

A SURE BET

An eclectic collection of casinos guaranteeing a payout of maximum experience.

by PAUL RUBIO

ARIA RESORT & CASINO *Las Vegas, Nevada*

CONTEXT Striving for economic recovery during the Great Depression, Nevada legalized gambling in 1931 and never looked back. “The Strip,” as we know it today—the highly saturated 62,000-key stretch of South Las Vegas Boulevard—began taking shape in 1989 with the debut of Steve Wynn’s megaresort, The Mirage.

CASINO Opened in December 2009, the Aria casino is the sole gambling establishment in the ultra-high-tech, \$8.5 billion, 16,797,000-square-foot City Center complex. At the time of its building, Aria became the world’s largest Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certified hotel, so it’s only natural the casino features energy-efficient slot machines that double as A/C units.



GAMES 150,000 square feet of gaming; 145 gaming tables; 24 poker tables; and 1,940 slot machines embrace the eclectic, kitsch, and camp that is Las Vegas (think: the Lynda Carter–dedicated Wonder Woman Wild adorned with authentic memorabilia and an Ellen DeGeneres–themed slot with an Ellen’s Dance Party Free Spins bonus).

HIGH ROLLING Dedicated areas include SPIN, a Peter Marino–designed, high-limit slot room; the Poker Room, which includes the one-table, high-limit Ivey Room; the Baccarat Lounge, a small, hidden bar for high rollers located outside Salon Privé; and multiple high-end gaming tournaments (baccarat, blackjack, poker, slots) with prize pools from \$500,000 to more than \$1 million.



SCENE By day: Guests at City Center’s Aria, Vdara, and Mandarin Oriental in stylish resort wear, also random Circus, Circus folk coming to see what the fuss is about. **By night:** Upscale Vegas tourists and A-listers in Armani and business-casual attire.

From \$129, aria.com.



THE VENETIAN MACAO *Macao SAR, China*

CONTEXT The genesis of gambling in Macao dates to legalization circa 1850 under Portuguese rule. Three years after the colony was transferred back to China in 1999, the government ended previous casino monopolies, opening the floodgates for larger operators and megaresorts, with the island surpassing Vegas gaming revenues by 2007 (now generating more than five times Vegas’ revenue).

CASINO Opened in 2007 on the Cotai Strip, The Venetian Macao stakes claim as the world’s largest casino housed in an eponymous hotel, which is a replica of The Venetian Las Vegas, but double the size. As the name suggests, the casino channels Italian grandeur (heavy on the gold and religious frescoes).



GAMES 385,000 square feet of gaming; 500 tables including the Chinese dice game “sic bo” (which translates to “big/small”), Sands stud poker (a variant of Caribbean stud poker), baccarat, blackjack, and three-card poker; fast action baccarat and dragon elements (both unique to this hotel); 2,000 slots.

HIGH ROLLING High-limit Ruby Room for those who prefer to play in communal areas, otherwise private VIP rooms provided; members-only Paiza Club offers baccarat, blackjack, roulette, and bespoke tables; 180 VIP Slots in Venetian High Limits (with top jackpot awards exceeding HKD10million or \$1.3 million).



SCENE By day and night: Constantly busy with both Chinese nationals and foreigners, with daytime wear dictated by the outdoor temperature and nighttime wear generally resort casual to slightly dressy (slacks and shirt for men; cocktail dresses for women).

From \$245, venetianmacao.com. ▷



BORGATA HOTEL CASINO & SPA

Atlantic City, New Jersey

CONTEXT The 1976 passage of the Casino Gambling Referendum brought gambling to Atlantic City, home to America’s first boardwalk circa 1870 and inspiration for the board game *Monopoly*. (Ever wonder what “Short Line,” “Reading Railroad,” and “Pennsylvania Railroad” had in common? Atlantic City!)

CASINO The upscale Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa opened in 2003, bringing a Las Vegas-style destination to the East Coast. Soft renovations to the sprawling casino are happening at press time as part of a larger multimillion-dollar hotel refresh.



GAMES 161,000 square feet of gaming; 182 gaming tables; a poker room with more than 80 tables; 3,150 slot machines—statistically the loosest slots of any property in Atlantic City and Pennsylvania.

HIGH ROLLING For the highest of high rollers, comped nights at one of Borgata’s elusive and famous sky-high residences, which cannot be rented at any cost, making them priceless; The Boardroom, an exclusive high-limit poker lounge (minimum buy-in of \$10,000); and the Borgata Poker Open, with a \$3 million prize guarantee in 2015.

SCENE By day and night: Mixed bag of Manhattanites gone wild on bachelor and bachelorette parties; a young yuppie crowd out for a good time; cliché real housewives of New Jersey.

From \$99, *theborgata.com*.

CASINO CLUB AT THE GREENBRIER

White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

CONTEXT When the historic Greenbrier hotel (est. 1778) was about to go bust in 2009, coal magnate and West Virginia’s only billionaire, Jim Justice, came to the rescue with \$250 million to revive the hotel and lobbied the West Virginia Senate to pass a bill enabling the opening of the state’s first and only casino.

CASINO The casino opened in July 2010 as part of a new wing at the refurbished Greenbrier, decked out in the hotel’s flowery and colorful Dorothy Draper decadence (though done by protégé Carleton Varney). It’s open only to hotel guests and Greenbrier Sporting Club members.

GAMES 103,000 square feet of gaming; 37 tables including blackjack, Texas Hold ‘em poker tables, craps, baccarat, and roulette; 320 slot machines. Simulcast racing bets are taken in the Twelve Oaks lounge.

HIGH ROLLING Separated, raised areas for baccarat and high rollers; nightly Champagne toast at 10 p.m. preceded by performance of the “Greenbrier Waltz” (he in tails, she in a crinoline).

SCENE Quiet by day. **By night:** Old-money elegance, women donning family heirlooms or Harry Winston jewels, men in formal suits or at least the requisite sport coat (no denim is allowed).

From \$228, *greenbrier.com*.



BEAU RIVAGE *Biloxi, Mississippi*

CONTEXT Casino gambling was legalized in Mississippi in 1990, but the industry had been thriving since the 1920s—albeit illegally. The Gulf Coast became the largest port for contraband liquor during Prohibition and local government turned a blind eye to this rum-running as well as the casinos overtly operating at resort hotels. Today 11 casino resorts line the Gulf Coast.

CASINO The \$800 million Beau Rivage, the largest single investment in Mississippi’s history, opened in 1999 and was rebuilt in 2006 following Hurricane Katrina to the tune of \$550 million. It operates as part of the greater MGM Resorts International empire.

GAMES 85,000 square feet of gaming; 88 tables including blackjack, craps, and roulette; 16-table poker room; 2,029 slots including thematic Wizard of Oz, Michael Jackson, and Iron Man machines.

HIGH ROLLING Dedicated high-roller salon, with 10 blackjack tables and a baccarat table, operates as a casino within a casino; 96-machine high-limit slot room.

SCENE By day: Smart casual. **By night:** Cocktail dresses and slacks. A dynamic, upscale Vegas pulse infused with the Southern charm of both employees and clientele.

From \$99, *beaurivage.com*.



THE CASINO AT THE RITZ-CARLTON ARUBA

Aruba, Dutch Caribbean

CONTEXT Following legalization of gambling in the Netherland Antilles, Aruba’s first casino debuted in 1959 on unspoiled Palm Beach at the Aruba Caribbean Hotel. By the 1970s and 1980s this land of Dutch tropical exotica—downy sands, glitzy casinos—was an island of choice for yesteryear’s jet set. The wildly popular Caribbean stud poker was patented in Aruba in 1988.

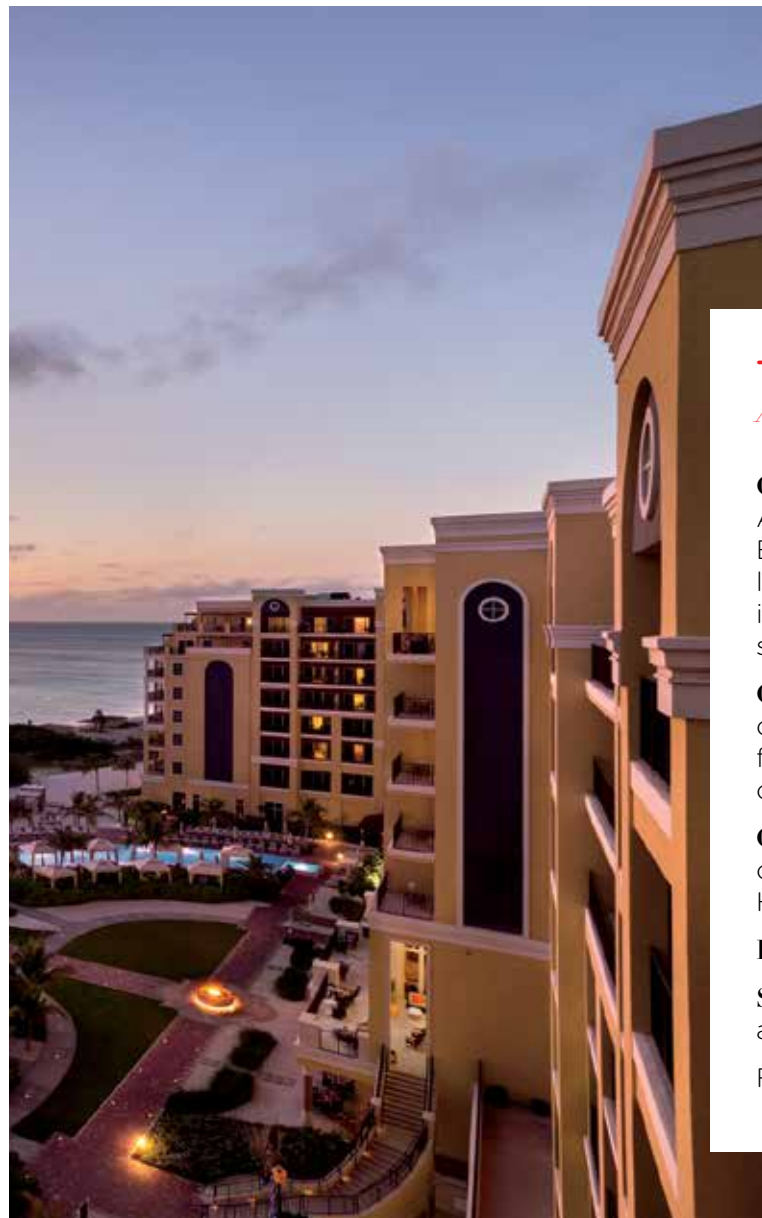
CASINO The youngest (opened November 2013) and most upscale of Aruba’s current 11 casinos, the Casino at the Ritz-Carlton Aruba flanks the hotel’s main lobby, handsome and understated (as far as casinos go).

GAMES 15,000 square feet of gaming; 17 tables including blackjack, craps, Caribbean stud poker, EZ baccarat, Let It Ride, and Texas Hold ‘em; 305 slot machines; Luxury Bingo.

HIGH ROLLING Designated section of high-limit tables.

SCENE By day: Quiet. **By night:** Honeymooners and dads in Dockers and Izod polos, sneaking out after putting the kids to bed.

From \$629, *ritzcarlton.com*. ▸





ATLANTIS CASINO *Paradise Island, Bahamas*

CONTEXT Nine years after crafting the Lotteries and Gaming Act of 1969, the Bahamas passed a new amendment granting all casino licenses to hotels, catalyzing the dawn of Nassau's modern-day gambling scene. Gambling remains a "tourist only" activity, meaning it's still illegal for native islanders.

CASINO The tropical-inspired Atlantis Casino opened in 1998, doubling as a magnum opus for glass sculptor Dale Chihuly, with larger-than-life crystal pieces like the mid-casino elevated Temple of the Sun and Temple of the Moon, as well as his sea life chandelier in the casino's high-limit table area. More recently, the casino added a dedicated zone for sports betting: the new 6,860-square-foot tech-savvy Atlantis Race and Sports Book with 44 personal betting stations and six VIP betting stations.

GAMES 60,000 square feet of gaming in three separate areas; 75 gaming tables including baccarat, Caribbean stud poker, Let It Ride, craps, roulette, and blackjack; 750 slot machines. Don't miss sun-kissed, poolside blackjack and craps at the outdoor Cain at the Cove casino area, or games like blackjack and roulette at The Cove's Sea Glass.

HIGH ROLLING Dedicated high-limit zone on casino floor; annual Poker Stars Caribbean Adventure (PCA) tournament; and annual \$75,000 slot tournaments.



SCENE By day: Fanny-packed and Hot Topic cruise ship crowd and the resort-casual, in-house crowd. **By night:** Caribbean chic and stylish for a night out—in a casino (think: Versace and Cavalli).

From \$280, atlantisbahamas.com.



CASINO DE MONTE-CARLO

Monte-Carlo, Monaco

CONTEXT Monaco's Princess Caroline was the brains behind opening a grand casino in the mid-19th century, predominantly to generate revenue to pay off debts. Needless to say, the venture was a success. Initial profits fostered the creation of *Monte-Carlo Société des Bains de Mer*, which soon funded multiple expansions. Nowadays, the *Société* manages Monaco's handful of casinos, and much like in 1856, Monégasque citizens are not allowed to gamble inside the casinos.

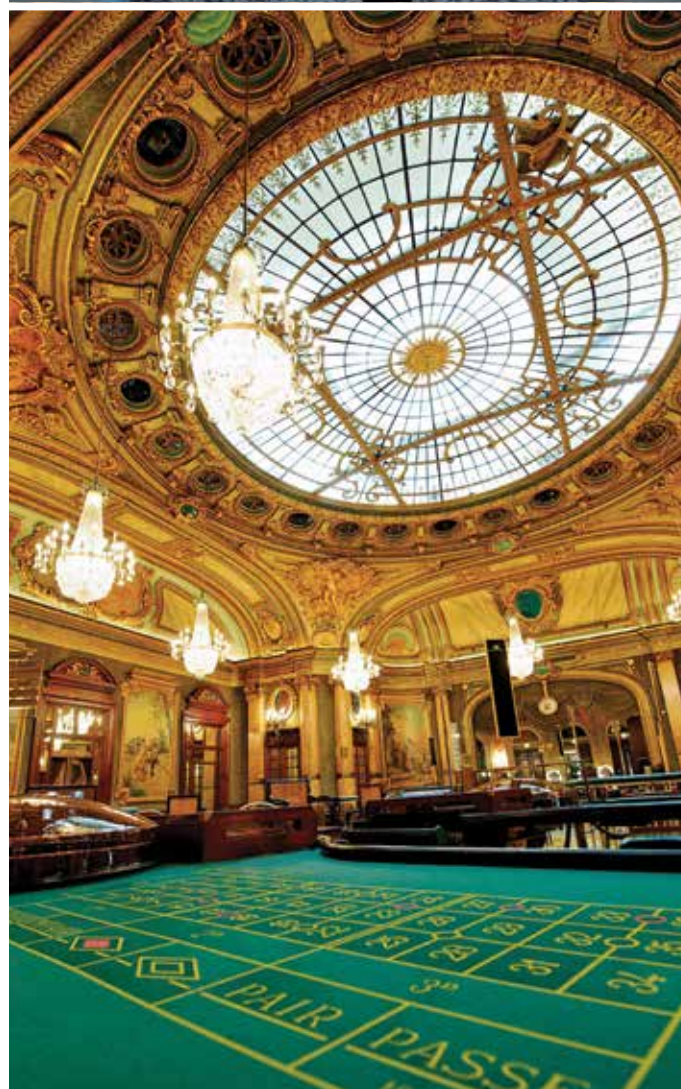
CASINO With a history dating to 1856, this Beaux Arts stunner is the apex of casino glamour. A transformation in 1879 by Charles Garnier (of Paris' Palais Garnier fame) bestowed the Casino de Monte-Carlo with the iconic Belle Epoque façade. Al fresco gaming terraces capitalize on the seafront location.

GAMES 75,000 square feet of gaming; tables include European, English, and American roulette, as well as electronic roulette (double zero is replaced by a bonus figure, a Monte-Carlo original), punto banco, chemin de fer, banque à deux tableaux, and 21+3 (unique to the casino, it combines hands from three-card poker and blackjack); no traditional poker; more than 1,100 slot machines with many exclusive to the casino.

HIGH ROLLING Les Supers Privés—prestigious, super-private gambling rooms, where high rollers gamble on their own with a *sur-mesure* (or bespoke) service; full access to the myriad hotels, casinos, and amenities of *Société des Bains de Mer* on a case-by-case basis.

SCENE By day: Tourists and cruise ship passengers checking out this world-renowned sight. **By night:** Sophisticated and stylish, the living reality of a James Bond fantasy, complete with mystery, intrigue, tuxedos, diamonds, and haute couture galore. casinomontecarlo.com

Stay Hôtel Hermitage Monte-Carlo, from \$400, hotelhermitagemontecarlo.com. ➤





SEMINOLE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO

Hollywood, Florida

CONTEXT In 2004 Florida officially voted in favor of casino gambling, but the state's relationship with betting dates to the Roaring '20s. Back then, underground supper clubs and gambling halls rebelled against the Prohibition movement, and gangsters like Al Capone surreptitiously took residence in the Sunshine State. Nowadays, gaming is highly regulated and limited to Native American territories.

CASINO Las Vegas-style slot and table action arrived in 2008, replacing video gaming machines inaugurated in 2004, and providing a much-hyped alternative to the typical smoky bingo halls on Florida's Indian reservations (and more to talk about than Anna Nicole Smith's untimely death here in 2007).

GAMES 140,000 square feet of gaming; 120 tables, including blackjack (82 tables), mini-baccarat (26 tables), Spanish 21, and Casino War. Special house rules include: "6 Card Bonus Bet" in three-card poker and "match the dealer" in all blackjack games.

HIGH ROLLING High-stakes, no-limit poker; high-limit tables room with 36 total tables of blackjack, mini-baccarat, and pai-gow poker; two private gaming rooms with direct access to the cashier; the biannual Seminole Hard Rock Poker Open (which in 2013 carried a record-breaking \$10 million prize guarantee); and VIP perks like complimentary butler service and access to the resort's private Chef's Table.

SCENE **By day:** Florida seniors getting their casino fix and tourists in shorts and flip-flops. **By night:** Mixed bag of overly dressed Latin power players, "Girls night out" gal pals in BCBG, and South Florida suburbanites rolling the dice before hitting the adjacent arcade of nightclubs and lounges.

From \$175, seminolehardrockhollywood.com. ♦



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