



Xin Beitou's hot springs attract visitors (inset); wooden buckets are best for scooping hot spring water

新北投的溫泉吸引不少訪客前來(內圖)；用來舀泉水的木桶

Soak up the atmosphere at Xin Beitou's hot springs, a Taiwanese melting pot of old and new, luxury and mass market, and cultures and cuisines

台北的新北投溫泉區新舊匯聚，奢華與大眾化兼備，還有值得品味的文化和美食



Full steam

by JO BAKER

戀戀溫泉鄉

THE AIR was dark and tinged with cool, old trees struck dramatic poses against the night sky and below them a near-naked elderly man waxed lyrical about the stars. "This is a good place," he says, a blue towel twisted jauntily around his head. "Out in the open air with the stars, the moon. It's a very good way to relax." The scene was a busy Friday night at a Taiwanese public hot spring; the place, a sleepy town called Xin Beitou, just north of Taipei.

Among the traditions the Japanese left in Taiwan after World War II are great sushi, a penchant for orderly queues and onsen (hot springs) or *wenquan* in Putonghua. The Japanese have been dunking themselves in steaming, therapeutic mountain ponds for centuries and developments in towns like Xin Beitou are long-standing tributes to this love affair.

The minerals dissolved in geothermal springs are widely thought to have significant health benefits and many cultures, from Roman to Maori, have celebrated the restorative powers of a good, volcanic soak. Maladies from warts to wrinkles are supposed to be soothed by a dip and though science may raise its metaphorical eyebrow, few doctors will dispute the good a hot bath can do for circulation or muscular pain. Sophisticated complexes feature water of varying temperatures and pH levels but the water of each district varies.

With 20 or so semi-dormant volcanoes hemming Taipei's northern edges, its forested vistas seethe with wispy puffs of steam. Hot-spring resorts dot the region and hikers rarely set off without a towel in order to take advantage of



The modernist
boutique hotel
Villa 32
三二行館是家
現代派的精品酒店



Steamy hot springs
in Xin Beitou's
Geothermal Valley
位於新北投地熱谷
的溫泉熱氣沸騰

WHERE TO GO 溫泉選擇

Longnaitang Public Bath
瀧乃湯大眾浴室
244 Guangming Road
光明路244號
+886 2 2891 2236

WHERE TO STAY 住宿選擇

The I-Tsun Hotel
逸郵大飯店
140 Wen Chuan Road
溫泉路140號
+886 2 2891 2121

Pacific Wellness Spa & Club
太平洋北投溫泉度假飯店
1 Ciyuan Road
奇岩路1號
+886 2 2893 1668
www.pacificspa.com.tw

SweetMe Hotspring Resort
水美溫泉會館
224 Guangming Road
光明路224號
+886 2 2898 3838
www.sweetme.com.tw

Whispering Pine Inn
吟松閣
21 Youya Road
幽雅路21號
+886 2 2895 1531

Villa 32
三二行館
32 Zhongshan Road
中山路32號
+886 2 6611 888
www.villa32.com

those with even the most basic of facilities. But for a steamy, laid-back mini break less than an hour from the city – and a pilgrimage to the roots of Taiwanese hot-spring culture – Xin, or New, Beitou is the place to go.

While other Taipei spa towns have a polished, developed feel, Xin Beitou's revival came later and it has a charming, hodgepodge mix of old and new in which old invariably seems to win. The place is walkable and very green, its roads hopelessly twisty and public space is still hallowed.

"That park was designed by the Japanese," says Tony Wang, manager of SweetMe Hotspring Resort, pointing at a central public green in which old men play chequers and locals splash around barefoot in a stream. "It's hardly changed at all."

The park is just a short walk from Xin Beitou subway station and a push through the usual gaggle of chain stores and past the same rocky stream will bring visitors to the town's oldest bathhouse. Longnaitang sits crouched, thatched and whitewashed in a light cloud of sulfur-scented fog. Mr Lin on reception will happily chat about the area, his family home for five generations. As he speaks, the sound of vigorous slapping keeps steady pace behind a curtain. Is it some kind of massage service? "No, they do that to themselves," he says. "It's part of the bathing tradition."

For those who worry about the perils of wenquan etiquette, the local council has published a sheet of "Prohibitions and Matters for Attention" in English, which Lin distributes. Many of the rules – do not take pets into the baths; stay away if you

have an infectious disease – are common sense. But it is worth noting that immersion should be limited to 15 minutes and that a full body wash is expected before entering. Other potential pitfalls, such as whether to be clothed or not, or how best to brandish your little wenquan towel, will usually come from other local bathers, happy to show newbies the ropes. Still, if being nude with an egg-smelling roomful of strangers pushes your pleasure threshold to the max, alternatives beckon.

Not far along Xin Beitou's steep, narrow alleyways, flanked by little houses are two old bastions of its hot-spring history, with baths of the communal and in-room variety. The I-Tsun has been in the hands of the Lee family for decades and both building and hostesses are ageing but gracefully hospitable. I-Tsun's interiors are a fascinating mix of eras; architectural Kyoto-style detailing in wood and stone from the turn of the 19th century; curtain and sofa fabrics from the late 1980s.

Further up the hills, Whispering Pine Inn is more polished with koi carp ponds and tatami rooms, although still rather dated. At night the nostalgic sounds of traditional *nakashi* bands waft up from its popular function rooms below, bolstered by an electronic keyboard. You'd be forgiven for mistaking the renditions of *Please Release Me* for salarymen's

karaoke, rather than, as we were told severely, professionals charging NT\$2,000 (HK\$514) an hour.

Xin Beitou does have its modern side. Smart real-estate offices, brash new



Wooden bath clogs
泡湯穿的木屐

ad



Rustic stone outdoor
hot-spring baths

感覺純樸天然的
戶外石砌溫泉

hotels and international burger chains suggest that once the economy picks up again, the town's landscape could see further changes. But while a few Las Vegas-inspired options let the side down, others offer affordable weekends away in tasteful three- and four-star comfort. Hotels such as Pacific Wellness Spa & Club and SweetMe Hotspring Resort combine decent breakfast buffets with sleek design and modern hot-spring spa complexes covering whole floors.

One place in particular has dramatically hoisted Xin Beitou's chic credentials. Villa 32 was built by Taiwanese millionaire Chiu Ming-hung on a secluded side of the town's primordial Geothermal Valley, a popular tourist site. Villa 32 was originally designed as a luxurious guest-house but Chiu later spent years and millions of Taiwanese dollars converting it into a boutique hotel. He kept many of the personal touches of a wealthy home. Hip, modernist hot spring complexes lie under century-old camphor and maple trees and the villa's five suites – three split-level suites in a European style and two with tatami mats and fusuma sliding doors, both with

GETTING THERE 前往方法

The drive to Xin Beitou takes about 80 minutes from Taoyuan International Airport, 30 minutes from Taipei's main train station, and less by Taipei metro system.

由桃園國際機場開車前往新北投，只需約80分鐘；從台北車站出發，車程亦不過半小時左右，乘坐台北捷運的話需時更少。



Soak in the
atmosphere at
an indoor bath

在室內享受
泡湯之樂



CX FLIGHTS 國泰航程

Cathay Pacific Airways
flies 108 times a week
to Taipei

國泰航空每周有108班航
機飛往台北

sweeping private spas – are served by about 70 staff. The place rivals Taipei's top luxury hotels, and for those unable to book a room, the Italian restaurant offers a fine lunch.

Diversions tend to be limited in Xin Beitou, but hiking trails, a museum of hot-spring history and another of indigenous crafts, as well as modest night-market dining adventures all can pull visitors out of the bath. Access to busy Taipei is easy. But once the pace of life in Xin Beitou has got to you, it can be hard to let go. You'd be much better advised to surrender, lay back and sample the delights of a holiday in hot water. ■

戀戀溫泉鄉

ad
台北盆地的北緣靜躺著20餘座睡火山，遠遠看去，只見山丘樹叢間冒出氤氳地熱。區內滿佈溫泉會館，但來這裡登山的人，總會記得攜帶毛巾，以便在野外一些簡樸的溫泉設施享受一番。若想暫離台北市區的喧囂，享受令人鬆弛的溫泉浸浴之餘，順道來一趟台灣溫泉文化的尋根之旅，距離鬧市僅一小時車程的新北投是不二之選。

當多個位於台北的溫泉市鎮紛紛重新發展，換上新貌的同時，新北投的重生卻姍姍來遲。雖然區內有不少新潮的溫泉會館，與古樸的溫泉浴室並排而列，不過舊日的風韻仍然非常濃厚。區內大部分景點都可以漫步而至，蜿蜒的小路旁綠地處處，公共空間都受到妥善保護。

由新北投捷運站出發，經過櫛比鱗次的商店，沿著遍佈石塊的北投溪前進，你會來到一間不起眼的瓦頂白牆古老建築。這間瀰漫著硫磺氣味和煙霧的小屋就是北投地區最古老的溫泉浴池「瀧乃湯」。接待處的林先生十分健談，並且喜歡分享他與家人五代世居北投的點點滴滴。

林先生手上拿著一份由市政府印製的溫泉禮儀須知，上面列明的許多規範都是普通常識，但仍有不少值得注意的提示，包括每次浸泡時間不應超過15分鐘，以及全身沐浴清潔後才可進入浴池。應該穿衣還是赤裸入浴？怎樣正確使用溫泉小毛巾？不妨請教當地的溫泉客。如果光著身子跟陌生人擠在一間充滿硫磺味的公眾浴池讓你感到吃不消，請別擔心，區內還有多個好去處。

沿著陡峭狹窄的巷道

再走不遠，夾道

兩側的小屋

當中藏著兩

間在新北投

歷史悠久

及頗具

知名度的溫泉旅館，公眾浴池或獨立溫泉室任君選擇。當中的「逸邨大飯店」（又稱「星乃湯」），由李家經營數十年，內部裝潢巧妙地融合不同年代的風格，由石材搭建建成的傳統京都式木造建築，更已超過百年歷史，就連酒店內的窗簾和沙發布套也一用就是數十年。再往山上走，迎面而來的是裝潢比較光鮮的「吟松閣」，這裡的庭院建有錦鯉魚池，旅館內則是日式的榻榻米房間，精緻得來古意盎然。華燈初上之後，樓下的包廂不時傳出樂隊演奏的傳統音樂，給人時光倒流的奇妙感受。

新北投也有現代化的一面，街上滿佈連鎖快餐店、華麗的地產公司和嶄新的酒店。附近亦有多家適合周末短住的三、四星級酒店，例如太平洋北投溫泉度假飯店及水美溫泉會館，兩家均提供自助早餐、漂亮的環境及多層的摩登溫泉套房，以優惠價格提供水準不俗的度假享受。

談到最能突顯新北投時髦高貴新貌的溫泉旅館，非「三二行館」莫屬。它由台灣百萬富翁邱明宏斥資興建而成，選址在常年熱氣滾滾的著名新北投旅遊勝地「地熱谷」，位置僻靜隱蔽。三二行館本來已是一所豪華賓館，但是邱明宏花了數年時間及投資數億元新台幣，將它改建為精品酒店。行館散發著豪宅獨有的奢華風格，庭園內種植了百年樟樹和楓樹，樹蔭下就是風格時尚兼現代化的溫泉套房。行館僅有五間套房，但卻有將近70位員工負責打理，當中包括三間歐式分層套房及兩間日式套房，全都附有獨立溫泉浴池。這所足可稱為台北最豪華的酒店經常一房難求，不過向隅者仍可以在附設的意大利餐廳享用精美午餐。

區內其他的娛樂設施雖不算多，但仍有登山徑、溫泉歷史博物館、本地手工藝博物館，以及美食夜市，往來台北市區的交通亦相當便利。不過既然來到新北投，何不停下你的腳步，盡情享受舒暢的泡湯情趣！



