

LAS VEGAS LUXE

PLANNERS WITH BIG DREAMS AND BIG BUDGETS CAN MAKE A GRAND STANDING IN LAS VEGAS. BY EMILY CARRUS



The Fountains of Bellagio

To admire them is one thing; to control them, another. The Fountains of Bellagio, with their dazzling demonstration of water 1,000 feet long and 460 feet high, are among Las Vegas's most iconic showpieces—and to be the creative force behind them for just one night is an experience reserved for an elite few. “Luxe is getting to choreograph the music for the evening that the fountains are going to play to and then watching the show from

a reception at the Hyde, Bellagio's exclusive nightclub. There is literally a big button to push to get them started. Experiences like these are what people continue to talk about over and over again,” says Mike Dominguez, senior vice president and chief sales officer for MGM Resorts. “Using just the assets we already have here in Las Vegas, we can create amazing over-the-top experiences for groups.” Whether they're reveling in a custom-created fountain composition from a sleek

Phillipe Starck-designed nightspot, driving a lavish Lamborghini around a slick racetrack, or savoring a sumptuous breakfast delivered by their own personal butler, incentives and VIP groups can be made to feel on top of the world in Las Vegas. “It's not just transportation: It's a dream car. It's not just fine-dining: It's a celebrity chef. It's not just entertainment: It's hundreds of spectacular shows with top talent,” says Debby Jacobs Felker, vice president of sales for the destination

management company Destinations By Design. “Las Vegas is known for elevating every experience.”

DO NOT DISTURB

In this city that regularly caters to high rollers, indulgence and extravagance are par for the course—so planners will have no trouble impressing a group of hedge fund executives or well-traveled entrepreneurs. “I don't believe any place on planet earth has got the facilities that we do,” says Chris Meyer, vice president of global business sales for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). “Everyone that steps into these properties is always amazed at how incredible they are, from the treatments on the walls to what they have going on in their lobby areas.”

From Aria to Mandarin Oriental to Wynn Las Vegas, each property is upscale in its own nuanced style. That's especially evident at some of the boutique-style hotels that have cropped up in the city, many of which have a unique hotel-within-a-hotel location that can be a boon to business programs. Under one roof, planners will find a wider range of guest rooms, suites, and services to help them satisfy all kinds of attendees within a single group. The W Hotel, for example, is an intimate enclave with the SLS Las Vegas. Under the Caesars Palace roof is the sophisticated Nobu Hotel, featuring modern Japanese-inspired design. And at Mandalay Bay, the Four Seasons is an Art Deco-styled masterpiece taking over some of the tower's top floors. Undoubtedly, one of the ultimate landing spots for VIPs

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is over at the MGM Grand: Its Mansion is considered one of the most exclusive bookings in town. “It is like no other facility that you’ll see in the world. It is an invitation-only location, and when you step inside you feel like you’ve been transported to Europe,” says Dominguez of the 18th-century Tuscan-inspired villas, some of which measure 12,000 square feet and have private swimming pools. There is a seven-to-one staff to guest ratio, temperature-controlled atrium that is nothing short of spectacular, and sumptuous private screening room.

Because the Mansion has its own private entrance, it is especially favored by high-profile Las Vegas visitors. “Specifically when there are privacy or security concerns for members of a group, the private entrance and exit caters to that,” he says. Small groups that just want a peek, though, can have it: The Mansion is available for one-off bookings and has facilities for groups that include a boardroom and opulent dining room.

Indeed, even just a few hours in some of Las Vegas’ most exclusive spaces can be a real

treat for groups and make attendees feel like superstars, even for a night. The city’s hotels have an impressive collective of hotel suites—featuring high-end artwork, panoramic views of The Strip, plunge pools, and even a private bowling lane—that can be made available for receptions and the like.

“Whether it’s just champagne and appetizers—or a progressive event from one suite to another where the theme and entertainment are different from room to room—these details make for over-the-top experiences. Some of the suites in Las Vegas have two stories, and many have been featured in major motion pictures,” says Jacobs Felker.

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, for example, has Wraparound Terrace Suites with an outdoor space well suited to its moniker, and the Hard Rock Hotel has several swanky, upscale enclaves designed to host rock-and-roll royalty.

The experience of an intimate event in such surrounds can be exhilarating for groups and stimulate great conversations. “It doesn’t seem real when you



are in them,” says Dominguez, highlighting the five-diamond and five-star rated Sky Suites at Area and the two-level Sky Loft Suites at MGM Grand. “To be outdoors on a terrace overlooking the Strip—that’s a real ‘wow’ factor.”

Venues more accessible to the general public—nightclubs, pool decks, spas, restaurants, and lounges—can be booked for private events that are equally impressive for groups. They range in style, so planners can suit the sophistication to their specific group. The new rooftop Breathe Pool Ultra Lounge at the Hard Rock Hotel, for example, has an acrylic-edged pool and cool ambiance. A few blocks away, Wynn’s Chairman Salon is decidedly different in character and evocative of France’s Belle Epoque era.

Here, grandiosity and opulence are highlighted by a dramatic curving staircase and burnished chintz.

And over at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas, lots of shimmer and sparkle create a multisensory experience. “The jewel of The Cosmopolitan, the Chandelier Bar, is a three-story architectural masterpiece draped in Swarovski crystals,” says Brad Meyer, associate director of sales for the property.

ON WITH THE SHOW

The spotlight is bright on Las Vegas’s entertainment scene, and with good reason. “With all of the residencies throughout the city, there are great A-list performers right in our backyard,” says Jacobs Felker. “This is what you just can’t get

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in other destinations.”

Access and proximity to so many big-name stars can lead to amazing experiences for groups. “We have had instances where Paul McCartney played a private event before he did a live event at one of our arenas,” says Chris Meyer of the LVCVA. “Similar for Elton John and U2.” Las Vegas has both large-scale arenas and more intimate music venues, such as Hard Rock Hotel’s 650-seat Vinyl, to accommodate these exclusive concerts and events.

Indeed, sometimes entertainment extravagance means more than just a ticket in this town—and luckily, there are lots of options. Private meet-and-greets with performers can be exhilarating for attendees. In Las Vegas, they can get face time in with the eponymous performers of the Blue Man Group, for example. The company also offers 75-minute behind-the-scenes tours as well as a chance to sit-

in on the nightly sound check.

The famed entertainment company Cirque Du Soleil has exciting add-on options, too. Its SPARK sessions let attendees take to the stage themselves for guided brainstorming and rebuilding sessions based on the creativity and acrobatic style of its signature shows. For fans, this can be an ultimate once-in-a-lifetime experience. “To see Michael Jackson ONE and then go learn some of the dance steps with the performers and how they create the show is so unique to Las Vegas,” says Dominguez. “When you’re hooked up to the wires and spinning like a Cirque performer yourself, it’s truly over-the-top and leaves a lasting impression of Las Vegas being the ultimate entertainment destination.”

TOP TABLES

From crooners to chefs, what happens at the dining table is a show unto itself in Las Vegas



with food legends ranging from Joel Robuchon to Bobby Flay to Emeril Lagasse on the city’s restaurant scene. “Where else can you do a buy-out of the Michelin three-starred restaurant?” says Meyer. “You’ve got these very, very high-end places that are set up to handle groups. In other places of the world, that’s just not always possible.”

For an elite few, Las Vegas’ top restaurants offer yet another

extravagance. “Almost all of the restaurants here are starting to gear towards a chef’s table. Groups on the smaller side can get the unique experience to be right up close to the chefs preparing the meal, not only for them, but the entire restaurant,” says Jacobs Felker.

Inspired by the tastes in the city, amateur chefs and cooking enthusiasts in any group will thrill at getting in a kitchen themselves. Among the exciting opportunities for gourmands in town is the newly launched Wynn Master Class Series of interactive educational experiences in food and wine (as well as other subjects), led by top experts in each field. To learn from the best—crafting pasta with the executive chef of Wynn’s Sinatra restaurant, Theo Schoenegger, or blending grape varieties with a master sommelier—is an experience most attendees can’t get at home. “The first workshops proved to be successful and we’re seeing a lot of interest, so we’ll be adding additional experiences throughout the year—all of which can be repurposed for a private group setting,” says Pedram Pakneshan, executive director of

DRESS TO IMPRESS

What’s a night out without the right outfit to wear? Luckily, Las Vegas’ retail scene showcases world-renowned fashion brands and ahead-of-the-trend designer boutiques. There are new spots for high-end shopping opening their doors regularly in Las Vegas, so the shopping scene is always fresh and exciting. Last year, for example, the Atrium at The Palazzo opened as one of the city’s newest high-end retail meccas, and in 2018, Wynn Las Vegas will unveil Wynn Plaza, another high-end retail experience with valet service, two atrium-filled stories, and a skylight rotunda.

Even better, there are ways planners can elevate the shopping experience for groups in ways that will feel totally red carpet. One way, says Debby Jacobs Felker of DMC Destinations by Design, is by hiring personal shoppers to guide attendees through their retail experiences and help them style today’s hottest looks. “We have also brought in designers to do some very fun and exclusive fashion show events. Afterwards, attendees can try on the outfits they saw on the runway and shop for the looks they liked,” she says.

Retail hubs in Las Vegas are so refined and upscale that even without any planned shopping activities, their ambiance is sublime for networking events and receptions—similar to art galleries and museums. That’s the case at Wynn Collection, one of the city’s upscale retail spots. “Even the furniture placement was thoroughly considered during the design process, with plenty of areas to lounge with a glass of Champagne or small bites by Wynn’s catering team,” says Pedram Pakneshan, executive director of convention sales. “Its salon-like environment encourages lingering.”

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convention sales at Wynn.

Chris Meyer of the LVCVA also highlights the growing microbrewery scene in Las Vegas as a chance for planners to add exclusivity to events. They can bring in master brewers for private workshops or treat attendees to extra-

special liquor tastings. Think “400-dollar pours,” he says.

KEY IN THE IGNITION

Extravagance comes in many forms in Las Vegas, with transportation being no exception. Imagine the feeling attendees will have when they

roll up to dinner in a Rolls Royce or another rental car of their dreams. But a drive down Las Vegas Boulevard isn't the only way attendees can get their luxury car fix. For the right price, they can maneuver a Ferrari, Porsche, or professional racecar for several loops around one of the tracks near town.

Commuting around Las Vegas by helicopter is another option. Maverick Helicopters can shuttle high-end customers from the Las Vegas Strip all over the city—and to the outskirts, too, with the adrenaline rush of the ride complemented by awe-inducing views of The Strip. Meyer says helicopters are a great way to get attendees to and from such events as a NASCAR race or one of the crowd-drawing festivals that are on Las Vegas' event schedule.

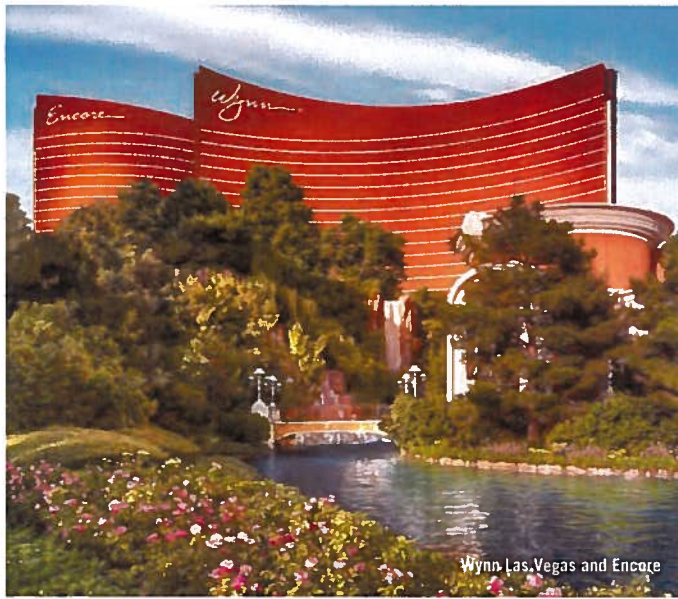
“They can get top-end customers there in a few

minutes. That means they're not sitting in a car or bus in traffic all day long with several hundred thousand other participants also trying to get to one of these great events,” says Meyer. Maverick also combines flights with food tours in an appealing package; another includes a private 75-minute yoga session atop the gorgeous rock formations of the Valley of Fire—to which attendees arrive by helicopter, of course.

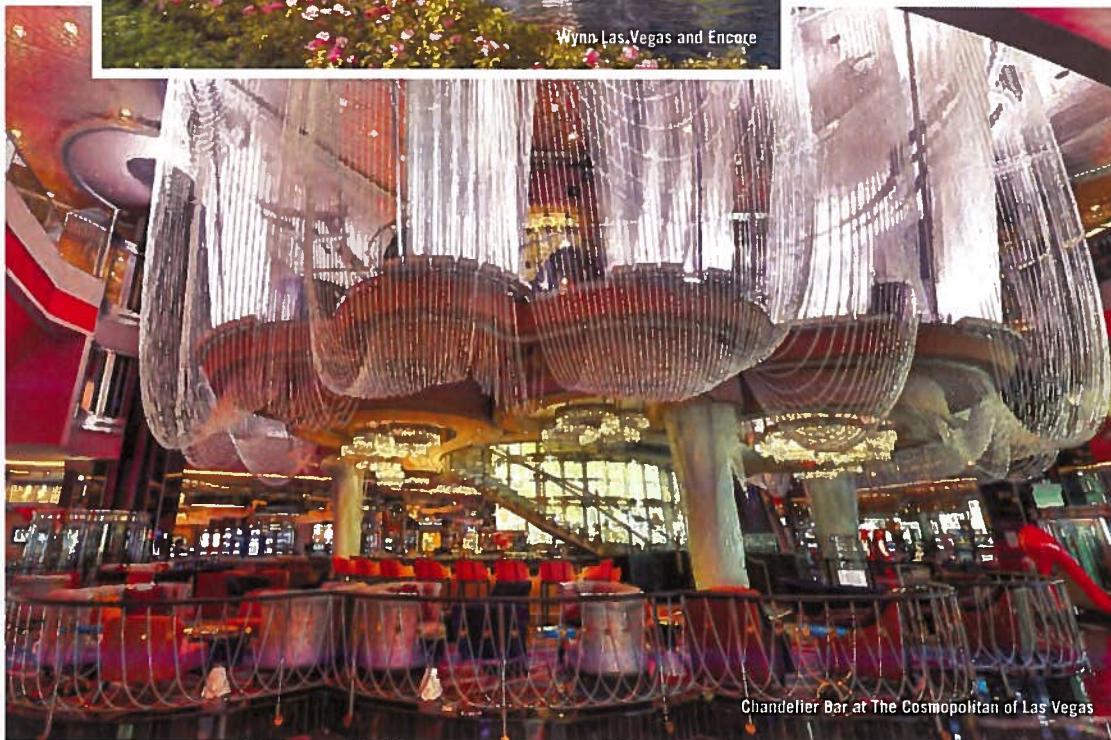
Any sore muscles—from achieving a challenging new yoga pose or dancing 'til dawn as a VIP in one of Las Vegas' nightclubs—can be soothed in sumptuous style, too. “We have more than 40 of the world's top spas, and any number of experiences can be arranged,” says Meyer. Bookings for incentive winners and VIPs can include a few hours at The Cosmopolitan's Sahara Spa, which offers a truly indulgent hammamm experience inspired by a purification practice that dates back centuries.

Whatever the category, Las Vegas continues to deliver—over and over again. “People talk about luxury in different places, but they don't always invest in that luxury,” says Meyer. “Las Vegas constantly refreshes its ultra-luxury offers—in fact all of our product is refreshed on a very regular basis.”

For that reason, planners know they can bring high-end programs back to the city repeatedly. “Attendees that have been there and done that and seen it all—it is very possible that when they come back it will have all changed,” he says. “What's new is new again in Las Vegas.” ■



Wynn Las Vegas and Encore



Chandelier Bar at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas