

Gallup is ready for its close-up

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 July 2022 04:29



Smithsonian Magazine article gives travelers worldwide reasons to visit

Locals know about the treasures in Gallup and surrounding areas – hot air balloons, natural wonders, bike and hiking trails, Native Dances, the arts community and New Mexico cuisine – and may take those things for granted. But they’re a big draw for visitors.

This year Gallup gets a bump, in the form of *Smithsonian* magazine’s “The 15 Best Small Towns to Visit in 2022.” Gallup was chosen as the “Best Artsy Small Town,” a distinction shared with the world in an online article.

“All of the small towns we feature are 25,000 or under in population, and have a lot to offer per capita, in terms of local culture, history and natural beauty,” Megan Gambino, Smithsonianmag.com web editor and leader of travel coverage, said.

The art was just the beginning for the editors at Smithsonian.com, the storied magazine’s online presence. For them, Gallup is the whole package.

“Gallup was a no-brainer, as it’s brimming with Indian trading posts and galleries, public art, artisan shops, cozy eateries, historic sites and hiking and biking trails through the area’s

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jaw-dropping red rock landscape,” Gambino said. But the clincher was the 100th anniversary of the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial.

“Each of the towns we highlight also has a specific reason to visit this year – say, the unveiling of a new museum, an inaugural festival or one celebrating a major anniversary, or a major historical event or natural phenomenon that will make this year special,” she said. “For Gallup, that milestone event is the centennial celebration of the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial in August.”

That’s great news for the Ceremonial, which, like many businesses and events, is still bouncing back from a couple of lean COVID years.

“We’re beyond excited to be featured in this magazine. To think about where that goes, not only across our country but across the world, and how many people make it a bucket list point to say ‘I’m going to go to this. This is 100 years old,’” said Kyle Tom, president of the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial Association. “For us on the board, I can honestly say that we want to be as true to this event as we can and honor the history and culture of it. For people from around the world to take note of that and want to come experience the authentic ceremonial, it’s just very special.”

Local tourism leaders are also pleased with the exposure for the community. Gallup’s marketing and tourism manager Jennifer Lazarz, who worked with the article’s author to identify some local attractions, said even though there is no way to measure how much impact the community gets from the article, it’s good street cred for a town with a big tourism economy.

“Earning national media for Gallup is a big win for us. It shows the rest of the world what a special community we have and supports small businesses,” she said. “Pieces like this combat negative press but also help our own residents feel good about the place where we live. Gallup is a great destination and place to live, and we often underappreciate our own backyard. Coverage like this is also really helpful for local businesses – it lends them credibility with tourists and helps them to stand out.”

The article is not in Smithsonian’s print edition, which has 1.6 million subscribers. But that’s no problem, considering the website’s international reach and 10.8 million unique visitors a month.

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The article also includes a photo gallery of local businesses.

“Those 10.8 million unique visitors are the audience that I want to reach,” Francis Bee, executive director of Gallup’s Business Improvement District, said. “Gallup has had a strong reputation, for at least 100 years, as an interesting place to visit for people who wish to enjoy an authentic experience of the American West. A significant percentage of visitors to Gallup come from outside of the U.S.”

Importantly, he added, “*Smithsonian* magazine is read by people who actually do read it. The psychographic profile of *Smithsonian* readers aligns well with folks who are looking for the ‘Gallup Experience.’ If you want to experience the real America, this is the place.”

Bill Lee, CEO of the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, said the article should help highlight local businesses and bring in more visitors — and their spending money.

“Gallup is very deserving of the ‘artsy small town’ moniker. It makes sense when you consider the huge cottage industry of Gallup/McKinley County, and the fact that most of those in that industry are artisans. It is estimated that roughly 75% of the world’s best Native American art comes from our area,” he said. “Our arts community also embodies the many cultures that make our community a unique melting pot. This combination of rich cultures helped us to be named one of the few arts and cultural districts in the state. This article is a huge win that promotes tourism and will bring outside dollars to Gallup.”

Read the article (and size up the competition) at the Smithsonian magazine’s website under the “Travel” section.

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