

Chapter 5

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPING HERITAGE AND NATURE TOURISM

One of the biggest economic benefits of Congressional designation for a Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area will be a boost to heritage and nature tourism in southern Arizona. Currently, visitors from many other states and countries travel to this region to experience its unique nature and/or heritage resources. The increased national and international recognition brought by a National Heritage Area designation will allow the region to build on the strong existing tourism industry. Related resources across the region can be linked by the interpretive themes of the National Heritage Area, regional tourism itineraries can be developed for each theme, and tourism promotion can be coordinated at a regional scale.

NATURE AND HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS

Heritage and nature tourism are currently the cornerstones of the regional tourism industry. A 1997 study by the University of Arizona found that the top tourist attractions in the Tucson region are nature and heritage destinations, which are also visited repeatedly by large numbers of local residents. Saguardo National Park receives almost 3.5 million visitors annually, second in Arizona only to Grand Canyon National Park. Sabino Canyon, the rest of the Santa Catalina Mountains, and Tucson Mountain Park are each visited more than 1 million times a year. The Rillito River Park and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum each have more than 500,000 annual visitors. The Arizona Office of Tourism reports that the number of visits to the three state

Top Nature Attractions in the Proposed National Heritage Area	Visitation 2002
Saguardo National Park (East and West)	3,400,000
Sabino Canyon, Coronado National Forest	+1,500,000
Santa Catalina Mountains (except Sabino Canyon), Coronado National Forest	+1,500,000
Tucson Mountain Park	+1,500,000
Rillito River Park (2003)	587,000
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum	520,000
Reid Park Zoo	413,000
Madera Canyon, Coronado National Forest (2000)	260,000
Mount Lemmon Ski Valley, Coronado National Forest	221,000
Patagonia Lake State Park	217,000
Tohono Chul Park	169,000
Colossal Cave Mountain Park	165,000
Roy P. Drachman Agua Caliente Park (2003)	135,000
Santa Cruz River Park (2003)	133,000
Catalina State Park	126,000
International Wildlife Museum (2001)	110,000
Tucson Botanical Gardens	98,000
The Nature Conservancy's Patagonia-Sonoita Creek Preserve (average 1998-2000)	17,000
Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (2003)	13,000

parks in the region that are currently open to visitors (Catalina, Patagonia Lake, and Tubac Presidio) totals more than 360,000 annually.

Birding is currently the major nature tourism activity in southern Arizona, although the diverse landscape of this region—including lush desert vegetation, cool canyons, and forested sky islands—offers many other nature experiences. The Santa Cruz Valley is also a cultivated landscape, and another growing tourist industry in the region is agricultural tourism. The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan estimates that pick-your-own orchards and farms attract as many as 10,000-30,000 visitors per farm during the harvest seasons. Also increasing in popularity are farmers' markets, and tours and festivals at wineries in the Sonoita and Elgin areas.

For heritage tourists, the region has many interesting archaeological sites and historic buildings, neighborhoods, and communities, ranging from ruins to ghost towns to stunning restorations. The church at San Xavier is widely considered to be the most outstanding example of Spanish period architecture in the United States, and the mission at Tumacácori National Historical Park, established by Father Kino in 1691, is the oldest in Arizona (although the standing church dates to the early nineteenth century). The park at Tumacácori has recently expanded significantly to 355 acres, and the nearby Tubac Presidio State Historic Park is now complemented by the interpretive trail through the Barrio de Tubac Archaeological Preserve maintained by the Archaeological Conservancy. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail along the length of the Santa Cruz River is being marked and developed segment by



*The growth of heritage tourism
and nature tourism brings
long-term economic benefits
to designated areas.*



Top Heritage Attractions in the Proposed National Heritage Area	Visitation 2002
Old Tucson Studios	350,000
Pima Air and Space Museum	200,000
Tucson Museum of Art and Historic Block	191,000
San Xavier Mission	175,000
Arizona Historical Society, Second Street Museum	85,000
Titan Missile Museum	57,000
Tumacácori National Historical Park	48,000
Arizona State Museum	40,000
Old Pueblo Trolley (2003)	26,000
Tubac Presidio State Historic Park	19,000
La Posta Quemada Ranch Museum	10,000
Fort Lowell Museum	6,000
Sosa-Carillo-Frémont House (2003)	6,000
Arizona Historical Society, Downtown Museum	6,000
Postal History Museum	3,000
Pimería Alta Historical Society	3,000

segment, as funding is obtained. The Anza Trail and the chain of Spanish-period missions and presidios down the Santa Cruz Valley form a unifying heritage theme, one which will link the rebuilt mission and presidio in the Tucson Origins Heritage Park (a key part of the Rio Nuevo project) to its larger historical context.

The region has a number of accessible Old West ghost towns and mining camps, ruins of military forts built before and after the Civil War, and well-preserved Territorial period ranch houses. Important examples of historic ranch buildings are being restored at the new San Rafael State Park, Empire Ranch, Canoa Ranch, and Posta Quemada Ranch. Tourists and residents interested in the prehistoric cultures of this area – the earliest dating back to at least 12,000 years ago – can already see the remains of a Hohokam village and ballcourt at Romero Ruin in Catalina State Park. Soon they will also be able to visit the new Julian Wash archaeological park, interpreting a Hohokam village near the Interstate 10/Interstate 19 interchange, and learn about Tucson’s 4,000-year history of continuous settlement and agriculture, at the Tucson Origins Heritage Park.

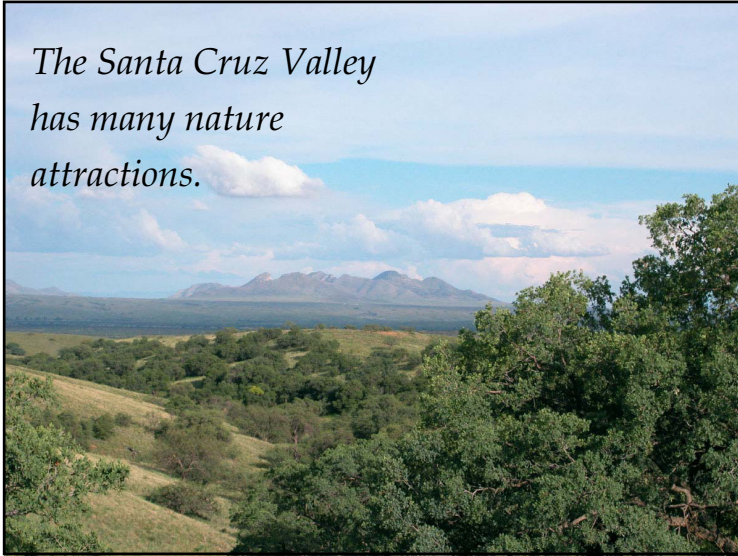
Heritage tourism also takes many other forms in the region. A growing number of ranches offer ranch-living and round-up tour packages, attracting many tourists seeking an authentic experience of working and living on a real Western ranch. Many bed-and-breakfasts are located in historic buildings, adding to their appeal as alternative lodging. Guided photographic tours of ghost towns and prehistoric rock art sites are also available. The new National Heritage Area could maximize potentials for heritage tourism in the region by identifying sets of destinations, festivals and other events, foods, musics, crafts, and lodging related to each other in terms of heritage themes.

CURRENT ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Tourism is a major industry in the proposed National Heritage Area. The Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau estimates that tourism currently impacts the economy of

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*The Santa Cruz Valley
has many nature
attractions.*



*Increased nature tourism
such as birdwatching
will bring economic
benefits to the region.*

Tucson and eastern Pima County by \$1.8 billion a year, and supports 40,000 jobs. Local governments also greatly benefit from taxes generated by tourism. A 1997 study by the University of Arizona showed that, from tourism-related taxes, Pima County collected \$9.9 million and the City of Tucson collected \$12.3 million during the 1995-1996 fiscal year.

In terms of expenditures and total economic impacts, heritage and nature tourists are some of the most desirable kinds of tourists. According to the Report on Cultural and Historic Tourism by the Travel Industry Association of America in 2001, visitors to historic sites stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of tourists. A 2002 study by the University of Arizona concluded the same things about nature tourists in southeastern Arizona, and estimated that the total economic impacts (direct, indirect, and induced) of visitors to the top two birdwatching sites in the upper San Pedro Valley ranged between \$17 and \$28 million in 2001. Because 20 of the top 50 birding spots on the Southeastern Arizona Birding Trail are within the boundaries of the proposed National Heritage Area, the total economic impacts of birding in this region are likely at least comparable to those in the neighboring San Pedro Valley. The Arizona Office of Tourism ranks nature tourism as the fastest growing type of tourism in the state.

POTENTIALS FOR GROWTH

Regional growth in heritage and nature tourism resulting from designation of a National Heritage Area can be enormous. For example, the Path of Progress National Heritage Area in

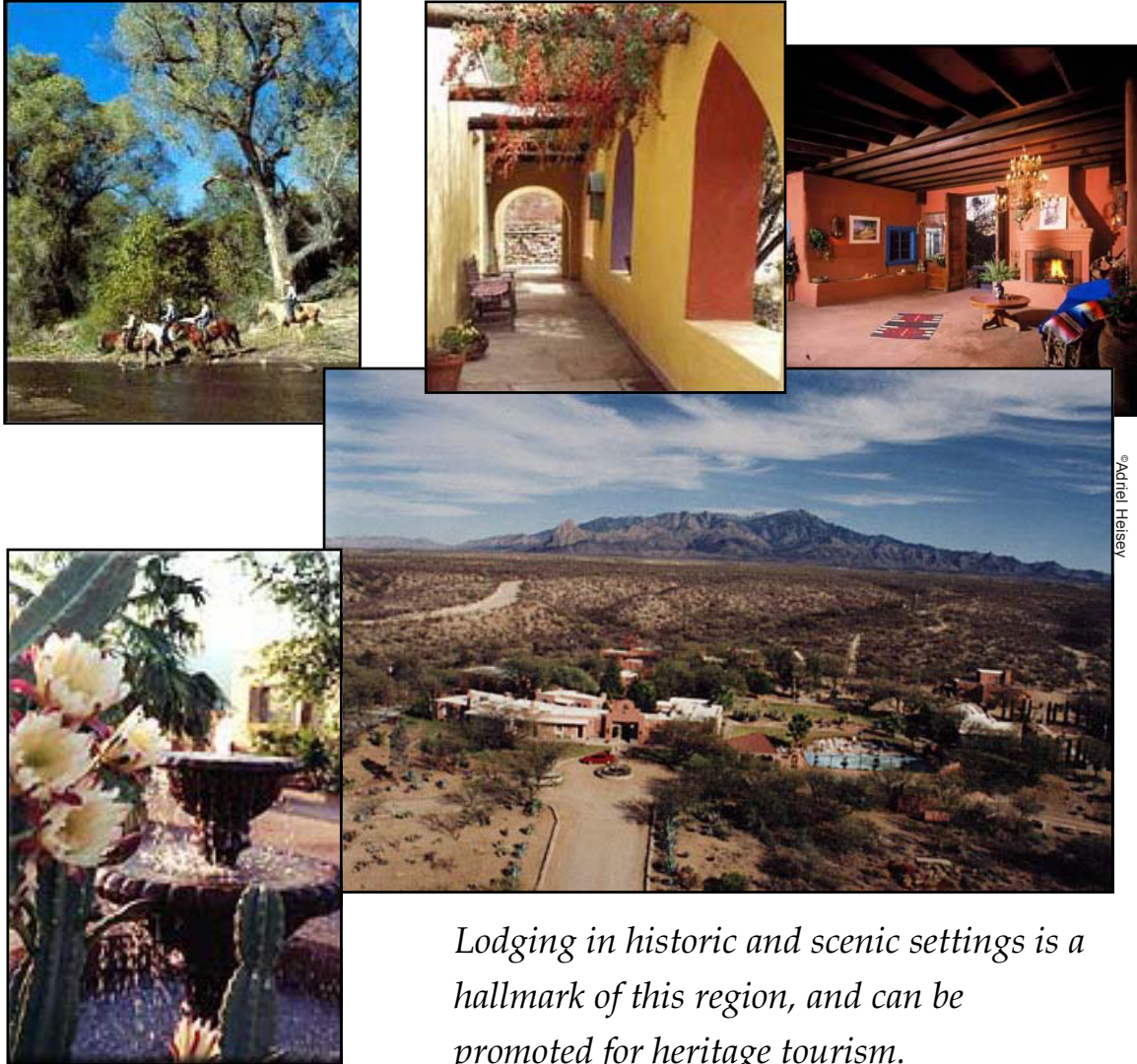


Traditional foods, music styles, crafts, and cultural festivals that also make this region unique will be promoted.



southwestern Pennsylvania experienced a doubling of the annual economic impact of tourism in the 10 years following designation, and both the average length of visits and the average amount spent by each tourist more than doubled. A recent comparative study of seven National Heritage areas by Michigan State University found that such increases are typical. If the Santa Cruz Valley similarly doubled the current annual economic impact of tourism, the resulting \$3.6 billion in annual impact and additional 40,000 jobs would provide a big boost to the economy of the region.

The seed money available to Heritage Areas has proven to be an important catalyst for local economic growth. The Alliance of National Heritage Areas reports that, for every \$1 of federal



Lodging in historic and scenic settings is a hallmark of this region, and can be promoted for heritage tourism.

match funding, the studied National Heritage Areas have leveraged an average of \$8.70 in local funding, from a combination of governments, business groups, corporations, foundations, and individuals. For those Heritage Areas that obtain the full \$10 million federal match over 15 years, an average of \$100 million will be provided to their local economies, largely in the form of projects that result in increased tourism and the related economic benefits.

Based on performances of other National Heritage Areas, designation of a Santa Cruz Valley National Heritage Area can be expected to strengthen the regional economy through increased tourism, job creation, and stimulation of public and private partnerships for new investment opportunities. With adequate planning and management, increased heritage and nature tourism will, in turn, help preserve the unique character of the region. A priority will be to ensure that these kinds of tourism do not destroy the very resources that attract visitors in the first place. The success of the new National Heritage Area will be based on a balance between preservation and promotion.