

The Province

TRAVEL

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Get a close look at Galápagos Islands aboard luxurious Silversea **PAGE D4**

The edge of Vegas **Solitude secured**

Off-the-Strip excursion to entertainment city offers new outlook **PAGES D2-3**



The Vintner Grill's sumptuous outdoor terrace transports you to an exotic locale. The restaurant receives daily deliveries from Los Angeles farmers' markets.

Going where Vegas locals play

Time at the edge of Sin City offers an entirely new perspective on Nevada life

Catherine Roscoe Barr
FOR THE PROVINCE

Since discovering Las Vegas a few years back, I've visited every year around springtime for some guaranteed sunshine and undoubtedly a good time.

This time, however, my eyes were opened to an entire new Vegas when my friend Amber and I stayed at the edge of town and experienced some of the city's natural wonders — 16 national parks lie within a two-hour drive — and off-the-radar restaurants.

The Red Rock Casino, Resort and Spa sits near the western border of Las Vegas, in Summerlin — a master-planned community designed by the Howard Hughes Corporation and named for the late billionaire's grandmother — just five kilometres east of Red Rock Canyon. The opulent resort, dripping with

more than three million Swarovski and Preciosa crystals and gleaming with polished marble, opened in 2006 — the first billion-dollar luxury resort to go up off the Strip and one of the newest additions to the Station Casinos properties — and, despite being named one of the world's best new hotels by Conde Nast in 2007, has largely remained a local's getaway and the place they recommend to visiting friends.

We stayed in one of the resort's gorgeous 2,500-square-foot third-floor villas, with our own private patio and infinity pool, overlooking the massive pool deck dotted with palm trees and lounge chairs below.

A local writer we met over cocktails told us a lot of locals go to nearby Red Rock Canyon early in the morning to run and bike when temperatures are still relatively cool and the tourists are still in bed. The resort's Adventure Spa can



The black truffle and cremini mushroom pizza was incorporated by Due Forni's executive chef Carlos Buscaglia.

arrange a variety of activities at Red Rock Canyon, as well as at numerous surrounding recreation areas, including mountain biking at Blue Diamond Park, road biking at Mount Charleston, horseback riding at

Eldorado Canyon, river rafting at Black Canyon and boat tours or kayaking at Lake Mead.

We opted for a driving tour of Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area with Pink Jeep Tours in

their custom 10-passenger all-terrain vehicle. The tour stops at the new visitor centre, where resident desert tortoise Mojave Max can be seen slowly meandering around his habitat past rock climbers who travel from around the world to experience the legion of routes.

On the other side of Vegas, about 50 kilometres east of the city centre, we got an up-close look at the behemoth Hoover Dam during a boat cruise around Lake Mead — the fifth-most visited unit of the U.S. national park system — in a classic Mississippi-style paddlewheeler.

We also joined an interpretive float trip along the Colorado River in Black Canyon with Black Canyon and Willow Beach River Adventures, which begins at a restricted-access point immediately below the dam, and got to see plenty of bighorn sheep — even a family of three with a wee baby — along the water's edge.



Lake Mead Cruises offers the beautiful *Desert Princess*, a three-level, Mississippi-style paddlewheeler.

Each night we ventured out to one of Summerlin's celebrated restaurants, neighbourhood gems helmed by longtime locals who first made their mark on the Strip.

Husband and wife team, Summerlin residents, and longtime Vegas culinary insiders, chef Kim Canteenwalla and restaurant consultant Elizabeth Blau, opened the whimsically appointed Honey Salt (she's the honey, he's the salt) in October 2012.

The whitewashed brick walls, reclaimed wood, and clusters of mismatched lamps and framed mirrors offer an inviting shabby chicness, matched by the menu's gourmet comfort foods, such as the delicate tuna tartar taken to exquisite heights with crunchy quinoa, the caramelized scallops with vanilla bean cauliflower purée and truffle sauce, and the tender lamb porterhouse, seared to rare perfection and served with smoky bacon sofrito.

The restaurant has farm-to-table sensibilities, sourcing many ingredients from nearby suppliers and neighbouring states, and farms near Santa Barbara, but chooses quality over proximity for certain items such as the octopus, trap-caught in Portugal.

Another largely-local restaurant is the fabulous Vintner Grill, which takes freshness so seriously that it's without a freezer and receives daily deliveries from Los Angeles farmers markets, about 430 kilometres southeast.

Executive chef Matthew Silverman began his culinary career as a dishwasher at one of Wolfgang Puck's Las Vegas restaurants, and has led Vintner Grill's kitchen team since the fine dining restaurant opened in 2006.

The sumptuous outdoor terrace is shielded from the suburban shopping plaza it sits in by regal cabanas, Bohemian accoutrements and glowing Moroccan lanterns.

Inside, checkerboard tiles allude to the restaurant's bistro fare, but things are kept light with menus presented on particle board clipboards, accents of lime green and pops of tangerine.

Be sure to start your meal with their mix-and-match charcuterie and cheese platters, featuring a dozen different cured meats and more than three dozen international artisan cheeses, a selection of which are impeccably made in-house — Silverman is a chef ambassador for the Wisconsin Artisan Cheese Council — and pair perfectly with their thoughtfully selected wine flights, featuring international and regional labels.

For another outstanding wine list and selection of to-die-for food, head to Due Forni Pizza and Wine.

When co-owners executive chef Carlos Buscaglia, formerly top chef at MGM Grand's Fiamma, and brothers Russel and Alex Taylor were dreaming up the restaurant concept they couldn't agree on the style of classic Italian pizza they'd offer — Roman or Neapolitan — so they went with both (Due Forni means two ovens).

The dual Neapolitan brick ovens are fired to 500 and 900 F so each of the half-dozen pizza varieties can be made in either the cracker-thin Roman or chewy Neapolitan styles, respectively.

Buscaglia's Italian roots inspired many of the scrumptious dishes, such as the Tartufo pizza, with black truffle, Parmesan crema, and roasted cremini mushrooms, topped with over easy egg and finished table-side.

The Taylors were adamant about quality ingredients and quality execution, importing a variety of Italian buffalo mozzarellas as well as San Marzano tomatoes, investing in Enomatic wine dispensers so they could offer nearly four dozen wines by the glass, and hiring numerous



A canopy of twinkling lights tops Honey Salt's terrace, where gourmet comfort food awaits.

staff with sommelier credentials.

More than just a pizzeria, Due Forni serves a small selection of appetizers and entrees, and whether it's the tender braised octopus, or the decadent semolina gnocchi, they've been cooked in one of the pizza ovens, for exceptional, deep flavour.

Exceptional flavours, peaceful retreats and outdoor adventures are a Las Vegas theme I could definitely get used to, and already I'm dreaming of my next little jaunt to this sunny paradise.



A half a dozen of the Vintner Grill's cheeses are made in-house, including the impossibly fluffy and mild chèvre.