

Reading Zone 5

Skim-read the following passage and answer the questions that follow. Try to summarize and turn the passage into a tweet/telegram as you read it. You can check your answers on page 240.

Las Vegas is a good restaurant town. It's not New York or San Francisco, but it offers respectable culinary and ethnic diversity, served dependably. Las Vegas hotel dining is relatively homogeneous in style and cuisine, while proprietary restaurants try hard to be different. The restaurant business in Las Vegas is as much a psychological as a culinary art, an exercise in perceived versus real value. In Las Vegas you can have the same meal in an astounding variety of environments for an unbelievable range of prices.

Left to its own devices, Las Vegas would be a meat and potatoes town. Owing to the expectations of its many visitors, however, Las Vegas restaurants put on the dog. There are dozens of designer restaurants, gourmet rooms as they are known locally, where the pampered and the curious can pretend they are dining in an exclusive French or Continental restaurant while enjoying the food they like most: meat and potatoes. It is a town full of Ponderosas masquerading as Lutèce or The Four Seasons.

What has saved the day for discriminating diners is the increased presence of foreign visitors, particularly Asians. The needs of these visitors in conjunction with their economic clout have precipitated great growth and improvement among proprietary ethnic restaurants, which in turn have forced improvement among the more staid hotel/casino dining rooms. While many of the hotel gourmet rooms continue to be gastronomic and stylistic carbon copies, Las Vegas's proprietary restaurants have established distinct identities based on their creativity in the kitchen. There are two kinds of restaurants in Las Vegas: restaurants which are an integral part of a hotel/casino operation, and restaurants which must make it entirely on the merits of their food. Gourmet rooms in the hotels are

usually associated with the casinos. Their mission is to pamper customers who are giving the house a lot of gambling action. At any given time, most of the folks in a hotel gourmet room are dining as guests of the casino. If you are a paying customer in the same restaurant, the astronomical prices you are charged help subsidize the feeding of all these comped guests. Every time you buy a meal in a gourmet room, you are helping to pay the tab of the strangers sitting at the next table. This is not to say the gourmet rooms do not serve excellent food. On the contrary, some of the best chefs in the country cook for hotel/casino gourmet rooms. The bottom line, however, if you are a paying guest, is that you are taking up space intended for high rollers, and the house is going to charge you a lot of rent.

Restaurants independent of casinos work at a considerable disadvantage. First, they do not have a captive audience of gamblers or convention-goers. Second, their operation is not subsidized by gaming, and third, they are not located where you will just stumble upon them. Finally, they not only compete with the casino gourmet rooms, but also go head-to-head with the numerous buffets and bulk-loading meal deals which casinos offer as loss-leaders to attract the less affluent gambler.

Successful proprietary restaurants in Las Vegas must offer something very distinct, very different, and very good at a competitive price, and must somehow communicate to you that they are offering it. Furthermore, their offer must be compelling enough to induce you to travel to their location, forsaking the convenience of dining in your hotel. Not easy.

All of this works to the consumer's advantage, of course. High rollers get comped in the gourmet rooms. Folks of more modest means can select from among the amazing steak, lobster, and prime rib deals offered by the casinos, or enjoy exceptional food at bargain prices at independent restaurants. People with hardly any money at all can gorge themselves on loss-leader buffets. In many ways, Las Vegas restaurants are the culinary version of free-market economy. The casinos siphon off the customers who are willing to pay big bucks for food and feed them

for free. This alters the target market for the independents and serves to keep a lid on their prices. Independents providing exceptional quality for such reasonable charges ensure in turn that buffets and meal deals stay cheap. Ah, America, what a country!

1. According to the passage, proprietary restaurants in Las Vegas are
 - (A) all extremely similar
 - (B) run by the casinos
 - (C) inordinately expensive
 - (D) crowded and scattered
 - (E) creative and individual

2. The phrase “put on the dog,” as used in the passage, means
 - (A) serve meat and potatoes
 - (B) become more fancy
 - (C) keep things simple
 - (D) cater to tourist needs
 - (E) lower prices

3. According to the author, casino restaurants have an advantage over independent restaurants because
 - (A) they offer room deals that include food at a considerable discount
 - (B) their operations are subsidized by gambling revenues
 - (C) they attract a more wealthy client
 - (D) without rent, they are able to charge lower prices
 - (E) all of the above

4. According to the author, food in Las Vegas can be generally described as
 - (A) expensive and unpleasant
 - (B) traditional American cuisine
 - (C) scattered across the Strip and difficult to get to
 - (D) competitive and differentiated
 - (E) usually very inexpensive

5. According to the passage, the gourmet rooms
 - (A) serve food to high rollers only
 - (B) are priced high, but reasonably for the food
 - (C) serve French and Continental cuisine only
 - (D) are staffed by some of the best chefs in the country
 - (E) pay no rent, and are therefore anti-competitive

6. An adjective used in the passage to describe the overall diversity and quality of the dining experience in Las Vegas is
 - (A) pricy
 - (B) compelling
 - (C) gourmet
 - (D) free-market
 - (E) respectable

7. The Las Vegas term “gourmet room” means
 - (A) an expensive restaurant
 - (B) a supper club for local high rollers
 - (C) a buffet room, subsidized by the casino
 - (D) a restaurant which serves French or Continental cuisine
 - (E) a designer restaurant

8. According to the author, dining in Las Vegas would be less palatable without
- (A) competitive pricing
 - (B) the increase in foreign visitors
 - (C) locally grown food supplies
 - (D) a variety of price-range options
 - (E) the overseeing arm of the price-control commission
9. What does the author mean by a “proprietary restaurant”?
- (A) Privately owned
 - (B) Buffet style
 - (C) Expensive
 - (D) Exotic
 - (E) Affiliated with a casino
10. Which of the following, if true, would most undermine the author’s experience of dining in Las Vegas?
- (A) He contracted botulism from a bowl of soup at the Sands casino.
 - (B) He couldn’t get a reservation at Wolfgang Puck’s cafe.
 - (C) There is no ethnic cuisine in Las Vegas.
 - (D) Las Vegas charges a minimum food tax of 73%.
 - (E) The average restaurant in Las Vegas closes after three months of operation.