

Las Vegas casinos hoping for Lucky Chinese New Year

Las Vegas (Reuters) – Golden dragons hang from the ceilings and lion dances are poised to start as Las Vegas Strip casinos prepare to ring in the lunar New Year – one of biggest money-making events for the gambling corridor.

While the global financial crisis has stilled the hand of many gamblers, Las Vegas is doing what it can to keep them coming in the year of the Ox.

The Chinese New Year, which starts this year on Monday, ranks with the western New Year and the National Football League's Super Bowl weekend as the three busiest times for Las Vegas casinos.

„There is great demand for the Chinese New Year period,“ said Rob Oseland, chief operating officer at Encore, the new casino-hotel from Wynn Resorts Ltd.

Encore and the adjacent Wynn Las Vegas will host a series of galas, starting with a 67th birthday party for owner Steve Wynn and culminating with the Super Bowl next weekend.

„Every year we have a dragon dance procession that runs through the casino and casts good luck,“ Oseland said.

The atrium at Wynn features a huge, bejeweled dragon, but the seasonal decoration at Encore, which already includes huge red chandeliers and Asian-esque rosettes, is more muted.

„Our Asian customers are very important and they appreciate the touches, but we wanted to show off the (existing) design. Having a huge dragon up there would just be gilding the lily,“ said Bruce Anderson, Encore's director of horticulture design.

Other resorts, particularly high-end properties like Las Vegas

Sands' Venetian and MGM Mirage's Bellagio, are also keen to court Asian clients.

The Venetian and the adjacent Palazzo plan dragon and lion dances, complete with firecrackers and an eye-painting ceremony.

Sands' resorts feature lotus lanterns and decor in the customary color scheme of red and gold, along with traditional tangerine trees and banners heralding „Gong Hei Fatt Choy,“ a common New Year greeting that translates as „Wishing you great happiness and prosperity.“

Chris Harrington, a visitor from New York, described Encore as „lovely, other than the red ... I feel like I'm in China, but I think that's what he (Steve Wynn) was looking for.“