

# RV-friendly CASINOS

By Emily Fagan #99408

During our RV travels, we have had fun and some surprising moments at casinos around the country. We generally look for them at times when we need an overnight stop. Often, that brief stop brings delightful and unexpected discoveries.

We rely on the very useful Website, [www.casinocamper.com](http://www.casinocamper.com), to find RV-friendly casinos. It is maintained by seasoned casino-goers who are RVers. We use it for directions, to find out what amenities each casino has to offer and to read recent reviews from other RVers about the overnight parking options. On occasion, we have submitted our own reviews as well, sharing our experiences with those who come behind us.

Casino camping, like Walmart or any other kind of commercial parking lot overnighting, has a simple etiquette: Check with security to be sure it is okay to stay, follow their guidelines and try to look like you are *parked* rather than *camping*. No camping chairs, no barbecue, no awning and don't *set up camp* in any other way, unless the casino specifically allows you to do so. We invariably leave the trailer hitched

to the truck and open the slides only if there is plenty of room.

A few of the highlights from our casino adventures follow:

## **Cher-Ae Heights Casino— Bright Lights in the Fog**

Our first casino experience was on a foggy and rainy night on the northern California coast. It was the Fourth of July weekend, and there wasn't a campsite to be found. Tired and hungry, we followed the billboards to the Cher-Ae Heights Casino and crept into a quiet corner of the RV parking lot. Our faces

River Palms Casino, Laughlin, Nevada, RV parking area, photo courtesy of Karen B. provided by [www.casinocamper.com](http://www.casinocamper.com).



were glued to our rainy windows as we watched rig after rig pull in out of the fog that night to seek shelter alongside us. We left early in the morning with a new bounce in our step; we now had a new backup plan for overnights on the road: when all else fails, find a casino!

### Wild Horse Pass Casino— Paid to Park

On our way to an RV factory tour in Pendleton, Oregon, we arrived at Wild Horse Pass Casino after a long day of driving. Our jaws dropped at the sight of at least 30 rigs in the casino parking lot, and we tucked our rig into the lineup. No sooner had we gone into the trailer to get set up than a golf cart arrived at our door, driven by a smiling security guard.

“Do you want a ride to the casino?”  
Wow, such service! Sure, why not?

He whisked us away, letting us know that we were lucky because tonight was “Men’s Night” and Mark could get \$5 to play the slots. Wow, again!

We aren’t gamblers, but, aw heck, why not? Mark went up to the player’s club window and was handed a \$5 bill.

**“We returned to our trailer, where a gorgeous sunset was blanketing the sky, and we laughed and scratched our heads for a long time, wondering how we’d gotten so lucky to live a life where we get paid to camp.”**

“Put that in your pocket!” I said, but Mark had other ideas. He sat down at a five-cent slot machine and quickly turned his fiver into \$6.55. Not bad!

We returned to our trailer, where a gorgeous sunset was blanketing the sky, and we laughed and scratched our heads for a long time, wondering how we’d gotten so lucky to live a life where we get paid to camp.

### Tropicana Casino— New Sleep Shirts

This casino thing was turning out to be a lot of fun, so when we were headed out of the North country toward Arizona, we decided to spend Thanksgiving in Laughlin, Nevada, a small casino town built along the banks of the Colorado River. Laughlin was in the process of changing their rules for RV overnighting, but Tropicana Casino still offered a free stay.

What a shock to pull around behind the casino and find marked spaces for about 200 RVs. The flocks of RVing snowbirds had been arriving for a while, and the winter party was just getting underway. As we walked among all the rigs, we saw endless little groups of grey-haired folks in their camp chairs, their winter jackets tossed aside and their bare arms and legs soaking up the rays while laughter filled the air.

Inside, Tropicana was offering a free tee shirt and a \$5 card to play the slots. We each signed up for these goodies and

*Continued on next page ⇒*

Be sure to review  
**THE RVERS’ GOOD  
NEIGHBOR POLICY**  
on page 83.



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quickly turned the slot cards into \$9.47 of cash. The tee shirts were nice and big and soft, perfect for sleeping in, and for the next year we were reminded of the fun we had at Tropicana every night as we got ready for bed.

### **Golden Nugget Casino—Free Beers**

We were discovering that every casino has a different lure to get people to come and play. From delicious, cheap eats to free slot machine play, there was always a special enticement to bring people in.

In the past we had teased Mark's mom endlessly about her fondness for casinos, but now we were beginning to understand her passion. Looking for a deal at the Golden Nugget Casino in Laughlin, we dropped in at their micro-brew pub to check out their dark ale.

"If you put a \$10 bill in the video poker machine at the bar, I'll give you two a pitcher of beer," the bartender said. Cool!

We bellied up to the bar, and for the next two hours, between sips of their yummy brew, Mark made one savvy blackjack move after another and slowly turned the \$10 into \$13.42. Buffalo wings were on sale that afternoon, so our little blackjack profit covered the cost of the wings. Now that was a deal worth calling home about, and Mark's mom got the call.

### **Pechanga Casino—Charming Town and Farmer's Market**

Almost a year later we found ourselves hopscotching across the scorching California desert on our way to San Diego in late September. We stopped in at Pechanga Casino in Temecula where the presence of an upscale RV park limits the free overnight parking to 24 hours. We made the most of those hours, however, and early in the morning rode our bikes to Old Town Temecula where the weekly farmers' market was in full swing. We stuffed our backpacks with fresh fruits and vegetables of all kinds and wandered among vendors selling beautiful arts and crafts. One woman was offering homemade aged Gouda

cheese. She talked with us at length as we sampled her wares, telling tales of Temecula back in the early 1970s when it was still a remote rural area and she could ride her horse all through the valleys that are now filled with housing developments. If not for the casino, we never would have gotten off the interstate to see Temecula.

### **Viejas Casino—Halloween Dinner's a Treat, not a Trick**

Leaving San Diego at the end of October, we hopped off the interstate once again to visit Viejas Casino in Alpine, California. This casino is part of a large outdoor shopping mall complex, and we spent two days exploring the environs. Workers were busily erecting a huge Christmas tree and converting an open area into an outdoor ice rink for the winter. The calendar was full of magical holiday events coming up.

After sampling a little bit of everything at the dinner buffet and enjoying the pretty view out the restaurant windows, we decided to walk off dinner in the outdoor shopping mall, where we discovered a Halloween trick-or-treat event was going on for the local children. Tiny ghosts, goblins and fairy princess descended on the shops, gathering up treats from every boutique they entered in quite an unusual retail version of Halloween.

### **Delta Downs Casino—Horse Racing**

We were on a mad dash to Florida and needed a quiet overnight rest in Louisiana. Following signs to Delta Downs Casino, we found a wonderful, huge parking area and settled down to recover from I-10's white-line fever.

While closing our shades for the night, I noticed that we were right next to the horse track, where the stadium lights were lit and the races were in full swing. Suddenly rejuvenated, we ran outside and got swept up in the races. The horses were paraded before the bettors, the line at the betting window was long, and the announcer was colorful.

We watched a few races (Mark should have put money on #2 like his

instincts told him). The next morning, at oh-dark-thirty, we opened our blinds to see all the horses training in the morning mist. The horses and tiny jockeys kicked up the dirt as they practiced wind sprints and gate starts.

What a perfect diversion after 2,000 miles of driving on the interstate!

### **Pala Casino—Tropical Interlude**

Our favorite casino stop so far was our impromptu visit to Pala Casino in Pala, California. The parking lot is small, and we were lucky that the casino was quiet enough on the day we arrived that we were allowed to park (or even find a parking spot) at all. The casino didn't look too unusual from the outside, but once we were inside we made a spectacular discovery: The back end of the casino opens onto a beautiful resort-style swimming pool and hot tub surrounded by lounge chairs. Off to one side under a thatched roof, there is a tropical tiki bar manned by grinning bartenders in Hawaiian shirts. Unbelievable!

We dashed back out to the trailer and grabbed our swimsuits and beach towels and happily wiled away the most perfect sunny afternoon, alternating dips in the pool, soaks in the hot tub and tropical drinks in our lounge chairs.

We have not been bitten by the gambling bug, but we have enjoyed our casino visits immensely. If you find yourself out on the road somewhere, dragging a little bit from too much travel or needing a safe place to park for a night, follow the signs to the bright lights and see what's going on at a casino nearby. 🏠

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## **Resources**

For more information on overnighting at casinos, check out these resources:

- [www.casinocamper.com](http://www.casinocamper.com). Excellent resource for everything related to casinos.
- *Casino Camping: A Guide to RV-friendly Casinos* by Jane Kenny #66929, reviewed by Marcella Gauthier #12371 in the July/August 2006 issue of *Escapees* magazine and available at Camping World.
- [roadslesstraveled.us](http://roadslesstraveled.us). Information on dry-camping, boondocking and overnighting at casinos.