

Meeting International Museum Supporters

FOM's worldwide association of museum friends' annual meeting report

By Ron Stride

Background

Formed in Brussels, Belgium in 1975, the World Federation of Friends of Museums' (WFFM) purpose is to foster international cooperation between Associations of Friends of Museums "to promote mutual understanding, to exchange information and to pool the experience acquired with the purpose of intensifying the life and function of such organisations to benefit the museums and the public."

WFFM is composed of 18 country Federations (mostly European and North American countries with more than one Friends' organisation), 27 Associate members (associations serving specific museums) and numerous Individual members. In Asia, Associate members include Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and, of course, Singapore. Former Associate member Korea has recently been elevated to Federation status.

The elected Executive Committee is made up of WFFM's officers: the President, the Secretary-General, the Treasurer and one Vice President for each of the four established geographical regions (Africa-Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America and South America).

Event

WFFM's annual Council meeting and General Assembly were held in Lisbon, Portugal in May. Some 91 Friends from 22 countries attended and enjoyed a well-rounded programme of meetings,

museum visits, palace tours, great meals of local food, lovely countryside, and very warm and gracious hosts in the Federacao de Amigos dos Museus de Portugal.

Highlights

The event officially commenced with a wonderful dinner in magnificent surroundings at the National Palace of Ajuda (the former Royal Palace of the kings of Portugal), where delegates had the privilege of meeting the descendants of the last king of Portugal.

Those of us not required at council meetings had the luxury of visiting some of the beautiful museums in and around the Lisbon area. Highlights for me included: the splendid tile (Azulejo) museum with its collection from the 15th century to the present; the Gulbenkian Foundation museum and its magnificent collection of art, porcelain and prints (from both East and West) donated by a Turkish-Armenian oil magnate; and the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga and its fine collection of paintings and porcelain. I wish I could have spent more time in this last wonderful museum, but alas, our schedules would not allow it.

Outside of Lisbon, the visits to the towns of Evora and Sintra were also a wonderful experience. In the ancient town of Evora, we toured the palace of the dukes of Cadaval. The family's current generation hosted us for lunch and then we enjoyed a guided tour of the family's stunningly ornate church.



The Jeronimos Monastery in Lisbon, a stop on the WFFM tour roster

A large, first century Roman temple dedicated to Diana, goddess of the hunt, dominates the main square of Evora. Sintra's main attraction, besides the beauty of the surroundings, is the Palace National with its remarkable salon. Painted in 1515, the salon shows the coats of arms of the 71 Portuguese noble families. At each of these venues, we were ably guided by docents from the Portuguese Friends' organisation.

A report from the Council meeting revealed that WFFM is financially healthy and has consolidated some offices to reduce expenses. It signed a pledge to work with the International Confederation of Museums to mutually support museums and preserve cultural heritage. Estonia's application for Associate membership was also approved. Additionally, Carla Bossi-Comelli, who was President of WFFM for eight years, was awarded a Certificate of Merit for her contributions to the society.

WFFM's worldwide Congress is held every three years for all members. The next Congress is set for Genoa, Italy from 18 to 23 September, 2011. Mark your calendars. To learn more about WFFM, visit its website at www.museumfriends.com

Ron Stride has been an FOM Singapore member since 1988. He served as FOM Treasurer for many years and is currently a member of the Council. Ron is also President of the American Association of Singapore and he and his wife are avid collectors of Asian art and antiques.

Photos by Ron Stride

A Lisbon battle scene, rendered in tiles

