

1994

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### Recommended Citation

Becker, William A. (1994) "Can Las Vegas Go Family Friendly?," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol13/iss1/3>

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# CAN LAS VEGAS GO FAMILY FRIENDLY?

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Las Vegas is in transition. It is changing from a single- to a multi-purpose destination that is family oriented. Growing pains are occurring but growth is slow and steady. Much has been invested in physical plant. Change is necessary because Las Vegas must diversify to develop a new identity to compete in the global market.

## INTRODUCTION

For many years Las Vegas has had an image of the Gambling Mecca of America. It offered an 'adults only' combination of casino gambling, R-rated shows and nearby legalized prostitution. With a series of multi-million dollar projects that include an indoor theme park, a number of heavily themed hotels and G-rated shows, Las Vegas is involved in a metamorphoses from what some critics call the "Sodom of the Sands" into what they may need to retitle "Disney of the Desert." Hotel owners are gambling \$2 billion that parents might come to view Las Vegas as a friendly family entertainment center. (4)

Las Vegas is concerned about its future as a tourist destination. They fear the spread of casino gambling to Atlantic City, gambling

boats on the Mississippi River, various Indian reservations, and the soon to be completed French Quarter casino in New Orleans. Casino gambling is now allowed in 14 states, and some form of gambling is permitted in 48 states. (12) They realize that gamblers now have many choices for casino gambling, lotteries and pari-mutual wagering. They also covet the spectacular growth of Orlando as a major tourist destination. It is hoped that a combination of spectacular new theme hotels and theme parks will lure the family vacation business away from Orlando to Las Vegas. A spokesman for the Circus Circus Hotel-Casino, which pioneered the family business in Las Vegas, said there is no doubt that the future of Las Vegas is as a destination resort for the family. (Moskowitz, 1993)

Las Vegas tourism officials are encouraged by the recent figures which show 21.8 million visitors last year, a 2.7 percent gain. Officials noted a 5.4 percent surge in guest traffic and a whopping 86 percent hotel occupancy rate for the first half of 1993, even though the Southern California recession has suppressed what traditionally has been the city's principal source of tourist dollars. (6)

The change has been coming for years. In 1968, Circus Circus was the first property to encourage young visitors. They offered live circus acts, a video arcade and a carnival type midway with games and shops. Despite the predictions of some, the place was a huge success. (5) The more recent trend started with the \$630 million Mirage Hotel-Casino which opened in 1989 with a jungle theme, along with white tigers, bottlenosed dolphins and an \$14 million exploding 40 foot volcano. Next came the 4,032 room Excalibur with it's King Arthur themed medieval castle and jousting knights on horseback. (12)

The new projects include the \$90 million Grand Slam Canyon indoor theme park; \$1 billion 5,009 room MGM Grand Hotel-Casino and theme park; the \$430 million, 3,000 room pirate themed Treasure Island Hotel-Casino; and the \$375 million 2,521 room Egyptian themed Luxor Hotel-Casino. These projects will add 10,530 rooms to the 77,449 now available. (1)

The \$1 billion MGM Grand Megaresort includes the largest resort hotel in the world, 5009 rooms; the largest casino in the world, four acres, the size of four football fields, with 3,500 slot machines; the 33 acre MGM Grand Adventures theme park; and the 15,200 seat MGM Garden special events arena. Other features include the Wizards Midway & Arcade, a 31,000 square foot carnival midway and arcade featuring 33 games of skill and a video arcade; King Looney's Youth Center, a child care center; the Grand Health Club & Spa; and the Grand Oasis, a beach entry swimming pool complex. (7)

The MGM megaresort complex has a heavy MGM movie theme, especially the "Wizard of Oz." The theme includes a nine-story MGM lion entrance, a re-creation of the

Wizard of Oz's Emerald City and the famed Yellow Brick Road.

The MGM Grand Adventures theme park has 12 major attractions, nine theme areas, a variety of entertainment, a dozen food and beverage outlets and 12 shops. Two major attractions are the "Deep Earth Exploration" and "Lightening Bolt." Deep Earth Exploration is a state-of-the-art motion simulator ride which makes a 4,000 mile journey through the earth's crust to it's flaming core. Lightening Bolt is an indoor roller coaster that shots by 52 images in a mere 70 seconds at 34 miles per hour, twice the speed of Disney Land's Space Mountain. (Moskowitz, 1993) MGM is hoping that 4 million people will visit the theme park each year. A maximum of 15,000 patrons will be allowed into the theme park at one time. (Moskowitz, 1993) Dan Shumny, senior vice-president of hotel sales, said that the park is a five-to-six hour experience. "We will stagger the admission time to try to coincide with the length of stay at the park." Larry Nettles, MGM leisure sales manager, said the purpose of the staggered admission times was to avoid the long lines that people complain about at Disneyland. An MGM park pass will cost \$25 for adults and \$20 for children. Only one day passes will be issued initially. (Moskowitz, 1993)

The Luxor Hotel-Casino project was developed by Circus Circus Enterprises at a cost of \$375 million. The hotel-casino takes the shape of a 30 story pyramid and features a winding Nile River barge ride past 4,000 years of Egyptian history in it's atrium. The atrium, billed as the world's largest, has three city-like gathering areas representing ancient Luxor, New York's Times Square, and a city of the future. The entertainment features a trio of "participatory adventures" that use virtual-reality technology to simulate landscapes in the past, present and

future. These include a 15 passenger simulator ride called Luxor Live, a 350 seat theatre showing a solar eclipse in 3-D, and a 350 seat "time transporter" named The Theater of Time, featuring a 70 foot vertical 70mm screen. (Moskowitz, 1993) Other attractions include a video arcade, a kosher deli on the River Nile, 2.3 acre casino and a health club and spa. (10)

To attract guests to the Luxor, developers have built a 10 story sphinx and an obelisk out front. Lasers will bounce between the sphinx, obelisk and a lagoon; the lagoon will boil and a water screen will appear displaying projections of King Tut's head. From the top of the pyramid, a powerful xenon light beam with the brightness of 40 billion candles shines brightly enough to be seen by air travelers 250 miles away. (4)

The Treasure Island hotel-casino was developed by the Mirage group. The \$430 million, 3,000 room project has been designed after the famous Robert Louis Stevenson pirate novel. From the strip, guests and passerby will be seeing an hourly mock sea battle that features 30 stuntmen and actors in a \$30 million pirate village with lagoon between the 90 foot pirate ship Hispaniola and the full-sized British frigate Royal Britannia. The British frigate is designed to break in half and "sink" at the end of each "battle."

The hotel-casino has Mutiny Bay, an 18,000 square foot arcade entertainment center set in an ancient Moorish castle; seven restaurants; two wedding chapels; tropical pool; health spa and salon; and is the permanent home to a new production of the famed Montreal based circus Cirque du Soleil in a 1,500 seat showroom.

Grand Slam Canyon is a \$90 million indoor, 5 acre, climate controlled, indoor theme

park. The "Adventure**dome**" was built 14 feet above ground level over a parking garage and is covered in a dome made of pink glass. The main attractions include the "Canyon Blaster", the only double loop, double corkscrew indoor roller coaster in the United States; The "Rim Runner, a water flume ride; two 45-foot-high tubular "Twist & Shout" slides; and "Hot Shots" laser tag, a high-tech interactive game played in a black-lit arena. Other features include "Dinotrek" with eight fully animated life-sized interactive dinosaurs in a natural looking setting; "Adults Quarters" which is a slot machine area for adults; a Mexican restaurant; and a Native American Village which includes cliff dwellings of the Pueblos. The park also has a video arcade and souvenir shop. (5)

Richard J. Brand, the Circus Circus Hotel Casino Vice President and General Manager said, "Circus Circus pioneered family entertainment in Las Vegas back in 1968. Because of the trend we initiated 25 years ago, Las Vegas has been transformed from an 'adults only' town into an increasingly popular family vacation destination. Just as Grand Slam Canyon demonstrates the evolution of life on our planet, the Adventuredome itself is another step in the evolution of Las Vegas." (3)

Future developments in Las Vegas include the Mirage group's demolition of the Dunes hotel and construction of a 3,000 room beach resort hotel. In addition to the existing golf course, entertainment will focus on an 18 acre lake with windsurfing, water skiing, paddleboats and possible outdoor water theater with fireworks at night. (12) Plans are also underway for the Hard Rock Hotel-Casino with a 326 room hotel by the people who built the successful Hard Rock Cafe restaurants. (11)

Karl Haas, the MGM director of theme park group sales said: "We hope to expand and open doors to people that are not just pure gamblers, but people looking for other alternative forms of entertainment. The new Las Vegas will be a family destination, and rides and attractions should provide an incentive for visitors to re-visit. You have to have a vehicle to draw people here and a theme park fills that niche." Market analysts

point out that 85 percent of all Americans have never been to Las Vegas, and that the biggest untapped segment is families. (Moskowitz, 1993) The Las Vegas hospitality industry is evolving from a strictly gambling mind-set to more of a vacation and resort orientation. The Mouse and Orlando surely have a fight on their hands for the family vacation dollar.

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