

Travel – time to get to Taiwan for the Lantern festival

On Saturday, the 2020 Lantern Festival was launched in Taichung by President Tsai Ing Wen. She lit the main lantern which is called Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Light following a show full of music and colour.

The President's part of the ceremony took a full five minutes. It was not just a matter of flipping a switch, as there was a whole light show set to loud music.

This is the second time in five years that the festival has been staged in the city. The Edinburgh Reporter was invited to attend the Lantern Festival by the Director, Taipei Representative Office in

the UK Edinburgh Office and the HQ in Taipei.



Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Life before nightfall PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

The 31st festival is the biggest yet in Taiwan's second city on three sites, the Forest Park Area, Horse Ranch Area and Wenxin Forest Park over 40 hectares. It begins fifteen days after Lunar New Year which was 25 January this year.

The various lantern themes centre around Dazzling Taichung, and include religion, railways, military, new immigrants, zodiac animals and Jurassic Park.

The Guardian of the Forest Tree of Light is a great 'tree' grown from a seed. The seed's soul transforms into a full moon and the rising sun, floating above the growth rings of Taiwan energy. The tree trunk has 22 light belts, each representing a city or county in Taiwan, Butterflies and Taiwan Sibias meet at the treetop. Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Life prays for unity, harmony, happiness and prosperity for Taiwan.

This lantern will retained at the World Flora Expo Forest Park after it has been enjoyed by those coming to see it in the next couple of weeks. The organisers hope that by leaving it in place they will make the organisation of the event more sustainable.



Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Life before nightfall PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter



The top part of Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Life after nightfall showing two birds in the nest tending to chicks PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter



The top part of Guardian of the Forest – Tree of Life after nightfall showing two birds in the nest tending to chicks

PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

Dr Yung-Hui Chou, Director General, Tourism Bureau, MOTC said very transparently that the idea behind the festival is to grow tourism. He said : “It is a great tool for marketing Taiwan, and I urge you all to visit.”











The Deputy Mayor Linghu, Jung-da said it was a good opportunity to use the same site as they had developed for the Flora Exhibition last year. The transportation is already in place. He explained that there are three themes to the festival – Screen, Nature, People. He said : “There is too much to see in one day and there are other things to see on other days. For example there will be 800 drones flying at the closing of the exhibition on 23 February.”

He tackled the question of Coronavirus head on, saying that this is a safe event. He commented : “It is an outdoor event, and what you must do is use a face mask, alcohol for your hands and wash your hands often anyway.”

That said, before we were allowed into the VIP area where the President would be, we were again screened for high temperatures and our hands disinfected too. It is clear however that depending on Chinese tourists from the mainland as they do here in Taiwan, it is a matter of concern.

LED drummers SPARK Photo ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

I drew to the Deputy Mayor's attention that in Edinburgh we have festivals too, which he was already well aware of, and told me many Taiwanese had taken part in our various festivals.

I told him that the group of British LED drummers, SPARK, who appeared on stage in Taichung today, had had a 'face off' with Louise Marshall and her women pipers a couple of years back.

There were no pipers at the opening of the Lantern Festival, but there was a huge selection of music and dance, including the French luminous white horse dance theatre. who have also been to Edinburgh in recent years.



One of the several groups of Japanese Yosakoi performer PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter



PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

The peaceable crowd watched as the festival began with a riot of lights, and then filed out to their public transport or cars, having waited for the President to leave first with her entourage.



British LED drummers SPARK! Photo © 2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

We walked around some of the festival space afterwards, admiring the ingenuity and craftsmanship of many lantern makers from across the country. With the combination of lanterns and new technology this is truly a Garden Festival 2.0