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Kiwi Steve's designs on the Taiwanese music scene

Kiwi website designer and music lover Steve Leggat fell in love with Taiwan during business trips for global companies such as Maybel-line, Vodafone and Audi.

Eight years ago he decided to move to the capital city of Taipei where he has since created GigGuide, currently the biggest online guide to Taiwan's growing live music scene.

The site combines two of Leggat's great passions, design and music. Leggat, who grew up in Auckland, began his design career by making and selling screen-printed t-shirts of his favourite bands. He then went on to study screen-printing, design and desktop publishing.

He discovered his vocation for web design in the mid-90s when the Internet was in its infancy, going on to co-found his own design company.



Steve Leggat at Formoz Fest in Taipei. Photo by 羅執中

However, after first visiting Taiwan in 2004 to see clients, he was soon spending months at a time there. He decided to start freelancing from his Taiwan apartment instead.

But despite “living the dream”, there was one thing missing. “In New Zealand I was always going to gigs. But when I arrived in Taiwan that kind of stopped because I never knew what gigs were going on.”

After learning more about Taiwan’s growing music scene, Leggat launched GigGuide, which provides information in English and Chinese, to tell expats and Taiwanese music lovers about music options beyond karaoke and clubbing.

At present GigGuide is a labour of love for Leggat and he’s concentrating on growing it further in Taiwan – but it could potentially expand to other Asian countries.

While other Taiwanese music websites tend to focus on mainstream bands, GigGuide covers everything from Elton John to tiny DIY punk gigs. Leggat says that the bilingual approach has given it a “pretty wide audience”.

Taiwanese workers generally have long working days, earning comparatively low wages – an issue that was covered in a Forbes Asia special report last year.

However, Leggat says people are increasingly trying to introduce more of a work-life balance – which includes going to gigs

“While the culture of going out to a gig is still not as popular in Taiwan as it is in New Zealand, it’s definitely been growing.

“This year I also organised a four-show tour by Kiwi band So So Modern. It went really great. Being able to show those lads around Taiwan was a real buzz and I’d love to have more Kiwi bands visiting Taiwan.

“I hope one day I can also take some Taiwanese bands to New Zealand. There are some great bands here that I know would go down well there. I’m out seeing bands two or three nights a week and talking with members to find about their tour and recording plans.”

Leggat studied Chinese formally for about seven months but finds that many Taiwanese people speak English. Chinese learners in Taiwan often find that locals will respond in English even if the conversation is initiated in Chinese.

“Often I’ll end up having this long, strange conversation. It’s a like a battle of who can speak the other’s mother language the best.”

Many Kiwi immigrants teach English or work in technology, although Leggat says finding jobs in the technology sector has become more difficult because more companies are moving to China.

However, Taipei is also a website designer’s dream location.

“It’s not unusual to see freelancers spending all day or night in a café, taking advantage of the city’s free Wi-Fi network,” he says.

“I just love what I’m doing. Going to see great bands two or three nights a week, meeting interesting people, and coding till the wee hours. Sure, I hope I can earn a living off GigGuide, but in the meantime I’ve still got my design work.”