

What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas? A young traveler's decision making problem

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Introduction

It is the 15th of April 2019, a sunny day in rural Wisconsin, USA. Jack meets with his friends Steve and Jim at the local bar to celebrate his 24th birthday. The three have known each other since elementary school and also went to college together from which they will graduate next month. After a round of beer and burgers the conversation turns to future plans:

Jim: So, here we are, the usual suspects, soon graduating – what are we going to do afterwards?
Steve: Not sure, what your plans are going to be guys, but I will move to a big city...Chicago maybe, or New York!

Jim: That sounds like a great plan. I wish I could move to, but my father wants me to join his local business. No escape, for me!

Steve: Jack, you have not said anything yet...what about you, any plans after college?

Jack: Not really, I have couple of applications running, but no response yet. To be honest, before starting a job, I would like to travel a bit.

Steve: That's a fantastic idea...listen, why don't we put together a weekend trip. Us three, before we go off to pastures new?

Jack: I am in. Great idea! What about you Jim?

Jim: Sure. Sounds good!

Steve: Amazing idea, guys!!! Where should we go? – Hawai? California? ...or a big city trip?

Jim: Keep calm, we graduate with high debt from our student loans...don't stretch expenses too much. Hawai is out I would say.

Steve: You are right, Jim. Sorry, the thought of Hawai seemed to be too tempting. Any other suggestions?

Jack: We will sufficient time to visit the big cities later; I mean hitting NYC or Chicago will be easy even when working. Let's do something different.

Jim: Ok here is an idea: Each one of us writes down three suggestions for the trip on a piece of paper and folds it. We put all suggestions blindfolded on the table and make draw. The only thing we need to agree is that whatever we draw, we will commit to it – agreed?

Jack: Cool – seems to be a good solution. I commit to following the result of the lottery.

Steve: Ok, let's do it this way.

The three ask the waitress, Caroline, for a large bowl, three pens and pieces of paper and explained what they were about to do. Caroline knew the three well as they have been coming to this place

Note: The case is loosely based on our article:

Schoeneborn, D., & Homberg, F. (2018). Goffman's return to Las Vegas: Studying corruption as social interaction. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 151(1), 37-54.

All characters are fictional. The case is intended to be used as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

for a number of years now and had no problems following this request. After a short while of thinking everyone of the group writes down suggestions for the trip, folds his pieces of paper such that they cannot be read anymore and puts the pieces into the bowl. They then ask Caroline to make a draw. She picked one of the pieces and before reading out loudly what was written on it, her face turned into big smile.

Caroline: And the winner is...Las Vegas! Have fun gambling guys and remember: What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. But don't party too much there and get back safely.

Jack: Oh my god, that's crazy.

Steve: Great choice.

Jim: Wow...who did write that?

The conversation went on for a little while, over more beers. It was actually pretty difficult to identify a suitable weekend for all three of them. But in the end they agreed to aim for a weekend in mid-June this year which left them not too much time to get started with the preparations.

Jack loves travelling. His family is well situated: his father is a successful lawyer and his mother an accountant. He and his siblings never had to worry about money matters. Even college tuition was affordable for all of them. Although, he knew his parents were quite happy now that he was graduating soon. He had even been to Europe a few years ago and he also travelled Canada and South America before. He was well aware to be in a very convenient situation. More or less the same was true for his friends. They all could be considered being "privileged white kids".

Nonetheless, Jack has been raised in the spirit not to waste money. Thus, he always looks for a good deal, where he at least saves a little bit. Also, he (as well as Jim and Steve) had jobs while being at university. Actually, he had quite a variety of jobs. They ranged from working in a fast food pizza place to serving as a research assistant for one of his professors. So, he knew about the value of money earned through work.

Three days later, Jim was the first to text everyone, saying that a well-known travel portal had some good offers for Las Vegas. When he came home that evening, Jack sat in front of his PC, opened his browser and accessed the suggested portal. Luckily, he found a good offer. The Mandalay Bay (see details in exhibit 1), a hotel located at the south end of the main strip in Las Vegas, was selling a weekend package for their preferred travel dates. He grabbed the opportunity, booked a standard room and notified his friends who did the same.

Las Vegas is the capital of gambling in the US. The city is well known for attracting travelers due to its busy night life and casino density. In 2018, Las Vegas had more than 42 million visitors of which 20% indicated their gambling budget is more than USD 600. Onweekends, the hotel occupancy rate is 94.5% (see LV Visitor Statistics website for details). The city of Las Vegas has about 640,000 inhabitants whereas the greater metropolitan area is home to 2.2 million citizens. ¹A traveler website reports that Las Vegas attracts more visitors than sites like the Grand Canyon or the Yellowstone National Park and states that “Downtown Las Vegas is built to serve not residents but guests—tens of millions annually” – a nice way to describe it. ² There are approximately 150,000 hotel rooms available in the area and hosted approximately 42 million visitors in 2018 (see appendix 1). ³ Gambling has been and still is the primary economic motor of the city. The website [statista.com](https://www.statista.com) reports that “the average cost per night of accommodation in Las Vegas reached 128.85 U.S. dollars in 2018”. ⁴ It also reports that Las Vegas tends to host more than 18 thousand conventions annually since 2001.

...back to Jack...

As the trip approaches, Jack searches the web for information about what to do in Vegas in order to plan his time in the best possible way. To get started he reviews www.tripadvisor.com and several travel blogs as he did not want to spend all the time gambling (notwithstanding that his budget would not permit this anyway). At least he was hoping also make a day trip to the Grand Canyon or Hoover Dam. Alternatively, he also looked through the various shows available on their chosen weekend.

While doing this search, he comes across a couple of blog entries talking about a so called “\$20 sandwich trick”. He finds out that the \$20 sandwich refers to a common tipping practice people apply when checking in into their hotels in Vegas. The blog offers the following description:

“When you get to your hotel, you'll line up at reception with the hundreds of other guests checking into the hotel. While waiting in line, take a \$20 bill and triple-fold it so it's smaller than the size of your cards. Then "sandwich" the bill between your ID and credit card. When you get to the front desk, they'll ask you for your ID and credit card. Hand them the sandwich, they'll split the cards up, note the \$20 bill and nonchalantly leave it on the reception desk.

1. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada>

2. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Las-Vegas-Nevada>

3. LVCVA. (January 31, 2019). Number of available rooms in Las Vegas in the United States from 2000 to 2018 [Graph]. In Statista. Retrieved October 14, 2019, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221045/room-inventory-in-las-vegas/>

4. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221047/daily-room-rate-in-las-vegas/>

They'll look up your booking and confirm the standard details about the check-in dates, room preferences, etc. Acknowledge that it's all correct, and then ask "Are there any complimentary upgrades available?" They'll acknowledge your request and say they'll see what they can do for you. (...) Good luck!"⁵

Jack catches fire. He so wants to play the \$20 sandwich trick when travelling to Las Vegas. At the end of the day, gambling is part of city life in Las Vegas. And here he has nothing to lose, which makes it very different from roulette or black jack. Even if he does not receive an upgrade he will not be worse off than before. He cannot think about any better opportunity to practice his gambling skills!

"But is this real? Does it really work?" he wonders.

He continues searching information on the \$20 dollar sandwich trick on the web as we wants to make it work. "Maybe, there are variations which make it work better?" he wonders. Anyway, at some point he also finds social media influencer Kenji Yagi's video on Youtube who documents his way of playing the trick resulting in a massive upgrade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2JyA72Xj-Y>

Jack is actually astonished about this video. He is impressed by the ease with which the trick apparently worked and stunned by the value of the complimentary upgrade Kenji receives. Now his thoughts go wild. He imagines his low-cost travel deal being upgraded to a suite on the top floor with stunning views and a large jacuzzi in the room...maybe topped up with unlimited use of the minibar? Or some free entry to a show? Who knows...everything is possible in Las Vegas! But anyway, by now, his decision stands firm; he really wants to try it when arriving at the hotel. However, he decides not to tell his friends about it. If anything goes wrong and he gets in trouble at least they can still enjoy their stay.

It's travel day!

Finally, it is Friday, 14th of June, 2019...the big day has come. Jack meets with his buddies Jim and Steve at the airport. They are getting ready to board the plane and Jack has already prepared his \$20 bill which he plans to use use later in the afternoon at the hotel. The flight arrives in Las Vegas on time, and at 2.30 pm Jack and his friends are queuing to check in to the Mandalay Bay. It will take a while as the queue of travelers is quite long. It turns out to be a busy weekend for Las Vegas.

5. Source: <https://www.massdrop.com/talk/8002/vegas-and-the-20-sandwich-trick>

Suddenly, Steve starts shouting: “Watch, watch over there!” and both Jack and Jim turn to their left. They see a large bunch of weirdly dressed people passing....” That explains a lot!” states Steve, “It’s Comic Con! That’s why it is so busy here.”⁶

While waiting Jack’s thoughts start to float and he thinks about the \$20 trick again and he closely observes how travelers in front of him behave. Maybe he can spot someone playing the trick, he wonders? Queuing, gazing around he notes an employee walking up behind the check-in desk operator. Is that perhaps a manager who is in charge of supervising the receptionists? He continues observing the scene and notes the supposed manager occasionally stepping forward to the desk operators to discuss something. On other occasions the desk operator stands up in order to talk with the manager before processing the check-in of the travelers. “Oh no, will the trick still work? Or is too obvious?”, he begins worrying. With his thoughts floating in this direction he realizes the attempting to play the trick may be more difficult than he initially thought it would be. *Suddenly he gets this odd feeling of doing the wrong thing – should he really play the 20\$ sandwich trick? Is it ethically sound? And is playing the trick actually a tip or a bribe?* It’s almost his turn, only two more travelers are waiting in front of him. He needs to make the decision now. *Should he try to play the \$20 sandwich trick here and now?*

6. Amazing Comic Con is advertised as “Nevada’s premier pop culture event” (<http://gocitybook.com/event/amazing-comic-con-las-vegas/>) and took place 14-16th June, 2019.

Appendices

The appendices provide a number of statistics on Las Vegas tourism.

Number of available rooms in Las Vegas 2000-2018

Number of available rooms in Las Vegas in the United States from 2000 to 2018

2000	124,270
2001	126,610
2002	126,787
2003	130,482
2004	131,503
2005	133,186
2006	132,605
2007	132,947
2008	140,529
2009	148,941
2010	148,935
2011	150,161
2012	150,481
2013	150,593
2014	150,544
2015	149,213
2016	149,339
2017	148,690
2018	147,238

Source: LVCVA. (January 31, 2019). Number of available rooms in Las Vegas in the United States from 2000 to 2018 [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved October 14, 2019, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221045/room-inventory-in-las-vegas/>

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS, STAYS IN VEGAS?

Number of visitors to Las Vegas 2000-2018

Number of visitors to Las Vegas in the United States from 2000 to 2018 (in millions)

2000	35.85
2001	35.01
2002	35.07
2003	35.54
2004	37.39
2005	38.57
2006	38.91
2007	39.2
2008	37.48
2009	36.35
2010	37.34
2011	38.93
2012	39.73
2013	39.67
2014	41.13
2015	42.31
2016	42.94
2017	39.01
2018	42.12

Source: LVCVA. (January 31, 2019). Number of visitors to Las Vegas in the United States from 2000 to 2018 (in millions) [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved October 14, 2019, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221042/visitors-to-las-vegas/>

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS, STAYS IN VEGAS?

Hotel occupancy rate in Las Vegas 2001-2018

Hotel occupancy rate in Las Vegas in the United States from 2001 to 2018

2001	88.9	in %
2002	88.8	in %
2003	89.6	in %
2004	92	in %
2005	91.8	in %
2006	93.2	in %
2007	94	in %
2008	89.8	in %
2009	85.3	in %
2010	83.5	in %
2011	86.9	in %
2012	84.4	in %
2013	84.3	in %
2014	86.8	in %
2015	89.8	in %
2016	90.8	in %
2017	91.3	in %
2018	88.2	in %

LVCVA. (January 31, 2019). Hotel occupancy rate in Las Vegas in the United States from 2001 to 2018 [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved October 14, 2019, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/221046/hotel-occupany-rate-in-las-vegas/>

Exhibit I – Hotel Description

Mandalay Bay

Address	3950 S. Las Vegas Blvd. Las Vegas, NV 89119
Phone	(877) 632-7800
Website	http://www.mandalaybay.com
Location	strip
Star Rating	*****
# of Rooms	3309
Casino	Yes, 135,000 square feet. Casino games include Blackjack, Caribbean Stud Poker, Craps, Let It Ride, Pai Gow Poker, Poker, Roulette, Slots, Baccarat, Megabucks and Super Megabucks. More than 2,400 slot/video poker machines, 122 table games. The casino has a poker room.
Sports	Yes, a 300-seat race and sports book, equipped with 84 televisions and 17 big screens.
Restaurant(s)	Mandalay Bay has the following dining options: Aureole, Bay Side Buffet, Beach Bar & Grill, Border Grill, China Grill, Fleur de Lys, House of Blues, Raffles Cafe, Red, White and Blue, Red Square, rumjungle, Sea Breeze Pizza, Ice Cream and Juices, Shanghai Lilly, StripSteak, Trattoria del Lupo, The Noodle Shop, Turf Club Deli and a food court in the convention center area. There is also a Starbucks. Additional restaurants located in the Mandalay Place shopping area: Giorgio Caffe & Ristorante, The Burger Bar, Chocolate Swan, restaurant rm and r bar cafe. In THEhotel there are the cafe, the coffee bar and Mix.
Entertainment	Entertainment includes Broadway hit Mamma Mia! in the showroom, headline acts in the 12,000-seat events center or on Mandalay Beach, the House of Blues live music venue (approx. 1,500 people) and three lounges.
Night Life	Ivan Kane's Forty Deuce, rumjungle nightclub, Foundation Room, Late Night at House of Blues and Mix Lounge.
Attraction(s)	The Shark Reef is a \$40 million aquarium covering more than 90,000 square feet that holds more than 1.5 million gallons of seawater and 100 species of animals.
Pool	Yes, 11 acres of beach environment that include three pools, a lazy river, a topless pool and a 1.6-million-gallon wave pool with a sand-and-surf beach.
Health	Yes, a 3,000-square-foot fitness and personal training center. A second health club is located in THEhotel, a new all-inclusive tower at the resort.
Spa	Yes, there are two. The 30,000-square-foot Spa Mandalay with 21 treatment rooms offers multiple types of massages and services. The spa also has a full-service salon. The 14,000-square-foot bathhouse spa in THEhotel offers multiple types of massages and services. A full-service salon is located outside of the spa in the adjoining Mandalay Bay hotel.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS, STAYS IN VEGAS?

Shop(s)	Yes. A hotel and House of Blues gift shop, Pearl Moon Boutique, Reflections Glass Gallery, Le Paradis, Bali Trading Co., jungle juice, Rangoon News Bureau, Tropical Gifts & Stuff, The Wave and Jack Gallery. There are also 41 shops and restaurants located in Mandalay Place, an upscale boutique mall that connects Mandalay Bay to the Luxor.
Wedding Chapel	Yes, the THE wedding chapel offer a number of wedding ceremony packages.
Convention Center	Yes, a 1.8 million-square-foot convention center.
Business Center	Yes
Internet Access	Each room has a phone jack for dial-up internet access.
Wheelchair Access	Yes
RV Park	No
Child Care	No
Pets Allowed	No
Room Service	Yes
Parking	Yes, a six-story parking garage.
Airport Shuttle	No. Shuttle service to and from the airport available for a fee from an outside company.
Strip Shuttle	There is a monorail that passes from Excalibur to Mandalay Bay.
Room Amenities	Air conditioning, alarm clocks, remote-controlled cable TV, desk, electronic door locks, hair dryer, iron and ironing board, pay-per-view movies, radio and telephone.
Hotel Amenities	Beauty salon, concierge, currency exchange, laundry service, luggage service, maid service, safety deposit box, valet parking and wake-up call.
Check-In Time	3:00 pm
Check-Out Time	11:00 am
Minimum Age	21
Policies	The maximum total number of guests (adults and children) in a room is four.
Extra Charges	Hotel requires a credit card or a cash deposit for incidental charges.

Source: <http://www.20tip.com/las-vegas-hotels/mandalay-bay/16/information.html>