

COOL BARS



Photo courtesy Minus 5

Employees of Minus 5 are outfitted in parkas, hats and boots. From the furniture to the drink glasses to the bar, Minus 5 surrounds guests, and employees, with ice in temperatures that hover right around minus 5 degrees.

Despite the sweltering heat, you and your drink stay cool in Vegas

It's summer in Las Vegas. Just those few words can conjure up visions of relaxing poolside, a fruity cocktail in hand. But too often, when the temperatures reach 115 degrees and there's not a spot of shade to be found, the reality is more searching for the nearest air-conditioned hotel, while a glass full of melting ice sweats all over your hand.

It doesn't have to be that way though.

In a series of increasingly drastic solutions, a few bars in Sin City have gone the extra mile to make sure that even in the sweltering heat, your drink (and you) stay cool. From a frozen tap to a frozen room, the sun doesn't stand a chance.

Here's the rundown on the coldest watering holes in Vegas:

Frozen Tap Towers at First Food & Bar (Palazzo)

Most bars serve beer, sure, but it's usually through an ordinary tap — not one covered in a half-inch of ice. First Food & Bar is the exception.

Jon Newton, vice president of VV Ventures (the company that operates First), said he knew he wanted the Perlick frozen taps for First, so he researched, coordinated with the kitchen designer and then there they were — four frozen taps on the back bar, ready to pour Pabst Blue Ribbon or Stella Artois at a cool 32 degrees.

But then Newton and staff realized something — the guests were going to want to touch the taps and so they were moved to the front bars and now guests marvel over them daily.

The taps use a glycol system to keep things cold, but unlike other areas of the country where there's moisture in the air to help form the ice, the staff at First Las Vegas has to mist their towers down to get the ice to form.

But form it does, prompting guests to put their fingers to the ice as their beers are poured (into a frozen glass, of course). And, although they do look cool, a big benefit of the taps is that they actually are cool, providing you with a drink that's near freezing on what feels like the hottest day of the year.

"You can drink a beer and by the time you're done, it's still ice cold," Newton said.

Ice Rail at Daydream Pool (M Resort)

You might think just keeping things poolside is taking enough precaution against the ruthless Sin City sun — you'd be wrong.



Photo courtesy Red Square

Lenin's head (from a statue out front) sits on ice at the center of the vodka locker at Red Square.

At Daydream Pool at M Resort not only did they have a special pool deck installed to keep your toes from getting burned (a travertine one, which absorbs the heat instead of pushing it onto your feet), they also put a rail of ice around the bar.

Several inches wide and stretching the length of the bar, this ice rail is used to keep drinks cool. Guests can set their drinks on the rail and they'll stay cold for much longer than they'd last with ice just in them.

"I won't drink for 15 or 20 minutes and then all of the sudden I'll take a swig and it'll still be freezing," said Justin Litterelle, vice president of business development for Las Vegas Nightlife Group (who runs Daydream).

Plus, its spot on the bar means the rail is within touching distance for most guests.

"It's sort of easy to write your name or do artwork on," Litterelle said. "Throughout the course of the day, it'll change appearance, people will tag it with their initials...It's pretty cool how it changes throughout the day."

But the ice rail (which starts fresh

everyday) isn't the only ice keeping your drink cool — there's regular ice, too. So much so that Litterelle said an actual memo outlining the "ice policy" came out. Any time a staffer enters a cabana at Daydream, they're to check whether ice refills are needed.

About 75 percent of the time, they are.

Vodka Locker at Red Square (Mandalay Bay)

If the idea of exposing yourself or your premium vodka to the harsh rays of the sun or anything less than freezing temperatures is abhorrent, Red Square's vodka locker is the place for you.

A round room with Lenin's head on ice in the center (Lenin's body, a statue, sits in front of the restaurant covered in fake bird droppings), the vodka locker is kept between minus 5 and 5 degrees and holds 20 individual lockers for companies and individuals to store their alcohol.

And although a locker will run you anywhere from \$3,000 (for a personal one) to \$5,000 (for a business one) annually, guests without lockers can still enjoy the cool benefits by purchasing



Photo by Bryan Steffy

At the bar at M Resort's Daydream pool, guests can set their drinks on an ice rail, which helps keep drinks cold.

one of Red Square's bottles of vodka and entering the room for a tasting.

"They go in and try a vodka they've never tried before in subzero temperatures," is how Michael Bigas, assistant general manager of Red Square puts it simply, but there's more to it than that.

Groups of up to 12 can fit in the locker at one time and Bigas said they don't mix groups, so each set of guests gets a personal experience.

Bigas and his staff dress the guests in Russian army fur coats and hats before bringing them inside. Once in the locker, guests do tastings of vodka usually picked out with the help of Red Square's vodka goddess — a vodka aficionado that counsels guests through the bottle selection procession (Bigas said it's often a decision between flavored and straight vodka).

After the group finishes in the locker, if they have vodka left in their bottle, they can take it back into the restaurant, Bigas said. And although it's normal temperatures out there, there's still an ice-topped bar to keep drinks cold — which is sort of the point.

"Things tend to taste better when they're cold," Bigas said. "Like water, vodka has the same effect — it's better really, really cold."

Frozen Bar and Room at Minus 5 Ice Lounge (Mandalay Bay)

Although the ingenuity of every cool solution should be applauded, no heat-beating technique goes as far as Minus 5.

Located inside Mandalay Bay, the first American outpost of Minus 5 is nearly the exact opposite of the

summer sun-baked asphalt of Las Vegas Boulevard — it's ice and it's nearly everywhere you look.

From the furniture to the drink glasses to the bar, Minus 5 surrounds guests with ice in temperatures that hover, not coincidentally, right around minus 5 degrees.

Constructed from 500 pound blocks of ice trucked in from Canada (for clarity), Noel Bowman, director of operations for Minus 5, said the bar isn't as unbearably cold as it sounds because they control the wind and humidity inside the space (both are set at zero), but it's still plenty chilly.

For \$25, guests are dressed in Minus 5 parkas, hats and boots (there's a \$70 VIP package with an upgrade to faux fur, too) and sent into the room to drink fruity cocktails, where beer isn't an option because it'll freeze. The first cocktail is included in the price of admission, as is the use of the winter gear.

Once inside, they can touch life-size ice sculptures of Elvis or enjoy bottle service on a table made entirely of ice.

The bar's ice is refreshed about every six weeks, Bowman said, keeping displays new and giving repeat guests something new to look at it. Plus, with so many people and their body heat in the lounge, the ice is prone to some wear, he said.

But keeping things new and interesting isn't the only challenge.

In a room where liquids will freeze or fuse rapidly, spilled drinks are a problem.

"It'll become part of the bar [if left too long]" Bowman said. "We have to get on clean-up duty pretty quick."

That's also the reason coasters are encouraged — ice glasses and ice tables would become one without them.

Although there's no time limit on guests' stay inside the ice lounge, most guests stay about 45 minutes, Bowman said. And the stays get a little longer at night when the lounge turns into a venue with a little bit of a nightclub vibe. (Bowman said it's during these nights when the parkas come off and guys sometimes try to prove their worth by strutting around a freezing room in their boxer shorts.)

After guests finish their time in the ice lounge, they can still hang out at Minus 5 in the lodge — a room temperature bar decked out like a ski lodge. It's not freezing anymore, but Sin City central air doesn't look so bad after time spent in a giant ice cube.

— Jamie Helmick