

Las Vegas' Central Park

Culture is not the first thing most people associate with Las Vegas, but it can be found if you know where to look. The Springs Preserve, an educational and historical attraction, is a 180-acre cultural hub for tourists and locals alike, located just a few miles west of downtown Las Vegas.

Believe it or not, water is what first

drawn settlers to Las Vegas. The Springs Preserve, known as the birthplace of Las Vegas and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sits on the site where water was first discovered in the valley. The springs dried up in 1962 but the Las Vegas Valley Water District had the land designated as a preserve in 1997 to protect it from development.

With its botanical gardens, live entertainment, museums and walking trails, the Springs Preserve has been referred to as Las Vegas' version of Central Park.

The attraction, which recently celebrated its first birthday, also places a big emphasis on conserving and recycling Las Vegas' natural resources and using environmentally-friendly technology—a

fact visitors will notice from the moment they arrive and pull their car beneath the covered parking composed of hundreds of solar panels.

Educational opportunities abound and families will find plenty for the kids to do in the form of interactive exhibits and games, a play area and live animal exhibits.

Adults will appreciate the botanical

gardens, a Wolfgang Puck restaurant and a gift shop full of unique items. The Preserve is also the future home of the Nevada State Museum.

Whether it's recreation, education or just some fresh air and green trees you're looking for, the Springs Preserve has something for everyone, so don't miss out on seeing a very different side of Las Vegas.



TRAILS

A series of more than 1.8 miles of trails with interpretive displays winds through the Springs Preserve. The trails border the cienega (wetlands), which is home to native plants, birds and animals. On the Cienega Trail you'll get a glimpse of what 19th century explorers might have found when they discovered the area. Visitors can engage in bird viewing opportunities, including a bird viewing blind and spotting scopes. The cienega draws more than 35 new species of wildlife to the Springs Preserve including birds such as the peregrine falcon, belted kingfisher and white-faced ibis. Restored vegetation includes cottonwood, willow, mesquite and acacia trees. Take an archaeological journey into the past on the Springs Trail, which features historical structures and exhibits about the various people who lived in the area. The Crossroads Trail takes you past the remains of the Big Springs Springhouse, which was built to protect the water supply. Features along this trail include the Water Works pump station and a plant recognition wayside.

AMPHITHEATER

The 1,800-seat open-air amphitheater at the Springs Preserve, which features remarkably grass-like artificial turf, hosts big-name entertainment. CineVegas will host an outdoor screening series there, "CineVegas Under the Stars" through July. Tickets are \$10 general admission or \$25 for dinner and a movie.

NEVADA STATE MUSEUM

Moving to the Springs Preserve in 2009.

ORIGEN EXPERIENCE

The name Origen was derived from two words: original and generations. At the Origen Experience at the Springs Preserve, visitors can explore the history of the Las Vegas Valley from early American cultures to Anglo-European settlers. The Origen Experience features three historic museum galleries with more than 75 exhibits including interactive attractions, games for kids, a theater and live animals including foxes, bats, lizards and more. Twelve exhibits in the Natural Mojave Gallery explore the geological and biological history of the Mojave Desert and the formation of the Las Vegas Valley. Thirty-three exhibits in the People of the Springs Gallery focus on the cultural history of the Preserve and the role of water in the development of Las Vegas. The New Frontier Gallery, designed for children, features games and activities celebrating the cultural highlights of Las Vegas and sustainability.

SPRINGS PRESERVE

HOURS: Open daily, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

PRICE: \$18.95 for adults and \$10.95 for children. Children under 5 are free. Admission to the gardens and trails is free, however you must obtain a ticket to enter.

LOCATION: Located on South Valley View Boulevard between U.S. 95 and Alta Drive. From the Strip, take I-15 North, and merge onto US 95 North (Reno). Take the Valley View Boulevard exit. Turn left onto South Valley View Boulevard. Continue south to Meadows Lane. Turn left (east) into the Springs Preserve.



GARDENS

The beautiful 8-acre garden area at the Springs Preserve is home to 400 mature trees and plants including a fruit orchard, vegetable garden, herb garden, rose garden, cactus garden and palm tree oasis featuring a dozen different palm species. The gardens are designed to be a learning environment where visitors can explore both native and non-native plant life through interpretive stations, as well as learn about landscaping and water saving measures. A 250-seat amphitheater is available for gardening instruction and demonstrations.

WATER RESERVOIRS

There are three operational water reservoirs on site at the Springs Preserve, which hold 40 million gallons of water.

SOLAR PANELS

Solar panels at the Springs Preserve are mounted on a structural steel framework over the parking lots, also providing shade for up to 200 parked cars.

SPRINGS CAFE

Fans of Chef Wolfgang Puck can enjoy natural and organic food in the Springs Cafe. The restaurant participates in the WELL program (Wolfgang's Eating, Loving and Living program), which is dedicated to providing the freshest ingredients while contributing to the conscious treatment of the environment. The menu includes creative items such as farmer's market sweet white corn soup, topped with eggplant caviar, fire-roasted bell peppers and sweet basil. Puck's signature Chinois chicken salad mixes slow roasted free-range chicken with romaine lettuce, Napa cabbage, radicchio and sweet sesame cashews. The restaurant is a bright, open space with large floor-to-ceiling glass windows and a patio providing a sweeping view of the Springs Preserve with the Las Vegas Strip in the background. The restaurant is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with extended hours for special events.



— Written by Kristine McKenzie
— Photos by Studio J courtesy of The Springs Preserve and VEGAS.com