

Fewer masks, more visitors: What to expect Memorial Day weekend

By [Bailey Schulz](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal
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This upcoming Memorial Day weekend could be the kick-start to a strong summer of tourism in Las Vegas.

The holiday is the first major travel event since mass vaccinations took off in the U.S. Industry watchers expect strong demand from visitors over the three-day weekend — a stark contrast from last year's Memorial Day, when [casinos across the state were still shuttered](#).

“With capacities continuing to increase, this year's Memorial Day may end up being one of the best that the city has seen in some time,” said Brendan Bussmann of consulting firm Global Market Advisors.

Drawing visitors

Memorial weekend wraps up just before June 1, the [goal date set by Gov. Steve Sisolak](#) to have Nevada businesses end capacity and social distancing restrictions.

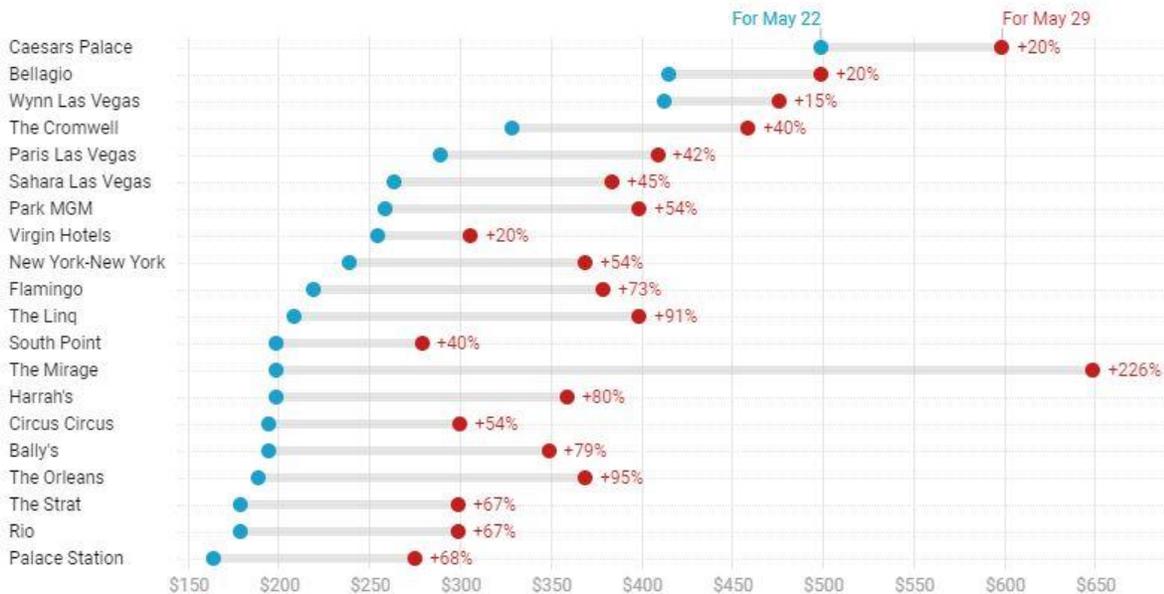
Even so, the majority of Strip casinos have already been given the go-ahead to [operate at full capacity](#), after demonstrating to the Nevada Gaming Control Board that they have taken “measurable and material steps” to vaccinate the workforce, visitors and community. Other nongaming venues inside the properties — including restaurants and pools — continue to operate under 80 percent capacity limitations.

Holiday weekend room rates

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Source: Hotels.com • Created with [Datavrapper](#)

Operating under higher occupancy limits should provide customers “a sense of comfort and ease,” said gaming consultant Debi Nutton.

It “gives customers a sense that we are really doing our part in Las Vegas to make them comfortable and secure,” she added.

Many local hotel-casinos also [rolled back mask mandates](#) for vaccinated guests this past week, now that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its guidance to say that vaccinated people are OK to go maskless in more indoor and outdoor settings.

The new measures come at a time when Las Vegas casinos are seeing a spike in interest among leisure travelers. These new measures could increase demand even further, Bussmann said.

“The lifting of the mask mandate for vaccinated guests and workers further solidifies that Las Vegas is back open for business,” he said. “While we still have a ways to go, things are heading in the right direction.”

Room rates reflect surge in demand

Some room rates are already showing increased demand on the Strip for the three-day weekend.

The Mirage, for instance, is charging \$649 per room on May 29, the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, according to [Hotels.com](#). That’s more than three times the \$199 starting price listed for a room this upcoming Saturday.

Bally’s prices jump 79 percent to \$349 in that same time span, while prices at The Orleans nearly doubled from \$189 to \$369, according to [Hotels.com](#). Websites for some properties, including Circa and Aria, show rooms the night of May 29 were unavailable as of Monday.

“I expect that virtually every room that is made available will be filled,” said Alan Feldman, a distinguished fellow at UNLV’s International Gaming Institute.

Nutton said operators are seeing “very, very high” demand for Memorial Day weekend, with some resorts booked at over 90 percent occupancy.

To compare, the average weekend occupancy in March was 78 percent, according to the latest monthly report from the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

The growing weekend demand tracks with previous statements from resort companies. Earlier this month, management from Caesars Entertainment Inc. said all weekend rooms are [expected to be sold out](#) for the foreseeable future.

“Vegas is starting to feel like Vegas again,” said Nehme E. Abouzeid, president of consulting firm LaunchVegas. “You see operators looking to fill positions, forward booking numbers solid, and conventions starting to announce returns. These are positive signs.”

UNLV College of Hospitality assistant professor Amanda Belarmino said the weekend will be a good time for Las Vegas to show its chops with travelers who had previously been concerned about venturing outside their homes.

“I think Las Vegas will see high occupancy and high demand,” she said.

“However, what will be key this weekend is how well we take care of our guests. A successful weekend in terms of customers satisfaction may be the best marketing we could ask for at this time.”

Growth heading into summer

Pent-up demand is expected to continue into the summer, according to industry watchers.

Abouzeid said new resorts such as Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, Circa and Resorts World — which is set to open June 24 — will draw interest from visitors, along with the return of more entertainment and events.

“Vegas can get rolling again with all of the things that make it an unbeatable destination,” he said. “I expect it to continue throughout the summer, with July 4 also being strong.”

Bussmann said he expects pent-up demand will continue to push Las Vegas’ rebound.

“Memorial Day will be the kickoff to what looks like a strong summer for the destination,” he said.

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