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**Silent Macau**

**By Ieuan Dolby**

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A failed or neglected city springs to mind when walking around Macau during the day time. Around the outskirts of the Islands the doors of modern buildings never seem to open. Hotel restaurants tend to sole customers with reluctance: public gardens remain empty except for the lone tramp rooting around in the bins, roads remain unsullied with tyre tracks and the silence is loud all around. Inside and up the hill cracked and uneven pathways run along to meet the next, weeds compliment the falling cement on graying walls. Unpainted fences balance precariously around crazy paved basketball pitches whilst graffiti gives color to an otherwise drab setting.

The Portuguese gave the place some amazing buildings when they ruled and controlled, in fact Macau was the first European Settlement in the Far East. The Portuguese beat the Dutch and the British by a hairs breadth with their establishment of this well positioned and soon to be rich trading post. Hong Kong, Singapore and Malacca followed many years later as the British, Dutch and other nations established a presence in Far East Asia but at the beginning Macau ruled the roost. The Dutch tried many times to get hold of the Islands as did the Spanish and the British once or twice. A prize jewel had Macau become and Portugal managed to retain control throughout, only really giving it up in 1999 when they handed it back to mainland China.

China now rules Macau under what has become known as a SAR. This stands for a Special Administration Region and basically comes under the Mainland Chinese Policy of "one rule, two systems". A status-quo in which Macau governs itself for the most part, and it makes and lives under its own laws, but it belongs to China however it is run or seen to be run.

Today it is a little paradise steeped in history and culture. Large imposing, century old structures now vie for space amongst the tattered remnants of shoddily built 20 century brick houses and classily built modern glass offices that reach to the sky. Massive and squat stone offices of a colonial era sit regally and steadfastly among haphazard and leaning towers of steel girders: gray stone snubs orange brick and the slate roofs still keep out the water were the tin cladding has long since failed.

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New roads lead around the coast in smooth patterns, over long and impressive bridges they flow before swooping gracefully in arcs around flashing advertisements and over reclaimed land that oozes intent. Newly built high speed, two-lane, motorways pass futuristic glass structures and cloud hitting spirals, they zoom over decorated spanned bridges that are a feat to modern engineering, they whiz past glittering hotels that invite money to be spent and all before lowering themselves in stature to greet and pass over to times gone by.

Working inwards and upwards modern tarmac meets old cobbles as the flat ground turns into the steep climb. Little lanes hobble through culture that crowds-in upon itself. Houses of times past squash and bulge against each other and hang precariously over paths that defy the eyes to follow. Hanging baskets swing delicately from balconies that threaten to pull down the houses that they belong to, whilst open windows give glimpses to the crowded life beyond.

The modern steels and glass facades of hotels and office blocks, the colonial stone museums and Portuguese Officialdom of yesteryear that grace the flatlands around the coast are left behind when walking inland. The hilly centers of the Islands house the main population: looking at houses from many years ago the place strikes chords of a fishing village in Portugal when looking one way and China Town the next. These small houses built along old cobbled streets crowd in upon each other and bring life and activity all around.

But all is not as it seems. From the heat of the day, when cool drinks and light foods go together with a swimming pool and air conditioning, the evening brings change. From the dull and fading brick work and overgrown flowerbeds, from the graffiti and flaking paint on shop walls springs lights of dazzling proportions. From a forgotten City lying to waste in its own decay grows a glittering display of neon power, one that transforms the place and everything within. As the sun sets on the horizon people come out to play, tourists put aside their bathing towels and no longer think of cold air, workers get ready for the night ahead and hotel lobbies transform from desolate halls to crowded and bustling bee hives filled with action and intent.

Public Gardens become noisy meeting points for those going out on the town, overloaded buses groan along roads that are a mass of spinning wheels and alert taxi drivers fight for the needy customers with skill and adeptness. Policemen wipe the sleep from their eyes and come out of their cubby holes, ready and watchful for the evening ahead. Bars stock up with large muscled men who hang around the doorways with folded arms silently saying, "make trouble and you will have me to deal with". Hopeful jewelers open their doors and invitingly offer tourists the once in a lifetime chance to buy gold at the cheapest prices in Asia, the Indian on the corner suggests that he can measure and make a suit in a day and the electronics stores beckon where they had not during the day.

But what is really going on? Aside from the tourist scene, apart from the night life and the activity that springs up after the sun hides away, what is really going on. What makes Macau what is today and why do most people prefer to sleep during the day, workers and tourists alike and what changes the city from a neglected and desolate place under the sun to a fun filled bundle of activity in the night?

Gambling.

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It is all about Gambling. The Macau government makes seventy percent of its revenue from Gambling. Most Hotels are built with gambling in mind and thus they boast many a casino and gambling dens on its premises. Limousines carry the rich gambler to his seat for the evening, the one who has not yet sniffed defeat. Hotels lay on special packages for those with money to loose and girls lie in wait to help spend money that prospectors may have had thoughts of keeping. Bars keep drinks flowing to loosen punters stiff fingers, fast food flows to produce contentment and security in the high rollers and the large muscled men act positively when throwing out the losers.

Banks close down and turn over their business to rows upon rows of fast acting machines that spout out money like it is going out of fashion. Urgent and edgy punters queue at these machines, itching to get into the action, worried that they have no money left. Security guards watch metal detectors closely and search handbags with vigor, hidden cameras turn circles as unaware gamblers throw their money on luck and doormen's arms ache as they ceaselessly open doors for the excited newcomers and help the defeated out. Receptionists check-in new arrivals by the hundreds as tours from Mainland China pour off trains like ants from a mole hill. Airport-staff sweat freely, as planes land in quick succession to throw out more determined miners from Taiwan, the Philippines, from Singapore and other corners of the world.

Newly arrived punters race against time to grab their bags, get through immigration and to catch a cab for their hotel and the casinos next door, above or beneath. Time is precious and time is money - money that will be spent despite dreams that suggest otherwise.

Not all arrivals and visitors to Macau are gamblers on a mission. Some visitors are genuine tourists who wonder why the city is so bare and drab during the day, those that have no idea as to the other face of Macau. And from Taiwan and other expensive Asian economies comes another bunch of visitors, the group or package tour and should one see the tour as it engorges itself from the plane, one will notice that it is all men. These men are on a mission, they will also be all over the age of fifty and the average age will probably be about seventy. This is a specially arranged tour that may for example start off from Taiwan and fly to Macau for a three day visit. And it is special in that it is for men only, that they are going to Macau to get a woman, to have three days of sex and romp and then to climb back onto their plane alone and back to Taiwan: maybe to repeat the process in a years time, if they can afford it or their wives don't find out. Yes, another side of Macau; the availability of prostitutes who service the Taiwanese or overseas visitor or who relieve punters and gamblers of any change that they may still have jangling in their pockets after the gambling halls have shut for the night.

Prostitutes hang around doorways and exits from casinos, they balance precariously on high heels that defy gravity and they are covered in layers of make-up that gives competition to a skilled plasterer. Skimpy skirts ride high on slim legs and breasts push eagerly against tight tops that are all but not present. Little purses swing invitingly from hands that wander fleetingly as males pass by, smiles are issued freely to those that look and glares are given as those looked walk on.

Innuendos are made and promises of a new life are given as punters exit casinos for new ground or with nearly empty pockets. New entrants are given the choice of female company as they prepare to spend and while away the night and whatever one can think of it is there. Slim girls with long legs, short girls with big busts, tall girls with big busts and short girls with long legs are all around leaning

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against doorways and offering hope and suggestion in husky voices. Slim waists peek out as hips thrust invitingly, nipples protrude as tongues are run along lips and eyes smile to all who see. Men dressed as woman, large woman with massive breasts and large men with even bigger breasts stand in the background for those inclined and little girls with spirit and enjoyment run around touching bottoms and kissing cheeks like they are in love.

A neglected city it may be during day light hours, but prostitutes, bouncers, gamblers, airport staff, taxi-drivers, croupiers, fast food hall owners, barkeepers, bus drivers, doormen, receptionists, bankers, service engineers, thieves and security guards need to sleep during the day so that when the sunsets they will be ready for a new night of action.

And the only daylight customers are the tourists who never knew the other face of Macau and the cleaners who must make the city ready for the next plane load of enthusiastic passengers and the next train full of excited amateurs with their pockets full of cash and dreams of a rich and enjoyable future ahead of them.

Ieuan Dolby, from Scotland is an Engineering Officer in the Merchant Navy. He has been travelling the world for 15yrs on an endless tour of cultural diversification. Currently based in Singapore he writes

various articles for magazines and newspapers and is working on a marine glossary.

## **There's No One Right Way To Travel To China**

**By Frank Johnson**

A traveler might wonder where to begin in a foreign country that is slightly smaller than the size of the United States with over 5,000 years of recorded history. The wonderful advantage to traveling China is that there is no right or wrong place to start. China's fascinating past is written all over its 23 provinces,\* 5 autonomous regions and 4 municipalities. The Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau are also part of China's government under a "one country, two systems" law.

### Greater Than the Great Wall: Travel to China's Many Wonders

China is a mecca for human-made and natural wonders. The southern Tibetan border is home to the world's tallest peak, Mt. Everest. Take in the inspiring Himalayan view then head north and travel through the majestic Three Gorges, a 120-mile stretch of plummeting cliffs along the Yangtze River. Stand in the middle of the largest plaza in the world, Tiananmen Square, at the heart of the capital city, Beijing. While in Beijing, visit the Imperial Palace and find out why it is known as the Forbidden City. Then, venture south to discover a true artistic Qin Dynasty treasure in Xian, where over six thousand Terracotta Warriors are arranged in battle formation on 14,000 square meters of land.

### Hong Kong and Macau: Another Way to Experience China

These two regions are governed with a significant degree of political and commercial autonomy and

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are China's most prominent examples of the fusion of cultures brought about by colonialism. While travel to these provinces provides a very different experience from the rest of China, they are by no means lacking in worldly wonders or the authentic Chinese lifestyle.

Hong Kong came under British rule in 1841 after centuries of British involvement in the silk and tea trade. The expansion and modernization of this global port city attracted commercial and cultural influences from all corners of the world. China regained sovereignty over the British colony in 1997 but agreed to leave the democratic government structure intact. What has resulted is an unparalleled bastion of progressive ideas, pioneering technology and architectural phenomena like the world's three longest bridges.

Thirty-five miles west of Hong Kong across the Pear River delta, the enclave of Macau is perched on a peninsula surrounded by small islands. Portugal had established sovereignty over Macau in 1887 after a history of heavy trade and navigation in the region. The Portuguese finally ceded all authority back to China in 1999. The sophisticated blend of Chinese and Portuguese art, architecture and cuisine define Macau's truly enchanting character. In Macau it is commonplace to enjoy an espresso and pastry for lunch and Dim Sum for dinner, accompanied by a fine Portuguese wine.

Be sure to set aside ample time to explore Hong Kong and Macau as part of your itinerary to travel China!

\* It should be noted that China considers Taiwan to be its 23rd province; however Taiwan essentially functions as an independent nation and is not easily accessible from mainland China.

For more information on traveling to China and other areas in Asia, visit

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