

VA-VA-VA-VEGAS

YOU'LL BE SATIATED, SCANDALIZED AND SOMEWHAT STUNNED BY SIN CITY. **BY GILLIAN KENDALL**

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED to join the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Founded in San Francisco, the Sisters comprise street theater/social awareness/activist groups of drag nuns who often sport bearish beards with their habits and pray to the Blessed Virgin in deep, throaty voices. In their black-and-white gowns and rhinestone rosaries, they clown around with onlookers at Pride marches, protest anything homo-oppressive and generally promote safe, not-so-innocent fun that's of the sexiest, most self-indulgent kind.

Unfortunately for me, the Sisters are mostly male, and they don't have a chapter where I live. But last week, I felt like an honorary (or dishonorary!) member of the troupe during my time in Las Vegas. My first visit to Sin City, to research all things queer, left me more than satisfied: I was sated, scandalized and somewhat stunned by the onslaught of food, drink, drag and other forms of, yes, perpetual indulgence that combine, clash and kaleidoscopically converge in the four-mile-long area known as the Strip.

For the first time in my life, I was picked up from the airport in a stretch limo. From then on, Presidential Limo supplied the ride every time I left the hotel—or actually, every time I left “THEhotel at Mandalay Bay,” as it's called and capitalized. That contrived spelling encourages pronunciation with the emphasis on the definite article, as if it's *the only* hotel in Las Vegas, instead of one of dozens

that collectively offer 150,000 rooms. THEhotel is at THEend of THEStrip—get it?

Still, despite its gimmicky moniker, THEhotel does offer THE best view of the Strip from its Alain Ducasse–inspired miX Lounge on the 64th floor, and my spacious suite was *très luxe*, if a little less than restful, due to the late-night revelry from the streets, cocktail bars, pools, casinos and partying sisters six floors below.

But no one comes to Vegas to get a good night's rest, and anyway, most nights I was out late. For instance, I spent a few cheery hours at the Chandelier Bar at the Cosmopolitan, where the “mixologists” unveil trays of lavender, sea green and pale orange drinks like intoxicating works of art. True to its name, the Chandelier Bar is not just lit but surrounded by interwoven strings of crystals, which are draped like blingy cobwebs. The bar is a perfect place for a romantic marriage proposal, or a romantic quickie (if you can find a dark corner).

My companions and I had ample opportunities to, uh, network at the many parties (pool, cocktail, cocktail-in-pool, etc.) organized by MGM Resorts' Fabulous Las Vegas, an annual weekend event aimed at the gayest of revellers. Even beyond the massive MGM complex, the Strip's endless parties, shows, restaurants, bars, nightclubs and, oh yes, casinos, all wanted us badly—now. And beyond

Cirque du Soleil's *Zumanity*



the Strip lies the rest of Las Vegas, including the old, neon-lit Fremont Street area (pedestrians-only). You'll find the overwhelming entertainment choices listed in the free gay print magz: *Night Beat* or *QVegas* (with a female editor!), or you can download *Q Vegas*, the new, free, all-gay iPhone app, for up-to-the-nanosecond party news and more.

One show not to miss is Frank Marino's *Divas Las Vegas* at the Imperial Palace, a two-hour, ooh-la-la extravaganza of impressive impersonations, catty celebrity gossip and a little bit of real heart.

A person can get worn out with all the late nights, long afternoons and early mornings—not to mention endless libations and clever conversation—so it was with relief that I scheduled a morning at the Caesars Palace Qua Spa. An amazing deep massage started the relaxation routine, which I completed with long silent soaks in pools of various thrilling temperatures, until I was rehydrated and ready for more of everything va-va-va-Vegas.

Serendipity 3, a wildly popular pink-and-white eatery at Caesars, resembles an idealized ice cream parlor from the '50s. It's only on closer inspection that one observes the rows of top-shelf liquor behind the soda fountain, and notes the 2012 prices for the indulgent brunch items (Frrrozen Hot Chocolate is a big seller, though too sweet for this sugar addict). If deep-fried Oreos sound a little intense, go for the Tex-Mex-y eggs or an omelet. No matter what you want to eat, go early, before everyone else has shaken off their hangovers, or be prepared to wait for a table.

Just as Las Vegas is called "Vegas" by its residents, they never refer to Cirque du Soleil by anything other than its first syllable. There are currently three Cirque shows playing in Vegas, and a local man who learned that I was seeing *Zumanity* said, "Oh, you're going to the porn one!"

Well no, not really. The "adult" show didn't seem pornographic to this polyamorous bi-dyke, but, strangely, a couple of gay male friends were actually offended, though I think less by the displays of nudity (no shirts on the women, big deal) than by the lack of overt male sex acts. I myself—and, no doubt, the many straight men in the audience—relished the sight of two young women cavorting inside a large fishbowl, and I liked the panorama of reasonably diverse sexuality throughout the show. One caveat: The two fat characters were also the only ones who were totally comic and asexual. I kept hoping for a scene that would reveal the two large, middle-aged women's beauty and sensuality, but there was none.

The best and most purely beautiful hours I spent in Vegas were in a front row center seat for the k.d lang show at the graceful, brand-new Smith Center for the Performing Arts. To my amazement, the theater was not sold out, but the locals seemed enthusiastic, especially when k.d., who has performed in spectacular venues worldwide, praised the new art deco-style theater, saying how lovely it was and how very grateful she was to be there. For myself, I will never again wash my right hand: k.d. high-fived me in passing during the rock-out version of "Miss Chatelaine."

Thanks to a marketing catchphrase, it used to be that "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." Now, apparently, what happens in Vegas goes viral, especially weddings at the Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel, where not only can a marriage be performed by Elvis in a vintage pink Cadillac, or a goth union be witnessed by vampires popping out of coffins, but the event can be streamed

live on the Internet for thousands of your closest cyber friends. Ironically enough, the business is owned by a gay couple, who can't legally marry in their own state; nevertheless, a small percentage of their 400 to 500 celebrations a month are same-sex unions.

After too much fun, I was delighted to board my boring AirTran flight to the relative serenity of Atlanta Hartsfield Airport: I slept all the way. I enjoyed what happened in Las Vegas, and I'd go back next year for Gay Days, or Shedonism at Rumor Boutique Hotel, or another Cirque show. But my first attempt to rock glitzy Sin City had been altogether overwhelming. Anybody want to join me at a nunnery? ■

CURVE
SLEPT
HERE



Rumor
Las Vegas

Almost everyone has a favorite part of Vegas—something that keeps them coming back. Maybe it's the glitz of the Strip, or the thrill of the roulette wheel. For me, it's Rumor, a queer-friendly boutique hotel that serves as my personal retreat in Sin City. Unlike the labyrinthine mega-hotels Vegas is known for, Rumor, just off the Strip, is a sophisticated place with an easy-to-navigate floor plan. The hotel has no casino to speak of, giving it a relaxed atmosphere, but should you fancy a flutter, hop across the street to the Hard Rock Hotel, known for its great casino and world-class events. For a small fee, Rumor guests can also head to the Hard Rock's remarkable gym and spa facilities.

Rumor is elegant. Each of its 149 suites (every room is a suite) has gorgeous black-and-white decor, silver lighting and violet, red and aqua accents. The beds are deluxe, with fluffy comforters and tons of pillows, and there are mirrors. Lots of mirrors. If

you enjoy a good soak, like I do, make sure to request a room with a soaking tub—big enough for you and your lovely lady.

And because you are, after all, in Sin City, Rumor is a wee bit naughty. The artwork in the rooms hints at the hotel's reputation as a swingers' destination, as do the sofas facing the five-person shower in the "Wet Room" (one of Rumor's four mega-suites). Yeah, I said "mega-suites." These enormous themed suites are great for birthday parties, bachelorette parties and any kind of one-on-one naughtiness.

What else? Rumor plays host to queer events, including Shedonism, the official women's event for Las Vegas Pride, and Gay Spring Break. For lesbian ethical eaters, Addiction Restaurant can accommodate a vegetarian, gluten-free diet. And for pet-loving lesbians, Third Thursday Yappy Hours cater to four-legged friends and their owners. (rumorvegas.com) [Kristin Flickinger]