

THE PAGODA QUEST

JOURNEY THROUGH
A WORLD OF PAGODAS




Pagoda Odyssey 1915:
From Shanghai to San Francisco



This activity booklet
belongs to:

Activity
Trail
For ages
7 and up

ARE YOU READY?

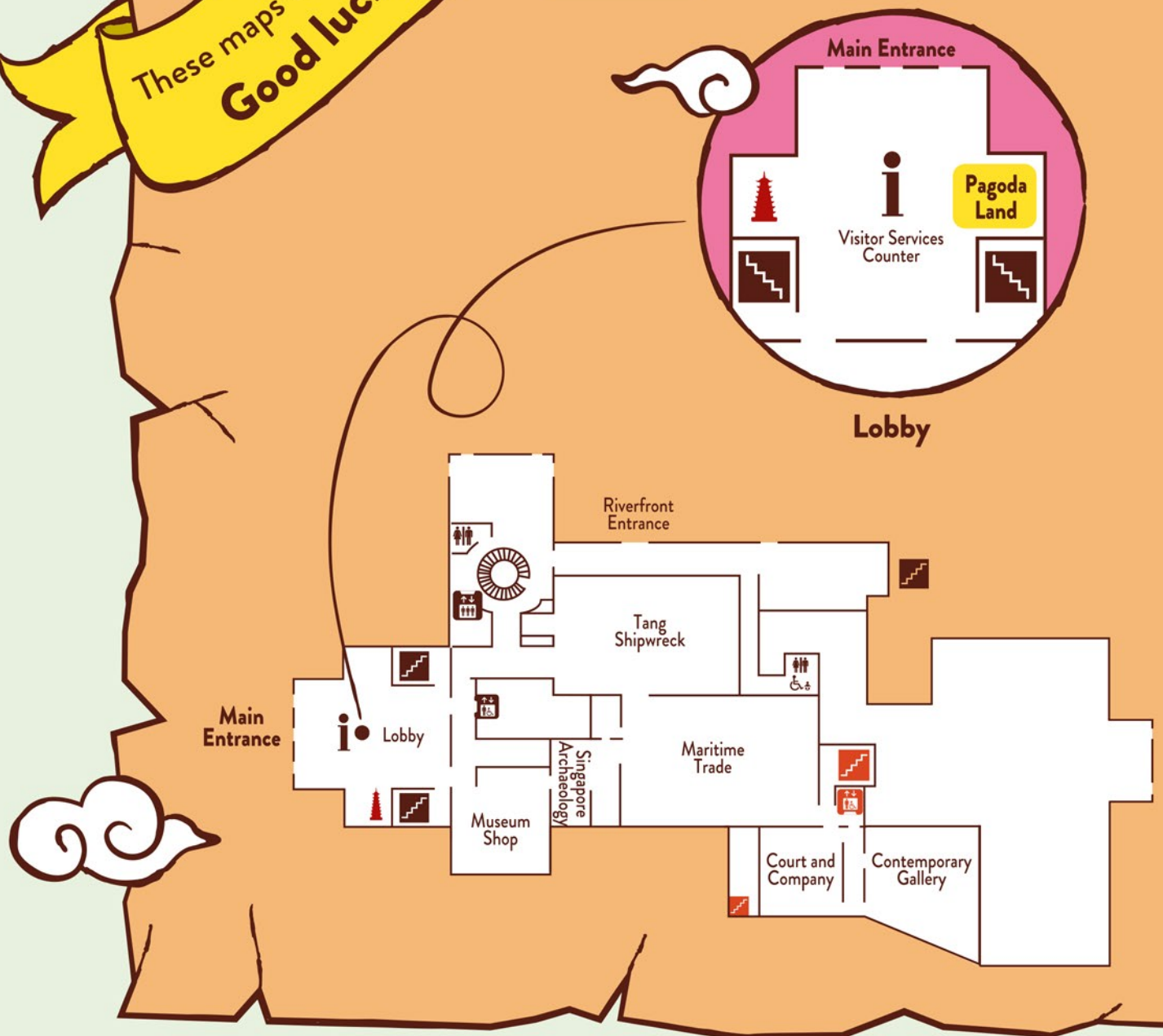
Embark on a quest to unlock treasures. After completing each activity (look for ) , tick the box at the bottom of the page.



The box looks like this ▶

These maps will help you find your way.
Good luck, adventurer!

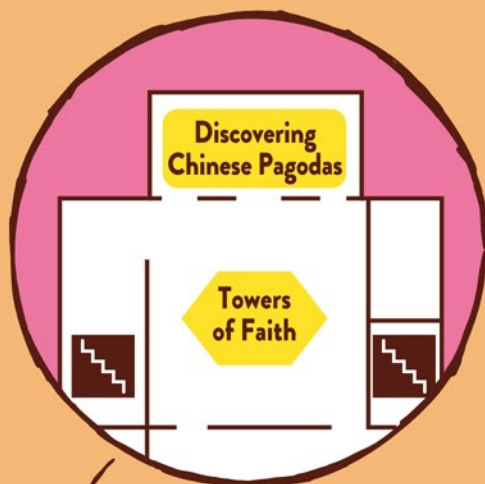
LEVEL 1



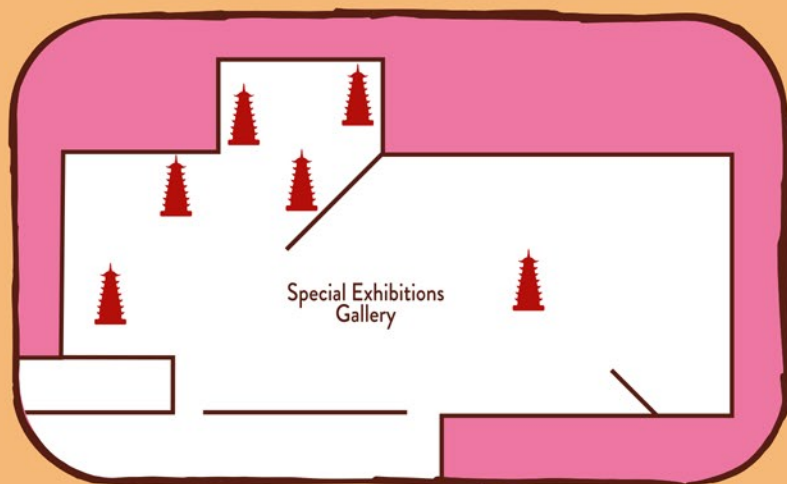
Redeem your treasures by presenting your completed booklet at the Visitor Services Counter at the end of your journey.

 Objects featured in this booklet

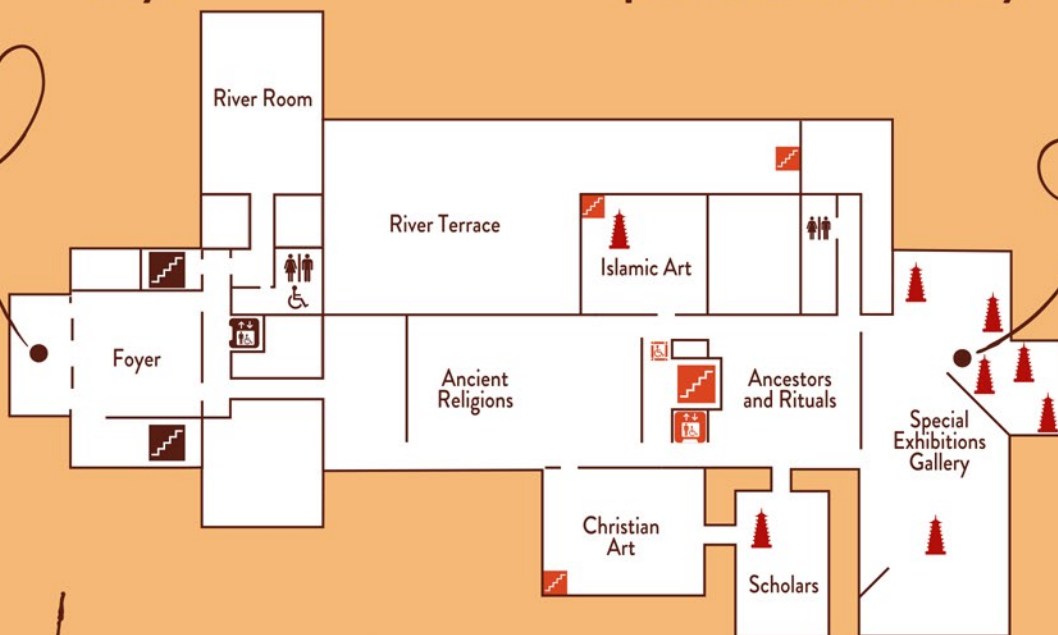
LEVEL 2



Foyer



Special Exhibitions Gallery



All pagoda models were made by Tushanwan Orphanage Workshop in China, Shanghai, from 1912 to 1914. To find out more about the artists who made them, visit the Special Exhibitions Gallery.

1

WHAT AN A-MAZE-ING PAGODA!

Lobby

A towering pagoda stands in front of you.

Enter the pagoda and find your way up to the clouds through the maze.

The Chinese pagoda was inspired by the ancient Indian stupa, a dome-shaped Buddhist monument that holds important religious objects.

Over time, it developed into tall towers that people could climb, as if reaching the heavens!

Many became famous landmarks believed to bring blessings.

Learn about some features of Chinese pagodas on the right. ►



Narrower top



Eaves curving upwards



Viewing deck



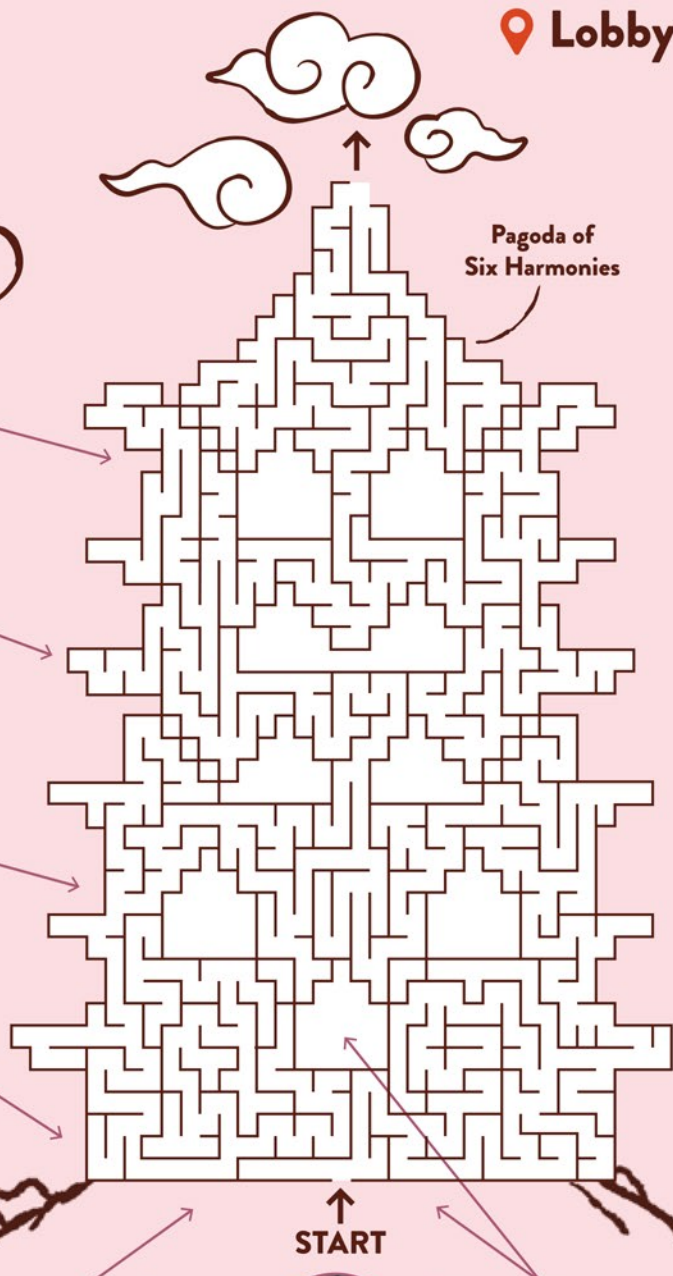
Octagonal base (8-sided)



Pagodas are often built on hills and mountains or overlooking rivers.



Religious objects could be hidden inside or underground in crypts.



This pagoda in Hangzhou was built to calm the waves of the Qiantang River.

Legend has it that the ferocious Dragon King of the Qiantang River caused dangerous waves and floods. A boy named Liuhe, saddened by his father's death and his mother being swept away by the waves, threw rocks into the river hoping to calm its flow. This caused the Dragon King's Palace to shake violently. Finally, the Dragon King gave up and released his mother, promising never to cause disasters again. In gratitude, the people built a pagoda and named it after Liuhe, whose name means Six Harmonies.



Check out the *Pagoda Land* activity space at the Lobby. Use LEGO bricks to make a wall art of this pagoda!

Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.

CODES OF THE MYTHICAL CREATURES



From the clouds, you spy with your little eye... mythical creatures! They decorate different parts of many pagodas.

👉 Solve the creature codes by **filling in the blanks** below. What are they? What do they mean?



D _ _ _ _ _
Wards off b _ _ d luck and
brings g _ _ _ d fortune.



P _ _ _ _ _
Brings po _ _ _ ti _ e
energy and bl _ ss _ ngs.



FUN FACT

You can see mythical creatures such as dragons, phoenixes, *qilins*, and *bixis* on pagoda carvings. They appear in many Chinese myths and are believed to offer protection, wisdom, and guidance.



Q _ _ _ _ _
Brings l _ _ _ k and
ha _ m _ ny.



B _ _ _ _
Brings scholarly virt _ e
and s _ pp _ rt.

Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.



Discovering Chinese Pagodas activity space on Level 2: Touch and feel the decorative elements of a pagoda or ride a dragon in the VR experience.

3

THE EARTH IS SQUARE

Special Exhibitions Gallery

As you soar through the sky on a Chinese dragon, you arrive at the Great Wild Goose Pagoda. Take a moment to observe closely. What is the shape of the pagoda's base?

It's a square, which makes it different from the octagonal pagodas built in later times.

In Chinese culture and Buddhist belief, the square represents the earth, stability, and balance. It means having a strong foundation and a connection to the land.



Great Wild Goose Pagoda



FUN FACT

If you walk around the pagoda, you can find the names and hometowns of successful candidates from the imperial examinations carved on the walls.



Circle the words that a square base represents in Chinese culture. ▶

**EARTH
STABLE**

**STRONG
BALANCE**

**GROUNDING
FOUNDATION**

X E A B G A P G O C H
 Z A M B A Y A R L H S
 N R E M O L S O Q O T
 S T A B L E A U E L R
 O H I L N N B N S I O
 E S C W D C W D C Y N
 R E A V E S I E M E G
 B L P G O T U D I E Z
 F O U N D A T I O N A

Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.

📍 Special Exhibitions Gallery

LOUGE VERSUS MIYAN STYLE

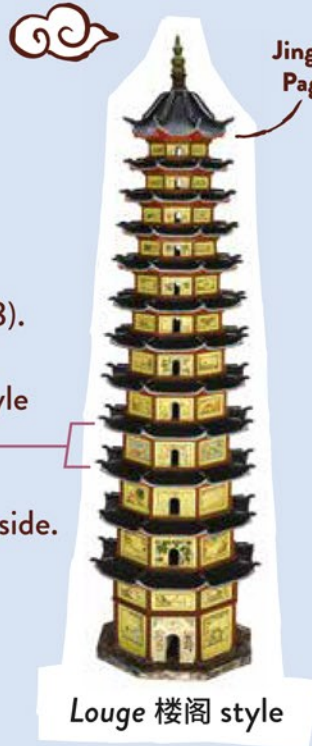
4

As you reach the midpoint of your quest, the early morning fog envelopes the river. Emerging from the mist are two pagodas in the two most common architectural styles: *louge* and *miyan*.


Jingzhou Pagoda has 8 sides and 13 storeys.


Storeys are often odd-numbered (5, 7, 9 or more), whereas the sides are always even-numbered (4, 6, 8).

Pagodas in the *louge* style look like **multistorey towers** on the outside, with accessible levels inside.



The *miyan* style has **eaves that are closely piled up** with short spaces between storeys. The inside is usually solid brick.

 **FUN FACT**
Don't be fooled by how they look on the outside. On the inside, they can be solid or hollow! Not all can be climbed. Some even have false doors and windows.

 **Draw your own pagoda.** Is it in the *louge* or *miyan* style? How many storeys are there?

Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.



Step inside a pagoda in the VR experience at the *Discovering Chinese Pagodas* activity space on Level 2.


5

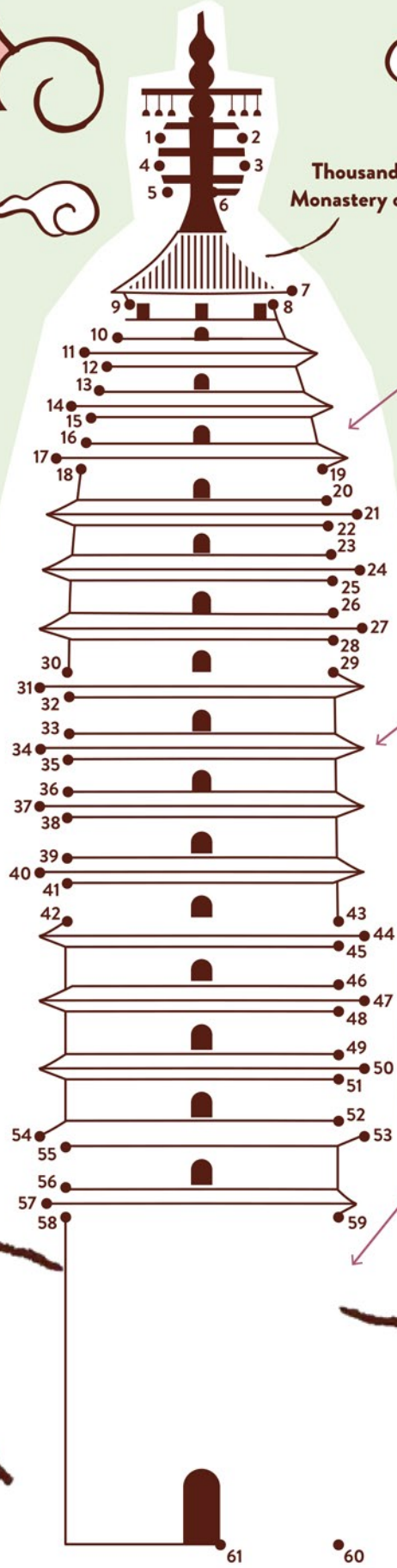
TALLEST OF THEM ALL

Special Exhibitions Gallery

The fog has cleared. After crossing a long bridge, you crawl through thick bushes. As you stand up, you spot the tallest pagoda you have ever seen!

How tall do you think this model is?

 **Connect the dots** to see what the pagoda looks like. ▶



Thousand-foot Pagoda of the Monastery of Venerating Nobility

This pagoda in Yunnan is part of a royal Buddhist monastery. It is about 70 metres tall and has 16 storeys.

The middle level is slightly larger than the others, making the pagoda curve slightly outwards.

It has a very tall first level and a square base.



Treasure




Tick when activity is completed.


FIERY TALES

Is something burning?

The Pagoda of Thunder Peak in Hangzhou is a famous landmark built more than 1,000 years ago. Unfortunately, about 600 years later, war and fire reduced it to a ruin. In 1924, the tower collapsed.

The pagoda was eventually rebuilt. Each storey has a viewing deck for visitors to enjoy the scenic West Lake.

 **FUN FACT**
This model shows the pagoda's broken cornices, fallen tiles, and even large trees growing through the cracks, showing that it is hollow inside.

 **Circle 5 differences** between the 2 pictures. ▶



The Pagoda of Thunder Peak is well-known because of the Chinese tale *Legend of the White Snake*. It is a love story about a white snake spirit and a human scholar. They were forced to part ways after a Buddhist master trapped the white snake beneath the pagoda.



Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.



Read more about this tale and make your own Pagoda Paper Art at the *Discovering Chinese Pagodas* activity space on Level 2.

A LIGHT IN THE DARK

After fleeing the fire on a boat, darkness blankets your surroundings as night descends. There is no moon or stars in sight, and no one else around. Suddenly, a beam of light from the Light Minaret of Huaisheng Mosque shines across the Pearl River, casting light onto your boat. You are saved!

This is not a pagoda, but a minaret – an Islamic tower built in or next to a mosque. The muezzin uses it to call Muslims to prayer.

This minaret is part of Huaisheng Mosque, one of the earliest mosques in China. It once served as a lighthouse to guide boats on the Pearl River.

 **Draw a boat to carry you across the river.**



Light Minaret of the Huaisheng Mosque



Head to the Towers of Faith display at the Foyer on Level 2 to discover five religious towers in Singapore.

Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.

📍 Scholars Gallery

8

TOWER TRIUMPHS

You have reached the final challenge on your journey! A large crowd gathers around you at the Tower of the Principal Graduate. Will you be the top scholar? May the pagoda bestow its luck upon you!

This pagoda was built to bless those taking the imperial examinations, in the hope that one would become the Principal Graduate (*Zhuangyuan*).

These pagodas were referred to as literary peak towers, as they were built for literary purposes and to improve local feng shui, not for Buddhist worship.



Tower of the Principal Graduate



FUN FACT

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese practice that involves arranging buildings, objects, and spaces to create harmony and balance. It is based on the five elements found in nature: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.



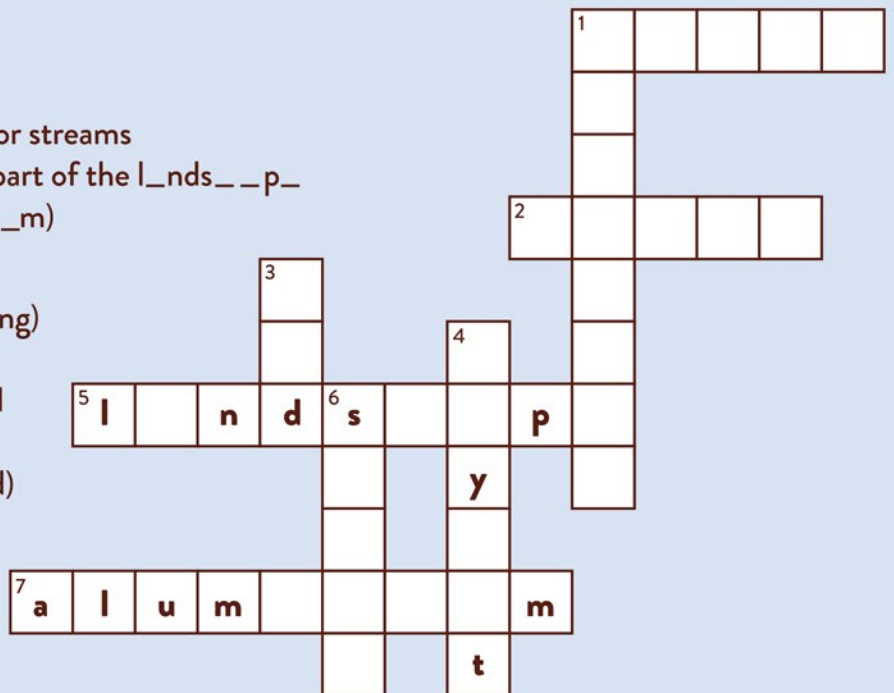
Complete the crossword puzzle below to learn more about feng shui.

Across

1. Wood element colour
2. _____ features such as ponds or streams
5. Rivers, mountains, and wind are part of the l_nds__p_
7. Metal element (Hint: Alum____m)

Down

1. _____ energies (e.g., yin and yang)
3. Fire element colour
4. Way in which spaces are arranged
6. Earth element
(Hint: could be grey, brown or red)



Treasure



Tick when activity is completed.



Touch and feel a model of this pagoda at the *Discovering Chinese Pagodas* activity space on Level 2.

Answer: (Across) brown, water, landscape, aluminium (Down) balanced, red, layout, stone

TREASURES UNLOCKED!

Congratulations on completing the quest.

You've shown great bravery!

Redeem your treasures by presenting your completed booklet at the Visitor Services Counter on Level 1.

Use them to decorate this book cover!



About the exhibition

In 1915, a set of 84 hand-carved model pagodas made in Shanghai travelled thousands of miles to San Francisco for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Exquisitely detailed, they were based on real structures, some of which no longer exist. For many visitors they offered the first, tantalising glimpse of China's rich architectural heritage. The pagodas are reunited for the first time at the Asian Civilisations Museum in 2024. Together with related works, they paint a vivid picture of cosmopolitan Shanghai and San Francisco at the turn of the 20th century.



WHAT'S ON

Scan the QR code to find out what programmes will be running throughout the exhibition.

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