Tour Code
**TA3**

ADVENTURESABROAD

# 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

### Day 2 Taipei: City Tour

Taipei is a city where Taoist temples sit beside shopping malls, and the whole of imperial China's art collection sits on a hillside in the suburbs.

We begin at the National Palace Museum. When Chiang Kai-shek's government withdrew from the mainland in 1949 it brought the emperors' collection with it: jade, bronze, porcelain, calligraphy and scroll paintings gathered over a thousand years. Only a fraction of the 700,000 pieces is on show at any one time, and it is still more than a morning can hold. Next door, the Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines introduces the island's first peoples, Austronesians whose languages are related to those of Hawaii, New Zealand and Madagascar, and whose weaving, carving and pottery are shown here alongside the history of what happened to them.

After a break for lunch we visit the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, the white-marble monument to the president who ruled Taiwan for 26 years, set in a square large enough for the changing of the guard. We pass the Presidential Office, built by the Japanese in 1919 as the governor-general's headquarters and used by the Republic ever since.

We finish at Taipei 101, the world's tallest building from 2004 to 2010, whose observation deck gives the view over the basin that holds the capital, the Tamsui river and the hills beyond.

Overnight in Taipei.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 3 Taipei - Lukang - Sun Moon Lake

We drive south to Lukang, the port that made central Taiwan rich in the 18th century. The old saying ranked the island's cities "first Tainan, second Lukang, third Mengjia", and while the harbour silted up long ago, the town kept what the money built.

Lukang has more historic buildings than anywhere in Taiwan except Tainan. We walk the old street, red brick underfoot and overhead, past Longshan Temple. Rebuilt in its present form in 1786, it still keeps some of the finest Qing woodwork on the island in its beams and caisson ceiling. The merchant houses along the lane have deep shopfronts that run back to hidden courtyards. The lanes are famous for their food, and we stop where the oyster omelettes and taro cakes are.

After a break for lunch we continue into the central mountains to Sun Moon Lake, Taiwan's largest lake, 750 m/2,460 ft up and named for the shape of its two halves. The lake was enlarged under Japanese rule, when a 1930s dam raised the water level to power the island's first major hydroelectric station. It remains the ancestral home of the Thao, the smallest of Taiwan's recognised indigenous peoples. A cruise takes us across the water to Xuanguang Temple and the view of the surrounding peaks. The ropeway then lifts us above the lake to see the whole of it.

Overnight at Sun Moon Lake.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 4 Sun Moon Lake - Taichung

This morning we drive to Taichung and the Wufeng Lin Family Mansion, the 18th-century home of Lin Wencha, a Qing general who fought the Taiping rebels on the mainland. Its layered courtyards, opera stage and ancestral hall show how Taiwan's leading families lived under the last dynasty. The mansion was badly damaged in the same 1999 earthquake we learn about next door, and was not fully restored until the 2010s.

The 921 Earthquake Museum is a different kind of preservation. At 1:47 in the morning on 21 September 1999 a magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck central Taiwan. It killed more than 2,400 people and destroyed 50,000 homes, still the island's deadliest disaster in decades. Rather than clear the site, the museum kept a collapsed junior high school exactly as the quake left it. Its running track, buckled by the fault, anchors the exhibition around the wreckage.

After a lunch stop, two of Taichung's stranger pleasures. Rainbow Village is the work of Huang Yung-fu, a veteran who faced the demolition of his military dependants' village. He painted every wall in reach with animals, faces and folk figures. The paint saved the village and made him famous in his nineties, turning a site slated for demolition into one of the city's most visited corners. The Miyahara Building, a 1927 Japanese-era eye clinic built in a Baroque Revival style, is now an ice cream and confectionery shop fitted out like a library. The building itself is the reason to go in.

Overnight in Taichung.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 5 Taichung - Tainan

We continue south to Tainan, stopping at the Jingzaijiao tile-paved salt fields at Beimen, the oldest of their kind in Taiwan. Salt was made here from 1818 by drying seawater in shallow ponds, and workers laid broken pottery across the crystallising beds so the salt would not bond with the soil. Commercial production continued until 2002, when cheaper imports finally ended an industry nearly two centuries old, and in the right light the old ponds still read as a mosaic.

Tainan is Taiwan's oldest city and was its capital for more than two centuries. The Han migrants who sailed from Fujian in the 17th century made landfall on this coast, and the city has never let go of them. It is often compared to Kyoto for its temples, old streets and living ritual. It is the place on the island where tradition is least performed and most simply lived.

We arrive with the afternoon still ahead of us. The Confucius Temple of 1665 is thought to be the island's oldest and was its first school. Its red walls and banyan-shaded courtyard have hosted Confucian scholarship ever since. The Great South Gate is the best surviving piece of the Qing city wall. We end at Hayashi, a 1932 Japanese-era department store: five floors of restored timber and terrazzo now given over to local designers and makers. It is one of the city's best-loved spaces.

Overnight in Tainan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

## Day 6 Tainan Sightseeing

Today we see Tainan's full depth, and its temple processions are not staged for visitors; they are daily life.

We begin at Chihkan Tower, on the site of Fort Provintia, which the Dutch built in 1653 to govern their colony. Ming loyalists, Qing officials and Japanese administrators each ran the island from this ground afterward. Each left something standing: the Dutch foundations, Qing pavilions, a row of stone turtles carrying imperial stelae. The lanes around it are dense with temples, and the incense never quite clears.

At Anping we reach the beginning. Fort Zeelandia was the Dutch East India Company's first foothold in Taiwan, begun in 1624 on a sand spit

chosen for its shipping lane to Batavia. It was finished ten years later. In 1662 the Ming general Koxinga besieged it for nine months, took it, and made Taiwan a refuge for a dynasty that had already fallen on the mainland. The brick walls the Dutch fired here are still standing, and Koxinga himself is still worshipped as a deity in temples across the island. Beside the fort, Yanping Street is the oldest merchant street in Taiwan, still narrow, still selling food. Nearby, the Anping Tree House, a 19th-century salt warehouse, has been left to the roots of the banyan that consumed it rather than fought.

The layers we saw stacked in the Palace Museum four days ago sit side by side on the ground here. Dutch, Ming, Qing, Japanese: each built on the last, none quite erased.

Overnight in Tainan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

The high-speed train returns us to Taipei in about 90 minutes, at up to 300 km/h, along the western plain where most of the island's 23 million people live.

This afternoon we complete the capital. Lungshan Temple was founded in 1738 by settlers from Fujian and rebuilt after earthquake, typhoon and an American bomb in 1945. It is dedicated to Kuanyin, the goddess of mercy. Like most Taiwanese temples it houses Buddhist, Taoist and folk deities under one roof: Matsu the sea goddess, the god of literature, and Yue Lao, the matchmaker god. His altar draws young Taiwanese hoping for luck in love. It is the city's busiest place of worship and the best place to watch how the island prays.

Dihua Street is old Taipei's market, laid out in the 1850s beside the river docks. Its shops still sell dried mushrooms and scallops, medicinal herbs, tea and bolts of cloth, from arcaded buildings that mix Fujianese, Baroque and Japanese fronts along one street. In the weeks before Lunar New Year the lane becomes the city's busiest market for gifts and dried goods.

We finish at the Martyrs' Shrine, built in 1969 on the model of the Hall of Supreme Harmony in Beijing's Forbidden City. It is dedicated to the soldiers who died fighting Japan and, later, the Communists. The changing of the guard, precise and slow-motion, is often compared to Buckingham Palace's.

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