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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



DrPleishner

# Las Vegas On A Budget

## Las Vegas, 3 Days

### Table of contents:

- Guide Description 2
- Itinerary Overview 3
- Daily Itineraries 4
- Las Vegas Snapshot 12

# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** Las Vegas is full of fancy accommodations and expensive restaurants, but you can still experience the City of Neon without breaking the bank. Downtown hotel casinos are a good alternative to the pricier Strip, public transportation will allow you to park the car, and free lounge shows will leave you with more money to take back home, even if Lady Luck isn't on your side.

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Las Vegas

**DAY NOTE:** Stay Downtown to take advantage of lower room rates, as well as to experience some Old Vegas ambiance. The Four Queens and El Cortez offer good rates, and the El Cortez has a Las Vegas history that includes Bugsy himself. There's no need to drive anywhere Downtown—Fremont Street is closed to traffic and you can wander from casino to casino on foot. The Neon Museum's vintage Las Vegas signs are installed along Fremont Street, and at night the Fremont Street Experience lights up the canopy with an hourly show. When you're ready to hit the casino, most of Glitter Gulch's casinos offer low limits tables, nickel poker machines, and even penny slots. Binion's is a good place to find low limits tables, as well as the El Cortez. Drinks are on the house for players at any casino. When you're ready for something to eat, check out the coffee shops before the buffets—buffets aren't always inexpensive these days. Magnolia's at the Four Queens and the Bay City Diner at the Golden Gate are good choices for budget eats..

	<b>Four Queens</b> Glitter Gulch Defined
	<b>El Cortez Hotel &amp; Casino</b> Dripping Old Vegas history
	<b>Neon Museum &amp; Boneyard</b> Vintage Old Vegas neon signs
	<b>Fremont Street Experience</b> Downtown Las Vegas' incredible light show
	<b>Binion's Gambling Hall &amp; Hotel</b> Serious gambling here
	<b>Bay City Diner</b> San Francisco charm

## Day 2 - Las Vegas

**DAY NOTE:** To get out on the Strip, save your gas money and take the Deuce, Las Vegas' double-decker bus. You won't move very fast, but you will get to see all the sights along the way. Wandering through any of the megaresorts will give you an eyeful, and you can find plenty of free attractions. The Lion Habitat at the MGM is free, as is the Flamingo's wildlife habitat. The evening shows in front of the Strip hotels are free—the pirate and sirens at the TI, the volcano at the Mirage, and the Bellagio's dancing fountains (inside the Bellagio, you can also visit their

conservatory for free and be sure to check out the Chihuly glass sculpture in the ceiling by the front desk). For an inexpensive meal, stop at the Sahara's buffet, which is reasonably priced. Instead of splurging on showroom acts, try a lounge show at any of the casinos. There may be a drink minimum, but that will cost you far less than tickets to a Strip show.

	<b>MGM Grand Lion Habitat</b> Lions on the Vegas Strip
	<b>Flamingo Hilton Wildlife Habitat</b> Penguins and flamingos
	<b>Fountains at Bellagio</b> The Bellagio's famous dancing waters
	<b>Sahara Buffet</b> Closed May 16, 2011

## Day 3 - Las Vegas

**DAY NOTE:** Take a drive west of Las Vegas to see Red Rock Canyon. The entrance fee is only five dollars, but if you'd like to experience a portion of Red Rock for free, look for the Calico Basin Road before you reach the entrance to Red Rock. Turn off the main road onto Calico Basin Road and follow it through the small community of Calico Basin. The road will lead you right to the parking lot of Calico Basin/Red Springs, and a raised wooden walkway will take you around a meadow. The springs and meadow are too fragile to support foot traffic. The striking red, white, and purple sandstone hills stand in back of the meadow. Be sure to bring your camera.

	<b>Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area</b> Beautiful desert area west of Las Vegas
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# Day 1 - Las Vegas

## QUICK NOTE

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### contact:

tel: 702/385-4011

fax: 702/387-5122

<http://www.fourqueens.com>

### location:

202 Fremont St  
Las Vegas NV 89101

## 1 Four Queens

Hotels.com

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Make time to have dinner at Hugo's Cellar, an old-time Vegas favorite

**DESCRIPTION:** Opened in 1966 with a mere 120 rooms, the Four Queens (named for the owner's four daughters) has evolved over the decades into a major Downtown property occupying an entire city block. One of the last bastions of original Vegas glamour that still exists, and if this isn't the luxurious place it once was -- and certainly it pales to the point of vanishing when compared with, say, The Palazzo -- there is still plenty to like here, including sometimes very low rates. As the staff says, this is the place to stay if you just want to gamble -- or if you want a genuine retro experience. A remodel has given the place a bit of a lift. Newly redone rooms come in a bright color palate, which is jarring given the monochromes that otherwise rule local decor. They can be rather wee, but the ones in the South Tower are a shade larger than the others, though we wouldn't hold any multi-person slumber parties in either. In most cases, rooms in the North Tower offer views of the Fremont Street Experience. The restaurant, **Hugo's Cellar**, has a cozy lounge with a working fireplace, and two bars serve the casino. © Frommer's

### contact:

tel: 800/634-6703

fax: 702/474-3626

<http://www.elcortezhotelcasino.com>

### location:

600 Fremont St  
Las Vegas NV 89101

## 2 El Cortez Hotel & Casino

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Inexpensive, renovated rooms and a great downtown location make the El Cortez a good choice

**DESCRIPTION:** Finally, a much-needed (as opposed to just done because everyone else is doing it) and well-conceived renovation has given an old-timer an unexpected new shot of life. The public areas are totally refreshed: Check out those



cherrywood and oxidized metal panel sheets on the walls -- you just don't see something that contemporary and design-intensive all that often in Downtown. By daringly removing half the slot machines, the casino floor has been opened up and aired out. The new entrance exterior with its stonework, planters, hitching posts, and stone driveway feels like an entirely new hotel. Even more exciting, there are plans to take out a parking lot and turn it into a proper plaza with trees, fountains, and the like, which seems totally alien to the concept of Vegas. Additional plans include a South Beach-themed upscale annex in an adjacent, currently shabby property. Rooms (some quite large) have gotten new traditional furnishings; admittedly, nothing stands out, but with amenities like flatscreen TVs, nice new (if small) bathrooms, armoires with actual minifridges, and Wi-Fi (for a fee), they are right behind Main Street Station for recommendable affordable downtown lodgings. There is a new, popular Chinese buffet, and the steakhouse Roberta's is solidly good. Many of the employees have been here well over a dozen years, which says a lot. Local legend Jackie Gaughan still lives in the penthouse and wanders through the property. Overall, it's now a cool old Vegas place of the variety that doesn't exist any more. Forget the manufactured versions. This is the real thing, updated but without losing its identity, and for probably half the price (or even a third). © Frommer's

**contact:**

tel: +1 702 387 6366  
fax: +1 702 477 7751  
<http://www.neonmuseum.org>

**location:**

821 Las Vegas Boulevard  
Las Vegas NV 89101

**3 Neon Museum & Boneyard**

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Not as accessible as the displays downtown, but worth the extra effort to see this unusual museum of neon.

**DESCRIPTION:** What happens to the signs when old casinos are torn down to make room for new resorts? They go to the Neon Museum! In The Neon Museum's Bone Yard you'll see Binion's Horseshoe, the famous Silver Slipper, signs from the Golden Nugget and the Sahara. These works of art are both classic pieces of Las Vegas history and visual reminders of times past. Eventually, the Neon Museum will open a permanent exhibit on the Las Vegas Strip in the rescued and historic La Concha Motel lobby, designed by internationally famous architect Paul Revere Williams.

Tours at the Boneyard are by advance appointment only; admission is \$15.00 per person. Photography at the Boneyard is restricted to photos for personal use only. Several neon signs are on display at the Fremont Street Experience, and there is no charge to see those signs and no restrictions on photography.

© NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Kyle McCluer

**contact:**

tel: +1 702 229 6551  
http://www.vegasexperience.com

**location:**

Fremont Street  
Las Vegas NV 89101

**hours:**

Shows nightly

4 **Fremont Street Experience**

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Fun, free entertainment in downtown Las Vegas.

**DESCRIPTION:** Poor Downtown. For years now, it's been overlooked in favor of the Strip. And no wonder: It's so . . . small . . . by comparison. Even its once-dazzling collection of hotel marquee lights seems like candles next to the klieg-light voltage of the Strip. But things are cheaper down here, people; and speaking of people, if you get tired of feeling not pretty or rich enough for the Strip, you are not alone. Come join us in admiring the project that closed off the heart of "Glitter Gulch" and turned it into a much more user-friendly pedestrian mall. The Fremont Street Experience is a 5-block open-air landscaped strip of outdoor snack shops, vendor carts, and colorful kiosks purveying food and merchandise. Overhead is a 90-foot-high steel-mesh "celestial vault"; at night, it is the most successfully revamped **Viva Vision**, a high-tech light-and-laser show (the canopy is equipped with more than 12.5 million lights) enhanced by a concert-hall-quality sound system that takes place five times nightly. There are a number of different shows, and there's music between the light performances as well. Not only does the canopy provide shade, but it also cools the area through a misting system in summer and warms you with radiant heaters in winter. It's really cool, in that Vegas over-the-top way that we love so much. Go see for yourself; you will be pleased to see how a one-time ghost town of tacky, rapidly aging buildings, in an area with more undesirables than not, is now a bustling (at least at night), friendly, safe place (they have private security guards who hustle said undesirables away). It's a place where you can stroll, eat, or even dance to the music under the lights. The crowd it attracts is more upscale than in years past, and, of course, it's a lot less crowded than the hectic Strip. This helps give a second life to a deserving neighborhood. **Note:** A good place to view the Sky Parade light show is from the balcony at Fitzgerald's Casino & Hotel. And in a further effort to retain as much of classic Las Vegas as possible, the **Neon Museum** is installing vintage hotel and casino signs along the promenade. The first installation was the horse and rider from the old Hacienda, which presently rides the sky over the intersection of Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard, while the Lamp from the old Aladdin Hotel twinkles at the northwest corner. Eventually, the Neon Museum hopes to have a complex at their Neon Boneyard, using the old La Concha Motel, itself a piece of classic Vegas architecture thankfully saved from the wrecking ball, as a centerpiece. It's uncertain when the complex will open, but in the meantime, you can do a self-guided walking tour of sign installations in downtown. (Go to [www.neonmuseum.org](http://www.neonmuseum.org) for information.) © Frommer's



wcities

**contact:**

tel: +1 702 382 1600 / +1 800 622 6468

<http://www.binions.com/>

**location:**

128 E Fremont St  
Las Vegas NV 89101

5

## Binion's Gambling Hall & Hotel

**DESCRIPTION:** Serious gamblers absolutely love this place. It is a throwback to the original "old Las Vegas" hard-drinking and hard-playing atmosphere. The best view of downtown can be had at Binion's Ranch Steakhouse on the 23rd floor where you can dine on some of the best steaks and prime rib in Las Vegas. The guest accommodations are adequate and comfortable and the rooftop swimming pool is a great place to relax after a day at the tables. © wcities.com



**contact:**

tel: 702 385 1906 / 1 800 426 1906

<http://www.goldengatecasino.net>

**location:**

One Fremont Street  
Las Vegas NV 89101

**hours:**

Mo to Su from 12:00 AM to 12:00 AM

6

## Bay City Diner

**DESCRIPTION:** This is a small, cheery room nestled inside one of the oldest existing hotels in Las Vegas, the Golden Gate. This eatery has all the charm of 1930s San Francisco, contrasting with the modern delights of the Fremont Street Experience. Counter seating and the mahogany interior with brass fixtures give the place a real "old-time" feel. Table seating is also available. Most famous for the "99-cent Shrimp Cocktail," it also offers a range of menu choices including breakfast and complete meals. © wcities.com

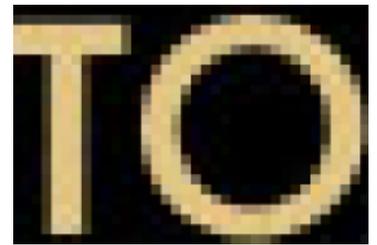


Photo courtesy of Bay City Diner

# Day 2 - Las Vegas

## QUICK NOTE

**DAY NOTE:** To get out on the Strip, save your gas money and take the Deuce, Las Vegas' double-decker bus. You won't move very fast, but you will get to see all the sights along the way. Wandering through any of the megaresorts will give you an eyeful, and you can find plenty of free attractions. The Lion Habitat at the MGM is free, as is the Flamingo's wildlife habitat. The evening shows in front of the Strip hotels are free—the pirate and sirens at the TI, the volcano at the Mirage, and the Bellagio's dancing fountains (inside the Bellagio, you can also visit their Conservatory for free and be sure to check out the Chihuly glass sculpture in the ceiling by the front desk). For an inexpensive meal, stop at the Sahara's buffet, which is reasonably priced. Instead of splurging on showroom acts, try a lounge show at any of the casinos. There may be a drink minimum, but that will cost you far less than tickets to a Strip show.

### contact:

tel: 702/891-7777

<http://www.mgmgrand.com/entertainment/lion-habitat.aspx>

### location:

3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S  
Las Vegas NV 89119

### hours:

Daily 11am-10pm

1

## MGM Grand Lion Habitat

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

A family-friendly, free activity on the Las Vegas Strip

**DESCRIPTION:** Hit this attraction at the right time, and it's one of the best freebies in town. It's a large, multilevel glass enclosure in which various lions frolic during various times of day. In addition to regular viewing spots, you can walk through a glass tunnel and get a worm's-eye view of the underside of a lion (provided one is in position); note how very big Kitty's paws are. Multiple lions share show duties (about 6 hr. on and then 2 days off at a ranch for some free-range activity, so they're never cooped up here for long). You could see any combo, from one giant male to a pack of five females who have grown from cub to adult size during their MGM time. Each comes with a trainer or three, who are there to keep the lions busy with play so they don't act like the big cats they are and sleep the entire time. But obviously, photo ops are more likely to occur as the more frisky younger set tussles, so what you observe definitely depends on who is in residence when you drop by. And, of course, actually seeing anything depends on how many other people think this is a two-star attraction; hordes of tourists are often pressed against the glass, preventing you, not to mention your kids, from doing the same. © Frommer's



wcities

### contact:

tel: +1 702 733 3111

fax: +1 702 733 3528

<http://www.caesars.com/Flamingo/LasVegas/>

### location:

3555 Las Vegas Boulevard  
South  
Las Vegas NV 89109

2

## Flamingo Hilton Wildlife Habitat

**DESCRIPTION:** Located on a newly opened 15-acre park area behind the Flamingo Las Vegas, this animal habitat features some animals not normally found in the Nevada desert. Surrounded by waterfalls and breathtaking flora, you will find ponds filled with Catfish, Japanese Koi (giant goldfish), and turtles that swim freely. For bird-lovers, penguins, flamingos (naturally), swans and other rare birds make this park their home. Everyone in the family will have an enjoyable time especially the kids. Admission is free. © wcities.com



Photo courtesy of Loren Sztajer

**contact:**

tel: +1 702 693 7111  
[http://www.bellagio.com/pages/frameset\\_noflash.asp](http://www.bellagio.com/pages/frameset_noflash.asp)

**location:**

3600 Las Vegas Boulevard  
South  
Las Vegas NV 89109

**3 Fountains at Bellagio**

**OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:**

Shows begin at 3:00 p.m. on weekdays and noon on weekends; shows are every half an hour until 8:00 p.m., and after that every 15 minutes until midnight. Inclement weather can cause cancellations.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Bellagio's Fountains sound like a simple concept: shooting jets of water timed to music. But what sounds simple is actually a complex choreography of technology, sound, and water. Designed by WET Design, an international company that specializes in elaborate water displays, the Bellagio's Fountains are spread over the nine-acre lake in front of the Bellagio. Over 1,200 nozzles and 4,500 lights work together to shoot water 400+ feet in the air—but that's not all the fountains do. They sway, they dance, and they wow the crowds that gather to watch them.

Shows start in the afternoon, but the best time to see the fountains is at night. The combination of music and the illuminated dancing water is enchanting. Many people have already seen the fountains on television shows or in movies (most famously, the George Clooney remake of "Ocean's 11"). Romantic, spectacular, and iconic, the Bellagio's Fountains are a free Las Vegas attraction that's appropriate for anyone of any age.

An underground well supplies most of the water for the fountains. Prior to the Bellagio, the Dunes and its golf course were located here—thus, the well, which watered the golf course. The Dunes was imploded to make way for the Bellagio.  
© NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Kashyap Hosdurga

**contact:**

tel: 702 737 2111 / 702 737 2700  
fax: +1 702 791 2027  
<http://www.saharavegas.com/food/buffet/>

**location:**

2535 Las Vegas Boulevard  
South  
Las Vegas NV 89109

**4 Sahara Buffet**

**DESCRIPTION:** CLOSED 05-16-11

The buffet at the Sahara Hotel is enormous with more than 900 seats and a Middle Eastern theme. Menu items include carved meats, salads, turkey, seafood, chicken, Chinese food and an Italian cooking station. One nice feature is a "serve yourself" beverage station. The place has a comfortable ambiance making for a pleasant dining experience. Prices and menu may vary on holidays, holiday weekends, and during special events.  
© wcities.com



photo courtesy of Sahara Buffet

**hours:**

Breakfast: 7a-10:30a M-F,  
Brunch: 7a-4p Sa-Su, Lunch:  
10:30a-4p M-F, Dinner:  
4p-10p M-Su

# Day 3 - Las Vegas

## QUICK NOTE

**DAY NOTE:** Take a drive west of Las Vegas to see Red Rock Canyon. The entrance fee is only five dollars, but if you'd like to experience a portion of Red Rock for free, look for the Calico Basin Road before you reach the entrance to Red Rock. Turn off the main road onto Calico Basin Road and follow it through the small community of Calico Basin. The road will lead you right to the parking lot of Calico Basin/Red Springs, and a raised wooden walkway will take you around a meadow. The springs and meadow are too fragile to support foot traffic. The striking red, white, and purple sandstone hills stand in back of the meadow. Be sure to bring your camera.

### contact:

tel: +1 702 363 1921  
(Information)  
<http://www.redrockcanyonlv.org/>

### location:

State Route 159 from  
Charleston Boulevard  
Las Vegas NV 89124



## Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area

**DESCRIPTION:** Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area's towering cliffs look similar to the colorful rock formations in Nevada's Valley of Fire or Utah's Zion National Park, but while it's reminiscent of other areas, Red Rock stands by itself, a lone island of mountains and springs in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

West of Las Vegas, Red Rock sits off State Route 159 (follow Charleston Boulevard west and it will turn into SR159). Admission to Red Rock is \$7 per vehicle, and includes admission to the new visitor's center, a map/newsletter. The visitor's center integrates information, art, and the environment of Red Rock itself. Most of the displays are outside, which is fine for the vast majority of the year in Southern Nevada. Mojave Max, the center's desert tortoise mascot, lives here, along with a few of his friends. The hands-on displays explain the forces that created Red Rock: fire, wind, water, and earth. Keep your eyes open for the colorful birds flying in and out of the inside of the exhibit--the center of the displays is planted with native vegetation.

A one-way scenic drive takes visitors into Red Rock, and it has several places to stop for a hike or to take in a scenic vista; one area, adjacent to the Children's Discovery Trail, has a picnic area next to some springs. Water is plentiful here, so look for wildlife early in the morning and late in the day. You'll see lots of birds, but also look for burros and big horn sheep. Consult the map/newsletter to find a trail that fits your fitness and schedule. Short hikes, like the Children's Discovery Trail, can be completed in under an hour, while a trip to the top of Turtlehead Peak will take you half a day or more.

Winter is a great time to explore Red Rock. Temperatures are generally mild, but the mountains are covered in snow during the coldest months (dressing in layers is highly recommended). Spring and fall are short, but beautiful, with plenty of water from the snowmelt in the streams. Summer is usually far too hot for exploring Red Rock, although short hikes in the very early mornings are often doable. Remember to always bring plenty of water with you, no matter what the time of year, and sunscreen and lip balm are advisable.

Hikers, bikers, and rock climbers flock to Red Rock. As you drive along the loop, look for the climbers dangling off the rocks



Photo courtesy of the\_tahoe\_guy

of the Calico Hills, and always be on the lookout for bicyclists and pedestrians on the roadways.

This area was settled in the late 1800s, and you can find remnants of its prior history. At Sandstone Quarry, you can see where the blocks of sandstone were carved, and at Pine Creek, a short hike will take you to the foundation of an old homestead. Agave roasting pits and petroglyphs are evidence of far earlier inhabitation.

© NileGuide

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# 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.

© NileGuide

© NileGuide

## 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 new Wynn 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, the Bellagio 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 Hotel at 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 the Paris Las Vegas, New York-New York, Excalibur (the medieval theme is terrific for families), Luxor (otherwise known as the big pyramid), Treasure Island, or the Sahara, 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 erupt at The 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, upscale Palms is just a few blocks west of the Strip, as is the all-suites Rio. Station Casinos offers a chain of hotel casinos throughout Las Vegas, including the Gold Coast, the Texas, and Boulder Station. The Orleans, a few blocks west of the Strip, frequently hosts reasonably-priced concerts and events. Non-gaming hotels include the Alexis Park and the Renaissance, and most major chains, such as Marriott and Holiday 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, including Postrio 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's Fleur de Lys at Mandalay Bay; Joel Robuchon's eponymous restaurant at the Mansion at MGM (also his L'Atelier, for more casual dining); and Alex Strada's Alex 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 through 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. The Golden 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 and Dona 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 of New York-New York, the Sahara, and the Stratosphere. Downtown, the Fremont 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 the Old Mormon Fort (only a partial wall remains within another building). The Springs Preserve is a new museum that features walking trails along with environmentally-friendly buildings and hands-on exhibits about Southern Nevada. The Atomic 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 by Hoover Dam, sits adjacent to the Valley 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 as Spring 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/>) Papillon-Neon Light (+1 888 635 7272/<http://www.papillon.com/>) Scenic Airlines (+1 702 638 3300/<http://www.scenic.com/>) Sundance Helicopters (+1 800 653 1881/<http://www.helicoptour.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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