

GPAFFC 28th October – Dongguan visits

On the 28th October, the final day of our Friendship trip, we were taken to three locations in Dongguan:

- Nanshe Village: an old, and very well preserved village within the city, and one considered to be the diamond of Dongguan because of the splendour of the old buildings, temples and architecture that represent the old ways of a life that have largely been replaced elsewhere in China.
- The Weimei Ceramics Workshop:
- Keyuan Gardens:

Nanshe Village

One immediate impression of Dongguan is that it is big! It takes quite a time to get anywhere simply because the scale of the city is grand. It was therefore quite remarkable to find Nanshe Village – a beautifully preserved example of how life was once lived in China. It has a large number of ancient buildings and ancestral temples, dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties and preserved as they would have been all those years ago.



The village abounds in tight, winding alleyways where one can wander under eaves of the beautiful cascading rooftops, giving a good impression of what life was like hundreds of years ago. Fortunately the village has escaped the plethora of touristy stalls that plague other such locations, and even the conversion of a number of buildings to restaurants and cafes has been done sympathetically. There is even a small hotel for those who wish to prolong their stay. The village is on a surprisingly large scale and there is plenty to see.

Nanshe Village is an example of the ancient Pearl River Delta Water Villages that once dominated the area.



Most of the buildings in Dongguan were built 300 to 800 years ago during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It was only in recent times, as Dongguan experienced rapid industrialisation, that residents abandoned this ancient village. Residents had continued to live much the way they had done historically until not so very long ago.

Fortunately, while a huge city has emerged from the villages around Nanshe it has been saved and preserved as a very impressive cultural heritage site. Nanshe has applied to be a Chinese Historical and Cultural Village.

Weimei Ceramics Workshop

Crossing the city, we progressed to the Weimei Ceramics Workshop – an Architecture Ceramics Museum, housed in the headquarters of Wonderful Ceramics Group (their company name, not a superlative!).



The museum opened in 2006 to highlight the architectural history of ceramics in the Pearl Delta area. It is interesting also in that it is a museum established wholly within a working enterprise, but this ensured that it was a 'dynamic' museum where we were able to see much of the current practices employed today and in the past. The museum spans three floors with three differing themes:

- A History Showroom of the Wonderful Ceramics Group
- A Culture Brick Showroom and Pottery Workshop of the ...
- The China Architecture Ceramics Museum and Chen Fucheng Art Gallery of the ...



There was quite a display of roof tiles over the years, brick making and decorated tiles. However the pottery and ceramic artwork were quite remarkable. As well as the many displays, there were displays of artists carving ceramic tiles, making teapots and various pieces of pottery. The artist, Chen Fucheng, is prominent through his ceramic work at Weimei, and there was a large display of his rather flowery and impressive artwork in the museum.



Some of the more modern pieces maybe left a bit to the imagination though.

Keyuan Gardens



Another lengthy journey across this giant city too us to the magnificent Keyuan Gardens - one of the four famous gardens in Guangdong from the Qing Dynasty, and now state-run as a national cultural treasure. The gardens were built by Zhang Jingxiu, a deposed military officer, as a pleasant environment in which to meet with his friends. The name of the garden means 'a garden not too bad for

visiting' in Chinese.

There are four main areas in the gardens:

- A group of building for welcoming guests
- Pavilions for feasting and viewing the gardens
- A place Zhang to reside, paint, parade and recite poetry
- A big, central courtyard.



There are many scenic spots, such as the Orchid Platform, the Bend Pool and the long Huanbi Corridor which connects the three building groups. Walking the corridor allows visitors to enjoy the full beauty of the garden.



Keyuan is also known for its importance in the modern history of Chinese painting and calligraphy. Although Zhang Jingxuan was a military officer, he mastered painting, calligraphy, chess as well as poetry. He invited two other well known artists – Ju Chao and Ju Lian - to paint in Keyuan all year round, and their work laid a foundation for the Lingnan School, an important school in China's artistic history.