

Q: We've been arguing. I say Monte Carlo is the most glamorous gambling city in the world. My spouse says there's none better than Las Vegas. Who's right?

A: Your one-and-only said it. Vegas, baby, Vegas, of course. Consider me an expert, because over the past 50 years, I've invested quite a bit of time and money in Sin City. Of course, the return on the investment in gambling has been minimal, but the experience has always been more than worth the cost. Seriously, Las Vegas has all you want just within quick taxi or walking distance on the famous Strip.



Vegas boasts world-class entertainment, every kind of international food, luxurious hotels, all sorts of gambling, fantastic pools and great shops. You'll enjoy all the elements of Sin City along with millions of retirees in walkers and go-carts. And don't be surprised if you see an Elvis, Madonna or Michael Jackson clone performing marriages, pumping gas, waiting on tables or in the toilet stall next to you.

For another city that is exciting for many other attributes, including gambling, I choose London. It has some very posh clubs where you can lose your money in great dignity, along with the very snootiest of British society. The city itself is full of fascinating historic sites, great theater, wonderful museums, terrible weather and lousy restaurants.

Other great gambling destinations on my list are Monte Carlo, Baden-Baden, Atlantis, Macau, Sun City in South Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore, Reno, Atlantic City and that little old RVer favorite on the Colorado River, Laughlin.

For the world's original luxury casino, you can visit Baden-Baden in Germany. It was opened by

some guy named Wilhelm the First, Frederick the Great or Hans von Schickelgruber way back in 1809. It is said Napoleon gambled there, and the reason he always held his hand inside his coat was because the casino took his underwear, pants and the treasury of France. Maybe Nappy stormed out saying, "I've been haddened in Baden Baden!".

Because of all the James Bond movies, and when Monaco's Prince Rainier married movie star Grace Kelly in 1956, wealthy European and American gamblers were convinced the Casino de Monte Carlo in Monaco was the coolest, hippest gambling joint in the world. Why not? It's rumored that the wealthy Philly Kelly family gave Prince Rainier, the blushing bridegroom and pit boss, a \$2 million dowry to spend on some major casino renovations to what looked like a bad imitation of Caesars Palace in Vegas.

The famed casino today is slightly threadbare, actually is a former French palace, and is more roomy and rheumy than Buckingham. When I was there two years ago, I did some half-hearted gambling, but was more interested in finding out about the late Princess.

I was told the grave of Grace Kelly, the glamorous movie idol of my youth and fellow Philadelphian, was in a memorial building next door to the casino. Oh, great, I thought. They built a cathedral to our Gracie. What a disappointment and shock! She's under a small, flat stone slab on the floor of a tiny chapel. Was that the best the bosses of the gambling joint could do for the lady who put Monte Carlo back on the map?

I guess I shouldn't have expected anything else. Today Monte Carlo is greatly overrated, and looks like a rundown downtown 1950s Fremont Street Vegas casino. However, if you want to go back home bragging that you gambled in the same casino as James Bond and rubbed shoulders with some crooked financiers, give it a day's trip from Cannes or Nice.

I never liked the Caribbean. Mostly shabby Club Meds and all the hype trying to hide the fact that most of the people there are super rich or super poor. However, the Atlantis Resort Hotel in the Bahamas is the largest and most luxurious casino in the Caribbean, and a great gambling location. The hotel is a beautiful structure, featuring twin towers connected by a scenic penthouse walkway. The penthouse, incidentally, costs \$25,000 a night, so at least some people on the island are not poverty-stricken.

Although I've been all over the world, and have sampled many of the gambling areas, I always return to Vegas. In fact, within the past ten or so years, Vegas has replicated the whole world on the Strip. For instance, to enjoy the flavor of France, there's the posh Paris Resort.

For Italy, there's Bellagio and the Venetian. For ancient Egypt, there's Luxor. And, despite my griping, if I want a taste of the Caribbean without all the long flights and the angry people, there's the Mandalay Bay Resort. It even has a sandy beach and enormous pool that pumps up big waves for surfing. Just like the ocean, but without the pollution and oil slicks.