
THE CrossFit LIFE

The Hangover, CrossFit Style

Everything is different when you do CrossFit—even Las Vegas. Jeremy Striffler reports on a trip to Vegas that included more barbells than bars.

By Jeremy Striffler

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At high noon on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, I found myself running around a parking lot in Las Vegas with a group of strangers. We were taking a lap around the large industrial building that houses CrossFit Las Vegas with medicine balls on our shoulders and the infamous Strip off in the horizon.

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I had touched down in Las Vegas just an hour before to celebrate my 30th birthday with my two best friends from college. A year ago, I would have predicted a weekend of excessive drinking, eating and minimal exercise. I pictured *The Hangover*, with me in the Ed Helms role—missing tooth and all. The only calories burned would be from walking from the chaise lounge to the tiki bar to order another round. Thankfully, I started CrossFit last summer, and that was far from what happened.

That's not to say I didn't have a lot of fun, drink a few beers and gamble some money, but I found a more satisfying trip based on quality rather than quantity. More clean living than Sin City. Perhaps it's due to age and maturity, but I think my adoption of the CrossFit culture was a huge contributor.

Hitting the Bars

My taxi driver at the airport was a bit confused that my first destination in Las Vegas was a gym. He was used to shuttling people straight from the baggage carousel to



Matt Kovalcik

Itinerary of a CrossFitter: first the gym, then the Strip.

the roulette wheel. But I was happy to put off the slot machines for a little longer to experience my first visit to a different CrossFit affiliate.

Driving along Dean Martin Drive, away from all the action on the Strip, we passed numerous industrial buildings and motels. I arrived with my entire luggage at the gym and no one batted an eye. I wasn't their first visitor, and in fact there was another CrossFitter from Oregon who had just arrived as well. We were both warmly greeted by the coaches and owner Joe Marsh, who led the noon class.

I quickly changed into my workout clothes and unpacked my two CrossFit go-to's in my carry-on: my lifting gloves and my jump rope. Walking into the enormous gym, I was overwhelmed by the new surroundings. CrossFit Las Vegas is 10 times the size of my beloved TwinTown CrossFit (TTCF) in Minneapolis and has the largest, scariest-looking ceiling fan I have ever seen in my life.

The gym had 30-foot-tall ceilings and enough room to host a small casino floor. There was equipment everywhere. As many CrossFitters can relate, new and different equipment is always exciting to see.

There was enough room on the floor for the rowing machines and racks at the same time. Further, like something out of a Cirque du Soleil act, a dozen sets of rings were lowered from the ceiling for the other class that was going on at the same time. (Did I mention there were two classes taking place, with plenty of elbow room to spare?) It was going to be very different to have so much breathing room.

Having completed the lap around the building, the class got down on the floor to do some stretching with the foam rollers. With the roller under our shoulders and our hips extended, we did a variation on thoracic extension with our arms overhead. Joe didn't hesitate to get in close and help.

"I don't know you but I am going to do this anyway," he said as he pushed my arms back, allowing me to feel the full stretch.

Throughout the workout, Joe treated me like a regular, providing instruction and encouragement. The other men and women working out also contributed to the welcoming environment, which seems to be one of the biggest differentiators between CrossFit gyms and every other chain out there.



Matt Kovalick

Gamble in the casinos, play it safe with your health.

After working on push jerks, it was time for a combination of Tabata rowing and kettlebell swings. After an intense 8 minutes of work, I was happy to collapse on the floor. We finished the hour with everyone lying down and stretching with bands. Overall, it was the epitome of a great CrossFit workout: it combined a variety of movements and exercises and worked a variety of muscles.

Working out with showgirls and members of the Thunder From Down Under was definitely unique (at least they all looked like they could be performers on the Las Vegas Strip). And while my allegiance will always be to TTCF, it was great to visit another affiliate.

Much like visiting a Hard Rock Café in every city, I imagine a lot of fun can be had in going to CrossFit gyms across the United States and globe while traveling for business or pleasure. And similar to tradition at that restaurant franchise, I've got my CrossFit Las Vegas T-shirt as a treasured souvenir.

Beyond the Buffet

Traveling to Las Vegas, like many other vacations, can quickly devolve into a few days or an entire week of bad eating habits. Every casino along the strip, from the

discount to the deluxe, offers buffets that cater to excess. One can spend all day staring through sneeze guards and sifting through mountain-high piles of shrimp cocktail and dessert trays. I wanted a more dynamic dining experience.

Teddy Kim, owner of TTCF, often explains that "in CrossFit we refer to nutrition as the 'metabolic foundation of health.' CrossFit is not even remotely coherent absent the nutritional prescription. Many a new athlete is dismayed to learn that you don't stop being a CrossFitter when you sit down to dinner."

We can all have our cheat days, especially on vacation, but I wasn't about to allow my trip to deteriorate into a weekend of regret. So rather than buffets and bad eating habits, I picked out a few high-quality restaurants by master chefs like Thomas Keller, José Andrés and Mario Batali to enjoy with my friends. I was conscious of the food I ate and sought out menus full of interesting and flavorful ingredients.

It's too easy to let yourself off the hook while on vacation. The problem with not holding yourself accountable is that the bad habits that happen in Vegas don't just stay in Vegas. They rear their ugly head the minute you get back home. Being healthy and being on holiday don't have to be exclusive.



Matt Kovalcik

***If marksmanship ever comes up in a WOD,
Striffler will be ready.***

The culinary tour throughout the weekend began the first night at Carne Vino, where my friends and I toasted my birthday with a nice glass of red wine. This large steakhouse by Chef Mario Batali at the Palazzo welcomed a large crowd but offered plenty of breathing room at the table for my buddies and I to catch up. I feasted on bison carpaccio with garlic, radish greens and basil, and a main entrée of veal scalloppine porcini with a side of fresh string beans.

The second night led us to the Public House at the Venetian, a contemporary take on the British gastropub. I enjoyed a small serving of crispy frog legs with tomatoes, brown butter and lemon herb. It was followed by an all-natural, grass-fed beef burger with bacon marmalade, gruyere cheese, roast tomato, frisée and Guinness aioli.

The final night of our great weekend finished at Chino Poblano, a Mexican-Chinese fusion restaurant from Chef José Andrés, which is decorated with images of Frida Kahlo and Mao Tse Tung and located at the Cosmopolitan. The menu offered a wide selection of small plates. I got to try and enjoy some sui mai scallops, a braised baby pig/pork rind/spicy salsa verde cruda taco, and a shredded duck taco.

A New Normal

My weekend in Las Vegas was reflective of my new way of thinking brought on by CrossFit.

I found fun in physical activity and not excess. Waking up clear-headed and happy the second day, I enthusiastically went for a 4-mile run on the Las Vegas Strip past the gondolas of the Venetian, the stunning waterfall at the Wynn, the red and white tent of Circus Circus, the remains of the historic Sahara and the famous Chapel of the Bells. In the warmth of the morning, I saw the city from a very different perspective. There is nothing like running past revelers who still haven't gone home at 8 a.m.

I also went out of my comfort zone during the weekend, something I learn to do more and more every day at TTCF. At Machine Gun Vegas I got to fire off multiple rounds with a hand gun, shotgun and submachine gun. Shooting guns might not seem to directly correlate to lessons learned in the gym, but I find a similarity in the confidence gained and a desire to live a life where I don't settle for just sitting on the couch.

Thanks to CrossFit, my travel itinerary was totally transformed.

