

International Cultural Kaleidoscope Explores the Fun and Diversity of Global Cultures

Campus focus

Did you know that giving a thumbs-up is considered taboo in Iran? Or that one of the first things Indonesians miss when coming to Taiwan is the absence of a bidet sprayer in restrooms? To showcase the fun and differences of global cultures, the International Student Guidance Section of the Office of International Affairs held the “International Cultural Kaleidoscope” event at 6:00 p.m. on December 3 at the 10th floor of the Ching-Sheng Building. The event invited international students Candela Balboa Chirona from Spain (first year, Department of Diplomacy and International Relations), Shiena Chailand from Indonesia (fourth year, English-taught Program in Computer Science and Information Engineering), Noda Seina from Japan (third year, Department of Diplomacy and International Relations), and Ali Kouhi from Iran (fourth year, English-taught Program in Computer Science and Information Engineering) to share stories from their home countries through everyday perspectives such as food, festivals, and social customs.

Representing Spain, Candela Balboa Chirona opened with the country’s vibrant festivals and cuisine rooted in natural, locally sourced ingredients. She explained how Spanish dishes emphasize freshness and regional flavors, highlighting examples such as Valencian seafood paella, Andalusian gazpacho (a cold summer soup), and the classic Spanish omelet. She noted that promoting the use of local ingredients not only reduces food miles but also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals of Zero Hunger and Climate Action. She also introduced three iconic Spanish festivals: Las Fallas in March, featuring the burning of giant artistic sculptures; the Seville April Fair with its strong Andalusian character; and the San Fermín Festival, famous for its running of the bulls, leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

Offering a Southeast Asian perspective, Indonesian student Shiena Chailand

began by describing Indonesia as a multiethnic nation composed of nearly 20,000 islands, home to more than 1,300 ethnic groups and over 700 languages, resulting in remarkable cultural diversity. She shared everyday cultural elements such as batik clothing, the popular instant noodles Indomie, and lively traditional games played during Indonesia's Independence Day celebrations. She also introduced interesting cultural highlights, including Indonesian prawn crackers, the world's largest flower, the titan arum, and the bidet sprayer commonly found in Indonesian bathrooms but rarely seen in Taiwan. She joked that this is often the first thing Indonesian students find hard to adjust to when they arrive in Taiwan, illustrating how cultural differences are usually reflected in everyday details.

Japanese student Noda Seina guided the audience through a deeper understanding of how Japan's global image differs from everyday reality. She pointed out that while Japanese cuisine emphasizes light flavors and balance, ramen and curry, commonly found in Taiwan, are not originally native Japanese dishes. She also introduced her hometown of Shizuoka Prefecture and shared insights into Japan's 26 UNESCO World Heritage sites. She explained how Mount Fuji, Suruga Bay, and Miho no Matsubara together form a unique natural landscape, and highlighted the Genbei River in Mishima City, which has been restored from pollution through community efforts and is now recognized as a water management heritage site, demonstrating the possibility of balancing cultural preservation with environmental protection.

The final speaker, Ali Kouhi from Iran, led the audience into the world of ancient Persian culture. He recommended a classic 10-day travel route starting from Tehran, which connects historical gardens in Kashan, the desert city of Yazd, and Shiraz, featuring its ancient ruins. He also shared how Iran's desert climate has shaped clothing preferences, with people favoring white or light-colored garments. Ali introduced Taarof, a distinctive Iranian social etiquette that emphasizes humility and politeness in interactions. He specifically reminded participants to be mindful of gestures in cross-cultural communication, noting that the

thumbs-up gesture commonly used in Taiwan can be highly offensive in Iran, and that head movements used to express refusal differ from Taiwanese customs.

Krittaya Kruapat, a fourth-year student in the English-taught Program in Computer Science and Information Engineering, shared that the event exposed her to cultures and countries she had never known before and found the experience highly rewarding. She said she was particularly drawn to the presentation on Japan, noting that Japan is not only a popular travel destination in Asia but also a beautiful country worth visiting in person.

“This is already my second time attending a similar event, and I learn something new every time,” she said.

