

Spirited Away to the forgotten wonders of Taiwan

By [James Hall](#), Travel Editor (2016/17)

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Image: Taiyo Fujii

Apart from computer components and the occasional international crisis, Taiwan doesn't feature as a country of interest to the average European, particularly as a holiday destination.

This is something that should change. With 90-day visa exemption travel for most EU citizens and cheap onwards flights across south-east Asia with a growing number of no frills airlines, Taiwan can provide a perfect stepping stone to Asia.

Despite an independent military and a democratically elected government, only 22 states recognise Taiwan (officially titled the Republic of China), as an independent country. The People's Republic of China (mainland China) asserts that Taiwan is a renegade province within its borders, which it enforces by breaking off diplomatic relations with any country that recognises the ROC.

Despite its confused political situation, Taiwan has a very modern society compared to many east Asian countries, with a modern system of infrastructure and orderly queues for the metro system Londoners on the Underground could learn from.

The level of English proficiency is very low among the average person. However, this is more than made up for by the willingness of people to try and help you and their surprising level of patience for the ignorant western tourist, which is perhaps aided by the relative lack of western tourists.



Image: Anton Diaz

A somewhat comprehensive tour of Taiwan can be made in 2-3 weeks, making use of the fantastic railway network that follows the coast of the small island. A basic outline of a tour would include such sights as: Taipei, Jiufen, Wai-ao, Hualien, Tarako Gorge, Green Island, Tainan and Sun Moon lake.

Taipei, the capital of Taiwan is a modern metropolis with a far more relaxed feel than other Asian cities of a comparable size, such as Ho Chi Minh City. The skyline is dominated by Taipei 101 which previously held the title of the world's tallest building. However, a better view of the city can be found atop Elephant Mountain, a short walk from the centre.

The tea house in the old wooden city of Jiufen is purportedly the inspiration for the architecture found in the acclaimed animated film Spirited Away; Wai-ao, a short train journey away, is a great place for beginners to experience surfing for the first time from the town's black beaches.

To reach Green Island, you need to take a ferry ride from Taitung. Don't be deterred by the need to hire a small electric motorbike as there is hardly any traffic on the island. A half day ride around the coastal road taking in the dramatic scenery is a must, ending in a trip to one of the world's only salt water hot springs below the dazzling night sky.

The old capital Tainan is rich in history and featured many of the battles between Chinese warlords and the Dutch, who maintained the existence of their trading posts through force. Reconstructed and repaired versions of the original forts and temples can be found scattered around the city.

If the listed highlights haven't convinced you that Taiwan is worth visiting, perhaps the return flights from £380 (EVA Air) and onwards flights to Manila one way from £20 (Air Asia), will.



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