

Flu season arrives early

By Megan Molteni, Wired

If you've been putting off your flu shot until the season really gets going, wait no longer. It's already here—and it's looking like it's going to be a doozy.

Influenza viruses quietly circulate year-round in the US, but every winter they go big, triggering a seasonal epidemic of sniffles, sweats, and sore throats. And this year it's come earlier than usual, just in time for a potential peak over the holidays.

Normally, infections start to increase around the beginning of January, peak in February, and then come down by the end of March. But according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, the flu is already widespread in 12 states, including California and New York.

Read the whole story

Building a 4-lane highway across the Sierra



A 1938 postcard of the two-lane U.S. 40 over Donner Summit. Photo/Nevada Photo Service/James R. Herz Collection/UNR Library

By Alicia Barber, KUNR

Anyone who frequently drives along Interstate 80 across the Sierra has probably experienced travel delays due to heavy traffic or snow.

Before the construction of the modern interstate, driving over the Sierra between Reno and Sacramento meant dealing with U.S. 40, a winding highway with just one lane heading in each direction. Even modest amounts of snow could make the narrow roadway impassable for days, and one record-breaking storm in 1952 closed the highway for an entire month.

Every winter, Reno's casinos went through a seasonal slump as nervous drivers kept their distance.

Read the whole story

Things to know before feeding pets marijuana

By Chris Kudialis, Las Vegas Sun

The latest trend for treating Fido's pain comes in a package not found at a run-of-the-mill veterinarian's office.

The marijuana boom across the United States and now in Nevada hasn't just been about people. As much as 5 percent of the country's estimated 165 million dogs and cats owned as pets are involved in using some form of the plant, according to estimates by the American Veterinary Medical Association and Los Angeles-based veterinarian Jeff Werber.

And while the psychoactive ingredient THC isn't legal for pets, nor is it recommended by vets, cannabidiol (CBD) hemp supplements help animals deal with pain.

Read the whole story

Burning Man releases details for 2018

By KRXI-TV

Burning Man has released its schedule and price points for tickets to the upcoming 2018 gathering at Black Rock City.

The main sale for tickets priced at \$425 begins March 28, with registration open from March 21 through March 23, according to the organization's website.

Pre-sale registration runs from Jan. 24-26, for the 5,000 tickets priced at \$990 and \$1,200. The 'pre-sale' sales will begin on Jan. 31.

Read the whole story

Casualties of the cashless society – seasonal tips

By Douglas Quenqua, New York Times

As 2018 looms, the dawn of a cashless society feels at hand. Don't believe it? Try throwing a couple \$20 bills on the table next time you're splitting the check. Or better yet, ask anyone not standing behind a cash register to break a \$10 bill.

While the rise of Venmo, Uber, Seamless and Bitcoin et al have made it practically gauche in certain circles to flash a wallet thick with bills, there are many urban workers for whom the shift away from cash represents a serious financial problem. Doormen, elevator operators, manicurists – any employee who relies on small, spontaneous cash tips – are finding themselves left out in the cold by an increasingly cashless world.

"These guys, they don't tip like they used to, because they don't have the cash in their pockets like they used to," said Mark, an elevator operator at an upscale Manhattan co-op, talking about his building's tenants. He asked to use only his first name because his union and employer forbid him from talking to the press.

Read the whole story

Travel industry has sparked a backlash against tourists

By Carter A. Hunt, *The Conversation*

Travel is a major global industry, but in 2017 it attracted unprecedented resentment and retaliation towards tourists. A growing global backlash against tourism extended from tropical rain forests to urban destinations like Rio de Janeiro and Venice.

I have studied tourism's social and environmental consequences along the coastlines of Colombia, Costa Rica and Nicaragua, in the rain forests of Peru and Ecuador, on the islands of Fiji and the Galapagos and across the savannahs of South Africa and Tanzania. My research and that of numerous other scholars spotlights a key fact: More tourism is not always better. Increasing the number of visitors has generated profits for travel companies – particularly the cruise ship industry – but it has not always benefited local communities and environments where tourism occurs.

Fortunately, once people are aware of the often surprising ways in which their trips impact local people and places, it becomes easy to ensure that their travel has more positive consequences for the destinations they visit.

Billions on the move

Born from the accessibility of mass air travel, modern international tourism has been popularized as “holiday-making”

in regions that offer comparative advantages of sand, sun and sea. Travel is often portrayed as a tool for personal growth and tourism as an economic motor for destination countries and cities. There is a tendency to assume that tourism is good for everyone involved.

Today the big bang of tourism drives more than 1.2 billion tourists across international borders each year, generates 9 percent of global GDP and provides one out of every 11 jobs on earth. But many popular places are literally being loved to death. Recent protests in ports of call like Venice and Barcelona against disturbances created by larger and more numerous cruise ships show the unfortunate consequences of emphasizing quantity over quality in tourism.

Unabated tourism development has become a primary driver of social and environmental disruption. Tourism studies, which came of age as a scholarly field in the 1970s, provides much documentation of the many negative social impacts of tourism and resulting resentment that local populations direct towards visitors.

Early tourism scholars even developed an "irridex" to measure this irritation with tourists among local residents. Later, scholars identified stages through which tourist destinations evolve. Antagonism toward tourists typically develops in mature, heavily visited destinations. Protests in heavily visited destinations suggest that traditional tourism has overstayed its welcome.

Resentment toward tourists, attacks on foreign-owned hotels and increases in crime against both tourists and local residents were regularly documented in the 1970s and '80s, at a time when only 2 to 3 million tourists were crossing international borders annually. So it is not surprising that such protests have escalated in scale and frequency as tourism has grown.

In Barcelona, for example, growing resentment of neighborhood gentrification, elevated real estate and rental prices, and erosion of local social networks has led some residents to call tourism the city's biggest problem and label tourists as "terrorists."

Friends without benefits

Residents often become frustrated when the benefits of tourism are not felt locally. Although it can generate foreign exchange, income and employment, there is no guarantee that multinational hotel chains will allocate these benefits equitably among local communities.

On the contrary, when people stay at large resorts or on cruise ships, they make most of their purchases there, leaving local communities little opportunity to benefit from tourist spending. These forms of tourism widen economic and political gaps between haves and have-nots at local destinations.

In recent decades, local residents in destination communities also have found themselves negotiating new cultural boundaries, class dynamics, service industry roles and lifestyle transformations. For example, data show that tourism activity corresponds to increased alcohol, drug and sex abuse as local residents adopt the behaviors of tourists, often leading to parallel upticks in crime, addiction and prostitution.

All-inclusive resorts can also privatize access to important coastal, marine, forest and agricultural resources. And when foreign investment drives up local land values and living costs to international standards, it may put ownership out of reach for local residents. In such situations, even people who depend on tourism will often question its ethics, whether they are rural Nicaraguan residents working in a newly booming resort industry or urban dwellers being priced out of their apartments by the sharing economy.

Cruise lines miss the boat

Jim Damalas, owner of Si Como No ecolodge in Costa Rica, observes that publicly traded corporations do “not fall in love with the country, they fall in love with the numbers.” No form of tourism is more in love with the numbers than cruises. While all forms of tourism have grown in recent decades, the rise in cruise travel is dramatic. For instance, cruise visitors to Belize grew from 34,000 in 1999 to 800,000 in 2005.

Contemporary cruise ships can entertain as many as 5,700 passengers. These boats themselves are the destinations. As they bounce from port to port, they are not beholden to any particular community and provide only the most superficial levels of engagement with local people and places. Their business model emphasizes packing the greatest number of travelers into the greatest number of places in the shortest amount of time.

Research into the industry’s impact has shown that few forms of tourism do less to improve the social, environmental or economic well-being of the places where they occur than cruises. These trips may give passengers a pleasurable experience, but they miss the boat – pun intended – with regard to supporting local communities and environments.

A better model

The United Nations declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. What does this mean for the everyday traveler? Here are a few of the U.N.’s suggestions, which research on tourism supports.

First, as Stephen Colbert has quipped, “There’s nothing American tourists like more than the things they can get at home.” All tourists should make every effort to honor their hosts and respect local conditions. This means being prepared to adapt to local customs and norms, rather than expecting

local conditions to adapt to travelers.

Second, tourism is a market-based activity and works best when consumers reward better performers. Livelihoods, human rights and the fate of endangered species all can be affected by travelers' decisions. In the information age, there is little excuse for travelers being uninformed about where their vacation money goes and who it enriches.

Informed travelers also are better able to distinguish between multinational companies and local entrepreneurs whose businesses provide direct social, environmental, and economic benefits for local residents. Such businesses are in love with the destination, not just the numbers, and are therefore deserving of market reward.

In the long run, the goal should not be just to minimize the impact of travel. Being a responsible traveler means ensuring net positive impacts for local people and environments. With the amount of information available at our fingertips, there has never been more opportunity to do so.

Winter sketching workshop in Hope Valley

Nature artist John "Jack" Muir Laws will join Sorensen's Resort on Jan. 7 to lead a winter sketching workshop.

He will teach techniques for fast sketches, drawings and paintings.

Bring a sketchbook, binoculars, and favorite lightweight drawing materials. No experience necessary.

Laws is the author of easy-to-use “Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada”, “Laws Guide to Drawing Birds,” and “The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling.”

The workshop will be from 9am-1pm. Cost is \$60 for Sorensen’s guests, \$95 for others. For more info or to sign up, email info@sorensensresort.com.

‘Tonight thank God it’s them instead of you’

By Kathryn Reed

“At Christmastime it’s hard, but when you’re having fun

There’s a world outside your window

And it’s a world of dread and fear

Where the only water flowing

Is the bitter sting of tears

And the Christmas bells that ring there are the clanging chimes of doom

Well tonight thank God it’s them instead of you”

The lyrics from “Do they know it’s Christmas” is about Africa, but it might as well be Lake Tahoe.

For some on the South Shore, the material riches of Christmas are only something to dream about.

For Rich Barkley, he woke up this morning outside. That’s where he lives. For Laurie, she was in a chilly trailer, unable to afford any decorations, and without her teen-age daughter who is in foster care.

Thousands of people are in the Lake Tahoe Basin now – vacationing, spending a holiday in one of the most beautiful places in the world. And, yet, for so many who call this place home, it is less than idyllic.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, nearly 554,000 people across the country are homeless. The South Shore is part of that equation.

Barkley and Laurie share having income insecurity. He has a job, but no home. She has a home, but no job. It's a precarious situation for both.

Poverty with a view – Lake Tahoe's longtime moniker – is getting more real for more people almost on a daily basis.



Even though it has been below freezing every night for weeks, Rich Barkley lives in the woods in Stateline. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Finding his way in Lake Tahoe

Barkley was in Lakeside Inn at Stateline on Thursday, trying desperately not to fall asleep. They don't take kindly to vagrants using their establishment as a warm room, so to speak.

"Lakeside doesn't give me crap if I'm not sleeping," he says. It's a place to hang when he has nowhere else to be and the daytime high is hovering at freezing.

While the hotel-casino doesn't have a homeless policy per se, it doesn't tolerate loitering.

"Anyone who makes our guests uncomfortable is asked to leave," Stacy Noyes with Lakeside told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Barkley lives in the woods not far from the casino. His two sleeping bags keep him warm, though there are nights he has sought out public places to give him a little shelter, a little break from the bone-chilling wind.

Snow he can handle. It's the rain, when everything is soaked that makes life difficult. It is impossible to get warm. He insists he doesn't start fires.

Barkley packs his stuff up every day, putting it in a garbage bag and then placing it in a ditch. He doesn't want the little that he has to be stolen or thrown away.

He carries a small backpack with him. Some of what he has is how he is able to eat. He's a harmonica player with a fairly regular gig at Base Camp Pizza in Heavenly Village. Owner Ted Kennedy gives him food credit for his playing.

"We helped him because he's a friend. The Bible calls on us to do that. In fact, Christ said, you guys didn't feed or shelter me when I needed it. The folks said – wait, we never saw you hungry. Christ said when you didn't do those things for the most needy among you, then you didn't do it for me," Kennedy told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Rich is also a hell of a harmonica

player and we love his music.”

Barkley has seven harmonicas; using them to join other musicians who are at the restaurant.

Barkley has been in the area for more than seven years, having come from San Diego. Like so many who call Lake Tahoe home, he saw that lake in pictures and wanted to be here. It’s what keeps him here.

He secured a seasonal job right away at Kirkwood Mountain Resort. At Heavenly Mountain Resort he’s taught skiing, at various hotels he has done maintenance. Today he is working at the snowplay area across from MontBleu.

He doesn’t explain what happened to his vehicle. He doesn’t explain why it’s been so hard to keep a traditional roof over his head. He’s had roommates, even places to himself. He admits he doesn’t like living with other people. Friends let him stay on occasion, or just come in to shower. He does work for them in exchange. The recreation center in South Lake Tahoe is a place to get clean as well.

Barkley won’t use the warm room, saying he can fend for himself.

Hanging out at the South Lake Tahoe Library is common, as it is for others who are homeless. It’s easier to get to compared to the library in Zephyr Cove.

“I actually enjoy not being in a fixed location,” he said.

What Barkley would really like is to save money for an old truck to fill it with tools so he could drive around fixing things for people. An RV would do, too, so then he has that roof.

“My goal is to save money to get my electrician’s license,” he tells *Lake Tahoe News* in between bites of a hot meal at Lakeside.



Health issues keep Laurie from having steady work; begging puts food on the table and heats her trailer. Photo/Kathryn Reed

A life of uncertainty

Laurie is a bit of a fixture at the main post in South Lake Tahoe where she sits on the steps with a sign saying she needs work. On this particular day her quest is to collect \$25 from strangers so she can fill her propane tank. This will last five to seven days.

She' been begging there on and off since 2014.

She doesn't want her last name used because of legal reasons. When her daughter was with her, she was getting welfare checks. While her daughter is still in her life, she isn't living with her. It was illegal to keep the money even though some of the money was spent on the 17-year-old. Laurie is willing to pay the money back, but the payments have to work for her.

Her court date is set for late January.

"I can't be locked up. I wouldn't have this trailer," Laurie tells *Lake Tahoe News* through tears.

While this felony lingers, it's makes getting a job difficult.

Health issues are what led her to unemployment. She said she's been diagnosed with Crohn's disease, which she said is not on the list of maladies to trigger disability.

Calling in sick one too many times forced her to lose her jobs at Jamba Juice and Doc's Cottages.

She doesn't like to beg, but doesn't know what else to do. A regular job is hard to commit to. And right now a bike is her main means of transportation.

"There are some angels out there and some haters," she says of the people she encounters. Laurie says she is the example where drugs, alcohol and mental health issues are not the cause of her problems.

She's had an array of jobs – clerical, retail, cleaning, even topless dancing. Laurie says she wants to work.

A friend may be giving the 59-year-old a car after the first of the year so then she could work for a cleaning agency that said it would hire her.

Her daughter's father has never been part of her life. The South Tahoe High School senior is living with a friend and her mom. She has plans to go to college, with the hopes of going into the medical profession.

"Her happiness is the reason I breath every day," Laurie says of her daughter. They see each other nearly every day.

On Friday they celebrated Christmas with a few gifts exchanged.

Laurie has been in Tahoe for 25 years. Her illness has been

part of her life since her daughter was 5. It's been a struggle ever since, with living conditions for the two of them that have included hotel rooms and a shed.

Sitting in Laurie's trailer near the Y it's cold even with a jacket on. It's never more than 65 degrees inside. Blankets cover the windows. A picture of her daughter is on the table, one of the few items that makes it look like a home rather than an ordinary travel trailer.

Laurie has been at this location since the summer. She does work for the landlord in exchange for the trailer.

She is able to get food at Bread & Broth once a week, and when she's able to transport the goods Christmas Cheer is also a resource.

"Cash goes to things I run out of – propane, soap, laundry detergent," Laurie said. "Asking for help is really hard."

NORAD's Santa tracker began with a typo

By NPR

This Christmas Eve people all over the world will log on to the official Santa Tracker to follow his progress through U.S. military radar. This all started in 1955, with a misprint in a Colorado Springs newspaper and a call to Col. Harry Shoup's secret hotline at the Continental Air Defense Command, now known as NORAD.

Shoup's children, Terri Van Keuren, 65, Rick Shoup, 59, and Pam Farrell, 70, recently visited StoryCorps to talk about how

the tradition began.

Terri remembers her dad had two phones on his desk, including a red one. “Only a four-star general at the Pentagon and my dad had the number,” she says.

The red phone rang one day in December 1955, and Shoup answered it, Pam says. “And then there was a small voice that just asked, ‘Is this Santa Claus?’”

Read the whole story

Road Beat: Kia Forte 5 SX strong on performance



The Kia Forte 5 SX is a small package with big performance. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Kia Forte 5 is a small car even though it is considered a compact, as it has an interior volume of about 100 cubic feet with a cargo capacity of over 23 cubes. Fold down the rear seat and it becomes a mini-ute with 54 cubes of volume. It is a practical design.

However, while it has a great looking, aggressive front end, the aft end and its truncated window line and rear end are not exactly my favorite. But that's the end of the negatives as the rest of the Road Beat is all positive.

Forte 5 rides on a long 106-inch wheelbase while measuring just 171 inches in length. It is a reasonable 70 inches wide and stands 57 inches tall. But as above, it's big inside.

Forte 5's get one of two engines either a 2.0L 164 hp power house which should make for lively performance as it only weighs 3,000 pounds or in the top of the line SX model you get a downsized 1.6L inline four banger, but it has a turbo which takes peak hp to 201 at a low 6,000 rpm and peak torque which hardly peaks as it is flat as a slab of marble from 1,500-4,500 rpm cranking out a stout 195 pounds twist between those rpms which is caused by the engine controller limiting boost but holding peak torque almost throughout the entire rev range. It makes for a very flexible engine being able to twaddle along in top (sixth gear at 1,500 rpm and still pull away smartly without a downshift. In the lower gears hand on to your hat (when the sun roof is open).



Specifications

Engine

2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder 164 hp @ 6,200 rpm

151 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm

1.6L DOHC, 16 valve turbo inline four cylinder 201 hp @ 6,000 rpm

195 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,500-4,500 rpm

Transmissions

2.0L Six-speed torque convert

Transmissions

2.0L

Six-speed torque convert automatic

1.6L turbo

Six-speed manual

Seven-speed dual clutch automated manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 171.3 inches

Width 70.1 inches

Height 57.1 inches

Track (f/r) 60.8/61.3 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches
Fuel capacity 13.2 gallons
Cargo capacity rear seats up/down
23.2/56.4 cubic feet
Weight 2,976 pounds
GVWR 3,990 pounds
Steering lock to lock 2.85 turns
Turning circle 34.8 feet
Wheels 81X7.5 inches
Tires 225/40X18

Performance

0-60 mph 6.23 seconds
50-70 mph 3.00 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 4.32 seconds
Top speed Estimated 140-145 mph
Fuel economy EPA rated 23/29/25
mpg. Expect 28 mpg in rural
country driving and 37 mpg on a
level highway at legal speeds.

Performance is strong with the ability to knock off 0-60 mph in an average of 6.23 seconds. Passing performance is also super quick with a 50-70 mph run taking three seconds flat and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slowing that time to 4.32 seconds. Only a Honda Si, a VW GTI or a couple of other Hyundais and Kias using the same engine are in this class of performance. Everything else is in second place or much farther behind. Even with the turbo, in my first drive I was literally "blown away" by the instantaneous throttle response. This thing boogies.

As to the throttle, in the first three gears it pulls well from just 1,500 rpm, where it can make peak torque because of the turbo boost and by 2,000 rpm it will pull smartly even in sixth gear. Going up the Sierra at over 6,000 feet where the grade is at least 6 percent, it would pull like a freight train is fifth at just 2,500 rpm where it is making about 100

hp. I remember when a 1.6L inline four wouldn't make 100 hp at 6,000 rpm. Ah, the benefits of boost. And did I mention this is one of the smoothest inline fours the Road Beat has encountered?

EPA fuel economy numbers appear to be pretty dismal at 23/29/25 mpg city/highway/combined, but even when putting the pedal to the metal in very aggressive driving I averaged 26 mpg. However, in more normal driving expect about 28-29 mpg and in a 70 mph two-way run on a level highway the Forte 5 SX averaged 36 mpg. More telling was my two-way average from Placerville to Carson City and back where the Forte averaged 37.1 mpg. EPA testing must have been done with a spark plug wire missing or something. Fuel tank is of average capacity at 13.2 gallons. Bigger would be nicer.

Handling is very good and sporty as it has the credentials, MacPherson struts up front and a coupled torsion beam in the rear, a quick electric rack at 2.85 turns lock to lock, big 225/40 series rubber on wide 7.5 x 18 inch good looking alloys and a wide 61 and 62-inch track. And it does handle and when pushed very hard in the twisties, understeer seemed to want to turn into oversteer. Most drivers will never get that far, but its grip is strong, with a crisp turn-in and a flat attitude. On and off-center feel is also very good. In other words, it is most fun when the road bends. I would call it playful.

The ride is extremely smooth and it is quiet. The only time tire noise becomes even apparent is on coarse roads, but smooth asphalt will leave you thinking is a whisper. While most bumps don't get through the insulation of the suspension, hard jolts can be heard. That's about it in the ride department. The engine spins a little fast, 3,000 rpm at 70 mph in top gear. The seven speed DCT would spin about 2,400 rpm and probably return a couple more mpg and actually improve its already stellar performance.

Safety includes most of the acronyms including an excellent

back up camera, but no blind spot detection, something I didn't miss as a good driver prides himself in situational awareness. Headlights are HID and very good on low and high beam.

Inside is a two-tone leather interior done in a dark charcoal (Kia calls it black) with some bordering orange trim. Snazzy and comfortable, with full power adjustability for the driver and heating and ventilation for both driver and shotgun. Instrumentation is complete with a center info center and a big tach and speedo flanking left and right. Perfect. The rest of the interior is all first rate materials, with a few surprises like the "D" shaped leather wrapped steering wheel and leather shifter. Nice.

On top of the center stack is a big seven-inch color screen for NAV and the sound system and they are intuitive and very easy to use. BMW take a lesson. Great sounding radio.

Rear seating is a 60/40 split and according to a rear seat passenger quite comfortable.

As to the Forte 5's utility re-read the first two paragraphs, for just 171 inches it can haul the mail and then some.

So what is the damage control for such an exceedingly fun ride probably made more fun by the addition of the DCT? How about \$26,000, but if you want the obligatory floor mats add \$125 and then the delivery charge of \$895 from its Pesqueria, Mexico, assembly plant and if that doesn't surprise, 82 percent of the content is from Mexico, including the engine. The tranny comes from Japan.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.