

# Gambling ban ends with poker tourney

Singapore will lay its cards on the table later today when it hosts an international poker tournament billed by organisers as the first-ever in the city-state.

Britain-based betting exchange Betfair, has teamed up with local operators Capital Events for the six-day Asian Poker Tour.

More than 370 players have paid the USD 5000 buy-in for the main event which begins on Wednesday at the Meritus Mandarin Hotel.

Qualifying starts today, and players from 32 countries, including Singapore, will be after the prize pool of about USD 2 million, the company said.

„Betfair has become the first gaming company permitted to present a poker tournament in Singapore,“ the company said in an earlier statement.

The Straits Times newspaper quoted Oliver Chong, an official of the Singapore Tourism Board, as saying the event brings „significant opportunities to profile Singapore.“

The city-state is a majority ethnic Chinese country where betting is allowed through official outlets.

Last year Singapore lifted a four-decade ban on casinos despite strong domestic opposition, saying two planned casino projects would boost the tourism sector and draw more visitors.

Singapore awarded Las Vegas Sands a licence to build one casino development, which is to open in 2009. The winner of the second licence is to be announced next month.