

Nevada

Contributed by Administrator
Monday, 21 July 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 24 July 2008

NEVADA is without doubt the most desolate state in the US, consisting largely of endless tracts of bleak, empty desert. Its flat sagebrush plains are cut intermittently by angular mountain ranges, and the lack of rainfall or fertile soil has ensured its maintenance as untouched wilderness.

Apart from the huge acreages given over to mining and to grazing cattle and sheep, much of Nevada is under the control of the military, who use it to test aircraft and weapons systems, including Stealth fighters and atomic bombs. Dozens of intriguing small communities are scattered around the state, some showing signs of strong Basque influence. Many more are decrepit roadside ghost towns, often little more than a gas-station-cum-general-store, flanked by a saloon and perhaps a brothel - Nevada is the only US state not to have outlawed prostitution, though it is illegal in Las Vegas.

Though millions of people pass through on their way to and from California, there's only one real reason why anyone ever visits Nevada, and that is to gamble: as soon as you cross the state border, you'll be attacked by a 24-hour onslaught of neon signs and gimmicky architecture, each advertising the best odds and biggest jackpots, nowhere more than in the surreal oasis of Las Vegas. Even the smaller and more down-to-earth settlements of Reno and state capital Carson City revolve around the casino trade. At least the casinos' energetic pursuit of passing trade keeps rooms and especially food inexpensive, so the towns make good places to break a long journey - and, with Nevada's relaxed marriage and divorce laws, make or break a relationship.