

# Connecting with yourself through Japanese gardens



Above: Christo Rabie as he shares some of the most beautiful Japanese gardens he has seen during his travels

As you run through life dealing with stress and routine, it's easy to forget how to connect with yourself. It was with this intention that Unisa's Chance 2 Advance programme ran a workshop with a spiritual difference on 7 March 2012 entitled "Japanese gardens: luminal spaces of extraordinary beauty and spiritual connectedness".

Facilitating the workshop was Christo Rabie (Head: Education Services, Voortrekker Monument) who is also an avid traveller to Japan with a passion for the beautiful gardens they are famous for. Believing that one should not lecture on beautiful things, Rabie instead used the session to get staff in tune with their creative and spiritual sides, while taking them on a journey of his journeys. Referring to Japanese gardens, he said: "It's not called a place, it's a space. A space to sit, look and get connected with your own spirituality."

Some of the beauty in images that Rabie shared included Nagoya Castle gardens in central Japan and Tenryu-ji temple which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Rabie explained the general perceptions of what one should know about these gardens and shared a few examples of other World Heritage Sites. Imparting valuable advice on how to create these gardens, he illustrated different elements that can be used. One such is a *tsukubai* which is a small basin provided in Japanese Buddhist temples for visitors to purify themselves through the ritual of washing hands and rinsing the mouth. This leads to the cleansing of words and actions. With the Japanese concept of beauty perceived as either the property of a natural accident or the perfection of a man-made accident, Rabie believes that respect is what brings elements of a garden together. "In a garden, certain things are always used. Always respect the rocks, sand, grass, etcetera. Things that have been together should always stay together."

After delving a bit into feng shui (the Chinese system of geomancy believed to use the laws of both Heaven and Earth to help one improve life by receiving positivity), Rabie then gave staff a practical exercise to conceptualise a small section in their garden using elements and teachings from the workshop.