

# A Vegas Vacation Perfect for Non-Gamblers

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PHOTO: Red Rock Canyon near Las Vegas, Nevada. (photo courtesy of coleong/iStock/Getty Images Plus)

Pauline Frommer once said, “As often as you have seen it on TV or in a movie, nothing can prepare you for your first sight of Las Vegas.” And that rings true each time we return to the city that’s constantly re-inventing itself.

Yes, “Glitter Gulch” as it’s often been called is about flashing neon lights, luxury casinos and gambling. And it’s likely the number one reason most people come to Vegas.

Truth be told though, there’s so much to do and see here that even for non-gamblers, Vegas is well worth the trip.

## **Where to Stay**

While there’s more than one facet to Vegas, there is no denying the major draw remains Las Vegas Boulevard. A section of this road is widely known as “The Strip.”

Ablaze in lights, it’s quite a spectacle day or night, stretching 4.5 miles from Mandalay Bay to the Stratosphere.

Casino resorts may appear to reign supreme, but there are many great hotels and vacation clubs for those who don’t want the chaos and constant ding-ding-ding of slot machines or smoke-filled casino floors.

Due to the challenging length of The Strip, location can be very important. Our perfect option just happens to be on the 50-yard line of this eclectic stretch of real estate.

Elara by Hilton Grand Vacations features studios to four-bedroom grand villas with all the conveniences of home in a resort setting just steps from the action.

Our stunning one-bedroom Hollywood-themed suite had a king-size bed with a separate living area and floor-to-ceiling window views of Las Vegas.

Vegas wakes up slowly after going strong all night long, so, we loved greeting the day with coffee and breakfast in our own spacious villa watching the city crawl back to life.

### **Where to Play in Vegas**

Entertainment abounds in Vegas and can vary from a variety of free shows to top-billed Cirque du Soleil spectacles and well-known entertainers like Celine Dion.

For same-day deals, Tix4 Tonight offers half-price tickets online or at their nine Vegas booth locations for a myriad of shows featuring illusionists, comedians, impersonators, cabaret and more.

Additionally, many of Vegas' magnificent themed hotels host fascinating no-cost shows and spectacular exhibits. Several of these are definite must-dos.

Bellagio's Conservatory and Botanical Garden is a year-round feast for the senses as the 14,000 square-foot floral playground is transformed seasonally into a magnificent showcase of trees, flowers, water features and colorful décor.

Our visit happened to fall within the Chinese New Year celebrating the Year of the Dog and the displays were breathtaking.

One of the most popular attractions in Vegas is the spectacular outdoor Fountains at Bellagio. Perfectly choreographed, the 1,000 fountains shoot majestically into the air dancing gracefully to lights and songs by Andrea Bocelli, Luciano Pavarotti and other greats.

Set in a tropical lagoon surrounded by palm trees and cascading waterfalls, The Volcano at the Mirage erupts every evening after dark spewing smoke and fire 100-feet into the air. Oohs and ahhs from the crowd watching this spectacle of fire, water and light registered their delight.

It's worth a trip downtown to get that "Old Vegas" feel at the Fremont Street Experience. Located in the heart of downtown, the free nightly shows feature 12.5 million lights and 550,000 watts of amazing sound and music.

Just one mile north of downtown, the Neon Museum and Boneyard has one of the most extensive collections of neon signs in Las Vegas from casinos, hotels, wedding chapels, restaurants and other historic businesses. Its meandering trails past iconic signs are literally a walk down memory lane.

With more than 150 vintage signs in view, guided tours give visitors the opportunity to turn back the hands of time to the days of yesteryear in Old Vegas.

### **Where to Play Near Vegas**

For a little break from all the glitz and glamour, we drove 25-minutes west to Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area to experience the natural beauty of the Mojave Desert.

Here, visitors can hike, rock climb or enjoy the scenery along an awe-inspiring 13-mile scenic drive to see spectacular vividly-colored rock formations.

Volunteers at the Visitor Center provided detailed maps and information regarding scenic overlooks and the perfect hikes to match activity and interest levels.

After spending a half-day exploring gulches, hills, washes and the incredible majesty of the red rock formations, we were convinced a return visit is definitely in the cards.

Another fascinating must-see site is Hoover Dam, located just 35 miles south of Vegas.

One of the greatest engineering marvels of the 20th century and an icon of modern architecture, the dam never ceases to impress. Onsite tours share the inside scoop on the environmental and engineering challenges that had to be overcome when building this technological masterpiece. Just peering over the edge takes your breath away.

### **Shop and Gawk**

Whether you're into shopping or not, it's that guaranteed shopping in Vegas isn't like any other place.

Yes, there are mega malls and designer boutiques here, but nothing beats browsing the fascinating themed emporiums inside the magnificent hotels.

One of our favorites is the Grand Canal Shoppes at the Venetian and Palazzo resorts. Cobbled walkways, charming streetside cafés and live performances under a domed blue sky make the experience uniquely fascinating and fun. And when we took a break, a creamy luscious gelato was the perfect afternoon snack.

Though the Grand Canal is not exactly like the real canals of Venice, it definitely has its appeal. Authentic Venetian gondolas floated gently beneath bridges, alongside Italian cafes and under balconies as a serenading gondolier poled us down the Grand Canal with melodious renditions of "O Sole Mio" and "Santa Lucia."

In another shopping twist, visitors can walk the streets of faux ancient Rome accompanied by ambient surroundings and talking statues in the Forum Shops at Caesars Palace. Anyone looking for world-class retailers like Versace and Armani will find them here amidst the trappings and grandeur of the Roman Empire.

The forum also features a 50,000-gallon saltwater aquarium filled with sharks, stingrays, puffer fish and a myriad of other tropical sea life.

It's impossible to miss the Fall of Atlantis fountain show located near the aquarium where every hour on the hour, guests are treated to animatronic figures coming to life with special effects as they recount their rendition of the famous mythical island's demise.

## **Bites and Sites**

This trip we decided it was time for an alternative from the glamorous strip dining to explore other Vegas restaurants.

Booking a [Lip Smacking Foodie Tour](#) was the most fun culinary experience we've had in Vegas—ever.

We selected the Downtown Tour to see what's new and happening in this older part of the city. The two-and-a-half-hour experience included three incredible chef-driven, farm-to-table restaurants and one rooftop bar with killer views.

Downtown Las Vegas is seeing incredible change. Restorations are rejuvenating this once-seedy part of Vegas with new appeal and an exciting urban vibe.

Our first stop was [Carson Kitchen](#), the first downtown casual eatery located inside a repurposed mid-century motel. The eclectic, swanky comfort food-inspired eatery served up some incredible delights with a twist like "Devil's" eggs with crispy pancetta and caviar, crispy chicken skins with smoked honey and veal meatballs with a sherry foie gras cream sauce.

As we entered the restaurant, a group of satisfied patrons on their way out described Carson Kitchen to a tee when they called it, "the best gosh-darn restaurant we've ever eaten in here in Vegas."

Enroute to our next stop, we peeked into a restored speakeasy that to this day requires a password for entrance.

"Savor.Sip.Share" is the motto of [Therapy](#), a fascinating gem located on East Fremont Street.

Every small plate dish was creative and incredible, including the Devils on Horseback and bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with truffle goat cheese and almonds. But we were really here for their renowned Red Velvet Chicken Waffle Sliders.

Touted by many as the "best chicken waffle you'll ever eat," it's all true, even though I'm not a big chicken waffle fan. Buttermilk Battered Fried Chicken Breast with a red pepper remoulade slaw is stuffed between two red velvet waffles then topped with a vanilla maple syrup. It was simply to die for.

"Downtown like you've never seen it" is the only way to describe [Inspire](#) Nightclub's rooftop bar. Once an exclusive private club with limited membership, it's now open to the public. And views of the downtown are just that—inspiring.

The culinary program at 7th & Carson is about simple, approachable ingredients combined to create fun flavors in their shared plates.

The restaurant is fun and lively and the food here is innovative and astoundingly delicious. The Hearth Oven Bread, a round, in-house baked crispy-edged pie with four accompanying spreads was a huge hit.

We loved the freshness and inventively flavorful combinations of the Grilled Pear and Burrata and Wood Roasted Salads. But the shining star of the evening was the Salted Butterscotch Panna Cotta.

Too full for dessert, our server encouraged us to just try one bite. Needless to say, this devilishly delectable delight was so good, there was nothing left but the spoon.

Drew Carey once said, "Everything and anything you want to do, you can do in Las Vegas." And that's so true, even for those of us who aren't gamblers at all.