

TRAVEL

16

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2010



A holiday sound track

*FreakFest's two days of music offer visitors to
Kending aural pleasures to go with the sand and sea*

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

It's no surprise that Kending (墾丁), with its national park and surrounding beaches, is inundated with tourists seeking some R & R at Lunar New Year. This year, add a two-day music festival to the itinerary. FreakFest 2010 at Liufu farm (六福山莊) near Kending takes place on Feb. 15 and Feb. 16.

The music begins at 2pm on Feb. 15 with an eclectic and relaxed set by DJ Tai Ji, then continues with live hip-hop from THC (Taipei Hip-hop Crew, H中P在台北) and the Shaman (玄武), and a roster of DJs including Duckie, vDub, aka Shaun Kidd, Koala, Mixer T, Marcus Aurelius and Dragon spinning until 4am. Feb. 16 follows a similar schedule.

"The two days look a bit similar on paper," said organizer Rock Starkey, "but will prove to be quite different stylistically."

Day one focuses on hip-hop and tribal electronica, while day two is veers off into psychedelic territory, ending with a five-hour psytrance party.

Starkey said he chose DJs who "have their own style and are a little freaky," and will each play different sets over the weekend to show off the full range of their repertoires.

Live acts include Rock in Hose Burlesque. THC will host an open mic session for would-be MCs and rappers to show off their stuff from 5pm to 6pm on Tuesday. The group will perform three gigs over the two days.

Audience members can expect to hear "new songs [from the crew's upcoming album, slated for a summer release], razor sharp freestyles, and some of the best underground hip-hop," said the Shaman, aka Elliot Tsai (蔡一聯).

The venue has free camping, hot showers, public washrooms and four tented areas. Tent rental will not be available on-site so festivalgoers are advised to take along their



PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES

own gear. While February in the south is often mild, with warm days, the nights can get chilly: a hooded jacket and a sleeping bag or blanket are recommended.

Tin Pan Alley, Starkey's Tainan-based restaurant, will sell smoked Andouille hot dogs and pizza by the slice, and man a bar. A booth from the Surf Shack in Hengchun (恆春) will serve burgers and sandwiches.

Bottled water, soft drinks and juices will be available.

Food and drinks are priced from NT\$50 NT\$200, with beers around NT\$100. No outside drinks are allowed at the festival.

Though there will not be shuttle buses, local taxi companies have been informed of the festival, and from the center of Kending the farm is 20 to 30 minutes away on foot.

Set in Kending National Park, the site offers ample opportunity to commune with nature. A hike to the summit of Dajian mountain (大劍山) takes three to four hours return journey.

Kending's main beach (across from the Howard Plaza Hotel) serves drinks and rents out umbrellas, but is the plain sister when compared with nearby spots such as Baisha (白沙), which is a 10 to 15-minute scooter or taxi ride west of town.

Scooters can be rented at various locations along Kending's main drag — if they are out, try taking a taxi to nearby Hengchun and renting there. It'll give you a chance to check out the old city gates and see a town that is far less touristy than Kending or Nanwan (南灣).

Festival Notes:

What: FreakFest 2010

Where: Liufu farm (六福山莊) inside Kending National Park

Address: 5, Dasi Ln, Gongyuan Rd, Kending Village, Hengchun Township, Pingtung County (屏東縣恆春鎮墾丁里公園路大溪巷5號)

When: Feb. 15 and Feb. 16 from 2pm to 4am

Admission: NT\$800 for both days. NT\$700 for Feb. 16 only

Details: No outside drinks, free camping

Getting there: The venue is a 20 to 30-minute walk from Kending

On the Net: tw.myblog.yahoo.com/freak-fest

Named and shamed: the world's dirtiest hotels

TripAdvisor's reader-generated list has raised a few eyebrows, not least among hoteliers

BY JOE SHARKEY
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

The reviews of the world's dirtiest hotels are in, and only Max Bialystock, the character in *The Producers* who makes a shady living bringing big theatrical flops to Broadway, would welcome notices like these:

"Cradle of filth: The worst, worst, worst hotel in the world!" — Kimo-Sabe, Dubai.

"Slept in my clothes!" — Caznbri, Somerset.

"Made me think of my own grave." — Person-Brighton, UK, Brighton.

Those are just a few excerpts from reader-generated reviews of various hotels in Britain, culled from the 2010 Dirtiest Hotels lists published recently by TripAdvisor.com, the online network of travel sites. TripAdvisor says it has reviews of more than 450,000 hotels around the world.

The "dirtiest hotels" lists, which TripAdvisor has heavily promoted for several years, always generate robust publicity. This year's lists singled out the 10 "dirtiest" hotels in each of six regions — the US, Asia, Canada, France, Italy and Britain.

In Britain, particularly, this year's list is causing a fury as "the hotel industry is growing increasingly concerned at the power wielded by Internet sites such as TripAdvisor," according to the *Independent* newspaper there.

The newspaper reported last week that hotels throughout Europe were "seeking to persuade the European Union Commission to overhaul the rules governing Web site reviews to ensure that they have been posted by genuine guests and not by rivals or people simply out to cause mischief."

In the US, hard-hitting online travel reviews cause a lot less commotion, even though TripAdvisor's reviews of the "dirtiest" hotels in the US are just as blunt as the rest of the worldwide lists. ("Sleep in your car, not here!" warns LuckyDude, Chicago.)

Web sites using online reader-generated commentary are rewriting the rule book for travel reporting, and no site has as much impact as TripAdvisor, which is owned by Expedia and is one of the biggest online reader review sites. So it was a good time to talk with TripAdvisor's chief executive, Stephen Kaufer.

The dirtiest hotels lists are a tiny part of what TripAdvisor does, of course. But Kaufer was happy to address the criticism.

"You bet, if you're a hotel on that list, it is not a good sign for your business," he said. "We have advertisers who call us up after they see one of their chain properties on the list and say, 'Come on, I spent money with you advertising, and you put the property on the list?' The sales guys tell them, 'The editorial team looks at all the reviews; they look at what the guests say on the site — and one bad review does not get you on the list. But when it's consistently ranked as a bad hotel by lots of people saying terrible things, hey, we are not shy.'"

"Please believe me," he added, "we are careful about the lists, so a hotel isn't named just because there are four bad reviews. We are dealing with someone's reputation. It's the ones that are consistently bad that make it — and I challenge any curious individual to check out one of these places and see whether they deserve to be on the list."

How about the charge in Britain that lists and reviews can be manipulated by wily competitors or, as the *Independent* darkly put it, by unspecified others who are out to "cause mischief"?

"It's damned hard to trick our system in a way that would affect the ratings, because we have the sheer volume of reviews to use for comparison," Kaufer said. "Suspicious activity is caught in our filters before it makes it live to the site. And then we rely on the millions of people a day who are not shy about clicking on the link to report that they smell a rat."

Outside the US, the online reviews are upending long-established systems of hotel reviewing, some regulated by governments. Even travel review warhorses, like printed travel guides, are briding at the online competition.

On his blog, the long-established travel guidebook publisher Arthur Frommer, has, for example, pointedly noted the "allegations" that TripAdvisor reviews have been "manipulated and distorted by less-than-objective opinions."

Frommer is also critical of another fast-growing hotel review site, Oyster.com, which has a small staff of journalists who write reviews that are profusely illustrated with photographs that are not always flattering. Oyster's inspectors are hired from the ranks of young former "journalism students," Frommer wrote dismissively.

We'll hear more in future columns about this developing donnybrook in the world of travel reviewing. Is there any future for print travel guides, which are typically out of date before they hit store shelves?

In online travel reviewing, does the future belong to sites like TripAdvisor and IgoYougo, which are driven by Internet crowd sourcing, or to the likes of Oyster, which plans to expand its ranks of visually oriented, professionally trained staff reviewers?

Or are there market niches for them all, once the commotion settles?