Tourism Tuesday

Welcome to Tourism Tuesday, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director:

Good afternoon,

Preliminary domestic overnight visitor volume data for Q1 (January - March) and Q2 (April - June) is coming into view and the information looks great for our state. To no surprise, the majority of our statewide visitation occurs during the winter and spring months and for the first two quarters of 2016 our visitors did not disappoint!

In reviewing the data from our research vendor Tourism Economics, domestic overnight visitation to Arizona slowed down in both quarters compared to the same time frame in 2015, which was more of an anomaly because of the Super Bowl and surrounding activities. However, we still saw positive growth in visitor volume of more than 250,000 visitors (or 2.6% in visitation) over Q1 and Q2 of 2015.

Even though overall percentage growth is slower than last year, this seems to be a trend we are seeing nationally. According to recent data release by D.K. Shifflet & Associates, leisure travelers of all generations, but particularly the younger generations, plan to travel less this fall than they did last year. Arizona seems to be following the national visitation trend for leisure travelers, which is expected to continue through the end of 2016.

Indicators in other tourism sectors are also seeing positive growth. As stated in Tourism Economics' Q1-Q2 year-over-year report, hotel rooms sold were up 1%, total air arrivals gained 26.5% and real amusement sales gained 18.1%. Additionally, gains continued in leisure and hospitality employment (up 2.5% from the prior year) which also contributed to visitation growth estimates. This positive travel activity is great for our state's economy and underscores the reason why this industry is so important to Arizona's economic success.

In other appetizing news, it's Arizona Restaurant Week! This special week is a delicious way to get out and enjoy our state's dynamic culinary scene. It doesn't matter if you're a foodist or if you just enjoy a good meal, now is the time to discover why Arizona's unique local cuisine has quickly become one of our industry's most treasured assets.

And I'm throwing out a challenge to all of you! It's my personal goal to experience two new restaurants this week. How many will you try? For a complete list of participating restaurants, visit ArizonaRestaurantWeek.com. Enjoy!

Debbie Johnson
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism
#AZTourismTuesday

AOT in Action

New AOT Research Now Available

The following reports are now available at tourism.az.gov:

- State Park Visitation August 2016
- Arizona Lodging August 2016

For the latest and historical tourism indicator reports, please visit the Data and Trends page on tourism.az.gov. For more information, contact Colleen Floyd at 602-364-3716 or cfloyd@tourism.az.gov.

Join AOT for the China Trade and Media Mission

AOT is pleased to invite Arizona DMOs and tourism suppliers to participate in a Travel Trade and Media Mission to China. The five-day mission will take place October 24-28 in Shanghai and Beijing, two of the largest cities for doing travel trade business in China. China is the fastest growing outbound travel market with an estimated 250 million Chinese tourists anticipated to travel overseas by 2020. In addition, Chinese visitors are big spenders, spending more than $6,000 per person per trip. In 2015, Chinese visitation to Arizona alone increased 18.5% (over 2014 visitation). And, in 2015, Visa card spending from China was up 34.8% year-over-year (source: VisaVue).

AOT plans to meet one-on-one with tour operators and media professionals as well as host meal events and destination workshops for optimal networking and educational opportunities with the Chinese travel trade. This is a great opportunity for you to meet with approximately 125 key travel agents, tour operators, media professionals and other related travel trade professionals in this important market. There are several ways to participate in this mission, so please contact us for more information. Contact Jennifer Sutcliffe (trade) at 602-364-3693 or via email at jsutcliffe@tourism.az.gov or Kimberly Todd (media) at 602-364-3305 or via email at ktodd@tourism.az.gov.

Upcoming AOT Events & Activities

Canada Media Influencer Tour - Get Your Kicks on Route 66

Date: October 16-21
Locations: Phoenix, Winslow, Flagstaff and Kingman
AOT's media rep with ConnectWorldWide in Canada will escort this tour which will provide the opportunity to explore the people and places along Historic Route 66.

China Trade and Media Mission

Date: October 24-28
Locations: Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai

AOT's trade and media representative in China, AVIA Reps, will coordinate a delegation-led mission to Beijing and Shanghai. The events in each city will typically include a destination presentation followed by a luncheon as well as trade specific meetings and one-on-one media appointments. This is available to co-op partners.

Upcoming Industry Events & Activities

Arizona Restaurant Week

Date: September 16-15
Location: Arizona
This statewide affair offers foodies a wealth of dining opportunities and the chance to get outside their own neighborhood and try something new. From sizzling Southwestern and soothing comfort foods to five-star dining and international fare – it's all on the table during Arizona Restaurant Week.

Lighting Arizona Purple - Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Date: October 3
Location: Arizona State Capitol, House Lawn, Phoenix
October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. October 3rd Governor Ducey will light the State Capitol purple as a symbol of Arizona's dedication to ending domestic violence. Stand with the Governor as we say, "It Can Stop".

Arizona News

Reverdecer en el Desierto/Greening in the Desert

AOT collaborated with journalist, Juan Pablo Montes, and photographer, Juan Carlos Ramos, with the *Food and Travel Mexico* publication when they visited Arizona last September. Their visit produced an eight-page article featuring Arizona as a gourmet oasis with vineyards and culinary discoveries. The article talks about the culinary experiences one can have in the communities of Phoenix, Scottsdale, Mesa, Sedona, and Cottonwood. Montes also mentions in the article that it is very difficult to leave Arizona without promising to come back and explore even more of the state. The article includes how to arrive to Arizona from Mexico by air and the main resources to obtain information about statewide destinations.

The article was just published in the September 2016 issue as the magazine's cover story. The article "Reverdecer en el Desierto/Greening in the Desert" was published September 6, 2016. The article has an advertising equivalency of $68,750 and reached a circulation of 30,000.

Willcox Wins Federal Designation as a Unique Arizona Wine Region

Willcox became Arizona's second federally-recognized wine-growing region, formally known as an American Viticultural Area, a designation the area's winemakers hope will increase the credibility of the region among oenophiles

The approval puts Willcox on the same national list of recognized viticultural areas that include Napa Valley, Calif., Paso Robles, Calif., and Willamette Valley, Ore.

“It’s a point of pride for the industry,” said John McLoughlin,the owner of Cellar 433 who spearheaded the three-year effort to get the recognition. “We’re designated. We’re doing this seriously.”

The designation, approved by a bureau within the Department of the Treasury, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, means the area was recognized as a unique region for growing grapes. Arizona’s first designated American Viticultural Area, Sonoita, was named in 1985.

The move was published in the Federal Register, the legal newspaper of the federal government, on Monday. Wineries can start using the AVA name on wine bottles 30 days after that publication date. Willcox can only be used on labels for bottles of wine made almost exclusively with grapes grown in the region.

McLoughlin said he envisions the name Willcox becoming more visible in the wine world, printed on wine lists at Phoenix-area restaurants and seen on shelves at grocery and wine stores.

Though many of the tasting rooms and tourism industry are in the Verde Valley, most of the state’s vineyards are spread through southeastern Arizona, just below the city of Willcox.

The area, according to the documents submitted to the Treasury Department, includes 21 vineyards. The bulk of the state’s grapes — more than two-thirds, according to the documents — are grown in the Willcox basin.

That was why McLoughlin said he started the push for the designation in 2013.

“The major growing in the state didn’t have an AVA,” he said. “It needed to be done.”

McLoughlin's own Willcox vineyard is the largest in the state, providing grapes for wineries such as Chateau Tumbleweed and Page Springs Cellars, as well as his own labels, Arizona Angel, Fiddlebender and Bitter Creek Winery.

McLoughlin said he learned a lot about the region while preparing the application. He likened it to the owner of a car reading the instruction manual after years of driving it and being surprised at all the features. He had already known the area was good for grape-growing, but he said the research let him know just how unique of a place it was.

“It was more than just a piece of ground,” he said. “It’s the weather, the soil, the climate and the weather patterns, all that wrapped up into one package.”

In the application for approval, prepared by Paul Hagar, a special projects manager at Cellar 433, the region is described as a closed basin, meaning no water flows into or out of it. The area gets its water from rain and underground aquifers, according to the petition.

The application traced the history of the region back to volcanic explosions 75 million years ago. It mentioned the first grapes grown in the area, by R.W. Webb in 1984, and the significant growth in vineyards over the past decade.

It described the unique challenges to growing grapevines in the region. The petition said growers “must manage leaf canopies carefully so that the fruit does not become sunburnt, while preventing the canopies from becoming so dense that the fruit does not reach optimum ripeness.”

The petition also discussed the unique soils, which it said are predominantly loams of sand, silt and clay. Typically, this type of soil is too rich for grapevines, producing an overly vigorous plant, but, the petition said, the heat in the Willcox area keeps the growth in check.

The petition further described how the summer heat makes leaves close up, delaying growth, until the beginning of the monsoon season when the cooler temperatures and moisture in the air cause the plants to open their leaves longer.

The petition was open for public comment from January to March. Two comments were received, one for and one against. The person against it said he was a rancher who was against seeing the character of the region change into a wine culture.

In addition, three vineyards within the Willcox AVA — Arizona Stronghold, Zarpara and Asmundson Family vineyards — sent letters in support.

The government's website noted the designation is not an endorsement for the quality of the grapes grown there. It does mean no winery can use Willcox as part of its name unless the wine it makes comes largely from grapes grown in the region.

There are no wineries currently using the Willcox name, although there are trademarks and corporations registered with the state of Arizona that contain the name.

Gallifant Cellars, based in Peoria, owns a corporation called Willcox Winery, with an address in downtown Willcox. Owner Gavin Gallifant said his business owns the downtown property, but does not operate a winery there. He said he is planning on selling the building and the name.

The McLoughlin-owned Odyssey Cellars owns trademarks on two winery names: Willcox Wines and Wines of Willcox. McLoughlin said he might use one of those names for the tasting room he hopes to build near his vineyard.

The rule only applies to wineries. It would not affect the Wines of Willcox, run by Thomas Johnson, that creates winery maps and maintains a website aimed at promoting the region.

Rod Keeling, the president of the Arizona Wine Growers Association, said the Willcox designation marks a further step in Arizona being recognized as a legitimate wine-growing world.

“It has a quality connotation,” Keeling said. “The government has said (that) this is a unique and special place for wine grapes.”

Keeling said the effect on consumers is more subtle. Seeing the name Willcox on bottles, rather than the more generic Cochise County, gets the city name in front of wine fans. It might make them consider visiting, Keeling said, or make the more adventurous think about investing in the city.

“It’s one more of those incremental changes that are necessary for community improvement and development,” he said.

Keeling opened his Keeling-Schaefer Vineyards tasting room in 2010 in a bank building in downtown Willcox. At the time, his was the only tasting room in the downtown. He’s since been joined by three more, Carlson Creek Vineyard, Flying Leap Vineyards and Aridus Wine Company. And vineyard owners in the area south of the city are readying blueprints for bed and breakfasts and elaborate tasting rooms.

Keeling said he has seen a 20 percent increase in sales at his tasting room every year since it opened. Admittedly, he said, that is an increase from not very much, but an increase all the same.

Still, he sees the possibility for Willcox to become like Cottonwood. That city, south of Sedona, has seen wine tasting rooms open on its Main Street, which had been abandoned. Weekends in Old Town now see sold-out hotels and bustling restaurants.

Keeling said the viticultural designation can help propel downtown Willcox in a similar direction.

“We’re not a truck-stop town,” he said. “I believe it has the potential to be a pretty interesting place.”

McLoughlin agreed, envisioning a lively tourism boom in downtown Willcox.

“I truly believe Willcox will be the major wine region in the state,” he said. *(Arizona Republic, Sept. 19, 2016)*

http://www.azcentral.com/story/travel/arizona/2016/09/13/willcox-wins-federal-designation-unique-arizona-wine-region/90094172/

Industry News

Google Debuts Trips, a Mobile App to Plan Travel Itineraries Faster

Today Google launches its first all-in-one travel app, Trips. The free app aims to be a personalized tour guide available for Android or Apple devices.

The most powerful trick of Google Trips is that the app suggests activities to do at a destination based on time, weather, ratings by other Google users, and your past mobile device behavior.

The app pulls reservation details out of a user’s Gmail account to build lists of suggested itineraries. Once a user is in their destination, the tool can suggest relevant attractions based on time of day and the user’s location.

Mapping out favorite attractions can help travelers make efficient use of their time. In Tnooz's tests, we found that Google Trips makes it quick to see which attractions are open, account for how far it takes to get from point A to point B, and estimate how long visitors typically stay at each stop.

Richard Holden, who since 2013 has developed product strategy and led product management teams focused on Google's Travel products, said the results are produced without any paid placements and are based on algorithmic calculations of popularity. He told Tnooz:

"Today this is purely an organic product. We want to focus first on building a good user experience. We think there are some interesting partnership opportunities in the future, but we really haven't looked into those at all."

The Trips app has all the hallmarks of a serious effort, unlike the brand's half-hearted and now forgotten FieldTrip, a tour guide app pushed several years ago. FieldTrip relied on content from selected publishers and users for a limited set of destinations — which limited its usefulness.

Unlike Field Trip, the search giant is providing a bit of marketing muscle behind Google Trips, as signaled by a promotional video that it released today to tout the app.

To encourage habitual use, Google Trips is also a place to store flight, hotel, and car rental information. The app pulls from Gmail, so that you can see your reservation details in one place. The app also has your hotel confirmation details and lets you plot your hotel on a map, even if your device lacks access to an internet data connection.

One major implication of Trips for attractions managers and food-and-beverage vendors is to make sure that the business details on their Google Local cards, or organic directory listings, are up-to-date.

Vendors may also want to encourage customers to post reviews via Google Local. The importance of Google's Local Guides program is also implied, as these volunteers are often significant providers of ratings and photos to Google Local, which in turn feeds Trips and other Google Travel content.

Day plans and "relevant" suggestions

Customization is front-and-center. For some users at some destinations, Google Trips has a "For You" option that offers recommendations of places to see and dine based on what the app knows about you. The app pulls your saved places from Maps and the types of searches you've done in the past to suggest some places to see that may be particularly appealing.

Holden said that on a visit to London, the Trips app recommended he visit Hampstead Heath, a park that is a popular attraction, because his Android device knows he's often visited the neighborhood nearby in recent years (which he has done because his brother happens to live in that area).

For 200 popular destinations globally, the mobile app shows "day plans", itineraries that include a mix of the most popular sights and attractions.

A uniquely Google perk is that, for each major attraction, Google displays the typical length of time that visitors stay, based on the anonymized behavior data of millions of Android mobile users. The app combines that data with average travel times from its Maps product to build day-long itineraries.

Tnooz played with a test version of the app. For Rio de Janeiro, possible day plans included thematic tours like “Top Sights in the Old City”, “Beyond the Beaches: Highlights”, and “Rio with Kids.”

Users aren’t stuck with pre-made plans. Clicking an edit icon lets you swap in or out other attractions.

For instance, a day plan on Art & Architecture mapped out sites that have been highly rated by Google users, such as the Niterói Contemporary Art Museum.

On the plus side, Google pulls in information on the opening hours of museums and other venues, so that you can adjust plans on the fly or save them for other days.

On the negative side, Google’s algorithmic approach to compiling suggestions means that the recommendations are weighted toward attractions that have built up favorable reviews via Google Local over time. This approach risks missing out on just-opened venues and smaller local gems that don’t have as much foot traffic. (For instance, Google’s lists for Rio de Janeiro that focus on Art and Architecture or Top Sights overlooks the Museum of Tomorrow, a critically acclaimed building that opened last December.)

Holden notes that the day plans and other lists have been lightly curated by Google team members. You can also search for things to do by keyword.

If your destination is not one of the top 200 most-popular, Google Trips will not offer full or part-day itineraries. But it will still provide suggestions of things to do and places for food and drink, grouped thematically.

The itineraries can be saved to be viewed offline, in case a traveler faces a lack of steady internet access or wants to avoid roaming data charges on a foreign cellular network.

When you first use Google Trips, you are presented with a list of the trips it infers you have taken based on clusters of reservation emails it has found in Gmail messages for the past decade. You can view the emails where it found this info in each trip’s menu, or you can turn off the feature if you don’t want trips added from your Gmail. As of launch, there’s no way to add in reservation details manually or from other email services besides Gmail.

The app’s development may signal a more dedicated focus on travel by Google. In the past 16 months, Google has released a set of browser-based tools for destination inspiration and research, it revamped its hotel search interface and added instant booking (and made its payment structure more flexible for hotels), and made its flight search more mobile-friendly.

Google Trips is free for Android or Apple devices. *(TNooz.com, Sept. 19)*

https://www.tnooz.com/article/google-trips-mobile-travel-app/

Best Western Launches VR Tours for all North American Hotels

As part of Best Western Hotels & Resorts’ virtual reality (VR) experience, guests now have an immersive 360 degree look into all of the company’s North American hotels. Through the Best Western Virtual Reality Experience (BWVRE), guests are now able to view a virtual reality tour of nearly 2,000 properties. Best Western is the first major company of its size and scale to utilize this cutting-edge technology in

this way, setting a new industry standard for how virtual reality can be used to enhance the consumer journey.

The VR tours offer a guided 3D video of the hotels including narration and music, creating an engaging story-telling experience. Each video ranges in length from 50 seconds to 2 minutes. Guests can access the videos from Best Western's YouTube channel – bestwesternTV.

"Before even stepping foot on the property, guests will be able to view guest rooms, lobbies, and amenities, as if they were there in person," said Dorothy Dowling, Chief Marketing Officer and Senior Vice President of Best Western Hotels & Resorts. "Best Western is a first-mover in this effort, and we know our guests and our hotels will benefit from this game-changing technology."

For the past three years, Best Western has worked in partnership with Google Street View to gather 1.7 million photos of its nearly 2,000 North American hotels, paving the way for the BWVRE. BWVRE videos were developed in 8K resolution, the current highest ultra-high definition video available, far beyond what is available in most consumers' homes today. As technology infrastructure improves, BWVRE provides the best quality, sharpest images available.

BWVRE will be available on all platforms that are supported by HTML5, such as Google Maps, Google Search, YouTube and Facebook. This method allows the broadest distribution for these video assets and the ability for Best Western to continue to enhance the experience over time.

The launch of BWVRE comes during Best Western's transformative brand refresh, an effort highlighting the hotel company's decade of success. During the past two years, Best Western hotel owners have invested $2 billion in property improvements and renovations across North America. In addition, Best Western has grown its portfolio from one to seven hotel brands. *(ehotelier.com, Sept. 16)*

http://ehotelier.com/global/2016/09/16/best-western-launches-vr-tours-north-american-hotels/?inf_contact_key=7a1c709c69ab99bcd7aa51dcc34d2591975ef749c99385caaac809a14a601a96

Did You Know

Sedona, Arizona was named after Sedona Arabella Miller Schnebly (1877–1950), the wife of Theodore Carlton Schnebly, the city's first postmaster. Mrs. Schnebly was celebrated for her hospitality and industriousness.

Statewide Calendar of Events

Visit **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!

Become a fan on Facebook! http://www.facebook.com/arizonatravel
Follow us on Twitter! http://twitter.com/ArizonaTourism