



## ***AOT in Action***

Welcome to AOT in Action, your bi-monthly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

### **A Message from Director:**

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Good afternoon,

Congratulations to Governor Doug Ducey and Arizona Cardinals President Michael Bidwill for their induction into the National Football Foundation Leadership Hall of Fame!

Governor Ducey and Bidwill will be honored for their outstanding leadership and contributions to the State of Arizona, including their unwavering support of mega events like the upcoming College Football Playoff National Championship (CFP). You can find more information about their induction from the [official press release](#). The pair will be recognized January 7, 2016 at a kick-off affair that will get the ball rolling for a fun-filled weekend of events surrounding the CFP game.

We are just 48 days away from what will definitely be an exciting college football match up. AOT is working in collaboration with the [Arizona Organizing Committee](#) to make certain the game and local events are widely promoted. Fans can take part in various activities including the [Championship Campus](#), a three-day event with great food, interactive games and a free concert series. In addition to all the CFP events, we will be encouraging fans to stay longer and visit some of Arizona's great attractions and destinations.

For a complete listing of events, visit [azchampgame.org/events/championship-campus](http://azchampgame.org/events/championship-campus). To stay up-to-date all the CFP news, visit [azchampgame.org](http://azchampgame.org).

I would also like to congratulate Karen Churchard, former assistant deputy director for AOT, who has been named as the new Tourism and Events Director for the City of Scottsdale. We look forward to working with Karen in her new position.

Have a great week,

Debbie Johnson  
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

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## AOT News

### **Join Us for AOT's World Tour 2015 - December 8 (Flagstaff), 9 (Scottsdale) & 10 (Tucson)**

To give statewide communities a more in-depth educational experience on the state's top international visitor markets, AOT will be bringing our in-market international representatives to you for a series of seminars in northern, central and southern Arizona. AOT will once again conduct the **AOT World Tour** program this December over three days – Dec. 8, 9 & 10 – in Flagstaff, Scottsdale and Tucson, respectively. This is an opportunity for DMOs, attractions and hotels to identify specific opportunities each area of the state has in attracting tourists from Arizona's six international markets (Canada, China, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Mexico).

New this year is the opportunity to interact with our in-market representatives directly in smaller breakout sessions.

Be sure to register online at [www.aotworldtour.ezregister.com](http://www.aotworldtour.ezregister.com). Registration closes on Thursday, **December 3**. Visit [tourism.az.gov/aots-world-tour-2015](http://tourism.az.gov/aots-world-tour-2015) for agenda details.

### **New Research Updates Available!**

The following reports are now available at [tourism.az.gov](http://tourism.az.gov):

- [Airport Passenger Volume September 2015](#)
- [Arizona Lodging October 2015](#)
- [National Park Visitation July 2015](#)
- [National Park Visitation August 2015](#)
- [Gross Sales & Tourism Taxes September 2015](#)

For more information, visit [tourism.az.gov](http://tourism.az.gov) or contact Colleen Floyd at [cfloyd@tourism.az.gov](mailto:cfloyd@tourism.az.gov).

### **AOT Hosts International Media for Route 66 Press Trip**

AOT and community partners recently hosted seven international travel writers for the *Get Your Kicks in Arizona! The People and Places of Route 66* press trip. The writers were from the UK, Germany, France, China, Canada and Mexico. The group experienced and enjoyed the attractions along Route 66 including Petrified Forest National Park, Winslow, Meteor Crater, Flagstaff, Seligman, Grand Canyon Caverns, Kingman and Oatman. AOT thanks our partners and volunteers along the way who shared with the group the history, lore and symbolism that is Arizona's Route 66. For more information, contact Kim Todd at [ktodd@tourism.az.gov](mailto:ktodd@tourism.az.gov).

### **AOT Announces New China Representation**

AOT is pleased to announce that it has entered into an agreement with AVIAREPS Shanghai Representative Office for trade and media representation in China. AVIAREPS specializes in destination promotion with fully integrated media and travel trade promotions throughout

mainland China. This agreement expands AOT's efforts to capture this continually growing and important inbound market. For more information, contact Kim Todd at [ktodd@tourism.az.gov](mailto:ktodd@tourism.az.gov).

### **AOT and 12 Arizona destinations conduct media mission in Toronto**

AOT led a delegation of 12 state tourism partners to Toronto, Ontario, Canada for a media event attended by 41 travel writers and editors on Nov. 18. AOT was joined by media representatives from Flagstaff, Glendale, Grand Canyon West, Mesa, Navajo Nation, Phoenix, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, Scottsdale, Sedona, Tempe, Tucson and Yuma.

Connect World Wide, AOT's contracted media representative in Canada, arranged the reception at the Ritz-Carlton Toronto on behalf of the delegation. Canada is Arizona's number-two international market behind Mexico, generating nearly 900,000 visitors in 2014. The province of Ontario is the second-largest source of Canadian visitors to the state, behind Alberta. For more information, contact Tony Alba at [talba@tourism.az.gov](mailto:talba@tourism.az.gov).

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## **Upcoming Events & Activities**

### **[AOT World Tour 2015 - Flagstaff](#)**

Date: December 8

### **[AOT World Tour 2015 - Scottsdale](#)**

Date: December 9

### **[AOT World Tour 2015 - Tucson](#)**

Date: December 10

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## **Industry News**

### **Save the Date: 2016 Tourism Unity Dinner February 25, 2016**

Planning has begun for the 12th Annual Arizona Tourism Unity Dinner. This year the event will be held at The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa. The event brings together Arizona's Tourism Industry leaders along with our state elected officials to celebrate the \$20.9 billion AZ tourism industry and its significant contribution to our state's economy. In addition, this event recognizes entities and individuals that have greatly enhanced and positively impacted Arizona tourism. We will also be honoring the Hotelier of the Year, Allied Member of the Year and the Tourism Legacy Award winner. For more information, visit [www.azlta.com/events/unity-dinner](http://www.azlta.com/events/unity-dinner).

### **Save the Date: 2016 Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism July 11 – 13, 2016**

The next Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism will be held at the beautiful Westin La Paloma in scenic Southern Arizona! The Arizona Governor's Conference on Tourism provides valuable networking opportunities, professional development sessions, nationally recognized

speakers, a dedicated sponsor exhibit area and the Governor's Tourism Awards Gala. The conference, consistently attended by 500, provides an opportunity for our visitor industry to gather information on the latest trends impacting tourism. For more information, visit [aztourismconference.com](http://aztourismconference.com).

### **National Geographic and Sedona Verde Valley Tourism Council Introduce Sedona Verde Valley Geotourism Website**

Travelers seeking unspoiled places and culturally authentic experiences now have a valuable new resource in a comprehensive Geotourism website for the Sedona Verde Valley region. The landmark project has taken two years to plan and execute and is a historically significant asset for everyone who visits or lives in the region.

Local residents were asked to contribute suggestions of places to visit in the area and useful travel advice. This created the content for this remarkable site that celebrates everything special and unique about the Verde Valley.

The Geotourism website highlights the spectacular landscapes and diverse people of north central Arizona. It is designed to showcase to local, national and international audiences the natural, cultural and historic attractions that define the region. Sedona, Cottonwood, Clarkdale, Camp Verde, Jerome and The Yavapai Nation are all part of this exciting project.

National Geographic's acclaimed mapmaking and sustainable tourism expertise helped produce the Geotourism website along with Verde Valley Chambers of Commerce and local business leaders.

The Sedona Verde Valley website:

- Is one of only 22 Geotourism programs worldwide
- Showcases many of the sites nominated by local residents
- Is a resource designed to improve local, rural economic development
- Provides access to a niche national market of "geotravelers"
- Will grow with the addition of hundreds of more sites and events
- Highlights the resources of the region encompassing a major portion of north central Arizona
- Provides a long-term resource for promoting Sedona and the Verde Valley to the nation and the world.

The National Geographic Society has worked with community-based alliances to develop similar Geotourism MapGuides and websites in other regions around the world. Geotourism MapGuide projects have been completed or are ongoing in the Central Cascades (Oregon, Washington), Four Corners (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah), Greater Yellowstone (Idaho, Montana, Wyoming), Lakes to Locks Passage (New York, Quebec), Newfoundland, Portugal's Douro Valley, Redwood Coast (California), Sierra Nevada (California, Nevada), and the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia.)

Founded in 1915 as the Map Department of the National Geographic Society, National Geographic Maps is responsible for illustrating the world around us through the art and science of mapmaking. Today, National Geographic Maps continues this mission by creating the world's

best wall maps, outdoor recreation maps, travel maps, atlases and globes that inspire people to care about and explore their world. For more information, visit <http://www.natgeomaps.com>.

The website can be viewed at <http://sedonaverdevalley.natgeotourism.com/>. Residents and visitors may continue to nominate new sites, events and special places for the website, which will be dynamic and constantly changing. (Nov. 12)

### **Welcome to Trace Ward, New Director for Flagstaff Convention and Visitors Bureau**

As the Flagstaff Convention and Visitors Bureau Director, Trace Ward brings more than 25 years of experience in the hospitality/destination marketing arena. His career includes senior-level sales & marketing positions with iconic brands such as Starwood, Hilton and Marriott. In his previous position he led the team as the Interim Executive Director for Experience Kissimmee, the convention and visitors bureau for Osceola County, FL, a department of more than 40 employees with a budget of \$19 million and home to the world-famous theme parks.

At Experience Kissimmee, Ward oversaw all aspects of the bureau and was responsible for all sales and marketing deliverables. With a solid approach to sales and marketing, and a blend of strategic, creative and analytical skillsets, Ward and his team, along with the partnership of the community, were able to increase the bed tax collection in Osceola County from \$36 million to \$42 million in his tenure. This increase was accomplished through building awareness and inspiring both domestic and international visitors to experience their destination. Furthermore, the team took a targeted approach to the meetings & conventions market, nearly doubling their qualified leads to their meeting facilities.

Ward noted that his passion and enthusiasm for driving economic impact through tourism is a lifelong endeavor. He enjoys working with the industry partners and community in which he serves to bring about positive change. A native of Omaha, Neb., Ward received a degree in business management from Bellevue University, has earned certificates of sales training from Starwood, Marriott and Hilton, as well as has earned his Certified Destination Marketing Executive (CDME) degree from DMAI.

When he is not spending time strategizing on tourism development, Ward can be found playing tennis, hiking, skiing, traveling to new and exciting places or spending time with some of his 30 nieces and nephews. He is the youngest of fifteen siblings. (Nov. 12)

### **Sniff Out Vineyards, Wineries & Tasting Rooms with the Arizona Wine Trail Map**

Wine connoisseurs and aficionados alike have a new online tool for unearthing the vineyards, wineries and tasting rooms of Arizona's burgeoning, multimillion dollar wine industry. The new [Arizona Wine Trails Map](#), created by the Arizona Experience team at the Arizona Geological Survey, is an interactive and mobile-friendly resource that opens the door to Arizona's unique wine culture.

"Arizona's wine experience is fast becoming one of our state's most popular tourism assets and contributes more than \$40 million dollars to the state's economy," said Debbie Johnson, director of the Arizona Office of Tourism. "The Arizona Wine Trails Map is a wonderful and innovative online tool that can help us further promote this authentic Arizona visitor experience."

The map includes 65 locations, capturing tasting opportunities in Arizona's three winegrowing regions - Sonoita, Willcox, and the Verde Valley - and urban areas. Colorful icons illustrate whether a location is a tasting room, winery, vineyard, or all three attractions in one. Site popups provide hours, location, website URL, and a directions function that displays the most direct route.

An "Open Now" feature shows all businesses open in real time to facilitate Arizona wine enjoyment whenever the mood hits.

Wine tourism is a growth industry in Arizona that entices guests and supports local 'cottage industries' such as restaurants and hotels. Arizona's rugged climate and mineral-rich soil produces flavorful grapes and distinctive wines with a character as varied as the terrain.

Winemakers embrace innovation with unique varietals and blends, resulting in a spectrum of tastes from region to region and even vineyard to vineyard. Novice tasters and connoisseurs alike will appreciate the ease with which the Wine Trails Map helps them find a tasting room that suits their fancy. Both residents and visitors will delight in clear directions and easily marked routes to their destinations.

The Wine Trails map is hosted at the Arizona Experience "Arizona Wine Country" page and at the Arizona Office of Tourism's VisitArizona.com site. The map is complemented by a brief story of Arizona's wine country and a description of each of the three winegrowing regions.

This is the second interactive map produced by the Arizona Experience to promote agritourism in Arizona. The U Pick Farms Map, released in June 2014, showcases farms and orchards growing specialty crops – apples, honey, grapes, lemons, chili peppers, olives, sweet corn, pumpkins, and more - that allow the public to select their own fresh, locally grown produce.

Funds for this program provided by the Arizona Office of Agriculture. For more information, visit [ArizonaExperience.org](http://ArizonaExperience.org). (Nov. 16)

### **#OptOutside @AZStateParks**

In collaboration with outdoor specialty retailer REI, Arizona State Parks invites Arizonans to #optoutside on Black Friday! Visit an Arizona REI store from November 21-25, 2015 and receive a free day pass for entry into an Arizona State Park. There are four REI stores in Arizona: Flagstaff, Paradise Valley, Tempe, and Tucson.

Park visitors opting to spend time outdoors rather than fighting the holiday shopping crowds can post photos of their experience at Facebook.com/azstateparks with the hashtag #optoutside. The ten photos that receive the most "likes" will win a free Arizona State Parks annual pass. The annual pass will give you entry to State Parks for one year.

Get into the true spirit of the season and #optoutside. Put off the holiday shopping, get outdoors, and burn-off those Thanksgiving calories by enjoying time with family and friends at one of your Arizona State Parks. For more information, visit [AZStateParks.com](http://AZStateParks.com). (Nov. 18)

### **New Services Offer More Non-Stop Travel Options and Support International Growth**

Air Canada announced today new non-stop services between 12 U.S. cities and its four key Canadian hubs beginning next summer. The new transborder routes will introduce new destinations, such as Washington-Dulles-Toronto, Salt Lake City-Toronto and San Jose-Vancouver, while also creating new city-pair routings, such as Chicago-Vancouver, Houston-Montreal, Denver-Montreal and San Francisco-Calgary. To promote the new routes, Air Canada is offering special introductory fares; details are available on [www.aircanada.com](http://www.aircanada.com).

"Air Canada is the foreign carrier operating the most flights to the U.S., carrying the most customers and serving the most destinations. As such, we are pleased to strengthen our market presence, particularly as the U.S. is the top destination for Canadian travelers and Canada is one of the most popular destinations for Americans. These new routes will make it easier for international travelers flying from and to the U.S. to connect to Air Canada's global network through its major Canadian hubs. Additionally, customers travelling in the U.S. or from Latin America on our partner United Airlines will have more travel options and connection opportunities at UA's hubs in Houston, Denver, San Francisco and Washington-Dulles," said Benjamin Smith, President, Passenger Airlines, at Air Canada.

"International travelers are increasingly finding that connecting through Canada on Air Canada is the most convenient way to fly from and to the U.S. to both Europe and Asia. Not only do our hubs offer some of the shortest elapsed travel times, they also provide international travelers seamless connections and Air Canada's Four-Star service, featuring lie-flat seats in International Business Class, a Premium Economy cabin on select flights, and seatback In-Flight Entertainment throughout all aircraft. All flights provide for Aeroplan accumulation and redemption, Star Alliance reciprocal benefits and, for eligible customers, priority check-in, Maple Leaf Lounge access at our hubs, priority boarding and other benefits."

The new routes announced today will be operated by Air Canada mainline, Air Canada rouge and Air Canada Express aircraft. All routes will operate year-round except where indicated by (\*).

Route	Frequency	Start Date
Salt Lake City- Toronto	Daily	May 28, 2016
Portland, Oregon - Toronto	Daily	May 27, 2016*
Washington/Dulles - Toronto1	Two-times daily	May 2, 2016
Jacksonville, Florida - Toronto1	Two-times per week(Saturday, Sunday)	May 21, 2016
Denver - Montreal	Daily	June 4, 2016
Houston - Montreal1	Daily	June 6, 2016
Philadelphia - Montreal1	Two-times daily	May 24, 2016
Phoenix - Calgary2	Three-times weekly (Monday, Thursday, Saturday)	Continued from Winter
San Francisco - Calgary1	Daily	June 18, 2016
Chicago - Vancouver	Daily	June 4, 2016
San Diego - Vancouver2	Daily	June 2, 2016*
San Jose - Vancouver1	Two-times daily	May 9, 2016

1 Flight operated by Air Canada Express; 2 Flight operated by Air Canada rouge. ( November 20)

## Where Will Americans Travel in 2016?

In a constantly evolving tourism industry, new offerings, attractions and experiences are making travelers more apt to explore unique and underrated destinations to satisfy their inner wanderlust. As 2016 rapidly approaches, Hotels.com® is revealing its Top 10 Travel Predictions for the new year through an analysis of travel demand changes over the last two years\* on the website.

"For 2016 we're foreseeing an interesting mix of trending and often overlooked destinations with something for every type of traveler no matter your budget, climate preference, preferred language or lifestyle," said Josh Belkin, VP and general manager, North America for Hotels.com.

1. Queens will overtake Brooklyn as the most popular destination for New York visitors staying in the outer boroughs. While the hipster haven has experienced steady growth in travel demand over the past two years (approximately two-thirds increase in travel demand), Queens is catching up quickly (nearly 150 percent increase) with an eclectic food scene and several boutique hotels like The One Boutique Hotel in Flushing and Z NYC Hotel in Long Island City.
2. Dallas will make a significant leap in popularity after seeing a nearly 40 percent increase in travel demand since last year. In addition to offering great shopping, arts and dining options, Dallas has made a focused effort to welcome more diverse visitors including LGBT travelers.
3. Anaheim will see a large surge in tourism beyond theme park visitors. The city is increasing in popularity faster than any other major California destination (up 40 percent over 2014), and with a convention center expansion and new hotel openings in the coming year, that trend will continue.
4. Milwaukee will become a Top 50 Domestic Destination in the Hotel Price Index™ (HPI®). As the 2nd most popular Midwestern city, Milwaukee has seen a more than 70 percent increase since 2013, and has been included on countless lists of underrated cities due to its strong food and beer scene and great shopping and entertainment options.
5. Oregon's smaller cities will benefit more from marijuana tourism than Portland. Portland saw a more than 25 percent increase in travel demand compared to 2014, but Ashland – the closest city to California with recreational marijuana shops – and Eugene – closest to Idaho – experienced the two largest increases in the state at 65 percent and 70 percent, respectively.
6. Buffalo will emerge as a top travel destination. The Rust Belt cities have all experienced significant growth in travel demand over the last two years. Cleveland (up more than 70 percent), Detroit (up nearly 70 percent) and Pittsburgh (up more than 60 percent) each benefited from the upswing in visitors, but Buffalo, with the highest increase in demand (over 90 percent) will be the city to watch in 2016. The city is developing its waterfront and Main Street areas and is growing as a foodie destination.
7. Mexico will attract more travelers beyond its top destinations. Major Mexican destinations such as Mexico City, Cancun and Riviera Maya have experienced a surge in tourism in recent years and Hotels.com expects that trend to spill over into other Mexican cities as well. Since 2013, cities such as Ciudad Juarez (more than four-fold increase in travel demand) and Tijuana (more than three-fold increase) have benefited from local tourism efforts and increased safety.

8. Phuket will become a Top 40 International Destination in the 2016 HPI. Thailand's tourism council is expecting a record 30 million visitors this year[i] but it's not just Bangkok that is attracting travelers. Phuket, the country's largest island, has experienced significant increase in travel demand (over 70 percent over 2014).
  9. Under-the-radar Canadian destinations will continue to shine in 2016. The province of Ontario is home to perennial Top 15 International Destinations – Toronto and Niagara Falls – according to the HPI, but over the last two years, the region has seen the most growth in travel demand in lesser-known destinations such as Toronto's neighbor Mississauga, the border city of Windsor and the scenic town of Niagara-on-the-Lake, with each more than doubling.
  10. The Norwegian capitol of Oslo will become a top Scandinavian destination for American travelers. Known as one of the world's cleanest cities, Oslo has experienced the largest increase in travel demand among all European destinations since 2013 (up over 180 percent). (*Travel Industry Wire, Nov. 20*)
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### **Calendar of Events**

Visit [www.visitarizona.com](http://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!**

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