

IowaLife

Iowans get good look at Taiwan's tea culture PAGE 3E

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Midwest Traveler



Submit travel stories and photos by e-mail to travel editor Ellen Modersohn at emoderso@dmreg.com.

Iowans on the Go

Register readers write about their travels

SOAKING UP TAIWAN'S TEA CULTURE

By MIKE FELLER
Special to the Register

Once a year, my business partner at Gong Fu Tea in Des Moines, Rusty Bishop, and I travel to some destination within the tea-growing lands to meet the producers of our loose leaf teas. We decided this year to spend some time in Taiwan — home to some of the world's best oolong teas.

Taiwan is a relatively small country on an island across the Taiwan Strait from mainland China. Despite its diminutive size, the breadth of its tea offerings was remarkable. We found that tea production styles varied widely as we traveled from north to south.

The island was small enough that we were able to see almost all of it during the last week of September and the first week of October — a time we selected to coincide with the beginning of Taiwan's dry season and the start of its higher-quality fall and winter tea harvests.

It took us a little more than a full day to get from Des Moines to Taipei, with layovers in Chicago and Tokyo. We were picked up at the airport in Taoyuan, an industrial suburb of Taipei, by relatives of our Chinese language instructor who lives in Des Moines.

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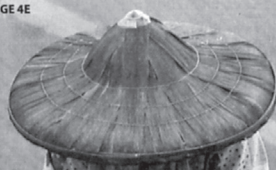
The owners of Gong Fu Tea in Des Moines enjoy a land of beverage, beauty and ceramics.



Above: Workers harvest High Mountain oolong tea in the Alishan region of central Taiwan, an area of natural beauty.

Top photo: Mike Feller and Rusty Bishop (second and third from left), owners of Gong Fu Tea in Des Moines, dine with their host family in Taiwan.

A tea picker in traditional garb works the fields.



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TAIWAN

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We arrived on the leading

edge of Typhoon Jumbi, which relegated us to staying in close proximity to our hotel in East Taipei's Da'an district for the first

three full days in Taiwan. We passed the time soaking up northern Taiwan's rich tea culture. We visited ornate teahouses in Pinglin

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and Maokong that served pots of locally grown oolong tea, tea merchants who sold every imaginable quality of leaf, and the bustling night markets of Taipei and the coastal town of Jiufen.

We also made a trip to the historic ceramics center in the town of Yingge, visiting the Ceramics Museum as well as the wonderfully diverse ceramics stores along Jianshanpu Road.

After the storm we made our way southward through Hsinchu county, home to Oriental Beauty tea, to the Alishan region of central Taiwan, home to Taiwan's famous High Mountain oolong — and an area of unprecedented natural beauty.

We spent the next four days touring the Dong Ding and Alishan areas and sampling both High Mountain oolong and Jin Xuan styles of tea that are produced by the various tea factories we visited.

"Home base" during these excursions was a wonderfully hospitable guesthouse in Ruellii village, featuring comfortable beds and traditional, home-cooked Taiwanese food in a beautiful, rural setting surrounded by tea fields.



A temple bell hangs in the Alishan Forest Recreation Area.

Details

WHO: Mike Feller and Rusty Bishop

HOMETOWN: Des Moines

DESTINATION: Taiwan

TRIP DATES: Sept. 25 to Oct. 6

DESTINATION BEST FOR: Physically active eco-tourists would enjoy this trip for its pristine mountain scenery, which is not easily accessible. Travelers would need to be fluent in Chinese or have an interpreter.

PHOTOS BY MIKE FELLER/SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER