



PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
FROM LEFT Street food vendor; Hot pot ingredients.

ELYSE GLICKMAN

TASTES OF

Taiwan's Heartland

by ELYSE GLICKMAN

AS ASIAN-STYLE night markets and street food continue to capture the imagination of people around the world, some adventurous eaters are looking to go back to basics wherever they travel. And the basics in Taiwan, though simple at first glance, are anything but boring.»



Taiwan

WHERE ON EARTH

THE 2025 EDITION of Taiwan's annual Lantern Festival, staged in Taoyuan, minutes from Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, featured a night market area and an agricultural pavilion alongside the lanterns... some of which outshone fireworks and drone light shows. That said, exploring the elements of Taiwanese cuisine at their points of origin can be equally exciting.

My travel companions and I made our way from the airport to Sun Moon Lake by van. The rural landscapes along the highways to Yuchi Township were subdued given spring had yet to arrive. Specialty food shops and convenience stores inside sprawling truck stops, in contrast, burst with colour. Shelves of sweets and savoury snacks in artistic packaging were as attention-grabbing as the food floors of high-end Tokyo department stores. Train stations in Kaohsiung and Taichung City were similarly lively. Even with competition from Starbucks and a handful of international food chains, micro-local food producers draw in commuters and tourists with vibrant displays, packaging and food samples.

INGENIOUS INDIGENOUS

The four-star Wyndham Sun Moon Lake hotel, opened in June 2024, is winning raves for its contemporary design, upscale room amenities, spa, and a sprawling breakfast buffet featuring lots of fresh local fruit and interesting fusions of Eastern and Western ingredients. However, one of its best draws may be its proximity to Thao Old Street, just outside one of its main entrances. While the market covers only a few city blocks, the depth of what's available is impressive and the market comes alive at night like its big city cousins. In addition to aromatic kiosks and pocket-sized shops specialising in one or a small number of delicacies, there are places where one can sample liqueurs, rice wines and desserts that are equal parts approachable and exotic.

Regardless of how fancy or casual the restaurant, "Lazy Susan" service is ubiquitous throughout Taiwan and even more so in Sun Moon Lake. Multi-course experiences are front and centre and served family style, whether the customer mixes and matches items from an a la carte menu or opts for a pre-set selection. Reservations are a must and guests need to be punctual as the owners are likely to have just enough provisions on hand for the people in a given party.

Some visitors who came to Lusi'an Restaurant Sun Moon Lake Cuisine at dinner hour, unaware of the unspoken yet well-established reservation rules, were turned away but politely informed that spots were available on other days. Lunch and dinner service at Sun Moon Lake Hsin Shan Wei/Flavors Restaurant is handled the same way. Once the dishes start coming out, one instantly understands why capacity is restricted and the kitchens are so insistent on having just enough ingredients for the different courses.

At Hsin Shan Wei, some of dishes we ordered at lunch, including a nutty green salad served in a hollow ice egg and steamed freshwater fish in soybean sauce, would be right at home in any of Taipei's Michelin-star restaurants. Simply»

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Food as art at Silks Palace; Lantern Festival lucky cats; Street scene near Wyndham Sun Moon Lake; Sun Moon Lake Hsin Shan Wei fish dish; Xin Dian Hotpot broths.



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TAIWAN

SERVES 4

Braised Beef Noodle Soup

AT COOKINN Taiwan cooking school in Taipei, we learned that braised beef noodle soup originated in 1949 when members of the Republic of China government fled to Taiwan. Homesick soldiers and their families experimented with recipes to recreate the taste of home.

The Base

Boneless Beef Shank 800 g

Scallion 1, white and green parts separated and chopped

Fresh Ginger 1 inch piece, sliced

Rice Wine 1 Tbs

Water 8 cups

To Braise

Onion 1, chopped

Chili Bean Sauce 3 Tbs

Soy Sauce 4 Tbs

Rice Wine 3 Tbs

Chinese Herbs

Sichuan Peppercorns 2 g

Star Anise 1 whole

Dried Tangerine Peel (chenpi) 2 g

Cassia Bark (Chinese cinnamon) 2 g

Noodles

Chinese Wheat Noodles 400 g

Leafy Greens 1 handful

Chinese Pickled Mustard Greens 1 Tbs

1 IN a stock pot, add beef shanks, ginger slices, green scallions, rice wine, and water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes.

2 TRANSFER the meat to a cutting board and cut into 1 cm-thick slices.

3 POUR the beef broth through a sieve into a cooking pot and discard the solids.

4 HEAT a wok or frying pan with oil. Add the Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, chenpi and cassia bark. Stir-fry until fragrant then put the herbs into a cheesecloth or empty tea sachet. Tie it up.

5 HEAT the wok or pan with oil again, and stir-fry the onions and white parts of scallions.

6 ADD the chili bean sauce, soy sauce and rice wine. Bring the mixture to a boil.

7 ADD the braised meat and herb packet to the pot. Reduce the heat and cook, covered, for 60 minutes.

8 COOK the noodles and leafy greens in another pot of boiling water.

9 COMBINE everything into individual serving bowls and serve warm with pickled mustard greens.



STEVE WERTZ

SERVES 4

Three Cup Chicken

THE EQUAL amounts of sesame oil, soy sauce and rice wine used in this classic recipe are called “cups” but are a measure of about two ounces. The dish can be made ahead and reheats well.

Soy Sauce

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup

Shaoxing Wine

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup

Toasted Sesame Oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup

Sugar

2 tsp

Peanut Oil

1 Tbs

Garlic

8 cloves, peeled

Ginger

1 inch piece, thinly sliced

Chicken Thigh Meat

2 lbs, cut into large pieces

Scallions

6, sliced on the bias

Star Anise

2 whole

Fresh Red Chili Peppers

6, or to taste

Basil Leaves

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup

- 1 **COMBINE** the soy sauce, rice wine and sesame oil in a small bowl, add the sugar and stir well to dissolve.
- 2 **HEAT** the peanut oil in a wok or skillet and add the garlic and ginger. Stir-fry over high heat for 30 seconds. Add the chicken pieces and stir-fry until lightly browned, 2-3 minutes.
- 3 **ADD** the scallions and chili peppers and stir-fry another minute. Add the soy sauce mixture and star anise. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover the pan, and simmer for 10-12 minutes, until the chicken is cooked through.
- 4 **RAISE** the heat to high and cook uncovered, tossing the chicken pieces to coat evenly, until the sauce is thick and sticky.
- 5 **STIR** in the basil leaves and serve with steamed rice.



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PHOTOS THIS SPREAD CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Sun Moon Lake Walkway; Fish farming in Sanliao Bay; Shrimp dish at Lusi'an Restaurant; Hiafeng Train treats, Huang Guoliang explains the future of fish farming.



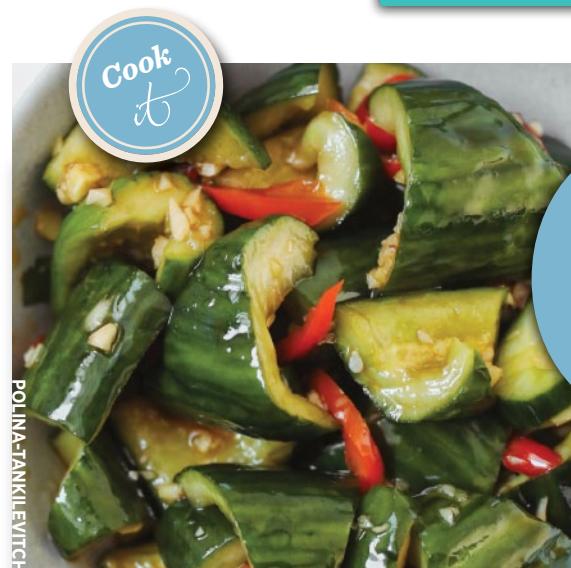
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presented items, such as chilled bamboo, clear mushroom soup, aboriginal-style roasted pork, and crispy lake shrimp all benefitted from savoury and complex seasoning. At Lusi'an Restaurant, some of the items we ordered for dinner (lake shrimp, roasted pork, mixed mushrooms) were conversation starters. Others, including sticky rice and chicken, tofu smothered in hot sauce, and water bamboo gratin — perhaps Lusi'an's aboriginal answer to pizza — were surprisingly addictive. At both venues, the Lazy Susan got a workout, and shared platters emptied quickly.

FISH TO TABLE

Tainan City, Taiwan's former capital in the southwest of the country, is regarded as a culinary capital richer than Taipei as there are numerous restaurants committed to serving representations of native food culture going back generations. The exemplary Michelin Bib Gourmand-acclaimed Chang Ying Seafood House, on the rural outskirts of town in the community of Sanliao Bay, is a hidden gem and ultimate "sustainable" food experience. Prospective guests who get wind of its buzz are encouraged to confirm dietary limitations of those in their party as, like its Sun Moon Lake counterparts, the kitchen only sources just enough raw ingredients.

The mother-daughter team of Huang Ying Qing and Xie Jia Xin completed Taiwan's Council of Agriculture's 'Tian Ma Ma' program, which prepares rural women to transform family cottage industries into viable businesses that prepare and sell local specialties while preserving the nation's culinary heritage. At Chang Ying, additive-free and EU-certified milkfish from the family's fish farm are served in many delicious forms. There is a tempura-fried preparation as well as a signature milkfish fillet aged and seared in its own oil to achieve the perfect crispness and umami. The house specialty, three-cup milkfish sausage, was as easy to dive into as popcorn thanks to its texture and savoury flavour profile. The owners explained that the sausage base, which recently earned certification for export to Europe, is made with a cold dry technique that turns the dorsal fin



POLINA-TANKILEVITCH

SERVES 4

Cucumber Salad

THE RECIPE for this popular local side dish is from CookInn Taiwan.

Persian or Telegraph Cucumbers
2

Fresh Red Chili Pepper
1, sliced

Garlic
3 cloves, chopped

Sugar 2 Tbs

Fresh Lemon Juice
2 Tbs

Salt $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp

Sesame Oil
a few drops, to taste

1 CUT the ends off the cucumbers and cut into four pieces.

2 SMASH the cucumbers with the flat side of a large knife, and break pieces into smaller chunks, discarding the seeds.

3 PLACE the cucumbers, red chiles and sugar into a covered bowl and shake.

4 ADD salt, lemon juice, sesame oil and garlic. Toss to coat.

5 CHILL for 30 minutes in the refrigerator before serving.

rich in oils and fats into a fish product that can be used in a variety of dishes.

As part of a special package offered by the restaurant, the dining experience can be extended to include a visit to the family fish farm. Huang Guoliang, Xie Jia Xin's uncle, explains that his farm and methods go beyond feeding people and supplying restaurants, also giving back to nature, and raising fish to prevent future overfishing.

Guests are asked to carefully step onto the plastic fishing platforms where Huang demonstrates how milkfish and other freshwater species are raised and humanely harvested. He also addresses how the »

Tea & Cakes

HOW OFTEN does one have an opportunity to enjoy tea with a 90-something founder of a long-established tea producer who knows his legacy is set, even with so many competitors? On the outskirts of Yuchi and the Sun Moon Lake Region, Shih Chao Xin started operating the company Chi-Mu Black Tea Factory (now known as HugoSum) in 1949 during the years of Japanese occupation. Under his direction, the company was dedicated to producing black tea whose quality was so high it was also known as "Tea Gold." Even with competitors making profits on less expensive teas and blends and other teas becoming trendy, his instincts led him to believe the best black tea would always be in style.

Daughter Shih Zhu Hua, along with husband Chen Yen Quan, continued the family business to extend her father's legacy with a goal of establishing a "renaissance of Taiwan black tea." In 2005, Hugosum Black Tea Garden opened with a mission to educate tea novices and connoisseurs about the black tea industry and the nuances between the different expressions they produce for service in their tea garden and for their beautifully appointed store.

Fine tea can also be savoured aboard the Haifeng ("Sea Breeze") Dessert Train, overseen by Lion Travel and Taiwan Railway Company. The first visual "wow" moment is like stepping into a giant Tiffany gift box. Art Deco-flavoured interiors act as a bridge between a bygone era of rail travel and the present-day artform of Instagrammable premium desserts. After a butler welcomes passengers aboard the train, they stroll past macaron and souvenir displays into one of four softly lit carriages. Ocean-inspired music and diffused green-note fragrance waft through the air. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the vistas outside, while the relatively slow speed of the train (less than 20 miles per hour) compels passengers to take in and appreciate the journey's multi-sensory elements.

Desserts and savoury bites are served *umikaze*-style in jewelry box-inspired packaging and accompanied with a tea of choice (coffee and cocktails are available for an extra charge). After stops at various cultural spots and nature lookouts along the route (which changes seasonally), the journey concludes with a scoop of ice cream or sorbet by Minimal, the world's only Michelin-starred ice cream at press time.

«methods he uses counter the controversies surrounding fish farming practices elsewhere in the world, stressing that the flavour and freshness of fish is determined by the conditions in which they are raised. In addition to adding biodiversity to the fish farm environment, he is also passionate about passing his knowledge on to other fish farmers.

Back at Chang Ying, Huang freezes and then slices the day's catch with surgical precision using special knives in his possession. As we compare different cuts of fish from his farm, he explains he will no longer go out for sushi because he trusts his products and practices more. At the first melt-in-your-mouth bite, we don't blame him.

Up the road from Chang Ying, a visit to the Jingzajiao Tile-Paved Salt Fields adds extra perspective to Taiwan's food culture. They originated as the Laidong Salt Field during the Qing Dynasty, but were moved to Taiwan in 1818, making them the oldest existing salt fields in Taiwan. The arts of salt drying, salt gathering and salt harvesting have endured for more than two centuries. The shop shows how sea salt can not only be used to season food but also be part of one's wellness routine in toothpaste, haircare, skincare, and more. Soft-serve ice cream integrating the salt is surprisingly refreshing.

KEEPING IT REAL IN TAIPEI

As one would expect from a Michelin-touted hotel, the Grand HiLai Taipei serves an expansive East-meets-West breakfast. However, sampling breakfast bites at the Changchun Market in Longzhou Village in the Songshan neighbourhood is too good to pass up, with Fu Hang Dou Jiang and Yonghe Soy Milk regarded as two of the best breakfast spots. Even in the humble setting, ten US dollars buys a luxurious spread with one or two of pretty much everything on the menu and a soymilk drink. *Sao bing youtiao* (thin flatbread wrapping a crispy Chinese doughnut and egg), *dan bing* (thin flatbread with egg and scallions), egg rolls (which here are stuffed omelets), generous bao, and various stuffed and plain fried and baked breads make for an unforgettable breakfast.

The founders of Taipei's CookInn Cooking School know visitors often leave Taiwan wishing they could reproduce their favourite bites back home. The foundational class offered at its two locations focuses on the preparation of *xiao long bao*, the ever-popular soup dumpling served everywhere from night markets and mom-and-pop eateries to white tablecloth restaurants. The comprehensive Taiwanese Xiao Long Bao & Noodles Class, meanwhile, is a three-hour multi-course immersion that includes step-by-step preparations for soup dumplings, hearty braised beef noodle soup, smashed cucumber salad, and bubble milk tea. At the end, participants leave with a personalised recipe book and a photo of themselves in action.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM LEFT
View from the Wyndham Sun Moon Lake Hotel;
Breakfast at Changchung Market; Salted ice cream at the Jingzaijiao salt fields.



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HugoSum Tea Garden
www.hugosum.com.tw/en/pages/sdgs

Lusi'an Restaurant Sun Moon Lake Cuisine
www.lusihan.com.tw

Sun Moon Lake Hsin Shan Wei Restaurant
No. 134, Zhongshan Rd., Yuchi Township, Yuchi

Wyndham Sun Moon Lake
www.wyndhamsunmoonlake.com

Chang Ying Seafood House
www.facebook.com/milkfish.dragon

Jingzaijiao Salt Fields
www.facebook.com/JingZaiJiaoTilePavedSaltFields

CookInn Cooking School
www.cookinn.tw/en

Silks Palace
www.silkspalace.com.tw/en

HiLai Grand Taipei
www.grand-hilai.com.tw/taipei/

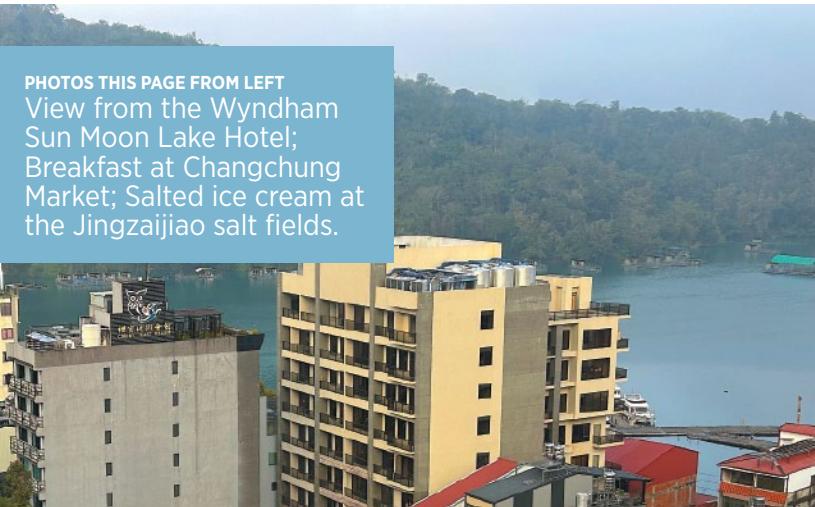
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Travel in Taiwan
www.travelintaiwan.net/

Sun Moon Lake
www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw/en



Ziu Weng Yugang Seafood, a neon-lit dining institution in the Songshan neighbourhood, is an oasis where shareable fried, sautéed, seasoned, spicy and sauced fish and seafood reign supreme. The night we are there, young models promote Taiwan Beer, whose lightweight body and flavour complement the food and clean the palate. Hotpot restaurants are also a local favourite, and a few minutes' walk from landmark Taipei 101 lands you at Xin Dian Hotpot. The modern, cheerfully lit location offers vegetarian options as well as a two-broth pot guaranteed to please both hardcore spice lovers and those favouring milder profiles. One can pick and choose extras from a self-serve condiments bar to add heat or texture to the broth, and meats and vegetables can be mixed and matched from the menu.

From Sun Moon Lake to Tainan's outskirts and Taipei's residential neighbourhoods, food-related attractions and micro-local restaurants offer a deep-dive education in Taiwan's food traditions. The families behind them have established solid followings for their interpretations of traditions, preparations and recipes that go back generations. From there, hopes are high among purveyors that they can ultimately carry those traditions into the future and beyond Taiwan's borders.

ELYSE GLICKMAN is a freelance writer and regular contributor to TASTE&TRAVEL based in Los Angeles.