

# AIANTA

American Indian Alaska Native  
Tourism Association

*Introducing America's First Nations to the World*

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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(Albuquerque, NM) The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) and co-host Apsáalooke (Crow) Nation is hosting the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual American Indian Tourism Conference (AITC) in Big Sky Country, Billings, Montana on September 23 – 26, 2012.

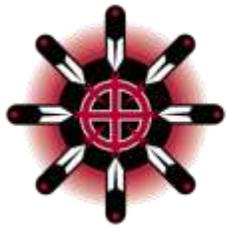
Crow Tribal Chairman, Cedric Black Eagle has invited AITC participants to an exclusive (not open to the general public) tour to kick things off on Sunday, September, 23<sup>rd</sup>. Participants will travel a scenic journey through tribal communities as they make their way to the Bighorn Mountains and the Crow Buffalo Pasture where they will view tribal buffalo herds just as these majestic creatures once roamed the Great Plains. Be prepared to capture breathtaking views from the beautiful mountain range and see why the Apsáalooke people call this home.

September 24<sup>th</sup>, participants will have two options in which to journey back through time. Plenty Coups State Park, home of the last traditionally recognized Chief of the Apsáalooke people, Chief Plenty Coups (Aleek-cha-ahoosh) meaning “many achievements”, is home to a museum dedicated to introducing visitors to life of the Apsáalooke people. Participants will experience true Crow culture through stories, games, traditions and food!

At the heart of the reservation, which is known as the “Tipi Capitol of the World” lies the world famous Little Bighorn Battlefield. Participants will see the Indian Memorial honoring those warriors who defended their way of life, and the monument and National Cemetery where General George A. Custer and his men were defeated and buried the day after the battle. An interpretive guide will then take participants to the Reno-Bent Defense site where the famous battle all began June 25, 1876 and wrap up the day at the home Chief Plenty Coups for a traditional Crow meal.

This looks to be a monumental year for AIANTA. While this may be the 14<sup>th</sup> annual, this will be a year of many firsts for the organization. A long anticipated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between AIANTA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Department of Transportation. Mr. LeRoy Gishi, Chief, Division of Transportation, BIA, Mr. Del Laverdure,

(more)



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Acting Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Mr. Mike Black, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs will be on hand for this historic event. "This is a long awaited and most exciting event for AIANTA. This MOU ensures AIANTA the capacity to continue to provide education, technical assistance, and resources to Indian country tourism at the grass roots level." states Mary Jane Ferguson, AIANTA President.

Another addition to this year's AITC program is the *Soaring Stars & Infinite Skies* Silent Auction and Awards Ceremony, a fundraising event for AIANTA to establish a scholarship fund for American Indian individuals wishing to pursue their education in the hospitality, tourism and culinary arts industry. To accomplish this goal, AIANTA will recognize and honor best of Indian Country Tourism nominees in the areas of Best Tribal Destination, Best Cultural Heritage Experience and Outstanding Customer Service. Tuesday, September 25<sup>th</sup> Chef Nephi Craig, Navajo/Apache will create a delightful and tantalizing traditional meal while guests view some of the most exquisite Native art items and getaway packages from some of the finest tourism destinations Indian country has to offer.

"This year's conference has a new twist and focuses on attraction building and marketing. We are fortunate to have such renowned speakers such as Gerard Baker, Retired NPS Assistant Director of American Indian Relations, Gail Adams, Office of Intergovernmental & External Affairs of the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Native American Rights Fund, and other prominent supporters of AIANTA" says Sherrie Rupert, AITC Co-chair and AIANTA Board of Directors. "It is critical to have the support of these agencies in furthering the mission of AIANTA".

AIANTA will also be electing five new Board of Directors positions with one of those being an At-Large position to represent AIANTA constituents at the national level. The two day breakout sessions will close with a Leadership Forum: Indian Country Tourism with Mr. Gerard Baker, Retired Assistant Director, American Indian Relations, National Park Service, Ms. Elizabeth L. Dougherty, Director of Inventor Education, Outreach & Recognition Office of Innovation Development, U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, U. S. Department of Commerce and Mr. Jim Reddekopp, Chairman, National Tour Association.

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