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History of Las Vegas



The Journal



Las Vegas Come Back, Optimism in the air in the Gaming capital



Las Vegas skylight 2021

Las Vegas, NV March 3rd, 2021
By Shannon S. Okada, Managing Director of Gaming with HVS, The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Las Vegas economy has been extremely harsh given the market's reliance on visitation and conventions. Following five consecutive years of accommodating more than 42 million visitors, Las Vegas hosted just over 19 million people in 2020 (the lowest number of visitors since 18.1 million in 1989). While vaccination rollouts have begun in Nevada, measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus remain in place. Continued weak performance is anticipated through the first half of 2021. Thereafter, the recovery of travel and general economic performance is expected to accelerate as vaccines, medical therapies, and public confidence support the beginning of the return to pre-pandemic levels. Fortunately, construction is classified as an essential business in Nevada and has continued throughout the pandemic. New developments will contribute to the eventual recovery of the market.



COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On March 17, 2020, Nevada's Governor Steve Sisolak ordered the closure of Nevada's nonessential businesses and urged residents to

implement social-distancing measures to reduce spreading the COVID-19 virus. The Las Vegas economy was devastated in April and May 2020 due to the shut – down of businesses. Governor Sisolak authorized certain businesses, including restaurants, barbershops, hair salons, and most retail businesses, to reopen with limitations beginning May 9, 2020, and Nevada began its emergence from the pandemic shutdown. Nevada's casinos were allowed to reopen on June 4, 2020, with restrictions. The initial guidelines from the Nevada Gaming Control Board (NGCB) for the reopening of casinos included requirements such as reducing casino capacity by 50%, physical distancing at slots and table games, using personal protection equipment (PPE), and cleaning surfaces frequently.



New Prendi Café at the Sahara featuring OscarTek new models

On November 22, 2020, Governor Sisolak ordered stricter requirements on mask usage and a rollback on permitted crowd sizes in both public and private settings given the surge in the number of COVID-19 cases. Requirements effective November 24, 2020, which remained in place through February 14, 2021, included the following:

Masks usage when around someone who is not part of your immediate household, whether indoors or outdoors.

Restaurants and bars limited to 25% capacity, with no more than four people per table; reservations are required, and no walk-ins are allowed.

Gaming operations restricted to 25% capacity and operated pursuant to rules issued by the NGCB. Gyms/fitness centers, dance and martial arts studios, museums, art galleries, libraries, zoos, aquariums, arcades, racetracks, bowling alleys, miniature golf, and amusement/theme parks limited to 25% capacity.

Public gatherings limited to 50 people, or to 25% of capacity, whichever number is lower.

Private gatherings limited to ten people from no more than two households, whether indoors or outdoors.

Indoor malls and retail stores allowed to operate at 50% capacity limit.

Due to declines in the number of active COVID-19 cases and the local positivity rate, changes to restrictions aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19 were relaxed as of February 15, 2021, and included the following:

Restaurant capacity increased to 35%, with no reservations required.

Capacity at casinos, places of worship, gyms/fitness centers, dance and martial arts studios, arcades, racetracks, bowling alleys, and pool halls (and other venues providing similar activities) increased to 35%.

Capacity at libraries, museums, art galleries, zoos, and aquariums increased to 50%.

Public gatherings and event limits increased from 10 to 100 individuals, or 35% capacity. Venues eligible for large gatherings capped at 20% of total fixed seated capacity, with strict social-distancing requirements.

Beginning March 15, 2021, businesses operating at 35% capacity will be allowed to move back to 50% capacity, and public gatherings and event limits are expected to be increased to 250 people, or 50% capacity.

On January 21, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order that adds safeguards to international travel and requires masks on

planes, ships, and other public transportation. The executive order also requires international travelers to show proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test before entering the U.S. and follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines to quarantine once they arrive. International travelers are asked to stay home at least seven days if they get tested again, or ten days if they do not get tested. The CDC issued an order that took effect on February 1, 2021, requiring travelers to wear a mask on public transportation in the U.S.; specifically, passengers on airplanes, trains, buses, subways, ships, ferries, taxis, and ride-shares must wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth from entrance to exit. Additionally, people must wear masks on the premises of transportation hubs such as airports, train and subway stations, bus and ferry terminals, seaports, and ports of entry. Masks must stay on while people await, board, travel, and disembark public transportation. While the new mandates could be the beginning of the return of international travel, the order may have only a minimal impact on Las Vegas visitation or COVID-19 infection rates given that Nevada has enforced public mask usage since June 2020.

As of February 21, 2021, Clark County had reported 224,597 COVID-19 cases and 3,798 related deaths, representing the majority of Nevada's total 291,145 cases and 4,882 fatalities. The state's two-week positivity rate, the percentage of people tested who are confirmed to have the disease caused by COVID-19, had decreased from a high of 21.7% on January 13, 2021, to 9.6% as of February 21, 2021.

To learn more, click below to request a copy of the full report. This in-depth article examines trends and market developments affecting the Las Vegas hospitality market. If you encounter any issues requesting the report, please contact Lizzette Casarin at lcasarin@hvs.com.

History of las Vegas

1905

Las Vegas was founded as a city on May 15, 1905, when 110 acres of land situated between Stewart Avenue on the north, Garces Avenue to the south, Main Street to the west, and Fifth Street (Las Vegas Boulevard) to the east, were auctioned off by the railroad company. The completion of the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, linking Southern California with Salt Lake City, established Las Vegas as a railroad town. The availability of water made Las Vegas an ideal refueling point and rest stop. J. T. McWilliams laid out his Original Las Vegas Townsite (now Historic West Las Vegas) on what is now the west side of the railroad tracks



1911

Las Vegas was incorporated on June 1, 1911. On that day, voters in the unincorporated township of Las Vegas went to the polls and voted on the issue of incorporation. The results were 168 in favor of incorporation and 57 opposed. Las Vegas Age front page - June 3, 1911.

1922

The Historic Westside School was built in Historic West Las Vegas on W. Washington Avenue and D Street. The building was the first grammar school in West Las Vegas and is the oldest remaining schoolhouse in Las Vegas. The school is listed on the city of Las Vegas Historic Property Register, and the state and National Register of Historic Places.

1931

Divorce laws were liberalized in Nevada, making residency easier to attain. A "quickie" divorce could be attained after six weeks of residency. These short-term residents stayed at dude ranches, which were working ranches taking in paying guests to help make ends meet. Surviving examples are located at Floyd Lamb Park at Tule Springs. The first gaming license in Nevada was issued to Mayme Stocker at the Northern Club. Beginning in 1931, the construction of Hoover Dam brought

an influx of construction workers, which started a population boom during the Great Depression and gave the valley's economy a needed boost. The Las Vegas High School now the Las Vegas Academy, was built at S. Seventh Street and Bridger Avenue. The opulent art deco style high school is listed on the city of Las Vegas Historic Property Register and the National Register of Historic Places.



1941

The Las Vegas Army Air Field (now Nellis Air Force Base) was built in the northeast. The western-style El Rancho Vegas hotel-casino, became the first themed resort on the Strip. This was followed by the Last Frontier (1942), Flamingo (1946) and Thunderbird (1948) hotels and casinos. On Fremont Street the El Cortez hotel-casino opened

1946

Fremont Street from Main to Third Streets was named Glitter Gulch by the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce.

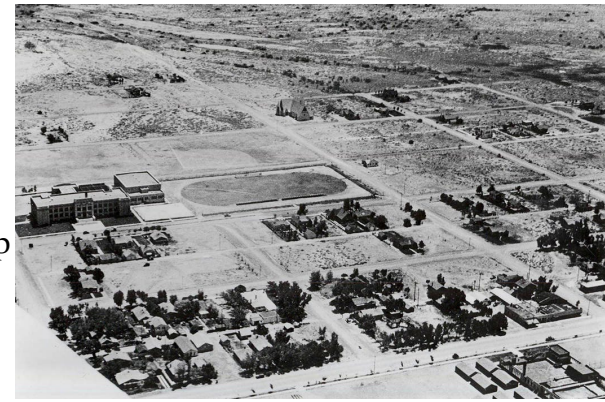
1950

Tennessee Congressman Carey Estes Kefauver held hearings into the mob at the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse in downtown Las

Vegas.

1966

On both Fremont Street and the Strip, hotels and casinos were engaging in face lifts, remodels and multi-story additions. Howard Hughes began a buying spree of Las Vegas hotels and other businesses. His presence helped pave the way for the corporate ownership

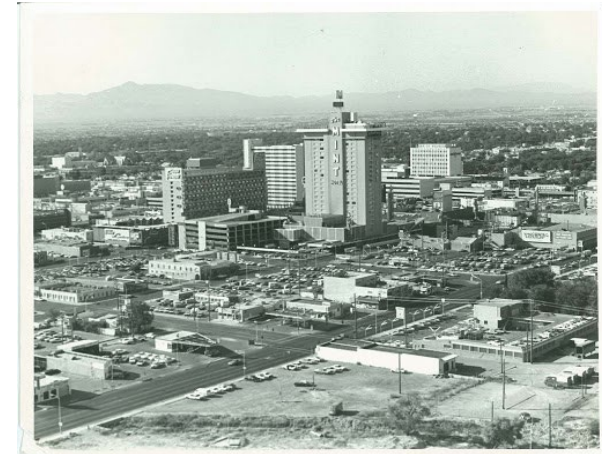


1985

Starting in the mid 1980s, a period of unprecedented growth began. Annual population increases averaging nearly seven percent caused the city's population to almost double between 1985 and 1995, increasing 97.6 percent from 186,380 to 368,360.

1995

The Fremont Street Experience opened. The \$70-million canopy above Fremont Street provides visitors with a spectacular light and sound show. This creation also ended auto traffic on the street where teenagers cruised in the 1940s and 1950s.



2007

The three-block area known as the Fremont East Entertainment District opened. As part of its downtown revitalization efforts, the city's Redevelopment Agency contributed funds to this renovation in an effort to attract additional non-gaming nightclubs, cocktail lounges and entertainment hot spots to the area

2012

The National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement opened inside the former U.S. Post Office and Courthouse located at 300 Stewart Ave. The new City Hall, located at 495 S. Main St., opened for business in downtown Las Vegas, leaving the previous City Hall available for development by Zappos.com. The Smith Center for Performing Arts opened bringing Broadway productions, concerts and a home for culture in Las Vegas

History in the early period;

Paleo-Indian peoples, whose descendants include the Paiute, were the first inhabitants in the area, some 12,000 years ago. Their tools have been discovered at several sites in the Las Vegas Valley. The Ancestral Pueblo (Anasazi) and Paiute peoples came later and

Migrated between seasonal camps in the mountains and the valley. The first Europeans known to have entered the area were members of a Spanish exploration party led by Santa Fe trader Antonio Armijo and a scout, Rafael Rivera, who were seeking a new route from Santa Fe to Los Angeles. Arriving in the area in 1829 and noting its wetlands and meadows, Armijo described it on his map as Las Vegas. In that same year the first Americans to see the area were in a trapping party that included frontiersman Kit Carson; he returned 15 years later as guide for the pioneering mission to the region led by John Charles Frémont.



In 1855 a group of Mormon missionaries settled in the area. Led by church elder William Bringham, the Mormons built a log fort surrounded by garden plots and fields of grain. In 1856 Bringham's men discovered lead in the Spring Mountains, and Mormon church leader Brigham Young sent metallurgists from Salt Lake City to develop a mine for the purpose of making tools and ammunition. The find did not become profitable at that time but was developed during World War I as the Potosi mine, a rich source of galena ore and silver.

The land and climate were harsh, however, and the crops failed the second year, which led to internal dissent and Bringham's dismissal. Under the leadership of Samuel Thompson, the settlers again faced hardships in 1857, as insects devoured most of that year's crops. The dispirited Mormon missionaries abandoned the fort at the end of the year. Other Mormons came to the area in the next few years, notably Daniel and Ann Bonelli, who operated a ferry on the Colorado River. The Las Vegas Valley—part of Arizona Territory until 1866, when it joined the state of Nevada—remained little explored and thinly populated for several decades. The census of 1900 counted only 30 people, almost all of whom were employees of a cattle ranch that had been established near the site of the old Mormon fort.

The early 20th century

At the turn of the 20th century, Las Vegas was much smaller than Searchlight, a mining town about 60 miles (100 km) to the south. The community's fortunes improved, however, with the arrival of William A. Clark, a mining magnate and politician from Montana for whom the present-day county was named. Clark, a principal investor in the company building a railroad from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City, recognized that the artesian springs of Las Vegas would provide a reliable water source along the route. He purchased a large tract of land in the Las Vegas Valley, secured water rights to the springs there, and arranged for a railroad depot to be built. Clark also exercised his political and economic clout, openly bribing legislators to secure favours for the railroad.

In 1905 Clark organized an auction of his landholdings near the new railroad depot and station café, which included the town's first casino. The auction, heavily advertised in the railroad's two terminal cities, far exceeded Clark's expectations and resulted in the sale of nearly every available lot. Clark used a portion of the proceeds to build a pipeline from the springs to the depot and dig a well, which would assure a steady water supply for the new town. He also helped fund the construction of secondary rail lines to the mining towns of Tonopah and Goldfield.

Las Vegas grew slowly at first—with the exception of one area, which rapidly developed as a legally sanctioned zone of prostitution and gambling. The zone suffered a modest setback in 1910 when the Nevada legislature outlawed gambling. In response, the casinos went underground and continued to flourish covertly until gambling was again legalized in 1931. Las Vegas, which was officially founded on May 15, 1905, was incorporated on March 16, 1911, two years after it had been named the county seat.

Development as a tourist destination

Clark sold his share of the railroad to the Union Pacific Company in 1921. Small ranches began to pop up in and around Las Vegas, some of them thinly disguised brothels, and the town soon became a popular weekend destination for residents of Los Angeles. An influx of people who worked in the Hollywood movie industry helped fuel a growth spurt, bringing the population to more than 5,000 by 1930. Californians were lured not only by the climate and gambling but also by Nevada's newly relaxed divorce laws, which required only a six-week residency in the state before one was eligible to file for divorce. Construction of the Boulder (later Hoover) Dam across nearby Black Canyon in the 1930s, during the height of the Great Depression, proved to be a tremendous boon for Las Vegas. The project, one of the largest and most ambitious public works endeavours ever undertaken by the federal government, would come to provide the two key commodities that made contemporary Las Vegas possible: water and electric power. More immediately, the city benefited from the thousands of dam builders who came to the small town each weekend, lured by the handful of casinos and other diversions.

Wartime and early postwar growth

With the advent of World War II, Las Vegas grew even larger as the dam builders were followed by defense workers and military personnel. Nevada Senator Pat McCarran successfully lobbied the federal government to establish two major installations near Las Vegas in 1941: a magnesium-processing plant southeast of the city in Henderson and a military airfield just to the northeast. The latter, now Nellis Air Force Base, eventually grew to occupy an area of some 1,350 square miles (3,500 square km), including the U.S. Air Force's vast testing range northwest of the city. These and other defense-related installations set up in the region brought in thousands more people. Hotel owners, encouraged by the large influx of newcomers, began to offer entertainment featuring top-name performers such as Frank Sinatra, Tommy Dorsey, and the Andrews Sisters.

After World War II, many of the returning soldiers chose to settle in the Las Vegas area. Their decision was made easier because air-conditioning systems were rapidly being installed in buildings, which made Las Vegas and the rest of the Southwest much more habitable during the hot summer months. Growth was rapid, the city's population nearly tripling between 1940 and 1950 and more than doubling again in the following decade.

Emergence of the contemporary city

The prospect of enormous profits from legalized gambling and prostitution proved to be a strong attraction for organized crime syndicates. In 1945 Bugsy Siegel, one of the most prominent of these criminals, began constructing the Flamingo, the city's first major casino and hotel complex. He incurred a large debt with Meyer Lansky and other mob associates, and the first months of the Flamingo's operation were shaky. It opened for good in March 1947, but Siegel was murdered shortly thereafter—according to one theory, at the behest of Lansky and other disgruntled investors—and Lansky immediately took over the business. The Flamingo's

enormous success encouraged more ventures, and several new casinos sprang up along what had become known as the Strip: the Thunderbird in 1948, the Desert Inn in 1950, the Sands and the Sahara in 1952, and the Riviera, the Royal Nevada, and the Dunes in 1955.

Although organized crime largely created contemporary Las Vegas, its dominance was short-lived. By the late 1950s the newly established Nevada Gaming Commission—which was responsible for licensing and overseeing gambling operations—began to curtail severely the freedom of gangsters to operate in the city. In the early 1960s the commission formulated its so-called “Black Book”; seeking to remove corruption from the gambling industry, the commission listed people with criminal records and banned from the casinos anyone listed in the book. Through vigorous enforcement of the law and the removal of corrupt public officials, the commission largely succeeded in separating crime organizations from the casinos, and corporations later took their place.

Also of importance to the development of the city were private individuals, among them Wilbur Clark, the owner of the Desert Inn, who proposed that the federal government retire its World War II-era debts by holding a national lottery, and Howard Hughes, who kept a suite at the Desert Inn throughout the 1950s and lived there permanently from 1966 to 1970. Some of the investments made by Hughes proved to be failures, including the costly Landmark Casino, which went bankrupt, but others were outstanding successes that brought Hughes vast profits. The Howard Hughes Parkway, a major thoroughfare that skirts the University of Nevada and McCarran International Airport, honours his many contributions to the city’s development.

The area also became well known in the 1950s and ’60s for the nuclear weapons tests conducted at the federal government’s Nevada Test Site, some 65 miles (105 km) from Las Vegas. At first the local populace responded favourably to these events, which could easily be seen by city dwellers; for a time, the atomic bomb’s mushroom cloud was even incorporated into the official seal of Clark county. Soon, however, protests were mounted against aboveground testing, forcing the government to conduct its experiments underground; Hughes, one of the most influential protestors, argued that open-air testing would drive visitors away from the city. It also became apparent in later years that exposure to nuclear fallout from those tests was yielding a high incidence of radiation-related cancers.

Las Vegas continued to grow in the 1960s, thanks in part to the publicity brought by such popular entertainers as Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., Wayne Newton, and Elvis Presley, all of whom became residents there. Its growth faltered only for a few years, beginning with a nationwide economic recession in the late 1970s; in addition, tourism declined after a fire at the MGM Grand Hotel killed more than 80 people in November 1980. Entrepreneur Steve Wynn, who had operated the Golden Nugget Casino since the early 1970s, used the downturn to acquire and renovate old casinos and build new ones, foremost among them the lavishly expensive Mirage, which opened in 1989.

In the late 1980s the city’s overall growth accelerated to match that of its gaming and tourist economy. The city’s population increased by nearly 100,000 between 1980 and 1990 to exceed a quarter million, and it surpassed the half-million mark early in the 21st century. The metropolitan area reached one million inhabitants in the mid-1990s and was well on its way to doubling that number a decade later.

The venerable Dunes was demolished in October 1993—in true Vegas tradition, as a spectacle in front of a huge crowd of onlookers. It was the last of the city's 1950s-era hotels, and its destruction symbolically ushered in a new era of elite hotels, including the Venetian and the Bellagio. In addition, these new hotels were concentrated in fewer hands; the MGM Grand Corporation bought the Mirage Resorts Corporation in March 2000, effectively ending Steve Wynn's chairmanship and bringing several major resorts under one corporate umbrella. Wynn, however, remained a presence in the city, opening a new casino resort complex in 2005. In a city that has long been characterized by such periods of sweeping growth and change, tourism and its vast array of ancillary services have provided Las Vegas with its most constant measure of continuity over the years



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