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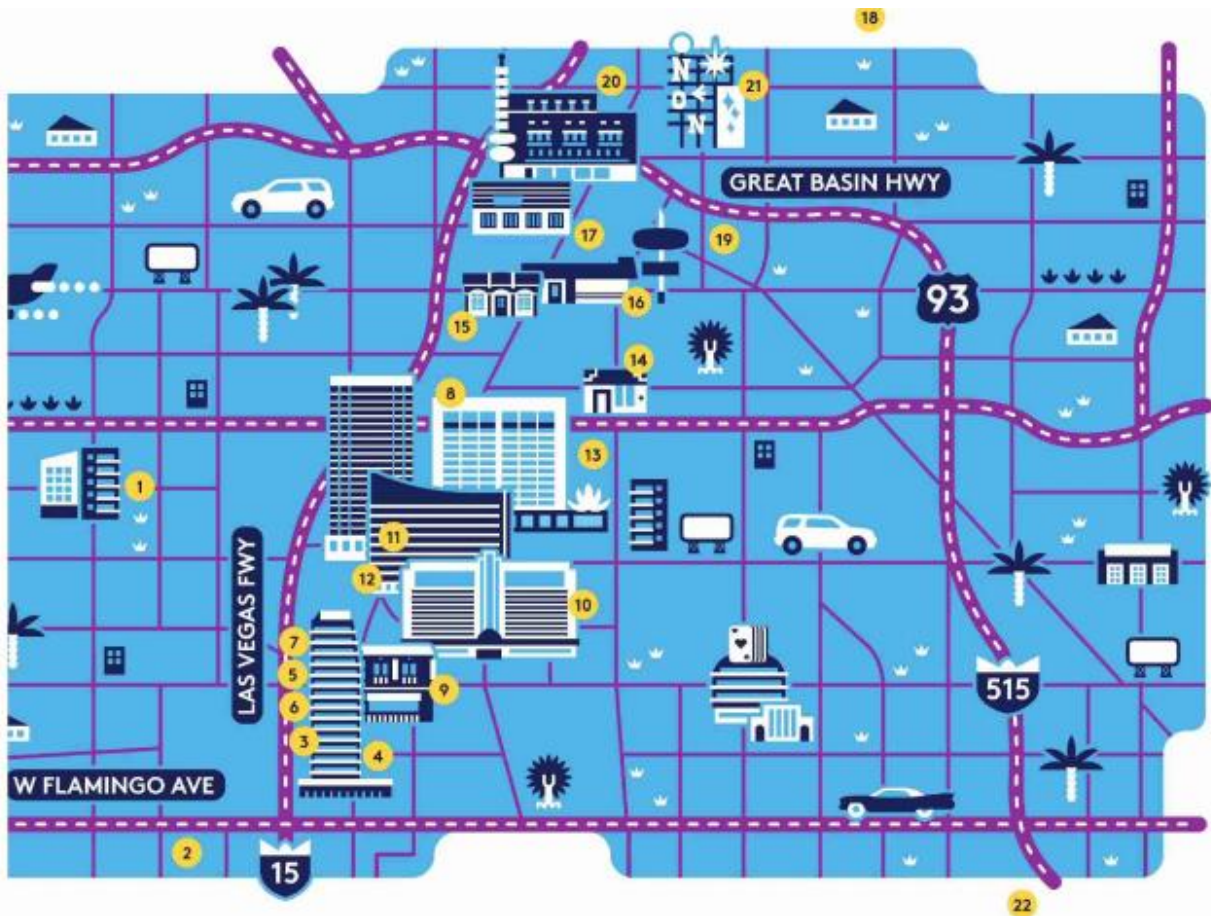


MUSIC LOVERS, LIVE LIKE A HIGH ROLLER IN VEGAS WITH THESE INSIDER TIPS FROM INDUSTRY VETS AND HOMETOWN HEROES LIKE IMAGINE DRAGONS AND THE KILLERS

By Colin Stutz

Be it the blackjack table or the dinner table, deals are being made and hands are being played all across Las Vegas. No more is it an old man's game in that other Entertainment Capital of the World, and long gone are the days when the most diversity in town is at the hotel buffet. "You can go old school, you can go indie, you can see those that have passed via an impersonator—really the options are endless on any given night," Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas chief marketing officer **Lisa Marchese** says about the music offerings in town. "And while the quality varies dramatically, there is no shortage of options." Book a trip for the upcoming Billboard Music Awards on May 19 (see story, page 32) or check

ILLUSTRATION BY JAN KALLWEJT



in on Memorial Day weekend, when Sin City turns into the EDM capital of the world, says **Jesse Waits**, managing partner of XS and Tryst nightclubs at Wynn Las Vegas. “It’s the kickoff to the entire summer and there are amazing parties and headlining DJs all over town.” Billboard spoke to some of the most important insiders in town to figure out the best of the city—and where the real business goes down.

1. AWG Ambassador

4676 Wynn Road

For transportation around town, Insomniac founder/CEO **Pasquale Rotella** recommends this limo service. “It’s better than waiting in cab lines and [it’s] affordable,” he says.

2. Pearl Concert Theater

The Palms, 4321 W. Flamingo Road

When the Palms Hotel built this theater, every seat was tested to ensure no sightline was obstructed. Hard-wired to the Studio at the Palms to record live shows, it’s

a favorite venue of Panic at the Disco’s **Brendon Urie**. “It sounds great and it shows all kinds of acts,” he says.

3. The Cosmopolitan Hotel

3708 Las Vegas Blvd. South

Located in the center of the Strip, it’s a city favorite. As proof, Marchese extols its status as Foursquare’s most checked-in hotel in the world. Innovative Leisure Records founder **Jamie Strong** notes that the hotel “is responsible for making Vegas exciting again.”

Check out its Set Your Life to Music Thursday-night indie series.

4. Jaleo

The Cosmopolitan, 3708 Las Vegas Blvd. South

Celebrity chef **Emeril Lagasse** loves Jose Andrés’ tapas restaurant for a great power lunch. “Order several items for the table to share to get a good sampling of the menu,” he says.

5. The Buffet Bellagio

The Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. South

“One of the best breakfast buffets,”

Killers drummer **Ronnie Vannucci Jr.** says. "It's as ornate as you can get."

6. Yellowtail Japanese Restaurant & Lounge
The Bellagio, 3600 Las Vegas Blvd. South

The terrace and view of the Bellagio fountains make for an impressive dinner, Dim Mak Records founder/DJ **Steve Aoki** says. "They've got a bomb tuna jalapeño dish."

7. Drai's Afterhours
3595 Las Vegas Blvd. South

"After all these years, Drai's is still the best after-party in town—a place where it's OK to get freaky-deaky," says **Jonathan Shecter**, aka "Shecky Green," director of programming at Wynn Las Vegas nightclubs.

8. The Flamingo Showroom
Flamingo Las Vegas, 3555 S. Las Vegas Blvd.

"There aren't many traditional showrooms left in Vegas, so it reminds me of the Rat Pack and Elvis days, when I worked Vegas as a little kid," says **Donny Osmond**, of the Donnie & Marie Theater at the Flamingo.

9. Spago
The Forum Shops at Caesars Palace, 3500 Las Vegas Blvd. South

Wolfgang Puck started Vegas' fine-dining movement 20 years ago with Spago, AEG Live Las Vegas VP **John Nelson** says, and "it's still the place to run into any Las Vegas heavy-hitter."

10. 1 OAK
The Mirage, 3400 Las Vegas Blvd. South

"1 OAK owns the Vegas after-party scene," says **Darren Pfeffer**, VP of music and entertainment marketing at Clear Channel Media and Entertainment. "Usher shut it down after the iHeartRadio Music Festival last year."

11. Trump International Hotel Las Vegas
2000 Fashion Show Drive

With 64 floors of golden glass, "it's the secret destination of the elite when coming to Vegas," Food & Beverage magazine publisher **Michael Politz** says. "Grammy Award-winning producer Damon Elliott can be seen having drinks with Pink at the lobby bar."

12. The Country Club
Wynn, 3131 Las Vegas Blvd. South

For a power lunch, Pfeffer says, "If In-N-Out Burger is too crowded, the Country Club at the Wynn is a must."

13. The Peppermill
2985 Las Vegas Blvd. South

So long as you're ready to wait, this neon-filled Vegas staple serves the best breakfast at any time. Shecter says, "It like a scene in 'Boogie Nights' had a baby with the Rat Pack. Huge portions, attitudinal waitresses, off-the-charts kitsch value."

14. Lotus of Siam
953 E. Sahara Ave. A5

Locals and visiting foodies know the modest beauty of this Northern Thai restaurant, nestled in a mall east of the Strip. "It surprises with its understated location and aesthetic, but then surprises again with amazing food," Marchese says.

15. Luv-It Frozen Custard
505 E. Oakey Blvd.

It would be easy to drive by this tiny stand north of the Strip, but **Gary Richards** (aka DJ Destructo), founder/CEO of HARD Events, says

this ice-creamery isn't to be missed.

16. Dino's Lounge
1516 Las Vegas Blvd. South

The Strip's favorite dive bar. **Andrew Courtney**, special events manager at Hard Rock Cafe Las Vegas, recommends it for an after-party: "a legendary karaoke room that's always a show in itself."

17. Artifice
1025 S. First St.

"Old Downtown is having a bit

of renaissance," Vannucci says, with Artifice in the center of the 18-block, decade-old Arts District now coming into its own. "It's souped up with the sort of flavor you might find in hipper towns like L.A. or even New York."

18. Chicago Joe's
820 S. Fourth St.

"The best unknown Italian restaurant in Vegas," KLUC PD **Cat Thomas** says. "It's a house downtown with only a dozen tables, and the food is amazing. It's like having a meeting in Old Vegas."

19. Commonwealth
525 E. Fremont St.

North of the Strip, this pub offers a hip relief from the typical commotion, making it the perfect place for drinks after a show, Waits says.

20. Du-Par's Restaurant and Bakery
Golden Gate Casino, 1 Fremont St.

Imagine Dragons singer **Dan Reynolds** says that inside Vegas' oldest hotel-casino, with more than 70 years of service, "are the best pancakes in the world."

21. The Neon Museum
770 Las Vegas Blvd. North

One of the city's hottest tickets is a tour of this two-acre neon bone yard, showing off rescued relics from Vegas' most iconic properties. "If they'd only fit, these signs would decorate every loft apartment in downtown L.A.," Nelson says.

22. Pinball Hall of Fame
1610 E. Tropicana Ave.

Teamwork Management founder **Kevin Kusatsu**, who represents some of the city's biggest DJs (Diplo, A-Trak), says this is the best place for a break: "It's weird and different and there's no nightclub in there."

23. Hash House a Go-Go
6800 W. Sahara Ave.

Vegas loves this new-school break-

fast spot that serves healthy enough portions to cure what ails you from the night before. "One item on the menu is a 24-ounce beer and a plate of bacon," Urie says.

24. Vintners Grill
10100 W. Charleston Blvd.,
Suite 150

"The greatest power lunch spot in town," Politz says. "On any given day you can catch Nicolas Cage, Al. B. Sure! or Carrot Top lunching with their teams, strategizing their careers."

25. Red Rock Casino Resort & Spa
11011 W. Charleston Blvd.

If you're staying off the Strip, Thomas recommends getting a room at the base of Red Rock Canyon. "They spent \$1 million per suite," he says. "And the pool is amazing."

Harking back to the Rat Pack's glory days at the Sands Hotel and Casino, or Elvis Presley's 800-plus sold-out shows at the Las Vegas Hilton, Vegas' tradition of residencies and special engagements is innately tied to the town's musical history. The practice continues still, but with more diversity than ever.

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

Boyz II Men

The rundown: Terry Fator Theatre at the Mirage, \$40-\$60, March 1-Dec. 29

What to expect: The quartet's a trio now, but fans can still look forward to a strong run-through of the group's platinum hit singles, like "Motown-philly" and "On Bended Knee." There are some newer songs, too, as well

as the safe padding of Motown and Beatles covers, but mostly it's pure '90s nostalgic bliss.

Wow factor: Spoiler alert! For "End of the Road," all three singers leave the stage to cruise through the aisles, and on "I'll Make Love to You" they hand out roses.

Celine Dion, "Celine"

The rundown: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, \$55-\$250, March 2011-2019

What to expect: No Cirque du Soleil backup dancers or overelaborate show here, just an elegant Dion and a 31-piece orchestra running through expected hits and diverse covers.

Wow factor: She's impressive enough with just this to earn her comparisons to Frank Sinatra in talent and Elvis in star power.

Elton John, "The Million Dollar Piano"

The rundown: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, \$55-\$250, April 20-May 11

What to expect: Whereas John's previous residency—2008's "The Red Piano"—was over the top, with a video component by David LaChapelle, this show is more natural and geared toward his amazing catalog, with two hours of mixed hits and deep cuts.

Wow factor: John's piano is outfitted with 68 LED screens that complement the tennis court-size screen behind the pop singer, lighting up with myriad patterns, colors and clips.

Mötley Crüe

The rundown: The Joint at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, \$50-\$125, Sept. 18-Oct. 6

What to expect: It's a less-than-month-long residency, but following the band's stint of a similar length last year, the city is eager for more. It's surely been said before, but was there ever a band more fitting Vegas' hard-partying ethos?

Wow factor: Backup dancers and acrobats, pyrotechnics and Tommy Lee's 360-degree roller-coaster drum set.

Santana, "Greatest Hits Live: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow"

The rundown: House of Blues at Mandalay Bay, \$138-\$375, April 18 onward

What to expect: A two-hour set of the guitar hero doing what he does best—shredding through his catalog.

Wow factor: What sets this apart from the two years Santana spent at the Hard Rock Hotel some years back is the venue size. At roughly 2,000 capacity, this is an intimate feel for a city where bigger is almost always better.

Rod Stewart, "The Hits"

The rundown: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, \$49-\$250, July 20-Aug. 4

What to expect: An on-your-feet singalong experience, for starters, as Stewart lives up to the show's title with a stacked performance of his singles.

Wow factor: Do ya think he's sexy? The intimate setting means no viewer is more than 120 feet away from the stage.

Shania Twain, "Still the One"

The rundown: The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, \$55-\$250, December 2012-December 2014

What to expect: Twain's high-wattage comeback is committed to the thought that she's still got it—the voice, the sex appeal, everything that's made her the world's best-selling female country artist. Naturally, the hits are aplenty, the production typically Vegas.

Wow factor: A lacy black bodysuit, horses and a motorcycle flying through the air.

EDM

Hakkasan

The rundown: Hakkasan at the MGM Grand Hotel, \$20-\$30 (female), \$30-\$75 (male), April 18 onward

What to expect: The new five-level, \$200 million Chinese restaurant/nightclub will host residencies through the summer by such heavyweight DJs as Deadmau5 (started April 18), Steve Aoki (starting April 25), Calvin Harris (April 27) and Tiësto (May 3).

Wow factor: It's been reported that Hakkasan

spent an estimated \$70 million to pay the salaries of its superstar DJ lineup for its first year. At that price, it had better be good.

Light

The rundown: Light at the Mandalay Bay Hotel, \$20 (female), \$40 (male), opening May 24

What to expect: Cirque du Soleil's new entertainment venue will pair the Montreal performance group's high-flying circus theatrics and production with residencies by some of EDM's biggest names inside and outdoors at the Daylight Beach Club's Eclipse pool party. Among them: Axwell (starting May 22), Zedd (May 24), Baauer (May 26) and Skrillex (May 26).

Wow factor: Each show will be specially crafted to fit the performer, meaning each night will feature different visuals and atmospheres.

Wynn's DJ residencies

The rundown: Surrender, Encore Beach Club, XS and Tryst at the Wynn Las Vegas, \$25-\$30 (female), \$35-\$55 (male), April 22 onward

What to expect: This year the Wynn has upped the ante with 42 DJ residencies across its properties including Avicii (starting May 4), Afrojack (May 11), Diplo (May 18) and David Guetta (May 26), all running at least through the year.

Wow factor: With an average of 10 DJs on four stages during a given weekend, the Wynn sounds more like a music festival than a hotel. —CS