



CHRIS ABELE, MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
JOHN DARGLE, JR., DIRECTOR, MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS



TRI CITY NATIONAL BANK



Contact: Shirley Walczak, Director, Boerner Botanical Gardens
414-525-5603
Shirley.Walczak@milwaukeecountywi.gov

For immediate release

Julie Stolper Dieckelman, Public Relations/Marketing Consultant
262-853-1602
jbsdllc@gmail.com

China Lights Lantern Festival at Boerner Botanical Gardens Celebrates Final Week – Ends Oct. 29

MILWAUKEE (Oct. 24, 2017) — In its final week, the China Lights Lantern Festival at Boerner Botanical Gardens reminds all ticket-holders that their tickets, with the end date of Oct. 22, are good through the Oct. 29 extension.

Due to overwhelming demand, ticket sales were suspended last week. Currently, a limited number of tickets are being made available each day, online only. Only ticket holders will be allowed entry. No on-site ticket sales are offered.

The closing weekend will offer giveaways and egg-roll-eating contests.

China Lights: The Magic Returns is a celebration of Asian culture featuring 50 larger-than-life sculptural lantern displays illuminating 10 acres of Milwaukee's renowned Boerner Botanical Gardens, in Whitnall Park at 9400 Boerner Drive, Hales Corners, WI. The festival, presented by Tri City National Bank, also celebrates Asian culture with professional entertainment, a bustling marketplace, and a wide variety of food and beverage options. The event runs through Oct. 29, Tuesday through Sunday, from 5:30–10 p.m

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ADDRESS
9480 Watertown Plank Road
Wauwatosa, WI 53226-3560

PHONE/FAX
ph: **414 / 257 PARK** (7275)
fax: 414 / 257 6466



EMAIL
parks@milwaukeecountywi.gov

WEBSITE
countyparks.com

Mobile Guide Giveaways

Friday through Sunday, the first 1,000 visitors each day will receive free mobile guides. The mobile guide, which requires a cell phone for use, provides background information on the displays. Guides may be purchased on-site for \$5.

Egg-Roll-Eating Contest

Visitors who like to make eating a competition are invited to take part in the Zilli Hospitality Group Egg Roll Eating Contest on Friday and Saturday at 6:50 p.m. Signup begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Dragon Stage. The competition is limited to the first eight people who sign up each night. The winner is the person who eats the most egg rolls in 88 seconds or eats eight egg rolls, whichever comes first. There is no fee to enter the contest. All participants will receive the China Lights souvenir lantern (as well as their untouched egg rolls to share with friends or family). The first-place winner will also take home a China Lights t-shirt and sweatshirt.

Lantern Displays

Of course, the lantern displays are the star of the show. Even before reaching the Welcome Gate, visitors have been impressed by the Porcelain Tower. Here, the intricate work of Chinese artisans brought together 60,000 porcelain bowls, bottles, cups, plates, and spoons to create the nearly 40-foot-tall structure.

When inside the exhibition, visitors often find that each display is more magical than the last. Glowing flowers, swans, fish, and pandas emerge from garden spaces. Most dramatic are the 200-foot dragon and an accompanying phoenix with a long undulating tail.

To power one of the displays, youths can lend a hand—or, more precisely, their feet. In the Perennial Garden, a bicycle is connected to an elephant lantern, known by staff as “pedal the pachyderm.” Visitors can hop on the bike and pedal to illuminate the elephant.

Professional Cultural Entertainment

Kicking off the entertainment, the Illumination Parade will proceed through the audience at the Dragon Stage at 6:15 p.m. On Saturday and Sunday, free fortune cookies will be handed out to the audience to celebrate the closing of the exhibition. The parade concludes in time for the first performance of the night.

Friday through Sunday, six shows will be presented by the professional performers from China. Performances begin at about 6:30 p.m. and are staggered between the Dragon and Panda stages. The night’s schedule is posted at the Welcome Gate.

The professional acrobats, martial artists, and musicians from China will offer a full range of entertainment. Some of the acrobatic feats, such as plate spinning or catching bowls on a unicycle require calm conditions. If winds are too strong, other professional acts will go on. One example is face changing, an ancient Chinese art form from the Sichuan opera. Performers wear thin masks that change with the passing of a fan. Another example is the demonstration of baji, a kind of tai chi that features explosive, short-range strikes. In addition, traditional Chinese folk music will be performed on the erhu, or two-stringed Chinese violin. The instrument, which is played vertically and has free-floating strings, is said to imitate the sound of thousands of horses.

Cultural Displays

In the Garden House, cultural displays and videos can be viewed. Samples of traditional Asian clothing are shown in display cases, with additional small-sized clothing items available for guests to try on.

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Food & Beverage

China Lights food vendors will offer a variety of Asian and Western food options from Kowloon Chicken to hot dogs. The vendors, in concessions areas near the performance stages, are Tanpopo/Greenfish, Lychee Garden, Zilli Hospitality Group, Gift of Wings Grill, Wisconsin Fried Cheese Curds, and T. Best Kettle Corn Co. Beverage service in the concessions areas includes Tsingtao (a lager from China), original Ozeki Sake, domestic and premium tap beers, and wine. Non-alcoholic bottled beverages are also available.

Offering a cozy area with bistro tables, Ralph's Wine & Sake bar serves beverages only—four styles of wine, Ozeki's flavored and sparkling sake, craft sodas including Sprecher's Lychee and Asian Pear, coffee, hot chocolate, and hot tea.

The Chinese Marketplace

In the colorful marketplace, Chinese artisans create traditional handicrafts. Some of the crafts being demonstrated include name painting, rice engraving, inner-bottle painting, and aluminum weaving. Name painting combines calligraphy with vivid imagery to create a work of art. Rice engraving requires a microscope and a steady hand to carve a Chinese poem, a person's name, or special wishes on a grain of rice. When complete, the tiny artwork is preserved in oil in a synthetic crystal capsule. Inner-bottle painting, also known as painting snuff bottles, uses a bent brush to paint figures inside a bottle, leaving the artwork protected. In aluminum weaving, thin metal wires are formed into ornaments representing flowers, dragons, and even motorcycles. The marketplace is more than a place to shop; it's a cultural experience.

Admission/Fees

China Lights admission tickets are valid through Sunday. Tickets, available online only at chinalights.org, are \$15 for adults (age 18–59) and \$10 for seniors (age 60 and up) and children (age 5–17). Children under age 5 are admitted free.

Free Parking & Shuttle Service

Free first-come, first-served parking is included with all tickets, and free shuttle service is provided from outer lots to the entrance. Before entering Whitnall Park, visitors will see notifications of parking lot availability. As the nine lighted lots near capacity, signage will indicate temporary lot closures. As parking spaces become available, the lots will reopen and signage will be updated. Signage on the eastern side of the park is located at three 92nd Street intersections, at Rawson, College, and Forest Home avenues. Signage on the western side of the park is located at three Whitnall Park Drive intersections, at College Avenue, 108th Street (Hwy 100), and Lilac Lane. Accessible close-up paved parking nearest the China Lights entrance is available on a first-come, first-served basis to people with disabilities who have state-issued disabled parking or disabled Veteran parking license plates, or the state-issued disabled parking identification card.

China Lights is brought to Milwaukee through the partnership of the Milwaukee County Parks and The Park People of Milwaukee County, with support from Travel Wisconsin. The event is presented by Tri City National Bank and is sponsored by We Energies.

For more information, visit chinalights.org.

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Background

In 2016, Milwaukee became the first Midwestern city to schedule the unequalled China Lights. Visitors from across the state, the Midwest, and beyond attended the show. At one point, demand for tickets to the show was so great that sales had to be suspended.

As part of China's five-year economic plan, in 2015 the Sichuan Provincial Department of Commerce developed a campaign with the goal of holding 100 lantern shows in 100 cities worldwide to spread Chinese traditional culture and promote cultural exchange. The custom of lighting lanterns has occurred for thousands of years, and Zigong City now boasts 380 lantern-making companies with 80,000 lantern artisans.