

# Taiwan

## The Other China

14 days ex Taipei

Taipei – national parks – native culture – temples – hot springs – mountains and beaches

When you say Taiwan, many people's first thoughts are of cheap toys and cutting-edge electronics "Made in Taiwan" and maybe the island's tumultuous relationship with its booming neighbour. But this tear-shaped drop in the Pacific Ocean, coined "La Ilha Formosa" (The Beautiful Island) offers untouched beaches, breathtaking gorges, picturesque peaks, serene lakes, tropical forests, aboriginal peoples, stunningly ornate temples, neon-clad cities and decaying Qing dynasty courtyard houses, all contained in an island only 250 miles long and less than 100 miles wide.

Taiwan was first settled by Austronesians who had traveled across the Pacific (and still exist in remote mountainous and island communities). Later, waves of emigrants from China came to the island to escape famine and persecution. In the last half millennia Taiwan has served as a colony for the Portuguese, Dutch and Japanese, and a retreat for the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party) when they were forced out of China by Mao Zedong's communists. Free from the purges of the Cultural Revolution on the mainland, "the other China" has managed to keep its cultural legacy far more intact and accessible than its big brotherly neighbour – you'll see offering tables laid out and ghost money being burnt on the street on auspicious days of the month, and maybe even witness noisy processions and festivals.

In spite (and perhaps because) of their varied history, the Taiwanese remain warm, friendly, hospitable and keen to open the door to their island and culture. This past has also given Taiwan its fabulous culinary diversity and you'll find all the Chinese specialties here, from the delicious to the disarming, along with excellent Japanese fare, and a host of island delicacies such as "stinky tofu" and "pearl milk tea" which can be enjoyed everywhere from fine restaurants to atmospheric nightmarkets.

Our tour offers a diverse introduction to the manifold treasures that make up this tiny Pacific jewel, and whether relishing a hike in East Asia's highest mountains, joining the locals for some morning *tai ji*, soaking away the stresses of life in a hot spring or just slurping down a hearty bowl of delicious noodles, Taiwan will assault your senses and leaves you hungry for more!

## Itinerary

### Day 1 | Taipei

On Day 1 people will be arriving throughout the day. We'll meet in the evening to get to know one another over dinner and have an introduction to the tour.

### Days 2 | Taipei

On Day 2 we take in some of the contrasting attractions of this modern city including Asia's tallest building, the Taipei 101, the fabulous Chinese art on display at the National Palace Museum and the culinary curiosities to be found at a traditional nightmarket.

### Day 3 | Sun Moon Lake

Today we take the high-speed rail to Taichung where we transfer by road for the journey up to Sun Moon Lake. Sun Moon Lake's turquoise waters are surrounded by mountains, temples and pagodas and it is a great place to enjoy a relaxing boat trip.

#### **Days 4 | Alishan**

Alishan is a charming mountain village which is famed for its stunning sunrises, beautiful hiking trails, and its spring cherry blossom. Weather permitting we take an afternoon hike through the ancient forests.

*Please note that due to the devastation caused by Typhoon Morakot in 2009, the famed Alishan Forest Train remains closed until further notice and until it re-opens we will be transferring from Sun Moon Lake by road.*

#### **Days 5 | Tainan**

Today, we rise early to seek the "sea of clouds" and catch a glimpse of Taiwan's highest mountain, Yushan (Jade Mountain). After breakfast we'll cross the Tropic of Cancer on our drive to Tainan, the island's oldest city which showcases Taiwan's varied past through its lively temples, colonial remnants and traditional cuisine. Tainan is located at the heart of the south's rice, banana, coconut and pineapple belt and its balmy heat lends the city a relaxed atmosphere.

#### **Day 6 | Foguangshan**

This morning we take a walking tour of the old city of Tainan, wandering narrow lanes to brightly colored temples. In the afternoon we drive to Foguangshan, the island's largest Buddhist Monastery, recently voted by the Times Online as one of the world's 50 most relaxing escapes! We'll have the chance to fully explore the monastery's beautiful grounds and then spend a surprisingly comfortable night learning about monastic life in Taiwan.

#### **Day 7 | Kenting**

Continuing our journey south we drive via the aboriginal region of Sandimen to Taiwan's southernmost point, Kenting, deservedly famous for its fine beaches, national parks and nightmarket. We take an afternoon hike through one of the national parks where we'll try to spot monkeys, birds and other wildlife.

#### **Day 8 | Kenting**

Today is a free day for you to spend some time hiking, biking, swimming, snorkeling, surfing or just relaxing on the beach.

#### **Day 9 | Zhiben**

On Day 9 we drive across the mountainous interior of the island to Zhiben which was established as a hot spring resort by the Japanese. We'll take a hike through the lush national park and then have time to enjoy the hot springs – relax, rejuvenate, and soak away your aches and pains!

#### **Day 10 | Green Island**

After a short drive, today we take a boat out to Green Island. This volcanic island just off the east coast, once served as an exile for political prisoners, but these days is visited for its dramatic coastal scenery and the sublime pleasure of soaking in a saltwater hot spring on the seashore – one of only three places in the world you can do so.

#### **Day 11 | Taroko Gorge**

Today we continue north with a drive along the dramatic east coast to breathtaking Taroko Gorge which forges its way through the Central Mountain Range. Whether shrouded in mist or glowing in sunlight, this sheer marble gorge is a captivating sight.

### **Day 12 | Taroko Gorge**

Today we explore this incredible area by taking a gentle hike along a beautiful tributary gorge. The rest of the day is at leisure to enjoy the beauty of this magnificent natural wonder.

### **Day 13 | Taipei**

On Day 13 we make one last stunning drive, from Taroko north past the sheer beauty of the Cingshui Cliffs and then inland through the tea plantations of Pinglin and on to Taipei. On arrival we celebrate the end of our adventurous journey to this little visited part of the world with a delicious duck dinner.

### **Days 14 | Taipei**

The tour ends after breakfast, You are free to leave any time today!

*NB. The itinerary is subject to change without notice in the case of extreme conditions (see Climate).*

## **Tour Details**

### **Style**

Adventure travel tour

### **Inclusions**

Private transport, bullet train, tour leader, Sun Moon Lake boat cruise, Green Island ferry trip, some meals, all entry fees as per itinerary

### **Group Size**

Minimum 4, Maximum 12

### **Food**

Included Meals 13 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 7 dinners

### **Accommodation**

12 nights comfortable hotels, 1 night comfortable monastery!

### **Single Room Supplement**

On Grasshopper Adventures single travellers do not have to pay extra to join our trips – we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to have your own room we are happy to book you a single room for you for the duration of the tour. This single supplement charge is US\$1200. We should also point out that on occasion single rooms may not be available and in these instances you may need to share for a night or two – we will refund part of your single supplement in these cases.

### **Additional Accommodation**

Should you require additional accommodation in Taipei before or after your trip we can offer you competitive rates at the tour hotel.

### **Arriving in Taipei**

International flights arrive at Chiang Kaishek (CKS) Airport in Taoyuan, from where there are two main options to get to the hotel:

- The airport shuttle bus runs every 30mins and costs NT\$100-150 (US\$3-5) for the hour journey.
- Meter taxis will cost NT\$1200-1400 (US\$40-45) and take around 45 minutes to get to the hotel. Ignore taxi touts who offer taxis in the arrivals hall and proceed outside to the official taxi rank.

The meeting point for this trip will be advised when you book the tour. The hotel is well-located in the heart of Taipei and the surrounding streets are full of markets, restaurants and shops.

## Travel Details

### Visas

In Taiwan, 30 day single entry visas are free on arrival for many nationalities (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa & Ireland; UK citizens are granted 90 days). On arrival you may need to show proof of onward travel, so make sure you have your actual ticket or the e-booking number.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

If you are looking for an insurer we can recommend World Nomads. [Click to see more details.](#)

### Flights

International flights to and from Taipei are not included in the price of this tour. Several airlines fly direct to Taipei ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com), [www.cathaypacific.com](http://www.cathaypacific.com), [www.evaair.com](http://www.evaair.com), [www.jal.com](http://www.jal.com), [www.nwa.com](http://www.nwa.com), [www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au), [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)), otherwise Hong Kong is the nearest major hub, from where there are regular flights to Taipei and Kaohsiung ([www.china-airlines.com](http://www.china-airlines.com), [www.dragonair.com](http://www.dragonair.com), [www.eva.com](http://www.eva.com)), whilst Bangkok ([www.thaiair.com](http://www.thaiair.com), [www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com)) and Singapore ([www.jetstar.com](http://www.jetstar.com)) are a little further away.

### Money

The official currency of Taiwan is the New Taiwan Dollar (NT\$) which must be used for all transactions. Taiwan has a modern banking system and there are ATMs accepting foreign cards in all major settlements. However, machines break down, eat cards or are just empty, so it's worth having some back-up (mint condition) cash or traveller's cheques, ideally in US\$.

For current exchange rates visit: [www.oanda.com](http://www.oanda.com)

### Costs

Taiwan is certainly less expensive than Europe, North America or Australasia, but isn't as cheap as neighbouring China or the Philippines. Whilst local produce and favorites can be very cheap, imported items are far from a bargain. To give you some rough idea of prices:

1.5L bottle of water NT\$30/US\$1, Street vendor snack \$30/US\$1, large bottle of beer (shop NT\$50/US\$1.60, bar NT\$120/ US\$4).

Some meals are included in this trip, but we recommend you bring around NT\$1500 /US\$50) per day as spending money, more if you plan to buy a lot of gifts.

### Tipping

Tipping isn't common in Taiwan, but is customary for guides and drivers: allow US\$100.

### Packing

You will be required to carry your own luggage at times, so we recommend packing lightly and bringing a backpack. What clothes you decide to pack depends on the season (see Climate, below) and your personal tastes, however a hat and waterproof jacket can come in useful any time of year and the following might be of help as a basic checklist:

#### Personal Items

- Adaptor (110V with two flat prongs)
- Alarm clock
- Business cards
- Camera (Film & Memory cards, charger)
- Comfortable hard wearing shoes or sneakers/runners
- Earplugs
- First Aid kit and basic medicines
- Flashlight
- Hat
- Insect repellent
- Lipbalm
- Traditional Chinese phrasebook or dictionary
- Pictures of home (to show people you meet)
- Plastic ziplock and garbage bags
- Pocket knife
- Reading material

- Rubber sandals
- Sewing kit
- Small padlock
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Swimming Costume
- Waterproof jacket

#### Travel Items

- Passport (with at least six months validity after the end of your trip and spare pages)
- Flight Tickets
- Money – cash/credit cards/ traveller's cheques
- Insurance Policy
- Tour Voucher
- Photocopies of all of the above kept separately from the originals

*NB – Remember to put any blades, scissors, lighters or liquids in your hold luggage when flying.*

### Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling to Taiwan unless you have been in Africa or South America within the previous six days in which case a Yellow Fever Vaccination Certificate is required for entry. However we recommend visiting a travel medicine doctor before your trip; WHO advises vaccination against Diphtheria, Tetanus, Hepatitis A & B, Typhoid, Japanese B Encephalitis and Tuberculosis. You should carry a well-stocked First Aid Kit and any personal medication with you when you travel. All Grasshopper Adventures Group Leaders are First Aid trained, but they are not permitted to dispense any medication.

### Photography

Taiwan is a photographer's dream with beautiful scenery, brightly colored temples and plenty of smiling faces. Film, memory cards and digital photo burning to CD are available in all major settlements.

## Climate

The belt of mountains which runs along the centre of Taiwan lends a diverse climate to such a small island. Throughout the summer (May to October) the entire country experiences high temperatures and humidity, although cool escapes are offered by mountains, the ocean, regular rainstorms and the occasional typhoon.

### Typhoons

Typhoons (from *taifeng*, meaning strong wind, known elsewhere as tropical cyclones or hurricanes) regularly hit Taiwan between May and September and can occasionally arrive as late as November. Although they can be tracked, their exact course cannot be forecast and during such times itineraries may need to be adjusted. Likewise, after a typhoon, roads may be closed and we may have to alter our route accordingly.

Winters can be cool and wet in the north, but south of the Tropic of Cancer, Taiwan rarely sees temperatures lower than 15°C/60°F, and in the height of winter, Kenting can still enjoy sunny days peaking in the high twenties °C (mid eighties °F). Taiwan experiences a rainy season which tends to arrive in May or June and finish in August. Whilst the north continues to get some rain throughout the winter, this is the south's driest time, with clear, sunny warm days.

Overall, Spring (March-April) and Autumn (October-December) are the best times to visit Taiwan, when temperatures and humidity are more comfortable and there is little rainfall (especially in Autumn). This said, hot spring pools are best appreciated in the middle of winter, whilst the beaches are at their most appealing mid-summer – Taiwan is a year-round destination.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Taipei</b>												
max (°c)	19	19	22	26	29	32	34	34	31	28	24	21
min (°c)	13	14	15	19	22	24	26	26	24	22	19	15
rainfall (mm)	87	166	180	183	259	319	248	305	275	139	86	79
<b>Kenting</b>												
max (°c)	24	25	27	30	31	31	32	32	31	30	27	25
min (°c)	18	18	20	22	24	25	25	25	24	23	22	19
rainfall (mm)	26	28	39	44	164	371	396	475	288	142	43	20

## Positive Impact

### Dress

Taiwan is a hot and relaxed country and in the cities you'll see similar styles of dress as you might in a European, North American or Australasian city.

### Etiquette

Taiwan's melded history, so removed from Western civilization has left a minefield of different social customs which can initially be baffling to foreign visitors. Fortunately the

Taiwanese view foreigners as very different from themselves and in most situations cultural *faux pas* will be ignored. However, that isn't to say you shouldn't try to conform whilst here – if you do your actions will be both noticed and appreciated. Your group leader will fill you in on “do's and don'ts” in Taiwan. As well as the items mentioned under donations and packing, it's worth bringing your business cards, which are highly valued items in the Chinese world.

### **Language**

One of the highlights of a visit to Taiwan is her people and whilst English is increasingly spoken, away from the cities, Chinese, Taiwanese, regional and ethnic dialects rule. We'll teach you some of the basics of *gwoyu* (National Language), the most widely-spoken version of Chinese, but it's also worth bringing a phrasebook along with you.

### **Donations**

Taiwan isn't completely free from poverty, but it is certainly far wealthier than many other Asian countries. Whilst you won't be drawn into the dubious activity of giving away sweets or pens in Taiwan, it's worth bringing some things from your home country (postcards, photographs) to give as gifts to people you meet along our journey.

Grasshopper Taiwan supports two local charities, Liouguei Christian Mountain Children's Home ([www.twcmch.org/history.htm](http://www.twcmch.org/history.htm)), a local orphanage, and BARK (<http://bark-taiwan.blogspot.com>), a local charity which takes injured animals off the streets and endeavours to find permanent homes for them. We make a contribution to both organizations for every tour we run in Taiwan, and there is also the opportunity for you to donate individually during your trip.

### **Important**

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures