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# **Tourism Potential in Lincoln County, Nevada**

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## **SUMMARY**

Lincoln County has a large potential for tourism growth. The quiet rural lifestyle found in the county is a complete contrast to that found in the populated areas around Las Vegas. The county has extensive resources to offer, such as: abundant nature; wildlife; country life experiences; and cultural heritage in mining, ghost towns, farming, railway and ancient Native American sites. Many of the potential tourist attractions in Lincoln County are outlined in this document.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism provides a great opportunity for bringing in outside dollars to be spent in Lincoln County. There are advantages for the communities because it will allow more businesses to remain viable despite the small populations. Tourism can also help maintain the county's quiet rural lifestyle by making the lifestyle an attractive feature to visit. Once tourists fall in love with the county's lifestyle they will be powerful supporters in keeping the lifestyle in place rather than destroying it.

Lincoln County is a very different world from Las Vegas and its surrounding communities. The pace of life is slower, residents take time to visit, there is abundant space and much wildlife and nature to observe in Lincoln County. Residents from the populated areas will find a complete escape from the traffic, rushing and noise in Lincoln County.

This document outlines many of the attractions that Lincoln County could offer to tourists.

## **COUNTY RESOURCES**

### **Land/Open Space**

Lincoln County has over six million acres of land. Ninety-eight percent of the land is publicly held, mostly by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The land ranges from low desert in the south, and moves up into high desert areas in the north. The vegetation changes from Mesquite trees and Spanish sword yuccas to juniper and Pinion pine, and up to Aspen trees on some mountains. The

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mountains and rock formations range from limestone to lava, creating a wide array of colors and shapes. There are a large number of trails and roads available for traveling to see the backcountry. Fourteen areas are designated as wilderness which only allows travel by foot or horse.

There are seven state park facilities in the county that have scenic surroundings well worth touring. These parks are working on expanding their camping areas and should pursue adding cabins for rent, especially if their activities could be included in packages with local businesses.

This open land is used for off-road ventures, hiking, cycling, camping and natural land formation sightseeing.

There are a number of competitive off-road races for motorcycles, dune buggies and ATVs that run through the county from early spring to fall. Many of these races involve top national competitors. The Silver State Trail has been built for off-road ventures of motorized vehicles. This trail covers a large area of back country running from west of Caliente to west of Pioche and loops further west and then south back down to connect into a complete circuit. There is access to the trail from Caliente, Panaca and Pioche. This, and the many other less formal off-road vehicle trails, is a great opportunity to provide ATV rentals or tours into the backcountry.

New bicycling trails have been approved near Alamo and Caliente which opens the opportunity for future bike rental, supply shops and cycling tours.

Lincoln County has a large number of hiking and camping areas that can be used by people on their own. There is also the opportunity to provide getaway packages by taking people hiking and/or camping in the wild.

There are ranches near all of the communities in Lincoln County which could offer horse ride tours of the local landscape or heritage tours. There is great interest from city residents to take a holiday working on the ranch, delivering a calf or participating in a cattle drive.

Many city residents are thrilled to pay for an event that simply allows them to sit under the stars. Texas Prairie Rivers Region has been successful in drawing in urban visitors from long distances to enjoy country life on the farm and in nature. This may include astronomy observation, but a more popular activity includes simple bonfires with cowboy poets, local singers or storytelling. They can't see stars in the city and there are few family social events to attend that are quiet, easy-going and friendly.

## **Wildlife**

There are a number of animals to see in Lincoln County such as: mule deer; antelope; elk; big horn sheep; beaver; coyotes; rabbits; wild horses; sage grouse; wild turkeys; road runners; and other birds. There is great potential to create tours for wildlife observation, where people can go sit outside and watch wild animals go about their natural activities. Beavers are always busy working and can provide hours of entertainment for many people. There is great interest in wild horses by city people for viewing and photographing.

A number of outfitters in Lincoln County provide hunting, scouting and camping services. Deer hunted and tagged in Lincoln County are recorded as

being some of the largest in the United States. One of the outfitting companies is considering expanding its services to wildlife viewing during the off-season of hunting.

## **Water**

Lincoln County has numerous springs providing water for a desert county. There are several lakes where tourists can go fishing and camping. Many valleys run through the county that contains running creeks and lush plant growth. These areas provide excellent areas for nature and wildlife observation and farming.

Some of the water is in the form of hot springs that can be enjoyed for much of the year. The hot springs have not been developed for tourism. There are plans for expanding the Ash Springs by BLM.

There are plans to pipe water to Las Vegas from Lincoln County. It may be beneficial to educate some residents from the Las Vegas area on the use and beauty of the lush valleys areas in Lincoln County during their vacations to the area.

## **Friendly People**

Visitors have indicated the residents of Lincoln County work hard but take time to ask how they are doing. Kindness and kids are top priority for residents over money and material items. As a result, tourists find a different and more relaxed world than found in cities. The lifestyle provides an environment for getting away from the fast-paced life found in cities. There is no traffic, rushing or fear of your neighbor. Allowing city residents an opportunity to get away and join the county's lifestyle is a great attraction that many would pay for. The return for Lincoln County would be more income and jobs in the county. The greatest return is getting urbanites to help preserve the cherished rural lifestyle in Lincoln County rather than deteriorate it.

Tourism can build from the lifestyle in the form of: on ranch experiences and other agrotourism; bed and breakfasts that draw them into the lifestyle; personalized tours about the community heritage; or simply training staff in stores and services to provide friendly service. There are elder residents that can tell historic stories about their community throughout the county.

## **History and Heritage**

Lincoln County has history dating back over 3,000 years in native communities. The county has over a hundred sites of petroglyphs. The Spanish trail ran through the county. Exciting history occurred when the gun was the law in mining towns; Butch Cassidy and his gang stayed in the area, the hanging tree was justice and cattle rustling provided a living. There are a number of ghost towns that were established in mining rush years. Heritage is built in the area having some of the oldest settlements in Nevada established by Mormons for farming.

Each community in Lincoln County has its own set of stories in history, making them all different tourist attractions. The tables below outline attractions that can be found in each community.

**PAHRANAGAT VALLEY (ALAMO /HIKO/ RACHEL)**

The Pahrnagat Valley is a green valley with a strong history in native Indian settlements and ranching. Alamo means cottonwood and the whole valley contains many cottonwoods making it appear like an oasis in a desert. Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge is situated at the south end of the Pahrnagat Valley providing a sanctuary for wildlife and fishing. Many residents from Las Vegas would love to go into the county and have time in a green valley.

Rachel is a community on the far west side of Lincoln County that is made famous for extraterrestrial sightings. It is also situated near the famous test site for newly developed aircraft, nicknamed "Area 51."

**Table 1. Activities in the Pahrnagat Valley and Rachel Areas**

<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Nature Based</b>	<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Other Attractions</b>
Battlefields (Indian fights)	Pahrnagat National Wildlife Refuge	Swimming: Ash Springs BLM site	Extraterrestrial Highway, Hwy 375; Alamo to Rachel, Nev.
Indian artifacts & ruins	Bird watching & wildlife observation	Picnic areas	Dude & cattle ranches
Petroglyphs & archeological sites	Nature trails	Dry lake bed wind surfing	Pioneer Days-July 24 in Alamo
Mining camps – Hiko & Rachel areas	Fishing & hunting	Pahrocs rock climbing	Harvest Festival-October in Alamo
Historical tours of early settlements, homesteads, buildings	Spring flower & fall foliage		Rachel Days-May
Historical markers Pahrnagat Valley -#38, Crystal Springs - 205 & Hiko-206			
"The Rolling Stones" of Pahrnagat Valley			

**CALIENTE**

Caliente is a city built around the railway. It has a old mission-style train depot that depicts the railway's history sitting beside a major Union Pacific line in town. Caliente is on the north end of the beautiful Rainbow Canyon which contains rock formations of almost every color. There are great archeological sites in the surrounding area.

**Table 2. Activities in the Caliente Area**

<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Nature Based</b>	<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Other Attractions</b>
Archeological sites & petroglyphs	Bird watching & wildlife observation	Kershaw-Ryan, Beaver Dam & Elgin School House State Parks	Natural hot springs (un-developed)
Indian artifacts & ruins	Nature trails	Picnic areas	Elgin Apple Orchard "Pick your own"
Historical tours of early settlements, homesteads, buildings	Fishing & hunting	Rock climbing	Homecoming - Memorial Day weekend
Mining camp/ghost town -Delamar	Christmas tree cutting		Dude & cattle ranches
Historic theater: undergoing renovation & original one-room school house/now Methodist church	Rainbow Canyon: bird watching, geological formations, nature trails, natural lookout points, caves, historical sites		4-H farmers market
Historic mission-style Union Pacific Train Depot: houses city offices & art gallery	Mountains, cliffs, canyons, streams, small waterfalls		
Historical markers #55-Culverwell Ranch & #249- U.P. Depot	Hunting		
Historical railroad houses	Spring flower & fall foliage tours		
History Boxcar Museum			

**PANACA**

The town of Panaca is the second oldest community in Nevada, established in 1864. It is a green valley that was settled by Mormons for farming. In the town of Panaca are ancient greenish-colored lakebed formations and a hot spring-fed pond that is a well-liked swimming hole. Near the town is the beautiful Condor Canyon that contains great history dating back to early native settlements and a waterfall.

**Table 2. Activities in the Panaca Area**

<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Nature Based</b>	<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Other Attractions</b>
Early settler home sites & buildings; Panaca is one of the oldest towns in Nevada	Natural spring "swimming hole"	Beaver Dam & Cathedral Gorge State Parks	Heritage home bed & breakfast
Historical Marker- Panaca- # 39 & Panaca Ward Chapel -182, Panaca Spring- #160, #93, Mercantile Store - #39	Condor Canyon & waterfall	Walking self-guided tour the historic buildings and lake bed formations	Dude & cattle ranches
Heritage museum	Christmas tree cutting		Pioneer Days in July

**PIOCHE AND AREA**

Pioche is located on the side of an old mining mountain with a beautiful view of the valley below. The town is full of history from its rich silver mining heritage. The town's main street has original buildings providing a "wild west" atmosphere. There are great stories about the early residents and their rugged, wild lifestyles.

The area has up to 15°F cooler climate than Las Vegas which is desirable in summer and provides periods of winter snow fun. The meadow valley wash near Pioche contains a series of rich, green valleys with fishing areas, agriculture and heritage dating back to the mid 1800s. There are endless tour opportunities in this area.

**Table 3. Activities in the Pioche Area**

<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Nature Based</b>	<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Other Attractions</b>
Archeological sites in Upper Meadow Valley Wash	Bird and wildlife watching	ATV & off-road	Wild west stories & atmosphere
Historic/early settlers homes & buildings	Pine nut gathering	Local parks, playgrounds & picnic areas	Dude & cattle ranches

<b>Table 3. Activities in the Pioche area continued</b>			
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	<b>Nature Based</b>	<b>Recreation</b>	<b>Other Attractions</b>
Historic "Million Dollar Courthouse" & Thompson Opera House	Spring flower & fall foliage tours	Echo Canyon & Spring Valley state parks	Eagle Valley Resort
Mines, ghost towns & miner's houses	Christmas tree cutting	Snow play	Hunting outfitters
History museum	Fishing Derby		Labor day-weekend festival
Historical Markers Pioche -#5, Bullionville- #203, Jackrabbit -#204			Testical Festival in Ursine
			Christmas decorating contest

## **TARGET MARKET**

The greatest market for Lincoln County tourism consists of Las Vegas and surrounding area residents and traffic currently traveling through Lincoln County.

The Las Vegas area is continuing to grow rapidly and has over 1.7 million residents. There are over one half million residents that make over \$75,000 per year in their households and want to escape the heat and busy lifestyle. This Las Vegas market is only 90 to 175 miles away from the major communities in Lincoln County. It is tempting to try to target the huge number of vacationers coming to Las Vegas but they are a less likely market. The visitors to Las Vegas are attracted to the lights, shows and gambling which is the opposite scene and experience offered by Lincoln County. As a result only a small percentage of these tourists would be drawn to Lincoln County and the cost to reach them would be high. The residents of Las Vegas are a target that is easier to reach in marketing and could become return visitors.

The current travelers passing through Lincoln County largely consist of business people and snowbirds. If the business people traveling through received information on the great activities available in Lincoln County then they may come back for a vacation. Marketing to them is simple since they are passing through the county. Snowbirds are individuals who reside in colder climates but relocate in southern, warmer climates every winter. Many of the snowbirds travel through Lincoln County to and from their winter stay. Enticing these people to stay for activities in the county during their travel through could greatly boost tourist spending in the county (Harris et. al., 2005).

## **WHAT IS NEEDED TO START TOURISM- NEXT STEPS**

The activities and features available for tourism is almost endless in Lincoln County and the list and discussion in this paper are just the start of what is available. The major step to getting more tourism going in the county is deciding what and how to share these features and how much it is worth. The greatest asset for tourism is working with the people in each community that know the history, sites and features that can be offered and get them to talk about them.

The communities already hold their big festivals but there needs to be small activities going during different times of the year. These smaller events can be achieved through private businesses being started and/or collaboration of volunteers. The businesses can be as simple as a ranch offering to let one or two people come along for a day or two on their regular duties caring for animals. There are great opportunities for locals to load their truck with people who want to see some of the land formations or heritage sites. The rest of the tour could be planned in coordination with local motels and restaurants to create a package of activities.

The question becomes not what should be created to get tourism going but how can the county work together to offer a tour package of activities, sites and lifestyles that already exists in Lincoln County.

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