

4. FANTASTIC WEEKENDS IN VEGAS

A two- to four-day weekend is an optimal length of time to spend in Vegas. It's enough time to see and do a whole bunch. Vegas weekends are packed with potential, regardless of what's bringing you here. Whether a romantic getaway, a bachelor party, or a shopping binge, these suggested itineraries will help you get the most out of every minute.

Each getaway assumes Friday evening arrival and a Sunday evening departure. Three- and four-day weekends offer a king-size slice of the Vegas experience. After each Friday-Sunday plan, you'll find a **Long Weekend** section offering day and night ideas to keep you entertained beyond the first 48 hours.



Hotel Rates

In Las Vegas, room rates fluctuate wildly from one day to the next, driven by citywide occupancy trends and gaming revenue needs, since these 3,000-room-plus behemoths are filing cabinets for gamblers moreso than lodging for tourists. Weekends, special events, conventions and holidays all drive up the price of a room.

It's hard to give an accurate picture of what you'll pay in such a dynamic market, but we'll give you an idea what your *best-case scenario* is. \$ hotels can often be booked for less than \$50 per night. \$\$ hotels frequently go for less than \$100 per night. \$\$\$ hotels usually start in the \$100-150 range, while \$\$\$\$ hotels rarely have rates below \$150.

RECOMMENDED PLAN: Choose wisely when booking your hotel. You definitely want something comfortable and convenient. Since **weekends are busier**, expect to pay significantly more, not just for your hotel room, but at the tables. \$5 minimums are rare on the Strip on weekends, and some higher-end places jack their minimums up to \$15 or \$20. Many of these plans can be executed much more cheaply during the week without missing out, so consider taking a few days off from work for your visit if your wallet can't handle a weekend.

VEGAS ESSENTIALS WEEKEND

What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. You've seen the commercials. It's a mantra. And yet, ironically enough, somebody's told you wild stories of what happened to them in Vegas. And now you've decided to experience it first-hand. And while Las Vegas has an anything-can-happen vibe, if you leave every detail of your trip to luck you will likely not have a great trip. Preparation is key! Play it safe and book hotels and shows in advance.

First-time Vegas visitors should **book a casino hotel on the Strip**. There's just something about being right in the middle of all the action. Despite the overall upward trend of the Vegas lodging market, there are rooms in every price range on the Strip. Our top recommendations in each price range for first-time visitors are the **Mirage (\$\$\$)**, **Mandalay Bay (\$\$\$)**, **Caesars Palace (\$\$\$\$)**, **Flamingo (\$\$)** and **Imperial Palace (\$)**.

Don't Miss...

- **Fountains of Bellagio**
 - **Mirage Volcano**
- **Forum Shops at Caesars**
 - **The Strip after dark**
 - **A big production show**
 - **Wynn Las Vegas**
- **Fremont Street Experience**
(for a long weekend stay)

After checking in and stashing your stuff, explore the hotel. Find the buffet, the 24-hour coffee shop, and the exit! Casino exits are notoriously difficult to find, and you'll lose valuable time if you wander around lost every time you want to catch a taxi.

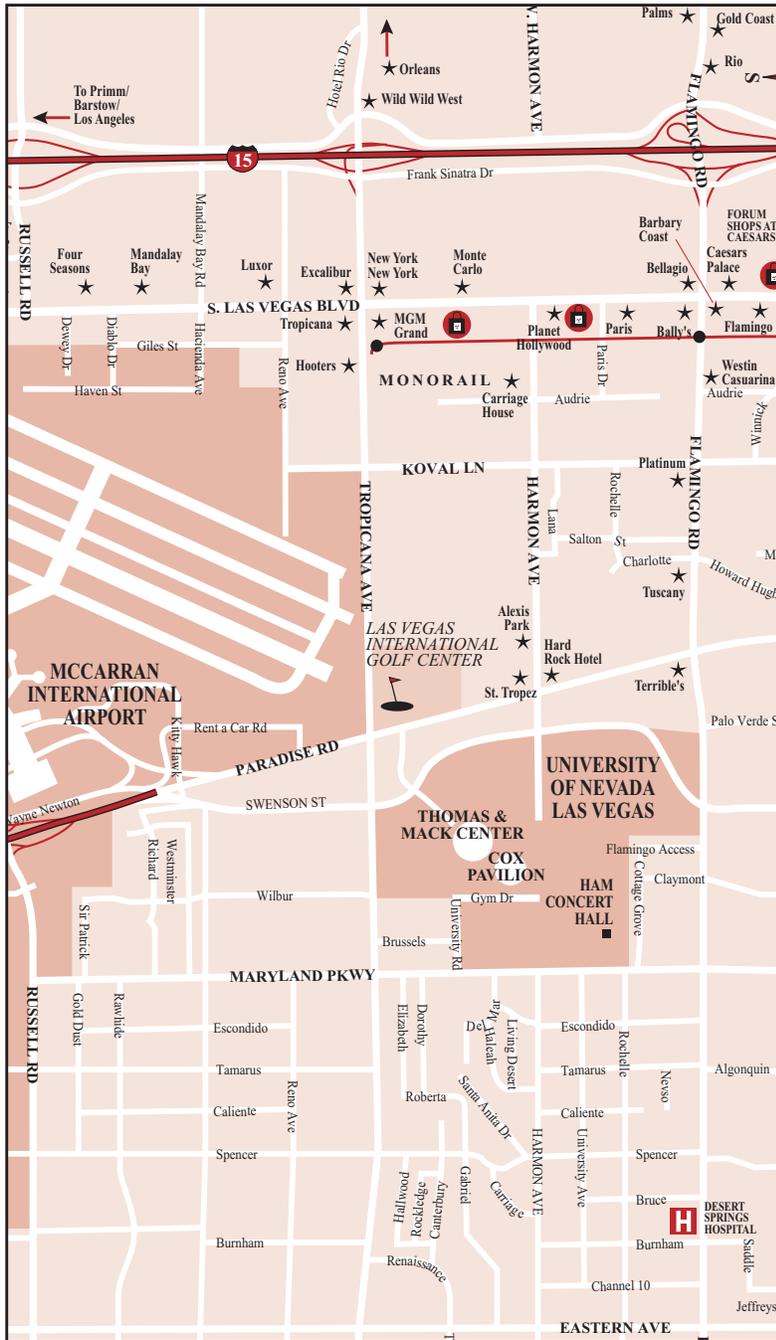
Once you get settled in, check out the Strip on foot. Be sure to catch a performance of the **Fountains of Bellagio** show. It's

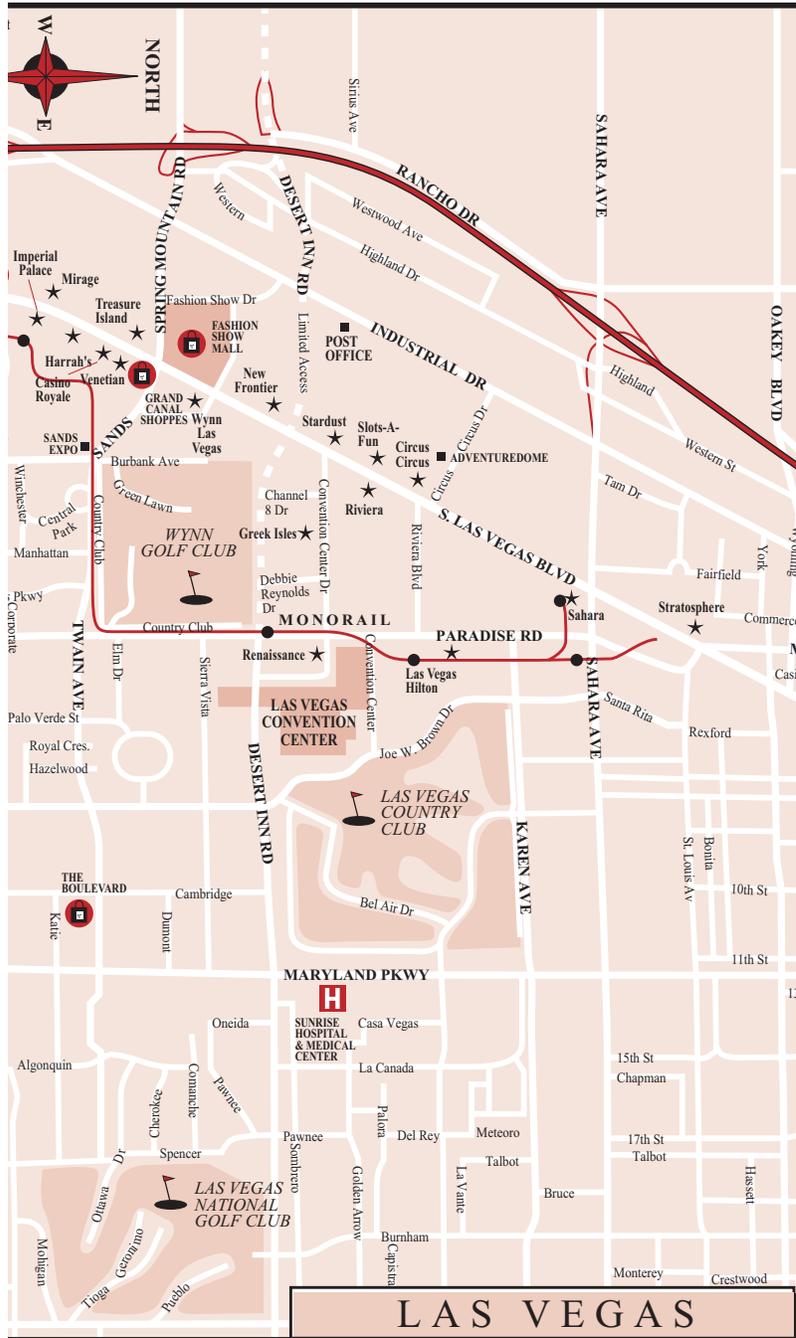


particularly worthwhile at night, adding light to the synchronized mix of music and water. Head back to your hotel and change into something nice, because you're going out on the town.

Strip hotels feature lounges, bars, performers and nightclubs, often under the same roof. If you've got the money, a great way to spend your first night in town is to grab a few drinks at a lounge, play some craps or blackjack to get into a social mood, and then visit a burlesque club. This **new Vegas trend** combines the elegance of a cabaret,

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the sex appeal of a strip joint and the social potential of a dance club. Some of the best choices for this kind of evening are:

- **Mandalay Bay.** Red Square, with its headless Lenin statue, offers 100 different kinds of vodka and every imaginable martini. Classy, intimate and deliciously retro, Ivan Kane's Forty Deuce features DJs and classically trained dancers whose striptease is accompanied by a three-piece jazz band every 90 minutes. It's easy to miss, by design, located behind the escalators to Mandalay Place. *Info: Mandalay Bay* - 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Russell. Tel. 702/632-7777. *Ivan Kane's Forty Deuce* (Tel. 702/632-9442) is open 10pm 'til dawn Thu-Mon. Cover is \$25.

- **ti - Treasure Island.** While many bemoan the scrubbing of Treasure Island's pirate motif, we like the party vibe here. The Breeze Bar features Bobby Barrett's dead-on Sinatra impersonation. The always-packed Tangerine offers burlesque shows every hour from 10:45pm to 1:15am. Its outdoor patio boasts a fantastic view of the Strip. *ti - Treasure Island* - 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Spring Mountain, Tel. 702/894-7111. *Tangerine* is open 5:30pm-4am Tue-Sat. Cover is \$20 for men, \$10 for women, free for hotel guests.

- **Caesars Palace.** The Shadow Bar tantalizes with silhouetted dancers who gyrate toplessly behind curtains and talented flair bartenders. The Pussycat Dolls Lounge at PURE nightclub is the Vegas outpost of the Hollywood burlesque whose cast has featured virtually every known celebrity with two Y chromosomes. They demonstrate the art of the tease every half hour from 10:30pm on. *Info: Caesars Palace* - 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo Tel. 702/731-7110. *PURE* and *Pussycat Dolls Lounge* are open 8pm-4am Tue-Sat. Cover is \$20.

Hopefully you made it to your room not much worse for wear, as it's easy to get caught in the moment your first night in Vegas. If you're not hurting your first morning, you weren't trying hard enough. Recovery, like most things, is better at poolside. Vegas pools are generally open from March to November, but some are year round. During the day, they are usually the hotels' centers of activity. The Mandalay Bay, Mirage and Flamingo all have

beautiful tropically landscaped pools. Be sure to stay hydrated! At some point you'll be ready to refuel. The casino coffee shops offer casual dining at all hours. Grab a bite at the one at your hotel, or venture elsewhere if you want to check out the competition.

Ease back into life by visiting one of the Strip's many themed shopping malls. The first stop should be the recently-expanded **Forum Shops** at Caesars Palace. The Forum Shops are impressive, with decadent, ornate Roman touches throughout, a trompe l'oeil ceiling and 160 shops. Head all the way down to the Fall of Atlantis Show. Every hour on the hour this fountain and 50,000 gallon salt-water aquarium comes alive with a special effects-laden battle between *les enfants terribles* of King Atlas over the fate of the sunken city. *Info: Forum Shops at Caesars Palace* - 3500 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo. Tel. 702/893-4800. Open 10am-11pm Sun-Thu and 10am-midnight Fri-Sat. *Fall of Atlantis* - shows are every hour on the hour. Free admission.

While you're here you should take in one of the big-production extravaganzas for which Vegas is known. The first name in the business is Cirque du Soleil. And of its five Vegas shows, **Mystère** is a great place to start. Cirque began 20 years ago as a humble troupe of bohemian street performers in Montreal, and while each subsequent show goes further over the top, this is probably the Strip's purest iteration of Cirque's original vision. *Mystère* has won "Best Production Show" honors from the *Review-Journal*

Best Vegas Podcast

iTunes users embrace the brave new world of podcasts, MP3s posted on the Internet for on-demand listening. Of several podcasts covering Las Vegas, one is clearly the best of the bunch: **Five Hundy By Midnight**, hosted by a charming, soft-spoken, and offbeat couple from the Twin Cities. This show includes everything from Vegas news and trip reports to late-night hooker hunts and fantasy concepts like their beloved "Monkey Poker Dome." It's hard to describe and even harder to resist. Download their show from iTunes or on their website, www.fivehundybymidnight.com.

"The \$20 Trick"

If you're interested in **upgrading your room**, try the so-called "\$20 Trick." When you're checking in, tuck a folded \$20 bill under your credit card as you hand it to the clerk. Ask if any upgrades are available. If affirmative, you just got upgraded for a mere \$20, and looked smooth doing it. If there's nothing available, you keep your money and dignity. Supply and demand determine the outcome, so don't expect an upgrade to a popular hotel's suite on a holiday weekend. If you have your heart set on a particular room, don't leave it to chance. Book what you want since this trick is no guarantee!

appreciate it. This high-energy act freshened up in 2005 when it moved into a custom-built 1,760 seat theatre at the Venetian. *Info: Venetian* – 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Sands. *Blue Man Group* (Tel. 866/641-SHOW) performances at 7 and 10pm Mon, Tues, Fri, Sat, 8pm performances on Wed, Thu, Sat. Tickets are \$71.50, 93.50 and \$121.

Before blue men and contor-

eight times, but thanks to the novelty of the newer productions, tickets are usually easier to get than for K&A and O. *Info: Treasure Island* - 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Spring Mountain. *Mystère* (Tel. 800/392-1999) performances are 7 and 9:30pm Sat-Wed. Tickets are \$60, \$75 and \$95.

Another show worth checking out is the **Blue Man Group**. This trio of mute but meticulous musicians captures the colorful, imaginative and downright weird vibe that defines Vegas. They make art or music out of virtually anything. The show is a dizzying sensory overload that inspires love-it-or-hate-it reactions, but open minds usually

Line Passes

If you've managed to hang on at the tables for an hour or more, ask the pit boss for a **line pass to the nightclub**. Line passes, mostly available for nightspots, coffeeshops and buffets, are among the easiest comps to get. Casinos don't mind giving them out, because they don't cost them anything.

tionists invaded the strip, Las Vegas nightlife was dominated by headliners like Siegfried and Roy, Elvis Presley and Liberace. Now, two are dead, one got eaten by a tiger. But **Barry Manilow** has still got it. The “Music and Passion” show at the Hilton is the kind of nostalgia performance that actually makes you understand the artist’s original appeal. Manilow has aged far better than Wayne Newton. Don’t forget to check out the Elvis statue by the main entrance. It was here that the King held court for the last seven years of his life. *Info: Las Vegas Hilton* – 3000 Paradise Rd., between Desert Inn and Sahara, 3/4 mi. east of the Strip. Tel. 800/222-5361. *Barry Manilow: Music and Passion* shows are at 8pm on selected nights. Check the Hilton website for show dates. Ticket prices are \$95-225.

No matter what you got into last night, now is not the time to start repenting. Go get some brunch. Champagne Sunday brunches are offered by most casinos, but there is no brunch finer than **Bally’s Sterling Brunch**. This sumptuous spread includes lobster, shrimp, crabs, sushi, caviar, and attentively poured Evian water and premium champagne. *Info: Bally’s Las Vegas* – 3645 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo. Tel. 702/967-7999. *Sterling Brunch* starts at 9:30am, last seating is at 1:30pm. Cost is \$65 per person plus tax and tip.

Before you leave town, you’ve got to see Steve Wynn’s newest megaresort: the opulent **Wynn Las Vegas**. Unlike the streetside attractions he built at Bellagio, Mirage and Treasure Island, you have to step inside to see the cool attractions on offer here.

Enjoy the view at **Parasol Up/Down**, a beautiful two-level bar named for the colorful umbrellas hanging from the ceiling. It looks directly across the Lake of Dreams into a waterfall. *Info: Wynn Las Vegas* – 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Sands. Tel. 702/693-7111.



If you still have some time left before you need to get to the airport or hit the road, check out the **Bellagio Conservatory** or the **Flamingo Habitat**.

LONG WEEKEND

It's not a bad idea to extend a Vegas trip beyond a 48-hour banzai run, especially if this is your first time. There's a lot to see here, and while three days only scratch the surface, you see a lot more of the town at a much more leisurely pace. An extra day also gives you more freedom to explore beyond the Strip. Add these stops to your list for a third day.

At the **Rio**, every corner turned provides new opportunities for entertainment. There's a pit where bikini-clad dealers deal blackjack games. There are Bevertainers, cocktail servers who burst into song and dance routines every 20 minutes or so. If all that seems a little passive for your taste, there's the **Masquerade in the Sky parade**. You can participate, put on a costume and join performers aboard the floats. *Info: Rio* - 3700 W. Flamingo Rd., 3/4 mi. west of the Strip. Tel. 702/777-7777. *Masquerade in the Sky* performances are every hour from 6pm to midnight. Viewing the show is free, riding costs \$12.95. Riders must be 36" tall.

While a few of the hotels in Vegas are more plain on the inside than their wild exteriors would indicate, the **New York-New York** delivers in evocative detail. Recreations of Central Park, Grand Central Station and the Financial District are particularly faithful, as are the 300-foot Brooklyn Bridge and 150-foot Statue



of Liberty that face the Strip. The **Roller Coaster at New York-New York** is a thrilling way to tour the outside of the hotel, as the track loops around the twelve skyscrapers that mimic landmarks like the Chrysler Building

and the Empire State Building. *Info: New York-New York* - 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Tropicana. Tel. 702/740-6969. *Roller Coaster* open 11am-11 pm Sun-Thu, 10:30am-midnight Fri-Sat. Tickets are \$14 for the first ride, \$7 for re-rides, \$25 for an all-day pass. Riders must be 54" tall.

A bonus night in Vegas allows a trip downtown. Do this after you've seen the Strip, so you can appreciate the differences. The *Viva Vision* show at the **Fremont Street Experience** is the most intense sensory stimulation this town has seen since Hunter S. Thompson flipped out on adrenochrome. The canopy displays different shows every hour, ranging from psychedelic to patriotic.

At the area's east end, the **Neon Museum** offers a self-guided outdoor walking tour of Vegas' unique contribution to Americana, with eleven signs displayed including the old Aladdin genie lamp and the Hacienda's Horse and Rider. Also popular are guided tours at noon and 2pm Tue-Fri. Reservations are a must! *Info: Fremont Street Experience* - Fremont St. between Main St. and Las Vegas Blvd. Tel. 702/678-5600. Shows every hour on the hour between 7pm and midnight. Free admission. *Neon Museum* - 702/387-NEON. Open 24 hours, free admission. Guided tours are a suggested \$15 donation per person.



LOVE, VEGAS-STYLE WEEKEND

Las Vegas is the “marriage capital of the world.” Everyone from Warren Beatty to Elvis Presley has married here. Some of them have worked out better than others. But you don’t need to say “I do” to take advantage of all Sin City’s opportunities for *amore*. Most Vegas hotels offer **Jacuzzi suites**, perfect for lovers. Some of these fantastic rooms even boast great Strip views right from the tub. The most romantic hotels in town are Paris Las Vegas (\$\$\$), Venetian (\$\$\$\$), Bellagio (\$\$\$\$), Red Rock (\$\$\$\$) and Mandalay Bay (\$\$\$).

Paris Las Vegas is one of the most beautiful spots in town, inside and out. Walk through the lovely shopping arcades inside the hotel, and outside through iconic landmarks like 2/3-scale Arc de Triomphe and the Louvre. The half-scale **Eiffel Tower Experience** gives a remarkable 360 degree Strip view, right from its



center. Take the elevator up 460 feet, where tour guides answer questions and point out landmarks. The 11th floor restaurant features Continental cuisine and sweeping fountain views. Want to pop the question here? You wouldn’t be the first, but what a way to get a “yes.”
Info: Paris Las Vegas - 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S., between Flamingo and Harmon. Tel. 702/946-7000. *Eiffel Tower Experience* open 9:30am-12:30am, weather permitting. Admission is \$9, \$7 for seniors and kids 6-12.

The **Bellagio** offers plenty for romantics. The Fountains are a no-brainer, but the main lobby reveals **Fiori Di Como**, a massive 70'x30' Dale Chihuly sculpture containing over 2,000 hand-blown glass flowers. The **Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art** rotates pieces from its \$300 million permanent collection. This is a serious gallery. Recent exhibitions have featured the work of Warhol, Monet, Picasso and Van Gogh. *Info: Bellagio* - 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo. Tel. 702/693-7871. *Bellagio Gallery of Fine Art* (Tel. 702/693-7871) is open 10am-6pm Sun-Thu, 10 am-9 pm Fri-Sat. Admission is \$17, \$14 for students, seniors and Nevada residents.



If the Eiffel Tower view isn't dynamic enough, you have options. Flying from McCarran, **Papillon** offers 8-10 minute helicopter rides over the Strip and Downtown. A more pricey option is a private flight including champagne and hotel pickup. *Info: Papillon* - 275 E. Tropicana Ave., 1 mi. east of the Strip. Tel. 702/736-7243. Flights leave between 6:30pm and 10:30pm. Cost is \$82, \$39

for kids. A private flight for up to 4 people is \$375.

Don't Miss...

- **Eiffel Tower Experience**
- **Gondola rides**, either at the Venetian or on Lake Las Vegas
- **The Strip by helicopter**
- A spectacular **gourmet dinner**
- A **couples' massage**

Get up early and enjoy breakfast in bed if room service appeals to you. You don't have to wait til Sunday for a **champagne brunch** - most of the resorts, including the Paris, Planet Hollywood and Bellagio each offer this indulgence all weekend long.

The **Venetian's** romantic appeal is obvious. The canal city's Vegas namesake features many of its most recognized sights, built to full scale, plus free performances from strolling musicians and opera singers. The **Grand Canal Shoppes** feature 500,000 sq. ft. of premium shopping around a winding canal. You can take a gondola ride through the complex, though you never forget that you're inside a mall. Too bad the rides offered outdoors are kind of underwhelming as well. Quite riveting, however,



are the talented **Living Statues**, who perform daily in St. Mark's Square and next to Ann Taylor. (If you're here for three days, skip the gondola ride here and take one on Lake Las Vegas instead.) *Info: Venetian* - 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. between Sands and Flamingo. Tel. 702/414-4469. *Grand Canal Shoppes* (Tel. 702/414-4500) open from 10am-11pm Sun-Thu and 10am-midnight Fri-Sat. Admission and entertainment are free. Living Statues perform noon-8pm daily. Gondola rides (Tel. 702/414-

4300) are \$12.50 outdoors, \$15 indoors. Private 2-passenger rides are \$50 and \$60 respectively.

Part of the Vegas renaissance is the emergence of **luxurious spas**, which have popped up at all of the major casino resorts and many of the smaller ones too. Visit one of these world-class spas for an intimate couple's massage. The Venetian's **Canyon Ranch Spa** offers two-by-two aromatherapy, stone, Ayurvedic or Shirodhara massages. Tel. 702/414-3600. Other top choices include:

- Paris for Lovers (\$450) at **Mandara Spa** (Paris), a 2-hour package offering a silkening body polish, pastry service while you soak in the whirlpool, and an Aromatique massage. *Info:* 3655 Las Vegas Blvd. S. Tel. 702/946-4366.

- The signature Pittura Festa (\$475 per couple) treatment at the off-Strip **WELL Spa** at the new **Platinum Hotel**, which includes dual body glows and a private body painting party. *Info:* 211 E. Flamingo Road at Koval Lane. Tel. 702/636-2424.

- The Ceremony of Love (\$300-495 per couple) at **Planet Hollywood Spa by Mandara**, which combines the massage of your choice with an exotic jasmine flower bath. *Info:* 3667 Las Vegas Blvd. S. Tel. 702/758-5SPA.

Don't fret if these prices seem steep. Some **mid-market casino spas** offer some kind of couple's massage for about half the cost. Check out the Orleans, Tropicana, Imperial Palace or Euphoria – a highly rated local chain of day spas.

Las Vegas' wide array of **gourmet restaurants** includes many with enough intimacy and charm to appeal to couples. Don't miss out on the opportunity to dine in lavish surroundings unlike any you'll find at home. See the sidebar below for my top picks.

Quite a few of Las Vegas **shows** lift your heart and tantalize your nether regions. Your tastes may vary, but the three shows we

Most Romantic Restaurants

- **Picasso**, Bellagio
- **Alizé**, Palms
- **Eiffel Tower Restaurant**, Paris Las Vegas
- **SW Steakhouse**, Wynn Las Vegas
- **Mix**, THEhotel

Best Views in Vegas

- **VooDoo Lounge**, Rio
- **ghostbar**, Palms
- **Stratosphere Tower**, Stratosphere
- **Eiffel Tower Experience**, Paris
- **MIX**, THEhotel at Mandalay Bay

suggest below are great for couples. **Zumanity** may be the best-suited of the bunch. Cirque du Soleil's productions are sensual enough to begin with, and this cabaret-style show spotlights human sexuality in all of its colors and kinks, to stimulating effect. The sublime and erotic show is not for every body, so if you are

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offended by topless women, transvestites, unnaturally large codpieces and dildo jugglers, move on. Best of all are the **Duo Sofas**, loveseats that offer some of the best vantage points in the house plus the chance to snuggle. *Info: New York-New York* - 3790 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Tropicana. *Zumanity* (Tel. 702/740-6815) showtimes are 7:30 and 10:30pm Tue, Wed, Fri-Sun. Tickets are \$69, \$79 and \$99. Duo Sofas are \$129 per person.

Folies Bergère has been a Vegas fixture since 1959, featuring beautiful showgirls, elaborate sets and lavish costumes. Featured acts rotate over the years, but the general idea remains the same: beautiful dancers performing fast-paced and seamless production numbers. Its setting in Tropicana's Tiffany Theater is definitely showing its age, and it lacks the technical wizardry of some other productions. There is something to be said for traditions though. Note that there are topless and covered versions of the show. *Info: Tropicana* - 3801 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Tropicana. *Folies Bergère* (Tel. 800/829-9034) is performed at 8:30pm Tue, Fri and at 7:30 and 10pm Mon, Wed, Thu, and Sat. 7:30pm performances are not topless. Tickets are \$64.90-75.90.

The MGM Grand's skin show, **Crazy Horse Paris**, is one of the aforementioned technological marvels. This Parisian import, not to be confused with the Crazy Horse Too strip club, uses an astrological construct as its excuse to display the dancers' natural

No Clocks Here ...

... Still, all of the **production shows in Las Vegas start promptly**. Plan accordingly, as it sucks maneuvering through a row of people cursing your inconsiderate name. Allow time for traffic, parking, and walking to the theater. Erring on the side of caution preserves your karma and gives you the chance to enjoy a pre-show drink.

breasts in finely choreographed unison. Besides skimpy costumes, you'll get creative lighting, intricate set pieces, and special effects. This show is more high-brow than you'd expect. *Info: MGM Grand* - 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Tropicana. *Crazy Horse Paris* (Tel. 877/880-0880) is performed at 8 and 10:30pm Wed-Mon. Tickets are \$49-59.

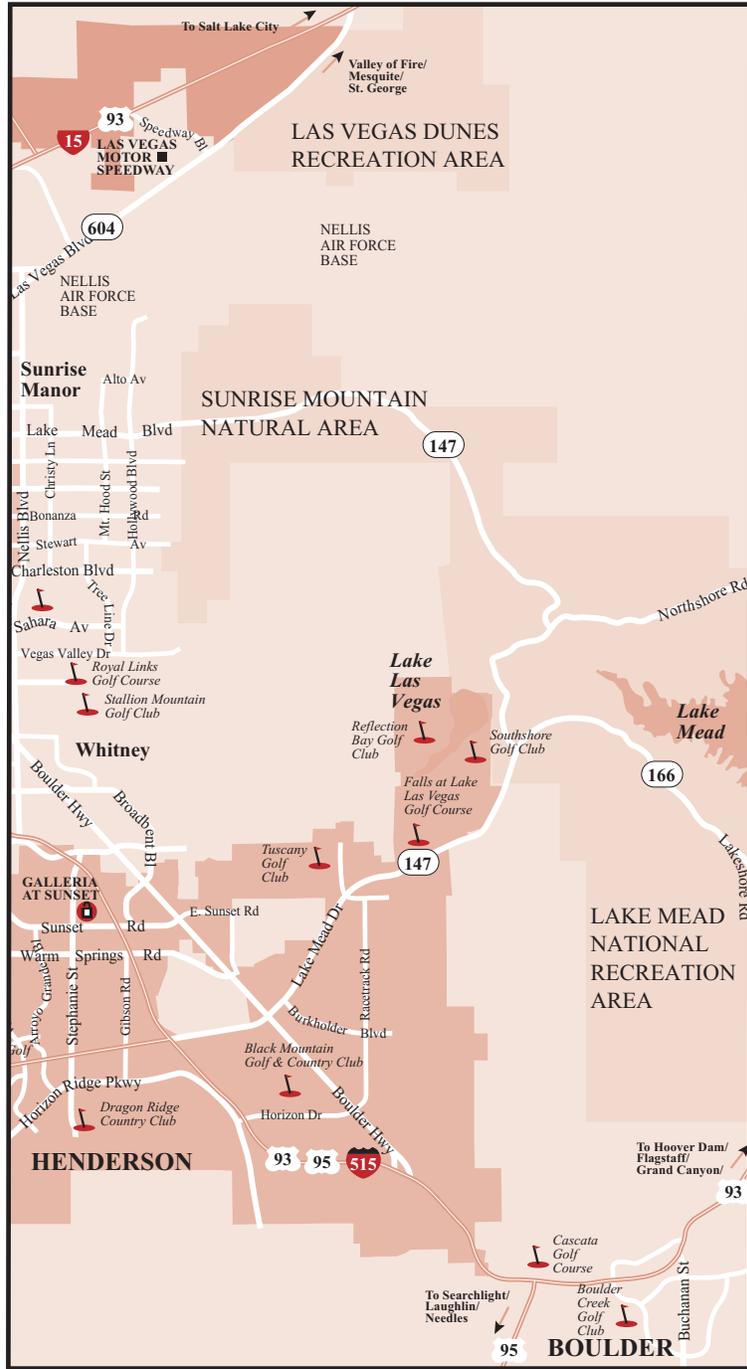
On your last day in town, you'll be a little more comfortable and well-versed in the Strip's offerings. This is a good opportunity to explore some of the other Strip hotels. The **Mirage** is particularly lovely. Behind the check-in is a 20,000 gallon aquarium filled with over 1,000 colorful, unusual creatures, including sharks. Across the way is an atrium whose 90 ft. high glass dome houses a lush paradise recreating a tropical rainforest. The South Seas theme is carried out in many areas of the hotel's beautiful interior, including the elaborate casino. *Info: Mirage* - 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. S., between Flamingo and Spring Mountain. Tel. 702/791-7111.

LONG WEEKEND

Return to the **Bellagio**. See the Conservatory if you haven't already. Follow the smell of heaven to **Jean-Philippe Patisserie**. There you'll find the world's largest chocolate fountain, pumping over two tons of molten white, milk and dark chocolate from the ceiling to the floor, through a series of 25 hand-crafted bowls. It's safely behind glass, so don't even think about pulling an Augustus Gloop. You can, however grab a decadent dessert or savory snack from interactive stations that will satisfy any unholy craving the fountain inspires in you. Or, visit the new **Payard Patisserie & Bistro** at Caesars Palace for the city's only dessert tasting menu. *Info: Bellagio*



- 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo. Tel. 702/693-7111. *Jean-Philippe Patisserie* is open 7am-11pm, until midnight on Friday and Saturday. *Caesars Palace* - 3570 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Flamingo. *Payard Patisserie* (Tel. 877/346-4642) hours were not available at press time. The restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



A half hour's drive from the Strip is **Lake Las Vegas**. This full resort community has Tuscan-inspired architecture, lush green fairways and multi-million dollar homes surrounding the placid 320-acre lake. Its views are some of the best in the entire valley. The resort includes golf, tennis, and gambling, but lovers will appreciate the **gondola rides**. The gondolas at the Venetian are all well and good, but you're in the middle of a chlorinated mall fountain. The open sky, serene water and mountain scenery make this a much more authentic experience. Book a gourmet dinner cruise, and you'll enjoy a savory meal served on the finest crystal, china and silver. Picnic cruises, as well as champagne and chocolate cruises, are also available.

Admittedly, Lake Las Vegas is fairly remote, but the presence of **free live jazz on the waterfront on weekends** sweetens the deal. *Info: Gondolas at Lake Las Vegas* – 220 Grand Mediterra, Henderson. Tel. 877/4-GONDOLA. Open 11am-midnight daily. Cruises are \$135-395 per couple.

Gentlemen, you've sold your significant other on a Las Vegas vacation by playing up its fantastic shopping. Why not suck it up and join her for some of it? The **Esplanade** at the Wynn is haute couture at its haughtiest: the only stateside retail establishments of Oscar de la Renta and Jean-Paul Gaultier can be found here, along with a veritable who's who of fashion. The benefit of taking her shopping at the Esplanade is that its prices are so insanely high that you probably won't have to actually buy anything. If you're actually looking to take something home, the **Forum Shops** (*photo at right*) and **Grand Canal Shoppes** are high-end, but accessible. The Stratosphere recently renovated and renamed its 107th-floor lounge, **Romance at Top of the World**. The sweeping view alone lends itself to amorous ambitions, and they've enhanced it with mood lighting and candles. Live jazz trios and DJs provide tunes.



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For true intimacy, private seating is available with Strip views and plush couches, perfect for bottle service and snuggling. *Info: Stratosphere* – 2000 Las Vegas Blvd S. north of Sahara. *Romance at Top of the World* (Tel. 702/380-7764) is open from 4pm-1am Sun-Thu, until 2am Fri-Sat. No cover.

If a day at Lake Las Vegas and shopping isn't your thing, how about this? If you can handle a pre-dawn wakeup, a short drive can yield an unforgettable view. Pack binoculars, champagne and OJ and take Lake Mead Blvd. (Highway 147) east to the edge of the Las Vegas Valley. The road curves through switchbacks, rising to pass between **Sunrise** and **Frenchman Mountains**. From these desert peaks 4,052 feet up, you can sip mimosas with your sweetheart while watching the early morning sun paint the casinos in colors you'll never see another time of day.

In the evening, head to **Peppermill's Fireside Lounge**, named **one of the top ten makeout bars in the country** by *Nerve* magazine. The low-lit and cozy atmosphere focuses on the eponymous fire pit. Lovers of a certain age can relive their adolescence at the last drive-in movie theater in town, the **Century Las Vegas 6**, near Fiesta Rancho. *Info: Peppermill's Fireside Lounge* – 2985 Las Vegas Blvd. S., at Convention Center. Tel. 702/735-4177. Open 24 hours. Free admission. *Century Las Vegas 6 Drive-In* – 4150 W. Carey Ave., North Las Vegas. Tel. 702/646-3565. Showtimes vary. Admission is \$6, \$4 on Tuesdays.

MAXIMUM PARTY WEEKEND

Las Vegas is to inhibitions what prom night is to virginity: things get lost. Las Vegas is a place to go off-script and get out of character. For many people, this means spending the weekend in a state of intoxication, **partying from dusk til dawn**. With Vegas' open container laws and 24-hour liquor licenses, you can understand why! Read on to find Sin City's best parties.

Many of the hot party places are located off-Strip, but you're still

going to want easy Strip access, so avoid the neighborhood casinos. Off-strip or downtown hotels are OK. A cab ride is a cab ride, and you certainly won't be driving on this trip. The **best party hotels** in Vegas are the Palms (\$\$\$), Hard Rock (\$\$\$), Rio (\$\$), Treasure Island (\$\$) and the Stratosphere (\$).

Don't Miss ...

- **Rehab pool party** at the Hard Rock
- Harrah's **Carnaval Court**
- Your choice of **A-list nightclubs**

If you get into Vegas before the sun goes down, **happy hour** is in order. One of the best ways to party on the cheap in this town is to take advantage of SpyOnVegas.com's Open Bar series, where every weekday a different bar hosts an event with a sponsored bar, where drinks featuring a particular liquor are on the house. The lineup changes every week, but the summer tends to feature pool parties with big-name performers at the Hard Rock's pool. *Info:* Check SpyOnVegas.com for details.

Some of our other favorites include **McCormick & Schmick's** (335 Hughes Center Dr., just off Flamingo and Paradise. Tel. 702/836-9000) for its renowned \$1.95 bar menu, the **Triple 7 Brewpub** (Main Street Station, 200 N. Main St. Tel. 702/387-1896) for its microbrews, and **Firefly on Paradise** (3900 Paradise Rd., between Flamingo & Sands. Tel. 702/369-3971) for half price drinks to accompany the best tapas in the city.

Further down the stretch of Flaming known as Restaurant Row, **The Tillerman** (2245 E. Flamingo. Tel. 702/731-4036) offers half price bottles of wine and bar food. The Hard Rock's **Pink Taco** (4455 Paradise Rd. at Harmon): has deals on beers, margaritas and appetizers.

Check into your hotel and explore. While it's tempting to start throwing down money and quaffing the free drinks ASAP, you don't want to be burned out, blotto and broke before midnight. Pre-game but pace yourself. You've got a lot of weekend ahead of you! And tonight, you need to be 100%, because you're going

Best Ways Past the Velvet Rope

- The most iron-clad way to ensure entrance is to **reserve bottle service**.
- **Dress to impress.** No jeans, sneakers, t-shirts, athletic wear, Timberlands, baseball caps, etc., although the dress code varies by club and night. Call beforehand to verify.
- **Bring girls.** The prettier, the better. Groups of men have a real hard time getting into most places. Clubs aim for a 4:1 ratio in favor of females.
- **Arrive early.** As clubs fill up, doormen are more selective.
 - If you're gambling where you'll be clubbing, **ask the pit boss or host for a line pass.**
 - **"Front-of-line" passes,** which truthfully only get you into a shorter line, are available on VEGAS.com. You'll pay a \$20 premium. Do not, however, buy line passes from a cabbie.
 - **Don't club-hop.** \$20-30 covers and long lines make this a really bad idea.
 - If all else fails, you can try **tipping the bouncer.** Don't even think about trying this with less than a \$20.

to one of the hottest clubs in the city. If you've got the scratch, consider taking advantage of **bottle service**. For \$300 and up, depending on the club and the beverage, you can reserve your own table for four, complete with liquor, mixers and accoutrements. It may seem like a lot of money, but it can be a real conversation starter and attention getter if you're trying to flaunt and flirt.

The newest celebrity-approved hotspot in town is **Social House**, an overpriced but ultrachic sushi restaurant with prime real estate on the edge of the Treasure Island lagoon. The Palms maintains its Hollywood cache, as always, with the new **Playboy Club**. And some of the world's most in-demand DJs perform at the Hard Rock's **Body English**, especially at the Godskitchen party promoted by London's Ministry of Sound on Wednesdays. Friday and Sunday parties feature especially attractive promos for ladies. *Info:* *Treasure Island* - 3300 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Spring

Mountain. *Social House* (Tel. 702/894-7223) is open 5pm-midnight, with late night dining until 2am Thu-Sun. *Palms* - 4321 W.

Flamingo Rd., 1 mi. west of the Strip. *Playboy Club* (Tel. 702/942-6832) opens at 8pm nightly. Admission is \$20-40, depending on the night, and may include Moon admission as well. *Body English* (Tel. 702/693-4000) at the Hard Rock Hotel, 4455 Paradise Rd. at Harmon, is open 10:30pm-4am Wed -Sun. Cover is \$30 for men, \$20 for women.

You can't talk about Vegas nightlife without discussing the **Palms**, home to wildest nightspots in town. George Maloof's hip off-Strip casino has long been another favorite with the celebrity elite. **Rain** is the Palms' signature nightclub. Pyrotechnics and special lighting effects dazzle onlookers, and surprises here include an infamous night where Britney Spears showed up and shocked by getting on stage to debut "I'm a Slave 4 U." Ah, those innocent days when Britney shocked us with her music. *Info: Palms* - 4321 W. Flamingo Rd., 1 mi. west of the Strip. *Rain* (Tel. 702/940-7246) opens 11pm Thu-Sat. Admission to each is \$10 Thu, \$25 Fri-Sat.

The Venetian's entry into the superclub sweepstakes is the ambitious and popular **Tao**, a 42,000 sq. ft. complex with a great restaurant, hip ultralounge, banging nightclub with two rooms of music and a lushly landscaped outdoor terrace with a pool. The décor is just as pan-Asian as the food, with the lounge boasting a hand-carved Buddha statue and a Koi-filled infinity pool. *Info: Venetian* - 3355 Las Vegas Blvd. S. between Sands and Flamingo. *Tao* (Tel. 702/388-8588) lounge opens at 5pm nightly, nightclub opens at 10pm Thu-Fri, 9:30pm Sat. Cover for the nightclub is \$20, \$30 for men.

Plan to sleep in and sleep it off. A couple glasses of water before bed will ease the morning after. Still, draw the shades unless you want to spontaneously combust at the unforgiving desert sunrise. Spend some time by the pool if that'll make you feel better. The Palms and Hard Rock are fantastic examples of aquatic excess, each featuring lounging hardbodies galore and swim-up blackjack tables. (Note that both pools, like most in this town, shutter up during the winter months.)

Ready to venture out into the public again? Time for some *al fresco*

dining and drinking. One of our favorite places to sit and sip is **Carnaval Court** at Harrah's. This festive, brightly colored open-air venue features flair bartenders and diverse live music including Vegas legend Cook E. Jarr. Its casual menu is one of the Strip's most affordable options, with just about everything under ten bucks. *Info: Harrah's Las Vegas* - 3475 Las Vegas Blvd. S. between Flamingo and Sands. Tel. 702/369-5000. *Carnaval Court* is open from 1pm-2am.

The newest party bar in town is right next door at the Imperial Palace. **Rockhouse bar & nightclub** opened at this space right on the sidewalk during summer 2006. Rockhouse features a Strip-side daiquiri bar, cheap bottles and a mechanical bull and bird-cage where attention whores and bachelorette parties can debase themselves. *Info: Imperial Palace* - 3535 Las Vegas Blvd. S. between Flamingo and Sands. *Rockhouse bar & nightclub* (Tel. 702/691-2909) is open from 10am-4am daily. \$10 cover charge applies after 9pm Thu-Sun. \$20 cover after midnight Thu-Sun.

Ultralounges may seem on the surface like every other nightclub, but generally these are better environments for mingling, chatting, and general socializing. Perhaps the highest profile ultralounge is **ghostbar**, on the 55th floor of the Palms Tower. This sleek, retro-chic nightspot features a white, silver and green palette, with lots of chrome and even a little Astroturf. ghostbar takes full advantage of its height, offering a 180 degree view from inside the club, and 270 degrees from the patio. What's more, it's surfaced with reinforced glass, allowing you a view straight down to the pool. This is one of the most difficult spots in town to get into, so arrive early. *Info: Palms* - 4321 W. Flamingo Rd., 1 mi. west of the Strip. *ghostbar* (Tel. 702/942-6832) opens 8pm nightly. Admission is \$15 Sun-Thu, \$25 Fri-Sat.

Even though it's a hefty cab fare from North Strip, the **Whiskey** at **Green Valley Ranch** is another highly recommended nightspot, popular with your Clooneys and DiCaprios, plus locals from upscale Henderson. Outside, the 8-acre Whiskey Beach pool area offers Strip views, fresh air and quiet conversation, even during the winter months, when it's heated. *Info: Green Valley Ranch* - 2300 Paseo Verde Pkwy., Henderson, about 10 miles southeast of

the Strip. *The Whiskey* (Tel. 702/617-7560) is open 5pm-2am Sun-Thu, 6pm-3am Fri-Sat. No cover.

There are, of course, ultralounge options on the Strip. We recommend the one that started it all: **Tabú**. Open since 2002, it's still a standard bearer. This sophisticated, happening venue features distinctive touches you won't find in any ordinary bar. Things like hostess/models who mix drinks at tableside and change costumes throughout the evening.



Tables with morphing images projected onto them. Bottles presented inside a large block of ice. Every nightclub likes to paint itself as revolutionary, but Tabú is genuinely innovative. And speaking of innovative, check out the new **eyecandy sound lounge & bar** at Mandalay Bay. This place features interactive lighting, visuals and messaging, plus upscale cocktail lounge chic. *Info: MGM Grand* - 3799 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Tropicana. *Tabú* (Tel. 702/891-7254) opens at 10pm Tue-Sat. Cover is \$20 Sun, Tue, Wed, Thu; and \$25 Fri-Sat. *Mandalay Bay* - 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Russell. Tel. 702/632-7777. *eyecandy* is open from 6 pm to 4 am.

No self-respecting night of Las Vegas excess is complete without a drunken meal at the **Peppermill**, the landmark North Strip restaurant featured in the movie *Casino*. While this place could get by on reputation and atmosphere alone, the food is great, especially when you've got a stomach full of alcohol. Breakfast is served 24 hours, but this is hardly a greasy spoon. It's not just retro, it's vintage. *Info: Peppermill* - 2985 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Convention Center. Tel. 702/735-4177. Open 24 hours.

Champagne brunches are a dime a dozen, but if that's a little frou frou, head down to the outstanding **Garduño's** at the Palms.

This value-priced New Mexican restaurant offers an all-you-can-eat Sunday brunch featuring breakfast food, unlimited margaritas, and a fajita bar. *Info: Palms* - 4321 W. Flamingo Rd., 1 mi. west of the Strip. *Garduño's* (Tel. 702/938-2666) serves brunch from 10:30am-3pm Sun. Cost is \$14.99 per person. Note: brunch is not served at the Fiesta Rancho location.

There's only one truly appropriate way to round out a weekend of drunken madness. Go to **Rehab**. On Sundays the **Hard Rock** opens its pool to the general public for a shindig favored by the fabulous. Tanned, trim and nearly threadless girls and guys drink, dance and dive at this party, which is as wild as anything that happens here after dark. Cabanas offer misters, shade and attentive drink service, plus you get the same kind of attention you get from ordering bottle service. *Info: Hard Rock* - 4455 Paradise Rd. at Harmon, 3/4 mi. east of the Strip. Tel. 702/693-5000. *Rehab* is on Sundays during pool season (usually Apr-Oct) from noon-8pm. Cover is \$30 for men, \$20 for women.

LONG WEEKEND

If you're getting in on Thursday, and you'd rather sneak in a little happy-hour action at the tables than at the bar, the quiet, modern **Westin Casuarina** is your go-to. Its normal \$5 minimums drop to \$3 on the craps table and 25 cents on the roulette wheel. Of course, this happy hour special also includes free cocktails. *Info: Westin Casuarina* - 160 E. Flamingo, 1/2 mi. east of the Strip. 702/836-9775. Happy hour is Mon-Thu from 5-8pm.

Be sure to take advantage of Vegas' liberal open container laws while you're here. Grab a frozen daiquiri at **Fat Tuesday** and wander the Strip. Its locations include the Stratosphere, MGM Grand, Miracle Mile, and the Forum Shops at Caesars. Downtown, the otherwise unremarkable **La Bayou** has a daiquiri bar serving lethally potent frozen drinks in footballs and yards. *Info: La Bayou* - 15 E. Fremont St. Tel. 702/385-4250.

If you'll be in town til Tuesday, you'll discover that Mondays are quiet. One notable exception is the **Foundation Room**, the House of Blues' exclusive, members-only club situated high atop the Mandalay Bay. This exotic, classy, and cozy room is open to the

public only once a week, and the public takes full advantage, braving long lines and exorbitant beverage prices in exchange for chill conversation and stunning Strip views. Mirage's **JET** is another worthwhile Monday option, with a popular industry night. This state of the art pleasure palace includes cryogenics, lasers, and killer sound. *Info: Mandalay Bay* - 3950 Las Vegas Blvd. S. at Russell. *Foundation Room* (Tel. 702/632-7600) is open to the public 11pm-5am Mon. Admission is \$30. *Mirage* - 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. between Flamingo and Spring Mountain. *Jet* (Tel. 702/693-8300) is open 10:30pm-4:30am Fri, Sat, Mon. Admission is \$30.

If none of the above fits the bill, try hipster hangouts like the **Ice House Lounge** and the **Beauty Bar** (the latter a centerpiece of the bustling new Fremont East entertainment district), as well as more esoteric spots like the eclectic **Art Bar** and neighborhood-style **Dino's Lounge**. *Info: Ice House Lounge* - 650 S. Main St. Tel. 702/315-2570. Open 10am-2am Mon-Fri, 11am-2am Sat. Cover Sat only, \$10 before 11pm, \$20 after. *Beauty Bar* - 517 S. Fremont St. Tel. 702/598-1965. Open 9pm-4am Sat, Sun, Tue. Open 5pm-4am Wed-Fri. Cover is \$5 Fri-Sat. *Art Bar* - 1511 S. Main St. Tel. 702/437-2787. Open 2pm-6am daily. *Dino's Lounge* - 1516 Las Vegas Blvd. S. Tel. 702/382-3894. Open 24 hours.

LAST WEEKEND OF FREEDOM

Las Vegas is also the **bachelor party capital** of the world. Bottomless booze. Topless dancers. Walls of big-screen TVs showing sports. And there's even a little gambling. If there's any better place for a group of guys to send someone off in style, we'd like to know about it. A bachelor party takes preparation and leadership. If you're the best man, be prepared for some cat herding as you keep your boys on schedule and on plan.

Quite a few bachelor parties will pack a bunch of guys into a single room. You're going to need a solid base of operations with plenty of space. (The standard rooms at the **Rio** (\$\$), **Venetian**