



## **Stay & Play in Vegas**

There are endless one-word descriptions that one might use to encapsulate Las Vegas. Gaudy, exhausting, stimulating, energizing, tacky and risqué are all applicable, as is fantasy, dicey, (or "dice-y," if you prefer) frivolous, frenetic, and maybe a thousand other potential candidates. Here's one for today: Variety.

The choices in Las Vegas are endless - gambling halls, eating establishments, shows, nightlife, hotels, recreation options, golf courses - you name it, and there are a dozen or more new options every time you arrive. So we'll make things very simple, and provide a user-friendly, easy-to-follow and selective guide regarding where to stay, eat, play, etc.

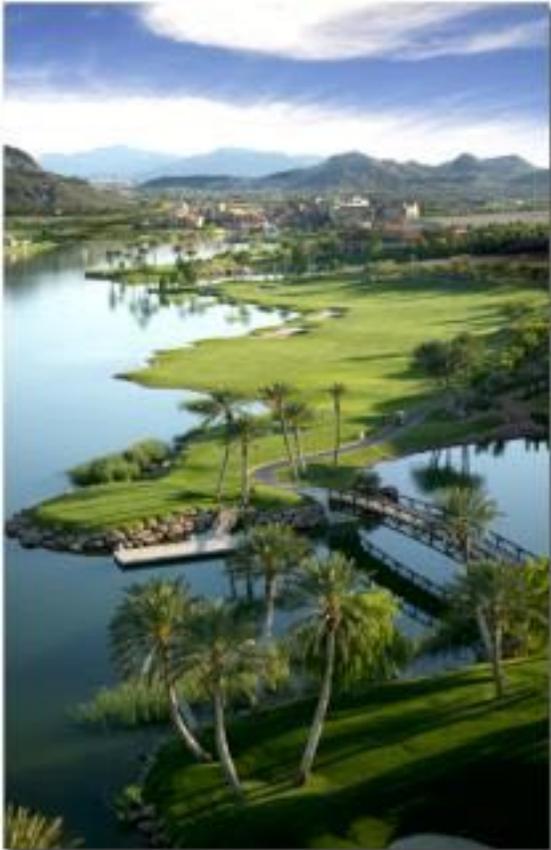
### **Lodging**

The Las Vegas Strip is remindful of Bourbon Street in New Orleans, in that its fun for an hour or two, but its charms can wear off quickly. The hotel options on the Strip run from opulent to awful, and it's a great choice if one requires non-stop action and a casino at the ready. But for those who prefer the opportunity to get away from the cacophony every so often, the Las Vegas Renaissance Hotel is an excellent choice. First off, there's no casino. Secondly, there's no smoking. Thirdly, it's less than 10 minutes, and about a \$10 cab ride to the Strip itself.

(There are other great lodging options, equally mellow, but much further removed - places like Red Rocks Casino, or the JW Marriott, which are both a good half-hour from the action.) The Renaissance is adjacent to the Convention Center, on the monorail route, close to the highways, and maybe 15 minutes to the airport. Aside from convenience, it has nearly 600 modern, spacious rooms and suites, a dynamite fitness center (for a hotel - it's no Gold's Gym) and plenty of style. In the Vegas Hotel Universe, it's not an obvious choice, but an excellent one.

## **Golf**

Again, so many options it's almost dizzying. Let's assume the marquee names (Shadow Creek, which is currently under renovation anyway) Wynn and Cascata are beyond one's budget. "Theme Park" courses like Desert Pines and Royal Links (Carolina-style, and UK-replica course, respectively) seem too kitschy, and the Las Vegas Paiute Resort, with its trio of Pete Dye designs, too far removed. Here's a four-word solution to the dilemma of where to play, day-after-day: Lake Las Vegas Resort.



Located in the mega-growth suburb of Henderson, about 30-odd minutes from the strip, Lake Las Vegas offers a trio of courses from which to choose. The South Shore course is private, but the remaining pair - Reflection Bay and The

Falls - are accessible to the public, and legions of satisfied customers are quick to agree with the old expression, "two out of three ain't bad."

Jack Nicklaus designed the former, and his long-time rival and fellow Ohio State alum, Tom Weiskopf, designed the latter. These big-stick Buckeyes have worked in tandem before, at South Carolina's Daufuskie Island and on Mexico's Baja Peninsula, at Cabo del Sol. In this writer's opinion, Nicklaus has previously had the upper hand. His Melrose Course has more depth and texture than does Weiskopf's Bloody Point, on the island of Daufuskie, just south of Hilton Head. Similarly in Cabo San Lucas, while the Weiskopf Desert Course is estimable, the true marquee venue in Big Jack's Cabo del Sol - Ocean.

But at Lake Las Vegas the tables are turned. Reflection Bay is the Nicklaus effort, mostly low-to-the-ground, with about 1.5 miles of shoreline views courtesy of the manmade lake that abuts four of the holes. It's a solid resort offering. But The Falls, particularly its vertical ramble of a back nine, 400 feet of up-and-down, is the true attention-getter. Bighorn sheep roam the premises on the skyscraper holes through the middle portion of the journey home. Not surprising, as this is Billy-goat terrain. Architectural purists might turn up their noses at the wacky 12th, an up-and-over par-5, or the vertigo-inducing par-4 13th, with its terraced, nosebleed tee boxes, or the drive-able par-4 14th. But casual golfers, even if they're rocketing wayward shots into oblivion, will likely call it one thing: fun.

**Dining** in Vegas dwarves the golf-and-lodging choices by a factor of 1,000 to 1. There are more eateries than there are casino chips at The Flamingo and The Sahara combined. So we'll become highly, highly selective, and just offer two ideas. And bear in mind, this isn't what you call spa cuisine. Another watchword in Vegas is "Indulgence," so be sure to bring your appetite!

The Pampas Brazilian Grille in the Miracle Mile Shops near Planet Hollywood is a gustatory experience par excellence. This handsome eatery specializes in the South American method of grilling the finest cuts of meat on a wood or charcoal fire. The food is simply prepared and spit-roasted over a brick "rodizio" to juicy perfection and the menu includes all sorts of delectable grilled items, and local favorites like black bean stew, fried banana, Brazilian cheese bread or Brazilian dumplings. Waiters circle the restaurant with their wares on a skewer, and if your drink coaster is green-side-up, they'll stop and carve you some more. It's only when you admit defeat after loosening your belt, and flip that coaster over to the red side, the Pampas equivalent of waving the white flag, that they'll allow you to say "Uncle."

Of course, Pampas is like the Pritikin Diet compared to the bacchanalia that is the Bellagio Buffet. Picture everything food-wise you've ever liked, like currently, or might like in the future. Now imagine more of that item than you could eat in two months. That sums up the Bellagio Bounty quite nicely. Sushi. Raw Bar.

Pizza. Roasts, twenty types of bread. Carved meats, stews, veggies, a half-acre salad bar. Fifty desserts, plus ice cream machines. Walk in, waddle out.

**Shows** range from the current big-timers - Bette Midler, Elton John, Danny Gans, Penn & Teller, Barry Manilow - to the up-and-comers, lesser-lights, and minor league ventriloquists, hypnotists, magicians, etc. You can't go wrong with anything by Cirque Du Soleil. Longtime offerings include the aquatics-based "O" at Bellagio, the powerfully acrobatic "Mystere" at Treasure Island, and sexy "Zumanity" at New York, New York. Cirque Du Soleil affords the viewer the opportunity to suspend their disbelief for a few hours, which, come to think of it, is the main reason for visiting Las Vegas in the first place.