

## **Get ready for Reno**

While plans are well underway for all the events surrounding 98th National Convention in Cincinnati this August, it is not too early to start looking further ahead to the 99th National Convention in Reno, Nev., which will fall a week earlier, Aug. 18-24, 2017.

The Reno/Tahoe area is a region rich in history, folklore, outdoor activity and culture. Members of The American Legion family planning on attending the 2017 National Convention may want to plan on staying in the area during the extra week before Labor Day to get the most out of the unique experiences available in and around Reno. There are, of course, plenty of casinos and gambling opportunities in the area, but Reno prides itself on offering much more to visitors.

Many convention-goers will stay at the two hotels nearest the Reno-Sparks Convention Center, the Atlantis Casino Resort Spa and The Peppermill Casino Resort. Others will stay three miles away at the Grand Sierra Resort near the airport, and still others will stay downtown at the Silver Legacy Resort Casino and Circus Circus Reno hotels. A quick 10-minute shuttle ride will give attendees easy access to all locations.

### **DOWNTOWN RENO**

Like many mid-size cities in the 1990s, Reno recognized that suburban flight and the shuttering of multiple casinos had left its downtown empty and run-down. The Reno City Council began a massive renovation and revitalization effort that, over the past 15 years, has transformed the downtown to a vibrant destination that sparkles with art, culture, nightlife and nature. The convention parade route will travel along Virginia St., and bring most convention attendees downtown, but several other attractions make this part of Reno a must-see destination.

**Downtown Riverwalk District:** In the 1800s the city of Reno blossomed up around the first bridge built to cross the Truckee River. For years it was a focal point of the community and many of Reno's historical treasures were established along the riverbanks nearby - particularly when the area was awash in the riches gained from the Comstock Lode in nearby Virginia City. In the 1930s and 40s when the town became more known for gambling and quickie divorces, the city lost focus on the natural areas around the river. The first phase of the 1990s Reno redevelopment process was to bring the Riverwalk back to life. The area now boasts of a coalition of local merchants offering boutique shopping, entertainment venues, museums and dining experiences that celebrate the history and culture of Reno, and has brought vibrancy back to the heart of the downtown area. The Raymond I. Smith Truckee Riverwalk was recently named one of America's Top 10 Riverwalk's by Travel & Leisure Magazine.

**National Automobile Museum:** Gaming pioneer Bill Harrah, who founded Harrah's Hotels and Casinos, was an avid car collector. Over the years, he assembled a collection of approximately 1,400 vehicles - including many historically significant cars.

Harrah died in 1978, and in 1980, Holiday Inn bought Harrah's Hotels and Casinos ... and his automobile collection. The company announced it would sell off the cars - but the citizens of Nevada spoke out against the impending liquidation of the collection. In response, Holiday Inn donated 175 cars and a research library to seed the future museum. The City of Reno Redevelopment Agency, the State of Nevada and others pulled the rest together and the National Automobile Museum opened its doors in 1989.

Since then, it has been widely acclaimed as one America's Five Greatest Automobile Museums by Auto week. Over 200 vehicles are on display, including the 1907 Thomas Flyer, the American car that won the 1908 New York to Paris race; a 1973 Cadillac Eldorado Custom Coupe given to Elvis as a birthday gift from his father; and a rare 1936 Mercedes-Benz Type 500K Special Roadster, one of five still known to be in existence, formerly owned by Princess Nina Mdiviana, wife of Denis P.S. Conan Doyle, son of "Sherlock Holmes" creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Join the millions who marvel at this collection each year. The museum is open 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.

**The Reno Arch:** Undoubtedly the most iconic symbol in Reno, the storied arch that welcomes visitors along Commercial Row has a history as colorful as the neon that glimmers across Virginia Street. It is a story of three arches - all of which still stand in different locations today.

The original arch was built in 1926 to promote the 1927 Nevada Transcontinental Highway Exposition. It was a steel structure topped with the word RENO, bracketed by two blazing torches. More incandescent lights illuminated letters announcing the exposition, which was a celebration of the completion of the Lincoln and Victory highways. Once the exposition was over, the Reno City Council voted to keep the arch, and initiated a contest to come up with a slogan to replace the exposition lettering. G. A. Burns of Sacramento claimed the \$100 prize for the now-famous motto: "Reno, The Biggest Little City in the World."

In 1934, the incandescent lighting gave way to the newest trend - neon, and the sign was remodeled to the single word - RENO - in bright green neon. There was public outcry over the removal of the slogan, and so the city council added it back to the sign in new art deco neon lettering. The sign remained unaltered on Virginia Street for the next 30 years.

In 1963, Reno launched a campaign to build a new sign for Nevada's centennial. A new, futuristic model was unveiled during New Year's Eve celebrations that year and the original sign was moved to Idlewild Park. Six years later, a 1969 street widening project forced the original 1926 arch to be moved to Paradise Park. And in 1988, it was placed into storage because the cost of necessary repairs did not fit into the city's budget. In 1994, a movie production company finally resurrected the sign, repairing it and erecting it over 4th Street for four days of filming for the movie "Cobb." The community rallied around the resurrected sign and after a year-long grass-roots effort, the original arch was placed on Lake Street near the National Automobile Museum where it stands today.

During this mid-80s, the city decided that the mod-design arch unveiled in 1963 was losing some of its shine. So in 1987, the 1963 sign was donated to the town of Willits, Calif., 250 miles west,

where it spans Highway 101 and welcomes visitors to Mendocino County as the “Gateway to the Redwoods.” Meanwhile, a third arch was built over Virginia Street - incorporating both the 1963 starburst motif as well as the 1930s art-deco lettering. While there is a new wave of local debate about a next generation sign and the relevance of the 87-year-old motto, this sparkling jewel that serves as a gateway into the revived Riverwalk District still serves as a prime location for photo-ops while visiting Reno.

**National Bowling Stadium:** In Reno, bowling is a really big deal. Known as “The Taj Mahal of Tenpins,” the National Bowling Stadium is a state-of-the-art, 78-lane, championship bowling facility. The Bowling Stadium serves as a tournament facility for multiple bowling leagues, and the stadium seating, multiple food vendors and a 440-foot video screen - the longest in the world - provides a premium spectator experience during tournament play.

In addition to tournament play, the Bowling Stadium also doubles as a unique event venue and offers some features for the public.

On the Bowling Stadium’s first floor is the International Bowling Museum & Hall of Fame. This exhibit of Hall of Fame portraits and other bowling memorabilia is a satellite to the International Bowling Museum & Hall of Fame that is housed on the International Bowling Campus in Arlington, Texas.

On the tournament level, the Lane 81 Pro Shop offers top-of-the-line bowling equipment, and a Computer Aided Tracking System Lane lets bowlers take their game to a new level with computer evaluation and recommendations.

**Greater Nevada Field and Freight House District:** A 9,100 capacity stadium set on the banks of the Truckee River, Greater Nevada Field is the current home to the Triple-A Reno Aces, a Minor League Baseball team. Beginning in March of 2017, the Aces will share the facility with the United Soccer League minor league team, Reno 1868 FC. The regular seasons for both teams runs well into September, so availability of tickets for August home games are likely. Because of the flexibility of general admission areas, party zones with picnic seating and luxury suite options, it is not uncommon for the venue to be filled beyond its stated capacity.

The attached Freight House District is a year-round entertainment complex that works both in conjunction with events at Greater Nevada Field, as well as independently. Festivals, concerts and other events happen year-round, and the complex also offers nearly a dozen options for private events.

**The Terry Lee Wells Nevada Discovery Museum:** For families with children, the Discovery Museum is a great way to spend a day in Reno. Originally designed as a children’s museum in 2011, the museum has made its mark as a hands-on museum dedicated to inspiring lifelong learning in science, technology, engineering, art, math and the natural world. Among the permanent exhibits, the two-story Cloud Climber jungle-gym allows visitors to scramble into the stratosphere while learning about the water cycle; the Smithsonian Spark! Lab teaches about the history and process of invention and inspires visitors to create new inventions; and the hand-on experiments in the Da Vinci’s Corner gallery gives insight into what fascinated and inspired

Leonardo da Vinci. The Museum is open at 10 a.m. Tuesday to Saturday and at noon on Sunday. It closes at 5 p.m. each day except Wednesday, when it is open until 8 p.m. The Discovery Museum is closed Mondays.

**Midtown District:** In the two-mile stretch that connects the convention center and downtown, an urban renewal project to help counteract suburban flight in the 1990s has blossomed into an eclectic art community of like-minded entrepreneurs who celebrate the unique and the local. Beautiful graffiti murals decorate the alleyways, and tattoo artists make equally beautiful personal art. Clothing boutiques, theme dress shops, consignment shops and other independent retailers offer a culturally diverse and dynamic shopping experience. Spas, salons and exercise studios offer beauty and wellness options, and locally-owned restaurants, bars and nightclubs round out the offerings with something to please every palate.

## WATERSPORTS

With over 300 days of sunshine each year, and with mid-August temperatures averaging around 90 degrees, activities that involve cool bodies of water are popular in Reno. Whether you prefer a scenic cruise on a mountain lake, paddling along in a kayak or just relaxing on a beach after a swim, options are plentiful around the region.

**Truckee River Whitewater Park:** Unlike most major rivers in the United States, the Truckee River does not flow into an ocean. It begins at the mouth of Lake Tahoe, spills down the mountain to the north and east, fed by tributaries and a series of reservoir lakes - all of which have their own recreational activities - and continues into the desert where it ends at Pyramid Lake. Roughly midway through the 121-mile journey, the Truckee snakes right through downtown Reno/Sparks where a 2004 city redevelopment project harnessed a half-mile of the river to create the Riverwalk and Whitewater Park. Paddlers in kayaks, canoes, rafts and inner tubes can enjoy the Class 2 and 3 rapids, 11 drop-pools and 7,000 tons of smooth flat-top rocks and boulders installed for easy public access, spectators and kayaking maneuvers.

**Lake Tahoe Cruises:** Take the short but breathtakingly scenic drive to Zephyr Cove Resort on Lake Tahoe where you can board the 500-passenger paddle wheeler, the M.S. Dixie II for a cruise around South Lake Tahoe and Emerald Bay. Cruises leave the Zephyr Cover Marina twice daily for 2.5-hour Daytime Scenic Cruises, and once more each evening for the Sierra Sunset Dinner Cruise. Both cruises offer astonishing 360-degree views, fabulous photo opportunities and opportunities to learn about the history and geology of the Lake of the Sky.

**Zephyr Cove Marina:** The mile-long beach at Zephyr Cove provides both relaxation and adventure. Sun-worshippers can rent a beach chair and umbrella and spend the day bobbing in the turquoise waters. The more adventurous can rent powerboats, wave runners or wakeboards, or even soar above the clear blue waters on a parasail.

## **SCENIC DRIVES AND DAY TRIPS**

Nevada has an abundance of wide-open spaces where you can hit the road, and the Reno area is no exception. Situated on the western edge of the Great Basin, Reno/Sparks is nestled in the valley known as Truckee Meadows between the rounded hilltops of the Virginia Range to the southeast, the prominent Peavine Peak to the northwest, and the soaring Sierra Nevada Mountains to the southwest. Here, at the highest point in the area, the 10,785-foot summit of Mt. Rose resembles a beautiful smiling woman, head thrown back to joyfully feel the sun on her face, hair blowing freely in the wind while her graceful arms open wide to welcome visitors. Of course, all of these mountain ranges mean winding roads and beautiful landscapes that make traveling to a day-trip destination half the fun.

**Virginia City:** This Victorian-era town in the shadow of Sun Mountain was once a vibrant boom-town with 25,000 citizens. Sitting atop the famous Comstock Lode, Virginia City became one of the most important industrial cities in the West as the mineral deposits made destitute prospectors into millionaires. At its peak during the “Big Bonanza” of 1873, miners pulled \$300 million out of the mines that lay 3,000 feet beneath the city.

These millions were used to build mansions, hospitals and churches. The entrepreneurs and industrialists who built San Francisco did so with the earnings from the Silver Queen mine. Money from the mines helped finance the U.S. Government during the Civil War to such an extent that historians claim the Union was saved by Comstock silver.

The spoils of the mines were not easily won, however, as 100-degree temperatures and toiling deep in the mineshafts was dangerous work and many lost their lives in pursuit of their treasure. Many believe the spirits of those lost to the mines still wander the streets of Virginia City, and paranormal experts often visit the town today.

Haunted tours, trolley rides, mine tours, cemetery tours, shopping and dining all make the scenic trip up Highway 341 worthwhile.

**Truckee, Calif.:** The area around Truckee has been inhabited since prehistoric times. These nomadic groups were the ancestors of the Washoe, Maidu and Paiute Indians who later traveled through and lived in the mountain meadows and forests in the area. The name Truckee is derived from a friendly Paiute guide who, in 1844, assisted thousands of emigrants making their way west through a narrow mountain pass on the California Trail. To the white men, the guide’s name sounded like “Tro-kay” and they dubbed him Truckee.

In late October 1846, the Donner party – 89 men, women and children – arrived in the area to attempt a crossing of this mountain pass. The heavy winter snows had already begun, and it was impossible for them to continue. They were stuck near the pass and forced to wait out the winter in a tiny cabin with dwindling supplies, and the results disastrous. The pass was later dubbed Donner Pass, but in the years that followed, westward-bound wagons continued to pour over the mountain as emigrants headed to California in search of gold, land and new starts. Later, the

same pass became the route for the first transcontinental railway, and then U.S. 40 - the first transcontinental highway.

Today, the Emigrant Trail Museum helps visitors learn about Truckee area history and the ill-fated Donner Party. The 20-mile museum is a series of 29 interpretive signs along the scenic drive on Old Highway 40 from Donner Lake over the summit to Rainbow Bridge. The signs illustrate history and highlights at each site along the way.

The town of Truckee offers plenty of dining, walking tours, museums and unique shopping for bargain hunters and big spenders alike.

**Lake Tahoe Scenic Drive:** The 149-mile journey along the sweeping switchback drive up Mt. Rose Highway and the loop around Lake Tahoe will show travelers why this largest alpine lake in North America is known as the “Jewel of the Sierra.” Sometimes following the shoreline, sometimes plunging into the alpine forests, the fully paved route never stops providing beautiful views of clear turquoise waters and the surrounding mountains. Along the way, there are plentiful scenic pull-off points, and towns like South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe City, Incline Village and King’s Beach provide additional opportunities for adventure. Multiple lakeside public parks – Emerald Bay and the Tahoe Rim Hiking Trail – offer recreational activities as well. The Tahoe Loop was featured in the 2014 Nevada Rides Motorcycle Guide published by Nevada Magazine. The publication is produced each year and costs \$1. [The 2014 and 2015 editions are available online.](#)