

FEATURES



Located in the heart of Taipei, Tonghua Street night market is a popular shopping hub for food, drinks, fashion, home decor and fluffy pets

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Tonghua Street Night Market has it all: neon-lit fashions; traditional snacks sold alongside trendy treats; and hidden bargains for every shopper.



EAT, DRINK AND SHOP till you drop



Adjacent to the high-fashion and financial center Xinyi District (信義區), Tonghua Street night market (通化街夜市) is less commonly known as Linchiang Street tourism night market (臨江街觀光夜市), which it was officially renamed in 1997. The market — which spreads out from the intersection of Tonghua and Linchiang streets, criss-crossing through the alleys and lanes between Xinyi Road (信義路) Section 4 and Keelung Road (基隆路) Section 2 — is a popular spot for evening feasting and shopping. Tonghua epitomizes the neon-lit street culture of the night market, where the traditional and the new, and the local and the foreign, cohere. Modern franchises stand side-by-side with food vendors that have more than 30 years of history, while traditional Taiwanese snacks and dishes from China, Japan, Thailand and the Middle East all make their way to the local palate.

The most convenient way to get to Tonghua is by MRT. A 15-minute walk north along Keelung Road from the Brown Line's Liuzhangli (六張犁) station takes you directly to the main entrance of the night market near the intersection of Keelung Road and Guangfu South Road (光復南路). The No. 282, No. 207, No. 254, No. 284 and No. 650 buses, which arrive at the Sanxing Elementary School (三興國小) stop, are also a quick way to get to Tonghua. Visitors coming from Xinyi Road can take lines 292, 20, 22, 33 and 38 and get off at the Tonghua and Xinyi (信義通化路口) stop. Parking for motorcycles and automobiles is usually almost impossible to find.

Compared to the expansive Shilin (士林) and Raohe (饒河) night markets, Tonghua is more pedestrian-friendly and won't make your feet sore or leave your ears pounding from deafening street noise. Vendors using speakers to hawk their wares are noticeably absent, perhaps because Tonghua is one of the few Taipei night markets located in a residential area.

Tonghua is a traditional marketplace by day, a housewives' paradise designed to satisfy a family's every need. Since most of the selling action takes place on Linchiang Street, the narrow alley that cuts from Keelung Road to Tonghua Street, the first half of the strip has fewer snack stalls and more vendors who sell items for daily use, as well as clothing for women, men and children. A stroll down the short lane can fill every need for underwear, socks, shoes and sneakers, daytime and evening wear, as well as bedding, lighting, home

decorations, accessories and trinkets.

Shops targeting younger shoppers with pseudo-ethnic clothing, pipes and other paraphernalia for a night — or day — of relaxation, have now become fixtures in Taipei's larger night markets, and Tonghua is no exception. A novelty chain store called Check Fun (格子趣) lets would-be entrepreneurs realize their dreams by allowing them to rent spaces on the store's shelves and sell a motley range of items. Merchandise available includes solar energy-powered toys, wrist rings said to speed up blood circulation, Malaysian soup packs and coffee from Singapore.

The night-market experience is incomplete without a lineup of mobile vendors in the middle of the main pedestrian thoroughfares, hawking street food like *luwei* (滷味) and traditional treats like potatoes cooked with sugar and candies made from peanuts and sesame. Most of these peddlers are unlicensed and swiftly disappear at the sight of a policeman. Next time you see a street free of carts in Tonghua, make sure to wait for the guerilla troop to come out from their hideouts so you won't miss all the good stuff.

Advance to the intersection of Linchiang Street and Alley 50, Lane 39, Tonghua Street, and you will be greeted with a cluster of well-established eateries that make the night market famous. Grandma Tseng's pig-blood sticky rice cake (曾阿婆豬血糕) and Hunghua Hungguai sausages (紅花紅桂香腸) are two famous vendors frequented by savvy regulars.

People with low a tolerance for spicy foods, however, should be wary of the more piquant choices among the dozens of flavors available at the sausage stand.

For the more adventurous diner, Hu's Rice Noodle Soup (胡記米粉湯) has served diners the traditional delicacy of pig intestines for more than 30 years and continues to enjoy unceasing popularity, as evidenced by the long queue every night.

Further toward Tonghua Street stand a few joints with an equally long history. Shichia Chinese Burgers (石家割包, 104 Linchiang St) is where the chain store began and expanded throughout the rest of the city. The 35-year-old Today Sushi (今日壽司店, 106 Linchiang St) offers shoppers

a spot to sit down and take a break from the human traffic while enjoying fresh sushi and oden dishes. On the other side of the alley, Hsin Da Hsing Shaved Ice (新大興刀削冰, 97 Linchiang St) has peddled the traditional frozen dessert since 1980 and can sell up to 1,000 bowls per day, said its owner, a silver-haired woman surnamed Liu (劉).

Traditional edibles are repackaged with contemporary trappings in chain shops along the more spacious Tonghua Street. Opposite to the market's landmark Qingdao Soybean Milk (青島豆漿, 73 Tonghua St) is the overly franchised Meet Fresh (鮮芋仙) and Wonderland of Jelly Ice (愛玉之夢遊仙草), both of which peddle updated concoctions made from old favorites such as shaved ice, herb jelly, taro balls and tofu pudding.

Visitors with an appetite for different types of cuisine should take time exploring the alleys off Tonghua Street. 20 Pots (20鍋, 14, Ln 38, Tonghua St) has quickly become a hangout for local foodies with its hot and spicy *ganguo* (干鍋), or dry pot, a culinary transplant from China's Yunnan province. Across the alley is Japanese joint I Wei Wu (乙味屋, 36-1, Tonghua St), famed for its fresh sashimi dishes. A customer's bill here can easily reach NT\$1,500 per person if some of the more premium seafood selections are ordered.

For those who think spending more than NT\$1,000 for a meal is a bit too much for a night market, try the humble restaurant across the street that specializes in Taiwanese meatballs (肉圓) and rice and taro cakes (油粿).

Other forms of entertainment include a visit to the Nanshan Theater (南山戲院1, Ln 24, Tonghua St). For NT\$130, ticket-holders have the freedom to see all the second-run movies showing on the theater's four screens. Early-evening visitors are encouraged to take a walk along Wenchang "Furniture" Street (文昌傢俱街) to look for deals — provided that they have better bargaining skills than the seasoned salespersons.

Last but not least, let's not forget the pet shops along Keelung Road, where girls and young women practice their fake-cute (裝可愛) squeaks at fluffy pets that don't look particularly amused about being cooped up in small cages, basked in fluorescent light and gawked at through the glass all day and night.

