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Las Vegas
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the Glitz



SPRING FEVER!



Las Vegas

The showgirls, the scandals, and the slot machines are still here, but great chefs and sophisticated shops are giving America's gambling capital a Monte Carlo air

By Deanna Kizis

Mention Las Vegas to those with refined tastes, and they're usually stricken with visions of kitsch bathed in the unearthly glow of neon. Frankly, elegance has always been in short supply in this oasis. The city cashes in on the illusion (sometimes a poor one) that a casino is really Paris, that the ubiquitous \$9.99 buffet is fit for a king, and that high-roller status is just one more bet away. Travelers who value veritas and restrained luxury typically vacation elsewhere.

But this desert-bound mistress of makeovers is in the midst of another tectonic shift. The resort has abandoned its once-heralded

"family attraction" model—the one that brought the MGM Grand's Disney-style Rainforest Café, complete with a 10,000-gallon aquarium and gushing waterfalls—and embraced a less dissolute, more alluring version of the "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" culture. Sure, there's unabashed wantonness, but increasingly, surprisingly, there is also style, substance, even grace. Star chefs abound; so do celebrity architects. No wonder so many popular television series are set here, namely *Las Vegas* (glitz and jiggle) and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (seamy underbelly). As a result, jet-setters in search of >

las vegas

the next chic destination are rediscovering a city they used to assiduously avoid. "You can come to Las Vegas now and have a wonderful grown-up weekend that doesn't involve hanging out in clubs until three in the morning," says Jennifer Worthington, whose photographic history, *In the Spirit of Las Vegas*, is published this month by Assouline. "I'm always bringing in reluctant friends who soon realize they can go to incredible restaurants, see an amazing show, and be in the spa first thing in the morning."

That sense of civilization is hard to imagine, considering the city's rough-and-tumble beginnings and relative youth. Mormon missionaries established a fort here in 1855, but they left a few years later, and the acres they abandoned eventually became a cattle ranch. In 1902 most of the ranch was sold, and the site soon was reborn as a railroad town. Lax divorce laws followed, and in 1931—when construction on Hoover Dam began, sparking a rush of settlers and development—Nevada legalized gambling. A decade later, California developer Thomas Hull opened the first casino on the Strip, and soon roulette wheels were spinning faster than East Coast socialites could get quickie divorces. Since then, scandalous folks and a certain vibrant cheesiness have always kept things interesting, from the dapper (text continues on page 130) >



Blankspace, a shop in Mandalay Place at Mandalay Bay.



Joel Robbott for
MGM Grand



Bathhouse spa
at THEhotel at
Mandalay Bay.



See Hoover Dam
on a Maverick
helicopter ride.



Essential Las Vegas

The area code is 702.

Hit the tables. Unless you're staying at the gameless Four Seasons or THEhotel, just follow the sound of the slot machines. Some tip: The Palms is rumored to have the "loosest" slots (they pay out most frequently), and Wynn Las Vegas has the most elegant gaming room.

Catch a show. There are dozens of live revues to choose from at any given time, including five Cirque du Soleil productions (the newest is LOVE, with dance and acrobatics set to Beatles tunes), and Monty Python's Spamalot (for ticket information: vegas.com).

Meet the hipsters. Galleries, artists' lofts, and boutiques stay open for First Fridays, a huge block party with live music and street performers on the first Friday of the month (firstfriday-lasvegas.org). Those in the know head to the after-party at Dino's dive bar (1516 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 382-3894; dinoslv.com).

Take in the city lights. Head to Mix Lounge and gasp at the sweeping views of the Strip. Go before 10 P.M. to

avoid the arrival of the club kids (632-7777; thehotelatmandalaybay.com). **Repair the damage.** The staff of Bathhouse spa will prepare a custom blend of scented oils to soak or massage away casino fever (877-632-9636; thehotelatmandalaybay.com); in the Forum Shops, Truefitt & Hill—a branch of what is reputedly the world's oldest barbershop—gives signature straight-razor shaves, manicures, haircuts, and shoeshines in a swank, wood-paneled room (3500 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 735-7428).

What to See

Maverick Helicopters, 6075 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 261-0007; maverickhelicopter.com: This touring company uses luxury helicopters with leather seats and wraparound glass to show off the Strip, Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, and the Colorado River. The high point is the Grand Canyon, where guests disembark to explore and drink Champagne. **The Neon Museum,** 387-6366; neonmuseum.org: Book a guided tour of the Boneyard, a lot filled with vintage neon

signs, or wander to an installation on Fremont Street and check out restored lights, including the gold lamp from the Aladdin and the horse and rider from the Hacienda Hotel.

Springs Preserve, 333 S. Valley View Blvd., 822-6344; springspreserve.org: Las Vegas and Mother Nature meet in a \$250 million park with 180 acres of hiking trails, a sustainable-living center, and botanical gardens. It opens June 8.

Where to Stay

Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 693-7111; bellagio.com: Five-star European-style rooms offer easy access to the posh restaurants and casino; ponder your gaming strategy at the iconic Bellagio fountains, where you can pretend you're on the set of *Ocean's Eleven*.

Four Seasons Hotel, 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 632-5000; fourseasons.com: Tranquility can be found at this sophisticated resort built for visitors who prefer quiet refinement amid the razzle-dazzle. **Palms,** 4321 W. Flamingo Rd., 942-7777; palms.com: Living large never stops at this off-the-strip pleasure palace, which houses the Pearl (a slick new concert hall) and Moon (a nightclub with a retractable roof).

THEhotel, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 632-7777; thehotelatmandalaybay.com: Mandalay Bay gives this tower a boutique-hotel feel by hanging works by Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns in the lobby; the vibe continues in your room with a refreshingly subdued color palette.

Wynn Las Vegas, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 770-7000; wynnlasvegas.com: The gigantic rooms have floor-to-ceiling windows and breathtaking views. Top-notch service, lavish restaurants and shops—it is Steve Wynn's latest masterpiece.

Where to Eat

Alex, Wynn Las Vegas, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 248-3463; wynnlasvegas.com: Sweep down the fab staircase (a replica of the one in the movie *Hello, Dolly!*) into an opulent dining room so chef Alessandro Stratta can wow you with his haute French tasting menus.

Daniel Boulud Brasserie, Wynn Las Vegas, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 248-3463; wynnlasvegas.com: Sip a signature Blister Frenchie (grapefruit vodka and fresh juices) before tucking into crispy duck confit or Dover sole in an airy yet welcoming setting.

Fix, Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 693-8400; fixlasvegas.com: This womb-like restaurant and bar, constructed almost entirely of Costa Rican padouk, is the it spot for slick American fare.

L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon, MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 891-7358; mgrand.com: Those not in the mood for a formal meal at the exquisite Joël Robuchon will be overjoyed by the equally chic tapas fare at L'Atelier next door. Sit at the counter, order the foie gras sliders, and approach Nirvana.

Mix, Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 632-7777; thehotelatmandalaybay.com: This is superstar chef

Alain Ducasse's futuristic top-floor restaurant, designed by Patrick Jouin; dine on braised short ribs and lobster beneath 15,000 handblown glass spheres suspended from the ceiling. **Red 8,** Wynn Las Vegas, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 248-3463; wynnlasvegas.com: If the hour-plus wait at the buffet seems too daunting, go around the corner for excellent dim sum in this pretty chinoiserie restaurant just off the casino floor. **Social House,** Treasure Island, 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 894-7223; socialhouselv.com: Late-night diners head to this Pan Asian spot (inspiredly decorated by AOKK) for miso cod and Kobe beef three ways (seared, tataki, and tartare).

Where to Shop

Agent Provocateur, the Forum Shops at Caesars, 3500 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 696-7174; agentprovocateur.com: Unleash your inner showgirl at this pink, boudoir-esque shrine to enticing intimates. **Dust Gallery,** 1221 S. Main St., 860-3878; dustgallery.com: An oasis of sophisticated art installations, currently exhibiting painter Matthew Radford's high-energy urban street scenes.

Epic Shoos, 1209 S. Main St., 388-4343; epicashoos.com: Trainerphiles won't want to miss this sneaker gallery, which stocks hip kicks from the likes of Keap and Greedy Genius, as well as BBC hoodies.

Fashion Show, 3200 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 369-0704; thefashionshow.com: An upscale mall with Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom, and Bloomingdale's Home, all under one roof. One essential stop is Talulah G for its perfectly edited collection of Chloe, Stella McCartney, and Anna Sui (talulahg.com).

Las Vegas Paper Doll, 231 W. Charleston Blvd., 385-7892; lvpaperdoll.com: Frameworthy letterpress cards and cheerful stationery in historic Holsum Lofts, a 1950s bakery turned showroom-and-gallery complex (holsumlofts.com).

Mandalay Place, Mandalay Bay, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 632-7777; mandalaybay.com: High-design boutiques line a sky bridge between the Mandalay Bay and Luxor resorts. Head to Blank-space (Fico lighting, Jonathan Adler furnishings, Cassina furniture) before doing a tasting at 55° Wine + Design.

Modify, 8 E. Charleston Blvd., 384-6555: The best vintage furniture store in Vegas for those who love the thrill of the hunt; this Arts District spot is packed with midcentury-modern finds, books, and pillows made of vintage fabrics.

Red Rooster Antique Mall, 1109 Western Ave., 382-5253: Wander the stalls of this tamlike emporium for antique iceboxes, Depression glass, plus vintage clothing and furniture.

Wynn Esplanade, Wynn Las Vegas, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S., 770-7000; wynnlasvegas.com: Home to branches of Chanel, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, British perfumery Jo Malone, and more. Don't miss Wynn LVNV, a furniture and tabletop destination laid out like an apartment (770-3470).