

The following contains excerpts from an article written by Kristin Bustamante, Maria I. Alvarez, and Joanne Pelton for the Spring 2010 issue of Southwest Meetings + Events.

Feature: UnStripped

Las Vegas remains the most recognizable meeting and event destination in the Southwest-this despite some negative press in recent years. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the city has more than 140,000 guest rooms, nearly 10 million square feet of meeting and exhibit space and world-class dining and entertainment. This global village allows your group to travel around the world-from the palazzos of Italy to the top of the Eiffel Tower-all in the two-and-a-half miles of Las Vegas Boulevard known worldwide as the Strip.

The city offers the ideal blend of work and play, allowing your group to hunker down, work through its objectives and enjoy a reward for all the hard work. But if your clients are still shying away from the Sin City stigma, there's a way to get the best of both worlds: Head to the softer side of Las Vegas.

Take your group just off the Strip, and you'll still enjoy all the amenities of the better-known casino properties-fine dining, easy airport access and ample meeting space-but you'll also discover a bevy of non-Strip and sometimes non-gaming properties that can host your next event.

Not sure what types of groups to book on the Strip and which to shelter off the main drag? You don't necessarily have to choose. "There really is no specific profile for groups that prefer the Strip versus downtown or neighborhood properties," says Michael Goldsmith, senior director of convention sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

Step Away from the Strip

Bob Corbett, trade show manager for Optimum Nutrition, liked being off the Strip. "It was nice to go to Vegas and not see casinos and games," he says. He held a Building and Fitness Expo at the Las Vegas Convention Center and housed his group at the adjacent Renaissance Las Vegas Hotel.

The contemporary boutique-style hotel just two blocks from the Strip features 548 rooms (30 are suites) equipped with flat panel TVs and wireless Internet. The 1,600-plus-square-foot Presidential Suite accommodates up to 75 visitors in modern yet cozy digs. VIP Suites are roomy enough for 55 visitors, while Exhibitor Suites accommodate up to 45 people. The hotel's restaurant, ENVY The Steakhouse, has private dining for up to 30 people, a swanky ambiance and a revamped wine list. Other amenities include 24-hour access to the health club and business center, outdoor pool, whirlpool and concierge service to provide tee times and tickets.

With 20,000 square feet of meeting space, the Renaissance Las Vegas offers more meeting space than any other non-gaming Las Vegas hotel. The 9,850-square-foot ballroom is on the first floor and seats 1,200 theater-style; eight meeting spaces (ranging from 350 to 1,700 square feet) are located on the second floor, while the pool deck accommodates 200 for a reception.

Swing by Summerlin

Located in Summerlin, a seamlessly integrated suburb of Las Vegas, the JW Marriott Las Vegas Resort & Spa lies in the heart of southern Nevada's most prestigious collection of golf courses. The 54-acre lushly landscaped property is designed for an intimate, allinclusive feel, creating a special world all its own. The resort features 548 oversized guestrooms, including 77 suites. "The sheer number of suites that we have available is a big selling point because we have so many options for upgrades, executive lodging, etc.," Director of Sales Mitchell Hirschman explains. The design of each of the 1,950-square-foot, twobedroom suites offers additional meeting space for breakout groups. The suites' balconies are large enough to accommodate cocktail parties, and an in-room bar and dining room are convenient for entertaining. One-bedroom and junior suites are also available. Every guestroom has a spacious bathroom with a Jacuzzi and separate, walk-in rain shower.

The 10 onsite restaurants include Ceres (American cuisine by executive chef and culinary Olympian Bruce Knapik); Spiedini Ristorante (Milanese fare by famed chef Gustav Mauler; also provides catering services); Shizen (an intimate

teppanyaki-style steakhouse and sushi bar); J.C. Wooloughan's Irish Pub (an authentic reconstructed pub from the Emerald Isle, serving up Celtic dishes, Irish beers and whiskey); and The Carmel Room (described by Hirschman as "so authentically Las Vegas, you expect to see Bugsy sitting in the next booth over."). Gusto Mauler's Gourmet Tobaccos & Lounge is a cozy, leathery, late-night setting serving premium spirits, vintage ports and imported hand-rolled cigars. The on-site Rampart Casino has 1,200 slot machines, 40 gaming tables and a sports and race betting club. When it's time to work, the resort has 39 meeting rooms and 100,000 square feet of total meeting space, the largest of which is the grand ballroom with a max seating capacity of 1,400 and one of Vegas' only built-in stages. Twinkle Thompson-Seitts with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management recently held a conference with 388 people at the resort and is considering a repeat visit this year.

"It was a joy to be there. The staff was excellent and critical to the success of the conference," says Thomspen-Seitts. Request an exterior room for your breakouts and treat attendees to natural light as well as outdoor access during break time. When partitioning the larger ballrooms, every meeting space maintains accessible load-in for gear, catering and, most important, guests. The Palms Tower can host groups up to 7,500. With a separate check-in desk, proximity to meeting spaces and exterior access, it's essentially a private hotel for your event.

Downtime activities include the world-class Aquae Sulis spa, shopping boutiques, waterfall pool, volleyball and bocce ball. Duffers will enjoy the gold service provided by the onsite golf concierge and access to the TPC Las Vegas.

What to do Off the Strip

By Joanne Pelton

A main draw of these outlying properties is the numerous outdoor group activities like hiking, horseback riding and desert tours available nearby.

"Groups that prefer a more relaxed atmosphere or a more nature-oriented event can choose to hold a meeting at one of several resorts outside of the main resort corridor," says Michael Goldsmith, senior director of convention sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. "They may want to be on the outskirts of Las Vegas with quick and easy access to Red Rock or Valley of Fire." It is, he says, one of the great advantages of southern Nevada: "We can accommodate nearly any situation a group wants."

Whether groups want to take to the sky, water or land, the options are virtually endless. "With a 20-minute drive, guests can be swept into a world of rolling desert, surrounding nature and historic landmarks," says Jennifer Miller, general manager of ACCESS Destination Services.

For groups looking for a birds-eye view of the stunning desert landscape, hot-air ballooning and helicopter rides are available. Nearby Lake Mead National Recreation Area offers activities such as boating, kayaking and river rafting, as well as hiking and biking. Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in the Mojave Desert offers hiking, biking and climbing.

For a real feel for the Southwest, consider a tour, from the Hoover Dam to a Wild West mining or ghost town. The Richard Petty Driving Experience offers group events for those interested in the thrill of driving a racecar-or riding as a passenger if that's more your speed. Horseback riding and ATV tours are also available. All these activities can be enjoyed from an off-Strip venue that is nonetheless close to the excitement of the heart of Las Vegas Strip for those who so choose. Says Miller: "Today's Vegas offers an idyllic climate for meetings and incentives, knowing that no matter what you seek to explore in the city, it's right at your fingertips."

*Since 1970, **ACCESS** Destination Services has provided the highest caliber of full-service, professional destination management and event production services in the West, including Anaheim/Orange County, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Diego...and now proudly serving Northern California!*



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