

Saipan and DFS gamble on Chinese arrivals...

International casino operator 'Best Sunshine' says it is hoping to attract more than 2.2m Chinese tourists to the US Commonwealth of Saipan by 2020, after winning an exclusive 40-year gaming license on the Pacific island last year and setting up temporary operations on the ground floor of the DFS T Galleria.



Best Sunshine is now committed to a \$7.1bn three-phase project to fully develop its new casino and resort complex after its 'Casino Resort Developer License' was confirmed by the Saipan Lottery Committee last year.

More recently, Best Sunshine's parent company, Hong Kong-based Imperial Pacific International Holdings has signed the aforementioned lease with DFS Saipan for the 'soft opening' of its 'Temporary Casino', with this formalised on 26 July this year *[according to a filing with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange-Ed]*.

The casino operator has already poured millions of dollars into the location and is now engaged with phase one of its major project, which involves the construction of its initial five-star Casino Hotel which it hopes to complete and open by December 2016.

Phase two then envisages the completion of a fully-integrated resort complex, including an amphitheatre, a shopping mall, park amusements and convention space, while phase three will see a multi-property expansion, featuring resort and condominium developments.



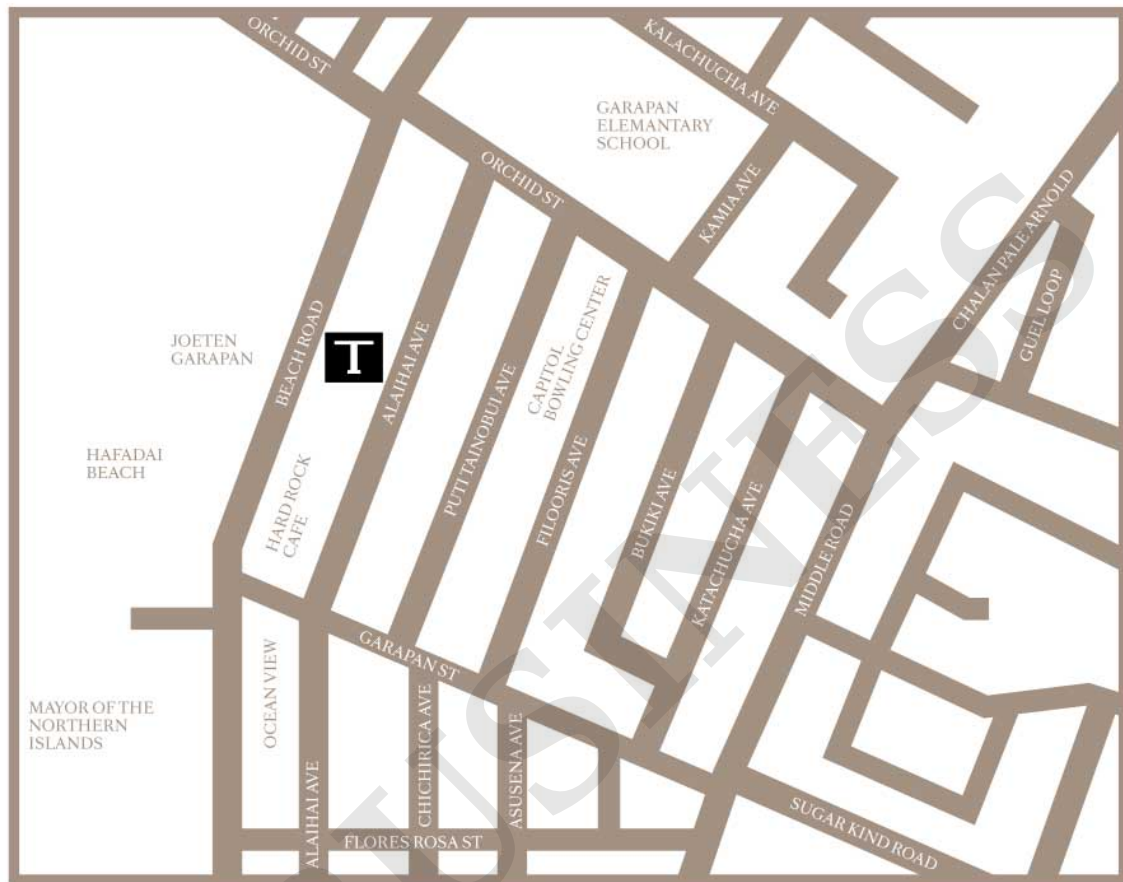
The DFS T Galleria in Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan.

Best Sunshine points to a big opportunity in Saipan, not least the five-hours or less flight proximity for visitors from most Asian cities and simple Chinese visas on arrival for 45 days. But the casino operator also faces some big challenges, including recruiting hundreds of employees to work in its future casino and resort facilities in a country (or territory of the US) where the population is no bigger than 49,000. In addition, Best Sunshine also had its first encounter with Saipan's occasional extreme weather conditions, following the unwelcome visit from Typhoon Souder on August 2, which led to President Obama declaring 'disaster status' for the Northern Mariana Islands – so invoking Federal Aid.

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The company involved itself heavily in providing food and water for many residents who were forced to leave their homes, with its managers and employees rolling up their sleeves to help those who needed it most.

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Location of the DFS T Galleria in Saipan.

As reported at the time, several DFS staff lost their homes to the typhoon, as the US Navy rushed to the US Territory's aid with essential supplies and repair crews. DFS also wasted no time in establishing its very own aid campaign on several fronts, including providing shelter, food and clean water and other requirements. It also established an appeal site for the most needy, which is still accepting donations (*click here: <http://www.gofundme.com/saipandfs>*).

[It should be noted that both Best Sunshine and DFS have made it very clear in the local press that there is no partnership between the two companies, with the temporary casino leasing arrangement on the T Galleria ground floor a purely financial agreement-Ed].