

Macau to the Max

This former colony's name alone conjures **images of high rollers**, hedonism and high-octane racing. But this rare gem of a destination also serves up a **heady mix** of cultural wonders from Asia and Europe, says Pamela Wade



Macau Tower
bungee jump

High Times

Iwish there were no openings in the floor of this metal platform outside the Macau Tower's 61st floor. Through them, I can see the 233m of emptiness beneath. Anthony, who's about to send someone plummeting towards the concrete below, doesn't look at all worried as he jokes with his white-faced victim. I wonder how that guy's feeling. It's bad enough watching, never mind being the person poised for a high dive.

The countdown is called and suddenly the platform's empty apart from Anthony, who's leaning over the edge while tracking the jumper as he hurtles earthwards. "Screaming like a stuck pig all the way down!" he tells us gleefully. This is the highest tower jump in the world and it delivers a rush, but taking a flying leap isn't even the scariest thing you can do here.

Elsewhere, people in orange jumpsuits warily stroll the open platform ringed the tower while, farther up, others ascend ladders for the most dizzying experience in Macau. I'm content just to drink in the views of the harbour – with its trio of long, graceful bridges – and of the city itself, which is home to an architecture enthusiast's dream collection of stone and mirrored-glass structures. Now, if only I could lever my fingers off this railing...



Macau Science
Centre

Science of Wow

I'm pinned flat on my back in the dark and a huge orange ball of fire is roaring towards me. It seems there's no escape from this deadly asteroid, which looks to herald the end of the world. Except it's the opposite: I'm actually seeing images of the universe's birth. There's a blinding flash as stars and planets scatter in all directions, seemingly passing so close to my face that I recoil. It's all part of the stunning, ultra high-definition 3D spectacular at the Macau Science Centre's Space Theatre.

Downstairs, I try the many hands-on machines and displays, in the process learning about space exploration, ecology, meteorology, even food science and sport. Best of all are the three knee-high, yellow-and-black droids in the Robotics Gallery, which perform tai chi, back flips and press-ups before sweetly finishing their demonstration with polite bows.

THE BENEFICIARIES OF THIS ELABORATE LANDSCAPING ARE HOI HOI AND SAM SAM, WHO ARE FAT AND FLUFFY AND BEAR THE COMICAL EYEPATCHES OF THEIR SPECIES



Macao Giant
Panda Pavilion

Grin and Bear It

There isn't much that can put a grin on your face faster than the sight of a panda. In a fan-shaped building on the island of Coloane is a roomy enclosure whose design – which features rocks, running water and grassy expanses – is based on feng shui principles. The fortunate beneficiaries of this elaborate landscaping are Hoi Hoi and Sam Sam, who are ridiculously fat and fluffy and bear the comical, black eyepatches typical of this rare bear species. Together, their names form the Chinese word for "happiness", which is what they provide for onlookers like me. As Sam Sam rolls onto her side for a leisurely scratch, Hoi Hoi shambles up a slope, leans on a rock and begins gnawing on a leafy bamboo stem. It's cuteness times two at the Giant Panda Pavilion.



From top: Ford Model T; Grand Prix Triumph

Wheels of Fortune & Fame

Jammed behind the tiny steering wheel of a bright yellow Reynard 923, I feel as though I'm in a coffin on wheels – albeit one capable of reaching a top speed of 255km/h. Here in the Grand Prix Museum, there's a gridful of lean speed machines from the 60-year history of the city's challenging street circuit. The earlier cars look naked without spoilers, but I fall instantly in love with the shiny red Triumph TR2 roadster that won the inaugural Grand Prix in 1954 – it's a cartoon car on steroids. Among the low-slung racers, there's Michael Schumacher's 1990 winner in dainty lavender blue, Ayrton Senna's red-and-white Ralt RT3 from 1983, plus motorbikes, a Ford Model T and a ruinously expensive Porsche 906. On the simulator, I screech around the tight turns of the Guia Circuit at 200km/h – it's a sweaty business and my smash-ups are epic.

AMONG THE LOW-SLUNG RACERS, THERE'S MICHAEL SCHUMACHER'S 1990 WINNER IN DAINTY LAVENDER BLUE, AYRTON SENNA'S RED-AND-WHITE RALT RT3 FROM 1983 PLUS MOTORBIKES, A FORD MODEL T ... AND PORSCHE 906



My Left Foot

The young man removes his trousers and hangs them up alongside those of other customers, who are sitting around in nothing but shirts and underwear. It's disconcerting, but they're chatting with the girls crouched at their feet as if it's all perfectly normal. And it is – in this backstreet massage parlour, anyway. Needless to say, it's markedly different from the hushed salons at the big hotels. Here, there's a Brazil-Argentina football match on the big-screen TV and real-life scenes that are nearly as riveting. Case in point: when my young blonde friend is whisked off for a back-and-shoulder treatment her masseur bellows, "You're beautiful! Marry me!" Sadly, my masseuse is a grim-faced, leathery lady who attends to my feet and calves with something less than tender, loving care. Relaxing it isn't, and I think wistfully of the soothing sea "music" that wafts through the air at the hotel spa. Much to my surprise, however, when I stand up my feet feel like new. I give the old lady a tip that leaves her smiling. Still, it's no marriage proposal...



Egg tarts

In the Eat of the Moment

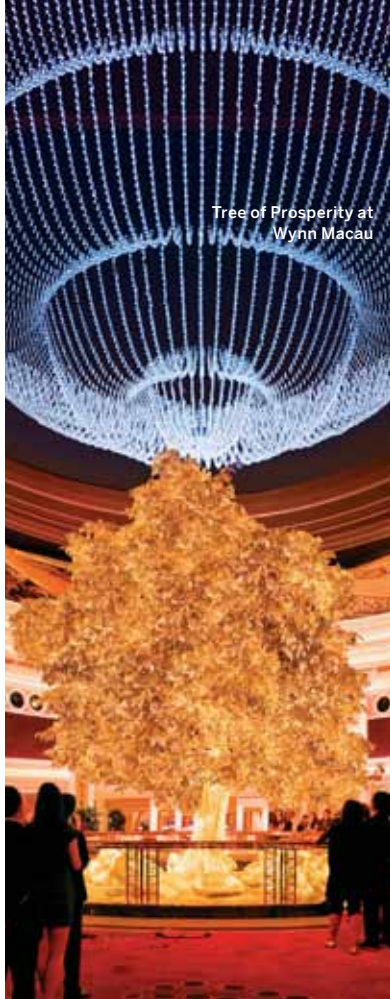
I'm glad I came hungry to Macau's heritage district. I'm soon grazing the entire length of the famous food street at Taipa Village, sampling Chinese, Portuguese, Korean, Cantonese, French and Italian fare. Shiny brown jerky of all types, including wild boar, is brandished before me by ladies with scissors, happy to snip off samples of this tangy, salty snack. Fish balls, wrapped in pale pastry stuffed with different fillings and dipped in sauce, are surprisingly tasty. And then there's the local speciality: warm and delicious egg-custard tarts in flaky pastry, along with brightly coloured jellies in pots and durian ice-cream and drinks. The shops here are stacked with dainty nibbles so prettily packaged it looks like Christmas.

WHERE TO STAY

* **LANDMARK HOTEL** is a classy, luxurious and centrally located five-star property. 555 Avenida da Amizade, tel: +853 2728 1781, www.landmarkhotel.com.mo

* **HARD ROCK HOTEL** Cool, fun and edgy, this four-star hotel is the place to get in touch with your inner rock star. Estrado do Istmo, Cotai, tel: +853 8868 3338, www.cityofdreamsmacau.com

* **HOTEL SINTRA** is close to the airport, ferry, shops and casinos. Avenida De G João IV, tel: +853 2871 0111, www.hotelsintra.com



Tree of Prosperity at
Wynn Macau

Light Sleepers

Before I came to Macau I thought hotels were just buildings with beds. Big mistake. The grand hotels here aren't just in friendly competition with one another, it's all-out war. And the weapons of choice are glitz, glamour and spectacle. Each property is deadly serious about offering something even more mind-bogglingly over the top than whatever it is their competitors have on offer. Taking it all in makes for some of the city's best free entertainment

In the lobby at Wynn Macau, I watch a thousand illuminated moon jellyfish, each the size of a dinner plate, waft around in a tank behind the reception desk. Sparkling from the ceiling are 7,000 Swarovski crystals, some as large as my fist. On the rotunda, the Tree of Prosperity with its 98,000 gold-plated leaves and a smoke-breathing dragon rises majestically from the floor. Outside, the waters of 200 spot-lit fountains dance to a soundtrack of soaring tunes, the eye-catching choreographic display punctuated by startling bursts of fire.
www.wynnmacau.com



Galaxy
Macau's lobby
extravaganza



Michael
Jackson's glove

All That Glitters

When the music starts playing in the lobby at the Galaxy Macau, those in the know immediately turn to look at the fountain. Along with many others, I watch what must be the biggest diamond on the planet seize the spotlight in the middle of an elaborate water show. There's plenty more H2O up on the hotel's second floor, much of it in the form of the 1.5m waves in the pool. From the vantage point of the pool, you can take in the stunning views of the hotel's gleaming cupolas, covered in 24-carat gold leaf.
www.galaxymacau.com

Finding Neverland

In Sofitel Ponte 16's darkened MJ Gallery is a collection of spot-lit cases displaying Michael Jackson memorabilia. Here you'll find the sparkly rhinestone glove that the King of Pop wore while doing his trademark "Billie Jean" moonwalk. The matching socks, too. There are gold discs on the wall, videos to enjoy and elaborate costumes to gaze at. No prizes for guessing the background music. www.ponte16.com.mo

Raise a Glass

MGM Macau's distinctive wavy glass façade fronts a palace where the floor is "paved" with lapis lazuli, lilies and orchids festoon glittering corridors and the staff roster features an employee whose only job is

WHAT TO DO



MACAU TOWER

Admission: S\$12/A\$9 for adults, S\$6/A\$4.50 for children. Open 10am-9pm on weekdays, 9am-9pm on weekends. Largo de Torre de Macau, tel: +853 2893 3339, www.macautower.com.mo



MACAU SCIENCE CENTRE

Admission: S\$4/A\$3 to S\$7/A\$5. Open 10am-6pm daily except Thursdays. Avenida Dr Sun Yat-Sen, tel: +853 2888 0822, www.msc.org.mo



GIANT PANDA PAVILION

Admission: S\$1.50/A\$1 for adults, free for children. Open 10am-1pm, 2pm-5pm daily except Mondays. Seac Pai Van Park, Coloane, tel: +853 2888 0087, www.macaupanda.org.mo



GRAND PRIX MUSEUM

Admission: S\$1.50/A\$1 for adults, free for children. Open 10am-6pm daily except Tuesdays. Rua Luís Gonzaga Gomes, tel: +853 7984 108, www.macau.grandprix.gov.mo



TAIPA FOOD STREET

Rua do Cunha, Taipa



Grand Canal
Shoppes at The
Venetian Macao

to polish the leaves of potted plants. The hotel's display of creations by American glass sculptor Dale Chihuly is truly a sight to behold. Nearly as exquisite are the cupcakes and chocolates at the MGM Patisserie, located in the hallway between the hotel and One Central Mall. There's even a light-and-sound show in a full-size replica Portuguese square indoors. www.mgmmacau.com

Little Mermaids & Shark Tails

By the numbers? The House of Dancing Water show at City of Dreams is anything but. Still, the vital stats speak volumes: 14 million litres of water, 80 dancers and acrobats, 400 costumes, 239 fountains, seven motorcycles, five sharks and, so far, 700,000 satisfied showgoers. It's so popular that I can't get a ticket. Never mind, the free bubble show is an amazing 360°, 3D extravaganza featuring dragons along with mermaids who swim in a virtual aquarium. www.cityofdreamsmacau.com

The Merchant of Venice

The Venetian is mind-blowing. Inside this mammoth structure are Italianate canals, piazzas and bridges – not to mention 330 shops – all under a sky-like ceiling of painted clouds. Gondolas glide across the water, propelled by gondoliers in striped jumpers who – you guessed it – sing. I'm rowed by Luciano, a genuine Italian opera singer who serenades me with 'O Sole Mio. Minstrels wander the shiny cobblestone streets along with fellow entertainers decked out in medieval garb. The Venetian is also home to Cirque du Soleil's *Zaia*, an eye-popping display of skill, strength and grace, plus enough techno-wizardry to float a hot-air balloon directly overhead. In a word: magical. www.venetianmacao.com



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MGM Macau

WHERE TO EAT

- * **O PORTO** Typically packed with families (always a good sign), this classy but comfy restaurant serves a mix of Portuguese and Macanese cuisine. Don't miss the garlic-stuffed giant prawns and coconut-fried African chicken, and leave room for dessert. 259 Amilante Sergio, Santo Antonio, tel: +853 2896 7770
- * **O MANUEL** Tiny, crowded and authentic, this restaurant exemplifies the passion of its eponymous chef/owner. Try the lobster soup, char-grilled sea bass and suckling pig. 90 Rua Fernão Mendes Pinto, tel: +853 2882 7571
- * **ESPACO LISBOA** Portuguese specialities include melted goat's cheese with honey and oil – so much nicer than it sounds – codfish cake and classic warm and buttery sweet egg tarts from Lord Stow's Bakery next door. 8 Rua dos Gaivotas, Coloane, tel: +853 2888 2226
- * **ANTÓNIO** Award-winning Portuguese cuisine served with panache in a small, cosy restaurant in Old Taipa Village. Ask António to demonstrate how to open a Champagne bottle with a sabre. 3 Rua dos Negociantes, Taipa, tel: +853 2899 9998, www.antoniomacau.com