VISIT Tucson

◆◆◆ 2026 ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

WORTH THE TRIP, WORTH THE STORY

A CONVERSATION WITH PATI JINICH

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PHOTO: KATHLEEN DREIER PHOTOGRAPHY

This year we traded the keynote for a conversation. Pati Jinich, the chef, author, and host of *Pati's Mexican Table*, *La Frontera*, and the new *Pati Jinich Explores Panamericana*, sat down with Lee McLaughlin, Visit Tucson's Senior Vice President of Marketing, to explore one question: what makes a story worth telling?

Each part of the conversation opened with a short clip of a Tucsonan Pati has met on her many trips here. Several clips came from the Tucson episode of *Panamericana* Season 2 before it airs. The thread we kept coming back to: the stories that make people want to travel are the ones that could only happen here.

01 WHY SHE STOPS

Pati's path to Tucson started with food, but it was the people behind it who kept her coming back, and each visit took her deeper into their stories. First came a journey into Tucson's Mexican food on *Pati's Mexican Table*, then a deeper look at Southern Arizona's borderlands culture on *La Frontera*. Now there's *Panamericana*, which features Tucson as Pati follows the roads that connect the Americas from Alaska to Argentina, asking what it truly means to be American. She said every person in the new Tucson episode could have carried an episode of their own. As poet Logan Phillips put it in his clip, it's not the buildings, it's the people.

02 WHAT SHE LOOKS FOR

Once something catches her eye, Pati looks for openness and access. Filming a poet reading or a chef plating isn't enough. She wants to be invited in, to Logan's home and his circle of fellow poets, or to the places where chef Aaron Lopez harvests. That openness starts with the storyteller. "We want real. We want raw," she said, and that means being willing to hold the hard parts of a story too. The *La Frontera* clip of Amy Juan of San Xavier Co-op Farm showed what that looks like. In it, Amy talks about young Tohono O'odham people reclaiming faith, song, and language.

> *"If you can't hold the pain of others, then you shouldn't have the honor to hold their joy."*
>
> PATI JINICH

03 WHAT SHE ASKS BEFORE SHE FILMS

Behind every unscripted moment is a lot of preparation: research, scouting, and planning to find what Pati called a place's DNA and the voices who can share it. Then she leaves space for surprise. Her Barrio Bread shoot was on March 14, 2020, right as the world began shutting down due to the pandemic. The crew stuck it out, filmed one of the last long bread lines anyone would see for a while, and made it home before flights stopped. "You have to plan a lot in order to be able to break the plan," she said, and when it breaks anyway, "embrace the chaos." That same flexibility makes any business easier to feature when a journalist, photographer, or film crew calls.

04 TUCSON, THROUGH HER EYES

The Chinese chorizo clip from the *Panamericana* Tucson episode said it best. This is Mexican chorizo, made by Chinese grocers for their Mexican neighbors, with no single recipe, seasoned to each neighborhood's taste. Feng Feng Yeh's Chinese Chorizo Project connected the crew with families who ran those stores, including Patsy Lee, whose family's grocery in the barrio was the heart of the neighborhood. Her neighbors even let her father know when his chorizo needed more spice. From there, the story moved from history to the kitchen to the table. Pati called food "a noble tool" for seeing the history of a people and a place. She said Tucson stands out for its layers, which is the same way Visit Tucson promotes our unique local culture and our UNESCO City of Gastronomy designation.

05 STORIES MADE HERE

The last two clips played back to back, each a different kind of love letter to Tucson. Musician Brian Lopez chose to build his career here instead of Los Angeles, and the desert now runs all through his songs. Chef Aaron Lopez ends every meal at Ursa with a creosote-infused marshmallow, the smell of the Sonoran Desert after rain in one last bite.

Both stories let viewers see Tucson through the eyes of people who love it, with almost no narration needed. "I don't want to tell people, 'I love Tucson,'" she said. "You're bringing the people from Tucson who are telling you that." People are looking for rooted, true stories. That's exactly what Visit Tucson's brand essence, *Don't Fit Right In*, invites every business to tell.

THREE TAKEAWAYS

Pati and the Visit Tucson team developed these takeaways together to help you tell your own story. Each one starts with a simple question worth answering before the next visitor, journalist, or camera walks through your door.

KNOW YOUR STORY

If someone walked into your business tomorrow, what story would you tell them?

Imagine Pati walking in with a camera. What would you show her?

OWN YOUR PLACE

What part of your story could only happen right here?

Brian and Aaron could have built their work anywhere. Their stories are stronger because they built them here.

MAKE IT REAL AND VISIBLE

Is your story authentic, easy to see, and easy to find?

Let people in the way Logan and Aaron did, then make your story easy to find wherever visitors look for you.

IN TUCSON, WE DON'T ASK YOU TO FIT IN.

WE INVITE YOU TO STAND OUT.

◆◆◆ KEEP THE STORY GOING

Panamericana Season 2 premieres October 26. Have a Tucson story worth telling? Share it with us @VisitTucson or use #VisitTucson.

Thank you to Pati Jinich, and to the JW Marriott Tucson Starr Pass team for an amazing event.

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