



Close-up of the Chang'an Tower at the Xi'an International Horticultural Exposition.

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Xi'an Expo: antique and modern

By LU HONGYAN

The International Horticultural Exposition is getting its third China experience this year, in the Chan-ba Ecological District of Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

Previous ones included the 2006 Shenyang Expo and the 1999 Kunming Expo. Xi'an is the oldest of the Chinese capitals so it has plenty of historic treasures, the terra cotta warriors, for example, but its natural beauty has been underrated.

It is located near the Qinling Mountains, which have diverse fauna and flora, and four of their treasures (the panda, golden monkey, crested ibis and takin) will be used to represent Xi'an's nature and environment.

Over the past few years, Xi'an has paid greater attention to environment protection, as evidenced by



the expo slogan, "Green Leading the Trend", and 45 percent of it is covered by forest.

And its citizens now can expect a blue sky more than 300 days out of the year, compared with 175, back in 2002.

The expo focuses on natural beauty in a cultural context, with the ideas of peace and harmony between nature and mankind and nurturing the earth — a natural city, co-existing in peace.

The expo site covers a 418-hectare area, and is expected to receive 12 million visitors over its 178 days.

Some of its highlights are four landmarks, four special gardens, and nine master gardens.

Every architectural element is expected to blend with the environment and the buildings are meant to flatter rather than challenge the local terrain. Pathways are interwoven and heritage comes with the latest advances in green technology.

The expo's emblem and mascot reflect this spirit. The emblem is the Chang'an flower, whose name comes from a line of poetry, "Riding the crest of success, seeing all the flowers of Chang'an". It consists of four layers of petals, containing three, four, five and six petals, from the inner to the outer.

Its meaning is: three, for the seeds of nature, contained in an auspicious flower; four, for the corners of the earth, holding up the vault of heaven; five, for the foliage of trees, shielding the land; and six, for running water, which nurtures life.

The mascot is an animated cartoon character, cheerful and lovely. It draws its inspiration from the city's plant, the pomegranate. It will greet visitors from home and abroad.

A visit to the Xi'an International Horticultural Expo will be a refreshing and enriching experience. It provides a contrast of antiquity and modernity, man-made wonders with natural beauty, and technological advances with classical wisdom.

A walk around the site is a rare opportunity to appreciate natural beauty and human endeavor, a chance to contemplate the past and the future or reflect on the relationship of spirituality and physical existence.

The tickets are affordable level, with a off-holiday price of 100 yuan, and a national holiday price of 150 yuan.

One perk with the expo ticket is the discounted admission fee for 144 neighboring tourist attractions for the duration of the expo.



Kaifeng Garden, one of the most popular sites for both Chinese and foreign visitors.

A true integration of Chinese and foreign cultures

By LU HONGYAN

The 2011 Xi'an International Horticultural Exposition is not just for tourists, it is also a major event for horticulturalists, farmers, agronomists, sellers, equipment manufacturers, and people who simply enjoy gardens and flowers.

Here are some of the things to look for at the expo:



European architecture in one of the expo's gardens as seen at night.

Green technology

Every bit of the Xi'an expo shows an awareness of the need for environmental protection. It promotes the idea that going green is the fashion.

It is situated on the Chan-ba Ecological District, a former sandpit where the water was severely degraded in the 1980s. But, two decades of work has restored the ecosystem and even the water of its Yuntan

Lake is now clear.

The purpose of this expo is to show what it is possible to accomplish in eco-protection through the use of the most advanced technology, ideas, and material.

Master works

The expo presents an array of work from prominent architects from around the world. One piece, the Chang'an tower, is a sort of landmark, designed by Zhang Jinqiu of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

Three others, Creativity Pavilion, the Greenhouse, and the Guanyun Entrance, were designed by the Chief Architect of Plasma, Eva Jiricna.

This expo is the first example of the use of nine master gardens in this way. They are the work of designers and planners from the United States, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Denmark, Australia and Spain.

The expo also has 10 university gardens that are the work of students and professors at top horticulture schools. Their work reflects the latest trends and highest standards in horticultural design.

Dialogue across time

Guangyun Lake, where the expo is situated, was significant in Sui (AD 581-618) and Tang (AD 618-907) times, when tributes and taxes from outside were transported by river to the lake and Chan-ba, before making the final trip to Xi'an. The Xuan Emperor of the Tang Dynasty ascended the steps of a tower by the lake to get a look at the boats. His presence caused people to gather, and they bought goods that the boats had brought.

Now, more than a thousand years later, Xi'an is playing host to a different sort of gathering at Guangyun Lake, but nonetheless an opportunity for a dialogue between the Xi'an of the past and the modern version. This recurrence of events is no coincidence — rather, it is a rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. And, prosperous eras give rise to great events.

Perfect integration

The 2011 Xi'an Expo embodies by three forms of perfect integration.

The first is the integration of Chinese and foreign cultures. The architecture, landscaping, gardens, and sculptures are a joint effort from various foreign and Chinese experts, so the site is in the traditional Chinese style com-

plemented by modern, western elements.

The second is past events recurring in the modern age.

The third is the shared aspirations of Taiwan and the mainland. To explain: the Taipei International Floral Exposition will draw to a close on April 25, 2011, three days before the Xi'an expo opens. The Taipei expo's 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) theme or goal shares the same spirit of the Xi'an expo, the pursuit of harmony between nature and humans.

Cultural pageant

The show flower in water will be performed two times a day. It conveys an understanding of flowers using modern techniques such as multi-media, for an impressive audio-visual effect.

Unlike China's many other expos, the Xi'an expo comes with a carnival with a procession of floats, military band performances, a fashion show, dances, and circus performers. The carnival is a global approach to celebration, and will add a festive air to the expo.

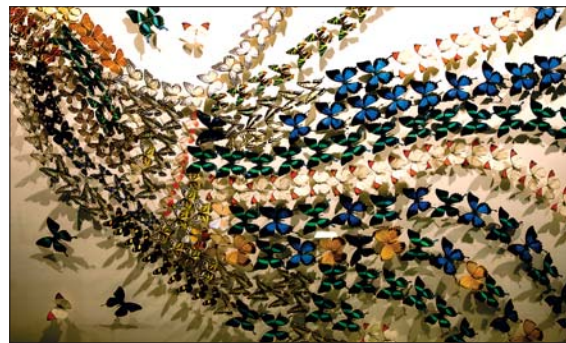
Visitors can enjoy the dances and singing with a Southeast Asian flavor on Southeast Asia Street then get a taste of European traditional culture on European Avenue.



Floral arrangement comes alive at the Zhongnan Garden.



Digging Garden.



Butterfly show at the Insect Pavilion.

418 hectares

covered by Guangyun Lake, a part of the Chan-ba Ecological District of Xi'an

178 days

packed full of excitement for the 2011 Xi'an International Horticultural Exposition

45 percent

of Xi'an covered by forest, an indication of the amount of work that has gone into environment protection, hence the expo's slogan "Green Leading the Trend"



Three of the expo's scenic spots.



Tianjin Garden.



Chengdu Garden.

Traditional Shaanxi takes on a new look

By LU HONGYAN

For those of you who are still thinking of last year's fascinating Shanghai World Expo experience or who regret missing it, there's good news.

The Xi'an International Horticultural Expo, running from April 28 to Oct 22, provides another chance to take in an awe-inspiring, breathtaking experience.

While the Shanghai expo presented technological gems from all over the world, the Xi'an expo provides a rare look at nature's own gems, combined with human ingenuity.

It is located in the Chan-ba Ecological District in north-eastern Xi'an, on a 418-hectare space, about two-fifths of which is water.

Its basic composition can be described as two circles, two axes, and five nodes.

The circles are a primary one containing most of the gardens and parks and a secondary one with auxiliary facilities.

The axes are a main north-south axis and a secondary east-west one. The "nodes" refers to five parks on the expo site with the names Chang'an, Creativity, Five Continents, Poly-tech, and Experience.

The expo's various examples of architecture include the following:

Four Landmarks

These are the Chang'an Tower, the Guanyun Entrance, the Pavilion, and the Greenhouse. They are a must-see and express the expo's combination of modern technology and national heritage.

The Chang'an Tower, which sits on a hill, offers a vintage point from which to appreciate the site's beauty. It pays tribute to the classical Tang tower while incorporating modern elements.

The Guanyun Entrance introduces visitors to the expo's 60-meter-wide avenue bordered by water and dotted with trees and flowerbeds.

The Pavilion sits on the north-south axis and contains the latest in horticultural technology and achievements.

The Greenhouse holds rare plants from different parts and climate zones around the world.

Nine Master Gardens

This is the work of nine prominent architects, dome especially for the expo and expressing the inclusiveness of traditional Chinese culture.

The Quadrangle, designed by a Chinese architect, takes its inspiration from the traditional Chinese courtyard and is intended to give visitors a serene view of a Chinese garden.

The Loess Garden shows the Danish architect's view of Chinese

culture, using clay to symbolize the basis of Xi'an's prosperity.

The Labyrinth is a bold attempt by an American architect to explore American culture within the context of Chinese architecture.

The Landscape and Chinese Map are meant to be a correlation of Chinese landscape painting and horticultural art. The French architect wanted a vivid, yet natural Chinese map.

The Digging Garden reflects the German architect's childhood dream of digging down, all the way through the earth, to China.

The Passage, by an Austrian architect, is a romantic, small garden that tracks the passage of time as if it were a sonnet.

The Botanist demonstrates the British architect's attempt to show the diverse flora of the Qinling Mountains in a harmonious environment.

The Bridges tells the story of a journey of humans through life and across the bridges over the river of melancholy.

The Dutch designer wanted to depict life as a continuous, winding path.

The Labyrinth of Mountainous Paths reflects the Spanish architect's effort to combine Chinese landscape painting, the vibrant colors of an oil painting, and concepts of the modern deconstructionist thought.

Four Feature Parks

The Bonsai Park contains a display of Xi'an's many plants. The careful arrangement of trails, stones, trees and plants expresses Chinese bonsai art, and conveys a sense of tranquility.

Qinling is intended to express the scenery and culture of the Qinling Mountains. The stones with poems engraved, the four treasures of the Qingling Mountains (golden monkey, panda, crested ibis and takin), and the rare plants express a harmony between nature and culture.

Chang'an is dedicated to the unique culture of Shaanxi and has a theme of "interpreting new green, ecological, Chinese styles". Its culture is one of bamboo, herbal medicines, and plants in the same space, an integration of traditional Shaanxi culture and more recent achievements.

Landscape and Poetic Chang'an is meant to recreate poetic expression and the beautiful botanical gardens described in *China's Book of Songs*.

These sites highlighted above, will guarantee that a visit to the expo will be nourishing and refreshing experience. In no other place can the clever integration of nature's beauty and human endeavor be seen, and rarely is such a vintage point available so that people can appreciate traditional Shaanxi culture in such a modern context.



Ground-level view of the Creativity Pavilion with its reflecting pool.

Mesmerizing experience has people coming back

By LU HONGYAN

Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, out in central China, was known as Chang'an, back before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It has served as the capital of 13 dynasties, from the Zhou (c.11th century-256 BC) to the Qin (221-206 BC), Han (220 BC-AD 220), Sui (AD 581-618), and Tang (AD 618-907).

But being the capital of various dynasties is not the city's only claim to historic significance. It was also the starting (or end) point of the Silk Road, the transcontinental route that linked China in the East with the Roman Empire in the West. Xi'an was, thus, one of the world's earliest metropolitan areas.

Evidence of this can be seen among the antiquities in the Shaanxi History Museum, where many Han and Tang items give a sign of immense cultural exchanges.

Xi'an was at the zenith of prosperity during the Tang's Tianbao period, a time of political stability and flourishing trade. Academics, students, traders and merchants from all over visited Xi'an, contributing to its diverse culture.

Traces of Tang glories can be

found in the Huaqing Palace, a grand gathering of buildings and gardens on Li Mountain.

Another testament to Tang glory is the Daming Palace ruins. The original structure may have been destroyed, but the palace still conveys a sense of magnificence and splendor.

The Ming was the last dynasty to have its capital in Xi'an. To savor the Ming style, a good place to start is the Bell Tower. It stands in the center of the city and offers a place from which to view the city center. Nearby, to the west, is the Drum Tower.

Four prosperous streets stretch out east, west, south and north from the Bell Tower. In the evening, the two towers are illuminated, and stand in fascinating contrast to the surrounding commercial structures.

As the bell tolls, the casual visitor might experience a temporary confusion of time and place.

Close by the Drum Tower is Muslim Street, a good place to savor Xi'an's culinary specialties. Its cuisine is quintessentially northwestern Chinese food and visitors would be well-advised to try Xi'an's most famous dishes: the pancake, the mutton soup, which

can be spicy, and the handmade noodles, which come in various flavors, shapes and sizes.

Xi'an's history has shaped its culture. For example, it is the cradle of China's oldest opera, the Qin-qiang, which is characterized by high-pitched, emotional performances. Xi'an's art and style reflect the environment and character of Shaanxi.

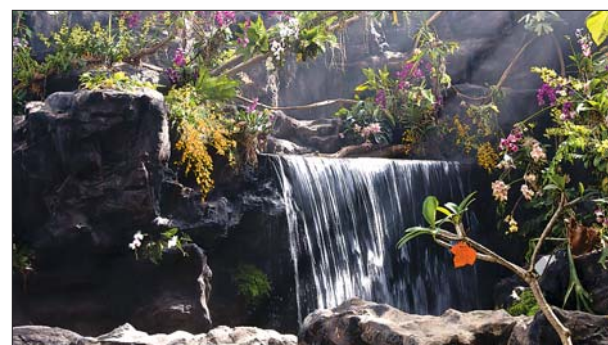
Another cultural phenomenon is the shadow puppetry. Colorful puppets interpret the various stages of life against a white curtain, manipulated by artists backstage, who also provide the voices.

This combination of sound and

image is the earliest precursor of the cinema, an art form that testifies to the artistic achievements of classical Shaanxi.

Now, that historical ebb and flow is long gone, replaced by a modern, thriving city. But, the traces of that long history cannot be erased even from the urban landscape. And, the visitors can expect to savor the heritage and unique culture, while enjoying the convenience of modern life.

Xi'an is a perfect example of modernity blending well with history, and offering a mesmerizing experience that keeps people coming back for more.



Landscape at the Nature Pavilion, as attractive as a painting.