
Las Vegas: "Entertainment Capital of the World"

by Christine Wilson, Assistant Director of Communications, WMA

John C. Fremont would never recognize it. The Las Vegas he visited in 1844 was nothing but a hot, dusty stop on a trade route to Los Angeles. Today, it's a mecca for thousands of visitors each year.

In the past 30 years, the population of Las Vegas has leaped from 100,000 to more than 600,000. That figure will reach 1 million by the year 2000.

Unknown to many visitors (and many residents), gambling was not always legal in Las Vegas. For 21 years, from 1910 to 1931, those who wished to pursue "games of chance" had to go "underground."

Thanks to the restoration of gambling, as well as the income generated by the Union Pacific railroad and the construction of nearby Hoover Dam, Las Vegas were spared many of the hardships suffered by other Americans during the Great Depression.

The flash and glitter of the famous Las Vegas Strip did not begin until just before World War II. El Rancho Vegas was built in 1940, the Flamingo in 1946.

After 1950, casinos began sprouting up so fast that by the late '50s, a convention site was built on the Strip. (The Las Vegas Convention Center is now more than 1 million square feet – the

largest single-level facility in the nation.) The Riviera – site of the 1990 WMA Convention – was the city's first high-rise at nine stories high. That was back in 1954.

Gambling, entertainment and a variety of quality, yet affordable, dining spots. These are reasons to *visit* Las Vegas, but why do so many people *move* to this southern Nevada city?

For one thing, there are no city or state income taxes (due to gambling and sales taxes, largely paid by tourists). The climate is virtually dry all year-round (annual rainfall is around 4.190 inches) – ideal for outdoor sports enthusiasts.

And there are plenty of places to enjoy these sports: 16 golf courses, 22 health clubs, more than 200 public and hotel tennis courts, jogging and bicycle trails, horseback riding facilities and arenas, archery ranges, trap and skeet ranges, and even bird and game hunting.

Less than an hour's drive from the Strip is Lee Canyon, popular with both novice and expert skiers. Lake Mead, a short drive east of Las Vegas, is ideal for fishing, boating and waterskiing.

Las Vegas hosts two major rodeos each year, has its own professional baseball team and is known for its high-quality collegiate sports. And, of course, there is always the

spectacular scenery that surrounds this valley metropolis. Red Rock Canyon, Rogers Springs, Valley of Fire State Park and the Lost City Museum attract families all year long.

Casinos

While casinos are only a part of Las Vegas' attraction for visitors, they are an important part. Almost 75,000 people are directly employed by the gaming and tourism industry there.

One of the most popular casinos in town is the Circus Circus Hotel and Casino. Its amusement arcade and free circus acts have made it one of the most-visited spots in town.

Other casinos that contain family attractions are Caesars Place (Omnimax Theatre), Imperial Palace (Rare Auto Collection), Las Vegas Hilton (Scandia Family Fun Center and Youth Hotel), and Four Queens Hotel (Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum).

The biggest news in the gaming industry these days is *computerization*. There are now electronic versions of most casino games. Sports books are big news, too.

About 37 of these in-house books exist in the larger hotel/casinos, ranging from one-window betting operations to giant, satellite-fed

projection screens, plush seating, and free drinks and Racing Forms.

Entertainment/dining

"The Entertainment Capital of the World" has earned its title. Where else could you find miles of huge billboards and brightly lit marquees advertising nightly shows and entertainers?

"Folies Bergere," "Lido de Paris" and "An Evening at La Cage" are a few samples of the lavish extravaganzas Las Vegas has to offer. (Most showrooms present two performances nightly.)

Compared to most U.S. cities, Las Vegas tends to be a late dining town. Restaurants do most of their business between 7:30 and 11 p.m.

Those restaurants range from 24-hour coffee shops to exquisitely decorated gourmet rooms. Huge buffets, offered by many of the hotels, are especially popular.

Because casino operators want to pamper their customers, many top chefs have been lured to the city. (Some have even opened their own restaurants.) To top it off, menu prices are low almost everywhere.

Shopping

Where do visitors go when they're tired of staring at slot machines and roulette wheels? Would you believe shopping malls?

Two of Las Vegas' three major malls are within walking distance of the Strip - The Fashion Show (including Nieman-Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue) and The Boulevard. The Meadows is about 5 miles west of the Strip.

Getting there

Las Vegas is now served by 14 scheduled air carriers and is a real bargain for air travelers. More than 75 percent of McCarran Inter-

national Airport's passengers arrive on discount tickets - the nation's highest percentage.

Tourists who have visited other large airports will appreciate the fact that McCarran is only minutes away from most hotels in town.

They'll also appreciate the airport's beauty and efficiency (the result of a three-phase \$1 billion construction program, the first phase of which was recently completed).

Perhaps John C. Fremont wouldn't recognize this town anymore, but at least he'd know he was still remembered. Eighteen local businesses carry his name, including the Fremont Hotel & Casino in downtown Las Vegas . . . on Fremont Street.
