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## When the Chips Are Down ...

August 06, 2009 - Elyse Glickman, Jewish Exponent Feature

Two years ago, Macau lay somewhere between its colorful history and the city it wanted to be in the 21st century. It boasted a venerable collection of museums and sites celebrating its fusion of Chinese and Portuguese culture, and yet was the world's most ambitious construction site.

Billionaire casino hoteliers Steve Wynn and Sheldon Adelson placed heavy bets on Macau properties, designed to push the envelope beyond their Las Vegas establishments.

The three areas making up Macau (Macau City, Taipa and Coalone) retain much of their rustic charm. Many of its streets are not only paved with gold, but also lapis and jade -- color schemes in many elegant new hotels that did not exist in 2007 when I last wrote about it.

While Las Vegas is in a downturn, Macau is far from that. Adelson's Cotai Strip-based Venetian Macau is not only fully realized, but also a monument to urban development. It is a city unto itself, with 3,000 rooms and a posh mall that connects it to an even more upscale sister Four Seasons.

It is also home to Zaia, a dazzling only-in-Macau Cirque de Soleil show of global diversity.

Though Macau's museums, parks, restaurants and UNESCO Heritage sites are also on the rise in terms of visitors, Macau Tourist Office guide Teresa Costa Gomes (who claims some Jewish ancestry in her family tree) pointed out that Jews are continuing to come to Macau from other parts of the world.

Although many of them still travel to Hong Kong for key synagogue holidays, Gomes predicts this will also change. She introduced me to resident Priel Manes, from Israel, who,



like her, fell in love with Macau and now makes it her home.

We sat down for a chat in the tastefully opulent lobby of the Ponte 16 Sofitel to discuss what made Macau such an exciting, attractive place for young Jewish professionals in such fields as education and security (there is an appreciation for Mossad-trained individuals among casino, club and retail owners).

### Growing and Growing ...

"Though some people in Hong Kong will insist the area's entire Jewish community is concentrated in Hong Kong, Macau has a Jewish community that is definitely growing" with arrivals "from Israel, Australia, Canada and the U.S. to work and study," explains the 25-year-old student.

"Out of necessity, we have made efforts to network and meet one another, and groups like Macau Jewish Singles reflect this," she says. "Even general business networking parties have been great; when you mention you're from Israel, several other people will take an interest" and reveal that they are Jewish as well.

With "people meeting one another during High Holiday and Passover services in Hong Kong, the Jewish community for Macau has come together over the past four years," she continues.

Though Manes admits that she is one of the younger members of Macau's Jewish community -- noting that most are professionals in the 30-50 age range -- her enthusiasm about its growth was heightened on a visit to Hong Kong for Israel Independence Day.

A chance meeting and conversation with one of the area's prominent Reform rabbis revealed that because the community in Macau has grown so quickly, there are talks starting up regarding the need for a center or temple here.

Most residents -- be they longtime residents like Gomes or new arrivals like Manes -- share an enthusiasm for Macau's uniquely international array of cultural and architectural wonders.

"My suggestion for any visitor is to just go to the city center, drop the map and walk around Senado Square," says Manes.

The Macau of 2007 was primarily a treasure trove of culture and unusual food. Today, thanks to shopping opportunities offered by the casinos, one can gamble as much on the latest fashions from every corner of the globe as on bets in the city's elegant casinos.

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