

TAIWAN**'La Isla Formosa'****8 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 - Lukang - Sun Moon Lake

On our journey to Sun Moon Lake we will make a stop in Lukang, the economic and transport hub of central Taiwan in earlier times. The saying "first Tainan, second Lukang and third Mengjia (today Wanhua District in Taipei)," illustrates the high position of the town in its glory days.

Lukang is a historic old town renowned for its well-preserved cultural and historical heritage. Once a bustling port in the 17th and 18th centuries, it served as the center where Taiwan's most affluent families amassed their wealth and power, capitalizing on the thriving commerce of the era. Despite the port losing its functionality due to sedimentation, Lukang has retained its enduring charm, serving as a

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timeless reminder of its glamorous past.

We visit Lukang Old Street, a leisurely stroll through the town adorned with red brick walls and floors, where historic relics await your discovery, each with an intriguing story to tell. During the Dutch and Qing eras of Taiwan, it was the most populous city and most important trading port in central Taiwan. There are more historical buildings here than anywhere in Taiwan except Tainan. Now the area is a lively shopping district, famous for traditional crafts and foods such as oyster omelets, shrimp balls, taro cakes, and meat buns.

After a break for lunch, we continue to 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. We will then take in the lake from above as we experience the Sun Moon Lake Ropeway.

Overnight at Sun Moon Lake.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Sun Moon Lake - Taichung

This morning we travel to Taichung, a city that wears its history and creativity in equal measure. Our first stop is Wufeng Lin's Mansion, the beautifully preserved 18th-century residence of Lin Wenchang, a celebrated Qing Dynasty military commander. The mansion's layered courtyards and ornate detailing offer a rare window into the lives of Taiwan's most influential families during the Qing era.

We then visit the 921 Earthquake Museum, one of the most sobering and powerful museums in Taiwan. On September 21, 1999, a 7.3-magnitude earthquake devastated central Taiwan. Rather than clearing the wreckage, the museum preserved it – collapsed school buildings, ruptured fault lines, and buckled riverbanks remain exactly as the earthquake left them, a testament to both the scale of the disaster and the remarkable resilience of the Taiwanese people.

After lunch we explore two of Taichung's more unexpected pleasures. Rainbow Village is the life's work of Huang Yung-fu, a veteran soldier who – facing the demolition of his military dependents' village – began painting every surface in sight with vivid murals of animals, figures and folk imagery. His one-man act of defiance saved the village and turned it into one of Taichung's most beloved landmarks. We also stop at the Miyahara Building, a beautifully restored 1927 Japanese-era ophthalmology clinic that has been reimagined as an atmospheric ice cream and confectionery emporium – the architecture alone is worth the visit.

Overnight in Taichung.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Taichung - Tainan

This morning our journey continues south to Tainan, with a stop en route at the Jingzaijiao Tile-paved Salt Fields in Beimen. These are the oldest surviving tile-paved salt fields in Taiwan, with roots in the Qing Dynasty and their present form dating to 1818. To prevent salt crystals from bonding with the soil, workers laid broken pottery shards across the crystallizing ponds – a technique that produced purer, cleaner salt and, under the right light, turns the fields into a shimmering mosaic that is as visually striking as it is historically significant.

We continue to Tainan, Taiwan's oldest city and its capital for more than two centuries. Most of the Han migrants who sailed for Taiwan in the 17th and early 18th centuries made landfall along this southwestern coastline, and the city they shaped has never entirely let go of that heritage. Often compared to Kyoto for its density of temples, historic streets and living tradition, Tainan is essential Taiwan for anyone drawn to history, religion and the texture of traditional life.

We arrive with time to begin our exploration. The Confucius Temple – built in 1665 and believed to be the oldest in Taiwan – and the well-preserved Great South Gate offer an unhurried introduction to the old city. We also visit the Tainan Art Museum, whose bold contemporary architecture makes as strong an impression as the collection within, before ending the day at Hayashi – a beautifully restored 1932 Japanese-era department store, now home to local artisans and designers, and one of the city's most atmospheric spaces.

Overnight in Tainan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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Day 6 Tainan Sightseeing

Tainan retains a living grip on traditional Taiwanese culture – Buddhist parades and temple ceremonies are not heritage performances here but the fabric of daily life. Today we give ourselves fully to the city's extraordinary historical depth.

We begin in the Chihkan Cultural Zone, the heart of the old city, where Chihkan Tower marks the site of Fort Provintia, built by the Dutch in the 1650s. The Dutch word for "eternity" gives the tower its name, and something of that permanence has proved apt – the site has served as an administrative and cultural landmark through successive periods of Ming, Qing and Japanese rule, each leaving its mark on the structures that remain. The surrounding zone is dense with temples, their incense and ceremony a constant backdrop.

From here we make our way to Anping, considered the cradle of Han Chinese civilization in Taiwan and the island's first European settlement. Fort Zeelandia – Anping Old Fort – took the Dutch nearly a decade to complete. Positioned on what was then a sandy coastal peninsula chosen for its direct supply lines to Batavia, it remains one of the most evocative colonial monuments in Asia. Nearby, Yanping Street – Taiwan's oldest merchant thoroughfare, also known simply as Taiwan's First Street – winds through a neighbourhood of narrow lanes, small shops and food stalls whose character has changed little over the centuries.

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 Departure

Today we say our goodbyes and depart from Taipei.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast