PART FIVE

SHOPPING and SEEING the SIGHTS

SHOPPING in LAS VEGAS

THE MOST INTERESTING AND DIVERSIFIED specialty shopping in Las Vegas is centered on the Strip at the Fashion Show Mall (2 702-369-8382), Grand Canal Shoppes at the Venetian (2 702-414-4500), and the The Forum and Appian Way Shops at Caesars Palace (2 702-893-4800). These three venues, within walking distance of each other, collectively offer the most unique, and arguably the most concentrated, aggregation of upscale retailers in the United States. In fairness, it should be noted that The Forum Shops and the Grand Canal Shoppes are not your average shopping centers. In fact, both are attractions in their own right and should be on your must-see list even if you don't like to shop. Both feature designer shops, exclusive boutiques, and specialty retailers. Fashion Show Mall, by comparison, is plain white-bread, with no discernible theme but a great lineup of big-name department stores.

At the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Spring Mountain Road, the Fashion Show Mall is anchored by **Saks Fifth Avenue**,

Robinsons-May, Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Nordstrom, Bloomingdales', Nine West, AnnTaylor, The Sharper Image, and Dillard's, and contains over 100 specialty shops, including four art galleries. There is no theme here—no Roman columns or canals with gondolas. At the Fashion Show Mall, shopping is king. And although there is no shortage of boutiques or designer shops, the presence

unofficial TIP The Fashion Show Mall is the place to go for that new sport coat, tie, blouse, or skirt at a reasonable price.

of the big department stores defines the experience for most customers. The selection is immense, and most of the retailers are familiar and well known. To underscore its name, the mall stages free fashion shows most afternoons. The Forum Shops is a *très chic (et très cher)* shopping complex situated between Caesars Palace and the Mirage. Connected to the Forum Casino in Caesars Palace, The Forum Shops offers a Roman market–themed shopping environment. Executed on a scale that is extraordinary even for Caesars, The Forum Shops replicate the grandeur of Rome at the height of its glory. Nearly 100 shops and restaurants line an ancient Roman street punctuated by plazas and fountains. Dozens of retailers and eateries populate the three-story, 175,000-square-foot Appian Way expansion. Though indoors, clouds, sky, and celestial bodies are projected on the vaulted ceilings to simulate the actual time of day outside. Statuary in The Forum is magnificent; some is even animatronic.

The Grand Canal Shoppes are similar to The Forum Shops in terms of the realistic theming, only this time the setting is the modernday canals of Venice. Sixty-five shops, boutiques, restaurants, and cafes are arrayed along a quarter-mile-long Venetian street flanking a canal. A 70-foot ceiling (more than six stories high) with simulated sky enhances the openness and provides perspective. Meanwhile, gondolas navigating the canal add a heightened sense of commerce and activity. The centerpiece of the Grand Canal Shoppes is a replica of St. Mark's Square, without the pigeons.

A fourth major Strip shopping venue is **Desert Passage**, a 450,000square-foot shopping and entertainment complex at the Aladdin/ Planet Hollywood (2 702-866-0710). The venue recreates street scenes from real and imaginary North African and eastern Mediterranean towns in a shopping concourse that stretches around the periphery of the hotel and casino. The bazaars and shop facades sit beneath an arched ceiling painted and lighted to simulate the evening sky. Overall, although the replication is effective, it falls a little short of the Forum Shops but gives the Grand Canal Shoppes a run for its money. Like the Grand Canal Shoppes, Desert Passage offers primarily upscale boutique shopping, but more of it, with 144 shops and restaurants compared to the Canal Shoppes' 65.

At Paris is **Rue de la Paix**, 31,000 square feet of upscale French boutique shopping. Modest in size by Las Vegas shopping standards, the Rue de la Paix re-creates a Paris street scene with cobblestone pavement and winding alleyways.

The Wynn Esplanade at Wynn Las Vegas (2702-770-7000) is, as you'd expect, an insanely expensive array of upscale shops and boutiques, including **Brioni, Oscar de la Renta, Graff, Jean Paul Gaultier,** and **Manolo Blahnik.** Garnering the most attention is the **Penske-Wynn Ferrari Maserati** dealership, including a Ferrari merchandise store.

Mandalay Place, a mall with more than 40 boutiques and restaurants, also serves as the pedestrian connector linking Mandalay Bay and Luxor. The retailers seem more diverse and selectively chosen than at many other venues, making the shopping interesting even for

those not hooked on shopping. There's a great wine shop with very affordable selections, a bookstore specializing in Las Vegas lore, a barber spa and retail shaving emporium for men, and a chocolate shop, among many others. Among the restaurants is the Burger Joint, featuring a \$60 hamburger dressed with truffles. Fortunately, there are also less frou-frou burgers at reasonable prices.

Another Strip shopping venue is the **Showcase**, adjacent to the MGM Grand. Although most of the 190,000-square-foot shopping and entertainment complex is devoted to theme restaurants, a Sega electronic games arcade, and an eight-plex movie theater, space remains for a number of retail specialty shops. Practically next door is the **Hawaiian Marketplace** (2702-795-2247), an 80,000-square-foot mall. Though the theme is Polynesian, the mall's restaurants and retailers are an eclectic lot ranging from **Café Capri** to **Zingers**, and from **Tropical Jewelers** to the **Las Vegas Tobacco Company**.

There are three large neighborhood malls in Las Vegas: the **Boulevard Mall** (2702-732-8949), the **Meadows Mall** (2702-878-3331), and the **Galleria at Sunset** (2702-434-0202). The Boulevard Mall, with 122 stores anchored by **Sears, JC Penney, Marshalls, Dillard's,** and **Macy's**, is on Maryland Avenue, between Desert Inn Road and Flamingo Road. The Meadows, featuring the same department stores (except for Marshalls), has more than 100 stores spread over two levels. The Meadows is situated between West Charleston Boulevard and the Las Vegas Expressway (US 95) on Valley View. The third mall, Galleria at Sunset, at 1300 Sunset Road, offers 125 stores and restaurants with **Dillard's, JC Penney, Robinsons-May**, and **Mervyns California** leading the lineup.



Because the neighborhood malls target locals, and because locals also have access to area discount shopping, these three malls offer lowball prices to stay competitive. You won't have the choice available at Fashion Show Mall, but if you can find what you're looking for, it will probably be cheaper.

Adjacent to the Green Valley Ranch Resort and Casino, **The District** is a 40-store shopping complex. The shops line a long pedestrian plaza with two smaller plazas intersecting. Resembling a Georgetown, Washington, D.C., commercial and residential street, The District's shopping mix includes restaurants, 14 apparel shops, and a couple dozen specialty stores, including REI, Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn, and Mel Fisher's Treasures, selling artifacts from shipwrecks. For further information, call **2** 702-564-8595.

Neonopolis (2702-477-0470), downtown's first entertainment and shopping complex, opened at Fourth and Fremont Streets in 2002. Anchored by **Jillian's**, Neonopolis also features a 14-screen movie complex, a games arcade, and a few dozen specialty shops, including a **La Reliquia Gallery**. If you're downtown, it's worth a few minutes to check out the vintage neon signs on display at Neonopolis. Also downtown is Las Vegas Premium Outlets, (2702-474-7500) an \$85-million, 120-store outlet mall. A clone of other Premium Outlet malls, featured brands include AIX Armani Exchange, Dolce & Gabbana, Ann Taylor, Kenneth Cole, Lacoste, and Coach. The mall is just west of downtown, between downtown and Interstate 15. It's a bit far from downtown to walk but is only a short cab ride away. From I-15, the mall entrance is off Charleston Boulevard.

unofficial TIP For those without transportation, Las Vegas Citizen's Area Transit (CAT) operates a bus route that connects the various Strip and suburban shopping centers. Fare is \$1.25 in residential areas and \$2 on the Strip. Service is provided daily, 8:30 a.m.– 10:30 p.m. For more information on CAT, call Another large discount shopping venue has materialized about five miles south of Tropicana Avenue on Las Vegas Boulevard, near the Blue Diamond Road exit off I-15. Just north of Blue Diamond Road is a **Las Vegas Outlet Center** mall (2702-896-5599), with 135 stores. Las Vegas Outlet Center, like The Forum Shops, doubled its size in 1998. Promotional literature listing the individual shops is available in almost all hotel brochure racks. The easiest way to reach the outlets is to drive south on I-15 to Exit 33, Blue Diamond Road. Proceed east on Blue Diamond to the intersection with Las Vegas Boulevard. Turn left on Las Vegas Boulevard to the Las Vegas Outlet Center.

About an hour southwest on I-15 in Primm, Nevada, is **Fashion Outlets of Las Vegas Mall (2** 702-874-1400), offering themed dining and 100 outlet stores. You'll find Williams-Sonoma, American Eagle **Outfitters, Versace, Jones New York, Fossil, Tommy Hilfiger, Escada, Kenneth Cole, Banana Republic, Perry Ellis, Tommy Bahama,** and **Last Call from Neiman Marcus,** among others. The mall is adjacent to the Primm Valley Resort and Casino.

UNIQUE SHOPPING OPPORTUNITIES

WINE AND LIQUOR Though not centrally located, **Lee's Discount Liquors** (2702-269-2400) on South Las Vegas Boulevard just south of Blue Diamond Road offers the best selection of wine, liquor, and beer within easy access of the Strip. Unless your hotel is south of Tropicana, take I-15 to the Blue Diamond Road exit and then head south on South Las Vegas Boulevard. If your hotel is south of Tropicana you're just as well off taking South Las Vegas Boulevard the whole way.

OUTDOOR GEAR Las Vegas went from famine to feast in the outdoor retailer department with an **REI** store (2702-896-7111) in The District shopping complex next to Green Valley Ranch, and a **Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World** (2702-730-5200) at the Silverton Casino. Between the two stores you'll find everything you need to go fishing on Lake Mead or mount a safari to Tanzania. The Bass Pro Shop is a hoot, with dozens of stuffed critters placed strategically throughout the store.

ART Las Vegas is a great place to shop for contemporary and nontraditional art and sculpture, with galleries in the Fashion Show Mall, The Forum Shops, and the Grand Canal Shoppes. Do not, however, expect any bargains.

GAMBLING STUFF As you would expect, Las Vegas is a shopping mecca when it comes to anything gambling related. If you are in the market for a roulette wheel, a blackjack table, or some personalized chips, try the **Gamblers General Store** at 800 South Main (2702-382-9903 or 800-322-CHIP outside Nevada; www.gamblersgeneralstore. com). For books and periodicals on gambling, we recommend the **Gamblers Book Club** store at 630 South 11th Street (2702-382-7555 or 800-522-1777).

If you have always wanted a slot machine for your living room, you can buy one at **Showcase Slot Machines**, 4305 South Industrial Road (2702-740-5722 or 888-522-7568; www.showcaseslots.com). Possession of a slot machine (including video poker and blackjack) for personal use is legal in the following states:

Alaska	Kentucky	Nevada	Texas
Arizona	Maine	Ohio	Utah
Arkansas	Minnesota	Rhode Island	Virginia
			West Virginia

Another group of states will allow you to own a slot machine providing the machine is fairly old (how old depends on the state). In Pennsylvania and South Dakota, the machine must have been manufactured before 1941. In the following states and the District of Columbia, the required age falls somewhere between 20 and 64 years:

California	Kansas	New Hampshire	Pennsylvania
Colorado	Louisiana	New Jersey	South Carolina
Delaware	Maryland	New Mexico	South Dakota
Florida	Massachusetts	New York	Vermont
Georgia	Michigan	North Carolina	Washington
Idaho	Mississippi	North Dakota	Washington, D.C.
Illinois	Missouri	Oklahoma	Wisconsin
Iowa	Montana	Oregon	Wyoming

In all other states, the possession of any type of slot machine is illegal.

HEAD RUGS The next time you go to a Las Vegas production show, pay attention to the showgirls' hair. You will notice that the same woman will have a different hairdo for every number. Having made this observation, you will not be surprised that the largest wig and hairpiece retailer in the United States is in Las Vegas. At 953 East Sahara Avenue about five minutes away from the Strip, **Serge's Show-girl Wigs** inventories over 7,000 hairpieces and wigs, made from both

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synthetic materials and human hair. In addition to serving the local showgirl population, Serge's Showgirl Wigs also specializes in assisting chemotherapy patients. A catalog and additional information can be obtained by calling **2** 702-732-1015 or 800-947-9447 or visiting **www.showgirlwigs.com**.

ETHNIC SHOPPING At the southwest corner of Spring Mountain and Wynn Roads is **Las Vegas Chinatown Plaza** with 22 outlets (2702-221-8448; **www.lvchinatown.com**). This location offers Asian theme shopping and restaurants.

For Native American art, crafts, books, music, and attire, try the Las Vegas Indian Center at 2300 West Bonanza Boulevard (2702-647-5842; www.lasvegasindiancenter.org). And 25 minutes north of Las Vegas in Moapa, Nevada, you'll find the Moapa Tribal Enterprises Casino and Gift Center (2702-864-2600). Take I-15 north to Exit 75.

ZOOT SUITS No kidding. For the coolest threads in town, try **Valentino's Zootsuit Collection: Vintage Apparel & Collectibles** at 906 South 6th Street. If you only want to zoot up for a special occasion, rentals are available (2702-383-9555).

COSTUMES Halloween Experience (2 800-811-4877) at 5800 South Valley View features thousands of costumes, masks, and accessories yearround. The showroom is open Monday through Friday to the public and on weekends by special arrangement (2 702-740-4224). For "sextheme" apparel and costumes, try **Bare Essentials Fantasy Fashions** at 4029 West Sahara (2 702-247-4711). You'll find everything from dresses to G-strings. There's even a large selection of "bare essentials" for men. Some merchandise would be at home in suburbia, but some is strictly XXX. And speaking of XXX, that goes for sizes too.

SHOES If you have feet a helicopter could land on, you might want to check out **Leonard's Wide Shoes**, 3999 South Las Vegas Boulevard (2702-895-9993; **www.leonardswideshoes.com**). Leonard's specializes in W-I-D-E sizes, 5 to 13EE for women, and 6 to 18 (6E) for men. If smoking stunted your growth, increase your height with custommade platforms, boots, and high heels from **Red Shoes**, 4011 West Sahara, Unit 1 (2702-889-4442). For a great selection of cowboy boots, try **Cowtown Boots**, 2989 Paradise Road (2702-737-8469).

SEEING *the* **SIGHTS**

RESIDENTS OF LAS VEGAS ARE JUSTIFIABLY PROUD of their city and are quick to point out that it has much to offer besides gambling. Quality theater, college and professional sports, dance, concerts, art shows, museums, and film festivals contribute to making Las Vegas a truly great place to live. In addition, there is a diverse and colorful natural and historical heritage. What Las Vegas residents sometimes have a difficult time understanding, however, is that the average business and leisure traveler doesn't really give a big hoot. Las Vegas differs from Orlando and Southern California in that it does not have any bona fide tourist attractions except Hoover Dam. Nobody drives all the way to Las Vegas to take their children to visit the Guinness Book of Records exhibit. While there have always been some great places to detox from a long trade show or too many hours at the casino, they are totally peripheral in the minds of visitors. Las Vegas needs a legitimate, nongaming tourist draw, but the strange aggregation of little museums, factory tours, and mini–theme parks is not it.

In 1993, the opening of the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino and Grand Adventures Theme Park brought Las Vegas a little closer to penetrating the consciousness of the nongambling traveler, but, alas, the park was a dud. It limped along for eight years before shutting down in 2001. During the 1990s, Circus Circus opened a smaller theme park, Adventuredome, behind its main casino. For the most part, the new theme parks have made little impression on either the locals or the tourists. From 1997 through 2000, a number of Strip casinos, including Caesars Palace, the Stratosphere, New York-New York, the Sahara, and the Las Vegas Hilton, opened new attractions. They are, by and large, imaginative, visually appealing, and hightech. Some, like the Hilton's Star Trek attraction, would stand out as headliners in any theme park in the country. Others, while not up to Disney or Universal Studios standards, represent a giant leap forward for Las Vegas. Clearly, the competition learned a few things from MGM Grand's theme-park flop.

ADVENTUREDOME AT CIRCUS CIRCUS

TO FURTHER APPEAL TO THE FAMILY MARKET targeted by the MGM Grand Adventures Theme Park, Circus Circus opened a small but innovative amusement park in August of 1993. Situated directly behind the main hotel and casino, the park now goes by the name of Adventuredome. Architecturally compelling, the entire park is built two stories high atop the casino's parking structure and is totally enclosed by a huge glass dome. From the outside, the dome surface is reflective, mirroring its surroundings in hot tropical pink. Inside, however, the dome is transparent, allowing guests in the park to see out. Composed of a multilayer glass-and-plastic sandwich, the dome allows light in but blocks ultraviolet rays. The entire park is airconditioned and climate-controlled 365 days a year.

Adventuredome is a fun way to escape the heat of a Vegas summer day.

The park is designed to resemble a classic Western desert canyon. From top to bottom, hand-painted artificial rock is sculpted into caverns, pinnacles, steep cliffs, and buttes. A stream runs through the stark landscape, cascading over a 90-foot falls into a rippling blue-green

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pool. Set among the rock structures are the attractions: a roller coaster, a flume ride, an inverter ride, and Chaos, a spinning amusement that hauls riders randomly through three dimensions. There are also some rides for small children. Embellishing the scene are several life-sized animatronic dinosaurs, a re-creation of an archeological dig, a fossil wall, and a replica of a Pueblo cliff dwelling. There is also a small theater featuring magic and illusion. Finally, and inevitably, there is an electronic games arcade.

Adventuredome's premier attractions are the **Canyon Blaster**, the only indoor, double-loop, corkscrew roller coaster in the United States; the **Rim Runner**, a three-and-a-half-minute water-flume ride, and **Chaos**, a verticle Tilt-A-Whirl on steroids. Canyon Blaster and Rim Runner wind in, around, and between the rocks and cliffs. The flume ride additionally passes under the snouts of the dinosaurs.

Guests can reach the theme park by proceeding through the rear of the main casino to the entrance and ticket plaza situated on the mezzanine level. Circus Circus has changed the admission policy so many times we have lost track. You can choose between paying for each attraction individually (\$4 to \$6) or opting for an all-inclusive day pass (\$22.95 adults; \$14.95 juniors). For exact admission prices on the day of your visit, call **2** 702-794-3939 or visit **www.adven turedome.com.**

BELLAGIO ATTRACTIONS

THE BIG DRAW AT THE BELLAGIO is the **Gallery of Fine Art Exhibi**tion, which hosts temporary traveling exhibits. Tickets usually run about \$15 for adults, \$12 for children and seniors. For information, call **2** 702-693-7871 or visit www.bgfa.biz.

Bellagio's free outdoor spectacle is a choreographed **water-fountain show** presented on the lake in front of the hotel (which stretches the length of three football fields); Monday through Friday, every half hour from 3 p.m. until 8 p.m.; and Saturday and Sunday every half hour from noon to 8 p.m., and every 15 minutes from 8 p.m. until midnight. The five-minute production uses 1,200 fountains that blast streams of water as high as 200 feet. Almost 5,000 white lights and musical accompaniment by Sinatra, Pavarotti, and David Foster, among others, complete the picture. It's pleasant and fairy-like, but not necessarily something you should go out of your way to see.



LAS VEGAS HILTON ATTRACTIONS

THE HILTON OFFERS AN ATTRACTION called **Star Trek: The Experi**ence (www.startrekexp.com). You enter through a museum of *Star Trek* TV/movie memorabilia and props en route to a 18-minute Klingon Encounter that culminates in a four-minute space-flight simulation ride. The Hilton ride differs from other simulation attractions in that the field of vision seemingly surrounds the guests. In 2004, a sister *Star Trek* attraction, **Borg Invasion 4-D**. was added. In this one, the Borg attack your spaceship and chase you to an escape spacecraft (actually a theater) where you see a 3-D movie in which your spacecraft helps defeat the Borg. The special effects are good, but the plot is a little fuzzy to anyone not already familiar with the Borg. All you need to know, really, is that the Borg drill out your brain and inhabit your body. You can purchase tickets for each attraction individually or opt for a ticket that covers both.

Upon returning from your mission to far-flung reaches of the galaxy, you are welcomed back to this planet at the gift shop. **The History of the Future Museum** is a self-guided exhibit that you can enjoy at your own pace. Besides the museum, the *Klingon Encounter*, the *Borg Invasion*, and the gift shop, *Star Trek: The Experience* includes an electronic-games arcade, a restaurant, and a lounge.

Although the visuals on the simulator ride are a little fuzzy by modern standards, the overall experience, including *Borg Invasion 4-D*

(which offers several neat twists and surprises), earns *Star Trek* a first-place ranking among Las Vegas's attractions. Not wanting to detract from your enjoyment of *Star Trek*, we're not going to tell you what happens. Suffice it to say that it's extremely well done, and the total experience gives most Disney or Universal attractions a good run

for their money. Both *Klingon Encounter* and *Borg Invasion 4-D* are approximately 18 minutes long. Each experience is complete with live in-

teraction. If you happen to go when there is not much of a line, take time to check out the chronological history of the universe. The history show is open Sunday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–10 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.–11 p.m. Admission is \$34.99 for adults, \$31.99 for 12 and under/seniors, including tax. You can purchase tickets three days in advance only at the Star Trek box office (at en-

unofficial TIP The best times to see Star Trek: The Experience and Borg Invasion 4-D are on weekdays from 12:30 to 2 p.m. or after 4:30 p.m.

trance). For information, call 2 702-732-5111 or 888-GO-BOLDLY.

LUXOR ATTRACTIONS

THE LUXOR OFFERS TWO CONTINUOUSLY RUNNING, gated (paid admission) attractions inside the pyramid on the level above the casino. Designed by Douglas Trumbull, creator of the *Back to the Future* ride at Universal Studios, *In Search of the Obelisk* (in the Egyptian ruins) consists of two motion simulators: a runaway freight elevator that gives you the unusual (and disconcerting!) sensation of plummeting a fair distance, and a runaway tour tram in the bowels of a subterranean world. The second attraction, a seven-story IMAX 3-D theater with a 30,000-watt sound system, runs 24 hours a day and costs about \$10.

unofficial TIP At Star Trek: The Experience, the entrance from "Deep Space Promenade" is free.

MANDALAY BAY ATTRACTIONS

THE BIG DRAW AT MANDALAY BAY is the **Shark Reef** aquarium featuring sharks, rays, sea turtles, venomous stonefish, and dozens of other denizens of the deep playing house in a 1.3-million-gallon tank. If you don't like fish, separate exhibits showcase rare golden crocodiles and pythons. Something for everybody, you might say. The Shark Reef audio tour is open daily from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m. Admission is about \$16 for adults, \$10 for children ages 12 and under, and ages 4 and under are free. Additional information is available at **2** 702-632-4555.

MGM GRAND ATTRACTIONS

THE MGM GRAND HOSTS a **tri-story 5,000-square-foot lion habitat** that houses up to five of the big cats. The lions are on duty from 11 a.m. until 10 p.m. daily and admission is free. There is also, of course, an MGM Lion logo shop and the opportunity (for \$20) to be photographed with a lion.

MIRAGE AND T. I. ATTRACTIONS

NOT ONLY ARE THE MIRAGE AND T. I. ATTRACTIONS of top quality, they are also free. The two biggies are the pirate battle at Treasure Island and the exploding volcano at the Mirage. The disco naval battle takes place every 90 minutes, weather permitting, beginning at 7 p.m., with the last performance at 10 p.m. (11:30 p.m. during warm-weather months) nightly. In 2003, as part of an image makeover, T. I. wrote the British out of the script (they always lost anyway) and replaced them with "a group of sexy women" called The Sirens of T. I., who now fight the pirates. In the new production, the pirates are apparently so disconcerted by all the leg and cleavage that they do not put up a very robust fight. The best vantage points are along the rope rail on the entrance bridge to the casino. On weekdays, claim your spot 15 to 20 minutes before show time. On weekends, make that 35 to 45 minutes. If you do not insist on having a *perfect* vantage point, you can see most everything just by joining the crowd at the last minute. If you are short, or have children in your party, it's probably worth the effort to arrive early and nail down a position by the rail.

The volcano at the Mirage goes off about every 15 minutes from 7 p.m. until midnight, if the weather is good and the winds are light. In the winter, when it gets dark earlier, the volcano starts popping off at 6 p.m. Usually, because of the frequency of performances (eruptions?), getting a good, rail-side vantage point is not too difficult. If you want to combine the volcano with a meal, grab a window table at the second-floor restaurant in the Casino Royale across the street. Dinner here costs \$10 to \$20, though, so these are not cheap seats.

The Mirage has some of *Siegfried and Roy's* white tigers on display in a well-executed, natural habitat exhibit. In addition to the tigers, the Mirage maintains a nice dolphin exhibit. Both are open daily, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. The exhibit costs \$15 for adults and \$10 for children ages 4–12. (Children ages 3 and under get in free.) For the price of admission you can also take in the **Secret Garden** next to the dolphin habitat, a small zoo with Siegfried and Roy's white and Bengal tigers, white lions, an Indian elephant, and more (the Secret Garden tigers retire at 3:30 p.m.). For more information about Mirage, call **2** 702-791-7111. For more information about Treasure Island, call **2** 702-894-7111.

PARIS LAS VEGAS ATTRACTIONS

THE BIG DRAW AT PARIS IS, OF COURSE, the 540-foot-tall replica of the **Eiffel Tower**. Requiring 10 million pounds of steel and more than two years to erect, the Las Vegas version is a little more than half the size of the original. Just below the top (at 460 feet) is an observation deck accessible via two ten-passenger glass elevators. It costs a stiff nine bucks to ride, but that's just the beginning of the story. You must first line up to buy tickets. Your ticket will show a designated time to report to the escalator (that's right: *escalator*. You must take an escalator to reach the elevators). If you're late you'll be turned away, and there are no refunds. The escalator will deposit you in yet another line where you'll wait for the elevator. The elevators run from

10 a.m. until 1 a.m. except when it's raining.

Though all this hopping from line to line is supposed to take 5 to 20 minutes, we found 40 to 60 minutes more the norm. Here's the rub. The observation deck holds fewer than 100 persons, and once people get up there, they can stay as long as they want. Hence, when the observation deck is at max capacity, nobody can go up unless someone comes down. Because the tower affords such a great view of Bellagio across the street, gridlock ensues several times nightly while people squeeze on the observation overlong to watch Bellagio's dancing-waters show.

SAHARA ATTRACTIONS

THE NEWLY RENOVATED AND EXPANDED Sahara has its own entry in the raging simulator-ride craze. Called **Cyber Speedway**, the attraction draws

unofficial TIP If accessing Paris's observation platform seems like too much work, take the separate elevator that serves the restaurant and bar on the 11th floor of the tower. You don't need reservations to patronize the bar, but you must be nicely dressed (that is, jackets recommended for men and absolutely no jeans, T-shirts, tank tops, or sandals). The bar is open nightly from 5 p.m. until midnight.

its inspiration from Indy car racing. You can elect to drive an Indy car in an interactive simulated race, or alternatively, you can strap in as a passive passenger for a 3-D, motion-simulator movie race. The interactive race cars respond exactly like a real race car to braking, acceleration, and steering control. You can even choose between driving a manual or automatic (recommended) transmission. Your race pits you against other drivers and lasts about eight minutes. There are several racecourses to choose from, ranging from an easy oval to a simulated Grand Prix course through the streets of Las Vegas. You start by choosing a racecourse and then proceed to a video orientation briefing where you learn how to get into the car, adjust the seat and steering wheel, turn on the engine, and work the transmission, accelerator, and brakes. While none of the above is especially complicated, most people require a little coaching or assistance when they actually get into their car.

Once your race begins, driving the course at high speed demands intense concentration. If you have a simulated crash, you will be directed to the simulated pits for repairs. The visuals on the screen in front of your car are reasonably good but come to you at numbing speed. If you are sensitive to motion sickness, the Indy car simulator will leave your stomach spinning.

In our opinion, you need to race once just to understand how everything works. After you get the hang of it, you will enjoy the experience more and also be more competitive. Start out on a simple course with an automatic transmission and work up to more demanding courses. After each race you will be given a computergenerated report that tells how you finished, and it provides some comparative information on your general performance. Each race you drive costs \$10.

Speed, the roller coaster at the Sahara, opened in June of 2000. You race down 1,350 feet of track, including one 360-degree loop and a harrowing 224-foot climb straight up a tower. From the tower's top, you'll roll *backwards* back to the starting point. The round-trip takes 48 seconds. Special electromagnetic fields slingshot riders from 0 to 40 miles per hour and again from 35 to 70 miles per hour in two seconds flat. Yikes! Speed is flat out the fastest roller coaster in town, and is open Sunday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–midnight and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.–1 a.m. Rides cost about \$10 each or \$19.95 all day, call **☎** 702-737-2111 on the day you go.

STRATOSPHERE ATTRACTIONS

THE STRATOSPHERE TOWER STANDS 1,149-FEET TALL and offers an unparalleled view of Las Vegas. You can watch aircraft take off simultaneously from McCarran International Airport and Nellis Air Force Base. To the south, the entire Las Vegas Strip is visible. To the west, Red Rock Canyon seems practically within spitting distance. North of the Tower, downtown glitters beneath the canopy of the Fremont Street Experience. By day, the rich geology of the Colorado Basin and Spring Mountains merge in an earthtone and evergreen tapestry. At night, the dark desert circumscribes a blazing strand of twinkling neon.

A 12-level pod crowns the futuristic contours of three immense buttresses that form the Tower's base. Level 12, the highest level, serves as the boarding area for the **High Roller**, a roller coaster; X **Scream**, a dangle-daddy; **Insanity**, a sort of Tilt-A-Whirl in the sky; and the **Big Shot**, an acceleration/free-fall thrill ride. Levels 11 and 10 are not open to the public. An outdoor observation deck is Level 9, with an indoor observation deck directly beneath it on Level 8. Level 7 features a 220-seat lounge, and Level 6 houses an upscale revolving restaurant. Levels 4 and 3 contain meeting rooms, and the remaining levels—1, 2, and 5—are not open to the public.



The view from the Tower is so magnificent that we recommend experiencing it at different times of the day and night. Sunset is particularly stunning, and a storm system rolling in over the mountains is a sight you won't quickly forget. Be sure to try both the indoor and outdoor observation decks.

The rides are a mixed bag. The first roller coaster was such a snoozer that the Stratosphere re-engineered it only two months after it opened and then closed it indefinitely because of "technical problems." When the coaster is working, it basically lumbers around the circumference of the pod. Visibility, the only thing this coaster has going for it, is limited by the tilt of the tracks, the safety restraints, and other people in the car. All sizzle and no steak, this ride only works in the press release.

Where the High Roller is hype at best, the Big Shot is cardiac arrest. Sixteen people at a time are seated at the base of the skyward projecting needle that tops the pod. You are blasted 160 feet straight up in the air at 45 miles per hour and then allowed to partially freefall back down. At the apex of the ascent, it feels as if your seatbelt and restraint have mysteriously evaporated, leaving you momentarily hovering 100-plus stories up in the air. The ride lasts only about a half-minute, but unless you're accustomed to being shot from a cannon, that's more than enough.

If you're having difficulty forming a mental image of the Big Shot, picture the carnival game where macho guys swing a sledgehammer, propelling a metal sphere up a vertical shaft. At the top of the shaft is a bell. If the macho man drives the sphere high enough to ring the bell, he wins a prize. Got the picture? OK, on the Big Shot, you are the metal sphere.

In X Scream, you ride in a large gondola attached to a huge steal arm. The arm dangles the gondola over the edge of the Tower, then releases it to slide forward a few feet as if the gondola is coming unglued from the arm. All and all, it's pretty dull.

The fourth ride, Insanity, is a little harder to describe. It consists of an arm that extends 64 feet over the edge of the Tower. Passengers are suspended from the arm in beefed-up swing seats and spun at up to three Gs. As the ride spins faster and faster, the riders are propelled up to an angle of 70 degrees, at which point they're pretty much looking straight down. The Stratosphere touts the ride as providing "a great view of historic Downtown Las Vegas." The elevators to the Tower are at the end of the shopping arcade on the second floor of the Stratosphere, above the casino. Tickets for the Tower can be purchased at the ticket center in the elevator lobby on the second floor or at various places in the casino. Tower tickets cost about \$10. Packages including the Tower and the rides run from \$12 to \$25, depending on the number of rides included. You can purchase individual tickets for the rides at a cost of \$4 to \$8, in addition to your Tower admission.

Expect big crowds at the Tower on weekends. Once up top, the observation levels are congested, as are the lounge, snack bar,

unofficial TIP If you must see the Tower on a weekend, go in the morning as soon as it opens. restrooms, and gift shops. If you want to try the rides, expect to wait an additional 20 to 40 minutes for each on weekends. When you've had your fill of the Tower and are ready to descend, you'll have another long wait before boarding the elevator. However, if you walk down to the restaurant (you'll take the emer-

gency staircase; ask an attendant where to find it), you can catch the down elevator with virtually no wait at all.

Another way to see the Tower without a long wait is to make a reservation for the **Top of the World** restaurant. To be safe, reservations should be made at least two weeks in advance. When you arrive, inform the greeter in the elevator lobby that you have a dinner reservation and give him your confirmation number. You will be ushered immediately into an express elevator. The restaurant is pricey, but the food is good and the view is a knockout, and you do not have to pay the Tower admission. If you want to try the Big Shot or the High Roller, purchase ride tickets before taking the elevator to the restaurant. Finally, be aware that most folks dress up to eat at the Top of the World.

On weekdays, it is much easier to visit the Stratosphere Tower. Monday through Thursday, except at sunset, the wait to ascend is usually short. Waits for the rides are also short. Tower hours are Sunday to Thursday, 10 a.m.–1 a.m., and Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m.–2 a.m. For more information, call 2702-380-7777.

VENETIAN ATTRACTIONS

LIKE NEW YORK-NEW YORK DOWN THE STRIP, it can be argued that the entire Venetian is an attraction, and there's a lot to gawk at even if you limit your inspection to the streetside Italian icons and the Grand Canal Shoppes. But there's more. The Venetian is host to the first **Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum** in the United States. Covering two floors and 28,000 square feet, the museum is about half the size of the original London exhibit (2702-862-7800; **www.mtvegas. com**). Approximately 100 wax figures are displayed in theme settings. Some, like Frank Sinatra and Tom Jones, were central to the development of the entertainment scene in Las Vegas. The museum opens daily at 11 a.m. Admission is \$21 per adult and \$10 per child.

The Venetian also hosts the **Guggenheim Heritage Museum**, which presents rotating exhibits from the Guggenheim collection. In 2005, the museum showcased *The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt*. Admission is \$19.50 for adults, \$16.50 for seniors and Nevada residents, \$14.50 for students with ID, \$14.50 for children ages 6–12, and children 5 and under get in for free. Admission discount coupons are routinely available in the hotel lobby. A portable audio guide is included in the price of ticket. For additional information, call **2** 702-414-2440 or visit **www.venetian.com** or **www.guggenheimlasvegas.org**. Museum hours are 9:30 a.m.–8:30 p.m. daily.

A WORD ABOUT STRIP ROLLER COASTERS

THERE ARE NOW FOUR ROLLER COASTERS on the Strip. After careful sampling, we have decided that, although shorter, the **Canyon Blaster** at **Adventuredome** offers a better ride than the more visually appealing **Manhattan Express** at **New York–New York.** The Canyon Blaster is tight and oh-so-smooth. The Manhattan Express, on the other hand, goes along in fits and starts, all of which are jerky and rough. It does, however, provide a great view of the Strip as it zips in and out of the various New York–New York buildings.

The Canyon Blaster at Adventuredome is the *Unofficial* favorite of the Vegas Strip coasters.

Speed, at the Sahara, lives up to its name, but is overpriced at \$10. The other coaster, the High Roller at the Stratosphere, is a dud.

FREE STUFF

IN ADDITION TO FREE ATTRACTIONS described earlier, two other "attractions" worthy of your consideration are the Fremont Street Experience and the Rio's Masquerade in the Sky. The Fremont Street Experience is an electric light show produced on a futuristic canopy over the Fremont Street pedestrian concourse downtown. Shows begin at 4 p.m. and run about once an hour through 10 p.m. on weekdays, and midnight on weekends. The show at the Rio is a sort of musical Mardi Gras parade complete with floats, acrobats, musicians, and dancers, all circling the casino suspended from a track on the ceiling (who thinks this stuff up?). Both shows are free. A third free attraction is the water-and-laser show at Caesars Palace at the Forum Shops. This production, staged on the hour daily beginning at 10 a.m., combines animatronic statues and fire drama. The Tropicana hosts Air Play, in which slot machines serve as a makeshift stage for acts performed by singers, dancers, and aerialists who spin and fly inches above the machines; show times are daily at 11 a.m. and 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 p.m. Outdoor productions at Bellagio, T. I., and the Mirage (all described earlier) are also free of charge.

REALLY EXPENSIVE THRILLS

FOR \$99 TO \$3,000, YOU CAN FLY a foot off the ground at the **Richard Petty Driving Experience.** Here you can get behind the wheel of a 600horsepower NASCAR Winston Cup–style stock car. The Driving Experience is located at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway. Call **2** 702-643-4343 or visit **www.1800bepetty.com** for additional information.

OTHER AREA ATTRACTIONS

THE LOCAL VISITOR GUIDES DESCRIBE nearby attractions and sites pretty honestly. If you have children, try the **Scandia Family Fun Center**, **2** 702-364-0071, for miniature golf and the **Lied Discovery Children's Museum**, **2** 702-382-5437, for a truly rewarding afternoon of exploration and enjoyable education. Right across the street from the Lied is the **Las Vegas Natural History Museum**, **2** 702-384-3466.

Near scenic Red Rock, a curious side trip just outside of Las Vegas is **Bonnie Springs Old Nevada.** This rustic recreation of an Old West town features several trinket stores, a saloon, two museums, a restaurant, petting zoo, and guided horse rides. The hoot, though, that goes with this holler is the low-budget melodrama. The kicker is the real, live Western hanging that takes place at noon, 2:30, and 5 p.m. "You can't hang me, sheriff!" "Why not?!" "Cause yer wife'll miss me!" Cost to get in—\$7 per carload weekdays, \$10 on weekends or holidays; **2** 702-875-4191; **www.bonniesprings.com.** Real rope, real fun.

Adults who wax nostalgic over vintage automobiles should check out the **Auto Collection at the Imperial Palace**, **2** 702-794-3174, where more than 200 antique and historically significant vehicles are on display. The collection is well worth the admission price of \$6.95, \$3 for seniors and children under 12, though discount coupons are readily available in the local visitor guides and at the Imperial Palace casino.

The Liberace Foundation and Museum, ☎ 702-798-5595, www. liberace.com, on East Tropicana Avenue, is one of Las Vegas's most popular tourist attractions. The exhibit chronicles the music, life, and excesses of Liberace. Though possibly the most professionally organized and well-presented celebrity museum in the United States, it's definitely more fun if you are a Liberace fan (\$12.50, adults; \$8.50 seniors 65 and older and students with a valid ID ages 11 and older, children ages 10 and under are free).

If you want to pay tribute to the King, you'll find his most elaborate temple at the **Elvis-a-Rama Museum**, **2** 702-309-7200, 3401 Industrial Road. The gift shop sells every kind of Elvis kitsch imaginable, and the museum has a moderately decent collection of Presley memorabilia. There's also an impersonator show in the museum's theater.

The most unique museum in Las Vegas is the **Atomic Testing Museum**, which chronicles through exhibits and film the history of the NevadaTest Site where atomic bombs were detonated only 65 miles from Las Vegas. Open daily, the museum is located at 755 East Flamingo Road. Admission is \$10. Call 2702-794-5151 for more information.

Adjacent to the MGM Grand is the **Showcase**, a shopping, dining, and entertainment venue with a giant Sega arcade, an eight-screen movie complex, and the World of Coca-Cola—a 150-foot Coke bot-tle housing two elevators.

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS NEAR LAS VEGAS

IN THE MEXICAN PAVILION OF EPCOT at Walt Disney World, tourists rush obliviously past some of the most rare and valuable artifacts of the Spanish colonial period in order to take a short, uninspired boat ride. Many Las Vegas visitors, likewise, never look beyond the Strip. Like the Epcot tourists, they are missing something pretty special.

Las Vegas's geological and topographical diversity, in combination with its stellar outdoor resources, provides the best opportunities for worthwhile sightseeing. So different and varied are the flora, fauna, and geology at each distinct level of elevation that traveling from the banks of Lake Mead to the high, ponderosa pine forests of Mount Charleston encompasses (in 90 minutes) as much environmental change as driving from Mexico to Alaska.

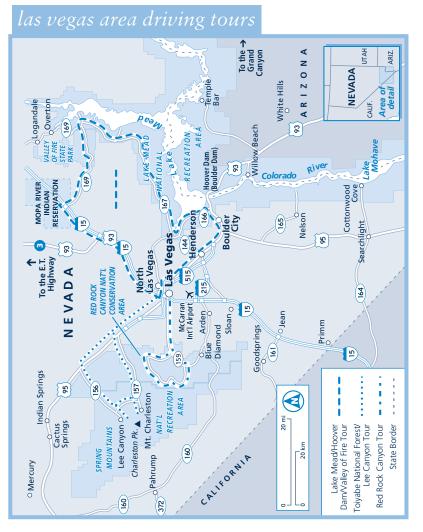
Red Rock Canyon, the **Valley of Fire**, the **Mojave Desert**, and the **Black Canyon of the Colorado River** are world-class scenic attractions. In combination with the summits of the **Spring Mountains**, they comprise one of the most dramatically diversified natural areas on the North American continent. So excuse us if we leave coverage of the Guinness World of Records Museum to the local visitor's guides.

Driving Tours

For those who wish to sample the natural diversity of the Las Vegas area, we recommend the following driving tours. The trips begin and end in Las Vegas and take from two hours to all day, depending on the number of stops and side trips. The driving tours can conveniently be combined with picnicking, hiking, horseback riding, and sightseeing. If you have the bucks (\$70 to \$200 per person, depending on the package), we also recommend taking one of the air/ground tours of the Grand Canyon.

i. Mount charleston, kyle canyon, lee canyon, and the toiyabe national forest $\ 4\ to\ 6\ hours$

If you have had more than enough desert, this is the drive for you. Head north out of Las Vegas on US 95 and turn left on NV 157. Leave the desert and head into the pine and fir forest of the Spring Mountains. Continue up Kyle Canyon to the Mount Charleston Inn (a good place for lunch) and from there to the end of the canyon. Backtracking a few miles, take NV 158 over the Robbers Roost and into Lee Canyon. When you hit NV 156, turn left and proceed to the Lee Canyon Ski



Area. For the return trip to Las Vegas, simply take NV 156 out of the mountains until it intersects US 95. Turn south (right) on US 95 to return to Las Vegas. If you start feeling your oats once you get into the mountains, there are some nice short hikes (less than a mile) to especially scenic overlooks. If you are so inclined, there is also horseback riding, and there are some great places for picnics.

2. RED ROCK CANYON SCENIC LOOP 1.5 to 3 hours

Red Rock Canyon is a stunningly beautiful desert canyonland only 20 minutes from Las Vegas. A scenic loop winds among imposing, rustred Aztec sandstone towers. There is a visitor center, as well as hiking trails and picnic areas. With very little effort you can walk to popular rock-climbing sites and watch the action. From Las Vegas, head west on Charleston Boulevard (NV 159) directly to Red Rock Canyon. The scenic loop is 13 miles (all one-way), with numerous places to stop and enjoy the rugged vistas. The loop road brings you back to NV 159. Turn left and return to town via Charleston Boulevard.

3. Lake mead and the valley of fire $5 ext{ to } 8 ext{ hours}$

This drive takes you to the Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Valley of Fire State Park. How long the drive takes depends on how many side trips you make. If you plan to visit Hoover Dam during your visit, it will be convenient to work it into this itinerary. The same is true if you wish to tour the Ethel M (as in Mars bars) Chocolate Factory and Cactus Garden.

Head south out of Las Vegas on US 95/93 (detour west on Sunset Road to visit the Chocolate Factory and Cactus Garden), continuing straight on US 93 to Boulder City. From Boulder City continue to the Hoover Dam on US 93 (if desired) or turn left on the Lakeshore Scenic Drive (NV 166) to continue the drive. Travel through the washes and canyons above the lake until you reach the Northshore Scenic Drive (NV 147 and NV 167). Turn right, continuing to the right on NV 167 when the routes split. If you wish, you can descend to the lake at Callville Bay, Echo Bay, or Overton Beach. If you are hungry, Callville Bay and Echo Bay have restaurants and lounges. Overton Beach has a snack bar, but Echo Bay has the best beach.

Near Overton Beach, turn left to NV 169 and follow signs for Valley of Fire State Park. Bear left on NV 169 away from Overton. Valley of Fire features exceptional desert canyon scenery, a number of panoramic vistas, unusual and colorful sandstone formations, and Indian petroglyphs. A short two-mile scenic loop makes it easy to see many of the valley's most interesting formations. If you have time, take the road past the visitor center and climb to the Rainbow Vista overlook. From here a new highway accesses some of the most extraordinary terrain in the American Southwest. After the loop (and any other detours that interest you), continue west on NV 169 until it intersects I-15. Head south to return to Las Vegas.

Hoover Dam

Hoover Dam is definitely worth seeing. There is a film, a guided tour, and a theater presentation on the Colorado River drainage, as well as some static exhibits. Try to go on a Monday, Thursday, or Friday. Arrive no later than 9 a.m., when the visitor area opens, and do the tour first (\$10, \$8 seniors, and \$5 students). After 9:30 a.m. or so, long lines form for the tour, especially on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The dam is closed to visitors at 5 p.m. A ban on visitors inside the dam, initiated following 9/11, was subsequently lifted, but there are security checkpoints on US 93 leading to the dam.

Other than chauffeured transportation, there is no advantage in going to Hoover Dam on a bus tour. You will still have to wait in line for the tour of the dam and to see the other presentations. If you are the sort of person who tours quickly, you probably will have a lot of time to kill waiting for the rest of the folks to return to the bus.

The Canyons of the Southwest

Las Vegas tourist magazines claim **Bryce Canyon** (400 miles roundtrip; **2** 435-834-5322) and **Zion Canyon**, **Utah** (350 miles round-trip; **2** 435-772-3256), as well as the **Grand Canyon**, **Arizona** (**2** 928-638-7888) as local attractions. We recommend all of the canyons if you are on an extended drive through the Southwest. If your time is limited, however, you might consider taking one of the air day-tours that visit the canyons from Las Vegas. Running between \$100 and \$400 per passenger, the excursions follow one of two basic formats: air only, or air and ground combined. Some tour companies offer discounted fares for a second person if the first person pays full fare. Also, discount coupons are regularly available in *What's On* and *Today in Las Vegas*, distributed free of charge in most hotels.

Almost all canyon tours include a pass over Lake Mead (2702-293-8907) and Hoover Dam (2702-294-3517). The trip involving the least commitment of time and money is a round-trip flyover of one or more of the canyons. A Grand Canyon flyover, for example, take-off to touchdown, takes about two hours. While flying over any of the canyons is an exhilarating experience, air traffic restrictions concerning the Grand Canyon severely limit what air passengers can see. Flying over the other canyons is somewhat less restricted.

If you want to get a real feel for the Grand Canyon particularly, go with one of the air/ground excursions. The Grand Canyon is many times more impressive from the ground than from the air.

The air/ground trips fly over the Grand Canyon and then land. Passengers are transferred to a bus that motors them along the rim of the canyon, stopping en route for lunch. Excursions sometimes include one or more of the other major canyons in addition to the Grand Canyon, and they last from seven to ten hours. Many flights offer multilingual translations of the tour narrative.

All of the aircraft used will feel very small to anyone accustomed to flying on big commercial jets. Most of the planes carry between 8 and 20 passengers. The captain often performs the duties of both flight attendant and pilot. Each passenger usually has a window, though some of the windows are pretty small. Cabin conditions for the most part are spartan, and there is not usually a toilet on board.

Because small aircraft sometimes get bounced around and buffeted by air currents, we recommend taking an over-the-counter motion-sickness medication if you think you might be adversely affected. The other thing you want to do for sure is to relieve your bladder *immediately* before boarding.