

Suggested Itinerary: Las Vegas, Nevada and Utah

Although many travellers have visited Las Vegas before, the city is constantly re-imagining itself, with new chef-driven restaurants, spectacular shows and gleaming attractions that provide ample reason to return. It's easy to spend a weekend or an entire week in Las Vegas, and then venture beyond the city to explore the area's stunning state and national parks.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Suggested: 3 - 5 days

Set in the desert of southern Nevada, Las Vegas is a resort town famous for its non-stop energy, 24-hour casinos and endless entertainment options. The city's focal point is the Strip, which is lined with elaborate themed resorts such as the pyramid-shaped Luxor, the Paris Las Vegas (with its half-size Eiffel Tower) and the Venetian, complete with its own Grand Canal. Whether you decide to stay in a luxury resort or in more modest accommodation, plan to try your luck at the many casinos, explore elegant and innovative dining options from big-name chefs, and be wowed by some of the city's famous entertainment. Shopping is a popular pastime, and the options are almost endless. Go window shopping at The Forum Shops at Caesars or The Shops at Crystals and Via Bellagio. For budget-friendly shopping, head to the north end of the Strip to the Fashion Show Mall or to the Las Vegas Premium Outlets. For a truly unique experience, visit the Downtown Container Park – home to hip, artsy boutiques, galleries, restaurants and live music.

Valley of Fire State Park, Nevada

Suggested: 1 - 2 days

Less than an hour from the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas, Valley of Fire State Park features spectacular attractions of a very different sort. Magnificent sandstone formations that date back more than 150 million years, along with ancient petroglyphs and abundant wildlife draw visitors to this location which is the oldest state park in Nevada. Many of the park's animals, including bobcats, jackrabbits and coyotes, are nocturnal, giving a different meaning to 'nightlife'.

Zion National Park, Utah

Suggested: 2 – 3 days

Visitors who drive another three hours northeast will come to Zion National Park, famous for its steep red cliffs and slot canyons, towers and monoliths, and rivers and waterfalls. Hike among enormous cottonwood trees along the Virgin River, then explore its waterfalls and hanging garden. One can't-miss experience is a hike through water in the narrowest section of Zion Canyon, with walls a thousand feet tall (300 m) and the river just 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 metres) wide. This area is frequently photographed due to its amazing grandeur. Observe the abundant wildlife in the park, including California condors, peregrine falcons, mountain lions and grey foxes. A five-mile (8 km) scenic drive along the Kolob Canyons Road allows visitors to see the crimson canyons and gain access to trails and dramatic overlooks.

Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah

Suggested: 2 - 3 days

Take your time as you drive the 70 miles (113 km) to Bryce Canyon National Park – it's the best way to appreciate the beautiful landscape en route. Once in Bryce Canyon, take the park's 38-mile (61 km) round-trip scenic drive to get the lay of the land and choose which overlooks and hikes to return to. One not to miss is the hike down to the expansive Bryce Amphitheater. This impressive natural landscape sits below the Rim Trail hiking path and is filled with hoodoos – brightly coloured, tall, thin rock spires. Plan to spend several days at the park so that you can experience both sunrise and sunset here, and photograph the views from overlooks such as Sunrise Point, Sunset Point, Inspiration Point and Bryce Point. Stay on after dark to see the vast, star-filled night sky.

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