

Little Taipei in Monterey Park, California

■ By Suzy Guttler

小台北



Lilly, Van and Suzy on an afternoon in Monterey Park.

Having lived half my childhood in the bustling city of Taichung, Taiwan, it was truly a refreshing experience to be immersed in an environment that reminded me so closely of home. That environment was Monterey Park, California.

A leisurely drive along Atlantic Boulevard in Monterey Park, offers a glimpse into the soul of the city affectionately called “Little Taipei” by the Chinese immigrants who have made it their home.

Little Taipei (小台北) is the informal name given to the city of Monterey Park, California since the late 1970s as it once had its large immigrant population from Taiwan.

Beginning in the 1970’s, well-educated and affluent immigrants from Taiwan began settling in the west San Gabriel Valley, primarily in the city of Monterey Park, in what would become the new “Chinatown” in Greater Los Angeles.

Known as the father of modern-day Monterey Park, Frederic Hsieh was a promotion-minded young real estate agent from Hong Kong when he approached the Chamber of Commerce in the 1970’s with a novel suggestion.

Tens of thousands of highly educated, upwardly mobile Chinese were poised to move here, he told the incredulous business leaders, if someone would just market



A variety of Taiwanese shops that’ll take you back to Taiwan.

the place properly. It turned out that Hsieh, knew just how to do that.

For starters, he would translate the city’s name into the Chinese equivalent of Lush Green Valley, even if rain-starved Southern California is rarely green for more than a few months a year. He would play up the city’s area code, then 818, because eight is a lucky number in Chinese.

In the 1980s, second-generation Chinese Americans tended to move out of the old Chinatown and into the San Gabriel Valley suburbs, joining the new immigrants from Taiwan and Mainland China. The city is now regarded as a starting point for new Chinese immigrants. It was dubbed the “first suburban Chinatown” by the Los Angeles Times.

It was a campaign so successful that 75-year-old Cecilia Yu, who has lived here seven years now, echoes the words of many residents when she says: "Everybody in Taiwan has heard of Monterey Park."

Today, the ethnic Chinese diaspora population in these cities is fairly diverse in terms of socioeconomic, linguistics, and culture, ranging from moneyed Mandarin-speaking immigrants from Taiwan to the Chinese refugees from Vietnam. Other major Chinese groups in San Gabriel Valley include those from Mainland China (from various provinces), Hong Kong, Cambodia, Korea, and Indonesia. Despite the diversity of backgrounds

of these migrants, business is conducted in either Mandarin or Cantonese. A number of supermarket chains catering to these immigrants include 99 Ranch Market, and Hong Kong Supermarket, and Shun Fat Supermarket.

Chow Time

As a result of its many ethnic food offerings, Monterey Park has become widely known and promoted as a Mecca of sit-down or fast-food restaurant offerings, particularly in the culinary styles of ethnic Chinese food. Touted in magazines such as "Sunset Magazine," the Los Angeles Times, and a variety

of other newspapers and magazines, the primary ethnic cuisine bringing people from across the San Gabriel Valley, Los Angeles, Orange County, and South Bay areas, to Monterey Park is the Chinese specialties. Visitors may choose from a variety of cooking styles such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Singapore, and Shanghai. Most particular, are the many restaurants offering Chinese style "dim sum" or specialties with seafood such as crab, shrimp, scallops, and clams.



Van and Suzy in Aji Ichiban.



A variety of Taiwanese shops that'll take you back to Taiwan.



Taiwanese chow time.



Shopping Centers scattered throughout Little Taipei.

