



## TRANSFORMING TAINAN

Look past the temples and historical attractions of Taiwan's oldest city, and you'll find a place reinvigorated with snazzy new boutiques, bars, and cafés.

BY CHRIS SCHALKX

Above, from left: Zyu-u Tsubo's owners Chien Meng Yin (right) and Chu Hsin Yi outside the restaurant; preparing a special whey-infused cocktail at TCRC.

Considering its reputation as the culinary capital of Taiwan, it's no surprise that Tainan draws visitors from far and wide to feast on its famous *xiaochi* (small eats). But there is more to this southern city than street food: recent years have seen an influx of Taipei-ites choosing to put down roots in Tainan's low-rent neighborhoods, opening up exciting new places to eat, drink, and shop—and spotlighting the legacy of the Japanese colonial era.



### ● WHERE TO EAT

Housed in a onetime rubber workshop, **Zyu-u Tsubo** (No. 22, Ln. 158, Zhongyi Rd.; [fb.com/zyuu-tsubo](https://fb.com/zyuu-tsubo)) combines Japanese cooking techniques with Taiwanese ingredients. While its narrow interior is intentionally rough around the edges—think original factory fixtures, concrete walls, and just 10 counter-side stools—the food is anything but. The kitchen's focus on top-quality seafood and beautiful presentation is clear in the *harako meshi*, a bowl of vinegary rice topped with Norwegian salmon, roe, and fresh wasabi. Other standouts include *long tian yang* (soy-marinated fried chicken) and a seafood donburi loaded with salmon sashimi, scallops, and squid.

Tainan's Japanese influence is also apparent at **Sputnik Lab** (74 Fubei St.; 886/926-251-122), a tatami-floored teahouse built almost a century ago as a dormitory for Japanese civil servants. Don't let the strict no-shoes policy deter you from sampling its range of delicious matcha-based desserts. Over on café-lined Zhengxing Street, the daily-changing menu at **Sensory 68** (68 Zhengxing St.; 886-6/222-8805) revolves around fresh produce from the morning market, with colorful vegetable bowls, salads, and stews, all served on beautifully crafted ceramics that you can buy at the small on-site boutique.

### ● WHERE TO DRINK

Occupying a former warehouse, gritty-chic **TCRC** (117 Xinmei St.; [fb.com/tcrcbar](https://fb.com/tcrcbar))—an acronym for The Checkered Record Club—has appeared twice on the Asia's 50 Best Bars list since its 2015 debut, so expect crowds. The classic drinks here

are strong and on point, but do order the weekly specials: experimental cocktails might include the Pizza Margarita with blue cheese-washed gin, clarified tomato juice, and basil. A short cab ride away, **Lola** (110 Xinyi St.; 886-6/222-8376) sports a similar laid-back vibe, though it doesn't require the one-hour wait for a seat. Located in a small residential alley, this homey bar is littered with vintage furniture, hard-to-find vinyl records, and remnants of the building's Qing-era past. Try out its handful of signature drinks made with local spirits, such as the Yoko with plum wine, green tea, and vodka.

Tainan has no shortage of charming coffee shops, but **PariPari** (No. 9, Ln. 158, Zhongyi Rd.; [fb.com/paripariapt](https://fb.com/paripariapt)) is well worth seeking out for its nostalgic interior and locally roasted beans. Opened by a group of designers from Taipei and nearby Kaohsiung, this antiques store-cum-café is designed to resemble a *kissaten*, or retro Japanese coffee salon, in tribute to the building's original owners, who studied in Japan back in the 1950s.

#### ● WHERE TO SHOP

Tainan's best shop for souvenirs also happens to be one of its oldest. During its heyday in the 1930s, the **Hayashi Department Store** (No. 63 Zhongyi Rd.; [hayashi.com.tw](http://hayashi.com.tw)) lured well-heeled locals who sought the thrill of riding an elevator (it was the island's second at the time), but after a much-needed renovation, it now attracts out-of-towners looking for unique gifts. On its shelves, you'll find Taiwanese teas, condiments, and spices—all in vintage-inspired packaging—as well as local apparel, stationery, and quirky homeware. Don't miss the observatory deck with Taiwan's only rooftop Shinto shrine. Next door, **Dou Maison** (33 Zhongzheng Rd.; [fb.com/doumaison](https://fb.com/doumaison)), the flagship store of Taiwanese fashion brand Duochanglee, also stocks a well-curated selection of indie magazines, coffee paraphernalia, contemporary jewelry, and leather accessories, mostly by homegrown talents.

Not a single horizontal surface is left empty at **Deerhouse** (No. 30, Ln. 70, Weimin St.; [deerhouse.com.tw](https://deerhouse.com.tw)), a family-run business whose tiny shop is packed with new and vintage bowls, plates, and glassware—all imported directly from Japan. More Japanese knickknacks can be found at **Mu Er** (No. 59 Xinyi St.; [fb.com/muerwuwu](https://fb.com/muerwuwu)), just a few doors down from Lola's. Here, owner Yuting Xu—a designer hailing from Kaohsiung—has transformed a derelict godown into a dimly lit showroom for Japanese and Taiwanese handicrafts and vintage goods. Its flower arrangements and antiques displays are as exquisite as the products themselves, which range from ceramics to woodworks and jewelry. ●



Inside PariPari's antiques store. Below: Donburi at Zyuu Tsubo.

#### Trip Tips

Tainan can be reached by high-speed train from Taipei in just under two hours. Nearby Kaohsiung International Airport, a 45-minute drive away, has direct flights from Seoul, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. Stay at the **Shangri-La Far Eastern Plaza Tainan** (886-6/702-8888; [shangri-la.com](http://shangri-la.com); doubles from \$148) for its dependable five-star luxury, or experience the city's current zeitgeist at **Maowu** (886-6/391-2113; [maowu.tw](http://maowu.tw); doubles from \$250), whose minimalistic rooms are a subdued balance of exposed concrete and wood.



**CRUSH IT**

.....

The team behind JUA Collection is on a mission to bring modern sensibilities to Thai cookware, discovering the country's abundant (and often underutilized) natural resources and skilled craftsmen one product at a time. Made by artisans using local black granite and coconut wood, the sleek Krok Sak mortar and pestle set can be used on both sides: the granite end to grind chili, garlic, and herbs; and the wooden end for pounding dried spices ([fb.com/juacollection](https://fb.com/juacollection)).

**LET THERE BE LIGHT**

.....

Launched as a sub-brand of THINKK, the THINGG homewares collection gives contemporary furnishings a distinctly Thai touch. The brand's founders often visit remote artisan communities to explore new uses for materials like teak and techniques such as wicker-weaving—often blurring the boundaries between craftsmanship and industrial design. Their colorful Sarn ceiling lights, for example, pair coated steel with lampshades hand-woven using sustainably grown palm leaves ([thinggstore.com](https://thinggstore.com)).

**WELL ROUNDED**

.....

Studio Patapian elevates the art of bamboo weaving by combining it with unexpected materials like marble, copper, and rosewood. Its Round collection takes inspiration from *prangs*, the multi-tiered spires often found on Thai temples, using this shape to create mirror stands, pendant lights, and vases. The studio works with various weaving communities around the country to develop their skills and provide them with an extra source of income ([patapian.com](https://patapian.com)).

# CRAFTY CREATIONS

Using new interpretations of age-old techniques, these Bangkok-based design studios are giving Thai artisan work a contemporary edge.

BY CHRIS SCHALKX

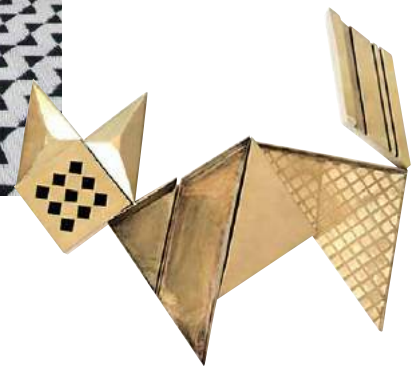


Stride, from PDM's range of woven plastic mats.

**TAKE THE FLOOR**

.....

It was an observation by a visiting friend about the lack of carpets in Thai homes that sparked PDM founder Doonyapol Srichan's idea for a carpet design fit for the tropics. Inspired by the woven plastic mats found in temples across the country, the brand fuses traditional weaving techniques with modern materials (in this case, recycled polypropylene) and bold patterns to make floor coverings that are both timeless and durable ([pdmbrand.com](https://pdmbrand.com)).

**SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED**

.....

Brass craftsmanship might be a dying art in Thailand, but the duo behind COTH Studio aims to revive it with this quirky desk organizer. Designed like a tangram puzzle, and made in collaboration with a small-scale manufacturer using leftover brass plate cuttings, its eight individual elements function as a pen holder, paperclip holder, or storage trays and can be rearranged in endless combinations, creating a stress-relieving mini-playground on your work table ([cothstudio.com](https://cothstudio.com)).