

Museum to reopen after two years

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TAIPEI: The National Palace Museum, the world's leading Chinese art museum, will reopen next month.

There will be more display space for imperial art and amenities aimed at luring an expected surge in visitors from long-time rival mainland China.

After almost two years of remodelling, the museum will open on Feb 8 its entire 24,000 square metres of exhibit halls that now include more snacking areas, a new lobby and a school, said director Lin Mun-lee.

The museum is known for its unique stash of 654,500 imperial art treasures brought to Taiwan at the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949 to keep them away from the communists.

Because more people look at old art more often if it's in a modern setting, the museum remodelled almost every hall, a spokeswoman said. The exterior, which resembles imperial palaces within Beijing's Forbidden City, was not changed.

"This museum has been mod-

ernised," Lin said. "A museum is not just to provide something for everyone to appreciate, it also creates a kind of lifestyle."

The museum will now have four coffeeshops and a Taiwan teahouse to make the isolated hillside complex of three buildings more comfortable, Lin said.

The growth in display space, for a total of 9,600 square metres, will let the museum show more pieces at one time. It can now show only 3,000 items at any time.

New exhibits are already in the works. The museum will get a collection from the British Museum next month, and in October it will display 100 Baroque-era pieces from a museum in Austria.

The 42-year-old venue normally exhibits treasures such as centuries-old calligraphy scrolls, Ming dynasty ceramic vases and jade seals of Qing emperors.

Scrolls are descended over imposing white walls, while vases are shown in backlit cases in halls as dark as caverns. The museum's oldest piece goes back about 8,000 years. — Reuters