



# Landscape Comparison: Arizona and Massachusetts

- By Ramón Bannister

## The Southwest and the Northeast

This is not a news story per se as much as it is a geographical comparison between two very different regions of the country. Below this long introduction is a slideshow where you'll be able to compare the geography with your own eyes. By looking at Southern Arizona (Tucson/Phoenix area) and Eastern Massachusetts (Boston/Worcester area) side-by-side, I want to get you used to the idea of comparing elements within both states. This comparison will help in the next series I have in mind, where I will compare the same issue (yet to be revealed) in different states. I got the idea when I moved from Tucson, Arizona, to Bloomington, Indiana; and after Indiana I moved to the Boston area. In each region, I observed very different cultures. It is interesting to me that in the same country, where people spend the same kind of money, eat the same kinds of food, speak the same language (sort of), and experience the same kinds of successes and failures, that people could be so different.

The problem with what I said is that people really don't eat the same kinds of food, speak the same language and experience the same kinds of successes and failures. Well, they do and they don't. Everywhere you go there's a McDonald's; but the United States is not one culture - it is many. In Boston this is quite pronounced. Sure, we have the traditional grocery stores and restaurants, but there are also strong influences from Italy (i.e. Boston's North End), Ireland, India (3 Indian restaurants and at least 2 Indian grocery stores within 2 blocks of each other on Moody Street in Waltham), Africa (including Uganda), and Puerto Rico - to name just a few. Let's not even mention the Boston accent. In Tucson, the main not-so-foreign influence is Mexican, keeping in mind that Mexicans inhabited Texas, Arizona and other states before the colonists stepped in and took their land away; but in Tucson there are people from many countries around the world too.

And we have to remember that cultural differences lead to character differences, which have a lot to do with whether the city is big or small. Not that I have proof of these differences, but I have noticed when I go to a restaurant in Tucson that all the employees are actually nice to me. They treat me like I'm an important dignitary. That doesn't happen very much in Boston. But Boston tends to be more efficient, where the hustle and bustle of the big city forces people to work quickly. Sure, the city bus driver in Boston will ignore you when you say "hi" and look at you as if you're bothering him. But I can guarantee that he won't stop in the middle of his route, park the bus on the side of road, get off the bus and walk into a fast food restaurant to eat his breakfast, and then come back to the bus 10 minutes later w/ half a sandwich and coffee in his hands, where he then eats the rest of his breakfast in front of all the passengers who are looking at their wrist watches and wondering why he didn't eat breakfast at home. The aforementioned happens all the time in Bloomington, Indiana; people are more lax there, and bus drivers actually talk to you.

Probably more interesting are the differing geographical features, which have much influence on people's personalities. In Tucson, for instance, people constantly worry about the water supply,

more specifically the amount of water available. The Colorado River Project has helped to alleviate the underground water shortage. But when the high reaches 110 degrees every day for 2 months and not a single drop of water falls from the sky, that's going to have a psychological effect on the inhabitants. People in the Northeast don't realize how powerful the sun can be. Northeasterners tend to think that dry air makes the heat tolerable. Tell that to the turkey you put in the oven this Thanksgiving! When it's 120 degrees in Phoenix you can cook bacon on the sidewalk. It's been done before. You go into your car and can't touch the steering wheel without having 1st degree burns on your hands, literally.

In Massachusetts that doesn't happen. You can actually touch bare steel in Boston (like your seat belt) in the middle of the summer and not get burned (it'll be uncomfortable, but it won't give you 1st degree burns). That's a foreign concept to me. And we get so much rain out here that even Northeasterners get tired of it. That's also foreign to me. I used to love the rain; now I hate it. The fact that we can get more rain in a week than Tucson gets in 6 months is science fiction to those who have rarely traveled outside of the desert. The first time I rode a plane out of the Southwest, I went to Franklin, Tennessee. When we were landing I noticed fields upon endless fields of grass, green as the greenest green you'll ever see. I was bewildered - I had never seen so much grass before. I thought that only happened in rain forests, because I knew how much water was necessary even for desert grass. So, I asked my wife (from the Northeast) sitting next to me, of course in the booming, loud voice that I have, "How do they water that grass?" She and others around us chuckled. I would too...now that I know the answer. Even when she told me that people don't water it because it rains so much, I didn't believe her. I had to experience the week-long rains to know what she really meant. In fact, this year in June it rained every day for about 3 weeks straight, almost literally without stopping. It reminded me of that science fiction story where people are on another planet and see the sun once every few decades. Thankfully, the sun only took 3 weeks to come out, and it was just as miraculous as it was for the people in the sci-fi story.

I'll never forget the first week I lived in Indiana. The news media reported that there was a serious drought. Then, I went outside and noticed it was raining. Being from the desert, I asked myself, "How can there be a drought when it's raining?" Growing up in Tucson had a strong effect on me. I often dump my aquarium water (when doing water changes) in the flower gardens I have outside. But Massachusetts has its own water problems. In the summer, there are some towns that send out a "boil water" order because the water supply is poisoned with bacteria. Water officials increase the amount of chlorine, and still there's bacteria. Sometimes ocean water gets "red tide," the result of an algal bloom, forcing fisherman away from those areas because eating shellfish from those waters can be poisonous. And the famous Charles River is said to be at least somewhat polluted. I live near a "pond," which in Tucson would be a lake, which is also said to be so polluted that you're not allowed to swim in it. Why people fish from the pond is beyond me, but I have seen some smaller fish near shore, probably a sign that the water wouldn't kill you if you fell in. I haven't seen anyone swim in it though...And I won't even talk about the fact that growing up in the desert gives you no idea about how much it can snow.

My point is that geography is a very interesting component of culture. The fact that Massachusetts vacationers have the luxury of Cape Cod and the Cape Cod National Seashore available to them is very different from the luxury of hiking the desert trails, getting poked by

cacti, and watching the beautiful sunsets behind long mountain ranges. We have the New England Aquarium with huge ocean-going turtles. Arizona has the Saguaro National Park with huge, century-old saguaros. There's nothing like swimming in 55-60 degree ocean water in the middle of the 80 degree summer, and then flying to Phoenix in 115 degree weather where not having an air conditioner can literally be life-threatening.

Seeing photographs is probably the best way to get a sense of these geographical differences. Even video can't record the geography in the same way, So, the slideshows below have photos that I think are representative of Southern Arizona and Eastern Massachusetts. I was the photographer and used an SLR film camera. The film was CVS brand ISO 200. The camera was an obsolete Canon EOS Rebel T2, w/ 28-90mm auto/manual focus lens, and a minor lens filter that cuts out a little bit of sky blue to enhance the other colors and cut down on glare. Traveling at highway speeds (someone else was driving) often forced me to use semi-auto modes and set very high shutter speeds, at around 1500-3000. But I mostly used the full auto modes. You'll see mountain regions in Arizona, and very green grass in Massachusetts. (All photos ©Ramón Bannister, 2009.)

## Southern Arizona



**Figure 1:** Typical scene on I10 travelling east towards Casa Grande.



**Figure 2:** Mountain, Picacho Peak, in the distance.

## Eastern Massachusetts



**Figure 1:** Typical fall scene on Route 2 west.



**Figure 2:** Trees changing color as far as the eye can see.



**Figure 3:** Picacho Peak up close. Notice: not a cloud in the sky.



**Figure 3:** Grassy open field with colorful trees in background.



**Figure 4:** Strange rock formation near Picacho Peak on other side of the road.



**Figure 4:** More trees with blue sky and minimal clouds.



**Figure 5:** Crop of Pecan trees on either side of I10.



**Figure 5:** More trees on either side of Route 2.



**Figure 6:** Mobile traffic cam to catch speeders.



**Figure 6:** Entering Fruitlands Museum in Harvard, Massachusetts.



Figure 7: Close up of mobile traffic cam vehicle.



Figure 7: Wide shot near visitor center, Fruitlands Museum.



Figure 8: Cotton crop on edge of I10.



Figure 8: Famous tree sculpture on Fruitlands Museum.



Figure 9: Road near Saguaro National Park.



Figure 9: Looking straight up at scary close-up of sculpture's face. Beautiful blue sky and clouds in background.



**Figure 10:** Wide shot with saguaro cacti in background, from balcony of Saguaro National Park visitor center.



**Figure 11:** Example of variety of desert vegetation. Various types of cacti, shrubs, small trees, etc.



**Figure 12:** Photo of bird, unknown type. Note how well it blends in to background.



**Figure 13:** Barrel cactus with its fruit on top.



**Figure 10:** Trail in Fruitlands Museum, looking behind me as I walk the trail.



**Figure 11:** Further down the trail, looking diagonally up and to the left.



**Figure 12:** Middle of trail, near old Willard Farm site.



**Figure 13:** Woods, with manmade bridge further down the trail.



**Figure 14:** Front of parking lot, Saguardo National Monument. Flag stands out from the greens and browns of the desert. Again, not a cloud in the sky.



**Figure 14:** Beautiful ground cover of red leaves and green ferns, sun filtering through the green, red and brown leaves still on the tree. Fruitlands Museum.