

Forget Wayne Newton! ... Vegas is the place to go for good eats!

Viva Las Vegas! Having just returned from a little birthday celebration in the city of sin, I knew I had to return with a good story about the food—since food and shows are the primary purpose of the journey.

Having not been in Vegas for about seven years, I can tell you things have certainly changed. In the four days that we were there, we managed to not only visit, but eat in, just about all the newest and greatest hotels.

We stayed at the Mirage Hotel and although a couple of their gourmet restaurants were closed due to construction, Gerry called up the Executive Chef and told him we were visiting, so could we come for a little tour? He gladly agreed and off we went for a tour of all the kitchens, banquet facilities, warehouse and shipping areas. What a tour! This one hotel has many banquet rooms, but the largest one seats 6,000 in one room. Each restaurant and catering facility in the hotel has its own kitchen, but there is also a central kitchen that produces common items such as pastries, chocolate-dipped strawberries and other delectables.

The guys at the shipping dock start accepting the daily deliveries at 5 a.m. They are delivered right into a "staging" cooler or freezer, where they are then separated and delivered by runners to each individual restaurant. All of the kitchens are connected by a series of backstage hallways so that deliveries can be made and staff can travel without ever interfering with the guests. This hotel serves approximately 21,000 meals per day—and that does not include feeding the staff, which is an entirely separate kitchen itself.

Most days we breakfasted with goodies from the coffee shop as we lounged by the pool at our hotel. After extensive research, we can report that The Mirage has the best pool in town. We had a lovely Italian lunch at the Venetian Hotel in a restaurant called Cannaleto—fabulous pastas, delicious salads all placed in the middle of an open-air feeling plaza with gondolas sailing down the nearby canal. Next stop was a simply superb array of appetizers at Jasmine—an Asian restaurant at The Bellagio. We didn't stay for the main course, as we were looking for something fairly light before the show that night,



What's cookin'

Lori Gysel
Gerry Kentner

but I can only imagine how good it must be. This is a **m u s t - s e e** place—the dancing fountains are right outside the window, the

décor is astounding, the service is perfect, the food is delicious, the china and glassware are gorgeous.

Another dinner stop was a seafood restaurant in the Luxor hotel. This hotel is not particularly new, but we've never been in it before and the pyramid shape of the building has been calling to us for years. The entire building had an odd feeling to it, not quite sure it would suit my taste, but to each his own. The meal at the Sacred Sea was tasty, but the atmosphere and service was all wrong—a completely forgettable experience.

One of our favourite stops for food was the Paris hotel. With the Eiffel tower bursting out of the building, this is a really interesting place to go. One morning we had coffee and pain au chocolate for breakfast (basically chocolate croissants, but so good!) as we watched all the people passing by. Another day we had dinner at Le Provencal, a lovely little spot with good (not fabulous) food, great presentation, excellent atmosphere and singing wait staff—that was cool. And yet another trip there saw us eating freshly-made crepes from the street-side crepe maker. There was a choice of about six different savoury fillings and the same of sweet fillings. Oh, such a tough choice!

Another lunch was at a little Mexican bar in Treasure Island called Isla. Kind of hidden among the clanging slot machines, but very authentic food. Once again we were only having a couple of hors d'oeuvres, but the beef empanatas with dried cherries inside were the best I've ever had.

The trip was a resounding success, as the shows were just as good as the food and of course, the company I traveled with was the best!

Have fun and keep cooking!

Corn Cakes Ingredients

- 1 cup butter
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 4 oz green chilies
- 17 oz can of creamed corn
- 1/2 cup grated Monterey jack cheese
- 1/2 cup grated cheddar cheese
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup plain cornmeal
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 4 tsp baking soda

Method

1. Have butter and eggs at room temperature.
2. Cream the butter and sugar, then blend in eggs.
3. Stir in chilies, corn and cheese.
4. Combine remaining ingredients.
5. Add to corn mixture, stirring until well blended.
6. Heat a small amount of oil or bacon fat in a large skillet.
7. Once oil or fat is hot, add a generous spoonful of the mixture—just like cooking pancakes. You should be able to fit two to three cakes per pan depending on the size of the skillet.
8. Once the cake is browned on the bottom, flip and cook on the other side.
9. Serve warm.

Editor's Note: These are particularly fabulous cooked outdoors while camping. To make your camp cooking easier, mix all the wet ingredients together before you go and pack in a resealable container, large enough that when you get there, you'll be able to add the dry ingredients to it.

Then, mix all the dry before you go and pack in a resealable container. This can be done 2-3 days in advance as long as the wet ingredients are kept cold.

When you are ready to make the dish, let the wet ingredients sit out in the warmth for an hour or so, long enough so that the butter is melted or at least, soft. It should not be in big chunks. Then give the wet ingredients a really good stir. Add the dry and mix until combined. Now carry on with cooking!

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