

Southern comfort

Volante

Elyse Glickman takes in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's southern city, which celebrates its heritage and women's contribution to its culture and food
Photographed by the author







THE ANALOGY that Kaohsiung is to Taipei what New York is to Los Angeles is accurate yet a little too obvious. It has a lot in common with Los Angeles, from its tropical climate and sunshine to its eclectic artisanal boutiques and colourful neighbourhoods. This is why some Taiwanese guides may use the food scenes to explain why southern Taiwan is a colourful and rich destination in its own right, thanks to the influence of artists, designers, and entrepreneurs.

The food scene in particular reflects that women have transformed resourcefulness, tradition, and ingredient

heritage into an expanded perspective of Taiwan's food landscape for the visitor. For the past few decades, that spirit has permeated fashion, beauty, interior design, and lifestyles, putting creative entrepreneurs in a position to generate as much international excitement as their counterparts in Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong.

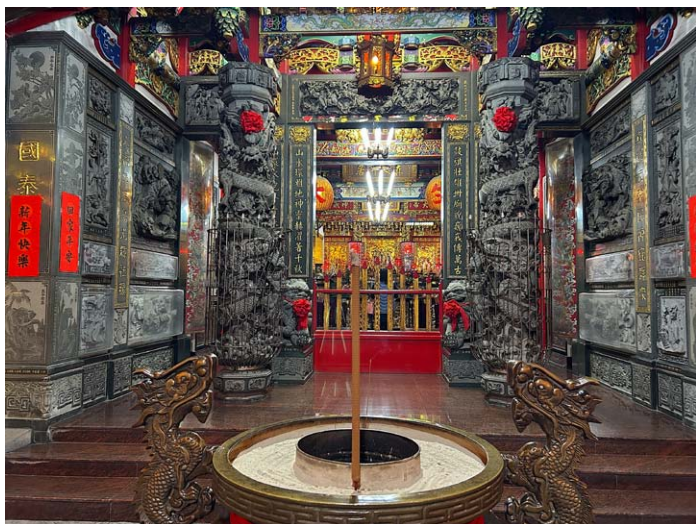
A restaurant that proves Taiwan's future is (increasingly) female is the acclaimed Chang Ying Seafood House, on the outskirts of Tainan City. It is a product of Taiwan's Council of Agriculture's Tian Ma Ma programme, which empow-

ers rural women to transform family cottage industries into viable businesses. Mother-daughter founders Huang Ying Qing and Xie Jia Xin excel at achieving the council's mission to preserve Taiwan's culinary heritage through the manufacture and marketing of specialities within and beyond Taiwan's borders.

The Michelin Bib Gourmand-designated restaurant requires advanced reservations and confirmation of guests' dietary restrictions as the kitchen only sources enough raw ingredients for a given day. Additive-free and EU-certified milkfish from the family's fish farm are



Sights from
the night
markets,
a lantern
festival,
and the
Chang Ying
Seafood
House.



Sights of Kaohsiung, from the Chenghuang (City God) temple, top left, through to the Saturday markets and the Lihue night market, art in the Yang district above, and, at left, fine dining at the Grand Hi-Lai Hotel.



served in many delicious forms, from tempura-fried and stir-fried preparations to a signature milkfish fillet aged and seared in its own oil to achieve the perfect crispness and umami. The house speciality, three-cup milkfish sausage, is as addictive as popcorn thanks to its texture and savoury-but-un-fishy flavour profile.

Kaohsiung's night markets, meanwhile, are not only culinary maps of southern Taiwan you can eat your way through. It is also a convenient way

Right: Sun Moon Lake, reputed to be one of Taiwan's most beautiful, serene spots. It is in Nantou County, on the way back up to Taipei after experiencing Kaohsiung. See *Lucire* 26 for one of our earlier excursions to this part of the island.



to support many entrepreneurial food producers. The Liuhe Tourist Night Market is a crowded but well-run foodie magnet, covered in bright lights and flanked by bustling cosmetics superstores, souvenir shops, and electronics' emporiums behind the stalls. Ziqiang Night Market, a few blocks away, is less touristy and flashy. In keeping with the less-is-more maxim, vendors are more generous with spice, seasoning, herbs, and portion size. Chenghuang (City God) Temple provides a colourful backdrop to enjoy one's food finds at leisure.

The revitalized historic Yancheng District (taiwaneverything.cc/2024/02/15/yancheng-district/) is a delightful maze of murals, picturesque storefronts, boutiques, and a mix of time-tested and contemporary food shops. Among the recently opened, Amain Mochi (803, Yancheng District, Sinle Street, 198之27) is a standout for its fresh fruit-filled desserts. Family-owned, "old school" specialty places drawing long lines include Duck Zhen (258 Wufu 4th Road), known for its painstakingly prepared duck to seal in its rich, satisfying flavours), 70-year-old Lee's Tangyuan bakery, and Po Po Shaved Ice, all of

whom put their long-standing culinary legacies on display.

Any time of the week, one can take advantage of walking paths, waterfront scenery, and bike rentals on the paths passing Kaohsiung Port Warehouse No. 2 and Pier-2 Art Centre. Industrial buildings built around 1914 are repurposed to house contemporary restaurants, bars, and design shops, highlighting local clothing, jewellery, and home décor designers. However, the waterfront comes alive on weekends with kiosks rented by up-and-coming artisans, crafters, and food vendors. Elaborate murals, street performers, and public art fill in the backdrop. Other flea markets worth checking out include the Sanfong Temple Crafts Market, the Central Park Artisan Market, and the Look Out! Mural Art District.

The Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum extends across 250 lavish acres of temples, pagodas, gardens, and chapels. It is so stunning that it requires at least a full day to thoroughly and thoughtfully take in the artistry and cultural legacy that far transcends Taiwan and Asia. While you can, take a deeper dive into the culture beyond art and architecture with its Art and Culture Tour; other group packages

include its Photographer's Journey, Eco Tour, Treasure Hunt, Food Tour, and Life Education Classes. Hilai Vegetarian Restaurant, frequented by the museum's Buddhist nun and monk staff and discerning vegetarians, reflects the philosophy that food that's good for the soul can also make the palate and spirit happy. Several boutiques adjoin the restaurant, offering a mix of higher-end artisanal food, ceramic tea accessories, clothing, jewellery, and home goods.

While numerous branded and indie design hotels abound, the Grand Hi-Lai Hotel Kaohsiung (www.grand-hilai.com) is a good go-to, with its central location, 13 distinctive restaurants, old school "grand hotel" setting, and a full-sized mall at its ground level. However, kids at heart will love its dedicated Hello Kitty-Sanrio floor, with 18 themed rooms outfitted from top to bottom with Sanrio-themed accessories, bath amenities, snacks, and postcards, as well as bright furnishings and appointments that reference and reimagine Paris, American college towns, and the Caribbean. A limited-edition line of Hello Kitty and Sanrio character souvenirs, not in regular Sanrio boutiques, are available for sale to all guests.

When in Taipei

As Taipei is almost always the point of arrival and departure to and from North America, you can always find an excuse to extend the trip on the front or back end to check out what's new and notable in the capital.

Nearly a decade ago, the flagship location of the Eslite Bookstore in Xinyi generated a major buzz as an exciting alternative to Taipei 101. It transcended its bookstore designation, overflowing with locally and independently owned boutiques, stalls, and eateries, and nary an international mall brand in sight. Sadly, the ambitious multi-level maze of retail bliss shut down in 2023 when its owner decided not to renew its lease.

Thankfully, the city's excellent public transportation system makes it easy to get your non-mall shopping fix in other neighbourhoods across the city.

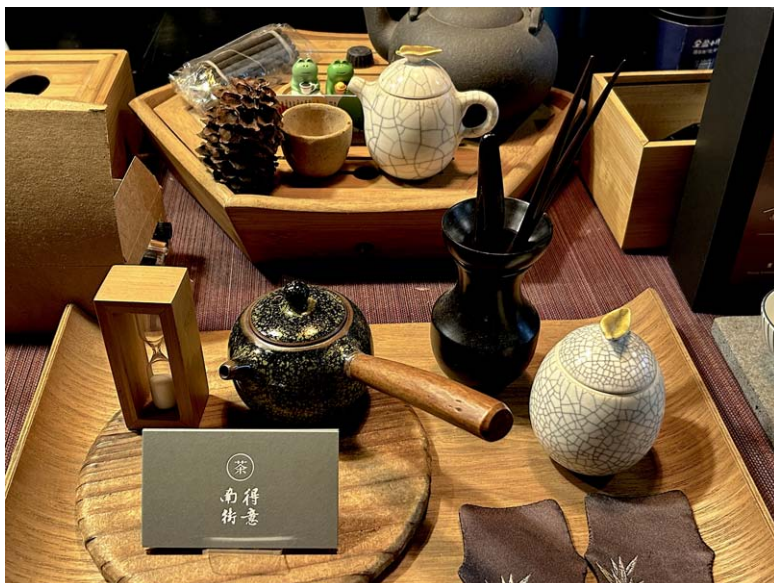
Dadaocheng district

The recent renaissance of Dihua Street draws upon its historic roots with old-school tea shops, herbalists, and sundry stores intermixed with boutique-emporiums with clothing, accessories, specialty foods, high-end ceramics and art-glass galleries. The Dadaocheng District and Visitor Centre, a good starting point, provides an interesting historical overview of the area. The 1920s were a pinnacle era for the neighbourhood, and Salon 1920s offers a dreamy opportunity to travel back in time with cheongsam rentals, styling, and photography services.

The multi-storey South Street Delight Tea House (shiningtea.com.tw), next door to Salon 1920, stands out among other tea houses with its eclectically decorated second floor and one-of-a-kind tea selection menu. On each table, bottles with numbers match up with those on its menu, allowing the guest to literally sniff out a favourite selection. The tea service also includes green bean cake, candied walnut almond cookies, date or pineapple 'newtons', black beans, dried cranberries and guava, almonds, and pumpkin seeds. The first-floor retail area offers its unique tea blends to travel home with tea enthusiasts.

Yongkang Street

The heart of this neighbourhood gives off a few harajuku vibes, between extremely young (though less theatrical) crowds and loads of bright, kitschy shops and boba-dessert joints. The narrow streets along the perimeter, however, offer real finds and treasures.



Above, from top: A street in Dadaocheng. A neighbourhood tea shop. South Street Delight Tea House.



Clockwise from left: Taitung City market and station. On sale at Salon 1920. Salon 1920 and its retro fashion. Local food at the CookInn Cooking School. CookInn's teacher shows how it's done. Xin Dian Hotpot.



Between traditional tea shops and inspirational home décor shops are fashion and jewellery designers all offering minimalist chic and statement pieces that skew toward timelessness.

Food for thought

Taipei's CookInn Cooking School is best known for its xiao long bao (soup dumpling) class and the comprehensive

Taiwanese Xiao Long Bao & Noodles Class, a comprehensive three-hour multi-course immersion with hands-on step-by-step preparations for soup dumplings, hearty braised beef noodle soup, smashed cucumber salad, and bubble milk tea.

There is more DIY fun to be had in the city's many hot pot restaurants, and Xin Dian Hotpot is a favourite among locals

for its vegetarian options and a two-broth pot guaranteed to satisfy hardcore spice-lovers and those favouring milder profiles. Meats and vegetables can be mixed and matched from the menu, as can condiments from a self-serve bar. Ziu Weng Yugang Seafood, in the Songshan neighbourhood, is an oasis where shareable fried, sautéed, seasoned, spicy sauced fish, and seafood reign supreme. •