



THE NUMBERS GAME

Annual gross gaming revenue, commercial casinos (2004):
\$29 billion

Annual gross gaming revenue, Nevada (2004):
\$10 billion

Percentage of U.S. population visiting a casino in 2004:
26

Percentage of U.S. casino visitors from the West:
35

Total U.S. spending at commercial casinos:
\$28.93 billion

Source: State of the States: The American Gaming Association Survey of Casino Entertainment

emphasized tourism, entertainment, shopping, dining. And our gaming revenue has also grown nicely, thank you very much.”

Any lingering doubt that major gaming destinations want to woo meeting groups has been smashed by the expansion of convention facilities in Las Vegas, Reno and any number of tribal casinos. The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority board of directors just approved a \$737 million enhancement plan to the city’s convention center. Beginning later this year, the project will build a 100,000-square-foot general session space, as well as add meeting rooms to the center’s South Hall and create a 500,000-square-foot lobby connecting all three halls.

“It used to be that casinos thought of conventions as a bad thing, that conventioners didn’t have any money to spend,” says I. Nelson Rose, professor of gambling law at the Whittier Law School in Costa Mesa, California. “That really changed when the owner of The Sands created a convention center and made a lot of money.”

Of course, planners who want to make sure they receive star treatment can always bypass the megaresorts altogether, and choose a smaller, meetings-focused hotel that still pro-

A model of the Platinum Las Vegas gives a preview of the casino-free property to open in June.

vides access to gambling. Both the new Renaissance Las Vegas Hotel and the upcoming Platinum Las Vegas offer no casino games of any kind, though both provide access to the Las Vegas Strip.

“It will be a quiet hotel for small meetings of under 100 people,” says Peter Rockwood, vice president and general manager of the Platinum Las Vegas. “They can conduct business and be the only group in the hotel. It will have a strong appeal for groups who have come to Vegas in the past and enjoyed the splendor of a big hotel. Now they have an alternative, an un-casino experience.”

MYTH #3: TRIBAL CASINOS ARE ONLY FOR THOSE WHO CAN’T AFFORD TO GO TO LAS VEGAS.

In the past, the line on the nation’s 405 Native American casinos was that they were, at best, “spring training for Las Vegas,” as UNLV professor Rothman says. Fellow professor Thompson is less kind: “Their goal is to make money, period. There’s no concern for entertainment. They’re just trying to extract money,

and they do it well.”

Just try telling that to Patty Guglielmino, director of sales at the Skagit Valley Casino Resort in Bow, Washington. “There are a lot of people who come to our resort who never go into the casino,” she says. In fact, unlike most Las Vegas resorts, the hotel at Skagit is accessible through a separate entrance; guests don’t have to walk through the casino to get to their rooms. That’s part of the resort’s philosophy, she explains.

“Our vision is to do a lot more with the property than gambling,” Guglielmino says. “We’re diversifying, offering more.”

Just as Las Vegas has evolved from ‘Sin City’ to the home of world-class cuisine, high-end entertainment and all-inclusive family resorts, tribal casinos are spending millions to remake themselves into “destination resorts.” Take the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort and Casino near Ruidoso, New Mexico, where members of the Mescalero Apache tribe have invested in a new Ted Robinson golf course, new restaurants and nightclubs, and a 15,000-square-foot Events Center for concerts and meetings. Or consider the Sandia Resort & Casino in Albuquerque, which just added 198 hotel rooms, restaurants and a spa. These