

Asian nations on the Far East would become gambling giants

The Far East of Asia has now entrenched itself as the world's biggest legal gambling destination for tourists due to the announcement by Samak Sundaravej, incoming Thai prime minister, who is planning to legalize gambling and build five casinos in Thailand.

Sundaravej is planning to legalize gambling and build five casinos for domestic and foreign holidaymakers in the country's tourist belts of Phuket, Pattaya, Khon Kaen, Hat Yai and Chiang Mai. „Thais who want to gamble, can gamble,“ said Samak. „The police can do other jobs instead of cracking down on illegal gambling dens.“

Despite gambling being illegal in Thailand, it has not stopped Thais from flocking to neighboring Cambodia and Myanmar where casinos have mushroomed along the border with Thailand.

Samak may also be facing up to the reality that it is far better for the country to gain from legalized gambling than to let it sip into the pockets of its police officers who are known to follow a ritual of rounding up an illegal casino following a complaint.

In an editorial, the Bangkok Post said it is an open secret that a number of police officers are close to illegal casino operators, who are „ready to help“ if police stations need cash to carry out their day-to-day operations. Insisting that casinos are not bad for Thailand, Samak said other Far East countries from Malaysia to Singapore have them. „It will bring tourist dollars into the country.“

From the largest casino in Macau, the most popular destination for casinos and legalized gambling with a total of 39 legal casino establishments to poor Nepal, there are now a total of

12 countries in Asia which has legalized gambling. „Casinos in Asia are visited by tourists across the world,“ said Worldcasinodirectory, which tracks the world’s gambling industry.

It is a fact that a sizable number of tourists from neighboring Southeast Asian countries to Malaysia head straightaway to Muslim Malaysia’s only legalized casino in Genting Highlands on their arrival at KLIA, which provides a direct transport service to the country’s only casino.

In an interview with USA TODAY, David Green from consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers said, „Gambling is going legit in Asia, and the trend goes beyond Macau, which has overtaken Las Vegas as the world’s gaming market.“

Singapore has passed legislation allowing Singaporean to gamble on slot machines and blackjack after paying an „entrance fee“ in its soon to be completed Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World casinos at Sentosa.

„The Chinese have gambling genes in their blood,“ said Harry Tan, assistant professor of tourism at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, explaining the Chinese love for gambling in Hong Kong and Macau. „They are enthusiastic gamblers.“

With the opening of three casinos last year, South Korea now has total of 17 casinos, one of the largest number of casinos in Asia. The country plans to expand its gaming industry by competing with Macao. „If 11 foreigners visit a casino, they will spend the equivalent of one exported car,“ said a South Korean newspaper in its editorial.

Globalysis, a US-based technology firm that works with casinos, said South Korea’s Jeju island, which has eight casinos, could become Asia’s next casino gaming giant.

According to an Asian Development Bank study, the rise of „middle-class“ Asians from poverty to affluence will create

millions of consumers with cash to spend on entertainment by 2020. „The regulated gaming industry will grow by 14 percent a year from 2005-2010 – the fastest pace in the world,“ predicted PricewaterhouseCoopers.