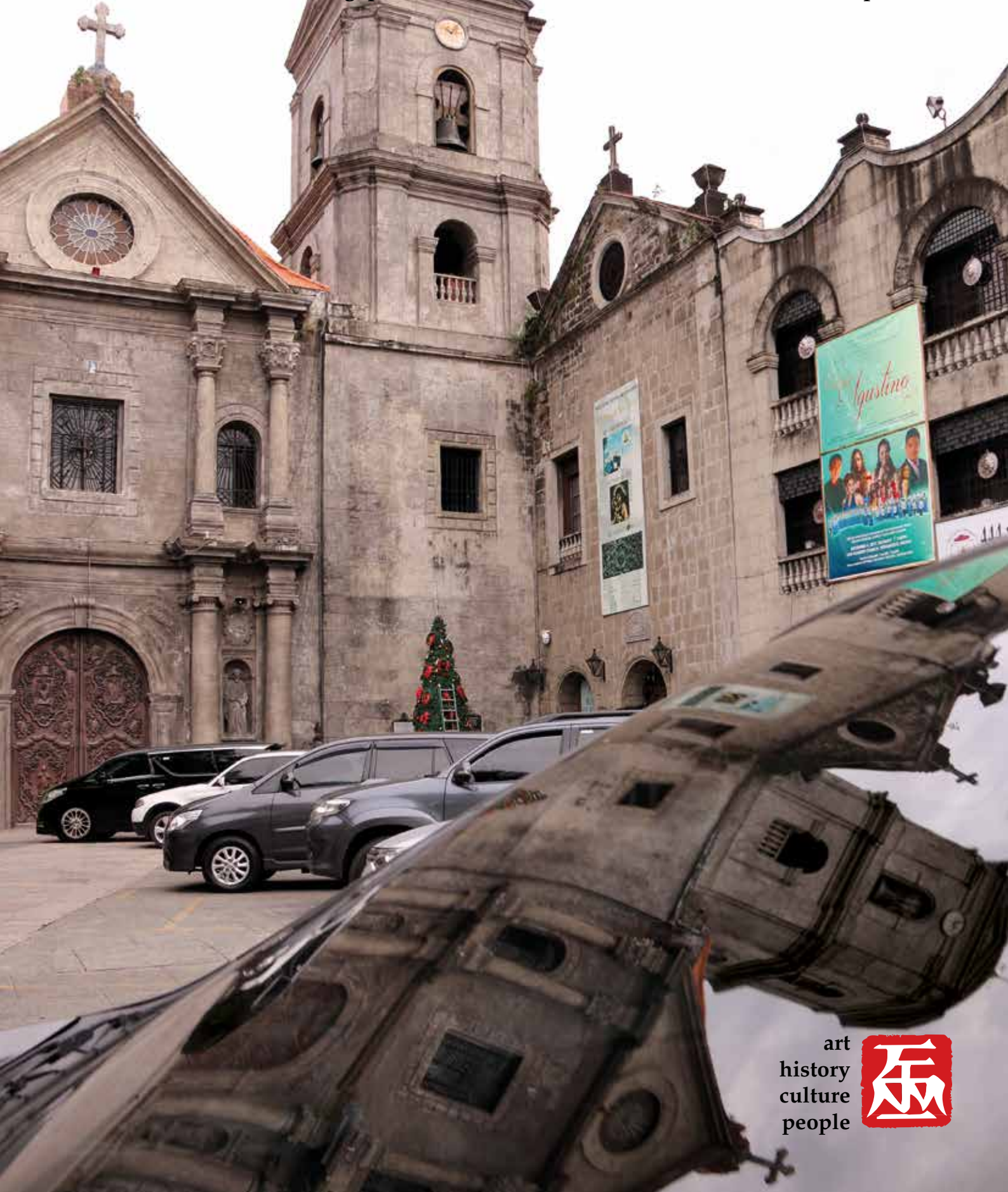


PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

March / April 2018



art
history
culture
people



President's Letter

Dear Friends,

I hope you have all kept yourselves busy attending FOM programmes since the beginning of the year, especially our public lecture series on Monday mornings and Friday evenings. These wonderful lectures are a great source of information on Asia's art and culture. I have found them to be immeasurably helpful whenever I am doing research on a new exhibition or looking for information to share with my visitors. Did you know that our Monday Morning Lectures (MMLs) were so popular when they started that the lectures were run three times a week to cater to the limited seating capacity? Our ex-president, Margaret White shares her memories of MMLs in the past.

If you are planning a day out with the family, the recently opened Ancient Religions gallery at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) is worth a visit. With over 160 artefacts on display, the new permanent exhibition explores the art of Hinduism and Buddhism as these religions spread from India to the rest of Asia and how they are represented in different cultures. Do join our ACM docents as they take you through the gallery every Monday to Friday at 3.30 pm.

Another wonderful exhibition to explore is at the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), where the special exhibition, *Symbols & Scripts: The Language of Craft*, is on until 30 June. The exhibition has close to 140 artefacts which explore the meanings behind different Indian scripts and symbols on jewellery, textiles and even toys. There will also be demonstrations by craftsmen from across India of some of the ancient craft traditions. If you are keen to pick up some traditional Indian craft skills, do check out the IHC website for information on these specially organised workshops. Our docent-led tours of this exhibition take place on Wednesday and Friday at 3:00 pm.

My warmest congratulations to the trainees who will be completing their docent training at the ACM, the National Museum of Singapore, the Peranakan Museum and STPI. Best wishes to all of you during your mentor tours. And I would like to commend all the senior docents who have volunteered to take one of the trainees under their wing to guide him/her through their first public tour. The camaraderie that our docent communities have shown to the trainees is a key factor in the success of our docent training programmes.

If you are new to FOM, do join us for a coffee morning on 23 March at the Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall. This is a great opportunity for you to make new friends and learn about the myriad activities that we organise for our members. Existing members are also welcome if you would like to reconnect with the FOM community.

Finally, to all our remarkable volunteers who are giving their time to FOM, a big thank you for making our society so vibrant!



Clara Chan
FOM President 2018



Symbols and Scripts

Special Exhibition at the IHC

By Soumya Ayer

The latest exhibition at the Indian Heritage Centre (IHC), *Symbols and Scripts: The Language of Craft*, is a visual feast. It showcases spectacular Indian craft traditions through media such as clay, textiles, ivory, wood, hide and metal. The exhibition features rare artefacts that depict the use of symbols and scripts in Indian handicrafts, with loans from the National Museum of Delhi, The Museum of Art & Photography, Bangalore, Pondicherry University and the collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee, as well as artefacts from the IHC and the Asian Civilisations Museum. Historical artefacts keep company with innovative contemporary pieces on loan from the Dastkari Haat Samiti, an association of Indian artisans that supports the preservation and revival of traditional skills.

The star piece of the exhibition is a group of mysterious 5,000-year-old Indus Valley seals that are about the size of postage stamps; one is beautifully carved with the image of a unicorn-like beast and captioned with perplexing symbols. In the 1920s, seals such as this led to the excavation of Harappa where they were first found, in present-day Pakistan. This led to the rewriting of Indian history and the discovery of sophisticated urban mercantile centres in India. Experts have yet to decipher the symbols, an incentive for code-breaking enthusiasts to visit this exhibition.



An Embroidered Zoroastrian hanging, circa 1890-1930

The exhibition also features replicas of potsherds that are around 2,500 years old and were excavated from a site in southern India inscribed with Tamil Brahmi. Brahmi was a post-Indus script that was used across the subcontinent and even in Southeast Asia. One of its variants is Tamil Brahmi, used to write the Tamil language before it evolved into its current form, significant in Singapore since Tamil is one of the nation's official languages.



Harappan seal depicting a unicorn, dating to 3000 BCE

The diversity of scripts exhibited is striking, from the various South Asian languages to the unexpected cuneiform script embroidered on a purple velvet backdrop used by Parsi theatre troupes in Mumbai.

Also on display are several examples



Madhvi Subrahmanian's Ode to the Unknown

of textiles that are transformed into sacred and powerful objects with scripts and symbols. Hindu devotees wore *namavali* shawls (inscribed with the names of deities) for rituals, Islamic communities used talismanic textiles painted with calligraphy, Jains and Hindus used cloth maps of important pilgrimage centres and brides had wedding saris with inscriptions that emphasised their devotion to their husbands. One such example is a 19th century pink and gold silk wedding sari, produced for a queen and conveying wishes for her husband's longevity.

Wealthy societies have time for entertainment and this expresses itself in the assortment of handmade games and toys. A mobile shrine containing cut-outs from Hindu mythology includes busts of British royalty with movable heads and limbs and is an intriguing part-shrine, part social critique.

The exhibition concludes with a contemporary installation entitled *Ode to the Unknown* by artist Madhvi Subrahmanian, a collection of painted rubber-tapping cups, fashioned from Singapore clay and created in her studio at Guan Huat Dragon Kiln, one of the production centres for rubber collection cups in the 1900s. The artist hopes to pay homage to the unknown makers and users of such cups – the Chinese who laboured in the kilns and the Indians who worked on the plantations.

Acknowledging the importance of preserving craft traditions, the exhibition also showcases well-known artisans who will demonstrate their skills. This not-to-be-missed exhibition runs until 30 June with tours offered on Wednesdays and Fridays at 3:00 pm. Admission is free for Singaporeans and permanent residents.

Come and be dazzled by this very special display.

Soumya Ayer is a docent at IHC and ACM as well as an author of children's books.

Photos courtesy of the Indian Heritage Centre Resource Library

The Museum of Innocence in Istanbul

Real Objects and Fictional Lives

By Pallavi Narayan

When you turn into the chic yet quiet district of Beyoğlu, you find it sprinkled with cafés and art galleries. Then, you chance onto Çucurkuma Caddesi, a residential neighbourhood. On traversing steep cobbled streets lined with houses painted mustard yellow, green and blue, you realise that what defines the area is an abundance of artfully organised boxes and spaces that are filled with bric-a-brac – yellowing photographs, old silver spoons, glass bottles and bowls, the occasional toy. This is the domain of antique collectors and dealers and you would not be amiss in passing by the narrow maroon building that could be mistaken for another middle class home. The washing-line near it, with well-worn, laundered clothes fluttering in the breeze, adds to the illusion. But this is no ordinary residence – it is *Masumiyet Müzesi*, or the Museum of Innocence, Orhan Pamuk's museum based on his novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2009).

This private museum encapsulates a decade – the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s – of life in Istanbul and combines fiction and reality in a way that defies it being one or the other. In 1999, Pamuk purchased the building with only a slight idea of what he intended to do with it, while also playing with the concept of an encyclopedic catalogue that documents objects in the city. He later decided on the novel format and wrote each chapter based on objects he found, or hoped to find, during his wanderings through Istanbul.



Füsun's hand gestures in a video montage in the entrance hall of the museum



A cross-section of the vitrines on the second level

The novel and the museum developed as simultaneous projects, but the latter only opened in 2012, a full four years after the novel's publication. Narrating the love story of Kemal, an upper-class man, and Füsun, his lower middle-class distant relative, the novel is painstakingly and lovingly populated with lively descriptions of objects, many of daily use, that constituted life in the home and the city. A number of these objects found their way into vitrines in the museum; each of the

novel's 83 chapters is a vitrine and the objects in it evoke the underlying emotion of that chapter. The material elements of everyday life speak to each other in enchanting arrangements that invest each object with an emotional value and grant it a higher artistic role.

In the novel, Pamuk displays the attitudes a person can have when collecting in a systematic manner. This obsession with archiving and researching the particular mood, character or tenor of one's surroundings, lends itself to the ambience of the museum. I first visited it in 2012, when it had just opened, and some of the vitrines were still awaiting objects. On revisiting it in 2017, I discovered that much had changed.

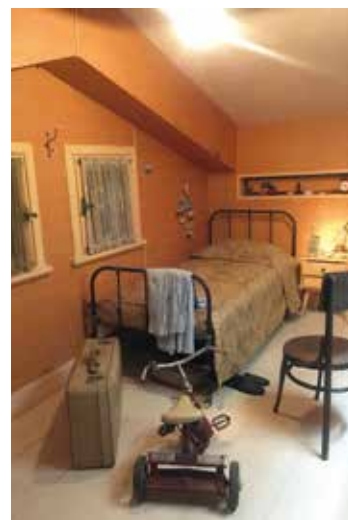
As the museum catalogue titled *The Innocence of Objects* (2011) promises, the aural landscape of 1970s

Istanbul is now vividly brought home with the sounds of *simit* sellers (*simit*, a typical street-side snack, is a circular bread usually encrusted with sesame seeds), *boza* vendors (*boza* is a traditional fermented, mildly alcoholic beverage of the region) and ships on the Bosphorus, and also videos in some of the vitrines such as the repetitious video of a series of Füsun's hand gestures, which bring the fictional lovers to life. Kemal's bedroom in the attic of the museum gives the impression of his living there as caretaker of a universe he has created, mimicked in the Aristotelian time spiral on the ground level that can be seen from anywhere in the museum. The plethora of clocks and keys further embeds the notion of time into space, as do the 4,213 cigarette butts stuck on the wall, documenting all the times Kemal watches Füsun smoke.

Go with a copy of the book and turn to the last chapter. You'll see a ticket, which you can get stamped with an imprint of Füsun's earring. Ticket and visiting information is available at this link: www.en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/visitinginformation.

Pallavi Narayan is an academic and writer based in Singapore. Her doctoral work, in its critical analysis of Orhan Pamuk's corpus, focuses on the portrayal of the city in fiction.

Photos by the author



Kemal's attic bedroom on the top level of the museum, with the tricycle he and Füsun both used as children in the novel



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On the Cover: The Church of San Agustin, in Manila. This is the oldest church in the Philippines, with construction beginning in 1587. It was completed in 1607 and since then has survived intact through numerous invasions as well as earthquakes. Photo by Andra Leo.

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$25 (senior) - \$100 (family) depending on category of membership.

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FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Looking Back-Monday

The highly successful and popular Friends lecture series has been around for almost as long as FOM has existed. Focused on Asian art, history and culture, the first public lectures were initiated in 1979 and by 1984, each lecture was given three times a week, on Wednesdays at 10:30 am and twice on Friday mornings at 9:30 am and 11:00 am, in the National Museum's theatrette where seating was limited (75-80). Late-comers were not admitted and fire regulations had to be observed. Of course this was exhausting for the speakers, so the lecture series coordinator would take the often-hoarse speaker out for lunch. Then, as now, welcome committee members served tea and coffee outside under the porte cochère, a cooler, breezier spot to catch up with friends as well as being an information point for other FOM activities. Inside, some felt the air-conditioning was too cold, so shawls with our logo were sewn for people to borrow.

Inevitably, there have been changes over almost 40 years. The lecture venues changed as new museums were opened. With the cooperation of the museum directors, we occasionally availed ourselves of the Glass Hall at the Singapore Art Museum and later, the auditorium and the River Room at the Asian Civilisations Museum. As technology changed, PowerPoint presentations became the norm.

Our lectures have adhered to a high standard because the museum expected it, as did FOM. In former times, Study Groups (8-10 groups, each with 10 members) were hugely popular, with members studying a wide range of topics that provided fertile ground for many a lecture. However, some topics were considered sensitive, for example, if religion was discussed, the speaker had to be a member of that religious group. Potential speakers were mentored, resulting in high-quality public lectures. Geeta Varghese coordinated lectures around 1998-99 and after listening to my talk on silk weaving, made several recommendations to my script. This was a fine proving ground for me.



Evelyn Chew (a regular speaker) and Rebecca Poston (MML coordinator early 1993)



Projection Committee 1999-2000 at the National History Museum. L to R Veronique Lee, Louise Warouw, Bernice Rebusck

In the era of slides (laboriously prepared by each speaker), these were also viewed ahead of time by the MML coordinators – discarding poor quality ones and adding more if necessary. The week prior to the actual lecture, a full-dress rehearsal was held with the lecture series coordinator and the FOM projection team. This ensured that the speaker could feel confident that all would go smoothly although

Morning Lectures (MMLs) 1979-2017

By Margaret White



Welcoming Committee (1999-2000) under the porte cochère, with the coordinator, Susan Lamkin, on the left



Mary Connors and Sue Williams, two regular speakers at the MMLs

we always prayed that slides would not become stuck in the projector's carousel. Each speaker was asked to donate at least two slides to FOM's slide library. Speakers were also asked to prepare a three-page handout with cover sheet, overview/timeline and a bibliography that was photocopied and could be obtained with a \$1 contribution on the day of the lecture. Speakers were encouraged to create a display and many did, which often led to a fun, informal discussion and hands-on session at the end of the talk. We also insisted on no commercial tie-ins or promotions of any sort. The emphasis was on scholarship.

When I joined FOM, Rebecca Poston oversaw all the lectures and was also a speaker. I was a trainee docent and especially remember her lecture on jade. Along with many other speakers, she went on to pen books. Successors, including Aditi Krishnakumar, Jane Adamson, Vicki Douglas and Marianne Beutler (in the 1990s) continued to oversee our lecture series. More recently, Council Member Sue Ellen Kelso (2007-2010) and former FOM President, Brooks Goodyear (2010-present), have worked tirelessly with Vatsala Mohandas to bring audiences some wonderful lectures.

For many years, the lecture series ran from September to December. After Chinese New Year we had repeats of

popular lectures for the spring series. Originally, these were once a month, but eventually this became a second full lecture series of weekly talks. In 1995 the series became Monday Morning Lectures and started with a block of foundation lectures covering Singapore's history and culture, which formed the basis of the Docent Training Programme. Invited guest speakers have introduced other topics and provided opportunities to reach out to the wider community. In 1999-2000, we recorded 9,500 attendees at 31 illustrated public talks.

Over the years, I have enjoyed listening to many regular speakers. Some memorable ones include the effervescent former president, June Davey, speaking on different aspects of her beloved China. Sue Williams gave many knowledgeable lectures on a variety of subjects, including the Peranakans, of which she is an honorary member. Inveterate traveller and then study tour coordinator, Mary Connors, gave many lectures on Southeast Asia. Another well-known, passionate and dedicated member who remains at the helm of the MMLs after some 14 years, is Vatsala Mohandas who has also enlightened us on many aspects of Indian religion and customs in her lectures.

I believe we can be justifiably proud of our lecture series, which run from September to June every year. Under sterling leadership, MML coordinators continue the fine tradition of sourcing speakers who make us think and improve our knowledge of Asia in inestimable ways. I would like to quote Sue Ellen Kelso who said, "The magic of the MMLs is that they are more than a means of promoting FOM – they are a crossroads where members can connect and renew friendships; that's a pretty powerful thing."

My thanks to Sue Sismondo (co-ordinator in the 1980s) Brooks Goodyear and Sue Ellen Kelso for their valuable input.



Sue Sismondo and Geeta Varghese MML coordinators, 1980s and 1999 respectively

Margaret White lived in Singapore from 1991 to 2011 and is a past president of FOM who contributed many MMLs to FOM through the years.

All photos courtesy of the author

The Singapore Sports Museum: Go on, Be a Sport

By Arlene Bastion



The Singapore Sports Museum



Wooden benches on the wall

Sportsmanship can be experienced even by couch potatoes. We don't have to be wielding a tennis racquet or kicking a football to have at some time felt the spirit of joyous camaraderie, the fulfilment of playing fair, of conceding defeat with grace and honour. The Singapore Sports Museum, in its celebration of sportsmanship, would strike a chord in anyone. Here you can chart the history of various sports and sporting triumphs in Singapore, but the exhibits and presentation somehow evoke emotions of the sportsmanship of the old days and the pride in achievement. And of course, nostalgia for the past.

We inherited sports in the 19th century from the colonial rulers, thankfully along with crumpets for tea. They inaugurated the concept of the sports club as a gathering ground for friends and families. At the museum, you can get a whiff of this era with ceiling-to-floor banners relating the history of the old sports clubs, such as the Singapore Chinese Swimming Club, Indian Association, and Ceylon Sports Club. I could almost taste the *sundowners* such as the *gin stengahs*.

The history of sports in Singapore is linked to the development of Singapore itself. In our journey towards independence, it was a clever tool for forging a national identity and knitting our various communities together. Sports were also used to toughen us up and create a rugged society, with sports facilities built all over

Singapore. They continue to proliferate and are constantly crowded, testimony that sports are very much a part of Singaporean heritage.

The entrance to the sports museum is a panelled wall made of wood salvaged from the benches of the old National Stadium which closed in 2007. Many felt the loss because so much of Singaporean sporting history – the *Singapore Wave*, the *Kallang Roar* – was made in that stadium. The museum recreates echoes from that time really well, through the skilful interspacing of the memorabilia of pioneer sports personalities, events and items. The place is compact and easy to walk around in and learn.



Esplanade walk outside the museum



National identity through sport

Adjacent to the Sports Museum is the Sports Library, another gem in the Singapore Indoor Stadium complex, where both are housed. It is replete with books on sports. Just across from it, an uncluttered esplanade set against the Singapore skyline will bring out the sports person in you.

Arlene Bastion is currently a part-time lecturer at a Singapore university.

All photos by the author

A Curse of Epic Proportions

By Ramya Narayanan

Among the many stories you can tell in the Asian Civilisations Museum's Ancient Religions gallery is that of an extraordinary encounter between the powerful Hindu god Shiva and the mighty demon-king Ravana. This story is depicted on a ninth century sandstone stele, north India, probably once part of a temple wall or pillar. The composition is called *Umamaheshwara*. It depicts Lord Shiva seated on his abode, Mount Kailash, with his consort, the goddess Parvati, while the demon-king of Lanka tries to shake the mountain from under them. While the two main protagonists are Shiva and Ravana, also present on the stele are Shiva's sons, Ganesh and Skanda, his mount Nandi the Bull and other sages and attendant figures.

King Ravana had just defeated and looted Alaka – the city of his step-brother and the god of wealth, Kubera. After the victory, he was returning to Lanka in a flying chariot stolen from Kubera, when he happened upon Mount Kailash. However, the chariot could neither fly over it nor around it because of Shiva's power. Ravana became enraged at being halted and went under the mountain, lifted it up and started shaking it. Chaos ensued as Parvati turned to look at her lord with concern on her face, but Shiva stayed calm. By merely pressing his toe down, the great god brought the weight of the mountain down upon the king of demons, who cried in pain.

For a thousand years, the imprisoned Ravana sang hymns in praise of Shiva, who finally relented, released him and granted him an invincible sword. This encounter between Ravana and Shiva has been portrayed in art as the *Ravananugraha-murti*, or the form showing Shiva's grace to Ravana, and is chronicled in Hindu mythology in the famous epic *The Ramayana*. It is part of the *Uttara Kanda* or the epilogue of the great epic that not only details the ending of the saga, but also contains stories from before it even began, stories that tell us that all that happened was predestined.

So how did this incident predict the future? When Ravana was trying to uproot the mountain, Nandi who is the gate-guardian of Mount Kailash as well as Shiva's mount, had gone to remonstrate with him. However, Ravana did not listen to him and Nandi angrily cursed him, saying that one day he would be defeated by an army of monkeys.

Our narrative now naturally continues at a beautiful 12th century bronze statue from southern India when the affluent Chola dynasty was in power. The Chola bronze sculptures were known for the perfection and grace of their physical form, which was seen as a reflection of their spiritual purity



The Umamaheshwara stele at the Asian Civilisations Museum



Hanuman, the heroic monkey god

and beauty. Say hello to Hanuman, the heroic monkey god known and worshipped for his strength, courage and loyalty. He played a key role in the *Ramayana*, leading his simian army to help the hero Lord Rama rescue his wife Sita from the clutches of an arrogant demon-king. No prizes for guessing who that was! The monkey armies decimated Ravana's demon armies and after a long duel, Ravana was finally killed by Lord Rama, thus fulfilling Nandi's curse.

Such bronze sculptures were an intrinsic part of the rituals of Chola society and this particular one would have been part of an ensemble of processional statues, with Rama, Sita and Lakshmana at the centre and Hanuman on the side.

Stories such as these from Indian mythology are very rarely stand-alone tales. Much like the threads of a rich tapestry, they come together to present a larger picture or as in this case, an epic tale of the triumph of good over evil.

Ramya Narayanan has been guiding at the ACM for a year and especially enjoys guiding in the Ancient Religions Gallery.

Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum, images courtesy of the National Heritage Board

The Louvre Abu Dhabi

A Bridge Between East and West

By Izabella Kosla-Sluzek

After ten long years of waiting, the Louvre Abu Dhabi (LAD) officially opened to the public on November 11, 2017. The intergovernmental accord establishing the Louvre in the capital of the UAE had been signed by the former French President Jacques Chirac. It was already decided back then that LAD would be a universal museum, the first in the Arab world. According to the Louvre definition, “a universal museum brings together art and artefacts from across time and place”. In other words, the LAD is a thematic museum whose collections illustrate the universality of human culture, from its dawn to modern times.

The fame of the building actually preceded the LAD itself. Its French designer, Jean Nouvel, is one of the most celebrated architects of today. His genius lies in incorporating regional architectural characteristics into his designs, and the LAD is no exception. A massive silver dome covers 55 interlinked buildings, housing a total of 12 galleries (called chapters), loosely modelled on a traditional Arabian village (*medina*). This dome is impressive on several counts, not least because it weighs 200 tonnes more than the Eiffel Tower and its eight-layered metal stars create the “rain of light” effect, imitating the play of light and shadow in an oasis.

Not surprisingly, in France the Franco-UAE Louvre agreement was met with scepticism and excitement in equal measure. Eventually, the funds the LAD pledged to many, sometimes small, French museums for loans, were accepted, notably for the renovation of the 19th century Palace of Fontainebleau theatre. Upon completion, it will be renamed after Sheikh Khalifa, the UAE president.

In addition to the LAD’s permanent collection of 300 exhibits, the French museums have generously loaned another 300 masterpieces to be displayed in Abu Dhabi for 30 years. The greatest names and treasures in art history can be found in each and every gallery, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Picasso, Van Gogh and Ai Weiwei, to name just a few.



Bodhisattva, Gandhara, 100 – 300 CE, schist



The Orator, Italy, 100-50 CE, marble



Louvre Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE

The galleries follow the milestones in human history, beginning with The First Villages, The First Great Powers, Civilisations and Empires, Universal Religions, Asian Trade Routes, right through to modernity. In each gallery, exhibits illustrating an underlying theme have been chosen from all over the world and placed next to one another. My personal favourite is a small, dark, yet powerfully symbolic room in the Universal Religions gallery. There, in the same showcase, lying in harmony are a Yemeni Torah, French Bible, Buddhist sutra and two Qur'an folios.

To a Buddhist art enthusiast such as myself, the most interesting aspect is the curators’ focus on the Graeco-Roman influence on the early images of the Buddha. At the entrance to the Civilisations and Empires gallery, visitors encounter a white marble bust of Alexander the Great, the fourth century BCE Macedonian king and conqueror. Behind him two statues stand side by side – the marble Roman Orator and the Gandharan Bodhisattva. The similarity between the drapes of their robes is all too evident. Farther away, in the Asian Trade Routes gallery, two Buddha heads – the Indian-Gupta red sandstone one and the white-marble Northern dynasties Buddha head from China – are objects for yet another comparison. Visitors are invited to analyse the differences and similarities between their hairstyles, facial features, type of stone and proportions.

On a final note, Abu Dhabi has recently purchased Leonardo da Vinci’s painting *Salvator Mundi*, the most expensive artwork ever sold at an auction. No doubt it will add to the allure of a museum that has been a hit with local and international visitors since its opening day.



Pentateuch (Torah), Yemen 1498, ink on paper

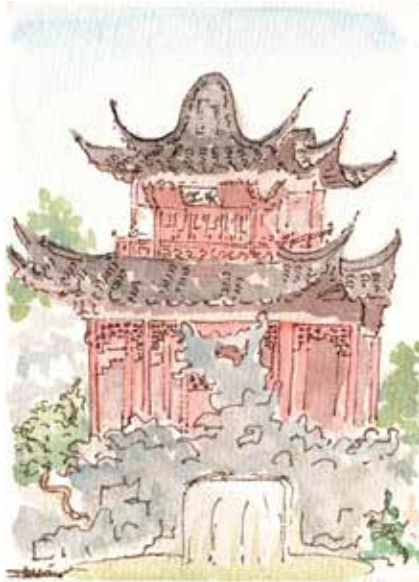
Izabella Kosla-Sluzek is a former FOM docent. Since 2011 she has lived in Abu Dhabi, UAE. She is the founder and coordinator of the Culture Club within the American Women’s Network.

All photos by the author

Chinese Temples

By Siobhán Cool

Owing to emigration and abiding devotion, Chinese temples abound through Southeast Asia, wherever the mainland traders and merchants settled. The temples are places to revere ancestors and pray to the gods, but I find them a treasure trove of textiles, ceramics, carvings and many more sights and feasts for the senses.



Nature's waterfalls and rocks contrast with the refined architecture of this garden temple in Shanghai.



Serene and aloof, this cat holds court on the step of a temple in Hanoi, reminding tourists that they are only passers-by in the cosmic universe.



Beautiful crimson hues give character and a certain mystique to the architraves of this temple in Hanoi, aged by weather and time.



In the furthest corner of the A-Ma Temple compound in Macao, a dark altar nestles in a cavern-like storeroom.

Siobhán Cool is a corporate lawyer who has lived in Singapore for 14 years, never tiring of the colours and sounds of Asia.

Ladakh – Land of the Other Indus Valley

By Abha Dayal Kaul

Journeys to far-flung and culturally distinct, geographical locations are always thrilling and enriching learning experiences. Ladakh, literally meaning 'Land of High Passes', is one such singular spot in a lesser-traversed corner of India – nestled high in the Himalaya, quite hidden from the world and yet just a short flight from New Delhi.

As our plane neared the Ladakh region in India's northernmost Jammu and Kashmir state, I was struck by the pilot announcing that we were flying over the Indus Valley. This evocative term usually refers to western Punjab and post-partition Pakistan. Ah, I thought, Ladakh is indeed India's "other Indus Valley", this one set amidst arid, high mountain deserts, showcasing one of the world's great rivers – the Indus.

Ladakh's vast lunar-like landscapes and rich Buddhist heritage draw visitors to one of the most remote places on earth, especially in the summer months when it is hot and steamy elsewhere. The region's capital city, Leh, boasting India's highest airport, lies in the heart of central Ladakh and offers an immediate cool respite – those arriving by air are forced to stay put for at least 24 hours to acclimatise to lower oxygen levels at over 3,500 metres above sea level. Views of snow-capped mountains and bright blue skies from hotel grounds were therapeutic indeed and prepared us for the visual splendours to come.



Bactrian camels in the Nubra Valley

This area of the subcontinent has been called Little Tibet, the westernmost part of the great Tibetan Plateau from where the Indus River rises and enters southern Ladakh at Demchok. The river that gave India its name (from *Sindhu*, in Sanskrit) runs northwest, across the central spine of Ladakh, then turns west in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and flows south again through Pakistan, out into the Arabian Sea. Various 'oasis' settlements along its path present an astonishing sight, bright green fields, with poplars and willows standing between tall, barren mountains on all sides. In the summer months, bearing silt, the Indus is as brown as the surrounding terrain – like liquid mountainsides.

The majestic river can be surveyed from the distinctive Leh Palace, built over nine levels on a rocky hill looking



Thiksey Monastery, its buildings cover an entire hillside

down upon the sprawling valley town along the lower slopes of the Ladakh Range. Constructed out of mud bricks and wood in 1630 by Sengge Namgyal, Ladakh's famous "lion king", it was considered fine enough to be used as a model for Lhasa's colossal Potala Palace, built slightly later.

A short drive west of Leh, on the Kargil road, the compact Buddhist monastery complex at Alchi is justifiably renowned for its unique architecture, magnificent Kashmiri-style wall paintings and imposing statuary. Sadly, no photographs are allowed, but the finely painted art and monumental, decorated bodhisattvas here are unforgettable. Said to have been founded as a sacred seat of learning in the 11th century in the time of Rinchen Zangpo, the Great Translator, Alchi survives in remarkable condition as it was abandoned but protected by its position on the other side of the Indus from the main trade route out of Leh, snaking away to Central Asia and Tibet. The remains of rare Indian Himalayan Buddhist art are to be admired at Alchi, from a time before Tibetan Buddhism took firm hold in Ladakh.

Northeast of Leh, we followed the old caravan route that led to the Central Asian cities of Yarkand and Khotan before borders were closed, and particularly enjoyed the exciting drive over Khardung La, a dizzyingly vertiginous pass on the Ladakh Range cut by the third highest motorable road in the world. This snowy, windswept pass affords formidable vistas of the great Himalayan peaks to the south and the great Karakoram to the north; we felt the headiness of



Confluence of the Zaskar and Indus



The Raja of Turtuk and his family's genealogical table



Rafting on the turbulent Zanskar River

the hour not just because of the sky-high altitude. Incredible views accompanied us all the way down to the stunning Nubra Valley, on to Hunder, starring the famous double-humped Bactrian camels, to be found only here in Ladakh, among desert sand dunes near the Shyok River. Nubra's isolated camels remind us of how this spot once connected to the Silk Road in Xinjiang farther north.

Here, the Nubra and Shyok, a large tributary of the Indus, meet, and overlooking their confluence is Diskit's soaring *gompa*, a typical Ladakhi Buddhist monastery, strategically perched high on a hillside, facing north. The largest one south of the Karakoram, this *gompa* was plundered by Mongol invaders, one of whom had his arm cut off then displayed in an inner shrine as a warning to other marauders.

We tracked the turbulent Shyok River all the way up the valley to one of the last Indian villages this side of the Line of Control – Turtuk, a charming Balti settlement now increasingly popular with bikers and young Israeli adventurers.

Only a tiny part of the Baltistan region falls in India; most of it is on the other side, along with its capital, Skardu. A walk in Turtuk's apricot-tree-lined village, through barley fields and into its pretty 14th century Shia mosque was a memorable experience. The highlight for us was a visit to the Raja of Turtuk's modest home, where he showed us a genealogical table painted on a wall, and unique heirlooms that belonged to his family, once rulers of large swathes of land stretching from Afghanistan across to northern Kashmir.

Local Balti people are distinctive with their blue eyes, reddish hair and rosy cheeks, and their food was refreshingly tasty and different, featuring walnuts, yoghurt, mountain mint and barley in various forms. It was a thrill to discover and explore this truly unfamiliar and pleasant spot deep in the valley. The Shyok roaring past Turtuk towards Pakistan is called the "river of death" or "sorrow", being lethally swift and filled with unseen rocks, but my sons had a grand time jumping into a safer stream by its side to be invigorated in icy glacial meltwater at the feet of the Karakorams.



The courtyard of Hemis Monastery

From Turtuk, we headed all the way south to savour the wild beauty of Ladakh's pristine great lakes, driving upstream along the Indus in full spate after branching away from the Leh-Manali road, to arrive at the heavenly 16-kilometre-long Tso Moriri, meaning mountain lake. We had spotted adorable marmots, yaks and wild horses en route and at the sapphire blue lake were captivated by families of wild ducks and Tibetan wild ass. Ringed by towering, bare mountains, the magical, placid Tso Moriri has an ethereal feel; one does not want to leave in a hurry.



Heavenly, crystal clear Tso Moriri

But we had to head back to Leh, and did so via another high-altitude lake, Tso Kar, where we were fortunate enough to sight graceful, black-necked cranes at the marshy lake's edges. Nearer Leh, there was time to wander into and be awed by two amazing monasteries – the largest structure in central Ladakh at Thiksey, impressively draped over an entire hillside, and the striking Hemis Monastery, which is supposedly the wealthiest and best-known *gompa* in all Ladakh.

We ended our delightful Ladakhi sojourn by river rafting down the Zanskar River south of Leh, past its picturesque confluence with the splendid Indus, resolving to return soon to this spectacular land.

Abha Dayal Kaul is an FOM docent at ACM, MHC and IHC, who leads and also coordinates FOM study tours. She is delighted to travel to and write about remote and culturally rich parts of the world.

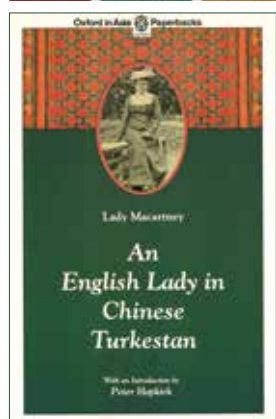
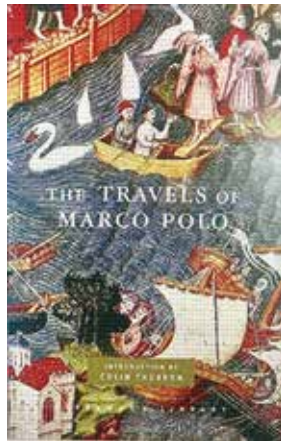
Photos courtesy of Ajai Mohan Kaul

Travel Writing in Asia – Some Book Suggestions

By Cécile Collineau

FOM organises cultural trips around Asia, going to far-flung or little-known destinations that few of us would visit if we were on our own. Quite often these involve long-distance bus journeys, when one's thoughts might wander to early travellers. If one is not prone to travel sickness, these long hours are an appropriate moment to catch up on some reading and what is more apt than reading travelogues? Here is a selection of some of my favourite travel books.

The first author that comes to mind when I think about travelling in Asia is of course **Marco Polo**, the ultimate traveller. This Venetian merchant wrote the *Book of the Marvels of the World* in the 13th century. It follows his travels along the Silk Road, from Venice to the palace of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan. Some scholars doubted if the account was true, while others recognised the accuracy of his narrative was better than other travellers of the same period. We should keep in mind that it was written by a businessman, with a view to developing his flourishing commerce with the East, a bit like today's guides to good business practices with Asian trade partners.



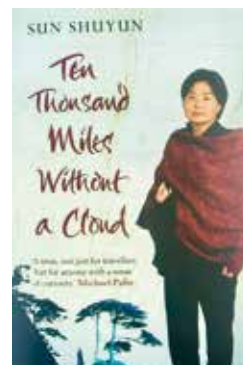
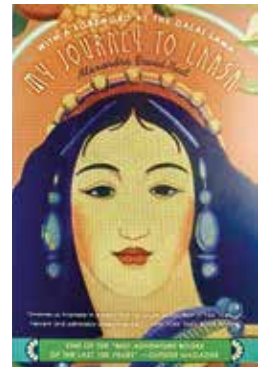
Polo's book has captivated many travellers and readers, and none more so than **William Dalrymple** who wrote his first book *In Xanadu*, when he was just 22 years old. Dalrymple follows in the footsteps of Marco Polo 700 years later. This is a candid account by a young Englishman about to graduate from university. Dalrymple travels from Jerusalem to the ruins of Kublai Khan's palace, through Syria, Iran, Pakistan and China. The author's sense of humour prevails throughout the book, together with erudition and great writing style (despite some un-elegant stereotypes).

During his trip, Dalrymple spent a few days in Kashgar, in today's Xinjiang, China. This reminded me of a book I read a few years ago, *An English Lady in Chinese Turkestan*. **Lady McCartney** was the wife of the English Consul whom she

married in 1898, at age 21, during a particularly sensitive time when England and Russia were covertly competing to

control this part of the world, a competition known as the Great Game. Her accounts of daily life are very detailed and colourful; she lived there for 17 years. The description of her journey back to England for home leave is hair-raising; riding a donkey above a deadly gorge with a new-born child is indeed a far cry from the safety of today's travel.

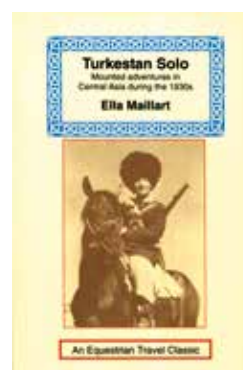
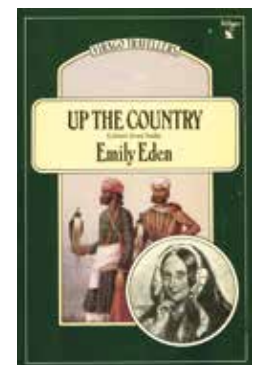
Just a couple of decades later, an even more formidable woman travelled to a remote place where few westerners had ventured, Tibet. **Alexandra David-Neel** wrote *My Journey to Lhasa* in 1924. Aged 55, she dressed as a beggar for four months (complete with yak-hair extensions) to reach the then forbidden capital of Tibet. She was a well-prepared traveller and carried a hidden pistol and ransom money in case of kidnapping.



Another female writer fascinated with Buddhism is contemporary Chinese author **Sun Shuyun**. In *Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud* she retraces the steps of Xuanzang, the monk who travelled to India in the eighth century, searching for authentic, original Buddhist texts to take back to China. The journey, which crossed 118 different kingdoms, took him 18 long years. This book is the author's own personal journey towards

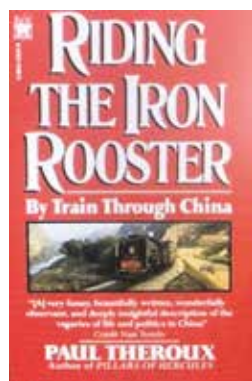
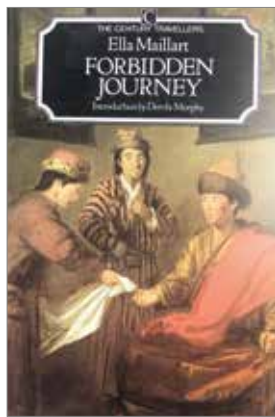
understanding the Buddhist faith of her grandmother, recognising the passionate idealism of her family's communist beliefs and discovering her own ideological and personal path through life.

Other intrepid women travellers of the 19th and early 20th century of note are equally fascinating. In 1866 **Emily Eden** wrote *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India*. As one reviewer noted, this book is



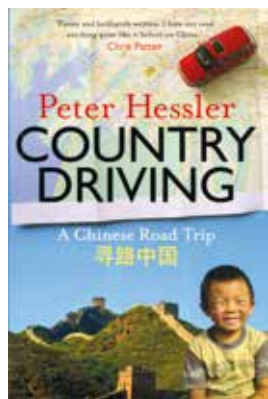
"addressed primarily to a public consisting of wives, sisters, or daughters of possible Governors-General, and is sure therefore of general popularity". I am convinced other audiences can be equally interested. The first part takes us from London to Calcutta via sea voyages and monsoons while the second part conveys the growing anxiety surrounding the impending Anglo-Afghan war and stirring accounts of poverty.

Forgive me for being partial to female explorers, but I find their courage quite extraordinary. Here is another example, **Elsa Maillart**, a Swiss adventurer. She is famous for her *Turkestan Solo - Mounted Adventures in Central Asia During the 1930s*, describing her journey from Moscow to Kirghizstan and Uzbekistan in 1932. She then continued *with Forbidden Journey - From Peking to Kashmir* (her trek across Asia with Peter Fleming in 1935): travels filled with life-threatening diseases, cut-throat criminals and the perils of a civil war, all written with a keen sense of observation.

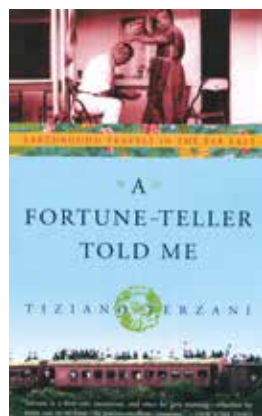


Two contemporary travel writers I enjoy when it comes to China, are Paul Theroux and Peter Hessler. I remember laughing more than a few times while reading **Paul Theroux's** *Riding the Iron Rooster* written when he was travelling by train through China in the 1980s. I still remember his constant efforts to lose the government official forced to follow the mad American for the entire trip. Fortunately, independent travellers have an easier time in China today.

More recently I read **Peter Hessler's** *Country Driving: a Chinese Road Trip*. His prose reminds me that, at least for me, style-wise, the best non-fiction books are written by journalists. A correspondent for *The New Yorker*, Hessler travels by car to remote places, staying clear of the usual tourist areas to go deep into China. His empathy for the people he meets, his sense of humour (I never thought a driving test on theory could be so funny) and ability to look at the big picture, make it an invaluable peek into contemporary China.



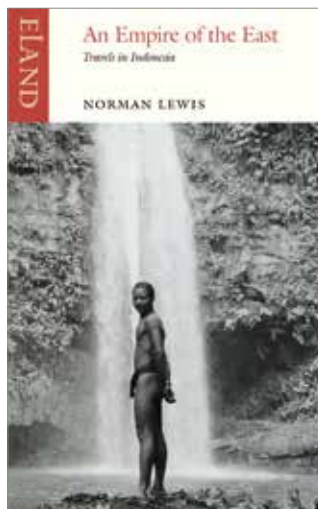
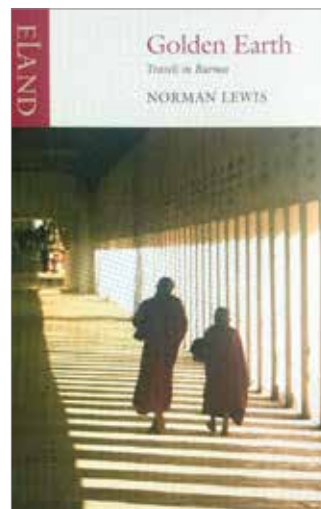
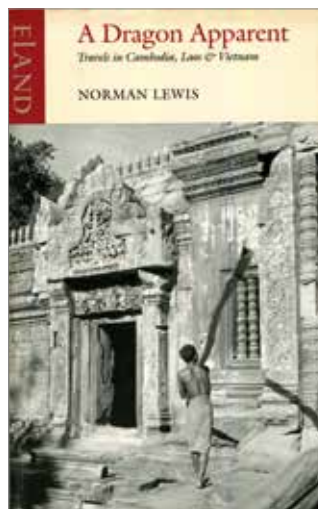
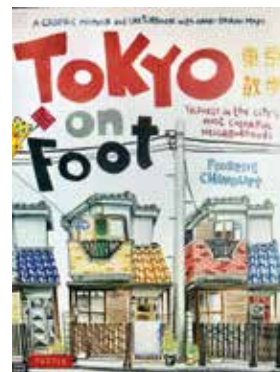
Another author who, like Theroux, took the train very often during his trip across Southeast Asia is **Tiziano Terzani** (another journalist). His travelogue *A Fortune-Teller Told Me* is a true gem. In the 1980s, a fortune-teller predicted he might die in an aircraft accident. He decided to transform the gloomy prediction into an opportunity to take a sabbatical year to travel around Asia, using a myriad modes of transport (by train of course, but also on foot, motorcycle, tuk-tuk, bus... all except by air). At each of his stops, he sought a fortune teller to check whether the prediction would be confirmed or not.



Farther east, in Japan, I was delighted and amused to read **Florent Chavouet's** *Tokyo on Foot*. Partly comic strip, partly sketchbook, the author roams the streets of the Japanese megapolis, sketchbook and colour pencils in hand,

offering us a quaint glimpse into daily life in Tokyo. I found it charming.

Closer to us, in Southeast Asia, **Norman Lewis** was your classic travel writer. In the 1950s, as a journalist, he travelled through Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam (in *A Dragon Apparent*) and Myanmar (*Golden Earth*). An endless wanderer (can one be a traveller by profession?), he probably was one – a dream job



indeed. He wrote numerous travelogues, including *An Empire of the East* in 1993, a book that covers Indonesia.

While on the topic of Indonesia, a not-to-be-missed book is **Elizabeth Pisani's** *Indonesia Etc...* Another journalist, Pisani takes one year to travel the archipelago (deliberately avoiding Jakarta and Bali), retracing her own steps from 20 years before. I liked her double approach: the more intimate picture (her humble attitude allows her to enter people's homes and

create deep friendships quickly) as well as the larger one (an analysis of the economy, politics, environment).

One could write a whole book about travel writing; the list of great travel books is endless. For this article I have included only a handful. Keep an eye out for my next Facebook post on the FOM page and feel free to add your own favourite travel books in the comments section.



Cécile Collineau is the FOM Book Groups coordinator. She has been living in Singapore for 17 years and works in a large bookstore in Orchard Road.

Hornbill Festival of 2017

Nagaland's Festival of Festivals

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



Performers from the Yimchungru tribe gather outside their morung (young men's dormitory)



In the old days, the 'tail' seen in the attire of the Khiamniungan tribe, would have been the hair of a woman whose head was taken by that warrior



Men from the Ao tribe perform the Arpu Tsungang (War Dance)



A woman from the royal household of the Konyak tribe, posing with her beaded necklace and headband

Picture a land of stunning natural beauty, with hills shrouded in mist and carpeted by lush green forests, and where feared headhunting tribes once roamed. Such is the allure of the Indian state of Nagaland, tucked away in the northeastern corner of the country, flanked by Myanmar on its eastern side. The state is home to 16 major tribes, each with its own distinct set of customs and traditions, festivals, cuisine, attire, even their own language.

Till a century ago, the mutually unintelligible languages of the Naga tribes meant that they could not communicate with each other. Hence, in the past, most inter-tribal contact was hostile. More recently, a creole language known as 'Nagamese' has evolved, thus allowing for peaceful interaction amongst the tribes.

In 2000, the government of Nagaland started the Hornbill Festival as a means of preserving and showcasing Nagaland's rich (yet quickly disappearing) tribal culture. It was also an opportunity for all the major tribes to come together, interact and experience each other's culture. Several traditions such as headhunting are no longer practised, but ceremonial dances remain an integral part of the lives of Naga tribespeople.

Held from the first to 10 December every year, the Hornbill Festival is billed as Nagaland's "Festival of Festivals". For visitors to Nagaland, the festival is the best introduction one can get to the rich and diverse tribal culture of the state.



Close-up of a woman from the Phom tribe



An elder from the Chang tribe stands guard as members of his tribe prepare to beat the log drum



The log drum of the Phom tribe, carved out of a single, huge tree trunk



Performers from the Sangtam tribe

Glimpses of Bodoland, Assam

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



Approaching Guwahati airport



Freshly extracted jute fibres hung out to dry in the sun



A lone wild water buffalo resting near the waters of the Manas River

The Indian state of Assam has a special place in world history. It is, after all, the only other region in the world, besides southern China, to have a native tea plant variety, *Camelia sinensis* var. *assamica*. When the East India Company began commercial production of tea in Assam in the mid-1800s, it broke the long-held Chinese monopoly on the tea trade.

Today, Assam serves as the gateway to the enigmatic northeast corner of India, with its largest city, Guwahati, well-connected by air to most major cities in India. In stark contrast to the city I had left behind (Mumbai), the approach to Guwahati was blanketed with bright-green paddy fields, juxtaposed against the dark, forest-covered mountains. Green continued to be the colour of the trip, with sprawling tea estates adding their own pleasant shade to the mix.

My journey to Assam was prompted by a slowly disappearing tradition – Bodo weaving. The Bodos are Assam's indigenous people and a majority of them live in Bodoland, an autonomous region within the state, close to the India-Bhutan border. One of the prized traditional skills of the Bodo people is weaving and every Bodo home has a loom. In the past, in her spare time, the woman of the house would weave clothes for herself and her family. Traditional clothing items such as the *dokhona* (a sari-like garment worn by Bodo women) and the *gomosa* (a multipurpose shawl-like garment) were woven at home. This skill was passed from mother to daughter and was highly valued in a prospective bride. Sadly nowadays, much of the younger generation has moved on to office jobs and the tradition is at risk of dying out.



Close-up of the fabric being woven by Munita, a weaver at the ant centre

I was hosted by a remarkable nonprofit called 'the ant' (www.theant.org), which among several other rural development projects, has been able to tap into the traditional weaving knowledge of Bodo women, to create livelihood opportunities for them. The women are commissioned to weave fabrics, which are later fashioned into



Munita, a Bodo weaver at work in the ant centre

garments, sold in India, and exported internationally as well. These exquisite handwoven fabrics have intricate motifs inspired by nature, including representations of plants, birds and animals.

As I continued my travels through the rustic yet stunning landscapes of Bodoland, I was fascinated by the luminous golden fibres hung out to dry in several locations. I learnt that the fibres were from the jute plant. Assam is one of the largest jute-producing states in India, thus contributing to India's position as the top jute producer in the world. In addition to the fibres extracted from the stem, every part of the jute plant is utilised. The stem cores are used for house-building or as firewood and the leaves are cooked with pork to prepare a traditional delicacy known as *narzi*. Very much an acquired taste, I'm told.

Bodo cuisine was a rather novel experience for me. While rice is a staple, foraged greens form a big part of their diet. Silkworms and freshwater snails are a delicacy, while river fish and pork are the preferred meats. A fiery chutney made from the world famous Bhoot Jhalokia chilli (Ghost Pepper) accompanies every meal, though the Assamese variant is not as hot as the Naga one.

Manas National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is also located in Bodoland. This protected

forest is home to several rare and endangered species including the one-horned rhinoceros, the Bengal tiger, and the Indian elephant. But Manas is most famous for its pure, wild water-buffalo population, of which less than 3,500 individuals are believed to exist globally.

Bodoland, located three to four hours by road from Guwahati airport, has a lot to offer the discerning traveller. It is beginning to receive attention from both Indian and international audiences.



Phoolshree, a Bodo woman fishing with tools made of woven bamboo strips

Anne Pinto-Rodrigues is an Amsterdam-based writer and blogger. She recently travelled through parts of northeast India. Anne chronicles her experiences of interesting places and people on her blog *No Roads Barred* <https://noroadbarred.wordpress.com>

All photos by the author

Island-Hopping in the Philippines

FOM's Fun Photography Trip with Photojournalist Lester Ledesma

By Maren Kraemer-Dreyer



A fishing village



Sunset over Manila Bay



Black Island cave, photo by Lester Ledesma



Busuanga lunch on the beach



Lester's photo of his camp on North Cay

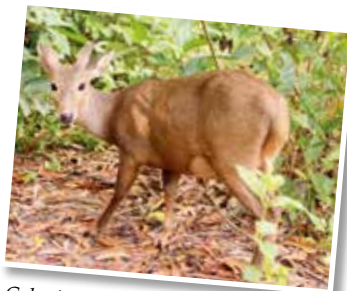


Calauit giraffes

The photo trek of 23 to 27 November 2017 provided vistas of stunning nature and interesting Spanish-Filipino heritage. On the first day we visited the historical area of Metro Manila and toured the picturesque enclave of Intramuros. Riding on a *calesa* (local carriage), or walking through the narrow, lively streets, we focused our cameras on the colonial buildings and their courtyards, those the Spanish had built during their 350 years of colonial rule. A lovely dinner on the rooftop garden of our hotel provided us with great opportunities to capture the spectacular sunset over the Manila Bay area. Our next destination, Calauit Island just off Busuanga Island, had a special treat to offer: five different animal species from Kenya, including giraffes and zebras, together with local deer and birds in the middle of the Philippine jungle. A remnant from the Marcos era, this unusual nature park allowed us to photograph and feed semi-tamed animals and see how the locals strive to support them with very little financial support from the government.



The entire group, photo courtesy of Claire Robinson



Calauit indigenous deer



Clown fish and coral, photo by author



Disembarking at North Cay



Feeding the giraffes



Flautist in Black Island Cave



Gisella taking a photo, taken by Lester Ledesma



The beach at Busuanga, photo by Amina Islam



Panlaitan fishing village children



Nay Maurit pounding coffee



Gisella Harrold's photo from inside the cave

After a night under the stars, we followed our local guides to a Filipino *banka* (local outrigger boat), the Margie-Z, that for the next two days would take us around the stunning islands. Our next stop, gorgeous Black Island with lonely beaches and crystal-clear waters, looked almost too good to be true. Needless to say, most of us went for a swim. The island also has amazing caves. Although pitch black inside, they came to life because Lester, our enthusiastic and patient photography expert, taught us how to take revealing pictures in complete darkness. From there we headed towards Panlaitan Fishing Village, a lovely little place revealing much of the daily life in the Philippine islands. We stayed overnight on a tiny coral island and documented the sunrise over the sea. After lunch on a pristine beach where we snorkelled and watched clown fish among the corals, we visited the village of Lajala on Usong Island to meet a lively coffee lady, with a special way of roasting local coffee beans. Learning how to grind them properly was a fun experience for all of us. Swimming in one of Coron Island's freshwater lakes as well as in the Twin Lagoons nearby was a lovely finish to this remarkable trip, before we returned to the town of Coron and flew home to Singapore.



Kids fooling around on our boat at Panlaitan



Gisella, Emily and Nicola, photo by Lester Ledesma



Snorkelling off Black Island



Nong Vicente roasting coffee



Sunrise from North Cay

Maren Kraemer-Dreyer loves the Philippine Islands and wrote about them in her doctoral thesis. Within FOM she fulfilled many roles (docent, MML lecturer, council member).

Unless otherwise noted, photos by Andra Leo



Our equipment



Zebra males fighting



Leaping into Kayangan Lake, photo by Lester Ledesma



Village feast



One of the twin lagoons



The three amigos on the beach, photo by Lester Ledesma

A Dream Come True

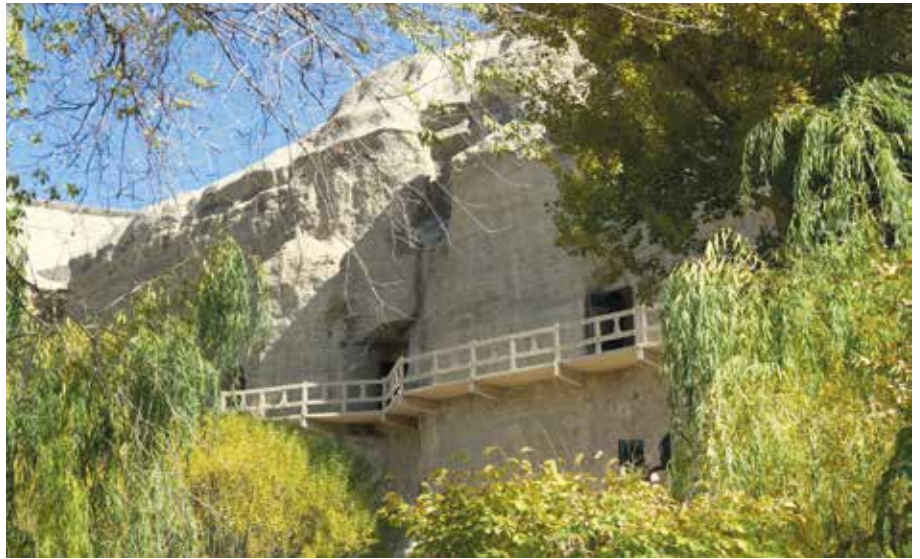
By Laure Bonardel-Petit

An FOM Silk Road Study Tour! To me, these words sounded dream-like. Since my early years with FOM, I had heard about that trip. Previous travellers told of how marvellous it was, how exceptional. The places they mentioned sounded both exotic and remote, beyond reach, both geographically and culturally (except for FOM study tour leaders). But I had never had the opportunity, or perhaps had never dared take it. Suddenly, the opportunity arose and everything fell into place. I was going on FOM's Silk Road 2017 Study Tour.

Under the excellent and friendly leadership of Abha Kaul, our 26-member-strong group departed from Changi Airport bright and early on Friday, 20 October and arrived in Urumqi the same evening. The following morning was spent visiting the Xinjiang Regional Museum in Urumqi, where the *pièce de résistance* was the amazing Tarim mummies. The "Loulan beauty" and the other mummies were recently unearthed from ancient cemeteries in the Tarim Basin, which borders the Taklamakan Desert – very inhospitable to life, but excellent for preserving bodies. Some date back as far as 4,000 years ago.

An afternoon flight took us to China's westernmost city, Kashgar. Those of us seated near the windows enjoyed the stunning views of the Tian Shan Mountains and the desert. The weather in Kashgar was ideal and we had a pleasant stroll in the picturesque Old Town where many of us started the shopping going with yummy dried fruit, grown in this region.

The following day began with a visit to the large and beautiful complex of the Id Gah Mosque, the largest one in China, built in 1442. Then we went on to have a quick look at Chini Bagh, the former British Consulate. The building is quite run-down but is an important historical landmark. It dates back to the 19th century and the political and diplomatic confrontation between Tsarist Russia and Victorian Britain over the Central Asian territories, known as The Great Game. As in all FOM study tours, we deepened our knowledge of



The Yulin Caves, also known as the Ten Thousand Buddha Cliff Caves

local crafts, shopped at the Dongmen Grand Bazaar, and when visiting a lovely local market, we minded our health by buying fruit that Xinjiang is famous for.

The next morning, we took a short bus ride and had a lovely walk to a holy Sufi shrine at Abakh Khoja's Tomb, also known as the Mausoleum of Xiang Fei, a Uyghur concubine of the Qianlong Emperor. It is a masterpiece of Uyghur Islamic architecture, a large complex decorated with green glazed tiles in Arabesque design. On the evening of the fourth day, we took an overnight train to Kucha. We had lots of fun and did quite a bit of singing in the dining car, much to the amusement of the local passengers.

In Kucha, we visited the picturesque and colourful mosque and went on to stroll in the old town, browsing the traditional shops where many of us bought tea and dried fruits, but very few if any dared to buy dried lizards or snakes, although they were readily available. We went on to the Subashi Buddhist Temple ruins, witness to Kucha's history as a primary Buddhist centre on the Silk Road, set in quite a spectacular desert and mountainous landscape.

Day six started with a visit to the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves. The 236 caves are among the oldest monasteries and temples in China, dating from the third to the ninth century CE. The caves are decorated with murals portraying Buddhist stories and many different influences can be seen according to the period the murals were painted. Much damage wreaked by "foreign devils" can be seen here, but despite large-scale removal of wall paintings and sculptures



Statue of Kumarajivo in front of the Kizil Caves



Camel ride in the desert



Abakh Khoja's Tomb, also known as the Mausoleum of Xiang Fei



The Mogao Caves, cut into the mountainside

hauled off to Europe, and defacing by other religious groups later in history, Kizil remains a jewel of the most remarkable Buddhist cave art.

A beautiful drive along the northern rim of the Taklamakan Desert (overnight in Korla), took us to Turpan. Turpan is famous for many reasons, and one of them is the ancient Karez underground irrigation network. We had a very interesting tour of the visitors' centre and saw a portion of this ingenious and fascinating system, which provides water for the many crops grown in the oasis, notably grapes for raisins and wine.

In the late afternoon we had the best light for exploring the mud-packed ruins of Jiaohe, an ancient trading post and military fortress on the Silk Road, and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The following morning, we braved the cold weather to visit more stately ruins, those of sprawling Gaochang. An important cosmopolitan city on the Silk Road, it was also a major Buddhist centre where the monk Xuanzang stayed on his way to India.

We then went on to admire the Bezeklik Grottoes, in cliffs at the base of the Flaming Mountains. Characteristic wall paintings show Uyghur donors and the paintings have also been an important source of knowledge about Uyghur history and the culture of those days. Lunch was in a typical village where we took a walk and had a hard time choosing which raisins to buy from the wide variety offered by street vendors. There was a lot of tasting. We ended the day with a visit to the Turpan Museum, which exhibits mummies from the Astana tombs near Gaochang.

After a well-deserved night's rest, we were off to visit the late 16th century Emin Minaret and Mosque, which showcases beautiful Central Asian Islamic architecture and boasts the tallest minaret in China (44 metres high). Then we almost travelled to the future and caught a very high-tech bullet train to Dunhuang, the last but not the least stop on our itinerary.

Indeed, there is a lot to do in and around Dunhuang and we started with a day trip to the Yulin Caves, aka the

Ten Thousand Buddha Cliff Caves. The caves had been excavated sometime between the Tang and Yuan dynasties, from two cliffs separated by the Yulin River, a very beautiful vista. Of the many grottoes, 43 are well-preserved and some of the Buddhist paintings and sculptures are considered valuable masterpieces.

Our second last day started with the amazing Mogao Caves (also known as "the Caves of a Thousand Buddhas"). Dating back to between the fourth and 14th century, 1,000 caves were cut into the mountain and it is thought that about half were richly decorated with paintings on the walls and ceilings and also with polychrome sculptures. After Islamic forces conquered Dunhuang in 1006, some caves were destroyed and more damage was wreaked in the early 20th century by western explorers. However, many beautiful paintings can still be seen. Luckily, monks sealed away valuable manuscripts that are now displayed in the Dunhuang museum, which we visited the next day. Before that, we spent the late afternoon and sunset hour at the huge Mingsha (Singing) Sand Dunes and Crescent Moon Lake in the golden desert, where those who wished could enjoy the view while riding a camel, which was a lot of fun.



A wall painting in Cave 27 in the Kizil Caves

On our very last half day we visited the Dunhuang Museum that houses priceless documents and written sutras, and other valuable artefacts excavated from the caves.

I have to say the tour lived up to my dream, and based on what I heard from fellow travellers, it was a dream come true for all of us.



Group photo in the ancient city of Jiaohe, near Turpan as the sun sets

*After 25 years in Asia and half as much involved with FOM, **Laure** resettled in France in 2016. She was delighted to be able to reconnect with FOM and Asia on this tour and can't wait for more occasions.*

Photos by Lynn Baker

Venturing Through the Ceramic Capitals of China

By Jane Peterson

“Porcelain is China”, writes ceramics artist Edmund de Waal in his book *The White Road*.

For our intrepid band of 15 travellers, that double entendre, pulled from the pages of our fall reading list, conjures up a host of vivid impressions – and, of course, the treasured porcelain mementoes we brought home. Our group sped through China’s three ancient porcelain capitals in 10 days – on buses, planes and high-speed trains. Here are a few highlights.

First stop: Dehua, Fujian Province

We kicked off our adventure by visiting a 400-year old dragon kiln, one of some 200 ancient wood-firing kilns in Dehua. Ascending the steps that surrounded it, our guide Patricia Welch, cut her thumb prying out a piece of *qingbai*—a bluish white porcelain celadon with an icy-blue glaze – from the parched earth nearby. Noting its drops of pooled glaze,



Hunting for Song dynasty shards at an archaeological site in Dehua

she quickly determined it was from the Song Dynasty (960-1279). (*Qingbai* was the precursor to the more famous *Blanc de Chine*, normally associated with Dehua.) It would be the first archaeological find; to our delight, many more would follow.

Curators at the Dehua Ceramic Museum liked our connection to ACM, home to the world-renowned Hickley Collection of 160 milky white Dehua pieces. They ushered us into their back-office lab. Pointing to baskets full of ancient shards, ready to be catalogued, they offered us the chance to pick them up. “To be able to touch the Ming Dynasty pieces



Yueji Kiln in Dehua is still alive with production



Workers lift giant clay discs from drying racks to stack them into seven-foot columns, which line the factory perimeter

in that back room, that was the highlight of the trip,” said Caroline Carfantan.

Noting our excitement, one curator volunteered to skip her lunch break and take us to their archaeological dig site, full of debris, mosquitoes, and hidden behind bushes in the back of an old Chinese temple. It is packed with Song Dynasty shards, minus the handful of tiny remnants that found their way into our pockets!

Dehua is still alive with production. At the Yueji Kiln Ceramic Art Centre, an enormous bronze status of Mao raising his hand welcomes us. Lined with small artisanal boutiques, it was our first shot at buying contemporary porcelain. More expensive pieces have a fine, vitreous body covered by a thick satin glaze. The Dehua touch of iron oxide yields a warm white or pale ivory colour during firing.

Within the kiln compound, a few of us followed the sound of pounding mallets beating porcelain stone into clay. We watched workers lifting giant clay discs from drying racks to stack them into seven-foot columns, which lined the factory perimeter. Meanwhile, artisans were busy making teapots in a multi-chambered, wood-firing dragon kiln, also 400 years old. We watched a white-gloved worker haul piles of saggars out of the kiln, each one holding several newly fired porcelain teapots. Quickly picking out the rejects, he would hurl them into his enormous junkyard of broken china, which now awaits a future group of porcelain scavengers.



Newly-fired porcelain teapots; rejects are hurled into an enormous junkyard of broken china



Contemporary porcelain, at various price levels, is for sale throughout China's ceramics capitals



At the Jingdezhen Royal Kiln, master painters create intricate designs on vases, holding brushes upright and always between their middle and ring fingers

Second stop: Changsha, Hunan Province

We arrived in Changsha by plane, checking into the lovely Intercontinental Hotel. Our sky-high rooms offered sweeping views of a modernising, second-tier Chinese city. With direct access to the promenade of the Xiang River, it was a perfect spot to get some exercise and watch locals cast their fishing rods at sunset.

Our hotel was a stone's throw from the impressive new Changsha Museum, home to some 50,000 of the region's artefacts. A vast exhibition of Changsha porcelain through the centuries, with excellent English translations, deepened everyone's understanding. "It showed the whole thing," was how Robert Mann explained it, while Anne Perng said, "It's a connection to the past, realising a potter made those pieces."

We met a challenge at the Changsha Tongguan Dragon Kiln Site, dating back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). After a long bus ride through snarling traffic, security guards initially denied our group access. Thanks to some persistent pleading from our Mandarin speakers, the barrier finally lifted. Several of us dashed inside the unlocked pavilion for a fleeting glimpse of the kiln that had produced countless pieces for European export on the Maritime Silk Road. Within a flash, however, those overprotective guards were back, and we were escorted out.

Third stop: Jingdezhen, Jiangxi Province

We spent three nights at Xishan Lake Gloria Resort, overlooking a peaceful lake off the beaten track. As the most famous ceramics mecca of the three, the heart of Jingdezhen is dressed for tourists with blue and white porcelain street lamps, trash cans, stone walls, picnic tables. Row upon row of boutiques sell fine white porcelain, including bowls that ring when you tap their outer rims. It's the special mix of petunse and kaolin that gives Jingdezhen china its thin, translucent quality.

We stepped back in time at the sprawling Imperial Kiln



Giant hammers crush kaolin stone, which is then formed into kaolin bricks

Archaeological Discovery Site, in its heyday an enormous royal 'factory' of artisans and kilns, each one specialising in select court wares. "The Imperial site put flesh on what we were reading," said Onn Peng Chen. "Out of somewhat decrepit, industrial sites can come sublime beauty."

The Kiln Gods Temple on the site was a favourite for Andra Leo, our trip photographer. It was erected in honour of Tong Bin, known as the God of Wind and Fire. Starting life as a potter in the 16th century, Tong Bin achieved his divine status after plunging into a burning kiln to protest the persecutions inflicted on his fellow potters.

We paid two visits to the Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Zone, a tourist-friendly complex of old ceramics factories that house modern studios, cafés, shops and exhibitions. It's a place where foreign ceramicists flock for short-term stays, thanks to subsidies offered by the government to help showcase Chinese ceramics. We enjoyed mixing with local artisans and browsing through their makeshift stalls at a huge night market. Two of us bargained, on behalf of our group, for replicas of the famous Meiyintang 'chicken cup', which Sotheby's recently sold at auction for \$36 million. Ours were a far cheaper substitute – under \$15!

If you visit Jingdezhen, do put the Royal Kilns site on your bucket list. Set in a traditional lakeside Chinese garden, it recreates the ancient pottery assembly line. We watched master potters, in beautiful blue and white coats, spin perfect bowls and vases in under two minutes. Moving on, artisans etched flowers with X-acto knives and master painters created intricate designs on vases, their brushes held upright and always between their middle and ring fingers.

Venturing an hour away, we visited the ancient wooded kiln site of Raonan, which seemed deserted. Patricia Welch flagged it as her favourite trip highlight. "Seeing is believing," she said, marvelling at the range of shards she collected that day near an old dragon kiln.

Nearby, in the leafy Gaoling National Mining Park, known as the birthplace of Jingdezhen china, we hiked in the footsteps of kaolin miners, potters and traders, dating back to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). We passed giant hammers crushing kaolin stone and huts drying kaolin bricks. "I have a better impression about where kaolin comes from – the white bricks, the mill, and the water wheel," said Sock-yan Sim. "It gives me a new appreciation for the porcelain I have at home."

Jane Peterson, a Minnesota native and former ACM docent, has lived in Singapore since 2007. She writes for the New York Times and Forbes Asia.

Photos by the author

Tribal Nagaland and Colonial Kolkata Study Tour

2-13 December 2017

By Ingrid Hanson

On an ambitious and challenging 12-day, five-location journey, 16 FOM members toured Nagaland and West Bengal. Under the wing of Rashmi Panchal, travellers flew, rode and floated to the easternmost part of India.

Nagaland: Dimapur, Kohima, Kisama Heritage Village

Our landing point was Dimapur, after transiting Kolkata for a night. Dimapur is the only major airport in Nagaland and is 74 kilometres from the capital, Kohima. The population of Nagaland is about two million, with 16 major tribes. Nagas are descendants of Mongolian people and speak a group of Tibeto-Burman languages. In our SUVs, we could see that tourism is nascent in the state. The majority of the buildings along the road were Christian churches, schools and missions.

After an early night (no thanks to the closure of the Bamboo Centre because the staff decided to take Prophet Mohammad's day as a public holiday), we set off before dawn the next day for Kisama Heritage Village, 75 kilometres away. The drive took four hours on stretches of road construction and along mountainous tracks. Arriving at about 10:00 am, we found places in the stands before the performers filed in, clad in their traditional clothes and headdresses.



Ao tribesmen sitting in the audience at the festival

The annual Hornbill Festival, also called the Festival of Festivals, has been held for the first 10 days of December since 2000. December first is Nagaland's statehood day. The festival's purpose is to revive, protect, sustain and promote the richness of the Naga heritage and traditions. The name comes from the Indian hornbill that features in the folklore of most of the state's tribes. Sixty percent of the population of Nagaland depends on agriculture, around which their festivals revolve. Activities include rifle shooting (RS100 per



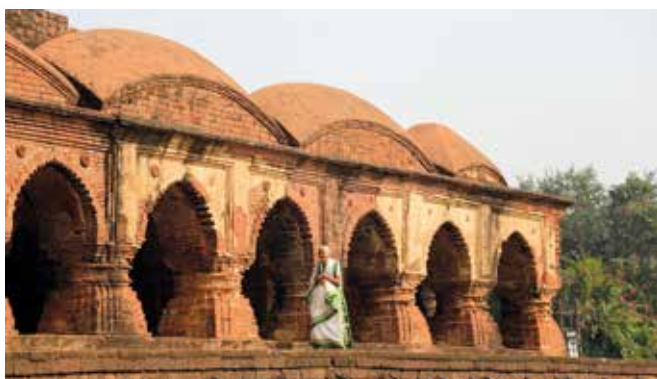
Naga tribesmen performing at the Hornbill Festival in Kisama

shot), Naga chilli-eating competitions, pork fat eating, fire making, greased bamboo pole climbing and craft bazaars – and we tried what we could. En route back to Dimapur, we visited the WWII Museum. Kohima was the site of a dramatic battle between Japanese forces and the Indian National Army, with fighters recruited in Singapore, and British troops.

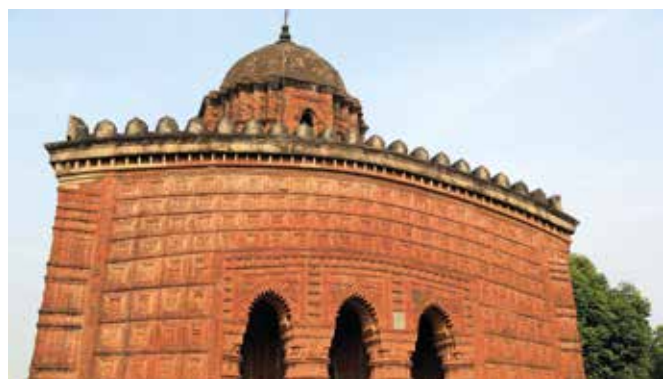
West Bengal: Shantiniketan

On the way to the airport the next day, we stopped at the Bamboo Resource Centre to see how bamboo is processed. Nagaland has over 20 species of bamboo, which is a significant part of the local economy. On arrival in Kolkata, we immediately set off on a bumpy ride to Shantiniketan, on paved but potholed roads. The Garden Bungalow, photographed for Condé Nast, was a welcome sight and after dinner at the glass house in the garden, everyone quickly scattered to look for a room they liked.

India's and Asia's first Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, for *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, lived in Shantiniketan for 31 years. He also founded Viswa Bharathi University of Fine Arts and like Socrates, championed classrooms without walls. The pace of Shantiniketan was unhurried and relaxed, a respite before our early morning 130 kilometre drive to Bishnupur.



Rasmancha Temple, of carved terracotta brick, built in 1600 in Bishnupur



Madanmohan Temple constructed in 1694 in Bishnupur



Waterway in the mangroves of the Sunderbans



A street in Kolkata

Bishnupur

Bishnupur was a bit of a detour en route back to Kolkata. However, the 17th and 18th century terracotta temples – the Radhamadhab, Kalachand, Radhagovinda and Nandalal – were worth the bumpy ride.

Kolkata

I cannot overstate the relief I felt walking into the Lali's lobby: a return to civilisation if Kolkata can be called that. The morning of Day 7, at 5:45 am, we met in the lobby for a short ride to the flower market where we had to lock arms to stay together in the crowded space. On a heritage walk through central Kolkata we saw the Writers' Building, the Post Office, and the Armenian church along with administrative buildings. We had lunch at the Tollygunge Club and shopped at Bailou and Made in Bengal before dinner at the Bengal Rowing Club. After dinner, we visited the Kalighat Temple.

The next day, most of us paid a pre-breakfast visit to Belur Math, the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Our Kolkata tour continued to Jorasanko Thakur Bari, ancestral home of the Tagore family and now a museum. We saw the Marble Palace from the outside and walked through the garden. After a buffet of Bengali food at 6 Ballygunge, we made a whirlwind stop at the Weavers Studio, before our final stop of the day at *Mother House* of the Missionaries of Charity, the home of Mother Teresa and her final resting place.

Sunderbans Cruise

Day 9's tour kicked off with spirits – waiters on our Vivada cruise boat stood with trays of red and white wine to greet us. We finished all the white wine on board that afternoon, and the crew could only restock three bottles the next day. It was just enough to toast Iris and Holger Seehusen's wedding anniversary.

At the beginning of the three-day Sunderban cruise, I started reading *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh, recommended by a friend's daughter, borrowed from a



Albino salt water crocodile sun bathing

fellow traveller. It's rare that I have the luxury of sitting still on a boat with the windows open, passing villages and barges that fit into the setting of what I'm reading. The Sunderbans are the world's largest delta of mangroves containing over 80 animal species. We saw every animal mentioned in the book except the Bengal tiger and Irrawaddy dolphins. Among those we saw were salt-water crocodiles, spotted deer, wild boar, crabs, water snakes and over a dozen kinds of birds, from openbill storks to peregrine falcons.

On Day 10, we walked two kilometres on an algae-covered brick path to a crocodile project. Rangers breed and raise crocodiles to release into the mangroves. Because you never know when there will be a shopping opportunity, I had my wallet, and sure enough, rangers had collected wild honey and were selling it in 1.5-litre water bottles. They said that honey bees migrate from the Himalayas in the spring when the mangrove forest blooms.

Day 11 was the highlight of the trip – a boat trip through some of the smaller waterways into the Sunderban Tiger Reserve. We visited the Sudhanhakhali watchtower, the Interpretation Centre, and cruised through narrow creeks among the mangrove forests in an almost 'Heart of Darkness' silence. The three days on board the Sunderban cruise gave us time to catch up on sleep.

Our last day, Day 12, was spent cruising up the final stretch of river back to the city. The tide was against us and the cruise company had to send a speed boat to pick up some passengers so they would not miss their flights. The rest of us had time to visit the Victoria Memorial and take a walk in the expansive garden, before going to the airport for our short, four and a half-hour overnight flight.

Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my sunset sky.
(Rabindranath Tagore)

Ingrid Hanson is a 32-year resident of Singapore. A past chair of the SSOLL, fundraiser for various arts organisations, an ex-docent at SAM and the National Museum. Her museum and project work inspired her to attend SOAS for another Masters in the History of Art and Archaeology 10 years ago. She is a constant traveller, visiting friends and family and exploring new places.

Photos by Iris Seehusen

Explore Singapore!

To join an ES! event, please go to the FOM website to register on line or register at the ES! table at any Monday Morning Lecture.

House of Tan Yeok Nee

Wednesday 7 March
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25



In the Orchard Road precinct sits a rarely visited National Monument. Come with Explore Singapore! to find out more about this beautiful building, one of two remaining traditional Chinese mansions in Singapore, making it a unique cultural treasure. It was built by Chaozhou-born businessman, Tan Yeok Nee between 1882 and 1885. This is the most elaborate of the 'Four Grand Mansions' built by rich Teochew tycoons in the late 19th century in Singapore and is the only survivor. Our guide will tell you about the building's history, its varied uses and diverse ownership. He will also reveal the meaning and symbolism of the many still intact architectural features found within.

The Joy and Fun of Gamelan – a Workshop

Thursday 15 March
10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Fee: \$25



In the Performing Arts Gallery on the third floor of the Asian Civilisations Museum is an impressive set of authentic Javanese gamelan orchestral instruments. Have you ever wondered how these instruments are played and what they sound like? Here is a unique opportunity for you to find out. In this workshop you will get to play the actual museum artefacts. In the process you will learn about the gamelan's history, traditions and related cultural activities, such as *wayang kulit* (Indonesian shadow puppetry) and Javanese dance. Our instructors will open your eyes and ears to the delight of gamelan music and teach you to play at least two traditional gamelan songs.

Singapore Wet Market and Hawker Foods

Thursday 22 March
9:30am – 12:30pm
Fee: \$30 (including snacks and drinks)



One of the attractions of living in Singapore is the wide variety of delicious, cheap and easily available food. For many Singaporeans eating is a passion and hunting for that 'best' stall for a particular food is a favourite pastime. The many races of people living here have contributed to an interesting melting pot of market and street food. Local 'wet' markets are fascinating for the variety of foods not found in supermarkets as well as other non-food items. Step into any food court or hawker centre and you will be

confronted by stalls with signs such as *Char Kway Teow*, *Hokkien Mee*, or *Mee Rebus*. If you would like to find out about these foods, join this Explore Singapore! programme. You will not only learn about, but will also get to taste some of the most popular foods.

Chinese Tea Ceremony

Thursday 12 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$45 (including snacks)



Tea culture in China differs from that of other countries in the tea preparation, tasting and the occasions when it is consumed. According to legend, tea was discovered some 5,000 years ago by the divine Emperor Shennong. Since then, tea has become an important part of Chinese tradition and everyday life. There are many tea varieties, but nearly all come from the same plant species – *camellia sinensis*. Chinese tea is categorised into different types based on the way the leaves are prepared and processed. The four main categories are: white, green, oolong and black. The Chinese tea ceremony emphasises the tea more than the proceedings (unlike Japanese tea ceremonies) – how the tea smells and tastes, and the comparison of tastes in successive rounds of making. Join us to find out about and taste the different kinds of Chinese tea and learn the fine points of appreciating it. Watch a demonstration, then have a hands-on session of making the tea yourself. Enjoy the tea with a variety of snacks provided.

Little India Heritage and Mural Art Trail – Serangoon in the 1900s

Thursday 26 April
10:00 am – 12:00 noon
Fee: \$25



The early 20th century was a defining period that shaped today's Little India as migrants from India, China and Britain settled in the area and established a diversity of trades and institutions. This tour focuses on the region's early settlers. We will follow a trail through some of the most important locations including the Chinese Clan Associations, Sri Veeramakaliamman temple, Abdul Gaffoor mosque, Sakyamuni Buddhist temple and the new Tekka Market among others. Also highlighted on this trail are some of the modern beautiful street murals in Little India like the Mural of Traditional Trades of Little India by Psyfool. Our guide will provide information on street names as well as the cattle trade, the race course and urban development at the turn of the century.

Study Group



Want to learn more about Asia in a friendly, relaxed way? Join our group. A study group consists of 10 to 16 members who meet weekly to improve their knowledge of a specific theme. Each week, we have two 40-minute presentations; each one researched and given by a member of the study group. Members choose their own topic within the theme.

The FOM Study Group provides a wonderful opportunity to meet and enjoy the diverse nationalities of FOM members.

We usually have the meetings in our homes, taking turns to host. On occasion, we also enjoy a pot-luck lunch after the presentations.

Do not worry if your first language is not English; we are patient and appreciate the viewpoints of members from all over the world. We can also support you if you are new to making presentations and need some help with PowerPoint or Google slides.

The Arts in Asia Since 1950: Visual Art, Performing Art, Film & Architecture

This study group will focus on relatively recent art in Asia and hopes for a diverse range of presentations. The theme will enable participants to explore all forms of the arts, from Ai Weiwei's activist art to K-pop bands, Singapore's condominium architecture to Manga. Join us as we explore the arts as they have developed in Asia since World War II. For more information and to join the April Study Group, please visit the FOM website.



A few possible topics: (A longer list is available on-line and please feel free to develop your own.)

- Sopheap Pich – Cambodian bamboo sculpture
- Queen Sirikit and the invention of modern Thai fashion
- Famous Asian-born architects – eg I M Pei and Zaha Hadid
- The Golden Era of Singapore Cinema – the Shaw Brothers and the Cathay Organisation
- The rise of the Korean entertainment industry
- Playwrights and plays of Singapore



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Singapore Art gallery guide

Your magazine to all arts in and around Singapore

www.sagg.info

Photo © Felix Hug (Eyes on Asia)

Island Notes

Fàilte (Welcome)

By Darly Furlong



When you think of vacations, if you dream of green mountains, clear seas and a crisp wind, then you are thinking of the Emerald Isle...Ireland. Among its iconic beauties are the cliffs of Moher, named after a promontory fort that has stood on its southernmost tip since 1 BCE. The promontory was formed 319 million years ago and consists of beds of shale and limestone with a channel of rivers cutting through the bedrock. The cliffs are vertical and afford gorgeous views of the sheer drop below. Large colonies of birds perch on the cliffs, adding to its charm and making it a place to remember.



Darly Furlong is an avid history and mythology buff. She enjoys living in the Katong district and exploring Peranakan culture.

Textile Enthusiasts Group

Shared Passion

Date: Friday 23 March

Time: 10:00 am for a 10:30 start

Hostess: Janet Stride. The address will be sent via email to registered participants.

TEG members always look forward to Shared Passion Month. This annual show-and-tell event is a wonderful opportunity to share your knowledge as well as learn from fellow members. Bring one of your favourite textiles to share with the group – a piece that is either something you wear or keep as a collector's item. It would be helpful if you know the weaving technique and provenance of your selected piece, but if you don't, you may be able to draw upon the knowledge of other members. Each member will be given a chance to speak about their textile piece. Please note that it is not required to bring a textile piece; you are welcome to attend for the learning experience.



Threads of a New Tradition: Percy Vatsaloo

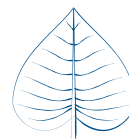
Date: Friday 20 April

Time: 10:00 am for a 10:30 start

Location: Isan Gallery, 42 Jalan Kembangan.

Percy Vatsaloo, textile designer and founder of Isan Gallery, started visiting the Isan region of NE Thailand in 1987. He soon discovered handwoven textiles and other local crafts that were rapidly dying out. By the mid-90s, Percy realised that the antique Laotian textiles that he loved so much were becoming both scarce and very expensive. He decided to create textiles with his own designs and set up a small weaving team in the village of Ban Borang. Inspired by traditional weaving techniques such as ikat, brocade and tapestry weaves, he designs wearable art fashioned entirely in silk. The Weaving Village is a socially-responsible project that gives women in the countryside a fair income without leaving their village. Percy will also give a brief introduction to antique Laotian and Cambodian textiles and share how they have influenced *The Weaving Project*. Some pieces from Percy's private collection will be on display.

To register for these events, please email fomtsgsingapore@gmail.com



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Japanese Docents

My name is Eri Yokoi. I became Japanese Docent Coordinator1 in October 2017. We welcomed Ms Megumi Nakatani as a Japanese Coordinator2 in December then started a new JD committee for 2018. We hope to contribute to Singapore society with all JD members.

Today, I'd like to talk about my dialect, *Osaka-ben*, which I use regularly when I introduce myself. I am from Osaka, in south-western Japan, famous for Osaka Castle as well as being a gourmet capital, for dishes such as *takoyaki* and *okonomiyaki*. People from Osaka speak *Osaka-ben*, which has stronger intonation patterns.

The Japanese think Osaka is unique and I feel we are. We love Osaka and are proud to use its dialect, so most of us use it even though we can speak the standard dialect. Moreover, we prefer to use *Osaka-ben* even when we are abroad. Each prefecture has its own dialect, but we do not hesitate to speak in *Osaka-ben* with other Japanese. One of the reasons is that many comedians who appear on TV speak in *Osaka-ben*. Therefore, most Japanese are quite familiar with this dialect.

Have you heard that the Japanese append *san* to a person's name? This corresponds to Mister or Miss/Mrs/Miz in English and is used all over Japan. The uniqueness of the Osaka dialect is that sometimes it will be added to the name of a food, for example, *omame-san* (beans), *oimo-san* (potato). But it's not used for all foods. *San* will be added if the food seems to be familiar and is mainly used for round shapes and small items. According to one theory, we respect food, especially the foods the royal family eats. We don't affix *san*



Eri Yokoi and Megumi Nakatani

to *shabu-shabu* or *sukiyaki*, but it doesn't mean that we don't respect them. I don't know why...

Although I use Osaka dialect in everyday life, please do not worry. I use standard Japanese when I guide at the museum.

Eri Yokoi, JD Coordinator1

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URA/FOM Walks

These walking tours are conducted for the URA by FOM docents around the four precincts of Chinatown. They are two hours long and start from the URA building in Maxwell Road. Registration is required and can be found on the eventbrite site www.eventbrite.sg/o/urban-redevelopment-authority-7497466443. Please note that registration is open only one week before the tour.

Tours in March and April are as follows:

- 2 March Friday – Tanjong Pagar
- 3 March Saturday – Bukit Pasoh
- 9 March Friday – Tanjong Pagar
- 10 MarT Saturday – Telok Ayer
- 14 March Wednesday – Kreta Ayer
- 16 March Friday – Telok Ayer
- 17 March Saturday – Kreta Ayer
- 23 March Friday – Bukit Pasoh
- 24 March Saturday – Telok Ayer



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Monday Morning Lectures

Monday Morning Lectures are usually held in the Asian Civilisations Museum, 1 Empress Place. However, in March 2018 they will be held in the URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road, 069118. Everyone is welcome to arrive at 10:30 am for coffee or tea before the lecture, which begins promptly at 11:00 am. Do come early to get a seat.



5 March • Chinoiserie – A Vision of the East

Speaker: Margaret White
Location: URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road, Singapore, 069118

The mystical attraction of the Far East long held sway over Europe. However, as small quantities of luxury goods such as porcelain, silk, ivory and lacquer trickled into Europe in the 14th century, the desire for all things 'Chinese' grew. Discover why the craze for the chinoiserie style has continued to captivate the global imagination up to the present day.



12 March • Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio – Baroque Master of 'Light and Dark'

Speaker: Maren Kraemer-Dreyer
Location: URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road, Singapore, 069118

Revealing the recently discovered secrets of Caravaggio's practices, this talk focuses on the interweaving between the influential western artist's dramatic artworks and his personal life.



19 March • Three Lives of Keong Saik Road

Speaker: Charmaine Leung
Location: URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road, 098118

Keong Saik Road is famous for its history as a red-light district, but few people know of its back stories and transformations over the years, from the early 1930s to the present day. Hear about the different waves of change from Charmaine Leung, author of *17A Keong Saik Road*, who grew up in Keong Saik Road in the 1970s as the daughter of a brothel owner. Charmaine has pulled together different accounts of life on the street, on the *Ma Je*, the *Pei Pa Zai*, and the *Dai Gu Liong*—all marginalised, forgotten women of the past.



26 March • World of the Kris

Speaker: Ronald Stride
Location: URA Function Room, 45 Maxwell Road, 098118

The kris is a distinctive dagger found throughout the Malay world, but usually associated with central Java in Indonesia. Although kris follow a basic model, there is an almost endless variety of blades, hilts, sheaths and decorations. This variation depends on the place where the kris was made, the materials available and the design (called an *empu*) that the Kris-maker, wanted to achieve. It is also a mystical weapon with supernatural powers. Up to about 100 years

ago, kris were part of the daily attire of most males in central Java. They also served as status symbols, hence were made from the best materials available and occasionally were decorated with gemstones and gold inlay.



9 April • Paintings from India's Rajput Courts

Speaker: Pia Rampal
Location: ACM

Divine and mortal love has been a favourite subject for painters in the lush green *pahari* or hills area. We explore paintings from two outstanding illustrated manuscripts dated to the 17th- 18th centuries. The *Rasamanjari* (Bouquet of Delight) from Basohli, uses fiery colours, expressive eyes and the shimmer of emerald green beetle wings – as hot as curry. The *Gita Govinda* (Song of the Cowherd) from Kangra, is luminous, with lyrical landscapes and delicate faces – as cool as moonlight. Join us this morning and enter a magic world.



16 April • The Extraordinary Legacy of Angkor

Speaker: Dr Vidya Schalk
Location: ACM

Around 800 CE, Angkor was perhaps the largest pre-industrial city in the world, with an elaborate aquatic infrastructure system of 1,000 square kilometres and housing up to 1 million people. The Khmer empire was centred in Angkor and would dominate for another 500 years. Its crowning glory was the temple complex of Angkor Wat. This lecture will focus on Angkor's background, history, archaeology and artistic legacy to provide insights into the special exhibition currently at the Asian Civilisations Museum, *Angkor: Exploring Cambodia's Sacred City*.



23 April • The Silk Road – From Kashgar to Dunhuang

Speaker: Abha Kaul
Location: ACM

The famed Silk Road winds its way along desolate deserts and majestic mountains in China's Central Asian territories in Xinjiang province, tracing the paths trekked by countless merchants, missionaries and explorers in the exchange of goods, ideas and cultures over the centuries. This talk will take you on a virtual journey from Kashgar to Dunhuang and the Mogao Caves rimming the Taklamakan Desert. Share the discoveries of a group of travellers on a recent FOM study tour to these far-flung oases of the ancient Silk Road.

30 April • NO LECTURE (May Day)

Coordinators Contact List



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Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am, 12:30 pm, 2:00 pm and 3:30pm, Fri 7:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every second Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)
First Wed of the month 11:30 am (Korean)
Second Thursday of the month 11:30 am (Spanish). Third Thursday of the month 11:30 am (French)

Understanding Asia through Singapore

The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world. The new and refreshed permanent galleries are arranged along broad themes that highlight cross-cultural connections, rather than being segmented by geography or culture.

The ACM connects the cultures of Asia across two broad themes: trade and the exchange of ideas, and faith and belief. Beginning with the ninth century Tang shipwreck, the galleries explore Southeast Asia as a trading hub. Chinese porcelain, Southeast Asian ceramics, Indian textiles and furniture are showcased along with the Asian luxuries that were in demand in the global market. Asia was also a source as well as a crossroads of faith and belief and the ACM galleries display works of art showing the development of ancient Indian faiths and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism across Asia. Christianity and Islam in Asia reveal the Asian origin and evolution of these global faiths.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com



A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

Sat 4:00 pm: Art & History Tour
Sat. 5:00 pm: History and Heritage Tour
To register please visit www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

DISINI

(through September)

A brand new site-specific festival of programmes, outdoor sculptures and murals by home-grown, regional and international artists at Gillman Barracks, celebrates the precinct's rich heritage as a former military barracks and its current role as Asia's leading contemporary arts cluster. Highlights include captivating outdoor artworks located across various spaces, a multi-functional artist-designed pavilion where a series of exciting and stimulating programmes will take place, and curatorial-led showcases to capture your attention.

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg



Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.
Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm, Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

11:00 am for the permanent galleries
3:00 pm on Wed and Fri for the special exhibition

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.

Symbols and Scripts- The Language of Craft (through June)

The exhibition showcases craft traditions from the Indian subcontinent in the context of Singapore's Indian communities. Traditionally, craftsmen have used signs, symbols, patterns and scripts in the decoration of handmade objects in the Indian Subcontinent for thousands of years. This exhibition presents iconic examples of craft traditions representing the material culture of Indian communities through craft forms across diverse media. It also examines the role of these crafts as trade objects and underscores the trading networks between South and Southeast Asia.

Malay Heritage Centre

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 6:00 pm (last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays
FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 11:00 am; Sat: 2:00 pm (Subject to availability. Please call ahead to confirm the availability of a docent).

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) provides wonderful cultural exposure and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and interests. Situated amidst the Istana Kampong Gelam, Gedung Kuning and the surrounding Kampong Gelam precinct, the Centre acts as a vital heritage institution for the Malay community in Singapore. Through its exhibits, programmes and activities, the Centre hopes to honour the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

Sirri na Pesse: Navigating Bugis Identities in Singapore (through 24 June 2018)

Sirri na Pesse, which loosely translates to 'Honour and Pride' in the Bugis language, features the history and development of the Malay-Bugis community in Singapore, many of whom can trace their roots through seminal historical developments in the Malay world during the 18th to 20th centuries.

Sirri na Pesse is the fourth instalment in the *Se-Nusantara* (Of the Same Archipelago) series of exhibitions that rediscover the rich multi-ethnic heritage and culture of the Malay community in Singapore.

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg



Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English)
Mon to Fri 10:30 am and every first Saturday 1:30 pm (Japanese)

The Singapore History Gallery

In celebration of 50 years of independence, this gallery has been refreshed with updated stories and content on Singapore's history, capturing the nation's defining moments, challenges and achievements from its earliest beginnings 700 years ago to the independent, modern city-state it is today.

Desire and Danger

Discover the fine line between desire and danger at this stimulating new exhibition at the Goh Seng Choo Gallery. Featuring creatures that arouse appetites and instill fear, and exotic plants sought for their ability to induce pleasure or pain, this selection of drawings from the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings explores the complex and sometimes uneasy relationship between man and nature.

Museum Information and Exhibitions

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore 119279
Tel: 6516 8817

www.museum.nus.edu.sg

Free admission

Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am - 6:00 pm, Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays,

Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Rediscovering Forgotten Thai Masters of Photography (through July 2018)

An artist research project by Thai photographer Manit Sriwanichpoom, the exhibition features bodies of works by seven Thai photographers from the 50s to the 70s, for purposes of editorials, studio portraits and documentaries, as well as for illustrating koans.

Crossings | A Solo Exhibition by Wei Leng Tay (through November)

A four-part iteration, Wei Leng Tay's research and photographic project spans histories of migrant individuals from different generations and backgrounds in Pakistan, Hong Kong and Singapore. These installations are multi-lingual and polyvocal fragments, capturing the vagaries in ideas of agency, nation and relationships implicit in moving between places of home.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883
Tel: 6227 5731

www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

English heritage tours: Tues - Fri, 10:00 am; Mandarin Heritage Tour: First Monday of each month, 10am;

Self-Guided Visits: Every Sat, 1.30pm/2.15pm/3.15pm/4.00pm

To register, please visit babahouse.nus.edu.sg/visit/plan-your-visit
For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore 179941
Tel: 6332 7591

www.peranakanmuseum.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am and 2:00 pm (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese), every second Wednesday of the month 10:45 am (French).

This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555
Tel: 6332 3222

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm, Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Mon to Fri 11:00 am (English), Tues to Fri 10:30 am (Japanese)



The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Housed in a restored 19th century mission school, it opened its doors in 1996 as the first art museum in Singapore. Also known as SAM, the museum is now a contemporary art museum.

SAM has built one of the world's most important public collections of Southeast Asian contemporary artworks, with a growing component in international contemporary art. SAM draws from its collection and collaborates with international contemporary art museums to co-curate and present contemporary art exhibitions

Cinerama: Art and the Moving Image in Southeast Asia (through 26 March 2018)

Cinerama brings together 10 artists and collectives from across Southeast Asia who work through the medium of the moving image. Spanning hand-drawn animation to immersive video installations, the works explore the history of the genre, its current-day expressions, and potential for the future.

STPI

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236

Tel: 6336 3663

www.stpi.com.sg

Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am - 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00

am - 6:00 pm

Closed Sundays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours: Thurs 11:30 am, Sat 2:00 pm

Please refer to STPI's website at www.stpi.com.sg for STPI's public programmes.



Dinh Q. Lê : Monuments & Memorials

17 March to 12 May 2018

Internationally acclaimed artist Dinh Q. Lê was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the US at the age of ten to escape the Khmer Rouge. Lê consistently challenges how our memories are recalled with context in contemporary life; he is known for his large-scale photo-montages, where he weaves photographic strips into a tapestry of images that revolve around the theme of the Vietnam War. He utilises the artistic process as a tool for examining and unearthing history, exploring the universal themes of loss and redemption and through his work merges Eastern and Western cultures, as well as personal and fictional realities.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874

Tel: 6256 7377

www.wanqingyuan.org.sg

Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, Closed on

Mondays

FOM guided tours: Tues to Fri 2:00 pm (English)

FOM Special exhibition guided tours: 10:30am on Fridays in English



Stitches of Love: Hidden Blessings in Children's Clothing and Accessories (through 4 March 2018)

A collaboration between Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall and the Memorial Museum of Generalissimo Sun Yat-sen's Mansion in Guangzhou, this special exhibition showcases children's clothing and accessories from the late Qing to the early Republican period. It reviews the wide range of images rich in symbolic meanings that were employed to bestow good fortune, longevity, male progeny, health, wealth and career success. The collection on display includes clothing, hats, ear muffs, bibs and shoes that feature a variety of motifs derived from the natural world, history, literature and folklore.

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