

China Town in Mauritius

Contributed by André Lee
Sunday, 24 June 2007

A regional quarter of the past adversities pulled people together, to fight for survival and progress of their kinsmen. "You can find anything at the Royal Road of Chinatown," goes the saying, generally accepted with much skepticism and some degree of disbelief. However, neighborhood is distinctively recognizable by numerous tiny shops agglomerated side-by-side, all selling identical items obviously, as they all sell all products. Second hand and used spare parts, plastic toys, Chinese paintings, clothes, books and medicines may be found in the same shop.

{mosbotwordcount}

A regional quarter of the past adversities pulled people together, to fight for survival and progress of their kinsmen. "You can find anything at the Royal Road of Chinatown," goes the saying, generally accepted with much skepticism and some degree of disbelief. However, neighborhood is distinctively recognizable by numerous tiny shops agglomerated side-by-side, all selling identical items obviously, as they all sell all products. Second hand and used spare parts, plastic toys, Chinese paintings, clothes, books and medicines may be found in the same shop.

{bot_wrgoogle}In the suffocating heat of Port Louis, one can only stand in awe at the contrast between the activity and life animating the Chinatown and the stillness of the place after working hours in the late afternoon and the evening when cats and dogs seem to be the only passers-by. As you walk along down Royal Road, you will encounter the various hardware stores. Though many have expanded and modernized, a small number of stores still sell tin wares, lamps, ropes and cooking utensils, which are now considered luxury items of a bygone time.

Even today, the eldest inhabitants of the Port Louis Chinatown have kept a deep Chinese accent making their speeches almost incomprehensible. Impatient and always in a hurry, the elder Chinese people seem never to have the time to stop and discuss, saying that they have no time for idle talk and they are there to do business only. What also characterize the Chinatown are undeniably the heat, dust and the strong smell oozing from the ingredients and spices, proper to Chinese cuisine, giving the real impression of being in China. Nose stinging spices, dried mushrooms, nuts, grains; some even say, "Everything you need to prepare Chinese cuisine can be obtained in Chinatown, provided you knock on thy right doors."

Indeed one of the major cultural characteristics of a neighborhood such as Chinatown is undeniably its food. The Lai Min Restaurant, Chinatown Restaurant, Furama Restaurant, Kwang Chow Restaurant, Singapura Restaurant and some of the eating-places which propose Chinese cuisine. Food is one of the main interests of the neighborhood. "You won't walk 50m without passing by two or three snacks which propose 'hakienns', wax cakes, 'gato zinli' or 'gato cravate' and among others," points out a tourist, visibly amused by the movement of the small town'.

Customs and habits

However, Chinatown without its traditional festivals is unimaginable, the best known among which is most probably the Chinese New Year. It is an occasion for

old and young to gather around the same table and welcome the New Year. Every Chinese believes that it is auspicious to begin the New Year well in order to gain health, wealth and happiness. At the same time of prayer on the first day of the year, Chinatown and the shopping centers are unusually quiet. In the place of the noise and the bustle, one only hears the sound of silences. The heart of the City has stopped beating. Chinese pavements as well as entrances to Chinese houses are canopied red with exploded firecrackers.

How did all start? The first Chinese immigrants landed in Mauritius in the 1820's from the province of Kwang Tong in the South Eastern region of China, and were followed by the Hakkas, originating from the region of Honan in central China. A large number converted to Christianity and despite the impact of the European cultural influence, most of the Chinese, particularly those of the older generation, are still attached to their ancestral customs, traditions and culture.

Towards the end of the 19th century when Chinese immigrants reached a peak, the Asiatic culture was at its height. Since then, the country witnessed intensive cultural activities. Profound changes have taken place affecting the Chinese community for better and for worse. Indeed the Chinese food and eating habits, some traditional festivals like the Chinese New Year, moon festival and the dragon boat festival are some of the many remnants of the Chinese past.

The younger generation has been strongly influenced by the western way of life. Indeed we can consider that the Chinese have become as westernized as the most western-oriented communities on the island. However, much effort is being invested by the older generation to come back to the values of the first Chinese immigrants, attached to the harmony and peace with the nature and people.

.....

<http://MauriTravel.com>