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ACCOMMODATION

Taiwan provides the full range of lodgings, from basic hostels to world-class hotels and resorts, and air-con is standard. Quality, however, can really vary, even at the same price range; a newly remodelled hotel may charge only slightly more than the decaying establishment beside it. In addition, many hotels are really a star or even two below their advertised rating. Few hotels really deserve the five-star rating as facilities and service are rarely top notch. Many continue to charge as if they do, however, which exasperates even the tourism board.

Unlike in many other countries, accommodation is generally priced per room (or number of beds per room) and not per guest. What's called a 'single' room in other countries (one single bed) is rare; a 'single' in Taiwanese hotel lingo usually means a room with one queen-sized bed, which most couples find spacious enough. 'Double' generally means a double bed, while 'twin' denotes two beds per room. The lesson here: couples travel cheaper per person.

Discounts off the rack rate are the norm except for a very few hotels (mostly strictly budget) that always charge the same price. Sometimes you must ask, but mostly discounts are given automatically (often they are even written on the hotel's price list). Discounts range from 20% to 50%. If you're heading to a resort, the most common time to find discounts is on weekdays, while business hotels most often have weekend discounts.

The tourist information booths at airports and high-speed rail stations can make hotel reservations for you. Many hotels offer shuttle services.

See the glossary (p371) for accommodation terms.

Camping

Camping is a real option now. Along the east coast you can set up a tent on pretty much any beach but there are some excellent public camping grounds as well. Remember that while camping in the hotter months on the beach sounds good, at sunrise the inside of your tent will become as hot as a pizza oven. Always look for shade.

A freestanding tent is useful as many camping grounds have wooden platforms

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

for setting tents on. You can pick up a tent cheaply in Taiwan for under NT1000. Grass camp-site spots cost on average NT200 per person per night, while a wooden platform with an eight-person tent already set up may go for NT800 (negotiable if there is just one of you and you have a tent). Most camping grounds offer bathrooms (with showers), barbecue areas and a small convenience store. Some unfortunately also have karaoke. You can camp in some national parks (Kenting, Sheipa and Taroko, and also Yushan if you are hiking on the trails) but not usually in forest recreation areas.

Remember to prepare for the elements. Higher elevations can get chilly at night and below freezing in winter, but it's important to monitor the weather carefully whatever time of year. See p333 for general weather conditions. And remember to bring bug repellent if you're going to stay by the beach.

Homestays/B&Bs

Mínsù (民宿; homestays) offer travellers a way to meet local people in a setting that can often lead to friendship. There's been an explosion of new homestays in the past few years, and most are well run and offer good accommodation at a fair price. Some are positively charming with rooms full of old furniture and mountain or sea views.

The tourism board puts out a booklet (also on its website: www.taiwan.net.tw) listing the 40 best homestays in the country. We checked out about two-thirds for our research and none were wanting. Most charge in the NT2000 to NT3000 range, with off-season and midweek rates dropping considerably. If you have a Youth Guesthouse Network card (see p328), you can stay in the Top 40 for NT1200 to NT1500 a night, sometimes less if they have a dorm room.

Signs for homestays are everywhere, with a big concentration down the east coast. Ask local people or look for the English signs that say B&B.

Hostels

The great news is that more and more excellent hostels are being opened, and by well-travelled, English-speaking young Taiwanese. A basic dorm bed starts at NT250, though the better places charge NT400 to NT500 per night. Private rooms, when available, are usually tiny and start at NT500. You can often

arrange for weekly or monthly rates as well, as the owners are aware that many people come to Taiwan looking for work.

While some Taiwanese hostels are affiliated with *Hostelling International* (HI); and offer discounts accordingly for cardholders, most are not. Some are also technically illegal, though there is nothing dodgy about them otherwise.

Hostels generally have laundry, simple cooking facilities, a TV, computer hook-up with ADSL and a room for socialising. Note that many Taipei hostels are dingy and old, having catered to a different era. Choose carefully in the capital.

Hotels

There's a great range of options among hotels (*fāndiàn* or *dāfāndiàn*). Starting at about NT550 per night, you can have a private room in a very basic budget hotel. For that price you're likely to find threadbare accommodation and occasional mouldy odours, but private bathroom (no shower curtain), TV and phone are generally included. Don't count on being able to make yourself understood in English. At a slightly higher price, NT800 to NT1600, quality varies greatly. Usually above NT1200 rooms are good enough that you wouldn't feel embarrassed putting family up. ADSL, either in rooms or at a small central computer station, is common at this price range.

At midrange hotels (NT1600 to NT4000 per night), you're likely to find a fancy lobby, one or more restaurants on site, ADSL and possibly plasma TVs. Private bathrooms include shower (or bathtub with shower) and shower curtain. Décor can range from a little dated to very modern. Unless you're looking for a luxury experience, most travellers will feel comfortable here. In the big cities usually at least one or two staff members speak some English. Elsewhere you'll be able to muddle your way to a room.

The big cities abound with international-standard top-end hotels. Typical amenities include business centres, English-speaking staff, concierge services, spa and/or fitness centre, massage services and a sense of style. In this book, 'top end' starts at NT4000 per night, though rack rates at big-city hotels can easily be double that.

Don't forget that hot-spring hotels are also for those just looking for accommodation

PRACTICALITIES

Newspapers

The first three daily English-language papers have weekend entertainment listings and can be purchased at bookshops, hotels, convenience stores and kiosks.

- *Taipei Times* (www.taipetimes.com)
- *China Post* (www.chinapost.com.tw)
- *Taiwan News* (www.etaiwannews.com)
- *International Herald Tribune* (www.ihf.com) has worldwide circulation, and is available at hotels and news dealers.

Magazines

- *Taiwan Panorama* (formerly *Sinorama*; www.sinorama.com.tw) is an intelligent look at Taiwanese language and culture, sports, finance, history, travel and more. Available in Chinese-English versions.
- *Commonwealth Magazine* (www.cw.com.tw/english) is the Taiwanese *Economist*. Now available online in English.
- *Travel in Taiwan* (www.sinica.edu.tw/tit) is an excellent resource for all things cultural and touristy, with calendars of events and colourful coverage.

Also look for regionally published magazines for local listings and coverage of local topics. These include: *Taiwan Fun*, *FYI South*, *Highway 11*, *Journey East*, *24/7*, *Xpat Magazine* and *Taiwanease*.

Radio & TV

- International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT) broadcasts nationwide in English 24 hours a day at 100MHz (FM) with a mix of music, news and information.
- Taiwan has three broadcast networks: CTS, CTV and TTV, with shows in Chinese, including dubbed foreign shows. Cable TV is available throughout Taiwan, with the usual options on the international circuit – movie channels, news channels and the like. Some of these are available in English. The exact selection changes from venue to venue and it's common around New Years for channels to suddenly switch numbers (if CNN was 47, for example, it may now become 102).

Electricity

- Taiwan uses the same electrical standard as the USA and Canada: 110V, 60Hz AC. Electrical sockets have two vertical slots. If you bring appliances from Europe, Australia or Southeast Asia, you'll need an adaptor or transformer. Some buildings have outlets for 220V plugs, which are intended for air conditioners.

Weights & Measures

- Taiwan uses the metric system (see the conversion chart on the inside front cover) alongside ancient Chinese weights and measures. When Taiwanese measure floor space, for example, the unit of measure is the *píng* (approximately 4 sq metres). Fruit and vegetables are likely to be sold by the catty (*jīn*, 600g), while teas and herbal medicines are sold by the tael (*liàng*, 37.5g).

(and not hot springs) and cater to most budgets. Prices range from NT2000 to NT8000 a night. At the higher end it's not uncommon to have other services, such as massage, food and beverage, or spa treatments.

Note that if you're phoning someone at a hotel and do not speak Chinese, you may run into trouble at all but the high-end hotels as staff may not recognise the guest's name. Hint: speak clearly, and if the last

name does not work, try the first name. A room number is best.

Rental Accommodation

If you're going to be in Taiwan for an extended period, getting your own place makes sense. Your employer may be able to help you set something up.

English-language newspapers carry rental listings, though these are usually luxury accommodation catering to expats on expense accounts. If you're looking for an upscale or even good midrange apartment, it's useful to hire an agent. Look in the papers for numbers. Usually the agent charges a fee of half a month's rent.

For less expensive accommodation, check out websites catering to the foreign community (see p23) or enlist the help of a Chinese-speaking friend to peruse the Chinese-language papers. You might also just choose an area where you'd like to live and look for signs tacked up on telephone poles and outside apartments. You can usually ask building guards if there are apartments for rent. The excellent **Tsui Mama website** (www.tmm.org.tw) provides listings of mid- to low-range accommodation by area and price in Taipei.

Bland studio apartments (no kitchen) in Taipei range from NT5000 to NT10,000 per month, while a small three-bedroom place might go for NT20,000. In a good neighbourhood, rents can easily be double that. Outside of Taipei, even in the cities, rents are much cheaper: a decent three-bedroom apartment could cost as little as NT7000. Negotiations are usually possible. One good approach is to say that you really like the place but can only afford (however much) right now.

YOUTH TRAVEL IN TAIWAN

In 2005 the National Youth Commission was asked to develop a programme to encourage international youth (backpackers, students etc) aged 15 to 35 to visit Taiwan. In addition to a guesthouse network (above), the programme offers discounts on train and bus tickets and museums, as well as free mobile phones called the Digital Tour Buddy (with Chinese-English dictionaries built in as well as access to special hotlines). The youth commission also works with local nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to offer cultural exchanges. These might involve a week-long stay in an aboriginal village, a few days walking on the Matsu pilgrimage (see p216) or visits to local artists. Check out the website (www.youthtravel.net.tw) for more information including registering for a cultural programme and applying to get the Digital Tour Buddy. You can pick up a Youth Travel Card (and the mobile phone) at the airport visitor centres.

Temple Stays

Here are three temples we know of that offer overnight stays: Shitoushan (p175), Foguangshan (p274) and Tiengong (p161). The accommodation at the temples is surprisingly good and the vegetarian meals delicious.

Youth Guesthouse Network

The **network** (www.youthguesthouse.org.tw) offers 15-to-35-year-old travellers basic accommodation around the country for NT300 to NT500 a night (usually only weekdays, however). Many are in old police hostels, hero houses (for soldiers) or labour recreation centres that previously were off limits to the public. Quality really varies and sometimes the hostels are quite far from a bus or train station. Still, the programme offers yet another budget option. It also offers good discounts on the 40 best B&Bs (see p326). See the boxed text, below for information on picking up a Youth Travel Card.

ACTIVITIES

Although Taiwan ranks among the world's most densely populated areas, opportunities for outdoor activities abound. About 40% of the land is mountainous and sparsely inhabited, and being an island, there is a long coastline.

Bird-Watching

Who knew Taiwan was a top spot for birding? We sure didn't until very recently. But the island has 15 endemic bird species and more than 60 endemic subspecies. Birders from around the world are now paying thousands for organized tours to see them.

We're not going to pretend we can give you the same for free, but we know most of the places they go and have included

some in this edition. These include Kenting (p285), Wulai (p141), Wulu (p264), Aowanda (p230) and Taiwan's islands (p304).

See the website of the **International Taiwan Birding Association** (www.birdingintaiwan.com/index.htm) for more, and check out Kate Rogers' *The Swallow's Return*. See also the boxed text, p71.

Cycling

Taipei and Taipei County have over 100km of connected bike-only routes (p102) along the rivers. For short day trips, head to Pinglin (p149). You'll find a good 25km of dedicated bike routes, and lots of back roads as well. The stops along the Jiji Small Rail Line (p220) offer some pleasant wheeling through the countryside, as does the route in Kuan-shan (p201). At Sun Moon Lake (p222) you'll find scenic paths alongside the lake.

For longer rides, try Hwy 11 (p192) from Hualien to Taitung, or the South Cross-Island Hwy (p260). And check out May and June 2006 archives on this biking blog (<http://rank.blogspot.com>) and the forum pages of www.formosafattire.com.

HIRE

You can hire bikes for around NT50 to NT100 an hour. A full day might cost NT150 to NT300. Sometimes you are asked to leave a deposit, sometimes not. In Taipei you can rent at one location and leave at another. You can also take bikes on the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) during certain posted hours.

PURCHASE

A mountain-bike lookalike can be had for NT3000 to NT5000. These are fine for riding on paved paths, or on relatively flat stretches of grass or dirt. High-end models for real off-road riding can cost NT20,000 and up. It's usually possible to resell.

Folding bikes are a great option for travelling in Taiwan. You can't take an ordinary bike with you on a train (they must be sent a day ahead) but with a folder any little stop outside the congested urban areas is yours to explore.

Diving & Snorkelling

Taiwan's ocean conditions pose a serious challenge to the diver. Strong currents exist just offshore and exits are hard. In the north there

are good spots near Fulong (p160) but you'll need to go with local divers to find them. The tourism board recommends Longdong (p159), but no-one else seems to. Green and Lanyu Islands (p322 and p318), however, are considered fantastic venues by everyone.

For snorkelling, head to Fulong, Green Island, Kenting (p284) and Little Liuchiu Island (p281).

Check out the Leisure – Sports category of www.forumosa.com for the SCUBA thread: a group of expat diving enthusiasts post here regularly.

Golf

Golf driving ranges are everywhere, even in small towns, and all major cities have golf courses, though they are often in the suburbs as land is expensive. A lot of golf courses are illegally built and controversial due to run-off from pesticides and fertilizers. Call the official **Chinese Taipei Golf Association** ([@ 02-516 5611](http://www.ctpga.com); Taipei) for information.

Hiking

It's not well known, but Taiwan is a paradise for hikers. One of the tallest peaks in East Asia is here (Yushan, 3952m), and there are dozens more peaks above 3000m. Most require fitness and basic equipment, but no technical skills.

There's also a vast network of trails at lower altitudes. These trails run through subtropical and tropical jungles and broadleaf forests, and along coastal bluffs. Some are just a few hours long while others go on for days. All three major cities – Taipei, Kaohsiung and Taichung – have mountains and trails either within the city limits or just outside.

A lot of time and money is going into developing a **National Trail System** (<http://trail.forest.gov.tw/index.asp>). At the time of writing, six of the longer national trails had been restored, including the Nenggao Cross Island Trail (p230), the Jin-Shui Ying Old Trail (p280), and the trail up to Jiaming Lake (p264). All national trails are clear and marked with distance markers and map boards. Good maps are also available (see p330). No advanced permits are necessary to hike. Just apply for a *dēng shān zhèng* (登山證; mountain permit) at a local police station, or secure this before you head out to the **Ministry of the Interior** (Map p88; [@ 02-2321 9011](http://www.moi.gov.tw); 7 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.1, Taipei).

Regional trails (usually shorter) are being repaired and signposted and by the time you

read this a booklet (in Chinese only) will be available listing about 70 of these. If you drive around you can also see signs for many trails in English and Chinese.

BOOKS & MAPS

For the north, pick up either volume of *Taipei Day Trips* by Richard Saunders or his new *Yangmingshan, the Guide*. These books are very detailed, with transportation information included, and we've been using them to good ends for years.

Taiwan Jiaotong Press (台北縣市近郊山圖) publishes a series of 14 maps at a scale of 1:25,000. These only cover the north (from Sansia/Wulai up) and you can pick them up at mountain equipment stores around the Taipei train station. Be aware that not every trail on these maps will be walkable when you get to them. Trails get washed out and overgrown all the time.

The forestry bureau puts out a useful four-volume set of books, called *Taiwan Forest Vacation Guide*, which cover 21 forest recreation areas around the country.

For the six national trails (see p329), you can pick up good waterproof foldable maps with a 1:25,000 scale at equipment shops or San Min bookstores (三民網路書店). These maps include itineraries, though the information is in Chinese only.

See also p334 for important safety notes.

CLUBS

Richard Saunders (richard0428@yahoo.com), author of *Taipei Day Trips*, runs a free weekend hiking club. Also check out the Events thread on www.forumosa.com for hikes organized by yours truly. **523 Mountaineering Association** (www.523.org.tw/English/index) runs a couple of free hikes a month as well as longer hikes that charge a reasonable fee.

Hot Springs

The diversity of Taiwan's hot springs is so amazing we wrote a special chapter for this edition (see p75).

Kayaking

We're told there are some good rivers for kayaking in Taiwan, and Nanao (p166) has a fantastic coastline for sea kayaking. Contact Andre at **Cloud 9** (0911-126337; www.cloud9tw.com) in Pinglin about lessons or just advice on where to go and how to contact local clubs.

Martial Arts

You'll find the full range of martial-arts schools in Taipei, from Wing Chun to Brazilian Jiu-jitsu. Check out the expat websites (see p23) for recommendations from people who live for this kind of stuff.

Mountaineering

Great news! First, Taiwan has some fabulous climbs and anyone in decent shape can conquer most of them. Second, the routes have all been improved in recent years, with map boards and distance markers added along the way; good route maps are also available. Third, the old Class A permit system that required hikers to travel in groups with a 'qualified' guide is gone (in part because of the improvement mentioned above). Anyone can now climb the high mountains in Taiwan, though for safety reasons we include in this book only those hikes that we feel a pair of properly equipped travellers, with some mountain experience, can tackle on their own. Fortunately, these are some of the highest and most beautiful mountains, such as Snow Mountain (p170) and Yushan (p243).

Permits are still needed to climb, and possibly by the time you read this a new streamlined application form will be in place. The easiest way to apply, however, is to contact the folk at **523 Mountaineering Association** (www.523.org.tw/English/index). This association is a registered nonprofit organization (NPO) with a mandate to help introduce the foreign community to Taiwan's mountains. For a nominal fee it will get you your permits. It can also help arrange for a driver for private transportation to the mountains. The staff at 523 speak English, though it's best to email Doris Juan (doris@523.org.tw).

The best time to climb is always the autumn, when weather conditions are dry and stable. Spring is good if you get a patch of steady clear weather. Summer can be fine as long as there are no typhoons. Be aware of the ferocity of the sun, though, in the thinner mountain air. Winter hikes to the high mountains should not be attempted unless you have proper experience and equipment. If you have to ask whether you have these, then you don't.

EQUIPMENT

Most high mountain routes have cabins, though a tent is needed on some of the longer

hikes through Yushan National Park. Since the weather is extremely changeable, always be prepared with a Gortex jacket and pants (a climber died recently for want of these). A good sleeping bag, warm socks with reinforced toes and heels, quick drying shirts, comfortable pants, fleece jacket, thermal underwear, gloves and an all-weather hat are also necessary. Other useful items include a compass, stove (and something to cook in) and water filter.

It can be warm enough to wear shorts during the day but it can get close to 0°C at night even in autumn. We don't need to tell you to take out your rubbish but consider an extra bag to carry away the waste of the less enlightened.

See also p334 for natural dangers.

MAPS

Sunriver (上河文化) publishes maps of most of the main high mountains. The maps give detailed daily itineraries, including how long (in hours) each section takes to hike and the distances covered. They are in Chinese but if you get someone to translate the itinerary and pertinent places on the maps (cabins, peaks, water sources etc) you should be fine. Most national parks have basic maps (in English) of the climbing routes on their websites to give you a general overview.

Swimming & River Tracing

Suòxī (river tracing) is the sport of walking and climbing up a riverbed. At the beginning stages it involves merely walking on slippery rocks. At advanced stages it can involve climbing up and down waterfalls. Taiwan is fantastically suited for the sport: there are hundreds of good streams and rivers to trace, no dangerous animals in the water (though beware

of snakes on the rocks), and the terrain is so thick and jungly in places you feel like a kid in a Tarzan movie. Summer is a great time to trace as it's too hot for regular hiking; in and above the water the temperature is mild.

Basic equipment includes a life jacket, helmet and a waterproof bag. You can buy dry bags for your regular knapsack but there are also specially made dry-bag knapsacks. Some people wear Neoprene to keep warm. Even in summer it can get chilly in some streams, especially when you've been wet all day.

The most important piece of equipment, though, is the felt-bottomed shoes that allow you to grip the rock and walk normally. You need to try these to believe how well they work. Don't bother with rubber-soled boots (no matter what your local equipment shop says). These will not grip the rocks in Taiwan. You can pick up shoes for NT300 to NT400 in the equipment shops near the Taipei train station.

Unfortunately there are no local river-tracing groups we can recommend. The ones that charge money don't impress us. We have literally seen leaders unable to swim across river pools with mild currents we were playing in.

Around Wulai (p141) and Pinglin (p148) you can safely trace with a couple of friends in the smaller streams.

Surfing & Windsurfing

Taiwan has some good surfing beaches, though it's become a little too trendy up in the north in the last few years. Real surfers will be frustrated with the hordes of floaters obstructing their path, and the general lack of surfing etiquette. Honeymoon Bay at Daxi (p161) has gotten particularly crowded but it's still popular with experienced surfers.

MIXED-UP MAPS

Be aware that many map boards in Taiwan are the mirror image of what they should be. To understand what this means, consider this example: you are walking north and come to a four-way split in the trail with a map in front of you. On the map, you see the trail to your destination heads to the right. Easy, you think. I should go right at this fork (heading west).

Wrong. If you look at the compass points on the map you'll see that the trail that actually points west in reality is pointing east on the map. Yes, this is nonsense and anyone but the supremely spatially intelligent will get a headache trying to flip the map over in their head.

To solve the problem ignore your immediate environment. Look at the map and discover what direction you should be going in. Then take out your compass and figure out where that direction lies. North and south are usually hard to mix up. East and west are easy to confuse.

Some places to get away from the crowds include Jialeshui in Kenting (p284) and various points along Hwy 11 (p192).

You can also surf the Penghu Islands (p306) – and windsurfing in autumn and winter is the tops. Makung (p310) holds international windsurfing competitions in November.

White-Water Rafting

See Rueisui, p198, for information on rafting along the Hsiukuluan River. See p262 for information on rafting the rougher Laonong River.

Contact Andre at **Cloud 9** (0911-126 337; www.cloud9tw.com) in Pinglin for inner-tubing down the Beishi River.

BUSINESS HOURS

Standard hours are as follows. Reviews won't list business hours unless they differ from these standards.

Banks (☎) 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri

Convenience stores (☎) 24hr

Department stores (☎) 11am-9.30pm

Government offices (☎) 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm

Museums (☎) 9am-5pm, closed Mon

Night markets (☎) 6pm-2am

Offices (☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri

Post offices (☎) 8am-5pm Mon-Fri

Restaurants (☎) 11.30am-2pm & 5-9pm

Shops (☎) 10am-9pm

Supermarkets (☎) to at least 8pm, sometimes 24hr

CHILDREN

The Taiwanese are very welcoming, and doubly so when it comes to children. If you're travelling with kids, they will probably attract a lot of positive attention.

The website www.parentpages.net has all kinds of Taiwanese children-related forums. You'll be able to find information from birthing and midwifery to raising kids to keeping them amused. The Parenting forum on www.forumosa.com is also helpful. The **Community Services Centre** (Map p100; ☎ 2836 8134; www.community.com.tw; 25 Lane 290, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.6, Tianmu) in Taipei has lots of information for families relocating to Taiwan.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* is a useful book that prepares you for the joys and pitfalls of travelling with the little ones. Also check out the Kids to Go branch of the Thorntree forum (<http://thorntree.lonelyplanet.com>).

Practicalities

You're not likely to find high chairs or booster seats for kids at lower-end restaurants, but you may well find them at more expensive places. Upper-end restaurants may have set menus for families, or even kids' menus. You can generally find Western baby formula and baby foods at supermarkets.

If you're travelling by car, note that children under four years of age and weighing less than 18kg must be in car safety seats. Parents who ignore the law can be fined NT1500 to NT3000. This law does not apply to taxis, and don't expect taxis to have child safety seats.

If you need a nanny, be aware it's not legal to hire an overseas one despite what agents may tell you. For a Taiwanese nanny in Taipei (NT15,000 to NT20,000 a month), call ☎ 2726 0735.

Taiwanese love children, and strangers may often want to touch or even handle your babies. Some people use a sling to help minimize contact and interruptions as they move about their daily business. You can also tell people your child has a cold. If you can't speak Chinese a little sign language will do.

See also p65 for information on dining out with children in Taiwan.

Sights & Activities

In general Taiwan is a great place for active families. The cities offer indoor adventure playgrounds, museums, water parks and hiking trails, and courses on martial arts, painting, yo-yoing, opera and dance. The gondola out to Maokong (p138) is a fun ride for kids of all ages.

Here are some suggestions for sights around the island that children will enjoy.

Hwy 11 (p192) Sleep in driftwood huts, camp on the beach, explore bizarre rock formations and see water run uphill.

Jiji Small Rail Line (p220) Cycling and light walking.

Kenting (p282) Beach activities, aquatic museum and forest parks.

Northeast Coast (p157) Sea-life displays, a stone lion museum and a crab museum, and sandy beaches perfect for kids.

Pingxi (p148) Cycling, swimming, camping, tree climbing and nature observation.

Pingxi Branch Rail Line (p144) Little kids can sit right up the front of the train, and play with real trains and self-propelled trolleys at the stations.

Sanyi (p178) Touch and feel giant wood statues, walk along abandoned rail tracks and go through 1km-long tunnels.

Yingge (p151) Hands-on pottery making.

CLIMATE CHARTS

For such a small place, Taiwan has a great variety of climates. Plus, as the island sits at the confluence of various trade winds, weather is known to change frequently, especially in late autumn and winter.

The island can be divided into essentially three climate zones: the north and east coasts (including Taipei), the central mountains and the southwest coast.

Daily temperatures in Taipei can be about 35°C in summer but rarely go below 12°C in winter. Very cold weather and snow are a function of elevation: temperatures can drop precipitously as you move from sea level to 2000m, and above 3000m you're likely to find snow in winter.

Taiwan's most agreeable weather is in autumn, specifically October and November. Winter in the north and on the east coast tends to be overcast and occasionally chilly with frequent drizzle – although more rain actually falls in the summer, it may not feel like it! Spring is warm and mild, but it is known for frequent rain (the locals poetically call it the 'plum rain'). Spring is also notorious for the sandstorms that blow in from China. These foul the air and people are advised to stay indoors.

Summers are hot and humid with frequent afternoon thunderstorms in the north. The mountains are the island's rainiest region, particularly in summer when rains fall in

short thundershowers, especially in the mid-afternoon. In winter, the west side of the mountains tends to be drier than the east side. Southern winters are the best: warm and dry.

If you're travelling to Kinmen or Matsu in winter, be prepared for cold, and don't be surprised if your flight or ferry is cancelled because of inclement weather. Winter winters in the Penghu Islands can be severe. See p21 for information on the best times to travel.

COURSES

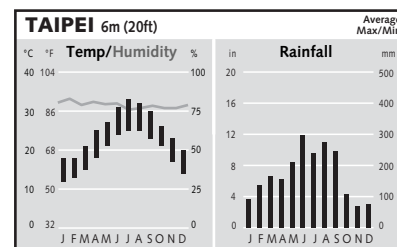
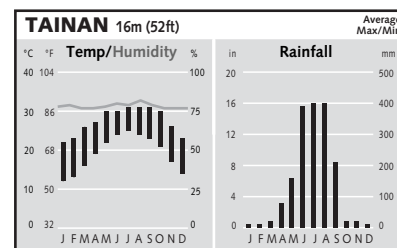
In addition to the following, contact the **Community Services Centre** (Map p100; ☎ 2836 8134; www.community.com.tw; 25 Lane 290, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.6, Tianmu) in Taipei for updates on various courses available for visitors and expats.

Studying Chinese

There are programmes at universities and private cram schools. Most are two to four hours a day, five days a week. Costs vary greatly from NT5000 a month at a private cram school to over US\$1000 a month at a top programme.

To obtain a study visa at the time of writing, you had to enrol at a Ministry of Education-approved school (<http://english.ctu.edu.tw/ct.asp?xItem=677&CtNode=417&mp=1>). Some of the better-known programmes include **ICLP** (<http://homepage.ntu.edu.tw/~iclp/>) at National Taiwan University and the **Mandarin Training Program** (www.mtc.ntnu.edu.tw/indexe.html) at National Taiwan Normal University. Both are in Taipei but there are programmes around the country.

You can apply for a programme in your own country. Once you've been accepted, apply for a multi-entry extendable visitor visa (for study) at a local trade office or Republic of China (ROC) mission. You must start classes within the first month upon arrival and after four months of good standing you can apply for a resident visa at the **Bureau of Consular Affairs** (BOCA; ☎ 0800 085 078; www.boca.gov.tw; Hualien ☎ 03-833 1041; 6th fl, 371 Jungshan Rd; Kaohsiung ☎ 07-211 0605; 2nd fl, 436 Chenggung-1st Rd; Taichung ☎ 04-2251 0799; 1st fl, 503 Liming Rd, sec.2; Taipei ☎ 02-2343 2888; 3rd-5th fl, 2-2 Jinan Rd, sec.1). This then allows you to apply for an ARC (Alien Resident Card) at the **National Immigration Agency** (www.immigration.gov.tw), formerly the Foreign Affairs Police. An ARC should be good for up to two years, though you must renew it each year. Note that your school will not usually do anything to help you through the process.



Check out the ever-informative www.forumosa.com for the latest from people in the know.

Calligraphy

Chinese-language schools (private and university) often have courses on calligraphy, painting and other Chinese arts. Inquire at the schools or check one of the foreigner chat sites (www.forumosa.com or www.tealit.com) for recommendations. You can also post ads on these websites if you are looking for a private teacher.

Meditation

There are four main Buddhist associations in Taiwan: Tzu Chi, Foguangshan, Dharma Drum and Chung Tai Chan. **Dharma Drum** (www.dhammadrum.org) offers meditation classes in Taipei and Jinshan; click on Chan Meditation on their website for more information. **Chung Tai Chan** (ctworld@ms16.hinet.net) offers weekend classes in its temple in Puli (see p226). **Foguangshan** (www.fgs.org.tw) has courses at its main temple near Kaohsiung (see p274). All three offer classes in English.

In addition, the **Taiwan Vipassana Centre** (www.udaya.dhamma.org), in the mountains west of Taichung, offers a 10-day meditation course in English: the course is the same as that taught at its centres throughout the world.

Taichi

There are many schools in the cities offering courses on tai chi. Again, it is best to go to one of the expat websites or Chinese schools and ask for recommendations.

Yoga

Yoga classes are booming, in Taipei anyway. For classes, check out gyms and other fitness centres, as well as English newspapers and expat websites.

CUSTOMS

Customs laws allow passengers 20 years and older the duty-free importation of 200 cigarettes, 25 cigars or 450g of tobacco, one bottle of liquor (up to 1L) and goods valued at up to NT20,000 (not including personal effects). Up to US\$10,000 in foreign currency may also be brought in.

And to quote a sign at Taoyuan International Airport: 'Drug trafficking is punishable by death'.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The following government websites offer travel advisories and information on current hot spots.

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs

(☎ 1300 139 281; www.smarttraveller.gov.au)

British Foreign Office (☎ 0845-850-2829; www.fco.gov.uk/countryadvice)

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs (☎ 800-267 6788; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca)

US State Department (☎ 888-407 4747; <http://travel.state.gov>)

Dodgy Dealings

A barber's pole outside a shop with tinted windows almost always indicates a brothel.

Food & Drink

Travellers are advised not to drink water poured directly from the tap (though it's fine to brush your teeth with). In most places you will be served water that has been boiled, which is fine to drink, and tea and bottled drinks, including water, are widely available. In general, look for plastic seal wraps, as water can sometimes be contaminated in shipping. We use the brands YES and More water.

Avoid cafeteria-style restaurants after the lunch or dinner rush. Food can go bad if it has been sitting for a while.

Stay away from brightly coloured local snacks (including dried fruit) as they are often bleached and full of preservatives. If you're concerned about your health, speciality stores and many supermarkets sell organic produce. The most reputable is the small chain called Cottonfields (p116).

Natural Dangers

When hiking in the mountains be aware of the following. Afternoon fogs are common, as are thundershowers, which can leave you soaked and chilled. There are numerous species of poisonous snake around the island (though these are not usually a problem in the high mountains), a poison ivy-like plant at around 1000m to 2000m, and wasps in summer. One reader scoffed at this last warning but these dangerous insects kill and put people in the hospital every year. In the areas where they are a danger you will often see warning signs, though not always, so inquire locally.

Although the island is small, it is easy to get lost. The forest is extremely thick in places, and trails are quickly overgrown. Never leave

the trail and don't hike trails you don't know unless they are wide and clear. Prepare rain gear if you are going to be out for a few hours, and carry an umbrella, food, mobile phone and lots of water.

Earthquakes are common all over the island, and are especially strong along the east coast. If you are here for a few months you will likely experience one. Typhoons affect the island from summer to late autumn. Do not go outside when they are raging, and avoid going to the mountains in the few days after as landslides and swollen rivers can wash out roads and trails.

Many foreigners at first dismiss concerns about swimming too far from shore. But note there is no continental shelf here, meaning that the deep blue sea is just offshore, and dangerous undercurrents and riptides flow around the island. General advice: do not go out further than you can stand on your tiptoes and don't swim at a beach unless you know for certain it is safe.

Nightlife

Foreign men should be careful at bars and clubs. Taiwanese men can be very protective of any female in their group, even if there's no romantic relationship. Be careful about approaching a woman who is with a guy (or accepting her advances). Gangsters hang out in clubs, though they are usually not a problem unless threatened or forced to lose face. When that happens you are in serious trouble. Contrary to Western customs, Taiwanese don't fight alone. It's a sign of one's personal power and influence to be able to call 20 guys at the drop of a hat to come and beat the hell out of you. In general it's a good idea to get recommendations for bars and clubs, especially in the south.

Street Crime & Theft

In terms of street crime, Taiwan is one of the safer places in Asia, although residential burglaries do happen and pickpocketing is common where crowds gather. (We almost had our pockets picked at a religious festival.) If you're staying in a youth hostel or camping ground, be sure to lock up your belongings securely as most of these facilities are open to the public.

Most midrange and top-end hotels have safes or other facilities to guard your valuables. And if you're concerned about theft of your money, use travellers cheques.

Foreign victims of crime often don't get much help from the police, though we have to say that in many cases we have seen of this the foreigners made it easy for the police to ignore them. You can mitigate cultural misunderstandings by bringing along a Taiwanese person (someone respectable looking) and acting respectful yourself.

See also p344 for more advice to women travellers.

DISCOUNT CARDS

Student cards are widely used for public transport as well as museums, parks, (some) movie tickets and performances at public theatres. However, foreign student cards are not likely to be accepted. Foreigners studying Chinese can get student cards from their school, and these will be accepted.

Children's discounts usually go by height rather than age (eg discounts for children under 110cm). Seniors (65 years and older) are usually given the same discounts as children. Seniors over 70 often get in free.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Because of the 'One China Policy' adopted by the Mainland (the idea that mainland China and Taiwan are both part of one country: People's Republic of China), only about 15 countries (the number keeps dropping) and the Holy See have full diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Most likely your country is represented not by an embassy but by an office calling itself something to do with trade and/or culture. 'Institute' figures in the name of many of these offices.

Overseas, Taiwan is represented by consular, information and trade offices. Both Taiwanese legations abroad and foreign legations in Taiwan serve the same functions as embassies or consulates would elsewhere: services to their own nationals, visa processing, trade promotion and cultural programmes.

For a complete list of embassies and trade offices (both Taiwanese overseas and foreign offices in Taiwan), visit the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (www.mofa.gov.tw) site.

Foreign Legations in Taiwan

All addresses are in Taipei unless otherwise indicated.

Australia (Australia Commerce & Industry Office; ☎ 02-8725 4100; www.australia.org.tw; The Presidential International Tower, 27-28th fl, 9-11 Song Gao Rd)

Canada (Canadian Trade Office in Taipei; ☎ 02-2544 3000; www.canada.org.tw; 13th fl, 365 Fuxing N Rd)

France (French Institute; Institut Français de Taipei; ☎ 02-3518 5151; www.fi-taipei.org; 10th fl, 205 Dunhua N Rd)

Germany (German Institute; Deutsches Institut; ☎ 02-2501 6188; 4th fl, 2 Minsheng E Rd, sec.3)

India (India-Taipei Association; ☎ 02-2757 6112; Room 2010, 20th fl, 333 Keelung Rd, sec.1)

Ireland (The Institute for Trade & Investment of Ireland; ☎ 02-2725 1691; 7B-09, Taiwan World Trade Centre Bldg, 5 Xinyi Rd, sec.5)

Japan (Interchange Association; ☎ 02-2713 8000; www.japan-taipei.org.tw; 28 Ching Cheng St)

Netherlands (Netherlands Trade & Investment Office; ☎ 02-2713 5760; www.ntio.org.tw; 5th fl, 133 Minsheng E Rd, sec.3)

New Zealand (New Zealand Commerce & Industry Office; ☎ 02-2757 6725; Room 2501 25th fl, 333 Keelung Rd, sec.1)

South Africa (Liaison Office of South Africa; ☎ 02-2715 3250; Suite 1301, 13th fl, 205 Dunhua N Rd)

South Korea (Korean Mission in Taipei; ☎ 02-2758 8320; Room 1506, 333 Keelung Rd, sec.1)

Thailand (Thailand Trade & Economic Office; ☎ 02-2581 1979; 12th fl, 168 Song Jiang Rd)

UK (British Trade & Cultural Office; Kaohsiung ☎ 07-238 7744; Suite D, 7th fl, 95 Mintzu 2nd-Rd; Taipei ☎ 02-2192 7000; 9th fl, 99 Renai Rd, sec.2)

USA (American Institute in Taiwan; www.ait.org.tw; Kaohsiung ☎ 07-238 7744; 3rd fl, 2 Chungcheng Rd, sec.3; Taipei ☎ 02-2162 2000; 7 Lane 134, Xinyi Rd, sec.3)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Dates vary, so we've listed them here by month.

FEBRUARY

Lantern Festival (opposite)

APRIL-MAY

Birth of Matsu The birth of the Goddess of the Sea and protector of fishermen is commemorated at temples island-wide on the 23rd day of the 3rd lunar month. A week-long pilgrimage begins at the temple in Dajia (see p216).

MAY

Sanyi Woodcarving Festival (p179) In Taiwan's wood-carving capital. Highlights include on-the-spot carving contests, Hakka food tasting and ice-sculpting.

JUNE

Dragon Boat Festival (opposite)

JULY-AUGUST

Ilan International Children's Folklore & Folkgame Festival (p163) Top children's performers and performing

troups are brought in to Luodong from around the world. In addition, there are exhibits of toys and games, and sales of exotic toys.

AUGUST

Festival of Austronesian Cultures (p203) In Taitung County, a stronghold for aboriginal culture in Taiwan. Good for purchasing native handicrafts.

Keelung Ghost Festival (Zhōngyuán Jié; p155) Each year a different Keelung clan is chosen to sponsor the events. Highlights include folk-art performances, the opening of the gates of hell and the release of burning water lanterns. Lasts the entire seventh lunar month.

OCTOBER

Hualien International Stone Sculpture Festival (p185) Features the stonework of local and international artists, as well as folk performances.

FOOD

This book classifies budget meals as under NT150, midrange NT150 to NT400 and top end NT400 and up. See the Food & Drink chapter (p58) and local listings for more on Taiwan's excellent local food and eating scene.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

In Taiwan's family-oriented society, where the propagation of children is considered a duty, there is a stigma attached to homosexuality. Taiwanese gays and lesbians, however, have made great strides towards openness and equality, particularly since the end of martial law. The island's big cities have some of the best gay life in the Chinese-speaking world. The Chinese-speaking world's first gay-pride parade was held in Taipei in 2003 and the community has never looked back. In 2006, then Taipei mayor and now presidential hopeful, Ma Ying-jeou, presided over the opening of the city's annual Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Festival – the first event of its kind to be sponsored by a local government in Taiwan.

Unlike in other East Asian countries, gay and lesbian visitors will likely find their Taiwanese hosts friendly and welcoming. Taipei in particular has a number of bars and clubs, as well as shopping, salons, saunas and other gay-friendly venues. You'll find similar venues, though in far smaller numbers, in other cities as well. One good website with updated information is www.utopia-asia.com/tipstair.htm. See also the boxed text, p118.

Taiwan's official stance towards gays and lesbians may be considered among the most progressive in East Asia, though police harassment in various forms is still too common. There is no sodomy law to penalise homosexuality, in 2002 the military lifted its ban on homosexuals and in 2003 the ROC government announced plans to legalise same-sex marriage (though the bill has gone nowhere since).

HOLIDAYS

Taiwanese holidays are set according to either the Western calendar or the Chinese lunar calendar. Holidays in the lunar calendar fall at different times each year in the Western calendar. Bad times to travel are Chinese New Year, winter holidays for students (three weeks around Chinese New Year), Tomb Sweep Day, Dragon Boat Festival, summer weekends (July to August) and Moon Festival.

Western Calendar Holidays

JANUARY

Founding Day (Yuándàn) 1 January. Commemorates the founding of the ROC back in 1911. Businesses and schools close, and many remain closed on 2 January. In recent years huge sponsored events have been held on December 31 to celebrate the countdown. Many people are now using 1 January to nurse their hangovers.

FEBRUARY

2-28 (Èrèrbā) 28 February. This holiday recollects events of 28 February 1947, when political dissent led to the massacre of thousands of Taiwanese. Instituted in 1997 at the behest of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), but without universal public support.

APRIL

Tomb Sweep Day (Qing Míng Jié) 5 April or 4 April on leap years. Families return to the graves of their ancestors to clean them as a gesture of respect. Expect to see lots of ghost money being burned around the island. Bank holiday.

SEPTEMBER

Teachers' Day (Jiàoshī Jié) 28 September. Originally honouring the birthday of Confucius, this holiday now honours all teachers. Confucian temples around the country stage elaborate ceremonies all day and while people don't get the day off, the ceremonies are worth taking a holiday to see. Get your tickets well in advance.

OCTOBER

National Day (Shuāngshí Jié) 10 October. Sometimes called 'Double 10th Day' after its date, this day is marked by military parades, fireworks and beach parties. Bank holiday.

DECEMBER

Constitution Day (Guāngfù Jié) 25 December. Although it was a holiday in Taiwan long before Christmas was a significant presence here, you can guess which holiday has taken over the national psyche. Although it's not a national day off anymore, the night of the 24th can be party time.

Lunar Year Holidays

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

Chinese (Lunar) New Year (Chūn Jié) Lunar date: first day of the first month. The year's most important festival is marked by special banquets and family gatherings, red envelopes of money are given as gifts and it's common for people to wear new clothes. Visitors might consider staying away since many businesses and sights close for extended periods.

FEBRUARY

Lantern Festival (Yuánxiāo Jié) Lunar date: 15th day of the first month. This is fast becoming one of the most popular holidays in Taiwan. Festivities vary from fireworks displays to art shows to activities that combine tradition and technology. All draw large crowds. One highlight in the north is the release of thousands of sky lanterns into the air around Pingxi (see the boxed text, p149).

JUNE

Dragon Boat Festival (Duānwǔ Jié) Lunar date: fifth day of the fifth month. One of the most important Chinese holidays and very photogenic and colourful (though many find it dull and slow). The highlight is the dragon-boat races in which long, sleek boats, decorated like dragons, compete in remembrance of the suicide drowning of the poet Chu Yuan. Some of the best places to see them include Lukang (p216; where Dragon Boat Festival is part of a four-day folk festival), Keelung (p153), Kaohsiung (p270) and Sansia (p152). *Zongzi* (粽子; sticky-rice dumplings wrapped in leaves) are a culinary treat not to miss. A national holiday.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

Moon Festival (Zhōngqiū Jié) Lunar date: 15th day of the eighth month. Also known as Mid-Autumn Festival, this traditional Chinese holiday celebrated the end of the harvest and was a time of plenty. These days it's a time for family and friends to get together, barbecue and eat moon cakes and pomelos. The moon is supposed to be the year's brightest and fullest, though it is often obscured by clouds in the north. The festival usually marks the beginning of cooler weather after the scorching summer.

INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. There are a wide variety of policies available, so


check the small print. Some things to watch out for:

- Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking.
- A locally acquired motorcycle licence is not valid under some policies.
- Some policies pay doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation.
- Some policies ask you to call (reverse charges) a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.
- Check whether the policy covers ambulances or an emergency flight home.

For health insurance advice, see p354. For details on car insurance, see p350. World-wide travel insurance is available at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services. You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're already on the road.

INTERNET ACCESS

Taiwan is among the most cyber-savvy places on the planet, and if you've got your own laptop you shouldn't have any problem getting online. In Taipei at least, most coffee shops have wireless access: some servers are free, others are accessible by buying a *wúxiàn wǎng kǎ* (pay-for-time card) with a name and password at 7-Eleven or most other convenience stores. You'll know if you need a card because when you try to access the web you'll be redirected towards a login page, most of which will have English instructions as well.

Many midrange and top-end hotels – especially in the big cities – offer in-room ADSL high-speed internet connections for laptops. Some of these carry hefty charges (up to NT300 per day), but more and more include the service in the room rate. If you don't have your own laptop, look for a hotel with a business centre. At smaller hotels this could be a single computer at a desk. This book denotes all forms of internet access with the icon .

All cities and towns have cyber cafés (though these aren't as common as they once were, as most Taiwanese own their own computers) or gaming parlours where you can go online. Libraries usually have free internet access, though you may have to sign up for a

specific time slot. Tourist offices will sometimes let you use their computers.

For information about Taiwan on the web, see p23 and p342.

LEGAL MATTERS

Don't even think of messing with illegal drugs in Taiwan; this includes marijuana. Smuggling can carry the death penalty and even possession can get you busted.

If you are caught working illegally, you'll get a fine, a visa suspension and an order to leave the country. You may not ever be allowed back.

Under Taiwanese law, knowingly transmitting HIV to another person is punishable by up to seven years in prison. This law also allows for mandatory testing of members of high-risk groups, namely sexual partners of HIV carriers and intravenous drug users, as well as foreigners who come to work certain jobs and require an ARC. Oddly enough, adultery is also a crime.

If you're detained by the police, you should get in touch with your country's legation in Taiwan. Even if it can't provide any direct aid, it can at least offer legal advice and notify your family.

If you are arrested, you have the right to remain silent and to request an attorney, although authorities are under no obligation to provide an attorney. You also have the right to refuse to sign any document. In most cases, a suspect cannot be detained for more than 24 hours without a warrant from a judge – notable exceptions are those with visa violations.

Taipei City offers *pro bono* legal service at most district offices.

LEGAL AGE

- Voting: 20
- Driving: 18
- Military conscription: 18, but most do it after their university studies
- Consumption of alcohol: 18
- Consensual sex (heterosexual or homosexual): 16

MAPS

The best road map (in Chinese) is *Formosa Complete Road Atlas* by Sunriver (two vol-

umes, about NT2000 each). You can pick up a good four-part collection of bilingual maps called *Taiwan Tourist Map* from tourist offices. These should suffice for most purposes. City and county maps are also available at tourist offices.

Eslite, Caves and other bookshops that sell English-language material have English maps of Taiwan and the major cities. See local listings for useful local maps.

A compass can be useful if you're going to be travelling on country roads; sometimes you may not see a road sign for kilometres.

For hiking maps see p330.

MONEY

Taiwan's currency is the New Taiwanese Dollar (NT). Bills come in denominations of NT50, NT100, NT200, NT500, NT1000 and NT2000, while coins come in units of NT1, NT5, NT10 and NT50. See the inside front cover for exchange rates with key currencies.

Unlike some other countries in Asia, Taiwan uses the local currency exclusively.

Foreigners can open Taiwanese bank accounts even without an ARC if they get a identification number at the local police office.

See p21 for information on costs.

ATMs

ATMs are the easiest way to withdraw cash from your home account, and 7-Elevens are usually our first choice as they are always on the international Plus or Cirrus network and have English-language options; and 7-Elevens are literally everywhere in the country (there are around 4000 of them).

Many ATMs at banks around the country are also on the Plus and Cirrus networks, and as sometimes on Accel, Interlink and Star networks. Keep in mind that there may be limits on the amount of cash that can be withdrawn per transaction or per day, and that your home financial institution may charge a fee on withdrawals from other banks. Banks islandwide charge a NT7 fee per withdrawal for all but their own customers.

Cash

Nothing beats cash for convenience – or for risk if it's lost or stolen. For peace of mind, keep any extra cash in the safe deposit box at your hotel. If you're carrying foreign cash to exchange, the most widely accepted currency is US dollars.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are widely accepted. The bottom-of-the-barrel budget hotels won't take them, but if your room costs more than NT1000 a night, the place will most often be set up for credit cards. Most homestays, however, do not accept them.

Small stalls or small food joints never take credit cards. Most midrange to top-end restaurants do but always check before you decide to eat. We've been caught without cash a few times, but the staff have never had a problem with us leaving to withdraw money.

Moneychangers

Private moneychangers do not proliferate in Taiwan like they do elsewhere. Hotels will change money for their guests, but banks are the most common option.

Tippling

Tippling is not customary in restaurants or taxis (but is still appreciated). However, if a porter carries your bag at a hotel or the airport, a tip of NT100 is considered courteous. Also, many foreigners tip at better bars and clubs, especially those run by expats, and so staff may expect this. Note that the 10% service charge added to the bill at many restaurants is not actually a tip to be shared with the staff.

Travellers Cheques

As with cash, it's best if your travellers cheques are in US dollars. You get a slightly better rate on exchange, but that can be cancelled out by commissions so check carefully before you change money.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Taiwan is a technologically up-to-date place and every city has scores of photo studios where you can download digital pictures onto a CD, or print them out. Look for Fuji or Konica signs if you can't read Chinese.

POST

Taiwan's postal system is efficient and fast. Domestic letters generally arrive within two days, and take about seven to 10 days to destinations in North America and Europe; fewer to Hong Kong or Japan. Stamps can be purchased at post offices and convenience stores or even online now.

Main post offices in the big cities have poste restante services. Mail should be addressed

to GPO Poste Restante, with the city name. Generally, mail must be claimed within two months or it will be returned to sender.

For general inquiries, visit www.post.gov.tw, or phone ☎ 02-2321 4311 or toll free ☎ 0800 099 246.

Basic mailing rates	Postcard	Letter
within Taiwan	NT2.5	NT5
China/Hong Kong	NT6	NT9
elsewhere in Asia/Australia	NT10	NT13
USA/Canada	NT11	NT15
elsewhere	NT12	NT17

SHOPPING

Taiwan is a shopper's paradise.

Night markets are a highlight of any trip to Taiwan. While the specialities vary from market to market, you can generally expect to find cheap clothing (though occasionally cheap in both senses), toys, home wares and trinkets. They're also among the best places to find snack food – some night markets specialise in food only.

Other good buys include jade and aboriginal crafts. See the Lukang (p219), Yingge (p151), Sanyi (p178), Meinong (p276), Kinmen (p302) and Taipei (p122) sections for buying traditional crafts.

Electronics are widely available, including some Taiwanese brands and many international brands. However, prices may not be any better than in your own country. If there's something you've been looking for, price it before leaving home and don't be disappointed if you leave Taiwan without it. Also, make sure that the current of any item you buy is compatible with the one at home.

The Guanhua Market (p122) in Taipei specialises in computers, peripherals and components. Knowledgeable buyers can try shops that will assemble a computer to specifications for about half what you would pay back home. See right for information on VAT refunds.

Bargaining

At chain stores, convenience stores and department stores you pay the marked price. At pretty much any market or privately owned shop, you can certainly bargain (though don't bargain for your fruits and vegetables or a pen and notebook). Discounts range from 10% to 20%, so if you aren't comfortable bargaining, you're usually not losing much.

Convenience Stores

There are around 7000 convenience stores nationwide, the highest concentration in the world. In addition to newspapers, drinks, snacks and sundries, you can usually find daily-made sandwiches, sushi triangles, fresh fruit (at 7-Elevens only) and bread. You can also buy beer, wine and fine cognac, and withdraw money at ATMs (most of which are capable of handling international cards).

The ubiquitous 7-Eleven chain has the greatest range of services, from faxing and copying to bill payments (phone, water, electricity, parking) for residents. By the time you read this you may even be able to purchase train tickets. In the countryside, 7-Elevens act as rest stops, with public bathrooms inside and picnic tables outside. Other chains include Family Mart, Hi-Life and Nico Mart.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

Larger Chinese restaurants tend to serve portions meant for groups and may not know what to do with a solo traveller. Smaller restaurants are generally no problem. Night-market vendors always cater to the single customer.

Simple tea or coffee shops often have set meals (meal and drink) for less than NT150. Noodle stands and breakfast shops are always cheap. Be wary around barbecues as often the portions are set for a table or half-table.

Solo female travellers should have no problems in Taiwan if they use common sense. Make ATM withdrawals during the day, stick to brightly lit areas by night in cities and towns, and avoid obviously seedy hotels and hitchhiking.

If a problem arises, you'll probably find the Taiwanese very helpful.

TAXES Residents

If you're a working resident of Taiwan, you are responsible for paying Taiwanese taxes. You can find complete information in English on the website of the **National Tax Administration** (www.ntat.gov.tw).

Value Added Tax Refunds

Visitors with foreign passports and others with certain ROC documents are eligible to receive refunds of Taiwan's 5% value added tax (VAT). There are catches, however. First, just a small number of shops are registered as Tax Refund Shopping (TRS) stores: mostly

large department stores and shopping malls in major cities. Second, you must make a minimum purchase of NT3000 in a single day at a single store. Third, when you leave Taiwan you must present your items with your passport, plus an original copy of the uniform invoice to the 'Foreign Passenger VAT Refund Service Counter' at the airport or seaport. You may claim your refund at Taoyuan International Airport (either terminal), Keelung Harbour, Hualien (airport or harbour) or Kaohsiung (airport or harbour).

For further information, contact the visitor centre at the airport or seaport when you arrive.

TELEPHONE & FAX

The country code for Taiwan is ☎ 886.

Taiwan's telephone carrier for domestic and international calls is **Chunghwa Telecom** (www.cht.com.tw). For detailed information on rates and services, visit the website.

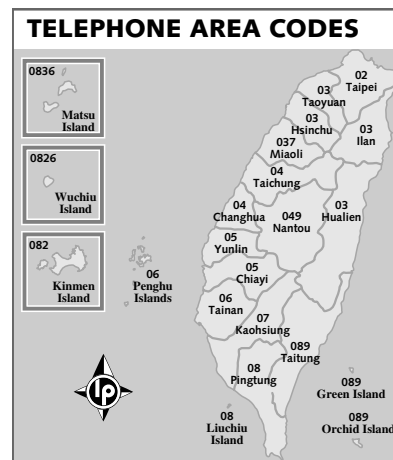
Area Codes

Area codes throughout Taiwan are shown below. Note that you do not dial the area code when calling within an area code.

The number of digits in telephone numbers varies with the locality, from eight in bustling Taipei to five in the remote Matsu Islands.

Domestic Calls

From public telephones, local calls cost NT2 per two minutes and local long-distance calls are NT3 per minute. From private phones it's



NT1.6 every three minutes for a local call and NT.035 per second for a local long-distance call. Calls to mobile phones (beginning with ☎ 09) vary from NT0.05 to NT0.11 per second depending on the provider and the time of day. Rates are discounted from 11pm to 8am Monday to Friday, from noon on Saturday and all day Sunday.

Fax

Most hotels offer fax services – but you'll probably pay through the nose for them. However, at 7-Eleven stores, local black-and-white faxes cost NT15 per page; local long-distance faxes are NT20 per page; and international faxes are NT85 per page.

International Calls

For overseas direct-dial calls, dial ☎ 009 or ☎ 002 before the country code and number. Chunghwa Telecom's E-call cards are sold in denominations of NT200, NT300 and NT500 and entitle users to a 30% discount on standard rates, although the quality of connection is somewhat lower. E-call cards can be purchased at Chunghwa Telecom locations and 7-Eleven stores. To use, dial the access number on the back of the card and then follow the instructions (English option available).

Overseas calls are charged per six-second unit, as follows:

Country	Direct dial	E-call
Australia	NT1.30	NT0.96
Canada	NT0.59	NT0.40
China	NT1.22	NT0.77
France	NT1.60	NT1.04
Germany	NT1.60	NT1.04
Japan	NT1.30	NT0.96
Netherlands	NT2.00	NT1.10
New Zealand	NT1.30	NT0.96
UK	NT1.40	NT0.96
USA	NT0.59	NT0.40

There is a discount of approximately 5% on calls made during off-peak hours. You can dial via an overseas operator (☎ 100), but this will cost a bundle. For directory assistance in English, dial ☎ 106 (NT3 per call).

If you have your own phone line in Taiwan, note that there are always specials going on. See Chunghwa's website for details. The absolute cheapest way to stay in contact with people around the world is through **Skype** (www.skype.com), a peer-to-peer internet telephony

network. Rates are just a couple of US dollars an hour to most countries, and completely free if the person you are calling is also set up with Skype on a computer.

Mobile Phones

These are often called *dàgèdà* or just cell phone. There are many options. Chunghwa Telecom and **FarEastone** (www.fareastone.com.tw) are two big carriers. Costs of handsets can vary widely, from NT1000 to NT25,000. In general, expect to pay about NT1 a minute for outgoing domestic calls. Some packages charge more but give you a number of free minutes, while others offer a low monthly fee and fewer or no free minutes. Check locally or on the web for the latest options.

You can usually bring your phone from home and buy a SIM card from a local carrier and a prepaid phonecard (there are desks right at the airport arrival terminals). If you have an ARC you can apply for a mobile phone in Taiwan.

All mobile phones in Taiwan start with the prefix 09XX, followed by six digits. Note that when calling within an area code, you still have to use the area code. A Taipei call then would look like this: 02-XXXX XXXX.

Public Phones & Phonecards

Calls from public phones cost NT2 for local calls of up to two minutes, NT3 per minute for local long-distance, and NT6 per minute for calls to mobile phones. Note that with the proliferation of cell phones, public phones are not as numerous as they once were.

In addition to coin-operated telephones, there are two types of card-operated phone. Ordinary phonecards cost NT100, while IC cards cost NT200. Cards are available at convenience stores. When your card is about to run out, the display will flash: press the 'change card' button to insert your new card. For international calls with prepaid cards see p341.

TIME

Taiwan is eight hours ahead of GMT; the same time zone as Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore and Perth. This means that when it's noon in Taiwan, it's 2pm in Sydney, 1pm in Japan, 4am in London, 11pm the previous day in New York and 8pm the previous day in Los Angeles.

Taiwan does not observe daylight-saving time. During daylight-saving time, add one

hour to the local times listed here for locations outside Taiwan (eg 5am in London).

TOILETS

Western-style toilets are standard in apartments and hotels. Restaurants and cafés can have either Western or squat toilets (fewer and fewer of the latter), while public facilities are likely to have squat toilets, except for a handicapped stall. Most businesses have their own toilets on site. Some toilets have toilet paper, but it's always good to be prepared with your own (pocket packs of tissues are common giveaways on streets in the big cities). Many places ask you not to flush the toilet paper down the toilet but put it in the wastebasket beside the toilet. There's a lot of controversy about whether this is truly necessary. The claim is that old pipes and septic systems just cannot handle toilet paper. It's best to comply when asked.

It's also handy to remember the characters for 'male' (男; *nán*) and 'female' (女; *nǚ*)

TOURIST INFORMATION

In addition to Taiwan's main tourism website (www.taiwan.net.tw), look for information on specific counties, national parks and national scenic areas on the following websites:

Alishan National Scenic Area (www.ali.org.tw)

East Coast National Scenic Area (www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw)

East Rift Valley National Scenic Area (www.erv-nsa.gov.tw)

Forest Recreation Areas (<http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>)

Hualien County (<http://www.taitung.gov.tw/english/index.php>)

Ilan County (<http://enwww.e-land.gov.tw/default.asp>)

Kaohsiung County (<http://english.kscg.gov.tw>)

Kenting National Park (www.ktnp.gov.tw)

Maolin National Scenic Area (www.maolin-nsa.gov.tw)

Matsu National Scenic Area (<http://www.matzu-nsa.gov.tw/>)

North Coast & Guanyinshan National Scenic Area (www.northguan-nsa.gov.tw)

Northeast Coast National Scenic Area (www.necoast-nsa.gov.tw)

Penghu National Scenic Area (www.penghu-nsa.gov.tw)

Sheipa National Park (www.spnp.gov.tw)

Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area (www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw)

Taitung County (<http://tour-hualien.hl.gov.tw>)

Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area (www.trimt-nsa.gov.tw)

HELPING OUR FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS IN TAIWAN

Like many Westerners in Taiwan, Sean McCormack couldn't stand the sight of so many homeless dogs and cats. But unlike most of us here, he did more than just feel sad and hopeless. In 2005 he started an animal-rescue association that is now making a major impact on the stray population in this country.

Sean has always worked with animals in one way or another (even when he was a pub manager in Folkstone, England, he says). When he first came to Taiwan he began to take in strays, pay for their medical care and seek families for adoption. But his work may never have gone any further had it not been for Jane Goodall. Yes, that Jane Goodall.

Goodall has an institute in Taiwan and visits often. On one such visit, she asked a local friend to introduce her to people who were trying to make a difference in Taiwan. And with that, Sean found himself one day in a hotel room in downtown Taipei, listening to the greatest living animal-rights activist tell him that he should start an association of like-minded people. Unable to convince himself he couldn't do it, Sean founded AnimalsTaiwan.

At first, AT had only a handful of members but they cleverly garnered support by asking people for help for 'planned' activities, as opposed to helping plan activities. (They knew that people would be more willing to join an activity when they thought the ball was already rolling – even if in truth these people were the ones really pushing it.) Soon AT was getting free vet care from local clinics, coverage on Taiwanese TV and funds from drives, doggie biscuit bake sales and generous patrons. In 2006 AT moved operations from Sean's apartment near the Taipei Zoo to a large holding facility out in Shilin.

Around the same time, Goodall returned to Taiwan and Sean was able to meet her again. In fact, he marched with her on parade through the streets of Taipei holding her hand while dressed as a gorilla. It was one of the happiest days of his life and Goodall's genuine enthusiasm for AT was just what he and the others needed to reinvigorate themselves after two very long years.

Sean's work has inspired other foreigners around Taiwan to start their own animal rescue branches. One of the most successful has been in Kaohsiung. Called BARK, it was founded by Canadians Chris Leroux and his wife Natasha Hodela, who like Sean began as small team just trying to make a difference.

Both groups are now registered nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and are helping hundreds of animals to a better life. Their long-term goal, however, is to reduce the stray population to manageable levels (manageable because if cities reduce it altogether then other, less desirable, animals will move in). For this they are employing a counterintuitive, but very successful and humane method called CNR (catch-neuter-release). CNR is endorsed by the World Trade Organisation and has been used to great effect in India in recent years to reduce the stray cat population.

If you're in Taiwan, for a year, a month, or even a week, give the fine folk at AnimalsTaiwan or BARK a shout (for more details see p344). They can always use the help. Or rather, the animals can.

Yushan National Park (<http://english.ysnp.com.tw>)

The following websites, while not specifically aimed at tourists, are helpful resources:

Forumsosa.com (www.forumsosa.com)

Information for Foreigners (<http://iff.immigration.gov.tw>)

Taiwan Fun (www.taiwanfun.com)

And don't forget the 24-hour English/Japanese/Chinese tourism hotline: ☎ 0800 011 765.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

While Taipei is slowly modernising its facilities for the disabled (new buildings must now meet a building code), disabled trav-

ellers may be dismayed to find footpaths are uneven, kerbs are steep, and public transport, other than the MRT, is not well equipped with wheelchair access.

On the other hand, disabled parking is usually available and respected.

Committed to ensuring that those with disabilities can enjoy all Taiwan has to offer, the **Eden Social Welfare Foundation** (<http://engweb.eden.org.tw>) provides advice and assistance to disabled travellers.

VISAS

At the time of writing citizens of the following countries could enter Taiwan without a

visa and stay for 30 days (this period cannot be extended under any circumstances): Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and USA.

Those coming to Taiwan to study (see p333), work or visit relatives for an extended period of time should apply at an overseas mission of the ROC for a visitor visa good for 60 to 90 days. These can be extended up to six months under certain circumstances at the **Bureau of Consular Affairs** (BOCA; ☎ 0800 085 078; www.boca.gov.tw; Hualien ☎ 03-833 1041; 6th fl, 371 Jungshan Rd; Kaohsiung ☎ 07-211 0605; 2nd fl, 436 Chenggung-1st Rd; Taichung ☎ 04-2251 0799; 1st fl, 503 Liming Rd, sec.2; Taipei ☎ 02-2343 2888; 3rd-5th fl, 2-2 Jinan Rd, sec.1).

BOCA requires anyone entering Taiwan to have a passport valid for at least six months, a ticket and/or seat reservation for departure from Taiwan and no criminal record.

Citizens of countries not listed here can find information on various visa requirements via the mission in their country or on the bureau's website. The website also contains advice on procedures and requirements for changing visa status, for example from student to resident.

If you're planning to stay longer than three months and work in Taiwan, the law requires you to have an ARC. However, if you're an Australian or New Zealander aged 18 to 30, you may obtain a working holiday visa, which enables you to undertake short-term, part-time work in Taiwan for one year. This scheme was introduced in 2004 though we have not heard many positive things about it.

VOLUNTEERING

There are few opportunities for foreigners to volunteer in Taiwan, often because it is technically illegal. One area where you can help out, and where help is truly needed, is with animal welfare. Contact **AnimalsTaiwan** (☎ 02-2833 8820; www.animalstaiwan.org) in Taipei and **BARK** (☎ 07-

348 7444; www.barktaiwan.org) in Kaohsiung. See also the boxed text, p343.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Taiwan is a safe country, but women should take care and be wary of walking through underground tunnels alone at night; there's a danger of getting felt up on crowded buses and the MRT, or occasionally of being stalked. If you have to take a taxi home at night alone, ask a friend to call as there will be a record. For additional safety let the driver see the friend write down the taxi licence-plate number. If the driver can also see that you have a mobile phone, trouble is less likely.

Women travelling to Taiwan for business should dress modestly and conservatively (as should men). Also, although drinking and smoking are a part of Taiwanese business culture, Taiwanese women tend to smoke and drink less than Taiwanese men, though this is changing fast among the younger generation.

Apart from the attention normally given to foreign travellers, women travellers should not expect any special attention.

WORK

If you're going to Taiwan to do a business deal, it helps to have an introduction through a government office or some other contact that does business with the other party. At least for the first meeting, modest, conservative dress is in order. This typically means dark wool suits and ties despite the country being tropical. Short sleeves are acceptable in summer.

There has been an attempt to introduce island wear (bright floral shirts) as acceptable business attire in summer but this has by no means caught on with everyone.

You don't need us to tell you that Taiwan is a popular place to teach English. The market is no longer a seller's, and wages have stagnated for 10 years (while the NT has lost 20% value) but you can still make a good living here and save money to pay off loans or travel. To find out the latest on visas, regulations, costs, salaries and so on, check out the local expat sites www.forumosa.com and www.tealit.com.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Most visitors enter through Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, where the immigration procedures pose few hassles. Guards are basically efficient.

For visa information, see p343.

AIR

Airports & Airlines

Taiwan's main international airport is **Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport** (TPE; www.taoyuanairport.gov.tw/) in Dayuan, 50km (40 minutes) west of central Taipei. It was formerly called Chiang Kai-shek and may still be referred to as CKS Airport. Taiwan's other international airports are **Siaogang Airport** (KHH; www.kia.gov.tw) in Kaohsiung and **Cing Cyuan Gang Airport** (RMQ; www.tca.gov.tw/English/Introduction.htm) in Taichung. TPE handles traffic from around the world, while most of the international traffic into and out of Siaogang Airport and Cing Cyuan Gang Airport comes from Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. At the time of writing there were still no direct flights between China and Taiwan.

TPE airport has two terminals connected by a small skytrain. Terminal 2 is newer and by far the more attractive of the two. Both terminals have signs in English for every service and facility. There is also a tourist information

booth in each. You can contact the booth in Terminal 1 on ☎ 03-383 2790, or Terminal 2 on ☎ 03-398 3341. Both are open from 7am to 11.30pm and can help with hotel bookings and bus information, as well as with getting a Youth Travel Card (see p328).

Other facilities include showers, free wireless internet, a post office, several banks for currency exchange and ATM withdrawals, mobile-phone service desks (for buying prepaid SIM cards, renting phones etc) and **Lost & Found** (☎ 03-398 2538).

Getting to/from TPE is simple. Several bus companies run the route (average fare NT125, 60 minutes) every 15 minutes from the airport to the main train station in Taipei from 4am to midnight. Some buses also go to the domestic airport, Songshan (see p347). You can buy bus tickets in the arrival areas of both terminals. Look for the 'Express Bus' signs in Terminal 2 and 'Bus Stop' (Station) signs in Terminal 1. If you want to get dropped off at a particular hotel let the staff at the ticket counters know, as there are different routes.

Buses also connect with the High-Speed Rail (HSR) station in Taoyuan, which can then whiz you off to Taipei in 25 minutes. From Taipei to Taoyuan station the HSR fare is NT160. From the airport to the station by bus costs NT20. Buses run every 20 minutes. However, because trains were not that frequent at the time of writing, this was not the best way to travel to Taipei except during rush hour when buses were slowed by traffic.

Taxis from the airport to downtown Taipei will cost around NT1200, and NT1000 going the opposite direction.

See p274 and p214 for details on transport to/from the airports at Kaohsiung and Taichung.

Note that the domestic terminal is nowhere near the international. If you want to fly within Taiwan you need to go to Songshan Airport in Taipei (see p347), about an hour away by bus.

INSURANCE

Please see p337 for guidelines on purchasing travel insurance.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM TAIWAN

If the names of the airlines listed below sound familiar but not quite right, there's a reason. Owing to agreements with China, many large international carriers operate flights to Taiwan under different names. For example, All Nippon Airways becomes Air Nippon.

Taiwan has two major international airlines: China Airlines and Eva Air. While Eva Air started operation in 1991 and has had no fatalities to date, the same cannot be said of China Airlines, which is somewhat infamous for its safety record. However, incidents so far this decade have been far fewer than in the '90s; officials credit this to new training practices (with pilots training at US flight schools) and a new corporate culture.

Air Macau (NX; ☎ Taipei 02-2717 0377, Kaohsiung 07-251 0860, TPE airport 03-398 3121; www.airmacau.com.tw/default.asp; hub Macau)

Air New Zealand (NZ; ☎ Taipei 02-2567 8950, TPE airport 03-398 3018; www.airnz.co.nz; hub Auckland)

Air Nippon (EL; ☎ Taipei 02-2501 7299, Kaohsiung 07-330 9019, TPE airport 03-351 6805; www.ana.co.jp; hub Tokyo)

Ankor Airways (G6; ☎ Taipei 02-2504 6522, TPE airport 03-398 3968; www.ankorairways.com; hub Phnom Penh)

Asiana Airlines (OZ; ☎ Taipei 02-2581 4000, TPE airport 03-398 6010; www.flyasiana.com; hub Seoul)

Cathay Pacific Airways (CX; ☎ Taipei 02-2715 2333, TPE airport 03-398 2501; www.cathaypacific.com; hub Hong Kong)

China Airlines (CI; ☎ Taipei 02-2715 1212, Kaohsiung 07-282 6141, TPE airport 03-398 8888; www.china-airlines.com; hub Taipei)

Continental Airlines (CO; ☎ Taipei 02-2719 5947, TPE airport 03-398 2404; www.continental.com; hubs Newark, Houston)

Dragon Airlines (KA; ☎ Taipei 02-2518 2700, Kaohsiung 07-201 3166, TPE airport 03-351 6805; www.dragonair.com; hub Hong Kong)

Eva Air (BR; ☎ Taipei 02-2501 1999, Kaohsiung 07-337 1199, CKS airport 03-351 6805; www.evaair.com; hub Taipei)

Far Eastern Air Transport (EF; ☎ Taipei 02-4066 6789, Kaohsiung 07-801 2311, TPE airport 03-398 3170; www.fat.com.tw; hub Taipei)

Japan Asia Airways (EG; ☎ 0800-065 151, TPE airport 03-398 2282, Kaohsiung 07-237 4101; www.jal.co.jp; hub Tokyo)

Jetstar Asia Airways (3K; ☎ Taipei 02-8176 2288, TPE airport 03-398 8888; www.jetstar.com/sg/index.html; hub Singapore)

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines (KL; ☎ Taipei 02-2711 4055, TPE airport 03-398 2769; www.klm.com; hub Amsterdam)

Korean Air (KE; ☎ Taipei 02-2518 2000, TPE airport 03-383 3248; www.koreanair.com; hub Seoul)

Malaysia Airlines (MH; ☎ Taipei 02-2514 7888, TPE airport 03-398 2521; www.malaysiaairlines.com; hub Kuala Lumpur)

Mandarin Airlines (AE; ☎ Taipei 02-2717 1230, TPE airport 03-398 2620; www.mandarin-airlines.com; hub Taipei)

Northwest Airlines (NW; ☎ Taipei 02-2772 2188, TPE airport 03-398 2471; www.nwa.com; hub Detroit)

Pacific Airlines (BL; ☎ Taipei 02-2543 1860, Kaohsiung 07-338 1183, TPE airport 03-398 2404; www.pacificairlines.com.vn; hub Ho Chi Minh City)

Palau Trans Pacific Airlines (GP; ☎ Taipei 02-3393 5388, TPE airport 03-398 3170; hub Koror, Palau)

Philippine Airlines (PR; ☎ Taipei 02-2506 7255, TPE airport 03-398 2419; www.philippineairlines.com; hub Manila)

Qantas Airways Limited (QF; ☎ Taipei 02-2559 0508, Kaohsiung 07-566 6516; www.qantas.com.au/international/tw/index.html; hub Sydney)

Singapore Airlines (SQ; ☎ Taipei 02-2551 6655, TPE airport 03-398 3988; www.singaporeair.com; hub Singapore)

Thai Airways (TG; ☎ Taipei 02-2509 6800, Kaohsiung 07-215 5871, TPE airport 03-383 4131; www.thaiair.com; hub Bangkok)

TransAsia Airways (GE; ☎ Taipei 02-449 8123, Kaohsiung 07-805 7861, TPE airport 03-398 2404; www.tna.com.tw; hub Taipei)

UNI Airways (B7; ☎ Taipei 02-2518 2626, Kaohsiung 07-791 7977, TPE airport 03-351 6805; www.uniair.com.tw; hub Taipei)

United Airlines (UA; ☎ Taipei 02-2325 8868, Kaohsiung 07-273 5544, TPE airport 03-398 2781; www.united.com; hub Chicago)

Vietnam Airlines (VN; ☎ Taipei 02-2517 7177, Kaohsiung 07-227 0209, TPE airport 03-398 3026; www.vietnamair.com; hubs Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City)

Baggage Transport

If you don't feel like dragging your luggage between TPE airport and central Taipei, **Pinoy Express** (☎ Taipei 02-2591 0888, TPE airport 03-

398 3652; 294-2 Chungqing N Rd, Taipei; ☎ 6am-11.30pm) can transport it for you. Same-day service is available if the bags arrive before 10pm at the Pinoy Express counter (in the arrival hall of each terminal). To arrange pick-up of luggage from your hotel or residence in Taipei, ring Pinoy Express one day in advance.

One-way rates to/from central Taipei are NT340 for the first bag (up to 20kg) and NT300 for each additional bag. Cash only.

GETTING AROUND**AIR**

TPE airport is for international flights only, so passengers flying into Taipei and transferring elsewhere within Taiwan will have to travel to **Songshan Airport** (TSA; www.tsa.gov.tw). It's north of central Taipei, but the city has pretty much engulfed it in recent decades.

Considering that Taiwan is such a small island, Songshan Airport is a very busy place. Four domestic-based carriers cover the country from about 7am until 10pm, with an average of about one takeoff or landing every

three minutes. Destinations served include Hualien, Kaohsiung, Kinmen, Penghu, Taichung, Tainan and Taitung.

Songshan Airport facilities include a bank (with foreign currency exchange), a post office, food shops and restaurants, free wireless and a **tourist information counter** (☎ 02-2546 4741; ☎ 8am-8pm). Small/large coin-operated lockers cost NT80/120 per 24 hours and have a six-day limit.

From Taipei's main train station take bus 275 or 262. A taxi will cost around NT200.

AIRLINES IN TAIWAN

Daily Air Corporation (☎ 02-2712 3995; www.dailyair.com.tw)

Far Eastern Air Transport (☎ 02-2715 1921; www.fat.com.tw)

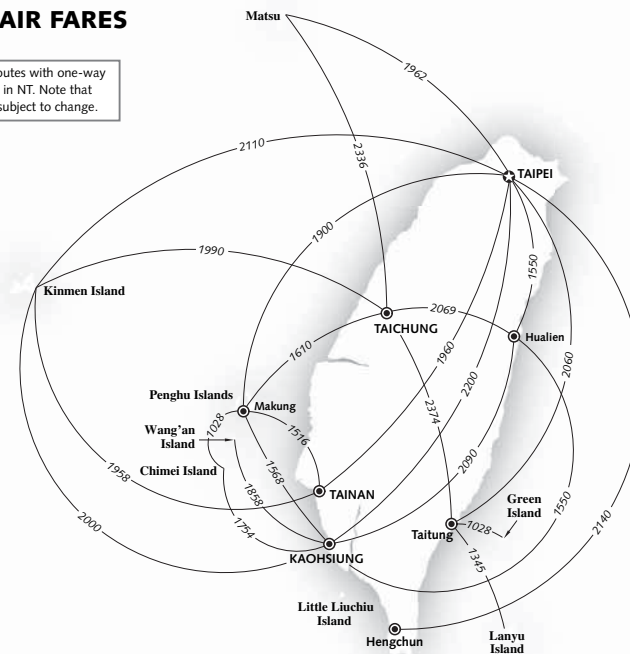
Mandarin Airlines (☎ 02-2717 1230; www.mandarin-airlines.com) China Airlines affiliate.

TransAsia Airways (☎ 02-2972 4599; www.tna.com.tw)

UNI Air (☎ 07-801 0189; www.uniair.com.tw) Eva Air affiliate.

DOMESTIC AIR FARES

Map shows major routes with one-way economy air fares in NT. Note that these air fares are subject to change.

**THINGS CHANGE...**

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & climate change

Pretty much every form of motorised travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon offset schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow travellers to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, support the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: www.lonelyplanet.com.

Several buses an hour make the run to/from TPE airport (average fare NT125, 60 minutes).

Although Songshan is the hub and most other destinations on the island are the spokes, the airports at Taichung, Tainan and particularly Kaohsiung also serve multiple destinations. Because of weather, flights to Taiwan's islands can be hair-raising.

At smaller airports around Taiwan you'll usually find a visitor centre or information desk (sometimes with English speaking staff), banking or ATM services, and a post office or DIY postal service.

BICYCLE

We don't recommend biking as your usual means of transportation. Traffic in the cities is too intense and the air quality at road level

is not good. Biking is recommended down the east coast of Hualien and also in other rural areas. See p329 for more.

BOAT

There is regular ferry service between Taiwan and its outlying islands (although in recent years air transport has become more popular). It's a cheaper way to travel but some routes could make a Navy SEAL vomit. And if the weather doesn't cooperate, forget it: you're not going anywhere.

See the regional chapters for details of schedules and prices. See also the 'Ferry Services' boxed text (below).

BUS

While Taiwan has a long-established system of private bus companies, competition in recent

BUS COMPANIES

Company	Contact
Aloha Bus	☎ 02-2550 8488; www.aloha168.com.tw
Kuo Kuang Hao	☎ 02-2311 9893; www.kingbus.com.tw
UBus	☎ 0800-241 560; www.ubus.com.tw

Sample bus costs and journey times from Taipei on Kuo Kuang Hao:

Destination	Price (NT) & Frequency	Duration (Hr)
Taichung	230 Mon-Fri, 260 Sat & Sun	2½
Tainan	310 Mon-Fri, 450 Sat & Sun	4
Kaohsiung	370 Mon-Fri, 450 Sat & Sun	5
Sun Moon Lake	390 Mon-Fri, 465 Sat & Sun	4½
Alishan	620 daily	6

years from trains, planes and automobiles has brought down the number of people using them, especially on rural routes. Between major cities you'll never have to wait more than an hour for a bus, but congestion is a problem on the highways, and that five-hour trip to Kaohsiung could easily become seven hours, or even 10. On the positive side, buses are smoke-free and quite comfortable. The more pricey intercity buses have airplane-like seats and show movies. Buses along rural routes are more basic.

The main transit points are Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung. See regional chapters for individual routes and schedules and the contact numbers for local bus companies. For intercity travel we recommend Aloha, UBus and Kuo Kuang Hao. See also the 'Bus Companies' boxed text (above).

Reservations are advisable for weekend travel and especially during holidays. Note that some buses run 24 hours a day and fares can drop considerably from midnight to 6am.

CAR, MOTORCYCLE & SCOOTER

To reach certain choice areas and to get around once you're there, your own transport is advisable, and sometimes absolutely necessary: we've noted where in relevant chapters. Driving a car is not terribly difficult outside of the cities, especially on weekdays. Scooters are cheap to rent (average NT400 per day, but some as low as NT200), but not every place will let you rent one without a local licence. At the time of writing, you could rent scooters with just an International Driver's Licence in Hualien, Kenting, Chiayi, Tainan, Sun Moon Lake and Jiaoshi.

Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) has an excellent overview of Taiwan's road and highway system, which includes explanations of the numbering system. Go to the website and type 'highway system in Taiwan'.

Driving Licence

An International Driver's Licence (IDL; available in your home country) is valid in Taiwan for up to 30 days. After that you can apply for an IDL permit from a local Motor Vehicles Office. This is a simple procedure and validates the IDL for as long as it is valid (up to one year). You can do this every year if you can get someone back home to apply for a new IDL. This is much easier than going through the Taiwanese driver's test, which requires you, among other nonsensical manoeuvres, to go backwards in an S-shape.

If your country has a reciprocal agreement with Taiwan, you may be able to obtain a Taiwanese licence just by showing your home licence and passport. If not, and you really want a local licence you will have to take a written test as well as the 'practical' test on a closed course. Driving licences are issued by county. For an idea of what to expect, see the Taipei government's Motor Vehicles Office website (www.tcmvd.gov.tw).

Fuel & Spare Parts

Petrol stations are everywhere, as are garages to get parts and repairs for scooters and cars. Check out www.forumosa.com for a thread on reliable and trustworthy mechanics.

Hire

Car rental fees typically run between NT800 and NT1500 for a half day, or NT1500 and

FERRY SERVICES

Route	Operator	Contact
Fugang (Taitung)—Lanyu & Green Islands	Jiou-Xin Ferry	☎ 089-320 413, various others
Kaohsiung—Kinmen Kinmen	Kaohsiung Harbour	☎ 07-521 6206
		☎ 082-329 988
Kaohsiung—Makung	Taiwan Hangye Company	☎ 07-561 3866 (Kaohsiung) ☎ 06-926 4087 (Makung)
Putai (near Chiayi)—Makung	Makung Tomorrow Star	☎ 06-926 0666 (Makung)
Donggang—Little Liuchiu Island	Donggang—Liuchiu Route Ferry	☎ 07-551 1373

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Chiayi	---																		
Hsinchu	169	---																	
Hualien	339	240	---																
Ilan	270	101	139	---															
Kaohsiung	103	272	337	373	---														
Keelung	264	95	185	46	367	---													
Kenting	203	372	306	473	100	467	---												
Taichung	86	83	253	184	189	178	289	---											
Tainan	63	232	373	333	40	327	140	149	---										
Taipei	239	70	170	31	342	25	442	153	302	---									
Taitung	272	407	167	306	170	352	132	348	210	337	---								
Taoyuan	215	46	194	55	318	49	418	129	278	24	361	---							
Chiayi		Hsinchu	Hualien	Ilan	Kaohsiung	Keelung	Kenting	Taichung	Tainan	Taipei	Taitung	Taoyuan							

NT2800 for a full day, depending on the type of vehicle and rental company. Typical long-term discounts are 10% for three to seven days, 20% for eight to 20 days and 30% for longer. Ask if there is a limit to the number of kilometres you can drive. All airports have car rental agencies (or else they do free delivery), as do most of the High-Speed Rail stations. You can also check with local tourist information offices for rental agencies in your area. The following are two possibilities:

Central Auto (☎ 02-2828 0033; www.rentalcar.com.tw) Long-running foreign-managed rental company with Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung branches. Good reputation.

Hertz (☎ 02-2731 0377; www.hertz.com) Many branches islandwide.

Insurance

Insurance laws were modified in 2007 but at the time of writing it wasn't clear how this would play out in rental businesses. Many agency staff members seemed unaware of any changes. At the time of writing, the best deal we could find was decent third-party liability insurance and the option of buying comprehensive insurance with a NT10,000

deduction for damages. In the case of theft or loss, the renter would also be charged 10% of the value of the car. Not the best, but much better than years ago when you essentially were uninsured despite what rental companies might have told you.

Road Conditions

It's not advisable to drive in Taipei or any other large or medium-sized city until you get used to the way people drive. In the countryside, it's not much different from driving in the West, but be on the lookout for drunk drivers at night. Seriously consider renting a car or scooter (or even a bicycle) when you visit, as you'll really be missing out on a lot of the best this country has to offer if you rely exclusively on public transportation.

Road Rules

By the standards of your home country, driving in Taiwan might seem just a little out of hand. The Taiwanese drive on the right-hand side of the road, although at times you'd be hard-pressed to tell! Taipei drivers are the best of the lot, Taichung are probably the worst.

As for the rules, right turns on red lights are not allowed. Passengers in the back seats must buckle up and children under four (and 18kg) must be secured in safety seats. Violators face fines of NT1500 (NT3000 to NT6000 on highways). Front-seat passengers are also required to wear seat belts.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who do decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. If you do choose to hitch you will be safer if you travel in pairs and let someone know where you are planning to go.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Bus

Outside of Taipei, buses are the only public transport option in the big cities. It used to be difficult to catch a bus outside Taipei, but now most buses have signs in English at the front. You can usually find complete bus schedule information at the visitor centre in town (often right inside the train station). Take advantage of this. In smaller towns it's easier just to walk than bother with sporadic bus services.

It doesn't usually matter whether you enter at the front or the back, but be aware that sometimes you pay when you get on and sometimes when you get off (and if you cross a zone you pay when you get on and again later when you get off). Just follow the passengers ahead of you or look for the characters 上 or 下 on the screen to the left of the driver. 上 means pay when you get on (pretend the character points up to tell you to pay when you step up on the bus). 下 means pay when you get off (pretend the character points down to tell you to pay when you get down off the bus). If you make a mistake the driver will let you know.

Fares vary by city. The fare within a single zone in Taipei is NT15, in Kaohsiung NT12. The fare for riding within two zones is always double the one-zone fare.

Metro

Taipei's MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) has made a huge difference to the city's environment, traffic, cleanliness and general culture (see p124). Kaohsiung's system should be ready by the end of 2008.

Taxi

In the large cities, taxi rates are NT70 for the first 1.5km or portion thereof. After that, it's NT5 per 300m, or per two minutes of waiting time (for example, at traffic lights or if you're caught in traffic). The waiting time is cumulative – taxi meters are fitted with timers. Fares are surcharged approximately 20% after midnight. Surcharges may also apply for things such as luggage and reserving a cab (as opposed to hailing one).

In the big cities, taxis are everywhere and you hardly need to bother calling for one except for safety concerns (all calls are recorded and saved for one month). In smaller cities it's a good idea to get your hotel to call first, then keep the driver's number for subsequent rides. In Taipei, call the taxi hotline on ☎ 0800-055 850 to find a particular company or call ☎ 02-2799 4818 for English-, Japanese-, Cantonese- and even Spanish-speaking drivers.

TOURS

Taiwan Tour Bus (☎ 0800-011 765; www.taiwantourbus.com.tw/) is organised by the tourism bureau and has easy-to-understand half-day and full-day itineraries. Buses depart from train stations, airports and major hotels. See the website or pick up the booklet *Taiwan Tour Bus: Route Handbook* at any visitor centre. Tours range in price from NT600 to NT2000.

Green Island Adventures (☎ 0972-065 479; www.greenislandadventures.com) has tours to Taiwan's outer islands and the mainland.

Taipei-based **Fresh Treks** (☎ 02-2700 6988; www.freshtreks.com) offers adventure tours around the island, including mountain climbing, river tracing and laser tag. Few tours are open to the public these days, however.

Edison Travel Service (☎ 02-2563 5313; www.edison.com.tw) has been around for a long time and can handle tours, flights, hotels and car rental.

WHICH WEB BROWSER TO USE?

As with many Taiwanese government websites, you may have problems using the interactive pages of the train website with a Firefox-based browser (such as Netscape). Opera and Microsoft Internet Explorer work fine for this and every other site we have tried.

TRAIN

The Taiwan Railway Administration (TRA) operates trains on two main lines. Major stops on the Western Line include Pingdong, Kaohsiung, Taichung, Taipei and Keelung, while the Eastern Line runs from Shulin via Taipei and Hualien to Taitung. The Southern Link connects Kaohsiung and Taitung. There are also several small branch lines maintained for tourist purposes, including Pingxi (p144), Alishan (p241), Jiji (p220) and Neivan (closed at the time of writing for the next several years). For detailed timetable and fare information, you can pick up the *Taiwan Railway Passenger Train Timetable* at train station info centres, kiosks or 7-Eleven stores, or visit http://new.twtraffic.com.tw/TWRail_en/index.aspx.

Express trains are reasonably comfortable and they all offer reserved seating and carts coming through the aisles offering boxed meals (such as they are). Snacks are available on platforms at many stations, and there are always shops and convenience stores nearby.

Most major cities now have visitor information centres inside or just outside the train station with English-speaking staff. They are usually open from 9am to 6pm and are a blessing for getting local bus, food and accommodation information.

Classes

There are different classes of service: Tze-Chiang (*Ziqiáng*) is the fastest and most comfortable; Chu-kuang (*jūguāng*) and Fu-hsing (*fūxīng*) are slower and more ordinary. There are also the very cheap DRC and Ordinary Express trains that stop at all stations, have no reserved seating and usually no air-conditioning. Sometimes it's fun to take one of these along the east coast just to watch the scenery go by so slowly.

Reservations & Fares

For the fast trains, especially on weekends or holidays, it is advisable to buy your tickets up to two weeks in advance. You can book online but many people report problems with this on the English-language pages. By the time you read this you may be able to book at 7-Elevens.

HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Taiwan's **high-speed rail** (HSR or THSR; www.thsrc.com.tw) system started operations on 5 January 2007. At their fastest, trains reach speeds of 330km/h and can cover the 345km distance between Taipei and Kaohsiung in 90 minutes (though most trains take two hours with stops). The trains are beautiful works of engineering, and the ride itself is smooth, quiet and comfortable. The total cost of the project has been estimated at US\$15 billion, most of which came from the public purse despite the HSR being billed as a BOT (build-operate-transfer; a form of financing for public projects in which a private company finances, designs and builds a project and is then allowed to operate it for profit for a certain number of years before it is returned to the public sector) project. Essentially, the government has paid for most of the project but still doesn't have ownership.

At the time of writing, eight stations had opened and there were trains about every hour. A regular ticket from Taipei Main Station (in the same building as the regular train station) to Kaohsiung (actually, to Zuoying station, as the final stop in downtown Kaohsiung hasn't opened yet) costs NT1490. Taipei to Taichung costs NT700. See the website for all fares.

You can buy tickets at the stations, either at machines or counters. The machines have had glitches since the beginning, so we tended to prefer the counters. By the time you read

this, the online booking system should be up and running.

At every station you'll find a visitor centre and English-speaking staff to help with transfers, hotel information and the like. You'll also find car rental and taxi services, hotel shuttles and buses or commuter trains to take you

downtown when the station is outside the city centre. It's a really easy and convenient system and it's going to revolutionise travel in Taiwan (see the boxed text, p236).

For a personal take on the system, here's an article by one of the authors of this book: www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/21126.

TRAIN SERVICES

From	To	Duration (Hr)/Fare (NT, Tze-Chiang)	Duration (Hr)/Fare (NT, Fu-hsing)
Taipei	Hualien	2½/445	3½/343 (Chu-kuang)
Taipei	Kaohsiung	4½/845	7/544
Taipei	Tainan	3½/741	5¾/476
Kaohsiung	Taichung	2½/470	3/241
Hualien	Taitung	2½/355	3¼/273 (Chu-kuang)
Taichung	Taipei	2/375	3/241

Health

Dr Trish Batchelor

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Health issues and the quality of medical care vary significantly depending on whether you stay in Taipei or venture into rural areas.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases, but infections are a rare cause of serious illness or death while overseas. Pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is relatively common. Fortunately most common illnesses can either be prevented with sensible behaviour or be treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and regular medications (use generic names) is also a good idea. When carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In Taiwan it may be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, blood-pressure medications and contraceptive pills.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company will check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance – check lonelyplanet.com for more information. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive; bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. Note that doctors in Taiwan expect payment in cash. Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs. These include places such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation and receipts. Some policies require you to call (reverse charges) a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information: they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- Antifungal cream (eg Clotrimazole)
- Antibacterial cream (eg Muciprocin)
- Antibiotics if you are visiting rural areas; one for skin infections (eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin) and another for diarrhoea (eg Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin)
- Antihistamine – there are many options (eg Cetrizine for daytime and Promethazine for night)
- Antiseptic (eg Betadine)*
- Antispasmodic for stomach cramps (eg Buscopan)
- Contraceptive method
- Decongestant (eg Pseudoephedrine)*
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diarrhoea – consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and an antinausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)*
- First-aid items such as scissors, elasto-plasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers*
- Anti-inflammatory (eg Ibuprofen)
- Indigestion tablets (eg Quick Eze or Mylanta)
- Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- Laxative (eg Coloxyl)
- Migraine medicine – sufferers should take their personal medicine
- Paracetamol*
- Permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- Steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes (eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone)
- Sunscreen and a hat
- Throat lozenges*
- Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment (eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet)
- Ural or an equivalent if prone to urine infections

* Indicates most commonly used items by travellers.

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice available on the Internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to visit for starters. The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest for up-to-the-minute information is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country and is revised daily. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

To begin with, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel Asia & India*. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – have a look at the website (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most of the time these blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, it is possible for some to break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf. This usually (but not always) occurs on just one side of the body. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should seek medical attention as soon as possible. To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should make sure you walk around the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract and relax the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is most common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating only light meals. Once you have arrived at your destination, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine), prochlorperazine (Phenergan) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for the treatment of motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN TAIWAN

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Taiwan is a relatively well-developed country and the quality of medical care reflects this. In Taipei the quality is high, however in rural areas you cannot expect to find Western standards of care.

A recommended hospital in Taipei is the **Adventist Hospital** (Map p96; ☎ 2771 8151; 424 Bade Rd, sec.2); it has English-speaking staff.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic in Taiwan in both cities and rural areas. It can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites – there is no vaccine. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so try to avoid bites at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (previously Dengue was known as “break bone fever”). Some people develop a rash and diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol. Do not

take aspirin, and see a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Hepatitis A

A problem throughout the country, this food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A; you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to Taiwan should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. People who have hepatitis B usually are unaware they are carriers. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

HIV

HIV is also spread by body fluids. Avoid unsafe sex, sharing needles, invasive cosmetic procedures such as tattooing and needles that have not been sterilised in a medical setting. HIV rates in Taiwan remain low by Asian standards, although infection via contaminated-needle use is increasing. However, transmission is mainly via sexual contact in Taiwan.

Influenza

Influenza is transmitted between November and April. Symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis

This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes, but is rare in travellers. The transmission season runs from June to October. Risk exists in all areas except the central mountains. Vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die, while another third will suffer permanent brain damage. However, as mentioned earlier, this is a rare disease.

REQUIRED VACCINATIONS

Yellow Fever Proof of vaccination is required if entering Taiwan within six days of visiting an infected country. If you are travelling to Taiwan from Africa or South America check with a travel-medicine clinic whether you need the vaccine.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to Taiwan.

Adult diphtheria & tetanus Single booster recommended every 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year, a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. In 95% of people three shots results in lifetime protection.

Measles, mumps & rubella Two doses of MMR required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can occur a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than two weeks and only in Taipei. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, however the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur. Travellers should get vaccinated before they get to Taiwan.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

The following immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk.

Influenza A single injection lasts for two months. Recommended for all travellers over 65 years of age and those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes or a compromised immune system.

Japanese B encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Occasionally an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Pneumonia A single injection lasts five years. Recommended as per the flu vaccine.

Tuberculosis A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

Lyme Disease

This tick-borne disease occurs in summer. Symptoms include an early rash and general viral symptoms, followed weeks to months later by joint, heart or neurological problems. Prevent this disease by using general insect-avoidance measures and checking yourself for ticks after walking in forest areas. Treatment is with Doxycycline.

SARS

In mid-March 2003 the world's attention was drawn to the outbreak of an apparently new and serious respiratory illness that subsequently became known as SARS. At the time of writing SARS appears to have been brought under control. Since the outbreak commenced, 8500 cases were confirmed, resulting in 800 deaths. The peak of disease activity was in early May 2003, when over 200 new cases were being reported daily in Asia. Taiwan had a significant number of cases of SARS.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases are common throughout the world, and the most common include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis

Taiwan has a high rate of tuberculosis (TB) infection. While rare in travellers, precautions should be taken by medical and aid workers and long-term travellers who have significant contact with the local population. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available.

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel)

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water.
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.
- Avoid ice.
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down.
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. However, it should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size (less than four microns).

pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly worsening fever and headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Though contracting typhoid is rare, vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than two weeks in Taiwan and travelling outside of Taipei. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is the most common problem affecting travellers – between 10% and 30% of people visiting Taiwan will suffer from it. In the majority of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel-actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated: rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example, if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Eat only freshly cooked food and avoid shellfish and food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Giardiasis

Giardia is a common parasite in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, 'eggy' burps, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option. Giardia is not common in Taiwan.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS**Air Pollution**

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is a severe problem in Taipei. If you have severe respiratory problems speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If you are troubled by the pollution, avoid downtown during busy hours and visit the suburbs instead. The air is much better in the early morning and at night.

Insect Bites & Stings

Insects are not a major issue in Taiwan, though there are some insect-borne diseases present.

Ticks can be contracted from walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, or fever or muscle aches,

you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents and treats tick-borne diseases.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment. For other people, pain is the main problem; apply ice to the sting and take painkillers if necessary. There are warning signs over problem areas. Please heed them as some wasps in Taiwan are known to be deadly.

Parasites

There are a number of flukes (liver, lung and intestinal) that can be contracted by eating raw or undercooked seafood, meat and vegetables in Taiwan. Such dishes should be avoided unless eating in a top-class restaurant.

Skin Problems

Cuts and scratches can become easily infected when travelling. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness) see a doctor.

Rashes can often be very difficult to diagnose, even for doctors. If you develop a rash you should seek medical advice as soon as possible.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

In most well-developed areas of Taiwan, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring supplies of your own contraception.

Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops: it's best to bring suitable antibiotics.

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems are at their lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor medical facilities and transport. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. However azithromycin is considered safe.

TRADITIONAL & FOLK MEDICINE

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) remains very popular in Taiwan. TCM views the human body as an energy system in which the basic substances of *chi* (*qi*; vital energy), *jing* (essence), blood (the body's nourishing fluids)

INSECT AVOIDANCE

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites at all times by following these suggestions:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently.
- Sleep under a mosquito net that has been impregnated with permethrin.
- Accommodation should have screens and fans if not air-conditioned.
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin in high-risk areas.
- Wear light-coloured long sleeves and pants.
- Use mosquito coils.
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

and body fluids (other organic fluids) function. The concept of yin and yang is fundamental to the system. Disharmony between yin and yang or within the basic substances may be a result of internal causes (emotions), external causes (climatic conditions) or miscellaneous causes (work, exercise, sex etc). Treatment modalities include acupuncture, massage, herbs, dietary modification and *qijong* (the skill of attracting positive energy) and aim to bring these elements back into balance. These therapies are particularly useful for treating chronic

diseases and are gaining interest and respect in the Western medical system. Conditions that can be particularly suitable for traditional methods include chronic fatigue, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and some chronic skin conditions.

Be aware that 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe', and there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If you are using both systems, ensure you inform both practitioners what the other has prescribed.