

This is a neighborhood profile from "Moon Metro Las Vegas."

CENTRAL STRIP/FLAMINGO ROAD

First-time visitors to Las Vegas often head straight for the crossroads of Flamingo Road and Las Vegas Boulevard, from which the Strip's major attractions radiate in all directions.

This hub of Vegas cool restored the city's status as a glamorous weekend getaway – and nothing epitomizes its fresh, gleaming allure as beautifully as the lake at Bellagio, where dancing fountains bring water to breathtaking life. The overwhelming popularity of these choreographed jets have, in just a few years, made them one of the city's identifying landmarks, as familiar as the Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas sign and Vegas Vic, the neon cowboy.

The supremely elegant hotel that rises over the lake represents the city's shift in image from disreputable guilty pleasure to classy vacation spot, setting a new standard for grown-up entertainment. A year after Bellagio opened, Paris Las Vegas debuted across the street and continued the trend, reproducing the intricate architecture of the Palais Garnier opera house and the Arc de Triomphe. Shorts and sneakers may be the modern tourist uniform, but people are starting to dress up again to venture into such graceful surroundings.

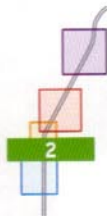
These larger-than-life sights draw some of the biggest crowds on the Strip. The best way to take it in is on foot – especially after dark, when the glow from the fountains and the half-scale Eiffel Tower produce an irresistibly romantic setting. Elevated walkways at major intersections keep gaping sightseers from drifting distractedly into traffic, but motorists still must negotiate around hordes of pedestrians at driveways. Celebrity chefs have also set up shop at several points on this part of Las Vegas Boulevard,



many establishing outposts of noted East and West Coast eateries, such as Le Cirque and Crustacean. Diners have responded, proving they have a taste for more than shrimp cocktail and budget steaks.

While the Strip has succeeded in reaching an upscale clientele, the off-Strip boutique properties in this area have made significant gains by targeting a younger crowd, who may find the boulevard a bit stodgy. Two such resorts – locked in fierce competition for single, A-list pleasure-seekers – bookend this corridor. The Palms Casino Resort to the west and the Hard Rock Hotel to the east both revel in a hedonistic image and attract an endless stream of movie stars, pop singers, pro athletes, and the stargazers who want to party with them.

Farther east on Flamingo Road sprawls the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. Though it's primarily an urban commuter school, the trappings of college culture are evident in the Maryland Parkway bars and secondhand clothing and record shops nearby. Always within sight of the Strip's glow, the university is well integrated into the community, hosting concerts and sporting events at its Thomas & Mack Center as well as on-campus museum exhibits and professional performing arts productions.



UNFOLD FOR MAP