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ZOOM

in on america

By the U.S. Missions of Austria and Poland

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A CITY SURROUNDED BY A DESERT



A limo once belonging to mobster Bugsy Siegel is seen on display at the Mob Experience at the Tropicana Hotel on March 28, 2011, in Las Vegas. "The Mob Experience" on the Las Vegas Strip, is an interactive attraction featuring gangster memorabilia and commentary from film mobsters James Caan, Mickey Rourke and Frank Vincent. (AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

This city is stunning at every step. You drive to it for miles on end through the sunburnt countryside of southern Nevada; no tree in sight, no grass. Or, you approach it from the opposite direction, across the hottest and driest stretch of land in the western hemisphere, Death Valley. Upon reaching the city center, you find artificial lakes, fountains, the luscious greenness of palm trees and the garish colors of flowers. You are surrounded by tall, luxurious hotels, statues, and colorful, moving billboards. You close your eyes in disbelief. You open them again expecting the desert landscape to return... No, it was not a mirage. A stage incarnation of Elvis Presley, guitar on arm, passes by while performers with Mickey Mouse headdresses on their heads hand you a leaflet advertising an evening show. You feel the paper leaflet in your hand. It is ... real. You really have

just arrived in the most amazing and unreal city in the United States, Las Vegas.

Considering its humble beginnings, few would have anticipated that this city located in such a hostile environment would become the fastest growing metropolis in the United States in the 20th century, but ... it has. The source of Vegas' success was a natural spring of bubbling water that formed an oasis in the desert area and earned the city its name (in Spanish, Las Vegas means "the meadows.") Vegas played a role as a rest stop in the mid-19th century when hundreds of thousands of gold diggers traversed the country from east to west in search of Californian gold and silver. Before that, the place was home to the Paiute Indians, and, for a short period of time, Mormon missionaries, who, however, soon abandoned it.

IN THIS ISSUE: *Las Vegas*

ZOOM IN ON AMERICA

A SUCCESS STORY



Themed hotels and tourist attractions along the Strip (also known as Las Vegas Boulevard) Photos Bozena Pliat

Numerous factors contributed to the spectacular success of the development of Las Vegas in the 20th century.

The foundation of the town in 1905 was linked to the construction of a railroad, but it was only in 1911 that Las Vegas received a city charter. The beginnings were rather unremarkable, but, in the 1920s the largest dam in the United States was constructed on the Colorado River southeast of Las Vegas. Thousands of workers found employment in the far-away, solitary place on the edge of a desert at the time of one of the most severe economic crises - the Great Depression. Hoover Dam had yet another beneficial effect on the area; it provided the resource that was most scarce in this part of the country - water.

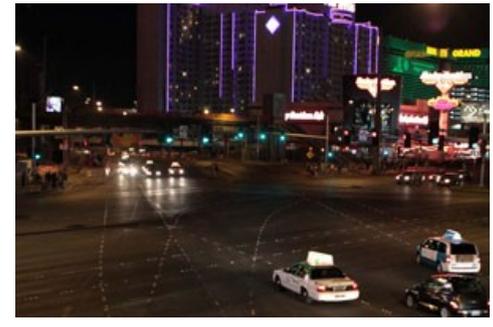
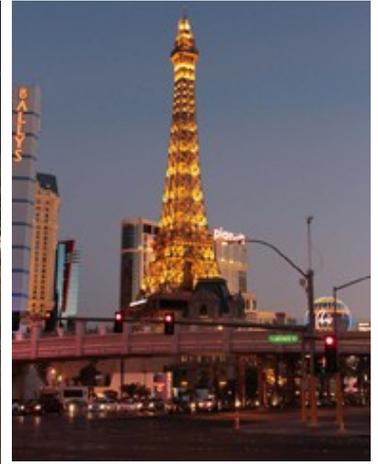
In the 1930s Las Vegas transformed into a huge construction site. Hotels were built as well as casinos, since permissive regulations in the state of Nevada allowed gambling. Again, this created lots of jobs. A decade later, Thomas Hull, the real estate businessman came up with the idea of the "resort" hotel. This was also the time when mobster Benjamin Siegel, known as "Bugsy" came onto the scene. He wanted to build a luxury hotel and combine Hollywood-style entertainment, show business and casino gambling to attract the rich to come and spend money in Las Vegas. With almost no con-

cern for costs, he started to build the Flamingo Hotel and planned for a grand opening with celebrities coming from across the country to a spectacular show. A chain of bad luck destroyed his plan - the construction was not completed, the day of the event was changed at the last moment, and even the weather conditions were bad preventing many people from coming. The initial fiasco of Siegel's idea and the sky rocketing costs of his venture (the costs rose to \$6,000,000 from the initially planned \$1,500,000) caused the mob syndicate to lose patience with the mobster. "Bugsy" was killed in 1947. However, by the 1950s the Flamingo Hotel prospered and helped to expand the gambling resort-casino base.

During World War II a large air force base was built in the area, which was also a boost to the local economy.

The growth of Las Vegas in the 20th century owes much to the entrepreneurial zeal of hotel and casino owners, who built more and more elaborate entertainment venues to attract tourists from all over the United States as well as from abroad. Las Vegas became a premier tourist attraction. Each year over 30 million tourists come to see with their own eyes what Las Vegas proudly call "The World's Capital of Entertainment" or "The City That Never Sleeps."

A CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS



Themed hotels and tourist attractions along the Strip (also known as Las Vegas Boulevard) Photos (except second from left) Bozena Pilat

Las Vegas has been witness to an ongoing competition to build bigger, taller, more comfortable and more stunning hotels. When Steve Wynn built his Mirage Hotel and Casino with 3,000 rooms and an eighteen-hole golf course and tennis court, it looked like the record would be hard to beat. Especially since the hotel boasted a white tiger display in the lobby, a dolphin pool, and a tropical island with a volcano that erupted every fifteen minutes at night.

Well, it was not... The MGM Grand Hotel and Casino exceeded Wynn's hotel by 2,000 rooms. Themed hotels were built such as Mandalay Bay, Treasure Island, Planet Hollywood (previously the Aladdin, where Elvis and Priscilla Presley got married.) Steve Wynn's answer was the luxurious hotel Bellagio with a pool the size of a lake in front and a sound and water show which makes passers-by stop in amazement and admire the fountain "dance" performance to opera, classical or Broadway music every fifteen minutes after dark - a real feat of engineering skills.

On the opposite side of the Strip tourists are taken straight to Italy by Sheldon Adelson's Venetian, where they can buy a ride on a gondola decorated with a garland of colored lights. The Rialto Bridge and canals complete with St. Mark's Square are all there.

If a tourist prefers Paris, that's not a problem. The Eiffel Tower is visible from anywhere on the Strip, towering over the Paris Hotel and Casino.

Even though New York is halfway from Las Vegas to Paris, one does not have to get on the plane to travel there. Along the Strip, one can easily find New York-New York, a simulated Manhattan.

The Grand Canyon is a lot closer than New York, but the visitor to Vegas can save the time and cost of a trip there as well, since a model of the famous canyon is in the city.

Ancient Egypt and the Valley of the Kings is re-created at the pyramid-shaped Luxor Hotel, while King Arthur's times can be re-lived in the Excalibur Hotel.

Las Vegas is also a popular site for conventions, shopping and "fine dining".

The hotels and casinos also organize major art exhibits. Vincent van Gogh, Jackson Pollock, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse paintings have all been exhibited in Las Vegas hotels.

ACTIVITY PAGE

Exercise 1 Reading Comprehension

Read the text below, then answer questions 1-5.

The sample marriage formula quoted below is said in Las Vegas with a frequency hardly matched in another big city in the United States.

I, TAKE YOU, FOR MY LAWFUL HUSBAND/WIFE TO HAVE AND TO HOLD FROM THIS DAY FORWARD, FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE, FOR RICHER, FOR POORER, IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH, UNTIL DEATH DO US PART.

In addition to all the previously mentioned titles, Las Vegas claims to be “The Marriage Capital of the World.” The Marriage License Bureau, located in downtown Las Vegas, is really busy. The office hours are 8:00 through midnight, and there used to be a time when the counter was open 24 hours a day. After the marriage license has been issued, a ceremony must be performed in the state of Nevada within one year from the date of its issuance. The ceremony may be held in any church or chapel or at the Civil Marriage Office. Marriage licenses cost \$60.00. The popularity of getting married in Nevada lies in the fact that the state does not require a blood test or a waiting period.

A special date is important for many couples in planning their wedding. Dates like 7-7-2007, 8-8-2008, 9-9-2009, 10-10-2010, and most recently 11-11-2011 have been sought for dates, with the 2007 date regarded as the most attractive considering the appearance of three lucky sevens. If such a date falls on a Saturday or Sunday, there is a real marriage frenzy.

1. Why do many couples prefer special dates?
2. What date was considered the luckiest?
3. Why do so many people get married in Las Vegas?
4. What document must be obtained before the marriage ceremony can take place?
5. What institution issues marriage certificates?

Exercise 2 Grammar

Put in the missing articles in the text from the America.gov website.

All of Las Vegas is ... (1) party. Imagine ... (2) giant adult theme park full of ... (3) brightest lights and the most decadent, over-the-top buildings. One needs only walk down ... (4) Las Vegas Strip to see that vision realized. Visitors here find everything from towering fountains to laser light displays to high-stakes casino games to variety shows headlined by perfectly choreographed performers. Sleeping is ... (5) last of any visitor's priorities. Those tourists looking for ... (6) slightly less-flashy Vegas experience venture to Fremont Street downtown where many of ... (7) casinos feature ... (8) more old-fashioned vibe.

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