

Northern Taiwan



NORTHERN TAIWAN

If you don't have the time, or perhaps resources, to travel all over Taiwan, you can see much of the best it has to offer within a few hours of Taipei. The north has one of the best networks of hiking trails, an abundance of hot springs, a strong aboriginal presence and three towns devoted to traditional industries.

For something fresh, try swimming or river tracing in the jungle-lined rivers of Pinglin or Wulai. The opportunity to engage in such a splendid sport almost year-round has kept more than one expat happy with life in Taiwan.

The northern trail system begins right at the edge of Taipei and extends, with easy connections, as far as the North Cross-Island Hwy and the northeast coast. Most trails take you through thick forest or steamy jungle, but some run along coastal bluffs or grassy headlands or even across ridges so thin only one person can cross at a time.

The northern towns of Sanyi, Pinglin and Yingge still thrive as centres of traditional industry, producing fine wood carvings, tea and ceramics respectively. It's not uncommon for people to visit Pinglin for tea, then Yingge for a teapot set and finally Sanyi for a traditional table to display everything on handsomely.

Two weeks in the north would just begin to do it justice, while a month would not be too much. We have lived in this area for years and never tire of getting out to explore.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the quaint mining villages of **Jiufen & Jinguashi** (p157)
- Hike and swim under a jungle canopy in **Wulai** (opposite)
- View the work of Taiwan's master carver at the **Juming Museum** (p156)
- Enjoy wild vistas and natural hot springs on the **North Cross-Island Highway** (p166)
- Cycle through tea fields in **Pinglin** (p148)
- Spend the night in a temple on the slopes of **Shitoushan** (p175)
- Soak in top-quality hot spring water in **Taian** (p176) **Jiaoshi** (p163)
- Wander the shops in **Sanyi** (p178), the woodcarving capital of Taiwan
- Tread carefully along the knife-edged ridge of Wuliao Jian in **Sansia** (p152)



National Parks & Forest Recreation Areas

The north has more than its fair share of parks and is a hikers' paradise. Sheipa National Park has the second highest mountain in Taiwan in its Wuling Forest Recreation Area (FRA). Guanwu FRA, on the northern side of Sheipa, was closed at the time of writing, while Syuejian FRA was just about to open. Neidong FRA has three beautiful waterfalls and is a popular birding destination. Manyeyuan FRA is home to a stand of 2000-year-old cedars and is connected to Dongyanshan FRA by a 16km-long trail. Mingchih FRA on the North Cross-Island Hwy makes a great base for exploring an area rich in natural hot springs and old forests.

Getting There & Around

There's good rail and bus transport along the coastlines (except the northern top, which only has bus services). Heading inland, bus routes dry up and you will really need your own transport to visit some places. Traffic is pretty light on weekdays.

The high-speed rail has stops in Taoyuan, Hsinchu and Miaoli, but these won't be of much use to the average traveller.

TAIPEI COUNTY

In many ways the county is the poor cousin of Taipei, but at least transportation is good, and there are some real treats for the nature and culture lover once you get away from the urban sprawl.

WULAI 烏來

☎ 02 / pop 7000

The little aboriginal village of Wulai (Wúlái) has long been touted as one of the top hot-springs resorts in Taiwan. But we advise against spending your money here as the town is pretty grubby (though many hotels are first rate inside) and the water is reportedly not very pure. As one local friend quipped, the only prosperous business in Wulai these days is selling water heaters.

That said, step outside the village and you're in a thickness of jungle that has impressed travellers for 200 years. You can hike, swim, river trace or just picnic by cool mountain streams. There are spectacular waterfalls in the area, some accessible just off the road, oth-

ers known only to a few, and many excellent bird-watching venues. Even the tourist street in the village is not bad, especially for a hearty meal after a long day in the wilds.

If you're seeking a hot spring, you'll find endless choices and prices, including free ones by the river.

Orientation

Wulai is about 25km almost directly south of Taipei. The main tourist areas are Wulai Hot Springs Village and Wulai Waterfall, 2km from the village. There is a pedestrian-only street in the centre of the village lined with shops and hot-springs hotels.

Dangers & Annoyances

If you go river tracing, plan to be out of any river by 3pm or 4pm. Afternoon showers are a daily occurrence in late spring and summer, and rivers can become swollen very quickly. Also, be on the lookout for snakes. There are no water snakes in Taiwan, but many species sun themselves on the rocks, or hole up in nooks along canyon walls. Leeches are also a nuisance on many of the more overgrown trails.

Sights & Activities

WULAI WATERFALL 烏來瀑布

This 80m-high waterfall (Wúlái Pùbù) is a beauty and the fact that you can float past it on a **gondola** (adult/child NT220/150) is one more reason to come to Wulai. There's a **minitrain** (adult/child NT50/30; ☎ 8am-5pm) to the base, or you can walk the pedestrian route beside the train line.

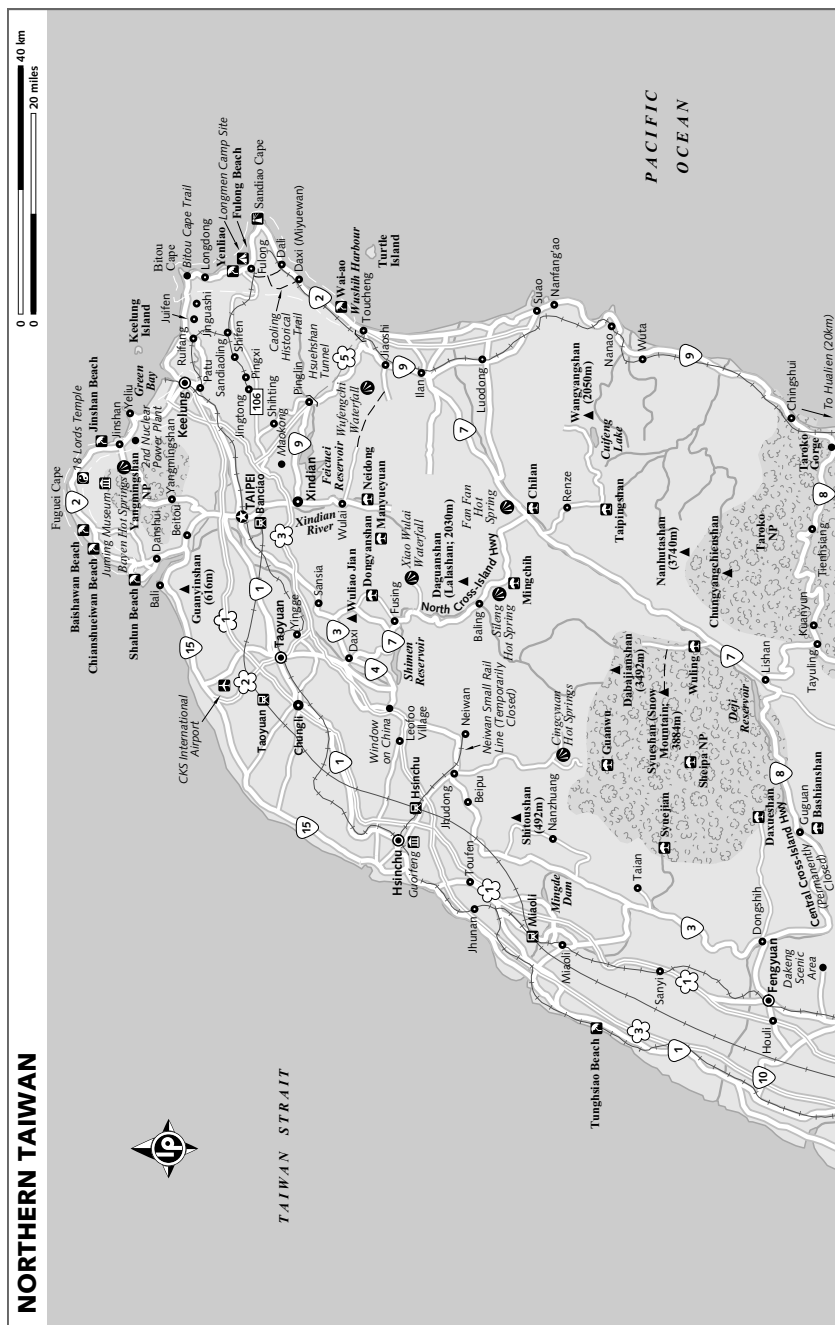
SWIMMING & RIVER TRACING

Every weekend in the hot summer months river-tracing clubs or informal groups of friends flock to the rivers and streams around Wulai to practise river tracing (*suòxí*; see p331), which combines scrambling, swimming and hiking (and true technical climbing and rappelling at higher levels).

One popular venue is the **Jia Jiu Liao Stream** (加九寮溪; Jiā Jiǔ Liáo Xi), which features a jungle canopy worthy of a Tarzan film, an amazing natural rock slide and a deep pool large enough for a group to swim in. The stream has no steep inclines and flows relatively gently, so it's pretty easy going but still an absolute joy to trace up.

The best time to go is summer, though on weekend afternoons you may find yourself

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sharing the river with organised groups. Follow one to find out where the rock slide is; the general location is about 100m downstream from the big pool. An average person can reach the pool in less than an hour, though it takes most organised groups about two.

To get to the Jia Jiu Liao Stream, take a bus to Wulai and get off just past the 11.5km mark at Cheng Gong Village (成功). Head down the side road for 1km to a large river. Cross the car bridge and then walk up and around until you come to another bridge. The stream that flows under this is the Jia Jiu Liao. Head up the path on the left and then make your way to the stream when the path veers off to the left. The first part of the stream is very crowded on a summer weekends, but after five minutes you will be alone.

HIKING

Taipei Day Trips II (see Hiking, p329) lists some interesting trails in the area that are too detailed for us to mention here. One clear simple path, about an hour long, follows the Nanshih River downstream from Wulai to the Jia Jiu Liao Stream. The path starts near the old tollgate at Wulai St Bridge.

CYCLING

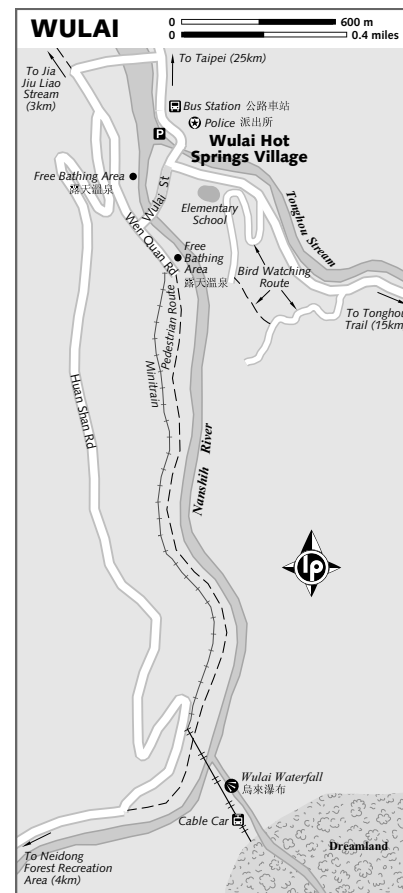
Mountain bikers rave about the trail riding around Wulai, though you'll likely have to go with a local group to actually find the trails. Contact the guys at www.formosanfattire.com or post a message on www.forumosa.com.

One popular route you can do on your own follows the **Tonghou Stream**. From Wulai head east along (and soon high above) the river on the paved road. After a few kilometres you'll pass a police checkpoint. Register using your passport or Alien Resident Certificate (ARC) if you want to go further. The process is simple and costs NT10.

At the end of the road (15km to 20km from Wulai) you can continue on foot, or on mountain bike, along the **Tonghou Trail** (桶后越嶺古道; Tǒnghòu Yuèlǐng Gǔdào). This goes all the way to Jiaoshi on the east coast and it takes about three to four hours to walk one way. In 2006 the forestry bureau expanded, marked and signposted the trail making the way completely clear.

BIRD-WATCHING

Wulai is renowned for its bird-watching areas and there are two main routes birders take.



One follows the path to Neidong Forest Recreation Area (p144). The other follows the Tonghou Stream, starting from the parking lot in Wulai.

To begin, cross the first bridge and then take a left before Wulai St (the tourist street). Follow the road along the Tonghou Stream for a short distance, then turn right up a small road. The loop road/trail that eventually leads back to the road alongside the Tonghou Stream is said to be the best bird-watching area in Wulai. A word of warning though: the route is often littered with rubbish.

Among the birds you can see in Wulai are river kingfishers, collared owls, the yellow-throated minivet and the Indian black eagle. Winter is a particularly good viewing time

as many mid-altitude species migrate to the lower river valleys. For more information pick up a copy of *Birdwatcher's Guide to the Taipei Region*, and see p328.

NEIDONG FOREST RECREATION AREA

內洞森林遊樂區

About 4km past Wulai Waterfall is this recreation area (Nèidōng Sēnlín Yóulè Qū; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>; adult/child NT80/40), popularly known as Wawagu, or 'Valley of the Frogs'. This place alone is wonderful enough to make it worth a dedicated trip.

The main attractions are the broadleaf and cedar forests, the bird and insect life (and the occasional monkey), and the three-tiered **Hsinhsian Waterfall** (Xinxian Pùbù), one of the most gorgeous in the north.

According to the Forestry Bureau, May to September is the best time to see the bird and insect life, as well as blooming flowers.

There's only one main trail through the reserve so you can't miss it. It starts near the first tier of the falls and leads up a series of switchbacks through a broadleaf forest. At the top it connects to a dirt logging road that runs through thick cedar forests. Go right and in an hour or so you'll reach the end of the road and reconnect with the Neidong River.

If you don't have a vehicle you can walk to Neidong without much trouble in about an hour. Most of the route is off the road and flat. Take the pedestrian walkway or the minitrain in Wulai to the end and then make your way to the main road. After you pass through a small tunnel you will see a bridge on the left. Cross it and follow the abandoned road on the other side upstream all the way to Neidong.

Eating

Aboriginal cuisine is the standard fare in Wulai. A few mouth-watering selections that can be found at any number of shops along Wulai St include mountain vegetables and wild pig (not really wild any more in the Wulai area), *zhútóng fàn* (竹桶飯; sticky rice steamed and served in bamboo tubes) and freshwater fish. Snacks and alcoholic drinks made from *xiàomǐ* (小米; millet) can be found at many shops and stalls in the village.

Note that there is no food near Neidong.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Wulai (NT32, 40 minutes, every 30 minutes) run frequently from near the Taipei Xindian MRT station (the last stop on the line). When you get off the escalators, walk to the main road in front of the station and turn right. Walk two blocks to the bus stop just past the 7-Eleven. Buses are not numbered but they now have English signs.

PINGXI BRANCH RAIL LINE 平溪支線

☎ 02

Of the three small branch lines that have remained open for tourism, this 12km track (Píngxī Zhīxiàn) is the closest to Taipei, and our favourite by a long shot. For one thing, it's a highly scenic ride through a wild, wooded gorge. Furthermore, the stops are full of rewarding sights and activities, including thrilling hikes, high waterfalls, river pools to swim in, and the remains of what was once a thriving coal industry. Pingxi town itself is the site of the annual sky lantern release during Lantern Festival, an event not to be missed (see the boxed text, p149).

The Pingxi line branches off from the main east coast trunk line at Sandiaoling and ex-

DAY TRIPS FROM TAIPEI

All of the following can be reached by public transport from Taipei within an hour.

- The emerald tea fields and bike paths of **Pinglin** (p148)
 - The swimming holes, hiking trails and hot springs of **Wulai** (p141)
 - The old streets of **Sansia** (p152) and the nearby ceramic shops and museum of **Yingge** (p151)
 - The sand and surf of **Fulong Beach** (p160) and **Baishawan Beach** (p156)
 - The waterfalls, mines and craggy peaks along the **Pingxi Branch Rail Line** (above)
 - The teahouses and gold mines of **Jiufen & Jinguashi** (p157)
 - The six-hour **Bijia Shan Trail** (p150) ridge walk from Shihing to Maokong
- Pick up a copy of *Taipei Day Trips* (see Hiking, p329) for many more ideas.

WALKING THE WALK WITH PROF HUANG Robert Kelly

I've been invited by a friend to join the TMITRAIL Association for a hike from Wulai to Jiaoshi along the historic Tonghou Trail. As I've wanted to do this hike for almost 10 years, and to meet the association and its founder, Professor Huang Wu-hsiung (黃武雄), since I first read about them in the local papers, I can't say no.

TMITRAIL Association, which stands roughly for 'a thousand kilometres of trails around the island', began as the vision of Professor Huang to rebuild Taiwanese people's relationship with nature through a network of walking and biking paths. 'We should be able to walk from village to village, as in the old days', Huang says, 'but we can't because the priority has been to make roads accessible for cars, not walkers'.

And yet, many of Taiwan's mountain roads are so seldom used that they do in fact form an extensive walking system already. To prove this I set out in autumn 2006 to walk from Taipei to Daxi on the east coast with my hiking partners Chris Nelson and Peter Widdle. In what turned out to be a classic example of ideas cross-fertilising, the TMITRAIL Association later learned about our walk and drew their own inspiration from it.

Now when I meet the association I am rather amused that everyone, including the media, know who I am. 'So who's the fellow who walked to Daxi?', I hear a reporter shout out, and before I realise it's me, all fingers are already pointing in my direction.

Professor Huang, the founder, is late arriving. When he does I can't help but notice he is dressed in a white cotton collared shirt and khaki pants. If he was part of my hiking club, I would have long ago introduced him to the wonders of quick-drying fabric. But his outfit is pretty standard for men of his generation, as is the old smooth stick he uses for a walking pole. In any case, he is as fast a walker as I am, and seems to sweat a lot less.

Professor Huang doesn't have a sad face, but he looks sad for most of the day. When I first get the chance to ask him why he started the association, he says wearily, 'Because I had to'. Taiwan needs civic groups to stand in opposition to politicians who focus solely on economic development. If Taiwan is ever to reach the living standards of Western countries, with their order, cleanliness and civic mindedness, it will have to come through bottom-up organisations such as TMITRAIL.

Huang is well aware he is preaching a new idea, but I soon see that he is serious about taking the message directly to the people. As we walk along a section of pitch, he stops to talk to two workers expanding the road. He explains to the men how their actions are making the road more prone to washouts, and also increasing people's ability to drive faster (thus making the road even more likely to be damaged, to say nothing of making it unsuitable for walking). At first I think the professor is preaching to the wrong people (what can these guys do?), but later I realise that this is the whole point of his mission: to get ordinary people thinking and involved in changes.

As we talk further, I realise that Professor Huang is actually not very sanguine about the future of Taiwan. Despite the widespread practice of recycling, and huge improvements in air and water quality, he feels the overall environmental situation has worsened in the past 10 years. I understand his point, but can't quite agree with his pessimism. I'm a bit Pollyanna-ish for sure, but these days I'm meeting more and more people, such as the professor, who are willing to do something concrete to improve this island. And this surely will make all the difference.

tends to Jingtong, about a 30-minute ride east of the Taipei Zoo. The most interesting stops are Sandiaoling, Shifen, Pingxi and Jingtong. The entire ride takes about 45 minutes.

At the Shifen Scenic Administration Office (☎ 2495 8409; 🕒 8am-5.30pm), near Shifen station, you can pick up English-language brochures and consult the large maps on the 1st floor.

Getting There & Around

If you are going to start at Sandiaoling, catch a direct train from Taipei, though note there are usually only two or three in the morning hours. If you are going to any other stop, first take a train to Ruifang (fast/slow train NT80/62, 40/50 minutes, every 30 minutes) and then transfer to the Pingxi line on the same platform. All-day train passes cost NT50

and give you a discount on admission to the Shifen Waterfall.

Alternatively, you can catch a bus from Muzha MRT station. From the station walk south to the main road and cross the street to catch bus 16. At the time of writing the buses came by around 7.30am, 8.20am and 9.45am every day (NT45). For the return schedule check the bus stop signs in Pingxi. If you have three or four people in your group, consider taking a 30-minute taxi ride (approximately NT450) from Muzha MRT.

Every sight listed along the Pingxi Branch Rail Line can be reached easily on foot from the various stations. The track is only 12km long and trains only come by every hour or so, so it is possible to walk part or all of it. There are a few tunnels – be extremely careful going through these – but if you carry a torch and a schedule of the trains, you should be fine. If you do hear a train coming, note that there are special alcoves built into the tunnel walls for you to squeeze into.

Sandioliing Waterfall Trail

三貂嶺瀑布步道

This wonderful trail (Sāndioliing Pùbù Bùdào) starts just a few minute's walk from the first stop along the Pingxi line and is a must-visit for any waterfall lover. In just a couple of hours you can see three of the highest and most beautiful falls in the north in their natural glory. The second waterfall even allows you to get right in behind it via a cave formed by the overhang: it's like something out of *The Last of the Mohicans*. If you have the afternoon or the whole day, you can see at least four more falls, and if you are willing to river trace a little, seven more after that.

To get to the trailhead, exit the station and follow the tracks south until they split. Cross over and follow the tracks to the right (the Pingxi line). After a few minutes you will see the wooden signpost (it's in English) for the trailhead. The trail is simple and clear to follow at least as far as the third fall (about an hour away). If you want to continue after this all the way to Shifen station (further down the Pingxi line) pick up a copy of *Taipei Day Trips II* (see Hiking, p329) or go with someone who knows the trail. It's not difficult, except for a couple of climbs up ladders, but it is a little tricky with the turns.

Shifen 十分

The upstream watersheds of the Keelung River receive more than 6000mm of rain a year and have more waterfalls than any other river system in Taiwan. One of the most spectacular is the 40m-wide **Shifen Waterfall** (十分瀑布; Shifen Pùbù; adult/child NT180/100; ☎ 7.30am-6pm), the broadest waterfall in Taiwan.

A park has been built up around the falls, complete with coffee shops, lookouts and stone trails that allow you to get right beside the falls. It's outrageously expensive to get in, and we object to the walls the owners have set up along the tracks, blocking any view to the falls, but the falls are truly something to see after a heavy rain.

To reach the falls, turn right as you exit the train at Shifen station. Walk about 15 minutes until you come to a split in the road. Follow the lower road for another five minutes to the tourist office. The waterfall path begins behind this building and takes another 15 minutes of walking. Note: don't mistake (as many do) the first set of falls you encounter, called the Eyeglasses Waterfall, for the much larger Shifen Waterfall.

Back in town, a few minutes' walk in the direction of Taipei from Shifen station leads to the 40-hectare **Taiwan Coal Mine History & Culture Exhibition Hall** (台灣煤礦歷史文化陳列館; Tāiwān Méikuàng Lìshǐ Wénhuà Chénnlièguǎn; ☎ 2495 8680; 5 Tingliao Tsu; adult/child NT200/160; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm). This was once a real coal-mining station and everything on display is authentic mining equipment: from the rotors to the motors, conveyor belts, coal washing machines, electric transport trains and mine tunnels. There's also a 1km electric-train ride to the main coal tunnel, and working jiggers with 100m of track to practise your pumping skills on. Most travellers can give this place a miss unless they have young children or a deep interest in coal history.

One of our favourite **day hikes** begins just behind the coal mine. Take the road to the left just before the entrance to the mine hall and follow it for about 1km. When it splits, take the road on the right down to the coal mine area. Swing round the mine to the left and you'll see the start of a trail. It's straight up for the first 40 minutes, but then levels out and runs along the top of a ridge until the peak of Wufenshan (五分山; Wūfēnshān). The view from up here is perfect through 360 degrees, with the ocean to the east and mountain ranges in every other

direction. Go on a clear day and give yourself around four hours for the return trip.

Around Shifen station you can sample traditional snacks such as *mifānshù* (蜜蕃薯; sweet potatoes cooked in wheat sugar) and *zhēngyùtóu* (蒸芋頭; steamed taro).

Pingxi 平溪

Pingxi (Pingxi) is a bit grubby (though there were efforts at the time of writing to fix up the old village), but there are two reasons you should make a stop here: the Pingxi crags and the sky lanterns (see the Lantern Festival boxed text, p149).

If you've got a head for heights and like unusual hikes, don't miss out on the series of **crags** (慈母峰; *címǔfēng*) literally across the street from the train station. The highest crag is only 450m or so, but you must scramble up metal ladders and steps carved right into the rock face to reach the top. No technical skill is required, but it's an adrenalin rush nonetheless.

To reach the crags, head down to the road from the train station and look for an old map beside a set of stairs on the other side of the street. Follow the stairs up to a temple. Just beyond the temple is a dead-end road. The well-marked and easy-to-follow trails start here. It doesn't matter which crag you climb first, but we usually head right at the first junction and do a loop back to the road.

As if Pingxi wasn't enough fun already, there is a fantastic little **swimming hole** that has become sufficiently well known that we can let you in on it, but not so well known you won't want to go because of the crowds. The pool is 5m deep and has a small waterfall at the back you can stand under.

To reach the pools, walk to the main road from the train station and go right. Just past the spiffy-looking red-brick school you'll see a set of stairs to the left (if you cross the bridge over a small stream you've gone too far). Head up the stairs and continue along the flat. Veer right and stay on the flat trail at the second set of stairs. Walk 30m and look down into the ravine: you'll see the edge of the pools.

Note that if you head up the second set of stairs you will reach a rocky path that leads to an old mining area we call **Gollum's Lair**. It's an interesting place to explore.

Jingtong 菁桐

The coal mining industry in the Pingxi area operated for 100 years before finally closing

in the mid-1980s. **Jingtong station** (菁桐站; Jīngtóng zhàn), the last station on the line, once served as a major centre for coal shipping. Today it has one of the best-preserved traditional station houses in Taiwan. With nearby coal carts, train engines, a **photo museum** (admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm) and an 'old street', it's a fun place to explore and take pictures. For more on the history of coal mining in Taiwan check out www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2002/09/29/170075.

Another place to check out in town is **Prince's Guesthouse** (太子賓館; Taìzǐ Bīnguǎn; admission NT50; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat, Sun & holidays), a sprawling 10-room Japanese-style wooden house built in 1939 with wood from Alishan. Today, both the interior and exterior are in almost perfect condition, only in need of a little spit and polish (and paint) around the edges. On weekends you can tour inside the house and examine the old furniture, books and rooms.

The house sits on a little picturesque flat by the river. To reach it, exit Jingtong station, turn right and follow the 'old street' to the main road. Cross the street to the bridge and you'll see the house to the right in a cluster of trees. You can't miss it.

There's some great **hiking** around Jingtong and the excellent trails are never crowded, even on weekends. One favourite short hike is up to the pyramid-shaped **Shulong Point** (Shǔláng Jiǎn; 622m). It's the highest mountain in the area and you can see Taipei 101 from the top. We also highly recommend **Fengtou Point** (Fēngtóu Jiǎn), a tough but exhilarating ridge walk. For details on these and other hikes in the area pick up a copy of *Taipei Day Trips II* (see Hiking, p329).

For something to eat, try **Palace Restaurant** (皇宮咖啡簡餐; Huánggōng Kāfēi Jiǎncān; set meals NT220; ☎ 11am-9pm Tue-Sun). Set in a short row of Japanese-era houses, this restaurant has both an old-time wooden interior and good food. Guests can sit on the floor, Japanese style, or at tables. To reach the restaurant, cross the bridge by Prince's Guesthouse and turn right; it's 100m down the road. There are signs in Chinese.

Moca Cafe (紅寶經典咖啡餐坊; Hóngbǎo Jīngdiǎn Kāfēi Cānfāng; ☎ 9am-6pm) only serves drinks. Make sure you try the traditional and hearty *miànchá* (麵茶; sesame paste drink; NT30); it's great on a chilly day. When you exit the train station, turn right and follow the 'old street' 30m to this shop. You can't miss it as

it has a blown-up photocopy of its Lonely Planet *Taiwan* entry plastered on the front with a caption about foreigners going crazy about their drinks (indulge them).

PINGLIN 坪林

☎ 02 / pop 7000

Pinglin (Pinglin), which means 'forest on level ground', is famous nationwide for its locally grown bao chung tea. Only an hour from Taipei by bus (about 24km east of Xindian), it is also well loved by day-trippers for its emerald mountain landscape, picture-perfect tea fields, scenic bike paths and clear, swimmable (and kayakable) rivers teeming with fish. The town also features the world's largest tea museum, where you can learn not only how tea is grown and processed, but also how to drink it.

Information & Orientation

The town is quite small and easy to navigate. You can walk from the tea museum to the end of the dykes in 40 minutes. Admission to the tea museum includes a large foldout map of the area. It's all in Chinese but the

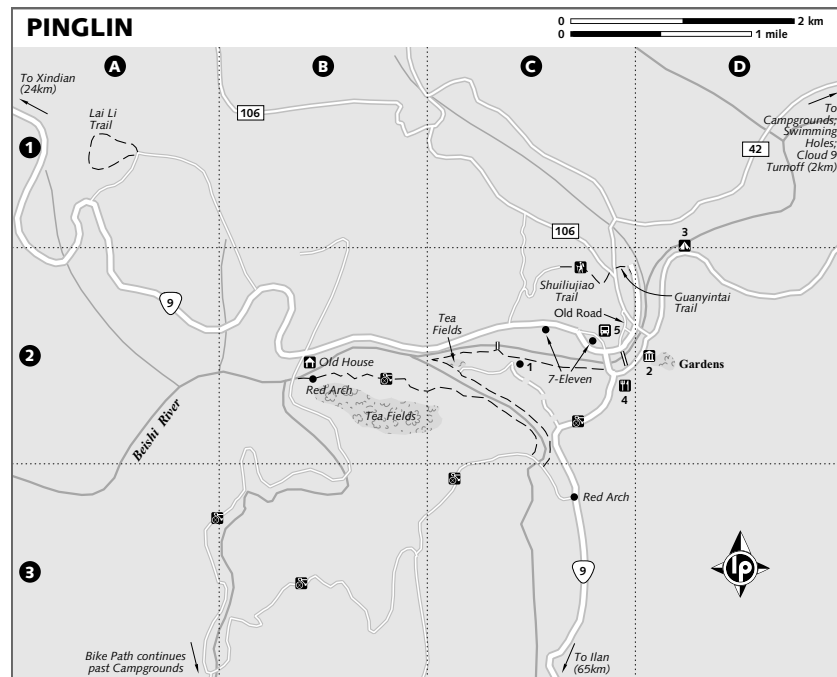
photographs and intuitive symbols make it useful nonetheless.

Pinglin Township is large and encompasses endless mountains, rivers, campgrounds and hiking trails. We only scratch the surface of the area here, essentially concentrating on places you can get to if you don't have your own vehicle. If you do, the Sunriver Maps (see p331) give a great overview. Country Rd 42, heading east, is particularly rich in camping spots, hiking trails and places to swim in the rivers.

Sights & Activities

TEA MUSEUM 茶葉博物館

This place has everything you ever wanted to know about tea – and then some. The two floors of the classically designed **museum** (Cháyè Bówúguǎn; ☎ 2665 6035; fax 2665 7138; adult/child NT100/50; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Fri, 8am–9pm Sat & Sun) feature all manner of displays, dioramas, charts, equipment and, of course, tea in all its forms. There are sections on the history of tea production in Taiwan and China, the culture of tea drinking and tea-making methods over the centuries. All exhibits now have complete English translations.



LANTERN FESTIVAL 元宵節

Lantern Festival (Yuánxiāo Jié) is quickly emerging as one of the most popular holiday events in Taiwan. And why not? Of all the ancient Chinese festivals, this one has best been reimagined for the modern age, with spectacular light shows, live concerts and giant glowing mechanical lanterns showing across the island. And yet, one of the best spectacles is still the simplest and most traditional: the sky lantern release in Pingxi.

A sky lantern (*tiāndēng*) is a large paper lantern with a combustible element attached to the underside. When the element is lit, hot air rises into the lantern sack and the lantern floats into the sky like a hot-air balloon.

In Pingxi people have been sending sky lanterns into the air for generations. Long ago, the remote mountainous villages were prone to attacks from bandits and marauders. Sky lanterns were used to signal to others, often women and children, to get packing and head into the high hills at the first sign of trouble. But today it's all about the sublime thrill of watching glowing colourful objects float up against a dark sky. Check out www.youtube.com for a teaser.

During the festival, which is spread out over two weekends, there are shuttle buses all day to the site. After dark, lanterns are released en masse every 20 minutes. Usually the participants in these events have been chosen beforehand, but if you hang around you may be asked to replace someone who didn't show up.

If you wish to light your own lantern, remember first to write some special wish on it. Then light the combustible element, wait till the paper sack has filled with hot air and made the skin taut and let your lantern go. As it floats away to the heavens repeat your wishes to yourself... and pray your lantern doesn't burn up prematurely and crash down into the crowds, or light a tent on fire, as occasionally happens.

See p337 for more information.

Sharing the grounds with the museum is a faux-classical style teahouse. There is a leaflet (in English) available to help as you follow the steps to make tea the proper way (around NT200 per person). Staff are also on hand to offer assistance.

CYCLING

After you've learned a little about how tea is grown and made, it's time to see it for yourself in the fields. Pinglin's **bike path** (*jiāotàchē zhuānyòng dào*) runs for almost 20km through open tea fields and along an unspoiled river valley with deep pools loaded with fish (kudos on fishing). Take a rest in one of the tiny hamlets

along the way and you may see tea leaves spread on the ground drying, or even roasting in a tea oven.

No cars are permitted on the sections that run through the tea fields. From the 'old house', much of the route is on a raised footpath, making these areas safe for children to ride on. In any case, cars are few and far between even on the road sections, as the route finishes at a dead end.

You can rent bikes (per day NT250) at the He Huan Campground (see Sleeping, p150) any time of day. Helmets and locks are not provided. From the campground, ride back towards town and then follow Hwy 9 south for about 700m. Turn right at the big red arch and you are at the start of the bike route. Alternatively, you can follow the river and ride through the tea fields. Either way, signs denoting bike path guide the way.

It takes two leisurely hours to cycle to the end and about an hour to return.

SWIMMING

There are many sweet spots for a dip in the rivers around Pinglin. Head northeast on Country Rd 42 (the river here is very clean) or follow the bike path to the end.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Fish-Viewing Path 觀魚步道1	C2
Tea Museum 茶葉博物館2	D2

SLEEPING

He Huan Campground 合歡露營渡假山莊3	D1
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EATING

He Huan Restaurant 合歡茶宴風味餐廳4	C2
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TRANSPORT

Bus Stop5	C2
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HIKING

In the hills just back from town and along the rivers there are short paths suitable for families and strolling couples. To get to the trailhead for the **Guanyintai Trail** (Guānyīntái Bùdào), cross the bridge near the museum, turn right and walk about 200m. The stairs on the left take you up to the giant Guanyin statue that overlooks Pinglin.

At the end of the trail cross County Rds 42 and 106 and continue to the suspension bridge at the beginning of town. From here you can walk along the river back to the museum.

Children usually like watching the 'flashy fish' along the **Fish-Viewing Path** (Guānyú Bùdào). A return trip from the museum takes about 1½ hours.

If you have your own vehicle there are numerous, more challenging trails in the Pinglin area. Look for the trail signs (in English and Chinese) around town to point you in the right direction.

Sleeping

In addition to the **He Huan Campground** (Héhuān Lǚyìng Dǔjià Shānzhuāng; ☎ 2665 6424), there are numerous campgrounds heading south along the bike path and along Country Rd 42. Our favourite spot just off along the route is **Cloud 9** (☎ 0911-126 337; www.cloud9tw.com; Pinglin Township; camping per person NT200), run by a friendly South African family who've made Taiwan their home.

The campground sits on a shady grassy flat beside the Beishi River. It's in a prime spot with several deep but calm swimming holes just steps away, and numerous hiking and biking trails nearby. The owners are avid kayakers and offer lessons and rentals. They also offer two- to five-hour inner-tubing excursions down the Beishi River. A maximum of 30 people are permitted to camp at one time, which is a welcome change from the more-the-merrier (and louder-the-better) locally run sites. Meals are available (NT150 to NT200) and there are also kitchen and barbecue facilities.

Cloud 9 is a bit tricky to get to from central Pinglin, so call for a pick-up or consider taking a taxi from Taipei Main Station. The campground has a working relationship with a local driver and the fee is NT500 to NT600 (very reasonable if there are a few of you). You don't need your own transportation once you are here. Note that at the time of writing the campground was only open on weekends.

Eating

He Huan Restaurant (Héhuān Chàyàn Fēngwèi Cāntīng; ☎ 2665 7775; 5-1 Shuide Village; dishes NT200; ☎ 11am-6pm) The speciality here is food made with tea. Not every dish is successful in our opinion, but the *chàyè xiāngsū* (茶葉香酥; deep-fried tea leaves; NT150) are a hit with most people. The menu is in Chinese but there are pictures to aid selection.

For simple, cheap fare there are noodle shops along the main road and a 7-Eleven that sells sandwiches.

Shopping

On the main drag into town there's no end of stores selling tea and products made with tea. While tea jellies, Popsicles and *tóngzǎi mǐgāo* (筒仔米糕; sticky rice) are inexpensive, a jar of good *bāo zhōng chá* (包種茶; bao chung tea), the local speciality, can cost thousands of dollars. In our opinion, though, it is one of the most delicious teas in Taiwan and easily appreciated by the untrained palate.

Getting There & Away

Pinglin is a popular destination and it's simple to get there by public transport. In Taipei, take the MRT to Xindian station. Turn right on the main road in front of the station and walk to the 7-Eleven. Just past the 7-Eleven you'll see a bus stop. Buses to Pinglin run about every hour to 90 minutes (NT68).

The bus drops you off in the centre of Pinglin. It's a short walk from here to the museum. Note that the last bus to Taipei leaves Pinglin at 5pm.

SHIHING (SHIDING) 石碇

☎ 02 / pop 300

The little town of Shihing (Shiding) sits in the hills about 15km east of Maokong. There's not much to see in the town itself, though locals do commend the various tofu dishes you can get on the 'old street'. For the foreign traveller there are two excellent hikes that shouldn't be missed: Huangdi Dian (皇帝殿; Huángdì Diàn) and Bijia Shan (筆架山; Bìjiā Shān). Huangdi Dian runs east of Shihing along a narrow ridge that in parts is no more than 20cm wide – with sheer drops on the right and left! There are ropes and guide poles in place in the more dangerous parts, but still, don't go if you haven't a head for heights.

The Bijia Shan trail runs west of Shihing all the way to Maokong and is a safer but still im-

mensely satisfying hike along a wooded ridge. Give yourself about six hours for this trail, and four to six hours for Huangdi Dian.

Shihing can be reached by taking bus 666 (the bus of the beast as we call it; NT15, 20 minutes, frequent service in the morning) from Muzha MRT station. Exit the station, walk to the main road and cross to reach the bus stop.

Both trails have a few too many twists and turns (some to avoid) for us to give you safe directions in a few words. Pick up a copy of *Taipei Day Trips I & II* (see Hiking, p329) for a full description.

YINGGE 鶯歌

☎ 02 / pop 83,468

C is for Ceramics. C is for – Yingge? Well, not quite, but 'Yingge is for ceramics' is something almost any Taiwanese can chant. This little town (Yingge) in the very southern part of Taipei County lives by and for the production of high- and low-quality ceramic and pottery objects: everything from cupboard handles to Song-dynasty vases.

Pottery was introduced to Yingge in 1804, and a century later ceramics also began to be developed. Both industries flourished due to the excellent local clay and good local transport network, originally using the river and later rail. In recent years the town made the successful leap from manufacturing base to cultural venue. The opening in 1999 of the NT6-billion Yingge Ceramics Museum and the creation of the 'Old Street' solidified this crossover and put Yingge on the traveller's map for lovers of traditional crafts.

Yingge makes an enjoyable, long day trip from Taipei and fits in naturally with a stopover at nearby Sansia for a look at the masterfully restored Tzushr Temple and the nearby blocks of Qing- and Japanese-era buildings.

Orientation

At the train station, English signs direct you left or right to the Old Street and ceramics museum. Ignore the signs and exit on the right side of the station no matter where you want to go. Turn right when you're outside and walk down the road until you reach a big four-way intersection. To get to the Old Street, turn right, pass through the tunnel and then head towards the arches on the left. The Old Street begins here.

To reach the ceramics museum, turn left at the four-way and walk for another five minutes. Just past the petrol station you'll see the museum on the right.

The Old Street is pedestrian only (most of the time), but there are few footpaths in Yingge and a lot of traffic, which makes walking about unpleasant. If you're travelling with children consider taking a taxi (NT100 to the museum).

Sights & Activities**YINGGE CERAMICS MUSEUM**

鶯歌陶瓷博物館

Most people think that pottery and ceramics are the same thing, but they are quite different. They use different types of clay and are fired at very different temperatures: pottery under 1250°C, ceramics above 1260°C. Humans have been making pottery for around 8000 years, but only mastered the ceramic process around 3000 years ago.

If you didn't know this (as we didn't), then it's time to head to the very stylish and terrifically informative **Yingge Ceramics Museum** (Yingge Táocǐ Bówùguǎn; ☎ 8677 2727; www.ceramics.tpc.gov.tw; 200 Wenhua Rd; adult/child NT100/70; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun). This is really one of our favourite museums in Taiwan, in part because of the exposed concrete and steel design. Exhibits cover everything from 'snake kilns' (see p224) to the various woods used in firing, and influences on Taiwanese ceramics from China, Japan and the Netherlands. Special exhibitions of local artists show the direction modern ceramics is taking, and the occasional humorous exhibit and flashy videos help to keep interest high as you move around the three floors.

Adults can make their own pots on weekends, while supervised children's workshops (for kids four to eight years old) are run every day (NT75 for materials). Instructions are in Chinese only, though it's common to have someone around who can speak English and help out. Call for times.

YINGGE OLD STREET 鶯歌老街

Dozens of pottery shops and stalls, large and small, compete for your business on the Old Street (Lǎo Jiē) and you could spend hours just browsing. Prices start at around NT30 for a cup or saucer, but these will most certainly be mass-produced in China. Quality handmade Yingge pieces can cost tens of

thousands, though many of the best shops are not even on the Old Street.

The Old Street, although not really old at all is somewhat quaint, with its cobbled roads, traditional street lamps and a walk-in kiln. At the time of writing the street was getting a lot of added character in the form of red-brick façades and cleaned-up buildings. Most shops close between 6pm and 7pm.

Eating

On the Old Street there are plenty of vendors to help you line your stomach. Next to the museum you'll find a street filled with small restaurants and noodle shops.

Getting There & Away

Trains from Taipei (NT31, 30 minutes) run about every 30 minutes.

SANSIA (SANXIA) 三峽

📍 02 / pop 86,958

Across National Hwy 3 from Yingge is this old town (Sānxiá), most noted for a temple that has been under reconstruction since 1947 and a couple of blocks of perfectly restored Qing- and Japanese-era buildings. In short, Sansia and Yingge go hand in hand, contrasting and complementing each other like peanut butter and chocolate.

Sights & Activities

TZUSHR TEMPLE 祖師廟

Originally constructed in 1769, this temple (Zūshī Miào) has been rebuilt three times. The last involved the life's work of Professor Li Mei-shu, a Western-trained painter who supervised reconstruction with such fastidious care that today the temple is a showcase of carving, painting and temple reliefs. For example, while most temples have a couple of dragon pillars, this one has 156. There are also a number of features you'll not see in another temple in Taiwan, such as bronze doors, carvings of bears, turkeys and octopuses, and even Greek-style gargoyles. Pick up an English brochure at the temple for a very thorough introduction.

The temple is dedicated to the Divine Progenitor and is the centre of religious life in Sansia. It's liveliest on the deity's birthday, the sixth day after Chinese New Year.

If you plan to see only one temple in Taiwan, make it this one. It's often the first place

guests are taken to when they arrive in Taiwan, as it's on the way from the airport to Taipei. No one has failed to be impressed.

MINCHUAN OLD STREET 民權老街

Take a walk back in time on this old street (*lǎo jiē*), which features several blocks of red-brick shops dating from the end of the Qing dynasty to the early years of the Japanese colonial era. If you look closely you can see a diversity of styles in the shop façades as they incorporate traditional Chinese, Japanese and Western baroque elements. Note that the mortar used for the bricks is sticky rice and crushed seashells.

At the time of writing the street had just completed its renovations and was looking much as it must have 80 years ago. To reach the old street turn right as you exit the temple and walk up the alley to Minquan (Minchuan) St.

HIKING

There are some excellent hikes in the Sansia area, including many people's favourite in all the north: **Wuliao Jian** (五寮尖; Wǔliáo Jiān). The Wuliao Jian trail take about six hours to finish, but it doesn't cover much ground as most of it involves treading lightly along a knife-edge ridge. These days you'll find secure ropes and guide poles in place, and they really are necessary. On one section, for example, you must go up and along a bumpy narrow slice of rock that's exposed on all sides. Years ago, when we first hiked the route, there was only a thin rope attached to the flat of the ridge and you actually had to straddle the rock and shimmy across. It was insane then; now it's just a good thrill.

Needless to say, don't go unless you have a good head for heights and are in the mood for a challenge.

Like many hikes, this one has a few too many twists and turns for us to describe safely in a short space. Once again consult *Taipei Day Trips II* (see Hiking, p329) for full information, including transport. One transport option not included, however, is to take the MRT to Yongning Station (the last on the blue line) and then a taxi (NT300). It's worth it if your group numbers several people, as bus service is very infrequent to the trailhead. At the temple at the end of the hike you can ask for a taxi to come and pick you up.

Getting There & Away

From Yingge, the only sensible way to get to Sansia is by taxi (from ceramics museum to temple NT110).

MANYUEYUAN FOREST RECREATION AREA 滿月圓森林遊樂區

This recreation area (Mǎnyuèyuán Sēnlín Yóulè Qū; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>; adult/child NT100/75; 🕒 8am-5pm) is truly a park for all seasons, and all people. The first section has paved or cobbled paths, scenic pavilions and short walks to a number of gorgeous waterfalls. It's perfect for families or strolling couples.

Once you get past this section, however, you're on natural trails that take you through sweet-smelling cedar forests, up to mountain peaks and, further afield, to a stand of **giant ancient cedars** (神木; *shénmù*). The trail starts up a short incline to the right of the bathrooms at the end of the paved route to Manyueyuan Waterfall. It's broad and clear, takes about four hours to hike and has many side branches. The main route connects Manyueyuan with Dongyanshan Forest Recreation Area (p168), but note that there is no public transport to and from Dongyanshan. If you walk there you must walk back.

The trails to the old cedars, and to the higher mountains, are unfortunately not straightforward enough for us to write up in a short space. They are fairly popular trails though and anyone in decent shape can manage them. Get a copy of *Taipei Day Trips II* (see Hiking, p329) for clear directions.

Autumn is a nice time to visit the park as the gum and soap-nut trees are changing colours. Fireflies come out in the spring and summer, though we have seen them as late as October. You can often spot monkeys further into the park during the day. Be aware that the park has its own microclimate, and while it may be sunny and dry in Taipei, it could be cool and wet here.

To get to the park take an infrequent **Taipei Bus Company** (📞 2671 1914; NT48) bus from the station on Dayung Rd (台北客運三峽站 大勇路) in Sansia to Lele Valley (樂樂谷; Lèlè Gǔ). From Lele Valley it's about a 30- to 40-minute walk to the park gates. If you can get a few people together, take a taxi (NT450) from Yongning MRT station to the park. You may be able to get a taxi back on a busy summer weekend, but don't count on it. Hitchhiking into Sansia is an

option, as well as walking down to Lele Valley and catching the bus. The last bus leaves Lele Valley around 6pm (call the Taipei Bus Company to confirm).

KEELUNG TO DANSHUI

📍 02

This pleasant route follows Provincial Hwy 2 as it winds along the top of the island. To one side, the blue ocean stretches to the horizon, while to the other, the lush dark-green hills of Yangmingshan National Park (see p132) rise up to dominate the sky. Public transport is limited to buses, but these are frequent and hit every place we mention.

There are a few good swimming beaches along the way, a couple of excellent hot-spring resorts and a great little sculpture museum. At the time of writing, Fuguei Cape, the most northerly point in Taiwan, was getting a new look, along the lines of Fisherman's Wharf in Danshui. Let us know how it turned out.

Most of this area falls under the auspices of the **North Coast & Guanyinshan Scenic Administration** (📞 2636 4503; www.northguan-nsa.gov.tw/en/index.php; 🕒 8am-5pm). By the time you read this, its headquarters and visitor centre should have moved back to Baishawan Beach from its temporary home in Sanjhi.

KEELUNG (JILONG) 基隆

📍 02 / pop 399,000

Keelung (Jilóng) is a port city, the second largest in Taiwan, and has the rough-around-the-edges, devil-may-care vibe so common in places where mingling with sailors is common. Though a modern city today, in the markets and alleys you'll still catch a whiff of the city's long and storied history, which involves foreign invaders, pirates and intrigue by the barrel full.

Keelung is a quick trip from Taipei by either bus or train and offers a lot to the casual traveller who knows where to look. Thanks to its strategic importance over the centuries, the area has a number of old forts. Befitting a coastal town, you'll also find ocean parks, scenic lookouts and, perhaps most germane to the gourmand, copious amounts of excellent seafood.

Weatherwise, Taiwanese sometimes joke that Keelung is Taiwan's Seattle, with wet

and drizzly winters and three other seasons in which it may well rain a bit on any given day. But something about the damp, mist-shrouded climate of Keelung suits its moody nautical feel to a T.

Orientation & Information

Keelung is a very wander-able town, with a small centre and plenty of winding alleyways that turn into quaint MC Escheresque neighbourhoods (with houses built into the sides of hills and steep alleyways that become staircases). You can visit most of the sights outside of the city by bus within 30 minutes.

The bus and train stations are adjacent to each other at the northern end of the city. You can pick up good English maps at the **Keelung Tourist Service Centre** (☎ 2428 7664; www.klcc.gov.tw; ☹ 8am-5.30pm), right next to the train station.

Sights

KEELUNG MIAOKOU 基隆廟口夜市

It's still thought of as a **night market** but you're not going to go hungry at Miaokou (Jilóng Miàokǒu) if you show up during the day. Encompassing several square blocks around the intersection of Ren 3rd Rd and Ai 3rd Rd, this area (famous throughout Taiwan) became known for its great food during the Japanese occupation, when a group of clever merchants started selling snacks at the mouth of the **Dianji Temple** ('Miaokou' means 'temple entrance' and also 'temple mouth', which is

a fine play on words if you ask us). After the war, more shops opened up in both directions. Nowadays, Miaokou is considered the best place in Taiwan for street snacks, especially seafood. Though some shops are open during the day, it's after dark when the place really comes to life.

For the benefit of all, stalls on the main street are all numbered and have signs in English, Japanese and Chinese explaining what's on the menu. If you can possibly make it past them all without falling over, the temple itself is worth visiting.

JUNGJENG PARK 中正公園

This park (Zhōngzhèng Gōngyuán) overlooks the city and the harbour. You can get here from the train station by bus 101, 103 or 105, but shouldn't you walk off that afternoon snack-fest at Miaokou? In any case, the park isn't hard to find. Let a Keelung icon, the bone-white 22m tall **Guanyin statue**, flanked by two gigantic golden lions, be your guide. Note that while there's a main road leading up from the south side of the hill, the stairs and alleyways from the west side have more character.

ERSHAWAN FORT 二沙灣

Also known as Haiman Tienxian, this first-class historical relic (Sea-gate Fort; Ersháwān) was once used to defend Taiwan during the First Opium War. Its imposing main gate and five cannons, still tucked into their battery emplacements, are a dramatic sight.

FOGUANGSHAN TEMPLE 佛光山寺

Just south of Jungjeng Park is this beautiful and subdued **Buddhist complex** (Fóguāngshān Sì) with an open meditation hall.

AROUND KEELUNG

If you have a bit more time to spend around Keelung, check out **Keelung Island** (基隆嶼; Jílóng Yǔ), a tiny spot of land with an emerald peak and surprisingly high cliffs. Boats to Keelung Island (adult/child NT300/200) leave from **Bisha Harbour** (碧砂漁港; Bìshā Yúgǎng), 10km east of the island and itself worth visiting. The return trip takes about 90 minutes and includes time on the island. Boats leave when full; on weekdays and in winter months you may find yourself waiting for a while.

To get to Bisha Harbour take bus 103 from the train station. Buses are frequent and the trip takes about 20 minutes. Foreign travellers should bring their passport or ARC.

Bisha Harbour is also known as a great place for seafood.

Festivals

During the seventh lunar month, Keelung is host to one of Taiwan's most renowned **ghost festivals** (*zhōngyuán jié*). The festival lasts the entire seventh lunar month (usually August), and each year a different Keelung clan is chosen to sponsor the events. Highlights include folk art performances, the opening of the Gates of Hell and the release of burning water lanterns.

Sleeping

Most people treat Keelung as a day trip. If you want to stay a night there are cheap hotels

close to the harbour. In the midrange, **Harbourview Hotel** (Huáshuài Hǎijīng Fāndiàn; ☎ 2422 3131; www.hhotel.com.tw/; 109 Xiao-2 Rd; 孝2路109號; s/d incl breakfast NT1950/2340) is a chic, smartly furnished place in between the train station and night market. For food, try the **vegetarian restaurant** (☎ 2423 1141; dishes NT80-150; ☹ 10am-8pm) beside the Foguanshan Temple. We recommend the wonton soup, a vegan rarity.

Getting There & Around

Trains from Taipei to Keelung (NT43, 40 minutes, every 20 minutes) run till 11.30pm. Buses to local sights start at the city bus hub near the train station area and cost NT12 no matter the distance. Buses to sights along the north coast start from the **Keelung Bus Company** (☎ 2433 6111) station, which is also near the train station.

Though not always reliable, you can take an overnight boat from Keelung to Matsu Island. Boats leave from Keelung Harbour's Pier 2.

YELIU 野柳

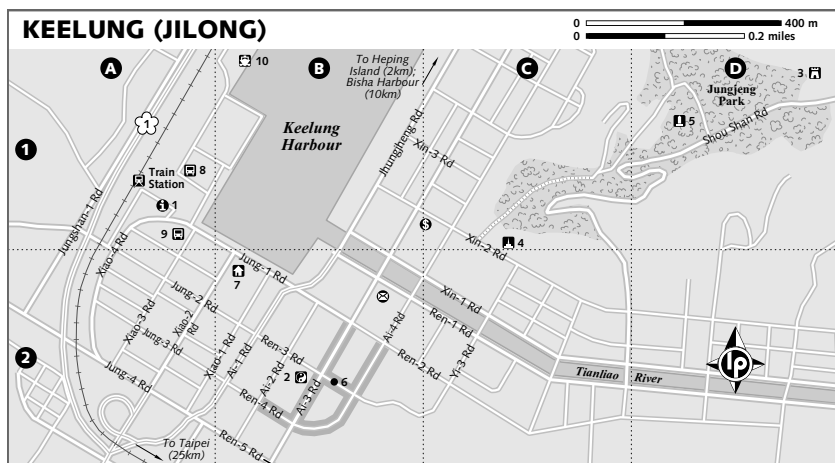
Just a few kilometres northwest of Green Bay sits this **limestone cape** (Yèliú; adult/child NT50/25; ☹ 8am-5pm) that has long attracted people to its delightfully odd rock formations. Aeons of wind and sea erosion can be observed firsthand in hundreds of pitted and moulded rocks with quaint (but accurate) names such as Queen's Head (Nǚwáng Tóu) and Fairy's Shoe (Xiǎnnǚ Xié). It's a geologist's dreamland but also a fascinating place for the day-tripper.

The **visitor centre** (☎ 2492 2016; ☹ 8am-5pm) has an informative English brochure explaining the general conditions that created the cape and also the specific forces that formed different kinds of rock shapes, such as the mushroom rocks, marine potholes and honeycomb rocks. To get to the park, take a Kuo Kuang Hao bus heading to Jinshan from the Zhongxiao-Fuxing MRT station (the bus stop outside exit 2). Buses (NT83) run every 15 minutes.

JINSHAN (CHINSHAN) 金山

☎ 02 / pop 5000

Continuing northwest, not far past Yeliu and the nuclear power plant is Jinshan (Jīnshān), a small town hemmed in by the mountains of Yangmingshan to the west and the East China Sea to the east. With its good beach, scenic cape, grassy-banked river and abundant hot springs, Jinshan should be a great little summer getaway. And it may yet be.



INFORMATION	
Keelung Tourist Service Centre 基隆遊客中心	1 A1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Dianji Temple 奠濟宮	2 B2
Ershawan Fort 二沙灣	3 D1
Foguanshan Temple 佛光山寺	4 C1
Guanyin Statue 觀音佛像	5 D1
Keelung Miakou 廟口夜市	6 B2
SLEEPING	
Harbourview Hotel 華帥海景飯店	7 B2
TRANSPORT	
City Bus Hub 市公車站	8 A1
Keelung Bus Company Station 基隆客運公車站	9 A1
Matsu Ferries 基隆大樓東二碼頭	(see 10)
Pier No 2	10 B1

At the time of writing, however, chaos seemed to rule on Jinshan's beaches. Too many swimmers, surfers, wannabe surfers and vendors were all trying to compete for the same stretch of sand. However, the situation may be very different by the time you read this if the North Coast & Guanyinshan Scenic Administration get control over the area as they are attempting to do.

Sights & Activities

Our favourite hot spring resort in the north, the five-star **Tienlai** (天籟, Tiānlài; ☎ 2408 0000; www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/gogo/goen_32.htm; 1-7 Mingliu Rd; 金山鄉重和村名流路1-7號; unlimited use of public pools NT800) is just outside of Jinshan and the road into Yangmingshan National Park. The resort features over a dozen outdoor and indoor pools that can massage, soak, perfume, shower and even spin you right round. This is a place to take a loved one when you want to spoil them. Check out the website to see how lovely it all is. Tienlai is a 10- to 15-minute taxi ride from Jinshan.

Just down the road from the entrance to Tienlai is the start of a trail to the natural springs called **Bayen Hot Springs** (八煙溫泉; Bāyān Wēnquán). At the 5.5km mark, head down the side paved trail. Follow the signs or, on a weekend, ask other hikers. It's a well-known place, a bit too popular at times, but still lovely.

Not far from Jinshan, the **Juming Museum** (朱銘美術館; Zhūmíng Měishùguǎn; ☎ 2486 9940; www.juming.org.tw; adult/child NT250/220; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun May-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Apr) is a 15-hectare park built to display the creative works of internationally recognised sculptor Juming from Miaoli County, including works that have been displayed in Paris, Hong Kong and Tokyo. It's a 10-minute taxi ride (NT150 to NT200) to the museum from Jinshan. For more information, check out the museum's excellent website and see the boxed text on p53.

Getting There & Away

To get here, take a Kuo Kuang Hao bus heading to Jinshan from the Zhongxiao-Fuxing MRT station (the bus stop outside exit 2). Buses (NT83) run every 15 minutes.

18 LORDS TEMPLE 十八王公

People sometimes refer to this temple (Shíbā Wánggōng) as the 'dog temple'. According to one version of the legend, 17 fishermen went

missing one day. One loyal dog pined for days for the return of his master until, unable to bear the suffering any longer, he leaped into the foaming sea and drowned himself. Local people were so impressed by this act of loyalty they built a temple in honour of the dog.

Years later, the Kuomintang (KMT) constructed the first nuclear power plant behind the temple. Both buildings are now just off Provincial Hwy 2.

The temple, we should warn, is not at all picturesque. In fact, you can barely see it for the ugly crowded shops and stalls. Still, the opportunity to be blessed by a dog should not be missed if you are driving through the area.

BAISHAWAN BEACH 白沙灣

The best beach on the north coast is found at this little bay (Báishāwān), the name of which translates as 'white sand bay' (though these days it is definitely more of a yellow colour). The **North Coast National Scenic Area Administration** (☎ 2363 4503; www.northguan-nsa.gov.tw/en/index.php; 🕒 8am-5pm) has helped to clean up the area and keep the vendors and shops organised. There's none of the chaos plaguing the nearby beaches at Jinshan, though there certainly are crowds on the weekend.

The entrance to the beach is down a road 100m or so off Hwy 2 (there are brown signs in English). Swimming is permitted during summer (June to September) and in recent years a surfing scene of sorts has taken off. You'll find no end of shops offering boards and wetsuits should you want to try your hand at the sport. And you'll also find no end of young Taiwanese paddling their boards in the shallows not daring or caring to actually get on the waves.

To get to the beach, take the MRT to Danshui, then catch a **Tamshui (Danshui) Bus Company** (☎ 2621 3340) bus heading east to Jinshan/Keelung (NT50, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes).

DANSHUI & BALI

There are two places worth seeing further up on the North Coast; the Taipei-river suburb of **Danshui** (see p126) and the charming sea-front town of **Bali** (see p129) are both easy day trips best made out of Taipei. These towns are accessible via the MRT from Taipei and are popular as day trips with locals as well as tourists.

NORTHEAST COAST

We're using Keelung as our kicking off point again, but this time we're heading east, where the mountains rise straight from the sea. This is a great region for lovers of the outdoors; as there are swimming and surfing beaches and a number of excellent day hikes along the coastal bluffs. And, of course, this being Taiwan, you'll find hot springs.

For the history and culture buff there are two old mining towns from the Japanese era to explore. Interestingly, one of the most precious legacies of this era is an old street filled with teahouses. Further south, you'll find a fantastic private collection of stone lions and a centre devoted to the traditional arts.

Most of this area falls under the auspices of the **Northeast Coast Scenic Administration** (☎ 2499 1115; www.necoast-nsa.gov.tw). Its headquarters and visitor centre are in Fulong.

JIUFEN & JINGUASHI 金瓜石 九份

☎ 02 / pop 2000

Nestled against the mountains and hemmed in by the sea are the small villages of Jiufen (Jiūfen) and Jinguashi (Jīngūāshì), two of the quaintest stops along the northeast coast. Both villages were once centres of gold mining during the Japanese era. In the 1930s, Jiufen was so prosperous it was known as 'Little Shanghai'. Jinguashi later became notorious during WWII as the site of the prisoner of war camp Kinkaseki.

When the mining sources dried up, Jiufen and Jinguashi became backwaters just waiting to be rediscovered. Jiufen's discovery happened first. After the release of the 1989 film *City of Sadness*, set in Jiufen during the Japanese occupation, urban Taiwanese began to flock to the old village in search of a way of life that had been all but swept away in the rush to modernisation. The old town, rich in decorative old teahouses, Japanese-style homes and traditional narrow lanes gave them exactly what they were looking for.

Jinguashi hit the traveller's radar just recently and we have to say it has completely eclipsed its neighbour, except for as a place to sit and drink tea. Our recommended itinerary would be to spend the morning and early afternoon in Jinguashi enjoying the

Gold Ecological Park and strolling through the verdant treeless hills, and the afternoon and early evening hanging out at one of the old teahouses on the hillsides of Jiufen before returning to Taipei.

Orientation & Information

Many of Jinguashi's sites are in what's called the Gold Ecological Park. The park is a showcase for just how well the Taiwanese government can design a new tourist area when they can start from scratch and own the rights to the land. The contrast between the orderliness of the park and its high quality facilities and infrastructure, and the chaos, grubbiness and piecemeal improvements in Jiufen is striking.

The park is free but a ticket allows you entry into the Crown Prince Chalet and the Museum of Gold. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 2496 2800; www.gep.tpc.gov.tw; 🕒 9am-5pm) at the start of the park, where you can pick up an English brochure that includes a good map and information on all the attractions, both inside the park and out.

As for Jiufen, there are really only two main streets to consider and they intersect: Jishan St, a narrow covered alley, and Shuchi Rd, a long set of stairs. On these two streets you'll find most of the teahouses, craft shops, galleries and food stalls Jiufen is famous for.

Jiufen Sights & Activities

JISHAN STREET 基山街

Narrow, covered Jishan St (Jīshān Jiē) often leaves lasting impressions. We were taken there and to a nearby teahouse during our first week in Taiwan, and have never forgotten it. Jishan is really just one long, narrow covered lane, but spending a few hours here browsing the knick-knack, curio and craft shops is a lot of fun.

One of the most popular activities on the street is snacking. Some distinctive snacks to look for include *yuyuán* (芋圓; taro balls), *yúwán* (魚丸; fish balls), *cǎozǐ gāo* (草仔糕; herbal cakes) and *hēitáng gāo* (黑糖糕; molasses cake).

TEAHOUSES

Apart from shopping, strolling and snacking, the main attraction in Jiufen is spending a few hours in a stylish traditional teahouse sipping fine tea. This isn't everyone's - well - cup of tea, but for those of us who love it,

Jiufen gets top marks as a place to indulge in a favourite pastime. The best shops, which are mostly on the stepped Shuchi Rd, are like folk art museums, filled with curios and antiques. Note that the teahouses don't have English signs outside.

The price for making your own tea (*pào chá*) is much the same everywhere: NT250 to NT400 for a packet of leaves and NT100 for your water fee. The following teahouses are among the best.

The owner claims his business, **Jiufen Teahouse** (Jiufen Cháfang; ☎ 2496 9056; 142 Jishan St; ☎ 10am-10pm), housed in a 90-year-old building, was the first teahouse in Jiufen. There is indoor and outdoor seating, and it's hard to decide which to choose, though we usually sit inside as the wood and brick design has such a charming old-world feel to it. The teahouse only serves tea and snacks, but if you want a meal they will direct you to their (almost) as-nice sister restaurant down the street.

Bafan Gold Site Teahouse (Bāfān Cháguān; ☎ 2496 0692; 300 Chingpien Rd; ☎ 10am-10pm) is a three-storey place that's well stocked with antique

furnishings. Indoor and outdoor seating is available. The views from the decks are the perfect complement to Chinese tea brewed the classical way.

We're listing **City of Sadness** (Bēiqíng Chéngshì; ☎ 2496 9917; 35 Shuchi Rd; ☎ 10am-midnight) because of its fame, but have to say that it is not one of our favourite teahouses. The place is a little cramped and unfortunately placed on the end of the lane where trucks and other modern nuisances can too often be heard.

JILONGSHAN 雞籠山

You can't miss this emerald colossus for the way it dominates the skyline. At only 588m, Jilongshan (Jílóngshān) may read like a rather puny giant, but it rises up so fast and steep, it's dizzying to stare at from below. You can climb the peak in about 40 minutes.

Jinguashi Sights & Activities

GOLD ECOLOGICAL PARK 黃金博物園區

We could, and did, spend hours just wandering this park (Huángjīn Bówùyuánqū), set high above the village in green, quiet

hillsides. In fact, the natural environment around Jinguashi should be as big a draw as the cultural attractions.

A couple of the highlights in the park include the **Crown Prince Chalet** (太子賓館; Tàizǐ Bīngguǎn), built as an official residence for the Japanese royal family to use when visiting Taiwan (alas, they never came). It's the best-preserved Japanese style wooden residence in Taiwan, and really quite a beauty. The ruins of the **Gold Temple** (黃金神社; Huángjīn Shénshè) sit high on the steep slopes above Jinguashi and look like something out of Greek mythology.

REMAINS OF THE 13 LEVELS 十三層

The remains are a massive **copper smelting refinery** (*shísāncéng*) that inspires such a heavy, dystopian industrial awe it has been used as a background for music videos. The remains are down from the park heading towards the sea. There are signs in English to direct you there from the park.

GOLDEN WATERFALL 黃金瀑布

Further towards the sea is this waterfall (Huángjīn Pùbù), so-called because its water has a yellow hue from the copper and iron deposits it picks up as it passes through Jinguashi's old mines.

Getting There & Around

The two towns are only 3km away from each other and are served by buses every 10 minutes or so. To get there, take a train from Taipei to Ruifang (fast/slow train NT80/38, 40/60 minutes, every 30 minutes). Pick up a ticket (NT100) to the Gold Ecological Park at the visitor centre in the train station and then cross the main road to catch the bus heading to Jiufen-Jinguashi (you'll pass Jiufen first). Your ticket allows you four rides on the bus.

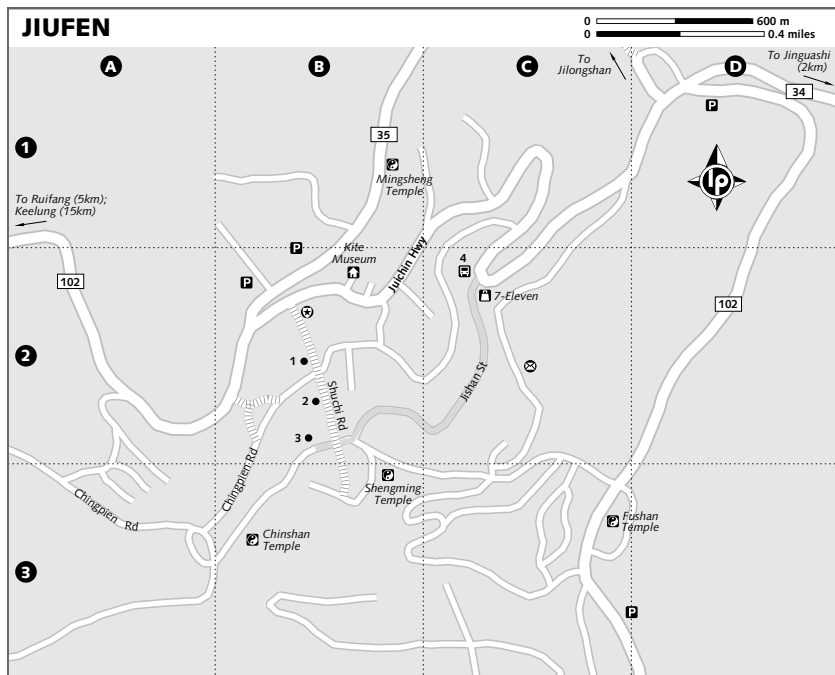
The bus drops you off right at the start of the Gold Ecological Park in Jinguashi. Return to this spot when you want to go to Jiufen. Get off at the bus stop by the 7-Eleven. Jishan St begins just across the street.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bafan Gold Site Teahouse 八番茶館.....	1 B2
City of Sadness 悲情城市餐廳.....	2 B2
Jiufen Teahouse 九份茶坊.....	3 B2

TRANSPORT

Jiufen Bus Stop 九份站.....	4 C2
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BITOU CAPE 鼻頭角

One of three capes along the north coast, Bitou Cape (Bítóu Jiǎo) is of note for its beautiful sea-eroded cliffs, fantastic views along the coast, and the **Bitou Cape Trail** (鼻頭角步道; Bítóu Jiǎo Bùdào), which is like an easier version of the nearby and more majestic Caoling Historical Trail.

Interestingly, the rock formations at one part of the trail were formed six million years ago, while those at another, only 3km away, were formed 60 million years ago. For fun, make a bet with your companions to see who can tell which is which.

The trail starts near the bus stop before the tunnel and takes a couple of hours to walk. There is a map in English. To get here from Keelung, take a bus (NT65, 20 minutes, every hour) from the **Keelung Bus Company** (☎ 02-2433 6111) station.

LONGDONG 龍洞

Just through the tunnel past Bitou Cape is Longdong (Lóngdòng), a well known, but not particularly good, diving and snorkelling spot in the north. There are two sections of Longdong and they are connected by the very scenic **Longdong Cape Trail** (Lóngdòng Wǎnjiǎo Bùdào), which is around 7km long. The trail starts at the Longdong South Marina Ocean Paradise (Lóngdòng Nánkǒu Hǎiyáng Gōngyuán; the sign off the highway says Lungtungnankou), a few kilometres to the south of the Longteng Bay Park (Lóngdòngwān Gōngyuán).

Keelung Bus Company buses stop outside the park every hour or so (NT70, 20 minutes).

Within walking distance of the bay park is an area described as having the best **rock climbing** in northern Taiwan. Check out www.geocities.com/Yosemite/1976 for more information and contacts, and also pick up a copy of *Long Dong Trad Climbs* by Matt Robertson. The book is available at various mountain equipment shops around the Taipei Train Station.

YENLIAO 鹽寮

This is northern Taiwan's longest **beach** (Yánliáo; adult/child NT180/90; ☎ 8am-6pm) and we're always surprised that it doesn't get the same buzz as Fulong. Facilities at the beach include a garden area as you enter, a children's water park, a café, showers and changing rooms.

To get to Yenliao Beach, take a train to Fulong (fast/slow train NT132/85, 60/80 minutes, every 30 minutes), 5km to the south, and then a taxi. Alternatively, catch any bus heading up the coast.

FULONG BEACH 福隆海水浴場

The most popular beach (Fúlóng Hǎishuǐ Yùchǎng; admission NT50; ☎ May-Oct) in northern Taiwan is also one of the best and easiest to get to. Fulong has a long sandy beach and clear waters suitable for sailing, windsurfing, surfing and other sports. In recent years the town of Fulong has seen some aesthetic improvements (some buildings have actually had a fresh coat of paint applied), and the beach area is getting new wooden boardwalks, pavilions, treed parks and open-air restaurants. All in all, the town is starting to shape up into a community that's on a par with its natural resources.

Note that there are two parts to the beach, divided by the Shuangshi River. The left beach, behind the visitor centre, is the pay area. If you head right and go through the YMCA grounds and continue towards a large temple on the end of a peninsula, you'll get to the free beach, which is a great place to swim or surf and is reasonably clean in summer.

Dangers & Annoyances

The beach is officially closed after October but people still go there to surf and swim. Note that the beach is usually pretty dirty at this time unless a crew has been in to clean it up recently.

The currents at Fulong can be treacherous in places, especially where the river flows into the sea. The beach is also constantly changing; it lost a lot of sand a few years back to a typhoon. Fortunately, it is coming back nicely.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that people do not swim several days after a typhoon as many contaminants get washed into the sea from the land. During summer, the EPA makes regular announcements about the water quality here and at other beaches.

Festivals

Every July, Fulong is the host of the **Hohaiyan Music Festival**. Now in its eighth year, the festival has grown from a small indie event into the largest outdoor concert in Taiwan, attracting hundreds of thousands over a three-day

period. The festival is free and features local and international bands (though so far nobody big). Being a long-weekend concert the exact date changes each year, and sudden cancellations or rescheduling may occur because of typhoons. The official website (www.alluni.com.tw/hahaiyan/) is all in Chinese, though this may change. In any case, the English-language newspapers always report on the festival, as does the Youth Travel in Taiwan website (<http://youthtravel.tw/web/index.php>).

Sleeping & Eating

Longmen Riverside Camping Resort (龍門露營區; Lóngmén Lùyīn Qū; ☎ 02-2499 1791; 4-person site incl tent from NT800, 2-/4-person cabins NT2300/3500) This 37-hectare camp site by the Shuangshi River has accommodation for up to 1600 people. There are tent sites and A-frame log cabins. Camping is a bit pricey for sure, but two groups with their own small tents can rent one site for NT600. Note that there is an additional fee of NT70 per person to enter the camp site.

The site is well laid out and facilities are clean and modern. Bicycles, barbecues and rowboats are available for hire. To get to the camp site from Fulong train station, exit the station and turn left at the main road (the highway). Just past the visitor centre a dedicated lane runs along the highway to the campground, making it quite safe to walk. It takes about 10 minutes to walk to the campground from the station. There are plenty of restaurants, cafes, lunch-box shops and convenience stores around the train station. By the temple near the free beach are several good seafood places sharing an outdoor patio.

Getting There & Away

Trains from Taipei to Fulong (fast/slow train NT132/85, 60/80 minutes) leave every 30 minutes or so.

CAOLING (TSAOLING) HISTORIC TRAIL 草嶺古道

If you can only do one hike during your stay in Taiwan, make it this one, which runs along the rugged coastal mountains from Fulong to Daxi. The first sections of the trail take you through thick woodlands and scrub, which are pleasant enough, but it's the many, many kilometres along high grassy bluffs overlooking the Pacific that make this hike such a treasure. To top things off, there are wild grazing

buffalo to observe and a few boulder-sized historical tablets.

In 1807 the government in Taiwan built the Caoling Trail (Cǎolǐng Gǔdào) to provide transport between Danshui and Ilan. The 8.5km section that remains today is one of the few historical roads left in Taiwan.

In recent years, a long addition was made to the trail called the **Taoyuan Valley Trail** (桃園谷步道; Táoyuángǔ Bùdào). Taoyuan Valley is not a valley but an emerald grassy bluff, kept trim by the water buffalo. It's stunningly beautiful up here and makes a prime spot for picnicking. With the addition of the Taoyuan Valley Trail section, the entire Caoling Trail is about 16km long and takes five to eight hours to complete.

The entire trail is broad and simple to follow, with signposts and maps, though it certainly is strenuous in places. There is not the slightest danger of getting lost, but do save the walk for the autumn, winter or spring months. You'll roast at the top during summer.

There are many ways to tackle this trail, so get a map from the Fulong visitor centre to plan which route is best for you. You need not do the entire trail, but if you do, we like starting at Daxi (the trailhead is clearly marked just north of the train station) and working our way back to Fulong. There are trains from Taipei to Daxi (NT104, 90 minutes, every two hours).

If you want to spend the night in the elaborate and sprawling **Tiengong Temple** (天公廟; Tiāngōng Miào; ☎ 03-978 1075), stop in Dali (大里), about midway on the trail (though you must walk down to reach the temple). Room charge is by donation.

DAXI (MIYUEWAN) 大溪

☎ 03 / pop 500

There's not much to recommend in Daxi (Dàxī) itself, but just south of town is a popular surfing beach known as **Honeymoon Bay** (蜜月灣; Miyuè Wān). The beach used to be a popular hang-out for foreign beach bums, but has become less so in recent times as the surfing scene has pretty much taken over and the quality of the beach itself deteriorates year after year. The waves are generally chest to head high, though during the summer typhoon months they can get much higher than that and conditions can become quite challenging.

Normally though, Honeymoon Bay is a fine location for beginner and intermediate surfers, though for more experienced surfers this means that during peak season you will be sharing the waters with a lot of people who don't know what they are doing. And we mean a lot, as surfing has really hit Taiwan big time in the past few years, and there isn't a lot of emphasis on skills and etiquette.

You can surf at Honeymoon Bay all year round, with only a swimsuit needed from April to November. Throughout the late spring and summer months (and now increasing into the autumn months too), you'll find a number of shops and kiosks on the beach renting surfing equipment (NT600 per day for boards), and selling things to eat and drink. Note that the boards for rent are pretty low quality.

To get to Daxi, take a train (NT104, 90 minutes, every two hours) from Taipei. When you get off at Daxi, cross the road and walk south about 600m along the seawall to reach the beach.

One place where English is spoken is the **Spider Surf Club** (☎ 978 1321; www.spidersurfing.com; 96 Binghai Rd, sec.5; 濱海路5段96號), which offers surfing lessons (including room and board NT3000) and dorm accommodation (NT300) on weekends. It also has showers (NT50) if you just want to rinse off after a day at the beach. When you exit the train station, the club is just to the left on the other side of the street.

If you wish to camp, you can use the grounds of the elementary school behind the beach on nonschool days. The school charges NT300 a site. Classrooms can also be rented for NT1000. Talk to the janitor.

WAI-AO 外澳

Wai-ao (Wài-ào) is a small village on the coast that has become a popular surfing venue in recent years. The surf is rough here and not really suitable for swimming or beginner surfers. Trains from Taipei (NT117, 100 minutes) leave every two hours or so.

LION'S KINGDOM MUSEUM & LEO RESORT 里歐海洋渡假中心

Despite the name making it sound like a Disney theme park, this **museum** (Hédōngtáng Shìzì Bówùguǎn; admission NT180) has a fantastic private

collection of stone lions of every shape, size, colour and country of origin. Most are at least a hundred years old, and some are far, far older than that. The collection numbers around 6000 pieces and at least 500 are on display, in addition to some stone horses, turtles and old decorative window frames. This is really a must-see for anyone interested in Asian art.

The museum occupies two floors of the splendid seaside **Leo Resort** (Liū Haiyáng Dǔjià Zhōngxīn; ☎ 03-987 0782; 36 Binhai Rd, sec.4, Toucheng; 濱海路4段36號; d/tw from NT6300/9900, weekdays NT5600/8800), where we would gladly spend a major birthday or anniversary. Set off the road, next to a protected stretch of coastline, the five-storey hotel overlooks the ocean and includes a full view of Turtle Island from the dining room. Down by the seaside there's a lush green garden, a saltwater pool and various wooden decks overlooking the sea (but protected from the tide by high rocks). There are also hammocks in the trees, a nice, all-too-rare touch in Taiwan.

By the end of 2007 the hotel will offer genuine hot-spring water in both the rooms and the outdoor swimming pool. Room rates include admission to the museum, breakfast, afternoon coffee and dinner. The food is delicious and very fresh: the seafood, for example, is delivered daily from the nearby Wushih Fishing Harbour.

Note that nonguests can also stop by for a meal or just a coffee down by the sea.

If you are taking public transport, catch a train to Toucheng (fast/slow train NT189/122, 1½/two hours, every 30 minutes) and then a taxi, which should cost around NT150 to NT200 for the 10-minute drive.

TURTLE ISLAND (KUEISHAN ISLAND)

龜山島

This captivating volcanic islet (Guīshān Dǎo), 10km off the coast of Ilan, is less than 3km long yet rises up to 400m and supports 13 species of butterflies and 33 species of birds.

The island also has numerous quirky geological features. These include underwater hot springs that turn the offshore water into a bubbling cauldron, volcanic fumaroles that spout steam, and a 'turtle head' that faces right or left depending on where you stand on shore.

Turtle Island is open from March to October. You must apply at least two weeks in

advance for a special permit if you wish to land on the island. (If you simply wish to sail around it you don't need a permit.) You can download a copy of the application form, but only from the Chinese section of the northeast coast's website (www.necoast-nsa.gov.tw). Once you get your permit, call a boat operator to make a reservation. Here's one to try: ☎ 978 0870.

Boats leave from Wushih Harbour (Wūshí Gǎng). It costs NT600 for a 1½-hour cruise to and around the island, and NT1000 for a three-hour tour that includes a stop on the island (though hopefully not as long as that more famous three-hour tour, Gilligan's Island). Combination tours involving stops on the island and whale-watching are also available (NT1400, 4½ hours).

To get to Wushih Harbour, take a train from Taipei to Toucheng (fast/slow train NT189/122, 1½/two hours, every 30 minutes) and then a short taxi ride.

Call the **English Tourist Hotline** (☎ 0800-011765) or **Northeast Coast Scenic Administration** (☎ 02-2499 1115) for more information.

PEI KUAN CRAB MUSEUM

北關螃蟹博物館

After our respectful review of the Lion's Kingdom Museum (p161), you'd be forgiven for expecting this **crab museum** (Pángxiè Bówùguǎn; ☎ 03-977 2168; admission NT250; ☎ 9am-5pm) to be a slapstick afterthought. A crab museum? What's up with that?

Well, a lot actually. Two floors, in fact, devoted to the dozens of crab species found in Taiwan. The first floor exhibits whole crab exteriors, and the sheer range of colours, shapes and sizes is astonishing – and at times plain creepy. The horseshoe crab, for instance, has a dark slick cover that looks uncomfortably like the shell of the monster in *Alien*.

There are English signs for each category of crab though not for each species. Kids will love it here, as will anyone with even a mild interest in the natural world. The price is very steep because it includes access to the Pei Kuan Farm. Come during the spring months when fireflies light up the riverbeds and walkways.

The museum is up a side road a few kilometres off Hwy 2 south of the 131km mark. There are signs in English on the highway, though none on the way up, but just look for the crab pictures. It's best to have your own transport to get here.

JIAOSHI 礁溪

☎ 03 / pop 5000

Jiaoshi is a small town just off the coast well known for its three-layered waterfall, hot springs and related cuisine (they grow vegetables in hot spring water here). It's close enough to Taipei for a day trip, though with two dozen or so hot spring hotels, and countless restaurants and cafés, you can easily make it an overnighter or even stay a weekend.

Orientation & Information

Jiaoshi is fairly compact and you can walk around most of the hot-springs area in an hour. There's a helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 987 2403; 16 Gongyuan Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm; ☎) a 10-minute walk from the train station. Pick up some brochures, as there's a lot more in the area than we can cover, or check out the website for Ilan County (<http://svr2.ilccb.gov.tw/ready/ilan/e-sitemap.asp>).

From the station, head up the road and take the first right. Walk a few blocks until the road joins Hwy 9. Cross and then take a quick left. The centre is just up the road. There is usually someone there who speaks English, but it's always good to call ahead to confirm this if you think you will need their services. There's free internet at the centre.

Sights & Activities

WUFENGCHI WATERFALL 五峰旗大瀑布

Almost directly in line with Turtle Island is the Wufengchi Waterfall (Wūfēngchǐ Pùbù). There are three layers and each one is more impressive than the last.

The falls are 3.5km northwest of the Jiaoshi train station (礁溪火車站). There is no public transport to the falls so you must walk or catch a taxi (NT150).

HOT SPRINGS

Jiaoshi is one of the few hot-spring towns developed by the Japanese that has not been overdeveloped to the point where there simply isn't enough water for all the businesses that claim to use it. The springs produce salty, odourless water at 60°C, known to be good for countering nervousness and general feelings of malaise.

In general, we recommend the places west of Hwy 9 heading towards the mountains. An inexpensive option is the new stylish **public spring park** (湯圍溝公園; Tāngwéigōu Gōngyuán; ☎ 987 4882; admission NT80; ☎ 10am-11pm) set up by

the Jiaoshi government. There are free foot-soaking tubs outside, and very lovely wood and stone segregated pools inside (clothing optional). To get to the pools, head straight up the road from the train station. Turn left on Hwy 9 (the second road up) and then take the first right. The hot springs are on the left a few blocks up.

HIKING

The 6.5km historic **Paoma Gudao** (跑馬古道; Pǎomǎ Gùdào), or Running Horse Historic Trail, trots over the grassy slopes high above Jiaoshi. The trailhead is 3km from the train station. It's best to take a taxi as the trail is one-way, and there's no point doing the road section twice. Paoma Gudao is wide, clear, smooth and simple to follow. On the way back just keep heading down and you will reach Jiaoshi and probably a hot-spring hotel will catch your eye as a place to soak your tired bones.

Getting There & Around

Trains to Jiaoshi (Chiaoshi; fast/slow train NT205/132, 1½/2 hours) leave Taipei about every half hour.

You can rent scooters outside the train station (NT300 to NT600) with an International Driver's Licence.

LUODONG (LOTONG) 羅東

☎ 03 / pop 73,196

Not far south of Jiaoshi, this small town (Lódōng) has put itself on the map with its massively popular children's festival and a new centre dedicated to reviving traditional arts in Taiwan.

Every summer for four to five weeks in July and August, Ilan County plays host to the **Ilan International Children's Folklore & Folk-game Festival** (國際童玩藝術節; Guójiā Tóngwán Yìshù Jié; ☎ 931 0720; www.folkgame.org.tw; adult/child NT450/200), where top children's performers and performing troops are brought in from around the world. For families this is a must-see event. The festival is held in Chinsui Park (親水公園; Qīnshuǐ Gōngyuán), which has facilities for rowing, wading and getting wet and wild in summer.

The **National Centre of Traditional Arts** (國立傳統藝術中心; Guólí Chuántǒng Yìshù Zhōngxīn; ☎ 960 5230, ext 164; www.ncta.gov.tw; admission free; ☎ 9am-9pm; ☎) occupies 24 hectares along the scenic Tongshan River, providing a venue for

THE HSUEHSAN TUNNEL 雪山隧道

At 12.9km, this tunnel (Xuěshān Sùidào) is the longest in Asia and the fourth longest in the world. It's also had one of the longest periods of construction – when it finally opened in June 2006, work on the tunnel had been underway since 1991.

The tunnel is the centrepiece of the 55km-long National Hwy 5 connecting Taipei with Ilan County. It was supposed to open up the east coast, but along the way it opened an ancient aquitard and the water just kept on pouring out. Boring machines were flooded and buried, work slowed to a halt for months on end, and at many points engineers wondered if they should consider giving up.

They persevered, but at the cost of US\$1.8 billion and 25 lives. Was it worth it? Hwy 5 facilitates fast travel from Nangan in Taipei County to Suao in Ilan County. When it's not backed up (all the way from Nangan to Suao), the highway cuts travelling time down to a third of what it once was. While letting people rush to Jiaoshi in 30 minutes for an evening dip in a hot spring may seem a frivolous waste of money and life, the highway and tunnel will doubtless save lots of both in the future: the old tortuous route was the scene of countless fatal accidents.

If you decide to drive Hwy 5 and pass through the tunnel, avoid early mornings and evenings, especially on weekends and summer days. The best windows for smooth sailing are between 10am and 4pm and after 8pm.

the research and performance of folk music, opera, dance, toy making and even acrobatics. For visitors there is an exhibition hall, a learning centre, a temple especially built to help preserve temple-related arts, and a folk-arts street where you can browse for glassware, paper cuttings and glove puppets in a recreated traditional township atmosphere.

Trains to Luodong (fast/slow train NT243/157, 1½/2½ hours) leave Taipei about every half hour. Once in Luodong, it's a short taxi ride to the arts centre or water park. During festival times shuttle buses run between the train station and both sites.

SUAO TO HUALIEN

Just past Luodong, Hwy 9 rejoins the coast and begins what is known as the Suao–Hualien Hwy. The road stretches for 118km along the coastline and is literally carved into sheer cliff walls. One of the most breathtaking sections is called the Chingshui cliffs, where the highway twists its way around towering walls of marble and granite that loom over 1000m above the rocky seashore.

The beginnings of the route go back to 1874, when China's Qing government ordered a road to be built along the east coast, with the aim of alleviating some of the isolation of the region. The Japanese widened the road in 1920, battling with landslides and earthquakes the whole time. In fact,

the road didn't officially reopen for public use until 1932.

Most people drive the highway on their way to Hualien and only stop to look at the scenery. If you're a spring aficionado, consider a break in Suao for a cold spring, and then another in Nanao for a hot spring.

SUAO 蘇澳

☎ 03 / pop 44, 487

Suao is a grubby little port town noted only for the **Suao Cold Springs** (蘇澳冷泉; Sùào Lěng Quán; ☎ 996 0645; admission NT70; 🕒 8am–10pm). The carbonated springs have an average temperature of 22°C and are completely odourless, making them a rare treasure in the world. The large outdoor facilities have been updated to look somewhat like a Roman bath. It gets pretty busy here in summer.

There are about 10 trains a day from Taipei (fast/slow NT273/176, two/2½ hours).

NANAO 南澳

☎ 03 / pop 500

The small coastal town of Nanao (Nánào) has a pretty crescent bay and dark sandy beach visible from the highway as you make your descent from the hills. It's a lovely beach for strolling along (though it's sometimes littered) and taking in the gorgeous coastal scenery. If you have time for more, Nanao has more, including hot springs, waterfalls, hikes and some quiet country roads for biking. Amazingly there is an English website in English

(www.gmes.tpc.edu.tw/~2000/en/html/jyes/jyes3.htm) introducing the area. We guess the locals know they have a good thing going and want to share it.

Sights & Activities

JINYUE WATERFALL 金岳瀑布

The turnout for the road to the falls (Jinyuè Pùbù) is around the 133km mark on Hwy 9. After you cross the bridge you'll reach the school for the 200-soul aboriginal community of Jin-yue. Turn left and follow the road for a few kilometres. When you pass the second bridge, the road to the right leads to the falls in 10 minutes.

The main reason to come to this fall is to swim in the pool under it. You'll need river-

tracing boots as the trail takes you to the top of the falls and there's no way down. Instead you must walk back 100m or so and take a side trail down to the riverbed and then trace your way back upstream to the falls and the lovely pool under them, which is a simple enough matter with the proper shoes.

FOUR PARTS HOT SPRINGS 四區溫泉

These alkaline carbonate hot springs (Sìqū Wēnquán) have water temperatures around 45°C. To get to them, follow the directions for Jinyue Waterfall, but when you reach the junction at the school, go right and follow the river up. Two or 3km later you'll see a sign in English for the springs. From the road, follow rough steps down to the river to find



three simple concrete pools under a simple roof. Though it would be nicer if the structure were a little more natural looking, it is still a pleasant place for a free soak and a great way to meet local people. Some people camp on the riverbank just behind the springs.

Afterwards, continue down to the end of the road and head down to the Nanao North River. When the grey muddy water is low (it's a grey colour as a result of quarrying far upstream) you can easily walk on the sandy banks and over the colourful boulders. The scenery is really splendid here, especially as the river takes a bend into a canyon whose walls rise up steeply for hundreds of metres.

CYCLING

Even if you have your own vehicle, Nanao is a great place for cycling. On both sides of the highway, towards the ocean or into the mountains, you'll find quiet country roads (especially midweek). Down by the rivers there are many rough dirt paths. Get out and explore.

You can rent bikes at the Nan-ao Recreation Farm for NT300 a day.

KAYAKING

The coastal waters here are known for excellent sea kayaking and the Nanao North River is a popular spot for river kayaking. Contact Andre at Cloud 9 in Pinglin (p150) for more information.

Sleeping & Eating

Nan-Ao Recreation Farm (南澳農場; Nánào Nóngchǎng; ☎ 988 1114; <http://nanao-farm.e-land.gov.tw/html/link2.htm>; tent sites from NT200) This large, clean, green and well-run camp site has showers, bathrooms, barbecue sites and lots of trees for shade. It's just south of the centre of Nanao town.

If driving south turn left after crossing the bridge, around the 134.5km mark. Follow the road down about 1km to the obvious camp site entrance (NT60 entrance fee).

If you are taking the train, note that you should get off at the station past Nanao, called Wuta. This is a little nothing of a station without even a ticket booth. Head downhill to the highway and turn right. Cross the bridge and follow the directions above. The distance from the station is about 2km.

There are many small noodle shops and restaurants in Nanao beside the highway. There's also a 7-Eleven, a small grocery

store and a night market near the town square. Jin-yue Village also has simple places to eat.

Getting There & Away

There are five trains in the morning from Suao to Wuta Train Station (NT62, 45 minutes).

NORTH CROSS-ISLAND HIGHWAY

If you're looking for wild scenery but want a change of pace from coastal waters and rugged shorelines, try a journey down National Hwy 7, also known as the North Cross-Island Hwy (Běibù Héngguān Gōnglù).

The highway starts in the old Taoyuan County town of Daxi (not to be confused with the Ilan County town on the north-east coast), famous for its excellent *dòugān* (firm tofu) and the Qing-dynasty façades on Heping St. At first the road winds through the countryside, passing flower farms and settlements, including the burial grounds of former leader Chiang Kai-shek. After passing above Shimen Reservoir, the largest body of water in northern Taiwan, the road narrows and starts to rise and wind its way along steep gorges, across precipitously high bridges and, in general, through some pretty fantastic mountain scenery.

At Chilán, the highway descends suddenly and an hour later enters the flood plains of the Lanyang River. It then continues north-east to Ilan, with spur routes to Luodong and Wuling Forest Recreation Area.

You can drive the highway in four or five hours, but there are many great stops leading to waterfalls, caves, forest reserves, hot springs and stands of ancient trees. It's best to have your own transport, as buses are few and far between.

The entire highway can literally become a car park during Chinese New Year and on hot summer weekends. Late autumn and winter are especially good times to go as the crowds are thin and the sights seem improved by the chill and mist in the air. If you drive, be very aware of both other drivers and the natural hazards. This road defines curvy and treacherous, and some part of the surface is always under repair due to typhoons and landslides. While much of the road is being

widened these days, in some places there is only enough room for one car.

Information

The **Pei Herng Travel Service Centre** (Cihu Service Centre; ☎ 03-388 3552; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), just off Hwy 7 at the back of a large car park, covers Taoyuan County and sights along the North Cross-Island Hwy. The centre is half a kilometre before the turn-off for the tomb of Chiang Kai-shek (to which you can walk from the centre). It really depends on who is working as to whether you'll get helpful information or not.

Taipei Day Trips II (see Hiking, p329) has an informative write-up about much of the highway, including a number of very interesting hikes that are too detailed for us to include.

Getting There & Around

To begin your journey by bus, you need to get to Daxi (大溪; Dàxī) first. Take the MRT to Ximen Station and take exit 2. Walk south to Guiyang St and turn left. Cross the road and just past Yanping Rd wait at the bus stop in front of Soochow University. Catch the Taipei-Daxi bus (NT104, one hour, every 30 minutes) to the **Taoyuan Bus Company** (桃園客運; ☎ 03-388 2002) station in Daxi. This is the last stop.

From here you can catch buses as far as Xiao Wulai, but be warned that there are fewer and fewer buses running these routes, so it's best to call the Taoyuan Bus Company to confirm the schedule. It's so much better to have your own vehicle. Consider renting a car in Taipei or a scooter in Jiaoshi.

CIHU 慈湖

Cihu (Cíhú; Lake Kindness) is a quiet, scenic park where the remains of Chiang Kai-shek's body are temporarily entombed. In the past we could hardly recommend people go here, but how time changes this country. Starting in 2006, Chiang statues have been shipped here as part of the DPP government's de-Chiangification of Taiwan. And there are *lots* of statues, as any dictator worth their salt creates a cult of personality through the constant repetition of their name and image.

Regardless of where you stand on the issue, Cihu is now a veritable wonderland of Chiang statues of all shapes, sizes and materials. Expect to take lots of pictures.

SHIMEN RESERVOIR 石門水庫

This **reservoir** (Shímén Shuǐkù; <http://shimenreservoir.wranb.gov.tw>; adult/child NT80/40) is the largest body of fresh water in the north. In the past, when there were few areas for outdoor leisure in Taiwan, the dam was deservedly popular for the beauty of its dark green hills and green-blue water, its numerous scenic pavilions and well laid-out parks. There's no doubting its appeal, but today it's hardly a must-see destination, especially as it doesn't look as though it's had an update in the 11 years we have lived in Taiwan.

The **tourist service centre** (☎ 03-471 2000; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) on the far western side of the lake has booklets in English about the dam, and there are large maps around the dam with clear directions to parks and trails.

FUSING (FUHSING, FUXING) 復興

☎ 03 / pop 1000

The aboriginal village of Fusing (Fùxíng), 18km down Hwy 7 from Daxi, makes for an excellent pit stop, or an even better base from which to explore the whole area. You can stay (or at least have a coffee) at the new Youth Activity Centre, the site of a former summer villa of Chiang Kai-shek. In town, you can get solid, aboriginal-style food, such as *tú jī* (土雞; free-range chicken), *zhútǒng fàn* (竹筒飯; rice steamed in bamboo tubes) and a variety of noodle dishes served with the mushrooms for which Fusing is famous.

The **Youth Activity Centre** (青年活動中心; Qingnián Huódòng Zhōngxīn; ☎ 382 2276; d/tw incl breakfast NT2600/3200) sits in a pretty, landscaped park on a high ridge overlooking an arm of Shimen Reservoir. The land was formerly occupied by one of Chiang Kai-shek's summer villas (it burned down in 1992), which should clue you in to the fact that it's incredibly scenic here.

The centre has large, simply furnished rooms with balcony lookouts. Views from the rooms and the patio of the **coffee shop** (coffee & tea NT100; ☎ 7am-10.30pm) are postcard perfect. Room 404 has one of the best views in the whole building. You can pick up a brochure in English at the centre that highlights attractions in the area.

On a small bluff to the right of the centre (head to the back of the parking lot and then down the wooden stairs) is **Senling Shui An** (森鄰水岸; Sēnlín Shuǐ Àn; ☎ 382 2108; coffee NT100; ☎ 9am-9pm), a small wood-cabin coffee shop run by an aboriginal family. The view here is

even more incredible than at the centre and the coffee is much better. The owner speaks English and used to be a pub singer. If there are enough people at the café, or he likes you, he will take out his guitar and play.

DONGYANSHAN FOREST RECREATION AREA 東眼山森林遊樂園

About 1km past Fusing is the turn-off for this 916-hectare **forest recreation area** (Dōngyánshān Sēnlín Yóulèyuán; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>). There are no buses, but if you have your own vehicle it's a pretty 13km drive up a good road to the **tourist centre** (☎ 03-382 1506; ☎ 8am-5pm), where you can buy simple meals and maps for the area.

The park's altitude ranges from 650m to 1200m, making it a perfect cool retreat in summer. There are many trails, some of which are nature interpretation walks suitable for families, while many others involve two- to three-hour hikes up small mountains. The longest hike is along a 16km trail that actually connects Dongyanshan with neighbouring Manyueyan Forest Recreation Area (p153). All trails start near the tourist centre and are well marked and easy to follow.

XIAO WULAI WATERFALL 小烏來瀑布

Of the four big falls in northern Taiwan – Wufengchi, Shifen, Wulai and this one – we have to say that the 40m-high Xiao Wulai (Xiǎo Wūlái Pǔbù) is our favourite. Like Wufengchi and Wulai, this fall is long and cascading, but unlike the other two you can view Xiao Wulai from a ridge almost half a kilometre away. The sweeping scene of steep mountain peaks and the long waterfall bears a remarkable likeness to the famous Song-dynasty landscape *Travellers in Mountains and Streams*.

If you are driving, the sign for the turn-off to the falls is just past the 20.5km mark. Two kilometres up County Rd 115 you'll run into a tollbooth charging entrance (NT50) into the waterfall scenic area. The ridge lookout and the start of the trails are just a few metres past the tollbooth. Further down the road are some nice swimming holes and a somewhat messy campground with hot springs.

UPPER BALING 上巴陵

☎ 03 / pop 300

This tiny aboriginal village (Shàng Báling) is famous for the **Lalashan Forest Reserve**

(拉拉山國有林自然保護區; Lāláshān Guóyǒ Lín Zìrán Bǎohùqū; ☎ 391 2761; ☎ 6am-5pm), which contains a stand of ancient cypress trees. The village is about an hour's drive from Fusing and can be disturbingly crowded on summer weekends and holidays. This is definitely a place to keep for a quiet winter weekday.

The way to the old tree area is clearly designated from Upper Baling. In the reserve itself, a 3.7km path winds through the forest and each tree is specially marked to indicate its age, species, height and diameter. There are over 100 old trees, the oldest reported to be 2800 years old!

To get to the reserve, exit Hwy 7 onto County Rd 116 at the village of (lower) Baling (巴陵; Báiling). Pay your entrance fee (NT100) at the tollbooth, continue up a very steep road to Upper Baling and then go on to a parking lot at the end of the road (about 13km from the turn-off on Hwy 7). The trail starts here and there's a small **exhibition hall** (☎ 9am-6pm) where you can pick up maps and information. Note that there are no longer any buses to Baling.

From the reserve it is possible to hike all the way downhill to **Fushan** (福山; Fúshān; six hours) near Wulai on the Fu-Ba Trail (福八越嶺; Fú-bā Yuèlǐng). This is part of the National Trail System (see Hiking, p329).

There are numerous B&Bs in the area should you want to stay the night. Note that the Baling area is famous for its peaches and pears, but don't buy them as high mountain fruit farming is a scourge on the environment.

MINGCHIH FOREST RECREATION AREA 明池森林遊憩區

This **reserve** (Míngchí Sēnlín Yóuqǐ Qū; ☎ 03-989 4104; adult/child NT150/75) makes for a great base for exploration, or a retreat from the relentless heat of summer in the city. Mingchih lies between 1000m and 1700m and so even in July the average temperature is only 20°C. If you want to get out and see the sites, there are a couple of wild hot springs nearby and a stand of ancient trees, and the old trees at Baling are only an hour's drive away, too.

Sights & Activities

MINGCHIH (LAKE MING) 明池

There's not much in the reserve itself except a pleasant little **pond** (Míngchí) across the highway that's very popular with ducks. Strolling around when you first wake up is a great way to start the day.

MA-KOU ECOLOGICAL PARK 馬告生態公園

If you continue down Hwy 7 past Mingchih, you'll see a gated road called No 100 Forest Rd. This leads into an ecological park (Mǎgào Shèntài Gōngyuán) with a stand of ancient red cypress trees. You need permits to enter the park, which essentially means you need to go with a tour organised by the forest reserve (room guest NT660, others NT869). The tours are in Chinese, but the majestic old growth forest speaks all languages. Inquire at the front desk for times and to make reservations.

HOT SPRINGS

There are numerous hot springs within a short drive of Mingchih. There are developed ones at **Renze** (仁澤溫泉), on the way up to Taipingshan, and at **Jiaoshi**, but there are also some natural ones. Here's are some good ones.

Sileng Hot Spring 四稜溫泉

What is it about the cross-island highways and their abundant hot springs? Whatever it is we are grateful. This particular natural spring (Sílèng Wēnquán) is down a steep ravine. The spring water pours and seeps down from the cliffs (stained a multitude of colours from the minerals) into a small rock pool set above a rushing river.

To get here, head west from Mingchih exactly 7.1km (to around the 59.5km mark). As you go right, round a sharp bend that juts out into the ravine, you'll see a small spot on the left to park. Park and then look for the faded signs for 'hot spring' (溫泉) on the cement barrier. When you see it cross the barrier; there's a trail starting on the other side. Follow the trail down for 40 minutes or so till you reach the river. The springs are obvious on the other side.

Note that as you hike down, the trail seems to run flat for quite a while. Note also that you must cross the river at the end, so don't go after heavy rain. River shoes will be helpful.

Fan Fan Hot Spring 梵梵溫泉

This spring (Fàn Fàn Wēnquán) is a lot easier to get to than Sileng, which means that on weekends you'll be sharing the place with the EQ-challenged who drive their 4WD vehicles up the river.

The spring is an alkali bicarbonate one, which is said to be good for the skin. The water is full of calcium and magnesium and you can drink it. To get to the springs from Mingchih,

follow Hwy 7 to the fork. Turn left and when you get to the village of Yingshi (英士) don't cross the bridge but take the side path to the right. Park and follow the river up a kilometre or so. The way up is flat and easy and the walk takes about 30 minutes.

Sleeping & Eating

Mingchih has cottages (from NT3200, 20% weekday discounts) set among tall cedar trees. Try to get a room away from the highway though, as trucks come by at all times of day or night and can disturb your sleep. An OK restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner (average meal NT250).

Getting There & Away

Private buses to Mingchih (NT250, 1½ hours) leave from the back of the Ilan (Yilan) train station at 12pm daily (returning 5.30pm). You must call (☎ 03-989 4106) to make a reservation. Ilan is on the east coast just south of Jiaoshi.

If you want to rent a car in Ilan call **Shang Xin Car Rental** (☎ 03-935 7777). It does pick-ups from the train station and the staff speak English.

WULING FOREST RECREATION AREA (WULING FARM) 武陵農場

☎ 04

Most people feel that the North Cross-Island Hwy ends around Chilán, a small forest reserve, but it actually continues south to Lishan and north to Ilan. If you want to continue your exploration of Taiwan's rugged mountains, head north. Not far south down the road is the turn-off to **Taipingshan National Forest Recreation Area** (太平山國家森林遊樂區; Taipingshān Guójiā Sēnlín Yóulè Qū; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw/forest.php?init=05&char=en&forest=1>; adult/child NT150/100), where you'll find hot springs, a small mountain train, a few trails and a pretty lake.

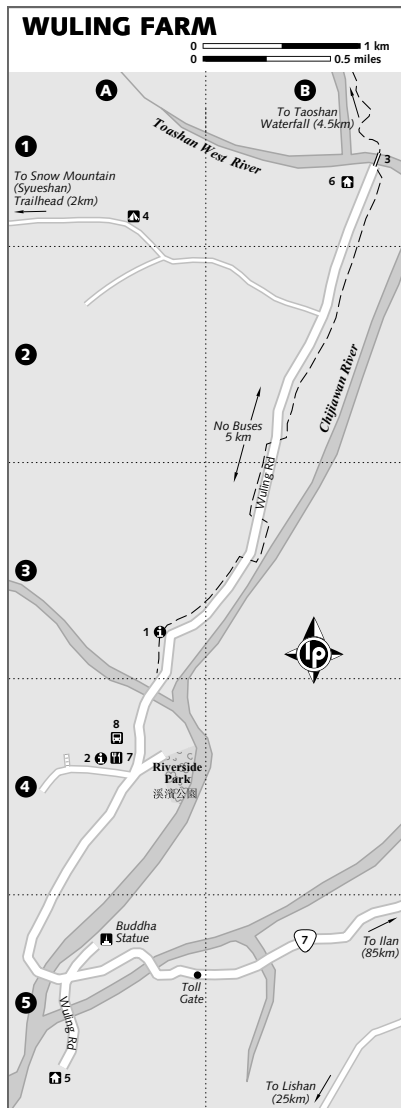
About 1½ hours further south down Hwy 7 itself is Wuling Forest Recreation Area, better known as **Wuling Farm** (Wǔlíng Nóngchǎng; admission NT160). The farm (elevation 1740m to 2200m) was originally established in 1963 as a fruit-growing area by retired soldiers. It became part of Sheipa National Park in 1992. By the time you read this there will be little farming left in the reserve as new land-use laws finally take effect.

Many travellers come to Wuling to climb Snow Mountain, Taiwan's second-highest

mountain, and in the eyes of many, including ours, the most beautiful. But Wuling also makes for a nice weekend getaway, or a cool break from the heat of summer.

Orientation & Information

There's only one main road through the park, with an offshoot to the camping ground.



There's a **Travel Service Centre** (☎ 2590 1350; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), but it doesn't have much information. The *Bunbury Map* available at the entrance gate (a treasure for fans of Oscar Wilde) is about as good as you'll get.

Online, check out the websites for the forest recreation area (<http://recreate.forest.gov.tw>), Sheipa National Park (www.spnp.gov.tw) and Wuling Farm (www.wuling-farm.com.tw).

Sights & Activities

SNOW MOUNTAIN 雪山主峰

Many hikers come to Wuling to tackle Snow Mountain (Xuě Shān; elevation 3884m). The trail takes two to three days to complete (three is best), and is broad, clear and well marked, with map boards every few kilometres and distance markers every 100m. Anyone in reasonably good shape can do it. There are two rough cabins to stay in on the way up with running water, toilets, solar lights and dorm bedding.

The best times of year to hike the mountain are autumn and spring. In late May/early June the alpine flowers bloom near the top, making this a particularly great time to go. From September to December, the weather is driest and most predictable, and your chances of having clear skies are best.

To climb the mountain you need a mountain permit and a park pass (see p330). Note that you must get your mountain permit stamped at the police station at Sheipa National Park Wuling Station before proceeding to the ranger station at the trailhead (where you show your park pass).

A basic itinerary involves driving from Taipei (four hours) to the trailhead ranger station and then hiking to Chika Cabin (1½

to two hours). The second day involves hiking from Chika to 369 Cabin (five to six hours), and the third, hiking to the summit (three to four hours) and returning to 369 Cabin (two hours). Here, most people rest for a while then hike back to the ranger station and their car (four hours).

Maps of the hiking route, in Chinese, are available at the mountain equipment shops near the Taipei Main Train Station.

OTHER HIKING

For the average hiker the park offers short walks down by the **Riverside Park** (Xībīn Gōngyuán) or strolls along newly built paths beside the main road. The only longish hike is to **Taoshan Waterfall** (桃山瀑布; Táoshān Pùbù; elevation 2500m), 4.5km from the end of the road near the Wuling Mountain Hostel. The falls are 50m high and well worth the 90-minute hike.

SALMON

Wuling Farm is well known for its efforts to preserve the unique **Formosan Landlocked Salmon** (櫻花鉤吻鮭; Yīnghuā Gōuwěn Gūi), also known as the masu salmon. Unlike other salmon, these never leave the cool freshwater rivers they were born in. At the time of writing about 1000 salmon lived in the waters of three rivers in Wuling. If conservation measures go as planned, around 5000 should exist in five years. They will then be introduced into three more rivers with the goal of having 10,000 or so in 10 years. At this point the population will be considered stable.

One place to try to see the salmon is below the **Wuling Suspension Bridge** (Wúling Diàoqiáo).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping ground (Lùyíng guǎnlǐ zhōngxīn; ☎ 2590 1265; sites from NT400) This campground is set high on a gorgeous alpine meadow. There are clean, modern facilities (including showers and a convenience store), raised camping platforms and sites with parking included.

Wuling Villa (Wuling Mountain Hostel; Wúlingshān Zhuāng; dm/s/d NT480/2130/2280) Run by the Wuling National Hostel, rooms here have simple wooden interiors with a minimum of furniture. Breakfast (congee and salty eggs) is included.

Wuling National Hostel (Wúling Bīnguǎn; ☎ 2590 1259; rooms & cabins from NT3420) A pleasant place

to stay, the cabins here offer decent comfort and nice scenery. Buffet-style meals (NT150 to NT350; breakfast, lunch and dinner) are available for guests and nonguests at the hostel's restaurant.

Besides the buffet meals at the National Hostel, there's a **convenience store** (☎ 9am-5pm) near the visitor centre for instant noodles and snack foods.

Getting There & Away

There are two Kuo Kuang Hao buses a day from Ilan to Wuling Forest Recreation Area (NT276, three hours, 7am and 12.40pm). From Wuling you can continue south to Lishan and transfer to a bus to Taichung. You could also consider renting a scooter in Jiaoshi (see p163), or a car in Ilan through **Shang Xin Car Rental** (☎ 03-935 7777).

HSINCHU TO SANYI

The Hsinchu Science Park is by far the most famous site in this region, but most travellers come for the high mountains or the rural countryside where the old traditions are still going strong in a few small towns. There's also a top-quality hot-spring resort out here and a small mist-shrouded mountain dotted with temples that you can spend the night in.

Hsinchu, Taoyuan and Miaoli Counties have a heavy concentration of Hakka people, and this is reflected in the food you'll find in many small towns. It's good to familiarise yourself with some of the staples before heading out (see p59).

Getting around this region is pretty easy. Trains run up and down the coast all day, and there is inland bus service to most places.

HSINCHU 新竹

☎ 03 / pop 386,950

The oldest city in northern Taiwan, and long a base for traditional industries such as glassmaking and noodles, Hsinchu (Xīnzhú) sprang into the modern era in 1980 with the establishment of the Science Park. The park has often been described as the Silicon Valley of Taiwan and is the centre of the semiconductor industry. Though it's the most famous landmark of the city, the park does not offer much to the average visitor. Nor, to be honest, does Hsinchu itself. We recommend a visit

INFORMATION	
Police Station 檢查站.....(see 1)	
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here mostly to see the rich collection of curios and antiquities at Guqifeng on the outskirts of town. A few other nearby sites help round out an afternoon.

Hsinchu is an hour from Taipei on the train, and it's best taken in as a day trip.

Orientation & Information

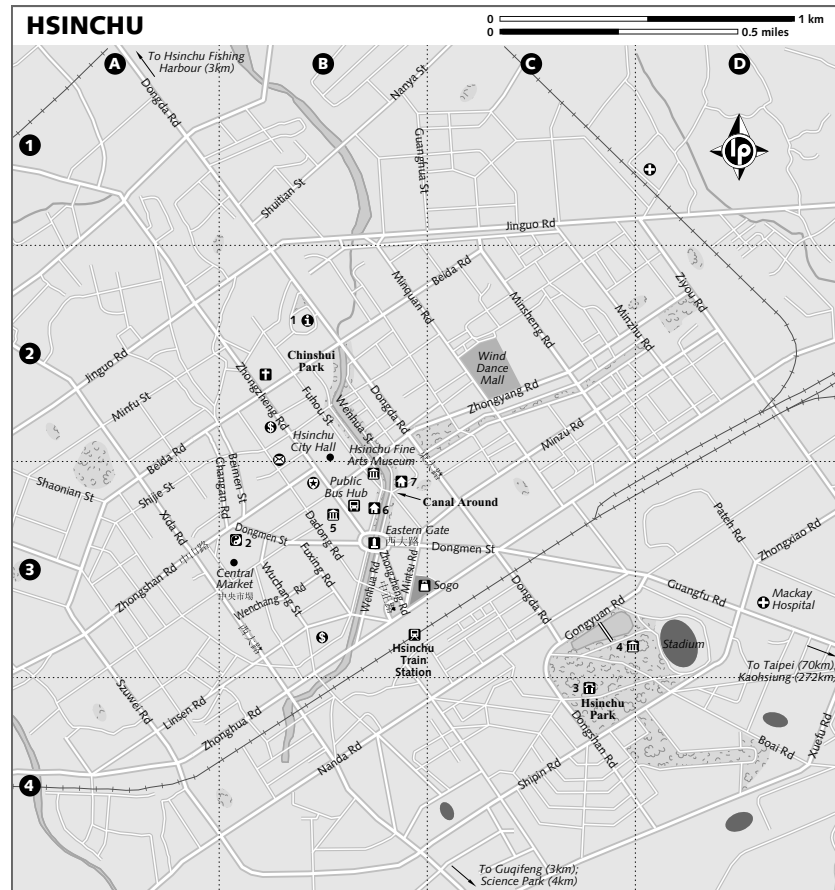
The town centre is small and most sights can be reached on foot. Hsinchu lacks good footpaths in many places, but the traffic is not bad during the day and the constant wind (this is the Windy City) keeps air pollution down.

Hsinchu roads use Hanyu Pinyin for their Romanisation scheme and almost all roads are signed. There are plenty of banks in the

town centre, as well as ATMs in 7-Elevens and other convenience stores.

The **Hsinchu Cultural Bureau** (☎ 531 9756; www.hccb.gov.tw/english/index.asp; 1 Lane 15, Dongda Rd, sec.2; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun) acts as the city's tourist centre. The bureau's website now has good information in English about all the sites in the city, including a long list of historical relics and places to eat.

The tourism bureau's website (<http://dep-tourism-en.hccg.gov.tw>) is also an excellent guide to the city. Check out 'Theme Trips' for English maps, but be aware that many of the themes, especially the 17km of 'glorious coastline', are not quite ready for prime time (the middle third of the way is still a very messy, dirty construction zone).



The science park has an **administration centre** (☎ 577 3311; <http://eweb.sipa.gov.tw/en/index.jsp>; 2 Shinan Rd, sec.2; ☎ 8am-6pm) where you can get maps and books about the park. The website is also very informative.

Sights & Activities

GUQIFENG (GUQI MOUNTAIN) 古奇峰

The Pu Tian Temple complex on the slopes of **Guqifeng** (Gúqífēng; admission free) houses one of the most impressive private collections of artefacts and curios we have seen in Taiwan. A few standouts include a life-size Chinese bed made out of pure jade, a 6m-long panel of pure jade high relief, ferocious carved dragon heads whose mouths you could step into, several miniature villages carved from wood and a small taxidermy collection of rare Taiwanese mammals. The 40m-high statue of Kuang Kong that squats above the temple is quite a site too.

The Hsinchu government is interested in making Guqifeng a flagship attraction in years to come, and we hope they do, as this collection deserves a much better venue than it currently has. Note that the collection is only available for viewing on weekends, though the temple is always open.

There are no public buses to Guqifeng. A taxi will cost around NT200.

RELICS

Hsinchu was called Hsinchang by the early Chinese settlers who built a bamboo fence (*hsinchang*) around the city to protect themselves from Taiya, Saisha and Pingpu aborigines. In 1826 a solid brick wall was constructed around the city. Only one portion of the wall remains today, the **Eastern Gate** (Dōng Dàmén), but it is in fine shape and a great central landmark.

The second most famous landmark is the **City God Temple** (Chéngguáng Miào). Built in 1748, it has the highest rank of all the city god

temples in Taiwan. It also has a lot of very finely carved statues and wall reliefs, whose quality doesn't take an expert to recognise. The temple is most lively during the seventh lunar month and on the 29th day of the 11th month, when the birthday of the temple god is celebrated. There's a lively and surprisingly well-organised market around the temple selling all manner of traditional foods.

For more information on these and other important relics, check out the websites listed earlier.

MUSEUMS

It is not well known, even by many Taiwanese, that Hsinchu has a long history of glassmaking, nor that in recent years several local artists have gained an international reputation. The **Municipal Glass Museum** (Bófǒ Gōngyǐ Bówùguǎn; ☎ 562 6091; www.hcgm.gov.tw; 2 Dongda Rd, sec.1; adult/child NT20/10; ☎ 9am-5pm Wed-Sun) was designed in part to promote and display the active glass scene. Informative tours in English are available if you request them in advance (by phone or email).

The museum is situated in Hsinchu Park (Xīnzhū Gōngyuán), which also features a **Confucius Temple** (Kǒng Miào; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sun) and zoo.

The **Municipal Image Museum** (Yīnshàng Bówùguǎn; ☎ 528 5840; www.hmim.gov.tw; 65 Zhongzheng Rd; adult/child NT20/10; ☎ 9.30am-noon, 1.30-5pm & 6.30-9pm Wed-Sun) occupies a stylish old building that was once the first air-conditioned movie theatre in Hsinchu that now serves as a movie relics museum, educational centre and public movie theatre. Movies are shown around 7pm Wednesday to Friday and at 10am, 2pm and 7pm on Saturday and Sunday. Admission is a low NT20 unless a festival is on.

Sleeping

Hsinchu has plenty of hotels that mostly serve the people working at the Science Park.

Dong Cheng Hotel (Dōngchéng Dàlùshè; ☎ 522 2648; 1 Lane 5, Fuhou St; 府後街5巷1號; d/tw NT800/1200) A nondescript budget hotel, this place has clean good-sized rooms that won't make you wish you'd brought a sleeping bag. It's one of the cheapest hotels in town, and bars, restaurants and cafés abound nearby.

Sol Downtown Hotel (Yíngxī Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 533 5276; fax 533 5750; 10 Wenhua St; 文化街10號; d/tw incl breakfast NT3800/4700; ☎) This is a solid mid-range business hotel, also suitable for visitors

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City God Temple 城隍廟..... 2 B3

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SLEEPING

Dong Cheng Hotel 東城大旅社..... 6 B3

Sol Downtown Hotel 迎曦大飯店, 文化店..... 7 B3

looking for softer beds, better bathrooms and a higher thread count in their sheets. Discounts of 30% to 40% are available every day.

Eating & Drinking

The train station area is chock-a-block full of places to eat, both on the streets and in the shopping malls. The area around the City God Temple holds a lively, though orderly market, where visitors can sample any number of local dishes. For information about some of these, from duck noodles to 'black cat steamed buns', check out the Cultural Bureau's website. Almost 50 restaurants and stalls are listed (including hours and addresses), with pictures, useful descriptions in English of the dishes and touching stories of the trials and triumphs of the owners of various establishments.

Hsinchu has scores of cafés and pubs, though not all of the latter are welcoming to strangers. One good area to try is Wenhua St alongside the canal.

Shopping

For high-quality glass products ask at the Glass Museum for the numbers and addresses of Hsinchu artisans.

Getting There & Around

Trains leave from Taipei (fast/slow train NT180/116, 60/90 minutes) and Taichung (fast/slow train NT198/128, 60/90 minutes) from 5am to 11pm.

The high-speed rail doesn't go directly to Hsinchu downtown from Taipei (NT290, 40 minutes), so you still need to catch a bus to complete your journey (NT31, 30 minutes, every 30 to 40 minutes). A taxi will cost about NT300 to the Hsinchu train station.

At the time of writing there were high-speed rail trains about every hour, though this will certainly increase as time goes on.

Roaming taxis are not that numerous in Hsinchu. Get your hotel to call before you head out or keep the number of the driver once you've found one.

BEIPU 北埔

☎ 03 / pop 10,400

'I'm a little bit Lukang, I'm a little bit Meinong, too.'

With all due respect to Donnie and Marie, that's Beipu (Běipǔ), a small Hsinchu County town that in recent years has, like the others, tried to pull in visitors with its Hakka cultural

heritage. Lest our little jingle makes it sound like Beipu has not been successful, we have to note that it makes for an excellent day trip. There's a nice authentic feel to the place, and while it could be a little cleaner, the quality of its attractions (temples, teahouses, old houses and some speciality foods) is quite good. It's certainly one of the best places to try Hakka pounded tea.

Orientation

There are almost no signs in English around town, but it's very small and most of what you'll want to see is close together. The bus drops you off in the heart of things. Some teahouses have a Chinese map. The town's website is also in Chinese only (www.peipu.com.tw).

Sights

The following is written as a short tour from the bus stop on Jhong Jheng Rd (中正路), across from an OK convenience store.

From the bus stop head back towards the hill. In a minute or so you will see old buildings on either side of the road. On the right is **Tian Shui Hall** (天水堂; Tiān Shuǐ Táng), the largest private traditional three-sided compound in Beipu. You can look in over the walls, but you can't go in.

To the left is **Jinguangfu** (金廣福公館; Jīnguǎngfú Gōngguǎn), a heritage house from 1835 that unfortunately you also can't enter. If you continue up the narrow alley between the buildings you'll reach the very quaint teahouse **The Well** (see opposite).

Facing Tian Shui Hall, go right. Shortly you will pass **Jian Asin Mansion** (A-Hsin Jiang Residence; 姜阿新故居; Jiāngāxīn Gù Jū) on the left. This two-storey Western-styled house was built by a rich tea merchant who, not surprisingly, had a lot of Western clients. Entry is by prior reservation only.

From the mansion it's just a hop to our favourite site in Beipu, the **Zhitian (Citian) Temple** (慈天宮; Cítīān Gōng). You can enter this building and should to see the very beautiful pillars and the high relief on the walls.

To the left of the temple (as you face it) is a small passageway; walk to its curvy end. Notice a few loose stones? That's not an accident. In the wilder days of Taiwan's history the narrow passageways into Beipu were lined with the occasional loose stone so that intruders (who of course wouldn't know this) could be heard approaching.

As you exit the temple the street directly in front of you is **Beipu Street** (北埔街). There are a number of old buildings along the first few blocks and many pleasant snack shops, teahouses and cafés.

One block up, at the intersection with Nansing Rd (南興街), look right for an OK convenience store sign. This is where you got off the bus, and where you can catch it again back to Jhudong. Note that you catch the bus back on the opposite side of the road.

Eating & Drinking

Like Meinong in the south, Beipu (which means northern wild area) is over 90% Hakka. In almost every restaurant you'll find Hakka staples such as *bàntiáo* (板條; flat rice noodles) and *lěi chá* (see the boxed text, below).

The Well (水井; Shuǐjǐng; ☎ 580 5122; set meals NT250, lei cha for 3 NT300; ☎ 10am-6pm) One of the best places to try *lei cha*. The Well is a rustic Hakka-style house that has just the perfect heritage character. It hasn't been gussied up for modern times, nor is it old and dirty. You can sit inside at tables, or on wooden floors, or even outside on a wooden deck under the plum trees. The food here is not bad, but most people come for the atmosphere and the chance to grind and make their own *lei cha*.

People don't linger in Beipu so expect most shops to close by early evening.

LEI CHA 擂茶

If you pronounce it incorrectly, *lei cha* (*lěi chá*) sounds like 'tired tea', but this hearty brew was designed to do anything but make you sleepy. It was a farmer's drink, rich and thick and full of nutrients and calories. In the old days, Hakka farmers would drink it both during and after work in the tobacco fields in order to fortify their bodies.

Or so the story goes.

Very likely, *lei cha* is a modern invention (like the Scottish tartan), or at best a family drink that has been cleverly promoted as an authentic part of Taiwan's Hakka heritage. In any case, it's everywhere now, and authentic or not, it's definitely part of the Taiwan experience.

Lei cha means pounded tea, and that's exactly what you must do before you can drink it. If you go to an athen...well, if you go to a shop that does it right, you will be given a wooden pestle and a large porcelain bowl with a small amount of green tea leaves, sesame seeds, nuts and grains in the bottom.

Then comes the 'pound' part of 'pounded tea'. Using the pestle, grind the ingredients in the bowl. Yes, we know we said this is *pounded* tea, but then your host also said this is an ancient recipe. So grind, atomise, pestle (it's a verb, too), pulverise and mix the ingredients to a fine mush. Your host will then add hot water and dole out the 'tea' in cups. At this moment, or perhaps earlier, you will be given a small bowl of puffed rice. Add the rice to the drink and consume before the kernels get soggy.

If this sounds like your cuppa (and really, it is delicious), head to any teahouse in Beipu, Meinong or Sanyi.

Getting There & Away

To get to Beipu from Hsinchu, take a **Hsinchu Bus Company** (☎ 03-596 2018) bus, which you'll find just to the left of the train station, heading to Xia Gong Guan (NT44, every 20 minutes). Forty minutes later get off at Jhudong (竹東) and then transfer to a bus to Beipu (NT23, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes). At the time of writing the first bus left Jhudong at 7am, and the first bus from Hsinchu to Xia Gong Guan left at 6.10am.

SHITOUSHAN 獅頭山

☎ 03 / elevation 492m

Shitoushan (Shītóushān) is a foothill on the border of Miaoli and Hsinchu Counties. Beautiful dense forests and rugged rock faces define the topography, but if you ask anyone it is the temples tucked into caves and hugging the slopes that have given the place its fame. Shitoushan is sacred ground for the island's Buddhists and draws big weekend crowds, with people coming to worship or simply enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the mountain. Over the years, Shitoushan has been consistently described by Lonely Planet travellers as a highlight of their trip to Taiwan.

Yuanguang Temple (元光寺; Yuánguāng Sì) was the first temple to be constructed in the area (in 1894). Many more buildings were added over the years, including **Chuanhua Tang**

(勸化堂: Quànhuà Táng), which today also serves as a guesthouse, and the **main gate**, built in 1940 by the Japanese to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of their royal court (that's one ancient royal line!). There are 11 temples, five on the front side of the mountain, six on the back, as well as numerous smaller shrines, arches and pagodas. Shitoushan is a veritable temple wonderland and a great hit with photographers, nature lovers and temple aficionados. Give yourself at least three hours to explore the area or an overnight stay for the full effect.

On the other side of the mountain, connected by a walking trail, is the **Lion's Head Mountain Visitor Centre** (☎ 580 9296; ☎ 9am-5pm). The centre is a pleasant place to grab a meal or a map, should you wish to explore beyond Shitoushan itself.

Visitors (including non-Buddhists) are allowed to stay overnight at **Chuanhua Tang** (Chuanhua Hall; ☎ 822 020, 823 859; d/tw NT800/1100). Excellent vegetarian meals are NT60 each, but if that doesn't appeal to you there are stalls and shops lining the back parking lot and even a café on the way up the stairs to the hall. The old rules forbidding talk during meals or couples sleeping together are no longer enforced, but do be on your best behaviour.

From the car park it's a short walk up the stairs to Chuanhua Tang. The check-in counter is to the left, just before the temple. There's a large map (with some labels in English on it) on the right side of the car park to show you the way.

Getting There & Away

It's not easy to get to Shitoushan. The best way at present is to take a bus from the **Hsinchu Bus Company** (☎ 03-596 2018), just to the left of the Hsinchu train station, heading to Xia Gong Guan (NT44, every 20 minutes). Forty minutes later get off at Jhudong (竹東) and transfer to a bus heading to Shitoushan (NT50). Ask the driver to let you off at Shitoushan Old Hiking Trail Arch (獅頭山舊登山口牌樓). From here it's a 30-minute uphill walk through a dream-like forest landscape to the parking lot. Note that there are few buses a day to Shitoushan, so call to check the schedule.

AROUND SHITOUSHAN

Not far from Shitoushan, down County Rd 124 (甲), is one of the most pleasant hot-

spring resorts outside the Taipei area. **East River Spa Garden** (東江溫泉; Dōngjiāng Wēnquán; ☎ 03-825 285; www.eastriver.com.tw, Chinese only; public baths unlimited time adult/child NT350/150; ☎ 9am-10pm) is nestled in the bend of a fast flowing river in an area with no other development. The design makes use of traditional red bricks and lots of wood. It looks traditional, but there's no denying it's for urbanites who want *their* version of rural Taiwan, ie folksy but clean and comfortable.

If you are staying at Shitoushan you can get a taxi to the hot springs for about NT200. If you have your own car, make sure you explore the rural roads around the hot springs. The area is called **Nanzhuang** (南庄) and it's full of little surprises.

TAIAN HOT SPRINGS 泰安溫泉

☎ 037

There are hot springs all over Taiwan, and beautiful mountains for hiking, too, but we still think Taian (Tàian Wēnquán) is special. For one thing, it has hot spring water so good the Japanese built an officers' club here to take advantage of it 90 years ago.

More recently, Taian has gone from largely unknown to the hot new hot-spring place (we never doubted it for a second, though now that it's happened, we aren't all that happy sharing). Weekdays are best if you want to avoid the crowds, but note that if you are going hiking, a warm weekend is not going to attract the hot springers. Whatever you do, avoid the hugely popular strawberry season in autumn. And avoid the strawberries: they are loaded with pesticides.

Orientation & Information

Taian is in a remote corner of southeastern Miaoli County, near Sheipa National Park (see p178). The area is not precisely defined on any map, but is more or less the region that County Rd 62 runs through. Beginning just outside the town of Wenshui, County Rd 62 runs for 16km alongside the Wenshui River before ending in a car park just below the Japanese Police Officers' Club.

Most visitors stay within the last 3km stretch of County Rd 62, in an area of Taian known as Jinshui Village (Jinshǔi Cūn; population 200). A tourist map, in Chinese, is available at the Tenglong Hot Spring Resort.

Sheipa National Park Wenshui Visitor Centre (☎ 996 100; www.spnp.gov.tw; 100 Shuiweiping, Dah; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) sits at the start of Coun-

try Rd 62. It doesn't have any information on Taian, however.

Dangers & Annoyances

Taian suffers frequent landslides, which can wash out roads and change the course and look of riverbeds. Avoid the area after heavy rains or earthquakes.

Sights & Activities

HIKING

There are a number of trails marked on our map, but you should always check with locals about the conditions before heading out. This is a rough area. Try to finish higher trails before mid-afternoon, as fog can obscure the views and make it easy to get lost.

HOT SPRINGS 溫泉

Taian's springs produce alkaloid carbonic water at a temperature of about 47°C. The water is clear, tasteless and almost odourless and said to be good for treating skin problems and nervousness. The **Sunrise Hot Spring Hotel** (Rìchū Wēnquán Dūjià Fàndiàn; ☎ 941 988; public pool unlimited time adult/child NT350/150; ☎ 8am-11pm) has excellent modern facilities to enjoy the waters. Both public outdoor pools and private tubs in rooms are designed to let you take in the mountain views as you bathe.

Sleeping

Tenglong Hot Spring Resort (Ténglóng Shānzhuāng; ☎ 941 002; www.tenglong.com.tw; camp sites NT300, with tent & sleeping bags for up to 8 people NT1000, 2-person cabins

NT3000; ☎ 6.30am-10pm) Tenglong has a good, central location, near food stalls, restaurants and hiking trails. The campground is nothing special and you probably wouldn't want to go on a sunny weekend due to the noise and crowds. The cabins are pretty good value (weekday discount 25%) if you want a little more privacy. The public pools here cost NT200.

Sunrise Hot Spring Hotel (☎ 941 988; d/tw NT5500/7000, 20% weekday discount) Rooms here are stylish, but some are holding up better than others; make sure you check before paying.

Eating

Food is fresh and local, and we've never had a bad meal in many visits. There are numerous small restaurants and shops along the main road, and a collection of small **food stalls** (dishes NT100) open for lunch and dinner beside the suspension bridge into Tenglong. There's a convenience store in the village that also has good lunch boxes.

Mountain Legend Café (Shānzhuāng Chuānqí; ☎ 941 380; 16 Qingan Village; dishes NT150; ☎ 10am-10pm)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

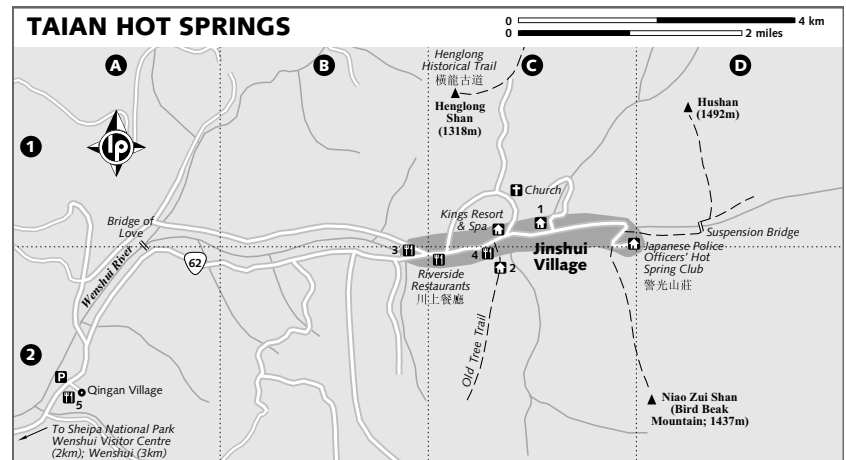
Sunrise Hot Spring Hotel 日出溫泉度假飯店.....(see 1)

SLEEPING ☎

Sunrise Hot Spring Hotel 日出溫泉度假飯店.....1 C1
Tenglong Hot Spring Resort 騰龍山莊.....2 C2

EATING ☎

Convenience Store 采菊民宿.....3 B2
Food Stalls 小吃店.....4 C2
Mountain Legend Café 山中傳奇.....5 A2



Worth a special mention, this rustic Qingan Village establishment has been in the Peng family for three generations now, and while grandma is no longer cooking (a great shame), we can't really complain about the fare her daughter-in-law whips up. The menu features great fried tofu and Hakka-style food such as salty eggs, bitter melon and excellent mountain chicken. The café sits atop the Turtle Nest (Gūi Xuè), a large rock standing in the exact location where the three Miaoli County townships intersect. The most powerful feng shui in all of Taian is right here.

Getting There & Around

The one bus route that used to get you close to Taian is no longer running, so you will need your own transportation.

SHEIPA NATIONAL PARK

雪霸國家公園

Many rivers and one mountain range run through this 76,000-hectare national park (Xuěbà Guójiā Gōngyuán). Sheipa National Park is home to 51 mountain peaks over 3000m and is the primary source of drinking water for northern and central Taiwan.

The park was established in 1992 and much of it remains inaccessible, in fact prohibited. The three sections you are permitted to enter are the forest recreation areas of Wuling (see p169), Guanwu and Syuejian. Guanwu (觀霧森林遊樂區; Guānwù Sēnlín Yóulè Qū) was closed at the time of writing, while Syuejian (雪見森林遊樂區; Xuějiàn Sēnlín Yóulè Qū) was just about to open after a three-year delay.

The park's **headquarters** (☎ 037-996 100; www.snp.gov.tw; Dahu; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) are on the road to Taian Hot Springs. Here you can pick up a number of brochures and check out some interesting ecological displays. English-speaking staff are usually on hand.

The best months for hiking in the park are October to December and March to April. In winter, high-altitude trails are often snowed in; after April, seasonal heavy rains, including monsoons, are common.

SANYI 三義

☎ 037 / pop 5000

Over 100 years ago, a Japanese officer discovered that camphor grew in abundance in the hills around Sanyi (Sānyì), a small Miaoli County town. Since camphor makes for excel-

lent wood products (it's aromatic, extremely heavy and can resist termites), the officer wisely established a wood business. Over time, Sanyi became the woodcarving region in Taiwan. Today, nearly half the population is engaged in the business in one way or another, with the other half probably wishing they were.

In addition to the wood products, Sanyi is worth visiting for its excellent museum, old train station village and You Tong trees. The You Tong (*Aleurites fordii*) is a hardwood whose oil was once used to waterproof wood products. It covers the mountainsides around Sanyi, and during the spring months its blossoming white flowers give the landscape the appearance of being dusted with snow.

Orientation

The sights in Sanyi are spread out and, now that the public shuttle bus service has been cancelled, it is not that easy to see everything in a day without your own transportation. If you're on foot, and starting at the Sanyi train station, walk out and up to Jungjeng Rd, the main thoroughfare in town, and turn left (everything you want to see is left). The turnout for the old train station and village is about 1km down the road, though the station itself is another 5km away. The main commercial carving street and the wood museum are about 2km away, making them easy to walk to. There are signs in English about town.

Sights & Activities

WOODCARVING

Woodcarving is the lifeblood of the town, and on Jungjeng Rd alone there are over 200 shops selling an array of carved items. We're not talking dull signposts here, but 3m cypress statues of savage-faced folk gods, delicate window reliefs and beautiful traditional furniture. You can come here with the intention of buying, but if you just like to browse and enjoy the work of skilled artisans you won't be disappointed.

Most stores are clustered in two areas: Shueimei St (Shūiměi Jiē), which is actually just a few blocks of Jungjeng Rd; and Guangsheng Village (Guāngshēng Xīnchéng), which you pass through on the way to the museum. Stores in both areas close around 6pm, though a few stay open till 10pm or later on weekends.

MIAOLI WOOD SCULPTURE MUSEUM

苗栗木雕博物館

This **museum** (Miáoli Mùdiāo Bówùguǎn; ☎ 037-876 009; adult/child NT60/50; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed holidays) opened in 1995 with the goal of promoting Taiwan's wood culture. Exhibits include informative displays on the origins of woodcarving in Sanyi, a knockout collection of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, some gorgeous traditional household furniture and architectural features, and even a few pieces by Juming (see the boxed text, p53).

Other than the titles to these displays, there is no information in English at all, which is a shame. Some of the history of Sanyi is quite quirky, such as how the town became popular in the '50s with American Catholics who came to custom order hand-carved statues of the Virgin Mary.

The museum is just at the end of Guangsheng Village. You can't miss it for the two carved mastodons outside.

SHENG SHING TRAIN STATION 勝興火車站

Built during the Japanese era and without the use of nails, the charming Sheng Shing Train Station (Shèngxīng Huòchēzhàn) is now a little too popular on the weekends with day trippers coming to explore the old grounds, walk through a 1km-long tunnel (bring a torch) or stroll along the abandoned railway tracks.

At 480m, the station used to be the highest stop along the whole Western Trunk Line. When it was closed in 1997, walkers soon discovered that the 12km of abandoned track made for a fine stroll through the countryside. A small tourist village soon popped up around the station, and, when not overrun with tourists, it is very pleasant here. The street is cobbled and lined with all manner of old-style teahouses, cafés and restaurants, many in charming old brick buildings with rustic decks made out of old railway ties. Evening time really brings out the charm of the place.

Four kilometres past the station stand the picturesque ruins of the **Long Deng Viaduct** (Lóngténg Duàn Qiáo). The viaduct was built in 1905 and destroyed in a 7.3 magnitude

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earthquake in 1930. The remains are fairly dramatic and rather interesting in that the terracotta brick arches are held together with mortar made of sticky rice and clam shell.

HIKING

In addition to the abandoned rail tracks, you can walk the **April Snow Trail** (四月雪步道; Sìyuè Xuě Bùdào). This begins just to the right of the museum and takes you through a beautiful forest of You Tong trees whose white blossoms in April and early May give the trail its name. The trail leads, in about 30 minutes, to a beautiful open tea field.

Tours

Taiwan Tour Bus (☎ 0800-011 765; tours NT1500) runs tours to Sanyi, which include a hot-springs stopover in nearby Taian.

Festivals & Events

Every May artists from around Taiwan are invited to display their best work and to create new works, in wood and ice, right on the street during the **Sanyi Woodcarving Festival** (三義木雕節; Sānyì Mùdiāo Jié). For visitors there are also opportunities to try your hand at woodcarving and to sample Hakka food.

The **Miaoli Mask Festival** (苗栗國際假面藝術節; Miáoli Guójiā Jiǎ Miàn Yìshù Jié) has been getting rave reviews since the first one was held in 1999. Now held yearly in the **Shangri-La Paradise Theme Park** (香格里拉樂園; Xiānggélǐlā Lèyuán; ☎ 561 369), the event draws bigger and bigger crowds each year. In 2005, Central and South American masks and cultures were highlighted, though local mask makers, opera troupes and folk dance troupes were also showcased. The festival usually runs from late March through to the end of May.

Eating

There is no end of places to eat and drink traditional Hakka fare near Sheng Shing station and Shueimei St.

Getting There & Away

There's only one train in the morning from Taipei (NT193, 2½ hours, 8.53am), but many more from Taichung.