

BOLD

INSPIRATION FOR TRAVELLERS

Inspired ESCAPES

BALI
BROOKLYN
GERMANY
CAPE TOWN

GOING IN STYLE
Trains, planes, automobiles
+ the most luxe cruises

VIENNA
OUR LITTLE BLACK BOOK

**H
E
L
L
O**

**K
I
T
T
I
E
S!**

Having absorbed (and perfected)
Japan's culture of cuteness, Taiwan is ready
to join Seoul and Hong Kong on the global
runway, reports VAWN HIMMELSBACH



EVA Air's Hello Kitty-inspired check-in counters.

It's easy to get lost in the labyrinth of corridors at the Songshan Cultural and Creative Park in Taipei, a former Japanese tobacco factory built in the 1930s. But you won't find factory workers rolling cigarettes. Instead, you'll see artists, fashionistas and coffee-drinking hipsters in this converted industrial-chic complex, housing local designers, creative incubators and pop-up shops. The SCCP is also home to the Taiwan Design Center, which is helping local talent develop their brands. While Taiwan was once known as a post-war manufacturing powerhouse, designers are attempting to change its reputation for cheap goods, moving from "Made in Taiwan" to "Designed in Taiwan." The focus is now on high-quality craftsmanship, where attention is paid to details such as fabric and tailoring. This island of 23 million people was once a colony of Japan, from 1895 to 1945, an era that saw the development of education, healthcare and infrastructure. Today there's genuine admiration for Japanese culture, with its influence felt in everything from architecture and fashion to the bite-sized shape of sushi. In the streets of Taipei, you're just as likely to find ramen and sashimi as you will Chinese food. Japanese films, video games and manga comic books are on display in shop windows. Hello Kitty is everywhere—there are more than 200 licensees across Taiwan, and even the national airline, EVA Air, offers a Hello Kitty check-in counter at Taoyuan International Airport. Indeed, the animated figure has appeared on more than 50,000 products over the past 40 years, with brand collaborations that span Vans sneakers to MAC Cosmetics. Hello Kitty is part of the "culture of cuteness," called *kawaii*, an aesthetic found in Japanese pop culture, from anime to manga, like Pokémon's Pikachu.

In fashion, the *kawaii* aesthetic often involves lace and ruffles, but Japanese designers have also pioneered long-standing global trends such as androgyny and uneven design, finding perfection in imperfection. The '90s saw the rise of Harajuku street style; nowadays, Japanese retailers like Uniqlo are joining the ranks of global fast fashion.

But Japan and Taiwan don't have a monopoly on all that's fashionable coming out of Asia these days. South Korea, a country where music and TV dramas drive K-style, has a growing influence, while Hong Kong is bent on nurturing local creative industries to increase its soft power. Together, these nations are creating a new global dialogue about what's on-trend. While pan-Asian influences can be found on the runway, in pop culture and all over Instagram, it takes a visit—or several—to get a true sense of the cultures driving it all.

The Taiwanese, for their part, have a talent at synthesizing trends from Japan and, increasingly, South Korea. In accessories, from jewelry to eyeglasses and handbags, designers are focusing on industrial chic, using elements such as cement, aluminum, granite and other industrial materials to turn the mundane into works of art. Taiwanese watchmaker Sean Yu's top-selling watch, for example, features a cured concrete dial, inspired by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, known as the King of Concrete. The SCCP is just one place to find Taipei's up-and-coming designers. Abandoned industrial spaces are increasingly being turned into creative hubs and innovation labs. Huashan 1914 Creative Park was created in a former sake factory. In the district of Dadaocheng, historic brick buildings that once housed Chinese medicine shops and traditional tea houses are now home to the city's young entrepreneurs. Here you'll find ArtYard, a project that converts abandoned buildings into creative spaces such as ceramics boutiques, leather shops and art galleries.



THIS PAGE: Hello Kitty cakes at EVA Air's VIP lounges. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Young women showcasing their *Harajuku* fashion style; Japanese pop idols Musubizm show off *Kawaii* style.



*“Hong Kong’s
East-meets-West look
still influences pan-Asian
fashion today”*



Not about to be left behind, Hong Kong, too, is fostering local creative industries. Last year it launched a Fashion Incubation Programme at the Hong Kong Design Centre. Similar to the SCCP, the newly opened Tai Kwun is a former law enforcement complex in Old Town Central turned heritage, arts and leisure hub. Nearby is the PMQ, or Police Married Quarters, another historic building transformed into a creative hub housing almost 100 local artists and designers.

Back in the '60s, Hong Kong reached the height of its global influence in clothing manufacturing until factories started moving to mainland China. At the time, Hong Kong was still a British colony with a large ex-pat community, and the world came here to find skilled tailors. Hong Kong's East-meets-West look still influences pan-Asian and global fashion today.

These days, though, Seoul is considered one of the hottest fashion cities in Asia—and arguably the world—with its own version of East-meets-West. First came K-pop and K-beauty, such as lip taints and cushion foundations that revolutionized makeup, influencing international brands like Revlon and L'Oréal.

Now it's K-fashion, heavily influenced by K-pop stars. K-pop, in fact, isn't just about popular music; it's a lifestyle, intertwining fashion with music, film and television. Even in Japan, once the style capital of Asia, teenagers have a fascination with all things Korean and are heavily influenced by K-pop.

Modern-day Seoul is all about shopping, from luxury retailers lining posh Apgujeong Rodeo Street in Gangnam to the Dongdaemun shopping district—open 9pm until dawn, if you still haven't had your fill—with 30,000 stores in 30 shopping centres over 10 blocks.

But head to the tree-lined Garosugil shopping haven in hip Sinsa-dong for trendy, homegrown boutiques and design stores to add some "K" to your wardrobe and people-watch for local streetstyle (plus, there's cafés, brunch spots, wine bars, beauty shops and the ever-popular Korean dessert shops).

K-streetwear, in particular, is putting Korea on the fashion map. What sets it apart—aside from the use of high-impact logos, bold colours and experimental fabrics—is its affordability. Yet, with its impeccable tailoring, K-streetwear isn't disposable. The label Ader Error, which gained a huge following on Instagram, was a pioneer of K-streetwear, combining elements of Asian and Western streetwear. Often referred to as Korea's answer to cult favourite Vetements, the label uses sophisticated cutting and tailoring techniques on simple fabrics.

This look, hugely popular in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan, is going global, worn by international celebs such as Rihanna and Rita Ora. You'll even find Korean street style on the catwalk (at the Concept Korea show at New York Fashion Week) and in retail shops like Zara, Top Shop and H&M. And yes, there's also a name for this Korean obsession: *hallyu*.

In Hong Kong, I make sure to stop by G.O.D., which stands for Goods of Desire, known for merging colonial motifs and vintage Hong Kong brands from the 1960s with contemporary design. There's a silk tie with a motif of Hong Kong's old tenement buildings, an Alex Croft "graffiti wall" carryall and graphic Ts emblazoned with Chinese slang (and cheeky, unprintable translations). It's both retro-cool and ultra-modern; to me it's quintessential Hong Kong.

TAIWAN ESSENTIALS

STAY

For an urban vibe, the new Amba Taipei Songshan offers minimalist, contemporary design and thoughtful extras like Apple TV. For five-star luxury, Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel has the city's highest rooftop swimming pool and signature gin cocktails in the Lobby Court.
amba-hotels.com; shangri-la.com

EAT

Taipei's first-ever Michelin guide was released earlier this year, with 20 restaurants receiving stars (and 10 street food stalls making the Bib Gourmand list). For the three-star experience, head to Cantonese restaurant Le Palais.
palaisdechinehotel.com

DO

Taiwan is known for its green spaces; hike to the top of Elephant Mountain in Taipei and catch the sunset over the city. Or, get out of town at picturesque Sun Moon Lake, a popular cycling spot in the mountains.

THIS PAGE: An EVA Air A330-200; flight attendants buying into the Hello Kitty brand.

