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

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.

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 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 City Touring

We begin at Gyeongbokgung, the largest of Seoul's Five Grand Palaces and the first the Joseon dynasty built when it founded the city as its capital in 1395. Japanese forces burned it during the 1592 invasion, and it stood in ruins for over 250 years until a full reconstruction in the 1860s. We time our visit, where possible, for the changing of the royal guard at the main gate. Inside the grounds, the National Folk Museum sets the daily life of that era against the throne halls outside: farming tools, wedding customs, the rhythms of a Confucian court.

After a break for lunch we visit Jongmyo, the shrine built to hold the memorial tablets of Joseon's kings and queens. Its long, plain halls,

deliberately unornamented to focus the mind on ritual, have stood since the 16th century. A royal rite is still performed here each May, the oldest continuously observed Confucian ceremony anywhere.

We finish at Namsan Seoul Tower, raised in 1969 as the country's first integrated broadcast tower. The observation deck gives the clearest view in the city: the mountains that ring Seoul and the Han River curling through it. We stay for dinner at the top as the skyline lights up. The palace we walked through this morning sits far below.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Seoul & The DMZ

We travel north along the Han River to the Demilitarized Zone, the 4-kilometre/2.5-mile buffer that has divided the peninsula since the 1953 armistice ended fighting without formally ending the war. Barbed wire and guard posts line much of the route.

At Imjingak we walk to the Freedom Bridge, where 12,773 released prisoners of war crossed south in 1953 after the fighting stopped. A rusted steam engine, riddled with bullet holes from the war, stands nearby. The Mangbaedan altar lets displaced families perform memorial rites for relatives they cannot visit in the North.

We then descend into the 3rd Infiltration Tunnel, one of four found running under the DMZ since 1974 and dug, North Korea maintains, for coal mining. It reaches within 170 m/560 ft of the Military Demarcation Line, and the walk down is steep and low-ceilinged.

At the Dora Observatory we look across the DMZ itself: Kijong-dong, the North's unoccupied propaganda village, and its flagpole, one of the tallest in the world at 160 m/525 ft. From the platform, guides point out the DMZ's forest, undisturbed by development for seven decades and now one of the most intact temperate habitats on the peninsula.

In the afternoon we return to Seoul and visit the War Memorial of Korea. Its galleries and outdoor displays of tanks and aircraft set the day's sites into the fuller history of the 1950-53 war.

NOTE: today's route and stops may be altered or curtailed without notice, owing to the security situation.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Seoul - Fly to Jeju Island

We fly this morning from Seoul to Jeju, Korea's largest island and the country's only volcanic one, built up in eruptions that continued into the last few thousand years. Hallasan, the shield volcano at its centre and South Korea's tallest peak at 1947 m/6,388 ft, is visible on a clear day from nearly anywhere on the island.

Jeju's culture grew from that geology and from its distance from the mainland. Farming was hard on volcanic soil, so for generations the sea supported families instead, largely through the haenyeo. These free-diving women harvest shellfish and seaweed without oxygen tanks, some diving into their seventies and eighties. Their diving income long gave Jeju women more economic independence than was typical elsewhere in Korea, shaping a more matriarchal society. UNESCO recognised the tradition in 2016 as it has grown rare.

The Jeju Folklore and Natural History Museum introduces both threads, the island's volcanic formation and the customs, from stone walls to shamanist ritual, that developed on top of it. At Jeju Stone Park we see basalt shaped by wind and water into the grandmother and grandfather figures, dol hareubang, that stand guard at village entrances across the island. The grounds also recreate a traditional Jeju village.

Overnight on Jeju.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Jeju Island Touring

At Seongsan Ilchulbong, Sunrise Peak, we climb the rim of a tuff cone that rose from the sea floor about 5000 years ago. It is one of the youngest features in this volcanic landscape, and part of the same UNESCO listing that covers the island's lava tubes. The crater, 600 m/1,970 ft across, has given the peak its name since dynasties looked to it for the first light of the day. The climb up wooden stairs takes about 20 minutes and rewards with views along the coast in both directions.

We continue to the Jeju Haenyeo Museum, dedicated to the free-diving women we learned about yesterday. Photographs, diving gear and the museum's recreated village houses show a working life passed from mother to daughter for centuries. It is now kept alive mostly by women in their sixties and older. Fewer than 3,000 haenyeo still dive today, down from over 20,000 in the 1960s, and most are now in their seventies.

In the afternoon we walk part of Manjanggul, one of the longest lava tubes in the world at over 7 km/4.3 mi. It formed as Hallasan's lava flowed to the sea some 200,000 years ago. Its open section reveals lava columns, ropy flowstone and a 7.6 m/25 ft lava column, the tallest of its kind known anywhere. Manjanggul was discovered in 1958 and only a fraction of its length is open to visitors, kept dim and cool year-round regardless of the season outside.

Overnight on Jeju.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Jeju Island - Fly to Busan: City Touring

We fly this morning from Jeju to Busan, Korea's second-largest city and its busiest port, spread around a natural harbour at the peninsula's southern tip. It has been Korea's gateway to the sea since the country opened to foreign trade in the 1870s.

Gamcheon Cultural Village began as an informal settlement, built up the hillside by refugees who fled here during the Korean War. Busan was the only part of the country never occupied by North Korean forces, and its population tripled almost overnight. The houses, painted in blues, yellows and pinks since a 2009 arts programme, still house residents, and narrow stepped lanes wind between them to viewpoints over the harbour.

We break for lunch at Jagalchi Fish Market, Korea's largest, where the morning catch is sold straight off the boats and can be cooked to order at stalls upstairs. Stalls run three levels deep along the waterfront, and the market has operated here since the 1930s.

In the afternoon we visit the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, the only UN cemetery in the world. It holds more than 2,300 soldiers from the 1950-53 war, representing 11 countries that fought under the UN flag. Each grave faces east toward its home country, and the grounds include a memorial wall listing more than 40,000 further dead whose remains were repatriated.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Busan:Gyeongju Excursion

We drive south from Busan to Gyeongju, capital of the Silla kingdom for nearly a thousand years and now one of Korea's richest concentrations of ancient sites.

Bulguksa Temple was built in the 8th century and reconstructed after fire during the Japanese invasions of the 1590s. Its two stone pagodas anchor a design meant to represent a Buddhist paradise on earth. Inside, a wooden hall houses a bronze Buddha that has survived from the temple's founding.

Tumuli Park holds 23 of the more than 200 royal burial mounds scattered through the city, grass-covered domes under which Silla's kings, queens and nobles were buried. Gold crowns and other treasures from the tombs are now displayed in the Gyeongju National Museum. We walk among the mounds before visiting the museum itself, whose collection centres on the Silla gold and a 3 m/10 ft bronze bell cast in 771.

Cheomseongdae, a stone tower built around 647, is among the oldest surviving astronomical observatories in East Asia. Its 362 stones, laid in

27 courses, are said to mirror the days and months of the lunar year the tower was built to track.

We finish at Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond, a former royal retreat built beside an artificial lake in the 670s. Its reflecting pool and reconstructed pavilions, based on excavated foundations, are lit after dark.

NOTE: given the length of today's excursion, your Tour Leader may include lunch and leave dinner free.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure from Busan

Departure from Busan.

BON VOYAGE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast