

Introduction

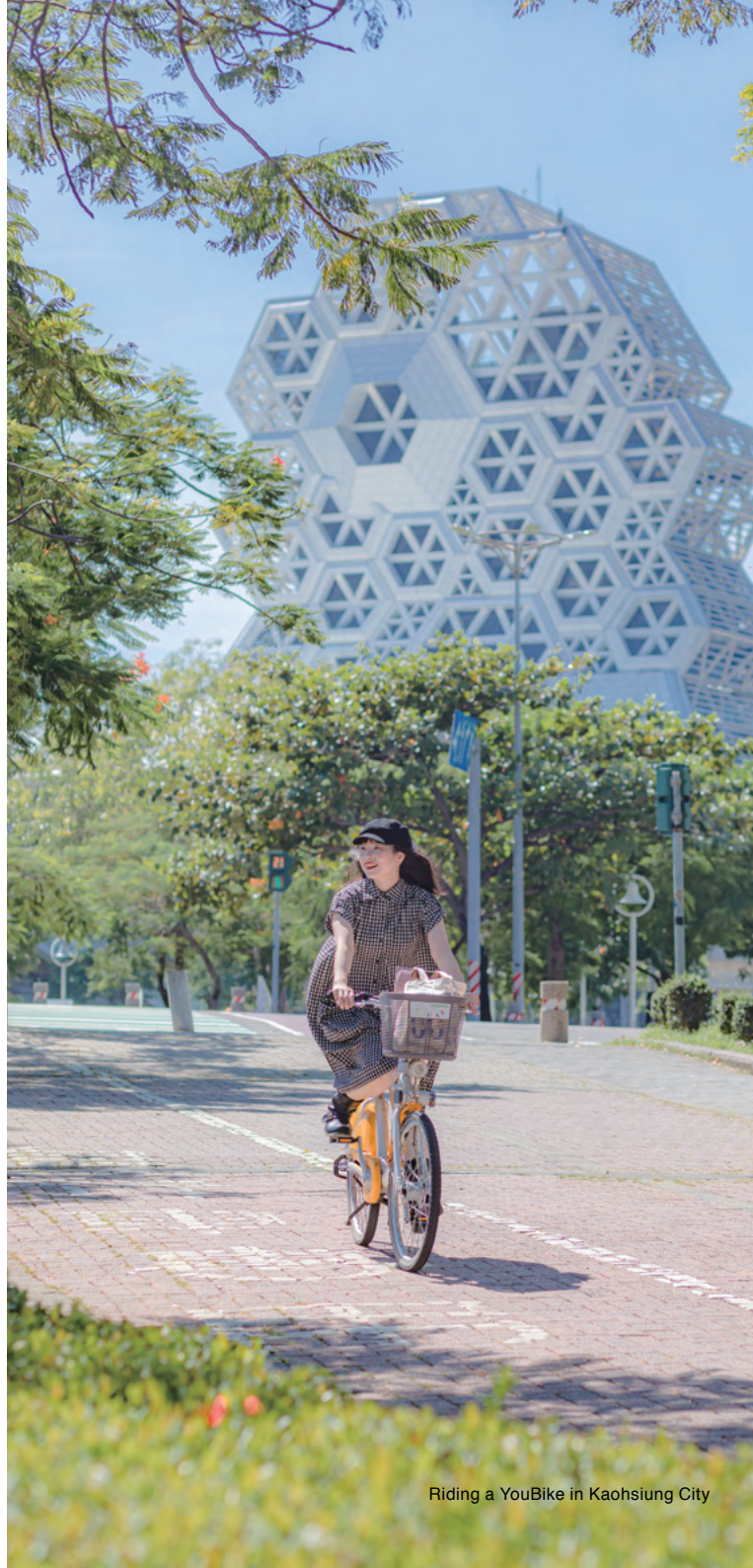
There are specific experiences that international travelers leaving Taiwan consistently report have been far beyond their expectations. Two examples: The breathtaking rugged beauty of the thick central mountain ranges. The mouthwatering breadth of the cuisine, from 3-star plush restaurants covered by Michelin to the mesmerizing array of traditional snack delicacies served in night markets, also considered worthy of coverage by Michelin.

And something perhaps surprising – the impressive efficiency and comprehensive geographical coverage of the public-transportation network, covering mainland Taiwan and its many offshore islands of wonder-full individual scenic and cultural differentiation. Travelers marvel at how the interconnected network of buses, trains (metro/regular/high-speed rail), planes, ferries, and even public-bike rentals get you comfortably and inexpensively to almost every tourist attraction of significance in surprisingly little time, and how easy the network is to navigate for non-locals, with plentiful and accurate English available. Often drawing special praise is the hop-on, hop-off Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus service (www.taiwantrip.com.tw), with routes launching from major urban transport hubs through cities and deep through the countryside.

In this booklet we'll be your guide on outings to attractions in Taiwan's different regions – north, central, south, east, and offshore islands – easily reached via public transport. The information is from popular recent articles in the Tourism Administration's Travel in Taiwan magazine (www.travelintaiwn.net). Enjoy!

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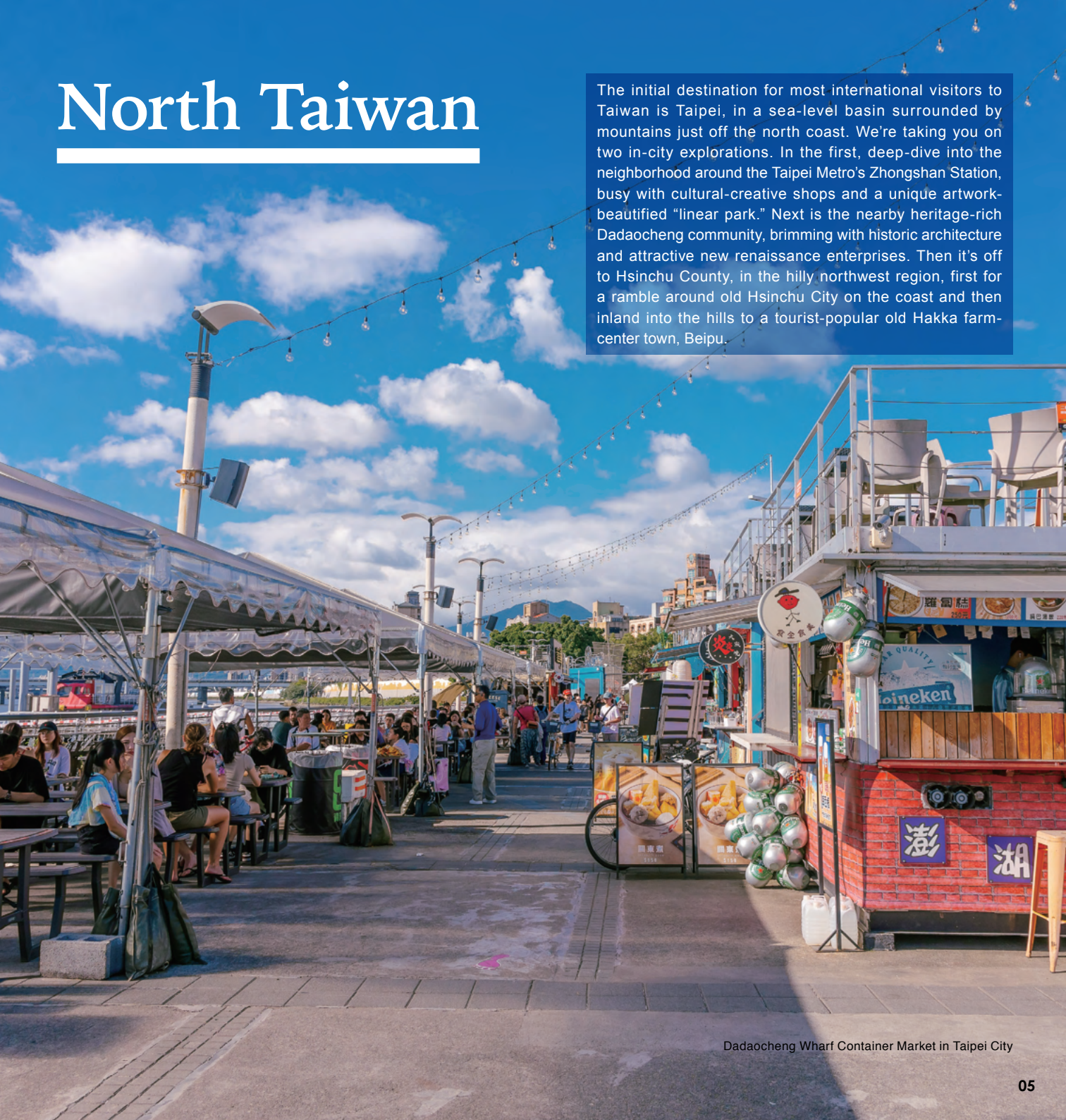
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Riding a YouBike in Kaohsiung City

North Taiwan

The initial destination for most international visitors to Taiwan is Taipei, in a sea-level basin surrounded by mountains just off the north coast. We're taking you on two in-city explorations. In the first, deep-dive into the neighborhood around the Taipei Metro's Zhongshan Station, busy with cultural-creative shops and a unique artwork-beautified "linear park." Next is the nearby heritage-rich Dadaocheng community, brimming with historic architecture and attractive new renaissance enterprises. Then it's off to Hsinchu County, in the hilly northwest region, first for a ramble around old Hsinchu City on the coast and then inland into the hills to a tourist-popular old Hakka farmer-center town, Beipu.



West Taipei's Trendy Corner

Exploring the MRT Zhongshan Station Neighborhood

The area around Taipei's underground MRT Zhongshan Station is today a shopping and leisure hotspot, especially with local young fun-seekers and international tourists, drawing the crowds with glitzy large retailers, scores of cultural-creative shops, and a unique "linear park" dotted with iconoclastic public artworks that flows through the neighborhood's heart.

MRT Zhongshan Station

This metro station is located under the intersection of Nanjing West Road and the Xinzhongshan Linear Park. On a day-tour exploration of the area around the station, entertainment is also to be enjoyed "in" the station itself, for the long underground Zhongshan Metro Mall runs right through the concourse level. It stretches from Taipei Main Station to Shuanglian Station.



Eslite Spectrum Nanxi

Places to visit:

Xinzhongshan Linear Park – This park has become a social hotspot, with large retailers concentrated around the intersection; a legion of characterful cafés, eateries, cultural-creative shops, and studios is set up in the vintage buildings, including several meaningful heritage structures, along the park's sides.

Eslite Spectrum Nanxi – The swank Eslite Spectrum Nanxi (meet.eslite.com) is right on the Nanjing W. Road/linear park intersection. Debonair Shin Kong Mitsukoshi department store buildings are right beside and across.

Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei – The Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei (MOCA Taipei; www.mocataipei.org.tw) is another key anchor of this neighborhood's rejuvenation, opened in 2001 as the first museum in Taiwan dedicated exclusively to contemporary art.

Mitty – Tucked away up on the second floor of a low-rise on an alley just off the corner of a neighborhood park Mitty (www.mittygoods.com; Chinese) offers American and Japanese apparel, digital games, toys, and action figures to sports and movie posters.

Waha Café (www.facebook.com/Wahacafe0417) serves up coffees, teas, and light foods such as sandwiches, quiches, salads, pastas, and curries with rice, plus rich desserts such as pies, cakes, and tarts.

Iclea x bag – This inventive designer enterprise (icleabag.waca.tw), creating leather and canvas daily-use items that are both fashionable and practical, is right on Chifeng Street just north of Mitty and Waha Café.

Petit Pot Cake (www.petitpot.com.tw) is a French-style patisserie that would look right at home on a quiet Paris neighborhood street, sporting an elegant European-style storefront with the color black prominent and a genteel interior with dark-stain wood prominent

WAT/Taipei Chifeng Branch – The cozy interior space of this bar has fridges stocked with a delicious circus of cocktails presented in hipster-colorful takeaway bottles and cans.

Getting there by public transport

Take either the Red Line or the Green Line of the Taipei Metro (MRT) to Zhongshan Station.



Food vendors at Dadaocheng Cisheng Temple

Dadaocheng: A Walk Through Time

Exploring One of Taipei's Historic Districts

The timeless yet simultaneously progressive Dadaocheng neighborhood, by the Tamsui River on Taipei City's west side, is a must-check day-outing experience with international visitors. Visit the neighborhood to explore some of its many vibrant young cultural-creative ventures while immersing yourself in its deep history.

Let's start our day excursion at one of Dadaocheng's most beloved hangouts for traditional hot snacks, the boisterously busy square fronting **Dadaocheng Cisheng Temple**, one of the old-time spiritual and cultural hearts of the district. The original version of this temple – dedicated to Mazu, Goddess of the Sea – was erected in 1866. Visitors to Dadaocheng have long made special trips to its courtyard food market, home to 40-plus vendors, to try the culinary specialties, many island-renowned.

The signature offering at **Ye Family Meat Congee** is considered among the top sold in Taipei. Congee features grains softened from cooking that remain whole while only minimally starchy. Pork and sweet potato chunks are normally added to the delicately flavored broth, and the dish is usually accompanied by savory side dishes. **Xu Zai Pork Trotter Vermicelli** is a family-run venture, making bellies happy for over 50 years. The clear broth that comes with the signature dish is rich and moderately zesty while being free of any greasiness, and the chewy, tender meat, always exceedingly fresh, is lightly fatty giving it a pleasant texture.

Qinjing Old Warehouse is a vintage/antiques store immediately south of Cisheng Temple, along the same narrow lane on which the temple's food vendors are strung out. The "warehouse" is a shop jammed to the rafters with treasures from everyday Taiwanese life. The elegant **Sin Hong Choon Tea Shop** is in a stately three-story building erected in 1934 as a tea-processing factory. Sporting a yellow-tinted exterior, it is a synthesis of Taiwanese and Western architectural elements, including terrazzo stairs and red-brick walls inside. The facility was used by the resident owner-family in tea export to Southeast Asia.

The **Dadaocheng Wharf Container Market** is right by the Tamsui River, in the riverside park found at the west end of Minsheng West Road. The market provides delicious food and drink along with much-loved alfresco seating in a covered picnic-table area and right atop the containers, and the nighttime cross-river views are especially sparkling.

Getting there by public transport

Take either the Green Line of the Taipei Metro (MRT) to Beimen Station or the Orange Line to Daqiaotou Station.



Food vendors at Dadaocheng Cisheng Temple



Sin Hong Choon Tea Shop



Ye Family Meat Congee

Bicycles, Bites, and a Boardwalk

A Day-Tripper's Guide to Getting the Most Out of Hsinchu City

With easy rail and road connections, the northwestern municipality of Hsinchu is a convenient day-trippable distance from Taipei. Visitors can spend a pleasant morning strolling its streets hunting for history, an afternoon cycling towards sunset, and an evening attending to both spiritual and bodily needs with a visit to a market-ensconced temple.

Hsinchu is a city that has wholeheartedly embraced modernity. Homegrown international tech companies have turned its sprawling science park into a technology hub of global importance, while the city's many universities have given it an injection of youth culture and a bounty of inexpensive eateries.



Food served at Miaokou Duck Rice



Entrance to Chenghuang Temple

Central Hsinchu

Hsinchu Railway Station is the ideal jumping-off point for a foray into this oft-overlooked and underappreciated city. The old station was designed by Matsugasaki Tsumunaga, a German-trained Japanese architect whose Baroque-infused flourishes added a touch of European style to structures throughout Taiwan.

Turning left out of the station, a 200-meter wander west brings you to **Hucheng He Riverside Park**. This oasis of water and greenery threads its way through the heart of the city, tracing the course of the moat that once encircled the city walls. Close to the park is the **East Gate** (Yingxi Gate). The almost 200-year-old gate has been given monument treatment and now sits proudly on the edge of a pedestrianized plaza that can only be entered via subterranean walkways.

Ever since Hsinchu became a fortified city in the 1730s, **Hsinchu Chenghuang (City God) Temple** has occupied space at its core. City God temples exist throughout Taiwan as a spiritual foil to city-level politics. Their main deity is always Cheng Huang Ye (aka the City God) – a Taoist figure whose role in the supernatural realm is akin to that of a modern-day mayor.

Over the decades, a profusion of vendors selling fried, grilled, skewered, and candied snacks has been drawn in by the inescapable magnetism that such vital religious centers seem to possess. Ducking through one of the entrances is like entering a self-contained parallel world. Vendors weave through the crowds with the nimbleness of alley cats as they bear bowls of steaming noodles aloft to hungry diners, and clouds of enticingly-scented vapor waft along in their wake, mingling with the heady aroma of incense smoke billowing from the censer in the table-lined temple courtyard.

Getting there by public transport

To get to central Hsinchu can take an express train or local train to Hsinchu Railway Station. The places introduce above are within walking distance of the station.





Crab Viewing Boardwalk

Along the Coast

Stretching from Zhunan Coastal Park (in Miaoli County) in the south to Nanliao Fishing Harbor (Hsinchu City) in the north is the flat **17km Coastal Bikeway** that hugs the coast. Undertaken purely on two wheels, the ride can fill the better part of a day, especially when factoring in breaks for exploration and refueling. However, if you're seeking briefer alternatives, then either driving or catching a local train to Xiangshan Railway Station and picking up a YouBike rental bike at the station would allow you to condense the trip into a single afternoon.

Not only is **Xiangshan Railway Station** a good jumping-off point for your ride along the Hsinchu coast, but it's also a noteworthy destination in its own right. The original station was built in 1902, although the current building dates to a later 1928 expansion and makeover. Like many other Japanese-built structures from that era, it was constructed using local hinoki, a type of wood sourced from Taiwanese red cypress trees that's highly prized for its durability, pleasant fragrance, and beautifully warm tones. Even if you don't have a train to catch, you can pop in to take a seat on the wooden benches lining the waiting room and meet the station master's cat.

Heading northwards, the next port of call is the **Xiangshan Wetlands**. This vital wetland habitat, spanning nearly 17 square

kilometers from the Hsinchu-Miaoli boundary to the Keya River, was once threatened by land reclamation projects. Thankfully, local environmentalists were successful in fighting for its preservation and now the dunes, mudflats, and mangroves provide a home for a diverse array of wildlife. The wetlands' star attraction is undoubtedly the **Crab Viewing Boardwalk**. Here, visitors can observe numerous crab species as well as comical-looking mudskippers. Fiddler crabs dominate the higher reaches of the foreshore, the largest among them easily fending off smaller rivals with a warning wave of a lopsided pincer, while more evenly matched opponents dance dueling circles around their burrows. Out at the boardwalk's seaward end, tiny soldier crabs hold sway, and in contrast to their less social neighbors, they march across the flats in small, coordinated troops. So numerous are the crustaceans here that – if you sit quietly on the edge of the boardwalk – you can hear the sound of them eating.

Getting there by public transport

To reach the Hsinchu coast, take or local train to Xiangshan Railway Station. At the station, you can rent a bike from the YouBike public rental bike service.



Jin Guang Fu Hall

The Hakka of Hsinchu

Tourist-Friendly Towns, Classic Culinary Gems

Hsinchu County in northwest Taiwan is beloved by tourists for the natural beauty of its hills and for the concentration of Hakka culture, with attractive small towns established centuries back, today warmly welcoming visitors. Hsinchu County is almost all hills, until reaching the spine of mountains in the island's center. The Hakka primarily live away from the coast, in the more remote upriver regions. Come visit the popular old-time settlement of Beipu and learn about Hakka culinary icons.



Making leicha

Beipu

Beipu is located on curvaceously scenic Provincial Highway No. 3, woven through the western foothills from north to south in the era before today's two west-side freeways were constructed. The highway was built to facilitate economic activity and ensure continued communication should the more exposed flatlands Highway No. 1 be cut in conflict with communist China.

Beipu – the word means “north flat land” – is set atop a richly fertile low plateau. In the smaller Nanpu or “south flat land” community next door visitors can learn about traditional farming and experience the life of farmer folk. A slender, shallow valley of neatly sculpted rice paddies courses between. Beipu was long second only to the small city of Hsinchu as a county commercial nexus and is today home to the densest concentration of Hakka cultural elements of any Hsinchu settlement. The **Beipu Old Street** area is thickly populated with heritage buildings.

Among the copious meaningful structures you'll come across on a leisurely walkabout is the **Jiang Family Ancestral Temple** (built in 1924), one of Taiwan's four key ancestral temples. The **Jiang Ah Hsin Residence** (1949; Jiang Ah Hsin was a wealthy black-tea merchant) is an imposing work of Baroque-style architecture. **Jin Guang Fu Hall** (1835) was a pioneer-settlement office. **Citian Temple** (1846) was built by the responsible land development association – in one role to serve as a defensive fortification against the displaced local native peoples.

DIY *leicha* experiences are a big Hakka-culture tourism draw. Visit the **Guangfu Teahouse**, a rambling old wood-and-red-brick enterprise homey with Beipu antique and retro treasures. *Leicha*, or *lei* tea, crafted with a mortar and pestle, is not traditional tea, but a meal-like beverage made with dried tea leaf, roasted peanuts, sesame seeds, and pumpkin seeds. Such hearty fare is quintessential in Hakka life, replenishing the body after strenuous manual labor.

Getting there by public transport

To get to Beipu, take a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus that follows the Lions Head Mountain Route. The bus can be boarded at Zhubei Railway Station and Hsinchu Railway Station.

Central Taiwan

Three of our four central Taiwan files are on majestically scenic Nantou County, a mountain fastness that is Taiwan's sole landlocked county. At Sun Moon Lake, one of the country's top tourist destinations, cycle the emerald lake's perimeter, take a cruise, and ride a mountain-climbing ropeway. The colorful trains of the Jiji Line bring tourists to quaint old settlements along a river valley snaking up from the western plains. And the soaring Central Cross-Island Highway delivers you to the lofty mountainside-hugging Qingqing Farm and stunning Wuling Pass views. Elsewhere, way back down in Taichung City's urban core on the west coast, perambulate one of its iconic long green corridors.

Nantou County

Sun Moon Lake

Located close to Taiwan's geographical center and about 750m above sea level, Sun Moon Lake (www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw), is one of the island's most iconic scenic attractions. The renowned round-lake biking route, about 30km in length, often makes lists of the world's most scenic bicycling destinations – the CNN Travel website has described it as one of the world's top 10 “cycling routes that'll take your breath away.”

You can cycle much of the lake's west side right beside the emerald-green waters – sometimes seemingly flying along overhead – on a long (14km) dedicated bikeway. The full lake circumnavigation is accomplished by using the round-lake highway on the hilly east side, which involves some climbing; the highway has low motor-vehicle speed limits. There's one long dedicated bike-path section along this length. Numerous bike-rental operations vetted by the Tourism Administration are found along the route – at the Xiangshan Visitor Center and the two tourism-focused villages on the lake's north and south shores, Shuishe and Ita Thao.

The lake's scenic focal points include **Lalu Island**, visible from many vantage points along the west and north sides. This is sacred ground for the area's native people, the Thao, who had a key village here before waters were raised last century as part of a major hydroelectricity project. Regular yacht-tour cruises launched from the **Shuishe** and **Ita Thao** piers circle the island in-close. Other west-side bikeway high points include



Cycling around Sun Moon Lake



Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village



Sun Moon Lake Ropeway



Sun Moon Lake bikeway

the dynamic-design **Xiangshan Visitor Center**, which has an info-rich exhibit hall and fine glass-façade café overlooking a tranquil bay, and the nearby poetically comely **Tongxin Bridge** and **Yongjie Bridge**, known as the “wedding photo bridges.” There's also the **Xiangshan Scenic Outlook** skywalk, reached via a branch boardwalk that seems to flow through treetops, high above the aforementioned bay.

Major sights fronting the lake's east side are the magisterial, decoratively extravagant **Wenwu Temple** and the **Sun Moon Lake Ropeway** (www.ropeway.com.tw), which lifts you up to high-gliding big vistas on the way to popular **Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village** (www.nine.com.tw), located in a valley not far from the lake.

Getting there by public transport

To get to Sun Moon Lake, you can take a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus that follows the Sun Moon Lake Route. The bus can be boarded at Taichung Gancheng Station, Taichung Railway Station, and Taiwan High Speed Rail Taichung Station.

Jiji Line

The short multiple-carriage trains (some colorfully painted) that ply the scenic 29.7km Jiji Line operate like buses on a convenient local route, delivering tourists and locals between old settlements along the Zhuoshui River from the edge of the western plains to the foot of the mighty central mountains below Sun Moon Lake. Tourists use the frequent service for relaxed and inexpensive hop-on/hop-off expeditions through the river valley. The branch line, which runs between the towns of Ershui and Checheng, was created by the Japanese colonial government in the 1920s to transport materials for Taiwan's first great hydroelectricity-generation project, encompassing up-mountain Sun Moon Lake and valley-bottom Checheng.

The massive hydro-facility works at Checheng are a wonder to behold, especially the suite of giant side-by-side pipes descending the mountainside at the village's edge. Checheng also had a long period as a major logging center, and right in the village is the highly informative Checheng Wood Museum, a renovated timber-processing complex, where you can view an old timber mill, lake-sized timber storage pond, and numerous other logging-era wood-built structures.

Just outside the town of Shuili is the tourist-focused **Shuili Snake Kiln** (www.snakekiln.com.tw), a sprawling heritage facility perched on a hillside hidden by forest cover. In bygone days Nantou was a flourishing ceramics-production center. The compound's facilities encompass the original kiln and a museum area, multimedia exhibition room, boutique, and breezy open-front coffee shop.



In Jiji Township, visit the quaint, cottage-ish Japanese-style Jiji Railway Station, a reproduction created after severe damage to the original in Taiwan's infamous 921 Earthquake, and the mesmerically photogenic ruins of the original Jiji Wuchang Temple, which collapsed in on itself. Rent bicycles near the train station and head out along the sun-dappled Jiji Green Tunnel, a vivaciously green 4.5km tree-lined section of County Route 152, motor-vehicle traffic is generally light, which has good spots to rest and take photos of passing trains.

Getting there by public transport

Apart from taking a train on the Jiji Branch Line, you can also take a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus that follows the Jiji Route. The bus can be boarded at Taichung Gancheng Station, Taichung Railway Station, and Taiwan High Speed Rail Taichung Station. If you take the train to the eastern terminus, Checheng, note that from there the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Checheng Route connects to Sun Moon Lake.

Jiji Railway



Café inside Shuili Snake Kiln



On a Hehuanshan trail



Tea time in Qingjing

Qingjing Farm/Hehuanshan

Qingjing Farm (www.cingjing.gov.tw) and Hehuanshan are exceptionally popular alpine tourist destinations located on the Highway 14A section of the Central Cross-Island Highway. Though high and deep in the central mountains, both are easily reached thanks to Taiwan's first-rate highway system. If self-driving, Qingjing is just 3.5hrs or so from Taipei, 1.5hrs from central Taichung. Among your varied bus options, perhaps the most convenient is the Taiwan Tour Bus (taiwantourbus.com.tw) guided-tour service, vetted by the Tourism Administration, which offers a Qingjing/Hehuanshan outing.

Qingjing, at an altitude of about 1,750m above sea level, is one of Taiwan's most visited recreational farms. The area's unique quartet of enticements are wondrous mountain panoramas, alpine-farmland experiences, dramatically perched slope-hugging inns and homestays, and a vibrant Baiyi community. The farm was settled in the early 1960s by retired Nationalist soldiers who had been stationed in China's Yunnan region after the Chinese Civil War; many had married women from the local Baiyi and other minority tribal groups. Taiwan's highest-elevation skywalk, the gently curvaceous Qingjing Skywalk, flows uphill along steep pastureland slopes for 1.2km. At the Green Grassland, sheep and (sometimes) cattle graze on rolling mountaintop pastureland, and there are daily sheep-shearing/sheep-dog shows and horse-riding shows.

Wuling, Taiwan's highest public road point at 3,275m and gateway to Mt. Hehuan's various peaks via easy-access roadside trailheads, is about an hour's drive from the farm. Since the highway puts you just below the vertexes, the hike to the main peak requires only moderate fitness. The Hehuanshan Main Peak Trail, 1.8km one way, brings you to the 3,417m-altitude pinnacle, where you'll enjoy grand panoramic views. Along the way, you'll see abandoned military facilities (until 2000 this was an off-limits zone) such as a barracks camp and camouflaged pillboxes.

Getting there by public transport

To reach Qingjing Farm/Hehuanshan, you first need to get to the town of Puli. From Taichung Gancheng Station, Taichung Railway Station, and Taiwan High Speed Rail Taichung Station take a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus following the Puli Route. From Puli, take a bus that follows the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Qingjing Route. The bus stops at Qingjing Farm, but does not go all the way to Hehuanshan. However, in the Qingjing Farm area, there are tour operators that offer shuttle services to Hehuanshan, including early-morning star-gazing outings.

Taichung's Calligraphy Greenway

Suggested Morning/Afternoon/Evening Walk Itineraries

Central Taichung is one of the most pleasant urban centers in Taiwan to perambulate on foot. Planners have taken full advantage of the ample space available to create comfortable room along streets for pedestrians and have designed green spaces aplenty, including long green corridors.

Launch your morning promenade at the lengthy Calligraphy Greenway's north end at the **National Museum of Natural Science** (www.nmns.edu.tw), opened in 1986. One of Taiwan's finest science museums, this global-caliber facility has galleries dedicated to the subjects of science, life sciences, human cultures, and the global environment. The museum's adjacent **Botanical Garden** is a forest of endemic plants penetrated via a web of shady walkways. A transparent glass structure with exposed steel-pipe framing that resembles a monumental lunar-landing craft rises in the center above the forest's canopy – the **Tropical Rainforest Greenhouse**. Stepping within, enter a humid simulated tropical rainforest complete with a spraying waterfall, orchid cliff wall, and intermittent "rain."



Calligraphy Greenway

Fantasy Story - Green Ray



PARK2 Caowu Square

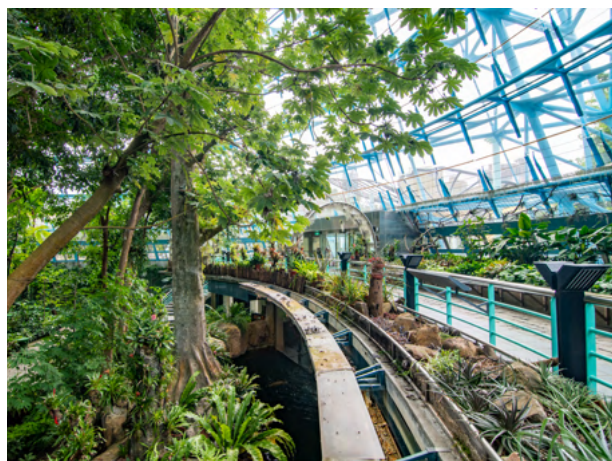
A little south of the museum are Park Lane by CMP, Taichung Civic Square, and PARK2 Caowu Square. **Park Lane by CMP** is a multi-story one-time parking garage gracefully recast as an urban garden where nature and modernity harmoniously coexist. **Taichung Civic Square** is a large lawn-centered park that serves as the stage for the acclaimed international Taichung Jazz Festival. **PARK2 Caowu Square** has been described as a "non-classic" park combining green vegetation and brand-recognition retail, dining, and liquid-refreshment outlets.

A short walk further south is **Fantasy Story – Green Ray**, along a peaceful lane a block-plus west of the greenway. Here, glass walls and exposed steel framework have been dynamically introduced to a long-abandoned line of 12 traditional-style Chinese dormitory residences with red brick and ceramic-tiling roofs. Among the dining options here are the **CYS Taichung** beer bar (www.facebook.com/cystaichung); the **Tasty Hipster** café, serving light meals and refreshing drinks; and the (Fried) **Dumpling Lab** (www.facebook.com/dmplab).

At the greenway's south end is the grandiose **National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts** (www.ntmofa.gov.tw), inaugurated in 1988. Taiwan's first and only national-grade fine art museum, its vast collection today surpasses 19,000 works.

Getting there by public transport

There are numerous bus routes from Taichung Railway Station to the National Museum of Natural Science, including no. 22, 37, 41, 45, 103, 106, and 135. The National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts is served from the station by bus no. 5, 11, and 75.



South Taiwan

In the south, in Chiayi County, you'll visit rustic Xingang town near the Taiwan Strait coast, a religious-pilgrimage center, and travel up to the high-mountain Alishan area, another Taiwan tourist destination celebrated internationally. Then it's four files further south in the historic heritage-street core of Tainan, Taiwan's oldest city, founded by the Dutch in 1624, plus one file meandering the wonders of the adjacent Taiwan Strait littoral – tidal flats, lagoons, wetlands, mangrove swamps, fish farms, salt pans, and just-offshore silt islands. Then deeper south still, harborside Yancheng District in the brawny port city of Kaohsiung, an old community now transformed into perhaps the city's most dynamic tourist magnet.





Fengtian Temple

MAZU AND MUSEUMS

Experiencing Traditional Culture in Xingang Township and Chiayi City

Traveling from Taipei in the north many international travelers spend no more than an hour in Chiayi City, or bypass it altogether. This low-rise city of 264,000 people is much more than a transportation hub, however, and discerning tourists are starting to recognize that its museums, temples, culturally rich hinterland, and other attractions more than justify an overnight stay.

Xingang Township

Since 1988, Xingang's **Fengtian Temple** (www.hsinkangmazu.org.tw) has been where pilgrims taking part in the famed annual Mazu procession from Dajia Jenn Lann Temple in Taichung City turn around and begin the return leg of their epic nine-day, 300-plus-kilometer journey. Like Jenn Lann Temple, Fengtian Temple exists to honor Mazu the Chinese Goddess of the Sea.

Jealousy has no place in Taiwanese popular religion, and many of those who pray to Mazu at Fengtian Temple also offer incense to the shrine's other resident divinities, among them Guan Gong. More unusual is the local practice of honoring the Tiger General. Effigies of this divinity can be seen at numerous shrines around

the island. But only here is he elevated from his usual floor-level position and given an altar and chamber of his own.

Mazu has been worshiped at Fengtian Temple since at least 1811, and the current iteration of the temple is a treasure house of traditional artistic expression, crowded with detailed paintings, carvings, and ceramic figurines.

To see how such images and objects are produced, there are few places better than **Bantaoyao Crafts Studio of Jiao-Zhi Pottery & Chien-Nien** (www.bantaoyao.com.tw). Located less than 4km west of Fengtian Temple, this family-friendly operation was established to promote and preserve the ancient arts of *jiaozhi* pottery (often also called koji pottery in English) and *jiannian* decoration.

The former is an exceptionally ornate and colorful form of art in which the Chiayi area is considered to be preeminent. The latter is a cut-and-glue method that utilizes fragments of colored glass and earthenware to create representations of characters from folktales and auspicious symbols such as pagodas and dragons.

For visitors, there are opportunities to watch masters at work and to try their hand at creating mosaic art or painting ceramic dolls. Even if you pass up the chance to make something of your own, there's a good chance you'll find some excellent souvenirs. Some of the items on sale are utterly traditional in appearance, while others reflect modern ideas of what's cute and charming.

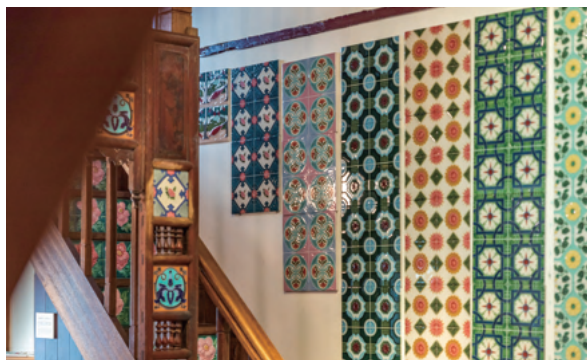
Chiayi City

Chiayi City is easy-paced and small, with just 264,000 residents. Its compact old core, centered on the Chiayi Railway Station, is choc-a-bloc with places of historic interest. If your time for visiting the city is limited, do not miss these highlights:

The **Chiayi Art Museum** (chiayiartmuseum.chiayi.gov.tw) consists of three historic buildings, the main one a modernist work dating to the Japanese colonial era that served as a government office.

Alishan Forest Railway Garage Park, Beimen Station, and Hinoki Village form a treasure-house trio on Chiayi County's forestry history. The garage park contains the former Alishan Forest Railway headquarters repair/maintenance garage and an impressive collection of antique imported locomotives and other rolling stock. Alishan cypress-built Beimen Station, the original launch-point for the forest railway, is today one of two city forest railway passenger pick-up points. Hinoki Village – “hinoki” is the Japanese for “cypress” – is a complex of about 30 Japanese-built bungalow-style structures, most of these former forestry-industry worker dormitories, that today house food-and-beverage enterprises, arts-and-crafts boutiques, history exhibits, etc.

Nearer the old core's perimeter, the **Chiayi Old Prison**, opened in 1922 and closed in 1998, is now a museum. Large, pleasant **Chiayi Park**, established by the Japanese



Museum of Old Taiwan Tiles

in 1910, has an arboretum and a landscaped area. Two other highlights are its 62m-high **Sun-Shooting Tower** and elegant **Chiayi City Historical Relic Museum**, housed in two exquisite Japanese-constructed wood buildings.

Chiayi Municipal Museum (museum.chiayi.gov.tw) isn't so big that you'll suffer from information overload, yet it manages to provide a comprehensive overview of the city's long history. The first floor is a venue for temporary exhibitions, while the second floor explores the development of Chiayi. The huge model of the city, which introduces its landmarks and notable industries, is quite impressive. Culture vultures are likely to spend more time on the third floor, where the permanent exhibition is titled *Architectural Theater: Story Time with Temple Figurines*. This is probably the best place in Taiwan to learn about the origins of *jiaozhi* pottery, its masters, and the themes and characters often depicted in *jiaozhi* works. The **Museum of Old Taiwan Tiles** (www.1920t.com), 900m from Chiayi Municipal Museum, was founded by a Chiayi native who realized that a form of decoration favored by Taiwan's wealthier families between the 1880s and 1930s was in danger of disappearing, this museum preserves exquisite tiles salvaged from houses undergoing demolition. It also gives a new generation of tile artists a way to connect with the public.

Getting there by public transport

Chiayi City can be easily reached by local and express trains. Fengtian Temple and the Bantaoyao Crafts Studio of Jiao-Zhi Pottery & Chien-Nien can be accessed by taking a bus following the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Southern Branch of the NPM [National Palace Museum] Route. Buses can be boarded at Chiayi Railway Station and THSR Chiayi Station.

Alishan Forest Railway Garage Park

Chiayi Art Museum



Alishan Tea and Railway

Chiayi County's Best Attractions

Chiayi County, in Taiwan's southwest, stretches from the Taiwan Strait across the fertile Jianan Plain and up to the majestic central mountains. Out on the plains is Chiayi City, the most popular jumping-off point for Alishan journeys. When visiting Chiayi, make sure to explore Alishan's famed tea farms and take a ride on the alpine forest railway.

Tea

If lacking your own wheels, the best way to explore the Alishan National Scenic Area's tea farms is the **Taiwan Tourist Shuttle** service (www.taiwantrip.com.tw). Buses ply Alishan's main road, Provincial Highway 18, with the **Alishan National Forest Recreation Area** as the terminus. This is a hop-on/hop-off service, with many stops along the way, making for easy visits to the attractions recommended below.

Alishan high-mountain oolong teas are among Taiwan's finest, enjoying renown far from this island's shores. The forest recreation area is located about 2,200m above sea level, while Alishan's tea farms primarily inhabit the cool and foggy 800m~1,600m zone.

To explore the world of Alishan's mountain-slope tea plantations consider walking the **Shizhuo Trails**, a network of five comparatively short footpaths laid out on steep slopes, lined with grids of tea bushes, above the village of Shizhuo. **YuYuPas Cultural Park** (www.yuyupas.com; Chinese) celebrates the culture of Alishan's original inhabitants, the Tsou Tribe. Tea (and coffee) is also grown and sold here, with teahouses offering magnificent views in large thatched-roof structures evoking traditional Tsou meeting halls. You can also buy tea at **FKUO Tea** (www.facebook.com/fkuoo) and **Sheng Li Farm** (www.slffhs.com; Chinese).

Forest Railway

One of Taiwan's most popular tourist attractions is the wonderful **Alishan Forest Railway**, a narrow-gauge heritage line built by the Japanese in the early 1900s that takes you up from the Chiayi City plains to alpine country using evocatively romantic period locomotives and carriages.

For more detailed info, visit the **Alishan Forest Railway Ticketing System** (afrts.forest.gov.tw/TP01_1_E.aspx). Visit afrch.forest.gov.tw/en for a map showing all of the many stations, plus brief introductions on each, including elevation and distance markers. There's one train each way daily on weekdays and three on weekends/holidays.

The line goes up to the Alishan National Forest Recreation Area where you can stay in the sumptuous **Alishan Hotel** stay (www.alishanhotel.com.tw), surrounded by thick tall-tree forest. Early bird it on the next day for the **Zhushan Sunrise Watching Train**, which chugs up-mountain from the recreation area's Alishan Station to a high plateau from which the glorious sunrise over the distant Mt. Jade massif is enjoyed.



Alishan Forest Railway



YuYuPas Cultural Park

Getting there by public transport

To reach the tea plantations and hiking paths along Provincial Highway 18, take a bus on the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Alishan Route. Buses can be boarded at Chiayi Railway Station and THSR Chiayi Station. The Alishan Forest Railway journey starts at Chiayi Railway Station and terminates at Alishan Station in the Alishan Forest Recreation Area.

Downtown Tainan on Foot

A Relaxing Day Taking in Some of the City's Coolest Places

Walk yourself back into history in the city of Tainan's West Central District, where Taiwan's oldest Han Chinese settlement took root in the 1600s, and at the same time walk right into some of the city's most debonair young cultural-creative attractions.

Launch your Tainan adventure with the **Tainan Art Museum Building 2** (www.tnam.museum), which opens mid-morning. Building 2 is a bold, purpose-built new architectural work, likened to a ziggurat or Mars base mockup. The exterior design inspiration was the flamboyant flame tree (*Delonix regia*), brought to Taiwan during the 1895–1945 Japanese colonial era, now Tainan's official tree. The striking pentagonal contours, building block-style layered exhibition spaces, and dramatic fractal roof canopy immediately made this work a Tainan architectural landmark.

Tainan Confucius Temple is Taiwan's oldest temple dedicated to the Great Sage and Teacher. The island's first educational institution, it was built in 1665 as an incubator for a Chinese cultural renaissance in Taiwan. Set in a tranquil garden compound, arched gates and corniced walls separate numerous courtyards, each with its own halls and special functions.

Narrow Door Café



Tainan Confucius Temple



Tainan Art Museum Building 2



Tainan Confucius Temple

Tainan Art Museum Building 1 looks across an intersection at the temple complex's northeast corner. An exemplar of Tainan's love for repurposing older architectural works, this was originally the Tainan Police Agency building, Taiwan's oldest police edifice, designed and built in Art Deco style by a Japanese architect in 1931. It has 16 galleries.

Just over one block south of the aforementioned Taipei Confucius Temple / Tainan Art Museum Building 1 intersection is the **Narrow Door Café**. (www.facebook.com/narrowdoor99). Its name is more than apt. The "door" in question is a long, narrow slit between two multi-story commercial buildings, which looks like a deep fissure in a cliff, that you have to enter sideways. The owner-operator has taken what was originally a home built by a doctor a century ago during the Japanese era and transformed it into a Turkish-style getaway idyll.

About four blocks southeast of our temple/museum intersection is **44 Bit Records** (www.facebook.com/44bit) on a languid lane facing a community park. A combo eatery/music-listening oasis, it's on the ground level in a classic old-style deep and long two-story former residence with an exceedingly narrow façade of yellow brick. Reflecting the owner's fondness for electronic music, the space is filled with old records and CDs from around the globe in the DJ room and on stacked racks of DJ equipment. The menu presents teas, tea drinks, and carbonated fruity drinks.

Hayashi Department Store (www.facebook.com/hayashi.tw) is one block north of Museum Building 2. The multi-story dedicated department store building, opened in 1932, features a harmonious blend of Eastern and Western architectural elements. Hayashi was south Taiwan's first department store, Taiwan's second. Abandoned for many decades after Allied bombing in WWII, it was refurbished and reopened last decade. There's tea, handicrafts and multifarious other Tainan-connected items for sale, a coffee shop on the 4th level, a restaurant on the 5th, and on the 6th a sake brewery, Japanese-style food and drink enterprise, and an observatory with splendid city views.

Quirky **Snail Alley** is just under two blocks north of Building 2. This is a small area of narrow lanes, old residences, and historical buildings bursting with funky installation artworks and, especially, colorful 3D murals. Snails, as one might surmise from the place name, are a favorite subject matter. The enclave is hipster nirvana, also jam-packed with shops and restaurants. The "Snail Alley" name is derived from a fictional alley depicted in a well-known novel by Taiwan novelist and literary scholar Yeh Shih-tao, whose last residence was here.

Bing Xiang (www.facebook.com/icecountry160) or "Ice Country," is two-plus blocks north of Building 2. This simple-decor shop

is a purveyor of shaved ice treats that has a special place in the hearts of Tainan locals – it was opened in 1978 and has grown up with them. The secret here is the freshest of fruits; Taiwan has been called the "Kingdom of Fruit," and Tainan sits within a key production region. Specially recommended is the mango ice and banana ice. The tofu pudding is also esteemed.

The **Yebisu Kan** (www.facebook.com/yebisukan1935) building, three blocks west/northwest of Museum Building 2, was once home to one of Tainan's four major movie theaters, from 1935 in the Japanese era until 1961. In 1970 Taiwan's renowned Black Bridge brand (maker of traditional-style sausages, meat floss, jerky, etc.) moved in and comprehensively renovated the retail facility to resemble a museum.

We'll wind down the day at **The Spring**, perfect for evening scenic photography. It's about five blocks northwest of Museum Building 2, near the Anping Canal. When the early 1980s-built Tainan Chinatown mall was demolished, the now-mostly-alfresco basement was ingeniously transformed into a public plaza rich with greenery. Selected original beams and columns have been left in place for aesthetic effect. A shallow, clean-water mini-lagoon complete with tree-studded islets was created for kids' water play (changing rooms available).

Yebisu Kan



The Spring



Walking Old “Taiwan South”

The Most Historic – and Fun – of Tainan City’s Old Streets

Tainan City is the garden where Taiwan’s modern era took root. This was the island’s first urban settlement, established by the colonizing Dutch in 1624, who were driven out decades later. Glorious Tainan thereafter served as Taiwan’s Chinese imperial capital for over two centuries.

Shennong Street

A most stimulating place to embark on a day’s walking tour of the old Tainan city core is cozy Shennong Street, stacked with long and narrow historic two-story shophouse buildings hosting cultural-creative shops, artist studios, as well as quaint compact cafés, teahouses, bars, and eateries – plus a smattering of homestay operations. Adding to the old-world ambiance and the tight-knit community feel are two city-designated historic sites, **Jinhua Temple** and **Yaowang Temple**. Many of the shophouse structures date to the late Qing Dynasty (latter 1800s) and Japanese colonial (1895-1945) periods.

Shift down to your slowest walking gear to allow time for admiration of the eclectic yesteryear façades, each a distinguishing artistic expression; many have been further prinked and personalized to announce the new 21st-century ventures now moved in. The artery, which is just a few hundred meters long, is especially busy and alluring after the sun sets when retro-style lamps introduce an ethereal night-time glow that evokes the settings travelers rejoice in ambling the old quarters of Nice, Bordeaux, and other romance-tale European destinations.

Shennong Street intersects with a major north-south thoroughfare, Hai’an Road, on its east end. “Hai’an” translates as “sea tranquility,” a clue to the fact that the coastline once ran alongside. The land under Shennong Street stretched out into the water, pier-like, flanked by short transport canals. Goods were brought in by boat through the canal-facing backs of the shophouses. Shops were in the front section, facing the street, storage was above on the second floor, and family quarters were toward the rear. Fore and aft edifice sections were often divided by a sky well, a courtyard area allowing in sunlight. Looking at Google Maps, you can see how silting has pushed the Taiwan Strait kilometers to the west; the nearby Anping Canal is a vestige of the long-vanished harbor area.



Yebisu Kan



Shennong Street



Antique shop



Guohua Street and Yongle Market (right)

Guohua Street

Just to the east of Shennong Street is an aromatic and forever-buzz timeless neighborhood where you can dive headlong into traditional local Tainan living as pursued generation after generation back into imperial times. Browse heritage markets and feast on some of the snacking classics the city has gifted to the global gourmand table. The enclave is fixed on north-south Guohua Street, a narrow old-ways market street teeming with family-run operations that spill right out onto the street.

Cross Hai'an from Shennong Street and you enter the excitingly cacophonous **Shuixian Temple Market**, among the city's oldest. The covered forest of stalls within surrounds the venerable Shuixian Temple, established in 1703 with a cadre of deities especially dear to traders, seafarers, and fisherfolk resident within, specialist protectors against water-related disasters.

Among the most celebrated of the many long-in-place family-run operations in the market is the **Bao Lai Xiang bakery**. It's been making palates happy for over seven decades now, a seller of *peng* cakes and other old-time baked yummys Tainan is known for. *Peng* cakes are puffed-up pastries with a very thin outer layer that is crunchy and crumbly and, within, a "hollow" inside the rounded top and caramelized brown sugar at the bottom.

Another market with a legitimate claim to being "Tainan's Kitchen" is close nearby – **Yongle Market**, at the Guohua Street/Minzu Road corner. This labyrinth stuffed with a hundred-plus operators is a covered operation. Tainan is known around Taiwan as the island's creative kitchen for *xiaochi* or "little eats" – i.e., fresh-made snacking delicacies. Though even busier with tourists than Shuixian Temple Market, this remains a true food bazaar serving locals.

Directly across Guohua Street from Yongle Market at the Guohua/Minzu intersection is one of Tainan's best-known purveyors of Taiwan-style spring rolls, **Jinde Spring Rolls**. The founder ran a stall nearby selling cold drinks in the 1950s and started making spring rolls in 1954. The move to this location was made in 1966. Jinde's soft wrap-skins are lightly pan-fried; the filling consists of cabbage, shrimp, pork, dried tofu, egg, beans, garlic, coriander, peanut powder, and sugar.

Just a couple doors down along Guohua Street is **Fu Sheng Hao Rice Pudding**, a household name in Tainan, established in 1947. Taiwan's iconic savory rice pudding is known as *wagui*, using the Taiwanese pronunciation, literally "bowl cake." Inside a bowl of steamed sticky rice paste are tasty "hidden treasures." Inside Fu Sheng Hao's fresh-crafted version, your key discoveries will be shrimp and ground pork. The mixing in of soy sauce gives it a color darker than found elsewhere.



Shuixian Temple Market



Jinde Spring Rolls



Fu Sheng Hao Rice Pudding

How to Read the City of Tainan

Our Theme: Coast

The lands along Taiwan's southwest coast are extremely flat, barely above sea level. This is a blurred dry/wet world of wide tidal flats, lagoons, wetlands, mangrove swamps, fish farms, salt pans, and just-offshore silt islands.

Ply Tainan's coastal stretch using the hop-on/hop-off bus runs of the convenient **Taiwan Tourist Shuttle** service (www.taiwantrip.com.tw). The **88 Anping**, **99 Anping Taijiang**, and **West Coast Expressway** routes will get you to or very close to most attractions introduced below.

Yuguang Island is Tainan's sole silt island directly off the city's old urban core, reached by a short bridge close to the popular **Eternal Golden Castle** attraction. Meander low-rise boardwalks through a planted forest, and enjoy the outer-side bay, fringed by an oyster-rack flotilla.

Just to the north of Anping District is the seaboard **Taijiang National Park** (www.tjnp.gov.tw). Give time to the informative visitor center, its gleaming white-walled buildings propped atop pilings simulating an old-time fishing hamlet. At the park's nearby **Sicao Green Tunnel**, take a motorized raft ride through Taiwan's first canal, dating to the 1870s.



Anping Fort

Anping Old Street

The Anping Old Street/Anping Fort area, perhaps Tainan's most popular tourist draw, is due west of the Shennong Street/Guohua Street area, roughly a kilometer distant. When the Dutch launched Tainan they built a bastion, Fort Zeelandia, at the tip of a long spit of land that stretched into open water.

The **Anping Old Street** neighborhood is the site of the first Dutch settlement, which formed beside the fort. At its heart is narrow Yanping Old Street. The quarter's brick- and stone-paved lanes are thronged with tourist-focused eateries and sellers of handicrafts, many handmade.

Deyi Shrimp Biscuits creates big, thick, crispy shrimp biscuits in a diversity of flavors; this is a retail enterprise specializing in souvenir purchases, though you can also eat hot and fresh on the spot. Shrimp biscuits are a fried treat crafted with shrimp paste, egg white, corn flour, sugar, and seasonings. Only local wild shrimp from the Anping area is used.

Though the simplest of dishes, Tainan's famed beef soup packs tremendous flavor, and Anping's **A-Cai Beef Soup** is one of the city's go-to makers. Thin strips of the freshest raw beef produced in Tainan are dropped in steaming-hot beef and ginger broth, the broth doing the cooking on the spot. The meat is so melt-in-your-mouth tender and flavorful that no seasonings are required.

The site of Fort Zeelandia's ruins is today called **Anping Fort**. Little of the fort remains – a good deal of the materials were used by the Chinese military to construct another popular and largely intact attraction nearby, the Eternal Golden Castle (another fort), in the 1870s. Your experience will be richly rewarding nonetheless, for there is good and ample English signage explaining the ruins and on-site digs.



Sicao Green Tunnel

Getting there by public transport

To reach the areas introduced above, from Tainan Railway Station, take a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus following the 88 Tainan Loop Route or the 99 Anping Taijiang Route (both only available on holidays). Alternatively, take advantage of the Tainan Sightseeing Bus service (www.tainansightseeing.com.tw).



Hamasen Railway Cultural Park

Old Yancheng District on Foot

The Renascent Heart of Kaohsiung City's History

The smallest of Kaohsiung's urban-core districts, old Yancheng is located on the north side where the Love River flows into the Port of Kaohsiung. After a long period of decline, the past few decades have brought a magical renaissance and compact, flat, comfortably walkable Yancheng has become perhaps the city's most powerful tourist magnet.

Yancheng District is so level and easy to navigate on foot because, in the imperial era, the Han Chinese drained the marshy expanse here to create salt fields. "Yancheng" is, literally, "salt fields." In the 1895-1945 Japanese colonial era it was transformed into the city's first *sakariba*, or bustling commercial/entertainment zone. Post-WWII the district became an emporium for the sale of restricted imported goods and a gateway for American cultural influences.

Take the most edifying of walks through Kaohsiung's development at the **Kaohsiung Museum of History** (kfm.org.tw) its home a stately edifice dating from the Japanese era that served as the Kaohsiung Municipal Hall during that era and later as Kaohsiung City Hall.

Yancheng First Public Retail Market is a traditional market, once Kaohsiung's busiest, that was established in 1949 and refurbished with a hipper new look designed to attract a younger crowd in 2022. Within its alleyway labyrinth, old stands and shops have been given aesthetic makeovers, and nattier enterprises such as a café and beer-on-tap kiosk opened.

The historic Hamasen area in Gushan District, which adjoins Yancheng's southwest corner, is today home to the **Hamasen Railway Cultural Park**. The key features in the park are a railway museum, platform area and 38 sets of rail tracks, open-air displays of locomotives, carriages, and other rolling stock, and mini-train rides.

The **Kaohsiung Port Warehouse No. 2** (www.kw2.com.tw; Chinese), immediately south of the park looking out at the harbor's ship-, ferry-, and tour yacht-busy north end, was reopened for its new tourism mission in 2018. You'll browse iconic Taiwan food-brand and cultural-creative outlets on the first floor, and artist-exhibit spaces on the second.

The wonder-filled enclave that is **The Pier-2 Art Center** (pier2.org) just northeast of Warehouse No. 2 looking into the waters of one of the port's manmade berthing inlets, was the explosion point for Kaohsiung's recent-decades cultural-creative bloom. The first of its three revived warehouse clusters was transfigured in the 2000s. The original mission of these long-abandoned structures was the storage of resources such as granulated sugar and fish meal. Today they're cultural-creative incubators, stages for domestic and international exhibitions and festivals, live indoor and outdoor musical, theatrical, and busker performances, and quirky large-scale outdoor installation artworks and 3D/graffiti-style murals.

Bar inside Yancheng First Public Retail Market



The **Great Harbor Bridge** jumps the aforementioned berthing inlet before The Pier-2 Art Center, landing on its southwest side at the young Kaohsiung Port Depot 410 complex, four warehouses stuffed with food and shopping ventures. The arched, sleek-lined, pure-white 110m pedestrian passageway is Taiwan's first horizontally rotating landscape bridge, and Asia's longest cross-port rotating bridge (3min tourist-display rotations 3pm daily, 7pm Fri/Sat/Sun). Its dynamically contoured profile is in the image of a dolphin and seashell, odes to the Kaohsiung region's marine culture. The Kaohsiung Light Rail's Dayi Pier-2 Station is right off the east end, making public-transport travel a breeze, and large Taiwan coast guard ships berth here in a line with the city's skyscraped skyline as backdrop, making for quintessential Kaohsiung-theme photo captures.



the south side is the Coral Zone, with roof looking like coral as seen from the Dolphin Walk, used for exhibits and cultural-creative retail.

A **Love River** cruise is a de rigueur Kaohsiung experience for visitors to the city. Rides on quiet electric-powered, open-sided Love Boats and on gondolas are offered. Two launch points are located just upriver and downriver from Zhongzheng Bridge, on the left bank. Commentary in Chinese is provided, and the gondoliers periodically break out in song. The experience is soothingly peaceful, especially in the evenings, with the riverside promenade and bridge lighting reflected on the water and the music of leisure establishments wafting through the air. Outings are provided weekdays 6pm~10pm and weekends/holidays 3pm~10pm. Check details in person at the ticket booths beside the cruise-launch locations, or with the city's Tourism Bureau (khh.travel).

Getting there by public transport

Yancheng District is easily reached by taking the KMRT system's Orange Line and getting off at Yanchengpu Station or Hamasen Station. You can also take the LRT Line to the Hamasen or Penglai Pier-2 stops.

Kaohsiung Music Center



The **Kaohsiung Music Center** (kpmc.com.tw) a monumental young architectural artwork on the north side of the Love River's mouth, is an incubator for south Taiwan pop-music talent. The bold-design look of the main building is integrated with the surrounding harbor scenery. Honoring the importance of the marine environment for Kaohsiung, its bright-white exterior features towers that resemble crashing sea waves and honeycomb-look facing that symbolizes coral-reef communities. Also part of the complex is the Dolphin Walk, structured to resemble a leaping dolphin, which delivers visitors over the Love River mouth to other KMC facilities on the south side. One of the Kaohsiung Light Rail's charming bus-stop-style stations is right along the raised pathway. On

Walking along the Love River





East Taiwan

The pristine East Coast, a Hawaii-like region, is comparatively isolated from the busy west and north by the central mountains. We have files on each of its two small, laid-back cities, coast-side Hualien and Taitung. History and nostalgia are the foci in Hualien, with time spent at a railway culture park, stone sculpture museum, and immense night market. In Taitung, it's scenic and cultural parks, cycling a forest park, seashore park, and park-landscaped old railway corridor, and visiting a park-transformed heritage sugar-factory complex. Elsewhere, take in a farm experience in the Ghibli-esque East Rift Valley and walk the Platform of the Three Immortals, a just-offshore island along the palm-fringed coast.

A Slow-Paced Paradise

Discover Cultural Gems and Picturesque Landscapes in East Taiwan

While island Taiwan's west side and far north are places of dense population and fast-paced activity, its east – Hualien and Taitung counties – is a land of more idyllic human/nature balance. Below, discover a few themed suggestions that will immerse you in the enchanting beauty of Eastern Taiwan, featuring some must-see cultural and scenic attractions in the vibrant cities of Hualien and Taitung.

There are two cities on the east coast, Hualien and Taitung, named like the counties they are part of, and we're visiting both. Each has a population of about 100,000, and both have significant indigenous populations, as does the Hualien/Taitung region as a whole. The city of Hualien is at the north mouth of the 180km-long, narrow, fertile, and majestically mountain-cupped East Rift Valley – which we're visiting as well – and Taitung is at the south mouth.

Hualien City – History and Nostalgia

In Hualien City, a few hours at the **Hualien County Stone Sculpture Museum** (stone.hccc.gov.tw) is highly recommended. The eponymous county is a lucrative source of world-class marble, jade, rose stone, and other stones, and while perusing the museum's indoor exhibits and Outdoor Stone Sculpture Park you will learn all about how the region has become a creative hive for stone sculpture art, viewing modern works as well as antique Buddhist sculptures, aesthetic elements taken from heritage buildings, and other traditional stone works.

The complex that is today the abode of the **Hualien Railway Culture Park** was originally the operations center for all eastern railway operations, constructed in 1932. You can view displays in buildings once housing offices for senior administrators, construction section personnel, railway police, archives, detention cells, and a blacksmith workshop, and enjoy a period-costume experience. Sitting outside is a refurbished heritage steam locomotive used in the east.

Don't miss the chance to check out some of Hualien's alluring nostalgia cafés. **Café Shouwa** (www.facebook.com/shouwa58) brings you back to Japan's imperial Showa era; the Japanese-style desserts are delectable. **Morning Mountain** (www.facebook.com/himorningmountain) is in a quaint Japanese-style wood-built dormitory building used by the Japanese imperial forest service. **Mole Man** (www.instagram.com/chihnan_) is your time transporter to 1960s Hualien culture.

While in the city, be sure to visit **Dongdamen Night Market**. The city's largest night market with 400-plus stalls, it has an irresistible carnival flair. Laid out in a street grid, it sits on a massive square paved with black and white granite slabs, bringing a distinct "stone of Hualien" flavor. Likely of greatest interest for foreign visitors will be the "Indigenous People's Street," with stalls serving bamboo rice, barbecued wild boar, stir-fried mountain vegetables, millet wine, and other specialties.

Getting there by public transport

Hualien City is easily reached by local and express trains. The places introduced above are within walking distance from the station. Alternatively, take a cab.



Morning Mountain

Hualien Railway Culture Park



Hualien County Stone Sculpture Museum

Taitung City – Scenic and Cultural Parks

The Beinan River drains the waters of the East Rift Valley's south sector, debouching into the sea just to Taitung City's north. Between the city and the river sits the 280ha **Taitung Forest Park**, a splendid place for cycling. Taitung folk call this coast-protecting reserve the “Black Forest,” after its tall, dark-hue beefwood trees. Leave time for the two lakes in the park; Pipa Lake has lookouts to savor the bird and fish inhabitants, and Flowing Lake has facilities for water fun such as kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding.

The forest park's bikeway connects with **Haibin (Seashore) Park**, stretched out seaside beside the city's northeast quarter. The cycling you're doing here is all part of the popular 21km Taitung Mountain-Ocean Bikeway. In contrast to the forest zone, Haibin Park is a wide-open, breeze-swept expanse with sweeping Pacific views eastward and sky-bound peaks westward. Its manmade aesthetic showpiece is Paposogan, a large rattan dome with a tree-shaded viewing deck. Inside is a large rattan tree, which represents Earth; the dome symbolizes the surrounding universe.

Taking you right through the city's heart, southeast to northwest, is the green and breezy 6km **Taitung Old Railway Corridor**. The city's original railway station – at the corridor's southeast terminus – was retired in 2001, and a



Pipa Lake in Taitung Forest Park



Haibin Park

new station was built on the northwest outskirts. Today the cycling/walking route is framed with planted trees and further prettified with garden landscaping. At the southeast end of the corridor is the Taitung Railway Art Village, a key local tourist gem.

Taitung Sugar Factory Cultural and Creative Park, which is along the aforementioned mountain-ocean cycleway, is Taitung County's largest industrial-heritage complex. As with Taiwan's arsenal of other priceless sugar-factory heritage sites today refashioned into tourist destinations, it was built by the Japanese during their rule of the island 1895-1945. You can easily lose yourself for a half-day in this sprawling creative-arts space inhabited by galleries, workshops, craft shops, and cafés.

Getting there by public transport

Taitung City is easily reached by local and express trains. The places introduced above are within walking distance from the station. Alternatively, take a cab.



Old railway station of Taitung





Taiwan International Balloon Festival



Sanxiantai

Imagine Taitung

Luye is a quiet, deeply rural township at the southern end of the East Rift Valley. The region's scenery has a Ghibli-esque quality with blue skies, green mountains, and the occasional flash of orange-and-white-liveried express trains reflected in the mirror-like surfaces of paddy fields. An agricultural patchwork blanket of bananas, pineapples, avocados, guavas, loquats, custard apples, papayas, and dragon fruit each take their turn to swell and ripen, while on higher slopes tea pickers endure blazing sun to harvest leaves that will become Luye's specialty red oolong.

Tourism here is something of an all-or-nothing affair. Every summer, thousands of visitors descend upon the Luye Plateau for the month-long Taiwan International Balloon Festival (balloontaiwan.taitung.gov.tw), while for the other 11 months, there are few outsiders. The founders of Imagine Taitung (imaginetaitung.com.tw) felt that this was a wasted opportunity. More specifically, they believed that the seasonal rhythms of agricultural life could form the basis of many an engaging slow-travel experience, and so the company was born. Initial offerings centered around connecting local farmers with curious incomers. That soon expanded to incorporate an online platform allowing small-scale producers to sell to a wider audience, and the final step involved establishing a physical headquarters to serve as a base for the farm tours along with a kitchen-cum-classroom where local produce could be explored in greater depth. These days the company's cooperations allow it to cover an impressive variety of activities ranging from high-adrenaline adventures to handicraft workshops and several farm-to-table experiences.

Getting there by public transport

To get to the Luye Highland take a bus that follows the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's East Rift Valley Line.

Sanxiantai

The name Sanxiantai – or for a literal translation, Platform of the Three Immortals – is derived from legendary folklore characters, the Eight Immortals. Sanitized, tourist- and child-friendly accounts of a local tale say that three of the eight, Lü Dong-bin, Li Tie-guai, and He Xian-gu, once stopped here for a rest, but there's a second, more colorful version. In that telling, incurable womanizer Lü took He into one of the islet's sea caves for a bit of adult private time, only to be followed by Li. When a guardian god from the South Gate of the Heavenly Court caught the latter peeping, he attempted to punish him, but accidentally turned all three to stone.

Bawdy mythical figures aside, the islet was historically an isthmus used by the local Amis tribe for goat herding. Over time, erosion shaped it into an islet, accessible only at low tide, but this changed in 1987 with the construction of an elegant eight-arched bridge. The structure, which has the look of a serpentine dragon, has since become one of the east coast's top stops for photo ops.

Many tourists remain near the mainland end of the bridge, but those who cross it will find a boardwalk that cuts through tangled screw pine and white-budded beach cabbage, eventually reaching the foreshore on the islet's sea-facing side. From here, you can scramble over fossilized corals and rockpools filled with sea critters. We even encountered a trio of banded sea kraits (highly venomous, exceedingly docile) chilling in a shady pool.

Getting there by public transport

To get to Sanxiantai take a bus that follows the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's East Coast Line.

Offshore Islands

Taiwan is blessed with a treasure fleet of adventure-perfect offshore islands welcoming tourists, large through very small. Each is a geo/cultural world unto itself – even those within direct sight of other members of their respective archipelago flotillas – each a veritable “living theme park.”

We have two files, covering the islands of Kinmen and Little Kinmen, mere kilometers off the China mainland. Travel the islands’ millennium-plus years of settlement with visits to historic villages and the heritage core of Jincheng, the main town, defined by tight, winding lanes and densely packed sights, and to tourism-refocused former military facilities built during decades of military confrontation last century, including huge granite-excavated tunnel complexes and forts.

It's Time to Time Travel!

An Edifying Wander Through Kinmen's Historic Villages

Well over a millennium of settlement and decades of military conflict in the 20th century, have endowed Kinmen with a unique blended culture and a landscape where battle scars coexist alongside quiet villages full of exquisite traditional architecture. Just an hour's flight from Taipei, Kinmen presents travelers with an unconventional and unforgettable getaway.

At first glance, Kinmen may appear a strange choice for a vacation. Far closer to China than to Taiwan, it lacks the beach culture of the islands of Penghu or Xiaoliuqiu, and there's none of the lush high-hill scenery found on outlying islands such as the Matsu Islands, Orchid Island, and Green Island. However, for a certain kind of traveler – the ones who seek the uncurated or unusual, the ones who cherish the unfettered freedom of roaming through historic villages searching for characterful local folk deities, battlefield relics, and living rooms that double up as restaurants – Kinmen is an island paradise.

Shuitou

One of the first things you notice upon arriving in Kinmen is the wealth of historic buildings. **Deyue Tower** and **Huang Huihuang Mansion** are two of Shuitou Township's more striking structures. They were built in the early 1930s to the specifications of Huang Huihuang, a Kinmen businessman who amassed his wealth in Indonesia. The tower was both a deterrent and defense against bands of pirates that plied the region's waters, but far from being purely utilitarian, its protective design was augmented with aesthetic appeal – note the decorative moldings framing its embrasures, and lintels shaped like draped ribbonry.

Guandi Temple



Beishan Wind Lion



Huang Huihuang Mansion in Shuitou

Guningtou

Kinmen's largest settlement is **Guningtou** – a part of Jinning Township encompassing the villages of Nanshan, Beishan, and Lincuo. One way to comfortably see this area's highlights is by hopping aboard one of the twice-daily **Guningtou Electromobile Tours** (kinmen.travel/en/discover/tour/44). The tours take in sites illuminating the area's military significance as well as locations with cultural or ecological interest.

Cultural stops include two protective talismans, the **Beishan Wind Lion** and **Shuiwei Pagoda**, as well as **Guandi Temple** – all of which are clustered around **Shuangli Lake**. The e-vehicle tour also pauses at the nearby **Shuangli Wetland Nature Center**. The upper floor of this split-level facility includes introductions to the region's geology, changing landscape, and birdlife, while downstairs are displays devoted to intertidal ecology, horseshoe crabs, and the island county's beloved Eurasian otter population.

Another of the tour's stops bearing ecological interest is the **Beishan Seawall**, outside which the majority of Kinmen's oysters are reared. At low tide, forests of granite posts poke out of the exposed mud against the distant backdrop of Xiamen's innumerable skyscrapers.

The remainder of the tour stops are locations with military import, including the **Beishan Broadcasting Wall** and the **Guningtou Battle Museum**, where large-scale oil paintings recount scenes from the frontline. But by far the most viscerally impressive of these tourist stops is the **Beishan Western-style House**.

Central Jincheng

The historic core of Jincheng – Kinmen's main town – has tight, winding lanes and densely packed sights that make the area ideal for navigating on foot, with a morning or afternoon giving ample time for thorough exploration.

The **Chastity Arch for Qiu Liang-gong's Mother** is a finely carved stone structure that was commissioned in 1812 by military officer Qiu Liang-gong. Qiu's father died a month after his birth, but rather than seeking the swift financial safety net of remarriage, his mother honored her marriage vows by remaining single and raising Qiu alone. Women of that era had few avenues through which to support themselves, so the fact that she raised him not just adequately but well enough to support his ascension through the military ranks was no mean feat. It's worth pausing to enjoy the archway's intricate stonework. In particular, of the eight guardian lions, note the lone lioness painted jade green.

On our way further through the twisting lanes to find Wudao City God Temple, we passed the **Kinmen Military Headquarters of the Qing Dynasty**. If you're attending the free evening walking tour of old Houpu (the old name of Jincheng; www.kinmen.travel/en/discover/tour/43; tours are held in Chinese), this sprawling structure is where you'll begin your excursion.

If you're looking for souvenirs from your Kinmen journey, you'll want to head over to **Mofan Street**. The two-story arcade buildings along this street were built by a consortium of local business owners in 1924, and feature broad brickwork arches fronting a covered walkway of the style popular in Southeast Asian colonial architecture. Here, behind the plant-fronted columns, you'll find vendors selling all the region's top specialties.

For easy-to-transport, snackable souvenirs, you can't do much better than Kinmen's tribute candy. Made by combining ground peanuts and maltose, the bite-sized candies have a light sweetness and a crumbly texture similar to a peanutty shortbread. **Tianyi Tribute Candy** – located towards the north end of Mofan Street – sells several variations on the theme, and visitors can sample the wares before choosing their preferred sweets.

Situated directly opposite Tianyi Tribute Candy, **Chuen Shin Kaoliang Handmade Cake** is famed for producing a Taiwan foodie souvenir staple – egg rolls. These flaky, cylindrical treats are generally made using eggs, wheat flour, and sugar, but this store has replaced some of the regular flour with sorghum flour.

Finally, no discussion of Kinmen's souvenirs would be complete without mentioning **Jin Yong Li Steel Knives**. The company embodies a Kinmen twist on the adage “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade” – that is, when history gives you a surplus of spent artillery shells, make great big knives. The company operates two premises in the town center. In the modern, brightly lit store on Mofan Street, display cases glint with everything from pocket knives to massive cleavers.



Kinmen Military
Headquarters of the Qing Dynasty



Getting there by public transport

Shuitou is a stop on the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's A Route Shuitou Zaishan; Guningtou is a stop on the B Route – Guningtou Battlefield. Buses of both lines can be boarded at Jincheng Station.



Shaxi Fort Lookout



Lieyu Visitor Center

Over the Bridge to Little Kinmen

A Tiny Island with Numerous Tourist Draws

The smaller of Kinmen County's two main islands, Little Kinmen (or Lieyu) is a sleepy backwater unlikely to be high up on most people's Taiwan travel itineraries. But do not write it off! Read on to learn about some of the enriching experiences that await visitors to this frontier chunk of land.

Home to around 13,000 people and a whole lot of cows, Little Kinmen is mostly known for its "wind chicken" guardian deities and melt-in-the-mouth taro. Previously, anyone planning to visit would have needed to catch a ferry from the main island, but the 5km-long **Kinmen Bridge** was officially opened in 2022, making it easier to pop over and explore at your own pace. And there's certainly plenty to explore.

Barely 500m from the western end of Kinmen Bridge, the **Tie Han Fort** and **Yongshi Fort** duo are among the first structures you'll come across when you arrive on Little Kinmen. These forts are interconnected and their one-way foot flow means they can only be accessed via the Yongshi Fort side.

Entering, it's immediately apparent why the one-way system has been implemented. A walkway – barely wide enough for two burly soldiers to squeeze past each other – sinks down into the depths of the earth. As the tunnel begins to level out, it also widens, and the remainder of it is occupied by an exhibition dedicated to the horrors of landmines. To leave the tunnel, you have to walk

through a simulated minefield. Gravel crunches underfoot and motion sensors trigger an onslaught of flashing lights and the sound of explosions.

From the pier, A short walk from Jiugong Pier along a waterside path will take you to the **Jiugong Tunnels** and **Lieyu Visitor Center**. As with the better-known Zhaishan Tunnel on Kinmen's main island, the subterranean network at Jiugong was built by Chiang Kai-shek's army in the wake of the 823 Artillery Bombardment in 1958. Construction began in 1963, with soldiers laboring to carve interlinking boat and pedestrian tunnels out of the granite bedrock using little more than jackhammers and brawn.

Shaxi Fort sits on a protuberance jutting out into the waters at the westernmost limit of Little Kinmen. Built in the 1970s by the ROC Army's Tiger Battalion, descending below ground here is a more claustrophobic experience than any of the other tunnels mentioned previously. The 140m-long main tunnel is tolerable – if narrow – but the shoulder-width offshoots fanning out to low-ceilinged bunkers are decidedly tight.

Above ground, a raised wooden walkway snakes over the rocky promontory, terminating at a viewing pavilion facing China. In the bizarrely near distance, Xiamen's skyscrapers rise from the waters, easily seen with the naked eye, and on the day of our visit towering cumulonimbus clouds massed over the land, mirroring the buildings' skyward reach.

Getting there by public transport

To get to Little Kinmen, take a bus following the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Kinmen Bridge Lieyu Line. Buses can be boarded at Jincheng Station.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Transportation Information

Taiwan Tourist Shuttle

(台灣好行)

Add: 9F, No. 290, Sec. 4, Zhongxiao E. Rd., Taipei City

(台北市忠孝東路四段 290 號 9 樓)

Tel: (02) 2349-1500

Website: www.taiwantrip.com.tw

Taiwan Tour Bus

(台灣觀光巴士)

Add: 9F, No. 290, Sec. 4, Zhongxiao E. Rd., Taipei City

(台北市忠孝東路四段 290 號 9 樓)

Tel: (02) 2349-1500

Website: www.taiwantourbus.com.tw

Travel Service Center of the Tourism Administration

(Taiwan Taoyuan Int'l Airport)

(桃園國際機場旅客服務中心)

Add: No. 15, Hangzhan S. Rd., Taoyuan City (桃園市航站南路 15 號)

Service Hotline:

Terminal One: (03) 398-2194

Terminal Two: (03) 398-3341

Website: www.taoyuanairport.gov.tw

Travel Service Center of the Tourism Bureau (Kaohsiung Int'l Airport)

(高雄國際機場旅客服務中心)

Add: No. 2, Zhongshan 4th Rd., Kaohsiung City (高雄市中山四路 2 號)

Service Hotline: 0800-252-550, (07) 805-7888

Website: www.kia.gov.tw

Taiwan Railways Administration

(臺灣鐵路管理局)

Tel: (02) 2381-5226

Website: www.railway.gov.tw

Taiwan High Speed Rail

(台灣高鐵公司)

Service Hotline: (02) 6626-8000

Website: www.thsrc.com.tw

Metro Taipei

(台北捷運公司)

Add: No. 7, Ln. 48, Sec. 2, Zhongshan N. Rd., Taipei City

(台北市中山北路 2 段 48 巷 7 號)

Tel: (02) 2181-2345

Website: www.metro.taipei

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Taiwan Tourism Administration

(交通部觀光署)

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Website: www.twtainan.net

Kaohsiung City

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Website: khh.travel