

## Has Las Vegas deserted the Family?

Millions of dollars were spent to make Las Vegas family friendly with New York, Stratosphere, Sahara, all adding roller coasters to their repertoire, but when it didn't become the Disney Land they were hoping for, how did this affect the families who had bought into this vision?

Well when my husband and I said we were taking our 3 kids ages 8,7 and 6 to Las Vegas, everyone asked why? You can't gamble with kids, what will you do? We had no idea but decided to go on an adventure to prove that Las Vegas is more than it's latest marketing gimmick "what happens here, stays here", and that it can be a very fun place for families.

Welcome to our journey. We're the Repchuk's, myself and my husband Dave travel all over the world with our children, and write about it. We decided that on my husband's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday we would go wherever he wanted, and he chose Vegas. So I got on the internet and started to figure out how we were going to fill our 10 day excursion of this adults paradise.

Things didn't go exactly to plan, but despite some surprises we had a fantastic time anyway. The key to a great family vacation is to expect the unexpected, and treat everything as part of the voyage. So when our flight arrived late into Chicago, and our connection had already left, we hopped on an 11:00pm flight to San Francisco, slept in the airport, and caught the 6:30am flight into Las Vegas the next day. Although we were tired, and our luggage was still in transit, we decided to use this day to familiarize ourselves with the 'strip'.

In our boots and warm clothing, we sauntered the street in 80-degree heat with our excitement and energy in tact. Enormous hotels, malls, TV screens, slot machines, and entertainment filled the air, and our kids were wide-eyed as they asked successive questions at a rapid pace. It had grown so much since my last visit 10 years ago. From Mandalay Bay to the Sahara, it stretched a mere 4.5 miles, but felt like 20. I was amazed when the kids didn't complain, it must have been the sites that kept them riveted.

We returned to the Circus Circus Hotel where we were staying, changed into more comfortable clothing from our newly arrived luggage, and went out in search of food. Much to my surprise, it was not cheap. Visions of \$1.99 breakfast and inexpensive buffets were a thing of the past. Too bad because my gang eats like wild buffalo. During the course of the week, despite our continued efforts, we certainly broke the budget on this item. If you wanted pop, liquor, hot dogs or donuts, these came cheap. Even though I was on vacation I didn't want to discard our healthy eating regimen, but fruit was very expensive, which gave me great insight to the overweight teenager epidemic.

Our entertainment would be the focus for our next week, and Vegas shines in this category. All for free we swam, watched circus acts, visited flamingos and exotic birds, seahorses, fish and white tigers, stood in awe at the Bellagio fountain as water rose hundreds of feet in the air to music, felt the heat from an erupting volcano, and watched pirates tame the seas at Treasure Island. The most amazing thing about Vegas was it was like a mini trip around the world. Hotel themes for Italy, France, New York, Egypt, the Sahara captured and intoxicated you with far away lands. The architecture and designs were amazing, from pyramids, to Sphinx, roller coasters, Statue of Liberty, Gondola rides of Venice, the Eiffel Tower and the extreme elegance of rich and exotic wares.

Then of course comes the side trip selection. For most, including us, we chose Hoover Dam, Lake Mead, Ethel M Chocolate Factory Tour, gardens and homes of the rich and famous. I think adults appreciate the splendor and feat of the dam, but children see beautiful blue water and ask how they can swim in it. My husband and I enjoyed the trip, the bus driver was informative and I learned a lot about the area. The kids loved the free samples from the chocolate factory, and we all liked the cactus garden as they invoked images of New Mexico and Arizona. Overall it was a lovely way to spend the day.

Upon our return however, we were surprised to see Fire trucks and security everywhere. We had already been aware of the capture of Ohio's most wanted, and was curious as to the commotion in our own hotel. A main transformer had blown, causing a power shut down in the tower we were in. I marveled at how the casino's remained untouched, while the ability to use the elevators, or get any power for 2 days in your room was the reality elsewhere. In darkness, with a security guard and one flashlight, on the second day we eventually moved to another room that had power. We did get compensated for our troubles, so even though it was a pain, the money savings helped to offset our meals, which was a blessing.

With the kids there were definitely 2 things that stood out, and really made you think. The first was the stacks and rows of 'women for sale'. My kids were continuously asking why there were so many, why they were naked, why did people approach you and ask you if you wanted a good time. Weren't we having a good time they would say. Now I know I was there with my family, but honestly those questions came to my mind as well. If I am interested in that aspect, I am capable of going to the newspaper like stands that hold it, and taking a look. Does thrusting a business card sized picture that gets dropped a few feet away really drum up business? I watched as men would ignore these offers just as frequently as families. I think if someone wants it, they know where to go, so my advise for Las Vegas in general is let's clear the streets of the sellers, and the litter they create. The other humorous comment was about "Elvis". The conversation went like this, "Mom, isn't Elvis dead?". "Yes dear he is". "So why do people want to dress and act like a dead man?" You don't see that in Toronto, New York, Montreal, Memphis, but for some reason, it's alive and

kicking in Las Vegas. I couldn't respond as to the motivation, and gave a brief summary of the significance of Elvis, but it does make you wonder why?, and I guess it's because anything can happen in Vegas, and at least they're having fun.

Thankfully a given seemed to be the continuous glorious weather, guaranteeing us daily visits to the pool, and a healthy glow to our skin. It was a Caribbean holiday without the price.

So after 10 days, with a first night in the airport, and 2 days without power would we recommend bringing a family to Las Vegas? The answer is a definitive yes. This place is a must see for adults and children. It is a carefully planned 10 mile strip of tourism genius. With over 35 million visitors a year, it is clear that there is something for everyone, including the family. We enjoyed our stay, and hope that next time you are considering a vacation, you take a good look at all that Las Vegas has to offer.

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