



Bastille Day celebrations draw hundreds in Taipei

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

With hundreds of people swaying to live jazz and enjoying a delectable buffet, for a few hours on Saturday night, Huashan Cultural Park was Taipei's own Little Paris.

The festivities to celebrate France's national day, Bastille Day, drew more than 700 people.

Decked out in the national colors — red, white and blue — the venue offered a slice of home for French expatriates.

Festivities are organized each year for Bastille Day by the Association of France in Taiwan.

MISSING HOME

"Back home, the people would dance in the streets. There were lots of parties and definitely a lot of alcohol," said Patrick Morain, a student studying Chinese in Taiwan.

Harmonique Sonnette, who arrived in Taiwan two weeks ago with her husband and eight-month old son, said the party reminded her of home, albeit without the fancy fireworks.

The night had something for everyone: a complete bar and French snacks, a magic show

and acrobatic performance, and a lucky draw for a wide line-up of prizes donated by businesses.

ARMED WITH BREAD

A rowdy crowd of French nationals and Francophiles with flags painted on their faces — some with baguette in hand — danced to the music of the Wailin' Souls.

One of the highlights of the party was a performance of the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*. Upon recognizing the melody, many people stood still as they listened to the 18th century piece symbolic of the French Revolution.

Christian Tron, a retired Air France employee and the treasurer of the host organization, said Bastille Day commemorates the end of the French monarchy and the dismantling of the Bastille on July 14, 1789.

The Association of France in Taiwan is a non-profit organization set up by French expatriates in Taiwan in 1991 to provide a venue where French speakers can interact and exchange views.

The group holds regular activities, but its Bastille Day celebration is the biggest event of the year, Tron said.

Traveler finds home in Taiwan

‘LIBERATING EXPERIENCE’: A short, low-budget trip to Taiwan and one great foot massage was the start of a new life in Taiwan for Japanese travel writer Yuka Aoki

BY **SHELLEY SHAN**
STAFF REPORTER

Japanese national Yuka Aoki has lived in Taiwan for about six years. She was recently chosen by the Tourism Bureau to promote its campaign to encourage foreign tourists to post their travel stories from Taiwan online.

Aoki has written three books about living and traveling in Taiwan, all of which have been translated into Chinese. She recently published a Taiwan travel guide for Japanese women with a focus on how to pamper oneself.

Apart from being a writer, she is the host of *Taiwan's One-Person Tourism Bureau*, a new travel program that airs on Wednesday nights on Japanese Entertainment Television (JET TV). She runs a hostel for backpackers and sells rice and vegetable rolls.

Now 36, Aoki admits Taiwan was not on her list of top destinations when she started traveling at age 20, but that changed.

"I had a colleague in Japan who came to Taiwan a lot and she invited me to come here with her on a four-day trip," she said, adding that she was on a tight budget.

On that trip, Aoki had a foot massage in Taipei that she describes as a "liberating experience."

"My body was filled with *genki* [energy]," she said.

That energy-charged experience, though painful, led Aoki to come back in 2002 to study foot massage techniques.

"Now I can have [foot massages] every day," she said.

Aoki spent six months studying with a foot masseuse, but even after she finished, the warmth of her Taiwanese friends inspired her to find ways to stay.

While she returned to Japan for

three months in 2003 during the SARS outbreak, she came back the next year and started writing stories about life in Taiwan for several Japanese magazines.

In her books, Aoki mentions her experiences visiting Matsu (馬祖) and Aboriginal villages. She also describes the delicacies to be found at Taipei food stalls and the hot springs Taiwan has to offer.

Her writing is interwoven with personal experiences of interacting with Taiwanese and learning about their everyday lives and culture.

To Aoki, one of the delights of living in Taiwan is discussing shopping tips with strangers.

"I went to a traditional food market one time and was checking out the fish sold by one of the vendors," she said. "There was an *ajisan* [old man] standing behind me who I didn't know and he said to me: 'Take it from me, don't buy that, it's no good.'"

"The other day I was on a bus and a woman came up to me and said: 'Hey, nice bag, where did you buy it?'"

"In Japan, you don't give advice to strangers or ask people for their mobile phone numbers the first time you meet them. Those who do are considered weird," she said.

The Taiwanese are not afraid of expressing themselves, an impression she says she got from hearing people fart in public.

While not a meat eater herself, Aoki said she is always intrigued by the booths selling *yansuji*, or salted crispy chicken, on the street.

"You can see these pretty, nicely dressed young ladies who seem to be having a good time gnawing chicken necks and nibbling chicken butts," she said, mimicking their motions.

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— Yuka Aoki, Japanese national

However, Aoki said there are things about Taiwan that frustrate her too, including the public toilets.

"You always see a full trash can with a big pile of used toilet paper because you cannot flush the paper," she said.

The garbage-collecting schedule can be a hassle at times, too, she said.

Nor is she a fan of Taiwan's insects.

"The cockroaches here fly, you know," she said. "And one time I was walking down Roosevelt Road at night and thought I was alone, but then I realized I had company — a band of roaches crawling by my side."

While Aoki said she might leave Taiwan one day, she had no plans to do so yet.

Her parents have visited her in Taiwan and felt certain their daughter would be happy staying here because of the warmth of her friends.

If there is one thing that tourists simply must not miss in Taiwan, she said, it is the chance to "interact with Taiwanese."



Japanese national Yuka Aoki wears a traditional Amis outfit while visiting Atolan Village in Taitung County in January.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOODAY WORKSHOP LIMITED

AmCham Taichung program helps orphans of 921 quake

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

For Taiwanese, the number "921" represents a day of devastation and heartbreak, fear and for many, the tragic loss of loved ones.

Measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, a fatal temblor on Sept. 21, 1999, rattled the entire country when the Chenglongpu Fault, which stretches along the foothills of the Central Mountain Range in Nantou and Taichung counties, shifted. The quake and its aftershocks shook Taiwan throughout the night, leaving behind a death toll that made 921 one of Taiwan's deadliest natural disasters.

According to the National Fire Agency, the earthquake killed more than 2,400 people and left 11,443 severely wounded. Around 150 children were orphaned.

The total cost of damage to buildings and infrastructure was NT\$300 billion (US\$9.2 billion).

The quake devastated more than 40,000 homes, but did not shatter the country's spirit. In the wake of the tragedy, communities united to help those in need and the expatriate community was no exception. In central Taiwan, expats were especially active in reaching out to their neighbors.

Ten years later, the American Chamber of Commerce in Taichung (AmCham Taichung) is still helping ensure the welfare of the 921 orphans and other needy children in the area.

Established in 1993, AmCham Taichung, which seeks to serve all foreign nationals and not just Americans, functions as a bridge between the expatriate and local business communities and Taichung City Government.

In addition to offering standard services to the community and businesses, AmCham Taiwan has made a name for itself through its KIDZ program.

Established six years ago by then-chairman Jack McDowell, who spent six years of his childhood in an orphanage in Tennessee, the KIDZ program began with a full-day Christmas party for the city's disadvantaged children.

The project has since evolved, providing juice and milk daily to Christian Herald Orphanage (台中光音育幼院) and special needs children at the Daniel A. Poling Babies Home. It also offers high



Children who lost their parents in the devastating earthquake that struck Taiwan on Sept. 21, 1999, chat at Christian Herald Orphanage in Taichung City in an undated photo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMCHAM TAICHUNG

school scholarships to all the orphans at the Christian Herald Orphanage, which includes some of those who lost their parents in the 921 quake.

"The philosophy behind the program is that if we can help those children to have a better future by making sure they receive an excellent education, they could move forward and have a more productive life and pursue a professional career," AmCham Taichung chairman Nathan Hines said.

These individuals could eventually help others in need or make other contributions to their communities, Hines said.

The first group of students to receive the scholarships are expected to graduate next year. In September, another 21 teenagers from the orphanage start high school with financing from AmCham.

Depending on whether a child attends a private or public high school, tuition per semester ranges from NT\$20,000 to NT\$60,000.

"If the kids can test into high schools, we want to make sure the funds are available for them. But right now it is a struggle to come up with enough funds to cover the expenses," he said, adding

that this had become more difficult with time because many of those orphaned in the 921 quake are high school age now.

Douglas Habecker, the chamber's secretary-general, expressed gratitude to all the donors who have supported the program, but said more was needed. Donations of any sum are appreciated, he said.

"We could go out and bang doors and try to get random donations and that could work. But at the end of the day, the one thing that makes charities like this successful is when larger corporate donors give large chunks of money," he said.

Those people who might not be able to donate money but would still like to contribute can help as volunteers, Habecker said. AmCham Taiwan holds fundraising events throughout the year, including a golf tournament and a chili cook-off. This November it will also hold a casino night.

Every dollar of proceeds from the events goes to the KIDZ program fund, Habecker said.

To learn more about the KIDZ program, visit www.amchamtaichung.org or call (04)2471-8133.

FEATURE