

Taipei

The city of Taipei showcases the country's rich history, its obsession with pop culture and indigenous tribal traditions, making it seem like several different places at once.

Boasting of a gloriously vibrant culture, Taipei is at once traditional and contemporary, with the city divided primarily into the East and West sides. The bustling, uber-chic Eastern District with malls, cafes, boutiques and restaurants neatly offsets the old-world charm of the Western District with its narrow roads, busy markets and street vendors selling all manner of wares.

The city is dotted with parks, green spaces, and nature reserves. Yangmingshan National Park, just 10 km north of the central city, is a popular recreation area. The nearby mountainous district of

Beitou is known for its many hot springs of varying temperatures at the Beitou Hot Spring Park. There are ocean beaches not far from the city – Fulong and Laomei are especially well-known.

Even though it is no longer the country's most populous city, Taipei remains the political, economic and cultural capital of the nation.

The city enjoys a semi-tropical climate. Plan your visit during the autumn months – when the rains cease to play spoilsport and the weather is pleasant.

1. A bird's-eye view of Taipei's skyline, with the National Taiwan University in the foreground and the soaring Taipei 101 making an impressive backdrop. 2. An indigenous woman greets a tourist in Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village.

Insider's View

Make a day-trip to the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village, Nantou County



A three-hour drive from Taipei will bring you to the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village. This museum-meets-theme-park introduces visitors to the ancient aboriginal tribes who were the early settlers of the island nation. Watch a traditional tribal performance; listen as they share knowledge of medicinal herbs passed down through generations. You will learn that the many tribes have their own languages, customs, rituals and food habits. Engage them in conversation and you will come away with more than a few legends, including the origin story of each of the tribes. The Village is also home to an amusement park packed with rides and attractions. Adrenaline junkies will head straight to the 'Mayan Adventure', the island's first suspended roller coaster. Or perhaps you'd like to start with 'UFO Adventures', the first free-fall ride that plunges the brave from a whopping 280 ft. Time your visit with the Cherry Blossom season – between February and March, but varies based on weather conditions – and you're in for a special treat.



In 2017, an almost nine-hour rainbow was seen in Taipei's mountains. Subsequently, the beautiful phenomenon made it to the Guinness World Records in 2018, as the World's Longest-lasting Rainbow.

Budget & Blowout Guide

Travelling on a shoestring budget or in the mood to splurge? Our guide can help you decide.

Save



In the 1900s, the wharf at the Datong District was the main port and soon merchants set up shop. Take the Mass Rapid Transport (MRT) to get here and spot traditional swallow-tailed roofs, Baroque architecture, the 130-year-old Wang Tea House, and more. Visit the Ama Museum, where a permanent exhibit showcases the history of 'Comfort Women' of the Japanese soldiers before and during WWII.

PAY R235 (Ama Museum entry).



Fill up on *xiaochi* – 'small eats' or street food. In Ningxia Night Market, let your nose lead you to stalls selling stinky tofu, a fermented version that gives it its distinctive odour. Or opt for either fried chicken or fried squid, often marinated in soya milk and heavily spiced. For the adventurous, there's pig's blood cake, where the animal's blood is blended with sticky rice in a vegetable broth, and served fried or steamed.

PAY R70 and above.



Wear your walking shoes and head to Ximending Night Market – a shopping mecca spread across several lanes. Give yourself ample time to check out the food stalls, boutiques selling tailored lace-gowns, shops and stalls selling everything from boots to stilettos, faux leather bags to electronics, Hello Kitty sunglasses and more. Bargain your way through!

PAY R40 and above.



Choose between a mountain view and a city view at the Sleepy Dragon Hostel. The rooms come with 12 beds, a curtain around each bed for added privacy, air-conditioning and free Wi-Fi. It is conveniently located next to Raohe Night Market (where you can drop in for some *xiaochi*). There's also a shared kitchen and a common area with a big-screen TV.

PAY R1,150 and above (prices vary by season).

Spend



Soar to the top of the tallest building in a super-fast elevator that will make your ears pop. Taipei 101, at 1,666 ft, was once the 'World's Tallest Building' until Dubai's Burj Khalifa took over. However, it continues to hold the record of the 'World's Tallest 'Green' Building'. The skyscraper is shaped like a bamboo stalk – associated with growth and prosperity in Feng Shui.

PAY Adult/Child: R1,400/R1,250



Din Tai Fung, a franchise popular for its dumplings, has made its mark across the globe with branches in UK, UAE, the Far East, etc. The story of this establishment began in Xinyi Road in Taipei, where the original still stands. In 1993, it was named amongst the 'Top 10 Restaurants in the World' by *The New York Times*. Beware, though: queues are serpentine, particularly at lunch time.

PAY R215 and above.



Shop at Taipei's first underground market, Taipei City Mall, that has local and international brands in clothing, electronics and food. Taipei 101 houses an upscale mall that has both global and local brands. A pricey souvenir you might want to carry back with you, is jade. Head to Jianguo Holiday Jade Market for this verdant stone, said to rid you of bad luck and bad health, and bestow blessings of success.

PAY R500 and above.



Whether it is business or pleasure that brings you to this city, W Taipei in the Xinyi district is the perfect choice. The decor is elegant, and all rooms – even the entry-level ones – are bright and spacious, with plush beds, large-screen TVs, spacious work desks and elegantly furnished bathrooms. It is conveniently located and within easy walking distance from the MRT.

PAY R19,000 and above (prices vary by season).

NOTE All prices listed here are approximate values at the time of print.



GETTING THERE

AirAsia flies to Taipei from Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Tokyo. airasia.com