

Viva New Vegas

Faced with increasing competition from its old-school downtown rival, the Las Vegas Strip has fought back in style with exciting outdoor experiences, hip hotels and an array of new dining options. *Director* flew in to investigate



Not long ago, downtown Las Vegas was no competition for its uptown glamorous rival – the Las Vegas Strip. But new casino hotels such as the D Las Vegas – a \$22m (£14m) renovation and rebrand of former Irish-themed venue Fitzgeralds – and a focus on outdoor cocktail bars, entertainment and street food have brought the buzz back to downtown's famous old Fremont Street. The Strip, a 20-minute drive uptown, and home to glamorous Caesars Palace and the Bellagio, suddenly faced a serious challenge to its Nevada desert dominance.

But the Strip has responded in style, as *Director* found out when we paid a visit recently to The Linq – Caesars Entertainment's new \$550m outdoor entertainment district. Previously an empty walkway, it is now home to shops, bars, leisure areas and restaurants including Sprinkles (famous for its cupcake ATM), Brooklyn Bowl and the new Polaroid Fotobar

Museum. It also features a neck-cranning new attraction in the High Roller – Vegas's observation wheel which, around 100ft taller than the London Eye, is the loftiest in the world. One of the 28 glass cabins can hold up to 40 people and during the 30-minute ride we enjoyed stunning views of the Strip including the famous fountains at the Bellagio.



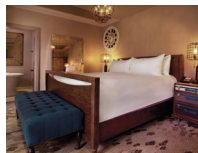
Wheel appeal: the High Roller in the Link entertainment district and, right, the Cromwell boutique hotel

The latest addition to this development, The Linq Hotel and Casino, opened in October. Previously The Quad Resort, after a \$250m makeover it now includes a new check-in area that serves as a lobby and DJ and mixology bar; 2,256 fully updated rooms and two new pools. Guests can also enjoy complimentary passes to the High Roller along with deliveries

from the various restaurants on the street directly to their room.

The Linq is the newest in a series of new hotels opening along the Strip to attract more guests uptown. The Cromwell, the first standalone boutique hotel to open on the Strip launched in May. Formerly Bill's Gamblin' Hall & Saloon, the property received a \$185m renovation and created 2,000 jobs. It features 188 rooms and suites, a 40,000 sq ft casino, hotel lobby bar, lounge, restaurant, and a beach-themed nightlife venue.

On the second floor of the Cromwell, Emmy award-winning TV chef Giada De Laurentiis's first restaurant, Giada, serves



breakfast, lunch and dinner, and can accommodate up to 300 guests. Crucially, for Vegas's new love of the outdoor, visitors can enjoy al fresco dining and a signature antipasto bar, a first for Italian eateries on the Strip. *Director* enjoyed a delicious selection including wood-roasted mushrooms and orzo meatballs accompanied with a tasty lemon pesto grilled cheese sandwich with zucchini scapece.

Elsewhere, after a \$73m makeover THEhotel became the all-suite Delano in September. The development kept all 500 of the original employees and created around 300 new construction jobs. It offers sweeping views of the Las Vegas skyline and 1,117 suites that boast one of the highest standard room square footages of any hotel in the city. At 725 sq ft, each one-bedroom suite features a spacious spa-style bath, a 46in flat-screen TV, wet bar, and its own powder room with an adjoining living room.

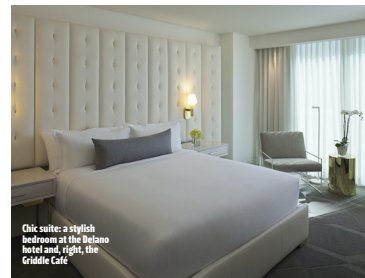
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SLS Las Vegas opened in August after a \$415m renovation of the legendary Sahara Hotel, creating 3,400 jobs within the resort and an additional 5,000 during construction. It features 1,600 rooms across three towers, two pools, a nightclub, spa and a 60,000 sq ft casino abuzz with nearly 800 slot machines.

DREAM DINING

However, it is the dining that is the main attraction here. With nine places to eat and drink, guests have a hearty range of cuisines to choose from. Highlights include the Griddle Café, known as the Disneyland of breakfast – but expect a queue from 9am until way past lunchtime of visitors eager to tuck into a range of delicious brunch dishes such as banananana pancakes and mom's French toast.

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Chic suite: a stylish bedroom at the Delano hotel and, right, the Griddle Café



Hotspots: clockwise from left, the new SLS Las Vegas, the hotel's glitzy Center Bar and cotton candy mojitos at Bazaar Meat



Fresh delivery: cupcake ATM at Sprinkles restaurant

dinner. With excellent service and a range of tapas-style meat samplings, guests can enjoy dishes such as foie gras candy floss (which must be eaten in one mouthful) and chicken-béchamel fritters served in a plastic shoe – washed down with cotton candy mojitos.

And let's not forget Katsuya – the sushi bar and kitchen that serves spectacular sushi and sashimi platters – and Cleo, the Mediterranean restaurant which continues the theme of small plates with a selection of delicious mezzes including hummus, artichoke flatbread, and its signature dish: Brussels sprouts, cooked with parsley, almonds and red wine

vinagrette. The chef is convinced that once you try it, you love it (and he's right).

This staggering investment into the Strip's offering appears to be starting to boost gambling revenues – which rose by \$25m in the last year despite tumbling across other cities in Nevada. With both The Delano and SLS looking to unveil new features in 2015, it looks like the Strip could once again be holding the winning hand in Las Vegas.

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FACT FILE

Getting there British Airways flies direct to Las Vegas's McCarran International airport from Heathrow and Gatwick.

Or book through WEXAS Travel (www.iad.com/traveloffers) or call (020 7838 9974).

Accommodation *Director* stayed at SLS Vegas in the Lux Tower. Prices start at \$109 (£70) per night. For more information visit www.slsLasVegas.com and www.LVCVA.com