

FEATURES

The faces and spaces of

Shida



A mostly residential district between two of Taiwan's premier universities, Shida offers a traditional morning market for locals and a lively night market for the university and office crowd

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Spreading through the alleys and lanes that branch off from the east side of Shida Road (師大路), just down the street from National Taiwan Normal University (台灣師範大學), is a grid of street stalls, boutiques, restaurants and family-run stores commonly known as the Shida night market (師大夜市). Though it may not be the largest or most famous of the city's night markets, it is perhaps the one that best encapsulates contemporary Taipei in all of its glitz, rapid change and frenetic activity.

The Shida area has changed significantly over the past few years. Once home to mainly mom-and-pop vendors, Longquan Street (龍泉街), the night market's main pedestrian thoroughfare, is today seeing these older shops replaced by trendy clothing and jewelry stores catering to the university students who make up a sizeable portion of the night market's foot traffic. Though many landlords have raised rents to upwards of NT\$100,000 per month for small storefronts in the lanes between Shida Road and Longquan Street, new cafes, fashion outlets and beauty salons are constantly appearing.

No space is wasted here, especially once the sun goes down. The vacant front steps of what is a teppanyaki restaurant by day become the site of a small business selling stuffed animals and other knickknacks at night; a half-meter-wide gap between two buildings becomes home to a makeshift stand hawking leather accessories from different parts of Asia.

Dining in Shida is a treat. At the intersection of Longquan Street and Shida Road Lane 49 stands the two-story Brother Cow (牛老大) restaurant, which serves fresh-cut noodles boiled in large woks at street level. Across the street, Precious Taste (珍品味) is popular among Shida habitués for its chicken leg rice (雞腿飯).

Another treat no night market crawler should miss is the greased-up flavor of *xiansuji* (鹹酥雞). Several metal carts along Shida Road Lane 39 sell this snack, and you know you've found the right place when you see the mounds of fresh vegetables (usually green beans, broccoli and bell peppers), tofu, chicken nuggets, skewered chicken hearts and butts, tempura, squid, onion rings and raw russet and sweet potato wedges (just to name a few) piled high on the stand and illuminated by high-wattage lamps. Ordering is a do-it-yourself process. Pick up an empty plastic colander and place in it a single piece of what you want to have deep-fried. You then hand the colander to the cook who adds roughly 100g of each food item you have chosen. Be sure to ask the cook to add fresh basil before deep-frying, and to sprinkle on garlic, chili powder and salt and pepper afterwards. However, if grease doesn't suit your palette, try *mianxian* (麵線), a traditional Taiwanese soup made from vermicelli noodles at a stall closer to the intersection of Lane 39 and Shida Road.

In addition to the night market, Shida is also home to a smaller market that harks back to an earlier era. Longquan market (龍泉市場) is a morning market where neighborhood residents go shopping for groceries and other household items. The sound of roosters crowing in the early morning signals the beginning of the business day in this small emporium, a series of covered stalls behind the Wellcome (真好) supermarket on Shida Road, where elderly men shuffle along the alleys while young mothers haggle over a catty of fruit or a pair of slippers. There are stalls selling pots and pans, vegetables and fruit, seafood, bedding, cheap clothing — some in style, much of it not — toys, tools and, of course, traditional Chinese breakfast foods. The adjacent Gufeng Park (古風公園) serves as the nucleus of activity for this early morning congregations of shoppers and vendors, where makeshift stalls compete with farmers selling their wares from blue trucks they have driven down from the mountains surrounding Taipei.

Because Shida's night market is close to a university that teaches Mandarin to international students, it is only natural that foreign restaurateurs are increasing their presence in the area. Biff's Pitas at 9-3, Ln 49, Shida Rd (師大路49巷9-3號) makes tasty and inexpensive burritos and pitas using fresh ingredients. Walk two minutes south from Biff's to 51, Yunhe Street (雲和街51號) and you'll find Maryjane Pizza, which serves satisfying thin-crust pizza. There are even several burger joints, most notably KGB: Kiwi Gourmet Burgers, at 5, Ln 114, Shida Rd (師大路114巷5號), which also stocks an array of hard-to-find Antipodean beers and local microbrews. For dessert, check out Dancing Cows (搖滾牛冰淇淋), 66 Longquan St. (龍泉街66號) for its premium American-style ice cream sold in a huge array of flavors, of which I personally recommend Oreos.

By 8pm the narrow drag of Longquan Street starts to feel even narrower as young entrepreneurs flock to tiny rented street-side spaces and open large portmanteaus stuffed with scarves, watches, leather bags, purses and wallets.

At night people come to Shida's markets to be seen as much as they do to shop and eat, and Shida park (師大公園), across from the market, is an ideal place in the evening to sit, chat and engage in some people-watching. On many weekends, space here is given over to vendors who sell anything from honey to books.

Facing the park and on the opposite side of Shida Road from the night market are two hangout spots where one can enjoy a glass of iced tea or pint of beer while sitting at a table outdoors or on a veranda. Roxy Jr, at 1, Ln 80, Shida Rd (師大路80巷1號); and Vino Vino, at 2, Ln 80, Shida Rd (師大路80巷2號), both offer great views of the park; and Jr is open 24 hours a day. Back on the night market side of Shida Road, Underworld (地下社會), in the basement at 45 Shida Rd (師大路45號), is a bar that has live bands on weekends and some weeknights.



Shida night market (師大夜市) is a short walk up Shida Road from exit No. 3 of the Taipower Building (台電大樓) MRT Station. The restaurants, shops and nightspots listed in this article are all located along or near the stretch of Shida Road bounded by Roosevelt Road Section 3 (羅斯福路三段) and Heping East Road Section 1 (和平東路一段).

Above: Shida Road Lane 39 is lined with food stalls and stores selling clothing and stationery.

PHOTO: HUANGHSUAN-RL, TAIPEI TIMES

Left from top: *Luwei* is a popular snack at the Shida night market; Brother Cow serves fresh-cut noodles; the steps in front of this teppanyaki restaurant become the location of a small business selling plush toys and other knickknacks at night.

PHOTOS: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES