

## Viva Las Vegas! : A Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

Exquisitely themed hotels, some of the finest dining, and a wide range of attractions.

It may sound just like the description of a Disney resort, but it can equally be applied to the gambling capital of the world, Las Vegas.

It's a city that is known for much more than just gambling and is working hard to attract families -- and there's certainly plenty for all ages to do. Yes, there are thousands of opportunities to try your luck, but you don't have to put a cent into the slot machines or a chip on a poker table to have a good time. If you're traveling with children, then it's probably best to avoid the casinos altogether anyway, as they're not keen on any young eyes seeing gambling.

If you're planning a trip to Vegas, the first thing to decide is when to go. The major resorts on the Strip have hundreds of different rates throughout the year, so try out a range of dates and see which comes out the cheapest. You may be surprised at the results -- I certainly was, with the Easter weekend being the least expensive time for us to visit.

And when it comes to places to stay, Vegas doesn't just have hotels, it has mega-resorts. The largest, the MGM Grand, boasts just over 5,000 rooms and if you took on the arduous job of staying in every room and suite, it would take you nearly 14 years. The MGM Grand is unusual amongst the big name hotels, with only limited theming. Perhaps in that respect, it's least similar to Mandalay Bay at the southernmost tip of the Strip, whose tropical beach enjoys machine-generated waves lapping on the shore.

From the tropics, you can travel to just about anywhere in the world in the space of just a couple of miles. The Luxor draws on the history of Egypt with its landmark Sphinx in front of a 30 story-high glass paneled pyramid. Just two resorts further along, the New York skyline dominates, with its own Statue of Liberty and Brooklyn Bridge. Unusually, even the casino at the New York New York hotel is themed, based on Central Park (complete with trees), and just the regular drone from the slot machines to disrupt the idyllic park scene.

MGM's Monte Carlo and Caesar's Paris casinos are further up the Strip, including replicas of the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe, while opposite, you can journey into Italy at the Bellagio. It's claimed it cost \$2.5 billion to build and this is indeed an opulent hotel, with glass flower

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chandeliers to greet you when you enter the lobby and the second largest casino in Vegas (the honor of the largest goes to the MGM Grand).

Italy is also represented by two other resorts, Caesar's Palace, based on Rome at the height of its power and The Venetian, complete with the Grand Canal, St. Mark's Square and gondoliers. Add to this line up the pirate-inspired Treasure Island and the heights of the Stratosphere Tower, the tallest free-standing observation tower in America, and the Strip has to be the world's most varied byway.

There's plenty to see and do at each resort. Each has a wide range of restaurants and there were no disappointments at any that we tried.

Some of the finest shopping can be found in Vegas, too. For the higher end of the market, don't miss the Grand Canal Shoppes at The Venetian, full of designer names. Just a little farther up the Strip the Fashion Show Mall lists Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue and Macy's amongst its 120 stores. The Forum Shops at Caesar's Palace are also well worth a visit, if you've got any money left after your visit to the slots!

During daylight hours, the resorts are mainly family-oriented. Highlights include the Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay, one of the best aquariums we've ever visited - very light and airy and filled with over 2,000 marine animals, including a dozen species of shark. Other animals can be found at the MGM Grand's free lion habitat, while the Mirage is home to dolphins and tigers.

Thrill seekers have plenty to occupy them, from the Manhattan Express which loops past the New York skyline to the absolutely terrifying High Roller Roller Coaster and Big Shot, both at the Stratosphere and only for the bravest of souls.

Night-time is really when Vegas comes alive, and that's something worth bearing in mind. Because of our jet lag from the long flight from the UK, we found it hard to stay awake late and did miss out as a result. Most resorts have something happening in the evening, free of charge, as well as the big shows. A volcano erupts outside of the Mirage, while the Sirens stage their sea battle at Treasure Island. Merlin battles the dragon at Excalibur and fountains dance to music at the Bellagio, although as we discovered to our disappointment, the water show is canceled in high winds.

If you do want to see one of the big shows at Vegas, be prepared to spend a lot of money for the top tickets and be prepared to book early. Although you might get lucky with a same-day cancellation, many of the

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big names sell out well before the night of the show. Top names include Celine Dion at Caesar's Palace, the Blue Man Group at The Venetian and no less than four Cirque du Soleil shows, soon to be joined by a fifth. There are also major-name musicals out here, including Mamma Mia, We Will Rock You, and Hairspray. Of the shows we experienced -- all of them Cirque du Soleil productions -- the one most worth seeing (in our humble opinion) is the water based "O" at the Bellagio. It's something we will definitely return to Vegas to see.

And that's the thing with Las Vegas. I don't think one visit could ever be enough. We were there for four nights and didn't see or do nearly everything we wanted to. In that respect, it is just like Disney. Vegas also caters to everyone these days - whether you're a family, a couple or with friends, there are plenty of things to see, do and eat. I can guarantee one thing. Once you've been, you'll want to go back to do all the things you didn't have time to do!

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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