



## Las Vegas, Nevada



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### An Entertainment Economy Lights Up the Desert

**L**as Vegas dazzles like a sparkling jewel in its southwestern desert setting. A visit to this “Entertainment Capital of the World” captures not only the man-made spectacles of neon, glass and steel but also the more rustic natural beauty of sun, sand and stone.

Here entertainment of all types for all tastes abounds, and the wonders of the world – both ancient and modern – are recreated for the enjoyment of guests.

### A Desert Resort

Few people lived in the Las Vegas Valley a century ago — only 30 were counted in the 1900 census. The name Vegas, the Spanish word for meadows, derives from a few desert springs and grassy meadows that existed.

The foundation for urbanization was laid when railroad investor William Clark purchased land and water rights in the valley and persuaded the Nevada state legislature to allow a railroad depot there. The city was founded in

A gondolier serenades a couple as he steers the gondola through the canal inside the Venetian Hotel and Casino.

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1905 when Clark auctioned off much of his land.

Visitors came to the small city for its gambling casinos, operating legally at first and then illegally from 1910 to 1931. Construction of the Boulder Dam (later renamed Hoover Dam) on the Colorado River nearby in the 1930s brought the electric power and water on which the modern metropolis depends.

After the state legalized gambling again in 1931 and large military bases went up near Las Vegas during World War II, hotel owners attracted more visitors by featuring famous entertainers such as singer Frank Sinatra. In the 1940s and 1950s, major casino-hotel complexes began to rise along the stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard known as “the Strip.”

## The People

Nearly 2 million people live in the Las Vegas metropolitan area, the 31st most populous in the United States. They account for more than two-thirds of the population in the entire state of Nevada. The average age is 35.

## The Land

Las Vegas is the largest city in the Mojave Desert. The city of 341 square kilometers sits in a dry basin surrounded by rocky mountains and vegetated by desert plants. Its lush lawns and trees and sparkling fountains depend on water diverted from the Colorado River.

## The Weather

Las Vegas summers are very hot and dry. The winters are short and mild, with temperatures rarely dropping to the freezing point. Rainfall averages a scant 114 millimeters per year.

In succeeding decades, bigger and bigger mega-resorts replaced older casino hotels. Some of the world’s biggest and most luxurious hotels now are located along the Strip.

## Defying the Desert

Las Vegas demonstrates how far humans can alter the natural landscape. Casinos and shows are the top attractions, but the hard beauty of the desert is close by.

“Contemporary Las Vegas is astonishing,” author Thomas “Taj” Ainlay Jr. writes. “At night, it is a brilliant cluster of jewels of all shapes, sizes, and colors, glowing in the middle of a vast, black velvet canopy. By day, it is also an amazing sight, almost like a mirage. There is nothing but desert and rugged mountains all around, and then — in the middle of it all — one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the United States.”

In Las Vegas, you can gamble almost anywhere at any time, even at the airport and supermarkets.

You can eat your fill and more at scores of buffets and fine restaurants.

Luxury resorts in monumental architecture offer entertainment. You can see circus shows, magic shows, comedy shows and shows in tribute to entertainers such as Elvis Presley

You can go indoor skydiving or ride indoor roller coasters. You can play the machines at the Pinball Hall of Fame. At the Neon Museum, you can see hectares of historic electric casino signs.



Two cyclists ride along the 21-kilometer scenic drive at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in Nevada. ©AP Images

You can watch an hourly volcano-eruption light show and see the world’s largest glass pyramid. You can see replicas of the New York City skyline, Paris’s Eiffel Tower, Egypt’s Valley of the Kings and Venice’s canals.

Water is abundant in this desert oasis: A fountain show set to music dances at the Bellagio resort, gondolas glide on gentle canals at the Venetian Hotel, and sharks circle menacingly in the Golden Nugget’s tank.

You can also get away from the urban fantasy. Nearby Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area offers the natural wonders of the Mojave Desert, including sandstone cliffs colored red and cream and fossilized sand dunes.

“Las Vegas is the most extreme and allegorical of American settlements, bizarre and beautiful in its venality and in its devotion to immediate gratification,” essayist Joan Didion wrote in 1968.

The city has a saying that “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” but the wonderful memories visitors create in this magical city are theirs to take with them and keep forever.