

Nov. 12-19, 2013 - What Happens in Vegas
...well you know!

I seem to get out to Las Vegas once every quarter century or so. This was my 3rd trip and there were a lot of changes since my first visit, in 1963, while I was on my Honeymoon and my return trip in 1988. The casinos are more numerous, the hotels are much larger and the attractions are more grandiose. Vegas will always be Vegas, but I did notice a lot more young people and families strolling along "The Strip" this time.

This particular trip was partially paid for as part of a "timeshare" sales promotion, and combined with a \$208 round trip non-stop flight on Spirit Airlines, provided me a lot of value for the out of pocket dollars spent. One of the things that I looked forward to was the opportunity to do some private flying while there as the weather is generally excellent this time of year. Since the Las Vegas "Strip" is located under Class "B" airspace, general aviation flying is somewhat restrictive, and flying over the casino hotel area is impossible since it abuts McCarran field, which is restricted right down to its surface. I, instead, selected nearby Henderson Airport for my aircraft rental. Although busy with helicopter tours and flight instruction, this tower controlled field was close enough to the things that I wanted to see, including nearby Lake Mead and Hoover Dam. My flight instructor for this aerial adventure was a 22 year old woman who was trying to accumulate hours for eventual employment by one of the Grand Canyon tour operators. Our hour long flight also included a "touch and go" at nearby Boulder City municipal airport.

My last visit to Las Vegas was almost 25 years ago and a lot is different. Many of the 1960 and 70 era hotels have been raised and in their place are modern, stunning and, some would say, even gaudy examples of decadence and over indulgence. They are, none the less, breathtaking and opulent, each trying to outdo their competitors. I really enjoyed just wandering around Las Vegas Blvd. both day and evening, simply taking in the sights. I suppose that the two most worthwhile would have to be the dancing waters at the Bellagio and the erupting volcano at the Mirage. Both of these attract hundreds of onlookers when they perform every hour on the hour at night. The Grand Canal inside of the Venetian Hotel, along with its gondola ride and the roller coaster ride at NY, NY are close seconds. In my opinion just viewing and experiencing all of the free attractions that these casino hotels have to offer could take the better part of a week. Its like a Disneyworld for grown ups. And, since I don't gamble, I used my entertainment budget to go to shows and great dinner venues each evening. As part of my "timeshare package" I also received two free show tickets and two dinners, so I was able to take in a stellar performance every evening that I was in town, including "The Jersey Boys", a musical about Frankie Valli and the Four Season, and "Dancing Queen" featuring ABBA hits from the '70's. I also visited a couple of area's museums, including one associated with the Smithsonian Institution on the development and testing of the atomic and hydrogen bombs in nearby Los Alamos. It's "Area 51" exhibit was interesting and informative with regard to the UFO's reported to be seen operating around the world. Why, I had such an enjoyable time on this visit, I almost can't wait until 2038, and my next quarter century scheduled return to Las Vegas!!



My rental Cessna 172 for this aerial adventure



My safety pilot/instructor- will work for "hours"



Lake Mead with its surrounding mountains



One of the several marinas that dot Lake Mead



A view of Hoover (Boulder) dam from above



And, later that day, at the Dam itself



A view from the Hilton Hotel's 31st floor room



One of the downtown Casino Hotels, NY, NY



Venetian Hotel/Casino, as seen from the outside



Inside view of the Venetian Hotel's Grand Canal



A night view in front of the Mirage Hotel's Lake



Me, waiting for the Mirage's Volcano to erupt