



The first Europeans to get a look at Taiwan were the Portuguese and as soon as they saw it they called it "The Beautiful Island" — *Ilha Formosa*. In 1590 they arrived and set up a trading settlement on the north coast. The next Europeans to turn up were the Dutch who built their center on the southwest coast. The Spanish and the English also saw Taiwan as a great place to do business. So did the Emperors on Mainland China and Japan. Taiwan has always been open for business.

NIGHT MARKETS

Most people spend their days working, which leaves their nights free for shopping. As a result, the cities of Taiwan have some of the world's most interesting night markets. The vendors pay little rent which allows them to offer lower prices than traditional shops.



The markets sprawl out over dozens of streets, opening at 7 pm and going on until sun up. They offer lots of different things... clothing, shoes, watches and they are always jam-packed with vendors.

SHOPPING

Taipei is the capital city of Taiwan and one of the world's major economic centers, which means that every major international retailer has a store. But there is very little point in buying something in Taipei that you can get in your hometown. You want to take advantage of what's unique to the country.



For traditional Chinese items, you can visit Section One of Tihua Street. The shops carry all kinds of dried foods and Chinese herbs, equipment and crafts. This section of Taipei offers an interesting contrast to the modern areas of the city. The buildings date from the late 1800s and often display architectural details that indicate

what's for sale inside.

If you'd like to take home something that is both very Chinese and unique, you can get yourself a chop. A chop is an essential piece of equipment in Chinese culture.

During my first visit to Taiwan, which was in the early 90s, I was given a Chinese name. They wanted it to sound like my English name, but also have special meaning. My last name became Wu, sounds like Wolf, but it's associated with storytellers. And because I was a journalist they decided I was a storyteller. My first name became Boa Da. So Wu Boa Da is my name, and it's close enough for government work.

As soon as I got my name I got a chop which is a block of material with your name engraved in the base. You put it into a little red ink. And then you stamp it on whatever document needs your official signature.

Name chops date back thousands of years to a time when most Chinese were illiterate and needed a simple form of identification. Even though today 93 percent of Taiwanese are literate, the tradition continues. Without a chop it is difficult to enter into a legally binding contract. It's used for bank accounts, safe-deposit boxes, even land sales. Engravers work with many different materials—wood, plastic, stone, metal and jade.

You might also enjoy a visit to the weekend antique market. Every Saturday and Sunday hundreds of vendors set up small tables and offer their stuff. It's virtually impossible to tell if you are looking at a rare and valuable object or just something that is being cleared out of somebody's closet. There's a lot of stuff here and all prices are subject to bargaining. You can always talk your way into a ten to thirty percent discount.

I was particularly interested in the jade area. Since the 11th century, the Chinese have worshiped the Jade Emperor. And when they started mining jade commercially in the 1700s, it became the country's most precious stone. Jade is usually thought of as a green stone, but it is also found in white, red, yellow and lavender. The most highly prized jade is a clear emerald-green and it comes in a variety of shapes. Jade in any form is worn for good luck.



Taiwan is also motor scooter heaven. So many people here own motorbikes and motor scooters that you'll find a wider selection of equipment in Taiwan than just about any other place in the world. In my somewhat misspent youth I was a serious biker. Not quite in a class with the guys in the American Chopper television series, but I was heading there.

For a somewhat more refined shopping experience you can stop in to Artasia, a shop that carries fine Asian art and antiques. The gallery is quite special in that it sells not just Chinese antiques, but antiques from all over Asia. In their gallery they have Indian art, Indonesian art, Cambodian art, Burmese art, and even art from Africa. The Taiwanese are very open to other cultures and curious about other countries.

MARTIAL ARTS

In the west we tend to think of the Chinese martial arts in the context of the Kung Fu films like "Kill Bill" and "Hero". But in fact, Kung Fu means "time and energy spent in cultivating an art". A wood worker can have good Kung Fu. So can a cook or a dressmaker. It's all about developing a skill.

On any given morning, at the crack of dawn, you will see hundreds of Taiwanese practicing Tai Chi, which is probably the most popular of the martial arts. This is not about defending yourself against the evil master. It's more about keeping your body and mind in good shape and defending yourself against the negative effects of aging.

A good place to study the martial arts is the Mei-Men Qigong cultural center where they teach the ancient art of lining up your body and mind with the way of nature. It's all about controlling your body and your ability to focus.



The secrets of the Chinese martial arts have been handed down from master to student for thousands of years. They believe that health and longevity are the true goals of the martial arts. They also point out that the martial arts can be used to protect you from dangerous enemies, but the man whose internal powers are strong normally never has to fight. His power is so evident that no one dares challenge him.

CHINESE MEDICINE

Traditional Chinese medicine believes that a good doctor should first try to cure an illness with food. Only when that fails should medicine be prescribed. Years ago, families retained a family doctor who would be paid a monthly fee and make regular visits to the family. When someone fell ill, the doctor was held responsible. Until he cured the patient the family would withhold payment. Preventive care at its best!

The Chinese regard medicine as part of a system of health and longevity which is designed to nurture life. The system encourages proper diet, regular exercise, breathing exercises, and medicinal treatments. Unlike western medicine which is broken down into specialties, Chinese physicians are required to work with multiple therapies. Doctors monitor a patient's internal balance by using herbs, acupuncture and other forms of treatment. In the west we call this "alternative medicine"; in China it's your primary system for well-being.

WHERE TO GO

MEI-MEN QIGONG CULTURAL CENTER

#19, LANE 170,
CHUNGSHIAO E. RD.
TAIPEI, TAIWAN
TEL: (02) 2361-7919

ARTASIA

312, TUNHWA S. RD., SEC. 1
TAIPEI, TAIWAN
TEL: 886-2-27037562
FAX: 886-2-27037563

CLOUD GATE DANCE THEATRE

5F, NO. 19, LANE 231
FUHSING N. ROAD
TAIPEI, TAIWAN (10542)
TEL: +886-2-2712-2102
FAX: +886-2-2712-2106
WWW.CLOUDGATE.ORG

CHIANG KAI-SHEK MEMORIAL HALL

21, JHONGSHAN SOUTH RD.
TAIPEI, TAIWAN (100)
TEL: (02) 2393-1100~3
FAX: (02) 2393-2740
WWW.CKSMH.GOV.TW/ENGLISH/INDEX.HTM

PILI'S MULTIMEDIA INTERNATIONAL PUPPET THEATER

WWW.PILI.COM.TW/EN/

DACHAN MOTOR PARTS

NO. 13 SEC. 3 CHEN-TE RD.
TAIPEI, TAIWAN

NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM

221 CHIH-SHAN RD. SEC. 2
TAIPEI, TAIWAN, R.O.C. 111
TEL: +886-2-2881
FAX: +886-2-2882-1440
WWW.NPM.GOV.TW

SHIHLIN NIGHT MARKET

CHUNG SHAN NORTH ROAD, SEC. 4
SHIH LIN DISTRICT

CLOUD GATE DANCE THEATRE

For thousands of years, the artists of China have focused on how people relate to nature. And it's still an important theme for contemporary artists in Taiwan. The work of the Cloud Gate Dance Theater is a perfect example.



Cloud Gate is the name of a 5,000 year old ritual dance. It is the oldest known dance in China. In 1973, it became the name of the first contemporary dance company in any Chinese speaking community. The company is made up of two-dozen dancers who are trained in Tai Chi, meditation, marital arts, Chinese Opera, modern dance and ballet.

The first time I saw the Cloud Gate Dance Troupe they were at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York City. The performance was extraordinary and turned me into a devoted fan of their work.

PUPPET THEATER

Hand puppet shows have been part of traditional Chinese entertainment for hundreds of years. Puppet masters, using their unique multiple-voice talent, enacted complex legends. Tales of chivalry, passion, and humor were brought to life.

These days, the Huang family not only carries on the tradition but has also used modern technology to advance the art. In 2000, with a budget of over a million dollars, they produced "The Legend of the Sacred Stone" a movie that gave the world a glimpse into the infinite possibilities of the puppet show. They also attracted young audiences by introducing stories that use Kung Fu sequences and characters that travel through space and time. They even have their own television channel. Once again, an interesting blend of ancient Chinese content with modern technology.

FESTIVALS

The traditional Chinese calendar is based on the movement of the moon. The fifth day of the fifth lunar month which usually falls during the western months of June or July is the date of the Dragon Boat Festival.

The festival comes with a magnificent story. In the year 300 AD there was a great poet much beloved by the people. He was also an advisor to an Emperor who was not so much beloved by the people. He got so fed up with the incompetence of the government that he took a big rock, held it tight to his chest and jumped into the river. People rushed to the river to try and save him but it was too late. Then they tried to find his remains in order to give him a proper burial, but they couldn't. To keep the sea creatures from eating what was left of him, they began to throw rice into the river hoping the fish would eat the rice rather than their beloved poet.

The anniversary of the event was marked by throwing rice into the river. But after about two hundred years the ghost of the poet showed up, expressed his appreciation for the annual

offerings of rice but pointed out that very often the rice was stolen by the monster that caused floods.

The ghost asked that the rice be wrapped in leaves and tied with string. It seems that leaves and string, both of which are high in carbohydrates, were not on the flood monster's diet. Since then, eating dumplings filled with glutinous rice and wrapped in bamboo leaves have been part of the festival.

The dragon boat races commemorate the search to save the great poet. They also demonstrate the Chinese devotion to cooperation and teamwork. Dragonheads and tails are on the boats. Taoist priests bring them to life with incense and firecrackers. Each boat has a helmsman, a drummer, twenty-two oarsmen and a flag catcher. Teams come from all over the world to take part in these races. A process of elimination produces a winner.

There are over a dozen important ritual holidays in Taiwan and they fall throughout the year. So no matter when you are visiting, some festival will be going on. A festival designed to enhance your well-being and drive off evil spirits.



TO LEARN MORE . . .

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