

Top 10 gambling getaways

The odds are in your favor at these action-packed gaming destinations

MSNBC, updated 4:00 p.m. ET Dec. 4, 2007

Don't roll the dice when planning your next gambling getaway! Choose instead from these action-packed gaming vacation destinations where the odds are in your favor for good times both on and off the floor. We've rounded up a winning mix of tried-and-true stateside contenders where Lady Luck rules the roost, as well as up-and-coming Asian hotspots that are raising international stakes. Card sharks can also ante up in sunny [Caribbean](#) and [Mediterranean](#) destinations, add big game to their card game in Africa, or make their wagers beside thundering waterfalls in Canada. From high rollers to slot slingers to those who just enjoy being around betting buzz, this list is the jackpot for gamers of every ilk.

1. [Aruba](#)

Aruba offers visitors that rare win-win Caribbean vacation: Days relaxing on Palm Beach morph into nights spent rolling the dice at the island's 10 alluring casinos. Most maintain addresses in glitzy hotels, and offer floor action until 3 a.m., but a few, like the elegant Crystal Casino in the Renaissance Aruba Resort, operate 24-7 in bustling downtown Oranjestad. Smoke a hand-rolled Cuban cigar at the Latin-themed Copacabana Casino at the Hyatt Regency, or try your hand at Caribbean Stud Poker (a poker game said to be invented in Aruba) at the Marriott's Stellaris Casino, the island's largest gambling destination. Spring-breakers can also have their fun, thanks to the [Caribbean's](#) legal gambling age of 18. Indeed, given the enticements of [Aruba's](#) casinos, you might be forgiven for missing out on the island's famous near-perfect weather.

2. [Atlantic City](#)

This ain't your daddy's [Atlantic City](#). A wave of development has crashed ashore at this long-standing Jersey Shore resort, bringing with it big-money investors who are betting big-time that this [East Coast](#) gaming mecca has what it takes to be a little Las Vegas-by-the-sea. The last few years have witnessed serious upgrades at the city's 11 casinos, from celebrity chef restaurants — headed by the likes of Wolfgang Puck and Michael Mina (both at the Vegas-style Borgata) — to sprawling spas and New York-style nightclubs. Add to the pot a historic concert hall that draws the likes of The Police, The Rolling Stones, and Madonna, as well as sparkling new retail, dining, and entertainment complexes like The Pier Shops at Caesars (where Tiffany & Gucci boutiques hold court) and the Havana-inspired The Quarter at Tropicana, and you get a high-ante gaming destination that promises plenty of payoff.

3. [Goa](#)

In a nation renowned for spiritual pilgrimages and Yoga retreats, it would seem that the state of [Goa](#) is very much the yin to [India's](#) yang. Synonymous with hedonism, this southern state's white-sand beaches, five-star hotels, and all-night-long seaside parties are already legendary; add on the fact that it's the only place in India to allow gambling dens, and you can imagine the activity at its eight hotel casino-resorts. But it's the state's newest gaming offerings that make Goa our wild card entry: five new floating casinos are in the works to entice gamblers to sail the Mandovi River instead. One ship is already doing brisk business: the lavish MS Caravela departs several times a day from Panaji (the state capital), carrying 300 players who can opt to dine or hit the sundeck and swimming pool when taking a break from the tables or slot machines.

4. [Las Vegas](#)

[Las Vegas](#) is world-renowned as a city of gambling, gluttony, and the ultimate good time. Two distinct neighborhoods draw revelers: an old-fashioned gambling quarter downtown, as well as a sexy "Strip" chockfull of the newest and hottest resorts and attractions around. Though downtown

Fremont Street provides a peek into the classic gambling halls of yesteryear (like the 1906 Golden Gate), the central hub of Sin City is Las Vegas Boulevard, better known as the Strip.

Lined by dozens of casino resorts varying in theme from ancient Egypt to tropical oases, this thoroughfare buzzes around the clock with Broadway-style shows, world-class eateries, celebrity-owned nightclubs, and ultra-high-end shops. But Vegas isn't all show. Gamblers can get their hands on slot machines, table games, off-track betting, and professional tournaments of every price and style. And with tawdry attractions, rental stretch Hummers, and showgirls around every corner, you'll quickly realize they didn't coin the phrase "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas" for nothing.

5. Macau

Five years ago, no one would have believed that the small, Chinese peninsula of Macau would ever rival America's Sin City, but today it's not only surpassed that casino-superstar in gambling revenue, but it's gaining on it in reputation to boot. Whether you're a card player (poker, blackjack, baccarat) or a fan of roulette, boule, or slots, Macau has your game. Packed into its 11 square miles (less than half the size of Manhattan island) are 26 casinos, including the \$2.4 billion Venetian Macau — the mammoth gaming/hotel complex with 4,000 slots and 800 gaming tables that became the world's largest casino when it opened in August 2007. Now Wynn and MGM are upping the ante with billions of dollars' worth of expansions scheduled for their Macau resorts, and big-name properties — the Four Seasons, Shangri-La, InterContinental — have high-rolling plans to open new casino-hotels here as well. Conclusion? Move over [Vegas](#), Macau is on a roll!

6. Mississippi Gulf Coast

There's big change in store for the riverboat frontier along the Mississippi [Gulf Coast](#) — the birthplace of gambling in America. The waterfront gambling towns of Biloxi and Gulfport are back on their A-game post Katrina with some hundred million dollars of expansions in the works. Thanks to the ban on land-based casinos being lifted in 2005, the area is on the rise to become a major gaming hotspot in the southern US. Most of the old stationary boat casinos, built on offshore barges, were destroyed in the hurricane, but with the bulk of rebuilding focused inland, with flashy new casino resorts in Biloxi like MGM's Beau Rivage, the Hard Rock, and the IP Casino Resort Spa, that sought-after Sin City feel is actually palpable in this Bible Belt state. So, so long Redneck Riviera, say hello to the new Las Vegas of the south.

7. Monte Carlo

The storied principality of Monaco is famed for its royal family, rich residents, tax-haven status, [Mediterranean](#) landscapes, and, most of all, its high-stakes casinos concentrated in glamorous Monte Carlo. Nowhere on our list is glitzier than the majestic Monte Carlo Casino, an opulent example of 19th-century belle époque architecture designed by Charles Garnier (the same architect responsible for the ornate Opéra Garnier in [Paris](#)). Inside, a marble-paved atrium surrounded by giant onyx columns leads to both an opera venue and a casino floor, where slot machines, roulette, and gaming tables lie between sculptures, frescoes, and paintings. Dress to the nines, and walk in looking like a million dollars. With any luck, you may just leave with a bank account to match.

8. Nassau & Paradise Island

It's a safe bet that you'll visit spectacular oceanfront casinos in the [Bahamas](#). Every year, hordes of tourists head to these breezy Atlantic isles to rendezvous with Lady Luck in [Nassau](#) and get some beachside sun at the same time. On Cable Beach, the Crystal Palace Casino boasts hundreds of slot machines, plenty of tables, roulette wheels, and off-track betting, and is open for round-the-clock fun. The main show-stopper, though, is the casino at Atlantis, on neighboring Paradise Island. The largest casino in the Bahamas, with a gaming floor that measures over 50,000 square feet, Atlantis is lit by skylights and windows that overlook rambling lagoons and gardens and boasts a huge indoor aquarium just off the lobby that makes a great distraction from a losing streak; it may also be

the only place you'll spot a local on the property, since Bahamian citizens are prohibited from gambling.

9. [Niagara Falls](#)

One of the newer gaming destinations to make this list, with its first casino only opening in the mid-1990s, this ever-popular destination's winning combination of sprawling gaming complexes, bustling tourist promenade, and some of the worlds' most amazing waterfall views have more than made up for lost time. Casino Niagara, on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, pioneered the gaming movement and when the larger, billion-dollar Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort opened in 2004 with the intention of replacing its predecessor, gambling was deemed sufficiently popular here for both to stick around. The result is neighboring casinos with 4,750 slot machines, 285 table games, a concert hall, wedding chapel, and over 300,000 square feet of gambling space between them. The American side of the Falls, looking to get in on the action, welcomed Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel in 2002, which features over 100 tables and 4,200 slots, plus sumptuous amenities like a spa, showroom, and steakhouse. The combination makes for three casinos spanning two countries, and the unique requirement that you bring your passport to experience them all.

10. [Sun City](#)

Gaming and game viewing go hand in hand at the Sun City complex, [South Africa's](#) jungle-themed gambling mecca 90-minutes northwest of [Johannesburg](#) on the southern border of Pilanesberg National Park. Take your chances on a "big five" (lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos, and buffalo) safari before retreating to the five-star Palace of the Lost City for a high-stakes game of punto banco (baccarat). Three other hotel properties, a Gary Player-designed golf course, a crocodile sanctuary, and a massive water park with steep slides and simulated waves are all set amid Sun City's 60-acre, man-made jungle. Novice gamblers whose arms grow weary tugging at the resort's 850 slot machines can enroll in the Sun City School of Gaming to learn the skills and etiquette of table games like roulette, blackjack, craps, and stud poker. It's roaring fun!