

# Taipei 台北



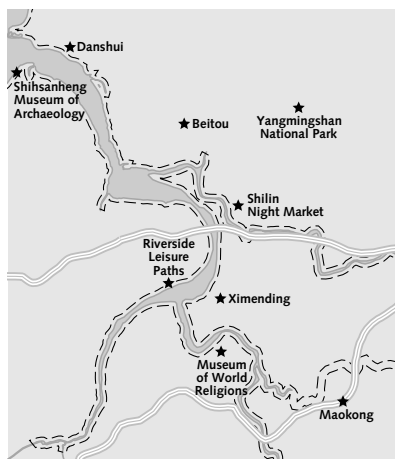
Once upon a time, Taipei's streets were chock-full of taxis, buses and racing scooters, and its sidewalks congested with people and trash. The air was foul, and the architecture – shrines, temples and old colonial buildings aside – was ugly. Central planning seemed sporadic or even nonexistent. In the late 1980s, as the scars of former martial law began healing, citizens realised that while they were materially rich, their quality of life was poor. They demanded change and over the next decade, city planners did what you'd expect those schooled in Asia's most computer-savvy society to do: they played a protracted game of SimCity, only for keeps.

'Traffic is hideous!' cried Taipeiers, and a light-rail network was built. 'The rivers are putrid, and our kids have nowhere to play!' was the next complaint. 'Strengthen environmental laws and build parks on every river bank', was the answer. 'Ugly buildings, we can't stand looking at 'em,' moaned the people of Taipei. 'Then let's build interesting-looking places!' was the Solomonic decision of city planners.

Naturally, this explanation is a vast oversimplification; a myriad of other complex political, economic, and social changes were also taking place. Still, in a veritable blink of the eye, Taipei has gone from an ugly duckling of Asia to one of the region's most dynamic, comfortable and liveable cities. Most important to the intrepid traveller, Taipei is also fun. If you take some time to explore, we think you'll agree that Taipei is a city that's managed to strike a fine balance between business and beauty, and between chaos and convenience.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Chill with the young and trendy set in ultraconsumeristic **Ximending** (p99)
- Experience some of Asia's finest street cuisine at the **Shilin Night Market** (p99) or if more nautically themed culture and cuisine is your thing, at **Danshui** (p126)
- Bike, skate or stroll along Taipei's lovely new **riverside leisure paths** (p102)
- Hike, soak or do both in **Beitou** and **Yangmingshan National Park** (p133)
- Relax over a fine cuppa and enjoy the spectacular view from the tea-growing hills of **Maokong** (p136)
- Explore Taiwan's prehistoric past at the **Shihsanheng Museum of Archaeology** (p129) or experience global spiritual beliefs at the **Museum of World Religions** (p138)



TELEPHONE CODE: 04

POPULATION: 3.5 MILLION

## HISTORY

Prehistoric Taipei (Táiběi) was wet. The mountains surrounding present-day Taipei were majestic then as now, but the basin in which a great metropolis would one day rise was under water. It was a pretty lake, we've no doubt, but it was completely lacking in restaurants, museums, hotel rooms and even people. We'd have advised all but the most adventurous travellers to postpone their trip for a few million years.

At some point, over 6000 years ago, the now (mostly) dry basin between the mountains began to be settled by people who'd sailed over from other islands in the Pacific. Anthropologists would later collectively describe the first settlers as 'Pingpu' or 'plains aboriginals'. Their descendants still live in Taiwan.

Fast forward to the last millennium. Having been 'discovered' by Han Chinese, Taipei (along with the rest of Taiwan) was subject to a slow but inexorable influx of settlers from China's east coast. These settlers forced the original inhabitants of Taipei to retreat into the surrounding mountains. They then renamed the displaced aboriginals 'mountain people', perhaps to make themselves feel better for having evicted them from the plains.

During Western Europe's great age of conquest, Taiwan was 'discovered' again, and in fairly rapid succession by the Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish, all of whom decided that they liked the place well enough to plant their respective flags around the island. The Spanish took a particular interest in Danshui (now part of Taipei County) and before leaving they built a fortress that still stands today (p127). Sensing that European interlopers were getting too attached to the island, in 1709 the Qing court reversed a Ming decree forbidding settlement on Taiwan and granted citizens in China's Fujian province permission to emigrate.

Many of these Fukkienese settlers came to present-day Taipei, founding communities along the Danshui River in areas that

today are considered central Taipei. These early communities became trading ports for tea and camphor and set the stage for more settlement from China as well as economic development.

By 1882 Taipei had become a fully fledged city, large enough to warrant the construction of a wall. Though the wall is long gone, four of the five gates leading into the city can still be visited. Alas, the city wall – the last to be built under the Qing – proved merely cosmetic to the Japanese, who took the city (along with the rest of Taiwan) through strong-arm diplomacy rather than arms, in 1895.

Under Japanese rule (1895–1945), Taipei became the administrative headquarters for the island. Although the Japanese ruled with an iron hand, their engineers left behind good basic infrastructure. Buildings remaining from that era are among the city's most prized. After the decampment of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces to Taipei in 1949, the city expanded, growing to its present size (272 sq km) and governmental structure of 12 districts. It's in this present-day city that your tour begins.

## ORIENTATION

First, the good news: finding your way around Taipei is much easier today than it was 10 years ago. Now the bad: it can still be pretty complicated.

The Taipei Metro (MRT) makes getting around the city pretty easy and every MRT station has a map (labelled in Chinese and English) that points the way to almost every sight worth visiting as well as street names both major and minor. If that wasn't enough, most people in Taipei are extremely friendly. If you look lost, chances are good someone will give you directions. Ready to head out? Not so fast. Here comes the complicated part.

Central Taipei is constructed on a grid, with major streets running east–west and north–south. These streets are named according

## SISTER CITIES

Taipei may well have more sister cities than just about any metropolis in the world. These number somewhere around 50 and America boasts the largest number of ceremonial urban siblings with the Taiwanese capital paired with the urban heavyweights of Boston, Dallas and Los Angeles. Other notable sister cities include Perth, Jeddah and Guatemala City. The likely reason behind the large number of ceremonial relationships is the Republic of China's (ROC) peculiar diplomatic status, necessitating the building of international relations at a more low-key municipal level.

to direction and broken up further into sections, numbered according to the distance from the central axis (roughly speaking, the Taipei Main Station). The lower the section number, the closer to the centre of the city the address tends to be; Zhongshan N Road sec.1 is close to Taipei Main Station; sec.7 is in the wilds of Tianmu, 25 minutes by taxi in good traffic.

But wait, it gets more complicated. Taipei also has numbered 'lanes', which generally run perpendicular to the main streets. Major sights, hotels and restaurants are located along the main streets, but many addresses include lanes. So if you're looking for, say, Grandma Nitti's Restaurant (p111), at 8 Lane 93, Shida Rd, you need to first find Shida Rd, then look for where number eight would be. But instead of finding a building, you'll find the lane where you'll find Nitti's.

Then there are alleys, which are to lanes as lanes are to streets. Though the system's a bit complicated, it's actually quite logical. But before you head out, there's one more thing you should know: though Taipei is an increasingly English-friendly city, with all street signs featuring both Chinese and English lettering, over the past few years there have been a number of, er, interesting developments concerning the spellings of nearly every street name in the city. Our spelling decoder, opposite, should help a bit, but visitors to the city should be aware that the Taiwanese approach to English translation is about as rigidly dogmatic as their approach to religion (ie not very dogmatic as all). As a result, don't be surprised to find a restaurant whose business card address reads Chunghsiao East Road under a street sign reading Zhongxiao E Road.

## Districts

Though Taipei proper is divided into 12 *qū* (districts), most of what we've listed in our inner Taipei section can be found in one of six general areas.

### OLD TOWN CENTRE 萬華區

The first part of the city to be developed, this proto-Taipei (also known as Wanhua) was once encircled by a wall. Though the wall is gone, four of its five gates still stand, adding to the historic character of this district. It's in and around this area where you'll find sights traditional (Longshan Temple), contemporary (Ximending) and

historically edifying (2-28 Museum). It's in the Old Town Centre where you'll find the government district, often a hub of activity in Asia's most vibrant democracy.

MRT Stations: Taipei Main Station, Ximen, Longshan Temple, Xiaonanmen, NTU Hospital, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.

### DA'AN & SHIDA 大安區, 師大區

These districts in the southern part of the city centre are built around Shida (home to Taiwan Normal University) and Da'an Park. Thus, Shida, sometimes spelt, amusingly enough, Shita, is filled with students and funky, while Da'an is breezy and more grown up, yet without the slick modernity of Xinyi in Eastern Taipei. Both feature famous food streets (Shida Night Market, Yongkang St and Tonghua Night Market) and Da'an is also known for the weekend jade and flower markets.

MRT Stations: Guting, Taipower Building, Gongguan, Da'an, Technology Building, Dingxi, Yongan market.

### ZHONGSHAN 中山區

This area north of the Zhongshan (Zhōngshān) train station and south of the Keelung River features museums (large and small, and even a miniature one), beautiful parks and some of Taipei's most important temples. The western part of this district, near the Danshui River, is sometimes known as Dadaocheng or Datong. In general, most of the major sights listed are within walking distance of the Xindian/Danshui MRT line.

MRT Stations: Zhongshan, Shuanglian, Minquan W Rd, Yuanshan.

### EASTERN TAIPEI 東台北市

With rivers and established subcities to the north and west, and mountains to the south, when it came time for Taipei to expand there was but one direction left. Encompassing Songshan, Xinyi and pretty much everything east of Fuxing Rd, Eastern Taipei is fast becoming a second city centre of Taipei. While central Taipei is characterised by its older neighbourhoods and winding lanes, neighbourhoods in the eastern districts are laid out in a grid, and feature spiffy new high-rise office blocks, five-star hotels, city hall and some of Taipei's trendiest night spots and restaurants. And of course, there's one edifice that sticks out, both literally and

## SPELLING DECODER

One complication for visitors to Taipei is that streets go by so many English spellings. Until roughly the beginning of the 21st century, the city used the Wade-Giles system of Romanisation of Chinese place names, then it switched to Hanyu Pinyin, the current standard in the Chinese-speaking world. But in practical terms there's no common approach to street names; spellings can be one way or the other, or worse, a hybrid of the two.

To make matters more confusing, the city recently instituted a system of numbering its major streets. Numbered 'boulevards' run east-west, and numbered 'avenues' run north-south. The numbers of the boulevards (1st, 2nd etc) start at the southern end of the city, while the numbers of the avenues start at the western end. Theoretically, this numbering system was designed to help foreigners make sense of it all, but in practice locals have no idea which street corresponds to which number.

Chinese	Wade-Giles	Pinyin	Number
<b>East-West Streets</b>			
和平路	Hoping Rd	Heping Rd	1st Blvd
信義路	Hsinyi Rd	Xinyi Rd	2nd Blvd
仁愛路	Jen-ai Rd	Renai Rd	3rd Blvd
忠孝路	Chunghsiao Rd	Zhongxiao Rd	4th Blvd
市民大道	Civil Blvd	Shimin Blvd	5th Blvd
長安路/八德路	Chang'an/Pateh Rds	Chang'an/Bade Rds	6th Blvd
南京路	Nanking Rd	Nanjing Rd	7th Blvd
民生路	Minsheng Rd	Minsheng Rd	8th Blvd
民權路	Minchiuan Rd	Minquan Rd	9th Blvd
民族路	Minchu Rd	Minzu Rd	10th Blvd
<b>North-South Streets</b>			
環河路	Huanho Rd	Huanhe Rd	1st Ave
中華路	Junghua Rd	Zhonghua Rd	2nd Ave
延平路	Yenping Rd	Yanping Rd	3rd Ave
重慶路	Chungching Rd	Chongqing Rd	4th Ave
承德路	Chengteh Rd	Chengde Rd	5th Ave
中山路	Chungshan Rd	Zhongshan Rd	6th Ave
林森路	Linsen Rd	Linsen Rd	7th Ave
新生北路/金山南路	Hsinsheng N/Chingshan S Rds	Xinsheng N/Jinshan S Rds	8th Ave
松江路/新生南路	Sungchiang/Hsinsheng S Rds	Songjiang/Xinsheng S Rds	9th Ave
建國路	Chienkuo Rd	Jianguo Rd	10th Ave
復興路	Fuhsing Rd	Fuxing Rd	11th Ave
敦化路	Tunhwa Rd	Dunhua Rd	12th Ave
光復路	Kongfu Rd	Guangfu Rd	13th Ave
基隆路	Keelung Rd	Jilong Rd	14th Ave

figuratively; the world's (at time of writing) tallest building, Taipei 101 (p101).

MRT Stations: Zhongxiao Fuxing, Zhongxiao Dunhua, Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei City Hall, Yongchuan, Houshanpi, Kunyang.

### SHILIN 士林區

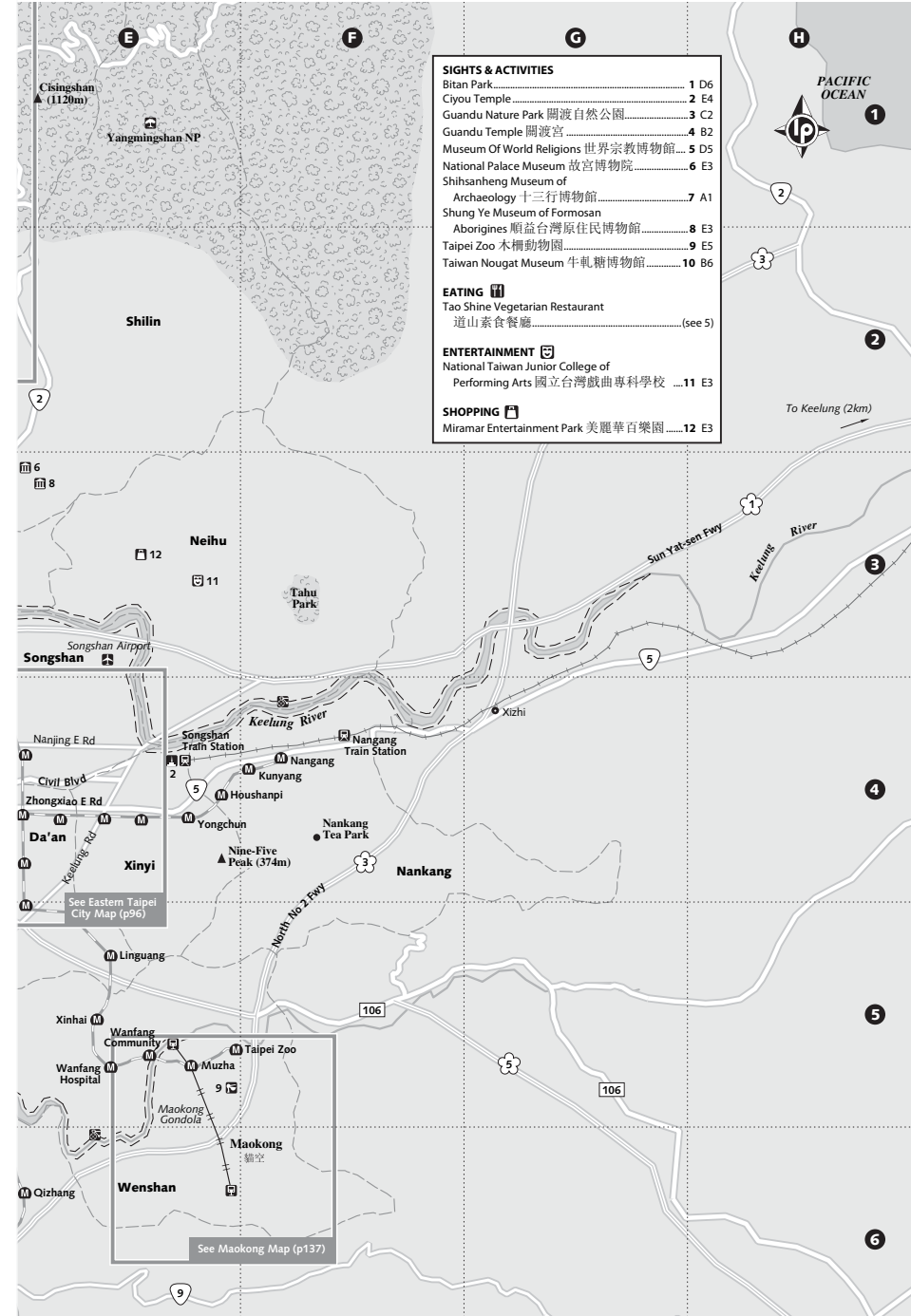
North of the city centre and south of Tianmu, Shilin (Shilin) is home to some of Taipei's best known cultural attractions such as the National Palace Museum, the CKS Shilin Resi-

dence Park, and of course, the Shilin Night Market. Shilin is also where you'll find some of Taipei's most kid-friendly venues, including the Astronomical Museum and the National Taiwan Science Education Centre. Bustling, crowded and usually noisy, Shilin is a must to visit.

MRT Stations: Jiantan, Shilin.

### TIANMU 天母區

Just north of Shilin, in many ways Tianmu (Tiānmǔ) is its diametrical opposite. Whereas



**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Bitan Park..... 1 D6
- Ciyou Temple..... 2 E4
- Guandu Nature Park 關渡自然公園..... 3 C2
- Guandu Temple 關渡宮..... 4 B2
- Museum Of World Religions 世界宗教博物館..... 5 D5
- National Palace Museum 故宮博物院..... 6 E3
- Shihsanheng Museum of Archaeology 十三行博物館..... 7 A1
- Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines 順益台灣原住民博物館..... 8 E5
- Taipei Zoo 木柵動物園..... 9 E3
- Taiwan Nougat Museum 牛軋糖博物館..... 10 B6

**EATING** 🍴

- Tao Shine Vegetarian Restaurant 道山素食餐廳..... (see 5)

**ENTERTAINMENT** 🎪

- National Taiwan Junior College of Performing Arts 國立台灣戲曲專科學校..... 11 E3

**SHOPPING** 🛍️

- Miramar Entertainment Park 美麗華百樂園..... 12 E3



Shilin is usually crowded and noisy, Tianmu tends to be quieter, less crowded, with wider avenues and more spread-out neighbourhoods. Shilin is where you go for street food and Tianmu is the place for sit-down restaurants. Though once thought of as kind of a foreigner ghetto, a nice place to live without much to draw the casual visitor, Tianmu has an excellent mountain park complete with temples and pavilions as well as some of Taipei's posher malls. Tianmu is also a great place to start or finish a hike into the volcanic wilds of Yangmingshan (p132).

MRT Stations: Zhishan, Mingde, Shipai

## Maps

Once hard to find, good English-language maps are now plentiful. The information booths at both the Taoyuan (international) and Songhsan (domestic) airports can provide you with a few government maps, and the freely available magazine *Taiwan Fun* has a great inlay map in every issue. Our favourite map for central Taipei is the *Taipei Visitor's Map* published by Asiamap and available free at hotels and tourist points. It's regularly updated and has street names in the current Pinyin spelling. It also depicts the all-important lanes and building numbers. As for neighbourhood maps, every MRT station boasts a decent mounted map of the surrounding area featuring temples, department stores, parks and other points of interest, though these can be a bit faded in some of the more distant stations.

## INFORMATION Bookshops

You'll find book sellers, from hole-in-the-wall newsstands to large local chains, at nearly every turn in Taipei. Not surprisingly, most books are in Chinese, but in the larger stores you will find foreign-language books (mostly in English) filed by subject along with their Chinese counterparts. Newsstands around the city (at MRT stations and the like) typically carry an assortment of English-language magazines and newspapers.

**Caves Books** (Dūnhuáng Shūjiù) Tianmu (Map p100; ☎ 2874 2199; 5 Lane 38, Tianyu St; Bus 220) Zhongshan (Map p92; ☎ 2537 1666; 103 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; MRT Shuanglian) Frayed and fading like a long-owned paperback, Caves was once one of the only places in Taipei where Westerners could find a decent selection of English books. Nowadays though Caves is still among the best places to find books on both teaching English and on learning

Chinese, selection-wise Caves has been well outdone by Taipei's newer and flashier generation of book sellers.

**Eslite** (Chéngpín; Map p96; ☎ 2775 5977; 245 Dunhua S Rd; MRT Zhongxiao Dunhua) Taipei's most renowned bookshop, with locations all over town. The flagship Dunhua S Rd location is the first place most locals look for foreign-language books, particularly on travel.

**GinGin's Taiwan** (Jingjing Shùkù Jingpīndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2364 2006; 8 Alley 8, Lane 210, Roosevelt Rd, sec.3; MRT Guting) Gay and lesbian bookshop and café.

**Le Pigeonnier Bookshop** (Xīngè Fàguó Shūdiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2517 2616; 9 Lane 97, Songjiang Rd) Specialist in French books.

**Page 1** (Map p96; ☎ 8101 8282; 4th fl, Taipei 101; MRT Taipei City Hall) Has one of the finest selections of English titles in the city, located on the 4th floor of the world's tallest building.

## Emergency

The national emergency contact numbers are ☎ 110 for police and ☎ 119 for fire and ambulance. English-language directory assistance is ☎ 106.

You may find English speakers at police stations throughout town, but the **Central District police station** (Map p88; ☎ 2556 6007; 33 Chengde Rd, sec.2) has dedicated English-speaking staff who can help if you're in a jam. If you need help with immigration or visa extensions, you'll be told to go to the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** or the **National Immigration Agency** (Map p88; ☎ 2388 9393; www.immigration.gov.tw; 15 Guangzhou St; MRT Xiaonanmen).

## Internet Access

It should come as no surprise that the capital city of an island whose main export is semiconductors is pretty much totally wired when it comes to internet access. With the exception of a few of the smaller hotels (generally the 'love hotels', whose customers generally have needs other than ready email access), all hotel rooms in the city have in-room broadband, and many have wi-fi in the lobby. Internet

### SECONDHAND BOOKS

If you're looking to stock up on cheap on-the-road reading, there are two restaurants in the Shida district boasting not just sandwiches but also secondhand books. These are Grandma Nitti's (p111) and Bongos (p111). Bongos has Taipei's best selection of science fiction paperbacks.

cafés abound, especially (but hardly limited to) neighbourhoods surrounding universities. And if you happen to be travelling with a laptop or another wireless device, you're pretty well set; when it comes to wi-fi access, cities don't get much friendlier than Taipei. You can buy stored-value wireless cards at 7-Eleven. The **National Central Library** (below) is a good place to check your email. There are also a couple of free kiosks on the 3rd floor of the **Nova Computer Arcade** (p122).

## Laundry

All of the hostels in our lodgings listings have washing machines on site, as does the YMCA. Getting your washing done at high-end lodgings can get expensive. If neither of these options works for you, there are some small clothes-cleaning shops and coin-operated laundromats. You'll find these shops in the alleys and lanes of many districts, especially those surrounding universities. One such place is **Shida Zihu Xiyi** (Shida Zhìzù Xiyì; Map p88; ☎ 2362 1047; 72 Longquan St; MRT Taipower Building), which will get your laundry back to you in about six hours (NT60 per load).

**E-clean** (Měishì Zhìzù Xiyì) Shida (Map p88; ☎ 0952-763 132; 159-1 Shida Rd; ☎ 24hr; MRT Taipower Building) Taipei City Hall (Map p96; 47 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.5; ☎ 24hr; MRT Taipei City Hall) is the most prominent laundromat chain in the city (NT60 per load). If you're up around the Minquan E Road area, **Shabon Coin Laundry** (Map p92; 122 Minquan E Rd, sec.2; ☎ 24hr) has washers for NT60 per load, and the dryers are NT10 for six minutes.

## Left Luggage

The basement floor of the Taipei Main Station has several rows of coin-operated lockers, as does the food court in the Shingong Tower across the street and the SOGO department store (p120). English instructions and regulations are clearly marked. The Songshan Domestic Airport has small/large lockers for NT80/120 per 24 hours, with a six-day limit. Most hostels also offer left-luggage service.

## Library

Right across the street from the Chiang Kai-shek memorial sits the **National Central Library** (NCL, Zhōngyāng Guójiā Túshūguǎn; Map p88; ☎ 2361 9132; 20 Zhongshan S Rd; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun), inside whose hallowed halls you'll find an extensive collection of Chinese-language tomes, current and back issues of more than

650 foreign magazines, a dozen newspapers in English, rare books and an art gallery on the 4th floor. The NCL also offers dozens of computers for free internet use, and a like number of desks with handy DSL ports for those travelling with their own laptops. If you're planning a trip to Taiwan's hinterlands, the NCL is a fine place to get photocopies of various road atlases and topographic maps (2nd floor). To enter, you'll need a library card; temporary (one day) cards can be picked up at the entrance with some ID, and for a permanent card you'll need your passport and a photo.

## Media

If you're after a steady stream of nonthreatening English-language pop tunes punctuated by light banter, traffic reports and news on the hour, then Taiwan's International Community Radio Taipei (ICRT; 100.7FM, 576AM) is the station for you. ICRT is Taiwan's only English-language radio station and possibly single-handedly responsible for making Taiwan's youth think that people in the West are actually still listening to ABBA and Hootie and the Blowfish. See p327 for general information on newspapers, magazines and TV stations in Taiwan.

Several free magazines published in English have loads of useful Taipei-specific information. These include *Wow Taipei* (published by the city government) and *Taiwan Fun* (www.taiwanfun.com), which has a great city map.

## Medical Services

Almost every hospital in Taipei has English speakers on staff; most also have an English-speaking, information-booth attendant close to the entrance. Most of the phone numbers below lead to recordings with English options. Three hospitals we've heard good things about are **Heping Hospital** (Map p88; ☎ 2192 6068; 33 Zhonghua Rd, sec.2, MRT Xiaonanmen), **Mackay Hospital** (Mǎjiè Yiyuàn; Map p92; ☎ 2543 3535; 92 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2, MRT Shuanglian) and **Veterans General Hospital** (Róngmín Zōng Yiyuàn; Map p100; ☎ 2875 7346; 201 Shipai Rd, sec.2; MRT Shipai).

Other hospitals include: **Adventist Hospital** (Táitiān Yiyuàn; Map p96; ☎ 2771 8151; 424 Bade Rd, sec.2; MRT Zhongxiao Fuxing) **Air Force Hospital** (Kōngjūn Yiyuàn; Map p96; ☎ 2764 2151; 131 Chienkang Rd) **Cathay General Hospital** (Guótài Zōnghé Yiyuàn; Map p96; ☎ 2708 2121; 280 Renai Rd, sec.4; MRT Zhongxiao Dunhua)

**Chang Gung Hospital** (Cháng Gēng Yīyuàn; Map p96; ☎ 2713 5211; 199 Dunhua N Rd)  
**National Taiwan University Hospital** (Táidà Yīyuàn; Map p88; ☎ 2312 3456; 1 Changde St; MRT NTU Hospital)  
**Yangming Hospital** (Yǎngmíng Yīyuàn; Map p100; ☎ 2835 3456; 105 Yusheng St, Tianmu; MRT Zhishan)

The Taiwanese enjoy subsidised medical coverage, but even as a visitor you won't find yourself paying too much for treatment for run-of-the-mill illnesses or injuries. If you're interested in checking out traditional medicine, the **Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine** (Táiběi Shìlǐ Zhōngyī Yīyuàn; Map p88; ☎ 2388 7088; 100 Kunming St; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 5-8.30pm Tue-Fri, 8-11.30am Sat; MRT Ximen) has English-speaking doctors. The same building also houses the **STD clinic** (Táiběi Shìlǐ Xíngbìng Fāngzhǐ Sùo; ☎ 2370 3739).

## Money

You shouldn't have much problem accessing your cash in Taipei as most Taiwanese banks are connected to either the Cirrus or Plus network. These networks generally accept foreign cards from banks aligned with those systems. You'll also find cash machines in the strangest places, such as McDonalds and 7-Elevens. We've found the latter to be especially trouble free in dispensing cash for out-of-town cardholders. The ATM on the ground floor of the Nova Computer Arcade (p122) across from Taipei Main Station also takes foreign cards. Most Taiwanese ATMs ask you to chose a language before entering your PIN. See p339 for further information.

## Post

Taipei's main post office, the **North Gate Post Office** (Map p88; Zhongxiao W Rd), is southwest of Taipei Main Station. Come here to claim poste restante packages. There are post offices throughout the city; easy to find because of their bright green facades and large signs in English. Post-office workers can generally understand a bit of English and are overall pretty helpful, but avoid going between noon and 2pm if at all possible; that's when busy time coincides with nap time.

## Tourist Information

There are eight Taipei Visitor's Information Centre booths scattered around the city, all with the usual assortment of maps and pamphlets, stacks of free magazines and generally helpful English-speaking staff.

**Taipei Visitor's Information Centre** Taipei Main Station (Map p88; ☎ 8am-8pm) Songshan Airport (Map pp82-3; ☎ 8am-8pm) These branches keep the longest hours. Taipei Travel Net (<http://taipeitravel.net>) has locations for the other six, plus loads of other useful information.  
**Tourism Bureau** (Guāngguāng Jù; Map p96; ☎ 2349 1500; 9th fl, 290 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4; ☎ 8am-5pm) Has similar information, though its location deep inside the building makes it a bit trickier to locate.

## Travel Agencies

There are a number of travel agencies located just south of the Songshan Airport by the junction of Minquan E and Dunhua N Rd and English-speaking agents advertise in all of the English-language newspapers. Low advertised prices without taxes and fees are often quoted, so clarify the total price before you buy any tickets. If you need to make a visa trip to avoid overstaying a landing or 60-day visa, the three cheapest spots to fly to are generally Manila, Okinawa, and of course, Hong Kong.

## SIGHTS

Taipei's sights can be extreme, from Qing dynasty temples with burning incense and chanting monks to wide plazas where teen-aged vixens with mobile phones seem to be engaging in tight-skirt beauty pageants. Wide and noisy neon-lit roads offer shopping malls (one of which is shaped like a golf ball and surrounded by wooden horses) with all the modern conveniences. Warrens of lanes and alleys, punctuated by the occasional playground, jungle gyms and health and pain inducing foot-massage paths (take off your shoes, walk steadily, and breathe deeply. Nothing better than some self-induced reflexology to keep you in shape) offer a quiet reprieve from the urban sprawl. With places to go, culture to experience, and things to eat, Taipei offers a plethora of exploration opportunities. We've listed some of our favourite spots, divided roughly by category. But we feel that the real joy of travel lies not in the destination, but in exploration itself. Taipei is particularly well suited for exploration, so make sure you leave yourself some time to investigate this truly dense – and often unexpectedly strange – city.

## Parks, Monuments & Memorials

Taipei has spectacular gardens, history from varying angles and more statues than you can shake a stick at: fancy a walk in the park?

**CKS SHILIN RESIDENCE PARK** 士林官邸  
 Once upon a time this multifaceted botanical garden, the **CKS Shilin Residence Park** (Shilín Guāndī; Map p100; 60 Fulin Rd; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm Sat & Sun; MRT Shilin) was part of the sprawling estate of Generalissimo and Mrs Chiang Kai-shek. They ruled the gardens with an iron hand, overseeing the pruning, weeding and other daily gardening tasks from their palatial home overlooking the estates, all the while dreaming of their inevitable triumphant retaking of mainland China. When the Generalissimo died, Madame Chiang (who never cared much for Taiwan), wasted no time in moving her official residence to America. For decades the estate and the surrounding gardens were closed to the public.

In the late 1990s, then-mayor (now president) Chen Shuibian decided to turn the whole area into a park. This did not please Chiang's widow, who, though in her late nineties, still claimed title to the property. Eventually a compromise was reached and the gardens were opened to the public while the house remained closed.

The main features of this sprawling estate, one of 15 of Chiang's estates still left over around the country, are its fabulous Chinese- and Western-style gardens. There is also a horticultural exhibition hall often filled with artistic displays of flowers and plants. Rafts of gardeners take care of them all.

The estate is just off Zhongshan N Rd, sec.5. The main entrance is about 10 minutes' walk from the Shilin MRT station. Keen observers might note that though the initials 'CKS' still appear on all signs, the former dictator's full name, as well his name in Chinese, have been removed from much of the signage within the property. Can it be too long before 'the little people' are wandering around Chiang's personal sanctuary? Who knows?

## DA'AN PARK 大安公園

If Taipei has a central park, then this is it. Bordered on all sides by the major urban thoroughfares of Xinyi, Jianguo, Heping and Xinsheg Rds; this large park (Dà'ān Gōngyuán; Map p88) is where the city comes to play. And play it does, from kiddies rollerblading and playing tag to teens playing basketball and ultimate Frisbee to old men whomping each other in *xiàngqí* (Chinese chess). The park is a great place to hang out on sunny afternoons; take off your

shoes and walk barefoot on the foot-massage path or just stop and smell the flowers. In the early mornings, you'll see folks practising taichi. Perhaps more incongruous for visitors expecting Asian-themed pursuits are the ad hoc ballroom-dancing classes that often occur on cool summer evenings. Find a partner and join in. On big holidays, especially Christmas, New Year and Chinese New Year, the amphitheatre hosts free stage shows featuring some of the biggest names in Taiwanese entertainment. There's also a row of restaurants with outdoor seating across the street from the park's northwest corner.

## 2-28 PEACE PARK 二二八和平公園

At first glance the lovely **2-28 Peace Park** (Èrbā Hépíng Gōngyuán; Map p88; MRT NTU Hospital) doesn't seem more significant than any of the other dozen or so parks in Taipei. There's a band performance stage, some lovely shrines and pavilions, paths and playgrounds. But there is a certain air of solemnity to this place, for it is dedicated to the memory of a massacre that began on 28 February 1947 (hence the 2-28), an event that heralded the start of Taiwan's martial-law era. In the centre of the park stands the memorial itself, a steeped sculpture surrounded by three enormous cubes turned on their corners. The memorial is surrounded by a moat that is crossed by a bridge. In the early mornings, the park is a good place to watch people practising taichi and you can join in if you're so inclined. At night, it's said that 2-28 park is a popular cruising ground for gay men. This park is home to both the 2-28 Memorial Museum (p92) and the National Taiwan Museum.

## BOTANICAL GARDENS 植物園

A beautiful oasis in Taipei's funky west side, this **park** (Zhīwúyuán; Map p88; ☎ 2381 7107; 53 Nanhai Rd; admission free; ☎ 4am-10pm; MRT Xiaonanmen) has greenhouses featuring a vast variety of lush plants, literature- and Chinese-zodiac-themed gardens and a marvellous lotus pond. Taipei's Botanical Gardens are also considered one of the best places in the world to see the rare Malaysian Night Heron, making the park a major stop on foreign birding tours. That such a rare bird can be seen so close to, let alone inside, a major urban centre is quite amazing, or so our twitcher friends tell us. The Botanical Gardens are where you'll find the National Museum of History (p93).



ZHISHAN CULTURAL & ECOLOGICAL GARDEN 芝山花園

Just south of Tianmu's Yangming hospital and a few blocks east of the Zhishan MRT sits one of our favourite Taipei parks (Zhishan Huayuan; Map p100; MRT Zhishan), a jungle-filled mountain just north of the Shuangxi River (also a lovely park in its own right). It's filled with gardens and shrines and the top of the mountain has a temple dedicated to a much revered sage and general called Chen Yuan Kwang who lived 1500 years ago. Though the temple itself is lovely enough, more interesting still are the statues surrounding it - carved stone representations of characters well known to anyone familiar with the Chinese classic Romance of the Three Kingdoms.

And what really makes the climb worth it is the view, a sweeping panorama of the whole of Taipei city. The park itself offers a wide variety of hikes, both on dirt trails as well as wooden boardwalks that skirt sections of the mountain.

CHILDREN'S RECREATION CENTRE 兒童育樂中心

Just south of the Keelung River, this large park (Értóng Yùlè Zhōngxīn; Map p92; ☎ 2593 2211; 66 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.3; NT30, additional for planetarium shows; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon; MRT Yuanshan) features a 'world of yesterday' with historical Chinese toys and folk arts, and a 'world of tomorrow' with, among other things, a planetarium.

OLD TOWN CENTRE, DA'AN & SHIDA



SUN YAT-SEN MEMORIAL HALL 國父紀念館 Occupying an entire city block, this hall (Guófù Jiànyànguān; Map p96; ☎ 2758 8008; 505 Renai Rd, sec.4; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm; MRT Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall) serves as a cultural centre (concerts, performances and special events), a large public park and a museum of the life of the man considered the founder of modern China. A huge statue of Dr Sun sits in a cavernous lobby facing the park to the south. It's guarded by two implacable sentries - you can watch the changing of the guards, an intricate choreography involving much spinning of bayoneted rifles and precision stepping. This happens twice a day. Morning visitors practising taichi on the grounds provide another kind of choreography. You'll also find the excellent Discovery Centre of Taipei (p93) on the grounds.

MARTYRS' SHRINE 忠烈祠 Against a backdrop of mountains across the Keelung River from the city centre, the monumental National Revolutionary Martyrs' Shrine (Zōngliècí; Map p92; ☎ 2349 1635; 139 Beian Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) enshrines the dead of the wars fought on behalf of the ROC. The complex covers around 5000 sq metres and the main sanctuary was modelled after the Taiho Palace in Beijing. Plaques, paintings and friezes in the arcade surrounding the main sanctuary describe the details of various 20th-century rebellions and battles. A bell tower and drum tower are used during memorial ceremonies. The main reason most people come here, however, is to see the hourly changing of the guards. Blue uniformed, silver-helmeted, implacable and silent, they wield and spin

Table with 3 columns: Category (e.g., INFORMATION, SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES, EATING, SHOPPING, SLEEPING), Item Name, and Reference Code (e.g., 1 C4, 28 A1, 54 C3). The table lists various services, attractions, restaurants, and accommodations in Taipei.

their bayoneted rifles with the precision of a drill team. The public is able to march along with the guards as they tread the path from the sanctuary to the main gate hundreds of metres away. The shrine is about 10 minutes' walk east of the Grand Hotel (p107).

### CHIANG KAI-SHEK MEMORIAL HALL

中正紀念堂

Whether this imposing **hall** (Zhōngzhèng Jìniàn Tāng; Map p88; ☎ 2343 1100; 21 Zhongshan S Rd; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm; MRT Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall) will still go by the same name by the time this book goes to print is anybody's guess. Many and strident are the voices in the high halls of Taiwan's government calling for this 70m-tall memorial to Taiwan's one-time dictator to be renamed, and the massive statue removed. For now, this iconic monument with its white walls and blue octagonal roof still stands as a grandiose, ostentatious and perhaps fitting memorial to the man who, in life, was known in some circles as 'General Cash-my-check'. On the ground floor you'll find a museum dedicated to Chiang's life, with an assortment of military uniforms, medals, paintings and manuscripts, along with two humungous black, bulletproof Cadillacs he used. You'll also find in this museum an interesting version of history in which Chiang's Kuomintang (KMT, Nationalist Party) forces nearly single-handedly defeated the Japanese empire, and the Chinese communist revolution is reduced to a mere speed bump in history.

The sculpture of the man himself is equally ostentatious. To get to it visitors ascend a flight of 89 steps (representing Chiang's age when he died), where the gigantic bronze sculpture occupies a cavernous hall, and looks out over the gate and towards China. The statue is flanked by two motionless guards with bayoneted rifles and, behind him, carved into the white marble walls, are Chinese characters reading 'ethics', 'democracy' and 'science', the 'Three Principles of the People'. A sign in front of the hall, opened in 1980, five years after Chiang's death, states that those with slippers or slovenly dress shall not be admitted.

The grounds (250,000 sq metres) also include the **National Theatre** and **National Concert Hall**; it's here that the Taipei City Classical Chinese Orchestra often performs (check schedule for times). The plazas and gardens around the three buildings are among Taipei's grandest and best used, and on weekends

you'll often find anything from outdoor art exhibitions to hip-hop concerts. The grounds are also used by marching bands and drill teams to rehearse their routines.

At press time, one of the most dramatic examples of Taiwan's break from the Chiang Kai-shek era is still in progress. As of mid-July the cavernous entrance to the upper portion of the monument has been covered by scaffolding, and the plaque above the doorway bearing Chiang's name taken down. Green and blue banners reading 'National Taiwan Democracy Monument' have been hung just under the eaves on three of the monuments. The name of the park and corresponding MRT station remains unchanged. Will this sight still be called 'Chiang Kai-shek Memorial' by the time you read this, or should you look for a building called 'National Taiwan Democracy Monument'? And will the colossal generalissimo still be seated upstairs? Time (and future editions of this book) will tell for sure.

### Museums

If it's museums you like, you'll find no shortage of them in Taipei.

#### NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM 故宮博物院

This **museum** (Gùgōng Bówùyuàn; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2881 2021; 221 Zhishan Rd, sec.2; adult/concession/infant NT100/50/free; 🕒 9am-5pm) is home to what could quite easily be termed the world's largest and finest collection of Chinese art; it is unfortunate that the overall interior setup of the museum does not match with the grandeur of the collection. Its renovation, ongoing for several years, was pronounced 'completed' with great fanfare in 2007; however, we have to liken the National Palace Museum to a sumptuous gourmet banquet made with the finest ingredients, but prepared by a disinterested chef and arranged by colour-blind kitchen staff.

The museum's interior is poorly lit and for the most part its grand collection is laid out with little sense of theme or design, giving the museum a stagnant feel overall. This is especially strange in light of the fact that the exhibits are rotated frequently; the vast collection (much of it liberated from mainland China during the last retreat of the KMT) is far too large to exhibit at any given time. Nonetheless, the sheer volume and beauty of the museum's treasures still makes it a must visit.

### ONE-DAY TAIPEI TOURS FOR THE...

#### Spiritual Traveller

Rise at dawn and head to **2-28 Peace Park** (p87) for some taichi and morning contemplation, followed by walking 200 steps along the stone foot-massage path to build inner resilience. Go to **Longshan Temple** (p97) to mingle with morning devotees and fellow travellers. After that, head over to the **Museum of World Religions** (p138) and check out exhibits until noon, then have lunch at the **Tao Shine Vegetarian Restaurant** (p139). Afterwards, visit the compact yet beautiful **Tien-Ho Temple** (p98), located in the heart of ultrachic Ximending. The walk from the MRT will test your resolve against a variety of forms of sin. Travel north to the Yuanshan neighbourhood to check out **Confucius Temple** (p95) and the surrounding temples in the area until dusk. Head to Shilin for a meal at **Haw Kuang** (p115). Afterwards, get to **Beitou** (p131) for a soak in the hot spring. You've earned it.

#### Culture Vulture

Spend the morning in the government district getting your historical bearings. To glean two very different versions of Taiwanese history, visit the **Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall** (opposite) and the **2-28 Memorial Museum** (p92). Then visit the **Presidential Building** (p102), letting the very fact that you can visit give you an idea of how far Taiwan's democracy has evolved. After an early lunch in the neighbourhood, head up to Shilin and divide the rest of the afternoon between the **Shung Ye Museum of Formosan Aborigines** (below) and the **National Palace Museum** (opposite) as they're close to each other. When the museums close, head up to **Danshui** (p126) for the evening, checking out the old shops and eating on Danshui 's Gongming St (also known as Danshui Old St).

#### Glutton

Get up whenever. If it's before 10am, find any restaurant that has a sign reading 早餐店 (Zǎocān Diàn, Breakfast Shop) and get yourself two *qī sī dàn bǐng* (rolled cheese and egg omelettes), a side of *luóbuógāo* (turnip cake – trust us, they taste better than they sound), and maybe a *wēn dòujiāng* (warm soymilk) to settle your stomach. If it's after 10am, go to the **Taipei Main Station food court** (p110) and try some Hakka food. After lunch, head back to your hotel, crank up the air-con, and rest up for a long night. For dinner, head out to the **Shida neighbourhood** (p111). Eat liberally from any of the stalls that appeal to you and don't forget to buy some fruit (to aid digestion). Hit the nearest 7-Eleven for a bottle of Whisbih (an energy drink) and take a taxi up to the **Shilin Night Market** (p99). Share your Whisbih with the driver and if he offers you betel nut, take it. Spend a few hours eating light snacks such as *zhū xiě gāo* (congealed pigs blood) and *chòu dòufu* (stinky tofu) before heading to the food court across from the station for a nice *táibēi niúpái* (Taiwanese beefsteak) nightcap. Bon appetit!

Among the treasures on rotation at the National Palace Museum are painting, calligraphy, statues and ceramic and jade. Some pieces date back thousands of years into Chinese history and even prehistory. The museum also has an amazing collection of Buddhist artifacts inherited from the Forbidden City. Some of the most popular items are always on display – check with the front desk to find out where they are during your visit.

The museum offers free guided tours in English at 10am and 3pm. Tour contents vary with each guide, but all offer a good overview. If you prefer to move about at your own pace, there's an English headphone guide (NT200).

To reach the museum, take the MRT to Shilin station (Red Line), exit to Zhongzheng Rd (north exit), and catch bus 304, 255, red 30, minibus 18 or 19 or culture bus 101.

#### SHUNG YE MUSEUM OF FORMOSAN ABORIGINES 順益台灣原住民博物館

This **museum** (Shūnyì Tàiwān Yuánzhūmín Bówùguǎn; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2841 2611; www.museum.org.tw; 282 Jishan Rd, sec.2; adult/concession NT150/100; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed Mon & 20 Jan-20 Feb) features highlights of nine Taiwanese indigenous tribes. These Austronesian peoples are related through blood or linguistic ties to people across precolonial Oceania, as far away as Madagascar. The tribes



developed pottery, basketry, wood carvings, musical instruments and colourful costumes. The museum is tastefully put together and features soft lighting and an interesting array of exhibits. Fine examples of Taiwanese aboriginal handicrafts are displayed and video footage offers an educational summary of the histories of the tribes themselves.

While the culture of Taiwan's aboriginal people was nearly subsumed as Han Chinese overtook the island both culturally and demographically, in the past decade, there's been a remarkable upswing of interest among Taiwanese people towards their aboriginal brethren, due perhaps in part to the wish of many in Taiwan to establish a cultural identity distinct from that of mainland China.

The museum is about 200m past the bus stop for the National Palace Museum, across the street.

**2-28 MEMORIAL MUSEUM** 二二八紀念館  
 Located inside 2-28 park (p87), the **2-28 Memorial Museum** (Èrèrbā Jìniànguǎn; Map p88; ☎ 2389 7228; 3 Ketagalan Blvd; adult/concession NT20/10; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon; MRT NTU Hospital) offers an explanation of the events and repercussions of the 28 February 1947 massacre. Acknowledgment of the 2-28 incident was a pivotal part of Taiwan's transformation from dictatorship to democracy. Though there is little in the way of English signage in the museum, a multilingual walking tour device is available for NT50, plus NT1000 rental deposit. However, there

are generally bilingual volunteers on hand willing to walk you through the displays. The building itself is significant, for it was from this, the former KMT radio station, that officials tried to calm the masses as panic swept the island.

Just north of the museum (by the park's northern gate) is the National Taiwan Museum (Guóli Tāiwān Bówùguǎn; Map p88), with exhibits on the flora and fauna of the island, as well as special exhibits. Its lack of English signage, however, may make it less accessible to non-Chinese-speaking visitors.

**FINE ARTS MUSEUM** 市立美術館

Constructed in the 1980s, this airy, four storey box of marble, glass and concrete showcases contemporary art, with a particular focus on Taiwanese artists. Although the **museum** (Shìlì Měishùguǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2595 7656; 181 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.3; student/adult/senior NT15/30/free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, closed Mon; MRT Yuanshan) features exhibits that change annually, and works from the permanent collection. These include pieces by Taiwanese painters and sculptors from the Japanese period to the present.

South of the museum is the Zhongshan Fine Arts Park, a gently sloping green-grass space with ancient trees, sculptures, and various rotating exhibits and happenings. The park is a popular weekend hangout for members of Taipei's *kabayan* (Philippine guest worker) community, who come here to picnic, play music and otherwise chill out on days off.

**MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART TAIPEI**  
 台北當代藝術館

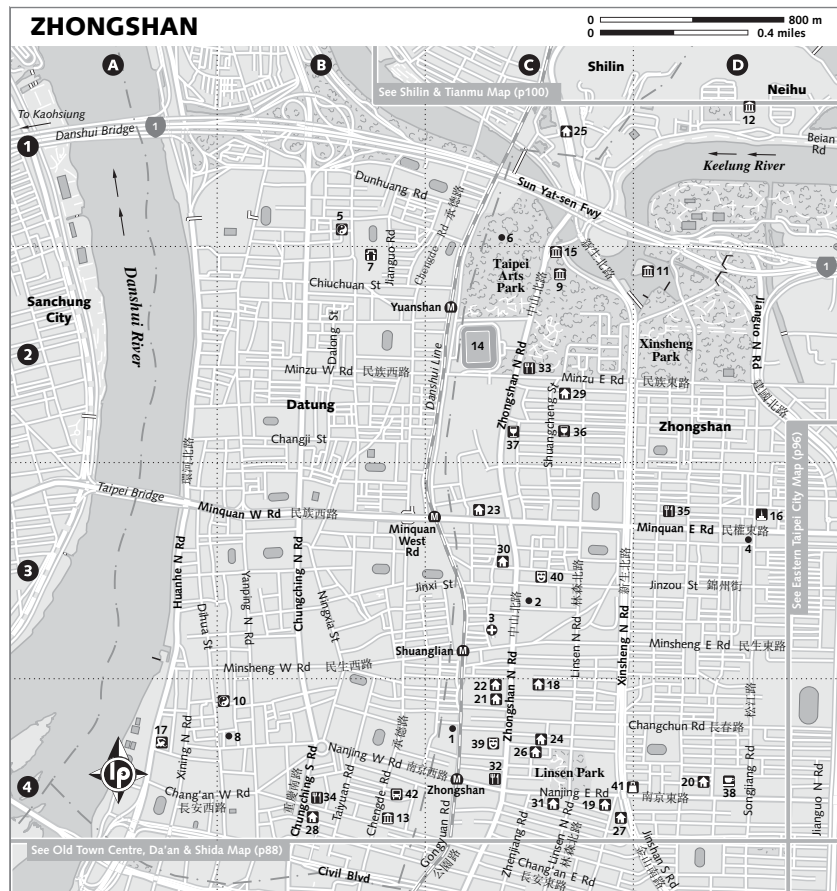
Taiwan's first **museum** (MOCA, Tàiběi Dāngdài Yìshùguǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2552 3721; www.mocatapei.org.tw; 39 Chang'an W Rd; admission NT50; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Mon; MRT Zhongshan) dedicated explicitly to contemporary art occupies an important Japanese-era building that was once Taipei's city hall. Shows are all special exhibits and fill anything from one gallery to the entire museum; they might include architecture, design, fashion, digital and video art and even comic books. Check the website for current exhibition information.

**DISCOVERY CENTRE OF TAIPEI** 台北探索館

Inside Taipei City Hall, this **complex** (Tàiběi Tànsuǒguǎn; Map p96; ☎ 2725 8630; 1 Shifu Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon; MRT Taipei City Hall) is a good place to get your bearings on the city and its history. You can see maps and models depicting Taipei's evolution from a walled, gated city in 1882 to the bustling metropolis it is today. You can find out more about its geography, topography, commerce, famous residents and natural resources here too. There's a free audio guide in English, and guided tours are available with advance notice.

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY**

國立歷史博物館  
 Just outside the Botanical Gardens, Taiwan's first **museum** (Guóli Lìshǐ Bówùguǎn; Map p88; ☎ 2361 0270; 49 Nanhai Rd; adult/concession NT20/10, child & senior



<b>INFORMATION</b>		Skate Park ..... 14 C2	<b>EATING</b> 🍴
523 Mountaineering Association 五二三登山會 ..... 1 C4	Taipei Story House 台北故事館 ..... 15 C2	Celestial Restaurant 天廚餐廳 ..... 32 C4	
Caves Books 敦煌書局 ..... 2 C3	Xingtian Temple 行天宮 ..... 16 D3	Haibawan 海霸王旗艦店 ..... 33 C2	
Mackay Hospital 馬偕醫院 ..... 3 C3	Yuquan Park Pool 玉泉公園溫水游泳池 ..... 17 A4	Joy Yuan Taiwan Buffet 喬園自助餐 ..... 34 B4	
Shabon Coin Laundry 自助洗衣店, 民權東路二段122號 ..... 4 D3		Paris 1930 巴黎廳 ..... 35 D3	
<b>SLEEPING</b> 🛏		<b>SLEEPING</b> 🛏	<b>DRINKING</b> 🍷
	Ambassador Hotel 國賓大飯店 ..... 18 C4	Emperor Hotel 國王大飯店 ..... 19 C4	Malibu West ..... 36 C2
	First Hotel 第一大飯店 ..... 20 D4	Formosa Hostel I ..... 21 C4	My Place ..... 37 C2
	Formosa Hostel II ..... 22 C4	Formosa Hostel III ..... 23 C3	Rose House 古典玫瑰園 ..... 38 D4
	Friends Spring Hotel 友春飯店 ..... 24 C4	Grand Formosa Regent 晶華酒店 ..... 25 C1	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> 🎬
	Grand Hotel 圓山大飯店 ..... 26 C4	Hôtel Royal Taipei 老爺大酒店 ..... 27 C4	SPOT - Taipei Film House 台北之家電影主題館 ..... 39 C4
	Hsiachai City God Temple 霞海城隍廟 ..... 10 B4	Moon Hotel ..... 28 B4	Taipei Eye 台北眼 ..... 40 C3
	Lin Antai Old Homestead 林安泰古厝 ..... 11 D2	Queen Hotel 皇后賓館 ..... 29 C2	<b>SHOPPING</b> 🛍
	Marty's Shrine 忠烈祠 ..... 12 D1	Riviera Hotel 歐華酒店 ..... 29 C2	Ten Shang's Tea Company 天翔茶業股份有限公司 ..... 41 C4
	Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei 台北當代藝術館 ..... 13 B4	Taipei Fortuna Hotel 富都大飯店 ..... 30 C3	<b>TRANSPORT</b>
		Taipei International Hotel 台北國際飯店 ..... 31 C4	Tonglien Bus Company 統聯客運站 ..... 42 B4



free; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Mon; MRT Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, (Xiaonanmen) is still an anchor of local arts and culture housed in an elegant Japanese-era building. 'History' is actually a misnomer – Chinese art history would be more accurate, with thousands of Chinese artifacts from the Tang, Shang and other dynasties. The tea room on the 3rd floor has views of the Botanical Gardens' lotus pond. A tour in English takes place at 3pm each afternoon.

**SU HO PAPER MUSEUM 樹火紀念紙博物館**  
Don't blink or you might walk right past the store front housing this four-storey museum (Shùhuǒ Jìniàn Zhǐ Bówùguǎn; Map p96; ☎ 2507 5539; 68 Chang'an E Rd, sec.2; admission NT100, NT180 with paper-making session; ☎ by appointment 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat; MRT Zhongxiao Fuxing). Fulfilling the lifelong dream of Taiwanese paper-maker Mr Chen Su Ho, this museum features special exhibits of ultracreative uses of paper (such as paper sculpture or installation art). No matter when you visit, you can make your own sheet of paper in the museum's workshop and learn about materials and processes. An English audio guide is available. Exhibits change two or three times a year.

### TAIPEI FOR CHILDREN

Children should have a good time visiting Taipei, as the number of kid-friendly venues is growing each year. This isn't so much to attract Western visitors who travel with children, though that may be a happy by-product; academic pressure starts early for Taiwanese kids, and over the last decade more enlightened souls in the country have sought to balance this pressure with play, giving rise to a cottage industry of child-friendly places.

There are obvious choices, of course, such as the **Taipei Zoo** (p136) and the **Children's Recreation Centre** (p88). There are also a number of museums geared towards children's edutainment. Our favourite of these is the newly opened **National Taiwan Science Education Centre** (opposite). Likewise, kids will like the **Taipei Astronomical Museum** (opposite) and **Taipei Sea World** (opposite). The little ones should find enough to occupy them inside the weirdly mystical **Wonderland of Love** (p139) to allow the parents a solid hour to explore the decidedly more mature **Museum of World Religions** (p138) to which it's attached.

**Danshui** (p126) is also a good place to bring kids. The waterfront plaza and Old St are car-free, and there are a number of odd venues (such as the Believe it or Not Museum and Starbugs) with plenty of gross-out factors that kids should enjoy. Just across the river, **Bali** (p129) is also a fine place for travellers with children, as the bike-rental shops seem to do a good business with various tandem bikes equipped with child seats – a great way to bring the little ones to the surprisingly kid-pleasing **Shihnsanhseng Museum of Archaeology** (p129). Of course, if the risk of severe insulin shock isn't daunting, a visit to the **Taiwan Nougat Museum** (p139) is fun for the whole family.

Naturally, Taipei also offers great opportunities to expose children to Chinese culture. Try a **Chinese opera performance** (p120) or a puppet show. Kids also seem to love marching with the guards at the **Martyrs' Shrine** (p89), while the **Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall** (p90) offers plenty of space for them to run around. And the night markets are always alluring, and offer lots of messy-dining meals for kids of all ages.

The museum shop sells cards, elegant kites and other trinkets constructed from handmade paper.

### MINIATURES MUSEUM OF TAIWAN 袖珍博物館

Bigger is better, so some say; but not at the **Miniatures Museum of Taiwan** (Xiù Zhēn Bówùguǎn; Map p96; ☎ 2515 0583; B1, 96 Jianguo N Rd, sec.1; adult/student/child NT180/150/100; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Mon; MRT Zhongshan Junior High School) where quite the opposite is true. This small, private museum is dedicated to the exhibition of the minuscule, the tiny, the 'Sweet Jesus, I can't believe someone had the patience and steadiness of hand to create something so small and intricate!' Among the most (of many) astounding articles on display is a 40-bulb chandelier no bigger than a single grain of rice. A most impressive little museum indeed.

**TAIPEI STORY HOUSE 台北故事館**  
Just north of the Fine Arts Museum, this house (Táiběi Gùshìguǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2587 5565; 181-1 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.3; adult/student NT30/20, child & senior free; ☎ 10.30am-6pm, closed Mon; MRT Yuanshan) was built in 1914 by an aristocratic tea trader. Its style

was said to have been inspired by a building he saw while visiting the 1900 Paris Expo. Today the house is an exhibition space for Taipei nostalgia and history. Exhibits change frequently and might include goodies such as toys, matchboxes and comic books.

The gift shop features the work of a dozen local artists and the tearoom serves afternoon tea and French-style cuisine.

### TAIPEI ASTRONOMICAL MUSEUM

天文科學教育館  
Opened in 1997, this museum (Tiānwén Kēxué Jiàoyùguǎn; Map p100; ☎ 2831 4551; www.tam.gov.tw; 363 Jihe Rd; adult/concession NT40/20; ☎ 8.50am-5pm, closed Mon; MRT Jiantan) houses four floors of constellations, ancient astronomy, space science and technology, telescopes and observatories. Though a good place to while away an hour with the kids, what keeps this otherwise excellent museum from being a must-visit is a dearth of English content, though every exhibit features English and Chinese, but most of the actual information is in the latter language only. Plans are underway to put full bilingual information online, so theoretically non-Chinese speaking visitors could download exhibit information and study up before arriving. More English-friendly attractions (at an extra charge) are an IMAX theatre, a 3-D theatre (presentations change frequently) and the 'Cosmic Adventure', an amusement-park ride through outer space.

### NATIONAL TAIWAN SCIENCE EDUCATION CENTRE 國立台灣科學教育館

If this place doesn't bring out the kid in you, than there's no kid in you to be brought out. The **National Taiwan Science Education Centre** (NTSEC, Guólí Tāiwān Kēxué Jiàoyù Zhōngxīn; Map p100; ☎ 2837 8777; 189 Shihshang Rd; NT100; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7pm weekends & holidays, closed Mon; MRT Shilin) is one of the coolest children's museums we've yet to find in Asia. Interactive exhibits cover the gamut of scientific knowledge, from anatomy (a walk-through digestive tract!) to zoology (a cat-head-shaped helmet that gives the wearer feline hearing powers). Though NTSEC is not fully bilingual, museum staff have gone to great length to include enough English content to make all sections of the museum accessible to non-Chinese speakers.

Like the Astronomical museum, NTSEC has a 3-D theatre (admission is an extra NT120). You also have the option of paying

an extra NT100 to take a short ride on a bicycle. Why would you want to do this, you ask? We'll let that be a surprise, suffice to say that it has to do with where the bicycle is located and what the short ride entails. Keep pedalling and for Buddha's sake, don't look down!

### TAIPEI CHILDREN'S ART MUSEUM

蘇荷兒童美術館  
Opened in 2003, this highly interactive children's museum (Sūhé Értóng Měishùguǎn; Map p100; ☎ 2872 1366; www.artart.com.tw; B1, 20 Alley 50, Tianmu W Rd; ☎ 10am-5.30pm, closed Mon except holidays & closed Tue following holidays; Bus 220) features artwork by children and regular programmes to encourage children to participate in the creation of art. Dedicated to the nurturing of children's hearts and minds through art, the museum offers an excellent counterpoint to the rote 'learning through repetition and imitation' educational methods prevalent in Taiwan. Though generally frequented by teachers with school groups, activities and guided tours for travellers with children can be arranged by calling in advance.

**TAIPEI SEA WORLD 台北海洋館**  
Though this aquarium (Táiběi Hǎiyángguǎn; Map p100; ☎ 2880 2310; 128 Jihe Rd; adult/concession/senior NT480/430/350; ☎ 9am-10pm; MRT Jiantan) probably won't win any awards from the Jacques Cousteau foundation, it's OK as a quick diversion. The fish are pretty, and kids should have a good time checking out the reasonable variety of sea creatures on display. Probably the only aquarium we've ever seen in a high-rise building.

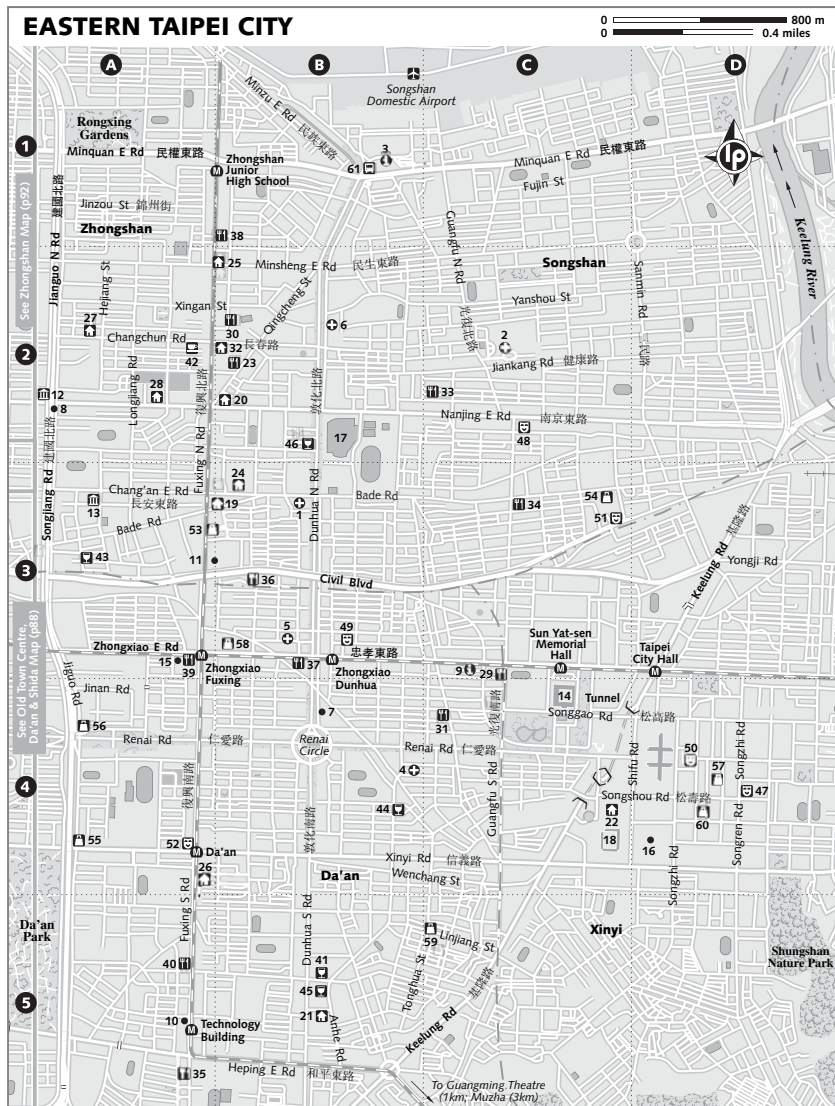
### Must-Visit Temples

Many are Taipei's houses of worship; some are even surrounded by snack vendors.

### CONFUCIUS TEMPLE 孔廟

Modelled after the temple in Confucius' native town of Shandong, this temple (Kǒng Miào; Map p92; ☎ 2592 3934; 275 Dalong St; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-9pm Tue-Sat, 8.30am-5pm Sun; MRT Yuanshan) is based on classical Chinese temple architecture. Confucius (551-479 BC) is generally acknowledged as China's greatest educator and scholar. In his day, education was exclusive to nobility but Confucius successfully promoted popular education.

Confucius valued simplicity, a trait seen in the temple's architecture and relatively muted



adornments. Inscriptions that might be found on columns, doors and windows in other temples are banned here; who would have the temerity to think his or her writing could compare with that of the great master? Do take note of the detailed carvings of dragons on the temple's Ling Xing Gate and the fired pottery on the Yi Gate. The central Ta Cheng hall is

one of the few traditional wooden buildings in Taiwan and contains a Confucius tablet. A seven-storey pagoda in the centre of the roof is said to drive away evil spirits. A total of 186 tablets representing the Confucian disciples are located on the premises.

The temple at this site (13,935 sq metres) dates back to 1928, replacing the original 1879

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Lawry's The Prime Rib 勞瑞斯牛排餐廳	(see 54)
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temple that was damaged beyond repair during a rebellion under Japanese occupation.

The temple's biggest day of the year is Confucius' birthday, celebrated on 28 September. Events begin at 6am with a ceremony presided over by the mayor of Taipei and officiated by rafts of attendants, supervisors and officers, all dressed in elaborate costumes. Confucius' spirit is welcomed with drumming, music, bowing, incense, chanting, a sacrificial feast and the burning of spirit money. Tickets go on sale at the temple about five days in advance and always sell out. At other times of year the Confucian tradition of education continues with weekly Chinese calligraphy classes (2pm to 4pm every Wednesday) and poetry readings (2pm to 4pm every Saturday). Classes are informal and free so just turn up.

### LONGSHAN TEMPLE 龍山寺

Religious life in Taiwan is alive and kicking seven days a week at the Longshan temple (Lóngshān Sì; Map p88; ☎ 2302 5162; 211 Guangzhou St; admission free; ☎ 6am-10.20pm; MRT Longshan Temple). Though not the biggest temple in the city,

there is something unique and beautiful about the vibe at Longshan that keeps people coming back.

The temple dates back to 1738. As the story goes, a passer-by left an amulet of the Guanyin (goddess of mercy) hanging on a tree on the site of the present temple, and the amulet shone so brightly, even after dark, that all who passed by knew the site was blessed. Nearly three centuries later, the spot still exudes a certain warmth. The stones that line the courtyard of the temple were originally ballast on the ships that ferried immigrants from Fujian province across the often treacherous Taiwan Straits, and the waterfall inside the courtyard is a favourite spot for shutterbugs. Once you enter the main building, expect a riot of scarlet and gold in the form of enormous bronze incense burners and carved-stone columns. The best times to visit are around 6am, 8am and 5pm when crowds of worshippers gather and engage in hypnotic chanting.

Like many temples in Taiwan, the Longshan temple is multid denominational. Although the Guanyin is still the central deity worshipped



here, the temple enshrines 165 other deities. Along the back wall are several bays containing different gods – on the right is the patron of scholarly pursuits, while on the left is the god of military pursuits and business people. The goddess Matsu (p216) is in the centre, and provides for the safe return of travellers by sea or land (air travellers pay their respects to the Guanyin). Matu is flanked by two male guards, one is said to see 1000 miles, while the other can hear 1000 miles.

The lights on columns at the back of the temple represents one person whose family has made a donation in his or her honour.

Outside of the front gate of the temple, old monks sit selling cedar-wood beads, and old women sell magnolias. The number of vendors increases markedly on weekends. Across the street from the temple is an underground market and the entire neighbourhood is good for shopping for religious items and trinkets of all sorts.

#### XINGTIAN TEMPLE 行天宮

This **temple** (Xingtian Gong; Map p92; ☎ 2502 7924; 109 Minquan E Rd, sec.2; admission free; ☞ 5am–11pm) is one of the city's busiest. It's dedicated to Guanyin (AD 162–219), a famous red-faced general who became deified and is worshipped as the god of war and, by extension, martial arts. Business people also flock here as Guangong was said to be adept at finance.

Although it does not have the long history of other temples (the present building dates from 1967), it has left. One distinctive feature is the large shed that covers the central courtyard. This is where supplicants leave their daily offerings on tables. Temple officials wear handsome royal-blue robes.

Xingtian Temple is also popular for fortune-telling. Within the temple grounds you'll hear, and then see, visitors dropping oracle blocks. Fortune-tellers can often be found even in the pedestrian underpass outside the temple.

The temple god is celebrated on the 24th day of the sixth lunar month, and at smaller festivals during the third and ninth lunar months.

#### BAO-AN TEMPLE 保安宮

It began with humble Qing-dynasty origins, but today this Taoist **temple** (Baoan Gong; Map p92; ☎ 2595 1676; 61 Hami St; admission free; ☞ 7am–10pm; MRT Yuanshan) is one of the city's leading religious sites. The original, wooden structure

was completed in 1760 by immigrants from Fujian province who brought their own materials with them. The current temple, dating from 1805, took 25 years to build.

The temple deity is the emperor Bao-shen, famous as a doctor and great healer. As such, the temple gets many visitors who come to pray for good health. Enshrined in the bell tower is the goddess of birth. She is flanked by 12 female aides, each of whom assists with childbirth during a particular month, so naturally it's long been popular with pregnant women. Other gods commemorated here are patrons of business and good fortune.

The two open-mouthed lions (one male, the other female) are said to be an appeal for the rule of law and good government.

#### HSIAHAI CITY GOD TEMPLE 霞海城隍廟

Others may be larger and grander, but this **temple** (Xiāhǎi Chéngguāng Miào; Map p92; 61 Dihua St, sec.1) teems with character and characters. It's also one of the best-preserved temples in the city and has had the same appearance for over a century. Visit on the city god's birthday (the 13th day of the fifth lunar month) for one of Taipei's biggest, loudest and most lively celebrations.

In addition to being protector of the people of the city, the city god also keeps track of good and evil deeds performed by mortals, and monitors the movements of souls and demons in the afterlife. The powers of the city god are almost carrot-and-stick in nature, the power to motivate good thoughts on the one hand, and the ability to strike fear through punishment on the other.

#### TIEN-HO TEMPLE 天后宮

More proof that good things come in small packages, this **temple** (Tiānhòu Gong; Map p88; 51 Chengdu Rd, Ximending) seems, from the outside, but a narrow (though exceptionally ornate) storefront in the busy Ximending district. But walk through the narrow gate and you'll find one of Central Taipei's most beautiful Buddhist temples, complete with statues of Matsu, ancient Chinese generals, a bell tower and a small dragon-shaped pond filled with huge carp. The original temple was built during the mid-Qing period and demolished during the last years of Japanese rule to make way for a roadway. The current temple was built in 1948 and holds several ancient statues

brought over from mainland China hundreds of years ago.

Then there's the matter of the smell. For reasons which we can't quite explain, the temple often smells of burning hemp. But worshippers seem to be walking straight, so we assume it's an industrial blend.

#### CIYOU TEMPLE 慈佑宮

Right across from Songshan train station, this **temple** (Ciyòu Gong; 761 Bade Rd, sec.4) is dedicated to the goddess Matsu and is one of the oldest in the city. But Ciyou temple has another thing going for it besides age; noise. Specifically this takes place, on the day of Matsu's birthday (p216), when the temple is said to hold the loudest, most colourful birthday celebrations in Taiwan. Proceedings are resplendent with gongs, music and firecrackers. If you see us at Ciyou temple during the festival, don't bother yelling. We might see you at Ciyou, but we won't be able to hear you...or anything else for the rest of the day, for that matter.

#### TAIPEI MOSQUE 台北清真大寺

Built in 1960, the Taipei **mosque** (Táiběi Qīngzhēn Dà Sì; Map p88; 62 Xinsheng South Rd, sec.2; www.taipeimosque.org.tw) seems at first strangely out of place in this city of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian temples. But with its green crescent-peaked domes and tall minarets, the mosque adds additional depth and texture to the spiritual cloth of Taiwan's capital city.

#### Night markets & Notable Neighbourhoods

Replete with fascinating neighbourhoods and world renowned for its night markets, Taipei is an urban explorer's dream.

#### SHILIN NIGHT MARKET 士林夜市

Considered by many to be the king of Taipei's night markets, the sprawling **Shilin Night Market** (Shílín Yèshì; Map p100; MRT Shilin) is a nightly carnival of snacking and shopping. Teeming with stalls selling delectable edibles far beyond our ability to describe (though we try – see p113), the latest in trendy clothing from shoes to hats (and everything in-between), games of skill and chance and much, much more. If you have only one night to spend in Taipei, spend it here. Appetite not whet yet? Fear not, Shilin Night Market is covered in greater detail in our food section.

#### XIMENDING 西門町

Like Tokyo's Ginza, **Ximending** (Ximéngdìng; Map p88; MRT Ximen) is the ultraconsumerist heart of Taipei's mainstream youth culture. This eight-branched intersection dates from the Japanese era and is now chock-full of shops selling fashion, fast food, sneakers, sunglasses, scarves, Sanrio, Sony and spaghetti. If it's young and trendy, it's here. The pedestrian streets northwest of the main intersection (between Chengdu Rd and Wuchang St) is more or less the epicentre, but for the full Ximending experience you'll really want to explore the smaller alleys. It's here you'll find the edgier side of Taiwan's youth culture, the places they hang out and the stores in which they work and shop.

There are restaurants for all tastes in Ximending, from coffee shops and steak houses to sushi bars both cheap and expensive, and plenty more. Though there are gift shops aplenty in Ximending, you may want to bring home something a bit more permanent to remember your Taiwan trip. Hanzhong Lane 50 is where you'll find your tattoo parlours and piercing joints. If it can be inked, pierced or otherwise modified, chances are good you can get it done in Ximending.

While it's busy most of the time, nights and weekends are prime time, especially Friday and Saturday nights. You might catch a musical act on a temporary stage set up on the streets and if you want to see a film, Wuchang St is home to many cinemas as well as some fine examples of Japanese-period architecture, notably the **Red Pavilion Theatre** (p102).

Ximending is also where you'll find one of our favourite urban holy spots, the **Tien-Ho temple** (opposite).

#### DIHUA MARKET 迪化街

The several blocks that make up this **market** (Dihua Shichang; Map p92; MRT Zhongshan) are Taipei's best-preserved examples of historic architecture. Building styles range from Fujianese to Baroque to modernist. The area is sometimes called 'Grocery Street', and for most of the year it's thought of as a good place for buying traditional Chinese medicines and herbs, bolts of cloth and sundries. If you're lucky enough to be in Taipei for the weeks leading up to the Lunar New Year celebrations, Dihua market's true colours shine, as the area is considered Taipei's best for traditional New Year foods, party supplies and gifts of all kinds. During these weeks, a festive spirit of bonhomie





descends on the market, manifesting itself in a veritable orgy of giving as merchants offer samples of their edible wares to all passers-by. Should you come during this period, be prepared to be fed.

No matter when you come, be sure not to miss the nearby **Hsiahai City God Temple** (p98).

### SNAKE ALLEY 華西街夜市

Once considered a Taipei must see, nowadays, Snake Alley, aka Huaxi St Night Market (Huáxījiē Yèshì; Map p88; Huaxi St; ☎ 7pm-midnight; MRT Longshan Temple) is more of a window into Taiwan's less enlightened past, when the live skinning of reptiles for the benefit of passing tourists was considered an appropriate form of cultural expression. In decades past, Taipei dwellers might bring their visitors from abroad to Snake Alley and express mild amusement as their foreign guests squirmed at the sight

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of a local merchant baiting a cobra with a hooked metal rod before slitting its belly and offering the foreigners a shot glass of snake bile mixed with Kaoliang liquor. These days, Snake Alley is considered somewhat passé and cruel by many.

If you'd like to watch a snake handler barking like a carnie while ('Careful, ladies and gents, don't get too close! One bite from this beast and you'll be dead before you hit the ground!') taunting a poisonous viper before disembowelling it, than by all means a trip to Huaxi St should be high on your agenda. The snake meat ends up in soup or stir-fried with vegetables, while the blood is mixed with liquor, a cocktail said to be good for virility and a host of ailments. Snake meat tastes like a blend of chicken and monkfish, and many of the restaurants in this brightly lit covered alley are worth visiting. Another interesting facet of this neighbourhood is that, until a few years ago, it was a legal brothel district. For this reason, Snake Alley is also a good place to find shops selling herbal aphrodisiacs, sex toys and Viagra. The foot-massage parlours on the bright end of the street are fine, but avoid the karaoke bars on the dark end as they're vile. The surrounding alleys are good places to buy religious items.

### Buildings

Taipei's reputation for boring architecture is so over. Here are a few reasons why.

#### TAIPEI 101 台北國際金融中心

Towering above the city like the gigantic bamboo stalk it was designed to resemble, **Taipei 101** (Táibēi Guójī Jīnróng Zhōngxīn; Map p96; 45 Shifu Rd; www.taipei101tower.com; MRT Taipei City Hall) is impossible to miss. At 508m, Taipei International Financial Centre 101, as it's officially named, is the world's tallest building (Dubai eat your heart out, until next edition at least!). Construction began in 1997 and the exterior was completed in 2003. In addition to holding the world record for height, Taipei 101 also holds the record for having the world's fastest elevator. The pressure-controlled lift travels at 1010m per minute and takes 40 seconds to get from ground level to the 89th floor observation deck.

In the basement of the structure is an excellent food court, and the lower five floors are taken up by swank malls and several banks. Floors 89 to 91 are the observation decks of-

fering incomparable views of the surrounding city, mountains and horizon. The hefty admission price for the observation floors (NT350, NT4500 for the outdoor deck) does not deter the hordes of locals and visitors who line up to catch the view from almost atop the world's tallest building.

At the time of this writing, the planned plush restaurants set to open on the floors just below the observation tower weren't open, but may well be by the time you read this. As for the floors between the mall and future restaurants, these are home to some of Taipei's choicest and most expensive office spaces. But don't get any bright ideas about pretending to work on the 80th floor just to sneak up and catch the view from a bathroom window without paying the observation deck fee, business floor elevators are strictly monitored and controlled. As for the stairway, well, there are frequent 'stair master' races held in Taipei 101, but as far as we know individual travellers are, shall we say, discouraged from using this method to around the ticket counter. But if you make it, let us know.

#### CORE PACIFIC CITY 京華城

Some people call it **Core Pacific City** (CPC, Jīnghuáchéng; Map p96; ☎ 3762 1888; 138 Bade Rd, sec.4). We like to think of it as The Great Golf Ball of Taipei. Designed by Jon Jerde, the Pablo Picasso of the architecture world, Core Pacific City is quite probably the weirdest shopping mall in Asia. A building inspired (by MC Escher or perhaps LSD) to say the least, from the outside CPC looks like a gigantic golf ball being embraced by a stone sarcophagus. Though you can get in through the basement, for maximum weirdness take the escalator from the street into the main lobby. Just keep reminding yourself that you are going shopping and not being taken via conveyor belt deep into the heart of an alien hive. Do not panic, the colour lights along the ceiling are there to soothe. Soon, you will be inside the structure, calm and refreshed, ready to experience all the shopping, eating, karaoke and cinema-going magic that the 'Living Mall' has to offer.

Since the initial rush of publicity over its grand opening in 2001, Core Pacific City seems to have had a bit of a mixed ride. Though unquestionably unique from the outside, most of the stores found inside can be found elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, despite

the free shuttle bus service from the nearest (but rather distant) Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall MRT, Core Pacific City is considered less convenient to visit as some of Taipei's other malls. As a result, this wonderfully strange, egg-shaped behemoth can sometimes feel a bit empty, though it tends to be more crowded on the weekends.

#### TAIPEI ARENA 台北體育館

'Build it and they will come', seems to be the motto behind this brand-new **Taipei Arena** (Táiběi Tìyùguǎn; Map p96; www.tpa.com.tw) on the corner of Tunhua and Nanjing Rds. Vast, cavernous and shaped like a flying saucer, the Taipei Arena hosts concerts, sporting events and noteworthy performances such as the 2007 Taipei running of *Cats* (the musical, not actual felines themselves). Check out the website for the latest schedule. Even if there's nothing in particular going on, it's a good place to visit because of the swish shops on the first level, and it's a good place for the kiddies thanks to the amusement centre in the basement.

#### PRESIDENTIAL BUILDING 總統府

Built in 1919 as the headquarters of the then-occupying Japanese forces, this **building** (Zǒngtǒng Fǔ; Map p88; ☎ 2311 3731; www.president.gov.tw; 122 Chongqing S Rd, sec.1; admission free, passport required; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri; MRT Ximen) has housed the offices of the president since 1949. Its ornate brickwork is typical of the Japanese era, and at 85m it was the tallest building in town for decades.

Exhibits include documents from Taiwanese history (both originals and copies) and artifacts from the Japanese occupation (lacquerware, statues etc). Although most signage is in Chinese, there is usually an English speaker on hand to guide you through. At the gift shop you can pick up a presidential windbreaker (NT500).

Taiwan's democracy can at times be extremely active. For a few weeks in 2006, large-scale protests were centred around the Presidential Building, making casual tourism in the area somewhat more interesting. Needless to say, should your visit coincide with any future mass acts of democratic expression, plan your trip to the Presidential Building accordingly (and don't be surprised if visiting hours are curtailed). In any case, most of the time, visitors are permitted to see only the gardens and ground floor exhibition

halls. However, the rest of the building does open but only for six days each year; check the website or inquire for details.

#### LIN ANTAI OLD HOMESTEAD 林安泰古厝

This is Taipei's oldest **residential building** (Línántài Gùcǔ; Map p92; ☎ 2598 1572; Binjiang St; admission free; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun; MRT Yuanshan). The southern Fujian-style 30-room house was built during 1783-87, near what is now Dunhua S Rd. It was gradually expanded as this wealthy merchant family grew. The home reached its present size in 1823.

However, the city also expanded and in the 1970s this historic home was slated to be destroyed as the road was being widened. Thankfully, public outcry saved it; the building was painstakingly dismantled and, in 1983, rebuilt on this field across from Xinsheng Park. Today the house is notable for its central courtyard, swallowtail roof and period furniture. We're not sure the Lin family would have wanted their house in the shadow of an expressway (as it currently is) but we bet they'd be glad it's been preserved.

#### RED PAVILION THEATRE 紅樓劇場

The **Red Pavilion Theatre** (Hónglóu Jǔchǎng; Map p88; ☎ 2311 9380; 10 Chengdu Rd; admission free except during events; ☎ 1-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun; MRT Ximen) is one of Taipei's older buildings. The wooden, octagonal structure was originally a public market, then a theatre for Chinese opera as well as a second-run cinema. Since beginning life anew as a multipurpose centre for vocal and visual arts it has hosted a variety of performers and performances, such as Taiwan-based world music group A Moving Sound (p56) and the Taipei run of the *Vagina Monologues*. Exhibits and performances change frequently, but even if you come just to check it out (or have a coffee), it's worth the time.

## ACTIVITIES

### HIKING & BICYCLING

First-time visitors will be astounded by just how thin the line between Taipei's urban jungle and jungle-jungle can be. Head south at either end of the MRT blue line and before long you're hiking through mountain foothills with only the occasional glimpse of Taipei 101 to remind you of how close to the city you still are. Head east out of the Xinbeitou MRT station and before long you'll be walking

through jungle that's dotted with sulphur-spewing steam vents.

One our favourite hikes is the Tianmu Trail, beginning at the very top end of Zhongshan N Rd, sec.7. It's here that Taipei's longest street becomes a dirt trail and later a stone staircase that pretty much leads to the front gate of Yangmingshan National Park (p132). Expect to pass by mountain streams and dense jungle on the way in. Though we can neither confirm nor deny tales of monkeys prowling the upper sections of the trail, looking to waylay travellers, signs warn of the dangers of monkey-feeding and help lend such rumours official credence.

The **Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation** (☎ 2181 2345; www.trtc.com.tw) puts out an excellent free booklet you can pick up at some MRT stations and at all tourism offices. The booklet, *Guide to Hiking & Cycling*, lists 20 excellent hiking and biking trails throughout and around the city. One of the best things is that the trails are well marked, with trailheads generally well signposted on the front map of its nearest MRT station.

Cycling opportunities abound as well, and cyclists would do well to pick up a free *Taipei City Cycling Map* from any of the Taipei Visitor's Information Centres (p86). This publication shows some of great trails running along the banks of Taipei's rivers. The booklet also lists seven city-run, bike-rental stores, and you can pick bikes up at one and leave it off at another. Charges vary depending on bike quality and you'll be asked to leave a deposit and show your passport. You can find bike-rental places close to the Muzha and Guandu MRT stations or you can call the **Taipei Cycling Lifestyle Foundation** (☎ 2719 2025) to get English directions to the nearest bike-rental place. The trails range from nine to 18km in length and you can easily get from one end of the city to the other along the rivers.

### BIRD-WATCHING

For a city, Taipei sure has a lot of bird-watching opportunities. **Shuangxi park** (Map p100) is a great place to spot cormorants and herons, and the **Botanical Gardens** (Map p88) is said to be a good place to spot the rare Malaysian Night Heron. The **Wild Bird Society of Taipei** (Táiběi Shì Yědiào Xuéhuì; Map p96; ☎ 2325 9190; http://www.taibeibird.org.tw; 3 Lane 160, Fuxing S Rd, sec.2) arranges bird-watching tours around Taipei and Taiwan and stocks a number of English

books for the devoted twitter. See p71 for more details about bird-watching in Taipei and around Taiwan.

### IN-LINE SKATING

Taipei boasts a small but dedicated group of in-line skaters. Most of the cycling trails work just as well for blading, though some are a bit rough in spots. The trail running under the MRT north of Shilin station is perfect, as are most sections of the Shuangxi river path. A Kiwi, Geoff, and his wife, Xiaolong have been teaching skating and hockey to children since the mid-90s. Their business, **Mono Club** (Map p88; ☎ 2321-2065; www.monoclub.com.tw; 20-1 Aiguo E Rd; skate rental per day NT150; MRT Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall), is the city's best skate shop. People at Mono Club will let you know what skating events are going on during the time of your visit. Some of Taipei's more hardcore skaters meet up for a Friday night skate through the city, weather permitting. Call the shop for details. There's also a small park for skateboarders in Zhongshan that aggressive in-liners might enjoy. The park has jumps, ramps and a serviceable quarter pipe and is south of the Yuanshan MRT station (Map p92).

### FITNESS CLUBS & SWIMMING POOLS

There are a few public outdoor swimming pools around town and some hotels have arrangements where you can use their pools for a fee. We've noted hotels with pools under Sleeping (p104). However, outdoor swimming is a seasonal thing in Taipei and is usually reserved for warmer months. People do swim in the river up in Wulai (p141) and there are a number of good beaches on the northeast coast. One excellent place to swim is **Yuquan Park Pool** (Yúquán Gōngyuán Wēnshuǐ Yóuyǒng Chí; Map p92; ☎ 2556 2539; 28 Xining N Rd; admission NT110; ☎ 5.30-7.30am, 8am-5pm & 6-10.30pm). The pool was constructed in 2004 and is near the centre of town. Its glass atrium features a water slide that empties into hot-water baths and there are nearby 'massage waterfalls'.

The **California Fitness** (Jiāzhōu Jiànshēn Zhōngxīn; Map p88; ☎ 2311 7000; 100 Zhongxiao W Rd, sec.1; guest pass NT500 per day; ☎ 6am-midnight Mon-Sat, 8am-midnight Sun; MRT Taipei Main Station) gym is as cutting edge as the health clubs in its namesake home state. You'll find the latest equipment and shiny metallic locker rooms fitted with steam and sauna baths. It's affiliated with California and 24-Hour Fitness clubs in other countries, so



if you have a regular membership card for either of these you can use the facilities for free. There's also a branch in Tianmu (with a pool) and another in Ximending. Get more details from the main branch.

Another gym is **Being Sports** (☎ 2369 9299; B1, 19 Roosevelt Rd, sec.2; ☎ 7am-11pm; MRT Guting). Though Being doesn't offer day passes, it does offer contract-free, one-month memberships for NT3000. Somewhat more low key than California Fitness, Being has weights, exercise machines, a sauna and a Jacuzzi.

## YOGA

**The Swami Salami School of Yoga** (Map p96; ☎ 0918 949 082; www.theswamisalamischoolofyoga.com; Lane 251, Alley 3, 8 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.3; MRT Zhongxiao Fuxing) Regular classes are taught by a Yogi named Rob Ogle, a man with a definite sense of humour (hence the business's name). Check his website for more details.

**Space Yoga** (Yújiā Kōngjiān; Map p100; ☎ 2877 2108; www.withinspace.com; Lane 43, 5 Tianmu E Rd; Bus 220) This upscale boutique yoga studio often hosts visiting international teachers. Visit their website for information.

**Chiu Su Jen Yoga Centre** (Map p96; ☎ 2740 2688; www.csjyoga.com.tw; 36 Fuxing S Rd, sec.1; MRT Zhongxiao Fuxing) This school has branches around Taiwan and Taipei and conducts both English and Chinese classes. The website has classes and branch information.

## TOURS

You won't have any trouble finding an organisation to take you on a bus tour of Taipei. The companies listed under Tours (p351) all offer them. Three-hour city tours (adult/child NT700/600) take in the Martyrs' Shrine, National Palace Museum, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, a temple visit and some shopping, although at three hours you won't get more than a taste of any one site. Other options

include a visit to a Wulai aboriginal village (adult/child NT900/700, four hours), a Taipei-by-night tour (NT1200, 3½ hours) and a culture tour that takes in Chinese opera (NT1200, three hours).

The **523 Mountaineering Association** (523 Dēngshān Hui; ☎ 2555 7523; Map p92; 28-2 Chifeng St; www.523.org.tw/English; MRT Shuanglian) has been a government-approved nonprofit organisation since 1999. The 523 can help travellers obtain mountain permits for a small fee as well as arrange transport to and from trailheads. It organises day and overnight trips to the high mountains and low jungle trails, some along paths you simply won't be able to find on your own. Its website has tour schedules and staff speak English.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

In addition to national festivals, interesting events include the celebrating of the birthdays of the city god at the Hsiahai City God Temple (p98) and Confucius at the Confucius Temple (p95). Christmas eve has become a de facto holiday too with bars and restaurants throwing big parties. The weeks leading up to the Lunar New Year's festivities are a great time to visit the Dihua Market (p99) and if you're around during the Lantern Festival be sure and hit both Chiang Kai-shek Memorial for the official festivities and Xindian's Bitan Park for ad-hoc pyrotechnics.

Trade shows are big business in Taiwan, with dozens taking place each year. While usually the domain of the business and not the casual traveller, trade shows are actually pretty cool if you're interested in the wares being traded. And what wares indeed, ranging from orchids to motorcycles to every high-tech gadget you can imagine. Trade shows are a great place to get cool samples, make connections and often buy things at rock-bottom prices (especially on the last day when vendors are looking to lighten their take-home loads). Most trade shows take place in or around the **Taipei World Trade Center** (Map p96), though smaller ones tend to be held elsewhere. To check out what trade fairs are happening and when, check out the website: www.taipeitradeshows.com.tw.

## SLEEPING

Budget lodgings have basic rates of up to about NT1600 per room and dorm beds in hostels start at about NT250. Midrange rates are up

to about NT4000 and anything above that is considered top end. Top-end accommodation in Taipei is easy to locate, so we've just culled our favourites from that end of the pool. (On the subject of pools, you'll generally only find swimming pools in a few of the top-end hotels and indoor pools are scarce).

Note that when Taipei hotels list rates for a 'single' room, it often refers to a room with one queen-size bed that most travellers will find big enough for two. Many hotels also throw in breakfast, though you may have to ask when you make reservations. Upmarket hotels tend to charge a 10% service fee and 5% value-added tax (VAT) on top of their rates.

The rates listed here are rack rates, the base rate charged at peak times. However, most midrange and top-end hotels offer reductions of up to 30% on weekdays as well as during nonpeak periods. Further, we've made note where hotels offer deep discounts on their websites. With various discounts factored in, some top-end hotels can be booked for midrange rates, and midrange for close to budget so plan your trip wisely.

Budget options are scattered around town, but the highest concentration is within striking distance of Taipei Main Station (see Old Town Centre and Zhongshan listings). The nexus for hostels in the Old Town Centre is the Taipei Key Mall (K-Mall), right across from the train station, and barring holidays, your chances of getting a bed are pretty good if you just turn up without reservations. Also, look out for boutique hotels in places just outside of the main city, as well as a new category of short-term residences that, while not really a good choice for a day or two, are good for those looking to spend a week or more in Taipei. These are listed in 'Around Taipei' (p126). And finally, another option for cheaper lodgings are 'love hotels'; just specify that you're renting for the night and not to 'take a rest'.

## Old Town Centre, Da'an & Shida

### BUDGET

**World Scholar House** (Map p88; ☎ 2541 8113; www.worldscholarhouse.com; 8th fl, 2 Lane 38, Songjiang Rd; 松江路38巷2號8樓; dm/d NT350/650; ☎ ☎) The Taipei hostel with the erudite name has been spruced up in recent years, and now offers both dorms and double rooms, cable TV, laundry and ironing facilities, and wi-fi. Weekly and monthly rates make this a popular spot for

expat English teachers, though we've heard that the atmosphere here can sometimes be a bit too wild for tamer travellers' tastes. Air conditioning costs an extra NT20 to NT30 per hour (depending on room size).

**Happy Family Hostels I, II & III** (Kuàilè Jiāting; Map p88; ☎ 2375 3443; www.taiwan-hostel.com; 2 Lane 56, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1; 中山北路一段56巷2號; dm/s/d from NT300/400/600; ☎) The three facilities are close to one another, but the office is at the address listed here (look for 'Happy Family' in red letters on the 2nd-floor window). Although all of the facilities are very simple, Happy Family III is the newest and nicest. Happy Family II gets a younger, more party-oriented crowd. There are shared toilets and hot-water showers on each floor, cable TV in the living rooms and free use of washing machines. Owner John Lee has been in the business for many years and enjoys a good reputation among travellers for hospitality. The reception for all three locations are at Happy Family I.

**Taipei Hostel** (Map p88; ☎ 2395 2950; www.taipeihostel.com; 6th fl, 11 Lane 5, Linsen N Rd; 林森北路5巷11號6樓; dm/s/d NT300/500/550; ☎) An institution in itself, the Taipei Hostel has been a launching pad for many a Taiwan expat's career. This aged dame may be a bit frayed around the edges, but she still attracts guests from all points on the map. On a quiet backstreet, the hostel has a large room for socialising, kitchen facilities, washer/dryer, free ADSL use for laptop users and a rooftop garden. Long-term rates are available, and as the hostel is a nexus of sorts for early stage Taiwan expats, there's always a buzz about jobs, visas and what-have-you on Taipei life. The website has tips and links to information on Taipei and teaching English.

**Hostelling International Taipei Youth Hostel** (Táiběi YH Qúnxianlóu Wénhuà Jiāolizhàn; Map p88; ☎ 2388 0885; www.yhtaiwan.com; 13th fl, 50 Zhongxiao W Rd, sec.1; 忠孝西路一段50號13樓; dm 650) This is a clean and cheerful place smack in the heart of Taipei. The proprietors have gone all out to make travellers feel welcome in Taipei. Services include tours, free films, a snooker table and use of the in-house musical instruments. There's also a nice kitchen, lockers and a laundry facility. The hostel also has a left-luggage service for travellers. International Youth Hostel (IYH) members get a discount here.

**Holo Family House** (À Luó Zhùsù Jiédài Jiāting; Map p88; ☎ 2331 7272; 22nd fl, Taipei K-Mall; 50 Zhongxiao W

## COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTRE

The **Community Services Centre** (Map p100; ☎ 2836 8134; www.community.com.tw; 25 Lane 290, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.6; MRT Mingde) is a clearing house for foreigners looking for practical information on living in Taipei. It offers newcomer orientation, continuing education, cooking classes, travel outings, 12-step meetings and Western-style counselling.



Rd, sec.1; 台北自助旅行家 忠孝西路1段50號 22樓; dm/s/d 550/680/1280) Yet another fine, clean and fun hostel run by a Taiwanese fellow who goes by the name of 'Hello'. This place is a bit quirkier than your usual hostel and offers free breakfast for guests. It also offers left-luggage service.

#### MIDRANGE

**Li-Yuan Hotel** (Liyuán Fàndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2365 7367; 98 Roosevelt Rd, sec.3; 台北市羅斯福路3段98號; r incl breakfast from NT1480; ㊤) Small, comfortable and clean, the Li-Yuan is on the south side of the Shida night market, and popular with friends and family who are visiting students at the local university. There's also free wi-fi.

**Taipei YMCA International Guest House** (Tāiběishì Zhōngguó Jìdùjiào Qīngniánhuì; Map p88; ☎ 2311 3201; rv@ymca-taipei.org.tw; 19 Xuchang St; 許昌街19號; s/tw from NT1800/2800, f NT4200; ㊤) Not quite cheap enough to make the budget category, the Taipei Y is nonetheless still popular with students and business people. Rooms are plain but well-kept and there's a laundry on site for guests.

**Han She Business Hotel** (Hánshe Shāngwù Lǚdiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2371 8812; www.handsomehotel.com.tw; 4th fl, 68 Chengdu Rd; 成都路68號4樓; r incl breakfast from NT1880; ㊤) Museum-lit *objets d'art* in the corridors, clean, handsomely furnished rooms and kind staff are just a few reasons that make finding this 55-room business hotel worthwhile. While the address is on Chengdu Rd, the entrance is on a small side street. Look for the sign reading 'hotel' and you've found the place.

**Cosmos Hotel** (Tiānchéng Dàfāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2361 7856; www.cosmos-hotel.com.tw; 43 Zhongxiao W Rd, sec.1; 忠孝西路1段43號; d/tw from NT3200/4000; ㊤) Ah, the Cosmos, if it were any closer to Taipei Main Station it would be inside it. This is where visiting midlevel businessmen on expense accounts, working for companies with tight-fisted accountants stay. The décor is a bit mismatched, but overall the hotel is immaculately kept and there's a gym and sauna.

**Keyman's Hotel** (Huáining Lǚdiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2311 4811; www.keymans.com.tw; 1 Huaining St; 懷寧街1號; r from NT2080) The rooms are a bit small, but the hotel is well kept, and as far as location goes the place is a good deal.

**Hotel Flowers** (Huáhuá Dàfāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2312 3811; 19 Hankou Rd, sec.1; 漢口街1段19號; r from NT2000) This is two hotels run by the same management really. One building is on the north and

the other on the south side of the street (the latter is slightly newer, but both are fine). The location is not quite a quiet corner, but you won't have to change out of your flip-flops to get great snacks outside. It's just a few minutes walk from Taipei Main Station.

**East Dragon Hotel** (Dōnglóng Dàfāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2311 6969; www.east-dragon.com.tw; 23 Hankou St, sec.2; 漢口街2段23號; s/tw from NT2100) The East Dragon is a comfortable 70-room hotel on the far and quiet end of Ximending's pedestrian plaza, making it an ideal place to rest and heal up from any gruelling 12-hour, liquor-fuelled piercing-and-tattoo session. Popular with Korean and Japanese tourists.

**Good Ground Hotel** (Guó Guāng Dàfāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2371 8616; www.goodground.com.tw/en; 6 Lane 27, Chengdu Rd; 成都路27巷6號; r from NT2200, f NT4800; ㊤) The faux-jade stone-pattern lobby floor makes the hotel feel like something out of the Flintstones. As laptop-toting geeks, we like the fact that the hotel is wireless down to the 1st-floor coffee shop (which also serves a good java). The six-person family room has three large beds but it's a bit cramped and we wouldn't recommend it for argument-prone families.

**Tango Hotel** (Kēlǚ Tiāngē; Map p88; ☎ 2531 9999; www.thetango.com.tw; 15 Lane 83, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1; 中山北路1段83巷15號; r incl breakfast from NT3600; ㊤) Formerly known as Kodak III, this small hotel gives more expensive hotels a run for their money. Rooms feature a flat-screen TV with DVD player, silk bedspreads and a Jacuzzi bathtub. Nonsmoking rooms are available. Although the address is a lane off Zhongshan N Rd, the hotel is actually closer to Linsen N Rd.

**Friends Star Hotel** (Yǒuxīng Fāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2394 3121; fax 2386 7791; 11 Heping Rd, sec.1; 和平路1段11號; r incl breakfast from NT2300) Fairly popular with travellers with budgets falling between hostel and four star, this newish hotel next to the Guting MRT is a quick hop to both the Shida night-life and the cultural attractions of downtown Taipei. Friends Star staff speaks English well enough to help you arrange your day. Small, windowless rooms cost the least and are good if you like things quiet.

#### TOP END

**Sheraton Taipei** (Tāiběi Xīláidēng Dàfāndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2321 5511; www.sheraton-taipei.com; 12 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.1; 忠孝東路1段12號; r from NT9000; ㊤) This recently renovated 686-room hotel smack

in the centre of Taipei's government district is the height of luxury. It's here that visiting high-ranking diplomats often stay, so if you're looking to see and be seen by the ambassador of Nauru or any other of about two dozen countries, this is the place to be. But be prepared to pay for it as luxury ain't cheap, and with a price tag of close to US\$80 million, the bill for all these renovations might not be paid yet.

#### Zhongshan

##### BUDGET

**Formosa Hostels I** (Map p92; ☎ 2511 9625, 0910 015 449; 3rd fl, 16 Lane 20, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段20巷16號3樓; dm/s/tw NT250/350/260) This hostel is decently kept, but extremely basic. Simple cooking and laundry facilities are available.

**Formosa II** (Map p92; ☎ 2511 9625, 0910 015 449; 2nd fl, 5 Lane 62, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段62巷5號2樓; dm/s/tw NT250/350/260) A basic hostel and a branch of Formosa I. When we dropped by there was major construction going on next to Formosa II, though hopefully that'll be done by 2008.

**Queen Hotel** (Huángòu Bīnguǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2559 0489; 2nd fl, 226 Chang'an W Rd; 長安西路226號2樓; s/d from NT700/800) Obviously budget but comfy. Rooms have a phone and some of their original 1950s tile work. There's no English sign out the front and you'll be lucky to find an English speaker inside, but it's right off a colourful market alley, and with the money you're saving on hotel rooms you'll be able to do more shopping.

#### MIDRANGE

**The Moon Hotel** (Map p92; ☎ 2521 3301; fax 2521 3309; 122 Xinsheg N Rd, sec.1; 新生北路1段122號; s incl breakfast from NT1800) 'A lovely place for lovers' reads their business card, and if it's a real 'Taipei 'love hotel' experience you're looking for, well, you've found it. Conversation with the concierge is kept at a minimum; a softly glowing board next to the counter shows pictures and prices of available rooms – all you need do is ask for your room of choice by number and pay the lady behind the desk. Go ahead, we know you want to check it out. We won't tell a soul.

**Friends Spring Hotel** (Yǒuchūn Fāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2597 2588; fax 2598 6664; 55 Minquan W Rd; 民權西路55號; s/tw incl breakfast from NT2500/3200; ㊤) This nice little budget hotel was redecorated a few years back and seems to get a lot of trade from Western business people. On weekdays, rates can dip as low as NT1875. Rates include a

copy of an English-language newspaper in the morning and there's free ADSL if you've got your own laptop. Close to the MRT Minquan West Rd stop.

**First Hotel** (Dìyī Dàfāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2551 2277; www.firsthoteltaipei.com; 63 Nanjing E Rd, sec.2; 南京東路2段63號; s/tw incl breakfast from NT2700; ㊤) The First makes the most of its four-decade-old shell and smallish rooms with renovated facilities, free wi-fi and several restaurant options. For friendliness, the staff can't be beat.

**Emperor Hotel** (Guówáng Dàfāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2581 1111; emperhrl@ms9.hinet.net; 118 Nanjing E Rd, sec.1; 南京東路1段118號; r incl breakfast from NT3400; ㊤) Its décor is a little dated and the rooms are a bit musty. However, its location is excellent, near shopping and surrounded by dining (with lots of Japanese restaurants nearby).

**Taipei Fortuna Hotel** (Fúdi Dàfāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2563 1111; www.taipei-fortuna.com.tw; 122 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段122號; r from 3400; ㊤) Around the corner from the Minquan West Rd MRT station, this high-rise is often busy with tour groups. It's ageing only moderately well, but rooms are a decent size for the price. There's a health club with sauna on the premises. Book online for deep (up to 40%) discounts.

#### TOP END

**Grand Hotel** (Yuánshān Dàfāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2886 8888; 1 Lane 1, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.4, Shilin; 士林區中山北路4段1巷1號; r from NT4800; ㊤) This is it, the big Kahuna of Taiwan's hotels and a tourist attraction in itself. This 1970s reconstruction of the original 1952 building is a Chinese-style high-rise just across the Keelung River. Resplendent with red columns and painted beams, the lobby itself pretty much screams 'Old Chinese Money'. Rooms, too, are suitably spacious and decorated in old-style Chinese, offering both city and mountain views. Recreation includes a golf driving range, tennis courts, year-round swimming, a fitness centre and sauna and there are eight in-house restaurants. Even if you're too broke to stay, paying the Grand Hotel a visit on the way to the Shilin Night Market is a great way to see how the other half lives.

**Hôtel Royal Taipei** (Lǎoyé Dàjiūdiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2542 3266; www.royal-taipei.com.tw; 37-1 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段37之1號; r from NT8000; ㊤) A member of the Nikko hotel group, this contemporary hotel features a subtly understated French design (dark wood and

white linen) that goes well with its overall quality of service. It offers fine attention to service, a gym and sauna. Each of the 202 rooms has bathrobes, a safe, a minibar and free ADSL connections. We are less impressed with the pair of elephant tusks in the lobby, however.

**Ambassador Hotel** (Guóbīn Dàfāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2551 1111; www.ambassadorhotel.com.tw; 63 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段63號; r incl breakfast from NT4500; ㊟) Crisp, contemporary and international in style, the 430-room Ambassador is a beautiful hotel that's popular with business travellers and flight crews. There is blonde wood and marble throughout, and there's a spa with massage services.

**Riviera Hotel** (Óuhuá Jiùdiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2585 3258; www.rivierataipei.com; 646 Linsen N Rd; 林森北路646號; d/tw from NT6000/7000; ㊟) With its European exterior and comfortable rooms, the Riviera is a favourite with business travellers and those looking for a quiet oasis within walking distance of some of Taipei's busiest nightlife districts, not to mention the Fine Arts Museum. The health centre is excellent and the rooftop jogging track is a unique topping for this high-class hotel.

**Grand Formosa Regent** (Jīnghuá Jiùdiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2523 8000; www.grandformosa.com.tw; 41 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; 中山北路2段41號; r from NT8400; ㊟) Set back from busy Zhongshan road, the Regent is tops in every way, from the gold-leaf accents and exclusive shopping to the mountain views from the rooftop pool. Standard rooms are large and well furnished, complete with lovely deep-soaking tubs. If you want to pamper yourself further, the 20th floor Wellspring Spa is one of the loveliest we've seen anywhere.

**Taipei International Hotel** (Táiběi Guójí Fāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2562 7569; fax 2531 8376; 66 Nanjing E Rd, sec.1; 南京東路1段66號; r incl breakfast from NT4320; ㊟) Eurasian in feel and well located at the corner of Linsen N Rd, the International opened in 2003. It has reasonably sized rooms with dark wood trim and cool bathroom faucets. Other amenities include a gym, free wi-fi and daily newspaper delivery.

## Eastern Taipei

### BUDGET

**One-Star Hotel** (Wànshídá Lǚdiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2752 8168; www.onestartaipei.com.tw; 12th fl, 219 Chang'an E Rd, sec.2; 長安東路2段219號12樓; r from NT1580 incl breakfast; ㊟) We say that the management

is being far too humble, for One-Star gets at least a three-star rating in our book. This cool little boutique hotel is clean, well furnished and offers no-smoking rooms (a rarity in the price range). There's free breakfast in the morning and a fruit basket on the bed when you arrive just to thank you for staying. The only catch is that the place is a bit tricky to find. Follow the blue One-Star sign just off Chang'an Rd.

### MIDRANGE

**Baguio Hotel** (Biyáo Dàfāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2781 3121; www.baguio-hotel.com.tw; 367 Bade Rd, sec.2; 八德路2段367號; d/tw from NT2300/2600; ㊟) Some might say the Baguio Hotel is a bit long in the tooth, but we prefer to use the phrase 'old-school' Taipei. Expect Chinese art on the walls, and a well-kept interior. Rooms are clean and comfortable and the staff are quite friendly. Seasonal discounts are available.

**Hotel Delight** (Dàlái Fāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2716 0011; 432 Changchun Rd; 長春路432號; s/d incl breakfast from NT2727; ㊟) This delightful little hotel has a classy, subdued feel, free wi-fi and an excellent free breakfast. The overall package gives more expensive hotels a run for their money. There's a little lounge area on the 1st floor with a small business centre.

**Brother Hotel** (Xiōngdì Dàfāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2712 3456; www.brotherhotel.com.tw; 255 Nanjing E Rd, sec.3; 南京東路3段255號; r from NT4300 incl breakfast; ㊟) Well situated on the corner of Nanjing and Fuxing roads, the Brother becomes a mid-range hotel when the 20% discount (often available) is factored in. The hotel is popular with business travellers.

**Waikoloa Hotel** (Wéikēlè Fāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2507 0168; www.waikoloa.com.tw; 187 Changchun Rd; 長春路187號; r incl breakfast from NT2640; ㊟) Located in an interesting neighbourhood, the Waikoloa is decorated in a mix of Japanese and Chinese via Versailles styles. There's also free internet access. Not a bad place at all.

**Taipei Fullerton 315 Hotel** (Táiběi Fùdùn Fāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2703 1234; www.taipeifullerton.com.tw; 315 Fuxing N Rd, sec.2; 復興北路2段315號; r incl breakfast from NT2800; ㊟) This is one of a pair of boutique hotels on Fuxing Rd. The Fullerton 315 has a lobby furnished like a classical British sitting room, comfortable rooms and pretty much anything the business traveller might want. It's also slightly cheaper than its sister hotel, the Fullerton 41.

### TOP END

**Taipei Fullerton 41 Hotel** (Táiběi Fùdùn Fāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2703 1234; www.taipeifullerton.com.tw; 41 Fuxing S Rd, sec.2; 復興南路2段41號; r incl breakfast from NT5200; ㊟) The Fullerton 41 has 95 rooms offering slick, contemporary décor that would not be unexpected in places such as San Francisco or Tokyo. Rates include use of the business centre, sauna and fitness centre. Internet discounts can often make the 41 almost as inexpensive as its sister hotel, 315.

**Far Eastern Plaza Hotel** (Yuándōng Guójí Dàfāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2378 8888; www.shangri-la.com; 201 Dunhua S Rd, sec.2; 敦化南北路2段201號; s/d from NT7200/8200; ㊟) Fancy indeed, with Chinese art features throughout and rooms with walk-in closets. Even the bathrooms have TVs and Jacuzzi tubs, but don't pass up the glorious Jacuzzi and pool on the rooftop. There's a hefty charge for in-room ADSL, but we get the feeling that people who stay here consider NT600 chump change.

**Grand Hyatt Hotel** (Táiběi Jūnyuè Dàfāndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2720 1234; www.taipei.grand.hyatt.com; 2 Songshou Rd; 松壽路2號; r from NT6200; ㊟) The Grand Hyatt is massive (over 850 rooms) and looms like a massive stone hawk, wings outspread in the shadow of nearby Taipei 101. Rooms have three phone lines, there's a business centre, health club and the very upscale Ziga Zaga nightclub. This is where the company sends you when the shareholders are very happy.

**Westin Taipei** (Liúfú Huángōng; Map p96; ☎ 8770 6565; www.westin.com; 133 Nanjing E Rd, sec.3; 南京東路3段133號; r from NT9400; ㊟) If American-style hotels are what you like, then the high-rise Westin with its 288 rooms, piano bar and dozen food and beverage outlets, won't disappoint. Front-desk reception seems a bit on the snooty side, but an indoor pool means that you can swim all year. There's also a health club.

### SHORT TERM RESIDENCE

**Mandarin Hostel** (www.mandarinhostel.com; stay@mandarinhostel.com; d NT3000/4000 weekly; ㊟) Catering primarily to those coming to Taipei to look for work or study Chinese, the Mandarin Hostel has a few locations throughout the city, generally near MRT stations. The one that we stayed at was close to the NTU student district, and was a typical hostel with TV, computers and a decent kitchen. Add NT1000 per week for double occupancy rooms. Check the website or email for more details.

### EATING

Beijing has its duck and Shanghai its dumplings. Singapore has its fish-head curries and Hong Kong its dim sum. But at the risk of sounding hyperbolic, Taipei has it all and more, and goes toe-to-toe with any of Asia's culinary capitals.

Some say that the reason behind Taiwan's culinary diversity is its history. It's true that among the millions who fled the Mainland in the great exodus of 1949 were skilled chefs bringing with them little more than the clothes on their backs and long-kept secret recipes. Others maintain that Taipei's position as a rising star on the Asian culinary scene has more to do with the tastes of the city's denizens themselves. Taipei people are well travelled, by and large, with a substantial percentage of the population a bit too worldly in culinary tastes to accept standard food. Geographical influence plays a role, with Taiwanese cuisine in general borrowing bits and bobs from that of eastern China and Japan with a healthy dose of aboriginal influence thrown in for good measure. Taiwan is a paradise for anyone with a taste for fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood. In addition, Taiwan's large Buddhist population makes the city a veritable heaven for those looking for vegetarian cuisine.

So numerous are the restaurants worth visiting in Taipei that listing each candidate would require a separate book entirely devoted to restaurants. For now, we've decided to list fewer individual restaurants than we have in the past, focusing instead on the various neighbourhoods, alleys and streets known to local food lovers as places to get good Taiwanese food of all varieties. Your job is to get out there and enjoy.

### Old Town Centre

The Old Town Centre offers myriad eating opportunities for diners of all tastes and budgets. The warren of roads stretching southwest from the Taipei Main Station to Ximending is popular with students and has scores of coffee shops, cheap noodle joints, and midpriced restaurants. The crowd in this neighbourhood tends to skew towards the young side, though there are also a number of wallet-lightening fancy restaurants in the hotels by the Taipei Main Station. Very politically incorrect on a number of levels, Huaxi St Night Market, otherwise known as Snake



Alley, has a few restaurants worth visiting. And lest we forget, the Shingong Tower and the main station itself are home to two of our favourite food courts.

### BUDGET

**Xiangyi Vegetarian Heaven** (Xiángyì Sùshì Tiāndì; Map p88; ☎ 2361 1755; 15 Wuchang St sec.1; meals from NT100; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Taipei Main Station) Easily one of the best vegetarian buffets in Taipei, this narrow two-storey restaurant is usually crowded, with the ground-floor seating generally taken by the monks who eat here daily. A beautiful assortment of Taiwanese vegetarian cuisine is cooked fresh and served to the lilting sounds of Buddhist songs coming from an overhead boom box. The restaurant has no English signboard, just look for a yellow sign above the door or follow the sounds of soft Buddhist chanting.

**Amigo Mexican Food** (Àmìgē Mòxìgē; Map p88; ☎ 2393 2488; 85 Linsen S Rd; dishes NT100; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall) Got a hankering for Mexican? Amigo has tacos, burritos, home-made soups and other 'south of the border' favourites just one block north of the Chiang Kai-shek memorial. Dishes are served with flair matching a genuine taco-stand ambiance.

### A (FOOD) COURTING WE WILL GO!

So you're a vegetarian, but your date absolutely must have Korean BBQ? Or perhaps you've got a strange hankering to eat a three-course meal of beef-noodle soup, sashimi and French fries? Fancy some freshly baked mini donuts for desert? Or maybe it's just raining and you don't feel like searching for just the right restaurant. If so, hungry traveller, a trip through one of Taipei's fabulous food courts might be just your thing. Some of our favourites include:

- **Taipei Main Station, 2nd floor:** An oldie but a goodie, the cavernous upstairs of the main station offers a plethora of noodle stands, BBQ joints and other assorted Taiwanese favourites.
- **Shingong Tower, basement:** Two floors of food stalls to choose from, including hard-to-find items such as duck-meat sandwiches and fish-ball soup. Many of the shops on the lower level offer samples, making the Shingong food court a moocher's paradise.
- **Tianmu Takashimaya, basement:** Korean BBQ, sashimi, Indian food and donuts. What more could you ask for in the basement of an upscale department store?
- **Taipei 101, basement:** Though most people are drawn to Asia's tallest building by its height, it's what's in the basement that keeps us coming back. Expect sandwich, sushi, pasta and prime rib and more. And lest we forget, there's also a very upmarket supermarket doling out free samples daily.
- **Jiantan Food Court:** After the old Shilin Night Market central food court was declared a fire hazard, an uproar ensued, forcing the municipal government to build a new food court across from the Jiantan MRT station to house some of Taipei's most venerable grease pits. Expect oyster omelettes, Taiwanese beef steak and of course, plenty of stinky tofu on tap day and night.

### MIDRANGE

**Yuan Thai** (Yuán Tāi; Map p88; ☎ 2389 5763; 25, Lane 10, Chengdu Rd; dishes from NT150; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Xi-mending) A nice little Thai restaurant behind Ximending's Red Pavilion Theatre, Yuan Thai is a stone's throw away from the serious youth bustle of Ximending without actually being in the middle of it. Though a bit plain in ambiance, the restaurant gets points for price and quality, and is a good place to get your *Pad Thai* fix.

### TOP END

**Momoyama** (Móyōshān; Map p88; ☎ 2321 5511, ext 8085; 12 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.1; set lunch NT500-1300, set dinner NT1300-3300, dishes NT100-1500; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Shandao Temple) One of Taipei's top Japanese restaurants, Momoyama is located on the ground floor of the upmarket Sheraton Taipei. The stunning décor might remind you of Kyoto, especially if you book a private tatami room (at extra charge). Popular with politicians.

**Tainan Tan-tsu-mien** (Huáxìjiē Tǎinán Dànzǎimìàn; Map p88; ☎ 2308 1123; 31 Huaxi St; dishes NT1200-1500; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Longshan temple) Odd though it may seem to have rooms decorated like Versailles and Vienna in Snake Alley, that's what you'll find here. Select your own fish and

seafood out the front and the chef will suggest a preparation method (grilled, steamed, fried etc). Don't forget to try the shop's namesake noodles (made with ground pork). A bargain at NT50 for a small bowl.

### Da'an & Shida

For the student crowd, the grid of roads south of Shida University, in between Heping and Roosevelt Rds, is the place for a feed. It's an excellent choice for the traveller with an appetite as well. At night the main drag is packed, as are most of the alleys, side streets and restaurants. You can buy everything from meat skewers to oyster omelettes to stinky tofu, and the stalls in the area tend to be pretty cheap. Our favourite vendor is a woman known for years to Shida students as *shuiguō āyí* (fruit auntie). Her stall is on the corner of Shida Rd and Longquan St (Map p88) and her freshly cut fruit must be tasted to be believed. There are also a number of self-serve buffets in the Shida neighbourhood that charge by weight (the foods' weight, not yours). The best time to hit these places is between 11.30am and 12.30pm for lunch, and 4.30pm and 6.00pm for dinner as that's when the dishes are freshest.

Looking for a slightly more upscale dining experience? The stretch of Yongkang St south of Xinyi Rd is lined on both sides with excellent restaurants reflecting a range of culinary styles. Just a bit further to the east lies Heping E Rd, sec.2, a long street chock-full of excellent restaurants. Alley 54 runs roughly parallel to Fuxing Rd and has at least two dozen restaurants of all sorts.

### BUDGET

**Vegetarian Paradise** (Sùshì Tiāntáng; Map p88; 182 Heping E Rd; meals from NT100; ☺ lunch & dinner; MRT Taipower Building) Because of its location (right across from Shida University), this is usually the first vegetarian buffet many newly arrived students visit. The owners haven't let success go to their heads, though, and they still serve the same sublime vegetarian cuisine as they did when some of us came here as students, way back when. Price is by weight, and unless your eyes are far bigger than your stomach, shouldn't ever exceed NT130.

**Ice Monster** (Bīngguǎn; Map p88; ☎ 2394 8279; 15 Yongkang St; dishes NT80-150; ☺ 10.30am-midnight summer, 11.30am-11pm winter) It's hard to imagine anything more refreshing on a hot summer day or after a big winter-time dinner than shaved

ice topped with chunks of strawberry, kiwi fruit or (most famously) mango and a scoop of mango sorbet.

**Yang's Bakery** (Yángjiā Shuǐjiǎoguān; Map p88; ☎ 2772 1190; 278 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.3; dumplings NT50-70; ☺ lunch & dinner) This 40-plus-year-old, northern-Chinese style place is unpretentious to the max and has no English menu, but that doesn't matter. Order yourself some *dàguōtiē* (long-rolled dumplings, steamed then fried) or *yángjiāshuǐjiǎo* (pork dumplings) and you'll see what we mean. Yang's is also a good place to get yourself a bowl of *niúròu miàn* (beef-noodle soup), one of Taiwan's most famous dishes.

### MIDRANGE

**Dintaifung** (Dìngtǎifēng; Map p88; ☎ 2321 8927; 194 Xinyi Rd, sec.2; dumplings NT140-290; ☺ lunch & dinner) With Taipei's most celebrated dumplings, Dintaifung is deservedly popular for Shanghai-style treats made fresh to order. Try the classic *xiǎolóng bāo* (steamed pork dumplings). Very popular with locals and visitors alike, so either phone in reservations (they speak enough English) or prepare to queue up.

**Grandma Nitti's** (Zhōngxī Měishì; Map p88; ☎ 2369 9751; 8 Lane 93, Shida Rd; dishes NT150-400; ☺ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 10am-11pm Sun; MRT Taipower Building) A mainstay of Taipei's Western community, Nitti's serves comfort food such as waffles, burgers, Philly-cheese steaks, Mexican dishes and family-size pastas. Breakfast is served until dinner time. There's a comfy street-side terrace and the windowed space upstairs is a great place to mull over newspapers. There's a long bookcase on the 1st floor with an excellent selection of secondhand books for sale, and the restaurant's owner is a mainstay in Taiwan's animal-protection community.

**Bongos** (Map p88; ☎ 2365 6059; 3 Alley 5, Lane 74, Wenzhou St; dishes NT150-300; ☺ 11am-11pm; MRT Taipower Building) Have a hankering for *poutine* (French fries topped with cheese curds and gravy) and pasta, or perhaps some salad served with a secondhand science-fiction paperback? Bongos, then, is undeniably the place. In addition to serving good Western-style lunches and dinners, including the aforementioned Canadian favourite, Bongos also has a comfortable reading area, outdoor seating, and a huge collection of second-hand paperbacks for sale.

**Yuan Shu Vegetarian** (Yuánsù; Map p88; ☎ 2393 3489; 2 Lane 14, Lishui St; set lunch from NT300; ☺ lunch



& dinner; MRT Guting) Since its opening in 2005, this restaurant has received a fair amount of press coverage for its new-school renditions of traditional Taiwanese favourites. Vegetarian meals are prepared in the classic Buddhist way, not merely meat but also garlic and pepper free. Hotpots are a specialty as are the pumpkin rice noodles and delicious tofu dishes. The sign outside reads simply 'Vegetarian'.

**Lan Ji** (Lánjī Málà Huógúo; Map p88; ☎ 2322 4523; 19 Jinsan S Rd, sec.1; ingredients NT50-400; ☎ 5.30pm-5am, closed Sun; MRT Zhongxiao Xinshe) It's a hole in the wall, but a can't-miss spot for Taiwanese hotpot. Order yours with any number of meats and/or vegetables and choose your desired level of spiciness. Special pots with dividers in the centre allow companions with different tastes to still share the same pot.

**Alleycats** (Xiàngmāo; Map p88; ☎ 2321 8949; B1, 6 Lishui St; pizzas from NT150; ☎ lunch & dinner) This dark and swank basement pizzeria not only serves the best stone-oven pizza in Taipei, but is also the only place we've found so far to get hard cider on tap.

## Zhongshan

This is the neighbourhood that stretches north from the city centre, roughly encompassing the neighbourhoods along the Danshui Line from the train station until the point that the subway becomes an elevated train line. Located in this area is Taipei's once-infamous bar and brothel zone, aka the Combat Zone (p117), now more noteworthy for the Shuangcheng Street Night Market to the south (great place for late-night eats and livelier than the Zone, in our opinion). Linsen Rd and the surrounding alleyways is popular among Japanese businessmen and tourists, so if you're looking for sake, teppanyaki, Kobe beef or tekka maki, you'll find it there.

## BUDGET

**Joy Yuan Taiwan Buffet** (Qiáoyuán Zìzhūcān; Map p92; ☎ 2550 0777; 171 Chang'an W Rd; dishes NT10-50; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Zhongshan) Always busy, this perennial favourite offers a cafeteria-style buffet with dozens of selections, encompassing a fairly wide chunk of the omnivore dietary spectrum. As a general rule, high turnover at a buffet ensures fresh food, making this among the best bang-for-buck buffets. Most dishes are under NT30 and a *biāndāng* (premade takeaway lunch box) costs NT70.

## MIDRANGE

**Celestial Restaurant** (Tiānchú Cāntīng; Map p92; ☎ 2521 1097; 3rd fl, 1 Nanjing W Rd; dishes NT165-380, Peking duck from NT750; ☎ lunch & dinner) Lovers of Beijing-style cooking have been coming to this restaurant for generations. In addition to Peking duck (expensive but meant for sharing), try the elegant, comforting 'green beans (actually peas) with shredded chicken'. Enter off Nanjing W Rd.

**Green Leaf** (Qīngyè Cāntīng; Map p92; ☎ 2571 3859; 1 Lane 105, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1; dishes NT128-298; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Zhongshan) This local favourite literally serves everything Taiwanese from dumplings to full plates in vintage 1964 décor. Pluses are its friendly service and the well-translated menu. Some more expensive seafood options cost up to NT1288, so unless your wallet is deep as the ocean you might want to steer clear of the lobster.

**Haibawang** (Hāibàwáng Qǐjiāndiàn; Map p92; ☎ 2596 3141; 59 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.3; dishes NT100-600; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Yuanshan) The speciality at this multistorey restaurant is Taiwanese hotpot. Expect an elegant setting, eight storeys above ground and overlooking the Taipei Arts Park and the Fine Arts Museum. If you're not up for hotpot (or some lovely Taiwanese seafood plates), some floors feature Italian or buffet-style dining.

**Hatsuho** (Chūsui Jūjūwū; Map p92; ☎ 2522 1251; 112 Nanjing E Rd, sec.1; dishes NT80-320; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Zhongshan) Just steps from the Emperor Hotel is where you'll find this country-Japanese-style place for sashimi, grilled fishes, *yakitori* (grilled chicken skewers) and *okonomiyaki* (savoury pancakes). You can choose *horikotatsu* seating, with your feet in a well under the table.

**Taipei Story House Tearoom** (Táiběi Gùshìguǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2587 5565; 181-1 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.3; dishes NT250-650, Chinese-/English-style tea NT320/280; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner nightly) Part of the Taipei Story House (p94), this place serves excellent snacks and tea.

## TOP END

**Cosmopolitan Grill** (Map p92; ☎ 2508 0304; 218 Changchun Rd; www.cosmo.com.tw; dishes NT400; ☎ lunch & dinner) An upscale Western-style eatery on the southwest corner of Changchun Rd and Jianguo Rd offers dinner, business lunches and delicious weekend brunches of the type that have helped make people around the world corpulent. Check their website for specials, map, and even an online menu.

## NIGHT MARKETS WE LOVE

- **Shilin** (Map p100; MRT Jiantan) If you can eat it, wear it or give it a name and bring it home with you (stalls selling puppies are big here, though we question the ethics of a spur-of-the-moment puppy purchase), you'll find it here.
- **Shida** (Map p88; MRT Taipower Building) If Shilin is king, than Shida is queen. You'll be met with a mind-boggling array of stuff to eat as well as some very cool shops.
- **Jingmei** (MRT Jingmei) Though a bit on the dark and grotty side, there's something about the realism of this night market on the southern end of the city that we respect.
- **Yingchuan Rd** (Map p126; MRT Danshui) While Danshui's Old Street is a great place to explore, don't leave before checking out the Yingchuan Rd Night Market.
- **Shipai** (MRT Shipai) Where people in Tianmu go for night-market food when they can't stand the crowds at the Shilin market. A good place to hit after soaking at Beitou Hot Springs.

**Paris 1930** (Báilíng; Map p92; ☎ 2597 1234; 41 Minquan E Rd, sec.2; meals NT1800-3000; ☎ dinner) This restaurant in the Landis Hotel is consistently rated as having the best French food in town. Diners will often run over six courses. There's piano music and a refined atmosphere, and the hotel's Art Deco setting provides a suitably sophisticated backdrop.

**Golden Dragon** (Huángjīn Lóng; Map p92; ☎ 2886 8888, ext 1262; Lobby, Grand Hotel, 1 Lane 1, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.4; dishes NT150-500; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Jiantan) Popular with politicians and visitors alike, the Golden Dragon is the gorgeous Hong Kong-style restaurant inside the Grand Hotel (which is possibly one of Taipei's best known landmarks). Excellent dim sum and other Cantonese favourites are served in style. Diners have a panoramic view of the Keelung River.

## Eastern Taipei City

Taipei city east of Fuxing Rd is vast and offers a plethora of flavours. While some of the city's most expensive restaurants are located here, there's no shortage of budget and midprice places. If street eats are your thing, have a walk up Da'an Rd just north of the Zhongxiao Fuxing MRT station, where you'll find a bunch of noodle shops and stalls selling everything from roast corn to stinky tofu. Just to the south, the stretch of Zhongxiao E Rd between the Zhongxiao Fuxing and Zhongxiao Dunhua stations are chock-full of eateries for all budgets.

There's a stretch of Fuxing Rd just beneath the Muzha elevated train line on the west side, right between the Technology Building and Da'an stations worth visiting. Certain friends of ours call this 'breakfast alley', though this

moniker is somewhat misleading. It's not traditional Sunday brunch that these friends come here for (they're rarely out of bed that early), but rather the postbarhop-get-something-in-stomach-before-passing-out meal so important to the health and well being of booze hounds in the know. Though the speciality of restaurants along this stretch are stomach-soothing items such as *wēn dòujiāng* (warm soymilk) and *qīngzhòu* (thin rice porridge served with chunks of sweet potato), a full variety of typical Taiwanese snacks are also available.

## BUDGET

**Yonghe Congee King** (Yǒnghé Qīngzōu Dàwáng; Map p96; ☎ 2702 1226; 132 Fuxing N Rd, sec.2; dishes NT20-80, ☎ 24hr) One of our favourite postdrinking-binge breakfast joints, Yonghe Congee King is clean, well lit (but not too bright) and serves perfect post and prehangover foods such as home-made *dòujiāng* (soymilk), *luóbuógāo* (turnip cake) and *qīngzhòu*. If this doesn't settle your stomach, consider laying off the Taiwan beer and Whisbi for a while.

**Liaochen Niuroumian** (Liáochén Niúròumiàn; Map p96; 1 Alley 9, Lane 133, Nanjing E Rd, sec.4; noodle soup NT70-80; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun) On a lane loaded with street-food stalls, come here for its famous beef-noodle soup and ignore the basic atmosphere.

**Sababa** (Map p96; ☎ 2738 7796; 8 Alley 54, Lane 118, Heping E Rd, sec.2; dishes NT150; ☎ lunch & dinner) This excellent new eatery serving falafel, hummus and other Middle Eastern food is already so popular that the kitchen exhausts their supply of delicious home-made pita before we get there for our typically late dinners. But

it would be selfish to not list Sababa just to keep the pita for ourselves. Instead, we're just going to exaggerate how hard the place is to find. Really. It's so very hard to find! You'll probably have to settle for one of the three dozen other restaurants on Alley 54, leaving the pita for us regulars. Good luck.

#### MIDRANGE

**G'day Café** (Qíngxī Cǎnfāng; Map p96; ☎ 2717 5927; 180 Xing'an St; dishes NT120-320; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun, closed last Mon of month) A popular hangout for local expats. The G'day is a good place to go for burgers, tacos, steak, Western-style brunches, apple pie with ice cream and a bottomless cup of coffee.

**Ostrich** (Tuó Niǎo; Map p96; ☎ 2748 4047; 67 Guangfu S Rd; dishes from NT300; ☎ lunch & dinner) Welcome to Ostrich, Taipei's first and only (at least to our knowledge) restaurant specialising in the tall and gamey bird. Ostrich steaks, ostrich burgers and ostrich noodle soup are all on the menu at this upscale restaurant just around the corner from Core Pacific City. (That's the mall shaped like a large ostrich egg. Coincidence? We think not.) Ostrich also serves drinks and has a good selection of wines from California, Australia and France.

**Very Thai** (Fěichāng Tàì Gáiniàn Cǎnting; Map p96; ☎ 2546 6745; 319 Fuxing N Rd; dishes NT150-450; ☎ lunch & dinner) Very dark and very cool, this mod-Thai spot has black-on-black décor and lovely dishes. It's open, you guessed it, very late.

**Sweet Dynasty** (Tángcháo Tiánpín Zhuānméndiàn; Map p96; ☎ 2772 2889; 160 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4; dishes from NT350; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Zhongxiao Dunhua) Though specialising in Chinese desserts, Sweet Dynasty also serves a wide variety of mouth-watering dishes such as Shanghainese prawns, braised beef ribs with bitter melon and other Chinese classics. Desserts, of course, are amazing, so top off your meal with a slice of taro cake or a dish of mango pudding. Lines can be long, especially on the weekends, so make reservations or be prepared to spend some time people watching on the footpath outside.

**Capone's Lounge Bar** (Kǎbāng Xīnyìshì Měishì; Map p96; ☎ 2773 3782; 312 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4; dishes NT350; ☎ Lunch & Dinner; MRT Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall) Named after noted Italian-American gourmand, mermaker and racketeer, Capone's serves Italian food at prices you can't refuse. A popular watering hole with upscale expats, especially after 9pm when the house band plays.

#### TOP END

**Hooters** (Map p96; ☎ 2716 5168; www.hooters.com.tw; 18 Qingcheng St; dishes from NT400; ☎ 11am-midnight Sun & Mon, 11am-1am Fri & Sat) The opening of Hooters in Taipei caused quite a stir. If you've ever been to a Hooters in the USA, you know that the women who work here are chosen for their looks, outgoing personalities, and willingness to join in spontaneous hula-hoop performances. The ladies of Hooters Taipei live up to the franchise's expectations. Food and décor is pure Americana – how you feel about that depends on your personal bias.

**Lawry's The Prime Rib** (Láoruìsī Nǐdèlpáí Cǎnting; Map p96; ☎ 3762 1312; 12th fl, Core Pacific City, Living Mall, 134 Bade Rd, sec.4; mains NT790-1690; ☎ lunch & dinner) This institution from Beverly Hills has now landed in Taiwan with its huge roast-beef dinners and a signature 'spinning bowl' salad prepared beside your table.

**Shabu-jan** (Chán; Map p96; ☎ 8761 6677; 11th fl, Core Pacific City, Living Mall, 134 Bade Rd, sec.4; dishes NT620-1680; ☎ lunch & dinner) Lots of places around Taipei claim to serve *shabu-shabu*, a Japanese hotpot of thinly sliced beef which you dip into sauces, but Shabu-jan (Japanese name, Shabu-zen) has the home-country pedigree to go with it.

**Geneva** (Rìnièwǎ; Map p96; ☎ 2731 7641; www.geneva.com.tw; 9 Alley 5, Lane 345, Renai Rd, sec.4; dishes from NT600; ☎ dinner, closed Mon) We were saddened to learn that Ticino's (our old favourite Taipei Swiss restaurant) had closed its doors, but happy that Geneva has picked up the flaming fondue torch. Though pricey, Geneva uses only the finest cheese to make its fondues and the best home-baked breads and imported meats for dipping. Leave room for desert, an amazingly decadent chocolate fondue served with fresh strawberries. And of course, don't forget to order the sparkling wine.

#### Shilin & Tianmu

Avoiding food in Shilin is a bit like avoiding casinos in Las Vegas; you really need to be committed to manage it, for the very name 'Shilin' is synonymous with Taipei's most celebrated night market. Quiet during the day, once the sun goes down the Shilin Night Market becomes a frenetic buzz of food carts offering tasty Taiwanese treats such as grass jelly soup, stinky tofu, beef-noodle soup, fresh cut fruit, and more meat-on-a-stick than you can shake a stick at. Until recently the centre of the night market had a food court with teppanyaki booths, noodle stalls and milk-tea

joint, but after many artery-clogging decades, city elders deemed the place a fire risk, and moved most of the food court's purveyors of tasty grease to their new home in the **Chiantan Food Court** (Map p100; MRT Jiantan), located just across from the Jiantan station. Specialities of the Shilin Night Market are numerous and wonderful, ranging from the recognisable, *chǎo pángxìè* (sautéed crabs), to the mysterious, *zhū xiě gāo* (congealed pig blood, usually served on a stick). There are also a number of more traditional style sit-down restaurants in the neighbourhood.

Though the two neighbourhoods border one another, culinary wise, Tianmu is Shilin's diametric opposite. While Shilin is the place for crowded night markets and street food, Tianmu is generally more upscale, offering a wide variety of sit-down restaurants. Tianmu does have a night market (p113), though it's a bit of a walk. Check out a little place called **Escargot** (24 Chung Yi St) for some of the best cakes in the neighbourhood.

#### BUDGET

**Beitou Squid** (Běitóu Yóuyú; Map p100; 98 Dexing E Rd; dishes NT30-50; ☎ lunch & dinner) It isn't in Beitou (though we're told there's another one there), and there's no squid. But we like this funky little eatery in Tianmu because, aside from the eats – great pork and seafood dumpling soup and tasty Taiwanese side dishes such as cold cucumber salad and tofu with thousand year eggs – the place is just way cool. Old 1960s Taiwanese movie posters adorn the wall (they're for sale) and the shop sells kitsch nostalgia items including wind-up cars and candy cigarettes. John Waters would just love this place.

**He Xiang Delicious Food** (Hé Xiāng Měishì; Map p100; 60 Fuguo Rd; dishes NT50; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Zhishan) A long-standing favourite street-side eatery in Tianmu, He Xiang has kept the same tiny menu for decades (the picture menu on the wall behind the counter has almost totally faded). The specialty of the house, and a local must-try, is the bamboo-steamed sticky rice with red pork and vegetables, wrapped in a lotus leaf and served with hot sauce. Look for the faded picture of this dish above the entrance. The restaurant is on the north side of the street, just east of the Zhishan MRT. Another excellent dish is the shrimp ball soup. Nothing fancy, just cheap, good and very Taiwanese.

**Haw Kuang Vegetarian Restaurant** (Háoquāng Sùshì; Map p100; ☎ 2883 2168; 357 Zhongzheng Rd; meals from NT100; ☎ lunch & dinner; MRT Shilin) Words can't describe how much we love this vegetarian buffet just a few blocks northwest of the Shilin Night Market. The chef is a genius, with an eye for both colour and flavour. Imagine yourself a painter and the white cardboard tray your canvas. Arrange your meal from dozens of beautifully prepared vegetarian dishes and enjoy. If you visit one vegetarian buffet during your time in Taipei, make it this one.

#### MIDRANGE

**Lavender Garden** (Tiānmǔ Gǔdào Sēnlín Huāyuán; Map p100; ☎ 2873 7581; 4 Alley 1, Lane 232, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.7; dishes NT250-350; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon) At the bottom of a long, steep stairway that (eventually) leads up into Yangming Mountain lies this excellent restaurant set inside a two-storey home that's surrounded by an aquatic garden. Amazing health-oriented Chinese dishes such as 'health tonic hotpot with 10 Chinese herbs' will give you strength for the climb ahead. Then again, as Lavender Garden's deserts are delicious as well, you might want to save the meal as a reward for the climb down.

**Doggy & Yummy** (Dōjī Yǎmì; Map p100; ☎ 2874 5341; 2nd fl, 59 Chungshan N Rd, sec.7, Tianmu; dishes NT250; ☎ lunch & dinner) One of the latest trends in Taipei is pet-friendly restaurants, that is, places where pet-loving city dwellers can take the pooch (or pot-bellied pig for that matter) out for a good meal. Though most tourists tend not to bring their own pets, doggy restaurants are fun places, especially for travellers with children (besides, we couldn't resist listing at least one of these odd eateries). Doggy & Yummy has decent Western food such as pasta and fried chicken and an English menu that's definitely dog (and kid) friendly.

**Lanka Curry Restaurant** (Lánkǎ Kǎlì; Map p100; ☎ 2832 0153; 48 Zhongyi Rd; dishes NT100-200; ☎ lunch & dinner, Mon dinner only) One of the less flashy (and less expensive) South-Asian restaurants in Taipei, Lanka has been serving excellent curries, sambals and dhal dishes for nearly two decades. If you're feeling especially adventurous, try the fish-head curry (the priciest item on the menu, but well worth it). Whatever you get, order their special appetizer, 'Lunu Dehi', it's diced onion mixed with lemon pickle.

**Fang's Restaurant** (Fāngjiā Xiǎoguǎn; Map p100; ☎ 2872 8402; 7 Tianmu E Rd; dishes NT160-560; ☺ lunch & dinner) You can find excellent plates of Jiangzishyle (Shanghai regional) cooking at this local favourite that is well regarded by both long-term expats and locals alike. Just about every table also seems to order a tray of 'mini-mall steamed buns', tiny soup dumplings (NT260 for a serving of 20).

### Organic Markets

Need something to balance out the night markets' stick-meat, fried tofu and assorted artery-clogging goodness? Taipei has a number of places to get organic fruits, vegetables and other healthy products. Our favourite place is **Cottonfields** (Map p88; ☎ 2364 8899; 273 Roosevelt Rd, sec.3), which sells the sort of stuff you'd find at a farmer's market in places such as San Francisco. It also sells salads and have a great juice bar with upstairs seating.

With branches all over the city, **Santa Cruz** is another organic chain. We've marked one of their branches on our Eastern Taipei map (p96). Santa Cruz is a good place to stock up on vitamins, though they tend to be pricier than those you'd find in North America or Australia.

### DRINKING Cafés

Once hard to find, coffee shops abound throughout Taipei. Typical opening times are 7.30am to 10pm and you might find folks, particularly students, camped out at them for hours studying or chatting over a coffee, pastry or light meal. As finding a coffee shop in Taipei has become as easy as, well, finding a coffee shop in Taipei, we've skipped the chain shops and listed some of our favourite unique spots. Many of these are as much chill-out and event spots as they are places to get coffee.

**Fong Da** (Fēngdà Kǎféi; Map p88; ☎ 2371 9577; 42 Chengdu Rd; coffee NT100; ☺ 8am-10.30pm) One of Taipei's original coffee shops, Fong Da dates from the 1950s and still uses some of the origi-

nal equipment. Drip ice coffee with biscuits costs NT100. Whenever we've been away for a while we always stop in as absence makes the heart grow Fong Da.

**Chocolic** (Qiāokēhàkè Qiāokēli Zhuānyīndiàn; Map p88; ☎ 2321 5820; 2 Lane 7, Yongkang St; drinks NT90-130; ☺ noon-11pm) Leave room for desert. This tiny, brightly painted café is an old favourite, dating back to the days when good chocolate was impossible (as opposed to merely inconvenient) to find. Expect cakes, chocolate drinks and a clientele of smiley young things galore.

**Norwegian Wood** (Nuówēi Sēnlín; Map p88; ☎ 2363 3714; 182 Wenzhou Rd; ☺ noon-midnight; MRT Gongguan) A very cool coffee house serving espresso drinks as well as alcohol. Known as a hangout for Taipei's literary crowd, as well as being a gay and lesbian friendly venue.

**Orange Music Cafe** (Kān Diànchē; Map p100; ☎ 2888-1220; 302 Wen Lin Rd; ☺ 11:30am-1am, Sun-Friday, 11:30am-3am Fri & Sat; MRT Shilin) Orange is the predominant colour of this bar and café located across from Shilin MRT station's exit 2. An up and coming chill-out spot, Orange serves food, but is better known for another fire-related activity, the 'fire dance' performances, which begin every Friday night at 10.50pm. Admission for the performance is NT150, but if you come in costume it drops to NT80.

**Corridor Cafe** (Huǐláng Kǎféiguǎn; Map p88; ☎ 8369 5656; Sports Bldg, National Taiwan University, 312 Roosevelt Rd, sec.4; ☺ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; MRT Gongguan) Smack in the middle of Taiwan's most respected institute of higher learning, the Corridor Cafe offers a small-stage performance space for both planned and ad-hoc performances. Good coffee, artistic vibes and a good place to meet up with Taipei artists.

### Tea Shops

Tea is an institution in Taiwan as well as a major export, and Taipei has a great variety of shops that serve it. You'll find tea shops in places as varied as atop serene mountains down to stands in crowded markets.

### THE ZONE

The Combat Zone got its name back when Taiwan was still known in some circles as 'Free China'. Then, American soldiers came here in droves. They were either stationed in Taiwan or on R&R leave from Vietnam. The neighbourhood was a major red-light district, a little slice of Bangkok, or perhaps of Amsterdam.

Times have changed and nowadays it's difficult to say exactly who the habitués of these few grungy alleys really are. Japanese businessmen perhaps, though the section of alleys across Linsen Rd to the southwest seems more geared towards such clientele. Shuangcheng St, the main road from which the alleys branch off, is a night market to the south, not much different from many of Taipei's other small night market streets. North of the night market on the main drag are a few pubs. There, places like B52 seem to be more popular with Filipino and Indonesian migrant workers than either locals or Westerners. As for the girlie bars, nowadays only one alley in the Combat Zone is still dedicated to them. While we're reluctant to advertise it by name, it isn't too hard to either find or avoid.

Though eschewed by tea purists, *zhēnzhū nǎichá* (pearl milk tea) is way popular with everyone from kids to secretaries. This sweetened tea with chewy black balls of tapioca is served in a plastic cup with a seal as tight as a bongo head and drunk through a straw thick enough to suck up marbles. Order yours *rè* (hot) or *bīng* (cold). Another favourite is *pàomò hóngchá* (bubble black tea), which is tea frothed until it has a head not unlike that of beer. Both are available at tea stands and stalls citywide for about NT25.

**Rose House** (Gúdiǎn Méiguī Yuán; Map p92; 95 Nanjing E Rd, sec.2) Readers have written in praise of this teahouse, which, despite its normal store front, looks like it could have been decorated by Laura Ashley inside. Among its dozens of varieties are Earl Grey and Mango. Teas are sold by the cup, the set or the tin.

**Maussac** (Mósàikǎ Fàshì Cháguǎn Cǎnting; Map p88; ☎ 2391 7331; www.m-tea.com; 24 Lishui St, sec.1; dishes from NT350) Maussac is an upscale teahouse, complete with a bookshelf's worth of jars featuring teas from around the world. In addition to tea, set-meal specials, including pasta, meat and seafood dishes, are all served with a haute European flair. Maussac's charming jazz atmosphere makes it a popular spot for Taipei's chic looking to unwind with a meal, tea or both.

### ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Clubs

Ah, where to begin? Taipei is a city where the young heading home from a night of hard clubbing pass through parks where the old have been practicing taichi since dawn. There is no lack of clubs, pubs, bars, musical ven-

ues or other places to drink, hear music, or if you're drunk enough, to make music of your own. Typically, beers sell for between NT100 and NT150. Hard liquor might set you back NT250. Ask around for happy hours or drink specials.

Clubs come and go, but we've done our best to list ones that should still be around when this book goes to print. A loose affiliation of pubs have come together to promote their latest menus and events. Check out their website, [www.taipeipubs.com](http://www.taipeipubs.com). Another excellent site to find out what bands are playing and where is [www.taiwannights.com](http://www.taiwannights.com).

**2F** (Map p88; ☎ 2392 2222; 15 Heping W Rd, sec.1) This large club (capacity more than 1000) is home to both commercial and underground scenes, with everything from techno to house to trance. It often hosts a selection of international DJs.

**45** (Map p88; ☎ 2321 2140; 45 Heping E Rd, sec.1) Go up the narrow stairs and join the huge crowd (which includes many foreigners), especially on Friday and Saturday nights. It's festooned with Americana, from licence plates to movie-star photos and the food is American style too.

**B1** (Map p88; ☎ 2397 0506; 71 Aiguo Rd) If you're young, hip and dress like the latest pop or hip-hop star, you'll find loads of company here. Pay the cover charge and it's all you can drink, all night.

**Brown Sugar** (Hēitáng; Map p96; ☎ 8780 1110; www.brownsugar.com.tw; 101 Songren Rd; admission NT380 Sun-Thu, NT550 Fri & Sat) A swank place with lots of right angles and silk curtains, Brown Sugar has live jazz Monday to Saturday nights and salsa on Sunday. It serves good food as well.

### HYPNOTIZED IN TAIPEI

'Hey Rocky, watch me pull a rabbit out of this hat!' No, seriously. Local legend-in-waiting Brian David Phillips doesn't do the old rabbit-in-the-hat trick, but the expatriate magician/hypnotist's performances packs 'em in all the same. Power of suggestion, mind over matter and experiential trance are all part and parcel of Phillips' bag-o-tricks. Shows are held in Chinese and English at various clubs around Taipei. Check out [www.BrianDavidPhillips.com](http://www.BrianDavidPhillips.com) for upcoming gigs.



## GAY & LESBIAN NIGHTLIFE

Foreign-born gay and lesbian travellers will find Taipei to be no less friendly than anywhere else. An open-minded city, Taipei hosted one of Asia's first Gay Pride parades (in 2-28 Peace Park), which has now become an annual autumn event. Gay life here is well documented in film and literature. While there isn't really a 'gay district' in Taipei, there's no lack of bookshops, bars, saunas and social options scattered throughout town to choose from.

Like the rest of the city's nightlife scene, the hot club when we go to press may not even exist by the time you read this, but the establishments we've listed have been around for a while. *G-spot* magazine puts out an informative little Taipei map listing some of the city's hot spots and you can usually pick up a copy at some of the venues listed below. Visitors should check out [www.fridae.com](http://www.fridae.com). And of course, the folks at **Utopia** ([www.utopia-asia.com](http://www.utopia-asia.com)) keep the data fresh for those looking to hook up in Taipei and elsewhere.

### Men's Saunas

**Rainbow Sauna** (☎ 2370 2899; 2nd fl, 142 Kunming St; MRT Ximending); **Garden of Eden** (☎ 2311 8681; 2nd fl, 120 Xining St; MRT Ximending); **24 Men's Sauna** (☎ 2361 1069; 5th fl, 72, sec.1 Zhongxiao W Rd; MRT Taipei Main Station)

### GLBT Venues

- **Fresh** (Map p88; ☎ 2358 7701; 2nd fl, 7 Jinshan 5 Rd) Taipei's gay club *du jour* has three floors of fun; a bar floor, a dance floor and a chill room. In addition, there's a roof garden. It's friendly and the crowd is international.
- **Jailhouse** (☎ 2364 1623; 3 Alley 8, Lane 316, Roosevelt Rd, sec.3) A long-standing favourite among the Taipei lesbian scene, this tiny bar in the Gongguan neighbourhood has a small dance floor and occasional drink specials. If you're just popping in to check things out, be advised that you'll be hit for a 'minimum charge' of NT500.
- **Source** (Map p88; ☎ 3393 1678; 1-2 Roosevelt Rd, sec.1) There's a small bar downstairs and a dance floor upstairs and the handsome top floor is reminiscent of a old-world Chinese salon. Foreigners aren't just welcome here, they're encouraged.

**Carnegie's** (Map p96; ☎ 2325 4433; 100 Anhe Rd, sec.2; dishes NT260-780) Carnegie's caused quite a stir when it first opened in 2001, what with patrons dancing on the bar and all, but even if it has calmed down a notch, it's still one of the liveliest nightspots in Xinyi. It's a popular meeting place for after-work drinks. The menu includes steaks, halibut and lamb.

**Green Bar** (Map p100; ☎ 2873 3263; 85 Tianmu E Rd) Green Bar is another icon of the foreign community. Here you'll find darts, table games and the latest sports on TV.

**Indian Beer House** (Map p96; ☎ 2741 0550; 196 Bade Rd, sec.2; meals from NT400; ☎ dinner) A Taipei institution. Dine among the dinosaurs (huge fossils dress the interior) and huge crowds of young professionals nightly.

**Jr Caffé** (Map p88; ☎ 2366 1799; 80 Shida Rd) It's in the heart of the student pub zone but everyone is welcome here. Glass doors means that it doesn't get too smoky on street level and there are foosball and pool tables downstairs.

**Living Room** (Map p96; ☎ 8787 4154; [www.livingroomtaipei.com](http://www.livingroomtaipei.com); 3rd fl, 8 Nanjing E Rd, sec.5; ☎ 6pm-1am) Part supper club, part music lounge, this low-key venue is a great respite from everything huge, noisy and self-consciously trendy. It's filled with sofas, curtains and has classy wooden flooring. Living Room is popular among musicians, and every night features a different theme. Expect jazz, jam sessions, electronica dance parties and more. Check the website to see what's going on and for images of the place.

**Luxy** (Map p96; ☎ 2772 1000; [www.luxy-taipei.com](http://www.luxy-taipei.com); 5th fl, 201 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4) A massive club that often features international bands, DJs and some of the hippest live entertainment in Taipei. Check the website for the latest offerings.

**Malibu West** (Map p92; ☎ 2592 8228; 9 Lane 25, Shuangcheng St) There's a pool table and a menu with dishes including burgers, pastas, pizzas and snacks. Happy hour is between 4pm and 9pm.

In the heart of the Combat Zone (p117), it has a tropical feel and is popular with business people and airline pilots.

**My Place** (Map p92; ☎ 2591 4269; 3-1 Lane 32, Shuangcheng St) Also in the Zone, My Place bills itself as Taiwan's first pub (established 1975) and is still going strong. This Brit-owned establishment boasts friendly hostesses, a pool table and a huge 100-inch-screen TV for sports broadcasts.

**Naomi** (Map p96; ☎ 2709 8295; 65 Anhe Rd, sec.1) Metal-bead curtains, mirrored columns, red padded walls and dim lighting provide a great backdrop for this lounge bar where well-dressed 20- and 30-somethings sip scotches and single malts.

**Peacock** (Map p88; ☎ 3365 2997; 5 Lane 93, Shida Rd; ☎ 6pm-2am, closed Tue) A recent entry into Taipei's world of nightspots, Peacock's sets itself apart by offering not just the usual snacks (pizza, fries and an assortment of tasty Mediterranean-themed items, all well presented) and alcoholic beverages, but also for renting Arab-style *shisha* (flavoured tobacco) pipes complete with a full variety of imported *shisha*. Food is reasonably priced and *shisha* pipes go for NT400 (NT10 for each extra mouthpiece).

**Pig** (Map p100; ☎ 2874 0630; 78 Tianmu E Rd; dishes NT250-425) This friendly Tianmu pub certainly feels very British and the menu includes steaks, chops, chicken and, er, enchiladas. There's no cover charge but when there's a band on (usually from 9.30pm) there's a minimum spend of NT400 for food and drink (NT500 on Friday and Saturday).

**Room 18** (Map p96; ☎ 2345 2778; Warner Village, 124 Songshou Rd) This dark and atmospheric basement club offers dancing, spinning, hip-hop and house, and would be very much at home in New York or London. It gets a lot of fashionable locals and ABC (American-born Chinese) visitors. Taiwanese stars might find

themselves in the VIP room. A warning: cover charges can be steep.

**Roxy 99** (Map p88; ☎ 2358 2813; 69 Jinshan 5 Rd, sec.2) Popular with students, workers and assorted 20- and 30-somethings, Roxy 99 has a great CD collection and a food menu that includes pastas, fried rice and more adventurous fare. It's in the basement, yet manages not to feel claustrophobic.

**Saints & Sinners** (Map p96; ☎ 2739 9001; 114 Anhe Rd, sec.2; dishes NT150-550) This bar attracts Taiwanese and foreigners alike. Expect a pool table, foosball and darts and a couple of big screens to watch sports broadcasts. Menu choices include Thai, Chinese and British pub food. The house drink, the 'upside down', includes, among other things, vodka, honey, plum powder and cherry brandy.

**Shannon** (Map p96; ☎ 2772 0948; 6 Dunhua N Rd) This cosy Irish-style pub opened in 2002 and is hugely popular with guests from overseas. There's live music (think R&B) Thursday to Sunday.

**Wall** (B1F, 200 Roosevelt Rd, sec.4; [www.the-wall.com.tw](http://www.the-wall.com.tw); ☎ 8pm till late; MRT Gongguan) Fast becoming Taipei's premier venue for alternative music, the cavernous Wall is tucked into the end of a grunge and punk-focused minimal. Live bands play Wednesday to Saturday.

**Underworld** (Map p88; ☎ 2369 0103; Basement, 45 Shida Rd; admission NT250) A little bit psychedelic, a little bit smoky and very friendly, this cosy, graffiti-painted basement pub pours lots of beer and Long Island iced tea. Come here after having dinner at nearby Shida Night Market and stay for DJs spinning house music or watch a live band on weekends.

**Velvet Underground** (Dixia Sirong; Map p88; ☎ 2314 1868; [www.velvet-underground.com.tw](http://www.velvet-underground.com.tw); Basement, Key Mall, 50 Zhongxiao W Rd, sec.1) Rock and roll lives, baby, at this underground (literally) club across from Taipei Main Station. Live bands, full bar, Mexican food and walls covered with kick-ass rock

### NOT THE MTV YOU EXPECTED

Another interesting choice for watching films are the once-ubiquitous MTV houses. These have nothing to do with the music channel of the same name. Rather, a Taiwanese MTV is a place where, for about the same cost as a normal movie ticket, you can rent a DVD and watch it a private room complete with a wide-screen TV, comfy couch and your choice of beverage. Favoured by teens looking for a quiet spot to make out on the cheap, most MTVs have a pretty decent collection of movies and are open 24 hours. Once found all over Taipei, there seem to be fewer and fewer every year. There are a few still open around Taipei and we know of at least two in Ximending. To find one, look for big signs with the words 'MTV'.

art not unlike something out of the a museum of album covers. **ROCK ON!**

**Vacuum Space** (Map p96; ☎ 2700 6535; 81, 208 Fuxing S Rd, sec.2) Vacuum Space was an overnight media sensation a few years back, and not just thanks to the nightclub's hip décor, talented fire-juggling bar staff or excellent music, but rather because of its amateur fight nights. Think the movie *Fight Club*, only with gloves, a few safety rules and prizes for the winners and you've kind of got the idea. Fight night is held on the first Saturday night of the month, the entry fee is NT500 and participants are required to sign a waiver releasing the management from responsibility should they be mashed to pulp.

### Chinese Opera & Theatre Venues

While some venues around town host touring Chinese-opera companies, there are regu-

larly scheduled performances at the following places. Both of these venues project English-language subtitles during the performance so you can understand the action.

**Taipei Eye** (Táiběi Xipéng; Map p92; ☎ 2568 2677; www.taipeieye.com; 113 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; tickets NT880; ☎ 8pm Thu-Sat) Situated in Zhongshan, this new venue showcases Chinese opera together with other rotating performances including puppet theatre and aboriginal dance. Audience members have the unique opportunity to watch the actors as they rehearse and put on make-up, wigs and costumes. Enter from Jinzhou St.

**National Taiwan Junior College of Performing Arts** (Guólí Táiwān Xìjù Zhuānkē Xuéxiào; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2796 2666; 177 Neihu Rd, sec.2; adult/child NT400/200; ☎ 10am Mon & Thu) Students begin their study on this campus (also known as Fuxing Arts Academy) at the age of 10. Junior and advanced

### SHOPPING MALLS & DISTRICTS OF NOTE

You'll have no difficulty finding cool places to spend money as well as interesting stuff to spend it on. Here are just some of the places we recommend, along with a brief description of what you'll find there.

- **Breeze Centre** (Wéifēng Guǎngchǎng; Map p96; ☎ 6600 8888; 39 Fuxing N Rd, sec.1; MRT Zhongxiao Fuxing) Nine floors above ground and three below, Breeze Centre houses worldwide brands including Ralph Lauren, Coach, Marc Jacobs, Omega and Prada...and that's just on the ground floor. The top floors features the Ambassador cinemas.
- **Core Pacific City 'Living Mall'** (Jīnghuáchéng; Map p96; ☎ 3762 1888; 138 Bade Rd, sec.4; ☎ 11am-11pm Sun-Thu, 11am-11pm Fri & Sat) This is one of Taipei's most unique buildings owing to its funky architecture. The 'Living Mall' has clothing, home wares, a great bookshop and a 13-screen movie theatre that runs 24 hours.
- **Warner Village** (Huá' nà Wéixiù Yǐngchéng; Map p96; 124 Songshou Rd) The centrepiece of this mall is the 18-screen Warner Village cinema. The centre is busy all day (and especially so on weekends). You'll find international boutiques such as the oddly named (but maybe we're just immature) FCUK, Monique Japan, Maybelline, Boots and Aveda. The food court is also popular.
- **Shin Kong Mitsukoshi Department Store** (Xīnguāng Sānyuè Bǎihuò; Map p96; ☎ 8780 1000; 11 Songshou Rd) This is a ritzy shopping centre not far from Warner Village.
- **Ximending** (p99) Pierced punks and glam girl a-go-go.
- **Dinghao District** (Dīnghǎo Shāngjuān; Map p96; Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4) Anchored by not one but two **SOGO Department Stores** (Tǎipíngyáng SOGO Bǎihuò; Map p96; ☎ 7713 5555; 45 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.4), it's Taiwan's most famous shopping street complete with shops both big and small, restaurants, cafés and nightspots.
- **Dayeh Takashimaya** (Dà yè Gāodǎowú; Map p100; ☎ 2831 2345; 55 Zhongcheng Rd, sec.2) Where Tianmu folk go when they want a change from outdoor ritzy to indoor ritzy. We like the food court.
- **Miramar Entertainment Park** (Měilìhuá Bǎilèyuán; ☎ 2175 3456; 20 Jingye 3rd Rd, Neihu) Part mall, part amusement park, all fun. This entertainment facility in the Neihu suburb northeast of the city boasts the world's second-largest Ferris wheel, located on its top floor. Panoramic views, and of course, plenty of stuff to eat in Miramar's fine food court.

### SPECIALITY SHOPPING STREETS

Taipei has a number of streets offering an abundance of items relating to particular pursuits. While some items on our list (camping gear and silk jackets) are the sort of things you may well want to buy in Taiwan, it's doubtful that the average traveller will make spurious purchases of wedding dresses or funeral urns. Still, browsing around the streets dedicated to the selling of said items is a good way to catch a peek into local tradition.

- **Wedding dresses** Aiguo E Rd, across from the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, and also at Zhongshan N Rd, near Minquan Rd.
- **Religious articles** Xiyuan Rd, west of Longshan Temple.
- **Menswear** Tacheng St, just south of the Dihua Market.
- **Footwear** Yuanling St between Chongqing S Rd and Boai Rd.
- **Cameras** Beimen Camera Shopping Area on Hankou St, southwest of Taipei Main Station.
- **Outdoor/backpacking gear** Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1, just north of the intersection of Zhongxiao E Rd, on west side of the street.
- **Chinese silk jackets and embroidered shoes** Yuanling St, west of Chongqing S Rd, just north of Baoqing Rd.

students, some teachers and alumni participate in twice-weekly performances of acrobatics and Chinese opera. Admission includes a guided visit of the Beijing opera museum (which is upstairs) as well as an educational video (in English) about Chinese opera. If you arrive early, you may be lucky enough to catch students participating in outdoor classes.

**Puppetry Art Centre of Taipei** (Táiběi Òuxìguǎn; Map p96; ☎ 2528 7955; www.pact.org.tw; 2-4 fl, 99 Civic Blvd, sec.5; tickets NT100; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon) This theatre sits in the shadow of the extraterrestrial-looking Core Pacific Mall. Born of a love of puppets and puppetry, the puppets on display and those used for performances all come from the vast collection donated by Lin Jung-fu, chairman of the board of the Tai-Yuan art and culture foundation. Call or check the website for performance times.

**Gu Ling Experimental Theatre** (Gúlingjì Xiǎojùchǎng; Map p88; ☎ 2391 9393; 2 Lane 5, Guling St) This grass roots, community-based, avant-garde company presents music, drama, dance and children's theatre. Performances are contemporary if not exactly experimental. The majority of the shows are not culturally specific, meaning that even those without Chinese-language skills will be able to follow. The building, which dates from 1906, was originally a police station and during some performances the audience can see all the way through to the former jail cells.

Both the **National Theatre** at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (p89) and the **Novel Hall for Perform-**

**ing Arts** (Map p96; ☎ 2722 4302, ext 7999; www.novelhall.org.tw; 3 Songshou Rd) host large-scale concerts and cultural events including dances, musicals, Chinese or Western opera and concerts of Chinese or Western classical or popular music.

### Cinemas

The place to head for an old-school movie experience is Ximending. There's a cluster of movie theatres with character along Wucheng St. Leading multiplexes are at Warner Village (opposite), the Core Pacific 'Living Mall' (opposite) and Breeze Centre (opposite). The theatres at the 'Living Mall' operate 24 hours. Ticket prices there are adult/concession/matinee NT280/250/220.

**SPOT – Taipei Film House** (Táiběizhǐjiǎ Diànyǐng Zhùtígūǎn; Map p92; ☎ 2511 7786; www.spot.org.tw; 18 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; nonmember/member tickets NT220/170) An excellent cinema with a bookshop and outdoor café. The building, a landmark that dates back to 1925, was once the home of the US ambassador.

Though sadly a dying breed in today's upscale Taipei, a few second-run theatres offering double features in a more 'downtown' setting have managed to survive. One of the last of the great film movie houses is called the **Guangming** (260 Muzha Rd, sec.1; tickets NT80). It's just off Yusheng St and runs four films on two screens, mostly in English with Chinese subtitles. Prices are for a double feature.



## SHOPPING

Taipei is a paradise for shoppers of all stripes. For those who like their shopping old school, the city has a plethora of streets and alleys chock-full of stores selling everything from antiques to religious items, herbal medicines to high-tech gadgetry. If you like your shopping new school, have we got malls for you. There are big malls, small malls, tall malls (p101) and even a mall shaped like a golf ball (p101). Prices are very reasonable and you can often bargain.

### Jade, Chinese Handicrafts & Clothing

There's no shortage of browsing for clothing in the city's night markets, but the highest concentration in one place is at the **Chinese Handicraft Mart** (Táiwān Shòuyè Tuiguāng Zhōngxīn; Map p88; ☎ 2393 3655; 1 Suzhou Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30pm; MRT Taipei Main Station, NTU Hospital). You'll find four storeys of clothing, jade, porcelain, ceramics, tea sets, jewellery, scrolls, paintings and prints and that's just a small selection of the variety on offer here.

Probably the most fun place to shop for knick-knacks in Taipei are the **weekend markets** that are set up under the Jianguo Fwy. On weekdays all one sees is empty asphalt; but all day Saturday and Sunday the area springs to life with stalls, tables, merchants and people coming out of the woodwork.

North of Renai Rd lies the **Holiday Jade Market** (Jiàri Yùshì; Map p96), perhaps the largest market for jade and other semi-precious stones in Asia. The Jade Market is also a great place to buy jewellery, *objets d'art* both small and large, religious items and everything you might need to set up your own feng-shui practice back home (outside of actual knowledge of Chinese geomancy of course).

South of Renai Rd the Jade Market becomes the **Holiday Flower Market** (Jiàri Huāshì; Map p96), a veritable cornucopia of plants, flowers and incredibly impressive bonsai trees. This market is also a good place to buy tea and tea supplies as well as dried fruits, nuts and some locally grown organic produce.

The markets are a must-visit, even for people who don't particularly like shopping in general. Noise and crowds are the norm, so if you're bringing your kids keep them close.

The **Shilin Night Market** (p99) is always a fun place to shop for clothing. Any of Taipei's shopping malls and districts are good for hours, if not days, of retail therapy too.

**Taipei Shanshui** (Táiběi Shānshuǐ; Map p88; ☎ 2361 9507; 12 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1) and **Tingshanliu** (Dēngshānyǒu; Map p88; ☎ 2311 6027; 18 & 22 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.1) are two popular options for outdoor clothing and gear.

### Computers & Electronics

Where do we even start? We have friends who come to Taipei just to buy laptops, mobile phones and other electronic whatnots.

**Guanghua Market** (Guānghuá Diànnào Shìchǎng; Map p88; cnr Civic Blvd & Jinshan Rd; MRT Zhongxiao Xīnsheng) This is a cyberpunk's paradise. Here are several square blocks of stores, alleys and underground malls that are to electronics what a night market is to clothing and foods. Software, hardware, laptops, peripherals, mobile phones, gadgets of all kinds.

**Nova Computer Arcade** (NOVA Zìxùn Guǎngchǎng; Map p88; ☎ 2381 4833; 100 Guangjian Rd) Across from Taipei Main Station, this arcade has about 130 shops and booths dealing in computers, components, digital cameras, mobile phones and just about any electronic peripheral you can imagine.

### Tea & Tea Supplies

Traditional Chinese teapots can be found in teashops all over Taiwan. They come in a mind-boggling array of sizes, shapes and quality. Some are truly works of art, decorated with poems and exquisitely carved. Oolong tea is one of Taiwan's most celebrated exports and a number of shops stock it. You'll find small shops in every corner of the city and there are a number of stalls inside of the Jianguo Weekend Holiday Flower Market selling tea supplies; for most you'll need to speak Chinese.

**Ten Shang's Tea Company** (Tiānshàng Míngchá; Map p92; ☎ 2542 7113; 45 Nanjing E Rd, sec.2) Hailing from a tea-growing mountain community in Central Taiwan's Nantou, Mr and Mrs Chang have been selling organically grown oolong teas from all over Taiwan for a quarter of a century. Visitors are welcome to come in and chat over a pot or two of their exquisite high-mountain tea while shopping for tea and tea supplies.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Western visitors tend to come into Taipei straight from Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. If you're taking a bus (a wise and money-saving choice indeed), you'll be let

off either around the Taipei Main Station, at Songshan Domestic Airport in the north end of the city or in front of one of the hotels along the way.

Getting out of Taipei is about as easy as getting into it, and intercity travel in Taiwan is now even easier thanks to the completion of Taiwan's High-Speed Rail (HSR; p352), which can traverse (nearly) the length of the island in a mind-bending 90 minutes. The HSR leaves from Taipei Main Station and makes a stop in Banqiao (MRT Banqiao) before heading south. Of course, the regular-speed rail (TRA) is always an option. Trains leave from both the Taipei Main and Songshan stations, with the latter being a good choice for trains heading north and down the east coast. TRA schedules are online at [http://new.twtraffic.com.tw/TWRail\\_en](http://new.twtraffic.com.tw/TWRail_en).

Buses are also a good intercity option. Several companies run buses ranging in luxury and price, up and down both coasts of the island. Generally speaking you'll never have to wait more than an hour (usually less) for a bus to any city in Taiwan, though you may have to wait longer over the holidays, when every student in Taiwan seems to be going somewhere. Kuo Kuang Hao buses leave from the city bus station a block west of the Taipei Main Station, while the luxury bus companies operate from the terminal about a half a block past that. The luxury bus companies (Aloha and Ubus are two popular ones) have wider seats, movies, and occasional light refreshments. They're also priced about 15% higher than the government-run buses and have a somewhat dicey reputation for being lax when it comes to road safety.

### GETTING AROUND

Fast and easy to use, the Taipei MRT makes Taipei city one of the easier Asian capitals to navigate. Another cool bonus of MRT travel is that every station has bilingual wall maps pointing out the neighbourhood's attractions. Compass-toting travellers beware, for whatever reason, some stations have maps in which south is facing upwards. Make sure to line their north arrow with that of your compass. In addition to operating the MRT, the Taipei Rapid Transit Association (TRTA) also runs many of Taipei's public bus routes and private bus lines that crisscross the city. Nowadays most buses have English as well as Chinese

route signs. You can find fares, route maps and lots of other information at [www.dot.taipei.gov.tw](http://www.dot.taipei.gov.tw).

### To/From the Airport

Two airports serve Taipei (see p345 for information on both). The international airport is the Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. Its airport code is TPE and it's situated about 50km west of the city centre. Songshan Airport, just north of the city centre, handles domestic traffic. If you're heading to any other city in Taiwan or to one of the outer islands (p288), this is the airport you will be going to. If you are transiting through Taipei between an international flight and a domestic flight you must first get from one airport to the other. The bus is your best bet.

To get to Songshan Airport from downtown's Taipei Main Station, take bus 275 or 262. A taxi will cost around NT200.

Unless you're travelling very late at night or are carrying way more than you can handle, there's no real reason to take a taxi to and from the international airport. Buses to Taipei city (NT125, one hour) run every 15 minutes until midnight and tickets can be bought at either terminal (just follow the signs for 'Long Distance Buses'). Buses run either to Taipei Main Station or Songshan Airport, usually stopping at major hotels along the way. Because different buses stop at different hotels, make sure you let the ticket staff and driver know where you want to be let off.

Taxis from TPE Airport to the city centre cost NT1200, but NT1000 going the other direction. It's more expensive from the airport to the city because of an airport surcharge. Many hotels also offer private car services (at a mark-up, of course), but some offer free and discounted tickets on the buses.

### Car & Motorcycle

There isn't much reason to drive in Taipei, though both cars and motorcycles can be a good thing to have to explore the mountains around the city. For information on car and motorcycle hire, see p349. If you do ride around Taipei on a motorcycle or scooter, make sure your paperwork is in order. Random traffic checks for unlicensed, drunk (or both) motorcyclists are now the rule, not the exception, and the days when a foreign face and lack of Mandarin-speaking ability would get you off the hook are long over.

## Public Transport SUBWAY (MRT)

Having already mentioned just how much Taipei transport has improved thanks to the MRT, we can skip the additional praise (deserved though it is) and get down to brass tacks.

The ever-expanding Taipei MRT (Map p16, though it might have expanded further by the time you read this) pretty much goes everywhere you want to get to. Trains are comfortable and you can usually get a seat except

during peak hours. Signage is bilingual and announcements are actually quadrilingual (all stations are announced not merely in Mandarin and English, but in Taiwanese and Hakka as well). Most places within the city centre are (or soon will be) within about a 20-minute walk of an MRT station. Our one complaint about the MRT is that we wish it would run even later than 1am, but we've been saying the same thing about San Francisco's BART for decades.

### OFF THE RAILS

Taipei's transformation from an ugly duckling of Asia to garden city has been nothing short of revolutionary. Though myriad are the factors involved in her rebirth, the greatest kudos probably goes to the Taipei MRT. Completed in 1999 (though 'completed' isn't quite appropriate as the system is still expanding to connect ever-distant suburbs to the city centre), the Taipei MRT was instrumental in greatly reducing the capital city's once-noxious pollution. Equally important, the MRT turned travel in and around Taipei from hellish to pleasant, making for convenient exploration of neighbourhoods that might otherwise have been overlooked by the casual tourist. Some of our favourite, and often overlooked, stations include:

- **Yuanshan** The first above-ground station on the red line marks Taipei's change from claustrophobic to suburban, and from business to spiritual. This is a good neighbourhood for temple hopping, quiet meditation and tea drinking. In addition to the being home to Taipei's well-known Confucius temple, Yuanshan also boasts a Buddhist temple and monastery (directly across from the station) built in the 1890s. Climbing the gnarled stone stairs that wrap around the complex's back brings you past several shrines and statues, and eventually to a small grass park with old stone tablets and a few stone stools and tables. It's a good place to sit in silence, though your meditation may be punctuated by the regular sound of an airplane coming in for a landing at Songshan airport, which lies directly east.
- **Xiaonanmen** Though in the city centre, this is another often overlooked station as it sits smack in the middle of a line with only three stops. Though there's only one cultural relic of serious note here, the old 'little south gate' (Map p88) for which the station is named after, it's well worth the 90-second ride from Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall station.
- **Kunyang** The eastern end of the blue line sees little tourist action. It's a shame, really, as Nankang park is just a short walk south of Kunyang station. A wide expanse of green grass, ponds, greenhouses, trees, pavilions and a lovely running track with a spectacular view of Taipei 101 to the west and mountains to the east, Nankang park is an oasis on the city's edge.
- **Xindian** The red line's southernmost stop, Xindian station, is the last neighbourhood in Taipei proper. Beyond here lie mountains and rural splendour. Xindian is where the Danshui River comes down from the mountains and sitting on both sides of the river is Pitan park, home to various semiregular fairs and festivities that offer the requisite games of chance and grilled meats. Xindian is also where you'll find the very cool, ever-swaying Bitan suspension bridge.
- **Tucheng** Very nearly the end of the western end of the blue line, Tucheng is a suburb of Taipei city that has a number of interesting temples, including the Buddhist Guang Cheng Yian and the Taoist Wugusiandi temples. If you follow the main road westward towards the Yongning station, you'll pass a park on your left that's used for traditional Taiwanese funeral parties, with a massive statue of a black dog straddling the park's entrance. We don't know the canine's proper name, but we're told he's there to keep watch for wayward spirits. It's a bit spooky, to be honest.

MRT fares are based on distance. The base fare is NT20 and you'll pay NT65 for the longest trip. Single tickets can be purchased from machines located in every MRT station. The fare for each destination is noted in both English and Chinese on a map beside the machine. Coins and bills are accepted, and change is provided.

If you're going to spend any length of time in Taipei, buy yourself an Easy Card, the TRTA's stored-value card. Adult/child Easy Cards sell for NT500/300, of which NT100 is a deposit. The rest is valid for MRT and bus fares and even for payments at certain car parks. It saves the hassle of queuing for tickets and fumbling for change and the best part, the Easy Card gives users a 20% discount on MRT fares. Additionally, if you use your Easy Card and transfer between the MRT and a bus within two hours, the bus ride is half-price. If you're taking a bus on your way to the MRT, the same discount applies.

To use your Easy Card, wave it across a reader device (Savvy Easy Card users wave the card through their wallet or handbag). The reader will then tell you how much value you have left. When the value drops below NT100, the reader will beep.

Easy Cards can be purchased from machines at many MRT stations (instructions available in English). Cash is accepted at most stations and you can add value to your Easy Card using either cash or bank/credit cards, although foreign cards tend not to work. Some stations have both cash and card versions of the Easy Card machines.

When you're done using your Easy Card, simply take it to an MRT ticket booth and your deposit plus any remaining value will be refunded.

### BUS

Taipei's bus system is decidedly harder to figure out as compared with the MRT, mostly because there are so many more bus lines than there are subway lines. But most buses in the city have English signs, generally names of the neighbourhoods or their terminal points, making Taipei's most time-honoured mode of transport a good bet for visitors as well.

There are several types of buses, run by several companies, although that won't matter to most travellers as all of them accept Easy Card (see opposite). Each bus is numbered on the front and sometimes on the

### TAIPEI BUS MAP ONLINE

Need to know what bus goes where? Then check out <http://www.taipeibus.taipei.gov.tw> (click on the English button) for an excellent online bus map put out by the Taipei City Government.

side, and larger buses display the start and end points of the routes in Chinese and English. Note, however, that it's not always clear which direction the bus is headed. There are also minibuses, sometimes called *hóng* (red) buses, with the character 紅 appearing before the route number.

All MRT stations have a map marking bus stops in its vicinity. If you can't find the map, just ask the attendant. Once you've located the bus stop, stand by the sign for your bus and if you see it coming be sure to flag it down. As there may be several different bus routes converging at the same stop, drivers often assume that passengers will identify themselves for pick-up. Note that Taipei's buses may not necessarily pull all the way up to the kerb. Occasionally the bus will stop a lane away, though you usually do not have to step through traffic to board the bus.

Fares are NT15 on most routes within the city centre, though that can double or triple on longer routes. If the sign over the fare box reads 上車 (*shàngchē*), that means you pay getting on and 下車 (*xiàchē*) means you pay getting off.

### Taxi

Taipei's distinctively yellow taxis are metered and charge by distance and waiting time. Base fare is NT70 for the first 1.5km plus NT5 for each 300m thereafter. After midnight, the base fare is NT70 for the first 1.2km plus NT5 for each 250m thereafter. Taxis also charge NT5 for every two minutes that the car is idle (eg sitting in traffic or at a red light). These two minutes are cumulative and appears on the meter.

You won't have any trouble finding a taxi in the city centre as they're everywhere. There are taxi stands around the city but most people just hail one from the side of the road. If an approaching taxi is available, it will have a red light in the windscreen. A taxi may well honk and just stop for you if you look like you need a ride.



## AROUND TAIPEI

Not to put too fine a point on it, but one of the many reasons for our boundless love for Taipei's MRT is that it has made once-difficult places a mere subway ride away. Even mountain spots such as Yangmingshan (p132), Maokong (p136) and Wulai (p141) are much easier to get to from the city centre thanks to the mass transit system.

### DANSHUI 淡水

pop 110,000

Start with a charming Taipei-river suburb as your soup base, add equal parts college-town youth vibe and oceanside-boardwalk festivity. Toss in a healthy sea breeze and a hefty dash of old-world colonial architecture and you've got **Danshui** (Dànshuǐ), possibly among the coolest, and most unique, hangout spots in Taipei.

### History

Also known as Tamshui, the long and storied history of this once-important fishing village

has been shaped primarily by its geographical position at a place where the Danshui River meets the Taiwan Straits. Danshui was initially settled by the Ketagalan tribe, then at various times by the Spanish, Dutch, Japanese and of course, the Han Chinese. By the mid-19th century Danshui was a bustling port city thanks to its natural harbour, and it boasted a sizable foreign population and even a British embassy.

By the end of the 19th century, Danshui's importance as a port had waned, and once Taiwan reverted to Chinese control after WWII, the town slowly settled into a comfortable position as farthest suburb of a major metropolis. With the opening of the Danshui line of the Taipei MRT in 1998, Danshui suddenly found itself a popular weekend travel destination.

### Orientation

Travelling from the Danshui MRT station towards the centre of town, the river front is on your left, while the town itself gradually slopes up the hills towards Tamkang University to the right. Directly north of the station is a great park for kite flying and past

this is Danshui's famous Gongming St and waterfront pedestrian plaza. Across the river is Guanyinshan mountain and the town of Bali, both a quick ferry ride away. Ferries also leave for Danshui's Fisherman's Wharf tourist area, near the mouth of the river. Though buses from the station take you to the various sights around town, most of Danshui is reachable on foot, and the town, though crowded, is particularly pedestrian friendly.

### Sights

A street filled with renovated colonial architecture, Danshui's Gongming St (also known as Danshui Old St) is a favourite with visitors. Lined with shops and food stalls, the pedestrian street gets pretty crowded on the weekends, so if you're averse to crowds, weekdays are the best time to visit. In addition to the shops and stalls, Gongming St also has a branch of Taiwan's (no affiliation with Ripley's) **Believe it or Not** where, for a mere NT90 entry, you can see a live two-headed lizard and a dead (and pickled) two-headed calf. Just look for the stuffed gorilla by the door. Fun for the whole family!

Gongming St runs adjacent to a river-side promenade, which, though lacking an actual boardwalk, still manages to have a boardwalk vibe thanks to its seafood restaurants, outdoor seating, carnival amusements, but

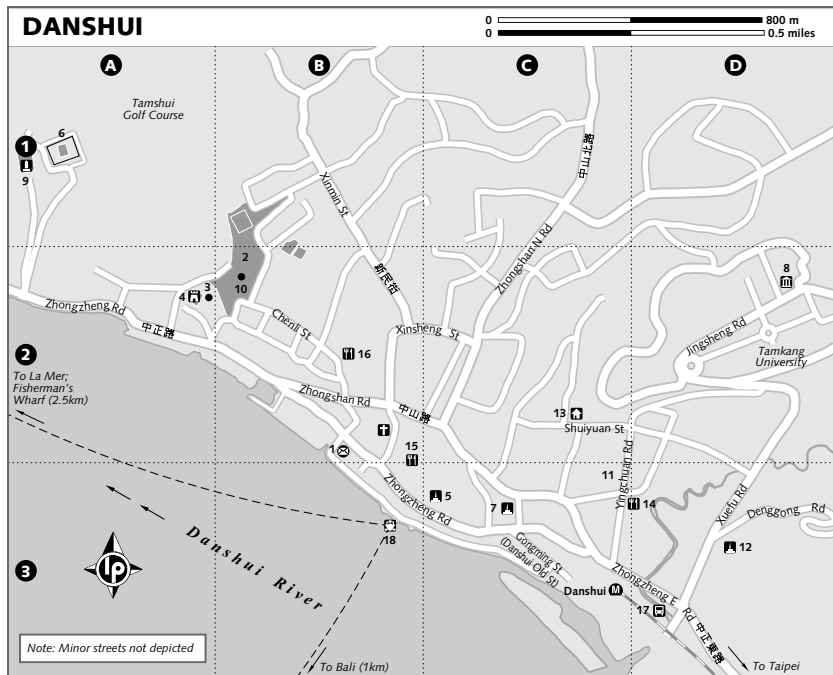
with just a few shrines to let you know you're still in Taiwan. From here you can catch a ferry across the river to Bali and the Guanyinshan area (see p130), or upriver to Danshui's newly renovated Fisherman's Wharf, which is a great place to drink beer while watching the sun go down over the Taiwan Straits after you've exhausted yourself walking around Danshui all day. Details on how to get there are on p129.

Gongming St ends at Zhongzheng Rd, but keep walking north as there's still plenty to see. Right next to the **Longshan Temple** (Lóngshān Sì; Map p126) sits the Danshui **morning market** (Map p126; ☀ sunrise-noon), the traditional centre of town. Nestled in its alleys are a cacophony of shops and stalls selling fish, vegetables, meats, clothing and the like. About 100m further along Zhongzheng Rd is **Fuyou Temple** (Fúyòu Gōng; Map p126). Built in 1796, this beautiful low-lying structure is the oldest temple in Danshui. Naturally the temple is dedicated to Matsu, goddess of the sea. In bygone days, wives and families would come here to pray for the safe return, and sometimes the souls, of their menfolk.

Hiking further up Zhongzheng Rd takes you past a plethora of shops, shrines and alleyways. Do you like bugs? Don't miss **Starbugs Insect Mall** (Map p126; Lane 11 Zhongzheng Rd; ☒ 3-9pm), a shop specialising in the care, breeding and raising of gigantic beetles. Browsers are welcome but a strict no-petting policy is enforced. But if you need tactile stimulation you can stick your hands inside puppets at the **Classical Chinese Glove Puppets Art Centre** (4 Lane 11, Zhongzheng Rd; ☒ 10am-9pm).

Further up the road sits Danshui's most famous sight, **Fort San Domingo** (Hóngmáo Chéng; ☎ 2623 1001; adult/student NT30/20; ☒ 9am-5pm, closed Mon). The hill on which it sits has been home to a fort since the Spanish occupation of northern Taiwan from 1626 to 1641. The original fort no longer exists and there are two theories on its demise: either the Spanish destroyed it during their 1641 retreat from the Dutch, or that the Dutch razed it in order to build a stronger structure. In any case, the basic structure of the current fort dates from 1642.

The fort was under Chinese control from 1683 to 1867 until the British took it over in 1868, painted it red and made it their consulate. Adjacent to the fort is the 1891 **former British consular residence**, a real throwback to the British Raj complete with original tiles from



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Huwei Fort 滬尾砲台.....6 A1  
Longshan Temple 龍山寺.....7 C3  
Maritime Museum 海事博物館.....8 D2  
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Java, ceiling fans, and furnishings recreated from photographic records. The consulate was closed under Japanese occupation but reopened after WWII, and the British retained it until 1972 when diplomatic relations with Taiwan were severed.

The fort's present-day offices and ticket booth near the entrance were once guards' and servants' quarters. Inside you can view the jail cells they built for insubordinate sailors and businessmen. There are sweeping views from the fort itself.

Up the hill from the fort is **Alethia University** (Zhēnlǐ Dàxué), the first Western-style university in Taiwan. It was founded by a Canadian Presbyterian missionary, Dr George Leslie Mackay, who first came to Taiwan in 1872 and is revered in certain Taiwanese circles for introducing Western techniques of education and medicine. Thanks in no small part to Mackay's influence, Presbyterian is the most popular Christian denomination in Taiwan. The university's original building, **Oxford College** was built in 1882 and fronts a Chinese-style pond and a large, more recent, chapel.

About 1km beyond Fort San Domingo, **Huwei Fort** (Hüwēi Páotái; adult/student NT25/15; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) is less flashy but no less interesting. This well-camouflaged fort dates from 1886. If Fort San Domingo is meant to convey authority, Huwei Fort was built for military action. It has thick walls, massive gates, four batteries and steep steps to its ramparts to deter intruders (try it and you'll see what we mean, but watch your step!). An inscription above the main entrance reads 'key to northern gate', denoting the fort's importance in the defence of the island. It was also used by the Japanese but never saw military action. In April and May, the fort's chinaberry trees are awash in purple flowers.

Back in the MRT station part of town is **Yinshan Temple** (Yīnshān Sì; Map p126; ☎ 2625 2930; cr Denggong & Xuefu Rds; admission free; ☎ 6am-6pm May-Oct, 6am-4:30pm Nov-Apr), considered Taiwan's best-preserved example of temple architecture from the Qing dynasty (AD 644-1911). Although small, it's a riot of sculpture, especially obnoxious in the tiny glass and ceramic figurines and flowers among the roofing tiles. This is also the city god temple for Danshui. Another unique feature is that the temple, founded 300 years ago, remains in the control of the 21 families who founded it. The current building dates

to 1822 and it was most recently renovated in 1992.

From here, Xuefu Rd leads up to the campus of Tamkang University. Aside from being one of the prettiest university campuses in Taiwan, boasting gardens and Qing-dynasty-style pavilions, Tamkang is also home of the **Maritime Museum** (Hǎishì Bówùguǎn; Map p126; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon), a four-storey museum shaped like an ocean liner. How appropriate, as it used to be a training centre for sailors and maritime engineers. The museum's collection is anchored by dozens of large model ships from around the world. Expect steamers, frigates, explorers' ships and aircraft carriers as well as an aboriginal canoe from Taiwan's Lanyu Island. You can learn about the treasure ship of Taiwanese admiral Cheng Ho, who was said to have navigated the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and East Africa 87 years before Columbus sailed. On the 4th floor, the 'ship's bridge' offers excellent views of distant buildings and Guanyinshan.

Finally, though not a big tourist magnet, one of our favourite Danshui neighbourhoods also happens to be among our favourite Taipei night markets. **Yingchuan Rd** (Map p126) and the surrounding alleyways are a great place to get cheap eats, shop for socks and observe genuine Taiwanese youth culture. Mind the speeding scooters though.

### Sleeping & Eating

Life is quieter in the outskirts and hotels outside of the city centre tend to be a mixture of midrange boutiques, with some 'love hotels' thrown in. We're convinced that Danshui and the surrounding areas are cool enough to warrant more than a quick trip; apparently we're not alone. Though there are a number of hotels in the area, **Regaless Hotel** (Fúgé Dàfāndiàn; Map p126; ☎ 2626 8165; www.regalees-hotel.com.tw; 89 Shie-fu Rd, Danshui; 台北縣淡水鎮學府路89號; r from NT2800), built in 2004, is particularly good value for the price. It's a few blocks east of the Ying Chuan Rd Night Market and within good walking distance of all Danshui's sights and smells, and not too far from the ferry to Bali.

Dining on a budget is no problem in Danshui. Yingchuan Rd is chock-a-block with restaurants and food stalls. Chenli St, on the way to Alethia University, is filled with **restaurants** catering to local students.

If you want seafood, there are dozens of restaurants on Danshui's harbour-front prom-

enade serving a 'catch of the day' likely caught just that day. And for Taiwanese favourites, Gongming St can't be beat as it's loaded with food stalls serving Taiwanese from-the-grill Specialties such as squid, chicken and corn. One local dish you'll find in abundance is called 'iron eggs' – these are regular eggs that have been boiled, shelled and roasted until they turn black and leathery. If you don't like the flavour, you can always use them to play marbles. Another Danshui delicacy is *A-gi*, fist-sized pouches of fried tofu filled with bean-thread noodles and served in hot broth.

The **Dongdong Vegetarian** (Dōngdōng Sùshí; Map p126; ☎ 2623 7692; 15 Ren Ai Jie; dishes NT40-100; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a nice little vegetarian place with daily specials. There's no English signage, so remember that the sign is yellow with green characters and it's across the street from a guitar shop.

The **Red Castle 1899** (Dáguānlóu; Map p126; ☎ 8631 1168; 6 Lane 2, Sanmin St; dishes NT180-360; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a Victorian-style building and a well-known architectural landmark in Danshui, dating back to the late 19th century. Beautifully restored and reborn as a swank eatery, the Red Castle serves both Western and Chinese dishes. We've heard mixed reviews on the food, but the ambience can't be beat. Anyway, you'll be ready to eat after climbing the 106 steps from the front gate to the restaurant.

Another good place to spend an evening is Fisherman's Wharf, just a few kilometres downriver. The upper deck of the promenade is a great place to watch the sun set after a day spent bopping around Danshui, and the shops, restaurants and amusements below are a fine way to while away the evening. Located roughly in the middle of the strip **La Mer** (45-12 Bei Shi Zi, San Chih) is a cool jazz and blues bar and grill. Their regular band is made up of both foreign and local musicians. Their Saturday night gig (7pm to 10pm) has been a regular feature for the past two years and looks set to continue for more to come.

### Getting There & Around

Danshui is at the end of the MRT Danshui (red) line. The journey from Taipei Main Station takes about 35 minutes and costs NT50. The **Danshui Motor Transport Company** (Map p126; ☎ 2621 3340) runs buses along the north coast to Baishawan (p156), Keelung (p153), and points beyond.

If you're going to Fisherman's Wharf, take red bus 26 from Danshui MRT station (NT15, 15 minutes). A more interesting option is the 15-minute ferry trip operated by **Suen Fung Ferry Company** (☎ 8630 1845; Danshui Ferry Pier; adult/child NT40/20; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat & Sun).

### BALI 八里

West of Danshui is the charming riverfront /seacoast town of Bali (no relation to the Indonesian paradise of the same name). Just across the wide mouth of the Danshui River where it meets the sea, Bali is quickly becoming a magnet for Taipeiers, especially families with children looking to get out of the big city for an afternoon. The entire bank of the river is taken up by the aptly named 'Left Bank Park', a waterfront park with 14km of biking and hiking trails and wooden boardwalks skirting wetlands teeming with plant and marine life. The area has also become a magnet for bird-watchers, as a number of species of birds either make their homes here or stop by for a quick feast on their migratory routes.

### Sights & Activities

Bicycles can be rented for NT50 per hour at a number of shops right off the boat dock from Danshui. Most of the bikes available are serviceable, but hardly in 'Tour de France' condition, so check to make sure yours has working brakes before you take off. A variety four-wheeled 'family bikes' are also available. These are pedal-powered minicars. In addition to the park and bike trails, Bali is also home to the Guanyinshan scenic area and an excellent new museum.

The newly built and very cool **Shihsanheng Museum of Archaeology** (Shísānxíng Bówùguǎn; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2619 1313; 200 Bowuguan Rd, Bali Hsiang, Taipei County, admission NT100; ☎ 9.30am-5.00pm, closed Mon) offers exhibits on the archaeological history of Taiwan's earliest residents. A variety of installations show the earliest evidence of aboriginal culture on the island, tracking the movements of the various tribes from prehistory to the present day. Highly interactive, the museum is surprisingly kid friendly for a museum devoted to as scholarly a pursuit as archaeology; kids will especially like the aboriginal weaponry displays. English signage abounds and the museum staff will be happy to arrange a tour.



## Getting There & Around

The same ferry company that goes to Fisherman's Wharf also operates regular boats from Danshui to Bali (adult/child NT18/10; ☎ 6.15am-8pm). However, if you're not planning to rent a bike but are planning to hit the museum, you can save some NT by taking the MRT to the Guandu station and buying a roundtrip bus ticket at the station that will bring you to the Bali waterfront, the museum, and back to Guandu station. The entire ticket is NT99 and includes museum entry.

## GUANDU 關渡區

Two stops south of Danshui, Guandu is home to both an excellent nature park and Taiwan's oldest temple.

## Sights & Activities

### GUANDU NATURE PARK 關渡自然公園

Ten years in the planning, this **nature reserve** (Guāndù Zírán Gōngyuán; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2858 7417; 55 Guandu Rd; adult/concession/children below 90cm NT50/30/free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed 3rd Mon each month) opened in 2001 under the control of the Wild Bird Society of Taipei. Over 100 species of birds, 150 species of plants and 800 species of animals live here on about 58 hectares of grass, mangroves, saltwater marsh and freshwater ponds at the confluence of the Danshui and Keelung Rivers (and their smaller tributaries).

On weekdays, it's rather busy with school groups, and with other tourists on weekends. Monday mornings are the least crowded.

### GUANDU TEMPLE 關渡宮

Dating back to 1661, this is one of Taiwan's oldest **temples** (Guāndù Gōng; Map pp82-3; 360 Zhixing Rd). Though it doesn't look like much from the street, this temple to Matsu is actually quiet lovely. To the right of the main hall is a 100m-plus tunnel through the mountain (lined with brightly painted deities enshrined in cases). At the end of the tunnel is a balcony with sweeping views of the Danshui riverscape. Naturally, the balcony has a rich assortment of stone carvings; take special note of the intricately carved and painted ceiling. Around the marble façade of the back of the temple, there's a hill-side park where you can contemplate an impressive frieze.

Legend has it that three banyan trees on the site died on the same day in 1895, and locals took it as an omen of impending disaster. Was

it coincidence that the Japanese occupation began the same year?

## Getting There & Around

Take the MRT Danshui (red) line to Guandu station. Leave by exit 1 and cross under the overpass to reach the nature park and temple. Both are about 15 minutes' walk from the station along Zhixing Rd (where there are a number of casual restaurants for a quick lunch). To reach the nature park, turn left when you see a playground. To reach the temple, continue on to the end of Zhixing Rd. Alternatively, Bus 302 from Guandu station terminates at the temple. It's an easy walk (less than 10 minutes) between the nature park and temple.

## BEITOU 北投

Beneath the soil of Taiwan bubbles a veritable cauldron of sulphurous water, and though most hot-spring resorts are well away from major urban areas, Taipei's Beitou (Bèitóu, sometimes spelled Peitou) is a notable and welcome exception. It's here that locals and travellers alike come for a quick soak in sulphurous waters.

The *wēnquán* (hot springs) in this district have been a lure for tourism as far back as the Japanese era.

Not too long ago, the waters themselves were the priority and comforts such as attractive baths, meals and massages came a distant second. Nowadays Beitou offers dozens of bathing options, from simply soaking your feet in the roadside creeks (cost: nothing) to glamorous private baths in ritzy high-rise resorts (cost: prepare your credit card for a workout). The latter might include the use of several public pools, with optional massages and multicourse dinners and even karaoke. Popular day-trip packages combine a hot-spring visit with lunch or dinner. There are also public hot springs with cheap admission to somewhat downmarket private baths that won't set you back more than a few hundred NT. But be warned, thought Beitou is lush and lovely, its position as a quick skip from the city centre means that the area can get crowded, especially on chilly winter weekends.

## Orientation & Information

The resort area is a few minutes' walk from Xinbeitou MRT station. Inside the eye-shaped Beitou Park are the Beitou Hot Spring Mu-

seum and public hot springs. A number of hot-spring hotels line Guangming Rd on the park's southern side. The park is bordered to the north by Zhongshan Rd, where you'll find the Ketagalan Culture Centre and the route towards the Di-re Valley, the source of the many resorts' hot springs. Where Guangming and Zhongshan Rds converge at the far end of the park, you can continue along the mountain roads to some deluxe resorts. Most of these have shuttle buses to and from Xinbeitou MRT station.

During the Hot Spring Carnival in October, Beitou's resorts offer special packages.

## Sights & Activities

### BEITOU HOT SPRING MUSEUM

#### 北投溫泉博物館

On the site of one of the original Japanese-era hot-spring baths, this handsome **museum** (Bèitóu Wēnquán Bówùguǎn; Map p134; ☎ 2893 9981; 2 Zhongshan Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) mixes a Victorian-style exterior with a variety of other architectural designs inside. Upstairs, wooden verandas surround a large Japanese-style tatami room where bathers once took tea and relaxed after their baths. The former baths downstairs feel almost Roman in their construction. Old scrubbing brushes, buckets and other implements of Taiwanese hot-spring bathing are displayed. You have to remove your shoes at the entrance and wear loaner slippers to enter the museum, but don't let this fool you into getting your hopes up; there is no actual bathing allowed at this museum.

### DI-RE VALLEY 地熱谷

Throughout the Japanese occupation this **geothermal valley** (Dirè Gǔ, Hell Valley; Map p134) was considered one of the country's great scenic wonders and a visit by the Japanese crown prince sealed Beitou's reputation as the hot-spring destination in Taiwan. These days it's interesting to walk through, and the valley's 3500 sq metres of bubbling waters and sulphurous gases leave no question as to the origins of its name. Although the waters are not suitable for bathing – in some spots they reach 90°C – it is the source of many of the hot springs used by the resorts in town.

The name Di-re refers to what first came to mind when folks first walked through this area of mountains filled with smoking craters and cracks from which steam and sulphurous fumes arose, 'This must be what hell is like!'. Since then, the scenic Di-re Valley has been tamed somewhat.

Since then, the scenic Di-re Valley has been tamed somewhat.

## KETAGALAN CULTURE CENTRE

### 凱達格蘭文化館

Opened in 2002, this multistorey **centre** (Kǎidáglán Wénhuàguǎn; Map p134; ☎ 2898 6500; 3-1 Zhongshan Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) exploring Taiwan's aboriginal culture is worth a stop. Exhibits are mostly on the 2nd and 3rd floors, while there are performance stages and various seasonal exhibits on other floors. The upper floors house study centres and a library. Although signage is in Chinese, English-language leaflets explain Taiwan's tribes in detail.

## HOT SPRINGS

Practically next to the Beitou Hot Spring Museum, Beitou's **outdoor public bath** (Gōnggōng Lútián Wēnquán; Map p134; ☎ 2893 7014; Zhongshan Rd; weekday/weekend NT20/40; ☎ 8.30-11.15am, noon-2.45pm, 3.30-6.15pm & 7-9.45pm) is one of the least expensive options in town. The outdoor public bath is set into a hillside and offers bathing for men and women. Bring your own swimsuit and towel as bathing *au naturel* is not permitted. This public hot spring boasts a number of pools ranging in temperature from comfortably warm to damn near scalding. There's also a frigid pool off to the side for those of especially strong constitution. The pools are emptied every few hours for cleaning, so be sure to allow yourself enough time to enjoy it.

On the other end of the spectrum is the **Asia Pacific Resort** (Yàitai Wēnquán Shēnghuógǔǎn; Map p134; ☎ 2898 2088; <http://www.apresort.com.tw>; 21 Yinguang Lane; ☎ 8.30am-1am Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2am Sat & Sun), a magnificent bathing/dining/meeting complex with Japanese raked-sand gardens and indoor and outdoor baths, including white-water mineral baths. Guests can rent private rooms with both indoor and outdoor hot-spring baths; some of these feature tea-service and others have setups for hot-pot dining. Pricing depends on a variety of options. The bilingual website lays these out nicely.

See p75 for bathing options inside large resorts.

## Sleeping

**Whispering Pine Inn** (Yíngsōnggē Lúshè; Map p134; ☎ 2895 1531; fax 2891 2037; 21 Youya Rd, Beitou; 北投區幽雅路21號; d NT3600) More than 80 years old, this Japanese-style inn is a registered historic landmark. Expect indoor stone baths

and rooms in which you can sleep on either beds or tatami. It's worth a stay here just to be around the beautiful original woodwork. The Whispering Pine Inn is unusually retro; not only don't rooms have internet, they don't have phones or TVs. Soaking and relaxing are what this place is all about.

**Broadway Hotel** (Bàilèhú Wēnquán Fāndiàn; Map p134; ☎ 2895 6658; 99 Wenquan Rd, Beitou; 北投區溫泉路99號; www.broadway-hot-spring-hotel.com.tw; d NT3000) One of the newest of Beitou's hot-spring resorts, the gorgeous Broadway has a wide variety of room types, ranging from Japanese-tatami rooms to Taiwanese to more Western-style rooms. There are a number of common areas furnished with mahogany Chinese tea tables, sculptures, and other works of art. It's an especially good deal on the weekdays, when prices drop nearly low enough for it to be considered in the budget range.

**SweetMe Hot Spring Resort** (Shuimèi Wēnquán Huiguān; Map p134; ☎ 2898 3838; www.sweetme.com.tw; 224 Guangming Rd, Beitou; 北投區光明路224號; d/tw incl breakfast from NT5600/6200) Across from Beitou Park and an easy walk from Xinbeitou MRT station, the SweetMe has an odd name but beautiful facilities. It opened in 2003 as the latest incarnation of an older, high-rise resort. There are indoor and outdoor baths, extensive spa and dining facilities and Japanese touches throughout. Even standard guest rooms have handsome bathtubs.

## Getting There & Around

Beitou is easily reached by MRT. Take the Danshui (red) line to Beitou station and transfer to a spur train to Xinbeitou station. Before 7am and after 9pm, services between Beitou and Xinbeitou may be by a free shuttle bus.

## YANGMINGSHAN NATIONAL PARK

### 陽明山國家公園

How fortunate Taipei is to have this **national park** (Yángmíngshān Guójiā Gōngyuán) at its doorstep, complete with majestic mountains, hot springs, tall grasses, forests of bamboo and broad-leaf trees and some handsome lodgings and restaurants. Among its 1200-plus species of plants, the area is particularly known for rhododendrons, azaleas and Japanese cherry trees. An excellent escape from the city for hikers, bikers (of the gear and motor-head variety), hot-spring lovers, twitters, or just about anyone getting away from it all.

Like Beitou, a major attraction of Yangmingshan is the hot-spring baths. The park is filled with *kēng* (sulphur steam vents), the largest being Xiaoyoukeng in the northwestern part of the park. To the east, Lengshuikeng has hot-spring baths open to the public for free.

Yangmingshan is protected and no new construction can take place. This can also mean that some of the lodgings are not as spiffy as those in Beitou but the trade-off is that they feel more historic.

The area just outside the park's boundaries tends to be more developed. Many well-to-do Taiwanese and expats live on the mountains' lower reaches and there are schools and churches serving the community.

## Orientation & Information

The centrepiece of the park is **Cisingshan** (Qixingshān), northern Taiwan's tallest peak at 1120m.

Yangmingshan bus station (Map p134) is near the south entrance of the park, and from here you can catch a shuttle bus around the park. There are some cafés and convenience stores near the bus station and nearby Jianguo St turns into an ad-hoc food festival on nice days.

There are visitors centres at major tourist sights within the park and most usually have an English speaker on hand. All these centres have simple maps of the park that includes basic information and hiking-trail details in English. You can pick up a detailed map of the park for NT50 at the **National Park Visitors Centre** (Map p134; ☎ 2861 3601; www.ymsnp.gov.tw).

Yangmingshan tends to be a bit cooler than central Taipei, so like mom used to say, bring a sweater. July to September has the most stable weather, though afternoon thunderstorms are common. Autumn brings monsoons and humidity, chilly rain and fog. Though it doesn't often happen, when it snows on the peaks the roads are clogged with Taiwanese who never see snow driving up to see it.

## Sights

Chiang Kai-shek had 15 villas, of which **Yangming Shuwu** (Yángmíng Shūwū, Yangming Villa; Map p134; ☎ 2861 1444; adult/concession NT50/30; ☎ tours 9am & 1.30pm, closed Mon) was the last (built in 1970) and the grandest. Its valley setting makes for quite a sight, especially in March when its gardens are in full bloom. It also provides quite an insight into the life of the president and ma-

dame. Even before you reach the house, you'll see bushes pruned into five clumps (symbolising Chiang's rank as a five-star general) and the hidden guard posts where an entire military police battalion could be stationed.

Inside the house are several dining rooms, both Chinese and Western, a life-size portrait of Chiang with eyes that seem to follow you around the room, and other memorabilia from the lives of Taiwan's last dictator. While the furniture is mostly reproduction, most of the building itself is original and quite grand.

Tours are held in Chinese and Japanese, although English-language tours can be scheduled by phoning the **national park visitor centre** (☎ 2861 3601; www.ymsnp.gov.tw) at least one week in advance. The centre also offers general information about recreation in Yangmingshan.

## Activities

### HIKING

Hiking is the main thing people do in Yangmingshan and no matter what else brings you here (bird-watching, flower gazing, hot springing), it's more than likely it will take some hiking to get you there. Serious hikers can spend days here exploring dozens of amazing trails, some of which can be done in a couple of hours and others which can take up the day. It would take a whole book to describe 'em. Luckily Richard Saunders went and wrote *Yangmingshan The Guide*, available at **Caves Books** (Dūnhuáng Shūjú) Tianmu (Map p100; ☎ 2874 2199; 5 Lane 38, Tianyu St) Zhongshan (Map p92; ☎ 2537 1666; 103 Zhongshan N Rd, sec.2; MRT Shuanglian), **EsLite** (Chéngpín; Map p96; ☎ 2775 5977; 245 Dunhua S Rd; MRT Zhongxiao Dunhua), and the **Community Service Centre** (Map p100; ☎ 2836 8134; www.community.com.tw; 25 Lane 290, Zhongshan N Rd, sec.6; MRT Mingde). The book outlines hikes both short and long in loving detail.

Casual visitors will not have any problems finding trails. There are English signposts and maps with 'you are here' symbols are all over the park, and you can pick up a simple map with trail instructions at the **National Park Visitor's Centre** (Map p134). One popular hike on Cisingshan starts at Xiaoyoukeng, northwest of Cisingshan, and goes to the top of the mountain. The hike takes you past the brimstone-reeking sulphur pits for which the region is famous; it's really quite a sight (and aroma). There are high-plains buffalo (mind the cow pies!) and the panoramic view is stunning when the fog lifts.

To get to the trailhead, take minibus 15 from the Shilin MRT station to the end of the line. From here, signs are clearly marked.

## HOT SPRINGS

The public **Lengshuikeng** (Léngshuikēng; Map p134; ☎ 2861 0036; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) bath on the park's eastern side has separate men's and women's indoor baths, although free admission means there can be long queues to enter. Its name means 'cold water valley', and by comparison to other local hot springs it's chilly, at 40°C. High iron content makes its waters reddish brown. Technically, Lengshuikeng is open to 5pm, but it's often open later, so phone ahead if you're considering an after-hours visit.

## BIRDWATCHING

Yangmingshan is definitely on the international birders circuit, being one of the best places to see endemic species such as the Taiwan Blue Magpie (an adorable bird with a tail almost twice its body length). The optimum time for bird-watching is early in the morning, with early autumn being the best season. The **Wild Bird Society of Taipei** (Map p96; ☎ 2325 9190; http://www.taipeibird.org.tw; 3 Lane 160, Fuxing S Rd, sec.2) organises tours from their Taipei office.

## Sleeping

**Yangming Sunrise Spring Hotel** (Rìchū Yángmíng Wēnquán Huiguān; Map p134; ☎ 2862 0668; www.sun-rise-spring.com.tw; 5 Lane 23, Yangming Rd, Beitou; 北投區陽明路一段23之5號; r from NT2500) Close to the entrance of the park, this cute hotel sits along a hot-spring river rolling down the mountain towards Beitou. Rooms are comfortable, but the main feature in each are the deep, stone Japanese tubs for extended hot-spring soaking. The lower level of the hotel is taken up by tub-only rooms, rented by the hour. Costs are steep on the weekends (NT800 for a 90-minute soak) but with the weekday 50% discount, the tubs alone make it worth the trip.

**International Hotel** (Guójiā Dàlǐguān; Map p134; ☎ 2861 7100; 7 Hushan Rd, sec.1; r incl breakfast from NT2310) Built in 1952 and maintaining its original character, the International has a rustic stone façade and charming rooms that are a great deal. The hotel is close to the hot-spring source and has both public and in-room hot-spring baths. Both Japanese and Western-style rooms are available. Three-hour use of rooms (including hot springs) is NT990.



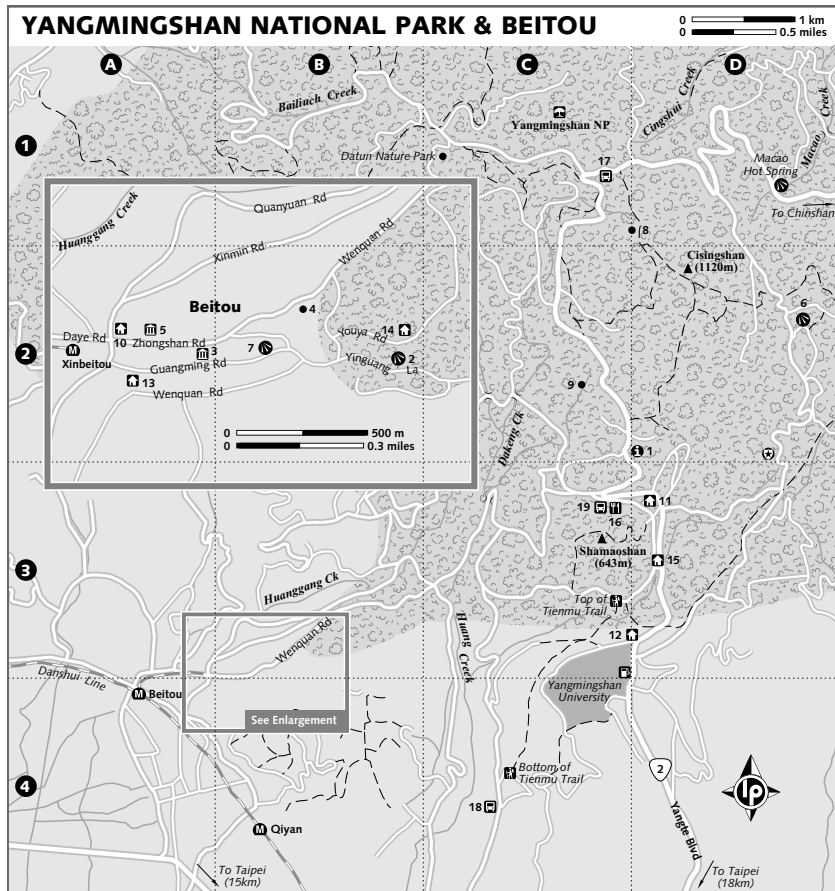
**Landis Resort Yangmingshan** (Yángmíngshān Zhōngguó Lìzhì Dàfāndiàn; Map p134; ☎ 2861 6661; www.landisresort.com.tw; 237 Gezhi Rd; r from NT7000) With its low-slung profile, slate surfaces and lots of grainy wood and plate glass, this grand yet intimate resort feels inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. Rooms in the deluxe category and up have hot-spring baths but any guest may use the spa and indoor pools. The Landis has an easy to use internet booking system that can get rooms down as low as NT5000.

## Eating

About a kilometre away from the entrance to Yangmingshan National Park sits Yangmingshan University, surrounding which is a plethora of student-type restaurants for

quick and cheap eats. There's also a Subway sandwich shop if you'd like to carry a hoagie into the park with you. On weekends and most nice days during the high season, Jian Guo St (on the south side of the bus station) turns into an open-air food court serving Taiwanese favourites such as Hakka-style salt pork, seafood dumpling soup and a variety of noodle dishes.

Among a number of small eateries near the bus station, country-style café **Ping Shan** (Map p134; ☎ 2861 4162; 2 Lane 11, Hushan Rd; meals NT260-280; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) does lovely versions of Western classics (salmon, steaks, squid-ink pasta) plus a few Japanese choices and Thai curries. Many dishes are part of set menus that include starters, drinks and/or desserts.



## Getting There & Around

Bus 260 comes all the way from Taipei Main Station (NT30) via Zhongshan N Rd. From Shilin MRT station you can catch red bus 5 (NT15). Buses run frequently between 5.40am and 10.30pm. Bus 230 and minibus 9 also run into the park from Beitou while Daohan minibus 15 heads into the park from Jiantan.

Note that if approaching from the park's main entrance on Yangte Blvd, passenger cars require permits from 8am to 3pm, weekends and holidays. Only residents can obtain permits. Other forms of transport are permitted within the park without a permit and some locals circumvent the permit requirement by approaching the park via Tianmu or Beitou.

On weekends and holidays, a shuttle bus does the circuit around Yangmingshan's main road every 15 minutes (hourly on weekdays), beginning at Yangmingshan bus station. The cost is NT15 per ride, or NT60 per day during flower-viewing season (late February to early March).

## SOUTH OF CITY CENTRE

### Xindian & Bitan 新店 碧潭

The Xindian station is the last stop on the red (Danshui to Xindian) line or the first, depending on your perspective, which is fitting as Xindian is the far end of Taipei city, beyond which lies kilometres of mountainous splendour, bucolic scenery, and, if you take the right bus, a little town called Wulai (p141). The main attraction of Xindian is **Bitan park** (Map pp82-3), which straddles both sides of the Danshui River as it rolls down the mountain. It's in this park where you'll find various semiregular fairs and festivities. Should you be in town during the

Lantern Festival (which caps the Lunar New Year's festivities), Bitan park is a great place to come to see Taipei's 'unofficial' lantern festival. While Chiang Kai-shek Shilin Residence Park is where folks go to see the floats, Bitan park is where locals come to write out their wishes on paper lanterns before setting them alight and aloft. The burning lanterns usually sink slowly into the river, but occasionally they'll be carried by the wind into the surrounding neighbourhoods. The Lantern Festival is usually a busy time for the local fire brigade.

Old Xindian St runs behind the station and stretches south along the river. The street boasts a small unspectacular night market that's good for a snack. Some stands sell grilled chicken, doughy octopus balls, and various other night market fare. From the market you can follow the river towards the mountains, checking out some of the old pumping stations along the way. You can also hang a right onto the pedestrian bridge and cross the river into Bitan. A marvel of low-tech engineering, the Bitan cable suspension bridge is extremely light. As a result, it has a peculiar tendency of bobbing and swaying in the near-constant breeze, offering the closest sensation you can get to seasickness without boarding a boat. Speaking of boats, small two-person pedal boats are available for rent on weekends at the river pier for NT100 per hour. Either side of the river is a great place to be during the Dragon Boat Festival (p337).

Bitan itself is increasingly becoming the main tourist attraction of the area. This small neighbourhood on the left bank of the river is home to the **Bi Ting** (Bi Ting; ☎ 2212 9467; right side of suspension bridge; tea NT200), a rustic, 50-year-old teahouse built on a rocky cliff overlooking the river where you can while away the afternoon

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or evening while brewing endless pots of tea. If you're looking for a fancy meal, **Rosemary's Kitchen** (Mǎlyàde Méigui Xiāngliào Chūfáng; ☎ 2218 9689; left side of suspension bridge; dishes from NT300) is a beautiful Western restaurant with an odd Bavarian theme and a balcony overlooking the river. Otherwise, there's plenty of street food on this side of the river as well.

**Taijing Temple** (Tàiping Sì), a multistorey Taoist temple is just a few blocks north of the suspension bridge and worth a visit. Perhaps oddest of the area's offerings is a small roadside shrine on the right side of the road leading off the bridge. One feature of this otherwise ordinary-looking shrine to Guanyin stands out; a line of water bottles on a table, beneath which a sign in Chinese reads 'Blessed Water - 100 NT'. Apparently the water has been blessed, either by the goddess herself or one of her earthly representatives. The bottles have red labels upon which a various blessings have been written. The shrine is generally unmanned, with payment based on an honour system. It seems unlikely that any believer in the benefits of blessed water would even consider pilfering the stuff.

Bitan has a number of decent hotels should you decide to base yourself a bit (but not too far) out of the city. The **Bitan Hotel** (Bitán Fāndiàn; ☎ 2211 6055; www.bitan.com.tw; 121 Bitan Rd; 臺北縣新店市碧潭路121號; d incl breakfast from NT1690; MRT Xindian) is pretty little boutique hotel with a view of the river and mountains. All rooms have flat-screen televisions and some have swinging porch chairs. We have no idea why, but it's a nice, though somewhat odd, touch. Free airport pick-up is available too.

A more upscale choice is the boutique **Beautiful Hotel** (Měilì Chūntiān Dāfāndiàn; ☎ 8666 9999; www.beautifulhotel.com.tw; 8 Taijing Rd, Bitan; 北縣新店市太平路8號; r incl breakfast from NT4200) in the Xindian/Bitan neighbourhood. This hotel seems about the same as the Bitan Hotel, only at twice the price and without the swinging porch chairs. Excellent lobby décor, though.

### Taipei Zoo 木柵動物園

The **Taipei Zoo** (Mùzhà Dòngwùyuán; Map pp82-3; ☎ 2938 2300; 30 Xingguang Rd, sec.2; adult/concession NT60/30; ☎ 9am-5pm; MRT Muzha) attracts five million visitors each year, making it one of Taiwan's top attractions. Its sprawling (165 hectares of land that's 1.5km across) grounds include a wide variety of simulated geographical regions, including a tropical rainforest zone, extensive

gardens and a beautiful aviary that rivals the one in Hong Kong Park in size and splendour. There's even an enclosed 'nocturnal world' section, kept dark during the day for the benefit of visitors. The zoo features more than 300 species. Eating opportunities abound inside the zoo and lunch boxes are available for around NT70 and snacks cost less. If you feel like something more substantial there's a food court with a Ponderosa Steakhouse next to the zoo.

On the subject of eating, if you feel like feeding the animals, don't. If you must, the crocodiles get peckish around midday; your hands might make a nice snack.

If you don't feel like walking the entire zoo, there's a minitrain (adult/senior NT5/3) that will take you around a circuit. If you really don't feel like walking at all but still want to see the zoo, the newly opened gondola system (see p138 for more details) actually goes over it, with a stop fore and aft, before climbing up to Maokong.

### Maokong 貓空

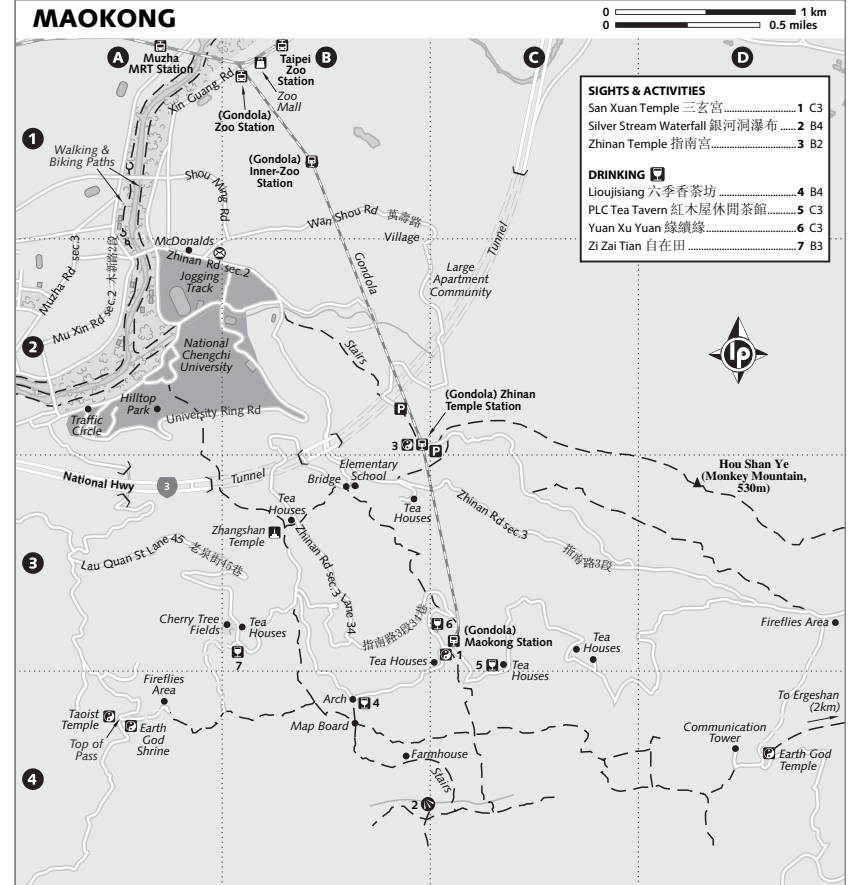
The hills of southern Taipei, known as **Maokong** (Mǎokōng, cat holes), have a history of tea growing that goes back to the 19th century. These days, however, the money is not in growing tea but selling a pleasing atmosphere for drinking it. Dozens of teahouses now dot the green hills, many with lovely interiors and splendid views. At the time of writing a new gondola was about to open, making these teahouses completely accessible from the city.

### SITES & ACTIVITIES

#### Teahouses

Most teahouses are open from around noon to at least 10pm (later on weekends). Typically you pay for a small packet of tea (enough for a group of four to enjoy for hours) and a 'water fee' of NT50 to NT100 a person. On weekdays you can bring your own tea and just pay the 'water fee', though do note that many teahouses close on Mondays. Teahouse designs vary, allowing you to choose one according to your mood and the weather; indoor or outdoors, traditional or modern, city view or nature view. Most serve food as well as coffee and flower-based drinks and it's usually no problem to visit just for a meal.

**PLC Tea Tavern** (Hóngmùwú Xiūxián Cháguǎn; Map p137; ☎ 2939 9706; 33 Lane 38, Zhinan Rd, sec.3; 指南路3段38巷33號; dishes NT100-200; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) One



of our favourites for its old-style brick design and verandas with excellent views across the valley. The food here is quite good too. The chicken soup is tasty and great on a chilly, foggy evening.

**Yuan Xu Yuan** (Yuán Xù Yuán; Map p137; ☎ 2936 7089; 2nd fl, 16-2 Lane 38, Zhinan Rd, sec.3; 指南路3段38巷16-2號2樓; dishes NT100-400; ☎ 11am-2am Sun, Tue-Fri, 10am-4am Sat, closed Mon) Just a minute's walk from Maokong station, this fancy-looking place has one of the best city views in Maokong. It's also the only place with private booths where you can spread out on the glass floor with cushions and pillows. Why is the floor glass? So you can watch fish and turtle swim under you.

**Zi Zai Tian** (Zìzài Tián; Map p137; ☎ 2938 1113; 27 Lane 45 Lao Quan St; 老泉街45巷27號; set meals NT180;

☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10am-midnight Fri & Sat, closed Mon) Another gem with a traditional atmosphere inside (the building is a remodelled traditional brick house) and a lovely garden setting outside. Set meals are simple but tasty and there is a veggie option.

**Lioujisiang** (Liújìxiāng; Map p137; ☎ 2939 4371; 53 Lane 34, Zhinan Rd, sec.3; 指南路3段34巷53號; ☎ 1pm-midnight) The teahouse is pretty rustic, but the tea (grown on site) is excellent. Try the namesake *liujisiang* (six-seasons fragrant) tea. The arch beside the teahouse leads to the network of trails around Maokong.

### Hiking

Maokong's a fantastic area for getting away from it all. The trails are in good shape, natural



(not staired like Yangmingshan) and many thickly wooded sections feel delightfully remote despite the fact that Taipei is just over the ridge. Few trails have any signs on them, however, so bring a compass.

One fun two- to three-hour return hike goes to the **Silver Stream Waterfall** (Yínhé Dòng Pùbù; Map p137). You can get behind the waterfall via a temple built into the cliff beside the falls. Enter the temple and follow the passage to the end. From Maokong station follow the trail beside **San Xuan Temple** (Sān Xuán Gōng; Map p137) up to the ridge, then head straight down. At the bottom head downstream until you reach the falls. An easier route, also on the map, starts beside Lioujisiang teahouse.

**Ergeshan** (二格山; Èrgéshān; elevation 678m) is the highest point in Maokong. To get to the top, again follow the trail from the temple up to the ridge. Go left this time (not down) and keep to the right side of the ridge for the first while. Look for signs at junctions to keep you on the right path (it's not hard at all if you have any hiking experience). When you reach the paved track by a communication tower (after about 1½ hours), follow it to a small earth-god temple and take the natural trail on the temple's right up. The path runs along a wooded ridge all the way to the platforms at the top of Ergeshan (1½ hours). Returning, take the dirt road by the earth-god temple down to Zhinan Rd, sec.3. Walk a kilometre west for a bus 10 or 15 back to the zoo.

### Fireflies

**Fireflies** appear in Maokong in late April, early May. They are most visible just after sunset for an hour or so. See the map for locations.

### Gondola 纜車

The **gondola** (Lǎn Chē; fares NT30-50; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-10pm Sat & Sun, public holidays) opened in July 2007. In short, on clear days or nights the views across Taipei and up the valley will be stupendous. On foggy days they will be dreamy.

The gondola ride begins at the Zoo station, just beside the Taipei Zoo MRT station, and goes through two stations before it gets to Maokong. You can alight and disembark at any station. Total travel time is 28 minutes. Travellers can use their Easy Card to pay for fares.

### Zhinan Temple 指南宮

In days gone by, the only way up to this **temple** (Zhīnán Gōng; Map p137) was by walking up 1200 steps. These days, the gondola system takes you to Zhinan Temple station and much closer to the temple than before.

Zhinan Temple sits high above Muzha and on a clear day you can see across Taipei to Yangmingshan. The temple is dedicated to Lu Tung Pin, one of the eight immortals of classic Chinese mythology. Himself a jilted lover, Lu often tries to break up couples who visit his temple before they are married. You'll find that many people still take this superstition very seriously.

As you head down from the gondola, be aware that the big multistorey edifice on the right is not the original 1891 temple. The real deal is further down and has three arches in the front.

### GETTING THERE

In addition to the gondola, or your own two feet, you can take bus 15 (NT15) from MRT Taipei Zoo station or bus 10 (NT15) from Wanfang Community station. Buses run every hour on weekdays and every 30 minutes on weekends. Drivers know the teahouses so show them the script characters if you want to go somewhere specific. You can get on or off anywhere.

### The Wild West

The extension of the blue line out past the suburb of Tucheng has made convenient neighbourhoods that a few years back would have been too much bother to visit from the city. Below are a few spots that we recommend highly.

### MUSEUM OF WORLD RELIGIONS

#### 世界宗教博物館

This beautiful and unique **museum** (Shìjiè Zōngjiào Bówùguǎn; Map pp82-3; ☎ 8231 6699; 7th fl, 236 Zhongshan Rd, sec.1, Yonghe City; www.mwr.org.tw; adult/concession/student NT150/120/80; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon) incorporates symbols, art, ritual objects and ceremonies to illuminate 10 of the world's great religions. Though founded by a Buddhist order, the stated goal of the museum is not to promote Buddhism, but to build harmony by showing the communality of all religions. The museum was designed by the same designer as the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Highlights include scale models of vari-

ous religious holy sites throughout the world; the insides of most can be viewed via tiny cameras. There are also a number of excellent multimedia presentations, a meditation room and a beautiful gift shop.

Signage in English is mostly good and there's a recorded English audio tour available for NT50. Knowing the religious nature of the exhibits might prove a bit too solemn for the little ones, curators built a small but fun children's museum on the same floor called **Wonderland of Love** (NT100).

Located on the same floor as the museum, the **Tao Shine Vegetarian Restaurant** (Táoshān Sùshí Cāntīng; Map pp82-3; ☎ 8231 6668; 7th fl, 2 Baosheng Rd, Yonghe City; weekday/holiday buffet NT370/398, weekday/holiday tea NT218/250; ☎ 11am-9pm) is good for soul and stomach alike. Its desserts are so fine as to make even the most hardened agnostic see the light.

Take the MRT to Dingxi station and transfer to bus 51, 243, 297, 706 or orange bus 6. All bus fares are NT15. There's also a free shuttle that runs between the station and Pacific Department Store (beside the museum) every 15 minutes. Alternatively, it's about a 10-minute walk from the station.

### TAIWAN NOUGAT MUSEUM 牛軋糖博物館

Not Taipei's biggest **museum** (Niúgāntáng Bówùguǎn; ☎ 2268 7222; 31 Zichang St; admission NT50; ☎ 9am-

5pm; MRT Yongning), nor its most well known, but one title that the Taiwan Nougat Museum surely wins hands down is that of 'sweetest museum'. The family that runs this museum and candy factory in Taipei's far-west suburb of Tucheng have been in the business of making nougat, a traditionally important confection for Taiwanese weddings, for over a century. After the family matriarch passed away, her son Chiu Yi-rong decided to transform parts of the newly expanded family factory into a place where families with children could come to learn about the history of nougat in Taiwan, watch sweets and wedding cakes being made, and even make the nougat themselves.

The 1st floor of the museum has nougat exhibits (including the world's biggest chunk of the stuff, covered in edible gold) and a larger showroom with a film in English and Chinese about the history of nougat in Taiwan. On the 2nd floor visitors can watch candy and cakes being made. Though the museum offers DIY candy-making classes for schoolchildren, this is usually reserved for classroom-sized groups as opposed to individual travellers. But a few members of the staff speak English and if you call in advance they'll try to steer you towards a time when individual travellers with kids can join up with a local class for some hands-on nougat making.

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