems the least fazed by

all this, is Nassar's three-year-old son. He has his own little cave, below the center table that is covered in beads. The set-up with video games, drinks, and his peanut butter sandwich keeps him entertained during the day.

It is not just being on the road that gets tough. With the competition increasing, it is necessary to keep a big inventory to meet all the customers' needs. This means spending a lot of money and taking greater risks. With trends in colors and bead-styles as unpredictable as the Tucson weather, they may get stuck with huge lots of undesirable beads.

Being a veteran on the bead show circuit, they can easily compare the Tucson show to the other shows. The Tucson show is the longest show (the Days Inn is open for 17 days) and it attracts a great variety of customers. Some Tucson shows are not open to the public, but theirs is. They like it this way: selling to a professional jewelry designer, a small bead store, and a bead enthusiast just starting out, all in the same day. They love making their customers happy, no matter how big or small the purchase.



They will be there again next year. Nassar's son may have to miss out though. By the time he is four, he will have to stay home and go to school. However, it would not be surprising if he will run this family business one day, the next generation of a family bead business.



60% OFF

60% OFF

## 2.2 Minerals

The Tucson show started as a show where collectible minerals were exhibited, swapped and sold. And today still, Tucson is a great place for mineral collectors to see and buy the most rare and beautiful specimens. Quite a few of the mineral sellers will specialize in minerals from one area, or in one type of mineral. A lot of these specialized dealers sell from hotel rooms at the shows along the I10. Also, many of these will be at the TGMS show in the Tucson Convention center.



### Presenting with pride: minerals from Arizona

It is hard to imagine when you walk through all the Tucson gem shows, that this all started with a small show, in a humble location, 58 years ago. Members of the Tucson Gem and Mineral Society (TGMS), founded in 1946, set up a show at a local school. They only made 50 cents profit, William Hodgson says. William has been president and vice-president of the TGMS since he joined them in 1980.

'The only thing they won't let me do is hold the position of treasurer', he jokes.

Currently, the TGMS show at the Tucson Convention center is still considered by some to be the 'Main Show'. One of the things that sets it apart from the other events, William says, is that 'This is a show, it is not a place for sale.' Although lots of dealing does go on at the TGMS, it is geared a lot more towards educating and sharing knowledge.



This is the place rockhounds will go, to see the most rare and interesting mineral specimens. This year, they have a unique collection of Arizona minerals to show. They were able to show this collection as part of the Arizona Centennial celebrations. The exhibit even includes some rare items like Geronimo's riddle. The TGMS show is usually scheduled at the last weekend of the Tucson shows.

William has fond memories of going to mines and digging up his own pieces. 'There is nothing like it. Imagine opening up a pocket of azurite by yourself'. He would go to the Apache mine for the azurite, and to Arkansas to find good quartz. Finding your own in Arizona has become more difficult, he says. 'Arizona used to be a great place for minerals, but now it has all been picked over, and most places have closed.'

Children can do their own share of discovering minerals at the TGMS show. On Friday morning, thousands of schoolchildren can go on a treasure hunt at the show. They can gaze at the exhibits, and many dealers will have special treats for them.



The TGMS show is a show where the variety of the Tucson shows seems to come together. Great minerals, stone beads, rough stone, delicate gems. More important than that, the show introduces the next generation of Tucsonans to the Tucson shows, and to what they can expect to see in years to come.

Right: a path made from rose quartz at the Electric Park RV Show





### 2.3 Jewelry

Jewelry in a wide range of qualities is sold in Tucson. One major type of jewelry that can be found is jewelry with stones mounted in them.

A lot of this jewelry, mostly silver or silver plated, is made in India and in China. There is also a varied range of low quality, low price jewelry for sale for those looking to fill their stores with very affordable jewelry. These are often made with beads and non-precious metals. A third type of jewelry, that is available at some specific shows, is high-end designer jewelry.

The AGTA and the GLDA are two shows where jewelry designers will show off their gold, platinum and silver jewelry. All the latest styles, materials and techniques can be seen here.

Some of this jewelry will be sold on site, other jewelry will be made to order.

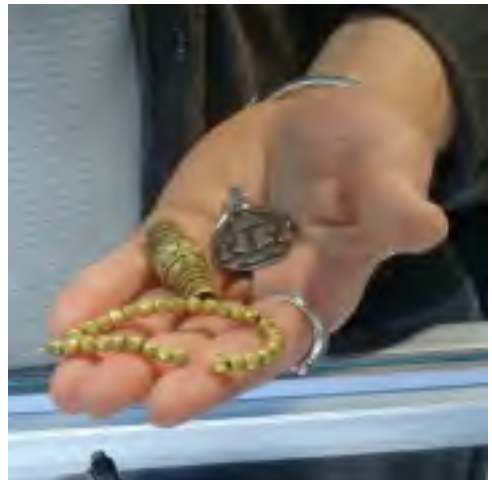


### From India to Tucson and back again

Not too many bead and jewelry dealers will name their business after a single bead. But then, Rusty Glicksman, owner of 'Earth Door Sky Door', is not your average bead dealer. In his booth at the Pueblo Gem and Mineral shows he displays an amazing collection of old silver and gold pieces from India, and handmade silver jewelry with stones such as rutilated quartz, aquamarine, kyanite and rainbow

moonstone. He also specializes in unusual opaque stones. His most prized bead is not on his booth, but worn around his neck. It is a stone bead, which he acquired when he was in Ladakh, in the Himalayan Mountains on his travels in the 1970's. It had a circle on one side, and a square on the other side and he liked it. Not until after he started learning more about beads, and he showed it to specialists in India, did he learn it was a highly prized and very rare Dzi bead. The pattern of the square represents the door to the earth, and the circle the door to the sky. It symbolizes how all is interconnected, which rings true for Rusty.

His drive when it comes to running his one-man business comes from his love for India, his love for handcrafted items, and a strong desire to be able to live independently. He started out as an English teacher, traveled overland to India in 1971, and fell in love with the place. Then he started thinking of ways to be able to travel there again. He says: 'It's not as if I came up with a business plan, or a clear set of goals. It just evolved, and it works for me'. He



still considers himself a traveler, like many who started doing this in the 60's and 70's. 'When I go to my hotel in Jaipur in India, it is full of old people, just like me, he jokingly says.

Right now, he works from India for 2,5 months every year, sells at several shows, both retail and wholesale and has some private customers. The Tucson show is the main event for his business year. It is the only big show he sells at, and 'there's nothing like it, not even close'. He likes what he does, but it is not an easy business. A lot of the people who are selling original and handmade items have stopped, the price of silver has gone through the roof, and antiques in India are getting harder and harder to come by. The market is 'being destroyed by reproduction', Rusty says. His advice: 'Do not buy, what you do not know.' The good stuff gets mixed in with the not so good stuff, and people get reluctant to buy the original, and may go for the cheaper replicas. Rusty's collection of antique and vintage Asian silver and gold has been built up over 20 years.



He does not buy too much in India now, but will buy from reputable collections. Together with its quality silver stone jewelry, the business of Earth Door Sky Door still continues to appeal to those buying special goods in Tucson. Rusty: 'Even though I did not have a plan, you could say it has worked out for me: I can feed myself, I have my independence, and I get to go to India'.



## 2.4 Gemstones

Gemstones, both precious and semi-precious, can be seen in abundance in Tucson. It is sold as rough stone, or as cut stone. Some of it is also sold as a half finished product, like slabs of stone for making cabochons. The variety of stones, quality and price is great. You can see rough stones like rose quartz and amethyst in chunks piled up in large oil drums in the parking lot of an outdoor gem show. You can see tiny sparkly diamonds picked up by tweezers at the fancy AGTA show. And you can find everything in between. Very popular are the amethyst geodes. They are large hollow rocks that are cut in half to reveal the amethyst crystals inside. It appears as if there is a contest going on between the different vendors who can bring the biggest amethyst geode.

### **My heart is in the stones**

With a mother in the jewelry business, Cara Williams has been no stranger to the Tucson shows. Cara would do the pearl and bead end of the family



business, and remembers the first time she came to Tucson in 1981. It was a completely different atmosphere then, she says. The AGTA show (American Gem Trade Association) was just starting out and most deals were being done in hotel rooms. It was still largely about the mineral dealers at that time, but also plenty of gemstones, pearls and beads. Finished jewelry came much later.

Now, more than 30 years later, Cara is set up at the AGTA herself, together



with her husband Bear Williams, with their company 'Stone Group Laboratories'. They specialize in testing gems, which is much like geology or mineralogy only the tests are non-destructive. In their highly specialized laboratory they test for treatments that have been used on gemstones, their origin but also if stones are natural or have been made synthetically. Cara also is a tutor for the Gem-A in London and, along with her husband, has written many articles on gemstones, 'My heart is in the stones'.

'While still in college I begged George Williams for a job. He used to sell gemstones to my family, and I just had to work with him. He did give me a job, and in 1994, I married his brother, Bear'. From one family business she went on to the next, when they started their business together in 1992.

'Gemology is a younger science', Cara says. It was not until synthetics started being made in the 19th century, that gemology started to grow. Because of this history, gemology has always evolved itself alongside the jewelry industry, with much focus on value and grading stones. For many years, the science did not play a great part in gemology, and this caused the gemologists to fall behind. Those using treatments and making synthetic stones are often a step ahead of the gemologists when it comes to technology. 'We need more education on gemstones, a more scientific approach and to share more knowledge. There is a need for consistency and reliability in the language we use. Things are improving as there is broad recognition of the challenges we face.'



Both in their laboratory at Stone Group Laboratories and in teaching students, Cara and Bear participate in the sharing of scientific knowledge of gemstones and the advancement of non-destructive testing methods. Treatments can be done with irradiation, heat, dyes, polymers, and many other combinations. Tucson is a good place to see stones with all of these techniques used being sold. And, getting to know the beads is a good place to start. Beads will typically be made from the lower grade of gem materials, which teaches you a lot about the inclusions, in what type of rock it is found, which can be very helpful. When a new type of gemstone hits the market, there are usually products offered in all grades of the stone: Low grade beads, commercial grade gems, and top quality gems. Cara remembers when a brand new type of feldspar came out: andesine, a stone ranging in color from red to green. It came straight from China to the internet and TV networks that would sell the stone. What should have made people suspicious, Cara says: 'We never had any andesine beads.' No low-grade material, but loads of top quality stone



meant something was not quite right. It turns out that the stone that is called andesine is a stone diffused with copper, to achieve its color.

The gemology business is a small business, and being in Tucson means being surrounded by people who are all in the same trade. That is 'very energizing', says Cara. She has only missed a few shows since 1981. One year, her boss made her stay to run the office. When he came back, he felt bad about it. Tucson is not something you want to miss. To her students she will tell to keep their eyes open. Tucson is a great place to train your eye. There is only one downside to Tucson, she says. 'There are too many great people here, and there is just not enough time. It is so compact, and so busy, and I don't get to visit with as many people as I would like.'

Cara describes the Tucson show as the highlight of her year. 'It is the Mecca for stone-geeks'. It's not just the quantity of stones that is available in Tucson, but mostly the quality and the diversity. People will come to Tucson and say 'I thought this stone was rare,



but there are so many of them'. That is because Tucson is the place for rare stones, this is where they all are.' And it is not just rare and precious stones that draw attention at the show. Cara has been known to bring someone special to the show: 'Precious'. A pet rat that would come along to the Tucson shows as a mascot. She would travel in a handbag, have her nails painted red, wear a pearl necklace and often received gifts of gems and jewelry at the show. A precious pet rat indeed.



## 2.5 Fossils and meteorites

Fossils and meteorites are abundant in Tucson. Fossils come in all types, sizes and price categories. From huge slabs with fossil fish and dinosaur bones to tiny trilobite fossils, all can be found in Tucson. There are quite a few dealers selling fossils from the United States, but the bulk of the fossils seem to come from China and Morocco. However, buyer beware. There are also quite a few fake or altered fossils on sale in Tucson, and not every buyer will tell you the difference.

Meteorites are very rare, and that makes Tucson a great place to buy them. Nowhere in the world do you have so many to choose from. They range from tiny 1 mm size meteorites from a rare find, to big heavy pieces from the Campo del Cielo meteorite group found in Argentina.



## Ancient fossils from Morocco

From the place where minerals and fossils are mined in Morocco, Midelt, to the city of Tucson, that is the journey that Bouabidi Ahmed has made for the

last 12 years. And he's not the only one. There are a growing number of Moroccan vendors of fossils and minerals coming to Tucson. Selling for example trilobites, limestone with a range of fossils in them, ammonites and selenite.

Bouabidi explains he does not mind the traveling, and he is happy with his spot at the Howard Johnson show. It is the only show he will go to in the US. He does travel to a lot of European shows, in for example Spain, France and Germany with his family business. For him Tucson is not so much about selling his goods on the spot, but about meeting new people and showing his business. Most of his sales will come from orders after the show. 'Business is okay here, I have many customers and many friends here'.

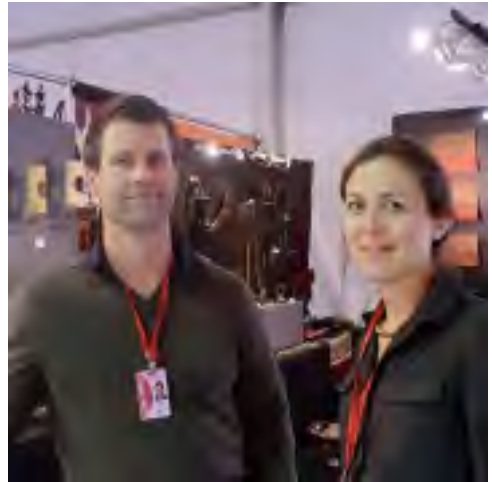




## 2.6 Various craft items

Besides stones, beads and jewelry, a variety of craft items are sold in Tucson. Most of these items, like scarves, baskets and woodcarvings are sold alongside beads or jewelry in the same booth. For example, a seller who specializes in Tibetan style items like dzi beads, amber, turquoise and coral, may also bring Tibetan cloth and Tibetan prayer flags to sell. At the African Art village, most sellers specialize in beads, but African woodcarvings and Djenne mud cloth is also sold.

Quite a few of the shows along the I10 have several stalls with a variety of craft items. Also, the Electric Park show is one of the shows where quite a few dealers sell craft items. Especially for those who are not making jewelry or collecting stones or minerals, these craft items can bring a welcome change in the Tucson shopping experience.



## Traveling the world to get the best

When Joe Loux did his first Tucson show 16 years ago, it was at one of the shows with only gems. He was 'completely surrounded by stone, with my tiny table of Touareg gris-gris, silver gold and leather pieces. Nobody was coming for this'. He was camping in a tent on Mount Lemmon, to save money. It cost him 500 dollars to set up at the show, and he sold for 500 dollars.

For some, it might have been a turn-off. For Joe, it was a good start, and he thought of ways to make money on the Tucson show circuit. The next year, he set up at the (then called) Rodeway Inn, with more merchandise and a clearer sense of the Tucson market. Currently, his booth is set up at the Gem Mall, along with many other dealers who used to set up at the former Rodeway. His booth stands out from all the others. It is not filled to the brim with beads and jewelry. Instead, it looks more like a museum gallery. A museum of tribal art, antique and ancient jewelry from Asia, talismanic items from around the world, textiles and ornaments from minority groups. And for every item, Joe can tell you where it came from, what it was used for and how old it is.

'It looks like I was destined to be a merchant,' Joe says, when he describes his first experiences at Moroccan Souks. He found the atmosphere there addictive. He arrived in Morocco after working for the Peace Corps in Guinea Bissau in Western Africa. It was in Western Africa, that Joe became interested in tribal and magical



artifacts. When things would not go smoothly, he and his colleagues would visit local bush doctors, shamans. They would make a gris-gris, like a talisman. It would need certain ingredients, the shaman would chant, and the talisman would be put in a leather pouch and could be worn to protect from evil and relieve the things that you were struggling with. It was Joe's introduction to items that are said to hold magical powers, and they intrigued him.



What started out with a gris-gris in Guinee Bissau and haggling at the souks of Marrakech, turned into a successful tribal art business, spanning many corners of the world. He spent years selling at the Santa Fe flea market, while buying in Western and Northern Africa. 'A great way to get to know the business', Joe says. When he started traveling to Asia, a new range of antiques and ethnic artifacts became available to him. Interesting antique beads from China, art from local minority groups, and there was of

course India. 'India really is the biggest jewelry culture in the world'.

Joe runs the business together with his wife Katie Loux. Katie came from what she calls 'a desk job', as a deputy editor at Hali Magazine, an English magazine on oriental carpets and textile art. To them, the Tucson shows are one of the more relaxed shows they participate in. Compared to the tribal art fairs, the Tucson shows is a lot less fancy and because the Tucson show goes on much longer, there is less pressure every day. 'Here, a bad day does not make a bad show'.

Like many others who have been in this business for a while, Katie and Joe have seen the world of antiques, jewelry and beads change. Prices go up, less of the good stuff is around, and fakes are more and more abundant. More dealers are trying to get a share of a market where the products becomes more and more scarce. They hate to see things get misrepresented, at the expense of unaware buyers. 'When goods dry out, some tend to spend less energy on sourcing the good things, and will resort to cheating'.



Their advice for new buyers, and new visitors to the Tucson show: It may take time, but take things slowly, you will make mistakes, just buy things, inspect them, and try to be as sure as you can. Better yet, find a good and worthy mentor.

And for sellers? 'Keep the spirit of your own taste leading. Have stuff that you really like. You have what you have, and let it speak for itself'.

Right top: The African Art Village  
Right bottom: The TGMS Show





### 3. Tucson as a meeting place

In between all the buying and selling, something else takes place in Tucson. According to some people, it is the most important part of the Tucson gem show. Tucson is an amazing meeting place for getting together with those that share your business or interest. There is no other place in the world where you can meet more than a handful of, for example, meteorite collectors, fossil hunters, turquoise miners, stone carvers, etc. Many groups of people with specific interests will come to the show to meet others. It makes Tucson a great way to share knowledge on gemstone finds, the latest techniques for cleaning dinosaur fossils, or the newest replica trade beads coming from China. Many stones, beads, techniques or jewelry will first be seen in Tucson, before they hit the rest of the market. Also, quite a few people come to Tucson to learn to use new tools and techniques.

At any given time during the Tucson shows there will be meetings going on. A shared breakfast to exchange ideas about a new type of 3D printer, official



invitational meetings from the AGTA, dinners where bead collectors swap stories and beads, etc. Even without a lot of money to spend, meeting up with likeminded people can make a trip to the Tucson shows a very worthwhile experience.

Top: Cracking a geode at the Electric Park Show

## Minerals from down under

Maureen Socklich from the Socklich Trading Company from Western Australia has her booth set up at the Tucson Showplace, together with Keith Thompson. It is filled with a great variety of Australian minerals, with shiny slabs of tiger iron immediately drawing attention.

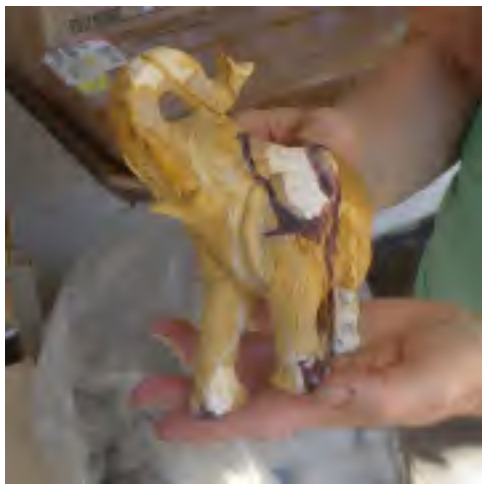
They can easily be called Tucson veterans: Maureen has been coming to the show for over 40 years. It was not until 5 years ago that they decided to not just come here for buying, but also for selling. They remember the first time they set up. Especially the shipping of the stone was nerve wrecking, Maureen says. Customs, timing, packing, it all has to go smoothly. By now, they do not seem nervous at all. All the big stuff gets shipped off in November, and they are fairly sure they will sell most of it. Customers know where they are, 'always at this show, always at this tent', and will come by each year. That does not mean they come here for the big business.

'Tucson really is like a holiday, looking at all the rocks, and meeting



like-minded people with the same interests educating each other'. The same way that the Tucson show seems like a holiday, Maureen describes the family business back in Australia as a something that started out as a hobby.

This year, they feel the show is slower than previous years. Obviously the world economic situation has its impact, but Maureen and Keith also wonder if the Tucson show has not become too big. 'Every year there are more new shows, but there are not more people coming to buy. The show



seems to have outgrown the amount of people here'. They are not too worried about having to ship all their stones back, though. At the end, there is always a rush of buyers, looking for the last minute deals.

Maureen's advice for first-time Tucson visitors is easy: 'If you see something you like, buy it right away. Do not leave it for later, because it will be gone, or you can not find it.'

It's a difficult business to get out of, especially when you like it. Maureen is not going to retire anytime soon, she says. 'I just cannot help myself.'







## Beads of Courage

For children's hospitals, children with serious illnesses and their parents 'Beads from Tucson' has very little to do with the Tucson gem and beads shows. Instead, Tucson is the home of the international organization 'Beads of Courage'. This organization sets up programs for these children at children's hospitals to help them tell the story of their illness and share it with others. It is a story that is told with beads. Children will set up a strand of beads, with each bead representing a specific treatment or moment in their medical and personal history during the time they are sick. The first beads on every strand spell the child's name, and the following beads spell out a language of shots, cancer treatments, hospital stays, painful tests, achievements and bad days. Everything the child goes through is recorded and visible on a growing strand of beads. Jacob Carter, director of community outreach at Beads of Courage shared with us the benefits of the program. 'It combines art with medicine, and starts with a positive viewpoint. It gives children something

tangible to show and see their accomplishments. It shows what they have been through, it gives them a language of healing.'

Jacob started at Beads of Courage as a volunteer. He worked for Aflac, a health insurance company for supplemental health coverage. When he visited a cancer center a few years ago, he met a young boy named Dylan. This cute little boy was on chemotherapy, and started talking proudly about his beads. It showed Jacob the impact the Beads of Courage program can have, and he decided to get involved, and so did Aflac. There now is a special Aflac 'wingman bead'. It's a duck with its wings spread out, reminding children they are not on this journey alone. They always have a 'wingman'.

The Aflac bead is not the only special bead that is on the Beads of Courage program. Cooperating with the Sonoran Glass Art Academy, the International Society of Glass Bead makers and individual glass bead makers, special handmade glass beads are made. These unique beads are given to a child for a 'big act of courage' such as a bone

marrow transplant. Donations of bead makers are very welcome.

The program started in 2005, concentrating on children with cancer and blood disorders. It was founded by Jean Baruch, a nurse who also did her PHD on setting up a pilot program for Beads of Courage, and researching the benefits.

Jacob: 'Just like many other nurses she was frustrated with what she could do for children with cancer. All she could give them at the difficult times were stickers, but kids already get stickers in school for doing their homework. It does not match with rewarding children for going through chemo therapy.' She chose beads as the universal language it has been throughout history. Beads often are a sign of status and power, a sign of achievement and were often considered to carry special healing and protecting powers. Children are generally on the program for two to three years. In this period they will gather around 500 beads, including about 8 or 9 special acts of courage beads. The program has been extended to include children with other serious illnesses and is active in 113 hospitals.



It is also available in children's hospitals in Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom. At any given moment, 30,000 children are participating in the program.

The bead that the child, the parents and siblings all hope for is a purple heart bead. It shows a child has completed his or her treatment. It is a true act of courage.

Do you wish to contribute to the program?

Look at [www.beadsofcourage.org](http://www.beadsofcourage.org)





## 4. Preparing for the Tucson Gem show

Preparing for the Tucson show is key to a successful show and a rewarding trip. It starts by setting a date, and booking a place to stay. There are a lot of accommodations to choose from, in a range of prices. Generally, all places will fill up quickly, and charge a premium price during the Tucson Gem shows. It is recommended to book early, especially if you intend to stay at the show for more than a few days. The best location for a place to stay depends on how you plan to get around, and which shows you are most interested in. It may be a good idea to check out the different shuttle routes, to see if any suit the motel, guesthouse or apartment you will be staying at. If you plan to drive to most of the shows yourself, you may want to consider a place to stay that is a bit outside the city of Tucson and enjoy some of the beautiful nature this area has to offer. If you are only in town for a few days without a car, staying at one of the motels at the I10 may be a cheap and practical place to stay, as you will be close to many shows and shuttles.



All of the Tucson shows take place within a three-week period: the last week of January and the first two weeks of February. Some last for a nearly three weeks, others only for three days. You will want to check these dates out, before you decide what the best time for you is to go. For example, if you are a rock collector, and you are mostly interested in rare minerals, you will not want to miss the TGMS show, which is on at the last weekend of the shows.

However, if you are a beading fanatic, you will want to be in town for the Best Bead show, which is usually only on during the first week of February. After you have picked your dates, and you have a place to stay, the next step in preparing is to make a shopping list. What do you absolutely need to buy and what do you need to see? Are there any specific dealers that you want to visit? Are there any sellers that you do business with online, and would like to meet? If you plan to buy items that you have not bought before, try to get a sense of the price range by looking online for prices. Based on your shopping list, set a budget. It is very easy to overspend in Tucson. I recommend setting a budget for your specific shopping list, and add an extra amount for stuff you did not know you needed, but you will want to buy when you see it. Based on your shopping list and your dates, you may want to make a list of the shows you want to visit. Some people will come back every year, and visit only one show. Others go to 5 shows a day, so they see as much as they can. See what suits you best, and plan accordingly.





The next step is registering for shows. If you have a resale license or a business license, pre-registering is certainly worthwhile. It means you send in your details in advance, and you will get your badge or your registration information sent beforehand. It can save you time and hassle at the entrance of the show.

Some shows are wholesale only, which means you cannot get in without proper proof that you have a relevant business. Other shows will ask you to register, whether you are a business buyer or not. Most of the wholesale shows will allow registered buyers to also register a guest, but they may charge a fee. Some wholesale shows are very specific about your proof of business, for others a business card shown at the entrance is enough. If you do have a resale license (or for non-US businesses some other proof of business) bring several copies with you to the shows, along with your business cards. Most shows however are open to the public.

## Get your education here

Jamey Allen is very clear about one thing: 'You simply have to be here'. This is where the people, the beads, the discussion and exchanges of information take place. And you have to be here every year, so you do not miss out. He remembers one year that he could not make it, and it still has him gnashing his teeth. It was the year that a new generation of beads came from China. They were very well made replicas of Venetian millefiori trade beads, and they were first seen that year in Tucson. Fortunately, fellow bead collectors helped him out and sent him some of the beads.

Jamey Allen has been collecting and researching beads, making beadwork and jewelry since 1967. He lectures on the history of beads, amber and other subjects, wrote the book 'Magical ancient beads' and has many articles on beads in his name. He is well known for his beadwork, his techniques for replicating ancient glass beads in polymer clay, and what he describes as



'the construction of necklaces'.

'Anyone can string something together and put a clasp on it. I look at what each bead needs, and a lot of time goes into that. You can call it architecture in miniature'.

He remembers his first trip to Tucson in 1987, when he went with amber expert Pat Craig. They went to any show they could find amber, and Jamey was very pleased to be able to buy Dominican copal. Even though he loved the Tucson shows, it took Jamey 15 years to make

it back again. That time, it was as part of 'Beadventures' where he would present lectures and guide first time visitors at the Tucson shows. It is always fun to show people around, Jamey says. It is very impressive to them; they have never seen quantities like this. This year is the 8th tour of the Beadventures.

For someone who has devoted a lot of his work and life in educating others, it is a difficult time. When asked what he was looking out for this year in Tucson, Jamey answered: 'My goal has always been to set up a collection for the bead museum in Arizona. But this has now closed down. I do not know where to put my collection just yet. I keep everything documented, which is important. Guess I will spend the next ten years on my collection and finding a good place for it'. He is still on the lookout for beads with new techniques, beads that look different, beads that add missing pieces to the puzzle of beadmaking techniques. For example this year he bought some interesting agate beads, which turned out to be glass. And well made imitations like this, are very educational.

The Tucson shows are a good place to get your bead education, according to Jamey. It gets more and more difficult to get it elsewhere. The Arizona bead museum has closed down; smaller museums with bead collections are struggling. Bead societies are changing more towards teaching bead and jewelry design than education. Conferences with lectures on history and manufacturing of beads have become very rare. You cannot get your education online: 'Beads are such a tactile object, you are going to want to feel them'. Not every seller at the Tucson shows will be able or willing to share information with you, but many will. And it pays off, Jamey says.

'Beads are the most misrepresented artifacts in the world. Get educated, or get ripped off'.



## 5. Do's

Bring a bag that is easy for you to carry. This may be a backpack, or a bag on wheels. Especially if you are buying a lot, your bag will get heavy quickly. Also, wear comfortable shoes and clothing. It may be very warm, it may get very cold, and it may rain all in the same day; so dress flexible.

Keep a record of what you are buying, where you bought it, and what it cost. For this purpose I like to bring zip lock bags with me. When you buy something, put it in a zip lock bag, along with the business card and receipt. If there is no receipt, use a marker to write the price on the bag.

Bring plenty of water with you. The Tucson weather is unpredictable in the winter, but generally it is very dry and pretty warm.


Educate yourself before you go, and ask questions. A seller who will answer your questions with knowledge and patience, and with love for his merchandise, is someone you want to buy from. An impatient seller who will brush off your questions, is not really worth your business.

Bring home souvenirs. There are some great cheap souvenirs to be bought in Tucson to impress family and friends. Your nephews will probably love a small trilobite, while you may make your sister very happy with a simple amethyst crystal.

Make use of the variety of guides and booklets that are available during the show. They are often found at the entrance of the shows, and some include very practical overviews of all the shows, all the vendors, the shuttle routes and some even show maps of the set-up of the booths at the shows.





 Enter the Earth

## Don'ts

Overspend. It is very easy to overspend in Tucson, especially on your first trip. You will see things you never knew existed, or things that were never in your reach. Keep a budget, and stick to it. If you know you will struggle with this, bring cash only. Most dealers prefer cash, and not all will accept credit cards or checks. The bigger shows have ATM's.

Think you can or will come back for an item. Because of the size of the shows, it is not recommended to backtrack. If you see something you really like, and the price is right, buy it. Chances are that if you do not, you will not be able to find the original stall, or will not have the time to go back.

Buy things you are not familiar with for big money. If you are not educated in for example fossils, trade beads or gemstones, it is easy to fall for replicas, treated stones or plain fake items. Sometimes the sellers may not even know what they are selling.

Try to do too much in one day. No matter how long you will be in Tucson, it is nearly impossible to see all the shows. You are better off looking at the shows that are really interesting to you, than to go all the way across town to more shows because they may have more of it.

Take pictures without asking. Some shows do not allow pictures to be taken at all. At other shows it is always best to ask before taking pictures that show any detail of the items they are selling. Pictures that show an overview of the show are generally fine, but pictures of the stuff people are selling: just ask.

Image right: pieces of block resin mixed with dyes and powder, replicating stone





## Traveling with 26.000 pounds of beads

The Tucson shows sure have changed, since Russ Nobbs and Dee Mueller from Rings & Things first came here. In the early nineties, they came to look for a good spot to set up their business in Tucson. Before that, they had been selling at Quartzsite, a major meeting ground for rock hounds, mineral and bead collectors. Finding the right spot in Tucson to sell was not an easy task. They 'walked' the show for three years before they settled on a hotel show at the Crosslands hotel. Eventually they ended up at the large Holidome show, where they can today be easily found by the silver balloons they attach to their booth.

For the first shows, Dee and Russ would drive cross-country from Spokane, Washington, close to the Canadian border, to Tucson Arizona, close to the Mexican border. A trip of 4 days, in a truck loaded with more than 26.000 pound of beads and findings. Finding a truck that would carry such a load was not as easy task, Dee recalls. 'The seller first got us a truck that was not

suited for this business. He must have thought 'How much can beads really weigh?' Right now, they will let their staff do the driving, while they travel by plane. You cannot blame them, after hearing some of the driving stories. If you thought, pigs could not fly, think again. Dee found a pig flying at her from a pig farmer's truck, hitting their truck full on. Everyone made it out alive, except for the pig.

The show has grown a lot bigger since their first years, but 'even back then, it was outrageous', Russ says. It was the first time they had seen so much variety crammed into one place. From massive amethyst geodes to fossils, all sorts of beads and much more. Dee says she was also 'flabbergasted' by the diversity of prices for one and the same item at different places. 'It shows how many hands a stone or bead can go through before it gets sold here. The more hands, the higher the price'.

In the early days, it was easier to find special and unique items. Dee actually found the first piece of beautiful gaspeite, on a small fold table at the Riverpark Inn, one of the shows along

the I10. It came in a beautiful green and blue color, and has become very popular since. However, things were also a lot less organized than today. They remember the Holidome tent not really being suite for the weather and lots of shows suffering from the mud caused by the rain that can come suddenly in Tucson. The unpredictability of the weather seems to be one of the few constant factors at the Tucson shows.

The Tucson shows have 'cleaned up'. There are less street sellers, and some of the creativity is lost because for many people the shows have become too expensive to participate in. The variety of characters is still here though; 'The crazy miners, the rockhounds, even some deadheads and other outrageous people meet in Tucson'.

Driving to the Tucson shows is not the only traveling Russ and Dee will do for their business. They go to China, Indonesia and other places to talk to suppliers of beads and jewelry supplies themselves. They will visit the factories, the workshops, and are keen



to learn about the latest trends and materials. To Dee and Russ, it's important to get all the right information, to be able to pass it on to their customers. Being in Tucson is like traveling without actually moving. The world comes to Tucson, and as Dee says: 'It is amazing how global this place really is. It is great to be part of an international community, even if it is only for a short time'.

Tucson is also the place where the information from traveling comes together with everyday business. Russ calls it 'pollination of information'.

It is Tucson where the Chinese made chevron beads were first sighted, and where many misrepresented materials are exposed. Rings & Things makes a strong effort to educate customers on what types of names for stones are used in the business, what is actual stone and what is enhanced or simply glass. 'Not everyone in the bead business was too thrilled when we made it clear on our website that for example pineapple quartz and cherry quartz are not some type of stone, but manmade glass'.

'The misrepresentation, the lies, the bullshit' is what Russ absolutely does not like, but it is abundant in Tucson. Some sellers may not know any better, but others are selling flat-out lies. The industry is not a clean one, when it comes to the information, but also when it comes to the methods of mining and manufacturing. Dee: 'We really should value some of these materials more. We are ripping stones from mother earth, as if the source will last forever'. When they are buying goods for Rings & Things they try to use the influence they have, but admit that the influence is small. Examples are getting the bead workers in a village in





Bali dust masks, and not buying from companies with a bad reputation when it comes to the treatment of their workers. They try to work with small family-run companies. At their warehouse, they bought an old building instead of building a new one. They also recycle as much as they can, including at their booth at the Holidome show.

Dee and Russ love the Tucson shows. They get to meet old friends, make new friends and be out in the sunshine. They look forward to it each year. Rings & Things is known for setting up 'trunk shows' in the whole country. This way they bring their beads and jewelry making materials to those who want to see and feel what they are buying instead of getting it from a catalogue. They have been doing this for about 10 years now. It is their way of bringing 'a little of Tucson around the whole country'.

Image left: Millefiori beads from India

Image right: Plenty of stones for sale





## 6. Getting around

There are several ways to get around Tucson, each with their own pros and cons. Driving from show to show gives you independence and ease of being able to offload heavy items into the car. However, car rental prices are inflated during the shows, and parking is a big hassle. Some shows have plenty of parking spaces available, others have little or none. Some empty pieces of land will be transformed into parking lots for the duration of the show. The price of parking will also be quite high. Since there are a few clusters of shows in Tucson, like the ones on the I10, a few in and near the convention center, a few along North Oracle Road, it may also be a good idea to park at one show for the day, and explore the others by foot.

Another way of getting around is by using the shuttles. They are provided by the different shows, and some years one or more are also provided by the city of Tucson. Most of them are minivans driving a route between two or more different shows, and the occasional parking hub. The routes are marked by the names of stones, such as

the turquoise route, the amber route, the ruby route, etc. The downside is that since the routes are run by the different shows, it can be quite a puzzle to figure out what shuttle goes where and when. It may mean that you have to change shuttles to get from show A to show B. Some shuttles will have a van stopping by at the shuttle stop every 15 minutes, while at other stops the wait can go up to 45 minutes. The upside is that the shuttles are free, and give you a chance to relax and mingle with other Tucson visitors.

There are two other ways of getting around that are not used a lot by Tucson Gem show visitors but are worth exploring. The first is the local public transport system. The Suntran busses run quite regularly, are cheap and will get you pretty close to a lot of the shows. Another way is to ride a bike. Tucson is a fairly flat city, and with a large student population, quite a few people ride a bike on the streets. You can rent bikes from several bike rental places. I recommend Bicas, a bicycle, art and community center that allows you to rent bikes very cheaply and get to see another side of Tucson.



## Driving you from show to show

With more than 40 shows in different locations, getting from one show to the next is a big part of the average day for buyers at the gem shows. Those renting a car will have to deal with parking hassles. Those without a car, rely on the shuttle vans going from one place to the next. There used to be shuttles provided by the city of Tucson, but now, an array of different shuttles on various routes are sponsored by the shows themselves.

Harry is the driver of a shuttle van from the parking hub at Simpson Street to the Best Bead Show across town. It is his first year driving the show shuttles and he likes the atmosphere. People may get pretty impatient, but are still friendly. 'By the end of the day, people are tired from looking, tired from buying, tired from walking. However, they are always in good spirits.' He has lived in Tucson for 15 years, and even though he knew about the Gem shows, he has only visited his first one last year. Most locals are pretty pleased with the Gem shows, and the money it brings into the city. However,



'Downtown is best avoided during the show, just too crowded for us locals'.

He remembers when the shows would bring in more business than today. 'When the economy was better, you could not find a hotel room at this time unless you went 20 miles out of town. Now the volume of people visiting has gone down'.

Harry is impressed with all the amazing things that can be found at the shows. Most people he drives in his van will

tell him about how they are pleased with what they found. Designers of jewelry, happy with the new rocks to bring home, tumble, polish and make into jewelry.

When he visited a show that was open to the public last year, he was mostly surprised with the geodes. 'How you can find a rock, know it is hollow and have such beauty inside.....that is just beyond me'



## The best tamales in town

The Tucson shows are not just about the gems, the fossils and the beads. They are also about the food. With a great variety of foods available at the different shows, and the need to get off your feet once in a while, stopping for lunch is a treat.

Some of the people feeding the hungry gem show visitors are Lee and Dee from Tucson Tamales. Their Mexican delicacy of ground corn maize baked with a filling inside cornhusks is a big hit. They are time consuming to make, and for those familiar with tamales, going by their stall brings back memories of good home cooking. However, a lot of the people at the shows will not know what tamales are, and Tucson tamales are their first introduction. The tamale stand set up this year first at the Best Bead show, and afterwards at the TGMS show. Dee, who originally is from New York, enjoys the variety of people buying their tamales, and talking to all the different people. Just the other day she introduced two sisters from London to their first tamales and asked them what they thought of Tucson. The



sisters explained what a great adventure it was to be in Tucson, and at all the shows. It allows Dee a little peek into how other people perceive Tucson. 'I would just love to talk to all these people from around the world. Finally, for a few weeks, Tucson is just like the place I come from: New York City.' Just as we say goodbye, with a bag of tamales to go, a Chinese mother and daughter come up to Dee and Lee. 'These were the best tamales we ever had'. Lee asks: 'Have you had tamales before?' 'No', they answer, 'but these are the best.'

# Tucson Tamale COMPANY



**Single Tamale** Choice of meats & chiles \$3.50

**2 Tamales & Rice** Choice of one 2 tamales served with rice 7<sup>00</sup>

**Big Salad** Spicy green chile roasted corn, meat, peppers, tomatoes, apples, and hot sauce with hot honey dressing \$5<sup>00</sup>

**Tamale Salad** Choice of tamale and spicy green chile roasted corn, meat, peppers, tomatoes and hot honey dressing 6<sup>00</sup>

**Sonora Fe** Meat **Berkeley** Red Beans, Pork Saus, Red Salsa, Beans & Hot Honey Sauce

**Sonora** Spicy Green Chiles, Roasted Corn, Beans, Hot Honey Sauce **Blue Tamale** Spicy Green Chiles, Roasted Corn, Beans, Hot Honey Sauce

**Blue Tamale** Spicy Green Chiles, Roasted Corn, Beans, Hot Honey Sauce

**Anstirn** Spicy

Tucson Tamale





## 7. Resources

The list of shows at Tucson changes each year, just like the venues and the dealers. There are a few guides that are available online and in print at the shows that give a good overview of the shows. Some are more general, while others are geared towards a specific group of buyers. All of these guides can be picked up for free at the shows. They are filled with advertising from the different shows and different dealers. You may want to consider getting a copy to keep and bring home, and getting a copy to use simply for the practical information. You can just take out all the pages with the advertising to help you save weight in a bag that is going to be too heavy anyway.





### **The Tucson Show Guide**

The Lapidary Journal Jewelry Artist makes this guide from Interweave Press. It is the most comprehensive guide that is available. Before the show, it can be found at [www.jewelrysthows.com](http://www.jewelrysthows.com). You can also purchase older copies of the Tucson Show Guide here, and find a lot of practical information on the show like parking and shuttles.

### **The Tucson EZ-Guide**

This guide is smaller than the Tucson Show Guide, but still has all the information on the shows that you need. You can find this guide, along with guides to other gem and jewelry shows online at [www.xpopress.com](http://www.xpopress.com) or you can pick up your copy at the show.

### **MetaGuide Magazines, Tucson Guide**

This comprehensive guide focuses on the metaphysical properties of certain stones. The guide holds a variety of articles on stones and dealers, and a map and overview of the different shows.

### **Guide to Fossil Events and Dealers in Tucson**

This small guide is geared towards those interested in fossils, and highlights the main shows and dealers of fossils in Tucson.

### **GIGM Shows**

Four of the shows along the I10 are from the same company: GIGM shows. Their guide lists the dealers with good maps of the shows for the Globe show at the Days Inn, The Howard Johnson Gem & Mineral Show, the Clarion show and the Grant Inn show.

More information can be found at [www.gigmshows.com](http://www.gigmshows.com)

### **G&LW Shows**

The Gem & Lapidary Wholesalers (G&LW) have two shows: one is the Gem Mall, and the other is the Holidome. Both are big shows, so picking up their guide to look at all the dealers beforehand and getting a sense of the location may be a good idea. More information can be found at [www.glwshows.com](http://www.glwshows.com)

Some of the other shows will also have a guide specifically listing the dealers of that shows. They may also include articles, coupons and other interesting information. Examples are the Show directory of the AGTA Gemfair and JOGS show guide.

### **[www.visittucson.org](http://www.visittucson.org)**

This site is the official site from the Tucson Tourist office. They have a good overview of the different shows, and can direct you to other interesting things that go on in Tucson

### **[www.tucsongemshow.blogspot.com](http://www.tucsongemshow.blogspot.com)**

This blog is written by Robyn Hawk and gives a great impression on the Gem shows. Much of the latest Tucson show news can be found on here first. It also includes a google map of the shows, and interesting links to a variety of useful information

### **[www.tucsongemandmineralshows.net](http://www.tucsongemandmineralshows.net)**

A website with an array of practical information on the Tucson Gem shows, including 'Insider Tips to shopping' and a restaurant guide.



## At the fringe of the show

The Tucson show is not all about the massive tents and venues. There are a lot of things going on at parking lots, sidewalks and campsites. You could call it the fringe of the Tucson shows, and sometimes, this is where the most interesting finds are. Rob is a young jewelry designer from California, who is selling his wire wrapped stones, rings and pendants at the sidewalk of one of the shows along the I10. He was on the road seven years ago, when he found temporary work at the gem shows, unloading trucks from sellers. 'I knew absolutely nothing about gems, jewelry or the craft involved', Rob points out. Someone showed him how to work with metal wire, and obviously he was at the best place to get some good stones as well. His work is inventive, using a variety of mostly gemstone quality stones and fine silver wire. At home, he sells his jewelry wholesale, and it will find its way through festivals to the people who will enjoy wearing the one of a kind pieces. Every year, Rob comes to Tucson from California. He's not the only one selling outside of the official shows. Most shows are very



expensive to get into, and it simply is not a possibility for everyone to sell there. Many are, like Rob, sleeping in their car. Things are changing though. According to Rob, Tucson is not as friendly to people like him as they used to be. Things are geared more and more towards the bigger commercial venues, and they are not too fond of the fringe side of the Tucson shows. However, as long as it is possible, Rob can be found, with his dog, around the shows selling his jewelry and buying more rocks from his profits.





## 8. List of Interviews

[In Tucson, they pull out all the stops](#)  
Paul Johnson

[Around the globe searching for beads](#)  
J-Me and Guy, Wild Things Beads  
[www.wildthingsbeads.com](http://www.wildthingsbeads.com)

[How can you not love this show?](#)  
Abdul Karim Cham

[A glass artist on a mission](#)  
Kevin O' Grady  
[www.kevinogrady.com](http://www.kevinogrady.com)

[On the lookout for the unique](#)  
Phil Fischman, Beads, Crystals & more  
[www.beadscrystalsandmore.com](http://www.beadscrystalsandmore.com)

[This show has everything](#)  
Abdouli Jawneh, Jawneh Brothers  
Imports

[Striped flint from Poland](#)  
Janusz Gradowski, Multistone  
[www.bandedflint.pl](http://www.bandedflint.pl)

[Carefree in Tucson](#)  
Kathy Tinkelenberg, Kathy's creations

[A life of glass](#)  
JoAnne Zekowski

[A family on the road](#)  
Akbari Family, M.A.K. Beads

[Presenting with pride: minerals from Arizona](#)  
William Hodgson, TGMS  
[www.tgms.org](http://www.tgms.org)

[From India to Tucson and back again](#)  
Rusty Glicksman, Earth door, Sky door  
[www.earthdoorskydoor.com](http://www.earthdoorskydoor.com)

[My heart is in the stones](#)  
Cara William, Stone Group Laboratories  
[www.stonegrouplabs.com](http://www.stonegrouplabs.com)

[Ancient fossils from Morocco](#)  
Bouabidi Achmed

[Traveling the world to get the best](#)  
Joe and Katie Loux, Joe Loux  
[www.joeloux.com](http://www.joeloux.com)

[Minerals from down under](#)  
Maureen Socklich, Socklich Trading  
Company  
[www.socklichtrading.com.au](http://www.socklichtrading.com.au)

Beads from Tucson

[Beads of courage](#)

Jacob Carter

[www.beadsofcourage.org](http://www.beadsofcourage.org)

[Get your education here](#)

Jamey Allen

[Traveling with 26.000 pounds of beads](#)

Russ Nobbs, Dee Mueller, Rigns &

Things

[www.rings-things.com](http://www.rings-things.com)

[Driving you from show to show](#)

Harry

[The best tamales in town](#)

Dee and Lee

[www.tucsontamalecompany.com](http://www.tucsontamalecompany.com)

[At the fringe of the show](#)

Rob and his dog





Beads from Tucson



## Conversations, overheard at the show

These are pretty beads, look at all those colors! How much are these beads, sir? Wow, 300 dollars may just be a bit too much for my little girl. These 5 dollar beads look nice too. (at the African Art Village)

Amber, there must be 200 different types, and you should really go talk to that one guy, you can let him know you talked to me. He will get you a good deal. (at the food court)

Prices of rough sugilite, but the price per gram is so much better at that other seller. His quality is not as consistent, but I am sure I can pick out some good stuff (at the shuttle stop)

Once again I am struck by the price of the gold, it may not be possible for me anymore. I may have to skip to gold plated silver, keeping stock is just killing me. (at the AGTA)

They just have too much to choose from. I knew it was big, I did not know it was this big. What am I going to do now? (In the ladies' room)

That was the main mistake I made this show. When I sat down with that first seller, with the rough. I bought too much from him, before I shopped around. Now, it is the most expensive stuff I bought. Live and learn, I guess. (On the shuttle bus)

Left: Packing, unpacking, covering it up: keeping merchandise safe.







ISBN 978-94-91311-01-7



9 789491 311017 >