



ESCAPE ARTIST

Get away from the over-the-top glitz of the Las Vegas Strip and explore the artistic side of Nevada.

The 4.5-mile stretch of Las Vegas Boulevard known around the world as simply the Strip, for all its glory, can put all your senses in overdrive. The bustling thoroughfare is festooned with pleasure palaces and gleaming megaresorts where debauchery is on display 24/7, where sin is celebrated (unless that “sin” is smoking cannabis, but that’s a different story).

The Vegas of yore, one defined by bare-breasted women in big feathered headdresses, is all but gone, displaced by havens of the utmost luxury, pinnacles of world-class entertainment, and more modern convention and meeting space than you’ll find in any other US city.

So often when discussing Vegas with friends and col-

leagues, I hear comments like “I can only take it for so long before I need to escape.” The city is a lot to handle, there’s no doubt, which can make extended travel there far more draining than, say, a week in San Francisco—a fact of which many business travelers are aware. In 2016, the city hosted close to 22,000 conferences, conventions, and trade shows that welcomed a total of 6 million attendees. A good portion of those professional networkers no doubt spent their days manning booths and their nights indulging in behavior that inspires the clichéd battle cry of bachelorettes everywhere: what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. But that doesn’t mean that *you* need to stay in Vegas, too, should you find



yourself in town on business with some time to kill. When you need to get away from the glitz and experience the serene, Nevada has a lot more than neon lights to offer. The state is a grab bag of wonders, a glorious mix of the unfamiliar and the predictable. And just outside the gleaming confines of the Strip are reminders that the world is full of remarkable and wonderful things to behold, if you take the time to find them.

DOWNTOWN VEGAS

TRAVEL TIME: Just a few minutes from the Strip

Downtown Vegas feels like the Anti Strip. Or the antidote to the Strip, depending on how casino row makes

you feel. And thanks to recent a revitalization, visiting downtown has become a staple of any Sin City stay.

To get there, head north on Las Vegas Boulevard past the official end of the Strip for 2.9 miles. Not exactly far but it is a world away, downtown is where the crazy-wonderfulness of Vegas began. Keep an eye out for Vegas Vic, the towering neon cowboy marquee that once marked the entrance to the long-gone Pioneer Club. Today, the smoking icon marks the entrance to the over-the-top Fremont Street Experience, a pedestrian mall/tourist bait that occupies the five westernmost blocks of Fremont Street.

Vegas's second-most-famous thoroughfare used to be *the* most famous part of town. All the casinos—or at least most of the good ones—were on Fremont, a neon-lined corridor that earned it the nickname “Glitter Gulch.” Fremont is where a lot of Vegas history happened. Vegas's first hotel, telephone, paved street, gaming license, traffic light, elevator, and high rise were here. Nowadays, it's got another first: Viva Vision, the world's largest video screen (shown to the left), at 1,500 feet long and 90 feet wide. It's suspended above a pedestrian walkway lined with casinos, shops, and dozens of restaurants. The whole Experience-with-a-capital-E is kitschy, yes, but don't dismiss it. This is the birthplace of Vegas, and with a recent resurgence, it has gotten a lot busier and more boisterous in the past few years as visitors leave the Strip seeking spots that are less glam and more authentic than the big fancy resorts.

Amid the classic neon marquees, penny slots, and street performers are some spots you'll want to see and things you'll want to do.

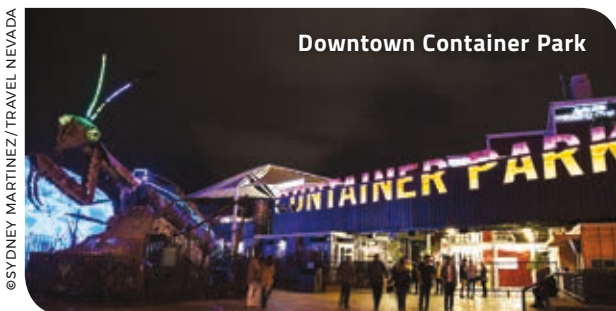
First up, check out the Neon Museum and Boneyard, which chronicles the history of Las Vegas through a collection of glittering signs rescued from destruction. Then explore the impact organized crime has had on Vegas at the nearby Mob Museum, steps off Fremont Street. Fremont Street Experience gives you the opportunity to zip-line from a two-story slot machine or splash through a shark tank. If that's what you're into, have at it. But if you want to see a softer, realer side of Las Vegas, it's just around the corner.

Fremont Street East has undergone a major transformation over the past five years, thanks in no small

part to the efforts of Zappos founder Tony Hsieh, a whiz of an entrepreneur with a knack for turning small startups into multinational forces by focusing on culture. When Zappos's headquarters relocated to downtown Vegas in 2013, Hsieh saw an opportunity to breathe new life into the area by approaching the making of a city much like he would a startup.

He invested \$350 million of his personal funds into the area's revitalization efforts, allocating it to people and businesses that would provide not merely a return on investment but rather a ROC: return on community. The efforts have resulted in more than a thousand new jobs and over 165 new businesses.

A bunch of those are located within Downtown Container Park, an open-air shopping center and entertain-



ment destination made out of 43 repurposed shipping containers. DCP now houses 39 shops, galleries, restaurants, bars, and more, plus outdoor stages and entertainment areas with free live music every weekend. It's located on Fremont Street, and it's hard to miss: just look for the giant fire-breathing praying mantis sculpture.

You'll also want to explore 18B, the Las Vegas Arts District described as the closest thing the city has to a bohemian enclave. The name is a nod to the original 18 blocks designated as part of the artsy spot. 18b is an urban mix of cultural, commercial, and residential spaces, including eclectic galleries and studios, shops, eateries, and bars. There's a new Circulator Bus offering free rides with stops at the major attractions of downtown. Hop on, hop off, and see what the buzz is about at spots like the Velvetten Rabbit, a craft cocktail and beer bar described as a "unique libation experience for seekers of the beyond" that's run by "witchy women" who will "elevate (and perhaps even levitate) your senses, calling upon the cosmic and mystical forces."

SEVEN MAGIC MOUNTAINS

TRAVEL TIME: 15 minutes west of Las Vegas

If you're yearning to escape the Strip for a few moments of respite in a serene space surrounded by nature where you can contemplate the lasting impact of artifice, you don't have to go very far. Ten miles south of the intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and St. Rose Parkway, a large-scale public artwork by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone sits just off the Interstate in the desert at a location physically and symbolically between the natural and the artificial, incorporating elements of both.

Seven Magic Mountains consists of 33 boulders weighing anywhere from 20,000 pounds to 25 tons, stacked into seven hoodoo-like towers drenched in Day-Glo. The colorful anomaly appears to either blend with the natural landscape or pop against the desert backdrop, depending on the lighting and your perspective, which changes as you approach along Interstate 15. Feel free to pull over and walk around to fully appreciate the mammoth scale of the gravity-defying balanc-



ing act that's as much an engineering feat as a work of art. The site-specific showcase—one of the largest land-based art installations in the US in the last 40 years—will be on view through May 2018.

GOLDWELL OPEN AIR MUSEUM

TRAVEL TIME: About two hours north of Vegas

The evocative landscape of the Amargosa Desert along the eastern edge of Death Valley National Park is a barren and lonely part of the world—and it's just a short drive away from the sensory overload of the Strip. Though the heat may be brutal, there's a striking beauty here. That beauty is what led to the creation of the "un-museum" just outside Rhyolite, Nevada, a spectacular ghost town off the road leading to Death Valley,

California. It's a short distance west of Beatty off State Route 374, basically in the middle of a literal nowhere. Which is part of its intrigue. The monumental and somewhat eerie sculptures scattered across the landscape are the other part. The artworks almost demand that you question their origin: who created them, and why? And, more importantly, why here?

It started in 1984 when the late Belgian artist Albert Szukalski began this self-described "art situation" with the creation and installation of "The Last Supper," a major sculpture featuring life-sized ghost figures posed as Christ and his Disciples as depicted by the Da Vinci painting. In the subsequent decades, other prominent Belgian artists joined Szukalski in the desert and created the colossal on-site sculptures you'll find within the vast upper Mojave desert.

Today, the 15-acre outdoor sculpture park is open to the public 24/7, and Goldwell remains a place for those who are seeking adventure in their art making in a spectacular and challenging landscape, according to its mission statement.

Red sandstone formations at the Valley of Fire State Park

VALLEY OF FIRE STATE PARK

TRAVEL TIME: About an hour northeast of Vegas

Want to see some ancient artwork? Head to this park, famous for its striking landscape and prehistoric remnants. The park is named for the bright red Aztec sandstone formations formed by shifting sand dunes 150 million years ago. When the sun hits them just right, the rocky outcrops appear to be aflame.

The striking scenery has inspired people for millennia. Throughout the park—throughout all of Nevada, in fact—2,000-year-old rock art petroglyphs are still visible. One of the most striking examples is found near the beginning of the Mouse's Tank trailhead in this park. According to experts, this example is one of the only to showcase human interaction. The figures depicted appear to be holding hands.

The oldest state park in Nevada, Valley of Fire earned its designation in 1935. Today, it covers about 40,000 acres, and the Nevada Scenic Byway, Valley of Fire Road, allows you to explore them by car.

There are also many intriguing trails throughout the park enticing hikers to get moving. For info on the best day hikes, stop by the visitor's center. While you're there, peruse the exhibits on the geology, ecology, prehistory, and history of a region that may be best known for being adjacent to Las Vegas but is so much more than that.

