

TAIWAN

THE BEAUTIFUL ISLE

Famed for centuries as Iha Formosa – the Beautiful Isle – Taiwan is a land with many faces. White beaches lined with basalt cliffs, marble-walled gorges and tropical forests are just the start of your journey, which could take you from mist-shrouded mountains to a pulsating modern capital. With a dynamic food culture, temple towns, hot-spring villages and adventures in both shopping malls and forests, Taiwan cuts a fine figure as one of Asia's most diverse destinations.

WHEN TO GO

Perfect Taiwan weather? In our opinion, late autumn or spring is best. While summer's fun, it gets hot and humid; as for winter, down in the temperate south the weather stays mild, but up north it is cold and damp. Typhoon season hits in late summer to mid-autumn, and tends to strike the east coast in particular.

High season (Jul–Aug)

- Accommodation costs increase 30% to 50% in tourist areas
- Generally hot and humid
- Saturday nights and Chinese New Year see price increases
- Heavy crowds at major tourist sights, islands and beaches

Shoulder (Sep–Oct, Apr–Jun)

- Good discounts on accommodation midweek
- Warm and dry in autumn (Sep–Oct); mild yet variable in spring (Apr–Jun)
- Crowds at major sights on weekends
- Best time to visit outer islands
- Nontourist areas see no price increase or decrease

Low season (Nov–Mar)

- Crowds are low except during Chinese New Year
- Damp yet mild in south, cooler in north
- Big discounts on accommodation at major tourist sights (up to 50%)
- Saturday-night rates may still be higher

FAST FACTS

Currency

New Taiwanese dollar (NT\$)

Money

ATMs widely available; credit cards accepted in many hotels and restaurants.

Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 30 days. Check with your embassy.

Language

Mandarin Chinese; Taiwanese

Transport

Extensive network; reliable transport throughout the country.



TRAVEL BUDGET

You may spend as little as US\$50 a day on a tight budget, or travel comfortably with US\$100–150 per day, or spend more if the sky is the limit.

Budget travel (NT\$1500–2500)

- Dorm bed NT\$300–500
- Cheap hotel NT\$500–1200
- Eat at convenience stores, noodle stands, night markets
- Take late-night intercity buses for cheapest rates

Midrange travel (NT\$3000–5000)

- B&B double room NT\$1500–2400
- At this price range B&Bs usually offer superior rooms to hotels

- Lunch and dinner at a decent local restaurant NT\$250–400
- Go to popular destinations midweek for accommodation discounts

Top-end travel (more than NT\$6000)

- Double room at 4-star hotel NT\$4000–6000
- Hotel restaurant meals NT\$600–1200

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

GETTING AROUND

Commonly visitors rent scooters or use the bus and train. The transport options are as follows:

Bus

Safe, reliable and cheap; intercity network, rural buses and tourist shuttle buses available.

Train & High Speed Rail

Fast, comfortable, clean and reliable; extensive system running throughout country; HSR offers higher speeds and airplane comfort.

Air

Domestic air travel is possible but uncommon (except to the outer islands) due to competition from the High Speed Rail.

Boat

Safe but can be uncomfortable due



to rough seas; regular ferries to outer islands.

Car & scooter

International visitors can hire a car or scooter; a licence valid in Taiwan or other documentation may be required.

Bike

Cycling routes extensive and well maintained.

CAN I GET BY WITHOUT MANDARIN?

Mandarin Chinese is the dominant language, with Taiwanese more commonly spoken in the home. Speaking no Mandarin is relatively easy in major cities, and challenging but possible in smaller areas. Learning basic phrases will help. English materials or translations are often found at major sights, stations, tourist offices, some hotels and restaurants, and on transport signs.

DON'T MISS

Taroko Gorge Taiwan's top tourist draw rises above a blue-green river, the marble walls swirl with the colours of a master's palette.

Mountain hikes Don't forget your boots – two thirds of Taiwan is mountainous.

National Palace Museum, Taipei By a pure accident of history, Taiwan houses the greatest collection of Chinese art in the world.

Temple towns: Tainan & Lukang

These towns boast a wealth of old buildings, from understated Confucius temples to Matsu temples rich in examples of the decorative arts.

Cycling the east coast The unspoiled and sparsely populated east coast has emerged as the top destination for multiday trips.

Diving & snorkelling With hundreds of soft and hard corals, reefs brimming with tropical sea creatures and good visibility, Taiwan offers fantastic venues for snorkelling and scuba diving.

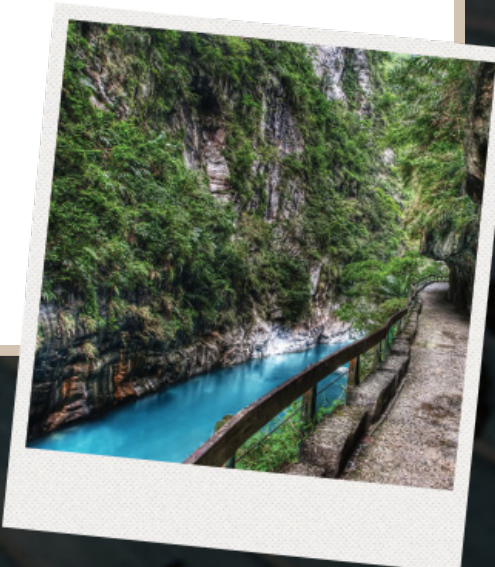
Sun Moon Lake The largest body of water in Taiwan, boasting a watercolour background ever changing with the season and light.

Hot springs Formed by the collision of two major tectonic plates, Taiwan's surface has plenty of cracks and the abundance of spring sources is hard to match.

Alishan National Scenic Area

Uncover quiet tea-growing villages, old-growth forests, hiking trails and a historic railway.

Hiking the Walami trail This trail runs deep into the heart of one of Taiwan's best preserved subtropical environments.



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