



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,

Planning has begun for our next Governor's Conference on Tourism! We are working diligently to build a dynamic program that will provide you with the latest tourism marketing information and research.

The conference is a month earlier so mark your calendars with the new date: **June 22-24, 2015**. This year, the conference will be held at the Camelback Inn, a JW Marriott Scottsdale Resort & Spa.

The new conference date also means we will be collecting nominations for the Governor's Tourism Awards earlier. Look to future **AOT in Actions** for more details and start thinking of your award submissions!

Have a great Arizona week!

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

Save the NEW Date for Governor's Conference on Tourism

Be sure to save the **NEW** date on your calendar to attend the 2015 Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism **June 22-24**. This year's annual conference will be held at the Camelback Inn, a JW Marriott Scottsdale Resort & Spa, a month earlier than usual. The Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism provides valuable networking opportunities with industry peers, professional development sessions, nationally recognized speakers, an industry-related exhibit

area and the Governor's Tourism Awards Gala. For more information, visit <http://www.azlta.com/events/governors-conference/>.

Meet UK Media Representatives on a Mission to England and Scotland

AOT is pleased to invite Arizona CVBs, Chambers and DMOs to join us in England and Scotland on a media mission to London and Glasgow, **May 11 – 15, 2015**. The format of the mission will focus on events in both cities and we anticipate there will be approximately 60 – 75 key media representatives in attendance. Registration is \$2,000, plus travel expenses and shipping. For more information please contact Mary Rittmann at mrtrittmann@tourism.az.gov or 602-364-3730.

Experience and Share! Be an AOT Guest Blogger

AOT is currently accepting applications from individuals interested in contributing to our consumer website's blog, Arizona Insider. We're seeking experienced writers who can provide a unique or interesting perspective on Arizona travel-related topics such as photography, road trips, golf, hiking, camping, water recreation, etc. If you'd like to become a regular contributor to our blog, please use the application below to share your experience and areas of interest with us. Applicants will be reviewed for relevancy to our audiences, writing style, experience and subject matter expertise.

Blog webpage www.visitarizona.com/experience-and-share/arizona-insider

Blogger application: www.visitarizona.com/guest-blogger

Upcoming Events & Activities

Brazil Sales and Media Mission

Date: March 16-20

Locations: Sao Paulo, Campinas and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Media Tour: Native Ways

Date: April 12-18

Locations: Hon-Dah, Chinle, Hopi, Chandler

Visit USA Show - Brazil

Date: April 27

Locations: Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Campinas

Industry News

Mother Nature is Building her Spring Bouquets; State Parks Offer On-the-Spot Wildflower Coverage with "Ranger Cams"

The Arizona State Parks department is already fielding calls about the possible flower bloom this year and are making plans for the droves of visitors those flowers might bring. To help the public track the evolution of the delicate fields of blooming poppies, the rangers take pictures and post them on the Arizona State Parks website at <http://AZStateParks.com/RangerCam2015>.

Executive Director Sue Black said, "Our rangers and volunteers take pictures as soon as the flowers start blooming and visitors can then decide when to leave other states to come here and take their pictures. Updated information about flowers at each park will be posted to help people around the country plan their vacations." Call the "State Parks Wildflower Hotline" at (602) 542-4174 and customer service staff will provide even more details for long distance travelers. "We want the visitors to check the website regularly, look at the pictures and then drive out into the surrounding deserts," said Black.

According to Picacho Peak Park Manager Aaron Soggs, "At Picacho the rain data is showing about 10 inches by the end of January this year which is the accumulated total since September of 2014. A great flower year was 1998 when there was 12 inches of rain, so we believe with any rains in February or March, there should be some magnificent Mexican poppy blooms. The mountain is greening up and we see the small plants are looking healthy this year."

Flowers in the desert bloom based on the elevations, the rainfall at a certain area, and the temperature. Usually the order of the bloom is: bladderpods, Mexican poppies, chuparosa, globemallow, brittlebush and then other cacti species. Already on some trails in the valley, the little yellow bladderpods, are creating yellow carpets across the landscapes. The tiny yellow-cross style flower gets its name from the small round fruit pods that develop after pollination. Green landscapes are early indications that the wildflowers may be glorious by early March. Other great flower blooming years in Arizona were 1995, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2008.

The public is encouraged to tour State Parks to see flowers on weekdays when there is less traffic and there is plenty of parking. The poppies are just now starting to pop up and if it stays cool they may not bloom fully until the middle of February or early March.

Wildflower books are available with brochures and maps in rural areas at all of the State Parks. The "State Trails Guide" with 550 hiking trails is also available at all of the State Parks. For details on different areas around the state, call the State Parks Wildflower Hotline (8am-5pm weekdays) at (602) 542-4174 or watch "Ranger Cam" featuring pictures taken regularly at <http://AZStateParks.com/RangerCam2015>.

Beacon Technology: The Next Big Marketing Tool for the Travel Industry?

The increase of mobile devices has changed the world as we know it, as businesses have needed to adapt and become more mobile-friendly.

Beacon technology—placing beacons to send location-based information and offers to these mobile devices—could have a similar impact in the travel industry and beyond.

Evan Schwartz, CEO of ActionX, a mobile app and cross-screen retargeting company, certainly sees the potential in the technology. The technology has been gaining steam in the last few years, Schwartz said, but it's about to "explode" in 2015.

The draw of beacon technology to businesses is simple. You aren't communicating with consumers across a TV screen, where they could be miles away from your business. You are communicating with them at the selling location itself. Retailers have begun to introduce the technology to the public, and it's starting to make its way into the travel industry, with hotels, airports and airlines beginning to use it.

Miami International Airport, for example, recently launched a new app that uses beacons to help consumers find the correct gate for departure while sending them notifications on their mobile devices for restaurant and retail deals while they're traveling through the airport.

Marriott International now features beacon technology at 14 of its properties in the United States since unveiling the technology in July 2014. The LocalPerks initiative is available exclusively to Marriott Rewards members, making Marriott Rewards the first major hotel loyalty program to offer geo-targeted, mobile offers during a guest's stay.

Schwartz, who already has several clients lined up to introduce the technology in the future, told TravelPulse that he sees beacon technology making a similar impact to the travel industry as mobile apps did. He specifically highlighted Virgin Atlantic and Apple as examples.

Virgin Atlantic ran a trial in May 2014 for Upper Class passengers at London Heathrow Airport using Apple's iBeacon technology. Upper Class passengers had the opportunity to receive special partner offers as they passed through the airport, such as 0 percent commission at a MoneyCorp currency exchange booth.

At the time, Reuben Arnold, brand and customer engagement director for Virgin Atlantic, said the airline had only "skimmed the surface" of the technology, exploring the ability to notify customers of open appointments at the Clubhouse spa or introduce crew members as they board their flight, via the Virgin Atlantic blog.

Beacon technology makes a lot of sense because it almost works like a business owner standing outside and inviting customers in: it's directly targeting customers at the point of sale.

In fact, Schwartz told TravelPulse back in October that the clients ActionX works with are no longer content with a boost in app downloads—they want to see a clear indication of a boost in revenue. In that sense, beacon technology is naturally a new way of doing just that. It's no surprise that major companies such as Virgin Group and Apple are embracing the technology with open arms. It's also no surprise that ActionX—a company that specializes in mobile advertising—has taken it and ran with it.

But why has it taken a few years to really get beacon technology off the ground? Well, as with any advanced technology, it takes some tinkering to completely understand. Businesses have been learning how to fully implement beacon technology into their properties, Schwartz said.

As Sarah Bradley, director of Marriott Rewards Digital Strategy and leader of the LocalPerks initiative, told TravelPulse in December, it's particularly more difficult to implement the technology at, say, a large-scale resort than it is at a small retailer. You have to make sure beacons don't cross signals and bandwidth usage can be a problem.

“Installing beacons is a relatively simple process, but the strategy behind their placement and how to trigger the messages is more complex than we had expected,” Bradley said at the time. “The number of outlets, the layout of the hotel and the type of business the hotel drives all impact the placement and message strategy. We have learned quickly, however, and our core team has done a fantastic job of creating a unique experience.”

And for those worried about getting blasted with digital offers everywhere they are (futuristic movies such as “The Fifth Element” come to mind), rest assured, you not only have to download a specific app, but you also have to turn on Bluetooth, location services and the app’s notifications. Similar to personalized online marketing these days, advertisers using beacon technology don’t want to bombard consumers with offers, Schwartz noted. They are targeting them for a reason: It could genuinely be of interest to the consumer.

And as travelers move across this wondrous world, beacon technology is only a natural fit for the travel industry. (*Travel Pulse, Feb. 6*)

Arizona Properties Makes Forbes Travel Guide 2015 Star Ratings List

Forbes Travel Guide unveiled its 57th annual list of worldwide Star Rating recipients on Wednesday, including destinations that achieved their first five-star status.

The 2015 Star Ratings feature 18 new five-star hotels, 46 new four-star hotels and 26 new hotels in the “Recommended” category. That includes Forbes Travel Guide’s first star-rated properties in Mexico, the Caribbean, Latin America, Japan and Thailand.

As Forbes Travel Guide expanded its global reach for yet another year, the first five-star winners in Mexico and the Caribbean were announced: Four Seasons Resort Punta Mita, Nayarit, Mexico; Rosewood Mayakoba, Playa del Carmen, Mexico; Jumby Bay, A Rosewood Resort, Antigua; and Cheval Blanc and Eden Rock in St. Barts.

Three newly rated cities in Asia also boast their first five-star hotels: Guangzhou with Four Seasons Hotel Guangzhou and The Ritz-Carlton, Guangzhou; Bangkok with Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok; and Tokyo with Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo.

Two properties— Wynn Macau and Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong—have to be particularly proud. The properties earned the “Quintuple Five-Star” for the first time in Forbes Travel Guide’s history, each receiving a five-star rating for its hotel, three restaurants and spa.

Las Vegas continues to be a hotspot for five-star hotels, restaurants and spas. ARIA Sky Suites, Encore Tower Suites, Wynn Tower Suites, Skylofts at MGM Grand and Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas were each five-star winners once again.

Joël Robuchon at MGM Grand, Restaurant Guy Savoy at Caesars Palace and Twist by Pierre Gagnaire at Mandarin Oriental were also repeat five-star winners.

The Spa at Encore Las Vegas; The Spa at Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas; The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas; and The Spa at Wynn Las Vegas were repeat five-star winners in the spas category.

Rosewood Hotels & Resorts also has to be feeling good. The luxury hospitality company saw three new five-star hotels added from its collection: in Antigua; Playa del Carmen, Mexico; and Menlo Park, Calif. This is the first time the company has achieved three new five-star hotels in one year.

Conrad Hotels & Resorts, Langham Hotels & Resorts and Hyatt each now feature their first five-star hotels: Conrad Macao, Cotai Central; The Langham, Hong Kong; and Park Hyatt Aviara Resort.

Ten new five-star restaurants were also added to the Star Ratings list, bringing the total to 55. That includes four new five-star restaurants in Macau: Tenmasa, Belon, Vida Rica Restaurant and Bar, Il Teatro at Wynn Macau. In fact, Macau also added another five-star hotel, Conrad Macao, Cotai Central. Macau now features 23 five-star hotels, restaurants and spas—more than any other regional market in the world.

Seven new spas also earned five stars. Forbes Travel Guide now includes 48 five-star spas. Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group continues to dominate the spa category, receiving three new five-star ratings this year: The Spa at Mandarin Oriental Pudong, Shanghai; The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo; and The Oriental Spa, Bangkok. Mandarin Oriental now boasts 13 five-star spas on the list, the most of any brand.

Forbes Travel Guide now includes 115 five-star hotels across the globe (the most in its history), as well as 336 four-star hotels, 192 four-star restaurants, 163 four-star spas, 100 Recommended hotels and 60 Recommended restaurants. The rating service, formerly Mobil Travel Guide, has now added the following markets since originating the first five-star rating system in 1958: the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Costa Rica, London, Beijing, Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai, Tokyo, Bangkok, Singapore and Guangzhou.

For the complete list of 2015 Forbes Travel Guide Star Rating recipients, visit <http://blog.forbestravelguide.com/the-2015-forbes-travel-guide-star-award-winners>. For information on how Forbes Travel Guide compiles its Star Ratings, visit www.forbestravelguide.com/about/ratings. (*Travel Pulse*, Feb. 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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