

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~



Day 1 - Las Vegas



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!



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



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.ht

location:

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



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 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, tarantuallas, 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 remnanats 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,



Photo courtesy of Terrisa Meeks



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 a honor basis, but rangers do come through and check periodically.

contact:

tel: 702-515-5000 fax: 702-515-5023

http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo /lvfo/blm_programs/blm_speci al areas/red rock nca.html

location:

Off Nevada State Route 159 Las Vegas NV 89124



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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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http://www.nv.blm.gov/vegas/

Default.htm

location:

US Highway 95 & State Highway 157 Las Vegas NV 89143



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:

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location:

S Las Vegas Boulevard Las Vegas NV 89109



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 adultsonly 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. Awardwinning 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 theMirage, with its white tigers and erupting volcanoes. See the Paris Las Vegas with outstanding replicas of the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe andmagnifique 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 magnificentMandalay 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 theRio, thePalms, and theHard 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. TheNeon 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 classicGolden 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 outsideRed 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 fromLake Mead National Recreation Area and is home to the trendyGreen Valley

Ranch Resort, which starred in its very own reality TV show for a while. In North Las Vegas, theLas Vegas Motor Speedway draws racing fans from all over the United States, and places like theCannery 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 inBoulder 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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Hotel Insights

Las Vegas Hotels Highlights

Deciding where to stay in Las Vegas can be challenging, simply because of the sheer number of choices. You'll want to consider the atmosphere, theme, and location of your accommodations. Room rates run the gamut from decadent to budget priced. With few exceptions, Las Vegas hotels offer everything you might need on-site —restaurants, shows, shopping, spas, sometimes even bowling alleys and movie theaters, and, of course, casinos. Once you arrive, you won't have to leave your hotel unless you want to.

The Las Vegas Strip

On the Strip, luxury permeates the newWynn Las Vegas and its neighbor,Encore. Built on the site of the old



Las Vegas Snapshot continued

Desert Inn, Wynn and Encore have been showered with both praise and awards for their five-star accommodations. Further south on the Strip, theBellagio is probably best-known for its dancing fountains, but the amazing synchronized water show is secondary to the interior of the hotel. The Chihuly glass creation over the lobby is fascinating, and is a good indication of the Bellagio's attention to detail. Other notable Las Vegas luxury hotels include the Mandalay Bay and THE hotelat Mandalay Bay(which are interconnected), the Venetian, and Caesar's Palace. The Trump International, which does not offer gaming, is another consideration for travelers looking for pampering, sophistication, and opulence.

If your budget calls for less extravagance. you have plenty of options, such as theParis Las Vegas.New York-New York, Excalibur (the medieval theme is terrific for families), Luxor (otherwise known as the big pyramid), Treasure Island, or theSahara, all of which are located on the Strip. Except for the Sahara, each of these hotels entertains visitors with distinct themes from other cities and/or other time periods. The Paris recreates the famous French city on a small scale, complete with an Eiffel Tower. Both the New York-New York and the Sahara have rollercoasters. and the Sahara offers the Las Vegas Cyber Speedway for your inner race car driver. The Treasure Island's nightly pirate show has always been popular, and they recently changed the show to "Sirens of the TI," so the show now includes a perennial Las Vegas favorite: scantily clad dancing girls. For a G-rated show, you can always go nextdoor to watch the volcano errupt atThe Mirage.

Downtown

Staying downtown will give you more of that Old Vegas feeling, without pyramids or rollercoasters. Downtown is a good place to stay if your major reason for visiting Las Vegas is strictly to gamble. None of Downtown's hotels have been imploded(yet), so favorites like the Golden Nugget, Binions, and the Plaza (formerly the Union Plaza) are still there. Downtown's nod to the modern era is the Fremont Street Experience, which closed Fremont Street to traffic and connected the hotels with an overhead canopy that displays nightly light shows. If you're traveling with kids, however, Downtown hotels don't offer much

in the way of entertainment for the under-21 age group.

Off the Strip

Off the Strip and in Las Vegas neighborhoods, the hotel casinos are smaller, and will appeal to visitors who want to stay away from the crowds on the Strip. The hip, upscalePalms is just a few blocks west of the Strip, as is the all-suitesRio.Station Casinos offers a chain of hotel casinos throughout Las Vegas, including the Gold Coast, the Texas, and Boulder Station. TheOrleans, a few blocks west of the Strip, frequently hosts reasonably-priced concerts and events. Non-gaming hotels include the Alexis Park and theRenaissance, and most major chains, such asMarriott andHoliday Inn, have non-gaming hotels in Las Vegas.

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Restaurants Insights

The good news about Las Vegas restaurants is that the city has officially shed its status as a restaurant backwater. The bad news is that eating out in Las Vegas isn't nearly as cheap as it used to be

Las Vegas is now home to a variety of accomplished, award-winning chefs, some of whom will be well-known to foodies. Wolfgang Puck was one of the first celebrity chefs to set up shop in Las Vegas, beginning with Spago at Caesar's Palace; Puck now has five Strip restaurants, includingPostrio at the Venetian Hotel in the Grand Canal Shoppes. Thomas Keller has a place at the Venetian, Bouchon, which serves the fabulous bistro food he made famous in Napa Valley. Other culinary heavy-hitters in Las Vegas include Hubert Keller'sFleur de Lys at Mandalay Bay:Joel Robuchon's eponymous restaurant at the Mansion at MGM(also hisL'Atelier, for more casual dining); and Alex Strada'sAlex at Wynn.Emeril Lagasse has four restaurants in Las Vegas, most recently opening a sports bar and grill, Lagasse's Stadium, at the Palazzo.

Some Las Vegas restaurants integrate great food with beautiful décor and feasts for your eyes. Aureole at Mandalay Bay is known for its food and its wine angels, who fly though the wine racks to retrieve your

selection of wine. Mix is acclaimed for its view and interior design just as much as for its food. Atop the Eiffel Tower at Paris Las Vegas, you can enjoy French cuisine at the Eiffel Tower Restaurant while watching the Strip below you. For a more expansive view, the Top of the World Restaurant at the top of the Stratosphere will serve you gourmet entrees while you take in the view from the tallest structure west of the Mississippi—and the restaurant rotates.

In the years before Las Vegas restaurants went seriously upscale, the city's better restaurants were known for thick steaks. TheGolden Steer has been in business for over 50 years, and it's the perfect place to get a feel for the days before megaresorts. Downtown. Hugo's Cellar at the Four Queens is another long-time Las Vegas favorite. Also located Downtown.Chicago Joe's andDona Maria's Tamales offer diners authentic Italian and Mexican food. minus celebrity anything. West of the Strip, Rosemary's award-winning food draws both visitors and locals—it's in a rather nondescript shopping mall, but diners will be too enchanted with the food to notice anything else.

Naturally, if you're in Las Vegas, you'll have to try a buffet. Even though they're no longer the cheapest choice for meals, Las Vegas buffets are now known for their varied selections of food. The Golden Nugget was one of the first buffets to raise the price but also the quality of their food, and The Buffet is still worth visiting. The Mirage's Cravings, Bally's Sterling Sunday Brunch, and the Rio's Village Seafood Buffet are great places to experience the new and improved Las Vegas buffet.

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Things to Do Insights

Finding things to do in Las Vegas is easy. The Strip is dedicated to entertainment, from its lavish hotel casinos to its animal exhibits. Beyond the Strip, you'll find museums, an Arts District, and beautiful desert scenery.

Wander through any of the Strip's resorts to find plenty of gambling opportunities(you may want to join the casino's "club" for a variety of deals, if they have one). If you're not interested in gambling, almost every hotel has a spa designed to massage and



Las Vegas Snapshot continued

pamper.Caesar's Palace,Planet Hollywood, and the Venetian have elaborately themed and designed shopping areas, complete with overhead skies in the ceiling that change from day to night periodically. Caesar's has talking statues and the Venetian features canals and gondolas. Animal lovers may enjoy the Mirage's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat, the Mandalay Bay's Shark Reef, or the MGM Grand's Lion Habitat. Rollercoasters are a feature ofNew York-New York, theSahara, and theStratosphere. Downtown, theFremont Street Experience and Neon Museum give visitors all the bright lights they can handle along a pedestrian walkway that connects the Downtown casinos together.

Las Vegas museums offer a great deal of history about Southern Nevada. The state's oldest non-native building is located at theOld Mormon Fort(only a partial wall remains within another building). TheSprings Preserve is a new museum that features walking trails along with environmentally-friendly buildings and hands-on exhibits about Southern Nevada. TheAtomic Testing Museum details the history of the atomic bomb. The Downtown Arts District, along Charleston Avenue, is a growing community of galleries and restaurants. On the first Friday of every month, they hold a street festival.

Exploring the desert surrounding Las Vegas will take you to red sandstone cliffs and rock formations, rare desert springs, and a massive man-made lake.Lake Mead, the reservoir created byHoover Dam, sits adjacent to theValley of Fire State Park, Nevada's first state park. Look for bighorn sheep in this area.Red Rock Canyon, to the west of Las Vegas, is a popular destination with rock climbers, hikers, and horseback riders. To escape from the desert heat, visit Mt. Charleston, also known asSpring Mountain National Recreation Area. Las Vegas is also a good place to use a base

camp for day trips in Death Valley, Zion National Park, and the Mojave National Preserve. Helicopter or plane tours to one of the rims of the Grand Canyon are also popular. The South and North Rims are part of the national park, and the West Rim, which is on Hualapai tribal land, features the Skywalk, a glass walkway that juts out over the canyon.

For guided tours:

Las Vegas Tours Haunted Vegas
Tour(http://www.hauntedvegastours.com/)
Papillion-Neon Light(+1 888 635
7272/http://www.papillon.com/)
Scenic Airlines(+1 702 638 3300/
http://www.scenic.com/) Sundance
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www.helicoptour.com/)

Grand Canyon Tours Adventure
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Canyon Airlines, Inc(+1 800 634
6801/http://www.scenic.com/) Grand
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www.grandcanyonairlines.com/) Grand
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www.cowboytrailrides.com/) Sagebrush
Ranch Adventures(+1 866 552 7838/http://
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www.awesomeadventureguide.com/)

Adventure Tours All Las Vegas Tours Inc.(+1 800 566 5868/http:// www.alllasvegastours.com/) Sun Buggy Fun Rentals(+1 866 728 4443/http:// www.sunbuggyfunrentals.com/) Sunset Cowboy Dinner Ride(+1 877 444 4464/ http://www.awesomeadventureguide.com/)
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Fun Facts

- 1. The legal age for gambling and drinking in Las Vegas is 21. No exceptions.
- 2. Prostitution is not legal in Clark County, where Las Vegas is located. It is legal in the neighboring county of Nye, a short drive away.
- 3. Interesting fact: The Shark Reef at the Mandalay Bay is North America's only predator-based aquarium. It's also Nevada's first and only animal facility accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
- 4. Las Vegas is about 280 miles from the South Rim of Arizona's Grand Canyon.
- 5. Las Vegas is in the Mojave Desert, North America's smallest desert.
- 6. Average rainfall in Las Vegas is about 4.5 inches.
- 7. Fun fact: The Clark County Marriage License Bureau is open seven days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to midnight.
- 8. In 2009, over 36 million visitors came to Las Vegas.
- 9. Random fact: According to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Las Vegas has 148,941 hotel rooms available.
- 10. Gambling became legal in Las Vegas in 1931.
- 11. The Stratosphere is the tallest observation tower west of the Mississippi River. Original plans called for it to be even taller.
- 12. Weird fact: Boulder City, just outside of Las Vegas, is one of only two Las Vegas towns that do not allow gambling.(The other town is Panaca.)
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