



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:

Play Ball!

Arizona's Cactus League spring training games have officially begun! I hope everyone—friends, families and visitors— get out to these fabulous baseball parks and have fun seeing a game or two.

As one of our state's most valuable tourism assets, Cactus League spring training games generate an economic benefit that resonates throughout all of Arizona. Year after year, more than one million fans enjoy our spring training games and generate nearly \$600 million dollars in economic impact for Arizona. That is a significant economic contribution which is vital not only to the local economy but to our entire state.

To encourage baseball fans to take advantage of their time here in our great state, extend their visit and travel around Arizona, our agency's advertising efforts are directing visitors through online and interactive efforts to visit springtraining.com. This website resource offers information on what to see and do around the league's 10 baseball fields in addition to travel adventures throughout the entire state such as road trips, outdoor adventures, golf activities, spas, nightlife and dining experiences.

For more information about Cactus League Spring Training and a schedule of games, visit cactusleague.com. For what to see and do in Arizona while enjoying spring training games, visit springtraining.com.

See you in the stands!

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

AOT Participates in Congressional Visit to Nogales

Nogales, AZ hosted Congressman Paul Gosar, Congressional District 4, on Monday in a day that included meetings with stakeholders and a tour of the newly expanded Mariposa Port of Entry.

Pictured: Carolina Martinez, Economic Development, Nogales, Son.; Mayor Ramon Guzman, Nogales, Son.; Laura Franco French, Arizona Office of Tourism; Congressman Paul Gosar, CD4; Marisa Walker, Arizona Commerce Authority; Mayor John Doyle, Nogales, AZ; Larry Lucero, Arizona Mexico Commission Chair; Gail Lewis, Arizona Department of Transportation.

Congressman Gosar participated in roundtable discussions with the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA,) the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority, and the newly formed Ambos Nogales Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. After the roundtables, the Congressman visited the Mariposa Port of Entry to see the newly expanded facility.

The mayors of Ambos Nogales, Mayor Ramon Guzman, Nogales, Sonora; and Mayor John Doyle, Nogales, AZ; along with Larry Lucero, Chairman of the Arizona-Mexico Commission, welcomed Congressman Gosar and his staff to Nogales and thanked him for acknowledging the importance the community plays in cross-border trade for Arizona and for his willingness to dialogue about the issues and concerns Nogales is facing.

Bruce Bracker, Chairman of the Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority, and Lance Jungmeyer, FPAA, presented statistics on cross border trade, the impacts of the maquila industry, and steps that are needed to make Arizona more globally competitive. Some of the concerns expressed by the group were the inadequate staffing levels of U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel, which delay the flow of legitimate commerce and tourism through Arizona's ports of entry. Another concern is the recent closing of bank branches along the border and banks no longer doing business with companies who operate on both sides of the border due to burdensome anti-money laundering regulations imposed by the federal government. The unintended consequences of the Dodd-Frank Act and the Patriot Act are severely hampering the ability of business to operate, yet alone grow, in the border region.

Lea Marquez-Peterson, president of the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the newly created Ambos Nogales Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, gathered business leaders to discuss their concerns with the Congressman and the closing of border banks was also a top priority.

Nogales was encouraged by the visit and looks forward to more such events with elected leaders. For more information please contact Laura French at lfrench@tourism.az.gov or 602-364-3720.

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 mriddmann@tourism.az.gov or 602-364-3730.

Meet French Media Representatives at an Arizona Reception

AOT is pleased to invite Arizona tourism suppliers to join us in Paris for a media reception on Tuesday, May 19, 2015. Participation is open to Arizona tourism suppliers with preference given to CVBs, Chambers and DMOs. We are anticipating approximately 25 key media representatives to attend. Registration is \$1,000 and is limited to one representative per company. For more information please contact Mary Rittmann at mrtrittmann@tourism.az.gov or 602-364-3730.

AOT conducts desk-side visits with writers in Toronto and Montreal

Tony Alba, media relations manager for the U.S. and Canada, traveled to Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec last week for a series of meetings with travel writers in the two cities that are among the largest Canadian markets for generating visitors to Arizona. Tony met with eight media members in a day and a half of meetings in Toronto and six journalists in a day of appointments in Montreal, home to several major French language travel publications. His meetings included *The Toronto Star*, *Elle Canada* and *Zoomer* in Toronto and *enRoute* and *LaPresse* in Montreal. *enRoute*, the in-flight magazine for Air Canada, featured Cactus League spring training baseball as its [February cover story](#). For more information, please contact Tony Alba at talba@tourism.az.gov or 602-364-3715.

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.eventbrite.com/e/2015-arizona-governors-conference-on-tourism-tickets-15880590273>

Upcoming Events & Activities

[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

[AAA/CAA FAM Tour](#)

Date: April 29 - May 3

Locations: Mesa, Sedona, Prescott and the Grand Canyon National Park

Industry News

The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index® Declines

The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index®, which had increased in January, declined in February. The Index now stands at 96.4 (1985=100), down from 103.8 in January. The Present Situation Index decreased to 110.2 from 113.9, while the Expectations Index declined to 87.2 from 97.0 in January.

The monthly Consumer Confidence Survey®, based on a probability-design random sample, is conducted for The Conference Board by Nielsen, a leading global provider of information and analytics around what consumers buy and watch. The cutoff date for the preliminary results was February 12.

According to Lynn Franco, Director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board: “After a large gain in January, consumer confidence retreated in February, but still remains at pre-recession levels (September 2007, Index, 99.5). Consumers’ assessment of current conditions remained positive, but short-term expectations declined. While the number of consumers expecting conditions to deteriorate was virtually unchanged, fewer consumers expect conditions to improve, prompting a less upbeat outlook. Despite this month’s decline, consumers remain confident that the economy will continue to expand at the current pace in the months ahead.”

Consumers’ appraisal of current conditions was moderately less favorable in February than in January. Those saying business conditions are “good” decreased from 28.2 percent to 26.0 percent, however those claiming business conditions are “bad” decreased from 17.3 percent to 17.0 percent. Consumers were also somewhat less positive in their assessment of the job market, with the proportion stating jobs are “plentiful” decreasing slightly from 20.7 percent to 20.5 percent, and those claiming jobs are “hard to get” increasing from 24.6 percent to 26.2 percent.

Consumers’ optimism about the short-term outlook was considerably less positive in February. Those expecting business conditions to improve over the next six months decreased from 18.9 percent to 16.1 percent, while those expecting business conditions to worsen increased from 8.2 percent to 8.7 percent.

Consumers’ outlook for the labor market was also less optimistic. Those anticipating more jobs in the months ahead decreased from 17.3 percent to 13.4 percent. However, those anticipating fewer jobs declined from 14.8 percent to 14.3 percent. The proportion of consumers expecting growth in their incomes declined from 19.5 percent to 15.1 percent. The proportion expecting a decrease rose from 10.8 percent to 12.0 percent. (*The Conference Board, Feb. 24*)

U.S. Travel Abroad up 10%; Mexico, Canada and Europe Top Spots

Americans traveled abroad in record numbers last year, marking the first double-digit increase in international travel in a decade.

A report from the Department of Commerce said outbound travel from the U.S. grew 10% in 2014 compared with the previous year to a record 68.3 million travelers.

The previous record of outbound travelers was 64 million in 2007, shortly before the national recession dealt a serious blow to the nation's travel industry, according to the National Travel & Tourism Office of the Commerce Department.

Growth in travel abroad has been steady for the last two years, said Ron Erdmann, a spokesman for the tourism office. But he said the growth surged last year.

"We haven't seen double-digit growth since 2004," he said.

The long-term travel trends, however, have not changed much, with federal statistics showing Mexico, Canada and Europe as the most popular destinations in 2014.

"Those have by far been the dominant three" destinations," Erdmann said.

About 34% of U.S. travelers going abroad visited Mexico, with 19% going to Canada and about 18% visiting Europe, according to Commerce Department data. Other popular destinations were the Caribbean, Asia and Central America. (*L.A. Times, Feb. 23*)

Phoenix on American Express Travel List for Top Spring Break Destinations

Spring Break is only a few weeks away, and for some—particularly those experiencing brutal weather—it couldn't come soon enough.

American Express Travel recently unveiled the top domestic and international destinations for Spring Break (travel between March 10 and April 20), based on customer traveling trends. On top of that, representatives from the travel service provider, dubbed American Express Travel Counselors, were nice enough to dish out some travel tips.

According to American Express Travel, the top domestic destinations this Spring Break are: Orlando, Fort Myers, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, New York, Kahului, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Denver and Salt Lake City. The destinations that experienced the greatest jump in popularity include: San Juan (up 28.1 percent), Denver (up 24.9 percent), Phoenix (up 21.6 percent), Kauai Island (up 20.1 percent) and Miami (up 19.8 percent).

The top international destinations this Spring Break are: Cancun, St. Thomas, Nassau, Providenciales, San Jose del Cabo, Paris, London, Puerto Vallarta, St. Maarten and Aruba. The destinations that spiked the most in popularity include Tokyo (up 49.2 percent), Providenciales (up 41.8 percent), Puerto Vallarta (up 27.8 percent), Amsterdam (up 24 percent) and St. Thomas (up 21.5 percent).

American Express Travel Counselors noted that travelers should consider booking their flight and hotel through a travel agent. It not only saves you time scouring the Internet for deals, but it's also likely that you'll find a better deal anyway through a travel agent, given the agent's knowledge of the travel industry and potential to unlock nifty rewards.

Counselors also suggest all-inclusive resorts for families, particularly for those who are traveling with older children and/or teenagers that tend to have quite the appetite. For families that aren't traveling to all-inclusive properties, Counselors suggest taking advantage of

complimentary breakfasts and asking about any resort credits or bonuses for food, accommodations and even local destination tours/excursions. Shopping at a local grocery store and opting for a family picnic will also be more cost-effective than ordering from the hotel restaurant night in and night out, too.

And if you think there's some magical day to book flights, Counselors indicated that this isn't necessarily the case anymore. Instead, being flexible (possibly shifting the vacation a day or two) may be more effective in cutting costs. Counselors did say that it is still prudent to avoid flying on weekends or holidays, though.

Last but not least, it's never too early to book your winter vacation. Flights for the winter holidays already started popping up three weeks ago, and travelers can save some major bucks by booking now. (*Travel Pulse, Feb. 26*)

International Visitors Spent a Record \$222 Billion in the U.S. Last Year

The United States received a record \$222.3 billion boost to the national economy from international visitors in 2014, the National Travel and Tourism Office reported this week. This is a 4 percent increase over the \$214.8 billion reported for 2013.

Americans spent an estimated \$146.7 billion abroad last year creating a \$75.7 billion travel-trade surplus.

Travel and tourism exports include money spent by international visitors while in the country and what they spent to get here for business and personal reasons. Goods and services include food, lodging, recreation, entertainment and local transportation.

In December alone, international visitors spent more than \$18.8 billion on travel and activities to and within the United States, a 2 percent increase over December 2013.

Although spending on tourism-related activities and fares remained relatively unchanged in comparison to the year earlier, expenditures for educational and health-related tourism increased 7 percent.

The NTTO edited its definition of travel in 2009 to include business-related, education-related, and health-related travel for the first time, bringing its measurements in line with common international practices. [Full Article](#). (*Skift.com, Feb. 26*)

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 today's 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." (*U.S. Travel Association, Dec. 5*)

Accolade: [Aji Spa](#) at the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass made National Geographic Traveler's list of [50 Top Wellness Destinations](#). The spa was one of only ten listed in North America.

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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