

Las Vegas and me

Emily Geyerhoss

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A M A Z E D
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My story



This book.

This is my story of visiting the city of Las Vegas in 2022. It's a travel book, a memoir and a celebration of everything that Las Vegas is, as well as a commentary on its social, cultural and historical background. This book translates memory to a physical narrative and reconstructs the story of Las Vegas through my perspective, to unravel my thoughts and feelings about the city. Some family members have kindly contributed to this book by providing some of their own opinions about the experience of visiting Las Vegas.



Las Vegas and me - My story.



I am not very well travelled. I've been on family holidays to Málaga, a weekend away in Dublin and a school trip to Barcelona, and that's it. Aside from the cost, anxiety is the reason I didn't travel much. To confront our mutual anxieties, myself and my Dad started to go on weekends away together, first to Edinburgh and then to Dublin. Our next plan was Amsterdam, but the pandemic halted these plans, and the worries about travel slowly crept back in.

My sister Megan became engaged in June 2021 and planned for her wedding to be in Las Vegas the next year, after she and her fiancé Conor had visited a few years prior. 34 close family and friends were invited to join them.

This would be my first holiday in over three years, my first long haul flight, my first time leaving Europe. I felt anticipation and anxiety about this important but expensive holiday, a seven night stay in a standard room at a hotel-resort and economy seat return flights were around one and a half grand each.

And yet, despite the worries and the cost, and though it's cliché to say, I can't think of a time that topped that week in Las Vegas. It was always going to be good, but I didn't expect to be so captivated by the city and the memories made, the sights we saw and the culture experienced, nor did I expect to have such a boost to my general confidence upon our return. Life after Las Vegas didn't feel like it was ever going to be the same.

The visit

My experiences

Attractions

Fremont Street Experience
The High Roller
Arch de Triomphe — Eiffel Tower
Las Vegas Walk of Stars
The Speakeasy — The Mob Museum
Bellagio Conservatory & Botanical Gardens — Bellagio Fountains
The Neon Museum
Statue of David — Trevi Fountains
Allegiant Stadium
T-Mobile Arena
Sky Beam — Sphinx — Luxor Pyramid
Statue of Liberty — Brooklyn Bridge — New York Skyline

My experiences

Hotel-casinos

Mon Ami Gabi — Paris
Nine Fine Irishmen — The Bar at Times Square — New York New York
Excalibur
Luxor
The Bellagio
Binions
Planet Hollywood
Golden Nugget
House of Blues — Mandalay Bay
Golden Gate Hotel
Caesars Palace
MGM

Where I stayed

The Mirage

Love Theatre — Cirque du Soleil Beatles show
Waterfall pool
Atrium — Aquarium
Volcano
Siegried & Roy's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat

Where family stayed

The Venetian

Grand Canal Shoppes — St. Mark's Square — The Grand Canal
Pool decks
The Grand Colonnade — Armillary sphere
Royal Britannia Gastropub
Rialto Bridge — St Marks Campanile



Las Vegas and me - My story

Photo courtesy of Nick Fewings
Design by E. Geyerhosz

Expectations.

*“You can never see
Las Vegas for the first
time again.”* Unknown

My thoughts about Las Vegas were all formed by depictions in films and photos from Megan’s trip in 2015. It was the bright lights reflecting on windscreens, gambling in huge windowless casinos with no clocks and sitting at poker tables all night.

My pre-visit version of Las Vegas was limited to the screen which can obviously never portray its size or the feeling of arriving there after leaving a cold, medium-sized city in the North of England a day prior. I had this idea that Vegas would be pure gambling and drinking and that anything else was just for show, something to look at but not distract you from spending money.

I thought that Megan was probably over exaggerating when she said that everything is so far away from each other to the point that even leaving your hotel room could be a mission. I didn’t expect to see so many lifelike and immersive imitations of other places in such close proximity; I thought it would be all American. I expected to feel somewhat safe in Las Vegas, and that a slight detour from the main streets would not be a bad idea, thinking surely it would still be a safe and busy area. I thought things would be expensive but not completely unreasonable, and I was under the impression that walking on The Strip would be hot but not unbearable. I didn’t expect to spend much time around any pools or relaxing. I didn’t think there would be any time to do anything that could be easily done on a much cheaper European holiday.

I didn’t think that a big part of Las Vegas would be the people there; I thought that most people would be just like me, tourists, just trying to have a good time. I thought it would be a rare occasion to get accosted by someone trying to get you to go to a club or have your photo taken or something along those lines.

I thought that the holiday would be jam-packed and follow a strict itinerary to get as much seen as possible. I didn’t think for one minute that time, tiredness and cost would stop us from doing whatever we wanted to do. I believed that I would like Vegas and find it fun, but would probably never return because I thought it was shallow and too crazy and expensive for me. I always imagined Las Vegas would be a pit stop on some big American trip where places like San Francisco and New York would take precedent.

At the end of it, my expectations of Las Vegas was that I wasn’t really sure what to expect; that made it so much more exciting. I did know that it would be like no place I had ever gone to and like no other place I would ever go again.

Day by day.

Saturday

The travelling day.

The holiday actually started on the Friday with a four hour coach trip to a Premier Inn near Heathrow airport, where we spent the evening at the hotel bar getting to know Conor's friends and family.

Saturday started with a full English, then a taxi to our terminal. There were the usual airport things and a few drinks in the lounge to calm any flight nerves. The journey was about ten hours, so we arrived at around 6pm Pacific Time. A taxi ride later my boyfriend Luke and I were on The Strip ready to check-in at The Mirage. We found our room, dumped the bags, freshened up and headed straight back out to explore.

We wandered through The Mirage in search of food and watched the sportbook screens next to the restaurant we settled on. We saw the volcano show then walked for around an hour or so to locate those who were staying at The Venetian hotel across The Strip. We found them at an English themed pub in the indoor-outdoor canal part of The Venetian. We wandered around The Venetian streets for a bit. Back at a bar at The Mirage, we watched gamblers chain smoke and tap buttons, and then headed back to the room to unpack, unwind and sleep.

Sunday

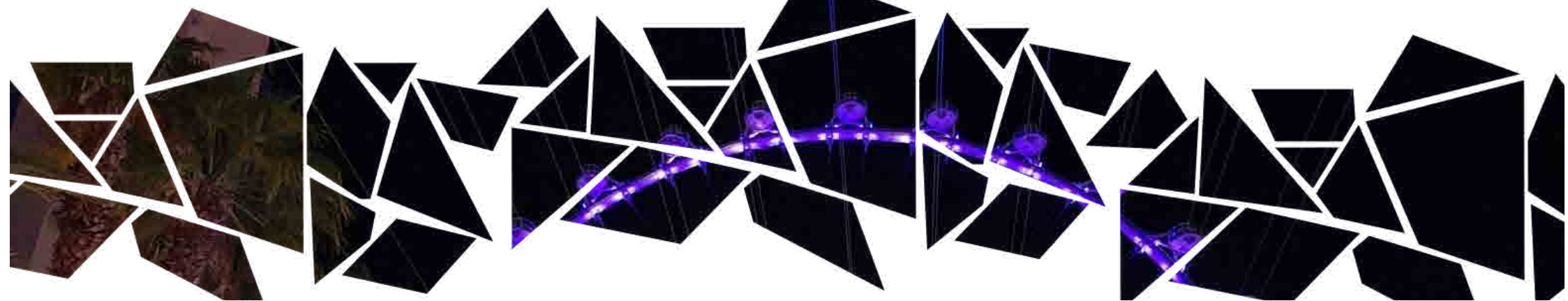
The first full day.

It started at 4am local time. We were wide awake, which was just as well given we intended to meet others at a sports bar in The Linq to watch the Leeds game. After this and an American breakfast at Denny's, Luke and I took a long walk up The Strip, seeing the Trevi Fountain, the Bellagio lake, Planet Hollywood, the Las Vegas Walk of Stars and the Eiffel Tower.

We took a taxi with my Dad to Fremont Street. We had lunch in the Golden Nugget and gambled a bit. Tired, we found ourselves sat at a bar, people watching and putting the odd one dollar bet down to kill time before our tour at The Mob Museum where we spent a couple of hours. We finished with a cocktail at the downstairs Speakeasy. We then walked for around forty minutes off the main streets and through some questionable areas to The Neon Museum.

There was an hour tour around The Neon Boneyard and then a show in another part of the museum, which projected old footage onto the exhibitions. We got back to The Strip via a dangerously fast Uber ride. We found a pizza place for a huge slice of pepperoni pizza and then headed for bed.

Las Vegas and me - My story.



Monday

The hen and the stag do day.

This day started early, again. We met up with my sister Frankie and her boyfriend Luke and had an all-you-can-eat buffet breakfast in The Venetian. We met my Mum, found Megan and went up to the pool deck and we were shown our private cabana that Megan had rented for the day. We set up for the pool party together, putting up decorations and blowing up inflatables. The next few hours were total bliss, chatting, drinking and playing games in our own pool, sunbathing on our private deck chairs, dancing to music and enjoying platters of food. We spent the full day there. After the bill was settled, we went to freshen up before meeting at Excalibur for a strip show that the Maid of Honour had organised. After, we decided on a round of drinks at The Mirage, where we met the last standing members of the stag do, who had been drinking and gambling on Fremont Street. We stayed up until around 3am.

Tuesday

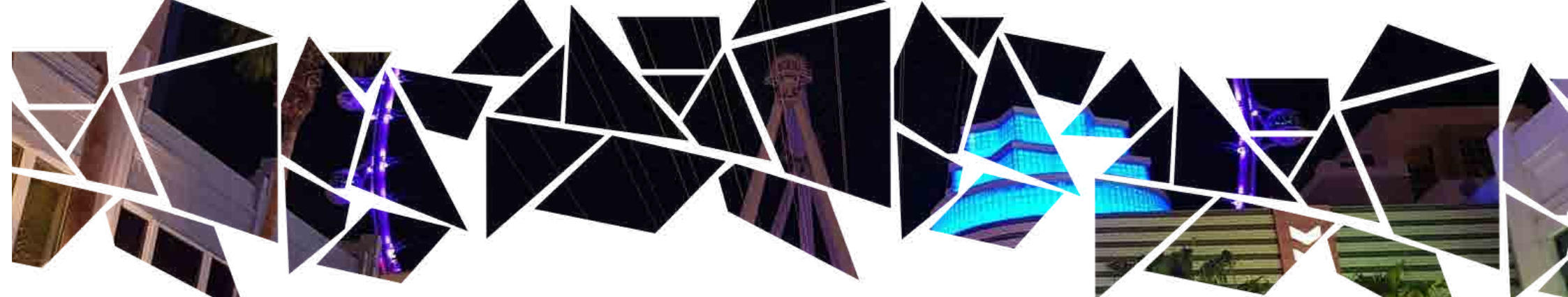
The Mirage day.

Tired from the respective events the day before, Luke and I started with a lazy breakfast by the pool, where I had the best French toast ever and a tall iced coffee. We relaxed by the pool for a few hours, hopping in for a swim when we got too hot, enjoying the feeling of the waterfall. We dried off and visited Siegfried and Roy's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat. I loved watching the dolphins playing, though I felt conflicted about seeing animals in captivity.

Later, we showed my dad around The Mirage, then watched The Beatles LOVE by Cirque de Soleil, followed by food at a cantina. I had booked tickets for us to go up in The High Roller so we could see Las Vegas from high up at night after we'd eaten. We were able to watch the Bellagio fountains from our pod. With the wedding the next day, we headed back to get some beauty sleep.

*“What you need is a weekend
in Las Vegas, the playground
of the world.”*

Psycho



*“A little bit of this town goes
a very long way.”* Hunter S. Thompson

Wednesday

The day of the wedding.

I woke early and went straight to Megan's room in The Venetian. She had organised for a hand delivered breakfast tray to arrive while we got our hair and makeup done. The morning was a blur of getting wedding ready and taking photos together before getting in a limo to take us to the chapel. The wedding was perfect, officiated by a joke-cracking minister and filmed from start to finish so relatives and friends could watch back at home.

After photos, there was a party bus organised to take us back to The Venetian for a celebratory drink at Bar Luca on the casino floor. Myself, Frankie and our partners travelled early to the reception venue, a fancy steak house called Capital Grill, to set up for the wedding feast.

We were treated to a beautiful three course meal, then the speeches and, several bottles of wine later, we walked back to our hotel to drop some things off (in all of our wedding attire). Then it was to New York New York for an evening of singing and dancing at an Irish bar with a live band, followed by the same again at The Bar at Times Square, where two pianists took song requests until the small hours of the morning. I can't remember how or when we got back to the hotel.

Thursday

The day after the night before.

Feeling a bit tender, Thursday started later than any other day that week, which upset me as I didn't want to waste any time in Vegas. Luke and I grabbed a burger and a milkshake at a diner and then spent the afternoon sunbathing and relaxing at the pool deck at The Venetian with Megan and Conor and his family and friends.

That evening we enjoyed dinner at a restaurant in Paris with family. After, we took photos by the Eiffel Tower and watched the famous Bellagio fountain show up close, before parting with family and venturing into the Bellagio to see the artworks at the Conservatory and Gardens. Luke and I then walked on to Caesar's palace and looked around the casino, before heading back to The Mirage for a bit of a gamble before bed.

Friday

The last full day.

We spent the morning by the pool, savouring my last French toast of the trip. I bought a huge \$34 cocktail and we lounged on dolphin inflatables for most of the morning, trying to keep cool. I wanted to sightsee a bit more so we walked through some shopping malls and then up The Strip to see the Statue of Liberty, the New York skyline, and Excalibur. We wandered around the Luxor, MGM and Mandalay Bay, in search of a place to eat. We had lunch at The House of Blues and then walked to an American football game at the Allegiant Stadium. It was the *Las Vegas Raiders* versus *The New England Patriots*. We only saw half of the game because Megan and Conor had bought us tickets to see *The Killers* at the T-Mobile arena. It was an amazing concert and the best way to round off the week. What wasn't so great was going back to the hotel room and starting to pack up, ready for check out the following day.

Saturday

The day we travelled back.

We were sad to be packing up and saying goodbye to everything. We spent a couple of hours by the pool, soaking up the sun before we left the heat behind. We went with heavy hearts for the airport.

The journey back was difficult for me. We left at night and were chasing the dark around the globe, so it was dark and claustrophobic on the plane for the full ten hours. Unlike travelling to Vegas, there was no anticipation for the week ahead, so nothing to distract my mind; I grappled with anxiety after seeing lightening strikes outside our window. I couldn't sleep despite feeling exhausted. But we made it back safely and the coach from Heathrow home was speedy.

I spent the rest of the day and night sleeping, happy to be home, sad to have left, but so thankful to have gone.

Las Vegas and me - My story.





Las Vegas and me - My story.

Paul

I loved every minute of Las Vegas, it's definitely a place I would return in an instant. I was overwhelmed at first and amazed at how fancy my hotel was. I thought 'this place is surreal, it doesn't get any better than this'. But it did get better, because of Megan's wedding.

Walking around day or night, I had a massive grin on my face, thinking 'this place is fucking brilliant'. I felt like it took a while to come down off cloud nine when we returned to Leeds. I was pining to go back. There was always something going on, and it was so bright and loud and felt totally unique and everyone I met was so kind. The whole experience was just out of this world, but it was taken to a whole other level by the wedding; it was such a privilege to be able to travel to Las Vegas and experience it with family.

I thought the casinos were wild and it was fun to watch people gamble, plus it was nice to get some big pay-outs from small bets – I made \$750!

The food we had there was so good from start to finish, and I was surprised with how good the Guinness was too! I really enjoyed learning about the history of the city at The Mob Museum and The Neon Museum too. The other things we did, like the Cirque du Soleil and The High Roller Wheel were just fantastic, I was in awe of it all.

The stag do reminded me of an '80s stag – just good old fashioned drinking, which, to me, is how it should be! The main event of the week was of course the wedding; walking Megan down the aisle to our favourite song is a memory that will stay with me forever.

F A S C I N A T E D

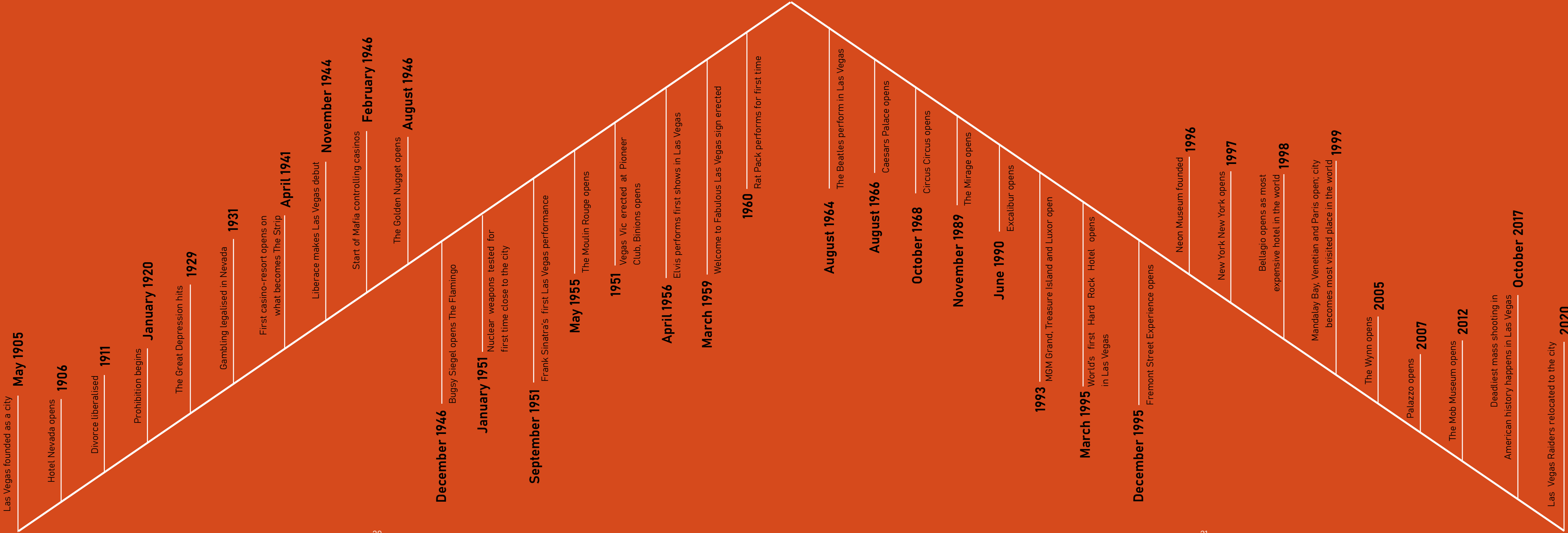
fascinated

2

The history



Top: photo by Roger Violett
Middle both: photos by Bettmann
Bottom right: photo by Bettmann
Bottom middle: photo by Underwood Archives
Bottom left: photo by Keystone-France



Small beginnings.



Las Vegas and me - The history.

The history of Las Vegas is brief and modest compared to its modern day image. Las Vegas Valley was founded by Spanish merchants in 1829 on their quest to establish a trade route between Santa Fe and Los Angeles. They named the area ‘Las Vegas’, Spanish for ‘The Meadows’ due to the fertility of the plains and wetlands at that time.

Las Vegas was inhabited by Mormon missionaries in 1855, though they suffered from failing crops and left the next year. Other Mormons settled in the next few years, though the population of the area was extremely small, with most inhabitants working on the same ranch.

The opening of a railroad to connect the Las Vegas area to Salt Lake City in 1900 was a key moment for the city. William A. Clarke, a mining entrepreneur, had organised for the railway to be constructed to cut down the transportation times of his mined resources. He realised the springs in the area could provide a water source for potential businesses. He opened a rail depot in Las Vegas that became known as a water and refuelling stop for trains and wagons. This rail stop was at the head of what is now Fremont Street. The city was officially founded as a railroad town in May 1905 when 110 acres of land were auctioned off by the railroad company. The most rapidly developing zone of the tent town (as most buildings in the area had a canvas roof at that time) was the area where gambling and prostitution were legally sanctioned. The first casino, Hotel Nevada, was opened in 1905, and is now the Golden Gate Casino.

The city was loosely governed at this time, so prostitution and gambling thrived. This was forced underground

due to stricter laws on gambling in 1910. Gambling went underground but was still covertly popular. Las Vegas suffered further economically due to the diversion of resources in support of WW1 as well as strikes in 1922, and had started to get a reputation as a den of iniquity. Divorce laws were relaxed in 1931 in the State of Nevada; divorce could be obtained within six weeks. An influx of people seized upon the opportunity for a quick divorce and lived their six week waiting period in what were named ‘dude ranches’, where they could work during their stay.

The population boomed with the construction of The Hoover Dam between 1931 and 1936 during The Great Depression. The dam brought a source of water and power to the city and, most importantly for that time, work. The population swelled to around 25,000 people.

Gambling was legalised in 1931 as a highly profitable industry for the large population of men arriving to work in the city. The population increased again when The Las Vegas Army Air Field was built in 1941. Hotels began to showcase performances at their venues to keep the crowds coming. Many soldiers who returned from WW2 decided to settle in Las Vegas. Around this time, casinos were opened that are still around today such as Flamingo, opened in 1946 by Bugsy Siegel as the first

major casino-hotel to open in Vegas. That same year, the area on Fremont Street with the highest concentration of casinos was named ‘The Glitter Gulch’.

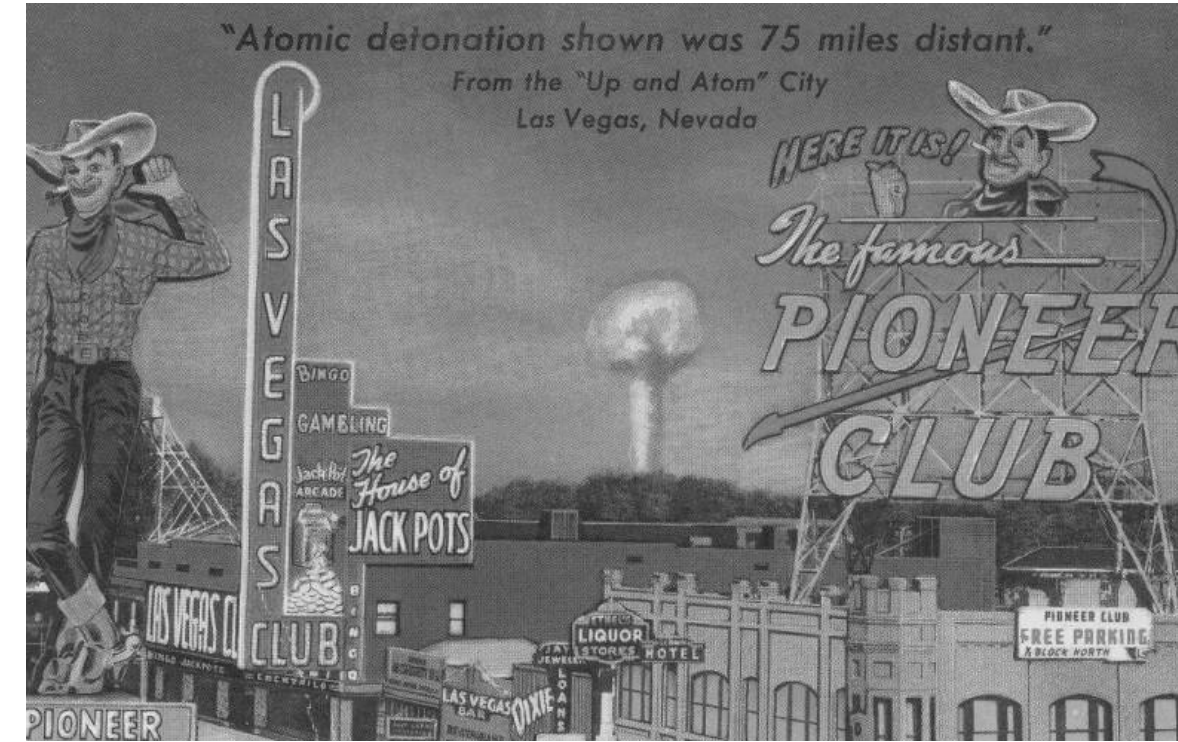
Las Vegas continued to grow due to big names such as Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley taking up residences. The 1950s to modern day Las Vegas is a blur of unprecedented growth, popularity and building. Showgirls debuted their performances in 1957. The Rat Pack performed for the first time in Vegas in 1960, the same year that the city was desegregated. 1966 saw many casinos revamped with more lights added and bigger signs installed. The 1970s saw a huge population growth, particularly as The Strip was developing at an alarming rate. The 1980s saw the birth of the mega-resort, the first of which being The Mirage in 1989. From 1990 to 2005, several well-known hotel resorts were built, and The Fremont Street Experience was opened in 1995. The global financial crisis in the late 2000s affected the economy of the city, however new hotels were still being opened regardless of this. These new hotels initiated the movement away from immersive themed hotels that the older casinos previously relied upon to stand out from their competitors.

An explosive past.



Las Vegas and me - The history.

If you look up Las Vegas' history on Wikipedia, the word 'booming' is used several times to describe its growth in population, tourism, economy and business. It's a word that fits the city quite well to express its size, it's all-or-nothing attitude and it's everything, everywhere, all at once style. After all, it was nicknamed the 'Atomic City' in the 1940s.



Atomic tourism in Las Vegas.
Left page: photo courtesy of Rare Historical Photos
Left: photo courtesy of UNLV Digital Collections
Right: The DIXIE Showgirl, photo courtesy of The Nuclear Secrecy Blog

Las Vegas' tourism has always offered alternative activities to gambling, one of which was a phenomenon called 'atomic tourism'. Established in 1951, The Nevada Test Site, situated around 65 miles north of the city, was capitalised upon by hotels that held 'bomb viewing parties'. The testing went on for around forty years, with over a thousand tests conducted. Mushroom clouds could be seen from up to 100 miles away, so they were viewable from Fremont Street. Many hotels made atomic themed cocktail and calendars that advised on detonation times and best viewing spots. There was a 'Miss Atomic' beauty pageant that coincided with Operation Plumbbob (a series of nuclear tests in 1957). These events went on until atmospheric tests were banned in 1972 due to concerns after a reported spike in cancer rates in the surrounding areas; all further tests were taken underground. The site is no longer a nuclear testing facility, though is still active for other US security needs. It is possible it may be reauthorised as a test site once again. Visitors can learn about Las Vegas' atomic history at the National Atomic Testing Museum.

There is a question about the morality of the city for its nuclear past. Of course, atomic tourism happens in many other places however it feels like it fits Las Vegas' image; something considered immoral that everyone sort of ignores as immoral because it's been monetised and made into a spectacle. Could you say the same about gambling, mobster activity and excessiveness in Las Vegas?



A city of made men.

Las Vegas was built on immorality and there is no activity more immoral than organised crime. Mafia funding was crucial to the transformation of Las Vegas into the tourist destination it is today.

*The rise and fall of the Las Vegas mobster.
Left: Bugsy Siegel, photo courtesy of Associated Press
Right: Frank Cullotta, photo courtesy of KNPR
Right page: photo courtesy of Vintage Las Vegas*



Las Vegas and me - The history.

“We owe a debt of gratitude to the Mafia for developing Las Vegas, and there’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Guy Rocha

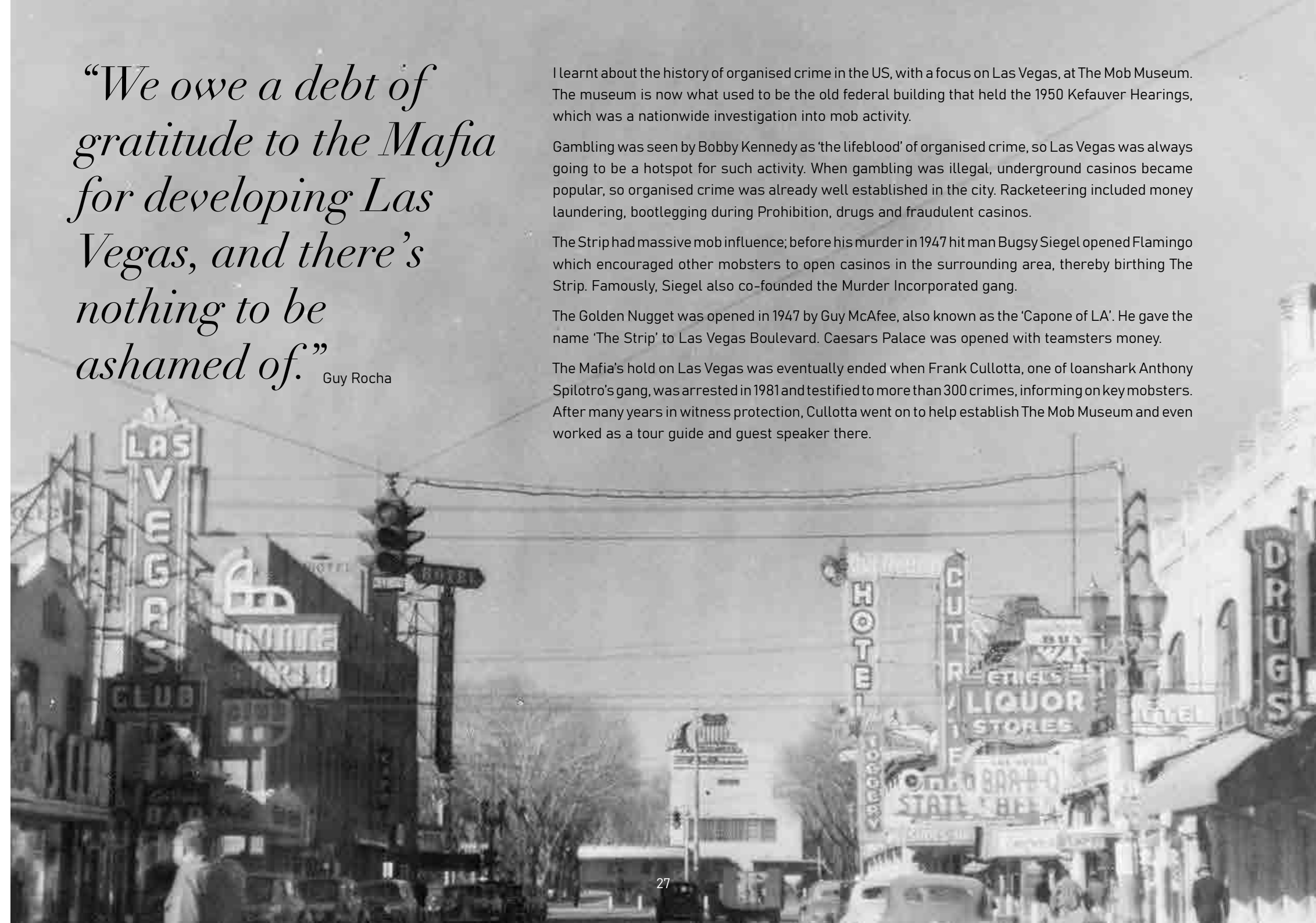
I learnt about the history of organised crime in the US, with a focus on Las Vegas, at The Mob Museum. The museum is now what used to be the old federal building that held the 1950 Kefauver Hearings, which was a nationwide investigation into mob activity.

Gambling was seen by Bobby Kennedy as ‘the lifeblood’ of organised crime, so Las Vegas was always going to be a hotspot for such activity. When gambling was illegal, underground casinos became popular, so organised crime was already well established in the city. Racketeering included money laundering, bootlegging during Prohibition, drugs and fraudulent casinos.

The Strip had massive mob influence; before his murder in 1947 hit man Bugsy Siegel opened Flamingo which encouraged other mobsters to open casinos in the surrounding area, thereby birthing The Strip. Famously, Siegel also co-founded the Murder Incorporated gang.

The Golden Nugget was opened in 1947 by Guy McAfee, also known as the ‘Capone of LA’. He gave the name ‘The Strip’ to Las Vegas Boulevard. Caesars Palace was opened with teamsters money.

The Mafia’s hold on Las Vegas was eventually ended when Frank Cullotta, one of loanshark Anthony Spilotro’s gang, was arrested in 1981 and testified to more than 300 crimes, informing on key mobsters. After many years in witness protection, Cullotta went on to help establish The Mob Museum and even worked as a tour guide and guest speaker there.

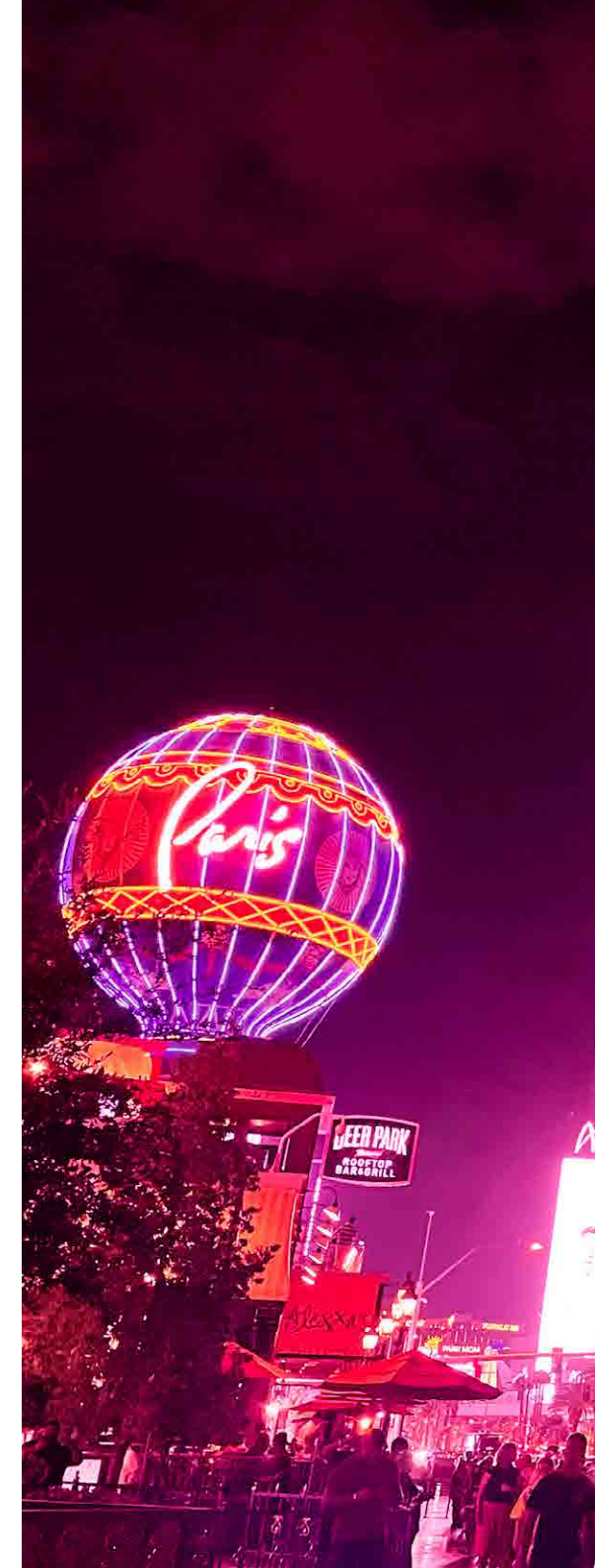




When I was first invited to Las Vegas, I wasn't sure what I would make of it. I thought that the flight seemed like a long time and was left thinking 'would it be worth it?' I thought Vegas was going to be just casinos, gambling and bright flashing lights. However when I got there I was totally wrong. Vegas was larger than life but it wasn't all gambling and I fell in love. There was no shortage of attractions, culture and it was one hell of a ride. I can now hands down say Vegas is one of the best experiences I have ever had and I'm counting down the days until the next time!

B E W I L D E R E D
bewildered

3 The Strip



Reality.

It all starts with the world famous Las Vegas Strip; a four mile long neon metropolis, a jungle of hotel-casino resorts, shops, landmark replicas and soaring attractions located in the area of Las Vegas called Paradise.

A huge, endless road with embankments of sprawling resorts, crowded restaurants and shops, crowds, stacks of signs, and so many cars. Cliché to say but you can't describe the emotions that come up when you first experience The Strip. Demand for your eye is constant, there is something to look at every direction which is completely jarring. The Strip feels like a massive integrated theme park playing on simulated feelings. In the same way that a roller-coaster simulates danger, Las Vegas simulates some sort of warped, utopic fantasy relying on the promise of winning. The city has become this dark adult playground where people aren't bound by normal societal rules.

I couldn't believe I was actually there. There was no 'is this it?' moment. I don't think anyone could feel completely calm on The Strip as there is always a feeling of excitement, disbelief, anxiety, surprise

etc. A big part of those initial thoughts was thinking that everything Megan had said about Vegas was completely true and not an over exaggeration at all.

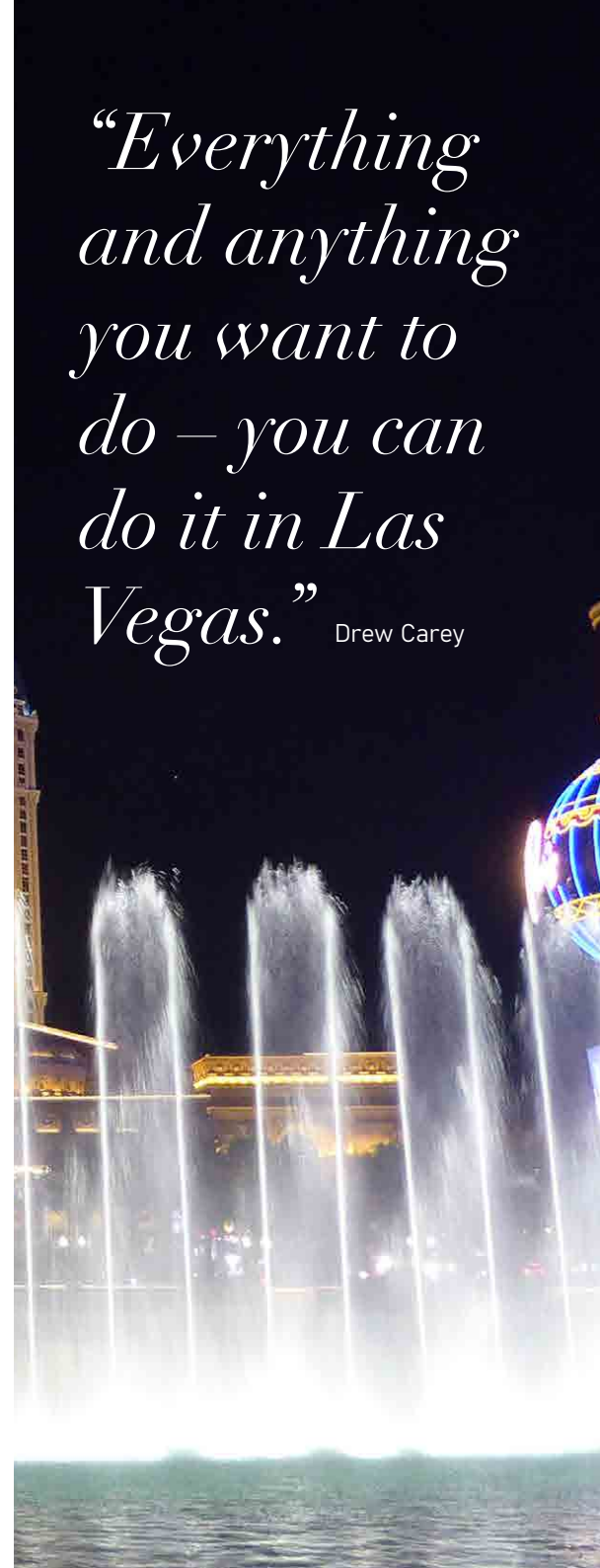
Movement is a big part of The Strip. Nothing is designed to be stationary, even the signs move, blink, shimmer. Your own movement, by contrast, is usually within a slow moving crowd; there is no fast pace in Las Vegas though the reality of Las Vegas is a lot of walking and trying to find things. It's leaving you room and walking across the street to realise it's taken you twenty minutes to do so instead of two minutes.

Walking in the heat is something that you don't realise will be akin to walking through treacle and will leave you sweaty, tired and cranky, but getting back into air conditioning feels heavenly. Las Vegas

is taking refuge in places like the pool decks where you can enjoy the heat but also cool off immediately and recharge your constantly empty batteries. Las Vegas is running on fumes all the time while happily ignoring your exhaustion.

The Strip, and Las Vegas as a whole, makes you feel like you're missing out if you're not always in the middle of it all at every moment. Sleep feels like an inconvenience, disrupting the constant flow of fun and madness; getting a full eight hours in or taking time out to go to the gym feels like a sin in this city. It's not about self improvement or self care, it's about the experience above all, regardless of consequence.

Las Vegas and me - The Strip.



“Everything and anything you want to do – you can do it in Las Vegas.” Drew Carey



A themed world.

Las Vegas' themed hotels help to create an illusion and transport the visitor to another place, firstly to appear different to other complexes, and secondly to disorientate the tourist and therefore make them more likely to engage in activities they may not normally participate in to excess, such as gambling.

Las Vegas and me - The Strip.



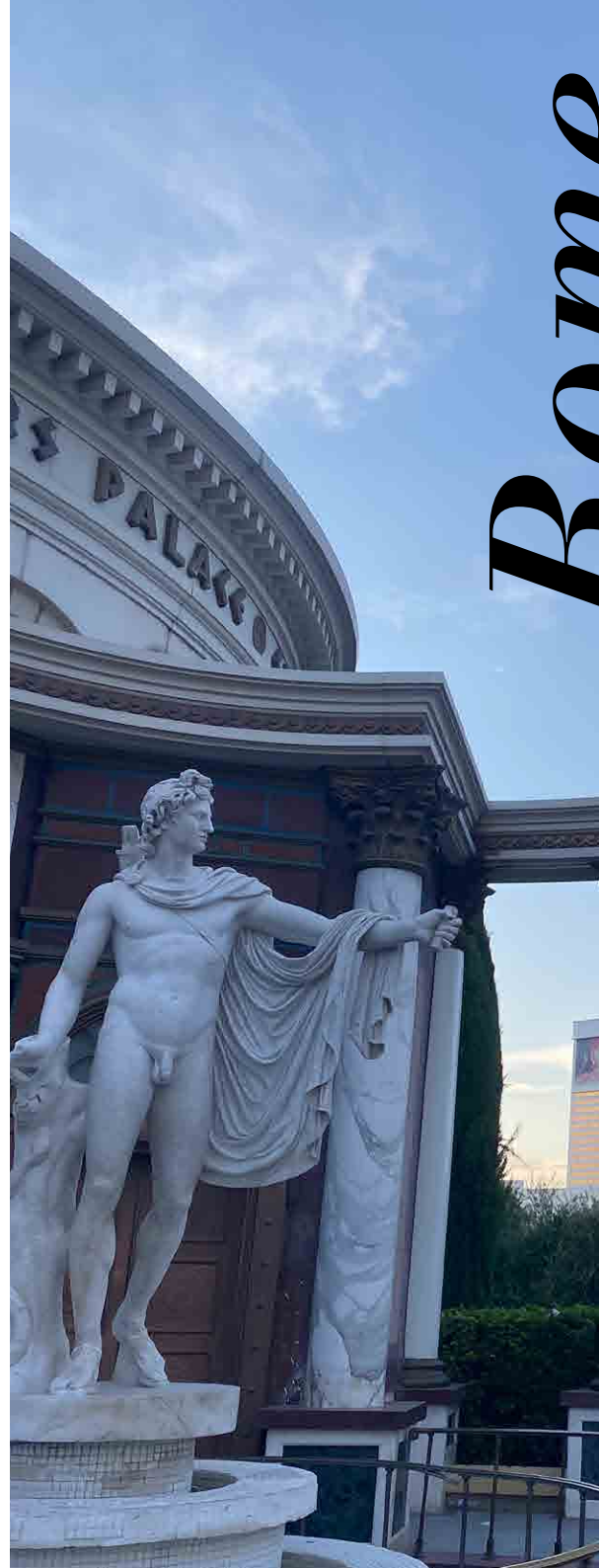
Venice



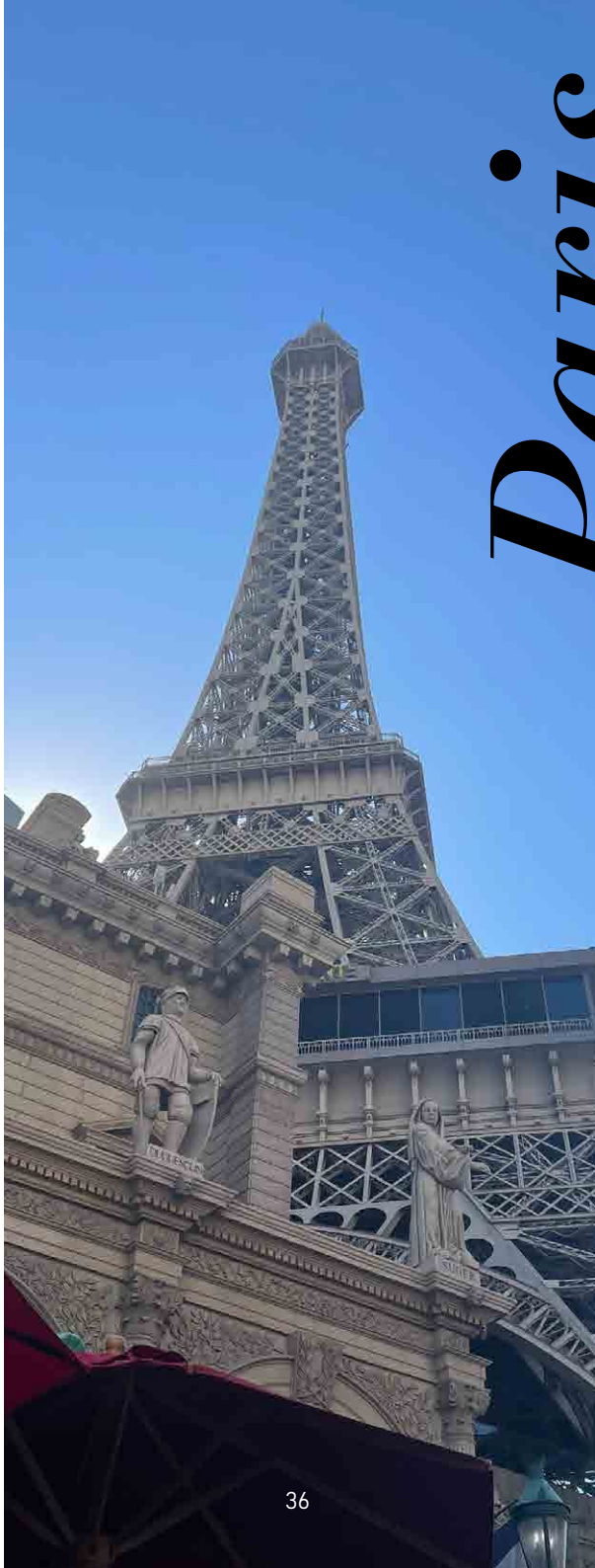
New York



Egypt



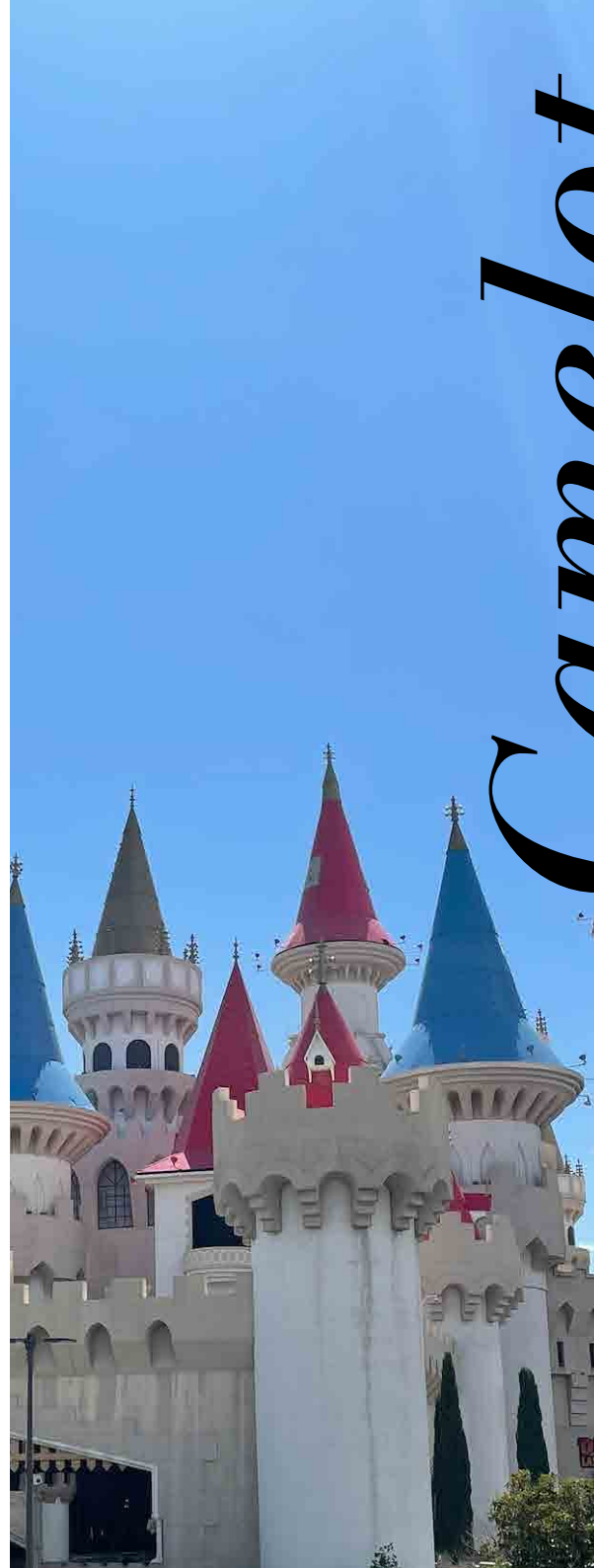
Rome



Paris



Polynesia



Camelot

“Seriously, why tour the world when all you have to do is visit Las Vegas and see all the highlights in one location?”

Jeff Maguire

The previous images are just some of the environmental themes in Las Vegas. Others themes are Polynesia, China, Miami, Hollywood and the Caribbean.

The Las Vegas skyline is hectic yet completely unique. It was clear that seeing a medieval castle next to a pyramid next to The Statue of Liberty was a big reason why the city is so astounding and fun to experience, however the casinos are mostly identical to each other. The casinos were a bit disappointing in that regard, they could do with taking on more of the theme that was so exciting on the outside.

Theming maintains interest in The Strip with each hotel offering something unique. All casinos can be the exact same, but the environment surrounding them has to have an edge to compete with the last complex. Las Vegas tries to make you think ‘this place has everything, so why go anywhere else?’

The themed nature of The Strip turns the city into a dreamlike place of wonder. Nevertheless, it is a highly simulated environment that resembles a theme park, where portions of the rides are themed differently to engage visitors and keep their interest.

Some themes felt a bit tenuous to me. I never had the chance to visit Treasure Island, which supposedly has a Caribbean theme however photos I saw of the complex suggested it only had a pirate theme. I also didn't see how MGM was Hollywood themed at all, to me it just seemed like another huge complex.

Then there are hotels like Luxor, designed to imitate Ancient Egypt (albeit a stereotypical imitation of Ancient Egypt). I was impressed by Luxor because of how old the complex was yet how modern it felt, along with the unique architecture. All the hotel rooms are within the pyramid itself, and inside you can see right up to where the sides of the pyramid meet. When you're inside Excalibur for example, it's not really evident that you're in a castle, whereas Luxor's Ancient Egypt experience is really enveloping and it feels like the theme is more than an outer shell used to entice visitors in.

More general motifs include the metropolitan, Madri Gras, the Old West, life imitating art, tropical environments and the circus.

The Mirage.

Created by Steve Wynn in 1989, The Mirage is a Polynesian themed hotel-resort, famous for its nightly volcano shows and Roy and Siegfried's Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat. It was the first mega-resort to ever be built in Las Vegas and the largest hotel in the world at the time of its opening.

The Beatles LOVE by Cirque Du Soleil is the show that this hotel hosts; the faces of the famous four are printed across the exterior of several of the top floors. The pool has its own waterfall, Secret Dolphin Bar and separate Bare Pool Lounge.

This was by far our favourite hotel. Of course, The Venetian was beautiful, Bellagio was impressive, Luxor interesting etc., but The Mirage felt completely different and relaxed. Slightly rougher around the edges in some ways, without pretence, a bit dated, but impressive in its own right. It felt like an oasis in the otherwise overwhelming city. Looking back at our stay, I feel a huge sense of nostalgia. The Mirage felt like our place, part of a really special memory. Another reason why the hotel felt more memorable was because The Mirage is soon to be completely rebranded. Proposed plans include removing the volcano and the dolphin habitat. The hotel will be stripped back to a concrete shell, a giant guitar will be erected to house the rooms, the casino will be expanded and an infinity pool will erase the current waterfall pool. The fact that we knew that The Mirage would not be there in the future made us appreciate our stay even more.



Las Vegas and me - The Strip.

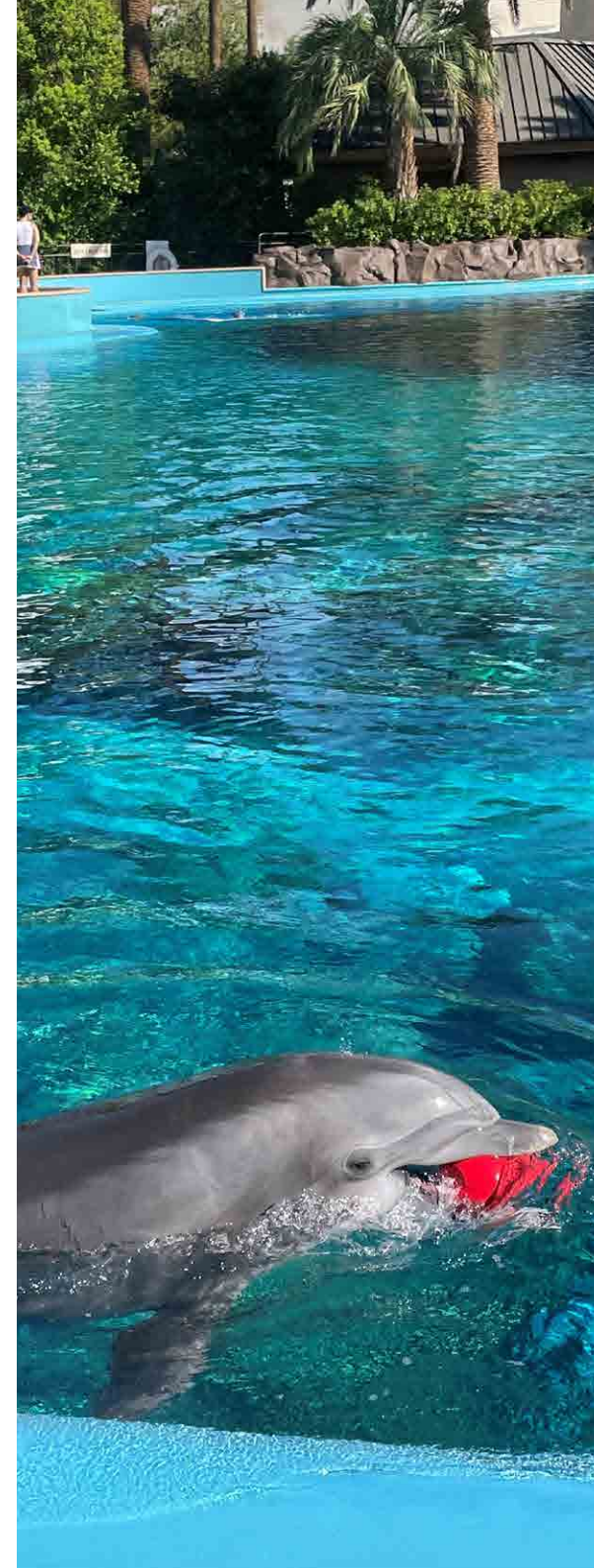


This is where Luke and I stayed. From the entrance, the visitor is welcomed by a cooling mist which was heavenly after enduring the desert heat. Before you hit the cigarette smoke of the casino, there is a noticeable scent of piña coladas used to mask the smell of the gas from the volcano, to further envelop the visitor in the Polynesian tropic theme. The reception features a large aquarium behind the desks. We were surprised at check-in by having to pay our resort fees upfront. Only an hour or so into our holiday and we had spent hundreds without betting a single dollar.

Across from the main entrance is the atrium, a jungle under a high glass dome with a waterfall and wooden bridge. The casino is sprawling, low, smoky, loud and lit only by the multitude of the slot machines. The casino holds many island bars, restaurants and a sportsbook area. It was rare to not have to navigate around crowds of people flowing through the casino.

The path through the casino twists and turns, finally getting to the guest lifts. The rooms are situated in the tower part of the complex, lining the three legs typical of Las Vegas resort architecture; The Mirage actually pioneered this Y-shaped design. Standing where the three legs unite, you can look down each leg and see how the corridors turn into tunnels so long that you can't see an end. Our room wasn't far from the lifts, so it didn't take us too long to get there. Nevertheless, getting from room to street was often a hike in and of itself.

Our room was perfect for us and of course massive compared to those typical of UK hotels. The Mirage's rooms at our rate were not as luxurious or classy as, for example, the standard rate rooms The Venetian, but then The Mirage is an older, smaller hotel and around \$300 cheaper altogether.



The Venetian.

Opened in 1999, The Venetian has always been marketed as luxurious and large; it's the second biggest hotel in the world with over 7,000 rooms and a shopping mall. The hotel has an Italian Renaissance theme, with replicas of The Rialto Bridge, St. Mark's Square and the canals of Venice, complete with gondolas and singing gondoliers.

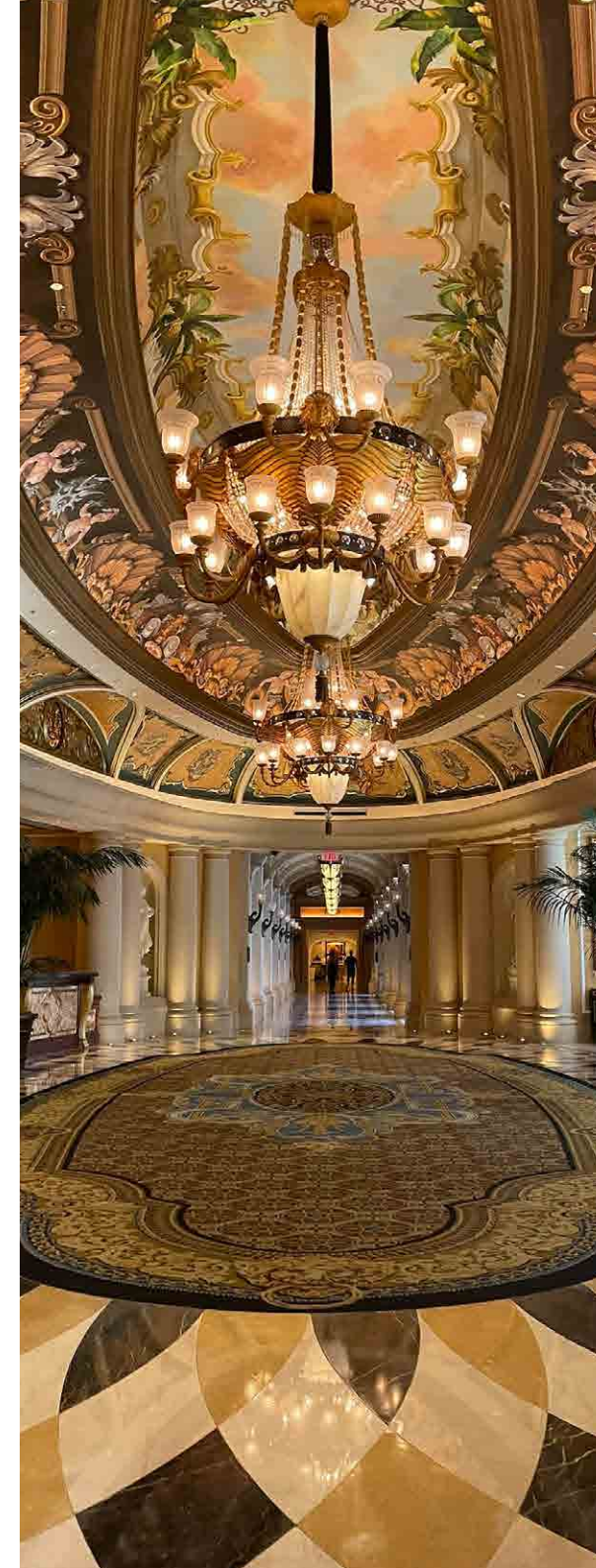
The Venetian is unbelievably grand and luxurious. Their standard rooms felt like their own apartments. I was impressed with The Grand Colonnade pictured right; it was like walking through some highly cultural place with unprecedented historical value. That was until you heard the slot machines and realised the 'marble' columns are plastic and hollow. It's true that The Venetian's interior design and intricate decorations are not genuine, they're purely for show and only a faint mimicry of true Italian art and architecture; but it didn't stop me feeling impressed.

The canal that flows through the majority of the complex made me feel like we were in a highly interactive museum; it reminded me of the chocolate river in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – it had the same make-believe feel as a fantasy film. There was the feeling of incongruity at seeing a river inside and experiencing this grand outdoor-indoor world.

The sheer number of people in The Venetian was unbelievable. I still can't process that the check-in desks were packed out at 1am. This shows how time is warped in Las Vegas; all normal experiences of time are completely backwards.



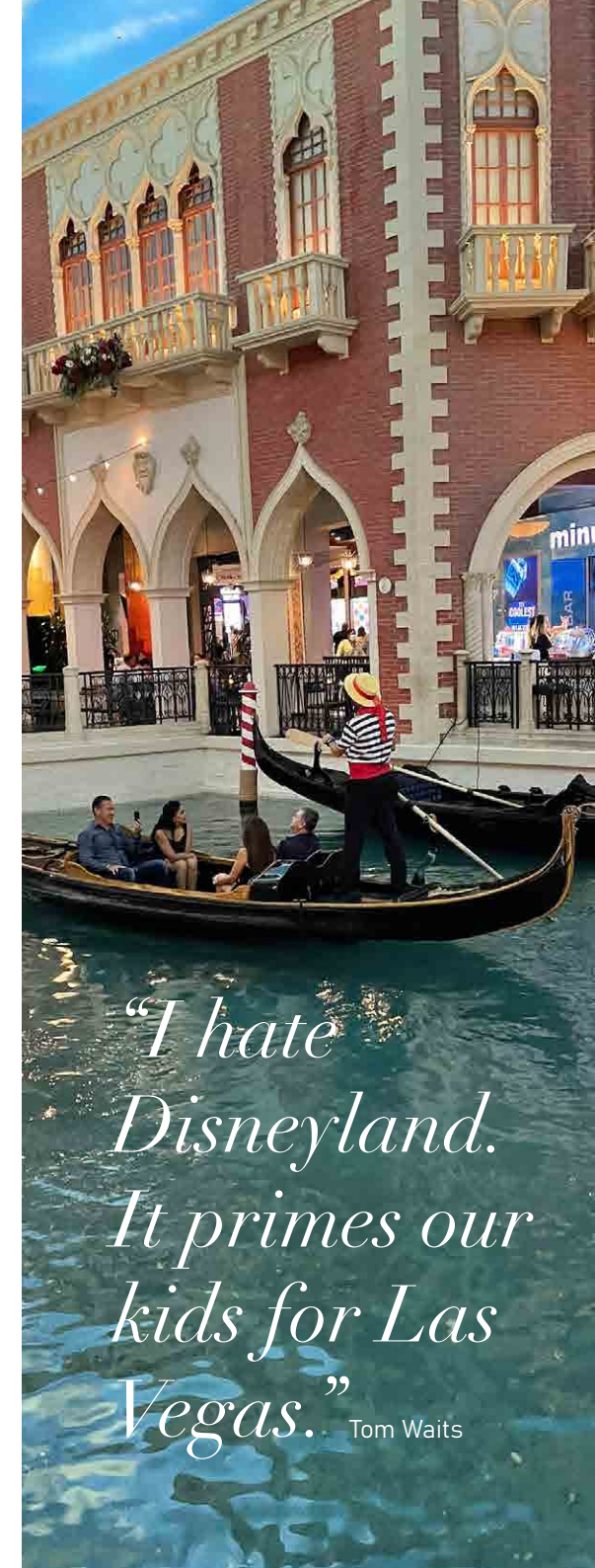
Las Vegas and me - The Strip.



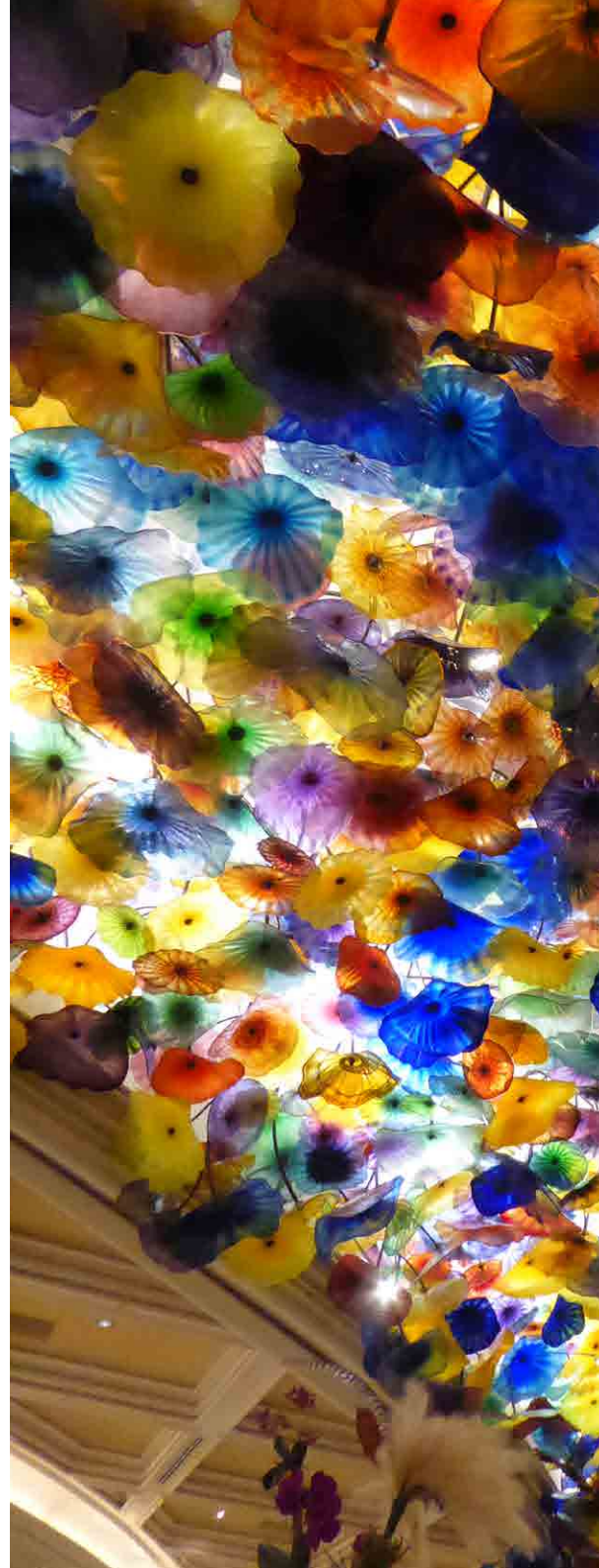
I astounded by how little we actually explored. That's just how big it is, like a city itself, like Vatican City. Even though we explored so little, we spent a long time completely lost here, trying to find the rest of the wedding party. The Venetian is a maze of familiarity in which most places look exactly the same, until you reach a landmark like the Armillary Sphere. There are several entrances to The Venetian, all grand, all luxurious, but all leading straight to the casinos, which were a labyrinth of slot machines, tables, bars and twisting paths. The signs of The Venetian were more unhelpful than anything; they pointed you in the vague direction of what you thought you were searching for, then when you reached the following set of signs, what you were aiming for ceased to exist. That was my first experience of manipulative wayfinding with an aim to stop you from leaving the casino, and the complex. I have so many photos in my WhatsApp group chats of corridors of The Venetian, along with messages such as 'I'm here, do you recognise this?' in an attempt to locate others.

The best part of The Venetian was the hen do in the rented cabana, complete with our own pool. Tucked away from the crowds, with our own bartender, I felt like we were rich influencers that only travelled in first class, stayed in the most expensive rooms, used private pools and put down big bets in the high roller rooms. I think that's what Vegas can make you feel like, as if you're living this other life of luxury. Then again, I may have felt like this because I was part of a wedding party where no expense was spared in having a time to remember.

The Venetian features several nightclubs, pool decks and theatres and a huge shopping mall, The Grande Shoppes, which resemble the streets of Venice.



"I hate Disneyland. It primes our kids for Las Vegas." Tom Waits



Bellagio.

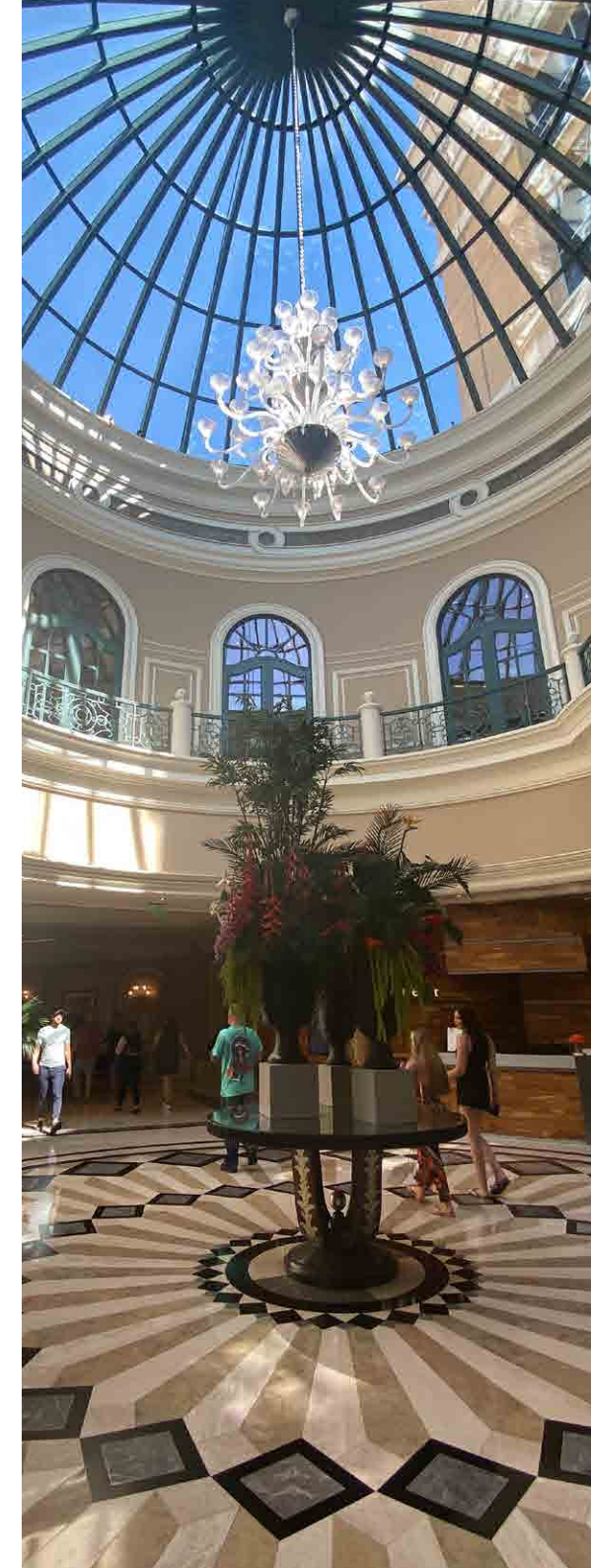
Another grand hotel, Bellagio and its dancing fountains are some of the most famous sights of Las Vegas. Inspired by a village of the same name in North Italy and opened by casino owner Steve Wynn in 1998 at the cost of \$1.6 billion, Bellagio offers a fine art gallery, a conservatory and a botanical garden with seasonal exhibitions.

Las Vegas and me - The Strip.

“While I was busy hating Vegas...I grew to love Vegas.” J. R. Moehringer

Bellagio's opening was important to Las Vegas shedding its 'tacky' image, as hotel construction started to move towards luxury soon after.

We visited Bellagio to watch the fountains and see the conservatory, which receives around 20,000 visitors daily. It has alternating themes based on the season, each costing around \$1 million to create and using thousands of plants and flowers. We saw the summer 2022 display, named 'Jungle of Dreams'. There were 28 animal sculptures, two of which were giraffes made from 900 pounds of flax seeds. There was also a waterfall, 50 palm trees, a koi pond and a jungle boat. The conservatory has a sustainable approach in recycling water, re-purposing plants and utilising green waste. The displays show that Las Vegas isn't all just style over substance and that maybe the city is not entirely the epitome of low-brow.



Frankie



Las Vegas and me - The Strip.

Las Vegas had so much contrast, from things like really cold air-conditioning and to then open oven door heat, to seeing homeless people in a really bad way to then seeing gamblers pouring money into slot machines. A lot of it was overwhelming, there's constant noise, light and people. When you're in your hotel room and you look out of the window, there was nothing but desert so you feel like you're in this manic hub of activity in the middle of nowhere.

Vegas made money feel like nothing, you go along with handing it over. I found it strange that the people who work there were always so enthusiastic to help you but then the people on Fremont Street who were holding signs were completely ignored and everyone tries to avoid eye contact with them as much as possible. I never felt 100% safe in Vegas and I was so hyper aware of everything. I found Fremont Street to be intense and the people there were crazy, it felt like they weren't even real. A lot of the time when walking around I just thought 'how long before I get back into the air conditioning' because it was always so hot.

I thought that it must be strange for people who live and work in Las Vegas to see the stream of tourists everyday; their life by contrast much be much slower and they will never get to experience the city or see it in the same way as its visitors. It felt like tourists have a certain status in Las Vegas because they part of this massive flow of money into the city.

Everything was just constant and fast paced because we didn't want to waste a moment; we were so sleep deprived. The wedding was the best part of the trip, and being able to experience it with family. I would definitely go back to see Las Vegas again if I had the chance.

P R E S S U R E D
pressured

4

Fremont St.



The Fremont St. Experience.

Opened in 1995 as an attraction, The Fremont Street Experience is a covered pedestrian mall with a 90 foot tall LED canopy overhead. Lining the streets are casinos, hotels, shops and stages where free shows are held. Along the street are countless performers ranging from acrobats and beat-boxers, to people making hand crafted goods, to mankini wearing men holding signs asking for donations. Tourists can pay to take a ride down the Fremont Street zip line overhead.





Las Vegas and me - Fremont St.

Las Vegas and me - Fremont St.

The Strip is crazy because of its architecture, size and lights, Fremont Street is crazy because of its people.

There are singers and bands on stages at all times.

Chippendales tried to hand out beaded necklaces to women as that seemed to be a transaction that once taken, you had to follow them to have your photo taken, which you then paid for.

Each performer was more or less locked in a metre wide circle that had been painted on the ground, with space in-between each performer.

So many people all over that place, on the ground, on stages, on the zip line.

I didn't return to Fremont Street after those few hours on the Tuesday and it's not something I regret too much; there was plenty to see on The Strip.

It was intimidating; my mum was harangued by one of the street performers to the point where she actually feared he wouldn't leave her alone.

I was impressed by how far some performers would go to earn a living and how little some would need to do to make money, like holding a hand made sign with a joke on it.

Kiosks for cigars, phone cases, Vegas souvenirs.

Crowds, people with drinks in weird long plastic cups that were as tall as me.

The casinos on Fremont Street offer much less variety than that of The Strip; they're pretty much exactly the same and much more musky and old than the likes of The Venetian.

The whole street was lined with these bubbles, and every one was taken up by buskers.

Couples sat on the ground making souvenirs out of palm tree leaves.

The Golden Gate used to be The Nevada Hotel, opened in 1906.

There were always big crowds around the more energetic performers.

From the moment you start walking up the street, you'll see women wearing nothing but nipple tassels, body paint and thongs wanting to take a photo with you.

There were men holding signs saying 'just here to look at boobs' while smirking. Another wanted to 'make America naked again' while wearing a mankini and cowboy hat that wanted tips from anyone who glanced at him.

There was a woman holding a sign saying 'vodka or cigarettes'.

We spent a while in The Golden Gate actually, I think that was where we first braved the blackjack tables that I had been too nervous to try my hand at.

It felt like a circus, like when the clowns try to get members of the audience on stage and you're really hoping they don't pick you.

Completely overstimulating.

A night out would be more wild on Fremont Street than any other place in Las Vegas.

Restaurants and pubs with their bars on the street.

Fremont Street very much represents old Las Vegas, you can see it in the casinos, one of which dates back to the conception of the city.

Other than the performers, there wasn't a massive amount of stuff to do on Fremont Street.

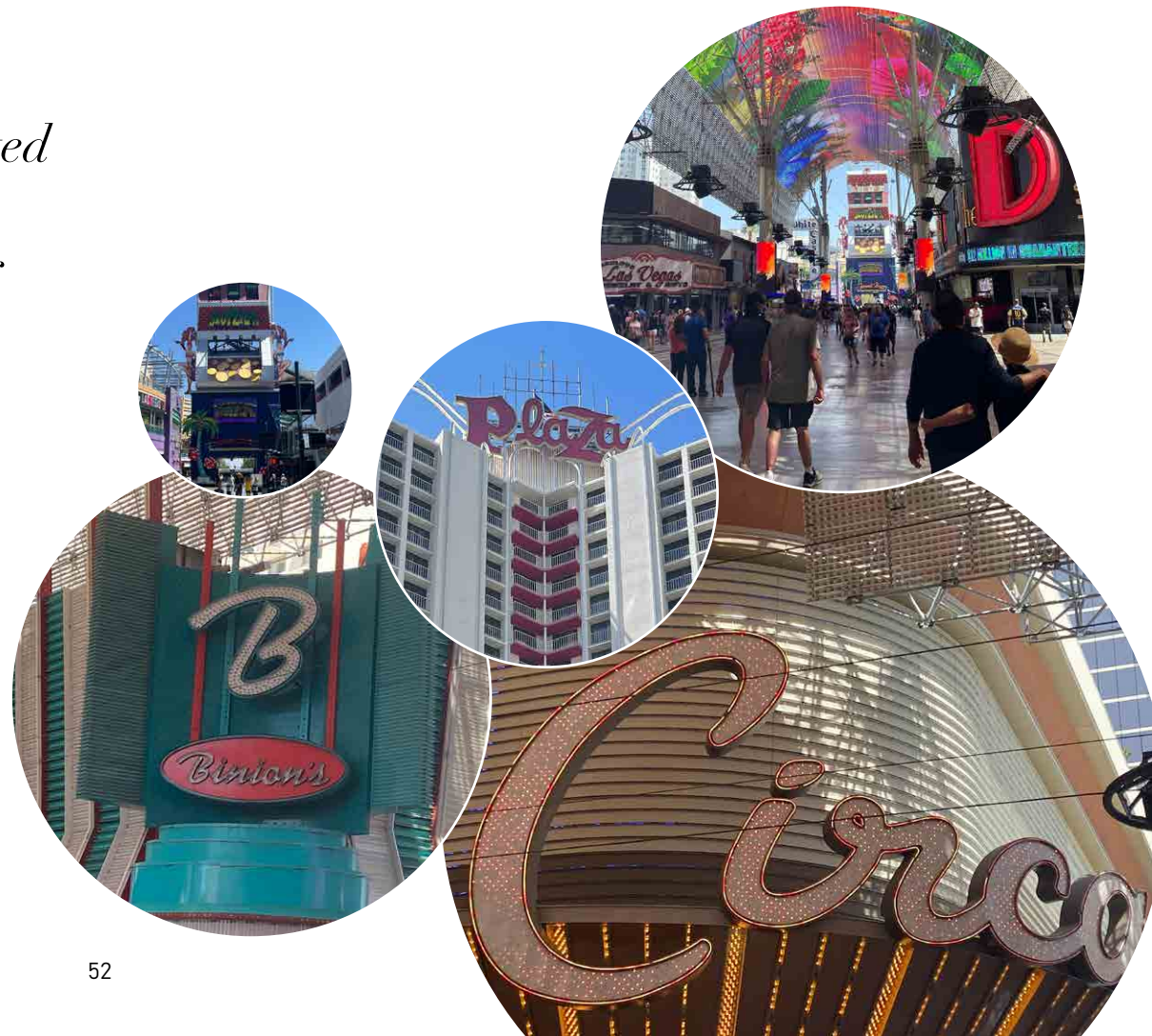
You learnt to not look at the street performers in the eye, and to put your phone away because if it looked like you were taking photos they would ask for donations.

We had a few hours there one day before going to The Mob Museum and we were at a loss of what to do for a good couple of hours.

It reminded me of a seaside resort, jumping from one arcade to the next to find them all exactly the same, except with less disappointing weather and more crazy Americans about.

Old Las Vegas.

After it's conception, Las Vegas grew outwards from Fremont Street, which acted as an epicentre for many years. Now The Strip is much bigger and varied, however a trip to Fremont is a must when visiting. The casinos and hotels on Fremont feel a bit outdated and rough and ready in comparison to those on The Strip, yet the madness of Las Vegas is tripled there.



“Las Vegas...where oddities don't make you lame, but instead bring you riches and fortune and fame.” Walter Wykes

The Strip and Fremont Street are somewhat dissimilar. The Fremont Street Experience (FSE) is smaller and cramped; it'll take about ten minutes to walk the length of the FSE unlike The Strip which is around 4 miles long. You're shielded from the baking sun too on Fremont Street. Though there are many old casinos on The Strip such as Circus Circus and Flamingo, the oldest are mostly situated on Fremont Street. Binions for example was established in 1951, El Cortez in 1941 and The Las Vegas Club in 1930.

There is a split in personalities between The Strip and Fremont Street. The Strip feels like a new-age type of Vegas where everything is polished and modern. Fremont Street plays on this old Las Vegas heritage, trying to keep authenticity in its casinos. You can even play on old slot machines that are quite rare to see in Las Vegas, considering as slot machines now rely on harder to win screen display slots.

Fremont Street felt much brighter than The Strip, which makes sense considering as the area used to be called 'The Glitter Gulch'. The exteriors of the casinos are illuminated by thousands of lights and the canopy constantly changes colour and runs adverts. I liked the old typefaces used on signs to advertise craps, blackjack and roulette tables; they reminded me of the circus or an old Western film. The typeface was everywhere, pretty much on every casino despite their different brands. The casinos feel more unanimous than on The Strip, where each entity is fighting for an edge.

Though it may be less flashy and represents a tacky, older version of Las Vegas, it's safe to say that Fremont Street, and the history behind it, is still a massively popular attraction and integral to the full Las Vegas experience.





Las Vegas and me - Fremont St.

I never wanted to visit Las Vegas but having spent 12 hours on a plane to visit San Francisco and Yosemite in 2004, it seemed rude not to drop in on the way home, especially as it's a staging post to see The Grand Canyon and The Hoover Dam. It is the complete antithesis of my usual holiday destinations of lakes and mountains.

2004 Las Vegas - Blackpool on steroids. Totally over the top, 24-hour living based on gambling and alcohol and not really my cup of tea.

2022 Las Vegas - unchanged really, just more over-priced and a lot bigger. I didn't gamble during either of my visits but spent my time walking along The Strip and sightseeing. It felt claustrophobic as I don't choose to visit very busy places. I don't like hustle and bustle and noise. To me Vegas is shiny, glitzy and feels like a film set. Having said it's not my cup of tea, I thoroughly enjoyed the four days spent there as part of the wedding party.

INTIMIDATED

intimidated

5

The culture





Tipping.

You don't need to go to Las Vegas to experience the tipping culture in the US. To give you an idea of tipping, the drink to the left is of one of three mimosas I bought at the hen party if you couldn't guess. The cost was \$96 altogether so the tip was rounded to \$20 meaning the total was \$116 for three drinks all of which were gone in about an hour.

Las Vegas and me - The culture.

“Las Vegas is sort of like how God would do it if he had money.” Steve Wynn

I'm used to giving a 10% tip when paying for a sit down meal in the UK; it's rare to tip for drinks let alone after every round. You are expected to tip after most services in the US but what confused me was that some places required you to add an amount to a receipt so the tip could be taken from your bank card after payment rather than just leaving cash. Unlike in the UK, tips are what wait staff live off. 15-20% is the customary tip, regardless of how good the service was.

It seems so odd to me that restaurants and bars don't pay a fair wage considering how expensive everything is in Vegas. In the US, it is totally acceptable to complain about your food or the service if it's not 100% to your satisfaction because of tipping. To us polite Brits, that seemed like a daunting prospect.

The history of tipping in the US goes back to the mid 1800s as a way of wealthy Americans imitating the European practice of giving a tip for excellent service, a custom that has been around since medieval times. Businesses realised that they could benefit from this by paying their workers less so they would work harder to achieve a tip,

essentially turning what should be a bonus for exceptional service into a wage top up. The average hourly salary for a server in Las Vegas is \$11.57. Considering that a cheap pint in Vegas was around \$8, that wage starts to look very poor. An eight hour shift would make less than \$100. The average tip for a days work is \$110. It's a sad reality that the economy of the US is propped up by these mandatory tips, and it's a culture that you're supporting whenever you visit the US. As much as I loved Las Vegas, the more you look into the reality of the city, the more disturbing it becomes.

There are lots of different opinions and numbers suggested for tipping different services, with some UK visitors saying they spent more on tips than anything on else while visiting. Tipping is a bit different in Las Vegas compared to anywhere else in the US because of it's tourist status. It's intimidating knowing how to tip considering that tips are literally the livelihood of wait staff. I'd rather just pay the figure that gives a fair wage to everyone and not have to fiddle around with cash trying to work out percentages and thinking I've just ruined someone's day by not giving a big enough tip. I didn't even know that if you got a free drink while gambling you're expected to tip, even though you didn't ask for that drink. It was bizarre to tip after every drink, particularly if you were on a night out or just ordering a can of pop at the bar. I wasn't loathed to give tips at all and I ensured that I tipped well, I just thought the whole idea of needing to tip as unfair on people who worked in hospitality.

The photograph on the right is prior to wedding breakfast. I was told by the bride and groom that when looking at places to book for the meal, most places expected a tip upfront of over half the cost of the meal in full, which would have been no small amount given it was for over 30 people at a luxurious restaurant.



The Marriage (and Divorce) Capital of the World.

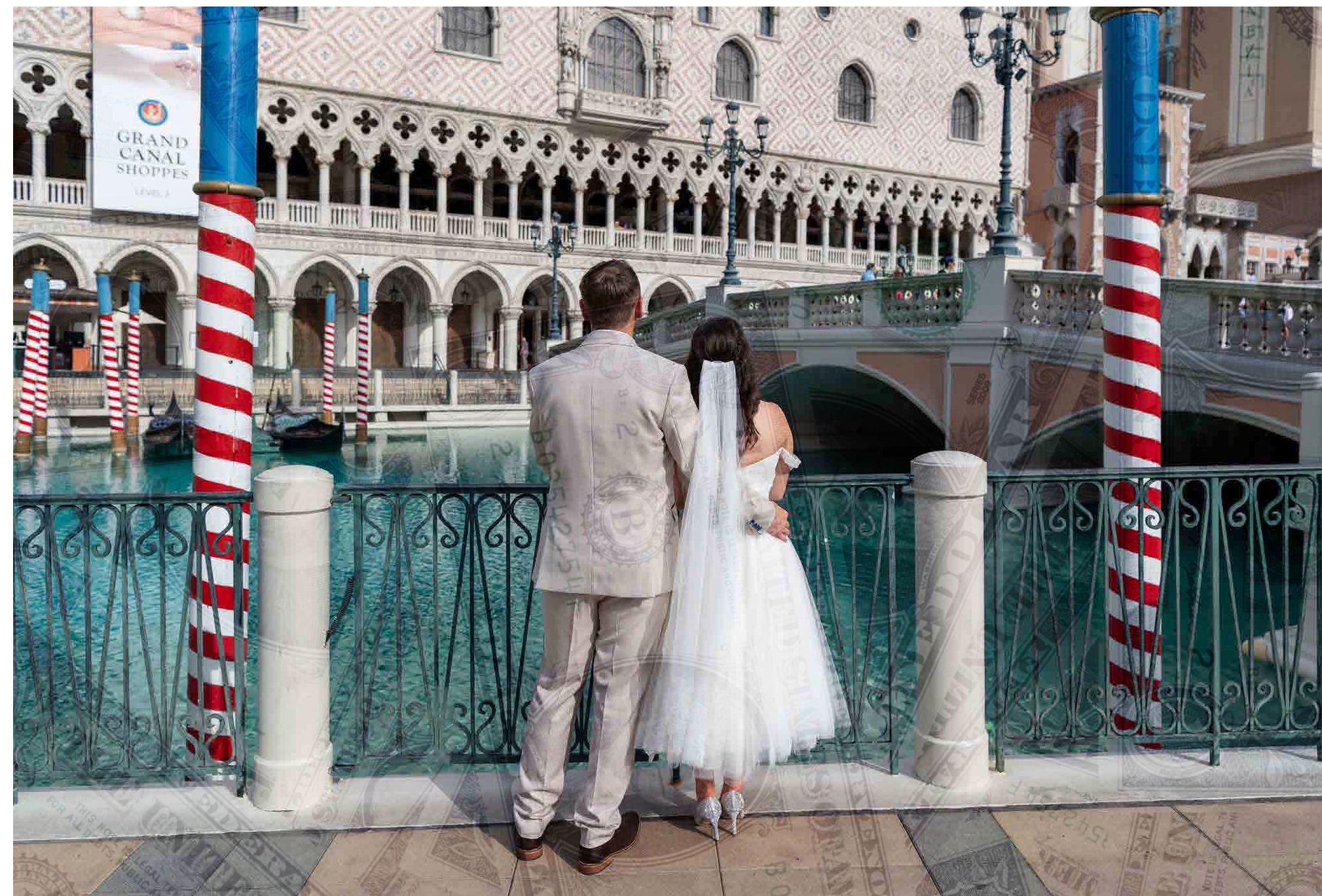
Sin City is one of the most popular places in the world to tie the knot. With drive-through weddings and Elvis officiators, getting hitched in this city isn't what you would call traditional. With statistics reckoning that over 120,000 weddings per year are had in Las Vegas, it normal to see newly weds on The Strip in their wedding suits and dresses.

The wedding we attended was absolutely beautiful and we all enjoyed every minute of it. There was no expense spared and everything ran smoothly. The chapel was gorgeous and classy and felt pretty traditional despite the Vegas setting. It was completely different to the expectations many of us had before visiting Vegas that a wedding there would most likely be sleazy or rushed.

The speed in which you can receive your wedding license (the same day) is a big reason why Las Vegas is the marriage capital of the world. Many chapels are quite cheap and there is a higher chance of drunken wedding plans being made there (I'm blaming *Friends* for my thinking here). A lot of celebrities tie the knot in Las Vegas too, which makes it trendy. There's a huge amount of choice offered, not just in chapels but for places to celebrate as well and the 40 degree heat and sunshine is usually more preferable than the unreliable weather typical of the UK. Because it's such a popular wedding destination, the process of getting married is easy and well rehearsed. It can be a honeymoon, stag/hen do and wedding all wrapped up in one holiday.

Las Vegas is also the divorce capital, with the highest divorce rates in the US. I thought at first that divorce was so big because of the amount of weddings, and that the ease of getting married there leads to impulsive and poor decisions, but divorce has always been a part of Las Vegas' story. The history behind weddings and divorces is largely attributed to the city trying to bring in people, between the 1930s to the 1960s. The desert environment at that time with no air conditioning meant that Las Vegas needed to become a place that people visited because there were things to do there that no other state allowed. This included gambling, but also quick weddings and marriage dissolution. Nevada had a larger variety of grounds for divorce unlike most states that, if they even permitted divorces at all, only issued divorces on the grounds of provable infidelity. Las Vegas didn't even require proof for grounds of divorce.

Las Vegas and me - The culture.



A foodie's heaven.

When you look up things to do to in Las Vegas, there are a lot of recommendations for eateries thought to be 'so good you can't leave without going'. Deemed to be a city where gluttony meets fine dining, and where so many celebrity chefs have restaurants, a foodie can have a great time here, provided they're happy to pay upwards of \$60 for a steak.

When it came to food in Las Vegas, I only knew about places like The Heart Attack Grill. Between us, Luke and I made a list of places that we wanted to eat at, most being American chains such as In n' Out and the Cheesecake Factory. In the end, we barely made a dent in our list. Usually, when you're hungry in Vegas you go to the best sounding yet closest place out of convenience because you don't have time to get a taxi and then locate the places that we had hoped to eat at.

I didn't find the food to be overwhelming large, mostly just expensive. The burgers over there are pretty much always good, and breakfast is always a big affair and usually served with maple syrup and lots of butter, and coffee is the drink of choice.

The steak we had for the wedding breakfast was one of the most delicious steaks I've ever had and I still have dreams about my poolside French toast,

I did find that after two days of eating in Las Vegas that I needed a salad or something green because I felt incredibly unhealthy and sluggish from all the sweet, processed and fatty foods I'd consumed.



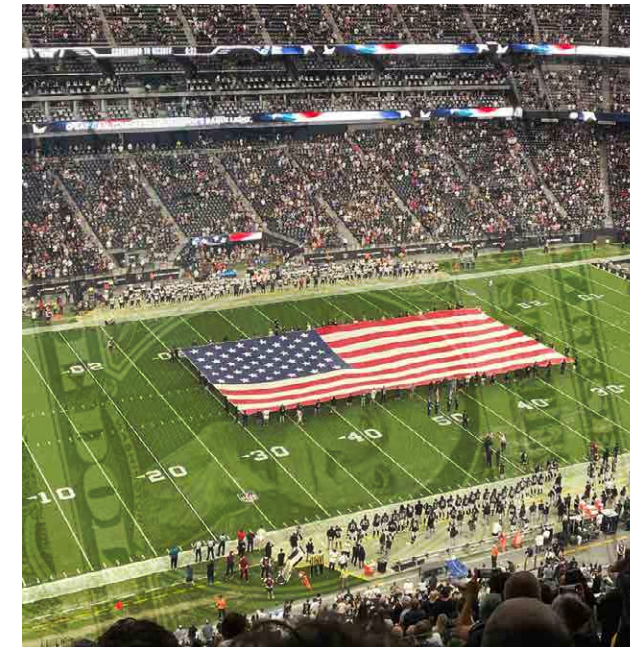
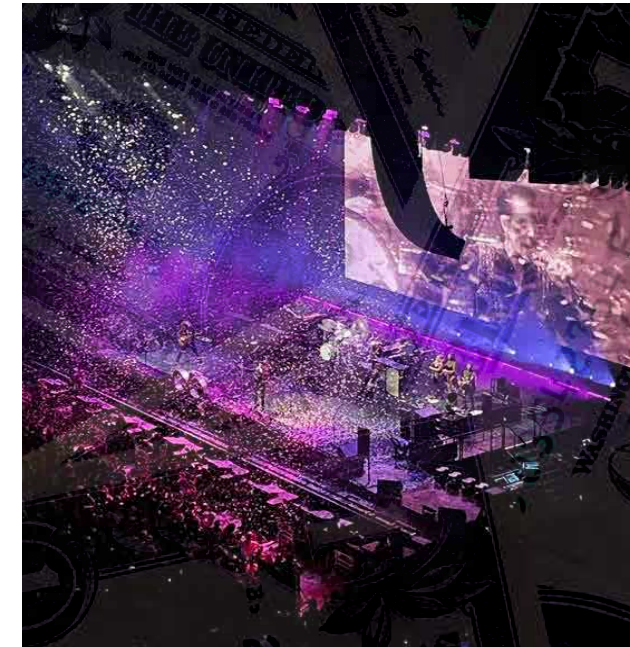
Entertainment.

Like with going to London and seeing a show on the West End, or going to New York and catching a show on Broadway, it's always highly advised that you go to a show in Las Vegas.

The number one show in Vegas is the Cirque du Soleil, of which there are several versions. We went to see The Beatles LOVE at The Mirage. It involves dancers and acrobats performing high intensity circus stunts and interpretative dance in an interactive format, in time with reimagined Beatles songs. It's a psychedelic whirlwind of joyous dancing using bungees, ropes, swings, trampolines and skating – it's unusual for the performers to not be airborne. The costumes and props are beautiful and intricate and so expansive. The idea of the show is that you can't really focus on one thing as acrobats perform high in the sky, to your left, to your right and even next to your seat at some points. Petals, streamers, bubbles and a massive sheet are thrown into the crowd during the show. It felt like a weird dream, and like I could have watched the show a hundred times and still not have seen every performance. In true Las Vegas style, you're left feeling dazed and amazed, that is once you stop feeling like the performers will injure themselves. It was truly a beautiful experience and I would highly recommend a Cirque du Soleil show wherever the opportunity arises.



Las Vegas and me - The culture.



Concerts are also important to the Las Vegas experience, considering as residencies by Elvis and Sinatra and the like helped to put Las Vegas on the map. We were lucky enough to see The Killers at the T-Mobile Arena on our final night. I guess you could see them anywhere they're touring, but as they're actually from Vegas, it felt more like a once-in-a-lifetime concert to me. Of course it was massive, bright, colourful and full of confetti and neon. Johnny Marr was the support act which felt weird to me considering as he's a British musician and was singing songs from his former band The Smiths. It felt like I was transported to some music venue in the UK – it felt no different to a Friday night out in Leeds.

“A city that literally zaps you in the eye.” Bruce Bégout

Another part of Las Vegas entertainment is live sport. We had tickets to see the Las Vegas Raiders versus the New England Patriots game at the Allegiant Stadium. I was looking forward to it however, I came out feeling disappointed. It was so stop-start, punctuated with a stream of ads – the cheerleaders gave a better show than anything else really. Nothing much really happened. I felt like there was a reason why there were so many small performances during the match; they have to keep the crowds entertained as the football is about ten seconds of action and then nothing for ten minutes. I was assured this was the same for most American sports, to allow for adverts, of course.

Adults only.

Anytime, day or night, scantily clad Show Girls walk The Strip and Fremont Street in headdresses, festival attire and bright gogo boots. The girls pictured right are actually a pretty modest example of this. I just remember seeing a lot of body paint, nipple tassels and thongs.



Show girls walk The Strip. Photo courtesy of Benjamin Hajer.

Adult entertainment in the form of strip shows are another reason why Las Vegas is a big place for hen and stag parties. Advertisements for strip clubs are all over the place, like the city wants to remove the stigma around things that may be viewed by some as shameful, because indulgence trumps everything else in Vegas. Adverts included on the top of taxis, on huge LED screens, and on leaflets strewn around the pavements. A common way that stripping is advertised in Las Vegas is Chippendales or Show Girls engaging with the public on The Strip and on Fremont Street. The Chippendales in particular will hand women beaded necklaces which form some type of currency in which you have to take a photo with them and pay something like \$20. Not just a normal photo though, one where they lift you up and grab your thighs and waist and such. The Show Girls wear these amazing costumes, smile, wave and greet men as they walk past and ask if they would like photographs taking.

I found it kind of annoying to be honest, I didn't want to be harassed constantly while sightseeing. God knows how those who don't speak English are able to manoeuvre around that situation.

As part of the hen party, the Maid of Honour had organised for us to attend a strip show at Excalibur called *Thunder Down Under*. It felt a bit sleazy but it was actually a fun night out. Although, it did seem to me that those who got picked on by the strippers when they came into the audience didn't have the opportunity to give consent when the strippers interacted with them by basically just feeling the chosen person up. I get that you're at a strip show, but I didn't think that getting felt up was part of a strip show or club unless you specifically requested it and then heavily tipped them or something. Of course any bride to be on her hen do is pulled on stage and given a more personal experience.

The below photo was taken from the only segment of the show where you were allowed to have your phone out. To me the whole thing got a bit monotonous, and I thought it was a bit weird we'd paid to see some guys dance and then strip off again and again, like it was a surprise. Then, of course, there was a huge queue at the end for people to get photos with their favourite stripper. It was weird to me. I was surprised by just how many men there were there as well, considering it was marketed as a ladies night. Everyone was in really good spirits though, and the atmosphere didn't feel unduly uncomfortable, just removed from normality.



I was surprised to learn that, after all the jesting about what had been organised for Conor, the stag do never actually went to any strip clubs during their night, preferring to drink and gamble on Fremont Street until the early hours of the morning. I found it funny that, traditionally, men are more likely to go to strip clubs, particularly on their stag do, and yet Conor didn't even bother with it, when the strip show for the hen do was apparently always going to be part of the plan. I feel like stripping, regardless of gender, is something that is important to Las Vegas because it could be considered a sin to some, deemed racy or immoral and a pursuit of an unchaste way to make money.

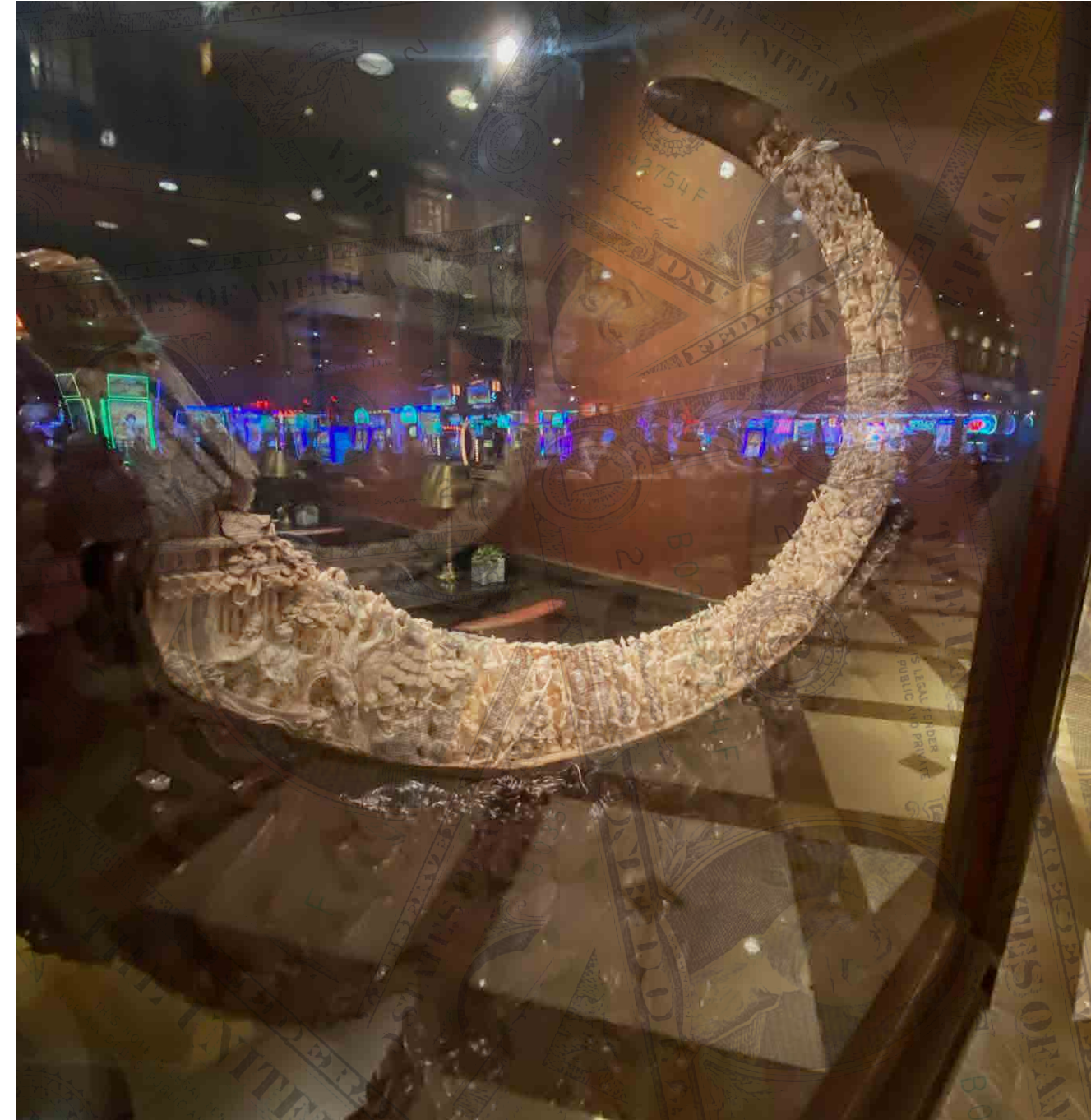
Show Girls are just always around on The Strip, so Las Vegas feels like a carnival or festival that never ends. I admired the show girls for their confidence as they fully accepted that they will be ogled at and maybe even pursued, or worse. When out on the streets, they don't benefit from the security of an establishment that protects its workers from being taken advantage or made to feel uncomfortable. It must be much harder for those who busk on Fremont Street by stripping down and asking for donations as they are always alone, wear the bare minimum of clothing and often appear vulnerable.

Culture or kitsch?

There is no doubt that a lot of Las Vegas is tacky and that many things that are intended to look classy are really just imitations of real high art. Though I appreciate I'm in no position to critique what is considered in good or bad taste, I can say that Las Vegas isn't all gaudy.



Las Vegas and me - The culture.



Tucked away in Treasure Island's casino is an item of remarkable significance; a genuine woolly mammoth tusk with hundreds of tiny carvings. The age of the tusk is over 4,500 years. The intricate carvings are believed to have been completed over centuries and through many different generations due to the transitions in the military garbs and weaponry represented in the carvings. It would have taken a great amount of skill, time and dedication to produce, not to mention the age of the exhibit. Yet it's on display in a Las Vegas casino, the very antithesis of high-brow. In this image you can see the reflections of the slot machines on the glass display case. What does this say about Las Vegas? Why is this piece of art and history here?

Other discoveries in Las Vegas include a piece of the Berlin Wall at a urinal at Main Street Station Casino. There are two pieces of The Blarney Stone on display at The D Casino and artefacts of The Titanic at the Luxor. These artefacts surely belong in a museum. It was strange to discover these secret pieces of history, particularly as Las Vegas is not exactly known for art or culture. And yet, Las Vegas is probably one of the most beautiful man made places. The Bellagio and The Venetian for example. They were breathtaking and felt like they were places of true luxury, of high art and importance. From the gardens, the lakes and fountains, the hallways, the galleries, the artworks and statues, these places in Las Vegas did not feel kitschy or grotesque. They felt genuine. Whether Las Vegas is cultured or kitsch really doesn't matter to me at all, I loved it for what it was, but I understand the preconception that it will be nothing more than trashy. I think a lot of people who believe this would probably be surprised at what Las Vegas is actually like, particularly if they widen their focus to see the truly beautiful things rather than the madness and glitz of the city.

Clare

Las Vegas and me - The culture.



I first visited Las Vegas in 1992 – it was very much a means to an end, the end being a visit to The Grand Canyon in a terrifyingly small Cessna plane. I was staying in a small motel near the airport end of The Strip. I visited Excalibur both nights. The Strip was pretty much a building site (Luxor) and full of vacant lots with miles of fencing, concrete paths and traffic.

I simply don't understand gambling or gamblers – the thought of putting hard earned money on the table with a slim chance of getting anything back leaves me cold! Back in 1992 I suppose it was fun getting a plastic bucket of small change and losing \$10 in an hour and leaving. In 2022 when the Bellagio lift doors opened onto the casino floor and a bored looking middle aged woman in a cardi with a fag and a tumbler of wine pushes \$5 bills into a machine at 8am, one wonders where the fun has gone; has she been there all night or is she simply an early riser?

When my daughter went to Las Vegas with her boyfriend many years later. they absolutely loved the place. I joked 'get married in Vegas and have your honeymoon built in, marry in a trashy Elvis fashion'. I meant just the two of them! When she actually got married in Vegas, 34 people went!

Las Vegas wasn't on my list of desperately needed to see places but I wanted to be at my daughter's wedding and what a day we had. A beautiful little chapel (not an Elvis in sight), a lavish meal and an Irish band in a pub during an evening that couldn't have been the same in Leeds.

In 2022 I did a lot of sightseeing and no gambling. My impression of Las Vegas is now lavish, EXPENSIVE, extravagant, brash, beautiful, impressive, fun, loud, busy, bright. It has ostentatious wealth and a huge drug problem. Park your environmental concerns in the arrivals lounge too.

6

The signs

INSPIRED
inspired





The City of Bright Lights.

The brightest place on earth is Las Vegas, and the highest concentration of light in the city is on The Strip. The satellite images show this patch of gridded light in a sea of darkness, with it's centre standing out like a flame, like a beating heart. That light is from the casinos, hotels, attractions and all of their signs.

Las Vegas was once full of neon, all now replaced with cheaper and easier to make LED lighting and screens. I love neon with it's glow and softly curved glass and how it subtly warms up the background with a warm blush. To me, neon represents excitement and feels like it's promising something fun. Neon is loved by a lot of people; it's vibrancy and the association with tourist destinations plays on our most basic emotions. Las Vegas has a history of harnessing neon for this reason.

The Hoover Dam has been a source of hydroelectric power to Las Vegas for decades. With plentiful resource, electricity was used to draw in tourism. Moths are mesmerised by light; tourists are not much different. Las Vegas had to be bright to draw in folk that were travelling through the desert to places such as LA.

Neon became a part of the Las Vegas identity, some deeming the city a shrine to neon. As with everything, neon wasn't made to last. Most of the neon in Las Vegas now sits in varying states of repair in The Neon Museum, a memory of the rise and fall of neon. The preserved signs are seen as invaluable pieces of art representing the history of Las Vegas. Despite the cost, hours and expertise needed to preserve these signs, over 250 signs are kept at the museum.

“All of Las Vegas comes down to its lights.”

Bruce Bégout

The main part of The Neon Museum is the Neon Boneyard. It was haunting to walk around, feeling like I was in some sort of neglected fairground. I could feel a sense of a shared gaze, as weird as that sounds, as I saw these signs as they were back then compared to how they are now. I could see them in their heyday, standing tall, bright and glowing in the nights sky, promising winnings and eagerly beckoning folk inside. I could also see them for what they are now, rusting, dusty, broken, weathered, faded, but intricately designed with yards of neon tubing, light bulbs and decorative type. I know they are only signs but it felt a bit sad to me that they had once lit up the darkness of the night, throwing light into the emptiness of the Mojave Desert, and now they sit dormant in a graveyard as part of an effort to make neon relevant in Las Vegas' ever evolving culture.

Las Vegas and me - The signs.



Welcome.

Designed by Betty Willis in 1959, the famous Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas landmark is one of the most well-known signs in the world. Willis, who went on to design other popular Las Vegas signage, is a bit of a graphic design legend to me. Not only was she working in an industry that was predominately male led at the time, but she's also regarded as one of the biggest influencers of the identity of the city. You can't walk into a gift shop in Vegas without seeing this sign everywhere.



“That sign was the result of an all-night bull session in which one of the first drawings was retrieved from the wastebasket.” Betty Willis

Unfortunately, this is one attraction I didn't have time to see. It's located on the far end of The Strip and we didn't find ourselves down that side much. It's a shame you can't see it as you arrive, either by air or taxi, as cars move around the Strip via the freeway.

The sign is an example of Googie – when I researched into this, I exclaimed: ‘ohhh that’s what that is’. It’s a strangely familiar and futuristic style of architecture commonly used in the US in the 50s, typically on roadside venues such as motels. It’s reminiscent of Space Age design, using geometric shapes and neon, so it’s perfect for Las Vegas.

La Concha Motel (now restored as The Neon Museum’s lobby, pictured left) is also Googie, designed in 1961 by African American architect Paul Williams, in a time where architecture was white male dominant.

Las Vegas’ design history is somewhat rooted in a more inclusive approach to talent. The more I researched, the more I was surprised at the seeds of progressiveness in the city’s history and the more I liked Vegas. Details of the first racially integrated casino can be found overleaf.

After reading through some of her interviews, I’ve realised what an icon Willis actually was. She said that “we thought Vegas was fabulous, so we added the word” to the sign. She never copyrighted her sign because she thought that the city needed all the help it could get to stop it from going bust. She called her work a ‘gift to the city’. Willis persevered with her work in Vegas despite worries that the city was a fad. As an artist, Willis liked typography the most and didn’t shy away from harshly critiquing her own designs, deeming the hand-drawn lettering of ‘fabulous’ on the sign to be amateurish.

Moulin Rouge.

The sign sits in pride of place at The Neon Museum, completely restored to it's 1955 state. Officially open for only five months, The Moulin Rouge Hotel was poorly managed and left vacant for decades. In 2003, a fire gutted the building; the sign was one of the only things to survive.

"I loved the sign business...when I build 'em, they last." Betty Willis

The Moulin Rouge Hotel was the first ever racially integrated casino to open. It's conception was a major historical event for Las Vegas during the civil rights movement, as it proved to the world that as long as you had money to gamble, The Moulin Rouge would welcome you. The hotel saw the likes of Sammy Davis Jr., Louis Armstrong, Judy Garland and Frank Sinatra to name a few.

In 1960, there was a mounting threat of a march against racial discrimination through the city, to which a meeting was held in the then closed The Moulin Rouge to agree on desegregating all casinos in the city. Even though the hotel was short-lived, it did a lot for the civil rights movement in Las Vegas.

The design of The Moulin Rouge's sign was done by none other than Betty Willis. She spent days researching Parisian lettering and hand-drew the type seen on the sign today. The sign uses over 800 feet of neon tubing and weighs approximately 1,200 pounds. Though the sign is mostly restored, the photograph on the right shows that part of the neon tubing on doesn't work in places. That was the case with a lot of the signs in the museum.

An arson fire in 2003 destroyed most of the old Moulin Rouge building, though the sign was one of the few things to survive undamaged.

This sign was a particular favourite of mine because of it's shockingly bright pink neon and rhythmic, wavy cursive type, lined by the neon tubes. I loved that this sign represented the beginnings of ending long set racial and gender prejudices.

Las Vegas and me - The signs.



Vegas Vic.

Historically, Las Vegas' tourism has been assisted by revolutionary graphic design. An example of this is Vegas Vic, a 90-foot tall cowboy whose arm once moved to beckon travellers into the city. A restored version can still be seen on Fremont Street today.

What makes Vegas Vic so special aside from being the unofficial mascot of the city, was that it was a signifier of a departure from traditional signage in which no type was used to persuade passers by, instead relying on the friendliness of a human form. The original sign welcomed people to The Pioneer Club, however the restored version now sits atop a souvenir shop. The original had a waving arm, moving cigarette and he even exclaimed 'howdy podner' every fifteen minutes. Now Vegas Vic is a much overlooked symbol of Las Vegas' past, sitting amidst the hustle and bustle and spectacle of The Fremont Street Experience.



Vegas Vickie.

Vegas Vic became 'married' in an official ceremony in 1994 to cowgirl Vegas Vickie. From 1980 to 2017, Vegas Vic advertised the Glitter Gulch strip club until she was removed to make way for new casinos. She is now restored and lives in the Circa hotel.

It didn't surprise me to learn that the two signs had been 'married'. Of course a place like Las Vegas would do something like that. It shows how particularly important signs were to the city when neon was more heavily relied upon. People didn't just come to see Las Vegas, they came to see the signs, which became the spectacle and part of the history of the city.

Unlike her husband who no longer waves, Vegas Vickie has been restored to ensure her leg kicks. Another thing to see next time I go to Vegas!

Vegas Vickie photo courtesy of Harald Sund/Getty Images.





Las Vegas and me - The signs.

It's hard to put into words why I love Las Vegas so much, you can't properly understand what it's like until you've experienced it yourself. I feel like you're in a bubble, you're completely removed from the real world, because Vegas feels like a world of its own where it's totally acceptable to drink early and to see men in tankinis on Fremont Street. Everyone's there for the same reason, to have a good time. There's so much to do, there's something for everyone. It's so crazy to see a pyramid next to a castle next to the New York skyline, it's complete madness from top to bottom.

I first went to Las Vegas in 2015 to celebrate my 25th birthday and I completely fell in love with the city. It was overwhelming, busy, vast, excessive, bright, exciting and not like to any other place I'd been to before. I think it feels like a Disneyland for adults.

When Conor proposed during the pandemic, I knew that the only place I wanted to get married was Las Vegas. I can't explain why, it just felt right to get married there. I never wanted a big white wedding, I wanted something different and fun and Vegas is a place that we both love. It's safe to say that both of our parents weren't thrilled at the idea of a Vegas style wedding. Conor's mum even said that she thought Vegas was 'Blackpool on steroids'. Needless to say, once they'd been, they realised they were wrong about the city and understood why we wanted to get married there.

When I saw Luxor and New York New York from the plane, I was so excited for everyone with us to experience Las Vegas for the first time and feel how I felt when I first saw The Strip. Driving in a limo to the wedding chapel in my dress, I knew I had made the right decision to get married in Sin City. The next day I knew I could never have had such a special day anywhere else in the world.

7

Underworld.

S H O C K E D
shocked



The weird...

Americans are really proud of their country. The American flag is everywhere, being 'genuinely' American is a selling point. At the football game, everyone stood when the national anthem played and held their hands over their hearts. I cannot understand why when there are so many problems with the US like their gun laws, racism and lack of environmental concern etc.

One conversation, or rather heated debate, I overheard was between a group of American men drinking by the pool at The Venetian. One guy was proud to be a Trump supporter because 'Trump lowered the gas prices' which he claimed was his only reason for supporting any politician. He was concerned about how much money was being spent to support civilians with the Russian invasion of Ukrainian rather than putting "boots on the ground". I thought he was joking, but he didn't back down when others started to argue with him about his backward opinions; he couldn't comprehend their compassionate and reasonable views. I'm glad we didn't meet any obviously pro-gun Americans.

“Vegas means comedy, tragedy, happiness, and sadness all at the same time.”

Artie Lange



Las Vegas and me - Underworld.



Photo courtesy of John Schnobrich/Unsplash

...and not so wonderful.

One uncomfortable conversation about the problems that come with excessive, Las Vegas style gambling and drinking, topped off with a whole load of racism and bigotry.

As we sat by the pool at The Mirage, an American couple struck up a conversation with us. We had had some nice conversations with other tourists in Las Vegas; this was not one of those occasions.

The guy, who I will call 'Dick', told us that he was on holiday with his ex-wife who was a gambler and alcoholic. What a great place to take her on holiday. They'd divorced because when she drank, she ate, resulting in weight gain that the Dick "couldn't bare." He had given her cash so that she would move out quickly, another wise decision considering her addictions. Dick spied about homelessness and drugs saying Las Vegas "never used to be like this" and that "some people" are the problem. He said, "you know the type I mean" and made a circular gesture to his face. "We pretend to like them, everyone in this country actually hates them". Completely dumbfounded by what we had just heard, and that all it had taken was twenty minutes for such unashamed racism to appear, we quickly left.

I had thought of challenging Dick, but you can't argue with someone like that. I couldn't believe what we'd heard. Racism is more outspoken in the US, but I didn't think I would actually witness it, and with such a proud stance on the matter, in a place that was so multicultural and beautiful.



Las Vegas and me - Underworld.

“I only ever play Vegas one night at a time. It’s a hideous, gaudy place; it may not be the end of the world per se, but you can certainly see it from there.”

Robin Williams.

It’s customary in my work group chat to send photographs when on holidays. I sent a photo of the waterfalls and lights of our hotel at night as I thought it was a bit different to the typical photos of resort holidays and beaches in Europe. The first message I received back was “the electricity bill must be astronomical”. An underwhelming response but one that was sadly true of Las Vegas coming from those used to the UK measures of trying to reduce pollution, household waste and bills in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

Excess and waste.

The UK is somewhat environmentally conscious. I feel like many would disagree with me, however, compared to Las Vegas, the UK is essentially green. We have banned single use plastic straws, encourage the use of energy efficient bulbs, recycle where possible, and try to go paper and travel free at work. You get the feeling that we are encouraged to do our bit.

Las Vegas serves you an useless plastic sword with each drink in plastic cups that get thrown away upon finishing. Most things are part of a really bad throw away culture. There are no recycling bins to be seen; the city produces more than 5 billion pounds of waste every year. On a larger scale, the sheer amount of energy used to power so many large casinos and hotels in terms of excessive lighting and constant air conditioning is beyond irresponsible. It goes so far to air condition the outside as porte cochères are usually blasted with cool air to invite visitors in. This isn’t even mentioning the focus on travel by huge cars and increased air travel due to the popularity of the city.

The location of the city is a problem; it needs a vast amounts of water as a city in such an arid atmosphere. Greenery only exists because of the amount of water used to keep it alive. But then how much water goes

into Bellagio’s lake? The location of Las Vegas means that water scarcity is a real issue. Close by Lake Mead for example has dropped 170 feet since the turn of the century, resulting in a hose pipe ban in the suburbs. The city has actually been in a state of drought since 2000. On average, Las Vegas gets roughly 5 inches of rain per year, which amounts to nothing considering the high temperatures. The city is considered to be the fastest-warming city in the whole of the US.

The air quality in Las Vegas is notoriously bad due to the high temperatures, transportation, construction, and big population. It resulted in \$1 billion spend on healthcare in 2012, and yet more construction is being done, more casinos built, and more cars on the road. As a tourist in Las Vegas, all I did was contribute to this; I was very much a part of the problem. There is a good amount of guilt attached to my visit, contributing to a city that is so laissez-faire towards the self-inflicted environmental damage caused, particularly to the surrounding natural beauty of the area. Las Vegas is literally sucking the life out of the State of Nevada and the Colorado River.

Social issues.

The sad truth of many cities is high rates of homelessness and Las Vegas is no exception.

In fact, Nevada has the highest rate of youth homelessness in the nation. What is most shocking is the disparateness of it in Vegas; the huge wealth of a city is the backdrop to many struggling to survive.

Makeshift camp during pandemic; Hard Rock Cafe sign at Neon Museum can be seen in the background. Photograph courtesy of John Locher/Ap.



“Las Vegas is the suicide capital of America...not everyone who comes here leaves here.” Paul W. Papa

The midday August heat of Las Vegas is something you can't stand in summer wear for more than ten minutes. With all the struggles that come with being homeless, there is also the heat to suffer. The attitude towards homelessness is one of indifference in Las Vegas - we witnessed a security guard overlook a man who was fully clothed laying unconscious in the 40 degree heat. I guess the lack of free health care in the US means that those in need of medical attention aren't as quickly attended to, if at all.

What makes it so shocking is the mix of high roller rooms, where thousands of dollars betted away every second, with the sight of those asking for a few cents for food just outside of the casino. It's a dark parallel between those who have and have too much and those who really don't have anything.

In recent years, camping in public places has been criminalised in Las Vegas. During the pandemic, homeless people were directed to a car parks to sleep in socially distanced outlines as pictured left. This was all while thousands of hotel rooms stood empty. Suddenly calling it "the City of Hospitality" leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Not far outside the big, popular streets of the city, there are homeless encampments that many turn to because of the threat of fines or jail time for public camping.

The levels of poverty you witness are completely heartbreaking; you get a sense that many on the streets have only the clothes of their backs. I remember hearing the statement "the homeless here make the homeless in the UK look well off". I think many assume that homelessness in Las Vegas is a direct outcome of gambling, however places such as LA and New York have the worst homeless rates in the country, none of which are gambling cities.

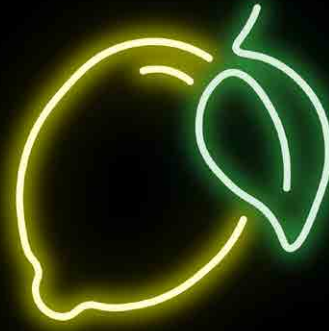


*Above: pregnant woman using a D Casino cup to ask for money. Photo courtesy of CNN.
Below: photograph courtesy of Rachel Aston/The Guardian.*



The dark casino.

The many casinos of Las Vegas are pivotal to the culture of the city however, there are tales of gamblers soiling themselves because they won't risk a bathroom break and losing thousands of dollars in seconds on risky bets. It's undeniable that there is a sad and sinister streak to these 'adult pleasure zones'. After all, the house always wins.



Las Vegas and me - Underworld.



Supposedly, only 7% of Las Vegas visitors are there to gamble. The average gambling budget per trip is around \$500. The state of Nevada is said to have the worst gambling addiction rate in the US. 2022 brought in around \$14.8 billion in gambling revenue from casinos in Nevada alone. I think often about how much money is put down in an hour in Las Vegas when there are things such as high roller rooms where all bets have to be three figures or more. We took a decent amount of spending money to Las Vegas with us for food and drink, tips, travel etc, but we didn't really allow for much betting money. We were surprised at hearing others bringing decent amounts of cash just to gamble with, but that's Vegas. You can brush aside many things you don't understand or that seem crazy by saying 'well that's Vegas'. I'm not judging those who gamble at all as it was fun, though the gambling I did wasn't with the hope of winning a lot. Though, when you watch people pushing buttons with blank expressions, like robots, it does feel like the way these casinos work is sometimes not to make gambling fun, rather to satisfy an itch or chase a feeling.

There are different approaches to how people use the casinos: some don't gamble at all, some have the odd small bet, some gamble more seriously and others literally rot at poker tables and slot machines. I didn't understand how people could be gambling for such long periods of time. A five dollar bet took me about thirty seconds to lose, at which point I'd shrug and think "I'm not going to waste anymore". But there were people at machines pushing endless amounts of notes in, or sitting on tables for hours. With how expensive everything is in Las Vegas, I didn't understand spending money without the reward of the goods you'd paid for because making a profit seemed very rare. It was fun to gamble, but for me it was only really fun if you won something.

The UK's stance on gambling is wildly dissimilar to that of Las Vegas. In the UK, gambling goes on in seedy betting shops, or in a dark corner of some pub, or in a taped off area of an arcade. It feels like it's something that you should look down on to some extent; you can usually never see into those betting shops because banners cover the windows, and fruit machines, though colourful and blinking, stand solitary on the pub floor, out of the way. Apart from the odd more luxurious casinos (like Victoria Gate in Leeds), gambling feels more 'wrong' here. Las Vegas' casinos reminded me of arcades at UK seaside resort towns, of which I never won anything either. The the coastal arcade and the Las Vegas casino are similar, yet one feels much more acceptable, much more light-hearted and obviously more family friendly than the other. I think it was an unspoken rule that kids couldn't leave the walkways through the casinos, because of course casinos aren't a separate entity in the hotel complexes and the slot machines aren't roped off or placed at the back of the venue as they are in the UK.

At first you're pretty stumped at seeing people gambling at 7am in the morning but after a few days you don't even realise it anymore because that's just what people do in Las Vegas, it's totally acceptable. The casinos actively encourage it, being open 24/7, providing free drinks and, of course, you can smoke inside, which was really shocking to us Brits. You don't expect to come outside of a venue stinking of smoke, it's usually the other way around in the UK. When I think of casinos, I think of poorly lit, carpeted, low ceiling room that go on forever. That doesn't always ring true with Las Vegas's casinos. They are always sprawling and big and usually dimly lit, so when you step outside you get that weird feeling when you leave a cinema during the daytime. However, casinos like Caesars or The Venetian are actually bright and the flooring is marbled, so you have a feeling of being in a really high class place. For the prices typical of Caesars, I would say you are actually in a classy establishment. There are always lots of small screens, lots of wheels, arrows, chairs, reflective panelling and so many clusters of a variety of different slot machines.

The casinos are highly manipulative. It's a widely believed myth that they pump oxygen into the casinos so visitors feel energised. It's actually believable considering the other tricks played on you to encourage gambling. The lighting, the big celebrations for rare wins, the maze-like layout, the free drinks, the removal of temporal indicators such as clocks and windows and the disassociating of money with chips...you go into these casinos fully aware of how they are manipulating you. To people who are fortunate enough to not have a gambling addiction, it's no more than fun, a small flutter, something to do. Yet those psychological tactics become a whole lot more sinister to someone with an addictive personality or poor impulse control.



Las Vegas and me - Underworld.

I think I'd consider myself to be somewhat of a Vegas regular, or at least as much of a regular as you can be living over 5,000 miles away.

My first trip to Sin City was in 2014 with a group of friends. Since then I've been a further three times. I truly believe if it wasn't for the COVID-19 pandemic then there would definitely have been a few more visits in that time. The scale and grandeur of the city is incomparable to anywhere else; walking through the various casinos and seeing the sights that are on offer is ecstasy to each and every sense.

Las Vegas is a differing experience, purely based on your reasons for visiting. During holidays with my friends it was non-stop gambling, drinking and partying, all of which I loved. In contrast, when visiting with my wife it was fine dining, refined cocktail bars and shows that would be applauded as exceptional across any stage in the world. In hindsight, and as I get older, the second example of experiences is more preferable to me.

The bright light city is somewhere I always saw when I was younger and dreamed of going to. As I've gotten older and visited multiple times, I thought it would feel as though I've 'been there, done that' with Vegas, but that's never been the case.

Las Vegas and me - Underworld.

CAPTIVATED
captivated

8

The future.



Evolving Las Vegas.

The photograph on the previous page is of a view that will cease to be as it is when The Mirage is refurbished by Hard Rock Cafe.

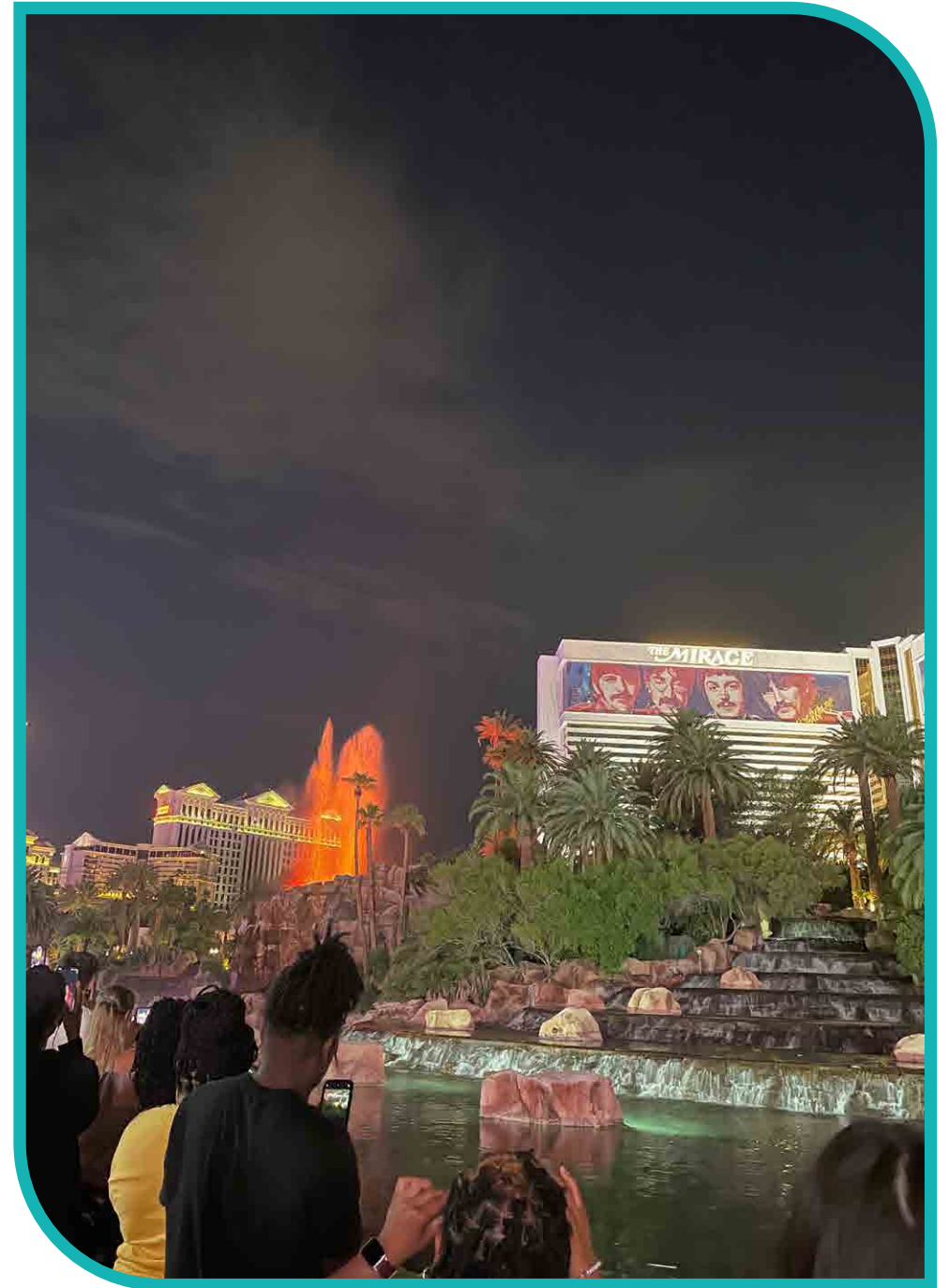
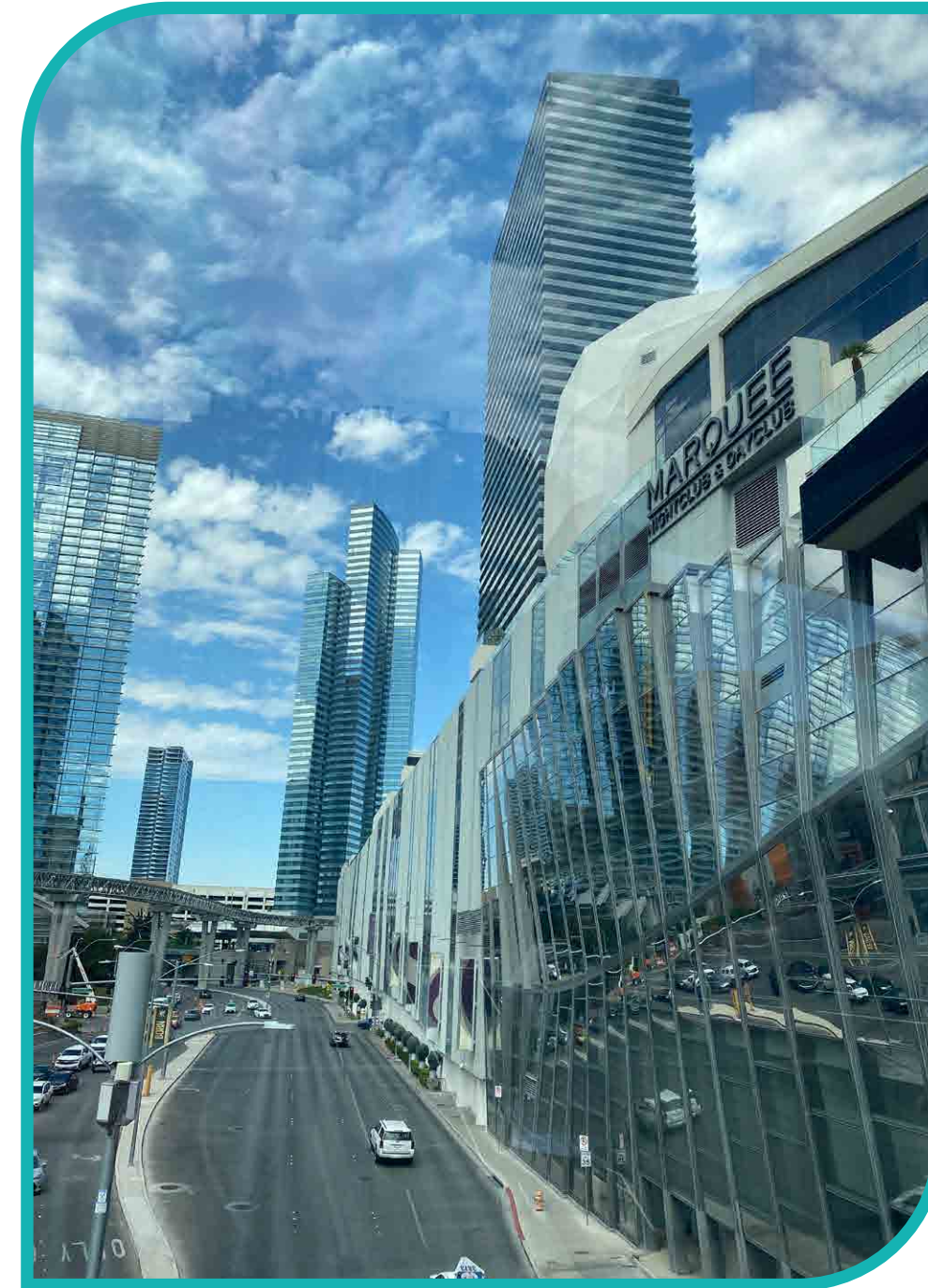
Las Vegas is a fast changing city, keeping up with the demands for new and interesting entertainment and a forever changing flow of tourists. When you consider that my parents barely recognised the Las Vegas from when they visited in the early 90s, you realise that this young city has always had to change and expand to keep up with its own success, so much so that hotels don't usually last longer than forty years, if that.

A key part of Las Vegas evolving is the replacement of themed hotels for more generic environments as part of a remodelling of the city which places luxury above all else. The movement to replace themed hotels has meant The LINQ removed its Asian motif, Luxor toning down its Egyptian theme and MGM Grand removing its *Wizard of Oz* roots. New hotels are opening as unthemed such as ARIA Resort and Casino. The biggest de-theming will be the refurbishment of The Mirage as it was bought out by Hard Rock Cafe, removing the Polynesian motif in favour of, well I'm not really sure. Something much more bland, removing most of the unique features of this much loved hotel resort.

Since the economic pressures of the pandemic, themed hotels such as Luxor and Excalibur that have been around for a while, have been rumoured to sell up to new companies that want to revamp and sterilise The Strip of it's identity for a more cool and consistent look. There is an emergence of the polished high rise devoid of all personality rising up from the distinguished skyline.

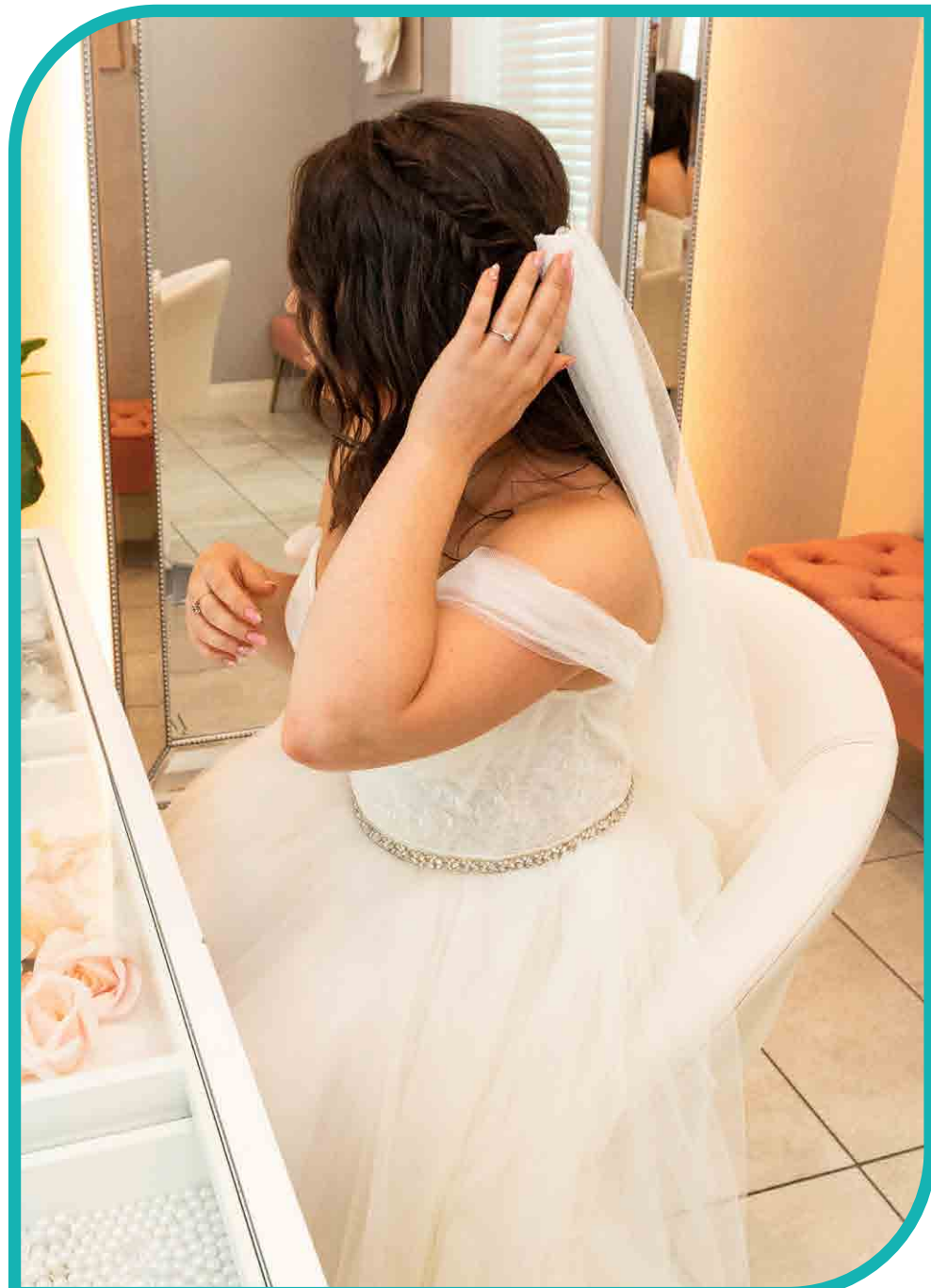
In terms of a future Las Vegas, there are some bleak theories about its current climate crisis due to the increasing population and constant drought threats. As more and more hotels go up, the more jobs there are, the more people move in, the more cars on the road, the more water and energy needed, the more resources are ravaged. The temperatures are rising at alarming rates in Nevada, and water is becoming more and more scarce as time goes on.

The more hotels, the more expensive everything gets; maybe a trip to Las Vegas in the next few years would be too unreasonable considering Vegas was much cheaper a few years back according to those who have been in the last decade.



Returning.

The Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon, the Stratosphere, Zion National Park, Fremont Street's zipline, the National Atomic Testing Museum, the Welcome to Las Vegas sign, the Titanic exhibition...just a few things on my list for next time. But would I return as Megan did as a blushing bride to be? Definitely not.



Las Vegas and me - The future.

All the planning and organising for a Las Vegas wedding seemed so hectic and stressful to me; I could not hack the stress of making sure it ran smoothly. Ensuring that the dress wasn't creased, the rings were where they needed to be, things for the reception were to hand, the right music was playing, the guests were all where they needed to be and no hair was out of place etc would definitely make a Las Vegas style wedding for me complete hell. That and I would only want something low key and nothing about Vegas is low key. It would be fun though, there's no doubt about that.

As we waited in The Mirage before our flight home, we found ourselves looking up flights for a return trip. We even started to plan out the things we hadn't the chance to do during the trip we were still on. It felt depressing to be leaving, it felt like we'd only just got there and I didn't want to leave behind the heat and the madness and the luxury after only just getting used to it, particularly to be returning to the dreariness of home.

Even though researching while we waited to return was to make us feel a bit better about leaving, I know that we were all actually serious about returning one day. Even those who were adamant they wouldn't like Vegas such as my Mum were sad to be leaving. It left me thinking, why had this place left such an imprint on all of us? Why couldn't I stop comparing things back home to the experiences of Vegas? Why couldn't I stop thinking about what I would do differently when I return? I felt like the trip occupied my whole mind for weeks afterwards. I'd travelled so far, spent so much money, done so many things I thought I would never have the courage to do, and then I was plonked back into reality - comfortable, boring, routine normality.

There are many other places to experience in the world yet I can't shake this feeling that I want to see Vegas



again, and soon. I didn't fully experience Vegas, nor did I feel satisfied when we left, nor did it feel like it was time to go home as you can sometimes feel on holiday.

The whirlwind nature of the city, the focus on fun, the all or nothing mentality, the excess, the spectacle, the luxury etc. encapsulated in this book makes me think that Vegas is so captivating because it's a complete escape from reality. There are no rules there, all you find and seek is fun and experiences. You can take on a different personality there, someone who is confident and carefree; I think that's what is addictive about Vegas. You become someone else when you're there. You live in luxury, you party all day, you're not bound by responsibilities. The psychological effect is definitely what I'm so astounded and interested by, beneath all the fun of the city. I'm aware of all the bad things that come with Vegas too, which made me so conflicted about loving the city as much as I do.

I can say that Las Vegas has given me confidence. Travel doesn't seem anywhere near as daunting and we booked a couple of holidays for 2023 fairly soon after. This even includes trips where I will be flying alone, a thought that I could not even comprehend before travelling to Vegas. While we were there, I felt confident wearing certain outfits I would feel so much more self aware wearing back home. I didn't obsess about how I looked or wondered if anyone was judging me - there simply wasn't time for that and there was definitely this feeling that there was a 'good vibes only' energy. I didn't want anything to interfere with the happiness I experienced while there. Despite the tiredness and resulting grumpiness, I genuinely think I was one of the happiest versions of myself while I was there. I will always look back so fondly on the city and our time there, and someday I will see it again.



Las Vegas and me - The future.

Las Vegas was otherworldly. All sense of time, place and normality were erased, like walking out of a dark cinema after watching a great film. It's a place of make believe, of style over substance, of pleasure above all. You're quite aware that you are a captive audience in a place that is highly manipulative but you don't care, or at least I didn't. It's a city that plays on your sentiments for making memories. Gamble in an authentic Vegas casino to cross it off your bucket list. See a show because how could you not. Watch the Bellagio Fountains because you can't go to Vegas and not see them. We saw so much yet we probably didn't see a third of what there is to see there.

From arrival to departure, it's a dazzling experience. The lights and spectacles constantly beg for your attention. From the shows and attractions, to the sheer size of everything, you just know that there is no place like it. There's a reason why it's one of the most bucket listed destinations. It's a phenomenon, it's a bright bulb in the middle of a desert drawing people in like moths to a flame. How many other places could offer so much in one day? A day in Vegas could have relaxing by a waterfall, a roller-coaster ride, a whirl in a gondola, walking through the Brooklyn Bridge, eating world class food, gambling in a castle, dancing in an Irish bar and drinking in a Wild West Bar.

When I look back at my visit, I feel envious of my past self. The heat, the sun, the luxury of the hotels, the fun we had, the things I experienced, the wild things I saw, the all day partying, seeing things you've only ever seen in films. The memories I had there will live with me forever; I'm sure I will tell my grandchildren about the week I had in Las Vegas celebrating their great auntie and uncle's wedding and how I even made a book about it because I could not stop thinking about the city. I'm certain that it was made even more special because I could share it with my family.

*A special thank you to those who
contributed to this book by providing me
with quotations of their thoughts and
feelings towards visiting Las Vegas.*

End.

