

MACAU'S

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TRUE RICHES

With a growing local art scene, quiet heritage districts, seaside localities and rich culinary traditions, the districts of Taipa, Cotai and Coloane show that there's so much more to Macau beyond betting and racing

BY ALEX GREGORIO





MACAU

1 The view from the Ruins of St Paul's Catholic Church
2 and 3 Taipa Village

It is the week of the Grand Prix, and all over Macau billboards of Formula 3 cars and 1000cc bikes herald glamor and adrenaline.

The Macau Grand Prix, now on its 66th year, is the region's enduring icon of racing prestige and dangerous speed. Just in 2018, German teen racer Sophia Flörsch catapulted into a spine-breaking crash and miraculously survived. Back in 1967, Filipino Arsenio "Dodjie" Laurel, the first two-time Macau Grand Prix winner, passed away in a crash after heroically steering his out-of-control car away from spectators. The annual race is a fitting metaphor for Macau — a city that continues to expand and thrive on reclaimed land to accommodate new gilded palaces dedicated to luck and fortune.

By this year, Macau will overtake Qatar as the wealthiest place on earth. It is the most densely populated territory on the planet, and the only city in China where casinos are legal. Like Las Vegas, Macau's gaming revenues run into tens of billions of US dollars per year. Unlike Las Vegas,

Macau has a long and rich history, dating back 500 years.

Despite the city's reputation as the Asia-Pacific region's gambling playground, it is possible to have fun here without visiting a single casino complex. Inscribed into the list of Unesco World Heritage sites in 2005, Macau exemplifies East meets West. Here, European and Chinese building methods are married in stone, with Western architecture imbibing Chinese design features. Historic structures such as St Lawrence's Church and Dom Pedro V Theatre, for example, have managed to preserve this mix of Western and Oriental forms. Even Macau's cobbled sidewalks, known as Portuguese pavements, are akin to the sidewalks of Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro.

Building on the past

From the Macau Peninsula, travelers can quickly cross the Pearl River via any of the three bridges that connect the mainland to the districts of Taipa, Cotai and Coloane — now all part of one bigger island. Taipa and Coloane

used to be two separate islands, but the land has gradually grown since the early 1970s through reclamation. In 2005, the two islands were finally joined as one with the newly defined Cotai — a portmanteau of Coloane and Taipa — in the middle.

In glitzy Cotai, the government allows towering structures to rise. Gigantic gambling temples The Venetian, Wynn Palace and City of Dreams are all there. Zaha Hadid Architects' futuristic Morpheus, a hotel with a striking exoskeleton façade, is a fantastic recent addition.

In the old town centers of Taipa and Coloane, however, the government still mandates a three-storey maximum building rule. The building code alongside strict design guidelines has enabled developers like Sniper Capital to go against the grain of gaming development.

As head of the Macau operations of Sniper Capital, João Alfonso has been redeveloping the old Taipa town center into a heritage-based retail destination that's a rising alternative to the tourist-packed Senado Square. "We only do non-gambling development," João says.

PHOTO BY CORI MITCHELL (2), TERA.KEN / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (3)



The Museum of Taipa and Coloane History

Insider information

OUR LOCAL GUIDES (AND NEW FRIENDS) RECOMMEND A FEW THINGS TO CHECK OUT

Cinemateca Paixão (Cinematheque Passion)

Movie buffs should check out arthouse cinema and film archive Cinematheque Passion, say the members of indie band WhyOceans. The yellow building (which is immensely photogenic inside and out) hosts regular screenings of independent Macanese films and foreign titles. cinematheque-passion.mo

Lou Lim Ieoc Garden

Photographer António Leong recommends that visitors interested in Chinese heritage visit this well-preserved Chinese garden in St Lazarus district, his favorite area of the city to take leisurely walks on lazy afternoons and appreciate Macau's distinct architecture. *10 Estrada de Adolfo Loureiro*

Lilau Square

Lilau Square is an under-the-radar gem recommended by João Alfonso — it's a quiet colonial plaza surrounded by old banyan trees and heritage buildings. *Largo do Lilau*

“Besides gambling, we need to create an area for people to relax, to discover Portuguese food, to see a traditional old house, to experience a destination rooted in authentic heritage.”

João straddles Macau's past and future. On one hand, he's plugged into the new developments in town enough to have appeared in Anthony Bourdain's *No Reservations*, where he kart raced with the legendary chef and writer for the show's episode on Macau (they later had dinner at one of Macau's most popular restaurants, António). João is also one of the few remaining people who can still speak the endangered local patois known as Patuá. For him, the risk of losing his heritage is real, so after a career in racing and sports management, he shifted his attention to the adaptive reuse of Taipa Village's rundown shophouses. “When we started in 2007, this was empty; no restaurants, all old shophouses. Our test case was António in a small rented building. We tried to see if this could be done. We were not sure if it would work.”

All of it worked. Taipa Village is now one of the most visited sites and

one of the hippest places for shopping and dining in Macau. Featuring the old shophouses renovated into colorful restaurants and rooftop bars, Taipa Village's shops sell everything from Hello Kitty souvenirs to Harley-Davidson motorcycles — but it still manages to reveal a glimpse into Macau's past as a fishing and firecracker-making village. The Museum of Taipa and Coloane History, the Pak Tai Temple with its yearly Cantonese opera performance and the Iec Long Firework Factory — they're all here.

City of music and art

Beside Taipa Village lies the Cotai strip, where new palaces to art and entertainment are being built. Wynn Resorts recently announced that it is investing billions in creating a new art destination called the Crystal Pavilion. It will feature a swanky new art museum, prefigured for now by a monumental Jeff Koons sculpture called *Tulips*. Art collective TeamLab, too, is opening a big immersive art installation in The Venetian Macao.



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4 Performance artists at the Macao International Parade 5 Musician Akitsugu Fukushima, who's based in Macau

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All these large-scale displays in luxurious venues are driving local artists to turn inward. Some of the best local work that we discover are quiet and reflective. One example is the work of photographer António Leong, who has been chronicling the streetscape of Macau and its transformations since 2010.

Despite receiving praise from the *National Geographic* and various critics, António still calls himself a hobbyist photographer. His beautiful photographs reveal a deeper side to Macau: a city gleaned from memory. António's pictures explore its cityscape and traditions while longing for that quieter past as the city continues to grow on a bigger, more anonymous scale. "I remember when I was a child, Macau was a small town where neighbors were connected, and we knew each other," he says.

This wistful notion as a photographic theme fits António's process well. "I like to shoot alone," he says. "These are the times when I can feel perfectly isolated, and I can enjoy the moment. I am attracted to any subject, but I'm particularly

drawn to creating images with light and shadow."

His play of light and dark has resulted in some memorable images. António's photos of fishermen in a bay, for example, recall the Macau's past in a beautiful, melancholic light. Others capture the everyday dramas of an old village living behind a big-city façade — the photo titled *Mum and Me* shows a mother and her young daughter walking hand in hand in the rain under yellow streetlights in one of Macau's narrow alleys.

Macau's contrasts of silence and spectacle are evident in its music and performing arts scene as well. Grand theatrical productions — such as *The House of Dancing Water* and shows at Broadway Theatre — feature dozens of international performers every night, even as independent local bands search for a bigger stage.

Like António's images, the songs of notable homegrown band WhyOceans are electronic hymns that are beautiful invitations to nostalgia. "We are not really into any of Macau's grand shows — these are mainly commercial forms of entertainment

supported by big teams with big budgets," says Jackal Tam, the band's leader, and pianist and keyboardist. "The only way to grow the local music scene is to support our local musicians and enable our local audience to mature."

Independent musicians seem to be making it work in Macau, where a good deal of music is being pumped out. Among the city's noteworthy acts are Akitsugu Fukushima, or Aki, and electronic dream-pop band Evade. "Macau's local music and art scenes still have a limited following," says Tommy Chu, one of WhyOceans' guitarists. "But now the government is promoting independent art, more music — they coordinate free performances and sponsor international festivals. They are trying their best, we can see, to help local artists."

By the sea

The biggest of these international music festivals is Hush!, staged every year on Hac Sa Beach, in the southeast of Coloane. The three-day

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