Tour Code
TA4

ADVENTURESABROAD

TAIWAN & SOUTH KOREA

15 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Taipei

Arrival in Taipei -- welcome to Taiwan!

Lying off the south-eastern coast of mainland Asia, and across the Taiwan Strait from China, Taiwan is an island truly on the edge of the Pacific. One of the most densely-populated places on earth, this is also a natural wonderland with steep mountains, magnificent forests and an array of scenic attractions. Being situated on the western edge of the Pacific "ring of fire", continuous tectonic movements have created majestic peaks, rolling hills and plains, spectacular coastlines, and other natural wonders. 8 national parks and 13 national scenic areas preserve Taiwan's best natural ecological environment and cultural sites.

Overnight in Taipei.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Taipei: City Tour

We will spend today exploring vibrant Taipei, modern and old, where Taoist temples sit alongside shopping malls. Many have rated Taipei as one of the region's most dynamic, comfortable and liveable cities. Situated at the northern tip of the island, the capital is located on the Tamsui River, about 25 km southwest of the Pacific Ocean. This is the political, economic, and cultural center of Taiwan. Originally founded in the early 18th century, Taiwan quickly became an important center for overseas trade in the 19th century. Today this truly is one of Asia's most dynamic and fascinating cities. Taipei is the thriving heart of Taiwan and the bustling centre of commerce, government and culture.

Our sightseeing will first take us to the world-famous National Palace Museum, the world's largest collection of Chinese artifacts. Here we will see porcelain, paintings, jade, bronze, tapestries and other art objects that once belonged to the emperors of China. This truly is a breathtaking selection of Chinese Imperial Art. In 1949, the collection was brought to Taiwan by Chiang Kai Shek's armies. Nearby is the wonderful Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines. This museum houses exhibits relating to the cultures and histories of the Taiwanese aborigines. These Austronesian peoples are related through blood or linguistic ties to people across precolonial Oceania, as far away as Madagascar. The tribes developed pottery, basketry, woodcarvings, musical instruments and colourful costumes. We will view some fine examples of Taiwanese aboriginal handicrafts and learn about the history of these people.

After a break for lunch we will continue with our tour of the city. A must is a visit to the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, located in the heart of the city. This Memorial Hall (C.K.S. Memorial Hall) was constructed in memory of the former president of R.O.C. During our touring of the city we will pass by the Presidential Buildings Presidential Square. Originally built by the Japanese, it originally served as the governor's mansion.

A must during the tour will of course be a visit to Taipei 101, with its outstanding views over the city. Taipei 101 is a 101-floor landmark skyscraper that claimed the title of world's tallest building when it opened in 2004.

Overnight in Taipei.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Taipei - Taroko Gorge

This morning we will depart Taipei and travel to the famous Taroko Gorge. Our route will take us to the hilly suburbs of Taipei, and through the Hsuehshan Tunnel ("Snow Mountain" tunnel), the longest tunnel in Taiwan. From the coastal city of Yilan we will continue along the coast via the Suao Highway.

The eastern coast of Taiwan is the least populated region and yet covers more than a fifth of the landscape. In every sense, nature is less tamed on this side of the island. Our drive will take us past the Qingshui Cliffs, located on a section of the highway that provides some of the most spectacular sights on Taiwan's Pacific coast. The cliffs here are more than 1000 meters high and they drop almost vertically into the sea.

The highway snakes along its curving face, with the sheer cliffs rising on one side and a sheer drop to the ocean on the other.

The Taroko Gorge is the undisputed scenic highlight of Taiwan, the jewel of the beautiful national park of the same name. The gorge itself is a marble canyon featuring a rushing white water river, towering cliffs, hiking trails and even the odd hot spring. The most phenomenal aspect of the park is the amazing relief and change in terrain. In a single afternoon we will travel from the rugged coastal cliffs through a maze of subtropical forest. The road is carved into the sheer walls of rock, winding its way past forested peaks and cliffs towering thousands of feet above it, while hundreds of feet below a river roars past gigantic marble boulders.

Many consider this area to be the most attractive region of Taiwan. This steep ravine, with its high marble cliffs, is permeated with a network of tunnels. Shrines, waterfalls and grottoes are found throughout the area. We will spend the afternoon touring the gorge, with plenty of scenic viewpoints and trails to explore.

Overnight at Taroko Gorge.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Taroko Gorge - Sun Moon Lake

This morning we will drive out of the Taroko Gorge region and travel southwest to Sun Moon Lake, one of Taiwan's most famous and most beautiful vacation spots, situated in the foothills of the Central Mountain Range. Our route will take us from the gorge through a high elevation sub alpine coniferous forest. We travel via Puli, a town in the heart of Taiwan and surrounded by mountains.

We will have a guided tour of the spectacular Chung Tai Chan Monastery located on the outskirts of Puli. This massive temple is more than just another modern temple - it is an international centre of Buddhist academic research, culture and the arts.

This afternoon we continue with our journey to Sun Moon Lake. The surrounding region is dotted with temples and pagodas, and on arrival we will have the opportunity to visit Wenwu Temple. This region has also been a center of aboriginal life for thousands of years, with aboriginal people involved in its tourist industry since the 1930s.

Overnight at Sun Moon Lake.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Sun Moon Lake - Tainan

After breakfast we will continue exploring the Sun Moon Lake area. In this idyllic environment we will see the deep blue waters of the lake and the mountainous surroundings from different perspectives. We will begin by enjoying a cruise across the lake, where we will benefit from fantastic views of the neighbouring mountains. Then, we will take in the lake from above as we experience the Sun Moon Lake Ropeway.

This afternoon we continue our journey south to Tainan.

Tainan is the oldest city in Taiwan, and was its capital for over 200 years. This city has managed to maintain much of its historical character, and its many historical sites make for some great exploration. Most of the Han migrants who sailed for Taiwan in the 17th and early 18th centuries landed on the islands southwest coastline, an area of flat land suitable for rice cultivation. Often compared to Kyoto, Tainan is an essential destination for those interested in history, religion and traditional ways of life. Upon arrival in the city we may enjoy some sightseeing this afternoon.

Overnight in Tainan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Tainan Sightseeing

Today we will enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Tainan. This is an enticing city and a true highlight on the west coast of Taiwan. Tainan retains a

stronghold of traditional Taiwanese culture, with frequent Buddhist parades and ceremonies. Our exploration will take us to several of Tainan's historic sites and temples, as well as the Dutch fort of Anping on the coast. We will explore both the Chihkan Cultural Zone and the Confucius Temple Cultural Zone.

The Chihkan Cultural Zone covers the northern part of the old city, and highlights here include several temples and the Chihkan Tower. This was the site of Fort Provintia, built by the Dutch in the 1650's. Meaning 'eternity' in Dutch, the Chihkan Tower has been a significant administration centre of Tainan ever since the Dutch invaded the country. The tower has been through various periods of Chinese rule, such as the Ching and Ming Dynasties, as well as a period of Japanese Colonization. Many of its original architectural features can still be seen today.

Anping is considered to be the cradle of Han Chinese civilization in Taiwan, and the first European base on the island. It took the Dutch nearly 10 years of hard work to construct the impressive Fort Zeelandia (Anping Old Fort) in the town of Anping. This noteworthy fortress is a clear reminder of colonial rule in the country. When constructing the fortress the Dutch selected a sandy peninsula in Tainan, and the strategic location was aimed at providing direct access for various supplies and support from Batavia (now known as Jakarta, Indonesia). Yanping Street is one of the oldest streets in Tainan. Also known as Anping Old Street or Taiwan's 1st Street, it was the first established merchant street in the area. We will walk along the narrow and winding streets with their little shops and food stalls that cover a full range of souvenirs and handmade products.

As well as these sites we will also explore the southern half of the old city of Tainan where we see the well-preserved Great South Gate and the Confucius Temple. Built in 1665, the Confucius Temple is believed to be the oldest Confucius temple in Taiwan.

Overnight in Tainan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Tainan - High-speed train to Taipei - Taipei Sightseeing

Today we will leave Tainan and travel back to Taipei by high-speed train. This high-speed line opened for service in 2007, using trains with a top speed of 300 km/h (186 mph). The journey time from Tainan to Taipei will take just over 90 minutes!

This afternoon we will complete our sightseeing of Taipei. A visit to the Taoist Lungshan Temple provides some insight into the local culture. Dedicated to Kuanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, this is one of the city's most popular and busiest temples. Like most temples in Taiwan, the Temple worships a mixture of Buddhist, Taoist, and folk deities such as Matsu.

We will walk through the Dihua Street Area, where one can get a true feel for the city's past. The old-town market has dozens of shops selling a variety of traditional goods such as Chinese medicines and herbs, temple icons and incense, spices and dried food, colourful bolts of cloth, and bamboo and wooden crafts. This is a fascinating patch of the past.

Built on a green hillside in 1969, the impressive Taipei Martyrs Shrine was architecturally inspired by the Hall of Supreme Harmony in Beijing's Forbidden City. The shrine is dedicated to the 390,000 soldiers killed in the service of their country during the War of Resistance against Japan and the civil war between the Chinese Republican and communist forces.

Overnight in Taipei.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Taipei, Taiwan - Seoul, South Korea

Today we fly to Seoul/Incheon, South Korea and transfer to our hotel.

Seoul is a city of contrasts. In this rapidly evolving metropolis, the traditional exists with the modern in a state of harmony. For over 500 years the seat of Joseon Dynasty kings, Seoul is now the beating heart of modern Korea, the centre to which all else in the country is drawn.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Seoul: The DMZ & Seoul City Touring

This morning we hit the ground running with a full highlight-packed day.

After an early departure we travel along the Jayuro (Freedom Road) to Imjingak, the northernmost point bordering North Korea.* On the way, we will be able to view barbed wire fences and military guards on duty all the way along the river. At Imjingak, we visit the Mangbaedan Memorial ritual altar which was established in 1985 for those who were separated from their families or displaced from home during the Korean War. It is a symbolic spot used to hold traditional memorial services for ancestors or to pray for separated family members living in the North and for reunification of the country. We will see the Freedom Bridge, the very locale where 12,773 Korean War prisoners walked to freedom to South Korea in 1953.

We then board a tour bus that will take us to the 3rd infiltration tunnel dug up by North Koreans. On the 20-minute ride to the tunnel, we pass through the check points, military camps, and mine fields. Before going down to the tunnel, we will view a short video presentation and visit exhibition hall for information on the divided Koreas. A seven-minute tram ride (if available) or a walk down a steep access through a narrow and steep interception tunnel, leads us to the lower platform, a point where we are only 170 meters from the Military Demarcation Line.

Our next stop is the Dora Observatory where we can see the whole expanse of the Demilitarized Zone, North Korean propaganda village, Gijeong-dong, where the world's largest flag hangs on a 160 meter-tall flagpole, South Korea's northernmost village of Daeseong-dong and Panmunjom where the ceasefire that ended hostilities was signed.

We return to Seoul in time for a break for lunch in Insadong, a lively district known for it's vast array of restaurants, small museums, and shopping. Insadong was originally two towns whose names ended in the syllables "In" and "Sa". They were divided by a stream which ran along Insadong's current main street. Insadong began 500 years ago as an area of residence for government officials. Today Insadong has some of the tastiest food vendors in all of Seoul. One of the main attractions in the area is the ‘Kings Dessert’ or the ‘Dragons Beard Candy’, 16,000 strings of honey wrapped multiple times with a flavouring of either almond, peanut or chocolate on the inside. There are also gooey pancakes and spicy Korean dumplings to sample.

From here we proceed to the War Memorial of Korea, an excellent tie-in with what we experienced at the DMZ. This huge museum documents the history of the Korean War (1950–53) with documentary footage (with English commentary) of the main battles and events. Along with photos, maps and artefacts, the films give a fascinating insight into what the war was like. There's also plenty of military hardware outside – tanks, helicopters,
missiles and planes, plus stirring war memorials.

* Due to an ever-changing security situation, our activities today may be altered, re-routed, or curtailed without notice.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Seoul: City Touring

This morning we start with a visit to Gyeongbokgung Palace, where we plan to arrive in time for the very colourful changing-of-the-guard ceremony.

Of all the tourist attractions in Seoul, the Joseon Dynasty Palaces and, particularly Gyeongbokgung Palace, are the most tangible link between modern Korea and its not-too-distant monarchical past. Not merely inert relics, they are symbols of a deep history and rich culture. Although substantially reduced in number, the remaining palace buildings provide a glimpse of traditional architecture and the overall organization of a palace grounds.

As part of our visit, we also include the National Folk Museum, contained within the palace. This excellent museum presents historical artifacts that were used in the daily lives of Korean people in the past. Through the displays, visitors can learn about the domestic and agricultural lifestyles, as well as Korea’s cultural beliefs.

After a break for lunch, we proceed to Jongmyo, a royal shrine dedicated to the performance of ancestral rites for the deceased kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty. Being the place where the royal ancestral tablets are enshrined, Jongmyo's atmosphere is solemn and sacred rather than splendid like the royal palaces. The simple and elegant buildings of this shrine have faithfully kept their original forms since the 16th century.

We finish our day at Namsan Seoul Tower, built in 1969 as Korea's first integrated transmission tower beaming television and radio broadcasts across the capital. Since opening to the public in 1980, it has become a much-loved Seoul landmark. The tower's main attractions include multi-coloured digital art projected onto the tower at night, a digital observatory, a roof terrace, and a number of viewing platforms where visitors can enjoy the cityscape. 32 LCD screens recount the 600-year history of Seoul.

This evening we'll have our dinner at the top of the tower and enjoy a typical Korean meal and nighttime views of the city.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Seoul - Fly to Jeju Island

This morning we transfer to the airport for our short flight to Jeju Island.

Jeju Island, also known as the "Island of the Gods," is a popular vacation spot for Koreans and foreigners; indeed it remains the top honeymoon destination for Korean newlyweds. The island is known for beaches, rugged coastal scenery, volcanic geography, and a unique culture which stands in stark contrast to the mainland (and much of Asia) as being matriarchal. Stemming from this basis, and some odd tax reasons, the role of seafood gathering on the island has been dominated by women. As such, a common sight around Jeju's coastline is that of the "haenyo" or "woman diver", a figure that has become somewhat iconic of the island.

After our arrival we'll have a break for lunch and then visit the informative Folklore and History Museum, an excellent introduction to the island. Flight/arrival time-permitting, we can also visit Yakcheonsa Buddhist Temple, a relatively new structure built in the style of Buddhist temples of the early Joseon Dynasty.

Overnight on Jeju Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Jeju Island Touring

Early this morning we head to Sunrise Peak for a spectacular view of/from this unique caldera/mountain and surrounds. After a break for lunch we'll visit the Jeju Haenyeo Museum, dedicated to the women divers of Jeju before heading to Ilchul Land, a park offering themed gardens, sculptures, and walks in Micheon Cave, a large lava tunnel.

Jeju has an extensive system of lava tubes, natural conduits through which magma once flowed, now empty caves that are some of the largest in the world. The insides of the tube is adorned with multi-coloured carbonate decorations and innumerable cave formations commonly found in lava tubes. They include lava stalactites and lava stalagmites, lava columns, lava flowstone, lava helictites and lava blister, cave corals, benches, lava raft, lava bridges, lava shelves and striations.

Our last stop is Dol Hareubang, a small park featuring stone sculptures associated with local legends, plus a traditional garden.

Overnight on Jeju.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Jeju Island - Fly to Busan: City Touring

This morning we fly to Busan, South Korea's second largest city and largest seaport.

Busan is known for its beaches, hot springs, nature reserves, and events such as the city's renowned international film festival held each fall. Busan is a good destination for those seeking a more laid back atmosphere than Seoul. Located at the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, Busan's important port gives the city an international flair, with sailors from around the world trooping through and a growing number of tourists.

On arrival we'll visit the Gamcheon Cultural Village (a UNESCO site), spread out in a panorama of endless rows of low-rise cubicle homes climbing up the steep hillsides, earning it the nickname "Santorini of the East." The cheerful blue, yellow and pink hues a delight to the eye. Narrow stone and concrete alleyways wind their way through the homes, yielding something new at every turn. The village used to house the city's poorest people, but during the Korean War, refugees fled their homes for Busan, which was the only area which was free from fighting.

We'll head to the Jagalchi Fish Market for a break for lunch, followed by a visit to the impressive UN Cemetery.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Busan: Gyeongju Excursion

This morning we head out of the city to Gyeongju, located on Korea's southeast coast. This was the capital of the 1,000-year Silla dynasty, and is known for its extensive historical remains. We'll visit the 8th-century Bulguksa Temple featuring twin stone pagodas, a series of wooden staircases, and a large bronze Buddha.

Afer a break for lunch in Hwanglidan-gil we'll continue to Tumuli Park, which contains 23 of the over 200 royal tombs found in Gyeongju. At times, the sense of history, and of secrets buried along with the royals, is almost palpable in the quiet between the large grass-covered mounds.

We'll visit Cheomseongdae, the oldest astronomical observatory in all of Asia The 362 stones that make up the 27-level structure represent each day of the lunar year. Built during the reign of Shilla Queen Seon-deok, it was used for observing the stars in order to forecast the weather.

Our last stops include Gyeongju National Museum, largely devoted to relics of the Silla Kingdom; and Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond, once part of the palace complex of ancient Silla. Return to Busan.

PLEASE NOTE: owing to the length of the day and the probability of a busy trave day tomorrow, your Tour Leader may choose to include lunch today and leave dinner to yourselves this evening.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure from Busan

Departure from Busan.

BON VOYAGE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast