



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,

I am pleased to share that the Arizona Office of Tourism was represented by Assistant Deputy Director Karen Churchard at the college football playoff national championship game this past weekend. Karen was part of a delegation of more than 20 Arizona sports, tourism and marketing leaders in attendance. We are thrilled to welcome the game to Glendale's University of Phoenix Stadium on Jan. 11, 2016. It is an honor to serve as vice chair of the Arizona organizing committee leadership team, and I look forward to successfully working together to execute another high-profile event that draws football fans, visitors and viewers from across the country.

Have a great week,

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

Immersive Arizona Tourism Campaign Transports Chicagoans to Warmer Weather

The Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) is by bringing Arizona vacations to life in Chicago this month as part of its target cities campaign. Residents in the chilly temperatures will step into an Arizona vacation, literally, when AOT takes over a train station and brings a mobile Grand Canyon experience to the Windy City. [Read Full Press Release.](#)

To promote Arizona's mild winter weather and the diverse travel experiences the state has to offer, AOT is outfitting Chicago's Fullerton Station with its Station Domination initiative, covering most of the station with scenic imagery of Arizona's landscapes – from floor graphics to ceiling displays and everything in between. Brand ambassadors will bestow "Random Acts of Sunshine" on commuters, giving out free coffee and other gifts including complimentary hotel nights,

rounds of golf and spa treatments on select days to showcase Arizona's reputation for hospitality.

Chicago residents also will encounter an Airstream mobile travel experience throughout the city and at major events that emulates an Arizona vacation at the Grand Canyon. From a welcome sign that greets guests to rock walls and rocky terrain, the Airstream transports visitors at every turn and allows them to take pictures and feel like they are experiencing the iconic natural wonder. Brand ambassadors at the Station Domination and in the Airstream will encourage individuals to visit www.WarmUpinAZ.com and www.AZGrandTour.com.

Call for 2015 Arizona Calendar of Event information!

The Arizona Calendar of Events is posted on www.VisitArizona.com for the convenience of visitors, residents and media. Events through March 2015 are posted at this point. Please send events for the remainder of 2015. Information needed for each event includes: the date (including the year), community, event title, event venue, description and public contact website and/or phone number. Information can be emailed to Marjorie Magnusson at mmagnusson@azot.gov or faxed to Marjorie's attention at 602-364-3702.

Upcoming Events & Activities

Brazil Media Tour

Date: February 22-28

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

Industry News

Three Phoenix-Area Restaurants Named Among Top 100 in the US

Three Valley restaurants have been named among the top 100 in the U.S., according to OpenTable, an online restaurant reservation and review service.

OpenTable handed out "[2014 Diner's Choice Awards](#)" to the best 100 restaurants in the country, while only ranking the top 10. The San Francisco-based company used more than 5 million reviews for over 20,000 eateries across the country to develop its rankings.

Although three Arizona restaurants made the top 100, only one was named among the 10 best: Kai at Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort in Chandler.

Kai's Facebook page describes the restaurant as "Native American with global accents." [The Phoenix Business Journal points out](#) that the establishment is the only AAA Five Diamond restaurant in Arizona.

The state of New York boast the most restaurants in the top 100 list with 12, while California and Florida tied for second place with eight apiece. OpenTable noted that 59 of the 100 winners are dinner-only establishments.

[Click here](#) for a slide show of photos to see the Arizona restaurants that received a 2014 Diner's Choice Award. (KTAR, Jan. 3)

Hotels Expand Mobile Check-In Options

Already available at [a smattering](#) of brands and individual hotels, mobile hotel check-in is poised for rapid expansion this year across the industry.

While check-in kiosks and other methods of avoiding the front desk line in recent years have become more commonplace at hotels, integration of mobile technology into the travel process is spurring greater adoption across some major hotel brands. At the same time, some third-party technology suppliers are providing tools for hotels and distributors to offer mobile check-in.

"You're going to see a ton of change with hotel check-in apps," Concur executive vice president of supplier and travel management company services Mike Koetting said in November during a Business Travel News conference in Dallas. "There's a tremendous opportunity to avoid the front desk, but it does require some infrastructure investment from hotels."

Marriott Hotels, for example, during the first half of this year plans to offer mobile check-in at all 500 of its hotels globally, at least for Marriott Rewards members. Guests who are members can check from via the Marriott Mobile App from 4 p.m. on the day before arrival. Upon arrival, their key card is waiting for them at a designated mobile check-in desk.

Hyatt Hotels and Resorts has a similar process at select hotels, with kiosks available for incoming guests to retrieve keys.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide's Aloft brand has taken a slightly different approach at the nine properties currently piloting the Smart Check-In program. Guests receive an Aloft-branded Starwood Preferred Guest Card and, on the day of their arrival, receive a text message telling them their room number. They then can head straight to their room and use the SPG card as their key.

Third parties also have been developing mobile check-in technology. Mountain View, Calif.-based CheckMate late last year launched a beta version of a mobile check-in platform, which it piloted with a handful of hotels in California. Hotels using the technology, which works with any property management system, receive a daily report of arriving guests and can send out white-labeled emails the day before a guest arrives.

"Guests could send in-room requests, arrival times and add loyalty numbers or special requests," said CheckMate co-founder Anthony Maggio. "On the day of arrival, hotels access that information and can go in and assign rooms in advance."

Besides individual hotels, hotel distributors including online travel agencies and travel management companies also can use the CheckMate platform, Maggio said. Distributors can

field guests' requests and send them to a hotel prior to arrival, even if that hotel itself is not using the technology. Hotel booking and search tool [Room 77](#) acquired CheckMate in April 2013 and is among its first distribution partners, along with PointsHound and the Alliance Reservations Network.

Maggio said that he would like to work with corporate travel agencies, as "a lot have not had the budget or resources for this type of operation, and we think their travelers would definitely benefit from these kinds of things."

Concur's Koetting said as more hotels retrofit their properties with the appropriate technology, it soon could be commonplace to check in online and get a bar code readable by a key dispenser near a hotel's elevator. As mobile check-in expands, front desk arrangements also could evolve to adapt, he added. Some hotels might move to models like an Apple Store, with roving employees allowing "the front desk to come to you," he said.

Aloft's mobile check-in capabilities already have spurred rethinking about the front desk, said Starwood vice president of specialty select brands Paige Francis. At the Harlem Aloft in New York City, for example, the desk is in the center of the front lobby. "We took the front desk off the back wall and put our talent in the middle of the space," Francis said. "Some people do want to bypass the front desk, but with it in the middle, they can interact with them in a more meaningful way when they want to interact with them."

Some previous mobile check-in strategies have been slow to expand. For example, Holiday Inn's Mobile Room Key program, in which the mobile phone itself becomes a guest's key, first [began tests in 2010](#) but remains deployed only in a handful of hotels. Sabre TripCase director of project management Ben Newell said some early attempts were "a solution looking for a problem."

"People don't necessarily hate keys; the real problem is they didn't want to go to the front desk," Newell said. "With this, the technology got a little ahead of itself, though it may end up being a solution eventually." (*Business Travel News, Jan. 13*)

Why People Abandon a Travel Booking Online

It varies between sectors and types of users, but conversion rates for those making a travel booking are generally low – often in the single digit percentage range.

But why do so many consumers who have actively decided to buy a product still abandon their travel booking during those final phases online?

A [SaleCycle](#) surveyed 1,000 consumers last summer to try and find out why.

One of the most commonly cited reasons is that despite being "in the booking path" they are still not ready to complete their travel booking.

Obviously price is a major factor – a cheaper deal is found elsewhere or they might have second thoughts.

The results, displayed [here](#) in an infographic, are worth examining to see if your own brand is taking enough steps to lower these abandonment rates. (*Tnooz, Jan. 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!

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