



# Surf's up as waves gain in popularity

## HAZY, CRAZY DAYS:

Gone are the days when a handful of people on the beach would be a 'busy day.' But as surfing gains in popularity, some are concerned about safety

BY JENNY W. HSU  
STAFF REPORTER

Clad in a black bikini with shimmering water beads trickling down her light caramel skin, the American girl with the sun-kissed hair stuck out like a sore thumb on the beach.

But as soon as she picked up her board and paddled out to sea, Jennie Miller of Texas looked like she was in her element, as did the hundred other surfers at Jialeshui (佳樂水), Kenting.

"It was love at first surf," said Miller, describing her first encounter with the increasingly popular sport in Taiwan.

"I have wanted to learn to surf for a long time and when I saw the opportunity, I grabbed it," said the Tamkang University MBA student at last month's Third Annual Kenting Cup International Open Surf Contest.

Miller, who had never surfed before she came to Taiwan two years ago, was among the handful of foreigners who in recent years have discovered the thrills and spills Taiwan's waves have to offer.

Taiwan may be considered a tropical island, but contrary to the typical image of Pacific islanders, Taiwanese are not known as water sports enthusiasts.

In fact, many adults born in the 1950s can hardly swim without the aid of a floating device.

Seeking to explain the paradox, Soochow University political science professor Luo Chih-cheng (羅致政) said older generations had been raised to dread the ocean because the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) regime had deployed barbed wire and gigantic cement blocks along the shores to turn the beaches into military bases during the Martial Law era.

People were not taught to swim, he said, while recreational beaches were only open to a select few.

By no means a major destination on the world's surfing radar screen, Taiwan has nevertheless been gaining in popularity among locals and expatriates.

Comparing the waves in Taiwan with those in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Australia and the UK, Neil MacDonald, a 52-year-old Englishman and long-term resident of Kenting,



Canadian Terry Meysen, who lives in Hengchun, Pingtung County, surfs in an undisclosed location — the old-time surfers want to keep it to themselves — in southern Taiwan in August of last year.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE HEARD

touted the waves here as "world class," albeit quite inconsistent.

"Seventeen years ago, there were maybe two or three American surfers. Six people sharing the beach was considered a crowded day," he said.

"Now there are too many people," he said.

Hawaiian Duggar Parrish, 49, said he relished the good old days when he started surfing in Taiwan 11 years ago.

"There was hardly anyone here," he said. "Back then, there were only a few local boys. The surfing scene in Taiwan has definitely changed."

Looking "cool," Parrish said, is the main reason behind the sudden boom.

"It's the surfing lifestyle that is attracting the young people. The surfing equipment industry in Taiwan is also pumping up the excitement. And most all, surfing is fun, relatively easy to learn and not that

expensive," he said.

Neil Narbonne, another fan of Taiwan's waves and who grew up both in Taiwan and the US, attributed the growing popularity to the fashion industry.

"Clothing manufacturers made a big push into Taiwan, some are pure surfing brands [OP, RipCurl, O'Neill, Stussy, Billabong] while others are just outdoor manufacturers that also include a surf line [Reef, etc] tied together with the media promoting surfing as a cool sport, as well as a general liberalizing of the youth as can be seen at local night spots," he said.

Moreover, girls today are more willing to wear bikinis and both boys and girls are more willing to try action sports, he said.

For some seasoned surfers, however, Taiwan is still off their recommended list because of the dangers of surfing — mainly the result of poor supervision, under-qualified swimmers and lack of

"etiquette" among surfers.

"It is rare to find a lifeguard on beaches, and even if you see one, they are often not properly equipped," Parrish said, recounting how he and MacDonald rescued two or three unskilled surfers in recent months.

A surfer should be able to swim at least 1km without touching the ocean floor before he can hit the waves, he said.

"But most importantly, you must learn to first understand and respect the ocean," Parrish said.

Surfing is also about maintaining an inner balance of peace and learning how to coexist with Mother Nature, said Michael Cosby, a sexagenarian surfer from Seattle.

"The surfers must be in harmony with the waves, the wind, the board and most of all with yourself [sic]. You must be physically, mentally and emotionally balanced so you can be focused and centered," he said.

For MacDonald, the danger arises when people violate the

**"You must be physically, mentally and emotionally balanced so you can be focused and centered."**

— Michael Cosby, a surfer from Seattle

surfing "code of ethics."

Surfing etiquette, among other things, is knowing when to leave a wave alone, especially if another surfer is already riding it, he said.

The lack of surfing etiquette can sometimes be the source of friction between locals and foreign surfers, Narbonne said.

"The locals feel there's a need to protect their local turf. This tends not to be a problem if you remain courteous and adhere to surfing etiquette, which is the same

around the globe. I have seen some small skirmishes that were calmed once the non-local apologized. After all, this is still Taiwan and the 'face' issue still exists," he said.

All the talk about the possible perils of surfing Taiwan seem to be lost on younger surfers like Narbonne, however, who says that surfing in Taiwan is "perfectly safe."

Typhoons make the sand shift frequently, he said, but even then, it remains very smooth and the water covers the rocks.

"Over the past few years the Coast Guard has been actively issuing warnings and tickets to those who defy warnings to surf during typhoons after the government has issued official typhoon warnings," he said.

Her eyes firmly glued on the ocean, Miller said she does not worry about safety because the sport is more exciting without the lifeguards.

"Hey, it's more fun to live on the edge, right?" she said.



American storyteller Michael Lockett gestures while relating a story at a press conference last Wednesday promoting two storytelling evenings at Howard International House in Taipei this Friday and Saturday night.

PHOTO: CNA

## Storytelling master to share his talent at English festival

BY JENNY W. HSU  
STAFF REPORTER

Parents and teachers can bring children to see a master storyteller in action this weekend.

Award-winning storyteller Michael Lockett of Normal, Illinois, is in Taiwan for "Grandpa Mike's Summer Story Festival" at the invitation of publishing companies and is also conducting workshops for English teachers on using the art of storytelling in classes.

With his white, straw hat and hearty smile, Michael Lockett, says the secret to unleashing the "inner child" in most people is getting them involved in the storytelling process. Indeed, not many people can lead a room full of adults — including two US officials — in making monkey sounds in a matter of minutes as Lockett did last Wednesday on the top floor of the Taipei World Trade Center International Trade Building.

"Storytellers can take [their audience] to another time and another place," Lockett says.

The lifelong educator has been telling stories all his life and believes strongly in the power of storytelling to teach children and stimulate their imagination.

Storytelling can help children learn to read faster, broaden their vocabulary and maintain a higher retention rate of what they've learned, Lockett says.

Lockett will perform again on Friday and Saturday from 7:30pm to 9pm at the Howard International House on Xinsheng S Road, Section 3.

For more information, visit [www.cet-taiwan.com/story2008](http://www.cet-taiwan.com/story2008). All stories will be told in English, except for animals sounds, of course.

## PIGEON POST

### Nigerian 'fraud ring' busted

CRIME

Five Nigerians — four men and a woman — were detained in Taipei and Tainan counties on Thursday and Friday last week for allegedly swindling money from would-be investors, Hsinchu City police said on Friday. Police tracked down the five suspects, who included one naturalized Taiwanese, after receiving information from a Filipino who said she was the wife of a Taiwanese man swindled by a foreign fraud ring. Police then detained the Nigerian woman and learned that she had overstayed her tourist visa after entering the country last year. Police allege the woman set up a dummy company, pretending to deal in second-hand cars, to defraud investors. The Filipino told police she had been defrauded of some NT\$500,000 (US\$15,900) by the Nigerian woman and that she had only recently learned that the Nigerian belonged to a fraud ring. Police also allege that the ring illegally shipped used cars back to their home country.

### Kaohsiung opens foreigner service center

OPENING

Kaohsiung City's Bureau of Social Affairs opened its eighth foreign spouse service center earlier this month to offer more help to foreign husbands and wives in their daily lives. The new service center is located at a children's day care center in Cianjhen District (前鎮). In addition to serving as locations for social gatherings, the centers offer cultural courses, professional training and free counseling on family relationships. The municipal authorities encourage foreign spouses to use the service centers to explore their own relationships and build a wider network of friends. As of the end of last month, there were a total of 11,693 Chinese spouses and 7,645 husbands and wives from other foreign countries living in Kaohsiung, the city's statistics showed.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

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# Being the change we want to see in the world

**MAKING EVERYBODY'S EYES GREEN:** Robin Winkler envisions a greener world that starts with opening our eyes to the problems around us, then making changes

BY MEGGIE LU  
STAFF REPORTER

It's a hot, summer morning at the office of Winkler Partners in Taipei. At the reception desk the air conditioning is barely on and a floor fan churns on low. A few meters away is a bicycle and helmet. Staff walk around busily in casual clothes and house slippers.

Robin Winkler (文魯彬) — longtime environmentalist, lawyer and former Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) committee member — emerges in a T-shirt and shorts, his feet bare, and says: "Let me give you a tour around the office."

The office is divided into two sections: one for Winkler Partners, a legal office that serves "Fortune-500 type clients," and the other for Wild at Heart Legal Defense Association (WaH), a group that offers legal assistance in cases involving development projects that threaten the habitats of wildlife and people.

In his 12th floor office on Chongqing S Road, Winkler opens a glass door and reveals a rooftop garden complete with shrubs, herbs, a vine trellis, an outdoor compost toilet and three metal barrels that collect rainwater to flush some of the toilets inside the office.

In addition to protecting the environment, Winkler is a strong advocate of "greening" our offices, something he calls "reverse engineering."

"The process of office greening consists of observing what nature

tells us and then trying to apply that information in the context of a modern law office," he says.

We take the stairs from the 12th floor to the ground floor — with Winkler turning off the staircase lights along the way — and catch the subway to a meeting of the Taipei Bar Association's environmental group, where attorneys discuss environmental issues from a legal standpoint.

Along the way, Winkler takes out a towel and hands it to the owner of a baked-yam stall, who wraps up eight yams for his lunch and possibly dinner.

Both Winkler Partners and WaH were founded by Winkler in 1993, but his involvement in Taiwan started long before that. Winkler first set foot in Taiwan in 1977, when he came to learn Chinese.

Twenty-six years later he traded his US citizenship to become a naturalized Taiwanese.

Asked what inspired his dedication to environmental issues, Winkler rebutted the notion that he first became passionate about nature after surviving cancer almost five years ago.

"We see the world based on our experience," he said. "I had the good fortune to spend a lot of time the first six years of my life on a farm" in Wisconsin.

Those years were the foundation for his love of nature, he said. His upbringing by very environmentally



Law firm founder and environmentalist Robin Winkler stands in the terrace garden outside his 12th floor office in Taipei last month.

PHOTO: MEGGIE LU, TAIPEI TIMES

conscious parents and his ravenous appetite for books cemented that passion.

Born to parents who loved the great outdoors and enjoyed the work of Rachel Carson — a renowned US nature writer and biologist whose works in the 1950s were pivotal to the environmentalist movement — Winkler said that more than a decade ago, he began going through mounds of books that seemed "to confirm a lot of things I'd observed, but wasn't able to articulate."

*The Continuum Concept* by Jean Liedloff, *Beyond Civilization* by Daniel Quinn and *The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken were especially insightful, Winkler said.

"There are things that most people would be upset with if they noticed — like locking dogs in wired cages, slapping children around or having road lamps turned on in daylight ... The problem is that, people just don't," he said.

The state of the environment in Taiwan has been sliding downhill, Winkler said.

"It's becoming an environmental disaster," he said. "One of the prime indicators is that we are consuming like Americans ... We are a superpower when it comes to waste and overconsumption."

Winkler strives for simplicity and zero negative impact, seeking to reduce and eventually eliminate all purchases of new materials and equipment for himself and his office.

"I haven't used an air conditioner for years in my home; I'm trying to never buy anything new again and I don't own a car," he said.

Outside of his daily work at the office, Winkler gives lectures at schools, meets with individuals and groups interested in his message and publishes books on environmental protection.

WaH also promotes education and public discussion on the en-

vironment, in addition to producing research and translations of important works in a variety of related fields. Winkler Partners, meanwhile, donates 3 percent of its earnings to environmental and social organizations.

Winkler and WaH are also working on a long list of projects. They are opposed to the Central Taiwan Science Park and WaH is in the middle of biodiversity research to combat a Yunlin County decision to flood Youcing Valley (幽情谷) to alleviate a water shortage in the area.

Does the work ever pay off? Yes, Winkler says. The organization's efforts have, for example, led Taipei County to file a construction company that began building a road between Wulai (烏來) and Sansia (三峽) before its EIA had been passed.

But the green movement is more than just seeking a balance in our use of the environment, Winkler says: Society has a lot to learn.

"The greening process include[s] paying colleagues as much as we can afford, being completely open about firm finances and providing opportunities to develop or move to different positions within the office," he said.

In the right environment, most people can do some very interesting and outstanding things, he says — and that in turn benefits the organization as a whole.

Above all, Winkler says, people need to learn to "really see" their surroundings.

"You ask me why I care about the environment so much, but I'm surprised whenever I talk to people outside the environmental field," he said. "Why isn't [the issue of the environment] obvious to everyone?"