The Monte Vista Crane Festival (MVCF) is in its 39th year and is the oldest birding festival in Colorado. The festival usually takes place on the second weekend in March, and has developed into a one-of-a-kind experience enjoyed by both locals and tourists alike. The festival offers visitors the opportunity to experience and learn about Colorado’s beautiful San Luis Valley, while witnessing the natural spectacle of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, ducks, and geese flying against a backdrop of towering, snow-covered mountains.

By encouraging people to come and experience this spectacular wildlife event and learn more about the cranes and the landscape and resources that support them, we can help preserve not only the natural resources critical to the cranes’ survival, but also our local economies.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

While many local businesses are aware of the economic impact of other wildlife-based activities like hunting and fishing, the economic potential of birders is much less well known. However, in the 2020 study, “The Economic Impact of the Spring Crane Migration on the San Luis Valley of Colorado” by Max Ciaglo, Kyle Balint, and Jenny Nehring, the authors show that “the sandhill crane migration is a significant economic driver for the region, contributing nearly $3.5 million to the local economy, including $118,000 in local taxes. These findings show that the livelihoods of the communities in the SLV are uniquely intertwined with this single species and the habitat that supports them.”

Tourism in and around the annual spring festival is a massively untapped resource for the local economies of the San Luis Valley, and something that any local business can and should take advantage of. The economic impact survey found that 16,500 people visited the Valley to see cranes over a 30 day period during spring migration. This business toolkit is designed to give local business owners some tips and suggestions for ways to capitalize on the influx of visitors during a time of the year when the majority of other tourism is not occurring.
6 TIPS FOR CAPITALIZING ON CRANE-BASED TOURISM

1. OPEN YOUR DOORS

It’s true, the spring is definitely a “shoulder season” here in the San Luis Valley, but that’s all the more reason to open your doors to the visitors who brave the cold and wind for a chance to take in the spectacular sites and sounds of the Sandhill Cranes. While the economic potential of Crane Festival visitors is significant, you cannot take advantage of any of it if you are closed during the peak of the migration in March and April.

2. BE PREPARED

If you are open during the Crane Festival, be prepared for visitors—lots of them! This means potentially staffing up for the weeks before, after and during the festival itself, making sure you have enough supplies or product to satisfy an increased demand, and even creating promotions designed to appeal to visitors who are in town for this special event. Plan your business hours around crane viewing. Many visitors get up early to watch the sunrise and cranes departing from their overnight roost. This means they need early morning amenities like coffee and breakfast so capturing their business may mean you open earlier than usual during the festival weekend. Similarly, staying open later than usual may be profitable to capture the business of 250 people leaving the Vali 3 theater after an evening festival event.

3. JOIN YOUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The best way for us to let visitors know where to stay, eat and shop in the San Luis Valley is by linking to the business listings from our local chambers of commerce. There are lots of benefits to becoming a chamber member, and all types of businesses can get involved.

mvcranefest.org
GET FOUND
Can visitors find your business or service? Do you have good signage, a working phone number, website or Facebook page with your location and hours of operation clearly stated?

Create a ‘Google My Business’ Listing - ‘Google My Business’ is a platform allowing you to control your business listing in Google. Setting your business up with a ‘Google My Business’ listing will give your business a public identity and presence on Google Search and Google Maps. You can add contact information, business hours, showcase pictures, and interact directly with potential customers. Setting up a ‘Google My Business’ listing is free and only takes about 15 minutes; simply fill out the form on Google My Business. Once you have completed this form, Google will send you a postcard containing a verification code, on receiving your postcard, log back into your Google account and enter the details shown on the postcard. Google provides information about their ‘My Business’ service on this short video.

GET INVOLVED
Think of ways to reach out to Crane Festival visitors and make them feel welcomed. This could be as simple as putting out a “Welcome Crane Viewers” sign, offering a Crane Festival discount or simply creating a crane-themed window display. In the next section, we provide a wealth of ideas for targeting festival visitors and encouraging them to patronize our local businesses.

BECOME A FESTIVAL SPONSOR
Take advantage of the advertisement opportunities and promotional perks of sponsoring the Crane Festival. Learn more at www.mvcranefest.org/sponsor/

mvcranefest.org
CRANE-RELATED MARKETING IDEAS BY SECTOR

Restaurants
- “Crane Gate” box lunches for people to take food go watch cranes sitting on their tail gates
- Après crane watching specials—drinks or dinner specials for those out enjoying the cranes at sunset
- "Date with the Cranes" date night/family picnic dinners to-go
- Crane-themed special events—dinners, speakers, art shows, etc.
- “Early bird” specials for coffee shops and restaurants that open early so people can grab and go watch the cranes

Hotels
- Festival discounts
- Seasonal crane-viewing discounts for anyone interested in staying before or after the festival (late February to early April), or during the fall migration season (late September to early November)
- Provide crane viewing maps and updates when guests check in
- Crane-themed special events—dinners, speakers, art shows, etc.

Retail stores
- Crane/bird themed window displays and signage
- Crane/bird themed merchandise
- Discounts for festival-goers (show us your crane photo and get 10% off, etc.)
- Crane viewing kits/essential supplies (warm clothes, snacks, etc.)

Services
- Festival/crane season discounts

Agriculture
- Private tours, blinds, etc. for more “intimate” crane experiences

mvcranefest.org
HOW TO GET A SPECIAL EVENT OR OFFER LISTED ON OUR CALENDAR/WEBSITE

If your business is hosting a special event or offer that you’d like us to share or list on our calendar/website, send us an email at mvcranefest@gmail.com. The Monte Vista Crane Festival reserves the right to decide if an event or offer meets our criteria for posting.

MAPS AND BROCHURES

If you would like a stack of crane viewing maps or Monte Vista Crane Festival information packets to display at your business, please contact us at mvcranefest@gmail.com. Or you can download and print them yourself from our website: https://mvcranefest.org/plan-your-visit/.

SOCIAL MEDIA

If you have a crane-festival related event or promotion, please tag us on IG (@mvcranefest) or FB (@MVCraneFest) and we will share these events on our feed and account where suitable.