

East Coast



For many travellers, a love affair with the east coast begins with a journey to Taroko Gorge. Wandering this bedazzling marble canyon, visitors often find a private paradise in the form of a deep waterfall-fed pool or rocky lookout. Such delight does this discovery give that most people fear losing the spot to the masses and try to keep it secret.

But fear not, there are places like this all over the east coast. This chapter will let you in on some of them, but if ever you should take our recommendation to get off the beaten track, this is the time and place to do it.

Two main highways run through the east; try to travel them both (one down and one up). Hwy 11 is the coastline route and offers stops for swimming, biking and visiting aboriginal and fishing villages. Hwy 9 runs through a wide valley, rich in hot springs and local flavour. This is also prime farmland and the vast fields of rice, backed up by dark green hills, are wonderfully photogenic.

Eastern Taiwan has the highest concentration of indigenous peoples in Taiwan and many tribal members maintain both their language and lifestyle. Visiting an aboriginal village or attending a traditional festival is a highlight for most travellers.

For years, people have been saying that the time to visit the east coast is now before its backwater charms are lost forever, but we see no danger of that happening for a while yet. In any case, if you happen to find one piece of this paradise has gotten too crowded, there's always the next valley over.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike ancient hunting trails in **Taroko Gorge** (p188)
- Raft the scenic **Hsiukuluan River** (p198)
- Cycle down the winding coastline on **Highway 11** (p192)
- Photograph colourful fields of orange day lilies on **Sixty Stone Mountain** (p200)
- Visit the wetland classroom of **Mataian** (p197)
- See monkeys and barking deer in a banyan forest in **Chihpen** (p205)
- Retrace history and nature-watch on the **Walami Trail** (p200)
- Check out the thriving local music scene at **Dulan Sugar Factory** (p194)



Culture & History

Because of its geographical isolation, the east coast was slow to develop. Before the 20th century there were few settlers apart from indigenous peoples such as the Ami, Atayal, Bunun, Puyuma and Yami.

But things began to change (albeit less dramatically than in other areas) under Japanese rule. In 1926 the Eastern Railway Line began operations and wood and sugar processing factories were established up and down the coast. These factories drew large numbers of workers from other parts of Taiwan, especially the Hakka, who over time became the largest ethnic group in Taitung County. When Taiwan was returned to Chinese rule, the east was opened further with the completion of the Central Cross-Island Hwy in 1961 and the South Cross-Island Hwy in 1972.

Today, the east coast is still a relatively undeveloped area. The real legacy of the 20th century is the diverse mix of ethnic groups and cultural traditions that is easily seen in towns across the region. The indigenous people, while not the majority, have one of the strongest influences, reflected in the large numbers of annual festivals held throughout the year and the food visitors will encounter.

Climate

It gets warmer and more tropical the further south you go and the vegetation becomes lush; you can see, feel and smell the differ-

ence. Hualien is always slightly cooler than Taitung, and anywhere in the mountains will be cooler than along the coast.

Unlike in the north, there are not afternoon showers every day in summer, which makes the area more suitable for outdoor activities. Mid-August to October is typhoon season and the east coast is frequently battered with severe storms. Winters are chilly and the pervasive dampness and overcast skies can make it seem much colder than the actual temperature. Don't go to the east coast looking to swim in winter; head to Kenting (p282) instead.

National Parks & Forest Reserves

The crown jewel of Taiwan's national park system is Taroko, with its marble canyons and ancient hiking paths. The Nanan section of Yushan National Park, no slouch itself, features the rugged Walami Trail. Chihpen, Fuyuan and Chihnan National Forest Recreation areas each have their highlights: Chihpen has a beautiful old banyan forest, Fuyuan a butterfly valley and camphor forests, and Chihnan highlights the history of the logging industry in Taiwan.

Getting There & Around

There is air and rail service to the east coast and bus service is available locally, but having your own transport is the most convenient way to see eastern Taiwan. There are simply too many places you can't get to without

EAST COAST EATING

Hualien and Taitung Counties have a diverse mix of aborigines, Hakka, Taiwanese and former mainland Chinese, all contributing to the culinary traditions of the area. One of the most influential cuisines in Hualien is that prepared by the Ami people. The cooking tends to be simple and emphasises the natural flavours of fruits, flowers, taro and wild vegetables. Dishes made from betel-nut flowers, sorghum and rattan are common and can be seen in night markets and restaurants around Hualien. For something unique, head to Mataian for hotpot made to boil with heated rocks.

Fruit grown in eastern Taiwan is often tastier and fresher than elsewhere. Pineapples, mangoes and watermelons can be seen growing (or for sale) along the sides of roads, and some orchards allow you to pick your own fruit and pay by weight. City markets have tables and carts heaped with a colourful assortment of common and exotic fruits, including star fruit, pomelos (the ones grown in Dulan are best), coconuts, durian, papaya and lychees. Taitung's custard apple, or Buddha head fruit (so-called because the bumpy ridges on the fruit resemble the head of the Sakyamuni Buddha), has even garnered its own festival; sad to say, it's pretty lame. The fruit is delicious though and really does have the consistency of custard.

Other delicacies to try include the dumplings in Hualien, the dried fish of Chengkung and the sticky rice of Taitung. Fresh seafood is available all along the coast; some of the best places to find it are Chengkung, Shihtiping and Fukang Harbour, north of Taitung.

INFORMATION

Bank of Taiwan 台灣銀行.....	1 D5
Hualien City Library 花蓮市立圖書館.....	2 B3
Hualien County Information Centre 花蓮縣旅遊服務中心.....	3 B2
Laundromat 洗衣店.....	4 C2
Photo Studio 照相館.....	5 C4
Tzu-Chi Buddhist Hospital 慈濟醫院.....	6 A2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Calvin Cycle Outdoor Explore 光合作用戶外探索學校.....	7 C4
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Chingszu Temple 靜思佛堂.....	8 A2
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SLEEPING

Amigos 阿美客國際青年館.....	9 B3
Bu Lao Hai Yang 不老海洋.....	10 D6
Ching Yeh Hotel 青葉大飯店.....	11 C2
Formosa Backpackers Hostel 青年民宿.....	12 B4
Naluwan Hotel 那魯灣飯店.....	13 C3
Yongqi Hotel 永祺大飯店.....	14 B3

EATING

Buk Kut Ten 肉骨茶.....	15 C3
Ye Hsiang Bianshi Dian 液香扁食店.....	16 C5

SHOPPING

Hui Pi Hsu Cake Shop 惠比須.....	17 C5
Ya Chi Hsiao Fang 雅集小坊.....	18 C4

TRANSPORT

Dingdong Bus Company 鼎東客運站.....	19 B2
Hualien Bus Company Downtown Station 花蓮客運市中心站.....	20 D5
Hualien Bus Company Kiosk 花蓮客運站.....	21 B2
Pony Leasing & Rental Group.....	(see 11)

it's worth. If you need a coffee at a nice shop, or a foreign-exchange bank, head here. In the third part of town, the harbour area, you'll find the fanciest hotels and restaurants.

Information**INTERNET ACCESS**

Hualien City Library (170 Guo Lian 1st Rd; ㄖ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) Free internet access close to the train station.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Hualien County's tourist website (<http://tour-hualien.hl.gov.tw/en/index.jsp>) is a good introduction to the attractions in the area.

LAUNDRY

There's a DIY coin **laundromat** (46 Guo Lian 2nd Rd; ㄖ 24hr) very close to Amigos hostel.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Tzu-chi Buddhist Hospital (Ciji Yiyuan; ㄨ 856 1825; 707 Jung Yang Rd, sec.3) A hospital known for its excellent facilities.

MONEY

There are ATM machines all over town and in most 7-Elevens.

Bank of Taiwan (ㄨ 832 2151; 3 Gung Yuan Rd) Offers money changing in addition to ATM service.

PHOTO STUDIO

There's a studio at 306 Jung Shan Rd.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The free monthly English magazine *Highway 11* focuses on life on the east coast. It's a great source of information about restaurants, hotels, guesthouses and the like. Readers will also find it an informative and entertaining read. You can pick it up at the information centre and in many restaurants around town.

Hualien County Information Centre (Huálián Xiàng Lǚyóu Fúwù Zhōngxīn; ㄨ 836 0634) An excellent visitor centre, on the right of the train station exit, with an abundance of information available in English: everything from bus schedules to tour prices and times. Staff are friendly and speak good English.

Sights & Activities**MEILUNSHAN PARK 美崙山公園**

This park (Měilúnshān Gōngyuán) rises up behind the Hualien train station and has pleasant walking trails that lead up to the summit. From the top of the hill are excellent views of the city and the Pacific Ocean. The easiest way to get to the park is to follow Linsen Rd north across the bridge.

SEASIDE PARKS

Hualien has three seaside parks, all joined by a walking and bicycle path that continues to Chihsingtan Beach (passing the city garbage dump on the way). The path starts at **Nan Bin Seaside Park** (南濱海濱公園; Nán Bin Hàibīn Gōngyuán), the southernmost park, which is a pleasant place for a stroll or a snack at the night market. You are right next to the ocean and the sound of the surf is always with you.

CHINGSZU TEMPLE 靜思佛堂

The simple white and grey exterior of the 10-storey **Chingszu Temple** (Jìngsī Fó Táng; Chungyang Rd) is striking. Inside, a large exhibition hall showcases the Tzu Chi Buddhist organisation's activities around the world. Exhibits are in English and Chinese.

CHIHSHINGTAN BEACH 七星潭

This pretty **beach** (Qīxīng Tán), about 3km north of Hualien, sits at the foot of a series of high cliffs. The water is too rough for swimming, but this doesn't stop crowds flocking here on weekends.

Tours

Calvin Cycle Outdoor Explore (Guānghé Zuò Yòng; ㄨ 835 7992; www.outdoor-taiwan.com; 130 Guang Fu St; ㄖ 10am-7pm) For outdoor adventure tours (cycling, rock-climbing, tree-climbing, kayaking, river tracing and hiking), check out this shop with a good local reputation. The owner and staff speak English.

Festivals & Events

One of Hualien's long-standing traditions is stone carving, which is not surprising considering the city's main export is marble. The **Hualien International Stone Sculpture Festival** (www.2007stone.com.tw/eng/home/home.asp), established in 1995, showcases the work of local artists and promotes Hualien to the international art world. The festival lasts for over a month starting October and takes place annually in towns around Hualien County.

For aboriginal festivals around Hualien County, see the boxed text on p195.

Sleeping**BUDGET**

Most of the sub-NT1000 hotels in Hualien have become pretty awful of late. Competition from hostels and B&Bs is driving them out of business. For bare-bones budget travellers,

hostels are the only option now, and thankfully Hualien has some very nice new ones.

Formosa Backpackers Hostel (Qíngnián Mínsù; ㄨ 835 2515; 206 Jian Guo Rd; 建國路206號; dm adult/student NT400/350; j) You might as well toss a coin to decide whether to stay here or at Amigos. Both are run by young, well-travelled English-speaking Taiwanese women, and both offer great hostel value for money. Formosa has laundry service, a full kitchen, a small café, a 500-book English library and free pick-up from the train station. Each dorm room has its own bathroom, and if free shampoo and soap are what you need, you'll find it here. The hostel owner is a keen surfer and from May to September she works in conjunction with a Canadian surf instructor to provide lessons (NT1500 per day).

Amigos (Àmèikè Guójí Qíngnián Guǎn; ㄨ 836 2756; www.amigos68.com; 68 Guo Lian 2nd Rd; 國聯2路68號; dm incl breakfast NT450; j) This place has everything you could want in a hostel: it's bright, clean, inexpensive, run by a friendly, well-travelled local who speaks your language (English anyway), and it's just a five-minute walk from the train station. There's air-con in the dorms, a shared kitchen, free ADSL, clean sheets and enough showers for everyone. Amigos' owner can help with everything from scooter rentals to tours.

ODD THEME MUSEUMS IN TAIWAN

Taiwan has its share of themed museums, and more than its share of odd ones. Here are a few to keep in mind for a rainy day:

- **Taiwan Salt Museum** (see p258) See the display of salt crystals from around the world.
- **Taishan (Barbie) Doll Museum** (泰山芭比娃娃博物館; Taishān Bābī Wáwa Bówùguǎn; ㄨ 02-8531 1406; 26 Lane 26, Fengchiang Rd, Taishan, Taipei County; admission free) Mattel had Barbie dolls made in Taishan for 20 years. This is one attempt to relive the glory days.
- **TaiPower North Visitor Centre** (核二場台電北部展示館; Hé'èrchǎng Táidiàn Běibù Zhǎnshì Guǎn; ㄨ 2498 5112; 60 Badou, Yeliu Village; admission free; ㄖ 9.30am-4.30pm) An exhibition hall for the second nuclear power plant just north of Yehliu on the Northeast Coast. *Excellent, Smithers.*
- **Taiwan Nougat Museum** (p139) Come see the biggest piece of nougat in the world.
- **Crab Museum** (p162) It's a lot more interesting than you would expect.
- **Chunghwa Postal Museum** (郵政博物館; Yóuzhèng Bówùguǎn; ㄨ 02-2394 5198; 45 Chongqing Rd) This museum in Taipei has stamps, uniforms and so, so much more for a token admission price.
- **Coca Cola Museum** (可口可樂博物館; Kěkǒu Kèlè Bówùguǎn; ㄨ 03-364 8800; 46 Hsing Bo Rd, Taoyuan City, Taoyuan County; admission free; ㄖ 10-11am & 2-3pm Fri) This museum, of course, is IT! Call before visiting.
- **Chihsing Tan Katsuo** (七星柴魚博物館; Qīxīng Cháiyú Bówùguǎn; ㄨ 03-823 6100; Chihsingtan Beach; admission free; ㄖ 9am-5pm) This museum near Chihsingtan Beach is dedicated to dried bonito. All we can say is ???

Reservations are recommended from July to September and on long weekends; you can book online. There are no lockers, but you can store things downstairs. Also, there's no laundry, but there's a laundromat just a block away.

Yongqi Hotel (Yǒngqí Dàfāndiàn; % 835 6111; fax 835 5727; 139 Guo Lian 1st Rd; 國聯1路139號; d/tr NT1200/1500) This hotel is a good budget option and a popular place for travellers. The accommodation is simple but comfortable.

Ching Yeh Hotel (Qīng Yè Dàfāndiàn; % 833 0186; fax 833 0188; 83 Guo Lian 1st Rd; 國聯1路83號; d from NT1500) The Ching Yeh is one of the best options by the train station. Rooms are small, simply furnished and very clean. Some have great views of the mountains.

MIDRANGE

Rose Stone (福園古厝客棧; Fúyuán Gùcuò Kèzhàn; % 854 2317; www.rosestone.com; 48 Hai Bin Rd; 海濱路48號; d/tw NT2300/3800) It's a little bit out of the way, but this is our choice for accommodation in Hualien. The Rose is technically a B&B but it's set in one of the best preserved old courtyard buildings we have seen in Taiwan. Rooms are cosy, with tatami-style bedding and old furnishings. But it's the old-time atmosphere of the place that is the real draw. There's an elaborately decorated tearoom for tea and meals (NT250) and a large chamber filled with the family's collection of antiques.

To get to the Rose, drive south down Jung Shan Rd to the end and turn right onto 193 (the last road at the coast). Continue down the 193 (also Hai An and later Hai Bin Rd) until the 19km mark. The turnoff for the Rose is just past this on the left. Note that you really can't see the place until you are on top of it and the nearby area does not look promising. A taxi from the train station will cost about NT200. Room rates are discounted by 20% on weekdays.

Naluwan Hotel (Nàlūwān Fāndiàn; % 836 0103; fax 832 0409; 7-3 Guo Lian 5th Rd; 國聯5路7-3號; d/tw incl breakfast NT3300/4500) This is a nice looking place with touches of aboriginal décor. Rooms are spacious and feature comfortable beds, plasma TVs and attractive furnishings. Seasonal discounts of 20% to 50% are available.

Bu Lao Hai Yang Homestay (Bùlǎo Hǎiyáng Mínsù; % 0928-299 567; fax 832 2129; 16 Hai Bin Rd; 海濱街16號; r incl breakfast from NT3800; j) Another excellent addition to the B&B scene in Hualien is this modern four-storey building offering a super-clean environment (the owner is

a self-described clean freak) and romantic room designs. East facing rooms have clear ocean views and wide balconies for lounging. Walking and biking paths can be accessed through the back door, and free bike rentals are offered to guests. The B&B is just on the outskirts of town. A taxi will cost about NT150 from the train station. Weekday discounts of 30% are available.

TOP END

Many visitors complain about the top-end accommodation in Hualien. If the service isn't bad, then the rooms will have terrible sound insulation (a common complaint). If the rooms are good, the food will be lousy.

Parkview Hotel (美崙大飯店; Měilún Dàfāndiàn; % 822 2111; www.parkview-hotel.com/pv_hotel_e/pv_1-1_e.htm; 1-1 Lin Yuan; 林園1-1號; r from NT5400) If you must stay in a five-star, try this place. The amenities include a golf course, tennis courts, restaurants, a swimming pool and everything else you can imagine.

Eating

Hualien cuisine is a mixture of typical Taiwanese cuisine (soups and noodles) and the food of the aboriginal tribes who for centuries have sustained themselves on fish, wild game and wild vegetables and flowers. The most enjoyable way to try the local food is to head to one of the many markets and sample what's on display. Central Hualien, along Fu Shing Rd, is a good place to start, as are the markets around Jung Jeng and Jung Shan Rds. Some things to sample include *dùn páigǔ* (燻排骨; stewed spareribs) and *kǔguā* (苦瓜; bitter gourd).

For the latest restaurants and cafés check out *Highway 11* magazine.

Ye Hsiang Shi Dian (Yè Xiāng Biānshí Diàn; 42 Shin Yi St; dishes NT40; 𠄎 breakfast, lunch & dinner) This tiny place is a favourite of locals for its steaming bowls of pork and seafood dumplings. The restaurant has been around for over 70 years and is known all over Taiwan.

Buk Kut Ten (Ròugǔchá; % 835 4499; 477-2 Jung Shan Rd; dishes NT60) The speciality at this little makeshift shop is southeast Asian-style wild-boar soup with herbal medicine. Other meat and noodle dishes are available, as is an English menu.

For seafood, go to Gouzaiwei Night Market (Gōuzǎiwēi Yèshì), the oldest market in town, sometimes nicknamed 'Seafood Street'. Here

you'll find such treats as squid-on-a-stick and grilled clams. The market is near the intersection of Nanching and Po'ai Sts.

There's a small night market out at Nan Bin Seaside Park. Grab a snack here and then go for a stroll along the ocean front.

Drinking

Hualien has many trendy cafés and teahouses along its main streets. On Linsen Rd, east of Jung Shan Rd, you'll find a small bar district with at least six establishments to choose from. Also check out the seaside parks for bars with outdoor seating.

Shopping

Hualien's main export, marble, is all over the city. Numerous souvenir shops sell marble carvings, but be aware that the mining of marble is having a devastating effect on the local environment.

Hualien's delicious cakes and cookies are available at bakeries and gift shops around town.

Hui Pi Hsu Cake Shop (Huì Bǐ Xū; 65 Jung Hua Rd) This shop has been in business since 1899 and is well known for its delicious peanut and sesame cookies. Goodies are sold in bulk or in attractive tins that make good souvenirs.

Ya Chi Hsiao Fang (Yǎ Jī Xiǎo Fāng; 84 Sanmin Rd) To find something with more lasting value, head to this government-certified antique shop.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Far Eastern Air Transport (% 826 5702), **Mandarin Airlines** (% 826 8785) and **Transasia Airways** (% 826 1365) have reservation counters at Hualien Airport (www.hualairport.gov.tw). There are flights from Hualien to Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung.

There's an **information desk** (% 821 0768; 𠄎 7am-9pm) on the airport's 2nd floor.

BUS

The bus situation along the east coast is rather confusing (even to locals), with multiple companies operating out of multiple stations. Thankfully, the information centre at the train station is up to date on all this and can advise you on the latest. You are well advised to seek their help to confirm times and departure points.

The **Hualien Bus Company** (% 832 3485) has a full station downtown at the end of Jung Shan

Rd and a small kiosk to the right of the train station information centre (as you face the centre).

The **Dingdong Bus Company** (% 089-333 023; 138-6 Guo Lian 1st Rd) has no station, just a small bus stop sign to the left of the train station information centre as you face the centre.

Both companies run buses to Taitung via Hwy 11. Dingdong runs about four buses a day (NT479, three hours), while the Hualien Bus Company runs one every hour or so. However, most Hualien buses only go as far as Chengkung.

Between Hualien and Taitung, it's possible to get off the bus at certain spots, do some exploring and hop on the next bus when it comes by. This is a slow way to travel, but possible. Verify when the next bus is supposed to come to avoid being stranded.

The Hualien Bus Company also runs buses to Tienhsiang and the National Park Headquarters in Taroko Gorge.

TRAIN

There are frequent trains running between Taipei and Hualien (fast/slow NT455/343, 2½/four hours). They can be crowded, so make sure you buy tickets ahead of time to reserve a seat.

In early 2007, the Taiwan Railway Administration purchased a fleet of tilting trains from Japan that can cover the distance from Taipei to Hualien in less than two hours. They should be running by the time you read this.

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The Hualien Bus Company runs buses to the airport (NT25, every 20 minutes) from its downtown station.

CAR, MOTORCYCLE & SCOOTER

Vehicles are available for rent around the train station. For a scooter or motorcycle, rates are NT400 to NT500 a day and for a car NT1500 to NT2000, excluding petrol. Most scooter shops ask for a Taiwanese driver's licence. If you don't have one, go to **Pony Leasing & Rental Group** (% 826 2538), just to the left of the Ching Yeh Hotel. For some reason staff here will still rent scooters to foreign visitors with just an International Driver's Licence.

We have also heard of people having more luck renting scooters at Hsincheng, the closest train station to Taroko Gorge.

TAXI

Hualien taxi drivers congregate around the train and bus stations, hustling passengers for tours around the city and to Taroko Gorge. If you are interested, a Taroko tour will cost up to NT3000 a day, depending on the time involved.

TAROKO GORGE 太魯閣

％ 03

Just 15km north of Hualien, inside Taroko National Park, lies Taroko Gorge (Tàilǔgé), Taiwan's top tourist destination. With its marble-walled canyons, lush vegetation and cliffs so outsized they block out the sky, Taroko Gorge puts the 'Formosa' in *Ilha Formosa*.

Taroko contains almost half of all the animal species in Taiwan, including the Formosan black bear and wild boar. It's unlikely travelers will come across these larger animals but it's not hard to spot a Taiwan macaque or two. The park covers over 120,000 hectares and rises from sea level in the east to over 3700m further west. The blue-green Liwu River cuts through the centre, forging deep slitted valleys and ravines before emptying into the sea.

Some people get immense satisfaction just touring the park in a bus, car or taxi, while taking in the majestic scenery. For the more active, there are numerous hiking trails and some lovely spots for swimming and river tracing. (Just do these activities out of sight of regular tourists as many Taiwanese can't swim, but for some reason think water is safe when they see others in it. Summer drownings are in the hundreds every year as a result.)

You can visit the park any time of year, but be warned (with an extra stern look) that during weekends and holidays the place is a madhouse, especially on the road. Occasionally you may get stuck in traffic for a considerable length of time as two tour buses try to figure out a way to get past each other in some narrow, twisting tunnel. On the other hand, if you go on any of the longer trails, you will soon leave the crowds behind.

Quite a few visitors take a bus to Tienhsiang and walk the 19km back down to the National Park Headquarters. While this is a great way to take in all of the scenery, as increased traffic in the gorge has spoiled a once enjoyable walk. If you do walk, wear reflective clothing

and bring a torch for the tunnels. Try leaving as early in the morning as possible to avoid traffic. Mid-morning, mid-week, mid-winter would be an ideal time to go.

Summer is obviously the best time to do any river tracing or swimming; unless a typhoon is coming, the weather is usually sunny. Winters are chilly and there's often drizzle, but that keeps the crowds away. May and June are the rainy season.

History

The original inhabitants of the park area were the Atayal people, known for their fine weaving skills, facial tattoos and headhunting. Most of the Atayal have now moved out of the park but a few families remain, supporting themselves by selling woven products to tourists. Many of the trails in the gorge now used by tourists were once Atayal hunting and trading routes. For example, the old Hohuan Trail (Héhuān Yuèlǐng Gǔdào), the precursor of the Central Cross-Island Hwy, was once used for crossing the island.

In 1914 the Japanese entered the gorge hoping to gain access to the forestry and mineral resources. The Atayal resisted but the Japanese crushed all opposition with brutal military force. They then began to cut roads and widen existing trails. A road was built as far as Tienhsiang, and Taroko became a popular hiking spot for Japanese tourists in the 1930s. Later, in the 1950s, the KMT extended the road as part of the first Cross-Central Hwy; not surprisingly, much of it followed the old Hohuan Trail.

Taroko National Park was officially established on 28 November 1986.

Orientation & Information

The **National Park Headquarters** (Guójiā Gōngyuán Guǎnlǐ Chū; ％ 862 1100; www.taroko.gov.tw; 7 8.30am-4.45pm, closed 2nd Mon of month), at the entrance of the gorge, provides useful information on the status of trails and road conditions. It also has free maps and brochures of hiking trails and a bulletin board with bus schedules and notices to travellers. There's also a café and a souvenir shop with books for sale.

Tienhsiang (Tiānxiǎng), the tiny resort area at the other end of the gorge, is where most of the accommodation is centred. You'll also find here a post office, a smaller visitor centre and a few small cafeterias (with awful food) next to the bus station.

Amazingly, there are still no ATMs in the park that accept international cards.

Sights**WENSHAN HOT SPRINGS 文山溫泉**

How we miss this place. About 3km above Tienhsiang, these lovely secluded **springs** (Wénshān Wēnquán) once flowed into an open basin of solid marble beside the Dasha River (Dàshā Xi). In 2005, however, a rock-slide killed and injured several tourists and the springs were closed. At the time of writing, they were still closed pending a final decision by the park's administration. We believe this decision will be in favour of opening the springs, though the water may be diverted to a safer location.

ETERNAL SPRINGS SHRINE 長春祠

This **shrine** (Cháng Chūn Cí) sits on a steep cliff overlooking the Liwu River and above a rushing waterfall fed by springs that never dry. It is dedicated to the 450 workers who lost their lives building the highway. It's a strangely beautiful site.

To reach the shrine, cross the suspension bridge and hike up the steps.

HSIANGTE TEMPLE 祥德寺

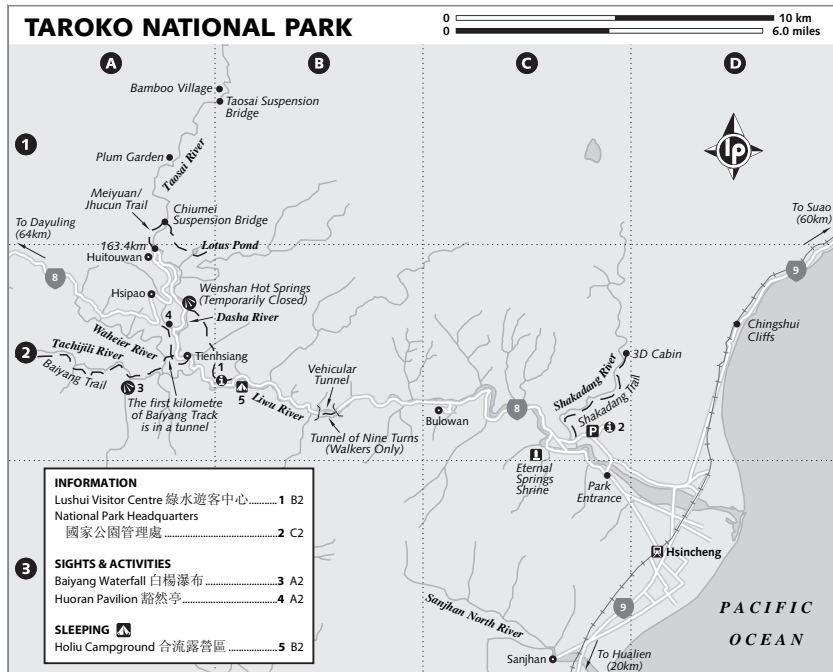
Just before Tienhsiang a suspension bridge leads to the **Hsiangte Temple** (Xiàngdé Sì), which sits high on a cliff overlooking the valley. The temple is named after the Buddhist monk Kuangchin, who prayed for the safety of the workmen as they built the Central Cross-Island Hwy.

Activities**SHORT HIKES**

For short hikes, pick up the free brochure at the National Park Headquarters. You can also easily find and follow most trails using our overview map. These hikes require little effort by the walker and many are done by tourists in silly shoes coming directly off a bus. The trails are all wide, clear, obvious, well marked, and safe unless they have been damaged by a typhoon or earthquake. Of course, this does not mean they are not still immensely scenic and enjoyable.

Note that the following lists do not exhaust the possibilities of hiking in the park.

The **Shakadang Trail** (砂卡礑步道; Shākádāng Bùdào), formerly the Mysterious Valley Trail, is a flat 4.4km hike (one hour one way). The



route follows the crystal-clear Shakadang River, which winds through marble canyons and boulder-strewn flats that create massive pools of blueish-green water (tinted by limestone in the rocks). Many outdoors groups from Hualien come here in summer to swim and river trace, though the park's board members are not entirely happy about that.

Coming from the National Park Headquarters, the trailhead is to the right after emerging from the first tunnel. Follow the stairs down to the river to access the path. Note that you can only go as far as 3D Cabin without a permit.

The **Tunnel of Nine Turns** (九曲洞; Jiǔ Qū Dòng) is actually a 2km section of the original highway through the park. In the early '90s, the highway was diverted to leave this section – the most scenic in the entire gorge – open to walkers. Don't miss this one!

Our favourite short hike is along the **Baiyang Trail** (白楊步道; Báiyáng Bùdào), which runs high over a river valley, through a series of solar-power lit tunnels, to the high **Baiyang Waterfall** (Báiyáng Pùbù). The entire trek to the waterfall and back is 3.6km and takes about two hours to complete. The trail starts about 500m up the road from Tienhsiang. Look for the tunnel on the left; you have to go through this to get to the trail on the other side. Bring a torch as it's 380m long!

Once part of the Hohuan Trail, the **Lushui-Holiu Trail** (綠水 - 合流步道; Lùshuǐ-Hèliú Bùdào) runs for 2km above the highway along a cliff, with fantastic views of the Liwu River. The trailhead is behind the Lushui Visitor Centre. Note that at the time of writing a new five-hour-long trail from Lushui to Wenshan (the site of the old hot springs) was about to open. You'll probably need a permit for this so inquire at the park headquarters.

The **Huoran Pavilion Trail** (豁然亭步道; Huòrán Tíng Bùdào) is short but steep, gaining 400m in elevation in 1.9km. The trail leads to **Huoran Pavilion**, which has fantastic views of the Liwu River and Tienhsiang. Note that the trail turns into a slippery mess when it rains and is best avoided at these times. Landslides occasionally close the area, so check with the National Park Headquarters before starting out. The trail starts off the road on the way up to the Youth Activity Centre.

LONGER HIKES

For longer hikes, pick up a copy of *Trails of Taroko Gorge and Su-Hua Areas* (NT220) at

the National Park Headquarters. The book has a chapter on most of the hikes (long and short) in the park. Useful trail maps are included with clear information on length, times, conditions and things to observe along the way.

It's always good to confirm trail conditions with staff at the National Park Headquarters before setting out on any longer hike. It's important to follow only those trails that you find on the park's maps or in its books. It seems some readers (using very old *Taiwan Lonely Planet* guides) sometimes set out on trails that have been closed for years because of typhoon and earthquake damage. Several foreign visitors have lost their lives over the years most likely wandering off the beaten path. Don't add to the list.

The Shakadang Trail officially ends at 3D Cabin but if you have permits you can continue on the **Dali-Datung Trail** (大禮 - 大同步道; Dàlǐ-Dàtóng Bùdào), leading to Dali and Datung, two isolated Atayal villages. At the time of writing, the trails were getting new signs and being made more accessible and clear, and should be ready for hiking by the time you read this. Maps should be available at the park headquarters. Apply for permits at the police station by the park headquarters. The trail should take about seven to eight hours return.

About 6km north of the main road from Tienhsiang, at the 163.4km mark on a switchback, is the trailhead for the **Meiyuan/Jhucun Trail** (Bamboo Village/Plum Garden Trail; 梅園竹村步道; Méi Yuán/Zhúcūn Bùdào). This is a clear, level 9.2km-long trail (one way) that takes six hours return. It's an exciting trail in parts, especially where the path has been chiselled into the walls of a cliff, or where it crosses over high suspension bridges.

At the Jiumei (Chiumei) suspension bridge there is a 4.3km side trail to **Lotus Pond** (蓮花池步道; Liánhuā Chí Bùdào), a former farming area now reverting to its natural state. It is a three-hour return hike from the suspension bridge to Lotus Pond.

You can camp at Plum Garden and Bamboo Village, but make sure you ask the park for permission first.

RIVER TRACING

The Sanjhan North River (三棧北溪) flows through southern Taroko Park. A short 2km

trail has been built along the river following a canal built by the US government in 1952 (clean, clear water still flows down the canal), but the real reason to come here is to river trace to an area called the **Golden Canyon** (黃金峽谷; Huángjīn Xiágǔ). Those who have done the trip rave about the beauty of the gorge, the numerous waterfalls and the deep swimming pools.

River-tracing outings are organised year-round by the local aborigines in Sanjhan from the community **activity centre** (三棧社區發展協會; Sānzhàn shèqū fāzhǎn xiéhúì; % 826 9916, 0972-100 684; <http://pratan.eypp.com.tw/eypp/front/bin/home.phtml>). The cost is NT2000 per person including all rental equipment. Trips take about eight hours return and start from the activity centre, usually in the early morning. You should be able to just go and join a group.

Sanjhan is just south of Taroko Park on the way back to Hualien. Heading south, turn right off Hwy 9 at the sign for Sanjhan (Sanchan; 三棧; Sānzhàn). When you cross the bridge into the village stay right along the river. The community centre is obvious, 150m on at the end of the road on the left.

Note that you are technically supposed to apply for a police permit to enter the village but there often may not always be someone on duty.

Tours

All travel agencies in Hualien and Taipei can arrange full- or half-day tours of the gorge. **Taiwan Tour Bus** (% 0800-011 765; half-/full-day tours NT600/988) leaves from beside the visitor centre at the Hualien train station. The staff at the visitor centre can help you purchase tickets.

Taking a tour is a convenient way to see Taroko but it doesn't leave enough time for exploring.

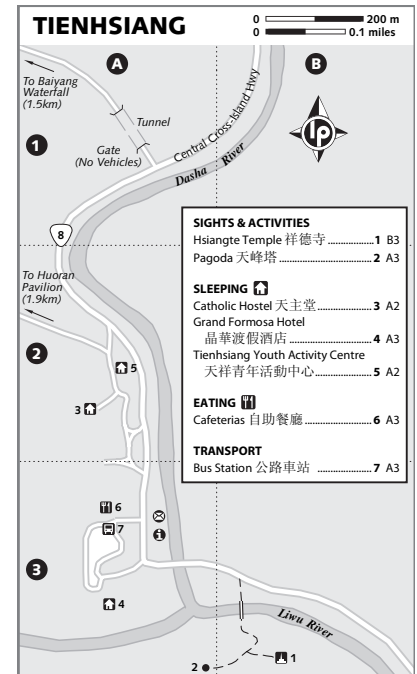
Festivals & Events

Since 2000, the park has been the venue for the autumn **Taroko International Marathon**. Organisers like to stress that it's 'the only canyon marathon in the world'. The event attracts runners from all over the world and there are 42.195km and 21km marathons. Contact the park for more information.

Sleeping

TIENHSIANG

Catholic Hostel (Tiānzhǔ Táng; % 869 1122; dm NT250, d/tw NT1000/1200, s/d without shower NT350/600) The



Catholic Hostel has been the principal budget hostel in Tienhsiang for 50 years. The place is getting a bit long in the tooth but it still offers clean decent rooms and dorms at non-nonsense prices. The dorm rooms are a bit stark though, with old metal frame bunk beds and zero decorative touches.

Tienhsiang Youth Activity Centre (Tiānxiāng Qīngnián Huódòng Zhōngxīn; % 869 1111; <http://gcysyac.myweb.hinet.net>; dm NT450, r from NT1700) Up the hill from the Catholic Hostel, the Youth Activity Centre is the only other budget option in the gorge. Rooms are simple – try to get one that faces the canyon – and discounted by 15% midweek. Many travellers consider the dorms here better value than those at the Catholic Hostel.

Grand Formosa Hotel (Jīnghuá Dǔjià Jiùdiàn; % 869 1155; www.grandformosa-taroko.com.tw; r from NT6000) This is the first building you'll see upon entering Tienhsiang. The five-star hotel is fairly generic, both inside and out, but rooms are comfortable and spacious, with fancy marble bathrooms. The hotel boasts a lounge, two restaurants, a café and a gift shop. Shuttle buses from Hualien airport or train station are available.

BULOWAN 布洛灣

Meaning 'echo' in Atayal, Bulowan (Bùluòwān) is a former Atayal mountain village. In the upper village, on a high meadow surrounded by postcard-perfect scenery, the **Leader Village Taroko** (利德布洛灣山月村; Lidé Bùluòwān Shānyuè Cūn; ☎ 610 111; www.leaderhotels.com; 2-person cabins incl breakfast NT4500) rents out 36 quality wood cabins with old-time porches to let you relax and take in the views. This is by far the best place to stay in the park.

Thankfully, there is no KTV or loud entertainment permitted (though there are nightly aboriginal musical performances). Management encourages guests to be quiet and enjoy what nature has to offer, which includes a small trail behind the cabins where monkeys are sure to be seen, along with the occasional civet and deer. Our only complaint is the pricing system, which is highly misleading. Despite quoting prices per person, rooms are only rented at a double price, and the package deals usually offer no savings at all.

Bulowan is about 8km west of the park entrance. To get to the village, look for the English sign on the main road that indicates the turn-off. In the lower village a few aboriginal families sell and display good quality **arts & crafts** (☎ 8.30am-4.30pm, closed 1st & 3rd Mon of month).

CAMPING

There is a free camp site in Holiu (合流) with wooden platforms and bathrooms with showers. It's a lovely spot on a flat spot overlooking the gorge, but there aren't that many tent sites so arrive early on a weekend.

Eating

Tienhsiang Youth Activity Centre (☎ 869 1111; breakfast NT100, lunch & dinner NT150) Meals are available to guests and nonguests here. Buy a ticket in advance. For breakfast, let the centre know before 9pm the night before.

Leader Village Taroko (lunch & dinner set meals NT400-600) This place in Bulowan serves excellent aboriginal food prepared by aboriginal chefs. Portions are large and every last bite is a delight. A typical set meal might include both barbecued wild pig and mountain chicken, soup, rice steamed in bamboo tubes, and exotic mountain vegetables. Menus are in English.

Grand Formosa Hotel (lunch/dinner buffet NT600/650) The breakfast buffet here is free for guests

but NT400 for everyone else. The food in the Western restaurant is only mediocre; it's much better in the Chinese restaurant.

The cafeterias around the bus station in Tienhsiang deserve a sign above them reading 'Serving barely edible food since 1986'.

Getting There & Away BUS

The Hualien Bus Company runs frequent buses every day from Hualien to the park headquarters at Taroko Gorge (NT77, one hour) from its train station branch. There are eight buses a day to Tienhsiang (NT155, 90 minutes). Check the visitor centre at the Hualien train station for the latest schedule. The earliest bus leaves Hualien at 5.30am, the last at 9.30pm. Note that not all buses go to the visitor centre.

TAXI

Taxi tours to the gorge are easy enough to arrange – cabbies will come looking for you, rather than the other way around. A return trip through the gorge with stops will cost around NT2500 from Hualien. Another option is to have your driver take you through the gorge and drop you off at Tienhsiang, which will cost about NT1500.

TRAIN

Hsincheng (Sincheng) Station (新城站; fast/slow train NT409/315, 2½/3½ hours from Taipei) is quite close to the park entrance and preferred by travellers who don't want to go to Hualien. All buses to Taroko NP stop here.

HIGHWAY 11

There are two routes to decide between when travelling south of Hualien: Hwys 9 and 11. Hwy 9 (see p196) cuts through the verdant East Rift Valley (Huādōng Zōng Gǔ), while Hwy 11 travels down the east coast, skirting some stunning coastal scenery. The coastal route allows you to visit small aboriginal villages, numerous beaches, the arts scene at Dulan, and Lanyu and Green Islands (see the Taiwan's Islands, p288). There are several places to camp along the way, and more and more guesthouses seem to spring up every year.

Much of Hwy 11 falls under the auspices of the East Coast National Scenic Area, whose

visitor centre (☎ 089-841 520; www.eastcoast-nsa.gov.tw/en/index.php; 25 Shintsuen Rd, Chenggong; ☎ 9am-5pm) is between Duli and Chengkung.

Getting Around

The Dingdong Bus Company runs several buses daily from its Hualien train station bus stop to Taitung (NT354, 3½ hours). Hualien Bus Company runs buses about every hour but most do not go all the way to Taitung, only to Chinpu or Chengkung. See the visitor centre outside the Hualien train station for the latest schedule.

Your own scooter, car or bicycle is ideal for travelling Hwy 11 unless you are just heading out to one site.

HUALIEN OCEAN PARK 海洋公園

This **ocean park** (Hualien Far Glory Ocean Park; Huálián Hǎiyáng Gōngyuán; www.hualienoceanpark.com.tw/e/page01.htm; admission adult/child NT890/790; ☎ 9am-5pm) is a large aquarium/amusement park south of Hualien off Hwy 11. The facilities are first-class and attractions include dolphin shows, sea lion exhibits and a water fun park. Kids love this place.

The easiest way to get here if you don't have your own transportation is to take a **Taiwan Tour Bus** (☎ 0800-011 765) from outside the visitor centre in front of the Hualien train station. The price is around NT1000 per person and includes transport and tickets. Inquire at the visitor centre for details.

COW MOUNTAIN BEACH 牛山

A short but wide stretch of sandy coastline with rocky cliffs, Cow Mountain Beach (Niúshān) is about 27km or so south of Hualien. It's a lovely place to enjoy the surf and escape the crowds of the more developed beaches on the east coast. Note that there is no swimming here, though, because of the rough surf and a quick drop-off.

Apart from the quiet beachside atmosphere, travellers come here to stay in the **Huting Recreation Area** (呼庭休閒區; Hūting Xiūxián Qū; ☎ 03-860 1400; ☎ 10am-7pm), an old grazing area (Cow Mountain is called Huting by the local aborigines) developed by a friendly Ami family into a rustic resort. The recreation area is just back from the beach up a short road. There's a café-restaurant serving Ami food, a simple camp site (NT150 per person) set up on the open grassy fields, and very rustic driftwood cabins (double/twin with

shared bathroom NT1200/2200, with a 30% discount from Sunday to Thursday).

The beach and recreation area are about 1.5km off the highway. Look for the sign with the cow head on it for the turn-off.

JICI (CHICHI) BEACH 磯崎海濱遊憩區

This **beach** (Jīqí Hǎi Bīn Yóuqī Qū; admission NT60) is one of only two you can swim at between Hualien and Taitung so if you're looking for a dip, a paddle, or a bit of surfing, don't pass by – at least from May to September between 9am and 6pm.

Erosion has sadly taken its toll in recent years and body surfing is becoming a bit more painful as a line of rough pebbles extends along the shoreline. But the beach is still an excellent summer playground and the almost completely undeveloped coastline is very scenic. There are some nice hikes up to the bluffs to the south, and a waterfall walk about 20 minutes up the river on the other side of the highway. Many people trace up for a shower as a fun way to conclude their day.

The beach is developed to a degree, meaning you'll find showers, changing rooms and rental equipment, as well as a **campground** (☎ 03-871 1251; tent site/cabins NT500/1500). All Hualien and Dingdong buses pass by the beach so you should never have to wait more than an hour for a ride.

SHIHTIPING 石梯坪

Shihtiping (Shítīping) is a small fishing village halfway between Hualien and Taitung, 30km south of Jici Beach. Shihtiping means 'stone steps', referring to the volcanic rock along the coastline that has slowly eroded to form natural stone steps. It is this coastline that draws visitors in and a pleasant park has been developed with paths down and along the rocks. If you love exploring rocky, rugged coastlines you'll be in your element here.

There's a **camp site** (tent site NT250) with raised platforms that face the sea, which is just 30m away. It's a wonderful spot to camp out and there are showers and barbecue pits.

CAVES OF THE EIGHT IMMORTALS 八仙洞

A mandatory stop for all tour buses going up and down the east coast, the **Caves of the Eight**

Immortals (Bashian Cave; Bāxiān Dòng; 八仙洞 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm) are hardly worth your while. If you have the choice to pass them by, do so.

PLATFORM OF THE THREE IMMORTALS 三仙台

This series of **arched bridges** leading to a small coral island that was once a promontory joined to the mainland is also known as Sansiantai (Sānxiāntái). The island's three large stone formations have been likened to the three immortals of Chinese mythology – hence the name.

Sansiantai is a very pleasant spot to wander around for a couple of hours, though on holidays and weekends it is a bit of a madhouse with all the tour bus crowds.

CHENGGONG 成功

To the south of the Platform of the Three Immortals is the fishing village of Chengkung (Chénggōng), the largest town between Hualien and Taitung. The town has a lively fish market and is a good place to sample local seafood. Every afternoon between 3pm and 4pm the daily catch is unloaded and goes on auction. All the noise and excitement makes the auction entertaining to watch. Around the harbour are plenty of small seafood restaurants worth checking out. Dried fish slices are a speciality of Chengkung; they make a very good, though smelly, snack.

Incredibly, Chengkung has an English website (www.changkang.gov.tw/) highlighting its history and a few pretty natural spots in the area.

AMI CULTURAL CENTRE

阿美族民俗中心

About 11km south of Chengkung is the **Ami Cultural Centre** (Ami Folk Centre; Àmèi Zú Mínsú Zhōngxīn; ☎ 089-841 751; 25 Sinchuan Rd, Sinyi Borough, Chengkung; 9am-noon & 1.30-4pm Wed-Mon), which is highly recommended for its exhibits of Ami handicrafts and traditional architecture. The centre is on the grounds of the East Coast National Scenic Area office.

JINZUN RECREATION AREA

金樽遊憩區

Another 11km south on Hwy 11 is this recreation area (Jinzūn Yóuqì Qū) centred on a beautiful 3km-long sand beach hemmed in by high cliffs. There's not much to do here other than head down the stairs to the beach,

stroll around and admire the view (and maybe have a picnic, get your feet wet in the surf, take some photos, paint a seascape, read a book, write a book etc, etc).

DULAN 都蘭

pop 500

The tiny town of Dulan (Dūlán) hardly merited a nod years ago as you passed by on the way south. But in recent years this has changed as a thriving local arts scene has taken off. There's live music on the weekends and a larger arts festival held in autumn. Dulan is also the site for many of the larger yearly aboriginal festivals (see opposite). Check the Taitung County Cultural Affairs Bureau website (www.ccl.tct.edu.tw/) or the Taitung County website (www.taitung.gov.tw/index.htm) for dates and details.

The Dulan area has been inhabited for thousands of years, as is evidenced by archaeological ruins of the Beinan culture in the hills west of town. These days it has one of the largest Ami settlements along the east coast, and the aboriginal presence in the arts scene is strong.

The **Dulan Sugar Factory** (都蘭糖廠; Dūlán Tāngchǎng; ☎ 089-530 060; 61 Dulan Village; 台東縣東河鄉都蘭村61號), a once-busy processing plant, was shut down in the 1990s. Local artisans and craftspeople began to use the abandoned warehouse space for makeshift studios and soon a genuine local arts scene developed, which continues to develop and gain in reputation. Every Saturday night there is live music on a driftwood-framed stage. Both Taiwanese and foreign musicians can be seen playing, and the event attracts people from all over the island. As you arrive in Dulan from the north it is easy to spot the factory on the right near the edge of town: it looks like a factory, with high walls and smokestacks, except for the incongruous driftwood stage and a small café.

Just south of Dulan, around the 152km mark, is a big stone with a sign for the road heading up to the trailhead for **Dulan Mountain** (都蘭山; Dūlán Shān), a sacred place for the Ami people. The sign says the trailhead is 2km away but it is actually 4km and they are four very steep kilometres. Small cars should not attempt to go up. In fact, you could just begin your hike here as there is little development the whole way up. The trail was just being finished at the time of research. From the

trailhead to the top and back will probably take a few hours. The views should be fantastic as they certainly were from the viewing platform at the start of the trail.

Just south of Dulan is the geological oddity **Water Running Up** (水往上流; Shuǐ Wǎng Shàng Liú). Look for the English roadside sign that leads to a large ditch off the highway (or just follow the tour buses). The water in the ditch really appears to be flowing upwards for 100m or so. See if you can figure out why.

If you wish to spend the night in Dulan, inquire at the café at the sugar factory about guesthouse rooms. As for eating, there are many small shops along the highway (the main road through town) to grab a bite.

SHANYUAN BEACH 杉原海水浴場

Beautiful Shanyuan Beach (Shānyuán Hǎishuǐ Yùchǎng) is the closest beach to Taitung and the second swimmable beach between Hualien and Taitung. With its soft yellow sand, tropical

blue water and stunning mountain backdrop, it's a fantastic place to enjoy the natural life.

Unfortunately, the beach has been officially closed for some time as a 'five-star' hotel is built, and built, and built. At the time of writing it was said to be another two years before the hotel would be completed. If the model plans are accurate, the hotel is going to look like a Taiwanese technical junior college (c 1975).

Currently, you can still enjoy the beach by simply entering it from the north end beside a temple.

HSIAO YELIU 小野柳

Just a few kilometres north of Taitung is Hsiao Yeliu (Siao Yeliou; Xiǎo Yèliú), a **coastal park** known for its bizarre rock and coral formations, formed over thousands of years by wind and water erosion. The landscape is truly unearthly here, with rocks curving and twisting into all manner of fantastic shapes.

ABORIGINAL FESTIVALS ON THE EAST COAST

Dates for festivals are only roughly the same each year so it's important to find out the exact schedule before you go. Fortunately that is easy these days. Call the 24-hour tourist hotline (☎ 0800 011 765) or check out the events calendars on the websites for Hualien (<http://tour-hualien.hl.gov.tw/en/index.jsp>) and Taitung County (www.taitung.gov.tw/english/index.php). The Events page on the National Youth Commission's website (www.youthtravel.net.tw/web/index.php) is also a good source of information.

- **Ami Harvest Festival** This festival is the largest in Taiwan and takes place every July or August in various towns around Hualien and Taitung Counties. In June tribal chiefs choose the exact date.
- **Rukai Harvest Festival** One highlight of this harvest festival is watching tribal youths play on giant swings. The swings are built to allow guys to show their affection for the gals by sending them higher and higher into the air. The festival takes place every July or August.
- **Bunun Ear Shooting Festival and Millet Harvest Festival** The Ear Shooting Festival takes place around the end of April and is meant to honour the legendary hunting heroes of the tribe and to teach young boys how to use bows and arrows. The Millet Harvest Festival is held after the April millet harvest. Both festivals take place in towns throughout the East Rift Valley.
- **Paiwan Bamboo Pole Festival** The Paiwan tribe holds this festival every five years in October to honour its ancestors and to pray for a good harvest. The festival takes place in Daren township, Taitung. The next festival will take place in 2012.
- **Puyuma Tribe Annual Festival** This festival combines the old monkey and hunting rituals with the larger coming-of-age ceremony for young men. The festival is celebrated by tribal members in Beinan township, near Taitung, at the end of December.
- **Yami Flying Fish Festival** The Yami on Lanyu Island hold this festival every March to May during the beginning of the flying fish season. Like the Puyuma festival, this celebrates a young man's passage into adulthood. For more info, see p318.

A large park has been developed around the most interesting stretch of coastline and most nature lovers would have a happy time here exploring the rocks and tidal pools. It's also a fun spot for families with young children, as the area is compact but full of surprises. It's simple to get around and there are English signs. There's a good **camping ground** (per camp site NT350) at the back of the park, with wooden tent platforms facing the sea. Bring your own food. A **visitor centre** (☎ 089-280 093; 11 9am-5pm) has English maps and information about the various rock formations.

HIGHWAY 9

The East Rift Valley is a long fertile strip of land between the Central Mountain and Coastal Mountain Ranges. It's great farming country and highly scenic. There are plenty of hiking and biking routes – and even a white-water rafting venue – to keep the outdoor enthusiast happy, and numerous hot springs exist for those who want to indulge themselves. A few quirky highlights include the fields of orange day lilies that bloom in late summer, and the wetlands in Mataian. Those interested in organic farming should check out the scene at Loshan.

Travelling by train, bus or your own vehicle is simple. The road is relatively flat and straight and there are English signs for most of the places we list. Cyclists can consider taking quiet alternative routes such as County Rds 64 and 195, and Hwys 23 and 197. Camp sites are available along the way and there are some lovely, lovely B&Bs.

LIYU LAKE 鯉魚潭

This very scenic 2km-long lake (Liyú Tán), shaped somewhat like a carp (*liyú* means 'carp' in Chinese), sits in the foothills of the Central Mountain Range about 19km southwest of Hualien. It's the largest natural inland lake in Taiwan, and has a splendid backdrop of lush green hills. It's also blessedly free of overdevelopment. There are pavilions and walking trails and even boat rental shops along the shores, but they are mostly of wood-and-stone construction and blend in nicely with the environment.

Families with small children who enjoy camping or picnicking will like it here. There are safe bike trails around the lake, and short

hikes in the nearby hills. There's also a forest recreation centre just 1km away that highlights the history of the logging industry in Taiwan. Most kids will get a kick out of the real locomotive engines on display and the old logging equipment.

Information

There's a **visitor centre** (☎ 03-864 1691; 11 8.30am-5.30pm) at the lake with English maps of the area. At the time of writing there was no English sign for the centre; it's on the north side of the lake.

Sights & Activities CYCLING

For the casual biker, there's a 4km **bike path** (*Jiàotàchē Zhuānyòngdào*) around the lake itself, but for a real adventure consider heading out to **Hwy 14** (midweek is best). It's more like a backcountry road than a highway, and runs through a wild, rugged, marble-walled canyon that is like a smaller version of Taroko Gorge. The road is very narrow in parts, and goes through a series of long, dark winding tunnels, so headlights are essential.

To get to Hwy 14, head north along Hwy 9 from Liyu Lake. Cross the bridge heading back to Hualien and then turn left to follow the river upstream. Cross the next bridge and continue upstream (now on the left bank). Just past the power plant, stop and register with the police and pay NT10 (bring your passport).

The road goes on for 10km or so, ending at a dam. After that a very narrow farm road continues up a side canyon. This is the eastern portion of the Nenggao Cross Island Historic Trail (see p230).

There are **swimming holes** down a side road. After passing the police station continue for a few kilometres until you reach a large red bridge. Don't cross, but instead take the lower road to the left going upstream along the Chingshui River. After the first tunnel look down to the right. See the massive, marble-lined natural swimming hole with deep blue-ish-green crystal clear water? To get down, ride up to the second tunnel and look for the stairs to the right (before the tunnel entrance). Head down to the river and then river trace downstream to the swimming hole. Decent quality bikes can be rented on the west side of Liyu Lake for NT250 per day. Look for the building with the Giant bike sign on top.

HIKING

You can walk around the lake in about an hour, or do the **Liyu Mountain** (鯉魚山; Liyú Shān; 600m) circuit in three to four hours.

CHIHNAN NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION AREA 池南國家森林遊樂區

This **small forest reserve** (Chíhnán Guójiā Sēnlín Yóulèqū; ☎ 03-864 1594; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>; adult/child NT50/25; 11 8am-5pm) exists to preserve the history of Taiwan's logging industry. The old steam locomotive engines stole the show (for us anyway), though the museum of old logging equipment and the cable system are pretty interesting too. The visitor centre has an informative English brochure, which includes a simple map. Sometimes there are English-speaking tour guides available.

The reserve is just west of the lake. There are clear signs to it in English.

Sleeping & Eating

The **Liyu Lake Campground** (鯉魚潭露營區; Liyú Tán Lǚyíngqū; camp sites/with shelter NT500/800, wooden cabins NT1200) is just 1km south of the lake off Hwy 9. The modern campground has showers, barbecue areas, tent sites and small wooden cabins. There's a nice clean flowing river behind the campground to paddle in.

There's a string of simple restaurants and noodle shops on the main road across from the lake.

Getting There & Away

To get to Liyu Lake by bus, go to the Hualien Bus Company station (☎ 03-833 8146) on Jung Shan Rd and catch a bus heading to Shoufong (壽豐). Buses (NT52, 20 minutes) run about every two hours.

LINTIANSHAN (LIN TIEN SHAN)

林田山林業文化園區

Lintianshan (Líntiánshān) was once a Japanese logging village, with a population of over 2000. It's now a quaint ghost town (with a few remaining residents), which highlights a colonial heritage that involved stripping this island of most of its ancient forests. But it's worth a visit if you are in the area. The surrounding mountains are beautiful and there is a genuine historical atmosphere to the village, which is made entirely out of spruce. The atmosphere here grows on you.

A fire in 2001 destroyed a whole section of old houses but there is still plenty to see, and

there are ongoing efforts continue to restore what was burned. There is even talk of opening up the old hot springs that once served the village.

When you visit, check out the nearby river. The water is a beautiful light blue-green colour. At first we thought it was pollution – it was so unreal looking – but it turned out to be the natural result of minerals washing into the water from the eastern mountains. You see some of this same blue colouring in Taroko Gorge, but it's never this bright.

The turnoff for Lintianshan is marked in English on Hwy 9. From Hualien, there are two trains in the early morning (NT41, 55 minutes) and one around 1pm. Get off at Wanrong Station and turn left down a short lane. Turn left again at the end of the lane and follow the road (Hwy 16) for about 2.5km to Lintianshan. There are English signs along the way.

HUALIEN SUGAR FACTORY 光復糖廠

Despite the history here, there's no confusing this old **factory** (Guāngfù Tángchǎng; ☎ 03-870 5581; 9 Tangchang St, Dajin Village, Guangfu township 11 8am-8pm) with the Dulan Sugar Factory (p194), a genuine venue for local culture. This is a tourist trap, with gift shops galore, tacky music and a freak-show museum out the back. However, it is still worth a pit stop if you are driving down the highway for its ice cream (NT25). While you eat your cone or dish, wander around the factory grounds and check out the row of old Japanese-built wooden buildings. A bit of trivia for you: the large carp pools beside the ice cream shop are craters from the US bombing of Taiwan during WWII.

The sugar factory is just south of the town of Guangfu (光復) on Hwy 9. There are signs in English on the highway directing you there.

MATAIAN 馬太鞍

☎ 03 / pop 500

On the west side of Hwy 9, very close to the Hualien Sugar Factory turnoff is the wetland area known as Mataian. It's an ideal place for farming and fishing and the Ami people have lived here for generations. Recent efforts by the Taiwanese government to protect wetlands have seen the Mataian area turned into a bit of an ecological classroom. Many come here at the end of June to see fields of blooming lotus flowers, or to cycle along the quiet country roads. Ecological tours are

offered by local Ami residents, and if you are lucky enough to come in autumn or winter you can see glow-in-the-dark mushrooms in the nearby hills.

Information

The **Mataian Cultural Centre** (拉藍的家; Lálán de Jiā; % 870 0015; 光復鄉大全村大全村街42巷15號) acts as the region's visitor centre. Tours around the wetlands, which include demonstrations of traditional harvesting and fishing techniques (the fishing is like nothing you've seen before) can be arranged here (NT50 per person). We have been told there is someone who can do English tours but call ahead for this.

Sleeping & Eating

Shin-liu Farm (欣綠農園; Xīnlǜ Nóngyuán; % 870 1861; www.shin-liu.com; 光復鄉大全村大全村街55號; dorm per person NT450, dbl NT3000) This farm has two places to stay. One offers comfortable modern double rooms in a stone house, the other rustic dorm-style bedding in a structure that is actually a converted pig house. It's a fine place to stay, though rooms have shared bathrooms and thin walls. Check out the website for pictures. Shin-liu can also arrange eco-tours and has bicycles for rent.

The cultural centre also has rooms from NT1600. Both places offer good midweek discounts.

Cifadahan Cafe (Hóngwāwū Wénhuà Měishì Cāntīng; 紅瓦屋文化美食餐廳; % 870 4601; www.cifadahan.net; 光復鄉大全村大全村街62巷16號; 9-course set meal NT250; 10am-9pm) Don't miss this place, run by a talented Ami artist who makes all the carvings, furniture and decorations you see in the café. The café serves traditional Ami food, including *shítóu huǒgǔo* (石頭火鍋; stone hot pot; NT500) made out of betel nut leaves and boiled by fire-heated stones. A favourite of ours is the salad made with 19 local vegetables.

The café is easy to find – once someone shows you where it is, that is. Inquire at the visitor centre or just drive around and show the characters to people. Everyone knows this place. By the time you go, there may even be signs up in English.

Getting There & Around

To get into the Mataian area, look for the signs (in Chinese at the time of writing) around the 251.7km mark. It's not far from the turn off for the Hualien Sugar Factory.

If you want to go there by train from Hualien, get off at Guangfu Station. There's about one train an hour (fast/slow NT100/77, 45 minutes/one hour). From the station walk to Hwy 9, turn right, then walk 1km south. Turn right at the sign for Mataian. Note that the whole area is a maze of unmarked country lanes so watch where you're going and ask people for directions.

FUYUAN FOREST RECREATIONAL AREA 富源國家森林遊樂區

This recreational area (Butterfly Valley Resort; Fúyuán Sēnlín Yóulèqū; % 03-881 1514; http://recreate.forest.gov.tw; adult/child NT80/40; 11 8am-5pm) is a peaceful 235-hectare camphor forest with many good walking trails and waterfalls. It's a popular bird-watching venue, and there's also a valley famous for its butterflies, which swarm here from March to August. There used to be cheap cabins for rent here but they have been replaced with rooms starting at NT8000.

RUEISUI 瑞穗

% 03 / pop 5000

The small town of Ruesui (Ruisui) in the East Rift Valley is used as a base for white-water rafting trips down the Hsiukuluan River. It's also the site of the Ruesui (Juisui) Hot Springs, one of the oldest developed springs in Taiwan.

Sights & Activities

RUEISUI HOT SPRINGS 瑞穗溫泉

These springs (Ruisui Wēnquán) are the only carbonated hot springs in Taiwan. The first public baths were opened by the Japanese in 1919. The water is rich in iron and has a temperature of 48°C. Because of the heavy iron content, the water has a pale brown colour and a slightly salty, rusty flavour. People believe that frequent bathing in the spring water increases a woman's chance of bearing a male child.

The hot spring area is a few kilometres directly west of Ruesui town (on the other side of Hwy 9). As you drive down the highway there are English signs pointing to the area. From the train station head directly west.

RAFTING

A raft trip (泛舟; fànzhōu) down the Hsiukuluan (Siouguluan) River (Xiùgūluán Xi) is the main reason many people come to Ruesui, especially in the summer months. The

river is the longest in eastern Taiwan and originates from the Hsiukuluan Mountain Range, eventually emptying into the sea at the aboriginal town of Takangkou. The rafting portion of the river, from Ruesui to Takangkou, is 24km long, twisting and turning its way through gorges and steep cliffs. It takes 3½ hours to complete the route but there are few rough spots. This is, for the most part, very leisurely rafting.

Rafting trips can be arranged in Ruesui at the **Ruesui Rafting Service Centre** (瑞穗泛舟服務中心; Ruisui Fànzhōu Fúwú Zhōngxīn; % 887 5400; 215 Jhongsan Rd, sec.3; 中山路3段215號; 11 6am-3pm Jun-Aug, 8am-5pm Oct-Apr, 7am-4pm May & Sep), which is right at the start of the rafting route. Travel agents in Taipei and Hualien can also book for you. The standard fee is NT750, which includes transportation from and to Hualien, lunch, equipment and insurance. The cheapest option if you have your own wheels is to buy a ticket at any Family Mart convenience store (NT500).

To get to the centre from the Ruesui train station, head out the front exit and continue straight along Jhongsan Rd for about 4km to 5km. A taxi will cost around NT100.

Sleeping & Eating

In the Ruesui Hot Springs area there are many hot spring hotels and resorts offering rooms at varying degrees of quality and price.

Ruesui Hot Springs Hotel (瑞穗溫泉山莊; Ruisui Wēnquán Shān Zhuāng; % 887 2170; 23 Hongye Village; r from NT1200) We can't say this is our favourite place for a soak, but interestingly it was the first public hotel in the area and is still open. The hotel is run by an eccentric local family who keep the atmosphere very local and, well, eccentric. This is the kind of place where the owners will keep breakfast for you if you get up late, but might not bother to heat it up for you. The rooms are OK, but it's a bit noisy. The hotel is up a small road off the main road through the hot springs area. There are English signs.

Hongye Hot Springs Hotel (紅葉溫泉旅社; Hóngyè Wēnquán Lǚshè; % 887 2176; cabins from NT2500) This hotel, actually a row of nice wooden cabins, is the only one to use water from the Hongye Hot Springs. It has a pleasant setting on a flat grassy riverbank. To get to the hotel head directly west of the Ruesui Hot Springs and follow the road to the end.

There's a good **camping ground** (per camp site NT250) with raised wooden platforms and

showers on the grounds of the Ruesui Rafting Service Centre. There are also several B&Bs in the area. Inquire at the train station.

Most hot spring hotels have restaurants in them. Around the train station there are numerous small noodle stands and restaurants as well as convenience stores for snacks, sandwiches and drinks.

Getting There & Away

There are trains from Hualien to Ruesui (fast/slow train NT146/112, one/1½ hours) about every hour.

YULI 玉里

% 03 / pop 3000

The small rift valley town of Yuli (Yùli) makes a good base for exploration. Within 30 minutes there are hot springs, mountains for viewing the lovely day lilies in late summer, a lush green valley dedicated to growing organic produce, and the eastern section of Yushan National Park (p243), which offers some of the best hiking along the east coast.

There are plenty of restaurants, noodle shops and convenience stores around town and a couple of cheap hotels across from the train station. A decent one to try is **Yu Chiling Hotel** (玉麒麟別莊; Yù Chíling Bié Zhuāng; % 888 3113; 210 Datong Rd; 大同路210號; s/d NT700/1200).

The place to stay in the Yuli area is **Wisdom Garden** (智嵐雅居; Zhìlán Yǎjū; % 888 2488; http://home.kimo.com.tw/wisdom_garden; 玉里鎮大禹里酸柑98-1號; r from NT2400), just north of the train station off Hwy 9. Without doubt it's our favourite B&B in Taiwan. The house sits in an orchard high above the rift valley looking across to Chikha Mountain. Be sure to take your meals out on the front lawn. The owner, a Buddhist and former hotel manager, has made a true retreat here; it's both soothing and nurturing for the soul. Each room has its own character, and is flooded with light and green views. Furnishings are country quaint, bathrooms large and modern, and the owner's original paintings, watercolours and tie-dye works add a special decorative touch.

If you are driving, the turn-off for Wisdom Garden is at the 289.4km mark on Hwy 9. Just follow the English signs from here. If you make prior arrangements the owners will pick you up from Yuli train station.

There are frequent trains from Hualien to Yuli (fast/slow train NT193/149, 80 minutes/two hours). A bicycle is a good way to get

around, as is a scooter. If you have a Taiwanese licence you can rent scooters (NT400 per day) from around the train station.

ANTUNG (ANTONG) HOT SPRINGS 安通溫泉

These hot springs (Āntōng Wēnquán) are about 8km south of the town of Yuli off Hwy 9, a little up a mountain road. The springs produce clear, odourless, sodium hydro-sulphate water at a temperature of 42°C. It's drinkable and very soothing on the throat, which may be why the hotels here use it to make delicious coffee (the only places in Taiwan we know of that do).

Hotels in the lower village seemed a little run-down when we visited. For something nicer, and with a scenic mountain view, try the **New Life Hot Springs Resort** (加賀屋溫泉山莊; Jiāhèwū Wēnquán Shānzhuāng; ☎ 03-888 2686; d/tr NT2100/3800). Rooms are small but comfortable with wooden interiors and stone tubs. The hotel has its own source of hot-spring water, which you can see if you take a short stroll up the road. So much water is produced that no-one seemed worried that the tanks were overflowing onto the footpath the day we visited. Unlimited use of the public pools costs NT200 for non-guests. Hotels guests have free access to the pools.

To get to the resort and Antung area, follow the signs on Hwy 9 south of Yuli. As you drive into Antung you will see a sign for the resort (in English) on the left. Don't forget to try the coffee.

WALAMI TRAIL 瓦拉米古道

A must-do hike, this trail (Wālāmī Gǔdào) begins about 15km southeast of Yuli in the Nanan section of Yushan National Park, at an altitude of 500m over the Nanan River. There are waterfalls along the way, suspension bridges, lookouts, sections of path cut straight into the cliff walls, and the constant sound (and occasionally sight) of monkeys crashing through the trees. It's a jungle out there, and one of the best preserved in Taiwan. The views down the valley and across the mountains are chillingly beautiful.

The trail hails from the Japanese era and was built to facilitate the opening of the east as well as to maintain a careful eye on aboriginal tribes. As such this is a walk through history as much as nature. The trail has been fortified (meaning barriers have been placed on the

sides of the trail where you can drop hundreds of metres to your death) and improved in recent years, making it safe for most people to travel on, especially the first couple of kilometres, which you can do without any permits.

The Walami Trail is actually part of the much longer Japanese Occupation Era Batongguan Traversing Route (see p245), which goes all the way to Donpu. But this is a seven- to 10-day journey. The 13km hike up to the Walami cabin takes about six to seven hours and is not a particularly difficult route for anyone in decent shape.

Hiking all the way to the cabin and spending the night is highly recommended. The cabin has rough bedding (bring your own sleeping bag), water and solar-powered lights. If you go midweek you can get your mountain permit on the day at the police station near the **Nanan Visitor Centre** (☎ 03-888 7560; 83-3, Choching; 扌 9am-4.30pm, closed 2nd Tue of month or Wed if Tue is a national holiday). But first go to the visitor centre to pick up maps of the trail and book a bed in the cabin. The cabin only has 24 beds so if you are going on a weekend it is recommended that you arrange things ahead of time (see Mountaineering, p330).

If you don't have your own transport you can take a taxi from Yuli to the visitor centre (NT300), then walk the last 6km to the trail-head (after arranging permits). Along the way you'll pass **Nanan Waterfall** (南安瀑布; Nánán Pùbù). On a warm day stand under the falls for a natural spa treatment.

SIXTY STONE MOUNTAIN 六十石山

Once a typical rice growing area, Sixty Stone Mountain (Liùshí Dàn Shān; 952m) became a centre for growing day (tiger) lilies (金針; jīnzhēn) a few decades ago. Day lilies are popular with Taiwanese consumers who eat them fresh or dried in tea drinks and a host of other products. Every August to early September, around harvest time, the mountainsides become carpeted with the orange flowers of the blooming lilies, attracting hordes of visitors (see boxed text on opposite).

There's no public transportation to the area, though that may change. For now, consider a tour bus, or take a train and rent a taxi (probably a couple of thousand for a few hours) from Fuli (富里). If you have your own transport there are English signs on Hwy 9 (Sixty Stone Mountain Recreation Area) as you head south of Yuli. You can't miss it.

STOPPING TO SMELL THE FLOWERS

Tourism is a funny thing. It often makes people look twice at their surroundings. Take the folk who work on Sixty Stone Mountain in the Rift Valley. For decades they had been planting day lilies to sell for use in tea and soups but no-one really stopped to consider just how beautiful the green hills became when tinted with the blooming orange flowers in late summer. But nowadays, thanks to promotion from the tourism board, those same indifferent farmers run guesthouses and organised tours catering to a steady flow of visitors.

In the north, blooming You Tong trees (see Sanyi, p178) have been painting mountainsides white for centuries, but again, no-one ever paid them much mind. All the glory went to the cherry blossom, which in Taiwan is a spindly dwarf compared with the You Tong. But five years ago, talk about a tall sturdy hardwood with pretty white petals that looked like snow when they fell to the ground began to spread. Towns began to hold You Tong festivals as part of a revival of local Hakka culture and soon everyone had their own little favourite place to go and see the trees in April.

If flowers are really your thing, Baihe has a two-month-long summer festival devoted to the lotus (see p258), while Yangmingshan (p132) holds minor festivals from February to April for cherry blossoms, rhododendrons, peaches, azaleas and calla lilies.

In April and November look out for a white trumpet-like flower called the Formosan lily. It blooms everywhere in the wild and the smell is intoxicating.

LOSHAN (LUOSHAN) SCENIC AREA

羅山風景區

Just north of Fuli, in an area called the rice barn of Taiwan, lies this **valley** (Lóshān), which has become the centre of the organic industry in Hualien. But it's also one of the most scenically splendid valleys along all of the east coast. Some highlights include the 120m-long **Luoshan Waterfall** (羅山瀑布; Lóshān Pùbù) and a number of small bubbling mud volcanoes.

At the time of writing the valley had a campground, but the ownership and maintenance of it was being argued over by the local government and the Rift Valley Scenic Administration. Hopefully this will get sorted out as it would make for a wonderful base. Guesthouse accommodation is available in Loshan Village. Inquire at the **visitor centre** (☎ 882 1991; 扌 8am-6.40pm), which is a block north of the entrance into the scenic area, down a side road to the right.

KUANSHAN (GUANSHAN) 關山

pop 2000

Kuanshan (Guānshān) is a small farming community 50km north of Taitung. It's positioned right at the end of the East Rift Valley on Hwy 9. The main reason to come here is to take advantage of the bicycle paths set up in the town's large **riverside park** (admission NT50; 扌 7am-5.30pm), which pleasantly wind their way through colourful rice paddies and fields of

colza and sugar cane. The paths are pretty flat, and all in all total only 10km, so they won't appeal to serious cyclists – unless they happen to be birders as well. Another path leading from the park follows the river and is a great place for bird-watching, with viewing platforms set up at various points. For a longer ride, cross the river and head up County Rd 197 in either direction.

To get to the park, turn left as you exit the train station at Kuanshan, then take the first left and walk up the road about 1km. You can rent bicycles (NT150 to NT500) at any number of shops on your way. There are trains to Kuanshan from Hualien (fast/slow train NT287/221, two/three hours) about every two hours.

TAITUNG HONGYE (HUNGYE) HOT SPRINGS 台東紅葉溫泉

Don't confuse these **hot springs** (Hóngyè Wēnquán) with the Hungye Hot Springs near Rueisui. This is a new open-air place with a large tiled pool set high in the mountains of Bunun country. Facilities include showers, changing rooms and even a camping ground with raised wooden platforms. It's a really quaint little place to stay, especially on a quiet weekday, or just drop in on your way down the highway for a quick soak. Somebody should be around to take your money, but not always.

You need your own transport to get to Hongye. Since it's not so far off the highway

it makes an excellent stop if you are cycling. Look for the signs (in English) as you head south of Kuanshan.

It's worth exploring further up past the springs if you have time. There's a quaint little **Bunun village** (head right when the road forks after the hot springs) and a beautiful **gorge** (turn left at the fork).

TAITUNG 台東

‰ 089 / pop 110,192

There aren't a lot of reasons for the short-term visitor to make a long stop in Taitung (Táidōng) city itself. Taitung's charms reveal themselves slowly as you get to know the locals, discover the treasures in the surrounding hills and coastline, and learn how to move with, not against, the rhythms of southern life. But if you don't have time for that, we suggest either giving the place a complete miss (there are other places nearby to use as a base) or just spend some time in transit.

Orientation & Information

There are enough pinyin roads signs around for you to orientate yourself fairly easily.

Visitor centres at the **Railway Art Village** (‰ 359 085), the **new train station** (‰ 238 231) and the **airport** (‰ 362 476) are open from 9am to 5pm daily, but except for the volunteers, the staff's English ability tends to be weak. However, there is written English information on buses and trains, as well as some useful brochures.

Taitung County has two useful websites: <http://tour.taitung.gov.tw/english/index.asp> and www.taitung.gov.tw/english/Tour_information.php.

In addition to 7-Elevens for ATM service, the **Bank of Taiwan** (‰ 324 210; 313 Chungshan Rd) will exchange foreign currency and has an ATM that takes international debit cards.

Sights & Activities

The two most touted sites of Taitung, the **National Museum of Prehistory** (Guólǐ Shíqián Bówùguǎn; adult/child NT80/50) and the associated **Peinan Culture Park** (Bēinán Wénhuà Gōngyuǎn; admission free) are disappointing. The museum's exhibits are mostly pictures and dioramas with write-ups. There are some artefacts, but far fewer than at other places, such as the Indigenous People's Cultural Park in Sandimen (see p279).

Taitung's culture park is the site of the largest prehistoric settlement found in Taiwan. Unfortunately, almost all the artefacts have been shipped to Taipei for storage, and the site has been reburied (except for one tiny area) to protect it from looting.

If you're interested in **surfing** around the Taitung area, talk to Dave at KASA (see p204).

Festivals & Events

The **Festival of Austronesian Cultures** is held annually in August at the National Museum of Prehistory and Forest Park. The festival is a great opportunity to see traditional aboriginal handicrafts, musical instruments and wood carvings, as well as to try a smorgasbord of local foods. Festival participants include not only Taiwan's aboriginals, but also aboriginal groups from several South Pacific nations who are believed to share a common ancestry with Taiwan's indigenous people.

The **Ami Harvest Festival** is another large festival in the region that takes place in July or August every year in towns around Taitung County. It's a boisterous event, with plenty of singing and dancing.

Bombing Master Handan is an old festival (well, from the '50s) that is getting a new lease on life as Lantern Festival activities get bigger and bigger each year. During the festival, volunteers dress as Handanyeh, the Money god, and are carried through the streets. Since the god reportedly hates the cold, people shell him with exploding firecrackers to warm him up and thus win his favour. The festival takes place on the 15th and 16th day of the Lunar

New Year. Every year volunteers appear on TV a few days earlier to remind the public that the god doesn't like firecrackers thrown directly at his face.

Sleeping

Accommodation is pretty basic in town, with few worthwhile midrange options. If you have a vehicle consider spending the night outside of town in Chihpen Hot Springs, Jinluan Hot Springs, Dulan or at the camping grounds at Hsiao Yeliu and Hongye Hot Springs.

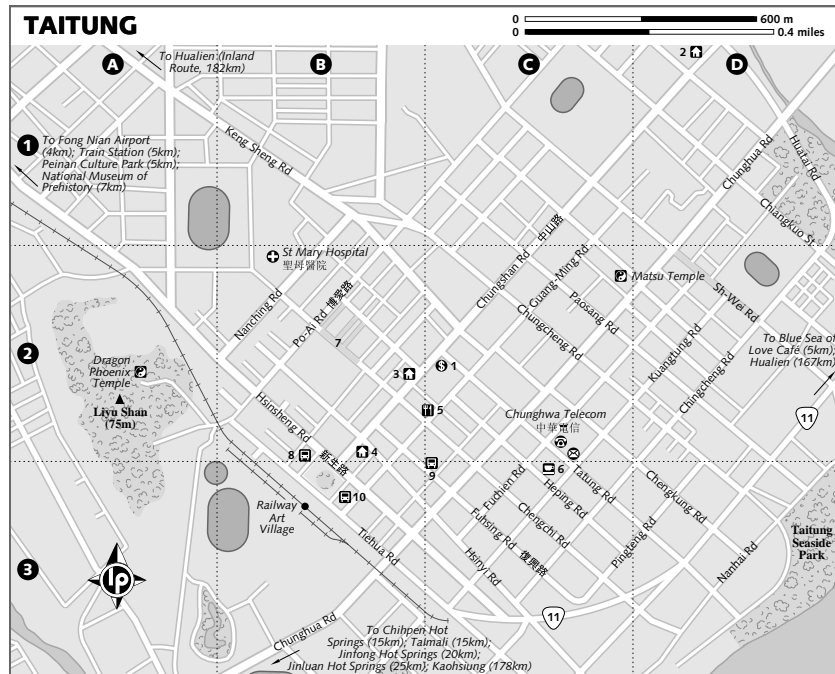
Fuhyuan (Fuhtuan) Hotel (Fúyuán Dàfāndiàn; ‰ 331 1369; 72 Wenhua St; 文化街72號; d/tr NT700/1000) This pleasant budget hotel is centrally located in a busy market area. The owners don't speak any English but they have had so many foreign guests over the years they have written down a wealth of bilingual travel information. The hotel is right on the bus route from the airport, which is good if you are carrying a heavy bag.

Hotel Hsin Fu Chih (Xīnfúzhì Dà Lǚshè; ‰ 331 101; 417 Chungshan Rd; 中山路417號; d/tw NT700/1000) The rooms at the Hsin Fu Chih are old but clean and pretty comfortable. It's no more nor less than a decent budget hotel.

Aboriginal Cultural Centre (Yuán Zùmín Wénhuà Huìguǎn; ‰ 340 605; fax 341 416; 10 Chungshan Rd; 中山路10號; d/tr NT1150/1450) The Cultural Centre has clean, spacious rooms with just a couple of chips and smudges here and there. There are a couple of traditional Yami canoes outside. The staff are very friendly.

Hugo Farm (雍雅居民宿; Yōngyǎjū Mínsù; ‰ 237 781; fax 238 990; 利吉路86號; r from NT6000, cash only) This is our choice for a top-end place to stay in the Taitung area. The farm, about an acre in size, is like a landscaped garden. From the back it looks onto Little Huangshan (小黃山), a very scenic stretch of craggy mountains along the Beinan River. The farm's guesthouses are modern and stylish. Rooms are huge and feature cool stone bathtubs (the only off feature are the plastic shower curtains). The slightly fizzy tap water comes from a nearby spring and is said to improve skin tone.

One thing to note about the price is that it never goes down, nor up, not even during summer or Chinese New Year. When you consider that during holiday times even bland midranges can charge NT4000 a night, the farm, which includes delicious multicourse breakfasts and dinners (with wine, coffee and dessert) in its rates is a solid deal.



INFORMATION

Bank of Taiwan 台灣銀行.....1 C2

SLEEPING

Aboriginal Cultural Centre 原住民文化會館.....2 D1
Fuhyuan Hotel 富源大飯店.....3 B2
Hotel Hsin Fu Chih 新福治大旅社.....4 B2

EATING

Beikang Xiao Chi Pu 北港小吃部.....5 C2

DRINKING

KASA.....6 C3

SHOPPING

Fruit Street 水果市場.....7 B2

TRANSPORT

Dingdong Coastal Bus Station 鼎東客運海線總站.....8 B2
Dingdong Inland Bus Station 鼎東客運山線總站.....9 C3
Hualien Bus Station 花蓮客運站.....(see 8)
Kuo Kuang Hao Bus Company 國光客運公司.....10 B3

Hugo is about a 15-minute drive out of Taitung. Head west on Hwy 11甲 and turn right up County Rd 45 after you cross a long bridge. Hugo is about 2km up the road on the left. There is an English sign out the front and the owner speaks good English.

Eating & Drinking

Chungshan Rd and Chunghua Rd are chock-a-block full of cheap eateries and cafés. Some local delicacies to try are *tóngzǎi mǐgāo* (筒仔米糕; sticky rice) and *zhū xiè tāng* (豬血湯; pork blood soup), a Puyuma dish.

Beikang Xiao Chi Pu (Beǐkāng Xiǎo Chī Pù; 212 Guang-Ming Rd; sticky rice NT25-40; 11am-7pm) The Beikang is an unassuming little place that has been around for over 20 years. The sticky rice here is some of the best in town. Try it with some *ròu gēng* (thick meat soup).

KASA (% 0921-548 769; www.wretch.cc/blog/kasa taitung; 102 Heping Rd; drinks NT100; 11am-midnight) KASA has been around Taitung for many years in various manifestations. The latest, off Heping Rd, is a rustic little café made out of driftwood and recycled yellow cedar. It's got a great laid-back atmosphere and a friendly crowd of regulars, both Taiwanese and foreign. Come here for a good brunch or sandwich in the afternoon, or a drink or two in the evening.

Entertainment

Every Saturday night there is live music at the Dulan Sugar Factory (see p194). On Friday nights, music is a little closer to town in Fukang, just a couple of kilometres north of Taitung.

Blue Sea of Love Cafe (藍色愛情海; Lánsè Àiqíng Hǎi; % 089-281 755) This little café made out of driftwood is right, and we mean right, on the ocean. It's a bit tricky to get to, but as you head into Fukang look for a blue painted alley on the right about 100m before the 7-Eleven. Head down the alley for 100m or so. It's a bit junky here but the café has a great view.

Shopping

Taitung has some of the freshest and most delicious fruit in Taiwan. In central Taitung, between Po'ai and Chungshan Rds, there's a lively fruit street (*shuǐguǒ jiē*) selling a colourful assortment of fruit, including pineapples, coconuts, bananas, mangoes, dragon fruit and papayas. There's also Taitung's most famous fruit, the delicious custard apple, nicknamed

'Buddha's fruit' (釋迦; *shìjiā*) because its shape resembles the head of the curly haired Sakyamuni Buddha.

Aboriginal arts and crafts are on sale at the gift shops of the National Museum of Prehistory and the Peinan Culture Park.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The following airlines have booking counters at Taitung's **Fong Nian Airport** (% 362 530; www.rdn.gov.tw/en/en1.asp): **Far Eastern Transport** (% 362 677), **Mandarin Airlines** (% 362 699), **Uni Air** (% 362 626) and **Daily Air Corporation** (% 362 489).

There are flights to Taipei, Taichung and Lanyu and Green Islands. The airport has a nice tropical feel to it, and is a pleasant way to enter the south. There's a **visitor centre** (11am-5pm) to help you out.

BUS

Taitung has four bus stations and finding which bus goes where can be confusing. Ask at any visitor centre for the latest. Listed below are the three most likely to be used by travellers.

The **Dingdong Bus Station** (% 333 343), near the Railway Art Village, runs about four buses a day to Hualien (NT479, three hours) along Hwy 11.

The **Kuo Kuang Hao Bus Company** (% 322 027) runs about five buses a day to Kaohsiung (NT455, 4½ hours). Buses to Tienchi (NT351, 4½ hours) on the South Cross-Island Hwy leave daily at 7.10am (but always confirm this time as some schedules still say they leave at 6.40am). There are no direct buses to Kenting.

The **Dingdong Inland Bus Station** (% 333 433) has about 10 buses a day to Chihpen Hot Springs (NT40, 40 minutes). There are also frequent buses to the new train station (NT22).

TRAIN

There are about 15 trains a day between Hualien and Taitung (fast/slow train NT355/273, 2½/3½ hours). The train follows the inland route through the East Rift Valley.

If taking a taxi to the train station, be clear with your driver that you mean the new station. From central Taitung it will cost around NT200. Buses for the new train station (NT22) leave from the Dingdong Inland Bus Station about every hour.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A taxi to or from the airport will cost about NT300. Buses (NT22) leave about every hour from the Dingdong Inland Bus Station. Check at any visitor centre if you need to know the exact schedule.

SCOOTER

Rentals are available around the new train station and typically cost NT400 to NT500 a day. Most rental agencies are now refusing to rent scooters to customers who don't have a Taiwanese licence.

SOUTH OF TAITUNG

Not many travel further south than Taitung, but there are a few interesting little spots where you can enjoy quiet hot springs, beach combing, camping and a fascinating banyan forest.

CHIHPEN (ZHIBEN) 知本

% 089 / pop 3000

The town of Chihpen is famous for the Chihpen Hot Springs (Zhiben Wēnquán), one of Taiwan's oldest hot spring resorts. The sodium bicarbonate water is colourless and tasteless and has a temperature of 32°C.

As with Wulai in the north, today's Chihpen is an overcrowded weekend playground with far too many hotels of all shapes, sizes and prices. There's no doubting the beauty of the natural surroundings, set in a canyon at the foot of a mountain range, but it's a tourist town and an unpleasantly aggressive one at that. Touts wait at every corner to rush out and stuff brochures in your face when you stop at red lights. Some will even drive beside you on a scooter waving their hotel's business card!

With so many hotels, we (and many knowledgeable locals) question the purity of the hot spring water and so would never pay top dollar to stay here, though we know many who have, and gladly, because of the beautiful surroundings at some of the better hotels. We've used the public facilities at a few places and enjoyed the experience though, especially after exploring the beautiful forest recreation area at the end of the road.

Sights & Activities

HOT SPRINGS

Most hotels have hot-spring facilities open to nonguests. We liked the large, multi-layered, multipooled complex run by the **Dongtai Hotel** (東台溫泉飯店; Dōngtái Wēnquán Fàndiàn; % 089-512 290; 147 Longchuan Rd; 龍泉路147號; adult/child NT250/150), near the end of the road towards the forest recreation area. The views from the upper deck over the river valley and mountains are excellent. This is worth a visit (and soak).

For the swankiest hot spring pools, head to the **Hotel Royal Chihpen** (老爺飯店; Lǎoyé Dǎjiǔdiàn; % 089-510 666; Lane 23, 113 Longchuan Rd; 龍泉路23巷113號; adult/child NT350/200), the finest hotel in town.

CHINGCHUEH TEMPLE 清覺寺

This temple (Qingjué Si) sits incongruously next to the Hotel Royal Chihpen. It's home to a beautiful white-jade Buddha from Myanmar and a bronze Buddha from Thailand; they're worth dropping in to see if you are already in the area.

CHIHPEN (ZHIBEN) FOREST RECREATION

AREA 知本森林遊樂區

At the far end of the canyon is this **recreation area** (Zhiben Sēnlín Yóulèqū; % 510 961; http://recreate.forest.gov.tw; admission NT100; 11am-5pm), a lovely forested region with hiking trails, rivers and waterfalls. It is worth coming to Chihpen just to wander the trails, especially along the upper slopes where there's a wonderful old banyan forest that reminds us of the Ent world in *Lord of the Rings*. In this area you can hear Taiwan macaques crashing around in the trees overhead and may be lucky enough to see, or more likely hear, the tiny Reeves muntjac, which makes a strange barking sound like a dog.

To get to the forest recreation area, either catch a bus from Taitung or simply follow the signs to Chihpen Hot Springs and drive through the hotel wonderland to the end of the road. The recreation area is obvious to the right. Cross a short bridge to the visitor centre where you can get English maps.

Eating

The main road through Chihpen (Longchuan Rd) has plenty of small restaurants and noodle stands selling decent local food at regular prices.

Getting There & Away

The Dingdong Bus Company has about 10 buses a day to Chihpen (NT40, 40 minutes) from its Inland Bus Station in Taitung. According to the company, all buses drop you off near the end of the valley road a few hundred metres from the forest recreation area.

TAIMALI 太麻里

It sounds like a Mexican dish, but Taimali (Tàimǎlǐ) is a little nothing town south of Chihpen. Ah, but there is one thing here: a beach. A long, beautiful palm-studded beach that stretches on and on. There's no swimming (it's far too rough), but the crashing surf, wide soft-sand beach, green mountains rising to the west, and long coastline sweeping out to the north make this an absolutely fabulous place for a couple of hours' strolling. There's also plenty of driftwood should you want to build a fire, and no-one would object if you set up a tent and camped out.

Interestingly, the BBC chose this beach as one of the 60 best places in the world to watch the sunrise of the new millennium on the eve of 1 January 2000.

It's best to have your own transport to get here.

JINFONG (JINFENG) HOT SPRINGS

金峰溫泉
pop 500

Just south of Taimali are these rather odd little hot springs (Jinfēng Wēnquán) set up by the local community. While most community hot springs are makeshift affairs – heavy on concrete, light on aesthetics – these ones have two large, open, tiled pools, a lovely little camping ground with covered wooden tent platforms, changing rooms and showers, in addition to the beautiful natural setting (a large grassy field in the mountains beside a flowing river). At the time of writing it was only open on weekends and till 5pm, but it should be truly open by the time you read this. The spot is ideal for cyclists heading down the coast.

The springs are simple to get to. As you drive down Hwy 9 you'll see the English sign for the Jinfong Hot Springs. Turn right onto County Rd 64 and drive a short distance until you see a police station on the right. Stop and tell the officer inside where you are going, fill out the forms and pay the NT10 fee (make sure you have your passport). Then drive a couple more kilometres, following the river,

until you see a strange stone chimney on the left in a wide clearing, belching out steam like a locomotive engine. This is the hot spring area, but you can't always make out the pools from the road so use the steam stack as your reference. Take the next left down to the camping ground/hot spring area.

JINLUAN HOT SPRINGS 金崙溫泉

pop 500

Just south of Jinfong on Route 66 is yet another hot springs (Jinluán Wēnquán) village. Here you have both wild and developed options to choose from, as well as an interesting little museum devoted to the local Ruiki and Paiwan tribes.

Sights & Activities

HOT SPRINGS

Most of the hot spring hotels are small local establishments with very basic facilities. For something much, much nicer try the **East Sun Spa Spring Hotel** (東太陽溫泉會館; Dōngtàiyáng Wēnquán Huìguǎn; www.east-spa.com.tw; d/tw NT2800/4200, weekdays NT2000/3000). The hotel has a simple modern design, with rooms taking advantage of clear ocean views. Six outdoor pools (unlimited time NT200) sit on a bluff with views over the river valley and the Pacific Ocean. Yes, it's nice up here.

To get to the hotel, drive about a kilometre or so west down Route 66. The hotel is 500m up a steep hill on the right. The sign for the turnoff has English on it so you can't miss it.

Locals tell us there is a great natural hot spring about two hours' walk up the **Jinlun River** (金崙溪). Inquire at the Dawu Mountain Education Centre for a local guide.

DAWU MOUNTAIN EDUCATION CENTRE

大武山自然教育中心

In such a remote part of Taiwan, you hardly expect a little **museum** (Dàwúshān Zìrán Jiàoyù Zhōngxīn; ☎ 089-771 957; admission free; 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed 1-5 Jun & 1-5 Dec) such as this one to have such good displays and to be completely bilingual. But it's here, and if you're in the area it's worth a stop to learn about the local Ruiki and Paiwan tribes of Taiwan, and the indigenous flora and fauna. Staff are very knowledgeable and helpful, though they do only speak Chinese.

To get to the museum, drive or walk west along Route 66 about 2.5km from the

highway turnoff. The museum is to the left, just past a bridge, and looks like a nice hotel with a grey stone exterior.

Eating

There are plenty of restaurants and noodle shops and even a 7-Eleven in Jinluan village. The East Sun Spa Spring Hotel also has a restaurant serving local aboriginal food.

Getting There & Away

If you are driving, the turn-off for Route 66 is at the 414km mark on Hwy 9 and is marked with an English sign. Trains from Taitung run every few hours (fast/slow train NT62/38, 35/40 minutes). When you exit Jinluan station, head west uphill to Hwy 9. Turn left and you'll quickly see the sign for the turn-off to Route 66 and the springs. The first train leaves just after 7am.

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