

Harrah's Tunica Casino to Close, Hinting at Gambling Glut

Written by Administrator
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Photo



Harrah's Tunica casino rising over the Mississippi River levee in Tunica Resorts, Miss.

Credit

Brandon Dill for The New York Times

TUNICA RESORTS, Miss. — At the height of a recent dinner hour at Mississippi's largest casino, fewer than two dozen patrons were seated in the buffet's dining room. A nearby jewelry display sat aglow but bare. The hallways were mostly empty.

This is what happens when a casino resort approaches an inglorious end. And on Monday, Harrah's Tunica will close, which company officials say will most likely lead to up to 950 job losses. In Tunica County in the impoverished Mississippi Delta, it is a disquieting reality that underlines the deeper threat facing Mississippi and other states with legalized gambling: There may be too many casinos chasing too few gambling dollars.

"There's gambling everywhere," said Allen Godfrey, the executive director of the Mississippi Gaming Commission, which reported that the state's nontribal casinos posted \$2.1 billion in gross gambling revenues last year. "If you just want to gamble, you don't have to go very far to do it."

It's extraordinarily rare for a major casino to just shut down. But along with a 2011 flood that closed casinos for weeks and a menu of other attractions that is insufficient to draw more visitors, the spread of the legalized gambling that revived this region has also contributed to its recent decline. "No one knew in 1993 or 1994 what it was going to be like, and then Mississippi showed the world that it could be a viable industry," said Anthony F. Lucas, a professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who researches the gambling industry. "And that encourages everybody else that has a possible way into the gate that they can compete."

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