



CHINA

BOOMING MACAU

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An advertisement for the Galaxy Casino.

- ▶ Macau is the Las Vegas of the East, the world's gambling paradise
- ▶ Gambling in Macau generates in excess of 30 billion dollars a year
- ▶ In October the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge was opened. It is the world's longest bridge
- ▶ The bridge will further increase the number of tourists, which in 2025 are due to reach record levels of 40 million
- ▶ Too many according to the authorities: the peninsula is small and it is necessary to introduce a maximum limit. But How?



The Grand Lisboa Casino. Opened in 2006, it is owned by Stanley Ho, holder of the gambling licenses monopoly in Macau until 2002.



A tourist in front of The Venetian Casino.



The lights of the Grand Lisboa Casino.



Chinese gamblers taking a break outside a casino.

The tourist invasion of the gambler's paradise

The Las Vegas of the East, the gambling town par excellence, one of the richest places on the planet (it is due to overtake Qatar in 2020) – it is, of course, Macau. The former Portuguese colony was returned to Chinese control in 1999, but with one particularity: it is the only place in China where gambling and casinos are legal. Macau – known by the Chinese as Aomén – is famous for two things: money (it is a tax haven) and the tourists attracted by the roulette, poker and slot machines. Here one in five inhabitants works in a casino and more than 70% of government revenues is derived from gambling, an activity that brings wealth (in excess of 30 billion dollars a year) and that in 2018 alone attracted almost 36 million visitors to Macau.

Paradoxically, this is too many: the optimal capacity for the area is no higher than 33 million tourists, while the annual figure is due to reach to 40 million by 2025. Consequently, the local legislative assembly is considering introducing a limit. But how? On 23 October 2018 the world's longest bridge was opened: 55 km that connects Honk Kong to Macau and from the following day thousands of tourists, in cars, arrived in the casinos of Macau. "We are being invaded by tourists, our genuine wealth could lead to our collapse" explained Maria de Senna, director of the tourist office. "Our solution? Move beyond the casinos and diversify, opening new museums, shopping centres and theme parks."



A street that resembles a budget cinema set leads to the Venetian Casino in Cotai.



A woman crosses the street near the Grand Lisboa Casino.



Opened in 2006, the Grand Lisboa Casino is owned by Stanley Ho, holder of the gambling licenses monopoly in Macau until 2002. Although it is much older and less profitable than its competitors in the Cotai area, the Grand Lisboa is an iconic landmark.



An employee of the Casino Parisian stands outside the lobby area.



Cotai is an artificial strip of land between the islands of Taipa and Coloane. It is home to the most recent hotels and casinos and it was created in order to enable Macau to continue to develop its gambling sector in spite of its high population density and relative lack of land.



Migrants from Philippines. Daniel, 29 (right) is a cook in a restaurant and has been living in Macau for 7 years. He wants to save money to buy a house in his homeland. He lives in an apartment shared with other migrant workers. Jojo, 26, (left) works as a public attendant in the Galaxy Casino.



Sanan, 25, from Nepal, is a Traffic controller at Galaxy Casino. He arrived in 2018 and he intends to stay for 4 to 5 years. He makes 10000 MOP/month and he saves 8000 MOP/month. He lives in a shared apartment with his brother and cousin who also work for casinos.



A group of tourists in front of the iconic Ruins of St. Paul's.



Construction work on the extension to the Macau Peninsula.



The population's poorest citizens live in northern Macau, near the Chinese border. Although the unemployment rate is 1.8% (over 30% before the casinos came to town), 18% of Macanese live below the poverty line. People complain of difficulties with transportation, pollution, real estate prices and that public services do not benefit enough from the profits of gambling.



Cheang So Lan, 31, is married with two children. She comes from the Guangdong province and has been living in Macau for 8 years. She came for economic reasons: "Life with casinos is better than before because the money spent by the Chinese in Macau is reinvested here. I go to mainland China once a week to do some shopping, it is 50% cheaper than here."



Caritas school of Macau. In Macau, more than 70% of children are foreigners and 50% of them have parents working in the casino industry.



Billboards advertise the city's casino cabaret style shows.



High speed Macau development has created striking contrasts in the local urban landscape. Here, a residential building can be seen in front of the iconic Grand Lisboa Casino.



Tourists pose in front of the Grand Lisboa Casino, opened in 2006 and owned by Stanley Ho, holder of the gambling licenses monopoly in Macau until 2002.



A man walks outside The Venetian Casino.



Chinese tourists sit in front of the bus of the Parisian casino. The building's main attraction is a replica of the Eiffel Tower.



The poorest among the local population live in northern Macau, near the Chinese border. In spite of an unemployment rate of 1.8% (over 30% before the casinos came to town), 18% of Macanese live below the poverty line. People complain of difficulties with transportation, pollution, real estate prices and that public services do not benefit enough from the gambling profits.



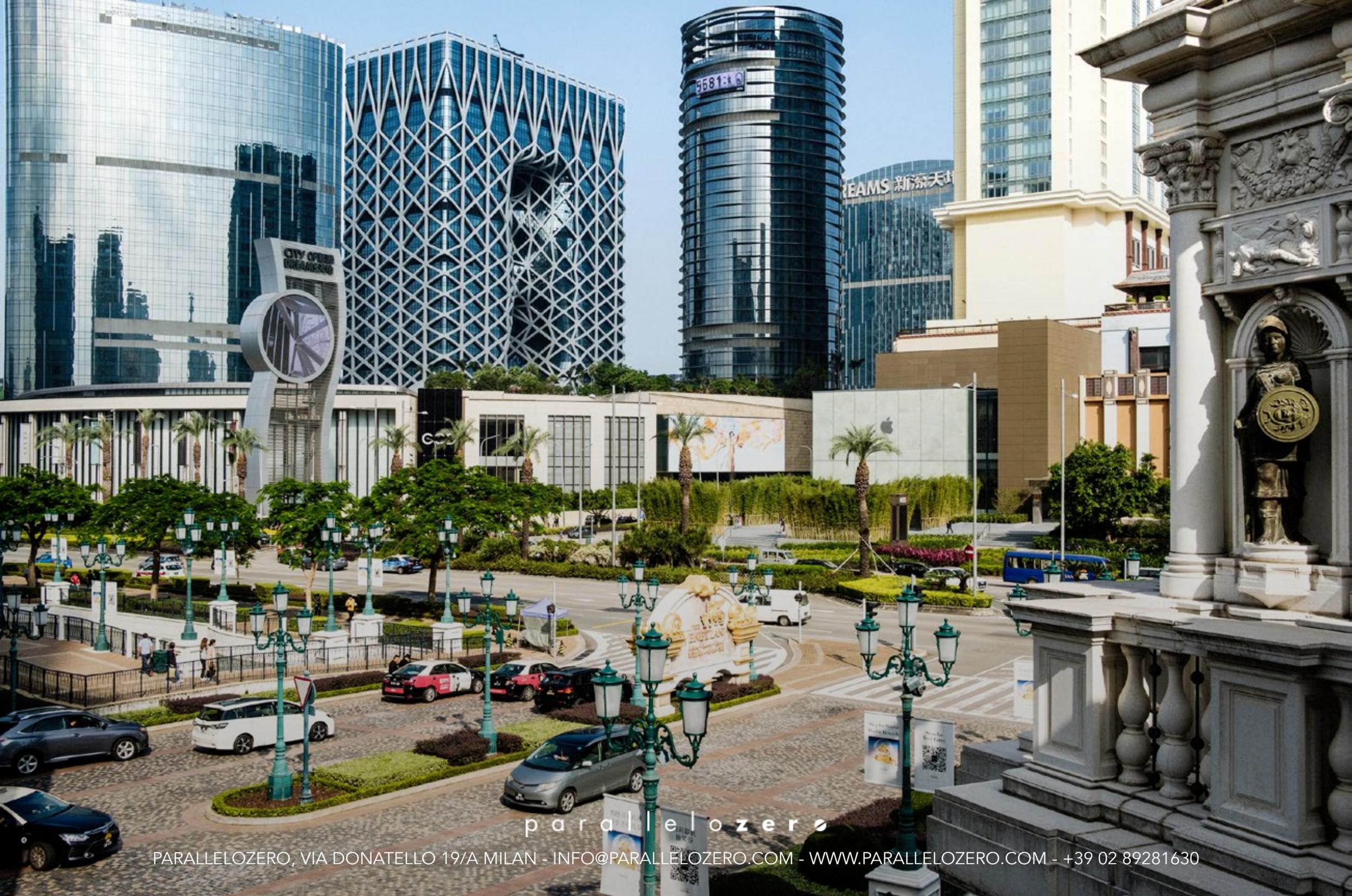
Pun Chi Ming (left), Secretary-General of Caritas Macau and David (right), 70, a homeless man currently taking refuge at the Caritas centre. On his T-shirt can be read "Wheel of Fortune". In spite of record profits thanks to gambling resources, 18% of Macau's population live below the poverty line.



The "Joyride", one of the numerous themed restaurants in Studio City casino, Cotai.



Ground level at the iconic Grand Lisboa Casino. Opened in 2006, it is owned by Stanley Ho, holder of the gambling licenses monopoly in Macau until 2002.



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PARALLELOZERO, VIA DONATELLO 19/A MILAN - INFO@PARALLELOZERO.COM - WWW.PARALLELOZERO.COM - +39 02 89281630