

The International Awards for  
Livable Communities 2013



# Xishan Community

*Where the Stars Come Out to Play*

Project Awards Submission

# Table of Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>                               | <b>1</b> |
| 1. Enhancement of the Natural and Built Landscape | 2        |
| 2. Arts, Culture and Heritage                     | 3        |
| 3. Environmental Best Practices                   | 4        |
| 4. Community Participation and Empowerment        | 6        |
| 5. Healthy Lifestyle                              | 7        |
| 6. Strategic Planning                             | 8        |
| <b>Reflection</b>                                 | <b>8</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>                           | <b>9</b> |



# Xishan Community

An Eco-haven for the Wild

## Introduction

Your eyes are met with a sea of green when you set foot in Xishan Community. The itinerary of your adventure will include a trip to the sapling nursery, the herbal garden, the arboretum, the ancient waterways, and waterfalls.

For the city-weary urbanites, Xishan Community offers the perfect weekend getaway.

Home to a population of 1,472, Xishan Community is surrounded by Mt. Dalunwei and Mt. Ewei, with Neishuang River and Waishuang River intersecting its midst.

The town began as an aboriginal hunting ground and then a settlement area for the immigrant Chinese

mainlanders in the 18th century. The settlers grew rice first, and experimented with cultivating other economic crops. An enterprising mining company later set up an outpost here to prospect coals in Xishan. Their efforts were so successful that the supply of coal was quickly exhausted.

However, this exhaustion of coal supplies turned out to be a blessing: in light of the gradual and steady loss of natural resources, the fact that more than half of the Xishan premises has been enclosed in the protected Yangmingshan National Park, coupled by the designation of a water resource reserve by the Neishuang and Wishuang Rivers in Xishan, the development of the community now proceeded with discretion and attention to resource protection.

### 01

#### Enhancement of the Natural and Built Landscape

##### Diverse and Unique Forestry and Geology

Xishan Community boasts Taipei City's best-preserved forest, totaling 104 hectares in size.

The area consists of predominantly subtropical broadleaf trees. The windward side of the mountain houses a patch of windswept coppice. The wintry temperature also gives rise to a spread of temperate-zone, broadleaf forest.

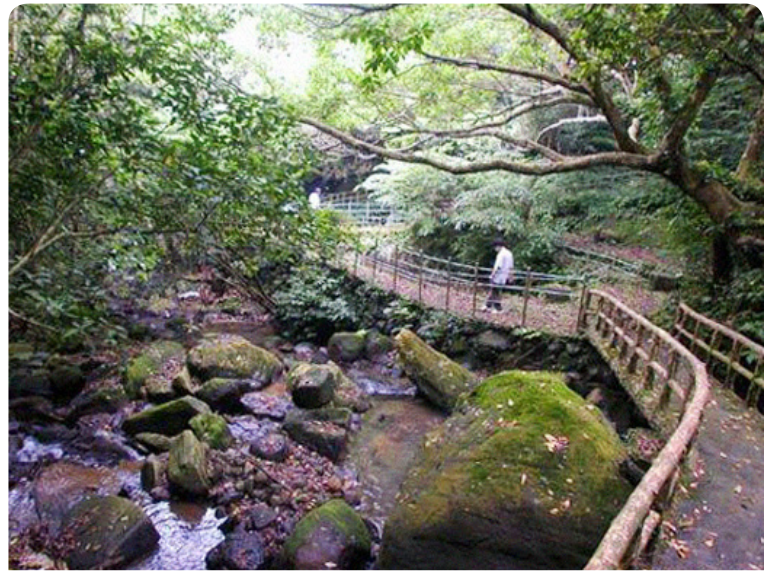
The area's geological makeup is mostly sedimentary rocks; the compressive stress of the strata caused the formation of "reverse faults." The magnificent Mt. Shitou and Mt. Dalun Touwei bear a compelling testimony to Taipei's fascinating geological history.

Neishuangxi Nature Center, inaugurated right here in Xishan Community, is the only environmental learning space dedicated to forestry. The rivers, trees native to the area, and the fault lines render the Center a perfect place for studying biodiversity and conducting eco-tours.

##### Yangmingshan National Park

Despite the low elevation, Yangmingshan National Park has an abundance of ridges, valleys, lakes, waterfalls and basins. Among which, Tianxi Park has been chosen as the Mecca of Forest Bathing. In addition to the murmuring streams and waterfalls, Tianxi Park also provides a much-needed wildlife sanctuary to wide number of insects, amphibians, birds, and mammals, including at least 16 protected species.

Like other nature reserves, Tianxi Park also suffered from mistakes of poor land management. Squatters had set up illegal trade activities and business traffic has consequently damaged the eco-system. To be better custodian of these natural gems, the Society of Subtropical Ecology has been commissioned to manage the area, working toward establishing an "Ecological Education Center" to sustainably protect the future of Tianxi.



Waterfalls are a rarity in northern Taiwan, given the extensive urbanization of the land; but there is a pristine, historic waterfall in upstream Neishuang River - the Tiered Saint Waterfall. In summer, water roars and plunges into the valley, creating many breathtaking Kodak moments. The waterfall used to be one of most popular favorite tourism hotspots, but due to landslide concerns, it was closed down for 2 decades. Experts have been commissioned to evaluate the possibility of reopening the area as soon as safety concerns are appropriately addressed.

##### Young Custodians of the Planet - Xishan Elementary School

Xishan Elementary School, established in 1956, is the only primary school in Taipei located in the water resource preserve. A makeshift "green facade" featuring public art pieces made by the schoolchildren is set up to greet tourists.

Ecological and environmental protection curricula make up the backbone of the school. The youths are encouraged to engage in every outdoor activity that the surrounding natural environment has to offer: river-crossing, rock-climbing, and flora/fauna observation tours.

Lauded as one of the "100 Unique Elementary Schools in Taiwan," chosen by the prestigious Business Weekly, Xishan has bagged numerous environmental education excellence awards.

#### Pamir Cultural Park

In 1949, at the height of the civil war between the nationalist army and the communists, a band of soldiers turned their backs on the looming communist rule to brave the Roof of the World - the Pamir Plateau. They detoured around Kashmir, Pakistan, and India, traveling tens and thousands of kilometers to arrive in Taiwan, and leaving a trail of tears and death behind.

Only about 300 survivors made it to the island.

The veteran soldiers set up a Pamir Patriot Society in 1950, and a Cultural Park dedicated to their heroic pursuit of freedom. The Park is located in the heart of Xishan Community, telling stories of these post-WWII freedom champions.

**Xishan Community is working to effectively preserve its abundance of historic monuments and geological heritage, while minimizing the impact on the natural environment.**



## 02 Arts, Culture and Heritage

### A Cradle for Artistic Creations

Xishan's scenic splendor has attracted a number of art virtuosi to set up their studios in the community, letting the area's natural landscape take their creativity to new heights.

World-class artiste, A-Sun Wu, winner of Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, is a resident of Xishan Community. His paintings and sculptural pieces embody the personalities of the 7 continents, and vivaciously expressive of his deep appreciation for Mother Earth.

Folksong composer Zhong Hongyuan is another noted resident of Xishan. Winner of the Newcomer of the Year in the Taiwan Folksong Category during the 2nd Golden Melody Awards, Zhong brings a breath of fresh air to the conventional music genre of Taiwan folksongs.

The aforesaid Xishan Elementary School inaugurated a short-term "artists in residence" program between 2004 and 2008, imbuing the community with a deepened respect for artists' creative process.



## 4 Xishan Community



Xishan's Cultural Legacies

### The Creation of a Public Arts Space

Artistic creations have been found to increase students' learning and thinking capabilities; with that in mind, and to implement a more effective art education program, Xishan Elementary School faculty voted to renovate the principle's dorm into an "Art and Culture Classroom" to nurture the next-generation artists.

Every semester, an "art visit tour" is opened to 30 schools across the island, the curricula ranging from photography, river crossing, bird-watching, and appreciation for national treasures.

The school was the backdrop of *The Dull Ice Flower* (1989 film), a movie that addressed education and other social issues in rural Taiwan in the deprived 1950s and early 1960s. The movie became a classic for its simple yet heartfelt depiction of human failings.

The community and the school joined hands to renovate the set to create a public arts space dedicated to *The Dull Ice Flower*. A separate space in the Art and Cultural Classroom has been designated to this classic. Students can now visit the movie set to relive the memories of *The Dull Ice Flower*.

### Xishan's Cultural Legacies

Plentiful water resources constitute the lifeblood of

successful agricultural endeavors. The water canal system in Xishan Community was first developed in 1741. In the 18th century, just about every tribe had its own water canal; the most notable of all was the Pingding Ancient Waterway.

The growing population has begun to take a toll on the water resources, so the tribesmen began to systematically open up several water canals: the Old Pingding Waterway, the New Pingding Waterway, and Dengfeng Waterway. The Qixing Irrigation and Engineering Department is now in charge of managing these passages.

### The Centennial Terrace

Terraced fields are one of Xishan's most distinguished features. Formerly a rice-growing farm village, Xishan abounds with terraces built to accommodate the mountains. Terraces are an excellent farming option to preserve water and the ecosystem.

To revive the terraces, elders in the community and township chief coordinated with the city government, met a number of times, and resolved to restore the abandoned waterways along Shuangxi water systems. Eco-engineering will define the restoration process to protect local wildlife and the ecosystem in the farmland to ensure sustainable management.

## 03 Environmental Best Practices

### Homage to the Mountains

The City Government has partnered with community residents to conduct a number of tree-planting events since 1997, when the City Government reclaimed the land once illegally occupied. These outings are a popular activity for the whole family: parents join their young children in happily getting down and dirty to plant the saplings.

*"I love getting to work to plant saplings with my children. It's a fantastic family bonding experience filled with laughter and delightful discovers..."*

### Eco-Trail

Xishan Community houses quite a few scenic hiking trails that attract tens and thousands of tourists and hikers. The first “eco-trail” in Taipei City, hand-built to minimize destructive impacts on the natural environment, was inaugurated right here in Xishan. Despite a mere 100 meters in length, this eco-trail is significant in that it maintains the soil pavement on the trail surface. Traditional soil-water conservation engineering was applied to the installation of drainage systems, and the handling of soil runoff and the exposing tree roots.

### Protecting Wildlife

The total length of the Xishan Hiking Trail is measured at 5 kilometers. Builders were determined to preserve as many trees as possible for the construction of the trail; and when tree-cutting

became necessary, builders tried to cut down as few trees as possible, and were careful to preserve the tree hollows. They also installed a wood trestle to bypass certain wildlife habitats.



## 6 Xishan Community



Resource Recycling

### Resource Recycling

Wind- and solar-power lighting facilities and an interactive photovoltaic interactive classroom were installed to ensure zero-pollution power generation effectiveness.

The camping grounds in Xishan also welcomed a rainwater harvesting storage tank. It's estimated to collect hundreds of metric tons of reusable rainwater.

Discarded building materials have also been collected and given a new lease on life. Local artists put their creative minds together and build public arts landscape improvement pieces.

### Living Water

Residents and the city government dredge and manage local streams and brooks. A fish ladder was set up in the upstream area to rehabilitate local fish species. A sand basin is mounted in the flat areas of the brook as an observatory.

## 04

### Community Participation and Empowerment

#### Resident Awareness and Community Engagement

Recognizing the importance of community autonomy, the people of Xishan and the Taipei City Government

co-launched a Wellness Outreach Project to reach out to residents in need. A volunteer network is also built to heighten service effectiveness and better care for the disadvantaged.

A Xishan-based charity group, Love Water Taipei, has been working tirelessly to engage the residents to promote farm village regeneration. The group sought help from the Soil and Water Conservation Bureau to host trainings for residents of different generations. In so doing, a sense of belonging and identity is forged, and a consensus formed to protect the agricultural legacy of Xishan.

Xishan Elementary School faculty and students serve as a vital part in community events. The school incorporated community building and creative living into their curricula to help youngsters expand their learning horizons through a "hands-on" approach.

#### Campaign Backup from the City Government

Neishangxi Nature Center is committed to promoting eco-centered environmental education and developing a creative variety of programs targeting different citizen groups, in hopes of inspiring everyone to contribute their part to protect the natural environment. The Center also publishes e-bulletins regularly that focus on outdoor education programs, themed events, and special projects.

#### Guided Tours around the Trails and Tree-Planting

Both the Dalun Touwei Hiking Trail and Pingding Guzun Hiking Trail are popular destinations among committed hikers. The City Government and the community join hands to host 4 guided hiking trips to encourage wider participation in this eco-friendly sport.

Tree-planting and sketching contests for schoolchildren are hosted as well to mentor our youngsters to spread the seed of hope. Children enjoy the fun of forestation and learn about the value of smart stewardship of forests during the process.

A number of environmental education courses, ranging from forest ecology, insects observation, do-it-yourself eco-study camps for the family and seminars for teachers, are also available.

The community teems with historic and cultural destinations, enchanting wildlife, and eco-tour possibilities. Getting better acquainted with Xishan will be impossible without the help of volunteer guides. Trainings are organized numerous times for volunteers interested in soil and water conservation, and those aspire to provide guided eco-tours to hikers.



Guided Tours

## 05

### Healthy Lifestyle

#### Integrating Hiking Trails with Bike Lanes

To give the fitness-minded a hearty workout, and to encourage visitors to explore Xishan with a more expansive perspective, the Community connected the 9 existing hiking trails and 6 popular bike lanes to guide tourists to travel by "Rest stops for cyclists" and "Farmers' Marketplace." In addition to taking a break, tourists can also sample fresh farm produce.

#### Bishan Campsite

The campsite is an excellent choice for the urbanites to get away from the bustle of the city. The campsite offers an obstructed view of the resplendent Taipei 101 skyscraper.

At 6.95 hectares in size, this 30-year-old campsite is nestled in the midst of the forest. Other than the regularly maintained shower area, activity plaza and camping grounds, this city-owned campsite also

features a "clean-energy bathroom," solar cells and a rainwater harvesting system.

#### Herb Garden and Garden of Healing

The herb garden situated inside Neishuangxi Nature Center has designated an area, called, the Garden of Healing, to aromatherapy. You will find a trip to the garden very therapeutic. And check out the perfect herb for your specific Chinese zodiac; the garden is both educational and entertaining.

The Five Elements, the fivefold conceptual scheme in Chinese philosophy, have also been adopted here to map different human body parts. Visitors can learn about the healing effects of different herbs for each elements.

#### Farmers' Marketplace and Tourism Ranch

Excessive use of pesticide and chemical fertilizers have severely hurt the natural environment of the community in early days. The number of bees and fireflies was decimated.

Fortunately, a small band of farmers came to their sense and decided to mend their ways. They experimented with organic farming, grew fruits and vegetables appropriate for Yangmingshan's unique geological makeup, cut down the use of pesticide, and discovered a unique marketing niche for their earth-friendly produce.

They launched their own Farmers' Marketplace to sell their homegrown, pesticide-free, fresh produce certified by the Farmers Co-op. The marketplace is a fantastic way to promote local consumption.



Farmers' Marketplace

Overdevelopment in the earlier days in Xishan have depleted resources and destroyed the beauty of the natural landscape. Heeding the painful lesson from the past, the people of Xishan now make careful planning an important element in every one of their community improvement projects.

#### Reviving Wanshan Coal Mining Site as a Historic Monument

Once upon a time, coal mining was a mainstay in Xishan Community. The depletion of coals however, can serve as a sobering reminder of smarter resource stewardship. Plans are underway to construct a coal mine museum to reenact a mining lifestyle that once defined Xishan in the 18th century.

#### Recruiting Artists for the "In-Residence" Program

The creations of local artists have found a special place in the hearts of the people of Xishan. The artists in turn have discovered Xishan a place of extraordinary spiritual and creative inspirations. The

community is planning more collaborative programs with the City Government to draw artists from both Taiwan and overseas to set up their studios and wow the town with their creative insight.

#### Promoting Organic Farming

3 farmers in Xishan have been certified for their organic agricultural ventures. Presently, a dozen more are waiting for their certification. More strategic planning will be launched to inspire other farmers to follow suit, promote fair trade, so that organic agriculture will take roots and prosper to benefit aspiring farmers.

#### A Safer Mountain-climbing Bike Lane Network

With a move to safeguard vehicular safety, a designated-pedestrian traveling space will be installed along the roadways in the community. These new roadways will be strategically connected with hiking trails and bike lanes that lead to rest stops for cyclists and leisure areas.

## Reflection

Men were put on this planet by the Creator to be stewards of all beings; yet they have trampled all over earth, leaving destruction, ruins, and causing wildlife extinction in their wake. Mankind's frivolity and ignorance have led to an exacerbating, extreme weather pattern; and the backlash of the destructive weather pattern comes in the form of a series of calamitous disasters.

In Xishan, we have plenty of opportunities to search our hearts and examine the bitter fruit of our inaction and the abuse inflicted on nature. This has to stop.

We have thus moved ahead with many restorative projects defined by "Reuse, Reduction, and

Recycling." We encourage organic farming to support local consumption; we set up national parks and water resource reserves, restore and preserve the hundred-year-old waterways, and establish gardens and arboretums to grow plants and vegetation native to our homeland.

We want the world to know about our community: it's such a wonderful oasis from the overwhelming busyness of the city. We look forward to telling the world and the judges in Xiamen about Xishan, and we welcome everyone from around the world to experience this green paradise that we call home.

## Acknowledgements

Our deepest appreciation to the number of groups and individuals who have made Zuzhihu's entry submission possible to the International Awards for Liveable Communities. They are:

- Xishan Elementary School
- Xishan Community Development Association
- Fayu Mountain Puyi Abbey
- Society of Wilderness
- NGO Natural Footpath Association
- Xishan Borough Office, Borough Chief Jian Qingpo
- Local artist Zhong Hongyuan



# Xishan Community

*Where the Stars Come Out to Play*