

ADVICE FOR CHEAPSKATES

THE DAYS OF FREE DRINKS AND 99 CENT BREAKFAST BUFFETS ARE LONG GONE IN VEGAS. It's all about harvesting dollars—your dollars—with as little outrage as possible.

It's fair to say the move to Mandalay Bay and the amenities we love the most—beer and coffee—are at least as expensive, if not more so, than at the Sands, Venetian, Treasure Island and Harrah's.

So consider this if you're locked into the Mandalay, Luxor, Excalibur, MGM Grand and Tropicana corridor:

- The standard price for beer-in-a-bottle or beer on tap, excluding your ultra-high-end brews, is six or seven bucks a pop. Everywhere. Plus an 8.1 percent sales tax.
- Several deli-style stores can be found at the hotels, but for the most part they only sell 24-ounce cans of light-amber, no-taste beer at \$6.49 per can. That includes sales tax. A relative bargain at \$3.25 for 12 ounces of mediocre yellow water.
- **So what are your options?** Across the street from Mandalay Bay, and please use the cross-walk, is the Smart Mart Wine & Slots. The selection is OK and you can get case of Coors for under 20 bucks.
- Soft drinks and bottled water are no bargains either, unless you buy your bottled water from a sketchy vendor hawking water for a buck a bottle. Otherwise the price, while it varies from hotel to hotel, can hit a stiff four bucks per.
- **So this is what you need in Vegas these days.** Visit a local Wal-Mart, Costco or Target and buy a cooler with wheels. My personal favorites are the Igloo Ice Blue MaxCold or the Coleman Extreme—a Walmart "best buy" at \$29.88.
- **Hotel ice machines?** It's iffy. So many people are wheeling coolers around, especially at the Luxor, that the machines have a hard time keeping up with demand.
- **So why the ice?** There are no in-room refrigerators in Vegas unless you have one delivered to your room at \$25 a day at the Luxor and Excalibur. The other hotels? Luck of the draw.
- **Coffee?** If you're a Starbucks fan, you're in luck. At last count there were two in Mandalay Bay, three in and around the Luxor, three at the MGM Grand complex, two at the Excalibur two at New York New York and at least one at the Tropicana.
- **Price?** All you need to know is this. A "Tall," Starbucks strange name for a "small" is \$3.25 versus a \$1.80 or so anyplace but Vegas. It's \$3.50 at the Tropicana. Use that \$3.25 price as a guide. Use a credit card for those frappuccinos, macchiatos and chai tea.

KEEP THAT APPOINTMENT!

WALK YOU MUST. Wear flip-flops or stilettos at your own peril. Distance is one thing; time is another. I prefer calculating distance by time. And remember, there is "elevator" time from your room to consider.

So if you were to hike from New York New York to the heart of Mandalay Bay for that 9 a.m. appointment, give yourself at least 25 minutes. A cab? Forget it.

By the time you catch a cab, weave through traffic, arrive at the Bay and walk to the convention center, it's faster to hike it. And way cheaper.

Here's some estimated "Stride" times at a moderate pace—if hemmed in by gawking tourists and some of the 20,000-plus visitors Interbike expects—from the following hotels:

- **Luxor**—15 minutes to walk 0.3 miles.
- **Excalibur**—20 minutes to walk 0.5 miles.
- **MGM Grand**—25 minutes to walk 0.7 miles.
- **Tropicana**—25 minutes to walk 0.5 miles.
- **New York New York**—25 minutes 0.7 miles.
- **Four Seasons**—20 minutes to walk 0.7 miles
- **THE Hotel**—10 minutes
- **Mandalay Bay Hotel**—10 minutes

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IN LAS VEGAS!



WI-FI IS VEGAS MYSTERY

ALL YOU HYPER CONNECTED DIGITAL ADDICTS, LISTEN UP. This is important if you plan on doing business on a laptop in your hotel room. After all smart phones can't do everything. Yet.

In-the-room Internet connections, especially at the cheaper hotels, is a hodge-podge. In fact, there is NO in-room Wi-Fi at the Luxor and Excalibur. Yes, you read that right.

Instead tucked away somewhere near what passes for a desk is an old fashioned Ethernet cable. You must plug that cable into your computer. The connection is supposedly free, or so we're told.

As for New York New York it's a mix—some rooms apparently have Wi-Fi and others have a cable. The Tropicana, recently remodeled, has Wi-Fi in its rooms as does the MGM Grand.

If you're living large with an iPad, but living downscale at the Luxor or Excalibur, you may be out of luck. Advice is conflicting on whether you can connect an iPad to an Ethernet cable. Check with your nearby Apple Genius.

If you have a cellular plan for your iPad or iPad wannabe, you're good to go assuming you can connect to your provider. Cellular can be iffy at these mega-hotels.

If you're packing an ultra-light laptop like a MacBook Air, which has no Ethernet port, you will need to bring or buy a so-called "dongle." A dongle has a USB connection on one end and an Ethernet connector on the other. Good luck with that.

Mandalay Bay, THE Hotel and the Four Seasons fall into the upscale category and have Wi-Fi in their rooms.

One final caveat, check your bill upon leaving. Travel Planners, the group which handles reservations for Interbike, told us there shouldn't be an Internet fee on your bill—it's covered by the so-called "resort" fee which is cleverly tucked away inside your room rate. So when checking in specifically ask what do you get for that resort fee.

There's a variety of "free" hotspots in public areas. And there are at least a dozen Starbucks at the various hotels. But it is Vegas, so slap a digital condom on your digital device.

WEDDING BELLS ARE RINGING

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS... UNLESS YOU POP INTO ONE OF FOUR AVAILABLE WEDDING CHAPELS ALL WITHIN MINUTES OF THE SHOW FLOOR.

A Vegas wedding requires no planning. But bring a credit card and \$60 in cash to pay the Clark County Marriage Bureau for a license. The Bureau accepts no checks, no credit cards, no blood tests. And if you plan to marry someone 16 or under bring a court order.

After a "rigorous" evaluation of dozens of wedding packages, ranging in price from \$199 to more than \$18,000, these are BRAIN's Best Picks for impromptu wedded bliss.

Tight budget: Excalibur's Canterbury Chapel and its "I Do" package at \$199 is a "Best Buy"—plus get a room for the night at a low, low \$29.95. Add to the moment by slipping into an authentic medieval costume for your nuptials—think Robin Hood and Maid Marian.

High rollers: For industry executives, nothing compares to the opulence of THE Wedding Chapel at Mandalay Bay. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Convenience: The Luxor's chapel is near the food court, so why spend a fortune on a catered reception. The "Amethyst" package starts at \$299 with a bridal bouquet and boutonniere for the groom. Or step up to the "Diamond" at \$1,625. Champagne and two nights at the Luxor with rates as low as \$49 a night makes this an unforgettable event.

Live video: Stream your wedding live at the MGM Grand for family and friends who can't make it to Interbike. The broadband video feed can be included as part of a package. So consider "Hollywood Glamour" at \$1,100 or step up to the "It Takes Two" for \$2,100.

ty to spend \$18,000 on a quick and tidy marriage. Yes, lower-cost packages are available, but the "Decadence" package has so many bells and whistles we can't list them all. But be assured your guests will eat and drink well with a full bar, hors d'oeuvres, a veggie grill, pasta bar and beef tenderloin dinner.

Remember: Most prices don't include an 8.1 percent sales tax or a separate minister fee that runs between \$55 and \$75. And adding optional services can really jack that final price.



TRAM TO NOWHERE
Forget the tram that runs between the Excalibur, Luxor and Mandalay Bay. It starts running at 9 a.m., so it's of no use to early morning show-goers. It can be crowded. It's slow. It's mostly for show. Think tourists and people with time on their hands.

TAXIS AND YOUR WALLET
Average fare from McCarran Airport to Mandalay Bay is \$17 to \$20 depending upon traffic. To the Excalibur—\$16; to the Luxor—\$17. If you must stay at the Venetian and surrounding hotels, an 8 a.m. cab ride to Mandalay Bay will run \$17 minimum. It's all about the traffic, so stay off the Strip. Here's how your cab fare is calculated:
• **Base Rate:** \$3.30
• **Per Mile:** \$2.60
• **Fuel Surcharge:** 25 cents per mile
• **Airport Pickup:** Add \$1.80

