

Shenzhen & Temple of Heavenly Peace Excursions

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Although we no longer live in Hong Kong, I retain my membership of the Society because I still really enjoy reading the excellent Newsletter and receiving the occasional surprise, such as the calendar, in my mail. When we were arranging a recent family trip back to Hong Kong I was delighted to find that it would coincide with two of the Society excursions planned for early 2006. A flurry of e-mail correspondence with Jane Ram and Anthea Strickland followed and we were 'on the bus' first to the Shenzhen New Year Flower Market on 27 January and, on the day we flew back to Australia, to the Temple of Heavenly Peace in the New Territories.

Shenzhen Excursion

In Shenzhen we saw stall after stall of amazing plants including the extraordinary Nipple Fruit, *Solanum mammosum* (Ng Doi Tung, literally "five generations under one roof").



Nipple Fruit in Shenzhen

There were also banks of Flowering Peach (*Prunus persica*), some potted but most severed for New Year decoration just as felled conifers are sold at Christmas time in Europe and Australia.



New Year Flowering Peach in Shenzhen

My tall Viking-coloured husband wearing his Aussie Akubra soon attracted the persistent attention of a local photo-journalist. Nevertheless we were easily able to purchase quality terracotta pots of New Year Jonquils (*Narcissus tazetta*) and penjing Japonica / Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*) for our Hong Kong hostess. We experienced only one attempt at "special foreigners' price" and negotiated very competitive prices for each despite our total lack of Cantonese. A couple of nights later we priced similar plants at the Victoria Park New Year market in Causeway Bay and found them to be between four and six times more expensive. To purchase similar treasures in Sydney, even if they were to be available, would require a second mortgage, so we felt very privileged to have been able to see and participate in this Chinese horticultural tradition.



New Year Jonquils in Shenzhen

Despite the dire predictions of our stay-at-home friends in Hong Kong the New Year border crossing was trouble-free and quick, although the return journey loading and unloading our heavy purchases twice, required some effort. The long Hunanese lunch at the MaoJia restaurant was excellent. Such distinct and intense flavours are a treat after even a few days of comparatively bland Cantonese food.



Hunan Food in Shenzhen



Year of the Dog Paper-Cut Decoration in Shenzhen

Temple of Heavenly Peace

Our family of four joined another seventy HKGS members and friends for the excursion to Ron Clibborn-Dyer's haven known as the Temple of Heavenly Peace near Shataukok in the New Territories on 30 January. Our twelve and seventeen year old children were reluctant starters especially when they read the rules proscribing all electronic devices. "What, even iPods Mum? Even on the bus with all those old people?" However they brightened up considerably at the sight of Ron's flock, especially the auspiciously new-born twin kids who had arrived on New Year's Day. (Those of you who shared Ron's concern that the new mothers might fail to bond with their offspring due to the energetic loving they received on the day will be pleased to learn that no harm was done. Mothers and babies are all doing well.)



Next the exhausted world-weary mother goose brooding her eggs in her plastic cubby house positively enthused them.



All was forgiven when the excellent and generous Indian food was portered in and presented so splendidly.



Our children have often visited farms in Australia and experienced baby animals there, yet they thoroughly enjoyed the whole event.

How much more exciting must the experience have been for children used to living in high-rise Hong Kong with few such opportunities.

As for the horticulturists amongst us, we too enjoyed the event. There is a wonderful sense of peace about the place. It is sited most beautifully with the hills behind and the sea in front and fresh water running past. The distant view of frenetic Shenzhen only enhances the calm of the Temple and its precinct.



Ken's painstaking efforts to reveal and restore the garden have uncovered many symbols of the former day-to-day rituals and meditative routines of the Hakka nuns who used to live here.

Old Terraces at the Temple of Heavenly Peace





His hard work in maintaining and extending the natural water supply is beginning to 'bear fruit'. Thank you Ken for sharing it all with us. What a shock to your normal quiet life our invasion must have been. Thanks also to those who organised the transport and food. It was altogether a wonderful, if eccentric, Hong Kong experience.