

Spicing up Macao melting pot

UNESCO nod to city's culinary history boosts its cultural and tourism status, both globally and within the Greater Bay Area

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Macao is looking to test its impeccable potential as a cultural and recreational center, having its role well defined in the great story unfolding on the Chinese mainland.

The plans come as the world's second-largest economy bolsters its vision of reviving ancient trade routes and creating a globally competitive cluster of metropolises in the Pearl River Delta.

"Hailed as a city where East meets West — a place where traditional Chinese culture seamlessly blends with Portuguese and Western ways to create a unique cultural mix — Macao has long been a focal point along the Belt and Road route, and has what it takes to play a pivotal role in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area plan," said Alexis Tam Chon-weng, secretary for social affairs and culture in the Macao Special Administrative Region government.

The Belt and Road Initiative is the China-led plan to build a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along the historical Silk Road routes.

As part of Macao's efforts to polish its brand as a family-friendly tourist destination with mass appeal, and a thriving cultural Mecca, the city has laid on a constant run of festivities. Newly launched events include the Wushu Masters Challenge and the International Film Festival and Awards Macao. Time-honored events include the Macao Grand Prix, Macao Galaxy Entertainment International Marathon and Macao International Dragon Boat Races.

The territory has also for six years running hosted the annual Global Tourism Economy Forum — billed as the single most representative non-governmental tourism platform in China and one of the major events on the global tourism calendar.

Food serves as a calling card for culture. In a nod to the territory's more than 400-year-old culinary legacy, whose cookery is reputed to be one of the world's oldest fusion cuisines, Macao was designated at the beginning of November as a new member city of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of gastronomy.

The designation, coming after more than a year of city-wide preparation, makes Macao among the network's 19 Creative Cities of Gastronomy worldwide, and the third such center in the country, along with Chengdu in Southwest China's Sichuan province and Shunde in South China's Guangdong province, which entered the network in 2010 and 2014, respectively.



Alexis Tam Chon-weng, the Macao SAR government's secretary for social affairs and culture, believes promoting gastronomy culture will become a key growth engine for the economy and take the city to a new height. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

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ALEXIS TAM CHON-WENG
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gastronomy culture that underscores the city's status as a melting pot known for its vibrant and diverse indigenous cultures."

The Creative Cities Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and

folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, music and media arts. Riding high on the designation, Macao is geared up to explore how culinary and other aspects of culture can fuse to diversify the economy, in its quest for one more growth engine.

As the Chinese mainland reinforces the theme of a higher level of intergovernmental and intercontinental collaboration, Macao, as a long-standing gateway between China and Portuguese-speaking nations, bets big on their bilateral relations taking on new significance, Tam said.

Over the past decade, Macao has been the host city of the Ministerial Conference of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macao), known as Forum Macao.

"Since its inception back in 2003, Forum Macao has focused on economic and trade issues without paying much attention to culture-related topics," Tam noted. "But I am

a firm believer that culture could also make a big difference in terms of lifting bilateral ties to a new height."

At the opening of the Fifth Forum Macao last year, Premier Li Keqiang pledged to set up the Center for Cultural Exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries in Macao, a bold move which will play to the city's cultural heritage.

"The city's vibrant, diverse and indigenous cultures had it added by UNESCO to its World Heritage List as early as 2005. This speaks volumes that the cultural tourism sector is certainly where Macao could export its expertise," Tam said.

For years, Macao has been joining hands with its counterparts in the Greater Bay Area to resolve a long-term shortage of talent in the tourism sector.

"Looking ahead, Macao will continue to help cities in the Pearl River Delta region groom tourism talent. This marks our own way to underpin the country's Greater Bay Area grand plan," Tam said.