

Decadent desserts

There's no shortage of ways to satisfy your sweet tooth in Vegas



Lemon tart at Bouchon at the Venetian.

Photo by Nikki Neu

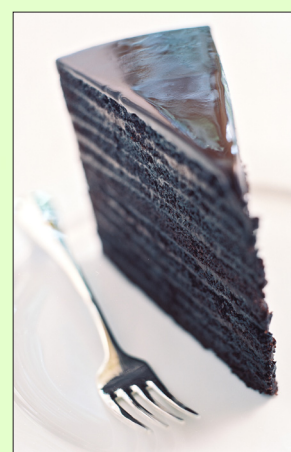


Photo courtesy of Strip House
Twenty-four layer chocolate cake from Strip House.



Photo courtesy of Caesars Palace
The Golden Opulence sundae at Serendipity 3.

BY NIKKI NEU
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When it's late at night and you're craving something sweet, just about every Vegas restaurant has the answer for you.

The problem is, too many times you see the same desserts: mediocre chocolate cake, gloppy cheesecake, and the omnipresent ice cream sundae.

But it doesn't have to be that way. If you know where to go, your desire for a decadent dessert can be fulfilled in creative, exotic ways — far beyond the boring piece of chocolate cake.

But just in case you're a chocolate cake fan, we've got a pick for that too.

Sugary standbys

When you do need a traditional favorite like a chunk of chocolate cake or a frozen treat, these are a few of the standbys we think might float your, well, root beer float.

What better way to enjoy a warm summer night in Las Vegas than to dine al fresco with cooling misters and a frozen treat? At Serendipity 3 at Caesars Palace, the Firrozen hot chocolate is a classic brought over from New York City that no one can resist. The rich chocolate flavor and cool drinkable/spoonable blended concoction is easily one of the best buys on the Vegas Strip and big enough to share.

A refreshing root beer float is waiting for you at Vosges Haut Chocolat inside the Forum Shops at Caesars. The boutique chocolate shop serves a root beer float made with naturally brewed root beer and Naga ice cream, a rich, custardy ice cream with hints of sweet Indian curry and young coconut.

"Typically, the more fat concentration, the more luxurious the concoction is," says Assistant Manager Julie Johnson.

The velvety texture of the ice cream and refreshingly pungent root beer give this root beer float a cool, distinct flavor.

Rao's ricotta cheesecake is a delightfully fluffy treat that just might be the best thing to come out of New York since, well, Ol' Blue Eyes. This cheesecake won't croon you a tune, but it will leave you wanting more with a delectable citrus flavor, light airy texture and crumbly graham crust. This cheesecake is the perfect way to end your meal and it's not too heavy, so you can make the pilgrimage through Caesars Palace back to your room.

In Planet Hollywood, Strip House's chocolate cake is 24 layers of pure chocolatey perfection. The sumptuous dessert features 12 layers of velvety chocolate cake and 11 layers of smooth chocolate filling, all covered in a chocolate ganache. At \$16, it's not the cheapest dessert to hit the Vegas Strip, but when the gigantic slice makes its way to your table, you'll understand why—it easily serves four people, so grab a group of your friends and be prepared to share.

Creative confections

If you're craving something beyond a slice of chocolate cake, look no further than one of these innovative twists on treats.

Valentino at the Venetian offers a cool mint soup, warm chocolate ravioli and delicious fresh strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and blackberries. Fresh mint sprigs as a garnish and skewered ravioli in a wonton-like shell make this dessert a must try for summer.

"I basically took a classic Italian soup recipe with pasta to make [the ravioli]. I think it's really an Italian novelty," says Pastry Chef Alessandro Stoppa.

The creative dish takes a familiar savory recipe and turns it into a refreshing new dessert. Stoppa created the chocolate ravioli just in time for summer and it will be on the menu well into the fall.

Pastry Chef Kim Valdez is a genius, taking a favorite carnival food and turning it into a well-done dessert at SW Steakhouse. Valdez's creative juices were flowing when she created a unique presentation of fresh-made funnel cakes extended on a small wooden tree and served with fresh strawberries, caramel and chocolate dipping sauce. The delicious dessert will wow you and you can munch on your fair food while watching the show at the Lake of Dreams at Wynn.

The Oeey Goey Butter Cake at RUB in the Rio is a Southern-style

favorite, but at RUB, they kick it up with a little strawberry syrup and make it the perfect way to end your meat-laden meal. The base starts off with a yellow cake with lots of eggs and butter. The icing is made with cream cheese, eggs, vanilla and powdered sugar and takes on a meringue-style crunch. A little strawberry syrup is drizzled on top and this butter-rich treat is sinfully delicious.

Savor the flavor

Looks are important, but in a dessert, flavor is even more important. Try sinking your teeth into some of these tasty treats that are bursting in flavor.

The chocolate toffee cake at Stratta at Wynn takes the cake, if you will. Layers of a dark chocolate cake made with coffee and buttermilk, hazelnut crisp, and milk chocolate espresso mousse make your mouth water before the first bite. The cake is covered in chocolate glaze and sprinkled with 23 karat gold leaf. The sides of the dessert are coated with crushed salted espresso and toffee pieces and served with an Illy roasted crème anglaise. The slight crunch of the hazelnut crisp and toffee pieces mixed with the richness of the mousse is the perfect balance in texture and with bold chocolate, hazelnut and toffee, the flavors strike a harmonious chord in your mouth.

Equally as bold and found in Mix restaurant high atop THEhotel at Mandalay Bay, is the Mix candy bar, which includes a layer of pie crust with milk chocolate, peanut butter, maple syrup cream and topped with hazelnut glaze. This super-rich treat is an upscale take on a peanut butter cup and is one that is not to be missed.

On a fruitier note, In the Venezia tower at the Venetian, Bouchon's lemon tart is a simple classic with power-packed citrus flavor. The lemon tart isn't what you'd call a fancy dessert: Zabaglione, lemon curd, pine nut crust. But its intense lemony flavor and well thought out recipe is enough to entice anyone to have a slice.

"Pine nuts give it a little different texture, a different taste than traditional pie dough or tart dough," explains Pastry Chef Chris Herrin.

While the pie crust gives a bit of a nuttier flavor and crunchier texture to the dessert, it's the flavor of that cool, lemony filling that will leave you renewed and refreshed after you've gorged yourself on Bouchon's other delicious food.

"We just do it as fresh as possible and with the best ingredients,"

says Herrin.

The quality of ingredients and level of standards at Bouchon all add to this delightful dessert.

Opulent endings

Occasionally you feel like a gem-encrusted grill or a diamond ring isn't enough. Enter the Golden Opulence sundae available at Serendipity 3 — a dessert with so much sparkle Liberace would shudder and Diddy would cower. If you're feeling flamboyant, a \$1,000 ice cream sundae dripping in gold leaf might indulge you. The price tag is somewhat justified in using ingredients from around the world: Tahitian vanilla ice cream, exotic fruits from South America and rare Venezuelan chocolate. But it's a sure bet the other \$950 is for the prestige of saying you've been there, done that, and got the crystal goblet. Lil' Jon would be pleased.

Perhaps not the \$1,000 scoop of vanilla, but equally as ostentatious, is Vosges' Swarovski crystal-filled box encasing one dozen truffles. The clear Lucite box is filled with hundreds of crystals in the lid. As for the dessert inside, the truffles entitled the "Groove Collection" feature exotic flavors like Soul and Motown Truffle, a unique blend of butter and chocolate. The Blues Truffle contains bacon and milk chocolate. Owner Katrina Markoff spends months researching her chocolates to give you the ultimate flavors and chocolate experiences. This blingy box is available at the Forum Shops at Caesars and retails for \$275.

These desserts are sure to satisfy your sweet tooth with innovative and fresh new takes on old favorites and some new concoctions that will quickly become your favorites. One thing's for sure: Vegas has your answer to any possible sweet craving you have.



Photo by Nikki Neu
Chocolate ravioli with cool mint soup and mixed berries at Valentino.