

TRAVEL & EXPERIENCES

Go Away With ... Lay

By Jae-Ha Kim, Tribune Content Agency

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Musician/producer Lay is celebrating his recent 27th birthday with the release of his latest solo album, “NAMANANA.” Born Yixing Zhang in Hunan, the EXO star recorded each song, including his self-produced single, “Give Me a Chance” -- in both English and Mandarin. A workaholic who says he’s happiest when he’s busy, he made his solo United States festival debut this past summer at the Chicago stop of Lollapalooza . “I’m like a machine (that) never rests,” says Lay, who collaborated with artists such as Bazzi on his album. “Even in my free time, I am pretty much always making music, composing and producing ... and maybe enjoying some food. It sounds a bit boring, but I hope to make the most of my time to improve, enhance my skills and achieve higher success. I am hoping to be stronger and obtain worldwide recognition.”

Q. Out of all the U.S. cities, how did you end up choosing Chicago?

A. It was Alan Walker who invited me to Lollapalooza. I got the chance to perform (my) song “Sheep” with him. Chicago was very impressive. I got to try

deep-dish pizza. It had a lot of cheese and I love cheese. I thought it was very good and delicious.

Q. How comfortable are you creating new music when you're on the road?

A. "NAMANANA" was made in hotels. For me, I can't really make a trip that's mainly for tourist purposes, as I usually have a very tight work schedule. So the way I gather inspiration when I produce music is that I will sit in a studio and then make a lot of beats, as well as try some other things.

Q. What do you remember about the first trip you took as a child?

A. I don't remember where I went for my first trip, but I remember I felt excited and nervous about the flight. I felt a bit worried about the turbulence and it made me feel dizzy. I remember convincing myself that without technology, or say without those developed transportation means, we would not be able to travel. So the plane must be designed very safe for people to travel. I had to just keep reminding myself of that!

Q. Many Americans have traveled to Beijing, but they don't know about provinces like Hunan. What are some things people should know about Hunan?

A. Hunan is a beautiful place. It's my hometown. I have some American friends studying there. It's a great place with delicious and traditional foods. Life in Hunan is more relaxed compared to other parts in China. People don't have that much stress. If you have time, you should visit.

Q. When was the first time you traveled to the United States?

A. Before visiting the U.S., I always thought it was very big and it turned out to be quite what I imagined. I visited the U.S. for the first time when I was 21 years old. It's beautiful and peaceful. When driving on the road, you will see lots of very big trucks, which is something I wasn't used to seeing. I'd like to have a big vehicle like that one day.

Q. If you have free time while you're touring, what do you like to do?

A. If I can go outside and there is no one following me, I will go to a nice restaurant and get some local food.

Q. Where have you eaten some of your favorite meals?

A. The first answer that came to my mind is my hometown, Hunan, of course. There is a lot of nice food there. If you have a chance, please (go) and have a taste. For food in China, you must try dishes from Hunan and Szechwan. Outside of China, I love (food in) America, Japan and Korea. I like a big, delicious American steak and burgers too. Sometimes, I try to diet and eat healthy, but the moment I see a burger, I lose control.

Q. Many of your fans travel to different cities and countries to watch you perform. If you had the time to go anywhere, who would you want to see perform in concert?

A. I feel grateful for those who travel far to see me perform live and give me support. That makes me feel very warm. When I get some time, I really hope I

get to see some top musicians' concerts like Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé and The Weeknd. I have heard they all put on great performances.

Q. What are your five favorite cities?

A. There are many cities that I like, but let me think. The first is Changsha (capital city of Hunan), then Seoul, Chicago, Tokyo and anywhere in Hawaii.

(Jae-Ha Kim is a New York Times bestselling author and travel writer. You can respond to this column by visiting her website at www.jaehakim.com. You may also follow “Go Away With...” on [Twitter at @GoAwayWithJae](https://twitter.com/GoAwayWithJae) where Jae-Ha Kim welcomes your questions and comments.)

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