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## Meet Tara Alcantara

More than 15 years ago, Tara Alcantara began quietly reshaping Tucson's relationship with its desert terrain. A downhill mountain biker with a deep belief in the city's untapped potential, Tara has spent much of her career advocating for trail access, building community, and helping put Tucson on the national mountain biking map. Today, through Home Grown Mountain Bike Tours and her continued work in trail development and advocacy, Tara is ensuring that Tucson's rugged landscapes are not just rideable, but celebrated. Keep reading to learn more about Tara's mission, or click below for the latest media updates from Visit Tucson.

[What's New](#)

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Watching 48-year-old Tara Alcantara descend the rugged slopes of Tucson's Santa Catalina Mountains, it's clear she could have dedicated her life to professional downhill (mountain bike) racing. The speed, precision, and confidence she brings to each trail reflects decades of experience in a discipline she favors for its intensity and "lots of endorphins."

But Tara's legacy isn't defined by podiums. Instead, it's rooted in Tucson, and in the deliberate, boots-on-the-ground work of building a mountain biking culture over the past few decades where one barely existed before.

That mission comes alive at [Home Grown Mountain Bike Tours](#), the Tucson-based outfitter and guide service she co-owns with her husband, Art. Home Grown offers high-performance mountain bike rentals and guided rides that drop guests straight into Tucson's most iconic terrain: from fast desert singletrack to the plummeting descents of Mt. Lemmon, soaring 9,159 feet above sea level. Shuttle service and coaching round out Home Grown's offerings, making Tucson's wild, technical trails accessible in a way they weren't just a few decades ago, back when Tara began honing her skills in one of mountain biking's most notorious proving grounds.

"If you can ride in Arizona, you can ride anywhere," Tara said. "The thing about Arizona is the riding is so diverse. You can be in desert terrain, scrub and saguaros one day, and within a few hours be riding pine forests like you'd find in Canada or even further north. It's like having the whole range from Mexico to Canada in one state."

A longtime mountain biker and certified personal trainer, Tara grew up in Boise and spent time in Phoenix before moving to Tucson more than 25 years ago. After meeting her husband and business partner, she fully immersed herself in mountain biking and quickly fell for the challenge Tucson's terrain offered: rocky, exposed, and relentlessly technical trails that demand focus and skill. Yet there was still a problem: despite its raw potential, Tucson had very few rideable trails, and mountain biking lagged far behind the city's road cycling scene.

In response, Tara and Art co-founded Tucson Off-Road Cyclists & Activists (TORCA) in 2010, committing the next decade to advocating for mountain bike access and trail development. Collectively, they spent thousands of volunteer hours developing and maintaining trails, meeting with land managers, and pushing for new tracks. The work was exhausting and cumbersome, but altogether worthwhile.

"It's a slow process and sometimes it feels like you're chiseling away at stone," Tara said. "... The fruits of that labor will probably not be seen by me – they'll belong to the next generation of riders who come after us. That's what keeps me going: knowing someone else will experience these trails and fall in love with them the way I did."



Despite her natural talent, Tara has often put her own riding on hold in favor of trail development, spending days off and weekends building and maintaining trails. She

was frequently the only woman on crews of 10 to 12 people, taking on physically demanding work deep in the backcountry.

“One day we counted 60 trees removed in a single trail session. Sixty! And these weren’t little saplings, they were huge, old-growth trees,” Tara said. “It was exhausting, but standing at the top of the trail at the end of the day, looking out over the forest, it felt like we’d done something real, something lasting.”

However, the Big Horn Fire of 2020 dealt a heartbreaking blow to TORCA’s efforts, scorching the landscape and toppling countless trees. That summer, fierce monsoon rains swept through, erasing one of their most treasured tracks, the CDO Trail, entirely.

“It was a devastating blow,” Tara said. “To see trails we built and cared for wiped out in a single fire; it was heartbreaking. But in the same way fire clears the forest for regrowth, it’s given us a chance to rethink, rebuild, and create even better trails for the future.”

Still, not all was lost. A second popular trail, Red Ridge, remained intact. Today, it is one of the most iconic rides in the region: featuring 22 miles with nearly 7,000 feet of descent.

“That trail is uniquely Tucson,” Tara said. “It shows you the challenge, the diversity, and the beauty that makes this place so special.”



Inspired by trails like Red Ridge and the untapped potential for mountain biking in the region, Tara and Art founded Home Grown Mountain Bike Tours in 2016. Their goal was simple: make Tucson's wild, technical trails accessible to locals and visitors alike, whether they were curious first-timers or experienced riders.

Today, Home Grown shines a light on Tucson's sprawling trail network, from the tight, saguaro-studded twists of the Starr Pass Trail System and the rolling desert expanse of Sweetwater Preserve, to the technical challenges of the 50 Year Trail System, the playful loops of Fantasy Island, and even a stretch of the epic Arizona Trail that runs 800 miles across the state – just to name a few.

Each trail offers its own brand of grit and beauty, a mix of rocky singletrack, sharp climbs, and sweeping descents that have long made Tucson a proving ground for riders of all levels. It's the diversity of terrain that hooked Tara decades ago, and what continues to fuel her mission to expose more people to Tucson's growing allure as a mountain bike hotspot.

Though Tara has always said she rides simply because she loves it, she acknowledges that her dedication to the sport has broken barriers for women in mountain biking, paving the way for riding, coaching, and mentorship opportunities that were virtually nonexistent when she first started. Through clinics and partnerships with organizations

like Ladies AllRide, she has played a key role in welcoming a new generation of female rides to the trail.

“I wanted to prove it could be done and to make sure the next generation of riders didn’t have to feel like outsiders,” Tara said. “There’s space for everyone on the trail if you want it badly enough.”

Today, Tara is most excited about continuing to share Tucson – its trails, culture, and wild beauty – with a broader audience. Mountain biking may be the entry point, but the goal is something bigger.

“I love Tucson. I love this place. That’s why I started this business, to share it with others... and build this place as the epic destination that it is, not just for mountain biking, but for anybody who wants to experience the Southwest in a meaningful way.”



**Tara’s Top 5 (when she’s not working or mountain biking for fun):**

[Tanque Verde Ranch](#) - Tara lives on the east side, not far from Tanque Verde Ranch. Even if you’re not into horseback riding, she says, “It’s just a great place to go,” offering a slice of Tucson’s Western history.

Tito & Pep – As a self-professed foodie, Tito & Pep is always at the top of Tara's restaurant list. This midtown gem serves mesquite-fired cuisine that's as inventive as it is delicious, plus she's a big fan of the hometown chef, John Martinez.

Hacienda Del Sol Guest Ranch Resort – Once an all-girls boarding school, this stylish boutique property is a favorite of Tara's. She enjoys browsing the historic photos that line the walls, often before or after dinner at the property's signature restaurant.

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum – An animal lover at heart, Tara calls the museum "a must-visit for anyone wanting to understand the Sonoran Desert in a deeper way."

Downtown Tucson - Decades ago, she wasn't a fan of downtown, but its revitalization, packed with restaurants, the Rialto Theatre, and the Fox Tucson Theater, has turned it into a place she's proud to show off to friends and family.



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