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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

DrPleishner

Top Las Vegas Outside Attractions

Las Vegas, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: Many Las Vegas visitors never make it out of a casino—there are all those flashing lights, free drinks, and the ever-elusive possibility of winning money—but Las Vegas has a wealth of outdoor activities. At Red Rock Canyon and the Valley of Fire, visitors can hike past petroglyphs and marvel at the otherwordly rock formations. Lake Mead offers fishing, boating, water skiing, and hiking along the shore. Mt. Charleston is a mountain oasis in the middle of the Mojave Desert. In town, the Springs Preserve has about two miles worth of hiking trails, which visitors can use without charge. ~Picture of Mt. Charleston.~

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Las Vegas

Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area
Beautiful desert area west of Las Vegas

Valley of Fire State Park
Other-worldly rock formations on the edge of Lake Mead

Mt. Charleston Restaurant
Chalet with a view

Springs Preserve
The birthplace of Las Vegas

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QUICK NOTE

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

location:
State Route 159 from Charleston Boulevard
Las Vegas NV 89124

1 Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area

Photo courtesy of the_tahoe_guy

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 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.

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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

Photo courtesy of Terrisa Meeks

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, 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.

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contact:
tel: 702 872 5500
http://www.mtcharlestonhotel.com

location:
2 Kyle Canyon Road
Las Vegas NV 89124

3 Mt. Charleston Restaurant

DESCRIPTION: This huge dining room is located inside the Mt. Charleston Hotel and offers sweeping 180-degree views of the surrounding mountains. Fieldstone fireplaces and cathedral ceilings add to the charm of this pleasant restaurant. Entrees include delectables such as Tournedos of Beef and Salmon Filet with Dill Sauce. Your meal will come with salad, vegetables, potato and freshly baked bread. Wine and cocktails are available from the full-service bar. © wcities.com

photo courtesy of Mt. Charleston Restaurant

contact:
tel: 702-822-7700
fax: +1 702 822 8453
http://www.springspreserve.org

location:
333 S. Valley View Blvd
Las Vegas NV 89107

hours:
Fri-Wed 10am-6pm or dusk, whichever comes first; Thurs 10am-9pm

4 Springs Preserve

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:
Don't skip the cafeteria at this attraction. The menu was originally designed by celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck, but the reigns have since been passed to the Culinary Academy of Las Vegas, who still emphasize fresh and sustainable ingredients. Enjoy a lovely view of the Strip as you relax and enjoy your tasty meal.

DESCRIPTION: The Las Vegas Springs Preserve rests on the site of the original desert spring that the city was founded on and which dried up in 1962. The 180-acre preserve has both historical and educational significance, reminding people that the area was once abundant with water and nature. The preserve's gardens include more than 400 species of plant life, plenty of trails, art displays and educational exhibits such as the Origen Experience and the Desert Living Center. © Frommer's

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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 asThe 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 theFlamingo and theMirage, with its white tigers and erupting volcanoes. See theParis 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 theStratosphere 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 theFremont 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 asThe 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

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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 theMandalay Bay andTHEhotelat Mandalay Bay(which are interconnected), theVenetian, andCaesar's Palace. TheTrump 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 theGolden Nugget,Binions, and thePlaza(formerly the Union Plaza) are still there. Downtown's nod to the modern era is theFremont 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 theAlexis 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 withSpago 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 theEiffel Tower Restaurant while watching the Strip below you. For a more expansive view, theTop 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'sCravings, Bally'sSterling Sunday Brunch, and the Rio'sVillage 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

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pamper.Caesar's Palace,Planet Hollywood, and theVenetian 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'sSecret Garden and Dolphin Habitat, the Mandalay Bay'sShark Reef, or the MGM Grand'sLion Habitat. Rollercoasters are a feature ofNew York-New York, theSahara, and theStratosphere. Downtown, theFremont Street Experience andNeon 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 Helicopters(+1 800 653 1881/http://www.helicoptour.com/)

Grand Canyon Tours Adventure Photo Tours(+1 702 889 8687/http://www.adventurephototours.com/) Eagle Canyon Airlines, Inc(+1 800 634 6801/http://www.scenic.com/) Grand Canyon Airlines(+1 866 235 9422/http://www.grandcanyonairlines.com/) Grand Canyon Coaches(+1 702 577 9056/ http://www.grandcanyoncoaches.com/) Scenic Airlines(+1 702 638 3300/http://www.scenic.com/)

Death Valley Tours Adventure Photo Tours(+1 702 889 8687/http://www.adventurephototours.com/) Pink Jeep Tours(+1 888 900 4480/http://www.pinkjeep.com/)

Horse Back Riding Tours Cowboy Trail Rides, Inc.(+1 702 387 2457/http://www.cowboytrailrides.com/) Sagebrush Ranch Adventures(+1 866 552 7838/http://www.sagebrushranchadventures.com/) Sunset Cowboy Dinner Ride(+1 877 444 4464/http://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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