

Shopping

Contributed by Administrator
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Not that Las Vegas is a great destination for bargain hunters ; apart from the odd souvenir store, it's not tacky, and it's not cheap. Instead, tourists can expect to encounter jazzed-up outlets of all the usual chains to be found in any US suburban mall, plus a leavening of high-end international names. What's really generating all the excitement is that the big casinos have started to bring Las Vegas's traditional flair for display and presentation to these shopping malls, turning them into must-see attractions. As for what makes the malls the most profitable in the nation, it would be nice to imagine that the city is full of successful gamblers who can't wait to flaunt their new-found wealth. However, the truth is more likely that visitors find themselves losing so much on the tables and slots, with nothing to show for it, that getting something in return for their money - however expensive - suddenly seems a miraculous alternative.

Along the Strip in particular, the shopping boom shows no signs of faltering. The arrival of the exquisite but very small Via Bellagio at Bellagio in 1998 did little to rock the Forum's throne, but things hotted up in 1999, when the Venetian unveiled its gloriously over-the-top Grand Canal Shoppes . Since then, the Desert Passage at the revamped Aladdin has appeared, on much the same extravagant scale, while Mandalay Resort Group has been pressing ahead with the construction of a huge new mall between Luxor and Mandalay Bay ; negotiations for Harrod's of London to be its anchor have fallen through, but something spectacular is certainly in the offing. Not to be outdone, the Strip's veteran Fashion Show Mall is in the throes of a massive expansion.

Not every casino has succumbed to the mall-building craze, however. Both the MGM Grand and the Mirage devote a tiny proportion of their space to shopping, while others among their neighbors stick to the traditional formula of offering only souvenir-type stores, such as Luxor 's enjoyable selection of Egyptian-themed outlets.

Neither is there all that much variety between one major Strip mall and the next, in terms of actual stores. Thus Ann Taylor and bebe have four outlets each within half a mile, at the Forum, the Grand Canal Shoppes, the Desert Passage, and the Fashion Show Mall, while several others are represented three times over. Bellagio may have won a much-publicized tussle to secure the Armani store that the Venetian wanted, but there was already one at the Mirage , and an Armani Exchange in the Forum.

As a city of over a million inhabitants, Las Vegas has of course its fair share of busy shopping districts - most notably along South Decatur Boulevard and South Maryland Parkway , a couple of miles west and east of the Strip respectively - as well as the kind of malls you'd find anywhere in the United States. Once again, however, few visitors bother to stray far from the Strip.

MALLS ON THE STRIP

Desert Passage The Aladdin , 3663 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 1-888/800-8284, . Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Although the Desert Passage mall has yet to attract the same volume of customers as either the Forum or the Grand Canal, it matches its rivals in every other respect. Its Arabian Nights theming is enjoyable, with an artificial sky that unleashes rainstorms in the Merchants Harbor district, and lively street entertainers in the Lost City's Oasis Square, and there are tricycle rickshaws to ferry footsore shoppers along its mile-long passageways. Readily accessible from both the Strip and the Aladdin 's parking garage, it's geared a little less exclusively towards tourists, with the large Z Gallerie for example ranking among the best home-furnishings stores in the city. Nonetheless, it holds dozens of appealing fashion and specialty outlets, including Betsey Johnson, French Connection, Napoleon, Victoria's Secret, and The Sharper Image, as well as a roster of excellent restaurants, headed by the best in the city, Commander's Palace .

Fashion Show Mall 3200 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 369-0704, . Mon-Fri 10am-9pm, Sat 10am-7pm, Sun noon-6pm. The Fashion Show Mall caused a sensation when it opened in 1981, as the first significant shopping mall to appear on the Strip. Back then, its range of department stores, high-end designer emporia, and even its run-of-the-mill mall outlets were a welcome novelty for Las Vegas. Now that the stakes on the Strip are much higher, however, the Fashion Show Mall has been visibly lagging behind its competitors, and is something of a seen-it-all-before snooze. It's therefore undergoing a massive expansion and revitalization, due at the time of writing to be completed in fall 2003. Behind a new glittering frontage it's expected to add Las Vegas's first Nordstrom's and Bloomingdale's Home Stores to an array of department stores that already includes as Neiman Marcus, Sak's Fifth Avenue, Macy's, Dillard's, and Robinsons-May.

Forum Shops Caesars Palace , 3500 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 893-4800. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight. The mall that kick-started Las Vegas's shopping boom in 1992 continues to be the most successful in the United States, generating \$1275 annually per square foot, compared to the national average of \$375. Having doubled in size in 1997, it added as much space again in 2002, and shows no sign of slowing up. That's largely because it's a great tourist destination in its own right. The basic concept is irresistible, with faux-Roman columns and fountains everywhere, "statues" that come alive, and an artificial sky that wheels each hour between dawn and dusk. Many of the larger stores join in the fun, so Mickey Mouse rides a chariot in the Disney Store, Elmer Fudd sports a toga at Warner Brothers, and

Barbie strikes classical poses at FAO Schwarz. Others take themselves more seriously, so the mix is eclectic. At more than a hundred there are far too many to list here, but clothing outlets range from Gap and Banana Republic, through Diesel and DKNY, to Emporio Armani; there are eight jewelers and eight shoe stores, including the karaoke-happy Just for Feet and a showpiece Nike Town; specialty stores include the excellent Virgin Megastore. The Forum doesn't have a food court as such - there's one not far away in the casino proper - but it does hold some fine restaurants, such as Chinois, The Palm, and Spago's.

While exploring the Forum, don't neglect the other mall at Caesars Palace - the Appian Way Shops, home to a replica of Michelangelo's David and a small but intriguing assortment of expensive stores.

Grand Canal Shoppes The Venetian, 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 414-4500. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Naturally enough, the shopping mall at the Venetian claims to draw its inspiration from Venice itself, but its true model is rather closer to hand. From its false Italian sky (here set permanently to early evening) down to many of the actual stores, the Grand Canal Shoppes slavishly imitates the most effective elements of the Forum across the street. In some respects it surpasses it; the Grand Canal itself is breathtaking, not least for the sheerchutzpah of locating a full-blown canal, complete with working gondolas, on the second story of the building, while with its "open-air" restaurants St Mark's Square really does feel like a vibrant city square. Purely in terms of shopping, however, it's not quite large or varied enough to outdo Caesars, though it is at least easier to reach, either via double escalators immediately inside the main casino entrance, or a moving walkway from the campanile on the Strip. Both lead to an impressive anteroom decorated with dramatic frescoes, beyond which you'll find a number of conventional mall outlets, like Banana Republic and New Balance. Further in, the general emphasis is more consistently upscale than at the Forum, with designer clothing stores like Gandini and Pal Zileri, and jewelry specialists such as Ca'D'Oro (gold), Erwin Pearl (pearls), and Simayof (diamonds). Less familiar "shoppes" include some making their first appearance outside Venice, like Il Prato, selling carnival masks and paper goods, and Ripa de Monti, specializing in exquisite glassware. There's also a food court, featuring a Krispy Kreme donut shop and a juice bar.

Via Bellagio Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 693-7111. Daily 10am-midnight.

While Via Bellagio isn't anything like the size of the Forum, Grand Canal Shoppes, or Desert Passage, its single-minded focus on the very top end of the spectrum has made it the chicest place to shop in Las Vegas. Even so, its stores epitomize the city's democratic approach to shopping: when even the scruffiest of dressers may turn out to be a big spender, anyone is welcome to browse. Just ten stores are ranged on either side of the plushly carpeted Via Bellagio, the walkway connecting the north end of Bellagio (facing Caesars) with the Strip. As well as Gucci, Giorgio Armani, Chanel, Tiffany and the self-styled "enfant terrible," Moschino, the catch-all Bellagio Collections stocks clothing & Co, and footwear by more than a dozen other internationally known designers.

MALLS ELSEWHERE

The Boulevard 3528 S Maryland Parkway at Desert Inn Blvd tel 732-8949, . Mon-Fri 10am-9pm, Sat 10am-8pm, Sun 11am-6pm.

Nevada's largest shopping mall has stood a couple of miles east of the Strip for over thirty years, but thanks to a recent overhaul it looks as good as new. Consisting of a single story centered on a bright glass-covered atrium, and anchored by department stores like Sears, JC Penney, Dillard's, and Macy's, it's the locals' favorite for day-to-day shopping. As well as over 150 outlets, including such mall regulars as Gap, Victoria's Secret, Body Shop, Radio Shack, and the entire gamut of Footlockers, it has a good-quality food court. CAT bus #203 connects The Boulevard mall with the Strip, running along Twain Avenue from the Fashion Show Mall.

Galleria at Sunset 1300 W Sunset Rd, Henderson tel 434-0202, . Mon-Sat 10am-9pm, Sun 11am-6pm.

Las Vegas's latest megamall is eight miles southeast of the Strip, opposite Sunset Station in suburban Henderson, a location convenient only if you're heading to or from the Hoover Dam or Arizona. In terms of stores, it's much the same as the Boulevard, with a Macy's and a JC Penney, plus another 130 conventional mall outlets, but it also stands at the heart of a busy shopping district, with large neighbors including a Border's and a Barnes & Noble.

FACTORY OUTLETS

Belz Factory World 7400 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 896-5599. Mon-Sat 10am-9pm, Sun 10am-6pm.

Roughly two miles south of Mandalay Bay, on the east side of Las Vegas Blvd (which by this point is no longer called the Strip), Belz Factory World is an ever-expanding, aesthetically challenged mall that offers the city's best bargain shopping. Among over 150 manufacturer's outlets, boasting discounts of up to 75 percent, you'll find clothing and footwear retailers such as Levi's, Dress Barn, Calvin Klein, Oshkosh B'gosh, Nike, and Reebok, plus the odd specialist store like Wolf Camera.

Fashion Outlet Las Vegas 32100 Las Vegas Blvd S, Primm tel 862-0710, . Mon-Sat 10am-9pm, Sun 10am-8pm.

Despite the street address and the deliberately misleading name, the Fashion Outlet is not in Las Vegas at all, but forty miles southwest, just short of the California state line in Primm. It carefully defines itself as a factory outlet center on the basis that more than half its stores offer discounts of between twenty and seventy percent on usual retail prices. The

reason you may find it worthwhile to venture out this far is that it features much bigger names than Belz, including Donna Karan, Polo Ralph Lauren, Gap, Banana Republic, BCBG, Timberland, Tommy Hilfiger, Benetton, Just For Feet, Last Call by Neiman Marcus, and Versace, with outlets loosely divided between a glitzy "New York" area and a less formal "South Beach" area.

FASHION AND ACCESSORIES

French Connection Desert Passage, The Aladdin , 3663 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 733-6420. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Sleek UK chain, introducing Las Vegans to its capsule range of affordable, sexy urban basics for men and women.

Gandini Grand Canal Shoppes, The Venetian , 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 732-1645. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Very fancy men's and women's clothiers facing the Grand Canal, packed with extravagant fur-trimmed delights.

Honolua Surf Company Desert Passage, The Aladdin , 3663 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 699-7873. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Hawaiian surfer (not-so-)chic in the Merchant's Harbor section; a fine array of colorful shirts, shorts, and swimwear.

Moschino Via Bellagio, Bellagio , 3600 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 693-7926. Daily 10am-midnight.

Ideally suited to its postmodern setting, Moschino revels in displaying its playful, ultraprincey women's wear and accessories on mock-reverential plinths and pedestals.

Napoleon Desert Passage, The Aladdin , 3663 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 699-7873. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Upscale men's retailer just off the Strip, selling beautifully tailored, very expensive, suits, shirts and shoes; the serious-minded staff will be happy to show you the latest interesting things that are happening in pants.

Ross Dress For Less 2420 E Desert Inn Rd tel 733-9001. Mon-Sat 9am-9pm, Sun 11am-7pm.

The men's, women's, and children's clothing and shoes on offer at this east-of-the-Strip outlet are considerably more attractive than the name might suggest, with the women's wear department in particular boasting a high local reputation.

Structure Forum Shops, Caesars Palace , 3500 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 892-0421. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

Fashionable but affordable men's clothing. Also in the Galleria at Sunset, the Fashion Show Mall, and the Boulevard Mall.

VINTAGE CLOTHING

The Attic 1018 S Main St tel 388-4088. Mon-Sat 10am-7pm, Sun 11am-5pm.

Located in an insalubrious area south of downtown (just a little too far to walk), this shrine to vintage Americana both chic and kitsch charges customers a dollar simply to cross its portals. Once inside, there's some amazing stuff, though it's all a bit too cannily priced to expect to leave with your arms full. Clothes and costumes of all kinds range from old Levi's and bell-bottoms to flamboyant 1960s creations, and there's a great assortment of shoes, hats, and accessories. The furniture too is a delight, with turquoise vinyl armchairs and the like, and there's also a little in-house coffee bar.

Buffalo Exchange 4110 S Maryland Parkway tel 791-3960. Mon-Sat 11am-7pm, Sun noon-6pm.

Buffalo Exchange, a chain of vintage-clothing stores familiar to Western bargain-hunters, is a bit less characterful than the Attic, but the atmosphere is just as cool, and it's a more dependable source of inexpensive retro items, including shoes.

SHOES

Jimmy Choo Grand Canal Shoppes, The Venetian , 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 733-1802. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

The last word in elegant female footwear, brought to you by the aptly named Malaysian designer who was a personal favorite of Princess Diana.

Just For Feet Forum Shops, Caesars Palace , 3500 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 791-3482. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

What's said to be the world's largest athletic shoe store, with four thousand big-name styles, faces the living statues just inside the Forum as you come in off the Strip. The prices generally aren't bad, but during one of their regular karaoke sessions you can get a reduction of twenty percent or more merely for singing one song and gyrating like a loon on top of the counter.

Nike Town Forum Shops, Caesars Palace , 3500 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 650-8888. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

This gleaming, high-tech, two-story superstore, behind Atlantis at the far end of the Forum, is as much museum as shoe store, but if there's even a hint of foot fetishism in your make up you won't be able to resist its adoration of the sports shoe. Each section is devoted to a specific sport.

HEALTH AND BEAUTY

Sephora The Venetian , 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 735-3896, . Daily 10am-midnight.

Extremely glamorous perfume and cosmetics store, located right on the Strip beneath Madame Tussaud's and stocking a phenomenal assortment of scents and daubs, with expert staff to help you try it all out. They have another outlet, slightly smaller but equally prominent, in the Desert Passage.

GIFTS AND SOUVENIRS

Ancient Creations Grand Canal Shoppes, The Venetian , 3355 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 414-3701. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

An antiques store with a fascinating difference; these are real antiques, dating back in some cases thousands of years. The exact stock varies of course, but can include Roman water jars priced at \$18,500, Greek statuettes for \$2400, or a 1611 edition of the King James Bible at \$99,000. Individual coins from the Classical world can cost as little as \$25. Ancient Creations has other branches in the Desert Passage and the Appian Way Shops at Caesars .

Bonanza Gift Shop 2460 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 385-7359. Daily 8am-midnight.

Located at a busy intersection, across from the Sahara and a few blocks south of the Stratosphere , the self-proclaimed "World's Largest Gift Store" is not all that big really, but it's the best single outlet for all those tacky souvenirs you'd hope to find in Las Vegas. Beyond the predictable array of used playing cards from all the casinos (costing \$1), gaming boards, fuzzy dice, whoopee cushions, fart candy, postcards, and male and female nudie ballpoint pens, you'll find a more surreal world of Las Vegas snowstorms, Elvis clocks, and inflatable aliens, plus every permutation thereof, if not exactly alien Elvises trapped in snowstorms.

Gamblers General Store 800 S Main St tel 382-9903 or 1-800/322-2447, Daily 9am-5pm.

For a truly authentic Las Vegas souvenir, you can't do better than the Gamblers General Store a few blocks south of downtown. As well as selling old slot machines for \$999 - be sure to check the list of states where it's illegal to possess one even in your own home - and full-sized craps table for \$4000, they have felt mats with roulette, blackjack, and craps layouts for \$40, and packs of cards from all the casinos for 99¢. There's also a large library of books on gambling, detailing techniques for blackjack, craps, horses, and even slots, though paying \$20 for a photocopied pamphlet explaining why you'll never win has to be a waste of money even by Las Vegas standards.

BOOKS

Albion Book Company 2466 E Desert Inn Rd tel 792-9554. Daily 10am-6pm.

The valley's best stock of secondhand books, with 150,000 titles including large sections on Las Vegas and the West, plus a big collection of used audio books at bargain prices - handy if you're setting off on a road trip.

Barnes & Noble 2191 N Rainbow Blvd tel 631-2216. Daily 9am-11pm.

This chain outlet is several miles west of downtown, just beyond the point where US-95 veers north, but has a copious selection of new books on every subject, plus a roomy café that's ideal for a light lunch. Also at 3860 S Maryland Parkway, and 567 Stephanie St in Henderson.

Borders 2323 S Decatur Blvd tel 258-0999. Mon-Sat 9am-11pm, Sun 9am-9pm.

An excellent range of new books and magazines, a couple of miles west of the Strip along Sahara Ave. Other branches at 2190 N Rainbow Blvd (across from Barnes & Noble) and 1445 W Sunset Rd in Henderson (near Sunset Station).

MUSIC

Big B's 4761 S Maryland Parkway tel 732-4433, . Mon-Sat 11am-9pm, Sun noon-6pm.

University District music store, with well-informed staff and a large stock of CDs and vinyl, both new and used.

Tower Records at WOW 4580 W Sahara Ave tel 364-2500. Daily 10am-midnight.

Two miles west of the Strip and a couple of blocks east of Borders, Tower boasts a good collection of new CDs - with a better chance of finding a bargain than at Virgin - and forms part of a larger complex that also sells videos and musical equipment.

Virgin Megastore Forum Shops, Caesars Palace , 3500 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 696-7100. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

One of the Forum's few multistory stores, the only music store on the Strip stocks the broadest selection of new CDs in town, and also has a small but very hip book section.

ELECTRONICS

The Good Guys 4580 W Sahara Ave at Decatur tel 364-2500, . Daily 9am-midnight.
The best source in Las Vegas for electronic goods of all kinds, from computers to TVs and audio equipment. Also at Boulevard Mall.

Sharper Image Desert Passage, The Aladdin , 3663 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 732-2505. Sun-Thurs 10am-11pm, Fri & Sat 10am-midnight.

A very entertaining selection of electronic gadgets and devices, some useful - such as wireless stereo speakers you can carry into the garden - and some downright daft.

Wolf Camera and Video Belz Factory World, 7400 Las Vegas Blvd S tel 896-4271, . Mon-Sat 10am-9pm, Sun 10am-6pm.
All films, cameras, and accessories here are likely to be better value than anything you'll find on the Strip, but British visitors in particular will be pleased to note that they sell PAL-system camcorders.