Taiwan Business
TOPICS

July 2016 | Vol. 46 | Issue 7

TRAVEL & CULTURE 2016

ISSN 1818-1961 07
4 713282 411865
NT$150

Published by the American Chamber Of Commerce In Taipei

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Taiwan Business
TOPICS

JULY 2016 VOLUME 46, NUMBER 7
一〇五年七月號

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Taiwan Business TOPICS is a publication of the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, ROC. Contents are independent of and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Officers, Board of Governors, Supervisors or members.

登記字號：台誌第一零九六九號
印刷所：帆美印刷股份有限公司
經銷商：台灣英文雜誌社 台北市108台北市萬華區長沙街二段66號
發行日期：中華民國一〇五年七月
中華郵政北台字第5000號執照登記為雜誌交寄
ISSN 1818-1961

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PHOTO: CHRIS STOWERS


PHOTO: MATTHEW FULCO


PHOTO: CHEN MEI-TING


PHOTO: CHRIS STOWERS

COVER PHOTO: STUART DAWSON/TAIWAN ADVENTURES

PHOTO: RICH MATHESON

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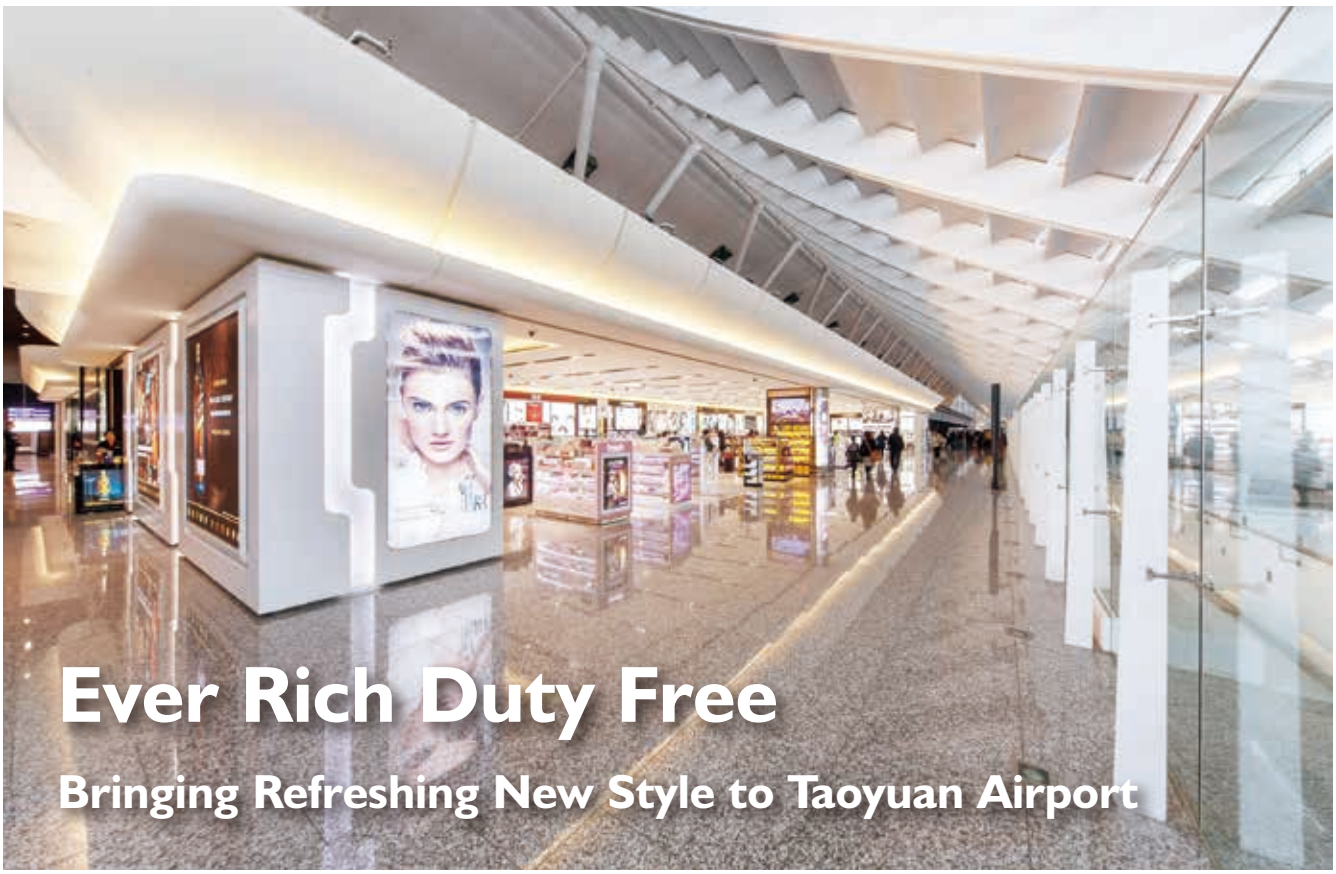

Ever Rich Duty Free

Bringing Refreshing New Style to Taoyuan Airport

Taipei Taoyuan International Airport has been honored with the 2015 Skytrax Best Airport staff award, mostly for its high proportion of enthusiastic duty-free airport service personnel. This award reflects the relentless efforts of Ever Rich Duty Free Travel Retail Company to enhance service quality. International air travel can be hard, Ever Rich knows, often involving dingy airports, big crowds, and endless lines. But thanks to Ever Rich, a visit to Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport is a comfortable and enriching experience of its own.

Ever Rich, the Taiwanese travel retailer that manages the commercial areas of the Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, has invested significant resources in enhancing the travel experience for visitors to Taiwan, and the airport now offers not only the latest luxury and duty-free shopping that travelers expect, but a cultural experience unlike any other airport in the region.

Beginning over a decade ago, 100% Taiwanese-owned Ever Rich invested billions of New Taiwan dollars to refurbish the public space in terminal control area at the Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, and those sections of the terminals have now been fully transformed to reflect the dynamic culture and economy of Taiwan.

Entering the departure lounges at the airport, one is immediately met with an array of the most popular luxury and duty-free brands that the international traveler expects. But there is so much more to see, smell, and taste. Ever Rich's signature jewelry shops offer beautiful, handcrafted jewelry, much of it made from jade mined right on the island. Then there's the Taiwan Specialty Liquor and Chocolate shops that offer to the hungry and thirsty traveler a taste of Taiwan's artisanal chocolates and liquors. Taiwan Craft Shops demonstrate that traditional and innovative handicraft skills are alive and well on the island. It's not all about tradition, though, and the Digital Plaza and Sound Vision center will remind travelers of Taiwan's place at the fore of digital technology.

The luxury brands on offer have evolved somewhat in recent years to reflect the changing tastes of younger, hipper travelers who are increasingly representative of the international traveling set.

Experience various activities of Taiwan Culture.

"The customers keep changing and the environment keeps changing, so we have to keep changing," notes an Ever Rich representative.

Marketing experts say that younger consumers want more than just a brand: they are also seeking a story and a memory. With this in mind, Ever Rich has teamed up with a number of luxury brands to produce exclusive Taiwan-themed goods, including handbags and backpacks incorporating an

image of the map of Taiwan, Taiwan's most famous bird – the blue magpie – or other Taiwan icons.

The waiting areas at the gates have also been designed along themes that represent significant elements of Taiwan's culture and environment, transforming them into attractive and fascinating locations unlike any other airport in the region.

Ever Rich's E-Library provides a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of international travel with a quiet area for reading both ebooks and paper books.

One of the waiting areas is now done up to depict the Golden Horse Awards event, Taiwan's version of the Academy Awards celebrating Taiwan's film industry. At this gate, travelers entering a small alcove are greeted by photographic flashes of the "paparazzi" before being treated to a wealth of information about the Golden Horse Awards and the local film industry.

At another waiting area, travelers can experience the history of Taiwan's Postal Service from its earliest days as a government agency committed to tying the island together through communication, to its current incarnation as a private company engaged in delivering not only letters but increasingly facilitating e-commerce. Ever Rich representatives say that young people enjoy the retro feel of the gate. Other areas celebrate Taiwan's different ethnicities, such as the Hakka Creative Park and the Taiwan Indigenous Culture Park, while the e-Sports Experience Area is a must see for anyone interested in gaming.

Ever Rich has been at the fore of promoting Taiwan's tourism for many years. The airport terminal renovations are just part of the many activities that Ever Rich is engaged in to develop Taiwan's tourism and travel infrastructure; the company has also redeveloped the Kaohsiung, Songshan, Taichung, and Hualien Airports and the Keelung Harbor passenger terminal. Ever Rich is also taking an active role in promoting tourism to Taiwan's outer islands of Matsu, Penghu, Green Island, and especially Kinmen, where it recently opened the largest duty-free shopping mall in Asia, which is also connected to Kinmen's first ever international standard hotel.

The Renovate-Operate-Transfer (ROT) agreements that allow Ever Rich to engage in such substantial renovations to public infrastructure have been a winning solution for Taiwan, the company, and most importantly, the millions of travelers that pass through these travel points every year.

Under the ROT agreement, Ever Rich has taken on the improvement of public transit spaces at no cost to the government in exchange for the right to manage and profit from these improved spaces. ROT agreements free private enterprise from the constraints and lengthy process times usually associated with government planning, enabling them to quickly and efficiently create bold new business models and public spaces.

The efforts made by Ever Rich in redeveloping these public spaces far exceed the immediate concerns of duty-free shopping and include the creative decoration of airport gates, for example, adding a unique Taiwan flair to the airport.

Top, colorfully decorated gates celebrate Taiwan's culture. Above, travelers can purchase reminders of their visit, including traditional tea and gifts.

THE WAY OF THE GODS

Beneath Taiwan's modern façade is a body of beliefs that stretch back for millennia. For an insight into how people really think, you need to know about folk religion.

BY JULES QUARTLY

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TOURISM BUREAU

Worshippers send their prayers to the gods on the smoke of burning incense.

In Taiwan, temples seem to be everywhere, ancestral shrines take pride of place in many homes, and altars can be found in numerous offices and restaurants. On various devotional days throughout the year, storeowners load tables with offerings to appease ghosts and the streets are filled with the smell of votive incense and "ghost money" burnt for delivery to ancestors. *Feng shui* aimed at directing the flow of energy, or "*chi*," determines where graves are situated and buildings constructed, while politicians strive to ensure the favor of the gods at election time.

Religion sets the clock for living in Taiwan, regulates holidays, and determines the rhythm for both business and family. But while the population is officially 34% Buddhist and 33% Daoist, Chinese "folk religion" has an even greater influence. Its ancient myths, rites, and deities hold sway over the imagination and provide a sense of identity that is both powerful and real.

According to the *2014 International Religious Freedom Report* by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, up to 80% of the population believes in some form of folk religion, including shamanism (the belief that certain practitioners can access the spirit world), animism (the belief that non-human entities can have powerful, spiritual essences) and ancestor worship (the belief that the dead continue to exert influence over the living).

As the report also notes: "Many adherents consider themselves to be both Buddhist and Daoist, and many others incorporate the religious practices of other faiths."

"Most people in Taiwan mix and match religions according to their needs," anthropology professor Marc Moskowitz of the University of South Carolina, who has

written several books on Taiwan and its culture, noted by email. "They might go to a Buddhist temple for a funeral, a Confucian temple to pray for their child's success in the university entrance exam, and a Daoist temple to pray for better health."

This syncretic and fluid attitude toward faith is supported by the constitution, which promises free exercise of religion and equal treatment under the law. Writes Moskowitz: "The government's main concern seems to be that people are not exploited financially or, as in the case of funeral strippers, that public decorum is being upheld. Taiwan is remarkably permissive to folk religion as a whole."

To an outsider, this religious practice might seem at odds with Taiwan's status as a decidedly modern and technologically advanced society. Yet the past and present coexist without contradiction in the minds of most of its citizens. The reason is partly historical. While the Communist Party repressed traditional culture, including folk religion, following its takeover of China in 1949, these practices thrived under the Kuomintang (KMT) government in Taiwan.

It is generally accepted that Chinese religious practice was codified during the Song dynasty (960-1279) when the philosophical tenets of Confucianism and the traditional worship of gods and ancestors through rites were entwined with the cosmology of Daoism and then integrated with Indian Buddhism to form the "three teachings" (三教).

Top: Effigies of Matsu in a temple. Below left: A Matsu effigy is passed through a crowd of worshippers during a ceremony.

The result is a huge constellation of colorful gods such as the Yellow Emperor (the purported founder of Chinese civilization 5,000-odd years ago) and beliefs that over time became part of a unifying Chinese tradition, legitimizing rulers, and providing a religious identity. This ethos manifested itself in rites and celebrations that are still held today, like the Dragon Boat Festival, Ghost Month, Lantern Festival, and even Chinese New Year.

Matsu: Taiwan's Patron Goddess

An important deity to many Taiwanese is Matsu. Said to be a real person, Lin Moniang (林默娘) was born in 960 AD on the Fujian province island of Meizhou. She is typically remembered as a young lady in a red dress who was a great swimmer and had magical powers. Tragically, she died young and a virgin.

When Chinese started emigrating en masse to Taiwan in the 16th century, they were so grateful to the "Goddess of the Sea" for helping them make a successful crossing of the Strait that the first thing they did was to thank her by building a temple. Penghu's Tianhou Temple in Magong is the country's oldest and was built in 1593.

Worshippers continued to give thanks, and Matsu gradually morphed from goddess of the sea to being associated with the Buddhist "Goddess of Mercy," Guanyin. She was prayed to for good crops, successful marriages, and just about everything else. She became a virtual patron saint of Taiwan, with at least 1,000 temples dedicated to her around the country.

One of Taiwan's liveliest festivals is the Matsu Holy Pilgrimage, which recreates the journey of 19th century devotees who traveled every 12 years from Taiwan to the goddess' temple in Meizhou Island, off the coast of Fujian in China. The now eight-day pilgrimage from Zhenlan Temple in Taichung to Fengtian Temple in Chiayi is internationally famous and recognized by UNESCO as a world intangible cultural heritage.

An estimated 200,000 pilgrims follow in the wake of Matsu's statue carried in a palanquin, through the streets and up the

Temple parades are lively affairs and often feature performers in costume and huge firework displays.

mountains, visiting smoky temples along the 300-kilometer route.

It's grueling, explosively loud, and fueled by fervor. Those taking part are often the needy and deprived, in search of salvation.

At the same time, it's the journey of a lifetime, with participants sure to experience the goodwill of total strangers and witness totally unexpected events. For example, the pilgrimage is the scene of occasional self-mutilation performances – blood rites, called *jitong* (乩童), that are a form of shamanism. Viewing it is like being transported back into another era.

The mediums are encouraged, with liberal libations of alcohol and betel nut, to enter a trancelike state that allows spirits to enter the body and answer questions from believers. By skewering their mouths, self-flagellating with whips, or cutting themselves repeatedly with knives and spikes, they satisfy the audience that they have been possessed and are no longer in control of their senses.

It should also be mentioned, however, that shamans are not necessarily male nor do they always mutilate themselves. They are just as likely to be women sending out email responses to clients, after being possessed in the comfort of their own home by the spirit of Ji Gong – an alcoholic 12th century Buddhist monk.

Tradition and modernity

Henry Huang, a newspaper editor and ethnology master's graduate from National Chengchi University, is well known for his colorful blogs about Taiwan's religious festivals. One of his favorite events is the Liu Fang Ma Guolu (六房媽過爐), which celebrates the legend of Lin Meiyun (林美雲).

A "barefoot doctor" or healer, she was murdered at a young age and then canonized as "Heavenly Holy Mother." Her six "brothers" (actually five brothers and one cousin) migrated to Taiwan and formed their own clans across Yunlin County, but never forgot their sister. In addition to giving thanks to her hallowed image for good harvests and other blessings, they organized an annual festival at which they would take turns to parade her image across the county and offer sacrifices.

Several hundred thousand people now take part in the 360-year-old festival, which is unique to Yunlin and is intended to drive away malevolent spirits and bring good luck. Huang says the secret of the rite's longevity is that it has maintained tradition while constantly updating itself for new generations.

"People are devoted to the goddess and come up with great new ideas to prove their dedication," Huang says. "They put tech devices on the holy palanquin, like geographic information systems or GPS. This helps people follow the route of the march. You will also see hot dancers gyrating on cars to electronic music. Young people love to post news about the event on Facebook or Instagram."

The festival focuses attention on Yunlin's cultural traditions, Huang says. In this way people can participate and "pass on this heritage from generation to generation. For me, Liu Fang Ma is a key to opening

my mind, pointing the way forward so that I can follow and do something."

Huang says he has no doubt Matsu and the Heavenly Holy Mother are living gods. "Even though I can't see her, I believe she is everywhere," he asserts.

Marc Moskowitz says that Taiwan's folk religion combines faith and ritual with material pragmatism. "People do tend to go to temples and ask for very specific things, which can be seen as pragmatic," he noted in an email. "But it is thought that for this to work they need to be sincerely devotional to the gods and offer something in return. This ranges from giving up meat for a certain period of time, to building a temple in thanks if they have the funds to do so."

Lim Tai Wei, a senior lecturer at Singapore Institute of Management and a research fellow at National University of Singapore's East Asian Institute, makes the point that folk religion is not just for the devoutly religious. "Taiwanese sometimes observe folkish practice when they feel a sense of personal crisis, or are affected by a life event," he says. "The non-religious may sometimes use folkish religion as a form of emotive relief."

It would appear that far from dying out, folk religion is actually getting stronger. While lay practitioners like funeral directors incorporate folk religion in their rites, relatively new religions and religious organizations such as Yi Guan Dao, Tzu Chi and Falun Gong actively spread the old traditions. "Folkish elements may actually be increasing or proliferating through such religious organizations," Lim wrote in an email from Singapore.

Folk religion and politics

A possibly surprising example of the influence of folk religion on Taiwanese culture is politics. Before the recent election of the Democratic Progressive Party's Tsai Ing-wen as president, for example, Fo Guang Shan Buddhist master Hsing Yun compared the candidate to the goddess Matsu. This backing was all the more striking, since Hsing Yun is generally regarded as a loyal KMT supporter.

"Religious appeal still seems to have some form of influence, as seen in the examples of political candidates visiting shrines and temples or making subtle references to religions in an attempt to boost their votes," Lim comments.

"Given that Buddhism, Daoism, as well as hybrid religious groups that incorporate folkish elements…have vast resources in terms of manpower, as well as monetary resources through donations (such as Tzu Chi), they inevitably attract political elites to socialize and canvas for votes on their behalf," Lim noted. "Through open support and resource allocation, the leadership of such religious organizations has an indirect say in Taiwan's politics."

The appeal of folk religion is a powerful and unifying one. It has been the case in China for millennia and in Taiwan for many hundreds of years. Folk religion is now being revived to some extent in China, where traditional beliefs and morality are seen by party leaders as a natural corrective to corruption and a boon for social stability.

Top: Devotees study scripture at Taipei's acclaimed Xin-tien Temple. Left: Boat effigies are burned to ward off evil spirits and disease.

DADAOCHENG: NEW LIFE IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT

One of Taipei's oldest neighborhoods is getting revitalized with the opening of art galleries, cafés, and specialty shops in picturesque surroundings.

STORY BY SCOTT WEAVER PHOTOS BY CHRIS STOWERS

Bustling Dihua Street and its environs on the west side of Taipei make for a fascinating walking tour.

If you could place yourself in Taiwan as the 19th century was drawing to a close and were wandering near the corner of what is now Dihua Street and Minquan West Road, you'd be surrounded by the chatter of tea and rice merchants, along with the sweet smells of camphor wood and tea waiting to be loaded upon barges for sale around the world.

Dihua Street is the center of the historic Taipei City area known as *Dadaocheng* (大稻埕), which stretches east to Yanping North Road, north to Minquan West Road, south to Nanjing West Road and west to Dadaocheng Wharf and Yanping Riverside Park.

Today, Dadaocheng is undergoing a revival as art galleries, coffee shops, and specialty retailers join a multitude of traditional shops to create a colorful and vibrant neighborhood that is increasingly focused on preserving the past while developing new opportunities for the future.

The closest MRT station for Dadaocheng is Daqiaotou. For a walking tour of the area, take the escalator for Exit 1 and follow the signs to "Yanping N Rd Sec 3/ Tourist Night Market," which is an underpass. As the underpass nears its end, follow the signs to "Yongle Elementary School." Coming out of the exit, proceed 170 meters west along Minquan West Road to Dihua Street, Section 1.

Some of Dadaocheng's best-preserved buildings are nearby. As you arrive at Dihua Street from Minquan Road, you'll see what seems like a series of charming brick houses. In fact, it is a single extended structure with brick arches framing the sidewalk along its length and a courtyard

Left, an example of the tian jin *or open courtyard common to the area's courtyard. Above, the Kuo Mu Sheng Foundation's Kuo Su-ren.*

in the back. At one time this building was owned by a prominent rice trader.

The first unit in this building, near the corner, is at 368 Dihua Street, Sec. 1 (迪化街一段368號) and was reopened on January 9, 2016 after painstaking renovations. Further renovations are still ongoing, but occasionally the wooden doors are opened to host events such as art exhibitions, generally by local artists. As we continue walking along the front of the building, we soon come across the courtyard that houses several businesses, including the Oriental Cuisine Guangzhou Restaurant and Grand Mom's Teahouse.

In front of the courtyard are steps leading to 348 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, which takes you up to a coffee shop and the Art Blooming Gallery. Curator Christine Yiting Wang explains that the gallery supports the work of local artists by providing a channel for them to display their work.

The coffee shop and gallery were opened in December 2014 by the Kuo Mu Sheng Foundation, established by Kuo Mu-sheng, the founder of textile and construction conglomerate LeaLea Group, who got his start selling fabrics on Dihua Street. He established the foundation at the suggestion of his daughter, Kuo Su-ren, who chairs the organization. She says that Taipei City recently approved the Foundation's preservation and development plan for a historic residence at 302 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, a building once owned by a Taiwanese doctor to China's last Emperor, Puyi. The narrow

Artist and Dadaocheng Native Son

Acclaimed Taiwanese artist Kuo Hsueh-Hu (郭雪湖, 1908-2012) was born in Dadaocheng and over a life that spanned 104 years, became one of Taiwan's most famous painters. Kuo's early years were hard, as he lost his father at the age of two and was raised by his mother. But even as a youth his artistic skills were already apparent, and at the age of 20 his works were selected for inclusion in the first Taiwan Art Exhibition in 1928. Kuo, along with Lin Yu-Shan and Chen Jin, became known as the "Three Youths at the Taiwan Exhibition."

Kuo's mentor was the prominent Japanese painter Koto Gohara. With Gohara's encouragement, Kuo resigned his position as head of National Taiwan Normal University's Art Department to become a full-time painter.

In 2008, the National Museum of History in Taipei City held an exhibition entitled "The Age of Elegance: A Centennial Exhibition of Kuo Hsueh-Hu" on the occasion of the artist's 100th birthday. Kuo has been praised as a leading force in the modernist art movement in Taiwan in the first half of the 20th century.

Above, the roof of the City God Temple. Right, Soren Yeh of the Rice and Shine tea shop. Below, noodles at Lao Ma Ma's.

frontage and long interior of the building, which stretches for about 50 meters from Huanhe Street to Dihua Street, are typical of Dadaocheng's older structures.

The Foundation has called upon Christine Wang, the gallery curator, to lead the restoration effort for this nearly century-old building. The plan is to transform the residence into a work space for artists in media such as ceramics, providing both artistic resources as well as a sales outlet for their work. Artists from both Taiwan and overseas will be invited to work in the new facility, which is scheduled to open sometime later this year.

Across the street from the Art Blooming Gallery, at 329 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, is "Rice and Shine." This interesting shop is operated by the affable and knowledgeable Soren Yeh, who is a member of the fifth generation of a Dadaocheng rice-processing family. The store is in a traditional home built in 1923.

Yeh points out one of the distinctive elements of the structure: the *tian jin* (天井), an open courtyard separating the front and back sections of the house that is a common feature in Dadaocheng's (and many Chinese/Taiwanese) older buildings. Rooms that would benefit from extra ventilation, such as kitchens and bathrooms, were often built adjacent to this open area so that they could have windows facing the courtyard.

Rice and Shine includes a small tea shop as well as a store selling locally sourced items, mostly rice-related. A second floor room is dedicated to the famous Taiwanese artist Kuo Hsueh-hu, and includes a copy of his famous painting of Dadaocheng called *Festival on South Street* (南街殷賑) [see the accompanying story]. Completed in 1930, the work depicts the street celebrations on Dihua Street in connection with the opening of the Taipei Xia-Hai City God Temple during the annual Ghost Festival.

Down the street from Rice and Shine at 309 Dihua Street, Sec. 1 is Lee's Bakery, established in 1894. Stroll through this small, well-known bakery and sample their delightful selection of moon cakes and other items.

Dihua Street boasts a growing number of innovative coffee and tea shops. One of these is Morgenstern Kaffee at 276 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, which combines a café with a crafts shop on the first floor. Many of their products are reproductions done in cooperation with the National Palace Museum. Opened in January this year, the shop is but one of several new enterprises combining the arts with a quiet place to enjoy a special hot beverage.

If you're beginning to feel hungry, one option is the small noodle shop called Lao A Bao at 226 Dihua Street, Sec. 1. You can enjoy fried noodles and a bowl of soup for under NT$100. The shop is open from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

For a modern place to dine, a bistro named Salt Peanuts and a bar/café called Peacock can be found at 197 Dihua Street, Sec. 1. The two establishments are separated by a pleasant garden, along the lines of the traditional *tian jin* mentioned earlier.

Dadaocheng offers a number of shops selling wooden and bamboo household items. For example, the "Together" shop at 155 Dihua Street, Sec. 1 sells an interesting variety of household items and holds occasional cooking events. "Together" is an active participant in the overall Dadaocheng revitalization effort.

If you want to take a rest at this point, Dadaocheng Park can be reached by tak-

Right, spooky puppets at the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum. Below, the Shengji herbal-medicine pharmacy.

ing a left from Dihua Street at Guisui Street. This area contains many textile and fabric shops.

Alternatively, take a right onto Guisui Street and you'll come to a lane that is the site of the Koo Family Mansion. Built around 1920 by the venerable Koo family, the mansion is located at Guisui Street, Lane 303, #9 (歸綏街303巷9號). In former days, it contained a rice trading floor and family residences, but currently is used by a pre-school.

As Dihua Street crosses Guisui Street, it changes from the cultural revitalization theme of the previous blocks to the bustling traditional food-in-abundance atmosphere that Taiwanese typically associate with Dihua Street. You'll see shops selling all sorts of items. Looking for an inexpensive bag of cashews? You're in the right place. The same goes for candies, dried foods, and various kinds of fresh foods. Many shops, such as Shengji Pharmacy (生記藥行) at 60 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, also prepare and sell Chinese herbal medicines.

After you pass Minsheng West Road, Dihua Street approaches the Taipei Xiahai Chenghuang (City God) Temple (台北霞海城隍廟) at 61 Dihua Street, Sec. 1, and the adjacent Yongle Market. The Xiahai Temple is the main temple for the district. As the losing side in the Ding-Xia Feud fled Bangka [see the sidebar for the historical details], they took the god of their ancestral clan with them to Dadaocheng, where the Xiahai Temple was built to house this deity. In modern times, the temple has gained acclaim, and a steady flow of visitors, as a place to gain guidance on matters of the heart and marriage. You'll generally see many young people visiting the staff and following the procedures for a consultation.

Next door, the sprawling Yongle Market continues to host many seamstresses busily working with their well-used traditional sewing machines – another reminder of the role textiles played in the development of Dadaocheng.

The Yongle Market is also home to the Dadaocheng Theater, housed on the eighth and ninth floors of the Dadaocheng Plaza next to the market building. The

Success Arising from Defeat

Violence and trade went hand in hand in early Taiwan, with immigrants from southern China often bringing their competing loyalties and hostilities to the island. Dadaocheng owes its existence to the outcome of one such conflict, having been established by the losing clan in the so-called "Ding-Xia Feud" (頂下郊拼) of the 1850s.

In 1853, settlers in Bangka (today's Wanhua District in Taipei City) competed for control of the lucrative trade along the Tamsui River. Earlier immigrants from the three Fujian counties of Hui An, Jinjiang, and Nan An controlled trade along the Tamsui through their trade association called the Dingjiao (頂郊). More recent immigrants from the Tongan area in Fujian formed their own business association called the Xiajiao (下郊) and vied with the Dingjiao over trade.

The Dingjiao, as earlier arrivers, controlled the port and imposed a 5% tariff on all commercial shipments, including those of the Xiajiao. Tension between the groups eventually erupted into violent conflict in August 1853 in which 38 people were killed and the Qingshui Temple in Bangka, where the Xiajiao worshipped, was burned down.

The Dingjiao emerged victorious and drove the defeated Xia out of Bangka. The Xia retreated downstream and created a new settlement which became Dadaocheng. But while the Xia had been defeated, within a few short years their fortunes turned. The silting of the Tamsui River and the relatively higher water level at Dadaocheng increased the area's attractiveness as a port over Bangka. Ultimately, Dadaocheng surpassed Bangka as the major trading port on the Tamsui River and helped usher in a period of prosperity that extended through the Japanese colonial era.

theater stages traditional Taiwanese opera performances.

On the lane right behind the Yongle Market sits another good noodle shop, with a large, clean and relaxed interior and a friendly staff. Known as Lao Ma Ma Noodles, it is located at Nanjing W. Road, Lane 223, #9 (南京西路223巷9號).

Continuing the tour, head south on Dihua Street past shops and intriguing examples of architecture until you reach Nanjing West Road and then turn right. (At this point, Dihua Street ends and continues as Tacheng Street, which you can follow to the Beimen MRT Station if you wish.)

Nanjing West Road is the southern border of Dadaocheng. Heading west, you can take a loop by making a right turn onto Xining North Road, which is home to the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum, located at 79-1 Xining N. Rd. (西寧北路79-1號).

From Xining Road, turn left onto Minsheng West Road. Just before Huanhe Road you'll see a lane next to a small park. This is historic GuiDe Street (貴德街), which in the glory days of Dadaocheng was home to the mansions of the rich and powerful. The largest and most impressive building on GuiDe Street is at #73, the currently unoccupied Chen Tian-Lai Residence (陳天來故居). Completed in 1920 as the home of wealthy tea trader Chen Tian-Lai, the building is constructed in neoclassical style, like many of Dadaocheng's buildings designed during the early 20th century.

When you return to Nanjing West Road, turn right and continue westward. As you approach busy Huanhe Road, you'll see a highway flyover and a large wall that conceals the Tamsui River from view. If you look carefully across the street, you'll see a small door in the wall with a small yellow sign next to it that reads, rather unromantically, "Yuquan Evacuation Gate."

Go through this gate and you'll suddenly see trees, bike paths, and a humble Buddhist Temple. You've now entered the lovely and pastoral Yanping Riverside Park. Take a right turn on the path along the Tamsui River heading north, where you will see large trees and hear the chirping of birds.

The next place you'll reach is Dadaocheng Wharf, which features small trucks selling snacks and a bike rental facility. We suggest you leave the park at this point, as the next exit – at Minquan Road and Taipei Bridge – involves a lot of stairs. (Of course, if you are on Minsheng West Road you can enter Dadaocheng Wharf from there.) The Wharf is an excellent place from which to watch a sunset over the Tamsui River.

Exiting from the Dadaocheng Wharf gate, you are now back at Minsheng West Road. You can take Minsheng back to Dihua Street to complete the circle, and from there meander north to Minquan West Road or head south and take Tacheng Road to the Beimen MRT station.

Another option is just to wander around a bit further on your own. The sights, sounds, and smells of Dadaocheng are truly a unique experience. You can readily feel the old splendor of the place, while also sensing the energy of innovative young people opening businesses and actively building a new and interesting future in one of the oldest and most historic parts of Taiwan.

Above, the Chen Tian-Lai Residence on GuiDe Street. Right, relaxing by the Dadaocheng Wharf and cycling through the Yanping Riverside Park.

The Great Getaway

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The Control Yuan
PHOTO: MATTHEW FULCO

IN TAIPEI, THE RISING SUN CASTS A LONG SHADOW

More than 70 years after the Japanese occupation of Taiwan ended, Japan's legacy endures in the Taiwanese capital.

BY MATTHEW FULCO

At first blush, little remains of Japan's colonial legacy in Taipei. The traditional Japanese wooden homes that lined the Taiwanese capital's streets in the mid-20th century were long ago razed to make way for contemporary mid- and high-rise buildings. The Japanese language, once spoken by a large segment of Taiwan's native population, now is largely only heard in conversations among Japanese visitors to the city. Even the city's streets all were renamed to correspond to places in China or Chinese concepts.

And yet, in Taipei the outsize impact of Japan's 50-year colonization of Taiwan (1895-1945) is hidden in plain sight. Consider the august Renai Road, which with its towering palm trees and wide promenades is hailed as Taipei's most attractive thoroughfare. Renai, and many of Taipei's other central avenues, were part of a dramatic effort by the Japanese colonial government beginning around 1900 to reshape Taipei as a modern metropolis by razing the city walls and replacing them with boulevards that facilitated easy entry into the city.

"What may now seem a logical treatment of the old wall was at its time quite radical," wrote Joseph R. Allen, a professor of Chinese studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, in his 2012 book *Taipei, City of Displacements*. "The Taipei city wall… was the first one razed as part of the modernization of urban space in East Asia," he notes. As a result, "traffic no longer ritually penetrated the city at its gates, moving toward a stationary center, but rather circumnavigated the open, modern city."

The Japanese colonial government designed Taipei's boulevards as elegant thoroughfares with three traffic lanes divided by tree-lined islands. Historians say that design was likely inspired by the grand boulevards of Baron Haussmann's Paris (Haussmann was chosen by Napoleon III to carry out a massive renovation of central Paris in the mid-19th century). The boulevards transformed Taipei "from a traditional bureaucratic center, walled and imperial, into a site of colonial modern-

NATIONAL TAIWAN MUSEUM
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

OLD BANK OF TAIWAN BUILDING
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

ism," says Allen.

Indeed, on those grand boulevards the Japanese built elegant European-style buildings incorporating a blend of Renaissance, Baroque, and Neo-Classical elements that were in vogue at the time. Many of the buildings look fashioned after the colonial architecture of French Indochina or British Malaya.

The most famous of the Japanese colonial buildings in Taipei is Taiwan's current Presidential Palace, which formerly served as the headquarters of the Japanese colonial governor. The ornate building's late-Renaissance style was influenced by the English architect Norman Shaw, according to the official website of the Office of the President of the Republic of China. Classical elements on the façade include colonnades, gables, arched windows, oeil-de-boeuf (small oval) windows, brackets, Roman columns, and compound columns. When the façade is viewed from the front, "the two corner towers and the peak of the central tower combine to approximate the shape of a pyramid," the website of the President's Office says. Heavily bombed during World War II, the building was restored in 1948 and has served as the center of operations of the ROC president ever since.

Other prominent Japanese-era colonial buildings in Taipei include the Control Yuan (the former Taipei County Hall under the Japanese colonial government), Taipei Guest House (the residence of the Japa-

Examples of traditional-style Japanese structures include the Umeyashiki Hotel where Sun Yat-sen once stayed, above, and the houses on Qingdong Street, below.

PHOTOS: MATTHEW FULCO

PHOTOS: TOURISM BUREAU

The outside of the Presidential Office Building and a shot of the magnificent interior.

nese governor-general), National Taiwan University Hospital, the National Taiwan Museum, and the Land Bank Exhibition Hall (the former Nippon Kangyo Bank).

"These colonial buildings are unique because they have preserved a snapshot of early 20th-century Japanese architecture in Taipei," says Hank Huang, a research adviser at the Taiwan Institute for Economic Research (TIER) who regularly travels to Japan on work assignments. On the other hand, he notes, "the buildings are not at all representative of architecture in Japan today."

Traditional architecture

While well-preserved examples of Japan's European-inspired colonial architecture abound in Taipei, traditional Japanese buildings are scarce. One of the few stretches of intact structures lies on secluded Qingdong Street, located near the intersection of Zhongxiao East Road and Jinshan South Road. According to Taipei City's Department of Cultural Affairs, 10 houses built for civil servants during the Japanese colonial era remain on the street. These houses were restored by the Taipei City government at a cost of NT$650,000. There were 17 houses originally, but the Bank of Taiwan, the landowner at the time, tore seven down in 2002.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

The old National Taiwan University Hospital building is a prime example of Japanese colonial-era architecture.

"The wooden structures make the preservation of historical Japanese buildings a challenge, and even in Japan, most old buildings were destroyed or dismantled to make way for urban renewal projects," said Teng Wen-tsung, a division chief in the Department of Cultural Affairs, during a 2009 press conference, according to the English-language *Taipei Times*.

One of the historically most interesting traditional Japanese buildings in Taipei is the former Umeyashiki Hotel, located off of Civic Boulevard near Taipei Main Station. Constructed in 1900, the 165 square-meter wooden building hosted ROC founding father Sun Yat-sen on his second visit to Taiwan in August 1913. During that visit, Sun met with local revolutionaries and Japanese supporters to discuss how to topple then-provisional Chinese president Yuan Shi-kai, a former Qing dynasty general who later declared himself emperor in 1915.

Historians are uncertain of the exact

length of Sun's stay at the hotel as no official records exist, but it is generally believed that he was there for about a week. After the ROC government took over Taiwan in the 1940s, the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party turned the hotel into a museum honoring Sun and named it the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial House. In 1983, the museum was disassembled and moved to a site 50 meters north of its initial location in order to facilitate construction of Taipei City's underground railway project. Later, a traditional Chinese garden, including a pond full of Japanese koi (a type of colorful carp), was added to the site.

Hidden treasures

While the Japanese influence can be appreciated visually, some of the best Japanese elements of Taipei are those that can be eaten and imbibed. Indeed, the city has a selection of myriad Japanese restaurants and bars. Some, like Taipei's Japanese architecture, recall a Japan of yesteryear. "I visited one Japanese restaurant in Taipei which serves amazing *unagi* (grilled eel)," says Takehiro Masutomo, a reporter for Beijing-based *Caixin's* international news desk and a research associate at the National University of Singapore's Centre on Asia and Globalisation. "I felt it was more authentic and traditional than many in Japan. The atmosphere is very *Showa*," he says, referring to the period in Japanese history corresponding to Emperor Hirohito's reign: 1926-1989.

As in Japan, the most intriguing Japanese restaurants and bars in Taipei are tucked away in labyrinthine back streets. The contrast with the city's multi-story neon-lit Chinese restaurants and KTVs is striking. "Japanese culture greatly values discretion," says Olga Su, a Taipei-based audio editor and fluent Japanese speaker who lived in Japan for four years. "Japanese people believe that some of the best things can be found in hidden places."

That may explain why the Okinawan *izakaya* (a Japanese-style pub that serves food and is typically open late into the night) Tyurajima is located in a lonely lane off of Zhongshan North Road across the street from a barren lot. Entering the lane from Zhongshan North Road, you have the sense you are headed in the wrong direction. But once you walk through the *izakaya's* doors, you are transported to Japan's southernmost islands. The chef and owner are Okinawan, as are several of the servers, and the restaurant decor has a slight island feel. The clientele are largely Japanese businessmen, which explains why the menu is written mostly in Japanese. Fortunately, there are bright photos to accompany the Japanese script, as well as a limited English menu.

The authentic Okinawan dishes include a number of delicacies hard to find outside of Okinawa, like sea grapes, the small bubble-shaped seaweed that is also known as green caviar. When the bubbles break on your tongue, they release a subtle ocean taste, with just a hint of salt and cool water. Tyurajima also serves *sunui* tempura, an Okinawan version of the fried dish made from *mozuku* seaweed. Food critics liken the tender pieces of seaweed coated in crispy batter to a bird's nest.

Looking ahead, Huang of the TIER wonders whether Japan's cultural influence in Taipei will be eclipsed by the ascendant Korean Wave (the spread of South Korean pop culture). "Of course, the infrastructure the Japanese built is here to stay, but Korean culture is catching on in many ways: television shows, food, pop music, consumer electronics brands like Samsung and LG," he says. "Just think about how popular brands like Sony and Toshiba used to be in Taiwan, and now think about how much stronger the Korean brands are."

Caixin's Masutomo has a different perspective. "I sometimes feel that there are Taiwanese who admire Japaneseness almost indiscriminately," he says, attributing that to the unique historical relationship between the two countries. In the near term, he expects Japan's cultural presence to remain strong in Taiwan. "Colonial influence is sticky," he says.

Unagi *(grilled eel), left, and the entrance to an* izakaya *pub, right.*

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA

YOUR HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Camping is the ideal way to rest and relax in nature and has become an extremely popular leisure activity in Taiwan over the past decade. For good reason.

BY JULES QUARTLY

One night while camping in Pingtung County's Kenting beach area, my family and I were awakened by a whooshing sound – like flames spreading quickly – and people hollering. Though alarmed by visions of tents on fire, we were soon relieved to discover that the commotion was caused by a group of fire-eaters putting on an impromptu show, cheered by about 40 people.

This event occurred during the annual revelries of the Spring Scream festival, but still shows that with camping in Taiwan, you should be ready for anything. It's part of the charm of the outdoors and being close to nature, together with a whole lot of similarly minded campers.

Taiwan is currently experiencing a "golden age" of camping, according to Morio Chen, honorary president of the Formosa Camping and Caravanning Club (FCCC). With a temperate climate, nature in abundance, and ease of access to good sites, Taiwan is a "paradise for camping," Chen says. Some 1,300 campsites ranging from basic to practically luxurious dot the island, and there's nearly always a 7-Eleven nearby to pick up vital supplies. Every weekend, upwards of 300,000 people head for the hills and down to the beaches to set up their tents in order to hike, climb, river trace, surf, cycle, and visit hot springs.

Morio Chen is Taiwan's camping guru. After a lifetime of camping, the 72-year-old still goes out on trips every week, and you can tell from his gait that he could out-hike someone half his age. Before he retired, Chen was a professor at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), where he taught middle-school teachers about outdoor pursuits and scouting. They in turn passed on their knowledge to hundreds of thousands of youngsters over the years.

For Chen, the first golden age of camping occurred after the Kuomintang (KMT) government beat a retreat from China in 1949. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek placed a strong emphasis in the schools on outdoor adventuring, with the idea of raising sturdy kids who would make strong soldiers able to "recover the mainland."

Boys and girls alike took mandatory courses on camping and wilderness survival under the aegis of the General Association of the Scouts of China. In 1974, a record 570,000 scouts took part in camping trips and jamborees. Until the 1990s, when the scouting association's affiliation with the government came to an end, its programs were how most Taiwanese learned to camp.

The average adult, however, rarely went camping – and those like Chen who did, rarely had well-provided campsites to visit. Rather, it was a case of finding some open land where campers wouldn't be bothered by snakes or stray dogs; landowners rarely

charged a fee for putting up a rudimentary tent. In the absence of toilets, campers dug latrine pits, and the adventurers had to wait for their return to civilization to enjoy a shower.

"They were simpler, more innocent days," Chen reminisces. "At 15, I loved camping and used to go with friends. My parents didn't come because in those days no one expected anything bad to happen. Back then there wasn't so much free time or money, and there were no outdoor activities like surfing."

As in to many countries, interest in camping and later caravanning (with horse-drawn carriages to begin with) developed in line with mass prosperity and more leisure time. "In Taiwan during the 1990s, people started traveling around more and taking weekend breaks," observes Chen, adding that the burgeoning environmental movement at the time inspired more people to camp in a cleaner and more environmentally friendly manner. More campgrounds opened as well, with many offering luxurious amenities.

On the other hand, Taiwan's temperamental weather means that even the most luxurious campground is subject to risk. For example, a trip that this writer planned along the East Coast in August 2015 turned out to be a washout, as Typhoon Soudelor barreled through Taiwan, causing eight deaths. Some of the campsites we had booked were wiped off the face of the Earth. Others, such as Shitiping (石琱坪) in Hualien County, are only now slowly being brought back to life.

The campground in Hualien's Fengbin Township was regarded as among the country's finest, with splendiferous views of the staircase-shaped rock formations that plunge into the sea. Built by the East Coast Scenic Area Tourism Bureau, it had three bathrooms with hot water, picnic tables and 29 wooden gazebos to camp on and under. Currently, it is partly open, with just four gazebos. The rest of the two-hectare site still under repair, according to management.

Chen says that today many campsites are fully booked on weekends, sometimes for up to a year in advance. Prices at popular and well-equipped sites can hit NT$1,500 a night in peak periods, roughly the cost of a room at a small hotel. "Naturally, because there are so many campers there will be new campsites – and then there will be too many, so less business and less money for each, but that's the way it goes," observes Chen.

He should know. A firm believer in "doing what you love," he set up a tent and rucksack company, Camping International, which ran from 1973 to 1998. He became president of both of Taiwan's

Opposite: Camping at Jialuo Lake deep in the Central Mountain Range. Above: Sunrise at Snow Mountain.

PHOTOS: STUART DAWSON/TAIWAN ADVENTURES


PHOTO: JULES QUARTLY


PHOTO: STUART DAWSON/TAIWAN ADVENTURES


PHOTO: STUART DAWSON/TAIWAN ADVENTURES

Above left: A member of a fire-eating troupe practices in the morning. Above right: posing by one of the largest trees by the Atayal village of Smangus. Right: The cliff section of the Zhuilu Old Trail.

camping associations (the internationally affiliated FCCC and the Camping Association of the ROC). In his retirement, he designs campground sites, much like famous golfers acting as consultants for new golf courses.

Not always roughing it

Asked how camping Taiwan-style differs from the European or American versions, he says: "Generally, foreigners want more space and don't travel in large groups as much. We like putting our tents together and enjoy eating with one another. We tend to take more stuff with us to keep comfortable – and yes, sometimes it might look a bit more like home."

Chen notes that membership in the country's camping clubs has fallen in recent years, even as the popularity of camping has grown. While camping club members in Europe and the United States get discounts on equipment and camping fees, Taiwan's campsite operators tend to act independently, leading to a wider variety of standards.

David Treston, a teacher at the Taipei European School, has become something of a camping aficionado over the past two-and-a-half years, taking his young family around the country on holiday breaks. "Taiwanese are so friendly and helpful, when you arrive they help you set up your tent and are willing to share everything they have. They tend to buy the latest camping equipment, from table sets to outdoor living room extensions," he observes.

"At a camping ground in Yilan, we saw a group with a massive tent. They had set up lots of chairs and had a huge screen to watch movies," he relates. "That was a bit of an exception, though. Most Taiwanese enjoy the outdoors, the night sky, and camp fires, just like we do in the West."

Treston says camping in Taiwan is easy for novices as the campsites often rent out equipment. Although it's possible to camp all-year round, he says October to April is the best time, as summers can be very hot unless you head up into the mountains. Taiwan has the greatest density of high mountains in the world, with over 200 peaks above 3,000 meters. Treston recommends the many camping spots in the mountains of Yilan and Miaoli counties. "It can be quite scary to get up there, with very narrow roads, but once there it's peaceful and beautiful in the morning looking down at white puffy clouds."

Stuart Dawson, co-founder 11 years ago of the company Taiwan Adventures, has still not managed to convince his Taiwanese wife to go camping with him, but lives in hope. Dawson and the three other outdoor enthusiasts who set up the company are all qualified Wilderness First Responders and trained in first-aid. They specialize in providing small-group custom tours to domestic, Asian, and Western clients. Dawson notes a particular interest among Singaporeans, saying "I guess they

don't have a lot of mountains."

In the early days Taiwan Adventures produced a travel app, but quickly realized that with the need for constant updating, the market wasn't big enough to make it pay. The hiking and camping element of Taiwan Adventures, however, supports two full-time workers, two part-timers, and a satellite crew of drivers and porters.

One of Dawson's favorite trips is up Snow Mountain, beyond the commercial camping sites, parking lots, and barbecue pits. "Everyone wants to do Jade Mountain because of its height, but with a hike up Snow Mountain the terrain changes so much and you can see so many things. You can start in pine forest, come out and see fantastic views of the central mountain range. Then, in the early morning, you head through the `black forest' (so called because the density of foliage blocks out so much light) and up to the peak.

"Of course, there's the view and clouds below, but it's also cool when you descend and realize what you walked through on the way up," he says. Such hikes are not for everyone, notes Dawson. "You have to be pretty fit and sometimes it's difficult to make people understand that."

Due to the growing "Leave No Trace" (LNT) movement to preserve the countryside, Dawson says, standards have gone up in Taiwan. "It's not too bad. People come over and are surprised by how clean the trails are, especially in national parks. The hiking and camping community is pretty good about clearing up after themselves.

"The permit system (for mountains and national parks) has certainly helped keep the environment pristine," he adds. "There are a lot of park volunteers who do their bit and keep reminding the public about clearing up after themselves, and also the porters do a fantastic job."

The porters, typically members of Aboriginal tribes, carry backpacks and supplies up steep trails for tour groups. "After the typhoons in August last year, they removed a lot of the damaged trees that were blocking the paths and generally cleaned up the area and campsites," Dawson says. "They're good people to work with."

Other camping and hiking tours that Dawson recommends are the Zhuilu Old Trail (錐麓古道) in Hualien's Taroko Gorge. Though only half open and difficult to get permits for unless you join a group, the walk along a worryingly narrow cliff face 400 meters above the gorge is something to write home about – after you have made it home safely. Also in Taroko is the Baiyang Waterfall Trail, which starts with an eerie walk through an unlit 100-meter tunnel before leading to the waterfall, the Liwu River, and cascading "water curtain tunnels."

Camping gear

Despite the strong interest in camping in Taiwan and the country's prowess in other types of manufacturing industry, it has never found much success as a producer of camping and hiking gear. Morio Chen says that while companies like his tried to get a foothold in the market as original equipment manufacturers from the 1970s onward, the advantage of cheap labor quickly passed to China.

In addition, Taiwan's manufacturers never really made the leap to designing their own camping and hiking equipment, as the Japanese were able to. "Taiwan's camping supplies designers were never that advanced," Chen says. "Today, you buy the cheap stuff from China and the better stuff from Japan. Either that or it's expensive imported gear from Europe and the U.S."

But whatever the source of the gear, camping is appealing to more and more Taiwanese as an opportunity to switch off from our connected, materialistic lives and get back to nature.

Above: Group shot on top of Snow Mountain. Left: Looking down the cirque of Snow Mountain.

PHOTOS: STUART DAWSON/TAIWAN ADVENTURES

PHOTO: TOURISM BUREAU

THE CHALLENGE OF PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY

Taiwan is home to a broad variety of species, some of them unique to the island. But development puts many at risk.

BY TIMOTHY FERRY

Swinhoe's pheasant is one of Taiwan's seventeen recognized endemic bird species.

PHOTO: FRANCESCO VERONESI

Since the go-go era of the 1980s and 1990s when environmental protection was ignored in favor of economic development, Taiwan has improved its performance in protecting its environment and biodiversity. Waste disposal and pollution controls have become much stricter, and more than a million hectares of land and coastal areas are protected either in Taiwan's nine national parks or its various ecological preserves. The more than 30% of Taiwan's entire land area under such protection compares to just 14% of similarly protected area in the United States.

Under the Wildlife Conservation Act nearly all hunting is prohibited save by aboriginals under special circumstances, and the ecologies and populations of many species have revived over the past two decades.

Biological diversity – or biodiversity – is the "variety within and between all species of plants, animals and micro-organisms and the ecosystems within which they live and interact," as defined by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). While biodiversity is generally taken to mean the number of different species, the term also refers to genetic variety within a species, as

well as ecological diversity, which looks at the network of different species present in local ecosystems and the dynamic interactions among them.

Taiwan and its surrounding waters are blessed with a large amount of biodiversity. The island's location in the subtropical Western Pacific is one reason, as tropical areas have much higher biodiversity than temperate regions. Additionally, Taiwan's extremes in altitude – the island goes from shallow coastal waters to steep mountains reaching nearly 4,000 meters – creates a wide range of habitats that can support myriad life forms.

"In the United States very often if you drive two hours you will probably see either a desert or cornfield," observes Eric Hsien-shao Tsao, head of Taipei Zoo's Conservation and Research Center. "But here in Taiwan you will probably find yourself traveling from a mountain top to the ocean. This is what we call biodiversity – habitat diversity. We should take advantage of that and not ruin it."

Preservation of biodiversity is considered crucial to environmental sustainability, as each species and organism is interconnected and the loss of any single species can have unforeseen consequences. Scientists have so far identified between 1.4 and 1.8 million different species around the world, according to the WWF, and estimates of total numbers – including those not yet discovered – range from around two million to as many as 100 million species sharing the planet.

Many of these species go extinct naturally every year, but due to human-induced habitat destruction, climate change, pollution, and overhunting and fishing, current extinction rates are 1,000 to 10,000 times higher than natural rates. The loss of biodiversity could have significant impact on agriculture, fishing, medicine, and economies.

The Taiwan blue magpie, top, the Formosan black bear, right, and the Asiatic giant hornet, bottom left, are all residents of Taiwan's great outdoors.

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA

According to the Biodiversity Research Center at Taipei's Academia Sinica, some 4,183 species of vertebrates (animals with backbones) inhabit Taiwan and its surrounding waters, including 2,945 species of bony fish, 186 species of cartilaginous fish (sharks and rays), 123 mammals, 717 birds, 130 reptiles, and 47 amphibians. Unsurprisingly for anyone who has spent any time in Taiwan's beautiful outdoors, the island is home to a huge insect biodiversity, counting some 27,881 arthropods, which includes insects, spiders, centipedes, and their relations, and crustaceans such as crabs. Academia Sinica also lists a total of 8,681 species of plants, including 724 species of ferns.

Biodiversity is not limited to species that are visible, of course, and Taiwan's humid, subtropical climate supports huge numbers of microorganisms, including hundreds of viruses, thousands of bacteria, and even six species of archaea, an ancient group of microorganisms.

Taiwan's proximity to mainland Asia also contributes to greater biodiversity. Taiwan was connected to Asia by a land bridge as recently as 15,000 years ago when the oceans receded during the last ice age, allowing many species to migrate to the island. Subsequent adaptation and evolution over the millennia caused many divergences with mainland species, with the result that many species are considered endemic, or unique to Taiwan.

By contrast, the isolation of oceanic islands such as Hawaii results in lower overall levels of biodiversity but proportionately greater numbers of endemic species. According to the Council of Agriculture's Taiwan Endemic Species Research Institute, approximately 975 vascular plants are endemic to Taiwan, as well as 17 bird species, 27 reptiles, and 50 butterflies, with many more endemic subspecies.

Endemic species

One of the most famous endemic species in Taiwan is the iconic Formosan black bear, Taiwan's largest carnivore, which inhabits the upper reaches of the mountains along with the endemic goat-like Formosan serow. Endemic Formosan macaques have become common in Taiwan's lower elevations, and several species of bats are likewise endemic. The endemic Taiwan blue magpie is perhaps Taiwan's most famous bird, along with Swinhoe's pheasant and the Taiwan whistling thrush. Yet another example of an endemic species is the acclaimed Formosan landlocked salmon.

According to Shen Sheng-feng of the Biodiversity Research Institute at Academia

Sinica, the number of endemic species in Taiwan is actually increasing, not because evolution is somehow speeding up, but because research into species is becoming more advanced and refined.

The term "species" denotes the most specific classification for a group of organisms, following from domain, phylum, class, order, family, and genus. Yet the definition of what actually constitutes a species has shifted over the years and still remains somewhat uncertain. Generally, "species" describes a group of individual organisms that interbreed in nature and produce viable offspring – essentially a gene pool. This definition is still problematic, however, as many single-celled organisms reproduce asexually, while many sexually reproductive species can interbreed with related species and producing viable hybrids. Differences between species may then come down to behavior or geography, and increasingly to genetics.

"In the past you determined differences based on morphology – color or shape," explains Shen. "Now, though, you need to do molecular phylogeny."

Molecular phylogeny is used to analyze differences in DNA sequences between different organisms to gain information on their evolutionary relationships. From such genetic analysis scientists have increasingly determined that Taiwanese species that might be related to those on the mainland are different enough to be classified as endemic to Taiwan. And whether a species is considered endemic or not can have profound consequences, as the case of the Taiwanese humpback dolphin illustrates.

The Chinese white dolphin (scientific name: *Sousa chinensis*), ranges widely throughout the coastal waters of the Western Pacific Ocean from northern China all the way to Australia. For years, scientists have debated whether the population that lives off the coast of Taiwan is distinct enough to be labeled a separate subspecies or even species. Finally, in 2015 a study of these dolphins' morphology, behavior, and phylogeny published in the journal *Zoological Studies* concluded that "evidence strongly demonstrated that the Taiwanese humpback dolphin population is differentiated at the subspecies level and… is independent from that of dolphins from adjacent waters of mainland China."

The Taiwanese humpback dolphin is a critically endangered subspecies of the Chinese white dolphin.

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA

The Taiwanese humpbacked dolphin, also known as "Matsu's fish," is now identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and other scientific organizations by its new scientific name, *Sousa chinensis taiwanensis*.

The new identification allows the IUCN to consider this much smaller population separately from its more common cousin. The organization now categorizes the Taiwanese humpback dolphin as "Critically Endangered," which will hopefully lead to stronger protection for the animals. Taiwan's government has already limited coastal development in areas that Taiwanese humpback dolphins are known to frequent.

Not all species retreat in the face of development, as can be seen around the world in the increasing prevalence of urban wildlife. Several species of wildlife have reportedly become common even within the city limits of Taipei, including gem-faced civets, ferret-badgers, and muntjac (tiny barking deer). Sambar deer populations are likewise reportedly recovering in Taiwan's high mountains, while wild boar and Formosan macaque populations have revived to the extent that they are considered agricultural pests.

Several wildlife biologists are even proposing reintroducing the clouded leopard to Taiwan's southern mountains, arguing that reintroducing a magnificent apex predator to Taiwan's environment would provide ecological balance to a restored ecosystem, much as the reintroduction of the Rocky Mountain wolf did in Yellowstone National Park in the United States. The idea has been met with guarded support in the wildlife biology and zoology community.

Despite these successes, many species in Taiwan continue to struggle to survive in a world increasingly dominated by human impacts. Eric Tsao of the Taipei Zoo actively engages in local species conservation through the zoo's wildlife rescue center, which has developed several innovative methods that are proving instrumental to preserving wildlife populations. Tsao is particularly proud of the Taipei Zoo's success with Chinese pangolins, an endangered species that is notoriously difficult to keep in captivity.

These armored mammals resembling armadillos live in Taiwan's low-lying hills where they are susceptible to habitat loss due to development as well as poaching (they are considered delicacies by many in the region). Breeding them in captivity is regarded as crucial to the survival of the eight species of pangolin living in Asia and Africa, but zoos were unable to replicate their diets of termites and ants until the Taipei Zoo found a way of using honey bee pupae harvested from domestic hives. It now can not only successfully breed pangolins in captivity, but also keep rescued pangolins alive until they are well enough to return to the wild. The Taipei Zoo sends personnel around the world to train other zoos on its methods.

The study of biodiversity is in many ways the study of survival and reproduction, which offers important insights into the nature of life and even human behavior.

"Animal evolution has been happening for millions of years, and through all of this time animals have been struggling to survive between and within species," observes John Wang, an American researcher at the Biodiversity Research Institute. "Basically you want your kid to survive. Collective and individual behavior – cooperation and conflict – always go hand in hand."

Protecting Endangered Leopard Cats


PHOTO: CHEN MEI-TING


PHOTO: NICOLE FERRY

The Asian leopard cat, above, and researcher and leopard cat champion Chen Mei-ting, below.

From a ridge overlooking western Miaoli County, densely wooded hills roll off into the distant sea, the green canopy broken only occasionally by rice fields or rooftops. This is prime leopard cat territory, according to Chen Mei-ting, Taiwan's foremost leopard cat researcher who has dedicated much of her life to the study of these shy, elusive felines.

Taiwan's only surviving wild cat, leopard cats are roughly the size of housecats with tawny black-spotted pelts and thrive in Taiwan's lower elevations of around 500 meters. Areas that mix wilderness with agriculture are particularly hospitable for them as rice fields provide ideal habitats for leopard cats' favorite prey: field mice and other rodents.

Yet despite the beauty and bounty of the Miaoli countryside, the green canopy hides a more ominous reality. While leopard cats are considered a species of "Least Concern" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as they are fairly pervasive across a wide range of habitats from Pakistan to Siberia and the Indonesian archipelago, the species is on the edge of extinction in Taiwan. Researchers with the Taiwan Endemic Species Research Institute (TESRI) under the Council of Agriculture estimate Taiwan's leopard cat numbers at less than 500 animals divided into three isolated populations in Miaoli, Nantou, and Taichung counties.

The species suffers from pesticide contamination (consumed through their prey), as well as road kills associated with increased traffic in rural areas. The leopard cats also continue to be actively hunted and poisoned, especially in Miaoli where farmers worry about the risk to their free-range chickens, which can fetch as much as NT$2,000 each in the market. When the chickens become part of the leopard cats' diet, pleas for sympathy for an endangered species fall on deaf ears and local poachers are called in to take care of the problem.

"These farmers don't keep so many chickens – maybe 10 to 20 – and they're big money for the local people," explains Chen. "Sometimes they'll lose one chicken every two days, which is a big loss."

Leopard cats are protected under Taiwanese law, but Chen complains that during her 10 years of research she has seen little evidence of enforcement of anti-poaching laws in regard to leopard cats. "At the beginning of my research, I wanted to tell the police about the hunters, but the hunters said the police won't do anything," she recalls. "The police don't want to have arguments or be an enemy to the local people. If the local people don't like the leopard cats, it's very difficult to prosecute."

Wildlife biologists have proposed compensating farmers for losses to their chickens, but Chen says that the government is reluctant to take that step, as it would open the door for compensation for the widespread crop damage caused by other species, namely Taiwan's famous monkey, the Formosan macaque. Instead, Chen has formed a group that will respond to claims of losses due to leopard cats, and after investigating will pay compensation if the claims are justified. Resources are tight, however, and farmers are still more likely to kill the animal rather than seek compensation.

Meanwhile, traditional ties to the land have weakened as farming loses its appeal for younger generations, and property values have risen dramatically in recent years. Many landowners are opting to sell the family farm to developers, spurring increased development in the Miaoli area for the affluent in search of their own country estates. "Habitat destruction is the largest threat to leopard cats," observes Chen, who notes that each animal requires a territory of some five to 10 square kilometers.

Roadbuilding and possibly the negative effects of pesticides on their neurological systems also leave leopard cats vulnerable to traffic accidents. Chen is promoting the cultivation of pesticide-free "leopard cat rice" as a higher-value alternative to conventional rice grown with heavy applications of pesticide, and is also promoting the housing of chickens in leopard-cat-proof coops.

Neither of these concepts has gained much traction, however. Selling leopard cat rice is more complicated than dealing with the traditional rice merchants, even if it can potentially command a higher price, and few small farmers want to invest in costly coops to protect their chickens. But perhaps the biggest hurdle is cultural; the farmers in these hills have been long set in their ways and are not likely to listen to advice from outsiders.

The leopard cat population in Nantou seems to be more secure, says Chen, noting that the local residents there have been long used to the presence of TESRI and are more accepting of environmental protection concepts. Wildlife biologists are also discussing the potential for reintroducing the species into New Taipei City's Feitsui Dam watershed as a way to mitigate against possible extermination in Miaoli.

— By Timothy Ferry

PHOTO: MATHEW FULCO

STRICTLY MONKEY BUSINESS

In this Year of the Monkey, a reminder of the sometimes strained relations between humans and Taiwan's other primates.

BY MATTHEW FULCO

The scene playing out on Kaohsiung's Shoushan could be an illustration from a visitor's guide on how not to engage with the Formosan rock macaque, a primate species endemic to the mountains of Taiwan.

Most of the visitors have brought food with them, and are shaking bags of potato chips, peanuts, and other snacks to lure the monkeys out from the foliage and into the open – a paved parking area overlooking the emerald sea. Sure enough, a troop of monkeys emerges from the undergrowth and gathers on the pavement, with expectant looks in their eyes. The monkeys are unafraid of the people: they have been through this many times before, and besides, they outnumber the humans.

The standoff continues for several minutes, the people excitedly snapping photos with their mobile phones – thankfully not selfies for the sake of everyone's safety – and the macaques gazing expectantly at them. It is a stocky man on a scooter who gives the monkeys the opportunity they have been waiting for. His first mistake is taunting the monkeys by waving chunks of meat from his pork chop lunch box clenched in chopsticks. Engrossed in that action, he fails to notice the excited chatter among the macaques as they prepare to relieve him of his lunch.

The monkeys strike swiftly. One of them nimbly leaps forward, snatching the lunchbox from the hands of the man, and before he can react, hands the food off to another monkey, who scampers to the back of the troop to deliver the prize to their leader. The furious man manages to deliver a wild kick that grazes the thigh of one of the culprits, but that effort is in vain. His lunch isn't coming back.

Unfortunately, such heated exchanges between macaques and humans are fairly common in Taiwan, observes Kuan Li-hao, director of the Conservation Division of the Forestry Bureau under the Executive Yuan's Council of Agriculture (COA). "Generally speaking, people are encroaching on the monkeys' living environment," he says. "At first, the monkeys were afraid of people, but as the animals become accustomed to their presence and find that the people are willing to provide them with food, they lose their shyness and can even become aggressive."

The monkeys may also gradually lose their food-gathering abilities as they become dependent on people to feed them." Experts say the monkeys should ordinarily spend about six hours a day looking for food, which consists of roots, leaves, fruits, nuts, insects, and small vertebrates.

The Shoushan National Park census reckons the park contains 1,100 to 1,400

Formosan rock macaques. The name of the park literally translates as "Longevity Mountain" but the areas has acquired the nickname of "Monkey Mountain" in English due to the presence of so many macaques.

In the case of Shoushan, human and monkey exchanges have increased considerably over the years, and in particular since the area was designated a national nature park in 2009. Prior to that, large swaths of the area were restricted for military use. (Now, only the northern part of Shoushan is used by the military).

According to the official website of the Ministry of the Interior's Construction and Planning Agency, visitors to Shoushan are advised to not feed the macaques. "National Park Rangers patrol the park and will issue warnings to first-time violators. Repeat violators will be fined accordingly," the website says. During two visits by *Taiwan Business TOPICS* to Shoushan, no park rangers were seen.

Safe interaction

There are several dedicated macaque preserves in Taiwan where humans can view the animals safely, notes Kuan. The oldest of these is the Wushan Macaque Conservation Area, which has been a dedicated safe haven for wild macaques for about 28 years. Home to more than 200 macaques, it is located on the borders of Nanhua District in Tainan and Kaohsiung's Neimen District.

The preserve is on private land owned by 87-year-old retiree Lin Pinghsiu. According to a February report in the English-language *Taipei Times*, Lin founded the conservation area because he was concerned hunters would harm the monkeys, who were not categorized as a protected species until the Wildlife Conservation Act was enacted in 1989. Violators of that legislation can face prison time of six months to five years and a fine of up to US$30,000.

The Formosan rock macaque was considered an endangered species at the time the Act was promulgated, but has since recovered. There are an estimated 250,000 macaques in Taiwan today. Some observers say the conservation of the species has been almost too successful. The fast-multiplying macaques have done so much damage to farmers' crops in recent years that the COA has had to propose a plan to clear them from farmland involving the capture and sterilization of "troublesome monkeys."

In Taichung's mountainous Betun District, there is a second macaque preserve called Uncle Kuo's Taiwanese Macaque Park run by 55-year-old Kuo Tzu-chi. Kuo told the *Taipei Times* that he became famil-

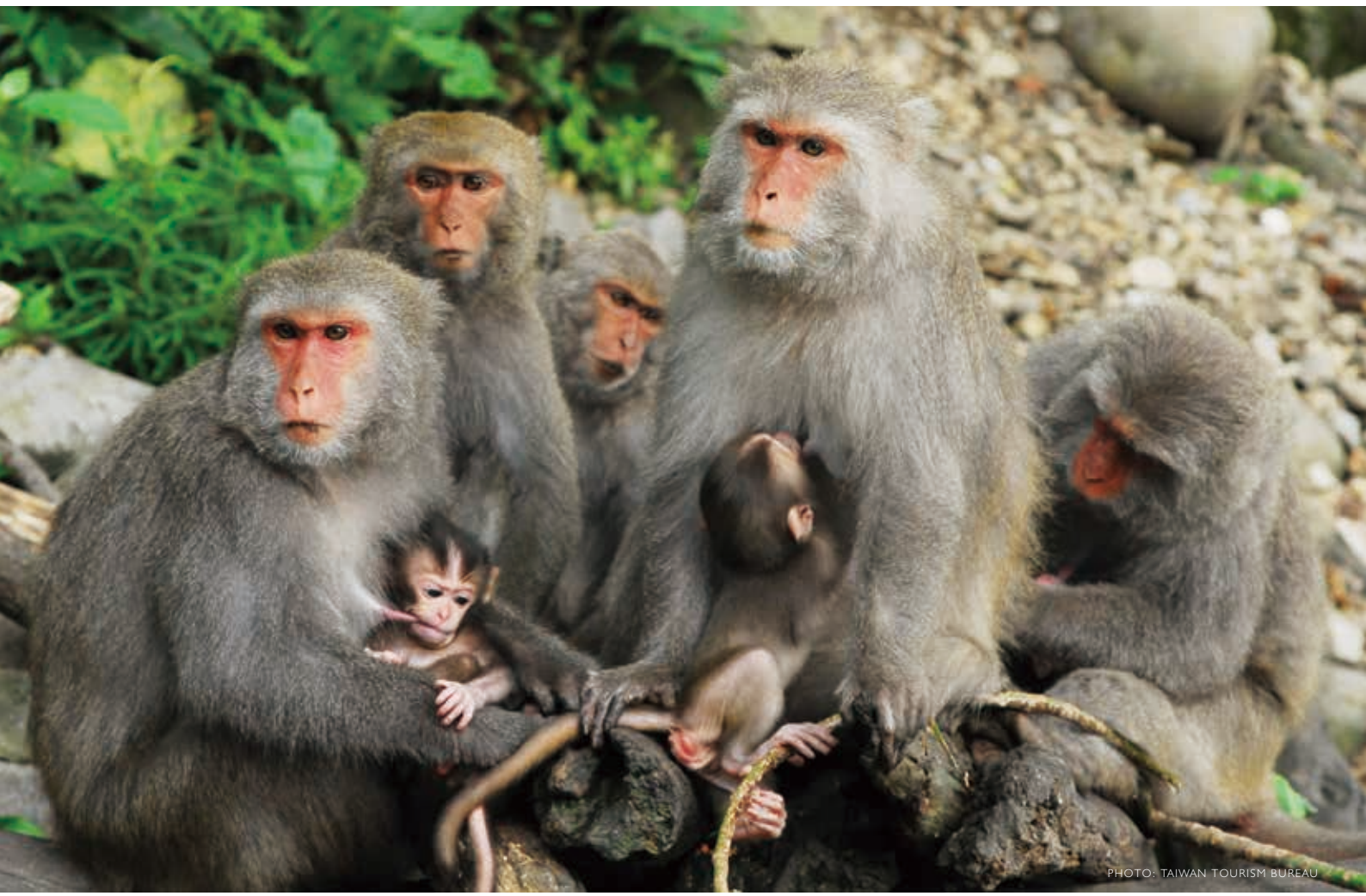

PHOTO: TAIWAN TOURISM BUREAU


PHOTO: TAIWAN TOURISM BUREAU


PHOTO: MATHEW FULCO

The Formosan rock macaque is one of the mammal species endemic to Taiwan.


PHOTO: MATHEW FULCO

iar with monkeys at a young age as he was raised on a farm where the children in the family were given responsibility for chasing the monkeys away from the crops. As an adult, concerned about what he saw as negative exchanges between the monkeys and people, Kuo decided to create a place where the animals could live happily and people could interact with them safely.

For those living in the Taipei area interested in observing the Formosan rock macaque, Kuan recommends the little-known Old Tienmu Trail, which begins at the end of Zhongshan North Road Section 7. "In Taiwan, many people think it is only possible to see monkeys in the mountainous regions of the center or south of the island, but we have them right here in Taipei," he says.


PHOTO: TAIWAN TOURISM BUREAU

In recent years, Kuan says, the Taipei City government has successfully taken measures to ensure peaceful encounters between monkeys and humans. "The key is education," he says, taking out a 30-page glossy color brochure entitled *Managing Interactions with the Formosan Rock Monkey.* The pamphlet provides extensive background information about the macaque's behavioral traits and explains in detail with illustrated diagrams what to do and what not to do when encountering them on a hike. The only problem with this information-packed guide is the lack of an English translation.

"Taiwan's macaques are not vicious creatures, but they are wild animals – not domesticated pets – and need to be treated as such," he says. "Keep a safe distance. Do not try to touch them. Do not feed them. It's common sense, but people need to be reminded," he says.

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KEELUNG: NEW SITES IN A HISTORIC HARBOR TOWN

Some suggested outings for those who enjoy museums, hiking, and ocean views.

STORY BY SCOTT WEAVER PHOTOS BY CHRIS STOWERS

The port city of Keelung bustles with the currents of international commerce, but is also home to picturesque shores, scenic hills, museums, a fascinating history, and a colorful night market. And new attractions have been added in recent years, contributing toward a more tourist-oriented and greener environment. In particular, the National Museum of Marine Science & Technology (NMMST) and the associated ecological park in the eastern Badouzi District offer a new and different set of attractions, as does the new Yang Ming Marine Museum closer to downtown.

Getting there

Driving is the easiest way to get to Keelung, but mass transit services are also available. Local trains depart from Taipei Main Station to Keelung via the Hsinchu-Keelung Line every 30 minutes or so, and the trip takes about 47 minutes. Express train service via the Chaozhou-Keelung Line exists but is infrequent.

Buses to Keelung are also widely available. From the Greater Taipei area, departure points include Taipei Main Station, as well as the major suburbs.

The main train station (Keelung Station) is very close to major inter-city bus stops and is a good starting point for a tour of Keelung. One reason is that the Keelung Visitor Information Center at 1 Gangxi Street (港西街1號) sits right outside Keelung Station. The Visitor Center, open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., offers maps and is helpful in answering questions, including directions to the right bus.

We've divided our travel suggestions into four outing options, which can be mixed and matched depending on interests and available time.

Outing #1: Downtown Keelung

From the Visitor Center, walk north, passing in front of the train station. The first building on your right is the new Yang Ming Museum.

Yang Ming Oceanic Culture & Art Museum

Although rather small, the museum has some interesting items related to Keelung and Taiwan's shipping history. It occupies the second and third floors of the building and admission is NT$100.

The building housing the museum is interesting in its own right. Dating back to 1915 during the Japanese colonial administration, it was once the offices of the Japa-

nese shipping firm Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) – Keelung Branch. Heavy bombing by the Allies during World War II resulted in significant damage, including the loss of its notable tower. The museum contains photos of how the building looked during the Japanese colonial era.

The second floor is devoted to special exhibits, which change annually. The current exhibit introduces Taiwan's wetlands. The third floor contains ship models, pictures of Keelung in the old days, historical items related to shipping company Yang Ming Marine, and a diorama of Keelung City. It also has a hands-on simulator of a container ship wheelhouse, which challenges you to pilot a ship safely out into the harbor.

From the museum, walk toward the harbor and the strip of stores that includes Starbucks and Burger King.

Keelung Harbor/Ocean Plaza

After passing the stores, take a left onto Zhong 1st Road, which passes by the end of Keelung Harbor. This area, called Ocean Plaza, is undergoing renovations but should soon again offer a comfortable location from which to view the ships moored in the harbor. The white letters of "KEELUNG" are visible spelled out on the hills to the west. To the right, in the distance, is the gleaming white statue of the Goddess of Mercy Guanyin peacefully gazing over the harbor from the eastern hills.

Downtown Keelung has a somewhat unique system for naming its streets. Streets that run parallel to one another often share the same basic name, such as Ai, Yi, and Xin, and are demarcated by consecutive numbers – 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. – indicating progression away from downtown.

To capture a little of the history of Keelung, wander down to Yi 2nd Road. To get there, continue east on Zhong 1st Road, then turn left on Ai 3rd Road, following it over the canal. Take a right and proceed on Xin 2nd Road until it intersects Yi 2nd Road.

Yi 2nd Road

The building at 290-1 Xin 2nd Road (on the northeast corner of the intersection of Xin 2nd Road and Yi 2nd Road) was a high-end clothing shop called Kishida Gofuku during the Japanese colonial era. An information board nearby enables you to picture the area as it was a century ago. After the end of the Japanese colonial rule, the second floor housed the restaurant/nightclub called "Little Shanghai Club." The club was used as a setting for parts of the famous Taiwanese movie, A City of Sadness (悲情城市). Today, most of the street has been overwhelmed by modernity, but this building and the one next to it remain true to their roots. The building now hosts a bakery on the first floor and the Yun-Chen Italian Restaurant on the second.

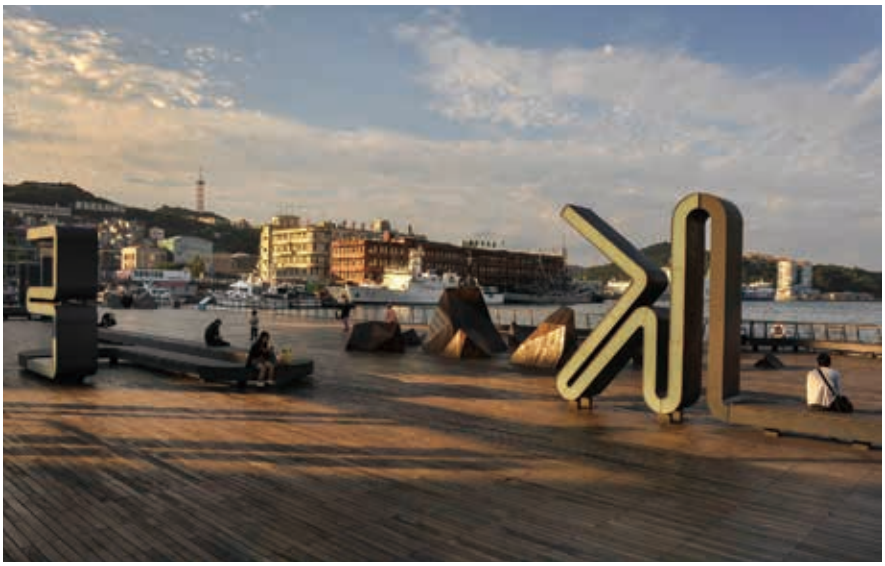
Walking further down Yi 2nd Road brings you to the entrance of Zhongzheng Park (中正公園), with a Chinese gate and a long set of stairs. We'll return here later for the start of Outing #2. Next door to the park is the Fo Guang Shan (佛光山) Buddhist monastery. From this point, we head south to the Miaokou Night Market.

Miaokou Night Market

For local Taiwanese, the Miaokou Night Market is Keelung's most famous attraction. Larger and offering more variety than most night markets in Taiwan, it opens at around 4 p.m. and its broad slate of offerings include sushi, traditional Taiwanese oyster omelets, seafood, soups, and ice desserts.

The market occupies several blocks but is generally centered on the intersection of Ai 3rd and Ren 3rd Roads. The Dian Ji Temple (奠濟宮) at 27-2 Ren 3rd Road (仁三路27-2號) is the spiritual center of the market. "Miaokou" translates as "mouth (or exit/entrance) of the temple." Land for the first temple at the site was donated in 1875, and the current structure was completed in 1923. Heavily damaged by Allied bombing in World War II, it has since undergone several restorations.

A nice place to stop and have coffee in the Miaokou area is Mr. Shinn Coffee, located at 3 Ai 5th Road (愛五路3號).



Outing #2: Zhongzheng Park Hike

The hike up and across Zhongzheng Park is strenuous but easily accessible and interesting, and includes visits to the Guanyin statue and Ershawan Fort. Be warned – the hike involves many steps

Miaoko Night Market (top) is popular with visitors and tourists alike. Statue of Guanyin (top right) and Ershawan Fort (bottom right).

and beverages are not widely available. Taxis are also not always available, so you may want to obtain a taxi contact number before you set off so as to more easily return to downtown Keelung. For those who don't want to hike all of the way up to Guanyin statue, you can go there directly by taxi and then walk around the area for some good views.

Zhongzheng Park and Guanyin Statue

At the Xin 2nd Road entrance to Zhongzheng Park, proceed through the Chinese gate and ascend the steps to the Martyrs Shrine. During the Japanese era, the gate was a torii arch, and the stairs led to a Shinto shrine. From here, continue up the hill. The trail to the Guanyin statue is not marked, but if you stay on trails and keep moving uphill, you should eventually arrive at it.

On the way up the hill, you'll pass tennis courts and religious sites, such as the Ming Shan Temple and the large Chu Pu Tan Temple. The Guanyin statue area provides excellent panoramic views, although some of the lower areas that you pass on the way to the statue can offer a quieter setting. Visitors can walk up the stairs inside the statue, though that is not recommended for the claustrophobic.

If you wish to continue on to Ershawan Fort, exit out of the statue area and take a left onto Shoushan Road.

Yizheng Park and Ershawan Fort

Yizheng Park (役公園政) is relatively close to Zhongzheng Park. After leaving the Guanyin statue and walking about 500 meters along Shoushan Road, you'll begin to see retired military equipment on the roadside – an indication that the main entrance to Yizheng Park is just ahead.

The park offers beautiful lookouts over Keelung Harbor, and one can easily understand what made it a strategic location for a fort. Ershawan Fort (二沙灣砲台), also known as Haimen Tianxian (海門天險), is built on several levels along the side of the hill. The stone steps are numerous and can be slippery, so walk carefully and wear appropriate shoes.

The fort was built in 1840 by the Qing government during the First Opium War with Britain. During the Sino-French War (1884-85), most of the fortifications were destroyed by French troops when they seized Keelung. The fort was rebuilt in 1885 after a truce was signed. Not a great deal remains of the original fort, but you'll see several canon batteries aimed out over Keelung Harbor, an old stone gate, as well as a small cemetery for the Qing soldiers who defended the fort, which was abandoned after Japan took control of Taiwan in 1895. Information boards provided throughout the fort provide a lot of interesting details about the history of the fort and related military history in the region.

Although not well marked, stairs descend down the back of the mountain toward the harbor, passing the occasional temple along the way. Eventually the stairs exit onto Donghai Street. Turn left on Donghai, which becomes Zhongzheng Road after about 200 meters. (If you don't want all those stairs, just retrace your steps to the park entrance.)

The way back along Zhongzheng Road passes a small but interesting relic of the Japanese era, the Prince Kitashirakawa Yoshihisa Monument, which is in a small area to the left of the building at 166 Zhongzheng Road (中正路166 號). The monument was built in 1933 to honor Prince Kitashirakawa Yoshihisa, who led a Japanese expeditionary force to Taiwan during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and died in 1895 of malaria just outside of Tainan. Although the monument is related to the colonial period, it was declared an official historical building in 2003. While time has taken a toll on the

monument, information boards provide pictures from the colonial era.

Zhongzheng Road then leads back to the end of Keelung Harbor and Ocean Plaza.

Outing #3: Badouzi District: A New Museum and Chaojing Park

Badouzi is an eastern district of Keelung. Until recently, it was home to a large coal-fired power plant. After the plant was removed, a new museum complex was built in its shell and the adjacent areas were turned into parkland. Badouzi is relatively uncrowded and provides an pleasant outing with picturesque views.

The easiest ways to get to Badouzi are to drive or take a taxi. Buses are also available from Keelung Station. A third option is to go by train from the Haikeguan (海科館) Station, which is not directly connected to the spur line from the eastern rail line to Keelung Station. To get there, take the eastern rail line to Ruifang (瑞芳) Station, then transfer to the northbound line of the Pingxi Rail line and get off at Haikeguan Station. Haikeguan literally means "Marine Science Museum."

Rongxuan hike

Near the train station and parking areas are signs highlighting various trails and available facilities. The Rongxuan Trail (容軒步道) is short and scenic but steep. It begins close to Haikeguan Station and is about one kilometer in length, with a beautiful ocean view at the top.

National Museum of Marine Science & Technology (NMMST, 海科館)

Proceeding west from Haikeguan Station brings you to the new NMMST (Admission: NT$200. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Monday). This large complex was opened in 2014 and is one of the largest museums in Taiwan. Among the many display areas are a "Marine Science Gallery" and the "Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering Gallery."

The nearby Regional Exploration Center across the plaza from the museum has free admission and provides an interesting array of exhibits on the Badouzi area, including a large satellite picture of the Badouzi area on the floor by the entrance.

Chaojing Park

A recovered landfill, Chaojing Park (潮境公園) is located on the east side of the Badouzi Peninsula. A short bridge connects the museum complex to the park. Chaojing Park has a nice natural feel. You may see people flying kites or walking the various trails. The main trail is a rather vigorous hike that goes uphill and down, but it offers some beautiful views of the ocean and the peninsula.

Outing #4: Heping Island Park

Heping (Hoping) Island Park (和平島公園) is north of downtown Keelung and attached to the mainland by a short bridge. The main walking trail in the park provides very good views of the harsh but interesting shoreline that forms its northern border. The park has a replica of an old fort that serves as a viewing place and venue for shops. One tip: you can avoid many of the tour buses by visiting during lunchtime.

The easiest way to get to the Heping Island Park is by taxi or driving. But another option is to take bus #101 from the train station to the "Hepingdao Park" (和平島公園) stop. You won't see any signs for the park, but walking north on Pingyi Road (平一路) will lead you there.

In sum, Keelung is a large city that offers good walking trails, beautiful views of the north coast, an interesting history, and an excellent night market. Moreover, new museums, parks, and shops have been added in recent years that provide more options to visitors for enjoying the sights, sounds, and flavors of this unique corner of Taiwan's northeast coast.

The Badouzi area (top left) offers splendid views. Heping Park (bottom left) and the marine museum (NMMST) (bottom right) are interesting attractions.

PHOTO: TRISTA DI GENOVA

PINGTUNG BECKONS FOR TOURISM AND FRUIT

Taiwan's southernmost county is famous for its beaches and deserves more attention as the country's "fruit basket."

BY TRISTA DI GENOVA

Residents of northern Taiwan are undoubtedly most familiar with the island's southernmost county of Pingtung as a sunny vacationland whose Hengchun Peninsula is home to the sprawling (333 square-kilometer) Kenting National Park. The adjacent beach resort of Kenting is Taiwan's premier location for water sports and attracts throngs of visitors for its springtime music festivals.

In recent years, Pingtung also gained wider exposure as the setting for the hit Chinese-language movie *Cape No. 7* and the filming location for the beach scenes in Ang Li's blockbuster *Life of Pi*.

Less well-known are other aspects of what Pingtung – a rich California-like mixture of coastal and mountain areas – has to offer as both a tourism destination and as one of Taiwan's most important areas for agricultural production. For an introduction to the culture of Taiwan's indigenous tribes, a visit to the picturesque Rukai mountain village of Sandimen is recommended. The nearby Taiwan Indigenous Peoples Culture Park is quite impressive, with a fairly comprehensive museum and reconstructed traditional Aboriginal slate houses that give a glimpse into Taiwan's tribal past.

Higher in the mountains are a wealth of historic and cultural sites that guidebooks fail to cover, and knowledgeable local sources say there are still many as-yet unexplored and undiscovered historic sites in the area. Would-be explorers are encouraged to pick up the Pingtung Culture Bureau's brochure *Ten Gorgeous Scenic Paths*, an excellent map of 10 stunning walks. Exploring this region – whether on foot, scooter, or car – offers some of the most intensely enjoyable experiences in all of Taiwan.

Wutai is one remote aboriginal village of note, only a half-hour drive from Sandimen. Over the past decade, this village has really blossomed, thanks to residents' artful and creative beautification efforts. "People have more time now" to decorate, explains Peresang, co-owner of the local Sama restaurant where her sister, a Taipei-trained hotel chef, oversees the kitchen. Guesthouses in these mountains – in one case a wood-sculptor's home – are a bargain (about NT$600 a night).


PHOTO: TRISTA DI GENOVA

Fruit basket of Taiwan

Above all, tropical fruit is really Pingtung's claim to fame. Thanks to Taiwan's climatic diversity, a vast array of fruits and vegetables is grown throughout the county, including some not widely available in the West. The massive agricultural production represents a significant contribution to Taiwan's overall prosperity. Due to the warm weather, Pingtung is the only place in Taiwan where farmers can bring in three rice crops a year instead of the usual two.

According to agronomist Yen Chung-Ruey of the National Pingtung University of Science and Technology (NPUST), fruit production accounts for 37% of the total value of the island's agricultural output (rice makes up 22%). Of the major fruit crops, Pingtung produces the lion's share of several, including 50% of the papayas, 70% for pineapples, 80% for wax apples, and about 45% of the mangoes and lychees. According to the Council of Agriculture (COA), Pingtung is the top producer of Taiwan's pineapples, bananas, wax apples, papayas, and lemons, and second-largest grower of mangoes and Indian jujubes.

Many of the farm products enjoy good markets abroad. For Taiwan as a whole but with Pingtung as a key contributor, the value of agricultural exports in 2014 (the most recent data available) came to US$5.27 billion, an increase of 3.7% over the previous year, according to COA statistics. Japan is the largest export market, followed by China, Hong Kong, and the United States.

Once self-sufficient, Taiwan in recent years has experienced substantial crop destruction due to natural disasters, especially typhoons. Together with increased consumer reliance on food imports, that destruction has resulted in an agricultural trade deficit that amounted to US$10.33 billion in 2014. In response to that trend, the central government has set an objective of raising the national food self-sufficiency rate from 32% in 2010 to 40% by 2020, through concrete measures to promote domestic farming.

An example is the government's "Small Landlords, Big Tenant Farmers" initiative, which has revived 45,000 hectares of fallow land by subsidizing organic farming. According to the program's website, its aim is to "counteract the aging of the agricultural population and expand the scale of farm operations" by encouraging small landholders and retired farmers to lease their land to tenant farmers.

In just a few years, the number of participants and area of farmland utilized for fruit production more than tripled. Between 2010 and 2014, planted areas for fruit orchards alone expanded by 900 hectares and the export quantity increased 25%, doubling the value of fruit exports to NT$2.5 billion. Vegetable exports saw similar impressive growth, nearly doubling during the same period to reach NT$2.6 billion.

Fruit growers have had to adjust cultivation and marketing methods to deal with increased competition from foreign imports. Some Taiwan orchards have been designated "agritourism" destinations. At these "leisure farms," tourists learn about the various stages of farming production and have the opportunity to sample the produce.

Given the agricultural richness of the county, its main university, NPUST, has emerged as one of the world's top research


PHOTO: TRISTA DI GENOVA

Top left: A farmers sorts mangoes in the market. Bottom: While ripening on the tree, fruits are often wrapped to protect against low temperatures.

TROPICAL FRUIT PRODUCTION IN PINGTUNG COUNTY (2014)

Fruit	Total area (ha)	Production area (ha)	Rank in Taiwan
Mango	15068	5217	#2
Banana	13999	3324	#1
Pineapple	10154	2851	#1
Wax apple	4714	3523	#1
Papaya	2450	745	#1
Lemon	2160	1603	#1
Indian Jujube	1970	647	#2
Coconut palm	1730	886	#1

SOURCE: COUNCIL OF AGRICULTURE

centers for the study of tropical agriculture. Yen Chung-Ruey notes that the school is part of a 75-member strong University Network of Tropical Agriculture established some 30 years ago. Through that network, large numbers of students from Southeast Asian countries have come to NPUST for advanced training. After they return home, they "become big farmers or food company owners, and then they send their own children to study here," says Yen. "Now we have the second generation of students, plus thousands of alumni, throughout Southeast Asia."

Yen is known in academic circles as the "Father of Pitaya" in Taiwan. Pitaya, more commonly known as dragonfruit, originated in Vietnam, but are now very popular in Taiwan, with Pingtung as the major area of cultivation. Yen is credited with improving dragonfruit cultivation techniques by introducing nighttime lighting systems to "lengthen the day" and accelerate the rate of flowering.

Yen also developed a cultivation technique at NPUST called "forcing culture." Aiming to produce longan off-season, he discovered that applying potassium chlorate to longan induced it to flower. The transfer of this technology brought the university several billion NT dollars, Yen said, since the small, lychee-like fruit is such an important crop in China.

NPUST researchers continue to work on ways to grow fruits year-round, such as bananas (which are highly popular in Japan) and Irwin mangoes, which can fetch attractive prices in export markets.

Future fruits

Another of Yen's many accomplishments is having created the world's first artificial hybrid lychee, Tainong No. 1, in 2008. And NPUST graduate student Chiu Zhan-tai won acclaim for developing another major Pingtung cash crop, "Papaya No. 7," which can reproduce asexually. The strain is potentially highly lucrative, but the university refrained from applying for a patent in order to stress its commitment to the educational value of research, Yen explains.

Another NPUST scholar, Tsai Shang-Han, a professor in the Department of Plant Industry, is researching the wax

apple. "At NPUST, we 'major' in new crops," Tsai says, describing the task as developing potential new "economic fruits" and devising ways to turn them into viable cash crops. The NPUST research helps Taiwan's farmers compete with other countries more effectively, he notes.

Although it has been written that wax apples – also called bell fruit, rose apples, and jambu – were "invented" in Pingtung, the species originated in Malaysia. Some 20 years ago, Taiwan researchers began breeding harder, larger-sized, and redder-skinned versions of the fruit with the objective of enabling year-round production. Pingtung's southern coast was found to be an especially favorable location for growing the fruit, which thrives on a little salinity. The latest strain of the bell fruit, the rouge-colored "black pearl" variety, today fetches high prices in the marketplace.

Currently NPUST is exploring production of the abiu, a yellow fruit with Amazonian origins that has been described as having a flavor like caramel cream. Sweet and juicy, it is considered to have high potential for production in Pingtung, as it adapts easily to the local climate. Researchers are working on adapting the growing season to allow the abius to reach the market in time for the Mid-Autumn Festival, one of the most important holidays in Taiwan. "Then you will be able see the moon and also eat the moon," Tsai says, referring to the color and shape of the fruit.

Guava may be the next big thing in Taiwan fruit production, adds Tsai, noting its high Vitamin C content – "higher than kiwi fruit," which is touted by marketers for its healthful aspects.

NPUST Professor Tsai Shang-Han shows off improved wax apples, left, while a student introduces the abiu, right.

PHOTOS: TRISTA DI GENOVA

CHIAYI: VISITING THE CITY OF "COMMENDABLE RIGHTEOUSNESS"

The opening of the National Palace Museum branch in nearby Taibao is bringing more tourists to the area.

STORY BY STEVEN CROOK PHOTOS BY RICH MATHESON

The 62-meter-high Chiayi Tower features an observation deck on the 10th floor.

Until recently, when tourists made their way to Chiayi City it was usually as a stopover on the way to or from the mountains of the scenic Alishan region nearby. But as of this year there is another good reason to visit Chiayi: the long-awaited opening of the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (NPM). Rather than simply provide additional exhibition space for the world-renowned NPM in Taipei, the Southern Branch's stated mission is to be "a world-class museum of Asian art and culture."

According to the original plan, the museum was to have been designed by U.S. architect Antoine Predock and be completed by 2008. But Predock quit the project before construction began. He was eventually replaced by Kris Yao (姚仁喜), a Taiwanese architect best known for Yilan's Lanyang Museum. Another deadline came and went in 2012, but Yao's edifice – which some compare to a giant black slug – was given a soft opening on December 28 last year.

The Southern Branch offers five permanent exhibitions, among them a brief and mostly monolingual look at the history of Chiayi, and a multimedia gallery where three videos introducing Asian art are played (none has English subtitles).

Far more engaging are the sections on tea culture in East Asia, in which you will learn that steeping tea leaves in hot water is a relatively modern method of preparing the drink, and on Buddhist artifacts drawn from the NPM's collection. The highlight of the latter is a *kangyur* (a compilation of Buddha's sayings) in Tibetan script created for the Emperor Kangxi in 1669. Although

the individual pages are quite plain, the boards made to protect and separate parts of the canon are quite fabulous, and call to mind the illuminated manuscripts drawn by Christian monks in medieval Europe.

Of the temporary exhibitions, the most remarkable continues until October 12 this year. "Treasures from Across the Kunlun Mountains: Islamic Jades in the NPM Collection" features dozens of lustrous tea cups, spittoons, Quran stands, and other items fashioned from nephrite or jadeite. Several are inlaid with precious stones or gold thread. Some originated from Mughal India or the Ottoman Empire, and were gifted to Qing Emperor Qianlong (reigned 1735 to 1796), who then had poetry inscribed on many of the bowls and plates.

While the Southern Branch has an excellent selection of three-dimensional *objets d'art*, there are few paintings or documents among current exhibits. For details of forthcoming exhibitions, see http://south.npm.gov.tw.

Access to the museum is limited to those who make online reservations in advance. The standard admission price is NT$250, but until June 30 residents of Yunlin and Chiayi counties and Tainan and Chiayi cities can get in for free, so long as they hold ROC citizenship. Opening hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday to Sunday.

The southern branch is located in Chiayi County's Taibao City. Every half hour, a shuttle bus connects the museum with the Chiayi HSR Station, 4.6 kilometers away (NT$24 one way). The museum's bus stop is 530 meters from the entrance and the parking lots are not much closer, so however they arrive, visitors get a good look at the 70-hectare grounds before stepping inside. In a few years, when the trees have grown a bit, the surroundings should look magnificent.

If you need help getting from the bus stop or car park to the door of the museum, ask at the visitors center to be taken by golf cart (NT$50 per person). At the same spot, you can rent a bicycle (NT$100 for the whole day).

Other attractions

More unusual is the ceramics collection in the basement of the Cultural Affairs Bureau building between the museum and the main road. The Koji Pottery Museum (open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tue.-Sun.; free admission) is a good introduction to the gorgeous art form that is sometimes called Cochin ware, and which is a key element of Taiwanese temple decoration.

The lotus pond at Hinoki Village, which consists of 28 wooden Japanese-era bungalows.

Unfortunately, the municipal museum says little about Chiayi's past. The city's written history begins in the 1640s, when Dutch East India Company officials passed through an aboriginal village hereabouts. The Dutch – who are said to have later created Lantan, the two-square-kilometer scenic body of water in the city's eastern suburbs – spelled the village's name Tilaossen. Fujianese settlers called it Tirosen, and rendered it in characters which Mandarin speakers pronounce Zhuluoshan (諸羅山).

Because Zhuluoshan's inhabitants successfully resisted the anti-Qing rebel army led by Lin Shuang-wen in 1786, Emperor Qianlong rewarded them with a more distinguished place name: 嘉義 (Jiayi/Chiayi in Mandarin, *Kagi* in both Taiwanese and Japanese), meaning "commendable righteousness."

After an earthquake flattened the city in 1906, the colonial authorities reorganized the city, giving it the straight but narrow roads it has today. The following year, work started on the narrow-gauge railroad that eventually reached Alishan.

Large-scale logging around Alishan was halted in the 1960s, but the impact of the timber trade on the city remains very visible. The pond outside the Cultural Affairs Bureau is far older than the building; red cypress trunks from the mountains were kept in it so they would not crack or warp in the heat of the lowlands.

All over Taiwan, individual wooden bungalows from the Japanese era or just after have been restored and repurposed. What makes Hinoki Village (also known as Cypress Forest Life Village) unique is the scale of the project. The village comprises

Clockwise from above: the quaint Beimen Station, the effigy of the City God at Cheng Huang Temple, and the spacious Chiayi Arboretum.

28 buildings, most of which were dormitories for forest-management officials and their families. The most elegant, however, is a 1914 cream-colored former clubhouse with Tudor architectural elements. The village does not have much historic atmosphere, but it is photogenic and a good place to stop for a coffee.

A string of minor attractions are located between Hinoki Village and the Chiayi TRA Railway Station, 1.6 kilometers away. At the time of writing, the Chiayi Lumber Factory was closed for renovation, and the Chiayi Motive Power Wood Sculpture Museum – a former power station – was between exhibitions. The narrow-gauge rolling stock on display at Alishan Garage Park will appeal to rail enthusiasts, and Beimen Station's wood-walled, tile-roofed ticket office/waiting room looks as quaint as ever.

Beimen Station is less than 10 minutes' walk from the former Chiayi Prison (140 Weixin Road; Tel. (05) 276-9574; open Wed.-Sun.; free admission). Between 1922 and 1994, this jail held up to 300 male convicts, plus 30 women in segregated facilities. Inmates were held in three wings arranged so the corridors could be surveilled by a single officer from his desk. The main doors (made of yellow cypress from Alishan), the workshops in which convicts labored, and the bathhouse where they washed have all been preserved.

Visitors can only enter at certain times (9:30 and 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 and 2:30 p.m.) and must stay close to the guide. Call (05) 276-9574 in advance and it may be possible to arrange an English-language tour.

Among the facts often related by the guides are that male staff, including the warden himself, were forbidden from entering the women's section; and that inmates trying to escape over the wall often hurt themselves jumping down on the other side. Some limped around the corner to St. Martin de Porres Hospital (founded in 1966 using money donated by American Catholics), where they were treated before being returned to the prison.

The city's liveliest religious site is Cheng Huang Temple (168 Wufeng North Rd.; open 5:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily), which was founded exactly 300 years ago. As its name suggests, the main deity here is the city god,

Above left, the old Chiayi Prison, and right, the Historical Relic Data Museum. Below, a specimen from the Koji Pottery Museum.

Chenghuangye, and his effigy is in the very center on the first floor. The temple was important enough to escape the ravages of the Kominka Movement in the late 1930s; that campaign by the Japanese authorities to "Nipponify" its colony resulted in the demolition or conversion to secular use of at least 60 shrines in Chiayi. Among the 600-plus icons inside Cheng Huang Temple are representations of Matsu and Guanyin, as well as heaven's matchmaker: the Old Man Under the Moon.

Beizihtou Botanical Garden (managed by the Taiwan Forestry Research Institute, www.tfri.gov.tw) is adored by birdwatchers but gets few other visitors, despite having such arboreal wonders as Garcinia subelliptica and Canaga odorata. The former, sometimes called the Happiness Tree, bears a fruit resembling the satsuma and is related to the mangosteen, but its leaves are more valuable. In the Taiwan of yore they were used to produce a yellowish dye. The latter is called the Perfume Tree. Stand downwind and you will notice a pleasant fragrance.

Like Beizihtou, Chiayi Arboretum was established during the early years of Japan's 1895-1945 occupation of Taiwan. At 8.3 hectares, it is nearly twice the size of Beizihtou. Almost all the trails are shaded, and the canopy is impressively dense thanks to a range of tree species, including teak, mahogany, and hoop pines (*Araucaria cunninghamii Sweet*).

Chiayi Park, adjacent to the arboretum, includes a few notable structures. Near the bland Confucius Temple is the 62-meter-high Chiayi Tower (open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wed.-Fri.; 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sat.). If the weather is clear, buy a ticket for the tenth-floor observatory (NT$50 for adults; NT$25 for children). The Shinto shrine that once stood here was demolished long ago, but the shrine's former office survives in the form of the Chiayi City Historical Relic Data Museum (open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wed.-Sun.; free admission). The displays inside are unlikely to engross you, but the sublime exterior is perhaps the city's single most beautiful spectacle.

Getting to and around Chiayi

Freeways 1 and 3 are equally convenient, and parking near tourist attractions

in the city is not too difficult. Chiayi's high-speed railway station is famously remote, but from the station there are fairly frequent buses to the downtown and to the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (see below).

Those who reach the city by public transportation should plan on using taxis or walking, as local buses are scarce. Alternatively, rent a car or borrow a bicycle from the information counter at the back of the Chiayi TRA Railway Station (free with deposit photo ID).

In the Beizihtou Botanical Garden, look for the fruit of the "Happiness Tree."

The City and the Artist

Which city has two botanical gardens compared to Taipei's one, a reservoir said to have been dug by the Dutch in the 17th century, and Taiwan's only Japanese colonial-era former jail open to the public? If your answer is Chiayi, you almost certainly live there.

The city (population: 271,000) is surrounded by but is administratively separate from Chiayi County. Whereas the county stretches from abandoned saltpans on the coast to the western slopes of Yushan (Jade Mountain – Taiwan's tallest peak), Chiayi City covers a mere 60 square kilometers. It has no shoreline, and no point is more than 99.4 meters above sea level.

Chiayi is also the hometown of the first Taiwanese artist to win fame beyond the island. In 1926, Chen Cheng-po (陳澄波, 1895-1947) became the first Taiwanese painter to have a work included in Japan's most prestigious art exhibition. Chen's works, which embody both Chinese landscape-painting conventions and aspects of Modernism, continue to be very popular. His 1935 Sunset at Danshui fetched US$6.5 million when auctioned in 2007.

But these days Chen is remembered as much for the way he died as for his artistic achievements. He was a member of Chiayi's city council when the February 28 Incident erupted in 1947. With other local leaders, he approached Nationalist Army units, hoping to begin negotiations. But he and three others were immediately arrested, and on March 25 they were marched to the train station and shot dead. The military authorities forbade their families from collecting the corpses immediately, and the remains of Chen and the others were left to decompose on the street for several days. Surprisingly, there is nothing at the station – not even a simple plaque – to memorialize this grisly event.

Tourists need not go out of their way to see Chen's paintings. Reproductions have been set on steel easels at various points around the city, including several in the park across the road from the small Chen Cheng-po Cultural and 2-28 Museum (228-12 Guohua St.; Tel. (05) 222-4525; open 9 a.m. to midday and 1-5 p.m., Mon.-Fri.; free admission).

The front section of the Chen Cheng-po Cultural and 2-28 Museum displays duplicates of more than 30 of Chen's paintings, along with bilingual commentaries. The back room is given over to Chinese-language information about the 2-28 Incident in Chiayi.

Chen Cheng-po also makes an appearance at the Chiayi Municipal Museum (275 Zhongxiao Road; www.cabcy.gov.tw/cymm; Tel. (05) 278-0303; open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tue.-Sun.; free admission), where visitors will also find some interesting fossils and a great deal of geological information.

AmCham's 2016 Golf Championship

AmCham Taipei's 2016 Golf Championship, held May 27 at the Kuo Hua Golf & Country Club in Tamsui, saw a total of 58 golfers on 15 teams gather for a day of friendly competition and fun. With a full shotgun start, all players teed-off promptly at 6:30 a.m., following the Texas Scramble format. Under clear skies and with hot temperatures, players stayed refreshed with non-alcoholic drinks generously sponsored by Swire Coca-Cola, tequila cocktails by Patron Spirits, and craft beer by Steve's Brew.

For the first time at the AmCham Taipei Golf Championship – held annually by the Chamber since 2011 – a side activity called "Pitch the Candidate" was introduced at this year's event. In addition to the regular 18-hole tournament, golfers could take aim at signs bearing the photo of either presumed U.S. Presidential candidate Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton. Each successful hit was awarded with a sleeve of top-quality golf balls.

Thanks to hole-sponsors Allianz, Corning, and Intel, golfers had the chance to win Nearest to the Pin contests at every Par-3 hole, as well as Longest Drive on two Par-5 holes. All participants also took home "goody bags" filled with golf balls courtesy of Sanfu Global's Simon Chang to celebrate his "Hole-in-One" achieved on March 4 this year, as well as other take-aways provided by Asian Tigers, Costco Taiwan, and Synergy Net.

Team handicaps for this year's tournament were determined using the Peoria system, with the six special holes drawn randomly by players during the awards lunch. IGST Rockys (Joe Welsh, Ray Koot, Donato Scioscioli, and Henry Wang) won the overall championship, followed by AmCham 3 (Sam Lo, Susan Huang, Jesse Chen, and Charles Liang) as runner-up, and Air Products San Fu 3 (Paul Yang, Patrick Chen, Ally Kim, and Jeff Chung) in third place. Other golfers also had opportunities to win prizes in the lucky draws that followed, with products sponsored by Audi, Ballantine's, Costco, Delta Airlines, Grand Hyatt Taipei, He Feng Chinese Cuisine, Howard Plaza Taipei, IGST, Patron Spirits, Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel Taipei, Silks Place Taroko, The Place Tainan, and The Sherwood Taipei.

Before ending lunch, AmCham President Andrea Wu extended special thanks to the 2016 AmCham Golf Committee – Simon Chang, Doug Klein, Joe Welsh, and Lee Wood – for their expert advice on all things golf-related.

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CHIMEI MUSEUM'S VIOLINS AND TOOLS OF VIOLENCE

Industrialist Shi Wen-long shares his eclectic and fascinating collection of art and artifacts through his private museum.

STORY BY STEVEN CROOK PHOTOS BY RICH MATHESON

The new home of the Chimei Museum in Tainan, which opened at the beginning of last year.

If an exhibition center wants to be taken seriously – yet displays a stuffed polar bear across the corridor from medieval Indian weaponry, while oil paintings by the likes of Anthony van Dyck share the upper floor with jukeboxes – it had better state its mission clearly.

Chimei Museum (www.chimeimuseum.org), which reopened in a purpose-built landmark building at the start of 2015, does all of these things.

Since the early 1990s, *bentuhua* (本土化, "localization") has been a powerful force in Taiwan's cultural sphere. The National Museum of Taiwan History, 14 kilometers from Chimei Museum in another part of Tainan, is the finest expression of this trend. But despite being founded by a man who served as a senior presidential advisor to Chen Shui-bian, Chimei Museum tacks in an utterly different direction.

Shi Wen-long (許文龍), the tycoon behind the museum, was born in 1928. He founded what is now the Chi Mei Group in 1960. In addition to manufacturing acrylics, resins, and consumer electronics, the group operates three hospitals.

Shi has been passionate about museums since his youth. He was fortunate enough to attend an elementary school near one, and recalls in the preface to the book *Highlights of the Chimei Collection:* "For a child, free admission to a museum full of wonderful treasures was so fascinating that I spent most of my time after school there. This museum not only gave me vivid childhood memories, but also inspired me to later build a museum for the public. The founding essence of the museum has always been 'to promote music comprehensible to

the common ears, and to collect paintings beautiful to the common eyes.'"

The young Shi also fell in love with the sound of the violin. Because his family was unable to afford an instrument, he fashioned his own, taught himself to play, and eventually became a talented musician.

"Chimei Museum aims through its collection to demonstrate art history and the lineage of violin luthiers. Our current acquisition policy focuses on completing the mapping of these historical puzzles," says Patricia Liao, the museum's deputy director.

"Mr. Shi's dream is to start a cultural renaissance in Tainan. He has selected artworks which Taiwan residents would otherwise have to spend an enormous amount of time and money to view in person. This is why his collection is mostly Western works of art. Our job is to help him choose works that enhance the museum's educational functions," Liao explains.

The museum holds approximately 12,000 items. By comparison, Taipei's National Palace Museum (NPM) has close to 700,000.

Despite having a brand-new, specially designed building, Chimei Museum shares one problem with the NPM: Not enough space to put everything it owns on display. "We currently exhibit a third of our total collection. Because we lack exhibition space, we plan to change half of the permanent exhibition items every four to five years," says Liao.

Asked to estimate the total financial value of the museum's collection, Liao responds: "It's very difficult to give a total. As a museum, we prefer to educate the public, and not put a monetary value on art. We hope that, once an item enters our museum, the economic value of the artwork is transformed into educational value."

Many visitors start with the Natural History and Fossils section, a permanent exhibition on the first floor. According to Liao, this gallery is one of the museum's most popular. The range of preserved, mounted animals is certainly impressive. This is where the museum's famous polar bear can be seen, along with Formosan Black Bears, elephants, zebras, deer, and more unusual creatures like the Slow Loris. Many species are represented by an adult male, an adult female, and juveniles.

***Museum-goers contemplate a bronze replica of Auguste Rodin's most famous work,* The Thinker.**

One creature everyone should make a point of seeing while here is the Formosan Clouded Leopard. This unique-to-Taiwan subspecies is thought to have become extinct in the 1980s.

Visitors depending on English labeling will appreciate the fact that for every specimen the common name is given, rather than the scientific name (as is the norm in local botanical gardens). However, very little English appears on the gallery's touchscreens.

Also of interest to nature-lovers exploring the first floor are two narrow galleries filled with stuffed birds. The raptors are striking, but unfortunately nothing in English or Chinese hints that several of the species displayed here – notably the Black-winged Stilt, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, and Black-faced Spoonbill – can be seen in Greater Tainan.

That shortcoming aside, the best adjective to describe the other major feature of the first floor is "remarkable." The Arms and Armor exhibition has items from almost every part of Asia and Europe. One of the most advanced examples of military technology here is a repeating crossbow from China. It could fire up to three bolts at a time, and up to 30 bolts before needing a reload.

Some of the bronze daggers in this section were forged 3,000 years ago during the Zhou Dynasty. The most modern exhibits, seven machetes made by Taiwanese indigenous people between the 1940s and 1970s, seem to be the only examples of local material culture displayed in any part of Chimei Museum. No matter: Taiwan has other museums devoted to the artistic and cultural achievements of the various ethnic groups who live here.

Nowhere else, however, will you see anything remotely like the Milton Shield, or the late 17th-century equine suit of armor from the Mughal Empire. The former is an example of British metalwork from around 1870. Engraved with scenes inspired by John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, it is fit for a monarch. The latter is believed to be one of the two most complete sets in existence; the other is in a private collection, unavailable for public viewing.

The finely sculptured kris (asymmetrical dagger) handles from Indonesia, made of wood, bone, and ivory, look more like chess pieces than weapon components. Equally eye-catching is the leather and lacquered-wood armor once worn by a

A visitor admires the oldest cello in the world that is still playable.

samurai, and a fabulously etched-and-gilded hunting sword crafted for "Mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria.

The third major section on the museum's lower floor is the Rodin Gallery. In addition to a bronze replica of Auguste Rodin's most famous work, *The Thinker*, there is a recreation of the artist's workshop. But more interesting is the 1860 half-size casting of *Theseus Fighting the Centaur Bianor*, an important work by Antoine-Louis Barye, one of the period's most renowned "animalier" (an artist who specializes in the realistic depiction of animals in two or three dimensions).

This is a work of international significance. Some years after Barye's death, a group of his admirers funded the production of a large-scale version of the work. It stood in a square in Paris dedicated to the artist's memory until World War II, when it was seized by the Nazis and melted down.

In 1999, the Paris Municipality contacted Chimei Museum (then located inside one of the company's industrial sites) to arrange a loan of the work so a replica could be made. The replacement, installed in 2011, bears a Chinese inscription signifying the city's gratitude to the museum.

Upstairs is where visitors will find paintings, drawings, sculptures, and musical instruments. It is here that the founder's wish to provide a complete outline of the history of Western fine arts from the 13th century to the present day is being realized.

Big names represented by original works include Jan Brueghel the Younger, Marc Chagall, Gustave Doré, and Pablo Picasso. An oil painting by a less famous artist, Thomas Cooper Gotch's *The Message*, gives its name to one of the two restaurants inside the museum.

This writer's favorite is not a painting, however, but Pietro Calvi's *Bust of Othello, The Moor of Venice*. This work, from 1869, has a bronze face wrapped in a marble cloak, and a bronze hand holding a strikingly realistic marble handkerchief. It is replete with emotion – as it should be, depicting the moment Othello becomes convinced his wife has been unfaithful.

The Musical Instruments section includes a complete luthier's workshop, a vast selection of string instruments and violin bows, and the unique Walk-In Orchestra. As an educational device, the orchestra is second to none. Each section of a modern orchestra is represented by a large screen on which a member of the Taipei-based National Symphony Orchestra demonstrates how his or her instrument is played. Visitors can wander from brass to woodwinds to percussion, in the process learning a great deal if they understand Chinese (the commentary is in Mandarin only).

Each hour on the hour between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., the orchestra performs a piece by Beethoven, Prokofiev, or Smetana. The experience surely inspires some visitors to attend a concert for the first time in their lives.

Oddities in this part of the museum include an 1880 pipe organ shipped to Taiwan on a U.S. Navy vessel at the request of an American missionary, antique gramophones, and a pair of jukeboxes. There are also ancient keyboard instruments, such as a spinet and a *dulce melos*.

The museum's collection of mechanical musical instruments is a fascinating convergence of entertainment and engineering. Some of the devices are highly portable, while others are as large as wardrobes.

One of the most advanced machines here, manufactured in Germany in 1924, used pneumatic technology to create the sounds of a piano and three violins. The latter were played with a single, circular bow that could move at four different speeds.

Tunes for these machines were stored on disks, cylinders, or long rolls of stiff paper. Just as telecoms companies find

they make more money in the long run if cellphones are inexpensive, enterprises like American Automusic Co. (makers of The Encore, a mechanical banjo) offered leasing and other options to customers, hoping they would spend a lot on media.

Several of the machines still work perfectly and give daily performances. To attend one of these, visitors must queue – the audience is limited to 120 people – and pay an additional NT$20.

Some of the most valuable violins, violas, and cellos in the museum's collection are not usually on display. Often, they are not even on the premises, having been loaned to musicians as part of Chi Mei Cultural Foundation's ongoing effort to stimulate cultural development.

The museum holds the oldest cello in the world that is still playable. Crafted in Italy in 1566 and once owned by King Charles IX of France, this instrument is taken out of storage only on special occasions. In its long history, the cello has been stolen, recovered, restored, and resized for better sound. Royal emblems painted on the back are still clearly visible.

Two of the 24 violins known to have been owned by Niccolò Paganini are here, as is a viola believed to have been the first instrument of its type in the British Isles. The latter is said to have been gifted to England's Queen Elizabeth I by King Henry IV of France. Its maker, Girolamo Amati, was a son of the luthier who made the Charles IX cello; one of Girolamo's sons trained several apprentices who went on to enjoy great success, among them Antonio Stradivari.

The Arms and Armor exhibition, where weapons from various parts of the world are on display.

These treasures are kept in a special storage facility to which only VIPs, researchers, and fortunate journalists are given access. The temperature is a constant 23 degrees Celsius; humidity is kept between 55 and 60 percent. Sensors in the ceiling are capable of detecting not only smoke but also dust or perfumes that could damage the instruments.

Even if there is no chance of seeing the oldest instruments in Chimei's collection, visitors should allow half a day to properly explore the museum, which is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday.

All individual and group visitors must book online at least a day in advance. Admission costs NT$200, or NT$150 for students and senior citizens.

The museum is the central feature of Tainan Metropolitan Park, which according to the Ministry of the Interior's Construction and Planning Agency is Taiwan's fourth-largest park.

Architect Tsai Yi-cheng (蔡宜璋) strove to meet Shi Wen-long's "cultural renaissance" concept, which is why the edifice incorporates Renaissance elements such as domes, pilaster, and columns with Corinthian, Ionic, and Doric capitals. The building is energy-efficient and has attained a Silver LEED rating.

The other major attraction in this part of Tainan is Ten Drum Culture Village (www.ten-hsieh.com.tw), home base of the internationally-renowned Ten Drum Art Percussion Group.

The Museum's Musical Instrument section includes a complete luthier's workshop.

Getting there

Those driving from the north can take either freeway, then head west along Expressway 86. The nearest exit to the museum, at kilometer-mark 5, is labeled "Tainan."

The museum is about 700 meters from the Baoan TRA Railway Station, which is served by commuter trains (but not expresses) linking Tainan and Kaohsiung. Travel time from Tainan is just six minutes (one-way fare: NT$15).

From the Tainan HSR Station, the TRA shuttle to central Tainan stops at Baoan; it takes 15 minutes and costs NT$15 one way. From the bullet-train station, one can also take HSR Shuttle Bus H31 (free; get off at Tainan Metropolitan Park stop), or hail a taxi (approximately NT$300).


MAYFULL


MAYFULL

HOTEL SECTOR FACES DAY OF RECKONING

The boom of the last eight years is coming to an end as Chinese tourists decline and hotel oversupply grows more severe.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MATTHEW FULCO

Former President Ma Ying-jeou sought closer relations with China as a way to expand Taiwan's economy. While the results of the various initiatives undertaken by the Ma administration remain open to debate, in the hotel sector Ma's China-first approach has borne fruit. His administration signed an agreement with Beijing in 2008 to permit Chinese tourists to visit Taiwan in tour groups and another in 2011 allowing them to visit Taiwan independently.

The ensuing deluge of Chinese visitors invigorated the sleepy tourism sector and spurred a construction boom that over the past eight years has added hundreds of new hotels to Taiwan and seen the renovation of many more. Occupancy rates have increased considerably, boosting hotel profits, while average room rates have risen as well.

Furthermore, unprecedented competition caused established top-tier properties like the Grand Hyatt Taipei, Regent Taipei, and Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Taipei to invest millions of dollars in refurbishing. The renovations have improved the overall standard of five-star room supply and food and beverage (F&B) outlets in the nation's capital.

In 2015 Taiwan attracted a record 10.44 million visitors, about 40% (4.3 million) of whom were Chinese. The Ma administration hailed those numbers as proof of the success of its tourism policy, noting that foreign arrivals have more than tripled from the 3.71 million yearly average prior to Ma taking office. In April, speaking to a delegation from the Monte Jade Science Association, Ma attributed the surge in Chinese tourists to "cross-Strait peace and liberalization" during his presidency.

At the same time, however, the focus on the China market has left Taiwan vulnerable to Beijing's political machinations. When it became apparent in late 2015 that Tsai Ing-Wen of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) would likely win the January presidential election, rumors began circulating that China would cut tourists to Taiwan by 95% from December 15 to January 15.

Tourist numbers did dip slightly during that period, but nowhere near 95%, and they recovered after the election ended. Political observers speculated that Beijing may have been testing Tsai Ing-wen's resolve. Still, as Tsai took office, ominous signs began to emerge. From March 23 to April 5, applications for Chinese tour groups to visit Taiwan fell 30% and "free independent traveler (FIT)" applications declined 15%, according to Taiwan's Tour-

ism Bureau. Overall, group permit applications fell 23% in April and 18% in May.

In May, then-Vice Transportation Minister Wu Men-feng told the Legislative Yuan that the number of Chinese arrivals this year might decrease by 30% from 2015. Based on that estimate, experts say about 1.2 million fewer Chinese would travel to Taiwan in 2016 than in the previous year. According to Taiwan government data, overall Chinese tourist arrivals in May fell 15% year-on-year, while tour group visitors dropped nearly 32%. Chinese FITs, however, increased 12% in May.

In June, the Chinese-language *United Evening News* reported that Beijing has a multi-part plan to reduce Chinese tourist arrivals to Taiwan this year which could cause the total number of Chinese visitors to fall below the 2 million mark. In the first stage, which ran from March 20 through June 20, Beijing sought to reduce Chinese visitors to Taiwan by 50,000 monthly from the current quota of 150,000. That figure will be further reduced by 25,000 in July and another 25,000 in October, the report said.

In an interview with *Taiwan Business TOPICS*, Tsai Ming-ling, chief secretary of the Tourism Bureau, declined to specify the amount of decrease the government expects in Chinese tourist arrivals this year, saying only that "arrivals will fall." Since many of the Chinese tourists in tour groups tend to be frugal spenders, the overall effect of the drop will be mitigated to some extent, she added.

Joseph Lin, Taiwan managing director of property-services firm CBRE, notes that Chinese tourism has been growing at a decreasing rate since last fall. "Now, the slowing effect is clear," he says. "First quarter arrivals represent applications that had been approved previously. We'll have a better idea of the extent of the slowdown after observing arrivals in the second and third quarter."

Bulls and bears

Some hotels are already feeling the pinch from falling Chinese tourist arrivals. Achim v. Hake, general manager of the five-star Sherwood Taipei, told *TOPICS* that business at his facility this year through April was down 5% compared to the same period a year ago. "China is not our top market, but we still feel the slowdown at the Sherwood, especially the weekend market," he says. "The weak domestic economy also is affecting business at our food and beverage outlets. People are eating out a little bit less. They are keeping a lower profile."

At Le Meridien Taipei, a five-star hotel near Taipei 101 where Chinese guests are the top market segment at 20-21% (but just ahead of domestic guests at 19%), hotel manager Paul Fu says business has only been affected slightly. "We're near all of the shopping destinations, so we attract a lot of Chinese FITs. We're seeing a small impact on Chinese guest numbers because visa processing is taking two weeks longer than before," he says.

Fu notes that hotels dependent on Chinese tour groups – especially those outside of Taipei City – are faring worse. "We are hearing rumors that they're seeing business fall by as much as 30 to 50%," he says. "If Chinese tourist arrivals continue to fall, it's likely we are going to see a number of hotels put up for sale this year."

Yet some newer entrants to the Taiwan hotel market are undeterred by the fall in Chinese tourist numbers and plan to expand aggressively. According to a March report in the English-language *Taipei Times*, Fubon Hospitality Management Co., an affiliate of Fubon Financial Holding Co., has developed its own hotel brand, "Folio Hotel," which will launch its first property in Taipei's DaAn District this year.

Fubon Hospitality Management seeks to "revitalize idle assets" held by its affiliate Fubon Insurance Co., which has won contracts for urban renewal and public leasehold projects, the report noted. Fubon has a number of projects in the pipeline throughout Taipei City. It plans to build a hot-springs hotel in Taipei's Beitou District and a five-star hotel on Nanjing East Road, and to jointly develop a luxury hotel with a global partner in the Xinyi District.

Meanwhile, My Humble House Hospitality Management Co., which owns Le Meridien and the Sheraton Grande Taipei, will launch two luxury hotels in the next two years, the *Taipei Times* reported in April. Last year the company recorded NT$303 million (US$9.4 million) in net income, a year-on-year increase of 6.7%,


SHERWOOD


SHERWOOD

The RSL Resort in Suao bills itself as the only hotel in Taiwan with water from both cold and hot springs in guest rooms.

fueled by strong revenue from its F&B outlets.

My Humble House will jointly develop a resort hotel in Yilan County with Transglobe Life Insurance Co. and partner with Continental Development Corp. on a mixed-use boutique hotel in central Taipei. The resort, to be located in Jiaoxi Township, could be operational in the third quarter of 2017, while the Taipei boutique hotel may launch in 2018, the report noted.

A spokesperson for My Humble House declined a request by *TOPICS* for comment on the expansion plans, citing uncertainty about details concerning the launches of the new properties.

The insistence of some developers to continue building amid the current supply glut can best be understood in the context of Taiwan's "beehive" (*yi wo feng*) business culture, says Mark Stocker, managing director of Taipei-based brand consultancy DDG, which worked with many hotels during the recent industry boom. "*Yi wo feng* is jumping on the bandwagon, rushing to copy a successful business model," he says, noting the number of lookalike "boutique" or "design" hotels that have sprung up throughout Taiwan. "The atmosphere is similar to thousands of bees swarming around a hive."

Stocker says that DDG decided to stop working on hotel projects from the beginning of this year despite strong interest from hoteliers. "The likelihood of saturation hitting the hotel market in the next one to two years (the 'concept to construction' period for a hotel) is high, and that poses a risk for DDG," he notes. "Should the market cool, we might never see the end to a project, and as a result risk not being paid for work completed to that date."

Figuring out Plan B

Given the tougher market conditions than they have faced in more than 15 years, hoteliers are scrambling for a solution. Niche luxury properties are better positioned to weather headwinds. For instance, the Grand Mayfull Taipei in Dazhi, an affiliate of the major Taiwanese foods distributor Mayfull Foods Corp., is exclusively targeting the premium market with rooms starting from nearly NT$11,000 and all high-end dining outlets. Company executives expect the hotel's food and beverage outlets to drive 70% of sales.

The Grand Mayfull, which launched in April, is the only hotel in Taipei to feature dedicated gourmet Cantonese, Taiwanese, Japanese, and Western restaurants under one roof, notes Chairman Chen Chun-tung. "We intend to set the bar higher for Taiwanese hotels – to show that domestic hotels can be on par with international brands," he says.

Meanwhile, the luxurious RSL Cold & Hot Springs Resort in Suao, where rooms start at more than NT$8,000, has seen its business grow steadily in recent years. As the only resort in Taiwan offering both cold and hot springs in guest rooms, it attracts mostly local bathing aficionados (85%). The remaining 15% of guests come from Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, and mainland China.

The Chinese guests constitute less than 1% overall. Still, resident manager Lawrence Lin sounded a note of caution in an interview with *TOPICS*. "It's true Chinese tourists are not a key market for us, but if the Chinese don't come to Taiwan, then the overall pie shrinks, and we'll face more competition with other hotels for other

tourist markets."

In recent years, Taiwan has been successful attracting more tourists from across East Asia – not only mainland Chinese. Last year South Korea was Taiwan's fastest-growing tourist market, expanding at a rate of almost 25% year-on-year to 658,757 arrivals. Thailand arrivals reached 124,409, an increase of about 19% percent over 2014. Hong Kong visitors grew to 1.5 million, up 10% from a year earlier.

In the first quarter of 2016, Hong Kong was Taiwan's fastest-growing tourist market as arrivals totaled 372,773, an annual increase of 30.3%. "Hongkongers are attracted to Taiwan's free society as well as the good value and relative low costs of accommodation and food compared to their home city," says Lin of CBRE.

Both Hong Kong and South Korea benefit from reciprocal visa-waiver agreements with Taiwan. As Chinese tourist numbers fall, market observers say Taiwan should waive visa requirements for Southeast Asian and Indian visitors to boost arrivals. "I'm all for it," Lin says. "There is a definite opportunity there given the large population, rising incomes, and proximity to Taiwan."

In November 2015, the government simplified visa-application procedures for tourists from India, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines in premium tour groups, but the results thus far have been unimpressive. From November to March, just 6,000 tourists participated in the program, comprising just 2% of the total visitors from those nations.

The new Tsai Ing-wen administration has signaled that it recognizes the value of visa-free entry in significantly boosting arrivals from India and Southeast Asia. James Huang, head of the new Southbound Policy Office coordinating commercial ties with ASEAN and India, told the Central News Agency on May 30 that his office will give near-term priority to promoting tourism and visa exemptions.

In the longer term, industry veterans urge Taiwan to make a greater effort to tap the burgeoning business traveler market in Asia. With its relatively low costs, strong infrastructure, strategic location, stunning scenery, and safe environment, the island at first glance would seem to be a natural choice for MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) planners.

Yet business-travel arrivals have grown anemically for the past 15 years. To some extent that trend dovetails with Taiwan's economic slowdown, but it's also considered to be the result of lackluster government promotion. "Business travelers look for opportunities," says v. Hake of the Sherwood. "They want to know the benefits of a destination. So when Taiwan is constantly promoted overseas simply as a place for eating, the broader opportunities are not apparent."

Given the strong competition Taiwan faces from MICE strongholds like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Seoul, the island should revamp its MICE promotion strategy, says the Meridien's Fu. "If you're a MICE planner, are you going to choose Taipei over Singapore, Hong Kong, or Seoul because Taipei has the best choice of cheap snacks at the night market?" he asks. "We have to change the way we present ourselves and tailor the message for a global business audience if we expect to win market share."

Le Meridien Taipei in the Xinyi district attracts a lot of independent Chinese travelers because of its nearness to prime shopping destinations.

Touring Traditional Taiwan By Bus

Like Asia's other "tiger economies," Taiwan's post-war history has been characterized by rapid modernization. Where oxcarts and bicycles once trundled along, cars and motorcycles now zip by. Concrete has replaced wood. Instead of traditional clothing, 21st-century Taiwanese dress much like their counterparts in Tokyo or New York. That said, glimpses of pre-1945 Taiwan are not hard to find. The Wanhua and Dadaocheng sections of Taipei, the town of Lugang, and Anping in Tainan City are portals to the past.

These colorful neighborhoods are easy to reach by public transportation. They are delightful, if not entirely representative – since in days of yore, most Taiwanese lived in the countryside.

The island's transformation from an exporter of sugar and tea to a manufacturing powerhouse happened fast. Farmers became construction workers; their children took factory jobs. Even now, few city families are more than two generations from the rice paddies.

Social scientists have noted that the rural-urban migration in Taiwan after World War II was not as detrimental to the countryside as in many other countries. Remittances sent back by migrants employed in the cities helped make up for the loss of manpower in the fields. What's more, many of those who moved away regularly returned to participate in the picturesque festivals that enliven Taiwanese communities.

Even now, Taiwan's vibrant festival culture boosts social cohesion. Each July and August, for example, thousands of Amis indigenous people working or studying as far away as Taipei return to their home villages in East Taiwan to celebrate Ilisin, the tribe's harvest festival.

Many visitors are keen to get out of Taiwan's big cities and explore the small towns and villages where traditional culture lives and breathes. But short of hiring a car and driver, how to do that if you are unable to communicate in Chinese?

The Taiwan Tour Bus (www.taiwantourbus.com.tw) network provides a solution. These services, provided by licensed tour companies under the supervision of Taiwan's Tourism Bureau, include not only transportation to a range of attractions accompanied by multilingual guides, but often an excellent lunch and sometimes fun activities.

Tours must be booked in advance. The cost always includes full insurance, and longer itineraries can be arranged on request.

The Sanyi Wood Sculpture and Dajia Mazu Tour covers a lot of ground and is priced at NT$1,850 per person (weekends are no more expensive than weekdays). Setting off from Taichung City, the tour goes first to the remnants of Longteng Bridge. These photogenic ruins are the result of a 1935 earthquake. Next up is the Shengxing Railway Station, a charming relic remaining from Japan's 1895-1945 occupation of Taiwan.

Sanyi has long been associated with woodcarving, and the town's Wood Sculpture Museum is an excellent place

to see what local artists are capable of. Near the museum, several galleries sell exquisite carved items. Shipping can be arranged, and credit cards are accepted.

After lunch, the bus heads west to Dajia, location of one of Taiwan's best-known places of worship. Jenn Lann Temple hosts a revered icon of the sea goddess Matsu (also spelled Mazu), and is the starting and end point of a massive annual pilgrimage in her honor. Foreign tourists who visit without a guide will appreciate the temple's intricate decoration, but are unlikely to grasp the significance of its effigies, tablets and other details. Before boarding the bus for the last time, passengers are given time to browse the shops and vendors that crowd the vicinity of the temple.

Pingxi in New Taipei City is a mere 11 kilometers east of Taipei 101, but it feels like a different world. From the 1920s, this area developed rapidly after coal was discovered in the rugged hills that separate Pingxi from Taiwan's capital. When mining ceased in the 1970s, many families moved away, leaving a little town full of quaint houses, and a still-active branch railway running along the middle of the main street.

The one-day Pingxi Tour (NT$1,200 per person on weekends, NT$1,000 on weekdays) is a convenient way to enjoy the district's nostalgic atmosphere. Passengers are given plenty of time to explore the narrow, old streets of Jingtong and Shifen as well as Pingxi, without having to worry about finding seats on the often-crowded trains.

Taiwan's farmers grow a fabulous range of fruit. Juicy mangoes, pineapples, papayas and other delights can be purchased in neighborhood morning markets. Portions of fruit washed and cut for your convenience are available in night markets. If you would like to pick your own fruit, consider signing up for the one-day Tainan Siraya Fruit Picking Tour (from NT$1,599 per adult, depending on how many people join the tour, and what kind of guide is needed).

Greater Tainan covers not only the historic settlement which functioned as Taiwan's capital between 1684 and 1885, but also a vast hinterland of farmlands and hill country. Until the 19th century, the latter was the stomping ground of the Siraya people, an indigenous tribe after whom the Siraya National Scenic Area (www.siraya-nsa.gov.tw) is named. In addition to picking fruit, the tour takes in a temple, a hot springs where excursionists can soak their feet, and a cluster of traditional homes built over several generations by the same clan.

If you wish to know ahead of time the type of fruit you will be picking – each season features a different crop – or if you have other questions, just send an email. As with all Taiwan Tour Bus programs, contact information for the companies operating individual tours can be found on the main website.

Because the southern city of Tainan has such an abundance of relics and culture, it is no surprise that it has more than one Taiwan Tour Bus option. The second offering, the Tainan Old City and Wushantou Tour, is another one-day jaunt. The price is NT$1,600 for adults and children, weekday or weekend, with pickup in Kaohsiung or Tainan.

Anyone taking this tour will gain an understanding of how often Taiwan has been fought over by outsiders. The first stop, the Eternal Fortress, was built in the 1870s on the orders of the Chinese imperial court, which then controlled Taiwan but feared aggressive Western powers would try to seize the island. From the fortress, it is a short drive to Anping, where the Dutch established a trading colony in 1624. The most unique sight hereabouts is Anping Treehouse, a former warehouse overgrown by banyan trees.

The tour then heads out to Wushantou Reservoir and the adjacent memorial to Japanese engineer Hatta Yoichi. He is fondly remembered for his work creating the reservoir, the dam that holds back its waters, and a vast network of irrigation channels. This infrastructure stabilized water supplies, vastly increasing rice production throughout much of south-central Taiwan.

For general travel information about Taiwan, visit the website of Taiwan's Tourism Bureau (www.taiwan.net.tw), or call the 24-hour tourist information hotline 0800-011-765 (toll free within Taiwan).

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