

Tourism focus groups reveal challenges in marketing Nevada

People see the state as hot, desolate, 'hell-like'

By [Richard N. Velotta](#)

Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011 | 8:51 p.m.

State tourism leaders trying to figure out the best way to brand Nevada to attract visitors may have a bigger challenge on their hands than they thought.

In six focus groups in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, participants demonstrated little knowledge of the Silver State and its tourism attractions.

David Bratton, founder of San Francisco-based Destination Analysts Inc., which conducted the focus groups, updated the Nevada Tourism Commission on the results Wednesday. Destination Analysts is gathering research for Seattle-based GreenRubino, which has been contracted to develop a brand identity for the state.

Bratton told commissioners members of the focus groups listed “explore Nevada parks,” “have an adventure” and “sense of exploration” as the top three experiences travelers could have in Nevada.

They also listed “gambling,” “enjoy nightlife” and “visit Reno as well as other state attractions” as the bottom three experiences.

In a map exercise in which group members were asked to give their impressions of the state by drawing on an outline of a map, one respondent drew “Vegas” in the middle of the state and labeled the rest of it as “empty desert.” Another placed Las Vegas in the southern end of the state and Lake Tahoe, surrounded by images of mountains and then a circle around the rest of the state labeled “not a whole lot.”

Another map-maker located “Vegas,” “Beautiful Tahoe,” Winnemucca, Wendover and Area 51 in approximately the right locations, labeling the rest of the state as “nothing.”

Yet another may have a future as a meteorologist, labeling eastern Nevada as “windy and hot,” the center of the state as “hot and dry” and Southern Nevada as “hell-like,” with the area around Las Vegas as “more hell-like.”

An attractions analysis indicated Great Basin National Park, Lehman Caves, Lake Tahoe, ghost towns around the state, Las Vegas and the Ruby Mountains near Elko as the state’s most interesting attractions.

The analysis listed Route 50, the “Loneliest Road in America,” which has aggressively been promoted by the state for years, as the least interesting Nevada attraction.

“It looks like we need to educate people,” said JoLyn Laney, deputy director of marketing and advertising for the commission.

Some of the research concerned members of the commission’s marketing committee, which plans to closely examine the data as the study progresses.

Some suggested that Las Vegas’ overwhelming brand presence is so strong that it has overshadowed anything else in the state.

GreenRubino plans to present its branding report at the Governor's Conference on Tourism Nov. 29-30 in Las Vegas.

In other business, the commission received an update on the state's bid to secure the 2022 Winter Olympic Games, learned that one of the state's historic artifacts is under consideration as a national historic landmark and got details on the upcoming state tourism conference at the Rio.

Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, who chairs the Tourism Commission and has been a leading advocate for bringing the 2022 Winter Olympics to Northern Nevada, said he will be attending a U.S. Olympic Assembly on Thursday in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Krolicki said the Bay Area Sports Organizing Committee, which led efforts to bring the Summer Olympics to San Francisco in 2012 and 2016, has offered to support Nevada's 2022 bid.

To host the Games, the state's organizing committee would first have to convince the U.S. Olympic Committee that it would be the best U.S. location. Denver and Salt Lake City are expected to be the strongest competition. The U.S. committee is expected to make its selection by 2013.

Once the United States has its nominee, the International Olympic Committee would weigh the bid against other world cities and make a selection in July 2015.

Las Vegas has received some spinoff hotel and tourism business when the Olympics have been staged in the region — in Salt Lake City in 2002 and in Los Angeles in 1984.

The Heavenly ski resort at Lake Tahoe would be the likely host for speed skiing events while Squaw Valley, Calif., would be home to technical skiing events.

In a [report on the planned opening](#) of the Nevada State Museum at the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas, Peter Barton, acting administrator of the state Museums and History Division, said a Northern Nevada attraction may get federal recognition.

Barton said the nation's only working McKeen Railroad Car, operated by the Virginia City & Truckee Railroad, has been nominated to be a national historic landmark. Barton will defend the nomination to the registry before the National Park Service later this year.

A total of 152 McKeen Rail Cars were built between 1905 and 1917 for the Union Pacific Railroad, and the one displayed and occasionally operated in Carson City is the only working unit remaining.

Barton said the \$51.5 million museum at the Springs Preserve, a collaborative project between the state and the Southern Nevada Water District, would open Oct. 28 for Nevada Day, with a dedication ceremony scheduled for Nov. 12.

Acting Tourism Commission Director Larry Friedman said the agenda has nearly been set for the two-day Governor's Conference.

A popular panel of leading resort CEOs is planned, as well as a presentation by Randall Walker, director of the Clark County Aviation Department, about McCarran International Airport's Terminal 3 opening next summer.

A presentation on the branding of Las Vegas and the results of Nevada's branding efforts are scheduled, as well as an update on the Olympics bid from the Reno Tahoe Winter Games Coalition.

Tourism forum website TripAdvisor.com also is scheduled to deliver a presentation at the conference.

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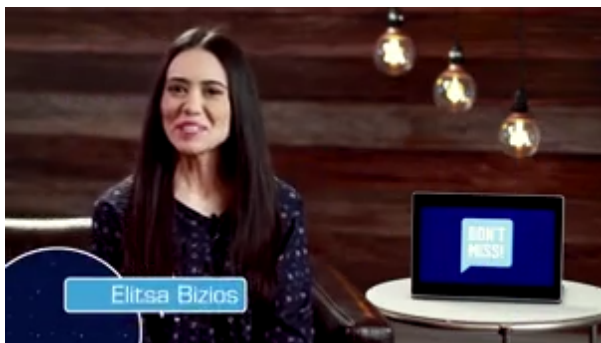
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