

Casinos in Bermuda would boost tourism, create jobs

The biggest plus to having casinos in Bermuda would be the potential boost to tourism.

As everyone knows, Bermuda's share of international tourism has steadily declined in the past twenty years. This has resulted in the closure of many of the island's hotels and a reduction in the number of available rooms from approximately 10,000 in [1990] to about 3,000 rooms today. This should be and is very disappointing, given that it is so close to the wealthiest market in the world, the U.S. North East Corridor (between Washington and Boston), still the wealthiest despite the economic ills of the last year. Over 75 per cent of visitors to Bermuda come from the U.S., and their tourists are able to visit casinos in almost every country they vacation in – except Bermuda.

Americans regard hotel resort casino gaming as a valuable entertainment amenity and many do not consider vacationing in Bermuda due to the lack of casino gaming.

The Bahamas is a great example of where Government has licensed a few responsible operators, with the result that the country's economy and local employment levels improved dramatically from 1995 through 2008. For example, the Atlantis casino resort generated over 5,000 new jobs in that period and significant gaming taxes were generated from tourist spending for the benefit of the country.

Although Bermuda has several distinguishing attributes – for example, its reputation for safety and its pristine environment, the much heard criticism of Bermuda from international tourists is that there is 'not enough to do'. The Bermuda climate is quite temperate, given its location in

the Gulf Stream, so as well as great sunshine much of the time, it also has a reputation for a lot of rain. Casino gaming would certainly give the tourist 'something else to do' on rainy days and in the evenings.

Training and good rates of pay

Hotels which qualify for casinos would be able to better afford to train and employ local Bermudians at decent rates of pay. This training obligation has to be well understood by the casino operator as a part of his getting and keeping a casino licence. The contribution at the hotel level from gaming would enable each such hotel to reinvest more in the property and grow its reputation for quality, which again would contribute to the growth of international tourism to the country.

While it is well known that uncontrolled gaming in any country attracts many people who simply do not have the disposable income, or significant capital, to participate without risking impoverishment, many jurisdictions have successfully instituted effective regulations to prevent access to those whose personal economic resources are not suitable for gambling in casinos.

In the modern age, especially with the easy access to international gaming sites on the Internet, anyone who has a credit card can play casino games at any time of day. So, any Bermudian who wants to play games of chance can already do so with comparative ease. The risks inherent in this type of gaming are very real and are obvious: if a player wins, will he get paid? will the on-line casino cheat him somehow? Many governments, including the U.S., do not allow its citizens to play in on-line casinos, nor do they allow on-line casino operators to operate from within their country.

The advantage in this regard of legalized casinos is that Government sets the rules and uses taxes on gaming revenues to more than cover implementing the rules and controlling the

methods of operation of the casinos. Bermuda could easily copy the most stringent of the U.S. sets of regulations: those operated by the State of New Jersey. In this way, criminal and bad elements can be kept out of the industry locally, through the individual licensing of the casino and resort employees.

In order to prevent people who local society recognizes are not sufficiently wealthy from playing in any hotel casinos in Bermuda and thereby risking what they can ill afford, the establishments that obtain casino licences could easily be required to operate casinos as private clubs. Membership could be automatic to international visitors but could also be extended on application to wealthy local citizens, per agreed criteria.

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