

China toughens visa restrictions on visitors to Macau

Beijing has further tightened restrictions on mainland visitors entering Macau, a report said this week, in the latest sign authorities are trying to put the brakes on the gaming haven's stunning growth.

Visitors from the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, which neighbours Macau, will now be limited to one trip every three months, the South China Morning Post said, citing an unwritten policy conveyed to travel agents.

Before June, visitors were allowed to enter every two weeks, but there has since been a gradual tightening of the visa policy, the report said. Guangdong is one of the main source of tourists to Macau.

The move is the latest effort by both China and Macau to cool the city's spectacular growth, which has seen the city overtake the Las Vegas Strip in terms of gaming revenue. The city's chief executive, Edmund Ho, earlier this year announced a moratorium on new casinos, amid worries that expansion in the city of 550,000 people was putting too much pressure on its infrastructure.

China is also concerned about the outflow of cash, much of it to United States-based firms that have been the major investors in Macau since its gaming business was opened up in 2002. China is also wary of its own corrupt local officials laundering their cash in Macau and the rise of problem gambling.

In July, Macau announced a string of increased restrictions on mainland visitors, but despite the move Andy Wu, president of

the Travel Industry Council of Macau, said numbers would still be up 10 % this year, the Post report said.