



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Sherry Henry:

Good afternoon,

Arizona can now add another great event to our mega event lineup! The NCAA 2017 Men's Final Four will be held at the University of Phoenix Stadium, April 2017. The national semifinals are set for Saturday, April 1 and the national championship game will tip off on Monday, April 3. This is fantastic news for our state as this is just another wonderful opportunity to showcase and tell Arizona's great story.

Also, we look forward to seeing our industry partners at our Arizona Media Marketplace tomorrow. AOT is holding the Arizona Media Marketplace in conjunction with Travel Classics West, a premier travel writer conference that allows freelance travel writers the opportunity to meet with top industry-related editors.

The writers and editors attending Travel Classics West have been invited to attend the Arizona Media Marketplace, giving our exhibitors the opportunity to interact with them and tell them all about our vibrant travel offerings. See you at the event!

Have a great week,

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

AOT Hosts Successful Media Tour

The Arizona Office of Tourism hosted seven journalists October 19-25 on its Aged to Perfection press trip which highlighted the burgeoning wine industry in southern Arizona as well as its art

communities, history, museums and the State's two oldest universities. The journalists from Mexico, Brazil, UK, China, Germany, France and the US visited the communities of Willcox, Sonoita/Elgin, Bisbee, Tubac, Tucson and Tempe. For more information, contact Kim Todd at 602-364-3305 or via email at ktodd@azot.gov.

AOT in Attendance for National Bicycle Tourism Conference

The 2014 National Bicycle Tourism Conference was recently held in San Diego, California on November 5-8. The [conference](#) was attended by nearly 250 bicycle event professionals, advocates, bike tourism leaders and cycling enthusiasts eager to learn and network with others in the bicycle industry. The Conference is held annually by the Bicycle Tour Network and serves as their annual meeting for their member organizations.

Arizona was one of over forty states with representation at the conference. AOT participated in a panel presentation on Tourism Trends along with Travel Oregon, Explore Minnesota, the San Diego CVB, and the Path Less Pedaled. Other great information that was shared includes the latest trends in bicycling, best practices from state tourism marketing organizations, development and marketing ideas for communities, and idea sharing and networking with bicycle event and tour organizers.

Bicycle enthusiasts have a lot to get excited about in Arizona, which is one of the top rated Bicycle Friendly States (with 9 bicycle Friendly Communities). Arizona has a lot to offer on road and off. Great events like the Cochise County Cycling Classic, Tour de Mesa, Tour de Tucson, Whiskey Off Road, and Tour of the White Mountains bring thousands of riders each year. The Arizona Department of Transportation completed an [economic impact report](#) of bicycling in Arizona in 2013, and is currently working on designating US bicycle routes through Arizona (an interstate highways system for bicyclists).

To learn more about bicycle tourism view [AOT's webinar](#), and check out the [Arizona bicycling page](#) on visitarizona.com. For more information, contact Glenn Schlottman at 602-364-3727 or via email at gschlottman@azot.gov.

AOT Announces World Tour 2014!

To give statewide communities a more in-depth educational experience on the state's top international visitor markets, AOT will be bringing our international representatives to you for a series of seminars in northern, central and southern Arizona. The AOT World Tour will take place over three days – **Dec. 2, 3 and 4** – in Flagstaff, Scottsdale and Tucson, respectively. This is an opportunity for DMOs, attractions and hotels to learn from AOT's seven in-market international representatives about the latest visitor trends and statistics to ensure that your promotional efforts are effectively reaching your target market. For more information, contact Kristin Swanson at 602-364-3696 or via email at kswanson@azot.gov.

Upcoming Events & Activities

[AOT's International Representative Road Show](#)

Date: December 2- 4

Locations: Flagstaff, Scottsdale and Tucson

[Chicago Media Mission](#)

Date: January 1, 2015

Locations: Chicago, IL

[China Sales and Media Mission](#)

Date: January 12 - 16, 2015

Locations: Beijing, Shanghai, PRC

Industry News

Travel Industry Applauds U.S.-China Visa Pact

Travel industry leaders are excited by today's news out of China that the U.S. and China will honor each other's visas for up to 10 years.

That extends the current one-year limit on visas between the two countries.

"I've heard from American business leaders about how valuable this step will be. And we've worked hard to achieve this outcome because it clearly serves the mutual interest of both of our countries," Obama said Monday at a summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

White House officials expect the news to spur job growth in tourism, with up to 440,000 American jobs created by 2021 and an estimated \$85 billion annual economic impact.

U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow said the impact of the announcement on the travel industry will be "strong and immediate".

"This policy move will harness the colossal and growing Chinese travel market for the direct benefit of U.S. job creation, exports and economic growth," Dow said. "Kudos to the Obama administration for negotiating this deal that will deliver tangible progress towards meeting his strategic objectives.

"President Obama and his team have long been a receptive audience for policy suggestions that help rev the powerful economic engine that is international travel. The travel community is always heartened and gratified when those proposals become policy reality, as we are with this one, which U.S. Travel first offered in a 2011 international travel report."

Dow said that international travel dollars are medicine for any economy, but that Chinese travelers are especially important. According to a U.S. Travel study, Chinese travelers spend \$7,200 per trip to the U.S., far above the overseas average of \$4,500 per trip.

Officials with the Asian American Hotel Owners Association applauds the new 10-year visa policy between the United States and China, as it will boost tourism and strengthen the economy.

“AAHOA is an enthusiastic supporter of international tourism, which creates jobs and gives our economy a major boost,” AAHOA Chairman Pratik Patel said. “We applaud this new visa policy, and we are confident that it will help strengthen our economy while meeting the increased demands of international visitors.” (*Travel Pulse, Nov. 10*)

Travel Industry Employment Reaches an All-Time High

Travel employment reached 8,027,000 based on the first-Friday Labor Department report, and actually bested the eight million mark for the first time in September according to the upward revision of the previous report

David Huether, senior vice president for economics and research at the U.S. Travel Association, reacts to Friday's Labor Department employment report:

“It’s another record-setting jobs month for travel, which continues to pace the economy in a number of indicators as it emerges from the recession. Travel employment reached 8,027,000 based on the first-Friday Labor Department report, and actually bested the eight million mark for the first time in September according to the upward revision of the previous report.

“The travel industry has been among the most reliable job generators in the U.S. economy, adding jobs in 51 of the 60 months during the past five years and 800,000 jobs overall since the Great Recession. That’s more jobs than the entire manufacturing sector has created.

“The travel industry has also created jobs at a 40 percent faster pace than the rest of the economy during the current expansion. One of the main reasons that the travel industry has been creating jobs faster than the rest of the economy is that travel is more export-oriented, more labor-intensive, and more immune to offshore outsourcing than other sectors of the economy. Every \$1 million in travel exports supports more than six U.S. jobs in the travel industry, which is three times more than the number of jobs supported by \$1 million of agricultural exports.

“Coming out of Tuesday’s ground-shifting election, President Obama said he’d look to work with Republicans on three specific issues: infrastructure improvement, boosting exports and job creation. Washington need look no further than the travel industry to check all of those boxes. Passing existing proposals, such as renewal of the Brand USA tourism promotion agency, would be terrific first steps for the new Congress.” (*Travel Industry Wire, Nov. 11*)

2015 Hotel Forecast: Higher Rates, Largest Occupancy Rates in Three Decades

Need further proof that the travel industry is headed toward a banner 2015?

PricewaterhouseCoopers said Monday that hotel occupancy rates are expected to hit a 30-year high next year, with all indicators stronger than they have been in a decade.

PwC said that group bookings and continued growth in walk-up bookings is driving its 2015 projections. The firm projects a 64.9 industry-wide occupancy rate, up from a projected ending for 2014 at 64.2 percent. Demand overall is expected to raise 4.2 percent for 2014, compared with a supply growth of just 0.9 percent.

Supply growth is expected to grow to 1.4 percent in 2015. Growth was up 40 percent in the third quarter year-over-year, according to PwC.

The firm said that lower-priced hotel chains should see the biggest benefit as high-end chains get a bit more aggressive in raising prices next year.

Revenue per available room (RevPAR) is expected to increase 8.2 percent this year, the highest jump since 2005. RevPAR is expected to jump 7.4 percent in 2015.

Consumers are not the winners here, as average daily rate for hotel rooms is expected to jump 6.2 percent next year – the highest jump since a 7.5 percent increase in 2006.

Occupancy rates have been on a steady rise since bottoming out in 2009 at 54.6 percent. This is also expected to be the sixth straight year of daily rate and RevPAR increases, since a 8.6 ADR drop and 16.6 percent RevPAR drop in 2009. (*Travel Pulse, Nov. 11*)

Majority of Americans Say a Poorly Performing Website or App is more Frustrating Than Dealing with the TSA

SOASTA announced the results of its Holiday Travel Behavior Study, examining habits and preferences of Americans planning holiday trips. The research revealed that 41% of Americans are planning to book holiday travel this year, and they'll be turning to websites and mobile apps for everything from purchasing airline tickets to upgrading seats. Americans are so reliant on websites and apps for holiday travel, that more than half (57%) say that a poorly performing website or app would be more frustrating than dealing with the TSA (Transportation Security Administration), with the #1 frustration being app failure when checking flight status.

SOASTA unveiled the survey findings as it announced a partnership with Switchfly, the company powering travel booking and loyalty redemption solutions. SOASTA validates Switchfly's web and mobile technology platform to ensure its customers – from American Airlines to Priceline – are fully equipped to handle peak traffic everyday and throughout the holidays. The survey was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of SOASTA among 2,022 U.S. adults.

"This is the most demanding time of year for planning travel, and that means leveraging a proven testing approach to make certain that all holiday traveler needs are going to be met," said Graham Blankenbaker, Chief Technology Officer at Switchfly. "We're proud to work with SOASTA to ensure that the travel programs Americans rely on the most during holiday travel time will deliver flawless user experiences under any traffic demands."

The new research confirmed that many Americans will be booking their holiday travel through a website (34%) or mobile app (13%). However, nearly one-third of Americans (31%) say they are worried about experiencing technical problems when booking travel through a website or app, including:

- Slow loading (18%)
- Unresponsiveness (18%)
- Crashing (17%)
- Bad interface (10%)

“Planning ahead is critical for holiday travel—and that same preparation is essential for companies providing online services during the peak holiday season,” said Tom Lounibos, CEO of SOASTA. “Our research affirms that Americans expect their travel apps to respond quickly and consistently under any circumstances. SOASTA’s platform acts like a flight simulator for web and mobile apps, allowing companies to proactively create any possible worst-case-scenario to prepare their systems to handle the volume and spikes of the holiday travel season.”

Americans are also using websites and apps to upgrade their flights. Nearly half (45%) of holiday travelers would be motivated to upgrade their air travel. Americans listed satisfying a need to unwind following a stressful holiday as the #1 reason (21%) they would move to premium seating. Avoiding sharing a flight with rambunctious or loud children (17%) ranked as the second most popular motivation, followed by to cheer themselves up before seeing their relatives (10%).

The research revealed that three out of four Americans would consider delaying their flight arrival during the holidays by 24 hours or more for an incentive, with the #1 incentive being a free flight (63%). 41% of Americans said the possibility of a first-class travel upgrade could be enough incentive to delay their flight arrival during the holidays by 24 hours or more.

Other popular incentives for delaying flight arrival by 24 hours include:

- Free hotel stay near the airport (38%)
- Discounted future travel (30%)
- Extra reward points (20%)
- A chance to sit next to Renee Zellweger (6%)

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of SOASTA and Switchfly from Oct. 29-31, 2014 among 2,022 adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact William McCormick at william.mccormick@grayling.com. For more information about SOASTA, please visit <http://www.soasta.com>. (*Travel Industry Wire, Nov. 18*)

Calendar of Events

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

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