

What Has Happened to the Casino Project in Eilat?

The dream for a casino in Eilat began in the early 1990s. To stimulate declining tourism in 2016, Netanyahu proposed a casino project in Eilat.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Gambling is a big business and an ever-growing industry. More and more countries are succumbing to public pressure and rising demand by changing laws and allowing companies to start taking bets on sports and games of chance.

Estimates from the Business Research Company say that the global market will hit a value of around \$565.4 billion, growing at a rate of 5.9% per year, through 2022.

Currently, the country is divided on this front. Many politicians are trying to push through the legalization of casino gambling, especially in terms of Eilat casinos in Israel's southernmost resort city. On the other hand, security forces and religious groups strive for the current ban to continue, and no such casinos to ever become legal. Nevertheless, Israelis can still [play online casinos on sites located in other countries](#).

Are There Casinos in Israel?

There are currently no casinos in Tel Aviv or elsewhere in Israel. If there are any, they are operating without a license and are subject to police raids. According to Israel gambling laws, there is a general ban on gambling activities in the country, with two exceptions. The National Lottery, established in 1951, and sports betting provided by the Israel Sports Betting Board, established in 1967. The latter has exclusive rights to regulate the practice of betting on sports.

Eilat Casino Project

The dream for a casino in Eilat began in the early 1990s when Yitzhak Rabin's government threw the notion around with gambling tycoon Sheldon Adelson, who first attempted to open a casino



casinos in eilat

in Israel to no avail.

In 1996, now US president, Donald Trump showed interest in the idea. He even reached a verbal agreement to hold the 1997 Miss Universe contest in Eilat. However, one year after this agreement, when it came time to sign the contract, negotiations collapsed. Trump asserted that the funds for the competition must come from the government, and not from sponsors. The deal fell through, and when Miss Universe in Israel didn't become a reality, any hope for a Trump casino in Eilat went away.

In August of 2008, many Israeli outlets reported the possibility that the then Tourism Ministry had forged a deal with the Israel Land Administration for the apportion of a piece of land amounting to 12 acres on Eilat's northern shore for Israel's first legal, land-based casino.

This initiative aimed to bring economic growth and boost the city's failing tourism economy. Then Tourism Minister, Yitzhak Aharonovitch, had faith in the project and said: "It's important to promote tourism in Eilat, which is losing visitors to neighboring cities like Taba, Aqaba, and Sharm el-Sheikh. All of which have casinos." It didn't materialize.

Instead, many Israelis found an alternative in gambling cruises that would take off from Eilat's ports into international waters, where gambling activities could take place. The operators of these boats have been accused of tax offenses and money laundering.

Eight years later, in 2016, Eilat's tourism industry was still in dire straits. According to statistics, it was down 40% compared to 2011. Illegal gambling was doing fine though. It generated \$281-385 million, according to a government report.

This prompted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to announce the formation of a committee that would explore the possibility of allowing casinos in Eilat.

However, many opposed the idea, including former Education Minister, and head of the Jewish Home party, Naftali Bennett. "I will act against a casino. We will teach our kids values, not gambling. Israel is not Vegas," he said.

The initiative went silent for three years, and resurged, again in late 2019, when Prime Minister Netanyahu, again expressed support. Amir Levy, the Tourism Ministry's director proclaimed that if there's ever a casino in Israel, it will be in Eilat.

There's been talk about placing a gambling venue at the Ramon International Airport, which is located 18 kilometers from the city. Another consideration is to hold a bidding war, where the hotel chains operating in Eilat will compete for a license. Many hotels are looked at, including The Princess Hotel and Herod's Hotel.

Another idea is Kings City, the biblical theme park that is undergoing an upgrade and should

reopen under real estate developer Bercleys UK Israel.

According to CEO Moti Green, the park would be an ideal place for gaming. "The setting of the City of Kings is the ultimate for a casino," he said.

However, many remain skeptical that the casino idea will ever come to fruition. Those that believe it will think that it should be under government ownership, not controlled by private interests. The ministry's figures reveal that casinos in Eilat would generate 400 million shekels in government profits per year. Add to this the fact that Lottery income has risen 71% in the past decade.

Can You Play Online Casinos in Israel?

Like most other countries, Israel does not have specific laws that criminalize or prohibit online casino gambling. Thus, everything that is not forbidden is allowed, meaning that Israelis can play online casinos at off-shore sites.

The attorney general of Israel, in 2005, clarified that the only law applicable to the activity is the Israeli Penal Law 5737.

Online gambling remains a grey area in the country and is mostly considered illegal, though authorities don't seem to prosecute individuals who partake in the activity. Many people in the country freely and regularly access reliable online casinos located in other countries. Others are evaluating legalizing [the industry that continues to grow in times](#) where land-based casinos have to close down.

The major irony here is that many top gambling platforms are of Israeli origin. 888 is an Israel-based company. Playtech, a leading software provider that [just entered the US market](#), was established by Israelis. The same applies to PokerStars, the biggest poker site in the world.

David Price

www.LegitimateCasino.com

+1 4126513768

[email us here](#)

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