



Vanessa Y. P. Shih

“Visitors to Taiwan are coming back again and again.”

The head of the Taipei Economic and Culture Office in Vienna and official representative of the Republic of China to Austria, stretches out the numerous attractions of Taiwan as a tourist destination.

Interview: Rainer Himmelfreundpointner

CD: Taiwan has a first class reputation as one of the four Asian Tigers, but, at least in Austria, not as a major tourist destination. Can you provide us with some facts and figures about Taiwan's tourism industry?

Vanessa Shih: We put emphasis more on quality than quantity. Most important, Taiwan is not only a safe country to visit, it is also very clean, very friendly, convenient, rich in culture and a value-for-money tourist destination. Taiwan is therefore highly praised by many international media. The British travel guide “Rough guides” in 2017 ranked Taiwan as one of the “Global Top 10 must-visit countries” and “InterNations”, the world's largest network for expats, has nominated Taiwan as the world's most friendly and favourite country for foreigners to travel and live. Actually, Taiwan is a hidden treasure for travellers, and many of the more than 10 million tourists visiting our country each year, are not only staying between 5 to 7 days in average, but they are also coming back again and again.

What exactly is so attractive to them?

Apart from our safe and clean environment, excellent infrastructure with convenient transportation systems and high-quality services. I would say they are mainly attracted by traditional Chinese culture which is very well preserved in Taiwan. For example, Taiwan's National Palace Museum is the most prestigious museum in Asia and one of the top four museums in the world, housing nearly 700,000 treasures from royal families throughout all Chinese history. Also, you may find a lot of folk festivals, religious celebrations, traditional cultural activities and modern art in Taiwan, such as Lunar New Year celebration, the Sky Lantern Festival in Pingxi, the Dra-

gon Boat Festival, where you eat rice dumplings, the Mid-Autumn Festival with its delicious moon cake, the Yanshui Fireworks Festival, as well as local cultural activities such as glove puppetry shows, Taiwanese opera, porcelain, tea culture, oil paper umbrellas, and so on. And do not forget that Taiwan's rich culture mainly derived from the Taiwanese indigenous people and Han Chinese from mainland China. The Dutch, the Spanish, and the Japanese all contribute to Taiwan's diverse multi-culture, including their vast cultural heritage, such as Fort San Domingo in Danshui – Spanish built in 1628, destroyed and then rebuilt by the Dutch, the Tainan Confucius Temple – built in 1666 during the Ming dynasty, the Taipei Lin An Tai Historical House and Museum – built 1754, and the Changhua Temple from the Ming dynasty.

How would you recommend travelling through your country?

That is absolutely your free choice: whether you want to join guided tours, rent a car and be a self-guided tourist, take public transportation or cycling – you can do whatever you like. People in Taiwan are so friendly and so willing to help – even for tourists who do not speak Chinese or English, there will be no problem to travel in Taiwan. For backpackers, young visitors and self-guided tourists, we have integrated all tourism information – including food, shopping, accommodation, transportation, entertainment, and even souvenirs – into a mobile network system with different languages including German. Just visit www.taiwantourismus.de via one of the more than 4,400 free WiFi hotspots in public places and you can easily access all the information you want while travelling.

Taiwan recently is aiming at European tourists and wants to attract visitors from Austria as well. Are there any special highlights waiting for them?

Well, apart from Taiwan's rich culture, I would say it's our nature, ecology, and gourmet food that will be unforgettable for European tourists, including Austrians. In terms of natural attractions, especially Austrians may be astonished that Taiwan is abundantly endowed with mountains. There are 258 mountain peaks higher than 3,000 meters, making Taiwan geographically unique. On the West side lies the Yushan or Yu Mountain Range with its main peak reaching 3,952 meters, the highest in Northeast Asia. The country also features a full range of climates and terrains from tropical to frigid. The variations in weather, geology, and elevation give Taiwan an unparalleled richness of flora and fauna, including many endemic species, for instance, the Formosan salamander, Formosan black bear and the Mikado pheasant, that are found nowhere else in the world.

Sounds extremely inviting. Anything else?

I would also recommend our beautiful offshore islands. Lonely Planet named Penghu Island one of the 10 best secret islands in the world. This year, the “Most Beautiful Bay Carnival” will be held in September in Penghu. For cycling lovers, you cannot miss peak-to-coast or island-wide bicycle excursions. You should also experience the bicycle route around Sun Moon Lake, which was selected by CNN's live travel programme as one of the world's top 10 most beautiful bike routes. Last but not least, Taiwan is heaven to food lovers. You must indulge yourself in the diversified delicious Taiwanese cuisines – from night market snacks to Michelin gourmet food. ●



As head of the Taipei Economic and Culture Office in Vienna, Vanessa Yea-Ping Shih since 2016 is the official representative of the Republic of China to Austria. Prior to that, she served as Taiwan's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and as representative to Singapore.