

## My Favourite Museum

We invite our readers to submit a short (300-400 words) article about a favourite museum, sculpture garden or non-commercial gallery in Asia, Australia or New Zealand or to write about an Asian collection elsewhere in the world. Please send submissions to Susan Hunter, Features Editor, at [susanfhunter@mindspring.com](mailto:susanfhunter@mindspring.com)

# Finding Buried Treasure in the Museu de Macao

By Virginia A. Sheridan

At the port of Xiamen, they called it *te*. In Guangzhou they called it *cha*. Depending on which of those Chinese ports supplied the goods, the rest of the world named the brewed beverage some derivation of the two. So what is tea in London is *teh* in Indonesia, *cha* in Korea, *chai* in Persia.... I learned that fascinating factoid via an interactive display at the Museu de Macao. That was 10 years ago – ample proof that the museum’s user-friendly, entertaining style is incredibly effective!

Located in the old quarter of the former Portuguese enclave near the famed arched façade of St. Paul’s church, Museu de Macao provides excellent insight into Macao’s trading and multi-cultural history. It’s also a welcome respite from the ever-present gambling casinos and gleaming office towers that have become the legacy of modern Macao, a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China since 1999.

The strength of the museum lies in its ability to package historical and cultural information into easily digestible, and generally satisfying, bites. You won’t find antiquities or priceless Asian art here, but you will find the cross-section of a fully-stocked trading ship, a *mahjong* game viewed through a shophouse window (clacking tile noises amplified for authenticity) and a 3D re-creation of an early Macao shopping street. There are lots of buttons to push, films to watch, photos to snap.

But the main course served here is Macanese culture, the unique blend of Chinese and Portuguese people and culture that over the centuries has yielded a distinct category of citizens – although now Macanese comprise only 2% of the population of Macao. Like Singapore’s Peranakans, the Macanese were known for their eclectic decorating style and for a cuisine that drew heavily on exotic port spices, particularly turmeric, coconut milk and cinnamon.



Cultural juxtaposition is a running theme throughout the museum. In a display of a 1900s Macanese drawing room, Portuguese lace cloths grace Chinese hardwood tables, an almond-eyed Madonna shares a corner shrine with a Buddhist deity and the Lunar New Year meal includes

a tray of Portuguese sweets. The *Towards a First Encounter* exhibit highlights developments made in 16th century China and Europe in parallel showcases; it’s fascinating to travel back and forth across the aisle (and time!) to compare and contrast ideas.

Literally hewn from the Monte Fort, a Jesuit stronghold constructed in 1626 as a protection against Dutch invaders, the museum blends well into what little remains of the city’s old quarter. Two of its floors are, in fact, hidden in the interior of the fortress, leaving just a single, unobtrusive level to peek out past the shaded, rooftop park and over the ramparts. The Museu de Macao is truly a ‘hidden treasure’ worth discovering.



**Museu de Macau**  
**Praceta do Museu de Macao**  
No. 112, Macao (1 hour boat ride from Hong Kong)  
Tuesday – Sunday 10:00 am to 6:00 pm  
Closed on Monday

Editor’s note: please check with the museum to verify opening hours

Tel: +853-2835-7911

[www.macaumuseum.gov.mo](http://www.macaumuseum.gov.mo)

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**Virginia Sheridan** has been a neurosurgeon, a concert pianist, an archaeologist and an aviator - at least vicariously via her real-life roles as writer, editor and occasional actress. Her work has been published in the *South China Morning Post*, *The Boston Globe*, *Travel and Leisure Magazine* and sundry airline and specialist magazines. She is currently heading the Docent Training Team at the ACM.

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