

Las Vegas: The Epic Guide to Drinking, Gambling and Entertainment

Endless rows of flashing machines; free drinks galore; and arguably more ways to be entertained than almost any other city on earth: Welcome to Las Vegas.

I consider Las Vegas to be like Disneyland for adults: pretty lights dazzle every guest, visitors are inundated with seemingly endless entertainment options, (and the workers are all probably on low wages from giant corporations).

I have been to Las Vegas 4 times now, which I consider quite impressive for someone that lives in Australia. There's a few reasons for this: I love the energy of the place, it's always buzzing, and there's always a sense of excitement. I love the grandeur of the casinos, rising out of the desert, completely out of place.

But most of all it's just fun.



Even though I don't let the "what happens in Vegas" mantra be an excuse to do dumb shit, there is a definite sense of freedom to do things you wouldn't normally do. For me this involves things like walking down a busy main street (none other than Las Vegas Boulevard) with *at least* [two drinks in hand](#); or sitting at a blackjack table smoking a cigar like a boss; or even just spending \$50 on a poker game.

Love it or hate it it's a magical place, so I've put together this guide to help you get the most out of your next visit, grouped by activity.

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Non-gambling entertainment

Las Vegas Neon Museum

For such a cool experience, I'm surprised the Neon museum isn't talked about more. Housed in what feels like someone's backyard are hundred of antique signs and their thousands of (mostly blown) light globes from a Vegas of old. Many are from the 1950s and 60s, some even older.

But more than just a yard of fading signs, the museum is a treasure trove of history from one of the most fascinating cities in the world and stands as a time capsule preserving the memory of casinos and motels past and present.



Eiffel Tower Experience

If you're looking for the best vantage point of the Las Vegas strip, look no further than the Eiffel Tower Experience. Located at the central Paris Casino, the monument is a one third replica of the original Parisian masterpiece and gives a stunning 360 degree view of the Strip and surrounds. It is the perfect height because you are high enough to see everything, but low enough that there is plenty of detail in what you are seeing.

Best time to go is at night because of all the lights Vegas puts on, but you do pay a bit extra for the privilege. I actually got my ticket for about 40% off from [Groupon](#) so keep an eye for sales there.



Pinball hall of fame

If you have a penchant for retro and have ever enjoyed playing pinball, the [Pinball Hall of Fame](#) is a must stop. Covering over 10,000 square feet of history, the hall of fame offers visitors flashing game machines that are actually fun, and won't cost near as much as those that fill casino floors. Most machines are either 25 or 50 cents to play.

NYNY coaster

Nothing in Vegas seems to come cheaply and the NYNY coaster is no exception. But thrill seekers will be treated to a truly unique roller coaster experience as gravity takes you on a grand tour of the New York New York skyline, with fleeting views of the Strip as you slide past high points.



Linq high roller

Hidden from most street views, yet starkly visible from any high view is the Linq high roller. The ferris wheel has 28 cabins holding up to 40 people each that circulate around a wheel to a height of 170 metres, about 35 metres higher than the [London Eye](#)!

Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay

I was really looking forward to going to see the Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay. In true Vegas style I pictured an epic shark tank, with Great Whites swimming inside, with a perfect view of the high roller tables.

What I found instead was some sort of aquarium zoo quite a walk away from all playing areas with quite a hefty entry fee. I can't actually tell you what it's like because I was hoping it was free and I could just do a drive by.

Wrong.

Adventuredome, Circus Circus

Not many people make it as far north as Circus Circus unless you are staying there, but the [Adventuredome](#) is actually a great way to have an afternoon of fun without being stuck at a gaming table. The indoor, air conditioned theme park has roller coasters, mini golf, a rock climbing wall, bungee jumping, video games, arcade games, and even free clown shows.

Gondola Ride in the Venetian

Just like in Venice, you can take a gondola ride through the canals under a partly-clouded blue sky. Except in Vegas, the blue sky is realistically painted atop Italian style indoor buildings.



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Where to drink in Las Vegas

A note about Las Vegas bars. I love my craft beer so I tend to gravitate towards places that satisfy this particular thirst. Just know that not being a beer snob doesn't exclude you from enjoying them as well, I wouldn't include them otherwise.

Chandelier Bar, Cosmopolitan

If you walk through the Cosmopolitan the Chandelier will be hard to miss. It's a multi-level bar in an atrium, in the middle of the complex. It is named such as it is draped in thousands of sparkly beads or crystals giving the impression of a chandelier.



This photo shows the whole bar much better than my own. By Sarah Ackerman, via [Flickr](#)

Beer Park, Paris Hotel

As an outdoor beer garden, [Beer Park](#) beckons with the promise of the warm sun beating down on your back while you and your pals sip the nectar of the gods while playing pool. Beer Park has an *extensive* craft beer range, as well as an impressive cocktail list and a casual eats menu that will have you going back for more.

Look for the signs on the Planet Hollywood side of the Paris Hotel from the Strip.

Omnia, Caesars Palace

Omnia is the huge dome that sits just in the foreground of Caesars Palace. On a Saturday night you can actually hear [Calvin Harris pumping out the tunes](#) from the other side of the Boulevard. That's right, Calvin Harris is the resident DJ at Omnia and people travel all the way from LA just to party here. I know because I saw the billboards all over Hollywood.

That said, there are many other famous DJs with residencies in Vegas, [you can see them all here](#).



Sin City Brewing Co

There are a few of these around, but the one I went to was in the Planet Hollywood Miracle Mile loop mall. It's just a small thing, but they had a decent range of their beers on tap. They had a few stools to sit on or you could just take one for the road.

Beerhaus, The Park

The Park is a small precinct behind the NYNY and in the front yard of the Monte Carlo. Visiting the Park is worthwhile just to enjoy the extensive tap list offered by Beerhaus. Despite the German sounding name, the beers are anything but Bavarian; they are appropriately diverse.

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Places to eat in Las Vegas

BurGR

I ate at Gordon Ramsey's BurGR last time I was in Vegas in 2014, and it was good enough to visit again in 2016. The burgers are simple but sublime and the tap list extensive. For the second time out of two I was blown away by the incredible creations of Mr Ramsey and could eat here every meal if given the option.



Holsteins Shakes and buns

Holsteins is actually known for their epic milk shakes (and they are epic!) but if milk isn't going to get your where need to be later in the night then peruse the long list of beers on offer and if you can't find something you love, you're not looking hard enough.

Oh and they also make damn fine burgers.



Mon Ami Gabi

While Mon Ami Gabi is very definition of **on** the beaten path, they do serve good French food. And since it is centrally located on the Strip, if you don't want to think too hard about where to eat it's a good option. I've only had breakfast there, but I've had breakfast there the last 2 times I've been in Vegas. I had some delicious (and what seemed like authentic) thin, French crepes with soft pear.

Shake Shack

While not exclusive to Las Vegas, Shake Shack is somewhat of a rarity in the western United States. Shake Shack is another quick burger joint; a giant chain out of New York that pits their fanatical fans against those of In'N'Out Buger. The burgers are great, but they are most known for their shakes.



Border Grill

After a big night out, if you're looking a good morning after brunch option, Border Grill offers a less traditional type of brunch - Mexican style. There are two locations on the Strip but the [Mandalay Bay](#) location has a lovely outdoor patio to relax on. Brunch is served as small plates that you can order in unlimited quantities for \$35 and you can add unlimited mimosas for an extra \$10.

For the more sweet toothed diner, there is also a good selection including churro tots with cinnamon sugar and passion fruit puree. Brunch is served on Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 3pm. (By Michele Robson www.turningleftforless.com)

Pin up Pizza, Planet Hollywood (giant-ass pizza)

Pin up Pizza is best enjoyed at 2am after a good few hours at the tables with many a free drink inside you. Don't plan to eat here for a meal, it will be wasted. The pizzas are delicious, excellent value, and at 15 inches, might even be the biggest slice I've ever had.



Sambalatte, Monte Carlo

I stayed at the Monte Carlo and having this place at my doorstep was a godsend. One of the few places I found in America that does decent coffee. Not many come close to our pretentiously high Australian standards, but this place was close. They also have quite a few good and quick breakfast options as well so it was a great place to start our day.

Bruxie, The Park

Located between the New York New York and the Monte Carlo is a string of eats and drinks, including this small place serving delicious waffle sandwiches. I had breakfast there on my last morning in Las Vegas and had a pesto, eggs and ham waffle and a Nutella waffle because, you know, who can make decisions that early in the morning?

Restaurant Guy Savoy

For those wanting that touch of luxury, gourmet Restaurant Guy Savoy in Augustus Towers at Caesars is a class above. [Fellow blogger Enzo](#) treated himself to a meal and wrote the expense off as a once in a lifetime opportunity and said it was well worth it. In fact this is the only place outside of Paris that you can appreciate the typical dishes of Guy Savoy such as the black truffle soup and Fois gras. (by [Enzo Ferarri](#))

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Free entertainment in Las Vegas

Fall of Atlantis, Caesars

While perhaps a little cheesy, the Roman-themed show in the Forum shops is completely free and is worth stopping by if you're planning on being there anyway. It features animatronic action and actors, and is played every hour on the hour. There are plenty of places to eat in the area so your best bet is to find a table with a view of the set so you can wait and watch while you eat.

Linq Promenade

The Linq Promenade is more of a precinct than a specific attraction, but as you are walking down the Strip exploring casinos, take a walk between the Linq Hotel and the Flamingo towards the High Roller ferris wheel. There's plenty of lunch and nightlife spots like Gordon Ramsey's Fish and Chips, or shops to poke your head in including a random hat store, a novelty souvenir store, and a cupcake ATM.



The Las Vegas sign

Iconic to this city of sin is the flashy "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign at the south end of the strip. It's a 15 minute walk from the Mandalay Bay, which we walked, but then getting back you'll get need to get a Lyft/Uber for a few dollars as it's a good few kilometres from the main part of the Strip.



Flamingos at the Flamingo

As the name suggests, the hotel does actually boast it's own flock of flamingos out the back. They aren't very active, but having never seen a real flamingo before, I got a bit of a buzz out of seeing them.

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Cheap places to Gamble

If you're like me you're not a big gambler, but when you're in Vegas playing the tables is the thing to do. You want to have go at the tables, but you aren't there to win big money, and you certainly aren't there to lose big money; you're just there to have a good time *and* a long time without losing too much cash. The cheap places to play generally coincide with cheap places to sleep so these are the places I found to have the cheapest tables.

Just note that when the tables are so cheap, the odds are generally worse than the more expensive tables. For example, standard on a \$5 blackjack table is blackjack pays 6:5 instead of 3:2.

Circus Circus

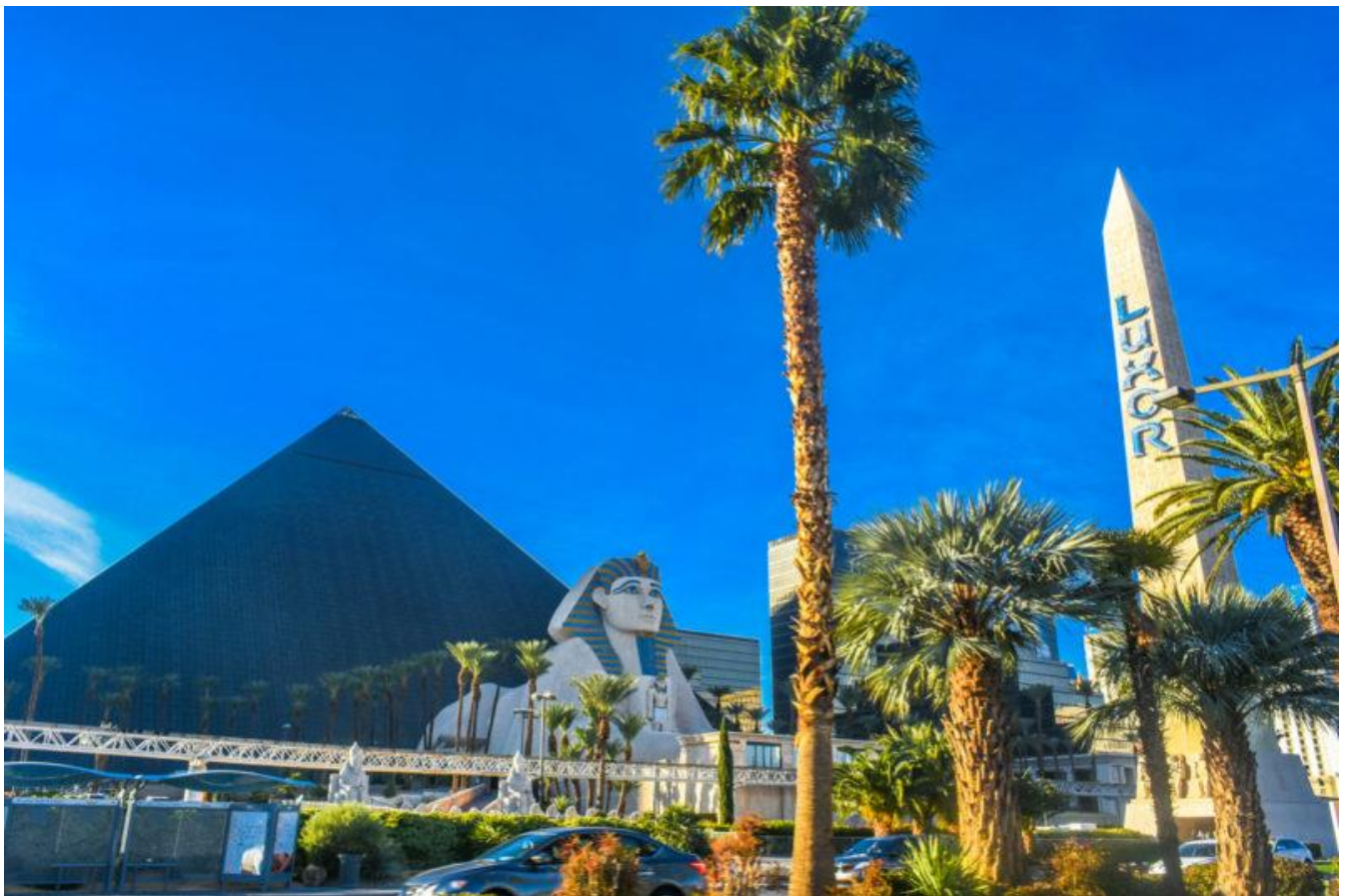
The cheapest hotel on the strip also has some of the cheapest tables on the strip. Many \$5 tables.

Linq

Another good value hotel that has good value tables. 6 of us played on a \$5 blackjack table for close to 3 hours.

Flamingo

Just next door, everything about the Flamingo screams budget, right down to the girls dancing on the tables. Quite a few \$5 tables here as well.



Luxor

We learnt to play craps on a \$5 tables in the Luxor but we also saw \$5 blackjack as well. They aren't hidden so look in the main section not far from Dick's Last Resort.

Hooters

Now I didn't quite make it to Hooters unfortunately, one more day in Vegas and I probably would have, but the casino does boast quite a few [\\$3 blackjack tables](#). Keep an eye out for cheap wing night as well, as this could potentially be your cheapest night out after you take into consideration the free drinks you'll get for playing. Located on Tropicana Avenue, it's only a \$5 Lyft/Uber away.

Monte Carlo

The Monte Carlo is where I stayed last time, and it has a single \$5 blackjack table, right near the food court. That's it though.

Las Vegas Shows

Vegas is full of shows and if you can afford it, I recommend you try and see at least one while in town. I've seen **David Copperfield's** show and it is phenomenal. Even you aren't into magic, you'll be gobsmacked with his illusions and wit.

At last count I believe there are [7 Cirque du Soleil shows in Las Vegas](#), each with a different story, performance, and hook. I've seen **Ka** at the MGM Grand and despite falling asleep due to having a massive night the night before, the stunts they pull off are mind bending.

Although I haven't seen them perform, I'd love to see the **Jabawockeez**. I'm not much into dancing, but I have been a genuine fan of the dance group ever since they burst into fame from one of the Step Up movies. I'm not embarrassed to admit it.

Another Las Vegas institution is the **Blue Man Group**, which just sounds like it would be a truly unique show. I haven't seen it but it intrigues me because I have no idea what to expect. Maybe next time.

Expect to pay up to around \$100 for a show ticket. But you if you don't really have a strong preference for what you see, rock up to one of the many [Tix4Tonight locations](#) along the strip and see what shows have last minute discounted tickets.

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Sweet views of Las Vegas

Although completely manufactured, Vegas is a beautiful city. The grandeur of the city lights up at night into a spectacle that can only truly be captured from heights. Thankfully there are plenty of places along the strip to take this in.

Eiffel Tower Experience

I mentioned above the Eiffel Tower Experience as a fun thing to do. I also think it has one of the best vantage points in the city, and is perfect for watching the Bellagio fountains from above. I truly felt like I was getting exactly how the artist planned it by seeing the shows from above.

Stratosphere

This one might be an obvious inclusion but nonetheless, for some of the best top-down views of the entire strip (and surrounds) from the northern end of town, the Stratosphere is your answer. Admission to the 869 foot observation deck is \$20 and an extra \$20 if you want to experience the adrenaline-fueled rides that hang off the side.

With three spine-chilling rides, the Stratosphere is a great stop for thrill seekers to be launched even higher than the tower already stands. And when you've tried them all there is even a quick way down again via the electrifying Skyjump - it saves queuing for elevators! (by [Matt Hullahd](#))



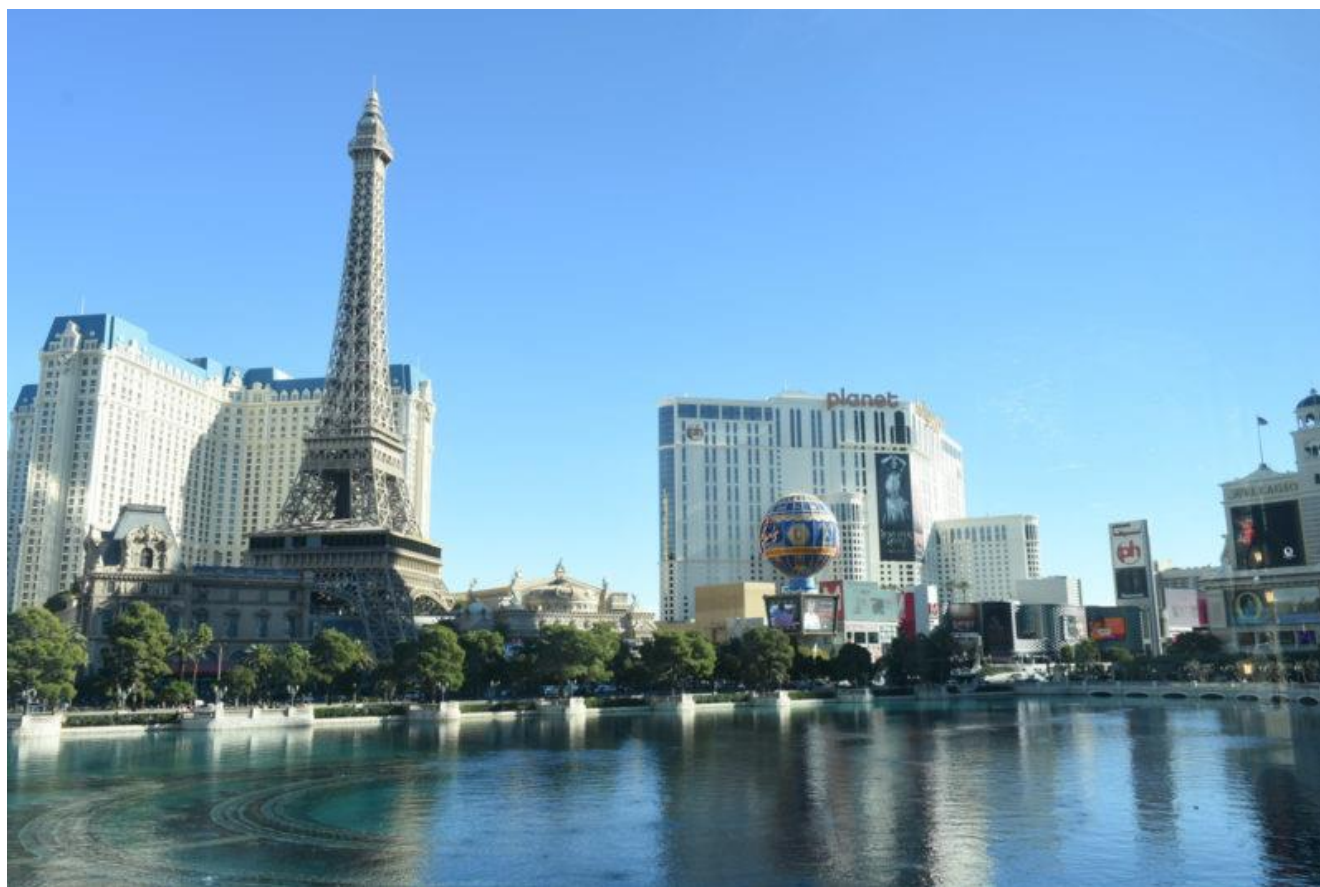
Novo Italiano, The Palms

Located a few blocks west of Las Vegas Boulevard, The Palms offers a unique view of the Las Vegas area with the Strip in the foreground. Albeit, not as high or as close as some of the on-strip locations but a good view nonetheless.

Lago by Julian Serrano

...Or in fact any of the restaurants dotted around the Bellagio fountains, there's about 5 or 6. They don't offer you a high view, but you do get a front row seat of the fountains every 15 minutes with the Paris in the background.

Lago offers a relaxed but elegant dining atmosphere with an unpretentious menu. Prebook your table to ensure a window seat and front row of the Bellagio fountain show.



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Downtown Las Vegas

Visitors to Las Vegas often come for a few days and just like it was for me the first 3 times I visited, there was more than plenty on-strip to keep me satisfactorily entertained.

But with 4 days this most recent trip I ventured off and visited Downtown, the heart of which is the completely undercover Fremont Street Experience.

You will most likely arrive at one end and walk through as a leisurely pace, but in case you want some direction, here are a few things to look out for.



Slotzilla Zipline

As you wander you will see people zip lining overhead down the Fremont Street. These people are being spat out of a giant slot machine, called Slotzilla.

Pizza Rock

Without doubt the best pizza I had in Las Vegas (perhaps even the USA). Set just outside of Fremont Street, the pizza mecca also boasts one of the best craft beer menus in the city as well.

Shark Tank at the Golden Nugget

I am absolutely crushed I didn't get to see this on my visit to Downtown Las Vegas. Inside the pool area at the Golden Nugget is an honest to goodness aquarium tank filled with fish and sharks. To top it off, there is a water slide that goes *through* the entire tank. Typical Las Vegas taking everything to next level. Here's a video I found of it on YouTube.

Take a photo with a million dollars at Binions

This was pretty tacky, but if you're in the casino you at least walk past. In front of a stationary camera is a million dollars worth of Benjamins, secured under thick Perspex, with an employee barking at you to put your camera away.



Commonwealth

Throw back to the good old days at the Commonwealth, an excessively large cocktail bar whose presence, decor, and beverages are an homage to prohibition - a time when people drank as much as they did prior to, just in secret. Cocktail bar out front, rooftop bar up top, hidden speakeasy out back, it's the opposite of the traditional Vegas experience.

Banger Brewing

Located along Fremont Street, Banger Brewing is a local brewery offering beers as offbeat as Vegas is excessive. Brews such as jalepeño hefe, coffee kolsch and double chocolate monk stout join more traditional ales such as IPAs, pales and browns on the menu board.

Beer fans with time to spare can also [take a tour of the brewery](#). Tours occur 3-4 times daily and are completely free.

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Where to Stay in Las Vegas

There are plenty of options along the strip with something to suit all budgets. Most of the hotels are either owned by MGM Resorts or Caesars and signing up to their rewards program before you go can get you discounts of up to 15%.

Also, if you can arrange it, staying midweek is *much* cheaper than on a weekend and this applies across the board. Sometimes a room can be 50% cheaper on a Thursday than on a Friday so it's definitely worth looking into.

Linq

I stayed here when it was still the Imperial Palace in 2011. It is a little nicer now that it has had a transformative facelift, but it is still a very good budget option.

Monte Carlo

I stayed here on my most recent trip to Las Vegas in 2016. I found a great price on a new aggregator website called [Prestigia](#). While looking a little dated in places, the rooms were clean, spacious, and reasonably modern with reasonably priced tables downstairs.

Bellagio

The Bellagio has the ultimate location, being plotted right in the middle of the Strip. At times, it can be only marginally more to stay here than a more mid priced hotel like the Paris or MGM so if you squeeze a little more out of your budget, the Bellagio is the place to stay.

Aria

Now that I'm thinking about, I'd probably put Aria on par with Bellagio in terms of experience. It's more modern in design and age (opened in 2009), the rooms are plush with technological touches (such as automatic blinds), and it has a great selection of restaurants.

Wynn/Encore

When money is no issue, the Wynn takes luxury to the next level. It is still on the strip - a little past Caesars Palace, but it is a little further away from the action.

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Getting Around Las Vegas

Compared to most cities, the attractions of Las Vegas are fairly compact. They are mostly located up or down the 5.6km Strip (I calculate the Strip as being from Mandalay Bay to Circus Circus) withing a short walking distance of each other. Therefore walking will be your main mode of transport.

Granted, you can walk *a lot* just going in an out of the casinos, as these are the main attractions, so be prepared for that and bring good walking shoes.

Many of the hotels are actually connected by a monorail. However, there is no one monorail that goes up and down the Strip; the monorails generally service 2-3 casinos each. These are all free and can save a lot of walking.

There is a bus that goes around, and this can get you to places off the Strip. I didn't actually use it because I didn't need to, and you probably won't either. But the option is there if you do.

And lastly, it goes without saying that taxis/Ubbers/Lyfts abound. When I visited there were many people giving out Lyft cards with a welcome code that gave me 10 \$5 vouchers. Most of the trips around Vegas are short so you could potentially get many rides for like \$2-3. This is what I did.

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Day trips from Las Vegas

Red rock canyon

If you have a day to spare in Vegas, or if you just really love epic nature, a visit to Red Rock Canyon is a must. Located just a half hours drive from Las Vegas Boulevard, Red Rock will feel miles away. Distinct rock formations explode from the earth, beckoning the eager hiker to get closer and higher.



There are likely tours that will take you there, but your best bet might be to hire a car and drive yourself so you can go at your own pace.

Make a beeline for the visitors Centre to grab a map and ask the staff for a recommendation on what hike(s) would be the most suitable. They all vary in length, difficulty and beauty but they are knowledgeable enough to get you onto the right one. We hiked along the Calico Tanks trail which was a gorgeous walk through a canyon and up to a panoramic view of the plateau with Las Vegas Boulevard in the distance.

Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon needs no introduction; it is famous for being the worlds largest hole in the ground. A red rainbow of rock formations extend to the horizon as you gaze in awe of the vast geological sea.

As far as day trips go, with a 4 hour journey each way, this is pushing the limit. However, plenty of tour companies can help you achieve it because if you want to only take a day, you won't want to drive it yourself. After 8 hours of driving you'll have no mental capacity left to lose shit tons of money at roulette.

If you would like to go at a more leisurely pace, do what I did and stay the night at or near Grand Canyon village and self drive (for me it was Kingman). The hotel prices will surprise you.



There are a number of different parts of the Grand Canyon to visit. The most common is the South Rim, but for more information on which to visit, read [my guest post on Mapping Megan](#).