



Tang treasures at hotel

Tang-era artefacts are on show at Goodwood Park Hotel to share history with visitors

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The museum is not the only place where you can view Tang-era treasures from the controversial Belitung shipwreck.

A little-known fact is that 88 artefacts from an Arab dhow wrecked off Belitung Island in Indonesia have been on display at Goodwood Park Hotel's Tang Treasures Suite since 2007.

This might come as a surprise to those more familiar with a storm that blew up over the treasure trove recently.

About 400 of these ninth-century treasures from the vast collection of 50,000 ceramic jars, bowls and vases of Chinese origin, plus a few gold and silver objects were displayed at the ArtScience Museum in Marina Bay Sands last year. The exhibition was titled Shipwrecked: Tang Treasures And Monsoon Winds.

Jointly organised by the Asian Civilisations Museum, the National Heritage Board, the Singapore Tourism Board and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute in the United States, the show was meant to travel to the Smithsonian. But it found itself in troubled waters in a dispute over how the objects were recovered from the wreck.

Some of the pieces, including 130 gold, metal and ceramics, can now be seen at the Asian Civilisations Museum at its show, The Tang Shipwreck: Gold And Ceramics From Ninth-Century China.

The items at Goodwood Park Hotel are on loan from the Singapore Tourism Board and displayed with the aim of sharing a part of history with hotel guests and visitors. The display is located next to L'Espresso cafe on the ground floor.

It is open for free and the room can be booked for private lunches and dinners for a maximum of 12 people, for those

who get a kick out of dining off modern tableware while being surrounded by the historic Chinese real deal.

A hotel spokesman told Life!: "We picked mainly ceramic pieces that were indicative of the whole collection. The selection was done in 2007."

The wreck where the trove was found was discovered by Indonesian fishermen in 1998. Seabed Explorations, a German

commercial salvage outfit, got the go-ahead from the Indonesian government to recover the cargo. It sold the recovered artefacts to Sentosa Leisure Group for US\$32 million in 2005.

At the hotel, visitors can see rare ceramics such as a very large changsha bowl, which is 25cm in diameter.

The glazed stoneware with an under-glaze painting was made at Changsha Kilns in Hunan province, China.

Bowls of this size are extremely rare. Only 10 complete pieces were uncovered from the Belitung wreck. These were exported from Korea and Japan to Southeast Asia, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, east Africa and Egypt.

Other historically significant ceramic wares including imperial-quality white and green-splashed pieces can also be seen in the Tang Treasures Suite.

There is green-glazed stoneware from Guangdong province on display. These ceramic jars were mainly used as storage containers and about 1,500 of them were found amid the wreck.

Another stand-out piece is a stem cup with fish motifs. About 200 whiteware pieces with copper-green splashes and monochrome green glazes were found.

Green-splashed ceramics have been found in ninth-century Chinese tombs as well as at Abbasid royal palace at Samarra in Iraq. A group of 20 stem cups have



models of fish, turtles and ducks at the centre. These were often referred to as “nose-drinking” cups, used for drinking through nostrils. A tube attached to the side of the cups was used as a straw.

The hotel plans to work with the tourism board to rotate these pieces within the next year or two.

In December 2004, it was announced that the Tang Treasures would be part a new Maritime Museum to be built.

In support of this museum, the estate of Tan Sri Khoo Teck Puat donated \$28 million in 2005. The project has since stalled. A spokesman for the Singapore Tourism Board said discussions on the museum are “ongoing”.

The family of the late banker and hotelier Tan Sri Khoo runs Goodwood Park Hotel.

The spokesman said the donation by the estate of Tan Sri Khoo made the acquisition of the Tang Treasures possible.

While some of the salvaged Tang treasures can be seen at the hotel and the Asian Civilisations Museum, the rest have been housed on a private floor of Hua Song Museum at Haw Par Villa since they arrived in 2006.

The museum, which opened in December 2005, was built from a converted wing of the faded Pasir Panjang attraction that once drew hordes of visitors in the 1980s.

The rarer pieces are stored in the National Heritage Board’s Heritage Conservation Centre in Jurong.

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view it

TANG TREASURES SUITE

Where: Tang Treasures Suite, next to L'Espresso, Ground Floor, Goodwood Park Hotel, 22 Scotts Road

When: 10am to 5pm (Mondays to Saturdays), closed on Sundays and public holidays

Admission: Free

Info: Call 6737-7411 or e-mail enquiries@goodwoodparkhotel.com



Some of the artefacts from the Belitung shipwreck on display at Goodwood Park Hotel (above), which include a stem cup with fish motifs (top right) and a big Changsha bowl (right). ST PHOTOS: JASON QUAH