

ADVANTAGETM

THE GLOBAL GAMBLING LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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THE LAST DEAL, THE LAST MEAL

// EXPERIENCES BEYOND THE CARDS

DEALER LEAVES THE TABLE

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// WHEN THE DEALER LEAVES THE TABLE

Las Vegas Bets on Machines

Las Vegas has always thrived on reinvention. Neon skylines, billion-dollar resorts, new spectacles arriving each season — the city has built its reputation on changing just fast enough to keep gamblers coming back. But on the casino floor itself, change has rarely felt as personal as it does today. For the first time in living memory, dealers — once the heartbeat of the Las Vegas experience — are being quietly replaced by machines.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority's July report revealed a sharp 12% year-over-year drop in visitor volume, with Strip occupancy sliding from 86.5% to 79.5%. That translates to half a million fewer visitors in a single month. Conventions remain strong, but casual tourism — the lifeblood of blackjack pits and roulette tables — is faltering. The culprits: tariffs squeezing international travelers, domestic affordability concerns, and a generational tilt toward mobile gaming

Against that backdrop, the Golden Gate Hotel & Casino made headlines when owner Derek Stevens announced that live dealers would be swapped for electronic table games (ETGs). Stevens, who also owns Circa, framed the decision as both pragmatic and forward-looking: "These new games aren't just machines — they're experiences," he said. "Players gather around them the same way they once did at tables, and the noise, the energy, the hollering — it's all still there."

For ADVANTAGE readers, the change is about more than efficiency. Vegas has long marketed itself as an experience economy, where the dealer's wink, the shuffle of cards, and the ritual of chips clacking on felt were part of the package. ETGs streamline that — faster play, lower minimums, fewer mistakes — but they also rewrite the psychology of the floor.



// When the Dealer Leaves the Table

// WHEN THE DEALER LEAVES THE TABLE

The Experience Factor



Slot developers have spent years gamifying isolation into community, turning machines into social hubs. ETGs are following the same path: stadium-style blackjack setups where dozens of players bet simultaneously, digital dice that rattle across giant screens, baccarat handled by avatars instead of hosts. Dealers, once the front line of Vegas hospitality, are becoming another part of the nostalgia reel.

This isn't just an aesthetic shift. Resorts World, Fontainebleau, and other Strip anchors have begun cutting dealer staff as foot traffic wanes. CEG Dealer School in Vegas has already seen enrollment dip, as would-be dealers rethink the city's stability as a career option. With Vegas's unemployment hovering above 5% — one of the highest among large U.S. metros — the decline of live dealing has a real economic ripple.

Las Vegas has seen cycles before: keno lounges, coin-drop slots, themed megaresorts that rose and fell with trends. Yet, insiders suggest this moment is different because it coincides with a structural tourism slump. International arrivals are down more than 70% compared to pre-2024 summers. Domestic travelers cite affordability and safety as deterrents.

Still, Vegas is not retreating — it's recalibrating. Universal Studios is investing \$1 billion into *Horror Unleashed*, while the Athletics' \$1.75 billion ballpark promises to add baseball to the Strip's entertainment roster. On the casino floor, the bet is that electronic tables can attract a new, hybrid gambler — the same one who spends hours on mobile apps, then expects seamless familiarity in live settings.

For players at the top of the market, nothing changes: baccarat salons and high-limit rooms continue to run on human touch. But the broader casino floor is shifting to match consumer reality: faster, digital, group-oriented play.

When the Dealer Leaves the Table

// ALL YOU CAN EAT... UNTIL YOU CAN'T

Buffets fade as food halls rise.

For decades, Las Vegas buffets were a rite of passage — endless crab legs, carving stations, and soft-serve machines fueling marathon nights on the Strip. Today, many of those icons are shuttered, replaced by sleek food halls designed for younger travelers. From Proper Eats at ARIA to Block 16 at the Cosmopolitan, the vibe has shifted toward curated, social dining.

Still, for ADVANTAGE readers chasing the classic all-you-can-eat experience, a handful of buffets survive — and thrive. South Point's Garden Buffet keeps the tradition alive with themed nights and a steady local crowd. Wicked Spoon at the Cosmopolitan remains a favorite for mixing indulgence with presentation. Bacchanal Buffet at Caesars Palace continues to set the standard, offering everything from dim sum to prime rib in a modern hall built for spectacle.

The heyday of the \$9.99 shrimp buffet is long gone. But for those who know where to look, the spirit of Vegas excess is still on the menu.

For ADVANTAGE readers, buffets aren't just meals — they're nostalgia served on a plate.

- [Garden Buffet – South Point Hotel](#)
- [Wicked Spoon – The Cosmopolitan](#)
- [Bacchanal Buffet – Caesars Palace](#)
- [The Buffet – Wynn Las Vegas](#)



// LOST IN THE SHUFFLE

Asia's Casino Divide - Macau's Boom vs. Vietnam's Bust



Vietnam's casino experiment was designed to rival Asia's gaming giants. Mega-projects like Corona Resort & Casino on Phu Quoc Island were built with the ambition of attracting international high-rollers while showcasing luxury at scale. Yet in 2025, the reality looks starkly different.

Corona reported losses of VND564 billion (\$21 million) in the first half of the year, pushing its accumulated deficit above \$200 million. Despite its sprawling 1,176-hectare footprint — complete with golf, villas, and five-star hotels — the resort's debt-to-equity ratio now sits at an alarming 20:1.

In the north, Royal Ha Long Casino offers a small counterpoint. After years of red ink, it has finally edged into profit, posting a \$22,000 surplus for the first half of 2025 on tighter cost controls. For most operators, however, the narrative is still one of mounting pressure.

The backdrop matters. Across the South China Sea, Macau casinos are rebounding after pandemic-era restrictions, driven by Chinese tourists and high-limit play. Operators there have leaned into integrated resorts, leveraging entertainment, shopping, and culinary draws to diversify revenue streams. Vietnam's resorts have tried a similar model, but with one critical difference: domestic play is still tightly restricted. Only foreign passport holders can legally gamble, leaving local appetite untapped.

For ADVANTAGE readers, this raises an insider's question: can Vietnam ever compete regionally without loosening its laws? With Macau regaining momentum, Singapore steady, and the Philippines growing fast, Vietnam risks being left as a footnote — luxury properties without the player base to sustain them.

The international spotlight is clear: Vietnam's bet on casinos is still on the table, but unless policy shifts, the odds remain stacked against it.

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// LETTER FROM THE CEO



Welcome to ADVANTAGE, The Global Gambling Lifestyle Magazine. For decades I've been fortunate to work across every corner of the gaming industry — from tribal operations and Las Vegas casinos to global advisory and technology. What I've seen consistently is that the world of the high-frequency gambler is more than play — it's community, access, and experience.

ADVANTAGE was built to capture that world.

This weekly LinkedIn newsletter is our way of opening the door, sharing insights, and celebrating the lifestyle of the globally mobile player. And four times a year, the quarterly magazine will take a deeper dive — aspirational stories, tactical intelligence, and the rare experiences that define our industry.

I'm proud to introduce ADVANTAGE to you here on LinkedIn. I invite you to read, share, and be part of the conversation as we chronicle the evolving global gambling lifestyle together.

A stylized, handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read 'A. Crystal'.

— Stephen A. Crystal
Founder & CEO, SCCG Management



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