

Superjumbo flying casino planned

Airbus said today it is holding talks with a number of customers interested in converting its superjumbo A380, the world's biggest passenger plane, into a flying casino.

„We have had interests from customers who would like to do something like (casinos),“ said David Velupillai, marketing director for Airbus's executive and private aviation division. „We had discussions with several customers about it,“ he said. „Of course the biggest attraction of the A380 is that it's got 50 per cent more floor space than the (Boeing) 747. If you have to do something like that, you have got the floor space that will allow you to do this.“

Velupillai said a fully-fitted casino on the world's biggest airliner could be delivered as early as 2012. He would not disclose the identity of the interested customers nor whether they included casino operators. Nor would he be drawn on whether there would be special interest from Asian customers seeking to exploit a gambling surge.

Gaming revenues from the southern Chinese territory of Macau have already overtaken the Las Vegas Strip and are set to challenge the greater Las Vegas region, Clark County, this year. Singapore is also set to open its first casino in 2009.

Airbus has so far received nearly 200 firm orders for the A380 from a list of predominantly Asian, European and Gulf-based customers. The first of the hulking, double-decker planes to go into normal passenger service has been flying the Singapore to Sydney route since October, operated by Singapore Airlines.

Giant casino operator Las Vegas Sands, which has operations in the United States and Macau, is hoping to launch VIP charter flights between Hong Kong and Las Vegas featuring baccarat

tables in Lockheed Martin planes, a South China Morning Post report said earlier this week.