



WINTER 2023

Festive Celebration

COVER STORY

Ximending: A Shopper's Heaven
with a Dash of Tradition and Trendiness

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EDITOR'S
INTRODUCTION

Taipei in Holiday Mood

In winter, Taipei comes alive with festive energy, spanning from Christmas and New Year's Eve all the way to the Lunar New Year holiday. The joyful atmosphere and celebratory rituals persist for over two months, bringing warmth to the chilly season.

Notably, Ximending stands out as one of Taipei's most representative and lively areas. Once selected by *Time Out* as one of the "51 Coolest Neighborhoods in the World," it's a must-visit for every tourist. While exuding a youthful and trendy vibe, Ximending also encapsulates a fusion of tradition and modernity, contrasting historical sites with current fashions. Our cover story delves into this dynamic mix, where 2024 Taipei Lantern Festival is set to unfold.

In terms of coziness, soaking in Beitou's hot springs is a winter ritual for locals and tourists alike. Just half an hour from the city center, Beitou offers hot springs of different styles and prices, surrounded by lush greenery and historical sites, making it an ideal place for a relaxing stroll.

Another form of warmth is the Lunar New Year's Eve dinner, where families gather together from near and far. Taiwan's history and culinary essence come to life on the New Year's Eve dining table, with flavors and interpretations integral to understanding Taiwan's culinary culture.

Exploring local markets provides a glimpse into the daily life of Taipei residents. Whether buying fresh ingredients or enjoying a simple lunch, our recommended indoor markets — Nanmen Market, Shi-Dong Market, Xinfu Market — are excellent places for delicious treats and intriguing merchandise.

Taipei also boasts a diverse array of international cuisines, including delectable halal options from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Middle East, China, and India. This issue features recommendations for several mouthwatering Muslim-friendly restaurants.

During the Lunar New Year, Taiwanese people visit temples to pray for a smooth and prosperous year, too, with "wealth seeking" being a crucial folk belief. The various temples dedicated to many kinds of Wealth Gods offers a chance to deepen your understanding of Taiwan.

As for literary traditions, the richness of Taipei as a capital of bookstores is evident in the concepts and book selections of the four arthouse bookstores we introduce.

Taipei, a city respecting animal rights, is showcased in the story of ACT for Animals, revealing the joint efforts of the government and NGOs in animal protection. Meanwhile, through the eyes of 33-year Taiwanese glove puppetry expert Dr. Robin Ruizendaal, we gain insight and a unique perspective on this traditional art form from a Dutchman's viewpoint.

The winter issue is filled with local wisdom, history, and an inspirational source for your winter holidays. Wishing you a happy New Year in advance!



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(Photo • Wayne Huang)

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Ximending: A Shopper's Heaven with a Dash of Tradition and Trendiness

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1

Ximending (西門町) is best known as a bustling, colorful shopping district near Taipei Main Station. Tourists arriving on the Airport MRT can easily transfer one stop to Ximending from Main Station's central hub to immerse themselves in the area's unique mix of the trendy and the traditional.

The area has been variously nicknamed as the Shibuya, Harajuku, and Times Square of Taipei — a place where diverse styles freely mingle. It features hip stores selling current fashions and athletic wear, shops featuring Japanese and Korean pop culture, department stores, tattoo parlors, a night market, street performers, and Cinema Street, not to mention a wide variety of tea shops, especially tapioca milk tea favored by Taiwanese youth, as well

as hotpot, barbecue, conveyor belt sushi restaurants, and places to buy all sorts of gifts. In November 2022, *Time Out* named Ximending one of the 51 coolest neighborhoods in the world for its wealth of attractions — just one small indicator of its charm.

Ximending received its name during the Japanese era for its location just outside Ximen, literally “West Gate.” It consists of the area bordered by Zhonghua Road (中華路), Kangding Road (康定路), Chengdu Road (成都路), and Hankou Street (漢口街). Early on, Ximending was dominated by movie theaters. Beginning in the 1930s, it was the largest center for shopping and entertainment in Taiwan, a status it maintained until being displaced by the rise of Taipei's East District in the 1980s.

The completion of the Bannan Line and the creation of a pedestrian district in the 1990s brought crowds back to enjoy performances, concerts, autograph sessions, and more. For instance, the annual Cosplay Battle Ximending (Cosplay 決戰西門町) is an iconic event for anime fans that always calls countless enthusiastic cosplayers to join the fun. Now in its tenth year, the event has a reach that extends far beyond the local fans who participate, drawing attention from fans all over Asia.

The Forefront of Trends

There's always something going on in modern, avant-garde Ximending, making it both a popular gathering place for the younger generation and a must-visit destination for tourists.

Fashion moves swiftly in Ximending, which is home to many international brands, including Don Don Donki from Japan, as well as Champion from America. Don Don Donki Ximen, the chain's first location

in Taiwan, was established in 2021 and is open 24 hours a day. Their broad product range makes for a wonderful shopping experience.

But that's not all. Further expressions of the area's popular culture include:

Graffiti

Lane 96 of Kunming Street (昆明街 96 巷), known as American Street, is home to a cluster of stores selling American fashion brands and vintage clothing. It also features eye-catching graffiti based on basketball, anime, and movies, vividly splashed across the walls, such as the movie *Suicide Squad*. As a result, American Street has become a popular spot for photos, and even served as the filming location of many hip-hop singers' music videos, while also being a key showcase of Taipei's street culture. Lane 120 of Section 2, Wuchang Street (武昌街二段 120 巷), as well as Lane 103 of Emei Street (峨嵋街 103 巷), are also well worth visiting for their graffiti.



1. Ximending is a bustling and vibrant shopping district in Taipei, famed internationally for its cool charm. (Photo • Wayne Huang)
| 2. Stroll along American Street to admire the street art and the cutting-edge culture it conveys. (Photo • Wayne Huang)

Tattoos

Lane 50 of Hanzhong Street (漢中街 50 巷), the only covered street in Ximending, is home to parlors offering both ink and piercings. Most recently, they've expanded their offerings to include all sorts of creative wraps for helmets and scooters — a great way to express your individual personality.

Movies

Ximending's Cinema Street had its beginnings in the Taiwan Exposition held by the Japanese back in 1935, for which four magnificent theaters were built. Construction on the Chung Hua Market Bazaar, which is no longer around, was completed in 1961,



3. Wan Nian Building features a variety of trendy products, and its exterior is also a popular backdrop for Instagram influencers. (Photo • Wayne Huang)

connecting Ximending with the rest of the city. As the economy boomed, numerous theaters sprang up along Wuchang Street (武昌街). While those old theaters have since closed down, newcomers like LUX CINEMA, in89 CINEMAX, and SHIN KONG CINEMAS are here to keep the cinematic atmosphere alive.

Fashion Trends

In the 1990s, young people came to the Wan Nian Building (萬年商業大樓) on Xining South Road (西寧南路) in search of magazines imported from Japan and posters of stars from Europe, the U.S., Japan, and Hong Kong, making it the site of fond memories of youth for many Taipei residents. Though its halcyon days are past, it remains a good place to buy sneakers, watches, games, and toys.

The building has also become a major hotspot for sneaker enthusiasts. Not only is it home to many select shops, it's also an excellent place to spot limited edition sneakers; some even say this is where the largest number of different styles of Converse can be sighted.

Meanwhile, skateboarders, cosplayers, anime fans, street dancers, and more can all find a place to belong here in Ximending.

A Harmony of Heritage and Modernity

Ximending has been Taipei's most prosperous shopping district ever since the Japanese era. Beneath its trendy exterior lies a glimpse of Taipei's long history, granting it a unique, multi-layered charm that blends old and new.



4. Besides being a popular attraction in Ximending, the Red House is also a gathering place for the LGBT+ community. (Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)

The Red House

Constructed in 1908, the Red House (西門紅樓) is a Ximending landmark. It is Taiwan's first government-constructed public market and one of the most well-preserved municipal monuments.

In its heyday, performances at the Red House were patronized by the surge of immigrants that followed the Kuomintang's arrival in Taiwan after their loss in the Chinese Civil War. Hence, Peking opera, Chinese crosstalk performances and dramas provided comfort and consolation for their sense of homesickness. From 1963 on, black-and-white wuxia movies, second-run Western movies, and domestic period films were all featured at the Red House Movie Theater.

In 2000, the Cruciform Building and the adjacent North and South Squares were destroyed in a fire.

Their destruction and rebirth marked the beginning of a new chapter in the Red House's history. Today's Red House has become a center for culture and creativity as well as a performance and exhibition space, incorporating a wide array of offerings.

The second floor of the Octagon Building features a theater and central display space, while the Cruciform Building houses the Creative Boutique and the Riverside Live House (河岸留言), a venue for live music. Meanwhile, the North Square has a market for artists, and the South Square is home to a number of open-air cafés and a world-renowned collection of gay bars, making the Red House a notable symbol of Taipei's LGBT+ friendliness.

The surrounding area is also bustling with life and a popular hangout, including a market for arts and crafts, live music, and plenty of outdoor dining and bars. Leave MRT Ximen Station through Exit 6 and look left to see the Red House.



Taipei Tianhou Temple

Ximending's Taipei Tianhou Temple (台北天后宮) was built in 1746. The primary deity worshiped there is Mazu. Standing on Chengdu Road, though its size and bustle are invisible from the street, step inside and it becomes clear that the temple has no shortage of devotees.

The temple had its beginnings with immigrants who crossed the sea to come to Taiwan. Faced with a future full of uncertainty, they carried incense and statues of deities with them for safety. After arriving in Taiwan, they built this temple in gratitude for the goddess' protection, and the number of worshippers steadily increased. This temple has variously been torn down, moved, destroyed by fire, and eventually rebuilt. The priceless wooden statue of Mazu inside the temple has a history spanning two hundred years.

Nishi Honganji

Nishi Honganji (西本願寺) on Zhonghua Road was once known as the Taiwanese Branch of Jodo Shinshu Honganji School. Constructed during Japanese era, it was the largest Japanese Buddhist temple in Taiwan in that period.

From a fire in 1975, the temple burned to the ground. Later, the Taipei City Government restored the *sando* (path approaching the temple), *rinbansyo* (abbot's residence), *shoro* (bell tower), and Shuxin Hall (venue used for Buddhism teachings), giving them a fresh new face that nonetheless retains their historical style.

Walk into Nishi Honganji Square and you'll immediately see the bell tower, which stands on a small hill. Across from it is the abbot's residence, an authentic Japanese building that once housed temple staff on duty. Since being restored to its original appearance, it has hosted cultural and historical exhibitions, and has also become home to Eighty-Eightea (八拾捌茶輪番所), a quaint teahouse that offers guests a taste of the Japanese history in Taiwan.

Culinary Archaeology

In the rich tapestry of Ximending's century-long history, a culinary archaeology unfolds, documenting the convergence of cultures and marking the stages of social development.

Apart from historical buildings, the Japanese also brought siphon-style coffee to Taiwan, giving birth to the iconic Fong Da Coffee (蜂大咖啡). Even today, they continue to serve traditional Mandhelung coffee paired not with Western-style cheesecakes, but with distinctive local treats like mung bean cakes.

Hong Kong, the first of the Four Asian Tigers to experience a post-war economic boom, once influenced Taiwan through the popularity of Hong Kong-style dim sum. Tucked away on the tenth floor of the once-premier Lions' Plaza Commercial Building (獅子林商業大樓), Golden Lion (金獅樓) preserves its ancient and dilapidated decor, capturing the essence of a bygone era where waitresses wheeled carts through the hallways, a sight even rare in present-day Hong Kong.

Founded in 1946, Mei Guan Yuan (美觀園), now in its third generation of management, offers Japanese cuisine with a Taiwanese twist. Far from the delicate art of *kaiseki*, their culinary approach is robust and flavorful, providing a taste of Japanese cuisine that's unique to the world.

Seventy years ago, when railway tracks still skirted the edges of Ximending, refugees from mainland China

set up street stalls alongside the rails. Many of them brought the rich flavors of mainland Chinese dishes, sustaining themselves and enriching the palates of Taipei locals. Lao Shan Dong Handmade Noodles (老山東牛肉麵), in business for over seventy years, remains a popular post-movie dining choice for many Taipei residents. Its generous portions of beef and hearty broth guarantee a fulfilling meal, offering a down-to-earth good value dining experience.

These longstanding establishments, with their timeless flavors, have loyal customers spanning multiple generations — a testament to the enduring warmth and hospitality of these venerable eateries.

Following the footsteps of Instagrammers

Young people have many ways of enjoying Ximending, not least the popular activity of snapping a few photos for Instagram. For instance, a visit to Nishi Honganji can produce snapshots comparable to taking a trip to Japan, while photos taken in the long corridors of Zhongshan Hall (中山堂) have the atmosphere of old movies.



5. Taipei Tianhou Temple is situated on the bustling Chengdu Road, not far from The Red House. (Photo • Wayne Huang)
6. Nishi Honganji Temple is a perfect spot to snap some appealing photos. (Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)
7. Fong Da Coffee sells traditional snacks to pair with coffee, providing a delicious fusion of multicultural flavors. (Photo • Wayne Huang)





Rainbow Six, prominently displayed outside MRT Ximen Station, symbolizes that Ximending is truly a diverse and inclusive place.
(Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)



8. A Korean-style photo sticker shop. Customers have just finished dressing up and are about to take a few snaps. (Photo • Chelsea Chen)

Cinema Street and American Street are also first-rate backdrops for creative photography. But the most classic image of Ximending is none other than Rainbow Six, the massive rainbow painted on the street outside Exit 6 of MRT Ximen Station. In May 2019, Taiwan became Asia's first country to legalize same-sex marriage. Rainbow Six was created in September of the same year. It symbolizes Taipei's support for the LGBT+ community and gender equality, and since then it has become one of Taipei's most seen Instagram check-ins.

For more unexpected spots, the rooftop of Luoyang Car Park (洛陽停車場) has been a viral attraction for years. Through the lens of a camera, the plain parking garage takes on a distinctive industrial style. The geometric lines of the surrounding buildings and the timeworn signs and railings form a perfect

backdrop for photography, offering a hint of the old Hong Kong vibe.

Another favorite photo-related activity in Ximending involves Korean-style photobooths. The area features many types of these machines where young people gather in groups to have fun.

Ximen Play and Buy

Ximending is eternally full of life, and never more so than during Christmas and New Year's. From December 1st to 31st, the Taipei City Government will collaborate with local businesses to hold 2023 Ximen Play and Buy (西門 PLAY 樂購町). Unique displays will be set up all over Ximending for visitors to stop and

take photos — a wonderful way to share the holiday spirit on social media.

Pop singers and idols have also been invited to participate in this event, ensuring a festive experience to the full.

Taipei Lantern Festival

The 2024 Taipei Lantern Festival will also be held in Taipei's Ximending area, with the main lantern displays stretching from MRT Beimen Station to MRT Ximen Station. It is divided into three major exhibition areas: Ximending Zone, Beimen Zone, and Zhonghua Road Zone. The festival will illuminate the city starting from February 2nd, with the official exhibition taking place from February 17th to March 3rd. Curated by the internationally acclaimed light artist Liu Zhiliang (劉治良), in collaboration with traditional Taiwanese paper-

cutting artists and calligraphers, the festival blends Chinese traditional culture, modern urban culture, and technology-driven light and sound art, offering a unique Lunar New Year experience in Ximending that's rich in sound, color, and culture. ◆



9. The 2022 Taipei Lantern Festival display, titled *Exploring Nature Lantern*, created by Dutch artist Karin Janssen. (Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)



10. The Taipei Lantern Festival is perfect for families to enjoy. (Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)



Exploring Taipei's Vibrant Indoor Markets: A Flavorful Journey through History and Culture

Author
Photographer

Jonathan Kaplan
Jonathan Kaplan, Shi-Dong Market, Dudva, JUT Foundation for Arts and Architecture

Markets symbolize the evolution of local culture and serve as microcosms of a city's essence. These markets are integral to local life, preserving tradition and community spirit.

Traditional markets are an indispensable facet of Taiwan's everyday life, featuring a variety of fresh vegetables, live poultry, and seafood, alongside eateries, grocery stores, and clothing boutiques. Distinguished by their operating hours, morning markets cater to the early hours, while evening markets come alive during the late afternoon and after work. Typically, people buy poultry and seafood at the morning markets and pork, fruits, and vegetables at the evening markets.

Pick a point in the city, pay attention long enough, and you too will observe the particular daily rhythms of that place. A good place to start would be at one of Taipei's traditional covered markets.

In the densely-populated capital city, these indoor markets are typically open and active from around 7 am to 7 pm. Here the city's rhythms are amplified amid the tightly-bunched grocery stalls, the farmers' stands, the upstairs eateries, and the clothing and accessory shops where artisans hand-make their goods while you peruse the stalls of cultural curios and fine goods out on display for both aficionados and casual shoppers to admire.

For visitor seeking an immersive, down-to-earth experience of Taiwan's local culture, here are a few unique markets to explore.

Nanmen Market: A Modern Update of a Neighborhood Market

Just outside MRT Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall Station is a gleaming new building that would fit right into any modern downtown, but upholds an honored tradition as the home of the area's century-old Nanmen Market (南門市場).

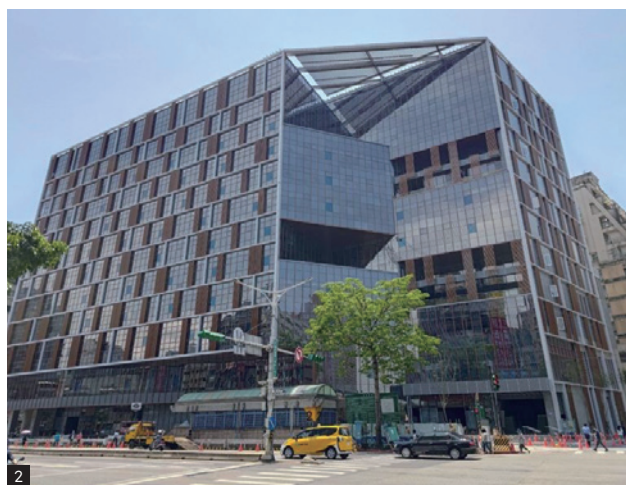
Established during the Japanese era in 1907, it has been the neighborhood's go-to spot for fresh and prepared foods, snacks, hot meals, tea, ingredients, and a variety of specialty goods for nearly 120 years.

Nanmen Market's original building underwent a city-initiated renovation in 2016 to enhance safety and convenience for visitors and vendors alike.

During a transitional phase, vendors were first moved to a nearby interim market in 2019. The ensuing pandemic led to daunting challenges, but in 2023, Nanmen Market finally reopened in its original location, with a grand reopening in October.

The first floor, with over a hundred independent stalls, is dedicated entirely to food. Indeed, it is a paradise for intrepid gourmands. One section features stalls selling dry goods: dried and candied fruit of every stripe (the guava is a must-try), nuts, grains, giant bags of dried mushrooms, and even dried scallops and cured pork belly are on offer here. Turn the corner and hot prepared foods are selling fast for local residents to take home for an indulgent feast. Under a long magenta sign, Yi-

Chang Yufang (億長御坊) doles out dishes like peeled shrimp with peas, *sanbeiji* (three-cup chicken), braised goose wings, stewed bamboo shoots, and many more. Other must-visit shops include Hoshin(合興糕粿), with its well-known Shanghai-styled steamed sponge cake, King Long Jerky's (金龍肉乾) sweetened and spiced pork jerky and Nan-Yuan's (南園) *zongzi* (sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves) to name a few.



1. The city's many markets offer a varied selection of fresh fruits. (Photo • Dudva) | 2. Nanmen Market has reopened at its original site, now with a brand new edifice. (Photo • Jonathan Kaplan) | 3. The first floor of Nanmen Market features typical food stalls selling fresh and cooked food, as well as dried food. (Photo • Jonathan Kaplan)



4

Asked what changes she sees in the new market building compared to the old, a shopkeeper who has been in business for 40 years recalled, “The old market was very traditional. There was no air conditioning, and it was very narrow.” The new Nanmen Market is a major upgrade — climate controlled and comfortable to move around in.

On the second floor, shops sell everything from jackets and jeans to fine wooden combs and jade jewelry. One shop in particular, Tianfu (天福), prominently displays delicate ceramic tea cups with beautiful designs. Ms. Wang, the shopkeeper, is eager to explain that much of the finery she sells is *Kutani* ware from Kaga, Japan, a type of porcelain dating back to Japan’s Edo period.

Poke around the upstairs shops of Nanmen Market and you will inevitably find some irresistible treasures. One such treasure is in the second floor’s food court area: the inimitable Hehuan Knife Cut Noodle Restaurant (合歡刀削麵). The menu features English translations for all eight options, and it is impossible to choose wrong here. The tomato beef noodle soup is so delicately rich and flavorful, with such tender beef. No wonder it’s a

local favorite, and you might just find yourself coming back for more.

The market’s incredible array of sights, fragrances, flavors, and finery are a marvelous introduction to the essence of Taiwan’s traditional marketplace, where local and niche imported regional products find their rightful place in customers’ hands (and bellies).

Shi-Dong Market: A Gourmet’s Dream Hidden in the North

Taipei’s Tianmu (天母) neighborhood is an enclave at the base of Yangmingshan Mountain, tucked away from the hustle and bustle of downtown. Hidden here is a delightful indoor market stands ready to feed visitors’ curiosity and appetites: Shi-Dong Market (士東市場).

A relatively new indoor market, Shi-Dong first opened its doors in 1992 to much local fanfare. Clean, bright,



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and well laid-out, it quickly became a neighborhood institution. As with Nanmen Market, the first floor is primarily dedicated to fresh produce and specialty groceries, while the second floor is divided between a central shopping gallery for clothes, antiques, handmade purses, and jewelry, with long halls of restaurant stalls on either side. Those restaurants are a major draw of the market, with everything from micro cafes to Korean food stalls, shaved ice desserts, and classic Taiwanese eateries getting a steady flow of satisfied diners throughout the day.

Back on the first floor, there is a standing sashimi restaurant, A-ji-shi (阿吉師), with delectably fresh fish, nestled among a hundred or so fresh grocers and specialty produce stores. Many of the stalls in Shi-Dong Market migrated there from the surrounding neighborhood when the building opened in 1992, including Mr. Lin Market (小林蔬菜), an organic vegetable stall, originally established in 1971.

As with other indoor markets, it pays to proceed at a comfortable pace and engage with the shopworkers when something catches your eye. From within stall



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4. Dried fruits, nuts, and mushrooms fill the air with their delicate fragrance. (Photo • Jonathan Kaplan) | 5. The display of fresh groceries at Shi-Dong Market is the preferred choice for nearby residents' produce needs. (Photo • Shi-Dong Market) | 6. A-ji-shi stand-up sashimi restaurant at Shi-Dong Market offers a unique dining experience. (Photo • Jonathan Kaplan)

number 57, Hakka Village Dayu Garden (客家莊大玉園), an affable man issues a pleasant greeting. Victor, a retired IBM engineer, now runs a shop selling goods from his family's farm in Taiwan's central Nantou County.

Among the fresh eggs, dried longan, and bottles of tea seed oil, containers of honey beckon visitors' attention. "I go back to the farm to help with the honey harvest," Victor explains in English. The family's grove of longan trees support the bee hives that produce a unique variety of longan honey. Victor proudly displays a bottle of his farm's champion honey, the 2023 winner of Taiwan's annual agricultural award, the National Domestic Longan Honey Evaluation.

Xinfu Market: A New Look of Historical Reflection

Xinfu Market (新富市場) sits in the heart of Wanhua District, the oldest district in Taipei and the one most connected to the city's original spirit. The market is just steps away from the famous Longshan Temple (龍山寺), with its ornate architecture and regular, hauntingly beautiful public chanting. After an unforgettable visit to the temple, why not pop into the bustling market nearby?

The sign for the market entrance on Kangding Road (康定路) indicates both Dongsanshui Street Market (東三水街市場) and Xinfu Market. Dongsanshui Street Market is what you will encounter first as you step into the covered walkway. Here you will find all manner of local goodies available for sale: every kind of tofu, vegetable, smoked, salted, or fresh meat, and a variety of clothing and accessories are for sale from the small stalls lining the long corridor.

Halfway down the length of Dongsanshui Street Market, on the right, you will find the entrance to Shintomicho Cultural Market (新富町文化市場), which is also the former site of the original Xinfu Market, and therein lies the surprise: it is nothing like Dongsanshui Street Market!

Xinfu Market was established in 1935 during the Japanese era. A horseshoe-shaped building with Art Deco flourishes, it primarily served the Japanese who settled in the area. The market was then reinvigorated in the 2000s as a museum showcasing the market culture of its time. Now rebranded as "U-mkt" after its unique U-shaped structure, Shintomicho Cultural Market is the heart of the region's revitalization. The



7. Xinfu Market, with Dongsanshui Street Market running perpendicular to the north. (Photo • JUT Foundation for Arts and Architecture)



8. A visitor takes in an exhibit on the history of Xinfu Market at U-mkt. (Photo • JUT Foundation for Arts and Architecture)

longstanding stalls from the original Xinfu Market continue their business on Dongsanshui Street, making the block a living “market trinity,” offering a glimpse into the old town’s historical roots.

Getting Up Close and Personal

A visit to Taipei’s indoor markets should be on the to-do list of any traveler keen to develop an understanding of Taiwan’s culture. These markets represent a living memory for Taiwanese people, a shared backdrop of daily reality that brings people together. Literally everyone and their parents and grandparents has been to these markets to pick up the ingredients of their signature dishes, where the sights and sounds of the vendors selling their products and customers picking out their purchases form some of the brightest threads in the tapestry of life in the city. 

Nanmen Market 南門市場

ADD 8, Sec. 1, Roosevelt Rd.,
Zhongzheng Dist.

HOURS Tue. to Sun.
7:00am – 7:00pm

Shi-Dong Market 士東市場

ADD 100, Shidong Rd., Shilin Dist.

HOURS Tue. to Sun.
7:00am – 6:30pm (1F)
7:30am – 9:00pm (2F)

Xinfu Market 新富市場

ADD 70, Sanshui St., Wanhua Dist.

HOURS Tue. to Sun.
8:00am – 3:00pm
10:00am – 6:00pm (U-mkt)



Soak in History: A Winter Journey to Taiwan's Timeless Hot Springs

Author
Photographer

Rick Charette
Beitou Hot Spring Museum, Long Nice Hot Springs, Radium Kagaya, MyTaiwanTour

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The deep cool of winter has descended upon Taiwan, stimulating hot-spring aficionados to head for the hills. There's perhaps no better way to reinvigorate one's chilled bones and spirit than a good hot-spring soak.

From the busyness and bustle of downtown Taipei, the tranquility and soothing mountain scenery of the Beitou (北投) hot-springs resort area, in the city's northwest sector, is just a 30-minute ride away by metro. The main resort area is in a shallow valley, carved by the Beitou Stream (北投溪), that cuts into the base of the mighty Yangmingshan (陽明山) massif. Directly before the valley's west-end opening is MRT Xinbeitou Station.

Let's head out on an introductory Beitou tour through space and time, exploring the hot-spring district's geological origins and cultural-historical significance.

Geological Origins — Molten Fire Down Below

The Yangmingshan massif is part of north Taiwan's Datun Volcano Group, active from about one million to 200,000 years ago. A large magma chamber, about 50km², bubbles underneath, with its top just 8 kilometers beneath the surface. The key beneficial result for today's tourist is that these mountains brim with hot springs, fumaroles, and sulfur pits — plus hot-spring resort hotels and public baths.

From Enchanted Valley to Popular Attractions

The Mandarin place name “Beitou” is from the name bestowed by the area’s indigenous Ketagalan people, “patauw,” meaning “home of the witches.” They thought that surely the great sulfurous mists generated in the Beitou Stream valley meant it was an enclave of magical goings-on. During the Qing Dynasty, the Han Chinese came to harvest the sulfur deposits for munitions and trade.

Later, Taiwan was controlled by the Japanese from 1895 to 1945, and their passion for hot-spring soaking was introduced and has since become a beloved pastime shared by many Taiwanese people. The Beitou Stream valley was developed primarily for use by the military — for officers on R&R and for injured servicemen. The place really began to boom with the transport of many injured during the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905. Beitou Park (北投公園), opened in 1913 along with the Beitou Public Bathhouse (北投公共浴場), was landscaped in classical European style. After the Japanese departure following the end of WWII, it was returned to today’s more natural look.

The Beitou Hot Spring Museum (北投溫泉博物館), just a short walk from MRT Xinbeitou Station, is this history-steeped district’s most important heritage site. It is a handsome Japanese-Western eclectic architecture of red brick and white stucco that originally housed the Beitou Public Bathhouse — Taiwan’s first and East Asia’s largest hot-spring public bath during the Japanese era. A Romanesque pool and columns have been restored, as has the original large, breezy tatami resting room. And there are many intriguing artifacts and informative

displays, including a fine collection of Japanese-period black-and-white photos and documentary film footage providing glimpses of yesteryear Beitou and Taipei.



1. Thermal Valley of Beitou, located on the outskirts of Taipei City, is a must-visit destination in winter. (Photo • Radium Kagaya) | 2. It was not until 1994, when students and teachers from Beitou Elementary School petitioned the government, that Beitou Hot Spring Museum was preserved as a municipal monument and extensively renovated. (Photo • Beitou Hot Spring Museum) | 3. One distinctive feature within the Beitou Hot Spring Museum is the Roman-style grand bath, enclosed by round arches and columns. (Photo • Beitou Hot Spring Museum)

Taiwan's Hot-Spring Culture & Beitou's Natural Treasure

When the Japanese took over Taiwan, experts were dispatched to survey the land, mapping out all exploitable natural resources. This study included hot-springs, and in the ensuing decades, many resorts were developed.

Beyond the wide choice of scenic settings, another key factor for today's international traveler is the diverse therapeutic qualities of the mineral waters in these myriad locations, catering to specific physical and spiritual needs. For many, of course, the need of the moment in the winter months is simply to escape the season's damp chill.

Take a walk up through the long, narrow, leafy Beitou Park along the meandering pathways that follow along either side of the Beitou Stream. High off in the distance loom the Yangmingshan peaks; high above the valley's inner end you may espy rock climbers scaling bare cliffs.

Imagine days gone by, when Beitou was the first hot-spring resort area in Taiwan. Along the Beitou Stream, there are five "*taki* (瀧)," literally small waterfalls in Japanese. Since the stream waters are actually heated, each *taki* forms a natural spa site. Early on, before many bathhouses were developed, Japanese would come and soak in the pools below the falls — naked, in the Japanese fashion. This caused quite a stir with locals, and Japanese officials thought it best to stop the practice, to maintain Japanese dignity and esteem.

Today, only foot-soaking is allowed in the stream,

4-5. The stones in the geothermal valley contain the radioactive element radium, and are known as Beitou Stone. The left image shows the Beitou Geothermal Valley; the right image displays the Beitou Stone from the Beitou Hot Spring Museum's permanent collection. (Left • MyTaiwanTour ; Right • Beitou Hot Spring Museum)





the scalded landscapes of steam vents, bubbling hot-spring pools, rich-yellow sulfur deposits, and bare-rock perimeter walls. Most of Beitou's hot-spring establishments use these waters.

Within a compact side valley near Beitou Park's uppermost point is Thermal Valley (地熱谷), also called Hell Valley. Why? Steam fills up the high-walled depression at the culmination of this dead-end valley, rising from a shallow lake of bubbling and spitting sulfurous waters heated by the Yangmingshan magma chamber. It's no wonder locals also refer to it as "Ghost Lake." Thermal Valley, otherwise known as "Jade Spring Valley," produces highly acidic green sulfur waters serving as the Beitou Stream's headwaters. They are the area's hottest, 80 to 100 degrees Celsius. A newly renovated pathway takes you around the lake, and there is a Spa Spring Resort (水都溫泉會館) nearby that offers a hot spring egg-boiling experience.

and the once-vertical waterfalls have become hardly noticeable due to river erosion. However, the bathhouses developed alongside each *taki* continue to thrive to this day, including Long Nice Hot Springs (龍乃湯), formerly known as "*Taki No Yu*," meaning hot spring by the waterfall. Generally, modern facilities now either provide separate men's and women's pools where bathing is done au naturel or mixed pools where swimwear and swimming caps are required.

Mineral Water Qualities

The Beitou area has three types of spring waters: white sulfur, green sulfur, and iron sulfur. The primary sources of the white sulfur are two large, moon-like depressions in the hills above the Sulfur Valley (硫磺谷, Liuhuanggu) and Dragon-Phoenix Valley (龍鳳谷, Longfenggu). Well-built walkways bring you through

The green sulfur waters are also sometimes called Radium Hot Springs (鑷溫泉) possessing especially beneficial healing capacity because they have radium content that causes a corrosive reaction with the park's stream-bed andesite rocks, creating a mildly radioactive crystalline substance that forms on the rocks in crusts. This is *Hokutolite* (Hokuto is the Japanese name for Beitou) or "Beitou Stone (北投石)," found only in Beitou and Japan, and it is the only mineral named after a toponym in Taiwan. A large 800 kilogram sample is displayed in Beitou Hot Spring Museum.

The iron sulfur waters are characterized by a relatively low temperature, lack of odor, and the water is transparent with a light brown color. Due to the presence of iron in the water, it is believed to have therapeutic effects on conditions such as neuralgia and rheumatism.

Other Notable Attractions in Beitou

Immerse yourself in history, quite literally, with a soothing soak at the bathhouse Long Nice Hot Springs, located right outside Beitou Park just up-valley from the museum. This is the oldest Japanese-style bathing facility in Beitou, dating back to 1907, opened by a transplanted Japanese citizen. During the Japanese era, Crown Prince Hirohito (later Emperor Showa) of Japan visited Beitou. To make his creek exploration easier, stepping stones were placed near the second *taki*. A monument, inscribed with “Monument to the Crossing of His Highness the Crown Prince,” was later erected in the courtyard of the then *Taki No Yu*. This historical connection adds an extra layer of significance to the later renamed Long Nice Hot Springs and the surrounding area.

Though a thorough renovation was undertaken last decade, both the exterior and interior still retain a faithful “old Japan” unadorned simplicity. There are *Otokoyu* and *Onnayu*, separate public baths for men and

women, along with a few private baths for couples and families up to five people (women’s and private facilities added about 1950), and a new courtyard foot bath.

The simple men’s stone bath, which retains its original appearance, is in the classical Meiji bathhouse style, now rarely seen in Japan itself. This was built with the famed local Qilian (唎哩岸) stone and sealed with a sulfur slurry to prevent erosion and osmotic infiltration from the Thermal Valley green sulfur waters used, giving them the original Meiji look. Qilian stone was also used for the women’s bath, engendering a rustic old-world character. Quarrying of Qilian stone has since been prohibited, leaving these baths one of a kind.

Outside the park directly facing the museum is a site offering a unique blend of contemporary luxury and historical significance. The upscale Radium Kagaya (日勝生加賀屋) has both public men’s and women’s pools as well as private bathing facilities. White sulfur waters are piped in. Ladies dressed like geishas greet arriving guests outside the hotel. Immediately down-valley (west) of the hotel, in a small park, are the ruins of Tiangouan (天狗庵), Beitou’s first privately-owned hot spring hotel opened in 1896. Among the remains on display are a stone staircase and a number of columns. Inside the park immediately down-valley from the



6-7. Long Nice Hot Springs is the oldest Japanese-style hot spring bathhouse in the area, offering the most authentic green sulfur hot spring experience. (Photo • Long Nice Hot Springs)






8-9. The predecessor of the Radium Kagaya was Taiwan's first Japanese-style hot spring inn, Tiangouan. (Photo • Radium Kagaya)

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hot-spring museum is the expansive, striking Beitou Library (北投圖書館, Taipei Public Library Beitou Branch), Taiwan's first green-building library. A work of stimulating innovation, built of wood and steel, everything recyclable, it looks like a giant treehouse. Rooftop greenery helps keep the interior cool, rainwater is gathered for varied interior use, and there are treetop-shaded open-air reading balconies on the second floor, plus many other impressive green-architecture highlights. 



► List of Certified Hot Spring Businesses

PROPER HOT-SPRING BATHING ETIQUETTE

Here are a few rules to follow at public hot spring facilities:

- Always take a shower before going into the water.
- Do not have any products such as sunscreen or moisturizer on your skin before showering, which may not remove them completely.
- Douse your feet with the hot-spring water before immersion; there's usually a bucket by the edge.
- Immerse yourself in the spring; never just sit waterside soaking your feet.
- Pregnant women, the physically challenged, the elderly, and children should avoid bathing alone.
- In establishments where swimming caps are not mandatory, do not let your hair enter the water.
- Respect the privacy of others: no photography or filming, and avoid staring at others.
- Quiet conversation is fine, loud is not.



Protection of the Moon by Dark Incredible was presented at the 2023 Taiwan Lantern Festival in Taipei.
(Photo • Tourism Administration, MOTC)



The fireworks show always brings an exciting climax to the Taipei New Year's Party.
(Photo • Maggie Huang)







The Art of Wealth Seeking: Temples and Culture in Taipei

Author
Photographer

Jenna Lynn Cody
Zifilm Studio, Songshan Xiahai City God Temple, Songshan Ciyu Temple, Che Wen, Guandu Temple,
Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government

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While people around the world might simply wish for more money, in Taiwan wealth and prosperity are symbolically intertwined with good luck, especially during the Lunar New Year. This is reflected in the giving of red envelopes stuffed with money not just as gifts, but for luck, and in greetings and songs that translate to “I hope you get rich! (恭喜發財).” In fact, one such song, “Here Comes the God of Wealth (財神到),” centers the God of Wealth in New Year celebrations.

The Many Faces of Gods of Wealth

The concept of a god of wealth transcends culture; most polytheistic religious beliefs include one, alongside gods reigning over concepts such as chance

and good fortune. Some have more than one god overseeing prosperity and riches, and Taiwan is no different. The traditional song may say that the god of wealth — Caishen (財神) — is coming, but it may be surprising to learn that there is more than one.

The various gods of wealth have been identified across the centuries as far back as the Qin Dynasty, as well as with cardinal and ordinal directions, different elements, and colors. Wealth gods can also be classified by function, primarily in regard to profession and method of acquiring wealth.

Notably, there are the Wen (文, Civil), Wu (武, Military), and Pian (偏, Luck) gods, each with a distinct function. The Wen God of Wealth, is venerated by civil servants and those not directly involved in business. The Wu God of Wealth has closer ties to industry, trade, and

businesspeople. The Pian God of Wealth is associated with luck and has connections to the Earth God Tudi Gong (土地公), and the Tiger Lord (虎爺).

Throughout Taipei, many vibrant temples host altars dedicated to these gods of wealth. Below are four key temples for anyone looking for prosperity in the Year of the Dragon.

Songshan Xiahai City God Temple: The Gods of Wealth of Five Directions

The Songshan Xiahai City God Temple (松山霞海城隍廟) was founded in the 19th century by a businessman named Lu Laixing (呂來興) from Quanzhou, China. Lu invoked the Xiahai City God during his voyages across the Taiwan Strait, which led to favorable weather and prosperous ventures. In gratitude for the area's beauty and prosperity, a shrine dedicated to the Gods of Wealth of Five Directions (五路財神) was added to the temple after its consecration.

The Gods of Wealth of Five Directions are based on an ancient tale involving Zhao Gongming (趙公明), a Taoist hermit with magical powers. Zhao is known as the Wu God of Wealth and presides over the Five Directions as the Center Wealth God.

1. During the Lunar New Year, it is a traditional custom for people in Taiwan to visit temples to pray for wealth and peace. (Photo • Zifilm Studio) | 2. In the 1970s, as the government needed to widen the road, local gentry raised funds to relocate the Songshan Xiahai City God Temple to its current location. (Photo • Songshan Xiahai City God Temple)

The Center Wealth God's four sworn brothers represent the Gods of Wealth in the cardinal directions. The North Wealth God is the God of Profitability (利市仙官) and is associated with markets and shops. The East Wealth God is associated with jewelry and precious stones, also known as the God of Collecting Treasures (招寶天尊). The South Wealth God is the God of Attracting Wealth (招財使者) and is associated with buying low and selling high. The West Wealth God is known for possessing especially rare treasures that can ward off the cold and is worshiped as the God of Collecting Valuables (納珍天尊).





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3. The Mazu deity of Songshan Ciyou Temple is at the center of religious life for local residents in Taipei. (Photo • Songshan Ciyou Temple) | 4. The money mother granted by the Tiger Lord is believed to bless worshippers with good fortune. (Photo • Che Wen)

The Gods of Wealth of Five Directions attract numerous devotees. It is worth noting that the traditional event at this temple is the “Welcoming the God of Wealth” on the first business day of the Lunar New Year. Temple staff distribute auspicious money packets at the temple’s entrance, attracting a large crowd of worshippers who eagerly line up to receive them.

Songshan Ciyou Temple: The Tiger Lord

Songshan Ciyou Temple (松山慈祐宮) is found next to the bustling Raohe Night Market (饒河夜市). The temple boasts several floors, an expansive front hall and multiple wings. Founded by a traveling monk in the 18th century, the temple is considered one of the most important Mazu (媽祖) temples in northern Taiwan.

In addition to Mazu, the Tiger Lord (虎爺) can also be found here. The Tiger Lord is not only the mount of various Gods, he is also a god of wealth in his own right. In fact, the pronunciation of “Tiger Lord” in the Taiwanese dialect, hóo-iâ, sounds like hó-giah, literally “being wealthy.”

As the old saying goes, “Tiger Lord’s bite brings money (虎爺咬錢來).” There is a very popular custom to perform the “money water ritual (換錢水)” to “seek the money mother (求錢母).” First, worshippers pay their respects to every god in the temple. Then, they go to the Tiger Lord with an offering — raw meat, fish, eggs and sweets are popular — and state their name, address, and birthday. Worshippers place a coin in a bowl of water and coins and take away a coin of lesser value. The idea is that the money water will make one’s wealth flow in, so it is important not to shake the water off the coins. These coins should be circled three times over the incense burner and placed in a small bag.

Guandu Temple: Caishen Cave

Guandu Temple (關渡宮) in Beitou is dedicated to Mazu and is considered one of the three most important Mazu Temples in Taiwan, the other two being Beigang Chaotian Temple (北港朝天宮) in Yunlin, and Lugang Mazu Temple (鹿港天后宮) in Changhua.

Guandu Temple includes a unique feature: the Caishen Cave (財神洞), a man-made tunnel leading from a side entrance to the back of one of the main temple halls. Caishen Cave was built between 1981 and 2000 by drilling into the nearby hill and features five gods of wealth. While similar to the Gods of Wealth of Five Directions, these specific wealth gods have different historical associations, and some, such as Jilun (季倫) and Shen Wansan (沈萬三), are primarily popular in Taiwan.



5. Guandu Temple boasts a rich history, with a legacy spanning over three centuries, making it the oldest Mazu temple in northern Taiwan. (Photo • Zifilm Studio)

One of these gods is the aforementioned Zhao Gongming. The second is the Blessed Heaven Emperor (天官賜福). It's said that he descends on the fifteenth day of each lunar month to judge the sins of mortals and dole out blessings. Devotees can also light a small lamp at his shrine to enhance their careers and attract wealth. The third is Wenbi Wealth God (文比財神), also known as Prince Bigan (比干). According to legend, Bigan was an honest minister who lived in the 10th century B.C.E. He was ordered to cut out his own heart by the cruel King Zhou of Shang and obeyed.

The next shrine in Caishen Cave is dedicated to Jilun Wealth God, who was said to have been richer than the emperor himself. Jilun is further associated with the

"luck star (祿星)" in Chinese Mythology. Finally, one can find Shen Wansan, who was an extremely wealthy man in the late Yuan Dynasty. One story says he helped to finance one-third of the construction costs of the city of Nanjing.

Xingtian Temple: Five Enzhus

Towering over the Minquan-Songjiang intersection, Xingtian Temple (行天宮) is one of the newer temples in Taipei. Established in 1967, it reflects mid-century design sensibilities. Xingtian Temple also made history by being the first place of



6. In Guandu Temple's Caishen Cave, there are tens of meters of hallway endowed with various gods of wealth, where worshippers can seek good fortune. (Photo • Guandu Temple)



7. The most distinctive features of Xingtian Temple are the fact that no rituals involving animals are held, no burning of joss paper, no theatrical performances for the gods, no fundraising, and no commercial activities of any kind. (Photo • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)

worship in Taiwan to go green, giving up incense use in 2014.

The temple is primarily known for its dedication to Guan Yu (關羽), a military commander famed for his appearance along with Cao Cao (曹操) and Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮) in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Guan Yu is also a Wu God of Wealth. In local folklore, it is believed that Guan Yu excelled in financial management, had a keen sense for accounting, and held high values of integrity. This belief attracts devotees who seek Guan Yu's assistance, hoping that business partners will treat each other with integrity and that their enterprises can prosper or make a comeback.

In addition to Guan Yu, the temple also venerates five deities. These are known as the "Five Enzhus (五恩主)", literally five benefactors, as they have the ability to confer prosperity, bless worshippers and avert disasters. The other Enzhus beside Guan Yu include Lu Dongbin (呂洞賓), a Tang Dynasty poet; the Kitchen

God Zhang Dan (灶神張單); Heavenly Marshall Wang Lingguan (靈官王天君), a Song Dynasty Taoist master; and Song Dynasty military commander Yue Fei (岳飛), also known as King Wumu (武穆王).

Besides, Xingtian Temple offers one of the most representative folk traditional therapies — *Siu-kiann* (收驚). Temple staff will first ask for the person's name and then request the Enzhu Guan Yu to take charge and protect them, with the process lasting about two minutes. The large number of worshippers not only highlights the temple's significant status, but also reflects the fervent religious demands of modern urban residents.

These temples invite us to explore the art of wealth seeking, not just in monetary terms but as a holistic journey encompassing virtue, prosperity, and the eternal quest for balance. In the ever-turning wheel of fortune, they are beacons of hope and guidance, reminding us that wealth, in all its forms, is a treasure worth pursuing with wisdom and devotion. ◆



Bookstores Redefined: Embracing Global Connections and Creativity

Author Hsinya Teng, Lin
Photographer Weight Books, Sungood Books, moom bookshop, Pon Ding

Since 1999, Taipei has been home to the world's pioneering 24-hour bookstore. The Eslite Dunnan Store, once a year-round haven for book lovers, stood strong for more than two decades until it was closed in 2020 and replaced by the Eslite Xinyi Store, which will soon be succeeded by the Eslite Songyan Store. Eslite's presence endows Taipei with an unmistakable "City of Readers" image that resonates on the global stage.

While physical books have faced the challenges brought on by the digital age, the presence of creative and unique bookstores in Taipei remains as

vibrant as ever. Many bookstores have evolved into diverse, multifaceted spaces that reflect the unique tastes and personalities of their owners. Such presence is proof positive that the physical space of a bookstore is an irreplaceable treasure. It is a place where passionate creators convene to hone and harness their creative vibrations.

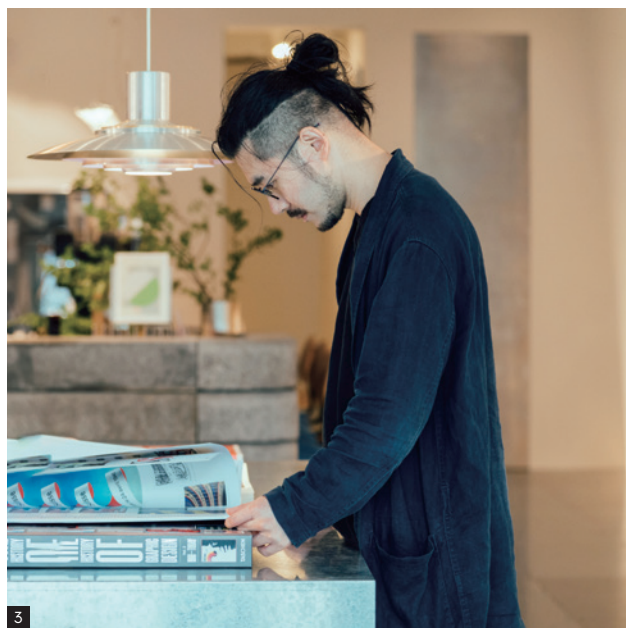
The four bookstores featured in this article, all specializing in art and design, are unique in their operational approach, spatial design, and curation, making them each a center of creative nourishment for the city.

Weight Books (重本書店)

Founded by graphic designer Yeh Chungyi (葉忠宜), Weight Books focuses on graphic design and typography. Yeh's passion for graphic design is evident in every corner of the store. The design revolves around the broad theme of "Space." You will find metal bookcases, a ceiling made of noise-reducing aluminum foam, a bar with floating balloon lights, and booths with silver-painted walls. It is an intimate universe where readers can be completely immersed in their reading.

The store has designer chairs by Tendo Mokko (天童木工), a renowned Japanese furniture manufacturer that combines ergonomic comfort with exquisite aesthetics. The bookstore also features two handmade speakers that offer visitors an elevated musical experience. From its book selection to the meticulously curated furniture, Weight Books is like an old friend who can't wait to share their collection with their friends.

Weight Books also collaborates with experts from various industries on themed exhibitions and culinary creations. For example, a special Ryuichi Sakamoto (坂本龍一) exhibition organized by a graphic designer, and a "Coffee Fine Dining" experience created by an expert barista, are different ways that enable customers to immerse themselves in design. In addition, the bookstore is open until 12 am on Fridays and Saturdays, making it a rare place in Taipei where you can enjoy a good drink and a leisurely read late into the night.



1. The value that a bookstore can provide is no longer just the books themselves, but also the atmosphere of the space, and the relationship between the space and people. (Photo • Weight Books) | 2-3. Weight Books is independently operated by its director, Yeh Chungyi, and is a hybrid bookstore specializing in graphic design and typography printing. (Photo • Weight Books)

Sungood Books (桑格設計書店)

Founded in 1984, Sungood Books is perhaps the oldest design bookstore in Taipei. The bookstore is tucked away on Fuxing North Road (復興北路), right in the heart of Taipei. It focuses on books on art and design, covering a wide range of fields, including graphic design, product design, architecture, interior design, fashion, animation, and illustration. Sungood also offers an online bookstore with a well-stocked collection with fast delivery services, making it a valuable resource for design professionals and enthusiasts.

Furthermore, the bookstore's interior became even more open and spacious after undergoing

renovations a few years ago, allowing it to become a regular venue for design workshops, exhibitions, and seminars. In 2022, Sungood began curating foreign design books for translation and publication.

In addition, the store collaborates with Taiwanese designers to create book covers that bestow new interpretations of the curated books. For example, this year, Sungood collaborated with designer Chu Chunda (朱俊達) to redesign the cover of the bestselling Japanese book *Future Designers: Modern Graphic Design Approaches and Attitudes* (未來設計師：日本現代平面設計方法和態度). They then released a Traditional Chinese version, showcasing the works of 40 emerging Japanese graphic designers, offering readers in Taiwan insight into the latest global design trends.



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4. *Future Designers: Modern Graphic Design Approaches and Attitudes* is a new publication from Sungood Bookstore in 2023. (Photo • Sungood Books) | 5. Sungood Bookstore has been in business for 40 years, and is located on the 14th floor. It's a mysterious bookstore that can be somewhat difficult to find. (Photo • Sungood Books) | 6. The founder of Sungood Books, Shih Anfu (施安富), is committed to providing a comfy reading space. (Photo • Sungood Books)



6



7. Moom bookshop has a well-stocked collection, primarily focused on art and photography books, and occasionally hosts photography exhibitions. (Photo • moom bookshop)

moom bookshop

Born as an online bookstore in 2016, moom bookshop ventured into the physical realm two years later, setting up its store in the alleys of Taipei's vibrant East District. It is one of Taiwan's few bookstores with an exclusive focus on photography. Its minimalist space makes it the perfect canvas to showcase its diverse curation.

Driven by the belief that physical books remain irreplaceable, the owner has curated a collection of European, American, Chinese, Japanese, and even African photography books, magazines, and art publications for its readers. You'll also find a handful of Taiwanese gems on the shelves.

Acting as a bridge between local readers and international art publishers, moom bookshop brings in a treasure trove of independent publications from around the world. It's a compact space, but the book selection is meticulously maintained to feature

complete works by renowned photographers. Moom bookshop is also a hidden gem for many of Taipei's well-known creatives who come to refuel themselves with innovative ideas and find new inspiration.

In addition to books, moom bookshop regularly hosts photography exhibitions and themed book fairs. With years of online content creation, moom tells behind-the-scenes stories that bring photography books to life and share the photographers' tales. The content has gained popularity on social media platforms, and has fueled the creative energy of Taipei's photography scene.

In the hearts of photography enthusiasts, this is more than just a bookstore; it's a welcoming place where they come to expand their artistic horizons and seek inspiration.

Pon Ding (朋丁)

Founded in 2016, Pon Ding takes up an old three-story apartment complex located in the Tiaotong

Commercial District on Section 1, Zhongshan North Road (中山北路一段). It is a multifunctional space that seamlessly blends books, art exhibitions, and a good brew. After years of exploring different operational approaches, Pon Ding has redefined itself as a vibrant cultural and artistic hub in Taipei.

Founders Chen Yichiu (陳依秋) and Kenyon Yeh, with their respective backgrounds in publishing and product design and their shared passion for the arts, combined with their professional capacity in planning, editing, and creative ideas, have brought the bookstore to life. Like its name, which comes from “ponding” in English, Pon Ding is a cumulation of fascinating elements and energy that reconfigure and flourish in an exciting metamorphosis.

Pon Ding is also a vibrant hub that curates independent publications, magazines, zines, and

artwork from around the world. Throughout the year, the bookstore hosts numerous exhibitions and seminars that bring together a diverse range of artists, including illustrators, artisans, photographers, furniture designers, and more.

The collaborators design the projects to provide the perfect platform for visitors to engage in dialogue with the creators and explore their inspiring works. Art takes on new dimensions under Chen and Yeh’s meticulous curation and thoughtful re-edits. Via the process, Pon Ding has transcended the traditional definition of a bookstore. The founders’ roles as curators and event organizers have added to its charm.

Broadly speaking, these aesthetic bookstores have allowed art to break away from the boundaries of the traditional bookstore, and thus thrive in diverse and unexpected settings. ◆



8. The brand concept of Pon Ding is based on the image of puddles. The founders envision the space as a platform for voluminous growth, bringing together diverse people to showcase multifaceted imaginations. (Photo • Pon Ding)



ACT for Animals Sets New Standards for Animal Rehabilitation

Author
Photographer

Rick Charette
ACT for Animals

1

Stray animals are an ongoing concern in Taiwan. Over the past few decades, pets have become beloved in Taiwanese society, with a surge in adoptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, this has led to an increase in abandonments, necessitating more rehabilitation efforts.

In 2017 a ban on euthanizing impounded animals took effect in Taiwan. As a result, pressure has steadily increased on resource-strapped public animal shelters, and numerous organizations have stepped in to help in rescue efforts. Among the most prominent names is ACT for Animals (台灣愛克特動物重生救援協會), founded in 2019 by a cross-culture couple, Judy Hsu (Taiwan) and Sean McCormack (UK). ACT stands for “Animal Care Trust.” *TAIPEI* sat down with Hsu, the Executive Director, to learn more about the NGO’s rescue activities, the homeless animal situation in Taipei/Taiwan, how

animal care practices in Taipei differ from other places worldwide, and her hopes for the future.

What ACT for Animals Does Over Time

“We provide 24-hour emergency response and urgent veterinary attention for stricken stray and wild animals all over Taiwan, but especially in the north,” says Hsu, “giving them the best chance possible of having their lives transformed. We focus primarily on rescue, rehabilitating, sheltering, and rehoming, but also in bringing those who deliberately harm animals to justice.”

The NGO rescues about 100 dogs and 60 cats annually. Most are seriously injured, especially those who have fallen victim to illegal boar traps and other types of

snares. It currently has about 300 animals under care in its three sanctuaries.

Hsu has always had a deep love for animals, and about 10 years ago answered an employment ad for animal care staff placed by an NGO McCormack was previously involved with. “In fact, one of my dreams as a kid was to build a dog park for stray animals,” says Hsu. At the time, Hsu was employed by China Airlines as ground staff and felt little passion for what she was doing. And so, she jumped at the chance to become involved in more meaningful work.

Citizens’ Attitudes Change Toward Animal

A few decades ago, says Hsu, strays in Taiwan were common. People did not understand the responsibilities of pet ownership amid limited space in residential buildings. This was compounded by “northern drifters” who moved to Taipei for work or study but faced a rental market unfriendly to pet owners.

However, over the past 20 years, the situation has greatly improved, Hsu says. “I have to say I am proud of our government at both the national and local levels because the changes have been drastic,” says Hsu, “You see few if any strays in Taipei, for example, except perhaps a few in the suburbs.” Much new green space has been created, the Animal Protection Act (動物保護法) has been passed, and the Taipei City Animal Protection Office (台北市動物保護處) has been established. In addition, government and NGOs have

engaged in animal-welfare education, leading to the creation of numerous shelters. Hsu goes on to say, “We envision Taiwan becoming a leader in Asia for humane treatment of all animals.”

The Taipei City Animal Protection Office provides various services, including adoption and rehoming of unwanted animals, as well as managing a large animal shelter. They receive around 10,000 reports annually, resulting in the rescue of about 1,300 dogs and cats, as well as 4,000 other types of animals. Those requiring medical intervention are sent to one of 24 partner facilities for further treatment.



In late 2022, the city announced a new 24-hour hotline (1959) for reporting animals in need of rescue and inquiries related to animal protection. This year, they introduced an animal rescue notification system on the city government’s official LINE account, allowing people to upload videos, images, and information about wild animals in need of rescue.

1. ACT for Animals founder Judy Hsu and co-founder Sean McCormack have long been dedicated to helping stray animals in Taiwan. |
2. ACT for Animals provides 24-hour emergency rescue, medical care, and rehoming services for stray animals.



3. Mocha, rescued three years ago, was abandoned by the original adopting family due to difficulty adjusting to a new environment. It wasn't until Mocha met Megan, from the UK, who provided warm care, that Mocha finally became domesticated. Megan is also soon taking Mocha back to the UK.

The city has also opened approximately 20 dedicated dog parks, with each of the 12 city administrative districts offering at least one. They have actively expanded pet park facilities in recent years, and have developed plans to renovate their shelter, all with the goal of providing better living space for animals. Additionally, this year, they established an “Animal Protection Classroom” course, requiring individuals to complete an hour-long class before committing to adopting an animal.

Taipei's Current Ecology Compared to Overseas

Unlike many animal rescue and rehabilitation groups overseas, ACT for Animals does not handle international adoptions, “Because they are so hard to trace, and we fear animals then being abandoned overseas and ending up in shelters again,” says Hsu. “Most of our adoptions currently are by foreigners living in Taiwan, who will then take the animals with them when they leave Taiwan,” she goes on. In the past, Taiwan citizens

were not keen on adopting rescued strays, especially disfigured animals, but attitudes have slowly been changing, with more understanding of and empathy for these animals' plight.

Due to the zero-culling policy, both public and non-public shelters are overwhelmed, and their resources are stretched to the breaking point. Because of a lack of space, Hsu states, some shelters are so cramped that they mostly keep animals in cages. ACT for Animals seeks to emulate the best of international practices seen in Europe, North America, Japan, and elsewhere, by “Running sanctuaries rather than shelters,” Hsu says, “more natural places built like outdoor gardens with large land areas and a lot of grass, with no dogs in cages or living inside, spending their time naturally outside.” It currently runs two dog sanctuaries and one “cat house,” which they also call a “cat cradle,” with the cats living inside but getting to spend time outside as well.

“My opinion is that Taiwan is not ready to be a no-kill country unless the government works with NGOs to handle the sheer amount of animals. Groups like us have the determination to build and run very large sanctuaries. The government can transfer animals that cannot be adopted or are unlikely so to our sanctuaries, and help us build these expansive, humane sanctuary facilities, while government shelters and resources specifically focus on ‘easier’ cases and function as adoption centers, generating more adoptions because the more aggressive, ‘unappealing’ animals that normally keep people away from shelters will be out of sight.”

Most Memorable and Touching Rescue Stories

ACT for Animals is best known for its remarkable rescue of animals caught in illegal traps and snares, as in the numerous compelling videos on their website.

The primary target of illegal trapping is wild boars. “One boar brings in at least NT\$30,000,” says Hsu. “To have these hunters prosecuted and put in jail, you must catch them red-handed in photos/video. This seems impossible — but we’ve done it!” She says co-founder McCormack, extremely determined, analyzes patterns where they are rescuing more maimed animals and identifies pathways trappers use — seeing where they’ve cut away branches, etc., creating settings with a more “unnatural” look. Motion sensor cameras are then set up.

“We cooperate with government offices by reporting people setting traps, and also cooperate when there are overlapping reports of strays and both the government and ACT for Animals are attempting rescues,” says Hsu. “When reporting illegal trapping we must also identify the individual’s car or scooter plates so the government can track him down.” This can be dangerous — on one occasion McCormack and another volunteer came face to face with unhappy trappers when in the jungle checking cameras. Many of them simply cannot understand why we are “giving them trouble,” Hsu adds, and “of course by definition all hunters are armed.” ACT for Animals also reaches out to licensed hunters to encourage them to use more humane devices, such as boxes, and to let any animals mistakenly caught go free.

Dreams for the Future

“Right now ACT for Animals’ dog sanctuaries are in the process of moving,” Hsu says, as the NGO is maneuvering through the legal licensing procedure. “We’re working with the government and trying to rent government land — flat, with reasonable rent — isolated from heavily populated areas, so we don’t bother the neighbors. We’ll also then be able to take in dogs and cats from the heavily overcrowded public shelters.”

She wants to build sanctuaries that are optimal for those dogs that cannot be adopted — “Aggressive, wild, crippled, disabled, and so on; natural places where they can happily live out their lives.” As well, coordinating with the government, ACT for Animals hopes to build adoption centers right in Taipei and other cities that are “Not too close to people but are also not too far away.” Each would hold 20 to 30 “easy” dogs for people to come view, encouraging adoption. With this type of setting, adoptions will hopefully go up, thus avoiding facility overloading and freeing resources to enable more rescues and rehabilitations.

“This type of endeavor has never been tried before,” Hsu says, “but I’m determined to forge forward, and coordination will be necessary with the Department of Agriculture, animal protection offices, units in control of government property, and various other concerned public bodies.” Hsu remains optimistic about the future of public awareness and rescue/rehabilitation work, saying, “I am sure that, working in concert, we can do it!”



4. Hsu hopes to build more spacious and comfortable sanctuaries in the future to care for animals.



Muslim-Friendly Taipei Collecting Cuisines from the Islamic World

Author

Kuan Yuan Chu

Photographer

Kuan Yuan Chu, Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen

1

Taipei City was recently lauded as the “Most Promising Muslim-friendly City Destination of the Year (non-OIC)” by the Halal In Travel Global Summit 2023. The honor not only highlights the city’s open-mindedness to diverse cultures, but also draws attention to the effort put in by the Taipei City Government and its residents in creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for visitors from around the globe.

The Islamic cultural landscape in Taipei is forged in part by the interaction between those from different Islamic regions in the world, such as Indonesian, Malaysian, Mid-East, and Chinese Muslims, and their characters can be found in the beautiful and

delectable Muslim cuisines to be spotted in Taipei. The Muslim cuisine in Taipei has a wide range of diversity. However, one thing they will certainly share is they are all halal.

The word *Halal* in Arabic means “permissible,” and halal food refers to those processed according to Islamic law defined in the *Koran*. The rules include that pork should not be included in any of the dishes, the animals should be slaughtered in a certain way, and the butcher should recite a dedication in the process.

With the cultural context of Taiwan, the styles of restaurants recommended here are related to

Southeast Asia, South Asia, and China. As these areas are widely renowned for their culinary prowess, numerous flavorful herbs and spices from the Maritime Silk Road areas can be expected in these gourmet halal dishes, such as Nasi Padang (beef rice) and South Asian milk tea. Enjoy!

Malayan-Style: Malaysia Kitchen in Taiwan

Inside the Neihu Technology Park, Nur Adibah binti Adammi and her restaurant, Malaysia Kitchen in Taiwan (大馬廚房), are here to greet all people with warm Asian-style hospitality.

The best-seller in the restaurant is Ayam Goreng Berempah. The chicken is marinated with spices and then fried, making it juicy and delicious. It pairs nicely with the Southeast Asian-style sauce and other side dishes. This dish brings satisfaction to everyone who adores Asian food.

The restaurant proudly states that their Nasi Lemak is the best in Taiwan. By steaming the ingredients with coconut water and adding various kinds of herbs, the Nasi Lemak is full of aromatic plant smells and tastes.

Spiced milk tea, otherwise known as Masala Chai, provides a smooth blend of milk and tea, and several spices are used to bring its aroma to the fullest.

1. An assortment of fish, chicken and lamb kebabs on a platter, a signature dish from Muslim-owned restaurants. (Photo • Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen) | 2. Malaysia Kitchen in Taiwan is run by a Malay owner, providing delicious Southeast Asian food. (Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu)



Thus, like the Nasi Lemak, it is distinctly rich with herbal flavors.

From the words of Ms. Adammi, a kind of pride can be found in providing other Muslims a place with all kinds of tasty halal foods. She sends a warm welcome to other Muslims, saying with a smile, “I just want them to know that there are other halals that they can go and explore, so don’t be afraid to come!”

Indian-Style: Ali Baba’s Indian Kitchen

Ali Baba’s Indian Kitchen (阿里巴巴的廚房) is one of the finest restaurants of any variety that Taipei has to offer. Established by Pakistani Muslim Muhammad Ali, this establishment is now managed by the second



generation of his devoted family. They grew up in Taipei, ensuring that they can provide authentic dishes born of their culture in the city in which they have deep roots.

Standing in Taipei for more than 30 years, the restaurant insists that all their food is halal and authentically Indian. To achieve this, the chefs, most kitchen equipment, and many spices are carefully chosen and imported from India.

Their Biryani is definitely the dish to have. The spices, vegetables and meat are fried, thus the delicious flavor comes out, and rice is put inside this dish before braising it slowly. Consequently, the color of the rice will be beautifully layered, and then it will be mixed, forming an appetizingly bright dish.

The Tandoori Mix Grill is filled with fish, chicken and lamb kebab. The chicken is marinated in spices and yogurt, and cooked in a tandoor imported from India with charcoal. The kebab and fish are also tasty, making this dish a wonderful, spiced meat feast.

As the second-generation owner Muhammad Usama says, halal dishes and authentic Indian cuisine are here in Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen for both Muslim friends and non-Muslim in Taipei to enjoy.



3. Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen features various delicious Indian dishes. (Photo • Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen) | 4-5. The crispy triangular dumplings stuffed with masala seasoned mashed potatoes and vegetables are called samosas, a delightful appetizer for an Indian feast. (Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu)





6. With notes from many countries as background, Kunming Islamic Restaurant provides exotic Muslim cuisine. (Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu)

Chinese-Style: Kunming Islamic Restaurant

Having lived in South China as Muslims for hundreds of years, owner Yacob Mah's family was part of the enormous number of people who settled in Taiwan during the early half of the 20th century. In 1993, Mah opened Kunming Islamic Restaurant (昆明園) in the name of the city his mother and grandmother came from, Kunming in Southwest China.

One dish that comes highly recommended is the Chilly Shrimp, a Burmese dish with the chef's modification. Not only does the shell-less shrimp taste great with the seasoning, but the taste of shrimp is so strong inside the sauce that it will linger in the mouth, providing pleasant sensations.

The Burmese Cold Tea Salad is another must-try. Making the tea leaves into sauces and mixing them with lavish kinds of vegetables and nuts, the dish is so multi-layered in both taste and aroma that it deliciously weaves the senses of richness and freshness together.

Starting from a Dubain customer who accidentally did not bring enough Taiwanese currency, the innumerable notes with signatures from different countries on the tables showcase the history and the diversity of people who have visited before.

Satisfying Muslims from all over the world for 30 years, Mr. Mah is still full of enthusiasm. "Connecting with Muslims from different countries is really gratifying" he says.

Local Taiwanese-Style: Muslim Beef Noodles Restaurant & Chang's Beef Noodles Shop

Beef noodle dishes are an absolute culinary must-have in Taiwan. For Muslims interested in trying them, Taipei has several halal options to offer, including Muslim Beef Noodles Restaurant (清真黃牛肉麵館) and Chang's Beef Noodles Shop (張家清真黃牛肉麵館).

These two noodle shops have two similar signs of good taste: they both have run their business for more than 60 years, and both establishments have been widely praised in the local media for their time-tested recipes.

At Muslim Beef Noodles Restaurant, the recommended dish is Braised Beef Soup Noodles. The beef inside is cut into large pieces without being too chewy, while the noodles are chewy and thick enough to feel the pleasure of every bite. In the meantime, 12 kinds of Chinese herbs are used when cooking the soup, providing it with a unique and multi-faceted flavor.

Similarly, the Beef Noodles in Chang's Beef Noodles Shop is worth mentioning as well. The beef is served in a healthy portion with great flavor to boot, while the noodles are slimmer by comparison, providing



7. The exterior of Chang's Beef Noodles Shop is simple, yet its steadfast deliciousness has drawn so many gourmet enthusiasts to visit. (Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu) | 8. The braised beef noodles at Muslim Beef Noodles Restaurant feature tender beef, resilient noodles, and a rich flavorful broth. (Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu)



9. Little Indonesia is not only a gateway to Indonesian culture, but also a great culinary treasure with many authentic dishes.
(Photo • Kuan Yuan Chu)

a different but also pleasant experience. The soup provides a deep sensation of satisfaction, as not only the taste of spices can be sensed, but it is also a little bit sweet. Truly, a distinguished dish.

Little Indonesia

Like Chinatowns in many cosmopolitan centers, there are always entrances to other cultures in big cities in the neighborhoods that these cultures are rooted in, that land that overseas citizens develop as a temporary hometown. For Indonesians in Taipei, the road that connects them to their homeland is

Beiping West Road (北平西路), or as the local calls it “Indonesian Street (印尼街).”

Visitors will experience a street scene of the proud southeast Asian nation not solely with the streetscape and the spoken (or happily sung in karaoke) language. The smells and tastes of Indonesian cuisine will cooperate with other sensations, transporting people to a place where the tongue and the stomach will both be pleased by the remarkably strong flavors Indonesia has to offer.

A must-try on this culinary journey is the world-renowned Nasi Padang. Cooked with many spices,



the dish deserves all the praise it receives. Versatile in the ways of fulfilling people's desire for delicious food through different flavors, those varying tastes never clash. Best enjoyed with colorful side dishes, this is a true classic.

As you wander the streets, you'll easily spot many vendors expertly grilling satay, an experience not to be missed. The freshly barbecued meat with the satay sauce and vegetables is so good that the juxtaposition of salty and sweet strongly persuades people to have a second or third helping.

Taipei — A Muslim-Friendly City

There are more than 60 Muslim-friendly restaurants and accommodations in Taipei. Additionally, over 30 sightseeing spots and public places are equipped with Muslim prayer rooms or bidet facilities.

Besides these installations, Taipei is also embracing Islamic culture as a part of its spiritual diversity. *Eid-al-Fitr* events are held every year to celebrate this important day as a whole city.

On Taipei Travel Net (travel.taipei), the Halal Travel Guide section is also set to provide useful information such as the locations of Mosques and prayer rooms. Suggested itineraries can also be found on this page.

This year, from September to December, the Taipei City Government cooperates with local businesses presenting the "Singapore & Malaysia Tourist Exclusive Package (星馬旅客限定專案)," welcoming Muslim visitors with souvenirs, discounts, and experiential activities. 



► Halal Travel Guide

Malaysia Kitchen in Taiwan

ADD 251, Ruiguang Rd., Neihu Dist.
HOURS Tue. to Sun. 11:30am – 2:30pm
5:30pm – 8:30pm

Ali Baba's Indian Kitchen

ADD 2F, 56, Sec. 2, Nanjing E. Rd.,
Zhongshan Dist.
HOURS Sat. to Thu. 11:30am – 3:00pm
5:30pm – 10:00pm
Fri. 5:30pm – 10:00pm

Kunming Islamic Restaurant

ADD 26, Ln. 81, Fuxing N. Rd.,
Songshan Dist.
HOURS Mon. to Fri. 11:30am – 2:00pm
5:30pm – 9:00pm
Sat. 5:30pm – 9:00pm

Muslim Beef Noodles Restaurant

ADD 23, Yanping S. Rd.,
Zhongzheng Dist.
HOURS Tue. to Sun. 10:30am – 8:00pm

Chang's Beef Noodles Shop

ADD 21, Yanping S. Rd.,
Zhongzheng Dist.
HOURS Sun. to Sat. 10:00am – 7:30pm



Lunar New Year's Eve Taiwanese Style: A Table of Lucky Dishes

Author
Photographer

Yi Tseng
Golden Formosa, Know-Sticky Oil Rice, Iris Huang, Stanley Wang, April Chen, Kerstin Hsu,
Michael Kuo, Crystal, Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government

1

The essence of Taiwanese cuisine lies in its cross-regional and diverse influences. Early migrations of Min and Yue people, cultural impacts from the Japanese era during the first half of the 20th century, and the arrival of millions of refugees after the Chinese Civil War have all contributed to a rich tapestry.

Despite their diverse cultural backgrounds and languages, these disparate communities share the use of the traditional Chinese lunar calendar. As a result, on the night of Lunar New Year's Eve, everyone returns home to prepare a sumptuous feast, following traditional customs of lucky homonyms, such as having fish for “surplus every year (年年有餘),” sycee-shaped dumplings for “welcoming wealth and treasures (招財進寶),” rice cakes for “rising fortunes

year by year (年年高升),” and sitting around the hot pot to form the “roundness” symbol for “family reunion (團圓).”

The varied preparations of these common ingredients showcase the cultural context of each family. Let's unveil the secrets of a Taiwanese Lunar New Year's Eve dinner, often considered the most important meal of the year.

Fish Dishes: Surplus Every Year

Taiwanese people express their humble hopes for the new year with the wish for “harvest with surplus.”

As the Chinese pronunciation of fish sounds like surplus (餘), fish dishes symbolizing good luck are indispensable. Moreover, for the New Year's Eve dinner, fish dishes should not be completely consumed, to practice the true meaning of "surplus."

Rong Rong Yuan (榮榮園) is highly recommended by food critics and Bib Gourmand. Its horsehead tilefish with stuffed tofu (馬頭魚燒豆腐) captures the rich flavors of Jiangsu and Zhejiang cuisine. For a more affordable option, deep-fried carp simmered with scallions (蔥燻鯽魚) at the long-established Yi-Chang Yufang (億長御坊) is both slightly sweet and sour, appealing to adults and children alike.

For those seeking a taste of high-end fish dishes, the steamed grouper or marble goby at well-regarded Shin Tung Nan Seafood (新東南海鮮餐廳) enjoys a stellar reputation. Young families with an open-minded approach to tradition may opt for fresh

sashimi from the Addiction Aquatic Development (上引水產), adding a refreshing and stylish touch to the dining table.

Dumplings: Welcoming Wealth and Treasures

The shape of dumplings resembles ancient Chinese currency known as "yuanbao (元寶)," i.e., sycee, a fairly popular symbol of prosperity during the Lunar New Year. The tradition of eating dumplings on New Year's Eve signifies ushering in wealth and becoming rich in the coming year. Hence, famous dumpling shops in Taiwan often see long lines in the days leading up to the Lunar New Year.

Notable examples include scallop dumplings from Takumi Dumplings (巧之味), said to be President Tsai Ing-wen's favorite, or the frozen dumplings of myriad



1. On Lunar New Year's Eve, the whole family gathers together to have a reunion dinner, often with a hot pot sitting in the center of a round table. (Photo • Golden Formosa) | 2-3. Fish dishes symbolizing "harvest with surplus" are indispensable. Modern families may opt for sashimi for a contrast of flavors. (Left • Michael Kuo ; Right • Stanley Wang)



4. Eating dumplings on Lunar New Year's Eve means ushering in wealth and becoming rich in the coming year, as the shape of dumplings is similar to that of ancient Chinese currency, "yuanbao." (Photo • Crystal)

fillings and seasonings in each Taipei resident's freezer, such as those from A-Yu Dumplings (阿玉水餃). If you can't reunite with family for the Lunar New Year, these easy-to-cook yet delicious dumplings can surely provide a welcome sense of ritual.

Buddha Jumps Over the Wall: Happiness, Longevity and Well-being

The top dish of Taiwanese pot cuisine, Buddha Jumps Over the Wall (佛跳牆), uses a variety of delicacies including premium squid, scallops, winter bamboo shoots,

5. The name of "Buddha Jumps Over the Wall" comes from the notion that even the vegetarian Buddha would climb over the wall to enjoy this dish, so irresistible is the alluring aroma. (Photo • Golden Formosa)

chicken, and ham. It is so fragrant that it's said the vegetarian Buddha would climb over the wall for it after catching its irresistible aroma. Therefore, this dish is also known as Buddha's delicacy.

Each ingredient needs to be processed separately and then cooked together. Due to the complicated process, modern families usually choose to order it from restaurants like Golden Formosa (金蓬萊遵古台菜). Their MICHELIN star shines so bright that reservations must be made at least two weeks in advance.

Rice Cakes: Rising Fortunes Year By Year

Every traditional market boasts several stalls selling rice cakes (年糕), turnip cakes (蘿蔔糕), and other traditional pastries that end with the sound "gao," which is a homophone for "rising." Each kitchen manager responsible for sourcing food has their preferred rice cakes vendor, and compromise is out of the question.



Turnip cakes from Xing Ji Food (興記) at Dongmen Market (東門市場), the various rice cakes from Red Turtle Uncle (紅龜伯) on Sanshui Street (三水街) in Wanhua (萬華)— each has its own loyal supporters. Of course, if there's a family member skilled in making traditional pastries, a homemade rice cake featured in your New Year's Eve table photo will undoubtedly win the most likes on social media, as rice cakes' auspicious meaning reflects Taiwanese people's strong desire for good things to happen in the new year.

Mullet Roe: Prospering Family with Many Offspring

During winter, mullet migrate to southern Taiwan to spawn. Their rich, roe-filled sacs are harvested, then

dried in the sun for several weeks, turned regularly until fully dried. Thus, the mullet roe is rich in flavor and full of texture!

While farmed mullet roe is available in the market, the highest quality is still the wild-caught variety, as it's considered a rare and luxurious treat. It's not something that people get to eat every day. When celebrating the Lunar New Year, a platter of mullet roe is a must-have to make the occasion grand, and the abundant eggs are taken as a good omen of many offspring and a prosperous family.

The preparation is straightforward: slice the mullet roe and lightly grill it in an iron pan, or over an open fire.

Remember to be careful to maintain its moist texture in the center. Serve with sliced daikon radish, garlic, or even apple for those who fancy a touch of sweetness. It creates a flavorful and sumptuous taste in the mouth.



6-7. People prepare traditional pastries that end with the sound “gao” to hope for rising fortunes. (Photo • Know-Sticky Oil Rice) | **8.** A platter of mullet roe expresses the meaning of a prospering family with many offspring. (Photo • Kerstin Hsu)





9



10

9-10. Dihua Street in Dadaocheng hosts one of the most famous events in Taipei — Taipei Lunar New Year Festival. Free samples are offered by stalls along the street, tempting visitors to give it a try. (Above • Iris Huang ; Below • Department of Information and Tourism, Taipei City Government)

Before the Lunar New Year, those in Taipei usually head to Dihua Street (迪化街) in Dadaocheng to shop at the “Taipei Lunar New Year Festival (台北年貨大街)” and purchase mullet roe along with other festive items. Even foreign tourists, upon visiting Dihua Street, would be easily tempted to try a slice of mullet roe, often offered at shops as a free sample. This is one of the most delicious traditional island delicacies on Taiwanese dining tables.

Hot Pot: Family Reunion

While western societies gather around long tables for significant feasts, typical Taiwanese tables are round, with the center hosting the most important dish of



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11. Hot pots can take various forms. Spicy hot pot is especially popular among younger generations. (Photo • April Chen)

the evening. On Lunar New Year's Eve, this position is often occupied by a hot pot. The roundness formed by the broth in the pot, the table, and the family seated around together indicates a happy family reunion.

Hot pots can take various forms — pre-cooked or with raw ingredients prepared for guests to cook themselves. Due to the festive occasion, ingredients must be abundant, ensuring excess to avoid any semblance of disrespect, and again, to conform with the idea of “surplus.”

Spicy hot pot, a favorite among the younger generation, sees Ding Wang Spicy Hot Pot (鼎旺麻辣鍋) packed with customers as the winter chills set in and

Lunar New Year approaching. Large numbers of people often queue to take away the broth and pair it with meat and vegetables purchased from the market. Egg dumplings from Mr. Chang Hot Pot Food Shop (南門魚丸店) at Nanmen Market (南門市場) are highly sought-after hot pot ingredients. Its popularity leads to long queues and the use of a number-ticket waiting system before the Lunar New Year.

The essence of the Lunar New Year lies in reunion, and the bountiful New Year's dishes call back family members who have been adventuring outside. On Lunar New Year's Eve, family members enjoy delicious food and stay up late chatting, symbolizing welcoming the new year with a fresh start and hope for a prosperous future. 1

A photograph of Robin Ruizendaal, a man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark blue shirt. He is holding a traditional Taiwanese glove puppet (waay) with a white face, a crown with blue and gold ornaments, and a red and gold robe. The background shows a room with framed pictures on the wall and a bed with colorful bedding.

Keeping Traditional Taiwanese Puppetry Art Alive with Robin Ruizendaal

Author
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Taiwanese glove puppetry is not only a traditional art form, but also one of the few local performing arts to have modernized for contemporary audiences. Today, the traditional and the modern coexist: old-style puppet theater is staged for gods and humans alike, while puppet-based television dramas remain popular across generations. Taiwanese puppetry has also attracted global interest, including committed puppetry practitioners and preservationists.

Robin Ruizendaal is one such practitioner. Originally from the Netherlands, Robin holds a Ph.D. in Chinese Studies from Leiden University and has been living in Taiwan for 33 years. He was the director at the Taiyuan Asian Puppet Theatre Museum (台原亞洲偶戲博物館), and in collaboration with the Chairman

of the Taiyuan Arts and Culture Foundation (台原藝術文化基金會), Dr. Lin Jingfu (林經甫), established the Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company (台原偶戲團) in 1997. Following the closure of both the museum and the company in 2020, Dr. Lin generously contributed over ten thousand pieces related to puppet theater to the National Taiwan Museum (國立台灣博物館).

Robin's remarkable efforts in promoting Taiwanese puppetry earned him the honor of becoming an honorary citizen of Taipei City and receiving the Taiwan-France Culture Award in 2019.

Currently, Robin is actively involved in projects in Taiwan, Japan, and Malaysia. He also lectures at National Dong Hwa University (國立東華大學) in

Hualien, while continuing his research at Dr. Lin's Collection within the National Taiwan Museum, where he is planning an upcoming exhibition.

Life in Taiwan

Before moving to Taiwan, Robin spent several years in China, primarily engaged in fieldwork focused on marionette theater in southern China and its relation to religion and social change in China since the 1920s.

"In 1991, I came to Taipei and really enjoyed Taiwan as a contrast to China. As someone who studies Chinese society, it's kept more of the original way of living, including its religion and social relationships. It was a real eye-opener for me, so I really liked it here," Robin says.

Regarding the intersection of politics, culture and puppetry art, Robin notes, "What's essential in Chinese culture is the religious life organized around ancestor worship, local temples. North of the Yangtze River, the Chinese Communist Party has eradicated this essential culture, which is sort of a moral compass of life, which has been sort of replaced by Communist ideology, which doesn't really work, according to me."



The Art and Culture of Taiwanese Puppetry

Puppetry is an "Art of the people," according to Robin. With about 200 active companies, it's the most common form of both modern and traditional theater in Taiwan.

Traditionally speaking, its continued popularity is partially due to the fact that this art of the people is not just for the people: it's for deities. Puppet theater can be found at temples across Taiwan as a gift to the gods rather than a human audience. In fact, sometimes there is no mortal audience at all.

Temple performances have specific elements including a religious prelude and a blessing of the community and the gods. Secular performances may follow similar storylines and include religious characters such as gods and buddhas, but "Lack the direct religious relationship with the community," Robin says.



1. Robin has dedicated a large portion of his life to Taiwanese glove puppetry. | 2-3. Robin introducing the puppet from *Marco Polo*. This play is a collaborative project between Robin and Taiwan's national treasure puppeteer Chen Shih-Huang (陳錫煌). It features dialogues in Italian and Taiwanese Hokkien, combining traditional and innovative elements in a new classical theater performance.



In fact, many archetypal characters — stock characters in puppetry performances who can be used in a variety of stories and scenes — are particularly pleasing to the gods, and they're not always the ones you'd expect. For example, there's the "striptease" character, who is usually given a real body instead of a typical cloth body.

"The gods are human in their tastes," Robin explains.

Other stock characters popular in both religious and secular performances include the Comic Lead (笑生), whom Robin quips is "The rich kid of the family, always stupid, never getting the girl, being mean to everyone who's lower class, obsequious to the higher class, an opportunistic little bastard, and very funny."

There are also archetypal male and female characters, such as the successful graduate of imperial exams and his beautiful, patient, but long-suffering wife. Robin calls this "A sort of a class in Chinese culture, how to behave as a man and a woman, and represent the whole palate of traditional Chinese society, with lots of bawdy humor."

Observing and Advocating for Puppetry in Taiwan

Taiwan is particularly important to the preservation of puppet culture. Robin notes, "What makes Taiwan

unique in the world, since the 1960s, there have been television puppetry TV series and movies. Taiwan is the only place where you can go to a convenience store and buy a puppet show DVD."

In Taiwan, puppetry had a very natural development. This melded with influences from Japanese and American films, resulting in, as he describes it, "A very postmodern form of performing arts."

Robin continues, "In the 1950s and 1960s, you had this enormously creative era where almost anything goes on stage. People started using music such as Beethoven and the theme from *Hawaii Five-O*."

The appearance of glove puppets in Taiwan has also undergone significant changes over the years. In the past, small carved heads were the norm, and smaller eyes were part of the beauty standard. Nowadays, modern puppets often look like K-pop stars with big eyes and narrow chins.

In the 1950s and 1960s, there were major developments in the history of Taiwanese-style puppetry because it opened up many artistic avenues. "The weirdest characters and puppets were — and are — being made," Robin says.

Robin studied theater in the Netherlands, but left when he was quite young. As such, his focus is on preserving puppetry art in his long-term home, Taiwan. He originally chose to study puppetry because, in his words, he "Wanted to study something

really grassroots that nobody knew, related to music, sculpture, embroidery.”

He said that being a foreigner in Taiwan means being “different,” but after living here for so many years, it has become his norm. He acknowledges that some people find this adjustment more difficult than others.

Over his three decades in Taiwan, Robin has staged performances in just about every well-known venue in the country, from Taipei Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂), the National Theater & Concert Hall (國家兩廳院), to The Red House (西門紅樓) in Ximending.

In addition to his other projects, he is currently developing a musical theater performance for Tainan City’s 400th anniversary celebration next year, which will be performed at Tainan’s Chihkan Tower (赤崁樓) as well as in Taipei.

Leveling Up: Aiming for a Global Audience

Outside Taiwan, Robin is involved in many projects aimed at introducing Taiwanese puppetry to international audiences. He is designing a small museum in Penang, Malaysia, while also developing a performance and workshop in Osaka, Japan that is devoted to nurturing students into curators of traditional performing arts.

4-5. Robin is introducing the evolution of puppet facial features. With the rising influence of K-pop culture, puppet faces have also transformed to become more slender. | **6.** *Taipei by Night* will be staged as part of the 400th anniversary celebration of Tainan City.

As for performances with international appeal, Robin mentions *Taipei by Night* (台北古城), a production from the 2000s that portrayed the story of Taipei, spanning from the Japanese era to the modern day. Notably, the performance was entirely musical.

That show is no longer in theaters. However, if you are interested in puppet theater, you may want to plan ahead for the Tainan 400th anniversary celebration show in April 2024.

Taiwanese puppetry still holds great potential to attract international audiences, despite the challenges it currently faces. In Asia, the entertainment value of traditional puppet theater is mostly on the decline. Robin observes that many kids who attend puppet shows may think, “I’ve seen a glove puppet show once, so I don’t need to see another.” It’s difficult to retain its entertainment function.

Therefore, while preservation efforts in Taiwan and across Asia are vital, global interest also matters, which has helped drive Robin’s focus. ⬇



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