



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,

On behalf of the Arizona Office of Tourism, I hope you had a wonderful holiday season and your New Year is off to a great start!

We are excited to kick off 2015 with our target cities campaign in Chicago. Utilizing breathtaking imagery of the Grand Canyon State, an interactive Airstream and continuing our “Random Acts of Sunshine,” AOT will bring an authentic Arizona vacation experience to Windy City residents. Midwesterners love visiting Arizona, and we look forward to further increasing awareness of our state in this important travel market.

Have a great week,

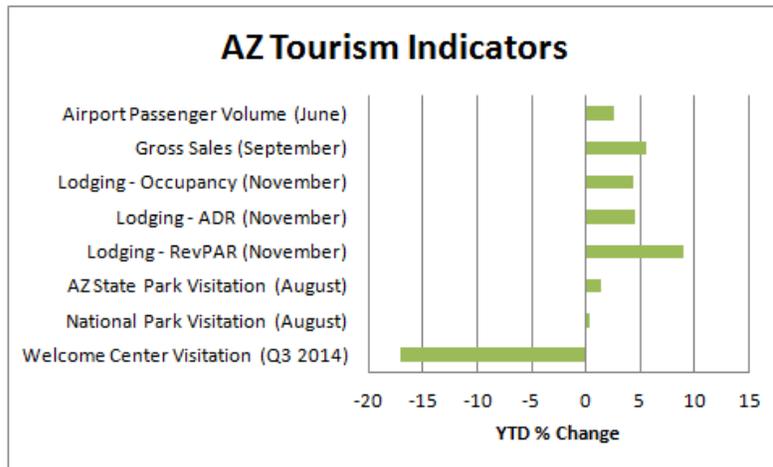
Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

New Reports on AOT’s Research Website

The following reports are now available in the Research and Statistics section of AOT’s business-to-business Website www.tourism.az.gov:

- [Gross Sales & Tourism Taxes September 2014](#)
- [Arizona Lodging November 2014](#)



*Percent change based on most recent complete report. Preliminary reports have not been included.

For more information, please visit www.tourism.az.gov or contact Research Specialist Colleen Floyd at cfloyd@azot.gov.

Arizona's 2015 Travel Guide is Now Available!

The Arizona Office of Tourism's 2015 Arizona Official State Visitor's Guide (OSVG), and accompanying Official State Visitor's Map are now available for travelers wanting more information about Arizona as a vibrant leisure destination. [Read Full Press Release.](#)

Abundant with valuable Arizona tourism information, from traveling tips to statewide accommodations, the guide is fully supported by advertising dollars and was produced with no direct costs to the agency's budget. More than 450,000 copies have been published along with 510,000 accompanying comprehensive maps. Complimentary copies of the guides and maps will be distributed in response to the agency's consumer advertising campaigns, queries into the Arizona travel call center, as well as to travel industry partners and 62 visitor information centers located throughout the state including AOT's Painted Cliffs Welcome Center.

The 2015 magazine-style guide features articles by Arizona-based writers on topics such as sports trivia countdown to Super Bowl XLIX; regional road trips that highlight the state's diversity; how American Indian artists put a unique spin on traditional crafts; and a list of restaurants that are so good, you'll want to take the recipes home with you.

To request a guide, visit www.VisitArizona.com. To download a digital version, visit www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/madden/az_ovg15/. If you would like to order copies of the guide for distribution, please contact Fulfillment and Visitor Services Manager Loretta Belonio at lbelonio@azot.gov.

Upcoming Events & Activities

[Germany Media Mission](#)

Date: January 26-30

Locations: Hamburg, Hannover and Frankfurt

[Brazil Media Tour](#)

Date: February 22-28

Locations: Phoenix, Flagstaff, Grand Canyon, Sedona, Tucson, Tubac and Scottsdale

Industry News

Where in the World Will Americans Travel in 2015?

Where should Americans vacation this year?

The most buzz-worthy destinations are as far away as Rangoon and as close to home as Queens, N.Y.

In fact, Lonely Planet named Queens, the largest borough of New York City, the No. 1 destination on its annual list of the "best" U.S. travel destinations for 2015. For its global Best in Travel list, Singapore was the top country to visit, Washington, D.C. was the top city and Tunisia was the best value destination.

Travel booking site Priceline.com, which studied advance hotel reservations to come up with its list of "top travel hot spots," named Orlando the top U.S. destination and Cancun/Cozumel in Mexico the top international destination.

Participating members of the U.S. Tour Operators Association, in a survey conducted by PwC, named Myanmar, for the third year in a row, the top "emerging destination." That was followed by Cuba, which President Obama normalized relations with recently after a 50-plus-year cold war.

And *USA TODAY* Travel has its own picks for worthwhile destinations. Brazil made it through the World Cup, despite having a shortage of hotels. Hotels are being built in time for the 2016 Summer Olympics. Questions loom about whether or not the infrastructure will be ready, but Rio and other Brazilian cities will continue to be in the spotlight this year.

Despite a stagnant economy, Puerto Rico is still an easy and exotic destination. Americans don't need passports to enter, can use U.S. dollars, and have plenty of beaches and historic sites to explore. New luxury hotels are opening, including the newly renovated Condado Vanderbilt.

Colombia has only recently become a viable destination for leisure travelers. For years, the South American country battled a violent drug trade and guerrilla war. Parts of the country are still experiencing turmoil, but the romantic, Caribbean city of Cartagena, once home to Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, is nothing less than enchanting. The capital city of Bogota is a nightlife and culinary mecca. And Medellin is appropriately nicknamed the City of Eternal Spring.

Istanbul continues to entice travelers, and a number of recent and upcoming hotel openings are propelling it into trendy territory. Soho House plans to debut in the city early this year. Morgans Hotel Group also plans to open a Mondrian.

Here are other trends that travelers will notice on the road this year.

New Hotel Brands Debut

Travelers, especially younger ones, will have new hotel chains to check into and check out.

The major hotel companies, in an effort to attract the next generation of travelers, are creating more technology-centric, hipper hotel brands.

Marriott International [recently opened](#) its first AC Hotel for Millennial travelers, those twenty- and thirty-somethings who are starting to travel more, in New Orleans. Best Western will introduce Vib. Hilton will debut Canopy.

Consider Canopy the model for hotel of the future. Gone is the traditional check-in and check-out. Instead, you will be able to use your mobile device, a growing trend in the hotel industry.

Also gone is traditional room service. Enter Rise and Dine. If you just want to have an apple, coffee, and yogurt ready for you when you wake up, someone will hang it on your doorknob at your requested time.

Closets won't have doors because most people don't unpack and use traditional closets anymore.

And lobbies will be social areas, where you can stop by for a free happy hour each night with local drinks and treats.

"Even if you are there for a day and a half, you can feel the neighborhood," says John Vanderslice, global head of luxury and lifestyle brands at Hilton.

Airline Miles

A number of airlines, including United Airlines and Delta Air Lines, are moving toward [revenue-based systems](#) for earning miles.

Starting in March, United customers will earn miles using a formula that takes into consideration what they paid for their fare -- not how far they flew -- plus their frequent-flier status.

Delta just instituted a similar policy. Low-cost carriers such as Southwest Airlines and JetBlue Airways already have a revenue-based system.

Only one other legacy carrier is holding out. Will American Airlines join the pack?

George Hobica, founder of AirfareWatchdog.com, doesn't think it will happen in 2015. But he thinks once American combines fully with US Airways, the merged airline will adopt the model "in order to better compete and to reward big spenders."

"Gone are the days of the one-size-fits-all 25,000 miles to obtain a domestic round-trip reward seat," he says. "You pay more for the more desirable flights, and you earn more the more you spend."

And how will airfares fare in general in 2015? Rick Seaney, co-founder of FareCompare.com, says the good news is that prices will likely not rise significantly over 2014.

The bad news? "Domestic airfare prices of 2014 are the highest I've seen in 10 years," he says.

Wellness on the Road

Americans are becoming more conscious of their mental and physical well-being when they're traveling. A number of hotels and other travel companies are stepping up their efforts to help them feel healthier.

In 2014, InterContinental Hotels Group debuted its new EVEN hotel brand, specifically targeting health-conscious travelers with prominently-placed fitness centers, healthful menus, exercise equipment in rooms, water stations, and encouraging messages scrawled on walls. Other EVEN hotels are on the horizon.

The Refinery Hotel in New York recently launched a Wellth Series in partnership with Wellthily, Co., a company that promotes wellness among travelers. They include fireside chats with fitness experts, spinning and yoga classes, and other activities -- for a fee. On Jan. 15, guests and neighbors will be able to attend a guided meditation with best-selling author Deepak Chopra.

Bob Diener, travel expert and co-founder of Getaroom.com, says such efforts nurture a desire among travelers to stay healthy and continue to enjoy their hobbies on the road.

"Consumers are increasingly looking to blend their interests and activities with their travels, and vacations that focus on the environment, sports, or spa/yoga/health will see big growth in 2015," he says.

Notable Anniversaries

- Miami Beach will celebrate its 100th birthday on March 26. Expect drinks, dancing, and dining Miami-style. The city is promising an epic concert for its centennial celebration. miamibeach100.com
- Aug. 29 marks 10 years since New Orleans was ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Since then, several neighborhoods outside of the French Quarter, including the Bywater District and Freret Street in Uptown New Orleans, have had a boom in new restaurants, bars and music venues. neworleansonline.com and neworleanscvb.com
- The American Civil War ended 150 years ago. General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865 (surrenders of smaller Confederate armies continued until June 23, 1865). Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 15, 1865. A number of activities will commemorate the Sesquicentennial at Civil War battlefields and historic sites across the country. civilwar.org/150th-anniversary (USAToday.com, Jan. 2)

Hot Hospitality Trends in 2015

One only needs to look at what's happening in the hospitality industry to understand how the world is changing. Hospitality companies make their money from catering to trends and the ever-morphing demands of travelers.

Agent@Home recently spoke with hospitality executives, hotel chefs and travel professionals to get the scoop on hot trends for 2015, from the Chinese travel market to culinary trends. Here are some trends that were highlighted in the coming year, including views on the effect these trends will have on home-based travel agents and professionals.

Chinese Travel Market

The burgeoning Chinese travel market is one of the hottest topics in the industry right now. Why? Because the market is still relatively untapped and it stands to generate a great deal of business. Today, the younger Chinese generations not only have more money to spend, but they also have greater flexibility in visa rules.

The Hawaiian Islands, which have been popular for Japanese traveler for decades, will likely see an increase in Chinese. For Outrigger Enterprises Group, which has its headquarters in Hawaii and recently introduced its new beachfront brand Outrigger Resorts, this is good news.

"With the recent change in visa rules between the U.S. and China, student and exchange visas are being extended from one to five years, and business and tourist visas are being extended to 10 years," says John Limper, vice president, sales and marketing, Hawaii & Guam for Outrigger Enterprises Group. And his company is seeing some promising results.

For example, Robert Conrad, executive chef of Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort, has seen an increase in Chinese tourism over the past three to four years at his property.

"For about four to five months of the year, our hotel experiences an influx of Chinese guests," Conrad says. "Young Chinese people ... now can travel because they have the financial ability that they didn't have 10 years ago."

These developments are also good news for travel agents. The rise in Chinese tourism will naturally impact the availability of hotel room inventory, in the U.S. and elsewhere. As a result, timing will be crucial when booking. Given the knowledge agents bring to the table, it is possible there could be a greater demand for agents because it should generally become more difficult to book what you want and people simply don't have the time to go through the whole process on their own.

"These additional numbers could impact travelers on the U.S. mainland and elsewhere, since additional visitors from China will impact the availability of hotel room inventory," Limper says. "This means travelers from the U.S. mainland to Hawaii may need to book their travel to the islands further out to ensure availability."

"People are living such hectic lives these days," he adds. "Time truly is a luxury for many. This is where travel agents have the advantage. We're seeing home-based agents becoming even more valuable to the consumer because of their knowledge and expertise in destinations such as Hawaii."

Enrollment in Outrigger's Expert Agent program has increased by 15 percent this year, which will further accommodate the increasing demand for travel agents.

"This tells us there is still tremendous value for the end-user using a subject expert, i.e., the travel agent, in making their arrangements," Limper said.

Culinary Trends

There are several new foodie trends in the hospitality industry that have sprouted up in the past few years. In fact, wellness tourism as a whole has increased by 12.7 percent in 2013, according to the 2014 Global Spa and Wellness Economy Monitor. The trend accounted for \$494 billion in expenditures in 2013.

The Westin brand has been a prominent leader in the health and wellness movement. It formed a partnership with SuperFoodsRx in 2007 to provide healthier meals and introduced a healthy kids menu earlier this year.

Starwood also introduced the Element by Westin brand a few years ago, a brand specifically dedicated to health and wellness.

"One of the more prevalent trends, especially in our hotels, is healthy eating," says Brian Povinelli, senior vice president global brand leader for Westin and Le Meridien. "People are taking more personal responsibility for the way they eat and becoming more demanding in the expectations they have in restaurants and food and beverage outlets."

Conrad also has seen an uptick in customers asking for healthier food options.

"People have become more concerned about health, and they tend to eat more healthy food," Conrad says. "In Phuket, we have more vegetarian [options], many guests require gluten-free meals and a lot of guests have special diets. Organic food has become increasingly popular."

In response, Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort has its own vegetable garden. The property's restaurants draw ingredients directly from the garden.

Another trend on the culinary front is the appearance of more Chinese and Japanese options on menus at hotel and resort restaurants.

The increase in Chinese tourism certainly has helped in terms of this sharp upturn in international demand for Chinese food, but Conrad also says Chinese and Japanese food has become less expensive, which has aided the spike.

"Japanese restaurant prices are much more reasonable than they were 15 to 20 years ago ... In the past three to four years, it has become very popular," Conrad says. "Chinese food, we should not forget, has also become popular, and there are more Chinese traveling around Asia. At [Outrigger Laguna Phuket], we hire Chinese chefs because we realize the importance of Chinese food."

Outrigger Laguna Phuket Beach Resort's onsite restaurants Locavore and Edgewater specialize in Asian cuisine.

Last but not least, more guests are concerned about the artistic component of a meal, and chefs are responding.

“There’s a surprisingly growing expectation of presentation,” Povinelli says. “Where in the past you could get away with not being as thoughtful with the way the food is plated, I feel people really appreciate when it’s done well now.”

The rise of social media use, especially on channels such as Instagram, has helped contribute to this demand, Povinelli says. Obviously, restaurants that surprise customers with eye-catching dishes get a lot of exposure through these social media channels.

Charity Driven

Hotels and tour operators have naturally spread cheer and made sure to give back during the holidays, but more charity programs are emerging this holiday season.

“We’re noticing hotels and tour operators incorporating charity components into their holiday programming — whether that means a partnership with a local charity or an interactive event on property,” says Catherine Colford, media relations specialist at Hawkins International PR.

Here are some examples of both ongoing and recent charity programs:

Through Jan. 15, Madeline Hotel & Residences Telluride is offering local organizations the opportunity to host events on the property. In exchange, the property will give back 5 percent of dollars spent to a local nonprofit of choice.

The Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, hosts the nation’s largest Gingerbread House Competition every year. Through Jan. 1, half of the proceeds from parking fees will be donated to six local nonprofits.

For Thanksgiving, Omni Mount Washington Resort in New Hampshire, Omni Homestead Resort in Virginia and Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta and Hotel Eden in Rome all featured charity programs.

XV Beacon in Boston donated 15 percent of every nightly room rate in November to the Greater Boston Food Bank.

Until Dec. 1, Lake Arrowhead Resort & Spa had offered a complimentary day pass and a 30 percent discount toward its spa and salon services for anyone who donated a new or rarely used coat. (*TravelPulse.com, Dec. 20, 2014*)

Calendar of Events

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

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