



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,

We are thrilled with the news of Congress passing a bill to reauthorize Brand USA through 2020. This decision is critical to our nation's tourism industry and our efforts on behalf of the state of Arizona. I am proud to say that the Arizona Office of Tourism has had a long-standing partnership with Brand USA, and we look forward to many more years of continued success!

This past weekend, the Grand Canyon experienced a rare climatic event of fog and cloud coverage that was captured in a [time-lapse video](#) featured on USAToday.com. I encourage you to take a moment to view this magnificent footage.

Also, congratulations to Chef Joshua Hebert of POSH in Scottsdale for the restaurant being named one of the 10 best chef's counters to watch your meal being made by [USA Today](#). POSH was touted as being "as much a show as dinner because you don't know what's coming at you." This is another well-deserved national culinary accolade for our state.

Have a great week,

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

"Random Acts of Sunshine" Campaign Brightens Seattle

The Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) "showered" the city of Seattle with Random Acts of Sunshine for a full week starting on Nov. 22, 2014. Seattle residents were treated to acts of kindness at high traffic areas and events along with one of the city's most popular shopping centers, Pacific Place Mall. Selected at random, individuals were given gift cards to spend at the

mall along with free coffee and Arizona-branded umbrellas. Everyone was encouraged to enter a sweepstakes and visit www.325daysofsun.com to learn more about Arizona as a travel destination. An eye-popping display of Arizona-branded red umbrellas in Pacific Place Mall represented AOT “showering” the city with the acts of sunshine and kindness. Campaign results will be available soon.

Upcoming Events & Activities

[Los Angeles Media Marketplace](#)

Date: January 13, 2015

Locations: Los Angeles, CA

[Travel Exchange-TREX15](#) (formerly National Tour Association Annual Convention)

Date: January 17-22, 2015

Locations: New Orleans, LA

Industry News

Brand USA Gets 5 More Years as Senate Passes Government Spending Bill

[Brand USA](#), the private but quasi-governmental U.S. travel marketing arm, won a new lease on life as the U.S. Senate [followed the House](#) and passed a \$1.1 trillion federal government spending bill on Dec. 13, 2014 that reauthorizes Brand USA through 2020.

President Obama is expected to sign the government spending legislation, which funds the government through the end of the next fiscal year, avoiding a government shutdown and officially reauthorizing Brand USA in the process.

The U.S. Travel Association, which proselytized for and applauded the reauthorization, notes that in 2013, Brand USA’s international marketing efforts to increase U.S. visitations from abroad claimed responsibility for an additional 1.1 million visitors who generated \$3.4 billion in spending.

The U.S. Travel Association emailed a press release late Saturday night following the Senate passage of the spending bill, hailing the reauthorization.

“It’s not every day that Congress makes a policy move that makes abundant sense and has demonstrable value for every region and demographic of this country. Renewing Brand USA is one such thing,” said U.S. Travel Association CEO Roger Dow. “The overwhelming majority that passed reauthorization in the House, coupled with the unanimous vote that passed it out of the Senate Commerce Committee, are a ringing bipartisan endorsement of Brand USA’s mission and effectiveness.”

Dow characterized the reauthorization as U.S. Travel’s top legislative priority.

“The effort to reauthorize Brand USA took many parliamentary turns, and we progressed because of a superb and strategic team effort, quarterbacked by U.S. Travel’s Vice President of Government Affairs Patricia Rojas-Ungar—integrating lobbying, communications, research, grassroots and sustained work by a broad coalition of industry partners,” Dow said.

Authorized by Congress in 2009, the U.S. Commerce Department appointed Brand USA’s first board of directors in 2010. In its short existence, Congressional budget hawks have criticized Brand USA’s spending practices and promotional activities, but this criticism was ultimately by and large rejected as the Senate Commerce Committee, for example, unanimously recommended the passage of the reauthorization measure.

International tourists from the 38 visa-waiver countries, not U.S. taxpayers, fund Brand USA, which solicits cash and in-kind contributions from the private sector. The federal government uses these travelers’ fees to match the private sector contributions.

Instead of paying visa fees, tourists from these countries pay a \$14 fee to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ETSA). Brand USA receives \$10 from this fee, with the remaining \$4 going to the Department of Homeland Security.

Brand USA qualifies for up to \$100 million per year in these federal matching funds through the reauthorization.

Until the creation of Brand USA through the adoption of the Travel Promotion Act in 2009, the U.S. was one of the few countries abroad that didn’t have a national body promoting inbound tourism, and the travel industry lobbied to fix that omission. (*Skift, Dec. 14*)

Choice Hotels Reveals 2015 Travel Trends

Choice Hotels International, Inc., one of the world’s largest hotel companies, has revealed the findings from its 2015 travel trends survey. The survey found that in exchange for a discount in the New Year, 55 percent of American travelers would forgo alcoholic beverages, 53 percent would give up daily housekeeping services, and 26 percent would go without their smartphone. The most important hotel amenity for the average American leisure traveler in 2015 will be free parking, ranking just ahead of free Wi-Fi and free hot breakfast.

A Spike in Leisure Travel

As the economy continues to improve, Americans are planning to spend eight percent more on leisure travel, and five percent more per trip than they did in 2014. Millennial leisure travel spending will increase by six percent, spending for families traveling with children will increase by five percent, and senior spending will increase by 33 percent. However, leisure travelers are still searching for the best deals, as 62 percent said the most influential factor when selecting a leisure travel destination was budget.

Despite being budget conscious, American travelers are willing to splurge for unique travel experiences, including "Set Jetting" (visiting a destination seen in a movie) and "Culinary Tourism" (food-inspired travel), which are projected to increase 18 percent and 30 percent, respectively, compared to 2014.

U.S. Go-To Events and Destinations in 2015

When asked which event they'd most like to attend in 2015, Mardi Gras in New Orleans (25 percent) ranked just ahead of the Cherry Blossom Festival (24 percent) and **Super Bowl XLVII (23 percent)**.

When asked which iconic American tourist attraction they'd most like to visit in 2015, 24 percent of Americans would visit the western national parks.

"Choice Hotels' 2015 travel trend survey revealed the desire for greater value as Americans take more leisure trips, and it's important that hotels stay abreast of the wants of American travelers in order to grow their loyalty base," said Patrick Pacious, executive vice president, and chief operating officer at Choice Hotels. "Free Wi-Fi, free parking, and free hot breakfast are just a few of the many amenities we offer to our guests at most of our hotels, and we look forward to leveraging our brands' offerings throughout 2015."

U.S. Travelers Going Abroad

Furthermore, 11 percent of participants say there are planning to visit Europe in 2015. As the main desire for their trip, over half want to visit Europe's historical sights and almost 40 percent would like to immerse themselves in European culture. The most popular European cities Americans would like to visit are London, followed by Rome and Paris.

"Americans venturing across the pond will find numerous Ascend, Clarion, Quality and Comfort brand hotels located right in the cities they want to visit the most, providing the great service and amenities they've come to expect from our brands," commented Pacious.

Other findings from the survey include:

- Over 40 percent of American travelers regularly stay at mid-price hotels, like Comfort Inn, when traveling for leisure, spending an average of \$115.94 per night.
- July is the preferred month for leisure travel.
- Most Americans would prefer driving to flying for leisure travel in 2015.
- While 60 percent of American travelers are planning a trip with their spouse or partner in 2015, half would rather stay home than take a vacation with Ben Affleck, Derek Jeter, Kim Kardashian, Oprah Winfrey or Warren Buffett. (*hospitalitynet, Dec. 9*)

Travel Employment Reaches New Record High As Travel Exports Continue to Expand

David Huether, senior vice president for research and economics at the U.S. Travel Association, provides analysis on U.S. employment and exports numbers:

"The Labor Department announced today that the U.S. economy added 321,000 jobs in November – the highest monthly increase since early 2012 – with widespread gains in all sectors, while the unemployment rate remained unchanged at 5.8 percent.

"The travel industry benefitted from a fifth straight month of growth, adding 8,500 jobs this month, again reaching an all-time high. Albeit from a very high base, November's travel employment increase was slower than the 12-month average of more than 11,000 jobs per month, and less notable than growth in other industries.

"Despite experiencing slower growth than the rest of the economy this month, the travel industry has been outpacing the economy -- growing 37 percent faster since the recession.

"Total travel job growth in 2014 so far has been just shy of 120,000, and the industry has experienced positive growth in all but one month this year. If history is an indicator, December job growth will likely be higher than November, bringing the industry close to, if not surpassing, the increase of 140,000 jobs experienced in 2013.

"Separately, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported today that travel exports increased to \$18.5 billion in October 2014, up slightly from September and only 3.1 percent lower than the recent peak of \$19.1 billion in August. Travel continues to be a major force in overall export growth for the economy.

"So far this year, travel exports have accounted for 17 percent of total export growth; nearly one in every eight dollars spent on new U.S. exports this year has been from the spending of foreign travelers coming to the U.S.

"Welcoming international travelers to our shores is a powerful catalyst to drive the U.S. economy and provide good jobs for many Americans. The State Department's recent extension of new Chinese business, tourist and student visas from one year to ten years can only be seen as great news for the economy, ensuring even more revenue from our fastest-growing source of overseas visitors."

The U.S. Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the travel industry that generates \$2.1 trillion in economic output and supports 14.9 million jobs. U.S. Travel's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States.
(TravelIndustryWire.com, Dec. 10)

Ten Most Popular U.S. Destinations for Facebook Check-Ins in 2014

Facebook users were more excited to announce their trips to national parks than sports stadiums in 2014, according to Facebook's annual Year in Review Data.

[Last year](#), four stadiums made the top ten including Dodger Stadium, AT&T Park, Rangers Ballpark and Fenway Park.

All were absent from this year's list and replaced with Yosemite National Park, **Grand Canyon National Park**, and Yellowstone National Park. Yankee Stadium also made the 2014 list.

Each year, Facebook lists the most checked into places in the United States. According to 2013 data, travel is the second most talked-about life event on the social network after relationship updates.

Disney Parks, Universal Studios Hollywood, and Times Square have topped the lists in both 2013 and 2014.

The full list of the 10 most-checked into destinations in the U.S. is below:

1. Disney parks including Walt Disney World, Disneyland, Epcot, Disney's California Adventure and Disney's Animal Kingdom

2. Universal Studios Hollywood
3. Times Square
4. Yosemite National Park
5. **Grand Canyon National Park**
6. Yellowstone National Park
7. Yankee Stadium
8. Las Vegas Strip
9. Hollywood Walk of Fame
10. Madison Square Garden (*Skift, Dec. 9*)

Google Glass a Game-changing Application in the Realm of Cultural Tourism

Antenna International, in partnership with The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, recently announced the first-ever integration of Google Glass technology into a major art museum exhibition. The tour enhances the exhibition "Keith Haring: The Political Line" by providing museumgoers with images, audio and video relevant to select works of art, leveraging the GuidiGO publishing platform.

The museum's staff is enthusiastic about the potential for Glass to create a richer tour experience. With Glass, visitors get a hands-free, media-rich experience without ever having to look away from the art.

"Utilizing Google Glass as an interpretive platform in museums introduces an exciting and truly hands-free approach to cultural touring," said David Falter, President and CEO of Antenna International. "As expert storytellers, we're used to choreographing multimedia content for both the ear and the eye; now we're using wearable technology to explore new modes of storytelling to create deeper engagement with audiences and provide innovative ways to view works of art."

As one walks through the exhibition, looking at Haring's artwork, they hear the sounds of subway trains through the Google Glass, merging into eyewitness accounts of those who saw the artist at work in the subway. Further into the tour, one can also watch a CBS newsreel, showing transit police arriving and arresting the artist for defacing public property. As the artist is arrested, visitors feel part of the action as they stand amongst the evidence.

"We were very pleased to see how fast Antenna used GuidiGO Studio in combination with their content, to create this amazing Glass experience," said David Lerman, CEO of GuidiGO. "We see great potential for producing stunning immersive tours in museums combining the technology with meaningful content."

The tour serves as an example of the potential application for wearable technology in cultural tourism. According to Euromonitor International's Consumer Electronics research, wearable electronics technology is expected to rise from 9 million units sold globally in 2013 to a forecast 180 million in 2016. Additionally, World Travel Market's 2014 Global Trends Report states, "wearable electronics will become an important tool for travelers, who will be increasingly connected to the internet through different types of mobile devices." The report continues, "Travel companies will need to be swift to embrace wearable electronics as part of their strategies targeting always-connected consumers in order not to lose ground to competitors."

As Google's "Glass Explorers" (individuals selected to try a prototype) navigate how to best use wearable technology in daily life – and many speculate on consumers' willingness to adopt such devices – the Haring exhibition offers a compelling example of Glass's unique ability to enhance the museum experience. By engaging them in a deeper and more contextual touring experience, museumgoers absorb more information about the exhibition subject and leave with a greater sense of its importance and meaning.

"As an institution located in a cradle of technological innovation, the Fine Arts Museums are pleased to participate in an initiative that provides models for a deeper engagement with the collections and exhibitions under our care," said Colin B. Bailey, Director of Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. "We're excited to incorporate this pilot multimedia tour into our broader educational mission." (*TravelIndustryWire.com, Dec. 11*)

Calendar of Events

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

Connect with the Arizona Office of Tourism!

Become a fan on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/arizonatravel>

Follow us on Twitter! <http://twitter.com/ArizonaTourism>