

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 30, 2014



Chickasaw Country earns 'Best Tribal Destination of the Year' Award

OKLAHOMA CITY – Chickasaw Country recently earned recognition from the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) as the 'Best Tribal Destination of the Year.' The award was presented at the 16th annual American Indian Tourism Conference.

Chickasaw Country continues the vision of raising awareness of the many tourism, cultural and entertainment experiences in south-central Oklahoma set forth by Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby.

"We are pleased this well-respected tourism organization has recognized Chickasaw Country," said Gov. Anoatubby. "We built the Chickasaw Cultural Center, Artesian Hotel, Bedré Fine Chocolate factory and Chickasaw Nation Welcome Center in this area, because we believe these facilities are a natural complement to the host of tourism opportunities in Southern Oklahoma. We are confident the success we have experienced in Chickasaw Country is only the beginning of greater things to come, because we plan to continue working with our neighbors to highlight the natural beauty, diverse cultures, rich history and vibrant artistic community in Chickasaw Country."

Chickasaw Country offers some of the most amazing mountains and lakes in Oklahoma, perfect for outdoor activities such as hiking, hunting, fishing, camping, boating and other watersports.

Other attractions range from museums and historic landmarks to a ride on a zipline in the beautiful Arbuckle Mountains. Chickasaw Country also offers a wide variety of shopping destinations from antique shops, vintage variety and upscale retail to southern chic apparel and Made in Oklahoma goods

Since the Chickasaw Cultural Center opened in July 2010 it has welcomed nearly 300,000 visitors from Germany, France, Australia and other places around the world. The number of visitors has increased each year, including an increase of almost 50 percent from 62,000 visitors in Fiscal Year 2013 to more than 91,000 in Fiscal Year 2014.

More than 51,000 guests have stayed at the Artesian Hotel since it opened for business in August 2013. That equates to an occupancy rate of more than 84 percent, which is 20 percentage points higher than the average across the U.S.

AIANTA is a national organization representing the tribal hospitality and tourism industry. Each year, AIANTA recognizes the best of Indian Country travel and tourism. Winners of the AIANTA tourism awards are selected by a panel of judges, including, AIANTA staff and board members, along with experts in the tourism industry. Each nominee must meet a host of standards for each award category, while also working to advance AIANTA's mission to define, introduce, grow and sustain American Indian, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian tourism that honors traditions and values.

According to a statement released by AIANTA, the 'Best Tribal Destination of the Year' designation was awarded to Chickasaw Country for "their devotion to sharing the spirit of their nation with guests by offering a destination enriched

with culture, nature, recreation and entertainment.” Also, AIANTA officials recognized that the Chickasaw Nation has established a host of hotels, spas, casinos, restaurants and cultural attractions.

Paige Williams, Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce director of tourism, attributes the recognition of Chickasaw Country to the diverse experience offered within its boundaries.

“While we honor and share the Chickasaw culture through many destinations, events and festivals, it is imperative to recognize Chickasaw Country’s boundless diversity also stems from the people who work and live within our boundaries,” Williams said. “The Nation’s tourism efforts coupled with those of business owners and chambers of commerce within the local communities provide a well-rounded, memorable Chickasaw Country experience.”

CIRI Alaska Tourism Corporation won the AIANTA award for ‘Excellence in Customer Service’ and Alaska Native Voices won the award for ‘Best Cultural Heritage Experience.’

For more information on Chickasaw Country, please visit: www.chickasawcountry.com.

###

About Chickasaw Country

Chickasaw Country is a regional tourism organization representing 13 south-central Oklahoma counties. Lead by The Chickasaw Nation to blend tourism efforts in the region, Chickasaw Country represents festivals, events and attractions. A very diverse and cultural destination, Chickasaw Country has new adventures around every corner. In 2013, the U.S. Travel Association honored Chickasaw Country with a Destiny award in both the Best Travel Website and Best Use of Social Media Platform categories. The awards were given during the annual Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations conference.

About the Chickasaw Nation

With nearly 59,000 citizens, the Chickasaw Nation is the 12th largest federally-recognized Indian tribe in the United States. The Chickasaw Nation had an economic impact of more than \$2.4 billion in Oklahoma in 2011. The tribe is the seventh largest employer in Oklahoma, with nearly 13,000 employees. A democratic republic with executive, legislative and judicial departments, the tribe's jurisdictional territory includes all or part of 13 counties in south central Oklahoma.

Media Contact:

Krista Bruce | Koch Communications | kbruce@kochcomm.com | 405-615-1526