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## Tucson Named UNESCO City of Gastronomy

*Tucson becomes the first American city  
to become part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for gastronomy,  
honoring Southern Arizona's food traditions and culinary innovation*

TUCSON, Ariz.- These days, every city believes their food scene is special and unique. Tucson is no different – we champion the vibrant, chef-focused cuisine (featuring two James Beard Award winners) downtown, the wide variety of international spots, and our incredible Mexican food. However, what makes one city's food more notable than another? Notice from national magazines? Accolades from bloggers? Tucson has those too, but now, we also have recognition from UNESCO.

There are only 116 Member Cities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Creative Cities program – established in 2004 to promote cooperation between cities for “sustainable urban development” – and on December 11, 2015, [Tucson became one of six Creative Cities in the United States](#), and the only one selected for Gastronomy.

Why Tucson? As the city's press release puts it, we were selected for “our region's rich agricultural heritage, thriving food traditions, and culinary distinctiveness,” but there's so much more to both Tucson than that.

Tucson's agriculture heritage extends back more than 4,000 years as the longest known continuously cultivated area in the North America, a legacy celebrated today at [Mission Garden](#), an interpretation of heritage plants and the culinary history of Southern Arizona. Tucson also has an incredibly unique mix of cultural influences reflected in our food, from the Sonoran hot dog's cross-border origin story to historic wheat brought here by Spanish missionaries and the fruit of the prickly pear cactus showing up in our local craft beers.

It's Tucson chefs teaching children about healthy meals and gardening in the morning and collaborating with local growers at night. UNESCO surely noted how the University of Arizona works on the forefront of agricultural research ready to tell the rest of the world a story about sustainable growing practices and biodiversity in a likely arid future.

Have you heard of [Native Seeds/SEARCH](#), co-founded by MacArthur Genius and conservation scientist Gary Paul Nabham, an organization that works to document and preserve the historic crops of the Southwest? Also, [our library system offers heirloom seeds](#) that can be "checked out" for your own garden.

It's [Janos Wilder](#) (one of the aforementioned James Beard winners) taking visiting chefs to Southside taco joints while he gets a new demonstration kitchen open to share his immense knowledge of food. Also, make note of fellow James Beard winner [Chris Bianco](#) choosing to open his first non-Phoenix restaurant in downtown Tucson, turning down big-check offers elsewhere.

Part of the honor must have been for the fun and delicious annual festivals like [Tucson Meet Yourself](#), [Viva La Local](#), [Agave Fest](#) and the [Tamal Heritage Festival](#). Give credit also to Tucson's surprising farmers' markets and the resort chefs who shop there.

The UNESCO honor isn't the end of a story, it's the beginning of great collaborations and new ideas. It's about Tucson's agricultural past and culinary future.

Visit Tucson, Tucson's destination marketing organization, is actively promoting Tucson's culinary wonders through press trips, culinary promotion and event sponsorship, a focus that has paid off with recent press coverage nationally and internationally, including a [June 2015 article in New York Magazine](#), which referred to Tucson as "the Southwest's next foodie destination."

For more information about the City of Gastronomy designation, what Tucson plans to do with this honor, or anything on the culinary front, contact Visit Tucson's communications department: Director of Public and Community Relations, Mary Rittmann ([mrittmann@visittucson.org](mailto:mrittmann@visittucson.org); 520-770-2166) or Director of Communications, Dan Gibson ([dgibson@visittucson.org](mailto:dgibson@visittucson.org); 520-770-2133).

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Visit Tucson's mission is to drive economic development by connecting visitors with their ideal travel & meetings experiences in Tucson and Southern Arizona. Free yourself in Tucson: <http://www.visittucson.org/>.

More on Tucson's application for the City of Gastronomy designation can be found at...

*Edible Baja Arizona:* <http://ediblebajaarizona.com/tucson-designated-unesco-world-city-of-gastronomy> and <http://ediblebajaarizona.com/gastronomy-designation-just-the-beginning>

*Tucson Weekly:* <http://www.tucsonweekly.com/tucson/the-road-to-unesco/Content?oid=5983515>

and the City of Tucson: <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/integrated-planning/tucson-unesco-city-gastronomy>