

How to Feel Like a Las Vegas Family

If you sprang for this guide, you no doubt have Las Vegas on the brain. Is it a good family destination? You're probably hoping the reply is yes. As it happens, the question is a lot more straightforward than the answer.

Las Vegas offers everything a family could want: world-class resorts; eye-popping neon; ersatz replicas of Egypt, Venice, Paris, ancient Rome, King Arthur's castle, and New York City; the most dynamic dining scene in America; top-notch entertainment for all ages; sports and outdoor recreational opportunities rivaled by few; and an assortment of attractions ranging from exploding volcanoes to the Hoover Dam. To ice the cake, all of this is available for a fraction of what you'd pay at most other destinations. Without spending a nickel in the casinos, you'll discover more to see and do in Las Vegas than a family can cram into 6 weeks.

But there, you see, is the rub. For many parents (perhaps including you), Las Vegas is on the short list for family vacation destinations precisely because mom and dad want to enjoy a little gambling. Gambling, after all, is what subsidizes those bargain hotel rooms, free pirate battles, and gut-busting buffets. It would seem almost un-American not to spend some time in the casino. Once you've started down that path, however, you're well on the way to taking the "family" out of "family vacation."

Gambling and spending time as a family are mutually incompatible. Children are not allowed in casinos. Period. So if you want to play some blackjack, the children will have to be someplace else. Where would that be exactly? Well, the 12-and-up crowd will eke out a couple hours a day at the pool (some pools require a parent present for children younger than 16); spend as much on buffets, burgers, and snacks as your budget allows; and then go cruising. This last consists of roaming up and down the Strip or Fremont Street ducking into arcades, gift shops, and hotels, riding the monorail, and checking out the freebie sex brochures available on street corners. Though cruising is good exercise, quite educational (every imaginable form of humanity is on display), and definitely horizon expanding, you might not be altogether pleased with the discoveries your children make.

For children aged 11 years and younger, your options are even more constrained. One spouse can watch the kids while the other gambles, or you can plop the kids in day care (generally not available on the Strip or Downtown), or hire an in-room sitter. If you pick up the tab and sign some waivers, a number of in-room sitters will even take your kids out for sightseeing or other activities. The problem with all of these alternatives, however, is that they turn your family vacation into an occasionally overlapping medley of solitary pursuits. You've become, in effect, just like all the other adults in town—a person who has come to Las Vegas to get away from children.

Can you have it both ways? Of course. After all, it's essentially a matter of degree. Even at Walt Disney World parents hire sitters in order to enjoy an occasional adult night out. Problem is, in Las Vegas it's very easy to let that adult evening expand into an adult vacation with your grown-up agenda supplanting the family one.

WHO LOVES YOU, BABY?

Possibly the most effective PR campaign ever launched on behalf of Las Vegas was the **Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA)** broadside of the early '90s that attempted to recast Las Vegas as a family destination. Today, more than a decade later, the misconceptions planted by that nifty piece of marketing still run rampant.

LVCVA had a couple of objectives. First, it wanted bodies to fill all those hotel rooms that sat empty except on weekends. Second, it sought to make gambling seem more mainstream and wholesome, sort of like bowling. Because family vacations are generally a few days longer than the average Las Vegas stay, and because a high percentage of families travel during the hot summer (historically Las Vegas's slowest time of year), an ad campaign targeting families seemed like a perfect strategy for boosting occupancy rates and visitors' average length of stay.

LVCVA's logic seemed reasonable to most outsiders and was buttressed by the opening of the Excalibur, a resort that, like its older sister Circus Circus, actually pursued the family trade. Coming on line at about the same time was the new MGM Grand Resort & Casino with its on-site Grand Adventures theme park. The message could not have been clearer: "Families! Las Vegas is the place for you!" Unfortunately, though the hype for the new theme park was world-class, the park itself was a total disaster. And while on the surface it appeared that the MGM Grand was targeting families, its actual position was one of confused ambivalence, an ambivalence that was resolved pretty quickly in the wake of the dud

theme park. Of course, by the time these events had transpired, LVCVA had long since bought into its own press releases.

Though LVCVA's family campaign seemed cogent enough and was successful in stimulating a lot of families to consider Las Vegas, there was a very big pea under the proverbial mattress. It seems that LVCVA had failed to solicit the support of the casinos, and that likewise it had failed to take the views of the Las Vegas bread-and-butter adult visitor into account.

As for the resorts, the last thing they wanted was a bunch of kids tearing around the casino and roaming up and down the Strip. The casinos *had* bothered to consult their regular customers. These folks responded resoundingly and unambiguously that they came to Las Vegas to have an adult experience. As one recreational gambler put it, "When we want to be around kids we'll go to Disneyland." Looking at it from another angle, LVCVA failed to notice that there was no hospitality infrastructure to support a large population of vacationing families. When it launched its campaign, there were only two resorts that solicited family business. That should have been a clue. Today, more than a dozen years later, there are still only the same two resorts—Excalibur and Circus Circus—that greet families with a warm smile. As for LVCVA, it now works more cooperatively with casinos and pays more attention to the repeat adult visitor. To make amends for letting the "Families Welcome" monster out of the bag, LVCVA runs ads and commercials that depict Las Vegas as a lusty, 24-hour-a-day den of iniquity where adults can find just about any kind of action they're looking for.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For you, two questions are paramount: 1) What are the practical implications of not being wanted by the casinos; and 2) Can you have a great family vacation in Las Vegas? We'll take them one at a time.

In practical terms, casino resorts are open to the public. They may not want you, but they won't turn you away either. And once you're there they'll treat you cordially, just like any other guest. The business logic is straightforward. Once you've arrived, they want you to have a good experience, to recommend the resort to others (preferably to adults), and hopefully to come back someday without the children. Security will be none too gentle if they catch your kids in the casino, and other guests will demonstrate their displeasure if your little ones are disruptive at the pool or in other public areas.

If, however, your children are generally well behaved and comfortable around adults, you can expect smooth sailing. Be aware that casinos aren't the only game in town. There are also dozens of nongaming hotels and motels in Las Vegas. These properties range from budget to luxury, and, unlike the casinos, will be happy to have your entire family's business. You won't be able to sneak down to the craps table in the middle of the night, but you'll enjoy certain other benefits, such as easy access to your car, that are absent from the product mix of the large casino resorts.

On to question two. You can most definitely enjoy a whale of a vacation in Las Vegas if your real objective is to have fun as a family. The way to accomplish this, however, is to commit to being together, or, expressed differently, to pretty much swear off gambling. Go to Las Vegas with the attitude that you'll let the grinds and high rollers subsidize your

bargain four-star resort, your endless buffets, and your lush Disney-esque swimming pool. The casinos are full of people busily losing money. Ride their coattails. Let them pick up the tab for the pirate battles, exploding volcanoes, and dancing fountains. Allow their losses to turn your beer budget into a champagne vacation.

BRING IT ON

Las Vegas is designed to separate you from your money, whether by gambling—the preferred manner—or spending, which does not offer quite as high a profit margin for proprietors. The malls of the resorts and hotels, as discussed in chapter 9, “Shopping for the Whole Family,” are, for the most part, over-the-top castles of commerce. Though the city's exotic hotels are low priced in comparison to rooms in other destination locations, there are attractions (reviewed in chapters 6, 7, and 9) such as roller coaster and gondola rides, aquariums, dolphin habitats, IMAX movies, arcades, Humvee tours of the desert, simulated weightless flights, and numerous other (kid and adult) magnets that will nibble away at your vacation budget. That said, while some of Las Vegas's memorable experiences aren't exactly cheap, you can definitely have an amazing time whether you are on a budget-conscious vacation or a price-be-damned adventure.

Along with visiting the glitzy tourist attractions, consider discovering the city's past and present through its cultural offerings (also discussed in chapter 7), many of which are offered in settings that are a pleasant change from the man-made environments of the casino hotels. Hoover Dam, the Mormon Fort, and the Atomic Testing Museum obviously provide very different views of the area than what you can garner “just” from the Strip.

The history and culture of Las Vegas are explored not only in museums and monuments, but also with diverse outdoor happenings. Rodeos, recreations of posse shootouts, and festivals celebrating the different traditions of the area's settlers help families explore Las Vegas's past. During the summer, there are opportunities to see classic family films screened outdoors under the stars. Nearby Nellis Air Force Base provides a chance to watch fighter jets up close, while those inclined toward the terpsichorean arts can see the ballet and/or a luau. Athletically inclined families can race BMX bikes and sports cars, or participate in or simply watch any number of indoor and outdoor sports. We were reminded by several locals that "kids under 12 fish free," meaning that fishing licenses are not required for that age group to try their hand at the fishing holes around town as well as at giant Lake Mead, which features fishing along with a slew of other water-related recreation. See chapters 6, 7, and 10 for more information on the many available activities and experiences in and around Las Vegas.

All that activity can build up an appetite, and though Las Vegas can be a gourmet's paradise of foie gras with chocolate sauce—something we actually saw on one restaurant's menu—feeding the kids something they'll like is no problem because every Strip hotel has a food court with a variety of quick meals and fast food. There are also the inevitable buffets and round-the-clock coffee shops, where your kids should be able to find *something* they'll like. We've made it a point to consider your family when reviewing the restaurants in chapter 6. Theme restaurants are a big draw here, especially for boys who can be coddled, entertained, *and* fed by the likes of Rainforest Cafe, Harley-Davidson, or ESPN. And while some fancy restaurants ban children under 5, others welcome children

of all ages, going beyond offering booster chairs to actually making custom dishes for the little ones. Vegetarian or vegan family members will also find something for their dietary concerns on almost every menu.

Being a vegetarian in Vegas is easy, but being a teenager is always difficult, and in Vegas, it can be especially hard. Unless you are 21, you are not allowed on the casino floor, and if you look underage, trust us, you will be carded. There are less than a handful of all-age nightclubs, and none of those are located in the actual Las Vegas area. Teens and 'tweens are too old for day care at most hotels, yet too young to be allowed alone in the pool areas. They are not allowed on the Strip after 9pm, or in arcades unescorted during the late night/early morning hours. But do not despair; teens who live in Vegas manage to have plenty of fun, and so can yours. In fact, even the grumbling Goth, rebellious rocker, and truculent teen should find something (they can choose from the likes of huge water parks, shows that will suit their tastes, arcades, movie theaters, malls, thrill rides, swimming pools, bookstores, record shops, comic book stores, and so much more) cool to do, see, eat, or buy in Las Vegas, which is saying a lot.

We are continually amazed at the number of fun activities for families in Las Vegas and even more impressed with the educational opportunities that can be cleverly disguised as fun. A trip to one museum lets you examine live, exotic desert creatures from just inches away; a visit to another lets you explore sound waves and soap bubbles. In one casino hotel, you can take a quick trip to an Egyptian tomb, and others transport you to other distant times and places: Renaissance Venice, ancient Rome, the New York of the 1930s, a perfect Paris, and exotic deserts. Here in Vegas, you get quite a bang from your vacation buck!

When in Vegas, you won't be able to help noticing the number of tourists (from around both the country and the world) who have traveled to Vegas, kids in tow, to take advantage of both the adult- and child-oriented attractions the city offers. They know what you're about to find out: You can't help but be overwhelmed by the

sheer amount of stuff to do and see in Las Vegas—but then again, if all you like to do on vacation is relax and lounge around the pool, that, too, can be accomplished with minimum effort in this city. In reality, Las Vegas is a great family vacation spot, with something for everyone. Just don't let the casino hotels in on the secret!

1 Frommer's Favorite Las Vegas Family Experiences

- **Hike to the Calico Tanks at Red Rock Canyon.** Less than 3 miles round-trip, this hike climbs up a narrow, rocky canyon to the Calico Tanks, a natural water repository situated high on a ridge overlooking the Las Vegas Valley. Children love the adventure and easy boulder hopping. Adults and kids alike love the view from the top. See p. 267.
- **Witness a simulated atomic bomb explosion at the Atomic Testing Museum.** Located less than 5 minutes from the Strip, this new museum traces the history of the atomic bomb and the tests conducted at the atomic test facility northwest of Las Vegas. The museum's many exhibits, films, and simulations are in a re-creation of a bunker used to shield test witnesses from the heat and shock wave of bomb detonations. Boys in particular will find the museum way cool. See p. 184.
- **Why must there always be snakes?** The answer to this question posed by Indiana Jones is that almost all of us are either fascinated or powerfully terrified by these primitive reptiles. Every species of venomous reptile native to Southern Nevada can be found at the Southern Nevada Zoological-Botanical Park. Also on display are endangered cats, apes, and eagles, among others. See p. 172.
- **Kayak or raft the Black Canyon of the Colorado River.** Starting below Hoover dam, paddle 11 miles to Willow Beach, deep within the dramatic towering walls of the Black Canyon. Along the way there are beaches for picnics and a multitude of side canyons to explore. There's a good current to speed you along but no rapids. A permit is required (easy to obtain) to run the river so don't wait until the last minute to make your plans. If you forget to acquire a permit you can opt for a more passive voyage through the canyon on a motorized pontoon raft. See p. 262.
- **Take an all-day excursion to Death Valley National Park.** The lowest point of elevation in the Western Hemisphere is in Death Valley. This is Desert 101 at it's best—high desert, low desert, sand dunes, salt flats, coyotes, rattlesnakes, curious rock formations, ghost towns, cactus, and in the spring, glorious wildflowers. The drive to Death Valley National Park is about 2 hours from Las Vegas via the shortest route. If you get an early start, that leaves plenty of time to explore one of the park's 18 hiking trails. Finally, one of the coolest things (pun intended) about Death Valley is that January and February are ideal months to visit.
- **Watch statues at Caesars Palace.** The "statues" come astoundingly

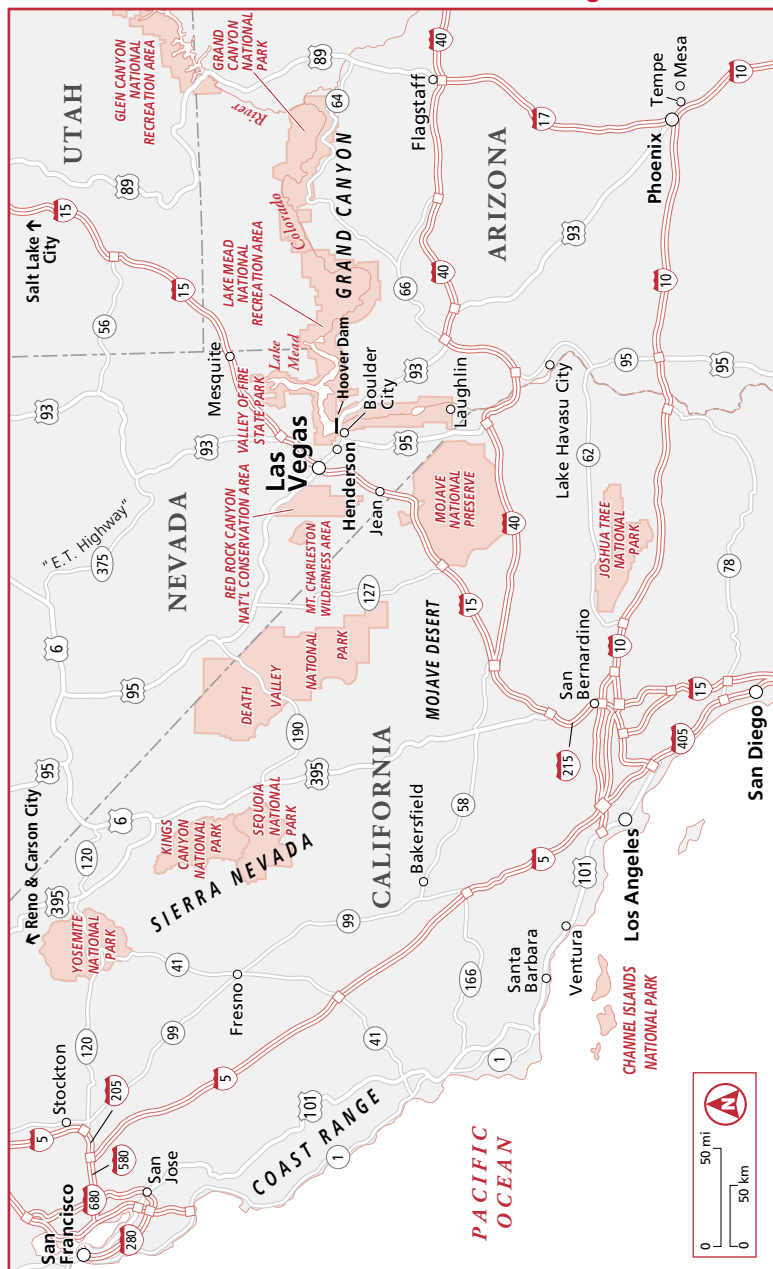
alive at two locations in Caesars Palace in the Forum Shops, accompanied by music, lasers, and fog, enthraling everyone around them. The Fountain Festival, the original statue show, stars Bacchus, the god of wine, and might actually get your children interested in Greco-Roman mythology. The newer show, more loosely drawn from classical literature, is full of explosions, thunder, and lightning. Both are huge favorites with children of all ages. For more information, see p. 169.

- **Check out the Night Lights at Fremont Street.** Fremont Street, the site of U2's video for "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," is now closed to cars, and a projection canopy of 12.5 million LEDs electrifies the evening sky with brilliant changing colors. A 540,000-watt sound system accompanies the light-and-laser show. Between shows, which run five times a night, there are live music and entertainers performing along this 5-block-long promenade lined with shops and cafes. The Neon Museum provides additional glow with the original lamp from the Aladdin and other classic Vegas signs. See p. 170.
- **Explore Lied Discovery Children's Museum.** Your entire family will have a blast piloting the Space Shuttle and composing tunes with your feet at this museum where over 100 exhibits are designed to be touched and played with. See p. 174.
- **See the pirate battle at Treasure Island.** Five times nightly cannons boom as a ship of lusty sirens does battle with a ragtag troop of pirates. The sirens, scantily clad, were substituted for the British Navy in an effort to make the pirate battle more adult. Though still pretty adolescent, the

presentation features hard-driving music, some good choreography, and an arsenal of special effects. Swords are drawn, swashbucklers swash and buckle, plus there's fire and a sinking ship. All in all, it's a very satisfying experience (watch it from the simulated docks outside Treasure Island), and, for fun after the crowds have cleared, you can watch the sunken ship rise from the watery depths to do battle again.

- **Watch the white tigers.** While visiting The Mirage, Siegfried and Roy's big cats stay in the White Tiger Habitat (yes, they are still there, despite the injuries one of them inflicted on Roy Horn during a tragic 2003 performance—it wasn't the tiger's fault—it acted like, well, a tiger), which is climate controlled and designed to replicate the tigers' natural environment. You can stay as long as you like waiting for the big cats to romp, roar, and roll. See p. 178.
- **Ride the Monorail.** Take a ride from the MGM Grand to the Sahara on the Las Vegas Strip Monorail. The ride takes 14 minutes each way and affords behind-the-scenes glimpses of famous strip hotels before racing past the Wynn Las Vegas golf course and the Las Vegas Convention Center, to the end of the line at the Sahara. See p. 80.
- **Toss balls with the dolphins at the Dolphin Habitat.** There is nothing cooler than playing ball with a water mammal. These dolphins don't do tricks, per se, but they will bounce balls back to you and their trainers, stand up on their tails, and do flips, not because they're trained to, but because they want to. See p. 178.
- **Count the moray eels at Shark Reef, Mandalay Bay.** Supposedly,

Las Vegas & Environs



there are over 20 of the slinky, spotted sea creatures living in the vast coral reef here, but we managed to count only 8. It's also fun to give them names, because each has a distinctive look. Ella Eel, Elvis Eel, Irwin . . . you get the idea. See p. 175.

- **Feel brave after the Stratosphere thrill rides.** You'll bond on the adrenaline rush before, during, and after a trip on the High Roller, the world's highest roller coaster; a drop on the Big Shot, a 160-foot free-fall ride on the Stratosphere's spire; and being dangled over the edge of the tower on X Scream. See p. 182.
- **Explore the International Marketplace.** This vast warehouse, a secret to most visitors, stocks thousands of different foods from around the world. Goody Japanese fruit candies in neon wrappers share space with tarragon soda pop from the Middle East and purple yam ice cream from the Philippines. See p. 220.
- **See the dinosaurs dance at the Las Vegas Natural History Museum.** Equipped with motion sensors, the re-creations of *T. rex* and his dino buddies come alive, roaring and moving when you enter their display

room. Live sharks swim in a nearby tank, and there's a cool collection of stuffed animals in displays designed to replicate their natural environment. See p. 186.

- **Travel at warp speed.** If a trip to Vegas isn't out of this world enough for your family, try blasting off into hyperspace with the crew of the Enterprise at *Star Trek: The Experience*. Beam aboard, and then save the universe. Even if you pass on the rides, you'll still get a kick out the History of the Future Museum, *Star Trek* memorabilia and themed shops, and a Trekker meal of Hamburger or Glop on a Stick in Quark's Bar. Yum. See p. 182.
- **Order in a pizza.** Take a break from your sightseeing to relax in front of the TV and order up a pay-per-view movie. Then call out for a large pie from Metro Pizza, the city's best, who will actually deliver to your hotel room. Those ingredients should add up to decadent, silly fun that will help remind you of what being a family is all about. It will also hopefully revitalize you for your next adventure. See p. 160.

2 Best Hotel Bets

For the full descriptions of the hotels below, please see chapter 5, "Family-Friendly Accommodations."

- **Most Family Friendly on the Strip:** Both **Excalibur**, 3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/937-7777 or 702/597-7777), and its North Strip sibling, **Circus Circus**, 2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/634-3450 or 702/734-0410), were designed with families in mind and feature regularly scheduled free entertainment and

large arcades. Circus Circus also has its own theme park (with rides for all ages) and miniature golf. See p. 105 and 117, respectively.

- **Most Family Friendly off the Strip:** The **Orleans**, 4500 W. Tropicana Ave. (☎ 800/ORLEANS or 702/365-7111), has a bowling alley and movie theaters and offers child care. **Sam's Town**, 5111 Boulder Hwy. (☎ 800/897-8696 or 702/456-7777), also features a multiplex theater plus the

free Sunset Stampede show and a large, beautiful indoor park with animatronic animals. See p. 128 and 126 respectively.

- **Best Suite Deals Close to the Strip:** **The Carriage House**, 105 E. Harmon Ave. (☎ 800/221-2301 or 702/798-1020), offers plenty of room for families in a nongaming environment 2 minutes from the Strip. A full kitchen in each suite also makes eat-in meals an option. And unlike hotels, there's full cable TV with over 40 channels, along with Nintendo at an hourly rate, plus free board games. See p. 121.
- **Best Suite Deals off the Strip:** A nongaming resort ideal for short- or long-term stays, **Desert Paradise**, 5165 S. Decatur Blvd. (☎ 800/424-1943 or 702/579-3600), offers complete apartments with their own washer/dryers, huge kitchens, full cable, and patio. With a barbecue area, lounge with large-screen TV, and a nice pool, this resort was designed with families in mind, and is a perfect getaway location. See p. 127.
- **Most Peace and Quiet on the Strip and the Most Child-Pampering Hotel:** You can't beat the nongaming **Four Seasons**, 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 877/632-5000 or 702/632-5000), located at the southernmost tip of the Strip. The luxurious hotel pampers children as well as parents, providing small bathrobes and gift baskets for the kiddies. Rooms can be childproofed in advance of your arrival, ensuring your peace of mind. See p. 100.
- **Most Peace and Quiet off the Strip:** Staying in Henderson, at the ultra-peaceful **Green Valley Ranch** resort, 2300 Paseo Verde Drive (☎ 702/617-7777 or 866/782-9487), will give you plenty of peace and quiet in luxurious surroundings, plus many activities for the children. There's a casino on-site, but you can avoid it completely and just go to the on-site multiplex, play golf, or sun by the pool. See p. 130.
- **Best View:** Unless you are on a low floor, at night, you should get a view of something sparkling no matter where you stay. But the view standing on the tower atop the **Stratosphere**, 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/998-6937 or 702/380-7777), located at the northernmost end of the Strip, tops them all. See p. 116.
- **When Price Is No Object: Caesars Palace**, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/634-6661 or 702/731-7110), with its hilarious Greco-Roman theme, provides an over-the-top vacation experience for all ages. And the Fountain Show and Forum Shops just add to the fun. See p. 108.
- **Best Lobby:** Huge statues of ancient Egyptian rulers greet you when you walk into the **Luxor**, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/288-1000 or 702/262-4000), making this a jaw-dropper for almost everyone. See p. 106.
- **Best Pool:** You can bob on a lazy river ride or bodysurf the gentle swells in the pools at both the (otherwise not quite kid-friendly) **Mandalay Bay**, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 877/632-7800 or 702/632-7777), or the **Monte Carlo**, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/311-8999 or 702/730-7777), but the best pool scene is at **The Flamingo**, 3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/732-2111 or 702/733-3111), where there are five pools, two whirlpools, a kiddie pool, and waterslides set in a tropical environment complete with exotic birds and koi ponds. See p. 107, 103, and 112 respectively.

- **Best Hotel Arcade:** Even though it's not a 24-hour game room, the Coney Island arcade in **New York-New York**, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/NY-FOR-ME or 702/740-6969), is the cleanest, best-lit arcade in the entire city, with gleaming hardwood floors instead of the usual dark carpet. See p. 104.
- **Best Fitness Center:** Though **The Four Seasons**, 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 866/536-9403 or 702/632-5000), is a very expensive hotel, unlike at other casinos/resorts in the area, the use of its ultramodern, state-of-the-art health club is free. Other hotels, such as the **Fairfield Inn by Marriott**, 3850 Paradise Rd. (☎ 800/228-2800 or 702/791-0899), also offer free use of their exercise rooms, which, though small, can still make you break a sweat. For those who don't mind paying \$35 a day for access to spa facilities, **The Venetian**, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/2-VENICE or 702/414-1000), offers Canyon Ranch, a branch of what is considered one of the best spas in the United States. The fee gets you access to all the machines, saunas, and exercise classes Canyon Ranch offers, including yoga and Pilates. There's also a rock-climbing wall. See p. 100, 125, and 111, respectively.
- **Best Bathrooms:** Marvelous marble everywhere graces the very large bathrooms at **The Venetian**, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/2-VENICE or 702/414-1000), but for sheer shower and bathroom opulence, we opt for **Mandalay Bay**, 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 877/632-7800 or 702/632-7777), with glassed-in showers and sunken tubs, plus bathrobes available upon request. See p. 111 and 107, respectively.
- **Best Shopping Area:** Although grown-ups may love the luxuries on display at **Via Bellagio** in the **Bella-gio**, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/987-6667 or 702/693-7444), kids will have more fun at **Caesars Forum Shops** at **Caesars Palace**, 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/634-6661 or 702/731-7110), **The Venetian's Grand Canal Shoppes**, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/2-VENICE or 702/414-1000), or even the **Miracle Mile Shops** at the **Aladdin/Planet Hollywood**, 3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 877/333-WISH or 702/785-5555), for their mix of family entertainment and eye candy. **Las Vegas Premium Outlets**, 875 S. Grand Central Pkwy. (☎ 702/474-7500), located near Downtown Las Vegas, offers 120 prestige-brand outlet stores. See p. 206, 206, 208, 204, and 204, respectively.
- **Best Hotel Coffee Shop:** Kids under 12 will enjoy the carousel theme of the **Pink Pony** cafe inside **Circus Circus**, 2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/643-3450 or 702/734-0410), with its circus place mats and crayons. The hipster groove of **Mr. Lucky's 24/7** at the **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino**, 4455 Paradise Rd. (☎ 800/473-ROCK or 702/693-5000), is more appealing to teens. But hands down, visitors go out of their way to visit **Calypsos** at the **Tropicana Resort & Casino**, 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/634-4000 or 702/739-2222), a classic coffee shop, which allows you to build your own burger and features classic coffee shop fare (try the slab of pound cake topped with fruit and frozen yogurt) in a tropical-themed environment. See p. 157, 160, and 146, respectively.

- **Best Hotel Restaurant for Kids:** The **Rainforest Cafe at MGM Grand**, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-8580), features a kid's menu, crayons, good food, and, best of all, animatronic animals and thunderstorms. See p. 143.
- **Best Hotel Kids' Program:** **Kid-Quest**, in the Sunset Station, 1301 W. Sunset Rd. (☎ 888/786-7389 or 702/547-7777), is a fun, safe place to tuck the kids for awhile. See p. 132.
- **Best Hotel Pet Programs:** **Hawthorn Suites**, 5051 Duke Ellington Way (☎ 800/527-1133 or 702/739-7000), welcomes any size, well-behaved Fido. See p. 125.
- **Best Hotel Buffet for Families:** **The Flamingo**, 3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/732-2111 or 702/733-3111), feeds kids under 8 for a discount price at breakfast, brunch, and dinner, with a view of birds, habitat, and fishponds. See p. 165.
- **Tops for Toddlers:** For sensory stimulation, **Circus Circus**, 2880 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/634-3450 or 702/704-3986), offers a midway, clowns, jugglers, and lots of flashing lights. The **Excalibur**, 3850 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/937-7777 or 702/597-7777), also has jugglers and throws in puppet shows and story times as well. See p. 117 and 105, respectively.
- **Tops for Teens:** Staying at the **Hard Rock Hotel**, 4455 Paradise Rd. (☎ 800/473-ROCK or 702/693-5000), can fill your teen with rock star dreams, plus *you'll* get points for being cool. Young sophisticates will enjoy the **Monte Carlo Resort & Casino**, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/311-8999 or 702/730-7777), and **The Venetian**, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/2-VENICE or 702/414-1000), with their luxurious European style. See p. 121, 103, and 111, respectively.

3 Best Dining Bets

For more information, please see chapter 6, "Family-Friendly Restaurants."

- **Best Burger:** Lots of folks love the 24-hour **Tiffany's Cafe at White Cross Drugs**, 1700 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/444-4459), on the north end of the Strip, but we are actually partial to the juicy, and pricey, burger available at lunchtime only at **Delmonico Steakhouse** in **The Venetian**, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/414-3737)—it's served with caramelized onions and Vermont cheddar, and made according to celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse's specifications. For drive-through, you can't beat **In-N-Out Burger**, 4888 Industrial Rd. at Tropicana (☎ 800/786-1000), where vegetarians can order cheese only, and those on Atkins can get a protein burger (no bun). Many locals consider this the best burger joint in town. See p. 157, 150, and 146, respectively.
- **Best Kids' Menu:** Buffets that offer price breaks for kids, such as those at the **Luxor**, 3900 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/288-1000 or 702/262-4000), or **The Flamingo**, 3555 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/732-2111 or 702/733-3111), actually can give kids a feeling of empowerment as they choose their own meals. Children can eat for half price at the buffet and at Benihana in the **Las Vegas Hilton**, 3000 Paradise Rd. (☎ 888/732-7117 or 702/732-5111), but the best actual kids' menu is at the **Verandah** at the **Four Seasons**, 3960 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/632-5000

or 702/632-5000), which offers lots of kids' favorites, including pizza, hot dogs, and PB&J sandwiches. See p. 163, 165, 165, and 146, respectively.

- **Best Tacos: El Sombrero**, at 807 S. Main St. (☎ 702/382-9234), serves by far the best tacos in Las Vegas, and they have been doing so for more than 50 years. Ask for any kind you like; chef Jose will put them together for you. See p. 162.

- **Best Secret Meal:** It's not on the menu, and it's a real deal—steak and shrimp, a Vegas classic, for \$8.95 at **Mr. Lucky's 24/7** in the Hard Rock, 4455 Paradise Rd. (☎ 800/473-ROCK or 702/693-5592). Someone in your party should order it, just to prove that parents know cool stuff that isn't always written down. See p. 160.

- **Best Food Court:** Most of the hotels have the same offerings (McDonald's, Nathan's, Häagen-Dazs, Starbucks, and the like), so that it's nice to find some different options. The food court at the **MGM Grand**, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-1111), has the usual suspects mentioned above, but also has Mama Ilardo's Pizza, which does a nice slice, and Hamada, which sells Chinese and Japanese food, including boxes of decent sushi. Menus are in Japanese and Mandarin, along with English, so you know it's the real deal. See p. 162.

- **Best Alternative Breakfast:** Some kids, and grown-ups, just don't like breakfast food. And even if you're a fan of eggs and waffles, that fare can get pretty dull day after day. Along with the usual morning meals, **Chin Chin**, in New York–New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/693-6763 or 702/740-6300), serves traditional Chinese breakfast foods such as

congee (rice porridge) and *dim sum* (small individual dishes, like steamed dumplings filled with meat, vegetables, or seafood, and many other dishes), including the Chinese version of a barbecue sandwich, *cha su bao*, chunks of pork or chicken and sweet sauce tucked inside a white doughy bun. See p. 144.

- **Best Pizza:** Practically every hotel food court has a pizza stand, and there are also nouvelle-style places like **California Pizza Kitchen**, in The Mirage, 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/791-7111), and **Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill**, in the MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-3000), throughout Vegas for fans of exotic toppings on their 'za. However, **Metro Pizza**, 1395 E. Tropicana Ave. (☎ 702/736-1955), located about 15 minutes away from the Strip, not only serves up the best slice in town, but also delivers to all major hotels. See p. 152, 143, and 160, respectively.
- **Best Ice Cream: Schraff's** in New York–New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/NYFORME or 702/740-6969), serves up frozen custard, along with its own brand of ice cream. See p. 104.
- **Best Educational Restaurant: America**, located in New York–New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/NY-FOR-ME or 702/740-6451), features food from around the United States; each menu item is designated with its reputed place of origin. That alone makes for some interesting conversation, but the really neat (yet educational) feature is the 90 ft. × 20 ft. map of the United States, complete with geographic and topographic features. See p. 143.

- **Best Milkshake:** **Tiffany's Cafe at White Cross Drugs**, 1700 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/382-1733) on the North Strip, serves them cold, thick, and creamy. If you'd rather sample the fountain goods in a hotel coffee shop, **Roxy's**, in the Stratosphere, 2000 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/998-6937 or 702/380-7777), pours a good one. See p. 157 and 116, respectively.
- **Best Thai:** **Lotus of Siam**, 953 E. Sahara Ave. (☎ 702/735-3033), located about 10 minutes east of the Strip, serves the best Thai food in the entire United States, according to food critics, both amateur and professional (*Gourmet* magazine's Jonathan Gold being one of the LoS's biggest fans). If you have a craving for satay, this is the place to sate it, because you won't find much Thai food at any of the casinos/resorts. See p. 158.
- **Best Hot Dog:** Ubiquitous **Nathan's Hot Dogs'** franks have perfect texture, savory taste, and low cost, making them a great snack or quick meal. You'll find a Nathan's at Monte Carlo, 3770 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/311-8999 or 702/730-7777), New York-New York, 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/NY-FOR-ME or 702/740-6969), and MGM Grand, 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 800/929-1111 or 702/891-1111). See p. 103, 104, and 102, respectively.
- **Best Selection:** The **Grand Lux Café** at The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 888/2-VENICE or 702/414-3888), gives you a choice of

over 150 entrees, appetizers, salads, and desserts, all of which are big enough to split between two or three people. The cuisine jumps from Italian to Pan-Asian to American, with stops in Europe, providing a huge, mostly very tasty selection. Plus, there's a kids' menu, which your server will recite for you, because it's not printed in the book-size menu you are handed at the table. See p. 154.

- **Best Romantic Outdoor Restaurant:** The patio at **Mon Ami Gabi** at Paris Las Vegas, 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/944-4224), faces the Bellagio water show, making this French bistro the most romantic spot on the Strip as the fountains spray and dance in time to music. After a meal of oysters, grilled steak, or roasted chicken; wine; profiteroles; and espresso, stroll through the adjacent casino hotel. Then whisper in your beloved's ear, "We'll always have Paris . . . Las Vegas." See p. 150.
- **Best Romantic Restaurant View (for a Night when You Hired a Sitter):** The food at **Alizé** is as impressive as its view from three huge windows overlooking the Strip from atop the Palms Hotel, 4321 W. Flamingo Rd. (☎ 702/951-7000). Chef Andre Rochat, from Andre's French Restaurant and Andre's at the Monte Carlo (two of the city's most acclaimed French restaurants) and Chef Jacques Van Staden, continually create and execute meals of epicurean perfection. See p. 167.

4 The Rest of the Best

- **Best Place to Run Around:** Providing a variety of outdoor diversions, from picnicking to skateboarding and in-line skating, plus a dog park, a radio-controlled miniboat area, and a

horseshoe pitch, **Sunset Park**, 2601 E. Sunset Rd. (☎ 702/455-8200), located south of the Strip near McCarran International Airport, is a welcome respite from much of

the city's artificial atmosphere. See p. 196.

- **Best Bookstore:** Although **Borders Express** in The Fashion Show Mall, 3200 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/733-1049), is easily accessed from the Strip, **Dead Poet Books**, 937 S. Rainbow Blvd. (☎ 702/227-4070), has a huge selection of used books for adults and children, and is the perfect place to fill up on literature at a discount. See p. 210.
- **Best Toy Store:** **FAO Schwarz**, located in the Forum Shops at Caesars Palace, 3500 Las Vegas Blvd. S. (☎ 702/796-6500), is three stories of fabulous toys—including a room of Barbies for girls, action figures for boys, and the store's trademark super-soft stuffed animals—stocked in a section that replicates Homer's Trojan Horse. Plus, they can hold a birthday party for your wee one, which could include a sleepover in the treehouse section of the store, if you want (and can afford it). See p. 223.
- **Best History Lesson:** Your child can join the posse and head out to hunt down the bad guy or watch the goofy Western melodramas that are staged every half-hour in **Old Nevada on the Bonnie Springs Ranch** (☎ 702/875-4191). Explore Boot Hill Cemetery—and other locations that re-create pioneer icons—with your family. Along with the Western town, cowhands, and petting zoo, there's a caged collection of rescued wildlife and the most reasonably priced horseback rides in the Las Vegas area. See p. 271.
- **Best Place to Beat the Heat:** Head for **Mount Charleston** in the Spring Mountains 40 minutes to the northwest of Las Vegas. While everyone else is sizzling in the desert heat, you'll be walking among tall conifers and drinking in the cool mountain air. Best of all, it's free! See p. 274.