



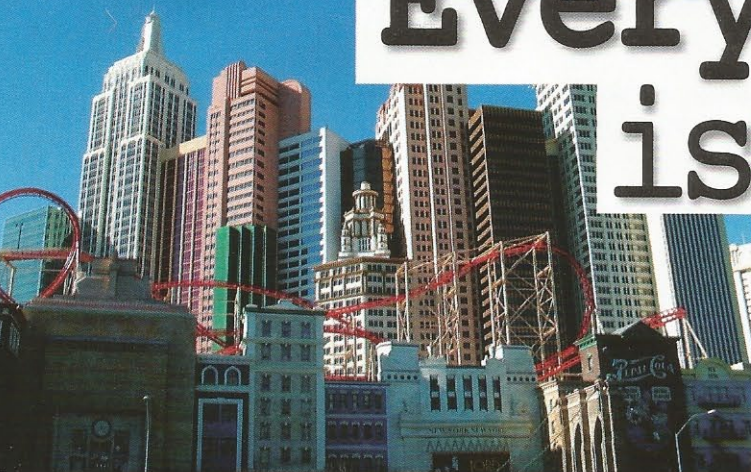
Everything Old is New Again

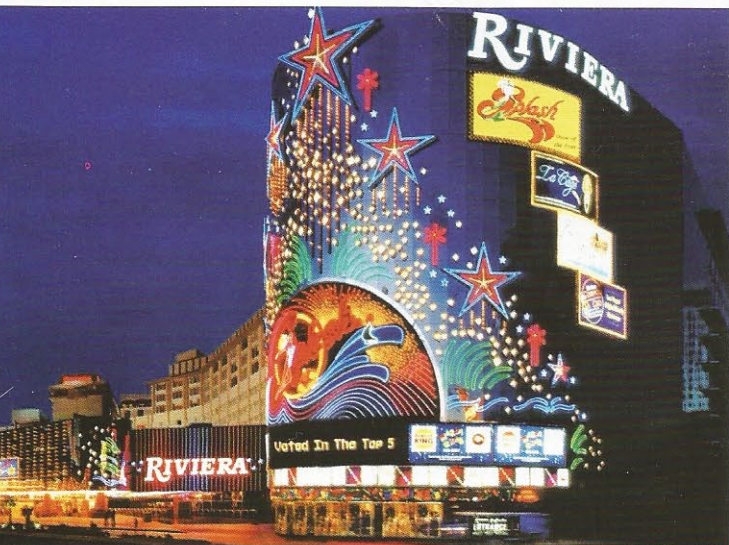
The Revitalization of Las Vegas

A few years ago, we were introduced to a stroke of marketing savvy and, well, genius that left the United States travel industry abuzz and revitalized. A handful of simple words attracted the masses of celebrities and laymen alike, and became the lifeblood of a city that, during Hollywood's Golden Age, had taken on an almost-mythic status in the minds of the general public. What are these

words now recognized as comprising one of the most powerful taglines in modern America? "Las Vegas: What happens here, stays here."
By **Faisal Al-Juburi**

"ANYONE WHO VISITS LAS VEGAS SHOULD NOT FEEL SHORTCHANGED. THE CITY CAN MATCH ANY IN EUROPE"





To understand why a city that requires only a short visit has become a vacation hotspot, one must realize that, for a large part of the American public, extended vacations are a thing of the past. It is estimated that 75 to 85 percent of Americans do not have passports and, by consequence, have not traveled beyond the borders of the United States. In addition, the average employed American has 80 hours, or two workweeks, of paid vacation a year. Because of the geographical location of the United States, it is not feasible to city-hop across Europe to explore the legendary nightlife of London, Paris, and Amsterdam without setting a significant amount of personal time aside, regardless of one's passport status. Thus, for most working individuals, the art of travel is very much centered upon the quick getaway, one which serves the purposes of both rejuvenation and maximum enjoyment. And, that is perhaps ultimately why Las Vegas is so appealing to people of most backgrounds.

During the latter part of the past century, however, Las Vegas had become associated with a certain sense of cheesiness. It was, to say the least, *passé* in terms of popular culture, a vacation spot meant more for camera-carrying tourists than for the social elite and masters of partying. Gone were the days when it was frequented by famed film and music stars such as Ava Gardner and the Rat Pack (Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., and Peter Lawford). Gone were the days when it exuded even a modicum of class. But, at the turn of the 21st century, a strong effort meant to give Las Vegas a glossy new veneer was put forth that has since caused quite a stir and has made many businessmen and tourists stand up and take notice. The city was suddenly stripped of the shtick that had come to characterize it, and, with the help of some of the entertainment industry's most powerful elite, the United States' very own city of lights once again became the "it" place to be.

In 2001, *Ocean's 11*, the remake of a film that had starred the original Rat Pack, set the box office ablaze. The movie starred George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon, and Don Cheadle – the team that would soon be recognized as the Rat Pack of our generation – and concerned a plan to rob \$150 million from the Bellagio, the Mirage, and the MGM Grand. Also starring Julia Roberts, the

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film helped once again to instill in the public conscious a sense of both mystique and grandeur to Las Vegas and showed that even a heist – albeit one carried out by only the most dapper of men – would be the city's little secret.

Then, in 2002, the city made actual headlines when it was announced that international singing superstar Celine Dion had signed a multi-year contract to perform a concert act entitled *A New Day...Live in Las Vegas* at Caesar's Palace, one which would be the city's own exclusive possession and would not be seen anywhere else. A new \$95 million, 4,100-seat venue was designed especially for the show, which was created by the masterminds behind Cirque du Soleil and has now grossed more than \$500 million since its official 2003 opening. In May 2007, it was revealed that famed actress and songstress Bette Midler (*Beaches*, *The Stepford Wives*) would, in addition to special engagements at the theatre featuring Elton John, assume concert duties at Caesar's Palace after Dion's departure in 2008.

And, in an effort to expand available entertainment options, Las Vegas has also breathed new life into the theater industry with productions of recent Broadway hits like *Mamma Mia*, *The Producers*, *Hairspray*, *Avenue Q*, *Spamalot*, and the behemoth of all musical theater Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* taking the stage in newly-built theaters at major hotels and casinos. And, while some theater professionals and enthusiasts bemoan the fact that most of the musicals presented in the city are abbreviated in order

to accommodate short attention spans and to rush hotel customers back into the casinos, it is important to note that theater – many times seen as a dying art form – is being introduced to massive new audiences. Because of the city's long history in addition to this latest revitalization effort, travelers have a wide range of hotels from which to choose, and the list will soon grow even more. Current choices include the aforementioned Bellagio, the Venetian, and the ever-popular Wynn Las Vegas, a \$2.5 billion hotel built by business mogul Steve Wynn that opened on April 28, 2005, and has since become a Las Vegas landmark. And, since these hotels regard their casinos as being their ultimate cash cows, so to speak, one can book a standard room at a rate of approximately \$200 per night, a relative bargain in comparison to hotel prices in other tourist-friendly cities. So, it is financially feasible for many to get to this fantasy land, of sorts, so that they may have the opportunity to live out said fantasies, ones which – if we are to believe Las Vegas's slogan – can supposedly exist solely within the confines of the city. That slogan – apparently the brainchild of young advertising copywriter Jeff Candido – attracts anyone who is looking for at least a momentary sense of escapism. Therefore, its grasp is far-reaching. There is, undoubtedly, this larger than life quality to the city, one that is greatly removed from a reality found all-too-readily in everyday life and in competing tourist cities such as New York City, Miami, and Los Angeles. Thus, visitors are wooed by the prospect of being released from their inhibitions, even if it is merely in theory rather than practice.

And, even though European cities are said by many travel aficionados to be the destination points for those looking for a fun time, anyone who visits Las Vegas should not feel shortchanged. The city can match any in Europe – if not in history, then most certainly in both opulence and, of course, decadence. ■