



**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Tony Alba  
Media Relations Manager–US and Canada  
[talba@azot.gov](mailto:talba@azot.gov)  
602-364-3715

Kimberly Todd  
Media Relations Manager-International  
[ktodd@azot.gov](mailto:ktodd@azot.gov)  
602-364-3702

**The First Arizonans: Native American Nations in the State**

Native American culture is not just part of Arizona’s past, although early Indian settlements are preserved at some of the Southwest’s most fascinating sites. The state’s 22 sovereign nations contribute to contemporary life, too, in ways both traditional and unexpected.

**The Past is Prologue**

As a result of ongoing archaeological digs and increased input by native peoples about their traditions, American Indian history is constantly in flux. Recent excavations near Tucson, for example, revealed pit houses dating back some 4,000 years. And the Athabascan term “Anasazi,” determined to mean “enemy ancestor,” is being replaced in books and on-site interpretive placards by the phrase “ancestral Puebloans” (the Hopi call these forebears “Hisatsinom”).

The Hohokam, Mogollon, and ancestral Puebloans are the primary groups who lived in what is now Arizona; other prehistoric cultures in the region include the Sinagua and Salado. Roughly speaking, the ancestral Puebloans are known for their cities and cliff dwellings in northern Arizona, the Sinagua for their settlements in the fertile plateau near Flagstaff and the Verde River Valley, and the Hohokam for farming, and developing extensive canal systems for irrigation, in the Gila and Salt River Valleys between Phoenix and Casa Grande. Most of these tribes left the area by 1400 A.D., likely because of a major drought.

**Ancient Sites, Modern Homelands – A Geographical Sketch**

**Northern Arizona:** Northeast Arizona is the most well-known area in the state for Native American cultural riches, past and present. On the vast Navajo reservation, the country’s largest, the oddly shaped buttes and spires of **Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park** are dotted with ancient Pueblo petroglyphs. An unlikely place for learning history, the Burger King in nearby Kayenta displays the memorabilia of King Mike, one of the **Navajo Codetalkers** who created a World War II code that the Japanese never cracked. The serene **Navajo National**

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**Monument** preserves cliff dwellings built by the ancestral Puebloans into soaring, pine shrouded ochre cliffs, as does **Canyon de Chelly National Monument**, where two rim drives afford vistas not only of these ancient Pueblo homes but also of the valley where the Navajo still live and graze sheep.

The **Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site** sells Navajo rugs, among other crafts, as it did when it opened in 1878. **The Hopi Villages** are located on three **Mesas**, where the Hopi have lived on or near for the past thousand years. Exploring 12<sup>th</sup> century **Old Oraibi**, visiting the **Hopi Cultural Center** on Second Mesa, and taking a guided tour of **First Mesa Villages**, including Walpi, are among the activities offered by this welcoming but private people.

The Sinagua settled the volcanic area around Flagstaff, as seen at **Sunset Crater Volcano** and **Wupatki National Monuments**, interesting for their lava flows, high-rise pueblo, and remains of three native cultures that co-existed here, and at **Walnut Canyon National Monument**, where the dwellings were built into niches of a lushly forested canyon. Learn more about the Sinagua and other native peoples of the Colorado Plateau at Flagstaff's **Museum of Northern Arizona**.

**Phoenix and Central Arizona:** The **Heard Museum** in Phoenix provides an excellent introduction to the history of the Southwest native peoples. Also in Phoenix, the 102-acre **Pueblo Grande Museum and Archeological Park** presents the remains of a Hohokam village and the extensive historic canal system as its centerpiece. Highlights of the Gila River Indian Community's new **Huhugam Heritage Center** south of Chandler include the antique baskets created by the Akimel O'odham, who, with the Pee Posh people, form the community. The heritage center's architecture was designed to resemble Sivan Vah Ki, better known as **Casa Grande Ruins National Monument**, about 45 minutes away. The site's four-story central structure, named "casa grande" by the Spanish missionaries who arrived in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, was part of a Hohokam complex built in the 1200s or 1300s.

**North Central:** Because Spanish explorers thought they'd stumbled upon an Aztec city, they named the streamside cliff dwellings they came across at **Montezuma Castle National**

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**Monument** for the famed Mexican ruler rather than for the real builders, the Sinagua. Another Sinagua settlement from around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, this one named “crooked water” by the Apaches, the hilltop **Tuzigoot National Monument** had excellent defensive views of the Verde Valley. In the Salt River Valley, **Tonto National Monument** showcases the natural cave

Apartments occupied by ancient Salado farmers from 1150 to 1450 A.D. On flatter ground – and thus more accessible for exploring – are the Salado homes preserved at **Besh-Ba-Gowah Archaeological Park**, Apache for “house of metal.” On the 1.5-million acre Fort Apache Indian Reservation, **Fort Apache Historic Park** sheds light on the past of the White Mountain Apaches in a 27-building complex with a museum and cultural center. The nearby **Kinishba Ruin**, “brown house in Apache,” is very tranquil, perhaps nearly as much so as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when the ancestral Puebloans settled here. The scrubby, high-elevation volcanic fields around Springerville, to the northeast, were also settled by forebears of the Hopi and Zuni, who created **Casa Malpais’** unusual fissure pueblos.

**Tucson and Southern Arizona:** Site names like Cochise Stronghold show that many cowboy and Indian battles took place in the southeast part of this region, and today the Tohono O’odham people have vast land holdings in the Southwest. But the main visitor attractions are Tucson’s **Arizona State Museum**, a Smithsonian Institution affiliate with displays focusing on 13,000 years of Southwest native settlement, and the **Amerind Foundation Museum**, with a great collection of American Indian artifacts set among the wrestling rocks near Benson.

### **Arts and Crafts**

**Arts:** The meaning of the many images painted or etched on rocks by the region’s early inhabitants continues to be important to the indigenous people. Some of the best places to see petroglyphs around the state include **Rock Art Canyon Ranch** south of Winslow; **Petrified Forest National Park**; **V Bar V Ranch**, near Sedona; **Deer Valley Rock Art Center**,

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north of Phoenix; and **Signal Hill** in Tucson's **Saguaro National Park West**.

Many galleries in Scottsdale, Sedona, and Tucson carry paintings and sculpture by working Native American artists, but the best outlet for contemporary American Indian fine art is the Heard Museum.

**Crafts:** Genuine **Hopi katsina** doll carvings, representations of spirits created as teaching tools for young girls, are intricately carved and painted and made of cottonwood root. To ensure authenticity, buy katsina dolls on the Hopi mesas, directly from the artisans or at one of the small shops. Read a bit about the past of **Navajo rugs** to learn why they're as costly – and as beautiful – as they are. The Hubbell Trading Post in Ganado, the Cameron Trading Post near the Grand Canyon and the Navajo Arts & Crafts Enterprise in Window Rock, Cameron, Kayenta and Chinle, all have large selections and learned staffs. Contemporary **silver jewelry** made by the Navajo and Zuni (often embedded with turquoise) and Hopi (overlay style), sold in crafts shops all over Arizona, should be stamped “sterling” and have the artist's hallmark on them. Pawn shops near the reservation are good sources for antique Navajo belts and necklaces. Some finely coiled and decorated **Tohono O'odham baskets** are sold at the San Xavier del Bac Mission south of Tucson, but the gift shop at Kitt Peak National Observatory, which leases its lofty acreage from the tribe, has the best selection.

**Markets and Festivals:** Numerous activities take place in tribal communities throughout the year. Among the largest, most interesting events that involve native foods, dancing, and crafts are the **O'odham Tash Indian Pow Wow** in Casa Grande (February); **Heard Museum Guild Indian Art Fair and Market** (March); **Hopi Festival of Arts and Culture** at the Museum of Northern Arizona (July); and the **Pueblo Grande Museum Indian Market** (December).

### Contemporary Enterprises

Most of the Native American nations in Central and Southern Arizona – though not in the north – own and operate casinos. These days, many of them feature big name entertainers, upscale

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eateries, and even water parks, and their proceeds help finance education and health care for the tribes. But the latest trend is toward non-gaming tourism enterprises, such as the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort and Spa, owned by the Gila River Indian Community; Sunrise Ski Park, owned and operated by the White Mountain Apache Tribe; and We-Ko-Pa Golf Club, created by the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation.

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