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History

Writing a historical overview of any place in under 5000 words necessitates being both sweepingly general and highly selective. For a travel guide, this is generally a fine way to go; after all, the only questions travel guides need answer are those of the 'why should I go?' and 'what should I eat/see/do if I do?' variety. But writing about Taiwan's history is especially tricky, because it's a history of two entities: Taiwan, the island, and Taiwan, a political entity known as the Republic of China (ROC). Though unified currently, the history of the former is far older, and the origin of the latter is found many miles elsewhere. Since history is a big part of Taiwan's appeal to travellers, and because Taiwan's history is so mired in politics, we endeavour to tread delicately, but boldly.

Information about Taiwanese history (from the point of view of the Taiwanese) can be found on www.taiwandc.org/history.htm. The site has a lot of interesting photographs and an excellent recommended reading list.

EARLY HISTORY

There is evidence of human settlement in Taiwan dating as far back as 30,000–40,000 years ago; current prevalent thinking dates the arrival of the Austronesian peoples, ancestors of many of the tribal people who still inhabit Taiwan (p47), between 4000–5000 years ago.

For most of her long history, China seemed fairly indifferent to Taiwan. Early Chinese texts from as far back as AD 206 contain references to the island, but for the most part it was seen as a savage island, best left alone. Contact between China and Taiwan was erratic until the early 1400s, when boatloads of immigrants from China's Fujian province, disillusioned with the political instability in their homeland, began arriving on Taiwan's shores. When the new immigrants arrived, they encountered two groups of aboriginals: one who made their homes on the fertile plains of central and southwestern Taiwan and the other, seminomadic, lived along the Central Mountain Range.

Over the next century, immigration from Fujian increased, these settlers being joined by the Hakka, another ethnic group leaving the mainland in great numbers. By the early 1500s there were three categories of people on the island: Hakka, Fujianese and the aboriginal tribes. Today, Taiwan's population is mainly descended from these early Chinese immigrants, though centuries of intermarriage makes it likely a fair number of Taiwanese have some aboriginal blood as well.

The bilingual 10-book series *A History of Taiwan in Comics* (認識台灣歷史) is a fun way to learn about Taiwan's history. It can be ordered at http://edu.ocac.gov.tw/local/history%5Fof%5Ftaiwan

EUROPE AND THE MING IN TAIWAN

In 1544 a Portuguese fleet 'discovered' the island. Enamoured by the lush plains, rugged mountains and rocky coasts, they declared Taiwan *Ilha Formosa,* meaning 'beautiful island'. Less romantically minded Europeans soon took notice, and before long the Dutch (national proprietors of the recently formed Dutch East India Company) set up a trading base on the Penghu Islands (p306) in the Taiwan Strait.

This did not sit well in China's Ming court, who sat up suddenly and took notice of Taiwan. The Ming government sent its navy to Penghu, and before long had thrown the Dutch off the island. But being particularly tenacious, the Dutch soon returned and established a colony in Penghu in 1622, remnants of which can still be seen in the Dutch Fort ruins (p313), a few kilometres out of present-day Makung City.

The first thing the Dutch did on their return was to establish a trading route between Batavia (now Jakarta), Makung, China and Japan. For a short period of time, Dutch trade dominated the Taiwan Strait, much to the chagrin of the Ming court, who issued a decree in 1623 banning all entry of ships into the Taiwan Strait from southeast Asia. Realising the ineffectiveness of the decree, Ming troops were sent to attack the Dutch, who gave in and agreed to remove themselves from Penghu. Oddly, the Ming allowed the Dutch to establish trading ports in Taiwan proper.

Spain, ever envious of the Dutch hold on Taiwan and their growing wealth, decided they wanted in on the action themselves. In 1626 the Spanish invaded what is now Keelung and established their territory all the way down the west coast to Danshui and eventually all over northern Taiwan. Unfortunately, Taiwan's climate took revenge and a series of catastrophes took its toll on the Spanish traders. Typhoons and malaria devastated the Spanish and attacks by local aboriginals caused them to relinquish their territory. In 1638 the Spanish withdrew from Danshui and the Dutch (ever tenacious) moved in to snatch up the remains, taking control of Keelung in 1642.

Taiwan was once a haven for pirates in the 15th and 16th centuries.

TAIWAN UNDER CHENG AND QING

Though continued western encroachment into Taiwan undoubtedly displeased the Ming court, over in Beijing the emperor had bigger problems; the dynasty itself was in collapse. One staunch Ming loyalist in exile would have a lasting impact on Taiwanese history; Admiral Cheng Cheng-kung, also known as Koxinga, sought refuge with his troops on the small island of Kinmen (p296) off China's Fujian province. On Kinmen, Cheng met a disgruntled former interpreter for the Dutch East India Company who convinced Cheng to invade Taiwan and overthrow the Dutch.

Intrigued, Cheng somehow managed to amass an army on Kinmen and build a fleet of ships (in the process deforesting the island, from which it's now only just recovering). Cheng set sail for the Penghu Islands, where he swiftly deposed the Dutch before moving on to Taiwan proper. Arriving in Taiwan, Cheng he was greeted by local supporters anxious to be free of the Dutch once and for all. Realising their days in Taiwan were numbered, the Dutch surrendered to Cheng in 1662 and left for good.

With Cheng came 30,000 mainland Chinese, who established Taiwan island as their home. Others soon followed, and would do so for the next 200 years. Taiwan's growing population accelerated development on the island, especially in the north and along the fertile plains of the west coast. To manage Taiwan's fast growth, Cheng set up an efficient system of counties, some of which remain today. However, his dreams of overthrowing the Manchu remained unfulfilled; he died a year after landing on Taiwan. Many Taiwanese today regard Cheng as a hero for driving the Dutch out of Taiwan.

After Cheng's death, his son and grandson ruled the island but their ineptness caused widescale poverty and despair. In 1683, the Qing government overthrew Cheng's descendents and took over the island, placing it under the jurisdiction of Fujian province. Having 'retaken' Taiwan, the Qing court's attitude towards Taiwan was about as lax as the Ming's before

TIMELINE

c 10,000 BC — Prehistoric people living in Taiwan

AD 1544 — Portuguese sailors 'discover' Taiwan and like it enough to call her *Ilha Formosa*

1624–1662 — Dutch set up Taiwanese colonies

1662 — Dutch surrender to Ming Admiral Koxinga

them, and Taiwan was again mostly ignored by China, save the boatloads of Chinese immigrants yearning for space to spread out.

In the West, however, Europeans were not blind to Taiwan's advantageous position, and the 'beautiful island' was quite well known among traders both for its strategic location and hazardous coastline. (The latter factor would eventually play a part in the Qing court's surrender of Taiwan to Japan.) After the second Opium War ended, Taiwan was opened to trade with the West in Keelung and Suao. The southern ports of Kaohsiung and Tainan were also opened. Foreign trade increased rapidly, with Taiwan's main exports being camphor, rice, tea and opium.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION (1894–1945)

Despite Taiwan's importance as a trading centre, the island remained a wild and unruly place, and the Qing government did little to control the frequent unrest between settlers, foreign sailors and the aboriginal population. In 1872 the crew of a shipwrecked Japanese junk was executed by an aboriginal tribe; after being told by the Qing emperor that the aboriginals on the island were beyond the his court's control, Japanese troops invaded Taiwan. Before the annexation was complete, the Qing government offered compensation to the families of the dead sailors, as well as pledging to exert more control over Taiwan. Placated for the time being, the Japanese withdrew from Taiwan.

Taiwan was declared a Chinese province only in 1887, just a few years before being ceded to Japan.

In 1894 war broke out between Japan and China over the Japanese invasion of Korea. China's poorly equipped navy was no match for Japan's modern fleet, and in 1895 China was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki which ceded the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa), Taiwan and the Penghu Archipelago to Japan.

Taiwan responded to the treaty with alarm and a group of intellectuals formed the Taiwan Democratic Republic, writing a Declaration of Independence and claiming the island as a sovereign nation. Japan was not deterred, and after subduing the areas of Keelung and Danshui, the Japanese took over the ex-Qing governor's office in Taipei. Control over the rest of the island was not as easy as in the north and the Japanese met strong resistance as they moved further south. Employing over a third of its army in Taiwan, the Japanese eventually overcame the Taiwanese who'd confronted the modern weapons of the invaders with bamboo spears and outdated weapons.

The hopes of the nascent Taiwan Democratic Republic were crushed, and Japan was to stay on the island for 50 years. It's believed that in the first several months after the Japanese arrived, over 10,000 soldiers and civilians lost their lives.

Once the Japanese felt they had things under control, they set out to modernise the island, building highways and railways to improve trade and to open up formerly isolated areas, especially along the east coast. They also constructed hospitals, schools and government buildings in an effort to improve the infrastructure of the island. Despite these improvements, the Japanese rule on the island was harsh, with brutal crackdowns on political dissent.

Over 80,000 Taiwanese served in the Japanese military during WWII.

THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The loss of Taiwan to Japan was merely one in a string of humiliations heaped by foreign hands upon the tottering Qing dynasty, and by 1900 it was obvious that a strong breeze would bring about its collapse. That wind came in the form of a revolutionary doctor named Sun Yat-sen, founder of China's Nationalist party, Kuomintang (KMT). In 1911, China's last dynasty finally collapsed; Sun's KMT stepped in to fill the void, and Imperial China became the ROC. By this time Taiwan had been under Japanese control for nearly two decades, and the nascent ROC had far bigger things to worry about than reclaiming Imperial China's former and farthest-flung possession. From the creation of the ROC in 1911 until the defeat of Japan in 1945, Taiwan remained firmly in Japanese hands, while the ROC battled for its very existence on the Chinese mainland.

All this would change on 25 October 1945 (known as Retrocession Day in Taiwan). Japan, defeated in WWII, was forced to cede all overseas possessions. Taiwan, now a spoil of war, was handed over to the ROC.

Richard C. Bush's *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait* provides a number of interesting insights into the difficulties inherent in the Taiwan-China conflict.

Though some say the Taiwanese were relieved to be rid of the Japanese, others maintain that most already grown accustomed to the stability offered by the Japanese. In any event, any goodwill towards their Chinese 'liberators' would be short-lived. Almost immediately following the defeat of Japan, civil war broke out on the mainland between the KMT (led by Chiang Kai-shek) and Chairman Mao's communist forces. Embroiled in civil war, Chiang sent an inept general named Chen Yi to govern Taiwan; Chen Yi and his thugs plundered Taiwanese homes and shops, sending anything of value back to the mainland to help support the Nationalist fight against the communists. Riots against the KMT broke out, leading to the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians.

TAIWAN UNDER CHIANG

Though adept at slaughtering civilians, Chiang's KMT proved less so at fighting soldiers, and before long Mao's communist forces had driven the

2-28 INCIDENT

On 27 February 1947, a trivial incident led to a massacre that still reverberates to this day. Having declared a government monopoly on the sale of all tobacco, the KMT went after merchants selling black market cigarettes. In Keelung, police from the Alcohol and Tobacco Bureau seized cigarettes and money from a middle-aged widow and pistol whipped her into unconsciousness. Angry crowds formed and attacked the officers, who responded by shooting into the crowd, killing an innocent bystander.

The next morning, crowds protested outside the Taipei branch of the Monopoly Bureau, attacking employees and setting the offices on fire. This was followed by a protest outside the governor's office. But the KMT was in no mood for negotiations. On the order of Governor Chen Yi – orders handed down, many maintain, by Chiang Kai-shek himself – troops fired on the crowds, killing dozens. A state of emergency was declared, and all public buildings were shut down as civilians took to the streets. Soon, news of the event spread and riots erupted island wide. Government offices and police stations were attacked and mainland immigrants were targeted for beatings.

The government's crackdown was brutal, and in the weeks following the incident intellectuals, political activists, and innocents were arrested, tortured and executed. Some estimate that up to 30,000 Taiwanese were murdered.

The 28 February incident evokes powerful memories even today for those who lived through the event. To commemorate those who died during the tragedy, 28 February was declared a national holiday 50 years later and Taipei New Park was renamed the 2-28 Peace Park (p87).

1895 China cedes Taiwan to Japan after defeat in first Sino-Japanese war

1912 Sun Yat-sen declares Republic of China after Qing dynasty collapse

1945 Japan defeated; Taiwan ceded to ROC control

1947 2-28 massacre

THE AUGUST 23RD ARTILLERY WAR

On the morning of 23 August 1958, Beijing, determined to take Kinmen from the Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army, launched a ferocious bombardment against the island. In just two hours the island was hit with over 42,000 shells. Alarmed, the US acted to defend Kinmen, realising that if it fell, the security of America's 'unsinkable battleship' (as Harry Truman called Taiwan) would be in severe jeopardy. The US sent a shipment of jet fighters and anti-aircraft missiles to Taiwan, along with six aircraft carriers.

Communist forces created a tight blockade around Kinmen's beaches and airstrip, preventing any military supplies from getting in. On 7 September, the US sent several warships into the Taiwan Strait to escort a convoy of ROC military-supply ships; the convoy got within 5km of the blockade and was surprised that the communists refused to fire.

Realising that its navy was outclassed (and no doubt wary of factions in America threatening China with nuclear bombs), Beijing offered the nationalists a very odd ceasefire – it would only fire on Kinmen on odd-numbered days. The deal was agreed to, and the Chinese side continued to shell Kinmen throughout September and October only on odd-numbered days. By November, tensions had decreased and the bombing stopped, but not before nearly half a million shells had struck Kinmen, killing and wounding thousands of civilians and soldiers.

KMT from the mainland. Fully defeated, Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan, followed by a steady stream of soldiers, monks, artists, peasants and intellectuals. One of the first things Chiang did when he arrived in Taiwan was to send Chen Yi back to the mainland (he was later executed). By 1949, the ROC consisted of Taiwan, Penghu, and a number of islands off the Chinese coast including Matsu and Kinmen. These straits islands were quickly set up as military zones, both to rebuff any mainland attack and to set up a base of operations from which Chiang vowed he would use to retake the Chinese mainland.

On Taiwan, Chiang proved the able state governor that he never had been in China, instituting a series of land reform policies that successfully laid the foundation for Taiwan's future economic success. While advertising his government in exile as 'Free China,' based on the democratic ideals of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang's Taiwan was anything but free. While economic development was swift, Chiang's rule was quick to crush any political dissent. The White Terror (opposite) era of the 1950s was a frightening time in Taiwanese history, when people literally disappeared if they spoke against the government. Political dissidents were either shipped to Green Island (p320) to serve long sentences or executed outright.

During the Korean War, the Americans were protective of Taiwan, assuring the Taiwanese that they would repel any communist attacks. Military outbreaks between China and Taiwan were common in the 1950s and 1960s, with Kinmen subjected to regular shelling. Events such as the August 23rd Artillery War kept Chiang's 'Free China' firmly entrenched in the hearts and minds of anti-communist America. At the time of the KMT arrival, the Taiwanese had been heavily indoctrinated by the Japanese and spoke little Mandarin. They were also accustomed to a higher standard of living than the mainland Chinese and felt an ingrained superiority towards the poorer and less well-educated immigrants, especially soldiers who often came from humble backgrounds. The KMT issued laws requiring all Taiwanese to speak Mandarin, in an attempt to 'resinicise' the population. The Taiwanese resented the heavy handedness of the KMT, and there were various outbreaks of rebellion and clashes with military police.

Though Taiwan prospered during the 1950s and 1960s, her economy becoming one of the richest in Asia, and her population growing to 16 million, big changes were on the horizon as the 1970s began. In 1971, Chiang Kai-shek withdrew the ROC from the UN Security Council after the council's admission of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 1979, America, the ROC's staunchest international ally, switched official recognition from the ROC to the PRC. US policy towards Taiwan would now be dictated by the Taiwan's Relations Act, which, while promising to protect Taiwan militarily in the case of attack by mainland China, recognised Beijing as the sole capital of a China which included Taiwan.

Denny Roy's *Taiwan: A Political History* is a very readable and balanced account of Taiwan's progress towards democracy.

Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, his presidential duties taken over by his son, Chiang Ching-kuo. The younger Chiang's rule over Taiwan was softer than that of his father; in an effort to improve relations with native Taiwanese, Chiang allowed more Taiwanese to take up political positions. The late 1970s saw increasing political dissent in Taiwan. One of the most noteworthy uprisings of the late martial law–period place occurred in December 1979.

Considered a turning point in Taiwan's shift from authoritarian rule to democracy, the Kaohsiung Incident occurred when editors of *Meilidao,* a publication often critical of the government, organised a rally to celebrate International Human Rights Day. The day before the rally, two organisers were arrested and beaten by police when they were caught handing out promotional flyers. On the day of the rally, scuffles broke out between police and protestors and the situation turned violent, changing from a peaceful event into a full-scale riot. Eight of the organisers were arrested, including Taiwan's current vice president Annette Lu. Among the lawyers who represented the organisers was future Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian. Though it was a short-term defeat for the democracy advocates, the violence brought increasing support for democratic reforms. Public sentiment eventually forced the KMT to make political concessions. In 1986, with martial law still in effect, Taiwan's first opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was formed. Chiang Ching-kuo, surprisingly, did not shut the party down, resulting in a large number of DPP candidates being elected to office, and culminating in the official formation of Taiwan's first opposition party.

TAIWAN'S WHITE TERROR

One of the bleakest times in Taiwan's history was the White Terror, when the government started a large-scale campaign to purge the island of political activists during the 1950s. Many who had spoken out against government policies were arrested, charged with attempting to overthrow the government and sentenced to death or life imprisonment. Some who were arrested were indeed political spies but most, it's believed, were unjustly accused. Over 90,000 people were arrested and at least half that number were executed. Taiwanese were not the only targets; a large number of mainland Chinese were arrested or killed. Today Taiwan's White Terror period, though an unpleasant memory, is not forgotten. Green Island's once-notorious political prison, now empty of prisoners, has been transformed into a human rights museum, serving both as a focal point for mourning and a reminder of the human cost of tyranny.

1949 KMT driven from China; seat of ROC government moved to Taiwan

1971 ROC loses UN seat to PRC

1975 Chiang Kai-shek dies; Chiang Ching-kou becomes ROC president

1979 Kaohsiung Incident; US recognition switched to PRC

TAIWAN'S DIPLOMATIC ALLIES

There are currently 22 nations maintaining official diplomatic relations with Taiwan (as the ROC) over the PRC. These are: Belize, Burkina Faso, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Gambia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Kiribati, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Nicaragua, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Swaziland, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and the Vatican.

In 1987, Chiang Ching-kuo announced the end of martial law. The following year, Chiang passed away and his vice president, Lee Teng-hui, became the first Taiwanese-born ROC president. For Taiwan, a new era had begun.

POST–MARTIAL LAW UNTIL NOW

With Taiwan all but excluded from the international community and China growing economically and militarily, Lee Teng-hui had his work cut out for him. Early in his presidency, Lee paid lip service to the 'One China policy,' but as the years progressed he developed a more pro-independence stance. Mistrustful of Lee, China launched a series of missiles only 25km away from the Taiwanese coast in 1995. But the scare tactics backfired, and Taiwan reelected Lee Teng-hui in open elections the following year.

Sensing that the 'stick' approach had failed, China switched to carrots, and in 1998 offered to lift the ban on shipping and direct flights. The offer was rebuffed by Lee, who incensed China even further the next year by declaring openly his belief that China and Taiwan, as two separate countries, should enjoy 'state to state' relations.

In 2000, with Taiwan's presidential elections looming on the horizon, there was much cross-Strait sabre rattling. Despite this, DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian won in a three-party race, ending 54 years of KMT rule in Taiwan. Though the election signalled pro-independence, Chen was widely seen as a disaster by Beijing. The newly elected Chen soon softened his stance somewhat, declaring in his inauguration speech that the status quo would be maintained as long as China did not attempt to take Taiwan by force. But Beijing was hardly won over by Chen's words, demanding a firm commitment to the 'One China principle.'

Chen found himself between a rock and a hard place, unable to please either his supporters or his detractors. As a result, cross-strait relations stalled during Chen's first term, with the only glimmer of improvement being the opening of limited trade and travel between China and Taiwan's offshore islands. Though often overshadowed by the more high-profile presidential election, Taiwan's legislative election of 2001 was equally revolutionary, reducing the KMT (albeit temporarily) to minority party status in a legislature they'd once controlled with an iron grip.

Chen's reelection in 2004, by the slimmest of margins, was surrounded by strange circumstances to say the least; an assassination attempt on the day before the election resulted in both president and vice president being mildly wounded, both by the same bullet. Needless to say, some felt the event was staged for sympathy. China, fearing that Chen's reelection would embolden pro-independence factions, caused cross-strait tensions to be ratcheted to their highest level in years with the issuing of an 'anti-secession law'. The law, in brief, codified China's long-standing threat to attack Taiwan should the island's leaders declare independence. Though Beijing's move was protested by massive rallies throughout Taiwan, cross-strait tension seems to have abated somewhat since, and there's been little outside of the usual sabre rattling for the past two years.

NOTABLE POLITICAL FIGURES OF POST–MARITAL LAW TAIWAN

Lee Teng-hui

Even Lee Teng-hui's worst enemies grudgingly concede that the first democratically elected president of the Republic of China (1988–2000) was one smart cookie. After all, only the most clever of men could possibly rise to the highest office in the land (a position once held by Chiang Kai-shek), all the while holding political views diametrically opposed to the very party he led. Taiwanese-born Lee, a Hakka, had been a KMT apparatchik since the early 1970s. After taking over the presidency on the death of Chiang Ching-kuo in 1988, Lee skilfully consolidated his power base by stalwartly defending the KMT party line while simultaneously continuing the democratisation of Taiwan which was started by his predecessor. During his term, Lee was a supporter of the Taiwanese localisation movement, which sought to restore the identity of Taiwan as more than just an appendage of Mainland China. While president, many suspected that Lee was a secret supporter of Taiwan independence. After the KMT loss in 2000 (a loss which many still feel was due in part to Lee's having sown the seeds of discord within his own party), Lee was expelled from the KMT, immediately becoming the spiritual leader of the staunchly pro-Taiwan-independence Taiwan Solidarity Union party.

Chen Shui-bian

Loved by some and despised by others, the ROC's current president Chen Shui-bian (or A-bian, as he's colloquially referred) was elected in 2000. His election ended more than 50 years of KMT rule in Taiwan, and though previously a strong supporter of Taiwanese independence, Chen's current official stance seems to be one of conciliation towards both sides of the issue. A lawyer by trade (Chen was one the defence lawyers following the crackdown on democracy activists in what would later be called 'the Kaohsiung Incident'), Chen's tenure as mayor of Taipei in the mid-90s made him the DPP's most prominent figure in the decade following the lifting of martial law. (Chen would lose his mayorship in 1998, only to redeem his political career in a big way in the presidential election of 2000.) Reelected by the narrowest of margins in 2004, Chen's second term as ROC president has been marked by scandals involving family members and island-wide protests that have widely gridlocked the government. Constitutionally barred from seeking a third term in 2008, it is likely that Chen, like his predecessor Lee Teng-hui, will become an elder statesmen of sorts.

Ma Ying-jeou

Current KMT chairman and former Taipei mayor Ma Ying-jeou is widely considered the front-runner for the 2008 presidential election. Though Ma's squeaky-clean image has been tarnished in recent years due to a number of scandals, Ma has defended his innocence and maintained his intention to run for the presidency in 2008. Whether Ma will be able to withstand the veritable typhoon of mudslinging that's part and parcel of Taiwan's current political environment with his image intact still remains to be seen; nonetheless, the charismatic former justice minister's image looms large over Taiwan's future political landscape.

1988 Chiang Ching-kou dies; Lee Teng-hui becomes first Taiwanese-born ROC president

1996 Lee Teng-hui reelected in first democratic ROC presidential election

2000 Chen Shui-bian elected ROC president, ending KMT rule

2000 'Three small links' opens trade between Taiwanese-held islands and Mainland China

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2006 brought a number of interesting political developments, as two major figures from Taiwan's 'old guard' made much-touted visits to mainland China. Other major political stories of 2006 and 2007 have been the changing the names of various state-run departments and buildings to incorporate the word 'Taiwan' instead of 'China,' and the large scale removal of thousands of statues of former dictator Chiang Kai-shek from many public spaces in Taiwan. As of this writing, there's even talk of removing Chiang's statue from one of Taipei's most famous landmarks, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall (p90); the hall's name itself might have been changed to the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall by the time this edition goes to print. Probably the biggest political story of 2007 has been Taiwan's extended state of political gridlock thanks to a number of high-profile corruption charges involving major figures from both the KMT and the DPP. What affect this will have on Taiwan's internal and external situation in the coming years is anybody's guess.

2004
Chen Shui-bian narrowly reelected

2005
China enacts 'Anti-secession law'

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The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Taiwan offers travellers food and festivals, mountains and beaches, temples and museums; still, the first thing that people usually mention after visiting the island is the kindness of the people. Taiwan's overall social friendliness can be seen in the island's overall low crime rate, general receptiveness to new ideas, and overall *joie de vivre* of its citizenry. A western visitor standing around in a train station trying to decipher the train schedule can pretty much take it for granted that some earnest young person (we say young person simply because the older generation is less likely to speak English, and not because Taiwanese kindness knows any particular generation gap) will approach them asking, 'Can I help you?' within a few minutes. 'Friendly' is often used to describe the Taiwanese, often followed by 'relaxed'. The latter is especially true when compared with Taiwan's close neighbours (physically, and to some extent, culturally), Japan and South Korea, where people there are often described as 'industrious', 'polite', and 'reserved' – but rarely 'relaxed'.

Articulate advice and acerbic arguments can be found on www.forumosa.com; if there's something about Taiwan you've got to say, don't be shy, join the fray.

Why is this? It's interesting to compare the national psyche of the three countries. Economically the three have followed roughly similar trajectories (low-tech agrarian to high-tech industrial) to roughly similar demographics featuring largely middle-class populations. Though dissimilar in many ways, the 20th century was filled with periods of trauma for all three nations. South Korea, like Taiwan, bears the scars of foreign colonialism, oppressive dictatorship, military occupation and the always-looming spectre of catastrophic war. The Japanese psyche is scarred by military defeat and occupation. But Taiwan, which endured the shackles of colonialism, decades of brutal martial law and dictatorship, continual low level threat of invasion, and the added ignominy of existing in the strange political limbo of being an officially politically unrecognised entity (by all but a handful of nations; see p38), has managed to produce a population of 21-odd million citizens whose disposition could be summed up with the word 'sunny'.

Wan An Taipei (Goodnight Taipei; http://wanantaipei.blogspot.com) is a regularly updated blog and podcast. It's a good resource for students of language and culture.

Strange indeed. Or is it? Consider the possibility that the same factors that have brought about Taiwan's unique geopolitical position have also had a great hand in shaping the disposition of its people. Taiwanese people are painfully aware of their island's diplomatic isolation. Though hobbled by (among other factors) imposed nonparticipation in the UN, the Taiwanese government has gone to great lengths to make itself heard on the international stage. Rarely does a week goes by in which the Taiwan government doesn't attempt to join various international agencies. Though generally blocked, these attempts are always big news in Taiwan. Taiwan's lack of 'official' international recognition is a big part of the Taiwanese psyche, so much so that every victory – the occasional recognition by any nation, no matter how small – is cause for national celebration.

Andres' Photoblog (http://drepix.blogspot.com) is the photoblog of a Taiwanese expat who has a definite eye for colour.

This may be part of why Taiwanese people are so genial. By the very act of applying for a visa, or of passing through customs at Taoyuan Airport, a foreign visitor is recognising (in some sense at least) Taiwan's legitimacy to control its own borders.

There's another possible way in which Taiwan's curious diplomatic situation may have helped to shape the disposition of its people. Although the United States does not technically recognise Taiwan as a sovereign nation, it has pledged to come to Taiwan's aid in the event of military conflict. Thus, like Japan and Korea, Taiwan enjoys the 'protection' of the world's most powerful

military force. However, unlike either of the other nations, Taiwan has long been free from the obligation of having to quarter American soldiers. Though older people might recall the days when American servicemen were stationed in Taiwan, or patronised brothels in Taipei's Combat Zone (p117) while on R&R from Vietnam, for people under 40 those days are forgotten history.

Anyone in Taipei can tell you how to order a pizza from Dominoes. The number – 2882 5252 in mandarin sounds like, 'Hungry Daddy hungry, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!'

By comparison, nearly every Seoulite has witnessed at least a few incidents involving American soldiers, ranging from minor cultural misunderstandings to fully fledged street brawls between young foreign soldiers and locals. In Okinawa, as well in other parts of Japan, the presence of American military bases are to the Japanese a source for feelings ranging from mild irritation to fear and anger. Perhaps this is another way in which the curse of Taiwan's political isolation has spit up a gift, and why western visitors to Taiwan don't have to learn to say 'I'm a tourist, not a soldier' in Mandarin.

Perhaps both of these theories are mostly hogwash. Maybe Taiwanese people are friendly because of the weather (hot and wet, and down south usually sunny). Maybe its because Taiwan has been blessed with a mixture of Buddhist philosophy and hefty (though somewhat underestimated) contribution of relaxed Polynesian DNA to the overall gene pool.

Or maybe there is something in the theory of collective national hunger for recognition from the world community, a sentiment that filters down only partly through the lips of people on the street. Perhaps when a Taiwanese person is especially nice to a Western visitor (as often happens), following some random act of kindness with the commonly spoken words, 'Welcome to Taiwan', they're only telling part of the story.

Maybe what they're really saying is, 'Thank you for realising that we are here.'

Tealit.com, an acronym (sort of) for 'Teach English and Live in Taiwan', has helped launch many an expat life in Formosa.

LIFESTYLE

Education

To foreign eyes, the Taiwanese generally seem a fairly relaxed bunch, at least on a superficial level. But beneath the surface, Taiwanese society is plagued by much the same pressures that bedevil Japanese, Korean, Hong Kong, and increasingly of late, middle class Chinese society; namely an education system that's an absolute pressure cooker for pathos.

One of the elements cited as a factor both in Taiwan's economic success and its successful transition from authoritarian dictatorship to representative democracy is the emphasis Taiwan society has placed on education. But this has come at a price, one especially paid for by the young. For most Taiwanese, the pressure begins in early adolescence. Competition to get into 'good' universities is fierce, and university admission in Taiwan is done on the basis of the results of standardised testing. Mastering these tests requires rote memorisation, offering students little incentive for creative 'out of the box' thinking. Beginning in high school, and often earlier, most Taiwanese students will spend long hours at one of tens of thousands of *bǔxíbān* (cram schools), where, well…they'll do just that; cramming as much studying and memorisation in as possible. One of the subjects they'll be tested on is English, but generally speaking, learning useful conversational English takes a backseat to memorising the grammatical patterns they'll see in their all-consuming tests. Many an idealistic Westerner has come to teach at one of these cram schools with the idea that they'll be beloved by gearing the preexisting curriculum towards fun and useful language skills, only to learn that their efforts are not appreciated. 'Teach us the English we need to pass the test', will commonly be the response of young Taiwanese towards their earnest foreign educators. 'When we've gotten into university then we can learn English we can actually use.'

Access Koshering (http://accesskaohsiung.blogspot.com) is a public-service site for English speakers living in Kaohsiung.

You might be able to detect the long-term detrimental effects of this type of education when interacting with educated Taiwanese, who often feel shy and awkward when confronted by a Westerner. Often times, what's going on in their head at the time is, 'Dammit, I studied English for years but I still can't tell this Western guy how to get to the train station.' Because of the overall friendliness of the Taiwanese, combined with their desperate desire not to lose face, they'll try their best. This is another reason Taiwanese people tend to flatter to the point of obsequiousness a Westerner who can barely string together three words of Chinese. Part of it is cultural (the Taiwanese are, in general, pretty prone to flattery), but another part is that they're generally impressed with someone who has the courage to risk losing face by speaking a language not their own.

Tolerance

A primarily Buddhist nation, Taiwan is, by and large, a highly tolerant society. Though no Sydney or San Francisco, Taipei has a flourishing gay culture scene, with plenty of bars, cafés, bookstores and other places where gay, lesbian and transgender people hang out. In 2006, then-mayor Ma Ying-jeou officiated the opening of the city's annual Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Festival, ceremonially hoisting a rainbow flag contributed

CULTURAL COMPASSION MOMENT #1

If you're a Westerner in Taiwan, chances are that you'll have had the following experience:

A parent will push their child – sometimes an adolescent, often younger – in your direction, saying in vaguely scolding-sounding Mandarin, punctuated with poorly pronounced English, 'Hello' or 'How do you do?'

What the parent is probably saying is some variation of, 'Mummy and daddy have spent thousands on English lessons you didn't want in the first place. Now show us that we haven't wasted all that money!'

If the child is the confident sort, they'll then say a few words in English in your direction. This is fine. Greet them back, always smiling.

More often than not, the child will fall into personality type 'B', and will look distinctly uncomfortable. They might even look as if they hate you, but don't take it personally. Instead, imagine your own parents, first forcing you to study a completely alien language when you'd rather be playing video games, then trying to get you to perform like a trained monkey for some random funny-looking stranger on the footpath. Just keep smiling. But remember this moment for Cultural Compassion Moment #2.

CULTURAL COMPASSION MOMENT #2

Also common among Westerners visiting Taiwan is an experience of the following sort: You are at a bank, a restaurant, or someplace else, desperately wishing that the local with whom you're briefly interacting could understand just a few words of simple English. But they can't; in fact, you seem to be making them visibly uncomfortable by your presence. Perhaps they're fidgeting, or stammering something unintelligible, or just giggling nervously. They certainly aren't helping you get your money changed, your coffee sweetened, or whatever it is that you came for. You find yourself wondering, 'Does this individual dislike foreigners?'

Consider instead the reluctant performing child of Cultural Compassion Moment #1. It's entirely possible that this nervous person before you is that child, all grown up, and that your current interaction is bringing up memories about which they'd rather not be reminded.

Though this only *might be* the case, smile sweetly, practising the compassionate patience of the Buddha.

by San Francisco mayor Gavin Newson, and stating that he felt the festival demonstrated that Taiwan society placed a premium on 'peace, compassion, and respect for all voices and cultures'. Certainly 'traditional' values hold sway in certain families, so a young, gay Taiwanese is probably slightly less likely to be comfortable coming out to their parents than, say, their North American counterpart might be. But the difference is probably not all that pronounced.

Drugs

Though Taiwan has liberalised in many ways, drugs are still as illegal as they've always been, and even possession of 'soft' drugs like cannabis is dealt with harshly. The Western traveller or expatriate caught with illegal drugs (in any quantity) soon discovers that the Taiwanese tendency to be overly kind towards westerners does not extend itself into the criminal justice system. Really – we can't stress this enough – if you need to catch a buzz during your visit to Taiwan, consider the mixing of *Whisbih* (p58) and betel nut to be your safest option.

Charlie in Wonderland (http://taiwan.atashi-anta.net) is a Taiwan blog in Spanish!

Home Life

Taiwanese home life is about as diverse as that of Australia, Canada, or other countries where a large percentage of families are urban and a small percentage lead more rural lifestyles. More typical Confucian family structure is still strong in some parts of society – especially in more rural areas, where an extended family living under one roof is common (opposite) – but nowadays most urban Taiwanese families wouldn't seem much different from their Western counterparts. Sexual equality has been the norm for decades in Taiwan, so two working parents are a feature of a good many families. Since most kids go to after-school programs of one sort or another (*bǔxíbān*, usually), there isn't the same level of outcry over children being left unattended in the afternoons as in the West. Furthermore, its still fairly common in Taiwan to have one or more surviving grandparents living within the nuclear family, taking more of a role in child-raising than in the west.

When entering a family household, greet the oldest person first unless said person is a middle-aged woman, who may not be pleased by your presumption.

ECONOMY

Taiwan has long been known as a serious economic success story, its economy being one of the strongest and most stable in Asia. Once known as a producer of cheap textiles and low-grade electronics, nowadays the 'Made in Taiwan' label can be found on a wide variety of high-end products, from laptop computers and LCD monitors to aluminium and carbon-fibre bicycle frames. Over the past several years, Taiwan's economy has begun to shift away from that of a purely manufacturing-based one. The reasons behind this shift won't come as a surprise to those familiar with current trends in the global economy; though political relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) are frosty, both governments have long since recognised the benefits of encouraging strong business relations between the two sides. This has allowed Taiwanese companies like Acer, Giant, and many others to take advantage of the mainland's cheaper labour and highly motivated workforces to maximise profits for the company.

Though his face appears on Taiwan's currency, Sun Yat-sen never made it to the island in his lifetime.

Though this policy has certainly increased corporate profits, it has also raised unemployment levels in Taiwan. At about 4%, Taiwan's unemployment rate is relatively low for the region, but still high for a nation used to near-full employment levels. Still, Taiwan's economy remains pretty strong; you don't tend to see former salary men sleeping on cardboard boxes in parks in Taipei, something quite common in Tokyo, Seoul, and other cities that have experienced marked economic downturns. Compared to the level of poverty visitors to the PRC will see, poverty levels in the ROC are negligible. Street beggars, ubiquitous in China, are a rarity in Taiwan.

Currently, one of the major factors slowing the pace of capital and investment growth between Taiwan and mainland China is the restrictions placed on travel between the two. While the lack of direct travel links between Taiwan and the Mainland is little more than a nuisance to the casual traveller (who needs to fly from one to the other via a 'neutral' political territory like Hong Kong), some in Taiwan – particularly the current administration – feel that such links would unduly accelerate the rate of job loss in Taiwan. The issue of direct links are discussed in greater detail in our History chapter (p32).

The Daily Bubble Tea (http://toddalperovitz.blogspot.com) has good pictures and cultural insights from an expat living in Taiwan.

A 'TYPICAL HAKKA FAMILY HOME' *Joshua Samuel Brown*

In the mid 1990s I lived with the Yeh family, Hakkas living in a medium-sized village just a stone's throw away from Hsinchu Science Park, one of Taiwan's major computer and high-tech manufacturing centres. The Yehs lived in a four-storey house, part of a chain of row houses that stretched fairly far in either direction along the town's main street. Half of the first floor was taken up by an indoor garage. The garage had a prominently displayed aquarium filled with goldfish, which, according to feng shui principles, is meant to bring good luck. If the fish weren't enough, the garage was also home to the family dog, Lai-fu, whose name meant 'Come Fortune'. The garage also had two nice cars, three or four motorcycles, and some bicycles for the kids. Lai-fu and the fish, it seemed, were earning their keep.

Behind the garage was the living room where at any given time friends, family and extended family might be found drinking tea, eating sunflower seeds or otherwise just hanging out. The centrepiece of the living room was an expensive, beautifully ornate wooden table carved from a single piece of wood. Next to the living room was a kitchen in which meals were cooked but almost never eaten. Instead, Yeh Tai-tai ('Mister Yeh's Wife', which was how I always addressed the family matriarch) and Mr Yeh's mother (who I called Ah-yi, or Auntie) brought the meals they cooked into the kitchen of the house next door through a side door that was never closed. This was the home of Mr Yeh's brother and his wife. Their kitchen was equipped with a large round table with a lazy Susan. There was always a pot of soup on sister-in-law's stove, as well as a rice cooker filled with rice.

Grandfather and Grandmother lived in an apartment somewhere behind the two kitchens. They were only home around half the year; the rest of the time they were off travelling around the world, a popular pursuit for Taiwanese retirees of decent physical and economic health.

The second floor contained the bedrooms of Mr and Mrs Yeh, across the hall from which was that of Chien-chiu (or 'Jem') a cute, chubby preadolescent who was almost always never seen without a big grin on his face. The Yehs had the idea that renting a room to a foreigner would be a good way for Jem to practice his English, but Jem wound up teaching me more Chinese than I ever taught him English.

The third floor contained the bedroom of the Yehs' oldest sons, who only came home for the holidays, and a parlour with a fold-up Ping-Pong table and disused snooker table that Mr Yeh had bought some years ago when snooker had been a passing craze in Taiwan.

The fourth floor was divided into two sections. In the back was the little apartment I lived in; two medium-sized rooms with wooden Japanese-style floors and a bathroom with a shower. The front of the fourth floor was the most beautiful room in the house; the front half was an outdoor garden, complete with a tiled fish pond and dozens of plants. The back half was a large, open room with an ornately tiled ceiling, an incense brazier, and a large mahogany table pressed against the northern wall.

This was the shrine of Yeh Ken-fu, the grandfather of Mr Yeh. It was here that the family came on holidays to pay their respects. Most of the time it was only me, the foreign boarder, who spent any time on the fourth floor, except on weekends when Mrs Yeh would come upstairs to clean and dust, and very early in the predawn hours when Mr Yeh's father would come up to tend to his own father's shrine.

POPULATION

As far as population density is concerned, Taiwan is second only to Bangladesh. The majority of Taiwanese live in crowded urban areas, and the most crowded of these is unquestionably Taipei; the capital and the surrounding areas, including the port city of Keelung, accounts for over 40% of Taiwan's entire population. Visitors will notice the crowds (if they try to travel between cities during the holidays, they'll notice them rather intimately); but in everyday circumstances, Taipei doesn't feel quite as elbow-to-elbow congested as Shanghai, Guangzhou or Hong Kong. If Taiwan were a man, people might comment 'He's fat, but he carries his weight gracefully.'

Business cards should be handed and received with both hands and never put in a back pocket.

On the surface, Taiwan's ethnic breakdown seems fairly straightforward – an overwhelming majority of people are of Han Chinese stock, with a tiny minority being of aboriginal descent. But appearances are deceiving, for in recent years, as Taiwan has sought to create a national identity for itself distinct from that of mainland China (which is itself not nearly as culturally homogenous as many would believe), its people have tended to look for diversity in their own cultural backgrounds wherever these might be found. For example, it isn't unusual to chat to a shopkeeper or taxi driver in Taipei affecting a few items of aboriginal-style clothing, only to have them tell you about their having some blood lineage (however slight), to one of Taiwan's nine major aboriginal tribes.

If you're working for a Taiwanese company and your boss says she's serving you some fried squid, don't look forward to sharing a tasty snack. To serve someone fried squid is slang, meaning 'You're fired!'

The population of Taiwan's indigenous tribes is under half a million, though the numbers become blurry when intermarriage is taken into consideration. These groups live throughout Taiwan, though the majority are concentrated in the Hualien and Taitung Counties, the Central Mountain Range and Nantou County. However, a fair number of Taiwanese people who wouldn't consider themselves as being aboriginal still have some aboriginal blood.

Then there are distinctions among the Han Chinese themselves. Some of the earliest Han Chinese immigrants were from China's Fujian province. They spoke the Hoklo dialect, which some now refer to as Taiwanese. These Fujian immigrants make up roughly 70% of Taiwan's current population. The Hakka people followed the Fujian people into Taiwan in the 17th century, settling themselves into the foothills of the Central Mountain Range. Nowadays, most Hakka live in the northwestern counties of Taoyuan, Miaoli and Hsinchu, and make up between 10% and 15% of Taiwan's population. Some Hakka also live on the east coast.

But the main distinction – some even call it a divide – has to do with the remaining 12% to 15% of Taiwan's population, the descendents of those who came over from mainland China with the Kuomintang (KMT) between 1945 and 1949; it was this group that by and large controlled the reigns of politics and business during the Chiang Kai-shek era. This situation only began to be reversed after the lifting of martial law, and though Taiwan can easily lay claim to being one of the most peaceful societies in Asia, old wounds and divides still linger under the surface.

Ben Goes to Taiwan (Not Thailand), http://taiwanben.wordpress.com, is full of random ravings from a roving rambler.

ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

Though Taiwan's aboriginal people represent less than 2% of the overall population, celebration of their culture is experiencing a serious heyday in Taiwan. Part of this has to do with the ongoing quest for a true 'Taiwanese' identity; not one necessarily independent from that of Han China, but one not totally viewed through the prism of China either. Taiwan's aboriginal culture has been touted especially heavily in various tourist campaigns, both internationally and regionally throughout Taiwan, so much so that first-time travellers to Taiwan might be led to believe that Taiwanese of non-Han descent represent a larger percentage of the population than the actually do.

TAIWAN'S INDIGENOUS TRIBES

With a few exceptions, most of Taiwan's indigenous communities are found in the mountains or along the eastern coast. Nearly all aboriginal people speak Mandarin in addition to their own tribal languages. Some villages offer Disneyesque recreations of 'traditional' tribal life and others are hardly distinguishable from any other small Taiwanese town.

- With a population of around 140,000, the **Amis** are the largest aboriginal tribe in Taiwan. You'll find people of Ami descent all over Taiwan, and predominantly Ami towns and villages on the east coast, from Taitung to Hualien.
- The second largest tribe in Taiwan, is composed of roughly 90,000 **Atayal** people living in the hills and mountains of northern Taiwan. Some of the businesses in Wulai County are owned by Atayal people.
- Originally from the central and southern mountains of the Island, the **Bunun** are the third largest tribe in Taiwan, with about 40,000 people.
- Around 40,000 people identify themselves as members of the **Truku** tribe, whose villages can be visited around Hualien, on Taiwan's central east coast.
- The **Rukai** and the **Puyama** dwell on Taiwan's south east coast, though the Rukai historically ranged out a bit further west than did the Puyama. About 9000 people belong to each tribe.
- The **Tsou** tribe settled in Kaohsiung north of Chiayi, and the **Paiwan** people settled in Kaosiung south of Pingtung. Each tribe claims membership of around 7000.
- Settled in the hills around Hsinchu and Miaoli, the **Saisiat** are a small tribe of around 4000, about the same size as the indigenous population of enchantingly beautiful Lanyu island, home of the **Yami** tribe.
- Taiwan's two smallest tribes are the **Kavalan** of Ilan, with around 1000 members, followed by the 400 or so **Thao** people, who live around Taiwan's most famous tourist spot, Sun Moon Lake.
- *Hold the presses!* Numbering between five and ten thousand, until recently the **Sakizaya** people had been classified as Ami; though the Sakizaya have lived among the Ami for the past century following conflict with Han settlers in late 19th century, in 2005 tribal elders petitioned the government for official recognition as a separate tribe. In January, 2007 the Sakizaya became Taiwan's 13th officially recognised indigenous tribe.

Some are cynical of Taiwan's usage of aboriginal imagery in light of the fact that for decades, prosperity largely bypassed aboriginal communities.

While we don't wish to be overly Pollyana-ish about it, what we hear while travelling among aboriginal communities is that a fair majority of Taiwan's aboriginals are taking a 'better late than never' attitude towards the sudden government and societal recognition of their contributions. To be sure, many issues remain unresolved (particularly on Lanyu, where hundreds of barrels of nuclear waste still remain buried on the island's southern end, continuing to affect the health of the native Yami tribe). But on the whole, travel and tourism seems to be playing a positive role in the empowerment of Taiwan's aboriginal people.

One of the most comprehensive sites on Taiwan's aboriginal peoples is www.atayal.org. The site provides detailed information on the history and customs of the nine major tribes in Taiwan.

SPORT

Since the establishment of the five-day work week, increasing numbers of Taiwanese are finding the time to pursue outdoor activities and organised sports. Land developers and government have really, er, stepped up to the plate. Newest is the Taipei Arena (p102), a state-of-the-art sports complex that seats 15,000 within its cavernous dome. The Tianmu Baseball Stadium seats 10,000, and is where many of Taiwan's professional baseball games are played.

If you really want to get to know a tribe, your best bet is to spend a few days in a homestay. Lanyu is a particularly good place to do this.

Lánqiú (basketball) and *bàngqiú* (baseball) are two of the most popular organised sports in Taiwan. The teams in Taiwan's Chinese Professional Baseball League include the Brother Elephants, China Trust Whales, President Lions, Makoto Gida, Sinon Bulls and First Securities Agan. Because the teams don't have a home stadium, games rotate at various local stadiums around the island.

Those interested in sporting events for the disabled will want to head to Taipei in 2009 when the city will play host to the summer games for the Deaf Olympics.

Basketball is popular largely because it can be played indoors and is not dependent on Taiwan's volatile weather. Amusingly, the most strident fans of basketball in Taiwan are junior high school girls, who have fan clubs devoted to their favourite stars.

Gāoěrfū (golf) is the oldest organised sport in Taiwan and a favourite pastime for the well-to-do. Most golf clubs are open to the public and only require a guest membership to play. Fees can be hefty, though, reaching NT3000 for 18 holes. The Professional Golf Association of the ROC holds annual tournaments in Taiwan and participates in international competitions.

Martial arts have always been practised in Taiwan as a way to keep fit and keep healthy by regulating ones *chi* (*qì;* vital energy). There are more than 20 different kinds of martial arts including the one most foreigners are familiar with, *tàijíquán* (taichi). Taichi is graceful but powerful slow-motion shadow-boxing and is commonly practised in the early morning as the sun rises. The 2-28 Peace Park or the Sun Yat-sen Memorial in Taipei are good places to watch taichi practitioners.

Dragon boat racing, another traditional sport, takes place in June. The Taipei International Dragon Boat Race Championships attracts local and international competitors.

Qing emperor Kangxi was not enamoured of Taiwan; he refused to allow it on official maps, calling it 'a ball of mud beyond the pale of civilisation'.

MEDIA

Unbiased…Reserved…Nontitillating…aren't words you often hear used to describe the Taiwanese media. Newspapers feature, as often as not, no-holds-barred political slugfests, with a number of papers clearly supportive of one political camp and mercilessly skewering the other. Rupert Murdoch might not understand the language, but he'd feel right at home collecting the cheques. Magazines with scantily clad sexpots in suggestive poses can be found everywhere from the backs of taxicabs to dentists' waiting rooms. Sex sells, and magazines, newspapers, and TV news programs grow more vapid and titillating by the year. Reporters on the Taiwan news beat are known – and feared – for being aggressive (Sir Elton John had a few words for the Taiwanese media on a recent trip, but we shouldn't reprint them in a family oriented guidebook). And they're crafty as well, so much so that its likely that any Taiwanese politician or celebrity thinks twice before removing their clothes anywhere but in the privacy of their own homes. Taiwan's media is free, not merely in the sense of being neither government censored nor controlled, but free in the purest 'free for all' sense. This is what a couple of decades of change brings after the near half-century of state-controlled propaganda the Taiwanese endured under martial law.

Though revered in Taiwan for deposing the Dutch, Ming general Koxinga is mostly remembered in Kinmen for cutting down all the trees.

Over on the Mainland, the Communist Party justifies censorship and government control of the press by warning that a Taiwan-style free press will lead to spiritual pollution and moral decay; bollocks. Though Taiwan currently has one of the most sensationalistic medias in the world, most Taiwanese are about as personally lascivious as a Norman Rockwell painting.

RELIGION

Religion on the island is syncretic, dominated by ancestor worship, Taoism and Buddhism. The Taiwanese approach to spirituality is eclectic and not particularly dogmatic; many Taiwanese will combine elements from various religions to suit their needs rather than rigidly adhering to one particular spiritual path. This is something that many Christian missionaries have found frustrating; many Taiwanese don't feel that a conversion to Christianity should imply giving up the myriad folk beliefs that have long-standing meaning to their culture.

Religion plays a number of roles in Taiwanese society. It fosters a sense of shared culture and identity, creating a kind of spiritual glue that brings together people from different economic backgrounds. Temples, especially in less urbanised areas, are usually not just places of worship, but community centres as well. And of course, religion gives Taiwanese people an excuse to get together many times a year and throw massive parties, complete with fireworks, huge multicourse meals, gifts and much making of toasts all around.

Looking to learn more about religious life in Taiwan? Pick up a copy of Mark Caltionhill's *Private Prayers and Public Parades – Exploring the Religious Life of Taipei.*

But there's a supernatural component too. Most Taiwanese homes have shrines, meant as a sacred place to burn incense and place offerings for ancestors. In a well-to-do household, this shrine will often be on the fourth floor (the word for 'four' and the word for 'death' are almost the same in Mandarin). Many Taiwanese wear amulets for good luck and the jade bracelets that adorn many women's wrists were once thought to have supernatural powers to protect the wearer from harm.

Folk Religion

Most residents of towns and villages practise special folk customs that pertain to a historical event or person particular to that area. Folk temples are dedicated to the myriad gods and goddesses that populate Taiwanese folk religion. Some of these deities were actually real people who later became deified due to their earthly reputation as a hero or a healer. The warrior Guan Yu, the famous general from China's legendary Three Kingdoms, has temples dedicated to him all over Taiwan. The most popular deities in Taiwan are the god of heaven, who personifies justice, the earth god, who watches over the harvest, and the house god, who protects families when they move into new homes.

Probably the most popular deity in Taiwan is Matsu, goddess of the sea (p216), who watches over fishermen when they go out to sea. Matsu's birthday, which falls on the 23rd day of the third lunar month, is one of the most important religious festivals in Taiwan and Matsu temples around the island host celebrations to honour the goddess.

Taoism

There are some 4.55 million Taoists and over 7000 Taoist temples in Taiwan. Taoist deities in temples sometimes share space with folk deities and the two religions are often intertwined. At the heart of the faith is the philosophy of *Dàojiào* (Taoism), based on the *Tao Te Ching,* attributed to the 6th century BC sage/philosopher Lao-tzu. The Tao, or way, according to Lao-tzu, is the essence of all things in the universe but ultimately cannot be defined. A central facet of Taoism is the concept of *wúwéi* (nonaction), meaning to live in harmony with the universe without forcing things to your will.

Taiwan has world's largest person/temple ratio.

In time, Taoism split into two branches – religious Taoism and philosophical Taoism, each taking very different approaches to Lao-tzu's teachings. Religious Taoism, borrowing concepts from Buddhism and folk religion, became ultimately concerned with the afterlife and achieving immortality. Taoist magicians banished demons through exorcisms and won over the public with demonstrations of their supernatural powers. China lost several emperors who died after drinking elixirs given to them by Taoists promising eternal life. Philosophical Taoism remained a way of life for hermits and for sages, who withdrew from the public life.

Chuang-tzu is one of the most interesting Taoist writers and the Chinese often quote him today. Numerous translations of his work exist and are easy to locate in bookshops around Taipei.

During the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, many Taoist temples were forced to become Buddhist. It wasn't until the KMT arrived that the Taoist temples were restored to their original status. Many of the Chinese immigrants who came after 1945 considered themselves Taoist and established Taoist organisations and fellowships in addition to schools, hospitals and publishing houses.

Confucianism

Rújiā Sīxiǎng (Confucian values and beliefs) form the foundation of Chinese culture. The central theme of Confucian doctrine is the conduct of human relationships for the attainment of harmony and overall good for society. Confucius (551–479 BC), or Master Kong, lived during the upheavals of China's Warring States era, a time of disunity and fear. Master Kong took it upon himself to re-educate his fellow citizens in the words and deeds of earlier Chinese rulers, whom he believed had wisdom that could be applied to his chaotic times. His goal was to reform society through government. Society, he taught, was comprised of five relationships: ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger, and friends. Other things he taught were deference to authority and devotion to family.

Over the course of his lifetime Confucius attracted a steady following of students. After his death at age 72, disciples carried on his work and thousands of books were published with sayings and advice attributed to the philosopher. The five classics of Confucianism are the *Wujing*, consisting of the *I Ching (Book of Changes), Shijing (Book of Poetry), Shujing (Book of History), Liji (Book of Rites)* and *Chuzu (Spring and Autumn Annals)*. Confucian disciples also published other collections of his work, including the *Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean* and *Classic of Filial Piety*. Perhaps the single most influential book attributed to Confucius is the *Lunyu (Analects)*, a collection of essays and dialogues between Confucius and his students. This slim little book contains the central teachings of Confucianism and is standard memorisation for Chinese children.

If you take but one of the great sage Confucius' sayings with you on your journey, we suggest the following: 'Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart.'

KNOW YOUR TEMPLES

Taiwanese temples are where most travellers will get their first exposure to Taiwan's rich religious heritage. The amazing craftsmanship found in temples is a science in itself. The shape of the roof, the placement of the beams and columns and the location of deities are all dictated by the use of feng shui, a complex cosmological system designed to create harmonious surroundings in accordance with the natural laws of the universe.

To the untrained eye, Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian temples look similar, but the three are actually quite distinct. Buddhist temples have fewer images, except for statues of the Buddha seated in the middle of the temple on an altar. Guanyin is the next most common deity you'll see, sometimes accompanied by other Bodhisattvas.

Taoist and folk temples are the gaudiest of the three, featuring brightly painted statues of deities, colourful murals of scenes from Chinese mythology, and a main altar with the temple's principal deity (often flanked by lesser-ranked gods). Fierce-looking temple guardians are often painted on the doors to the entrance of the temple, something you won't see at a Buddhist temple.

Confucian temples are the most sedate and lack the colour and noise of Taoist or Buddhist temples. Confucius was a studious sort, so his temples are generally located in park-like settings, or other locales that are well suited for study, contemplation, or other academic pursuits. About the only time you'll find a serious ruckus at a Confucian temple is on the sage's birthday.

Over time Confucianism developed as a philosophy, with Confucius' words and teachings adopted by Chinese emperors. One of his most important followers was Meng-tze (Mencius; 372–289 BC) who continued to spread the Confucian teachings and expand on Confucian thought.

Confucianism's influence on modern Taiwan society remains strong, as it does in most Chinese communities around the globe. Family is the most important unit of society, friends come second and country comes last. The close bonds between family and friends are one of the most admirable attributes of Chinese culture, a lasting legacy of Confucian teachings.

Buddhism

When Buddhism reached China in the 1st century AD it was already about four centuries old in India and had split into two schools: the Hinayana and Mahayana. In the Hinayana tradition, it was believed that Siddhartha Guatama was the sole Buddha who had given humans a simple path to attain freedom from suffering. The Hinayana stressed that Buddha was not a god but a man who had attained perfection and left the cycle of suffering. In the Mahayana school, Siddhartha was believed to be the reincarnation of a series of Buddas, stretching from the past into an indefinite future. In later Mahayana beliefs, Buddas became gods of transcendence and listened to the prayers of followers. It was Mahayana Buddhism that entered China and eventually made its way to Taiwan and other parts of northeast Asia.

Buddhism came to Taiwan in the 17th century, after the Ming loyalist Cheng Cheng-kung drove out the Dutch and relocated his troops to Taiwan. With him came a steady stream of Buddhist monks who had faced persecution in China and wanted to set up temples and monasteries on the island.

Many Japanese were devout Buddhists and supported the growth of Buddhism during their occupation. They were active supporters in the building of temples on the island and financed the construction of Buddhist schools and hospitals.

Buddhists in Taiwan largely follow the Mahayana school, believing in redemption for all mankind. In many Buddhist temples on the island, visitors will see the female Bodhisattva Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, who watches and protects people from harm. Translated, the name Guanyin means 'the one who listens to complaints'.

WOMEN IN TAIWAN

As far as sexual equality is concerned, Taiwanese society is about as equitable as you're going to find anywhere in Asia. The Taiwanese constitution forbids discrimination on the base of gender, and women are found in the upper echelons of many companies and businesses. And of course, vice president Lu, a heartbeat away from the presidency, is a woman.

In education there are a few interesting gender gaps; while graduating classes of both high schools and universities tend to be evenly split, graduate programs skew heavily on the male side, with roughly three of five Masters students being men, and only one in three doctorate students being women. A similar skew can be seen in the teaching profession; women dominate the profession at kindergarten and grade school levels while high school positions skew slightly towards men and the majority of Taiwan's university professors are men.

Foreign women travelling in Taiwan should be as cautious here as anywhere else, but on the whole Taiwanese men are pretty respectful (though they're known to sometimes gawk a bit too much). Incidences of actual harassment, though not unheard of, are on the low side for Asia in general.

ARTS

Art in Taiwan is alive and well in great abundance. Generally, a discussion of art can be divided into three fairly broad categories; traditional, contemporary and indigenous.

As far as the traditional is concerned, the fact that Taiwan is home to some of the world's finest repositories of classical Chinese art ranks among the world's worst kept secrets. Chiang Kai-shek was a voracious collector of valuable items, including art. In keeping with his passion for 'collecting,' he ordered his retreating forces to collect as much art as they could get their hands on while retreating from the Mainland in 1949. These treasures were added to the already voluminous collection that had been liberated earlier from the former imperial collection housed for centuries in the Forbidden City in Beijing. Much of this collection is housed at the National Palace Museum in Taipei (p90), but amazing examples of classical Chinese art – from paintings and scrolls to ceramics and bronze – can also be found in various museums throughout the island.

Chinese pronunciation of the number 'four' is similar to the word for 'death'; hence, the number is considered unlucky.

The storing of so many borrowed precious *objets d'art* on Taiwan is one of many long-standing sore spots between the ROC and PRC. However, the fact that much of the art currently on display in Taiwan would very likely have been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) had it remained in the Mainland leads most on both sides to believe that Chiang's having taken them to Taiwan turned out to be, in the long run, a good thing.

While many aspects of traditional Chinese arts can be seen in much contemporary art coming out of Taiwan today, over the past few decades, Taiwanese artists have sought to create an artistic vision that is more Taiwanese, and less connected with the themes found in classical Chinese art. This quest for a Taiwanese identity is one of the most important themes in the contemporary Taiwanese art world. Taiwanese artists have pursued this not only through traditional media such as oil painting and ceramic sculpture, but also through more modern approaches such as multimedia installations and videos, and performance art and film. Taipei's Fine Arts Museum (p93) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (p93) are both must visits. Fans of sculpture should make the trek into northern Taipei County to visit the Juming Museum (p156), which houses a vast collection of works created by Taiwan's most revered modern sculptor.

The art of Taiwan's aboriginal people is also becoming quite popular throughout the island; quite distinctive from Chinese and Chinese-influenced artwork, Taiwanese aboriginal art tends to be more earthy, and almost Polynesian. Traditional arts among Taiwan's aboriginal cultures include woodcarving, weaving and basket making. The Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines (p91) is an excellent place to learn about the arts and crafts of Taiwan's aboriginals. The Ketagalan Cultural Centre (p131) in Beitou, Taipei, features aboriginal culture exhibitions, a multimedia showroom, an aboriginal theme library, research facilities, and conference and performance space. Taitung's National Museum of Prehistory (p93) also has worthy exhibits devoted to traditional arts and crafts. Should you make it to Lanyu (p316), you'll be able to interact with local artists from the Yami tribe who create artwork unique to their tribe.

Eight is a lucky number. This accounts for the high number of businesses paying big bucks to have phone numbers like xxxx-8888.

Cinema

Taiwanese cinema has a long history, going all the way back to 1901, with Japanese-made documentaries and feature films. Silent-era films often used a Japanese convention called *rensageki,* a mix of film and theatre with moving images supplementing performances on stage. When the KMT took over Taiwan, they set up their own movie industry as a way to 'educate' the Taiwanese population in all things Chinese. The movie business was short-lived, however, because there was little interest in KMT morality plays and, on top of that, only a few of the older residents of the island could speak Mandarin.

In the 1960s the government created the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMP) and the movie industry finally took off. During the 1960s and 1970s, audiences were treated to a deluge of romantic melodramas and martial-arts epics and in the late 1970s a disturbing subgenre emerged called 'social realism', full of brutal violence and sex.

In the 1980s the Taiwanese grew tired of the repetitive films of the past two decades and film makers had to find a way to compete with foreign-made films. During this time, two film makers emerged who would have a strong impact on how Taiwanese cinema was seen abroad, though most locally made movies from this point forward would only be seen in art houses. Hou Hsiao-hsien, considered the most important director of this New Wave movement, broke away from escapist movies and chose instead to make movies that depicted the gritty reality of Taiwan life. *The Sandwich Man* (1983) is one of the best examples of Taiwan's New Wave ideals, establishing it as a realistic artistic movement. The movie is an adaptation of three short stories by the Taiwanese author Huang Chun-ming, which explore life in Taiwan during the 1950s and 1960s. One segment of the movie is taken from the story 'The Taste of Apples', and is about a young boy from the countryside who encounters tragedy when he moves from the countryside to Taipei.

Another of Hou Hsiao-hsien's movies, *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (1985), also explores childhood in rural Taiwan during the Cold War era.

MANY SCULPTURES, MANY STORIES

British art critic Ian Findlay has proclaimed Juming's work 'the most instantly recognisable of Taiwan's contemporary sculptors.' An afternoon spent at the Juming Museum in Taipei County's Chinshan is kind of like an intensive course in short story appreciation, with every tale created by a master of the genre, its text made of stone, metal and other mediums instead of words. Within the 12+ hectare sculpture garden and museum, myriad tales are told indeed.

One painted bronze sculpture shows a man and woman sitting beneath an umbrella while behind them a third woman sits with arms folded, a dour, petulant expression creasing her face. The couple are lovers, that much seems certain, but is the third woman a jealous paramour or disapproving auntie? If the artist himself knows, he isn't saying. One of Juming's most oft-quoted views is his belief that the interpretation of art is the domain of the viewer and not the artist. Visitors to the Juming Museum may well be struck by how few of his works bear titles aside from the names of the series to which they belong. The artist has been quoted as saying that he feels that naming his sculptures would just 'get in the way' of the viewer's interpretation.

While many of his sculptures (most notably those in his most famous series, *Tai Chi*, which feature gigantic blocky stone monoliths in various martial-arts poses) have clearly Taiwanese – or at least Asian – themes, the majority of Juming's works are slice-of-life features, moments frozen in amber, scenes that could be taking place anywhere in the world.

It is fitting, we believe, to consider Juming's artwork as highly representative of modern Taiwanese art as a whole. The artist – and his personal artistic philosophy – seems to fit well with the spirit of 'strategic ambiguity' that Taiwan itself has used so well to navigate the potentially hazardous waters of a political entity that, while clearly independent, dares not declare itself as such.

Is Taiwan a nation or a province? Is the scowling woman a jealous suitor or an over-protective auntie? Different people have different interpretations, but the 'official' answer to both of these questions is roughly the same:

'Have a look. Draw your own conclusions.'

Probably Hou Hsiao-hsien's most successful film is *City of Sadness* (1989), which follows the lives of a Taiwanese family living through the KMT takeover of Taiwan and the 2-28 Incident. This movie was the first to break the silence surrounding the tragedy. *City of Sadness* won the Golden Lion award at the 1989 Venice Film Festival. Hou Hsiao-hsien has continued to produce some masterful work, including the brilliant *The Puppet Master* (1993), an examination of the life of 84-year-old puppeteer Li Tien-lu, who is considered a 'living treasure' by the Taiwanese. Most recently, Hou Hsiao-hsien shot *Millennium Mambo* (2001), a more conventional story about a woman torn between two men.

'By far the most famous director to come out of Taiwan is Tainan-native Ang Lee'

By far the most famous director to come out of Taiwan is Tainan-native Ang Lee. Though his megahit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) made him a household name in the West, Lee had long made the A-list of Hollywood directors with the English language films *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) and *The Ice Storm* (1997). Lee's first film was *Pushing Hands* (1992), filmed in New York with funding from the CMP, followed by *The Wedding Banquet* (1993), which took a bold step in exploring homosexuality in Chinese culture. *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1995) was an art-house favourite in America, featuring both a beautiful storyline and some of the best food scenes ever filmed. Lee's Academy Award for Best Director for the 2006 film *Brokeback Mountain* was cause for major celebration throughout Taiwan, especially in his hometown of Tainan.

Taipei hosts some notable film festivals every year, including the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival. Attending the Golden Horse is a wonderful way to support a struggling industry and see some great films that won't make it into the general theatres. The best place to see indie movies, both local and foreign, is at the SPOT Taipei Film House (p121).

Music

To discover the roots of traditional Taiwanese music, you need to go back a ways, centuries in fact. Early Chinese music was brought to Taiwan by immigrants from Fujian province, who brought with them both the informal folk music and the more stylised operas of their native province. Soft and melodic Nanguan and its more cacophonous sibling Beiguan can be found played around the island. Taiwanese folk music today is called Hoklo, or Holo, and generally features melodic songs played on the *yuèqín* (moon guitar; a kind of two-stringed lute), and accompanied by lyrics in the Taiwanese dialect. Taiwanese and Hakka language opera are also popular, and can be watched both in theatres and at ad-hoc performances on warm nights in small towns around the island. The older generation are naturally more fond of opera than the younger.

As different from traditional Taiwanese music as it is diverse, Taiwanese aboriginal music is also reaching a wide audience, both in and out of Taiwan. Though you've probably never heard of Yingnan and Xiuzhu Guo, you've almost definitely heard their voices; the polyphonic vocals of this elderly Ami couple were sampled by Enigma, becoming the backing vocals for their smash hit, 'Return to Innocence.' (When the couple discovered that their voices were being heard around the world, they filed suit against Enigma, settling out of court for an undisclosed sum.) The more touristy aboriginal theme parks and villages around the island stage regular performances, and you can buy music recorded by various tribal groups all over Taiwan.

However, the most widely listened to music in Taiwan tends to be fairly generic pop. Ask most Taiwanese people what kind of music they listen to, and nine times out of ten you'll hear some variation of 'I like music that

WHAT IS TAIWAN HIP-HOP?

You don't need to understand Chinese to realize that Kou Chou Ching doesn't fit the mold of the stereotypical Western hip-hop aping Asian rap-act. The Taipei Based hip-hop band has been playing clubs, festivals and events around Taiwan since 2003, mixing politically charged lyrics in Mandarin, Hoklo (Taiwanese) and Hakka with sampled flavours drawn from the far corners of Taiwanese musical history. Kou Chou Ching's MC Fan Jiang spoke a bit about Taiwanese hip-hop, music and identity:

> 'What can I say about Taiwan hip-hop? Like everywhere else in the world, hip-hop is getting more popular in Taiwan, and like everywhere else, Taiwan has its share of 'pop' hip hop artists making money from rhyming over beats, guys like Jay or Wang (two rappers currently popular in Taiwan). A lot of Taiwanese hip-hop artists start by mixing music on computers, then mixing in various Western influences, including of course old and new school rap from African-American hip-hop artists.
>
> But some groups try to take it in a different direction aiming for a more clearly Taiwanese-flavoured hip-hop music. Kou Chou Ching draws its influences not primarily from the West, but from the music of our home, from traditional Taiwanese music; Kou Chou Ching songs sample Beiguan and Nanguan, Taiwan Opera, Hakka Ba-yin and Mountain Songs, South Chinese Huamei Diao, with some Peking Opera and Classical Chinese music thrown into the mix.
>
> Kou Chou Ching's language and lyrics reflect the new generation of Taiwan, people who have transcended so-called 'ethnic differences'. Our song 'Confluent People', attempts to realise this desire for harmony among Taiwan's diverse ethnic groups. The name of the song itself mixes Hoklo and Hakka language elements, using the Hakka phrase for youth and a Hoklo expression that means 'becoming close friends with just one word'. Together, this name represents young people shaking hands and coming to agreement, singing together and forming friendships.
>
> Another songs is called 'Your name is Taiwanese'. Modelled on an old Taiwanese folk-song called 'Moonlit Sighs', our song has a background beat that sounds kind of pensive, as if reminding the listeners to think things over. The word 'Taiwan' is sung many times throughout this song. This repetition, the beat and lyrics combined remind listeners to use their hearts when considering their roots.
>
> These days many people forget their roots. Caught up with J-Pop and the K-wave, young people don't remember their own culture. Parents send their children to study English, but where do the children learn to speak their mother tongue? Kou Chou Ching songs are about reminding people that it doesn't matter what language you speak at home; if you grew up eating Taiwanese rice, drinking Taiwanese water, then you are a Taiwanese person.'

Check out Kou Chou Ching's music online at www.myspace.com/koucc or www.kou.com.tw.

makes me feel happy.' Mainstream Taiwanese musical tastes would hardly be categorised as 'edgy'. (Kenny G albums sell well here, and the prince of saccharine-spiced sax plays to a full house when he tours around.) Most Taiwanese pop music falls well within this mold, and is best avoided by those with family histories of diabetes. (The curse of a reasonably well-adjusted society? Perhaps.)

The Daily Lomo (http://lomodiary.blogspot.com) showcases Taiwan through a fisheye lens. Very cool!

There are exceptions, of course. Wu Bai, Taiwan's 'King of Live Music' is probably the edgiest of Taiwan's mainstream rockers. An excellent guitarist and lyricist, Wu Bai is among the best-known Taiwanese rockers, playing to sold-out arenas in and out of Taiwan with his band China Blue. Those who understand Mandarin or Taiwanese (the artist records equally in both) can detect a certain amount of pathos in Wu Bai's lyrics, unusual for Asian pop in general.

Another extremely popular Taiwanese artist is A-mei, a singer/songwriter from Taiwan's Puyuma tribe. A-mei is one most well-known faces on Asia's pop scene, and since 2000 her career has been flavoured with cross-strait controversy. Early in that year A-mei did a Sprite beverage commercial; shortly thereafter, she performed the ROC national anthem at the first inauguration of newly elected president Chen Shui-bian. This did not sit well with the Beijing Government, who subsequently banned the singer from visiting mainland China and banned her songs from Mainland airwaves. Though the ban has since been revoked, A-mei performances in China are often marred by protests by Chinese nationalists; to make matters worse, the singer's Taiwanese patriotism has been questioned back home (by, among others, vice-president Annette Lu). Nonetheless, her career is still going strong, and her face has graced the cover of magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*, making her one of the most well-known Taiwanese entertainers in the world.

Of course, Taiwan's underground music scene, small though it is, is definitely flourishing; though you might not understand the lyrics, if you're a fan of underground music you'll definitely understand the sentiment if you can manage to catch a few of Taiwan's indie rock bands in full bloom. Some of our favourite Taiwanese punk bands are The White Eyes, Ladybug, Chicken Rice and Chthonic (the last would technically fall under the 'Death Metal' category). Taiwan also has a number of bands started by expatriates; Consider the Meek, Milk and the Deported being three well worth catching. There are a good number of venues for independent music around Taiwan. These include small clubs like Underworld (p119) and larger places like The Wall (p119).

A French blog from Taipei (http://michaelataipei.canalblog.com) covers music, sports, culture, and much more.

Serious indie music fans should definitely try to time their visit to catch one of Taiwan's weekend-long (sometimes longer) music festivals. Our favourite is the long-running Spring Scream Festival, currently in its 13th year. Held in Kenting during spring break, the multistage festival brings together names big and small in Taiwan's indie music scene, along with a few imported bands. Festival grounds rotate from year to year, with guests and bands alike camping out together in the fields inside the site. Check www.springscream.com/for more details.

A MOVING SOUND

Tom Pryor, of WorldMusic.NationalGeographic.com describes Taiwan's A Moving Sound (AMS) as, 'one of the most original outfits working in the world music arena today'. Performing both locally and internationally since 2002, AMS is comprised of five extraordinary performers who bring their diverse backgrounds together to create music that transcends the East–West barrier as only the highest art can.

Mixing elements of modern dance, taichi and deep-breath work, vocalist and dancer Mia Hsieh provides sublime vocals and movement in a unique performance style she calls 'Singing Body.' Percussionist Wu Cheng-chun combines Eastern and Western drumming styles, while Lo Tang-hsuan, an *èrhú* (mandolin) player since the age of eight, takes his traditional Chinese instrument and uses it to call forth a hybrid of Chinese, Indian and Western sounds. Equally skilled in both Western six-string guitar and the *zhōng ruǎn* (Chinese guitar), Hua Chou-hsieh uses both instruments to create a fusion of sounds drawing from influences as diverse as American jazz and Taiwanese aboriginal sounds. American-born Scott Prairie plays both bass and *zhōng ruǎn*, his compositions mixing his New York and Taiwan influences. Together, this diverse group of performers creates a sound that is both ancient and modern, at once universal and distinctly Taiwanese. In short, a sound that is truly moving.

Though AMS tour internationally, catching them on their home turf is an especially unique experience; check their website www.amovingsound.com for performance schedules and updates.

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Theatre & Dance

Taiwan has a number of home-grown drama and dance troupes. The best known internationally is the Cloud Gate Dance Company, founded in the early 1970s by Lin Hwai-min. Lin was a student under Martha Graham and upon his return to Taiwan in 1973 desired to combine modern dance techniques with Chinese opera. While Lin's first works were based on stories and legends from Chinese classical literature, his more recent works have tended to explore Taiwanese identity. *Legacy*, one of Lin's most important works, tells the story of the first Taiwanese settlers. More recently still, Cloud Gate's performances have included Tibetan, Indian and Indonesian influences. The company tours most of the year, both domestically and internationally. Check their website, www.cloudgate.org.tw, for performance schedules.

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Food & Drink

No doubt about it, there's a lot to love about Taiwanese food, and a lot of it to love. And crickey, do the Taiwanese love food. Taiwanese people tend to eat out often, and are hardly known as sombre diners. Looking for a good restaurant? Just follow the noise. But some of the best food is not found in restaurants but on the street, and gourmands know that some of Asia's best street eats are found in night markets in and around Taiwan's cities.

But first things first…

STAPLES

Rice

Rice is an inseparable part of virtually every Taiwanese meal; as in China, the phrase used to ask someone if they've eaten is to say 'you eat rice yet?' Rice comes in many forms – as a porridge (congee) served with plates of pickled vegetables at breakfast, fried with tiny shrimps, pork or vegetables and eaten at lunch or as a snack. Plain steamed white rice accompanies most restaurant meals, except formal banquets, where you'll often need to ask for it. While plain white rice is still the norm, many restaurants – especially vegetarian buffets, as well as more health-oriented eateries, offer a choice between white and *quán mài* (whole-grain rice).

Noodles

Noodles are thought to have originated in northern China during the Han dynasty (206–220 BC) when the Chinese developed techniques for large-scale flour grinding.

The long, thin shape of noodles symbolises longevity. For this reason, its considered inauspicious to break noodles before cooking them.

Taiwan has several types of noodles which are worth mentioning. *Lā miàn* (hand-pulled noodles) is created when the noodle puller repeatedly stretches a piece of wheat-flour dough, folding it over and stretching again, until a network of noodle strands materialise. Thin, translucent noodles made from rice flour are common in the city's Southeast Asian restaurants. And of course, for the carnivore no visit to Taiwan would be complete without trying the wares of at least a few beef noodle restaurants; the best of these places shave each noodle individually from a cinder block–sized lump of dough before tossing them into the pot of beef stock.

A RECIPE FOR OVERVIEW OF TAIWANESE CUISINE

Assemble following ingredients:

- One medium-sized subtropical island well suited for growing rice, vegetables, tubers and fruit;
- One surrounding ocean teeming with fish (seafood-rich outer islands optional);
- Several thousand years of indigenous Pacific Islander culinary tradition;
- Several hundred years of southeastern Chinese culinary tradition;
- Equal parts of Buddhist, Taoist and indigenous culinary roots;

Mix well, adding long dash of Japanese culinary influence. Continue to cook under subtropical heat until 1949.

In 1949, RAPIDLY infuse long and slow-cooking mixture with traditions of chefs from all corners of China fleeing political turmoil; continue cooking under high pressure for around 35 years.

Begin liberalizing in 1987: Continue to infuse and then mix regularly with random dashes of international influence and increasing aboriginal seasonings to taste.

Serve hot, cold, or in-between, and until all diners are fit to burst.

Serves around 22 million locals as well as guests.

REGIONAL CUISINES IN TAIWAN

Taiwanese cuisine can be divided into several styles of cooking, though the boundaries are often blurred. You'd be hard pressed to find some of Taiwan's more emblematic dishes (stinky tofu, for example) anywhere in China outside of restaurants specialising in Taiwanese cuisine, though you'll find much food of close comparison in Fujian province. Straddling both sides of the straits, Hakka food is distinct enough to warrant its own category, though Hakka cuisine you'll find on Taiwan will be more seafood heavy than what you'd find in China's inland regions. And of course, anything you'd find on the Mainland – Cantonese, Sichuanese, Beijing, Shanghainese and so forth – you'll find in Taiwan. See the Menu Decoder (p66) for pinyin and Chinese spellings of dishes described in the following sections.

For a quick and cheap snack, *cháyè dàn* (tea eggs) can't be beat. A cauldron filled with these hard-boiled (in black tea, naturally) eggs can be found in any convenience store. The darker they are, the longer they've been cooking.

Taiwanese

As our recipe at the head of the chapter shows, Taiwanese cooking has a long, storied and complex history, with influences ranging from all over China mixed with a rather unique aboriginal/Polynesian base. In general, food that you'll see people enjoying at roadside markets and restaurants tends to emphasise local recipes and ingredients (though often curious about things foreign, most Taiwanese tend to buy local when it comes to their food). Seafood, sweet potatoes, taro root and green vegetables cooked very simply are at the heart of most Taiwanese meals. Chicken rates second in popularity to seafood, followed by pork, beef and lamb. *Xiǎoyú huāshēng* (fish stir-fried with peanuts and pickled vegetables) is an example of a Taiwanese favourite. *Kézǎi* (oysters) is popular, and *kézǎi tāng* (clear oyster soup with ginger) is an excellent hangover cure and overall stomach soother. Something completely unique to Taiwan is its use of a local variant of *jiǔcéngtǎ* (basil), which frequently flavours soups and fish dishes. The Taiwanese like to cook with chilli, though dishes are never as mouth searing as those in Sichuanese cuisine.

Ah, Stinky Tofu!

Really, quite odious.

Truly Taiwanese.

Hakka

Hakka cuisine is having a renaissance in Taiwan, with Hakka-style dishes being featured in restaurants across the country. The dishes of the Hakka are very rich and hearty, suitable for people who historically made their living as farmers and needed plenty of energy to work the fields. Dishes are often salty and vinegary, with strong flavours. Pork is a favourite of the Hakka, often used in dishes cut up into large pieces, fried and then stewed in a marinade.

Hakka cuisine is also known for its tasty snacks. Some of these include *zhà shūcài bǐng* (fried salty flour balls made from mushrooms), *kèjiāguǒ* (shrimp and pork turnip cakes) and *kèjiā máshǔ* (sticky rice dipped in sugar or peanut powder).

'RICE OR NOODLES…' *Joshua Samuel Brown*

…was the question I heard pretty much daily from my first Taiwanese girlfriend when the subject of what we should eat for dinner came up. New to Taiwan and somewhat unschooled in the culinary culture as I was at the time, I took this as a sign that everyday Taiwanese cuisine was none too diverse. It took me a while to understand that this question would actually lead to a wide variety of meal choices, that the two staples were mere starting points, as limiting to the Taiwanese gourmand as choosing between oil paints or watercolours would be to an artist.

Fujianese

Much of Taiwanese cuisine has Fujianese roots, as the earliest wave of Han Chinese immigration to the island comprised primarily Fujian mainlanders who immigrated in the 18th and 20th centuries. Fujianese cuisine particularly abounds on the Taiwan Strait islands of Matsu and Kinmen (both of which are a stone's throw away from Fujian province), but you'll find Fujianese cuisine all over Taiwan. Really, most people won't call it Fujianese cuisine, as so much of its basic elements have been incorporated in Taiwanese cooking. Cuisine in Fujian is best known for its seafood, often cooked in red wine and simmered slowly in dark soy sauce, sugar and spices. One of the most popular dishes in the Fujianese food canon is *fó tiào qiáng*, 'Buddha Jumps Over the Wall', a stew of seafood, chicken, duck and pork simmered in a jar of rice wine. The dish got its name because it is believed that the smell is so delicious Buddha would climb a wall for a taste, ironic considering the fact that the Buddha is generally thought to have been a vegetarian.

On that subject, Fujian is where Chinese vegetarian cuisine reached its apex, partly thanks to the availability of fresh ingredients and partly because of the specialisation of generations of chefs. The Taiwanese, however, have taken vegetarian cuisine to heights that easily rival that of India, a fact worthy of a heading all its own (opposite).

Chopsticks stuck vertically into a bowl of rice is reminiscent of incense sticks stuck in a brazier; it reminds the Taiwanese of death, and is therefore considered a terrible faux pas.

Cantonese

This is what non-Chinese consider 'Chinese' food, largely because most émigré restaurateurs originate from Guangdong (Canton) or Hong Kong. Cantonese flavours are generally more subtle than other Chinese styles – almost sweet, with very few spicy dishes. Sweet-and-sour and oyster sauces are common. The Cantonese are almost religious about the importance of fresh ingredients, which is why so many restaurants are lined with tanks full of finned and shell-clad creatures.

Cantonese *diǎnxīn* (dim sum) snacks are famous and can be found in restaurants around Taiwan's bigger cities. Apart from barbecued pork dumplings, you'll find *chūn juǎn* (spring rolls), *héfěn* (flat rice noodles), *zhōu* (rice porridge) and, of course, *jī jiǎo* (chickens' feet) – an acquired taste.

Sichuanese

Sichuan food is known as the hottest of all Chinese cuisines, so take care when ordering. Lethal red chillies (introduced by Spanish traders in the early Qing dynasty), aniseed, peppercorns and pungent 'flower pepper' are used, and dishes are simmered to give the chilli peppers time to work into the food. Meats are often marinated, pickled or otherwise processed before cooking, which is generally by stir-frying.

CULINARY COURSES & MORE

Those looking to take more than memories of great Taiwanese cuisine back home will be glad to know that the **Community Services Centre** in Taipei conducts cooking courses where visitors to Taiwan can learn all the secrets to preparing amazing traditional Chinese and Taiwanese dishes. Call ℅ 02-2836 8134 or visit their website www.community.com.tw for information on current courses, prices and scheduling.

Located in Taipei, the **Lu-Yu Tea Culture Institute** offers basic, intermediate and advanced courses in tea arts, culture and lore. All courses are in English. Course length and schedules vary; call ℅ 02-2331 6636 for more information or email **Steven R Jones** (icetea8@gmail.com) for details on current courses.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

Eating in Taiwan can be an overwhelming experience, especially with so many delicious foods to try. It's important to venture beyond the more conventional dishes of *chǎofàn* (fried rice) or *chǎomiàn* (fried noodles) that seem to be available at every hole-in-the-wall roadside stand. What about trying a savoury dish of *húntún* (wontons), filled with leeks and minced pork?

For a meal on the run, consider picking up some *jiānbǐng* (omelette stuffed with pickled radishes, spring onions and filled with hot sauce). If time is not an issue, sit down to *huǒ guō* (simmering pot of vegetables and meats, cooked in a spicy broth).

For adventurous eaters, may we suggest delectable *chòu dòufu* (stinky tofu) – some say it's the equivalent to European stinky cheese. Or how about *chǎo shāchóng* (fried sandworms), a speciality of Kinmen and best served hot, and last but not least, Hakka-style *jiāngsī chǎo dàcháng* (stir-fried intestines with ginger).

Famous dishes include *zhāngchá yāzi* (camphor tea duck), *mápó dòufu* (Granny Ma's tofu; spiced mincemeat sauce and tofu) and *gōngbǎo jīdīng* (spicy chicken with peanuts). Sichuan is an inland province, so pork, chicken and beef – not seafood – are the staples.

Other Chinese Cuisine

In the north of mainland China, wheat or millet, rather than rice, is traditional. Its most common incarnations are steamed dumplings and noodles, while arguably the most famous Chinese dish of all, Peking duck, is also served in Taiwan with typical northern ingredients: wheat pancakes, spring onions and fermented bean paste. Shanghainese cuisine is popular, especially in Taipei. Expect dishes to be generally sweeter and oilier than China's other cuisines, and to feature a lot of fish and seafood, especially cod, river eel and shrimp. The word for fish, *yú,* is a homonym for 'plenty' or 'surplus'; fish is a mandatory dish for most banquets and celebrations.

Vegetarian cooking was already an independent school of Chinese cuisine by the 14th century.

Common Shanghainese fish dishes include *sōngrén yùmǐ* (fish with corn and pine nuts), *lúyú* (Songjiang perch), *chāngyú* (pomfret) and *huángyú* (yellow croaker). Fish is usually steamed but can be stir-fried, pan-fried or grilled. Shanghai-style steamed fish, cooked lightly and covered with ginger or spring onions is a mainstay at any banquet.

VEGETARIAN CUISINE

Vegetarian visitors to Taiwan may well consider applying for citizenship once they've experienced the joys of Taiwanese vegetarian cuisine. Taiwan's Buddhist roots run deep, and while only a small (but still sizable) percentage of Taiwanese are vegetarian, a fair chunk of the population abstains from meat for spiritual or health reasons every now and again, even if only for a day or a week.

Buddhist vegetarian restaurants are easy to find. Just look for the gigantic *savastika* (an ancient Buddhist symbol that looks like a reverse swastika) hung in front of the restaurant. If the restaurant has a cassette or CD playing a soothing loop of *ami tofo* (Buddhist chant) and a few robed monks and nuns mixed among the lay patrons, you're in business. Food at these places tends to not merely be 100% vegan friendly (no animal products of any kind), but also garlic and hot-pepper free (fiery belching being disruptive to meditation). Every neighbourhood and town will generally have at least one vegetarian buffet; some are a bit on the plain side, others are places of unparallel food artistry. Taipei has a number of vegetarian buffets (p115) that keep us coming back. Buffets are especially cool because there's no language barrier to deal with. Take what looks and smells the best, pay by weight, and enjoy.

Soybeans have been cultivated in China since 2700 BC.

The Taiwanese are masters at adding variety to vegetarian cooking and creating 'mock meat' dishes made of tofu or gluten on which veritable miracles have been performed. Some of our vegetarian friends shy away from some of the dishes at Taiwanese vegetarian restaurants because, in look and texture, they're just 'too meat-like for comfort'.

DRINKS

Tea & Coffee

Tea is a fundamental part of Chinese life. In fact, an old Chinese saying identifies tea as one of the seven basic necessities of life, along with fuel, oil, rice, salt, soy sauce and vinegar. Fujian settlers introduced tea to Taiwan over 200 years ago; a fondness for the beverage quickly took hold and tea became one of Taiwan's main exports. Taiwan's long growing season and hilly terrain are perfectly suited for growing excellent quality tea, especially high mountain oolong, which is prized among tea connoisseurs the world over.

Tea Island (http://chadao.blogspot.com) is dedicated to the appreciation of tea from Taiwan and the Mainland.

There are two types of tea shops in Taiwan. The first are traditional teashops (more commonly called teahouses) where customers brew their own tea in a traditional clay pot, sit for hours playing cards or Chinese chess, and choose from several types of high-quality leaves. These can be found tucked away in alleys in most every urban area, but are best visited up in the mountains. Taipei's Maokong (p136) is an excellent place to experience a traditional Taiwanese teahouse. The second type are the stands found (almost literally) on every street corner. These specialize in bubble tea, a mixture of tea, milk, flavouring, sugar and giant black tapioca balls. Also called pearl tea, the sweet drink is popular with students who gather at tea stands after school to socialise and relax, much in the way that the older generation gathers at traditional teahouses.

Bubble tea comes in an infinite variety of flavours; passionfruit, papaya and taro are a few of the most common. The pastel-coloured drinks are served in clear cups with straws fat enough to suck up the chewy tapioca balls that rest at the bottom. A cup usually costs from NT15 to NT25. Some find the gummy texture of the tapioca balls gross, but if bubble tea sales in Taiwan are anything to go by, these people are a quiet minority. As the saying goes, there's no accounting for taste.

Tea Arts (http://teaarts.blogspot.com) is a beautiful website with pictures and lore about Taiwan's tea culture.

Coffee, once hard to come by, is now widely consumed all over Taiwan, at prices ranging from cheap (NT35 per cup) to expensive (NT100 and up). Not only is Taiwan big on coffee consumption, the island is experimenting with coffee growing as well; in the past few years a number of coffee plantations in southern Taiwan have begun producing coffee for domestic consumption and export. Though Taiwan isn't likely to replace Brazil anytime soon, Taiwanese coffee – smooth, nonacidic and definitely flavourful – may well find niche market in the next few years. Stay tuned.

COFFEE IN TAIWAN

Twelve years ago, one of the writers working on this guide was teaching an adult English class in a major Taiwanese city, and as a conversational exercise divided the classes into groups, giving each one a business idea with the plan that they should discuss how best to make their business successful. One group was handed a card reading 'Open a coffee shop in Taipei.' After considerable conversation, the group came back and told the teacher that they felt as if they'd drawn the short straw. 'A coffee shop in Taipei would be a failure, teacher,' complained the group. They concluded, 'Taiwanese people are tea drinkers. We don't like coffee.'

Fast forward a dozen years. Coffee, once an alien beverage available only in McDonalds, expensive hotels, or the rare-as-hen's-teeth specialty shop, has become completely ubiquitous throughout Taiwan (not just in big cities but smaller towns as well). Popular chains include Barista, Mr Brown, Chicco D'Oro, Dante, Doutor, Is Coffee, E-Coffee, and, of course, Starbucks.

As for the students, we don't know what became of them, but we can say with certainty that, if they live anywhere in Taipei, their homes are no more than a ten-minute walk – probably less – from a coffee shop.

The Chinese were the first to cultivate tea, and the art of brewing and drinking tea has been popular since the Tang dynasty (AD 618–907).

Juices

Fresh-fruit stands selling juices and smoothies are all over Taiwan, and these drinks make wonderful thirst quenchers on a hot summer day. All you have to do is point at the fruits you want (some shops have the cut fruit already mixed in the cup) and the person standing behind the counter will whizz them up in a blender for you after adding water or milk. Especially good are iced-papaya milkshakes.

Generally, you'll find that fresh-fruit juices sold on the streets are cheaper than in the West. Expect to pay around NT50 a cup.

Harder Stuff

On the drunk scale, the Taiwanese tend to be fairly moderate drinkers (with some exceptions, banquets being a time where much drinking abounds). But Taiwan does have a number of locally produced inebriants well worth trying. The most famous of these is *gāoliáng jiǔ* (Kaoliang liquor). Made from fermented sorghum, Kaoliang is produced on Kinmen and Matsu, the islands closest to Mainland China. A running joke among locals is that, were mainland Chinese troops to invade the islands, they wouldn't get much further than the Kaoliang factories. Another local favourite is *wéishìbǐ* (Whisbih), an energy drink with a fine mixture of dong quai, ginseng, taurine, various B vitamins, caffeine, and some ethyl alcohol to give it a kick.

Like wine tasters, who spit rather than imbibe the wine to prevent drunkenness, some connoisseurs of fine teas do the same to avoid getting too wired.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

You can find restaurants on the main streets of most every city. For eats on the cheap, you can find generic-looking eateries on the main streets, back streets and alleys of any city or town. Small restaurants often open in the morning and stay open until late at night, sometimes closing for a few hours in the afternoon if business is light.

In the mornings, every town, village and small city neighbourhood has one or more places serving breakfast. These places open at dawn, and are usually scrubbing the grills clean by 10am. Breakfast shouldn't cost more than NT50, usually less.

All Taiwanese cities have Western-style restaurants, and the bigger the city the more and varied the restaurants. Taipei has a large international restaurant scene with places serving cuisine from around the globe. Restaurants generally open between 11am and noon for lunch, close around 2pm and reopen in the evening for dinner. Some stay open all day, while others don't. Bars often keep long hours in Taiwan, opening in the afternoon and closing late at night. Most bars offer a limited menu and some offer full-course meals. Expect to pay around NT150 or more for a beer.

This Hungry Girl is a Taipei blogger who writes restaurant reviews and takes fine food shots. Her website (http://hungryintaipei.blogspot.com) is definitely worth a visit!

Quick Eats

One experience you can't miss out on is eating at a night market. Though Taipei's night markets are arguably the most famous, all cities in Taiwan have at least a few of their own, and even a medium-sized town will have a street set up with food stalls selling traditional Taiwanese eats late into the night. We've listed our favourite night markets in our city headings, but you're sure to find ones you like all over the island.

So what kind of eats can you expect to find on the fly in Taiwan? Some items won't surprise people used to eating Asian food back home. Taiwanese *shuǐjiǎo* (dumplings) are always a good bet, especially for those looking to fill up on the cheap. Stuffed with meat, spring onion and greens, *shuǐjiǎo* can be served by the bowl in a soup, and sometimes dry by weight. Locals mix *làjiāo* (chilli), *cù* (vinegar) and *jiàngyóu* (soy sauce) in a bowl according to taste. Vinegar and soy sauce look almost identical, so Taiwanese people won't mind if you give the plastic bottles a squeeze and a sniff. Dumplings are often created by family minifactories – one person stretches the pastry, another makes the filling and a third spoons the filling into the pastry, finishing with a little twist to seal it.

A Tainan specialty, *guāncái bǎn* (coffin sandwiches) are fat toast planks hollowed out and filled with a thick chowder of seafood and vegetables.

Other street snacks include *zhà doùfǔ* (fried tofu), *lǔ doùfǔ* (tofu soaked in soy sauce) and *kǎo fānshǔ* (baked sweet potatoes), which can be bought by weight. Probably the most recognizable Taiwanese street snack is *chòu dòufu* (stinky tofu). This deep-fried dish is something of an acquired taste, like certain European cheeses. Generally speaking people either love the stuff or they can't stand it. Another strange food to keep an eye open for are *pídàn* (thousand year eggs – ducks' eggs that are covered in straw and stored underground for six months). The yolk becomes green and the white becomes jelly. More interesting snacks available at markets include *jī jiǎo* (chickens' feet), *zhū ěrduo* (pigs' ears), *zhū jiǎo* (pigs' trotters) and even *zhū tóupí* (pigs' faces).

Senorita Pequeña, a Taiwanese girl with a Spanish soul has lovingly put up a website (http://senoritapequena.blogspot.com). It has restaurant reviews in Chinese and English and is complete with pictures too!

Meals

A traditional breakfast in Taiwan usually consists of watery rice with seaweed, clay-oven rolls and steamed buns, served plain or with fillings. This is generally washed down with sweetened or plain hot soybean milk. Other popular breakfast foods include rolled omelettes, egg sandwiches, and turnip cakes. Most breakfast places open at about 7am and close midmorning.

The Taiwanese generally eat lunch between 11.30am and 2pm, many taking their midday meal from any number of small eateries on the streets. *Zìzhù cāntīng* (self-serve cafeterias) are a good option, and they offer plenty of meat and vegetable dishes to choose from.

Dinner in Taiwan is usually eaten from 5pm to 11pm, though some restaurants and food stalls in bigger cities stay open 24 hours. Taiwan's cities – especially the larger ones – all have a fair to excellent selection of international restaurants; don't be surprised to run into a small Indonesian, Indian, or even Mexican eatery on a back alley.

EATING DOS & DON'TS

- Every customer gets an individual bowl of rice or a small soup bowl. It is quite acceptable to hold the bowl close to your lips and shovel the contents into your mouth with your chopsticks. If the food contains bones, just put them out on the tablecloth or into a separate bowl, if one is provided. Restaurants are prepared for this – the staff change the tablecloth after each customer leaves.
- Remember to fill your neighbours' tea cups when they are empty, as yours will be filled by them. You can thank the pourer by tapping your middle finger on the table gently. On no account serve yourself tea without serving others first. When your teapot needs a refill, signal this to the waiter by taking the lid off the pot.
- Taiwanese toothpick etiquette is similar to that of neighbouring Asian countries. One hand wields the toothpick while the other shields the mouth from prying eyes.
- Probably the most important piece of etiquette comes with the bill: although you are expected to try to pay, you shouldn't argue too hard, as the one who extended the invitation will inevitably foot the bill. While going Dutch is fashionable among the younger generation, as a guest you'll probably be treated most of the time.

EATING WITH KIDS

Taiwan is a kid-friendly place and children often have free run of the restaurants when eating out (often to the consternation of those hoping for a quiet meal). Budget eateries won't have special menus for children (you'll be lucky if they have English menus), but some might have booster seats. Higher-end restaurants usually have both kids' menus and booster seats. A good bet for dining with kids on the cheap is to take them to a buffet restaurant, where they can pick and chose from colourful dishes to their heart's content. Another fun bet is to bring them to a pet-friendly restaurant, a new trend in Taiwan. Why just eat when you can eat surrounded by puppies and the occasional pot-bellied pig, eh?

Travellers with infants will find everything they need from baby formula to puréed baby foods as well as infant cereals. Every Taiwanese supermarket has at least an aisle for newborn baby fare.

Popular in Taiwan, *pídàn* (thousand year eggs) are ducks' eggs that are covered in straw and stored underground for six months. If this sounds less than appealing, consider that the traditional recipe has them soaked in horses' urine before burial!

BANQUETS

If you ever get the chance to go to a Taiwanese banquet, jump at it. As in China, Taiwanese banquets are amazing experiences. Like anywhere else, banquets are held to celebrate holidays and special events. Business banquets are also common, and many a significant business deal in Taiwan is clinched at the banquet table.

Dishes at a Taiwanese banquet are served in sequence, beginning with cold appetisers and continuing through 10 or more courses, usually comprised of the most expensive ingredients available. Vegetarians invited to a banquet should inform their hosts as early as possible so that a few suitable

A VERY TAIWANESE BANQUET

The *weiya* is a company dinner party held at the end of the lunar year, usually on the last Saturday night before everyone takes off for the holiday. Much wine or Kaoliang liquor will be drunk by all, usually in response to toasts made by the boss complimenting various employees for having done a good job, or to the company in general. Gifts will almost always be given by the boss, sometimes in the form of *hóng pāos* (red envelopes stuffed with money), or actual gift items, or both.

Always paid for by the boss, *weiyas* are massive spreads featuring the best dishes money can buy. You can generally expect a couple of expensive seafood dishes, like prawns, crabs (even lobster if it's been a good year for the company), and of course some sort of beautifully cooked whole fish. There'll be vegetable dishes and a few meat dishes as well, usually something interesting like *huíguō ròu* (twice-cooked pork), all served in an atmosphere of good cheer and revelry.

However, one dish always served at a *weiya* will be anticipated with some trepidation. This is the chicken course, whose manner of serving is fraught with meaning. Traditionally, a *weiya* is the event in which an unwanted employee is informed that their services will no longer be needed in the coming year, a message conveyed by the direction in which the chicken's head (left on, and not removed as with Western chicken dishes) is facing at the time of serving. An employee who finds themselves facing a just-served chicken at a *weiya* is being told not return to work after the lunar new year's break.

If the boss is happy with everyone's performance that year, the kitchen staff is instructed to serve the chicken facing him or her, or as part of a claypot dish like *réncān jītāng* (ginseng chicken soup), with the head tucked into the pot. For this reason, the serving of a headless chicken dish at a *weiya* is a cause for celebration for all.

Except, of course, for the chicken.

replacement dishes can be rustled up. Soup, often a broth made with medicinal herbs to aid digestion, is generally served after the main course.

Generally speaking a Taiwanese banquet usually ends when the food and toasts end. You may find yourself being applauded when you enter a large banquet. Applauding back is fine; bowing is considered gauche.

Ang Lee's *Eat Drink Man Woman* is a wonderful movie about a Taiwanese chef and his three estranged daughters. The best part about this movie are the close-ups of food!

EAT YOUR WORDS

See also the Language chapter (p361) for additional useful terms and phrases to help you enjoy eating out in Taiwan.

Useful Phrases

I don't want MSG.	*Wǒ bù yào wèijīng.*	我不要味精
I'm vegetarian.	*Wǒ chī sù.*	我吃素
Not too spicy	*Bù yào tài là.*	不要太辣
menu	*càidān*	菜單
bill (check)	*mǎidān/jiézhàng*	買單/結帳
set meal (no menu)	*tàocān*	套餐
Let's eat.	*Chī fàn.*	吃飯
Cheers!	*Gānbēi!*	乾杯!
chopsticks	*kuàizi*	筷子
knife	*dāozi*	刀子
fork	*chāzi*	叉子
spoon	*tiáogēng/tāngchí*	調羹/湯匙
hot	*rède*	熱的
cold	*bīngde*	冰的

Menu Decoder

TAIWANESE DISHES

chòu dòufu	臭豆腐	stinky tofu
kézǎi jiān	蚵仔煎	oyster omelette
kézǎi tāng	蚵仔湯	clear oyster soup
cháyè dàn	茶葉蛋	tea egg
guāncái bǎn	棺材板	coffin sandwiches
chǎo pángxiè	炒螃蟹	sautéed crabs
zhū xiě gāo	豬血糕	congealed pig's blood
luóbuó gāo	蘿蔔糕	turnip cake

When dining on whole fish, don't lift the fish and turn it over; its considered inauspicious.

RICE DISHES

jīròu chǎofàn	雞肉炒飯	fried rice with chicken
dàn chǎofàn	蛋炒飯	fried rice with egg
báifàn	白飯	steamed white rice
lǔroù fàn	魯肉飯	pork mince in soy sauce with rice
sān bǎo fàn	三寶飯	BBQ pork, chicken & roast duck with rice
shūcài chǎofàn	蔬菜炒飯	fried rice with vegetables
tǒngzǎi mǐgāo	筒仔米糕	sticky rice
xīfàn/zhōu	稀飯/粥	watery rice porridge (congee)
zhà páigǔ fàn	炸排骨飯	deep-fried pork chop with rice

NOODLE DISHES

gān miàn	乾麵	noodles (not soupy)
húntún miàn	餛飩麵	wonton with noodles
jīsī chǎomiàn	雞絲炒麵	fried noodles with chicken
jīsī tāngmiàn	雞絲湯麵	soupy noodles with chicken
májiàng miàn	麻醬麵	sesame-paste noodles
niúròu chǎomiàn	牛肉炒麵	fried noodles with beef
niúròu miàn	牛肉麵	soupy beef noodles
ròusī chǎomiàn	肉絲炒麵	fried noodles with pork
shūcài chǎomiàn	蔬菜炒麵	fried noodles with vegetables
tāngmiàn	湯麵	noodles in soup
xiārén chǎomiàn	蝦仁炒麵	fried noodles with shrimp
zhájiàng miàn	炸醬麵	bean & mincemeat noodles

BREAD, BUNS & DUMPLINGS

cōngyóu bǐng	蔥油餅	spring-onion pancakes
guōtiē	鍋貼	pot stickers/pan-grilled dumplings
mántóu	饅頭	steamed buns
ròu bāozi	肉包子	steamed meat buns
shāobing	燒餅	clay-oven rolls
shuǐjiǎo	水餃	boiled dumplings
shuǐjīan bāo	水煎包	pan-grilled buns
sùcài bāozi	素菜包子	steamed vegetable buns
xiǎo lóng tāng bāo	小籠湯包	steamed meat buns & meat sauce

SOUP

gě lì tāng	蛤蠣湯	clam & turnip soup
gòng wán tāng	貢丸湯	Taiwanese meatball soup
húntún tāng	餛飩湯	wonton soup
ròu gēng tāng	肉羹湯	meat *potage*
sān xiān tāng	三鮮湯	three kinds of seafood soup
suānlà tāng	酸辣湯	hot and sour soup
yóu yú gēng	魷魚羹	cuttlefish *potage*

VEGETABLE & TOFU DISHES

báicài xiān shuānggū	白菜鮮雙菇	bok choy and mushrooms
càifǔ dàn	菜脯蛋	omelette with pickled radishes
cuìpí dòufu	脆皮豆腐	crispy skin tofu
hēimù'ěr mèn dòufu	黑木耳燜豆腐	tofu with wood ear mushrooms
jīangzhí qīngdòu	薑汁青豆	string beans with ginger
lúshǔi dòufu	滷水豆腐	smoked tofu
shāguō dòufu	砂鍋豆腐	clay pot tofu
táng liánǒu	糖蓮藕	sweet and sour lotus root cakes

BEEF DISHES

háoyóu niúròu	蠔油牛肉	beef with oyster sauce
hóngshāo niúròu	紅燒牛肉	beef braised in soy sauce
niúròu fàn	牛肉飯	beef with rice
tiébǎn niúròu	鐵板牛肉	beef steak platter

CHICKEN DISHES

háoyóu jīkuài	蠔油雞塊	diced chicken in oyster sauce
hóngshāo jīkuài	紅燒雞塊	diced chicken braised in soy sauce
jītǔi fàn	雞腿飯	chicken leg with rice
tángcù jīdīng	糖醋雞丁	sweet and sour chicken

PORK DISHES

dōng pō ròu	東坡肉	stewed pork with brown sauce
gūlǔ ròu	咕嚕肉	sweet and sour pork
háoyóu ròusī	蠔油肉絲	pork with oyster sauce
jìangbào ròudīng	醬爆肉丁	diced pork with soy sauce
páigǔ fàn	排骨飯	pork chop with rice
ròu yuán	肉圓	deep-fried pork-mince buns

DUCK DISHES

yāròu fàn	鴨肉飯	duck with rice
yāxiě gāo	鴨血糕	congealed duck blood

SEAFOOD DISHES

gélì	蛤蠣	clams
gōngbào xiārén	宮爆蝦仁	diced shrimp with peanuts
hóngshāo yú	紅燒魚	fish braised in soy sauce
kē zǎi jiān	蚵仔煎	oyster omelette
lóngxiā	龍蝦	lobster
pángxiè	螃蟹	crab
xiǎoyú huāshēng	小魚花生	fish stir-fried with peanuts and pickled vegetables
yóuyú	魷魚	squid
zhāngyú	章魚	octopus

MAINLAND CHINESE SPECIALITIES

Hakka Dishes

bǎntiáo	板條	flat rice noodles
chéngzhī jīliǔ	橙汁雞柳	chicken and orange sauce
kèjiāguǒ	客家粿	shrimp and pork turnip cakes
kèjiā máshǔ	客家麻糬	sticky rice dipped in sugar or peanut powder
kèjiā xiǎo chǎo	客家小炒	stir-fried cuttlefish, leeks, tofu and pork
kǔguā xiándàn	苦瓜鹹蛋	salty eggs and bitter melon
zhà shūcài bǐng	炸蔬菜餅	fried salty flour balls made from mushrooms

Cantonese Dishes

chāshāo sū	叉燒酥	barbecued pork pastry
dōngjiāng yánjú jī	東江鹽焗雞	salt-baked chicken
héfěn	河粉	flat rice noodles
hóngshāo dàpái chì	红燒大排翅	stewed shark's fin with pork and chicken feet
mì zhī chāshāo	蜜汁叉燒	roast pork with honey
tàiyé jī	太爺雞	smoked chicken with tea and sugar
zhōu	粥	rice porridge

Fujianese Dishes

fó tiào qiáng	佛跳墻	Buddha Jumps Over the Wall
méicài gān kòuròu	梅菜干扣肉	steamed pork with dried mustard
qīxīng yúwán tāng	七星魚丸湯	fish-ball soup with eel, shrimp and pork

Sichuanese Dishes

guàiwèi jī	怪味雞	shredded chicken in a hot pepper and sesame sauce
gōngbǎo jīdīng	宮保雞丁	spicy chicken with peanuts
huíguō ròu	回鍋肉	twice-cooked pork with salty and hot sauce
málà dòufu	麻辣豆腐	spicy tofu
mápó dòufu	麻婆豆腐	Granny Ma's tofu (spicy mincemeat sauce and tofu)
zhāngchá yāzi	樟茶鴨	camphor tea duck

Shanghainese Dishes

dàzhá xiè	大閘蟹	hairy crabs
jīngdū páigǔ	京都排骨	Mandarin-style pork ribs
lúyú	鱸魚	Songjiang perch
shīzi tóu	獅子頭	lion's head (steamed pork meatballs)
sōngrén yùmǐ	松仁玉米	fish with corn and pine nuts
xiánshuǐ jī	鹹水雞	cold salty chicken
xiāngsū jī	香酥雞	crispy chicken
xièfěn shīzi tóu	蟹粉獅子頭	lion's head meatballs with crab
zuìjī	醉雞	drunken chicken

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DRINKS

Alcohol

bái pútáo jiǔ	白葡萄酒	white wine
hóng pútáo jiǔ	红葡萄酒	red wine
mǐjiǔ	米酒	rice wine
píjiǔ	啤酒	beer
gāoliáng jiu	高梁酒	Kaoliang liquor

Nonalcoholic

liǔdīng zhī	柳丁汁	orange juice
dòujiāng	豆漿	soybean milk
kuàngquán shuǐ	礦泉水	mineral water
niúnǎi	牛奶	milk
qìshuǐ	汽水	soft drink (soda)
shuǐ	水	water
yézi zhī	椰子汁	coconut juice

Tea & Coffee

hóng chá	紅茶	black tea
júhuā chá	菊花茶	chrysanthemum tea
kāfēi	咖啡	coffee
lǜ chá	綠茶	green tea
luòshén chá	洛神茶	hibiscus tea
mài chá	麥茶	wheat tea
mòlìhuā chá	茉莉花茶	jasmine tea
wūlóng chá	烏龍茶	oolong tea
zhēnzhū nǎi chá	珍珠奶茶	milk tea with tapioca balls

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Environment

An overcrowded and polluted hive of human industry or scenic seashore surrounding an interior comprised of equal parts jungle and mountains? A factory island pumping out high-tech or Asia's semi-tropical Switzerland, only with lovely beaches and cheaper food?

Would you believe Taiwan is all this and more?

THE LAND

Lying 165km off the coast of mainland China, separated by the Taiwan Strait, Taiwan straddles the Tropic of Cancer and is shaped kind of like a sweet potato, 394km in length and 144km wide. The territory includes a number of other islands, including the Penghu Archipelago and the islands of Matsu and Kinmen in the Taiwan Strait, and Green Island and Lanyu, off the east coast.

At 36,000 sq km, Taiwan is roughly the size of the Netherlands, and about a third more populous. But whereas most of Holland is flat, Taiwan is a different story entirely. Being mostly mountainous, the majority of Taiwan's 23 million people live on the small expanses of flat land to the west of the Central Mountain Range, a series of jagged mountain peaks that stretches for over 170km from north to south. It's this topography that makes Taiwan's capital Taipei feel considerably more crowded than Amsterdam.

Crisscrossed with many small rivers that empty into the sea, the plains and basins of western Taiwan essentially provide the only land suitable for either agriculture or industry. The east coast, with its towering seaside cliffs and rocky volcanic coastline, is utterly spectacular; outside of the three cities of Ilan, Hualien and Taitung, it's sparsely populated as well.

CLIMATE

Taiwan's climate is subtropical. Though often damp, winters can be pleasant enough, especially in the south. Up north, it tends to get chilly and damp, and many Taipei residents find themselves pining for some sunshine come mid-February. Typhoon season hits in late summer to mid-autumn, and tends to strike the east coast particularly hard. Summers are hot and humid: walking out of an air-conditioned mall in August feels like being wrapped in a steaming towel. Perfect Taiwan weather? In our opinion, autumn and spring are best. Summer's fun, but prepare to sweat, and as for winter, down south it's still nice most of the time, but up north, well, Taipei has plenty of indoor malls!

There's no more environmentally friendly way to travel than by bicycle. Definitely check out the Yangmingshan Cycling Club's website (http://taipeiycc.blogspot.com/) if you're interested in riding in northern Taiwan.

Taiwan is also prone to earthquakes, sitting as it does on the colliding Eurasian and Philippine plates. Before you curse the forces of geology, consider that these grinding plates are also responsible for the beautiful mountains and amazing hot springs that make a trip to Taiwan truly worthwhile. Most of these quakes are small earth tremors. Some are far more devastating, particularly the one that occurred on 21 September 1999, which measured 7.3 on the Richter scale and killed thousands. A more recent quake off the southern coast in late 2006 caused only a few casualties, but severed several underground cables, disrupting telephone and internet service across Asia.

WILDLIFE

Lush and mountainous, Taiwan is home to a wide range of flora and fauna, particularly bird life.

Fauna

Though many of Taiwan's larger mammals were driven to near extinction through hunting (much of it to make Chinese medicine), increased environmental education and awareness since the mid-'90s has helped to save a number of species native to the island. The Central Mountain Range has the largest amount of remaining forest in Taiwan and is home to a wide range of animals including the wild boar, Formosan macaque, Formosan black bear, sambar deer and pheasants.

The Formosan black bear is the largest mammal on the island and lives at altitudes above 2000m. It's highly unlikely you'll see one as they're very elusive; judging by the fact that some humans still seem to view them as walking medicine chests, this is probably a wise characteristic for them to have developed. Another elusive animal is the Formosan clouded leopard, which lives in the lowlands of the Central Mountain Range. Sadly, the last sighting of the leopard was in 1985 and authorities are not certain if any more of these animals remain in the wild.

AnimalsTaiwan provides aid to animals in need throughout Taipei, and welcomes visiting volunteers. Learn more about volunteering through http://animalstaiwan.org.

Monkeys live in the mountains of Taiwan as well, some of them rather close to major cities; you stand a good chance of running into a Formosan macaque on the trail from Tianmu to Yangmingshan (p102). Snakes also call Taiwan home, and though the majority of these are nonvenomous, the ones that are poisonous fall into that rare 'last animal you meet in this life' category. Hikers should tread with caution (and with good boots).

Flora

More than half of Taiwan is covered with dense forest. Experts claim that the island is home to over 4002 types of plants, 1000 of them found only in Taiwan. Some of these include the Chinese juniper and cowtail pine, though the most common species are bamboo, spruce, fir and cypress found at higher altitudes. Taiwan was once covered with camphor forests but, sadly, most of these have been logged to near extinction. The largest one remaining is at Fuyuan Forest Recreational Area (p198) in the Eastern Rift Valley.

TAIWAN FOR TWITCHERS

Taiwan is for the birds. We mean this in the best possible way.

According to the Taiwan Birding Association, Taiwan has 15 generally accepted endemic bird species (some authorities say 17 to 19, or more) and more than 60 endemic subspecies. Among the species endemic to Taiwan are the Taiwan partridge, Mikado pheasant, Taiwan whistling-thrush, white-whiskered laughing thrush and Taiwan bush-warbler.

Furthermore, Taiwan's geographic position makes it something of a massive food court for countless more species of migratory birds who stop by as they fly south in the winter and back again in the spring. And birds aren't the only ones making Taiwan a migratory stopover: twitchers (bird-watchers) are flocking to Taiwan as well, drawn by opportunities to spot a huge variety of creatures feathered and fowl. Serious twitchers will definitely want to visit the outer islands; Kinmen, in particular, is home to a number of species not found on the Taiwanese mainland. However, even Taipei's parks hold surprises for birding enthusiasts. Taipei's Botanical Gardens are considered one of the best places in the world to see the rare Malaysian night heron, which is fairly amazing considering that the gardens are in the centre of a major metropolis.

For serious birding enthusiasts, there are a number of resources to help you plan your trip. The Wild Bird Society of Taipei has a fairly good website (www.wbst.org.tw) charting recent bird sightings around Taiwan. It also sells two excellent books, *Bird Watching in Taiwan* (NT600) and *100 Common Birds of Taiwan* (NT200), and can arrange birding tours all over the country.

The Taipei City government also puts out a useful reference book, *Birdwatcher's Guide to the Taipei Region* (NT320), available at most bookstores.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

In an age of dwindling forests, melting icebergs and politicians in deep denial, Taiwan is a nation that seems to have managed to pull itself back from the precipice of environmental disaster. So what can tourists do to encourage the island to keep moving boldly forward towards its goal of becoming the 'Switzerland of Asia'? Sure, there are the obvious ways to minimise a person's personal environmental footprint. When buying snacks, avoid taking a plastic bag if you don't really need one. Nowadays most of the larger shops charge for bags as a way to minimise rubbish. Smaller stores still hand them out freely; try saying *bú yào xièxie* (no thanks) whenever possible. Recycling is the rule in most places, so place your rubbish in the appropriate bins. Most 7-Elevens also take used batteries, though at this point you really should be using rechargeable ones as your digital cameras will run longer on them anyway. And on that subject, Taiwan offers myriad temptations for those turned on by technology; just keep in mind that improperly disposed mobile phones, laptop and MP3 players wind up contributing to the growing and ever toxic high-tech trash heaps of southern China, India or Africa. Chose your purchases wisely and dispose of them even more so.

Another area for concern for visitors is visiting aboriginal villages. Tourism is becoming especially important economically for Taiwan's native tribes and for tourists, staying at an aboriginal family homestay is a great way to learn about the culture and contribute to the local economy. We've met more than a few Taiwanese aboriginals who've commented that tourists (city-bred Taiwanese are most often cited) treat the locals with less respect than the locals would prefer; extensive gawking, taking photographs without asking, entering private spaces uninvited and littering are oft-mentioned complaints. Try to be especially mindful when taking photos or when wandering around aboriginal areas. It never hurts to ask for permission to do so.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

The Republic of China (on Taiwan) National Park Act was passed in 1972, and since then six national parks have been established. This puts the percentage of Taiwan's acreage designated as national parkland at around 9%, which is pretty substantial for a country of Taiwan's relatively diminutive size.

National Park	Features	Activities	Best Time to Visit	Page
Kenting	popular beach resort with 'Cancún of Taiwan' vibe	swimming with tropical fish, diving in pristine coral reefs, migratory bird-watching, surfing, camping, 3-day rock concerts	year-round	p282
Kinmen	once off-limits military outpost transformed into a beautiful island park	hiking, history, bike riding, ancient villages, temples, bird-watching	summer, autumn	p296
Sheipa	second-highest mountain in Taiwan, diverse terrain, Formosan landlocked salmon	hiking, bird-watching	summer, autumn, spring	p178
Taroko	spectacular gorge, Formosan macaque, pheasants	hiking	summer, autumn, spring	p188
Yangmingshan	beautiful mountain park with varied climate, butterflies	hiking, hot springs, bird-watching	summer, autumn, spring	p132
Yushan	tallest mountain in Taiwan, rare Formosan salamander, Formosan black bear	hiking alpine, tundra and cedar forests	summer, autumn, spring	p243

There are also 18 nature and forest reserves around Taiwan, and it seems as though Taiwan is making up for lost time when it comes to preserving what untouched areas it has left. In addition to national parks, designated scenic areas have been established across the island, including the East Coast National Scenic Area between Hualien and Taitung.

Some of the most scenic spots in Taiwan can be found on the outer islands. Beautiful and replete with culture, history and wildlife, the island of Kinmen (p296) is itself a national park; just off the coast of mainland China, both Kinmen and Little Kinmen are excellent places to spot rare waterbirds. Halfway between China and Taiwan, the windswept Penghu Archipelago (p306) offers a surprising variety of topography, from flat white-and-black sand beaches to dramatic, jagged cliffs. And both Lanyu (p316) and Green Island (p320) offer otherworldly landscapes more reminiscent of Polynesia than East Asia.

In 1998 American actor and animal-rights activist Steven Seagal met with then-president Lee Teng-hui and convinced him to sign legislation limiting animal cruelty.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

When Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist troops were driven off the mainland, they brought more than just millions of Chinese people fleeing communism with them: they also brought capital, much of which was used to transform

TAIWAN'S ENVIRONMENT: TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

Taiwan well deserves the name given to it by the Portuguese centuries ago – *Ilha Formosa,* beautiful island. Lush green mountains jut up from the alluvial plain of the west coast, and on most of the east coast the mountains drop straight into the blue ocean. The central spine of the mountain ranges reaches nearly 4000m. The forest is semitropical; huge fern trees with fronds like green ostrich feathers, plus birds-nest ferns, hang overhead. The rice paddies are grass-green when the rice is young.

But the economy of the island has been industrialising pell-mell since the 1970s; 'Made in Taiwan' has evolved from sweaters and shoes through to colour TVs, computer components and biotech. With population density among the highest in the world, Taiwan became the workshop of the world, with both mega-factories and local homes getting into the production business. The outfall has been noxious industrial dumping, poorly planned residential and industrial sprawl through farm areas, and the urban concrete jungle of high-rise offices and apartments. Now several major freeways, waterways with flood walls, the railway and the bullet train compete for space on the western coast.

In 1988 Taiwan's environmental movement emerged in the wake of Chernobyl and the conclusion of half a century of martial law left over from the Cold War. It failed to stop the country's fourth nuclear power plant, but it delayed it by 14 years and put further nuclear-power projects on hold. Communities refusing to serve as sites for new garbage dumps or incinerators finally spurred city schemes for rubbish reduction and recycling; as a result garbage per capita has since been halved. Now a functioning democracy, Taiwan's elected leaders compete through populist projects such as modernised vegetable markets, riverside parks, community centres and children's museums. There is a continuing effort to clean up the rivers and create a modern sewerage system.

However, the island's wealth brings new challenges to environmental sustainability – Taiwan ranks poorly in this in world comparisons. Pork-barrel politics has spawned huge appropriations for 'flood control', which has resulted in streams and rivers and even some of the coastline being lined with cement walls and wave-breaker structures. The country's emissions per capita of greenhouse gases, about 60% of US emissions per capita, surpass Japan and most of Europe. Total carbon dioxide emissions have doubled since 1990, and are expected to soar further with planned industrial development as well as consumer preferences that ape the US, including 4WDs. Environmental concerns are paid lip service by the government, but hard choices lie ahead.

Environmental activist Linda Gail Arrigo is the International Affairs Officer of the Green Party Taiwan and former wife of former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-deh

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a primarily agrarian society into a major industrial powerhouse. Taiwan became wealthy, quickly, but it also became toxic, with urban air ranking among the world's worst, and serious pollution in most of its waterways. Indeed, Taiwan's 'economic miracle' came at a serious price, and pollution, urban sprawl and industrial waste have all taken a heavy toll on the island. In the name of economic wealth, vast tracts of Taiwan's forests have been destroyed, decimating animal habitats and causing extensive soil degradation.

Want to learn more about environmental regulations in Taiwan? Check out the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration's website at www.epa.gov.tw/english.

But over the recent years, much has been done to reverse decades of environmental derogation throughout Taiwan. Some of this can be attributed to a 'happy' accident of global economics: much of Taiwan's most polluting industrial production has shifted to mainland China. But some of the improvement can be attributed to increased government oversight. Environmental laws, long 'on the books with a wink towards industry', are now enforced far more stringently across the board, and the results have been tangible, eg the Danshui and Keelung Rivers in Taipei, once horribly befouled, are significantly cleaner in sections. We've even seen people swimming at the foot of the Danshui River in Bitan, and the Keelung, while hardly pristine, is home to a variety of waterfowl. Urban air quality has improved markedly, thanks to a combination of improved public transport, more stringent clean-air laws, and a switch to unleaded petrol. Taipei's air quality, once almost as bad as Mexico City's, now hovers somewhere around London's.

The Taiwanese collective unconscious has changed as well: so much of the emerging 'Taiwanese identity' is tied in with having a clean and green homeland that people are tending to take environmental protection far more seriously. This isn't to say that you won't see people chucking garbage into the street (or along wooded trails), but you tend to see far less of it than you would have a decade ago. (A notable exception to this is betel-nut-chewing taxi drivers. They still hack their blood-red spit and throw their chewed-betel-nut-filled Dixie cups out on the road, and they're about as *tái kè,* or 'truly Taiwanese' as you can get.)

Taiwan's Green Party is active in issues of ecological sustainability and social justice in Taiwan, coordinating with other environmental organisations throughout the island.

There's still much more to be done, of course. As travellers, we can't promise that you won't find empty beverage cans while hiking along a pristine mountain trail, or the remains of somebody else's picnic in a city park. The issue of decaying barrels of nuclear waste buried on the aboriginal island of Lanyu has also yet to be resolved to anybody's satisfaction. The environmental implications of the just-completed Taiwan High-Speed Rail are also something worth considering. Though proponents claim it will have a positive environmental impact by reducing car and air travel, some environmentalists feel that the positioning of the stations (outside of city centres in what was once farmland) will create urban sprawl and other environmental problems.

So while it's fair to say that Taiwan has made great strides on the environmental front, it's clear that yet more remains to be done.

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Hot Springs

Taiwan had been in the imperial sights of the Japanese empire long before her colonisation in 1895. Though conventional wisdom holds that Taiwan's neighbour to the north was seduced by the island's abundant wood, coal and metal deposits, we think the real reason (in part, at least) might have lain elsewhere. For a people as *wēnquán* (hot spring) crazy as the Japanese, the thought of having some of the world's finest hot springs so close to home yet not under imperial control must have been discomforting to them to say the least. And of course, there's the issue of prestige; for the rest of the world to discover that the finest hot springs in Asia were anywhere else but in Japan might have implied an unbearable loss of face. Clearly Taiwan, and her amazing geothermal waters, would have to be incorporated into the empire. The Japanese knew the truth, one the rest of the world is slowly finding out; when it comes to hot springs, Taiwan is second to none.

When it comes to hot springs, earthquakes giveth and earthquakes taketh away. The popular Cingcyuan springs were closed by an earthquake after WWII only to be reopened by a devastating quake on 21 September, 1999.

Taiwan is ranked among the world's top 15 hot-spring sites and harbours a great variety of springs including hot springs, cold springs, mud springs, and even sea-bed hot springs. Its worth noting that the most vociferous pilgrims to Taiwanese hot springs come from – you guessed it – the land of the rising sun. And as in Japan, the same geological forces that frequently shake Taiwan have caused the island to be riddled with hot springs (talk about the curse spitting up a gift).

WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

Water bubbling up from underground picks up a variety of minerals that offer a veritable bouquet of health benefits. Aficionados claim that Taiwan's waters are practically magical when it comes to healing various infirmities, and that knowing which waters are good for what ailments is a key to health. While we can't attest to the miraculous qualities of all Taiwanese hot springs, we do know that after a long hike, we always head for the nearest one (aching muscles being one condition on which all hot springs seem to work like a charm).

The first mention of Taiwan's hot springs came from a 1697 manuscript, *Beihai Jiyou* (裨海紀遊), but hot springs were not developed until 1893, when a German businessman discovered Beitou and later established a small local spa.

Bathers in Yangmingshan will notice waters there have a milky colour and mildly sulphurous odour. Waters in Beitou have an even stronger sulphur reek, which some find overpowering. Waters from Yangmingshan are said to be excellent in the treatment of ailments such as arthritis, measles and gout, while those from more acidic and sulphuric Beitou are said to be especially good for dermatitis and other skin ailments. Places such as Renze and Hungye (both on Taiwan's east coast) produce waters

HOT-SPRING ETIQUETTE

- Some resorts separate bathers by gender, while others do not. If you're at the former, get naked. If you're at the latter, doing so is probably a bad idea.
- Shower thoroughly using soap and shampoo before getting into the tub. If you're going to dunk your head, wash your hair.
- Once you're in the tub (to quote the sign at Lengshuikeng in Yangmingshan National Park), 'Do not do anything that will make other users uncomfortable.' We assume you know what that means.
- Some remote hot springs have a tendency to attract a more rough-and-tumble type of clientele. Comparing tattoos is fine; mentioning scars or missing fingers should be avoided.

OUR 10 FAVOURITES

- **Jiaoshi** (p163) From the minute you get off the train, you'll know you're in a hot-spring town. Don't believe us? Just ask one of the locals (you're sure to find one soaking a foot or two in the spring-fed fountain in front of the train station).
- **Taian Hot Springs** (p176) The springs produce silky, smooth bicarbonate water, said to be excellent for treating arthritis. It sure makes your complexion glow. The facilities are lovely outdoors and in, and the mountain surroundings are marvellous.
- **East River Spa Garden, Nanzhuang** (p176) The spa drills down for their water here (no, it's not cheating). We love the traditional Taiwanese red brick and wood design and the natural setting.
- **Tienlai, Jinshan** (p156) This high-class resort has more than a dozen pools, high-pressure water jets, saunas, and other spa fixings; all with a picture-perfect view of surrounding Yangmingshan.
- **Lisong Hot Spring, South Cross-Island Hwy** (p264) Simply one of the most beautiful natural springs in Taiwan. Don't miss this one.
- **Sileng Hot Spring, North Cross-Island Hwy** (p169) A wild spring on the wild North Cross-Island Hwy. You won't find a four-star hotel here, and that suits us just fine.
- **Paolai** (p261) Hosting one of the nicer southern hot-spring resorts, the area offers a number of lovely new hotels set in isolated pockets of the mountains, and the waters themselves are mineral rich.
- **Beitou** (p131) Though often crowded (it is in the city, after all), Beitou is still a great place for a quick dip. The waters are highly sulphuric, and come out of the ground extremely hot. Our favourite spot in Beitou? The humble public springs right in Beitou Park – the best NT40 we've ever spent.
- **Jauri, Green Island** (p321) One of only three saltwater hot springs in the world, the waters of Jauri are sulphuric, but only mildly so. The spa itself is on the beach, and an absolutely perfect place to stargaze on autumn nights.
- **Suao Cold Springs** (p164) OK, they're not hot, but after hiking around in the summer nothing feels better than a dip in the naturally carbonated 22°C water of Suao's cold springs. Good for body and spirit alike.

of an alkaloid nature, and are favoured by people who don't like the 'rotten egg' smell of the northern sulphuric springs. These waters are said to have a calming effect on the nervous system, as well as being good for stiff muscles and skin ailments. Closer to Taipei, the Jiaoshi springs also produce water that is clear and odourless, slightly salty and calcium- and potassium-rich to boot. This water offers similar benefits to the alkaloid springs down south.

THE TAIWAN HOT-SPRING EXPERIENCE

Antung is the only place you can get hot-spring coffee. Try some and tell us how it is.

Setting is a major part of the appeal of any Taiwan hot-spring experience. The best developed springs are found in valleys or meadows surrounded by green mountains, on hillsides overlooking the ocean, or (as is the case with Jauri springs on Green Island) actually *on* the beach itself. Sometimes the facilities, which include restaurants and cafés and rooms for an overnight stay, are almost as nice as the views. But the popularity of such places sometimes comes at the expense of water quality (more on that later).

Some of our absolute favourites are the wilder ones that lie beside cool rivers in deep remote valleys. We like them not only because they are free in the 'born free' way, but also because they literally cost nothing. Wild springs can be found around the island, most often up in the mountains. One of Taiwan's most famous wild springs lies in a river bed deep inside Taroko Gorge; unfortunately, this spring has been closed by recent landslides, and whether it will be opened again by the time you read this is anybody's guess.

If you are looking to explore wild springs beyond the ones we mention (and there are scores more), pick up a copy of *Taiwan Wild Hot Springs* (台灣溫泉地圖), by Sunriver Press (上河文化), at any outdoor shop. The book is in Chinese but the maps are good, and with minimal help translating walking times and locations, you should be able to use it.

Hot-spring resorts come in a variety of shapes and sizes. In addition to having rooms (available by the night or hour) with tubs waiting to be filled with pumped-in spring water, most spa areas also have large public bathing complexes, with multiple pools, jets and showers. Charges typically range between NT300 and NT500 for an unlimited time, though prices are higher around Taipei. We have started to really enjoy using the outdoor facilities as the range of bathing options is entertaining and the views are usually better than from out the window of a hotel room. Room tubs are also often a little too small for a single Western frame (to say nothing of two).

Legend has it that after Japan lost Taiwan, one Japanese police officer jumped into Hell Valley springs (p131), boiling himself alive rather than return to Japan.

THINGS TO AVOID

It's unfortunate but many of Taiwan's springs are victims of their own popularity. Random health checks are showing a disturbing trend of overuse. Hotels and resorts must often dilute natural hot spring water, and even recycle water between bathers. This is common around the world, even in Japan, but we still don't like it. So our recommendation is twofold: first, generally speaking, the less developed the area, the purer the water quality; second, since many of the worst offenders come from among the oldest and most expensive hot-spring resorts, avoid these unless we indicate otherwise. If you're going to be soaking in diluted mineral water, or water mixed with a little sulphur powder, you might as well not pay top dollar.

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