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DrPleishner

# Around Las Vegas: Great Places for a Drive

## Las Vegas, 1 Day

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** Las Vegas is in the Mojave Desert, North America's smallest desert, and home to miles of two-lane roads. For a day-trip outside of the Neon City, take a picnic and spend some time on the road. Multi-colored sandstone fractures Southern Nevada in places, and a huge man-made lake sits just a couple of hours from the Strip. The mountains west of town are much cooler than in Las Vegas. At the higher altitudes in both Lee and Kyle Canyons, take a break from the car and hike to see if you can spot a bristlecone pine, one of the longest-lived types of trees. ~Photo courtesy of Frank Kovalchek~

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Las Vegas



### Lake Mead National Recreation Area

America's largest man-made lake



### Valley of Fire State Park

Other-worldly rock formations on the edge of Lake Mead



### Red Rock Canyon Scenic Byway

Scenic, one-way, 13-mile loop. Spectacular sandstone cliffs.



### Spring Mountain Scenic Loop Drive

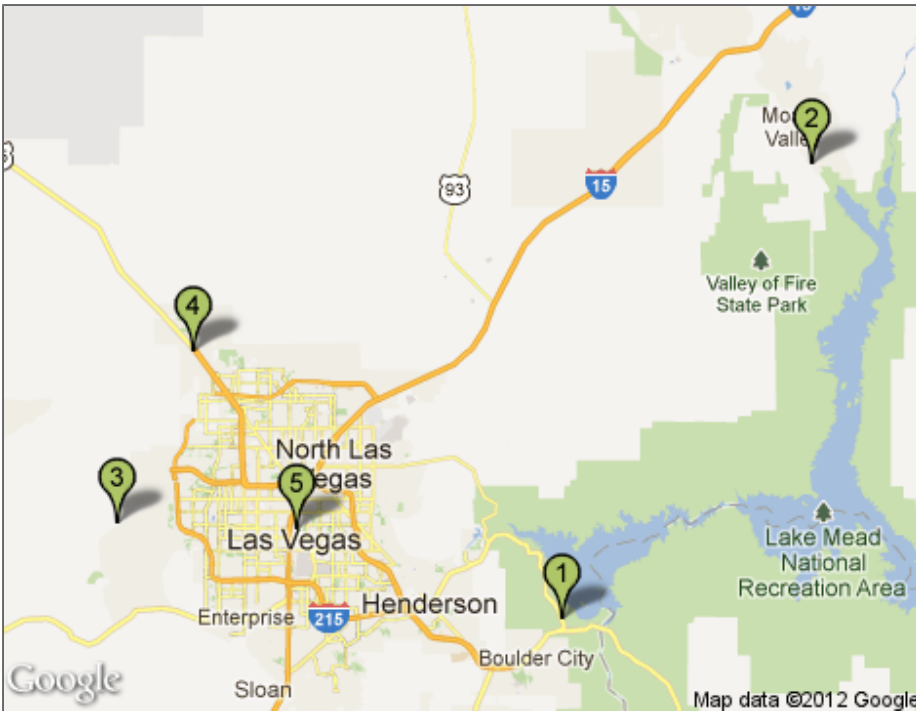
A 2 1/2 hour drive through the Spring Mountains



### The Strip

Casinos Galore!

# Day 1 - Las Vegas



## QUICK NOTE

### contact:

tel: +1 702 293 8990 (Visitor Center)

fax: +1 702 293 8936

<http://www.nps.gov/lame>

### location:

601 Nevada Way  
Boulder City NV 89005

## 1 Lake Mead National Recreation Area

**DESCRIPTION:** With over 500 miles of shoreline, Lake Mead National Recreation Area offers world class fishing, boating, swimming, kayaking and canoeing, scuba diving, hiking, camping, desert vistas and roadside sightseeing. The contrasts between water and desert, mountains and flat lands, blue skies and colorful desert rock are astounding. The North Shore Drive is an adventure as the road follows the shoreline, cutting through canyons and crossing mountains. The countryside is a collection of rock formations formed by wild weather and volcanic activity. Don't miss the Lake Mead Visitor Center, also called the Alan Bible Visitor Center, with its interactive exhibits and historical artifact displays. © NileGuide



### contact:

tel: +1 702 397 2088

<http://www.parks.nv.gov/vf.htm>

### location:

Interstate 15 on exit 75, P. O. Box 515  
Overton NV 89040

## 2 Valley of Fire State Park

**DESCRIPTION:** Nevada's oldest state park, founded in 1935, is where red sandstone monoliths and the Mojave Desert meet. Petroglyphs, some almost 3,000 years old tell the stories of the Anasazi. Petrified trees tell of a time when this ancient valley was lush with vegetation.

Located about an hour outside of Las Vegas, the Valley of Fire sits on the edge of Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Its remote location and brilliantly colored rock formations are a favorite of photographers, film makers, and nature lovers. Far more lightly visited than Red Rock Canyon, the Valley of



Photo courtesy of Terrisa Meeks

Fire is a great place to really explore the desert. Petroglyphs are abundant here, and wildlife is easy to spot (since there are so few people). Look for big horn sheep, coyotes, ravens, tarantulas, and other desert dwellers. Stop at the visitor's center to learn about the history, geology, and flora/fauna of the Valley of Fire.

Star Trek fans may recognize the area around White Domes, a land with brilliantly contrasting sandstone formations, as the place where Captain Kirk died. You'll also find the remnants of an earlier movie set if you take the hike at White Domes--it's a moderately challenging trail that requires rock scrambling at the beginning, and which leads through an amazing slot canyon. Slot canyons, found throughout the Southwestern United States, allow a person to stand in the middle of the canyon and touch both sides. Dangerous during flash floods, these fascinating paths through the rocks are intriguing and beautiful.

For a short and easy trail, try Mouse's Tank. The trail allegedly got its name because it was a hideout for a Paiute named Mouse, and the tanks are the tinajas (areas in the rocks that fill with water). Kids will love scrambling over the easy-to-climb rocks. Keep your eyes peeled along the trail for petroglyphs, and if you're there in the evening, watch for the bats that are out swooping up bugs as the sun goes down.

Valley of Fire offers camping, hiking, picnicking and spectacular photography. It's a popular outdoor wedding location because of its striking scenery. The camping spots fill up fast in the cooler months, especially on the weekend, so if you'd like to camp here, arrive early. Park fees are often on an honor basis, but rangers do come through and check periodically.

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tel: 702-515-5000

fax: 702-515-5023

[http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo/blm\\_programs/blm\\_special\\_areas/red\\_rock\\_nca.html](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/lvfo/blm_programs/blm_special_areas/red_rock_nca.html)

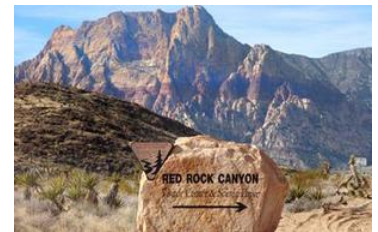
**location:**

Off Nevada State Route 159  
Las Vegas NV 89124

### 3 Red Rock Canyon Scenic Byway

**DESCRIPTION:** Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area has one paved road through its protected lands. The Red Rock "Loop," as locals refer to it, is a 13-mile, one-way scenic drive that weaves past the spectacular rock formations in Red Rock Canyon. The road itself is great fun to drive--if you like winding, curvy, slightly hilly roads with no guardrails. The Loop is a favorite photo-shoot backdrop for car clubs of all kinds, precisely because it's a such an enjoyable drive. This is a one-way road, but in its former life, this road was two-lanes. Drivers who like to take it slow should move to the right and let the faster cars pass.

The first pull-outs on the Loop overlook the Calico Hills. These overlooks are crowded with tourists, hikers, photographers, and rock climbers. Take a good look at the Calico Hills and you're likely to find several climbers clinging to its vertical rock walls. Sandstone Quarry is another popular stop along the Scenic Drive. Its name signifies exactly what it formerly was, and visitors who want to stretch their legs but not go for a hike will find this a good stop, but there are no picnic tables here.



High Point Overlook has a roomy parking lot and coin-operated binoculars. You can see the southwestern tip of the Las Vegas Valley from here, along with an expansive view of Red Rock's cliffs. If you can catch a full moon rising over the Calico Hills, it makes a great picture from this spot. Further down the road, drivers will find picnic tables at Willow Springs, close to the Children's Discovery Trail and the Lost Creek Trail. (Experienced 4WD drivers may want to try Rocky Gap Road, which goes over the mountains here. Check on road conditions before attempting this drive). Photographers adore the Red Rock Scenic Loop, and if you're in this group, plan on pulling over often. Red Rock's scenery appears frequently in movies, and it's also a favorite spot for weddings, romantic drives and picnics. Visitors who don't want to hike or climb can still enjoy a drive along the Loop, which ends back at State Route 159. The Red Rock Overlook sits just off SR159, and it has covered picnic tables. Drivers can pull in here for a panoramic view of Red Rock Canyon, and there's no entrance fee. A short trail climbs a hill just east of the parking lot, and several benches give people the chance to stop and rest, or simply to stop and enjoy the view. The Red Rock Canyon Scenic Loop is open from daylight to dark; hours change according to the seasons. Admission is \$7 per vehicle.  
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**contact:**  
tel: 702-515-5000  
fax: 702-515-5023  
<http://www.nv.blm.gov/vegas/Default.htm>

**location:**  
US Highway 95 & State Highway 157  
Las Vegas NV 89143

## 4 Spring Mountain Scenic Loop Drive

**DESCRIPTION:** The Spring Mountain Scenic Loop is an approximately 2 1/2 hour drive beginning at the intersection of U.S. Highway 95 and State Highway 157 (Kyle Canyon Highway, north of Las Vegas). The loop also includes State 156 (Lee Canyon Highway), and State Highway 158 (Deer Creek Highway), which connects Kyle and Lee Canyon Highways. The elevation gain from 2,500 feet to 8,500 feet present in a rich diversity of plant communities, from a desert basin dotted with Joshua trees to ponderosa pine and bristlecone pine forest. This scenic loop drive combines scenes of dramatic limestone cliffs, narrow forested canyons and panoramic views to the east of the basin and range topography unique to Nevada. A 30 degree temperature drop is not uncommon with the gain in elevation.



Photo courtesy of Ken Lund

**contact:**

tel: +1 702 892 0711  
<http://www.visitlasvegas.com/>

**location:**

S Las Vegas Boulevard  
Las Vegas NV 89109

5 **The Strip**

**DESCRIPTION:** When most people imagine Las Vegas, the first thing that comes to mind is The Strip—the four mile stretch of South Las Vegas Boulevard with all the famous casinos and hotels. Bordered by Mandalay Bay in the south and the Stratosphere in the north, visitors can enjoy 30+ casinos which are attractions in themselves. Fabulous shopping, dining, and world-class entertainment can all be found here. Pick up the latest designer bag in the boutiques at the Forum Shops in Caesars Palace Hotel Casino. Or peruse the Grand Canal Shoppes in the Venetian Resort & Casino. Watch the dancing Fountains at Bellagio, or take in an imported Broadway show. Attempts have been made to make The Strip more pedestrian-friendly by adding footbridges, free shuttles, cable-pulled trams, and the Las Vegas Monorail (frequency and rates vary).



Photo courtesy of Mark Richardson

# Las Vegas Snapshot

## Local Info

Las Vegas defies definition. This city in the desert is a gambling capital, vacation paradise, adventure destination, and premier business convention center rolled into one. Las Vegas is the city of neon and the city that never sleeps. Reality takes a hike when you enter the world of glittering casinos, and the hours trickle away in this realm of slot machines, roulette wheels, and high-stakes poker rooms. If you want to keep track of the time, be sure to wear a watch. Casinos don't have clocks, and they are open 24/7, year-round.

Las Vegas hotels range from utilitarian to luxurious, and options for entertainment come in every variety, from adults-only to family-friendly. As a business destination, Las Vegas wins hands-down with the volume of facilities and services available for either large conventions or small business get-togethers. Upscale eateries by chefs like Wolfgang Puck and Emeril Lagasse are found throughout Las Vegas, both on and off the Strip. Award-winning shows from Cirque du Soleil and adaptations of Broadway hits such as *The Phantom of the Opera* grace the hotels' showrooms. Late-night entertainment is plentiful and diverse. Beyond the casinos, the Mojave Desert holds adventures like world-class rock climbing and mountain biking.

### The Strip: Las Vegas Boulevard

The fabled five-mile area known as the Las Vegas Strip holds more hotel rooms than any other city in the world. You'll find famous and remarkable hotels, each with its own theme and ambiance. Bellagio's dancing fountains and Italian Renaissance aura ooze luxury. Caesars Palace recreates the glory of Rome, Vegas-style. The Venetian takes on another Italian city and era, duplicating Old World Venice, complete with canals and gondoliers. Old standbys include the Flamingo and the Mirage, with its white tigers and erupting volcanoes. See the Paris Las Vegas with

outstanding replicas of the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe and magnifique Parisian atmosphere and charm. Treasure Island offers daily live pirate battles, free of charge. At the "bottom" or south end of the strip, risen from the ashes of the Hacienda Hotel, the magnificent Mandalay Bay takes you to the tropics, including a pool with waves you can actually surf. At the top of the Strip, you will find the Stratosphere Tower visible from miles away. It is the highest free-standing building in the western half of the United States, with views from the top that are indescribable.

You don't have to stay right on Las Vegas Boulevard to enjoy neon and glitz. Just off the Strip, places like the Rio, the Palms, and the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino are only a taxi ride away and offer easier access to areas beyond the Strip.

### Downtown: Fremont Street

The original Las Vegas, where people hung out in the '30s and early '40s, is still thriving, but with a new face known as the Fremont Street Experience. The Fremont Street Experience closed the fabled street to vehicle traffic, and its 90-foot overhead canopy contains state-of-the-art LED lights that create jaw-dropping images. Some tourists actually prefer this area to the Strip because room prices are generally lower. It's an easy walk from one casino to the next, and it's reminiscent of the early, nostalgic days of Las Vegas. The Neon Museum has a permanent display along Fremont Street featuring Old Vegas signs, from Vegas Vic to Aladdin's Lamp. Nightly light shows on the canopy of the Fremont Street Experience are free, and street vendors hawk everything from spray-paint art to henna tattoos. In addition, there are famous hotels such as The Plaza (formerly known as Union Plaza), overlooking Fremont Street, and the classic Golden Nugget. For nostalgia buffs, there is also the Golden Gate Hotel Casino, renovated to its earlier classic glory and appearance and still famous for the 99-cent shrimp cocktail.

## Beyond the Strip

In the last two decades, Las Vegas has added residents at an astonishing rate, creating outlying neighborhoods full of homes and, of course, hotels and casinos. To the west of the Strip, Summerlin sits just outside Red Rock Canyon and contains three hotel/casinos, along with several golf courses. East of the Strip, Henderson/Green Valley puts visitors a quick drive away from Lake Mead National Recreation Area and is home to the trendy Green Valley Ranch Resort, which starred in its very own reality TV show for a while. In North Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Motor Speedway draws racing fans from all over the United States, and places like the Cannery give them a place to stay close to the track.

If playing the tables isn't risky enough for you, you may want to try some of Las Vegas' outdoor adventures. Red Rock Canyon is ranked among the top five rock climbing destinations in the world and contains over 2,000 climbing routes. Bootleg Canyon in Boulder City is home to a network of mountain biking trails and a new zip-line adventure that speeds riders along a suspended cable high above the canyon.

### Las Vegas Weather

Las Vegas is located in the Mojave Desert, which means that from roughly mid-May to late October, you can expect very hot temperatures, often over 100 degrees. The climate is quite dry, except during brief rainstorms—in which case be careful of flash flooding. If you're planning any outdoor activities, drink lots of water, wear sunscreen, and go as early in the day as possible. Better yet, save your desert explorations for the winter months, approximately November through April.

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