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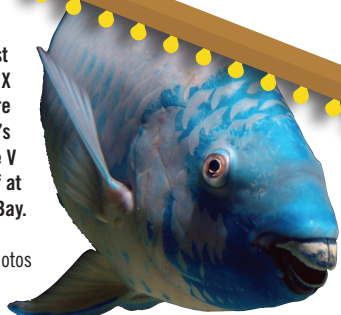
TO Family Friendly

LAS VEGAS

NEVADA

Las Vegas is home to many family friendly attractions, activities, restaurants and shows, including (clockwise from top), Pole Position raceway, the Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat at Mirage, the Rainforest Cafe at MGM Grand, the X Scream atop the Stratosphere hotel, "Gregory Popovich's Comedy Pet Theater" at the V Theater and the Shark Reef at Mandalay Bay.

File photos



Despite its reputation as Sin City, Vegas offers fun for whole family

Las Vegas resorts famously tried to promote themselves as family-friendly destinations during the 1990s. Treasure Island had swashbuckling pirates, the Excalibur welcomed people inside its castle walls and the MGM Grand boasted a sprawling theme park behind the hotel.

The theme park was closed down in 2000, the pirates were taken over by sexy sirens in 2003 and the Excalibur has added more adult-friendly touches to the property in the past couple of years.

Marketing for the city changed in 2003 with the launch of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's "What happens, here stays here" campaign, which made no secret about the fact that the city is full of entertainment options for adults. But that doesn't mean Las Vegas doesn't welcome families.

A 2008 Las Vegas Visitor Profile by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority indicated 6 percent of visitors had someone in their travel party under the age of 21. There's plenty for the younger crowd to do here. The Strip is full of kid-friendly shows, roller coasters, exotic animals and amazing hotel pools that will entertain visitors of all ages.

Hotels

Circus Circus has been a family favorite hotel for years. With its big-top look outside and free live circus acts, carnival midway games and arcade inside, kids will be constantly entertained. The hotel also features the Adventuredome, a five-acre enclosed theme park, which is climate controlled to 75 degrees. The theme park features, among other rides, the Canyon Blaster, a double-loop, double-corkscrew roller coaster.

Don Thrasher, president of Circus Circus, said the family market is definitely his hotel's niche.

"Las Vegas is a family-friendly destination, but we're the primary family-friendly hotel. Most of the other properties - although they do have some amenities for families - if you've been in this town for any number of years you know that they've pretty much phased away from that. The market for families is only just so large and we have the dominant position in that market segment."

"We've been here for 41 years and we're still going strong and I don't think there's many others that can make that claim," he said.

Thrasher said Circus Circus consciously tries to appeal to the family market.

"We try to market to families primarily through our value offerings and we have special offerings, especially in the summer when the kids are out of school, for room packages that include a lot of family oriented activities."

The Excalibur is another popular place for families to stay. Kids will be enchanted with the hotel's castle facade and inside, they'll find midway games, an arcade and motion rides. Parents will be happy with the newly-remodeled rooms, which include 42-inch flat-screen TVs, and the hotel's variety of bars, restaurants and shows.



File photo

The Canyon Blaster at Circus Circus's Adventuredome.



File photo

The Excalibur has a midway with games and an arcade as well as a charming castle facade.

MGM Grand is right in the center of it all and offers the perfect convenient location for families. The hotel is home to a Las Vegas Monorail station, so instead of walking everywhere with the kids or trying to get them corralled into a car, you can easily hop on the monorail and travel all the way down the east side of the Strip. The MGM Grand is also conveniently located next to the Showcase Mall, which features M&M's World and Gameworks. Just across the street is NewYork-New York Hotel, which has a roller coaster and a Coney Island-style arcade.

If it's a great pool your kids want, you can't beat the beach at Mandalay Bay. There are eight pools at the hotel altogether, including a wave pool with a real sand beach, an adults-only pool and some more traditional pools. There is even a lazy river with a 3 mph current, a beachside casino, a retail shop, restaurants and bars.

Mandalay Bay is also home to Shark Reef, which houses 100 species of marine animals including jellyfish, turtles, stingrays and a Komodo dragon. Kids will love the touch pool where they can actually pet some of the animals.

"Disney's The Lion King," a stage adaptation of the animated film, is also playing at the hotel. Adults and kids alike will be entertained by the award-winning music, stunning costumes and captivating story.

Shows

Las Vegas is known for its diverse entertainment offerings and when it comes to shows there are plenty of options for families. If you don't want to go to a show in the evening, there are afternoon shows available.

"Gregory Popovich's Comedy Pet Theater" at the V Theater at Planet Hollywood is full of everything kids love: clowns, circus acts and animals. Popovich rescued all of the animals in the show and has taught them some pretty amazing tricks. Kids will love their antics and so will adults.

"The Mac King Comedy Magic Show" at Harrah's Las Vegas is another kid-friendly afternoon show filled with magic tricks and laughs. "Xtreme Magic starring Dirk Arthur" keeps kids amazed with his exotic cats including tigers, leopards and a liger at the Tropicana.

David Saxe, show producer and owner of V Theater, says the key to a good family show is finding something that both kids and parents can enjoy. His show, "V - The Ultimate Variety Show" at Planet Hollywood features comedy, magic, aerialists, juggling and more.

"When I designed 'V,' it was to have a show for everybody," he said.

Saxe also offers child price tickets for "Gregory Popovich's Comedy Pet Theater," which is unusual in the Las Vegas show market.

"I've got three kids myself and paying full price for them doesn't seem to make sense," Saxe said. "It



File photo

"The Mac King Comedy Magic Show" at Harrah's Las Vegas.

Child care facilities/policies

If you want one night out by yourselves, there are child care services available at some hotels. Some hotels in Vegas will provide guests with phone numbers for outside babysitting services that can come directly to your hotel room. Ask the hotel concierge for details.

There are a few hotels that offer child care facilities on property. Most of these facilities have time limits, age limits and toilet training requirements:

Boulder Station: There is a Kid's Quest child care facility, which charges a fee.

Orleans: The Kid's Tyme Child Care Center offers arts and crafts, a movie room and more.

Palms: The Palms features a Kid's Quest child care center, which charges a fee.

Red Rock Casino, Resort and Spa: There is a Kid's Quest child care facility, which charges a fee.

Santa Fe Station: There is a Kid's Quest child care center at the resort, which charges a fee.

Sunset Station: There is a Kid's Quest child care center at the resort, which charges a fee.

Texas Station: There is a Kid's Quest child care center at the resort, which charges a fee.

gets expensive if you have a lot of kids - I'm also a consumer so I figure that's what I'd want."

If your kids are old enough for a show at night, there are several that will appeal to them. The medieval-themed "Tournament of Kings" allows kids to eat dinner with their hands and then cheer loudly for the horse racing, jousting and sword fighting that ensues.

Magician Lance Burton first became interested in his craft as a child and he makes a point of bringing kids on stage during his show at Monte Carlo to assist with a few tricks.

Keep in mind that a lot of shows in Vegas have age limits, and for many of them children need to be at least 5 years old.

Attractions

Las Vegas offers an abundance of different attractions that will both educate and entertain children.

The Secret Garden and Dolphin Habitat at Mirage is home to Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, lions, tigers and leopards. At the MGM Grand's Lion Habitat, families, separated from the lions by only one and a half inches of glass, can watch as these majestic creatures feed, play, groom themselves and sleep.

Education is a key component of The Springs Preserve, located at 333 S. Valley View Blvd. The Springs Preserve is home to exhibits, galleries, trails, a children's playground and gardens that provide not only recreational opportunities, but education about the Mojave Desert and the principles of sustainability.

"It's one of those places that really engages both the kids and the parents," said Marcel Parent, manager of education and volunteerism programs for the Springs Preserve.

One of the highlights is the sustainability gallery, where guests can learn about water, recycling and fuels of the future.

The Origen Experience building features live animal displays, a simulated flash flood, video games and much more.



File photo

Kids have fun at Origen Experience at the Springs Preserve.

"A lot of these interactive exhibits have been set up in a way that there's lots of educational layering, so that the parents will get a lot more information from it but they're still fun to play with - the kids have to pull on something or look at how things work. It's engaging, there's stuff on their level and hopefully there are things they'll learn about that will make a difference," said Parent.

Parent said kids from pre-kindergarten through teens will find something to keep them occupied at the Springs Preserve and he hopes they will not only have fun but will take a lesson home with them.

"There's two major things we want the kids to leave with - number one, the Mojave desert is a really, really fascinating place and it's a really special and delicate environment that everyone needs to take care of. The other thing that we'd like for them to leave with is having a little bit of a sense of how their actions make an impact on the planet in terms of sustainability."

The Teenager

If you're bringing teenagers to Las Vegas and you're worried that they won't have anything to do, have no fear. There are plenty of thrill rides and other attractions to make their vacation memorable.

Pole Position, at 4175 S. Arville St., is a state-of-the-art facility, which features indoor race karts faster than any of their kind in the country. Pole Position Raceway's 60,000-square-foot facility has a unique quarter-mile European-style track.

These aren't your standard go-karts - they are approximately 18-horsepower and capable of going up to 45 miles per hour.

If that's not thrilling enough, head to the Stratosphere and let your kids brave the rides on top of the tower. With names like Big Shot, Insanity and X Scream, you can't lose.



File photo

Insanity thrill ride atop the Stratosphere hotel.

Dining

When it comes to eating out, it can be difficult to satisfy kids. Luckily, Las Vegas has dining options that will keep everyone happy.

Themed restaurants keep kids occupied while you're waiting for your food or a table. The NASCAR Café at Sahara serves classic American food and a lot of fun. While you're there, you can check out the Las Vegas Cyber Speedway simulated race cars, the Pit Pass Arcade and plenty of NASCAR memorabilia. The Sahara is also home to Speed - The Ride, which sends riders zipping at 70 mph around a loop and into a tunnel.

Rainforest Café at the MGM Grand is always a favorite with its rainforest décor, gift shop, fun menu items, tropical rain storms and famous volcano dessert - a brownie, ice cream, chocolate and caramel, topped with a sparkler.

Kids can watch movie trailers and check out the movie props and memorabilia at Planet Hollywood at the Forum Shops at Caesars while enjoying fun dishes like Cap 'n Crunch coated chicken strips.

McDonald's is one of the four basic food groups for many kids and in Vegas, there's a McDonald's like no other. Viva McDonald's, located on the Las Vegas Strip, is a mixture of high-tech, fast food, and Las Vegas style. The 8,600-square-foot restaurant is the largest McDonald's in Nevada and features a ring of media screens and wireless internet.

Las Vegas will always be known as a playground for adults, but don't let that deter you from bringing the family here for vacation - there's a whole other side to the city filled with fun and educational opportunities for all ages.

— Written by Kristine McKenzie