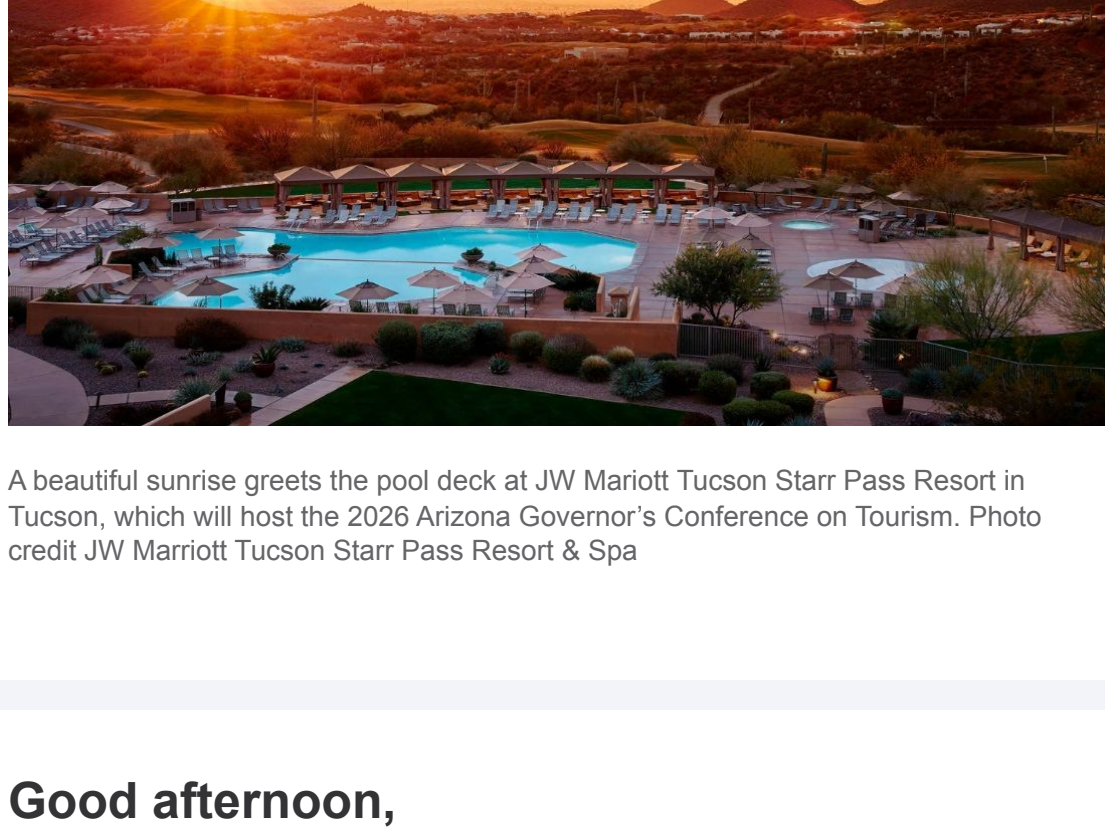


Tourism Tuesday

By Arizona Office of Tourism • Dec 09, 2025

Smart Brevity® count: 4 mins...1108 words



A beautiful sunrise greets the pool deck at JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort in Tucson, which will host the 2026 Arizona Governor’s Conference on Tourism. Photo credit JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass Resort & Spa

Good afternoon,

I am pleased to confirm the rumors that our 2026 Arizona Governor’s Conference on Tourism (GCOT) is all set to be held at the beautifully refreshed conference center at the stunning [JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort & Spa](#) in Tucson **August 12-14, 2026**. Be sure to mark your calendars now!

Gathering in Southern Arizona provides the perfect setting to reflect on our successes, strategize for the future and of course, explore a great destination! But this year, we are doing more than just changing the venue—we’re evolving how we build the conference itself.

We’re expanding our **GCOT Program Planning Committee**, traditionally composed of AOT staff, to include some of our colleagues across Arizona’s tourism industry. We’re looking for a few motivated industry professionals who understand the benefits of the conference and can inject fresh insights into the process. The goal is to ensure conference programming aligns directly with the most relevant and timely topics and issues facing our industry now and into the following year.

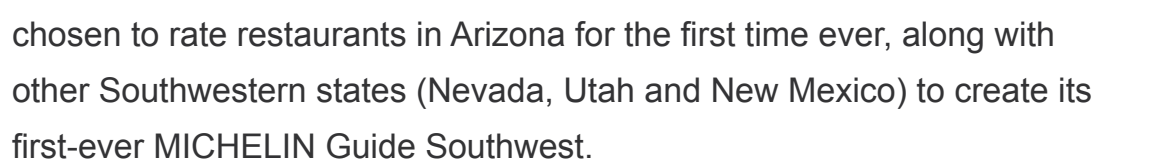
To express your interest in participating in this effort, [fill out this quick form](#) and we will reach out.

Additionally, based on feedback from previous years’ GCOTs, we’re refreshing our **Governor’s Tourism Awards** for 2026. We’re evolving the program to encourage more people and organizations to submit their work and to shine an even brighter spotlight on all the awardees. To express your interest in assisting us in making next year’s awards truly memorable, [fill out this quick form](#) and we will reach out.

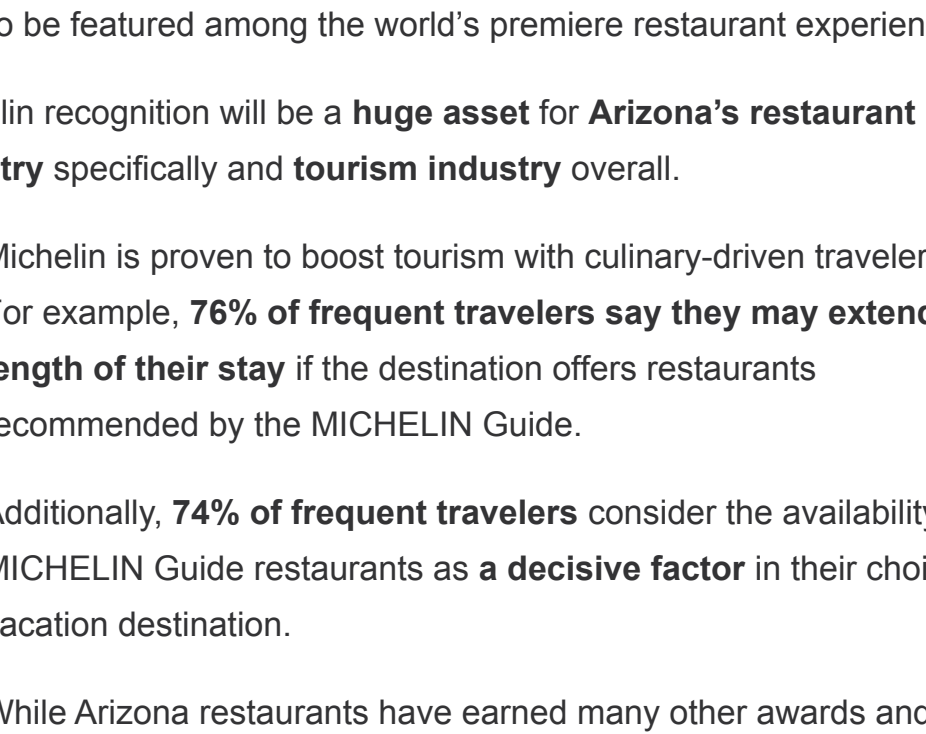
We plan to open registration and the room block for 2026 GCOT in mid April.

On behalf of the AOT GCOT Program Committee, we look forward to collaborating with you to make GCOT 2026 not just an event you attend, but a resource you help create!

Alix Skelpsa Ridgway, *Interim Director*, Arizona Office of Tourism



Arizona's Culinary Star is Rising



The MICHELIN Guide is coming to the Southwest U.S.

We’re excited to share that the globally-recognized [MICHELIN Guide](#) has chosen to rate restaurants in Arizona for the first time ever, along with other Southwestern states (Nevada, Utah and New Mexico) to create its first-ever MICHELIN Guide Southwest.

AOT will use Michelin’s presence in Arizona and its forthcoming variety of ratings as a promotional tool to drive marketing, communications and social media efforts to increase culinary-driven tourism.

There’s no doubt that Arizona’s culinary scene has more than earned the right to be featured among the world’s premiere restaurant experiences.

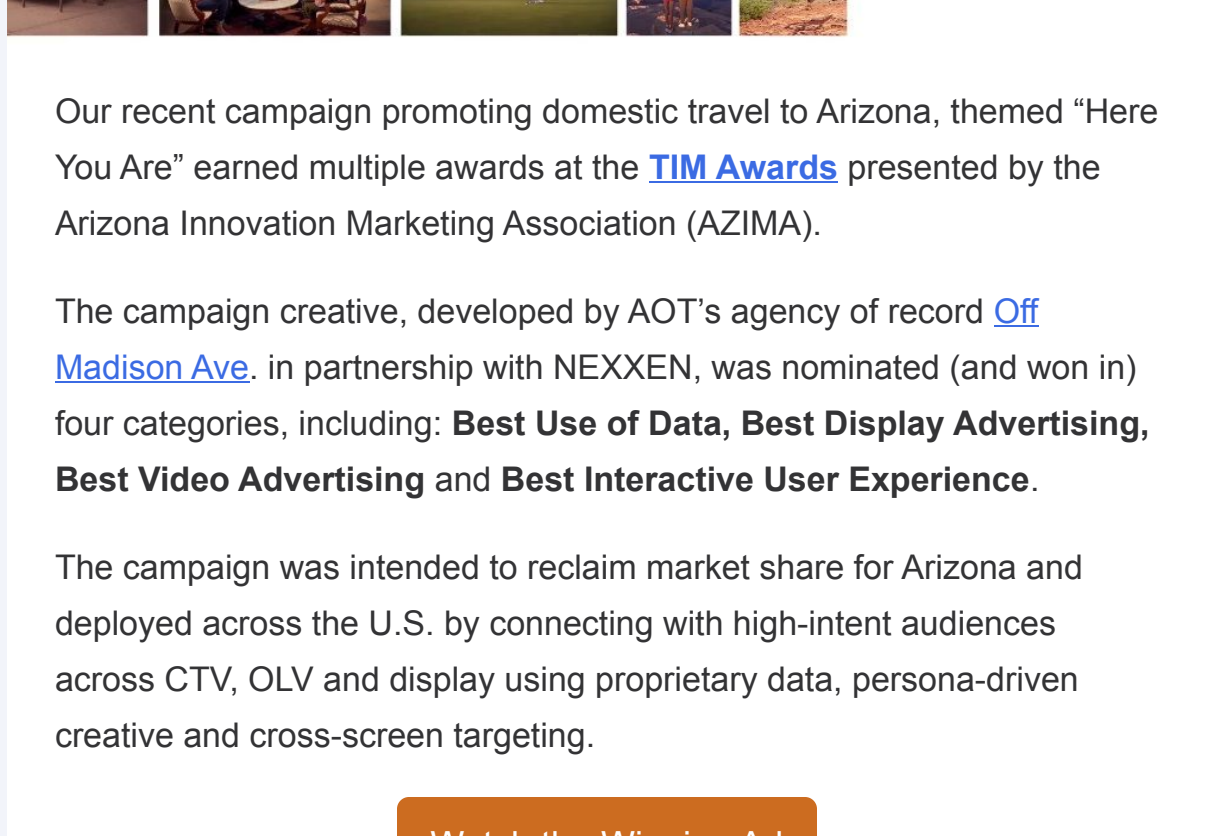
Michelin recognition will be a **huge asset** for **Arizona’s restaurant industry** specifically and **tourism industry** overall.

- Michelin is proven to boost tourism with culinary-driven travelers. For example, **76% of frequent travelers say they may extend the length of their stay** if the destination offers restaurants recommended by the MICHELIN Guide.
- Additionally, **74% of frequent travelers** consider the availability of MICHELIN Guide restaurants as a **decisive factor** in their choice of vacation destination.
- While Arizona restaurants have earned many other awards and honors, **Michelin provides true international recognition**. Overseas travelers who are primarily driven by food experiences ask about Michelin recognition in Arizona.
- Being Michelin-recognized helps **Arizona restaurants attract and retain top chefs** and other culinary talent.

[More Info](#)



Destination Stewardship Planning Opportunity for Arizona DMOs



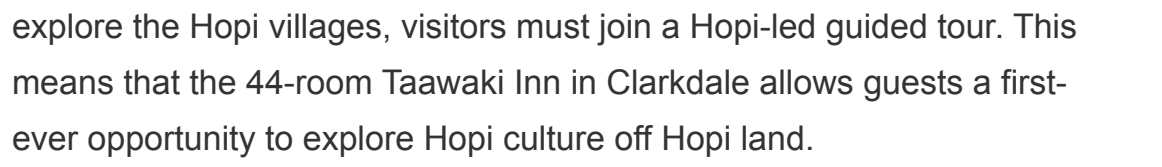
Travelers pose for a photo during a tour in Sedona.

Developing an impactful and sustainable destination stewardship plan has long been the holy grail of the tourism industry.

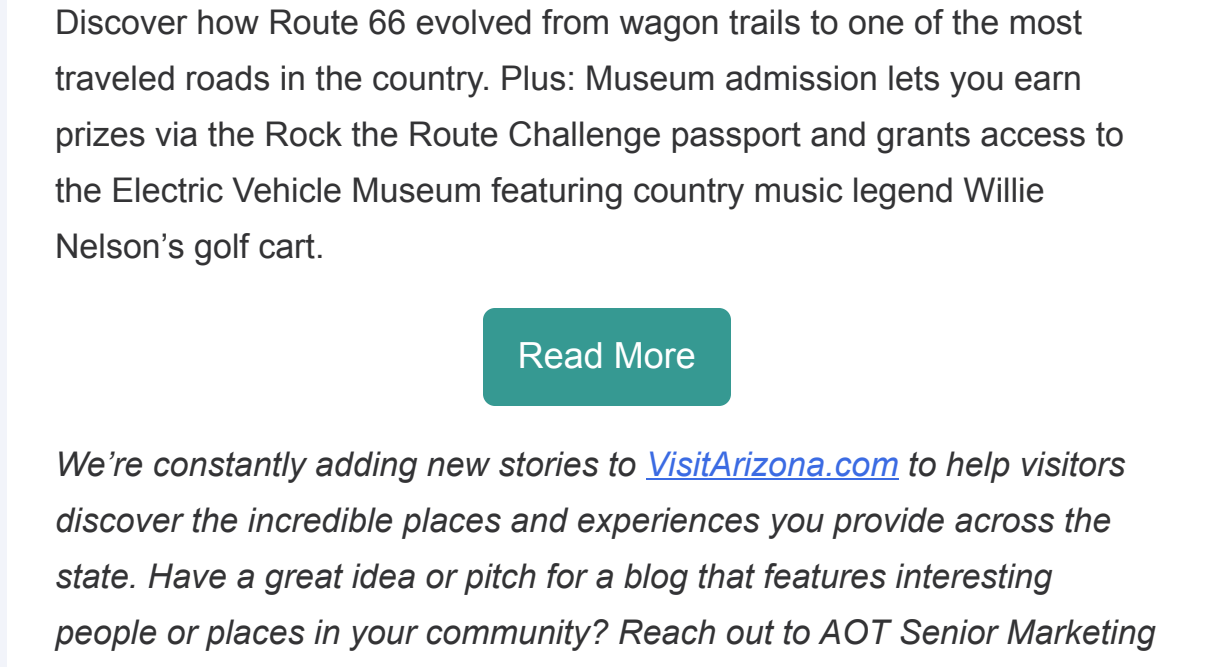
Of course, getting started often means simply achieving a quantifiable understanding of where you are right now in your stewardship practices.

To help take the first steps in developing usable destination stewardship practices, we are making available **five licensed spots** with [Destination Wayfinder](#), which we have been using during the past year to increase our own understanding of our strengths and areas for improvement in terms of statewide stewardship initiatives.

If you’re interested, reach out to [AOT Director of Stewardship Lena Allen](#) for more information and next steps!



AOT Domestic Tourism Campaign Wins Multiple Awards

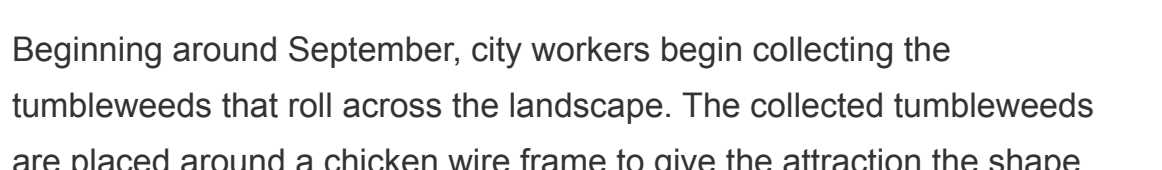


Our recent campaign promoting domestic travel to Arizona, themed “Here You Are” earned multiple awards at the [TIM Awards](#) presented by the Arizona Innovation Marketing Association (AZIMA).

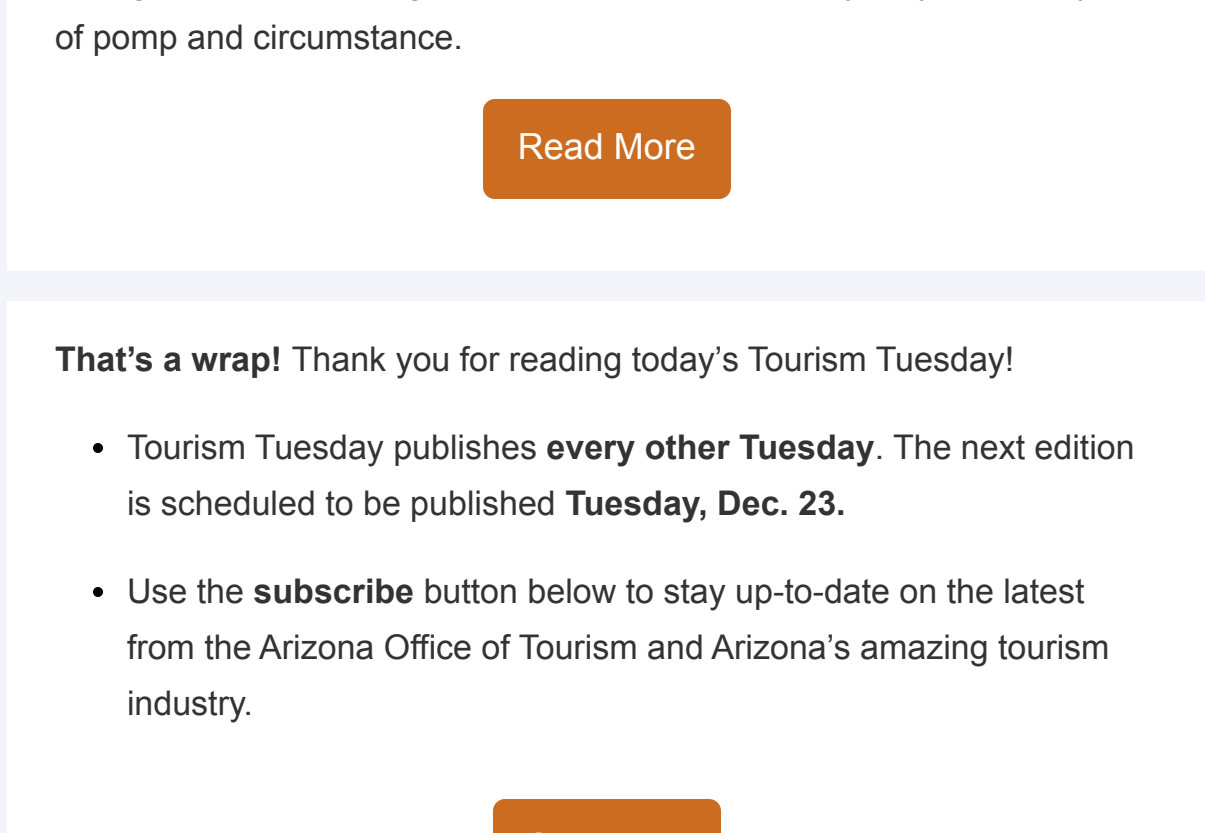
The campaign creative, developed by AOT’s agency of record [Off Madison Ave.](#) in partnership with NEXXEN, was nominated (and won in) four categories, including: **Best Use of Data**, **Best Display Advertising**, **Best Video Advertising** and **Best Interactive User Experience**.

The campaign was intended to reclaim market share for Arizona and deployed across the U.S. by connecting with high-intent audiences across CTV, OLV and display using proprietary data, persona-driven creative and cross-screen targeting.

[Watch the Winning Ad](#)



Newly Featured on VisitArizona.com



The Taawaki Inn near Clarkdale opened in July 2024.

Taawaki Inn: Northern Arizona Meets Hopi Tradition

As the first Hopi-owned and -operated hotel outside of the Hopi reservation, Taawaki Inn offers something found nowhere else in the world — a chance to immerse yourself in the traditions and values of the Hopi people. Hopi land is located in Northern Arizona, and in order to explore the Hopi villages, visitors must join a Hopi-led guided tour. This means that the 44-room Taawaki Inn in Clarkdale allows guests a first-ever opportunity to explore Hopi culture off Hopi land.

[Read More](#)

Family-Friendly Stops Across Arizona’s Route 66

Discover how Route 66 evolved from wagon trails to one of the most traveled roads in the country. Plus: Museum admission lets you earn prizes via the Rock the Route Challenge passport and grants access to the Electric Vehicle Museum featuring country music legend Willie Nelson’s golf cart.

[Read More](#)

We’re constantly adding new stories to [VisitArizona.com](#) to help visitors discover the incredible places and experiences you provide across the state. Have a great idea or pitch for a blog that features interesting people or places in your industry? Reach out to AOT Senior Marketing Manager [Emily Balli](#) with any pitches for consideration.

Attraction to go: Chandler’s Tumbleweed Christmas Tree

Did you know it takes an estimated 1,000 dried Russian thistle bushes (better known as tumbleweeds) to create Chandler’s massive Christmas “tree” each year?

Dating all the way back to 1957, the city takes its tradition quite seriously.

Beginning around September, city workers begin collecting the tumbleweeds that roll across the landscape. The collected tumbleweeds are placed around a chicken wire frame to give the attraction the shape of a wide, full tree, before being coated in a more pleasing shade of Christmas white and flame retardant.

Finally, the whole thing is assaulted with over 65 pounds of glitter and strung with Christmas lights which are activated in a yearly ceremony full of pomp and circumstance.

[Read More](#)

That’s a wrap! Thank you for reading today’s Tourism Tuesday!

- Tourism Tuesday publishes **every other Tuesday**. The next edition is scheduled to be published **Tuesday, Dec. 23**.
- Use the **subscribe** button below to stay up-to-date on the latest from the Arizona Office of Tourism and Arizona’s amazing tourism industry.

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