

# RESPECTING DIFFERENCES: ARIZONA TRIBAL TOURISM

## THE PARTNERS

- > Arizona American Indian Tourism Association  
[www.indianresources.com/NACC.html](http://www.indianresources.com/NACC.html)
- > Center for American Indian Economic Development, Northern Arizona University  
Flagstaff, AZ  
[www.cba.nau.edu/caied/](http://www.cba.nau.edu/caied/)
- > First Mesa Consolidated Villages, Hopi villages of Sichomovi, Tewa and Walpi, AZ  
  
Walpi Tourism Program  
Polacca, AZ
- > Hualapai Nation - The Grand Canyon Resort Corporation  
Peach Springs, AZ  
[www.hualapaitours.com](http://www.hualapaitours.com)
- > Center for Studies in Public Policy, The University of Arizona  
Tucson, AZ  
<http://udallcenter.arizona.edu>



A scene from the Fort Apache Annual Reunion.

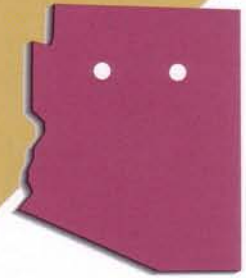


The Grand Canyon's lesser-known West Rim, part of the Hualapai Indian reservation, offers visitors a more intimate experience than the heavily visited National Park Service side of the Canyon.

## The Setting

AMERICAN INDIAN RESERVATIONS ARE UNIQUE COMMUNITIES—EACH UNTO THEMSELVES AND AMONG THE LARGER AMERICAN POPULATION. YET CHALLENGES AND ISSUES CONCERNING HOW MUCH TOURISM

THEY WANT IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND HOW MUCH OF THEMSELVES THEY WANT TO SHARE WITH THE TRAVELING PUBLIC HOLD RELEVANCE FOR TOURISM PLANNERS NATIONWIDE. SOME TRIBES HAVE AGGRESSIVELY SOUGHT TOURISM WHILE OTHERS HAVE MOVED SLOWLY AND WITH CAUTION INTO THAT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ARENA. BOTH METHODS ARE MEETING WITH SUCCESS.



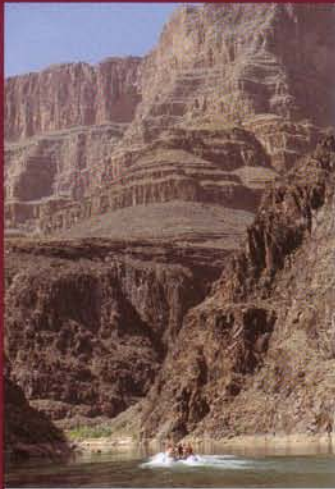
*Through the Hualapai tourism programs, non-natives are beginning to witness natural grandeur that previously was unattainable.*

Both organizations provide consulting assistance and training to help tribes and individuals develop tourism and enhance tribal economies. Timeche was also instrumental in forming the Arizona American Indian Tourism Association in 1994. That group was then the basis for the recent Arizona Indian Nations Tour, a cooperative marketing and tour program for potential visitors who visit facilities and attractions managed by the Hualapai, Hopi, White Mountain Apache and Navajo—a program primarily targeted at the German visitor market.

The Navajo and Apache nations are both successfully conducting businesses in the state and have done so for at least a decade. Highlighted here are one of the longest-standing rural tourism success stories in Arizona, the Hualapai tribe, and the Hopi Village of Walpi, which is at the other end of the spectrum, being the newcomer to Arizona Indian tourism.

**F**or an independent culture that has stayed largely separated from the surrounding majority culture, tourism can present both advantages and problems. On the plus side are the unique cultural practices and arts that attract the curiosity of tourists and provide opportunities for tourism and economic development. On the negative side is the issue of how to control tourism so that those same cultural amenities are not destroyed and the people do not feel violated. Isolated cultural groups such as the Amish face these concerns, as do Native Americans.

To confront these issues and manage tribal tourism in Arizona, there are important institutions fostering the industry as an economic development vehicle for Native Americans. At the core of this effort is Joan Timeche, assistant director for the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy at the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy in Tucson and former director of the Center for American Indian Economic Development in Flagstaff.



*"You will be an honored guest of the Hualapai Nation. We ask only that you respect the land as we do so that it may be preserved for all of the children to come."*

— Hualapai Lodge website

### **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT**

Many Americans are unaware that large portions of the Grand Canyon are not part of the Grand Canyon National Park. In fact, more than one million acres of land on the west side of the canyon—the West Rim—comprise the Hualapai Reservation, home to approximately 1,500 people whose ancestors settled in this region along the Colorado River in 600 A.D.



*Hualapai River Runners has been escorting visitors through the Grand Canyon since 1975, offering up-close views from a unique native perspective.*

As long ago as 1975, the Hualapai Nation recognized that they had something they could offer to the many tourists who wanted to see the Canyon up close—knowledge and experience. By offering river-rafting tourist services, the Hualapais ("People of the Tall Pines") decided they could better control the use of the river and their canyon than if an outside entity conducted tours. Hualapai River Runners

(HRR), this tribe's Colorado River rafting company, employs up to 45 people during peak season from April through October. In 2000, HRR escorted about 4,000 people on river trips and grossed roughly \$900,000, which included revenue from permitting other rafting companies to get off the river or land on the Hualapai Reservation.

In 1988, the Hualapais formed Grand Canyon West Tours to offer tribal-member guided tours along the rim of the canyon. By the year 2000, more than 100,000 visitors were taking these trips, which offer a unique look at the little-visited West Rim of the Grand Canyon through the culture and history of the Hualapais. Tourists are shown Eagle Point, where they hear the legend of the boy who turned into an eagle, and are encouraged to try to pick out the battleship, the cat, rat, eagle, and more in the rock formations. This program generates the bulk of tourism revenues for the Hualapai Nation and provides 32 jobs.

Looking for ways to expand their tourism season, the tribe decided to build a lodge for overnight visitors on reservation lands in the town of Peach Springs. In order to secure a private loan in conjunction with loan guarantees from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, the tribe formed the Grand Canyon Resort Corporation, which separates the management of tourism business from the tribal government process.

According to Waylon Honga, tribal member and president of the corporation, this step toward a more traditional business model was important. "What we are selling are intangible experiences, and it's important to have the management expertise that knows how to handle that kind of product."

Numerous challenges presented themselves during the start-up of the lodge, which was completed in 1997. The 62-room, 45-job Hualapai Lodge and Restaurant ran into the problem of attracting and hiring experienced lodging management to this remote corner of Arizona. Another issue was the limited housing on the reservation that requires hospitality staff to commute as much as an hour from Kingman, Arizona.

But with determination to make the lodge a successful adjunct to the established canyon tours, the tribe has hired a full-time professional marketing director. For more than 25 years, the tribe had spent no more than \$500 a year to market its product. Now, they are spending nearly \$50,000. The marketing director sells Hualapai tours directly to the tour industry, thus assuring some measure of quality control over the types of visits booked. This, according to Honga, is important because, "When the private tour operators were the only ones selling our product, they didn't always get the message right. Now we have control over that message."



The Hopi Indians are known for their distinctive culture, including arts and crafts such as these from the Hopi Market, located on Second Mesa.

### HOPi VILLAGE OF WALPI

Whereas the Hualapai have embraced tourism, directing it rather than being directed by it, villages of the Hopi Nation are taking a much more cautious approach. Religious independence and the maintenance of traditional lifestyles that support religious observance are critical to Hopi identity. In the eyes of some Hopi, tourism would dilute that independence. Thus, traditionally, there has been skepticism among Hopi elders when the topic of tourism comes up.

There are 12 villages of the Hopi Nation in Arizona, most of which see various levels of uninvited tourism. Each year, thousands of people show up in the villages, wander around and then leave. Some villages welcome the visitors, others do not.

To Belma Navakuku, member of and economic development director for the village of Walpi—one of the First Mesa

Consolidated Villages—the problem was not whether to manage tourism, but how to control it since it was already happening. So, in 1995, Navakuku raised the tourism issue again. The discussion she generated failed to convince village leaders to spend the money necessary for tourism management. But the talks did lead to a series of neighborhood clean-up projects, which led to discussion about how the village is perceived by visitors. The results were a spruced-up village and the laying of pebble paths specifically for visitors, who came whether invited or not, to follow. Signs were erected to direct visitors to the paths. Local craftspeople began to put up unobtrusive signs noting the locations of their shops and, without purposely meaning to, Walpi villagers initiated a tourism program.

For a couple of years, informal tours happened whenever visitors showed up in the village. In 1997, after much discussion, the village agreed to charge a fee for

the tours: \$5 for adults, \$3 for children. Then, in 1998, Navakuku conducted a community survey to find out how people felt about tourism. She found that residents generally supported it. The survey caused village leaders to consider a more formal tourism program. Elders saw that an organized tour program, led by village youth, would be a way for these young people to talk and learn about their culture. The result would be more pride in Hopi life and traditions, thus helping to perpetuate the culture, while improving the local economy.

Walpi village embarked on a marketing campaign, developing cooperative programs with the nearby communities of Winslow and Holbrook and, in 1999, Walpi became a member of the Arizona Indian Nations Tour marketing program. Progress in developing tourism facilities compatible with village values continues today in Walpi.





### MAKING THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITIES

**Collaborate:** By working across tribal boundaries, Arizona's tribes are discovering that partnerships generate increased tourism and revenues and alleviate the pressure from any one organization. The Arizona Indian Nations Tour and the Arizona American Indian Tourism Association are both increasing visibility for and assisting tribal tourism throughout the state.

**Find the Fit between the Community and Tourism:** During religious ceremonial days, the Walpi Village sets up a system to let potential visitors know that the village is not open for touring. There are many obstacles to overcome from the Walpi villagers' standpoint when it comes to opening themselves up for scrutiny. By easing into the tourism arena, and insisting on maintaining their privacy during important ceremonies, the community is becoming more comfortable with the visitors and vice versa.

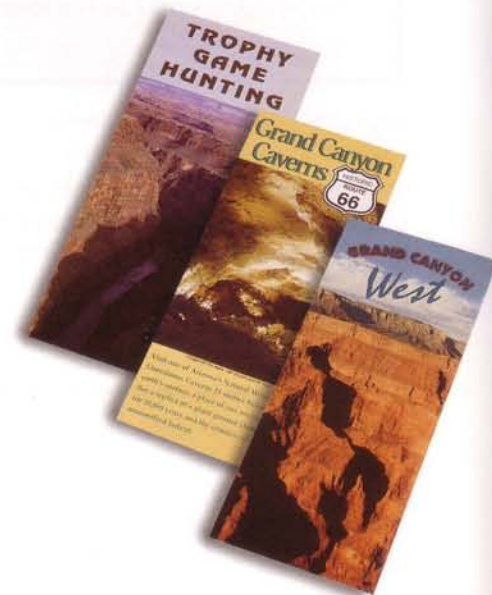
**Make Sites and Programs Come Alive:** The West Rim adventures shared by the Hualapai tribe and the traditional Walpi village and customs, such as the antelope ceremony and the snake dance, which are performed on alternating years in August, enrich tourism experiences and highlight the way of life of peoples who have inhabited this region for more than 1,400 years.

**Focus on Quality and Authenticity:** Visitors to the West Rim of the Grand Canyon go inside the Hualapai reservation, hearing oral histories and seeing canyon vistas that crowds on the east rim of the canyon cannot experience. These are places that non-Hualapai eyes have rarely seen and add to the quality of the tourism experience.

**Preserve and Protect Resources:** The Walpi village sits atop a tall, narrow mesa that cannot accommodate more development. Therefore, Walpi leaders believe they can leave their village largely untouched by modern infrastructure (e.g., electricity) but still entertain visitors in new facilities in Keams Canyon at the foot of the mesa, which belongs to the Hopi Nation as well. Tourists can view the historic village, but it will remain protected from modern development.

### RESULTS

- In 2000, Hualapai Lodge reached 48 percent occupancy and is expected to reach profitability within one to two years.
- The Hualapai Grand Canyon Resort Corporation plans to develop infrastructure, including improved roads, water and wastewater services, to their tour site in the West Rim, which is 55 miles from the reservation headquarters and lodge in Peach Springs.
- The First Mesa villages are cooperating to develop a Hopi cultural center in the town of Polacca, which is on reservation land but not in a traditional village.



### **TEAMING UP WITH ELDERHOSTEL**

Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff has worked for 17 years with Elderhostel to educate visitors about the cultural and natural resources of northern Arizona and the Colorado Plateau. Between 1984 and 2000, this hands-on program brought 50,000 people into these distinctive yet remote communities and tribal lands. In 2000, the program offered 31 different courses, many of which were innovative "mobile programs" that involved up to two weeks of traveling through rural Arizona to experience a variety of tribal and non-tribal communities and places of importance. Interactive programs offered include landscape studies, exploring the grand canyons of the west, history and culture of Hopi and Navajo nations, Arizona's national parks and monuments, geology, and astronomy. Participants can even sign up to tutor students on the Navajo and Hopi reservations. Observes Jennifer Beltz, a program coordinator for Elderhostel, "Elderhostel travelers are not just traveling and taking, but traveling and giving back." This program generates rural tourism development by allying itself with an established international tourism program for people age 55 and older. Contact the NAU Elderhostel Program at (520) 523-2359 or [www.nauelderhostel.nau.edu](http://www.nauelderhostel.nau.edu).



### **PRESERVING HISPANIC AND NATIVE AMERICAN LANDMARKS IN THE SOUTHWEST**

Cornerstones Community Partnerships, an award-winning nonprofit organization in Santa Fe, New Mexico, works with communities to restore historic buildings and building traditions in rural Hispanic villages and Indian pueblos in the Southwest. Over the past 15 years,

Cornerstones has been involved in preserving more than 50 irreplaceable landmark structures, helping communities retain their authentic appeal for visitors. Cornerstones teaches traditional building techniques during hands-on volunteer workdays and youth training programs. These programs, along with a recently published how-to guide book about adobe conservation, are helping rural Native American and Hispanic communities build pride in their heritage as they work to retain their unique architectural identity. For more information, check out [www.cstones.org](http://www.cstones.org).

