



Tourism Assessment in Peoria Arizona

About this Report

This report provides a summary of a tourism resource assessment of Peoria, Arizona, conducted in the fall of 2013 by ASU students in two TDM 372 (Tourism Planning) classes under the supervision of Drs Dallen J. Timothy and Gyan Nyaupane. Students were divided into eight groups, and the report is based on the primary and secondary data collected by the students. Students met and interviewed various tourism stakeholders, conducted systematic observations, and analyzed websites and printed literature.

The report is organized in five sections:

- A. A brief introduction of Peoria,
- B. Core attractions that include natural, cultural, sports and events,
- C. Amenities and support services, including meeting space, food and accommodation, and transportation,
- D. Marketing, and
- E. Summary recommendations and opportunities.

Message from the Instructors

The objectives of this report are twofold: to provide students a real-world experience to learn about tourism resource assessment processes as part of the tourism planning process, and to provide a summary report to the City of Peoria, which will potentially help guide the city's future tourism planning endeavors. We wish to thank the City of Peoria and the Peoria Chamber of Commerce for providing this opportunity for our students. We also wish to thank Ms. Kari Silva and Mr. Mark Mauer, who provided a great deal of information, support, and encouragement for our students and helped them connect with key tourism stakeholders.

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Introduction of Peoria

Peoria, Arizona, began in 1886 when a group of farmers from Peoria, Illinois, moved to the area of Arizona that is now Peoria and decided to name their new settlement after the one they left behind. The city lies 13 miles northwest of Phoenix and had a 2010 population of 154,065. It is the ninth largest city in Arizona and is located within Maricopa and Yavapai Counties.

Following its nineteenth-century settlement, Peoria's economy was based almost entirely on agriculture, but during the 1950s, the local economy grew to include commercial development and service industries. Today there are more than 12,400 businesses in the city, including banking and finance, food services, lodging, health-care services, government offices, and energy and resource agencies.

Peoria is a vibrant city that offers many recreational and tourism opportunities for Arizonans, as well as visitors from out of state. The city's economy and population are growing, as are leisure opportunities for day-trippers and overnight visitors.



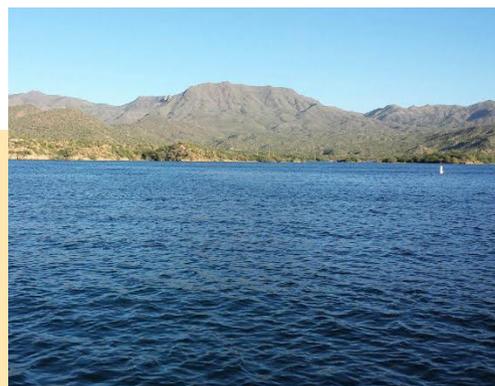
Core Attractions

1. Natural Assets

Like all of Maricopa and Yavapai counties, Peoria is located in the Sonoran Desert, boasting 320 days of sun each year, hot summers and mild winters. The dry desert climate provides many opportunities for outdoor activities all year long. One of the community's most important natural assets is hiking trails. There are several trails and trail systems that are popular among locals, with considerable potential for out of town visitors too. The city's trails provide comfort services and facilities, including parking, restrooms, and drinking fountains. New trail systems are currently being considered by city parks and trails advisors.

Birdwatching is a popular outdoor activity in Peoria, with several local establishments offering information and assistance with birding activities (e.g. guides, equipment rentals). The city is also home to 33 city parks, several recreation centers, and Lake Pleasant Regional Park. These parks provide many diverse activities, including fitness centers, water parks, baseball fields, amphitheaters, fish ponds, skate areas, playgrounds and more. Lake Pleasant Regional Park, which is managed by Maricopa County, is home to a variety of fish and animal species and hosts several special events each year. Water activities are especially popular at the lake, including boating, diving, and fishing. Lake Pleasant is home to the Scorpion Bay Marina and resort with Dillon's Restaurant, sport equipment rentals, boat rentals, and camping.

Peoria has much potential for attracting a nature-oriented tourism market, as the city has many natural attractions to offer. As the urban population grows, so does demand for nature-based tourism activities in and around urban areas. Unlike many other suburban cities in metro Phoenix, Peoria has unique natural assets, including lakes, trails and vast open spaces, which should be sustainably managed to develop Peoria as a nature-based destination for Arizonans and out of state tourists.



2. Cultural Assets

Cultural heritage refers to what humankind inherits from the past and utilizes in the present. Peoria is home to a variety of cultural and heritage assets that are of considerable interest to residents and visitors alike. These include, among other things, the Challenger Space Center Arizona, the Peoria Historical Society, Peoria Center for Performing Arts, and the Arizona Broadway Theatre. Additionally, Peoria is home to three historic sites on the National Park Service's **National Register of Historic Places**. These include Central School, the First Presbyterian Church of Peoria, and the Palo Verde Ruin in Palo Verde Park.

The Challengers Space Center is one of the most prominent cultural attractions in Peoria. Opened in 2000, the Center was established to provide educational experiences for young and old about the mysteries of space, science and the universe. The Center is a non-profit organization that relies heavily upon volunteers to cater to groups, families and individuals.

The West Valley Art Museum aims to provide “local access to a global collection”. Its mission is to share the arts through permanent collections, exhibitions and educational programs. The museum is a leader in preserving and interpreting art in Arizona and reaching out to the community to provide leisure, educational, and touristic experiences.

The Peoria Historical Society offers several different attractions. Its mission is to “discover and preserve the history of the Peoria area for future generations to enjoy”. The Historical society encourages residents of Peoria and Arizonans in general to connect with the city through its interesting and engaging heritage.

At the **Peoria Center for Performing Arts**, Theater Works inspires people to engage with performing arts as spectators and performers. The staff and members of this organization encourage citizens to share their talents through the world of art, and Theater Works offers a variety of theatrical productions.

Another main attraction in Peoria is the **Arizona Broadway Theatre**. The theatre lies at the heart of the cultural community. From unique, live musicals to fresh local food in the theatre, the establishment enriches the life of Peoria through performing arts and entertainment.



3. Sports and Events

Sport tourism is extremely important for Peoria. The Peoria Sports Complex opened in 1994 and consists of the main baseball stadium and twelve practice fields. The complex is one of five facilities to host Arizona Fall League Games and also the home stadium for the San Diego Padres' and the Seattle Mariners' spring training. Both MLB teams hold a lease through 2034. Spring training attracts fans from San Diego and Seattle, and every January Peoria Sports Complex holds a Fan Fest in Seattle and San Diego to promote and sell season tickets for spring training. The Seattle Mariners utilize the Hampton Inn, while the San Diego Padres use the La Quinta Hotel for their accommodations. Spring training supports many local tourism businesses as fans tend to stay close to the sports complex.

In addition to spring training, Peoria Sports Complex hosts other major sport events such as the Cactus League. During the non-spring training season, the complex hosts the Youth Baseball Tournament, also known as Junior Olympics, and the United Soccer League games. The Junior Olympics takes place at the end of July, attracting more than half of the teams from out of states. Both the Junior Olympics and Soccer League games help attract tourists during the off-season and consequently reduce the negative implications of seasonality.

The two most popular non-sport events in Peoria are the 4th of July All-American Festival and the Annual ARR Thanksgiving Day Classic. Both events are held at the Peoria Sport Complex and are capable of attracting residents and tourists from other cities. The Annual ARR Thanksgiving Day Classic is going into its 26th year. Participants in this event include members of the Peoria Diamond Club, Arizona Road Racers and other local residents. Peoria celebrated its 30th 4th of July All-American Festival in 2013.

Peoria hosts a range of exciting activities for all ages, including the Water Zones for kids, the Rock 'N' Roll Zone with the music of Darkness Dear Boy, Japhy's Descent and Banana Gun, the Country Zone or the Reggae Zone, and a Hotdog Eating Contest. The city also hosts smaller events, including the Eight Great Grill Fest, throughout the year to attract locals and visitors alike.



Amenities and Support Services

1. Meeting space

Peoria has many advantages in terms of business meetings and conventions, which are a salient part of the broader MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) tourism market. Major meeting spaces in Peoria include the Ramada Conference Center, the Arizona Broadway Theatre, Rio Vista Recreation Center, Trilogy at Vistancia, the Peoria Sports Complex, Challenger Space Center, Theater Works, and the Peoria Chamber of Commerce.

One of the most popular meeting venues is the Ramada Conference Center. Companies such as Honeywell and American Express use the Ramada's amenities each year to host events that involve business improvement planning and marketing development. Young Brothers, Freedom Plaza Properties, and Immanuel Care Campus are also returning clients that utilize the Arizona Broadway Theatre, Peoria Chamber of Commerce, and Rio Vista Recreation Center for some of their business meetings. Each of these venues in Peoria caters to groups under 500 people. Trilogy at Vistancia, a golf club and resort community, also hosts meetings and conventions for up to 250 people with 4,200 sq. ft. of space available within its three event spaces.

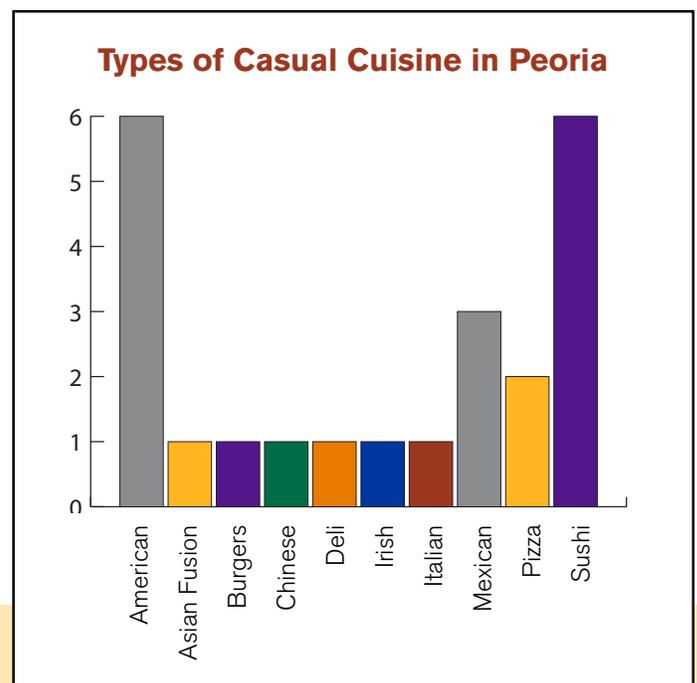
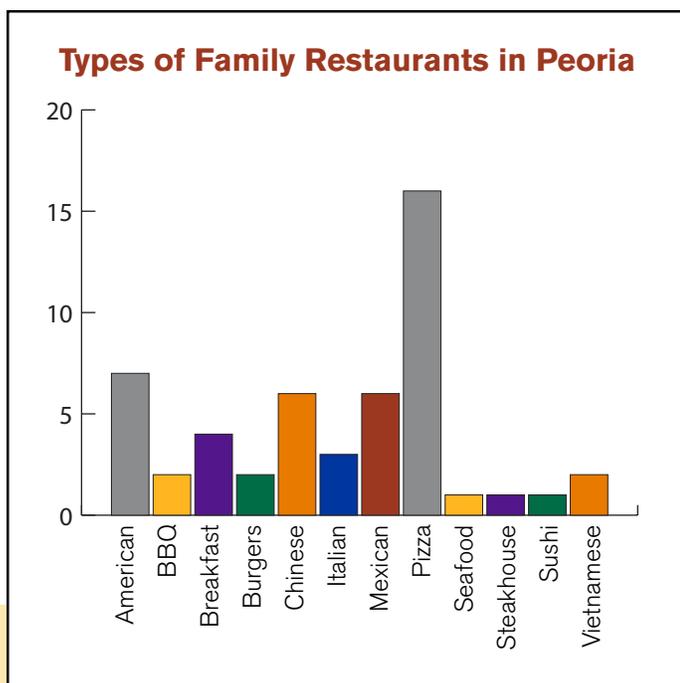
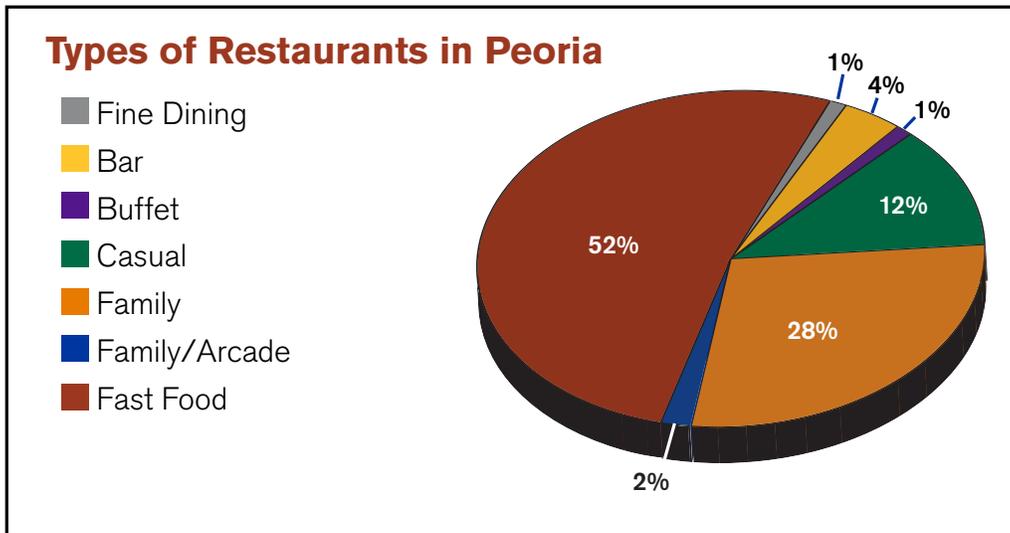
The Peoria Sports Complex is a unique venue, with the entire facility able to hold 18,000 people. Amenities consist of cafeteria/snack bars, onsite catering, sporting/recreation facilities, and wireless internet. Although this space is available for meetings and conventions for over 500 people, it functions only as an outdoor facility.

The Challenger Space Center is another one-of-a-kind venue with over 10 event rooms available, varying from a capacity of 20 people to 258 people. The space center has various amenities including tables, chairs, wireless internet, whiteboards, microphones, speakers, projectors, cafe, vending machines, air conditioning, ADA accessibility, and parking. Theater Works, the management branch of the Center for Performing Arts, has seven different event rooms available with the capacity to host up to 280 people. The Peoria Chamber of Commerce has two meeting rooms available, from eight to 60 people. Amenities include audio/visual components, water/coffee/tea service, air conditioning, free parking, free conference calls, tables, chairs, whiteboards, and wireless internet.



2. Accommodation and food sector

Peoria is a foodie's delight. The city is home to the nationally-acclaimed Fleming's Prime Steak House and Wine Bar, one of the finer dining establishments in the greater Phoenix area. It caters to a higher-end clientele who seek ambience as much as haute cuisine. There are approximately 200 additional eating establishments in Peoria, serving a wide range of casual, fast food, and family fare, with a wide range of ethnic foods.



There are several accommodations options in Peoria. One of the most popular of these is RV parks and campgrounds. Some of these were developed in connection with Lake Pleasant. Others are located in the city proper within easy reach of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities. Peoria also boasts nine hotels offering a variety of services, amenities, and price ranges. Trip Advisor and other national ratings consistently rank Peoria's eating and lodging establishments among the best in the greater Phoenix area.

3. Transportation

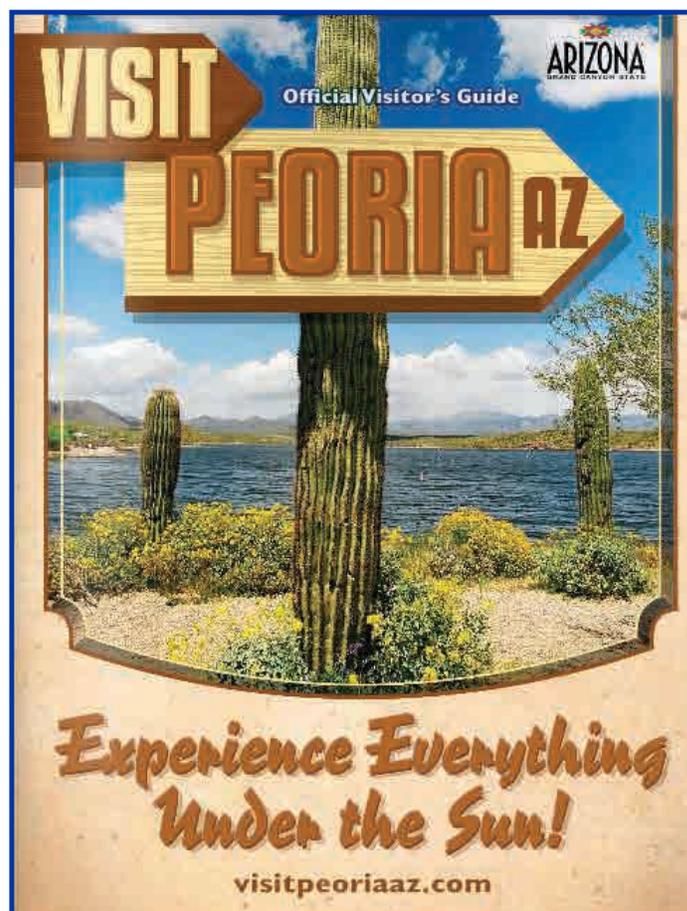
Peoria is easily accessible from anywhere in the United States and the world. From a global and national perspective, Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport, a national hub for US Airways/American Airlines, provides flights from many domestic locations, as well as connections to other parts of the world. Mesa Gateway Airport in the East Valley is also a key hub for Allegiant Air. There are a handful of other nearby airports with commercial and private connections throughout the United States. Peoria is easily accessible from Sky Harbor and Mesa Gateway via shuttle, taxi or car rental. In addition to air access, the city is easy to get to by interstate highway and other roads from throughout Arizona and the Southwest.

The city of Peoria is on the forefront of improving sustainable and accessible forms of transportation to reduce congestion and lessen the carbon footprint. Alternative transportation such as biking and transit travel options are becoming more common and encouraged by the use of trails and expansion of the bicycle lane network for bikers for both recreation and transportation needs. Since 2010, the city of Peoria has added 24.5 miles of new bike lanes to the streets. Peoria has also installed charging stations for electric vehicles to support new vehicle technology.



Marketing

Since Peoria does not have a Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), it is the duty of the chamber of commerce and the city to promote tourism. Two magazines are published to promote and provide information about Peoria: Visit Peoria AZ and Peoria AZ. Visit Peoria AZ, Peoria's official travel guide, showcases attractions, restaurants, and the outdoors. The city's trails, natural assets, and sport tourism opportunities are a primary focus of the magazine. The other magazine, Peoria AZ, published by the Chamber of Commerce, promotes similar attractions and activities. It also focuses on advertisements for local residents, such as businesses for health care and houses for sale. Overall, Peoria promotes itself as a healthy, fun place to live and focuses on community life and small businesses.



Summary Recommendations and Opportunities

Peoria lacks systematic policies for the development of tourism. The chamber of commerce, in concert with the city, should develop policies that will help the city grow its tourism economy in terms of marketing, partnership development, and asset appreciation.

While Peoria is not as populated nor as tourism-oriented as some other Valley cities, it is easily accessible and exudes a suburban or small town atmosphere. This gives visitors the benefit of leaving the fast-paced city to come to a relaxing area for a short period of time. Unlike other parts of the Valley, Peoria offers visitors a refreshing new environment with cultural and natural appeal. Although Peoria needs further development in this regard, the city's natural attractions and potential cultural appeal provide opportunities to become one of the top destinations in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Peoria needs to define what 'tourism' means for Peoria. There are numerous recreational, heritage, and other resources that already provide entertainment for residents and bring people from other parts of the metropolitan area. However, the city ought to consider how 'local tourism' can be operationalized at the municipal level. People from Phoenix filling up with gas, buying an ice cream cone, or dining out in Peoria can be defined as the city's 'tourism industry' and ought to be appreciate and noted as such.

The Peoria Sports Complex is one of Peoria's main tourism assets. The city should use the complex to its fullest capabilities, including hosting concerts and other staged events.

Peoria should look to other suburban cities in North America to see what successes and failures they have experienced in defining and developing tourism. While the greater Phoenix area has a lot of out-of-state tourism, many of the suburbs have difficulty in defining their portion of this and how it manifests within their city boundaries. The experiences of other similar suburban communities could provide valuable information for Peoria as it strives to encourage the growth of tourism.



While there is interest among residents of Peoria in a more bicycle-friendly community, there are, as yet, few opportunities for bicycles as a transport mode. The city should consider developing more bicycle lanes, and encouraging bike use on sidewalks and existing trails.

We recommend that Peoria consider establishing a convention and visitors bureau, a public-private partnership to promote and develop tourism.

There are several major attractions, including Westgate Mall, the Jobing.com Arena and the University of Phoenix Stadium, located near the borders of Peoria. The city of Peoria should aim to capitalize more on these resources through close cross-municipal collaborative efforts with Glendale.

Peoria possesses several nationally-known attractions, including the Peoria Sports Complex, Lake Pleasant, and the Challenger Space Center. Each of these sites can play key roles in attracting diverse group of visitors. However, Peoria should develop a brand image and marketing plan to emphasize the city as a unique regional destination in the long-term.

In addition to economic benefits, tourism has the potential to help build a sense of pride among Peoria's residents, making their city an attractive place to visit by people from across Arizona and the nation. This pride and ownership can be fostered further through the involvement of residents in tourism planning, goal setting and decision making.



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