
Las Vegas, NV

Get the insider scoop as our expert unveils the best picks for *summer* fun in Las Vegas.

Written by E.C. Gladstone

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Summer in the City

“What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” goes the popular marketing maxim. But if your image of Sin City still revolves around the era when Sinatra’s Rat Pack roamed, much has changed. Las Vegas is now a cosmopolitan city (pop. two million) with something for everyone, from Broadway shows to country-music honky-tonks, auto racing to world-class fashion boutiques. And the town once known for \$2.99 steak-and-shrimp specials has become an internationally recognized culinary destination.

Overview

Obviously, the gargantuan gaming resorts of the Strip (technically, Las Vegas Boulevard So.) are the main draw in Las Vegas, as well as the smaller casinos around downtown’s Fremont Street Experience. But the Vegas valley also offers a number of natural and man-made attractions, from Hoover Dam (also known by its original name, Boulder Dam) to Red Rock Canyon; even the Grand Canyon is just a day trip away.

There is so much to do in Las Vegas that if you don’t plan ahead, you can quickly get overwhelmed and miss the best it has to offer—or worse, take the guidance of certain locally printed guides that play favorites and offer less-than-unbiased reviews.

Weather

Though it might be easy to forget with all the impressive landscaping in and around the resorts, Las Vegas is in the Mojave Desert. While the climate changes here more than most might expect, in the summer months it is very hot and very dry, with average highs of 105 degrees Fahrenheit (and only lows of 78 degrees overnight). You’ll see a lot of people walking the Strip with huge frozen

alcohol drinks, but carrying water might be a better idea (many valets have free bottles if you ask). And don’t forget sunscreen, even if you don’t expect to be outdoors much.

Getting Around

A chief complaint of Vegas visitors is the deceiving distance between the resorts; walking farther than the next one over is definitely ill-advised, especially in summer (it’s 4.4 miles between the Stratosphere resort on the North end and Mandalay Bay on the South). Your best bet is a \$7 day pass on The Deuce, Las Vegas’ double-decker bus line that runs 24/7 up and down the Strip, to downtown’s Fremont Street and other points. There are also free trams between various resorts, plus the Monorail.

Flights to Las Vegas arrive at McCarran International Airport (LAS). Ask ahead if your resort offers a shuttle service (many do now), or try any of several reliable airport shuttle services that charge less than \$10 each direction.

Las Vegas cabs tend to be expensive and can eat up much of your travel budget. If you do decide on taking a cab, don’t try to hail one on the street (most aren’t allowed to pick you up on the curb)—go to a taxi line at a resort.

Checklist Tourism The Best of the Season

Top Summer Events

- Las Vegas 51s AAA Baseball
- Lady Gaga, MGM Grand Garden Arena (Aug. 13)
- Aureole Wine Weekend, Mandalay Bay (Aug. 13-15)
- World Extreme Cagefighting: Cruz vs. Benavidez, The Pearl at Palms (Aug. 18)
- ZZ Top, Las Vegas Hilton (Aug. 21)
- 2010 Miss Universe Pageant, Mandalay Bay Events Center (Aug. 23)
- Michael Buble, MGM Grand Garden Arena (Aug. 28)
- Carlos Santana, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino (Sept. 1-5)
- Free Labor Day Weekend show with Jefferson Starship, Fremont Street Experience (Sept. 4)
- “Sgt. Pepper Live” featuring Cheap Trick, Paris Las Vegas (Sept. 8-9)

Must-See LV For Free

- The Fountains of Bellagio
- Azure Mermaid Show and tropical fish display, Silverton Lodge
- Bellagio Conservatory and Botanical Gardens
- MGM Grand Lion Habitat
- City Center Public Art Collection
- The Volcano at The Mirage
- Wildlife Habitat at the Flamingo
- Phil Ruffin’s collection of antique carved ivory and jade, Khotan restaurant, Treasure Island Casino
- The “Welcome to Las Vegas” sign, South Las Vegas Blvd. by McCarran Airport
- Free entertainment at Fremont Street Experience (including Blue Oyster Cult, Aug. 13-15; Jefferson Starship, Sept. 3-6)

Luxe Spas & Salons

- Qua Baths/Color by Michael Boychuck, Caesars Palace
- The Spa At Encore
- The Spa at Mandarin Oriental
- Spa Bellagio
- Aria Spa
- Reliquary/Brannon Hair, Hard Rock Hotel
- Canyon Ranch SpaClub, The Palazzo
- Spa Mio, M Resort
- The Spa at Green Valley Ranch
- The Spa at Red Rock

Hotels

H1 The Venetian / The Palazzo

3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. • 702-414-1000 • www.thevenetian.com

EXPERT
FAVORITE



These connected sister resorts take top spot for overall experience, with luxurious, well-appointed standard suites; restaurants from A-list chefs including Thomas Keller, Wolfgang Puck, Emeril Lagasse, Mario Batali, and Luciano Pellegrini; two major shopping areas; three solid Broadway shows; the swank Lagasse's Stadium; two world-renowned nightclubs (Tao and Lavo); and a key location. Palazzo offers not only the Paiza level for VIP gamblers, but also the Prestige level, certainly the nicest generally available concierge club on the Strip.

H2 Mandarin Oriental

LUXURY

\$\$\$ • 3752 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-590-8888 • www.mandarinoriental.com

As befits this top-tier international brand, Mandarin Oriental's mod-Asian standard rooms offer every amenity imaginable, from a curling iron to a jogging map and beyond. The non-gaming property within City Center is relatively limited (though adjacent to plenty of gaming and other amenities), but the elements inside—restaurants Twist by Pierre Gagnaire and MOzen, the Sky Lobby Lounge, the tearoom, and the spa—are among the city's very best.

H4 Tropicana

BUDGET
FRIENDLY

\$\$\$ • 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-739-2222 • www.tropiv.com

In previous times, this '50s-era resort would have been slated for demolition. Instead, the property's new owners decided to remake its "good bones" to evoke the Trop's original Havana/Miami theme, so far bringing rooms and the pool up to a virtual four-star level. But while the casino rehab is still under way, accommodations are available at bargain rates. It's definitely the deal of the season (second choice: Gold Spike, also newly remodeled).

H3 Loews, Lake Las Vegas

KID
FRIENDLY

101 Montelago Blvd., Henderson
702-567-6000 • www.loewshotels.com

While several Strip hotels such as Mandalay Bay, Excalibur, Circus Circus, and Flamingo offer kid-friendly amenities like wave pools, carnival-style midways, multiplex theaters, and video arcades, the off-Strip, non-gaming Loews resort on Lake Las Vegas is the definitive family destination. With a secured beach, watercrafts, a pool slide, a kids' club, sushi-making classes, and free movies on the lake, Loews, while maintaining grown-up comfort and style, offers a vacation your kids will never want to end.

H5 Hilton Grand Vacation Suites

HIDDEN
GEM

2650 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-765-8300 • www.lasvegasstriphgvc.hilton.com

Located between the Encore and Sahara resorts, this HGV (the best of three in Vegas) is a "vacation ownership" property that's also a traditional hotel. One-bedroom suites offer a full kitchen, a dining area, a flat-screen TV with Bose DVD system, a pullout sleeper couch, a soaking tub open to the bedroom, soft bedding, and Crabtree & Evelyn bath products. The property offers a great pool area, a cozy spa, a 24-hour fitness room, a business center, a lounge (with Ping-Pong, pool, foosball, and a huge TV), and even a mini-mart (open 5 a.m. to 1 a.m.).

Best Off-Strip Neighborhood Stays

DOWNTOWN/FREMONT STREET

Most of the casinos around Vegas' original gaming center, Fremont Street (now a pedestrian mall canopied by a massive ever-changing video lightshow), are finding ways to spruce up. The Golden Nugget, downtown's only four-star resort—with a one-of-a-kind shark-tank pool deck—found space to squeeze in a whole new state-of-the-art tower. Downtown's arts corridor and emerging funky bar scene add to its alternative allure.

www.goldennugget.com

SUMMERLIN

This master-planned upscale community to the west of the Strip abuts Red Rock Canyon, a national conservation area holding a variety of natural and prehistoric treasures. The retro-modern Red Rock Casino Resort offers much for visitors and locals alike, including restaurants, a solid spa, and entertainment plus bowling and cinemas. A more traditional destination resort, JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa—adjacent to two courses—is a magnet for golfers and has the locals-beloved Rampart Casino's Carmel Room steakhouse.

www.redrocklasvegas.com, www.marriott.com

HENDERSON

As Vegas' other growing "suburb," and gateway to Lake Mead and Hoover Dam, Henderson has many of its own destination restaurants, day spas, and recreational activities. Adjacent to the District shopping experience, Green Valley Ranch is a pretty Tuscan-inspired resort offering a solid experience in all regards. Ultra-mod M Resort sports a chic spa, a category-killer cellar wine bar, an astounding buffet, and frequent poolside concerts.

www.greenvalleyranchresort.com, www.themresort.com

BOULDER HIGHWAY

Boulder Highway has emerged as a working-class alternative Strip, with several serviceable casinos (Boulder Station and Sam's Town among them). The newest, Eastside Cannery, is a skyscraping, Jetsons-style retro fantasy with impressively appointed rooms for the price, and valley-wide views.

www.eastsidecannery.com

Restaurants

R1

Sage (Aria)

3720 Las Vegas Blvd. S. · (866) 359-7111 · www.arialasvegas.com

EXPERT
FAVORITE

Among the many impressive restaurants in the new City Center, this dramatic but unstuffy spot presents revised American cuisine at its most elegantly inventive. Chicago chef Shawn McClain is emerging as Vegas' new star, balancing familiarity with scintillating surprise. Remarkable.

R2

Serendipity 3 (Caesars Palace)

KIDS
PICK

3750 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-731-7373 · www.caesarspalace.com

Though portions lean toward huge, kids will love this Alice In Wonderland-esque comfort-food café, with fun sandwiches, salads, and sundaes. The “Frrrozen Hot Chocolate” is its signature, but the “Forbidden Broadway” is just as super a spoonful. Burgers here are also among our best. On the run? They have one of the Strip's only to-go windows.

R4

Studio B (The M Resort)

BEST
BUFFET

12300 Las Vegas Blvd.S., Henderson
702-797-1000 · www.themresort.com

All-you-can-eat buffets are a pillar of Las Vegas cuisine, but they vary wildly in price and quality. Studio B's sprawling smorgasbord offers solid selections from virtually every cuisine you'd care to try (Indian to Cajun), fresh fish and meats roasted right there, plus desserts by an internationally recognized patissier. Beer and wine are included. The Bellagio runs a strong second in the Las Vegas buffet stakes.

R3

Top of The World (Stratosphere)

KILLER
VIEW

2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
www.stratospherehotel.com

Perhaps the world's tallest revolving restaurant, at 800 feet high, TOTW until recently only had its altitude to recommend it. But a recent menu revision has brought its creatively classic cuisine to new heights: tuna tataki, lobster bisque, and Muscovy duck breast are among many solid selections, and the sommelier knows his stuff, too.

R5

Stratta (Wynn)

LATE-NIGHT
PICK

3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
202-770-7000 · www.wynnlasvegas.com

Though Vegas is undeniably a 24-hour town, most dining options get decidedly dodgy after midnight. But this casual cucina by Michelin-starred chef Alex Stratta serves solid Italian favorites until the early hours, including some of the city's best pizza, and fresh-made Nutella-filled donuts that will satisfy any sweet tooth.

Top Tables

Need more mouthwatering excuses to chow your way through Sin City? Here are some more top bites:

Best for...

BREAKFAST: Verandah, Four Seasons; Tableau, Wynn
BURGERS: Simon at Palms Place; Mesa Grill, Caesars Palace
CELEBRITY SPOTTING: N9NE, Palms
COMFORT FOOD: First Food, The Palazzo
FOOD COURT: Cypress Street Marketplace, Caesars Palace; Grand Canal Shoppes, Venetian
INDIAN: Origin India, Paradise Road
ITALIAN: Nove Italiano, Palms
MEXICAN: Dos Caminos, The Palazzo; Hussong's, Mandalay Bay
POWER LUNCH: The Country Club at Wynn; Joe's, Forum Shops at Caesars Palace
ROMANTIC: Eiffel Tower Restaurant, Paris Las Vegas
SEAFOOD: American Fish, Aria; Bartolotta, Wynn; RM Seafood, Mandalay Place
STEAKS: Tom Colicchio's Craftsteak, MGM Grand
TAPAS: Julian Serrano, Aria

Michelin Guide-starred eateries ...

★★★

The Mansion by Joel Robuchon, MGM Grand

★★

Alex, Wynn; Restaurant Guy Savoy, Caesars Palace; Picasso, Bellagio

★

Aureole, Mandalay Bay; Bradley Ogden, Caesars Palace; L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon, MGM Grand; Le Cirque, Bellagio; Michael Mina, Bellagio; Mix, Mandalay Bay; Nobu, Hard Rock

Attractions

A1 **Disney's *The Lion King* (Mandalay Bay)**
 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. · 702-632-7777 · www.lionkinglasvegas.com EXPERT FAVORITE



Though there are several strong Broadway-caliber productions in town (including *Jersey Boys*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and Blue Man Group), this Julie Taymor-directed, Grammy- and Tony-winning production uses astounding scenery, costumes, and puppetry to bring the animated movie to life with a top-notch international cast. Unforgettable.

A2 **Cirque du Soleil: *O* (Bellagio)** BEST SHOW

3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
 (888) 987-6667 · www.bellagio.com

Of the many productions by the Canadian Cirque du Soleil troupe in Vegas (as well as Wynn's Cirque-inspired *Le Rêve*), this tribute to the power and majesty of that essential element of life—water, or *eau* in French—transports you to a dreamscape that words cannot fully describe. Tranquility in the middle of go-go Vegas? Yes, it's possible, if only for a few moments. The Beatles tribute *LOVE* and *Ka* are also highly recommended.

A4 **Donny & Marie (Flamingo)** HEADLINER

3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
 (888) 902-9929 · www.flamingolasvegas.com

Of the many internationally known headliners on the Strip (including Garth Brooks, Cher, Barry Manilow, Human Nature, even Cheap Trick), Donny & Marie are perhaps the only ones where you don't have to be a fan of them or their music to enjoy an intimate show-room performance. It's surprisingly energetic, surprisingly contemporary, and thoroughly entertaining—and their voices are in fine form, too.

A3 **Penn & Teller (Rio)** MAGICIANS

3700 West Flamingo Rd.
 702-777-7777 · www.riolasvegas.com

In the world's mecca for magicians, these rebellious anti-illusionists share more with other Vegas prestidigitators than they might want to admit. But their classy and classic delivery; incorporation of jazz music, vaudeville, and silent-film technique; intelligent dialogue; and constant development of new material put them at the top. They celebrate as much as despoil the magic arts, and thus belong in the pantheon of greats. For families, Mac King's matinee show is a strong second choice.

A5 **Fantasy (Luxor)** SHOW GIRLS

3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
 702-262-4102 · www.fantasyluxor.com

Want to see a showgirl revue? Sure you do—they're the definition of the "Only in Vegas!" mantra. Each of the Strip's sexy shows has its own merits (even the vampire-themed rock musical *Bite*), but the recently revamped *Fantasy*, starring *Baywatch* alum Angelica Bridges, features an appealing something-for-everyone cast and theme. The classic Bob Mackie-costumed *Jubilee!*, Holly Madison's fairytale-inspired *Peepshow*, and MGM Grand's sophisticated *Crazy Horse of Paris* are also recommended.

By the Numbers

TOP 10 KID-FRIENDLY ATTRACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

- Terry Fator, The Mirage
- Shark Reef Aquarium, Mandalay Bay
- Blue Man Group, The Venetian
- Adventuredome, Circus Circus
- Siegfried & Roy's Secret Garden, The Mirage
- The New York, New York roller coaster
- Gameworks
- Tournament of Kings, Excalibur
- Popovich's Comedy Pet Theatre, Planet Hollywood
- Pole Position Raceway indoor go-carting

TOP 10 SHOPPING DESTINATIONS

- The Forum Shops at Caesars (Custo Barcelona, John Varvatos, Agent Provocateur, Apple Store)
- Fashion Show Mall (Neiman Marcus, Saks, Nordstrom, Zara)
- The Shoppes at Palazzo & Grand Canal Shoppes (Barneys New York, Louboutin, Thomas Sabo jewelry, plus Bauman Rare Books and Annie Creamcheese Designer Vintage)
- Wynn & Encore esplanades (Manolo Blahnik, Alexander McQueen, Rock & Republic)
- Miracle Mile Shops (H&M, Bettie Page Boutique, Ben Sherman, Frederick's of Hollywood)
- Crystals (flagship Louis Vuitton, Tom Ford, Paul Smith, plus Kiki de Montparnasse lingerie and Assouline books)
- Las Vegas Premium Outlets (Armani Exchange, Burberry, D&G, Ferragamo)
- Via Bellagio (Armani, Fred Leighton, Prada)
- Mandalay Place (Urban Outfitters, Elton's, Art of Shaving)
- Town Square (Whole Foods, BCBG, Apple Store, Eleven Spa)

Image credit: Joan Marcus, © Disney

Nightlife

N1 Vanity (Hard Rock Hotel)

4455 Paradise Rd. · 702-693-5000 · www.thevanitylv.com

EXPERT
FAVORITE



There are a lot of showy, expensive nightclubs in Las Vegas, but this new 14,000-square-foot spot deserves the nod for great design (check out that cool ceiling-wide crystal chandelier); 64 VIP booths; a variety of experiences, including decadent outdoor cabanas connecting to Sky Bar; great sound; low hype; and a nicely mixed crowd. Even the bathrooms will impress.

N2 Mandarin Bar (Mandarin Oriental)

BAR WITH
A VIEW

3752 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-590-8888 · www.mandarinoriental.com/lasvegas

Of the several places on the Strip for a romantic cocktail with a view, Mandarin Oriental's 23rd-floor Sky Lobby is by far the best. Settle in for a subdued, chic retreat with 180 degrees of floor-to-ceiling windows, plush seating, creative cocktails, and refined service.

N4 Crown Theater (Rio)

BEST
VENUE

3700 W. Flamingo Rd.
702-777-7700 · www.riolasvegas.com

With the new Joint at Hard Rock, the Pearl at Palms, and arenas at MGM Grand, Mandalay Bay, and The Orleans, Las Vegas is now a prime place to see a live show. But the best venue may turn out to be Rio's new Crown Theater. Formerly Prince's resident 3121 club, The Crown is a 900-person-capacity, no-bad-seat circular room with up-graded sound, video projection, go-go dancers, and tiers of VIP booths hosted by lingerie-clad waitresses.

N3 XS (Encore)

LOCALS'
FAVORITE

3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-770-009 · www.xslasvegas.com

When it comes to the Vegas club scene, almost all agree that the semi-circular, indoor-outdoor superclub aptly named XS ("Excess," get it?) dominates. This plush party pad isn't for low-rollers, but it promises an unforgettable experience. (Also popular with locals: Thursdays at TAO and Sundays at The Bank.)

N5 BB King's Blues Club (The Mirage)

BEST
LOUNGE

3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
702-791-7111 · www.mirage.com

Casino lounges are a venerated essential of the Vegas experience, offering solid entertainment and drinks in a comfortable environment. But recently they've fallen on hard times, often featuring soulless cover bands or uncreative DJs. BB King's new juke-joint-inspired club isn't a lounge per se, but it functions exactly as one should, offering solid cover-free entertainment to which to drink and dance. The food's not bad, either. (Another popular spot is the Dueling Pianos Show At Harrah's.)

Best Day Life

Vegas being a 24-hour town, its nightlife culture has bled from after-hours events (the current hot one is at Aria's Gold Lounge) into daytime DJ-ed pool parties. Nearly every resort has one, but all are not created equal. Here's a brief on what to expect where.

Encore Pool Club (Encore)

A whimsically lavish escape with outdoor gaming, two floors of plush cabanas, and dance pads in the pool.

Bare (The Mirage)

One of the more intimate party pools, this topless-optional retreat culls VIPs and local models as a matter of course.

Azure (The Palazzo)

One of the more intricate, and mature, private pools, with multiple plunges, large Jacuzzis, and excellent food from Wolfgang Puck's Solara.

Tao Beach (The Venetian)

A sauté pan of sweat and sin, this number-one club is reliably stacked with sensuality.

Liquid (Aria)

The roomier, elegant sister to Bare promises a similar energy level with a slightly higher sense of self. Good food.

Rehab Sundays/Sky Bar (Hard Rock Hotel)

The mother of all Vegas pool parties, and its new stylish spinoff.

Wet Republic (MGM Grand)

There are hard bodies, and plenty of them. Two saltwater pools are stuffed with party people, and it's frequently celebrity-hosted.

The Hideout (Golden Nugget)

Aptly named, downtown's only adult pool is accessible only to those in the know—a small but rewarding respite.

Go Pool (Flamingo)

Attitude-free, European-style topless-optional pool with games and low-pressure fun.

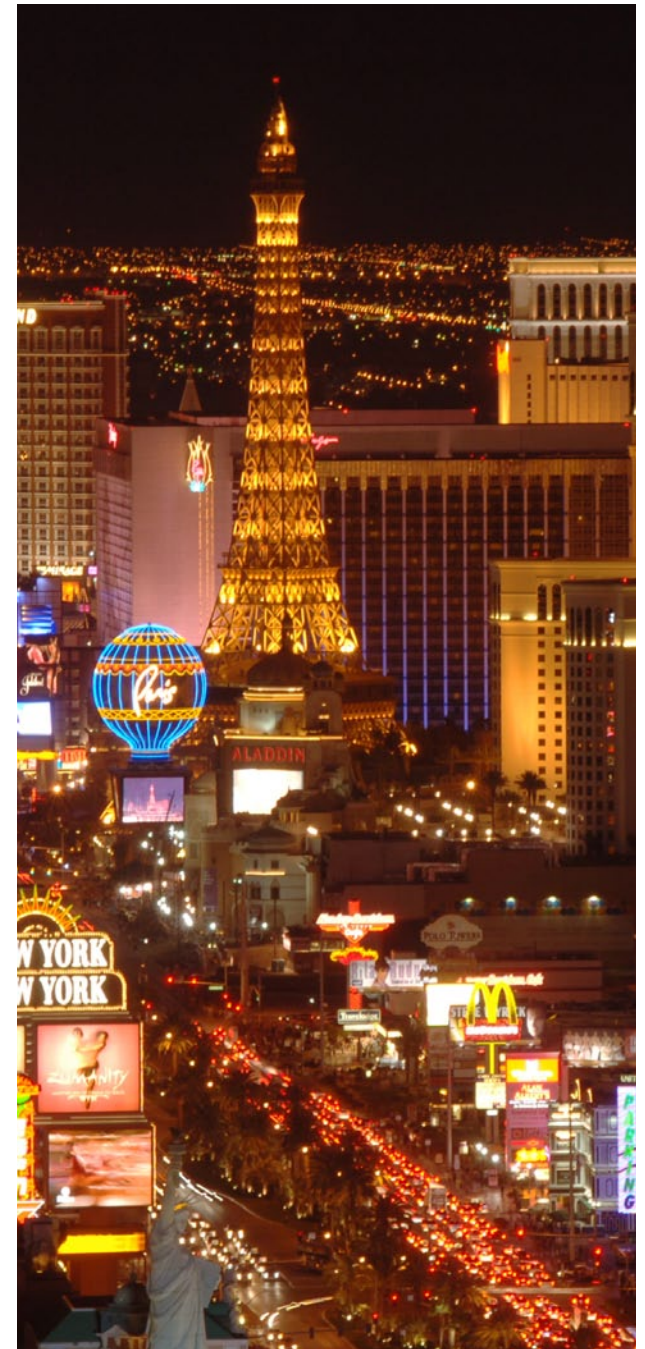
Ditch Fridays (Palms)

A bonanza of beautiful people, both local and Los Angeleno.

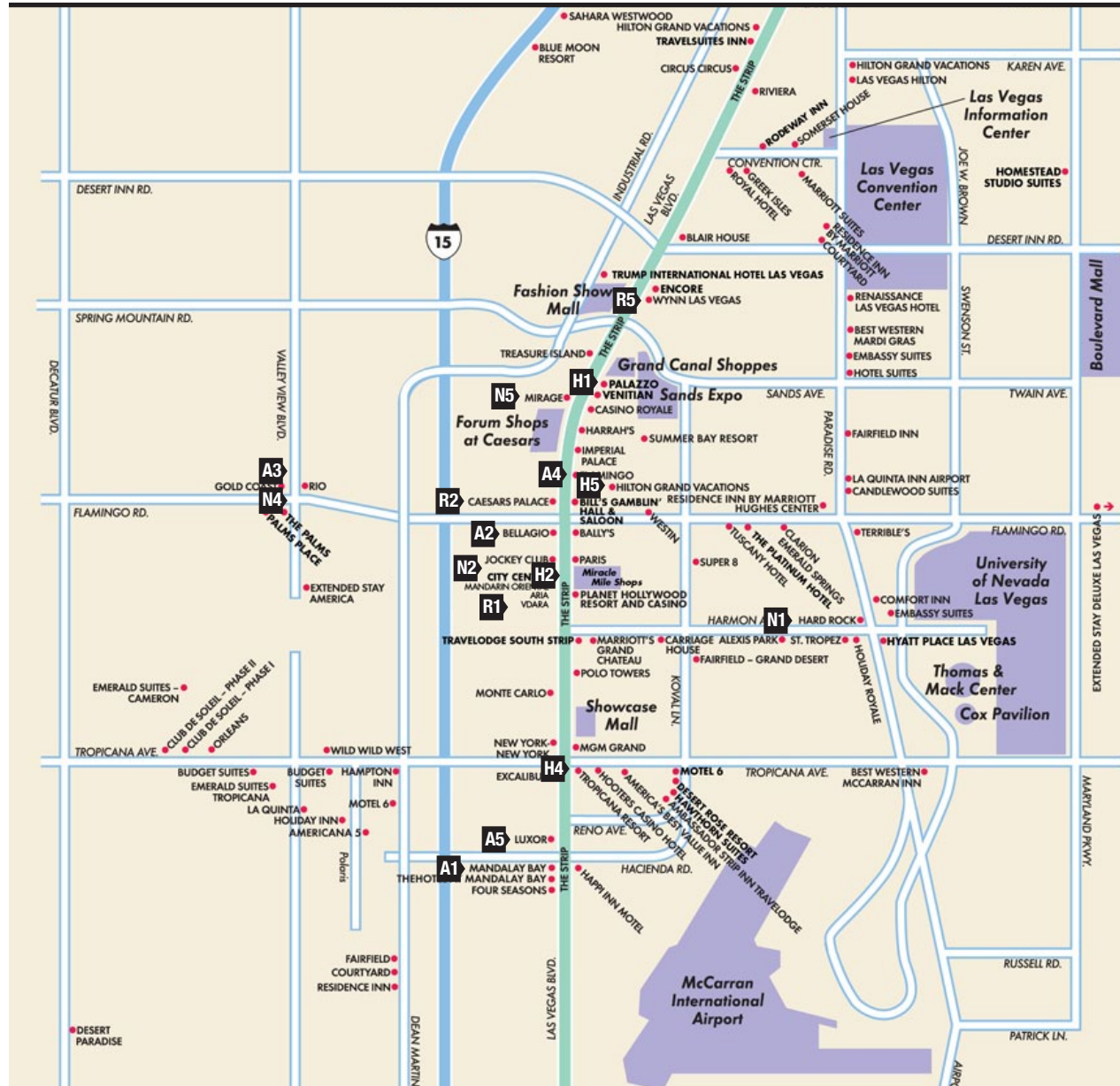
Ratings

Hotels	TripAdvisor +Rated on a scale of 5	Yahoo! Travel +Rated on a scale of 5	Frommer's
The Venetian	4	-	Very highly recommended
Mandarin Oriental	4.5	-	-
Tropicana	3.5	-	Recommended
Loews, Lake Las Vegas	4	4.5	-
Hilton Grand Vacation Suites	4	3.5	-

Restaurants	Yelp +Rated on a scale of 5	UrbanSpoon +Rated on a scale of 5	Gayot +Rated on a scale of 20
Sage	4	4.5	15
Serendipity 3	3	4	-
Studio B	4.5	4	-
Top of the World	4	4	-
Stratta	3.5	4.5	16



A Attraction **H** Hotel **N** Nightlife **R** Restaurant



Notes & Such

About the Author: Veteran journalist E.C. Gladstone has covered Las Vegas over the past five years for a number of online and print publications including AOL CityGuide, Orbitz.com, *Las Vegas Weekly*, *LVM*, and *LAX* magazine. He is also a former contributing editor for *VEGAS Magazine*.

More Reading

Away.com Las Vegas Travel Guide
www.away.com/lasvegas

Eating Las Vegas
www.eatinglv.com

JackColton.com
www.jackcolton.com

Las Vegas Weekly
www.lasvegasweekly.com

Urbanspoon Las Vegas
www.urbanspoon.com/las-vegas

VegasDeluxe.com
www.vegasdeluxe.com

Visit Las Vegas
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http://away.com/feedback/customer_feedback.html