

Macau shows off robot croupiers as hopes of recovery rise

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Macau overtook Las Vegas as the world's casino capital in terms of revenue after the sector was opened to foreign competition in 2002, and it still leads its US counterpart despite the downturn

Robot roulette dealers, animated playing cards and a gaming table that shakes its own dice were on show in the gambling hub of Macau Tuesday as experts forecast a two-year casino revenue downturn could be coming to an end.

The atmosphere was buoyant as around 200 exhibitors showcased their products at the Global Gaming Expo Asia—from miniature horse-racing tables to colourful craps machines sporting giant golden dragon sculptures.

Casino revenues in Macau continued to fall in April, marking 23 months of consecutive decline due to an economic slowdown in China and a corruption crackdown by Beijing.

But the 9.5 percent year-on-year drop, which put revenues for April at 17.34 billion patacas (\$2.16 billion), was less than analysts' expectations. Operators see a glimmer of hope that the tide of losses could be turning.

The stabilisation comes as the city seeks to shift towards the family-friendly [mass market](#) to make up for mainland high rollers who are staying away due to the corruption crackdown by Chinese President Xi Jinping, which has curbed public extravagance.

The hard-hit VIP sector comprised the bulk of gaming income in the semi-autonomous Chinese city, a former Portuguese colony.

Revenues could be back on the rise by the end of this year, helped by the opening of new [casino](#) resorts, said analyst Aaron Fischer in an opening speech at the gaming exhibition.

"Macau is transforming away from its first version," added Fischer, of brokerage CLSA.



A man tries his luck at a wheel of fortune machine at the Global Gaming Expo Asia held in Macau on May 17, 2016

"It's really moving away from VIP to lower-value mass market customers."

The Wynn Palace—a floral-themed 1,700-room resort featuring a lake with gondolas—and US casino mogul Sheldon Adelson's "The Parisian", which features a miniature Eiffel Tower, are slated to open in 2017.

"The sentiments have become quite bullish of late. The market is showing signs of bottoming out," gaming analyst Ben Lee told AFP ahead of the event.

But Lee said city authorities and casino operators must do much more to focus the industry on mass market consumers.

"Macau currently still does not have the infrastructure to attract the family segment. We are talking about logistics, attractions, language and plain old service friendliness."

The enclave saw the opening of two mega hotel and casino resorts in 2015, aimed at mass market visitors.

Studio City, which boasts the world's first figure-of-eight rollercoaster, launched in a star-studded fanfare in October, featuring Robert De Niro, Martin Scorsese, Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio.

That came hot on the heels of the opening of Galaxy Phase 2 last spring, with a sprawling rooftop water park complete with river rapids.

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