

Macao 澳門

A Festive City

Chief Executive Delivers
Maiden Policy Address

Specialty Coffee Stirs the SAR



27/05 – 31/08

LOBBY, MANDARIN ORIENTAL, MACAU
澳門文華東方酒店大堂

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Tsang Tseng Tseng 曾貞貞

MODERN VISION, TIMELESS TECHNIQUE

A Chinese art showcase celebrating
the 15th anniversary of the
Mandarin Oriental, Macau

觀古照今 · 筆墨恆長

澳門文華東方酒店十五週年慶特備中國藝術展

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COVER IMAGE
A parade participant expels rice wine from his mouth during the Festival of the Drunken Dragon, one of Macao’s most beloved and boisterous annual events - Photo by Xinhua News Agency

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‘Innovate to Elevate’

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai’s 2025 Policy Address outlined a bold and pragmatic vision for Macao’s future, focusing on economic diversification, social welfare reform, regional and international cooperation, and ambitious infrastructural developments.



Text **Gonalo C sar de S **
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivered his maiden policy address on 14 April. In it, he vowed that this year would see Macao “break new ground”

In April, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai delivered Macao’s 2025 Policy Address at the Legislative Assembly. In doing so, he presented a comprehensive roadmap for the Special Administrative Region (SAR)’s development over the coming year. The speech was framed by the forward-looking theme ‘Innovate to Elevate; Forge Ahead to Break New Ground.’

Sam’s address, his first since taking office in December, set out clear priorities for his administration. To drive economic diversification; improve public wellbeing; enhance governance through stronger administrative coordination; and deepen the city’s integration with national development strategies.

Speaking to lawmakers, Sam reaffirmed his commitment to working in close cooperation with all sectors of society to move Macao forward into a new chapter of progress and opportunity. He reiterated a vision of the city introduced in his New Year’s message to its people, that of a law-based, vibrant, cultural and blissful Macao. The chief executive also encouraged the city’s residents to study and implement the spirit of President Xi Jinping’s important speeches delivered during his December visit to Macao.

BEYOND THE SAR’S BORDERS

Sam stressed the importance of looking beyond the SAR’s landmass to support sustainable growth and appropriate economic diversification. This included strengthening ties with Guangdong Province and Hong Kong, Macao’s nearest neighbours and partners within the Greater Bay Area (GBA), as well as fostering deeper connections with Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) across Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. He also pledged to enhance cooperation with the Chinese mainland and the wider international community.

In this area, things have already been moving fast. Macao officials, sometimes joined by GBA officials, have led several trade delegations to Europe in recent months, exploring avenues for collaboration with countries including Belgium, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Monaco, Portugal and Spain.

In April, officials from Macao, Zhuhai and the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin travelled to Brazil for their first joint economic and trade seminar in a PSC, and toured three cities within the South American giant – one of China’s most important trade partners.

They also helped pull off the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA and Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference in Egypt, in May, to promote investment cooperation between the GBA and Africa.

The Policy Address took place at Macao's Legislative Assembly



Closer to home, Sam emphasised Hengqin’s central role in Macao’s diversification strategy. The 106-square-kilometre island, part of Zhuhai Municipality, provides Macao with much-needed space to develop. Sam said his administration would work diligently towards achieving Hengqin’s second-stage development goals by 2029. These relate to regulatory harmonisation between Macao and the Cooperation Zone, efficient cross-boundary flows, and support for Macao’s emerging industries – traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), modern financial services, high-tech industries and large-scale event hosting.

To strengthen Macao’s presence in Hengqin, additional civil servants would be appointed to key committees and working bodies. Pilot schemes would be introduced, such as the appointment of non-permanent judges for the creation of a collective court in the Cooperation Zone. Measures to enhance connectivity included facilitating access for single-plate vehicles, expanding public services available in Hengqin, and aligning its administrative environment with Macao’s governance model.

Regarding ties within the GBA, Sam said he hoped to help coordinate a single free-trade zone between the three regions and strengthen their infrastructure connectivity.

Sam shared his vision of the GBA as the future for many of Macao’s young people. As such, he proposed

rolling out a series of schemes to support Macao residents seeking internships and employment in Guangdong Province’s nine cities. One of these would be a monthly subsidy scheme offering 5,000 patacas to eligible Macao residents taking up opportunities either in Guangdong or in other parts of the mainland.

Macao’s role as a platform for cooperation between China and PSCs would also be expanded. The government would promote partnerships not only between mainland and Lusophone businesses but also between PSC enterprises and Macao-based firms. An ongoing profit tax exemption for Macao businesses earning income from PSCs – such as Portugal, Brazil and Angola – aimed to incentivise this cooperation.

SOCIAL WELFARE REFORM

Sam unveiled a comprehensive set of social welfare reforms to strengthen support for vulnerable groups and address demographic challenges. These reforms reflected a broader commitment to enhancing public wellbeing and ensuring long-term system sustainability.

To address a declining birth rate and support families, a new childcare allowance of 1,500 patacas per month would be introduced for children under the age of three, benefiting approximately 15,000 children in 2025. The marriage allowance would increase to 2,220 patacas per spouse, and the birth allowance would rise to 6,500 patacas per parent.

Elderly residents would see enhanced benefits, with the monthly pension rising to 3,900 patacas, and the old age allowance being upped to 10,000 patacas per year. The government also said it would set up a new elderly daycare centre in New Urban Zone Area A, an artificial island to the east of the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal.

Support for residents with disabilities would be expanded, too. The annual subsidy for individuals with lower-level needs would increase to 10,000 patacas, while those with higher-level needs would receive 20,000 patacas. Plans were also in place to build new treatment facilities and a comprehensive rehabilitation centre.

The value of health vouchers for permanent residents, meanwhile,

would jump by over 16 percent, reaching 700 patacas.

Macao's annual wealth distribution scheme would continue at current levels: 10,000 patacas for permanent residents and 6,000 patacas for non-permanent residents. However, officials were trying to optimise the scheme. Any resulting fiscal savings would be redirected to targeted welfare initiatives and community development.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE MAKING

During a question-and-answer session at the Legislative Assembly following his Policy Address, the chief executive announced that the government was actively identifying suitable sites for two

major development projects: an international integrated tourism and cultural zone, and a science and technology research and development industrial park.

Both projects were part of the government's long-term strategy for economic diversification and are expected to enter the public consultation phase in the second half of 2025. Multiple sites were being considered for each.

The proposed tourism and cultural zone was intended to reinforce Macao's status as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure while promoting cultural exchange. Key facilities envisioned include the Macao National Cultural Museum, the Macao International Performing Arts Centre, and the International Contemporary Art Museum.



Government Information Bureau



Xinhua News Agency

The science and technology park would focus on fostering innovation, supporting high-tech industries, and serving as a launchpad for mainland tech firms looking to expand internationally. It was also expected to attract global innovation projects.

Other key infrastructure initiatives included the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town and the development of Macao as an international air transport hub. These projects would be designed to support Macao's long-term economic resilience and reinforce its role as a dynamic, diversified city within the GBA.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND THE PUSH FOR DIVERSIFICATION

The government estimated total expenditure for 2025 would reach about 115 billion patacas. Sam acknowledged that if average monthly gross gaming revenue fell, Macao could face a fiscal deficit – a possibility that highlights

the importance of further reducing the SAR's reliance on gaming taxes and advancing its economic diversification.

Key diversification efforts in 2025 included supporting the global expansion of TCM products, promoting medical tourism through leveraging the “Peking Union” brand to boost Macao Union Hospital; expanding the city's bond market while cultivating and attracting more financial talent; and promoting the research and development of a ‘Digital Macao Pataca’.

Additional initiatives would include hosting international cultural, artistic and sporting events; revitalising six urban districts; and increasing support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

As Macao enters a new phase of development, these strategic initiatives reflect the government's determination to build a more resilient, diverse and forward-looking economy. One that is closely aligned with national priorities and deeply rooted in serving the long-term interests of its residents. ●

Sam Hou Fai reiterated his vision of a law-based, vibrant, cultural and blissful Macao during his 2025 Policy Address

(Opposite page)
The chief executive interacts with lawmakers during a question-and-answer session following his address



POLITICS

Xia Baolong Shares 'Four Aspirations' for Macao

The Central Government's top official on Hong Kong and Macao affairs urged the latter Special Administrative Region to deepen integration with Hengqin, promote economic diversification and expand international engagement during his latest tour of the city.

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**
Photos **Government
Information Bureau**

Macao Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) warmly greets visiting Central Government official Xia Baolong outside Santa Sancha in May

Xia Baolong, director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and director of the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, recently completed a fact-finding tour of the city, which took place over six days in May. The purpose of Xia's trip was to gain an understanding of Macao's current socioeconomic conditions and future development plans, as well as check in on the new government's progress.

Upon arriving on 8 May, Xia met with Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai at Santa Sancha. He delivered President Xi Jinping's greetings to the people of Macao and relayed the Central Government's recognition of the promising start made by Macao's sixth-term government.

Xia visited a wide array of sites reflecting Macao's historical, cultural, educational and infrastructure priorities. These included the Maritime Museum and nearby A-Ma Temple,

the Giant Panda Pavilion, the Macao University of Tourism (UTM), the Dom Pedro V Theatre and several plots of land earmarked for public projects. He also visited Hengqin, where he inspected the under-construction Macao International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal and the site where the University of Macau (UM) is building its new campus. The director's packed itinerary included meetings with the heads of Macao's executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as representatives from various sectors of civil society.

During his time here, Xia noted that Macao's destiny was entwined with the motherland's. He highlighted the longstanding tradition of patriotism demonstrated by Macao and Hong Kong people, and described both Special Administrative Regions (SARs) as precious jewels of the nation. He also described the pair as fertile grounds for investment and paradises for entrepreneurship.



FOUR ASPIRATIONS TO FOLLOW

On 12 May, Xia met with 21 representatives from Macao's industrial and commercial sectors. The director praised standout entrepreneurs from Macao and Hong Kong for consistently aligning themselves with the currents of China's economic growth. "As the saying goes, 'the rise and fall of a nation is the responsibility of every citizen,'" he noted.

While speaking with the representatives, Xia put forward "four aspirations" for their progress. First, he urged them to stand up to the bottom line of national interests,

while upholding their sense of honour and dignity.

Secondly, he encouraged them to continue striving for growth and development, aligning their strengths with the region's needs. Xia described Macao's appropriate economic diversification as of utmost importance and said that the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin should be regarded as integral to Macao's long-term future. "The development of Hengqin should be regarded as Macao's own business," the director noted.

Xia's third aspiration was for Macao businesses to participate in the country's opening up to the world.

"It is essential to vigorously expand the international business network, continue to consolidate economic and trade ties with traditional markets, proactively connect with national strategies such as the Belt and Road initiative, and actively explore emerging markets, such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa," he noted. Leveraging Macao's ties with Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) was also a priority in this regard, with the aim of developing new markets.

Encouraging an inward flow of international talent was another part of China's opening up policy, and Xia urged Macao's businesses to "make great efforts" to attract experts from abroad to fill the SAR's talent gaps.

His fourth aspiration was for Macao's business people to spread good stories of Macao, Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, and broadcast the success of the 'One Country, Systems' policy. "We should also leverage the advantages of our extensive international connections and invite more overseas friends to visit us, showcasing the vibrancy and charm of Hong Kong and Macao," he noted.



In the northern part of the city, Xia Baolong stopped in at the Qingmao Port and the Macao University of Tourism

(Opposite page) Xia visited the Lin Zexu Memorial Museum of Macao



GOVERNMENT PLEDGES SWIFT ACTION

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai responded to Xia's visit with a pledge to act decisively in key areas the director had highlighted, particularly in pushing forward the SAR's economic diversification agenda – an issue he described as pressing – and advancing development in the Cooperation Zone. He acknowledged the need for Macao's business sector to align business growth with the prosperity of the SAR and the development of the country.

At a press conference, Sam noted the need to advance major infrastructural projects in order to see them generate fresh momentum for Macao's economic transformation. The chief executive also announced plans for a joint government-business delegation from Macao to visit Portugal and Spain in the near future, with the aim of expanding opportunities in both Portuguese and Spanish-speaking markets while welcoming investment and talent from around the world. Furthermore, he committed to fostering patriotic

community groups and supporting youth development. "The Government is confident that under the central authorities' strong leadership and with substantial support from the State Council's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, and the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the [Macao] SAR, Macao will leverage its unique positioning and distinctive advantages; effectively implement all the central authorities' policies that benefit Macao; and consolidate cross-sectoral collaboration," Sam said. ●

Centuries-old A-Ma Temple was also on the director's itinerary

(Opposite page, top) Xia Baolong (centre) visited several museums while in Macao. Here, he learns about aspects of the city's maritime history

(Opposite page, bottom) Xia during a meeting with representatives of Macao's industrial and commercial sectors



Image courtesy of Embassy of China in Lisbon, Portugal

Q&A

Partners in Progress

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHINA'S AMBASSADOR TO PORTUGAL

Ambassador Zhao Bentang on China and Portugal's shared commitment to economic globalisation, trade liberalisation and a rules-based international order that benefits all.

Text **Fei Pou Lou**

Zhao Bentang became China's ambassador to Portugal in 2021, taking over from the man who now heads the Chinese mission to the EU, Cai Run

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Sino-Portuguese comprehensive strategic partnership and the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the European Union (EU); ties forged in 1975 with the EU's predecessor, the European Economic Community (EEC).

In an interview with *Macao* magazine, Chinese Ambassador to Portugal Zhao Bentang highlights China's major investments in Portugal – from the making of lithium batteries to producing fine wine – and emphasises how closer ties between China, Portugal and the EU can help protect global stability amid turbulent times.

How has Chinese investment in Portugal evolved over the years?

Chinese companies entered the Portuguese market on a large scale during the European debt crisis [which began in 2009 and lasted until the mid-2010s].

According to the central bank of Portugal, China's foreign direct investment in Portugal reached US\$4.46 billion in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 9.32 percent. It's seen a 4.5-fold increase over the past decade, and 14 consecutive years of positive growth. Portugal ranks among the EU countries receiving the most Chinese investment per capita.

Where are Chinese companies investing in the country?

More than 30 Chinese enterprises are active in Portugal across sectors as diverse as energy, finance, insurance, healthcare, communications, water, manufacturing, construction, aviation, aquaculture and catering. Through this, they contribute positively to Portugal's economic and social development. Chinese companies are known for respecting local laws and fulfilling their social responsibilities. They have built a positive image for themselves, which has been recognised by the Portuguese government and public.

We, as representatives of China's government, encourage greenfield investments, particularly in the new energy sector. For instance, China Aviation Lithium Battery (CALB) has invested more than US\$2 billion in a lithium battery production facility at Sines Port, about 100 kilometres south of Lisbon.

The factory is expected to create 1,800 direct jobs once its first phase is operational in 2028 and add 4 percent to Portugal's gross domestic product when fully operational. It will also fill a major industrial gap by taking advantage of local lithium deposits, helping Portugal cover electric vehicle batteries' whole value chain.

What new Chinese investments are on the horizon?

Hengtong Group, China's largest power and fiber optic cable manufacturer, plans to establish an undersea cable manufacturing hub at Aveiro Port, about 70 kilometres south of Porto – while the Jiangsu Aosheng Composite Materials Hi-Tech Company wants to build a carbon fiber composite plant for wind turbine blades in Valongo,



China's embassy in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, where Zhao is based

(Opposite page)
A Macao couple were among China's early investors in Portugal, buying a picturesque vineyard outside Lisbon in 2015

slightly inland of Porto. These projects support Portugal's clean energy ambitions, expand exports and optimise the country's economic structure.

We also encourage partnerships between Chinese and local companies to leverage Portugal's strong links within other Portuguese-speaking countries, opening new avenues in third-party markets.

How is trade tracking between the two countries?

In 2024, trade between China and Portugal reached US\$9.65 billion. Chinese exports to Portugal grew by 5.57 percent, totaling US\$6.75 billion, while Portuguese exports to China increased by 8.9 percent, reaching US\$3.17 billion.

Portugal's high quality agricultural products will continue to see their exports grow in China, and green cooperation will be one of the main focuses going forward. Companies from both countries will intensify cooperation in the development of renewable energy projects, such as

Portugal's offshore wind energy projects and photovoltaic plants.

In terms of economic and trade cooperation platforms, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and organisers of the Canton Fair visited Portugal this year to promote their initiatives. They invited the Portuguese government, business associations and companies to engage in face-to-face meetings with their Chinese counterparts.

As in previous years, the Chinese side also extended invitations to the Portuguese government and relevant enterprises to participate in the 8th China International Import Expo (CIIE), scheduled for November. Portugal has participated in all seven previous editions of the CIIE and has established a national pavilion on six occasions. At last year's expo, the Portuguese Food Products Association (PortugalFoods) led a delegation of 12 companies. The strong media coverage in China significantly boosted awareness and appreciation of Portuguese culture and food products.



STRENGTHENING CHINA-PORTUGAL RELATIONS THROUGH WINE



Many Chinese investors have made their mark in Portugal, but few have had the same impact as the late Wu Zhiwei, a businessman and philanthropist from Macao. He bought the Portuguese wine estate Quinta da Marmeleira in 2015, and its red and white wines have been sold since 2018. Today, they are served in top restaurants in Macao and major cities across the mainland.

Wu's Macao-born wife, Lao Chao Peng, has been an integral part of the project since the start and assumed its leadership following Wu's death, in January 2024. Her aim is to further solidify the vineyard, located near Lisbon, as a venture "promoting the deep integration of green agriculture, tourism and leisure industries." The idea is to attract tourists from China and beyond to Portugal, where they can experience the country's unique culture.

"Marmeleira has become a comprehensive enterprise with wine production and sales, hotel catering, tourism and leisure, cultural and creative industries", Lao tells *Macao* magazine.

Quinta da Marmeleira regularly participates in major exhibitions in Macao, as well as in cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Hainan and Guangzhou, promoting its fine Portuguese wines to high-end consumers. These wines are also available year-round via major e-commerce platforms in the mainland.

Wu's company and family remain deeply rooted in Portugal, particularly in the Alenquer region. Lao sees Alenquer as having "considerable potential for future growth

and development of Macao investors in Portugal." Lao, like her husband, is a firm believer in encouraging Chinese investments in Portugal.

"The Portuguese people are hospitable and have good relations with overseas Chinese in Portugal, and they are very tolerant and supportive of foreign investors," she says, adding that the country's beautiful scenery, rich culture and excellent culinary scene contribute to its appeal as an investment destination.

After Wu's death, the Portuguese government posthumously awarded him the Merit Medal for strengthening ties between Portugal and China. Wu had been the Portuguese Speaking Countries Community Business Confederation's first special representative to China, and served as vice-president of the Portuguese Chamber of Commerce in China.

This past March, in further recognition of Wu's commitment to Portugal, Portuguese Minister of State and Foreign Affairs Paulo Rangel, met with the late businessman's family during his visit to Macao – following his time in the mainland. Rangel praised Wu's vision and cited Quinta da Marmeleira as a strong example of how business initiatives can foster closer ties between China and Portugal.

Quinta da Marmeleira currently corks over 300,000 bottles of wine a year, with 65 percent of them being sold in the Chinese and Southeast Asian markets.

What was the significance of Portugal's Minister of State and Foreign Affairs Paulo Rangel's recent visit to China?

Foreign Minister Rangel was the first European foreign minister to visit China [both Beijing and Macao] after this year's 'Two Sessions' [the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference] in March. The Portuguese party reaffirmed its support for the 'One China' policy and the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle.

During the visit, both sides held a strategic dialogue covering trade, science and technology, culture and education. Renewable energy cooperation emerged as a focus area for practical cooperation, promoting the advancement of concrete collaborative projects and giving new impetus to collaborative development between the two countries.

The minister also visited universities, research centres and other educational institutions, strengthening bilateral cooperation, promoting closer cultural exchanges and bringing people from both sides closer together.

How can China and Portugal navigate volatility in the current global economy?

China and Europe, including Portugal, are strong advocates of economic globalisation and trade liberalisation, as well as firm supporters of the World Trade Organization (WTO). China remains committed to promoting an equal and orderly multipolar world and equitable global economic integration. European Union leaders have emphasised that a well-functioning global economy relies on stability and predictability.

While we must acknowledge that protectionism, unilateralism and anti-globalisation trends are gradually increasing, China believes that cooperation and development remain the dominant global currents. We remain committed to opening up to the outside world, and to our intention to share this vast market and create new opportunities with all countries.

In this spirit, China is willing to maintain its partnerships with Portugal, other European countries and the broader international community to increase cooperation and deepen economic and trade relations. This includes not only defending the legitimate interests of all parties but also jointly upholding international trade rules, fairness and justice.

We also trust that Portugal and other European nations will continue to offer a fair and equitable business environment for Chinese enterprises, enabling both sides to advance together for mutual benefit. ●



Portugal's Minister of State and Foreign Affairs Paulo Rangel (left) met with Lao Chao Peng while in Macao, recognising the influential role of her late husband and Quinta da Marmeleira



Franciso Leandro is a Macao-based scholar and expert in international relations regarding China and the Portuguese-speaking world

Macao's unique Sino-Luso history, strategic location within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and relationship with neighbouring Hengqin island are contributing to its economic growth

PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Macao's Path to Global Prosperity

By leveraging its unique positions both in China and the Portuguese-speaking world, the Macao Special Administrative Region (SAR) can achieve sustainable diversification while contributing to broader goals of national development.

Text **Francisco Leandro**, Associate Professor University of Macau

Macao is strategically advancing its role as a platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs), in full alignment with President Xi Jinping's vision of openness, shared advantages and international cooperation. This is evidenced by its emergence as a commercial and trade services hub for PSCs' small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) engaging with China; a food distribution centre for products from PSCs; and a convention and exhibition centre promoting economic and trade cooperation between China, PSCs and the SAR.

The process of getting there has seen Macao leverage its unique historical ties and geographic advantages to facilitate cultural, economic and trade exchanges while adopting a pragmatic approach to innovation and economic diversification. Innovation is a collective goal in the SAR, requiring active participation from the government and all sectors of society, guided by national policies and frameworks. This collaborative approach ensures that innovation is not just a top-down directive but a shared vision embraced by businesses, educational institutions and the general public.





Moderate economic diversification, meanwhile, remains a top priority for Macao's government. Its '1+4' appropriate economic diversification strategy has integrated tourism remaining as the city's core driver of gross domestic product while supporting four emerging industries' development. These are namely big health (incorporating traditional Chinese medicine and wellness tourism), modern financial services, high and new technologies, and MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) plus large-scale cultural and sporting events

The strategy is closely aligned with Macao's ongoing integration within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the development of the Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. The GBA, which includes major cities like Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, offers a vast market and numerous opportunities for collaboration:

further GBA integration will see Macao tapping into a far larger pool of resources, talent and technological advancements. Similarly, Hengqin provides a strategic location for the SAR to expand its economic activities and foster innovation.

10 PRIORITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

I see 10 key priorities for Macao in the coming years.

1. Investing in education, skills development and people-to-people exchange

A skilled workforce is essential for economic diversification. Expanding educational opportunities, particularly for students from PSCs, and fostering bilingualism will strengthen Macao's global competitiveness. Establishing an innovation fund, supported by the SAR's concessionaires, can drive academic research and entrepreneurship.

2. Modernising Macao through e-governance and digital infrastructure

Investing in high-speed internet and smart city technologies, including Internet of Things (IoT) sensors, smart grids and intelligent transportation, will enhance urban management and quality of life. A robust e-governance system should offer online services such as business registration, tax filing and public service applications, supported by a secure digital identity framework. Digital literacy programmes and public awareness campaigns will ensure accessibility for all residents.

Additionally, leveraging data analytics and open data initiatives will improve decision-making, while strong cybersecurity measures will safeguard sensitive information.

3. Strengthening public-private partnerships for sustainable development

Collaboration between government and industry is key to fostering economic diversification. Investment in renewable energy at micro and community levels can reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Establishing technology and innovation hubs, particularly in Hengqin, will attract startups and tech enterprises from China and PSCs. Expanding healthcare

infrastructure and biotechnology research will also create new economic opportunities and improve public health.

4. Linking research and development (R&D) to SMEs

Targeted financial and technical support for SMEs will stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation. Encouraging e-commerce, mediation and arbitration services, alongside cultural and business events, will facilitate informal networking and business expansion. Joint incubation programmes between China and PSCs can further enhance cross-regional collaboration. Investing in SME-focused R&D will drive the creation of new industries and competitive market solutions.



Guangdong Province's capital, Guangzhou, is a major economic hub within the Greater Bay Area

(Opposite page) Macao serves as an exchange platform between China and the nine Portuguese-speaking countries, namely Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, Portugal, São Tomé and Príncipe and Timor-Leste (represented here by their national flags)

5. Enhancing infrastructure for regional connectivity

Developing transport, communication and energy infrastructure is crucial for regional integration. Strengthening air and maritime links between Macao, the GBA and PSCs will boost tourism and trade. Expanding Macau International Airport and increasing direct flights will enhance accessibility, while upgrading port facilities will improve cargo handling and streamline logistics. Accelerating the rollout of 5G technology and fiber-optic networks will facilitate seamless digital communication. Advanced logistics and supply chain management, including automation and digital tracking, will improve efficiency and support diverse industries.

6. Developing creative industries and media exchange

Investing in arts, culture and entertainment will diversify the economy and strengthen Macao’s cultural identity. Increased funding for museums, art galleries and music conservatories alongside large-scale cultural festivals, will enhance regional cultural engagement. Cross-boundary collaborations in film, theatre and media production will showcase shared heritage and attract wider audiences. Media partnerships between Macao and PSC organisations will facilitate content exchange and professional development, while digital platforms will promote local cultural narratives internationally.



The Guangdong-Macao Intensive Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (left) gives the SAR (right) the space it needs to spread out and diversify its economy

Xinhua News Agency

Macao’s Diversification Roadmap

Focus Areas	Greater Bay Area – Henqin – Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs)		
National Policies	Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative		
Local Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘One Base’ for exchange and cooperation• Macao’s ‘1+4’ – ‘One centre’ for integrated tourism and leisure, while promoting the growth of four key industries• Macao’s ‘1+3’ – ‘One platform’ for economic and trade cooperation between China and PSCs, facilitating trade, investment and cultural exchange		
Key Actions			
Key Agents	SAR Government		Policies, planning, incentives, coordination, legislation and promoting P2P and sectorial training. Support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Attract foreign direct investment (FDI)
	Forum Macao		Encourage the China-PSC relationship (ministerial conferences). Promote P2P and sectorial training
	Higher education institutes Universities		Promote research and development (R&D), education, networking – develop human capital – new skills
	Great market operators	Macau International Airport & CAM	Adjust flights destinations and procedures
		TDM & CTM	Train, share and connect
		Gaming concessionaires	Train, implement and fund
	Private entities	Banking and insurance	Network, fund, facilitate and create new solutions
		Investment societies	Create and implement new solutions. Invest in multiple sectors
		Enterprises	Networking and on job training – develop human capital – new skills
Key Drivers	Holistic – Innovation – Openness		
Key Principles	E-governance and digitalisation; facilitation and circulation of capital; simplification of circulation of people, namely tourism; facilitation of circulation of information; support to innovation, language skills, education and entrepreneurship; fight against tax evasion and avoiding double taxation; nonjudicial mediation of commercial conflicts		

Source: Author

7. Advancing financial services and digital finance

Expanding financial products, including loans, insurance and investment funds, will support businesses of all sizes. Strong regulatory frameworks will ensure stability, transparency and investor confidence. Financial literacy programmes will empower residents and businesses to make informed

economic decisions. The introduction of the digital pataca (e-MOP) will streamline transactions and integrate with digital currencies in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, enhancing financial connectivity. Supporting digital infrastructure, e-commerce platforms and cybersecurity initiatives will strengthen Macao’s position as a digital financial hub.



Dave Primov

8. Smart and cooperative tourism development

Tourism growth requires strategic investment in infrastructure and marketing. Expanding the Macao Light Rapid Transit system, upgrading airport facilities and enhancing hospitality services will improve visitor experiences. Developing cultural and recreational attractions, such as museums and theme parks, will diversify tourism offerings. Digital marketing campaigns, partnerships with influencers and collaborative agreements with travel agencies will strengthen global outreach. Simplified visa procedures and streamlined boundary controls will enhance accessibility and encourage regional travel.

9. Enhancing trade policies for economic growth

Infrastructure investments in ports, airports and digital networks will support international trade. Promoting Forum Macao’s role in economic cooperation will strengthen ties with China and PSCs. Increasing engagement with local governments through trade missions and joint projects will maximise the forum’s impact and drive regional economic integration.

10. Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and regulatory reforms

A business-friendly environment is essential for attracting international investment. Incentives such as tax breaks, subsidies and streamlined administrative processes will encourage FDI. Highlighting Macao’s strategic location, skilled workforce and regional market access will enhance its investment appeal. Establishing investment promotion agencies will provide comprehensive support to investors. Regulatory reforms should modernise legal frameworks, simplify licensing and protect intellectual property to ensure a transparent and efficient business environment. Strengthening infrastructure and fostering joint ventures between Macao, the GBA and PSCs will drive sustainable regional development and economic growth.

THE ROLE OF OPENNESS IN MACAO’S FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

A commitment to openness is essential for Macao’s diversification strategy, as it enables the flow of ideas, talent and capital. This in turn is what allows businesses to adopt best practices, tap into global supply chains and leverage advanced technologies.

Openness is multifaceted. Economic openness encourages global investment, trade and financial integration, for instance. Technological openness allows access to cutting-edge innovations and global expertise, while cultural openness fosters mutual understanding and cooperation between diverse communities; that’s the concept of ‘making friends’.

Making friends is incredibly important when building strong, lasting relationships with international partners, leading to sustainable development and mutual prosperity. Indeed, Macao’s ability to establish friendly relations with PSCs based on shared history and heritage speaks to its natural talent for cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy builds the trust and cooperation that is crucial for successful international partnerships.

Guided by Xi’s vision, Macao is embracing an open and pragmatic approach to economic diversification that combines internal strengths, cross-boundary cooperation and global outreach. By consolidating its role as a bridge between China and PSCs, Macao is advancing its own economic transformation and positioning itself as a key player in the GBA while ultimately contributing to China’s broader national development goals. ●



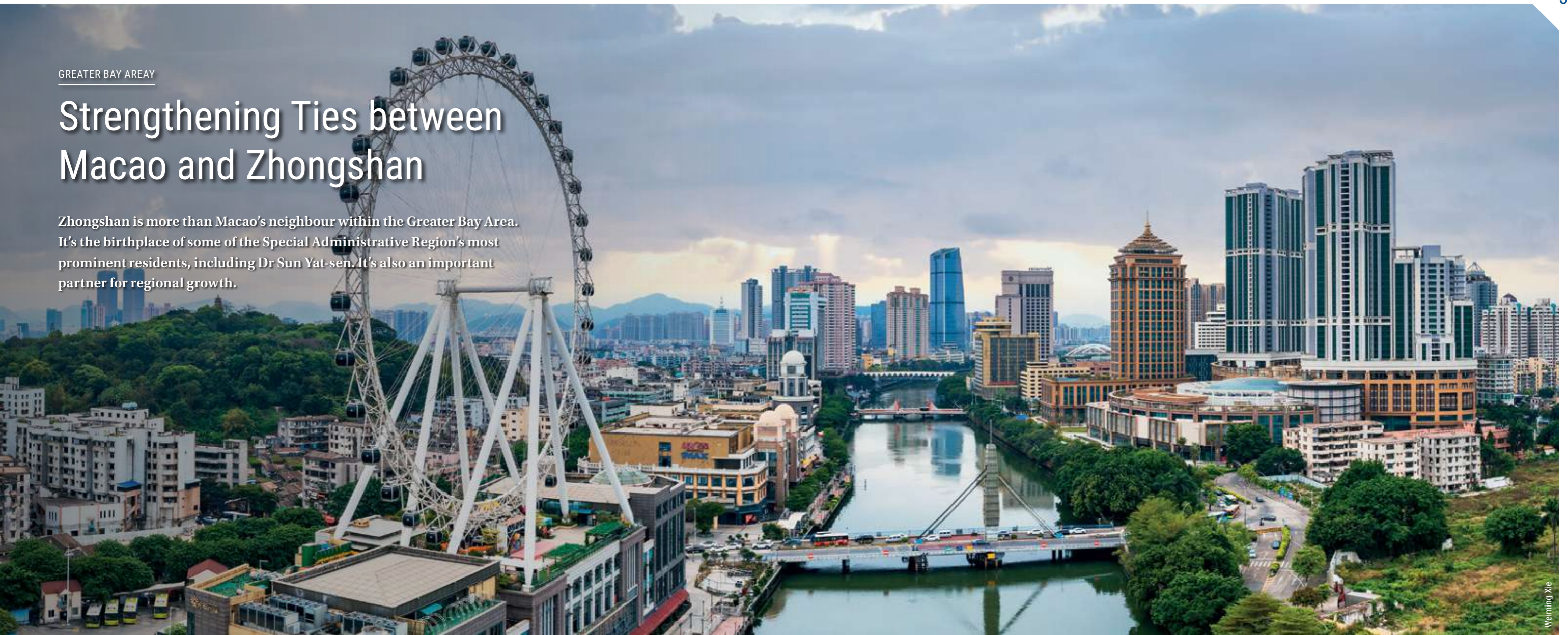
China’s Silicon Valley, Shenzhen is home to many of the mainland’s biggest tech firms

(Opposite page) Hong Kong, Macao’s fellow Special Administrative Region, is known as a financial and aviation hub within the GBA

GREATER BAY AREA

Strengthening Ties between Macao and Zhongshan

Zhongshan is more than Macao's neighbour within the Greater Bay Area. It's the birthplace of some of the Special Administrative Region's most prominent residents, including Dr Sun Yat-sen. It's also an important partner for regional growth.



Weiming Xie

Text **Mark O'Neil**

Straddling the Qijiang River, Zhongshan is home to 4.5 million people and a number of important manufacturing sectors

Just 39 kilometres separate Macao from Zhongshan, a leafy river city in the heart of Guangdong Province. But these two hubs of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) share more than geographical proximity; their historical, cultural and economic connections run incredibly deep. Today, around a quarter of Macao's current residents hail from the mainland city of 4.5 million people.

One of them is Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai, born in Zhongshan

in 1962. Sam, who has dedicated himself to the Special Administrative Region (SAR) for the past 30-odd years, is proactively strengthening ties between the two cities. Zhongshan was part of his three-city tour of Guangdong Province in late April, when he and a delegation from Macao met with Secretary of the Zhongshan Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and Chairperson of the Zhongshan Municipal People's Congress Standing Committee Guo Wenhai.

At that meeting, Sam highlighted Macao and Zhongshan's complementary strengths in their respective health industries. In particular, he noted that traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a promising emerging sector in the SAR, while Zhongshan is a well-established hub for biopharmaceuticals. The chief executive raised the possibility of establishing a demonstration centre in Zhongshan for "Macao formulas, Guangdong production" to facilitate the integrated development of healthcare within the GBA.

Sam and Guo also met a month prior, at Government Headquarters in Macao.

There, they discussed ways of strengthening cooperation between the two regions. Areas examined included the economy and trade, biomedicine, culture and tourism, advanced technology, and higher education. They reflected on Macao and Zhongshan's already very positive relationship, and Sam shared his hope that enterprises from the latter would further leverage Macao as a platform for commercial cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries (PSCs) – expanding the nation's trade and investment relations around the world in the process.

A MANUFACTURING POWERHOUSE

Indeed, Zhongshan offers plenty of scope for commercial collaboration. Known as one of the ‘Four Little Tigers’ of Guangdong (alongside Dongguan, Nanhai and Shunde), the city boasts a vibrant economy led by several pillars of strategic manufacturing. Sectors include household appliances, lighting, hardware, electronics, mahogany and rosewood furniture, and textiles. Zhongshan has developed specialised industrial clusters in its various districts: Dachong is dubbed ‘China’s Cowboy Clothing Town’ for its denim output, for example, while Guzhen is renowned as the country’s ‘Lighting Capital.’

The three biggest companies headquartered in Zhongshan are motor-maker Broad-Ocean, whose products are widely used in household appliances, and two chemicals giants, Hawley & Hazel Chemical and Lanju. Hawley & Hazel is best-known for its toothpastes; Lanju for its mosquito repellents.

While the Chinese home appliance giants Midea and TCL are headquartered elsewhere, their production centres are in Zhongshan. These contribute significantly to the city’s robust export figures, which hit a record 249.14 billion



Image courtesy of China Daily

yuan (US\$34.13 billion) last year – a 12.6-percent increase from 2023. According to official statistics, home appliances exports saw year-on-year growth of 20.6 percent in 2024 and accounted for 26.2 percent of Zhongshan’s total exports.

Exports to emerging markets showed particularly significant increases, with double-digit growth to countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative (which includes several PSCs), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China’s fellow BRICS members. Notably, Zhongshan’s exports to Latin American markets surged by 32.4 percent last year, with Brazil – the world’s

Household appliances are a major Zhongshan export. Here, a factory employee works on the production line for a model of helium refrigerator

(Below) The Shenzhen–Zhongshan Link has dramatically cut travel times between its namesake cities



Bill Wei

Government Information Bureau



Macao Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai (left) and top Zhongshan official Guo Wenhui, pictured together in Zhongshan, are committed to furthering collaboration efforts between their respective cities

largest PSC – experiencing explosive growth of 67.1 percent (second only to Peru in the region).

BUILDING BRIDGES – LITERALLY

At Sam and Guo’s meeting in March, Macao’s leader highlighted recent improvements in transportation links within the GBA facilitating greater regional integration and intra-regional visitor flow. One milestone is the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, which marks the one-year anniversary of its inauguration this month. This 24-kilometre mega-crossing – featuring two bridges, two artificial islands, and an underwater tunnel – has slashed travel time between Zhongshan and Shenzhen from two hours to just 30 minutes.

Driving between Macao and Zhongshan, meanwhile, takes around 45 minutes. Since January, a new ferry service has added further convenience, operating two round

trips daily between Macao’s Taipa Ferry Terminal and Zhongshan Passenger Port. The journey by sea takes around 50 minutes. These transport upgrades are part of the GBA’s broader vision to create a “one-hour living circle” through a comprehensive, interconnected transit network.

A TRI-CITY TOURISM ALLIANCE

Also in March, the tourism offices of Macao, the SAR’s neighbouring Chinese mainland city of Zhuhai and Zhongshan held their annual summit (the three form a tourism alliance established in 2006). Discussions centred around joint branding strategies, expanding visitor markets through multi-destination travel packages and updates to their shared guide for foodies, *A Handbook of Gastronomy in Zhongshan, Zhuhai and Macao*.

The summit, chaired by Macao Government Tourism Office (MGTO)

Director Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, took place in Zhongshan. In attendance were Zhong Guohuai, director of the Zhuhai Tourism Development Centre, and Huang Jianmin, head of Zhongshan’s Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism Bureau.

While international visitor sources – particularly from Southeast Asia – were a key focus, domestic tourism was also examined. Infrastructure projects like the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and the Shenzhen-Zhongshan Link, coupled with looser entry-exit rules between the mainland and the SARs, have made cross-boundary travel easier for travellers. New multiple-entry permits for residents of Zhuhai, Hengqin and Shenzhen, as well as the northbound travel scheme for Macao and Hong Kong residents visiting the mainland, have further boosted inter-regional mobility since the start of this year.



Cheong Kam Ka

Mainlanders, including many from Zhongshan, make up the vast bulk of Macao's visitor numbers. They flock to the SAR to experience its vibrant dining scene, unique blend of Chinese and European culture, and world-class integrated resorts. Conversely, many Macao residents enjoy Zhongshan's recreational offerings and some have even bought second homes there. Golf is one significant drawcard: the 36-hole Zhongshan Hot Spring Golf Club, with courses designed by US sporting legends Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer, is a favourite among Macao visitors. Located in Sanxiang Town, it was the first golf club established in the Chinese mainland.

Different parts of Zhongshan also draw food lovers from near and far with local specialities. Shiqi district is famed for its namesake roasted pigeon and Huangpu for its traditional cured meats; Nanlang, meanwhile, is known for delicious crab dishes and Dongsheng is celebrated for its crispy grass carp. Xiaolan Town, nicknamed 'Chrysanthemum City', serves up fragrant desserts made with the flower that has come to define its local culture.

Many of Zhongshan's most iconic attractions, however, relate to the city's most famous resident: Dr Sun Yat-sen, known as a great pioneer of democratic revolution in modern China. Originally called Xiangshan, the city was renamed Zhongshan in 1925 to honour his legacy. Born in 1866, Sun is known as Sun Zhongshan, the Mandarin version of his name, in the mainland. Many of the great man's admirers visit the Museum of Dr Sun Yat-sen in Cuiheng village (part of modern-day Zhongshan), where Sun spent

his early years. The sprawling site includes his childhood home, a memorial hall, a folk house exhibition and a farming exhibition.

Another key site is the Sunwen Xi pedestrian street, which has been designated a national tourism and leisure block. This vibrant thoroughfare features many well-preserved historic buildings housing upscale boutiques. Sun Wen was another name the doctor-turned-revolutionary was known by.

SHARING SUN YAT-SEN'S LEGACY

Sun is one of many human ties between Macao and Zhongshan: he resided in both cities at different times in his life. After attending secondary school in the Kingdom of Hawaii (now part of the US) and studying medicine in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, Sun moved to Macao to work as a physician at Kiang Wu Hospital in 1892. He was the first Chinese person in the city to practise Western medicine. While Sun's time in Macao was short at just 16 months, his ties to the city were already strong and remained so. His father worked in a shoe shop here in the years preceding Sun's birth, and Sun's first wife, Lu Muzhen, later lived in Macao for decades with two of the couple's three children. Their Moorish-style mansion near Guia Hill was converted into the Sun Yat-sen Memorial House in 1958. Today, the museum offers a fascinating window into the life of the revolutionary through artefacts and photography.

To mark the 100th anniversary of Sun's death in 1925, the governments of Macao, Hong Kong and Guangdong have jointly organised an exhibition celebrating his life. Featuring over 100 historic items and photographs, it



Jack Hong

opened in March at the Museum of Dr Sun Yat-sen in Zhongshan. August will see the exhibition relocate to Macao, before heading to Hong Kong at the end of the year.

ENDURING TIES AND FUTURE COOPERATION

Human connections past and present lay the groundwork for future cooperation between Macao and Zhongshan. Beyond Sun and Sam, tens of thousands of Zhongshan-born residents now call Macao home, while organisations like the Macao Zhongshan Minzhong Communal Friendship Association help maintain these links. Its current chairman, Lou Sai Hou, welcomed a delegation from the Zhongshan Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC) earlier this year.

"Since our association was set up, we have promoted the love of Macao and of the country, serving our fellow Zhongshan people and providing welfare to them," he told local Chinese media at the time. "We've encouraged our members to be active and innovative and earn the recognition of all sectors of society."

Zhuang Shujun, chairman of the CPPCC Zhongshan Municipal Committee, has described Zhongshan and Macao as close neighbours with an excellent foundation of cooperation and frequent contact. He noted that Zhongshan's people were eagerly taking part in the construction of China's flourishing southern megalopolis, the GBA, which included their contributions in Macao. Indeed, the relationship between the two cities serves as an important part of regional development, modernising and strengthening the country as a whole. ●

Macao's museum dedicated to the doctor-turned revolutionary: the Sun Yat-sen Memorial House

(Opposite page) The imposing statue of Zhongshan's most famous son, Sun Yat-sen, in the city's Sun Wen Memorial Park



SPORTS

Skateboarding Finds its Footing in Macao

Macao saw two new skateparks open in March alone, and one has already hosted the Greater Bay Area’s first international skateboarding competition. Local skater Diogo de Sousa Silverio hopes this momentum will inspire young talent and cement the sport’s place in the city.

Text **Erico Dias**
Photos courtesy of **City of Dreams** and **Diogo de Sousa Silverio**

Macao is working to position itself as a destination for regional and international skateboarding competitions

Once dismissed as a rebellious pastime, skateboarding has morphed into a global cultural force and respected competitive discipline. Its inclusion in the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games – delayed until 2021 – cemented its status as a bona fide sport merging athleticism with personal expression.

Macao appears to have taken note: all three of its official skateparks have opened since skateboarding’s Olympic debut, though locals have long been practising their tricks in public areas like Praça da Amizade and the Macau Tower. The city’s first dedicated skatepark, Ride 2 EXIT, opened in late 2021 as an extension of the skateboard shop, EXIT. Then, this past March, two more skateparks launched within eight days of each other. Their arrival signals a growing commitment by local authorities to support the sport’s development.

The Lisboaeta Skatepark held its soft opening at the Lisboaeta H853 Fun Factory, an entertainment and shopping complex in Cotai, on 15 March. Managed by the Macau Skateboarding Sports Culture and Development General Association

(MSSCDGA), the venue hopes to nurture local skateboarders who’ll some day represent Macao on the global stage.

Studio City Sk8te Park followed on 23 March. Also located in Cotai, this rooftop facility celebrated its grand opening with the inaugural SK8TEFest and the finals of the 2025 International Festival of Extreme Sports (FISE) Battle of the Champions. The three-day FISE showdown featured some of the world’s top skateboarders, and was the first event of its kind in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

In a press release, the senior vice president and property general manager at Studio City, Kevin Benning, described the skatepark as an asset for the government’s ‘tourism+’ strategy.

“By bringing world-class sports facilities and major international sporting events to Macao, we aim to strengthen the city as a City of Sports and further reinforce Macao’s positioning as a World Centre of Tourism and Leisure while offering both locals and tourists more diverse entertainment experiences,” he said.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Local skater Diogo de Sousa Silverio sees the new skateparks as game changers for the city’s skaters – who number around 200 – as well as those who’d like to get into the sport. “Having them means everything for the next generation of skateboarders here,” the 30-year-old tells *Macao* magazine. The parks’ street-focused designs feature proper ramps, grind boxes, quarter pipes and rails that provide a safe and structured environment. “[These features will] allow today’s young skaters to progress much faster than we ever could,” Silverio explains.



When Silverio began skating in the mid-2000s, he and his friends improvised on the streets – jumping staircases, tackling inclines and seeking gaps wherever they could find them. “We didn’t have ramps, quarter pipes or any proper obstacles to train on,” he recalls. “As teenagers, having a real skatepark was one of our biggest dreams.”

Sharing streets and squares with the public presented its own challenges, from complaints by pedestrians to clashes with security guards. “Traditionally, skateboarding was viewed as a ‘naughty’ hobby because we had no choice but to practice in public spaces,” Silverio reflects. But the Tokyo Olympics changed people’s perceptions. “Now,

people see skateboarding as a legitimate sport,” he says. “Parents are starting to believe that their skateboard-mad kids could one day become athletes.”

Silverio, who founded MSSCDGA in 2023, works closely with the Lisboeta Skatepark. But that’s just the latest way he’s helping build Macao’s skateboarding community. He and his association have organised many workshops and competitions with the aim of growing the sport from the ground up. These events have utilised makeshift skateparks, constructed out of wood, and included participants from Hong Kong and the mainland. There’s often a ‘sportainment’ quality to skateboarding events, where musicians and DJs are invited to perform – creating a festival-like atmosphere.

A makeshift skatepark used for a Vans-sponsored skateboarding event organised by the Macau Skateboarding Sports Culture and Development General Association in Coloane, back in 2023

Local skater Diogo de Sousa Silverio (left) is heavily involved in improving the facilities and opportunities available to the city’s up-and-coming skateboarders

(Above) A young Silverio perfecting a trick back in the 2010s, years before Macao had a dedicated skatepark





time and skateboarders soon discovered that their curved sides formed ideal playgrounds when empty.

Skateboarding went global in the 1980s, while remaining largely underground. Its spread was aided by handheld video cameras and a wave of iconic films shining a light on the subculture. More mainstream attention followed in the 1990s thanks to emerging extreme sports festivals, many of which were broadcast on television. One of these was FISE, which held its first edition near Montpellier, France, in 1997. Skateboarders joined BMX riders, inline skaters, windsurfers and other extreme athletes in what would become one of the world's premier urban sports festivals.

Skateboarding combines athleticism and creative expression, making it an effective tool for youth development, according to Silverio

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SKATEBOARDING

The world's first skateboarders were surfers in 1950s California. Looking for something to do when the waves were flat, they attached roller-skate wheels to short wooden planks and took these DIY rigs to the streets. But with poor manoeuvrability, early skateboards had limited appeal. That changed in the 1970s, thanks to two pivotal innovations: the kicktail and polyurethane wheels.

Kicktails – the upward-curved ends of skateboard decks – let skaters pop their

boards and pivot with precision, enabling tricks that are now foundational to the sport. Meanwhile, tougher, grippier polyurethane wheels replaced earlier clay versions, dramatically improving control and speed.

These developments made skateboarding much more dynamic, just in time for another factor key to the sport's rise: a prolonged drought in California. In 1977, the state's reservoirs hit record lows, prompting a ban on filling backyard swimming pools. Many Southern Californian homes boasted kidney-shaped pools at that



TOP TALENT ENTERS MACAO

Today, FISE hosts both a central multisport festival in France and a World Series with dedicated competitions in individual sports, including skateboarding. These take place in different locations each year. The model reflects growing professionalism and specialisation across urban sports.

This year, the festival's skateboarding segment played out in Macao. China's Chenxi Cui, a 15-year-old from Jinan, Shandong Province, took the crown in the women's pro division – beating Japan's Funa Nakayama in what one skateboarding media outlet described as a “clash of technical brilliance and jaw-dropping tricks.” Previously, Cui won gold in the women's street skateboarding

event at the 19th Asian Games, in Hangzhou (she was the youngest Chinese gold medalist that year), and came fourth in the same category at last year's Olympic Games. In the men's Battle Of The Champions final, Japan's Ginwoo Onodera defeated Richard Tury from Slovakia.

Having these top international skateboarding talents grace Macao was “incredibly inspiring,” according to Silverio. “Seeing what's possible motivates local skaters to push themselves to the next level.”

He believes events like FISE also broaden public appreciation of the sport, break down cultural barriers and frame skateboarding as a positive force for youth. “It's not just about the skateboarders. These events show the general public what skateboarding is all about and why it

deserves a place in our city's sports and cultural landscape.”

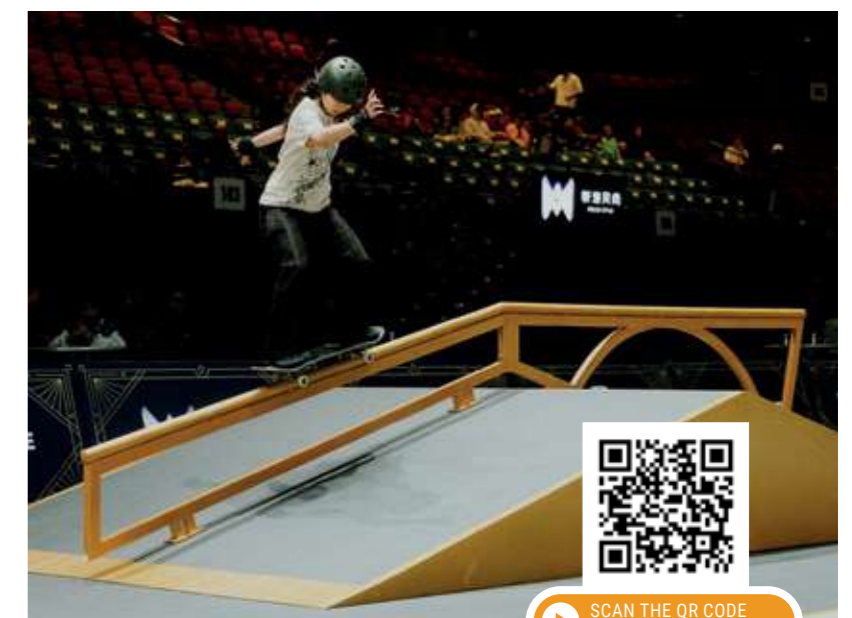
According to Silverio, the Special Administrative Region is currently home to at least one skateboarder who has the potential to compete at the international level. “Our job is to support him and help him achieve his dreams,” he says. Competitive skateboarders are typically very young, often teenagers like Cui. Silverio never had the chance to compete himself, so he sees in this new generation an opportunity to help others achieve what he couldn't.

WHAT NEXT?

With new facilities and increased exposure, it seems Macao's skateboarding community is poised for growth. Silverio and the MSSCDGA are all in, viewing the sport as a powerful tool for youth development. “It's a full-body exercise that improves balance, coordination, and reflexes,” he says. “But more importantly, it's a creative outlet and a way to connect with others.”

The association plans to use the Lisboaeta Skatepark as a training ground and launchpad for emerging talent. Looking further ahead, Silverio would like to see the city become something of a regional hub for urban sports, complete with more skateparks, “skate-friendly” public spaces and regular events.

“Skateboarding in Macao has come a long way since I started in 2007,” he says. “With the support of the community, the government and local businesses, I believe we can take it even further.”



SCAN THE QR CODE
TO WATCH THE VIDEO

As the veteran skater reflects on his own journey, he's grateful for all skateboarding has given him. “Skateboarding has been my go-to activity for most of my life and helped me find my purpose, connect with others, and stay true to myself,” he says. It's also taught him to persevere in the face of challenges. “When you're trying to land a new trick, it takes so many attempts, but you keep going until you get it. That mindset carries over into other aspects of life.” ●

FISE Battle of the Champions was the first international skateboarding competition to take place the Greater Bay Area

The 2025 FISE Battle of the Champions brought world-class skateboarding talent to Macao, and saw China's Chenxi Cui win the women's division



SPORTS

Local Handball Eyes the National Games

Fast-paced and fun to watch, handball remains an emerging sport in Macao. Local proponents see the upcoming National Games as a chance to inspire new talent and prove that even a small team can make a big impact when passion, perseverance and pride meet on the court.





Text **Erico Dias**
Photos **Lei Heong Ieong**

Leong Meng Un is a left-wing player for the Macau Handball team in his final year at the Fong Chong School of Taipa

(Opposite page) He's now in training for the 15th National Games, and looks forward pitting himself against players from around the country

As Macao gears up to co-host China's 15th National Games this November, one of the lesser-known sports on the schedule is hoping for a breakthrough moment. Handball, a high-energy game blending elements of football and basketball, has amassed a small but committed community of players and advocates here in the Special Administrative Region (SAR).

One of its most passionate practitioners is high school senior Leong Meng Un. Currently a left-wing player for the Macau Handball

Team, the 19-year-old rising star has juggled training with studies for the better part of his teenage years and will represent the region on the national stage come November.

"Handball gave me something to strive for," Leong tells *Macao* magazine. "It's made me physically and mentally stronger, more self-disciplined. It's changed my life."

His coach, Wong U Hou, is another handball evangelist. Wong, 40, has led the team for the past three years and is now on a mission to attract younger players, especially

those in primary school. "We need to build a stronger foundation to ensure the sport's future," he says. The National Games, Wong notes, offer a valuable opportunity to raise handball's profile in the SAR – especially if the local team performs well.

HANDBALL – WHAT IS IT, EXACTLY?

Versions of handball have been played in northern Europe since the late 19th century, with the modern indoor format developed in Sweden in 1910. However, the sport has remained decidedly niche outside of places where it's hugely popular. According to the International Handball Federation (IHF), a rather eclectic collection of countries rank handball as their second-most popular sport after football. Think Norway, Germany, Iceland, Romania, Montenegro, Qatar and much of North Africa. Denmark, the current world number one, claimed its fourth consecutive title at the 2025 IHF Men's Handball World Championship in February and also took home gold at the 2024 Olympic Games.

For the uninitiated, handball is played on a large indoor court with seven players per side including the goalkeeper. The objective is to throw a ball into the opposing goal, which resembles what you'd see on a football field. Players pass, dribble and shoot using their hands, with lightning transitions between offense and defense. Their action-packed matches last 60 minutes, split into two halves, and generally result in at least 20 goals per team.





Image courtesy of Leong Meng Un

Leong aims for goal at a test match against Hong Kong's handball team for the 15th National Games

(Opposite page) Coach Wong U Hou wants more kids to get into the sport, but says handball's low profile means they often turn to more familiar games

Handball made its Olympic debut in 1936 in its original outdoor format, which never officially appeared again. The now-dominant indoor version was added to the Games in 1972, when the team from Yugoslavia won gold (the sport remains very popular in former Yugoslavian countries).

So far, it's made modest inroads into East Asia. While the Asian Handball Federation (AHF) was founded back in the mid-1970s, the highest-profile handball win by an East Asian team remains South Korea's gold medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

GROWING HANDBALL IN MACAO

In Macao, the sport is slowly gaining traction under the guidance of the Macau-China Handball Association, particularly at the university level. The University of Macau (UM) runs a 'Beginning Handball' programme, and the annual Macau University Handball Championship also helps with exposure. There are a few dedicated handball courts in the city, but they're not readily available to the public.

Coach Wong would love to see more youth participation. "The shortage of young players creates a talent gap, which could lead to a decline in the overall level of handball in Macao as current athletes retire," he explains. According to Wong, one of the biggest challenges is that students typically gravitate toward familiar sports like basketball, football and badminton. Handball, by contrast, tends to be introduced only in secondary school, if at all.

Wong believes the sport offers plenty of appeal, however. It requires no specialised equipment, the rules are easy to learn and, above all, it's fun.

Watch a game and you'll quickly understand that there's never a dull moment in handball, for players and spectators alike. The sport is physical (with a lot of body contact and jostling), tactical and compelling – even a strong lead can disappear in seconds.

To help build the sport from the ground up, Wong spearheads initiatives that introduce handball to schoolchildren and connect local players and coaches with international training and techniques. He himself discovered handball at school, back in the late 1990s, when a teacher suggested he switch over from basketball.



BALANCING THE CLASSROOM AND COURT

Leong was introduced to the sport at a primary school sports meet in 2018. There, a coach noticed his natural athleticism and suggested handball might be a good fit. Even though Leong had never heard of the game before, he joined the school team with an open mind and quickly developed a passion for it.

At the end of 2021, just 16 years old, Leong was selected for the Macau Handball Team. The transition was intimidating. “The players were the best in Macao, and I was afraid of disrupting their progress,” Leong recalls. But his teammates welcomed him, and Leong’s commitment soon earned their respect.

Leong’s debut match outside of Macao was last year, at the 2024

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area Handball Championship. The team achieved third place.

He trains in the evenings, attending the Fong Chong School of Taipa during the day. “Academics are my priority,” he says. “But I’ve always found ways to make time for training without falling behind in my studies.” Now in his final year of school, Leong balances rigorous training for the National Games with preparations for exams. After he graduates, the athlete plans to attend university while continuing to compete in handball.

While Leong acknowledges that Macao’s handball team is still finding its footing, he says he feels immense pride in representing his hometown. He’s determined to seize every opportunity to grow and compete. “Playing against teams from other regions has shown me how much

The sport is getting more popular among university students in Macao with support from the Macau-China Handball Association

(Opposite page) A lot of action plays out in a handball match, making it a compelling sport for spectators



Image courtesy of Leong Meng Un



room we have to grow,” Leong says. “But this just motivates me to train harder, become stronger and prepare for the National Games.”

‘BUILD A LASTING LEGACY’

The 15th National Games will be jointly hosted by Macao, Hong Kong and Guangdong Province from 9 to 21 November. It will be Macao’s first time co-hosting the event, and local sports officials hope the exposure will not only promote lesser-known sports like handball but also showcase the SAR’s top-tier sporting facilities.

Leong says he’s excited to display his handball skills to a national audience, while Wong sees the Games as a crucial benchmark for the team’s development

and a chance to identify areas for growth. In the lead-up, training is intensifying. Leong and his teammates are working on their physical fitness, cohesion and tactical discipline. “We’re focused on building a solid foundation,” Wong says. “It’s crucial for both individual development and the team’s success.” He also believes the high-stakes environment of the Games will help players build psychological resilience for future international competitions.

Strong results are certainly the goal, but Wong also hopes the Games will inspire the next generation of Macao handball players. “When young players see local teams competing at a major event like this, it motivates them to take part in the sport,” he says. “This is how we build a lasting legacy.” ●

ARTS & CULTURE

Making a Splash

Macao's beloved residency show is back. A new and improved *House of Dancing Water* debuted in May, bringing fresh energy, a new character and high-tech upgrades to the city's theatrical marvel on a swimming pool stage.

Text Sara Santos Silva and Amanda Saxton
Photos courtesy of **House of Dancing Water**

When the curtain rose on the revamped production of *House of Dancing Water*, nearly five years had passed since it had last closed on the original. The return of this legendary aquatic spectacle, which premiered back in 2010, marks another milestone in Macao's emergence as a hub for performing arts. *Macao* magazine attended *House of Dancing Water's* May comeback at Cotai's Dancing Water Theater, where the atmosphere was charged with anticipation.

It's safe to say the new show lives up to the legacy. The production still transports its audience to a mythical kingdom, where they join a romantic voyager on his quest to rescue a princess from the Dark Queen. Its love story still unfolds on a state-of-the-art stage that transforms from a dry platform into a vast pool of water in under a minute. Breathtaking aerial acrobatics and dazzling laser displays still inspire a sense of having witnessed something special. The over 6 million people who saw *The House of Dancing Water* (it has since dropped the definite article) during its wildly popular decade-long run will find much that is familiar. But enough has changed to make the experience feel fresh again, thanks largely to its new artistic director, Giuliano Peparini, a celebrated choreographer and former ballet dancer from Italy.

One of the visually rich show's most riveting scenes involves a set piece called the Human Chandelier





Water is an integral part of the production: not only does it form the stage for much of show, it also falls from the theatre's ceiling

“It has been an extraordinary journey to reimagine *House of Dancing Water*, a show that holds such a special place in the hearts of many,” Peparini said at a press conference after the 7 May premiere, which was attended by government officials, regional celebrities and media from around the world.

In his reimagining, Peparini has introduced a playful new character named Sailor and an entirely new chapter to the storyline. His 90-minute production is also far more high-tech than its predecessor, featuring upgraded light projection systems and digital backdrops that create fluid transitions between underwater realms, enchanted forests and a futuristic cityscape. One of the original show's signature elements, the Golden Boat, has been reengineered with a new hydraulic system allowing it

to glide across the water with remarkable smoothness. The entire musical score, meanwhile, has been reorchestrated and recorded by a full symphony orchestra. Costumes worn by the cast have also undergone updates, with some acquiring a touch of cyberpunk flair. *House of Dancing Water's* performers have always been brilliantly attired: skull masks used in the production have 3,000 Swarovski crystals sewn onto each.

There are nearly 2,000 seats in Dancing Water Theater – a purpose-built theatre-in-the-round located within Studio City – and each offers a magical view of its central stage-cum-pool. The pool itself is a marvel, one of very few of its kind in the world. It holds more than five Olympic-sized swimming pools' worth of water, enabling performers to dive from towering heights and execute

aquatic stunts that flow seamlessly with the show's equally intricate dry-land and aerial choreography. One striking example is the Human Chandelier, a dramatic tableau revived from the original production.

From high above the stage, more than a dozen performers descend together, their bodies arranged like the sparkling pendulogues of a grand chandelier. Another tableau, new to this version of the production, is the haunting Aquarium Cage scene in which Princess Aani appears suspended in a transparent cell – her long dark hair floating like seaweed in the water as her would-be saviour gazes longingly through the glass. The show later injects a jolt of adrenaline via motorbikes, launched high in the air by their riders in gravity-defying displays of bravado. This segment makes for a thrilling contrast to the show's more ethereal moments.

PERFORMING ARTS TAKE CENTRE STAGE

House of Dancing Water's return is emblematic of Macao's increasing focus on residency shows and large-scale concerts, which is happening with encouragement from the government. Elevating the city's profile as a destination for performing arts and entertainment is a key part of Macao's economic diversification strategy and seen as an effective means of attracting tourists. The production now shares the Cotai Strip with another permanent residency show, *Macau 2049* – a tech-driven cultural spectacle created by renowned Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou that launched last December.

Macao's concert calendar is also gaining momentum. This year alone, international acts such as Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, US rockstars Green Day and the South Korean singer Kyuhyun

all graced the city's stages. Hong Kong Cantopop icon Jacky Cheung, meanwhile, is set to perform a series of concerts across June and July.

According to Lawrence Ho, the CEO and chairman of Melco Resorts and Entertainment, *House of Dancing Water* has the potential to “shape Macao into a live performance destination [and support] the government's initiative to sustain Macao's positioning as the World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.”

The show is brought to life each night by a team of nearly 300 cast and crew, including former Olympic athletes, from over 30 countries. Its aquatic stage not only helps blur the line between fantasy and reality, but pushes the skills of its performers and technicians to the limit – making for a truly unforgettable experience in Macao. ●

Flying motorbikes make for a high-octane chapter of *House of Dancing Water*



ARTS & CULTURE

Meet the Keeper of the Earth God

Lo Seng Chung has dedicated much of his life to preserving the folk customs surrounding Tou Tei, revered in Macao as the guardian of land and locality. Earlier this year, his efforts were formally recognised by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**
Photos **Lei Heong Ieong**

Lo Seng Chung traces his devotion to the Earth god back to childhood

Lo Seng Chung's earliest memory of setting foot inside the Foc Tac Temple is as a boy of about 9 years old. Now 65, the businessman recalls following his grandmother through its entrance to pay their respects to Tou Tei, the Earth god in Chinese folklore. This memory isn't just of the rituals they performed that day, Lo tells *Macao* magazine. He can still taste the much-anticipated treat that followed: barbecued pork, prepared as an offering to the deity.

Foc Tac, in Macao's historic Horta da Mitra neighbourhood, has always been a pillar of Lo's world. His grandfather ran a camera shop nearby, and his friends all lived in the area. As time moved on, Lo himself became an integral part of the organisation that manages the temple, the Associação de Beneficência Foc Tac Chi ou Tu Ti Mío de Macau.

In the 1990s, he started organising traditional Cantonese opera shows for Foc Tac's annual Tou Tei festivities – a series of events celebrating the Earth god's birth. The biggest of these is the Feast of Tou Tei, always held on the second day of the second lunar month.

When Lo was made president of the association in 2008, he enlisted his childhood friends – some of them retiring civil servants – and formed a “small but dedicated team” to help him. “Our neighbourhood may be small, but our bond is strong,” he says.

Other examples of Tou Tei customs include burning incense and making offerings to him before launching a new venture or moving house. As president, Lo spearheaded efforts to get traditions like these formally recognised as part of Macao's intangible cultural heritage. This year, he was designated Tou Tei beliefs and customs' ‘representative transmitter’ by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The designation honours his role as a custodian of tradition and the decades he has spent keeping Tou Tei worship alive in modern Macao. For Lo, that work is rooted in what he witnessed growing up. “The Tou Tei customs in Horta da Mitra were always present,” he recalls. “You could see the deity's influence everywhere – on street corners, at shop entrances. It shows how much the people of Macao value him.”



Tou Tei Po, the Earth goddess. Tou Tei's iconic image appears in the Chinese literary classic *Journey to the West*, published during the 16th century, as well as in its many adaptations in film and television.

Macao alone is home to over 160 small altars and tablets dedicated to Tou Tei, and 10 fully fledged temples. Of the three major Tou Tei temples, the oldest was built during the reign of Qianlong Emperor, in the 1700s, in Macao Peninsula's historic Pantane area. The second was established a little further south, in 1868, on Rua do Almirante Sérgio. The Foc Tac Temple is the youngest, built in 1886.

PROTECTING TOU TEI FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

In the 2010s, Lo watched as examples of Macao's intangible cultural heritage, like Cantonese Naamyam (Narrative Songs) and the customs of Na

Tcha, were added to the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list. This motivated him to seek local recognition for Tou Tei.

"We just wanted acknowledgement from the Cultural Affairs Bureau, as our annual festivities attract many participants," he recalls. The association formally announced its intent to push for 'The Belief and Customs of Tou Tei' to be inscribed in Macao's Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 2015 Tou Tei festival.

The approval process took two years and involved extensive documentation, community engagement and meetings with authorities. Finally, in 2017, Tou Tei culture became part of a precious collection of customs, arts, rituals, festivities and crafts safeguarded under Macao's law, ensuring they'll be passed down from generation to generation.

A sprawling complex near Luís de Camões Garden is the oldest major Tou Tei temple in the city

(Opposite page) An alter dedicated to the worship of Tou Tei (the bearded figure on the left) and his consort, Tuo Tei Po

FROM HARVESTS TO HIGH-RISES

Tou Tei traditions have deep agrarian roots in Chinese folklore. In ancient China, people believed that every plot of land had a spiritual guardian controlling its fertility. Over time, these spirits merged into a more formalised deity: the Earth god, who farmers worshipped with offerings and prayers, asking for bountiful harvests and protection from natural disasters. He's called Tou Tei (土地) in Cantonese-speaking regions like Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Macao. Elsewhere in China, he is better known by his Mandarin name, Tudi Gong (土地公).

As Chinese society urbanised, Tou Tei's role expanded beyond agriculture.

He became a guardian not just of land but of homes, businesses, construction sites and entire neighbourhoods. Across the ages, people from all walks of life have sought Tou Tei's aid. Reverence remains especially strong in southern China and among overseas Chinese communities. In Macao, stone tablets and small shrines to Tou Tei can be found at street corners, beneath banyan trees and at the entrances to buildings. Residents these days turn to him for everything from securing safe construction to smoothing squabbles within communities.

Tou Tei is typically depicted as a kindly, bearded old man carrying a walking stick. He is occasionally accompanied by his female counterpart or consort, an elderly woman known as



ONTO THE NATIONAL STAGE

Though it hadn't been the plan at the beginning, Lo and other Tou Tei advocates soon began to dream bigger. Ramping recognition of Macao's Tou Tei customs up to the national level would not only elevate the deity's standing in the country, they reasoned, but help showcase Macao's unique identity.

The three major Tou Tei temples convened. Since any application for national cultural heritage status must come from a single entity, Lo's association was chosen to represent them. He says he feels deeply grateful for the trust placed in him by his peers.

Achieving national recognition is no small feat. To get there, Lo and his team collaborated with the Macao Polytechnic

University's Centre of Sino-Western Cultural Studies, led by the now-retired Professor Jiang Chun, along with the Oral History Association of Macao. Together, they compiled extensive audio interviews, photographs and written records about the beliefs and customs of Tou Tei.

Their collective efforts paid off. In 2021, Tou Tei's cultural legacy was added to the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Lo sees the moment as celebrating the power of small but determined communities, united for a cause.

BIGGER, AND BETTER

Since then, the city's Tou Tei associations have continued to organise community events like Cantonese opera performances and banquets for the elderly.

Having Tou Tei become part of China's national intangible heritage has certainly increased their exposure, says Lo, and that's been a boon for the coffers. Donations come from regular worshippers, local celebrities and figureheads, and the government. "It's a positive cycle – more support leads to better outcomes," he notes. At the most recent Feast of Tou Tei, the Associação de Beneficência Foc Tac Chi ou Tu Ti Mio de Macau set a new record: 105 banquet tables lined the streets, each seating up to a dozen guests.

In an attempt to raise cultural awareness among younger generations, the association has collaborated with local creative brand Veng Lei Laboratory to design a contemporary *fu* talisman featuring Tou Tei. Originating from Taosim, these talismans are

rectangular, yellow pieces of script including incantations and symbols perceived as instructions for deities or spirits.

According to Lo, around 20 young volunteers took part in 2025's annual Tou Tei festivities. He believes their enthusiasm signals a promising shift toward youth involvement in heritage preservation.

This year also saw Lo officially appointed by China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a national-level representative transmitter of intangible cultural heritage – one of just two people from Macao selected in the latest round. A statement issued by the SAR's Cultural Affairs Bureau in March outlined the laborious process behind this special status, and noted that only nine people from Macao have been appointed to date. It highlighted Lo's tireless efforts to keep beliefs and customs of Tou Tei



alive, describing them as providing residents with a “sense of belonging and spiritual connection to the land on which they live” and “an important manifestation of Chinese traditional culture in Macao.”

Lo says it was a deep honour to be a representative transmitter. “I never imagined receiving such a significant title,” he reflects. “Our focus was simply on applying for Macao's intangible cultural heritage; even national recognition was beyond our initial expectations.”

Looking ahead, Lo hopes Tou Tei's legacy will continue to strengthen Macao's sense of community. To maintain this, he believes in preserving Tou Tei traditions through highlighting their cultural significance rather than their religious aspects. By focusing on how the ancient Earth god connects people and reinforces local identity, Lo has faith that Tou Tei will remain relevant to younger generations. ●

As a representative transmitter, Lo continues his work to preserve the beliefs and customs of Tou Tei for future generations

(Opposite page and centre)
Foc Tac Temple in Horta da Mitra holds the biggest Tou Tei festivities in the city



ARTS & CULTURE

A Festive City

Macao doesn't just preserve its heritage – it lives and breathes it. We explore how four of the city's most cherished festivals together embody its distinctive cultural identity.

Text **Don Lei**

Lighting incense for one's ancestors is an integral part of Cheng Ming, or the Tomb-sweeping Festival

The confluence of cultures that's shaped Macao over centuries gives rise to a remarkable calendar of cultural events. Many trace their roots to ancient Chinese customs; others reflect Macao's Portuguese Catholic legacy. Then there are those found nowhere else, festivals that are entirely unique to Macao. Sombre or joyful, all are laden with symbolism, steeped in ritual and unite communities within the city.

Among Macao's many annual festivals, four that took place between 4 April and 5 May stand

out for how clearly they reflect the city's layered identity. Together, Cheng Ming, Easter, the A-Ma Festival and the Festival of the Drunken Dragon help showcase Macao's status as a place where 'Chinese culture is the mainstream and diverse cultures coexist'.

CHENG MING: RECONNECTING WITH OUR ANCESTORS

Once a year, between the end of spring and the start of summer, families carrying

incense, food and paper offerings make their way to Macao's cemeteries. This day is Cheng Ming, also known as the Tomb-Sweeping Festival and the Day of the Departed. It's a time when people pause to demonstrate filial piety by honouring their ancestors and reconnecting with their pasts in a practice dating back millennia in China. Cheng Ming always falls on the 106th day after the Winter Solstice. This year it was 4 April.

Cheng Ming is one of China's 24 Solar Terms, which began in

the Western Han dynasty. They are based on the movements of the Big Dipper and part of the Chinese 'Xia Calendar'. In 2016, the Solar Terms were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Cheng Ming, meanwhile, is listed as a part of Macao's own intangible cultural heritage. According to Ieong Hoi Keng, president of the Macau Documentation and Information Society, its name refers to a period when "all things are clear and bright."

Traditionally, Cheng Ming involves cleaning and weeding the graves of relatives. Offerings – including the occasional model car – are supposed to be items useful the afterlife. Food is a big thing, from roast chickens to fruits, and many families end up feasting in the cemetery with their late loved ones. Willow branches are another popular offering. Their new leaves unfurl early, a symbol of vitality and the idea that memories of ancestors will always be in our hearts.



Ieong notes that while the spirit of Cheng Ming remains strong in Macao, modern life can change how it plays out. Limited space in the city means cremation is increasingly common, with people's ashes being kept in columbaria (walls of compartments that hold urns). And, with fewer extended families living together, younger generations aren't learning the full range of Cheng Ming rituals. These days, many people opt for more low-key forms of remembrance like laying flowers or lighting incense. While Ieong would love Cheng Ming to maintain its traditional, elaborate

format, she accepts the evolution. "I believe that as long as there is respect for ancestors, it is still a form of heritage," she says.

EASTER: THE MOST IMPORTANT HOLIDAY IN THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR

The Easter period is also about remembrance. In its case, of Jesus Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. With 450 years of Catholic history and many beautifully preserved churches, Macao is a meaningful place to celebrate Easter. While the Special Administrative Region designates two

days of Easter as public holidays – Good Friday and Easter Saturday (this year they fell on 18 and 19 April) – the city's devout follow four days of religious observance. Director of the Diocesan Catholic Education Commission Chan Teng Fong says that every Catholic church in the city holds Masses from Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday. Thursday's marks the Last Supper, when the Bible says Jesus dined with his disciples for the final time. In this ceremony, a priest selects 12 parishioners and washes their feet, according to Chan. The act symbolises humility and service to others, he explains.

Good Friday marks the day of crucifixion and its name reflects the belief that Jesus died for humanity's sins. In Macao, Jesus' sacrifice is commemorated with the Procession of the Dead Lord. Starting at the Macau Cathedral, members of the church carry statues of the cross, Jesus' body and his mother, Mary, on a short circuit through the old city. It's a very solemn ritual and many Catholics fast on this day. According to Chan, traditional fasting rules mean eating only one full meal, avoiding red meat, and keeping any other food to small snacks. Some, like Chan himself, choose to eat only vegetarian food for the entire day as a sign of reverence.

(Opposite page) Many Macao residents wind up in a columbarium rather than a cemetery these days, which has led to simpler Cheng Ming rituals

The Procession of the Dead Lord takes place every Easter in Macao, to commemorate Jesus' crucifixion



Holy Saturday is a time of waiting and reflection, with sombre Easter Vigils taking place within the city's churches that evening. Then comes Easter Sunday, the main event: a celebration of Jesus' return to life and entrance into heaven. Macao's Catholics flock back to church for a far more festive Mass, where priests wear white and gold vestments.

As for popular Easter symbols like eggs and rabbits, Chan notes that while these don't originate from Catholic rituals, they have become widely associated with the festival, much like Santa Claus with Christmas. According to Chan, the Church accepts them as part of a broader cultural landscape surrounding the holiday.

A-MA FESTIVAL: HONOURING THE GODDESS OF SEAFARERS

This year's A-Ma Festival, which always falls on the 23rd day of the 3rd lunar month, coincided with Easter Sunday – evidence of just how crowded Macao's festive calendar can get. It's an entirely local celebration that evolved from indigenous fishermen's reverence for the goddess A-Ma (also known as Tin Hau). As legend has it, A-Ma would protect fishermen at sea during storms. To thank her, they built temples in her honour – including one that dates back to the late 1400s, located halfway up Macao Peninsula's Barra Hill.



The A-Ma Temple, in Barra, is one of the oldest structures in Macao and pre-dates the arrival of Europeans

(Bottom) Traditional lion dances are a key part of the city's annual A-Ma festivities

(Opposite page) Cantonese operas have been performed to honour the Goddess of Seafarers since the mid-1800s

This is the site of the A-Ma festival: five days of banquets, lion dances and 'Cantonese Opera to Appease the Gods', organised by the Chinese Opera Association of Terrestrial and Maritime Dwellers of Barra. The entity is in charge of preserving A-Ma beliefs and customs in Macao, which have been inscribed as part of China's National Intangible Heritage.

Its president, Chan Kin Chun, has been intimately involved in annual A-Ma activities for almost 40 years. But the 77-year-old likes to point out that Macao people have been "following our ancestors' ways to celebrate the A-Ma Festival for centuries."

This year saw 85 tables laid for an annual banquet feeding more than 1,000 people. To accommodate the Cantonese opera performances – a key part of the celebrations since 1863 – in Barra Square, a massive theatre was built out of bamboo over the course of a month. Positioned to face a statue of A-Ma, Chan quips that the goddess enjoyed an excellent view of the shows. Nine different Cantonese operas are staged during the festival, with theatre troupes invited from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong. Chan says that each show "brings joy for both the goddess and the people."



FESTIVAL OF THE DRUNKEN DRAGON: MERRYMAKING WITH A MYSTICAL TWIST

Another local celebration with roots in fishing culture is the Festival of the Drunken Dragon, dating back to at least the Ming dynasty. It's held on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month, which this year was 5 May. The festival's true origin has been lost to the mists of time, but one story holds that it began during a plague in Xiangshan District (today's Zhongshan, Zhuhai and Macao).

As that legend has it, a monk cut an enormous snake into three pieces and threw them in a nearby river. Instead of sinking into the water, however, the snake's remains are said to have flown into the sky – while afflicted fishermen who drank from the river are said to have recovered

their health. Believing a celestial dragon (or *loong* in Chinese) had intervened to stop the plague, local fishermen thanked it by throwing what's become a boisterous annual party – one that appears to have embraced spirited inebriation from the get-go.

Regardless of how exactly it began, the 'Drunken Dragon' is deeply beloved in Macao. Each year, the Macao Fishmongers Association organises the three-part festival in its honour, kicking off with a Poon Choi Feast on the 7th day of the 4th lunar month. This type of meal is traditional in parts of southern China: it refers to layers of high-quality meats, seafood and vegetables served communally in one massive bowl.

A blessing ceremony followed by the Drunken Dragon Parade takes place the

next day. The rather raucous procession consists of dancing men who spray rice wine from their mouths while brandishing loong effigies carved out of wood. This year there were two parades, passing through Macao Peninula's Tamagnini Barbosa Market, Red Market, Bairro Iao Hon Market, Barra Square and Rua da Felicidade.

Markets are the procession's focal points, because they are where the slinky loongs engage in "plucking the greens," says Macao Fishmongers Association Chairman Celso Sou. This ritual act that symbolises the gathering of blessings: the loong appears to eat lettuce and auspicious offerings before theatrically spitting them out to spread good fortune.

The third part of the festival also takes place at markets during the parade. It's when 'longevity rice' laden with roasted vegetables and meats gets doled out to the public to represent prosperity, abundant wealth and general good fortune. To 38-year-old Sou, who has participated in the festival since childhood alongside his father and grandfather, this is its biggest highlight. He says that while Drunken Dragon Parades are also held in neighbouring areas like Zhuhai, the longevity rice tradition is unique to Macao.

"The Drunken Dragon Festival symbolises the unity and love among the people of Macao, and sharing the rice spreads this blessing and love," he notes. ●



Xinhua News Agency



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Participants in the Drunken Dragon Parade joyfully expel rice wine from their mouths, in part to appear more dragon-like

(Opposite page) Longevity rice is a festive delicacy in Macao

FOOD & DRINK

Brewing a Cultural Shift

Macao's café culture is undergoing a transformation, with imports of unroasted coffee beans nearly doubling between 2014 and 2024. We speak to people involved in two thriving specialty coffee shops to better understand how this shift is playing out on the ground.

Text **Vivianna Cheong**
Photos **Lei Heong Ieong**

Café culture in Macao is different to that of the West, where specialty coffee shops have been delivering people's caffeine fixes for decades.

As part of China, Macao tends to share the country's enduring love affair with tea. When it comes to coffee, it's the *cha chaan teng*, a Hong Kong-style diner blending Cantonese and British influences, that has traditionally set the tone. These establishments are known for serving up instant coffee, its bitterness offset by condensed or evaporated milk. An even more localised option is the *yuenyeung*, a mixture of instant coffee and milk tea. Affordable and fuss-free, both drinks are part of Macao's daily life – but far from the single-origin pour-over brewed at precisely 93 degrees Celsius found in Melbourne or New York.

This is starting to change. Over the past 10 years, a new generation of café

owners has slowly been introducing Macao to a specialty coffee experience defined by carefully sourced arabica beans (typically roasted in house) and prepared by meticulous baristas. These entrepreneurial artisans have added a layer focused on precision, provenance and taste to the city's café scene.

Residents who've lived in Macao over this period speak to the proliferation of trendy specialty coffee shops they've seen pop up around the city. Trade data is also telling. In 2014, the Special Administrative Region imported just under 400 tonnes of unroasted coffee. That figure grew by 55.6 percent over the next five years. Fast forward to 2024, and Macao imported almost 770 tonnes of the beans – testament to strong growth in demand.

It's worth noting that many new specialty coffee ventures have received help from the government's Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute, formerly the Macao Trade and Investment Promotion Institute, as well as support schemes for young entrepreneurs and small businesses.



Bloom manager and co-owner Kenny Chan says a growing number of Macao's coffee drinkers are interested in where their beans are sourced from, and how origin can influence a flavour profile

CAFFEINE AND COMMUNITY: BLOOM COFFEE HOUSE

When Bloom Coffee House opened its first store in 2012, in the Bairro Horta da Mitra district of Macao Peninsula, the area was dominated by old-school cha chaan tengs. Specialty coffee was a novelty then, and Bloom's manager Kenny Chan says it was hard to convince locals of its merits. Accustomed to instant coffee, many were skeptical of Western-style drinks like the Americano and latte, not to mention higher prices resulting from quality ingredients and well-trained staff.

These obstacles made Bloom a true pioneer. Its team slowly built up a loyal customer base that's contributed to a cultural shift among the city's younger residents (most of the café's visitors are aged between 20 and 40). Bloom's successful formula is evidenced by the fact it now operates 11 coffee shops across Macao. Since 2022, the combined amount of coffee beans these establishments go through each month has risen by about a quarter.

Chan, in his late 20s and now a co-owner of Bloom, tells *Macao* magazine that local tastes have changed most noticeably in the past four years. People used to be content with something

"bitter and strong", the characteristics of cheap robusta beans used in instant coffee powder, he says. Today, many customers are genuinely interested in exploring more nuanced flavour profiles and different brewing techniques. They seek a complex bouquet of sweetness and acidity, floral aromas and citrusy notes that – like wine – is heavily influenced by terroir.

Specialty coffee connoisseurs around the world see their 'cup of joe' as more than a caffeine hit. They want to know its story; hence the appeal of single-origin coffee beans traceable to a specific farm in, say, the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. They also appreciate the human side of coffee consumption, something Bloom's staffers are acutely aware of. "The connection between customers and us is important," Chan says. "A barista serves as a bridge in the machine age, when many things are automated." Speaking at Bloom's flagship café in Horta da Mitra, Chan points out design choices that encourage conversations, like a welcoming counter space.

While the Americano (a double shot espresso diluted with hot water) is the standard order at Bloom, the café's selection of 'dirties' is also popular. Dirty coffee is a relatively new trend, developed in Asia, in which a hot shot of espresso is poured over cold milk. The two liquids merge slowly, creating a layered, almost marbled effect that's best appreciated in a glass. The drinker's palate receives pleasing contrasts of hot and cold, tart and creamy.

Bloom adds a Macao twist to some of its dirties with flavours like apricot kernel, egg tart and local fruits. Chan recommends one made using milk tea infused with lychee flesh as the base, a concoction he describes as "true cultural fusion" (and reminiscent of that cha chaan teng favourite, the yuenyeung). Some customers prefer to stir their dirty, others embrace the layers. Either way, Chan describes drinking one as an experience.

Bloom sells beans to those who'd like to brew quality coffee at home

(Bottom) Specialty coffee shops like Bloom add another dimension to a café scene previously dominated by traditional cha chaan tengs





Staff at Asylum Coffee Roasters are eager to help customers learn more about their cups of joe

The São Lourenço-located café is Carsun Ho's third specialty coffee shop, though first in Macao

The café also caters to those eager to continue their coffee journey at home. It sells a vast array of coffee-making paraphernalia, from the basic French press to sophisticated goose-neck kettles. Bags of whole and ground beans sourced from Brazil, Kenya, Peru and Timor-Leste are on offer, as are Macao-themed souvenirs for coffee lovers. Bloom believes in partnering with fellow local businesses, giving rise to a coffee-flavoured chocolate bar made in collaboration with Gourmet House Macau and egg tart-shaped coffee cups from Portugal, sourced with the bookshop Livraria Portuguesa.

GET CURIOUS: ASYLUM COFFEE ROASTERS

In the historic São Lourenço district, another young entrepreneur is riding the specialty coffee wave. Carsun Ho, in his 20s, co-founded Asylum Coffee Roasters

(originally branded as Fogeí Coffee Roasters) with his now-wife and a friend in 2022. Asylum is located just off Rua da Praia do Manduco, near where Ho grew up. Creating a welcoming space for locals and visitors to mingle was a big motivator for the café, Ho tells *Macao* magazine. Like Chan, he sees good coffee as a bonding mechanism: “To me, coffee is more than a tangible product. It connects people,” he says.

Ho’s interest in coffee started in high school, while working as an apprentice barista. After moving to Taiwan to further his education, this interest became a passion and then a business. While studying at Taipei’s Shih Hsin University, Ho set up a society for fellow coffee lovers. After graduating, he opened two coffee shops with his classmates in the city, where they roasted and sold their own beans. One of these is still running today.

Returning to Macao in the early 2020s, the entrepreneur opened Asylum beside his dad’s hair salon. The café is compact, cool and clearly serious about its craft. At the counter, tarot-style cards describe house blends. ‘The Sun,’ with beans from Ethiopia’s Yirgacheffe and Sidama regions, has “energising” notes of tropical fruit. ‘The Emperor,’ meanwhile, uses three types of Brazilian bean for a strong-bodied brew delivering “rich chocolate front notes ... and a slightly smoky finish”. ‘The Hermit’ blend combines beans from Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Indonesia for coffee suggestive of nuts, floral aromas and cocoa.

Most of Asylum’s beans are roasted either here in Macao or at Ho’s other coffee shop in Taipei, and both businesses prioritise sustainable sourcing. A big part of Ho’s approach in the industry is to support farmers who

look after their land. “I think bringing up environmental issues in Macao is important, even if awareness around these subjects isn’t that mainstream here yet,” he says.

Ho also wants to challenge the perception that specialty coffee is elitist, or too high-brow for the average person. His advice? Get curious. Think of it as a whole different experience to that cup of instant alongside your plate of spaghetti. “Many locals in this area have drunk a lot of coffee. Some started appreciating coffee even before I was born. Today, I am not rejecting their taste, but introducing possibilities,” he explains.

That, of course, is the essence of Macao’s culture: always evolving, layering new influences onto the familiar. Whether in coffee, cuisine or another field entirely, there is always room for new flavours and a little experimentation. ●

Manual brewing: Carson Ho prepares pour-over coffee using a goose-neck kettle

Jars of coffee beans at Asylum, indicating origin and flavour profile

GREATER BAY AREA

A Breath of Fresh Air: Macao Expats Explore the Mainland

New travel policies are unlocking opportunities for Macao’s foreign residents eager to discover the vast and varied landscapes of the Chinese mainland. We speak to a mum-of-two and a passionate rock climber about what this unprecedented access to the neighbouring region means to them.

Text & Interviews
Amanda Saxton

Trips to the Chinese mainland offer Macao residents a chance to explore spectacular natural landscapes, like the Siguniangshan area in Sichuan Province

It’s been nearly a year since the Central Government announced that non-Chinese permanent residents of Macao would be eligible for a new kind of multi-entry travel permit allowing visits of up to 90 days to the Chinese mainland – an initiative met with great excitement by the expat community. Previously, only residents with Chinese nationality enjoyed seamless journeys across the boundary line. When applications opened on 10 July 2024, close to 20,000 Macao residents were eligible for a permit, alongside their counterparts in Hong Kong.

Speaking at the time, Macao’s then-chief executive said the new system would

promote people-to-people exchanges, accelerate the Special Administrative Region (SAR)’s national integration and support its drive to attract overseas talent. It would also play a role in the Central Government’s efforts to encourage international tourism.

China’s broader reopening to the world began in earnest in December 2023, when mainland authorities expanded visa-free entry to citizens of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia for tourism and business. By the end of 2024, dozens more countries had been added to the list, including Australia in July, Portugal in October, and Japan in

November. These developments give many of Macao’s non-permanent residents easier access to the mainland as well.

A confluence of other measures have helped spur the northbound flow, which is largely driven by the SAR’s Chinese residents. From Macao-registered cars being allowed to enter neighbouring Guangdong Province to a light rail linking Macao with the mainland island of Hengqin, getting to the mainland has never been easier. Crossings have also become more streamlined thanks to new ‘document free’ channels at the Gongbei checkpoint

with Zhuhai, which use biometric information to process eligible residents – including foreigners with a valid Mainland Travel Permit.

While many Macao-dwellers head to neighbouring Zhuhai to shop and dine out, some are venturing further afield. For a lot of foreigners living in Macao, the most densely populated territory on Earth, exploring the rest of China is a heady prospect. It is right next door, serviced by high-speed trains and a robust domestic flight network, but has until recently been something of an administrative challenge to reach. While the country boasts

ancient towns and ultra-modern cities, more outdoorsy travellers are drawn to its karst peaks, whispering bamboo forests and surreal terraced hillsides. They seek wide open spaces and beautiful nature: vistas found beyond their urban home.

Macao magazine checked in with two of the city’s long-term foreign residents – Sara Santos Silva from Portugal and the Frenchman Guillaume Leclerc – to better understand the possibilities offered by this golden era of domestic travel. Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

Guitar Photographer



Image courtesy of Sara Santos Silva

SARA SANTOS SILVA, WRITER

Sara Santos Silva is a mother-of-two who hails from Portugal. She has been permanently based in Macao since 2015 and works as a journalist for a local media outlet (the 37-year-old is also a contributing writer to this magazine). Santos Silva is fascinated by all the mainland has to offer, and can't wait to explore more of it with her kids, currently aged five and nine.

There was quite a reaction when China announced the new travel permit for non-Chinese residents of Macao. What was your experience?

I remember it clearly! Macao-based Portuguese nationals like me had been waiting for some time. It felt like everyone was sharing the news, everyone was very excited about travelling more in the mainland. It was a real game changer for those of us who have made Macao our home but don't hold Chinese citizenship. Before this, traveling to the mainland involved applying for visas, which was time-consuming and expensive, especially when traveling as a family. But we still did it a few times; it was always worth it.

What does being able to travel freely between Macao and the mainland mean to you?

When you live in Macao, your whole life happens within a very small land mass, right? It can feel like you keep bumping into the same people, going to the same places ... the city can feel rather small. Having this ability to go visit the rest of the country is a fantastic opportunity to switch things up.

Speaking as a mum, it's also a chance to show my kids something new and broaden their horizons! They're both learning Chinese here in Macao and I love that travelling to the mainland can put them even more in contact with the language.

Tell us about your first trip to the mainland after receiving your travel permit.

I took the kids to Foshan [in Guangdong Province] for a camping trip with friends. I have really great memories from camping trips with my father in Portugal, so I've always wanted to give my children these kinds of experiences. As Macao is so urban, camping here is not really an option. The mainland, on the other hand, is known for its vast and stunning natural landscapes. The possibility of spending more time in them is something I really appreciate.

Our campsite in Foshan was next to a river with lots of greenery and not crowded at all. We had space; the kids played football. We barbecued and we even saw stars. For my kids, especially, it was all just amazing.

What's been your favourite mainland travel memory?

Probably visiting Yangshuo County, part of Guilin [in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region] during Chinese New Year back in 2015. We stayed at a very nice boutique hotel. It wasn't luxurious, just nice and cosy, and we were treated like family. Particularly by the security guard, a gentleman in his 60s or 70s.

I remember getting back from a day trip and the weather had been rainy. This gentleman noticed that my boots and socks were all wet, and he offered to dry them by the



Built in the 1500s, Beijing's Temple of Heaven is one of many fascinating historic sites to explore in the mainland

(Opposite page) Macao resident Sara Santos Silva sees spending more time in the mainland as a chance to introduce her kids to new experiences, like camping

ZCOOL Hello RF

fireplace. I was so grateful, and ended up sitting next to him as he held my socks up next to the fire – something he insisted on doing! Such a nice random act of kindness.

What's it like traveling with children in China?

Travelling with kids can be pretty daunting anywhere, but it's actually easier in China than in other places I've been to. That's because Chinese people love children. We went to Beijing when my son, Francisco, was just three months old and I remember this sea of people surrounding us in the Temple of Heaven. They were just so excited to see this little blonde baby. It was very endearing.

How does the mainland compare with other destinations in the region for you?

Well, Asia is incredible in general. But China does have this very long history that's created

some truly fascinating culture. And amazing gastronomy – I mean, there are so many different cuisines within the country. And then there are the beautiful, diverse landscapes. This all means that the range of experiences on offer is just so rich. China is a country, but we can almost think of it as a continent in its own right.

Do you think the new policies will draw prospective newcomers to Macao?

I figure that for potential expats, people who are considering moving to Macao, easy access to the mainland will definitely be part of the appeal. People are super curious about this country, which is in part fueled by the impressive progress it has seen over the past few decades. I think many already recognise it as a worthwhile destination and would jump at the opportunity to spend more time here. These days, living in Macao makes that easier.

The otherworldly landscapes of Yangshuo County, near Guilin, draw outdoor enthusiasts from Macao

(Opposite page) Guillaume Leclerc (right) often brings rock climbing gear with him to the mainland, where he climbs with friends

**GUILLAUME LECLERC,
SOFTWARE DEVELOPER**

Born in France in the early 1980s, Guillaume Leclerc first visited Macao in 2006 before travelling around Southeast Asia. The experience made him fall in love with the region, and he relocated to Macao for a job at one of the city’s universities in 2007. Today, the 43-year-old is a software developer and permanent resident of the SAR who travels to the mainland frequently, often for rock climbing.

What first brought you to Macao, and how do your travels in the mainland connect to that?

I came to Macao because I love learning about cultures that are different from my own. I wanted to learn a new language and discover how people think and behave in ways that aren’t like what I know. Macao is its own cultural experience, a mixture of Chinese and European influences. It feels like an international city. The mainland, meanwhile, offers serious Chinese cultural immersion – which is

something I really enjoy. But I also go there for its green spaces. Macao can feel quite packed: it’s hard to find a coffee place where you’re looking out into nature. Venture into Zhuhai, and suddenly that’s easy.

What stands out to you when travelling around different parts of China?

There’s so much variety. Food is just one example. In Guangdong, you’re going to eat a lot of steamed fish. Then in Sichuan, everything is cooked with tongue-numbing spices. Even the people look different depending on where you are – height and skin tone vary a lot. In terms of scenery, the diversity is massive. But every place I’ve been has been beautiful in its own way.

How do you find communicating with local people?

For me, it’s always more interesting to sit outside a local restaurant on plastic chairs and strike up a conversation with someone than it is to visit a museum. So, speaking with locals has been a big motivation to learn Mandarin. I actually studied Cantonese in Macao first, then took private Mandarin classes for a year in Hengqin.

Being able to talk with people directly just opens everything up. Compared to places like Thailand, Vietnam or Malaysia, English is definitely more limited in China. Southeast Asian countries have relied on international tourism for a long time, so they’ve become adept at learning languages. They’ve also had more outside influence in their cultures throughout history. But China is such a huge country that most of its tourism market is domestic. This is starting to change, though, and some of the apps you use day-to-day there are even introducing English-language interfaces.

Do you have a favourite destination?

Yangshuo. I keep going back. I love being in nature, swimming in rivers, rock climbing... Yangshuo is perfect for people who love the outdoors. It’s like Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, but



Image courtesy of Guillaume Leclerc

inland. You’re driving along and suddenly these tall, narrow mountains rise out of nowhere. I often take my rock climbing gear and spend days exploring the incredible landscape, but you can rent equipment, too. And hiring a local guide is also a good idea.

What might surprise first-time visitors to the mainland?

I’d say how – language barriers aside – everything there is so convenient. Like, I’m from France. When you buy a train ticket there, there’s a good chance the train won’t leave on time. In China, transportation is super efficient. Things just work.

A lot of Europeans still have an image of China from 50 years ago. But it’s incredibly modern and actually more advanced than most places in Europe. It’s almost unbelievable. Lost in some remote area? You can just open an app and order a rideshare like DiDi to pick you up. China is so entrepreneurial. If you need something, pretty much wherever you are, you’re gonna find it. Like a power bank on top of a mountain, or a cooler of cold water you can open with a QR code. ●



Xinhua News Agency

ZOOM

A Carnival of Cultures

More than 80 performance arts groups, boasting a combined 1,800 performers from around the world, dazzled crowds during this year's Macao International Parade.

Xinhua News Agency

Text **Gonçalo César de Sá**

Around 1,800 performance artists took to streets during the 2025 Macao International Parade, delivering joyful bursts of colour, rhythm and creativity. All fully embraced this year's theme of 'Love, Peace and Cultural Integration.'

Now in its 11th iteration, the parade's 83 representative groups included Italy's Wonderwalks, an ethereal act centred around soap bubbles; Sufi-inspired tanoura dancing from Egypt's Emad Selim; a taste of traditional Polynesian cultures via Heiva i Tahiti; and the mesmerising movements of Argendance, from Argentina.

Other European talents hailed from Portugal, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, and Spain. Asian participants included South Korean performers who staged an enchanting 'elephant hat' dance and UniCircle Flow, from Japan, performing their unicycle show – often described as like figure skating on land. Artistic and comedic groups from the Chinese mainland were also out in force.

The parade's many home-grown acts were sources of awe and inspiration as well. Casa de Portugal's giant bandstand was one local highlight, as were Macao's energetic Brazilian capoeira dancers and the Macao Philharmonic Orchestra. Dozens of community groups contributed to the parade, displaying the Special Administrative Region (SAR)'s own cultural diversity and deep artistic sensibilities.

Under clear blue skies, the parade wound its way down from the Ruins of St Paul's, through St Dominic's Square and Senado Square, to journey along Avenida Panorâmica do Lago Nam Van. Crowds of residents and visitors lined the route, snapping photos and soaking in a carnival-like atmosphere that left no one in any doubt of the SAR's status as a 2025 Culture City of East Asia. The extravaganza wrapped up in style near Macau Tower at Sai Van Lake Square, with a traditional dragon dance as its grand finale. ●

① The Macao International Parade sets forth in a riot of colour and excitement from the Ruins of St Paul's



All photos on this page by Macao Cultural Centre



② The Egyptian Sufi artist Emad Selim performs his tanoura dance in front of St Dominic's Church

③ Portugal Artfusion delivered a sense of 'saudade' to the parade



④ Music is a big part of the event, which dances along to the beat of drummers

⑤ Stilt walkers from Italy enthralled bystanders with their act, Cloud Parade

⑥ Each year, cultural performances from around the region and world converge at the Macao International Parade



⑦ A Filipina dancer beams on her way along the parade's circuit through the city

⑧ A group from Zhejiang Province performs with a traditional Anji Bamboo Leaf Dragon, or Loong



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