

MACAU'S COLONIAL HISTORY PRE-DATES HONG KONG BY ALMOST 300 YEARS SINCE THE PORTUGUESE FIRST SETTLED THERE IN THE MID-16TH CENTURY. AS THE CLOSEST WORLD HERITAGE SITE TO HONG KONG, WE'VE PUT TOGETHER A CHILD-FRIENDLY TOUR OF SOME OF MACAU'S IMPORTANT HISTORICAL SITES FOR PLAYTIMES READERS.

World Heritage Rambling....



Many visitors from Hong Kong only visit Macau for a spot of lunch. Yet with a little planning, there is plenty of time in an afternoon to fit in a quick city tour that will enthrall parents and children alike. (Of course, a weekend will afford a little more time for exploration.)

The "Historic Centre of Macau" represents over 400 years of cultural exchange between the west and China, with predominantly European buildings standing in a typical Chinese city. Pick up a city map and the Macau World Heritage sheet from the tourist office, then take a taxi to Senado Square (San Ma Lo in Chinese) and begin our mini tour of the finest east-west architecture in China (approximately two hours).

The taxi will stop outside the Leal Senado Building. Cross the road and you will find yourself in the middle of Senado Square, a large pedestrian area which forms the centre of Macau's shopping district. Tucked behind the shops to the left is the Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple. Now recognised as the precursor to the chamber of commerce this was originally the local guild of Macau and it was here that the Qing government made their official announcements. Today, there are some good outlet stores for children's clothing in the Chinese market nearby if you are in the mood for shopping.

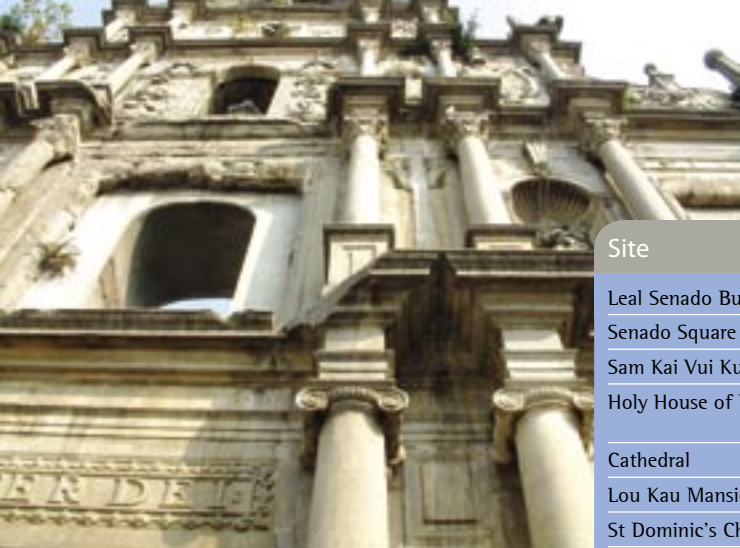
Return to the square where you will find yourself facing the neo-classical Holy House of Mercy, established in 1569 by the first bishop of Macau. Known in Chinese as the "Chi Leong Temple", (meaning the place where people received financial support) the building housed the first western-style medical clinic and also acted as the social welfare centre. There is a small museum here.

Opposite Starbucks in Senado Square is Travessa de S. Domingos, a small lane lined with cafes and restaurants which leads up to the Cathedral. Worth a visit are Platao, a Portuguese restaurant which boasts a large outdoor courtyard, and Café Toscana, a child-friendly Italian restaurant.

Originally built of taipa wood in 1622 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Cathedral was destroyed by a typhoon in 1835 and rebuilt several times. In 1850, it took on its current form with twin belfry towers crowning the building.

After a tour of the cathedral, take the small pedestrian road parallel to the road you came up back down to the end of Senado Square (or St. Dominic's Square as this area is called). On the way down you will pass Lou Kau Mansion built by the prominent Lou Kau family. A typical Chinese house with interior courtyards, the house is divided into three distinct areas. At the bottom of the street you will find St Dominic's Church and Square to your left. Follow the road round to the left in front of Häagen-Dazs - Rua da Palha - then take the second right up a street full of furniture stores, tourist t-shirt vendors and bakeries offering Macau's famous biscuits, towards the Ruins of St. Paul's, another victim of the 1835 typhoon.

Cross the Rua de Santa Antonio and either climb the imposing flight of steps or walk up one of the adjacent alleys. (There is a good, cheap, toy shop on the left hand side of the ruins.) This route brings you out opposite the miniature Na Tcha Temple, which forms an interesting contrast to the ruins beside it. Next to the temple is a short section of The Old City Wall.



After touring the ruins you can take a little time out from sightseeing to wander around the Museum of Macau, which is accessed via a long escalator to the right of the ruins. At the top of the first escalator you will find a small snack bar with cold drinks and tables on the terrace, as well as the museum shop. There are toilets with changing facilities here, although if you ascend another level you will find quieter, cleaner toilets near the reception counter. The museum showcases historical and religious artifacts from Macau, including the original bells from St Paul's and the first printing press in China. Ascending through the museum (there is a lift) you will come out at Mount Fortress. Originally built in 1617, it was the residence of the

Site	Opening Times
Leal Senado Building	Gallery 9am - 9pm, closed Mondays, Garden: 9am - 9pm
Senado Square	Open all hours
Sam Kai Vui Kun Temple	8am - 6pm
Holy House of Mercy	Museum: 10am - 1pm, 2pm - 5:30pm, closed Sundays and public holidays
Cathedral	7.30am - 6.30pm
Lou Kau Mansion	9am - 6pm on weekends and public holidays
St Dominic's Church	10am - 6pm
Ruins of St. Paul's	Façade: Open all hours, Museum: 9am - 6pm
Na Tcha Temple	8am - 5pm
Old city walls	Open all hours
Mount Fortress:	Garden and Fort: 7am - 7am, Museum 10am - 6pm, closed Mondays
St Anthony's Church	7.30am - 5.30pm
Casa Garden	Gallery 9.30am - 6pm, closed weekends and public holidays, Garden 9.30am - 6pm
Protestant Cemetery	9am - 5.30pm
Guia Fort and Lighthouse	9am - 5.30pm, lighthouse not open to public

For more information, see www.macauheritage.net

governors of Macau until 1740 when it became a garrison. From 1966 until 1998 it was home to a weather observatory. This is a pleasant area to sit and rest while the children run around and explore the numerous cannons.

From Mount Fortress you can return to the ruins and continue along the old city walls down to Rua Santa Antonio - home to the majority of Macau's furniture stores. Continue right along this street to the end and you will reach St Anthony's Church. Originally a bamboo structure built in 1560, it is one of the oldest churches in Macau, although the building you see today dates from the 1930s. Known locally as the "church of flowers", it was an important place for Portuguese weddings as St Anthony is the patron saint of marriages.

Cross over the road past the Old Protestant Cemetery on the right, last resting place of merchants, missionaries and seamen. Beside the cemetery is Casa Garden, home to a small museum and art gallery. Once the home of the British East India Company president, it was reclaimed by the government in 1885 and today it is the head office of the Orient Foundation. Next to this is the Camões Garden where there is a large children's playground and plenty of shade, although the access to the garden is not particularly stroller-friendly.

If you still have some energy, or time to kill, jump in a taxi to the Jardim da Flora where you can take a cable car to the Guia Fort and Lighthouse. There is a playground at the bottom of the cable car and a small aviary and zoo area. At the top of the hill, on the way to the lighthouse, there is a snack bar and large children's play area. There is also a climbing wall (although this is currently closed) and an atmospheric air-raid shelter. From the top of the hill, where the lighthouse stands, there are spectacular views of Macau and Zhu Hai.

This tour covers only about half of the World Heritage sites in Macau. Going south from Senado Square, there are several other noteworthy diversions which are clearly marked on local tourist maps. To enjoy those, you need an excuse for a long weekend... **pt**



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