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CALENDAR

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THE GUIDE

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time to
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19 RESTAURANTS
FOR RINGING IN
THE NEW YEAR

MAMMOTH
ACTION ON AND
OFF THE SLOPES

LIGHTS.



ACTION.



MGM Mirage

Mechanical penguins are part of the holiday decorations that adorn the conservatory inside the Bellagio resort.

Vegas brings out the holiday cheer

The holiday season is the one time out of the year when the neon lining the Strip isn't necessarily the brightest light in town. Las Vegas is home to some breathtaking holiday displays — from pecan-encrusted reindeer and animatronic penguins to a three-acre cactus garden full of lights and a floating ice skating rink, this city definitely knows how to be festive.

The Conservatory at Bellagio

Located at the heart of the Las Vegas Strip, the Bellagio Conservatory features an enchanting display that captures the essence of winter. With fresh evergreens, exotic flowers and other fine creations, visitors strolling through this attraction will definitely get into the holiday spirit.

"We always like the holiday show to be fun and youthful, a time to remember your childhood," said Audra Danzak, Bellagio's executive director of horticulture. "We get inspiration from nature, books, films and songs. We always challenge ourselves to do something different."

One of the unique things at the conservatory this year is a display of Emperor penguins atop a bed of icebergs. Three of the penguins are actually ma-

chine-operated.

"Guests are sure to laugh when they see them on a teetering ladder trying to hang a star on their tree," Danzak said.

Not too far from the penguin display is a breathtaking 42-foot Shasta fir tree centerpiece. Adorned with 12,000 colorful lights, gigantic ornaments and even a dancing water display at the base, it's the perfect centerpiece, but bringing this towering tree inside the conservatory was definitely a challenge.

"We had to get it inside Bellagio through a set of freight doors specifi-



Ethel M. Chocolates

Holiday lights adorn the cactus at Ethel M. Chocolate Factory's botanical gardens.

cally designed for conservatory use," Danzak said. "Once inside the hotel, we had to inch it carefully down public hallways before reaching the conservatory. That meant taking down signs and moving furniture."

To complete the festive winter scene, the conservatory also features pecan-encrusted reindeer wearing yokes made of cranberry-red dried botanicals. These reindeer can be found "flying" over a gigantic "Seasons Greetings" card made up of colorful, freshly-cut flowers and pinecones.

Visitors can witness a five-foot-tall, 230-pound dark chocolate Santa just steps away from the conservatory. This decadent display stands in front of Jean Philippe Pâtisserie, a fine chocolate and pastry shop adjacent to the garden.

Ethel M Chocolate Factory and Botanical Cactus Garden

If you just can't get enough of chocolate-inspired displays, then the Chocolate Wonderland at Ethel M Chocolate Factory is a sure treat. Located in Henderson just 15 minutes away from the Strip, this attraction is definitely worth the visit.

"Like the holidays, the love of chocolate is universal," said Blair Ford, vice

president of retail at Mars Retail Group. "Our Ethel's brand has a special assortment of holiday creations designed by our chocolate chef especially for this time of year."

Guests can view the festive chocolate displays inside the factory's candy shop and can also sample holiday bite-sized sweets. And for those who want to walk off those extra (but well worth it!) calories, the Cactus Garden offers an astounding holiday light show. The three-acre cactus garden features approximately 500,000 lights, which take staff members about a month to set up.

"Our Cactus Garden proffers 300 different species of cacti native to the Southwest and gives visitors a very unique sense of place," said Ford.

Visitors can admire its illuminating beauty by strolling through the winding paths or sitting on one of the secluded benches. And just because this is an off-Strip attraction, Chocolate Wonderland definitely gets its share of attention.

"The popularity of the Chocolate Wonderland just continues to grow each year," said Ford. "We expect to have approximately 100,000 visitors."

The Chocolate Wonderland display is open through Jan. 1, 2008. In addition to the holiday display, guests can also enjoy Santa visits and carolers on Fridays and Saturdays.

A peaceful, quiet holiday escape

For those wanting to venture even further from the city, visitors can enjoy a secluded holiday experience at MonteLago Village in Lake Las Vegas. Located just 30 miles from the Strip, this destination features a floating ice skating rink that sits on a stage on top of the lake. Cost is \$15 for adults and \$12 for children 12 years old and younger.

Aside from the outdoor ice skating rink, there are many other activities to enjoy as well.

"Everyone [who] comes out to Lake Las Vegas' MonteLago Village is thrilled with the quaint, cobblestone streets, carolers, Santa, the unique shopping and all of the fine dining options throughout the village," said Bob Crow, executive director of MonteLago Village.

Santa visits are open every Saturday throughout the month of December. Shoppers can enjoy carolers every Friday from 6 p.m. — 8 p.m.

To complete the MonteLago experience, guests can order gourmet hot chocolate from the Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory and enjoy views of the village-like atmosphere as well as the shimmering lake and desert mountains.

"Lake Las Vegas is the candlelight side of Vegas as opposed to the neon side," said Crow. "[It's] the perfect place to enjoy a crisp, winter landscape in the middle of the desert."

This advertising supplement was prepared by Jeannie Borbe and the VEGAS.com staff and did not involve the reporting or editing staff of the Los Angeles Times.



Montelago Village Resort

Skaters enjoy the floating ice rink on Lake Las Vegas.

Other fun holiday spots not to miss

The Winter Lights Festival at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve

Guests can witness half a million LED lights shining in a beautiful eight-acre garden. Visitors can also listen to carolers and enjoy holiday refreshments like homemade truffled popcorn, mini pecan pies and hot cinnamon apple cider from the nearby café.

Hours: Friday — Sunday from 6 p.m. — 10 p.m. From Christmas Eve through Dec. 30, the garden display is open daily.
Cost: \$4 for adults and \$2 for children 17 and younger.

Teddy Bear Village at the Four Seasons hotel lobby

Open through Dec. 20, The Teddy Bear Village features FAO Schwarz teddy bears in various Christmas festivity displays. The lobby also features a giant carousel made completely of chocolate as well as fine gingerbread houses. These houses will be on display through Christmas Day.

Hours: Open 24 hours.
Cost: Free

"The Polar Express" motion ride at the Excalibur

A 4-D version of the holiday movie classic

Hours: Monday — Thursday from noon — 9 p.m.; Friday, noon — midnight; Saturday, 10 a.m. — midnight; Sunday, 10 a.m. — 9 p.m.
Cost: \$12.95

The Magical Forest at Opportunity Village (6300 W. Oakey Blvd.)

The Magical Forest features hundreds of festive trees, holiday displays, Santa visits, train rides and other winter-themed attractions.

Hours: Open nightly from 5:30 p.m. — 10 p.m.
Cost: \$9 for adults and \$7 for children 12 and younger. For unlimited rides, tickets are \$5 more.

Bright Lights on Ice at Fremont Street Experience

Through Dec. 22, this venue features professional ice skaters performing from an iced platform, trampoline acrobats at ground level and traditional holiday music.

Hours: 7:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m., 9:30 p.m.
Cost: Free

