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Iowa Casinos

By Adel Awwad

Iowa, "the Hawkeye State," is a North Central state known for its agriculture, scenic trails, fishing, and hunting. With a population of over 3,000,000 and an area of 56,276 square miles, Iowa ranks first in the United States in the production of corn. The capital of Iowa, Des Moines, is a center for insurance, printing, and publishing, with a population of 200,000.

There are a number of Iowa casinos in the state, the majority on stationary riverboats. The largest of the Iowa casinos is the Meswaki Bingo Casino Hotel, a Native American casino in Tama, with 127,669 square feet of gaming space, 1,500 slots, thirty table games, such as blackjack, craps, roulette, and baccarat, and several types of poker; as well as three restaurants, monthly entertainment, and gaming instructions. Another large Native American casino is the Winna Vegas, with 45,000 square feet, 668 slots, and 14 table games. In addition, the Ameristar Casino Hotel in Council Bluffs is open 24 hours, with 38,500 square feet, 1,589 slots, 36 table games, and four restaurants. There are several other popular Iowa casinos, including Harrah's Council Bluffs, with 28,250 square feet, 1,212 slots, and 39 table games; and the Lakeside Casino Resort, with 37,480 square feet, 921 slots, and 31 table games.

A smaller Iowa casino is the Diamond Jo, a riverboat casino in Dubuque, open during the week from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. and 24 hours on the weekends, with 17,813 square feet, 776 slots, and 19 table games. The Catfish Bend Riverboat, in Fort Madison, is open Tuesday through Sunday for 24 hours, with 13,000 square feet, 535 slots, and 14 table games. Another Iowa riverboat casino, The Isle of Capri, is open 24 hours, with 24,939 square feet, 1,100 slots, and 24 table games. The Mississippi Belle II, a 10,577 square foot riverboat casino in Clinton, has 506 slots, 14 table games, live entertainment, and Thursday blackjack tournaments.

Iowa casinos provide a great deal of tax revenue to the state of Iowa, which has enabled the funding of many statewide projects. Tourism has grown at a rapid rate along with the demand for services and a gain in employment. Iowa casinos have contributed to the growth of the economy, and the enthusiasm for gambling in Iowa is widespread. The future of Iowa casinos looks bright, with more and more casinos appearing and major expansions being planned.

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Riverboat Casinos

By Adel Awwad

Riverboat casinos were first legalized in Iowa in 1991 and their popularity has increased dramatically since that time. At first, gambling on riverboat casinos was limited to \$5.00 bets and a maximum loss of \$200.00 for each cruise passenger. Riverboat casinos gradually moved to Illinois and Mississippi, where there were no limits and casinos were open 24 hours a day. In 1994, riverboat casinos were introduced to Missouri, the last state to legalize riverboat casinos.

Riverboat casinos are legal in six states, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri. They resemble the grand riverboats of the past; however, they seldom leave the shore and remain at dockside. The Mississippi riverboat casinos must be permanently docked, with gangplanks from the shore to the casino. Some riverboat casinos, "boats on moats," are large barges with casinos on deck, designed to float on pools adjacent to the river. The majority of the riverboat casinos operate on the Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers, with the exception of Illinois, which allows them on the Des Plaines, Ohio, and Illinois rivers, as well. Each state has its own gambling restrictions for riverboat casinos, including number allowed, types of games, admission charges, number of hours spent in cruising, and amount of gambling time allowed.

There are a variety of games on riverboat casinos, including blackjack, craps, roulette, poker, slots, and video poker, as well as frequent shows, featured performers, dinner, and dancing. Some popular riverboat casinos include the Argosy VI in Indiana, with 2,300 slots and 80 table games for over 4,000 passengers; the Grand Victoria Casino in Illinois; the Ameristar Casino in Missouri, with the largest floating casino floor in the world; and the Mississippi Belle II in Iowa. The Tunica Queen, a 3-deck riverboat casino featuring afternoon and evening gambling cruises, is very popular in Mississippi. One of the newest riverboat casinos is L'Auberge du Lac in Louisiana, a single-level deck, with 30,000 square feet of gambling space, 60 table games, and 1,600 slot machines. Another well-known riverboat casino in Louisiana is the Treasure Chest, featuring 1,000 slot machines and several types of poker games.

Riverboat casinos add millions of dollars in revenue to the economy of each state, as well as providing employment for thousands. Although natural disasters affect the riverboat casinos each year, gaming developers and individuals contribute to rapid reconstruction and reopening. There remains a bright future for riverboat casinos because of their convenience, reasonable prices, and inexpensive entertainment.

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