

## Las Vegas: How A Disney Does It

by , *PassPorter Guest Contributor*

A Disney fan in Las Vegas? What could Walt Disney World and Las Vegas possibly have in common? They may be fierce competitors when it comes to the convention market and are two of the most popular tourist destinations on earth, but don't they attract entirely different types of tourists: Walt Disney World for families and Las Vegas for adults? Well, the days of Las Vegas seeking to attract families with children for their family vacations may be over, but there are still a lot of places in Las Vegas that a Disney fan would enjoy, with or without children, with or without gambling. For example, Las Vegas and Walt Disney World share some of the same restaurants. You can find a Downtown Disney favorite sandwich stop, Earl of Sandwich, in Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino on "The Strip" in Las Vegas.

There's also a Rainforest Cafe inside the MGM Grand Resort & Casino. In fact, this was the first Rainforest I ever visited and remains one of my favorites, if not my favorite. Why? While I don't enjoy Rainforest Cafe inside shopping malls, there's an interesting juxtaposition about a place so fun and family-friendly inside a casino.

And if you're missing Alfredo's that was located in the Italy Pavilion inside World Showcase at Epcot until closing recently, it is relocating to Las Vegas in late 2008. Start planning a trip to Las Vegas and your Italian culinary wishes may come true.

While you're at Planet Hollywood, take a walk through Miracle Mile Shops for more themed restaurants and shopping. A Disney fan would definitely enjoy a tropical drink at Trader Vic's or Hawaiian Tropic Zone--you may want to try lunch to retain the G-rating. You'll soon hear the Enchanted Tiki Room song playing in your head.

And if you enjoy dining at one of the top-tier restaurants at Disneyland or Walt Disney World, then you can't go wrong in Las Vegas. The top celebrity chefs in the world have restaurants in Las Vegas: Emeril Lagasse, Wolfgang Puck, Bobby Flay, and Mario Batali are just four of those well-known celebrity chefs.

But before you plan where to eat, you may be wondering where to stay. The Mirage introduced themed resorts to Las Vegas when it opened in 1989. Since then numerous themed hotels have sprung up on the Las Vegas Strip.

If you're a fan of all things tropical, then the Mirage is a great place to

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start. The Siegfried & Roy tigers may no longer be hanging out just off the lobby, but there is still an aquarium behind the reservation desk, white tigers and dolphins at the Secret Garden & Dolphin Habitat (located beyond the lagoon-style pool with water slide and waterfall), a lush indoor tropical garden that transports you to Hawaii, and an outdoor volcano that erupts nightly.

If the Knights of the Round Table, complete with Tournament of Kings dinner show, are more to your liking, you may want to stay at Excalibur. At the Luxor, though it has toned down its Egyptian theme in the main casino areas, you still can't escape the fact that it's a giant pyramid located in the desert. Egyptian hieroglyphs are still present throughout, especially on the mezzanine level where several Disney-type attractions, such as an IMAX theatre and a Star-Tours type ride, are located.

Circus Circus is known for its circus theming and free circus acts, along with carnival games on the Midway, and roller coaster and other theme-park rides in the Adventuredome. If you're a fan of driving your RV to Ft. Wilderness, you can also park your RV at the Circus Circus RV Park and enjoy a direct shuttle to the casino.

Speaking of theme parks, the theme park at the MGM Grand may be gone, but you can still find a roller coaster at New York/New York Hotel Casino and other thrill rides located over a thousand feet in the air on top of the Stratosphere. If you love monorails, don't forget to seek out the Las Vegas Monorail--you can purchase a day pass for a special online rate of \$9. The monorail connects you to many hotels on the Strip. And while you're riding the monorail, you may want to stop off at the Las Vegas Hilton for the Star Trek Experience--especially if you're a Star Trek fan.

For a spectacular light show and a blast into the past right where Las Vegas got its neon start, you must see the Fremont Street Experience. You'll have to drive or cab downtown, but it's worth the trip.

My favorite experience as a Disney lover is strolling through the faux-painted outdoor sky-topped, indoor shopping malls of the Forum Shops inside Caesar's Palace, the Grand Canal Shoppes at the Venetian, and the Miracle Mile Shops in Planet Hollywood. Of those three, the Forum Shops are my favorite. You're transported to an ancient Roman city within a modern setting with upscale shops, restaurants, and unique "streetmosphere" with fountains, statues, and Roman facades. It's truly indescribable.

Paris Las Vegas, complete with a restaurant at the top of the Eiffel

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Tower, will make you think you're strolling through World Showcase at Disney World. You could pop into the bakery for a French pastry and hang out at Napoleon's for a round of dueling pianos, similar to the Dueling Pianos on the Boardwalk at Disney World.

Las Vegas is known as the Entertainment Capital of the World, and in addition to major headliners, Las Vegas, like Disney World, has spectacular shows like Cirque du Soleil. There are several Cirque du Soleil shows in town, but my favorite is "O" at the Bellagio.

If you'd rather be outside and Typhoon Lagoon is your favorite Disney activity, then be sure to book a room at Mandalay Bay. In addition to the Shark Reef aquarium, there is an outdoor pool area with wave pool and river pool. That gets my vote for all-around favorite pool, especially if I'm dining alfresco at Border Grill, overlooking the river pool.

By now maybe you're feeling overly-stimulated by all that Las Vegas has to offer. Perhaps you'd like to enjoy more rustic, outdoor recreational activities. Too much neon can do that to you. You can either take a helicopter tour of the Grand Canyon, plan an overnight trip at a Grand Canyon Lodge, or take a side trip to Zion and/or Bryce Canyon National Parks in Utah. These parks will give you a feeling of Disney *deja vu*--if you've ridden the train roundtrip around Disneyland, you've seen the Grand Canyon diorama. And if you've ridden Big Thunder Mountain at Disneyland or Disney World, then you've gotten a peek into Bryce Canyon National Park.

So whether you plan to take a side trip to Las Vegas on your next Disneyland vacation or visit Las Vegas specifically, rest assured that this is only the tip of the iceberg of having a Disney experience in Las Vegas or in the surrounding National Parks.

For more information on visiting Las Vegas, check out <http://www.visitlasvegas.com>

*About The Author: Kathy Holmes grew up near Disneyland. Shortly after exchanging wedding vows, Kathy and husband Rich took their first trip to Walt Disney World. That trip sparked an additional vow to move to Florida from California. Three thousand miles and three states later, they made that dream come true. But eventually home called, and they moved back west. They now live in Las Vegas, just four hours from Disneyland, and write about their adventures at <http://two4disney.wordpress.com>.*

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