



Illustration by Ben Tallon

Cathy Adams swaps the slots for wagyu steak at Vegas Uncork'd food festival, proving Sin City has a lot more going for it than gaudy casinos, blackjack and Elvis tribute acts



CLOCKWISE FROM THIS IMAGE: The Strip at dusk; chicken and waffles from Bacchanal Buffet at Caesars Palace; Bacchanal Buffet



experiences is Excalibur's Tournament of Kings, where, like a fat Henry VIII, you eat meat and potatoes with your fingers while watching medieval jousting. This is a place where anything goes – and luckily that's the kind of eating I'm into.

Las Vegas's gastro net is cast wider than the mega resorts and casinos lining the glitzy Strip, though. Downtown Las Vegas has amped up its appeal with the Fremont Street Experience and attractions such as the high-rolling Slotzilla, which involves being shot out of a giant slot machine on a zipline (really). There's also Inspire, which puts on talks, films and has a mean cocktail bar in 365 Tokyo, which is suspended in a glass box over the street.

Back at ARIA for Uncork'd, I'm getting valuable intel about the best places to eat in the city – both on and off-Strip – from a local journalist at a Sunday morning brunch at Sage. While tucking into ceviche, ribs and champagne during a four-course meal from four different acclaimed Vegas chefs, he whispers to me conspiratorially about the best places to eat that I definitely won't have heard of already. First on his hit list is Raku, a Japanese charcoal grill well away from the sins of South Las Vegas Boulevard – “it's where all the chefs eat”, he tells me. Then there's Lotus of Siam, in a dusty old strip mall, where every dish is incredible and draws queues out of the door; and The Palazzo's **Carnevino**, where steak isn't cheap but is apparently the best you'll ever have.

That's the problem with Vegas. There's always more, more, more – this is a city that's never going to be sated, no matter how many

wagyu beef sliders it puts away.

Where to eat on the Strip

YUSHO, MONTE CARLO
Japanese street food in the US doesn't come fresher than

Yusho. Sake comes in vintage-looking cans, the ramen is bigger, better and tastier (try the Monster Ramen with maitake mushrooms and shrimp) and the grill turns out all kinds of steaks from tofu to wagyu beef. montecarlo.com

BACCHANAL BUFFET, CAESARS PALACE

There's a reason this buffet is one of the best in Sin City, and even more of a reason why it's called

THIS CITY WILL NEVER BE SATIED, NO MATTER HOW MANY WAGYU BEEF SLIDERS IT PUTS AWAY

Bacchanal – there are over 500 different dishes each day, with top choices ranging from fried chicken and waffles to lobster benedict (in Vegas, it's a thing). caesars.com

RAO'S, CAESARS PALACE

Right opposite the queues for Bacchanal is Rao's, a family-run Italian that first opened in New York more than a century ago, and remains one of the oldest restaurants in the city. If you can't get a table in NYC (there are only 12, and it's notoriously difficult) head to Caesars – despite being in the



My conversation starter is not original, but it's the best I've got for my Lincoln Town Car chauffeur after a ten-hour flight that ran out of alcohol a few hours in. I don't even have to worry about an awkward silence, since he reels off about 20 different places to eat as soon as we leave the airport, and is still whirling through dishes I have to try as I'm attempting to remove myself from the car's leather clutches outside the Bellagio.

Turns out Las Vegas isn't just for Bradley Cooper, non-stop slots or showgirls. With so many dollars sloshing about on the iconic Strip, it's no surprise the Nevada playground is one of America's greatest cities for food – it's just finally saying something about it.

All the shouting's coming from the annual Vegas Uncork'd food festival by

Bon Appétit, which has been fattening up international foodies for almost a decade. In traditional Vegas style, it's a coruscating line-up of tastings, cooking classes, dinners and drinks up and down the Strip, and each year the city becomes the brilliant party host for an array of celebrity chefs and personalities – including Michael Mina, Guy Savoy, even our very own Gordon Ramsay – in a four-day foodie blowout. Over a single long weekend I learn how to ice cupcakes with **Buddy Valastro** at The Venetian, tuck into Mina's hog roast by the poolside at the

US celebrity chef Buddy Valastro (aka the Cake Boss) and his family own the Strip's renowned Carlo's Bakery, serving old-school Italian pastries and cakes.

MGM Grand and eat miniature everything at Caesars Palace.

Vegas's charm lies in knowing exactly what it is, and not giving a roulette chip what others think

LAS VEGAS KNOWS WHAT IT IS, AND IT DOESN'T GIVE A ROULETTE CHIP WHAT OTHERS THINK

about it. You're just as likely to scarf your way, blind drunk, through a mega hotel buffet at 2am as you are at 4pm; Michelin-starred restaurants sit cheek-by-jowl with roulette tables; and one of the more bizarre food





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Hakkasan at the MGM Grand; Joël Robuchon; Yusho



midst of the huge resort, it's got a cosy, intimate feel to it. The divine veal chop and lemon chicken won't exactly send you running for the streets of Manhattan, either. caesars.com

SAGE, ARIA

American classics are on the menu at this slightly garish purple and gold-clad restaurant. Headed up by Chicago chef Shawn McClain, the wildly popular Sage turns out traditional dishes such as strip

steaks and bone marrow alongside lobster and wagyu short ribs. There are ten different kinds of absinthe too, so go easy if you're planning on heading back to the slots... aria.com

THE VENETIAN AND THE PALAZZO

The gaudy mock-Italian Venetian (complete with canal and gondolas outside) and its neighbour the **Palazzo** at the end of the Strip do two things really well: gambling, and food. They have the most star-studded line-up of chefs that you'll find in the whole town, and are home to 15 restaurants run by celebrity names you'll recognise: Daniel Boulud, Wolfgang Puck and Thomas Keller among others. venetian.com

Between The Palazzo and The Venetian there are 38 different restaurants ranging from Sushisamba's Japanese-Brazilian-Peruvian food to Canyon Ranch Café's 'healthy spa cuisine'.

RESTAURANT GUY SAVOY, CAESARS PALACE

If you really want to go all out (you're in Vegas, after all), head to Guy Savoy's eponymous joint in Caesars Palace. It's the proud owner of two Michelin stars, and you'll understand why the moment you order – expect copious quantities of foie gras, artichoke and black truffle oil soup – while the Krug tasting room gives a closer

view of the kitchen. This place is so serious about food that Savoy tells his staff not to wear perfume in case it messes with the aromas. (Although smelling like cash? That's mandatory.) caesars.com

FLEUR, MANDALAY BAY

Fleur in the Four Seasons Mandalay Bay might get overshadowed by surrounding restaurants, but its small plates of perfectly masterminded global cuisine stand up for themselves. Try the tangy mini tuna tacos, meaty grilled octopus with patatas bravas or green papaya carpaccio with wagyu beef. hubertkeller.com

STAFF CAN'T WEAR PERFUME IN CASE IT MESSES WITH THE AROMAS OF THE FOOD



NEED TO KNOW

Rooms at the Bellagio start from \$187 (around £120) per night. bellagio.com

British Airways flies direct to Las Vegas from Heathrow and Gatwick from £575 return. ba.com

Vegas Uncork'd by Bon Appétit takes place from 23-26 April across a number of Las Vegas resorts. Details on demonstrations and tastings can be found at vegasuncorked.com. Tickets start from \$110.

For further information on Las Vegas, go to visitlasvegas.co.uk