

• AN  
INSIDER'S  
GUIDE



TO  
*Sin City*

BY CURT HARLER



**GIS 2012  
SPECIAL**



hile *Golfdom's* editors write about turf and fertilizer, they know a good time when they see it. And the Golf Industry Show in Las Vegas this month offers many opportunities to celebrate. The only questions are: Where? And how?

Just as hiring a caddy at a new course is a smart strategy, we know enough to rely on the opinions of knowledgeable locals. So we asked a half-dozen Vegas-area superintendents where to eat (and where not to), what to see and how to enjoy the experience.

John W. Lanier Jr. is a member of the Board of Directors for the Southern Nevada Golf Course Superintendents Association and the golf course superintendent at Desert Rose Golf Course. He says local superintendents look forward to hosting the GIS. "There are a great number of courses and superintendents that Las Vegas has to offer," he says.

# Superintendents in the know tell how to make the most of Las Vegas.



## Good eats

"Vegas has become such a place for fine dining with so many top chefs around that you can't go wrong," says Jeff Reid, director of golf course maintenance at the Las Vegas Paiute Golf Resort. His favorite for steak is **The Palm** inside Caesars Palace. "For seafood, try Rick Moonen's **RM Seafood** in the Mandalay Bay," he offers. "Both can be a little pricey but worth the bucks."

"The Forum Shops at Caesars offer a large selection of choices," says Kent McCutcheon, superintendent at the Las Vegas Country Club. "My favorite is the Palm restaurant. Try the filet Oscar."

"I usually don't eat close to the Strip," says Oscar Sanchez, superintendent at Tuscany Golf Club, Henderson, Nev. When he does, however, he likes the seafood buffet at the **Rio**. "They have two buffets there. The seafood one is great," he says.

Lanier is high on the Rio, too. "The Carnival Buffet has a great selection and the best quality food for a buffet," Lanier says. "It's always extremely fresh food and impeccable service."

But top on the eats list for Lanier is **Hash House A Go-Go**. "Humongous portions at a

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## Vegas, Baby!

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fair price,” he says. “You’ll definitely go home with a doggy bag.”

Reid’s top two buffet choices are the **Bellagio** with its great king crab legs, and the buffet at **M Resort**.

But as memorable as the big-name spots are, “make an effort to get off the Strip and frequent some of the local places,” advises Kym Mitchell, superintendent at Primm Valley Golf Club. “You’ll find lots of good restaurants, bars and locals’ casinos.”

### Entertainment

“You can’t go wrong with any show. Vegas has the best entertainment in the world, hands down,” Lanier says. “My wife and I enjoyed **Blue Man Group** the most.”

Mitchell says her friends say **Love**, a Beatles-themed musical by Cirque de Soleil, is the show to see. “Everyone should see the water show and the conservatory at the Bellagio,” she adds.

For McCutcheon, the Cirque du Soleil show **Mystere** at Treasure Island or ventriloquist **Terry Fator** at the Mirage are the top draws.

### Casino play

What would a trip to Vegas be without a few passes at the roulette wheel or an hour of blackjack? Just don’t expect to come home rich.

“Save your money,” Lanier advises. “The average person loses about \$800 gambling per trip,” he warns, “but Lady Luck could be on your side.”

“All of the casinos are going to take your money,” laughs Sanchez. “On the Strip, any of the casinos are great. I think **New York, New York** is nice. With the **MGM** and **Bellagio** you have the three best.”

Lanier’s favorite casino is **Treasure Island**. “Mystere is there,” he says, echoing McCutcheon’s choice of a top show. “In addition, the free pirate show is out front. Plus, there’s great shopping and the dealers are probably the friendliest on the Strip.”

“The most fun casino,” Reid says, “is **Red Rock Casino**. It’s the top venue for concerts, and the pool area is great.”

Sanchez likes to go with his wife to the old downtown section of Vegas, the area around Fremont Street. “It is more laid-back,” he says. There are buses from the Strip or taxis running back and forth between the Strip and downtown.

Don’t expect to hail a taxi from the curb. Cabs are allowed to pick up customers only at approved queues. That means going to the front of a hotel or a restaurant. You don’t have



to be staying at the hotel to grab a cab. But the cabbies are forbidden, by law, from picking you up on the street.

Sanchez likes the light shows, the bands and the shops in the Fremont area. Lanier says a must-see is the world’s largest television there. It plays different themes and music every hour.

“Fremont Street is worth the trip,” agrees Mitchell.

If you are downtown, check out the cheap tables, McCutcheon says. “The Neonopolis is fun,” he adds.

“**The Fremont Street Experience** is unique,” Reid says. “Check out the new zipline attraction. And they have the best odds for those who like to play craps.”

McCutcheon recommends **Planet Hollywood** or **Mandalay Bay**.

For those betting sports, Lanier recommends the **Las Vegas Hilton Sportsbook**. “It’s the largest sportsbook in Vegas with great odds and payouts,” he says. For a sports bar (not the same thing), he would hit **The Sporting House** in New York, New York. “Great atmosphere and it’s like a Chuck E. Cheese for adults,” he quips. The timing will be right for sports, as the week of the Golf Industry Show falls at the same time as when college basketball teams are wrapping up their conference schedules. March Madness will tip off just a few days later.

McCutcheon gets off the Strip and heads to Town Square to watch sports at **Yard House** or **Miller’s Ale House**.

The old school favors the Hilton. “If you’re new school, Planet Hollywood has the best March Madness set up,” he says.

Reid, meanwhile, says the best sports bar is **Blondies** in the Planet Hollywood Miracle Mile Shops. “A great atmosphere when the top sporting events are going on,” he says.

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## Vegas, Baby!



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### Busman's holiday

The Vegas area is chock-a-block with great golf courses. “Shadow Creek is the course to play,” says Mitchell. “Getting on is another question.”

She also recommends the 27-hole Badlands Golf Club designed by Johnny Miller and Chi Chi Rodriguez. It plays 6,700 yards from the back tees and just under 7,000 from the championship tees.

Another more modest golf course close to the strip is Las Vegas National. “There are many wonderful courses around the valley but they are quite spread out,” Mitchell says. “My courses, Primm Valley Golf Club, are great tracks but about 40 miles from the Strip.”

Lanier recommends Wolf Creek. “It’s 40 minutes north of Vegas but well worth the drive,” he says. “Hands down, it’s one of the most unique tracks I’ve ever played. It’s always around the top 20 in the nation for a reason.” He also puts in a plug for his own course, Desert Rose Golf Course. “With the course conditions and value, we are the home for the best deals in golf.”

McCutcheon points to the Las Vegas Paiute Resort. “Three courses, no houses, and beautiful mountain views,” he says. For superintendents who have deep pockets, he points to Shadow Creek. “But you have to stay at an MGM property,” he notes.

If you are looking for a nice, but more inexpensive course, McCutcheon recommends Boulder Creek.

Reid isn’t shy about trumpeting his course. “The must-play courses are any of the three at the Resort,” he says. “There are 54 holes of Pete Dye with true desert golf...no housing around.” They are about 30 minutes north of the Strip. For a more modest course he suggests Angel Park, about 15 minutes west of the Strip with easy freeway access.

### Leaving Las Vegas

Las Vegas isn’t the only game in town. Sanchez and Lanier both recommend a trip out to Hoover Dam, just 45 minutes away. Mitchell agrees, adding that Historic Boulder City, Red Rock Canyon and the Valley of Fire are all

worth a trip as well.

Red Rock Canyon is 17 miles from the Strip on Rt. 159 and is as popular for rock climbing as it is for its scenery.

Three reputable national parks are within a day’s drive. Death Valley is the closest. Travel north on I-15 out of Vegas to Lathrop Wells, Nev. and Hwy. 373 to California 190 to get to the nation’s lowest, driest, hottest spot. It’s a bit of a drive through the desert (just over two hours), but it’s amazing when you get there. A shorter but more difficult route goes through Pahrump, Nev. Either way, bring drinking water.

Or, head straight North on I-15 to Zion National Park. You will pass the beautiful Virgin River Gorge en route to Exit 16 in Utah, where you drive east on Rt. 9 to the park. It is a fast 160 miles to Zion.

Farther is the Grand Canyon. It is about a day’s drive — 275 miles and 4.5 hours — from Vegas to the South Rim (the North Rim area is closed this time of year). There are 14-hour bus tours offered from Las Vegas. If you plan to visit several national parks, buy the annual pass; vehicle passes run \$25 per car per park.

### Keeping it sane

Knowing what to avoid is important, too. “I would avoid the side streets around the Strip after dark, the ‘alphabet’ streets downtown and the area around the Stratosphere,” Mitchell says. “The Stratosphere itself is fine but not walking around in that area, especially at night.”

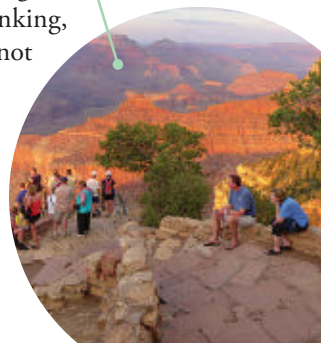
Lanier says you probably shouldn’t venture too far off the Strip, either. “Cab fares are extremely expensive if you travel too far,” he says.

“I would not recommend splitting 10s at the blackjack table unless you feel the need to help our local economy,” Reid laughs.

We’ll give the last words to McCutcheon. “Bring plenty of money. It does get cold here at night so don’t pack too light. Have fun paying our taxes. We always appreciate the visits!”

Whatever you choose to do, have a good time, but keep it under control. Overdrinking, overgambling and oversleeping are not recommended. Have fun! ■

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