

TAIWAN

Area : 36,000 square kilometers

Population: 22.6 million

Capital : Taipei City

People : Taiwanese

Language : Mandarin/Taiwanese/Hakka

Religion : Buddhism/Taoism/Christian

President : Chen Shui-bian



Taiwan's total land area is only about 3,6000 square kilometers; it is shaped like a tobacco leaf that is narrow at both ends. It lies off the southeastern coast of mainland Asia, across the Taiwan Straits from Mainland China-- a solitary island on the western edge of the Pacific Ocean. To the north lies Japan and Okinawa, to the south is the Philippines. Many airlines fly to Taiwan, helping make it the perfect travel destination.



Photography by Sun-In Au Corporation

Taiwan lies on the western edge of the Pacific "rim of fire," and continuous tectonic movements have created majestic peaks, rolling hills and plains, basins, coastlines, and other wonders. Taiwan sees climates of many types: tropical, sub-tropical, and temperate, providing clear differentiation between the different seasons. There are about 18,400 species of wildlife on the island, with more than 20% belonging to rare or endangered species; among these are the land-locked salmon, Taiwan mountain goat, Formosan rock monkey, Formosan black bear, blue magpie, Mikado pheasant, Hsuehshan grass lizard, and many more.

The government has established 6 national parks and 11 national scenic areas to preserve Taiwan's best natural ecological environment and cultural sites. Take in the splendor and sheer heights of the cliffs at Taroko Gorge; take a ride on the Alishan train--one of only three mountain railways in the world--and experience the breathtaking sunset and sea of clouds; hike up to the summit of Northeast Asia's highest peak, Jade Mountain. You can also soak up the sun in Kending, Asia's version of Hawaii; stand at the edge of Sun Moon Lake; traipse through the East Rift Valley;

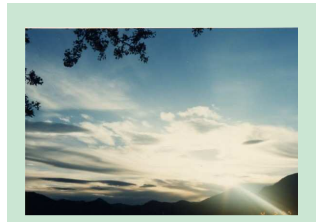


Photography by YEH MET CHING

or visit the offshore islands of Kinmen and Penghu. It's fun in capital letters as well as an awesome journey of natural discovery!

The cultural aspects also not to be missed. The blending of Hakka, Taiwanese, and mainland Chinese cultures has produced a rich plethora of cultural and social color. Whether it is religion, architecture, language, living habits, or food, it's just one big exciting melting pot! Food is the best representative of this cultural mixing and matching. Aside from cuisines from different parts of the mainland such as Zhejiang, Hunan, Guangdong, Yunnan, Shanghai, Beijing, Sichuan, and others, there is also the local Taiwanese cuisine as well as the local delicacies of each area.

Nature



Formosa (beautiful island) is what the Portuguese called Taiwan when they came here in the 16th century and saw the island's verdant beauty.

Located along the southeast coast of the Asian Continent at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean, between Japan and the Philippines and right in the center of the East-Asian island arc, Taiwan forms a vital line of communication in the Asia-Pacific region. It covers an area of approximately 36,000 square kilometers (14,400 square miles) and is longer than it is wide. Two-thirds of the total area is covered by forested mountains and the remaining area consists of hilly country, platforms and highlands, coastal plains and basins. The Central Mountain Range stretches along the entire island from north to south, thus forming a natural line of demarcation for rivers on the eastern and western sides of the island. On the west side lies the Yushan Mountain Range with its main peak reaching 3,952 meters, the highest mountain peak in Northeast Asia.

The Mountains

Taiwan has been generously equipped with forests. Some 293 mountain peaks are more than 3,000 meters high, geographically making Taiwan incomparable to any other country in the world. As mountains can be found anywhere, mountain climbing

is a popular leisure activity in Taiwan. One can choose to walk the mountains on the outskirts of the city or accept the challenge of climbing one of the numerous high mountains, follow the course of streams and valleys, trace back the source of rivers, or cross entire mountains. In any case, lush scenery will unfold before your eyes and it will not take too long before you'll be convinced of the beauty of Taiwan's mountains. In addition to this, six national parks offer a variety of distinct topographic landscapes: the Taroko National Park, a narrow ravine created by a river which has cut through the mountains, Yushan (Jade Mountain) National Park highest containing the highest landmark of Taiwan and also the highest peak in Northeast Asia, Shei-Pa National Park, featuring with its dangerously steep slopes; Yangmingshan National Park, offering volcanic craters and lakes; Kenting National Park, encompassing Taiwan's only tropical area which breathes a truly Southeast Asian atmosphere; and Kinmen National Park, with its storied granite hills

World of the Sea

Taiwan has a very rich marine ecology. In the Pacific Ocean on Taiwan's east, groups of bottlenose dolphins, spinner dolphins, Risso's dolphins, and pantropical spotted dolphins can be seen jumping out of the water. Azure seas and magnificent coral reefs can be found in Kenting on the south end of Taiwan, and on Green Island and the islands of the Penghu Archipelago. It is there for you to discover and marvel at.



Photography by Eugene Yeh

Eco-parks



Photography by Eugene Yeh

Taiwan has a warm and humid climate and a variety of terrain, including sandbars, plains, basins, hills, plateaus, and mountains. As a result, the island is home to abundant animal and plant life, including various endemic species, and can therefore be regarded as one gigantic eco-park. Because of the formation of mud flats and mangroves along the coast, large numbers of migratory birds from around the world are attracted to Taiwan, where they use these coastal areas as a temporary shelter and rest area before they resume their journey. In spring and summer there are the birds that leave the tropics behind to spend this season in Taiwan, such as the eye-catching fairy pitta, known in Chinese as the eight-color bird, while during autumn birds from colder northern areas come to Taiwan to spend the

winter, such as the black-faced spoonbill of which only 530 are left worldwide. Each year the gray-faced buzzard will be right on time to participate in the Double Tenth celebrations (Taiwan's national day), and there are also countless other migratory birds that use Taiwan either as a stopover or as their final destination, one way or the other adding exuberant vitality to Taiwan's wildlife.

One surprise after the other will come to you when traveling in Taiwan.



Culture

If this is your first visit to Taiwan, you will most certainly be amazed at the diversity of things this beautiful island has to offer, as a rich historical background has provided Taiwan with a multifaceted culture. People from many different places and backgrounds, such as Taiwan's indigenous people, the southern Fujianese from early China, Hakka immigrants, the Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese, and the recent immigrants from mainland China, have all played a role in Taiwan's development. While gradually developing a new culture indigenous to Taiwan, they also held on to their respective customs and traditions; as a result, you will be able to sample indigenous, Taiwanese, and Chinese cultures and even find traces left by the Dutch and the Japanese when traveling in Taiwan.

Chinese Culture



Taiwan forms the center of Chinese art and culture, which is not only obvious from the exhaustive collection of cultural relics from past dynasties exhibited in the



Photography by YEH MET CHING

famous National Palace Museum, but can also be perfectly illustrated by the traditional architecture and folk art found in Taiwan.

Temples and Architecture



Photography by Sun-In Au Corporation

Taiwan's traditional architecture is an aggregation of folk art. Decorations are refined and while they form an important part of the architecture, ranging from colored paintings to calligraphic illustrations, wooden and stone carvings, clay sculptures and ceramics, they tell the story of Taiwan's rich culture. Next to traditional Chinese architecture brought to Taiwan by the southern Fujianese from early China and the Hakka immigrants (such as can be seen in Bangiao at the Lin Family Garden), architectural features used in



Chinese temples can also be found across Taiwan. Some of the most famous temples in Taiwan that are not only of historical but also of artistic value. are the Longshan (Dragon Mountain) Temple and the Mazu Temple (Queen of Heaven Temple) in Lugang, and the Chaotian Temple in Beigang.

Folk Art and Culture

Some of Taiwan's most important annual holidays and festivals include the Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, Lovers' Day, and the Hungry Ghosts Festival. But local Taiwanese folk events, such as the Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage, the Goddess Mazu Making Rounds of Inspection in Beigang, the City God Welcoming in Taipei, the Burning of the Plague God Boat in Donggang, and aboriginal rituals, are also regarded as important celebrations.



Photography by Eugene Yeh

Next to keeping traditional Chinese opera alive, Taiwan has also developed its own Taiwanese opera and the famous glove puppet theater. Taiwanese opera combines local opera and music into one performing art, while the puppet theater has undergone great modernization in recent years and many special effects are added to performances today, making it extremely popular among Taiwan's

younger generation. Taiwan's movies and performing groups are also gradually gaining ground on the international stage, once again demonstrating the traditional and creative value of Chinese and Taiwanese culture.

Aboriginal Culture



The mysterious customs and traditions of the aborigines, Taiwan's indigenous people, such as the Harvest Festival (Smatto), the Worship of Hunting (Mabuasu), spiritual rituals, totemism, and snake worship, give an extra dimension to Taiwan's culture. The aboriginal tribes of Taiwan form the most northern branch of the Austronesian language group, and ethnically belong to the Malay race. Most aborigines have retreated into the mountains; but although many are faced with assimilation, still some 10 different tribes that have their own languages, traditions, and tribal structure can be distinguished: the Saisiyat, the Atayal, the Amis, the Bunun, the Puyuma, the Rukai, the Paiwan, the Tao, the Sao and the Zou. Orchid Island's Yami(Tao) tribe has been relatively isolated due to the island's geographical location, and was the last to come in contact with the Han Chinese; this tribe, therefore, has been able to preserve its aboriginal culture the best.



Photography by CHEN CHIA HSING

Colonial Culture



Remnants of colonial periods can still be found in many parts of Taiwan. Fort San Domingo in Danshui, for example, used to be home to the Spanish and the Dutch successively, while bustling places such as Taipei's Dihua Street, Taoyuan's Daxi area, and Tainan's Xinhua area have still been able to preserve the outstanding baroque architecture left by the Japanese. Some historically significant structures built during

the Japanese occupation include the Presidential Office Building, the Executive Yuan, and the old National Taiwan University Hospital Building in Taipei. Recently, decorative night lighting has been installed to display the graceful features of these old structures while at the same time illuminating the night skies of Taipei and creating an artistic and romantic atmosphere.



Photography by Eugene Yeh

Taiwan incorporates all this, a true cultural banquet: whether you are looking for something romantic, legendary, stately, or interesting, it's all here for you to discover.



Photography by Robert Shou

