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The Nan Hai Treasures Antique Gallery & Shop

*Mr Sten Sjostrand talked about his recoveries of ten shipwrecks in Malaysian waters, including his latest find, the Wanli at the **Nanhai Treasures Gallery** Saturday 24 July 2004. Sten also touched on the wreck found in Tg Simpang Mangayau (Sabah), which yielded mainly artefacts from the Sung Dynasty including a 1,000 year old teapot! It is Malaysia's first proof of maritime trading during the Sung Dynasty.*

The latest boutique at the newly completed Kota Kinabalu Waterfront is **Nan Hai Treasures**. It is an Antiques Gallery with a difference: here you can purchase a genuine piece of history and heritage in the form of finest Chinese porcelain, recovered from shipwrecks found in the waters of Malaysia.

The antiques salvaged are testimony of the long and busy trading history of the Chinese, who have come to the shores of what is nowadays know as Malaysia for nearly 1500 years. Back then, the Chinese traders came in search of valuable and highly esteemed jungle produce, such as rattans and bamboos, feathers for fashion, bezoar-stones and deer horn for medicines, rhinoceros horn as an alleged aphrodisiac, the casque of the huge Hornbill birds (prized as 'golden jade' by Chinese carvers), camphor and other woods, honey bees, wax and sago. From the sea came tortoise shell, coral and shells for decorative purposes, shark-fins, sea slugs (or sea cucumbers), dried squids and jellyfish and other special foods and medicine. From the caves came gypsum and birds-nests.

In return, trade from the mainland sent articles and materials that could not be made locally. Most impressive items that survive to the present time are stone-ware jars and porcelains from China (as far back as 607 AD). Other artefacts that were traded included universally prized glass-beads, and beads of semi-precious stones such as the Carnelian from India.

Early traders were adventurers and fortune seekers, but some did never make it back to their homeland. Their ships met a watery end in the relentless tropical storms. Their cargo sunk to the ocean ground and to-day provides a valuable insight into the history not only of China, but also of those countries with which trading was carried out.

Nan Hai Treasures emphasises very much on the latter, taking up the philosophy of Sten Sjostrand, a marine archaeologist who is internationally recognised as a leading authority on Asian antique ceramics.

For Sten, the cargo of a shipwreck is not just valuable booty that can be bartered for profit. For him, the historical value of the wreck, its sunken treasure and the insight it gives us into our own past is much more important. It is a value beyond any monetary price.

To actively preserve the history of the wrecks Sten Sjostrand has founded Nanhai Marine Archaeology S/B, and since the mid 1990s, with the permission of the Malaysian government and in joint-venture with the Muzium Negara he has been actively engaged in the exploration, discovery and recovery of artefacts from shipwrecks dating from the 11th-19th Century. Sten has discovered and surveyed not only one or two historically important shipwrecks in Malaysian waters. Up to date, he has discovered ten! The first seven were: the Turiang (±1370), the Nanyang (±1380), the Longquan (±1400), the Royal Nanhai (±1460), the Xuande (±1540), the Singtai (±1550), the Desaru (±1830), the Tg Simpang (AD960-1127) and the Wanli (±1600). The wrecks have yielded important historical evidence covering almost completely the times from AD960 to AD 1830!

If you purchase antiques from Nan Hai Treasures gallery in Kota Kinabalu, the first of its kind, you will not have to go through the agonising task of deciding whether a piece is genuine or fake, or worse, if it is pirated loot, history lost to the public. All pieces recovered from shipwrecks are individually recorded in a complete catalogue covering all the finds. This register gives each piece a serial number that confirms them to be artefacts from a specific shipwreck and assures their unquestioned authenticity. A Certificate of Authenticity, personally signed by Sten, accompanies each item, and the sales are done with the approval of the National Museum in Kuala Lumpur. Nanhai Marine Archaeology S/B has an arrangement with the Malaysian Government whereby all excavations are carried out with the cooperation of the Department of Museums and Antiquities. Under this arrangement, the company finances all the searches for shipwrecks, carries out the excavations and research and then produces the final reports. After sharing the recovered artefacts with the government, the company is allowed to sell its portion.

Besides recovering artefacts, Nanhai Marine Archaeology S/B is actively involved in research and the understanding of the shipwrecks as historical time capsules that teach us more about the time and history when they sailed. Nanhai Marine Archaeology S/B is also training Malaysian underwater archaeologists, teaching them all aspects of this profession, from salvaging over conservation to documentation and study, to the publication internationally. The work of Nanhai Marine Archaeology S/B has been recognised by leading museums such as the Muzium Negara (KL), the Asian Arts Museum (San Francisco), the Pacific Asia Museum (Los Angeles), the Ulricehamns Art Museum (Ulricehamns), the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), the Los Angeles County Museum (Los Angeles), the Far Eastern Antiquities Museum (Stockholm) & the Singapore National University Museum (Singapore).

Next to selling antique ceramics, the gallery also has static and audio-visual displays, meant to educate the public on the making and style of ceramics over the centuries, and the political influence reflected on the exhibits.

Nan Hai Treasures Sdn Bhd is in collaboration with **Nanhai Marine Archaeology Sdn Bhd**, and the gallery can be found at Lot 8, Tanjung Samudra (Waterfront) in Kota Kinabalu. The boutique opens daily from 12pm – 10pm. Tel 088216128



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