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Bob Sehlinger & Seth Kubersky

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INTRODUCTION

ON *a* PLANE *to* LAS VEGAS

I NEVER WANTED TO GO TO LAS VEGAS. I'm not much of a gambler, and I've always thought of Las Vegas as a city dedicated to separating folks from their money. As it happens, however, I have some involvement with industries that hold conventions and trade shows there. For some years I was able to persuade others to go in my place. Eventually, of course, it came my turn to go, and I found myself aboard a Delta jumbo jet on my first trip to Las Vegas.

Listening to the banter of those around me, I became aware that my fellow passengers were divided into two distinct camps. Some thought themselves on a nonstop flight to paradise and couldn't have been happier. Too excited to remain seated, they cavorted up and down the aisles, clapping one another on the back. The other passengers, by contrast, grouched and grumbled, lamenting their bad luck and cursing those who had made a trip to such a place necessary.

To my surprise, I had a great time. What's more, I've been back many times and never had a bad experience. The people are friendly, the food is good, and the hotels are among the nicest in the country. It's an easy town to find your way around, and even if you don't gamble there's plenty to do—24 hours a day, if you're so inclined.

It's hard to say why Las Vegas is so polarizing, even among folks who've never been there. Among our research team, we've had people willing to ship their kids off to boarding school for a chance to go, while others have begged off to undergo root canal surgery or prune their begonias. A third group wanted to go very badly but maintained a veneer of total indifference, reminding me of people who own five TVs yet profess never to watch television.

What I discovered during my initial visits is that nongamblers don't know very much about Las Vegas. Many people can't see beyond the gambling, can't see that there could possibly be anything of value in Las Vegas for nongamblers or those only marginally interested in gambling.

When you ask these people to describe their ideal vacation, they wax eloquent about lazy days relaxing in the sun, playing golf, enjoying the luxury of resort hotels, eating in fine restaurants, sightseeing, shopping, and going to the theater. Outdoorsy types speak no less enthusiastically about fishing, boating, hiking, and, in winter, skiing. As it happens, Las Vegas offers all of this. Gambling is just the tip of the iceberg in Vegas—but it's all many people can see.

Las Vegas is, of course, about gambling, but there's so much more. Vegas has sunny, mild weather two-thirds of the year; some of the finest hotels and restaurants in the world; the most diversified celebrity and production-show entertainment to be found; unique shopping; internationally renowned golf courses; and numerous attractions. For the outdoors enthusiast, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest offer some of the most beautiful wilderness in North America.

This guide is designed not only for those who *want* to go to Las Vegas but also for those who *have* to go to Las Vegas. Whether you're a recreational gambler, an enthusiastic vacationer, or a convention attendee, we'll show you ways to have more fun, make the most of your time, and spend less money. If you are one of the skeptics, unwilling companions of gamblers, business travelers, or people who think they would rather be someplace else, we will help you discover the seven-eighths of the Las Vegas iceberg that is hidden.

—Bob Sehlinger

PANDEMIC HANGOVERS: **A WORD *About* LAS VEGAS** ***in* THE AGE *of* CORONAVIRUS**

THE ENTIRE UNOFFICIAL GUIDES TEAM hopes that you and your loved ones have remained healthy and safe during the pandemic. Our thoughts are with the victims of the virus, as well as all the brave first responders and essential workers who have sustained our society.

This edition of the *Unofficial Guide to Las Vegas* is dedicated to the frontline employees of the city's tourism and hospitality industry, who have risked their personal health to help inject a little fun back into visitors' lives.

Las Vegas tourism has bounced back from the pandemic quicker than many other vacation destinations. While visitors to the region fell from a record high of 42.5 million in 2019 down to 19 million in 2020, they rebounded to 32.2 million in 2021, and 2022's numbers returned nearly to pre-pandemic levels.

unofficial TIP

Exposure to COVID-19 is an inherent risk in any public space—only you can determine whether it's a risk worth taking. Consult your physician about your health *before* planning your vacation.

At press time, face masks are optional in all indoor and outdoor locations. Guests who are not fully vaccinated are still encouraged to wear masks indoors, but no proof of status is required. Guests are not required to pass a temperature check or provide proof of vaccination when visiting, and although visitors are asked to practice social distancing and frequently wash and sanitize their hands, neither suggestion is officially enforced.



SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING IMAGINARY, SOMETHING TRUE

FRIENDS FREQUENTLY ASK US where they can get a taste of “the old Las Vegas.” Unfortunately, that concept exists primarily as an artifact. Though a few old gourmet rooms, showrooms, and lounges have survived, the Las Vegas of loss-leader buffets, cut-rate hotel rooms, cheap drinks, endless shrimp cocktails, and cramped, smoky casinos is a thing of the past, particularly post-pandemic. Gone also are the hotels’ dependence on gambling as their main revenue source. Luxury guest rooms, expensive entertainment, meals for two topping \$250, world-class spas, and immense, open casinos that are tourist attractions unto themselves are the new normal. Today, for many hotels, nongaming revenue sources make up 60% or more of total income.

On the Strip at present, all but roughly a dozen hotels target the luxury market. Middle-market properties have mostly been brought up to luxury standards by new owners, if not demolished. Every place is now a “boutique” hotel—never mind that some of these properties have hundreds of rooms.

When we first began covering Las Vegas, the casinos were predominantly independent. Each had a distinct identity, free of the corporate veneer that blankets Las Vegas today. Personality—or the lack thereof—was defining. As with cakes at a church fundraiser, what was on the inside was what mattered. Now it’s the icing that attracts attention, or, expressed differently, the icon in the front yard: the Statue of Liberty, an Egyptian pyramid, the Eiffel Tower, canals with singing gondoliers . . . you choose. Inside, the product is largely the same.

Four casino corporations now run most of Las Vegas; on the Strip it’s worse. Two companies—**Caesars Entertainment (CET)** and **MGM Resorts International (MRI)**—own or manage every Strip casino except the Tropicana, Venetian, Palazzo, Strat, Sahara, Casino Royale, and the Wynn resorts—19 out of 28 casinos. Standards for restaurants, hotel rooms, entertainment, theme, and just about everything else offer all the predictability of an upscale chain hotel. The maverick casinos and their rough-and-tumble owners are all but gone, and with them the gritty, boom-or-bust soul of this gambling town.

Las Vegas Strip Area



ARRIVING *and* GETTING ORIENTED

IF YOU DRIVE, you'll have to travel through the desert to reach Las Vegas. Make sure your car is in good shape. Check your spare tire and toss a couple of gallons of water in the trunk, just in case. Once en route, pay attention to your fuel and temperature gauges.

Virtually all commercial air traffic into Las Vegas uses **Harry Reid International Airport** (renamed from McCarran International in 2021). At Harry Reid, a well-designed facility with good, clear signs, you'll have no problem finding your way from the gate to the baggage-claim area, although it's often a long walk. Fast baggage handling is not the airport's strongest suit, so you might have a bit of a wait.

If you won't be renting a car, you have several options for getting from the airport to your hotel.

SHUTTLE SERVICES Two companies provide service at Harry Reid: **Bell Trans** (airportshuttlelasvegas.com) and **SuperShuttle** (shuttlelasvegas.com). The cost is about \$7.50–\$15 one-way and \$13–\$18 round-trip. Sedans and limousines cost considerably more: about \$70–\$150 one-way. The shuttle counters are located just outside the baggage-claim area in **Terminal 1**. At **Terminal 3**, shuttles are located outside on Level Zero.

TAXI OPERATORS

- | | |
|--|--|
| • A CAB TAXI ☎ 702-369-5686 | • NELLIS CAB CO. ☎ 702-248-1111 |
| • DELUXE CAB ☎ 702-568-7700 | • WESTERN CAB ☎ 702-736-8000 |
| • LUCKY CAB ☎ 702-477-7555 | • WHITTLESEA ☎ 702-551-5151 |
| • YELLOW CHECKER STAR TRANSPORTATION ☎ 702-873-2000 | |

TAXIS In Las Vegas taxi fares are regulated, and they cost the same no matter how many passengers are traveling (five maximum). Cabs charge a base fee of \$3.30 and \$1.63 per 0.6 mile thereafter. If a taxi ride originates at Harry Reid, an additional airport surcharge of \$1.80 per trip is added. Cab fare to the Strip is \$17–\$32 one-way, plus tip. One-way taxi fares to Downtown run about \$37–\$44. For more-accurate point-to-point fare estimates, see taxi-calculator.com.

Before you hail a cab, make sure that the company takes credit cards. If you plan to take a taxi from the airport, it's a good idea to check out the best route on **Waze** (waze.com) or **Google Maps** (maps.google.com). Some drivers will take a circuitous route to bump up the fare, but be mindful that traffic

unofficial TIP

For a stress-free arrival at the airport, good availability of rental cars, and a quick hotel check-in, try to arrive Monday afternoon–Thursday morning (Tuesday and Wednesday are best).

unofficial TIP

The most common route used to pad taxi fares to the Strip or Downtown is via the airport tunnel to I-215 and I-15.

LAS VEGAS *as a* FAMILY DESTINATION

LAS VEGAS IS PREDOMINANTLY AN ADULT TOURIST DESTINATION. Casinos are very particular about who's occupying their beds, and the least preferred customers of all are families with children. Kids can't gamble, they get on the nerves of adults who come here to avoid them, and they cut into Mom and Dad's casino time.

If, however, you don't mind being persona non grata, Las Vegas is a great place for a family vacation. Food and lodging are a (mostly) good value, and there are an extraordinary number of things that your family can enjoy together. Gambling aside, Las Vegas compares favorably with virtually every other family tourist destination—the rub, of course, is that gambling in Las Vegas is pretty hard to ignore.

Note: Persons under age 21 are not allowed to gamble, nor are they permitted to accompany you while *you* gamble. On the Strip and Downtown, your options for keeping your kids occupied are limited:

1. You can simply let your kids hang out. In this scenario, they'll likely swim a little, watch some TV, and eat as much as their (or your) funds allow.
2. If your children are a mature age 10 or older, you can turn them loose at the **Adventuredome** at Circus Circus. They'll probably get restless after an hour or two, though.
3. You can hire a babysitter to come to your hotel room.
4. You can forgo the casino and do stuff with your kids. Swimming and eating (as always) will figure prominently into the plan, as will excursions to places that have engaged the children's curiosity. You can bet that your kids will want to go to the Adventuredome at Circus Circus. The exploding volcano at the **Mirage** was a big hit but may vanish before your visit. **New York-New York** has a roller coaster, the **Strat Tower** features sports thrill rides, and **The Forum Shops** offer a free animatronic show. If you have two children and do a fraction of this stuff in one day, you'll spend in the neighborhood of \$80–\$250 for the four of you, not counting your meals and transportation.

If you have a car, however, there are lots of great, inexpensive places to go—enough to keep you busy for days. We recommend **Red Rock Canyon** and **Hoover Dam** for sure. On the way to Hoover Dam, you can stop for a tour of the **Ethel M Chocolate Factory** (see page 450 for details).

A great day excursion (during the spring and fall) is a guided raft trip through the **Black Canyon** of the Colorado River. This can easily be combined with a visit to Hoover Dam. Trips to **Valley of Fire State Park** (driving, biking, hiking) are also recommended during the spring and fall. See Part Six for more information.

The Las Vegas area has a number of real museums and museum-tourist attractions. Adjacent to the Smith Center Downtown, the

unofficial TIP

Guided tours advertised in the local visitor magazines require guests to be age 18 or older to tour unaccompanied by a parent or guardian.

PART ONE

ACCOMMODATIONS *and* CASINOS

WHERE to STAY: *Basic Choices*

LAS VEGAS HAS AN ASTOUNDING INVENTORY of approximately 150,000 hotel rooms. (Washington, D.C., by way of contrast, has about 32,000.) Occupancy rates exceed 81% on weekends and average 67% for the whole week. During the Great Recession, a large number of unsold time-shares and condos were added to the city's hotel inventory; for the most part, these remain, along with a nearly equal number of units available for rent through their owners. **Airbnb** (airbnb.com) is also active in Las Vegas, offering accommodations in private homes. If being near (as opposed to right on) the Strip works for you, there are some great bargains to be had.

Occupancy rates slipped during the pandemic. In 2022, Las Vegas began to see the reemergence of meetings, conventions, and trade show business. If nothing else calamitous befalls the city, occupancy rates should bounce back up to prepandemic levels of around 91% on weekends and an average of 85% for the whole week. (For comparison, the national average is less than 50% but also continues to trend up.)

THE LAS VEGAS STRIP AND DOWNTOWN

FROM A VISITOR'S PERSPECTIVE, Las Vegas is more or less a small town that's fairly easy to navigate. Most major hotels and casinos are in two areas: **Downtown** or close to the **Strip (Las Vegas Boulevard)**.

While the Downtown hotels and casinos are generally older and smaller than those on the Strip, a number of large and elegant hotels are located here, too, including **Circa**, a new hotel on par with the best Strip properties. What mainly differentiates Downtown is its incredible concentration of casinos and hotels in a relatively small area. Along **Fremont Street**, Downtown's main thoroughfare, the casinos present a continuous, dazzling galaxy of neon and twinkling lights for more than four city blocks. Collectively known as **Glitter Gulch**, these dozen-plus gambling emporiums stand cheek-by-jowl in colorful

services, dry cleaning, and the like, in addition to 24/7 gambling and dining, entertainment, and shopping.

If you spill a Cosmo on your khakis, however, think twice before ponying up for your hotel's laundry service—you'll pay by the piece (that is, through the nose). Instead, take advantage of a local wash-and-fold service. The nice people at **Wizard of Suds** (4275 Arville St.; ☎ 702-873-1453, facebook.com/laundromatinlasvegas) will tend to your dirties for cheap. At \$1.49 per pound (10-pound minimum), with quick turnaround if you drop off before noon, it can't be beat.

If you plan to tour mostly on foot, you're attending a convention, or you're a night owl who wants to immerse yourself in the Vegas experience, a large hotel in a good location has advantages. In addition to having the aforementioned amenities close at hand, you can find something fun to do at any hour. Many showrooms offer late-night shows, and quite a few hotels (**Gold Coast, The Orleans, Red Rock, Sam's Town, Santa Fe Station South Point, Suncoast, and Sunset Station**) have late-night bowling. **Brooklyn Bowl** at **The Linq**, the only bowling complex on the Strip, is open nightly at 5 p.m.; closing times vary; ages 21 and older only after 8 p.m. (3545 Las Vegas Blvd. S.; ☎ 702-862-2695, brooklynbowl.com/las-vegas).

WHAT'S *in an* ADDRESS?

DOWNTOWN: ACTION WITHIN REACH

THE HEART OF THE DOWNTOWN casino area is **Glitter Gulch**, or **Fremont Street** between Fourth Street (on the east) and Main Street (on the west). Hotel-casinos situated along this four-block stretch include the **Plaza Hotel, Golden Gate, Binion's Gambling Hall, Circa, Golden Nugget, Fremont, Four Queens, and The D Las Vegas**. Parallel to Fremont and one block north is **Ogden Avenue**, where the **California** and **Downtown Grand** are located; **Main Street Station** is on the corner of Main Street and Ogden.

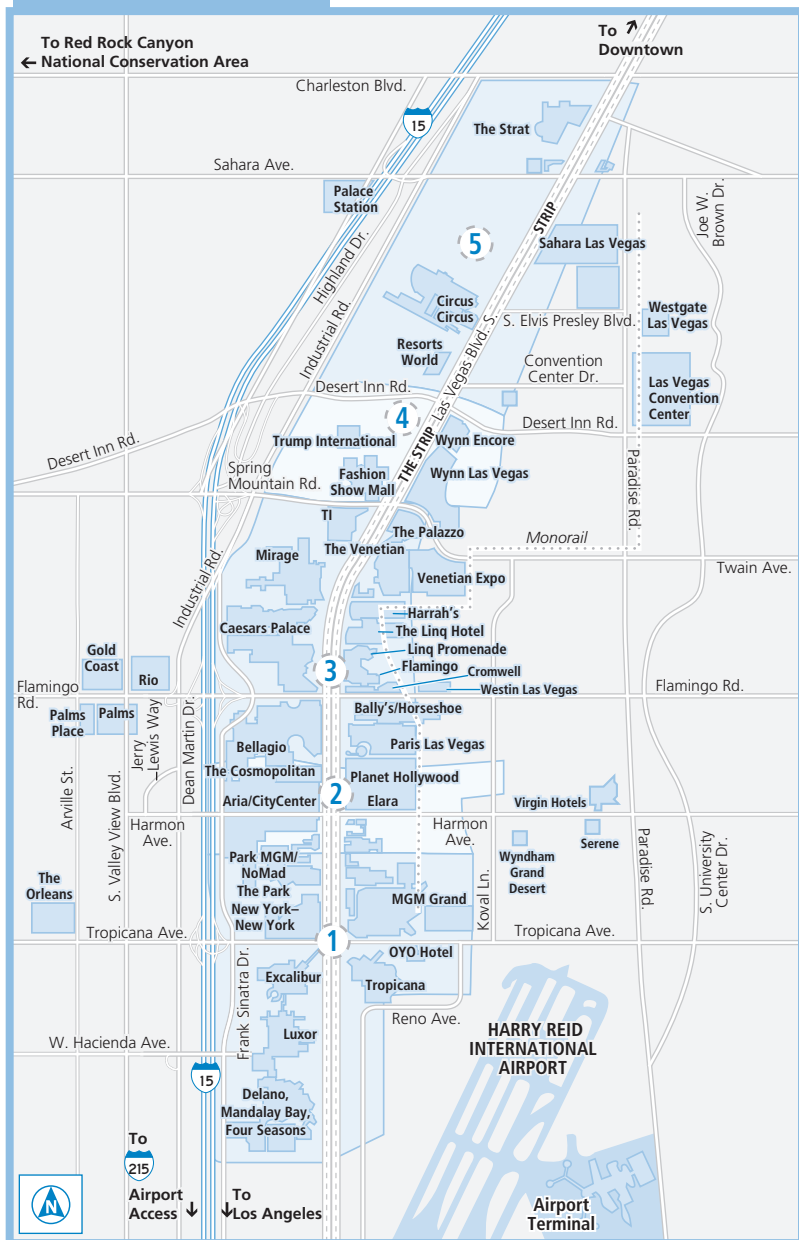
Downtown hotel-casinos are centrally positioned and convenient to the action, with the exception of the **El Cortez**, which sits three blocks to the east. When you stay Downtown, all of the action is within a 5-minute walk. By comparison, if you stay on the Strip, it takes longer to walk from the entrance of Caesars Palace to the entrance of the Mirage, next door, than to cover the whole four blocks of the casino center Downtown.

THE STRIP: LOCATION IS KEY

WHILE LOCATION ISN'T a major concern when you're choosing a hotel Downtown, it is of *paramount* importance when you're selecting a hotel on the Strip.

We once received a flier from a casino proclaiming that it was "**right on the Strip.**" The assertion was supported with a photo showing the

Hotel Clusters



COMMUTING TIMES IN MINUTES					
FROM	TO LAS VEGAS STRIP	TO CONVENTION CENTER	TO DOWNTOWN	TO HARRY REID AIRPORT	TO UNLV THOMAS & MACK CENTER
Alexis Park Resort	5/cab	8/cab	15/cab	5/cab	6/cab
Aliante Casino + Hotel + Spa	35/cab	40/cab	25/cab	47/cab	49/cab
Aria Campus (CityCenter)	on Strip	12/cab	14/cab	15/cab	11/cab
Arizona Charlie's Boulder	12/cab	18/cab	12/cab	20/cab	22/cab
Arizona Charlie's Decatur	19/cab	18/cab	12/cab	21/cab	20/cab
Artisan Hotel Boutique	5/walk	5/cab	14/cab	14/cab	14/cab
Bally's/Horseshoe	on Strip	8/mono	15/cab	7/cab	7/cab
Bellagio	on Strip	14/cab	15/cab	11/cab	12/cab
Binion's	14/cab	15/cab	Downtown	19/cab	19/cab
Boulder Station	19/cab	18/cab	12/cab	21/cab	20/cab
Caesars Palace	on Strip	12/cab	12/cab	10/cab	10/cab
California Hotel & Casino	13/cab	15/cab	Downtown	19/cab	19/cab
Cannery Casino & Hotel	23/cab	26/cab	20/cab	30/cab	30/cab
Casino Royale	on Strip	7/mono	14/cab	10/cab	10/cab
Circa Resort & Casino	13/cab	14/cab	Downtown	18/cab	18/cab
Circus Circus	on Strip	5/cab	13/cab	14/cab	13/cab
The Cosmopolitan	on Strip	12/cab	14/cab	15/cab	11/cab
Courtyard Convention Center	4/cab	5/walk	15/cab	9/cab	8/cab
Courtyard Las Vegas South	4/cab	14/cab	15/cab	8/cab	12/cab
The Cromwell	on Strip	7/mono	15/cab	8/cab	9/cab
Delano Las Vegas	on Strip	14/cab	15/cab	7/cab	13/cab
The D Las Vegas	14/cab	15/cab	Downtown	17/cab	17/cab
Downtown Grand	14/cab	15/cab	4/walk	18/cab	17/cab
Eastside Cannery	20/cab	25/cab	30/cab	19/cab	18/cab
El Cortez	11/cab	15/cab	6/walk	16/cab	17/cab
El Cortez Cabana Suites	11/cab	15/cab	7/walk	16/cab	17/cab
Elara by Hilton Grand Vacations	on Strip	8/cab	15/cab	7/cab	8/cab
Embassy Suites Convention Ctr.	6/cab	10/walk	15/cab	9/cab	7/cab
Embassy Suites Las Vegas	4/cab	6/cab	15/cab	6/cab	6/cab
Excalibur	on Strip	13/cab	14/cab	7/cab	8/cab
Flamingo	on Strip	7/mono	13/cab	8/cab	8/cab
Four Queens	15/cab	15/cab	Downtown	19/cab	17/cab
Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas	on Strip	14/cab	15/cab	7/cab	13/cab
Fremont Hotel & Casino	15/cab	15/cab	Downtown	19/cab	17/cab
Gold Coast	4/cab	13/cab	14/cab	10/cab	10/cab
Golden Gate	13/cab	14/cab	Downtown	18/cab	18/cab
Golden Nugget	14/cab	15/cab	Downtown	18/cab	19/cab
Green Valley Ranch Resort, Spa, and Casino	15/cab	18/cab	16/cab	15/cab	14/cab
Hampton Inn Tropicana	10/walk	6/cab	9/cab	10/cab	6/cab
Harrah's	on Strip	5/mono	15/cab	10/cab	10/cab

“enhance the guest experience.” The outcry has been immediate and deafening, but so far it’s fallen on deaf ears. See the chart on the previous page for a listing of parking fees for Strip hotels.

Free self-parking can still be found on the Strip, and valet parking is also free at the following properties, except for a tip: **The Strat, Sahara Las Vegas, Circus Circus, The Venetian/The Palazzo, Trump International, TI, Casino Royale, and Tropicana** (fees are charged for events at Allegiant Stadium).

A good way to beat parking fees is to park at a nearby shopping venue with free valet parking and walk to your final destination. These include **The Shops at Crystals** and **Fashion Show Mall** (also free parking in surface lots and garage).

Free parking within easy walking distance of the Strip is available at **OYO** (formerly **Hooters**), **Tuscany**, and **Westin Las Vegas**. Free parking is also available at the following properties, which are more distant to the Strip but also provide free shuttle service: **Gold Coast, JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa (Rampart Casino), M Resort, The Orleans, Sam’s Town, and Silverton Casino**. **Rio** and **Palms** offer free parking but no shuttle.

An interesting development in regard to parking fees is that Las Vegas visitors are gravitating to **Airbnb** to avoid them. If this trend grows, hotels with parking fees might have to rethink their policy.

ROOM RESERVATIONS:

Getting a Good Room, Getting a Good Deal

FOR DECADES, LAS VEGAS had the highest hotel-room-occupancy rates in the United States, averaging 93% on weekends and 85.2% during the week. Except for hotels that cater to the luxury market, the addition of a glut of new rooms to the city’s room inventory has created a buyer’s market. Some of the newly available rooms come from condo projects that were originally intended to be private residences.

THE WACKY WORLD OF LAS VEGAS HOTEL RESERVATIONS

THOUGH THERE ARE ALMOST 150,000 hotel rooms in Las Vegas, getting one is not always a simple proposition. In the large hotel-casinos, there are often five or more separate departments that have responsibility for room allocation and sales. Of the total number of rooms in any given hotel, a number are at the disposal of the casino; some are administered by central reservations or the front desk; some are allocated to independent wholesalers for group and individual travel packages; others are blocked for special events (fights, Super Bowl weekend, and the like); and still others are at the disposal of the sales and marketing department for

in the middle of the night about your bill. At the time of this writing, the authorities don't know how the scammers are matching guest room phone numbers with the names of the occupants. If any version of this happens to you, hang up and phone hotel security.

SCAM WEBSITES

MANY SCAMMERS PUT UP PAGES online that look polished and official and may even include logos of well-known hotel brands. They'll happily sell you a room, paid for in advance with your credit card, and email you credible-looking confirmation documents. The problem is, they never contact the hotel to make the booking. In a variation, they do make the booking but fail to pay the hotel, leaving you to pay when you arrive. Online sellers such as Priceline and Expedia are pretty safe but are plagued by foreign pop-ups from scammers. To be safe, never click a pop-up that routes you to a third-party website, regardless of how good the deal sounds. Some pop-ups list spurious phone numbers (often staffed by scammers posing as reservationists) and legit-looking URLs—say, **qualityinn.hotelreservations.com**. Fake websites have become such a problem, in fact, that real hotel sites are often labeled “Official Site.”

For BUSINESS TRAVELERS

CONVENTION RATES: HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

BUSINESS TRAVELERS, particularly those attending trade shows or conventions, are almost always charged more for their rooms than leisure travelers. For the big meetings, called “citywide conventions,” huge numbers of rooms are blocked in hotels all over town. These rooms are reserved for visitors attending the meeting in question and are usually requested and coordinated by the meeting's sponsoring organization in cooperation with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

Individual hotels negotiate a nightly rate with the convention sponsor, who then frequently sells the rooms through a central reservations system of its own. Because the hotels would rather have gamblers or leisure travelers than people attending conventions (who usually have limited time to gamble), the negotiated price tends to be high, often \$10–\$50 per night above the going rate.

Meeting sponsors, of course, blame convention rates on the hotels. Meanwhile, the hotels maintain a stoic silence, not wishing to alienate meeting organizers.

To be fair, convention sponsors should be given some credit simply for having their meetings in Las Vegas. Even considering the inflated convention rates, meeting attendees will pay 15%–40% less in Las Vegas for comparable lodging than in other major convention cities. As for the rest, well, let's take a look.

Sam Walton taught the average American that if you buy a large quantity of something, you should be able to obtain a better price (per item) than if you bought just one or two of it. If someone can buy a

Parking at the Las Vegas Convention Center

In all, there are 10,000 parking spaces for cars in eight color-coded lots at the LVCC. The most convenient parking is in the **Silver Lot**, right in front of the main entrance. On the east side of the convention center are the **Blue**, **Platinum**, and **White Lots**. The two Blue Lots, tucked into the northeast corner of the property, are second only to **Silver Lot 2** (just west of the complex) in convenience, but they're exclusively for the use of convention-center employees. The **Orange Lot**, on the south side, is likewise convenient but is largely reserved for tractor-trailer parking during large trade shows.

Silver Lot 1, just west of the South Hall, and the **Bronze Lot**, just to the south, are good choices if the South Hall is where you'll be spending most of your time. The White and Platinum Lots, across S. University Center Drive to the east, are more remote though still acceptable if your primary business is in the South Hall. The newest and largest (23 acres) but most remote parking area is the **Diamond Lot**, on the former site of the Riviera Hotel, just south of Elvis Presley Boulevard.

Though access to the exhibit floor varies from meeting to meeting, attendees are often required to enter through the convention center's main entrance off Paradise Road. If they're not parked in the Silver Lot, convention-goers must hike around the complex to reach the front door (a 7- to 12-minute walk). For other meetings, attendees with proper credentials (those with registration badges) are permitted to enter the exhibit halls by one of several doors along the sides of the convention center halls. As a rule, getting out isn't as difficult as getting in, and attendees are usually permitted to exit through the side doors.

COMFORT ZONES:

Matching Guests with Hotels

WE REMEMBER A GOOD FRIEND, a 32-year-old single woman, who, in search of a little romance, decided to take a Caribbean cruise. Thinking that one cruise was pretty much like any other, she signed up for a cruise without doing much shopping around. She ended up on a boat full of retired couples who played bingo or bridge every evening and were usually in bed by 10:30 p.m.

Our friend mistakenly assumed, as have many others, that cruises are homogeneous products. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Each cruise provides a tailored experience to a specific and narrowly defined market. If our friend had done her homework, she could have booked passage on a boat full of young single people and danced and romanced into the night.

In Las Vegas, it's likewise easy to assume that all the hotels and casinos are fairly similar. True, they all have guest rooms, restaurants, and the same mix of games in the casino, but each property molds its offerings to appeal to a well-defined audience. This concerted effort to

The popularity of the slot machine, video poker, and other single-player games among gamblers of all types has therefore democratized the casino. The casinos recognize that the silver-haired grandma at the quarter slots is an extremely valuable customer, and that it's good business to forgo the impression of snobbery and exclusivity in order to make her feel comfortable and wanted.

In Las Vegas there are casinos that maintain the illusion of catering to an upper-crust clientele while quietly practicing an egalitarianism that belies any such pretense. By virtue of its economic clout, the slot machine has broadened the comfort zone of the stuffiest casinos and made Las Vegas a friendlier, more pleasant place.

THE FEEL OF THE PLACE

LAS VEGAS'S HOTEL-CASINOS have distinct personalities. While all casinos contain slot machines, craps tables, and roulette wheels, the feel of each particular place is unique, a product of the combined characteristics of management, patrons, and design. This feel, or personality, determines a hotel-casino's comfort zone, the ambience that makes one guest feel totally at home while another runs for the exit.

HOW TO AVOID READING THE HOTEL-CASINO DESCRIPTIONS If you don't care how a place feels and you just want to know whether it has room service or when checkout time is, you can skip to the alphabetical Hotel Information Chart at the end of this chapter.

HOTELS *with* CASINOS

Aliante Casino + Hotel + Spa (aliantegaming.com)

THE ALIANTE, in North Las Vegas, is the only high-rise within a 9-mile radius. The tower stands boldly against the nearby Sheep Mountain range in the north Las Vegas Valley. This desert chic metro-resort borders the master-planned development of Aliante, about 20 minutes north of Downtown Las Vegas via I-15, and is adjacent to the intersection of I-215 and Aliante Parkway. Given the suburban location and distance from tourist attractions and facilities, a car is a must. The customer base is predominantly vacationers visiting family and friends, motor-sports enthusiasts, business travelers, and locals.

Designed to complement the stark beauty of the surrounding desert, Aliante blends the region's neutral color palette and natural materials. The 40-acre complex includes a 200-plus-room hotel; casino; six restaurants and a food court; showroom; fitness center and spa; 16-screen Regal IMAX Theater; and 14,000-square-foot conference center. The casino has a smoke-free poker area, 170-seat sportsbook with individual screens, 36 table games, and more than 1,800 slot and video-poker machines.

ETA, a trendy lounge, features DJs and dancing. On select weekends, eclectic headliner concerts at moderate prices invigorate the **Access Showroom**.

Choose from several brand names at the eateries that ring the casino. The hotel's flagship dining experience, complete with a lovely outdoor patio, is **MRKT Sea & Land**. Try **The Salted Lime** for margaritas and Mexican fare, or check out **Bistro 57** for European-inspired dishes.

Coming and going are easy at Encore. The main entrance is on the Strip, but it's in a section that's rarely congested. You can exit Encore onto the Strip in either direction or onto eastbound **Desert Inn Road**.

NAVIGATING *the* LAND *of the* GIANTS

THE GRAND HOTELS OF LAS VEGAS are celebrated on television, in film, and in countless advertisements. These are the prestige properties in a town that counts more hotel rooms than any other city in the world. Located along the center and southern end of the Strip, these mammoths beckon with their glamour and luxury. Specifically we're talking about the following:

• Aria Resort and Casino	• MGM Grand	• Resorts World
• Bellagio	• Mirage/Hard Rock	• TI
• Caesars Palace	• New York-New York	• The Venetian/The Palazzo
• The Cosmopolitan	• Paris Las Vegas	• Wynn Encore
• Luxor	• Park MGM/NoMad	• Wynn Las Vegas
• Mandalay Bay/Four Seasons	• Planet Hollywood	

But can so many hotels actually mean less choice? From a certain perspective, the answer is yes. The Strip, you see, suffers from a surfeit of homogeneity. After you've chosen your preferred icon—Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, pyramid, gondolas, what have you—you've done the heavy lifting. Aside from theme, or lack thereof, the hotels are pretty much the same. First, they're all so large that walking to the self-parking garage is like taking a hike. Second, there are high-quality guest rooms in all of the properties. This is a far cry from previous decades, say, when only a handful of hotels offered rooms comparable to what you'd find at a garden-variety Hyatt or Marriott. Third, all of the megahotels are distinguished by designer restaurants, each with its big-name chef, that are too expensive for the average guest to afford. Ditto for most of the showrooms.

So let's say you're a person of average means and you want to stay in one of the new, glitzy super-hotels. Location isn't important to you as long as it's on the Strip. **How do you choose?**

If you have a clear preference for gondolas over trapeze acts, or sphinx over lions, simply select the hotel with the theme that fires your fantasies. If, however, you're pretty much indifferent when it comes to the various themes, make your selection on the basis of price. Using the internet, your travel agent, and the resources provided in this guide, find the colossus that offers the best deal. Stay there and venture out on foot to check out all the other hotels. Believe us, once you're ensconced, having the Empire State Building outside your window instead of a statue of Caesar won't make any difference.

As it happens, there are also a number of livable but more moderately priced hotels mixed in among the giants:

• Bally's/Horseshoe	• Excalibur	• Harrah's	• Tropicana/Bally's
• Casino Royale	• Flamingo	• The Linq	

Some of these hotels were the prestige addresses of the Strip before the building boom of the past two decades. They're still great places to stay, however, and where you can afford to eat in the restaurants and enjoy a show. Best of all, they're located right in the heart of the action. It's cool, of course, to come home and say that you stayed at Wynn Las Vegas, but you could camp at the Excalibur for a week for what a Wynn Las Vegas weekend would cost.

BUSINESS HOTELS

MOST BUSINESS TRAVELERS stay in hotels with casinos or in all-suite hotels. There are two nongaming hotels, however, that merit special mention.

Renaissance Las Vegas Hotel (tinyurl.com/renaissancelasvegas)

NEXT TO THE LAS VEGAS CONVENTION CENTER sits the Renaissance Las Vegas, a haven of tranquility amid the buzz and traffic surrounding the vast meeting complex next door. This 15-floor property on Paradise Road is a 548-room, nonsmoking, nongaming sanctuary. The oversize guest rooms are well suited for business travelers, with a lounge chair with ottoman, an ergonomic chair and rectangular work desk, a coffee maker, a dual-line phone, internet access, and free newspaper. Bathrooms feature glass showers, separate tubs, marble floors, and granite counters.

Through the main lobby, the large center courtyard has windows on three sides. A cozy outdoor area includes tables, lounges, daybeds, and circle beds. Patio heaters warm the space on cool evenings. Food and beverage service is available. A small heated swimming pool and detached whirlpool are at the opposite end of the courtyard. The area is protected on all sides by the hotel's high walls—a welcome feature on Las Vegas's perennially windy days.

Award-winning **Envy Steakhouse**, with a unique red marble floor, is open daily. There is also a glass-enclosed **Wine Room**, with more than 400 vintages and seating for 20 guests. An abbreviated menu is available in the adjoining bar.

Amenities include a business center, 24-hour in-room dining, a health club, an activities concierge, valet parking, a coffee café, and a sundries shop. The property is close to the monorail stop at the convention center but is four lengthy blocks to the Strip—better to cab it.

Westin Las Vegas (westinvegas.com)

TALK ABOUT PHOENIX RISING. Westin acquired the old Maxim hotel, a place where business travelers reluctantly stayed when they couldn't get into Bally's, and transformed it into a high-end boutique hotel that now caters to business travelers. The guest rooms, though small, are exceptionally nice. There's ample meeting space for small meetings and conventions. If you travel

with Fido, he's welcome at the Westin (they even supply a special dog bed), though you'll have to pay a \$35 cleaning fee and a \$150 pet deposit. Travelers with some downtime can enjoy the pool, full-service spa, and fitness center. As for dining, the Westin offers **The Good Plate** and a **Starbucks**. Situated about a block from the heart of the Strip, the Westin is within easy walking distance of dozens of shows and hundreds of restaurants. If you have a car, the Westin has ample pay parking and is easy to enter and exit.

SUITE HOTELS

SUITES

SUITE IN LAS VEGAS covers a broad range of accommodations. The vast majority of suites are studios, consisting of a larger-than-average room with a conversation area (couch, chair, and coffee table) and a refrigerator added to the usual inventory of basic furnishings. In a one-bedroom suite, the conversation area is normally in a second room separate from the sleeping area. One-bedroom suites aren't necessarily larger than studio suites in terms of square footage but are more versatile. Studio and one-bedroom suites are often available in Las Vegas for about the same rate as a standard hotel room.

Larger hotels, with or without casinos, usually offer roomier, more luxurious multiroom suites. Floor plans and rates for these premium suites can usually be obtained on the hotel's website.

Some suite hotels don't have casinos. Patronized primarily by business travelers and nongamblers, these properties offer a quieter alternative to the glitz and frenetic pace of the hotel-casinos. Because there's no gambling to subsidize operations, however, suites at properties without casinos are usually (but not always) more expensive than suites at hotels *with* casinos.

While most hotels with casinos offer suites, only the **The Cosmopolitan, Delano Las Vegas, The Signature at MGM Grand, Tuscany, Vdara Hotel & Spa at Aria, Rio, The Venetian/The Palazzo**, and **Wynn Encore Resort** are all-suite properties. The basic studio suite is a plush, one-room affair with a wet bar and a sitting area but no kitchen facilities. The **Rio** sometimes makes its suites available at \$49 per night and is one of the best lodging values in town. In addition, **Signature** and **Tuscany** are by far the easiest to get in and out of if you have a car.

Many thousands of condos and time-shares—some of them standalone nongaming properties and others associated with established casinos—were being developed when the bottom fell out of the economy. The majority of these condos were presold and under contract but for obvious reasons never closed. Now developers are trying to stay afloat by making these units available to the general public. If you check hotel search engines such as Expedia and Kayak, a number of these properties will pop up, usually at extremely attractive rates. As a corollary, developers dumping condos and time-shares into the city's room inventory has put downward pressure on hotel rates across the board.

HOTELS *without* CASINOS

Alexis Park Resort (alexispark.com)

THIS 495-SUITE NONGAMING PROPERTY was one of the first in Las Vegas to create this concept in the 1980s. Situated on 16 acres, the 19 buildings house a variety of suites ranging in size from bedroom-parlor combos to large bilevel lofts. The standard junior suite is one room with a king or double-double beds sharing space with a hide-a-bed love seat, two side chairs, and a desk. A corner wet bar with granite counters encloses a refrigerator, coffee maker, and storage cabinets. Microwaves are available on request. In the larger one-bedroom suites, a Jacuzzi tub and glass-enclosed shower are alongside the king-size bed. There is a separate large living room with easy chairs and a sofa, more kitchen space, and a small powder room. Architectural prints line the walls. Ice machines are nearby. The property features three medium-size fenced pools and mature lawns and landscaping. Along with an intimate showroom hosting musical tributes and late-night magic, the lobby includes an internet station, barber shop, the poolside **Alexis Gardens** restaurant, and **Pegasus** lounge. Other amenities include a business center and a small fitness center.

Buildings are freshly painted, but the passageways underneath stairwells are underlit and all walkways are in need of resurfacing. Also, the exterior of the complex looks fatigued.

Elara by Hilton Grand Vacations (tinyurl.com/elaralasvegas)

IF YOUR IDEA OF NIRVANA is a luxury hotel atop a fancy shopping center, Elara has you covered. Positioned over the **Miracle Mile Shops**, the hotel is an upscale satellite of the **Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino** (see page 115).

Accessible from East Harmon Avenue, the 52-story all-suite red-and-blue tower offers several suite combinations to a maximum of four bedrooms with a parlor. The top five floors are residential condos, and the lower 47 are vacation-ownership hotel suites. All units feature high-tech components along with fully equipped granite and stainless-steel kitchens. Next to the king bed in the spacious sleeping room is a chaise and mirrored whirlpool tub. There are four flat-panel TVs throughout.

A spectacular rectangular pool, framed by tall palms, faces south for all-day rays and no sun blockage by vertical buildings. Other amenities include room service, a business center, a gift shop, a gym, a **Starbucks**, and 24-hour concierge service.

Elara is about a 5-minute stroll through the mall's south wing to reach the hotel's nucleus. This is a plus and a minus for guests: The plus is nongaming serenity with immediate access to eclectic shopping, and the minus is the significant distance to all Planet Hollywood venues. Guests preferring to stay toverside can sample the 15 culinary offerings within the Miracle Mile Shops. The property offers front-door valet parking, but self-parking is only available in the Miracle Mile garage.

English Hotel (theenglishhotel.com)

JAMES BEARD-AWARDED CHEF (and Vegas resident) Todd English put his name on both this 74-room nongaming boutique property in the heart of

When we inspected the Trump International, we were immediately struck by how quiet it is. From the lobby to the restaurants to the guest suites, it was restful and relaxing. The suites provide all the connectivity a business traveler could want, as well as full kitchens in the one- to three-bedroom units. Furnishings are something along the lines of Scandinavian contemporary, mixing dark and blond wood tones and restful neutral soft goods.

Though it's a 10-minute walk to the Strip, the Trump International is directly across Fashion Show Drive from the **Fashion Show Mall**, Las Vegas's largest shopping venue. The **Las Vegas Convention Center** is about 10 minutes away by cab/rideshare, and the **Venetian Expo Convention Center** is about 10 minutes distant by foot.

Wyndham Grand Desert (wyndhamgranddesert.com)

A TIME-SHARE PROPERTY, the Wyndham Grand Desert offers large one- and two-bedroom suites with fully equipped kitchens, washers and dryers, dining rooms, and plenty of closet and storage space. Living rooms feature a pull-out sofa and flat-panel TV.

The main complex, with the lobby, restaurants, spa, and two fitness centers, surrounds an expansive pool area that's nicely manicured but short on shade. A separate, freestanding hotel tower is located next door to the west. Internet access is free but spotty on floors lacking servers. Scheduled activities include shopping trips, magic shows, and transportation Downtown (for a nominal fee).

The Wyndham Grand Desert can be accessed from both **Harmon Avenue** and **Koval Lane**, making coming and going easy. Parking is all at ground level. Though this is a time-share, you're not required to slog through a sales pitch, although you could easily arrange one if you're interested. South-facing guest rooms overlook the airport but are out of range of airport noise. Bargain rates are frequently available on VRBO.com.

HOTELS *with* **BALCONIES**

VERY FEW LAS VEGAS HOTELS have balconies. If being able to step outside and enjoy the views is an important consideration in choosing a room, here's a (noncomprehensive) list of Las Vegas hotels that have at least a few balconies. Note that at **OYO** and **Tropicana/Bally's**, you have to specifically request a balcony room.

• The Cosmopolitan	• Platinum Hotel & Spa	• Tropicana/Bally's
• OYO Hotel & Casino	• The Signature at MGM Grand	

LAS VEGAS MOTELS

BECAUSE THEY HAVE TO COMPETE with the huge hotel-casinos, many Las Vegas motels offer great rates or provide special amenities, such as a complimentary breakfast.

And like the resorts, motels often have a very specific clientele. **La Quinta Inn**, for instance, caters to government employees, while the **Hampton Inn Las Vegas North** on Craig Road primarily serves folks visiting Nellis Air Force Base and the Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Just as in any major US city, national motel chains are well represented in Las Vegas. For space reasons, however, we've chosen not to list or review them in this edition of the *Unofficial Guide*. Chain motels are known entities to most travelers, after all, and you basically know what you're getting no matter where you travel. A Comfort Inn in Las Vegas is pretty much like a Comfort Inn in Louisville, and we're all aware by now that Motel 6 leaves the light on for you.

LAS VEGAS HOSTELS

LAS VEGAS HAS THREE HOSTELS: **Bungalows Hostel** (☎ 702-380-6902, bungalowshostel.com), on Las Vegas Boulevard halfway between the Strip and Fremont Street; **Sin City Hostel** (☎ 702-868-0222, sincityhostel.com), right next door; and the **Las Vegas Hostel** (☎ 702-385-1150, lasvegashostel.net), located downtown on Fremont at 14th Street. Though it's temporarily closed, the Las Vegas Hostel is easily the most attractive of the three, with 38 shared and private rooms, all with new furniture, mattresses, and bedding, along with en suite bathrooms. It also features a modest pool, a communal kitchen, and complimentary breakfast. Hostel patrons are young and mostly international, visiting from Australia, Europe, and Central and South America. Accommodations begin around \$20 per night.

RV CAMPING *in* LAS VEGAS

SOME CASINOS, including **Arizona Charlie's Boulder**, **Circus Circus**, **Main Street Station**, and **Sam's Town**, operate RV campgrounds with full facilities. There are also quite a few independent campgrounds. Of these, we really like **Las Vegas RV Resort** (☎ 702-451-8005, lasvegasrvresort.com), one of the largest in town with 378 sites. Limited to adults (ages 18 and up), this palm tree-lined RV complex is located two blocks north of Sam's Town on Boulder Highway at 3890 S. Nellis Blvd. The 18-acre resort offers full hookups for pull-thrus and multiple slide-outs. Entry, Standard, Deluxe, Premium, and XL Pull-Thru sites are available. Each site includes a picnic table. Amenities include a heated pool and hot tub, a clubhouse with lounge seating and big-screen TV, two coin laundries, multiple shower and restroom facilities, free Wi-Fi, and three pet runs. A small fitness facility is open daily, 8 a.m.–11 p.m. Propane deliveries can be preordered. Daily and monthly rentals are available.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Rated and Ranked

WHAT'S IN A ROOM?

EXCEPT FOR CLEANLINESS, state of repair, and decor, most travelers do not pay much attention to hotel rooms. There is, of course, a discernible standard of quality and luxury that differentiates Motel 6 from Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn from Marriott, and so on. In general, however, most hotel guests fail to appreciate that some rooms are better engineered than other rooms. Contrary to what you might suppose, designing a hotel room is (or should be) a lot more complex than picking a bedspread to match the carpet and drapes. Making the room usable to its occupants is an art, a planning discipline that combines both form and function.

Decor and taste are important, certainly. No one wants to spend several days in a room where the furnishings are dated, garish, or even ugly. But beyond the decor, there are variables that determine how “livable” a hotel room is. In Las Vegas, for example, we’ve seen some beautifully appointed rooms that are simply not well designed for human habitation. The next time you stay in a hotel, pay attention to the details and design elements of your room. Even more than decor, these are the things that will make you feel comfortable and at home.

ROOM RATINGS

TO SEPARATE PROPERTIES according to the relative quality, tastefulness, state of repair, cleanliness, and size of their standard rooms, we have grouped them into classifications denoted by stars. Star ratings in this guide apply to Las Vegas properties only and do not necessarily correspond to ratings awarded by Forbes, AAA, or other travel critics.

Star ratings apply to **room quality only** and describe the property’s standard accommodations. For almost all hotels and motels, a “standard accommodation” is a hotel room with either one king bed or two queen beds; in an all-suite property, the standard accommodation is either a studio or one-bedroom suite. Also, in addition to standard accommodations, many hotels offer luxury rooms and special suites, which are not rated in this guide. Star ratings for rooms are assigned without regard to location or whether a property has a casino, restaurant(s), recreational facilities, entertainment, or other extras.

In addition to stars, we also employ a numerical rating system. Our rating scale is 0–100, with 100 as the best possible rating and zero (0) as the worst. Rooms at the Suncoast, The Strat, and The Orleans, for instance, are all rated as 3½ stars. In the supplemental numerical ratings, however, the Suncoast and The Strat are rated 82 and 80, respectively, while The Orleans is rated 75. This means that within the 3½-star category, the Suncoast and The Strat are comparable, and both have somewhat nicer rooms than The Orleans.

HOW THE HOTELS COMPARE				
HOTEL	OVERALL RATING	ROOM RATING	COST (\$ = \$50)	LOCATION
DELANO LAS VEGAS	★★★★★	96	\$- x 8	South Strip
RESORTS WORLD CROCKFORDS	★★★★½	96	\$- x 11	North Strip
WYNN ENCORE RESORT	★★★★★	96	\$+ x 12	Mid-Strip
WYNN LAS VEGAS	★★★★★	96	\$- x 13	Mid-Strip
ARIA RESORT AND CASINO	★★★★½	95	\$- x 7	Mid-Strip
BELLAGIO	★★★★½	95	\$+ x 7	Mid-Strip
CAESARS PALACE	★★★★½	95	\$\$\$\$\$-	Mid-Strip
THE COSMOPOLITAN OF LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	95	\$- x 9	Mid-Strip
FOUR SEASONS HOTEL LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	95	\$+ x 9	South Strip
THE PALAZZO RESORT AT THE VENETIAN	★★★★½	95	\$+ x 11	Mid-Strip
PALMS	★★★★½	95	\$\$\$\$\$-	West of Strip
VDARA HOTEL AND SPA AT ARIA	★★★★½	95	\$\$\$\$\$-	Mid-Strip
NOBU HOTEL CAESARS PALACE	★★★★½	94	\$+ x 7	Mid-Strip
RESORTS WORLD CONRAD	★★★★½	94	\$+ x 10	North Strip
THE SIGNATURE AT MGM GRAND	★★★★½	94	\$\$\$\$\$+	East of Strip
THE VENETIAN RESORT	★★★★½	94	\$- x 10	Mid-Strip
WALDORF ASTORIA LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	94	\$- x 11	Mid-Strip
ELARA	★★★★½	93	\$+ x 8	Mid-Strip
MANDALAY BAY	★★★★½	92	\$+ x 9	South Strip
RESORTS WORLD HILTON	★★★★½	92	\$+ x 9	North Strip
TRUMP INTERNATIONAL HOTEL LAS VEGAS (all suites)	★★★★½	92	\$\$\$\$\$	West of Strip
VIRGIN HOTELS LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	92	\$\$\$\$\$-	East of Strip
CIRCA RESORT & CASINO	★★★★½	91	\$+ x 7	Downtown
PARIS LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	91	\$\$\$\$\$+	Mid-Strip
PARK MGM	★★★★½	91	\$+ x 7	Mid-Strip
RED ROCK RESORT, CASINO, AND SPA	★★★★½	91	\$+ x 8	Summerlin
M RESORT	★★★★½	90	\$\$\$+	South of Las Vegas
MGM GRAND	★★★★½	90	\$ x 8	Mid-Strip
MIRAGE/HARD ROCK	★★★★½	90	\$\$\$\$\$+	Mid-Strip
RENAISSANCE LAS VEGAS	★★★★½	90	\$\$\$\$\$+	East of Strip
EMBASSY SUITES CONVENTION CENTER	★★★★	89	\$\$\$\$\$-	East of Strip
TROPICANA/BALLY'S	★★★★	89	\$- x 7	Mid-Strip
ALIANTE CASINO + HOTEL + SPA	★★★★	88	\$\$\$+	North Las Vegas
FLAMINGO	★★★★	88	\$\$\$\$	Mid-Strip
HILTON LAKE LAS VEGAS	★★★★	88	\$- x 11	Henderson
JW MARRIOTT LAS VEGAS	★★★★	88	\$\$\$\$\$+	Summerlin
PLATINUM HOTEL & SPA	★★★★	88	\$\$\$\$\$-	East of Strip
SILVERTON CASINO	★★★★	88	\$\$\$+	South of Las Vegas
WESTIN LAKE LAS VEGAS	★★★★	88	\$\$\$\$\$-	Henderson

A reader complained to us a while back that he had booked one of our top-ranked rooms in terms of value but had been very disappointed in the room. We noticed that the room the reader occupied had a quality rating of 2½ stars. We would remind you that the value ratings are intended to give you some sense of value received for dollars spent. A 2½-star room at \$50 may have the same value rating as a 4-star room at \$100, but that doesn't mean the rooms will be of comparable *quality*. Good deal or not, a 2½-star room is still a 2½-star room. Listed on the previous page are the best room buys for the money, regardless of location or star classification, based on average rack rates.

WHEN ONLY *the* BEST WILL DO

THE TROUBLE WITH PROFILES is that details and distinctions are sacrificed in the interest of brevity and information accessibility. For example, dozens of properties have swimming pools, but we've made no qualitative discriminations. To distinguish the exceptional from the average in a number of categories, we provide a best-of list below and on the next page.

GENERAL

MOST VISUALLY INTERESTING HOTELS	
1. The Venetian	9. Red Rock Resort
2. Caesars Palace	10. Mirage
3. Wynn Las Vegas and Wynn Encore	11. New York-New York
4. Bellagio	12. Paris Las Vegas
5. Aria Resort and Casino	13. M Resort
6. Main Street Station	14. Rio
7. Mandalay Bay	15. The Cosmopolitan
8. Luxor	16. Resorts World
BEST FOR SHOPPING ON-SITE OR WITHIN AN 8-MINUTE WALK	
1. Caesars Palace	6. Planet Hollywood
2. The Venetian	7. CityCenter
3. Mirage	8. Resorts World
4. Wynn Las Vegas and Wynn Encore	9. Trump International Hotel Las Vegas
5. TI	10. The Cosmopolitan

DINING

BEST BUFFETS	
1. Caesars Bacchanal Buffet	4. The Buffet at Bellagio
2. The Cosmopolitan Wicked Spoon Buffet	5. A.Y.C.E. Buffet at the Palms
3. The Buffet at Wynn	

PART TWO

ENTERTAINMENT *and* NIGHTLIFE

LAS VEGAS SHOWS *and* ENTERTAINMENT

LAS VEGAS CALLS ITSELF THE ENTERTAINMENT CAPITAL of the World. This is no exaggeration, particularly when it comes to the sheer number of live-entertainment productions staged daily. On any given day, a Vegas visitor can select from dozens of presentations: large-scale spectacles, celebrity headliners, stand-up comedy, live music in lounges, and more.

According to an annual census conducted by the consumer-oriented *Las Vegas Advisor*, the average price of a ticket to one of the big production shows approached \$104 in 2022, a \$27 jump from 2021.

Those prices, however, are reflected in the shows' high quality. As for variety, there's literally something for everyone. And believe it or not, the value is still there—maybe not in the grand showrooms, but in the smaller rooms and lounges and in the main theaters off-Strip.

There's more of everything now, including both overpriced shows and bargains. Regarding the former, you'll be blinded by their billboards all over town. Concerning the latter, you'll have to scout around, but you'll be rewarded with some great shows at dynamite prices. And there are always discount coupons floating around.

CHOICES, CHOICES, CHOICES

MOST LAS VEGAS LIVE-ENTERTAINMENT OFFERINGS can be lumped into one of the following categories:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Celebrity headliners | • Elvis shows | • Long-term engagements |
| • Magic and illusion shows | • Broadway and off-Broadway shows | |
| • Musical-tribute and nostalgia shows | • Production shows | |
| • Impersonator shows | • Skin shows | • Comedy-headliner shows |
| • Hypnosis shows | • Comedy clubs | • Lounge entertainment |

that are unoccupied, point them out to the captain. Remember, however, that the first row of booths is usually held in reserve.

Before the Show Begins

Some showrooms serve drinks, while others offer self-service. A few of the variations you will encounter:

1. **A cash bar with no table service.** If you want a drink before the show, you walk to the bar and buy it.
2. **Drinks are included, but not table service.** You take a drink ticket to the bar and exchange it for your beverage of choice.
3. **Table service.** A server will bring you drinks.

In showrooms with table service, the servers run around like crazy trying to get everybody served before the show. Because all the people at a given table are not necessarily seated at the same time, the server responsible for that table may make five or more passes before everyone is taken care of. If your party is one of the last to be seated at a table, stay cool—you will be noticed and you will be served.

Bladder Matters

Be forewarned that in most showrooms there is no restroom, and that the nearest facilities are often a long way off, reachable only via a convoluted trek through the casino. If, like the majority of showgoers, you arrive early and imbibe freely, it isn't uncommon to start hearing nature's call just minutes before showtime.

And if you think you can slip out to pee and come right back, think again. If you're seeing a show at the **Westgate Las Vegas** or the **Tropicana**, you'll need to give yourself more than 10 minutes for the round-trip—and prepare for a quest. If you get to the can and back without getting lost, consider yourself lucky. At other showrooms, restrooms are somewhat closer but certainly not convenient.

unofficial TIP

Aria, Harrah's, The Linq, Luxor, MGM Grand, Mirage, New York-New York, Park MGM, Planet Hollywood, The Strat, The Venetian/Palazzo, and Wynn Las Vegas understand that show guests prefer not to combine emptying their bladders with a 5-mile hike. Showrooms in these casinos are situated in close and blessed proximity to the restrooms.

SELECTING *a* SHOW

PICKING A LAS VEGAS SHOW is a matter of timing, budget, taste, and schedule. Celebrity headliners are booked long in advance but may play for only a couple of days or weeks. If seeing, say, Elton John or Jerry Seinfeld is a big priority for your Las Vegas trip, you'll have to schedule your visit to coincide with their appearances; if the timing of your visit isn't flexible, as is the case with conventioners, you'll have to pick from who's playing when you're in town.

unofficial TIP

To find out which shows and headliners are playing before you leave home, check vegas.com/shows, visitlasvegas.com/shows -events, or lasvegasadvisor.com.

CELEBRITY-HEADLINER ROOMS

CHOOSING WHICH CELEBRITY HEADLINER to see is a matter of personal taste, though stars like Cher, David Copperfield, and Lady Gaga have the ability to rev up any audience. Our point is to suggest that the talent, presence, drive, and showmanship of many Las Vegas headliners often exceed all expectations, and that adhering to the limitations of your preferences may prevent you from seeing many truly extraordinary performers.



Las Vegas is about gambling, after all, so don't be afraid to take a chance on a headliner who's unfamiliar to you.

Most of the major headliners play at a relatively small number of showrooms. Profiles of the major celebrity showrooms follow; the headliners listed include both acts scheduled at press time and big names who've appeared in the recent past. Long-running (that is, a year or more) headliner shows are reviewed in depth later in this chapter.

David Copperfield Theater

RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION ☎ 702-891-7777 or 866-740-7711, mgmgrand.com

Headliners Basically all David Copperfield all the time, although past headliners have included acts such as Howie Mandel and Tom Jones. **Usual showtimes** Vary. **Approximate admission price** \$89–\$230. **Showroom size** 743 seats.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS A comfortable, modern showroom with all front-facing seats, the David Copperfield Theater is the home venue for the acclaimed magician.

CONSUMER TIPS Buy tickets in advance online or by calling the MGM Grand's main reservations number. If you're not staying at the MGM Grand, either arrive by cab or give yourself extra time to park and make your way to the showroom.

Dolby Live at Park MGM

RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION ☎ 844-600-PARK (7275), parkmgm.com or dolby.com/dolby-live-mgm

Headliners Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars, and Aerosmith. **Usual showtimes** Vary. **Dark** Varies. **Approximate admission price** From a pittance to a fortune. **Showroom size** Up to 6,400 seats.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Dolby Live (originally known as the Park Theater) was the first major component in reinventing the Monte Carlo as the Park MGM. An attraction in itself, the theater has four seating levels that can be modified according to the needs of whichever act is playing. Sight lines are excellent, with no seat more than 150 feet from the stage, which stretches 135 feet wide. Cutting-edge technology includes 30K HD projectors and an 80-foot LED display along the back of the stage. Though almost any production can be staged, Dolby Live was designed primarily for headliners, touring concerts, and smaller boxing matches and UFC fights.

A concourse to the rear of each level offers food and beverage options, as well as restrooms. The theater sits adjacent to **The Park**, an

To avoid the Strip, take **Frank Sinatra Drive**, which extends from Russell Road to Caesars Palace and is used mostly by locals. That four-lane road to the west parallels Las Vegas Boulevard and delivers vehicles coming from the south or north to the eight west-of-Strip hotel parking garages along that corridor. MGM Resorts has constructed an immense 3,000-space parking garage just south of the arena at the Excalibur, directly across Tropicana Avenue. Walkers can access the arena via the overpass above that congested east-west thoroughfare.

T-Mobile Arena offers 60-minute behind-the-scenes guided tours; tickets start at \$25 for visitors age 5 and older. What you see varies according to what show or event is being hosted. See t-mobilearena.com/plan-your-visit/arena-tours for more information.

Zappos Theater at Planet Hollywood

RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION ☎ 855-234-7469 or 866-919-7472, caesars.com/planet-hollywood/shows/zappos-theater

Headliners John Legend, The Doobie Brothers, Judas Priest, Nine Inch Nails, charity events, and beauty pageants. **Usual showtimes** 7 p.m. **Approximate admission price** \$58–\$536. **Showroom size** 7,000 seats.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS Formerly known as The Axis and before that the Aladdin Center for the Performing Arts, this 7,000-seat concert venue consists of three tiered sections of seating in a fan-shaped configuration facing a broad stage. The venue hosts concerts and charity fundraisers; it has also hosted pageants including Miss America, Miss Universe (Miss Klingon has never won to our knowledge), and Miss USA. Acoustics are good, though the decibel levels of concerts are overwhelming. Sight lines are universally good, though the rear third of the theater is quite distant from the stage.

CONSUMER TIPS This is the land of big productions, so center seats a little less than one third back usually serve best. Restrooms are located near the showroom. If you drive, park in the **Miracle Mile Shops** garage rather than at Planet Hollywood.

PRODUCTION SHOWS

LAS VEGAS PREMIER PRODUCTION SHOWS: COMPARING APPLES AND ORANGES

WHILE WE ACKNOWLEDGE that Las Vegas production shows are difficult to compare and that audiences of differing tastes and ages have different preferences, we have nevertheless rated the continuously running shows to give you an idea of our favorites. This is definitely an apples-and-oranges comparison (how can you compare *Absinthe* to *Blue Man Group*?), but one based on each show's impact, vitality, originality, pace, continuity, crescendo, and ability to entertain.

Even the continuously running shows change acts and revise their focus periodically, so you can expect our ratings to change from year to year. Also, be comforted by the knowledge that while some shows are better than others, there are only a handful of real stinkers. The quality

HOW LAS VEGAS SHOWS COMPARE

TYPE OF SHOW	OVERALL RATING	PRICE RANGE	HOTEL-CASINO
BROADWAY/OFF-BROADWAY			
<i>Bat Out of Hell</i>	★★½	\$52-\$153	Paris Las Vegas
<i>Blue Man Group</i>	★★★★½	\$49-\$110	Luxor
CELEBRITY HEADLINERS			
Carlos Santana	★★★★	\$99-\$245	Mandalay Bay
<i>52 Fridays</i>	★★★★½	\$29-\$179	Golden Nugget
CIRCUS AS THEATRE			
<i>Cirque du Soleil's LOVE</i>	★★★★★	\$69-\$218	Mirage
<i>Cirque du Soleil's Mystère</i>	★★★★★	\$64-\$135	TI
<i>Cirque du Soleil's KÀ</i>	★★★★½	\$76-\$268	MGM Grand
<i>Absinthe</i>	★★★★	\$118-\$217	Caesars Palace
<i>Cirque du Soleil's "O"</i>	★★★★	\$103-\$402	Bellagio
<i>Cirque du Soleil's Mad Apple</i>	★★★★½	\$59-\$175	New York-New York
<i>DiscoShow (opens 2023)</i>	—	—	The Linq
COMEDY			
<i>The Mac King Comedy Magic Show</i>	★★★★	\$44-\$54	Excalibur
<i>Comedy Cellar</i>	★★★★½	\$25-\$55	Rio
<i>Carrot Top</i>	★★★	\$40-\$82	Luxor
<i>Gordie Brown: Lasting Impressions</i>	★★★	\$23-\$55	Golden Nugget
Rich Little	★★★	\$40-\$60	Tropicana
HYPNOSIS			
Anthony Cools	★★★★½	—*	None currently*
MAGIC & ILLUSION			
<i>Banachek's Mind Games</i>	★★★★	\$29-\$59	The Strat
David Copperfield	★★★★	\$71-\$220	MGM Grand
<i>The Magic of Jen Kramer</i>	★★★★	\$20-\$50	Westgate Las Vegas
<i>Mat Franco: Magic Reinvented Nightly</i>	★★★★	\$50-\$168	The Linq
<i>Paranormal</i>	★★★★	\$52-\$70	Bally's/Horseshoe
<i>Shin Lim: Limitless</i>	★★★★	\$50-\$230	Mirage
<i>Xavier Mortimer's Magical Dream</i>	★★★★	\$39-\$95	The Strat
<i>Criss Angel Mindfreak</i>	★★★★½	\$58-\$221	Planet Hollywood
Penn & Teller	★★★★½	\$60-\$95	Rio
<i>Farrell Dillon Comedy Magic</i>	★★★	\$25-\$60	Jimmy Kimmel's Comedy Club
<i>Lioz Show</i>	★★★	\$28-\$58	Bally's
<i>Mike Hammer Comedy Magic Show</i>	★★★	\$29-\$39	Four Queens
<i>Nathan Burton Comedy Magic</i>	★★★	\$60	Miracle Mile Shops
<i>Piff the Magic Dragon</i>	★★★	\$63-\$78	Flamingo

*See profile on page 200 for more information.

(continued on next page)

Gotta Keep Movin'

If every player in Major League Baseball were a free agent, the willy-nilly team-hopping would bear a close resemblance to the Las Vegas entertainment scene. If, after reading our show reviews, you discover that your preferred performer or production has disappeared from the listed showroom, don't despair: chances are good that the show has moved to a different venue. (*Fun fact:* Melinda, "The First Lady of Magic" (now retired), holds the all-time record, having played at almost a dozen different Las Vegas casinos during her career.)

LAS VEGAS SHOW PROFILES

BELOW ARE OUR REVIEWS of select shows currently running in Las Vegas. Prices are approximate and fluctuate about as often as you brush your teeth; we've also listed age restrictions where they apply. (NA following an Appeal by Age star rating means we didn't get enough reader responses for that particular age group.) For at-a-glance listings, see the "How Las Vegas Shows Compare" table on pages 195–197.

Note that we haven't tried to cover each and every show that you can see in Vegas—we just don't have the space. Following this section are mini-profiles of other productions that are worth checking out but that we didn't feel merited full writeups.

Absinthe ★★★★★

APPEAL BY AGE 18-20 ★★★★★ 21-37 ★★★★★ 38-50 ★★★★★ 51+ ★★½

HOST CASINO/SHOWROOM Caesars Palace/Spiegel tent on the Roman Plaza; ☎ 702-534-3419 or 855-234-7469, caesars.com/caesars-palace or spiegelworld.com/absinthe

Type of show Low-tech, lowbrow circus. **Admission** \$118–\$217, ages 18+. **Cast size** 23.

Night of lowest attendance Wednesday. **Usual showtimes** Wednesday–Sunday, 8 and 10 p.m. **Dark** Monday and Tuesday. **Topless** Yes (male), almost (female). **Duration of presentation** 90 minutes.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS It's a silly, sultry, risqué interactive and participatory experience. Equal parts cabaret, burlesque, circus, and midway sideshow, *Absinthe* incorporates an impudent cast of slick professionals. The aerial and acrobatic performances are separated by repartee, tomfoolery, and other shtick hosted by an in-your-face ringmaster and his ditzzy female assistant. Among the rotating acts are a quartet of tubby aerialists, an acrobat balancing on a tower of chairs, a chanteuse who sings and strips while surrounded by four guys in drag, a limber lady on ropes, two musclemen with exceptional equilibrium, and a trio of highly focused low-wire tightrope walkers. While the performers are skilled and execute wonders on a tiny circular stage, without fail each act features the artists disrobing, which gives you an idea of the general tenor of the goings-on. An exception is The Silicon Valley Girls, three women who look like a cheerleading squad but demonstrate the strength, balance,

DONNY OSMOND (Harrah's Showroom, Harrah's Las Vegas; ☎ 702-777-2782 or 855-234-7469, caesars.com/harrahs-las-vegas/shows/donny-osmond)

FREESTYLE LOVE SUPREME (Summit Showroom, The Venetian; ☎ 702-414-9000 or 866-641-7469, venetianlasvegas.com/entertainment/freestyle-love-supreme.html or freestylelovesupreme.com)

JOHN LEGEND: *Love in Las Vegas* (Zappos Theater, Planet Hollywood; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/planet-hollywood/shows/john-legend)

KATY PERRY: *Play!* (Resorts World Theatre, Resorts World; ☎ 702-676-7000, rwlsvegas.com/entertainment/katy-perry)

LADY GAGA: *Jazz & Piano* (Dolby Live, Park MGM; ☎ 844-600-7275, parkmgm.mgmresorts.com/en/entertainment/lady-gaga.html)

LIONEL RICHIE: *Back to Las Vegas* (Encore Theater, Wynn Las Vegas; ☎ 702-770-9966, wynnlasvegas.com/entertainment/upcoming-shows/lionel-richie)

LUKE BRYAN (Resorts World Theatre, Resorts World; ☎ 702-676-7000, rwlsvegas.com/entertainment/luke-bryan)

MIRANDA LAMBERT: *Velvet Rodeo* (Zappos Theater, Planet Hollywood; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/planet-hollywood/shows/miranda-lambert)

ROD STEWART: *The Hits* (The Colosseum, Caesars Palace; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/caesars-palace/shows/rod-stewart)

SHANIA TWAIN: *"Let's Go!"* (Zappos Theater, Planet Hollywood; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/planet-hollywood/shows/shania-twain)

STING: *My Songs* (The Colosseum, Caesars Palace; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/caesars-palace/shows/sting)

TAPE FACE (House of Tape, Harrah's; ☎ 702-777-2782 or 855-234-7469, caesars.com/harrahs-las-vegas/shows/tape-face)

USHER: *My Way: The Vegas Residency* (Dolby Live, Park MGM; ☎ 844-600-7275, parkmgm.mgmresorts.com/en/entertainment/usher)

VAN MORRISON (The Colosseum, Caesars Palace; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/caesars-palace/shows/van-morrison)

WAYNE NEWTON (Bugsy's Cabaret, Flamingo; ☎ 702-777-2782 or 855-234-7469, caesars.com/flamingo-las-vegas/shows/wayne-newton)

WEEKENDS WITH ADELE (The Colosseum, Caesars Palace; ☎ 855-234-7469, caesars.com/caesars-palace/shows/adele)

LAS VEGAS NIGHTLIFE

BY MELINDA SHECKELLS

LAS VEGAS MAKES BILLIONS as America's go-to city for dining, nightlife, shopping, and entertainment, but this wasn't always the case. In the Rat Pack era, it was gaming that raked in the big bucks, with steakhouses and 99¢ breakfasts positioned as loss leaders, keeping

East Fremont at Maryland Parkway. For a bite with your beverage, stop in at **Atomic Kitchen; Carson Kitchen; Flippin' Good Chicken, Burgers, Beer; Evel Pie; Le Thai; Peyote;** or **7th & Carson**. Venture just north of the Fremont Street Experience to find **Triple George Grill, Pizza Rock,** and **The Underground at The Mob Museum** before letting your hair down and perhaps donating a bra to the impressive collection found at gritty biker bar **Hogs & Heifers**.

In the nearby 18 blocks that make up Las Vegas's Arts District are **Artifice; Cornish Pasty Co.; Esther's Kitchen; Velvetten Rabbit;** local breweries **Able Baker, CraftHaus Brewery, Hop Nuts Brewing Co., Hudl Brewing Company,** and **Nevada Brew Works;** wine bar **Garagiste;** kitschy antique store–watering hole **ReBar;** and **Jammyland Cocktail Bar & Reggae Kitchen**. Also in the Arts District, don't miss the eclectic **Berlin Bar** and the **Hard Hat Lounge**, where the pub grub includes Detroit-style pizza.

In the greater Downtown area, **Starboard Tack** is the city's rum-focused late-night place, **Herbs and Rye** is the cocktail bar that brought the city's mixology scene to the world stage, and **Tenaya Creek Brewery** is worth a pint or two on a hot day.

Located in the Spring Mountain Road corridor, **Sparrow + Wolf** has a fresh, inventive, and ever-evolving cocktail selection, while **Sand Dollar** marries live music with craft cocktails and some of the best pizza in the city.

COCKTAIL BARS, LOUNGES, *and* NIGHTCLUBS

IF YOU CAN'T FIND SOMETHING TO DO every night in Las Vegas, you're just not trying very hard.

The nightclubs profiled in the following section are, in our opinion, the hottest and trendiest in Las Vegas. These clubs are also shown on the maps in Part Four, "Dining and Restaurants," pages 368–374.

Allē Lounge on 66

Rooftop revelry at its finest

Resorts World, 3000 Las Vegas Blvd. S.; ☎ 702-676-7000, rwlasvegas.com/dining/alle-lounge-on-66 **NORTH STRIP**

Cover None. **Mixed drinks** \$21 and up. **Wine** \$16 and up. **Beer** \$10–\$14. **Dress** Upscale casual. **Food available** Yes. **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 5 p.m.–2 a.m.; Friday–Saturday, 5 p.m.–late.

WHO GOES THERE? Cocktail lovers and those looking to start (or end) their night with a view of the dazzling Las Vegas Strip.

WHAT GOES ON? Allē Lounge features a stunning space 66 floors above the neon lights. The lounge showcases an exceptional collection of fine and rare spirits, handcrafted cocktails, and globally inspired small plates.

IF YOU GO Check out “The Mothership,” a piece of LED art that can move freely around the ceiling.

ALSO TRY **Allē Lounge on 66** (see page 264) and **Here Kitty Kitty Vice Den** (see page 274), both in Resorts World.

LAS VEGAS *Below the* BELT

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

IN MANY WAYS, LAS VEGAS is a bastion of hedonism. It has a steaminess, an aura of risk and reward, a sense of libertine excess. The rules are different here—it's alright to let go.

Behind the illusion, however, are a community and, more particularly, a police department that puts a lot of effort into making it safe for visitors to experience the liberation of Las Vegas. In general, the Strip and Downtown are very safe: most hotels have in-house security, and police patrol in cars, on foot, and on bikes. When tourists get robbed, they're commonly far afield and often in pursuit of drugs or sex.

SKIN GAMES: SEXY TIMES IN LAS VEGAS

THOUGH NUDITY, PROSTITUTION, and porn are regulated more tightly in Las Vegas than in many Bible Belt cities, the town exudes an air of carefree sexuality. There's something for everyone here, but because more than 50% of all visitors are men, most ages 21–59, its fleshly attractions are targeted primarily to that demographic.

STRIPPING ON THE STRIP Compared with the live adult entertainment in many cities, skin shows in Vegas, both Downtown and on the Strip, are fairly tame. In some of the larger showrooms, this is an accommodation to the ever-growing percentage of women in the audience. More often, however, it's a matter of economics rather than taste—the result of a curious city ordinance stipulating that you can offer totally nude entertainment *or* you can serve alcoholic beverages, but not both.

MALE STRIPPERS Spearheaded by the Rio—home of the world-famous *Chippendales* (see page 208)—and influenced by the ever-growing number of professional women in town for trade shows and conventions, the rules for sexual objectification are being rewritten. In addition to *Chippendales*, the Strip has three other popular male revues, two of them featuring, coincidentally, hunks from Australia: *Thunder from Down Under* at Excalibur (see page 247) and *Aussie Heat* at Notoriety in Neonopolis (see page 202). The third, *Magic Mike Live* at the Sahara (see page 229), is based on the films featuring Channing Tatum, who got his start taking it off in Tampa.

Where the Girls Are

In this section we describe some of the better-known strip joints. For the whole scoop, check out **Arnold Snyder's Topless Vegas** at toplessvegas.com. In a city where it's easy to spend \$500 at a topless club,

PART THREE

GAMBLING

The **WAY IT IS**

GAMBLING IS THE REASON LAS VEGAS (in its modern incarnation) exists. It is the industry that fuels the local economy, paves the roads, and gives the city its identity. To visitors and tourists, gambling may be a game. To those who derive their livelihood from gambling, however, it is serious business.

There is an extraordinary and interesting dichotomy in the ways gambling is perceived. To the tourist and the gambler, gambling is all about luck. To those in the business, gambling is about mathematics. To the visitor, gambling is a few hours a day, while to the casinos, gambling is 24-7. The gambler *hopes* to walk away with a fortune, but the casinos *know* that in the long run that fortune will belong to the house. To visitors, gambling is recreation combined with risk and chance. To the casinos, gambling is business combined with near-certainty.

The casino takes no risk in the games themselves. In almost all cases, eventually the house will always win. The games, the odds, and the payoffs are all carefully designed to ensure this outcome. Yet the casino does take a chance and is at risk. The casino's bet is this: that it can entice enough people to play.

Imagine a casino costing hundreds of millions of dollars, with a staff numbering in the thousands. Before a nickel of profit can be set aside, all the bills must be paid, and the payroll must be met. Regardless of its overwhelming advantage at the tables, the house cannot stay in business unless a lot of people come to play. The larger the casino, the more gamblers are required. If the casino can fill the tables with players, the operation will succeed and be profitable, perhaps spectacularly so. On the other hand, if the tables sit empty, the casino will fail.

The gambling business is competition personified. All casinos sell the exact same product. Every owner knows how absolutely critical it is to get customers (gamblers) through the door. It is literally the *sine qua non*: no players, no profit. The casinos are aggressive and creative when

by the attitudes many people have toward gambling. As we profess to admire drinkers who can “hold their liquor,” we reinforce gamblers who beats the odds. Glamorizing these behaviors enables compulsive gamblers to remain in denial about their problem, blaming circumstances and other people for their misfortune. Friends and family may hear excuses like, “I didn’t get enough sleep; I couldn’t concentrate with all the noise; I lost track of the time; I’m jinxed at this casino.”

If this sounds like you or someone you care about, *please get help*. **Gamblers Anonymous** meetings take place across Las Vegas almost every Tuesday night; for more information, call ☎ 702-519-0202. To find a meeting in your area, call ☎ 855-222-5542 or check online at gamblersanonymous.org.

RULES *of the* GAMES

SLOT MACHINES

SLOT MACHINES, INCLUDING VIDEO POKER, have long eclipsed table games in patron popularity. Few Las Vegas casinos remain that haven’t allocated half or more of their available floor space to various types of slot machines.

The popularity of slots isn’t difficult to understand. First, slots allow a person to enjoy casino gambling at low or high stakes. Except at the oldest and lowest-tier casinos, all slot machines are now multid denominational, meaning you can play them for a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, dollar, and up. You don’t need change to do so—slot machines no longer have slots. You load them up with bills, then play at your chosen denomination. Higher-stakes players can find machines that accept bets of \$1–\$500 (\$2,500 to load up a \$500 video poker machine).

Second, many people like the slots because no human interaction is required. Absent in slot play is the adversarial atmosphere of the table games. Machines are less intimidating—at least more neutral—than dealers and pit bosses. Patrons can sit at machines for as long as their stamina and money last and never be bothered by a soul.

Finally, slot machines are simple, or at least ostensibly so. Although there are a number of things you should know before you play the slots, the only thing you have to know is how to put money, mostly bills, into the machine and press the spin button (it’s the rare slot machine that still has a handle).

What You Need to Know Before You Play the Slots

Starting at the beginning: All slot machines have (1) a slot for inserting either coins, bills, or machine tickets; (2) a button to push to activate the machine; (3) a visual display where you can see the reels spin and stop, or video symbols line up on each play; and (4) a coin tray or machine-ticket dispenser from which you hope some winnings will emerge.

PART FOUR

DINING *and* RESTAURANTS

DINING *in* LAS VEGAS

LAS VEGAS TOURISM took a while to rebound from the COVID-19 shutdown. But as conventioners began returning to the city in force in the spring of 2022, the Strip saw a return to some sense of normalcy. And the pent-up demand for a Las Vegas visit fueled a spending boom in the tourist corridors, which has trickled down to businesses everywhere. Bars and restaurants are once again seeing packed houses with customers itching to spend money. (Unfortunately, that's one of many factors that have led to higher prices across the board—so you should be prepared for some sticker shock.)

Returning visitors may find that post-pandemic Las Vegas looks (and tastes) a little different from the city they remember. The past few years have seen big changes in a town that has never been slow to reinvent itself. Many popular restaurants didn't survive the shutdown and the slowdown that followed it, while many others used the downtime as an opportunity to reinvent themselves. At the same time, innovative new operators never paused their development of new concepts. The result is a rebooted Las Vegas dining scene.

unofficial TIP

Many of the restaurants in the following area sections are profiled later in this chapter.

The bad news is that your longtime favorite may no longer be in operation, or (more likely) it may have significantly changed its offerings. The good news is that most of those changes have been improvements, and plenty of new players have stepped in to fill any gaps created by closures. There is no shortage of great places to eat, both on and off the Strip.

DOWNTOWN

THE DOWNTOWN LAS VEGAS REVIVAL has expanded far beyond the original inroads made by late Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh and his

gone bricks-and-mortar with a food-focused gaming bar across from the Henderson Silver Knights' Water Street practice facility, specializing in rotisserie chicken. Those over-the-top franks proved so popular, though, that he had to include them in the mix at Sticks. Camacho's tavern resonates with local foodies on all those levels. *Inexpensive*

THE RESTAURANTS: THE BEST *and the* REST

OUR FAVORITE LAS VEGAS RESTAURANTS

WE'VE DEVELOPED DETAILED LISTS AND PROFILES for the best restaurants (in our opinion) in town.

The section begins with lists of the best of the best in a handful of popular categories. For each pick, you'll find all the vital information you need, along with an explanation of what we believe makes the restaurant a great choice in that category.

But not all of our highly recommended restaurants fit neatly into one of these categories, or into one of the categories in the previous section. That's why we've created a section called "The Rest of the Best" (see page 362). The profiles there offer a bit more detail, in order to give you a sense of what each place is all about. They start with an easily scanned heading that allows you, in just a second, to check out the restaurant's name, cuisine, overall rating, cost category, quality rating, and value rating. Below that, you'll find some vital information on the atmosphere and food, along with our recommendations and comments.

OVERALL RATING This encompasses the entire dining experience: style, service, and ambience, in addition to taste, presentation, and food quality. Five stars is the highest rating possible and connotes the best of everything. Four-star restaurants are exceptional, three-star restaurants are well above average, and two-star restaurants are good. One star indicates an average restaurant that demonstrates an unusual capability in some area of specialization—for example, an otherwise unmemorable place that serves great barbecued chicken.

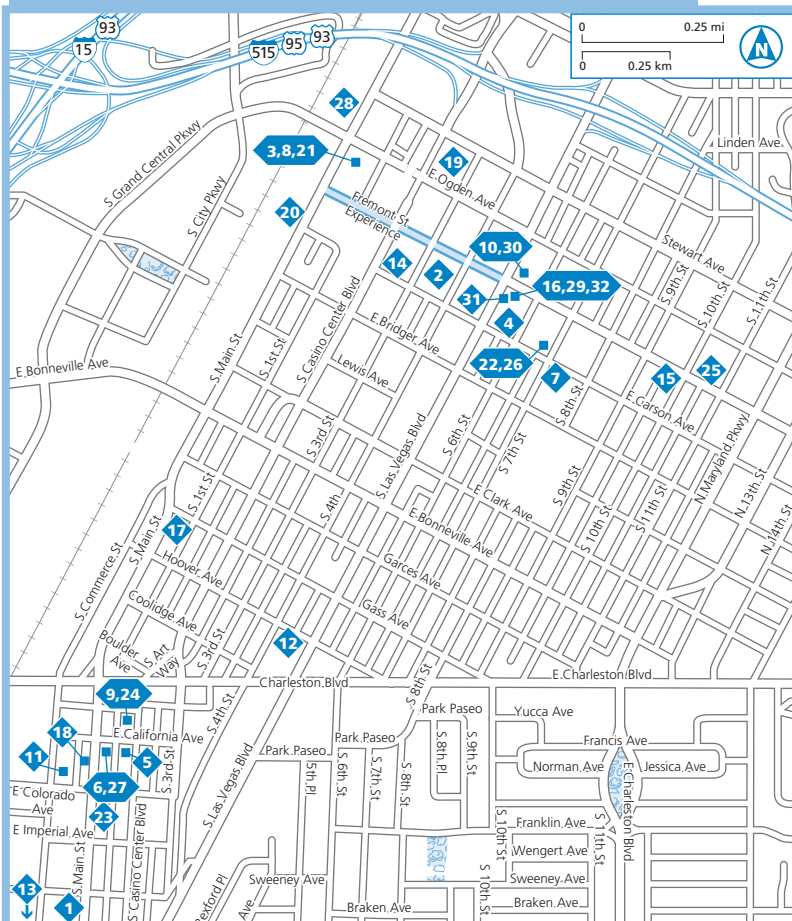
COST Our expense description provides a comparative sense of how much a complete meal will cost. A complete meal for our purposes consists of an entrée with vegetable or side dish, plus either an appetizer, soup, or salad. Desserts, drinks, and tips are excluded.

INEXPENSIVE	Below \$25 per person
MODERATE	\$25–\$75 per person
EXPENSIVE	\$75–\$150 per person
VERY EXPENSIVE	\$150+ per person

QUALITY RATING Beneath each heading appear a quality rating and a value rating. The quality rating is based expressly on the taste, freshness of ingredients, preparation, presentation, and creativity of food

LAS VEGAS RESTAURANTS: The Rest of the Best				
CUISINE	OVERALL RATING	COST	QUALITY RATING	VALUE RATING
AMERICAN				
HONEY SALT	★★★★	Moderate	★★★★	★★★★
SPAGO	★★★★	Moderate	★★★★½	★★★★½
CARSON KITCHEN	★★★★½	Mod/Exp	★★★★	★★★★½
KITCHEN TABLE	★★★★½	Inexp/Mod	★★★★	★★★★½
GORDON RAMSAY HELL'S KITCHEN	★★★★½	Exp/V. Exp	★★★★	★★½
EAT	★★★★½	Inexpensive	★★★★½	★★★★½
THE KITCHEN AT ATOMIC	★★★★½	Mod/Exp	★★★★½	★★★★½
BEAUTY & ESSEX	★★★★½	Expensive	★★★	★★★
FAT CHOY	★★½	Inexpensive	★★★★	★★★★★
ASIAN FUSION/PACIFIC RIM				
FUHU	★★★★	Exp/V. Exp	★★★★½	★★★★½
CHINESE				
WING LEI	★★★★½	Exp/V. Exp	★★★★★	★★★★
DIN TAI FUNG	★★★★	Moderate	★★★★½	★★★★½
CHINA MAMA	★★★	Inexpensive	★★★★	★★★★
CHINA POBLANO BY JOSÉ ANDRÉS	★★★	Moderate	★★★★	★★★★
FAT CHOY	★★½	Inexpensive	★★★★	★★★★★
COMFORT FOOD				
CARSON KITCHEN	★★★★½	Mod/Exp	★★★★	★★★★½
CONTINENTAL/FRENCH				
JOËL ROBUCHON RESTAURANT	★★★★★	Very Exp	★★★★★	★★★
LE CIRQUE	★★★★½	Very Exp	★★★★½	★★½
BARDOT BRASSERIE	★★★★	Exp/V. Exp	★★★★	★★★★
BOUCHON	★★★★	Expensive	★★★★	★★★★
MON AMI GABI	★★★★½	Mod/Exp	★★★★	★★★★½
EASTERN EUROPEAN				
FORTE	★★★	Moderate	★★★	★★★★
ITALIAN				
BREZZA	★★★★½	Expensive	★★★★½	★★★★
ESTHER'S KITCHEN	★★★★½	Moderate	★★★★	★★★★★
BUDDY V'S RISTORANTE	★★★★	Moderate	★★★★	★★★★
CARBONE	★★★★	Expensive	★★★★½	★★★★½
GIADA	★★★★½	Expensive	★★★★	★★½
LA STREGA	★★★★½	Moderate	★★★★	★★★★½
PIERO'S ITALIAN CUISINE	★★★★½	Expensive	★★★★	★★★
SINATRA	★★★	Expensive	★★★	★★

Dining and Nightlife Downtown



RESTAURANTS

1. Able Baker Brewing
2. American Coney Island
3. Barry's Downtown Prime
4. Carson Kitchen
5. Crafthaus Brewery
6. Cream Me Ice Creamery
7. Eat
8. 8 East
9. Esther's Kitchen
10. Evel Pie
11. Good Pie
12. The Goodwich
13. Guerrilla Pizza
14. Hugo's Cellar

15. The Kitchen at Atomic

16. Le Thai
17. Letty's de Leticia Cocina
18. Main St. Provisions
19. Pizza Rock
20. Pop Up Pizza
21. Saginaw's Delicatessen
22. 7th & Carson
23. SoulBelly BBQ
24. Tacotarian
25. Vegas Test Kitchen
26. VegeNation
27. Yu-Or-Mi Sushi

BUFFET

28. Garden Court Buffet

NIGHTLIFE

29. Commonwealth
30. Discopussy
31. Downtown Cocktail Room & Mike Morey's Sip 'n' Tip
32. We All Scream

Buddy V's Ristorante ★★★★★**ITALIAN MODERATE QUALITY** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★**GRAND CANAL SHOPPES** (The Venetian) 3327 Las Vegas Blvd. S.;
☎ 607-2344, venetianlasvegas.com/restaurants/buddy-v-ristorante**MID-STRIP AND ENVIRONS**

Customers Visitors, locals. **Reservations** Recommended. **When to go** Anytime. **Entrée range** \$17–\$50. **Payment** All major credit cards. **Service** ★★★★★. **Friendliness** ★★★★★½. **Parking** Valet, garage. **Bar** Full service. **Dress** Casual. **Disabled access** Yes. **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 11:30 a.m.–10 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE A classic, comfortable family-style Italian restaurant, right down to the red-and-white checkered tablecloths.

HOUSE SPECIALTIES Hoboken, New Jersey-born celebrity chef Buddy Valastro offers all the Italian-American classics, from linguine with clams to veal parmigiana. But he may be most proud of the Sunday gravy, packed with meatballs, pork, lamb, and sausage and served over rigatoni.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS Don't forget: Valastro is TV's *Cake Boss*—and that means you don't want to skip dessert.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS The majority of the Italian menu items are based on family recipes from Valastro's mother, grandmother, aunts, wife, and mother-in-law. So there's an authenticity here that you might not expect from a celebrity baker.

Carbone ★★★★★**ITALIAN EXPENSIVE QUALITY** ★★★★★½ **VALUE** ★★★★★½**ARIA** 3730 Las Vegas Blvd. S.; ☎ 877-230-2742, arialasvegas.com/carbone**MID-STRIP AND ENVIRONS**

Customers Visitors, locals, celebrities. **Reservations** Recommended. **When to go** Anytime. **Entrée range** \$25–\$69. **Payment** All major credit cards. **Service** ★★★★★½. **Friendliness** ★★★★★. **Parking** Valet, garage. **Bar** Full service. **Dress** Business casual. **Disabled access** Yes. **Hours** Sunday–Thursday, 5 p.m.–10:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m.–11 p.m.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE The lush main room, inspired by the Milan Opera House, features a floor-to-ceiling Murano crystal chandelier centered above a collection of outward-facing booths, with more-private “opera box” booths around the perimeter of the room (each of which features its own chandelier and curtains that can be drawn to avoid prying eyes).

HOUSE SPECIALTIES The menu elevates red-sauce favorites from “back East” with pristine ingredients, delivering them with old-school fine-dining flair, many with tableside preparations. The eggplant parm is a favorite.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS In March 2022, *Harper's Bazaar* called the original New York City Carbone “Your Favorite Celebs' Favorite Restaurant,” and that sense of glamour, style, and being part of the in-crowd carries over to the Las Vegas location.

Carson Kitchen ★★★★★½**COMFORT FOOD MODERATE/EXPENSIVE QUALITY** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★½124 S. Sixth St.; ☎ 702-473-9523; carsonkitchen.com/las **DOWNTOWN**

PART FIVE

SHOPPING *and* SEEING *the* SIGHTS

SHOPPING *in* LAS VEGAS

unofficial TIP

The average amount spent per trip on shopping by Las Vegas visitors in 2021 was \$284.

EVERY HOTEL-CASINO has a retail center, large or small. Some are extravagant, with high-fashion boutiques, such as those at **Bellagio** and **Wynn**, while others, such as the **Miracle Mile Shops** at Planet Hollywood, are more affordable. Aside from guests purchasing sundries and souvenirs, hotel retailers are most often patronized by casino players cashing in their chips or curious vacationers conducting reconnaissance visits. Discounts and special sales are sporadic, depending on the vendors' need to move or replace merchandise.

With the rebirth of **Downtown Las Vegas**, more merchants have ventured there and to the surrounding blocks, opening smallish shops

unofficial TIP

Warning: Some hotel gift and sundries shops engage in so-called surge pricing, which basically means the cost of an item is determined at checkout. If you don't see prices on the merchandise, assume that surge pricing is in effect and take your business elsewhere.

and cafés, although the gigantic **Las Vegas North Premium Outlets** supersedes all else. As Las Vegas's population has increased, so have large malls in the suburbs, several of which are included here.

Shopping overload is symptomatic of Las Vegas, with opportunities to spend money everywhere 24-7. To maximize your shopping opportunities before your trip, check the various hotel, mall, and store websites for coupons and noteworthy promotions.

To find out what's in store for you, check out the following high-profile shopping opportunities (listed by area and then alphabetically).

On or Near the Strip

Bellagio Shops

BELLAGIO 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S.; ☎ 702-693-7111, bellagio.mgmresorts.com/en/amenities/shopping.html

continued on page 402

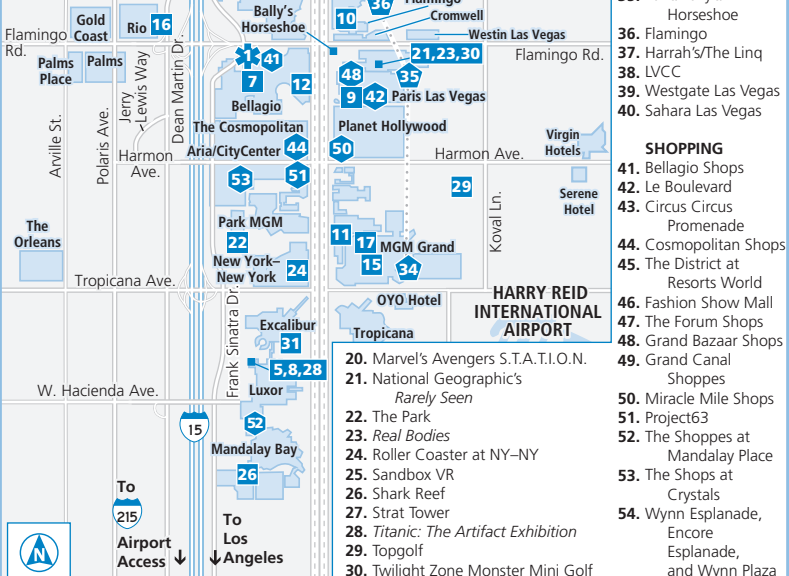
Las Vegas Strip Shopping and Attractions

ART GALLERIES

1. Bellagio
2. The Venetian

ATTRACTIONS

3. AdventureDome
4. Area 15
5. *Bodies: The Exhibition*
6. Circus acts
7. Conservatory and botanical garden
8. *Discovering King Tut's Tomb*
9. Eiffel Tower
10. Flamingo wildlife habitat
11. FlyOver
12. Fountains
13. *Glow*
14. Gondola cruises
15. *The Hunger Games: The Exhibition*
16. KISS Monster Mini Golf
17. Level Up
18. Linq Promenade, High Roller, Fly Linq, and VR Adventures
19. Madame Tussauds, *Marvel Universe 4D*, and The Virtual Room



31. Ultimate 4D Experience
32. Vegas Indoor Skydiving
33. Volcano

MONORAIL

34. MGM Grand
35. Paris/Bally's/Horseshoe
36. Flamingo
37. Harrah's/The Linq
38. LVCC
39. Westgate Las Vegas
40. Sahara Las Vegas

SHOPPING

41. Bellagio Shops
42. Le Boulevard
43. Circus Circus Promenade
44. Cosmopolitan Shops
45. The District at Resorts World
46. Fashion Show Mall
47. The Forum Shops
48. Grand Bazaar Shops
49. Grand Canal Shoppes
50. Miracle Mile Shops
51. Project63
52. The Shoppes at Mandalay Place
53. The Shops at Crystals
54. Wynn Esplanade, Encore Esplanade, and Wynn Plaza

20. *Marvel's Avengers S.T.A.T.I.O.N.*
21. *National Geographic's Rarely Seen*
22. The Park
23. *Real Bodies*
24. Roller Coaster at NY-NY
25. Sandbox VR
26. Shark Reef
27. Strat Tower
28. *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*
29. Topgolf
30. Twilight Zone Monster Mini Golf

SEEING *the* SIGHTS

RESIDENTS OF LAS VEGAS are justifiably proud of their home and are quick to point out that it has much to offer besides gambling. Live theater, college and professional sports, dance, concerts, art shows, museums, and film festivals, along with abundant natural beauty in the surrounding desert, contribute to making Las Vegas a truly great place to live.



Before you buy the Las Vegas Pass (see below), remember that shows and attractions in Vegas are constantly changing. To help ensure that the things you want to see and do will be open and covered by the pass during your trip, don't buy it too far in advance.

All that said, the average business or leisure traveler doesn't give a hoot about any of this. Aside from gambling, shows, and such, Vegas has no major tourist attractions except for nearby **Hoover Dam**; what's more, nobody drives all the way to Las Vegas to visit the Neon Museum, interesting as it is, and the only dancing of interest to most visitors occurs in nightclubs and strip joints.

Make no mistake: there are lots of places where you can detox from a long trade show or too many hours at the casino, but they're totally peripheral in the minds of most visitors. If, however, you're game to explore, read on.

Serious sightseers should consider the **Las Vegas Pass**, which at the time of this writing affords entry to more than 35 Las Vegas-area attractions. Passes are available for two, three, four, or five days and cost \$149–\$339 for adults and \$124–\$299 for kids. For more information, including details on discounts, visit lasvegaspass.com.

The pass is a sort of Vegas E-Ticket that you buy online, download to your smartphone, and then get scanned at the attractions you wish to visit. While this is far more convenient than picking up hard tickets at a physical location, be aware that to get the most out of your pass, you'll need to activate it as early in the day as possible at the first attraction on your itinerary: if, say, you've bought a three-day pass but you don't activate it until 4 p.m., you'll have already wasted more than half a day of the pass. Also, while many tours and other attractions can be booked ahead, shows can be booked only on the morning of the day you want to attend, limiting you to what's immediately available when it comes to seating.

Getting the maximum bang for your buck from the pass means packing in as much as possible in a day. When planning your itinerary, choose shows and attractions that aren't too spread out from each other—preferably within walking distance of your hotel—or make sure to budget for cabs, rideshares, or a rental car.

STRIP ATTRACTIONS

Bally's/Horseshoe

Real Bodies at Bally's (☎ 702-777-2782, realbodiesatballys.com) is an edifying stroll through human anatomy, featuring more than 200 preserved human bodies and organs. The specimens are posed in active

PART SIX

EXERCISE *and* RECREATION

WORKING OUT

MOST OF THE FOLKS ON OUR *Unofficial Guide* research team work out regularly. Some bike; some run; some lift weights or do yoga. Staying in hotels on the Strip and Downtown, they realized that working out in Las Vegas presents its own peculiar challenges.

The best time of year for outdoor exercise is October–April. The rest of the year is extremely hot, though mornings and evenings are generally pleasant in September and May. During the scorching summer, particularly for visitors, we recommend working out indoors or, for bikers and runners, very early in the morning.

WALKING

PRIMARILY FLAT, LAS VEGAS is made for walking and great people-watching. Security is very good both Downtown and on the Strip, making for a safe walking environment at practically all hours of the day and night. Downtown, everything is concentrated in such a small area that you might be inclined to venture away from the casino center. While this is no more perilous than walking in any other city, the areas surrounding Downtown aren't particularly interesting. If the Downtown casino center isn't large enough to accommodate your exercise needs, you're better off commuting to the Strip and doing your walking there.

If you're walking the Strip, it's about 4 miles from **Mandalay Bay** on the south end to **The Strat** on the north end. Because the topography is so flat, however, it doesn't look that far. We've met a number of people who set out on foot along the Strip and managed to overextend



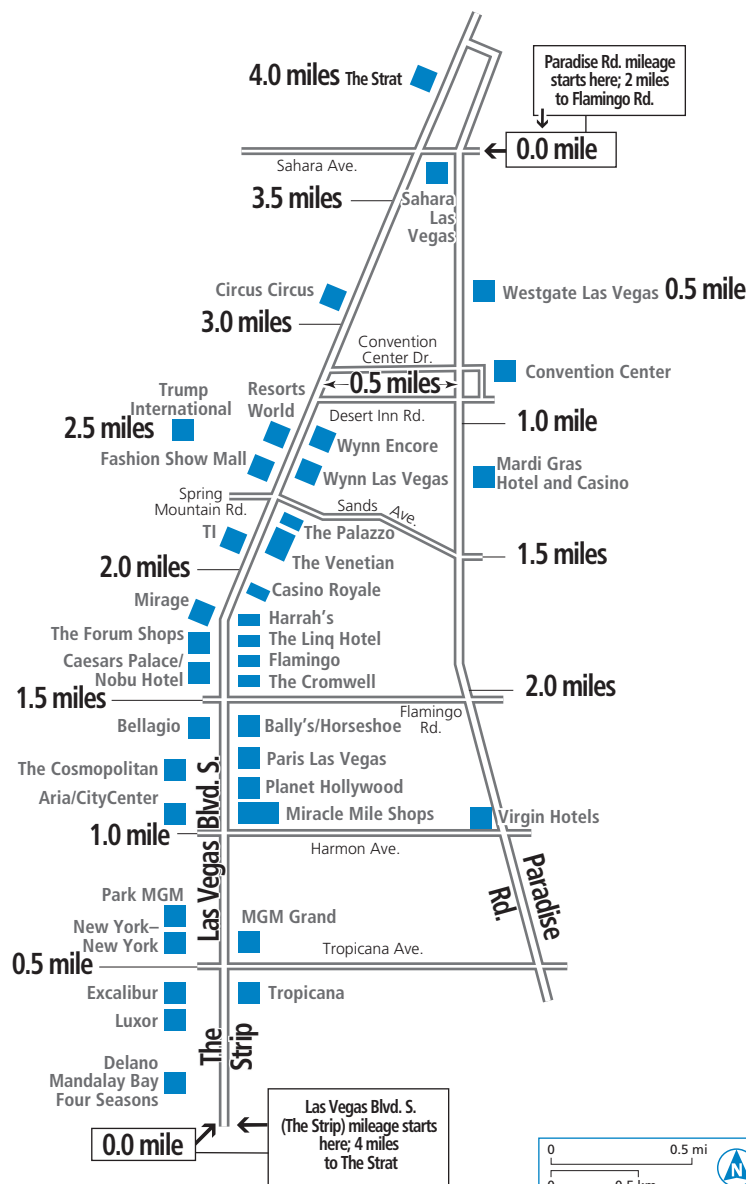
If you do anything strenuous outside, at any time of year, **drink plenty of water**. Dehydration and heat exhaustion can overtake you quickly in Las Vegas's desert climate. For outdoor workouts in Vegas comparable to what you're used to at home, you'll deplete your body's water at 2–3 times the usual rate.



When walking on the Strip, carry enough money to buy refreshments en route or catch a cab/bus back to your hotel if you poop out.

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Las Vegas Strip Walking Map



• Central 2655 S. Maryland Parkway ☎ 702-734-5822	• West 5200 W. Sahara Avenue ☎ 702-364-5822
• Northwest 1725 N. Rainbow Boulevard ☎ 702-835-5822	• North 6050 N. Decatur Blvd., Ste. 100 ☎ 702-647-5822
• Green Valley 9065 S. Eastern Avenue ☎ 702-853-5822	• East/Henderson 1195 Wellness Place ☎ 702-566-5822
• Southwest 9615 W. Flamingo Road ☎ 702-798-5822	

There are four **YMCA** locations in Las Vegas. The closest Y to the Strip and Downtown is the **Bill and Lillie Heinrich YMCA**, on the Westside near Springs Preserve (4141 Meadows Lane; ☎ 702-877-9622, lasvegasyymca.org).

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the **Student Recreation and Wellness Center** at UNLV is open to the general public for a \$10 daily fee.

FREE WEIGHTS AND MACHINES

ALMOST ALL OF THE MAJOR HOTELS have a spa or fitness center with weight equipment. Some properties have a single Universal machine, while others offer a wide range of free-weight and Hoist/Cybox equipment. Hotels with above-average facilities for pumping iron include **Aria, Bellagio, Caesars Palace, The Cosmopolitan, Golden Nugget, Luxor, Mandalay Bay, MGM Grand, Mirage, M Resort, Paris Las Vegas, Park MGM, TI, The Venetian, Westgate Las Vegas, and Wynn Las Vegas/Wynn Encore.**

PRO SPORTS

FOOTBALL The NFL's **Raiders** relocated from Oakland to Las Vegas January 22, 2020. They play in **Allegiant Stadium**, a \$1.9 billion multi-event facility that opened the following summer.

Located at 3333 Al Davis Way, near the southwest intersection of I-15 and West Hacienda Avenue, the stadium is an homage to the Raiders' legendary owner, Al Davis. A 92-foot memorial torch welcomes fans who enter through the north entry gate. Davis's legacy is forever linked to the Raiders: he coached the team from 1963 to 1965 before becoming the principal owner and general manager, a position he held for 39 years until his death in 2011. His inspirational quotes are displayed prominently throughout the stadium.

The Las Vegas Raiders' game days are the quintessential Vegas-NFL crossover, complete with high-roller suites, bottle service, DJs, and even a Guy Fieri-led tailgate party. But getting to the stadium is a challenge. Getting there by car—including by Uber and Lyft—is nearly impossible, unless you set out at sunrise. You're better off walking from the south end of the Strip. During events, the Hacienda Avenue overpass serves as a pedestrian walkway.



If an event at Allegiant Stadium is on your itinerary, stay at **Delano/Mandalay Bay, Excalibur, Luxor, MGM Grand, or Tropicana**. If you must drive, either park at Mandalay Bay and join the herd crossing on the Hacienda Avenue overpass, or use **RTC's Game Day Express** shuttle (see page 45) from a valley resort.

The **Dollar Loan Center** (see previous page) is also home to the American Hockey League's **Henderson Silver Knights**, the "farm team" for the Vegas Golden Knights. Their season runs from October through April; visit hendersonsilverknights.com for details.

BASKETBALL MGM Resorts bought the **WNBA's** San Antonio Stars, moved them to Sin City, and rechristened them as the **Las Vegas Aces**. They play at Mandalay Bay's **Michelob Ultra Arena**; for schedules and tickets, see aces.wnba.com. The WNBA regular season generally runs from May through August or early September.

As for the guys, Las Vegas hosts the **NBA Summer League**. Games are played at the **Thomas & Mack Center** and **Cox Pavilion**, both at UNLV (4505 S. Maryland Parkway). In 2022, single-game tickets started at \$40. See nba.com/summerleague for schedules, vividseats.com and unlv.tickets.com for tickets. Henderson's **Dollar Loan Center** hosts the NBA G League's **Ignite** developmental team. Games are held from October through March; see ignite.gleague.nba.com for more information.

SOCCER The **Las Vegas Lights Football Club**, a United Soccer League expansion team, began play during the 2018 season. The 33rd club to join the league, the Lights played 17 regular-season games at Downtown's **Cashman Field** (850 Las Vegas Blvd N.) during 2022. For information, tickets, and schedules, see lasvegaslightsfc.com.

BASEBALL In 2019, the Minor League **Las Vegas Aviators** moved to the new \$150 million, 10,000-seat **Las Vegas Ballpark**, in Downtown Summerlin west of the Strip (1650 S. Pavilion Center Drive), and broke Triple-A attendance records for the season. The Aviators are affiliated with Major League Baseball's Oakland Athletics (American League West). For schedules and tickets, see milb.com/las-vegas.

GOLF

PEAK SEASON FOR GOLF in Las Vegas is October–May. The other four months are considered prohibitively warm for most golfers; on the upside, however, greens fees are reduced substantially at many courses during summer. You can usually get the best rates through individual course websites, where all sorts of online specials can be found daily. Alternatively, several sites compile last-minute deals (see next page). Most courses also have reduced rates for locals, and many offer discounts for guests staying at partner hotels or discounted "stay and play" packages combining lodging and greens fees. These discounts are also available online, so make sure you check the course's website before booking.

Also, almost all Las Vegas-area courses offer discounted twilight rates, which, depending on time of year, start as early as noon. In general, morning tee times are more desirable and difficult to arrange than afternoons. Call the pro shop at least one day before you wish to play—same-day phone calls are discouraged.

unofficial TIP

Most Las Vegas golf courses and driving ranges stay open until at least 7:30 p.m. during the summer.

GOLF COURSE RATINGS

QUALITY RATING	VALUE RATING
★★★ Championship, challenging	★★★ A great bargain
★★ Playable, suitable for all caliber golfers	★★ A pretty good value
★ Preferred by beginners and casual golfers	★ Overpriced

Angel Park Golf Club ★★

ESTABLISHED 1989 | STATUS Municipal | QUALITY ★★ VALUE ★★

100 S. Rampart Blvd., Las Vegas; ☎ 888-446-5358, angelpark.com

TEES

PALM COURSE

- Professional: 6,432 yards, par 70, USGA 69.8, slope 125
- Championship: 5,741 yards, par 70, USGA 66.8, slope 114
- Forward: 4,488 yards, par 70, USGA 64.9, slope 109

MOUNTAIN COURSE

- Professional: 6,722 yards, par 71, USGA 71.6, slope 132
- Championship: 6,223 yards, par 71, USGA 69.2, slope 130
- Forward: 5,150 yards, par 71, USGA 69.0, slope 121

FEES \$49–\$84 for residents, \$57–\$194 for nonresidents.**FACILITIES** Pro shop, night-lit driving range, 12-hole par-3 course, 9-hole putting course, putting green, restaurant, snack bar, bar, club and shoe rentals.

COMMENTS Angel Park is one of the most successful public golf facilities in the entire United States. Its courses are well designed—by Arnold Palmer, no less—and the sophisticated 18-hole putting course is a popular attraction even for nongolfers. Its Cloud 9 short course is unique and great for golfers needing a quick fix, with reproductions of 12 famous par-3 holes from around the world, 9 of which are lit for night play. There is also a lighted natural-grass putting course called the Divine 9 (think fancy mini-golf). Both courses are crowded year-round, as the facility is close to the Strip and popular with locals. Angel Park recently moved to demand-based dynamic pricing, which can vary wildly from day to day.

Bali Hai Golf Club ★★

ESTABLISHED 2000 | STATUS Public | QUALITY ★★ | VALUE ★★

5160 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas; ☎ 888-427-6678, balihaigolfclub.com

TEES

- Black: 7,002 yards, par 71, USGA 73.0, slope 130
- Gold: 6,601 yards, par 71, USGA 70.2, slope 125
- Silver: 6,156 yards, par 71, USGA 68.6, slope 113
- Bronze: 5,535 yards, par 71, USGA 71.5, slope 122

FEES \$149–\$449, depending on time of day and year; see website for details. Bali Hai's website offers a low-rate guarantee and up-to-date deals for same- and next-day bookings.

FACILITIES Pro shop, driving range, putting green, snack bar, restaurant, locker facilities, caddies, forecaddies, club and shoe rentals.

TEES

- Black: 6,722 yards, par 70, USGA 71.1, slope 119
- Gold: 6,272 yards, par 70, USGA 68.7, slope 116
- Platinum: 5,868 yards, par 70, USGA 67.2, slope 113
- Bronze: 4,810 yards, par 71, USGA 64.9, slope 105

FEES \$650, rarely discounted. Includes cart fully stocked with free beverages and latest-generation Callaway rental clubs at no extra charge.

FACILITIES Pro shop with men's and women's locker rooms, driving nets, putting green, on-course snack stands, restaurant; forecaddies available.

COMMENTS Built in 2005, Wynn Golf Club was closed and partially demolished in 2017, then rebuilt by original designer Tom Fazio with 10 new holes and reopened in 2019. In full-on Vegas style, the signature 18th is a par-3, with an artificial waterfall behind the green and a tunnel within the waterfall to drive carts through for a memorable finish. The footprint of the course is small, so the result is a fairly short 18-hole layout with par of 70, but it's undeniably beautiful and exceptionally well maintained with luxury facilities—and luxury prices. It's a fun and welcoming course to play (not punishing at all), but by far the biggest appeal is its unbeatable mid-Strip location: it's easily reachable on foot from neighboring properties, including the largest in Vegas—The Venetian—and the newest—Resorts World. If it were out in the suburbs, it would cost a third or less, but it's not, and after two price hikes in the past two years, it now costs more to play here than at Pebble Beach.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

LAS VEGAS AND THE SURROUNDING AREA offer a host of outdoor and adventure activities. The following section provides information on the activities available.

Warning: Cellular coverage in Clark County outside of Las Vegas is spotty at best, especially in desert/wilderness areas, so be aware of this if you plan to hike, bike, climb, ski, or boat during your Vegas visit. Make sure that someone, either in your party or back at home, knows where you're going and when you expect to return.

MULTIUSE TRAILS

THERE ARE SEVERAL DELIGHTFUL multipurpose recreation trails in the greater Las Vegas area that accommodate road bikers, mountain bikers, walkers, hikers, runners, and birders. Unique is the **Clark County Wetlands Park and Nature Preserve**, an east–west linear park with miles of both paved and unpaved trails, including a 13-mile loop trail. The wetlands, which stand in stark contrast to the surrounding desert, are the product of the Las Vegas wash, a 12-mile channel that feeds runoff from a number of tributaries into Lake Mead. The creeks create a long oasis with ponds and small islands, grasses, and other wetland flora, as well as a diverse assortment of wildlife. Adjoining the parking areas is a large and well-conceived nature center highlighting the geology and

PLEASURE BOATING, SAILING, WATER-SKIING, AND JET-SKIING

LAKE MEAD AND LAKE MOHAVE are both excellent sites for pleasure boating, water-skiing, and other activities. Both lakes are so large that it's easy to find a secluded spot. Rock formations on the lakes are spectacular, and boaters can visit scenic canyons and coves that are inaccessible to those traveling by car. Boats, for example, can travel into the narrow, steep-walled gorge of Iceberg Canyon in Lake Mead or upstream into the Black Canyon from Lake Mohave.

First-timers, particularly on Lake Mead, frequently underestimate its vast size. It isn't difficult to get lost on the open waters of Lake Mead or get caught in bad weather. Winds can be severe on the lake, and waves of 6 feet sometimes arise during storms. In general, there is no shade on the lakes, and the steep rock formations along the shore don't make for hospitable emergency-landing sites. When you boat on either lake, take plenty of water, dress properly, be equipped, and be sure to tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return.

Most of the resorts listed in the table above rent various types of pleasure craft and water-skiing equipment; **Callville Bay Resort**, on Lake Mead, also rents personal watercraft. In addition, Callville Bay and **Cottonwood Cove** on Lake Mohave have luxury houseboats available for rent. For rates and other information concerning houseboats, call ☎ 855-918-5253, or visit callvillebay.com or cottonwoodcoversort.com.

LAS VEGAS SPAS: GET PAMPERED *in* STYLE

LET'S FACE IT: most people spend more time and money on preventative maintenance for their cars than on themselves. After all, changing the oil and checking tire pressure go a long way in extending the life of a car, let alone ensuring a smoother ride along the way.

Believe it or not, this analogy can also apply to participating in spa experiences. Call it preventative maintenance for your chassis—and a whole lot more. (Note, however, that we're talking about the psychological benefits of self-care and spa coddling: the purported physical benefits of these treatments are backed by "science" that's mostly tenuous at best.) The following section will help you make sense of the Vegas spa scene.

SPA 101

THIS SECTION EXPLAINS the terminology used to describe the array of services on offer at a typical high-end spa. These services sound (and feel) great, but the lexicon is largely marketing-speak—so if you read or hear about things like "aligning your chakras" and "optimum moisturization," take it with a grain of rare and precious Dead Sea salt.

“A Tourist’s Best Friend!”

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

“Indispensable”

—*The New York Times*

Honest and Outspoken Advice from the **Unofficial** Experts

- Nearly 100 hotels and casinos described, rated, and ranked, plus strategies for scoring the best room rate
- Reviews of more than 100 restaurants—a complete dining guide within the guide, plus the best buffets and brunches
- The best places to play for every casino game
- Almost 50 pages of gambling tips, including how to play, recognizing sucker games, and cutting the house advantage
- Critical reviews of 70 of Las Vegas’s best shows
- Complete coverage of the Las Vegas nightclub, bar, and lounge scene, with surefire advice on how to get into the most exclusive venues
- Detailed instructions for avoiding Strip and I-15 traffic gridlock
- In-depth descriptions and consumer tips on shopping and experiencing attractions



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