

MY CHINESE NEW YEAR EXPERIENCE

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The year 2010 marked my second Chinese New Year experience, but this time around I was well prepared. After being traumatized the year before, when there was total evacuation of the city and Taipei was transformed into a ghost town, I decided that I would not spend this Chinese New Year in Taipei. So like a tigress I took out to conquer new territories.

My journey began in Keelung where I spent a traditional Chinese new year with my Professor at his house. We picked our own vegetables from his garden and had a lavish hot pot dinner served with red wine. After dinner the Professor staying true to the Chinese tradition of the red envelope (*hong bao*) presented us with our sealed red envelopes, and told us that we should not open it until after the New Year. After dinner the professor taught us how to play mahjong (with money). I was instantly hooked on the game and we played until 4am in morning, now I am officially an addict. I was so caught up with the game, I almost forgot about my *hong bao*, but when I got to my room I couldn't resist the temptation to open it. And so going against my Professor's advice, I broke the tradition and opened my red envelope. I retired with an extra broad smile on my face, compliments my *hong bao*.

My next stop was Taichung where I spent the weekend with friends touring and enjoying the city. We went to a night club called The Pig Pen and were reluctant to enter because of the name. But then we were happy we did, because the music was really great. We also got to enjoy the NBA All Star weekend on big screen, while hanging with friends and enjoying great food and drinks at a sports bar.

Then I headed to Nantou where we visited an aboriginal village and restaurant. The food was similarly seasoned to that of my country. I met an adorable old man who was trying to get me drunk; by trying to convince me that strong rum was wine. But in the end, he ended up being the drunken one, because I was pouring my drink in my empty soup bowl when he wasn't looking. He is a farmer and upon our departure he gave us two huge bags of oranges, which was really refreshing for snacking on our road trip.

Next, I headed to Pingtung where we crashed a wedding true *Caribbean style*. We got there just as they were about to serve the meal. The meal was sumptuous and the desserts were delectable. After we finished eating we took photos with the bride and groom, just as any true wedding crasher would do. Then we headed for the night market, because by then we were hungry again so we had to sample some local food (*xiao chi*). There we sampled an array of dishes such as barbecue sausages, stone bread, fried chicken locally known as (*ji pie*) and roasted sweet potato. Then we had caramel pop corn for dessert, which was “ooohhhh” so delicious. We then headed back to our friend's house where we had a night cap and then retired for the night, as we had to be up early the next day to commence our journey back to Taipei.



Seeing that this is the year of the tiger, I thought it would be a great start by travelling and exploring Taiwan and it was indeed a splendid way to pass the time. So, my advice to anyone will be to do as the Taiwanese and get out of Taipei for the Chinese New Year. The south is where the action is at! *Da jia, xin nian kuai le!*