



CLASS CLOWNS

Two international students, one from Indonesia and the other from the US, wear costumes and go trick-or-treating from classroom to classroom at Deguang High School in Tainan City last week as they introduced students to the origin and traditions of Halloween in English.

PHOTO: HUANG PO-LANG, TAIPEI TIMES

Culinary delights come to Eslite

MARINATED IN LOVE: The purpose of the International Food Culture Exchange, the founder said, is to provide services to the marginalized through various activities

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Uproarious laughing, thunderous clapping, lip smacking and high-decibel "mmm" and "ahhh" noises are usually things that warrant the attention of the security guards in an upscale bookstore where quietness and tranquility are a must.

But on the third floor of Eslite's flagship store in Taipei's Xinyi District (信義), silence and strict adherence to the "no eating" rule is the very last thing on the store owner's mind on the third Friday of each month.

What started off last year with only a handful of participants has now exploded into the most popular activity offered at Eslite's recipe section. It is estimated that more than 100 people show up for the class each month and the number keeps growing. At the class on Oct. 24, the seats were filled an hour before the demonstration, and by the time the class started there was barely any standing room left.

Strangers have become each other's best food buddies because of the class, one woman said.

"I think the classes are fabulous. It is a wonderful opportunity to learn about other cultures and have a taste of different customs. You can tell a lot about one's culture from the food they eat," said Ann Keke, wife of the Solomon Island ambassador, who has attended the class six times to support her friends.

The International Food Culture Exchange was founded by Taiwanese Pallas Chen (陳玉枝) in May last year when she realized that many people in Taiwan were missing out on the scrumptious cuisines of many countries around the world. Using her connections and

friendship with the various embassies and representative offices in Taipei, Chen said she has been able to convince many wives of ambassadors, representatives, deputy representatives and other volunteers from embassies and representative offices to put on a cooking demonstration featuring the popular dishes of their homelands.

Some of the flavors that have been concocted at the Eslite cooking studio include mafeh, a traditional vegetable soup of Gambia taught by Madame Juwara, the wife of the Gambian ambassador, also mutter, a popular Indian dish made with potato and green peas in tomato gravy demonstrated by Madame Seetharam, the wife of the head of the India-Taipei Association, and chicken maque choux, a much loved Cajun dish introduced by Keith Schneller, the director of the agricultural trade office at the American Institute

in Taiwan (AIT). Despite the regional differences and the assortment of ingredients, all the dishes share one common trait — they are sprinkled with friendship and marinated in love.

"You see how I am blessed with such good friends?" Chen said with a smile, while looking over to rows of ladies and gentlemen from embassies and representative offices who were at the class to support Beata Pfeiffer, the wife of the Austrian Tourism Office deputy director giving a lesson on making kaiserschmarrn and fleckerl.

"I have made so many dear friends throughout the years and I am very grateful for the support they have shown me," she said.

In her early 30s, Chen was invited by a friend to join the Taipei International Women's Club, one



Left: Beata Pfeiffer, the wife of the deputy representative of the Austrian Tourism Office, left, teaches a class on how to make fleckerl on Oct. 24 with the help of her sister and a Taiwanese man. Right: "Bobotie" is a South African-style shepherd's pie. Below: Onlookers respond during a South African cooking demonstration at the Eslite flagship store in Taipei's Xinyi District on Sept. 26.

PHOTOS: JENNY W. HSU, TAIPEI TIMES



of the oldest charity organizations in Taiwan among the foreign community and founded in 1951 by Roberta Auburn, a wife of a USAID officer.

The purpose of the organization, she said, is to give services to marginalized populations through fundraisers, auctions, donations and other activities. After almost three decades in the club, Chen said, she gained an inside look on how to manage a charity foundation, how to pool positive energy together for a good cause, and most importantly, her experience has taught her that the strength of sisterhood transcends race, ethnicity and creed.

Through the years, Chen has witnessed embassies and representative offices in Taiwan shut down. Many of her friends have come and gone. When Malawi unexpectedly cut ties with Taiwan last January after 79 42 years of friendship, Chen held no bitter feelings for the family of the Malawi ambassador and even rounded up carloads of clothes for Madame Edna Maloya to take back to her impoverished country.

At the cooking session on Oct. 24, Sieglinde Sparlang, the head of the Austrian Tourism Office, said her office was delighted to participate in the program because "there is a



story behind every Austrian dish."

Take kaiserschmarrn for example, she said, which literally translates to "emperor's rubbish." It gained its name when Empress Elisabeth, who was mindful of her waistline, demanded that the royal cook make food that would keep her slim.

However, his pancake-like creation met with her disgust, but won the approval of her husband Emperor Francis Joseph.

This month, the Spanish Chamber of Commerce will present Daniel Ortega, the chef of El Toro,

to demonstrate how to make stuffed chicken with caramelized pine nuts and black squid risotto with parmesano reggiano.

Next month an American professor will make delicious fudge brownies using three types of chocolate and a French dessert, claufutti.

For more information on the upcoming cooking demonstrations, see www.eslitebooks.com or call the cookbook section of the bookstore.

All classes are free and open to the public.

'Lonely Planet Taiwan' author loves his subject

Every year, thousands of visitors to Taiwan rely on Lonely Planet to know where to go and what to do. The Taipei Times' sat down with guidebook co-author Robert Kelly, whose knowledge of the country's every nook and cranny is as big as his fondness for the place

BY J. MICHAEL COLE
STAFF REPORTER

British Columbia-born Robert Kelly's love story with Taiwan began at Hong Kong airport when he was 19, where, after traveling in Southeast Asia, he ran into a German on a "kung fu visa" who happened to be a teacher in Taiwan. What the latter had to say about Taiwan did not fall on deaf ears.

Back in Canada, Robert graduated from Simon Frazier University, traveled to Guatemala and then to the Yukon territory. As fate would have it, he again ran into someone who hailed from Taiwan. Wavering between moving to Japan, where his sister was working, and Taiwan, Robert chose the latter, and soon after moving here in 1996, he began teaching at a bushiban in Taoyuan, where his talent for writing stories soon gained notice.

After teaching for about a year and a half and developing pneumonia from the "toxic air" in the classroom, Robert moved to Muzha, Taipei. What immediately struck him was how quickly one could get away from the bustle of the city and "travel back in time" to rural areas.

After writing for various publishers, in fall 2003 Robert was approached by Lonely Planet, the Australia-based publisher known worldwide for its travel books. Hired as a freelancer, Robert and two other writers set about rewriting the entire guide, a 14-hour a day, seven-day-a-week adventure that would last six months.

"It was very stressful," says Robert, now 42, especially as they would only give him two or three days to cover a city of 2 million people like Taichung.

"Taiwan has among the nicest mountains in the world. I know mountains, I come from British Columbia," he said in an interview with the Taipei Times on Sept. 17.

Robert now knows that two days is enough to cover a mid-sized city. It all boils down to setting priorities, he says. Why spend a lot of time on a big city if it has little to offer tourists? Newspapers, magazines and local contacts can help save a lot of time, too, as one cannot sample every restaurant or stay at every hotel.

Another thing to keep in mind is how quickly things change in Taiwan.

"We need to stay current. I won't write about a business if it hasn't been opened for a while," he said. The trick is to focus on areas — parts of a city where most bars, or restaurants can be found, rather than specific ones, which can close at a moment's notice and no longer exist by the time the guide hits the shelves.

"Guide books that fail to stay current can waste people's time," he says.

For other aspects, staying at the general level is wise. If we say there are poisonous snakes in a river, killer bees in an area or that a sector is prone to flooding, we can't say bad things will happen for sure. But they're likely, and readers should be aware of that, he says.

"There's lots of really rough stuff in Taiwan" and readers should be aware of that. It's part of our job to tell them that."

In recent years — especially for last year's edition of the guide — the Tourism Bureau was helpful, providing various passes and lending officials, he said. This meant greater access to parks and areas, as well as information about little-known locales and insights into future development plans.

"This not only makes our guide more current," Robert says, "but it gives our readers a sense of things to come."

With a tight, one-year schedule divided between six months of research and writing, and six months of publishing, the oldest information a reader will get in the guide is

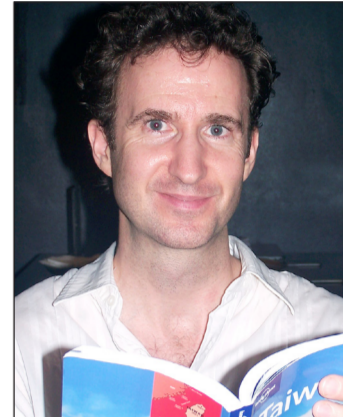


PHOTO: J. MICHAEL COLE, TAIPEI TIMES

“There are no ugly areas in Taiwan. It's only what people do to the land that makes it ugly.”

— Robert Kelly, co-author of Lonely Planet Taiwan

one year, he says.

Hot springs, trekking and "birding" are a special focus in the latest guide, which Robert and co-author Joshua Samuel Brown felt needed to "market" the country and distinguish it from other tourist destinations — treasures that most Taiwanese who never leave the city are unaware of themselves, he says.

Asked how writing the guide has changed his perspective on Taiwan, Robert says it has made him appreciate how the country has progressed. In fact, had it not changed, he might have left years ago.

"Studies have proven that as a country gets richer," he said, its people will start paying more attention to the environment.

With that comes development, recycling and cleaning.

He said he has also noticed that the country has many more people who give up their careers to return to the land to open tea shops or B&Bs. He also noticed that under the Democratic Progressive Party government, many Taiwanese became interested in learning more about where they came from. The two-day weekends, introduced in 2001, also encouraged Taiwanese to discover their country.

Many tourist areas, such as Kenting, have begun to realize that they cannot keep running things the "Taiwanese" way and have sought to learn from traveling abroad, he says. Slowly, people are recognizing that the area surrounding the tourist attractions, such as the beaches in Kenting, must be well-maintained for people to want to visit.

"There are no ugly areas in Taiwan," he said. "It's only what people do to the land that makes it ugly." Fruit farms and other exploitative businesses that damage the environment infuriate him.

"If only we could pay them off so they would leave," says Robert, who once had this writer carry a bag of garbage picked up along the way during a river-tracing expedition in Wulai (烏來).

Robert has also co-authored the Lonely Planet guides to Tibet, Hainan and Qinghai, which gave him a greater appreciation for Taiwan.

"There is no real poverty in Taiwan," he says. In China, "you get six-year-old children begging in the Forbidden City, on the streets of Shanghai."

As a foreigner in China he felt he was always being "cased for money" and feared for his health and safety. Robert prefers the openness in Taiwan.

Taiwan has tremendous beauty. What it needs is "hype" for the rest of the world to recognize that, he says. With Robert Kelly as author of Lonely Planet Taiwan for the foreseeable future, that hype is in good, loving hands.



Czech Republic Representative Jaroslav Dolecek, right, and his wife, second right, accompanied by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Javier Hou, left, and his wife, make a toast at a reception in Taipei last Tuesday celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Czech Republic's independence.

PHOTO: JENNY W. HSU, TAIPEI TIMES

Over 100 guests honor Czech Republic

BY JENNY W. HSU
STAFF REPORTER

Over 100 guests rose to their feet with glasses in hand last Tuesday night to wish the Czech Republic a happy 15th birthday as the east European country celebrated its national day in Taipei.

Hosted by the Czech Economic and Trade Office in Taipei (CETO), guests from all embassies, representative offices, ranking government officials, media personnel and individuals from the private sector expressed their good wishes to the young democracy.

In his address, Representative Jaroslav Dolecek referred to some unfortunate events that took place in the past, but pointed out that

after 40 years of totalitarian rule, the people of the Czech Republic now live in a "free and smoothly functioning democratic society."

"We have enjoyed rapid growth in exports, a strong inflow of foreign capital and relatively low unemployment," he said.

"In the first half of next year, the Czech Republic will face another test of its capability — for we will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union. Five years after we became an EU member state, we have been given the chance to prove our potential and to make our mark as an important and trustworthy partner on the international scene," he said.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Javier Hou (侯清山) added that like the Czech Republic, Taiwan has a history of fighting communism.

"Taiwanese also have experience fighting communism and pursuing democracy and freedom. Therefore we share in the joy felt over your country's joining the European Union and the Schengen treaty. Next year the Czech Republic will hold the EU presidency, which I suppose is a dream come true for you. Becoming more involved in the international community is a dream of our own as well," Hou said.

In the last four years, CETO issued an average 24,000 tourist visas to Taiwanese nationals. There are approximately 50 Czech nationals living in Taiwan.