



[Media Release] ACM makes major move into the arena of Asian games: Let's PLAY!

Description

Play takes centre stage this September at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM). Opening on 5 September (Friday) and in celebration of Singapore's 60th anniversary of independence, Let's Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games brings together more than 150 works of art to reveal how games have shaped culture, identity, and community for thousands of years. The museum's first playable exhibition, visitors can make moves, test their wits, and relive gaming history through interactives, outdoor installations, and newly commissioned works by contemporary designers.

Mr Clement Onn, Director, ACM and Peranakan Museum, says, "Games are central to social life—more than pastimes, they foster intellect, social cohesion, creativity, and moral reflection. Let's Play! is about more than just fun. It invites visitors to reflect on the vital role games play in our culture. Many of the games on display have been part of our shared experience for generations—accessible to all, yet marked by intricate craftsmanship and inventive mechanics that mirror how we think, interact, and express ourselves.

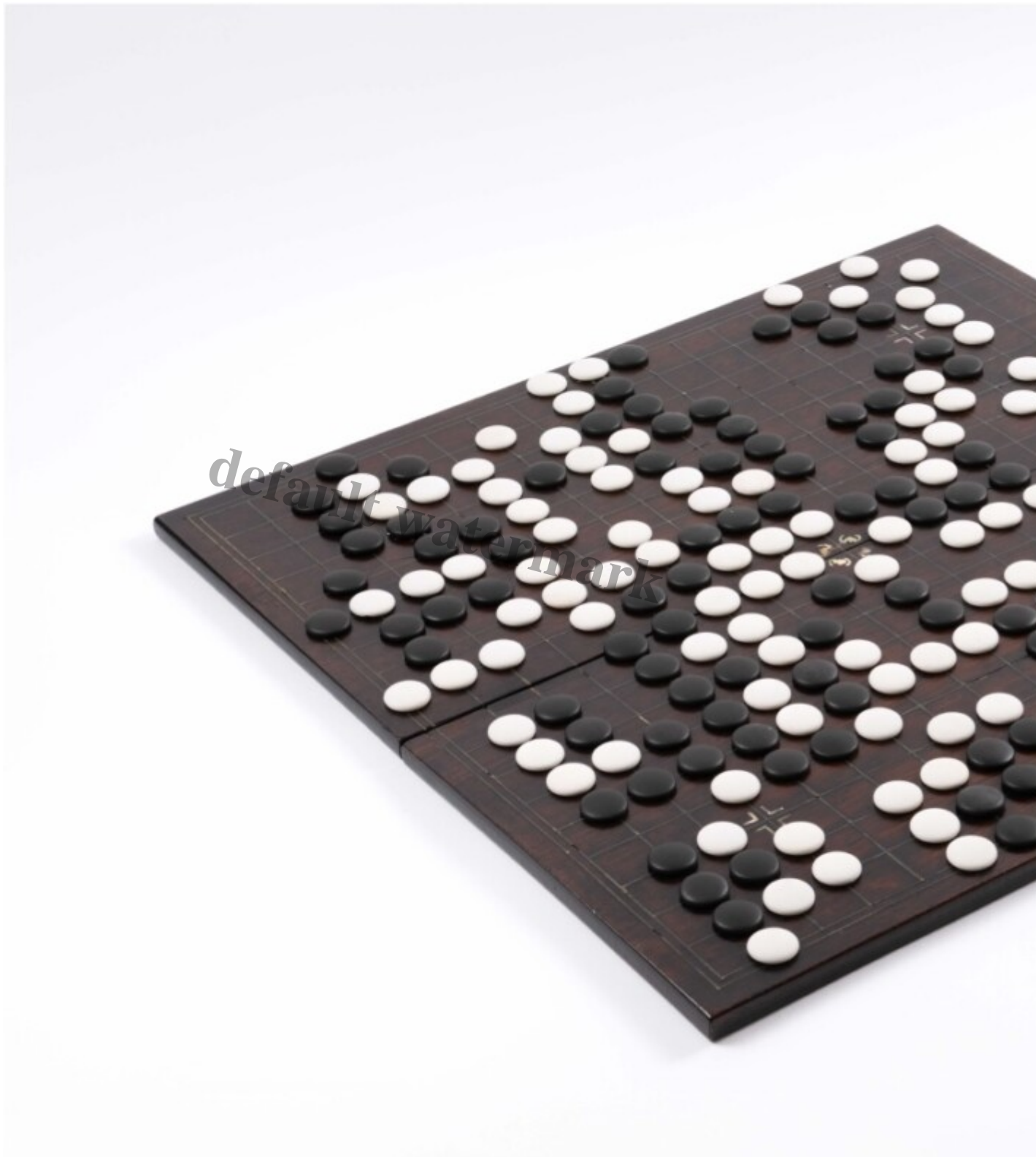
We're deeply grateful to the schools, community partners, and local game organisations whose support brings the exhibition's playable elements and sense of community to life. We hope that Let's Play! fosters cultural exchanges in the region, and shows how games with long, rich histories remain alive and meaningful today."

Art of play across cultures

Presented in five thematic sections, the exhibition features classics such as chess, chaupar, weiqi, xiangqi, shogi, carrom, mahjong, congkak and more, which reveal how play, in all its forms, remains a vital and enduring part of human life.

From the ancient to the contemporary, the exhibition explores humanity’s deep-rooted impulse to play while tracing the often-overlooked origins of familiar games. Chess, for example, developed from the Indian game chaturanga, a sixth-century strategy game. Alongside weiqi and xiangqi, it was once celebrated as a tool for mental discipline, cultivating patience, foresight, and resilience – virtues associated with rulers and scholars. Today, these games are recognised as “mind sports”, supported locally by professional associations like the Singapore Weiqi Association, Singapore Xiangqi General Association, and the Singapore Chess Federation.

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Weiqi set: China, 18th century, Wood, mother-of-pearl, black slate, clam shells, Asian Civilisations M



Chess set with Thai aristocrats: Thailand, 19th century, Ivory, Asian Civilisations Museum

A nineteenth-century figural chess set from Thailand, carved in ivory as human and animal forms, exemplifies how such games were reimagined through local traditions of design and craftsmanship.

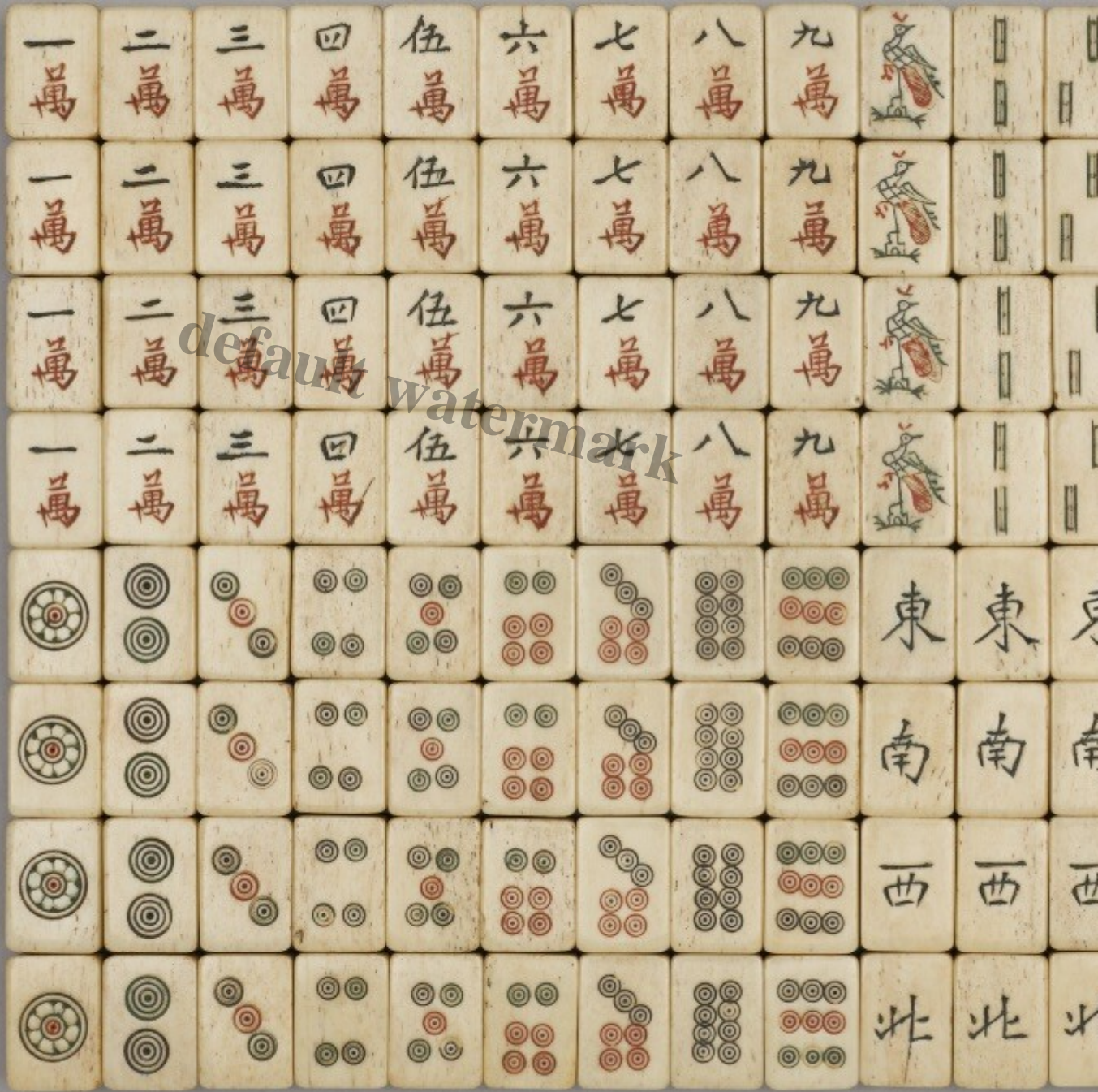




The exhibition also highlights the powerful ways in which games have reflected societies and shaped beliefs. The Indian game gyan chaupar —the precursor of Snakes and Ladders— offered a metaphor for life’s uncertainties and rewards, and was used variously for gambling, divination, teaching, and storytelling. Chaupar, another popular Indian race game dating to around the fifteenth century, balanced skill and chance in ways that continue in its modern descendants, such as ludo, parcheesi, and aeroplane chess.

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Equally powerful are the ways games have brought communities together. Originating in West Asia or East Africa, congkak and its variants have been played across island Southeast Asia for centuries. Visitors will encounter a 120-year-old congkak board from Seberang Perai, Malaysia, which was the first of its kind to enter Singapore's National Collection. Once played in homes and village spaces, congkak has also taken on ritual significance, from funerary vigils in parts of Indonesia to community gatherings in the Maldives and Madagascar.

The journey continues with mahjong, which developed in nineteenth-century southern China from the card game madio. Quickly becoming a fixture of urban social life, mahjong spread across the globe, taking root in diasporic communities and adapting to new cultural contexts. These transformations reveal how games carry identity across borders while continually reshaping themselves in imaginative ways.

Play in the modern world

Today, games continue to evolve, shaping fields from technology and diplomacy to contemporary design. They have become highly visible platforms for innovation, most notably in the field of artificial intelligence. From AlphaGo's celebrated victory over South Korean champion Lee Sedol in 2016 to the regular use of SenseRobots in elite training, AI has transformed games into testbeds for human-machine interaction.



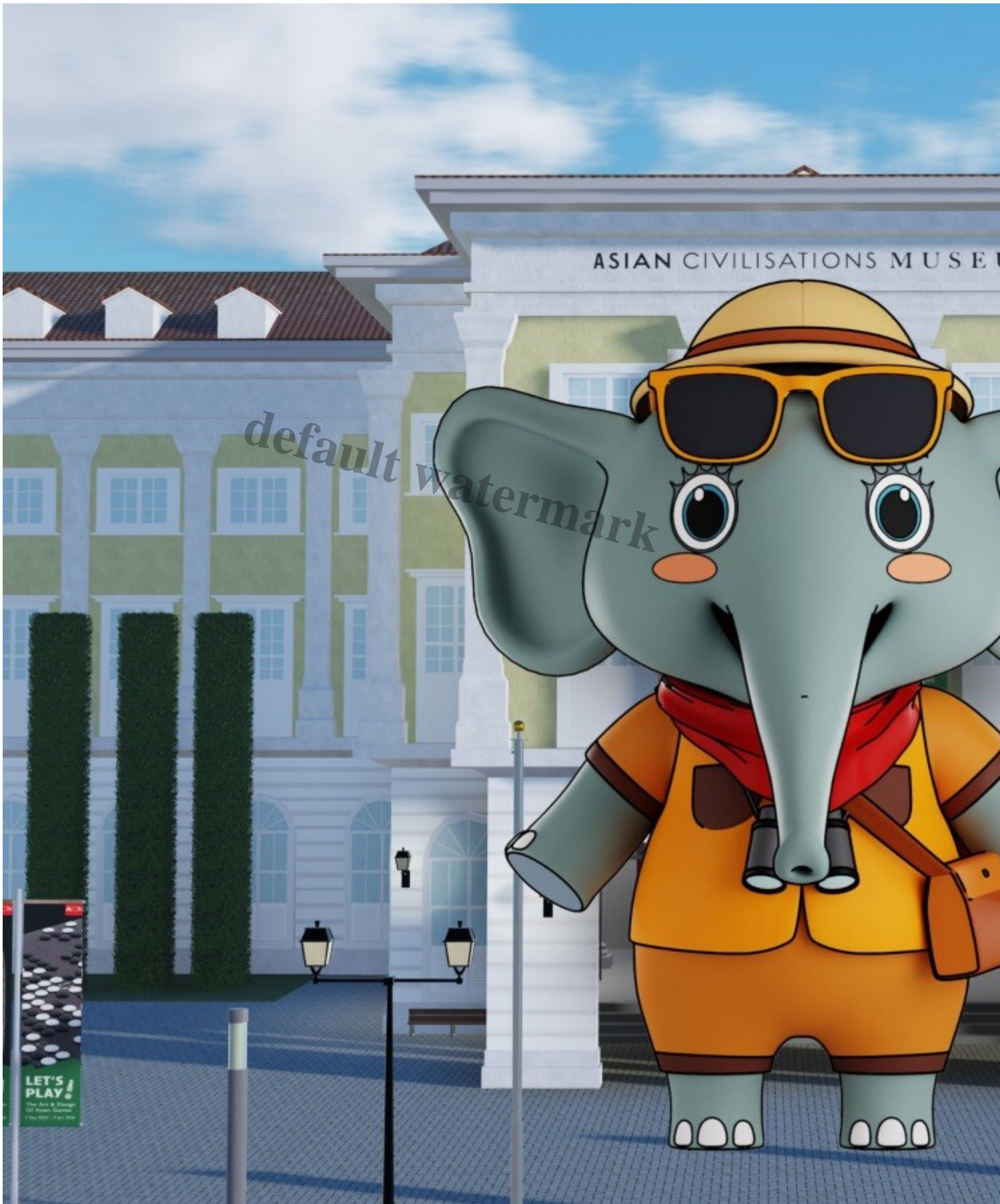
Games like chess and go have also evolved into professional competitions that draw international audiences. Singapore's hosting of the 1st ING Cup finals in the 1980s — which inspired the 2025 award-winning Korean film *The Match* — and the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 are reminders of how play continues to capture international attention and national pride.





Expanding beyond the museum's walls, ACM will also launch ACMverse on Roblox. Players can explore the ACMverse and complete missions to unlock exclusive rewards when they play onsite. By downloading the Roblox app on their smartphones, visitors can take part in a guided quest that links physical displays to digital challenges. Visitors can stay tuned to later launches such as mini games and a second quest.

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Game design today draws on heritage, food culture, and urban life, reflecting influences that connect across cultures. Let's Play More!, a playful extension of the main exhibition, offers more opportunities for visitors to try different games. From Jakarta Traffic to Steam Up, this communal play space mirrors the lively ecosystem of game caf  s and player communities, which have revived board gaming as a vibrant form of communal play. At Let's Play More!, visitors can also design a game token inspired by Asian games and watch it come to life on The Game Board.

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Games also inspire designers, artisans, and developers to create new interpretations that respond to contemporary concerns. Climbs & Slides by Forest & Whale reimagines the Snakes and Ladders board as a three-dimensional installation, inviting reflection on the ups and downs of life.

The experience extends outdoors with Checkmates!, an oversized playable chess installation by international artists Vendy Methodos and Osheen Siva. Set against the backdrop of the Singapore River, the work features contemporary reinterpretations of traditional chess pieces on a 7-metre-wide board, resulting in a striking fusion of art and strategy.

Supported by collaborations with schools, local game organisations, and community partners, alongside a range of curator-led tours, talks, and workshops, the exhibition invites visitors to experience the enduring power of play. By engaging with games both historic and contemporary, audiences are encouraged to see how Asia's rich cultural heritage continues to shape creativity, community, and connection today.

Let's Play! The Art and Design of Asian Games runs from 5 September 2025 to 7 June 2026 at ACM . Admission charges apply. For details, visit <https://www.nhb.gov.sg/acm>.

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