



# Understand Taiwan

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How centuries of colonisation, cultural pollination and political tension have produced one of East Asia's most culturally diverse nations.

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Island of urban high-tech landscapes or subtropical Switzerland of the East? Taiwan is all this and more.

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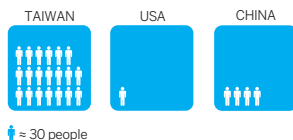
With half the island still forested, a rich variety of wildlife awaits the nature-loving visitor to Taiwan.

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What might the future bring with decreasing cross-Strait tension and increasing economic cooperation?



## population per sq km



# Taiwan Today

## An Island in Flux Clings to Its Identity

Sovereign nation or renegade Chinese province? Taiwan or Republic of China? At the start of the second decade of the 21st century, Taiwan retains its political autonomy even as political and economic realities seem to draw it closer into China's orbit. Today's Taiwanese are increasingly aware of their own strength as a society, one that's managed to transform from authoritarian rule to democracy, weather economic recessions better than other countries in the region and maintain a unique cultural identity in the face of a much larger neighbour seeking to absorb it. While Taiwan's future as a fully autonomous political entity is uncertain, you'll find little self-pity in the island's collective spirit. Instead, you'll discover collective pride at Taiwan's long list of historical, technological and economic accomplishments, along with a sense that, even if most of the world's nations don't 'officially' recognise Taiwan, Taiwan certainly recognises itself.

## Government

A multiparty democracy, Taiwan's government is dominated by its two largest political parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The current head of state is Ma Ying-jeou (KMT), whose party holds 74 of the seats in Taiwan's legislative branch, the Legislative Yuan. The DPP is a distinct minority, controlling 33 seats, with smaller parties and independents holding the remaining four. Though Ma's 2008 election was seen as a turning point in modern Taiwanese history, his approval ratings around the island have been lacklustre at best. Elected on a promise to stimulate the economy by moving closer to China, something his predecessor had sharply rejected, the administration's opening years have been strongly affected by the global economic crisis, which have sent the island's exports into a tailspin.

## Must-See Films

» **Cape No. 7** Director Wei Te-Sheng's 2008 romantic comedy became the second-highest grossing film in Taiwanese history.

» **Au Revoir Taipei** Director Arvin Chen's 2010 drama won the Best Asian Film (NETPAC)

prize at the Berlin International Film Festival.

» **Eat Drink Man Woman** Ang Lee's 1994 drama is still a must-see for anyone interested in Taiwanese culture and cuisine.

» **Super Citizen Ko** Wan Jen's 1995 film was one of the first

films to examine Taiwan's White Terror period.

» **Formosa Betrayed** Though not perfect, Adam Kane's 2009 film is a good primer on the last days of martial law in Taiwan, as seen through Western eyes.