

Treats from Taiwan

More Taiwanese cafes are opening to cater to Singaporeans' growing appetite for the cuisine



Eunice Quek

First there was the bubble tea craze from Taiwan. Then the obsession with its famous street snacks such as the fried chicken and oyster vermicelli.

The Taiwanese food trend in Singapore shows no signs of abating as new outlets have opened and existing eateries report brisk business.

The latest outlet is 8 Degrees Taiwanese Bistro, a chic 50-seater cafe which opened four months ago on Yio Chu Kang Road.

The bistro is an homage to Taiwanese pop icon Jay Chou, with his songs playing on an almost endless loop.

You can also find Andy Lau in the outlet – he is the 25-year-old Singaporean chef who operates the eatery with his brother Kelly Lau, 23.

Says the older Mr Lau: "We wanted the place to really feel like Taiwan, which has many small cafes and bistros for people to hang out in. For the past few years, tourism companies have been promoting Taiwan, so we wanted to seize the opportunity to expand, since people are more familiar with the food. Also, I feel that authentic Taiwanese food in Singapore is still hard to find."

His family also runs 4 Seasons Taiwanese Cuisine in Joo Chiat Road, which opened three years ago, as well as a six-year-old food kiosk, Four Seasons, selling Taiwanese snacks in the Singapore Man-



A popular dish at Taiwanese restaurant Xi Men Ding (right) is the stewed pork belly with preserved vegetables (left).

agement University's School of Economics building.

Over at IMM Building in Jurong East, Xian Ding Wei Taiwanese Xpress sees a good crowd of diners during lunch and dinner time.

It is currently running a first-year anniversary promotion which features home-cooked dishes such as "san bei" chicken, braised beef noodle soup and Taiwan-style vermicelli. The outlet is under the same management which runs Xian Ding Wei Taiwanese Tea Room in Kuala Lumpur.

A spokesman for the outlet says: "Business has improved over the year and we have many regulars working in the area who come back frequently looking for simple Taiwanese dishes."

Other familiar names serving Taiwanese fare include Xi Men Ding at VivoCity and Raffles City, Shin Yeh Taiwanese restaurant in Liang Court, Peng Lai Ge Taiwan Delight at Joo Chiat and Lai Lai Casual Dining outlets which specialise in beef noodles.

Taiwan porridge restaurants include Oasis in Toa Payoh and Goldleaf in Thomson Plaza and Amoy Street.

Media relations manager Bernadette Wong, from Creative Eateries which manages Xi Men Ding, says: "Taiwanese food is quite distinct from Japanese and Korean cuisine. We find that Singaporeans appreciate Taiwanese food for its savoury dishes that complement simple staples such as sweet potato porridge."

Popular dishes in its outlets include "san bei" chicken with basil, stewed pork belly with preserved vegetables, Buddha Jumps Over The Wall soup, steamed crab with glutinous rice cake and a deep-fried sweet taro balls dessert.

New menu items to be launched in the middle of next month include sesame oil chicken and Xi Men Ding Signature Fish Head Soup.

"Taiwanese delicacies and street snacks have quite a following among Singaporeans. This has helped business to grow since the outlets opened. So we have plans to ex-



PHOTOS: XI MEN DING

pand both in Singapore and in neighbouring countries," adds Ms Wong.

Taiwanese snack shacks which are popular with youths are still coming in to liven up the Taiwanese food scene here.

Hot-Star Large Fried Chicken opened last week at City Square Mall while I Love Tai Mei in Queen Street has been around for about two years.

But senior engineer Frank Lee, 28, feels that the Taiwanese food scene here is not up to standard yet. The Taiwan-born Singapore permanent resident moved here more than 10 years ago and still misses the bustling nature of Taiwan's food streets.

He says: "There should be a Taiwan street in Singapore selling all the popular Taiwanese food. I would love to see brands such as Tian Bu La, a famous fishcake snack, and Hua Zhi Gen, which serves a kind of squid soup, and food such as lu wei, assorted meats and vegetables which are boiled and tossed in spices and are available at many stalls in Taiwan."