

Macao 澳門



Boundary-crossings

FAST AND SEAMLESS

From automated gates and QR codes to biometric recognition, new technology makes Macao's boundary crossings faster and easier: for residents and international visitors

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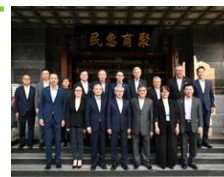
FIVE-YEAR PLAN
Macao's roadmap
to 2030



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Keeping visitors
safe and welcome



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PUBLISHER

Government Information Bureau of the Macao SAR
15th Floor, China Plaza Building, Avenida da Praia Grande, 762 – 804, Macao

TEL. (+853) 2833 2886 | **FAX** (+853) 2835 5426
info@gcs.gov.mo | www.gcs.gov.mo

DIRECTOR

Wong Lok I

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Amelia Leong Man Ieng

EDITOR

Eva Lei Sao Iok

PRODUCTION, MANAGEMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

TEAM Publishing and Consultancy Ltd.
Avenida da Praia Grande, No. 763,
Lun Pong Building, 9th Floor, Unit B, Macao

TEL. (+853) 2835 3934 | **FAX** (+853) 2835 3934
macaomagazine@teampublishing.com.mo
www.teampublishing.com.mo

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tiago Azevedo

MANAGING EDITOR

Emanuel Graça

SUPPORT SERVICES

Katrina Wong

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GOVERNMENT INFORMATION BUREAU



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Operational framework set for new Government Guidance Fund

In early September, the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government formally enacted the operational framework for its maiden Government Guidance Fund. The initiative is designed to rally private capital into priority development projects and emerging industries.

Earlier this year, MSAR authorities announced plans to inject an initial 11 billion patacas into the vehicle. The Government Guidance Fund – expected to launch before the end of the year – is forecast to reach 20 billion patacas once private capital contributions are fully integrated.

At the heart of the new regulation lies the philosophy of ‘patient capital’. By taking a



measured, enduring approach, the MSAR Government aims to cultivate strategic sectors and build lasting economic resilience.

To maintain robust oversight, authorities have established a multi-tiered governance structure. The regulation explicitly outlines permitted investment

modalities, encompassing fund investments, direct investments, and joint ventures.

To safeguard public resources, a negative list prohibits high-risk manoeuvres, such as financial guarantees or investments in volatile financial products. Any idle capital must be directed into low-risk, high-liquidity holdings.

University Town welcomes inaugural student cohort

The Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, situated within the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, officially welcomed its inaugural cohort of students on September 8.

The initial intake includes over 1,450 postgraduate students drawn from three of Macao's public higher

education institutions: the University of Macau, Macao Polytechnic University, and the Macao University of Tourism. Their academic pursuits focus on fields including artificial intelligence, microelectronics, big data, the Internet of Things, and cultural and creative industries management.

According to the Education

and Youth Development Bureau, the inauguration of the first-phase campus "marks a substantive step forward in Macao-Hengqin extended educational operations."

The University Town project is scheduled to expand in three phases through 2030, eventually accommodating more than 20,000 students.

Macao students rank No. 1 globally in computational problem-solving

Macao's 15-year-old students have ranked first globally in problem-solving using computational tools, outperforming peers across 91 participating countries and economies in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2025.

The benchmark study, published in September by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), underscored the city's broader academic strength. Beyond their top finish in

computational problem-solving, local pupils secured third place worldwide in both scientific and mathematical literacies, while placing fifth in reading literacy.

"In addition to nurturing a large number of high-performing students, Macao has also kept its share of low performers effectively in check, placing it among the world's top education systems," the Education and Youth Development Bureau stated in a press release commenting on the results.

BY THE NUMBERS

54.1 percent

Participation rate of Macao residents in cultural activities in the second quarter of 2026, the highest since 2020

BRIDGING EARTH AND ORBIT MACAO STUDENTS JOIN LIVE 'TIANGONG CLASS'

In September, classroom walls dissolved into orbital views for a delegation of students and educators from Macao. Attending a



dedicated session of the "Tiangong Class" in neighbouring Hong Kong, the group was granted a front-row seat to the frontiers of space exploration through a live video link with the crew of the ongoing Shenzhou-23 mission. Adding to the moment's resonance was the participation of Ms Lai Ka-ying, Hong Kong's first astronaut, aboard the Tiangong space station. Schools throughout Macao also organised live broadcasts of the special session for students back home. Launched in 2021, the Tiangong Class series features in-orbit astronauts conducting real-time interactive exchanges with students nationwide.

CROSS-BOUNDARY TRAVEL

OPENING MACAO

Text **Cherry Chan**
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**





TO THE WORLD

From automated gates and QR codes to biometric recognition, **crossing Macao's boundaries is becoming faster and easier.** As international arrivals grow and ties with the Greater Bay Area deepen, technology is dismantling travel barriers – solidifying Macao's role as a vital gateway between the Chinese mainland and the wider world

Crossing a boundary checkpoint used to be a very different experience in Macao. Two decades ago, every traveller depended on manual inspection. Then, in 2005, automated immigration channels arrived, beginning a transformation that has steadily changed how people move in and out of the city.

Automated clearance is now routine for many residents of Macao, the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong. The technology itself has also moved on. Traditional “two-gate” automated channels use document readers and fingerprint scanning, while “three-gate” automated channels – also known as a “joint inspection, one-time release” system – have made crossing between Macao and the Chinese mainland increasingly seamless.

Behind that evolution is a broader effort to make Macao's boundaries easier to navigate without compromising security.

The Public Security Police Force (CPSP), in partnership

with the Public Security Forces Affairs Bureau of Macao, the Zhuhai General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection and the Hong Kong Immigration Department, has progressively introduced measures to streamline boundary controls and simplify immigration procedures. International visitors are increasingly part of that process.

QR codes, iris recognition and intelligent facial recognition are among the technologies now being used. But the changes go beyond making boundary crossings faster. They also support Macao's ambitions to strengthen its role in the country's high-level opening-up and its positioning as “One Centre, One Platform and One Base” and “One Hub”.

With the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) seeking to reinforce its position as a bridge between China and Portuguese-speaking countries; a world centre of tourism and leisure; and an

international destination for conventions, exhibitions, sports and entertainment, it is more important than ever to ensure people can move seamlessly across its boundaries.

More countries, fewer barriers

The numbers illustrate the scale of that challenge. Macao recorded more than 6.27 million boundary crossings by foreign nationals in 2025, including tourists, non-resident workers and international students. That was 14.5 percent more than in 2024.

The use of automated channels grew even faster. Foreign nationals made approximately 124,000 crossings through automated channels during 2025, an increase of 65.4 percent year-on-year.

The trend has continued in 2026. From January to June, Macao recorded around 3.27 million crossings by foreign nationals, up 6.5 percent

from the same period last year. About 76,000 were made through automated channels, up 32.6 percent.

Part of the effort to make Macao more accessible has involved expanding the number of nationalities benefiting from simplified entry arrangements.

“To make it easier for foreign nationals to visit Macao, last year several new countries were added to allow their citizens to enter the MSAR either visa-free or with prior authorisation,” says Lao Ka Weng, head of the CPSP’s Border Control Department.

The arrangement currently covers 88 countries, he adds. For many of those who fall outside the visa-exemption arrangements, entry can still be relatively straightforward.

“The vast majority of other foreign visitors who do not benefit from visa-free entry may apply,

upon arrival at Macao’s boundary checkpoints, for an authorisation to enter and stay,” Mr Lao says, referring to the procedure commonly known as a visa on arrival.

At the same time, automated clearance is becoming available to a wider range of international travellers.

“With the aim of making boundary procedures more efficient and improving the experience of international visitors, in 2024 and 2025, the CPSP successively extended the use of Macao’s automated channels to visitors from Singapore, Portugal, Brazil, Germany, France, Malaysia and Spain,” the officer notes. “Together with visitors from Australia and South Korea, who were already covered, visitors from nine countries can currently register to use Macao’s traditional two-gate automated channels.”

Foreign visitors currently enter and leave the city mainly through the Border Gate, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge boundary crossing, the Outer Harbour and Taipa ferry terminals, as well as the Macau International Airport, according to official data.

Seamless travel

International connectivity is only one side of Macao’s changing boundary landscape. The city’s deeper integration into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin are also generating more frequent journeys between Macao and Guangdong.

That has created another challenge: how to make movement between two jurisdictions simpler for an increasingly mobile population. Integrated automated inspection channels are one answer.

“Following consultations between the Public Security Police Force and the Zhuhai General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, the categories of people eligible to use the integrated automated inspection channels at the Hengqin boundary crossing were expanded on a trial basis to include three new categories of foreign passport holders



▲ The ‘smart’ immigration clearance system continues to be expanded across the city’s boundary checkpoints

effective from October 28, 2024,” Mr Lao says.

Eligible travellers first complete registration procedures for automated clearance on both the Chinese mainland and Macao sides. They can then use the integrated automated channels at the Hengqin boundary crossing.

The initiative did not stop there. On January 26, 2026, it was extended to the Zhuhai-Macao inspection halls at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge boundary crossing, the officer notes.

Once registered, eligible foreign nationals can also use traditional two-gate automated channels at the Border Gate, the Outer Harbour, Taipa and Inner Harbour ferry terminals, Macau International Airport and the Hong Kong-Macao inspection halls at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

Combined, the measures are intended to shorten boundary-crossing times and make journeys easier not only for residents, but also for international visitors who want to travel between Macao and the Chinese mainland.

Staying in the car

Not every innovation involves an automated gate. The opening of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge created an important new route into Macao, including for travellers arriving through Hong Kong International Airport. Eligible foreign visitors are now able to make that journey even more conveniently without having to leave their vehicles.

“Since 9 June 2025, the Macao boundary crossing of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge has allowed eligible foreign visitors travelling in vehicles with a

maximum capacity of nine seats to complete entry and exit procedures using the vehicle lanes,” Mr Lao says.

The precise procedure depends on a visitor’s immigration status. “International visitors who are exempt from visa requirements for Macao can, with a valid passport, complete entry procedures without leaving the vehicle through the inbound vehicle lanes at the boundary crossing. International visitors who are not exempt from visa requirements can complete entry procedures in the inspection hall for vehicle passengers,” the officer explains. “All foreign visitors holding a valid passport can complete exit procedures without leaving the vehicle through the relevant outbound lanes.”

For eligible passengers, it removes another step from the cross-boundary journey and reduces the time needed to complete immigration formalities.

Efficiency at the boundary also matters to Macao’s ambitions as an international tourism and business destination. When major international events are held in the city, the CPSP can work with organisers to make arrival procedures smoother for participants.

“For example, during events such as the Ministerial Conference of the Forum

✓ Most vehicles now use dedicated lanes to complete cross-boundary procedures





The CPSP will continue to develop, with an innovative approach, further measures aimed at facilitating boundary crossings

Lao Ka Weng

Head of the CPSP's Border Control Department

for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao) and the APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] Tourism Ministerial Meeting, the CPSP worked with the organising entities to establish dedicated green channels at boundary checkpoints, allowing participants to pass through quickly and helping to build a positive international image of Macao as a convention and exhibition destination,” Mr Lao says.

At the same time, Macao is increasingly able to function not only as a destination in its own right, but also as a gateway for international travellers wanting to explore the Chinese mainland.

A significant development came in November 2025, with the implementation at the Hengqin and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge boundary crossings of the

Chinese mainland’s 240-hour visa-free transit policy.

Eligible foreign visitors can enter designated areas of the Chinese mainland from Macao through the two checkpoints and remain for up to 10 days.

The measure “not only facilitates tourism and business activities by foreign visitors between the Chinese mainland and Macao, but also creates favourable conditions for cities in the Greater Bay Area and Macao to jointly develop ‘one itinerary, multiple destinations’ tourism,” Mr Lao states.

The CPSP “has also been actively working with the tourism sector to promote this measure, further strengthening Macao’s role as a platform connecting the Chinese mainland with the rest of the world,” he adds.

The transformation is far from complete. “The CPSP will continue to

develop, with an innovative approach, further measures aimed at facilitating boundary crossings”, Mr Lao highlights.

Among the initiatives being studied are closer cooperation with the Chinese mainland to ease travel by foreign nationals across the Macao-Zhuhai and Macao-Hengqin boundaries; expand automated channels to more nationalities; and further streamline advance entry authorisation procedures.

Two decades after Macao launched its first automated immigration channels, the evolution of its boundaries represents more than just a shift from manual checks to technology. It reflects a profound transformation in how the city connects – integrating it more closely with neighbouring Hengqin and the Greater Bay Area, with international visitors and, ultimately, with the rest of the world. ■

Seamless travel with a human touch

From biometric identification and QR codes to coordinated checks with neighbouring jurisdictions, technology has transformed how people enter and leave Macao. Yet behind every increasingly seamless journey are frontline officers whose judgement, preparation and willingness to help remain indispensable.

For Temur Gvaramadze, a frequent visitor from Georgia, entering Macao once meant joining a queue and waiting for a manual inspection. The experience, he recalls, could be “exhausting”. His recent registration for an automated channel took about 10 minutes and changed the journey altogether.

“It was so convenient and so fast. You just go to the checkpoint, scan your passport and use facial recognition,” he says. “Registration was very quick. They took my fingerprints and facial image, and now I can enter Macao much more easily.”

His experience reflects a transformation that has unfolded over more than two decades. A manual inspection can take several minutes; an automated check on the Macao side can be completed in around 10 to 12 seconds. Fingerprints, facial and iris recognition, QR codes and systems that complete Macao and Zhuhai formalities in a single process are now part of the daily routine at the city’s boundary checkpoints.

The scale of that routine is considerable. Macao recorded more than 230 million boundary crossings in 2025, an average of 640,000 a day. In the first six months of 2026, the total exceeded 120 million, averaging 677,000 a day, 7.3 percent more than in the same period a year earlier.

On May 2 this year, the city set two records: 889,000 total crossings in a single day and 248,000 arrivals.

Managing flows of this size requires technology, planning and close coordination. It also requires frontline officers who can guide, reassure and assist people moving through the system.

From fingerprints to iris recognition

Since the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) introduced its automated boundary-clearance system in 2005, automated channels have become a familiar feature at checkpoints, operating alongside manual inspection. They largely fall into two categories: conventional “two-gate” channels and integrated “three-gate” channels used under the joint inspection model between the Chinese mainland and Macao.

Access has gradually been extended to international visitors. Citizens of Australia, South Korea, Singapore, Portugal, Brazil, Germany, France, Malaysia and Spain can currently register to use conventional two-gate automated channels when entering and leaving Macao.

Following discussions with the Zhuhai General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection, the Public Security Police Force (CPSP) has also expanded eligibility for automated joint inspection channels at Hengqin and in the Zhuhai-Macao inspection halls at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge boundary crossing. Foreign passport holders who meet the relevant conditions can register for these channels and use conventional automated channels at other checkpoints.

Those conventional channels are available at locations including the Border Gate checkpoint, the Outer Harbour, Taipa and Inner Harbour ferry terminals, Macau International Airport and the Hong Kong-Macao inspection halls at the



Eligible foreign nationals can use automated channels at some of Macao's checkpoints

Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. At Hengqin and the bridge's Zhuhai-Macao inspection halls, the three-gate arrangement completes departure procedures for one jurisdiction and arrival procedures for the other in a single passage.

The identification technology has also evolved. The earliest system relied on fingerprints alone, before facial and iris recognition were progressively introduced. Until recently, foreign nationals using two-gate automated channels had to verify their identity through facial recognition and fingerprints.

Since June 11, holders of a Non-Resident Worker's Identification Card or a Special Authorisation to Stay for international students have been able to register for channels that combine facial and iris recognition instead. The option is particularly useful for people whose fingerprints are difficult to read, but it also supports contactless clearance.

Lao Ka Weng, head of the CPSP's Border Control Department, says the force is studying the use of iris recognition in more immigration procedures.

The aim is to make automated clearance available to more people while improving the channels' efficiency.

Biometrics are only part of the system. MSAR Resident Identity Card holders can link their electronic identity to the Macao One Account app and use a mobile phone at the boundary. After scanning the "My Boundary Crossing" QR code at a two-gate automated channel and confirming their identity, they can proceed with the remaining checks.

Travel between Macao and Hong Kong is also covered through the respective Hong Kong-Macao boundary-crossing QR codes. When combined with iris recognition, the system enables fully contactless clearance and reduces verification time by one to two seconds compared with a conventional automated passage, according to the CPSP.

Two jurisdictions, one passage

Automation goes furthest on the links with Zhuhai and Hengqin. The joint inspection model brings

departure and arrival procedures together at one location, taking advantage of the jurisdictions' geographical proximity. It depends on close cooperation between the relevant authorities, both to align procedures and to ensure travellers understand how the system works.

Macao first adopted the model at the Zhuhai-Macao inspection halls at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge checkpoint in 2018. It is now also used at Hengqin and Qingmao, while eligible foreign nationals can use automated joint inspection channels at Hengqin and in the Zhuhai-Macao inspection halls at the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

Capacity at Macau International Airport has expanded as well. In 2020, the CPSP increased the number of automated channels on the departures floor from two to 10. In 2021, the number in the south arrivals hall rose from three to 10, while the north hall went from three to eight.

The time savings are substantial. Even when there is no queue, a manual check takes time because an officer must examine the travel document, verify its authenticity and confirm the holder's identity. Mr Lao says an automated two-gate inspection on the Macao side takes about 10 to 12 seconds. A three-gate automated passage takes about 20 seconds and completes both the Macao and Zhuhai, or Macao and Hengqin inspections, he adds.

For vehicles travelling between Macao and Hengqin, One-Stop lanes combine procedures previously carried out at two locations. Passage takes about 100 seconds on average and can be completed in as little as 50 seconds. More than 75 percent of cross-boundary vehicles now use these lanes, which have also been available to eligible foreign drivers since August 18.

Mr Gvaramadze believes easier clearance can shape how international visitors view the city. "Foreigners can sometimes face difficulties when travelling in an unfamiliar country or city," the tourist says. "Making it easier to enter Macao will encourage people to come more often. It is a big benefit because everything is simpler and faster, and you save a lot of time."

The human connection

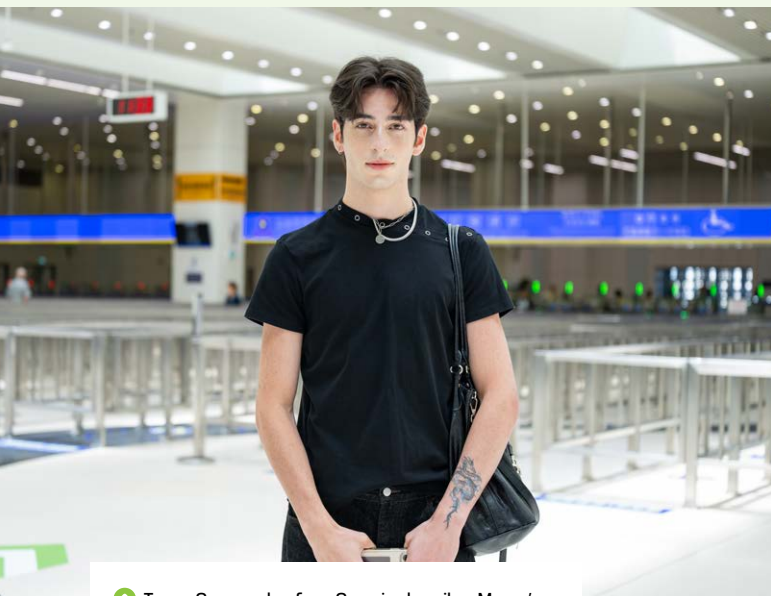
Speed, however, is only one part of a successful boundary experience. Alongside document checks and security inspections, CPSP personnel receive regular training designed to strengthen the interpersonal skills needed when dealing with travellers from around the world.

Communication is essential. Signs and notices at Macao's boundary checkpoints are presented in Chinese, Portuguese and English, says CPSP officer Lei Wang Ngai.

"To continuously improve service quality, the CPSP regularly organises English and Portuguese



CPSP officers Lei Wang Ngai (left) and Lou Oi Leng (right) help ensure that the city's boundary crossings remain efficient, safe and welcoming



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▲ Temur Gvaramadze, from Georgia, describes Macao's automated boundary channels as "convenient and fast"

courses taught by professional instructors, with the aim of strengthening frontline personnel's basic communication skills in foreign languages," he explains.

Sometimes, words alone are not enough. Fellow officer Lou Oi Leng recalls a distressed international visitor who approached officers in a boundary area. The tourist was speaking so quickly that they could not initially determine whether she was using English or another language. Once they understood that she had lost her mobile phone, officers immediately searched the control area. Colleagues who were off duty spontaneously joined the effort.

"After more than an hour of searching, we finally found the phone. The visitor smiled again and thanked us for our help," Ms Lou says. "Although situations like this are part of our daily work, helping visitors resolve their difficulties gives us an enormous sense of achievement and of having fulfilled our mission."

Holiday periods test both boundary infrastructure and coordination among public services. Ahead of major holidays, the CPSP prepares specific measures to handle peak flows.

Officer Lei says the force "draws up response plans for periods of high passenger volume and deploys administrative personnel to support frontline teams, ensuring that movement at the boundary remains safe and orderly".

The CPSP also maintains close communication with the relevant authorities in Zhuhai and Hong Kong, sharing passenger-flow information

so the authorities can respond in a coordinated manner during busy periods.

"The Macao-Zhuhai and Macao-Hengqin boundary checkpoints also conduct regular emergency and crisis-response exercises to ensure safety and order on both sides of the boundary," Mr Lei stresses. Cooperation extends to the hotel and tourism sectors. Visitors are encouraged to travel outside peak periods, while information is shared on clearance procedures, road safety and public-security alerts in Macao.

In day-to-day operations, the CPSP adjusts the number of inspection channels in real time according to passenger volumes at each checkpoint, opening additional lanes during peak periods. Technology makes it possible to manage numbers that would be difficult to handle through conventional methods alone.

Automated channels have consequently become the norm rather than the exception. About 80 percent of all crossings into and out of Macao in the first half of 2026 were completed through such channels, according to the CPSP.

Among foreign nationals visiting Macao in 2025, the Macao checkpoint of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge was the leading point of entry and departure, accounting for about one-third of their crossings. Macau International Airport represented around 20 percent, followed by the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal at 13.9 percent, the Taipa Ferry Terminal at 13.6 percent and the Border Gate checkpoint at 11.6 percent.

The CPSP is continuing to study ways of offering the same convenience to a broader range of foreign nationals. As technology develops, the seconds saved at a checkpoint will matter increasingly in a region where millions of people are constantly on the move.

Yet no boundary is made up only of equipment, automated systems and statistics. Behind every crossing is a human being – sometimes uncertain, hurried or in need of help. Technology can make the journey faster, but it is the judgement and small acts of care shown by those on the frontline that can make an arrival in Macao feel truly welcoming. ■ C.C.

DEVELOPMENT

MACAO 2030: A BLUEPRINT FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Text **Tiago Azevedo**

From diversifying the economy and deepening integration with Hengqin to renewing old neighbourhoods and improving healthcare, the **Government's Third Five-Year Plan** sets out an ambitious roadmap for Macao through 2030. The goal is clear: to build a broader, more resilient economy while improving the everyday lives of residents

By the end of this decade, the city envisioned by the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government should look, and in some ways function, quite differently from today. The economy should be less dependent on gaming, while Hengqin should be more closely integrated into the economic and everyday life of Macao.

Old neighbourhoods will also undergo

substantial renewal, while public transport, environmental performance and healthcare provision should improve. Education, scientific research and talent development are also expected to become increasingly connected to the city's economic transformation.

These ambitions are outlined in the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the MSAR, covering 2026 to 2030.





The construction of a greener and smarter Macao is one of four strategic tasks under the city's Third Five-Year Plan [↗](#)

Unveiling the plan in August, MSAR Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai described the occasion as a major milestone for the city.

“Today is a particularly important day for Macao,” he said at the press conference announcing the document, describing the formulation and launch of the plan as an undertaking of major significance for both the Government and society.

The document is the MSAR Government’s roadmap for what Mr Sam called a new stage of “high-quality development”. It establishes eight “major development goals” and 35 major economic and social indicators, spanning economic diversification, public welfare, infrastructure, environmental protection and Macao-Hengqin integration.

The plan also sets out a broader vision built around four concepts: a “Law-based Macao”, “Vibrant Macao”, “Cultural Macao” and “Blissful Macao”, Mr Sam noted.

The document, stated the Chief Executive, “represents a significant innovative step in deepening Macao’s practising of the ‘One country, two systems’ principle, and Macao’s alignment with national development”.

Mr Sam also said the country’s 15th Five-Year Plan had set “new directions and opportunities” for Macao. “The MSAR Government has proactively positioned Macao within the broader national development framework, actively implementing the national plan’s provisions within Macao, and strengthening alignment with Guangdong Province and the Hong Kong SAR, in order to promote coordinated development in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area,” he added.

Economic diversification

Behind the guidelines announced by the Chief Executive is an extensive programme covering almost every aspect of life in Macao, according to the full report of the MSAR’s Third Five-Year Plan.

Although the economy has recovered and public finances remain relatively strong, the

plan identifies the city’s narrow industrial structure among unresolved issues. It also points to employment, transport, healthcare and education as areas requiring attention, alongside the longer-term pressures created by an ageing population and low birth rate.

The response is a plan centred on four strategic tasks: economic diversification; deeper Macao-Hengqin integration; urban renewal and the construction of a greener and smarter city; as well as the forging of stronger connections between Macao, the rest of the country and the wider world.

The most significant economic target is also one of the clearest: by 2030, the MSAR Government wants non-gaming industries to account for approximately 60 percent of Macao’s gross domestic product (GDP). The figure stood at 56.7 percent in 2024, according to the baseline used in the plan.

Diversification is at the centre of the city’s economic transition, Mr Sam stated. The Government, he said, would combine Macao’s “advantages and resources”, increase policy support and capital investment and give greater play to the market and to enterprises in developing the “1+4” industrial structure.

Under the “1+4” framework, the Government has identified four emerging economic pillars alongside tourism and entertainment: the “Big Health” sector, notably Traditional Chinese Medicine; high-end manufacturing and technology; modern finance; and sectors including sports, culture, conventions and exhibitions.

These “emerging industries” accounted for about 13.8 percent of Macao’s GDP in 2024, a figure that should “increase progressively” until 2030, according to the document.

The plan calls for the gaming industry itself to develop “in an orderly and healthy manner in accordance with the law”, while tourism becomes more diversified and increasingly connected with culture, entertainment, sports, events and the community. The intention is to spread visitor spending



Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai describes the Plan as a major milestone for the city

more widely and create economic activity beyond the traditional tourism areas.

Conventions and exhibitions, for example, are expected to attract events related to sectors such as Big Health and high technology. The Government wants to strengthen links between these events, integrated resorts and community commercial districts, converting visitor flows into business for local neighbourhoods.

The strategy also includes support for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with an emphasis on digitalisation, technology and access to new markets.

At a larger scale, the Government plans to use a new guidance fund – an investment vehicle managed by professional teams – to attract private capital and support emerging industries. Four major development projects will provide physical space and infrastructure for the diversification drive, including the

Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town, the Macao Science and Technology Research and Development Industrial Park, the Macao International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone, and the Macao International Air Transport Hub (Port) on the West Bank of the Pearl River.

The aim is to create industries capable of standing alongside tourism as sustainable sources of jobs, investment and growth, according to the plan.

Macao + Hengqin

If diversification is the economic objective, Hengqin is increasingly the space that will support such a transformation. The plan describes the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin as key to “breaking the impasse” in Macao’s economic diversification. By 2030, the combined

Eight goals by 2030

The Third Five-Year Plan identifies eight overarching development objectives for the 2026-2030 period:

National security

Fully implement the overall national-security approach and strengthen Macao's capacity to safeguard national security

Governance

Improve law-based governance, deepen public-administration reform and increase government efficiency

Economic diversification

Make substantial progress towards a broader economy while reinforcing Macao's role as a world centre of tourism and leisure

Regional integration

Advance the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone and deepen integration between Macao and Hengqin

Education, technology and talent

Connect education and scientific research more closely with innovation and talent development

People's well-being

Progressively improve social security, healthcare, housing, employment protection, culture, sports and youth policies

Beautiful and smart Macao

Accelerate urban renewal, improve transport and infrastructure, and strengthen environmental protection

National development

Deepen participation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and strengthen Macao's role connecting China with the world

added value of Hengqin's designated industries – including cultural tourism, conventions and exhibitions, Big Health, finance, technology research and advanced manufacturing – is targeted to account for at least 65 percent of the region's GDP.

Mr Sam said the MSAR Government would “deepen the integrated development between Macao and Hengqin” and promote the high-quality construction of the Cooperation Zone, using technology and education as key drivers.

The Government would, he added, strengthen both the alignment of rules and mechanisms and infrastructure connections, while encouraging greater integration in areas including healthcare and elderly care.

The plan also highlights “hard connectivity”, involving infrastructure development, and “soft connectivity”, involving regulations and administrative systems. The longer-term ambition is for living, studying, working, starting a business and accessing services across the boundary to become progressively easier.

Healthcare and elderly services are specifically identified for deeper integration. Public services and social-security arrangements are also to be aligned more closely, with the stated aim of creating an environment in Hengqin similar to Macao for residents who choose to live and work there.

Education will be another major bridge. The first phase of the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town started operations in August. The new University of Macau campus in the Cooperation Zone is scheduled for trial operation in 2028, while the main construction of campuses for Macao Polytechnic University and the Macao University of Tourism is expected to be “largely completed” by 2030.

The concept is closely linked to another priority: integrating education, technology and talent development so that universities contribute more directly to research, commercialisation and emerging industries.

One model envisaged in the plan is “research



▲ The Plan was announced in August, during a press conference with high-level officials of the MSAR Government

and development in Macao + transformation in Hengqin”, enabling ideas developed in Macao’s universities and laboratories to move toward commercial application across the boundary.

The Macau International Airport Hengqin Upstream Cargo Terminal, currently being developed in Hengqin, is targeted to start operations in the “first half of 2027”, with a goal of handling up to 300,000 tonnes per year.

A city renewed

Some of the plan’s most visible effects could eventually be found much closer to home. Urban renewal is among the four major priorities, with the Government promising to accelerate the redevelopment and rehabilitation of ageing neighbourhoods while establishing a sustainable mechanism to finance and manage renewal.

“We will accelerate urban renewal and build a beautiful and smart Macao,” the

Chief Executive said, pledging to improve the legal framework, coordinate funding and policy resources, and establish a sustainable system for urban renewal.

Iao Hon is among the most prominent targets. Plans include the renewal of the neighbourhood’s seven clusters of old residential buildings, using approaches ranging from repair and reconstruction on the original site to relocation. Other projects include the Tamagnini Barbosa civil servants’ residential building and housing associated with the Red Market post office.

These efforts are intended to encompass more than housing. The Government wants old districts to gain better public facilities, leisure and sports areas, transport services and more attractive streetscapes. Six distinctive areas are to be created as part of efforts to revitalise community commerce and combine culture, business and tourism.

Plan by the numbers

The Third Five-Year Plan contains 35 headline indicators. Among its most tangible targets:

Economy

- Non-gaming industries: around 60% of GDP
- GDP: targeted to achieve stable growth
- Resident unemployment: to remain at a relatively low level
- Median monthly earnings of employed local residents: stable growth
- Number of international visitors: stable increase

Health and ageing

- Qualified doctors: 3.8 per 1,000 residents
- Qualified nurses: 5.6 per 1,000 residents
- Hospital beds: 5.2 per 1,000 residents
- Old-age pension recipients: 184,700

Housing and transport

- Public housing units: around 71,600
- Public transport share: 55–60%
- Natural-gas users: more than 35,000

Environment

- CO₂ emissions reduction versus 2005: more than 65%
- Non-fossil sources in electricity purchased outside Macao: more than 60%
- Waste treated harmlessly: 100%
- Green space: at least 200,000 square metres added or optimised



Around the Ruins of St Paul's, the plan proposes conservation-led revitalisation. Measures include dealing with abandoned and dangerous buildings, improving signs and surrounding façades and introducing a pilot beautification and revitalisation area while protecting the World Heritage landscape.

Putting people first

Economic expansion and construction occupy much of the plan, but its success will also be measured in less immediately visible ways. The MSAR Government places the principle of “putting the population first” among the plan’s fundamental principles, stating that the benefits of development should reach residents more broadly and fairly.

That is especially significant as Macao’s population ages. The plan expects the number of people receiving old-age pensions to rise from 159,313 in 2025 to 184,700 in 2030, an increase of roughly 3.0 percent a year.

Healthcare capacity is also expected to expand. By 2030, the Government targets 3.8 qualified doctors per 1,000 residents, up from 3.4 in 2025, and 5.6 qualified nurses per 1,000 people, up from 4.8. Hospital beds are targeted to increase from 4.8 to 5.2 per 1,000 residents.

The Rehabilitation Hospital at the Islands Healthcare Complex is scheduled for completion in 2027. The plan also promises free community and preventive healthcare services for all Macao residents.

Housing is another measurable priority. The stock of public housing units is projected to rise from approximately 56,850 to around 71,600 by 2030.

The plan also addresses employment, childcare, youth development, culture and sport. It seeks to keep unemployment among local residents relatively low and maintain high participation in social-security arrangements.

The document states that the MSAR Government will optimise policies to support birth rates and promote further incentive measures, “seeking to continuously improve

the quality of the population and foster balanced long-term population growth”.

The five-year transformation is accompanied by environmental targets. By 2030, the reduction in carbon-dioxide emissions compared with 2005 is expected to exceed 65 percent, while more than 60 percent of electricity purchased from outside Macao is targeted to come from non-fossil sources.

Public transport should account for between 55 percent and 60 percent of journeys, compared with 53.4 percent in the plan’s 2025 baseline.

The Government also intends to increase and optimise at least 200,000 square metres of green space across Macao and plant approximately 3,000 trees along green corridors, in parks and recreation areas.

Macao as a bridge

Another major pillar reaches outward. The Government intends to deepen Macao’s participation in the Greater Bay Area, strengthen cooperation with Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland, and expand the city’s traditional role as a link between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Mr Sam said in his speech that Macao should make better use of its “unique advantages” of having the support of the country while being connected to the world.

“We will actively participate in the high-quality construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and intensify cooperation with Hong Kong,” he said, while also expanding Macao’s platform role for exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

That platform is now being broadened to include Spanish-speaking markets. The plan envisages developing a branch of the Service Centre for Economy and Trade between China and Portuguese/Spanish-speaking Countries (CECPS) in Macao and potential overseas branches in countries such as Brazil and Mexico.

Culture is another element of that bridge-building role. The proposed International Integrated Tourism and Cultural Zone is intended to attract leading international cultural works and performances, while Macao is expected to deepen exchanges with Portuguese-speaking countries, Southeast Asia and other places along the “Belt and Road”.

The first phase of the National Cultural Museum of Macao is scheduled to be substantially completed in 2029. Planning for an International Performing Arts Centre and International Museum of Contemporary Art is scheduled to start in 2027, with architectural designs and construction tenders targeted for 2030.

Overall, the scale of the document itself hints at the breadth of the undertaking. The Third Five-Year Plan comprises 10 parts, 36 chapters and 68 special columns.

The Chief Executive has made clear that publication of the plan is only the beginning. The Government says implementation will be organised through three lists: priority projects, responsibility for major tasks and significant reform measures. The idea is to translate broad policy objectives into specific assignments and strengthen accountability across government departments.

The plan itself emerged from 40 preliminary research sessions and 36 thematic studies. Its 40-day public consultation generated 1,716 submissions containing 8,230 opinions – 2.6 times the number received for the Second Five-Year Plan, the Government noted.

“Planning represents 10 percent of success; the remaining 90 percent depends on implementation,” the document stated. “As the implementation of the Third Five-Year Plan is a major responsibility, as well as a demanding task and an honourable mission, its success will depend on the contribution of all sectors of society and the entire population,” it added. For Macao, 90 percent of execution will unfold between now and 2030. ■

OVERSEAS VISIT

MACAO BRIDGES PATH

Text **Tiago Azevedo**
Photos **Government Information Bureau**



📍 Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai meets with the Prime Minister of Singapore, Lawrence Wong, in the first stop of an eight-day visit to three Southeast Asian countries

TO SOUTHEAST ASIA

Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai's eight-day visit to Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia put Macao's **growing engagement with Southeast Asia** firmly in the spotlight, and aimed to strengthen cooperation in trade, tourism, MICE, technology, education, healthcare and beyond

When Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai departed Macao on August 29 for an eight-day journey through Southeast Asia, his objectives went well beyond strengthening ties with three individual countries.

The visits to Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia formed part of the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government's "Down South" strategy and its broader effort to reinforce the city's role as a bridge between China and international markets. They also offered an opportunity to present the priorities of the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the MSAR (2026–2030) and attract international resources to Macao and Hengqin.

According to the MSAR Government, Southeast Asia has longstanding cultural, economic and people-to-people links with Macao, while five of the city's 10 largest international visitor source markets are in Southeast Asia. The Macao authorities see those existing connections as a foundation on which to reinforce cooperation.

This was reflected in the composition of the delegation. Around 120 business representatives from Macao, Hengqin and other parts of the Chinese mainland joined the tour under a "joint voyage" model designed to help companies explore overseas markets while attracting international partners to Macao and Hengqin.

By the end of the visit, the numbers provided a measure of its scale. Mr Sam took part in 37 events, ranging from official meetings and business promotions to cultural and educational activities. More than 370 business-matching sessions were held and 189 cooperation agreements signed involving government bodies and businesses. These covered economic and trade cooperation, conventions and exhibitions (MICE), technology, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and "Big Health", halal products and brand marketing.

Mr Sam said the visit had "comprehensively strengthened" the overall level of cooperation between Macao and the countries visited, as well as with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Speaking to reporters at the end of the tour, the Chief Executive said the three-country visit had also promoted Macao's successful implementation of the "One country, two systems" principle, as well as the city's Third Five-Year Plan.

Mr Sam said the visit "bolstered exchanges" with the three countries and "deepened practical cooperation".

Singapore: complementary strengths

Singapore, the first stop, provided an opportunity to explore cooperation between two compact, highly internationalised Asian cities facing some similar challenges while possessing complementary economic strengths.

In a meeting with Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Lawrence Wong, Mr Sam highlighted existing exchanges in tourism, MICE, trade, education and culture. He also presented opportunities arising from the "Macao + Hengqin" development model, encouraging Singaporean companies to use Macao and Hengqin to connect with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and wider Chinese mainland.

Mr Wong noted the similarities between the two cities as open economies with high population densities and said the participation of entrepreneurs from Macao, Hengqin and the Chinese mainland in the delegation could strengthen connections with Singaporean investors.

"Macao, as a key part of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, is actively advancing the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, presenting abundant development opportunities," Mr Wong added.

Economic diversification featured prominently in other meetings. Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry, Gan Kim Yong, discussed with the Chief Executive potential cooperation in higher education, the digital economy and industrial

transformation. Singapore's experience in reducing dependence on individual industries and cultivating new growth engines was particularly relevant as Macao pursues its own economic diversification strategy.

Mr Gan added that this visit would "certainly spark greater interest among Singaporean enterprises in establishing operations in Macao and Hengqin."

Education and talent development emerged as another potential bridge. Mr Sam – during a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador to Singapore, Cao Zhongming – invited Singaporean universities and research institutions to participate in projects including the Macao-Hengqin International Education (University) Town and the Macao Technology Research Industrial Park. He also identified opportunities linking Singapore's expertise in healthcare and TCM with Macao and Hengqin.

Singapore's strengths in the digital economy, industrial transformation, international trade, and healthcare, combined with Macao's unique role in connecting the vast Chinese mainland market with Portuguese-speaking countries, "can form a new framework of mutually beneficial cooperation," Mr Sam noted. "The two sides should continue to deepen industrial linkages and resource alignment, to achieve synergistic development," he stated.

Business links accompanied the official discussions. In 2025, merchandise trade between Macao and Singapore increased by 36.3 percent, according to Singapore's Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Trade and Industry, Gan Siow Huang. Eight cooperation agreements were signed at a reception attended by around 350 people, covering trade, tourism promotion, Big Health, TCM, industry-academia research, modern finance, high-end technology and smart-city development.

The Chief Executive also met representatives of Singapore's Chinese community and business associations at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

New perspectives on urban development

Cooperation was not the only purpose of the Singapore visit. Macao's delegation also examined policies and projects that could provide lessons for the city's own development.

At a meeting with Singapore's Coordinating Minister for Social Policies and Minister for Health, Ong Ye Kung, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai discussed public health, TCM and the challenges posed by ageing populations. Macao and Singapore already have longstanding health cooperation, including a memorandum of understanding renewed every three

years since 2005, covering areas such as medical personnel training, public-health emergency response and information exchange.

Urban renewal was another focus. In Queenstown, a redevelopment project built in a former satellite town, Mr Sam toured a Housing & Development Board (HDB) public housing redevelopment project and discussed planning and housing policy with HDB chief executive, Tan Meng Dui. He said Singapore's approach to replacing ageing public housing could provide useful references as Macao tackles its own stock of older buildings.

The MSAR delegation also visited Sentosa and Gardens by the Bay, examining how tourism infrastructure, public space, culture, ecological technology and facilities for children and older people can be integrated into urban development.

Mr Sam stressed that urban renewal is a critical livelihood-related initiative, a key component in building the policy vision of "Blissful Macao" and directly impacts the city's overall image. This was also one of the priorities outlined in the city's Third Five-Year Plan.

The Chief Executive visits a Singapore HDB public housing project redeveloped on a former urban area site



Chamber President Kho Choon Keng pointed to opportunities created by combining Macao's access to the Greater Bay Area with Singapore's connections across ASEAN, including in technological innovation, finance and the modernisation of traditional industries.

Indonesia: boosting connectivity

The second leg of the ASEAN tour took the MSAR delegation to Indonesia, where Mr Sam became the first Macao Chief Executive to make an official visit to the country – a milestone highlighted by Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia, Wang Lutong.

Indonesia's scale, its position within ASEAN and its large Muslim population create several distinct areas of potential cooperation with Macao, Mr Sam highlighted.

During talks with Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Airlangga Hartarto, the two sides identified tourism, trade and healthcare

among areas offering room for growth.

The Chief Executive encouraged Indonesian businesses to explore the opportunities offered by Hengqin, combining Macao's international business environment with the land and industrial resources of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, to gain access to the Chinese mainland market.

Connectivity was a recurring subject. Both sides expressed support for restoring direct flights between Macao and Jakarta. The case for doing so is supported by growing travel demand: Macao received more than 200,000 Indonesian visitors in 2025, while more than 8,000 Indonesian citizens were working in the city, according to Mr Sam.

Indonesia's Tourism Minister, Widiyanti Putri Wardhana, and the Chief Executive also discussed deeper tourism cooperation following Indonesia's restoration of visa-free entry for MSAR passport holders.

✓ The MSAR delegation's meeting with Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Airlangga Hartarto



Strengthening the ASEAN links

The three-country tour also sought to strengthen Macao's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a whole. In the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, Chief Executive Sam Hou Fai visited the ASEAN Secretariat and met with the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Kao Kim Hourn.

Mr Sam said Macao would seek closer ties and more practical cooperation with ASEAN member states, using its position within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to help connect Southeast Asian markets with the Chinese mainland.

The Chief Executive also noted that strategic mutual trust between China and ASEAN "has continued to strengthen, cooperation in various fields has deepened," and the ASEAN-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership "has

maintained a good momentum in its development under the strategic guidance of the leaders of China and ASEAN member countries".

China, he added, "strongly supports" the Greater Bay Area in becoming "a new point of growth" for cooperation with ASEAN.

Tourism, trade, industrial cooperation and cultural exchange were among the areas highlighted. The Chief Executive also expressed hope that, with the authorisation of the Central Government and support of the ASEAN Secretariat, Macao could participate in relevant China-ASEAN cooperation mechanisms in an appropriate capacity and take part in ASEAN activities.

Mr Kao pointed to significant room for further cooperation. ASEAN countries welcomed some 120 million international tourists in

2024, while Macao has also recorded strong international visitor growth. He identified investment, trade, tourism and cultural exchanges as areas where the two sides could complement each other, adding that the ASEAN Secretariat was willing to maintain close contact with the MSAR Government.

The Chief Executive separately met Wang Qing, Head of Mission and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN. Their discussions focused on how Macao could build on existing China-ASEAN cooperation mechanisms, particularly in MICE, culture and tourism, and the Big Health industry.

Mr Wang said Macao's role as "One Centre, One Platform and One Base" placed it in a strong position to expand exchanges with ASEAN in trade, tourism and other areas.

Sam Hou Fai in a meeting with ASEAN Secretary-General, Kao Kim Hourn





Sam Hou Fai exchanged views with the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim

Macao, meanwhile, has been strengthening its Muslim-friendly tourism environment by encouraging halal certification, publishing a Muslim Travel Guide and providing further hospitality training. Indonesia was Macao's third-largest international visitor source market in 2025, according to official data.

That is why Halal industries were an important part of the economic discussions, alongside TCM, healthcare, artificial intelligence (AI) and environmental technology.

In his meeting with Ambassador Wang, Mr Sam sought support in connecting Macao businesses with Indonesian halal-certification organisations and understanding the standards required to serve Muslim consumers.

Cultural ties also had a prominent place. The exhibition "Splendor of the Mirrored Sea: Macao's Symphony of Civilizations on the Maritime Silk Road" opened at Jakarta Textile Museum during the visit, presenting

Macao's history as a meeting point along the Maritime Silk Road through intangible cultural heritage, craftsmanship and performing arts.

At the MSAR Government reception in Jakarta, nine cooperation agreements were signed in fields ranging from trade, investment and tourism to the MICE industry, pharmaceuticals, environmental engineering, TCM, Big Health and halal-product raw materials.

Malaysia: linking markets

The final stop, Malaysia, brought another set of complementary opportunities into focus.

Meeting Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Anwar Ibrahim, Mr Sam discussed cooperation spanning economic matters, trade, tourism and culture. He invited Malaysian companies to establish or expand operations in Macao and Hengqin, while also using Macao as a platform

for reaching both the Chinese mainland and Portuguese-speaking markets.

The discussions also produced a potentially significant longer-term proposal: exploring a Macao-Malaysia free trade agreement and an agreement to eliminate double taxation. Mr Anwar supported examining both ideas, saying they could help deepen trade and encourage sustained two-way investment. He also advocated stronger cooperation in healthcare, education, technology and tourism.

At a meeting with Malaysia's Deputy Minister of Investment, Trade and Industry, Sim Tze Tzin, and business representatives, the Chief Executive highlighted the MICE, TCM and halal industries as promising fields. Malaysia was Macao's largest ASEAN trading partner in terms of bilateral trade volume in 2025, while its mature halal certification system and regional supply chains offer potential gateways for Macao businesses seeking to reach Muslim consumers across Southeast Asia.

The delegation also engaged the Malaysian Chinese community. Mr Sam met Senator and Malaysia-China Business Council Chairman, Low Kian Chuan, along with Chinese community leaders and representatives from local chambers of commerce, encouraging them to connect companies and resources between Malaysia, Macao and Hengqin. Mr Low highlighted Macao's international MICE platform, network of Chinese entrepreneurs and role as a connector between China and Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking countries.

Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia, Ouyang Yujing, similarly pointed to the potential for cooperation, particularly in tourism, noting the complementarity between Malaysia's outbound travel market and Macao's tourism infrastructure.

Education provided another dimension. Macao's Education and Youth Development Bureau and nine of the city's higher education institutions staged a "Study in Macao" Education Fair in Kuala Lumpur to encourage Malaysian students to pursue tertiary education

in the city. Mr Sam and Mr Ouyang attended the launch, during which 12 education cooperation agreements were signed. Across the three-country tour, Macao institutions concluded 16 education agreements with counterparts in Singapore and Malaysia.

Turning agreements into cooperation

The visits to the three countries showcased the breadth of Macao's ambitions in Southeast Asia, with the Chief Executive summarising the main achievements under four key aspects.

First, the visit helped strengthen external exchanges and promote Macao's successful practice of the "One country, two systems" principle. Mr Sam also promoted Macao as an important bridgehead for China's high-level opening-up, highlighting the city's unique advantage of being "backed by the motherland and connected to the world".

The second goal highlighted by Mr Sam was the deepening of economic and trade cooperation with the three countries and the promotion of Macao's appropriate economic diversification.

That was followed by the strengthening of tourism collaboration with Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia, alongside efforts to attract more international visitors to Macao. The three ASEAN countries are important international tourist-source markets that Macao is seeking to expand.

The fourth aspect highlighted by the Chief Executive was the strengthening of cooperation in fields such as education and culture, thus promoting closer people-to-people exchanges.

For Mr Sam, the trip ultimately represented a two-way exercise: taking Macao and Hengqin's opportunities abroad while bringing international capital, companies, talent and ideas back to the city. The Chief Executive also said that, following the delegation's return, the MSAR Government would follow up on the cooperation projects and provide support to participating enterprises. ■

TOURIST POLICE

A REASSURING PRESENCE

Text **Shu Huang**

Created to meet the demands of a city welcoming millions of visitors each year, Macao's **Tourist Police** combine law enforcement with a more personal mission: to ensure travellers feel safe, supported and welcome

At the Ruins of St Paul's, the flow of people rarely stops. Visitors climb the steps towards one of Macao's most recognisable landmarks, pause for photographs and filter into the surrounding streets. Not far away, Senado Square has its own steady rhythm of tourists, while across the water Rua do Cunha draws another stream of visitors through the narrow streets of Taipa Village.

Amid the crowds, the blue uniforms of Macao's Tourist Police are easy to spot.

The officers patrol some of the city's busiest visitor areas every day. They keep

watch, manage crowds and respond to incidents, but their job extends beyond conventional policing. They give directions, help recover lost belongings, navigate language barriers and assist visitors who find themselves in challenging situations far from home.

It is a role shaped by the particular demands of a city that receives millions of visitors each year, and where the experience of feeling safe can be almost as important as the attractions themselves.

For Virginia Hertroy, a 46-year-old visitor from France, that sense of

security accompanied a week spent discovering very different sides of Macao.

"Macao is a very nice place. It's a mix between the modern and traditional, and I like it a lot. I give it a 10 as a tourist walking around the city, and I'm sure I'll be back," she says.

Her itinerary ranged from the city's integrated resorts to its temples and the Macao Giant Panda Pavilion. "Within a week, I saw everything from the part of the city with integrated resorts to the pandas and the temples. In the street along the Ruins of St Paul's, there are many people



📍 Tourist Police officers are deployed in busy visitor areas to provide direct assistance for tourists

and tourists, but that's normal," Ms Hertroy adds.

Policing a tourist city

Creating that level of comfort for visitors was one of the principal ideas behind the Tourist Police. The unit emerged as Macao's tourism industry expanded and increasing numbers of visitors began converging on a relatively small number of popular districts.

Lei Ieng Long, acting commander of the Macao Police Department of the Public Security Police Force (CPSP), traces the origins of the Tourist Police back to 2015.

"In response to the development of Macao's tourism industry, the large number of visitors and the high concentration of people in tourist areas, the CPSP established the

Tourist Police on a trial basis in April 2015," Mr Lei recounts. "After nearly two years of experience and refinement, this force was officially established on 5 March 2017."

Rather than creating an entirely different form of policing, the idea was to adapt police work around the particular pressures found in tourist areas. "The establishment of



The distinctive blue colour scheme of the uniform not only conveys the authority inherent in law enforcement, but also allows visitors to quickly identify officers

Lei Ieng Long

Acting commander of the Macao
Police Department of the CPSP

the Tourist Police was intended to improve police work in tourist areas, strengthen patrols and crowd management in these areas, as well as improve the quality of services provided to visitors,” Mr Lei says.

The remit is consequently broad. Officers receive requests for information and reports of lost property, assist visitors in difficulty and provide an initial response to emergencies. At the same time, they retain the fundamental responsibilities of any police officer: maintaining public order and preventing and combating crime.

From just over 30 officers when the initiative was launched in 2015, the Tourist Police has grown to 97 active members – 59 men and 38 women. Sixty are deployed on the Macao peninsula and 37 on the islands.

Their presence is concentrated where visitors are most likely to encounter them: the historic centre, Taipa and Coloane, major tourist attractions and boundary checkpoints, according to the authorities.

Multi-faceted training

Helping a visitor who has lost a passport requires a different approach from managing a dense holiday crowd. Explaining a local regulation to someone who speaks another language demands yet another set of skills. Thus, Tourist Police officers are trained for both sides of the job, Mr Lei explains.

Before taking up their posts, they undergo specialised programmes and must pass the relevant assessments. So far, 10 training courses have been held, completed

by 276 officers: 178 men and 98 women.

The model is built around what the authorities describe as a “dual competency”: policing ability combined with visitor-service skills. Operational training is provided by the CPSP Police School and includes the use of specialised vehicles and equipment, crowd-control techniques and the application of technology to police work.

The other side of the training is developed in collaboration with the Macao University of Tourism (UTM). Officers learn about the city’s history and culture, international etiquette, language communication and techniques for dealing with stressful situations and complaints.

Language training is particularly important, notes Tourist Police officer



T Tourist Police officers U Mei Kok (left) and Chu Io Chong (right) say their work helps preserve Macao's image as a world-class tourist destination

Chu Io Chong. He says communicating with people from different parts of the world is one of the most obvious ways in which his work differs from conventional policing.

"Tourist Police officers are deployed in places with large numbers of visitors, such as the Ruins of St Paul's, Senado Square, Rua do Cunha, the Coloane area and boundary checkpoints, where they provide assistance to visitors from all over the world," he says. "Therefore, in our daily work, it is necessary to have a command of Cantonese, Mandarin and English, while some posts also require knowledge of Portuguese. Multilingual

communication has become an essential component of our daily work."

Assistance from officers can be as straightforward as giving directions, or as urgent as helping someone who has lost important documents. Their duties also include mediating disputes involving tourists, dealing with lost-property cases and issuing replacement copies of the "Slip of Authorisation to Stay".

Blue in a sea of visitors

There is a reason Tourist Police officers look different from their colleagues elsewhere in the force. Their distinctive blue uniform is intended to make them easy to recognise, particularly

in a crowd. But its design also reflects a less visible aspect of the job: the sheer amount of walking involved.

"Tourist Police officers have to carry out long foot patrols in Macao's main tourist areas, frequently moving over uneven surfaces and covering long distances, which requires a high degree of mobility," Mr Lei explains.

Cobblestones, steps and uneven streets are part of the terrain, particularly around the historic centre. "Therefore, the fabrics used in the uniforms prioritise flexibility and breathability, while the design also incorporates practical solutions for carrying equipment, in order to support prolonged

periods of intensive outdoor duty,” he says.

At the same time, Mr Lei adds, “the distinctive blue colour scheme of the uniform not only conveys the authority inherent in law enforcement, but also allows visitors to quickly identify officers and approach them amid the crowds”.

Their equipment is otherwise similar to that used by other police officers and includes a firearm, pepper spray, handcuffs, a radio, body camera and service mobile phone. Cut-resistant gloves and protective vests designed to offer protection against attacks with bladed weapons have also been added, according to the authorities.

Their working hours follow the rhythms of tourism too. While conventional policing operates 24 hours a day, Tourist Police activity is concentrated between 7am and 11pm. During public holidays, festivals and major events, when visitor numbers surge, officers from other CPSP units are deployed to reinforce the main tourist areas. The challenge not only lies in maintaining security, but also in keeping people moving safely through intensely crowded streets.

When something goes wrong

Not every visitor knows Macao’s rules. Mr Chu

says officers regularly encounter tourists using drones without permission, dropping litter or taking photographs in places where photography is prohibited. In those situations, enforcing the rules is only part of the job. “In addition to patrolling and responding to requests for assistance, we have to patiently explain local regulations to visitors, provide them with timely guidance and put a stop to any violations, thereby helping to preserve Macao’s image as a tourist city,” he notes.

Other encounters are more personal. Officer Chu remembers being called to Rua de São Paulo after a tourist realised while shopping that her wallet might have been stolen. In an unfamiliar city and unsure what to do next, she was understandably distressed.

“When a colleague and I arrived at the scene, we immediately tried to reassure her. We then quickly gathered the necessary information, checked the video-surveillance footage and accompanied her to the police station to complete the subsequent procedures,” he recalls.

What stayed with him was not simply the police investigation, but the woman’s vulnerability. “This experience left a deep impression on me and

reminded me that the work of the Tourist Police requires not only professional competence and efficiency in law enforcement, but also a strong sense of empathy. In moments of crisis, providing support and assistance can effectively help alleviate victims’ distress and demonstrate the human side of police work.”

For fellow Tourist Police officer U Mei Kok, the job similarly moves back and forth between law enforcement and public service. Lost belongings, missing people, disputes involving tourists and language difficulties are common. During festivals and major events, officers must handle these individual requests while simultaneously managing crowds and preventing theft.

“Because they are in an unfamiliar environment, visitors frequently lose identification documents or personal belongings, and requests for this type of assistance are very common,” Ms U says. “We have to act quickly to help them search for lost items, follow up on the respective cases and provide guidance on replacing documents, thereby seeking to address their most urgent needs.”

One case involved two tourists who arrived at the Tourist Police Services Centre in a panic. They had



➤ Tourist Police officers help manage crowds in busy visitor areas

left a mobile phone in a taxi. Officer U began by recording where and when they had entered and left the vehicle, along with details of the car itself. The information allowed officers to identify the taxi and, working with other services, contact the driver. The phone was found and returned.

“The visitors expressed their appreciation for the cooperation between the different services and for the efficiency with which the case was handled. This experience further strengthened my determination to serve visitors,” Ms U says. “I will

continue to perform my duties in a professional, approachable and responsible manner, helping to convey the image of the Tourist Police as a helpful and dedicated force.”

Most people who come to Macao will never need the Tourist Police to find a missing phone, replace a document or respond to a crime. Their encounters, if they have any, may amount to little more than asking for directions or noticing a blue-uniformed officer while walking through Senado Square.

In a city where residents and visitors constantly

share busy streets, squares and attractions, the Tourist Police occupy a space somewhere between authority and hospitality. They are there to enforce the rules when necessary, but also to make an unfamiliar place easier to navigate.

For visitors such as Ms Hertroy, what remains after a trip is not necessarily the police presence itself, but the feeling it helps create. “I feel very safe,” she says.

For a tourist city, that simple impression can be part of the welcome. ■

**Shu Huang, contributor to the Chinese edition of Macao Magazine with Rui Pastorin*

BRITCHAM MACAO

CONNECTING MACAO WITH

Text **Tony Lai**



Eileen Stow, chair of the British Business Association of Macao 

BRITISH EXPERTISE

As **BritCham Macao** celebrates its 20th anniversary, the chamber is deepening Macao-U.K. commercial ties, connecting businesses with opportunities across the Greater Bay Area and adapting to engage a new generation

When the British Business Association of Macao was founded in 2006, the city stood on the cusp of a tourism boom, with a pipeline of world-class integrated resorts poised to transform its economy and skyline.

Two decades on, the organisation – rebranded in 2019 as the British Chamber of Commerce in Macao (BritCham Macao) – now marks its 20th anniversary as the city reaches another crossroads.

Today, Macao is shifting focus, diversifying beyond tourism and entertainment to foster emerging industries ranging from modern financial services and healthcare to advanced technology.

Amid that transformation, one constant has been the

confidence that Eileen Stow, a founding member and now chair of BritCham Macao, places in the city. “I have huge faith in Macao, and it hasn’t changed,” she says in an interview with Macao Magazine.

Under her leadership, the chamber is strengthening commercial ties between Macao and the United Kingdom in sectors spanning tourism, integrated resorts, construction and green technology, while exploring opportunities arising from regional initiatives such as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

According to Ms Stow, British businesses have established a presence across a diverse range of industries in Macao over the years, from food and beverage to education and healthcare. “Fashion brands, green

technology and construction also remain strong sectors for British businesses entering Macao,” she stated.

Her family’s food and beverage business, Lord Stow’s Bakery, is one of the most recognisable examples of British entrepreneurship in the city. Founded by her late brother, Andrew Stow, in 1989, the company rode Macao’s tourism boom to become a household name among residents and visitors from the Chinese mainland and beyond. Its signature product – an interpretation of the Portuguese custard tart, or pastel de nata – has become closely associated with Macao’s culinary identity.

Two-way exchange

The exchange is not solely one-way. Ms Stow pointed to a Macao construction company and BritCham



© COURTESY OF BRITCHAM

▲ Eileen Stow is a founding member of BritCham Macao

Macao member that has participated in development projects in the U.K., creating local jobs and building a successful presence in the British market.

Among the areas with the greatest potential for deeper U.K.-Macao collaboration, Ms Stow singled out the green economy, which encompasses activities and technologies that reduce environmental impact through renewable energy, energy efficiency and more sustainable business practices. The sector offers considerable

scope for cooperation given China's targets of peaking carbon emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

"Green is the new gold," she remarked. "We're eager to bring in more expertise from the U.K. and share it here."

Total trade in goods and services between Macao and the U.K. reached 295 million British pounds (3.22 billion patacas) in the 12 months to the end of the first quarter of 2026, an increase of 9.3 percent from the prior-year period, according to data

from the U.K. Department for Business & Trade.

The stock of U.K. foreign direct investment in Macao stood at 90 million British pounds at the end of 2024, an increase of 50 percent from a year earlier, while Macao's direct investment stock in the U.K. doubled to 2 million British pounds, showed the data.

Speaking at an event marking BritCham Macao's 20th anniversary in July, Sarah Robinson, British Deputy Consul-General in Hong Kong and Macao, said she expected

bilateral cooperation to continue going “from strength to strength”.

From Macao to the Greater Bay Area

Strengthening this bilateral cooperation remains central to BritCham Macao’s mission. Its membership has remained steady at about 80, encompassing large corporations, small- and medium-sized enterprises and individuals.

“One of the main purposes of BritCham is really about community, and that is something you cannot stress enough,” Ms Stow said. “There’s an old saying that birds of a feather flock together. People like being able to talk in their own language.”

The chamber also gives members a forum in which to exchange practical advice and tap into one another’s networks, she added.

“It’s about meeting people, sharing your experiences and discussing your problems,” Ms Stow explained.

“Someone may be able to offer a solution because they have a contact who can help.”

Over the past two decades, BritCham Macao has organised annual balls, business luncheons, seminars and networking events to connect members and deepen their understanding of Macao and the Chinese mainland.

More recently, the chamber has turned its attention to the Greater Bay Area.

Since 2025, it has organised visits to cities in Guangdong province to give members first-hand exposure to local business environments and potential investment opportunities. The trips also enable them to meet government officials, business leaders and other stakeholders, she noted.

The programme has so far covered four of the nine mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area: Huizhou, Zhaoqing, Jiangmen and Dongguan.

“Everyone has been talking about the Greater Bay Area, so we thought, ‘Let’s take some action’,” Ms Stow said. “The visits also allow us to see things to which we would not normally have access.”

She was particularly struck by the efficiency of businesses in the region and the scale and quality of its infrastructure, including its roads, bridges and transport links. The visits have also helped forge closer ties and laid the groundwork for future cooperation between BritCham Macao members and their counterparts in Guangdong.

Delegations from Huizhou and Jiangmen subsequently visited Macao, giving chamber representatives an opportunity to reconnect with them and build on the

relationships established during the earlier visits.

Giving back to the community

BritCham Macao’s annual charity ball is a highlight of its events calendar. Part of the proceeds supports the chamber’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes, including fellowships and financial assistance for Macao students pursuing academic opportunities and exchanges in the U.K.

Past beneficiaries include a Macao student who completed a master’s degree at Imperial College London and now works as a bioinformatician at the University of Cambridge.

The chamber has undertaken corporate social responsibility projects since 2009 and intends to continue doing so, Ms Stow added. “It is about giving back to the community from which we have all benefited.”

BritCham Macao is also working with local stakeholders to identify new commercial opportunities. A media company recently launched Access Macao, an initiative designed to connect international companies seeking to enter the Macao market with local hotel and integrated resort operators investing in entertainment, events, tourism, technology and wellness.

Ms Stow said the chamber was exploring how British companies could contribute their expertise to Macao's integrated tourism and resort ecosystem through initiatives of this kind.

Having first arrived in Macao more than 33 years ago, Ms Stow has witnessed the city's evolution into an international tourism hub and the emergence of its large-scale integrated resorts.

Beyond these changes, one of the developments that has impressed her most is the improvement in government efficiency, particularly since Macao's return to

Chinese administration in 1999. With the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government pledging to further streamline paperwork and simplify licensing procedures across different industries, she believes continued progress in this area could strengthen the business environment, particularly for overseas companies.

Spreading the word

Tourism remains a vital part of Macao's economy even as the city pursues diversification. Under

the Third Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the MSAR (2026–2030), the Government is targeting average annual growth of 5 percent in international visitor arrivals.

Ms Stow believes Macao's distinctive history and identity, reflected in its World Heritage sites, could help attract more long-haul visitors, including those from Britain. Yet she argues that the city remains relatively little known across much of Europe.

"I don't think Macao receives the recognition



📌 The chamber's events help support its CSR programmes



One of the main purposes of BritCham is really about community, and that is something you cannot stress enough

Eileen Stow
Chair of BritCham Macao

it deserves among many Europeans,” she said. “While it is well known in places such as Lisbon, it is often overshadowed in other [European cities] by Hong Kong, Singapore and other destinations.”

Macao received nearly 24.49 million visitors in the first seven months of 2026, an increase of 8.0 percent year-on-year, according to data from the city’s statistics bureau. International arrivals rose by 5.1 percent to 1.60 million, representing 6.5 percent of the total. Meanwhile, U.K.

arrivals grew by 3.1 percent to 24,686 during the same seven-month period, following an 8.7 percent increase to 42,211 for the full year of 2025.

Looking ahead, Ms Stow said BritCham Macao would continue to serve its members and facilitate exchanges between Macao and the U.K. At the same time, it plans to offer more affordable events designed to appeal to a younger generation. These could include smaller gatherings at which members meet over coffee and learn together,

rather than relying solely on cocktail receptions, seminars and wine-fuelled networking events.

“I think people tend to recognise the value of chambers only when they are more established in business, perhaps around the age of 28 or 30,” she noted. “Few people in their early 20s may see the benefits of joining a business chamber.”

It is a lesson she wishes she had learnt earlier. “I wish I had understood those benefits when I was young,” Ms Stow stated. ■

MADE IN MACAO

CRAFTING BEER WITH A FUNNY EYE

Text **Cherry Chan**
Photos **Lei Heong leong**

Perseverance, passion and positivity: meet the young start-up turning Macao's flavourful culture into a **signature craft brew**

The name reflects an ethos: looking at the world from a fresh perspective, exploring life through a unique lens and uncovering the lighter, more amusing side of everyday reality. Far more than a playful moniker, "Funny Eye" embodies a philosophy at the heart of Macao's first and only craft beer brand.

Crystal Kwok Tsz Ching, co-founder of 2048 (Macao) Limited, the business behind the brand, first encountered craft beer in Hong Kong in 2018. She remembers being struck by its distinctive flavour profile: sweet, floral and deeply aromatic, a world away from the mass-produced bitterness of industrial lager. Keen to explore more craft

styles, Ms Kwok soon realised that no local craft breweries existed in Macao. The absence sparked an ambition: she would brew her own.

"At the time, I never imagined I'd actually own a proper brewery; it was more of a personal challenge to be the first in Macao to brew my own beer," she told Macao Magazine in an interview.

Then an undergraduate at the University of Macau, she teamed up with two fellow students from the university's Cheng Yu Tung College. Supported by the residential college, the trio began experimenting with small-batch brewing in their spare time, with encouraging results, establishing 2048 (Macao) Limited in late 2018.

In 2019, the young founders joined the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) under the Institute of Collaborative Innovation at the University of Macau, where they translated scientific brewing techniques into commercial production. The result was Funny Eye, Macao's pioneering craft beer brand, which combines East Asian tea traditions with Western brewing techniques.

Guided by two residential college professors, the team created craft beers infused with traditional teas, dried flowers and fruit. Since then, the company has developed dozens of varieties, including lychee black tea, passion fruit green tea, osmanthus, coriander and coffee.



➤ Funny Eye, Macao's pioneering craft beer brand, combines East Asian tea traditions with Western brewing techniques

Its current range includes a Portuguese egg tart-flavoured IPA alongside “Macau Local IPA”, a crisp brew with citrus, lemongrass and lychee aromas. The firm has also expanded into other segments, offering a plum sparkling cocktail beverage and a sparkling tea, while launching a sub-brand, WildDays, for the Chinese mainland market.

Beer by cart

The group’s entrepreneurial journey began humbly at the Hong Kung Night Market, a short stroll from Senado Square in the historic heart of the Macao Peninsula.

Selling their craft brews from a simple cart on weekend evenings, Funny Eye began to attract a following.

Their initial strategy was simple and direct: establish Funny Eye as Macao’s premier craft beer by building grassroots support. The founders believed local recognition should come before expansion elsewhere.

To build a local presence, they entered entrepreneurship and brewing competitions, expanded retail distribution and opened a dedicated tasting room. Encouraged by mentors at CIE, the 2048 (Macao) Limited

team entered the 2020 Bank of China Trophy One Million Dollar Macao Regional Entrepreneurship Competition and won first prize.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the founding members regularly travelled to Hong Kong to brew larger batches. However, travel restrictions forced them to remain in Macao just as they graduated from university. The trio faced a crucial decision: pursue Funny Eye more seriously or set the venture aside for conventional corporate careers.

They chose the bolder path.



📍 Funny Eye officially opened its local brewery in 2021 with an investment of around 3 million patacas



We intended for our beer to be made in Macao, and over these eight years we have strived to maintain that

Crystal Kwok Tsz Ching
Co-founder of the Funny Eye brand

Backed by interest-free financial assistance schemes supported by the Government, Funny Eye officially opened its local brewery in 2021, with an investment of around 3 million patacas.

Establishing Macao's first commercial craft brewery presented regulatory hurdles. "We collaborated with staff from different government departments to work through the process," Ms Kwok recalled. Leveraging the Investor's "One Stop Service" provided by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute, 2048 (Macao) Limited successfully navigated licensing requirements to establish its local production site.

Fresh out of university, the team encountered challenges at every turn. Yet Ms Kwok credits these early difficulties with fostering

resilience. Her outgoing personality helped propel the business forward, whether she was persuading people to try the beer or securing financing.

Although pandemic restrictions repeatedly disrupted operations, Funny Eye persevered. A major turning point occurred when Ms Kwok began sharing her entrepreneurial story on Xiaohongshu (known internationally as RedNote). The social media platform broadened the brand's reach, cultivating a fanbase across the Chinese mainland.

A Macao brand

Unlike industrial beers, craft brewing allows Funny Eye to express local identity and narrative. According to Ms Kwok, the objective is not necessarily complex technical wizardry, but to offer fresh, hyper-local beer.

"We connect Macao's culture with our beer – through packaging, taste and overall concept," she explained. "Most brands produce beer strictly from the perspective of beverage manufacturers, but we approach it through culture. What we insist on, above all, is the spirit of being 'made in Macao'."

Today, production is divided between local supply and exports to Chinese mainland, distributed through wholesale channels. "Our main priority now is supplying products and building our brand," Ms Kwok said.

Every stage of production takes place locally. From grain milling and fermentation to bottling and packaging, Funny Eye carries out its operations in-house in Macao. This sets the brand apart from other local names.



📌 Craft brewing allows Funny Eye to express Macao's local identity and narrative

"I believe people should never forget their original intention," Ms Kwok said. "We intended for our beer to be made in Macao, and over these eight years we have strived to maintain that." The company consistently turns down lower-cost contract manufacturing facilities outside the city to protect its local identity.

Ms Kwok's infectious optimism shines through her journey: "I was proud from the very first day I decided to do this."

While commercial milestones validate the business, Ms Kwok finds the deepest reward in personal connections. She recalls one customer telling her that Funny Eye had become part of his memories of university life.

Reflecting the brand's spirit, she wants it to remind people to find positivity in difficult times.

"Through Funny Eye, we hope everyone can discover the silver lining in any situation," she said. "When people find themselves

facing tough times, perhaps enjoying our beer will remind them that others have overcome similar challenges and, with resilience, they too can press ahead."

Looking to the future, Ms Kwok envisions the brand as an enduring symbol of Macao's creative youth.

"One day, when people think of Macao, we would like Funny Eye to come to mind as the city's signature craft beer, just as other world cities have theirs. We aspire to become one of Macao's defining features." ■



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DIGITAL ASSETS

HONG KONG PINS HOPE ON NEW FINANCIAL FUTURE

Text **Guilherme Rego**

With licensed crypto exchanges, stablecoins and tokenised bonds taking shape under a single regulatory framework, Hong Kong is foreseeing that the future of finance will be digital. Its ambition goes beyond serving as a global crypto hub – the aim is to **bridge digital assets with the traditional financial system**

Few major financial centres have moved as far or as broadly into digital assets as Hong Kong. By August 2026, the city had 13 licensed virtual-asset trading platforms, Asia's first spot Bitcoin and Ether exchange-traded funds (ETFs), two licensed Hong Kong dollar stablecoin issuers and three digital government bond issuances. Other jurisdictions have approved parts of this financial ecosystem, but Hong Kong is trying to connect them all.

This approach has helped position the city at the forefront of Asia's digital-finance race. "Hong Kong is one of the global crypto hubs

and probably the main hub for Asia," says Henri Arslanian, adjunct professor at the University of Hong Kong, where he teaches financial technology and cryptocurrency courses. That momentum is reflected in Henley & Partners' 2025 index, which compares crypto-friendly jurisdictions offering investment-migration routes and ranked Hong Kong second behind Singapore.

Prof. Arslanian argues, however, that the real competition lies further west. "Hong Kong's largest competitor is not necessarily Singapore, but rather Dubai or Abu Dhabi," he notes.

Hong Kong is seeking to distinguish itself by integrating this new industry with the solid financial system it already has. The Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) oversees trading platforms and investment products, while the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) supervises banks and licenses stablecoin issuers. Together, they provide a regulated route into digital assets for both established financial institutions and new market participants.

The race is about more than attracting exchanges or encouraging people to trade Bitcoin. Hong Kong is preparing for a financial system in which conventional money, bonds and investment funds can be issued and settled on programmable networks. It wants the companies, capital and expertise involved in that transition to pass

through Hong Kong rather than around it.

That broader ambition first became official in a policy statement issued in October 2022, declaring the city open to global virtual-asset businesses. Speaking at Hong Kong FinTech Week at the same time, Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Paul Chan, said the policy demonstrated the government's "determination to explore financial innovation together with the global virtual-assets community".

When the HKSAR Government released its second policy statement on June 26 last year, the end goal became clearer: more efficient and lower-cost transactions, wider use of tokenised assets and a stronger international financial centre.





Tokenisation and stablecoins have the potential to change the underlying infrastructure through which traditional finance operates

Bo Tang

Head of the Institute for Financial Research at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Together, the two statements produced a framework with four connected parts. Licensed exchanges create a regulated entrance to digital assets. Exchange-traded funds place cryptocurrency inside a familiar investment product. Stablecoins provide money that can move on digital networks. Tokenisation places conventional assets on those networks too. The offer to the industry is straightforward: access to a global financial centre in exchange for accepting its rules.

Regulated entrance

Hong Kong's first move was to turn regulation into a competitive advantage. The JPX incident in Hong Kong in 2023 revealed what could happen when customers entrusted money to poorly supervised or unlicensed platforms. Instead of abandoning its hub strategy, the city drew a line between the market it wanted to build and the one it wanted to push out.

The answer was a compulsory licensing regime, which took effect in June 2023. Under that framework, platforms must meet requirements covering custody of customer

assets, capital, governance, cybersecurity and money laundering. Such a licensing system reduces the risk that the holding company will lose or misuse an investor's assets.

The regime deliberately borrows from conventional finance rather than treating crypto as a world apart. In November 2022, Mr Chan described the principle as "same business, same risk, same rules". A crypto platform performing the work of a financial intermediary must meet comparable standards on investor protection and financial crime.

Three years later, the SFC's register contains 13 licensed platforms, while six applicants remained on the SFC's published applicant list. Hong Kong had also launched Asia's first six spot Bitcoin and Ether exchange-traded funds in April 2024. By March 2026, the total number of authorised virtual-asset spot ETFs had risen to 11.

Yet a growing product list does not necessarily mean a large market. As of March 31 this year, Hong Kong's 11 virtual-asset spot ETFs had a combined market capitalisation of HKD4.3 billion. That represented approximately 0.7 percent of the HKD651.2 billion total for the city's authorised ETFs and leveraged and inverse products. Regulators have therefore begun moving from providing access to encouraging activity. Since November 2025, licensed exchanges have been able to seek approval to combine their orders with those of overseas affiliates, giving them access to a larger pool of buyers and sellers.

At Consensus Hong Kong earlier this year, SFC executive director of intermediaries, Eric Yip, described the market as having entered a "defining stage". The priority for 2026, he said, was liquidity: deeper markets, better price discovery and greater investor confidence.

Money that follows instructions

Deeper exchanges, however, solve only one part of the problem. To connect digital markets with the wider economy, Hong Kong also needs money that can move through

them. Stablecoins are privately issued digital tokens designed to maintain a fixed value against a conventional currency. Hong Kong requires issuers to hold adequate reserves, keep assets separate and allow holders to redeem tokens at face value. Of 36 applications, the HKMA initially licensed only HSBC and Anchorpoint Financial.

The first test arrived on August 12, when Anchorpoint began rolling out HKD At Par (HKDAP), the first licensed Hong Kong dollar stablecoin to reach the market. The initial phase was limited to institutional distributors and professional investors. When the licences were announced on April 10, HKMA chief executive, Eddie Yue, said he hoped they would “address pain points in financial and economic activities”.

Yet for an ordinary Hong Kong resident, the reason for using one might not be immediately obvious. The Faster Payment System (FPS)

already transfers money between banks and electronic wallets almost instantly. According to Bo Tang, head of the Institute for Financial Research at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the main value of an HKD stablecoin does not lie “in replacing FPS for domestic retail payments”.

Its potential becomes clearer when payment needs to interact with another digital asset. Imagine a company buying a tokenised bond. A programmable stablecoin could release payment at the exact moment ownership changes hands, rather than sending the money and asset through separate systems that have to reconcile afterwards. It could also operate around the clock across compatible platforms and, where rules allow, across borders.

“Its longer-term value therefore lies less in competing with FPS and more in connecting Hong Kong’s existing financial system with emerging digital-asset and



▲ Hong Kong's strategy aims to connect traditional banking with an emerging digital financial system



Hong Kong is an established global financial hub, so its natural edge is to become the bridge between digital assets and traditional finance

Henri Arslanian

Adjunct professor at the University of Hong Kong

cross-border financial infrastructure,” Prof. Tang says. The stablecoin matters, then, not merely because it is a digital HKD, but because it could become the money used to settle other digital transactions.

Putting assets on the same rails

That settlement function becomes much more useful if the asset can move on the same infrastructure. Tokenisation does this by creating a digital representation of ownership in an asset such as a bond or fund. It does not make the investment safer or more valuable. Its potential advantage lies instead in changing how the asset is issued, divided, traded and settled.

To prove the idea can work, Hong Kong has tested it with its own debt, issuing a tokenised government green bond in 2023, a larger multi-currency digital bond in 2024 and a third digital offering in November 2025. By March this year, the SFC had authorised 13 tokenised retail products holding HKD10.8 billion, an increase of 594 percent from a year earlier.

Those figures suggest momentum, but Prof. Tang describes it as movement from experimentation towards early commercial adoption, not large-scale use.

“If it merely places an existing bond or fund onto a blockchain without changing the underlying process, the commercial value is limited,” he says. The real test is whether tokenisation shortens settlement, broadens distribution, enables fractional ownership or makes collateral easier to move.

The next step is to bring the money and asset together through EnsembleTX, a pilot initiative using tokenised bank deposits to settle transactions involving tokenised assets. The technical objective is relatively simple: payment and ownership should change hands at the same time on connected infrastructure.

How widely this infrastructure will spread remains disputed. Some bankers believe all finance is heading in this direction. At Hong Kong FinTech Week in November last year, Standard Chartered Group chief executive officer, Bill Winters, said “pretty much all transactions” would eventually settle on blockchains.

Global regulators are more cautious. Tuang Lee Lim, who chaired the international securities regulator IOSCO’s fintech taskforce, told Reuters news agency on November 11 that tokenisation could reshape finance but “adoption remains limited”. Hong Kong is operating in the space between those two assessments.

A bridge worth owning

If Hong Kong succeeds in connecting these different parts of the system, whom are they meant to serve?

The Chinese mainland banned cryptocurrency trading and mining in 2021 and reaffirmed its restrictions in November last year. The SFC has told virtual-asset platforms to comply with the Central Government’s law by preventing Chinese mainland residents from using their services. The city’s opening is not a back door around Beijing’s policy.



▲ The HKMA supervises the city's banking system and licenses stablecoin issuers

That boundary does not eliminate Hong Kong's strategic value; it helps explain it. The city already links Chinese mainland companies with global capital through its stock and bond markets. Prof. Arslanian says "Hong Kong is an established global financial hub, so its natural edge is to become the bridge between digital assets and traditional finance".

The existing policy's welcome is strongest for stablecoins and tokenised real-world assets, he adds, and more limited for decentralised finance, the experimental part of crypto that often operates without conventional intermediaries.

Taken together, that boundary and the focus on established finance reveal what Hong Kong is aiming to build. Cryptocurrency companies are part of the strategy, but the city is not trying simply to reproduce a borderless crypto market inside its boundaries. It wants exchanges, banks, asset managers and regulators to place digital assets inside the financial establishment.

"Over the longer term, I believe stablecoins and tokenisation of conventional financial assets are more likely to have a structural impact on Hong Kong's financial sector than cryptocurrency trading alone," he notes. "Crypto trading can create new markets and attract liquidity, but it is still largely an additional asset class. Tokenisation and stablecoins have the potential to change the underlying infrastructure through which traditional finance operates."

Both assessments point back to Hong Kong's wider advantage. The city is at the forefront because it has already assembled more of that system than most competing centres.

What it has not yet demonstrated is mass demand. Success will not ultimately depend on the number of licences, pilots or product launches. It will depend on whether companies and investors choose this new infrastructure because it makes finance cheaper, faster, more accessible and easier to connect across borders. ■

'BELT AND ROAD' BUILDS

Text **Viviana Chan**

Adding to its foundation of transport and energy infrastructure, the “Belt and Road” initiative is increasingly focusing on **high-tech development, sustainability and human connectivity**

Ten years after the “Belt and Road” initiative entered a broader phase of implementation in 2016, the project is adding a new layer to its foundational ports and railways. New investment patterns and growing people-to-people exchanges are reshaping what connectivity means – and charting what the next decade may bring.

According to research from Fudan University’s Green Finance and Development Center, the first half of the year marked the initiative’s strongest start since its launch in 2013. Across 150 participating nations, Chinese investments hit 49.8 billion U.S. dollars, paired with 76.5 billion U.S. dollars in international construction contracts, signalling renewed momentum despite global trade uncertainty.

This surge is fuelled by a return to large-scale projects. Over 30 individual agreements exceeded the 1 billion U.S. dollar mark.

Dr Christoph Nedopil, the centre’s founding director and professor at the University of Queensland Business School, explains that, during the pandemic, travel restrictions made it harder for Chinese companies to negotiate and deliver major overseas infrastructure projects. After borders reopened, however,

companies rapidly returned to large deals in energy, technology and mining.

“The biggest shift to a new development paradigm of the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative took place after Covid-19 around 2023,” Dr Nedopil told Macao Magazine.

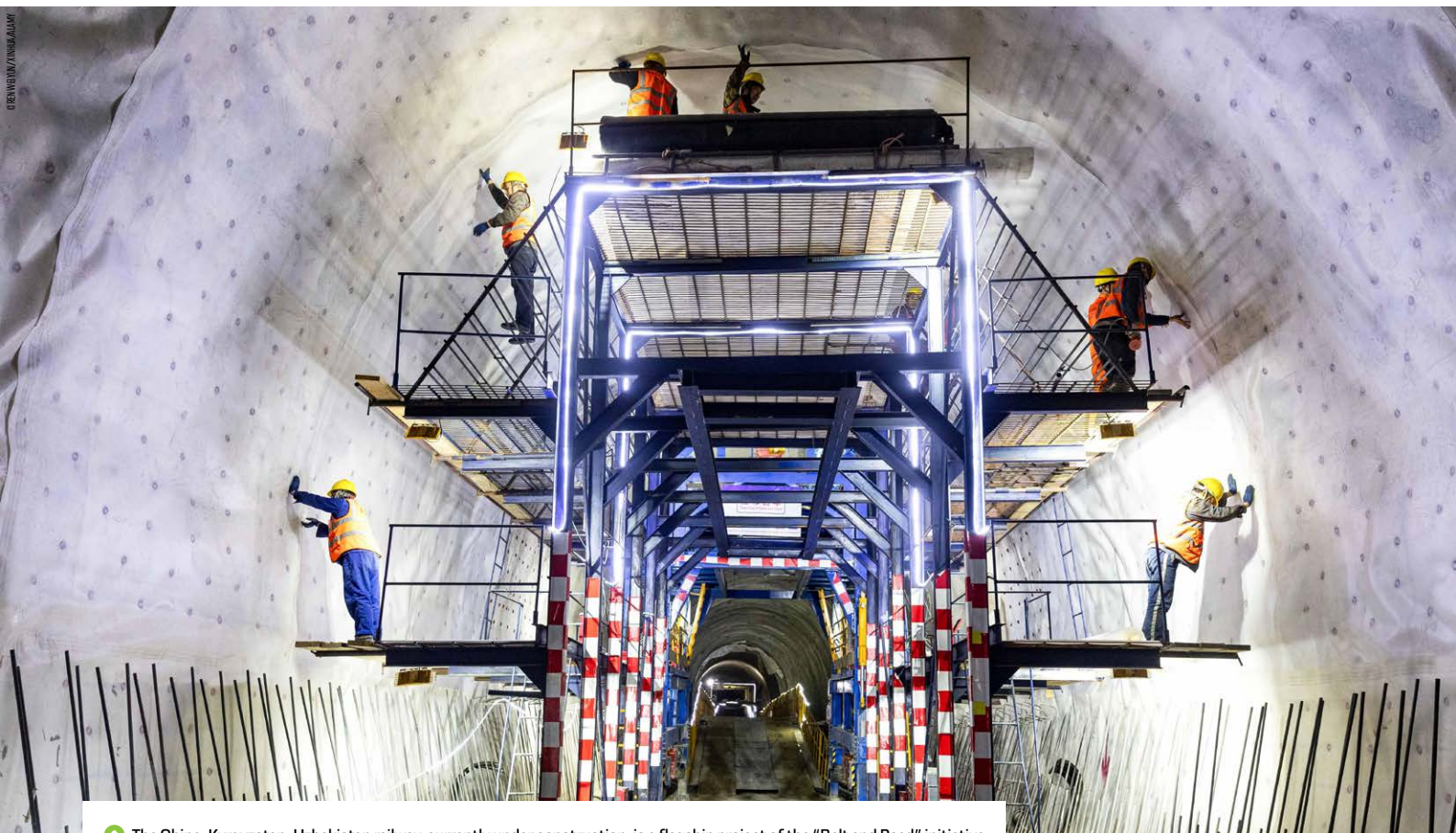
Going green

That return to large-scale projects is reflected in research published by the Green Finance and Development Center. The review shows energy projects dominated China’s “Belt and Road” activity in the first half of the year, reaching a record 36.3 billion U.S. dollars. For the first time, more than half of this (56 percent) was directed toward green energy – a new record both in absolute and in relative terms.

China also accelerated spending in critical minerals and metals processing, with 21.8 billion U.S. dollars flowing into steel and aluminium projects vital for automotive manufacturing, transmission lines and clean-tech supply chains.

Africa, again, emerged as the top destination for “Belt and Road” investment, almost tripling Chinese investment compared to the first half of 2025 to 33.5 billion U.S. dollars

GLOBAL MOMENTUM



➤ The China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, currently under construction, is a flagship project of the "Belt and Road" initiative

– more than ever – while the Middle East led construction activity. The Chinese private sector expanded its share of total engagement as measured in U.S. dollars from 13 percent in 2020 to 48 percent in the first six months of 2026, compared to state-owned companies.

The expanding sectoral mix reflects a broader

change in what connectivity means, observers say. It no longer refers only to moving goods along new roads or railways; it increasingly encompasses industrial supply chains, digital systems, technical standards, professional knowledge and the capacity to operate projects after construction is complete.

For instance, in the first half of the year, China exported 1.14 million new-energy vehicles to “Belt and Road” partner countries, up 59.4 percent year-on-year, according to Chinese customs data compiled by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. Automotive products shipped to those markets were valued at 83.67 billion U.S. dollars, accounting for more than half of China’s automotive exports.

This shifting industrial focus coincides with China’s broader push to ‘green’ the initiative, introducing stricter environmental guardrails. Most notably, the “Green Development Guidance for BRI Projects” – launched in 2019 – established a ‘traffic light’ system based on a project’s effects on pollution, climate and biodiversity. Dr Nedopil, who contributed to the work, regards it as an important step in elevating environmental considerations in overseas development.

A global framework

President Xi Jinping proposed the “Belt and Road” initiative in 2013 as a framework for improving connectivity and economic cooperation across countries and regions. Often referred to as the “New Silk Road”, it is structured around two main components: the overland “Silk Road Economic Belt” connecting China to Central Asia and Europe; and the “21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” linking China’s coast to Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in one route, and from China’s coast through the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other.

Two years after the launch of the concept, the National Development and Reform Commission’s “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” set out five main areas of cooperation: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and closer people-to-people ties.

The “Belt and Road” incorporation into China’s 13th Five-Year Plan in 2016 marked



The biggest shift to a new development paradigm of the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative took place after Covid-19 around 2023

Christoph Nedopil
Professor at the University of
Queensland Business School

the transition from a broad vision to a more coordinated phase of implementation. The initiative became more firmly embedded in national planning and began to further advance through government bodies, financial institutions, local authorities and companies.

Wang Yiwei, a professor at the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, places the changes of 2016 within the initiative’s longer development. “2016 can well be regarded as a key institutional watershed for the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative, though it did not bring about a fundamental change in the initiative’s nature,” he told Macao Magazine.

“Rather, it witnessed a historic transition from a visionary concept to institutionalised national arrangements and multilateral implementation.”

In 2021, “small-but-beautiful” projects became a more explicit part of the policy when Chinese officials called for such people-centred schemes, designed to respond directly to livelihood needs, to become a priority in overseas cooperation. The term



Large-scale infrastructure and 'small-but-beautiful' projects are alternatives that complement rather than replace one another

Wang Yiwei

Professor at the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China

describes relatively modest, practical projects intended to deliver visible local benefits in areas such as agriculture, health, poverty reduction and vocational education.

“Large-scale infrastructure and ‘small-but-beautiful’ projects are alternatives that complement rather than replace one another,” Prof. Wang said.

In his view, major infrastructure provides the physical backbone of connectivity, while smaller projects in health, agriculture, poverty reduction and vocational training allow the benefits of cooperation to reach communities more directly. Green and digital projects add a further layer, responding to changes in energy systems and technology.

Prof. Wang points out that while the outcomes of smaller-scale projects may take longer to quantify than the completion of a grand engineering feat, they can ultimately determine whether new infrastructure fosters lasting domestic development. “People-to-people bonds constitute the social foundation determining whether infrastructure projects

can endure, and their effects can indeed be observed and quantified,” he said.

Luban Workshops form part of that process. Pairing Chinese vocational institutions with overseas partners, they have expanded to more than 20 countries, offering training in fields ranging from industrial robotics and electrical engineering to agriculture and transport. Other programmes cover public health, student exchanges, joint research and training for officials and technical personnel.

Portugal in practice

Portugal illustrates how the “Belt and Road” initiative has moved from a broad international proposal towards more specific industrial and commercial cooperation.

Chinese capital was already present in the country’s energy, banking and insurance sectors following the 2011 financial crisis that impacted the European nation. However, many Portuguese companies initially viewed the initiative itself as distant from their day-to-day business.

Bernardo Mendia, secretary-general of the Portugal-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry and president of the Portugal-Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that around 2016, “Belt and Road” was largely perceived as an infrastructure drive centred on Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and maritime corridors. It attracted strategic interest but remained “somewhat abstract or distant” for many Portuguese companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

A memorandum of understanding signed by the People’s Republic of China and Portugal in December 2018 gave their cooperation a formal framework. According to Mr Mendia, it shifted attention towards more concrete trilateral cooperation involving China, Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking countries, while highlighting Portugal’s maritime and port capabilities. The official endorsement also gave companies greater confidence to develop longer-term projects and commercial partnerships, he says.

Mr Mendia notes Chinese investment in Portugal has since diversified beyond its earlier concentration in energy, banking and insurance into industrial technology, the green transition, logistics and real estate. “We have moved past exploratory delegations toward mission-driven, actionable programmes.”

He cites Chinese battery manufacturer CALB’s plant project on Portuguese soil as a leading example of cooperation in mobility and energy storage, with the potential to strengthen Portugal’s role in European electric-vehicle battery manufacturing. Last January, the Portuguese Government said the CALB project represented an investment of about 2.07 billion euros and would create 1,800 jobs, including 497 highly qualified positions, with production expected to start in 2028.

The next phase

Over the next decade, Prof. Wang expects the “Belt and Road” initiative to experience a gradual shift from project-led delivery towards greater coordination of institutions, development strategies and ideas. Major engineering works will remain relevant, but he anticipates more attention to regulatory alignment, mutual recognition of standards and cooperation between industrial systems across participating countries.

“Success will be measured less by the number of completed facilities and more by integrated alignment of development strategies, regulatory regimes and industrial systems across participating nations,” he said.

The scholar also expects participation to broaden beyond major contractors. SMEs, think tanks, youth groups and civil society organisations could assume a larger role, alongside multilateral institutions, multinational companies and third-country partners.

Cooperation is likely to extend further into areas that Prof. Wang describes as shared human challenges, including the low-carbon transition, digital governance, food security, public health and poverty reduction.



*We have moved past
exploratory delegations
toward mission-driven,
actionable programmes*

Bernardo Mendia

Secretary-general of the Portugal-China
Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Dr Nedopil approaches the outlook from the perspective of Chinese companies. He expects their internationalisation through overseas investment to continue, accompanied by “stronger localisation through local hiring of workers and management”.

He also believes there is considerable room for that engagement to expand. China’s outward foreign direct investment is currently comparable to that of the United States when measured relative to the size of its economy, at a ratio of about 0.84 percent. However, Dr Nedopil notes that export-oriented economies such as Japan (4.2 percent) and Germany (1.7 percent) invest considerably more overseas on the same basis.

“This suggests that there is significant upward potential for China’s overseas engagement,” he said.

Prof. Wang nevertheless cautions about “persistent headwinds” in the global economy, including geopolitical competition, protectionism and fragmentation. “Still, the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative draws its vitality from genuine development demands across partner countries.” ■

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📍 Ox Warehouse president Noah Ng Fong Chao says the organisation remains dedicated to promoting authentic, experimental art

OX WAREHOUSE: MACAO'S INDIE ART PLATFORM

Text **Margarida Vidinha** and **Lou Mei Kuan**
Photos **Cheong Kam Ka**

Artistic independence has been at the heart of Ox Warehouse's mission for more than two decades. Today, the organisation continues to serve as a catalyst for **experimental art** in Macao, supporting local talent and fostering cultural exchange through its artist-in-residency programme

In a city where tourism and entertainment play a significant role in the cultural landscape, Ox Warehouse has spent more than two decades carving out its own distinct cultural space. Founded as a non-profit association, it has become one of Macao's leading platforms for experimental art, providing artists with the freedom to test ideas, challenge conventions and engage with the public in new ways.

Ox Warehouse takes its name from the Former Municipal Cattle Stable which was originally built for cattle and later repurposed

into an art venue. While the stable remains central to Ox Warehouse's identity, the organisation has expanded beyond the historic site. Today, its exhibitions, performances, video works and installations are presented across Macao, while collaborations with artists from the Chinese mainland, Asia and beyond continue to expand its artistic impact. Yet despite this evolution, its guiding philosophy has remained the same.

According to Noah Ng Fong Chao, the group's academic director and president, Ox Warehouse seeks to create an environment

where art can remain “authentic, experimental and 100 percent personal”.

That philosophy is perhaps most evident in its artist residency programme, which welcomes around six artists each year to develop new work inspired by Macao. Rather than exhibiting projects conceived elsewhere, visiting artists are encouraged to immerse themselves in local neighbourhoods, communities and everyday life before beginning the creative process.

“We always ask that the creative starting point is Macao,” Mr Ng explained. “The work needs to have a real connection to the city. We don’t accept projects where an artist simply brings something that was already made elsewhere.”

Fostering cultural exchange

The artist-in-residence programme has become one of Ox Warehouse’s most impactful channels for cultural exchange. Visiting artists are given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in Macao, where they can create works of art shaped by their experiences.

According to Mr Ng, the programme is intended not merely to provide studio space, but to encourage new interpretations of Macao which will resonate with audiences beyond the city.

The breadth of the programme was evident in a trio of exhibitions staged earlier this year. The first – “Seak Kam Tong: Yuan Zeqiang” – which took place in January, showcased installations, paintings, video and mixed-media pieces by Hunan artist Yuan Zeqiang. “Seak” is the Cantonese word for “stone” and his works drew inspiration from Macao’s stone-paved streets, weathered stone pillars, layered masonry and textured façades – a reflection of the city’s distinctive material character.

Running alongside it was “Land and Sea: David Fank”, an exhibition created by Belgian artist David Fank during his residency with Ox Warehouse. Centred on two large-scale installations, “Land” and “Sea”, the exhibition was inspired by his travels across the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao

Greater Bay Area, as well as journeys to Beijing and elsewhere in China.

The organisation’s activities extend well beyond supporting artists alone. Curators and cultural managers gain practical experience through the production of exhibitions and festivals, while initiatives such as the Macao Experimental Video Festival (EXiM) connect local practitioners with broader regional networks. The latest edition of EXiM, which concluded in June, brought together artists from Xi’an, Lisbon, Hong Kong, Macao, Taipei and Tainan, showcasing work across a wide range of experimental video formats.

In March, Ox Warehouse hosted “The Golden Ratio – Macau Exchange Exhibition”, featuring 10 female artists from the Chinese mainland and Macao working across video, painting, photography, installation and more. The “golden ratio” is traditionally associated with a mathematical proportion used to measure facial symmetry and aesthetic harmony. However, this exhibition not only challenged traditional gender roles and social expectations, but also sought to reimagine and redefine a “golden ratio” belonging to women, while also encouraging dialogue.

From theatre to indie art

Ox Warehouse’s story began before the organisation adopted its current name. Its roots can be traced to Comuna de Pedra, an independent artistic collective founded in 1996 that focuses on physical and dance theatre.

In 2001, several members of the group, including the late photographer Frank Lei Ioi Fan and theatre director and choreographer Jane Lei Ioi Chon, established the Old Ladies’ House Art Space at Albergue da Santa Casa da Misericórdia. The platform was formally launched in March 2002, with a goal to transform the heritage complex into a space for contemporary artistic exchange.

The project was short-lived. Structural safety concerns forced the group to leave the site, but the initiative left a lasting mark



▲ Ox Warehouse takes its name from the Former Municipal Cattle Stable, where the group continues to host regular exhibitions

on Macao's emerging arts community. The Albergue hosted exhibitions, performances and discussions that introduced new forms of artistic practice to the city.

"For a small place like Macao, having somewhere for young artists to experiment was very important," Mr Ng said. "It also allowed us to remain independent in our work."

He recalls that the project quickly attracted attention within independent arts circles. From the beginning, the group sought to provide a space where experimental practices – including performance, video and installation art – could be explored.

"It became very well known," Mr Ng said. "No one else, not even Hong Kong, had anything like it."

A more permanent home arrived in 2003, when the collective leased the Former Municipal Cattle Stable.

Originally built in 1912, the Former Municipal Cattle Stable quarantined and housed cattle. In 1924, the stable was reconstructed, and its layout

and exterior have largely been persevered to this day. Featuring two parallel bungalows with truss roof structures, the colours of the mahogany roof and khaki walls are a testament to Portuguese eclectic architecture. In 1987, cattle-stabling operations moved to Ilha Verde. As a result, part of the structure was converted into a storage facility and the rest into an exhibition venue.

The repurposed site provided greater stability and allowed the organisation to expand its programme.

Over time, the venue and the group became closely linked – so much so that in 2011 the Old Ladies' House Art Space officially changed its name to Ox Warehouse. The former cattle stable evolved into one of Macao's best-known spaces for experimental art, combining exhibitions with education and community activities.

A space for all

Alongside contemporary art exhibitions, Ox Warehouse organised workshops, music events and theatre performances. The venue

also housed a specialist theatre library, an art archive, a bookshop and a weekend café, creating an informal gathering place for artists, students and local residents.

One of its most enduring initiatives was a children's art programme, reflecting the organisation's belief that creativity should be accessible to everyone rather than confined to professional artists.

"We want kids to have fun with the art, express their feelings and be creative with their imagination," Mr Ng said. "If their drawings don't look real or they don't match what the teacher says, it doesn't matter, because there aren't any hard and fast rules or pressure."

During this period, Ox Warehouse also broadened its outlook beyond Macao. Among its initiatives was the establishment of the Macao International Performance Art Festival (MIPAF), which strengthened the organisation's connections with artists and practitioners from across the region and beyond.

In 2016, the Former Municipal Cattle Stable came under the administration of the Cultural

Affairs Bureau. An inspection carried out that year identified safety risks resulting from the building's age and deterioration. The bureau subsequently launched a comprehensive restoration programme, including repairs to the roof, internal and external walls, waterproofing, drainage systems, flooring, windows and doors.

For nearly 15 years, the Former Municipal Cattle Stable was the hub of Ox Warehouse's activities. That chapter came to an end in 2017, when the organisation vacated the site to allow extensive restoration works to begin.

Artistic freedom

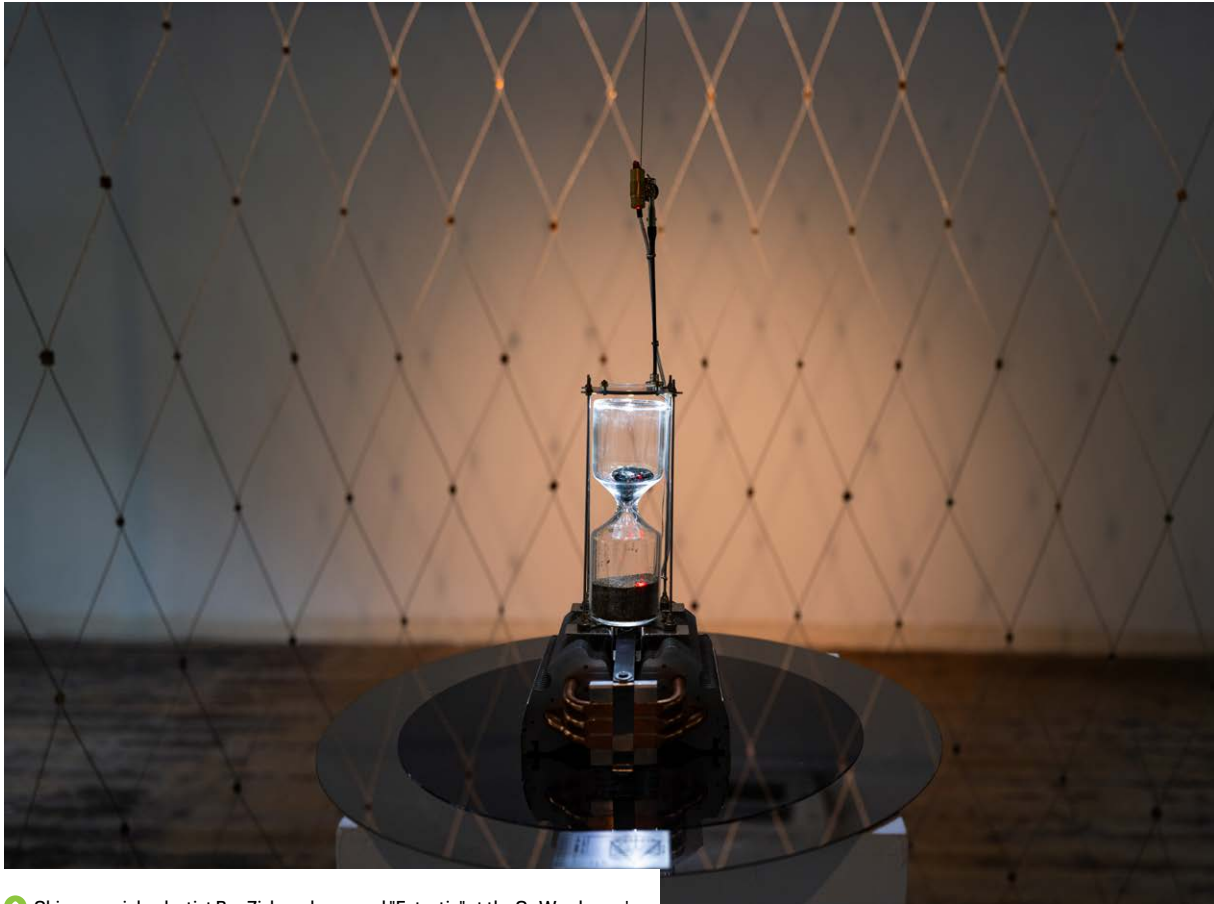
Leaving the Former Municipal Cattle Stable marked a turning point for Ox Warehouse. The organisation reinvented itself, taking on a more flexible approach. Rather than focus on one location, the group turned Macao itself into a canvas for artistic exploration, hosting projects all throughout the city.

From 2018 to 2022, exhibitions, performances and community projects were held across a range of venues, including Rua do Volong,



*For a small place like Macao,
having somewhere for
young artists to experiment
was very important*

Noah Ng Fong Chao
Ox Warehouse president



Chinese mainland artist Pan Zishen showcased "Eutectic" at the Ox Warehouse's "Future in the Making: Technology and Moving Image Art Exhibition" in June

where the group established its "Post-Ox Warehouse Experimental Site", as well as the Mong-Há Villas, the former Art Garden venue and other pop-up locations. This approach allowed Ox Warehouse to remain active while adapting to the practical realities of Macao's cultural landscape.

In 2022, Ox Warehouse returned to the renovated Former Municipal Cattle Stable. The group now regularly hosts exhibitions and other events at the venue, although the complex is managed by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, which also leases the space to other local arts organisations.

Mr Ng says independent organisations still have a comparatively limited presence within Macao's cultural ecosystem. Rather than competing with larger commercial institutions, Ox Warehouse focuses on experimentation and artistic risk, placing

emphasis on new art forms, new conversations and new perspectives. Many of its projects are supported by funding from Macao's publicly backed Cultural Development Fund.

The association's president would like to see more dedicated exhibition spaces and facilities designed for contemporary artistic practice. He believes that allowing groups such as Ox Warehouse to develop longer-term programmes and build stronger relationships with audiences through a clearer identity associated with their venues would be beneficial.

For Ox Warehouse, maintaining its artistic independence remains central to its mission. Its aim continues to be on encouraging experimentation, supporting emerging talent and sustaining dialogue between local and international artists.

"As long as we keep doing our work, we're here," Mr Ng said. "We create our own presence." ■

EXHIBITION

ECHOES OF WONDER

Text **Fernando Ferreira**
Photos **Cultural Affairs Bureau**

There are artists who paint what they see, and there are artists who build entire dimensions for others to step into. **Ekokaxi Wang** is the latter. Through her immersive, whimsical showcase, “Echo the Wind Wanderer” in Macao, she invites visitors to touch, play and explore a parallel universe. Beneath the giant creatures and playful forms lies a personal story of cultural exile, a chosen name and an unexpected sense of belonging

Step into Ekokaxi Wang’s world and the familiar rules no longer apply. Elephants can have bunny tails, creatures communicate through shapes and colours, and visitors are invited to touch, play and wander through an imagined dimension where almost anything is possible.

This is the universe of “Echo the Wind Wanderer”, the flagship exhibition of the 3rd Macao International Children’s Arts Festival. The exhibition was built from clay, paper, yarn and sponge, but shaped above all by Ms Wang’s fascination

with travel, childhood curiosity and the possibility of worlds beyond our own. Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) and jointly presented with MGM China Holdings Ltd, the exhibition opened on July 26 and runs until October 11 at both the Macao Museum of Art and MGM Cotai.

For the artist, however, the journey into this parallel world began long before the exhibition took shape. It started with the simple act of travelling.

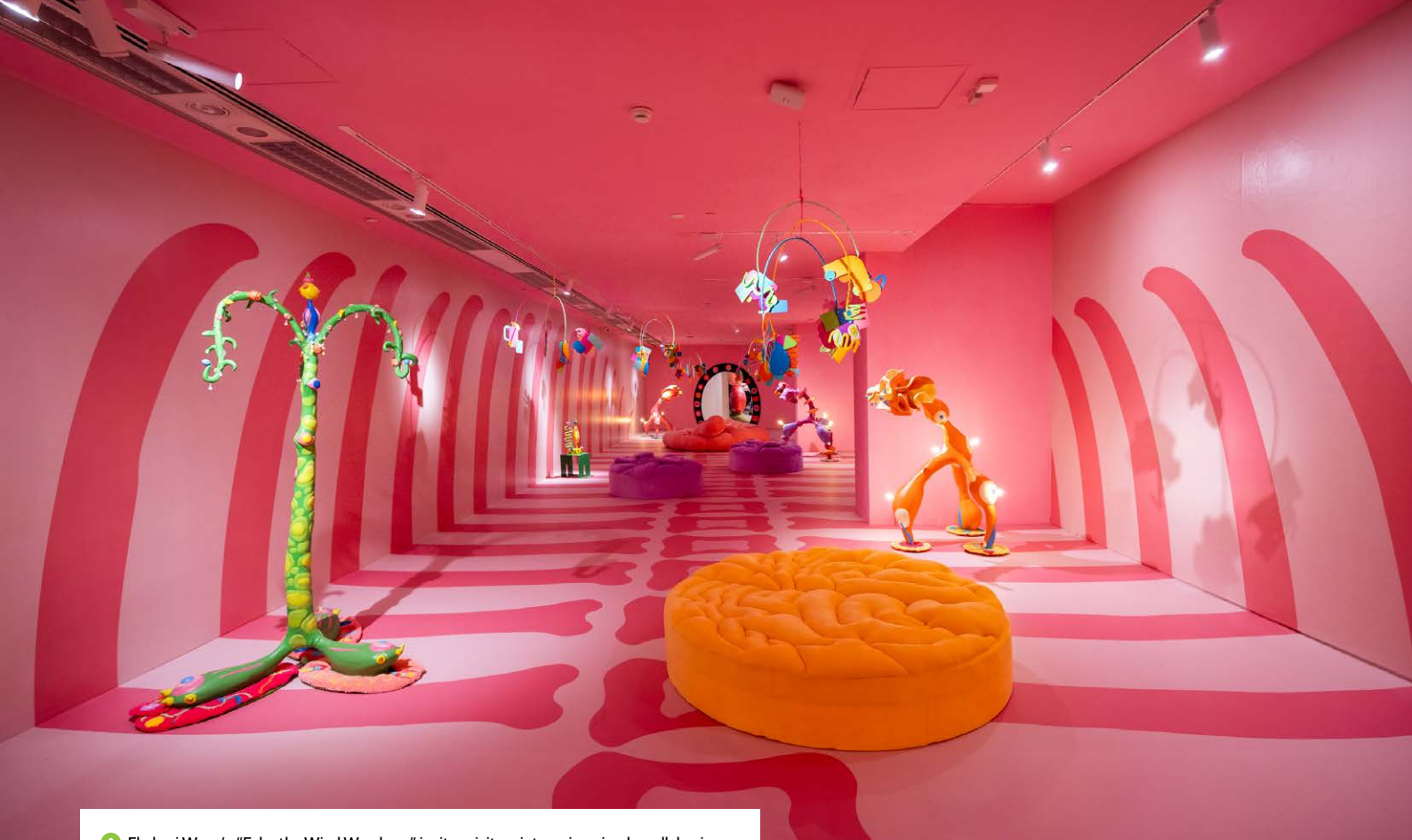
“I love traveling. A lot of times, traveling is like unlocking a parallel world

for me,” Ms Wang says.

“The travels I’ve done on Earth have been revealing so many different possibilities of life, customs, rituals, aesthetics and values.”

Those experiences planted a question that has occupied her for more than a decade: what would it be like to travel across dimensions altogether? “What would I see, and how could I recreate that for people on Earth to see?”

The answer became the world of Echo, a dimension built, quite deliberately, on the absence of the rules that govern this one.



Ekokaxi Wang's "Echo the Wind Wanderer" invites visitors into an imagined parallel universe

"In the other dimension, it would be a safe environment, with no judgement and no rules. Even evolution would happen differently. Language is no longer needed; every creature would communicate in shapes and colours, with no more misunderstandings," she explains, laughing as she describes one of its inhabitants: "Elephants would have bunny tails because there are no flies or mosquitoes."

The exhibition's title character, Echo, is not a mascot invented for the occasion. It is a name Ms Wang gave herself as a child, and one she has carried ever since.

"Echo is the name I chose for myself when I was

seven, with the influences of Echo Chen (Sanmao), the Taiwanese writer, and Echo, the mountain nymph who lived on Mount Cithaeron," she reveals. "I would always go back to Sanmao's writings, the free, emotional exploration of a world she created with words. And for the mountain nymph, I would always dwell on the concept of Narcissus and Echo: the mirror, the reflections, the action of watching and being watched."

That idea of the mirror runs throughout the exhibition. "I think, in a way, the exhibition functions as the mirror itself," she says. "The audiences come in and see the reflection

of themselves within the exhibition. And it's a mirror for one's inner child to be reflected, to re-emerge. A mirror that would shake off everyone's role in society. A mirror that would break all the rules and regulations."

Clay, chopsticks and stones

Ask Ms Wang about her creative process and the answer has less to do with fine-art supplies than with objects most people would throw away.

"I always collect recycled items to make them into sculptures. Underneath the mock-ups, there would be chopsticks or boxes, and I would always paint with straws and cotton sticks. I

would dig out clay from the mountains, collect stones from riverbanks and fire them in kilns,” she says. “No need to buy fancy art stuff. Collect some junk, go dig some dirt and play.”

Among the exhibition’s sections, “Re-coding Macao” occupies a particularly personal place, rooted in a life that has rarely remained in one place for long.

“I had a fairly complex background growing up,” she recalls. “I had to move between a lot of places – the United States, Korea, different parts of China – and I moved to Australia at the age of 14, spent 10 years in Melbourne, then I went to do my masters in the United Kingdom for four years.”

That constant movement left its mark. “I feel like a stranger and a misfit in my actual hometown, and I had a long period of time when I didn’t know where home was,” the artist explains. “I have been in a state of cultural exile for many years, feeling dislocated, alienated from my native culture and unable to find a sense of belonging.”

Macao, unexpectedly, offered something different. “From the first time I was in Macao, it felt so familiar that it felt like home. And it was such a strange feeling to call a place you had just visited for the first time home,” she says. “It

was a moment when I saw the possibility of all those different cultures coexisting in such an embracing, harmonious way. In a way, it made me love myself and my own existence.”

That feeling became the raw material for “Re-coding Macao”, according to the artist. “I have visited a lot of places in Macao and documented the shapes and colours that I felt were communicating with me. I love the artistic, historical and cultural aspects of Macao,” she says, naming the places that moved her

most: “Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Coloane, the Old Protestant Cemetery with the Morrison Chapel, and Cheoc Van Beach.”

Behind the glass

If the exhibition insists on being touched, it is because the artist has long resisted the conventional practice of keeping art at a distance.

“I have always had a problem with art being presented in a sterilised environment, behind glass and in a white box,” Ms Wang notes. “The glass between the audiences



Touch and play are central to Ekokaxi Wang's exhibitions

and the work is castrating the most important aspect of the artwork for me.”

Her own artistic education began with a material that resists being sealed away. “As an artist who started my career working with clay, the tactility of clay has become such an important aspect of art for me. How to bring that sense of touch to my audiences has become the main focus of my research for the past decade,” she explains.

That research became academic as well as artistic. Her PhD thesis, “Tactile Play Art – An Art Therapy Research on Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”, sits at the intersection of play therapy, art therapy and tactile stimulation research. “I was so lucky to have the chance to bring this research to life by making this exhibition happen.”

Spread across two very different spaces, the exhibition adapts its approach to each.

“In the Macao Museum of Art, we have designed three different spaces for children: to be in an artist’s studio, to enter a giant’s body, and to build Macao. They can play, touch and feel in any way they want,” Ms Wang says.

At MGM Cotai, the ambition shifts, playing with human scale itself. “We wanted to create the whimsical wonder of

entering a parallel world, where everything is off scale. In ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’, everything is to scale to daily life. In ‘Re-coding Macao’, we are the giants re-building the city. In ‘Aquarium Adventures’, we shrink down to enter a giant’s body. And in ‘Animals from the Parallel Universe’, big becomes small, and small becomes big.”

An unfinished exhibition

For the artist, the impulse behind all of this can be traced back to a single childhood memory.

“When I was three years old, I did a painting of a giraffe. The giraffe’s neck went out of the edge of the paper and came back in,” she recalls. “My mom was so touched by that painting. She kept telling me how talented I was, praising how I could think outside of the box. That was one of the very few memories I could remember from my childhood.”

That early encouragement, she believes, helped shape everything that followed.

“The encouragement and protection of my creativity and curiosity have made a great impact on me today. People would say the artworks look like they are made by a child, and I think that’s the best compliment I could have possibly received,” she highlights.

For her, the significance reaches beyond her own

artistic practice: “To keep that childlike wonder in the world, to be excited about every beautiful leaf on the side of the path. It is to let children know there are so many different possibilities in life, and there’s more than one designed path.”

Asked what she hopes visitors will take from the experience, she deliberately offers no fixed answer.

“I don’t have any expectations of that. I am free, as my audiences are free as well,” she says. “Every audience’s interpretation, participation and reading of this exhibition makes it into a new exhibition. I have only completed 50 percent of the exhibition by making all the artworks. It is through each individual’s own interpretation that the exhibition is completed.”

And when asked what has most shaped her approach to imagination, childhood and storytelling, her answer needs little elaboration.

“Nature,” she says.

“Nature rewards its bravest children. My mother always said, nature has all the answers. I am thankful to have nature with us.”

Her invitation remains open: to touch what most museums keep behind glass and, if only for an afternoon, rediscover the childlike curiosity that Ms Wang has spent a lifetime refusing to leave behind. ■

KARTING

CHASING THE MACAU

Text **Vítor Rebelo**

At just 18, Macao-born **Pedro Durães** is already making his mark on the European karting scene. Crowned Iberian champion in his first full season, the teen prodigy has one dream firmly in his sights: returning home to race on the streets of the Macau Grand Prix



GRAND PRIX DREAM

Born in Macao to a Portuguese family, 18-year-old Pedro Durães is testing himself on a major international stage. Like other young Macao drivers venturing overseas to pursue motorsport careers, he moved to northern Portugal last year to continue his secondary education and chase his racing dreams. In a nod to his family roots, he launched his European racing career in Fafe, his parents' hometown.

After securing second- and third-place podium finishes in local endurance races at Fafe, Mr Durães earned a guest invitation to a round of the Iberian Karting Championship (IKC) at Portugal's Braga International Circuit. Facing far more experienced rivals, the young talent kept a mature "cool head" and finished an impressive third. That breakthrough performance opened the door for him to contest the entire 2026 season.

He quickly made the most of the opportunity. Competing in the Proto2 420 category – with a team that is a tie-up between LK Motorsports Racing and Supremo Gosto Racing – the Macao-born driver established himself as a frontrunner and sealed the crown during the round at the Castelo Branco circuit – with two rounds still left to spare.

"It has been very good, mainly because this is my first experience in a competition at this level," he told Macao Magazine, adding that "there is still a lot to learn".

Winning a championship of this scale is no small feat. The highly competitive IKC features more than 60 drivers and

30 teams from Portugal, Spain and France who compete across three categories. The championship consists of six races followed by the EPIC Cup, expected to take place in early 2027. But while Mr Durães may be making his mark in karting now, his ultimate ambitions stretch much further – and this championship is just the beginning.

Coaching for the next level

Having already completed several tests in the Proto1 460 category, he is now preparing for the next step: joining a team coaching programme designed to "take him beyond what he is capable of today". The objective is to move from four-stroke to two-stroke karts and, from there, "keep moving up through the levels," according to the team.

The first move is to compete in the European karting championship with the ultimate goal of transitioning into sports cars or single-seaters. To do so, Mr Durães needs to secure sponsorship, as costs rise considerably at the higher levels of motorsport, he says.

He has always dreamed of competing in elite series like the GT World Challenge (GTWC), European Le Mans Series, IMSA and World Endurance Championship. "Ever since I was little, I loved watching drivers like Vanthoor, Buemi and Kobayashi," he says.

Of those ambitions, the GTWC holds particular appeal because it could one day fulfil a childhood dream of racing on the streets where he grew up.

"Ever since I was a child, it has been my



Ever since I was a child, it has been my dream to race in the Macau Grand Prix and leave my mark on one of the most challenging street circuits in the world

Pedro Durães
Karting driver

dream to race in the Macau Grand Prix and leave my mark on one of the most challenging street circuits in the world: narrow, steeped in tradition and a place where champions are made,” he highlights.

Building a ‘solid foundation’

Mr Durães’ experience pursuing motorsport in Macao has also shaped his views on how to help the city’s next generation of drivers. “At the time, I was one of the first drivers who had to take not only a theory exam, but also a practical ‘exam’ – eight hours in total – to obtain my licence and be able to compete,” he explains.

In his view, young drivers in Macao still face a few challenges: financial backing from sponsors, time for training sessions and the absence of a school framework that makes it easier to balance academic commitments with training and racing. Mr Durães believes that if Macao wants to establish itself as a pillar of international motorsport, it should build a solid foundation in karting and do more to promote the discipline among younger generations.

His own passion for racing began at an early age, although initially far away from the pressures of competition. He still remembers the first time he got behind the wheel of something resembling a racing kart.

“The first time I drove something resembling a kart was when I was around eight or nine years old, during my holidays in Portugal,” Mr Durães recounts. That initial experience soon developed into something more serious. “When I went back on holiday the following year, I went to an indoor karting track in Fafe, and that was where my passion for racing began to emerge.”

Mr Durães sees karting as an important stepping stone for anyone hoping to pursue a career in motor racing. Yet he also acknowledges one of the biggest obstacles facing aspiring drivers: the increasing cost of competing and progressing through the sport.

“That ultimately destroys the hopes of many talented drivers who want to continue their journey in racing,” he says.

Perfecting every detail

Success on the track is about much more than what happens when the lights go out.

Fast-tracking potential

Pedro Durães' progress has caught the attention not only of his rivals but also of those closest to his racing career. Both his team manager and coach, Rafael Cardoso, and his father, Pedro Lobo, say they have been surprised by the speed of his development, particularly the maturity he has demonstrated throughout his IKC campaign.

Mr Cardoso says his protégé "has a very good foundation", possesses "the sensitivity to understand what the kart is doing" and keeps a "cool head" when a race becomes complicated, "which is perhaps the hardest thing to teach a driver".

But his qualities extend beyond what happens on the circuit. Assessing Mr Durães as a member of the team, Mr Cardoso says the young driver is "hard-working, listens, accepts criticism and does not blame the equipment when things go wrong". For a team "like ours, that matters just as much as the stopwatch," he stresses.

His father, who is also his main sponsor, is equally pleased with what his son has achieved in such a short time. He says it is "obviously fantastic that he has been crowned IKC champion in the Proto2 class".

Mr Lobo says his son has always been drawn to speed, but said it was in Macao, at the age of just 12, where "his interest grew" during a 2020 "Summer Activities" programme organised by the Government.

Supporting a young racing driver inevitably comes at a price. Mr Lobo says that in Portugal, even with travel to Braga, Castelo Branco, Baltar and other karting circuits, the costs remain manageable. They vary according to the category and whether the driver owns a kart or races as part of a team, but "they can range from 20,000 euros to 30,000 euros". That is assuming there are no accidents or serious damages to the kart.

For Mr Durães, the next challenge is to continue moving up the ranks. For his family, there is also the prospect that the journey could eventually bring him full circle – back to the streets of the city where he was born and where his passion for motorsport took shape.

His father makes no secret of how much it would mean to see his son race in the Macau Grand Prix. "Both he and we, his parents, would be very happy," Mr Lobo concludes.

For Mr Durães and his team, preparation begins well before race day, with time spent learning the circuit and finding the right set-up.

"Normally, my team and I go to the track one or two days before the race so that I can start adapting to the circuit and working on the perfect set-up for qualifying and the race itself," he explains.

On race day, the team uses the free practice sessions to make any final adjustments and put into practice what they have learnt in the days leading up to the event, to "make sure we have everything ready," he says.

The work does not stop when the racing season does. During the off-season, the young driver alternates between training on his simulator and visiting the nearest karting circuit to keep his skills sharp.

His development has been largely practical. When he first entered the world of karting, Mr Durães did not take specific driving lessons, instead learning through experience and advice from those around him.

"The practical exam I mentioned earlier was more like the way a bird teaches its chicks to fly; in other words, I had to learn by myself," he says, adding that the only "lessons" he had in Macao were advice received from other drivers.

His experience in Portugal has given him access to more structured support despite already having experience behind the wheel. "I had the honour of receiving the support and training of a great coach, the late Rafael Miranda. I currently race under the partnership between LK Motorsport and Supremo Gosto Racing Team."

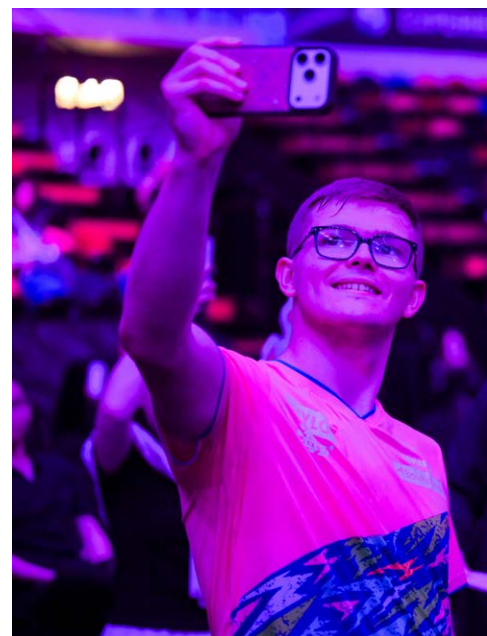
Supremo Gosto Racing Team, which currently supports the Macao-born driver's campaign, was established in 2023, adding karting to its involvement in off-road jeep trials. The team intends to strengthen its structure and bring together as many drivers as possible in order to "fight towards the goal of winning titles," the team manager and coach, Rafael Cardoso, states. ■

Lightning rallies

Photo feature by Cheong Kam Ka









Macao once again welcomed the world's best in table tennis at the **WTT Champions Macao 2026** from September 8 to 13. The singles tournament was jointly organised by the city's Sports Bureau, World Table Tennis (WTT) – the global events platform for the professional sport – and Galaxy Entertainment Group, and co-organised by the Macau Table Tennis General Association. The world's top players competed in a series of lightning-speed matches at the Macao East Asian Games Dome, where Sweden's 24-year-old Truls Moregard lifted his first Macao crown in the men's competition, while Japan's 18-year-old Miwa Harimoto claimed her third consecutive WTT Champions title of the 2026 season. The tournament also gave table tennis fans an opportunity to interact with their biggest idols.



BRICK & STORY

RED MARKET: THE BEATING

Text **Margarida Vidinha**
Photos **Lei Heong leong**



📍 The Red Market was designed by local architect Júlio Alberto Basto and built between 1934 and 1936

HEART OF MACAO

Celebrating 90 years, the Red Market is far more than an Art Deco landmark. It serves as a **vital community hub**, one that is deeply etched into the collective memory of generations

For many visitors, the Ruins of St. Paul's may be the face of Macao, but for those who live here – particularly in the bustling neighbourhoods of the northern peninsula – the Red Market is the city's true beating heart. This heritage landmark does more than preserve the past. As the only public market on Macao's official cultural register, it is a living monument and a thriving anchor of daily life.

Opened in 1936, the historic 90-year-old market has forged a reputation for its selection of fresh fish, vegetables and other seasonal produce, but that is not all. Recently revived by a comprehensive renovation, the Red Market is a striking architectural landmark that continues to serve as a central pillar of the community. Its signature deep-red

brickwork – from which it takes its name – stands as a proud badge of identity and collective memory.

Nuno Soares, an architect and head of the Department of Architecture and Design at the University of Saint Joseph, says the three-storey Red Market – situated at the intersection of Avenida do Almirante Lacerda and Avenida de Horta e Costa on the Macao Peninsula, and also known as the “Almirante Lacerda Market” – was conceived as an urban statement.

“It is not your typical market. It has an unusual architectural expression, more expressive than other markets of its time,” Mr Soares told Macao Magazine.

A timeless icon

Designed by local architect Júlio Alberto Basto and built

between 1934 and 1936, the structure became a focal point for the northern district's rapid urban and social development.

“It was a deliberate strategy to create an iconic building: the Red Market is iconic for its architecture, its colour and its location,” said Mr Soares, who also heads CURB – Centre for Architecture and Urbanism, a local think tank.

In the 1930s, Macao was undergoing rapid modernisation, driven by the need to streamline the food trade and improve public infrastructure. The Red Market was conceived in response to that demand.

Its development was not without controversy. During the planning and construction stages, local authorities received numerous objections from vendors and property owners at the nearby San Kiu Market. Fearing that the new development would undermine trade in the San Kiu district, objectors petitioned for construction of the Red Market to be halted. Municipal authorities responded by stressing the urgent need for a larger, modern facility that could meet rising hygiene standards and serve a growing population.

“The government's strategy was to create infrastructure, to build key buildings in the northern zone, to encourage

people to move and live there,” Mr Soares noted. “The market was not just a place to buy and sell, but a place of sociability.”

When the Red Market was completed, it stood as a prominent, freestanding structure on what was then the expanding fringe of the city. It also had a direct link to the waterfront.

The landscape around it has since changed dramatically. The stretch of sea that once lay close to the building was gradually reclaimed to create land for residential development, leaving the market surrounded by a much denser urban fabric.

Distinctive by design

Central to the Red Market’s enduring visual appeal is its architectural composition. The systematic use of red brick gives the building a distinctive identity, providing a warm contrast to the concrete streetscape around it. The material also had a practical purpose, helping the structure withstand Macao’s severe, humid climate and contributing to its long-term resilience.

The market represents the first public structure in Macao to explicitly embrace the international modernist movement. Symmetrical in layout, the building is distinguished by a central clock tower and watchtowers at each of its four corners.

“It’s an Art Deco building, but it has a tower. You don’t normally find that in a market,” Mr Soares said.

Devoid of neoclassical ornamentation, the Art Deco façade relies on its tower and geometric pillars for vertical emphasis, balanced by the white frames of rectangular windows that accentuate its horizontal lines. These crisp white borders, set against the red brickwork, reinforce the building’s clean, geometric character.

Originally, the interior face of the market’s outer walls was not lined with fixed stalls. Instead, they enclosed an open-air courtyard. As the neighbourhood grew and footfall increased, surrounding trees were cleared and a roof was installed over the perimeter space between the outer wall and the main structure, creating room for additional vendors.

“The Red Market has a robust structure... it still looks relatively young because of its expressive architecture and the way it has been maintained,” Mr Soares said.

The venue underwent a comprehensive rehabilitation project between 2022 and 2024. Guided by the principle of balancing historic conservation with functional modernisation, engineers rebuilt internal structural



The Red Market has a robust structure... it still looks relatively young because of its expressive architecture and the way it has been maintained

Nuno Soares
Head of the Department
of Architecture and Design at
the University of Saint Joseph

columns and floor slabs to improve load-bearing capacity and durability. Wall and floor tiles were replaced, ceilings restored and drainage systems overhauled. Walkways and entrances were optimised, while stall layouts were fitted with modern hardware.

Upgraded amenities now include full air-conditioning, barrier-free lifts, dedicated unloading platforms, improved lighting and modernised



▲ The venue hosts one of the most popular wet markets in Macao

public restrooms, creating a more comfortable environment for shoppers and vendors alike.

A market for the future

Beyond its concrete and brickwork, the Red Market is a repository of living memory. Generations of families remember it as a backdrop to daily life.

“As the 20th century progressed, the Red Market stopped being the only urban centre in the area. Today there are supermarkets and minimarkets,” Mr Soares noted. “Still, people go to the Red Market for specific things. It is known as perhaps the best fish market in Macao.”

For the market to remain relevant, he argues, preservation cannot mean leaving the building untouched. “The Red Market must adapt to present needs to remain a vital part of the urban area.”

One possibility would be to introduce contemporary social uses within the historic structure. “To stay relevant, it must offer experiences that attract younger generations,” Mr Soares said.

The idea reflects recent initiatives by the Macao Government at other municipal markets. At the Taipa Market, selected stalls have been revamped to feature artisanal goods, speciality coffee and tea beverages alongside traditional produce,

with indoor and outdoor seating areas designed to encourage visitors to linger.

Education offers another route to keeping the market connected to future generations, Mr Soares adds.

“It is very important that schools visit it. Stepping inside allows people to discover the local culture,” he said.

For all the changes around it, the Red Market remains remarkably familiar – a building that, Mr Soares stresses, has retained its place while the surrounding city evolved.

“Even today we use the Red Market. Despite the city’s growth, it remains a central point, still instantly recognisable.” ■

Macao, scene by scene

Text **Rui Pastorin**
Photos **Oswald Vas**

Name

Tracy Choi Ian Sin

Age

37

Title

Film director

Place of birth

Macao

Macao in one word

Home

You're Macao-born and raised. What is it about the city that instantly feels like home?

Macao is where I grew up and where everything started, including how I fell in love with film. But I think it's more about the people than any particular place. My family is here, and a lot of my friends are involved in filmmaking. It's a network and a community where we all know each other. There are still people here fighting to create a film industry, working together to see what's possible. That's what makes Macao special to me.

If Macao were a movie, what genre would it be – and who would be the main character?

A musical, because of all its contrasts. You have the glamorous integrated resorts alongside the old town and its streets. I've always imagined some crazy scenarios there – you could turn a corner and suddenly break into song. Recently, I was walking somewhere, looked up and suddenly there was someone singing fado. It really is like a musical. The main character would be a local working at an integrated resort. They would spend their day working in one of the most glamorous places in the city, yet their home could be tucked away in one of the historic alleys.

Where in Macao would you shoot the perfect movie scene?

Really, anywhere. But we're always looking for new places because we want to show a different side of Macao. For my first feature, "Sisterhood" (2016), we chose places that were more connected to daily life, such as the areas behind the Ruins of St Paul's. Then, in "Girlfriends" (2025), we wanted the Macao locations to show the old alleys and hilly areas. Because we grew up here, we're always looking for a perspective that might be different from an outsider's view.

A film-loving friend is visiting Macao for the first time. Where do you take them?

I'd start by taking them to the old part of Macao and walking around. Macao is a very walkable city, so we might go from the Ruins of St Paul's down to Senado Square and then on to Rua da Felicidade.

Forget the usual tourist checklist: what's one Macao spot you think everyone should discover?

The Three Lamps District and the areas around the market. They may not get a lot of tourists, but they're really interesting. It feels very local, while also having a real mix of cultures. There's quite a lot of Southeast Asian food there, which I like, and so many things to discover. That cultural mix is one of Macao's signatures. You have different cultures living quite peacefully together.

Macao has a vibrant food scene. What should visitors try?

There's a lot to recommend. You definitely need to try at least one Portuguese or Macanese restaurant. There's also Chinese food like dim sum, and the Southeast Asian food around the Three Lamps District is really good. We always joke that when friends come to Macao, they will never get hungry. There's food everywhere, at any time.

Now the speed round: they've only got two hours in Macao. Where do you send them?

I'd take them around the city centre and then drive to one of the resorts in Cotai. And maybe fit in a meal too.

Where do you go in Macao when you're looking for inspiration or a fresh perspective on the city?

I don't really have one specific place. When we accompany different productions scouting locations around Macao, I sometimes discover places I hadn't noticed before or find new perspectives on the city. I really enjoy that.

What's one corner of Macao you haven't put on screen yet, but would love to capture in a future film?

I'd actually like to try shooting inside one of the casinos. I know a lot of people have done it already, but I don't think we've really seen it from the perspective of a local Macao film. Everyone here has friends or family working in the gaming industry, so it's something that's very close to us. I hope that in a future project we can show a little of that world from our own point of view.



Music

THE SOUNDS OF "SILK RESONANCES"

Organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the Macao International Music Festival – now in its 38th edition – returns this autumn, with the theme "Silk Resonances". This year's lineup features 10 programmes, ranging from Chinese opera and Western opera to contemporary works and symphonic concerts. A major highlight is "Lang Lang in Recital: Iberian Rhapsody" on October 25, starring the world-renowned Chinese pianist (pictured). And, in a surprising operatic twist, international superstar Jackie Chan will make his directorial debut with Giacomo Puccini's "Turandot – Opera in Three Acts" on October 31 and November 1.

FROM OCT 2 TO NOV 29 | MULTIPLE LOCATIONS | WWW.ICM.GOV.MO/FIMM/38/EN



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Urban culture

LIVE MUSIC MEETS SEASIDE WELLNESS

The "hush! Beach Concerts x Urban Sports Wellfest" takes over Hac Sa Beach in Coloane for its fourth edition, blending live music, urban sports and wellness. Jointly organised by the Cultural Affairs Bureau and MGM, the festival features four distinct stages: the core "Hot Wave" beach stage, the relaxing "Music Chill" lawn, the family-focused "hush! Kids", and "Upbeat Power" for school and youth bands. Workshops and a marketplace round out the programme alongside outdoor fitness activities.

NOV 14 AND 15 | HAC SA BEACH | FREE ADMISSION, WITH SELECTED PAID EXPERIENCES AVAILABLE | WWW.ICM.GOV.MO/HUSH/2026/EN



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Crafts

CRAFTING CULTURE

Since 2008, the Cultural Affairs Bureau has hosted the Tap Siac Craft Market every spring and autumn. As one of Macao's flagship cultural events, this lively open-air market showcases unique artisanal goods from both local creators and regional craftspeople. Visitors can browse handmade products, enjoy live music from local and overseas indie artists and participate in creative workshops that bring Macao's contemporary culture to life.

FROM NOV 19 TO 22 AND NOV 26 TO 29 | THURSDAYS AND FRIDAYS 5PM TO 10PM; SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS 3PM TO 10PM | TAP SEAC SQUARE | WWW.CRAFTMARKET.GOV.MO/EN



© ANTONIO ALMEIDA

Commerce

OPENING NEW AVENUES FOR TRADE

Macao's principal commercial gathering, the Macao International Trade & Investment Fair – also known as MIF – is expanding its horizons this year. Organised by the Commerce and Investment Promotion Institute, the event showcases four core exhibition zones alongside specialised venues, highlighted by the debut of the Spanish-Speaking Countries Industry Pavilion. Running concurrently with the 2026 Portuguese-Speaking Countries Products and Services Exhibition (Macao) and the Macao Franchise Expo 2026, the triple-header assembles international investors, regional suppliers and local enterprises under one roof.

OCT 21, 12PM TO 6PM (TRADE VISITORS); OCT 22 TO 24, 10AM TO 6PM (GENERAL PUBLIC) | COTAI EXPO AT THE VENETIAN MACAO | FREE ADMISSION | WWW.MIF.COM.MO/MIF2026/EN



© CHAN WING YAN

Motorsports

HIGH-OCTANE THRILLS

The annual Macau Grand Prix is back this November, transforming the city's winding urban arteries into a high-octane battleground. The four-day spectacle draws world-class competitors across single-seaters, GT cars, touring cars, and motorcycles to tackle the notoriously unforgiving 6.2-kilometre Guia Circuit. A series of community festivities leading up to race weekend will immerse both residents and visitors in the motorsport fever, ensuring the excitement extends far beyond the tarmac.

FROM NOV 19 TO 22 | GUIA CIRCUIT | WWW.MACAU.GRANDPRIX.GOV.MO/EN



© CHAN WING YAN

Food

EAST MEETS WEST EATS

Sai Van Lake Square will soon come alive with flavour as the Macau Food Festival unfolds over 17 days this November. Hosted annually by the United Association of Food and Beverage Merchants of Macao, this year's event features nearly 150 local dining establishments showcasing the unique blend of Chinese and Western influences that defines Macao's culinary heritage. Alongside the diverse food offerings, live entertainment and games promise a festive, memorable experience for all.

FROM NOV 20 TO DEC 6 | SAI VAN LAKE SQUARE | FREE ADMISSION



© CHAN WING YAN

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

The Macao International Fireworks Display Contest has long been a cornerstone fixture on the city's autumn calendar. Staged between September and October, the annual extravaganza draws world-class pyrotechnic troupes from across the globe, each vying for top honours while flying the flag for their home nation.

Mission control is established along the waterfront by Macau Tower, where each choreographed display unfolds in sync with a musical soundtrack. Two teams take to

the skies per event night. On October 1, the National Day of the People's Republic of China, custom traditionally dictates that team China takes centre stage.

The contest's 2026 edition – its 34th overall – kicked off with a performance by Fireworks do Brasil, the Brazilian entrant. Among this year's major novelties has been the integration of coordinated drone displays on the opening and closing nights (September 12 and October 4), introducing an extra dimension of light to the celestial spectacle.

Can you find the 10 countries represented in this year's Macao International Fireworks Display Contest?

BRAZIL
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
CANADA
PORTUGAL
SOUTH KOREA
THAILAND
CHINA
PHILIPPINES
UNITED KINGDOM

(Words can go in any direction)

G	V	X	S	S	P	Z	F	X	V	O	D	X	R	U
N	K	Y	A	W	S	F	E	X	F	K	N	R	A	N
Z	O	Z	A	G	I	G	J	U	D	S	A	C	I	I
N	C	N	G	E	G	T	S	T	E	B	L	L	A	T
Z	A	S	D	P	R	A	Z	S	A	A	I	Q	O	E
L	A	G	U	T	R	O	P	E	N	U	A	P	I	D
Q	G	I	W	R	H	A	K	I	R	J	H	N	T	K
E	S	A	Z	G	C	O	H	H	B	L	T	R	A	I
G	H	D	E	J	C	C	F	N	T	O	A	X	L	N
Q	X	G	X	A	B	L	B	X	Z	U	A	N	Y	G
U	Z	K	N	A	B	Y	C	O	Q	Z	O	C	D	D
K	K	A	H	I	B	V	R	W	F	O	Z	S	R	O
C	D	P	H	I	L	I	P	P	I	N	E	S	G	M
A	N	J	E	N	A	M	B	R	A	Z	I	L	L	W
E	K	T	T	O	P	F	C	C	U	X	K	S	X	N



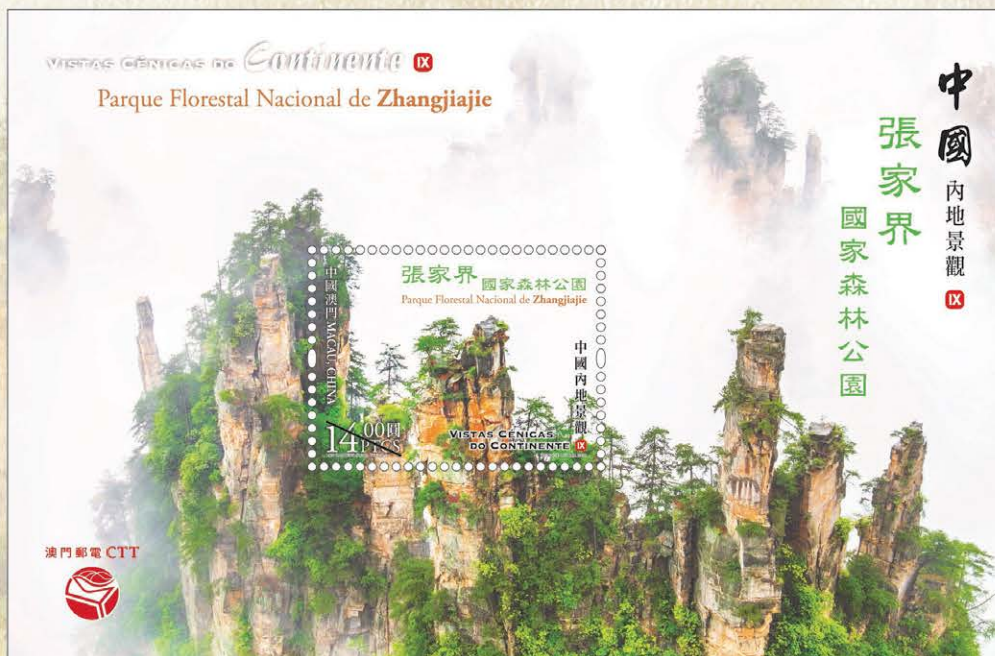
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