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By Ellen Boonstra

# The Venetian Macao Experience

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On the auspicious day of August 28, American billionaire Sheldon Adelson of the Las Vegas Sands Corp. opened the world's largest casino - The Venetian Macao.



Americans like to think BIG and do things BIG. But even Stanley Ho's jaw would probably drop to the casino floor when taking in the sheer magnitude of the 10.5 million square feet (980,000 m<sup>2</sup>) resort complex, The Venetian Macao. With its 550,000 square feet of gaming facilities, 1.2 million square feet of meeting space, one million square feet of retail space and 15,000-seat arena, this casino-hotel is the largest of its kind. But then Stanley Ho is a bit of a pauper compared to Sheldon G. Adelson, who conceived this super-size project. The Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Las Vegas Sands is number six on the Forbes 400 list of the world's wealthiest individuals (estimated net worth in billions US\$: 26.5), and the third richest American.

Sheldon Adelson is credited as the man who transformed Las Vegas from a somewhat seedy, mob and rat-pack (as in Frank Sinatra) infested place to the entertainment and convention capital of the world it is today (currently 50% of all major conventions in the US are held in this Nevada desert town.)

His is your classic rags to riches story – growing up in a poor Jewish Ukrainian immigrant family in Boston, hawking newspapers on local street corners, owning his first business by age 12, and over the course of five decades relentlessly expanding his business empire to mega-billion dollar proportions. A pivotal year in this colorful history was 1989, when Mr. Adelson purchased the Sands Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas.



**...row upon row of empty Bacarat, Black Jack and roulette tables stretching as far as the eye could reach before the casino opened at the auspicious time of 7:18 pm.**

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A couple of years later, while honeymooning in Venice with his second wife, Dr. Miriam Adelson, he gained the inspiration and theme for a mega-resort hotel. Never one for half measures, Mr. Adelson proceeded to blow up the venerable Sands, which had been a Las Vegas institution for some 44 years (a DVD showing the implosion was part of the press kit) and started construction on a hotel complex themed on the romantic Italian city, resplendent with canals, gondolas and singing gondoliers.

30 months and US\$1.5 billion later, Sophia Loren joined Dr. Miriam Adelson in launching the first gondola in the canals of The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino. Setting a new standard for opulence, the resort complex revolutionized the Las Vegas hotel industry with its combination of gaming, convention, shopping and entertainment facilities, becoming a choice destination for gamblers, tourists and business travelers alike.

With Las Vegas firmly 'veni, vidi, vici'd', the casino king set out to conquer other gambling-friendly parts of the planet. Forecasting the huge potential and hitherto untapped market of China, Macau – being the only place in China where casino gam-

bling is legal – was next. He repeated his success formula of "the integrated resort" or "Disneyland for adults" – this time on an even grander and more expensive scale.

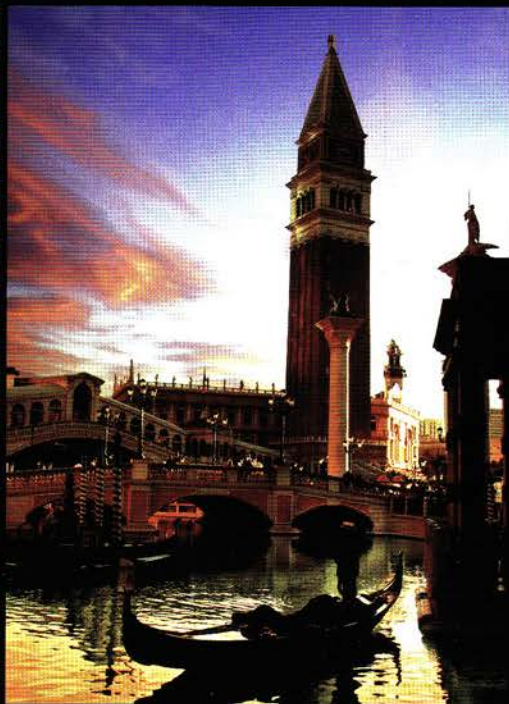
They say that from the moment it opened, the US\$2.4 billion Venetian Macao became the largest single structure hotel in Asia and the second largest commercial building in the world (only outsized by the Aalsmeer Flower Auction in The Netherlands). The hotel complex features 3,000 all-suite guest rooms, a retail area for 350 stores (larger than any shopping mall in Hong Kong), a 1.2 million-square feet of meeting, convention and exhibition space (at more than twice the size of Hong Kong's Convention and Exhibition Center, again outdoing its neighbor), and will have 30 fine dining outlets, all under one single roof.

The facility also boasts the 15,000-seat Venetian Arena, which made its debut at the grand opening. And when the sixth richest person in the world throws a party, you can expect something extraordinary. No expenses were spared for this star-studded event, which reportedly cost over US \$10 million. The audience got a sneak preview of coming attractions, with legendary entertain-

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Sheldon G. Adelson



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ers flown in from North America and Asia, such as A-Mei, David Tao, Grasshopper, Alan Tam, Diana Ross and Cirque du Soleil. This modern-day circus will be housed in its own state-of-the-art, purpose-built theater on the premises of The Venetian. It's expected to hold around 1,800 seats and will open in the spring of 2008.

There were never any plans to build a tourist attraction based on a different theme on Macau, says William P. Weidner, President and Chief Operating Officer of Las Vegas Sands Corp. "Renaissance, art and culture... Venice is unique. It's not as though you're copying something that doesn't have a lot of substance to it."


Certainly every effort has been made to make you feel like you've just stepped off the gondola in Venice. (A ride in the gondola while being serenaded by an Italian gondolier costs HK\$120 and then –yes, call me a sucker– another HK\$140 for that prized possession: a framed photograph of you in the gondola with the smiling gondolier). Walking around the enormous shopping complex is a surreal experience, from its medieval-looking house facades (storefronts) and artificially hand-painted blue skies (which make it impossible to tell

what time it is), to its indoor canals. Venice has not only been recreated with its picturesque maze of canals, bridges, narrow streets and market square, but – thanks to a ferociously blowing air-conditioning system – you can also experience a sometimes chilly European summer. So don't forget to bring a sweater!


The Venetian Macao might be a replica of the one in Las Vegas but with an Asian twist. A renowned Feng Shui master was consulted to choose an auspicious time for the opening. As Mr. Adelson put it, "I have to respect the culture of the people. So if we have to do Feng Shui, then Feng Shui it is," adding that "I don't sell hamburgers and hotdogs to people who eat Dim Sum and noodles, and vice versa." At the ribbon cutting ceremony Mr. Adelson blessed three wedding couples – from Thailand, Korea and Malaysia (not from China as it wasn't considered an auspicious month for getting married for the Chinese). Just as Las Vegas is the wedding capital of America, Macau is set to become its counterpart in Asia.

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fascinating, and much captured moment by the international press, was the sight of row upon row of empty Bacarat, Black Jack and roulette tables stretching as far as the eye could reach before the casino opened at the auspicious time of 7:18 pm. As soon as the doors were unlocked, visitors piled in en masse to try their luck. According to Mr. Weidner, the official door count in the first five hours (7 pm to midnight) was 64,800 visitors, with the first 24 hours of operation witnessing 100,000 entries.

Both CEOs maintain that gambling alone doesn't draw in the crowds – it takes the mix of gaming, retail, entertainment and MICE space in order to have a winner. The Venetian Macao is certainly holding all the aces. There are several of millions of Chinese within a one-hour flying radius of Macau; add another three hours flying time and you've practically got half the world population covered.

The Venetian Macao is merely a component in the grand masterplan. Built on a piece of reclaimed land called Cotai, future expansion will see another 14 hotel developments comprising over 60,000 rooms managed by the most renowned hospitality operators from around the world, such as Four Seasons, Hilton, Conrad, Shangri-La and Raffles. The Las Vegas Sands is investing a massive US\$11.5 billion in this project, most likely making the Cotai Strip – as it's being trademarked – the largest tourism project in world history.

Undoubtedly it won't take long before this monster investment pays itself off. Already Forbes estimates that over the past two years, Mr. Adelson's fortune has been growing by US\$1 million every hour. With the opening of The Venetian, and in the future the Cotai Strip, Macau is expected to rake in more revenue than the Las Vegas Strip, making him an even richer man. Move over Bill and Warren!

[www.venetianmacao.com](http://www.venetianmacao.com)