

FREE GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

The Scottsdale *Buyer's* *Guide*

*Everything you need to know to buy a home in Scottsdale,
Phoenix, or the greater Arizona metro — from a licensed local
agent.*

 Complete Guide  20 min read  By Yasmine Varanai

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Welcome

Buying a home in Arizona is one of the most exciting — and stressful — financial decisions you'll ever make. This guide strips away the jargon and walks you through exactly what to expect, from the first mortgage conversation to the day you get your keys.

I've written it specifically for Arizona — because our market has quirks most generic buying guides completely miss. Escrow works differently here than in California. Property tax structures are unique. HOA culture is massive. The heat matters for home design and maintenance. And the competitive landscape changes dramatically between Old Town Scottsdale and, say, Gilbert.

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Think of this as the conversation I'd have with you over coffee if you were considering buying.

Nothing hidden, nothing oversimplified.

The Arizona Market Today

Arizona has been one of the fastest-growing real estate markets in the country for over a decade. Phoenix metro added more than 1 million residents in the 2010s, and growth continues.

#1

Population growth among large U.S. metros

6-8%

Average annual home appreciation

\$450K

Phoenix metro median home price

350+

Sunny days per year

What this means for buyers:

- ♦ **Inventory moves fast** in the \$400K-\$700K range — expect multiple offers, especially in top school districts.
- ♦ **Luxury market is more negotiable** — homes above \$1.5M often sit 60-120 days and have room for price discussion.
- ♦ **New construction is booming** — especially in Gilbert, Chandler, Mesa (Eastmark), and North Phoenix.
- ♦ **Out-of-state demand is high** — California, Washington, and Illinois buyers arrive with cash and pre-approval.

REALITY CHECK

This isn't 2021

You have more negotiating power than buyers did three years ago. Inspections are negotiable again, seller concessions are common, and rate buydowns are often on the table. Don't let old-market-mindset headlines push you into bad decisions.

Your Buying Timeline

From first showing to keys-in-hand, a typical Arizona home purchase takes **30-60 days**. Here's the breakdown:
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- 01 **Pre-approval** — 3-7 days to get your initial approval letter
- 02 **Home search** — anywhere from 2 weeks to 6+ months depending on inventory and specificity
- 03 **Offer to acceptance** — typically 1-3 days of back-and-forth
- 04 **Inspection period** — 10 days (standard in AZ)
- 05 **Appraisal** — 5-10 days after inspection
- 06 **Final loan approval** — 15-25 days
- 07 **Closing** — typically Day 30-45 from accepted offer

If you're paying cash, you can close in as few as 10 days.

Getting Pre-Approved

In Arizona's competitive market, **pre-approval is non-negotiable before you start looking**. Sellers will not take offers seriously without it.

A good pre-approval letter confirms you're approved for a specific loan amount based on your verified income, credit, and debt. It's different from "pre-qualification" — which is basically a guess based on whatever you tell the lender.

What you'll need to provide:

Pre-approval document checklist

- ✓ 2 years of W-2s and tax returns (or 1099s if self-employed)
- ✓ Most recent 2 months of pay stubs
- ✓ 2-3 months of bank statements (all accounts)
- ✓ Investment / retirement account statements
- ✓ Government ID
- ✓ If self-employed: 2 years of Profit & Loss statements
- ✓ If you have rental income: leases and 2 years of Schedule E

"Get pre-approved with 2 or 3 lenders, not 1. Rate differences of just 0.25% can save you \$20K+ over a 30-year loan."

Loan Types Explained

Conventional Loan

The default for most Arizona buyers. Requires 3–20% down. If you put less than 20% down, you'll pay PMI (Private Mortgage Insurance) until you reach 20% equity. Best for strong credit (680+) and stable income.

FHA Loan

Government-backed, allows as little as 3.5% down with a 580+ credit score. More lenient qualification standards. Downside: you pay mortgage insurance for the life of the loan (unless you refinance) — so many buyers use FHA to get in, then refinance to conventional once they hit 20% equity.

VA Loan

For active-duty service members and veterans. Zero down payment. No PMI. Competitive rates. If you're eligible, this is almost always the best option.

Jumbo Loan

For purchases above the conforming loan limit (currently ~\$806K in AZ for 2026). More paperwork, usually higher credit/reserve requirements. Common in Paradise Valley, North Scottsdale, and Arcadia.

How Much Home You Can Afford

The classic rule is that your **monthly mortgage payment shouldn't exceed 28% of gross income**. That's mortgage + taxes + insurance + HOA + PMI.

Example scenarios:

\$100K

Household income → ~\$2,330/mo housing →
~\$375K home

\$150K

Household income → ~\$3,500/mo housing →
~\$560K home

\$200K

Household income → ~\$4,666/mo housing →
~\$750K home

\$300K

Household income → ~\$7,000/mo housing →
~\$1.1M home

These assume 20% down, 6.75% interest, current AZ tax rates, and typical insurance. [Run your own numbers here.](#)

HIDDEN COSTS

Budget for more than the payment

Closing costs in AZ typically run 2–3% of purchase price. Moving costs, immediate repairs, new furniture, and utility setup easily add another \$3–8K. Always keep 1–2% of the home value as a repair reserve for the first year.

Choosing a Neighborhood

In Arizona, the neighborhood matters as much as the house. A 10-minute drive in any direction can mean a different school district, different HOA, different tax rate, different lifestyle.

Questions to narrow your search:

- 01 Commute tolerance?** Phoenix traffic has intensified — 20 miles can mean 45 min at rush hour.
- 02 School priority?** If K–12 matters, Scottsdale Unified, Chandler Unified, Gilbert Public, and BASIS schools are top-rated.
- 03 HOA comfort?** Most newer AZ homes are in HOAs (good for standards, but \$50–\$500+/mo and rules you must follow).
- 04 Urban vs suburban?** Old Town Scottsdale, Downtown Phoenix, and Tempe offer walkability. The Scottsdale Byside, East Phoenix, and Gilbert are car-dependent. Most other areas are car-dependent.

For detailed neighborhood-by-neighborhood breakdowns, see my area pages: [Scottsdale](#), [North Scottsdale](#), [Paradise Valley](#), [Arcadia](#), [Phoenix](#), [Chandler](#), [Gilbert](#), [Mesa](#), [Tempe](#).

Viewing Homes — What to Look For

Arizona homes have unique wear patterns because of heat, dust, and hard water. Here's what I check on every showing:

Arizona-specific inspection checklist

- ✓ **AC system age** — major units last 12–15 years in AZ heat. \$8–15K to replace.
- ✓ **Roof condition** — tile roofs last 50+ years but underlayment fails around 20–25. Shingle roofs need replacement every 15–20.
- ✓ **Pool equipment age** — pump, heater, plaster condition matter.
- ✓ **Water softener** — AZ water is hard; many homes need softeners.
- ✓ **Foundation cracks** — small hairlines are normal with expansive soil; large cracks are a concern.
- ✓ **Pest evidence** — scorpions, termites, and roof rats are part of AZ living. Ask about treatment history.
- ✓ **Sunlight damage** — faded paint, warped wood on west-facing sides.
- ✓ **HVAC ductwork condition** — often deteriorates in attics that hit 150°F in summer.

Making a Competitive Offer

In a multiple-offer situation — still common in AZ's desirable areas — price is just one factor. Smart buyers also adjust:

- ♦ **Earnest money** — 1–3% of purchase price (higher = more serious)
- ♦ **Inspection period** — 10 days standard; 5 days shows you're flexible
- ♦ **Financing contingency** — shorter is stronger

- ♦ **Appraisal gap** — offering to cover some gap if the home appraises low
- ♦ **Close date** — matching the seller's preferred timeline can beat a higher-priced offer
- ♦ **Escalation clause** — "I'll pay \$X over the highest offer up to \$Y"
- ♦ **Personal letter** — controversial (HUD advises against) but still used in AZ

The Arizona Escrow Process

Unlike some states where attorneys handle closings, Arizona uses **title/escrow companies**. This is usually cleaner and faster — but you need to know what's happening:

- 01 **Open escrow** — within 24 hrs of acceptance, earnest money deposited
- 02 **Title search** — confirms seller can legally sell, no liens
- 03 **Inspection period** — 10 days (you can cancel, renegotiate, or proceed)
- 04 **Seller response** — they accept, counter, or decline your repair requests
- 05 **Appraisal ordered** — your lender verifies the price
- 06 **Final walkthrough** — 24-48 hrs before closing
- 07 **Signing** — typically 1-2 hrs at the title company
- 08 **Funding + recording** — loan funds, deed records with county, keys released

Closing Day

The day of closing, you'll:

- ♦ Bring a cashier's check or wire for your down payment + closing costs
- ♦ Bring government ID (two forms is safer)
- ♦ Sign approximately 60-80 pages of documents (most are standard)
- ♦ Get a closing statement (HUD-1) showing exactly where every dollar went

Once the loan funds and the deed records (usually same day), **the home is officially yours.**

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Your agent will coordinate key transfer.

After You Close

First-month checklist

- ✓ Change locks (or get rekeyed — ~\$80-150)
- ✓ Set up utilities: APS or SRP for electric, City of Scottsdale/Phoenix/etc. for water, Cox or Centurylink for internet
- ✓ File for Arizona Homestead Exemption — protects \$400K of equity from creditors
- ✓ If applicable, file for Senior Property Valuation Freeze (65+)
- ✓ Update your driver's license and voter registration
- ✓ Schedule first AC service — especially if moving in during summer
- ✓ Meet the neighbors — seriously, this matters in AZ
- ✓ Save your closing statement — you'll need it for taxes

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- 01 Making big purchases before closing** — new furniture, cars, or credit applications can tank your debt-to-income ratio and kill your loan. Wait until after closing.
- 02 Changing jobs mid-process** — lenders re-verify employment right before closing.
- 03 Skipping the inspection on a new build** — new homes have issues too. Always inspect.
- 04 Assuming HOA docs are fine** — read them. Some HOAs restrict rentals, exterior changes, pets, commercial vehicles.
- 05 Over-reaching on the offer** — leaving no emergency fund after closing is stressful. Keep 3-6 months expenses liquid.
- 06 Choosing a lender purely on rate** — the cheapest rate sometimes comes from the worst service. Close on time matters more than 0.125%.
- 07 Not understanding Arizona-specific title issues** — water rights, easements, and community property laws have nuances.

Working with Yasmine

Yasmine Varanai

Licensed Arizona Real Estate Agent · Independent



With 15+ years of business and negotiation expertise — including a career as a National Freight Manager — Yasmine brings an analytical, client-first approach to Arizona real estate. She serves buyers across the entire Phoenix metro, from first-time buyers to luxury estate purchasers.

If you're ready to talk — or just want to ask a specific question — I'm happy to connect. No pressure, no sales pitch. Just real answers.