

## TRAVEL

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14, 2008

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# Penghu's Aloha spirit

*At Shanshui Beach on Penghu's main island of Makung, the water is clean, the waves are nearly perfect — and, best of all, there's no attitude*

BY **NOAH BUCHAN**  
STAFF REPORTER

**Greg** Nolan thought he was the only surfer crazy enough to brave the big waves. Chunks of debris littered the murky waters creating an obstacle course. But through the mist he saw the silhouette of another figure advancing across the water.

"It was just after a typhoon ... and it was really dangerous," he said during an interview at Mahalo, a cafe and restaurant that offers stunning views of the breaking surf on Shanshui (山水) Beach, off the southwest coast off Penghu's (澎湖) main island of Makung (馬公).

"I saw this other crazy guy out there ... He was teaching himself ... He'd been reading magazines and he had a board totally unsuitable for him. But he had a bag of guts ... and the Aloha spirit," Nolan said referring to the Hawaiian philosophy that encompasses kindness, tenderness and perseverance.

Nolan offered the intrepid novice, A-chuan (阿泉), surfing lessons. Word of the classes soon spread on the base where A-chuan was doing his military service, and a business was born. "When I brought surfing here, people said,

'you are crazy, you are in the wrong place — you forgot the sail,'" Nolan quipped, referring to Penghu's reputation as a windsurfing destination.

Four years later and Nolan's surf business, which began with a few surf boards stored in the back of a VW Van, later a rusty tin shack, is today housed in a sleek, though somewhat cramped, modern building attached to Mahalo and a guesthouse (*minsu*, 民宿) on the beach's main drag.

The 54-year-old Australian has been surfing for more than three decades, eight years of which were spent touring the world's top surfing destinations as a professional surf photographer.

After a divorce, the civil engineer decided to completely change his life and he returned to school to become a teacher. Nolan intended to take up a post in China, but a student suggested he try Taiwan instead because, "the women are prettier and the food is nicer."

Nolan said that similar to Kenting (墾丁) and Ilan, Penghu's beaches are ideal for surfing. "Outside here in the summer," he said



Greg Nolan sits in front of Surf Club, while A-chuan demonstrates to tourists the proper way of standing on a longboard.

PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

pointing past the rows of colorful longboards lined up inside his surf shop, "we have near-perfect waves, half a day, every day. They may not be the biggest, but the water is clean, it's uncrowded and there is no hype."

The lack of attitude is arguably what makes Shanshui attractive to beginners and, Nolan said, contrasts with the competitive spirit

found in Australia where the vibe "is like 'you're not good enough to surf here [so] you surf at that end of the beach.'"

Having established himself on Penghu and gambling that it has potential to become a surfing destination, Nolan has his sights set on a new project. Plans have already been drawn up for a factory to produce custom-made boards during the winter when the wind makes surfing prohibitively difficult.

"We eventually want to make all boards by hand, based on the customers' personal characteristics," he said.

Though Penghu is unpretentious compared to more famous surfing destinations, Nolan says it still has a ways to go before it encapsulates the true Aloha spirit.

"Taiwanese have discovered surfing in the last 10 years. They've discovered the end of it — the shiny bit. They haven't completely found out the Aloha spirit yet," he said. "That comes over the years."

For complete details on Surf Shop's surf-board rentals, lessons and contact information, visit [www.taiwansurftours.com/penghu](http://www.taiwansurftours.com/penghu).



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SURF CLUB

## No Budweiser, no babes — and not much beach, either

*Stuck between two nuclear power plants in a town that places more value on sweet potatoes, Jinshan's gray-sand beach doesn't get much attention*

BY **IAN BARTHOLOMEW**  
STAFF REPORTER

**J**inshan (金山), which translates as "gold mountain," was once an important town on the northeast coast. It is said by some that Jinshan got its name from rumors that "there be gold in them there hills," but nothing much was ever found, and the area's prosperity derived from its role as a distribution center for local produce. This notion of how Jinshan got its name has largely been discredited, but I felt something of the disappointment of those early prospectors when I visited the town last week in the hope of finding a thriving beachside scene.

Jinshan manages to keep its beachside credentials well hidden. If I hadn't been traveling along the coastal Provincial Highway No. 2 (省道2號) to arrive there, I might never have suspected that the ocean was just a few hundred meters away from the town center. Huge posters for the 2008 Jinshan Summer Holiday Sweet Potato Festival (2008金山蒞期遶遶遊), which takes place tomorrow and on Sunday, seemed to pay little attention to ocean. Apart from a beach volleyball competition between 1pm and 4pm tomorrow (for those who can stand the heat), most of the activity will be focused on the forecourt of the Chaotian Temple (潮天宮) and the area around the Jinmei Parking Lot (金美停車場). There will

be bands, karaoke, the sale of agricultural produce, plenty of local specialties and cooking competitions for sweet potatoes.

But as beach volleyball was advertised, I assumed the beach could not be far away. I had arrived by the intercity Kuo-Kuang (國光客運) bus service from Taipei along with numerous other holidaymakers, some of whom thought my desire to explore the beach distinctly quixotic. The Jinshan Youth Activity Center (金山青年活動中心) had a good hot spring and pool, which, I was told, would be a much better choice if I wanted to play in the water. One fellow passenger recommended shopping and eating along the old shopping street (金包里老街).

The old shopping street is a relic of the town's former prosperity, though what original architecture remains is well-hidden behind advertisements and awnings. Making wooden clogs seemed to be a local specialty, as were various preparations of sweet potato, from candied to baked. Swimming costumes and beach balls were notable for their absence. There was no hint of a sea breeze, as the town nestles behind a low rise that cuts it off, both geographically and spiritually, from the water.

From the northern end of the old street, I took a shortcut through the town's public cemetery that commanded

the coastal heights. At the top of the hill, I caught some movement in the torpid air, and looked down on the castle-like Retrocession Building (光復樓), the main administrative center of the Jinshan Youth Activity Center. Beyond it was the ocean.

The Youth Activity Center occupies a huge grassy area and is designed to cater to big groups. There is excellent parking for tour coaches, decent toilet facilities and endless rows of barbeque pits. Big shady trees make the camping grounds remarkably pleasant. Catered meals for up to 50 people, ready availability of barbeque equipment, cheap dormitory accommodations, tent rental, paintball and the hot spring all make this a very convenient spot for big groups. Even a boombox with stack of CDs can be rented for NT\$1,000.

The pool, despite the NT\$250 admission price (or NT\$300 on Saturdays and Sundays), proved much more popular than the beach a few hundred meters away. The complex was a little shopworn, but the facilities were clean enough, and there was nothing wrong with the shallow pool and its hydrotherapy seats — if you didn't actually want to swim. There were also two foosball machines in the lobby.

Down at the beach, which was the size of about two football fields, the sand was fine and hot (and may perhaps

be excellent for slow-roasting sweet potatoes) but its dirty gray color and the stark view — a construction site on one side, a moldering breakwater on the other — limited its appeal. The volleyball court stood lonesome under the midday sun. By the water's edge, a lifeguard watched over a solitary swimmer pottering around in the tiny roped-off area where swimming is permitted. (The seabed drops precipitously about 50m out from shore.) An NT\$100 admission fee was posted for entry, but on the Friday afternoon I visited, the gates lay open and untended, the ticket booth seemingly having closed up sometime last decade. A faded sign welcomed visitors to the "Jinshan Budweiser Beach," but no beer appeared to be on sale.

A large sign just outside the youth activity center located the beach within the 5km evacuation area of the Second Nuclear Power Plant to the south in Wanli Township (萬里鄉). The First Nuclear Power Plant, a little further away to the north in Shimen Township (石門鄉), was also marked. "You are here" was located squarely between the two power plants.

The deserted beach, the detritus of construction, and now the warning of nuclear devastation — it all seemed a little too post-apocalyptic, when all I was looking for was bikini clad lovelies sipping beer beachside.



Jinshan's faded seaside glamour.

PHOTO: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES

## IF YOU GO

### Getting there

» Jinshan (金山), in Shihmen Township (石門鄉), Taipei County, is on the Provincial Highway No. 2, also known as the Coastal Highway. The beach is most easily accessed by the Kuo-Kuang (國光客運) bus service that departs from the Northern Bus Terminal near Taipei Main Station. Buses leave approximately every 15 minutes. Tickets cost NT\$120

### Facilities

» Jinshan Youth Activity Center ([www.cyh.org.tw](http://www.cyh.org.tw)) offers parking, toilet facilities, BBQ pits, dormitory accommodations, tent rental, paintball, a shallow swimming pool, and a hot spring

### Sweet potato festival

» More information about this weekend's 2008 Jinshan Summer Holiday Sweet Potato Festival can be found online at [www.gold.touch4u.net](http://www.gold.touch4u.net)