

# Tourism in Tucson

📅 February 7, 2008 / 👤 By Leslie Baker

Tucson has long boasted a spectacular climate, one historically enjoyed by the convalescent in search of the area's healthful air and temperatures. It was not until relatively recently, however, that Tucson's reputation for tourism began to rival that of more prominent Southwest cities such as Palm Springs, Santa Fe, or even Tucson's northern neighbor, Phoenix. Today, many events, locales, and lodging properties conspire to make Tucson a first-tier tourist destination whose lushness belies its desert setting.

## Courting the Snowbirds

During the past three years, investment commitments to downtown Tucson have reached more than half a billion dollars,<sup>1</sup> and the resulting new construction and renovations aim to highlight Tucson's urban appeal against its desert backdrop. The tourist season in Tucson lasts from October to May, when so-called "snowbirds" flock southwestward from less hospitable climates. This year, travelers to Tucson will notice a lot of new developments underway. The downtown Rio Nuevo revitalization project is finally taking shape, and the city is committed to bringing even more attractions, commercial developments, and restaurants to the well-preserved art and historic districts.

Contributing to Tucson's expanding popularity are two Robson Resort Communities voted among the top 15 most popular places to retire.<sup>2</sup> SaddleBrooke is situated just north of the city center in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains, and Quail Creek lies in the Green Valley to the south, offering spectacular views of the Santa Rita Mountains. Both master-planned communities feature world-class golf courses, health and wellness centers, and country club amenities.

Tucson International Airport now features flights to 28 non-stop destinations and connections worldwide.<sup>3</sup> The airport's range of non-stop service has grown significantly over the past decade, bringing a far higher level of convenience to faraway travelers. Revelatory of the level of luxury, executive, and corporate travel expected in the Tucson area, Premier Aviation plans to open its new franchise fixed-base operation, Million Air, at the airport. Scheduled for completion by mid-year 2008, the project will include a two-story building with 20,000 square feet of office space.<sup>4</sup>

## Events

Tourism in Tucson really begins to race in February, when a cavalcade of major events spurs an international influx of tourists. The Tucson Gem, Mineral & Fossil Showcase, held annually, draws a throng of more than 50,000 out-of-town visitors. These range from beginning collectors and gem enthusiasts to professional gemologists, jewelry artisans, and scientists, collectively making an estimated economic impact of \$100 million.<sup>5</sup> La Fiesta de los Vaqueros Rodeo celebrates the Southwest's rustic traditions with a nine-day event centered on the Tucson Rodeo, one of the top 20 professional rodeos in North America. The 2008 World Golf Championships-Accenture Match Play Championship will be held February 18-24 at the Gallery at Dove Mountain. This big-ticket event pits 64 of the world's top golfers in head-to-head competition for a piece of an \$8-million purse. Last year's championship brought an estimated \$100 million to the Tucson area<sup>6</sup> and produced \$1.5 million for state charities.<sup>7</sup>

## Resorts and Golf Courses

### Summary

Championship golf courses, lush resorts, and emerald events are earning this desert city a reputation for greenery.

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Over the past decade, Tucson has become home to some of the world's finest spa resorts. These include Canyon Ranch and the Miraval, Life in Balance Resort & Spa, both of which were voted among the "World's Best Destination Spas" by the readers of Travel + Leisure in 2007. Two of Tucson's long-time favorites, the Westward Look and the Omni Tucson National Resorts, are undergoing renovations and expanding their services to keep up with the area's growing popularity. The Omni Tucson will present the first fruits of its renovations this winter. The \$70-million renovation, scheduled for completion in 2009, will culminate in 279 guestrooms, suites, and villas, an array of entertainment and dining options, 22,000 square feet of meeting space, as well as the spa, swimming pools, and salons on which the resort's soothing reputation rests.<sup>8</sup> The Westward Look Resort, prided as the "Soul of the Southwest," has begun a major two-phase renovation. The \$10-million first phase of remodeling, projected for completion in April of 2008, will upgrade the resort's guestrooms and lobby area, as well as the Catalina and Sonoran Ballrooms. Phase Two is currently in the planning stage. The renovation will, in the words of General Manager Alan Klein, create ". . . a Four Diamond resort that will offer true Southwest luxury."<sup>9</sup>

Heading the list of newcomers to Tucson's resort community is the Starr Pass Resort & Spa, a Marriott-branded property comprising 575 guestrooms and 35 suites, a world-class spa, and five-star dining options. The Starr Pass Country Club's three golf courses were designed by legend Arnold Palmer. The sixth hole of the Coyote course has been incorporated into the trail blazed by Richard Starr's stagecoach in 1880, and the surrounding vistas glimmer with the magnificence of the surrounding mountain ranges and Sonora Desert.

The winter season draws many golfers to the Southwest, and Tucson offers a wealth of professionally designed courses. Among the best is the Arizona National Golf Club, which was heralded at its opening by Golf Digest as one of the top ten new courses in the United States. The Lodge at Ventana Canyon is home to the Tom Fazio-designed Mountain and Canyon courses, which form a 600-acre oasis in the midst of the Sonora. In addition, Hilton's El Conquistador resort features three recently renovated courses designed by Greg Nash.

### **More Hotels**

Many hotel properties have come online in Tucson over the past ten years to accommodate the increasing demand. Two of the most recent developments demonstrate how hotels can achieve an aesthetic synchrony with the environment and culture where they reside. The 119-suite Embassy Suites Tucson-Paloma Village, which opened in September of 2007, features original artwork by Tucson artist Diana Maderas, known for celebrating the region's adobe architecture and gorgeous landscapes in her watercolors.<sup>10</sup> In late 2009, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC will open The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain, a 250-room golf and spa resort in the high Sonoran Desert, just northwest of Tucson. The hotel's four-story main building will be constructed with adobe block, straw-flecked stucco, clay tile, and native stone, while the 226 guestrooms will offer views of the beautiful and variegated desert terrain.<sup>11</sup> The resort is being built in tandem with a master-planned residential community, and the total project, at 850 acres, will represent Ritz-Carlton's largest branded resort/residential community in the continental U.S.

### **Conclusion**

Many come to Tucson to engage in the bustle of its popular events and downtown atmosphere, and others to recede from the bustle altogether at one of the area's resorts or golf courses. Either way, the area's lodging industry is seeing more green than ever before. Since 2001, HVS has conducted more than 60 appraisal and consulting assignments in the Tucson market, one of the hundreds that we cover worldwide. To learn how HVS services could help guide your next project, contact our Dallas office at (972) 899-5400 or visit

<http://www.hvs.com/Offices/Dallas/>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ci.tucson.az.us/rionuevo/maps\\_and\\_plans/index.html](http://www.ci.tucson.az.us/rionuevo/maps_and_plans/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.robson.com/article.cfm?id=910&name=QuailCrk\\_&ActiveSubNav=](http://www.robson.com/article.cfm?id=910&name=QuailCrk_&ActiveSubNav=)

<sup>3</sup> Tucson International Airport

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.visittucson.org/media/research/eventprofiles/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0EIN/is\\_2006\\_Feb\\_26/ai\\_n16085255](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2006_Feb_26/ai_n16085255)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.worldgolfchampionships.com/2007/tournaments/r470/06/08/charity/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/TucsonNationalGolfResortAndSpa/Transformation.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.westwardlook.com/info.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29331-](http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29331-Embassy_Suites_Tucson_Paloma_Village_Opens_Its_Doors_.html)

[Embassy\\_Suites\\_Tucson\\_Paloma\\_Village\\_Opens\\_Its\\_Doors\\_.html](http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29331-Embassy_Suites_Tucson_Paloma_Village_Opens_Its_Doors_.html)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29734->

[The\\_Ritz\\_Carlton\\_Dove\\_Mountain\\_to\\_Open\\_in\\_NW\\_Tucson\\_Arizona\\_in\\_\\_\\_\\_.html](http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29734-The_Ritz_Carlton_Dove_Mountain_to_Open_in_NW_Tucson_Arizona_in____.html)