



Monday, October 22, 2012 29°C 62%

BREAKING NEWS

- Hong Kong Business
- China
- World
- Sports



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SECTIONS

- Top News
- Local Business
- China
- World
- ViewPoint
- CityTalk
- Sports
- People
- Central Station
- Weekend Spree

FEATURES

- Money
- Technology
- Health & Beauty
- Education
- Motoring
- Property
- Home Décor
- Travel

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Touch the future

Joy Li

Friday, August 10, 2012

"The future influences the present just as much as the past," German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said. His wise reflections, along with those of his contemporaries, fill the walls of City Gallery's themed area, "Hong Kong Next Century."



Taking three years to construct at a cost of about HK\$200 million, City Gallery opened its doors to the public on August 1. It is the first planning and infrastructure gallery in Hong Kong to explain the city's major planning proposals and infrastructure projects to the public.

Jane Kwan Wai-ling, senior town planner in the Planning Department, said that like other metropolises, Hong Kong now has a dedicated exhibition to showcase its philosophy of urban planning. Located at 3 Edinburgh Place in Central, City Gallery occupies five stories and has a floor area of more than 33,291 square feet.

The exhibition houses five themes - Unique Hong Kong; Sustainable Hong Kong; Planning Process and Changing Coastline and Skyline; Main Show and Hong Kong Next Century.

One salient feature of City Gallery is its interactivity. Out of the 55 displays, 40 have interactive functions to engage visitors to learn more about the rather technical side of urban planning.

Touch screens are widely used as a useful tool to explain urban design concepts and government infrastructure proposals. For instance, a person in the gallery's transportation and communication section can assume the role of

a traffic planner and get a sense of how sophisticated the city's airport or container terminal are in terms of efficiency and safety.



Over at the cross-border area, a simulation of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge allows people "road test" the bridge, which will be completed in 2016.

One section in the gallery - Unique

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Hong Kong in Miniature - allows visitors to reflect on the territory's rich past through miniature heritage buildings, such as old pawn shops and cafeterias. This exhibition is on the ground floor and runs until September 21.



On the first floor, visitors can sit on original Star Ferry seats to watch a video on steps being taken to preserve Hong Kong's heritage. The video also shows university experts and other professionals tracing the historical changes in the city, such as street shops in Mong Kok or the traditional markets in Central.



In the gallery's multifunction hall, a giant screen takes visitors on a journey highlighting key developments that shaped the city including the completion of the MTR's Island Line.



Short video clips shown on the corridor walls of the gallery reveal personal accounts of the close relationships that various people have had between the city and its residents. For instance, urban designer Ian Foster elaborates on the architectural guidelines the city adopted over the years.

Also on view are clips of tourists from the mainland and overseas who share their impressions of the city. Residents moving from overcrowded Hong Kong Island to the new towns, such as Sha Tin, also recall how they adapted to their new life.

The gallery also displays the winning entries of the drawing competition "My Future Hong Kong."

Organized by the Planning Department, more than 3,000 members of the public as well as primary and secondary school students show off their artistic skills.

"The drawing competition was intended to encourage the public to illustrate their 'dream land' and the future of the city using their imagination and creativity, and to share their vision of Hong Kong as the ideal place to live," said Jimmy Leung Cheuk-fai, director of the department.

Visitors to City Gallery can select any of three languages English, Cantonese and Putonghua to listen to the various audiovisual programs being shown. The gallery is open from 10am to 6pm, except Tuesdays. Entry is free.

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