

AIANTA

American Indian Alaska Native
Tourism Association

Introducing America's First Nations to the World

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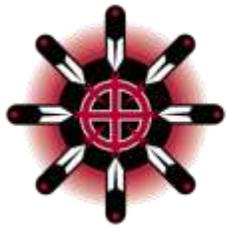
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(Albuquerque, New Mexico) As the national organization representing the tribal hospitality and tourism industry, AIANTA will be recognizing the best in Indian Country travel and tourism during its first ever Silent Auction and Awards Ceremony, *Soaring Stars and Infinite Skies*, during the 14th Annual American Indian Tourism Conference in Billings, Montana.

On Tuesday, September 25, 2012 AIANTA will host a decadent meal created by Native American Chef Nephi Craig, Navajo/White Mountain Apache, and silent auction featuring extraordinary items such as weekend getaways at some of Indian Country's most exquisite resorts and intricately designed art from world renowned Native artists in an effort to raise funds to provide for a scholarship to assist Native Americans interested in pursuing their education in the areas of hospitality, tourism and culinary arts industries. AIANTA members nominated tribal destinations, museums and cultural centers and individuals for three categories; Best Tribal Destination, Best Cultural Heritage Experience and Best Customer Service.

Cherokee Nation Cultural Tourism (CNCT) has been selected as the Best Tribal Destination in Indian Country tourism industry. CNCT has created one of the most authentic and comprehensive tourism programs to preserve and protect Cherokee history and culture. The program offers cultural tours and events, operates museums, historic sites, gift shops and welcome centers, all supported by a one-of-a-kind interpretive program that shares a global Cherokee story. This program has also been named one of top tourism organizations in Oklahoma as recognized by the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department. Since its inception, CNCT has had an economic impact of \$14 million and created nearly 200 jobs. The program has invested millions of dollars into Northeastern Oklahoma and as a result Cherokee culture and history has been preserved for future generations.

Chickasaw Cultural Center has been ranked and selected as the Best Cultural Heritage Experience with the largest tribal cultural center the U.S. has to offer. The mission of the Chickasaw Cultural Center is to share and celebrate Chickasaw history and culture. Visitors to Chickasaw can expect to travel back in time with interactive media stations, hands-on educational classes, seasonal events and live demonstrations.



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Best Customer Service award goes to Dawn Melvin of the Arizona Office of Tourism. Dawn has been the Tribal Tourism Relations Manager for the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) and the designated Tribal Tourism Liaison for the Governor's Office for the past eight years. As a Tribal member and State of Arizona employee, Dawn works diligently to provide consistent and excellent customer service as her role is pivotal to the success of AOT's collaborative efforts with Arizona's 22 federally recognized Tribes. Dawn is routinely called out by Tribal and communities members for "going above and beyond" her duties to work on projects she knows will enhance Arizona's Tribal tourism industry. Through relationship building and customer service skills, Dawn works with Tribal representatives on various tourism-related projects. As examples, Dawn worked to place Visitor Information Kiosks for travelers visiting Tribal Lands; collaborated with Tribal leaders to open the state's first Local Visitor Information Center on Tribal Lands; and continues to work with global media representatives to introduce Arizona's Tribal experiences to travelers. "She is an outstanding colleague, mentor and friend. Many people across the state benefit from her industry knowledge, and she is always willing to share personal stories to teach others about the tribal cultures that define her." says Sherry Henry, Director, Arizona Office of Tourism.

Honorable mention should be made to Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe for Best Destination of the year nomination and Arizona Indian Festival for Best Cultural Experience. Pyramid Lake is one of the most unique and beautiful places in the world providing visitors from around the world with world-class fishing, year-round recreation and over 10,000 years of history and culture. In 2010 it was named "one of the Best Public Fisheries in the World" by Fly Fishing and Tying Journal. In 2012, the lake was voted by visitors as the "Nevada Treasure for the Indian Territory in the Discover Your Nevada contest.

The Arizona Indian Festival is a 3-day event presented by the Arizona American Indian Tourism Association and is part of the Arizona Super Bowl. Visitors are able to walk through replicas of traditional villages and dwellings, observe traditional and contemporary performances and listen to storytelling presented by all the tribes in Arizona. Artisans sell and showcase a variety of authentic basketry, paintings, jewelry, carvings, sculptures and pottery. There is an array of traditional food available. Visitors can learn more about the various enterprises located on Arizona reservations. This is the event where visitors learn about Arizona's tribal lands and discover what the different tribes have to offer.

AIANTA is looking forward to the continued success and growth of this fundraising and recognition effort to promote Indian Country as a world class tourism destination for travelers and tourists to experience unique Native cultures.