



Las Vegas Sun

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Opening of Resorts World marks new chapter for the north Las Vegas Strip



Courtesy of Resorts World Las Vegas

Resorts World Las Vegas, the newest megaresort on the Las Vegas Strip, opens its doors to the public at 11 p.m. today. In doing so, it ushers in what many believe will be a rebirth of the north end of the Strip.

By *Bryan Horwath*

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[Resorts World Las Vegas Preview](#)



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For years, the north end of the Las Vegas Strip has been marked by casino closures, implosions and visions of grand projects that stalled out or flopped.

That all changes today.

The opening of Resorts World Las Vegas, a \$4.3 billion megaresort where the venerable Stardust once stood, is again raising hopes for the revival of an area with a history as the epicenter of Strip action.

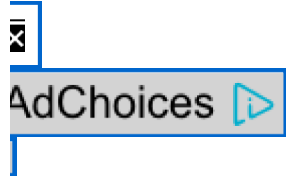
The new casino will throw open its doors to the public at 11 p.m. The 66-story resort features 3,500 hotel rooms, a 5,000-seat theater, 1,400 slot machines, 117 table games and a 30-table poker room.

In recent weeks, Resorts World has announced headliner musical acts including Katy Perry, Luke Bryan, Celine Dion and Carrie Underwood. The Zouk Nightclub also promises to be a hot spot.

The north Strip was once home to hotels and casinos like the Riviera, La Concha, Thunderbird — later known as the El Rancho — and the New Frontier. Stars of the day performed or hung out there, including the likes of Elvis Presley, Diana Ross, Ronald Reagan and Muhammad Ali.

“The north end is where the Strip began,” said Michael Green, an associate history professor at UNLV and a Nevada historian. “After the Flamingo, the next hotel on the Strip was the Thunderbird, which we

characterize as the north Strip. Most of the Strip's beginnings were in that area.”



But as large resorts sprung up farther south along the Strip — Mandalay Bay, the Luxor, Excalibur, MGM Grand and others — the north end was no longer seen as the life of the Strip party.

“I think there was hope that the Mirage opening in 1989 and the Wynn in 2005 would contribute to the revitalization of that north Strip area,” Green said. “How things happen, a lot has to do with the land that is available and who’s interested in selling.”

Las Vegas-based Boyd Gaming razed the Stardust in 2007 with plans for a new resort called Echelon, but the project was scrapped in 2008 amid the Great Recession.

Genting Group, a hospitality and casino company based in Malaysia, purchased the 88-acre site in 2013 and announced plans for Resorts World.

“We hope that the resort, along with the expansion of the Las Vegas Convention Center and other future projects, inspires new development and welcomes an exciting era for the north end of the Strip,” said Scott Sibella, president and CEO of Resorts World.

“We anticipate that our sizable investment in the north corridor, in addition to the many exciting developments around us, will in time drive business to this side of Las Vegas Boulevard,” Sibella said.



Just north of Resorts World, on the east side of the Strip, sits the 63-story blue-glass Drew Las Vegas property, which was purchased earlier this year by the real estate arm of Koch Industries, the Kansas-based company led by billionaire Charles Koch.

Construction on the resort started in 2006, but the project, then known as the Fontainebleau, was never finished.

In February, a spokesman for Koch Industries said the company would “provide the unique ability to combine patient, long-term capital” for the development of the Drew. But the Koch group has been mostly mum about a timeline for completion of the project.

Brett Mufson, president of Fontainebleau Development, the firm teaming with Koch on the project, called the area around it the “future epicenter” of Las Vegas.

“We are excited to be a part of the rejuvenation and the resurgence of the north end of the Las Vegas Strip,” Mufson said in the statement.

Also near Resorts World sits Circus Circus, which billionaire Phil Ruffin purchased from MGM Resorts International in 2019.

With the purchase of the aging resort, Ruffin, who also owns Treasure Island, got about 100 acres of land he has hinted could be developed.

Mike Mixer, executive managing director and co-founder of the Colliers International real estate services firm’s Las Vegas operation, said there’s plenty of potential for development around Resorts World.



The land near Circus Circus is among sites mentioned as a possible home for a new Major League Baseball park if a team moves to Las Vegas.

Owners of the Oakland A's recently visited Las Vegas to look at sites and have said they will pursue a move to Southern Nevada if they can't secure a deal for a new stadium in the San Francisco Bay Area.

"I don't know what Phil Ruffin plans to do with the land he bought, but it has the potential for something very interesting," Mixer said. An MLB ballpark on the Strip would be a "dynamite" attraction, he said.

Through a spokesman, Ruffin declined to be interviewed for this story.

As Las Vegas emerges from the pandemic, Mixer said he's seen a lot of interest in property along the Strip, especially on the north end.

The Las Vegas Convention Center recently completed a \$1 billion expansion, including a \$52 million underground transportation loop to whisk conventioners around the campus. More stops could eventually be added, including at Resorts World.

Steve Hill, president and CEO of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau, said work could begin on additional routes in the coming months, though that would require local government approvals.

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Other north Strip projects include the revival of the old Sahara, which closed in May 2011 and reopened in August 2014 as the SLS Las Vegas. It was eventually sold to the Meruelo Group, which renovated the property and returned to the Sahara name.

In 2016, the Lucky Dragon resort and casino opened on Sahara Avenue, just east of the Strip, but it closed in less than two years. It was later was sold to Don Ahern and rebranded in 2019 as the Ahern Hotel.

“With Resorts World, and the Convention Center and also the Sahara, which spent a lot of money lately for upgrades, that part of the Strip is on fire,” Clark County Commissioner Tick Segerblom said. “Downtown is jumping, too, and there are a lot of synergies now with the Strip and downtown.”

There are other pieces of land in the north Strip area that still have question marks attached. Those include the New Frontier property, about 40 acres owned by Wynn Resorts across from the Fashion Show Mall, and the old Wet ‘n’ Wild property, nearly 30 acres north of the Strip and Elvis Presley Boulevard.

But for now, all attention is focused on Resorts World.

“In many ways, the pandemic seems to be in the rearview mirror as Resorts World is getting ready to open,” Green said. “There’s an obvious sense that people want to celebrate and get back out into the world. That could benefit the north end of the Strip and its future development in ways that the opening of previous hotels would not.”



Still, Mixer said, Las Vegas might not see a development on the scale of Resorts World for quite some time. “Not too many developers can afford to spend that much money on a resort and make it pencil these days,” he said.

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