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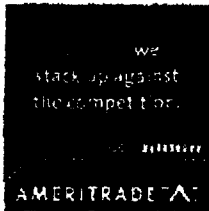
New Year's revelers still planning Las Vegas trips

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By Gail Fitzer-Schiller

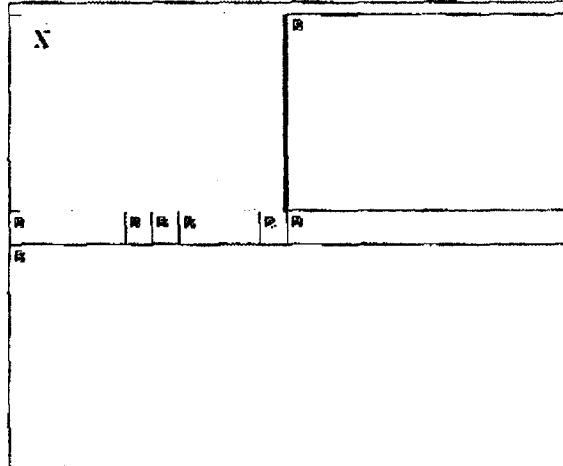
LOS ANGELES, Dec 26 (Reuters) - New Year's revelers planning to celebrate the holiday in Las Vegas are not canceling plans despite a heightened U.S. terror alert and a Christmas scare that grounded six flights from Paris to Los Angeles, booking agents and analysts said on Friday.

The disruptions to air travel that followed the Sept. 11, 2001, hijacking attacks hit Las Vegas casinos hard, in part because the city depends so heavily on tourists who arrive by plane.

But business on the Las Vegas Strip has been recovering in recent months. Neither this week's heightened security alert nor a report that Las Vegas might have been a target for attack appears to have unnerved travelers bound for the desert gambling resort, analysts said.

"We spent a lot of time researching this issue today and so far there really doesn't appear to be any trend toward increased cancellations," said Jason Ader,

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chief executive officer of Hayground Cove Asset Management and a former gaming analyst for Bear Stearns.

"From what we can tell, people who planned to go to Vegas still plan to go. Most people feel pretty relieved any such attack was thwarted and have a high level of confidence that things should be OK in the future," Ader said.

He said his firm's research was based on a proprietary survey of travel agents around the country.

Park Place Entertainment Corp. (nyse: [PPE - news - people](#)), which owns such Las Vegas Strip mainstays as Caesars, the Flamingo and Bally's, has not seen widespread cancellations due to concerns about security, spokesman Robert Stewart said.

"Our Las Vegas properties are at or above capacity for the New Year's holiday. We have had a few individual people who have expressed some concerns about traveling to Las Vegas at this time, but those cases were few and far between," he said.

Other major Las Vegas casino operators include Harrah's Entertainment Inc. (nyse: [HET - news - people](#)), MGM Mirage (nyse: [HET - news - people](#)) and Mandalay Resort Group. (nyse: [HET - news - people](#))

There are about 125,000 hotel rooms on the Las Vegas Strip. The New Year's holiday is typically one of the busiest times of the year.

The Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority said it had received over 100 calls just from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. Friday morning from people interested in booking hotel rooms for the New Year's

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holiday and conventions in January -- about normal for this time of year.

Spokeswoman Marina Nicola said the organization had not yet received any calls from tourists seeking to cancel their New Year's reservations or expressing concerns about Las Vegas being a target for terrorists.

"The people who are calling are more concerned about where they're going to stay for New Year's and next month's conventions," she said.

The Las Vegas Tourist Bureau, a private company that makes reservations for visitors to Las Vegas at most of the city's major hotels, also said it had not received any cancellations.

Last Sunday, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge placed the nation on heightened alert, saying threat indicators were "perhaps greater now than at any point" since Sept. 11, 2001, and stressed the need to guard against "al Qaeda's continued desire to carry out attacks" against the United States.

On Wednesday, U.S. officials asked Air France to cancel six flights from Paris to Los Angeles because of what they called a "credible threat" that emerged when passenger manifests were compared with an intelligence "watch list."

Fears of an attack eased somewhat on Friday after checks by French intelligence found no links to radical groups among passengers booked to fly on the six canceled flights on Dec. 24 and 25.

The Washington Post on Friday quoted U.S. government officials as saying the only big city on the Paris-Los Angeles route that hijackers would consider a "nice, attractive target" was Las Vegas. The same report quoted officials as saying that Los Angeles could also have been the intended target.

Ridge told CNN on Friday that the government had no knowledge of a specific threat to Las Vegas.

Reuters News Service

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