

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

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 continue to Taichung. Compared to Taipei, Taichung shows the more natural facet of Taiwan with attractive scenery and cultural experiences that you wouldn't find in Taiwan's bigger cities. We visit the Miyahara Building, a red-brick piece of architecture built by Miyahara Takeo, a Japanese ophthalmology doctor in 1927. After the surrender of Japan in 1945, Miyahara became Taichung Health Bureau, which slowly decayed and became an unused dangerous building. Fortunately, Dawn Cake, a pastry company renowned for its pineapple cakes, acquired the building and preserved Miyahara's original red-brick walls and archway. Visitors can appreciate the details of the historic architecture and also try Dawn Cake's signature ice cream, bubble tea, and pastries wrapped in nostalgic packaging.

We'll begin our sightseeing with a visit to Wufeng Lin's Mansion, the former residence of Lin Wencha, the land and water admiral of the Qing Dynasty and representative example of official residences built in southern Fujian in Taiwan in the 18th century.

Our next stop is the 921 Earthquake Museum. At 1:47 AM on September 21, 1999, Taiwan experienced one of its worst natural disasters of the past century -- a 7.3 magnitude earthquake that devastated the central part of the island. The museum conserved the damage caused by Ji-Ji earthquake, such as collapsed school buildings, fault rupture, and elevation of riverbank, making it a precious teaching opportunity in the natural sciences.

We'll also see the visually striking Taichung National Theatre (external view) before our dinner and overnight in the city.

Overnight in Taichung.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Taichung - Tainan

This morning our journey continues to Tainan, visiting Jingzaijiao Tile-paved Salt Fields en route. These were the first salt fields in Beimen, and are the oldest surviving tile-paved salt fields. They began as the Laidong Salt Field during the Qing Dynasty, and were moved here in 1818 AD. The name, Jiingzaijiao, was essentially derived from this particular landscape formation. To prevent salt crystals from attaching to the soil, salt miners at Pottery Dish Salt Field manually laid out broken debris of pottery onto the crystallizing ponds of salt fields. This approach resulted in purer and clearer salt being mined. Under the sunshine, the Pottery Salt Pan displays a resplendent, mosaic-like pattern.

We continue to Tainan, the oldest city in Taiwan and 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.

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 Departure

Today we say our goodbyes and depart from Taipei.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast