

Frommer's® PORTABLE

Las Vegas



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P O R T A B L E

Las Vegas

7th Edition

by Mary Herczog

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—Glamour Magazine



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—Mary Herczog

The editorial staff at Frommer's also wishes to thank the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority and Alex Kraus (who does know when to hit and when to hold in blackjack) for their assistance in making this book a winner.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Herczog lives in Los Angeles and works in the film industry. She is the author of *Frommer's Las Vegas*, *Frommer's New Orleans*, and *Las Vegas For Dummies*, and contributed to *Frommer's Los Angeles*. She still isn't sure when to hit and when to hold in blackjack.

AN INVITATION TO THE READER

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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


AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Finds** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Kids** Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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Now that you have the guidebook to a great trip, visit our website at **www.frommers.com** for travel information on more than 3,000 destinations. With features updated regularly, we give you instant access to the most current trip-planning information available. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the best prices on airfares, accommodations, and car rentals—and you can even book travel online through our travel booking partners. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the following:

- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

Planning Your Trip to Las Vegas

In the pages that follow, you'll find everything you need to know to handle the practical details of planning your trip in advance: airlines and area airports, a calendar of events, a list of major conventions you may want to avoid, resources for those of you with special needs, and much more.

We also suggest that you check out chapter 8, "Las Vegas After Dark," before you leave home; if you want to see the most popular shows, it's a good idea to call ahead and order tickets well in advance to avoid disappointment. (Ditto if you want to dine in one of the city's top restaurants; head to chapter 4, "Where to Dine," for full reviews and contact information.)

1 Visitor Information

For advance information, call or write the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority**, 3150 Paradise Rd., Las Vegas, NV 89109 (☎ 877/VISIT-LV or 702/892-7575; www.vegasfreedom.com). They can send you a comprehensive packet containing brochures, a map, a show guide, an events calendar, and an attractions list; help you find a hotel that meets your specifications (and even make reservations); and tell you if a major convention is scheduled during the time you would like to visit Las Vegas. Or stop by when you're in town. They're open daily from 8am to 5pm.

Another excellent information source is the **Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce**, 3720 Howard Hughes Pkwy., #100, Las Vegas, NV 89109 (☎ 702/735-1616; www.lvchamber.com). Ask them to send you their *Visitor's Guide*, which contains extensive information about accommodations, attractions, excursions, children's activities, and more. They can answer all your Las Vegas questions, including those about weddings and divorces. They're open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm.

Tips Getting Cash

Don't worry about running short on cash while in Las Vegas. ATMs practically carpet the city; no one wants you to find yourself without cash you could lose in a slot machine! Beware of withdrawal charges, though, which can often run as high as \$2 or \$3 (the highest charges are usually for commercial machines in convenience stores and hotel lobbies).

For information on all of Nevada, including Las Vegas, contact the **Nevada Commission on Tourism** (☎ 800/638-2328; www.travelnevada.com). They have a comprehensive information packet on Nevada.

2 When to Go

Because most of a Las Vegas vacation is usually spent indoors, you can have a good time here year-round. The most pleasant seasons are spring and fall, especially if you want to experience the great outdoors.

Weekdays are slightly less crowded than weekends. Holidays are always a mob scene and come accompanied by high hotel prices. Hotel prices also skyrocket when big conventions and special events are taking place. The slowest times of year are June and July, the week before Christmas, and the week after New Year's.

If a major convention is to be held during your trip, you might want to change your date. Check the box later in this section for convention dates, and contact the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** (☎ 877/VISIT-LV or 702/892-7575; www.vegasfreedom.com), as convention schedules often change.

THE WEATHER

First of all, Vegas isn't always hot, but when it is hot, it's *really* hot. One thing you'll hear again and again is that even though Las Vegas gets very hot, the dry desert heat is not unbearable. This is true. The exception is most of the hotel pool areas because they are surrounded by massive hotels covered in mirrored glass, which acts as a giant magnifying glass, focusing the sun's rays on the antlike people below. Generally the humidity averages a low 22%, and even on very hot days, there's apt to be a breeze. Also, barring the hottest summer days, there's relief at night when temperatures often drop by at least 20°F.

Major Convention Dates for 2004

Listed below are Las Vegas's major annual conventions with projected attendance figures for 2004; believe us, you probably want to avoid the biggies. Because convention schedules frequently change, contact the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** (☎ 800/VISIT-LV or 702/892-7575; www.vegasfreedom.com) to double-check the latest info before you commit to your travel dates.

Event	Dates	Expected Attendance
Consumer Electronics Show	Jan 8–11	110,000
National Association of Home Builders	Jan 19–22	75,000
World Floor Covering Associates	Jan 28–30	41,000
Men's Apparel Guild in California (MAGIC)	Feb 23–26	115,000
Associated Surplus Dealers	Mar 7–11	52,000
National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)	Apr 19–22	130,000
National Hardware Show	May 10–12	50,000
Networld/Interop	May 11–13	40,000
JCK Show	June 4–8	50,000
Associated Surplus Dealers	Aug 15–19	52,000
Men's Apparel Guild in California (MAGIC)	Aug 30–Sept 2	115,000
Specialty Equip. Mkt. Assn. (SEMA)	Nov 2–5	88,000
Softbank Comdex	Nov 15–18	125,000

Las Vegas's Average Temperatures (°F) & Precipitation (in.)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Avg. Temp.	47	52	58	66	75	86	91	89	81	69	55	47
Avg. High	57	63	69	78	88	99	104	102	94	81	66	57
Avg. Low	37	41	47	54	63	72	78	77	69	57	44	37
Avg. Precip.	.59	.69	.59	.15	.24	.08	.44	.45	.31	.24	.31	.40

But this is the desert, and it's not hot all year-round. It can get quite cold, especially in the winter, when at night it can drop to 30°F and lower. (In the winter of 1998–99, it actually snowed in Vegas, dropping nearly 2 inches on the Strip. There's nothing quite like the sight of Luxor's Sphinx covered in snow.) The breeze can also become a cold, biting, strong wind of up to 40 mph and more. And so there are entire portions of the year when you won't be using that hotel swimming pool at all (even if you want to—be aware that most of the hotels close huge chunks of those fabulous swimming pool areas for “the season,” which can be as long as from Labor Day to Memorial Day). If you aren't traveling in the height of summer, bring a wrap. Also, remember your sunscreen and hat—even if it's not all that hot, you can burn very easily and very fast. (You should see all the lobster-red people glowing in the casinos at night.)

3 Money-Saving Package Deals

Before you start your search for the lowest airfare, you may want to consider booking your flight as part of a travel package. Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and sometimes even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices—kind of like one-stop shopping. Packages are sold in bulk to tour operators—who resell them to the public at a cost that usually undercuts standard rates.

Package tours can vary by leaps and bounds. Some offer a better class of hotels than others. Some offer the same hotels for lower prices. Some offer flights on scheduled airlines, while others book charters. Some limit your choice of accommodations and travel days. You are often required to make a large payment up front. On the plus side, packages can save you money, offering group prices but allowing for independent travel. Some even let you add on a few guided excursions or escorted day trips (also at prices lower than if you booked them yourself) without booking an entirely escorted

tour. Before you invest, ask about hotel choices and look for hidden expenses (such as whether airport departure fees and taxes, for example, are included in the total cost).

You can often get a good deal on a vacation package to Las Vegas. Just to give you an example, at press time, **Southwest Airlines** (☎ 800/435-9792; www.iflyswa.com) was offering round-trip airfare from Los Angeles with 2 nights at several different hotels complete with ground transportation; per person based on double occupancy, for Bellagio it was \$259, and for the Golden Nugget \$99 (before taxes and fees), although these prices vary dramatically depending upon when you are traveling.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages. In addition to Southwest, other airlines offering packages to Las Vegas include **American Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (☎ 800/221-6666; www.deltavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (☎ 800/301-3800; www.coolvacations.com), and **United Vacations** (☎ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com).

Reservations Plus, 2275 A Renaissance Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89119 (☎ 800/805-9528; www.resplus.com), runs a free room-reservation service, but they can also arrange packages (including meals, transportation, tours, show tickets, car rentals, and other features) and group rates.

The biggest hotel chains, casinos, and resorts also offer package deals. If you already know where you want to stay, call the resort itself and ask if they can offer land/air packages.

Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59, and Lastminute.com—also do a brisk business in packages.

Vacation Together (☎ 800/839-9851; www.vacationtogether.com) allows you to search for and book packages offered by a number of tour operators and airlines to Las Vegas.

4 Getting There

BY PLANE

Given the shambles the airline industry is in, writing this section makes us wince. Just be aware that the future of many of the following airlines was in varying degrees of doubt as we went to press.

The following airlines have regularly scheduled flights into Las Vegas (some of these are regional carriers, so they may not all fly from your point of origin): **AeroMexico** (☎ 800/237-6639; www.aeromexico.com); **Air Canada** (☎ 800/776-3000; www.aircanada.ca) does

not offer direct service but will book on partner airlines, usually with a change in San Francisco; **Alaska Airlines** (☎ 800/426-0333; www.alaskaair.com); **Allegiant Air** (☎ 877/202-6444; www.allegiant-air.com) has service only from Fresno, California; **Aloha Air** (☎ 800/367-5250; www.alohaairlines.org); **America West** (☎ 800/235-9292; www.americawest.com); **American/American Eagle** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com); **American Trans Air/Comair** (☎ 800/435-9282; www.ata.com or www.fly-comair.com); **Continental** (☎ 800/525-0280; www.continental.com); **Delta/Skywest** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com); **Frontier Airlines** (☎ 800/432-1359; www.flyfrontier.com); **Hawaiian Airlines** (☎ 800/367-5320; www.hawaiianair.com); **Japan Airlines** (☎ 800/525-3663; www.jal.co.jp/en); **JetBlue** (☎ 800/538-2583; www.jetblue.com); **Midwest Express** (☎ 800/452-2022; www.midwestexpress.com); **Northwest** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com); **Southwest** (☎ 800/435-9792; www.iflyswa.com); **United** (☎ 800/241-6522; www.ual.com); **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com); and **Virgin Atlantic Airways** (☎ 800/862-8621; www.virgin-atlantic.com).

You can also search the **Internet** for cheap fares. The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity.com**, and **Orbitz.com** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet.

Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer’s authors. It’s a browser add-on that purports to “search 140 sites at once,” but in reality only beats competitors’ fares as often as other sites do.

If you’re willing to give up some control over your flight details, use an **opaque fare service** like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a “mystery airline” at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers—and the possibility of being sent from Philadelphia to Chicago via Tampa is remote; the airlines’ routing computers have gotten a lot better than they used to be.

BY CAR

The main highway connecting Las Vegas with the rest of the country is I-15; it links Montana, Idaho, and Utah with Southern California. The drive from Los Angeles is quite popular, and thanks to the narrow two-lane highway, can get very crowded on Friday and Sunday afternoons with hopeful weekend gamblers making their way to and from Vegas. (By the way, as soon as you cross the state

line, there are three casinos ready to handle your immediate gambling needs, with two more about 20 min. up the road, 30 miles before you get to Las Vegas.)

From the east, take I-70 or I-80 west to Kingman, Arizona, and then U.S. 93 north to downtown Las Vegas (Fremont St.). From the south, take I-10 west to Phoenix and then U.S. 93 north to Las Vegas. From San Francisco, take I-80 east to Reno and then U.S. 95 south to Las Vegas. If you're driving to Las Vegas, be sure to read the driving precautions in "Getting Around" in chapter 2.

Vegas is 286 miles from Phoenix, 759 miles from Denver, 421 miles from Salt Lake City, 269 miles from Los Angeles, and 586 miles from San Francisco.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com) does not currently offer direct rail service, although plans have been in the works to restore the rails between Los Angeles and Las Vegas for years now. At press time, Amtrak wouldn't confirm a date, but various reports have indicated that by 2004 they will restore service using the **TALGO**. This European-designed "Casino Train" will complete the trip from Los Angeles in about 5½ hours, with a wholesale seat price of \$99 round-trip. We've been hearing these reports for so long now they just make us roll our eyes, but believe us, if and when this ever happens, you will have to fight us for a seat.

In the meantime, you can take the train to Los Angeles or Barstow and Amtrak will get you to Vegas by bus.

Getting to Know Las Vegas

Located in the southernmost precincts of a wide, pancake-flat valley, Las Vegas is the biggest city in the state of Nevada. Treeless mountains form a scenic backdrop to hotels awash in neon glitter. Although it is one of the fastest-growing cities in America, for tourism purposes, the city is quite compact.

1 Orientation

VISITOR INFORMATION

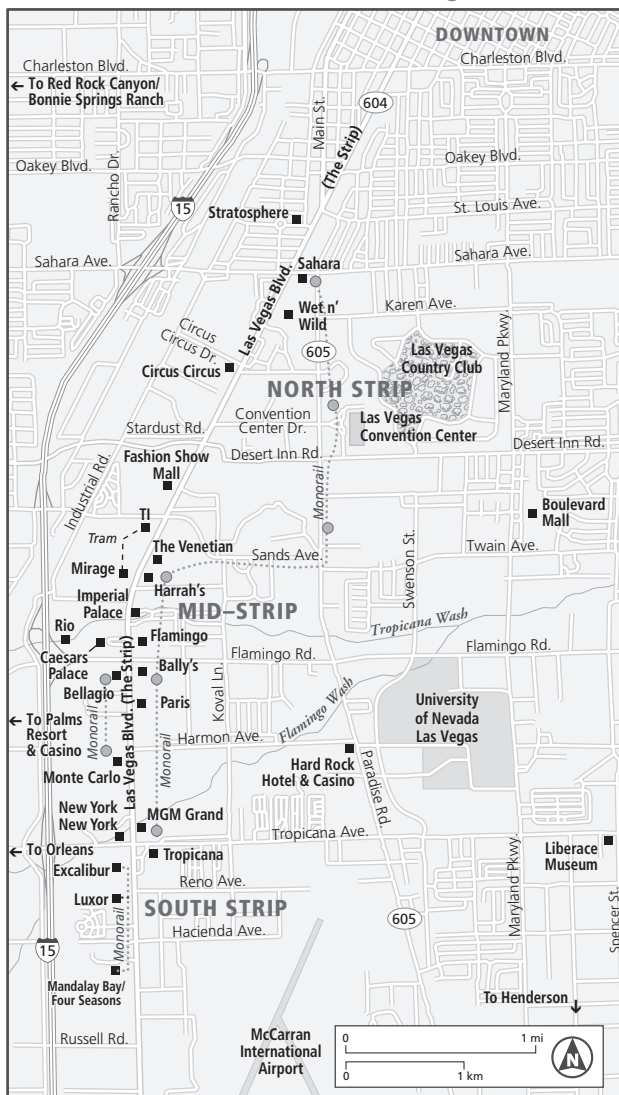
All major Las Vegas hotels provide comprehensive tourist information at their reception and/or sightseeing and show desks.

Other good information sources are: the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority**, 3150 Paradise Rd., Las Vegas, NV 89109 (☎ 877/VISIT-LV or 702/892-7575; www.vegasfreedom.com), open daily from 8am to 5pm; the **Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce**, 3720 Howard Hughes Pkwy., #100, Las Vegas, NV 89109 (☎ 702/735-1616; www.lvchamber.com), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm; and, for information on all of Nevada, including Las Vegas, the **Nevada Commission on Tourism** (☎ 800/638-2328; www.travelnevada.com), open 24 hours.

CITY LAYOUT

There are two main areas of Las Vegas: the **Strip** and **Downtown**. For many people, that's all there is to Las Vegas. But there is actually more to the town than that: Although maybe not as glitzy and glamorous as the Strip and Downtown—okay, definitely not—Paradise Road and east Las Vegas are home to quite a bit of casino action, Maryland Parkway boasts mainstream and alternative-culture shopping, and there are different restaurant choices all over the city. Confining yourself to the Strip and Downtown is fine for the first-time visitor, but repeat customers (and you will be) should get out there and explore. Las Vegas Boulevard South (the Strip) is the starting point for addresses; any street crossing it will start with 1 East and 1 West (and go up from there) at its intersection with the Strip.

Las Vegas at a Glance



THE STRIP

The Strip is probably the most famous 4-mile stretch of highway in the nation. Officially called Las Vegas Boulevard South, it contains most of the top hotels in town and offers almost all of the major showroom entertainment. First-time visitors will, and probably should, spend the bulk of their time on the Strip. If mobility is a problem, we suggest basing yourself in a South or Mid-Strip location.

For the purposes of organizing this book, we've divided the Strip into three sections. The **South Strip** can be roughly defined as the portion of the Strip south of Harmon Avenue, including the MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay, the Monte Carlo, New York–New York, Luxor, and many more hotels and casinos.

Mid-Strip is a long stretch of the street between Harmon Avenue and Spring Mountain Road, including Bellagio, Caesars, The Mirage and Treasure Island, Bally's, Paris Las Vegas, The Flamingo Las Vegas, and Harrah's, among other hotels and casinos.

The **North Strip** stretches north from Spring Mountain Road all the way to the Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower and includes Stardust, Sahara, The Riviera, and Circus Circus, to name a few.

EAST OF THE STRIP/CONVENTION CENTER

This area has grown up around the Las Vegas Convention Center. Las Vegas is one of the nation's top convention cities, attracting more than 2.9 million conventioners each year. The major hotel in this section is the Las Vegas Hilton, but in recent years, Marriott has built Residence Inn and Courtyard properties here, and the Hard Rock Hotel has opened. You'll find many excellent smaller hotels and motels southward along Paradise Road. All of these hotels offer close proximity to the Strip.

DOWNTOWN

Also known as “**Glitter Gulch**” (narrower streets make the neon seem brighter), downtown Las Vegas, which is centered on Fremont Street between Main and 9th streets, was the first section of the city to develop hotels and casinos. With the exception of the Golden Nugget, which looks like it belongs in Monte Carlo, this area has traditionally been more casual than the Strip. But with the advent of the **Fremont Street Experience** (p. 101), Downtown has experienced a revitalization. The area is clean, the crowds are low-key and friendly, and the light show overhead is as ostentatious as anything on the Strip. Don't overlook this area. Las Vegas Boulevard runs all the way into Fremont Street Downtown.

2 Getting Around

It shouldn't be too hard to navigate your way around. But remember, between huge hotel acreage, increased and very slow traffic, and lots and lots of people trying to explore like you, getting around takes a lot longer than you might think. Heck, it can take 15 to 20 minutes to get from your room to another part of your hotel! Always allow for plenty of time to get from point A to point B.

A warning note: The Las Vegas monorail is under construction and is scheduled to open in January 2004. This transport system will surely alter Vegas traffic flow in the best of all possible ways. For \$2.50 per person one-way, you will get to ride in comfort, in deluxe modern cars on these driverless trains, complete with roving attendants to answer your questions. Look for stations at MGM Grand, Bally's/Paris, the Flamingo, Venetian/Harrah's, the Convention Center, a separate stop at the LV Hilton, and the Sahara.

If you do get caught in some of the resulting construction traffic mess, just remind yourself, it's all for a good cause—and swear never to use a car again once the monorail is up and humming.

BY CAR

We highly recommend that visitors rent a car. The Strip is too spread out for walking (and Las Vegas is often too hot or too cold to make strolls pleasant), Downtown is too far away for a cheap cab ride, and public transportation (at least until the monorail is finished) is often ineffective in getting you from point A to point B. Plus, return visits call for exploration in more remote parts of the city, and a car brings freedom (especially if you want to do any side trips—bus tours are available, but a car lets you explore at your own pace rather than according to a tour schedule).

You should note that places with addresses some 60 blocks east or west from the Strip are actually less than a 10-minute drive—provided there is no traffic.

Having advocated renting a car, we should warn you that the growing population means a proportionate increase in the number of cars. Traffic is getting worse, and it's harder and harder to get around town with any certain swiftness. A general rule of thumb is to avoid driving on the Strip whenever you can, and avoid driving at all during peak rush hours, especially if you have to make a show curtain.

Parking is usually a pleasure, because all casino hotels offer free valet service. That means that for a mere \$1 to \$2 tip, you can park right at

the door, though the valet usually fills up on busy nights. In those cases, you can use the gigantic self-parking lot that all hotels have.

Note: If you plan to confine yourself to one part of the Strip (or one cruise down to it) or to Downtown and really don't want to rent a car, your feet will suffice.

RENTING A CAR

National companies with outlets in Las Vegas include **Alamo** (☎ 877/227-8367; www.goalamo.com), **Avis** (☎ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700; <https://rent.drivebudget.com/Home.jsp>), **Dollar** (☎ 800/800-3665; www.dollar.com), **Enterprise** (☎ 800/736-8227; www.enterprise.com), **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), **National** (☎ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), **Payless** (☎ 800/729-5377; www.paylesscarrental.com), and **Thrifty** (☎ 800/847-4389; www.thrifty.com).

DRIVING SAFETY

Because driving on the outskirts of Las Vegas—for example, coming from California—involves desert driving, you must take certain precautions. It's a good idea to check your tires, water, and oil before leaving. Take at least 5 gallons of water in a clean container that can be used for either drinking or the radiator. Pay attention to road signs that suggest when to turn off your car's air conditioner. And don't push your luck with gas—it may be 35 miles, or more, between stations. If your car overheats, do not remove the radiator cap until the engine has cooled, and then remove it very slowly. Add water to within an inch of the top of the radiator.

BY TAXI

Because cabs line up in front of all major hotels, an easy way to get around town is by taxi. Cabs charge \$2.70 at the meter drop and 20¢ for each additional $\frac{1}{9}$ mile, plus an additional \$1.20 fee for being picked up at the airport. A taxi from the airport to the Strip will run you \$10 to \$15, from the airport to Downtown \$15 to \$20, and between the Strip and Downtown about \$10 to \$12. You can often save money by sharing a cab with someone going to the same destination (up to five people can ride for the same fare).

If you want to call a taxi, any of the following companies can provide one: **Desert Cab Company** (☎ 702/386-9102), **Whittlesea Blue Cab** (☎ 702/384-6111), and **Yellow/Checker Cab/Star Company** (☎ 702/873-2000).

FREE TRANSPORTATION

There are a number of free transportation services, courtesy of the casinos. A free monorail connects Mandalay Bay with Luxor and Excalibur, another connects Bellagio with the Monte Carlo (though it's out of commission for all of 2004 due to renovations), and a free tram shuttles between The Mirage and Treasure Island. Given how far apart even neighboring hotels can be, thanks to their size, and how they seem even farther apart on really hot days, these are blessed additions—and the more tourists who take them, the less traffic there might be on the Strip.

FAST FACTS: Las Vegas

American Express There are about a dozen offices in town, but the closest one to the Strip is located inside the MGM Grand Hotel at 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (corner of Tropicana; ☎ 702/739-8474).

Area Codes The area code for Las Vegas is 702.

Babysitters Contact **Around the Clock Child Care** (☎ 800/798-6768 or 702/365-1040). In business since 1987, this reputable company clears its sitters with the health department, the sheriff, and the FBI, and carefully screens references. Charges are \$46 for 4 hours for one or two children, \$9.50 for each additional hour, with surcharges for additional children and on holidays. Sitters are on call 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, and they will come to your hotel. Call at least 3 hours in advance.

Banks Banks are generally open from 9 or 10am to 5 and sometimes 6pm, and most have Saturday hours. ATMs are plentiful all around town. Note also that most casino cashiers will cash personal checks and can exchange foreign currency, and just about every casino has a machine that will provide cash on a wide variety of credit cards.

Conventions Las Vegas is one of America's top convention destinations. Much of the action takes place at the **Las Vegas Convention Center**, 3150 Paradise Rd., Las Vegas, NV 89109 (☎ 702/892-7575), which is the largest single-level convention center in the world. Its 1.3 million square feet includes 89 meeting rooms. And this immense facility is augmented by the **Cashman Field Center**, 850 Las Vegas Blvd. N., Las Vegas, NV

89101 (☎ 702/386-7100). Under the same auspices, Cashman provides another 98,100 square feet of convention space. Additionally, there are massive convention facilities at many of the big hotels, including the MGM Grand, The Mirage, Mandalay Bay, The Venetian, and more.

Dentists & Doctors Hotels usually have lists of dentists and doctors should you need one. In addition, they are listed in the Centel Yellow Pages. See also “Hospitals,” below.

For dentist referrals, you can also call the **Clark County Dental Society** (☎ 702/255-7873), weekdays from 9am to noon and 1 to 5pm; when the office is closed, a recording will tell you who to call for emergency service.

For physician referrals, call the **Desert Springs Hospital** (☎ 800/842-5439 or 702/733-6875). Hours are Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm.

Dry Cleaners Things spill, and silk is easily stained. When in need, go to **Steiner Cleaners**, 1131 E. Tropicana Ave., corner of Maryland Parkway, in the Vons Shopping Center (☎ 702/736-7474), open Monday to Friday from 7am to 6:30pm, Saturday 8am to 6pm. Not only did they clean all the costumes for the movie *Casino*, but they were Liberace’s personal dry cleaner for years.

Emergencies Dial ☎ 911 to contact the police or fire department or to call an ambulance.

Highway Conditions For recorded information, call ☎ 702/486-3116. You can also tune in 970 AM for traffic news or 1610 AM for highway reports.

Hospitals Emergency services are available 24 hours a day at **University Medical Center**, 1800 W. Charleston Blvd., at Shadow Lane (☎ 702/383-2000); the emergency-room entrance is on the corner of Hastings and Rose streets. **Sunrise Hospital and Medical Center**, 3186 Maryland Pkwy., between Desert Inn Road and Sahara Avenue (☎ 702/731-8080), also has a 24-hour emergency room.

For more minor problems, if you are on the Strip, the Imperial Palace has a 24-hour urgent-care facility, the **Nevada Resort Medical Center**, an independently run facility on the eighth floor, with doctors and X-ray machines. It’s located at 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S., between the Sands and The Flamingo (☎ 702/893-6767).

Hot Lines Emergency hot lines include the **Rape Crisis Center** (☎ 702/366-1640), **Suicide Prevention** (☎ 702/731-2990), and **Poison Emergencies** (☎ 800/446-6179).

Liquor & Gambling Laws You must be 21 to drink or gamble; proof of age is required and often requested at bars, nightclubs, and restaurants, so it's always a good idea to bring ID when you go out, especially if you look young. There are no closing hours in Las Vegas for the sale or consumption of alcohol, even on Sunday. Don't even think about driving while you're under the influence, or having an open container of alcohol in your car. Beer, wine, and liquor are all sold in all kinds of stores pretty much around the clock; trust us, you won't have a hard time finding a drink in this town. It's even legal to have an open container while walking on the Strip.

Lost & Found Be sure to tell all of your credit-card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit-card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit-card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. **Visa's** U.S. emergency number is ☎ 800/847-2911 or 410/581-9994. **American Express** cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ☎ 800/221-7282. **MasterCard** holders should call ☎ 800/307-7309 or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ☎ 800/555-1212.

Newspapers & Periodicals There are two Las Vegas dailies: the *Las Vegas Review Journal* and the *Las Vegas Sun*. The *Review Journal's* Friday edition has a helpful "Weekend" section with a comprehensive guide to shows and buffets. There are two free alternative papers, with club listings and many unbiased restaurant and bar reviews. Both *City Life* and *Las Vegas Weekly* are published weekly. And at every hotel desk, you'll find dozens of free local magazines, such as *Vegas Visitor*, *What's On in Las Vegas*, *Showbiz Weekly*, and *Where to Go in Las Vegas*, that are chock-full of helpful information—although probably of the sort that comes from paid advertising.

Parking Free valet parking is one of the great pleasures of Las Vegas and well worth the dollar tip (given when the car is

returned) to save walking a city block from the far reaches of a hotel parking lot, particularly when the temperature is over 100°F (38°C). Another summer plus: The valet will turn on your air-conditioning so that you don't have to get into an "oven on wheels."

Pharmacies There's a 24-hour **Walgreens** (which also has 1-hr. photo processing) at 3763 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/739-9638), almost directly across from the Monte Carlo. **Sav-On** is a large 24-hour drugstore and pharmacy close to the Strip at 1360 E. Flamingo Rd., at Maryland Parkway (☎ 702/731-5373 for the pharmacy, 702/737-0595 for general merchandise). **White Cross Drugs**, 1700 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/382-1733), open daily from 7am to 1am, will make pharmacy deliveries to your hotel during the day.

Police For nonemergencies, call ☎ 702/795-3111. For emergencies, call ☎ 911.

Post Office The most convenient post office is immediately behind the Stardust Hotel at 3100 Industrial Rd., between Sahara Avenue and Spring Mountain Road (☎ 800/297-5543). It's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5pm. You can also mail letters and packages at your hotel, and there's a full-service U.S. Post Office in the Forum Shops in Caesars Palace.

Safety In Las Vegas vast amounts of money are always on display, and criminals find many easy marks. Don't be one of them. At gaming tables and slot machines, men should keep wallets well concealed and out of the reach of pickpockets, and women should keep handbags in plain sight (on laps). If you win a big jackpot, ask the pit boss or slot attendant to cut you a check rather than give you cash—the cash may look nice, but flashing it can attract the wrong kind of attention. Outside casinos, popular spots for pickpockets and thieves are restaurants and outdoor shows, such as the volcano at The Mirage or the fountains at Bellagio. Stay alert. Unless your hotel room has an in-room safe, check your valuables in a safe-deposit box at the front desk.

Show Tickets See chapter 8 for details on obtaining show tickets.

Taxes Clark County hotel room tax is 9%, and in Henderson it's 10%; the sales tax is 7%.

Time Zone Las Vegas is in the Pacific time zone, 3 hours earlier than the East Coast, 2 hours earlier than the Midwest. For exact local time, call ☎ **702/248-4800**.

Weather See “When to Go” in chapter 1. For local weather information, call ☎ **702/248-4800**. The radio station 970 FM does weather reports.

Weddings Las Vegas is one of the easiest places in the world to tie the knot. There’s no blood test or waiting period, the ceremony and license are inexpensive, chapels are open around the clock, and your honeymoon destination is right at hand. More than 101,000 marriages are performed here each year. Get a license Downtown at the **Clark County Marriage License Bureau**, 200 S. 3rd St., at Bridger Avenue (☎ **702/455-4415**), which is open Monday to Thursday from 8am to midnight, and from 8am Friday through midnight Sunday. On legal holidays, they’re open 24 hours. The cost of a marriage license is \$55; the cost of the ceremony varies depending on where you go to have it done. See “Getting Married” in chapter 5 for details on the local wedding chapels.

Where to Stay

If there's one thing Vegas has, it's hotels. Big hotels. And lots of them. You'll find the 10 largest hotels in the United States—9 of the top 10 in the world—right here. And you'll find a whole lot of rooms: 132,000 rooms, to be exact—or at least exact as of this writing. Every 5 minutes, or so it seems, someone is putting up a new giant hotel, or adding another 1,000 rooms to an existing one. So finding a place to stay in Vegas should be the least of your worries.

Or should it?

When a convention, a fight, or some other big event is happening—and these things are always happening—darn near all of those 132,000 rooms are going to be sold out. (Over the course of a regular year, the occupancy rate for hotel rooms in Las Vegas runs at about 90%.) A last-minute Vegas vacation can turn into a housing nightmare. If possible, plan in advance so that you can have your choice: Ancient Egypt or Ancient Rome? New York or New Orleans? Strip or Downtown? Luxury or economy? Vegas has all that and way too much more.

The bottom line is that with a few, mostly subtle differences, a hotel room is a hotel room is a hotel room. After you factor in location, price, and whether you have a pirate-loving kid, there isn't that much difference between rooms, except for perhaps size and the quality of their surprisingly similar furnishings.

Prices in Vegas are anything but fixed, so you will notice wild price ranges. The same room can routinely go for anywhere from \$60 to \$250, depending on demand, and even that range is negotiable if it's a slow time (though such times are less and less common thanks to the influx of conventions). So use our price categories with a grain of salt, and don't rule out a hotel just because it's listed as "Very Expensive"—on any given day, you might get a great deal on a room in a pricey hotel. Just ask.

Reservations Services

If you get harried when you have to haggle, use a free service offered by **Reservations Plus**, 2275 A Renaissance Dr., Las Vegas, NV 89119 (☎ 800/805-9528; www.reservationsplus.com). They'll find you a hotel room in your price range that meets your specific requirements. Because they book rooms in volume, they are able to get discounted rates.

The **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** also runs a room-reservations hot line (☎ 877/VISIT-LV) that can be helpful. They can apprise you of room availability, quote rates, contact a hotel for you, and tell you when major conventions will be in town.

A couple words of warning: Make sure they don't try to book you into a hotel you've never heard of. Try to stick with the hotels listed in this book. Always get your information in writing and then make some phone calls just to confirm that you really have the reservations that they say they've made for you.

1 South Strip

VERY EXPENSIVE

The Four Seasons ★★☆☆ *Kids* Various mammoth Vegas hotels attempt to position themselves as luxury resorts, insisting that service and fine cotton sheets can be done on a mass scale. But there is only one true luxury resort—in some people's eyes, *the* luxury resort—in town, located, on the top five floors of Mandalay Bay, though in many ways, the Four Seasons is light-years away. A separate driveway and portico entrance, plus an entire registration area, sets you up immediately. This is the one fancy hotel in town where you are not greeted, even at a distance, with the general hubbub that is the soundtrack to Vegas.

Inside the hotel, all is calm and quiet. But it's really the best of both worlds—all you have to do is walk through a door and instantly you are in Mandalay Bay, with access to a casino, nightlife,

and yes, general hubbub. The difference is quite shocking, and frankly, once you've experienced Vegas this way, it's kind of hard to go back to the constant sensory overload.

The rooms don't look like much at first—slightly bland but in good taste—but when you sink down into the furniture, you appreciate the fine quality. Here at last is a Vegas hotel where they really don't care if you ever leave your room, so the beds have feather pillows and down comforters, robes are plush, and amenities (such as safes, irons, voice mail, hair dryers, and VCRs) are really, really nice. Since Four Seasons has the southernmost location on the Strip, its Strip-view rooms (the most expensive units) give you the whole incredible panorama.

Service is superb and your needs are anticipated so quickly, you'll be tempted to sink to the floor in the lobby because you know someone will have a chair under your rear before you land. Children are encouraged (rare for Vegas) and spoiled with welcome gifts of toys and goodies, and rooms are childproofed in advance. Once you factor in all the freebies (gym/spa access, pool cabanas, various other amenities), not to mention the service and the blessed peace, the difference in price between Four Seasons and Bellagio (with all its hidden charges) is nothing.

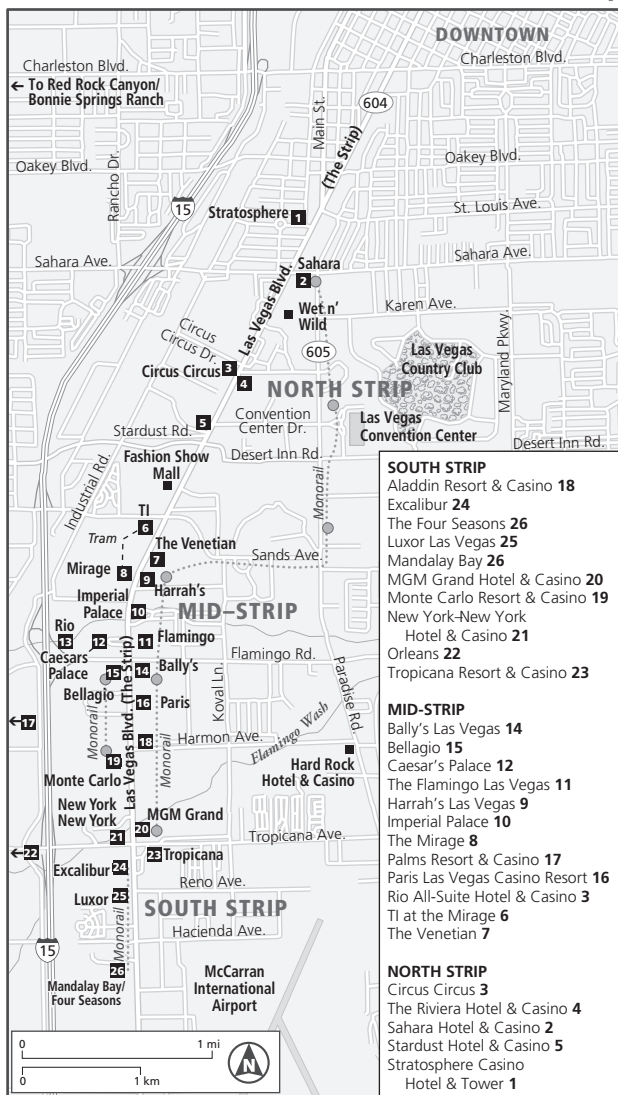
3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas, NV 89119. ☎ 877/632-5000 or 702/632-5000. Fax 702/632-5195. www.fourseasons.com. 424 units. \$200–\$500 double; from \$400 suite. Extra person \$30. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; heated outdoor pool with free cabanas and other luxury perks; elegant health club (free to guests) and spa; concierge; car-rental desk; courtesy car; full 24-hr. business center with faxing, delivery, and secretarial service; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; overnight laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Aladdin Resort & Casino ★ *Note:* As we were going to press, the beleaguered and bankrupt Aladdin had just been bought by Planet Hollywood, which, as of now, intends to rename, remodel, and restyle the property. This process may or may not be under way by the time you read this, but at least you won't be confused if there is a big blue globe out front, a new name, and lots of cast-off clothes and props from various Hollywood movies enshrined inside.

It's a bit of a pity, because the new Aladdin, rising on the ashes of the old Vegas stalwart, is a handsome building both inside and out. The theme is a generic Middle East theme—you know, the sort that pretends there is no significant difference between Egypt, Morocco,

Accommodations on the Strip



and Turkey, which may be news to Egyptians, Moroccans, and Turks—best characterized by one observer as “the Sahara with a billion dollars thrown at it.” Details that indicate considerable thought went into the design are everywhere—what other casino has actual tile work (clearly Moroccan in origin) throughout? But all that work came at a price, hence a \$700 million bankruptcy—the largest in Nevada history.

That petty detail aside, this is already what a sexy, but distinctly Vegas, hotel ought to be: a little bit of kitsch, a little bit of class, and all of it playful. And we hope that the new owners will concentrate on maintaining and building on these aspects. The rooms are not distinctive, but they are pleasing (except for the beds; the money must have run out before buying the mattresses, which are some of the most uncomfortable we’ve slept on), and the bathrooms can be quite large, with a deep tub and separate glass shower, plus little Aladdin-lamp-shaped faucets and exotic spice-scented amenities. Another plus is that the hotel is constructed so that guests need to see little of the casino (a plus for you, a drag for needed gambling revenue and likely one of the first things the new owners will change), while the pool area is decent but nothing spectacular.

And then there is the impressive Arabian Nights–themed **Desert Passage** shopping area (p. 141), another one to rival the capitalist ventures over at Caesars and The Venetian.

Inside the Desert Passage are a number of terrific restaurants, including a branch of New Orleans’s venerated **Commander’s Palace** (p. 64). The hotel also has its own arena, the **Center for the Performing Arts**, which is attracting big names back to Vegas. Finally, there is the Moroccan-flavored **Elemis spa** ★★, aesthetically our hands-down local favorite. Just looking at it is pampering, and that’s before one of their people puts you in a wrap and “dry float” (a womblike water bed–style cradle).

All in all, the place teeters on the brink of a higher rating, and all we can hope is that the new owners help push it over the hump, rather than in the other direction. The place deserves it.

3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 877/333-WISH (333-9474) or 702/785-5555. Fax 702/785-5558. www.aladdincasino.com. 2,567 units. \$99 and up double. Extra person \$30, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; performing-arts center; showroom; 15 restaurants; 7 bars/lounges; 2 outdoor pools; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access (for a fee), hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Mandalay Bay ★★ Let's hope the extreme southern Strip location doesn't make you overlook Mandalay Bay, as it's one of our favorite hotels. Why? Well, we love that the lobby (impossibly high ceilings, calm, gleaming with marble, and housing a large aquarium) and the other public areas really do seem more like an actual resort hotel than just a Vegas version of one. You don't have to walk through the casino to get to any of these public areas or the guest room elevators, the pool area is spiffy, and the whole thing is marginally less confusing and certainly less overwhelming than some of the neighboring behemoths.

We wouldn't say it really evokes Colonial Southeast Asia—oh, maybe around the edges, if you squint, thanks to the odd bit of foliage or Balinese carving—and this may well keep out the gawkers, who are looking for bigger visual thrills, but we find a place whose theme doesn't bop you over the head refreshing.

The rooms are perhaps the best on the Strip (king rooms are more attractive than doubles), spacious and subdued in decor. King-size beds have large carved headboard posts and firm mattresses. Sheets are slightly scratchy and pillows too firm for those with neck problems. The bathrooms are the crowning glory. Our favorite in Vegas, they're downright large, with impressive, slightly sunken tubs, glassed-in showers, double sinks, and separate water closets, plus fab amenities and lots of them. Note that a new tower with 1,000 rooms is set to open sometime in 2004.

Service overall is pretty good, and those pool-area employees are the best in Vegas, though there were no security guards at the guest elevators. A monorail system connects the hotel with Luxor and Excalibur, by which time you are well into Strip action, and this should more than help you get over any feelings of isolation.

The restaurants in Mandalay Bay feature some of the most innovative interiors in Vegas, each one more whimsical and imaginative than the last. **Aureole**, the **Border Grill**, **Red Square**, **rumjungle**, **House of Blues**, and the **buffet** are all notable places to dine. Mandalay Bay has a showroom and a separate arena, which was inaugurated by none other than Luciano Pavarotti, and currently offers **Mamma Mia**, the Broadway musical of ABBA songs.

There are no fewer than four pools (one of them topless), including the touted wave pool, which is more of a mini-wave pool. So plan instead to bob gently, or better yet, float happily in the lazy river (boogie and surf board rentals are available).

The health club is sufficiently stocked to give you a good workout (it should be, because they charge guests \$22 per day to use it).

The spa area proper—featuring hot and warm pools, plus a cold plunge—is exotically designed, as close to those found in the Turkish spas in Eastern Europe as we’ve come across.

3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Hacienda Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89119. ☎ 877/632-7000 or 702/632-7000. Fax 702/632-7228. www.mandalaybay.com. 3,309 units. From \$99 standard double; from \$149 suite; from \$149 House of Blues Signature Rooms. Extra person \$35. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 12,000 seat events center; 1,700 seat performing arts theater; aquarium; 13 restaurants (Seafood, Chinese, Mexican, Russian, American, Italian, and more); 4 pools; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; water-sports equipment/rental; concierge; tour desk; business center; 24-hour room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

MGM Grand Hotel & Casino ★★ *Kids* Vegas goes back and forth on its position on whether size does matter, and the MGM Grand is a perfect example of that. When it first opened, the massive glaring green behemoth was the largest hotel in town, with a casino to match—and its owners boasted of its family-appropriateness, as typified by the theme park that was originally in the back. But times and emphasis change, and with everyone else in Vegas moving away from the pseudo-family-friendly direction to the whole luxury-resort persona, the MGM Grand had no choice but to follow. So if you book here thinking your kids are still welcome, you should think again. The amusement park in the back is gone, and so is the Wizard of Oz theme that originally gave the hotel its identity. Instead, there are striptease shows and a lounge called Tabu. That sort of thing certainly sends a message.

Consider also the place’s size. The hotel management now downplays the once touted hugeness, trying to pretend that the really big casino is actually several medium-big casinos. Whatever. Despite plenty of signage, it is still a lengthy, confusing schlep from anywhere to anywhere. The 80 42-inch TV monitors (apprising registering guests of hotel happenings) in the otherwise lovely and vast white-marble lobby only add to the chaotic confusion a guest might feel—all the worse if you are toting kids. (At least the lobby is now immediately accessible from the outside world.)

On the absolute plus side, we are just knocked out by the Grand Tower rooms. No cookie-cutter, generic, upscale-but-forgettably-bland furniture here—instead, it’s a modern-day homage to 1930s moderne, all clean, curvy lines, good wood, and a fun palette of colors, plus black-and-white movie-star glamour photos. The results are some of the most distinctive rooms on the Strip—and even if

there are a heck of a lot of them, they are the best choice in town in their price range. The Emerald Tower rooms (about 700 of the hotel's total rooms) are a whole lot less grand. The remnants of the old Marina Hotel, these rooms are plainer (and smaller by about 100 sq. ft.) and more run of the mill (though the windows have shutters, which is semi-nifty). The expanded pool area is another victory, with several choices for dunking including a lazy river (though we wish portions of it weren't closed off for nonsummer months). Overall, report guests, the staff couldn't be more friendly and helpful.

MGM houses a prestigious assemblage of dining rooms, among them the **Wolfgang Puck Café**, Emeril Lagasse's **New Orleans Fish House**, and Mark Miller's **Coyote Cafe**. There's also a Rainforest Café and a buffet.

As befits a behemoth of this size, there's an appropriately gigantic casino. A new (as yet unnamed) Cirque du Soleil show is due to open in 2004. Plus, there's ***La Femme***, a very adult topless show; a hot new lounge, **Tabu**; nightclub **Studio 54**; a headliner showroom; and a larger events arena that hosts sporting events and bigger concerts. See chapter 8 for details on all the nightlife options.

The **Lion Habitat** is reviewed on p. 106.

The MGM Grand's spa is a Zen-Asian minimalist wonder, all natural stone and aged wood. The health club is state-of-the-art and larger than most, with some serious machines, including ones equipped with fancy computer video monitors (it'll cost you \$25 to work up a sweat here most of the day, but you can use the gym facilities only, without the whirlpools and other amenities of the spa, for only \$10 after 6pm).

The swimming pool area is a rousing success. The 6.6 acres of landscaped grounds feature five pools, including the longest lazy river in town.

It's not a family-friendly hotel anymore, but it still offers the **MGM Grand Youth Center**, reviewed on p. 115.

3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Tropicana Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-7777. Fax 702/891-1030. www.mgmgrand.com. 5,034 units. \$69–\$329 standard double; \$99–\$2,500 suite. Extra person \$25. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; events arena; showroom; cabaret theater; 2 wedding chapels; 14 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; youth center; game room/video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, data-port, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Monte Carlo Resort & Casino ★ When it was built, the massive Monte Carlo was the world's seventh-largest hotel. It's now considerably overshadowed by its high-profile, more theme-intensive brethren. Entering it is still nice, as it comes off more as a European casino hotel alternative (before Bellagio usurped that position), replete with Corinthian colonnades, triumphal arches and big and busy statuary, with an entranceway opening onto a bustling casino. A separate entrance in the rear of the hotel leads to a splendid marble-floored, crystal-chandeliered lobby evocative of a European grand hotel. We love that the guest rooms are accessible without going through the casino, but we hate that said rooms are somewhat dingy and badly in need of a makeover, with dinky bathrooms. The pool area, once the very last word in local pool fun, is now put to shame by better versions (including superior lazy rivers) over at Mandalay Bay and the MGM Grand. It does have a number of child/family/budget-friendly restaurants. All in all, just about last on our list of second-choice hotels, but a serious room redo, plus some work on the pool area, could move it up fast.

The Monte Carlo's **Pub & Brewery** and **Dragon Noodle Co.** are described in chapter 4. In addition, there is a highly recommended branch of the classic Downtown French restaurant **Andre's** (p. 87). There's a large and overly ornate casino, plus a lavish showroom that currently hosts the recommended show by magician **Lance Burton** (p. 156).

Monte Carlo's health club and spa is nothing special, but then again, it's \$17 for 1 day's access, which is cheaper than the fee at most other hotels.

3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Flamingo Rd. and Tropicana Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/311-8999 or 702/730-7777. Fax 702/730-7250. www.monte-carlo.com. 3,002 units. Sun–Thurs \$59–\$179 double, Fri–Sat \$109–\$269 double; \$149–\$339 suite. Extra person \$25, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showroom; wedding chapel; 7 restaurants; large wave pool with lazy-river ride and separate kiddie pool; 3 night-lit tennis courts with full services and equipment rental; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; watersports equipment/rental; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board.

New York–New York Hotel & Casino ★★ *(Kids)* Isn't this exactly the kind of hotel you think about—or dream about or fear—when you think “Las Vegas”? There it is, a jumbled pile mock-up of the venerable Manhattan skyline, the Empire State Building,

the Chrysler Building, the Public Library, all crammed together, along with the 150-foot Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, all built to approximately one-third scale. And as if that weren't enough, they threw in a roller coaster running around the outside and into the hotel and casino itself.

And inside, it all gets better. There are details everywhere—so many, in fact, that the typical expression on the face of casino-goers is slack-jawed wonder. If you enter the casino via the Brooklyn Bridge (the walkway from the Strip), you find yourself in a replica of Greenwich Village, down to the cobblestones, the manhole covers, the tenement buildings, and the graffiti. (Yes, they even re-created that. You should see the subway station.) The reception area and lobby are done in an Art Deco, golden-age-of-Manhattan style; you feel like breaking out into a 1930s musical number while standing there. It really is impossible to adequately describe the sheer mind-blowing enormity of the thing. It's a *wow!* all right.

Rooms are housed in different towers, each with a New York-inspired name. Truthfully, the place is so massive and mazelike that finding your way to your room can take a while. There are 64 different styles of rooms, and most are quite smashing (oddly, the style diminishes in inverse proportion to the size of the room). Essentially, each is done up in Art Deco style: various shades of inlaid wood, rounded tops on the armoires and headboards, brown and wood colors dominating. Some of the rooms are downright tiny (just like New York again!), however, and in those rooms all this massively detailed decoration can be overwhelming, if not suffocating. The bathrooms are also small, but have black-marble-topped sinks, which again lend a glamorous '20s image. Light sleepers should request a room away from the roller coaster.

Cranks would have us note that coming here is not like going to the real New York. On the other hand, given how crowded it is (everyone wants to come check it out and stays to play) and how noisy, it kind of is just like being in New York. Especially with the all-too-realistic traffic and parking nightmares.

There's a small health club and spa, and the mediocre pool is right next to the parking lot.

In addition to a number of more-than-decent restaurants, including reliable Italian chain **Il Fornaio**, there are several festive and beautifully decorated bars throughout the property, including **Hamilton's**, a sophisticated cigar bar; **Coyote Ugly**, a party-hearty bar where dancing on furniture is encouraged; and the **Bar at Times**

Square, where a lighted ball drops every night at midnight to re-create the famous New Year's Eve event in the real location. And just opened in July 2003 was a new adults-only Cirque du Soleil production, *Zumanity*.

3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Tropicana Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/693-6763** or 702/740-6969. Fax 702/740-6920. www.nynyhotelcasino.com. 2,033 units. Sun–Thurs from \$59 double, Fri–Sat from \$109 double. Extra person \$20, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 10 restaurants; outdoor pool; small health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; video arcade with carnival midway games; concierge; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access (for a fee), hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Tropicana Resort & Casino ★ As we go to press, the Trop had stopped taking bookings past April 2004, which may or may not tell you something. The rumors are it will be torn down and in its place will be erected two miniresorts of 2,000 rooms each. We'd like to say we are sorry—and in a nostalgic way we are, but really, the Trop has seen better days. Once known for its lavish tropical resort stylings, it's now more than a little worn around the edges, especially when compared with its splashy neighbors. The birds and other wildlife are gone, which makes things a little less messy, but the tacky “Garden rooms” are still around and ought to be demolished ASAP.

Rooms—well, think a clean '70s motel room, but a little bit nicer. Unless you're a Jimmy Buffet fan, you are better off staying in the Paradise tower, where the rooms are slightly bigger and much easier on the eyes—mock provincial, to be sure (check out the plaster molding and ceiling cornices—a curious and welcome little touch), but it all appears less shabby and more fresh. Bathrooms are also bigger here, but dull, except for the ones with Jacuzzi tubs. Even without the wildlife, the pool area is among the best around and is the place's biggest draw. Note, however, that their touted swim-up blackjack is seasonal (read: summer only).

Calypsos, the 24-hour coffee shop, is a good value, as are the Trop's **buffet** offerings. The showroom currently hosts the **Folies Bergère** revue (p. 154).

3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Tropicana Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **888/826-8767** or 702/739-2222. Fax 702/739-2469. www.tropicana.lv.com. 1,878 units. \$79–\$229 double. Extra person \$20. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; wedding chapel; 8 restaurants; 3 outdoor pools; small health club and spa; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minifridge in some rooms, hair dryer, iron and board, safes.

Excalibur ★★ *Kids* Now *this* is kitsch. One of the largest resort hotels in the world, Excalibur (aka “the Realm”) is a gleaming white, turreted castle complete with moat, drawbridge, battlements, and lofty towers. And it’s huger than huge. Frankly, we prefer stopping in for a visit rather than actually settling in here, but we know others who love the price and the authentic Vegas-tacky atmosphere.

Rooms are done in neutrals (a little too much brown for our tastes). They have vague heraldic overtones and, given the price, are perhaps the best bet on the Strip for the budget-minded. Note that none of the bathrooms have tubs, just showers. Guests who have stayed in Tower 2 have complained about the noise from the roller coaster across the street at New York–New York. (It runs till 11pm, so early birds should probably stay in a different part of the hotel.)

The second floor holds the Medieval Village, where Excalibur’s restaurants and shops are peppered along winding streets and alleyways, a sort of permanent Renaissance Faire. On the Village’s “Jester’s Stage,” jugglers, puppeteers, and magicians amuse guests with free 20-minute performances throughout the day. Up here you can access the enclosed, air-conditioned, moving sidewalk that connects with the Luxor. There are plenty of restaurants, including the **buffet** (p. 90). The *Tournament of Kings* (p. 159) is a medieval-style dinner show.

3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Tropicana Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/937-7777 or 702/597-7777. Fax 702/597-7163. www.excaliburlasvegas.com. 4,008 units. \$49 and up double. Extra person \$15. Children under 13 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; wedding chapel; 11 restaurants; outdoor pool; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer.

Luxor Las Vegas ★★ *Kids* Another hotel that thrills us to our very kitsch-worshipping souls. How happy you, who share our aesthetic taste—or lack thereof—will be when you behold the main hotel, a 30-story onyx-hued pyramid, complete with a really tall 315,000-watt light beam at the top. You’ll be giddy when you spy the towering statues of Ramses and overhear the talking Animatronic camels as you enter, though the Art Deco lobby is somewhat classy as well. It’s not as impressive as the real landmarks in the real Egypt, of course. But you knew that.

Rooms in the pyramid open onto the vast center that contains the casino, so if you want only a short drunken stumble back to your room, these are for you. Otherwise, ask for a room higher up. The pyramid rooms cross Egyptian kitsch with Art Deco stylings, and

marvelous views are offered through the slanted windows (the higher up the better, of course), but the bathrooms are shower-only, no tubs. High-speed “inclinator” elevators run on a 39-degree angle, making the ride up to your room a bit of a thrill—check out that sensation as the mechanisms grind to a halt!

Tower rooms (an expansion put additional rooms in a tower rather than another pyramid. Drat!) are even heavier on the Egyptian motif (with huge armoires housing the TVs and closet space), pleasing in a campy way but not as aesthetically successful. The bathrooms, however, including deep tubs, are better, so it might be a worthwhile tradeoff. Regardless of which room you get, these are some of the few rooms in Las Vegas that stand out. You know you are in the Luxor when you find yourself surrounded by unique, charming room design, as opposed to the cookie-cutter room decor usually found elsewhere in town.

The Luxor’s **Pharaoh’s Pheast** buffet (p. 90) offers a cool archaeological-dig atmosphere. The hotel’s high-tech nightclub **Ra** (p. 166) is a happening nightspot. Two notable attractions here are **King Tut’s Tomb & Museum** (p. 103) and the **Luxor IMAX Theater** (p. 105).

3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Reno and Hacienda aves.), Las Vegas, NV 81119. © 800/288-1000 or 702/262-4000. Fax 702/262-4478. www.luxor.com. 4,400 units. Sun–Thurs \$49 and up double, Fri–Sat \$99 and up double; \$149 and up whirlpool suite, \$249–\$800 other suites. Extra person \$25. Children under 12 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 10 restaurants; 5 outdoor pools; health club and spa; 18,000-sq.-ft. video arcade with the latest Sega games and more; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataports, hair dryer, iron and board.

INEXPENSIVE

Orleans ★ (Value) The Orleans is owned by the same company that owns the Barbary Coast and Gold Coast casinos. It’s a little out of the way, and there is virtually nothing around it, but with a 12-screen movie complex, complete with a food court and day-care center, a bowling alley, plus a new 9,000-seat arena, this is a reasonable alternative to staying on the hectic Strip. Plus, there is a shuttle that runs continuously to the Barbary Coast on the Strip. The facade is aggressively fake New Orleans, more reminiscent of Disneyland than the actual Big Easy. Inside it’s much of the same. But a bright casino (complete with Cajun and zydeco music over the loudspeakers) and a policy of handing out Mardi Gras beads at all

the restaurants and bars (ask if you haven't gotten yours) make for a pleasantly festive atmosphere.

If the prices hold true (as always, they can vary), this hotel is one of the best bargains in town, despite the location, though the staff can be rotten, which can seriously sour a bargain experience. The rooms are nice and quite large; all have a definite New Orleans–French feel. Each is L-shaped, with a seating alcove by the windows, and comes complete with an old-fashioned overstuffed chair and sofa. The beds have brass headboards, the lamps look antique, and lace curtains flutter at the windows. The one drawback is that all these furnishings, and the busy floral decorating theme, make the room seem crowded. Still, it's meant to evoke a cozy, warm Victorian parlor, which traditionally is very overcrowded, so maybe it's successful after all. There are 1,400 brand-new rooms in a newly built tower, and these hold to the same surprisingly nice standard.

The hotel has your basic Vegas-type places to eat. Worth noting is the moderately priced Italian Sazio, Big Al's Oyster Bar, a not unauthentic Creole/Cajun-themed restaurant, and **Don Miguel's**, a basic but satisfying Mexican restaurant. There are several bars, including one with live music at night. The **Orleans Showroom** is an 827-seat theater featuring live entertainment, and there's also a movie theater and 70-lane bowling alley.

4500 W. Tropicana Ave. (west of the Strip and I-15), Las Vegas, NV 89103. ☎ **800/ORLEANS** (675-3267) or 702/365-7111. Fax 702/365-7505. www.orleanscasino.com. 840 units. \$39 and up standard double; \$175–\$225 1-bedroom suite. Extra person \$10. Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showroom; 12 restaurants; 2 outdoor pools; health club; 70-lane bowling center; 12 movie theaters; Kids Tyme children's center offering amusements and day care for kids 12 and under; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board.

2 Mid-Strip

VERY EXPENSIVE

Bellagio ★★ The \$1.6 billion luxury resort that ushered in the new post-Vegas-is-for-families elegance epoch. What do you get for that money? Well, for starters, though it is named for a charming Lake Como village, Bellagio is not, thankfully, as theme-intensive as some of its nearest competition. There is an 8-acre Lake Como stand-in out front, complete with a dazzling choreographed water-ballet extravaganza, plus a representation of an Italian lakeside village, while the

pool area is sort of Hearst Castle Romanesque, but that's about it. Just as well. This is not much like a getaway to a peaceful, romantic Italian village. But it is exactly like going to a big, grand, state-of-the-art Vegas hotel. Nothing with a casino stuck in the middle of it can be that serene and restful.

But does it work as a luxury hotel? Sort of. It certainly is much closer to a European casino hotel than a Vegas one. Fabulous touches abound, including a lobby that's unlike any other in Vegas. It's not just grand, with marble and a gaudy blown-glass flower sculpture on the ceiling (the largest of its kind in the world), but it's also brave with plants, natural lighting, and actual seating. There's also a downright lovely conservatory, complete with a 100-year-old fountain and stuffed full of gorgeous, brightly colored flowers and plants, preposterously (and delightfully) changed every few weeks to go with the season (yellows and whites for Easter, for example)—it's one of the sweetest spots in all of Vegas.

On the down side, you still can't avoid a walk through the casino to get just about anywhere (At least it's laid out in an easy-to-navigate grid with wide aisles), and there are hidden charges galore. The rooms are nice—nicer than The Mirage even—but maybe not quite nice enough for the price. Furnishings are plush (good beds with quality linens, comfy chairs), the roomy bathrooms even more so (marble and glass plus good-smelling soap), but it's all just a busier and slightly more luxurious variation on what's found over at The Mirage. Strip-side rooms, while featuring a much-desired view of the water fountains, don't quite muffle the booms that said fountains make as they explode. Still, service is top-notch, despite the size of the place; the staff is eager to please and nonpatronizing.

Meanwhile, just about all the best new restaurants are found in Bellagio, including **Picasso**, **Le Cirque**, **Circo**, **Aqua**, and **Olives**. Most are reviewed in chapter 6, as is the buffet.

The resort's **water ballet** ★★☆☆, courtesy of a dancing fountain with jets timed to a rotating list of nine songs (everything from pop to Sinatra to Broadway to opera), sounds cheesy, but it absolutely is not. It's really quite delightful and even witty (no, really), and is the best free show in Vegas. Bellagio also features an upscale casino, and **O** (p. 152), perhaps the most incredible show from Cirque du Soleil.

The pool area has skidded to the top of our favorites list; it boasts six swimming pools (two heated year-round and two with fountains) geometrically set in a neoclassical Roman garden, with flowered, trellised archways and Italian opera piped in over the sound

system. The spa and health club are marvelous, but at \$25 a pop, it's pretty pricey (though with your fee, you are allowed to return throughout the day for additional soakings/steamings/workouts). The gym has the latest in cardio and weight machines, but can get very crowded. Attendants ply you with iced towels and drinks. The spa offers a full range of pricey treatments and has a serene soaking area with sumptuous plunge pools. In addition to drinks and snacks, smoothies are often offered—take one.

The shopping area, called **Via Bellagio**, features all the stores that advertise in color in glossy magazines: Tiffany, Armani, Gucci, Prada, Hermès, and the like. And there's also a highly regarded **art gallery** (p. 98).

And in 2004, look for a new tower with 900 additional rooms, a second spa, and more shopping and restaurants.

3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at the corner of Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 888/987-6667 or 702/693-7111. Fax 702/693-8546. www.bellagio.com. 3,005 units. \$139–\$499 double. Extra person \$35, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; wedding chapel; 16 restaurants; 6 outdoor pools; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access for a fee, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Caesars Palace ★★ Since 1966, Caesars has stood simultaneously as the ultimate in Vegas luxury and the nadir (or pinnacle, depending on your values) of Las Vegas cheese. It's the most Vegas-style hotel you'll find, covering all the bases from the tacky fabulous cheese of the recent past to the current trend in high-end luxury. Never one to rest on any kind of laurels, Roman or otherwise, Caesars gave itself a massive face-lift, and keeps on building and expanding. As a result, the hotel is getting a bit too big for its own britches: The layout has become ever more confusing and hard to negotiate, and it takes forever to get anywhere—especially out to the Strip.

Past or future, Caesars remains spectacular. From the Roman temples, heroic arches, golden charioteers, and 50-foot Italian cypresses at its entrance, to the impressive interiors, it's the spectacle a good Vegas hotel should be. The hotel, however, is getting a bit too big for its own britches and the layout has become ever more confusing and hard to negotiate; and it takes forever to get anywhere—especially out to the Strip.

Accommodations occupy four towers, and there are too many decorating schemes to describe here. Art in the rooms keeps to the

Greco-Roman theme (some have classical sculptures in niches); furnishings tend to neoclassic styles; Roman columns, pilasters, and pediments are common. Many rooms have four-poster beds with mirrored ceilings. The newest rooms are handsome, if not as overwhelming as the classic ones, and have floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a hypnotizing panoramic view. You'll likely enjoy a lavish bathroom with marble floor, European fixtures, and oversize marble tubs (about half are whirlpools). Some of the rooms have lavish tubs in the middle of the room, which can be uncomfortable if you don't want your shower to turn into a spectator sport.

Caesars has a well-deserved reputation for superior in-house restaurants. There are nine in the hotel, plus dining facilities in the Forum shopping area. All are highly recommended. The hotel's food court is one of the best in town (p. 76). Restaurants in the Forum Shops arcade include **Spago**, **The Palm**, and the **Stage Deli**. In the new Atlantis section, there is a **Caviartorium**—a place to sample high-priced fish eggs, and a **Cheesecake Factory**. For nightlife, there's **Cleopatra's Barge Nightclub**.

Yet another thing to take advantage of is the **Race for Atlantis IMAX 3-D Ride** (p. 106).

Having spent over \$100 million renovating its **Garden of the Gods**, Caesars has created a tasteful, undeniably "Caesar-esque" masterpiece. With three pools measuring a total of 22,000 square feet, there is plenty of space for frolicking in the hot sun. Inspired by the healing Baths of Caracalla in Rome, each of the pools is adorned with griffins or sea horses and inlaid with classic granite-and-marble mosaics. Several amenities are also available by the pool area, including massage, two whirlpools, three tennis courts, the Neptune Bar, and of course, a Snackus Maximus.

The **Caesars Spa** is another gorgeous facility, offering full salon services (a large range of facials, massages, wraps, and other beauty treatments). The spa also offers saunas, steam rooms, and whirlpool tubs, plus an incredibly well-supplied health club with state-of-the-art machinery, a rock-climbing wall, personal trainers, and more (it's a whopping \$24 per day just to work out, though).

The **Forum Shops** (p. 141) are in the grandest mall you can imagine and a massive addition should roughly double the size of the existing shopping areas in 2004.

Not content to stop paying contractors, Caesars recently opened a new 4,000-seat Colosseum, a replica of the original building in Rome, to give diva Celine Dion a place to play. She appears 200

nights a year in a ridiculously expensive production (p. 151) created just to showcase her vocal talents, and featuring Cirque du Soleil-type visuals.

3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (just north of Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **877/427-7243** or 702/731-7110. Fax 702/731-6636. www.caesars.com. 2,471 units. From \$99 standard double, \$109–\$500 “run-of-house deluxe” double; \$549–\$1,000 suite. Extra person \$20. Children under 18 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; wedding chapel; 23 restaurants; 3 outdoor pools; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Paris Las Vegas Casino Resort ★ *Sacre bleu!* The City of Light comes to Sin City in this fantasy hotel. It’s theme-run-amok time again, and we are so happy about it. The outside reproduces various Parisian landmarks (amusing anyone familiar with Paris, as the Hotel de Ville is crammed on top of the Louvre), complete with a half-scale perfect replica of the Eiffel Tower. The interior puts you in the middle of a dollhouse version of the city. You can stroll down a mini-Rue de la Paix, ride an elevator to the top of the Eiffel Tower, stop at an overpriced bakery for a baguette, and take your photo by several very nice fountains.

You’ll find signage employing the kind of dubious use of the French language that makes genuine Frenchmen really cross (“le car rental” and so forth), while all the employees are forced to dust off their high school French (“Bonjour, Madame! Merci beaucoup!”) when dealing with the public. Don’t worry, it’s all not quite enough to make you sick to “le stomach.”

Quel dommage, this attention to detail does not extend to the rooms, which are nice enough but disappointingly uninteresting, with furniture that only hints at mock French Regency. Bathrooms are small but pretty, with deep tubs. Try to get a Strip-facing room so that you can see Bellagio’s fountains across the street; note also that north-facing rooms give you nice Peeping-Tom views right into neighboring Bally’s. Overall, not a bad place to stay but a great place to visit—*quel hoot!*

The hotel has eight more-or-less French-themed restaurants, including a highly lauded **buffet**, the **Eiffel Tower restaurant** (located guess where), and bistro **Mon Ami Gabi**. The bread for all these restaurants is made fresh on-site at the bakery. You can buy delicious, if pricey, loaves of it at the bakery, and we have to admit, that’s kinda fun. There are also five lounges.

The **Eiffel Tower** attraction is covered on p. 100, and the hotel's new nightclub, **Risque**, is reviewed on p. 163.

3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **888/BONJOUR** (266-5687) or 702/946-7000. Fax 702/967-3836. www.parislvs.com. 2,916 units. \$119–\$269 double; \$350 and up suites. Extra person \$30. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC. V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 2 wedding chapels; 11 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

The Venetian ★★ One of the most elaborate hotel spectacles in town, The Venetian falls squarely between an outright adult Disneyland experience and the luxury resort experience that many of the other recently renovated Vegas hotels offer. Its exterior, which re-creates most of the top landmarks of Venice (the Campanile, a portion of St. Mark's Square, part of the Doge's Palace, a canal or two), ranks right up there with New York–New York as a must-see, and since you can wander freely through the “sights,” it even has a slight edge. We have to admit that the attention to detail here is impressive indeed. Stone is aged for that weathered look, statues and tiles are exact copies of their Italian counterparts, security guards wear Venetian police uniforms—all that's missing is the smell from the canals, but we are happy to let that one slide.

Inside, ceilings are covered with hand-painted re-creations of Venetian art. With plenty of marble, soaring ceilings, and impressive pillars and archways, it's less kitschy than Caesars but more theme park than Bellagio. The lobby, casino, and shops can all be accessed from outside through individual entrances, which helps avoid that irritating circuitous maneuvering required by most other locations. This is all the more appreciated because the casino seems to have a most confusing layout, with poor signage.

The rooms are the largest and probably the most handsome in town, with a flair that's more European than Vegas. They are all “suites,” with a good-size bedroom giving way to a sunken living area, complete with pullout sofa bed. Rooms have somewhat stately furniture, including painted, scallop-topped armoires; thickly draped half canopies over the beds; and crown moldings on ceilings. The marbled bathrooms rocketed virtually to the top of our list of favorites, in a tie for second place with those at Bellagio. (Mandalay Bay's are the best.) Glassed-in showers, deep soaking tubs (though your feet can easily kick the plug out), double sinks, fluffy towels,

and lots of space—that does it for us every time. Devices for the hearing-impaired are available upon request.

Despite the niceties, there is a certain amount of price gouging at this hotel that unpleasantly reminds one of the real Venice. There is a charge for that in-room faxing and printing, and the minibar is automated so that if you so much as rearrange items inside, you are charged for it.

There are many celebrity chefs and high-profile restaurants in residence at The Venetian, including **Star Canyon, Delmonico Steakhouse, Canaletto, Valentino, Lutèce**, and **Pinot Brasserie**. The Venetian has five pools and whirlpools, but so far its pool area is disappointing—sterile and bland. The lavish **Canyon Ranch Spa-Club** is run by a branch of arguably the finest getaway spa in America and is the finest hotel spa in town. From the Bed Head and Bumble & Bumble products on sale in the shop to the nutritionists, physical therapists, and acupuncturists on the staff, to the vibrating massage chairs that you rest in during pedicures—geez, what more could you want? The \$30-a-day fee is high, but it does include a full day's worth of classes ranging from regular aerobics to yoga, Pilates, and dance. Did we mention the rock-climbing wall?

The **Grand Canal Shoppes** rank with Caesars' shops as an absolute must-see. Like Caesars, the area is a mock Italian village with a blue, cloud-studded, painted sky overhead. But down the middle runs a canal, complete with singing gondoliers. (The 10-min. ride costs about \$12, which seems steep, but trust us, it's a *lot* more in the real Venice.) The whole thing finishes up at a small re-creation of St. Mark's Square, which features glass blowers, traveling musicians, flower sellers, and the like. Expect to run into famous Venetians such as a flirty Casanova and a travel-weary Marco Polo. It's ambitious and a big step up from Animatronic figures. Oh, and the stores are also probably worth a look—a decent mixture of high-end fashion and more affordable shops.

And let's not forget that this is the only hotel in town with a branch of the famed Guggenheim Museum, called the **Guggenheim Hermitage** (p. 103).

Note: Summer 2003 saw the opening of a new \$250 million Venezia tower with 1,013 rooms (reportedly even more luxurious than the current ones), and several new restaurants, including the first restaurant outside of Napa Valley by Thomas Keller, arguably the finest chef in America.

3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S., Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **888/2-VENICE** (283-6423) or 702/414-1000. Fax 702/414-4805. www.venetian.com. 3,354 units. \$125–\$399 double. Extra person \$35. Kids under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; wedding chapel; showroom; 17 restaurants; 5 outdoor pools; health club and spa; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, fridge, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Bally's Las Vegas ★ With all the fancy-pants new hotels in town, it's so hard to keep up with the Joneses, or the Wynns as the case may be. Poor Bally's, with a perfect location, has no big fountain or Eiffel Tower or anything to make a tourist booking long distance to think "right, gotta stay there." And we aren't really going to make you change your mind, though lately, we might give you a reason to consider it. After all, you can get a room for a ridiculously low rate these days, and those rooms, which are larger than average, have recently been redone to an admirable degree, with some swell touches including modern curvy couches, big TVs, wireless Internet access, and marble this and that. The public areas still feel dark and dated, but the hotel is connected to its swanky sister property, Paris Las Vegas, which is modern enough. Also, it will be a stop on the new monorail system, so you'll be able to go just about everywhere by foot or train, and, thanks to those nice new rooms, you've got someplace pleasant to return to.

Bally's has the usual range of dining choices and is justly renowned for its **Sterling Sunday Brunch** (p. 91). There's also a headliner showroom and the splashy *Jubilee!* revue (p. 155).

3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/634-3434** or 702/739-4111. Fax 702/967-3890. www.ballyslv.com. 2,814 units. \$69 and up double, \$35–\$60 more concierge floor (including breakfast); \$300 and up suite. Extra person \$30. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 14 restaurants; outdoor pool; 8 night-lit tennis courts; health club and spa; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, iron and board.

The Flamingo Las Vegas ★ The Flamingo is the Strip's senior citizen, boasting a colorful history. It's changed a great deal since Bugsy Siegel opened his 105-room oasis "in the middle of nowhere" in 1946. It was so luxurious for its time that even the janitors wore tuxedos. Jimmy Durante was the opening headliner, and the wealthy and famous flocked to the tropical paradise of swaying

palms, lagoons, and waterfalls. A fresh, new look, enhanced by a recent \$130 million renovation and expansion, has made Siegel's "real class joint" better than ever—including making it somewhat easier to reach the outside world, which in the past was often difficult. As we write this, several of the restaurants in the front of the building are being taken out and replaced by singer Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville nightclub, with a *Baywatch*-themed nightclub going in by the pool. So let's see how these additions continue to keep the old girl going.

Rooms occupy six towers and are variously decorated. Some are done up in soft blues and peach, and enhanced by pretty fabrics, light painted-wood furnishings, and watercolors of tropical scenes, lending a resort look. Others use soft earth tones, forest green, or coral. The **Flamingo's Paradise Garden Buffet** (p. 93) is a decent choice. There are also several bars, plus a **Second City Improv** comedy show.

Five gorgeous swimming pools, two whirlpools, water slides, and a kiddie pool are located in a 15-acre Caribbean landscape amid lagoons, meandering streams, fountains, waterfalls, a rose garden, and islands of live flamingos and African penguins. Ponds have ducks, swans, and koi, and a grove of 2,000 palms graces an expanse of lawn.

A health club (\$20 fee per day) offers a variety of Universal weight machines, treadmills, stair machines, free weights, sauna, steam, a TV lounge, and hot and cold whirlpools. Exercise tapes are available, and spa services include massage, soap rub, salt glow, tanning beds, and oxygen pep-up.

3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Sands Ave. and Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/732-2111** or 702/733-3111. Fax 702/733-3353. www.flamingolv.com. 3,999 units. \$69–\$299 double; \$250–\$580 suite. Extra person \$20. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. Inquire about packages and timeshare suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 11 restaurants; 5 outdoor pools; 4 night-lit tennis courts; health club and spa; small video arcade; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Harrah's Las Vegas ♠ Here's another property that is doing its best to keep up with the pace in Vegas, to no great success. Though parts of Harrah's benefited from a reworking of the place a few years ago, the rest of it evokes old Las Vegas—dark, dated, and claustrophobic. Still, there is much to like here, and occasional quite good

rates might make the so-so bits worth overlooking. Certainly, they want to be the fun and convivial place we wish more of Vegas was.

Guest rooms were slowly being refurbished at press time—just in time, as guests were complaining. All the rooms are larger than average; the points that emerge from both the old and the new tower wings translate inside into an extra triangle of space for a couch and table. Some rooms also contain a kitchen. Spacious minisuites in this section, offering large sofas and comfortable armchairs, are especially desirable.

The Range steakhouse is one of the few hotel restaurants that overlooks the Strip, and the hotel's **buffet** (p. 93) isn't bad. The casino has a fun, festive atmosphere, complete with "party pits." Harrah's showroom was hosting singer **Clint Holmes** (p. 153) and his 12-piece band at press time. In the afternoon, catch the whimsical comedy and magic of Mac King (p. 157).

Carnaval Court (p. 143) is a festive, palm-fringed shopping plaza where strolling entertainers perform. It's notable because it's right on the Strip, but entirely outdoors. Note that lounge singer legend Cook E. Jarr plays here late on Friday and Saturday nights.

Harrah's has an Olympic-size swimming pool and sun-deck area with waterfall and trellised garden areas, a whirlpool, and a kids' wading pool. It's a pretty underwhelming pool by Vegas standards.

The hotel's health club is one of the better facilities on the Strip with a full-range spa and a gym with Lifecycles, treadmills, stair machines, rowing machines, lots of Universal equipment, free weights, and two TVs and a VCR for which aerobic exercise tapes are available. Its \$20-a-day access charge is more reasonable than the fees in other hotels.

3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Flamingo and Spring Mountain roads), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/HARRAHS** (427-7247) or 702/369-5000. Fax 702/369-6014. www.harrahs.com. 2,700 units. \$65–\$195 standard "deluxe" double, \$85–\$250 standard "superior" double; \$195–\$1,000 suite. Extra person \$20, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 8 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

The Mirage ★★ Even though it has gotten somewhat eclipsed by the very hotels whose presence it made possible, we still really like this place. From the moment you walk in and breathe the faintly tropically perfumed air (we think it's vanilla) and enter the lush rain-forest, it's just a different experience from most Vegas hotels.

Occupying 102 acres, The Mirage is fronted by more than a city block of cascading waterfalls and tropical foliage centering on a “volcano,” which, after dark, erupts every 15 minutes, spewing fire 100 feet above the lagoons below. To be honest, it’s not very volcanolike; if you’ve seen any of the lava-saturated volcano movies, you’ll be disappointed. Instead of lava flow, expect a really neat light show, and you won’t mind a bit. The lobby is dominated by a 53-foot, 20,000-gallon simulated coral-reef aquarium stocked with more than 1,000 colorful tropical fish.

Next, you’ll walk through the rainforest, which occupies a 90-foot domed atrium—a path meanders through palms, banana trees, waterfalls, and serene pools. If we must find a complaint with The Mirage, it’s with the next bit, as you have to negotiate 8 miles (or so it seems) of casino mayhem to get to your room, the pool, food, or the outside world. It gets old, fast. (On the other hand, the sundries shop is located right next to the guest-room elevators, so if you forgot toothpaste, you don’t have to travel miles to get more.)

The rooms have recently been redone to a strong color palette that is oddly similar to the rooms’ original tropical decor scheme. Frankly, it’s here most of all where The Mirage isn’t holding up its end; the rooms are nice, but there are nicer—and larger—ones all over town now, and the bathrooms are a little too cramped for a what’s supposed to be a swanky hotel.

Behind the pool is the **Dolphin Habitat** and Siegfried and Roy’s **Secret Garden**, which has a separate admission (p. 107).

The superb food at **Renoir** and the **Mirage Buffet** are detailed in chapter 4.

The highly prominent production show by **Danny Gans** is reviewed in chapter 8. The Mirage’s famous *Siegfried & Roy* production show was canceled in October 2003 when illusionist Roy Horn was mauled on stage by one of the duo’s famous white tigers and suffered life-threatening injuries. Business analysts believe the resulting revenue loss (an estimated \$44 million a year) from the closing will hurt The Mirage financially in the short run. There was no word at press time about a replacement.

Out back is the pool, one of the nicest in Vegas, with a ¼-mile shoreline, a tropical paradise of waterfalls and trees, water slides, and so forth. It looks inviting, but truth be told, it’s sometimes on the chilly side and isn’t very deep. But it’s so pretty you’ll hardly care. Free swimming lessons and water-aerobics classes take place daily at the pool. The **Mirage Day Spa** teems with friendly staff anxious to

pamper you, bringing you iced towels to cool you during your workout and refreshing juices and smoothies afterward. The gym is one of the largest and best stocked on the Strip.

3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Flamingo Rd. and Sands Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/627-6667 or 702/791-7111. Fax 702/791-7446. www.mirage.com. 3,323 units. Sun–Thurs \$79–\$399 double, Fri–Sat and holidays \$159–\$399 double; \$250–\$3,000 suite. Extra person \$30, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 14 restaurants; beautiful outdoor pool; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safes.

Palms Resort & Casino ★ The latest Vegas hotel wonder, though maybe “wonder” is a bit of a stretch. In keeping with the tropical-foliage name, it’s more or less Miami-themed (but without the pastels), with a strange aversion toward straight lines (really, check out all those curves). Inside a bland building is a pretty nice complex, though we should point out that as we write this, the Palms is hands down the hottest hotel in town. That’s mostly due to the nightlife options—both **Ghost Bar** and the nightclub **Rain** have lines of people every night the facilities are open, offering to sell their firstborn sons for a chance to go inside. Why did those two places catch on so? Not really sure (though you can read our speculations about both in chapter 8), but you need to know that the entrances to them stand right by the elevators to your hotel room, which means on a busy weekend night, there can be upwards of 4,000 gorgeous and antsy (if not angry) people standing between you and access to your hotel room. If you are a Hilton Sister, or wish to see if one will date you, this could be heaven, but if encountering the beautifully dressed and coifed, with 0% body fat and sullen expressions of entitlement, and the 19-year-olds who seek to become all of that (and usually affect a thuggish demeanor) makes you, like us, itch, this might not be the most comfortable place to stay.

Having said all that, note that The Palms has perhaps some of the most comfortable beds in Vegas, thanks to fluffy pillows and duvets that make one reluctant to rise, plus big TVs and huge bathrooms. The main pool is oddly cheap looking—it’s really a posing spot rather than a splash, while a second pool has a bar and mermaids swimming in the water at night. Also on the property is **Alizé** (p. 69), in competition for the title Best Restaurant in Town (and owner of the title Most Gorgeous and Romantic Restaurant), a

cheap and hearty **buffet** (p. 94), movies theaters, a McDonald's, and other reliable cheap chain eateries.

4321 W. Flamingo Rd. (at I-15), Las Vegas, NV 89103. ☎ **866/942-7777** or 702/942-7777. Fax 702/942-6859. www.palms.com. 400 units. Sun–Thurs \$79 and up double, Fri–Sat \$119 and up double. Extra person \$12, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; nightclub/showroom; 8 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; non-smoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, high-speed Internet access (for a fee), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino ★ Rio pushes itself as a “carnival” atmosphere hotel, which in this case means hectic, crowded, and noisy. The newer section, the Masquerade Village, is actually pretty pleasant, with a very high ceiling, but the older section’s low ceilings only seem to accentuate how crowded the area is in both the number of people and the amount of stuff (slot machines, gaming tables, and so on). All this party atmosphere, by the way, is strictly for adults; the hotel actively discourages guests from bringing children.

The rooms are touted because of their size. Every one is a “suite,” which does not mean two separate rooms, but rather one large room with a sectional, corner sofa, and coffee table at one end. The dressing areas are certainly larger than average and feature a number of extra amenities, such as refrigerators (unusual for a Vegas hotel room) and small snacks. Windows, running the whole length of the room, are floor to ceiling, with a pretty impressive view of The Strip, Vegas, or the mountains (depending on which way you’re facing). The furniture doesn’t feel like hotel-room standard, but otherwise the decor is fairly bland.

Rosemary’s at the Rio and the hotel’s first-rate buffet are described in chapter 4. You might consider checking out the **Wine Cellar Tasting Room**, which is a must-do for any wine aficionado.

Penn & Teller, the smartest show in town, is reviewed on p. 158. Nightlife spots include the **Voodoo Lounge**, **Bikinis**, and **Club Rio** (p. 166). We adore the unpredictable antics produced by the improv dinner show **Tony & Tina’s Wedding**. The casino, alas, is dark and claustrophobic. In case you missed the party/carnival theme, there is a rather bizarre live-action show called **The Masquerade Show in the Sky**. It is presented Thursday through Tuesday at 3:30, 4:30, 5:30, 7, 8, 9, and 10pm. Sets modeled after Mardi Gras floats (sort of) move on grids set in the ceiling, filled with costumed performers who lip-sync to music designed to rev up the crowd but not continue

the theme (swing selections, for example). These floats are best viewed from the second floor of the village. Down below, dancers do their thing on a stage, while even stranger costumes (ostriches, dragons, and so on) prance next to them. Guests can also don costumes and ride a float, but you have to pay for the privilege.

Out back is a pool with a sandy beach, and two new pools in imaginative fish and shell shapes that seem inviting until you get up close and see how small they are. It could be especially disappointing after you have braved the long, cluttered walk (particularly from the new tower rooms) to get there. Three whirlpool spas nestle amid rocks and foliage, and there are two sand-volleyball courts. The 18-hole championship **Rio Secco golf course** was designed by Rees Jones.

3700 W. Flamingo Rd. (at I-15), Las Vegas, NV 89103. ☎ **888/752-9746** or 702/777-7777. Fax 702/777-7611. www.playrio.com. 2,582 units. Sun–Thurs \$90 and up double-occupancy suite, Fri–Sat \$140 and up double-occupancy suite. Extra person \$30, no discount for children. Inquire about golf packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 13 restaurants; 4 outdoor pools; golf course; health club and spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; video arcade; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

TI at The Mirage ★★ What happened to Treasure Island? What happened to the pirates? Why, Vegas grew up, that’s what. Originally the most modern family-friendly hotel, the former Treasure Island was a blown-up version of Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean. But that’s all behind them now, and the name change is there to make sure you understand this is a grown-up, sophisticated resort. There might still be the odd pirate element here and there, but only because someone absent-mindedly missed it in a recent ruthless purging of the last remnants. The latest victim is the pirate stunt show out front; by the time you read this, it will have reopened with the addition of, and we did not make this up, “sexy dancers” who will “battle the pirates.” Right.

To be fair, none of this matters a whit, unless, like us, you got a kick out of the old skulls and crossbones decor. What remains, after they stripped the pirate gilt, is such a nice place to stay that in some ways, it even outranks its older sister, The Mirage. The well-sized rooms are modified French Regency with a mélange of patterns, but the monochromatic color (many shades of gold) tones it down. While not distinctive, per se, they are much nicer than most in their price range. The good bathrooms feature a large soaking tub—a bather’s delight.

The hotel's premier restaurant, the **Buccaneer Bay Club**, is undergoing renovations. Of course, there's a **buffet**, and we're incredibly enthusiastic about the new branch of Los Angeles's Canter's deli that opened as this book went to press. The **Battle Bar**, in the casino near the race and sports book, airs athletic events on TV monitors overhead and offers live music Tuesday through Sunday nights. More importantly, it provides patio seating overlooking Buccaneer Bay; for the best possible view of what's now going to be called "The Sirens of TI," arrive at least 45 minutes before the show and snag a table by the railing. Treasure Island is also home to **Cirque du Soleil's *Mystère*** (p. 151), one of the best shows in town.

There's a full-service spa and health club with a complement of machines, plus sauna, steam, whirlpool, massage, on-site trainers, TVs and stereos with headsets, and anything else you might need (including a full line of Sebastian grooming products in the women's locker rooms). There's a \$20-per-day fee to use the facilities.

The pool is not that memorable, with none of the massive foliage and other details that make the one at The Mirage stand out. It's a large, free-form swimming pool with a 230-foot loop slide and a nicely landscaped sun-deck area. It's often crawling with kids, so if that's a turn-off, go elsewhere.

3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Spring Mountain Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/944-7444 or 702/894-7111. Fax 702/894-7446. www.treasureisland.com. 2,891 units. From \$69 double; from \$109 suite. Extra person \$25, no discount for children. Inquire about packages. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 11 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; very well-equipped game and video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

MODERATE

Bourbon Street *(Value)* Just a few steps (well, okay, more than a few, but not by much) down from the main Strip action, Bourbon Street is a bargain. It looks like a dump, but it's not. Adequately sized rooms, while hardly comparable to those in the luxe establishments on the Strip, are surprisingly nice—brighter, cleaner, and more cheerful than you would expect, with small but sweetly attended-to bathrooms (including some nice grooming amenities). Given price and location, it's a heck of a deal overall.

120 E. Flamingo Rd. (between the Strip and Koval Lane), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/634-6956 or 702/737-7200. Fax 702/794-3490. www.bourbonstreethotel.com. 167 units. \$39 and up standard double; \$59 and up minisuite; \$69 and up executive suite. Extra person \$10. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC,

DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Small casino; restaurant; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, safe.

Imperial Palace *(Value)* Smack in the middle of the Strip, you can't get more centrally located than the IP; and the price is right, too. What you get in exchange is an older, darker hotel that looks sort of sleazy in spots, but really isn't. Not much, anyway. We actually know types who prefer the more classic Vegas feel to the airy new upstarts. We aren't among those, we have to admit, and you may not be as well. The standard rooms are just that (remodeling is in the works, which is a good thing), but they all have balconies, which is exceedingly rare in Vegas. A perfect Vegas hoot, the "luv tub" rooms are some of the best deals on the Strip, especially if you can get them for the cheapest end of the price range; you'll get a larger bedroom (with a mirror over the bed!) and a larger-than-usual bathroom that features a 300-gallon sunken "luv tub" (with still more mirrors).

From April to October, the hotel holds "luaus" at the pool, with a Polynesian revue and buffet. Expect tiki torches.

The hotel is also home to the long-running *Legends in Concert* impersonator show (p. 156).

A unique feature is the **Auto Collections at Imperial Palace** (p. 98), displaying more than 800 antique, classic, and special-interest vehicles spanning a century of automotive history.

3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Sands Ave. and Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. © 800/634-6441 or 702/731-3311. Fax 702/735-8578. www.imperialpalace.com. 2,700 units. \$49 and up double; \$79 and up "luv tub" suite, \$159 and up other suites. Extra person \$19. Children under 6 stay free in parent's room. Inquire about packages. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; wedding chapel; 9 restaurants; outdoor pool; health club and spa; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, hair dryer, irons and boards.

3 North Strip

EXPENSIVE

The Riviera Hotel & Casino *(Overrated)* Its best days long past, this former Strip star is looking awfully dumpy these days (and there are rumors, thanks to its part-ownership by development-happy Donald Trump, that it will soon be knocked down anyway). Between that and its promotion as an "alternative for grown-ups" and an "adult-oriented hotel," you should probably only stay here if you can get a deal and simply must be on the Strip. You certainly shouldn't bring the kids, who are actively discouraged as guests.

The first “high-rise” on the Strip, it tries to evoke the Vegas of the good old days, and while it is appropriately dark and glitzy, it’s also very crowded and has a confusing layout. Rooms are blah and not likely to improve. Half the rooms offer pool views.

There is the predictable assortment of dining choices—though an excellent choice for families, ironically, is the **Mardi Gras Food Court**, which, unlike most of its genre, is extremely attractive. The Riviera’s enormous **casino** is one of the world’s largest; see chapter 8 for reviews of its production shows, *An Evening at La Cage* (female impersonators), *Crazy Girls* (sexy Las Vegas-style revue), and *Splash* (aquatic revue).

2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Riviera Blvd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/634-6753 or 702/734-5110. Fax 702/794-9451. www.theriviera.com. 2,136 units. \$59 and up double; \$125 and up suite. Extra person \$20 (all ages—no discount for children). AE, DC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; wedding chapel; showrooms; 6 restaurants; outdoor pool; 2 night-lit tennis courts; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, hair dryer (deluxe rooms only), iron and board (deluxe rooms only), safe.

MODERATE

Sahara Hotel & Casino (√*Value*) One of the few venerable old casino hotels still standing in Vegas (it’s come a long way since it opened in 1952 on the site of the old Club Bingo), the Sahara completed a major face-lift in 1999. A new entrance showcases an arched neon dome with Moroccan detail, plenty of marble and chandeliers, plus small tiles and other Arabian Nights decorations. This entrance is quite a hike from the actual registration area—be sure to bring your camel. And then to top it all off, they added a **roller coaster** (p. 109) around the outside (quite a good ride, enthusiasts assure us).

Unfortunately, none of this really adds up to a nice hotel experience. Recent guests had found the place, renovations notwithstanding, just a bit dreary and maybe even shabby. Again, this may simply be in comparison to the gleaming new kids in town, a comparison suffered by most of the older hotels. It should be noted that the Sahara feels they are not as well equipped as other hotels for children and discourages you from bringing yours—and yet, they added a roller coaster. Go figure.

The room decor suffers from overkill, with stars and stripes assaulting the eyes and not looking terribly Moroccan. The boldly striped bedspreads on the otherwise comfortable beds are a particular mistake. The windows open, which is unusual for Vegas.

The hotel has just remodeled their **Sahara Buffet**. The casino is there, of course, and there's a headliner showroom as well.

2535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at E. Sahara Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 888/696-2121 or 702/737-2111. Fax 702/791-2027. www.saharavegas.com. 1,720 units. \$39 and up double. Extra person \$15, no discount for children. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 6 restaurants; 2 outdoor pools (including 1 Olympic-size monster unfortunately located at the foot of a parking garage); Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minifridge on request (free but limited availability), hair dryer, iron and board.

Stardust Resort & Casino ★ Opened in 1958, the Stardust is a longtime resident of the Strip, and its 188-foot starry sign is one of America's most recognized landmarks. Don't get too used to it: Boyd Gaming, the owner, has been vocal about wanting to get rid of it, either through a sale or a teardown/do-over. It's a pity, in a way; it is a likable hotel, offering on-Strip accommodations at cheap rates, but it has no personality. (Though its oh-so-Vegas light bulb-intensive facade turns up in just about every location-establishing shot for Vegas called for by commercials, TV, or movies.)

Rooms in the Towers are perfectly adequate, nice even, but forgettable. If you must know more, the 32-story West Tower rooms are decorated in earth tones while East Tower rooms go the floral route. You can rent an adjoining parlor room with a sofa bed, whirlpool, refrigerator, and wet bar—a good choice for families. Also quite nice are Villa rooms in two-story buildings surrounding a large swimming pool. Decorated in soft Southwestern pastels, they have private shaded patios overlooking the pool.

Mr. Wayne Newton himself has taken up residence at the Stardust, performing regularly in its showroom.

3000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Convention Center Dr.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/634-6757 or 702/732-6111. Fax 702/732-6257. www.stardustlv.com. 1,552 units. From \$60 standard double; from \$250 suite. Extra person \$20. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 5 restaurants; 2 outdoor pools; small exercise room; Jacuzzi; video arcade; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, safe.

Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower ★ A really neat idea, in that Vegas way, in a really bad location. At 1,149 feet, it's the tallest building west of the Mississippi. In theory, this should have provided yet another attraction for visitors: Climb (okay, elevator) to the top and gaze at the stunning view. But despite being on the

Strip, it's a healthy walk from anywhere—the nearest casino is the Sahara, which is 5 very long blocks away. This, and possibly the hefty price charged for the privilege of going up to the top of the tower, may have conspired to keep the crowds away.

And while the crowds might have been justified before, they—and by “they,” we mean “you”—might reconsider, especially if you are looking for a friendly place to hang your hat, but nothing more. The smaller-size rooms here are basically motel rooms—really nice motel rooms, but with that level of comfort and style. Then again, you can often get such a room for around \$29 a night. (And do join the casino's players club—they tend to offer free rooms with more or less minimal play.) Perfect if you are coming to Vegas with no plans to spend time in your room except to sleep (if even that).

Which isn't to say there aren't other elements to like here, including the aforementioned casino, a Midway area with kiddie-oriented rides, a pool with a view and some of the friendliest, most accommodating staff in town. You can still ride the incredible thrill rides (provided the wind isn't blowing too hard that day) on top of the Tower: The world's highest roller coaster—aka the **High Roller**—and the **Big Shot**, a fabulous free-fall ride. (See p. 110 for a review of these two adrenaline pumpers.) Indoor and outdoor observation decks offer the most stunning city views you will ever see, especially at night. For the price, this might be the right place for you. Just remember you need a rental car or a lot of cash for cabs to get to the true thrills down the Strip.

The hotel stages *American Superstars*, an impression-filled production show, which is reviewed in chapter 8.

2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between St. Louis St. and Baltimore Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89104. ☎ **800/99-TOWER** (998-6937) or 702/380-7777. Fax 702/383-5334. www.stratospherehotel.com. 2,500 units. Sun–Thurs \$39 and up double, Fri–Sat \$59 and up double; \$69 and up suite. Extra person \$15. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; wedding chapel; 11 restaurants; large new pool area with great views of the Strip; children's rides and games located at the base of the Tower; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Circus Circus Hotel/Casino ★ *Kids* It's a last bastion of family-friendly Las Vegas, but still isn't what it ought to be, thanks to a reconfiguring a few years ago that took the pervasive Jumbo the Clown decorating scheme and turned it into somewhat more tasteful, more

commedia dell'arte harlequins. Like everyone else, even the venerable Circus Circus, once the epitome of kitsch, is trying to be taken more seriously.

Which is not to say this is an adult atmosphere; the circus theme remains (admittedly, centered around a casino) and the kid appeal along with it. The midway level features dozens of carnival games, a large arcade (more than 300 video and pinball games), trick mirrors, and ongoing circus acts under the big top from 11am to midnight daily. The world's largest permanent circus (according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*), it features renowned trapeze artists, stunt cyclists, jugglers, magicians, acrobats, and high-wire daredevils. Circus clowns wander the midway creating balloon animals and cutting up in various ways.

The thousands of rooms here occupy sufficient acreage to warrant a free Disney World-style aerial shuttle (another kid pleaser) and minibuses connecting its many components. Tower rooms have newish, just slightly better-than-average furnishings. The Manor section comprises five white three-story buildings out back, fronted by rows of cypresses. Manor guests can park at their doors, and a gate to the complex that can be opened only with a room key assures security. These rooms are usually among the least expensive in town, but we've said it before and we'll say it again: You get what you pay for. A renovation of these rooms added a coat of paint and some new photos on the wall, but not much else. All sections of this vast property have their own swimming pools; additional casinos serve the main tower and Skyrise buildings; and both towers provide covered parking garages.

Adjacent to the hotel is **Circusland RV Park**, with 384 full-utility spaces and up to 50-amp hookups. It has its own 24-hour convenience store, swimming pools, saunas, whirlpools, kiddie playground, fenced pet runs, video-game arcade, and community room. The rate is \$17 and up Sunday to Thursday, \$19 and up Friday and Saturday.

The very reasonably priced **Pink Pony** is Circus Circus's cheerful bubble-gum-pink-and-bright-red 24-hour eatery, with big paintings of clowns on the walls and pink pony carpeting. It offers a wide array of coffee-shop fare, including a number of specially marked "heart-smart" (low-fat, low-cholesterol) items. For gorging, there's always the **Circus Circus Buffet**.

In addition to the ongoing circus acts, there's also the upgraded **Adventuredome** (p. 114) indoor theme park out back. There are three full-size casinos, all crowded and noisy, where you can gamble while trapeze acts take place overhead.

2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Circus Circus Dr. and Convention Center Dr.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/444-CIRC** (444-2472), 800/634-3450, or 702/734-0410. Fax 702/734-5897. www.circuscircus.com. 3,744 units. Sun–Thurs \$39 and up double, Fri–Sat \$59 and up double. Extra person \$12. Children under 17 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; circus acts; wedding chapel; 8 restaurants; 2 outdoor pools; midway-style carnival games; video arcade; tour desk; car-rental desk; 24-hr. room service; shopping arcade; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, hair dryer, safe.

4 East of the Strip

In this section, we cover hotels close by the Convention Center, along with those farther south on Paradise Road, Flamingo Road, and Tropicana Avenue.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino ★★ The hip—from Hollywood and the music industry, among others—flock to the Hard Rock, drawn by the cool ’n’ rockin’ ambience and the goodies offered by a boutique hotel (657 rooms could be considered a “boutique hotel” only in Vegas). Our problem is that we are not famous pop stars and we do not look enough like Pamela Anderson to warrant the kind of attention that the staff seems to reserve for those types.

It’s that Boomer-meets-Gen-X sensibility that finds tacky-chic so very hip. Luckily, the “no-tell motel” look of the older rooms has been updated to more closely match the decor of the rooms in the new addition. All the rooms are still too ’60s-futuristic hip to come off as posh, and the decor is showing more wear than it ought to. Bathrooms are a big step forward—bigger, brighter, and shinier; though in the older section, they can be cramped, space-wise, in suites. On a high note, the beds have feather pillows, and mattresses are surprisingly comfortable.

There are several fine restaurants, including **AJ’s Steakhouse**; **Nobu**, a branch of highly famed chef Nobu Matsuhisa’s wildly popular Japanese restaurant; the funky folk-art-filled Mexican restaurant **Cantina Pink Taco**, and the 22-seat diner, **Counter**. The Hard Rock’s premier restaurant, **Mortoni’s**, is a beauty that serves vast portions of Italian fare. **Mr. Lucky’s 24/7** is the hotel’s round-the-clock coffee shop, displaying rock memorabilia and old Las Vegas hotel signs. And the **Hard Rock Cafe** is adjacent to the hotel.

Baby’s is the hot nightspot, but its velvet-rope policy keeps the likes of us out of there. The casino itself has a playful decor but an

unbelievable noise level. **The Joint** (p. 160) is a major showroom that often hosts big-name rock musicians.

If you've ever dreamed of being in a beach party movie, or on the set of one of those MTV summer beach-house shows, the reconstructed pool at the Hard Rock is for you. Multiple pools are joined by a lazy river, and fringed in spots by actual sand beaches. You won't get much swimming done—the water is largely so shallow that it won't hit your knees—but there is swim-up blackjack (they give you little plastic pouches to hold your money), and a stage that features live music in the summer. On warm days and nights, this is *the* hangout scene.

The newly refurbished spa is smaller than its Strip counterparts but is soothing in its posh Space Age Zen way, and the health club is plenty large and well equipped, offering a full complement of Cybex equipment, stair machines, treadmills, massage, and steam rooms. There's an \$18 per day fee to use the health-club facilities.

4455 Paradise Rd. (at Harmon Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/473-ROCK** (473-7625) or 702/693-5000. Fax 702/693-5588. www.hardrockhotel.com. 657 units. Sun–Thurs \$79 and up double, Fri–Sat \$145 and up double; from \$250 suite. Extra person \$35. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showroom; 6 restaurants; 2 outdoor pools with a lazy-river ride and sandy beach bottom; small health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; laundry and dry-cleaning service; non-smoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed Internet access (for a fee), dataport, irons and boards, hair dryer.

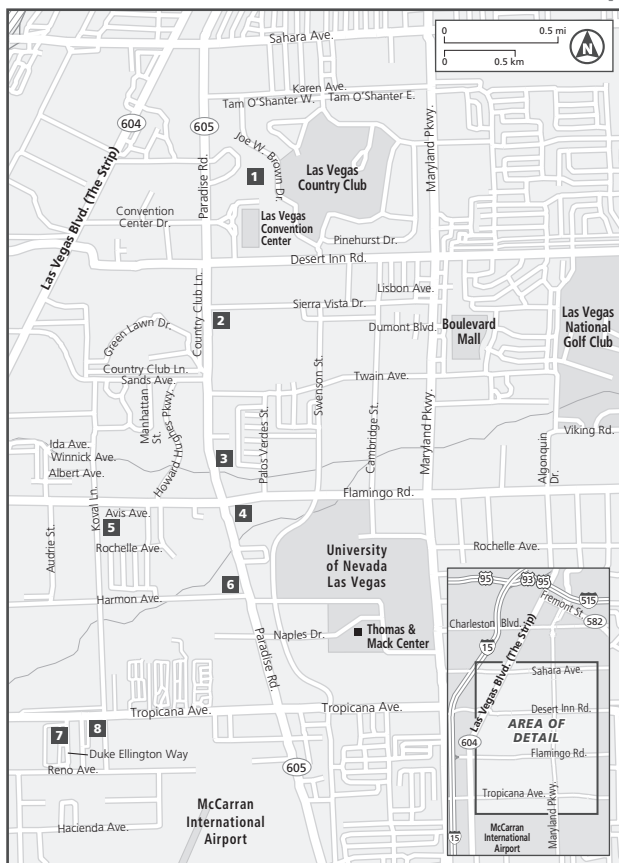
Las Vegas Hilton ★ One of the last of the dying breed of old Vegas hotels, the LV Hilton is a favorite of business travelers and, unlike many of its peers, still offers fine accommodations and even a bit more than that. Don't be put off by the distance from the Strip; the monorail will be stopping here once it opens, making access there easier than ever. There are quite a few terrific restaurants, plus the largest hotel convention and meeting facilities in the world.

Note: As we went to press, the Hilton was for sale. Be aware that by the time you read this, some of the information contained herein may have changed.

The Hilton has a strong showing of restaurants, including a **Benihana** and a **buffet** that's reviewed in chapter 4. **Note:** Children 12 and under can dine in any Hilton restaurant for half the listed menu prices, making this a great option for budget-conscious families.

The **Nightclub**, a first-rate casino lounge, has live entertainment nightly. It's a great place to hang out in the evening and features regular sets by local cover bands. One of Elvis's sequined jumpsuits is

Accommodations East of the Strip



- Best Western Mardi Gras Inn **2**
- Hard Rock Hotel & Casino **6**
- Hawthorn Suites **7**
- La Quinta Inn **3**
- Las Vegas Hilton **1**
- Motel 6 **8**
- Super 8 Motel **5**
- Terrible's **4**

enshrined in a glass case in the front, near the entrance to the lobby/casino (he played 837 sold-out shows here).

There are also a number of shops, plus ***Star Trek: The Experience*** (p. 109), with its accompanying space-themed casino.

The third-floor roof comprises a beautifully landscaped 8-acre recreation deck with a large swimming pool, a 24-seat whirlpool spa, six Har-Tru tennis courts lit for night play, Ping-Pong, and a putting green. Also on this level is a luxurious 17,000-square-foot state-of-the-art health club offering Nautilus equipment, Lifecycles, treadmills, rowing machines, three whirlpool spas, steam, sauna, massage, and tanning beds. There's a \$15-per-day fee to use the facilities, but guests are totally pampered: All toiletries are provided; there are comfortable TV lounges; complimentary bottled waters and juices are served in the canteen; and treatments include facials and oxygen pep-ups (you inhale pure oxygen).

3000 Paradise Rd. (at Riviera Blvd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 888/732-7117 or 702/732-5111. Fax 702/732-5805. www.lvhilton.com. 3,174 units. \$49 and up double. Extra person \$30. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showrooms; 13 restaurants; outdoor pool; golf course adjacent; 6 tennis courts (4 night-lit); health club and spa; Jacuzzi; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board.

EXPENSIVE

La Quinta Inn ★ This is a tranquil and visually appealing (within the limited range of chains) alternative to the Strip's hubbub, featuring courtyards, rustic benches, attractive pools, barbecue grills, and picnic tables. The staff is terrific—friendly and incredibly helpful. The rooms are immaculate and attractive. Executive rooms feature one queen-size bed, a small refrigerator, a wet bar, and a microwave oven. Double queens are larger but have no kitchen facilities. The two-bedroom suites are full apartments, with large living rooms (some with sofa beds), dining areas, and full kitchens. Ground-floor accommodations have patios, and all accommodations feature bathrooms with oversize whirlpool tubs.

3970 Paradise Rd. (between Twain Ave. and Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/531-5900 or 702/796-9000. Fax 702/796-3537. www.laquinta.com. 251 units. \$79 and up standard double, \$89 and up executive queen; \$115 and up suite. Rates include continental breakfast. Inquire about seasonal discounts. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; free airport/Strip shuttle; coin-op washers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, kitchens in executive rooms and suites, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board.

MODERATE

Best Western Mardi Gras Inn *Value* This well-run little casino hotel has a lot to offer. A block from the Convention Center and close to major properties, its three-story building sits on nicely landscaped grounds. There's a gazebo out back where guests can enjoy a picnic lunch.

Accommodations are all spacious, queen-bedded minisuites with sofa-bedded living-room areas and eat-in kitchens, the latter equipped with wet bars, refrigerators, and coffeemakers. All are midlevel motel okay, but they were recently redone so the furnishings and so forth should be fresh. Staying here is like having your own little Las Vegas apartment. A pleasant restaurant/bar off the lobby, open from 6:30am to 11pm daily, serves typical coffee-shop fare; a 12-ounce prime rib dinner here is just \$9.

3500 Paradise Rd. (between Sands Ave. and Desert Inn Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/634-6501 or 702/731-2020. Fax 702/731-4005. www.mardigrasinn.com. 314 units. \$59 and up double. Extra person \$8. Rates include free continental breakfast. Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking at your room door. **Amenities:** Small casino; restaurant; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; free airport shuttle; limited room service; coin-op washers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, iron and board.

Hawthorn Suites ★★ This "all-suite" hotel has plenty of extras, making it stand out from its brethren, and is extremely appealing to families. Sure, the suites themselves are bland, but they have full kitchens (perfect for families seeking to save some money) and actual balconies, a huge relief in stuffy Vegas where the windows usually don't open. There is a full free breakfast buffet, and an evening happy hour with snacks. The pool is large, and they've got courts for basketball and volleyball. And they take pets! All this, just a block from the corner of the Strip and Trop! This is really a lifesaver for families looking for a nice place not too far off the beaten path (especially if said family is using Vegas as a stopping point during a family vacation with Fido)—think of the savings with the free breakfast, the snacks, and that full kitchen for other meals.

5051 Duke Ellington Way, Las Vegas, NV 89119. ☎ 800/811-2450 or 702/739-7000. Fax 702/739-9350. www.hawthorn.com. 280 units. \$79–\$109 1-bedroom suite (up to 4 people), \$109–\$169 2-bedroom suite (up to 6 people). Cribs free, no rollaways. Rates include complimentary breakfast. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free outdoor parking. Pets accepted. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; small exercise room; coin-op washers; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, full kitchen, hair dryer, iron and board.

INEXPENSIVE

Motel 6 Fronted by a big neon sign, Las Vegas's Motel 6 is the largest in the country, and it happens to be a great budget choice. Most Motel 6 properties are a little out of the way, but this one is quite close to major Strip casino hotels (the MGM is nearby). It has a big, pleasant lobby, and the rooms, in two-story, cream-stucco buildings, are clean and attractively decorated. Some rooms have showers only; others have tub and shower bathrooms. Local calls are free.

195 E. Tropicana Ave. (at Koval Lane), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/4-MOTEL-6** (466-8356) or 702/798-0728. Fax 702/798-5657. 602 units. Sun–Thurs \$35 and up single, Fri–Sat \$58 and up single. Extra person \$6. Children under 17 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking at your room door. **Amenities:** 2 outdoor pools; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op washers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies.

Super 8 Motel Billing itself as “the world's largest Super 8 Motel,” this friendly property occupies a vaguely Tudor-style stone-and-stucco building. Free coffee is served in a pleasant little lobby furnished with comfortable sofas and wing chairs. Rooms are clean and well maintained.

The nautically themed **Ellis Island Restaurant**, open 24 hours, offers typical coffee-shop fare at reasonable prices. In the adjoining bar—a librarylike setting with shelves of books and green marble tables—sporting events are aired on TV monitors. The **Ellis Island casino** (actually located next door) has a race book and 50 slot/poker/21 machines; a bar here has a karaoke machine.

4250 Koval Lane (just south of Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ **800/800-8000** or 702/794-0888. 290 units. Sun–Thurs \$41 and up double, Fri–Sat \$56 and up double. Extra person \$8. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Pets \$8 per night (1 pet only). Free self-parking. **Amenities:** Casino next door; restaurant; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; coin-op washers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies.

Terrible's ★ *Finds* First of all, this place isn't terrible at all (the owner is Ed “Terrible” Herbst, who operates a chain of convenience stores and gas stations). Secondly, it isn't a bit like the hotel it took over, the rattrap known as the Continental. It's gone, and good riddance. In its place is an unexpected bargain, a truly enjoyable hotel with all together too often ridiculously low prices; try, as they get underway at least, \$29 a night! Near the Strip! Near a bunch of really good restaurants! Hot diggity! So what are we getting? Well, don't expect much in the way of memorable rooms; they are as basic as can be, and some have views of a wall (though even those get plenty of natural light). Some, however, are considerably larger than

others, so ask. The pool area is a surprise, with plenty of palms and other foliage. Did we mention price and location? Well, they plan to add free airport and Strip shuttles. Do reward them for all this and give them business.

4100 Paradise Rd. (at Flamingo Rd.), Las Vegas, NV 89109. ☎ 800/640-9777 or 702/733-7000. Fax 702/765-5109. www.terribleherbst.com/casinos/terriblescasino.lasvegas. 374 units. Sun–Thurs \$29 and up double, Fri–Sat \$59 and up double. Extra person \$10. Children under 13 stay free in parent’s room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; outdoor pool; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, pay-per-use Nintendo, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

5 Downtown

EXPENSIVE

Golden Nugget ★★ The Golden Nugget opened in 1946, as the first building in Las Vegas constructed specifically for casino gambling. In 1973, Steve Wynn took it over as his first major project in Vegas and gradually transformed the Old West/Victorian interiors (typical for Downtown) into something more high rent; marble and brass gleam, and the whole package seems considerably more resortlike and genuinely luxurious, especially for Downtown Vegas. The sunny interior spaces are a welcome change from the Las Vegas tradition of dim artificial lighting.

If the decor of The Mirage sounded appealing to you and you want to stay Downtown, come here, because the same people own them and the rooms look almost identical. They have marble entryways, half-canopy beds, vanity tables, and marble bathrooms. In the North Tower, the rooms are slightly larger than in the South. You don’t have to walk through the casino to get to your room, but you do have to walk a distance to get to the pool. During the winter, they put up a pavilion over part of the pool deck space to allow for more interior space. The presence of the pool, and general overall quality, makes this the best hotel Downtown for families; the others seem more geared towards the much older set and/or single-minded gambler set.

The Nugget’s superb buffets and Sunday brunch are described in chapter 4. And let’s not forget (as if they would let us) that there’s a casino here, too.

The Nugget’s top-rated health club (\$15-per-day fee to use the facilities) offers a full line of Universal equipment, Lifecycles, stair machines, treadmills, rowing machines, Gravitron, free weights, steam, sauna, tanning beds, and massage. Salon treatments include

everything from leg waxing to seaweed-mask facials. Free Sebastian products are available for sprucing up afterward.

Note: As this book went to press, MGM MIRAGE sold the Golden Nugget and its sister hotel in Laughlin to two Internet entrepreneurs for \$215 million. Though some changes are likely to be made in 2004—it's rumored that the new owners want to turn the Nugget into a modern version of "Old Vegas"—specifics are still unavailable.

129 E. Fremont St. (at Casino Center Blvd.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/634-3454** or 702/385-7111. Fax 702/386-8362. www.goldennugget.com. 1,907 units. \$59 and up double; \$275 and up suite. Extra person \$20. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; showroom; 5 restaurants (American, Italian, buffet, more); outdoor pool; health club and spa; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; 24-hour room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

MODERATE

Fitzgeralds Casino & Hotel ★ Fitzgeralds recently got a new owner, the first African-American to own a Vegas casino, an interesting bit of trivia. At this writing, a few changes had already been made: Mr. O'Luckey, the hotel's longtime mascot, is already gone; the check-in area has been redone; and a new outdoor pool—open until the unheard of (in Vegas) hour of 9pm—opened in summer 2003. More renovation work and upgrading is scheduled to take place throughout 2004. Right now, you can expect a sort of Irish country-village walkway, complete with giant fake trees, leading to the room elevators. Fitzgeralds has the only balcony in Downtown from which you can watch the Fremont Street Experience. You can also sit in its McDonald's and gawk at the light show through the atrium windows.

The rooms are clean and comfortable, featuring standard hotel-room decor done in shades of green. Because this is the tallest building in Downtown (34 stories), you get excellent views: snowcapped mountains, Downtown lights, or the Strip. Whirlpool-tub rooms are \$20 more and are slightly larger, offering wraparound windows.

301 Fremont St. (at 3rd St.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/274-LUCK** (274-5825) or 702/388-2400. Fax 702/388-2181. www.fitzgeralds.com. 638 units. \$36 and up double; \$60 and up suite. Extra person \$10. Children under 19 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 5 restaurants; lounge, outdoor pool, concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; courtesy car or limo; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, iron and board, safe.

Downtown Accommodations



Four Queens ★ 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. This property gets sold so often we think it's being used as a stake in some ongoing card game—it was just sold again, so the usual warnings about potential change still hold. The lobby is small but elegant—in a slightly faded, slightly dated way (with mirrors and huge chandeliers). In the Four Queens, you just know you're in Old Las Vegas. And you are glad. As the staff says, this is the place to stay if you just want to gamble (most of the clientele have been coming here for years). Another draw is the consistently helpful and friendly staff.

Rooms aren't going to blow you away, but note that the ones in the South Tower are a shade larger than the others, though we wouldn't hold any multiperson 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.

202 Fremont St. (at Casino Center Blvd.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/634-6045** or 702/385-4011. Fax 702/387-5122. www.fourqueens.com. 690 units. \$29 and up double; \$119 and up suite. Extra person \$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 2 restaurants; small exercise room; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

California Hotel/Casino & RV Park This is a hotel with a unique personality. California-themed, it markets mostly in Hawaii, and since 85% of its guests are from the Aloha State, it offers Hawaiian entrees in several of its restaurants and even has an on-premises store specializing in Hawaiian foodstuffs. You'll also notice that dealers are wearing colorful Hawaiian shirts. The rooms, however, reflect neither California nor Hawaii; they have mahogany furnishings and attractive marble bathrooms.

12 Ogden Ave. (at 1st St.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/634-6255** or 702/385-1222. Fax 702/388-2660. www.thecal.com. 781 units. Sun–Thurs \$50 and up double, Fri–Sat \$60 and up double, holidays \$70 and up double. Extra person \$5. Children under 13 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 4 restaurants; small rooftop pool; video arcade; tour desk; shopping arcade; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, safe.

Fremont Hotel & Casino When it opened in 1956, the Fremont was the first high-rise in downtown Las Vegas. Wayne Newton got his start here, singing in the now-defunct Carousel Showroom. Step just outside the front door and there you are, in the Fremont Street Experience. Rooms are larger, more comfortable, and more peaceful than you might expect. (Though up until midnight you can hear, sometimes all too well, music and noise from the Fremont St. Experience show. But then again, if you are in bed before midnight in Vegas, it's your own fault.) The hotel encourages environmental awareness by changing linens only every other day; upon request, it can be more often, but why not help out the earth a bit? For that matter, why not help out your wallet a bit and stay here?

The Fremont boasts an Art Deco restaurant called the **Second Street Grill** (p. 88) along with a buffet. Guests can use the swimming pool and RV park at the nearby California Hotel, another Sam Boyd enterprise.

200 E. Fremont St. (between Casino Center Blvd. and 3rd St.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/634-6182** or 702/385-3232. Fax 702/385-6229. www.fremontcasino.com. 452 units. \$35 and up double. Extra person \$8. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free valet parking; no self-parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 5 restaurants; tour desk; car-rental desk; free shuttle to Sam's Town; limited

room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron and board.

Lady Luck Casino Hotel The Lady Luck encompasses sleek 17- and 25-story towers and is a major Downtown player, taking up an entire city block. Its friendly atmosphere has kept customers coming back for decades. Eighty percent of Lady Luck's clientele is repeat business.

A ton of dough by a new owner was recently dumped into this venerable facility, which means that while it doesn't look shockingly different, it has been given a face-lift that makes it, like a 60-year-old showgirl, a significant bit fresher. However, that same new owner has, at this writing, put the old gal up for sale (is there no end to the indignities of time and age?), and so who knows what her fate will be by the time you read this. Until then, Garden rooms are small and basic with nice motel-style furnishings, while tower rooms (the newer ones) have fresh carpeting and furnishings, and all are clean and comfy. In other words, it's good enough even before you get to the econo-prices.

206 N. 3rd St. (at Ogden Ave.), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ 800/523-9582 or 702/477-3000. Fax 702/382-2346. www.ladylucklv.com. 792 units. \$40 and up double; Sun–Thurs \$55 and up junior suite, Fri–Sat \$70 and up junior suite. Extra person \$8. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; small show-room; 3 restaurants; outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; free airport shuttle; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker.

Main Street Station ★★ *Finds* Though not actually on Fremont Street, the Main Street Station is just 2 short blocks away, barely a 3-minute walk. Considering how terrific it is, this is hardly an inconvenience. In our opinion, this is one of the nicest hotels in Downtown and one of the best bargains in the city.

The overall look here, typical of Downtown, is early-20th-century San Francisco. However, unlike everywhere else, the details here are outstanding, resulting in a beautiful hotel by any measure. Outside, gas lamps flicker on wrought-iron railings and stained-glass windows. Inside, you'll find hammered-tin ceilings, ornate antique-style chandeliers, and lazy ceiling fans. The small lobby is filled with wood panels, long wooden benches, and a front desk straight out of the Old West. Even the cashier cages look like antique brass bank tellers' cages. It's all very appealing and just plain pretty. An enclosed bridge connects the hotel with the California across the street, where you will find shopping and a kids' arcade.

The long and narrow rooms are possibly the largest in Downtown, though the ornate decorating downstairs does not extend up here. White-painted, wooded plantation shutters replace the usual curtains; and the simple but not unattractive furniture is vaguely French Provincial. It's all clean and in good taste. The bathrooms are small but well appointed. Rooms on the north side overlook the freeway, and the railroad track is nearby. The soundproofing seems quite strong—we couldn't hear anything when inside, but if you're concerned, request a room on the south side.

The **Pullman Grille** is the steak-and-seafood place, and is much more reasonably priced than similar (and considerably less pretty) places in town. The stylish **Triple 7 Brew Pub** is described in detail in chapter 8. The excellent buffet is described in chapter 4. And the casino, thanks to some high ceilings, is one of the most smoke-free around.

200 N. Main St. (between Fremont St. and I-95), Las Vegas, NV 89101. ☎ **800/465-0711** or 702/387-1896. Fax 702/386-4466. www.mainstreetcasino.com 452 units. \$45–\$175 standard double. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free self- and valet parking. **Amenities:** Casino; 3 restaurants; outdoor pool next door at California Hotel; car-rental desk; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies.

Where to Dine

Among the many images that people have of Las Vegas are cheap food deals—bargains so good the food is practically free. They think of the buffets—all a small country can eat—for only \$3.99!

All that is true, but frankly, eating in Las Vegas is no longer something you don't have to worry about budgeting for. The buffets are certainly there—no good hotel would be without one—as are the cheap meal deals, but you get what you pay for. Some of the cheaper buffets, and even the more moderately priced ones, are mediocre at best, ghastly and inedible at worst. And we don't even want to *think* about those 69¢ beef stew specials.

However, there is some good, indeed, almost unheard-of news on the Vegas food scene. Virtually overnight, there has been an explosion of new restaurants that are actually of high quality. Vegas is now able to hold its head up alongside other big cities as a legitimate foodie destination.

Look at this partial list: Celebrity chefs Wolfgang Puck and Emeril Lagasse have half a dozen restaurants in town between them; deservedly famed chef Julian Serrano has set up shop at Bellagio's **Picasso**; and branches of L.A., New York, San Francisco, and Boston high-profile names such as **Pinot**, **Aqua**, **Olives**, **Lutèce**, **Border Grill**, **Star Canyon**, and others have all rolled into town.

Unfortunately, this boom has affected only the very highest end of the price category. Even as dedicated foodies, we can't in good conscience tell you to eat only at places that will require taking out a small bank loan—except we just don't really have any other options. For the moment, with a few exceptions, it's hard to eat extremely well in Vegas (especially on the Strip) for a down-to-earth price. If you get off the Strip, however, you can find some cheaper, more interesting alternatives, which we have listed below. If you're staying on the Strip and you don't have the mobility of a car, your food options will be severely limited.

There are tricks to surviving dining in Vegas. If you can, make reservations in advance, particularly for the better restaurants (you may well get to town, planning to check out some of the better

spots, only to find they are totally booked throughout your stay). Eat as much as you can during off-hours, which admittedly are hard to find. But you know that noon to, say, 1:30 or 2pm is going to be prime for lunch, and 5:30 to 8:30pm (and just after the early shows get out) for dinner. Speaking of time, give yourself plenty of it, particularly if you have to catch a show.

And if you want to sample the creations of a celebrity chef, but took a beating at the craps table? Check our listings to see which of the high-profile restaurants are open for lunch. Sure, usually the more interesting and exotic items are found at dinner, but the mid-day meal is usually no slouch and can be as much as two-thirds cheaper. Or skip that high-falutin' stuff all together. To locate budget fare, check local newspapers (especially Fri editions) and free magazines (such as *Vegas Visitor* and *What's On in Las Vegas*), which are given away at hotel reception desks (sometimes these sources also yield money-saving coupons). The late-night specials—a complete steak meal for just a couple dollars—are also an important part of a good, decadent Vegas experience (and a huge boon for insomniacs).

1 South Strip

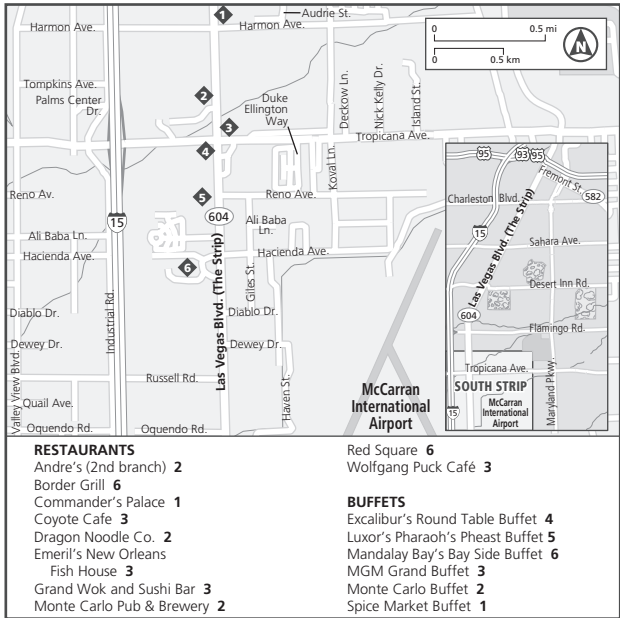
VERY EXPENSIVE

Commander's Palace ★★ CREOLE This is an offshoot of the famous New Orleans restaurant, which is considered the best in that town, and sometimes even the best in the country. We expected a lot, and they came through. It doesn't precisely look like the one in New Orleans, but it does have that classic handsome old N'Awlins restaurant wood paneling and big chandeliers. Service is nearly as good; we hardly felt neglected. And the food was, if not yet the standout of their elder cousin's, just about the best we've had in Vegas yet, with not one thing, from appetizer to dessert, that disappointed our palates. You may be best off getting the \$39 three course Creole favorite, featuring Commander's justly legendary turtle soup with sherry, Louisiana pecan-crusted fish, and signature bread pudding soufflé, three things they do very very well indeed.

3663 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in the Desert Passage in the Aladdin hotel). ☎ 702/892-8272. www.commanderspalace.com. Reservations suggested. Lunch \$16–\$28, dinner \$25–\$39. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3:30pm and 6–10pm.

Coyote Café ★ SOUTHWESTERN Mark Miller was one of the first celebrity chefs to hit Vegas, way back before the current trendy boom. His robust regional cuisine combines elements of traditional Mexican, Native American, Creole, and Cajun cookery. The Grill

South Strip Dining



Room menu changes monthly, but on a recent visit, we enjoyed a bibb lettuce salad with a lovely light lemon dressing, and some fine spicy pork chops. Desserts include chocolate banana torte served on banana crème anglaise and topped with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. The wine list includes many by-the-glass selections, including champagnes and sparkling wines, which nicely complement spicy Southwestern fare; Brazilian daiquiris are a house specialty.

The Cafe menu offers similar but somewhat lighter fare. Southwestern breakfasts (\$6–\$9.50) range from huevos rancheros to blue-corn pancakes with toasted pine nuts, honey butter, and real maple syrup.

In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/891-7349**. Reservations recommended for the Grill Room, not accepted for the Cafe. Grill Room main courses \$15–\$32. Cafe main courses \$7.50–\$18 (many under \$10). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Grill Room daily 5:30–10pm; cafe daily 8:30am–11pm.

Emeril's New Orleans Fish House ★★ CONTEMPORARY CREOLE Chef Emeril Lagasse, a ubiquitous presence on cable's Food Network, is becoming nearly as common in Vegas as in his adopted hometown of New Orleans. Seafood is the specialty here,

flown in from Louisiana or from anywhere else that he finds the quality of the ingredients to be the very finest. Be sure to start off with one of Lagasse's savory "cheesecakes": a lobster cheesecake with tomato-tarragon sauce, topped with a dollop of succulent Louisiana choupique fish caviar. It's a heady, rich appetizer that may be completely unlike anything you've ever had. Oysters on the half shell are also a favorite, served with two tangy dipping sauces. And try the barbecued shrimp, which come in a garlic-and-herb butter sauce that will have you mopping your plate with bread. For an entree, try one of Lagasse's sauce-enhanced fish dishes. Meat eaters will also be very happy with the utterly tender and flavorful filet of beef with *tasso* (Louisiana Cajun dried ham), hollandaise sauce, and home-made Worcestershire.

It's difficult to recommend one particular dessert from the vast menu, but a slice of the banana-cream pie with banana crust and caramel drizzle is one of the finest desserts you will ever have.

In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/891-7374**. Reservations required. Main courses \$12–\$18 at lunch, \$18–\$38 at dinner (more for lobster). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5:30–10:30pm.

Red Square ★★ CONTINENTAL/RUSSIAN Let's go dancing on the grave of the USSR. The restaurant's ice-covered bar keeps your drinks nicely chilled. Czarist excess is celebrated with an out-of-the-reach-of-the-proletariat, \$2,500-a-month ice locker for storing vodka (they have 150 different kinds of vodka, perhaps the largest collection in the world).

If you can lift your eyes from the theme-run-amuck, you might notice the food is quite good. Blow your expense account on some caviar (we found we liked nutty Osetra better than stronger Beluga), properly chilled in ice, served with the correct pearl spoon, accompanied by the right accoutrements. Or, more affordably, nosh on Siberian nachos—smoked salmon, citron caviar, and crème fraîche. The chef's special is a Roquefort-crusted, tender filet mignon, with some soft caramelized garlic and a fine reduction sauce; it's a grand piece of meat. Desserts are not as clever but are worth saving room for, especially the warm chocolate cake with a liquid center and the strawberries Romanoff. And when you are done, test how much you imbibed by coming up with sample answers for the committee at an HUAC hearing.

In Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/632-7407**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$17–\$31. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30pm–midnight.

EXPENSIVE

Border Grill ★★ MEXICAN For our money, here's the best Mexican food in town. This big, cheerful space (like a Romper Room for adults) houses a branch of the much-lauded L.A. restaurant, conceived and run by the Food Network's "Two Hot Tamales," Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger. This is truly authentic Mexican home cooking, but with a nuevo twist. So don't expect precisely the same dishes you'd encounter in your favorite corner joint, but do expect fresh and fabulous food, arranged as brightly on the plates as the decor on the walls. Stay away from the occasionally bland fish and head right towards rich and cheesy dishes like chile rellenos (with perfect black beans) and chicken *chilaquiles*, or try things like mushroom empanadas. Don't miss the dense but fluffy Mexican chocolate cream pie (with a meringue crust).

In Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/632-7403. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$20. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm.

MODERATE

See also the listing for **Coyote Café** (p. 64), an expensive restaurant fronted by a more moderately priced café.

Dragon Noodle Co. ★★ ASIAN FUSION A strong choice for a reasonably priced meal, Dragon Noodle is one of the better Chinese restaurants in town. We were glad to see that in addition to the usual suspects, there are some other interesting (if not radically less safe) choices on the menu. Food is served family-style, and prepared in an open kitchen, so you know it's fresh. Be sure to try the very smooth house green tea. You might let your waiter choose your meal for you, but try the crispy Peking pork, the sweet pungent shrimp, the potstickers, and perhaps the generous seafood soup. We were a little disappointed by the popular sizzling black-pepper chicken. And now they have a sushi bar!

In the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Flamingo Rd. and Tropicana Ave.). ☎ 702/730-7965. Main courses \$5.50–\$17 (many under \$10). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

Grand Wok and Sushi Bar ★★ *Value* ASIAN A pan-Asian restaurant runs the risk of attempting to be a jack-of-all-trades and master of none, but somehow this one pulls it off. We didn't try every cuisine offered (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and maybe more!), but a random sampling (including lovely fresh sushi, fat dumplings, and a huge Vietnamese combo soup that was full of

noodles and different kinds of meat) produced really superb and delicately prepared food. Hotel Asian restaurants are often a bit dubious, but this one really is marvelous—and the primarily Asian clientele clearly agrees. Note that soup portions are most generous; four people could easily split one order and have a nice and very cheap lunch, one of the best bargain meals in town.

In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/891-7777**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8.95–\$14, sushi rolls and pieces \$4.50–\$9.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Restaurant Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm, Fri–Sat 11am–midnight; sushi bar Sun–Thurs 5–10pm, Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

Wolfgang Puck Café ★★ CALIFORNIA A brightly colored riot of mosaic tiles and other experiments in geometric design, the Wolfgang Puck Café stands out in the MGM Grand. It's more or less Spago Lite: downscaled salads, pizzas, and pastas, all showing the Puck hand. While perhaps a little pricier than what you'd find at your average cafe, the food is comparably better, if sometimes not that special. However, it's all very fresh nouvelle cuisine, which makes a nice change of pace. There does tend to be a line to get in, particularly after *EFX* lets out just across the casino.

In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/895-9653**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9–\$15. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Monte Carlo Pub & Brewery ★★ ★ *(Finds)* PUB FARE Lest you think we are big, fat foodie snobs who can't appreciate a meal unless it comes drenched in truffles and caviar, we hasten to direct you to this lively, working microbrewery (with a sort of rustic factory appearance) and its hearty, not-so-high-falutin' food. No fancy French frills, and best of all, no inflated prices. Combine the general high quality with generous portions—a nachos appetizer could probably feed eight (though it was not the best nachos appetizer ever)—and this may be a better deal than most buffets. It's not, however, the place for a quiet rendezvous, with about 40 TVs spread throughout (a sports fan's dream) and music blaring.

Earning recent raves were the short ribs, in a fine barbecue sauce, cooked just right; the excellent chicken fingers and shrimp fried in beer appetizers; and the garlic pizza with mounds of our favorite aromatic herb. We also highly enjoyed the double-chocolate-fudge suicide brownie, though really, what's not to love about something like that? After 9pm, only pizza is served, and dueling pianos provide dance music and entertainment.

In the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (between Flamingo Rd. and Tropicana Ave.). ☎ **702/730-7777**. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$6–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–2am; Fri–Sat 11am–4am.

2 Mid-Strip

VERY EXPENSIVE

Alizé ★★ FRENCH Just a perfect restaurant, thanks to a combination of the most divine dining room and view in Vegas (situated at the top of the Palms Hotel, with three sides of full length windows that allow a panoramic view of the night lights of Vegas), and one of the best chefs in a town, Jacques Van Staden. The menu changes seasonally, but anything you order will be heavenly.

On our last visit, we had perhaps 14 different courses, and not a single one disappointed. In the appetizer department, the marinated jumbo lump crabmeat and avocado salad with heirloom tomato consommé and basil oil was a riot of freshness. Fish can be a little dry here, so we suggest either the stunning New York steak with summer truffle jus and potato herb pancakes, or the meltingly tender lamb chops with some shredded lamb shank wrapped in a crispy fried crepe. Desserts are similarly outstanding; try the sorbet in a case of browned marshmallow, floating in raspberry soup. Yeah, we're going over the top on this one, but we bet you won't think we're wrong.

In the Palms Hotel, 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ **702/951-7000**. Fax 702/951-7002. www.alizelv.com. Reservations strongly recommended. Entrees \$28–\$37. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–10:30pm.

Aqua ★★ SEAFOOD Fish fans should certainly head quickly over to Aqua, a branch of a highly respected San Francisco restaurant. And even fish-phobes might reconsider their position when they try Aqua's slightly Asian-influenced pleasures.

You can start your meal with a non-seafood choice such as Hudson Valley foie gras, which comes with a warm apple Charlotte. The mixed seasonal greens salad looks like a flower, and is a light, amiable mix of flavors. For a main course, fish fans should go straight to the vaguely Japanese miso-glazed Chilean sea bass in a rich, but not heavy, shellfish consommé. More timid fish eaters might try the robust Hawaiian swordfish au poivre, though its side of pancetta-wrapped shrimp dumplings (think fancy bacon-wrapped shrimp) is not as successful. The lobster pot pie is cooked in a pot, then brought to the table and disassembled with great ceremony, as 1½ pounds of lobster is laid out, a creamy sauce with veggies is poured

over it, and it's all topped with the crust. Do try some of their dainty and clever desserts, particularly their signature root beer float—no, really. It's got root beer sorbet, sarsaparilla ice cream, a chocolate straw, and warm cookies right out of the oven.

In Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/693-7223**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$29–\$34 (lobster and whole foie gras higher). AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm.

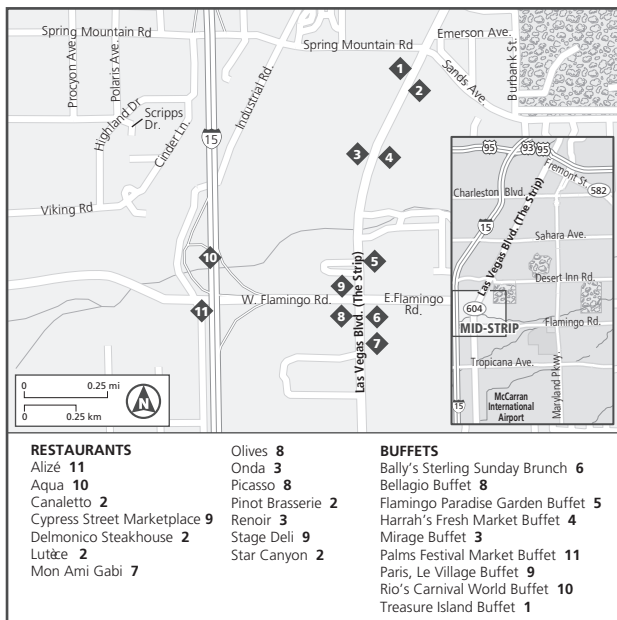
Delmonico Steakhouse ★★ CONTEMPORARY CREOLE/STEAK Watching the Food Network, you might well feel Emeril Lagasse is omnipresent. Slowly but surely, he's becoming as ubiquitous here in Vegas (though he has a long way to go to match Puck) as he is in New Orleans, as he brings variations on his Big Easy brand-name eateries to town. This latest is a steakhouse version of his hard-core classic Creole restaurant.

You can try both Emeril concoctions and fabulous cuts of red meat. You can't go wrong with most appetizers, especially the superbly rich smoked mushrooms with homemade tasso over pasta—it's enough for a meal in and of itself—any of the specials, or the gumbo, particularly if it's the hearty, near-homemade country selection. If you want to experiment, definitely do it with the appetizers. You're better off steering clear of complex entrees, no matter how intriguing they sound. We've found them to be generally disappointing, while the more deceptively simple choices are more successful. The bone-in rib steak is rightly recommended (skip the gummy béarnaise sauce in favor of the fabulous homemade Worcestershire or the A.O.K. sauce). Sides are hit or miss—the creamed spinach was too salty, but the sweet potato purée (a special, but maybe they'll serve you a side if you ask sweetly) was most definitely a winner. Too full for dessert? No, you aren't. Have a chocolate soufflé, a bananas Foster cream pie, a chocolate Sheba (a sort of dense chocolate mousse), or the lemon icebox pie.

In The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/414-3737**. Reservations strongly recommended for dinner. Main courses \$21–\$36. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm.

Lutèce ★★ FRENCH A branch of the highly esteemed New York City French restaurant, Lutèce is yet another example of how, if you want to dine well in Vegas, you've got to pay for it. It's full of style, style, style. It's genuinely chic, which is unusual for Vegas, but it's not threatening nor cavernous—it's New York all the way. A self-aware, self-confident place, this may prove to be one of our favorite

Mid-Strip Dining



dining spots in Vegas. Try to get a table in the little nook area that looks out at the Strip—it's more romantic than it sounds.

The presentation of the French cuisine is just lovely. The menu will probably change periodically, but on a recent visit, we enjoyed the appetizer of smoked codfish with white-truffle oil and arugula, a combo that works surprisingly well. For a main course, we loved the crisp black bass with lobster sauce and herb noodles, and the turbot poached in tarragon broth with baby veggies.

In The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/414-2220**. Reservations strongly recommended for dinner. Main courses \$26–\$38. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm.

Onda ★★ **ITALIAN** Onda is anything but a run-of-the-mill hotel restaurant. Chef Todd English, whose Olives cafe over at Bellagio is also well worth your dining time, offers a Mediterranean slant on Italian cooking, coming up with a menu that's full of pleasant thrills, putting to shame most other Italian joints in town. Vegetables are flown in especially for Onda, so we encourage you toward menu choices that feature them. The restaurant itself is pretty and comfortable (dress

casual chic, natch), with a particularly good vibe later in the evening (after 9pm, say)—for some reason, the staff doesn't tire but is still ready to take care of your every wish, allowing you to linger as much as you like.

Begin with that basket of varied breads, making sure the gorgonzola-laced breadsticks are among them. Move on to antipasti with polenta, truffles, fresh mozzarella, onions, stuffed zucchini, roasted peppers, and goodness knows what all else. Soup is good food, in particular the fine baby sweet-spring-pea purée with a dollop of mascarpone. A foil-wrapped veggie packet (slit at the table for you) includes porcini mushrooms good enough to make even non-mushroom fans reconsider their previous conviction. By now you don't need a heavy dessert, but the chocolate mousse cake is highly recommended if you can handle it.

In The Mirage, 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/791-7223. Reservations recommended. Main course \$17–\$35. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm.

Picasso ★★ FRENCH A Spanish chef who cooks French cuisine in an Italian-themed hotel in Vegas? Trust us, it works. This may well be the best restaurant in Vegas, and given the sudden serious competition for such a title, that says a lot. Madrid-born chef Julian Serrano (whose Masa was considered the finest French restaurant in San Francisco) offers an extraordinary dining experience (plus, \$30 million worth of Picassos gaze down over your shoulders while you eat).

Needless to say, Serrano's cooking is a work of art that can proudly stand next to the masterpieces. The menu changes nightly and is always a choice between a four- or five-course fixed-price dinner or tasting menu. The night we ate there, we were bowled over by roasted Maine lobster with a "trio" of corn—kernels, sauce, and a corn flan that was like eating slightly solid sunshine. Hudson Valley foie gras was crusted in truffles and went down most smoothly. A fillet of roasted sea bass came with a light saffron sauce and dots of cauliflower purée. And finally, pray that they're serving the lamb rôti—it was an outstanding piece of lamb, perfectly done, tender, and crusted with truffles. Portions are dainty, but so rich that you'll have plenty to eat without groaning and feeling heavy when you leave. Desserts are powerful, yet prettily constructed. A molten chocolate cake leaves any other you may have tried in the dust, and comes with ice cream made with imported European chocolate. Everything is delivered by an attentive staff that makes you feel quite pampered.

In Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/693-7223**. Reservations recommended. Fixed-price 4-course dinner \$80, 5-course degustation \$90. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 6–9:30pm.

Renoir ★★ NOUVELLE ITALIAN Executive Chef Alessandro Stratta was named one of “America’s 10 Best Chefs” by *Food & Wine*, and has several serious culinary awards including the 1998 “Best Chef in the Southwest” by the James Beard Foundation. Stratta’s cooking has given Renoir the distinction of five Mobil stars (as of 2000). While the space itself is less inspired than Picasso (the Renoirs on the walls seem an afterthought), it does have a tad more intimacy, thanks to some banquettes and a more hushed atmosphere, plus less obtrusive and less intimidating service.

Nightly, there are two tasting menus, including one focused solely on vegetables, but items from each can be interchanged with some from the a la carte menu. Standouts include downy pillows of potato gnocchi with black truffles—so good it seems like a pity when the dish is finished—and a combo of Maine lobster and sweet-corn ravioli. If you are looking to conserve money, note that the appetizer of terrine of foie gras (with Waldorf salad and toasted currant bread) is generously sized and would be fine as an entree. This is also the place for a cheese plate: One night it featured St. Andre, Vacheron, Comte, Tellagio, and Roquefort, all at perfect temperature. And thanks to a thoughtfully priced wine list, even the average person can try something as rare as Chateau D’Yquem—they offer a 1-ounce glass for \$25.

3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in The Mirage). ☎ **702/791-7223**. Reservations recommended. Entrees \$36–\$44. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–9:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

Canaletto ★★ ITALIAN Come here for solid, true Italian fare—and that means less sauce-intensive than the red-checked-tablecloth establishments of our American youths. Here, the emphasis is on the pasta, not the accompaniments. This place is all the more enjoyable for being perched on the faux St. Mark’s Square; in theory, you can pretend you are sitting on the edge of the real thing, a fantasy we don’t mind admitting we briefly indulged in. A risotto of porcini, sausage, and white-truffle oil was full of strong flavors, while the wood-fired roast chicken was perfectly moist. You know, a properly roasted chicken should be a much-celebrated thing, and that alone may be a reason to come here.

In The Venetian Grand Canal Shoppes, 3377 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/733-0070**. Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses \$12–\$29. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight.

Pinot Brasserie ★★ BISTRO This is the latest incarnation of a series of well-regarded Los Angeles restaurants whose mothership, Patina, regularly tops “Best of” lists among City of Angels foodies. While the more innovative cooking is going on back in L.A., Pinot reliably delivers French and American favorites that are thoughtfully conceived and generally delicious. It’s an excellent choice if you want a special meal that is neither stratospherically expensive nor too complex.

Salads are possibly fresher and more generous than other similar starters in town (thank that California influence), and they can come paired with various toppings for crostini (toasted slices of French bread) such as herbed goat cheese. Word is they might add Patina’s delightful butternut-squash soup to the menu here, and if so, you should try it. The signature dish, beloved by many, is a roasted chicken accompanied by heaping mounds of garlic fries, but if you wish to get a little more elaborate (and yet rather light), thin slices of smoked salmon with celery *rémoulade* could be a way to go. Desserts are lovely, and ice cream is homemade—the chocolate alone should make you wish you’d never eaten at 31 Flavors, because it was wasted calories compared to this. **Note:** It’s easy to graze through this menu and have a less costly meal here than at most other high-end places, and the constant operating hours mean you can also pop in for a nosh at times when other fine-dining options are closed.

In The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/735-8888. Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses \$12–\$18 at lunch, \$19–\$30 at dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10:30pm.

Star Canyon ★★ SOUTHWESTERN Texas-based chef Stephen Pyles is more or less credited with inventing Southwestern cuisine, and this branch of his highly touted Dallas restaurant not only gives Coyote Cafe a serious run for the title of Best Southwestern Restaurant in Vegas, but it might just be the Best American Restaurant.

For this reason, we urge you to take some chances (or what you may view as chances) with appetizers—we’d go a bit more plain, though with equal satisfaction, with the main courses. All use classic Southwestern flavors, and more importantly, spices, and combine them with just the right *nouvelle cuisine* influences. A tamale pie’s spicy crust is cooled by its filling of roast-garlic custard, topped with crabmeat, while that gourmand’s delight, seared foie gras, is most happily paired with a more humble corn cake, itself dressed up with pineapple salsa. Be sure to try the hearty, serious, chewy breads, which can come in such flavors as pesto and chipolte. While you may

justly feel tempted to make a meal of appetizers, don't. For then you would miss their signature dish, a bone-in ribeye, cowboy-style (think Western spices), an utterly tender, flavorful dish (topped with a mile-high tower of crispy onions) that makes it hard to imagine a better piece of meat. Desserts are perhaps not quite as joy-producing, though the chocolate bread pudding is more like a heavy soufflé than a boring basic bread pudding.

In The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/414-3772. Reservations recommended for dinner. Main courses \$10–\$17 at lunch, \$21–\$30 at dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

MODERATE

Mon Ami Gabi ★★ BISTRO This charming bistro is our new favorite local restaurant. It has it all: a delightful setting, better than average food, and affordable prices. Sure, it goes overboard in trying to replicate a classic Parisian bistro, but the results are less cheesy than most Vegas attempts at atmosphere, and the patio seating on the Strip (no reservations taken there—first-come, first-served) actually makes you feel like you're in a real, not a pre-fab, city. You can be budget-conscious and order just the very fine onion soup, or you can eat like a real French person and order classic steak and *pommes frites* (the filet mignon is probably the best cut, if not the cheapest). There are plenty of cheaper options (which is why we listed this place in the “moderate” category, by the way), especially at lunch. Yes, they have snails, and we loved 'em. Desserts, by the way, are massive and should be shared (another way to save). The baseball-size profiteroles (three or four to an order) filled with fine vanilla ice cream and the football-size bananas Foster crêpe are particularly recommended. Ooh la la!

In Paris Las Vegas, 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/944-GABI (944-4224). Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.95–\$27. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight.

Olives ★★ ITALIAN/MEDITERRANEAN If there were an Olives cafe in our neighborhood, we would eat there regularly. The less expensive relative of the Mirage's Onda (as well as a branch of Todd English's original Boston-based restaurant), Olives is a strong choice for a light lunch that need not be as expensive as you might think. Here's how to enjoy a moderately priced meal here: Don't fill up too much on the focaccia bread and olives they give you at the start (on the other hand, budget-obsessives, go ahead), and skip the small-size and thus costly salads and instead go right to the flatbreads. Think pizza with an ultra-thin crust (like a slightly limp

cracker), topped with delicious combinations like the highly recommended Moroccan spiced lamb, eggplant purée, and feta cheese, or fig, prosciutto, and gorgonzola. They are rich and wonderful—split one between two people, along with that salad we just maligned, and you have an affordable and terrific lunch. Or try a pasta; we were steered toward the simple but marvelous spaghetti with roasted tomatoes, garlic, and Parmesan, and were glad. The constructed, but not too fussy, food gets more complicated and costly at night, adding an array of meats and chickens, plus pastas such as butternut squash with brown butter and sage.

In Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/693-7223**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$19 at lunch, \$20–\$34 at dinner; flatbreads \$10–\$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5–10:30pm.

Stage Deli ★★ DELI New York City's Stage Deli—a legendary hangout for comedians, athletes, and politicians—has been slapping pastrami on rye for more than half a century. Its Las Vegas branch retains the Stage's brightly lit, Big Apple essence. Walls are embellished with subway graffiti and hung with Broadway theater posters, bowls of pickles grace the white Formica tables, and, in the New York tradition, celebrities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger drop by whenever they're in town.

Most of the fare—including fresh-baked pumpernickel and rye, meats, chewy bagels, lox, spicy deli mustard, and pickles—comes in daily from New York. The Stage dishes up authentic 5-inch-high sandwiches stuffed with pastrami, corned beef, brisket, or chopped liver. Maybe “overstuffed” is a better description. Unless you have a hearty appetite, are feeding two, or have a fridge in your room for leftovers, you might want to try the half sandwich and soup or salad combos. Other specialties here include matzo ball soup, knishes, kasha varnishkes, cheese blintzes, kreplach, pirogen, and smoked fish platters accompanied by bagels and cream cheese. Or you might prefer a full meal consisting of pot roast and gravy, salad, homemade dinner rolls, potato pancakes, and fresh vegetables. Desserts run the gamut from rugelach cheesecake to Hungarian-style apple strudel.

In the Forum Shops at Caesars, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/893-4045**. Reservations accepted for large parties only. Main courses \$10–\$14; sandwiches \$6–\$14. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 8:30am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–11:30pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Cypress Street Marketplace ★★ *(Kids)* FOOD COURT Often when we go to a Vegas buffet (and we are not alone in this), we sigh over all the choices, all those different kinds of pretty good cuisines

there for the taking, but of course, we can't possibly try everything. And yet, in some of the higher priced venues, we are charged as if we can. Here, in this modern version of the classic food court, it's sort of like being at a well-stocked buffet; there's darn fine barbecue (including North Carolina influenced pulled pork), wrap sandwiches (grilled shrimp for one example), Asian (including pot stickers and Vietnamese noodles), decent NY pizza, plump Chicago hot dogs, peel-and-eat shrimp and lobster chowder, a bargain-priced build your own salad bar, plus pastries and even wine. You get a card when you enter, and it's swiped whenever you choose something, and then you pay the one price after you eat (on real plates with real napkins and forks). It's slightly more convenient than the traditional pay-as-you-go food court, certainly more efficient than a cafeteria, and a better value (especially given how large the portions are) than many a buffet. And with the range of food, an entire family with very different tastes will all find something satisfactory.

3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in Caesars Palace). ☎ **702/731-7110**. Everything under \$10. AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight.

3 North Strip

INEXPENSIVE

Capriotti's ★★ ★ *(Finds SANDWICHES)* It looks like a dump, but there's a reason that Capriotti's is one of the fastest-growing businesses in town. They roast their own beef and turkeys on the premises and stuff them (or Italian cold cuts, or whatever) into sandwiches mislabeled "small," "medium," and "large"—the latter clocks in at 20 inches, easily feeding two for under \$10 total. And deliciously so; the "Bobby" (turkey, dressing, and cranberry sauce, like Thanksgiving dinner in sandwich form) would be our favorite sandwich in the world had we not tried their "Slaw B Joe"—roast beef, coleslaw, and Russian dressing. They even have veggie varieties. There are outlets throughout the city, but this one is not only right off the Strip, but right by the freeway. When we say Vegas needs more true budget fare, with both taste and a mom and pop background (as opposed to a generic chain), we mean places like Capriotti's. We never leave town without a stop here, and you shouldn't, either.

324 W. Sahara Ave. (at Las Vegas Blvd. S.). ☎ **702/474-0229**. Most sandwiches under \$10. No credit cards. Daily 10am–7pm.

Chang's of Las Vegas ★ CHINESE Dim sum are little Chinese nibbles, most often spiced and diced bits of meat and shellfish stuffed into buns or wrapped with dough, then steamed or deep-fried. A

menu at this cheerful strip mall restaurant will list the options, but not explain what the heck anything is (here's one, just to help you out—*hai gow* are steamed balls of dough-wrapped shrimp). Don't bother ordering from it, but instead wait as steam carts are pushed around the room and toward you, and the cart pusher pulls lids off many little pots, exposing various tasties within. (Dim sum service stops at 3pm except by special order.) You could ask for identification, but the answers might scare you—and scare you off something quite marvelous. So be brave and just point at something that looks good. Find out what you ate later. Or never. Sometimes it's just better that way.

In Gold Key Shopping Center, 3055 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/731-3388**. Dim sum \$1.80–\$5; main courses \$9.95–\$17. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–11pm (dim sum 10am–3pm).

Dona Maria Tamales ★★ MEXICAN Decorated with Tijuana-style quiltwork and calendars, this is your quintessential Mexican diner, convenient to both the north end of the Strip and Downtown. They use lots of lard, lots of cheese, and lots of sauce. As a result, the food is really good—and really fattening. Yep, the folks who did those health reports showing how bad Mexican food can be for your heart probably did some research here. That just makes it all the better, in our opinion. Locals apparently agree; even at lunchtime the place is crowded.

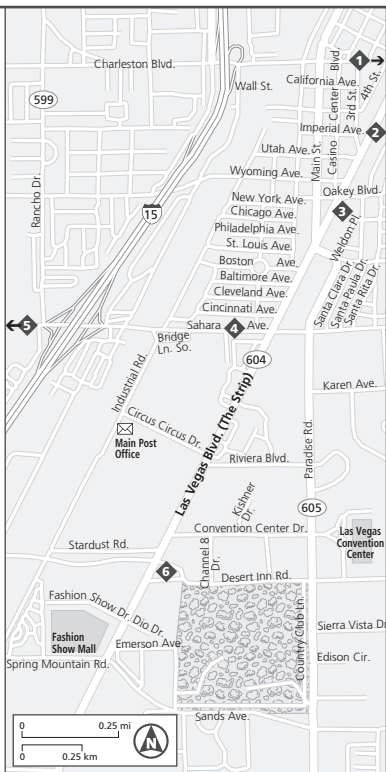
910 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (corner of Charleston Blvd.). ☎ **702/382-6538**. Main courses \$5.45–\$8 breakfast, \$6–\$13 lunch or dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Liberty Cafe at the White Cross Pharmacy ★★ (Value) DINER You can go to any number of retro soda-fountain replicas (such as Johnny Rockets) and theme restaurants that pretend to be cheap diners, but why bother when the real thing is just past the end of the Strip? The decidedly unflashy soda fountain/lunch counter at the Blue Castle Pharmacy was Las Vegas's first 24-hour restaurant, and it has been going strong for over 60 years. Plunk down at the counter, and watch the cooks go nuts trying to keep up with the orders. The menu is basic comfort food: standard grill items (meatloaf, ground round steak, chops, and so on), fluffy cream pies, and classic breakfasts served “anytime”—try the biscuits and cream gravy at 3am. They also serve gyros and the like. But the best bet is a 1/3-pound burger and “thick creamy shake,” both the way they were meant to be and about as good as they get. At around \$5, this is half what you would pay for a comparable meal at the Hard Rock Cafe.

North Strip Dining

RESTAURANTS

- Capriotti's **4**
 Chang's of Las Vegas **6**
 Dona Maria Tamales **1**
 Liberty Cafe at the
 White Cross Pharmacy **3**
 Rincon Criollo **2**
 Rosemary's Restaurant **5**



Places like this are a vanishing species—it's worth the short walk from the Stratosphere.

1700 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/383-0101**. Reservations not accepted. Most items under \$7. No credit cards. Daily 24 hr.

Rincon Criollo CUBAN Located beyond the wedding chapels on Las Vegas Boulevard, Rincon Criollo has all the right details for a good, cheap ethnic joint: It's full of locals and empty of frills. It's not the best Cuban food ever, but it gets the job done. The main courses (featuring Cuban pork and chicken specialties) are hit or miss; try the marinated pork leg or, better still, ask your server for a recommendation. Paella is offered, but only for parties of three or more (and starts at \$20). The side-course *chorizo* (a spicy sausage) is excellent, and the Cuban sandwich (roast pork, ham, and cheese on

Finds **Worth a Trip**

A true foodie in Las Vegas should make a point of finding the nearest moving vehicle that can get them to **Rosemary's Restaurant** ★★, 8125 W. Sahara (☎ 702/869-2251). A 15-minute (or so) drive west on Sahara (hardly anything) is all it takes to eat what may well be the best food in town. The brainchild of Michael and Wendy Jordan, both veterans of the New Orleans food scene, Rosemary's Restaurant shows more than a few NOLA touches, from the food to the service, in a room that's warmer and more inviting than most others in Vegas.

The cuisine covers most regions of the U.S., though Southern influences dominate, and 50 local farmers help supply products. Interesting sides include ultra-rich bleu-cheese slaw, slightly spicy crispy fried tortilla strips, and perfect cornmeal jalapeño hush puppies, to say nothing of "Grandma's pickled cucumbers." A recent visit found the crispy striped bass fighting it out with the pan-seared honey-glazed salmon for "best fish dish I've ever had." Desserts are similarly Southern—lemon icebox pie!—and most pleasant. There is a nice little wine list with a broad range, and they also specialize, unusually, in beer suggestions to pair with courses, including some fruity Belgian numbers—a rare treat.

The restaurant is open Monday through Friday from 11:30am to 2:30pm for lunch and nightly from 5:30pm to 10:30pm for dinner. Main courses at lunch run \$12 to \$16, at dinner they're \$18 to \$29. Major credit cards are accepted and reservations are strongly suggested.

Note: Rosemary's Restaurant has a second location, Rosemary's at the Rio (☎ 702/777-2300), in the former Napa space at the Rio hotel. More convenient for most of you, but also slightly higher priced and with less directly American classic influenced dishes.

bread, which is then pressed and flattened out) is huge and tasty. For only \$3.50, the latter makes a fine change-of-pace meal.

1145 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/388-1906. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$6.50–\$10, paella (for 3) \$20. AE, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–9:30pm.

4 East of the Strip

In this section, we cover restaurants close by the Convention Center, along with those farther south on Paradise Road, Flamingo Road, and Tropicana Avenue.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Lawry's The Prime Rib ★★ ★ STEAK/SEAFOOD If you love prime rib, come here. If you could take or leave prime rib, Lawry's will turn you into a believer, because Lawry's does one thing, and it does it better than anyone else. Yes, you can get prime rib all over town for under \$5. But, to mix a food metaphor, that's a tuna fish sandwich when you can have caviar at Lawry's.

Eating at Lawry's is a ceremony, with all the parts played the same way for the last 60 years. You tell the waitress what side dishes you might want (sublime creamed spinach, baked potato, and so on) for an extra price. Later, she returns with a spinning salad bowl (think of salad preparation as a Busby Berkeley musical number). The bowl, resting on crushed ice, spins as she pours Lawry's special dressing in a stream from high over her head. Tomatoes garnish. Applause follows. Eventually, giant metal carving carts come to your table, bearing the meat. You name your cut (the regular Lawry's, the extra-large Diamond Jim Brady for serious carnivores, and the wimpy thin English cut), and specify how you'd like it cooked. It comes with terrific Yorkshire pudding, nicely browned and not soggy, and some creamed horseradish that is combined with fluffy whipped cream, simultaneously sweet and tart.

Flavorful, tender, perfectly cooked, and lightly seasoned, this will be the best prime rib you will ever have. Okay, maybe that's going too far, but the rest is accurate, honest. It just has to be tasted to be believed. You can finish off with a rich dessert (English trifle is highly recommended), but it almost seems pointless. Incidentally, the other Lawry's are decorated English-manor style, but the Vegas branch has instead tried to re-create a 1930s restaurant, with art-deco touches all around and big-band music on the sound system.

4043 Howard Hughes Pkwy. (at Flamingo Rd., between Paradise Rd. and Koval Lane). ☎ 702/893-2223. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$20–\$30. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

Pamplermousse ★ FRENCH A little bit off the beaten path, Pamplermousse is a long-established Vegas restaurant that shouldn't be overlooked in the crush of new high-profile eateries. The menu, which changes nightly, is recited by your waiter. The meal always

begins with a large complimentary basket of crudités (about 10 different crisp, fresh vegetables), a big bowl of olives, and, in a nice country touch, a basket of hard-boiled eggs. Recent menu offerings have included out-of-this-world soups (like French onion and cream of asparagus), and appetizers like shrimp in cognac cream sauce or Maryland crab cakes with a macadamia nut crust. Recommended entrees include a sterling veal with mushrooms and a Dijon sauce, and an even better rack of lamb with a pistachio nut crust and a rosemary cream sauce (all sauces, by the way, are made with whatever the chef has on hand that evening in the kitchen). That's not to mention fabulous desserts such as homemade ice cream in a hard chocolate shell.

400 E. Sahara Ave. (between Santa Paula and Santa Rita drives, just east of Paradise Rd.). ☎ 702/733-2066. Reservations required. Main courses \$18–\$26. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10:30pm; closed Mon except during major conventions and holidays.

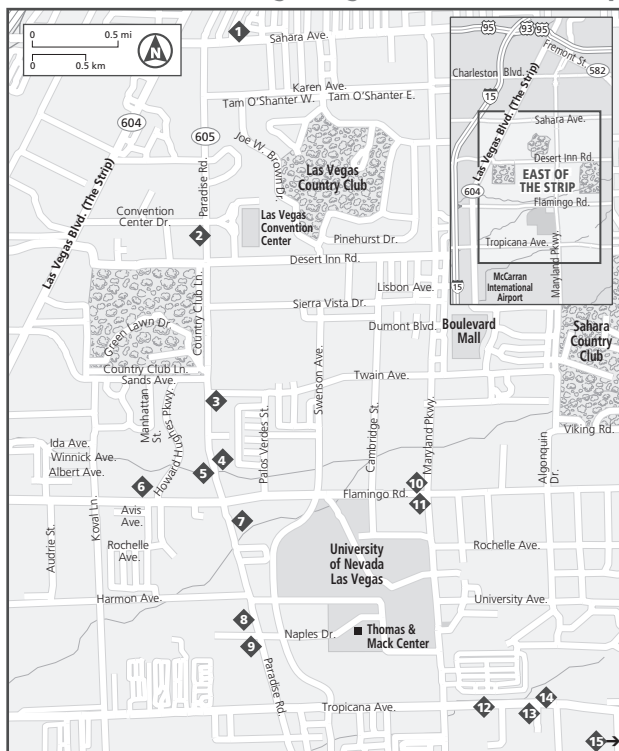
MODERATE

Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens ★ *(Finds* ITALIAN A bit of a drive, but well worth it for those seeking an authentic (read: dining in a restaurant that's been around more than 10 years) Vegas experience. This joint used to be owned by none other than the Rhinestone King himself, Liberace. See, it's formerly Liberace's Tivoli Gardens, and he designed the interior himself, so you know what that looks like (it was reopened a few years after his death and they kept the decor pretty much intact). This kind of history is more and more rare in this town with no memory, plus it's right next door to the Liberace Museum, no coincidence, so go pay your giggling respects in the late afternoon and then stop here for dinner. Expect traditional Italian food (pasta, pasta, pasta, and scampi).

1775 E. Tropicana Blvd. (at Spencer). ☎ 702/795-3236. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 4:30–10pm.

Gordon-Biersch Brewing Company ★ CALIFORNIA This is a traditional brewpub (exposed piping and ducts, but the place is still comfortable and casual), but it's worth going to for a nosh as well. The menu is pub fare meets California cuisine (kids will probably find the food too complicated), and naturally, there are a lot of beers (German-style lagers) to choose from. Appetizers include satays, potstickers, calamari, baby back ribs, delicious beer-battered onion rings, and amazing garlic-encrusted fries. A wood-burning pizza oven turns out pies with California-type toppings: eggplant, shrimp, and so forth. For lunch, there are various pastas, stir-fries,

Dining & Nightlife East of the Strip



RESTAURANTS

- Bougainvillea **7**
- Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens **12**
- Gordon-Biersch Brewing Company **5**
- Lawry's The Prime Rib **6**
- Leo's Deli **10**
- Mediterranean Café & Market **11**
- Memphis Championship Barbecue **15**
- Pamplemousse **1**
- Shalimar **4**

- Toto's **13**
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BUFFETS

- The Buffet at the Las Vegas Hilton **3**

NIGHTLIFE

- Icon **9**
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sandwiches, and salads. The dinner menu eliminates the sandwiches and adds rosemary chicken, steaks, fish items, and, just in case you forgot it was a brew pub-type joint, beer everything: beer-glazed ham, beer meatloaf, and beer-barbecued glazed ribs. Doesn't that make you want to order a glass of milk?

3987 Paradise Rd. (just north of Flamingo Rd.). ☎ 702/312-5247. Main courses \$11–\$16. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm; bar open until 2am daily.

Memphis Championship Barbecue ★★ BARBECUE Okay, we refuse, simply refuse, to get into the debate about Texas vs. Kansas City vs. Mississippi barbecue (and if you've got another state with the best dang barbecue, we really don't want to hear about it). But we can say that if you aren't physically in those places, eating at Memphis Championship Barbecue is hardly settling. Its vinegar-based sauce is sweet but has a kick. Food is cooked over mesquite applewood, and the meat falls off the bone just the way you want it to. Standouts include a pulled-barbecue-chicken sandwich, onion straws, and delicious mac and cheese. Note this special: a \$50 feast includes a rack of baby back ribs, three-fourths of a pork shoulder, $\frac{3}{4}$ pound of beef brisket, $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of hot links, a whole chicken, baked beans, coleslaw, rolls, cream corn, and fries. It feeds four; we think even if two of those four are teenage boys, you might have leftovers.

2250 E. Warm Springs Rd. (near 215 Fwy.). ☎ 702/260-6909. Reservations not required. Entrees \$8–\$17. Special barbecue dinner \$50 for 4 people. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm.

Shalimar INDIAN In a town full of buffet deals, it's hard to get excited about another one, but on the other hand, all those other buffet deals offer pretty much identical food: carving stations, various cafeteria hot dishes, and so forth. Here at Shalimar, a lunch buffet means about two dozen different North Indian-style dishes, all for about \$7.50. It's not as colorful or huge (in fact, it's just a table covered with steam trays) as those buffets up the street, but it is far more interesting. It's also a great deal and one of the first places to run to if you're sick of Strip food. Just ask the locals, who voted it their favorite ethnic restaurant in the *Las Vegas Review Journal's* annual poll.

In the Citibank Plaza, 3900 S. Paradise Rd. ☎ 702/796-0302. Reservations recommended. Lunch buffet \$7.50, main courses \$11–\$16 at dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; daily 5:30–10:30pm.

Z Tejas Grill ★ TEX-MEX This Austin, Texas-based restaurant's rather odd name came about because its original chef, a Frenchman, kept referring to it as “zee” Tejas Grill. Featuring self-proclaimed

“South by Southwestern” cuisine, it recently got a handsome makeover, lining the interior with streamlined warm woods and black accents. In particular, we like the generously portioned grilled-fish tacos, which come wrapped in fresh tortillas, stuffed with all kinds of veggies and served with a spicy Japanese sauce. Not your usual drippy, fattening tacos. Less of a bargain, but mighty tasty, is the tender and piquant black sesame tuna, with a black-peppercorn vinaigrette and a soy mustard sauce. (There’s a larger version of this found under the entrees; it’s called “Voodoo Tuna,” and it’s not quite as good.) A better main course would be the spicy-grilled Jamaican-jerk chicken, nuanced with lime and served with peanut sauce and rum-spiked coconut-banana ketchup; it comes with two side dishes—when we were there, garlic mashed potatoes and a corn casserole soufflé.

3824 Paradise Rd. (between Twain Ave. and Corporate Dr.). ☎ 702/732-1660. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.25–\$12 at lunch, \$8.75–\$17 at dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Bougainvillea ★★ (Value) COFFEE SHOP Oh, how we love a Vegas coffee shop. You got your all-day breakfasts, your graveyard-shift specials (10pm–8am, New York Steak and eggs for \$4.99), your prime rib, and, of course, your full Chinese menu. And it’s all hearty and well priced; we’re talkin’ build your own three-egg, three-ingredient omelet for \$4.99. You can get a full dinner entree, or a nice light lunch of a large half a sandwich and soup, also for \$4.99 (is that someone’s lucky number?). And 24-hour specials, which include a slab of meat, plus potato or rice, veggies, soup or salad, and a 12-ounce draft beer, run between \$7.99 and \$12.99. Yep. That’s the ticket.

4100 Paradise Rd. (in Terrible’s hotel). ☎ 702/733-7000. Entrees \$1.99–\$12.99. AE, MC, V. Daily 24 hr.

Leo’s Deli ★ (Finds) DELI Under new ownership, this basic, solid New York deli lacks the mammoth portions of the Stage Deli (though perhaps that’s a good thing), but also doesn’t charge the mammoth prices that the Stage does. And in many ways, it’s more authentic, from its revolving pastry case to the middle-aged waitresses who shout your order back to the kitchen to the clientele of classic Vegas characters. If you are lucky, you might sit next to a table full of dealers swapping war stories about their pit bosses. Don’t look for anything vegetarian here; instead, you got your pas-trami on rye, your matzo-ball soup, your chopped liver, your

tongue, your meatloaf, your lox and bagel, and so on. Desserts are a bit sparse for a deli, but you can't go wrong with the black-and-white cookies. Go ahead—have a nosh.

4055 S. Maryland Pkwy. (at Flamingo Rd.). ☎ 702/733-7827. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$7–\$12. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 9am–8pm; Sun 9am–4pm.

Mediterranean Café & Market ★ MEDITERRANEAN The emphasis on safe mainstream food for the masses in Vegas, means that the kind of ethnic places chowhound folks brag about discovering in big cities are rare indeed. And when you do find them, they are always, but always, in a strip mall. The Mediterranean Café is no exception, and its main dining room has no decor worth mentioning. But it gets extra points for having a courtyard seating area full of Middle Eastern touches and an honest-to-goodness hookah lounge. Plus, it's just so darn nice to find ethnic food in this town. Kabobs take, the menu warns, 25 minutes, so order an appetizer plate with various dips to while away the time. Hummus is too reminiscent of its chickpea origins, but baba ghanouj is properly smoky, and the falafel has the right crunch. Gyros may not be the most adventurous thing to order, but who cares about that when you've got a well-stuffed pocket of pita, gloopy with sweet yogurt sauce.

4147 S. Maryland Pkwy. (at Flamingo Rd., in the Tiffany Sq. strip mall). ☎ 702/731-6030. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$16 (all sandwiches under \$8). AE, DISC, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Sat 11am–9pm, Sun 11am–5pm; lounge Tues–Thurs 5pm–midnight, Fri–Sat 5pm–2am.

Toto's ★★ *Value* MEXICAN A family-style Mexican restaurant favored by locals, with enormous portions and quick service, this is good value for your money. With all that food, you could probably split portions and still be satisfied. Everything is quite tasty, and they don't skimp on the cheese. The nongreasy chips come with fresh salsa, and the nachos are terrific. Chicken tamales got a thumbs-up, while the veggie burrito was happily received by non-meat eaters (although it's not especially healthy, all the ingredients were fresh, with huge slices of zucchini and roasted bell peppers). The operative word here is *huge*; the burritos are almost the size of your arm. The generous portions continue with dessert—a piece of flan was practically pie-size. The Sunday margarita brunch is quite fun, and the drinks are large (naturally) and yummy.

2055 E. Tropicana Ave. ☎ 702/895-7923. Main courses \$6.25–\$14. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 9am–10pm.

5 Downtown

VERY EXPENSIVE

Andre's ★★ FRENCH Andre's has long been the bastion of gourmet dining in Vegas, but with all the new big boys crowding the Strip, it runs the risk of getting overlooked. It shouldn't—Andre may not have a show on the Food Network, but he ought to be a household name. Besides, his first restaurant—a celebrity haunt—still dominates Downtown. In a small, converted 1930s house, you find an elegant French provincial atmosphere, overseen by owner-chef Andre, who brings over 40 years of experience to the table. Much of the waitstaff is also French, but not the sort who give the French a bad name. They will happily lavish attention on you and guide you through the menu.

The food presentation is exquisite, and choices change seasonally. On a recent visit, an appetizer of Northwest smoked salmon *mille feuille* with cucumber salad and sevruga caviar was especially enjoyed, as was a main course of grilled provini veal tornados with chive sauce accompanied by a mushroom and foie gras crêpe. You get the idea. Desserts are similarly lovely, an exotic array of rich delights. An extensive wine list (more than 900 labels) is international in scope and includes many rare vintages; consult the sommelier.

Note: An additional branch of Andre's is in the **Monte Carlo Hotel & Casino**, 3775 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/798-7151), and is also highly recommended, as is the owner's slightly different take, **Alizé** (p. 69), in the new Palms hotel.

401 S. 6th St. (at Lewis St., 2 blocks south of Fremont St.). ☎ 702/385-5016. Reservations required. Main courses \$25–\$38. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat from 6pm; closing hours vary. Closed most Sun except during major conventions and holidays.

EXPENSIVE

Limericks Steakhouse ★ STEAK/SEAFOOD Decorated in the classic Olde English gentlemen's club style, Limericks is meant to be an oasis of gracious dining away from hectic casino life, and the overall effect is comforting and moderately womblike, particularly in the cozy booths at the back. Casino “ca-chings” still creep in, but it's not overly bothersome. The menu is classic, upscale steakhouse: beef, chops, some lobster, and chicken. The portions are Vegas-size (the small prime rib was 14 oz.), so bring an appetite (and a love of red meat). The filet mignon was tender enough to cut with a fork, while the lamb chops came with a pecan mustard glaze. Patrons who don't eat red meat might want to try the apricot

Downtown Dining



chicken. “Chef’s choice” desserts change nightly, and the wine list is good and extensive.

In Fitzgeralds Casino & Hotel, 301 Fremont St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ **702/388-2460**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$18–\$40. AE, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Mon 5pm–11pm.

Second Street Grill ★★ *(Finds)* **INTERNATIONAL/PACIFIC RIM** One of the better-kept secrets of Las Vegas, this is a Downtown jewel, a lovely bit of romantic, cozy class tucked away inside the Fremont Hotel, with excellent food to boot. There is hardly a misstep on the menu, from taste to beautiful presentation. To call this Hawaiian-influenced would be accurate, but don’t think of the “Polynesian” craze of the ’60s and ’70s—this is more like what you would find in a top-flight restaurant on the Big Island. You begin with warm sourdough bread accompanied by a garlic, eggplant, and olive oil dipping sauce. For starters, try the unusual lemon-chicken potstickers and the duck confit. Entrees include lobster, ahi tuna, and filet mignon, but the whole fish (opaka paka on a recent visit), served in a bowl with a giant tea-leaf lid, is the best bet. It comes

with sautéed mushrooms that will melt in your mouth. Other notable side dishes include some fabulous pesto mashed potatoes. Don't skip the Chocolate Explosion: a piece of chocolate cake topped with chocolate mousse, covered with a rich chocolate shell.

In the Fremont Hotel & Casino, 200 E. Fremont St. ☎ **702/385-3232**. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$17–\$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Mon and Thurs 6–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm.

INEXPENSIVE

El Sombrero Cafe ★★ MEXICAN This kind of hole-in-the-wall Mexican joint can be found all over California but not always so readily elsewhere. It's also the kind of family-run (since 1950) place increasingly forced out of Vegas by giant hotel conglomerates, making it even more worth your time (it's becoming harder and harder, particularly in Downtown, to find budget options that serve food that is more than just mere fuel). Mexican-food fans in particular should seek out this friendly place, though it's not in an attractive part of town. Portions are generous, better than average, and unexpectedly spicy. They also cater to special requests—changing the beef burrito to a chicken one (an option that comes highly recommended), for example, without batting an eyelash. The enchilada and taco combo also won raves.

807 S. Main St. ☎ **702/382-9234**. Everything under \$10. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–9:30pm.

6 Buffets & Sunday Brunches

Lavish, low-priced buffets are a Las Vegas tradition, designed to lure you to the gaming tables, and to make you feel that you got such a bargain for your meal you can afford to drop more money. They're a gimmick, and we love them. Something about filling up on too much prime rib and shrimp just says "Vegas" to us. Of course, there is quite a range. Some are just perfunctory steam-table displays and salad bars that are heavy on the iceberg lettuce, while others are unbelievably opulent spreads with caviar and free-flowing champagne. Some are quite beautifully presented, as well. Some of the food is awful, some of it merely works as fuel, and some of it is memorable.

Note: Buffet meals are extremely popular, and reservations are usually not taken (we've indicated when they are accepted, and in all those cases, they are highly recommended). Arrive early (before opening) or late to avoid a long line, especially on weekends.

SOUTH STRIP

MODERATE

Mandalay Bay's Bay Side Buffet ★ BUFFET This is a particularly pretty, not overly large buffet. Actual windows, floor to ceiling, no less, overlooking the beach part of the elaborate pool area, make it less stuffy and eliminate that closed-in feeling that so many of the other buffets in town have. The buffet itself is adequately arranged but features nothing particularly special, though there are some nice cold salads, hearty meats, and a larger and better-than-average dessert bar (they make their own desserts, and it shows).

3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/632-7402**. Breakfast \$13, lunch \$15, dinner \$23, Sun brunch \$23. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Spice Market Buffet ★ BUFFET A particularly good buffet, if not perhaps quite good enough to justify the price (though the range of food was large enough to please just about anyone). Come for lunch, as a more affordable compromise, and you can take advantage of the better-than-average salads (they had one with white balsamic vinegar on our last visit that was quite good), plus an especially notable Mexican station, Middle Eastern specialties, and other fun goodies. **Note:** This all may change as new owner Planet Hollywood revamps the Aladdin.

In the Aladdin, 3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/785-9005**. Breakfast \$11.99, lunch \$13.99, dinner \$19.99, champagne brunch \$17.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 8–10:30am, 11am–2pm, 4–9:30pm; Sat–Sun brunch 8:30am–2:30pm and 4–9:30pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Excalibur's Round Table Buffet ★ BUFFET This one strikes the perfect balance of cheap prices, forgettable decor, and adequate food. It's what you want in a cheap Vegas buffet. But they don't always have mashed potatoes or macaroni salad, which are essential for an archetypal buffet. The plates are large, so you don't have to make as many trips to the buffet tables.

3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/597-7777**. Breakfast \$8.99, lunch \$9.99, dinner \$11.49, Sun champagne brunch \$9.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6:30am–10pm (Fri–Sat until 11pm).

Luxor's Pharaoh's Pheast Buffet ★★ BUFFET Located on the hotel's lower level, this huge buffet looks like it was set in the middle of an archaeological dig, complete with wood braces holding up the ceiling, pot shards, papyrus, sarcophagi, and servers dressed in khaki-dig outfits. It's a unique and fun decor. The food is the best in its price range, and one of the top ones in town. There's

a Mexican station with some genuinely spicy food, a Chinese stir-fry station, and different Italian pastas. Desserts were disappointing, though they do offer a pretty large selection of diabetic-friendly options. Word has probably gotten out, unfortunately, because the lines are always enormous.

3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/262-4000**. Breakfast \$9.49, lunch \$9.99, dinner \$15.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6:30am–11pm.

MGM Grand Buffet ★ BUFFET This rather average buffet does feature a fresh Belgian waffle station at breakfast. Dinner also has an all-you-can-eat shrimp and prime-rib option. Also available: low-fat, sugar-free desserts! And at all meals, you get a full pot of coffee on your table.

3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/891-7777**. Breakfast \$9.99, lunch \$10.99, dinner \$17.99; reduced prices for children under 10, free for children under 4. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Monte Carlo Buffet ★ BUFFET A “courtyard” under a painted sky, the Monte Carlo’s buffet room has a Moroccan market theme, with murals of Arab scenes, Moorish archways, Oriental carpets, and walls hung with photographs of, and artifacts from, Morocco. Dinner includes a rotisserie (for chicken and pork loin, or London broil), a Chinese food station, a taco/fajita bar, a baked potato bar, numerous salads, and more than a dozen desserts, plus frozen yogurt and ice-cream machines. Lunches are similar. At breakfast, the expected fare is supplemented by an omelet station, and choices include crepes, blintzes, and corned-beef hash. Fresh-baked New York-style bagels are a plus.

3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/730-7777**. Breakfast \$9.49, lunch \$9.99, dinner \$14, Sun brunch \$15. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

MID-STRIP

VERY EXPENSIVE

Bally’s Sterling Sunday Brunch ★★ BUFFET Now, the admittedly high cost of this brunch seems antithetical to the original purpose of a buffet, which was a lot of food for minimal money. However, if you’re a dedicated buffet fan, this is probably a better spree than one of the many new high-priced restaurants. It works out to less money in the long run, and you will get, for your purposes, more bang for your buck. It’s a fancy deal—linen and silver-bedecked tables, waiters to assist you if you choose—and while the variety of food isn’t as massive as at regular buffets, the quality is much higher in terms of both content and execution. We’re talking

unlimited champagne, broiled lobster, caviar, sushi, and rotating dishes of the day (monkfish with pomegranate essence, tenderloin wrapped in porcini mushroom mousse, or even ostrich). No French toast that's been sitting out for days here! Perfect for a wedding breakfast or business brunch or just a big treat; stay a long time and eat as much as you can.

3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/967-7999. Reservations recommended. Brunch \$53. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun 9:30am–2:30pm.

EXPENSIVE

Bellagio Buffet ★★ BUFFET Though even pricier than its counterpart over at The Mirage, the Bellagio buffet gets nearly as high marks. The array of foods is fabulous, with one ethnic cuisine after another (Japanese, Chinese that includes unexpected buffet fare like dim sum, build-it-yourself Mexican items, etc.). There are elaborate pastas and semitraditional Italian-style pizza from a wood-fired oven. The cold fish appetizers at each end of the line are not to be missed—scallops, smoked salmon, crab claws, shrimp, oysters, and assorted condiments. Specialties include breast of duck and game hens. There is no carving station, but you can get the meat pre-carved. The salad bar is more ordinary, though prepared salads have some fine surprises, such as eggplant tofu and an exceptional Chinese chicken salad. Desserts, unfortunately, look better than they actually are.

3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/987-6667. Breakfast \$13, lunch \$16, dinner Sun–Thurs \$25, dinner Fri–Sat \$32, Sat–Sun brunch \$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Breakfast Mon–Fri 8–10:30am; lunch Mon–Fri 11am–3:30pm; dinner Mon–Thurs 4–10pm, Fri–Sat 4–11pm, Sun 4:30–10pm; brunch Sat–Sun 8am–4pm.

Paris, Le Village Buffet ★★★ BUFFET We don't like this trend of increasingly less-bargain-priced buffets, but we have to admit the fine assortment of food here offers more value for the dollar than you are likely to find anywhere else. Plus, the Paris buffet is housed in the most pleasing room of the buffet bunch. Serving stations are offered up according to various regions in France (Provence, Alsace, Burgundy, and so forth) featuring dishes you don't find at your run-of-the-mill buffet, such as chicken mushroom vol au vent and bay scallops with apple cider vinaigrette. There are special sauces (chateaubriand, cherry escoffier, and so on) for the roast meats. And it's all pretty darn good. Yes, there is quiche, plus fresh bread and cheese. The desserts, alas, are stuck in the doldrums.

3665 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/266-5687. Breakfast \$12, lunch \$17, dinner \$22, Sun brunch \$22. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7am–10pm, Fri–Sat 7am–11pm.

MODERATE

Harrah's Fresh Market Buffet ★ BUFFET The theme here is farmers market, which means lots of big sculptures of fresh fruits and vegetables, if not actual fresh fruits and vegetables. It follows the new trend of various food stations, as opposed to one long buffet. You'll find seafood, pasta, Mexican, Asian, and American specialties ranging from meatloaf to Cajun entrees. Above-average food combined with an extremely friendly staff makes this one of the better buffet choices.

3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/369-5000**. Breakfast \$8.99, lunch \$9.99, brunch \$15, dinner \$14.99, Sat–Sun champagne brunch \$14.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Mirage Buffet ★★ BUFFET Until recently, The Mirage's buffet was one of the higher priced in town, but also one of the most reliable in terms of food quality. It's been eclipsed in the former category, but still holds true in the latter. The ubiquitous carving station is complimented by a fajita station, an Asian station, and a pasta station. The pasta station features made-to-order sauces, starting with either a cream or tomato base. Note the standout salad bar, which features surprises like hummus, baba ghanouj, and couscous, plus a variety of veggie-intensive dishes. And there's gefilte fish, which is not something commonly seen on a Vegas buffet. Put your plate-loading emphasis on the salad bar, with some selections from the aforementioned special stations. Desserts are also better than the foam-rubber average, including bread pudding, chewy peanut-butter cookies, and an unexpectedly intense chocolate mousse.

3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/791-7111**. Breakfast \$9.50, lunch \$11, dinner \$15, Sun brunch \$15; reduced prices for children ages 5–10, free for children under 5. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Flamingo Paradise Garden Buffet ★ BUFFET The buffet's tropical interior, formerly one of the most pleasant in Las Vegas, is clean and tidy but showing some wear. At dinner, there is an extensive international food station (which changes monthly) presenting French, Chinese, Mexican, German, or Italian specialties. A large salad bar, fresh fruits, pastas, vegetables, potato dishes, and a vast dessert display round out the offerings. Lunch is similar, featuring a mix of international cuisines as well as a stir-fry station and a soup/salad/pasta bar. At breakfast, you'll find all the expected fare, including a made-to-order omelet station and fresh-baked breads. The seafood is dry and tough, and desserts uninspired. Drinks are

unlimited, of course, but are served in small glasses, so expect to call your server for many refills.

3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/733-3111**. Champagne breakfast/brunch \$8.75, lunch/dinner \$9.95. Prices may be higher on holidays. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily breakfast 6–11:30am; lunch 11:30am–2:30pm; dinner 4:30–10pm.

Palms Festival Market Buffet ★★ *Finds* BUFFET Not only does this buffet look rather swell, but it has some fresher concepts at the stations, most notably an emphasis on Middle Eastern fare such as gyros with warm pita bread, hummus, baba ghanouj, and kabobs of every variety. Plus there's a huge Chinese station complete with dumplings, a Mongolian barbecue section (where they toss all your chosen ingredients in one stir-fry vat), some "Jewish" foods (knishes and kugel), an ambitious carving station with ribs and pastrami, and desserts that, as usual, aren't much of anything. And actually, this comes for close-to-classic-buffet budget prices—while still supplying food that can be described as better than "merely edible."

4321 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ **702/942-7777**. Breakfast \$5.99, lunch \$6.99, dinner \$10.99, Sun brunch \$10.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

Rio's Carnival World Buffet ★★ BUFFET This buffet has often been voted by locals as the best in town. We don't agree—it's possible that it's been riding on its reputation—but it is still a cut and more above basic buffet offerings. The buffet looks like an upscale food court, with stir-fries, Mexican taco fixings and accompaniments, Chinese fare, a Japanese sushi bar and teppanyaki grill, a Brazilian mixed grill, Italian pasta and antipasto, and fish and chips. There's even a diner setup for hot dogs, burgers, fries, and milkshakes. All this is in addition to the usual offerings of most Las Vegas buffets. An array of oven-fresh cakes, pies, and pastries (including sugar-free and low-fat desserts) is arranged in a palm-fringed circular display area, and there's also a make-your-own sundae bar.

3700 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ **702/252-7777**. Breakfast \$9.99, lunch \$11.99, dinner \$16.99, Sat–Sun champagne brunch \$16.99. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

Treasure Island Buffet ★ BUFFET This buffet is served in two internationally themed rooms. The American room, under a central rough-hewn beamed canopy hung with the flags of the 13 colonies, re-creates New Orleans during the era of Jean Lafitte. And the Italian room, modeled after a Tuscan villa overlooking a bustling piazza, has strings of festival lights overhead and food displays under a striped awning. Both rooms serve identical fare, including extensive American breakfasts. Dinners offer a Chinese food station, peel-and-eat

shrimp, a salad bar, potato and rice side dishes, cheeses and cold cuts, fresh fruits and vegetables, breads, and a large choice of desserts. Lunch is similar, and Sunday brunch includes unlimited champagne. 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/894-7111**. Breakfast \$7.99, lunch \$8.99, dinner \$12.99, Sun brunch \$12.99. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

EAST OF THE STRIP

MODERATE

The Buffet at the Las Vegas Hilton ★ BUFFET The buffet space at the Hilton was renovated just a bit ago and is now a surprisingly stylish looking room, with the usual suspects (salad bar, bagel bar, desserts) and a good selection of Chinese food (including Peking duck). The fare is fresh and delicious, with special mention going to the prime rib and the outstanding cream puffs and superior rice pudding (it's hard to find good desserts at Vegas buffets). Dinner additionally features all-you-can-eat crab and shrimp. The Friday-night seafood selection is particularly large and palatable.

3000 Paradise Rd. ☎ **702/732-5111**. Breakfast \$8.99, lunch \$9.99, dinner \$13.99, weekend brunch \$12.99 (includes unlimited champagne); half price for children age 12 and under. DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–2:30pm and 5–10pm; Sat–Sun 8am–2:30pm and 5–10pm.

DOWNTOWN

MODERATE

Golden Nugget Buffet ★★ BUFFET This buffet has often been voted number one in Las Vegas. Most of the seating is in plush booths. The buffet tables are laden with an extensive salad bar (about 50 items), fresh fruit, and marvelous desserts, including the famous bread pudding made from the secret recipe of Zelma Wynn (Steve's mom). Fresh seafood is featured every night. Most lavish is the all-day Sunday champagne brunch, which adds such dishes as eggs Benedict, blintzes, pancakes, creamed herring, and smoked fish with bagels and cream cheese.

129 E. Fremont St. ☎ **702/385-7111**. Breakfast \$6.75, lunch \$7.75, dinner \$12, Sun brunch \$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–3pm and 4–10pm; Sun 7am–10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Fremont Paradise Buffet ★ BUFFET This buffet is served in a tropically-themed room. Diners sit in spacious booths amid lots of jungle foliage—birds of paradise, palms, and bright tropical blooms. On Sunday, Tuesday, and Friday nights, the buffet is renamed the Seafood Fantasy, and food tables are laden with lobster claws, crab legs, shrimp, raw oysters, smoked salmon, clams, and entrees such

as steamed mussels, shrimp scampi, and scallops Provençale—all in addition to the usual meat carving stations and a few non-seafood entrees. It's great! And finally, the Fremont has a delightful champagne Sunday brunch served by "island girls" in colorful Polynesian garb. It includes not only unlimited champagne, but a full carving station, lox with bagels and cream cheese, an omelet station, and desserts.

200 E. Fremont St. ☎ 702/385-3232. Breakfast \$5, lunch \$6.50, dinner \$10, Seafood Fantasy \$15, Sun brunch \$9. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10:30am and 11am–3pm; Mon and Wed–Thurs 4–10pm; Fri–Sat 4–11pm; Sun 7am–3pm; Seafood Fantasy Sun and Tues 4–10pm.

Main Street Station Garden Court ★★ ★ *(Finds)* BUFFET Set in what is truly one of the prettiest buffet spaces in town (and certainly in Downtown), with very high ceilings and tall windows bringing in much-needed natural light, the Main Street Station Garden Court buffet is one of the best in town, let alone Downtown. It features nine live-action stations (meaning you can watch your food being prepared), including a wood-fired, brick-oven pizza (delicious); many fresh salsas at the Mexican station; a barbecue rotisserie; fresh sausage at the carving station; Chinese, Hawaiian, and Southern specialties (soul food and the like); and so many more we lost count. On Friday night they have all this plus nearly infinite varieties of seafood all the way up to lobster. We ate ourselves into a stupor and didn't regret it.

200 N. Main St. ☎ 702/387-1896. Breakfast \$5, lunch \$7, dinner \$10, Fri seafood buffet \$14, Sat–Sun champagne brunch \$9; free for children 3 and under. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7–10:30am, 11am–3pm, 4–10pm.

What to See & Do in Las Vegas

You aren't going to lack for things to do in Las Vegas. More than likely, you've come here for the gambling, which should keep you pretty busy (we say that with some understatement). But you can't sit at a slot machine forever. (Or maybe you can.) In any event, it shouldn't be too hard to find ways to fill your time between poker hands.

Just walking on the Strip and gazing at the gaudy, garish, absurd wonder of it all can occupy quite a lot of time. This is the number-one activity we recommend in Vegas; at night, it is a mind-boggling sight. And, of course, there are shows and plenty of other nighttime entertainment. But if you need something else to do beyond resting up at your hotel's pool, or if you are trying to amuse yourself while the rest of your party gambles away, this chapter will guide you.

Don't forget to check out the **free hotel attractions**, such as Bellagio's water-fountain ballet, The Mirage's volcano, and the masquerade show at the Rio. **Note:** Treasure Island's pirate show, alas, has walked the plank and will be replaced with another "sexier" (but still free) outdoor production, *The Sirens of TI*, in fall 2003.

1 The Top Attractions

See also the listings for theme parks and other fun stuff in section 3, "Especially for Kids."

The Arts Factory ★★ *(Finds)* Believe it or not, Las Vegas has a burgeoning art scene (what some would consider soul-crushing is what others consider inspirational), and this complex, located in the Gateway district, is the place to find proof. It features a few galleries and a number of workspaces for local artists. Several of the spaces are closed to the public. On the first Friday of each month, they have a party event (unimaginatively named "First Friday") showcasing local artists and arts-oriented businesses, with live music, street

performances, and other entertainment and activities. Go to their website for further details.

101–109 E. Charleston Blvd. ☎ 702/676-1111. www.theartsfactory.com. Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri noon–5pm and by appointment.

Auto Collections at the Imperial Palace ★★ Even if you're not a car person, don't assume you won't be interested in this premier collection of antique, classic, and special-interest vehicles. There's more here than just cars and trucks. Check out the graceful lines and handsome sculpture of one of the many Model J Duesenbergs (one of which Elvis Presley drove in the movie *Spinout*). The craftsmanship and attention to detail make these cars, and others here, true works of art.

Note that the vehicles on display change regularly, so there's no telling what you may see when you visit. However, the last time we were here we saw a great deal of history. Down President's Row we saw JFK's 1962 "bubbletop" Lincoln Continental, Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Cadillac, Eisenhower's 1952 Chrysler Imperial 20-foot-long parade car, Truman's 1950 Lincoln Cosmopolitan with gold-plated interior, FDR's unrestored 1936 V-16 Cadillac, and Herbert Hoover's 1929 Cadillac.

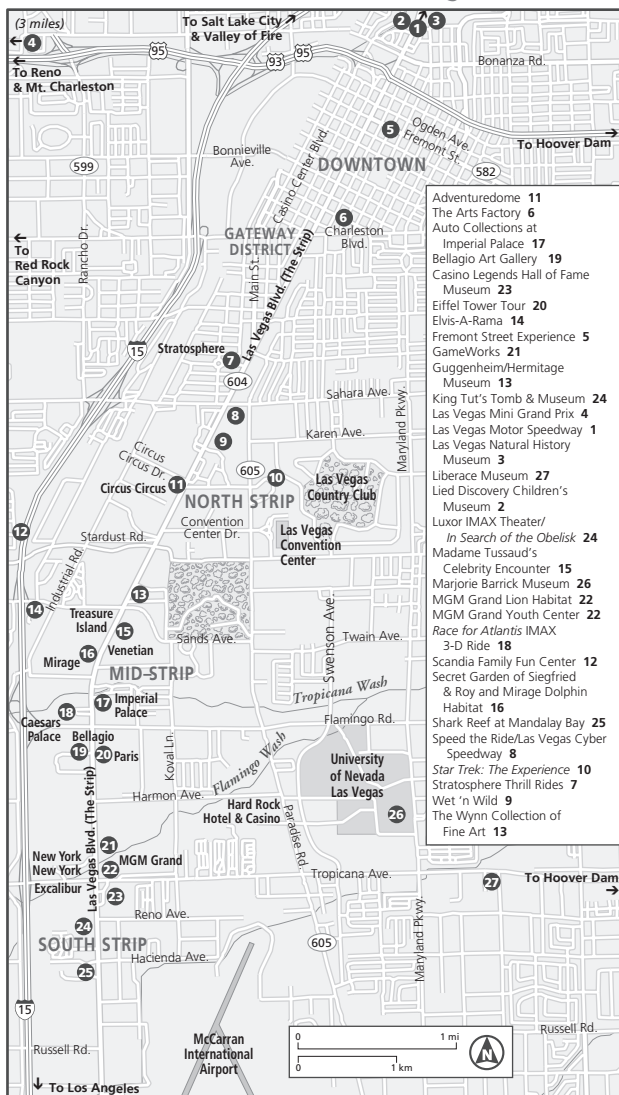
Other highlights are the 1959 Cadillac Fleetwood Special 60 driven by Marilyn Monroe in *The Misfits*; Al Capone's 1930 V-16 Cadillac; a 1954 Mercedes-Benz 220 Cabriolet currently owned by Wayne Newton; the 1967 Ford Mustang Fastback driven by Nicolas Cage in *Gone in 60 Seconds*; Howard Hughes's 1954 Chrysler (because of his phobia about germs, Hughes installed a special air-purification system that cost more than the car itself!), and a 1933 Pierce Silver Arrow, one of only three still in existence today.

In the Imperial Palace hotel, 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/794-3174. www.autocollections.com. Admission \$6.95 adults, \$3 seniors and children under 12, free for children under 4 and AAA members. Check website for free-admission coupon. Daily 9:30am–9:30pm.

Bellagio Art Gallery ★ Everyone—ourselves not nearly least among them—scoffed when then-Bellagio owner Steve Wynn opened an art gallery on his new fabulous property. After all, who would go see ART in Las Vegas? Tons of tourists, as it happens—so many that they had to almost immediately relocate the gallery to a larger space.

But then MGM MIRAGE bought Wynn's empire, and the future of the gallery, which did rely on his collection (he took most of it with him), was in doubt. Surprise again, you scoffers (and that again

Las Vegas Attractions



includes us). The Gallery is not only open again, it's getting written up by real art critics, thanks in part to well-chosen shows like an exhibit from the collection of none other than Steve Martin—yes, we mean the stand-up-comedian-turned-actor-turned-playwright/author.

Now, will there be as interesting a show up when you go? Beats us. When we wrote this, there was an acclaimed exhibit of European masterpieces, silver, gold, jewelry, furniture, and rare books on loan from England's famous Chatsworth manor. Then there's that ticket price: Do let us point out that the Louvre and the Vatican art collections, both of which are, needless to say, quite a bit larger and both of which, one can safely say, do have some notable works, cost around \$9.

In Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/693-7871**. Reservations suggested, but walk-ins taken every 15 min. Admission \$15 adults, \$12 seniors, students with ID, and Nevada residents. Daily 9am–9pm.

Casino Legends Hall of Fame Museum ★ *Finds* A substantial and fascinating collection of gaming memorabilia (chips, cards, dice, even swizzle sticks, from long-gone and current hotels), photographs (the original Flamingo surrounded by nothing but desert, for example), videos, displays, and minitributes to the people and professions that made and make Las Vegas what it is. Over 150,000 items make this the largest collection of its kind in the world. Provided that this kind of history interests you, this shouldn't be missed. The hotel's free slot-pull area and local magazines often offer free passes. A large gift shop is attached where you can buy all sorts of collectibles—even slot machines. **Note:** With the hotel's future in jeopardy, so is this collection's. Let's hope that if it has to close here, it gets picked up elsewhere.

In the Tropicana, 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/739-5444**. Admission \$6.95, seniors \$5.95. You must be 18 to enter. Daily 9am–9pm.

Eiffel Tower Tour *Overrated* Whether this is worth the dough depends on how much you like views. An elevator operator (we refuse to call them guides) delivers a few facts about this Eiffel Tower (this is a half-size exact replica down to the paint color of the original) during the minute or so ride to the uppermost platform, where you are welcome to stand around and look out for as long as you want, which probably isn't 2 hours, the length of the average movie, which also costs \$9. Nice view, though.

In Paris Las Vegas, 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/946-7000**. Admission Mon–Thurs \$9 adults, \$7 seniors over 65 and children 6–12, free for children under 6; Fri–Sun \$12 adults, \$9 seniors over 65 and children 6–12. Daily 10am–midnight, weather permitting.

Elvis-A-Rama ★ Three million dollars worth of Elvis memorabilia—we thought surely this place would give our beloved Liberace museum a run for its top spot in our camp-lovin’ hearts. But alas, while this is a must for the Elvis faithful (and admittedly, they are legion) looking to view holy relics, it’s not the place for a novice to start.

The amount of cool stuff is amazing: Elvis ephemera ranging from his Social Security card (a \$14,000 auction purchase) to his “little black book” (entries not divulged, darn it!), his Army uniform, a love letter to his hometown girlfriend, fan-club souvenirs (Elvis lipstick!), and on and on it goes. But alas, these precious (and discarded) possessions are exhibited in cases that, as of this writing, are lacking much-needed labels and identification, so all too often you have no idea what you’re looking at, much less its significance. The displays also don’t precisely give you a good view of the King’s life; it assumes you already know the highlights (Mamma’s boy, the Colonel, ‘Scilla), and it’s hardly complete. Despite our morbid hopes for prescription-pill bottles, there was nary a mention of Dr. Nick nor even The Death. There is, however, a whole case displaying what amounts to the contents of Vernon Presley’s wallet. It’s also all a little too straight-faced and reverent, though the gift shop makes up for it a bit. All in all, best for fans thinking, “You know, I really *should* brush up on my Elvis-iania.”

3401 Industrial Rd. ☎ **702/309-7200**. www.elvisarama.com. Admission \$9.95 adults, \$7.95 seniors, students with ID, and Nevada residents; free for kids under 12. Daily 10am–6pm. Call for free shuttle bus.

Fremont Street Experience ★★ For some years, Downtown Vegas has been losing ground to the Strip. But thanks to a \$70-million revitalization project, that’s starting to change. Fremont Street, the heart of “Glitter Gulch,” has been closed off and turned into a pedestrian mall. The Fremont Street Experience is a 5-block open-air pedestrian mall, a landscaped strip of outdoor cafes, vendor carts, and colorful kiosks purveying food and merchandise. Overhead is a 90-foot-high steel-mesh “celestial vault;” at night, it is the **Sky Parade**, a high-tech light-and-laser show (the canopy is equipped with more than 2.1 million lights) enhanced by a concert-hall-quality sound system, which takes place four times nightly. But there’s music between shows, as well. Not only does the canopy provide shade, it cools the area through a misting system in summer and warms you with radiant heaters in winter. The difference this makes cannot be overemphasized; what was once a 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. Some rightly mourn the passing of cruising Glitter Gulch, gawking at the original lights. It does indeed mean the end of classic Las Vegas, but on the other hand, classic Las Vegas was dead and nearly buried anyway. This has given a second life to a deserving neighborhood.

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 is the horse and rider from the old Hacienda, which presently rides the sky over the intersection of Fremont Street and Las Vegas Boulevard. Eventually, the Neon Museum hopes to have an indoor installation a couple of blocks from the Fremont Street Experience to showcase some of the smaller signs they have collected. It's uncertain when it will open, but in the meantime the Neon Graveyard is there and it's amusing to see the (unlit, of course) old signs languishing away until they once again get lit up in their glittery glory.

Fremont St. (between Main St. and Las Vegas Blvd.), Downtown. www.vegasexperience.com. Free admission. Shows nightly.

GameWorks ★★ What do you get when Steven Spielberg and his DreamWorks team get in on the arcade video-game action? Grown-up state-of-the-art fun. High-tech movie magic has taken over all sorts of traditional arcade games and turned them interactive, from a virtual-reality batting cage to a *Jurassic Park* game that lets you hunt dinosaurs. There are motion-simulator rides galore and even actual-motion activities like rock climbing. But classic games, from Pac-Man to pool tables, are here too.

All this doesn't exactly come cheap. There are two routes to pricing. First is the standard version where \$15 gets you \$15 in game play, \$20 gets you \$25, or \$25 gets you \$35. Alternatively, you can purchase a block of time (\$20 for 1 hr., \$25 for 2 hr., \$27 for 3 hr.; or if you get there at opening or closing you get 2 hr. for \$20), which goes on a debit card that you then insert into the various machines to activate them. But you do get value for your money, which makes this a viable alternative to casinos, particularly if you have children (though it's clearly geared toward a college-age-and-older demographic). Children probably should be 10 years old and

up—any younger and parents will need to stand over them, rather than go off and have considerable fun on their own. **Note:** If you don't like crowds, come here earlier rather than later when it can get packed.

In the Showcase Mall, 3785 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/432-GAME**. www.gameworks.com. See game prices listed above in the review. Sun–Thurs 10am–midnight; Fri–Sat 10am–2am. Hours may vary.

Guggenheim/Hermitage Museum ★★ The Guggenheim/Hermitage, is the first co-venture between the Guggenheim and the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The State Hermitage in St. Petersburg has one of the finest encyclopedic collections in the world, but few have had a chance to experience any of it. Unfortunately, the exhibit here at press time was of American pop icons. We're not really sure how the Hermitage collection figures into that, fond as we are of that particular moment in modern art, so we do rather hope that future exhibits feature more of those masterworks rarely, if ever, seen outside of Russia. After all, price-wise too, we note again that both the Louvre and the Vatican come considerably cheaper (well, once you pay to fly there) and offer quite a bit more.

In The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **866/484-4849**. \$15 adults, \$12 seniors and Nevada residents, \$11 students with ID, \$7 children 6–12, free for children under 6. Daily 9:30am–8:30pm.

King Tut's Tomb & Museum ★ This full-scale reproduction of King Tutankhamen's tomb includes the antechamber, annex, burial chamber, and treasury housing replicas of the glittering inventory discovered by archaeologists Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon in the Valley of Kings at Luxor in 1922. It was all handcrafted in Egypt by artisans using historically correct gold leaf and linens, pigments, tools, and ancient methods, and all items have been meticulously positioned according to Carter's records. It's hardly like seeing the real thing, but if you aren't going to Egypt any time soon, perhaps checking out reproductions isn't a bad idea—and for a Vegas fake, it's surprisingly enjoyable. A 4-minute introductory film precedes a 15-minute audio tour (available in English, French, Spanish, and Japanese).

In the Luxor Las Vegas, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/262-4000**. Admission \$5. Sun–Thurs 9am–11pm; Fri–Sat 9am–midnight.

Las Vegas Motor Speedway ★★ This 107,000-seat facility was the first new super-speedway to be built in the Southwest in over 2 decades. A \$100-million state-of-the-art motor-sports entertainment

complex, it includes a 1½-mile super-speedway, a 2½-mile FIA-approved road course, paved and dirt short-track ovals, and a 4,000-foot drag strip. Also on the property are facilities for Go-Kart, Legends Car, Sand Drag, and Motocross competition. The new speedway is accessible via shuttle buses to and from the Imperial Palace hotel, though some of the other major hotels have their own shuttles to the Speedway.

7000 Las Vegas Blvd. N., directly across from Nellis Air Force base (take I-15 north to Speedway, exit 54). ☎ 702/644-4443 for ticket information. www.lvms.com. Tickets \$10–\$75 (higher prices for major events).

Liberace Museum ★★☆☆ *(Moments)* You can keep your Louvres and Vaticans and Smithsonians; *this* is a museum. Housed, like everything else in Vegas, in a strip mall, this is a shrine to the glory and excess that was the art project known as Liberace. You've got your costumes (bejeweled), your many cars (bejeweled), your many pianos (bejeweled), and many jewels (also bejeweled). It just shows what can be bought with lots of money and no taste.

The thing is, Liberace was in on the joke (we think). The people who come here largely aren't. They idolize the-man-the-myth. Not found here is any reference to AIDS or chauffeurs who had plastic surgery to look more like him. But you will find a Czar Nicholas uniform with 22-karat-gold braiding and a blue velvet cape styled after the coronation robes of King George V and covered with \$60,000 worth of rare chinchilla not to mention a 50.6-pound rhinestone costing \$50,000, the world's largest, presented to him by the grateful (we bet they were) Austrian firm that supplied all his costume stones. The gift shop has plenty of rhinestone-covered objects plus countless Liberace knickknacks of increasing tackiness.

The museum is now better than ever thanks to a costly renovation that turned what was once a too-low-key exhibition (especially given the subject matter) into something much more gaudy and over the top—and, better still, properly enshrined. Expect a ridiculously outrageous entrance (three words: giant pink piano) into rooms with various exhibits that finally give detailed attention to facts and figures. Admission has been cranked up, probably to pay for the renovations, but we don't mind—this is a one-of-a-kind place. Unless you have a severely underdeveloped appreciation for camp or take your museum-going very seriously, you shouldn't miss it.

1775 E. Tropicana Ave. (at Spencer St.). ☎ 702/798-5595. www.liberace.org. Admission \$12 adults, \$8 seniors over 64 and students, free for children under 6. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–4pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Dec 25, and Jan 1.

Luxor IMAX Theater/*In Search of the Obelisk* ★ *Kids* This is a state-of-the-art theater that offers both motion-simulator films and IMAX projects, some in standard two dimensions, and one in 3-D. The glasses for the latter are really cool headsets that include built-in speakers, bringing certain sounds right into your head (though they're a little too heavy for comfort). The movies change periodically but always include some extraordinary special effects. If you have a fear of heights, make sure to ask for a seat on one of the lower levels.

In Search of the Obelisk is a motion-simulator ride encompassing an action adventure involving a chase sequence inside a pyramid. Two other less-Egyptian-theme-tie-in simulator rides that also play at the Luxor are *Fun House Express* and *Dracula's Haunted Castle* (neither as good as the first ride).

In Luxor Las Vegas, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/262-4000. Admission \$8.95 and up, prices vary depending on the movie; \$7 for *In Search of the Obelisk*; \$6 for IMAX Ridefilm (both episodes). Can be purchased as part of an all-attractions package for \$24. Sun–Thurs 9am–11pm; Fri–Sat 9am–midnight. IMAX show times vary depending on the length of the film.

Madame Tussaud's Celebrity Encounter ★ *Kids* Madame Tussaud's waxworks exhibition has been the top London attraction for nearly 2 centuries, so even if you aren't a fan of wax museums, this, its sole branch west of the Atlantic, is probably worth a stop—if you can stomach the price. Figures here are state-of-the-art, painstakingly constructed to perfectly match the original person. (Truth be told, though some are nearly identical to their living counterparts—Brad Pitt gave us a start—others look about as much like the celebrity in question as a department store mannequin.) There's no Chamber of Horrors, but the exhibit makes up for it, because all the waxworks are free-standing, allowing, and indeed encouraging, guests to get up close and personal. (Go ahead, lay your cheek next to Elvis's or Sinatra's and have your photo taken. You know you want to.) The emphasis here is on film, television, music, and sports celebrities, plus some Vegas icons, who are housed in five themed rooms ("Sports Arena," for example). There's also a behind-the-scenes look at the lengthy process involved in creating just one of these figures.

3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/990-3530. Admission \$19 adults, \$14 seniors and Nevada residents, \$9.95 children 6–12, children 5 and under free. Daily 10am–10pm, hours vary seasonally.

Marjorie Barrick Museum ★ Formerly known as the Natural History Museum, here's a cool place to beat the heat and noise of

Vegas, while examining some attractive, if not overly imaginative, displays on Native American craftwork and Las Vegas history. Crafts include 19th-century Mexican religious folk art, a variety of colorful dance masks of Mexico, and Native American pottery. The first part of the hall is often the highlight, with impressive traveling art exhibits. Children won't find much that's entertaining other than some glass cases containing examples of local, usually poisonous reptiles. Outside is a pretty garden demonstrating how attractive more desert-appropriate plants (in other words, those requiring little water) can be. You just wish the local casinos, with their lush and wasteful lawns, would take notice.

On the UNLV campus, 4505 Maryland Pkwy. ☎ 702/895-3381. Free admission. Mon–Fri 8am–4:45pm; Sat 10am–2pm.

MGM Grand Lion Habitat ★★ *Kids* 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 hours on and then 2 days off at a ranch for some free-range activity, so they're never cooped up here for long). So you could see any combo from one giant male to a pack of five females who have grown from cub to near 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 whole time.

In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/891-7777. Free admission. Daily 11am–10pm.

Race for Atlantis IMAX 3-D Ride ★ *Kids* Following the trend of virtual-reality theme-park rides, Caesars Palace joined forces with IMAX to create the *Race for Atlantis*. If you've never been on a virtual-reality ride, you will enjoy it, but the production values pale when compared to *Star Trek: The Experience* (but then again, that's also twice as expensive).

This experience begins as you walk past a giant statue of Neptune and his chariot drawn by wild-looking sea serpents. The stone hallway appears to lead into an underwater palace. As the line twists around, a sci-fi fantasy world unfolds with mists clouding the multicolored lights of the legendary city of Atlantis. Once inside the ride, you are treated to a 3-D visor (which can be uncomfortable for

some, as it tends to slip) and a silly safety rap song sung by Neptune's cowardly secretary. The ride itself is a 3-D motion simulator, which uses computer animation to create the lost city and the race-course. The goal is to get to the ring before the evil demon god gets there. If you like a bumpy ride, be sure to sit in the very front or very back. During the 4-minute race, your chariot is impeded by flying shrapnel, the evil god, and even by Neptune's own inept secretary. With the 3-D glasses, all of these sharp objects flying at you can get pretty intense. Eventually, the ring is saved, and the famed city of Atlantis survives. Not for the weak of stomach.

In Caesars Palace Forum Shops, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. Admission \$10 adults; \$9 Nevada residents, seniors, and students; \$7 children under 12. Sun–Thurs 10am–11pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight.

Secret Garden of Siegfried & Roy and Mirage Dolphin Habitat ★★ ★ *Kids* In the **Secret Garden** ★, a gorgeous area behind the dolphin exhibit, white lions, Bengal tigers, an Asian elephant, a panther, and a snow leopard join Siegfried and Roy's famous white tigers (one of whom caused the cancellation of the illusionist show when he mauled Roy Horn on stage in October 2003). It's really just a glorified zoo, featuring only the big-ticket animals; however, it is a very pretty place, with plenty of foliage and some bits of Indian- and Asian-themed architecture. Zoo purists will be horrified at the smallish spaces the animals occupy, but all the animals are rotated between here and their more lavish digs at the illusionist team's home. What this does allow you to do is get very close up with a tiger, which is quite a thrill—those paws are massive indeed. Visitors are given little portable phonelike objects on which they can play a series of programs, listening to Roy and former Mirage owner Steve Wynn discuss conservation or the attributes of each animal and deliver anecdotes.

The **Dolphin Habitat** ★★ ★ is more satisfying. It was designed to provide a healthy and nurturing environment and to educate the public about marine mammals and their role in the ecosystem. Specialists worldwide were consulted in creating the habitat, which was designed to serve as a model of a quality, secured environment. The pool is more than eight times larger than government regulations require, and its 2.5 million gallons of man-made seawater are cycled and cleaned once every 2 hours. It must be working, as the adult dolphins here are breeding regularly. The Mirage displays only dolphins already in captivity—no dolphins will be taken from the wild. You can watch the dolphins frolic both above and below ground through viewing

windows, in three different pools. (There is nothing quite like the kick you get from seeing a baby dolphin play.) The knowledgeable staff, who surely have the best jobs in Vegas, will answer questions. If they aren't doing it already, ask them to play ball with the dolphins; they toss large beach balls into the pools, and the dolphins hit them out with their noses, leaping out of the water cackling with dolphin glee. You catch the ball, getting nicely wet, and toss it back to them. If you have never played ball with a dolphin, shove that happy child next to you out of the way and go for it. There is also a video of a resident dolphin (Duchess) giving birth (to Squirt) underwater. You can stay as long as you like, which might just be hours.

In the Mirage, 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/791-7111**. Admission \$10, free for children under 10 if accompanied by an adult. On Wed, when only Dolphin Habitat is open, admission \$5. Secret Garden open Mon–Tues and Thurs–Fri 11am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5pm. Dolphin Habitat open Mon–Fri 11am–7pm, Sat–Sun 10am–7pm. Hours subject to change and vary by season.

Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay ★ Given that watching fish can lower your blood pressure, it's practically a public service for Mandalay Bay to provide this facility in a city where craps tables and other gaming areas can bring your excitement level to dangerous heights. Unfortunately, it's just a big giant aquarium (though we admire the style—it's built to look like a sunken temple), which, hey, we like, but gee, not at these prices. (Though standing in the all-glass tunnel, surrounded by sharks and finny friends, was kinda cool.) Note also that it is *waaaay* off in a remote part of Mandalay Bay, which might be a hassle for those with mobility problems.

In Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/632-7000**. Admission \$15 adults, \$9.95 children 5–12, free for children under 5. Daily 10am–11pm.

Speed: The Ride/Las Vegas Cyber Speedway ★★ These two attractions at the Sahara are a popular stop. The first is an 8-minute virtual-reality ride, **Cyber Speedway** ★★, featuring a three-quarter-size replica of a NASCAR race car. Hop aboard for an animated, simulated ride—either the Las Vegas Motor Speedway or a race around the streets of Las Vegas (start with the Strip, with all the hotels flashing by, and then through the Forum Shops—whoops! There goes Versace!—and so forth). Press the gas and you lean back and feel the rush of speed; hit a bump and you go flying. Should your car get in a crash, off you go to a pit stop. At the end, a computer-generated report tells you your average speed, how many laps you made, how you did racing against the others next to you, and so forth. It's a pretty remarkable experience.

In a separate **3-D motion theater** (★), you'll don goggles to view a film that puts you right inside another race car for yet another stomach-churning ride (even more dizzying than the virtual-reality portion). Speed junkies and race-car buffs will be in heaven here, though those with tender stomachs should consider shopping at the well-stocked theme gift shop instead.

Speed: The Ride (★★) is a roller coaster that blasts riders out through a hole in the wall by the new NASCAR Cafe, then through a loop, under the sidewalk, through the hotel's marquee, and finally straight up a 250-foot tower. At the peak, you feel a moment of weightlessness, and then you do the whole thing backwards! Not for the faint of heart.

In the Sahara Hotel & Casino, 2535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/737-2111. \$15 for 1 ride on each attraction, \$18 for all-day pass for all attractions. Stock-car simulator only \$10 (you must be at least 48 in. tall to ride), Speed: The Ride (roller coaster) \$10 for all-day pass. Opens daily at 10am; closing hours vary seasonally, but usually it's 10pm.

Star Trek: The Experience (★) It goes without saying that hardcore Trekkers (note use of correct term) will be delighted. On the other hand, normal, sensible fans, and those who couldn't care less about *Star Trek*, may find themselves saying, "I spent \$25 and 2 hours in line for this?"

This is the undisputed champ in the Vegas motion-simulator ride category. You can't fault the setup and interior design; your long wait in line will be somewhat entertaining, thanks to memorabilia and TVs showing various *Trek* clips. As you make your way to the ride proper, you encounter actors dressed in *Trek* gear, who let you know that you've crossed the line into the *Trek* future.

There is a story line, but we won't spoil it for you. Suffice to say it involves time travel and evil doings by the Borg, and if all doesn't work out, the very history of *Star Trek* could be affected. Do expect to be beamed aboard the *Enterprise* (that's really kind of cool), and know that if you have a sensitive stomach, you can skip the actual motion-simulator part, a wild and sometimes headache-inducing chase through space. On the way out, through the shops selling everything *Trek*- and space-related (go ahead, get that Tribble you've always wanted), don't miss the TV showing a "news report" about some of the very things you just experienced. **Note:** In spring 2004, a new, "edgier" attraction will be added to *Star Trek: The Experience*. *Borg Invasion 4D* will feature a 3-D film starring several *Star Trek Voyager* cast members, as well as numerous sensory and special

effects. There's no word yet on what the ticket prices—we'd bet on astronomical—will be.

In the Las Vegas Hilton, 3000 Paradise Rd. ☎ **888/GO-BOLDLY**. www.startrekexp.com. Admission \$25 for an all-day pass. Daily 11am–11pm.

Stratosphere Thrill Rides ★★ (Kids) Atop the 1,149-foot Stratosphere Tower are two marvelous thrill rides. The **High Roller** ★★ (the world's highest roller coaster) was recently revamped to go at even faster speeds as it zooms around a hilly track that is seemingly suspended in midair. Even more fun is the **Big Shot** ★★, a breathtaking free-fall ride that thrusts you 160 feet in the air along a 228-foot spire at the top of the tower, then plummets back down again. Sitting in an open car, you seem to be dangling in space over Las Vegas. We have one relative, a thrill-ride enthusiast, who said he never felt more scared than when he rode the Big Shot. After surviving, he promptly put his kids on it; they loved it. **Note:** The rides are shut down in inclement weather and high winds.

Atop the Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower, 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/380-7777**. Admission for Big Shot \$8; for roller coaster \$5; \$5 per ride, plus \$7 to ascend the Tower (if you dine in the buffet room or Top of the World, there's no charge to go up to the Tower). Multiride packages also available for varying costs. Sun–Thurs 10am–midnight; Fri–Sat 10am–1am. Hours vary seasonally. Minimum height requirement for both rides is 48 in.

The Wynn Collection of Fine Art ★ Steve Wynn is back with a new art gallery now that the Bellagio's was bought by MGM MIRAGE. Only a double handful of paintings is currently on exhibit, but that number could go up and down (Wynn is a ferocious collector with a keen appreciation, who just set some art-purchasing records while acquiring a couple of costly masterpieces). At this writing, among the pieces exhibited are Picasso's *Le Reve* and Matisse's *The Persian Robe*. Perhaps not enough to go out of your way for, but then again, what an alternative to slots . . .

3145 S. Las Vegas Blvd. ☎ **702/733-4100**. Admission \$10 adults, \$6 children 6–12. Daily 10am–5pm.

2 Getting Married

This is one of the most popular things to do in Las Vegas. Why? It's very easy to get married here. Too easy. See that total stranger standing next to you? Grab him or her and head down to the **Clark County Marriage License Bureau**, 200 S. 3rd St., at Briger Avenue (☎ **702/455-3156**; open daily 8am–midnight, 24 hr. legal holidays), to get your license. Find a wedding chapel (not hard

because there are about 50 of them in town; they line the north end of the Strip, and most hotels have one), and tie the knot. Just like that. No blood test, no waiting period—heck, not even an awkward dating period.

You can also call **Las Vegas Weddings and Rooms** (☎ 800/488-MATE), which offers one-stop shopping for wedding services. They'll find a chapel or outdoor garden that suits your taste (not to mention such only-in-Vegas venues as the former mansions of Elvis Presley and Liberace); book you into a hotel for the honeymoon; arrange the ceremony; and provide flowers, a photographer (or videographer), a wedding cake, a limo, car rental, music, champagne, balloons, and a garter for the bride. Basically, they can arrange anything you like. Theme weddings are a specialty.

Weddings can be very cheap in Vegas: A license is about \$55, and a basic service not much more. Even a full-blown shebang package—photos, music, some flowers, video, cake, and other doodads—will run only about \$500 total. We haven't quoted any prices here, because the ultimate cost depends entirely on how much you want to spend. Go cheap, and the whole thing will put you back maybe \$100, including the license (maybe even somewhat less); go elaborate, and the price is still reasonable by today's wedding price standards. Be sure to remember that there are often hidden charges, such as expected gratuities for the minister (about \$25 would do; no real need to tip anyone else), and so forth. And be aware that Valentine's Day is a very popular day to get married in Vegas. Some of the chapels perform as many as 80 services on February 14.

Cupid's Wedding Chapel “The little chapel with the big heart.” Well, they just might be. The manager explains that, unlike other chapels on the Strip, they schedule weddings an hour apart; this gives them time for the full production number. The folks at Cupid's pride themselves on offering “a traditional church wedding at a chapel price.” This includes a bridal processional, dimmed lights as the minister introduces the happy couple, and then a tape of the couple's favorite song, so they can have their first dance right there at the pulpit after their “first” kiss. They also offer family weddings for those couples blending pre-existing ones; the children become a part of the service, and as their parents exchange rings with each other, the kids are given their own small token, to let them know the parents are marrying them as well. The chapel is pleasantly low-frills and down to earth, with white walls and pews, and modern stained glass with doves and roses. (Kitsch-phobes will

be pleased to know the cupids are only in the lobby.) It seats 60 to 70. They recently added a classic banquet hall (and by that we mean, think New Jersey banquet hall) so you can have your reception and wedding all in one place. And, yes, if they don't have something already scheduled, they will take walk-ups.

827 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **800/543-2933** or 702/598-4444. www.cupidswedding.com. Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–1am.

San Francisco Sally's Victorian Chapel *(Finds)* This is an extremely tiny wedding chapel bursting at the seams with Victorian frills (fringed lamps, swags of lace curtains). They basically offer “an Olde Tyme Parlor Wedding.” This is perfect if you want a very intimate wedding—like you, your intended, and someone to officiate. It literally can't hold more than six people. (And the space at the back of the room opens for an even tinier reception area—it can barely fit the cake!) But if you love Victoriana, or you want to play dress-up at your wedding, this is the place. The shop rents out dresses and costumes, so you can wear a Scarlett O'Hara antebellum outfit or some other period number for your big day. (It's all fantasy anyway, so why not go whole hog?) They specialize in extras without extra charges, like altering and whatnot. The women who run it refer to themselves as “a bunch of mother hens;” they're delightful and will pamper you to within an inch of your life. (One couple drops in every year just to say “hi.”) Some may find it a bit cutesy, but it really is quite charming and has its own distinct personality, unlike most of the other chapels in the area (where the interiors all start to blur together after a while). This is a decidedly special place that might be just right depending on your wedding desires and fantasies.

1304 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **800/658-8677** or 702/385-7777 Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun 10am–4pm.

A Special Memory Wedding Chapel This is a very nice, new-ish wedding chapel, particularly when compared to the rather tired facades of the classics on the Strip. This is absolutely the place to go if you want a traditional, big-production wedding; you won't feel in the least bit tacky. It's a New England church-style building, complete with steeple. The interior looks like a proper church (well, a plain one—don't think ornate Gothic cathedral) with a cathedral ceiling, pews with padded red seats, modern stained-glass windows of doves and flowers, and lots of dark wood. It is all very clean and new and seats about 87 comfortably. There is a short staircase leading to an actual bride's room; she can make an entrance coming down it or through the double doors at the back. The area outside the chapel is

like a mini-mall of bridal paraphernalia stores. Should all this just be too darn nice and proper for you, they also offer a drive-up window (where they do about 300 weddings a month!). It'll cost you \$25—just ring the buzzer for service. They have a photo studio on-site and will do a small cake, cold cuts, and champagne receptions. There is a gazebo for outside weddings, and they sell T-shirts!

800 S. 4th St. (at Gass Ave.). ☎ **800/962-7798** or 702/384-2211. www.aspecialmemory.com. Sun–Thurs 8am–10pm; Fri–Sat 8am–midnight.

3 Especially for Kids

Like much of the rest of the world, you may be under the impression that Las Vegas has evolved from an adults-only fantasyland into a vacation destination suitable for the entire family. The only explanation for this myth is that Las Vegas was referred to as “Disneyland for adults” by so many and for so long that the town became momentarily confused and decided it actually *was* Disneyland. Some of the gargantuan hotels then spent small fortunes on redecorating in an attempt to lure families with vast quantities of junk food and a lot of hype. They now vehemently deny that any such notion ever crossed their collective minds, and, no, they don't know how that roller coaster got into the parking lot.

To put things simply, Las Vegas makes money—lots and lots of money—by promoting gambling, drinking, and sex. These are all fine pursuits if you happen to be an adult, but if you haven't reached the magical age of 21, you really don't count in this town. In any case, the casinos and even the Strip itself are simply too stimulating, noisy, and smoky for young kids.

Older progeny may have a tolerance for crowds and the incessant pinging of the slot machines, but they will be thoroughly annoyed with you when casino security chastises them if they so much as stop to tie their shoelaces anywhere near the gaming tables. Since you can't get from your hotel room to the parking lot without ambling through a casino, you can't reasonably expect a teenager to be in a good mood once you stagger outside. And those amusement parks and video halls that haven't yet been purged are very expensive places to park your kids for an afternoon or evening, assuming they are old enough to be left unsupervised.

Nevertheless, you may have a perfectly legitimate reason for bringing your children to Las Vegas (like Grandma was busy, or you were just stopping off on your way from somewhere else), so here are some places to take the children both on and off the Strip.

Adventuredome ★★ This indoor amusement park isn't a half-bad place to spend a hot afternoon. The glass dome that towers overhead lets in natural light, a solace to those of us who look peaked under the glow of the artificial kind. A double-loop roller coaster careens around the simulated Grand Canyon, and there's the requisite water flume, a laser-tag area, and a modest number of other rides for kids of all ages. A dinosaur-bone excavation area will provide a good time for preschoolers, and a place to rest for the supervising adults. Video games and an arcade are separate from the attractions, cutting down just a tad on the noise level. Jugglers and magicians provide impromptu entertainment. Our only suggestion is not to leave kids here alone; they could easily get lost.

2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (behind Circus Circus). ☎ **702/794-3939**. Free admission; pay per ride \$3–\$5; daily pass \$20 adults, \$14 children 33–47 in. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Park hours vary seasonally but are usually Mon–Thurs 10am–6pm, Fri–Sat 10am–midnight, Sun 10am–8pm.

Las Vegas Mini Grand Prix ★★ *Kids* Finally, after all our yammering about how Vegas isn't for families and how most of the remaining options are really overpriced tourist traps, we can wholeheartedly recommend an actual family-appropriate entertainment option. Part arcade, part go-kart racetrack, this is exactly what you want to help your kids (and maybe yourselves) work off their excess energy. The arcade is well stocked, with a better quality of prizes than one often finds, but we suggest not spending too much time in there, and instead hustling outside to the slide, the little roller coaster, and best of all, the four go-kart tracks. Each offers a different thrill, from the longest road track in Vegas, full of twists and turns as you try to out-race other drivers (be a sport, let the little kids win occasionally), to a high-banked oval built just so you can try to make other drivers take spills on to the grass, to, best of all, a timed course. The latter requires a driver's license, so it's for you rather than your kids (but the wee ones will find the 4th course is just for them), and here you can live out your Le Mans or Police Chase fantasies, as you blast through twisting runs, one kart at a time, trying to beat your personal best. A good kind of adrenaline rush, believe us. The staff is utterly friendly, and the pizzas at the food court are triple the size and half the price of those found in your hotel. The one drawback: It's far away from main Strip action—here's where you'll need that rental car, for sure. **Note:** Kids have to be at least 36 inches tall to ride any of the attractions.

1401 N. Rainbow Rd., just off US 95 N. ☎ **702/259-7000**. www.lvmgp.com. Ride tickets \$4.95 each, \$23 for 5. Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm, Fri–Sat 10am–11pm.

Las Vegas Natural History Museum ★ Conveniently located across the street from the Lied Discovery Children's Museum (described below), this humble temple of taxidermy harkens back to elementary-school field trips circa 1965, when stuffed elk and brown bears forever protecting their kill were as close as most of us got to exotic animals. Worn around the edges but very sweet and relaxed, the museum is enlivened by a hands-on activity room and two life-size dinosaurs that roar at one another intermittently. A small boy was observed leaping toward his dad upon watching this display, so you might want to warn any sensitive little ones that the big tyrannosaurs aren't going anywhere. Surprisingly, the gift shop here is particularly well stocked with neat items you won't too terribly mind buying for the kids.

900 Las Vegas Blvd. N. (at Washington). ☎ 702/384-3466. <http://vegaswebworld.com/lvnathistory>. Admission \$5.50 adults; \$4.50 seniors, students, and military; \$3 children 4–12; free for children under 4. Daily 9am–4pm.

Lied Discovery Children's Museum ★★ *(Finds)* A hands-on science museum designed for curious kids, the bright, airy, two-story Lied makes an ideal outing for toddlers and young children. With lots of interactive exhibits to examine, including a miniature grocery store, a tube for encasing oneself inside a soap bubble, a radio station, and music and drawing areas, you'll soon forget your video poker losses. Clever, thought-inducing exhibits are everywhere. Learn how it feels to be handicapped by playing basketball from a wheelchair. Feed a wooden "sandwich" to a cutout of a snake and to a human cutout, and see how much nutrition each receives. See how much sunscreen their giant stuffed mascot needs to keep from burning. On weekend afternoons from 1 to 3pm, free drop-in art classes are offered, giving you a bit of time to ramble around the gift store or read the fine print on the exhibit placards. The Lied also shares space with a city library branch, so after the kids run around, you can calm them back down with a story or two.

833 Las Vegas Blvd. N. (½ block south of Washington, across the street from Cashman Field). ☎ 702/382-5437. www.ldcm.org. Admission \$6 adults, \$5 seniors and children 1–17. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm.

MGM Grand Youth Center This is the sole child-care center on the Strip, and according to the genial manager, it's booked solid during summers and on holidays. MGM Grand Hotel guests get first priority to leave their youngsters in this warren of brightly decorated and well-supervised, albeit windowless, rooms. Arts and crafts compete with Nintendo and videos for kids' attention, and there are no

organized activities (although they do serve meals). If we were children and our parents left us here on a family vacation, we'd never let them forget it.

In the MGM Grand Hotel, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/891-3200**. For children 3–12 (no diaper wearers). Daily 11am–11pm. Costs vary, depending on season and whether you are a guest of the hotel (call ahead to get more information).

Scandia Family Fun Center ★★ This family-amusement center, located just a few blocks off the Strip, is still the most viable alternative for those who need to amuse children not quite old enough for GameWorks, or for those on a tighter budget. Certainly it's where local families come for outings, and they keep the batting cages hopping (\$1.25 for 25 pitches). The arcade is a bit warm and stinky, and other parts (including miniature-car racing and bumper boats, \$4 per ride; small children ride free with an adult) are a bit worn, but the miniature-golf course (three 18-hole courses, \$5.50 per game, free for children under 6) is quite cute. Still, we do have to wonder about those round-the-clock weekend hours; we certainly hope those playing miniature golf at 4am are not parents occupied by children.

2900 Sirius Ave. (at Rancho Dr. just south of Sahara Ave.). ☎ **702/364-0070**. Free admission, but there's a fee for each game or activity. Super Saver Pass \$12 (includes 1 round of miniature golf, 2 rides, and 5 game tokens); Unlimited Wristband Package \$17 (includes unlimited bumper-boat and car rides, unlimited miniature golf, and 10 tokens for batting cages or arcade games). Mar–Oct daily 24 hr.; Nov–Feb Sun–Thurs 10am–11pm, Fri–Sat 24 hr.

Wet 'n Wild ★★ When temperatures soar, head for this 26-acre water park right in the heart of the Strip and cool off while jumping waves, careening down steep flumes, and running rapids. There is a variety of slides and rides, plus a lazy river and a beach for those looking for more sedentary activities. The noise level can be extraordinarily high, so don't think of this as relaxing—but when it's 108°F in the shade, who cares? Also, be on the lookout for discount coupons. Many Las Vegas packages include a free admission (sometimes partial-day).

2601 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (just south of Sahara Ave.). ☎ **702/871-7811**. www.wetnwild.com. Admission \$26 adults, \$15 seniors over 55, \$20 children 3–10, free for children under 3. Early May–Sept 30 daily 10am–6 or 8pm (sometimes later). Season and hours vary somewhat from year to year, so call ahead.

4 Fore! Great Desert Golf

In addition to the listings below, there are dozens of local courses, including some very challenging ones that have hosted PGA tournaments. **Note:** Greens fees vary radically depending on time of day and year.

If you're a serious golfer, you may want to contact **American Golf** (☎ 800/468-7918), a nationwide reservations service that's based in Arizona. They can help you arrange golf packages, and book hard-to-get tee times.

Note also that the **Rio Suites** has a golf course; see chapter 3.

Angel Park Golf Club This 36-hole par-70/71 public course is a local favorite. Arnold Palmer originally designed the Mountain and Palm courses (the Palm Course was redesigned several years later by Bob Cupp). Players call this a great escape from the casinos, claiming that no matter how many times they play it, they never get tired of it. The Palm Course has gently rolling fairways that offer golfers of all abilities a challenging yet forgiving layout. The Mountain Course has rolling natural terrain and gorgeous panoramic views. In addition to these two challenging 18-hole courses, Angel Park offers a night-lit Cloud 9 Course (12 holes for daylight play, 9 at night), where each hole is patterned after a famous par-3. You can reserve tee times up to 60 days in advance with a credit-card guarantee.

Yardage: Palm Course 5,857 championship, 5,438 resort; Mountain Course 6,235 championship, and 5,751 resort.

Facilities: Pro shop, night-lit driving range, 18-hole putting course, restaurant, snack bar, cocktail bar, and beverage cart.

100 S. Rampart Blvd. (between Summerlin Pkwy. and Alta St.; 20 min. NW of the Strip). ☎ 888/629-3929 or 702/254-0566. www.angelpark.com. Greens fees \$65–\$160. Discounted twilight rates available.

Bali Hai Golf Club One of the newest and most exclusive golf addresses belongs to this multimillion-dollar course built in 2000 on the Strip just south of Mandalay Bay. Done in a wild South Seas theme, the par-71 course features over 7 acres of water hazards, plus an island green, palm trees, and tropical foliage everywhere you look. Not impressed yet? How about the fact that all of its golf carts are equipped with Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) tracking systems. Or that celeb chef Wolfgang Puck chose to open his newest Vegas eatery here. Okay, if that doesn't convince you of the upscale nature of the joint, check out the greens fees.

Even at those prices, tee times are often booked 6 months in advance.

Yardage: 7,002 championship.

Facilities: Pro shop, putting green, gourmet restaurant, grill, and lounge.

5150 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/397-2499. www.waltersgolf.com. Greens fees \$155–\$325.

Craig Ranch Golf Club *(Value)* This is a flat 18-hole, par-70 public course with many trees and bunkers; both narrow and open fairways feature Bermuda turf. The greens fees are a bargain, and you can reserve tee times 7 days in advance.

Yardage: 6,001 regular and 5,221 ladies.

Facilities: Driving range, pro shop, PGA teaching pro, putting green, and snack bar.

628 W. Craig Rd. (between Losee Rd. and Martin Luther King Blvd.). ☎ 702/642-9700. Greens fees \$19 walking, \$25 in golf cart.

Desert Rose Golf Club This is an 18-hole, par-71 public course built in 1963 and designed by Dick Wilson/Joe Lee. Narrow fairways feature Bermuda turf. You can reserve tee times up to 7 days in advance.

Yardage: 6,511 championship, 6,135 regular, and 5,458 ladies.

Facilities: Driving range, putting and chipping greens, PGA teaching pro, pro shop, restaurant, and cocktail lounge.

5483 Clubhouse Dr. (3 blocks west of Nellis Blvd., off Sahara Ave.). ☎ 702/431-4653. Greens fees \$53–\$75. Cart rental \$12 (walking is allowed).

Royal Links Golf Club *(Finds)* More than just greens and water traps, Royal Links was designed to simulate play on some of the greatest courses in the British Open tour. St. Andrews Road Hole, the Postage Stamp at the Royal Troon in Scotland, and a dozen others are all faithfully recreated here for a unique game and an interesting history lesson. Also fun is the clubhouse, designed (of course) to resemble a medieval castle, complete with an English pub inside.

Yardage: 7,029 championship, 6,602 regular, and 5,864 ladies.

Facilities: Pro shop, golf school, driving range, restaurant, and cocktail lounge.

5995 E. Vegas Valley Rd. (east of Boulder Hwy., between Flamingo and Sahara). ☎ 702/450-8000. Greens fees \$135–\$275.

5 Staying Active

You need not be a slot-hypnotized slug when you come to Vegas. The city and surrounding areas offer plenty of opportunities for active sports. In addition to many highly rated golf courses (described above), just about every hotel has a large swimming pool and health club, and tennis courts abound.

BOWLING The **Castaways Hotel & Casino**, 2800 E. Fremont St. (☎ 702/385-9123), is famous for housing the largest bowling center in North America (106 lanes) and for being the oldest stop

on the Professional Bowlers Tour. A recent renovation has made its premises bright and spiffy. Open 24 hours.

The **Orleans**, 4500 W. Tropicana Ave. (☎ 702/365-7111), has 70 lanes, a pro shop, lockers, meeting rooms, and more. Open 24 hours.

TENNIS Tennis buffs should choose one of the many hotels in town that have tennis courts.

Bally's (☎ 702/967-3380) has eight night-lit hard courts. Fees per hour range from \$10 to \$15 for guests, \$15 to \$20 for nonguests. Facilities include a pro shop. Hours vary seasonally. Reservations are advised.

The Flamingo Las Vegas (☎ 702/733-3444) has four outdoor hard courts (all lit for night play) and a pro shop. It's open to the public daily from 7am to 7pm. Rates are \$20 per hour for nonguests, \$12 for guests. Lessons are available. Reservations are required.

Monte Carlo (☎ 702/730-7777) has three night-lit courts available to the public for \$15 per hour.

In addition to hotels, the **University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)**, Harmon Avenue just east of Swenson Street (☎ 702/895-0844), has a dozen courts (all lit for night play) that are open weekdays from 6am to 9:45pm, weekends 8am to 9pm. Rates are \$5 per person per day. You should call before going to find out if a court is available.

About Casino Gambling

What? You didn't come to Las Vegas for the Liberace Museum? We are shocked. Shocked.

Yes, there are gambling opportunities in Vegas. We've noticed this. You will too. The tip-off will be the slot machines in the airport as soon as you step off the plane. Or the slot machines in the convenience stores as soon as you drive across the state line. Let's not kid ourselves, gambling is what Vegas is about. The bright lights, the shows, the showgirls, the food—it's all there just to lure you in and make you open your wallet. (The free drinks certainly help ease the latter as well.)

You can disappoint them if you want, but what would be the point? *This is Las Vegas*. You don't have to be a high roller. You would not believe how much fun you can have with a nickel slot machine. You won't get rich, but neither will most of those guys playing the \$5 slots, either.

Of course, that's not going to stop anyone from trying. Almost everyone plays in Vegas with the hopes of winning The Big One. That only a few ever do win doesn't stop them from trying again and again. That's how the casinos make their money, by the way.

Remember also that there is no system that's sure to help you win. We all have our own systems and our own ideas. Reading books and listening to others at the tables will help you pick up some tips, but if there were a surefire way to win, the casinos would have taken care of it. Try to have the courage to walk away when your bankroll is up, not down. Remember, your children's college fund is just that, and not a gambling-budget supplement.

1 The Major Games

Before you put your money on the line, it's imperative to know the rules of the game you want to play. Many casinos offer free gambling lessons that include low stakes games, so you won't lose much while you learn. During those instructional sessions (usually held only on weekdays), and even when playing on your own, dealers in

most casinos will be more than happy to answer any questions you might have. Remember, the casino doesn't need to trick you into losing your money . . . the odds are already in their favor across the board; that's why it's called gambling. Another rule of thumb: Take a few minutes to watch a game being played in order to familiarize yourself with the motions and lingo. Then go back and reread this section—things will make a lot more sense at that point. Good luck!

Note: In this section we give you some basic tips and explanations for a few of the major games you'll find in Vegas. It's by no means comprehensive, so if you're a novice and plan on sampling all of the games in Las Vegas, buy a more complete gambling book at your local bookstore—*Gambling For Dummies* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.) is a good choice—and take some of the aforementioned lessons at the casinos.

BLACKJACK

The dealer starts the game by dealing each player two cards. In some casinos, they're dealt to the player faceup, in others facedown, but the dealer always gets one card up and one card down. Everybody plays against the dealer. The object is to get a total that is higher than that of the dealer without exceeding 21. All face cards count as 10; all other number cards, except aces, are counted at their face value. An ace may be counted as 1 or 11, whichever you choose it to be.

Starting at his or her left, the dealer gives additional cards to the players who wish to draw (be "hit") or none to a player who wishes to "stand" or "hold." If your count is nearer to 21 than the dealer's, you win. If it's under the dealer's, you lose. Ties are a push and nobody wins. After all the players are satisfied with their counts, the dealer exposes his or her facedown card. If his or her two cards total 16 or less, the dealer must "hit" (draw an additional card) until reaching 17 or over. If the dealer's total exceeds 21, he or she must pay all the players whose hands have not gone "bust." It is important to note here that the blackjack dealer has no choice as to whether he or she should stay or draw. A dealer's decisions are predetermined and known to all the players at the table.

If you're a novice or just rusty, do yourself a favor and buy one of the small laminated cards available in shops all over town that illustrate proper play for every possible hand in blackjack. Even long-time players have been known to pull them out every now and then, and they can save you from making costly errors.

HOW TO PLAY

Here are eight “rules” for blackjack:

1. Place the number of chips that you want to bet on the betting space on your table.
2. Look at the first two cards the dealer starts you with. If you wish to “stand” then wave your hand over your cards, palm down (watch your fellow players), indicating that you don’t wish any additional cards. If you elect to draw an additional card, you tell the dealer to “hit” you by tapping the table with a finger (watch your fellow players).
3. If your count goes over 21, you are “bust” and lose, even if the dealer also goes “bust” afterward.
4. If you make 21 in your first two cards (any picture card or 10 with an ace), you’ve got blackjack. You will be paid 1½ times your bet, provided the dealer does not have blackjack too, in which case it’s a push and nobody wins.
5. If you find a “pair” in your first two cards (say, two 8s or two aces), you may “split” the pair into two hands and treat each card as the first card dealt in two separate hands. You will need to place an additional bet, equal to your original bet, on the table. The dealer will then deal you a new *second* card to the first split card and play commences as described above. This will be done for the second split card as well. **Note:** When you split aces you will receive only one additional card per ace and must “stand.”
6. After seeing your two starting cards, you have the option to “double down.” You place an amount equal to your original bet on the table and you receive only one more card. Doubling down is a strategy to capitalize on a potentially strong hand against the dealer’s weaker hand. **Tip:** You may double down for less than your original bet, but never for more.
7. Anytime the dealer deals himself or herself an ace for the “up” card, you may insure your hand against the possibility that the hole card is a 10 or face card, which would give him or her an automatic blackjack. To insure, you place an amount up to one half of your bet on the “insurance” line. If the dealer does have a blackjack you get paid 2 to 1 on the insurance money while losing your original bet: You break even. If the dealer does not have a blackjack, he or she takes your insurance money and play continues in the normal fashion.

8. **Remember:** The dealer must stand on 17 or more and must hit a hand of 16 or less.

CRAPS

The most exciting casino action is always at the craps tables. Betting is frenetic, play fast-paced, and groups quickly bond while yelling and screaming in response to the action. We list the possible bets available in craps below, but this is one game where you should definitely take a lesson or spend a considerable time watching before playing.

THE POSSIBLE BETS

The craps table is divided into marked areas (Pass, Come, Field, Big 6, Big 8, and so on), where you place your chips to bet. The following are a few simple directions.

PASS LINE A “Pass Line” bet pays even money. If the first roll of the dice adds up to 7 or 11, you win your bet; if the first roll adds up to 2, 3, or 12, you lose your bet. If any other number comes up, it’s your “point.” If you roll your point again, you win, but if a 7 comes up again before your point is rolled, you lose.

DON’T PASS LINE Betting on the “Don’t Pass” is the opposite of betting on the “Pass Line.” This time, you lose if a 7 or an 11 is thrown on the first roll, and you win if a 2 or a 3 is thrown on the first roll.

If the first roll is 12, however, it’s a push (standoff), and nobody wins. If none of these numbers is thrown and you have a point instead, in order to win, a 7 will have to be thrown before the point comes up again. A “Don’t Pass” bet also pays even money.

COME Betting on “Come” is the same as betting on the Pass Line, but you must bet after the first roll or on any following roll. Again, you’ll win on 7 or 11 and lose on 2, 3, or 12. Any other number is your point, and you win if your point comes up again before a 7.

DON’T COME This is the opposite of a “Come” bet. Again, you wait until after the first roll to bet. A 7 or an 11 means you lose; a 2 or a 3 means you win; 12 is a push, and nobody wins. You win if 7 comes up before the point. (The point, you’ll recall, was the first number rolled if it was none of the above.)

FIELD This is a bet for one roll only. The “Field” consists of seven numbers: 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 12. If any of these numbers is thrown on the next roll, you win even money, except on 2 and 12, which pay 2 to 1 (at some casinos 3 to 1).

BIG 6 AND 8 A “Big 6 and 8” bet pays even money. You win if either a 6 or an 8 is rolled before a 7. Mathematically this is a sucker’s bet.

ANY 7 An “Any 7” bet pays the winner 5 for 1. If a 7 is thrown on the first roll after you bet, you win.

“HARD WAY” BETS In the middle of a craps table are pictures of several possible dice combinations together with the odds the casino will pay you if you bet and win on any of those combinations being thrown. For example, if double 3s or 4s are rolled and you had bet on them, you will be paid 7 to 1. If double 2s or 5s are rolled and you had bet on them, you will be paid 9 to 1. If either a 7 is rolled or if the number you bet on was rolled any way other than the “Hard Way,” then the bet is lost. In-the-know gamblers tend to avoid “Hard Way” bets as an easy way to lose their money.

ANY CRAPS Here you’re lucky if the dice “crap out”—if they show 2, 3, or 12 on the first roll after you bet. If this happens, the bank pays 7 to 1. Any other number is a loser.

PLACE BETS You can make a “Place Bet” on any of the following numbers: 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. You’re betting that the number you choose will be thrown before a 7 is thrown. If you win, the pay-off is as follows: 4 or 10 pays at the rate of 9 to 5; 5 or 9 pays at the rate of 7 to 5; 6 or 8 pays at the rate of 7 to 6. “Place Bets” can be removed at any time before a roll.

SOME PROBABILITIES

Because each die has six sides numbered from 1 to 6, and craps is played with a pair of dice, the probability of throwing certain numbers has been studied carefully. Professionals have employed complex mathematical formulas in searching for the answers. And computers have data-processed curves of probability.

Suffice it to say that 7 (a crucial number in craps) will be thrown more frequently than any other number over the long run, which, favors the casino. You can’t beat the law of averages.

POKER

Poker is the game of the Old West. There’s at least one sequence in every Western where the hero faces off against the villain over a poker hand. In Las Vegas, poker is a tradition, although it isn’t played at every casino.

There are lots of variations on the basic game, but one of the most popular is **Hold ’Em**. Two cards are dealt facedown to the

players. After a betting round, five community cards (everyone can use them) are dealt faceup on the table. The player makes the best five-card hand, using their own cards and the “board” (the community cards), and the best hand wins. The house dealer takes care of the shuffling and the dealing and moves a marker around the table to alternate the start of the deal. The house rakes 1% to 5% (it depends on the casino) from each pot. Most casinos also provide tables for playing Seven-Card Stud, Omaha High, Omaha Hi-Low, and other poker variations. To learn how these variations are played, either read a book or take lessons.

Warning: Do not attempt to learn how to play poker at a table. Card sharks are not a rare species in Vegas; they will gladly feast on fresh meat (you!). Find a casino that provides free gaming lessons and learn, to paraphrase Kenny Rogers, when to hold ’em, and when to fold ’em.

ROULETTE

Roulette is an extremely easy game to play, and it’s really quite colorful and exciting to watch. The wheel spins and the little ball bounces around, finally dropping into one of the slots, numbered 1 to 36, plus 0 and 00. You can bet on a single number, a combination of numbers, or red or black, odd or even. If you’re lucky, you can win as much as 35 to 1 (though the actual house odds are 38 to 1 and you’re giving up odds to the house the minute you make most bets). The method of placing single-number bets, column bets, and others is fairly obvious. The dealer will be happy to show you how to “straddle” two or more numbers and make many other interesting betting combinations. Each player is given different-colored chips so that it’s easy to follow the numbers you’re on.

SLOTS

You put the coin in the slot and pull the handle. What, you thought there was a trick to this?

Actually, there is a bit more to it. The casinos make more from slots than from craps, blackjack, and roulette combined. But in order to keep up with the increasing competition, the plain old machine, where reels just spin, has become nearly obsolete. Now, they are all computerized and have added buttons to push, so you can avoid getting carpal tunnel syndrome from yanking the handle all night. Many don’t even have reels any more, but are entirely video screens, which offer a number of little bonus extras that have nothing to do with actual play. The idea is still simple: Get three

(sometimes four) cherries (clowns, sevens, dinosaurs, whatever) in a row and you win something. Each machine has its own combination. Some will pay you something with just one symbol showing; on most, the more combinations there are, the more opportunities for loot. Some will even pay if you get three blanks. Study each machine to learn what it does. **Note:** The **payback** goes up considerably if you bet the limit (from 2 to as many as 45 coins).

Progressive slots are groups of linked machines (sometimes spread over several casinos) where the jackpot gets bigger every few moments (just as lottery jackpots build up). And, of course, there are always those **Big Giant Slot** machines, gimmicky devices found in almost every casino. They may not win as often as regular slots (though there is no definite word on it one way or the other), but not only are they just plain fun to spin, they often turn into audience participation gambling, as watchers gather to cheer you on to victory.

Nickel slots are making a comeback. Many machines now offer a 45-nickel maximum (meaning a larger bet on those machines than on the five-quarter-maximum slots), and gamblers have been flocking to them. As a result, more cash is pocketed by the casino (which keeps a higher percentage of cash off nickel slots than it does off of quarter slots), which is happy to accommodate this trend by offering up more and more nickel slots. (See how this all works? Are you paying attention?)

The biggest trend in Vegas, though, is the use of **cashless machines**. When gambling with these machines, players insert their money, they play, and when they cash out, they get—instead of the comforting rush of coins cascading out into the tray—a little paper ticket with their total winnings on it. (Those of us who find the sound of the coins pouring out a comfort are only slightly pleased to learn that that noise plays, as a computer generated audio effect, when the ticket is disgorged.) It's not nearly as viscerally satisfying, but it is the wave of the future; many of the casinos are already entirely cashless, and the rest are on their way.

Are there surefire ways to win on a slot machine? No. But you can lose more slowly. The slot machines use minicomputers known as **Random Number Generators (RNG)** to determine the winning combinations on a machine; depending on how many numbers have been programmed into the RNG, some machines are going to be "looser" than others. A bank of empty slots probably (but not certainly) means the machines are tight. Go find a line where lots of people are sitting around with trays full of money. (Of course, yours

will be the one that doesn't hit.) A good rule of thumb is that if your slot doesn't hit something in four or five pulls, leave it and go find another. It's not as though you won't have some choice in the matter.

VIDEO POKER

Rapidly coming up on slots in popularity, video poker works the same way as regular poker, except you play against the machine. You are dealt a hand, you pick which cards to keep and which to discard, and then get your new hand. And, it is hoped, you collect your winnings. This is somewhat more of a challenge and more active than slots because you have some control (or at least the illusion of control) over your fate, and it's easier than playing actual poker with a table full of folks who probably take it very seriously.

There are a number of varieties of this machine, with **Jacks or Better**, **Deuces Wild**, and so forth. Be sure to study your machine before you sit down. The Holy Grail of video-poker machines is the 9/6 (it pays nine coins for a full house, six coins for a flush), but you'll need to pray a lot before you find one in town.

Technology is catching up with video poker, too. Now they even have touch screens, which offer a variety of different poker games, blackjack, and video slots—just touch your screen and choose your poison.

2 The Casinos

Casino choice is a personal thing. Some like to find their lucky place and stick with it, while others love to take advantage of the nearly endless choices that Vegas offers. Everyone should casino-hop at least once to marvel (or get dizzy) at the decor/spectacle and the sheer excess of it all. But beyond decoration, there isn't too much difference. You've got your slot machines, your gaming tables, and your big chandeliers.

Don't be a snob, and don't be overly dazzled by the fancy casinos. Sometimes you can have a better time at one of the older places Downtown, where stakes are lower, pretensions are nonexistent, and the clientele is often friendlier. Frankly, real gamblers—and by that we don't necessarily mean high rollers, but those who play to win regardless of the amount of said win—head straight for Downtown (and most often, straight for Binion's) for these precise reasons, caring not a whit about glitz and glamour. Even if you don't take your gambling as seriously as that, you may well want to follow their example. After all, it's getting harder and harder to find cheap tables (where you can play a hand of blackjack, for example, for less than

\$10) on the Strip—so take your hard-earned money to where you can lose it more slowly!

You can expect to find in every casino the usual and expected assortment of games—slot machines, of course, video poker, blackjack, table poker (though less and less these days), a race and sports book, a keno lounge, a poker room, baccarat, minibaccarat, Caribbean stud, Let It Ride, craps, roulette, pai gow poker, and more, more, more. Many of them also have sports books, where you can bet on local and national action. If you want a particular game, and it's not one of the most obvious, you might want to call before heading over to a particular casino, just to make sure.

What follows is a description of most of the major casinos in Vegas, including their level of claustrophobia, whether they have a giant slot machine (it's a sucker bet, but we love them), and a completely arbitrary assessment based on whether we won there.

SOUTH STRIP

Excalibur As you might expect, the Excalibur casino is replete with suits of armor, stained-glass panels, knights, dragons, and velvet and satin heraldic banners, with gaming action taking place beneath vast iron-and-gold chandeliers fit for a medieval castle fortress. This all makes it fine for kitsch-seekers, but anyone who hates crowds or is sensitive to noise will hate it. The overall effect is less like a castle and more like a dungeon. One of us won a lot of money here and refused to share it with the other, so our final judgment about the casino is, well, mixed. 3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/597-7777.

Luxor Las Vegas The Luxor casino has been completely remodeled and additional space gives it a much more airy feel, which gives it a low claustrophobia level—in parts, you can see all the way up the inside of the pyramid. King Tut heads and sphinxes adorn slot areas. We already felt inclined to like this casino thanks to a good run at blackjack, but the redesign has made it even more inviting. 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/262-4000.

Mandalay Bay “Elegant” gaming in a pre-fab, deliberate way, with a very high ceiling that produces a very low claustrophobia factor. Definitely the right place if you're looking for less hectic, less gimmick-intrusive play. Its layout makes it look airy, and it's marginally less confusing and certainly less overwhelming than many other casinos. Because it is so far off the Strip, there can be fewer walk-in players, but the presence of the House of Blues and the increasing popularity of rumjungle as a nightclub can mean a late-night influx of customers. 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/632-7777.

MGM Grand Las Vegas's largest casino at 171,500 square feet—we've been to countries that were smaller!—is divided into four themed areas, in a futile attempt to make it seem smaller. Many of the Wizard of Oz decorations have been removed, but spend an hour in here and you may feel like Dorothy after she got hit by the twister. You will get lost at least once. It's one of the few casinos that still have a poker room. 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/891-7777.

The Monte Carlo This place is all huge ceilings and white-light interiors: Obviously, they're trying to evoke gambling in Monaco. While the decor shows lots of attention, it perhaps had too much attention. Bulbs line the ceiling, and everywhere you look is some detail or other. It's busy on both your eyes and your ears, but on the plus side, it smells really nice and there's a low smoke factor. 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/730-7777.

New York-New York Another theme-run-wild place: tuxes on the backs of gaming chairs, change carts that look like yellow cabs, and so forth, all set in a miniature New York City. It's all fabulous fun, but despite a low claustrophobia level (thanks to an unusually high ceiling), it is a major case of sensory overload and is often seriously crowded. This may prove distracting. On the other hand, we won there, so we love it. (Our editor, New Yorker that she is, however, despises the place.) Serious gamblers understandably may sniff at it all and prefer to take their business to a more seemly casino, but everyone else should have about the most Vegas-y time they can. 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/740-6969.

Orleans This is not a particularly special gambling space, though it does have a low claustrophobia level. Another plus is that they sometimes play Cajun and zydeco music over the sound system, so you can two-step while you gamble, which can make losing somewhat less painful. It has all the needed tables—blackjack, craps, and so forth—plus plenty of slots. Because it's popular with locals, there are lots of video-poker options. And because it's not on the Strip, you'll find better odds for craps, and cheaper table minimums. 4500 W. Tropicana Ave. ☎ 702/365-7111.

Tropicana Looking a bit worse for the wear, it is highly tropical, with gaming tables situated beneath a massive stained-glass archway and Art Nouveau lighting fixtures. Unfortunately, ceilings are low and the smoke factor is high. In summer it offers something totally unique: swim-up blackjack tables located in the hotel's 5-acre tropical garden and pool area. Numerous tournaments take place here,

and free gaming lessons are offered weekdays. 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/739-2222.

MID-STRIP

Aladdin The newest big casino on the Strip and . . . it's a casino. It's big, sure, with some of the expected Arabian nights touches (though not as many as one would think), and high ceilings that mean it has only a moderate claustrophobia index, but it somehow doesn't really stand out, even though we gambled there for quite a bit. And one of our moms won there, so, hey, no complaints. It does feel a bit crammed with stuff, too. Of course, it will all probably change once new owner Planet Hollywood gets through with it. 3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/736-0111.

Bally's Las Vegas Bally's casino is large (the size of a football field), with lots of colorful signage. The big ceiling makes for a low claustrophobia level. The casino hosts frequent slot tournaments, and free gaming lessons are offered. There are also blackjack tables and slot/video-poker machines in Bally's Avenue Shoppes. 3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/739-4111.

Bellagio The slot machines here are mostly encased in marble and fine woods. How's that for upping the ante on classy? But its relentless good taste means that this is one pretty forgettable casino. After all, we are suckers for a wacky theme that screams "Vegas," and European class just doesn't cut it. Sure, there are good touches—we always like a high ceiling to reduce the claustrophobia index, and the place is laid out in an easy-to-navigate grid with ultrawide aisles, so walking through doesn't seem like such a crowded collision-course maze. (*Tip:* The main casino path is identified with black carpets.) And we won big here, so there's that. 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/987-6667.

Caesars Palace Caesars' casino is simultaneously the ultimate in gambling luxury and the ultimate in Vegas kitsch. Cocktail waitresses in togas parade about, as you gamble under the watchful gaze of faux-marble Roman statues. The very high ceiling in certain areas of the casino makes for a very low claustrophobia level, especially thanks to the recent facelift, which has lightened up the paint and made them much brighter. Unfortunately, some spots in the casino are dark and entirely too claustrophobic. Actually, although we love it, like Caesars itself, the casino has become somewhat confusing and unmanageable because of its size and meandering layout. The casino is famous for its state-of-the-art **Race and Sports Book**, with

huge electronic display boards and giant video screens. 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/731-7110.

The Flamingo Las Vegas We can't say for sure what their seemingly years-long casino renovation actually did. It all looks pretty much the same, but it might be marginally less confusing and tortuous a layout (trust us, anything is an improvement) with better, and most welcome, access to the street (before, you needed a trail of breadcrumbs and a lot of stamina to find your way out). We have to say that of all the casinos that qualify as older, this is the most pleasant one in which to play though the smoke factor is still pretty awful. One of our favorite slot machines is here, but we won't tell you which one, to save it for ourselves. Sorry. 3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/733-3111.

Gold Coast Adjacent to the Rio, this casino is not only well lit, but totally unique in Vegas: It has windows! It's a little thing, but it made us really excited. They also had a higher ratio of video-poker machines to slot machines, rather than the other way around. A remodeling made it much bigger, with high ceilings, and very bright overall. Nice job. 4000 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ 702/367-7111.

Harrah's A mixed bag of a casino, one that is both dated (low ceilings in some spots, old lighting, stuffy) and fun. The main reason to come here are the "party pits," gaming-table areas where dealers are encouraged to wear funny hats, celebrate wins, and otherwise break the usual stern dealer facade. Singing, dancing, and the handing out of party favors have all been known to erupt. (Gambling is supposed to be fun, so enjoy it!) There are nonsmoking areas (fat lot of good that did, the place reeks of smoke), and free gaming lessons are offered on weekdays. 3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/369-5000.

Imperial Palace The 75,000-square-foot casino here reflects the hotel's pagoda-roofed Asian exterior with a dragon-motif ceiling and giant wind-chime chandeliers. There is a Breathalyzer for voluntary alcohol-limit checks on your way to the parking lot (useful, since there are nine bars on the casino premises). One kitsch feature of note is the casino's Legends Pit, where, on weekends after 6pm, celebrity impersonators aping everyone from Elvis to Madonna deal blackjack. This is also one of the few places on this part of the Strip where you might be able to find \$5 table minimums. 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/731-3311.

The Mirage Gamble in a Polynesian village in one of the prettiest casinos in town. It has a meandering layout, and the low ceiling

makes for a medium claustrophobia level, but neither of these aspects is overwhelming. This remains one of our favorite places to gamble. It's one of the most pleasant, and popular, casinos in town, so it's crowded more often than not. 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/791-7111.

Palms Resort & Casino Here's where this Desperately-Seeking-the-Hip hotel has a bit of an identity crisis, because it also wants to mirror those hotels off the Strip that offer loose slots and other incentives to make the locals feel at home. This rarely makes for a chic playing area (because locals don't want to have to get glammed up to go out and play slots). On the other hand, the area is, especially on weekend nights, ringed with the beautiful and slender and aloof, desperate to get into Ghost Bar and Rain. Let's hope everyone just keeps getting along. The gaming area covers most of the ground floor, and is replete with Miami-tropical-inspired details. 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ 702/942-7777.

Paris-Las Vegas Casino Ringed by a rather Disney-esque 1/3-scale replica of the streets of Paris, this 83,000-square-foot casino is a very pleasant place to gamble, in that Vegas-gimmick kind of way. A tall ceiling adds to the illusion of trying to bust the bank while strolling outside; if nothing else, it has a much more airy, less stifling effect. It doesn't feel all that large, thanks to a meandering layout. It's also one of those gimmicky places real gamblers are appalled by. To heck with them, we say. 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/946-7000.

The Rio This Brazilian-themed resort's 85,000-square-foot casino is, despite the presence of plenty of glitter and neon, very dark. It has about the highest claustrophobia rating of the major casinos and seems very dated these days. Its sports book feels a little grimy. The waitresses wear scanty costumes (particularly in the back), probably in an effort to distract you and throw your game off. Do not let them. The part of the casino in the new Masquerade Village is considerably more pleasant (the very high ceilings help), though still crowded, plus the loud live show adds even more noise. There are nonsmoking slot and gaming table areas. 3700 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ 702/252-7777.

TI at the Mirage We really loved it when this place was a casino set in Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean—or so it seemed. It doesn't seem like a big deal, the loss of those pirate chests dripping gold, jewels, and skulls with eye patches, but with the removal of the theme, this is now just a very nice casino. But it is that, so you should come here. The layout can get a little confusing, but on the plus side, there are nonsmoking gaming tables in each pit. 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/894-7111.

The Venetian “Tasteful” is the watchword in these days of classy Vegas gaming, and all the gleaming marble, columns, and hand-painted Venetian art on parts of this casino’s ceiling is very nice, but after a while it’s also a bit ho-hum. Besides, this is Vegas, and we want our tacky theme elements, by gosh. The lack thereof, combined with poor signage, may be why this casino is so hard to get around—every part looks exactly the same. It’s not precisely claustrophobic, but it can be confusing. On the other hand, we made a killing at blackjack and my editor struck it rich at the slots, so we have to love the place for those reasons. Another (less personal) plus is that you can access the casino directly from the St. Mark’s Square re-creation out front. And the smoke-sensitive report that the ventilation system here seems to be tops on the Strip. 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/414-1000.

NORTH STRIP

Circus Circus This vast property has three full-size casinos that, combined, comprise one of the largest gaming operations in Nevada (more than 100,000 sq. ft.). More importantly, they have an entire circus midway set up throughout, so you are literally gambling with trapeze stunts going on over your head. Unfortunately, the casino is crowded and noisy, and there are lots of children passing through. That, plus some low ceilings (not in the Big Top, obviously), makes for a very high claustrophobia rating, though the new *commedia dell’arte* clown motif (as opposed to the old garish circus motif) has upgraded the decor. 2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/734-0410.

The Riviera The Riviera’s 100,000-square-foot casino, one of the largest in the world, offers plenty of opportunities to get lost and cranky. A wall of windows lets daylight stream in (most unusual), but as the hotel gets shabbier, every inch of the casino smells like smoke and age. Nickeltown is just that—nothin’ but nickel slots and video poker. 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/734-5110.

Sahara This is one place where there seem to be more tables than slots and video-poker machines. It’s also one of the few Strip casinos that offers low-rollers good deals such as \$1 craps and blackjack. But belligerent drunks and other fun-killing folks are often found at these \$1 tables. When we were last there, they had a whole row of Piggy Bankin’ machines that were all paying off, so we were happy. The Sahara runs frequent slot tournaments and other events. 2535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/737-2111.

Stardust This once-popular casino features 90,000 square feet of lively gaming action, including a 250-seat race and sports book with

an adjacent sports handicapper's library offering comprehensive statistical information on current sporting events. We usually do well here, so even though it's a little loud, we like it. Check out those \$1 slots just inside the front door—they've been very good to us. 3000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/732-6111.

Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower Stratosphere redid its whole casino area to make it more appealing to the many adults who were staying away in droves. This should lure many of you, because it is a nicer, and less crowded, place to play. They heavily advertise their high payback on certain slots and video poker: 98% payback on dollar slots and 100% payback on quarter video poker (if you bet the maximum on each). We can't say we noticed a difference, but other people around us were winning like crazy. There's a test area for new slot games, a Harley slot area with motorcycle-seat stools, and a high-roller slot room (\$5 minimum bet) where chairs move up and down and can vibrate to give you a back massage while you play. 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/380-7777.

EAST OF THE STRIP

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Where Gen X goes to gamble. The Hard Rock has certainly taken casino decor to a whole new level. Gaming tables have piano keyboards at one end; some slots have Fender guitar fretboards as arms; gaming chips have band names and/or pictures on them; slot machines are similarly rock-themed (check out the Jimi Hendrix machine!); and so it goes. Rock blares over the sound system, allowing boomers to boogie while they gamble. All this is genuinely amazing, but the noise level is above even that of a normal casino and we just hated it. We are in the minority, though; most people love it, so assume you will be one of them. 4455 Paradise Rd. ☎ 702/693-5000.

Las Vegas Hilton The casino has two parts, thanks to the space-themed portion adjacent to *Star Trek: The Experience*. In an area designed to look like a spaceport, you find space-themed slot machines, many of which have no handles—just pass your hand through a light beam to activate. We do like a well-designed space in which to lose our money.

Over in the original casino section, Austrian crystal chandeliers add a strong touch of class. The casino is actually medium-size, but it does have—at 30,500 square feet—the world's largest race and sports book facility. It, too, is a luxurious precinct equipped with the most advanced audio, video, and computer technology available. In

fact, its video wall is second in size only to NASA's. The casino is adjacent to the lobby but is neither especially loud nor frantic. 3000 Paradise Rd. ☎ 702/732-7111.

Sam's Town On its two immense floors of gaming action (153,083 sq. ft., 2nd only to the MGM Grand in size), Sam's Town maintains the friendly, just-folks ambience that characterizes the entire property. The casino is adorned with Old West paraphernalia (horseshoes, Winchester rifles, holsters, and saddlebags) and is looking a bit less dated thanks to some recent sprucing up (it's subtle, but believe us, it's better). Sam's Town claims its friendliness extends to looser slots. Free gaming lessons are offered weekdays from 11 am to 4pm, with poker lessons at other times. 5111 Boulder Hwy. (at Nellis Blvd.). ☎ 702/456-7777.

DOWNTOWN

Binion's Horseshoe *(Finds)* Professionals in the know say that "for the serious player, the Binions are this town." Benny Binion could neither read nor write, but boy did he know how to run a casino. His venerable establishment has been eclipsed over the years, but it claims the highest betting limits in Las Vegas on all games. It offers single-deck blackjack and \$2 minimums, 10-times odds on craps, and high progressive jackpots. It's also the home of the World Series of Poker. Real gamblers won't consider going anywhere else.

We especially like the older part of the casino here, which—with its flocked wallpaper, fancy lighting fixtures, and gold-tasseled burgundy velvet drapes—looks like an Old West bordello. Unfortunately, all this adds up to a very high claustrophobia level. They do, however, have a giant slot machine, which has been very, very good to us. 128 E. Fremont St. (between Casino Center Blvd. and 1st St.). ☎ 702/382-1600.

The California Hotel/Casino The California is a festive place filled with Hawaiian shirts and balloons. This friendly facility actually provides sofas and armchairs in the casino area—an unheard-of luxury in this town. Players can join the Cal Slot Club and amass points toward gifts and cash prizes, or participate in daily slot tournaments. This is the first place we found our favorite Piggy Bankin' machines. 12 Ogden Ave. (at 1st St.). ☎ 702/385-1222.

Castaways The former Showboat traded in its Mardi Gras/Showboat gambling theme for a Polynesian one. It's a big casino, nearly as big as the ones on the Strip, but over time has been portioned off into deceptively small rooms and other sections. It's not the most elaborate in town, but it is certainly clean, friendly,

and comfortable. At night, various bands play from an open lounge. Castaways' enormous 24-hour bingo parlor is a facility noted for high payouts. And if you're traveling with kids ages 2 to 7, you can leave them at an in-house babysitting facility free for 3 hours while you gamble. 2800 Fremont St. (between Charleston Blvd. and Mojave Rd.). ☎ 702/385-9123.

El Cortez This casino is one of the last shreds of pre-1980s Las Vegas, which is either wonderful or horrible depending on your view. It features frequent big-prize drawings (up to \$50,000) based on your social security number. It's also popular for low limits (10¢ roulette and 25¢ craps). 600 Fremont St. (between 6th and 7th sts.). ☎ 702/385-5200.

Fitzgeralds This casino is done up in greens and golds, and the overall effect is not quite as tacky as you might expect. In fact, it's rather friendly and with a medium to low claustrophobia level. The casino actually has two levels: From the upstairs part, you can access a balcony from which you get an up-close view of the Fremont Street Experience. Blackjack, craps, and keno tournaments are frequent events here. Several slot machines have cars as prizes, fun books provide two-for-one gaming coupons, and there are \$1-minimum blackjack tables. 301 Fremont St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 702/388-2400.

The Four Queens The Four Queens is New Orleans-themed, with late-19th-century-style globe chandeliers, which make for good lighting and a low claustrophobia level. It's small, but the dealers are helpful, which is one of the pluses of gambling in the more manageable sized casinos. The facility boasts the world's largest slot machine: More than 9 feet high and almost 20 feet long, six people can play it at one time! It's the mother of all giant slot machines, and frankly, it intimidates even us. Here is also the world's largest blackjack table (it seats 12 players). Slot, blackjack, and craps tournaments are frequent events, and there are major poker tournaments every January and September. The casino also offers exciting multiple-action blackjack (it's like playing three hands at once with separate wagers on each). 202 Fremont St. (at Casino Center Blvd.). ☎ 702/385-4011.

Fremont Hotel & Casino This 32,000-square-foot casino offers a relaxed atmosphere and low gambling limits (\$2 blackjack, 25¢ roulette). It's also surprisingly open and bright for a Downtown casino. Just 50¢ could win you a Cadillac or Ford Mustang here, plus a progressive cash jackpot. Casino guests can take part in frequent slot and keno tournaments. No giant slot machine, though. 200 E. Fremont St. (between Casino Center Blvd. and 3rd St.). ☎ 702/385-3232.

The Golden Nugget We'll have to wait and see what the new owners do to it, because right now this is not the standout that other casino properties developed by Steve Wynn are. It goes for luxury, of course, but there's too much crammed into too little space. That's not to say we didn't like it, because we won a lot of money here. And compared to most other Downtown properties, this is the most like the Strip. Despite the overcrowding, it has a much cleaner and fresher feeling than many of the dingy, time-forgotten spaces. 129 E. Fremont St. (at Casino Center Blvd.). ☎ 702/385-7111.

Lady Luck A complete remodeling didn't do too much to change this old gal, who is still a bit more smoky and crowded than we prefer, but that doesn't mean she's not good for a few go-rounds. Plus, its liberal game rules are attractive to gamblers. You can play "fast-action hold 'em" here—a combination of 21, poker, and pai gow poker. 206 N. 3rd St. (at Ogden Ave.). ☎ 702/477-3000.

Main Street Station *(Finds)* This is the best of the Downtown casinos, at least in terms of comfort and a pleasant environment. Even the Golden Nugget, nice as it is, has more noise and distractions. The decor here is, again, classic Vegas/old-timey (Victorian-era) San Francisco, but with extra touches (check out the old-fashioned fans above the truly beautiful bar) that make it work much better than other attempts at the same decor. Strangely, it seems just about smoke-free, perhaps thanks in part to a very high ceiling. The claustrophobia level is zero. 200 N. Main St. (between Fremont St. and I-95). ☎ 800/713-8933 or 702/387-1896.

Shopping

Shopping in Vegas—Nirvana or an endless Sisyphian repetition of every mall you’ve ever been to? Depends on your viewpoint. If you’re looking for quaint, clever, unique stores, this isn’t the town for you. But if you are looking for general shop-till-you-drop fun, this is your kind of town. In addition to some extensive malls, many hotels have comprehensive, and sometimes highly themed, shopping arcades, most notably Caesars Palace, the Aladdin, and The Venetian (details below).

In addition to exploring the malls, outlets, and shops listed below, you might consider driving **Maryland Parkway**, which runs parallel to the Strip on the east and has just about one of everything: Target, several major department stores, Tower Records, major drugstores (in case you forgot your shampoo and don’t want to spend \$8 on a new bottle in your hotel sundry shop), some alternative-culture stores (tattoo parlors and hip clothing stores), and so forth. It goes on for blocks.

1 The Malls

Boulevard Mall The Boulevard’s 144-plus stores and restaurants are arranged in arcade fashion on a single floor occupying 1.2 million square feet. Geared to the average consumer, it has such anchors as Sears, JCPenney, Macy’s, Dillard’s, and Marshalls. The wide variety of shops offer all sorts of items—moderately priced shoes and clothing for the entire family, books and gifts, jewelry, and home furnishings. There are also more than a dozen fast-food eateries. In short, you can find just about anything you need here. And there’s free valet parking. The mall is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from 11am to 6pm. 3528 S. Maryland Pkwy. (between Twain Ave. and Desert Inn Rd.). ☎ 702/732-8949. www.blvdmall.com.

Fashion Show Mall What was a nondescript, if large, mall has now been revamped with a *yowsa* exterior much more fitting Las Vegas. It’s capped by a giant . . . well . . . they call it a “Cloud” but we call it “that weird thingy that looks like a spaceport for UFOs,

what in the heck were they thinking?” Inside, you will find the city’s first Nordstrom, a Bloomingdale’s, Saks Fifth Avenue, a Macy’s and eventually a Lord & Taylor. Construction on the \$300 million expansion should be completed in late 2003. The mall presently comprises more than 130 shops, restaurants, and services. And the Cloud/Alien Spaceport Thingy will have giant LED screens, music, and other distractions—again, much more fitting for Vegas, where even the malls have to light up. Valet parking is available, and you can even arrange to have your car hand-washed while you shop. The Fashion Show is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 9pm, Saturday from 10am to 7pm, and Sunday from noon until 6pm. 3200 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at the corner of Spring Mountain Rd.). ☎ 702/369-0704. www.thefashionshow.com.

The Galleria at Sunset This is a 1-million-square-foot Southwestern-themed shopping center, 9 miles southeast of downtown Las Vegas. Anchored by four department stores (Dillard’s, JCPenney, Mervyn’s California, and Robinsons-May), and 110 of the usual mall suspects. In addition to shoes and clothing for the entire family, you’ll find electronics, eyewear, gifts, books, home furnishings, jewelry, and luggage here. Dining facilities include an extensive food court and two restaurants. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from 11am to 6pm. In nearby Henderson, 1300 W. Sunset Rd. (at Stephanie St., just off I-515). ☎ 702/434-0202. www.galleriaatsunset.com.

The Meadows Another immense mall, The Meadows is made up of more than 140 shops, services, and eateries, anchored by four department stores: Macy’s, Dillard’s, Sears, and JCPenney. In addition, there are 15 shoe stores, a full array of apparel for the entire family (including maternity wear, petites, and large sizes), an extensive food court, and shops purveying toys, books, CDs and tapes, luggage, gifts, jewelry, home furnishings, accessories, and so on. Fountains and trees enhance The Meadows’s ultramodern, high-ceilinged interior, and there are a few comfortable seating areas for resting your feet a moment. The Meadows Mall is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. 4300 Meadows Lane (at the intersection of Valley View and U.S. 95). ☎ 702/878-3331. www.themeadowsmall.com.

Showcase Mall Less traditional mall than an entertainment center, it has plenty of both shopping and fun—we rarely miss a chance to drop by M&M World, to say nothing of Sephora. Other occupants include GameWorks, the World of Coca-Cola store, Grand

Canyon Experience, and the United Artist Cinemas—the only regular movie theater complex on the Strip. Hours vary by store. 3785 S. Las Vegas Blvd. (right next to the MGM Grand). ☎ 702/597-3122.

2 Factory Outlets

The big news in outlet shopping was the opening, at press time, of the \$80 million, 435,000 square-foot “high-end” Las Vegas Premium Outlets Center near Downtown. The center has 100 stores, a food court, and other stuff. Stores include Armani Exchange, Coach, Dolce & Gabbana, Guess, Kenneth Cole, Lacoste, Polo/Ralph Lauren, St. John, Tahari, and Theory. It’s located right where the 15 and 93 come together behind the Plaza hotel.

Belz Factory Outlet World Located just a few miles past the southern end of the Strip, Belz houses 145 air-conditioned outlets, including a few dozen clothing stores and shoe stores. It offers an immense range of merchandise at savings up to 75% off retail prices. Among other emporia, you’ll find Levi’s, Nike, Dress Barn, Leggs/Hanes/Bali, Esprit, Carters, Reebok, Spiegel, Oneida, Bose (electronics), Danskin, Royal Doulton, Lennox (china), Waterford (crystal), and Geoffrey Beene here. There is also a carousel. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. 7400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Warm Springs Rd.). ☎ 702/896-5599. www.belz.com/factory/locations/lasvegas/index.html.

Fashion Outlet at Primm Dedicated bargain hunters may want to make the roughly 40-minute drive along I-15 (there’s also a \$13 shuttle from New York–New York or MGM Grand) to this big outlet complex, right on the border of California and Nevada. On your left is a large factory outlet with some designer names prominent enough to make that drive well worthwhile—Kenneth Cole, Donna Karan, Gap, Old Navy, among several others. Why so far out of town? Our guess is because all these designers have full-price boutiques in various hotels, and they don’t want you ignoring those in favor of discounted items. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from 10am to 8pm. 32100 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/424-6898. www.fashionoutletlasvegas.com.

3 Hotel Shopping Arcades

Just about every Las Vegas hotel offers some shopping opportunities. The following have the most extensive arcades. The physical

spaces of these shopping arcades are always open, but individual stores keep unpredictable hours.

ALADDIN The most recent Vegas “dazzle the tourists out of their money” shopping experience (the others being over at Caesars and The Venetian), the Desert Passage uses the mystical and romantic architecture (or recreations thereof) of the Middle East (Egypt, Morocco, Turkey) as its theme, and the results are pretty swell. Even the ceiling overhead is painted to replicate sultry days and nights, with occasional thunderstorms hitting. There is a lot to look at beyond the shops, and even more, because, at this writing, they have frequent live entertainers—acrobats, jugglers, belly dancers—to add to the visuals. And it’s not just visual but odiferous; they pipe in spices and other evocative scents appropriate to those regions. The whole thing allows you to have that Middle Eastern souk-shopping experience without all the pesky touts trying to drag you into their stall for hours of haggling. You can even take a pedicab (that would be a bicycle-powered vehicle pedaled by some comely worker) for a tour of Morocco, kinda. The stores are the assortment of mid- and high-end name brands one would expect (so the gouging happens in a different way than in the souks!). The thing that worries us the most about Planet Hollywood’s purchase of the Aladdin is how that might affect this mall and its appearance.

BELLAGIO The Via Bellagio collection of stores isn’t as big as some of the other mega-hotel shopping arcades, but here it’s definitely quality over quantity. It’s a veritable roll call of glossy magazine ads: Armani, Prada, Chanel, Tiffany, Hermès, Fre Leighton, Gucci, and Moschino. That’s it. You need anything else? Well, yes—money. We can’t even afford the oxygen in these places. If you can, good for you, you lucky dog. A nice touch is a parking lot by the far entrance to Via Bellagio, so you need not navigate the great distance from Bellagio’s main parking structure, but can simply pop in and pick yourself up a little something.

CAESARS PALACE Since 1978, Caesars has had an impressive arcade of shops called the **Appian Way**, highlighted by an immense white Carrara-marble replica of Michelangelo’s *David* standing more than 18 feet high. All in all, a respectable grouping of hotel shops, and an expansion is in the works.

But in the hotel’s tradition of constantly surpassing itself, in 1992 Caesars inaugurated the fabulous **Forum Shops** (☞), an independently operated 250,000-square-foot Rodeo-Drive-meets-the-Roman-Empire affair complete with a 48-foot triumphal arch entranceway,

a painted Mediterranean sky that changes as the day progresses from rosy-tinted dawn to twinkling evening stars, acres of marble, lofty scagliola Corinthian columns with gold capitals, and a welcoming goddess of fortune under a central dome. Its architecture and sculpture span a period from 300 B.C. to A.D. 1700, so you get all your Italian ancient cityscape clichés. Then there is the Festival Fountain, where seemingly immovable “marble” Animatronic statues of Bacchus (slightly in his cups), a lyre-playing Apollo, Plutus, and Venus come to life for a 7-minute revel with dancing waters and high-tech laser-light effects. The shows take place every hour on the hour. The whole thing is pretty incredible, but also very Vegas—particularly the Bacchus show, which is truly frightening and bizarre. Even if you don’t like shopping, it’s worth the stroll just to giggle.

More than 70 prestigious emporia here include Louis Vuitton, Bernini, Christian Dior, Gucci, Ann Taylor, and Gianni Versace, along with many other clothing, shoe, and jewelry stores.

And as if that weren’t enough, in 1998, the Forum Shops added an extension. The centerpiece is a giant **Roman Hall**, featuring a 50,000-gallon circular aquarium and another fountain that also comes to life with a show of fire (don’t stand too close—it gets really hot), dancing waters, and Animatronic figures, as the mythical continent of Atlantis rises and falls every hour. The production values are much higher than the Bacchus extravaganza, but it takes itself more seriously, so the giggle factor remains. The hall is also the entrance to the ***Race for Atlantis IMAX 3-D ride*** (p. 106).

In this shopping area, you’ll find a number of significant stores, including a DKNY, Emporio Armani, Virgin Megastore, and FAO Schwarz. Do go see the latter, as it is fronted by a gigantic Trojan horse, in which you can clamber around, while its head moves and smoke comes out its nostrils. We love it. And if that weren’t all still enough, yet another expansion is underway as you read this!

The shops are open Sunday to Thursday from 10am to 11pm, and Friday and Saturday from 10am to midnight.

CIRCUS CIRCUS There are about 15 shops between the casino and the Adventuredome (p. 114), offering a wide selection of gifts and sundries, logo items, toys and games, jewelry, liquor, resort apparel for the entire family, T-shirts, homemade fudge/candy/soft ice cream, and, fittingly, clown dolls and puppets. Adjacent to the Adventuredome, there’s a new shopping arcade themed as a European village, with cobblestone walkways and fake woods and so

forth, decorated with replicas of vintage circus posters. It's much nicer than what the tacky Circus Circus has had before.

HARRAH'S Harrah's has a shopping center called **Carnivale Court**. It's a small outdoor shopping promenade and among the store highlights is a Ghirardelli Chocolate store, a branch of the famous San Francisco-based chocolate company. Other stores include the Carnival Market and Wine and Spirits shops, perfect for creating your own outdoor picnic feast.

RIO The 60,000-square-foot **Masquerade Village** is a nicely executed shopping arcade at Rio. It's done as a European village, and is two stories tall, featuring a wide variety of shops including the nation's largest Nicole Miller, Speedo, and the N'awlins store, which includes "authentic" voodoo items, Mardi Gras masks, and so forth.

THE RIVIERA The Riviera has a fairly extensive shopping arcade comprising art galleries, jewelers, and shops specializing in women's shoes and handbags, clothing for the entire family, furs, gifts, logo items, toys, phones and electronic gadgets, and chocolates.

STRATOSPHERE The internationally themed (though in a high-school production kind of way, compared to what's over at Aladdin and The Venetian) second-floor **Tower Shops** promenade, housing more than 40 stores, is entered via an escalator from the casino. Some shops are in "Paris," along the Rue Lafayette and Avenue de l'Opéra (there are replicas of the Eiffel Tower and Arc de Triomphe in this section). Others occupy Hong Kong and New York City streetscapes.

TREASURE ISLAND Treasure Island's shopping promenade—doubling as a portrait gallery of famed buccaneers—has wooden ship figureheads and battling pirates suspended from its ceiling. Emporia here include the Treasure Island Store (your basic hotel gift/sundry shop, also offering much pirate-themed merchandise). The Crow's Nest, en route to the Mirage monorail, carries Cirque du Soleil logo items. Cirque du Soleil and *Mystère* logo wares are also sold in a shop near the ticket office in the hotel.

THE VENETIAN ★ The **Grand Canal Shoppes** are a direct challenge to Caesars Palace's shopping eminence. As in the Forum Shops, you stroll through a re-created Italian village—in this case, more or less Renaissance-era Venice, complete with a painted, cloud-studded blue sky overhead, and a canal right down the center on which gondoliers float and sing. Pay them (\$12) and you can

take a lazy float down and back, serenaded by your boatman (actors hired especially for this purpose and with accents perfect enough to fool Roberto Benigni). As you pass by, under and over bridges, flower girls will serenade you and courtesans will flirt with you, and you may have an encounter with a famous Venetian or two, as Marco Polo discusses his travels, and Casanova exerts his famous charm. The stroll (or float) ends at a miniature (though not by all that much) version of St. Mark's Square, the central landmark of Venice. Here, you'll find opera singers, strolling musicians, glass blowers, and other bustling marketplace activity. It's all most ambitious and beats the heck out of Animatronic statues.

The Shoppes are accessible directly from outside (so you don't have to navigate miles of casino and other clutter), via a grand staircase whose ceiling features more of those impressive hand-painted art re-creations. It's quite smashing. The Venetian's "Phase Two" hotel addition will eventually adjoin the Shoppes at the far end of St. Mark's Square.

Oh, the shops themselves? The usual high- and medium-end brand names: Jimmy Choo, Mikimoto, Movado, Davidoff, Lana Marks, Kieselstein-Cord, Donna Karan, Oliver & Col, Ludwig Reiter, Kenneth Cole, Ann Taylor, BCBG, bebe, Banana Republic, Rockport, and more, plus Venetian glass and paper shops. Madame Tussaud's waxworks (p. 105) is also located here, and so is the Canyon Ranch Spa Club.

4 Souvenirs

The **Arts Factory Complex**, 103 E. Charleston Blvd. (☎ 702/382-3886), has a gift shop full of pink flamingos and Vegas-specific items. There should be something here for every camp fancy.

If you prefer your souvenirs to be less deliberately ironic, head over to the **Bonanza Gift and Souvenir Shop**, 2460 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/384-0005). We looked, and we felt the tackiest item available was the pair of earrings made out of poker chips.

For reverent camp, encrusted with sequins, do take a peek at the **Liberace Museum gift store**, 1775 E. Tropicana Ave. (☎ 702/798-5595). Encourage them to get even more out there (don't you think they should add Liberace mouse pads and screensavers?).

If you like your souvenirs with more style (spoilsports), **Cirque de Soleil's O** has a gift shop in Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/693-7444), with Cirque-specific articles, but also fanciful pottery, masks, and other curiosities.

5 Las Vegas Specialty Stores

Gambler's Book Shop Here you can buy a book on any system ever devised to beat casino odds. Owner Edna Luckman carries more than 4,000 gambling-related titles, including many out-of-print books, computer software, and videotapes. She describes her store as a place where “gamblers, writers, researchers, statisticians, and computer specialists can meet and exchange information.” On request, knowledgeable clerks provide on-the-spot expert advice on handicapping the ponies and other aspects of sports betting. The store's motto is “knowledge is protection.” Open Monday through Saturday from 9am until 5pm; closed Sunday. 630 S. 11th St. (just off Charleston Blvd.). ☎ 800/522-1777 or 702/382-7555. www.gamblersbook.com.

Gamblers General Store A gambler's paradise stocked with a massive book collection, both antique and current slot machines, gaming tables (blackjack, craps, and so on), roulette wheels, collectible chips, casino dice, classic Vegas photos, and a ton of gaming-related souvenirs. Open daily from 9am to 5pm. 800 S. Main St. (Downtown). ☎ 800/322-2447 or 702/382-9903. www.gamblersgeneralstore.com.

6 Candy

M&M World *Kids* What can one do when faced with a wall of M&Ms in colors never before seen by man or woman (black! white! gray!)? Overpriced? Yeah! Who cares? There are doodads galore, replete with the M&M logo, and a surprisingly enjoyable short film and comedy routine, ostensibly about the “history” of the candy, but really just a cute little adventure with a decent budget behind it. Open Sunday through Thursday from 9am until midnight, Friday and Saturday from 9am until 1am. In the Showcase Mall, 3785 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (just north of the MGM Grand Hotel). ☎ 702/736-7611.

7 Antiques

Antiques in Vegas? You mean really old slot machines, or the people playing the really old slot machines?

Actually, Vegas has quite a few antiques stores—nearly two dozen, of consistent quality and price, nearly all located within a few blocks of each other. We have one friend, someone who takes interior design very seriously, who comes straight to Vegas for most of her best finds (you should see her antique chandelier collection!).

To get to this antiquing mecca, start in the middle of the **1600 block of East Charleston Boulevard** and keep driving east. The little

stores, nearly all in old houses dating from the '30s, line each side of the street. Or you can stop in at **Silver Horse Antiques**, 1651 E. Charleston Blvd. (☎ 702/385-2700), and pick up a map to almost all of the locations, with phone numbers and hours of operation.

Antique Sampler Shoppes Head here for everything under one roof. More than 200 small antiques shops sell their wares in this mall, which offers a diversity of antiques ranging from exquisite Indian bird cages to *Star Wars* memorabilia (let's not call those sorts of items "antiques" but rather "nostalgia"). Changing selections mean they can never guarantee what will be available, but you can probably count on antique clothing and shoes, lamps, silver, decorative plates and china, old sewing machines, antique furniture, and '50s prom dresses. The displays are well labeled and well laid out, making it easy to take in all the antiques. The oldest antiques are from the mid-1800s and range in price from \$100 to \$4,000. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am until 7pm, Sunday from noon until 7pm. 6115 W. Tropicana Ave. ☎ 702/368-1170. www.antiquesampler.com.

Antiques at the Market A brand-new antiques minimall (for lack of a better phrase) with a number of individuals operating stalls under one roof. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am until 6pm, Sunday from noon until 5pm. 6663 S. Eastern Ave. (between Sunset and Warm Springs Rd.). ☎ 702/307-3960. www.antiquesatthemarket.com.

Antique Square A cruddy-looking collection of stores in several remodeled houses arranged in a square. But every good antiques shopper knows that these kinds of crammed junk stores are the places to find real treasures, and to do real antiques hunting (because once they've been really picked through and prettily displayed by pros, you can kiss bargains and real finds goodbye). Individual store hours vary but most are closed on Sunday and Monday. 2014–2034 Charleston Blvd. (at Eastern Ave.). ☎ 702/471-6500.

8 Wigs

Serge's Showgirl Wigs Oh, you probably thought all those showgirls just naturally had bountiful thick manes. Sorry to burst your bubble. Actually, we aren't—if you don't know it's all illusion, you ought to. Meanwhile, if you have a desire to look like a showgirl yourself (and why not?), come to Serge's, which for 23 years has been supplying Vegas's wiggy needs, with more than 2,000 wigs to choose from. This, by the way, is not just for showgirls or the similarly delusional. Not only can wigs be fun for everyone (we treasure our own turquoise

number) but at least one sassy gal we know with thinning hair issues recently bought two natural-looking models, and reports that the sales staff was as nice and helpful as could be. Wigs range in price from \$130 to over \$1,500, depending on quality and realness, and you can pick from Dolly Parton's wig line or get something custom-made. They also make hairpieces and toupees and carry hair-care products. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am until 5:30pm.

And, if the prices at Serge's are too rich to bring your fantasy alive, right across the way is **Serge's Showgirl Wigs outlet**, with prices running from a more reasonable \$60 to \$70. 953 E. Sahara Ave. no. A-2. ☎ 702/732-1015. www.showgirlwigs.com.

Las Vegas After Dark

You will not lack for things to do at night in Vegas. This is a town that truly comes alive only after dark. Just look at the difference between the Strip during the day, when it's kind of dingy and nothing special, and at night when the lights hit and the place glows in all its glory. Night is when it's happening in this 24-hour town. In fact, most bars and clubs don't even get going until close to midnight.

But you also won't lack for things to do before 11pm. There are shows all over town, ranging from traditional magic shows to cutting-edge acts like *Mystère*. The showgirls remain, topless and otherwise; Las Vegas revues are what happened to vaudeville, by the way, as chorus girls do their thing in between jugglers, comics, magicians, singers, and specialty acts of dubious category.

Every hotel has at least one lounge, usually offering live music. But the days of fabulous Vegas lounge entertainment, when the lounge acts were sometimes of better quality than the headliners (and headliners like Sinatra would join the lounge acts on stage between their own sets), are gone. Most of what remains is homogeneous and bland, and serves best as a brief respite or background noise. On the other hand, finding the most awful lounge act in town can be a rewarding pursuit of its own.

Vegas still does attract some dazzling headliner entertainment in its showrooms and arenas. Madonna's 2001 show commanded the top prices on her tour, Bruce Springsteen played his first Vegas show ever in early 2000, U2 started its PopArt tour at UNLV's stadium, the Rolling Stones played both the MGM Grand and the Hard Rock Hotel's Joint, Pavarotti inaugurated Mandalay Bay's Arena, with Bob Dylan doing the same for the House of Blues, and Cher opened up the Venetian with a rare live performance. It is still a badge of honor for comedians to play Vegas, and there is almost always someone of marquee value playing one showroom or the other.

Admission to shows runs the gamut, from about \$28 for *An Evening at La Cage* (a female-impersonator show at The Riviera) to \$90 and more for top headliners. Prices occasionally include two drinks or, in rare instances, dinner.

To find out who'll be performing during your stay and for up-to-date listings of shows (prices change, shows close), you can call the various hotels, using their toll-free numbers. Or call the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** (☎ 877/VISIT-LV) and ask them to send you a free copy of *Showguide* or *What's On in Las Vegas* (one or both of which will probably be in your hotel room). You can also check out what's playing at www.vegasfreedom.com. It's best to plan well ahead if you have your heart set on seeing one of the most popular shows, or catching a major headliner.

More rock bands are coming to town, attracted to the House of Blues, the Hard Rock Hotel's Joint, or the Huntridge Theater, so that means you can actually see folks like Marilyn Manson and Beck in Vegas. But otherwise, the alternative club scene in town is no great shakes. If you want to know what's playing during your stay, consult the local free alternative papers: the **Las Vegas Weekly**, formerly *Scope* magazine (biweekly, with great club and bar descriptions in their listings), and **City Life** (weekly, with no descriptions but comprehensive listings of what's playing where all over town). Both can be picked up at restaurants, bars, record and music stores, and hip retail stores.

In addition to the listings below, consider the **Fremont Street Experience**, described on p. 101.

Note: If you're traveling with your family, be aware that there is a curfew law in Vegas: anyone under 18 is forbidden from being on the Strip without a parent after 9pm on weekends and holidays.

1 The Major Production Shows

You'll still find showgirls in Las Vegas and they're still scantily clad (though not as often topless; guess cable TV has taken some of that thrill away), but the productions around them have gotten impossibly elaborate. And they have to be, because they have to compete with a volcano, dancing fountains, a Mardi Gras parade in the sky, lounge acts galore, and the occasional imploding building. All for free.

The big resort hotels, in keeping with their general over-the-top tendencies, are pouring mountains of money into high-spectacle extravaganzas, luring big-name acts into decades-long residencies and surrounding them with special effects that would put some Hollywood movies to shame. Which is not to say the results are Broadway quality—they're big, cheesy fun. Still, with the exception of the astonishing work done by the Cirque du Soleil productions, most of what passes for a "show" in Vegas is just a flashier revue,

Tips Our Favorites

Our vote for **best show?** It's a toss-up between *O* at Bellagio and *Mystère* at Treasure Island, both by Cirque du Soleil. Either must be seen to be believed—and even then you may not believe it, but you won't be forgetting the experience anytime soon. **Most intelligent show** is put on by Penn & Teller and we are grateful. The **best magic show**, and one of the most reasonably priced productions (and thus the overall **best value for the money**), is Lance Burton at Monte Carlo. **Best classic Vegas topless revue** is *Jubilee!* at Bally's. **Best we aren't sure what the heck to call it** is Blue Man Group at Luxor.

with a predictable lineup of production number/magic act/production number/acrobatics/production number.

Unfortunately, along with big budgets and big goals come big-ticket prices. Sure, you can still take the whole family of four to a show for under \$100, but you're not going to get the same production values that you'd get by splurging on a Cirque du Soleil show. Which is not to say you always get what you pay for: There are some reasonably priced shows that are considerably better values than their more expensive counterparts.

Note: Although every effort has been made to keep up with the volatile Las Vegas show scene, keep in mind that the following reviews may not be indicative of the actual show you'll see, but the basic concept and idea will be the same. What's more, the show itself may have closed, so it's a good idea to always call the venue and check. Note also that some ticket prices may not include tax or drinks, so you might also check for those potential hidden costs.

American Superstars One of an increasing number of celebrity impersonator shows (well, it's cheaper than getting the real headliners), *American Superstars* is one of the few where said impersonators actually sing live. Five performers do their thing; the celebs impersonated vary depending on the evening.

A typical Friday night featured Gloria Estefan, Charlie Daniels, Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Diana Ross and the Supremes. The performers won't be putting the originals out of work any time soon, but they aren't bad. Actually, they were closer in voice than in looks to the celeb in question (half the black performers were played by white actors), which is an unusual switch for Vegas impersonators.

The youngish crowd (by Vegas standards) included a healthy smattering of children and seemed to find no faults with the production. In the Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower, 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **800/99-TOWER** or 702/380-7711. Tickets \$36 adults, \$25 children 5–12, show and buffet package \$44. Sun–Tues at 7pm; Wed and Fri–Sat at 7 and 10pm; dark Thurs.

Blue Man Group: Live at Luxor Are they blue? Indeed they are—three hairless, non-speaking men dipped in azure paint, doing decidedly odd stunts with marshmallows, art supplies, audience members, tons of paper, and an amazing array of percussion instruments fashioned fancifully from PVC piping. If that doesn't sound very Vegas, well, it's not. It's the latest franchise of a New York–originated performance-art troupe that seems to have slipped into town through a side door opened by Cirque du Soleil's groundbreaking successes. Don't get the wrong idea; this is no Cirque clone. There are no acrobatics or flowing choreography, and no attempt to create an alternate universe, just a series of unconnected bits. But even if the whole is no greater than the sum of the parts, the parts are pretty great themselves. In the Luxor, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/262-4000**. Tickets \$88–\$94. Tues at 7pm; Sun, Mon, and Wed–Fri 7 and 10pm; Sat 4, 7, and 10pm.

Celine Dion It's genuinely unprecedented for a star of this magnitude to take up a 3-year residency in a Vegas show—not to mention a Vegas show designed, theater and all, just for her. For those of you with (understandable) sticker shock, you can take some comfort in the fact that the money is all on the stage here. The theater is magnificent and the stunning staging includes a heralded enormous LED screen that allows for the most extraordinary special effects in town and Cirque du Soleil–style artistic touches.

The Diva herself appears on stage at least 90% of the time, and generally works her tail off when she's there. Her pearly tones are right on the money. But the problem is that no matter how visually stunning or remarkably staged, this is nonetheless a Celine Dion concert, and nothing else. That's great news if you are a fan, but not if you aren't. This show won't convert anyone, probably, despite her genuine best efforts—she's got a heck of a voice and she is a true entertainer, in the best sense of the tradition, if not the most charismatic one. In Caesars Palace, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **877/CELINE-4**. Tickets \$88–\$200 (excluding tax). Wed–Sun 8:30pm.

Cirque du Soleil's *Mystère* *(Kids)* The in-house ads for *Mystère* (say miss-tair) say “Words don't do it justice,” and for once, that's not just hype. The show is so visual that trying to describe it is a losing

proposition. And simply calling it a circus is like calling the Hope Diamond a gem, or the Taj Mahal a building. It's accurate but, as the ad says, doesn't begin to do it justice.

Cirque du Soleil began in Montreal as a unique circus experience, not only shunning traditional animal acts in favor of gorgeous feats of human strength and agility, but also adding elements of the surreal and the absurd. The result seems like a collaboration between Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, with a few touches by Magritte and choreography by Twyla Tharp. MGM MIRAGE has built the troupe its own theater, an incredible space with an enormous dome and super-hydraulics that allow for the Cirque performers to fly in space. Or so it seems.

While part of the fun of the early Cirque was seeing what amazing stuff they could do on a shoestring, seeing what they can do with virtually unlimited funds is spectacular. The show features one simply unbelievable act after another (seemingly boneless contortionists and acrobats, breathtakingly beautiful aerial maneuvers), interspersed with Dadaist/commedia dell'arte clowns, and everyone clad in costumes like nothing you've ever seen before. All this and a giant snail!

The show is dreamlike, suspenseful, funny, erotic, mesmerizing, and just lovely. At times, you might even find yourself moved to tears. For some children, however, it might be a bit too sophisticated and arty. Even if you've seen Cirque before, it's worth coming to check out, thanks to the large production values. It's a world-class show, no matter where it's playing. That this arty and intellectual show is playing in Vegas is astonishing. In Treasure Island, 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. © 800/288-7206 or 702/894-7722. www.cirquedusoleil.com. Tickets \$80 (excluding tax). Fri–Tues 7:30 and 10:30pm.

Cirque du Soleil's *O* *(Finds)* How to describe the seemingly indescribable wonder and artistry of Cirque du Soleil's latest and most dazzling display? An Esther Williams–Busby Berkley spectacular on peyote? A Salvador Dalí painting come to life? A stage show by Fellini? The French troupe has topped itself with this production—and not simply because it has situated its breathtaking acrobatics in, on, around, and above a 1½-million-gallon pool (*eau*—pronounced O—is French for water). Even without those impossible feats, this might be worth the price just to see the presentation, a constantly shifting dreamscape tableau that's a marvel of imagination and staging. If you've seen *Mystère* at Treasure Island or other Cirque productions, you'll be amazed that they've once again raised the bar to new heights without losing any of the humor or stylistic trademarks,

including the sensuous music. If you've never seen a Cirque show, prepare to have your brain turned inside out. Note that no tank tops, shorts, or sneakers are allowed. We know—those ticket prices—*ouch*. We want to say that we can guarantee it's worth it, but that's a decision only you can make. (Though no one we've personally sent has come back regretting that they went.) In Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/488-7111 or 702/693-7722. Tickets \$93.50–\$110. Fri–Tues 7:30pm and 10:30pm.

Cirque du Soleil's *Zumanity* Surely by now you've gotten the message—*Vegas is not for families anymore*. Need further proof? New York–New York, the hotel most like a theme park, is offering up this, yet another Cirque de Soleil show, with all the artistic imagery and astonishing human feats we've come to expect, but this one is . . . topless and R-rated—nobody under 18 allowed! The spin doctors for the show are using “provocative” and “arousing” to describe it. Also, there is some cabaret stool seating, and, even more tellingly, “Love Seats” and “Duo Sofas.” It opened too late for us to review it in this edition, but this may be Cirque's first misstep. We heard rumors from insiders that this show had too much shock value and not enough entertainment, and the *Las Vegas Review Journal* preview claimed in a preview that the show reminded one of a “bizarre '80s porno movie.” 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in New York–New York). ☎ 702/740-6969. www.zumanity.com. Tickets \$190 (for sofas), \$150 (love seats), \$75 (theater seats), \$55 (cabaret stools), all including tax. Tues–Sat 7:30 and 10:30pm.

Crazy Girls *Crazy Girls*, presented in an intimate theater, is probably the raciest revue on the Strip. It features sexy showgirls with perfect bodies in erotic song-and-dance numbers enhanced by innovative lighting effects. Think of *Penthouse* poses coming to life. Perhaps it was best summed up by one older man from Kentucky: “It's okay if you like boobs and butt. But most of the girls can't even dance.” In The Riviera Hotel & Casino, 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 877/892-7469 or 702/794-9433. Tickets \$33 (excluding tax). Fri–Wed 8 and 9:30pm.

Clint Holmes Who? “My name is Michael, I've got a nickel.” Oh, right. So why should you go? Because you miss, or simply still long for, the days of pure Vegas *entertainers*, you know, guys who sang (competently), told jokes and self-deprecating stories (competently), and dared the audience to love him with great confidence and, well, competence. No tigers, no magic, just a strong band and a strong sense of self; and he has a bit of talent to back up his confident and competent stage manner. You will hear some originals, some covers

(“Banana Boat Song,” “What Kind of Fool Am I?”), in addition to stories of how Holmes was influenced by Sammy Davis Jr., which explains a lot, and we mean that in a positive way. He’s good, but you need to want to see this kind of retro entertainment, and we mean that in a positive way as well. In Harrah’s, 3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/392-9002. Tickets \$60 (excluding tax). Mon–Sat 7:30pm.

Danny Gans: *The Man of Many Voices* In a town where the consistent sellouts are costly, elaborate extravaganzas, it’s a tribute to Danny Gans’s charisma and appeal that his one-man variety act can draw the same crowds with nothing more than a back-up band and a few props. Gans is “the man of many voices”—more than 400 of them—and his show features impressions of 80 different celebrities, usually a different mix each night depending on audience demographics.

The emphasis is on musical impressions (everyone from Sinatra to Springsteen), with some movie scenes (Hepburn and Fonda from *On Golden Pond*, Tom Hanks in *Forrest Gump*) thrown in. Gans’s vocal flexibility is impressive, though his impersonations are hit or miss (his Springsteen needs work). That said, when we last saw him, he did a dead-on impression of comedian Jeff Foxworthy that had the crowd rolling, a hilarious bit involving George Burns imitating MC Hammer, and a somewhat freaky, but totally on-target impression of Macy Gray. He’s a consistent crowd-pleaser, and the lack of bombast can be a refreshing change of pace. In The Mirage, 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/963-9634 or 702/792-7777. Tickets \$100 (including tax). Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun 8pm.

An Evening at La Cage No, it wasn’t inspired by the French movie or the recent American remake, or even the Broadway musical. Actually, it’s more like the stage show derived from the movie *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Female impersonators dress up as various entertainers (with varying degrees of success) to lip-synch to those celebrity entertainers’ greatest hits (with varying degrees of success). A Joan Rivers impersonator, looking not unlike the original but sounding not at all like her (even with the aid of an odd constant echo), is the hostess, delivering scatological phrases and stale jokes. They do make the most of a tiny stage with some pretty stunning lighting, though the choreography is bland. Still, it’s a crowd-pleaser. In The Riviera Hotel & Casino, 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 877/892-7469 or 702/794-9433. Tickets \$38 (excluding tax). Wed–Mon 7 and 9pm.

Folies Bergère The longest-running production show in town has recently undergone a “sexier than ever” face-lift, but the result is

far from that. It's more like tamed-down burlesque, as done by a college drama department. Bare breasts pop up (sorry) at odd moments (late shows only): not during the cancan line, but rather during a fashion show and an en-pointe ballet sequence. The effect is neither erotic nor titillating, suggesting only that absent-minded dancers simply forgot to put their shirts on. The dance sequences (more acrobatics than true dance) range from the aforementioned ballet and cancan to jazz and hoedown, and are only occasionally well costumed. A coyly cute '50s striptease number on a *Hollywood Squares*-type set is more successful, as is a clever and funny juggling act (don't miss his finale with the vest and hat). In Tropicana Resort & Casino, 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/829-9034 or 702/739-2411. Tickets \$45–\$55 (excluding tax). Fri–Wed 7:30 and 10pm.

Jubilee! A classic Vegas spectacular, crammed with singing, dancing, magic, acrobats, elaborate costumes and sets, and, of course, bare breasts. It's a basic revue, with production numbers featuring homogenized versions of standards (Gershwin, Cole Porter, some Fred Astaire numbers) sometimes sung live, sometimes lip-synched, and always accompanied by lavishly costumed and frequently topless showgirls. Humorous set pieces about Samson and Delilah and the sinking of the *Titanic* (!) show off some pretty awesome sets. The finale features aerodynamically impossible feathered and bejeweled costumes and headpieces designed by Bob Mackie. So what if the dancers are occasionally out of step, and the action sometimes veers into the dubious (a Vegas-style revue about a disaster that took more than 1,000 lives?) or even the inexplicable (a finale praising beautiful and bare-breasted girls suddenly stops for three lines of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"?). In Bally's Las Vegas, 3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/237-7469 or 702/739-4567. Tickets \$54–\$64 (excluding tax). Sat–Thurs 7:30 and 10:30pm.

La Femme! Further proof that Vegas is trying to distance itself from the "Vegas is for Families" image. Allegedly the same show that has been running for years in a famous racy French nightclub, *La Femme!* is just a bunch of pretty girls taking their clothes off. Except that the girls are smashingly pretty, with the kind of bodies just not found on real live human beings, and they take their clothes off in curious and yes, artistic ways, gyrating on pointe shoes while holding on to ropes or hoops, falling over sofas while lip syncing to French torch songs—in short, it's what striptease ought to be. But \$60 a ticket is a great deal to pay for arty nudie fun, especially when the routines, no matter how clever or how naked, start to seem alike

after awhile. In the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-7777. Tickets \$59 (excluding tax). Wed–Mon 8:30 and 10:30pm.

Lance Burton: Master Magician *(Kids Value)* Magic acts are a dime a dozen in Vegas of late. And most seem more than a little influenced by the immeasurable success of Siegfried & Roy. So when someone pops up who is original—not to mention charming and, yes, actually good at his job—it comes as a relief. Handsome and folksy (he hails from Lexington, Kentucky), Burton is talented and engaging, for the most part shunning the big-ticket special effects that seem to have swamped most other shows in town. Instead, he offers an extremely appealing production that starts small, with “close-up” magic. These rather lovely tricks are truly extraordinary. (We swear that he tossed a bird up in the air, and the darn thing turned into confetti in front of our eyes. Really.) Burton doesn’t have patter, per se, but his dry, laconic, low-key delivery is plenty amusing and contrasts nicely to other performers in town, who seem as if they have been spending way too much time at Starbucks. He does eventually move to bigger illusions, but his manner follows him—he knows the stuff is good, but he also knows the whole thing is a bit silly, so why not have fun with it?

His longtime support act is comedian/juggler Michael Goudeau, who is not only perhaps the only genuinely funny and talented support act on the Strip, but he can also juggle a bean bag chair, a chainsaw, and a peanut M&M all at once. His presence is just further proof of how right Burton’s show is overall.

All this and extremely comfortable movie-theater-style plush seats with cup holders. And for a most reasonable price. In the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 877/386-8224 or 702/730-7160. Tickets \$55–\$60 (excluding tax). Tues and Sat 7 and 10pm, Wed–Fri 7pm.

Legends in Concert This is a crowd pleaser, which is probably why it has been running since May 1983. Arguably the best of the Vegas impersonator shows (though it’s hard to quantify such things), *Legends* does feature performers singing live, rather than lip-synching. And the performers look remarkably like the originals; free use of video cutting between action on stage and the real performer generally shows what a good simulation the former is. Acts vary from night to night (in a showroom that could use a facelift) on a nice, large stage with modern hydraulics but twinkle lighting that is stuck in a *Flip Wilson Show* time warp. The personal touches here include scantily clad (but well-choreographed) male and female dancers, and an utterly useless green laser. When we went, the performers included a

carbon copy (at least in looks) of the early Little Richard, a crowd-pleasing Shania Twain, an energetic Prince, an appropriately flamboyant Liberace, a striking Bette Midler, and one helluva Elvis impersonator. In the Imperial Palace, 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 888/777-7664. Tickets \$40 adults (includes 1 drink, tax, and gratuity), \$25 children 12 and under. Mon–Sat 7:30 and 10:30pm.

Mac King *(Value)* One of the best entertainment values in Vegas, this is an afternoon comedy-magic show—and note order of precedence in that introduction. King does magic; thankfully, as far as we are concerned, emphasizing the only kind that’s really mind-blowing these days—those close-up tricks that defy your eyes and mind. But he surrounds his tricks with whimsy and wit, and sometimes gut-busting guffaws, which makes you wonder how someone else can still perform stunts with a straight face. (Check out how he takes a \$100 bill and—wait, we don’t want to give it away, but suffice to say, it involves an old shoe and a Fig Newton and several other unexpected props.) Perfect for the kids, perfect for the budget, perfect timing if you need something in the afternoon before an evening of gambling, dining, and cavorting. Then again, we are rather surprised he’s still just an afternoon gig. One day, someone is going to wise up and move him to the big time, and his ticket prices will move up too. So catch him while he’s still a bargain. 3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S (in Harrah’s). ☎ 800/427-7247. Tickets \$17 (plus tax). Tues–Sat 1 and 3pm.

Mamma Mia! We applaud Mandalay Bay for continuing to try to offer genuine theater options for Vegas patrons. Their first attempt was a production of the revival of *Chicago* (we can only imagine the business it would have done post-2003 Oscars!), and this charming and fluffy show is their second. It seems even better suited for Vegas audiences, since it’s all-ages, innocuous, and promotes much clapping and dancing. There is little of substance in the story, a loose narrative created solely for the purposes of bringing the many, many hit songs of the Swedish ’70s wonder group ABBA to the stage. Don’t get us wrong; it’s quite cute, as a young woman on the eve of her wedding, longing for the father she never knew to be a part of her present happiness, brings the three men who are the most likely biological daddy to her Greek island home, forcing her long independent mother to face up to her past and make choices for the future. Some of the songs fit better than others, but all are sung with the appropriate breezy joy. We want to shake the director when we witness all too many broad gestures and pointless scamperings during the rare moments of dialogue, but the cast is earnest

and those darn Swedes wrote songs that we have to admit, 30 years on, are still mighty infectious. 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in Mandalay Bay). ☎ 702/632-7777. www.mandalaybay.com. Tickets \$65 and \$85 plus tax. Mon, Wed, Thurs 7pm; Fri 8pm; Sat 7 and 10:30pm; Sun 5 and 9:30pm.

Penn & Teller *(Moments)* The most intelligent show in Vegas, as these two—magicians? Illusionists? Truth-tellers? BS artists? Tell you what, let's settle on geniuses—put on 90 minutes of, yes, magic and juggling, but also acerbic comedy, mean stunts, and great quiet beauty. Looking like two characters out of Dr. Seuss, big loud Penn and smaller quiet Teller (to reduce them to their basic characteristics) perform magic, reveal the secrets behind a few major magic tricks, discuss why magic is nothing but a bunch of lies, and then turn around and show why magic is as lovely an art form as any other. We won't tell you much about the various tricks and acts, for fear of ruining punch lines, but watching Teller fish money out of an empty glass aquarium or play with shadows is to belie Penn's earlier caveats about learning how tricks are done—it doesn't ruin the wonder of it, not at all, nor the serenity that settles in your Vegas-sensory-overload brain. 3700 W. Flamingo (in the Rio Hotel). ☎ 888/746-7784. Tickets \$65. Wed–Mon 9pm.

Splash They took out the mermaids and water tank that gave this show its name, froze the water, and added ice skaters and some increased production values. If the show is now the one in town that most closely resembles the guffaw-inducing extravaganza in *Show-girls*, it's nonetheless a considerable improvement over its previous incarnations. That may be because we are partial to ice skaters in any form, even if they are performing to the music from *Titanic* while topless dancers preen on a small version of the deck of the boat. The

Closing of a Vegas Institution

Though The Mirage had booked it "until the end of time," the curtain tragically came down on the legendary *Siegfried & Roy* production show on October 3, 2003 when illusionist Roy Horn was mauled on stage by one of the duo's famous white tigers. Horn suffered severe injuries, and at press time, was still in the hospital in critical condition. The show, a Vegas institution, was immediately canceled by MGM MIRAGE. Fans, in the meantime, have taken to leaving cards and flowers at the Siegfried & Roy statue in front of The Mirage as a tribute to the legendary entertainers.

weird lip-synching numbers, including a long tribute to Madonna that reenacts portions of *Evita*, even as clips from the real thing are shown on video screens, still remain, though improved and more ambitious choreography has been added. Expect up-close looks at bare breasts as the flashy and not-terribly-competent dancers parade through the crowd (sometimes in see-through filmy net cat suits that show less and are thus considerably more sexy—more topless shows should go this teasing route). Some “comedy gauchos” crack whips and insensitive jokes, and there’s a truly talented trio of juggling brothers. Pass the time wondering if it’s uncomfortable skating in a butt thong, and pondering the philosophical implications of a country’s wretched political problems providing fodder for first the Andrew Lloyd Webber mill and now a Vegas topless revue. ***Seating warnings:*** Seats on the sides are so bad that fully three-quarters of the stage might be obscured. In The Riviera Hotel & Casino, 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 877/892-7469 or 702/734-9301. Tickets \$57 (excluding tax). Sat–Thurs 8 and 10:30pm.

Tournament of Kings (Kids) If you’ve seen the Jim Carrey movie *The Cable Guy*, you probably laughed at the scene in which the two protagonists went to a medieval dinner and tournament. Perhaps you thought it was satire, created just for the movie. You would be wrong. It’s actually part of a chain, and something very like it can be found right here in Vegas.

For a fixed price, you get a dinner that’s better than you might expect (Cornish game hen, very fine baked potato, and more), which you eat with your hands (in keeping with the theme), while Merlin (or someone like him) spends too much time trying to work the crowd up with a sing-a-long. This gives way to a competition between the kings of various medieval countries, competing for titles in knightly contests (jousting, horse races, and such) that are every bit as unrehearsed and spontaneous as a professional wrestling match. Eventually, good triumphs over evil and all that.

Each section of the arena is given a king to be the subject of and to root for, and the audience is encouraged to hoot, holler, and pound on the tables, which kids love, but teens will be too jaded for (though we know some from whom a spontaneous “way cool” slipped out a few times unchecked). Many adults might find it tiresome. Acrobatics are terrific, and certain buff performers make for a different sort of enjoyment. In Excalibur, 3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 800/933-1334 or 702/597-7600. Tickets \$42. Daily 6 and 8:30pm.

2 Headliner Showrooms

Vegas entertainment made its name with its showrooms, though its glory days are somewhat behind it, gone with the Rat Pack themselves. For a long time, Vegas headliners were something of a joke; only those on the downhill side of fame were thought to play there. But with all the new performance spaces—and high fees—offered by the new hotels, Vegas suddenly has credence again, especially, in of all things, the rock scene. Both the Hard Rock Hotel's The Joint and the House of Blues are attracting very current and very popular acts who find it hip, rather than humiliating, to play Sin City. However, the classic Vegas showroom itself does seem headed for the way of the dinosaurs; many of the hotels have shuttered theirs. As for the remainder, one is pretty much like the other, with the exception of the Hard Rock and HOB (hence they are the only ones we bother to describe below), and in any case, audiences go based on the performer rather than the space itself. Check with your hotel, or those free magazines in your room to see who is in town when you are.

Note also that **Mr. Wayne Newton**, who really *is* Vegas, is currently playing the Stardust on a regular basis, about 40 weeks out of the year.

Hard Rock Hotel's The Joint Formerly just about the only game in town in terms of good rock bookings, The Joint, with a 1,400-seat capacity, now faces some stiff competition from the House of Blues. Nevertheless it does attract some top performers. When the Hard Rock Hotel opened in 1995, the Eagles were the first act to appear. Since then the facility has presented Bob Dylan, Ziggy Marley, Marilyn Manson, Hootie and the Blowfish, the Black Crowes, Donna Summer, Stephen Stills, Jimmy Cliff, Tears for Fears, Johnny Cash, Lyle Lovett, and James Brown.

The venue is not a preferred one, however; it's only worth going if a favorite performer is playing or if it's an opportunity to see a big artist play a smaller-than-usual room. Though there's sometimes table seating, it's usually festival style, making personal space at a premium during a crowded show; though the floor is slightly raked, this still makes for poor sightlines. The balconies upstairs, if you can get to them, aren't much better, as once the bodies are packed in about two deep, the stage is completely obscured. Unless you want to brave the crush at the very front (sure, you should—it's a rock show!), we suggest standing at the rail toward the back, which not only elevates you slightly above the crowd (improving those sightlines), but also protects one side of your body from the crowd.

Showroom Policies: Smoking permitted for some shows; seating is either preassigned or general, depending on the performer. **Price:** \$20 to \$250, depending on the performer (tax and drinks extra). **Show Times:** 8:30pm (nights of performance vary). **Reservations:** You can reserve up to 30 days in advance. In the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, 4455 Paradise Rd. ☎ 800/693-7625 or 702/693-5000.

House of Blues With its entry into Las Vegas, the House of Blues is going head-to-head with The Joint at the Hard Rock Hotel, and the prospects for some great bookings due to competition are high. On its own merits, the House of Blues is a good, intimate room with a cozy floor surrounded by a bar area, and an upstairs balcony area that has actual theater seating. (The balcony may actually be a better place to see a show because the sightlines are unobscured, unlike down below, where posts and such can obstruct the view.) It's probably the most comfortable and user-friendly place to see a rock show in Vegas.

Its heavy theme decor (a constant evocation of the Delta region and New Orleans) is a bit too Disneyland-meets-Hearst Castle, with corrugated tin this and weathered wood that, plus walls covered in outsider/primitive/folk art from various Southern artists. But it annoys us less in Vegas than it does in New Orleans; here it's sort of a welcome touch of the genuine amid the artificial, while in the actual Big Easy, it comes off as prefab.

The House of Blues will have rock and blues shows just about every night, and, as mentioned, already nationally recognized acts are flocking to the place, starting with Bob Dylan on opening night and continuing with shows by Seal, X, Garbage, Taylor Dane, Etta James, Al Green, James Brown, the Go-Gos, and the Neville Brothers.

Showroom Policies: Smoking permitted; seating is either preassigned or general, depending on the performer (some shows are all general admission, with everyone standing on the floor). **Price:** \$18 to \$250, depending on the performer. **Show Times:** Vary, but usually 8pm. **Reservations:** You can buy tickets as soon as shows are announced; lead time varies with each artist. In Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 877/632-7400 or 702/632-7600.

3 The Bar Scene

In addition to the venues listed below, consider hanging out, as the locals quickly began doing, at **Aureole**, **Red Square**, and the **House of Blues**, all in **Mandalay Bay** (see chapter 4).

You might also check out the incredible nighttime view at the bar atop the **Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower**—nothing beats it.

There's also the **Viva Las Vegas Lounge** at the Hard Rock Hotel, which every rock-connected person in Vegas will eventually pass through.

And the **Petrossian Bar** in Bellagio offers class along with its cocktails (to say nothing of caviar and other delicacies)—but come for the cocktails, as those in the know claim it's not only the best bar in Vegas for such matters, but maybe the best bar in the West.

The Bar at Times Square If you're looking for a quiet piano bar, this is not the place for you. It's smack in the middle of the Central Park part of the New York–New York casino. Two pianos are going strong every night, and the young hipster, cigar-smoking crowd overflows out the doors. It always seems to be packed with a singing, swaying, drinking throng of camaraderie and good cheer—or at least, full of booze. Hugely fun, provided you can get a foot in the door. And yes, every night, right outside, the ball on top drops at midnight, for a little *Auld Lang Syne*. Shows daily from 8pm to 2:15am. In New York–New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/740-6969. Cover Fri–Sat \$10.

Coyote Ugly You've seen the movie, now go have some of that prepackaged fun for yourself. Oh, come on—you don't think those bartender girls really dance on the bar and hose down the crowd just because they are so full of spontaneous rowdy high spirits, now do you? Not when the original locale built a reputation (and inspired a bad movie) on just such behavior, creating a success strong enough to start a whole chain of such frat-boy fun places? By the way, sarcastic and cynical as we are, can we say, totally fun place? In New York–New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (at Tropicana Ave.). ☎ 702/740-6969. Cover varies, usually \$10 and up on weekends.

Eiffel Tower Bar From this chic and elegant room, in the restaurant on the 11th floor of the Eiffel Tower, you can look down on everyone (in Vegas)—just like a real Parisian! (Just kidding, Francophiles.) But really, this is a date-impressing bar, and, since there's no cover or minimum, it's a cost-effective alternative to the overly inflated food prices at the restaurant. Drop by for a drink, but try to look sophisticated. And then you can cop an attitude and dismiss everything as gauche—or droit, depending on which way you are seated. In Paris Las Vegas, 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/948-6937.

Ghost Bar This desperate-to-get-into-the-gossip-pages-as-the-trendy-bar-of-the-moment place (decorated with a '60s Mod/futuristic silver-gleam look) offers a fabulous view of the city, which is the main reason to come here. That and to peer at those tousled-hair beauties copping an attitude on the couches and see if any of them have the kind of names that will make tomorrow's gossip pages. This may be the hot bar of the moment by the time you get there (dress up), or everyone may have moved on. Who knows? In the Palms Resort & Casino, 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. (just west of the Strip). ☎ **702/942-7778**. Cover varies, usually \$10 and up.

Peppermill's Fireside Lounge *(Finds)* Walk through the classic Peppermill's coffee shop (not a bad place to eat, by the way) on the Strip, and you land in its dark, plush, cozy 24-hour lounge. A fabulously dated view of hip, it has low, circular banquette seats, fake floral foliage, low neon, and electric candles. But best of all is the water and fire pit as the room's centerpiece—a piece of kitsch thought to be long vanished from the earth, and attracting nostalgia buffs like moths to a flame. It all adds up to a cozy, womblike place, perfect for unwinding a bit after some time spent on the hectic Strip. The enormous, exotic frou-frou tropical drinks (including the signature bathtub-size margaritas) will ensure that you sink into a level of comfortable stupor. 2985 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ **702/735-7635**.

Pink E's Sick of the attitude at Club Rio? Escape directly across the street to Pink E's, where the theme is pink. (You were expecting maybe seafoam?) Anyway, at least one regular described this as "the only place to go if you are over 25 and have a brain." And like pink. Because everything at this 24-hour joint is: the many pool tables, the Ping-Pong tables, the booths, the lighting, the lava lamp on the bar, and even the people. In its own way, it's as gimmick-ridden as The Beach dance club (see below), but surely no one would put out a pink pool table in all seriousness? Yeah, it's a ludicrous heresy, but don't you want to play on one? Pink E's offers retro diner food and a DJ on weekends. The dress code basically translates to "no gangsta-wannabe wear." Go, but wear all black (and no pink) just to be ornery. 3695 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ **702/252-4666**.

Risque Paris Las Vegas's most recent lounge (a bar with a dance floor, in this case), offers lots of scantily-dressed gals for you to gawk at, while a DJ spins discs in this industrial-nightclub-meets-modern-day-strip-bar. Fancy constructed desserts are for sale, and there

are dark nooks everywhere (including balconies that fit no more than four), where the desserts can be consumed and we don't want to know what else could go on. Of course, for every dipped-in-black club kid beauty there is a denim-wearing tourist, but still, you can get your jollies. 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (in the Paris Hotel). ☎ 702/946-7000. Cover men \$20, women \$10.

Sand Dollar Blues Lounge Here's a funky, no-decor (think posters and beer signs), atmosphere-intensive, slightly grimy, friendly bar. Just up the road from Treasure Island, this is a great antidote to artificial Vegas. Attracting a solid mix of locals and tourists, the Sand Dollar features live blues (both electric and acoustic, with a little Cajun and zydeco thrown in) every night. The dance floor is tiny and often full. The minimal cover always goes to the band. Depending on your desires, it's either refreshingly not Las Vegas, or just the kind of place you came to Vegas to escape. Go before someone has the idea to build a theme hotel based on it. 3355 Spring Mountain Rd. (at Polaris Ave.). ☎ 702/871-6651. Cover varies but is usually no more than a few bucks.

Sky Lounge It may not quite be the view offered by the Stratosphere's bar, but it's pretty darn good and a lot easier to get to. You see too much of the Holiday Inn Boardwalk directly across the street and not quite enough of the MGM Grand to the left, but otherwise there are no complaints. The decor is heavy on '80s black and purple, but overall the place is quiet (especially during the day) and civil. A jazz vocal/piano act performs at night, when the views are naturally best. The atmosphere produced by all this is classic Vegas in the best sense (with only a slight touch of necessary kitsch). Worth a trip for an escape from the mob, though you won't be the only tourist fighting for window seats. Open from 8am until whenever they feel like closing. At the Polo Towers, 3745 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/261-1000.

Tommy Rocker's Tommy Rocker is the owner—surely he wasn't born with that name—and he plays his club every Friday and Saturday night, mixing bar band standards with '80s and '90s hits. It's a one-man show, with Strip musicians dropping by after their own shifts are done. (Occasionally, local bands are permitted to play, as well.) Sort of like the inside of a Quonset hut painted black, his vaguely beach-frat-party-themed club has become the home for local and out-of-town Parrot Heads (Jimmy Buffett fans, for those not in the know), with the result that the crowd is 5 to 10 years past their heavy college drinking days. The large bar dominates the middle of

the room; there are two pool tables and a grill for ordering food, plus an espresso machine. 4275 Industrial Blvd. (at Flamingo Rd.). ☎ 702/261-6688.

Triple 7 Brew Pub *(Finds)* Yet another of the many things the new(ish) Main Street Station hotel has done right. Stepping into its microbrew pub feels like stepping out of Vegas. Well, maybe, except for the dueling piano entertainment. It has a partial modern warehouse look, but a hammered tin ceiling continues the hotel's Victorian decor; the overall effect seems straight out of San Francisco's North Beach. It's a bit on the yuppified side but escapes being pretentious. And frankly, it's a much-needed modern touch for the Downtown area. This place has its own brewmaster, a number of microbrews ready to try, and, if you want a quick bite, there's also an oyster and sushi bar, plus fancy burgers and pizzas. It can get noisy during the aforementioned piano duel act, but otherwise casino noise stays out. In Main Street Station, 200 Main St. ☎ 702/387-1896.

4 Dance Clubs

In addition to the options listed below, country music fans may want to wander on over to **Dylan's**, 4660 Boulder Hwy. (☎ 702/451-4006). They offer country music (live and otherwise) and line dancing, with free dance lessons. Dylan's is more casual and basic, with a definite roadhouse vibe.

The Beach If you're a fan of loud, crowded, 24-hour party bars filled with tons of good-looking fun-seekers, then bow in this direction, for you have found Mecca. This huge tropical-themed nightclub is right across the street from the Convention Center and is, according to just about anyone you ask, the hottest club in the city. It's a two-story affair with five separate bars downstairs and another three up.

Just in case walking the 20 feet to the closest bar is too much of an effort, they also have bikini-clad women serving beer out of steel tubs full of ice (they also roam the floor with shot belts). The drinks are on the pricey side (\$3.75 for an 8-oz. domestic beer), but the unfailingly gorgeous, 4% body-fat bartenders (both men and women) are friendly and offer rotating drink specials.

Downstairs is the large two-story dance floor. The sound system is top-of-the-line, as is the lighting design, and there wasn't one square inch of space available on a recent Friday night. Upstairs, there are balconies overlooking the dance floor, pool tables, darts, foosball,

pinball, and various other arcade games plus slot machines, video poker, and a sports book. Other neat touches include tarot-card readings by the stairs and hot-pizza vendors. And let's not forget those Jell-O shot contests where club-goers try to eat shaky cubes of alcohol-spiked gelatin off each other's partially bared bodies.

The crowd is aggressively young and pretty, more men than women (70/30 split), and about 60% tourist, which is probably why the place can get away with charging a \$10 cover. Party people look no further. There's free valet parking, and if you drive here and become intoxicated, they'll drive you back home at no charge. 365 S. Convention Center Dr. (at Paradise Rd.). ☎ 702/731-1925. www.beachlv.com. Cover \$10 and up on Fri-Sat and for special events.

Club Rio This is one of the hottest nightspots in Vegas as of this writing, but apparently made so by people who don't mind long lines, restrictive dress codes, attitudinal door people, hefty cover charges, and bland dance music. Waits can be interminable and admittance denied thanks to the wrong footwear or shirt. The dress code (no sneakers and shirts must have a collar) is supposed to make the clientele look more sophisticated than grungy; the effect is the opposite, as most of the men end up in combinations of chinos and button-down shirts. Of course, it's so dark you can't tell if someone is wearing sneakers.

Once inside, you find a large, circular room, with a spacious dance floor taking up much of the space. Giant video screens line the upper parts of the walls, showing anything from shots of the action down below to catwalk footage. Comfy circular booths fill out the next couple of concentric circles; these seem mostly reserved, and when empty, they leave the impression that the place isn't very full—so why the wait? Music on a recent visit included a Madonna medley and the perennial "Celebration," not the most *au courant* of tunes. The total effect is of a grown-up, not terribly drunken, frat and sorority mixer. The club opens at 11:30pm on Wednesdays, 10:30pm Thursdays through Saturdays, and stays open until about 4am all nights. In the Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino, 3700 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ 702/252-7777. Advertised cover \$10 for men, local women free, out-of-state women \$5 (but frequently when we went by on a weekend night, the cover was \$20 for everyone).

Ra The futuristic Egyptian-themed Ra is part of the new generation of Vegas hot spots. It has that Vegas "we're a show and an attraction" vibe, but is still not overly pretentious. The staff is friendly, which is a rare thing for a hot club. It might be worth it to go just to gawk at the heavy gilt decor. You'll also find a major light show,

cigar lounges off the disco, draped VIP booths, and plenty of little nooks and crannies. Current dance music (mostly techno) is on the soundtrack. The later you go, the more likely the mid-to-upper-20s clientele will be entirely local. Open Wednesday through Saturday from 10pm until 4am. In Luxor Las Vegas, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/262-4000. Cover \$5–\$15.

Rain At press time, this was the hottest nightclub in Vegas. Which means you (and us—don't think we aren't standing there with you, shoulder to shoulder in solidarity) probably will spend most of your time trying to convince someone, anyone, to let you in. You and a couple of thousand of Size-2 Juicy Couture jeans-clad 20-somethings who feel they will simply cease to exist if they don't get inside. We smirk and snicker at their desperation, because it makes us feel superior. But we also have to be honest; if you can brave the wait, the crowds, and the attitude, you will be inside a club that has done everything right, from the multilevel layout that allows them to pack the crowds in and allows those crowds to peer up and down at their brethren, to DJs who play the right house and techno cuts (at a pulse-thumping tempo, so don't expect for your good pickup lines to be overheard), to the scaffolding that holds pyrotechnic and other mood-revvers, to the ubiquitous-of-late go-go girls dressed like strippers. Note that the crowds start lining up way before the 11pm opening time. Open Thursday to Saturday from 11pm until dawn. 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. ☎ 702/940-7246. Cover \$20.

rumjungle Now, normally our delicate sensibilities wince at such overkill, and we tend to write off such efforts as just trying a bit too hard. But surprisingly, rumjungle really delivers the great fun it promises. The fire-wall entrance gives way to a wall of water; the two-story bar is full of the largest collection of rum varieties anywhere, each bottle illuminated with a laser beam of light; go-go girls dance and prance between bottles of wine to dueling congas; and the food all comes skewered on swords. It's all a bit much, but it works, it really does. A great deal of thought went into the various clever designs and schemes, and it's paid off. Almost instantly, rumjungle became the hottest club in Vegas, with lines of partiers out the door every night, ready to dance to live world-beat music. Get there early (before 10pm) to avoid lines/guest lists/the cover charge, and consider having dinner (served till 11pm); it's costly, but it's a multicourse, all-you-can-eat feast of flame-pit-cooked Brazilian food. For the amount of food and the waiving of the cover charge,

dinner is a good deal. Then dance it all off all night long (the club is open 'til 2am on weeknights, 'til 4am Thurs–Sat night). In Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/632-7408. Cover \$10–\$20.

Utopia *(Finds)* According to the old *Scope* magazine, Utopia was “less a discotheque and more a revolution”—which is an apt description, considering that in Las Vegas, underground once-a-week nightclubs usually disappear in a matter of weeks. (And for that matter, the underground itself is a shaky, hard-to-find thing.) Utopia is still going strong, despite the death (in a car accident) of its founder, Aaron Britt. The music is progressive house, tribal, trance, techno, and rave. The atmosphere is industrial, foggy, and heavy with lasers and other dazzling visuals. A cool and outrageous crowd fills three rooms with fun, peace, and love, in a heart-pounding, techno way. It's for the tragically hip, but isn't it good to know they are out there in Vegas? Internationally known deejays spin, and live rave acts play. It's open Friday and Saturday from 10:30pm until the sun comes up. 3765 Las Vegas Blvd. S. ☎ 702/736-3105. Cover \$20.

5 Gay Bars

Hip and happening Vegas locals know that some of the best scenes and dance action can actually be found in the city's gay bars. And no, they don't ask for sexuality ID at the door. All are welcome at any of the following establishments—as long as you don't have a problem with the people inside, they aren't going to have a problem with you. For women, this can be a fun way to dance and not get hassled by overeager lotharios. (Lesbians, by the way, are just as welcome at any of the gay bars.)

If you want to know what's going on in gay Las Vegas during your visit, pick up a copy of the *Las Vegas Bugle*, a free gay-oriented newspaper that's available at any of the places described below. Or call them at ☎ 702/369-6260. You can also find gay nightlife listings on the Web at www.gayvegas.com.

Gipsy For years, Gipsy reigned supreme as the best gay dance place in the city, and for good reason: great location (Paradise Rd. near the Hard Rock), excellent layout (sunken dance floor and two bars), and very little competition. A few years ago, some fierce competition stole some of its spotlight, along with a good portion of the clientele, and so the Gipsy fought back with a \$750,000 renovation that seemed to recapture past glories. The drink specials, along with special events, shows, male dancers, and theme nights make this

place a good party bar. Open daily from 10pm to 6am. 4605 Paradise Rd. (at Naples St.). ☎ 702/731-1919. Cover varies, but is usually \$5 and up on weekends, less or even free on weekdays.

Good Times This quiet neighborhood bar is located (for those of you with a taste for subtle irony) in the same complex as the Liberace Museum, a few miles due east of the MGM Grand. There's a small dance floor, but on a recent Friday night, nobody was using it, the crowd preferring instead to take advantage of the cozy bar area. A small conversation pit is a perfect spot for an intimate chat. Of course, there's the omnipresent pool and video poker if you're not interested in witty repartee. We remember this place as being a lot more crowded than it was during our most recent visit (but perhaps we were there on an off night). It makes a nice respite after the Liberace Museum (after which you may very well need a stiff drink). Open 24 hours. In the Liberace Plaza, 1775 E. Tropicana Ave. (at Spencer St.). ☎ 702/736-9494.

Icon This 24-hour gay bar received a new name (it used to be Angles) and not a whole heck of a lot else. It's still a casual neighborhood hangout compared to gay bars in other cities. The clientele is mostly local, about 85% men (including drag queens) in their mid-20s to early 30s. There are special promotions that vary from week to week, including occasional drag shows and go-go boys. There's a dance floor (the music's pretty loud), a small outdoor courtyard, and a game area with pool tables and darts, plus the requisite video poker at the bar. 4633 Paradise Rd. (at Naples St.). ☎ 702/791-0100.

6 Strip Clubs

An essential part of the Vegas allure is decadence, and naked flesh would certainly qualify, as would the thrill of trying something new and daring. Of course, by and large, the nicer bars aren't particularly daring, and if you go to more than one in an evening, the thrill wears off, and the breasts don't look quite so bare.

Cheetah's This is the strip club used as the set in the movie *Showgirls*, but thanks to renovations by the club, only the main stage will look vaguely familiar to those few looking for Nomi Malone. There's also a smaller stage, plus three tiny "tip stages" so that you can really get close to (and give much money to) the woman of your choice. Eight TVs line the walls; the club does a brisk business during major sporting events. The management believes, "If you treat people right,

they will keep coming back,” so the atmosphere is friendlier than at other clubs. They “encourage couples—people who want to party—to come here. We get a 21- to 40-aged party kind of crowd,” the manager told us. And indeed there is a sporty, frat-bar feel to the place. (Though on a crowded Sat night, some unescorted women were turned away, despite policy.) Lap dances are \$20. Open 24 hours. 2112 Western Ave. ☎ 702/384-0074. Topless. Cover \$10.

Jaguar’s These guys were totally going to be the largest strip club in town—25,000 square feet—and then someone built something twice as big. So they had to settle for being perhaps the prettiest. They are also sort of the Bellagio of strip clubs, by which we mean, two-story over-the-top marble Italian palace style (think the glory days of Caesars Palace), with high-tech gizmos (such as fingerprint identification for certain VIP rooms) for the well-heeled (and willing to spend it on semi-naked girls). There are three stages with four bars (interesting ratio), and each stage holds four performers, and really is more a series of poles, so this is the place to go if pole work is your particular thing (though weirdly, the stages can be so dark you can’t actually see the girls work). Forty percent of the clientele is women, the rest mid-30s guys with money. Lap dances are \$20. Open 24 hours. 3355 S. Procyon. ☎ 702/732-1116. Unescorted women allowed. Topless. Cover \$10.

Sapphires Ladies and Gentlemen, particularly the latter, Las Vegas, home of the largest everything else, now brings you—drum roll—the largest strip club *in the world!* That’s right, 71,000 square feet of nakedity. Of course, you have to see it—and of course, that’s what they are counting on. But let’s say this: While really, it’s nothing you haven’t seen before strip-club wise, if you haven’t seen a strip club, this is the place to start (though the size and looks are atypical, to say the least; it’s all downhill from here), because it’s modern and clean and, frankly, it’s not all that different, looks-wise, from Rain, the super hot nightclub over at the Rio, except that here you can actually hear yourself think, and also, the girls sometimes wear more clothes than at Rain. And it’s also more friendly and less attitudinal. Expect three stages in a bridge shape (including one where gawkers who paid for the privilege can watch the action from below, thanks to a glass floor), and a fourth in a separate, and still large, room, with several poles and strippers all working it at the same time. Giant video screens occasionally act as a Jumbotron for

the action on the other side of the cavernous room. Upstairs are incredibly posh and incredibly expensive rooms for wealthy sports and movie figures to utilize. Lap dances are \$20. Open 24 hours. 3025 S. Industrial. ☎ 702/796-0000. Topless. Cover \$20 after 6pm.

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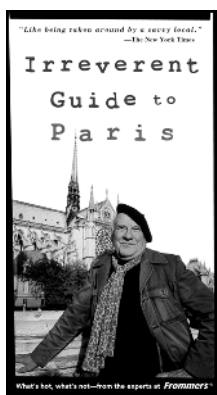
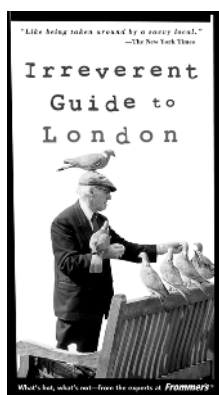
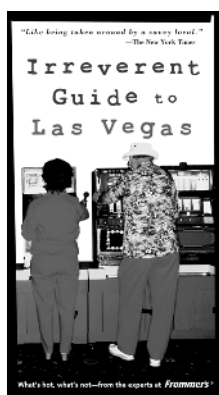
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