



THE BEST OF LAS VEGAS

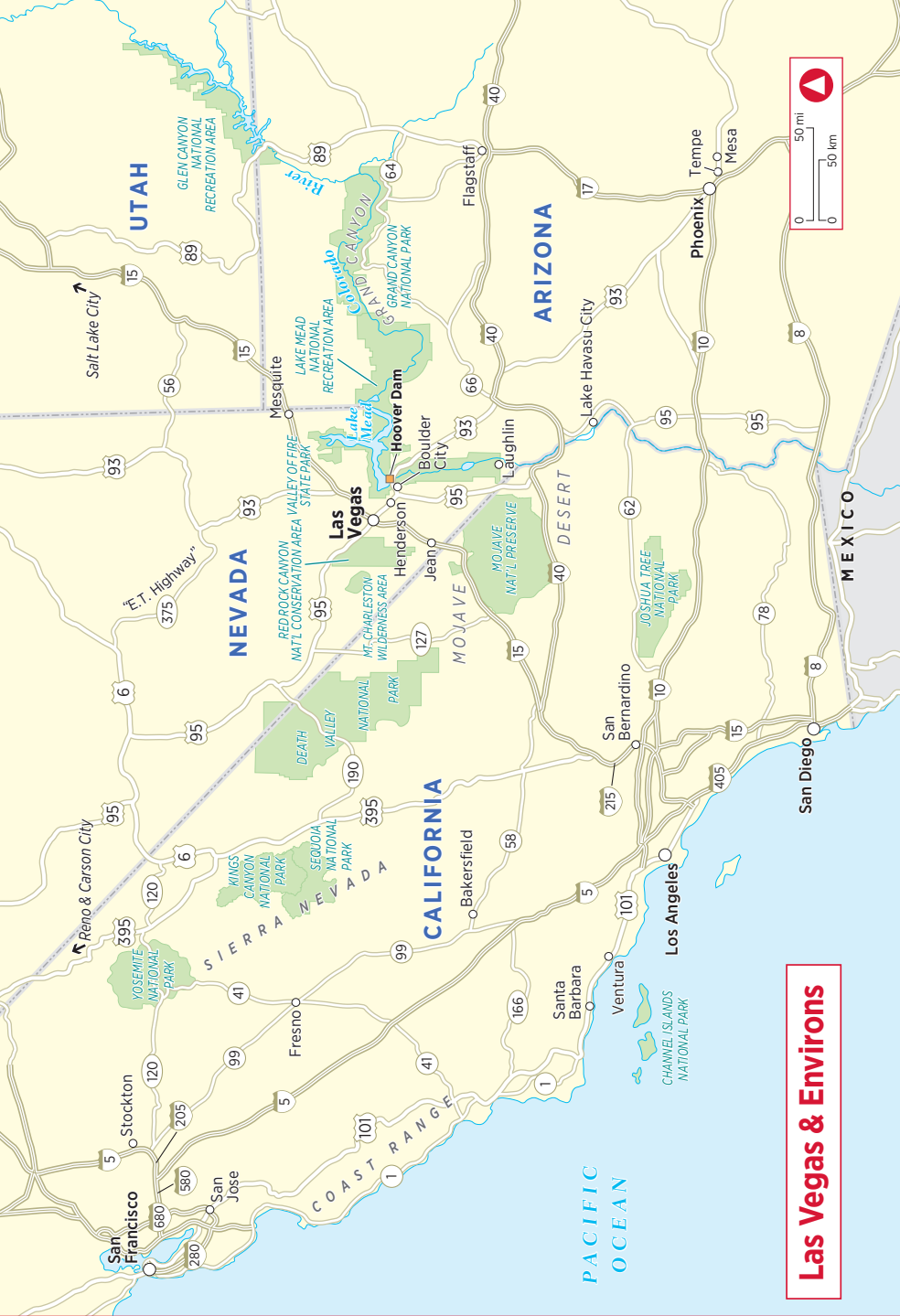
As often as you have seen it on TV or in a movie, nothing can prepare you for your first sight of Las Vegas. The skyline is hyper-reality, a mélange of the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, and a pyramid. It is sensory overload that can reduce you to hapless tears or fits of giggles. But in the spaces between the visual madness, there's a bit of something for everyone, whether you want a wild party, a relaxing getaway, or something in between. Las Vegas is designed to keep you entertained, satisfied, satiated, and distracted from the real world outside its glittering borders.

THINGS TO DO The chances of getting bored in Las Vegas are slim at best. Start on the **Strip** where you could spend days goggling at the visual overload of the whole thing: Wonder at the appropriated skylines of **New York–New York**, **Paris Las Vegas**, and **The Venetian**; get your camera ready for the delightful dancing waters of the **Fountains at Bellagio** and the lava-spewing drama of the **Mirage Volcano**; or pull out your wallet and try your luck in one of the dozens of opulent casinos.

SHOPPING Las Vegas has become one of the premier shopping destinations in the world, with labels both brand and esoteric crowding the high-end malls. But here, shopping is more than just a way to rack up more credit card debt, it is an



PREVIOUS PAGE: Fountain of the Gods at Caesars Palace. ABOVE: The Bellagio fountain show at night.



Las Vegas & Environs



Marquee at The Cosmopolitan is one of the city's newest and hottest clubs.

experience. Check out the Roman-themed street scene at **The Forum Shops at Caesars Palace** and the indoor version of Venice at **The Grand Canal Shoppes**, complete with its own canals and gondoliers.

RESTAURANTS AND DINING Once an outpost of cheap buffets and barely edible prime-rib specials, Las Vegas is now an epicurean destination. You'll do fine at celebrity chef outlets from **Emeril Lagasse** and **Wolfgang Puck**, but dig deeper to find the spectacularly intricate French cuisine at **L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon** or the modern, luxurious interpretation of an all-you-can-eatery at **The Buffet at Wynn Las Vegas**. True foodies get off the Strip to experience eclectic Japanese at **Raku Grill** or the gourmet delights of **Todd's Unique Dining**.

NIGHTLIFE AND ENTERTAINMENT Las Vegas comes alive at night, with a club scene that rivals Ibiza for its intensity and enough dazzling shows to give Broadway a run for its money. **Marquee** at The Cosmopolitan and **XS** at Encore are two of the better party-spot options these days while almost all of the **Cirque du Soleil** productions are worth their high ticket prices. If you can snag tickets for a headliner like **Garth Brooks** or **Céline Dion**, you're in for a treat.

FROMMER'S favorite LAS VEGAS EXPERIENCES

- **Strolling on the Strip After Dark:** You haven't really seen Las Vegas until you've seen it at night. This neon wonderland is the world's greatest sound-and-light show. Begin at Luxor and work your way past the incredible hotels and their attractions. You'll pass the gotta-see-it-to-believe-it New York–New York on your way, and if your strength holds out, you will end at Circus Circus, where live acrobatic acts take place overhead while you gamble. Make plenty of stops en route to see The Mirage volcano erupt, take a photo of the full moon over the Eiffel Tower, and marvel at the choreographed water-fountain ballet at Bellagio.
- **Casino Hopping on the Strip:** The interior of each lavish hotel-casino is more outrageous and giggle-inducing than the last. Just when you think they can't possibly top themselves, they do. From Venice to Paris, from New York City to the Manhattan-style chic of CityCenter, it is all, completely and uniquely, Las Vegas. See chapter 7 for more information on casinos and check out the "Best Casino Bets" later in this section.

- **Sleeping In:** Come on! You're on vacation! Yes, there are lots of things to see and do in Las Vegas but with tens of thousands of the most luxurious hotel rooms in the world don't you just want to stay in one of those big fluffy beds and maybe order room service? We know we do. For "Best Las Vegas Hotel Bets," see p. 58.

- **Eating Out:** Las Vegas used to be a dining desert, most famous for its \$4.99 prime rib specials, but these days it is one of the top dining destinations with world-class chefs serving up award-winning cuisine. For "Best Las Vegas Dining Bets," see p. 134.

- **Bingeing at Buffets:** Many are no longer the very best of bargains, but there is something about the endless mounds of food that just scream "Vegas" to us. Our choices for the best in town are listed in "Best Las Vegas Dining Bets" on p. 134.



Gorge yourself on high-class treats at the Wynn Las Vegas Buffet.

- **Spending an Evening in Glitter Gulch:** Set aside an evening to tour the Downtown hotels and take in the overhead light show of the **Fremont Street Experience** (p. 207). Unlike the lengthy and exhausting Strip, here you can hit a dozen casinos in about 5 minutes.

- **Shopping Until You're Dropping:** Take what Napoleon called "the greatest drawing room in Europe," replicate it, add shops, and you've got the **Grand Canal Shoppes at The Venetian** (p. 273)—it's St. Mark's Square, complete with canals and working gondolas. See chapter 8 for the low-down on the shopping scene and don't miss "Best Shopping Bets" on p. 12.

- **Get Dressed Up for a Show:** You don't have to get gussied up to see one of the mind-boggling Cirque du Soleil productions or one of your favorite headliners, but there's something about putting on your best suit or fanciest dress for an evening at the "thea-tuh" that can't be beat. See chapter 9 for



Glide on a gondola through the Grand Canal Shoppes at The Venetian.



Elephant Rock, Valley of Fire State Park.

reviews of the major shows and check out the “Best of Vegas After Dark” on p. 13.

- o **Getting Away From It All:** Las Vegas can be overwhelming so be sure to put some time on your itinerary to find your Zen at such scenic spots as the Valley of Fire State Park or Red Rock Canyon. See chapter 10 for more ideas for side trips from Vegas.

best THINGS TO SEE & DO

- o **Best Free Attraction:** Even if they charged money to see the dancing waters at the **Bellagio Fountain Show** (p. 214) or the dazzling light-and-sound show that is the **Fremont Street Experience** (p. 207) they’d be totally worth it. The fact that they are free is like winning a jackpot.
- o **Best Museums:** Las Vegas has its own idea of what constitutes culture and nowhere is that more apparent than at the **Erotic Heritage Museum** (p. 206), a titillating and though-provoking examination of human sexuality. If you’re looking for something even more explosive, try the **Atomic Testing Museum** (p. 200) for its absorbing examination of the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of our atomic age.
- o **Best Animal Attractions:** The **Mirage Dolphin Habitat** (p. 216) is a most un-Vegas experience. Watch these gorgeous mammals frolic in their cool blue pool. If you’re really lucky, they’ll play ball with you. Or you can get up close and personal with the big cats at the **MGM Grand Lion Habitat** (p. 211). But not too close!



Hang out with dolphins at the Mirage's Dolphin Habitat.

- **Best Way To Get Back To Nature:** Las Vegas exists because of the natural springs that once fed the valley and provided an oasis in the desert. The **Springs Preserve** (p. 217) examines the history, future, and impact of water in the region alongside relaxing nature trails and preserves.
- **Best Ways To Get Your Heart Pounding:** We get our pulses up by playing the \$5 slot machines, but if you want some serious thrills check out the high-altitude craziness of **Stratosphere Thrill Rides** (p. 218), including one that lets you jump off the top of a 100-story building. For those with a taste of adventure but a touch more sanity, go zipping down the **Fremont Street Flightline** (p. 207) directly under the light-and-sound-show canopy.
- **Best Ways To Keep the Kids Entertained:** Las Vegas is not really a family destination, but there are still things for the wee ones to do including playing their own games of chance at the **Circus Circus Midway** (p. 101), riding the roller coasters and other junior thrills inside the blessedly air-conditioned theme park that is **Adventuredome** (p. 198), or mixing fun with education (in a way that will have them so entertained they'll never notice they are learning something) at the **Lied Discovery Children's Museum** (p. 210).
- **Best Places To Get Hitched:** If you want a friendly, low-key wedding, walk down the aisle at the oldest chapel in Las Vegas, the **Wee Kirk O' the Heather** (p. 225). But this is Vegas and why would you want a low-key wedding? Instead, try one of the extravaganzas at the **Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel** (p. 224) where you can choose among themes ranging from Elvis to vampires to outer space and more.

For more ideas on things to see and do in Las Vegas, see chapter 6.



Wee Kirk O' the Heather.

best RECREATION BETS

- Best Swimming Pools:** There are acres of water park fun at **Mandalay Bay** (p. 65) including a wave pool, lazy river, beach, regular swimming pools, even its own open-air casino. Meanwhile, the lush landscaping, fountains, and water slides at **The Mirage** (p. 90) will make you feel like you're in a tropical paradise. For more picks for our favorite pools, see p. 76.
- Best Spas/Health Clubs:** We only wish our own gym were as handsomely equipped as the one at the **Canyon Ranch Spa** (p. 86) in The Venetian, which also has a number of other high-priced treatments on which you can blow your blackjack winnings. We are also partial to the full complement of machines at the health club at **Bellagio** (p. 77), probably the best-equipped club of all. For a straight spa experience, the **Spa at Encore** (p. 96), is a 70,000-square-foot oasis for the mind, body, and spirit, from its gorgeous Moroccan-infused design themes to its full menu of pampering delights. For more great spa options see p. 76.
- Best Golf Courses:** The greens fees are outrageously high but the course at **Wynn Las Vegas** (p. 229) is one of the most lush in town. "Real" golfers head to **TPC at the Canyons** (p. 228) for its challenging holes, gorgeous scenery, and occasional Justin Timberlake sightings.
- Best Bowling:** If you need to work out a few frustrations, try knocking down things with heavy balls at the **Strike Zone at Sunset Station** (p. 230). Not

only do they have 72 lanes, but they are open 24 hours in case you need to get in a few frames at 4am.

- **Best Drive:** The 13-mile **Red Rock Scenic Loop** (p. 336) provides a way to enjoy the colorful rocks and canyons without leaving the air-conditioned comfort of your car. On the other hand, you could get a good breeze going at about 140 mph in one of the race cars you can drive yourself at the **Las Vegas Motor Speedway** (p. 209).
- **Best Getaway:** If you need a respite from the hustle and bustle of Las Vegas, head north to **Mount Charleston** (p. 338) for a relaxed mountain retreat or to work up a sweat while hiking or snowboarding.
- **Best Man-Made Wonder:** One of the greatest engineering feats in history is the 726-foot-tall **Hoover Dam** (p. 324). You can take tours of the mighty facility and learn how it made Las Vegas (and much of the American Southwest) possible.

For more recreation options see chapter 6; to learn about major side trips out of Las Vegas, such as Lake Mead and the Grand Canyon, see chapter 10.



The Venetian's Canyon Ranch Spa.

1 best CASINO BETS

- **Best Classic Casinos:** On the Strip there is no place that honors its history quite like **Caesars Palace** (p. 252), where you can still enjoy the classic Roman decadence that has been wowing gamblers since 1966. And although they no longer have the World Series of Poker, serious players still head directly to **Binion's** (p. 260) for its “Vegas, Baby!” vibe and lively table game action.
- **Best Modern Casinos:** When we first saw the contemporary, cutting-edge decor at **Aria Las Vegas** (p. 248) we thought that nothing could top it in terms of modern casino luxury, but then along came the bold, artistic statement of the **Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas** (p. 248) and we realized we just might have a competition on our hands.
- **Best Downtown Casinos:** Gambling in Downtown Las Vegas is a lot different than on the Strip. You'll find lower limits so your money can go farther, and the dealers are often a lot friendlier so you will have a better time if your money doesn't go farther. The two best examples of the Downtown form are at the **Golden Nugget** (p. 263), all warm hues and laid-back fun, and at **Main Street Station** (p. 263), a charming turn-of-the-20th-century San Francisco-themed joint that makes up for its small size with lots of great gaming action.
- **Best Locals' Casinos:** Most neighborhood casinos are low-limit, no-frills joints but the casinos at **Red Rock Resort** (p. 259), **Green Valley Ranch** (p. 260), and **M Resort** (p. 260) are as stylish as many on the Strip. That they



Casino at Cosmopolitan Las Vegas.



Casino at the M Resort.

can be that visually appealing and still maintain most of the thrifty attitude that locals' casinos are known for is almost a miracle.

◦ **Best Players' Clubs:** Covering the casinos at places like Bellagio, Aria Las Vegas, and Mandalay Bay, **M Life** is the loyalty program for all MGM Resorts International properties and offers multiple ways to earn points for comps, cash, and one-of-a-kind rewards like backstage tours of shows and exclusive dining opportunities. For more on players' clubs, see p. 244.

◦ **Best Slot Action: The Palms** (p. 257) may not be the biggest or most interesting in town but it is almost legendary for its "loose" slots. Those seeking a retro feeling should head to the **Eastside Cannery** (p. 260) where they have a selection of "classic" machines that still take and dispense actual coins!

◦ **Best Dealers:** The dealers at most casinos on the Strip are all business, but those at **The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas** (p. 248) are among the friendliest in town. Bonus points go to the pit bosses who will often introduce themselves to you as you join a

table. Downtown Las Vegas is where a lot of people go to find a more laid-back, friendly attitude at the gaming tables and you'll find it in spades (and hearts and clubs and diamonds) at **The Four Queens** (p. 262).

- **Best Budget Casinos:** You won't find any ostentatious opulence at **The Orleans** (p. 257) but you will find thousands of low-limit slot and video poker machines and dozens of gaming tables that won't cost you an arm and a leg to join. Although farther away from the Strip than most people are willing to travel, the casino at **Santa Fe Station** (p. 259) also offers a great place to gamble for the budget conscious without sacrificing style or comfort.

For more information on casinos and the games played in them, see chapter 7.

- Best Malls:** The deliriously over-the-top togas and sandals theme at Caesars Palace continues into the **Forum Shops** (p. 270), where you can do you window shopping through a replica of an ancient Roman street scene complete with talking statues! For a less gaudy but much more extensive retail experience, head just up the street a block to the **Fashion Show** (p. 266), Nevada's largest mall with nearly 2 million square feet of shopping nirvana.
- Best Hotel Shopping Arcade:** You'll need to have some pretty high credit card limits to truly enjoy the shops at the **Wynn Esplanade** (p. 274), which include such pricey options as Cartier, Chanel, and Christian Dior (and those are just the C's). More down-to-earth delights can be had at **Mandalay Place** (p. 272), with clothing, beauty, and dining options galore.
- Best Bargains:** The outlet malls in Las Vegas often don't provide the kind of deep discounts that you will find about 40 miles south of town at the **Fashion Outlets Las Vegas** (p. 268). Yes, it's a bit of a drive (they offer a shuttle service) but it can be worth it for the money you'll save.



Hip boutiques abound at the Emergency Arts Collective.

TOP 10 THINGS I'LL MISS ABOUT BEING MAYOR BY OSCAR B. GOODMAN

1. My constituents, or as I like to call them my peeps.
2. My mayoral parking placard.
3. My showgirls.
4. My throne.
5. Playing the mayor of Las Vegas on *CSI*.
6. Everyone takes your call when you are calling as the mayor of Las Vegas.
7. The 12 different bobble heads made in my likeness.
8. My lucky mayor's casino chips with my caricature on them.
9. Welcoming visitors and conventions to fabulous Las Vegas.
10. Visitors to my office bearing gifts of Bombay Sapphire Gin.

Oscar B. Goodman was first elected Mayor in 1999 and went on to serve three terms, becoming one of the most popular politicians in the city's history. The former mafia lawyer (who had a cameo in the movie *Casino* playing himself) was Las Vegas's biggest cheerleader and drove the development of many notable projects, including the Mob Museum, scheduled to open in 2012. His colorful style (he usually showed up at events with showgirls on his arms and had a throne in his office) and say-anything attitude (he often professed his fondness for gin and the "good old days" of Vegas when disputes were settled in the desert with baseball bats) earned him some controversy, but also the respect of constituents who saw him as the perfect ambassador for America's most outrageous city. Goodman's tenure as mayor ended in 2011 due to term limits.

- **Best Souvenirs:** They call themselves the "world's largest gift shop" and although we're not sure who keeps track of claims like that, we're inclined to believe that the **Bonanza Gift Shop** (p. 276) could hold that title. If you are looking for anything with Las Vegas emblazoned on it—seriously, almost anything—you'll find it here.
- **Best Arts and Crafts:** The local artisans in residence at the **Emergency Arts Collective** (p. 276) offer a wide range of paintings, jewelry, clothing, and more all made with a one-of-a-kind flair that will give you something truly unique to remember Las Vegas by.

To learn more about all the retail heaven to be found in Las Vegas, see chapter 8.

best OF VEGAS AFTER DARK

- **Best Production Show:** It's a total deadlock between **Cirque du Soleil's KÀ** (p. 287) and **Mystère** (p. 288). The latter is more "traditional"—if you can call a human circus that mixes dazzling acrobatics with dramatic visuals "traditional"—in that it has only a loose semblance of narrative, whereas *KÀ* actually has a plot. Both are dazzling and, given the extremely high production values, seem worth the extremely high ticket prices.



Cirque du Soleil's *KÀ* is noteworthy for its use of a traditional storyline.

- o **Best Old-Time Vegas Production:** You know: big, huge stage sets, pointless production numbers, showgirls, nipples on parade, Bob Mackie headdresses. Ah, *Jubilee!* (p. 293), this world would be dreary without you. Meanwhile, the celebrity impression show used to be omnipresent in Vegas but these days **Legends in Concert** (p. 294) is one of the last of a dying breed. Go for the Elvis impersonator if nothing else!
- o **Best Smart Show:** This town isn't good enough for either **Blue Man Group** (p. 285) or **Penn & Teller** (p. 296). The former is a wacky, yet surprisingly cerebral, performance art piece starring guys with their heads painted blue; the latter is a master class in the art and artifice of illusion taught by guys who will both amuse and amaze.
- o **Best Magic:** It's almost as much of a comedy show as it is a magic one but the set done by **Mac King** (p. 295) will leave you astounded with some great close-up tricks and laughing your head off at the same time. Mixing traditional illusions (big sets and big shocks) with a rock-'n'-roll aesthetic, **Criss Angel: Believe** (p. 290) will make you rethink everything you thought about magic shows.

- **Best Adult Show:** The aforementioned *Jubilee!* (p. 293) is pretty tame by today's standards but still filled with beautiful, topless showgirls so it qualifies in this category. But if you want more titillation without veering into tawdry, check out the artistic (and athletic) numbers performed by the lovely ladies at **Crazy Horse Paris** (p. 295).
- **Best Headliners:** The stripped-down show put on by country-superstar **Garth Brooks** (p. 291), featuring him and his guitar and nothing else, is not only one of the best entertainment experiences in Las Vegas, it is one of the best shows anywhere at any cost. Meanwhile, aren't you glad we have lived to see a time where we can truly appreciate the perfectly constructed pop songs of **Barry Manilow** (p. 285) without being embarrassed?
- **Best Worst Lounge Show:** Some feel the show put on by **Mr. Cook E. Jarr** (p. 282) is the ultimate Vegas experience for its masterful blend of cheese, kitsch, and unbridled enthusiasm.
- **Best Local Hang:** Hard-core types (including punks; off-duty strippers; off-duty waitstaff; and, on certain nights, Blue Man men, sans makeup, doing weird percussion things) gather way after hours at the **Double Down Saloon** (p. 302).
- **Best Nightclub:** If by "best" you mean "most popular," and by "most popular" you mean "people are willing to start standing in line hours before they open and pay \$40 a pop, and that's before the alcohol, just to get a foot in the door,"



The traditional Vegas showgirl is disappearing but still makes waves at *Jubilee!*

then **Marquee** (p. 313), beats out the competition by a long shot. But if substance over style is more your bag, head toward **XS** (p. 318) where the lines are just as long and the covers are just as high, but the reward is a high-class indoor/outdoor club experience that truly lives up to its excessive moniker. And if you're a subscriber to the biggest equals best theory, then put on some sexy but comfortable shoes as you trek through **PURE** (p. 314), a 40,000-square-foot shrine to the party set.

- **Best Ultralounge:** That's just Vegas-speak for "fancy-pants hotel bar," but most of them are pretty nice, if trying too hard to be all that. Still, we like the vibe at **Surrender** (p. 307) with its gorgeous indoor/outdoor atmosphere and sultry decor. If you prefer a room with a view, take the elevator up to **ghostbar** (p. 303). Located high atop The Palms tower, it has a groovy ambience and some amazing scenery (both from surrounding landscape and the pretty people hanging out at the bar).
- **Best Hotel Bar:** The almost scientific construction of the cocktails at **Petrossian** (p. 306) makes this a must-visit bar for fans of mixology. Or you could immerse yourself in a different kind of intoxicating ambience at one of the bars inside the massive three-story **Chandelier** (p. 302) at The Cosmopolitan.
- **Best Gay and Lesbian Bar:** Part sexy ultra-lounge and part high-energy dance club, the facility at **Piranha/8 ½** (p. 310) offers a little bit of the best of both worlds in one fun package. For those who don't want to venture too far afield from the Strip, make a stop at the only gay club in the neighborhood at **Krave** (p. 309). It's like a bigger, more extravagant version of the big, extravagant gay nightclubs in your city.



The Red Room at PURE.



Treasures.

- **Best Party Places for 20-Somethings:** The title for hottest nightclub changes on an almost weekly basis, but these days the see-and-be-seen set is torn between the fever dream of a party spot **Haze** (p. 313), the multilevel **Marquee** (p. 313), which offers four clubs in one, and **Vanity** (p. 316) where the crowds line-up early and stay until dawn.
- **Best Party Places For People Who Aren't 20-Something:** So you want to go dancing, have a drink, and just enjoy yourself but you aren't 23, thin, and/or model-gorgeous anymore. Your best bet is to visit a one of the hotel lounges like **Mizuya at Mandalay Bay** and **The Fontana Bar at Bellagio** where they have most of the fun without all the attitude See p. 317 for more information on hotel lounges.
- **Best Strip Club:** You know you want to know. We give the honors to **Treasures** (p. 321), because we think all strip joints should insist on production numbers with stage effects and look like old-fashioned English brothels. For more information on the nightlife scene in Las Vegas, see chapter 9.