

Thoughts from Taipei

December 2004

I had been to Taipei a few times before, but had never spent more than one day here. This was a longer time with more time off. This was an interesting time to be here as the elections were going on. Elections are even more fractious here, with fist fights in the legislature and all kinds of shenanigans. There were trucks going up and down the streets with 130 dB of promises coming out of them. It is also legal for political candidates to endorse products in advertising...as long as they don't show their election number. That's right, a number. I guess this is to help folks. Everytime you see a candidate you see their number.

Anyway, Taipei is a fairly modern city. Especially when you remember that the Nationalist Chinese took over in the early 50's. They have a lot of new buildings and a lot of building going on.



Unlike Hanoi, Taipei is filled with tall buildings, including the tallest building in the world (to date) called the 101 Tower.



The base of the tower is a 5 level mall with every designer store one could think of. It was pretty amazing, but we didn't spend much time there. The city was very modern and one thing kept making us think of home. Every corner had either a 7-11 or a Starbucks on it.

One day we took a walk and saw the "night market". It is a lot less crowded during the day than at night. We even went down the famous "snake alley" where they'll snip the snake head off and catch the blood for a delightful cocktail. During this time, we visited a temple.



I took a picture of my traveling companions (Pat Harper and Tim Mitchell) at the gate.



The next morning we had off and so took the underground to the end of the line to a town called Dushuie. It is a port town where the river meets the ocean. The underground is extremely modern and inexpensive.

The town itself looks to cater to Taiwanese tourists. The beach front was all arcade, but there was no English anywhere. We were the only non-Chinese in the crowd.



The arcade seemed to be filled with students who appeared to have the afternoon off. You could tell by the brightly colored sweatclothes they had on. It also appeared that each student had their "number" embroidered on their shirt. Very interesting.



We got hungry whilst we were there and went into a restaurant. As I said, they don't cater to English speaking tourists and so the menu was a challenge.



Knowing that I had eaten all over the world using my index finger as my main ordering tool, I went at it. However, the few pictures that did appear in the menu appeared to be decorations only. The waitress drug everyone in the room who knew any English but to no avail. Finally, through pantomime and other means, we got a meal ordered. The meal was excellent in spite of ourselves. (Note: We did know that pichu=beer).

The Dushue harbor was very colorful and the fishing boats were in.



The weather was starting to degrade somewhat and so we started back. One of our party, Tim Mitchell, makes friends everywhere and so he had to stop and become buddies with a Chinese Flute player.



That last night, the local representative took us to a “cabaret”. This turned out to be a bar where the clientele would get on the bar and dance. They had even installed railings so folks wouldn’t fall down. It was interesting for a while, but it got so busy you couldn’t even wiggle so after an hour or so we headed back to the hotel.

It was nice to be able to spend some time in Taipei after so many short visits.