



# Taiwan

THE HEART OF ASIA

# ADVENTURE



## HIKING AND TREKKING

Contrary to the widely held assumption that Taiwan is one giant industrial set up, most of the island is, in fact, rugged wilderness that offers some of Asia's most amazing hiking and trekking possibilities. With an extensive network of national parks, scenic areas and forest reserves – all of which are laced with trails – the hardest part for most hikers is deciding where to start. There are also eighteen forest recreation areas in Taiwan, and while the trails in some of them have suffered extensive typhoon damage, others boast well-marked paths, some of which have English signage.

A monumental effort is under way to link up many of Taiwan's major trails into an island-wide, north-to-south interlocking network known as the National Trail System – which could someday make it possible for hikers to traverse the entire length of Taiwan. However, the series of typhoons that strikes the island each summer inevitably wipes out various sections of trail, often taking years to rebuild, so the prospect of a completely unified network is perhaps an overly optimistic undertaking.

## MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

With 258 mountains over 3000m and the highest peaks in northeast Asia (excluding some of the volcanoes on northeastern Russia's Kamchatka peninsula), you'd think Taiwan would be a mountaineering hotspot. By far the most famous peak is Yushan (Jade Mountain), which at 3952m is northeast Asia's highest. Ironically, it's one of the most accessible, thanks to a well-built, scrupulously maintained trail and one of Taiwan's most often-used mountain shelters. In good weather, reasonably fit climbers can ascend Yushan and its surrounding peaks without much difficulty.

Taiwan's second-highest peak, the 3886m Xueshan (Snow Mountain), makes for a beautiful climb that often yields awe-inspiring vistas of the mountains of Shei-Pa National Park and nearby Taroko National Park. During winter, Xueshan and the surrounding mountains that make up the so-called Holy Ridge live up to its name, often remaining covered in snow for months. The main trail to the summit is usually in excellent nick, and though the climb is steeper than that for Yushan, there are two mountain shelters that can help break up the journey.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING

Given its hilly terrain and extensive trail network, Taiwan has some of the world's top mountain biking, rivalling the best of North America and southern Europe. Heart-stopping downhill courses, technical rock gardens, jumps, berms and super-fast single track: the island has it all, and much is easily accessible from cities such as Taipei and Taichung. If you're an avid trail rider and plan to visit Taiwan for any length of time.

## CYCLING

Another two-wheeled activity for which Taiwan is well suited is bicycle touring, as the dramatic “cross-island” roads that wind their way across the central mountain ranges offer remarkable alpine scenery and an honest cycling challenge to boot. The Southern Cross-Island Highway, which at its highest point cuts through part of Yushan National Park, is highly recommended. The Northern Cross-Island Highway is also an extremely rewarding route, as are the amazingly scenic central cross-island routes. Sun Moon Lake Scenic Area offers one of the best and most scenic cycling trails in the country.



## WHITEWATER RAFTING AND KAYAKING

Taiwan’s steep mountains combined with typically heavy spring and summer rains often make for solid whitewater rafting and kayaking conditions. Though many streams are too steep and technical for all but the most experienced kayakers, a few of the island’s rivers are well known for whitewater rafting. By far the most popular – and one of the safest – is the Xiuguluan River. If you prefer to negotiate your white water in a kayak, there are several other less-commercialized rivers. Some kayakers put in at the headwaters of Taipei County’s Nanshi River at Fushan and paddle all the way down to Wulai, an elevation loss of about 200m. Another appealing option is the Beigang River in Nantou County’s



Huisun Forest, which has a fast-but-short stretch of rapids.

## PARAGLIDING

The exhilarating sport of paragliding is gaining enormous popularity in Taiwan, with a steady stream of fledgling pilots joining a dedicated community of die-hard expats and Taiwanese. Assuming you’ve done your initial training elsewhere, there are around six well-known flying sites scattered across the island, each with its own prime season, making it possible for local pilots to fly pretty much year round. Two places vie for honours as Taiwan’s top paragliding spot: Luye Gaotai, in the East Rift Valley near Taitung, and the Saijia Aviation Park in Pingdong County, not far from Kaohsiung. Luye Gaotai, which generally has better conditions in summer, has two specialized take-off sites with rubber running-track surfaces and is the site of an international competition that attracts some of the world’s most talented pilots. Along the northeast coast are some other popular paragliding sites, such as Feicuiwan (Green Bay) near Keelung, as well as Yilan and Hualien.



## DIVING AND SNORKELLING

Taiwan's top scuba-diving and snorkelling spots are Kenting National Park, Little Liuqiu Island, the Penghu Islands, and the superb Pacific islands of Ludao and Lanyu. It is best to arrange them in advance through one of the many scuba companies in major cities such as Taipei.

As for marine wildlife, the Pacific islands of Ludao and Lanyu are veritable treasure troves of tropical fish and dolphins, and sightings of sea turtles and magnificent striped sea snakes are possible even while snorkelling. Advanced scuba divers can see giant schools of hammerhead sharks off the southern tip of Ludao from January to March of each year.



## WINDSURFING

Taiwan is well known for its windsurfing, and the Penghu Islands are widely considered one of the world's top windsurfing spots. Given the islands' unique flatness, the northeast monsoon winds that whip across the strait are especially powerful here with wind speeds of up to 50 and sometimes even 60 knots possible in winter. And the horseshoe-like shape of the Penghu Archipelago generates a venturi effect that squeezes every bit of the wind pressure, making it a spectacular place for slalom sailing, chop hopping and just pure speed.

Penghu is packed with tourists especially in summer. Growing number of world-class windsurfers are making the islands part of their annual circuit.



## HOT AIR BALLOONING

Until 2011 a hot air balloon had never soared over Taiwan, until the first Taiwan International Balloon Fiesta was held in 2011 and a place was found for hot air balloons in Taiwan after preparing the take-off and landing fields, equipment, coordinating with the Civil Aviation Administration and overcoming various obstacles; then, in 2012, the first batch of Taiwanese hot air balloon pilots was trained. Visitors enjoyed the summer sunshine on the Luye Gaotai – a scenic spot in Taitung, popular for hot air ballooning; while watching hot air balloons float through air gracefully, adding color to the blue sky over Taitung and giving visitors a memorably enjoyable time as they watched the balloons carry hopes and dreams into the air.

Of the many activity series held in Taitung every summer, the “taster” flights on a tethered hot air balloon during the Taiwan International Balloon Fiesta have become extremely popular, giving people an opportunity to take a ride in a balloon (secured to the ground) without having to go overseas; the flying sessions are in the morning and afternoon. In the morning the air currents are relatively calm so it's the best time for taking photographs. To take the short fixed point flight, it's usual to have to get up really early and start queuing. It takes a lot of effort to make it onto the balloon but when you rise up into the air with your hopes and dreams you will feel it was all worth!

