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Basic Stuff

Nowhere else on earth will you find another skyline like that of Las Vegas Boulevard South—otherwise known as the Strip.

A Disneyesque Arthurian castle abuts an Egyptian pyramid and the Statue of Liberty. A volcano explodes across the street from Venice's Saint Mark's Square. Truly, Las Vegas has shouldered aside Hollywood as America's Dream Factory. Historian Michael Ventura calls Las Vegas "the last great mythic city that Western civilization will ever create"; art critic Robert Hughes calls Las Vegas "a work of art: bad art, but art nonetheless." The extravagant pleasure palaces lining the Strip make a bold, brash architectural statement, with developers increasingly crowing about architectural integrity and authenticity. Not that we can see a lick of such things, apart from the meticulous attention to detail when creating scale replicas of international landmarks, whether half-size (the Eiffel Tower at the **Paris** hotel), full (the **Venetian's** Doge's Palace), or oversize (**Luxor's** Sphinx).

In Las Vegas the hotel business is a staggering success story. The city has a total room inventory of more than 135,000, about twice that of New York. The five properties at the intersection of Tropicana and the Strip alone contain more rooms than all of San Francisco. Yet the Strip has an amazing hotel occupancy level of around 90%. Development, expansion, and large-scale renovation continue unabated. Far and away the biggest hotel story of 2005 was the opening of the \$2.7-billion **Wynn Las Vegas** by longtime casino mogul Steve Wynn. He bought the old Desert Inn and attached golf club, demolished everything, and erected his (quite literally) signature copper tower in their place. The debut of the Wynn spurred all kinds of competing big plans among the remaining unmerged casino conglomerates. The downmarket Bourbon Street closed in late 2005, and it faces likely destruction as its plot of land gets absorbed into larger, adjacent projects. The New Frontier will face the wrecking ball in early 2006 to make way for the new Trump International Hotel & Tower. And the Boardwalk gets flattened in mid-2006 under the footprint of the \$6-billion CityCenter project.

Visitors no longer need confine themselves to Vegas proper. Our favorite luxury resort can be found on a man-made lake in Henderson, in the form of the **Lake Las Vegas Resort**, a sprawling Mediterranean-style property that includes a **Ritz-Carlton**, **Hyatt Regency**, and chic shopping (and condo rentals) at MonteLago Village. The resort also offers three golf courses that feature both high desert and lakeside scenery.

Las Vegas possesses 8 of the world's 10 largest hotels and 17 of the 20 largest in the United States. A 2,000-room property is considered average size here. No wonder they're cities unto themselves, with everything from spas to bowling alleys, giving guests no reason to leave the hotel—and, more important, the casinos, since gaming is still the name of the game (note that main-floor elevator buttons are marked “C” for casino, instead of “L” for lobby).

In that respect, however, things have been changing here. Nongaming revenues are increasing at nearly quadruple the rate of gaming revenues, accounting now for over half of total income. Promoters these days talk of Las Vegas as a true resort, not merely a gambling destination. Every new hotel that's built includes a massive spa, glorified pool area, and fitness facilities—not to mention gourmet eateries, name-brand shops, in-house attractions, and razzle-dazzle shows. Guest rooms themselves have been improving; they're no longer dark, dingy, cramped chambers calculated to make guests flee to the casino. The typical directory of services looks like a small town's phone book—and it's printed in at least five languages (English, French, Spanish, Japanese, and German).

Developers up the ante in a high-stakes gamble for the tourist dollar. Older hotels constantly receive face-lifts (befitting a city renowned for its plastic surgeons). In the newly upscale Vegas, kitschier properties like **Circus Circus** and **Excalibur** have “classed up” their cheap-motel fantasy-suite decor. In a tornado of remodeling, the **MGM Grand** slew the 80-foot roaring lion at its main entrance (which had spooked Asian gamblers to no end) and demolished the tacky Emerald City just inside (including the animatronic Dorothys, Totos, and Munchkins). Unfortunately, in the rush to play “Can you top this?” many hotels are constructed little better than mud huts in New Guinea (you may be able to hear your neighbors shower, celebrate their winnings, or consummate their quickie marriages). Typically, Strip resorts settle about 2 to 8 inches just after construction because they're built on rock-like caliche; some sections of **Mandalay Bay** settled as much as 16 inches, requiring 500 steel pipes to be bored into its foundation to stabilize the tower. Even the **Venetian**, in its quest to replicate Venice, didn't sink to that level.

The new, upscale models, however, will never be the true pampering resorts they claim to be as long as hotels cling to the old casino-centric Vegas standards of guest treatment. Service

can be soulless and impersonal, including lengthy check-in periods and waits for your bags or car, even at the ultraritzzy Bellagio. Conventioneers often arrive early and grab the available rooms; though check-in time is normally 3pm, you may have to cool your jets before your room is clean. Hardly luxury coddling. You'd be amazed how difficult staffers find it to switch you from a double/double to the king you'd requested, even with 3,000-plus rooms to choose from. If necessary, make a fuss (politely); blather about being late for meetings. If you wait forever at restaurants or for room service, complain to the MOD (manager on duty) about your hypoglycemia. It might net a few coupons or a free meal. And be prepared to flash your room key/card as often as a teenager with fake ID at a bar—security is stringent, with the elevator banks staked out by the kinds of goons one usually associates with nightclubs.

Winning the Reservations Game

Given the 90% average room-occupancy rate, you may not be able to book on your preferred dates, so reserve way ahead or be flexible. Also be aware that there is no rhyme or reason to pricing—any given week, certain hotels will be in greater demand than others (presumably if they host a convention or special event), and rates oscillate wildly. Major holidays, needless to say, are near impossible. Even more important, avoid the big conventions and special events (see *Hotlines & Other Basics*), like Comdex, the NAB (National Association of Broadcasters), the World Series of Poker, and National Finals Rodeo week. Also watch out for events that may be nowhere near Las Vegas yet draw substantial gaming traffic (like the NCAA Final Four). During these events rooms are booked a year in advance; people may have to stay as far as 90 miles away in Mesquite. There are some rules of thumb: Most properties roughly double their prices over the weekend—except in the dog days of summer. The periods surrounding major holidays (except New Year's, which rivals New York for crowds) are usually slower, as are the first 2 weeks of January, April, June, and September (when estimated taxes are due). Keep checking the Internet or your travel agent for special deals: They come and go like airline promotions. Consider hooking onto something like a drag-racing promotion so you get the room at 25% off (and a free sun visor, too!). You can inquire whether or not a hotel offers casino deals, such as playing 3 hours straight at the \$5

table to gain a free night's stay, but remember that there is a risk here—you might end up losing quadruple the room price. If you win big, on the other hand, most casinos and hotels will “comp” you with breakfast, lunch, and dinner, treat you to a suite, or upgrade you to high-roller digs, all in the interest of keeping you in the casino. Be sure to sign up with the free gaming club at any casino you play in, since that's how casinos track your play (and award comps). High-roller suites are usually obtained via a guaranteed line of credit and a minimum amount (of both time and money) spent gambling, which varies according to property. On rare occasions, usually during slow periods, hotels release higher-end suites (expect to pay anywhere from \$1,000–\$25,000 per night). Among the most luxe, with haute bachelor-pad decor, are those at the **Rio, Caesars Palace, Las Vegas Hilton, MGM Grand, and Mirage**. You can always resort to calling the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority** reservations line (Tel 877/VISIT-LV), which can also inform you about convention schedules, or the discounter **Reservations Plus** (Tel 800/805-9528). Both services are free. Among the websites you can try are www.vegas.com, www.lasvegas.com, www.vegas4visitors.com, and www.ilovevegas.com. Each offers numerous properties at varying rates; just remember that you won't get your choice of room (a higher floor for maximum views, for example).

Is There a Right Address?

Naturally, most people want to stay on **the Strip**. Since this fabled stretch is a mere 4 miles long (technically walkable) and the iconic properties are lined up along it—from **Stratosphere** at one end to the **MGM Grand, New York–New York, Luxor, Excalibur, and Mandalay Bay** at the other—there is no preferred Strip address. It all depends on the ambience, theme, and facilities you seek. The old Vegas wisdom that a room is just a room no longer applies; posher digs are now available at the likes of the **Wynn, Bellagio, Four Seasons, and the Venetian**, as well as old standbys like **Caesars Palace, Mirage, and the MGM Grand**. Of course, you pay more for the premium toiletries, turndown service, and spacious rooms. Note, however, that genuine hoteliers, like the **Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton** (as opposed to casino-hotels, emphasis on the casino), seem more expensive on the surface but have much less in the way of hidden costs—at other properties you pay extra for health club access and other goodies, which add up fast.

While there are still bargains on the Strip itself (especially on weekdays), many people on a budget prefer to stay **Down-town**, where you can hit 15 casinos in a four-block radius. (Strip hotels are farther apart, though there are clusters at the southern and lower-central sections.) Another increasingly popular way to go is to choose one of the moderately priced **Paradise Road, Henderson, Summerlin, and Boulder Highway** properties. The local casino chains generally offer superior value, whatever the individual hotel's location. Boyd Gaming bought out rival Coast's properties in 2004 and now boasts Barbary Coast, California, Eldorado, Fremont, Gold Coast, Jokers Wild, Main Street Station, Orleans, Sam's Town, South Coast, Stardust, and Suncoast. The Station lineup (Green Valley Ranch, Santa Fe, Palace, Boulder, Texas, and Sunset Station Hotels, plus Fiesta Henderson and Fiesta Rancho) is also worth noting, as is Arizona Charlie's (West and East) and Terrible's. Though various properties in a chain may have different themes, they offer comparable facilities. Another benefit is that they provide free shuttles between their properties. In fact, most off-Strip properties, such as the **Hard Rock**, offer complimentary transport to the "action." Wherever you stay, especially if you bring the kids or don't gamble, make sure there are plenty of activities and facilities. All the properties listed below, unless stated otherwise, will include at least a pool, a restaurant, a bar, and a casino.

The Lowdown

New-style glitz... In the late '90s, Las Vegas casino-hotels were suddenly struck with a desire for "class," like a retired madam who madly redecorates in an effort to win over her former clients' wives. The prime class-monger is Steve Wynn, whose new and superhyped **Wynn Las Vegas** opened in 2005. The Wynn sports an unmistakable copper tower with the man's own signature gracing its crest, and the artificial mountain out front contains a Strip-typical special-effects spectacle. The hotel screams glitz more than elegance, but it's packed with restaurants, bars, entertainment, and high-end shops galore. The very Cirque du Soleil-esque *Le Rêve* headlines the show lineup along with Broadway imports like *Avenue Q* and, in 2007, *Spamalot* (see the Entertainment chapter). Wynn set the bar pretty

high in the past, considering his swan song as CEO of Mirage Resorts was the surface-exquisite Lake Como-style palazzo **Bellagio**. Highly refined (at least by Las Vegas standards), it strives to offer the best of the best, or at least the best that money can buy: world-renowned chefs/restaurateurs, haute couture shops, a spa offering no less than eight facials, the Cirque du Soleil extravaganza *O* (see the Entertainment chapter), the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art, and the Bellagio Conservatory (see the Diversions chapter for both). Caviar bars, afternoon teas, graceful fountains, exemplary lounge entertainment—the array begins to feel parvenu and ostentatious. Its hipster equivalent is the **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino**, where Fendi meets Fender guitars. The witty rock-music theme includes song lyrics posted in the elevators and the usual complement of gold records, guitars (formerly owned by REM's Michael Stipe, Axl Rose, and The Boss), and memorabilia (Elvis's gold lamé jacket, Ginger Spice's Union Jack bathing suit, Beach Boys' surfboards, '60s and '70s dolls of Sonny and Cher and Donny and Marie, even Andy Gibb and Bobby Sherman lunch boxes and Boy George makeup kits). The decor, with leather, gold, purple, and black accents, is kitten-with-a-whip, except when it's a little too No-Tell Motel for our tastes. There are even four all-music TV channels. As if painstaking re-creations of Venetian landmarks and Renaissance artworks, vaulted ceilings, miles of marble and gilt, scintillating gourmet restaurants, upscale shops, and the largest "standard" rooms in town weren't enough, the **Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino** has upped the Vegas status quotient with a branch of the Guggenheim Museum, devoted to masterpieces from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (see the Diversions chapter). The **Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino** juxtaposes old-fashioned glitz (a lushly landscaped exterior with sweeping waterfalls and fire pots shooting flames 15 ft.–20 ft.) with newfangled pizzazz (computer and dataport capabilities in the rooms, the biggest and best bathrooms on the Strip, and futuristic gourmet restaurants). Raffles it ain't, but it's impressively high-tech for a fairly high-maintenance crowd. The Beautiful People are crawling all over the **Palms**, and while that thought might make your skin crawl, notice that the rooms are stylish, with big TVs, soft lush beds, and large bathrooms. Plus, there are a number of

cheap dining/snacking options in the hotel, including a fantastic restaurant (Alizé) and a good low-priced buffet, and if you want to be among the B.P. scene, there are the sizzling-hot nightspots Rain, Ghost Bar, and Skin.

Not to be outdone... These newer properties exerted pressure on Strip institutions like **Caesars Palace**, which has responded with a staggering series of construction projects. The new 949-room Augustus Tower tops the list, with stylish rooms starting at over 600 square feet and tricked out with premium furnishings and two flatscreen TVs (one in the bathroom). Add a clutch of truly superb restaurants, high-end shops, and world-class high-roller areas—Caesars Palace attracts clients so posh, they carelessly leave unopened champagne bottles on their finished breakfast trays. The **Mirage** is undergoing a massive series of renovations, replacing most of its restaurants, adding a huge new nightclub, revving up its volcano, and retooling the late, lamented Siegfried & Roy theater into a venue for a new Cirque du Soleil show based on the music of the Beatles. Updates and improvements to the rooms and public spaces are planned as well. With luck, most of the dust will have settled by early to mid-2006. Next door is Treasure Island, now insistently called **TI** by hotel personnel (though no one else calls it that). The bulk of the pirate theme has been made to walk the plank, to a loud chorus of disapproval (have they not seen the box office for *Pirates of the Caribbean*? Do they not understand how sexy it is to see men buckle and swash?). In place of the pirates is, well, nothing in particular, except maybe an attempt to lure the Palms crowd with a packed nightclub. Good luck with that. But we are very fond of the rooms (not distinctive but handsome anyway, and the bathrooms are posh enough to make up for it), the spa (comparable to the fine one at the Mirage), and the prices; though you'll still find us next door at the Mirage's pool.

Older money... Discerning moneyed guests, missing the quiet James Bond class of the Desert Inn, quickly discovered the relative newcomer **JW Marriott**, with its 11-acre complex of gardens and pools, quietly elegant casino (almost an afterthought), and Aquae Sulis spa. The JW Marriott's Spanish Revival-style architecture blends harmoniously with the

surrounding mountains, with graceful domes, campaniles, cupolas, and barrel tile roofs. Inside, the lobbies of the two separate wings define quiet elegance, with tapestries, hand-carved and -painted woodwork, terra-cotta or parquet floors, and gigantic gilt or filigreed pewter mirrors. Guest rooms are huge, awash in marble and rich dark woods. The pool area, perfumed by desert blooms, takes full advantage of the breathtaking natural setting. The JW Marriott is an oasis where good old boys convene to raise profit margins and lower golf handicaps—it's affiliated with three nearby top-flight courses: Badlands, Angel Fire, and the nationally ranked Tournament Players Club at the Canyons (see the Diversions chapter). Restaurants include an authentic Irish pub (see the Nightlife chapter) and a fancifully designed eatery run by master chef Gustav Mauler (see the Dining chapter). On the other end of the Las Vegas Valley, you'll find the moneyed crowd frolicking at the **Hyatt Regency Lake Las Vegas**, a golf and spa resort that fits nicely into the neighborhood where Celine Dion lives. Although perhaps not as over-the-top luxurious as the nearby Ritz-Carlton (see below), the Hyatt still offers posh rooms with an understated Moroccan theme, a grand three-story indoor/outdoor lobby, a small casino, a huge multilevel pool, and a world-class spa, just for starters. Throw in the "we dare you not to relax" lake and mountain views, championship golf courses, and a host of fine dining options, and it's easy to understand why the valet parking lot is often lined with cars that cost more than most houses.

Where we spend our money... Out in the hinterland, perched right on top of Lake Las Vegas (the water flows under a bridge of hotel rooms), is the **Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas**. Goodness, is this place swell: heavenly, serene rooms with beds made of clouds, views to thrill to (if you get windows facing the lake—oh, do, really—which itself is framed by clear-cut mountains), stunning marbled baths, and service fit for royalty—that's you, pumpkin. Add to this real fly-fishing, hikes through the mountains, daily free yoga classes, and the added bonus (if you add the considerable money) of the Club Level, with its five daily feedings and constant free booze, and there isn't a resort in this part of Nevada that can touch it. Close on its heels (it trails only because that Lake Las Vegas setting is so super,

though it compensates with proximity to the Strip, as in, right above), **Four Seasons Las Vegas** is an oasis of serenity, perched on the 35th through 39th floors of Mandalay Bay. To enhance its guests' privacy, it has its own express elevators, as well as its own restaurants (two) and lounges, business center, meeting space, an 8,000-square-foot pool area, and spa/fitness club. Many areas are inaccessible to Mandalay Bay guests, though Four Seasons guests have access to the larger resort's facilities. Rooms are enormous, including junior suites with separate parlor, furnished in the usual refined Four Seasons style, with hardwood furnishings (including armoires and canopy beds), down comforters, marble bathrooms, and botanical prints on the walls. And no one can beat Four Seasons' service. Slightly less posh than the preceding, **Green Valley Ranch Resort** in Henderson (just 15 minutes from the Strip) offers a mix of Ritz-Carlton style (perhaps the most comfortable beds in town) and *W-meets-the-Hard Rock* hip, with a pool area that features only the most beautiful people, that is, when they aren't off posing with drinks at Whiskey Bar. The latter is so pretty and stylish and exclusive, only a supermodel's husband (Rande "Mr. Cindy Crawford" Gerber) could have designed it. Like the Ritz, you have to walk a block or so to get to a casino (and some affordable eateries), but offering resort isolation with Vegas fun a short trot away is just the right combo for those who don't want constant clang accompanying their getaway.

Don't know much about history... A handful of Strip hotels plumb the past for theme concepts, with mixed success. The awesome grandeur of ancient Egypt is actually captured in some parts of **Luxor**, erected in the shape of a Ray-Ban-dark glass pyramid (the inclined 39-degree elevators are an engineering feat in themselves), in that, hey, how *did* they do that? way. Cracked ruins, the Cleopatra's Needle obelisk, and a mysterious 10-story-high Sphinx greet you at the entrance. The lobby re-creates an archaeological dig, with exact replicas of Egyptian artifacts and statues (no, really, they did their homework astonishingly well), including a 35-foot Ramses; hieroglyphics are stenciled on the walls. Even the gourmet restaurants include vases, pharaoh images, hieroglyphics—thankfully without being cheesy. Okay, it's a little cheesy. Wanna make something of it?

Over-the-top as it is, the Roman Empire theme of **Caesars Palace** works (after all, the ancient Romans themselves were given to vulgar excess), though in the name of “class” (or the post-’90s version of same), it’s not working it nearly as hard. The public areas feature a miniature re-creation of Imperial Rome at its height, enhanced by holograms and fiber optics; the Garden of the Gods pools, inlaid with Carrara marble, were inspired by the Baths of Caracalla. The north edge of the property features the Quadriga statue: four gold-leaf horses and a charioteer that point the way through five triumphal arches into the Olympic casino. Everywhere you look are neoclassical statues, including reproductions of Michelangelo’s *David*, the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*, *Venus de Milo*, and *The Rape of the Sabine Women*. We dare you to peer at them without bursting into giggles. We are so bummed that the **Aladdin Resort & Casino**, which mixed and matched mythic and authentic Muslim influences, from Arabian Nights touches (the casino’s giant golden Aladdin’s lamp, Sinbad’s Roc egg embedded in a bar’s wall) to bona fide artifacts including antique Arabic royal outfits, is getting a theme overhaul, thanks to its new Planet Hollywood ownership. We worry for the connected Desert Passage mall (see the Dining and Shopping chapters) and its decorative parapets, onion domes, minarets, and keyhole arches. Less successful is medieval-themed **Excalibur**, where no one acts particularly chivalrous—people shove for a look at the animatronic dragon and cut ahead in the buffet lines. The first of the modern era of casino-hotel-as-theme-park, it’s slowly consigning King Arthur once again to history.

Overrated... In its no man’s land at the extreme north end of the Strip, the high-rise **Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower** sits as if in solitary confinement (though the advent of the Wynn Las Vegas and revamped Fashion Show Mall are making things a bit more lively up north). The Strat compensates with a full menu of activities and facilities; everything from the shows to the rooms is high quality but low-cost, and its 1,002-room tower adds watering holes and a leviathan pool area overlooking the Strip. Still, its unsavory surroundings (creatively termed the “Stratosphere District”) attract a high percentage of petty theft—if you stay or play there, drive or cab it. Plus, the rooms look pretty much like really nice motel rooms. Fine, if you are

(and you often are) paying motel room prices. To a certain extent, and that extent goes as far as your wallet and the amount of times you've appeared in *Us* magazine, the **Hard Rock** does not live up to the hype; it's no more rock 'n' roll than the Rolling Stones corporate office, and it seems to only treat people like Britney, Justin, and any member of an aging British band really well. The rooms can be quite disappointing, though the pool area does remain one of the hot spots of Vegas, even in cold weather. The **Rio** painted itself as *the* party hotel, with the biggest rooms in town, but that latter honor now goes to the **Venetian**, while the former is certainly eclipsed by the action over at the **Palms**. That is, assuming by "party" you mean "gorgeous girls in size 2 jeans who won't give you the time of day" (thick on the grounds at the Palms) instead of "desperate mall rats and frat boys seeking one last cheap thrill before marriage." The **Monte Carlo** updated its lackluster rooms in 2004, but they and the hotel at large still convey a vaguely Mediterranean vibe (not quite a theme). The Monte Carlo caters to upmarket guests interested more in ostensible class and less in glitzy tourist spectacle, but it really only sort of half-delivers on this promise. The hotel does have a couple of good restaurants and the long-running Lance Burton magic show.

Globe-trotting themes... If you can peel your eyes from the half-scale Eiffel Tower at **Paris**, you'll note replicas of other famed landmarks: the Opéra, the Louvre, and the Arc de Triomphe, along with bas-reliefs of famous French figures and an entrance skillfully evoking a Belle Epoque metro station, all squished together in a way that makes travel-guidebook mapmakers' heads ache. The 34-story hotel itself is modeled on the 800-year-old Hôtel de Ville, the Paris City Hall. Cobblestone paths wind everywhere, and the shopping areas (wine, cheese, lingerie, mini-Eiffel Towers stamped PARIS LAS VEGAS!) re-create Parisian street scenes circa the 1920s, striving for that *The Sun Also Rises* feel. Or just a Disneyland view of Paris. (Signs proclaiming LE CAR RENTAL certainly hint at overexuberance instead of cool Gallic thought.) Spiffy guest rooms feature crown molding, gilt mirrors, rich French fabrics in cool blues and mauves, and custom-designed inlaid-wood furnishings (including armoires as closets)—so why no bidets? Unlike

the other Vegas “cities,” the **Venetian** presents full-size replicas of its landmarks: the Doge’s Palace, the 315-foot Campanile Tower, the Rialto Bridge, the Bridge of Sighs, and the Ca d’Oro Villa. Interiors were meticulously duplicated from actual paintings, frescoes, and statues, though the result would make even a Medici feel faint. The Gallery area features copies of artworks by Titian, Bellini, and Canaletto. Okay, so the Grand Canal is only a quarter-mile long and 3 feet deep, not to mention inauthentically clean, with motorized gondolas; okay, so the cobblestone “neighborhoods” lining the canal are full of glassblowers, jugglers, opera singers, and living statues. Still, the St. Mark’s Plaza looks very convincing—at least until you spy the neon JIMMY CHOO sign and hear La Streisand playing on the sound system. **New York–New York**’s charm starts with the scaled-down version of the skyline: Statue of Liberty in a miniature New York Harbor (complete with a tugboat to hose her down), Brooklyn Bridge, Chrysler and Empire State buildings, storefronts, even gargoyles. Inside, on the walkway into Little Italy, manholes emit steam and mailboxes are covered with graffiti. Cobblestone street scenes are re-created down to the parking meters and fire escapes. Stroll through a Central Park with tall, spreading, lifelike trees surrounding a pond and footbridge—and banks of slot machines (well, it *is* a gamble walking through the park at night). **Sunset Station** duplicates sunny Spain, but it’s all over the map, from Barcelona—the free-form, hallucinogenic Gaudi Bar (see the Nightlife chapter)—to the Andalusian-village public spaces, with arcades, barrel tile “roofs,” and flower-filled shuttered “balconies.” Pleasant restaurants like Sonoma Cellar and Costa del Sol carry the theme through with beamed ceilings, flamenco guitars, and bullfight posters; the cookie-cutter guest rooms have cast-iron lamps, polished cherrywood, and pretty wallpaper stenciling. The Moroccan/Moorish motif of the **Hyatt Regency Lake Las Vegas Resort**, 20 minutes east of the Strip, is carried out with great flair, from the facade’s arched windows, deep loggias, and concrete grilles, to its palm-studded desert oasis landscaping. Genuine Moroccan hammered-iron lamps and majolica urns decorate the public areas; arabesque tracery, hand-painted armoires, and pewter mirrors accent the guest rooms, most of which have

sweeping lake views. The marvelous Café Tajine—named for a savory Moroccan casserole—delights with Spanish tiled tables, copper salt and pepper shakers, and an array of traditional teapots, ewers, and mortar and pestles.

Globe-trotting themes gone haywire... **Mandalay Bay** wants to offer the “colonial” experience suggested by Kipling, or at least the steamy tropical ambience of a Somerset Maugham novel. (Just for the record, the city of Mandalay in Burma is fictional anyway.) Thematically, it really spans the entire Asian continent, with a dash of South Pacific for good measure. And the theme is happily junked to accommodate Brazilian, Russian, Italian, Cajun, and nouvelle American restaurants that lure trendoids. Still, there are exotic notes aplenty. Weathered stone idols stand sentry throughout. Lily ponds, fountains, faux grottoes, waterfalls, hibiscus prints, and porcelain chinoiserie dot the public areas. Buddhas and Confucius bless various dining spots. Tropical plants and fish are seemingly everywhere. **Bellagio** is an overgrown Lake Como villa (with even the lake), with a porte-cochere modeled after Milan’s Galleria and trees imported from Piedmont and Tuscany—but any specifically Italian influence ends there. The upmarket Via Bellagio shopping/dining area, for all its marble and gold-plated fountains, is more Rodeo Drive; the casino area is almost gaudy with orange and red accents. Winking signs advertise Armani and Tiffany from the *soigné* “lakeside” restaurants and lounges—hardly old-world class. The oversize guest rooms are better than the **Mirage’s**, but not so much as the difference in price might suggest. They are handsomely appointed with marble floors and surfaces, imported striped and plaid fabrics, and the expected top amenities. Downtown’s surprisingly charming **Main Street Station** sports a wildly divergent collection of antiques, artifacts, and collectibles, including Buffalo Bill’s private rail car, a fireplace from Scotland’s Preswick castle, 19th-century Brussels street lamps, a piece of the Berlin Wall for guys to pee on outside the brewpub, and woodwork, crystal chandeliers, and stained glass pilfered from various American mansions. The large guest rooms feature “period” touches, including plantation-style window shutters and massive gold-framed mirrors.

Campiest themes... To our lasting and loud regret, the current trend towards “luxury resort” Vegas (or, more accurately, the “pretend this is a swanky hip boutique hotel even though we have 3,000 rooms” trend) means that many of the over-the-top properties are getting downscaled, so that if they now resemble any part of Disneyland, it’s the fanciest hotels at Epcot Center. That’s just plain wrong. Let’s hope those water- and London Bridge-themed hotels get off the drawing board and onto the Strip in a hurry. Meanwhile, **Excalibur** evokes Monty Python and the Holy Grail: When not in the shop, a purplish, robotic dragon languishes in a moat that resembles a mildewed bathtub with clogged drain (well, that might be historically accurate). Wildly colored turrets and towers bristle from the roof, and hand-applied stars spangle mock-stone wallpaper. The hell with Camelot; it’s as if Mad King Ludwig had dropped acid before designing Neuschwanstein. Fake concrete arabesques, hideous keyhole arches, half-hearted minarets—the **Sahara**’s remodeled decor actually makes you long for the tacky old neon camel. The onion-domed porte-cochere is attractive, but the entrance with psychedelic stained glass looks like it was designed by a sultan on peyote, and the casino (with gold-painted ceilings and fake-jewel-encrusted columns) is a headache waiting to happen. **The Orleans** isn’t so much campy as it is the Main Street USA/Disneyland’s French Quarter version of the Big Easy; predictable but appealing *trompe l’oeil* green shutters and wrought-iron balconies outside, French doors, intricate latticework, and a festive mauve/Key lime/coral color scheme inside. Rooms are generously sized, many with separate sitting areas and period touches such as brass bedsteads and patterned wallpapers. Just don’t expect proper mint juleps or Sazeracs (or much Dixieland) in the lounges. In a town that generally neglects its Wild West roots, **Sam’s Town** sticks to its six-guns, setting the tone with its enormous bronze *Spirit of Rodeo* sculpture, with three proud cowpokes on horseback carrying banners. A “log cabin” facade surrounds Mystic Falls, a glassed-in recreation of a Rocky Mountain aerie, complete with animatronic beavers and wolves (request a room with this interior view). Dance halls and saloons (see the Nightlife chapter) attract genuine boot-scooters. Bona fide antique barn doors, covered wagons, and saddles are strewn throughout;

rooms have rustic pine furnishings, Native American rugs, and rough-hewn ceramic lamps with cowhide shades.

When your chips are down... There are plenty of motels on the north side of the Strip, with deceptively quaint names like the Pollyanna and the Laughing Jackalope. We wouldn't recommend most of these *Leaving Las Vegas* spots, dubbed by locals "tramp-oline hotels." We just call them "the places where the hookers work." But that's just us. There are several relatively safe, clean, even appealing budget properties around town, especially Downtown. But before you go there, consider **Terrible's**, which is anything but...terrible, that is. Rooms are still motel-unmemorable, but for motel prices (some face walls, so try to ask for ones with more light), it has a very good 24-hour coffee shop, a surprisingly nice pool area (in a singles-apartment-complex way), penny slots in the casino, and a free airport shuttle. Or just get yourself downtown, where there are a dozen casinos within easy walking distance, and places like the venerable, if faded, **Four Queens**, which changes ownership faster than cards at a poker game. Real gamblers and aging grande dames stay here, and have for years. The nearby **Lady Luck** is another older gal, and also like the Four Queens, takes up a whole city block. Both hotels get the occasional face-lift, but like aging showgirls, they're not going to fool anyone in good light. Still, at the Lady Luck, try the fresher Tower rooms over the garden-side rooms, despite the appeal of the latter's name.

Gen-X... If you can actually see between the bodies crammed into the **Palms**, that's only because they are all so skinny that they disappear when they turn sidewise. This is the one and only place for hotties, or someone wanting a hottie, and the only place for anyone young and beautiful, or rich enough to get young and beautiful, or rich enough to have young beauties hang all over them. Oddly, not all these people actually stay here; most are here for nightclubs like Rain (the most popular in town), the gossip-generating Ghost Bar, and Skin out by the pool. You might want to come for Alizé, one of the best restaurants in town, or the cloudlike beds, but beware: If you hate crowds, or crowds that make you feel fat, there are usually quite a lot of them standing between you and the guest elevators. The cyber-yuppie

crowd loves **Mandalay Bay** for its postmillennial cool, a futuristic fusion of Pan-Asian, Russian, and European elements; it's *Blade Runner* meets the Forbidden City. Music folks like Mandalay Bay for its on-site House of Blues, but actual rockers more often head over to the **Hard Rock** to join an effortlessly sexy and cool clientele. Bring earplugs, unless you already blew your eardrums out during that White Stripes show. We bet that same crowd is going to head over to Planet Hollywood once the conversion from the likable Aladdin is finished. Though **Bellagio** is often thought of as a "mature" resort, stroll around the pool and you'll see not an ounce of cellulite in sight—the younger men all look fashionably pec-toned, the women as if they're awaiting their second callback for a Victoria's Secret ad. Ah, Eurotrash. Bent on entering the new millennium, **Caesars Palace** has scrapped its old-fashioned venues in favor of high-tech restaurants and bars, while rooms have been completely redone and new construction seems perpetual and unstoppable. Show off what you've got (or paid for) at their "European-style" pool (that means topless). The **Rio All-Suite Casino Resort** still has its party-hearty neon-confetti Carnival decor.

Family-friendly on the Strip... Admittedly, the great experiment to make Las Vegas a family destination failed abysmally, but it serves the market surprisingly well, if only because word still hasn't gotten out to families that they just aren't all that welcome here any more. Always ask if the hotel is offering a special deal, or if kids under 12, 15, or even 18 can stay free with their parents (yeah, just what that restless hormonal teen craves). Boy, do they pour it on at **Circus Circus**: Clown costumes dangle from ceilings and antique Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey posters adorn public dining areas. Ringmasters walk about in bright purple jackets; clowns offer free face painting; the Midway (see the Diversions chapter) features great old-style arcade games, free three-ring acts, even popcorn in huge dispensers; and the Adventuredome (see the Diversions chapter) is the world's largest indoor theme park. Older kids will appreciate **Luxor's** 18,000-square-foot Games of the Gods Arcade, featuring the latest interactive video games, simulations, and shootouts. The hotel's occasional animatronic

camels, Indy-Jonesian motion-simulator rides, and IMAX theater will also enchant kids. Babysitting services allow parents to wallow in the luxurious spa, dine at the romantic gourmet eateries, or play in the lively casino. Like a parody of Disney World on an episode of *The Simpsons*, **Excalibur** features 265-foot-tall bell towers, turrets, machicolated battlements, and drawbridges in colors Crayola hasn't yet invented. Inside you'll find moats, Arthurian knights and fair damsels, suits of armor, wandering minstrels, jesters, jousters, even free puppet and magic shows; kids happily spend their parents' farthings on the Fantasy Faire Midway's motion-simulator rides and arcade games. **Treasure Island** was always jammed with families who enjoy the nutty nautical decor, though that's been taken down permanently, so the kids may soon similarly vanish. It's marginally cheaper than its sibling, the **Mirage**, yet only a tram ride away from the Mirage's kid-appealing attractions like the Secret Garden, Dolphin Habitat, and White Tiger Habitat (see the Diversions chapter). The **MGM Grand** has jettisoned its kitschy animatronic Oz characters and Grand Adventures Theme Park (not to mention its activity center for kids), but it still offers the delightful Lion Habitat (see the Diversions chapter). Note that there are several adult-oriented clubs and bars in the hotel. Dauntingly elegant as it may seem, the **Four Seasons** is surprisingly attuned to children's needs. Hotel staff will note kids' names and ages when you make reservations, then present them with a "welcome amenity" and milk and cookies upon arrival. All furnishings are childproof; kids receive their own menu along with coloring book and crayons at the Verandah restaurant.

Family-friendly off the Strip... Technically on the Strip but far north of the activity, the **Stratosphere** enchants kids with its thrill rides and its sheer dizzying height; parents appreciate room rates made even more attractive by numerous promotions. It also attracts a fair share of Spring Break types in baggy pants and bad buzz cuts. Among the many entertainment offerings at **The Orleans**, which is off-Strip, kids enjoy the 70-lane bowling alley, 18-screen multiplex, enormous Time Out arcade, and the Kids Tyme child center with a gigantic 3-D jungle gym and fun activities like puppet shows, finger painting, even day trips. The

festive New Orleans decor includes Mardi Gras costumes, masks, and plaques from various krewes hanging and dangling everywhere, and the good-size rooms give families space to spread out. Social centers for locals, the Station hotels are very family-oriented, especially **Sunset Station**: Aside from the 13-screen cineplex, it boasts a Sega station (Tues from 5–11pm, you can play all the video games you want for a mere \$10). All the Station properties offer a Kids Quest day-care center with karaoke shows, video games, a play gym, high-tech Jungle Gym, and vivid playful colors like turquoise and mauve. As if its Wild West theme wasn't already a kid-pleaser, **Sam's Town**, out on the Boulder Highway, attempts to lure family business with a bowling alley and 18-screen cineplex. The **Hyatt Regency Lake Las Vegas** offers the company's award-winning Camp Hyatt program and a fully licensed child-care center. Kids 3 to 12 can go hiking with naturalists, or sailing or fishing on Lake Las Vegas, and learn how to make dreamcatchers, sand paintings, and petroglyphs like the local Native Americans. Kids stay half-price in a second room, based on availability, and can choose from their own menus. It's that rare resort that understands that children are guests, too.

If you've got the cash, you might find the **Ritz-Carlton** a surprisingly fine family option. Staying on the Club Level (an extra \$100 per night) means access to five food presentations (that's hotel parlance for gourmet snacks), plus unlimited beverages—a family of three can save a lot of money on food and drink this way. They also offer Ritz Kids supervised activities during summer months. Add to this access all kinds of hiking, fishing, and other healthy activities, and babysitting so that Mom and Dad can have a little Vegas fun, and it's worth checking the Internet for deals. Just coming to town to visit Grandma or passing through on the way to or from the Grand Canyon? Just want to avoid casino madness but can't afford the Ritz? Try the **Hawthorn Suites**, with free goodies like a breakfast buffet, nongambling (unless you make your own sports book) activities like volleyball and basketball courts, a “pets-allowed” policy, and all-around bland, but roomy enough, suites. This is a god-send for more than one family. Plus, it's just a block from the Strip...just in case.

Taking care of business... The **Las Vegas Hilton** enjoys location location location: right next to the convention center. Savvy management provides something for the older business traveler (golf course, elegant restaurants) and the new whiz kids, like *Star Trek: The Experience* (see the Diversions chapter) and a dance club (see the Nightlife chapter). Standard rooms are plain, though the marbled desks are long enough to be real working desks. Suites are classier in decor, individually decorated (including four fantasy-theme versions) with hand-carved four-poster beds, modern artworks, crystal chandeliers, and tall wrought-iron lamps. Also adjacent to the convention center is the new **Renaissance Hotel Las Vegas**, a high-end nongaming biz hotel with sumptuous rooms, a slick pool, and a delectable steak restaurant. **Mandalay Bay** joined the convention fray with a 1-million-square-foot facility, making it the largest directly on the Strip. Part of that space includes an elegantly designed 100,000-square-foot ballroom, which they claim is the largest in the nation although we're not exactly sure who tracks that sort of thing. In addition to its own extensive meeting facilities, the **Venetian** is connected to the Sands Expo Center, making it a whopping 1,800,000-square-foot corporate playground. In keeping with the rest of the resort, the meeting space has fastidiously duplicated frescoes, murals, and statues, as well as Venetian-glass chandeliers and textured wallpaper. **Paris** offers 140,000 square feet of pillarless function space, including a ballroom that was billed as the largest in Vegas until **Mandalay Bay** got that distinction from that mystery group we mentioned. The convention area is patterned after the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace in Versailles: It's lined with towering mirrored arches, while crystal chandeliers hang from recessed ceilings with gold-leaf cornice moldings, ideal for the CEO who fancies himself Louis XIV. Moreover, Paris is connected via "Le Boulevard" to its sister property, **Bally's**, which offers another 175,000 square feet. Meeting planners can one-stop-shop at the combined sales office for their functions. **Riviera's** lively "adult" rep (right down to the vulgar gold tassels on guest-room furniture in the newer towers) already appeals to certain conventioners; an added inducement is its 158,000-square-foot convention-center expansion. Hate the increasingly

dingy rooms, though. The Palace Tower meeting space in **Caesars Palace** is fit for any corporate emperor: marble pediments atop etched bronze elevators, replicas of Roman frescoes and murals, and barrel-vaulted ceilings. Fruitwood-paneled boardrooms, many with views of the stunning pool areas, offer plush leather executive chairs, and private minioffices with phones are available. The business center even has a notary on staff. The new Augustus Tower brings Caesars' total meeting space to 241,000 square feet. **MGM Grand's** separate 300,000-square-foot Conference Center is perhaps the most sophisticated part of this sprawling, amenity-packed hotel. The smart postmodern decor features striking abstract wood "torches," fake palms, and stained-glass panels; boardrooms, many with outdoor views, feature plush leather armchairs, marble tables, curved glass pendant lamps, and decorative porcelain in cabinets.

Service with a smile... The **Four Seasons** boasts 24-hour concierge service on all floors. Their "I Need It Now" program redresses packing lapses: The Concierge Kit includes everything from batteries to birthday candles, cuff links, sleeping masks, thermometers, and reading lights—all delivered within 15 minutes. Guests who go for a run are handed bottled water and a cold towel upon their return, while poolside loungers are offered complimentary Evian spritzing, fresh fruit, even cucumber slices for their eyes. The Verandah restaurant also anticipates every conceivable need: A kosher kitchen was installed, and black napkins are provided for those wearing standard N.Y./L.A. black, lest the white linen shed. With such an attentive staff, there's actually more of a "Raj" ambience here than at its downstairs neighbor, Mandalay Bay. **Bally's** has long been lauded for its smooth, friendly service, including some of the most helpful dealers and most gorgeous pool attendants in town. Giving the Four Seasons a reason to watch its tailored back is the **Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas**, where even barefoot, bathing-suit-clad guests are made to feel as welcome as business-suited cocktail-toting visitors, and much of what you want is just a phone call away. The **Bellagio** staff is unfailingly cordial, which is amazing considering some of the prima donnas checking in; they never raise a voice (though you suspect major dishing goes on

behind the scenes). **MGM Grand**'s staffers act like former cheerleaders; in an effort to counteract the place's massiveness, they're instructed like Stepford folk to chirp "Have a grand day"—even in the wee hours when you request your wake-up call.

Old Vegas... The Rat Pack landmarks are gone, but a few hotels, while keeping up with the latest trends, still retain that '60s time-warp feel. Downtown's **Golden Nugget** is the star hotel in an unjustly overlooked area. Understated and often luxurious, the rooms are similar to those at the **Mirage** and half the price. Public spaces are packed with clean marble floors, with turn-of-the-20th-century-evoking touches, from stained glass to potted plants, and a general air of savoir-faire. Restaurant chain Landry's completed a complex deal to purchase the Nugget in late 2005; no word yet on what changes they have planned, if any. Not nearly as swank, but still showing their moxie, are the **Four Queens** and the **Lady Luck**, both of which do mostly repeat business with clients who have been coming here for decades. The rooms aren't snazzy, but the service can have enough smiles to make up for it. These are the places the real gamblers, the ones who want serious (which is not necessarily high-stakes, mind you) action come to stay and play. **Stardust** has been featured in numerous flicks, including *Showgirls*, *Mars Attacks!*, and *Casino*, with its vintage cigarette girls, cartoonish neon, multihued carpets, mirrored columns, and crystal disco balls in the casino/reception area. Its sign is a blast from the past: a huge spangled fireworks display of stars going supernova. Built well after the Rat Pack heyday, **Bally's** has since been surpassed in many ways, but it upholds old-style professionalism—the restaurants are uniformly excellent, the nonthemed casino elegant without pretension, the rooms fairly large (450 sq. ft.) with furnishings that actually manage to be stylish without trying too hard. Its quiet style appeals to a loyal, discriminating clientele that doesn't want glitz. And dig the reception desk's great mural of Las Vegas characters in action. Downtown, **El Cortez** may be ugly, but it's genuinely historic—it was Bugsy Siegel's first Vegas property, with the town's oldest casino, built in 1941. Crusty Runyonesque codgers mill around in the smoky haze of its resolutely old-time gaming floor, where there are an astounding 2,100

slot machines, 11 single-deck blackjack tables, and a classic round-the-clock game of \$1-to-\$3 Texas Hold 'Em. Despite its aggressive modernization, **Caesars Palace** still purveys that inimitable Vegas crass/class combo. Several remodeled rooms, while handsome in muted earth tones, include features like mirrored ceilings, frosted-glass swinging bathroom doors, and whirlpool tubs rimmed with Roman frescoes. And those over-the-top high-roller suites are still the town's coolest: You expect a crooning Frank to swagger by, martini shaker in hand, trying to make up with Ava or Mia. The **Imperial Palace** offers a perfect central Strip location and just the right amount of sleaze and tacky lights for those frustrated by the all-too-clean-and-charging-for-it modern-day Vegas. The rooms are cheap cheap cheap for the Strip, or for anywhere, and the "luv tub" rooms are the right amount of classic kitsch (oh, for the days when a hot tub smack in the middle of a room was considered the height of romantic fun!) and a good bargain.

Better than you'd expect... **Main Street Station** has it rough, since it's Downtown—who goes there any more? Real gamblers and bargain hunters, that's who—and not quite on Fremont Street (though but a short, 2-minute or so, walk away). Ignore all this, and come to what can genuinely be described as a charming little hotel, at least by Vegas standards. Full of nifty touches, like actual antiques, lazy sideways-turning ceiling fans, all sorts of gold-rush-era San Francisco-period details, a small but sweet (and relatively smoke-free, thanks to a high ceiling) casino, plus tidy and streamlined rooms. They have the best buffet in Downtown, one of the best (for price and quality) anywhere, a fine and lively brewpub, and a steakhouse in a train car. We ask for so little, but Main Street Station gives us so much more. Despite a raft of nostalgically honky-tonk attractions, **Circus Circus** displays surprising restraint in other areas. The tower rooms are relatively nice and subdued; the sizable junior suites have muted tones of gold, silver, gray, and cream, with armoires and wet bars. The busy "back to the future" casino decor of the **Stardust**

thankfully isn't carried through into the rooms. In fact, lodgings are mostly in soft dun and gray tones, with distinctly Deco-ish touches—modernist curved cabinets and black torchier lamps. Rooms in both towers have received major face-lifts; the reconfigured 765-square-foot suites, now with hot tubs, are amazing bargains. Ignore the neon-splashed prisonlike exterior of the **Barbary Coast**—inside are much-better-than-expected public rooms, and guest rooms that are nearly sweet, in a Vegas older hotel kind of way. Pyramid-shaped **Luxor** has plenty of campy attractions in its public spaces, yet its rooms and lobby are surprisingly restrained, and the spa and gourmet restaurants are ultraluxurious—good amenities for this price. Avoid the drab tombs in the original pyramid—the novelty of the sloped windows wears off quickly, and many of the Strip views are now obscured by the second tower.

Where to escape the madness... Head straight to the wonders at the **Ritz-Carlton**; between the softness of the beds, the gloss of the bathrooms, the hiking, the fishing, the boating, the views, the chow at the Club Level if you paid for it—and you should—the nearness of MonteLago Village, the plentitude of restaurants, and the adequate casino (if you must), we will be surprised if you remember to make it into town. The **Four Seasons** is like a Bali “High” overseeing the South Seas nuttiness below in Mandalay Bay; you can descend from your aerie and enjoy the megaresort's facilities, but M-Bay guests can't impinge upon your tranquil experience (though the food-and-beverage outlets are, naturally, open to the public). Villas and suites offer even more seclusion for those who want it. If we aren't in those two places, we will be by the pool at the **Green Valley Ranch Resort**, napping, or inside on cushy beds, napping some more, or having a spa treatment complete with chocolate spread, or perhaps noshing at Green Valley's branch of the Pancake House or Fatburger. **JW Marriott** is set miles from the action in the *soigné* 'burb Summerlin. Though it offers an exquisite domed “European” casino (read: no theme elements), its emphasis is on restful golf and spa packages. The setting is glorious, taking full advantage of the views of Red Rock Canyon's spires and Toiyabe National Forest. The 21-acre **Hyatt Regency Lake Las Vegas** also provides a true resort experience, on

the shores of the largest private artificial lake in the United States (3 miles long and 135 ft. deep). The resort controls tee times at the Jack Nicklaus–designed Reflection Bay golf course (see the Diversions chapter), and a Tom Weiskopf–designed par-72, 18-hole course nearby. There are two pools, a water slide, and private sand beaches, as well as bass fishing, windsurfing, boating, and other watersports on the lake. The hotel’s persimmon- and terra-cotta-hued exterior blends with the stark ruddy desert surroundings, yet contrasts with the lake, which ripples from turquoise to tourmaline. Natural light floods the public spaces, from the Spa Moulay to the small but tasteful Casino Baraka, where two-story windows drink in that mesmerizing lake-and-mountains view.

Where to tie the knot... Nearly every major hotel offers at least one chapel and full wedding-planning services, often including in-house florists, photographers, videographers, and bands (for nonhotel chapels and marriage info, see the Diversions chapter). Most also provide themed nuptials of varying levels of campy tastelessness. Since one chapel pretty much looks like the next without stagy touches, we say, go for it. You are getting married in Vegas, after all. Why deny it? **Excalibur’s** Canterbury Chapels, gussied up with barrel-vault ceilings, stained-glass windows, and chandeliers with dangling crowns, offer a fairytale affair where you’re actually dubbed “faire maiden and noble knight.” As one couple, married in full medieval garb as King Arthur and Guinevere, exited the chapel, the groom grinned, “Get ready for a lotta lancing, babe.” The chapels at the **Venetian** are as opulent and intricately designed as the rest of the Venezia tower where they are located. Giant windows open up onto the pool deck and Italian gardens, which could be cool if you don’t mind a bunch of wet people in thongs watching you exchange vows. Sumptuous fringed draperies frame windows of handblown amethyst Venetian glass in **Bellagio’s** two chapels (never fear, ceremonies are carefully scheduled not to overlap). Most packages include complimentary limousine to the courthouse where you get your license. **Beware:** The floral fragrance can choke you upon entering. **Paris** also offers glitz and glamour in its Chapelle du Jardin (murals of garden scenes adorn the curved walls and the

ceiling) or Chapelle du Paradis (gold leaf and paint, with a ceiling mural of painted cherubs). Or if you need more of a view, they'll let you get hitched atop the Eiffel Tower replica some 50 stories above the Strip. But we can't imagine a more scenic locale to do your betrothing than at the **Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas**. They don't have a chapel but you can have your ceremony in the charming Italian gardens overlooking the lake or even on the bridge spanning it. They've had brides who demanded to walk the length of it to get to the hitching post.

Cool pools... **Mandalay Bay** doesn't just have a pool—it has a bamboo-gated 11-acre aquatic environment with a replica beach featuring sand, undertow, the whole bit. There's also a jogging track, lazy river ride, and four pools, including one where you can bodysurf some miniwaves. Hugely popular, they patrol it for nonguests quite closely. Stake out a chair early, and spring for the inner tube to ride the lazy river on. **Hard Rock's** pool is so hedonistic you could imagine you're at Hef's Playboy mansion. Exhibition is rampant: "Full moons" are common from the rooms overlooking the pool, and the hotel website features a live pool cam. The spread is lushly landscaped with palms, a lagoon, grotto, minibeaches, hidden Jacuzzis, and connecting lazy rivers. Wild purple lounge chairs add pizzazz, there's swim-up gaming, and the likes of Dennis Rodman, Ben Affleck, the E Street Band, and Arab sheiks retire with willowy models to private cabanas. Even reedier, more beautiful, more decadent folks line the shores of the not-that-great-looking **Palms** pool area. We prefer our pools with gizmos, but if eye candy is what you want, the Palms has it. Speaking of gizmos, abundant tropical flora, water slides, and waterfalls help make the meandering amorphous lagoon at the **Mirage** our favorite place to frolic. Our next favorite is the W-cool-meets-the-Hard-Rock-hip wonder outside the **Green Valley Ranch Resort**; it's geometric slick, but with a sandy beach and lots of little ledges for canoodling. Speaking of which, check out all those mattresses and other squishy lounge chairs strewn under cooling misters, with the Strip forming a backdrop. The cabanas are thick with even more mattresses and pillows. Caligula would have approved of the 4.5-acre Palace Pool Complex and Garden of the Gods at **Caesars Palace**,

its fountains playing around three column-lined pools inlaid with marble and granite surrounded by fragrant Mediterranean gardens. The main Temple Pool is crowned by a giant rotunda shading a central island cooled by mist from giant fountains. Statuary includes centurions in full gallop and mythical griffins (half-eagle, half-lion); even the lifeguard stands are decked out like thrones. Play the “real or fake” game while enjoying “European-style sunbathing” (topless, that is) at a specially designated pool. The **Flamingo** also provides acres of greenery, a series of linked pools, waterfalls, water slides (popular with the kiddies), and—you got it—pink flamingoes, both live (in wading ponds) and immortalized in plaster or bronze. **Bellagio** places its six swimming pools in a formal, 5-acre garden setting complete with imported Italian cypress trees, arbors, urns, and pattering fountains. Almost 300 pine trees sway in the desert breeze nearby, remnants of the old Dunes golf course. The pool area at the **Wynn Las Vegas** isn’t as large as Bellagio’s, but it’s got a similar classy vibe—lots of intensely manicured trees and shrubs, immaculate and subtle tile work, and a wandering, pleasant, vaguely French-garden design. The requisite high-ticket, private poolside cabanas provide a refuge for the well-to-do. Another favorite for the family set is the multiple water holes at **MGM**—five pools in all, including a long lazy river. (Some of the pools are closed during winter months.)

For the body beautiful... Be prepared to pay exorbitant fees to use the splendiferous fitness centers at nearly all of the major casino-hotels. The **JW Marriott’s** *Aquae Sulis* (Latin for “waters of the sun”) offers a United Nations of healing treatments: Asian shiatsu and reflexology, Swedish massage, and Native American hot-stone therapy. If all you want to do is work out, there’s top-notch cardiovascular and weight-training equipment, as well as personal trainers and stress-management consultations. The ravishing locker rooms feature domed skylights and intricate glazed tile panels decorated with aquatic motifs. **Bally’s** spa/fitness center provides state-of-the-art equipment, saunas, steam rooms, hot tubs, et cetera, but those in the know swear by the Belavi face-lift massage—you’re slathered with various creams and oils, then toned with herbal mists, and finally finished with a honey-lift masque while you

enjoy reflexology treatments. The tennis pros here are said to be the best in town. The **Hard Rock's** Rock Spa skews more toward the vain than the varicose-vein crowd with a state-of-the-art fitness center that includes a cross-training climbing wall, stair machines, treadmills, stationary bikes, and Cybex weight training. The spa's premium skin-care products are utilized in thermal-mineral-water therapy, aromatherapy, and herbal therapy. Besides massages, facials, and body wraps, guests can get shea-butter body polishes, coconut scrubs, tanning (both airbrush and booth), and waxing. The Garden of the Gods at **Caesars Palace** has a fitness center offering all the usual treatments, as well as a rock-climbing wall, virtual-reality stationary bikes (you're in the Tour de France!), and Zen meditation chamber. Don't miss the 110-minute Passage to India, a package that includes a dry-brush massage, warm-oil full-body massage, and scalp massage that drips warm oil lightly onto the "third eye." The 30,000-square-foot Spa at **Mandalay Bay** has 12 treatment rooms, steam rooms, saunas, and whirlpools. Treatments include massages, reflexology, aromatherapy, facials, and body wraps. M-Bay's exotic theme is carried out in the decor (stone fish fountains, wicker furnishings, porcelain vases) and an array of tropical ingredients (Pacific Island salt crystals, kiwi-seed exfoliates, mango-butter hydrators). The fitness center, overlooking the lagoon, is a prime place to see people huffing into cellphones, watching the stock ticker on *Moneyline* as they pedal stationary bikes or stride on treadmills. Ironically, the most "Eastern" facility is the Spa by Mandara at **Paris**, its 24 treatment rooms fitted out with Balinese teak tables, embroidered Thai silk hangings, and Oriental rugs. You can exfoliate, detoxify, and hydrate any number of ways, but the most intriguing options are the antioxidant green-tea body wrap and, naturellement, a caviar facial. You get a workout just traipsing the whopping 112 acres of **MGM Grand**, which, though clearly laid out, are also seemingly endless. But gym rats applaud the fitness center's high-tech virtual-reality climbers and bikes and computerized circuit-training equipment. The spa (beautifully designed with lacquered stripped bamboo, Buddhas, Japanese sketches, Tibetan rugs, water walls, abstract art, and ceramics) offers such signature treatments as Tranquility facials (involving extracts of blue chamomile, rose, and

black currant) and various forms of exfoliation, such as milk-and-honey and Parafango (a mix of paraffin and Austrian moor mud). When all is said and done, though, the king of Vegas spas is the **Venetian's** 65,000-square-foot outpost of the ultrachic Canyon Ranch SpaClub. Nutritionists and therapists poke, pinch, and prod clients to determine their fitness level or ergonomic profile, then prescribe a personalized regimen of diet and exercise. Guests put that regimen into action at the vast fitness center on the lower level (complete with 40-ft. climbing wall) and the Canyon Ranch Café, with its organic, additive-free fitness cuisine (dishes like crab mushroom quesadillas, sesame ginger chicken satays, and luscious fresh-fruit smoothies). The spa's 48 treatment rooms host massages, facials, wraps, scrubs, balneotherapy, and body treatments from around the globe. Between an exfoliating scrub and an aromatherapy massage, luxuriate by candlelight in the hammered-bronze Royal King's Bath, filled with rose petals and essential oils. Or experience a heated body cocoon: You're slathered with peat, clay, seaweed, or goat butter, then mummified and immersed in a virtual water bed. The Rasul Chamber, with its ornately tiled heated chairs and floor, is the spot for an ancient Middle Eastern ritual: Five muds of varying properties are applied by a therapist or, better yet, your significant other, after which a sudden downpour from the fiber-optic "night sky" ceiling rinses you off. Alas, the entrance/waiting area for the entire sanctuary is bustling and impersonal (the pool complex and staircase to the health club are located on the same level). **Green Valley Ranch Resort** offers a wide range of hilarious and over-the-top decadent-sounding spa treatments, including a chocolate, cream, and strawberry number now relegated to around Valentine's Day only. Pity.

Heavy lobbying... A step into the **Mirage** meant entering a rainforest with real orchids, elephant ears, and banana trees, not to mention a lagoon with waterfalls and rushing rapids, a couple of somnolent white tigers, bronze mermaids, and a coral reef (actually a 20,000-gallon aquarium stocked with more than 1,000 brilliantly hued fish, as well as several menacing sharks and gliding rays). As the hotel undergoes its most massive renovation ever (through early

to mid-2006), how many of those elements survive remains to be seen. The lobby of **Mandalay Bay** seems tame by comparison, featuring only a 14-foot shark-filled pagoda/aquarium, along with towering bamboo cages filled with parrots and cockatoos (desk clerks sometimes have to scream to make themselves heard above the birds' screeching). The **Caesars Palace** entrance is a riot of gilt bas-relief, carved and mirrored ceilings, friezes, and reclining marble nudes alongside black marble floors and crystal chandeliers. After more than 30 years, it's still Vegas glitz at its best. But for sheer camp, nothing exceeds the excess of **Excalibur**, with its mock medieval stained-glass ceiling, glowing dragons, brightly colored heraldic flags, suits of armor on wooden horses, and amazing turreted chandeliers.

The majestic 70-foot rotunda dome in the **Venetian's** lobby glistens with 24K gold leaf and a montage of 21 Renaissance paintings. The tile floors are the real thing, scavenged from condemned palazzi. Marble and Murano glass gleam everywhere, and a photo of Venice canals provides a *trompe l'oeil* effect behind the reception desk. Less awesome, but handsome all the same, is **New York-New York's** registration area, with its Art Deco bronze touches, '40s Times Square photos, and a marvelous mural of the New York skyline at dawn.

Handsomest guest room decor... The rooms at the **Ritz-Carlton** reflect subdued good taste, like so many in Vegas, and at least they didn't stick to the all-too-wearying beige palate favored by other "classy" resorts. Their color choices are just plain pretty, with a slightly Wedgwood feel (though if you have a lake view, you might never drag your eyes away from the windows long enough to notice). Did we say we aren't wild about beige? Or parchment? But when it's used as snazzily as it is at **Treasure Island**, we are. Rise above the Egyptian kitsch of **Luxor**: Its newer wing's guest rooms are quite stylish, with blond wood furnishings, sponge-painted golden walls, and subtle stencils of sunbursts and ancient jewelry. Door handles replicate the Ra sign of life or Isis snake amulet. Well, okay, the faux columns are a mite much. Some of **New York-New York's** rooms are cramped (just like Manhattan apartments, come to think of it), but they're deliciously Deco-ish: vivid colors, cubistic paintings,

curved headboards, and inlaid burl wood furnishings, with ziggurat and chevron patterns subtly incorporated throughout. The surprisingly inexpensive suites let loose, with zebra-, tiger-, or leopard-print lounges and antimacassars, streamlined torchier lamps, chessboard-patterned furniture, marble vanities, and black tubs and sinks. Too '80s for us, but it might fulfill some lurid fantasies for you. **MGM Grand's** rooms replicate MGM Studios' bungalows with Art Deco flair: burl wood furnishings, platinum accents, curvilinear chaise longues, all in tones ranging from copper to chocolate. Minisuites feature groovy violet chairs or '60s swingin' singles leopard-print love seats: Martha Stewart on mescaline. Even the hallways impress, with blown-glass lamps and sepia photos of MGM stars. Illuminated at night, the emerald green buildings emit a sensuous glow into the rooms. The huge rooms at **Mandalay Bay** manage to rise above the sameness that strikes too many Vegas hotels at this level, with plantation shutters closing off the bathroom, hardwood armoires, pineapple-carved beds, leopard-skin armchairs, prints of plants and butterflies, and abstract tropical fabrics. And in an ultracool move, rooms on M-Bay's 34th floor are decorated in fabulously funky House of Blues art naïf style. The imperial rooms of the new Augustus Tower at **Caesars Palace** dress to impress, foregoing the Roman theme entirely in favor of ultramodern luxury and wide-open spaces. The **Venetian's** sumptuous standard rooms are the town's largest: 700 square feet with sunken living rooms and 130-square-foot Italian marble bathrooms. Ferns drape everywhere; iron railings mark off separate areas; armoires are hand-painted and armchairs trimmed in gold gilt. As for amenities, the dataport, fax/printer, minibar, and two 27-inch TVs should satisfy any latter-day Borgias. The **JW Marriott's** two towers both feature stylish rooms in golden hues, with striped imported fabrics, plush armchairs, and large desks for working; best of all, most offer invigorating views of Red Rock Canyon.

Art-full hotels... Sure, the **Venetian** and **Caesars Palace** reproduce famed paintings and statues, but the real thing also exists in Vegas hotels (and not just in the Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art or the Venetian's Guggenheim branch; see the Diversions chapter). The **Four Seasons** echoes the

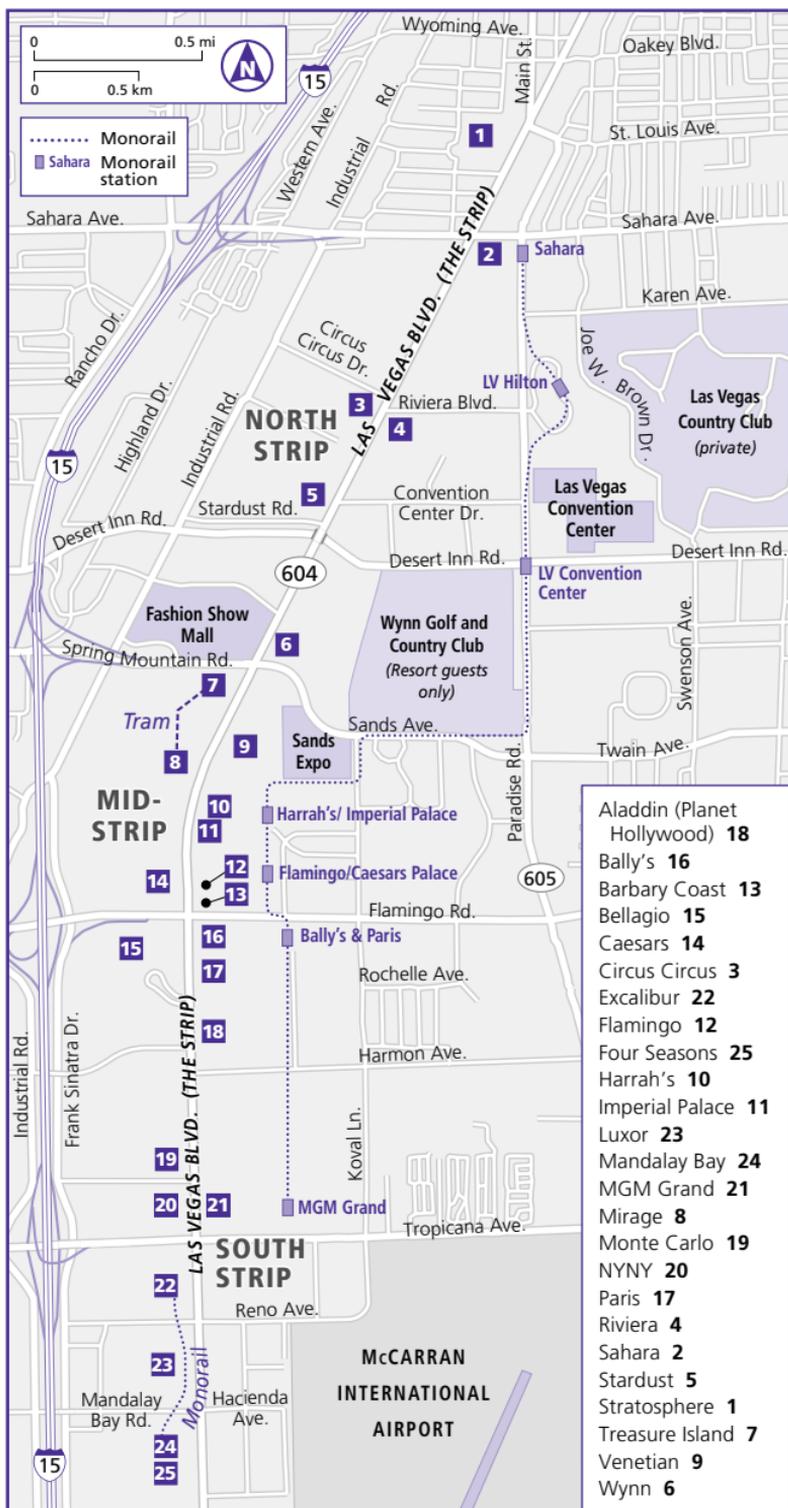
exotic motif of its downstairs neighbor, **Mandalay Bay**, with antique porcelain and bronze-and-cloisonné statues from China, Bali, and India scattered throughout the museum-like marble hallways. **Main Street Station** culls antiques and artifacts from around the globe: ornate doors, transom, and stained-glass windows from actress Lillian Russell's Victorian mansion; bronze doors from London's turn-of-the-20th-century Kuwait Royal Bank; a carved oak fireplace and sideboard from Scotland's Prestwick Castle; fluted cast-iron columns from the Royal Army barracks at Windsor Castle; an Art Nouveau chandelier from the Figaro Opera House in Paris; even the Schlitz Milwaukee mansion's mahogany-and-walnut elevator serving as a phone booth. Artworks by Picasso and Rauschenberg are scattered throughout the **Bellagio's** restaurants, but the cultural coup is Dale Chihuly's immense glass ceiling installation, *Fiori di Como*, which resembles, depending on your point of view, a profusion of glass jellyfish, a floral explosion, or someone's 1960s LSD nightmare. Back when Steve Wynn ran the place, he kept quite a bit of his own stellar art collection at the Bellagio. Now, of course, that collection is ensconced at the **Wynn Las Vegas**; it features works by Picasso, Cezanne, Gauguin, Vermeer, and Rembrandt, among others. The **Rio** is known for lavishly mounted traveling exhibits ranging from Tsarist treasures to Titanic artifacts. Amid the property's jazzy razzmatazz, it's easy to overlook a splendid permanent collection of contemporary art, most on display in the entrance corridor and lobby of the Penn & Teller Theatre: works by Cy Twombly, Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, and Nan Goldin. The mezzanine features a 20-foot-long sculpture of powder-coated stainless steel by Micah Lexier. Most extraordinary is the 32-foot-high, 22-foot-wide diptych mural by Charles Brown and Mark Evans, a shimmering mosaic of overlapping scenes from famous theatrical events of the 20th century.

Obsessively detailed... The signature landmark at **Paris** is its 50-story Eiffel Tower replica. To ensure authenticity, designers obtained Gustave Eiffel's original drawings. Although Las Vegas's Eiffel Tower is a half-scale replica, elevators can't be half-scale, so it's made of stronger welded steel, but rivets duplicate the original's wrought-iron

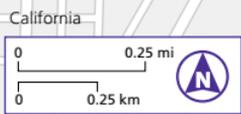
appearance. French is used throughout (even the parking levels are named for historic figures or landmarks, such as Sacre-Coeur and Georges Pompidou) to the point of cutesy overkill, and some guests complain that the restaurants serve only, *quelle horreur*, French food. But any hotel that convinces the phenomenal Gaston Lenôte to open his only patisserie outside of Paris is *très authentique*. The **Venetian** design team not only took thousands of photos on-site, they hired an architectural consultant from Venezia to ensure accuracy right down to the last detail. Every color exactly matches those in the original landmarks; every pediment, capital, frieze, and other embellishment is precise; in an air-conditioned on-site sweatshop, laborers hand-chiseled elaborate replicas of statues, right down to the cherubs' toenails. Marble in the floors comes from the same quarry that yielded the stone for the original Doge's Palace. **Luxor** features a painstaking replica of King Tut's Tomb, with "artifacts" fashioned according to ancient Egyptian methods (see the Diversions chapter). Tasteful **Bellagio** didn't strain for authenticity as much as its glitzy rivals, but its designers did import hundreds of genuine Italian cypress trees at a cost of several million dollars.

Suite deals... The anonymous but clean chain member **AmeriSuites**, just across the road from the Hard Rock, has no casino or restaurant, but offers plenty of gratis extras, such as a shuttle, tiny fitness room, heated outdoor pool, full buffet breakfast, laundry facilities, full business center, high-speed Internet access, and even popcorn and *USA Today*. The smallish units are attractively appointed, with stained-oak furnishings, moss green carpets, leaf-print fabrics; microwave, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, and iron are standard. Located at the corner of Flamingo and Paradise roads, the new **Atrium Suites** is a block from the Strip in one direction and a block from the convention center in another. Rooms are nothing to write home about, but they are clean, well furnished, and equipped with wet bar and fridge. Families traveling through town should strongly consider the **Hawthorn Suites**; accommodations are bland, but the price is right (at times less than \$100 for four people in a one-bedroom suite), and look what you get: a full kitchen, free breakfast buffet, happy-hour snacks, and it's all just a block from the Strip. And they accept pets!

Map 3: Strip Accommodations

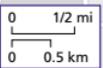


Map 4: Downtown Accommodations



- El Cortez **5**
- Four Queens **4**
- Golden Nugget **3**
- Lady Luck **2**
- Main Street Station **1**

 Fremont Street Experience





The Index

\$\$\$\$\$	over \$200
\$\$\$\$	\$150–\$200
\$\$\$	\$100–\$150
\$\$	\$50–\$100
\$	under \$50

Price ratings are based on the lowest price quoted for a standard double room in high season, including taxes and charges. Unless otherwise noted, rooms have air-conditioning, phones, private baths, and TVs.

The following abbreviations are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express
DC	Diners Club
DISC	Discover
MC	MasterCard
V	Visa

Aladdin Resort & Casino (p. 24) MID-STRIP Undergoing a total transformation from the former Middle Eastern-themed Aladdin to an ultrathemed Hollywood memorabilia concept in 2006 (when it will be renamed Planet Hollywood Hotel & Casino, or something like that); we aren't sure what it all will look like when it's done.... Tel 702/785-5555 (U.S. toll-free number 877/333-WISH). Fax 702/736-7107. www.aladdincasino.com. 3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,567 rooms. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

AmeriSuites Las Vegas (p. 46) PARADISE Comfortable suite property for business travelers and families on a budget.... Tel 702/369-3366 (U.S. toll-free number 877/774-6467). Fax 702/369-0009. www.amerisuites.com. 4520 Paradise Rd. 202 suites. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Atrium Suites Hotel Las Vegas (p. 46) PARADISE Basic all-suite hotel convenient to Strip and convention center.... Tel 702/369-4400 (U.S. toll-free number 800/330-7728). Fax 702/369-3770. www.atriumsuiteshotel.com. 4255 Paradise Rd. 201 suites. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Bally's Las Vegas (p. 33) MID-STRIP A heck of a bargain these days, and worth taking them up on their deals.... *Tel 702/739-4111 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-3434). Fax 702/739-4405. www.ballyslv.com. 3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,814 rooms (including 265 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Barbary Coast Hotel (p. 37) MID-STRIP A surprising smaller Strip hotel at sensational prices.... *Tel 702/737-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 888/227-2279). Fax 702/894-9954. www.barbarycoastcasino.com. 3595 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 196 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Bellagio (p. 20) MID-STRIP Luxe, lavish, and slightly nouveau, this re-creation of a villa on Lake Como is made for modern Medicis.... *Tel 702/693-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 888/987-6667). Fax 702/693-8585. www.bellagio.com. 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,613 rooms (including 388 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Caesars Palace (p. 21) MID-STRIP The town's first posh (and themed-to-the-max) property has maintained its standards. Trendoid restaurants, lavish showroom, Celine Dion in the house.... *Tel 702/731-7110 (U.S. toll-free number 877/427-7243). Fax 702/731-6636. www.caesarspalace.com. 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,420 rooms (including over 200 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Circus Circus (p. 30) NORTH STRIP An exuberant property-as-giant-arcade that appeals to the kid in everyone.... *Tel 702/734-0410 (U.S. toll-free number 877/224-7287). Fax 702/794-3816. www.circuscircus.com. 2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,744 rooms (including 130 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$-\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

El Cortez Hotel & Casino (p. 35) DOWNTOWN El cheapo, no-frills, but adequate hotel that caters to a senior crowd.... *Tel 702/385-5200 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-6703). Fax 702/382-1554. www.elcortezhotelcasino.com. 600 E. Fremont St. 308 rooms. AE, DISC, MC, V. \$*

See Map 4 on page 48.

Excalibur (p. 26) SOUTH STRIP The campiest theme in town—medieval mediocrity, but kids dig Camelot a lot.... *Tel 702/597-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 877/750-5464). Fax 702/597-7009. www.excalibur.com. 3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 4,008 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Flamingo (p. 40) MID-STRIP A pallid replacement for Bugsy Siegel's original, but still a good moderate Strip option, with decent-size rooms in warm jewel tones.... *Tel 702/733-3111 (U.S. toll-free*

number 888/308-8899). Fax 702/733-3353. www.flamingolv.com. 3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,565 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Four Queens (p. 29) DOWNTOWN The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be, but you know, Mae West looked pretty good for her age.... Tel 702/385-4011 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-6045). www.fourqueens.com. 202 Fremont St. 690 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 4 on page 48.

Four Seasons Las Vegas (p. 31) SOUTH STRIP Understated luxury, occupying Mandalay Bay's 35th to 39th floors.... Tel 702/632-5000 (U.S. toll-free number 877/632-5000). Fax 702/632-5195. www.fourseasons.com/lasvegas. 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 424 rooms (including 86 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Golden Nugget (p. 35) DOWNTOWN With a light-handed Victorian theme, this Downtown gem is the best in the area.... Tel 702/385-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 800/846-5336). Fax 702/386-8362. www.goldennugget.com. 129 E. Fremont St. 1,911 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 4 on page 48.

Green Valley Ranch Resort (p. 23) HENDERSON Superior combination of W/Standard hotel hip and classy grown-up Ritz-Carlton style.... Tel 702/617-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 866/STAYGVR). www.greenvalleyranchresort.com. 2300 Paseo Verde Pkwy., Henderson, NV 89052. 496 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Hard Rock Hotel & Casino (p. 20) PARADISE Hedonistic hangout for a hip under-40 crowd, fabulously witty and seriously loud.... Tel 702/693-5000 (U.S. toll-free number 800/HRD-ROCK). Fax 702/693-5010. www.hardrockhotel.com. 4455 Paradise Rd. 670 rooms (including 68 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Hawthorn Suites (p. 32) EAST OF STRIP Perfect for families, thanks to freebies and activities, and even accepts pets.... Tel 702/739-7000 (U.S. toll-free number 800/527-1133). Fax 702/739-9350. www.hawthorn.com. 5051 Duke Ellington Way. 278 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Hyatt Regency Lake Las Vegas Resort (p. 22) HENDERSON Sublime setting between lake and mountains, luxurious facilities and amenities (including watersports and golf), minutes from the Strip.... Tel 702/567-1234 (U.S. toll-free number 800/55-HYATT). Fax 702/567-6067. www.hyatt.com. 101 MonteLago Blvd. 496

rooms (including 47 suites and 10 casitas). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Imperial Palace (p. 36) MID-STRIP Where the “Swingers” crowd, if they had any genuine guts and weren’t just loud-talking posers, would stay.... Tel 702/731-3311 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-6441). www.imperialpalace.com. 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,700 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

JW Marriott (p. 21) WEST OF STRIP Suburban off-Strip location and luxury style make this resort feel more like a Phoenix/Scottsdale golf resort than a Vegas property.... Tel 702/869-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 877/869-8777). Fax 702/869-7339. www.marriott.com. 221 N. Rampart Blvd. 540 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Lady Luck (p. 29) DOWNTOWN She doesn’t look all that lucky or even ladylike, but she’s got prices that often can’t be beat.... Tel 702/477-3000 (U.S. toll-free number 800/LADYLUCK). Fax 702/477-7021. www.ladylucklv.com. 206 N. Third St. 637 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$

See Map 4 on page 48.

Las Vegas Hilton (p. 33) PARADISE Despite its age, the Hilton does everything well, serving a discerning business clientele.... Tel 702/732-5111 (U.S. toll-free number 888/732-7117). Fax 702/732-5243. lvhilton.com. 3000 Paradise Rd. 3,174 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Luxor Hotel & Casino (p. 23) SOUTH STRIP With just enough Egyptian theme to be fun, arguably the best middle-priced entry in town.... Tel 702/262-4000 (U.S. toll-free number 888/777-0188). Fax 702/262-4406. www.luxor.com. 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 4,467 rooms (including 473 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Main Street Station (p. 27) DOWNTOWN Handsomely outfitted Downtown property, one of the best deals in town.... Tel 702/387-1896 (U.S. toll-free number 800/713-8933). Fax 702/386-4466. www.mainstreetcasino.com. 200 N. Main St. 406 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$

See Map 4 on page 48.

Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino (p. 20) SOUTH STRIP A hip, corporate frat party with a South Seas theme. Cutting-edge fun, from the House of Blues theater to the top-notch eateries.... Tel 702/632-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 877/632-7800). Fax 702/632-7190. www.mandalaybay.com. 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,276 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

MGM Grand Hotel & Casino (p. 31) SOUTH STRIP The world's second-largest hotel, it remains a king of the Vegas jungle thanks to savvy improvements and faultless facilities.... *Tel 702/891-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 877/880-0880). Fax 702/891-1030. www.mgmgrand.com. Las Vegas Blvd. S. 5,034 rooms (including 756 suites and 29 villas). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Mirage (p. 21) MID-STRIP Remarkable jungle lobby (if it survives renovations), elegant rooms, excellent restaurants, and generally impeccable service.... *Tel 702/791-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 800/374-9000). Fax 702/791-7446. www.themirage.com. 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,044 rooms (including 279 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Monte Carlo Resort & Casino (p. 25) SOUTH STRIP Not one of the fanciest but a decent alternative to the grander palaces.... *Tel 702/730-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 888/529-4828). Fax 702/730-7250. www.montecarlo.com. 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 3,002 rooms (including 265 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

New York–New York Hotel & Casino (p. 26) SOUTH STRIP Merely average restaurants, pool, and spa/fitness club, but otherwise a thoroughly admirable property, and a theme run wild.... *Tel 702/740-6969 (U.S. toll-free number 888/693-6763). Fax 702/740-6700. www.nynyhotelcasino.com. 3790 Las Vegas Blvd S. 2,033 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

The Orleans Hotel & Casino (p. 28) WEST OF STRIP This popular Big Easy-themed resort doesn't take itself too seriously, and has great diversions for the kids.... *Tel 702/365-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 800/675-3267). Fax 702/365-7500. www.orleanscasino.com. 4500 W. Tropicana Ave. 1,886 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$*

See Map 2 on page 14.

Palms (p. 20) WEST OF STRIP It doesn't get any hotter or hipper, and while the rooms are fantastic and the property nearly so, the size 2 crowd makes us exasperated. But that might just be envy.... *Tel 702/942-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 866/942-7777) Fax 702/942-7001. www.palms.com. 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. 547 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 2 on page 14.

Paris (p. 25) MID-STRIP Obsessive replica of the City of Light, with near-authentic Gallic élan.... *Tel 702/946-7000 (U.S. toll-free number 877/796-2096). Fax 702/946-4405. www.parislv.com. 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,916 rooms (including 295 suites). AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Renaissance Hotel Las Vegas (p. 33) PARADISE High-end nongaming biz hotel near the convention center.... Tel 702/733-6533 (U.S. toll-free number 866/352-3434). Fax 702/735-3130. www.renaissancelasvegas.com. 3400 Paradise Rd. 571 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Rio All-Suite Casino Resort (p. 30) WEST OF STRIP First choice for any frat party of five or more, with extensive gaming, nightlife, and large rooms with dazzling views.... Tel 702/777-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 800/PLAYRIO). Fax 702/253-0090. www.playrio.com. 3700 W. Flamingo Rd. 2,563 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas (p. 22) HENDERSON The finest, and maybe only genuine, resort hotel in the entire Las Vegas area, in hands-down the most stunning setting. Thirty minutes and a lifetime away from the Strip.... Tel 702/567-4700 (U.S. toll-free number 800/241-3333). Fax 702/567-4777. www.ritzcarlton.com/resorts/lake_jas_vegas. 1610 Lake Las Vegas Pkwy., Henderson, NV 89011. 349 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Riviera Hotel & Casino (p. 33) NORTH STRIP The better days are behind it, and fast receding.... Tel 702/734-5110 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-6753). www.rivierahotel.com. 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,136 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Sahara Hotel & Casino (p. 28) NORTH STRIP A fading bargain at the edge of the Strip, popular with families and seniors.... Tel 702/737-2111 (U.S. toll-free number 888/696-2121). Fax 702/791-2027. www.saharavegas.com. 2535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 1,709 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Sam's Town (p. 28) EAST OF STRIP A virtual Western theme park, complete with dance halls, saloons, and a re-creation of the Rocky Mountains. One of the best buys in town.... Tel 702/456-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 800/634-6371). Fax 702/454-8014. www.samstowntlv.com. 5111 Boulder Hwy. 650 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 2 on page 14.

Stardust Resort & Casino (p. 35) NORTH STRIP Holdover that remains one of the best values in town, catering to middle-American sales reps and tour groups.... Tel 702/732-6111 (U.S. toll-free number 866/642-3120). Fax 702/732-6296. www.stardustlv.com. 3000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,431 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$

See Map 3 on page 47.

Stratosphere Casino Hotel & Tower (p. 24) NORTH STRIP Despite a poor location, the tallest structure west of the Mississippi offers solid value.... *Tel 702/380-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 800/380-7777). Fax 702/383-4755. www.stratospherehotel.com. 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,446 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$-\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Sunset Station Hotel & Casino (p. 26) HENDERSON Stellar example of this chain's family values, featuring an attractive Mediterranean theme.... *Tel 702/547-7777 (U.S. toll-free number 888/SUNSET-9). Fax 702/547-7606. www.sunsetstation.com. 1301 W. Sunset Rd., Henderson. 448 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 2 on page 14.

Terrible's (p. 29) PARADISE Think "motel" and you will be pleasantly surprised at how much more it gives you.... *Tel 702/733-7000 (U.S. toll-free number 800/640-9777). www.terribleherbst.com/casinos/lasvegas. 4100 Paradise Rd. 300 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$*

See Map 2 on page 14.

TI - Treasure Island (p. 21) MID-STRIP Popular sibling resort to the Mirage, with better rooms, but a more bland interior now that the pirates are gone.... *Tel 702/894-7111 (U.S. toll-free number 800/288-7206). Fax 702/894-7446. www.treasureisland.com. 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,891 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Venetian Resort-Hotel-Casino (p. 20) MID-STRIP Admirable duplication of Venice, including ceiling frescoes and a Grand Canal. Remarkable dining and shopping.... *Tel 702/414-1000 (U.S. toll-free number 877/883-6423). Fax 702/414-1100. www.venetian.com. 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 4,036 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.

Wynn Las Vegas (p. 19) MID-STRIP Newest superglitzy megacasinohotel.... *Tel 702/770-7000 (U.S. toll-free number 888/320-WYNN). Fax 702/770-1571. www.wynnlasvegas.com. 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S. 2,716 rooms. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$*

See Map 3 on page 47.