



Most of the rumored differences between Las Vegas strip casinos and local ones are just that. Gambling anywhere is a game of chance, and the casino always has the edge. In Sin City they call it gaming, to make it fit the luxury image.

Whether you invest a quarter into a Native American casino slot machine or toss a hundred dollar chip onto a fancy hotel casino blackjack table, the odds are about the same. Of course, every gambler dreams of the day when a moment of luck will result in a big pay-off. That's why people keep going to casinos.

There are a few actual and some fantasy differences between the big, fancy Las Vegas Strip resort casinos and the smaller, slightly-seedy small town ones, as well as those on the nation's Native American reservations.

1. The customers: Local casinos mostly attract modest gamblers who work for a living in and around the area. They're usually older, quieter and calmer than the tourists who roam Las Vegas. You don't hear too many shouts and screams when someone wins a five-dollar bet, as you do when the college and young career crowds are betting at a hip Sin City casino.

2. The mood: For example, the atmosphere at Native American and neighborhood casinos is more friendly, and there are fewer fancy lights, flashy waitresses and less ear-splitting music. Some, as in downtown Vegas, have the dark look of old-fashioned Western saloons. All that's missing are the spittoons.

3. Lower bets: Everything in the casinos where locals congregate costs less. There are many more small-change slot machines, and one-dollar minimum table bets offered. At Vegas resort casinos, five dollars is usually the minimum table bet, and most slot machines require 25 cents on up for each spin. Most so-called penny machines in Sin City require a minimum of 40¢ a spin.

4. Cheaper food and booze: Beer is the favored drink for locals in their casinos. Bottles may be as cheap as a dollar, and mixed drinks a bit more at two dollars. At the fancy Sin City casinos, the price is double, often triple.

Food at Native American casinos is very basic and cheap, usually burgers, tacos and cold sandwiches for \$5 or less. The locals come to gamble, not waste too much time on fancy dining. The famous Las Vegas buffet tradition is still going strong on the Strip, but instead of the 99¢ specials of a decade ago, they go from \$19.99 and up.

If you intend to gamble, whether at a fancy resort, a Native American casino or a highway joint favored by locals, never forget that the odds are on the side of the casino. They've always been that way, and will never change. Once you understand your slim chances of winning, and want to experience everything casinos have to offer, you can settle down and have a good time. Lotsa luck!