

## Harness the Universal Attraction of Water

Monday, Jan. 11, 2010, 8:15 p.m., EST

Olivia and Jeannie at Dongguan People's Park in China. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) Hundreds of large, well-fed, brightly colored koi live in the lake at Dongguan People's Park. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) While I attended the Canton Fair in Guangzhou, China, my wife, Jeannie, and daughter, Olivia, spent much of their days at Dongguan People's Park behind our hotel in Guangdong. Similar to thousands of other city parks across China, Dongguan People's Park provides citizens and tourists with a place for entertainment as well as respite from daily lives.

Dongguan People's Park includes a lake full of koi, a vast lotus pond overlooked by a tea room, a pool where children can catch fancy goldfish with tiny fishing poles, a breathtaking waterfall, paddle boats for rent, carved wooden bridges and a lily pond. Water represents a prevalent feature of this 57-acre park.

Hundreds of people gather at Dongguan People's Park in the early morning for tai chi. Old men play checkers under a willow tree. A small group of citizens participate in an outdoor ballroom dance class beside a baboon in a moated enclosure.

You can hear the twang of an erhu, an ancient two stringed instrument, ring out. Though busy, a calmness and serenity fills the park.

Olivia is zipped into a 4-foot clear plastic ball filled with air and pushed into the lake where she attempts to 'walk on water' inside this giant bubble. For 2 yuan (about 20 cents), you can buy a small bag of fish food to feed the koi.

Despite minimal disposable income, the people flock to the fish food vendors. Everyone feeds the koi and goldfish, including my wife and daughter. Repeatedly.

Every time we go down to the lobby, Olivia runs outside to the elaborate koi pond and begs to feed the fish. Hundreds of large, well-fed, brightly colored koi reside there. Olivia shares her fish food, and vice versa, with local children who also come to feed the koi. No cultural barrier exists here.

The universal attraction to water remains the same in any language. Harness that power.