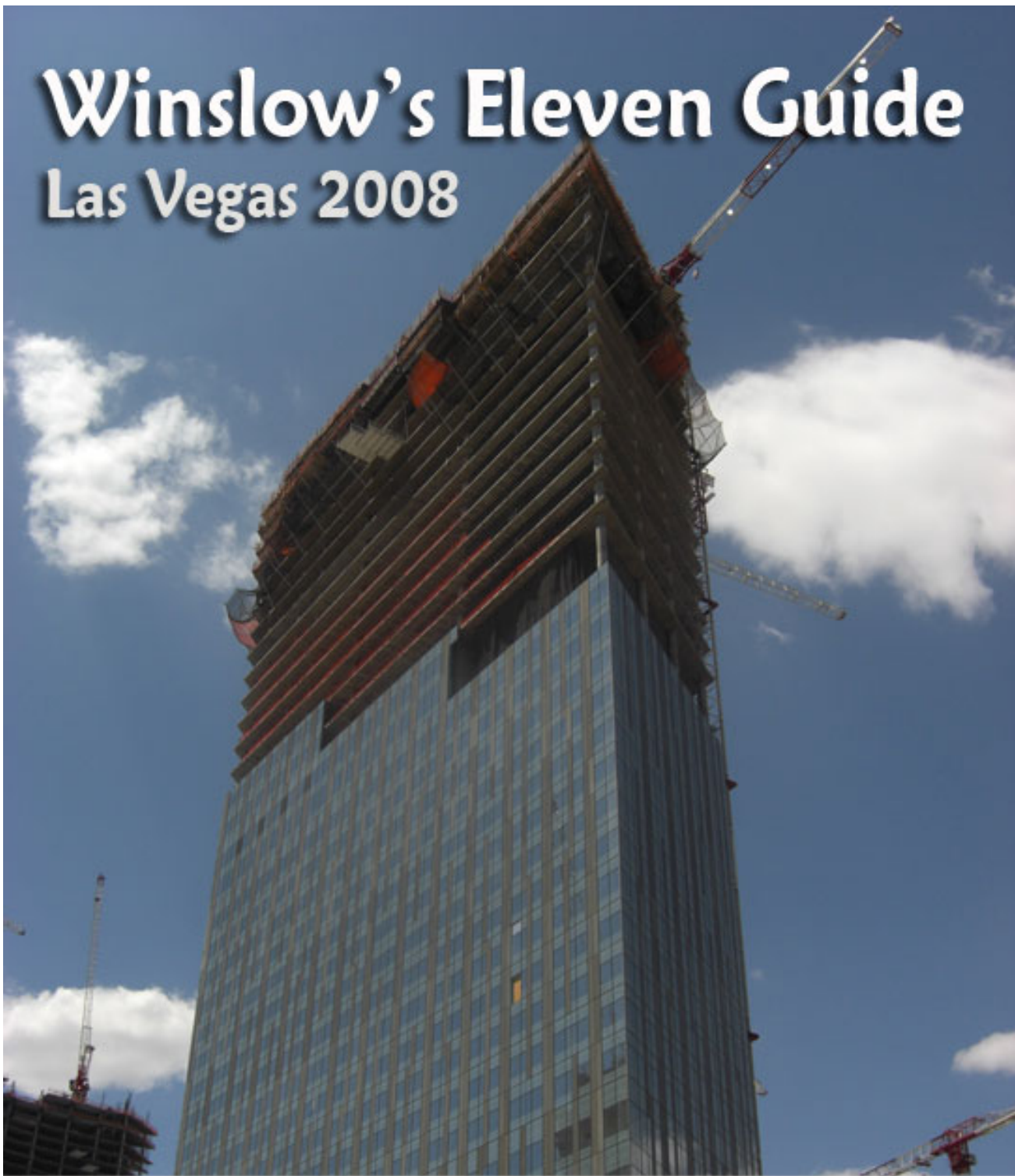


Winslow's Eleven Guide

Las Vegas 2008



Foreward by
David G. Schwartz
Author, *Roll The Bones: The History of Gambling*

Will Winslow

*For Suni
Now that we've got a new traveling partner,
it will only get better.*

Will Winslow
Winslow's Eleven Guide: Las Vegas 2008
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Las Vegas, Nevada

Foreward by David G. Schwartz

As you might know by now (particularly if you read last year's edition), I'm Will Winslow.

Why, you might ask, would an almost entirely obscure author publish something under a pen name then admit writing it in the first sentence?

Sure, this is the flimsiest deception since Frank Booth's well-dressed man outfit, but there's a good reason for it: I wanted to write stuff that was fun, but didn't quite have the seriousness of my academic or "straight" non-fiction. I try to keep that stuff as light as possible, and this is about as light it gets.

I figured top-ten lists were kind of boring, so a few top-eleven lists might pique your curiosity. Thus, a small, free, guidebook was born. It's smaller than last year's, but time is scarce, and this *is* free.

I see you using this short guide as a complement to your other research into Las Vegas, be it word of mouth or from guidebooks. I don't have anything in here on lodging, entertainment, or shopping, and most of the restaurants are off the Strip. If you only did the things in here, you'd be living like a local, which is exactly what you came here to avoid, but you can throw in a few of these "different" things to enhance your Vegas experience. *Winslow's Eleven* is really meant as an adjunct.

Here, you're going to get a mix of personal favorites, historically-significant landmarks, and roads less traveled. You'll notice that most of these skew to the Eastside, and that's not because the Westside is that boring, but because I spend most of my time east of the 15.

To get the most out of this guide, print it out, fold it up, and stick it inside your "other" guidebook (i.e., the one that you paid for), and whip it out when you've had enough of the pools, shopping malls, and slot machines.

If you want to know more, you'll just have to buy one of my books, read my weblog (www.dieiscast.com), or *politely* email me and ask me a reasonable, specific question.

That's it for this introduction: now the fun starts. Don't just take my word for what to do in Vegas: ask around and discover stuff on your own. The great thing about printing this as a pdf is that you have plenty of room on the back to take notes.

Above all, have a safe and fun time in Las Vegas, the greatest city in Southern Nevada.

* * * *

I: Must-See Vegas

These are some places that I think are underappreciated, but necessary, stops for anyone who wants to know the "real Vegas" without hanging out at the DMV for 3 hours. I've given you a nice buffet of activities, things to see, and places to shop. There's no rhyme or reason here: this is just stuff that rings my bell for whatever reason, or, even better, for no reason at all.

1. Carousel Bar, Circus Circus

2880 Las Vegas Boulevard South

Yeah, I know that you're already complaining about going to Circus Circus, but if it's good enough for Hunter S. Thompson (he wrote about this place in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*) it should be good enough for you.

If you self-park, you have two choices: either wait for what is certifiably the city's slowest elevator or take the stairs. I usually take the stairs. Cross over to the hotel's "lobby," then wind your way back into the casino to the central section, the original big top. If you walked in from the street, you should already be there. Climb the curving ramps or stairs up to the midway level, the circle it until you spot the Carousel Bar: you'll know it when you see it.

Jump in when you're able, and you're in clown bar nirvana. Enjoy some value-priced cocktails while slowly revolving around the center bar. Usually you've got to go to the roof of a 1970s-era Holiday Inn to enjoy that effect, but here you can get it just feet off the Midway. Of

course, you could go up to the top of the Stratosphere too, but that isn't *quite* as low rent as this. I like to think that Circus founder and Vegas visionary Jay Sarno spent some time up here, but I could be wrong.

The view of the sporadic live circus acts in the center of the midway is the cherry on top of this Genuine Vegas Sundae.

2. Reading Room, Mandalay Bay

3950 Las Vegas Boulevard South

No trip to Vegas would be complete without a stop at a bookstore, because when people think of Las Vegas and casinos, the first thing that pops into their mind is serious reading. Right? In some ways, spending time here is a very un-Vegas thing to do, but that's a big part of the charm. This is not only a bookstore in a casino, but a very *literary* bookstore in a casino, with a definite artistic bent. So while you can get "local interest" books on Las Vegas and gambling, you can also find some real gems that might not be in your local Borders.

The Reading Room regularly has book signings by low-and high-profile authors, so check their schedule before you come out to Vegas: you might be able to meet your favorite writer and get some books signed.

They talked about closing this down in February, but it looks like it's gotten a reprieve. Stop in and buy books next time you're here, just so the suits get the message: there *is* a place for literature on the Strip.

3. The Dispensary

2451 E. Tropicana Ave. (just east of Eastern)

I wasn't surprised to learn that this place has gotten some ink as a quiet, laid back place to have a drink. If you have fond memories of the 1970s, this place definitely is for you: the shag carpeting is incongruously homey, and the décor suggests a small bar that time forgot. There are several uber-comfortable conversation areas, so this feels more like a mellow party at a friend's house circa 1978 than a night out at a Vegas bar. The talkative wait staff will take an active interest in your problems and likely share theirs, too. A soothing water wheel—yes, you read that right—completes the scene. They serve food, too.

4. Sunset Park

2601 E. Sunset Road (Corner of Sunset and Eastern)

This is one of the best parks in Vegas. Want to play volleyball, baseball, or basketball? You can do it here. You can also romp with your dog (or someone else's) in the dog park, have a barbeque in the picnic area, catch fish in the central lake, and go for a walk or run on the mile-long track that loops around the lake.

In addition to flocks of geese, ducks, and other birds (hey, I'm no ornithologist), the lake area sports a genuine piece of Vegas history. Back in the 1960s, when tiki restaurants were all the rage, the Stardust opened its own Polynesian eatery, the Aku-Aku, with two huge moai (carved heads) outside. Don't ask how, but one of those heads ended up on the island in the center of Sunset Lake. So by spending the afternoon here, you can work on your tan and take in what ranks as a historic site in Las Vegas.

5. Turtlehead Peak

Red Rock Canyon Recreation Area

You've seen pictures of Vegas taken from the Stratosphere Tower. Now imagine looking at Vegas from 1000 feet *above* the Stratosphere Tower. That's the reward for the 1 to 1.5 hour hike to the top. Bring some water and trail mix, and be prepared to be absolutely blown away by the view

once you get to the top of this peak at Red Rock. Bring your binoculars and pick out your favorite spots below.

A warning: it's a moderate to strenuous hike with a lot of uphill and a bit of scrambling along the way. I would guess that anyone who's in moderate shape could make this climb as long as they don't mind exerting themselves a little. People who are seriously out of shape, have mobility issues, or have heart conditions will want to think twice about the hike, though.

To get to Red Rock, take Charlestown Boulevard west; you'll eventually see the entrance on your right. It costs \$5 per car to get into the area, and the scenic loop alone is worth admission. My advice is to make a morning out of it: get there around 9, hike to the top, look around, and return to the bottom. Enjoy the rest of the scenic drive, then massage your aching muscles while replenishing at your favorite buffet—Red Rock casino is ideal for this. If you want a slightly less casino-centric post-hike dining spot, go crazy at the Whole Foods at Charleston and Rampart, which features hot and cold food bars with tons of delicious food.

6. Casa Shenandoah

Pecos and Sunset Roads

I've got to admit I'm throwing this one in mostly for my buddies as VegasTripping.com, who've developed a justifiable fascination with this house's owner. Casa Shenandoah is Wayne "Mr. Las Vegas" Newton's 50-acre Arabian horse ranch and mansion.

There's not too much to do there—the concrete block walls on Sunset and the first few hundred feet of the Pecos frontage make it clear that you're not welcome to have a picnic on Wayne's lawn—but you can pull in near the *second* entrance on Pecos and take your picture in front of the gilded gate. You might even spot a horse or two.

Remember that Casa Shenandoah is private property, and if you try to jump the fence you'll definitely be arrested and charged with trespassing. Be respectful of Wayne and his guests, and be polite to any security guards who pull up and ask you why you're hanging out in front of someone else's house. If you're a fan courteously taking pictures, they'll be quite nice and may even invite you to see a concert for free (hey, it happened to me and some of my friends once).

7. Sam's Town Free Show

5111 Boulder Highway

Anyone can take pleasure in the Bellagio's fountains dancing in sync with classic favorites or recent hits. But you've got to have a special mindset to appreciate the charm of Sunset Stampede, the free show in the "Mystic Falls" atrium of Sam's Town's hotel.

To get to the show, drive to the casino (or take one of the many shuttles from the Strip). Find the hotel's main atrium, and walk to the back. A few times a night, the show will go off—you can tell when it's imminent by the crowds that gather. As the lights dim, get ready to be wowed.

The second the wolf's gleaming red eyes light up, I guarantee at least one kid is going to start shrieking in terror, and he probably won't stop until long after the show's over. It only adds to the atmosphere, trust me. Amid the shooting lasers and spouting waters, a bunch of animatronic animals roar, growl, and howl to their heart's content. Everyone gets in on the act, even the bear. It's hard to do it justice, but it's something you've just got to see. Time it right and you can catch a movie at the casino's multiplex while you're there.

8. First Friday

Las Vegas Arts District near Charleston and Main

Vegas isn't known as an artistic mecca, but there are a surprising number of talented artists living—and selling paintings—in Sin City. The first Friday of every month is when you can catch the most local art, because all of the galleries are open, as is a street fair whose vendors selling all sorts of things. It's a lot of fun and it's not that far from the tourist corridor, so you don't have any

reason not to check it out if you're in town early enough Friday night—unless you've already got tickets to see Barry, of course.

I suggest you take a cab or park near Charleston and Main. From there, you can explore the street fair area (to the south and west of the intersection) and hit some of the galleries that line Main. There are live bands and DJs galore, plus people selling artwork, handicrafts, and hot dogs. If you like mid-century modern, you need to visit Modify, which is a few feet west of Main on the south side of Charleston. Cross Charleston (with the light, please!) and see some more galleries before calling it a night.

9. "Talking" statues at the Forum Shops, Caesars Palace

3500 Las Vegas Boulevard South

You've got to check out this free show, just to appreciate how bad it is, and how far free Vegas entertainment has come. You'll find the statues in front of the Cheesecake Factory, at the far, far, far end of the mall—it's quite a hike, but well worth it. The "Escape from Atlantis" experience that was once the sequel to the free show has long been history, but I have a feeling you'll get all the closure you need from the free show.

You've got a bunch of statues that talk, but because of the limits of A/V technology, it's really hard to understand them. Basically, the story is that a brother and sister are fighting over their father's crown. Being that he's still alive and is sitting right there, this seems like poor taste, but I guess that Atlantis isn't noted for its tact. One of them controls fire, one controls water, and together they solve crimes! Well, not really—their greed and overweening ambition ends up sinking Atlantis. And that's it.

Perfect allegory for a casino setting, huh? Naturally, you really want people to keep their greed and ambition in check when they're in Las Vegas.

10. El Cortez

600 East Fremont

If you venture out from under the Fremont Street Experience's canopy of lights, past Neonopolis, and cross the street, you can step into a living piece of Vintage Vegas. Eighteen million dollars worth of recent renovations have brightened the place up, but it's still the same old El Cortez. If you get lucky you might spot former owner/patriarch Jackie Gaughan. Even if you don't see Jackie, you'll enjoy an eclectic mix of longtime locals and bargain-hunting visitors here, all pursuing the usual casino goodies: loose slots, cheap food, and good times.

In the early evening, the lounge features some spiffy organ music, but the last set ends at 9 p.m., so get there early.

11. Gambler's Book Store

630 South 11 St. (near Charleston and Maryland Parkway)

Founded by John and Edna Luckman in 1964, the Gambler's Book Store is an absolute must-visit shrine for all gambling devotees. It's the Holy of Holies of gambling literature. Sure, you can get anything you want online these days, but nothing beats the thrill of browsing through the shelves for that one title you've been looking for forever.

Have even more fun in the used book room, where you can flip through an array of yesterday's bestsellers and undiscovered gems. Longtime manager Howard Schwartz (no relation) put the bookstore up for sale last year, but as of May 2007 still runs this institution. Howard and his staff, as well as the regulars that filter in during the day, give new meaning to the term "Runyonesque." A pilgrimage to this gambling book mecca will make your trip to Vegas complete.

* * * *

II: Historic Vegas

You've just gotten through everything you must see, and I'm already asking you to look at more stuff. But this section is a little different, because each of these attractions is here solely because of their connection to Vegas history, real or imagined. If I were giving you a tour of Las Vegas simply to show off its history, it would include all of these sites.

1. Empty lot, Sahara and the Boulevard

2534? Las Vegas Boulevard South

You might wonder why an empty lot is the first stop on a historical tour of a city defined by endless reinvention. This particular empty lot might be littered with porn-slappers' discards today, but it was once on the cutting edge of casino design. On this very piece of land, on April 3, 1941, the Las Vegas Strip was born when Thomas Hull opened his El Rancho Vegas here.

This was the first casino resort to open on the Strip (then known only as Highway 91), and would forever deflect the city's casino development southward. As the Strip grew, the casino enjoyed only middling success thanks to its newer and bigger rivals. The El Rancho Vegas's central building burned to the ground on June 17, 1960, and the entire structure was eventually bulldozed.

Enjoy the void while you can, because this lot might not be empty for long. MGM Mirage has just purchased it, and the odds are good that by 2012 it'll be part of "City Center North," a mixed use project that might be getting off the ground by that time.

2. Sahara Coffee Shop

2535 Las Vegas Boulevard South

After grokking the emptiness of the Strip's birthplace, cross the street and enter the Sahara. Once you've found the resort's coffee shop, take a good look: this is (more or less) the oldest thing in continuous operation on the Strip today, going back to at least 1952.

The coffee shop is the only part of the casino besides the pool that isn't a later addition or a total refit. All of the original low-rise hotel rooms are gone, as is the original theater. The casino itself has been expanded and renovated beyond recognition.

Odds are the French fries haven't been hanging around since 1952, but I've slotted this landmark in the historic section rather than the restaurant guide, so make of that what you will.

This piece of culinary history might also be on borrowed time, since the new owners, SBE Entertainment, are planning a thorough overhaul of the Sahara. Hopefully they'll keep the coffee shop, if for nothing other than nostalgia, though updating the menu wouldn't hurt.

3. Slots-a-Fun

2890 Las Vegas Boulevard South

It's next to Circus Circus, and *slightly* more downmarket. Need I say more? Slots-a-Fun isn't majestic, it isn't altering urban paradigms, and it isn't hip. But it *is* fun. So why is it historic? Because "affordable Vegas" is disappearing faster than a cocktail waitress in the nickel slots. Enjoy a \$1.50 beer, low-roll at the tables, or play some slots. Given the name of the place, I'm not ruining the surprise by telling you that it's full of them.

4. Bellagio fountain

3600 Las Vegas Boulevard South

How can something that's only been around since the (late) Clinton Administration count as historic? In this case, the fountain is something nice to look at while you ponder what it replaced: one of 1950s Vegas's must-see attractions, the Dunes Sultan.

From 1955 to 1993 the Dunes stood roughly where Bellagio is today. For a while, the Dunes' signature architectural element was an over-sized, nightmarish paper mache-looking sultan that towered over the hotel's entrance. Later renovations thankfully replaced it with one of the gems of classic Vegas signage, a 200-foot work of neon artistry that weathered skimming charges and a revolving door of owners only to fall victim to Steve Wynn's theatrical cannonball that, on October 26, 1993, felled the Dunes—the resort's implosion was part of the spectacle that opened Treasure Island.

As you watch the Bellagio fountains leap and dance, consider the fates of the sultan and the sign, keeping in mind that someday these very fountains will be a part of history—maybe treasured, maybe forgotten.

I know it's not exactly the Capuchin Crypt in Rome ("As we are now, someday you shall be"), but it's probably as close as you'll get to a place to brood over mortality in Vegas.

5. Flamingo Pool

3555 Las Vegas Boulevard South

You can easily walk from subjunctive history to imagined history by crossing the street via one of the very safe overpasses and visiting the Flamingo. For the real story of the casino's origins, check out *Roll the Bones* or *Suburban Xanadu*, but here's the punchline: even though Bugsy Siegel gets all the credit today, the casino wasn't his idea, and he only ran it for about three months. For much of that time he wasn't even in Las Vegas, a town he passionately hated.

You wouldn't know that at the Flamingo, which has embraced Siegel as its mythical founder. Why any corporate suit would think that celebrating the life of an admitted murderer and convicted rapist is a good idea is beyond me, but evidently someone likes the long-departed thug, because there is a plaque in his honor in the lush tangle of foliage that surrounds the pool area.

The pool area is actually one of the Strip's best kept secrets. It's not a bad place to come and enjoy a drink or go for a romantic stroll, and the price—nothing—is right. So instead of admitting to your date that you're too cheap to pop for admission to one of the upscale pool areas, tell her (or him) that you really want to show her (or him) a site of deep historical significance. That might work.

6. Venetian

3355 Las Vegas Boulevard South

A little further up the Strip, you can have some fun while looking for a lost piece of Vegas history. The Most Serene Republic, Venice, has centuries of history. Las Vegas's version has about eight years worth. So this stop isn't about the Venetian, but what might be under it.

On the one-year anniversary of the Sands' opening in 1953 the owners, amid great fanfare, buried a missile-shaped time capsule (the was the atomic age) that featured artifacts including a microfilmed movie trade papers and gossip columns, Bing Crosby's pipe, Bob Hope's tie, and a wax impression of Jimmy Durante's nose. The capsule was unearthed in the 1970s and then returned to its resting place. In all the excitement of the Sands' 1996 closure and implosion, apparently everyone forgot about the time capsule until after the Venetian opened, at which point nobody felt like digging around for it.

So today, the time capsule is either sitting in an ex-employee's garage or is buried under several thousand tons of fake Venice. Apparently the Sands' management had promised that any guests returning for the fiftieth anniversary unearthing would be given free accommodations, a perk the Venetian did not honor (I personally fielded a call from a perspective golden anniversary celebrant wondering why the no one was returning his calls).

If you want to have a little fun, spend some time poking around the Venetian, and if anyone bothers you, say you're looking for the time capsule. But I won't be responsible for the consequences if you try to sneak a backhoe onto the casino floor.

7. Neon Boneyard

East of Las Vegas Boulevard and McWilliams

Some old neon signs end up getting reused. Others take a one-way trip to a local landfill. Increasingly, many of them have ended up in the custody of the Neon Museum, and while some of those are on display in the Fremont Street area, many of them are languishing in the Neon Boneyard.

The Boneyard is surrounded by a fence that isn't quite high enough to protect the signs from vandals but will probably ruin your view. Still, you can make out some of the signs, including my personal favorite, an oversized guy shooting pool with a righteous mullet. To really get to know the signs, you need to make an appointment with the Neon Museum, which will set you back at least \$50.

To get there, drive north on Las Vegas Boulevard from Fremont Street. Pass the freeway and keep on going. When you see the Ukulele Lounge on your right, you're almost there. McWilliams is a small street that will creep up on you: hit a right on it and drive down a little bit, catching whatever glimpse you can of your precious neon heritage.

8. Golden Gate

1 Fremont Street

This is one of the oldest buildings in Vegas: it's been around since 1906, when it was the Hotel Nevada and was considered a high-rise. Like most Fremont Street hotels, the Nevada had a few gaming tables, though they officially went into deep storage with the passing of a prohibitory law in 1909.

When commercial gaming was re-legalized in 1931, the tables and slots returned and the Nevada got a new name: the Sal Sagev, which was "Las Vegas" spelled backwards and was for some reason pronounced "Sal Saggee." Try this with other casinos: refer to "El Cortee" or "Mandalee Bay" and see if people get the joke. Or not.

In 1955, new owners rechristened the place the Golden Gate. Four years later, they started serving 99-cent shrimp cocktails (the first in Vegas), a tradition current owner Mark Brandenburg continues today.

9. Post Office/Courthouse

301 East Stewart Street (north of Fremont)

This Depression-era landmark looks out of place near Fremont: there's not a hint of neon, and its bland federal style betrays the influence of the Treasury Department architects who built it. Opened in 1933, this building housed the city's post office and courthouse for many years. On November 15, 1950, the Kefauver Committee held a half-day's hearings in the courthouse, showing how negligible Vegas was in those early years: the Kefauver Committee was charged with looking at the mob's ties to gambling, and they were more bored than horrified by the emerging casino capital.

Long superseded by more modern postal facilities and court buildings, the "Old Post Office" is a mostly-silent reminder of Las Vegas history these days. Plans to turn the building into a museum or cultural center have been circulating for over five years but nothing's come of them yet.

10. Binion Statue

South Point Equestrian Center (9777 Las Vegas Blvd South)

Unlike other world cities (e.g., Rome and London) Las Vegas has no tradition of equestrian statues, likely because its barely a century old and has no real military heroes.

But we do have at least one statue of a man on horseback; fittingly, he's not a brilliant military tactician or legendary emperor, but a former casino owner and ex-convict. Lester "Benny" Binion once owned the Horseshoe and despite run-ins with the federal government (that conviction

was for tax evasion, and he did prison time for it), was both successful and influential. He brought the World Series of Poker to Las Vegas, which in and of itself would earn him a statue.

In early 2008, South Point owner Michael Gaughan got permission to move the statue from Ogden and Casino Center, behind the original Binion's Horseshoe, to his equestrian center. It isn't exactly Marcus Aurelius in the Piazza del Campidoglio, but is still a fitting tribute to one of the real legends of Vegas.

11. Elvis statue, Hilton

3000 Paradise Road

From a knight of old Vegas to the King. Elvis was born in Tupelo, but he was reborn in Las Vegas, where his summer 1969 stint at the International marked his return to the stage. Elvis played a string of 837 consecutive sold-out shows there, with his last on December 12, 1976.

After his 1977 death, his family and the Hilton (as it was known after 1971) decided to honor Elvis with a bronze statue by sculptor Carl Romanelli. Dedicated on September 8, 1978, the statue was briefly showcased in a glass case near the showroom before being moved to the lobby.

On June 21, 2006, the statue was unveiled again in its current home, officially known as the "Las Vegas Hilton Courtyard," though I call it "the area to the right of the main entrance." If you're an Elvis buff or just a fan of old Vegas, this is one site you can't miss though, truth to be told, there are about a hundred Elvis impersonators out there who look more like the King than this bronze behemoth.

* * * *

III: Not Bad At All Restaurants

Before giving you a list of restaurants, I'll willingly confess that as much as I like food, I'm just not into haute cuisine. If you're a confirmed foodie I'd suggest heading for Rosemary's or Guy Savoy at Caesars Palace. But if you want to visit a few of the places that are Not That Bad, you should check these restaurants out. Most of them are off the Strip, but they are worth the drive if you've got a car.

1. Paymon's Mediterranean Café

4147 S. Maryland Parkway (at Flamingo)

Many of the places that I've told you about are quintessential old-fashioned Vegas: loud and tacky (sure, I could give you the nouveau-Vegas guide, with sleek nightclubs and trendy eateries, but what's the fun in that?). This place is the unVegas, an island of Mediterranean calm less than a mile from the bustle of the Strip. There's a West Sahara location (8380 W. Sahara, west of Buffalo), but most visitors will go to the one at the corner of Maryland and Flamingo, which is so close to UNLV as to practically be a part of it. It's a real campus institution: odds are that if you're meeting a faculty member for lunch, you'll be dining at Paymon's: I had my post-interview dinner here back when I applied for the Gaming Research gig.

Paymon's has a wide variety of Mediterranean dishes, all of which are excellent. For a beverage, try one of their immense selection of teas. At lunchtime you usually want to stick with the sandwiches and salads, since the kabobs can take a half hour to prepare. The salads are pretty huge and are a meal by themselves. If you go for French fries, try the seasoned Athens fries with your pita sandwich. If not, you can order some hummus and snack on the bounty of pita slices that your server will bring.

After you wipe away the last traces of tzaziki sauce, take some time to explore. There are four separate dining areas: the outside seats, if you want a primo view of the Maryland Avenue traffic; the main dining room; the corridor, which was at one time a courtyard; and the Hookah Lounge, which might be the most ambient room on the East side (outside of the Liberace Lounge,

naturally). I'd describe it is Persian cathouse eclectic, but you can decide for yourself. Late nights, the place features a smaller menu and has a more lounge-ish vibe.

2. Super Mex

3450 East Sunset Road (at Pecos)

I've never seen Wayne here, but this place is right across the street (diagonally) from his digs. He should consider himself lucky to live so close to what might be, pound for pound, the best Mexican restaurant in town, beating out Lindo Michoacan at 2655 East Desert Inn and Casa Don Juan downtown.

This is a Southern Nevada offshoot of a longtime Long Beach favorite. In the Vegas branch, as back in SoCal, the menu is typical unpretentious Mexican food. My personal favorite for starters is the Mexican Caesar Salad, but the nachos aren't bad if you're in a cheesy mood. You will have plenty to eat, though, when your server brings out the complementary house salsa (the best in Vegas) and tortillas, which are tasty with or without guacamole.

If you are drinking, the SuperMex margarita is a winner. For your meal, you can get a combo and not be disappointed, but I would choose one of the burritos. Try ground, chunked, or shredded beef, green chile pork, chicken, carnitas, and carne asada in either the Junior Mex or Super Mex size. The Junior Mex is huge, and I've never seen the Super Mex, but I'm guessing it's big enough for two people to split. Come hungry and enjoy some good food that won't break the bank.

3. Wo Fat

3700 East Desert Inn Road (near Sandhill)

This is apparently the name of an arch-villain from Hawaii Five-O, but you won't find Steve McGarrett or Danno anywhere around this place. Yet another great restaurant in an unassuming strip mall (next to a middling dollar store of all things), Wo Fat's is pretty cozy. The menu features Chinese food with a Hawaiian twist—you're sure to find some island favorites here, particularly on the whiteboard that hangs on the wall. Less adventurous diners might want to stick to the standard Cantonese stuff on the printed menu. Don't be afraid to give something new a try, though the bitter melon is admittedly an acquired taste.

My absolute favorite here is the honey walnut chicken, which should be on the board. This is not only one of the best Chinese dishes I've ever had—it's one of the best *things* I've ever had, period. It's that good. They've got reasonable and tasty lunch specials, too.

4. Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens

1175 East Tropicana Avenue (at Spencer)

I'll tell you straight off that I'm recommending this place more for the atmosphere than the food, but I guarantee that if you come here for dinner you won't leave disappointed, providing you've got reasonable expectations. You can enjoy a range of Italian standards like spaghetti and meatballs and veal parmesan, with an array of chicken, seafood, and pasta dishes. It's nothing special, but far from bad.

Have fun with the Chicken and Broccoli Alfredo all you want, but you'll want to save some time for looking around. Whether you take a few minutes before you sit down or just take a detour on your way back from the rest room, you simply *must* investigate this place.

There are two bona fide interior design gems here. The first is the cocktail lounge, which looks like a goodfellas' version of the Dispensary. Chill out and have a drink or two in here, just to soak in the dimly-lit ambience. Then walk through the lounge and into the glittering romp that is Liberace's Piano Lounge. Did I forget to mention that Carluccio's was designed by Liberace? It was, and this room was evidently his masterpiece. It's got an autographed Liberace piano and floor to ceiling mirrors, along with some Buck Rogers-looking furniture—Dr. Huer and Colonel Deering wouldn't be out of place.

If you're looking for a place to have an inoffensive meal with a group of your friends that's away from the bustle of the Strip but still taxi-distance, Carluccio's fits the bill. You can gawk in the sheer Vegas-ness of it all, and have some fun while you're at it. If basking in the glory of the Liberace Lounge hasn't provided your candelabra fix, the Liberace Museum is across the parking lot, though check for hours and admission fees.

5. Peppermill Inn

2985 Las Vegas Boulevard South

The Peppermill, a coffee shop with an adjoining lounge across from the just-imploded Stardust, is the epicenter of tacky Vegas. The coffee shop has standard, slightly-overpriced fare and I've only eaten there once, but the Fireside Lounge must be seen to be believed.

Like at least two other places in this guide, the Peppermill is throwback to the 1970s. If you've been to Reno's Peppermill casino, imagine it on a smaller scale. If you haven't been there, just imagine lots of blue and pink neon and mirrors, and you've pretty much got it.

In the lounge, you want to sit near the fire pit for the full experience, but any corner of this dark, intimate watering hole should suit you fine. There's no better place to bring a date for a late night (or early morning) drink.

Sure the Peppermill is cheesy, but it's cheesy in a fun way. Some not-so-obvious plusses: it's walking distance to the Convention Center, so it makes a great stop after walking the exhibit floor all day, particularly when Paradise is completely jammed with taxis and buses. Also, with all of the impending development of the North Strip, it won't be long before someone finds a more lucrative use for all this acreage, so enjoy the 1970s madness while you can.

6. Hugo's Cellar

Under the Four Queens, 202 Fremont Street

If you want to do the Old School Vegas thing while you're in town, you owe yourself a dinner at Hugo's Cellar. It's a legit cellar, located under the Four Queens in downtown Vegas. Make a reservation, put on your fancy clothes, and push your way through the throngs clogging casino; once you descend those steps, you'll be transported back to a time before the street out front was a malled Experience, back when Wayne Newton was a fresh-faced young singer across the street at the Fremont casino.

Have a drink while you wait in the cozy bar area and soak in the ambience. You'll be surrounded by a good mix of Vegas old-timers, longtime visitors, and hip youngsters. On your way in, each of the ladies in your group will get a rose, another classy touch.

The steakhouse standard menu won't disappoint or overachieve. Expect a solid, traditional Vegas steak dinner. The Cellar can get a bit pricey but it's well, well worth it. You can combine your jaunt here with a look at the new pool area, the Tank, at Golden Nugget, but a meal at Hugo's is worth a taxi ride by itself. If I was planning a three or four-day Vegas trip, I'd do this one on my second night in town, so I've had long enough in Vegas to see where the city is today and have a good comparison point for the rest of the trip.

7. Golden Flower Chinese Cuisine

3315 E. Russell Road (at Pecos)

Picture a completely unexceptional Vegas strip mall. Now imagine the most non-descript hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant imaginable, the kind of place that a location scout would drool over, if the scene called for a non-descript hole-in-the-wall Chinese restaurant. You probably grew up going to a place like this with your family on "special" occasions, only to later realize that it was just an average Chinese restaurant.

That's Golden Flower. And its very average-ness is what charmed me. It's just completely non-pretentious, and that's rather rare in Las Vegas. The food is typical American Chinese food—beef with broccoli, chicken egg foo young, General chicken—but it's done quite well.

So for a while, Golden Flower's been one of my secrets; I've only shared it with my closest friends.

Imagine my shock when I discovered that Golden Flower has won a Review-Journal "Best of Vegas" award. So much for my little secret. So with the cat out of the bag, I don't feel bad sharing this one with everyone. It's not classic Vegas; it's classic Sino-Americana.

8. U-Swirl Yogurt

790 Coronado Center Drive, way south on Eastern

Yes, this is insanely far from the tourist corridor. But it's awesomely good, and one of the few family-friendly attractions that I can suggest.

Pinkberry has taken the frozen yogurt world by storm, at least in LA, and there are too many Pinkberry rip-offs in Vegas to even count. They all had between two and five flavors of yogurt, a few toppings (heavy on the breakfast cereals), and similar pricing structures. I was wondering why no one tried anything substantially different. And then I found U-Swirl.

It's a totally different concept, and it makes getting your snack an adventure, which is great for kids. You get your yogurt yourself, then cover it with toppings, and pay for it by weight (36¢ an ounce) There are 16 different flavors, and you can mix flavors that share the same dispenser into a single stream of yogurty goodness. Of course, you can mix and match flavors as much as you want.

The toppings are a mix of fresh fruit, candy, and cereals, so you can try to keep the sugar rush in check. My favorite is mochi.

They've got wifi, so if you want to check email or upload tales of your Vegas adventure, consider making the drive down here and enjoying some yogurt.

9. Instant Replay/Villa Pizza

9495 Las Vegas Boulevard South (at Richmar, north of South Point)

I take pizza so seriously that I've developed my own personal pizza hierarchy. My grandmother made the best pizza in the known universe; the stuff I make is a distant number two; I had a few excellent slices at Rome's Il Forno di Campo de Fiori; Tony's Baltimore Grill has "the best on the island" back in Atlantic City; most other places range from "great" to "how can they screw up sauce, cheese, and crust?"

Pizza in Vegas is a continuing mission for me. So far the best I've found comes from an unfortunately-named eatery on the South Strip, Instant Replay. I can tell you that, in the many times I've eaten here, I've never suffered an "instant replay" of anything. I guess "Sudden Death" might be a worse name, but not by much.

Instant Replay is, first and foremost, a locals' sports bar: the walls are stocked with photos and memorabilia, and the TVs that surround the central bar are always tuned to one or more games. If every sports book in town didn't have similar, or better, coverage, I'd say this would be the best place in Vegas to catch the "big game," whatever that might be on any given day. Try your luck with the bartop video poker or request a table, whichever better suits your mood. If you want a good taste of a typical locals place but don't want to drive to a sub-mediocre shopping center somewhere on Craig Road, try Instant Replay.

They serve Villa pizza, which I think is connected to the New York-based chain of pizza places. In any event, it's delicious pizza. The rest of the bar food—wings, nachos, etc—is equally good, and not that expensive, either. When I first started going here, this place was way out in the middle nowhere, but a construction boom has seen it become the center of a bustling residential and resort corridor.

If you've got a car, a drive down the South Strip isn't such a bad idea, if only for a trip to the Outlet Stores or to take a peek at the Bass Pro Shop at the Silverton if you're an outdoor type. Once you're down here, check out Instant Replay if you're in the mood for pizza.

10. Capriotti's Sandwich Shop

19 Las Vegas locations and counting, including 322 West Sahara, 4747 Maryland Parkway, and the Red Rock Casino

Coming from Atlantic City I consider the sub to be just about the ideal meal. I never heard about Capriotti's when I lived on the East Coast, but once I was in Las Vegas I quickly discovered the best sub place (or places) in Las Vegas.

Take your pick from the usual suspects if you like (the cheesesteak is great), but I recommend that you try one of Capriotti's specialties like the Slaw-Be-Jo (cole slaw, pastrami, and Russian dressing) or the joint's signature creation, the Bobbie, best described as a complete Thanksgiving feast on a sub roll.

There's not much room for dining in (just a few bar stools), so you'll want to get this to go. If you're hiking or planning a day at Sunset Park (or the free jazz concerts held at the Henderson Pavilion in the summer), you can't go wrong with picking up a few subs here first.

11. Philadelphia Cheesesteak Factory

Inside the Sinclair gas station, Patrick and Pecos Aves.

This is one guy, with a grill, in a gas station. And he makes the best cheesesteak in Las Vegas, at least for my money. It's almost unfairly good. So if you're interrupting your vacation to buy some home improvement supplies at the Home Depot across the street or you're just in the neighborhood, try a steak—you won't be disappointed.

* * * *

IV: Eleven Tips for More Fun

Thanks for reading this far. To leave you with that feel-good....feeling, here's eleven pieces of advice for visitors to Vegas that will hopefully come in handy.

1. Just because Las Vegas is in a desert doesn't mean it is always hot. Check the weather and bring appropriate clothing.

Sure, Vegas is scorching in the summer. The winter, however, is a different story. While it rarely goes below freezing in the valley (though the snowfall on the mountains is spectacular) it gets pretty close, particularly at night. With little humidity, the day's heat quickly leaches away into space, making 20-degree temperature swings commonplace.

Generally, Las Vegas has four seasons: summer (May 15-October 15, when it's regularly over 90); fall (October 16-November 30, when the weather is quite pleasant); winter (December 1-March 31, with daytime temperatures in the 50s); and spring (April 1 to May 14, when the weather is again ideal). We've got about 12 weeks of ideal weather a year, and the rest is either slightly too cold for the pool or way too hot for comfort.

More good news: when the seasons transition, we have a week or so of extreme winds, with gusts reaching near 50 miles per hour. Ah, the joys of desert living!

2. What happens here *won't* necessarily stay here.

You can have all the fun you want, but it pays to be careful. If you're thinking about having a promiscuous fling, remember that STDs can definitely follow you home.

Also, with the proliferation of cell phone and digital cameras, it's easier than ever to document someone else's stupidity. Feel free to enjoy yourself, but don't do anything that you wouldn't want to tell your significant other about—or, if you are even a minor public figure, see on the front page of your local paper.

Either that, or don't complain when a clip of you loudly vomiting up your last six mojitos shows up on YouTube.

3. Watch your back—and your wallet.

Each year, Las Vegas attracts about 40 million visitors who spend about \$12 billion or so here. This makes the city a target-rich environment for criminals. It's not that well publicized (for good reason), but cars are regularly stolen from casino parking garages, room break-ins are known to happen, and pickpocket teams often work the Strip, particularly around major events like boxing mega-fights.

Protect yourself: first, never leave anything you don't want stolen unattended in any public area. Second, make absolutely sure your hotel room door has locked behind you: air pressure often holds the door slightly open, and "push door" thieves just stroll down hotel corridors, checking for doors left ajar. Leave anything valuable in your room safe. When in public, be aware of you wallet while in crowds, particularly in "choke points" around doors and escalators, where pickpockets thrive.

4. Remember, prostitution is illegal in Clark County and Las Vegas.

Don't worry, this is the last of the law enforcement killjoy tips. Here's the deal: prostitution is legal in the state of Nevada, though not in Washoe County, where Reno is, or Clark County, where Las Vegas and the Strip are. Ads for escorts and "personal entertainers" are rampant, but prostitution is still illegal here.

There are three big risks you take by becoming a Vegas John: one, it could be a sting by Metro (Las Vegas police), so you could end up in jail and on the local news. Two, you might get a sexually-transmitted disease (illegal sex workers are not screened). Three, you might get trick-rolled, which is a cute way of saying that your private dancer might flat-out rob you. It happens all the time. There's a fourth possibility, that the husky-voiced sweetheart you've picked up might really have a package bigger than yours, but I don't want to be judgmental, so I'll let you decide if that's a problem or not.

5. Drink lots of water.

Especially during the summer. Because of the high heat and low humidity, water evaporates quickly here: you can jump in the pool and be completely dry after baking for a few minutes. But that also means that your body dries out quickly. When you combine a natural tendency to get dehydrated with the drinking that people usually do while in Vegas, you're on the brink of destruction, with a killer hangover at the very least.

At night, drink as much booze as you want, but try to re-hydrate before you go to bed (or pass out). During the day, you should pretty much have a bottle of water with you at all times. Drink it, don't save it. You'll be amazed at how much better you feel when you've got the right amount of water in you. At the same time, don't over-hydrate, and feel free to mix in sports drinks and salty snacks to keep your electrolytes and sodium levels up, particularly if you're doing a lot of walking.

6. There isn't extra oxygen in the casino air—trust me.

Strictly speaking this isn't a tip, but I've heard this urban legend so many times that I'll take any opportunity to put it to rest. As a former casino employee, I can tell you that not only don't they

pump extra oxygen into the casino, but that I've never had a problem falling asleep in a casino. This whole thing is such complete nonsense that I'm amazed that anyone takes it seriously, but they do.

Think about the logistics: a casino is a huge area with many entrances and is far from airtight. To appreciably raise the level of oxygen in the atmosphere would require enormous tanks of pure oxygen. Is this a good idea? A casino, where people take smoking to be their divine right, is the last place that you'd want to enrich with oxygen. The wrongful death lawsuits that would surely follow a fire in an oxygen-enhanced casino would far, far outweigh any incremental gains in revenue a casino would get from people gambling more.

You're just having trouble getting to sleep because you're anxious about being in Vegas. There's not conspiracy.

7. Strip casino resorts are farther apart than they look.

It may look like a short walk from Circus Circus to the Stratosphere, but it's actually quite a hike, and a bit of a scary one after dark. Likewise, MGM Grand and Bally's might be on the same "block," but they're almost a mile apart. Factor in the oppressive heat, and that becomes a long, long walk.

Added to the deceptive distance between casinos is the fact that, once inside, you'll have to walk hundreds of yards to get where you want to be. That's no problem for more physically active people, but if you're with an older person or someone with limited mobility, intra-casino walking can be a hardship in and of itself.

There are a few solutions. You can hop taxis, which generally will drop you off in the casino's porte cochere (Vegas-talk for the main entrance). The porte cochere might not be exactly where you want to be, but it's usually centrally located. You can also try your luck with the monorail (if it's actually running), though it might be a further walk to the monorail station than it is to your destination, and it's laughably over-priced at \$5 a one-way trip, more than twice as much as a New York subway ride. Another alternative: drop yourself on the Deuce, a double-decker bus that regularly runs up and down Las Vegas Boulevard.

8. Get off the Strip.

After breathing conditioned air and hearing the discordant symphony of the slots for a few days, anyone would go a little crazy—anyone but casino employees, who already are a little crazy, but that's another story. Even though you could easily spend two weeks on the Strip and eat at a different restaurant and see a different show every night, you really should build some time into your trip for an off-Strip jaunt if you're staying more than three days. It'll help you fend off casino fatigue when all the slot machines, craps tables, and high-end retail outlets tend to blur together.

So take some time off from your time off. Have a cup of tea in the Mediterranean Café while reading that book you bought at the Reading Room. Drive the scenic loop at Red Rock, or go hiking there. Do some horseback riding. Visit the historical museum at Lorenzi Park.

Just get away for a while. You'll appreciate the spectacle of the Strip that much more when you get back.

9. Don't overdo everything—at least not too much.

This applies most strenuously to gambling: set win, loss, and time limits, and stick to them. Never, *ever* chase your losses. Once you lose money, just accept that it's never coming back, no matter how much you win in the future.

But this maxim also applies to spending time in the sun and at the buffet, or to staying up until 5 in the morning: even though you're in Las Vegas, you're still on planet earth, and you're still subject to the laws of physics and biology. Too much time outside without protection will earn you a painful sunburn. More than three plates at the buffet might wreak havoc on your gastro-intestinal tract.

Pace yourself, remember your limits, and you should have a great time.

10. Don't play the slot machines near the main entrance.

I heard this one from a major casino's comptroller. In general, the machines near the front of the property are much tighter than those by the guest elevators. The reasoning: those who drift in aren't likely to stay for longer than it takes to lose a few bucks anyway, while those "in the belly of the beast" are regular guests who are potential return visitors.

You aren't guaranteed to win by moving to the back, but your time on machine should increase a bit, at the very least. That means you're spending more time gambling, which could translate into more comps for you.

11. Please don't applaud when your plane lands in Vegas.

This is one of my very few pet peeves (my chief pet peeve being people with pet peeves). So I'll rephrase that: this just pisses me off. I absolutely cringe when people start clapping when the plane touches down at McCarran, every time.

As if having to listen to people brag about all the money they'll win when they get to town isn't bad enough, hearing them burst into cheers when the pilot does what he's paid to—lands the plane without incident—is just adding insult to injury. Please, please, don't do this, and if the person next to you does, try to calm them down.

About the Author

Will Winslow is a pen name of David G. Schwartz, one of the world's leading scholars of gambling. Thus far, Schwartz has published three books about gambling history, including the epic *Roll the Bones: The History of Gambling*.

Here he's addressing the audience at the International Launch Event for RTB, held at Mandalay Bay's Reading Room (#2 on the Must-See Vegas list).

A former front-line casino employee with a Ph.D. in United States History from the University of California Los Angeles, he's currently the Director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Schwartz regularly writes and opines about gambling and Las Vegas. He is much in demand as a convention speaker as well.



Photo credit: Suni Schwartz

To learn more, visit www.dieicast.com, where you can also find out about his speaking and writing. If you need a book about gambling history, he's definitely got something for you.