



As Tai O fishermen held a heritage-listed parade (top), there was no chance of staying dry in Aberdeen (top right). They tried to be heroes in Stanley (above left) but a panda stood out from the crowd, as did the Marriott International team. Photos: Felix Wong, David Wong, Dickson Lee

Noise back

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The history of boat races goes back years when the city's parade tradition's ancient Chiu (風原) evolved.

"It was quite spontaneous. The scale was small. I was a vice-chairman, who is a major event."

Men on fire dive into the water to the passing rain. They join in the race.

There were a number of rowing even no official teams.

It was a day. Sixty teams of 50 large-boat teams of 20 boats. There were clubs, student teams.

But a couple of boats is present. As the drums and their paddles.

The teams were complete with a safe voyager whenever fish into the water.

Paddling superheroes make a splash

From Stanley to Tai O, everyone wanted to stick their oar in at annual Dragon Boat Festival

Johnny Tam, Lo Wei and Jennifer Ngo

In Stanley it was all about beer and costumes, the athletes were in Aberdeen and for those wanting to see a century-old parade, Tai O was the place to be during yesterday's Dragon Boat Festival.

The rain didn't dampen spirits on the annual holiday, also known as the Tuen Ng Festival, which commemorates the death of Qu Yuan (屈原), a Chinese poet who was born in 343 BC, in the Warring States era. Qu killed himself in a river in despair at the defeat of his homeland's capital – part of modern Hubei (湖北). And in that spirit, there was a protest at the races in Tai Po, where Acting Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor was officiating. About a dozen people

called for the Leung Chun-ying administration to step down.

Meanwhile, in Tai O, thousands of indigenous villagers and tourists watched a procession on the water, a tradition that is over 100 years old and was included on the national intangible cultural heritage list in 2011.

It began when the fishing village was hit by a plague over a century ago. Fishermen paraded along the waterways between stilt houses on dragon boats, towing statues of deities behind them in a bid to cast out the evil spirits. The plague ended, but the custom has continued. "We're proud that we've kept this tradition alive. It allows us to celebrate our origins and it brings a large number of visitors to Tai O," said villager Cheung Tak-sing, 50.

In Stanley, there was also plenty to look at. Teams dressed

as Darth Vader from the *Star Wars* movies rubbed shoulders with paddlers done up as superhero Captain America at the International Dragon Boat Championships. And, of course, there were inflatable rubber ducks, like the art installation in Victoria Harbour last month.

"This is the best thing that happened this year," said Yara Kostetzer, who organised the event's first team from Brazil.

"We did better [in the finals than in the heats], as we concen-

trated more on the racing and less on the singing. We're better singers than paddlers."

But it wasn't all singing. The X-men, who won the men's Grade A event, have been training three times a week since January, coach John Pache said. "We worked hard," said Pache. "For me, I love the intensity, of really hitting it and pushing it."

The Liechtenstein Princely Navy was runner-up, with the Hong Kong Sea School Old Boys Dragon taking third place. There were 65 races and 15 prizes.

But the serious paddlers were in Aberdeen. Cheng Chi-keung, 43, team captain of the South Eagles Dragon Boat Association, said they trained year round, two to three times a week. It was the first race for Zeth Ko Pak-kan, 23, of the Institute of Architects team. "It was easier than I thought as we've been doing 500 metres in training. The race is only 380 metres. But it did get a bit tougher after the middle part."

242
The number of teams that took part in the races at Stanley's main beach yesterday