

Sweet Taiwan



Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate sells chocolate and other gourmet food and beverages made in Taiwan

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

On a street lined with restaurants featuring cuisine from around the world, Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate represents this country. Its signature treat is tailored to local tastes with flavors like oolong and matcha tea, and the cafe also sells jewelry, bags, clothing and food items made by artisans around the island.

The interior of the cafe on Pucheng Street (浦城街) near Shida looks like it came straight out of a zakka-style decorating magazine. Two small wooden tables sit near a large window; shelves decorated with canvas bags and woven jewelry are arranged carefully on the white walls. A "chandelier" made of jars filled with handmade jam hangs from a frame in the middle of the ceiling.

"We want to sell things that are handmade and healthy," says Lee Yannan (李燕南), who opened Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate three months ago. The centerpiece of the cafe is a case filled with chocolate. Most of the candy sold in the store is by Henry & Cary, a Taiwanese chocolatier whose combination kitchen and storefront is located near Roosevelt Road (羅斯福路).

Lee, who has been friends with the founder of Henry & Cary for more than a decade, says that the chocolate brand differentiates itself by tailoring its products to Taiwanese tastes, though it uses ingredients imported from France and Belgium.

"We want people to think of it as Taiwan's own chocolate brand. We don't use butter in our chocolate and it's not overwhelmingly sweet. We also wanted to focus on making the texture purer," says Lee, who adds that Taiwanese customers prefer darker chocolate.

In addition to matcha and oolong, other unusual flavors include lavender, rose and jasmine, all made with natural ingredients. Henry & Cary chocolates forgo fillings like nuts or caramel in favor of smooth, rich truffle. Each piece costs NT\$25, a relatively low price compared to other handmade chocolate brands.

"We don't focus on making our chocolates fancy looking," says Lee. "The price is accessible for everyone who likes chocolate, including students." Other offerings made in the store or by Henry & Cary include brownies, cornflake candy and multi-color chocolate, which features layer upon layer of different flavors.

Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate's neighbors include restaurants serving Indian, Tibetan, Korean, American and Italian cuisine, which are

frequented by students from National Taiwan Normal University (Shida) and National Taiwan University (Taida).

"We are glad we found this location because there are restaurants representing many different countries here, as well as a lot of foreign students," says Lee.

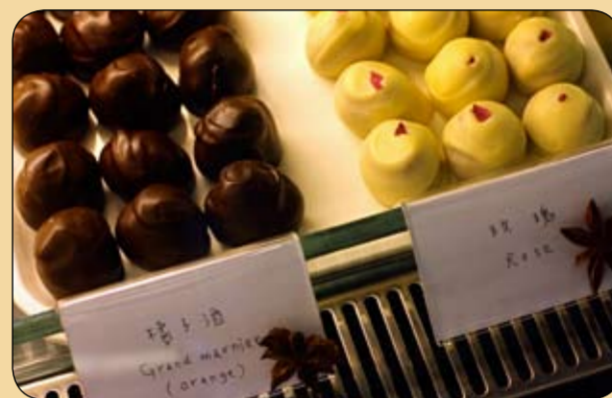
Other items in the store include bags sewn from recycled coffee bean sacks and fabrics created by Lee, gourmet coffee beans that are roasted in small batches and ground by hand, pasta sauce, beaded and braided hemp bracelets and chokers, necklaces with large leather pendants and wraparound trousers made from pieces of silk in different weaves and colors. Dumplings made by Lee's mother, a former restaurateur, are available as a meal or frozen for takeout.

Each item has a story behind it.

A woman in Taichung developed the recipe for Mama Yao's fruit vinegar (姚媽媽水果醋) after her husband was diagnosed with oral cancer and his doctor advised him to drink the enzyme-rich beverage. The sweet and tart fruit vinegar can be drunk chilled like juice, sprinkled over salad or used in cooking, and comes in 10 flavors, including pineapple, tangerine, dragon fruit and papaya.

Photos of each item's makers are printed on laminated cards along with their backgrounds, which customers can read over a cup of coffee.

"We want our customers to appreciate and enjoy things that are made in Taiwan," says Lee.



STORE NOTES:

WHAT: Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate

WHERE: 9-3, Ln 13, Pucheng St, Taipei City (台北市浦城街13巷9-3號)

OPEN: 11am to 10:30pm

TELEPHONE: (02) 2366-1364

ON THE NET: www.istaiwan.com.tw

Is Taiwan, Is Chocolate opened three months ago near National Taiwan Normal University.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



Pied-a-terre

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"It's because of Guo Guang's failure that Taiwan's defense strategy changed ... Chiang's son [later] focused on modernizing Taiwan and building peace across the Taiwan Strait," said Andrew Yang (楊念祖), a political scientist who specializes in Taiwan-China relations and defense issues at the Taipei-based Chinese Council of Advanced Policy Studies.

However, this consequential chapter in history might have forever remained a secret if not for the tenacity of the Taoyuan tourism department's supervisors and staffers, who spent years persuading Ministry of Defense, Academia Historica, the KMT's history museum and the president's office to give them access to the documents.

"We got in touch with any government office that knew about this history. The discussions encountered many difficulties," Hsieh said. "It was especially difficult at the

time of Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), because the DPP [Democratic Progressive Party] didn't want us to promote the legacy of the Chiangs."

But, Hsieh added, "We just feel that since this history existed, we shouldn't hide it. We want to tell people there was this part of history ... But we don't comment on it. We are not involved with politics."

Though documents originally existed for all 26 operations, files for 10 of them have been destroyed, Hsieh said.

"What we can see is what's opened to the public," she said.

The tourism department expects that, in addition to Taiwanese tourists, many Chinese tourists will also want to visit Back Cihu.

"They never learned this history, either. To them, this place is mysterious. When we go to the mainland, we want to know what Mao was like, so when they come here, they'd like to know what Chiang Kai-shek was like."

Besides tourists, old veterans also frequently visit the site — and are greatly appreciative of the fact that details not even found in Taiwan's history books are finally

being revealed.

Andrew Yang of the Chinese Council of Advanced Policy Studies said this newly uncovered information possesses the potential to positively impact cross-strait relations.

"In the early days, Taiwan still wanted to take over mainland China ... Both sides were focused on using force against each other," Yang said. "Perhaps it will teach both sides [China and Taiwan] some lessons — that it's better to abandon the use of force."