

AAG Newsletter
of the
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Reading Kierkegaard in Las Vegas

The AAG will hold its 2009 Annual Meeting in Las Vegas. Yes, that's right: Las Vegas. Now, it is taken for granted that you will enjoy your time actually spent in the AAG meetings, with thousands of scholarly papers, research presentations, and panel discussions on themes ranging from the classically geographic to the very latest on our revolutionary new geographic technologies. And with an expected attendance of nearly 8,000 geographers from around the world, you are probably already looking forward to meeting and interacting with interesting colleagues and friends, old and new, while in Las Vegas.

However, aside from all this, I know that the question foremost on the minds of most potential attendees is not the quality of the AAG meeting experience itself, which is assured, but rather how one can avoid the contaminating and corrosive effects of Las Vegas' well-known seamier side: the gambling, the glitz, the gaudy, and the inappropriate. Here I can only speak from personal experience.

The last time I was in Las Vegas was for a small meeting on the impacts of coal mining and burning on the environment, nearly thirty years ago during the "first" major energy crisis. I was just out of graduate school and recall walking through a couple of the casinos, and will admit that I was particularly impressed with the spectacular neon signage/artwork along the main casino strip, despite the topic of my meeting. But after quickly losing a couple of dollars that I didn't have to spare, I spent the rest of my spare time there reading Kierkegaard by the side of the pool. I still have vivid memories of the pleasures and irony of reading Kierkegaard

in Las Vegas (you will think I'm making this up but it is true: the book was K's *Purity of Heart*).

So when the AAG Council unanimously decided to hold our AAG Annual Meeting in Las Vegas for the first time, my vote was the only abstention. I abstained on

the vote not on principle or because I particularly opposed the idea but because I knew I would be the first one to receive any complaints about the city's "other qualities." The argument that finally carried the day during the Council's deliberations was Alec Murphy's point that, as geographers, we are concerned about understanding that which is on

the face of the earth, and that we cannot simply ignore the fastest growing urban area of the United States just because it is Las Vegas.

Despite its controversies, Las Vegas does present a great many advantages for visiting geographers of all stripes. Its physical, cultural, and economic geography field trip opportunities are phenomenal. It is perhaps the ultimate postmodern city. It presents stark environmental and natural resource conflicts. It provokes unique economic, cultural and social geographic questions. It is a city of immigrants and migrants yet also has one of the most highly unionized workforces in the U.S. (the AAG's primary hotel, the Riviera, is a fully unionized hotel). Advanced GIS programs are fully integrated into most of its urban planning and environmental assessment processes at very sophisticated levels. And its tourist economy is an international phenomenon in a league of its own.



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The immediate region surrounding Las Vegas is home to some of the most spectacular physical landscapes in the world, and dozens of AAG field trips are being planned to explore these features of the region. The Grand Canyon, Zion National Park, Death Valley, Bryce Canyon, Valley of Fire, Red Rock Canyon, Lake Mead, and dozens of other geographically fascinating places are easily accessible by organized AAG field trips, personal rental

car, or inexpensive commercial excursions from Las Vegas.

The moral of this story is that what you do in Las Vegas will be your decision. As is the case for most residents of this fastest growing urban area in the U.S., the gambling and glitz can be eschewed for a world of other activities. If AAG sessions, fabulous field trips, cutting edge research, and host of other events are not sufficient distraction, keep in mind that

there's always Kierkegaard by the side of the pool.

For more information on the AAG Annual Meeting, which will be held March 22-27, 2009, please visit www.aag.org. I look forward to seeing you all in Las Vegas (at poolside). ■

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