

Western Taiwan



If you want contrasts, head to western Taiwan and start at the coastline, continue through rich farmland and end in the high mountains of the central range. In fact, for a study in contrasts, just head to the Alishan National Scenic Area. Here you can travel through three biogeographical zones – tropical, subtropical and temperate – in just three hours (a rare old single-track alpine railway is your carriage).

But unless you have unlimited time, the west's contrasts will demand you choose from among them. Should you explore Taiwan's southern Chinese heritage (which includes a great collection of temples) or its aboriginal culture? Should you join a pilgrimage for the goddess of the sea or learn to meditate at a Buddhist temple? Should you climb one of the highest mountains in East Asia or cycle easy bike lanes through the countryside?

Of all the regions in Taiwan, this is one we suggest you follow our advice for most carefully (which includes letting you know those areas you don't need to follow our advice). While there are some real treasures out there, there's also a lot of dismal wasteland. In general, the cities can be given a miss except as jumping-off points. For smaller towns, don't miss Lukang, Puli and, to a lesser extent, Changhua, even if your time is tight. Forget the miles of coastline unless you like Styrofoam, cables, plastic and – you get the picture. Look to the rice fields, the mountains and Sun Moon Lake, the largest body of water in Taiwan, for your scenic fix.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Climb Yushan, one of East Asia's highest mountains, in **Yushan National Park** (p243)
- Get a primer in Buddhism at the **Chung Tai Chan Temple** (p226) in Puli
- See mountainsides light up with fireflies in **Rueili** (p237)
- Ride a rare alpine railway to **Alishan** (p241)
- Swim the rivers in remote **Fengshan** (p239)
- Bird-watch at **Aowanda** (p230)
- Cycle, boat and stroll at **Sun Moon Lake** (p222)
- Become a pilgrim for Matsu in **Dajia** (p216)
- Cross the island on the **Nenggao Cross-Island Historic Trail** (p230)
- Wander the old merchant streets of **Lukang** (p216)



National Parks & Forest Recreation Areas

Western Taiwan is one of the most pristine parts of the country and offers endless opportunities for long hikes, including several week-long ones. Yushan National Park is home of 3952m Yushan (Jade Mountain). Tame Alishan Forest Recreation Area is the polar opposite, with an old alpine train and cherry blossom trees being the draw. Aowanda Forest Recreation Area is one of the best bird-watching sites in the country. Rugged Hehuanshan Forest Recreation Area offers scenic hikes above the tree line.

Getting There & Around

Regular trains run frequently down the coast, connecting all major and minor cities, and there are decent bus services to most smaller towns. The High-Speed Rail (HSR) is now running, but stations are quite far from downtown. Taichung has one airport for both international and domestic services. A small-gauge alpine train (one of only three in the world) does the route from Chiayi to Alishan. In most cities you'll find scooter and car rental.

The only areas where public transportation is inconvenient are Yushan National Park, the more remote parts of the Alishan National Scenic Area, and Hwy 14 past Puli.

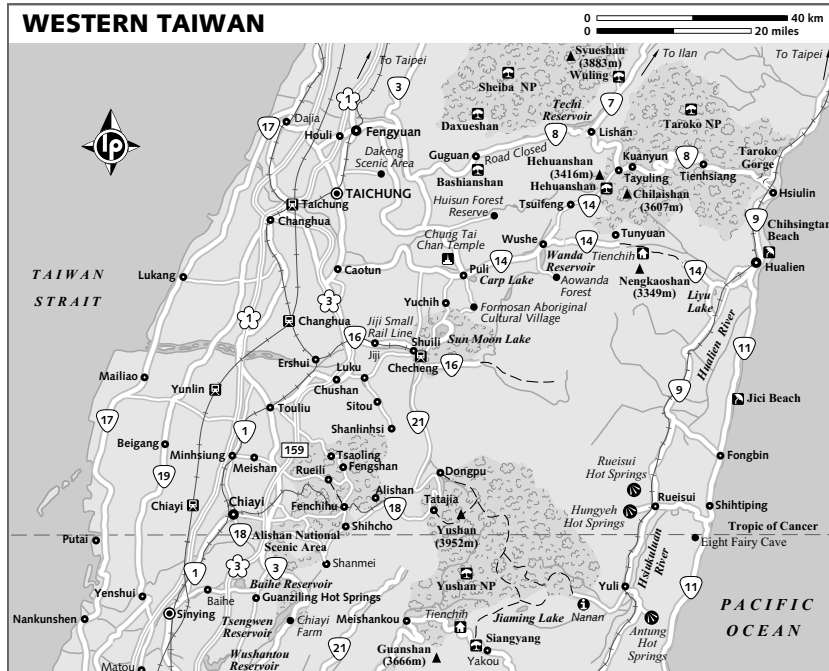
TAICHUNG 台中市

☎ 04 / pop 1,021,292

Taichung (Táizhōng), the third-largest city in Taiwan, is hardly a must-see for the short-term visitor, though many long-term expats do enjoy it as a weekend getaway. The city has several pleasant tea and restaurant streets, an excellent science museum and a very good art museum, which includes a top-of-the-line storybook fantasyland library for children. Taichung is also a bright ray of sunshine (literally) on a dreary winter day for those living in the capital. Taipei and Taichung have very similar average temperatures but Taichung is much drier, receiving around 1700mm of rain a year compared with Taipei's 2170mm.

Orientation

The area around the train station is called Central Taichung but, in reality, the focus of the city is shifting westward all the time. Note



WESTERN TAIWAN

WESTERN TAIWAN

that Zhongzheng Rd, which starts at the train station, runs northwest through the heart of the city and later turns into Taizhonggang Rd and then Hwy 12.

The city government has officially chosen Hanyu Pinyin for its road signs, but at the time of writing many signs had not made the switch. Be aware that some odd spellings may still exist, and sometimes both old and new signs may appear on the same street.

Information

There are plenty of banks and 7-Elevens with ATMs around the train station, and further up along Zhongzheng Rd and Taizhonggang Rd.

Internet places come and go frequently. Ask at the visitor centre. The websites given

here are useful and list some obscure sights and activities.

Bank of Taiwan (144 Zhongzheng Rd) Offers money-changing facilities in addition to an ATM.

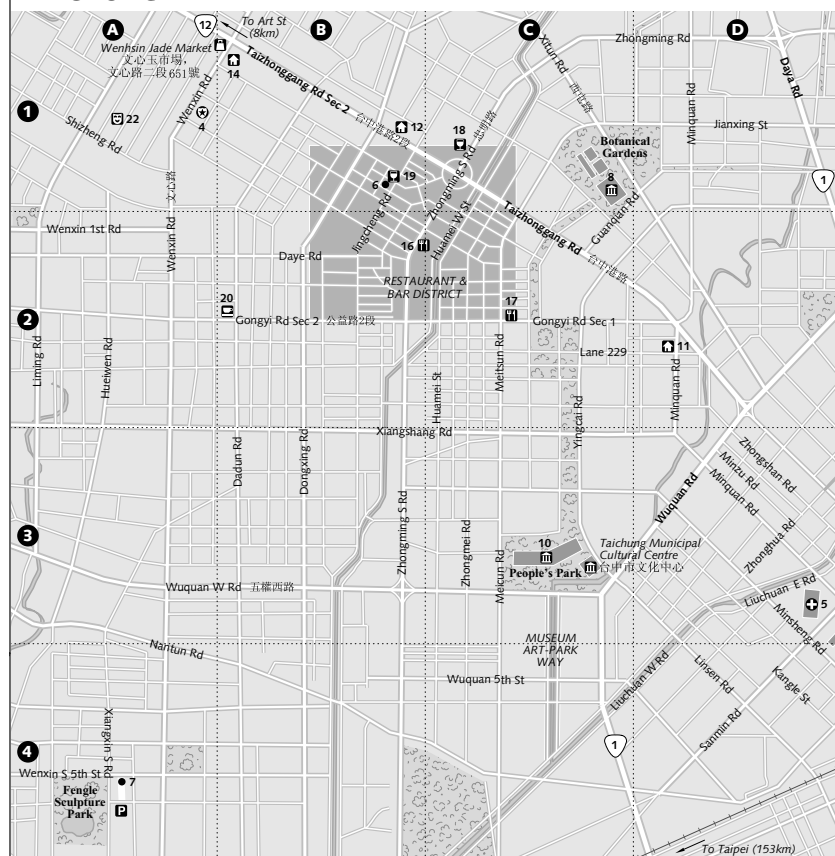
Compass Magazine (www.taiwanfun.com) This locally produced magazine is available free at the tourist office and many restaurants and shops around town. It's an excellent source of information about the city and you can download the latest copy of the magazine from the website.

Taichung County Government (www.taichung.gov.tw) The county's official website.

Visitor Information Centre (☎ 2221 2126; ☎ 9am-6pm) Right in the train station. Staff speak English and have an abundance of useful information including bus schedules (and prices), hotel prices and travel brochures.

Welcome to Taichung (<http://english.tccg.gov.tw/>) The city government's website.

TAICHUNG



Sights

TEA STREETS

ChingMing (Jingming) 1st Street (Jingming Yijiē) has a range of modern and traditional-style (or a mix of the two) cafés and restaurants. The area looks best when visited at night. To get there by bus take Taichung Bus 88 or 103, both of which run along Taizhonggang Rd. Get off around Jingcheng Rd and walk down.

Fengde Sculpture Park & Lakeside Tea & Shopping Street (Fèngde Diāosù Gōngyuán) has a nicely landscaped environment and some decent statues and is also best experienced at night. Around the park is an area of teashops, restaurants, and craft shops that open around noon and close about 10pm (most are closed on Mondays). To get to the park take UBus 73.

TAIWAN MUSEUM OF ART 台灣省立美術館
The **museum** (Tāiwān Shěnglǐ Měishùguǎn; ☎ 2372 3552; 2 Wuquan W Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) is one of the best in Taiwan, and appeals to both kids and parents. The open modern design is visually sophisticated (though not pretentious), and there are high-quality exhibits of both Taiwanese and foreign artists. Exhibits change often, though unfortunately there is almost no signage in English.

For children there is a wonderful hands-on play area and a fantasyland library that includes an igloo, castle and rainforest area (and of course loads of children's books). One expat father we know described it as the best children's library he has ever seen.

To get to the museum take UBus 75.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

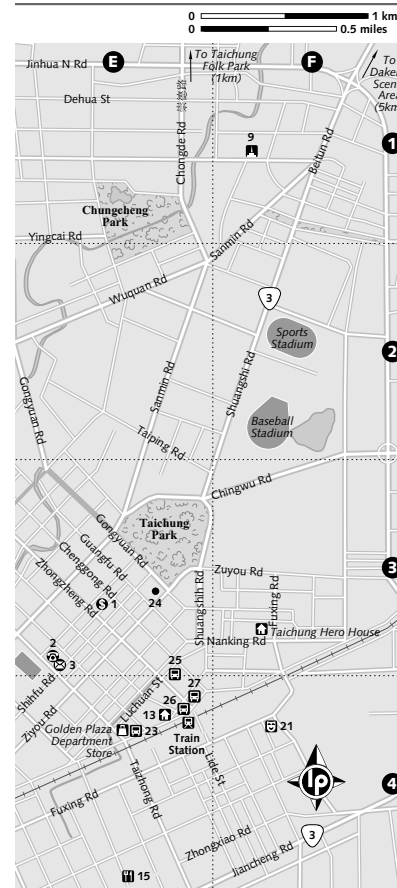
自然科學博物館
This was Taiwan's first **museum of science** (Zìrán Kēxué Bówùguǎn; ☎ 2322 6940; www.nmns.edu.tw; 1 Guanqian Rd; admission exhibition hall adult/child NT100/50, botanic garden NT20/10, space theatre NT100/50, IMAX 3D theatre NT 70/30; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed Mon) and though lacking explanations in English (except for display titles) it's still worth visiting for the visually interesting dioramas, models and exhibitions. Children usually thoroughly enjoy themselves here, especially when they see the life-size dinosaur skeletons and the moving (and roaring) dinosaur automatons. The museum is divided into various buildings, or centres, most of which have their own entrance charges. The Byzantine fee structure is explained in English at the ticket window. To get to the museum take Taichung Bus Company buses 88, 103 or 106.

PAOCHUEH TEMPLE 寶覺寺

This **Buddhist temple** (Bǎojiuè Sì; 140 Jianxing St; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm) features one of the largest and fattest Milefo (laughing) Buddhas in Taiwan. The 30m-high statue sits against a backdrop of old apartments, which unfortunately mar photos. There was a lot of work going on around the statue at the time of writing and it looks like some modern structures will soon block out the old ugly ones. It's best to take a taxi to get to the temple.

TAICHUNG FOLK PARK 台中民俗公園

The **park** (Mínsù Gōngyuán; ☎ 2245 1310; 73 Lu Shun Rd, sec.2; adult/child NT50/20; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 7pm Sat & Sun) is divided into several sections but most



INFORMATION		SLEEPING		WU WEI TAO TANG TEAHOUSE	
Bank of Taiwan 台灣銀行.....	1 E3	Athens Taichung Hotel 雅典商業旅館.....	11 D2	無為草堂.....	20 B2
Chunghua Telecom 中華電信局.....	2 E3	Evergreen Laurel Hotel 長榮桂冠酒店.....	12 B1	ENTERTAINMENT	
GPO 總局.....	3 E3	Fuh Chun Hotel 富春大飯店.....	13 E4	Vie Show Cinemas 華納威秀影城.....	21 F4
National Immigration Agency 警察局外事課.....	4 A1	Ful Won Hotel 富王大飯店.....	14 B1	Vie Show Cinemas 華納威秀影城.....	22 A1
Taichung Hospital 台中醫院.....	5 D3				
		EATING		SHOPPING	
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		Chunghsiao Night Market 忠孝夜市.....	15 E4	Ceramic Art 禾軒陶藝工房.....	(see 7)
Chingming 1st St (Teashops) 清明一街.....	6 B1	Finga's Base Camp 風格餐廳.....	16 B2		
Lakeside Tea & Shopping Street 湖水岸藝術街.....	7 A4	Shantung Dumplings & Beef Noodles 山東餃子牛肉麵館.....	17 C2	TRANSPORT	
National Museum of Natural Science 自然科學博物館.....	8 C1			Fengyuan Bus Company 豐原客運站.....	23 E4
Paochueh Temple 寶覺寺.....	9 F1			Nantou Bus Company 南投客運.....	24 E3
Taiwan Museum of Art 省立美術館.....	10 C3	DRINKING		Renyou Bus Company 仁友客運.....	25 E3
		Londoner.....	18 C1	Taichung Bus Company Station.....	26 E4
		Smooth Bar & Grill.....	19 B1	UBus 統聯客運.....	27 E4

of the interesting material is to the far right as you enter (to the left are cheap souvenir stalls). Don't miss the collections of folk artefacts (everything from ceramic pillows to farming implements). It's one of the best we have seen in Taiwan. The park is north of the city centre. To get there, take Taichung Bus 14 or 131 from the stops up on Luchuan St.

ART STREET 藝術街

Another road chock-a-block full of cafés, restaurants and shops – **Art St** (Yishù Jie) has the atmosphere of an alternative city-centre neighbourhood and is northwest of the centre. To get there, take Taichung Bus 88 or 103 and get off at Tunghai University. Spend a little time walking around the nicely landscaped campus and then walk up the hill a few blocks until you come to a big intersection with an overpass. Turn right and walk a few more blocks until you see a 7-Eleven. Turn left and you are on Art St.

DAKENG 大坑

To the east of the city is a hilly area known as Dakeng (Dākēng). If you are going to spend any time in the city, Dakeng is worth exploring, as there are pleasant hiking trails and even a few hot springs. You can pick up a detailed brochure (with map) of the area at the visitor centre.

Taichung For Children

In addition to obvious sights such as the science and art museums (p211 and p211), the big Buddha (see p211) appeals to many kids. Dakeng (above) has some nice outdoor hot spring and pool facilities for families. The

buildings of the folk park (p211) are complex enough to be fun for kids to explore on their own. The collection of curios can be very interesting if you highlight the right stuff (such as the – oh my neck – ceramic pillows).

Sleeping

The main problem with Taichung is that most of the budget hotels are right around the train station, which is a thoroughly unpleasant area, or far out of town. It's really a land that time (and the sanitation department) forgot. In fact, the budget traveller would do better to stay somewhere else (Changhua or Taipei) and just come in for the day. If you have to stay overnight, there are plenty of options.

Fuh Chun Hotel (Fúchūn Dàfàdiàn; ☎ 2228 3181; fax 2228 3187; 1 Zhongshan Rd; 中山路1號; r from NT530) This place, just across from the train station, has long been popular with foreign travellers and Taiwanese students. The women who run the place are exceptionally nice and make a point of offering fresh fruit to their guests every day.

Athens Taichung Hotel (Yǎdiǎn Shāngyè Lǚguǎn; ☎ 2305 2370; fax 2305 2378; 3 Da He Rd; 大和路3號; r from NT1400; ☑) This hotel is one of the few budget options in a modern upscale part of town. Staff are very friendly and rooms are a good size and value for money. The hotel is just far enough off Taizhonggang Rd that you won't be bothered by the noise of traffic. There is a 20% weekday discount.

Ful Won Hotel (Fúwáng Dàfàdiàn; ☎ 2326 5436; 636 Wenxin Rd; 文心路636號; s/d/tw incl breakfast NT2350/2900/3200; ☑) This bright, professionally run hotel sits directly across from the Jade Market. There is a 30% discount on rooms every day except public holidays, which makes

staying here a great deal if you are looking for a higher level of comfort.

Evergreen Laurel Hotel (Chángróng Guǎn Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 2313 9988; www.evergreen-hotels.com; 6 Taizhonggang Rd, sec.2; 台中港路2段6號; d/tw/stw NT6400/7600/9800; ☑) Close to the business district and airport, the Evergreen Laurel has a spacious and relaxed atmosphere. Facilities are top-notch and include a business centre, a number of excellent restaurants and cafés and a health club with squash courts. Book online for the best deals, which are often 50% off the rack rate.

Eating

Taichung has a great assortment of restaurants serving a wide range of Asian and Western cuisines. A few popular areas for restaurant dining are Art St, the streets south of the Art Museum (for lunch and dinner only) and the Chingming District. Check out Compass magazine for the latest offerings as places come and go quickly.

There are dozens of cheap noodle, Japanese fast-food and pizza places clustered around the train-station area.

Chunghsiao Night Market (Zhōngxiǎo Yèshì) Behind the train station; well known for its good, traditional, cheap food.

Shantung Dumplings & Beef Noodles (Shāndōng Jiǎozǐ Niúròu Miànguǎn; ☎ 2321 5955; 96 Gongyi Rd, sec.1; dishes NT90; ☎ 11am-9pm) Serves tasty traditional home cooking with a Shantung province flavour.

Finga's Base Camp (Fēnggé Cǎntīng; ☎ 2327 7750; 61 Zhongming 5 Rd; ☎ 7am-10pm) A deli, restaurant, butchery and bakery all in one.

Drinking

For tea or coffee, head to one of the 'tea streets' (p211). There are a dozen or more places to sit and relax (some with outdoor seating) in both locations. For beer or cocktails, head to the restaurant and bar district labelled on our map.

Wu Wei Tso Tang Teahouse (Wúwéicǎotáng; ☎ 2329 6707; 106 Gongyi Rd, sec.2; ☎ 10am-1am) This classical wooden teahouse invites guests to relax and drink tea the old-fashioned way. Soft Chinese music, thick willow trees and the swish of water from the carp pool keep the outside traffic noise to a minimum. A package of tea leaves costs NT400 and the 'water fee' is NT120 per person.

Smooth Bar & Grill (☎ 2329 3468; 5-7 Lane 50, Jingcheng Rd; drinks from NT150; ☎ 3pm-1am) One long-running place to try. The bar is well stocked

and has a big-screen TV for watching sports. There's also an international menu offering curries, steaks, pastas, goulash and more.

Londoner (☎ 2314 6919; www.londoner.com.tw; 143 HuaMei West St, sec.1; beer NT120; ☎ 7pm until late, noon-late Sat) Another veteran of sorts is this sports bar with a lively vibe and a great menu.

Entertainment

Vie Show Cinemas (www.wamervillage.com.tw) Tiger City Mall (4-6F, 120-1 Henan Rd, sec.3) Taichung Central Mall (4F, 186 Fuxing Rd, sec.4) You can book tickets in advance on the Warner Village website.

Shopping

Roman (☎ 093-123 1905; romantatoo@yahoo.ca; 56 Art St) Canadian-born Roman McNamara has found his niche on Art St with this funky little shop selling one-of-a-kind, handmade leather goods. The shop is on the 2nd level at the back of the small square about half way up the street. Since the last edition of this book, Roman has gone from part-time to full-time work, a testimony to the quality of his products.

Ceramic Art (Héxuān Tàoyì Gōngfāng; 321-12 Wenxin 5 5th Rd; ☎ 1-11pm) Near the Lakeside Sculpture Park, this small studio is run by well-known ceramic artist Hong Chi-shuen.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Taichung's new **Cing Cyuan Gang Airport** (☎ 2615 5206; www.tca.gov.tw/English/Introduction.htm) mostly serves the domestic market though there are flights to Hong Kong. In the future more international flights are expected.

UNI Air (☎ 2615 5188) and **Mandarin Airlines** (☎ 2615 5080) have ticket counters at the airport. There are flights to Taipei, Penghu, Matsu, Kinmen, Hualien and Taitung.

There's a **visitor centre** (☎ 2615 5029; ☎ 8am-5pm) to help you with your travel questions.

BUS

Taichung Bus Company (☎ 2225 5561) runs frequent buses to Puli (NT150, one hour). **Renyou Bus Company** (☎ 2225 5166) has four buses a day to Sun Moon Lake (NT190, 90 minutes) leaving from their office at 110 Luchuan St. The first bus leaves at 8am.

Kuo Kuang Hao Bus Company (☎ 2226 6168) runs frequent buses to Taipei (NT260, 3 hours). **Fengyuan Bus Company** (☎ 2222 3454), near the train station, runs buses once a day

(8am departure) to Hehuanshan, Lishan and Wuling Farm.

TRAIN

There are frequent trains to/from Taipei (fast/slow train NT375/241, two/three hours) and Kaohsiung (fast/slow train NT470/303, 2½/three hours) from early morning until almost midnight.

High-Speed Rail (HSR)

You can take a HSR train to Taichung (or to nearby New Wurih) from Taipei (NT700, one hour) but you may not save much time over the regular fast train and it will cost you nearly twice as much (see p236). At the time of writing there were trains running about every hour, though this frequency will certainly increase as time goes on. Below the station you can catch a regular train to Taichung station (NT15, 10 minutes, every 20 min).

Getting Around

Bus 115 (NT53) runs frequently between the airport and a stop on Zhongzheng Rd a couple blocks up from the train station.

For car hire call **Central Auto** (☎ 2254 7000; www.rentacar.com.tw).

There are three bus companies serving the Taichung City area, which is confusing, but fortunately the visitor centre at the train station has information on them all. Renyou Bus Company buses have a red stripe at the front while Taichung Bus Company buses

have a green stripe. **UBus** (☎ 2226 3034) buses are completely green. The usual fare for a single journey within the city is NT22.

Taichung Bus Company runs its buses from a station directly across from the train station and also from stops along Luchuan St, a block north of the train station. Renyou buses also run from stops along Luchuan St and the company has its office at 110 Luchuan St. The UBus station is across the street from the Kuo Kuang Hao station.

CHANGHUA 彰化市

☎ 04 / pop 234,308

Changhua City (Zhānghuà Shì), the capital and political heart of Changhua County, is usually been considered a gateway to the old town of Lukang, but there are some treats in the town itself, including an old Dutch-built well and a giant Buddha on a hilltop. Birders should note that Changhua is on the migratory route of the grey-faced buzzard and that the hilltop with the giant Buddha gives a 360-degree panoramic view.

Orientation & Information

Changhua is not a compact city, but you needn't wander too far from the train station during your stay. Even the Great Buddha Statue is only a couple of kilometres to the east. Road signs around the town are large, bright and green with easily read pinyin on them. We wish every town were set up so well.

You can change money at **Bank of Taiwan** (90 Zhonghua Rd).

A valuable source of travel information is the county's website in English (<http://tourism.chcg.gov.tw>) and the city's website (www.changhua.gov.tw). There is a **visitor centre** (☎ 728 5750; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) in the train station.

Sights & Activities

CHANGHUA ARTS MUSEUM & HONGMAO WELL

彰化藝術館 紅毛井

The **museum** (Zhūānghuà Yìshùguǎn; ☎ 728 7243; 542 Jhongshan Rd, sec.2; ☎ 9am-9pm, closed Mon & holidays) sits in Jungshan Hall, a lovely heritage building that we are happy to see has received a new life since the last edition. It now once again serves as a performance theatre, lecture hall and art gallery.

On the grounds of the museum is the 300-year-old **Hongmao Well** (Hóngmáo Jǐng), the last of the original Dutch-built wells (hence the name Hongmao, meaning 'red hair') in central Taiwan. Incredibly, the well still produces drinkable water, though you should boil it first.

CONFUCIUS TEMPLE 孔廟

This 1726 beauty is one of the oldest **Confucius temples** (Kǒng Miào; 6 Kongmen Rd) in Taiwan and a first-class historical relic. There's an inscribed plaque in the ancestral hall donated by the Qing-dynasty emperor Chien Long. It's a must visit if you are in Changhua. On Confucius' birthday every year (28 September) there is a colourful dawn ceremony.

BAGUASHAN 八卦山

Changhua is best known for the 22m-high **Great Buddha Statue** (Dà Fó Xiàng) that sits

atop **Baguashan** (Bāguāshān) and looks out over the city. Visitors are permitted to walk in and up the statue. Admission is free. Dioramas at each level depict major events in the Buddha's life. In addition to the Buddha a new and very spacious park has been built on the mountaintop with wooden walkways, pavilions, and playground areas for children. It makes for pleasant strolling.

You can easily walk up to Baguashan from the train station area. Just look for the signs in English to the Great Buddha Scenic Area.

Baguashan is a prime **bird-watching** area. During March and April grey-faced buzzards and sparrow hawks appear in great numbers. Contact the **Changhua County Wild Bird Society** (☎ 728 3006) for information.

Sleeping

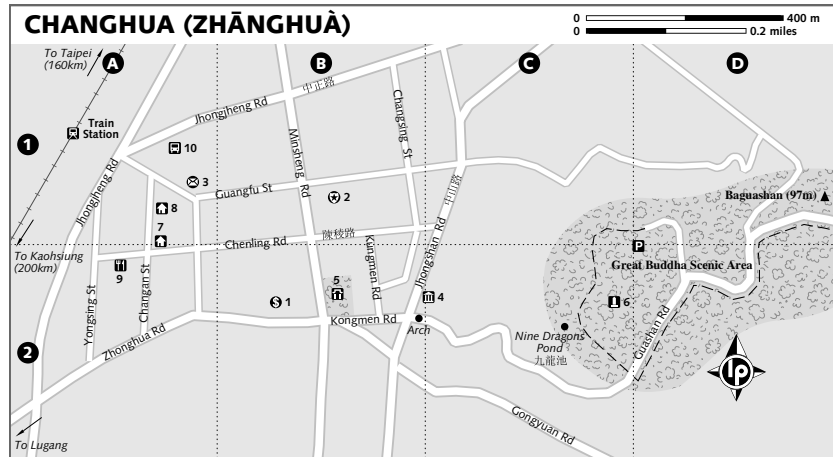
Rich Royal Hotel (Fúhuáng Dǎfāndiàn; ☎ 723 7117; 97 Changan St; 長安街97號; r from NT800; (P)) This place feels like a love hotel when you walk down the long garage (where you can park) to the check-in counter but it is, in fact, popular with families. Rooms are slightly frilly in design, and aging a bit, but it's probably your best value for money in town.

Ing Shan Hotel (Yīngshān Dǎfāndiàn; ☎ 722 9211; 129 Changan St; 長安街129號; d/tw NT900/1500) The hotel has received some renovations (new mattresses and a paint job) and you now have a choice of soft or hard mattresses and tiled or carpeted floors. Overall it's a good budget choice and the owners are friendly.

Eating & Drinking

Changhua is famous for its **ròu yuán** (肉圓; meatballs) and you'll find many places to try them out on Chenling St. For more local foods, check out the city's website. For cheap eats and cafés, there are plenty of places around the train station and on Guangfu Rd. For a beer, head up Chengling St past Heping. There are a few bars in the area, some more respectable looking than others.

Cat Mouse Noodle (Māoshǔmiàn; ☎ 726 8376; 233 Chenglin St; noodles NT50; ☎ 9am-8.30pm) The Changhua tourist website claims this shop's special noodle dish is one of the three culinary treasures of the city. It's a stretch, but the tangy flavoured noodles are pretty tasty. The shop's odd name arose because the owner's nickname sounds like 'cat mouse' in Taiwanese and not because of anything you'll find in the food.



INFORMATION	
Bank Of Taiwan 台灣銀行	1 B2
National Immigration Agency 內政部入出國及移民署	2 B1
Post Office 郵局	3 A1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Changhua Arts Museum & Hongmao Well 彰化藝術館、紅毛井	4 C2
Confucius Temple 孔廟	5 B2
Great Buddha Statue 八卦山大佛像	6 C2
SLEEPING	
Ing Shan Hotel 櫻山大飯店	7 A1
Rich Royal Hotel 富皇大飯店	8 A1
EATING	
Cat Mouse Noodle 貓鼠麵	9 A2
TRANSPORT	
Changhua Bus Company 彰化客運	10 A1

THE MATSU PILGRIMAGE

It's the 23rd day of the 3rd lunar month, and you arrive early in Dajia, Taichung County, to visit the Chenlan Temple (鎮瀾宮). You've read that today a week-long pilgrimage in honour of Matsu, the goddess of the sea, is going to begin around 10pm. All around you spirits are high as masses of people flow from one chamber of the temple to another, bowing, and prostrating themselves to a host of deities. In the corner of one incense-filled room you see the costumes of a god with a large happy pink face piled on display in a neat row. He intrigues you and you want to ask someone his name. But outside there are performances of ear-shattering opera, puppetry and folk dances, and you head out to catch a few moments of each.

The goddess Matsu remains hidden in the temple, housed in a glass case. But soon she will be taken out in a heavenly sedan chair and carried 280km around the island. If past years are any indication, you know that tens of thousands of worshippers will follow her.

Matsu is the most popular folk deity in Taiwan, with over 500 temples dedicated to her around the island. Legends about her origins vary but most agree that she was once a real person named Lin Mo, who was born into a fisherman's family on Meizhou Island, Fujian, China, sometime in the 10th century.

Stories are told about how the intelligent and gifted Lin Mo loved the sea and would often stand on the rocks of the harbour mouth dressed in red to direct ships in safely during storms. After her ascension into heaven, Matsu began to appear frequently to distressed sailors. Soon temples were being built along the coast of mainland China in her honour. The first Chinese settlers (all fishermen) to Taiwan brought statues with them and established rough temples. The site of the present Chenlan Temple in Dajia was founded in 1781.

Statues usually depict the goddess with black skin, a beaded veil and a red cape (which she wore to guide ships to harbour). Standing next to her are her loyal attendants, Eyes that See a Thousand Miles and Ears that Hear upon the Wind.

Preparations for the pilgrimage begin much earlier than the day you arrive, but the final steps are the most interesting. Everything must proceed according to custom and at times ordained by divination. As you wait, local men come out periodically to light off firecrackers to bless the earth that Matsu will be carried over. Drums beat, gongs are struck and folk gods dance about, including the pink-faced god you saw earlier. He's the god of wealth, the woman beside you says.

And then, just before Matsu is paraded out on her heavenly sedan, three cannon blasts ring the air.

The official procession that starts carrying Matsu is relatively small but soon looks to be over a kilometre long. Lay people jostle to touch the sedan chair while the most devout actually kneel down on the road and allow the goddess to be carried over them.

Over the next week the goddess will be carried through over 50 towns, in three different counties. Over a million people will see her pass their homes. Many devotees will follow Matsu the entire way, though most, like you, will only walk with her a short distance. But it's enough and this exotic and exuberant parade of folk worship and ritual is something you will never forget.

For information on the dates and events of each year's pilgrimage, check out the website <http://mazu.taichung.gov.tw/English/index.htm>. If you wish to participate in the pilgrimage the best way is to contact the National Youth Commission (see Youth Travel in Taiwan, p328).

To get to Dajia take a train from Taipei. Chenlan Temple is a few blocks straight ahead as you exit the front of the train station.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent trains from morning till late at night to/from Taipei (fast/slow train NT416/268, 2½/three hours) and Kaohsiung (fast/slow train NT432/333, two/three hours).

Buses to Lukang (NT44, 30 minutes) leave frequently from the **Changhua Bus Company**

(☎ 722 4603; 563 Zhongjeng Rd) station near the train station.

LUKANG (LUGANG) 鹿港

(☎ 04 / pop 84,767

Ninety percent of Lukang (Lùgǎng) is as nondescript as most small towns in Taiwan. But then there is that other 10%. Comprising

some of the oldest and most gorgeous temples in the country, and featuring curiously curved streets, art museums in heritage buildings, and dusty old shops where equally dusty old masters create colourful fans, lanterns and tin pieces, it is this small part of Lukang that justifiably brings in the crowds.

People call Lukang a 'living museum' and this is true as much for the food as it is for the buildings and streets. Traditional dishes are cheap and readily available near all of the major sights. Look for the enticingly named phoenix eye cake, dragon whiskers and shrimp monkeys, among many other dishes.

On the central coast and just half an hour from Changhua by bus, Lukang is easily reached from anywhere on the west coast.

History

Lukang translates as 'deer harbour', and earlier large herds of deer gathered here in the lush meadows adjacent to one of the best natural harbours on the west coast. In the 17th century the Dutch came to hunt and trade pelts (which they sold to the Japanese to make samurai armour) and venison. Trade continued into the 18th century and Lukang became one of the most thriving commercial cities and ports in Taiwan. Over the years settlers from different provinces and ethnic groups in China made their home here and, almost as a gift to the future, left a legacy of temples and buildings in varying regional styles.

In the 19th century, silt deposits began to block the harbour and in 1895 the Japanese closed it to all large ships. The city began to decline. To make matters worse, conservative

elements in Lukang refused in the early 20th century to allow trains and modern highways to be built near their city. Lukang became a backwater, only to be reborn decades later when modern Taiwanese began to search for a living connection with the past.

Orientation & Information

You can cover the sights on foot in one long day, but be aware that Lukang has few signs in English pointing to sights and few roads with pinyin on them: use our map.

The new **visitor centre** (☎ 784 1263; Fusing Rd; ☎ 9am-5.30 Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun) is easy to spot in a large field/parking lot across from the Changhua Bus Station. Pick up a brochure in English for more sights than we can cover here. Also check out the town's website (www.lukang.gov.tw). It's an informative introduction to the history and sights.

Sights

LONGSHAN TEMPLE 龍山寺

Though originally a rather small temple (and the first Buddhist temple in Taiwan), the present-day **Longshan Temple** (Lóngshān Sì) covers an area of more than 1000 sq metres. It's considered the best-preserved Qing-dynasty temple in Taiwan and really is a beautiful sight. At the time of writing restoration work was almost completed and you could wander around most of the temple grounds including the long inaccessible back courtyard, which used to hold theatrical performances. Some tourist offices still have an old copy or two of a brochure explaining the history and architectural features of this temple. Keep your eye out for it.

CASTING STONES, THE LUKANG WAY

Surely one of the most unusual customs of old Taiwan had to be the rock fight held in Lukang every spring. In *Lukang: Commerce and Community in a Chinese City*, a mostly serious academic study, Donald R DeGlopper describes this very odd event in rather humorous detail. During the fight, men from the three principal families in Lukang lined up in a field and threw rocks: Shih at Huang, Huang at Hsu, Hsu at Shih, and so on.

According to DeGlopper, the atmosphere was not one of aggression and hostility but of festivity. Children and women stood on the sides and cheered, and vendors, who seem to have been as ubiquitous back then as they are today, sold snacks and drinks.

The Japanese did their best to suppress the festival during their time on Taiwan, but to no avail. Unfortunately, it just seemed to die out on its own a few years before WWII. Later, when participants were asked why they joined in such bloody sport, some explained that it was 'tradition', while others noted that if blood was not spilled in the spring, disaster could not be averted in the coming year. As one reviewer of DeGlopper's book noted, however, the explanation is probably much simpler: the families just didn't like each other very much.

MATSU TEMPLE 天后宮

Another large and really splendid structure, the **Matsu Temple** (Tiānhòu Gōng) was renovated in 1936 and is completely accessible today. It is said that the Matsu statue in this temple was brought to Taiwan by a Qing-dynasty general. The statue is now called 'The Black-Faced Matsu', as decades of incense smoke have discoloured her original complexion. Check out the front of the temple for a cool display of old weapons.

The area around the temple is pedestrian-only and great crowds gather here on weekends, though the atmosphere feels festive and not touristy. Vendors and the surrounding stores sell a variety of traditional snacks, sweets and drinks.

FOLK ARTS MUSEUM 民俗文物館

The **Folk Arts Museum** (Mínsú Wénwùguǎn; ☎ 777 2019; 152 Zhongshan Rd; adult/child NT130/70; ☎ 9am-5pm, no entry after 4.30pm, closed Mon) has always been one of our favourite heritage sights in Lukang. Built in the Japanese era and originally the residence of a wealthy local family, the museum houses a large collection of daily-life artefacts from a bygone age.

The museum is behind Zhongshan Rd and can now be accessed via the **Din Family Old House** (Dīngjiā Jīnshì Gùcū; 132 Zhongshan Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm), another lovely heritage building recently restored and opened to the public. The building was once the home of a top imperial scholar and is the last remaining house of its kind in Lukang.

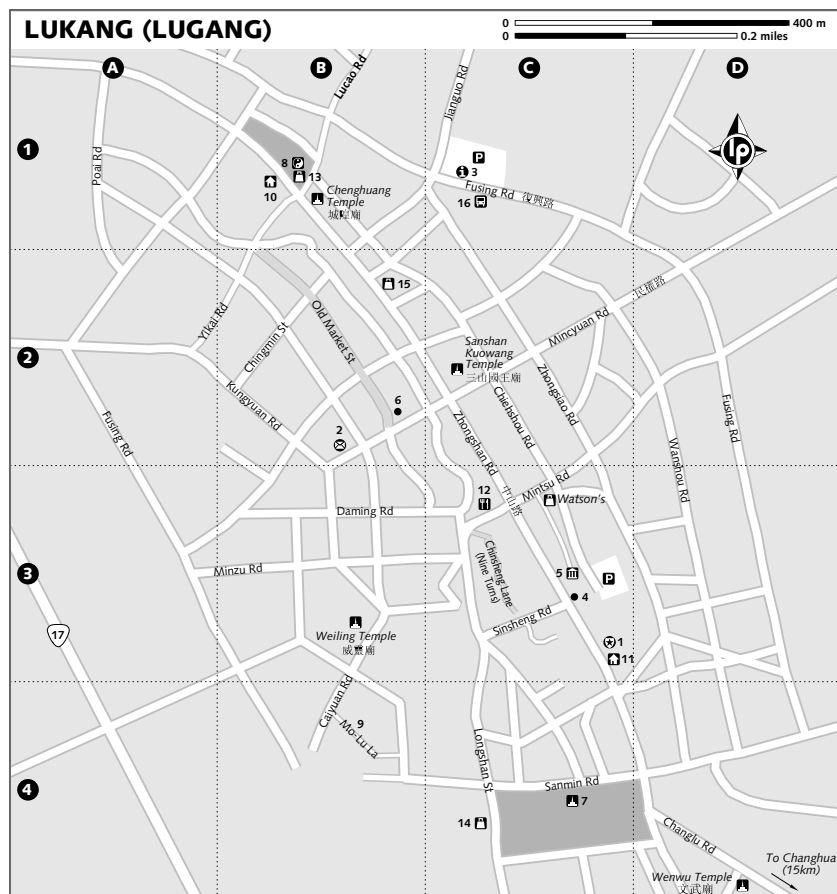
OLD MARKET STREET 古市街

The merchant streets of old Lukang are well represented (if you skip the first shop with Pachinko machines) by the shops lining both sides of the curved, red-tiled lanes of what is now called the **Old Market Street** (Gǔshì Jiē). Almost all the shop fronts have been restored and the interiors decorated with antiques. You can shop for traditional items here or just enjoy a stroll through history.

Not everyone likes it, but to us the **half-sided well** (Bànbān Jīn) is something we always look forward to seeing. The well, aptly named because you can only see half of it, was built to share: the rich family inside the complex used the interior half, while the poor and passers-by were permitted to use the outer half.

BREAST TOUCHING LANE (MO-LU LANE)**摸乳巷**

This old **alley** (Mōlǔshàng), also called Gentleman's Lane, gets its label from the fact that a man could not pass a woman down the extremely narrow inner passageway without her breasts brushing against him. (While we suppose she and he could always have turned their backs, Bum Touching Alley just doesn't have the same ring to it.) The true gentleman then, would always wait for a lady to pass through first. Take a stroll through the lane with someone you love – or hope to.

**INFORMATION**

Police Station 警察局	1	C3
Post Office 郵局	2	B2
Visitor Centre 遊客中心	3	C1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Din Family Old House 丁家進士古厝	4	C3
Folk Arts Museum 民俗博物館	5	C3
Half-Sided Well 半邊井	6	B2
Longshan Temple 龍山寺	7	C4
Matsu Temple 天后宮	8	B1
Mo-Lu Lane 摸乳巷	9	B4

SLEEPING

Matsu Temple Believer's Hotel 鹿港天后宮香客大樓	10	B1
Quanzhong Hotel 全忠旅社	11	C3

EATING

Yu Chen Chai 玉珍齋食品有限公司	12	C3
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SHOPPING

Mr Chen's Fan Shop 陳朝宗手工扇	13	B1
Wan Neng Tinware 萬能錫鋪	14	C4
Wu Tu-Hou Lantern Shop 吳敦厚燈籠鋪	15	B2

TRANSPORT

Changhua Bus Company Station 彰化客運站	16	C1
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Tours

Taiwan Tour Bus (☎ 0800 011 765; <http://taiwan.net.tw>) has day tours of Lukang (NT1500) leaving from major hotels in Taichung and the Changhua train station.

Festivals & Events

Every year Lukang hosts a four-day **folk-arts festival** that begins three days before the Dragon Boat Festival (p337). This is a crowded but rewarding time to come. Matsu's birthday, the 23rd day of the third lunar month (usually in April; see boxed text, p216), is also cause for intense celebration at the Matsu Temple.

Sleeping

Quanzhong Hotel (Quánzhōng Lǚshè; ☎ 777 2640; 104 Zhongshan Rd; 中山路104號; d/tw NT650/850) This hotel is getting old but at least it isn't raising its prices – and the location is good. Rooms are small, cheaply furnished and a little musty, but clean enough for a night's stay.

Matsu Temple Believer's Hotel (Lùgǎng Tiānhòugōng Xiāngkè Dàlóu; ☎ 775 2508; 475 Zhongshan Rd; 中山路475號; d/tw NT950/1790) You don't have to be a believer to stay here, though it might help you to ignore how bland (hospital-room bareness comes to mind) the rooms are. Note that the entire hotel may be booked out months in advance of Matsu's birthday and other important festivals.

Eating

Since the pedestrian-only zone was opened around Matsu Temple, the area has become a lively market of food stalls and small restaurants. Some famous local dishes to try are *xī xià* (溪蝦; shrimp monkeys), *é à jiān* (蚵仔煎; oyster omelettes), *ròu yuán* (肉圓; meatballs) and sweet treats such as *núshé bing* (牛舌餅; cow-tongue crackers) and *lóngshū táng* (龍鬚糖; dragon whiskers).

Yu Chen Chai (Yúzhēnzhāi Shípín Yóuxiàn Gōngsī; 168 Minzu Rd; ☎ 8am-11pm) This fifth-generation shop sells pastries based on original Qing-dynasty recipes. Try the *fèngyǎn gāo* (鳳眼糕; phoenix eye cake) or the *lǜdòu gāo* (綠豆糕; green bean cake).

Shopping

Lukang offers great shopping (or just browsing) if you're in the market for original crafts. Several shop owners have received 'Living Heritage' awards for their skill and dedication in preserving old crafts.

Wan Neng Tinware (Wànnéng Xìpǔ; ☎ 777 7847; 84 Longshan St) The master here is a fourth-generation tinsmith. His elaborate dragon boats and expressive masks cost thousands but are worth the price for their beauty and craftsmanship.

Mr Chen's Fan Shop (Chéncháo zōng Shòu gōng shàn; ☎ 777 5629; 400 Zhongshan Rd) The shop is just on the right before you enter the pedestrian-only area near Matsu Temple. Fans range from a few hundred dollars to many thousands for the larger creations. Mr Chen has been making fans since he was 16.

Wu Tun-Hou Lantern Shop (Wúdūnhòu Dēnglóng pù; ☎ 777 6680; 312 Zhongshan Rd) Mr Wu has been making lanterns for about 70 years and has collectors from all over the world come to make purchases. Lanterns start at a few hundred dollars but the really creative works cost thousands.

Getting There & Away

Buses to Changhua (NT44, 30 minutes) leave frequently from the **Changhua Bus Company station** (Fusing Rd).

Jiji Small Rail Line

集集小火車線

☎ 049

Like the Pingxi, Alishan and Neiwan lines (the latter closed at the time of writing), the 19km narrow-gauge Jiji Small Rail Line (Jiji Xiǎo Huǒchē) once served an important industrial purpose. In the Jiji line's case it was assisting in the construction of power plants. But these days the line remains open to boost local tourism.

The 45-minute train ride begins south of Changhua in the wide, fertile plains of Ershui. It then proceeds into the forested hills around Jiji and ends at Checheng, a vehicle yard surrounded by high mountains in Nantou County.

While the train ride is short, the list of things to see and do in this area is long: you can cycle, hike, bird- and monkey-watch, as well as visit temples, museums and historic buildings. You can visit any time of year, but don't bother on a summer weekend when crowds really make the place unpleasant and minicooters roar up and down the bike paths. Winter weekdays are lovely and quiet and the weather is usually dry and in the mid-20s. If you plan on staying in the area, a hotel in Jiji is your

best choice. Accommodation in Shuili and Ershui is pretty dreary.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

There are six stations along the way, the most visited of which are Ershui, Jiji, Shuili and Checheng. There was much work being done around the Chechen station at the time of writing and it definitely looks like it will be a nice place to stop in for a stroll by the time this book comes out.

You can sometimes get a map at the train stations but in Chinese only. Most of the towns have 7-Elevens with ATMs.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

You can get to Ershui, the start of the Jiji line, from anywhere along the West Coast Line, but note that not every train stops there. From Changhua (NT47) it's about a 30-minute journey. At Ershui station, alight and transfer to the Jiji Small Rail Line (there are signs in English telling you where to stand on the platform). You can buy your ticket on the train. It's NT44 from Ershui to Checheng and you are allowed to alight and reboard once along the way without buying another ticket. There are eight trains a day in either direction, about one every two hours. You can pick up a schedule at any station or go to the Taiwan Railway website (http://new.twtrafic.com.tw/TWRail_en/index.aspx; note that Jiji is spelt Chi-Chi).

Ershui 二水站

pop 3000

A good way to see Ershui is by the cycling-only **bike path** (*jiàotàchē zhuānyòngdào*) which intersects with quiet country roads that are also bikable. To reach the path, turn right when you exit the train station. Go 100m and then turn right to cross the train tracks. You will see the bike path on your right. Give yourself at least three hours to explore.

The countryside is picturesque, with lush fields, and temples, shrines, traditional brick villas and pagodas popping up in unexpected places. Just to the north stands Songbo Ridge, a holy spot for Taiwan's Taoists. With its thick forests and crumbling cliff faces, the ridge helps to break up the flat landscape along the bike path.

You can rent bikes outside the train station, though mid-week, mid-winter you may be out of luck. In such a case, you can always walk the paths or continue on to Jiji.

Jiji (Chi Chi) 集集

pop 3000

The fifth stop down the line, Jiji (Jiji) offers the most tourist facilities, though some attempts at town improvement, such as the creation of a fake old street, have failed miserably. In general though, it's a pleasant place when the crowds are low, and it has a real country charm about it with fields of banana and betel nut trees, grape vines, and dragon fruit plants lining the roads.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Wuchang Temple 武昌宮

This is one of the oddest sites billed as an attraction you're likely to come across in Taiwan. Previously unknown to outsiders, the **temple** (Wǔchāng Gōng) made its name after the 921 Earthquake (21 September 1999; measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale) collapsed its lower floors leaving the roof to lie in ruins on the ground. Very photogenic in its state of disrepair, the temple is now one of the first things people rush to see when they come to town.

To get to the temple turn right as you leave the train station and walk about 10 minutes to Ba Zhang St (八張街). Turn left and walk another 10 minutes. You can also reach the temple on the bike path.

Cycling

Jiji's 10km **bike path** (*jiàotàchē zhuānyòngdào*) is for the most part scenic and easy to follow, with distance markers and clear turning signs. There are now signs in English to the major sights along the path such as the Endemic Species Research Institute (see below). Note that when you get down near the weir the bike path takes you back to town, but it's fun to explore this area as well.

You can rent bikes (NT100 per hour) at numerous locations around the train station.

Endemic Species Research Institute

特有生物保育中心

The **institute** (Tèyǒu Shēngwù Bǎoyù Zhōngxīn; ☎ 276 1331; www.tesri.gov.tw; 1 Minsheng East Rd; adult/child NT80/50; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) functions as a research

centre and natural history museum for plant and animal species endemic to Taiwan. There's a very strong conservation message promoted throughout, which we found very refreshing. Displays are highly informative and now feature full text in English.

Don't miss the little pond in the back for observing fish, insect and bird life. It's not quite Walden, and we wouldn't spend two years, two months and two days here, but we would like to have stayed a lot longer than we had time for.

The institute is about 1km east of the train station on the bike route.

Jiji Station

The original Jiji Station was levelled in the big earthquake of 1999. As part of a plan to boost tourism in the area, the station was rebuilt to the standards of the simple Japanese-era original and has since become extremely popular with Taiwanese tourists looking for a photo op on the weekend.

SLEEPING & EATING

Jiji Vacation Village (集集渡假村; Jíjí Dūjiàcūn; ☎ 276 2988; fax 276 2986; 205 Chenggong Rd; 成功路 205號; d/tw NT2200/3000; ☎) Rooms are bright, clean, simply furnished and have large comfy beds. A buffet breakfast (7am to 9.30am) and use of the swimming pool (fed with mountain water), steam room and spa are included (summer only). To reach the hotel, go north from the train station to Cheng Gong Rd and turn right. The peach-coloured hotel, which looks like an apartment building, is on the right. Thirty percent discounts are usual.

Train Head Original Food Restaurant (火車頭 集集原味廚房; Huǒchētóu Jíjí Yuánwèi Chūfáng; 299 Minquan Rd; dishes NT120-180; ☎ lunch, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun, closed Wed) This popular Chinese-style restaurant has a motto: 'locally grown foods cooked in the traditional way'. Downstairs, the restaurant sells various local agricultural speciality items. The restaurant is across the road from the station and to the right.

Shuili 水里

pop 1000

The penultimate stop on the Jiji Line (the last stop is the quaint station at Checheng) is Shuili (Shuili), a bland little town set among lovely mountain scenery.

Go to **Yushan National Park Headquarters** (☎ 277 3121; www.ysnp.gov.tw; 300 Jungshan Rd, sec.1; ☎ 9.30am-

4.30pm) for English-language brochures and films about the park, as well as the latest road and trail information. To reach the headquarters from Shuili train station, walk straight down Minsheng Rd about 1km until you reach the river. Turn right and walk another 1km to where the road connects with Hwy 16. Turn left and cross the bridge. The park headquarters is in the white building on the right. Usually someone working can speak English.

From Shuili you can catch buses to Sun Moon Lake (NT49, 30 minutes, hourly), and Dongpu (NT112, 80 minutes, eight buses a day). There are two bus stations in Shuili. **Yuanlin Bus Company** (員林客運; ☎ 277 0041), which runs buses to Dongpu, and **Fengrong Bus Company** (豐榮客運; ☎ 277 4609), which runs buses to Sun Moon Lake (and on to Puli). Note that buses to these places run during daylight hours only (6am to 5pm or so).

To reach the Yuanlin Bus Company, exit the train station and turn left on Minquan Rd. The station is on the opposite side of the road from the 7-Eleven and just past the food stalls. The Fengrong Bus Company is further down the road on the same side.

Highway 16

To explore a relatively remote part of the country keep heading down Hwy 16 east of Shuili. Soon the road runs alongside a wide river valley that looks perfect for inner tubing down when the water level is low.

At the time of writing the highway ended at a washed-out bridge. You could, however, cross on a suspension bridge and continue on foot up what is called the **Danda Logging Road** (丹大林道; Dāndà Lǐndào), which gets you into some real back country. You're advised to get local reports on the condition of the road before you head up on a bike or on foot.

SUN MOON LAKE 日月潭

☎ 049

Sun Moon Lake (Rìyuè Tán) is the largest body of freshwater in Taiwan and has one of the island's loveliest natural landscapes. In his blue period, Picasso would have had no end of inspiration. At an altitude of 762m, the lake is backed by high-forested mountains and boasts good weather year-round. Boating is popular, both touring in large craft and in DIY rowing boats, as is hiking and biking. By the time you read this there will be a hotel offering hot springs.

Orientation

Sun Moon Lake is part of the 9000-hectare Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area, under the control of the central government. The scenic area stretches north to include the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village, south to the snake kiln in Shuili and the old train station at Checheng, west to Great Jiji Mountain, and east to Mt Shueishe. It's also close to Puli (15km) and makes for a nice base from which to explore that town (as accommodation in Puli is poor). Note that you can get to all these places from the lake by public transport.

Accommodation is more than plentiful, with the majority of hotels centred in Shueishe Village, on the northwestern corner of the lake. Most first-time visitors stay here, though increasingly people are taking advantage of the quieter atmosphere at Itashao on the other side of the lake.

Information

There are no banks but the 7-Eleven on the main road up from the village has an ATM. **Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area** (www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw) Excellent resource now with full bus information for both getting there and around.

Visitor Information Centre (☎ 285 5668; 163

Jhongsan Rd, Shueishe Village; ☎ 9am-5pm) Now in a large modern building off the main road just before the turn-off for the village. English-speaking staff are on hand to help with all your needs. If you see a kind elderly gentleman called Hsu Ting-fa (Tim), thank him for all the great work he has done to make Sun Moon Lake easy for English-speaking tourists to get around. Generous retirees like him are truly a national treasure.

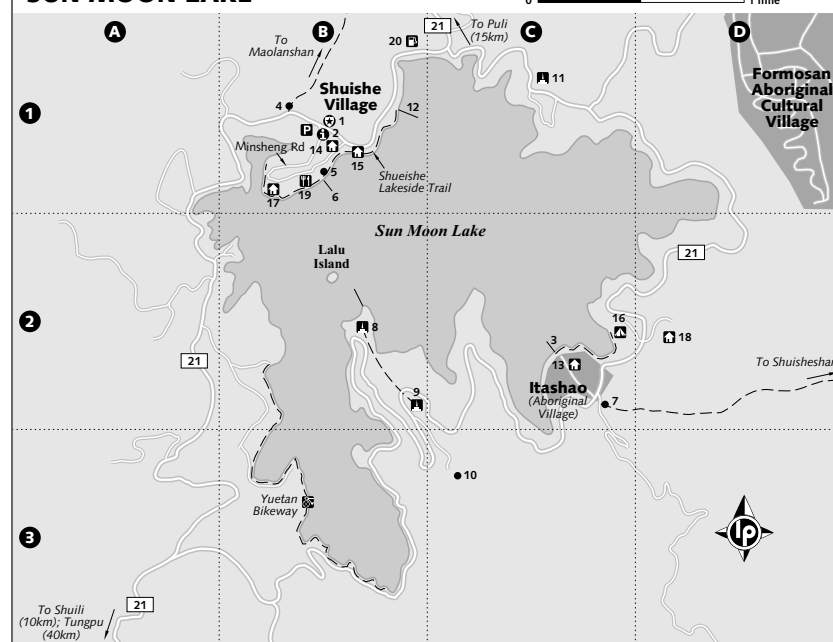
Sights & Activities

Swimming is banned in the lake except during the Annual Across the Lake Swim (see below).

SHUEISHE VILLAGE 水社村

People often refer to Shueishe Village (Shuishè Cūn) as Sun Moon Lake Village. The cobbled main road, Minsheng Rd, is supposed to be pedestrian-only but this rule is not being enforced very strictly. The area by the **Shueishe Pier** (Shuishè Mātóu), which was being rebuilt at the time of writing, is particularly attractive and a great place to hang out day and night. Most of the hotels have added new façades to their sides facing the water and built decks with food and beverage service.

SUN MOON LAKE



The **Meihe Garden** (Méihé Yuán) is a heavenly spot to hang out on a sunny day (and the night view is pretty charming too).

BOATING

Boat tours are a popular way to take in the scenery and leave at 9am and 4pm daily (NT300 per person) and other times when there is demand. Tours stop at all four piers. You can hire private boats at Shueishe and Itashao Piers. A trip to Lalu Island costs around NT300 per person. You can also rent small rowing boats for NT200 per hour and take yourself out on the water.

HIKING

Sun Moon Lake offers some very pleasant hiking, and on the longer trails you are sure to leave the tour groups behind. The trails to **Maolanshan** (Māolánshān; two hours return) and **Shueisheshan** (Shuishèshān; seven to eight hours return) are the longest, if you don't include the bike paths, which can, of course, be walked too. Signs in English mark the trailheads for all routes. The trail (which is really a road) to Maolanshan begins near Shueishe

INFORMATION

Police Station 警察局.....	1 B1
Tourist Information Office 旅客中心.....	2 B1

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Itashao Pier 伊達邵碼頭.....	3 C2
Maolanshan Trailhead 貓蘭山步道.....	4 B1
Meihe Garden 梅荷園.....	5 B1
Shueishe Pier 水社碼頭.....	6 B1
Shueisheshan Trailhead 水社山步道.....	7 C2
Syunguang Temple 玄光寺.....	8 B2
Syuentzang Temple 玄奘寺.....	9 B2
Tsen Pagoda 慈恩塔.....	10 C3
Wenwu Temple 文武廟.....	11 C1
Youth Activity Centre 日月潭青年活動中心.....	(see 18)
Zhaowu Pier 朝霧碼頭.....	12 B1

SLEEPING

Full House Resort Hotel 富豪群度假民宿.....	13 C2
Harbor Resort Hotel 碼頭休閒大飯店.....	14 B1
Spa Home 餐廳.....	15 B1
Sun Moon Bay Campsite 日月灣露營農場.....	16 C2
Teachers Hostel 教師會館.....	17 B1
Youth Activity Centre 日月潭青年活動中心.....	18 D2

EATING

Lalu 涵碧樓.....	19 B1
Min Hu Old Restaurant 明湖老餐廳.....	(see 14)
Oriental Brasserie 東方餐廳.....	(see 19)

TRANSPORT

Petrol Station 加油站.....	20 B1
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Village, while the one to Shueisheshan begins at the far end of Itashao.

Other walks are listed in the tourist brochures. Most can be reached by the round-the-lake public bus.

CYCLING

We hope increased tour buses won't ruin the lake for cycling. For now it is quiet enough midweek to cycle around the lake (30km or so) without much hassle. Give yourself four to five hours so you can stop and enjoy the sites.

One shorter route to try, and one that will minimize exposure to traffic, is to go left (east) from Shueishe Village and follow the road by the lake. In about 30 minutes you will see the sign to the 8km **Yuetan Bikeway** (月潭自行車道; Yuétán Zìxíngchē Dào). This is a very lovely wide path that runs right beside the lake. No cars or scooters are allowed here.

Other bike-only routes around the lake are planned so check at the tourist office for the latest information.

You can rent bikes at the Youth Activity Centre (NT120/270 per hour/day).

FORMOSAN ABORIGINAL CULTURAL

VILLAGE 九族文化村

It's an unlikely business model, a cultural showpiece combined with amusement park rides, but the **village** (Jiúzú Wénhuà Cūn; ☎ 289 5361; www.nine.com.tw; adult/child NT650/350; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) comes highly recommended. You can get to the village on a Fengrong bus (NT22, 20 minutes) from in front of the Visitor Information Centre. There are only four buses a day so see the Visitor Information Centre for the latest schedule.

After summer 2008 a cable car should run to the village from the Youth Activity Centre.

SHUILI SNAKE KILN 水里 蛇窯

Snake kilns were first developed in China during the late Ming dynasty. The name comes from the long, narrow, snake-like appearance of the kiln. The **Shuili Snake Kiln** (Shuili Shéyáo; ☎ 277 0967; adult/child NT120/60; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), for example, is more than 30m long. Within the kiln grounds are a gallery, museum, exhibition hall and a pottery shop selling good quality pieces.

The kiln is part of the Sun Moon Lake Scenic Area but is about 10km south of the lake itself. To get there take a Fengrong bus heading to Shuili from in front of the

Visitor Information Centre (NT49, 20 to 30 minutes, hourly).

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Wenwu Temple** (Wénwǔ Miào), **Syuentzang Temple** (Xuánzhuàng Sì) and **Syueguang Temple** (Xuánguāng Sì) are all worth a visit if you have time. Syueguang Temple is said to hold the remains of the monk immortalised in the novel *Journey to the West*.

Stately **Tsen Pagoda** (Ciēn Tǎ), built by Chiang Kai-shek in honour of his mother, is also worth visiting, as the views are about as good as it gets.

Note that all of the above can be reached by the public round-the-lake bus.

Festivals & Events

Thao Tribe Annual Harvest Festival Held every summer (during the eighth month of the lunar calendar). Visitors can watch all aspects of the festival, which include fortune-telling, mortar pounding to summon the people, as well as the sacrifice of wild animals. Festivities last for several days and take place in Itashao Village.

Annual across the Lake Swim Held every September to promote the lake and physical fitness, this is the only time swimming is permitted.

Sleeping

All hotels at the lake offer discounts during the week and often on the weekend, too. These can be up to 50%. Rooms that face the lake are always the most expensive. For homestays (double NT1000 to NT1500, ask at the Visitor Information Centre or just wander down the main road from the Visitor Information Centre toward the village (around the 7-Eleven).

Sun Moon Bay Campsite (Riyuèwǎn Lùyíng Nóngchǎng; ☎ 285 0559; www.rock-camp.com.tw; per site NT500) The camp site is set beside the lake and has clean grounds with some trees for shade. Showers and bathrooms are on site. To reach the site, take a round-the-lake bus to the Youth Activity Centre. Continue on foot just a little further and turn right onto a small road heading down to the lake.

Teachers Hostel (Jiàoshī Huiguǎn; ☎ 285 5991; with Youth Guesthouse pass dm Sun-Thu NT500) This is a hotel, not a hostel, but travellers with a Youth Guesthouse Network Card (see p328) can stay here fairly cheaply. The hotel is a 10-minute walk up the hill from the village. Single female travellers without transport should be aware that parts of the walk are isolated and dark at night.

Youth Activity Centre (Riyuètán Qīngnián Huódòng Zhōngxīn; ☎ 285 0071; Ru-Uei Village; d/tw 1800/3830). It's a 20-minute ride or so from Shueishe Village (the round-the-lake bus also stops here) but the centre has its own restaurant and store and large grounds for hanging out. You can also rent bikes here (see opposite). There's a 15% weekday discount on accommodation.

Full House Resort Hotel (Fúháoqiūqūn Dūjià Mínsù; ☎ 285 0307; www.fhsmi.idv.tw; 8 Shueishe St; d/tw NT2800/4500) The hotel, really a B&B, is set in a two-storey wooden house behind a small garden in Itashao. The lobby and restaurant are filled with quirky *objets d'art* that reflect the individualistic taste of the owner, a painter whose works adorn the lobby and rooms. Rooms are large (one has a second-storey loft for children to sleep in) and feature all-wood interiors, solid wood furniture, and antique decorations. In the last edition we mentioned that travellers bored with the same-old same-old of Taiwanese hotels would do well to stay here – and it appears from the photos the proud owner showed us that many of you have taken our advice. The hotel runs a 24-hour café and restaurant (set meals NT200).

Harbour Resort Hotel (Mǎtǒu Xiūxián Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 285 5143; 11 Minsheng Rd; d/tw NT3000/4500) The last hotel on Minsheng before the dock, it's lakeside rooms are bright and airy and have a modern décor that includes plasma TVs. Though the room windows are small there are excellent lake views from the balconies. There is a simple spa in the basement for guests.

Spa Home (☎ 285 5166; fax 285 5577; 95 Jungshan Rd; r from NT6500) The cosy rooms are all doubles with an extra sofa for lounging, and rates include two breakfasts, night tea on the café balcony, and a 1½-hour massage for one person.

Eating & Drinking

If you are on a budget, there's a 7-Eleven in town for noodles and sandwiches, and cheap stir-fries and filling set meals are available from the nearby restaurants usually for around NT200. If you're a vegetarian try the Full House Resort Hotel. Along the waterfront, both in Shueishe Village and Itashao, many hotels runs cafés where you can take in the lake views from your table.

Min Hu Old Restaurant (Míngshū Lǎo Cāntīng; 15 Minsheng Rd; dishes NT150; ☎ 9am-9pm) This bland-looking restaurant in Shueishe Village has what most agree is the best Chinese food at the lake.

The five-star **Lalu** (Hánbílóu; ☎ 285 5311; 142 Jhongsing Rd) resort (which is overpriced in our opinion as a sleeping option) has several lovely restaurants open to nonguests, including the Oriental Brassiere (dishes NT200-500; ☎ 7am-9pm daily). The brassiere is on level seven and is divided into two sections: one serving contemporary Western cuisine, and the other Eastern. The lake-view balcony tables outside are very popular at lunchtime.

Getting There & Away

From Taichung, catch a Renyou bus to Sun Moon Lake (NT212, two hours). There are at least two buses a day (at 8am and 3pm). From Taipei, **Kuo Kuang Hao** (☎ 02-2311 9893) runs buses directly to Sun Moon Lake (NT465, 4½ hours). Buses end their journey in the large car park behind the village.

From Taichung, you can also catch one of the frequent Fengyuan buses to Puli (NT150, one hour) and then transfer to a Fengrong bus to Sun Moon Lake (NT54, 30 minutes, every hour).

From Shuili, Fengrong buses run to Sun Moon Lake (NT49, 30 minutes, hourly). Buses from Puli or Shuili drop you off on the main road by the Visitor Information Centre.

Getting Around

The scenic area administration runs a round-the-lake bus (all day pass NT80) from about 6.45am to 6pm. Buses leave from in front of the Visitor Information Centre and do not quite go around the lake but turn back at Syueguang Temple (there isn't much to see after this anyway). Buses run about once an hour and there is a full schedule in English available at the Visitor Information Centre.

You can rent scooters (NT800 per day) with an international driving licence at shops along the main road, left of the 7-Eleven.

HIGHWAY 14

Though it starts just south of Taichung in the bland town of Caotun, Hwy 14 makes up for a poor start in no time. After Puli, which is worth stopping in to visit the marvellous Chung Tai Chan Temple, the elevation rises and one turn after another brings stunning mountain views. Along the way you can stop for hot springs, sightseeing and even some hiking if you are up for it

(one trails takes you down all the way to the east coast).

Hwy 14 ends at Tayuling, just north of the forest recreation area of Hehuanshan (at 3300m), and from here you can go east to Taroko Gorge or north to Wuling Farm and Ilan. Public transport is not great, or even good, along the highway. Only Puli has anything like regular bus service from Taichung. However, there is one bus a day from Taichung all the way to Lishan, with a stop at Hehuanshan. Driving and not stopping often, you could cover the route in four to five hours, but give yourself at least two days.

PULI 埔里

☎ 049 / pop 87,069

Most people in Taiwan know Puli (Pǔlǐ) as being the town hardest hit by the 921 earthquake. Puli has rebuilt itself since then, though perhaps not to the satisfaction of Japanese retirees (see p228), and today there is little evidence that it was once the epicentre of a massive 6.9 magnitude quake.

Puli is a 90-minute drive from Taichung, and is the first stop of note on a journey down Hwy 14.

Orientation & Information

Central Puli is small and it's not hard to figure your way around. Note that some sights, however, are a way out of town and will require a taxi ride. Taxis are not that common in Puli so it's best to have your hotel call one before you head out.

The tallest and most distinctive building in town is not what it seems, ie a department store. Rather it's the Pu Tian Community Centre (Pǔ Tián Jīn Shè), built by the Chung Tai Chan Buddhists. The centre is open to the public and has a children's library, movie room, meditation hall and gallery.

Sights & Activities

CHUNG TAI CHAN TEMPLE 中台禪寺

Completed in 2001, the 43-storey **Chung Tai Chan Temple** (Zhōng Tái Chánsì; ☎ 293 0215; www.chungtai.org in Chinese but has some interesting pictures) is more than just another massive modern temple – it's an international centre of Buddhist academic research, culture and the arts.

If that sounds intimidating, rest assured. In large part, the temple exists for those who

desire to learn about Buddhism, no matter what their current level of understanding. Several of the resident nuns speak English, and it is their duty to help visitors to understand what they see to as well as to explain the basic tenets of Buddhism.

The temple has embraced modern technology and the lighting and design are innovative and pleasing to the eye. The artwork is superb. Highlights include the 15m-high carved pillars of the guards of the four directions in the entrance hall, the pure-jade relief of the 18 lohans, the hand-painted chamber ceilings, the seven-storey (indoor) pure-teak pagoda and the massive Buddha statues that dominate each level.

There is no accommodation at the temple for the casual visitor, but there are meditation classes and week-long retreats where practitioners are permitted to stay at the temple.

To get to the temple, drive north on Jungjeng Rd out of Puli and then follow the signs. The temple is about 6km north of Renai Park. A taxi should cost around NT300.

For information about tours or to prearrange one, email or call the monastery.

MUHSHENG MUSEUM OF ENTOMOLOGY

木生昆蟲博物館

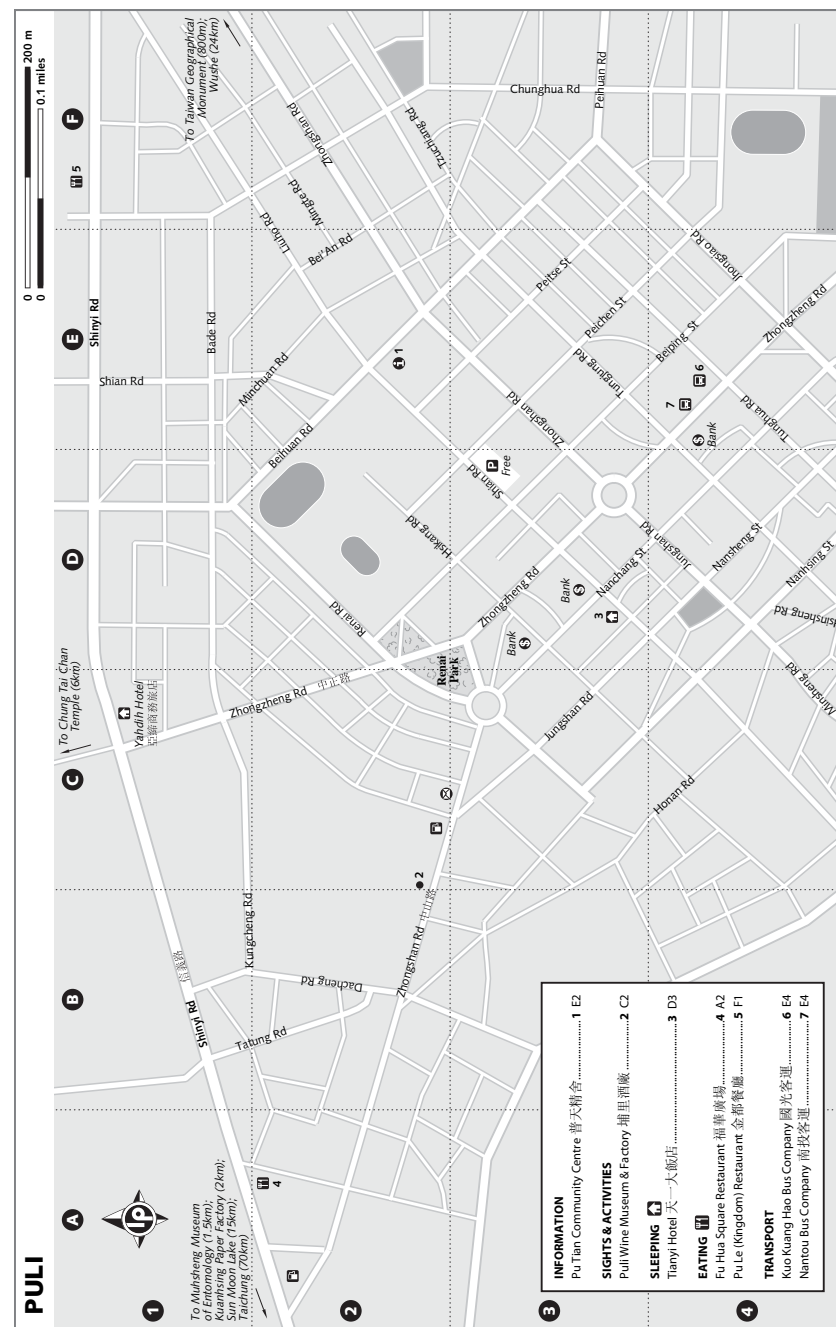
Taiwan has more than 400 species of butterflies, 350 of which can be seen around Puli, so it's no surprise that there is a **museum** (Mùshēng Kūnchóng Bówùguǎn; ☎ 291 3311; 622 Nan Cun Rd; adult/child NT120/100; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) dedicated to the winged insect here.

The museum features a live butterfly compound (which is just OK) and a display centre. On the 1st floor there are live beetles, stick insects and scorpions. On the 2nd floor hundreds and hundreds of preserved specimens are presented behind glass. There is a bizarre Thai 'face' butterfly, an 'owl faced' butterfly, a butterfly with wings that look like leaves, and the very odd hermaphrodite butterfly (the male half is dark, the female light).

It's best to take a taxi to the museum.

KUANHSING PAPER FACTORY 廣興紙寮

Really more cottage industry than factory, **Kuanhsing** (Guǎnxīng Zhǐ Liáo; ☎ 291 3037; 310 Tieshan Rd; admission free; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) is dedicated to preserving the craft of handmade paper. You can watch paper being made by hand and even



try it yourself. Though this place is set up for visitors it has a very authentic atmosphere.

You'll definitely need to take a taxi to get to the factory. Drivers will ask for NT200 but NT150 is fair. Kuanhsing is a popular destination for school field trips.

PULI WINE MUSEUM & FACTORY 埔里酒廠 Puli is famous for its Shaohsing wine (Shàoxīng jiǔ), made from glutinous rice and wheat. It has a kick and a bite, and while the wine is rarely appreciated by the Western palate, the jugs are very attractive and make for nice gifts.

The **museum** (Pǔlǐ Jiǔchǎng; ☎ 298 4006; 219 Zhongshan Rd, sec.3; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm) was undergoing renovations at the time of writing, with no word on when it will open or what it will present.

Across the street, in any case, is the wine-tasting area and **factory** (☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri,

8.30am-5pm Sat & Sun). There are a dozen or more 'wines' to sample, including some delicious fruit liqueurs. You'll also find tasty wine-flavoured ice blocks and cakes.

Do visit the 2nd floor, as you'll find an exhibit area of old posters, household items and, interestingly, Taiwan Beer bottles and cigarette packages from throughout the ages. The 'Great Men' series of cigarettes (featuring Winston Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek among others on the packaging) are some of the funniest artefacts we have seen in a long time.

TAIWAN GEOGRAPHICAL MONUMENT

台灣地理中心

If you follow Zhongshan Rd to the edge of town (where it turns into Hwy 14), you'll see a giant menhirlike stone with Chinese characters reading **Taiwan Geographical Monument** (台灣地理中心; Táiwān Dìlǐ Zhōngxīn). Though many

55 POOPS IN PULI

I pull into Puli on a sunny spring afternoon and there he is: going about his business as brazen as any streetwalker. Only this streetwalker has four legs, a furry coat and his business is pooping on the sidewalk of this small town in central Taiwan.

Odd as it may sound, I sit in my car to see what will happen next. The dog is a stray so I'm not expecting an owner show up and lay claim to the prize, but I am expecting the 'Puli Poop Patrol' or some-such entity to come and clean up the mess. When they don't, after a considerable wait, I leave in disgust, much like the old Japanese Nakamura couple did a year previously.

The Nakamuras arrived in Puli in 2006 as part of a pilot long-term stay program for Japanese retirees. The first of the Japanese baby boomers have just begun to retire and the total value of their pension funds could exceed US\$44 billion. Around the world, countries, cities, counties, you name it, are vying for a piece of that pie. Puli, which yes, does sound like 'poo village' ('li' is village in Chinese), is one of these cities.

Unfortunately, Puli's dog poop problem was not to the liking of the fastidious Japanese couple. And they weren't shy about venting their frustration. The you-know-what hit the fan, and the couple soon found themselves hiding out in a police station as an angry mob hunted for the slanderers (for as everyone knows, Puli is the jewel of Taiwan). In the end, however, most people slowly came to admit that the Japanese couple were right; like too many other small Taiwanese towns, Puli was butt ugly, dirty, polluted, and strewn with dog faeces.

Such admission could not help but translate into robust government action. Puli declared the 10th of every month clean-up day. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), not to be outdone, calculated the number of stray dogs in the country, divided that by the number of towns, divided that further by three (as one-third of dogs are reported to do their business wherever they like) and determined that no town should have more than 55 pieces of poop on the streets at any time. Any more and the town risked losing government funding.

How effective has the program been? Well, a few months later another couple, by coincidence also called Nakamura, arrived in Puli and their first impression was 'very good'. Mrs Nakamura went so far as to say the town had the best living environment and quality of life in the world. Mrs. Nakamura is Taiwanese, by the way.

Truly in Puli's defense, however, I did only see the one dog get away with leaving his lunch remains behind. And there really wasn't that much poop anywhere else. If progress continues like this, there may come a day the town will have to consider changing its name.

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

Like the Japanese, Taiwanese are quick and eager to adopt new technology. Even temples have gotten into the spirit. At the Chung Tai Chan temple in Puli, for example, a special Windows program and a 2m-wide LCD screen help members locate their donation plaques among the thousands on the walls of a vast chamber. In other temples around the country, it's quite common to see sales of virtual candles, online fortune telling, and even online booking for special religious services (to be held at a real temple), such as blessings to rid one of bad fortune during inauspicious years.

For years the EPA has been trying to get Taiwanese to go virtual in their burning of ghost paper. During Tomb Sweeping Day and Ghost Month, over 100,000 tonnes of thick paper pads are burnt as offerings to the spirits, sending the pm12 and CO2 ratings to the heavens. To mitigate the effects of the bonfires on air quality, the EPA has tried both central sites (with some success) and online temple sites, where people can make virtual offerings of ghost money (with less success).

It's always an uphill battle when tradition comes up against the environment. But we honestly suspect it won't be that long before virtual ghost-money burning catches on. After all, it's so much more convenient to burn online, and in a country that has the highest per capita ratio of 7-Elevens in the world, nothing sells like convenience.

people get their picture taken here, this is just a park sign. The plaque on the top of **Mt Hut-oushan** (虎頭山; Hùtóushān) officially marks the geographical centre of Taiwan. To reach the plaque, walk up the stairs located 50m or so to the right of the menhir and follow the trail up. Past the plaque, the trail continues to Carp Lake. It's about a one-hour walk.

CARP LAKE 鯉魚潭

Just on the outskirts of Puli lies **Carp Lake** (Lǐyú Tán), a very pretty, willow-lined pond with a lush green mountain backdrop. Around the lake itself you'll find pavilions, restaurants and cafés overlooking the water (but not so many to spoil things). In recent years a couple good hotels have opened up, one offering hot springs. Come mid-week as the place is small and you don't want to share it with too many others.

SOLAS RESORT 天泉溫泉會館

This **resort** (Tiānquán Wēnquán Huìguǎn; ☎ 298 8187; www.solasresort.com; hot springs NT250; ☎ 2pm-10pm) has attractive modern outdoor public pools, and facilities that include a unique wrap-around jet contraption, and a long trench with picnic tables and swings built inside. The general public can also use the hot springs, but you need to bring your own towels.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Puli is a little dreary: prices are going up as quality is going down.

This is unlikely to change as investment is going to Carp Lake or Sun Moon Lake. If you have your own vehicle, or even not, consider staying at Sun Moon Lake as it's only 15km away. You can also stay at Carp Lake or 15 to 20 minutes further east down Hwy 14 at one of several small, midrange hot-spring resorts.

Tianyi Hotel (Tiānyì Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 998 100, ext 2; 299 Shian Rd; 西安路299號; d/tw NT1600/1700, weekdays NT1000/1200) The hotel is in downtown Puli. Rooms are basic, but clean. The weekend price is far too high.

Lakeside Resort (天水蓮大飯店; Tiānshuǐlián Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 290 3411; www.lakesideresort.com.tw; r from NT4000) Overlooking Carp Lake (actually built right over it) is this smart little hotel with comfortably furnished rooms. Those with lakeside views cost NT600 more. There are 25% weekday discounts, and room rates include free use of the hot springs at Solas Resort (left) across the lake.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of cheap noodle stands, simple restaurants and cafés around Puli, especially on Zhongzheng Rd south of Renai Park. For something fancier, or just more scenic, head to Carp Lake.

Carp Lake Restaurant On Water (台揚水上餐廳; Tái yáng Shuǐshàng Cāntīng; ☎ 298 5445; http://tai-young.myweb.hinet.net; dishes from NT80; ☎ 9am-8pm). This vegetarian restaurant sits above the lake and features authentic hand-puppet theatre

around 8pm on evenings when groups have booked a show (usually on weekends).

Fu Hua Square Restaurant (Fúhuá Guǎngchǎng; ☎ 291 4788; 1099 Shinyi Rd; average dish NT150) The vegetarian dim sum here is a favourite with the monks and nuns from Chung Tai Chan Temple, and for good reason. It's not often you get Cantonese vegetarian-style cooking in Taiwan (especially with a real Cantonese chef). The restaurant is just off Shinyi Rd in a small square with an arched entrance.

Pu Le (Kingdom) Restaurant (Jīndū Cāntīng; ☎ 299 5096; 236 Shinyi Rd; per person NT300) Nantou County (of which Puli is a part) is the biggest flower-growing region in Taiwan. At Pu Le Restaurant, gorgeous-looking and tasting dishes are decorated and even cooked with fresh flowers. It's best to come with as many people as possible so you can try a number of dishes.

Getting There & Away

A visit to Puli could be part of an extended visit to the Sun Moon Lake region or a weekend getaway from Taichung. From Taichung, the Taichung Bus Company runs frequent buses to Puli (NT150, 1 hour). To Sun Moon Lake, catch a bus (NT54, 30 minutes, every hour) with the **Nantou Bus Company** (☎ 298 4031; 342 Zhongzheng Rd).

AOWANDA NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION AREA

奧萬大國家森林遊樂區

As you drive along Hwy 14 east of Puli, you reach the mountain community of **Wushe** (霧社) in less than an hour. It's very scenic up here and if you are interested in Taiwanese history there is a monument (just up the main road on the left) to the Wushe Incident, the last large-scale revolt against the Japanese, which led to a massacre of Atayal aborigines.

Half an hour or so south, down a long and winding road, is the forest recreation area of **Aowanda** (Aowàndà; <http://awdonline-eng.forest.gov.tw/stop.php>; adult/child NT200/150). It's well worth a stop here, or even an overnight stay in the quaint wooden cabins (NT1500) surrounded by plum and maple trees. Aowanda has a **visitor centre** (☎ 049-297 4511; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) with maps and brochures in English.

The park ranges in altitude from 1100m to 2600m, making it a cool retreat from the heat in summer. On the developed trails you can walk from one end of the reserve to the other

in about two hours. All signs are bilingual and trails are simple to follow.

Aowanda is famous around Taiwan for its **maple trees** (fēngshù). November to late January when the leaves change colours is a busy time for the park. **Bird-watching** is also popular here and a visit to Aowanda is usually on the itinerary for tours from Western countries. In all, 120 species of bird live in the park, and of the 15 endemic species of birds in Taiwan, 10 can be found here, including Swinhoe's pheasant and the Taiwan partridge. The park has even set up a **bird-watching platform** (shǎngniǎotái) and benches, one of which bears an amusing dedication to Jo Ann McKenzie, a Canadian twitcher who has been to Aowanda many times.

From Taichung, catch a **Nantou Bus Company** (☎ 2225 6418; 35-8 Shuangshi Rd) bus (NT270, 2½ hours) on weekends or holidays from November to February. The bus leaves at 7.30am.

NENGGAO (NENG-GAO/NENGAO) CROSS-ISLAND TRAIL

能高越嶺國家步道

This 200-year-old high mountain trail (Nénggāo Yuèlǐng Guójiā Bùdào; http://trail.forest.gov.tw/NationalTrailSystem_En/TR_H_02.htm) was first used by the Taiya to help them ply the trade between Puli and Hualien. During the Japanese occupation it was expanded and used, ironically, to police aboriginal tribes. During the latter half of the 20th century, the path was expanded further by Taipower, which used it when laying high-voltage powerlines. (Hence you will sometimes also hear the trail called the 'Nenggao Powerline Trail').

Today the path offers a fantastically scenic hike for those really looking to get into the heart of the central mountains. Depending on how you tackle the trail, it is for the most part not terribly demanding for anyone in decent shape. From the trailhead at **Tunyuan** (屯原) most people spend the first day walking to **Tienchi** (天池; 2860m). The elevation gain is 800m and it takes the average hiker about five or six hours to walk (allow three hours for the downhill return). Tienchi has a cabin where you'll find beds, a kitchen and water. You can also camp.

Many hikers use Tienchi as a from which-base to climb nearby peaks including **Chilai South Peak** (奇萊主山南峰; 3358m) and **Neng-gaoshan North Peak** (能高北峰; 3184m). The trails to these peaks are not as well marked or

as wide as the cross-island trail and are more demanding, but they can be done together on one long day with a return to Tienchi cabin. There's also a beautiful high waterfall, just a few hundred metres from the cabin, that's worth visiting.

On the second or third day most people return to Tunyuan to conclude their hike, but it's also possible to continue on to Liyu Lake in Hualien County. The way is clear and takes about two days from Tienchi. Note that the second day from Tienchi you will be on paved surface the whole time. Fortunately, the way is downhill and there is almost no traffic. If you need them, there are buses at Liyu Lake to take you to Hualien city.

Information

The Nenggao Cross-Island Trail is part of the National Trail System (p329). Only a mountain permit is needed to hike and one can be picked up at the **police station** (☎ 049-280 2520) in Wushe or at the **Ministry of the Interior** (Map p88; ☎ 02-2321 9011; 7 Zhongxiao E Rd, sec.1, Taipei). For information about the cabin at Tienchi, contact the **Nantou Forestry Bureau** (☎ 049-236 5226; <http://nantou.forest.gov.tw/eg-1.asp>).

Getting There & Away

It's best to do this hike with your own vehicle or with arrangements for someone to drop you off and pick you up (either at the Tunyuan trailhead or over on the Hualien County side). To get to the Tunyuan trailhead drive along Hwy 14 to the 94km mark. You'll see a sign in English directing you to turn right to the trail. Follow the road to the end and park. The trail begins here.

Past Wushe, Hwy 14 splits into Hwy 14甲, which heads north, and Hwy 14, which heads east to the trail. Note also that a side road later splits off Hwy 14 east to Lushan Hot Springs, a grubby, overdeveloped hot-spring resort.

HEHUANSHAN (HOHUANSHAN) FOREST RECREATION AREA

合歡山森林遊樂區

The last interesting stop on Hwy 14甲 before the descent into Taroko Gorge is **Hehuanshan** (Héhuānshān Sēnlín Yóulè Qū; <http://recreate.forest.gov.tw/>; ☎ 049-280 2732). At over 3000m, the recreation area sits mostly above the tree line, and the bright, grassy green hills of the Mt Hehuan Range roll on and on, often disappearing into the fog or a spectacular sea of clouds.

Hwy14甲 passes right through the park and at Wuling saddle (not to be confused with the forest recreation area called Wuling) it reaches the highest elevation of any road in Taiwan at 3275m. It snows up here in winter and when it does the road becomes a skating rink, parking lot and playground for the Taiwanese so expect crowds then.

Summer is delightfully cool, and highly scenic as different alpine flowers bloom from May to September. Autumn and spring are excellent times for hiking. In the autumn the 'sea of clouds' formations are at their best.

Despite its chilly temperatures (12°C average) Hehuanshan has a remarkable amount of plant and animal life to admire. It's even considered a good spot for birding. Check out the website for details.

Activities

There are a number of short hikes starting close to Ho-huan Cottage. Most have signs in English at the trailhead but you are advised to still get a proper map of the area (see p331). Be aware that fog or rain can come in suddenly in the mountains so always be prepared with warm clothing and some kind of rain protection. Be aware also that if you have driven straight up from lower altitudes your body may take time to get used to exercising at 3000m plus.

The trail to **Hehuanshan East Peak** (合歡山東峰; Héhuānshān DōngFēng; 3421m) starts across the road from the cottage. It's about an hour to the top.

The marked trailhead to **Hehuanshan North Peak** (合歡山北峰; Héhuānshān Běifēng; 3422m) starts a few kilometres north of the cottage off the highway. It's three to four hours return.

The trailhead for **Shimenshan** (石門山; Shíménshān; 3237m) is just north of the cottage on the east/left side of the road. It's a short walk to the top and people often go here to watch the sunrise.

The paved path up to **Hehuanshan Main Peak** (合歡山主峰; Héhuānshān Zhǔfēng; 3417m) starts just before Wuling and takes about two hours return.

The trail up to **Hehuan Jian Shan** (合歡尖山; Héhuānjiānshān; 3217m) starts just behind the cottage. It takes about 15 minutes to reach the top.

For longer, overnight hikes check out the website.

Sleeping & Eating

You can stay overnight in the very spartan **Ho-huan Cottage** (合歡山莊; Héhuānshānzhuāng; ☎ 049-280 2732; dm/tr with bathroom incl breakfast & dinner NT480/2650). The cottage has a simple overview map of the area and trails. You're advised to book ahead in winter and on weekends. There's a 30% discount from Sunday to Thursday. Bring a sleeping bag, towel, your own toiletries and some food. Simple dishes can also be picked up from vendors at Wuling.

Getting There & Away

There is one Fengyuan Bus Company bus a day (8am, NT393, 4½ hours) to Hehuanshan from Taichung. You could rent a scooter in Jiaoshi but it's a long ride. Consider a car.

If you want to continue north from Hehuanshan, catch the Fengyuan bus as it passes Hehuanshan heading north to Lishan (around 12.30pm daily, NT149, 2½ hours). The bus arrives in Lishan around 3pm. There's little to keep you here these days so take the 4pm bus to beautiful Wuling Recreation Area (NT62, one hour). From here you can continue to Ilan and Taipei.

ALISHAN NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

☎ 05

The Alishan National Scenic Area covers a region of over 37,000 hectares. From a starting altitude of 300m in the west at Chukou, the land quickly rises to heights of more than 2600m. As a result, the variety of plant and animal life is nothing short of amazing. One of the best ways to appreciate this variety is on the narrow-gauge Alishan forest train, which, in the space of 3½ hours (71km), takes you through three vegetative zones.

Don't confuse the Alishan National Scenic Area with the popular Alishan Forest Recreation Area, which is where the small train takes you. The forest recreation area is but one part of the national scenic area. Other areas include tea-growing communities such as Rueli and Fengshan, and aboriginal villages such as Shanmei, where the Zhou are trying to keep their culture and environment as healthy as possible.

Alishan can be as safe or as challenging as you want it to be. You can sip tea or swim in rivers. Your meals can come from a hotel kitchen or a rough barbecue pit. The forest recreation area offers a cool, relaxing, well-developed mountain retreat, while smaller towns offer homestays and a more traditional way of life.

The whole region is also perfect for just cruising around on a scooter. The roads are in good shape, signs in English are ubiquitous, and you're never really that far from a place to eat or sleep.

You can visit Alishan any time of year, though be careful in summer as rains can and do wash roads out. Do not go up during or after a typhoon or earthquake. Be aware that the higher up you go the colder it gets, and even in summer it can be pretty chilly at night in Alishan Village.

Check out the official website (www.ali.org.tw) before you go. There's information on accommodation, eating, transport and activities, as well as the history and culture of almost every village and town.

CHIAYI 嘉義

☎ 05 / pop 270,341

While Chiayi (Jiayi) is not part of the Alishan National Scenic Area, almost every traveller will have to pass through here on the way in. The narrow-gauge train to the Alishan Forest Recreation Area leaves from Chiayi train station, as do buses and taxis. There are a few better-than-OK sights to recommend in Chiayi so plan to spend a half-day or so before moving on.

Orientation

Chiayi lies directly on the tropic of Cancer, which nearly cuts Taiwan in two. Central Chiayi is small enough to walk across in 30 minutes, though air pollution often makes it unpleasant to do so. Most road signs have pinyin on them. Taxis are plentiful except in the area west of the train tracks.

Information

For information about the restaurant and entertainment scene, pick up a copy of the excellent monthly *FYT South Magazine*, which includes a pull-out map that is updated regularly. Copies are available at the visitor centre, many bars and restaurants in town, or you can download the content at the website www.w

.taiwanfun.com. There are usually internet cafés around the train station. They come and go, so ask at the visitor centre for the latest.

Chiayi City Government (www.chiayi.gov.tw/newweb/index_english.htm) Good for general information about the city, including sights and activities for tourists.

First Commercial Bank (307 Zhongshan Rd) ATMs and currency exchange. There are also numerous banks and ATMs on Renai Rd near the train station.

Laundromat (701 Jhongheng Rd; ☎ 24hr) This DIY place is just up the road from the Jiaxin Hotel.

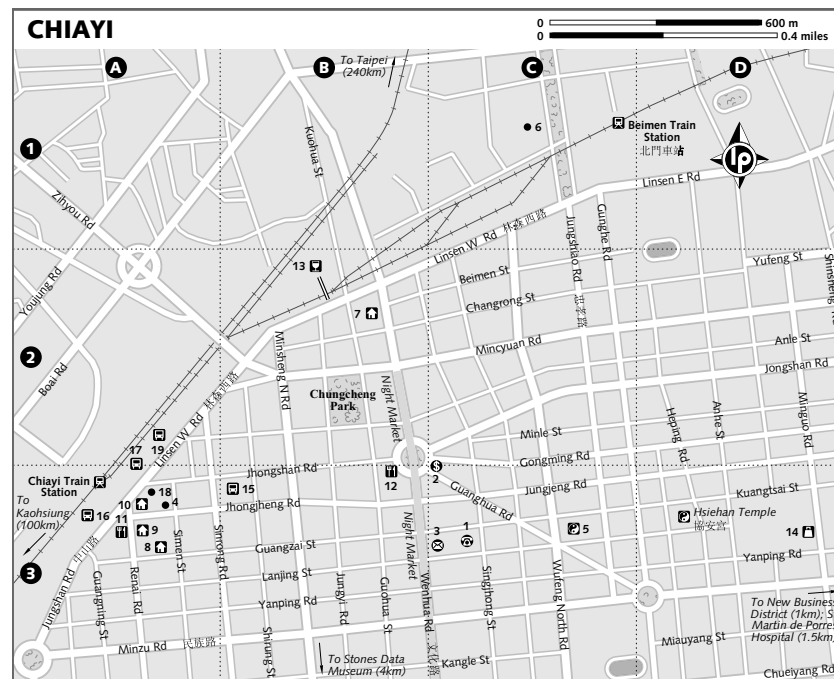
St Martin De Porres Hospital (☎ 275 6000; 565 Daya Rd, sec.2)

Visitor Information Centre (☎ 225 6649; ☎ 8.30-5pm) The centre, inside Chiayi train station, provides brochures and travel information in English about Chiayi, Alishan and pretty much anywhere else you want to go. Staff speak English.

Sights

COCHIN CERAMIC MUSEUM 交趾陶館

This museum (Jiāozhī Guǎn; ☎ 278 8225; 275 Jungshiau Rd; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 1.30-5pm Wed-Sun) is one of the best small museums dedicated to a single folk art in Taiwan. Cochin (*zhāo zhī tǎo*) is a low-fired, bright-coloured-glaze style



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of ceramic and is often used to make figurines and wall decorations. You've probably seen cheap work in tourist shops around the island. But much of the work here, especially that of Master Yeh (1826–91), is outstanding. For example, the set of figurines with lively faces performing what look like different martial arts gestures: you'd swear they had muscles and bone under their robes, so realistic is the motion captured by the artist.

Cochin artists have been working in the Chiayi area since the Qing dynasty and have won praise from as far afield as Japan and France. The museum is in the basement of the **Chiayi Cultural Centre** (Jiāyìshì Wénhuà Zhōngxīn), across from the Beimen train station.

STONES DATA MUSEUM 石頭資料庫

The **museum** (Shítóu Zīliào kù; ☎ 235 5333; 366 Huzihnei Rd; admission free; ☎ 8.30am–5.30pm) is an astonishing personal collection of strangely coloured and shaped stones, minerals, fossils and statues. There are rocks that look like craggy mountain ranges; brightly coloured mineral specimens from all over the world; meteorites; dozens of oversized monkey statues; and a fossil collection that also contains great reproductions of the skeleton of a prehistoric elk (3.4m in length), several dinosaur heads, a mastodon with full tusks, and human skulls from the australopithecines (Lucy) up to modern *Homo sapiens*. And this just starts to describe the collection. Kids will love it here.

To get to the museum take a taxi or drive south down Minsheng S Rd.

TEMPLES

Chiayi has a number of beautiful temples scattered around the city. **Chenghuang Temple** (Chénghuáng Miào), also known as City God Temple, is particularly fascinating for the array of elaborately carved and dressed statues of demons and guards.

Sleeping

There are many cheap hotels scattered around the train-station area. Those with a Youth Travel Pass (see p328) can stay in the Chiayi City Labour Recreation Centre but note it's quite a distance from the train station and no cheaper than the hotels listed below.

Yixing Hotel (Yìxíng Lǚquǎn; ☎ 227 9344; fax 227 9345; 730 Zhongjheng Rd; 中正路730號; s/d/tw NT450/600/850)

This is probably the cheapest place in town that's reasonably clean and comfortable. There are only two single rooms.

Jiāxīn Hotel (Jiāxīn Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 222 2280; 687 Zhongjheng Rd; 中正路687號; d/tw from NT700/1200; ☎) Rooms are clean, not too small, and overall offer good value for money. Some rooms have ADSL (for NT100 more).

Country Hotel (Guóyuan Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 223 6336; fax 223 6345; 678 Guangzai St; 光彩街678號; d/tw NT1260/2300; ☎) This place is more expensive than the others but offers a car park next door. Usual weekday rates for a double are NT950.

Chinatrust Hotel (Zhōngxīn Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 229 2233; 257 Wenhua Rd; 文化路257號; d/tw NT3600/4000; ☎) One of the top hotels in town, offering a 30% discount on weekdays. Facilities include a business centre, small fitness room and VIP lounge, restaurant and café. Some of the staff speak English.

Eating & Drinking

There are many inexpensive generic restaurants and cafés on Zhongshan and Renai Rds and around Chungcheng Park. The **night market** (Wenhua Rd; ☎ 5pm–2am), between Minyuan and Chuei Yang Rds, is also good for cheap food. For fancier fare try the **Cantonese restaurant** (☎ 229 2233; 257 Wenhua Rd; dishes NT100; ☎ lunch & dinner) on the 3rd floor of the Chinatrust Hotel.

If you head east on Minzu Rd a kilometre or two beyond the boundaries of our map (the road turns into Daya Rd) you'll hit the new business area of town. Many nice cafés and restaurants have opened up recently.

Pen Shui Turkey Rice (Pēnshuǐ Huójīfān; 325 Zhongshan Rd; dishes NT40; ☎ 8.30am–10pm) Everyone in Taiwan knows that Chiayi is famous for its turkey rice dish (*huō jī ròu fān*). This is the place that started it all over 60 years ago.

Gongbing Vegetarian Restaurant (Gōngbīng Dàizírán Sùshíguǎn; ☎ 227 3461; 457 Renai Rd; meals around NT100; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Offers buffet-style vegetarian food.

Calgary Pub (Kǎjiǎlì Měishì Cānyīndiàn; ☎ 227 1626; 19 Lane 351, Guohua St; beer NT150; ☎ 6pm–2am) This long-running Western-style pub is busy most nights. The crowd is a mix of expats and locals. Western-style dishes (NT150) such as hamburgers and pizza are staples on the menu. Even though the address says Guohua St, approach from Linsen W Rd (coming from the train-station area) and turn left down the alley just before Guohua St.

Shopping

Original En Dian Cookie Shop (Ēndiānsū Chuàngshī-diàn; ☎ 238 7898; 123 Minguo Rd) Chiayi is famous for square cookies (*ēndiān sū*) and this is the store that invented them. The cookies taste a lot like Graham Crackers and cost only NT50 for a box.

Getting There & Away

Chiayi is the gateway to the Alishan National Scenic Area. To get there you can take a train, bus or (our favourite) hired scooter.

TRAIN

If you are taking the small train to Alishan, note that you can board at Beimen station, northeast of the main station. This station is less crowded and has a few sights nearby, such as the Cochin Ceramic Museum and a Japanese-era station just across the tracks, to help you pass the time while waiting for the train.

There are two trains a day to Alishan (NT399, 3½ hours, 9am and 1.30pm). The earlier train is recommended as afternoon fog in the mountains can obscure views. If you catch the train at Beimen station the schedule is slightly later. During Chinese New Year and other holidays there are more trains scheduled each day. It is advisable to reserve tickets (☎ 276 8094, up to two months in advance) beforehand as travel agents and hotels tend to buy them up. You can make online reservations in Chinese only (<https://forestrailway.forest.gov.tw>).

Trains to/from Taipei (fast/slow NT600/462, three/4½ hours) and Kaohsiung (fast/slow NT248/160, one/two hours) run from morning till late at night.

High-Speed Rail

The HSR station is pretty far from downtown Chiayi but there is a shuttle bus (NT42, 40 minutes, every 20 min) between the two. The stop in Chiayi is behind the train station. Look for the BRT (bus rapid transit) signpost. At the time of writing there were trains (NT1080, 90 minutes) about every hour to/from Taipei.

BOAT

The **Tomorrow Star** runs between Putai (near Chiayi) and Penghu's Makung (NT650, 70 minutes). For inquiries call **Makung Tomorrow Star** (☎ 926 0666).

BUS

Buses to Alishan (NT214, 2½ hours) usually leave every two hours from early morning to late afternoon from the **Chiayi County Bus Company** (☎ 224 3140) station to the right of the train station as you exit. The full schedule (in English) is available at the visitor centre or at the bus station itself.

There are Kuo Kuang Hao buses (NT368, three hours) to/from Taipei every hour.

Getting Around

You can hire scooters (NT200 per day) from several shops across from the train station with an international driving licence. Travelling on a scooter up to the Alishan National Scenic Area is highly recommended. Take the old narrow Hwy 159 for less traffic and a pure mountain experience.

FENCHIHU–RUEILI HISTORIC TRAIL

奮瑞古道

Fenchiu (奮起湖; Fènqǐhú) is a tiny village (estimated population 200) at the halfway point on the narrow-gauge Alishan railway. Just a few years ago the place had a great remote outpost feel to it and we highly recommended a stop here. But those days have gone. The 'old street' now has a shiny 7-Eleven on it, completely ruining the atmosphere, and the merchants have traded their rural friendliness for indifference – unless you want to buy something. It's also on the tour bus route and even midweek you'll get packs of silly-shoed urbanites treading through the cedar forests making noise and leaving garbage.

Is there a reason to stop here now? Yes, and it's even better than the old one. An old walking trail, called the Fenchiu–Rueili Historic Trail (Fèn–Ruì Gǔdào) was recently opened up from, you guessed it, Fenchiu all the way to Rueili. The trail is long (7km) and steep enough to discourage the tourists, but it's not so long and steep that anyone in average shape should miss out on it. An average walker will take four hours, though longer with a heavy pack. Much of the trail runs through bamboo forests that look like something out of a wushu film, though some of it is along narrow farm roads.

From Fenchiu train station it's about a five-minute walk to the trailhead. Just cross the train tracks after you get off, and head up. You'll pass through an interesting grove of

square bamboo (四方竹; *sifāng zhú*) and within minutes reach the road. Turn left and walk for another few minutes until the road takes a sharp bend to the right. Head into the parking lot to the left and you'll see the map board and start of the trail. The map is in English and along the clear trail you'll see markers and posts at every junction. With these in place, and our map to guide you, there's little danger of getting lost, though a compass is still useful as some of the map boards are placed backwards (see p331).

In Rueili the trail ends (or begins) on the main road into town, close to hotels and restaurants. A short side route at the end takes you to the visitor centre.

It's cool in this part of the country so come prepared. Fenchihu has an average temperature of 19°C in summer and 12°C in winter.

RUEILI (JUILI) 瑞里

☎ 05 / pop 970 / elevation 1000m

Rueili (Ruili) is a small, quiet, temperate-mountain community that thrives on tourism and tea growing. It's always been one of our favourite places in the Alishan region and the fact that we can now walk there from the Fenchihu train station makes it all that more special. Rueili excels in eye candy

for the nature-lover. There are panoramic mountain scenes, bamboo forests, caves, waterfalls and historic walking trails. Come midweek (especially late autumn or winter) and it's practically yours alone.

One distinctive local feature that's highly commendable is that Rueili people have long been working to preserve the environment. As a result, the region is not only clean, green and pesticide-free, but it's one of the best places in the country for watching fireflies.

You can visit any time of year, though with the altitude winter nights can be chilly so bring warm clothing. Most hotel rooms aren't heated.

Information

Ruitai Tourist Centre (☎ 250 1070; 1-1 Rueili Village; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) offers brochures (in English) and a very knowledgeable, friendly staff of locals. These people really love their land and want to share its treasures with you. The centre covers not only Rueili but nearby (and even more remote) Taihe (太和, Tàihé) and Rueifong (瑞峰, Ruìfēng). The centre has internet access (for checking email). Note that there are various maps of Rueili around, but ours is the most accurate according to the staff at the tourist centre (who have helped us develop it over the years).

TAIWAN'S HIGH-SPEED RAIL: BRINGING THE BOONDOCKS TO YOU

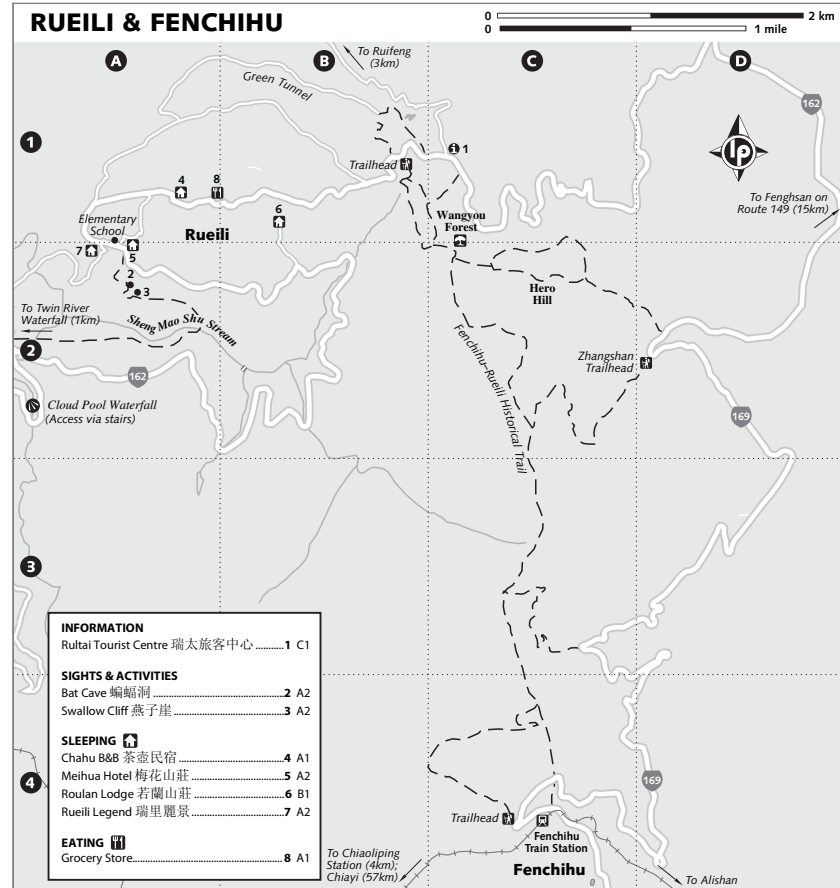
It's a slick system, with state-of-the-art Shinkansen technology from Japan, and it gets you from one city in Taiwan to the next in record time.

Or does it? If you look at the map you'll see that many High-Speed Rail (HSR) stations in Taiwan are literally in the sticks. When you factor in time spent on shuttle services from the HSR to urban centres, the reported savings start to look pretty meagre. On one test run from Taipei it us took a total of two hours, 40 minutes to get to Taichung on the HSR (this included getting to the station from home and all wait times). Return time on the regular fast train: two hours, 45 minutes.

Now friends complained that this test was not really fair as we could have taken a taxi from the HSR station to Taichung (yes, at an even greater cost), and in any case we did miss the first connecting shuttle train to Taichung getting a burger (OK, so subtract 15 minutes). But still, this is just not what we expected from high-speed rail.

The problem is that in many ways the system was built for a Taiwan that doesn't exist yet. Take Chiayi's station, for example. Eventually, it will be surrounded by a modern community of wide streets, green parks, sewage lines and building codes. Nearby will be, among other things, the southern branch of the National Palace Museum and a bus hub with direct links to Alishan. Visitors to Taiwan will be able to fly into Taoyuan Airport, catch the HSR to Chiayi station, see some great local sites, and return home all without having to deal with the traffic, noise, pollution and appalling architecture of Chiayi (or any other small city in Taiwan, for that matter).

It will be a powerful boost to tourism for sure, and we look forward to the day the system all starts to come together. In the meantime, look carefully at the true times of your journey on the HSR, and decide whether those few minutes saved really are worth the extra money.



Sights & Activities

FIREFLIES 螢火蟲

Rueili is one of the best places in Taiwan to see these amazing little creatures (*yinghuochong*) show off their bioluminescent skills. From March to June the mountainsides literally sparkle as countless fireflies turn each other on throughout the night. Try to get a copy of *The Love Light: A Guide to the Great Alishan Fireflies*, a free brochure highlighting the different types of fireflies in the area.

WATERFALLS

Rueili's most impressive fall is the **Cloud Pool Waterfall** (Yúntán Pùbù), which can be reached by a series of steep stairs. The return walk from the car park, which is just past the

22km mark on County Rd 122, takes about 45 minutes.

There is also the **Twin River Waterfall** (Shuāngxi Pùbù), which can visited as part of a trip to Swallow Cliff (p238)

RUITAI OLD TRAIL 瑞太古道

This **hiking trail** (Ruitai Gùdào) was once used for travel between Rueili and Taihe. Now it's a very enjoyable two- or three-hour walk through bamboo forests that look like they came from a movie set. The trailhead starts about 1km or so west of the visitor centre (there's also an access point right across from the centre) and is well marked with signs and map boards in English. Note that this trail is part of the overall system that connects

Fenchihu to Rueili via the Fenchihu–Rueili Historic Trail (see p235).

Fifty metres before the trailhead a set of stairs lead up to the **Green Tunnel** (Lùsè Sùidào), a length of road sealed off from the sky by tall, overhanging bamboo.

SWALLOW CLIFF 燕子崖

The **cliff** (yànzǐyái) is a large rock overhang pitted with the work of countless swallows who have built nests in the soft stone over the years. The hike is for the Stairmaster crowd (there are 1600 stone steps) and takes one hour return. Along the way you pass the 1000-year-old **Bat Cave** (Biǎnfú Dòng). If you continue for another hour you'll reach the Twin River Waterfall (Shuāngxī Pùbù), which is not that interesting, though the canyon it flows through looks good for river tracing (suòxi); the sport of walking and climbing up a riverbed).

The steps to Swallow Cliff begin across from the Meihua Hotel. The trailhead is well marked.

Sleeping

The tourist centre can help with homestays and hotel bookings.

Meihua Hotel (梅花山莊; Méihuā Shānzhūāng; ☎ 250 1668; 103-1 Rueili Village; 瑞里村103-1號; d/tw NT1500/2000) It's tiled-floor rooms are spotlessly clean but nondescript except for the quaint mosaic-tiled bathtubs. There are excellent mountain views from the 2nd floor and weekend and weekday discounts of 20 and 40% respectively so ask.

Chahu B&B (茶壺民宿; Cháhú Mínsù; ☎ 250 1806; http://052501349.travel-web.com.tw in Mandarin but with pictures; 100-6 Rueili Village; 瑞里村100-6號; d/tw NT2000/3000) Set in a spanking-new modern building, this cosy place offers rooms with soft beds, high ceilings and excellent views. On the 2nd floor there is a large balcony and a common area for reading or watching DVDs. Breakfast is served at the restaurant next door. There are weekday discounts of 20%.

Rueili Legend (瑞里麗景景觀民宿; Ruili Lǐjǐng; ☎ 250 2288; http://052502288.travel-web.com.tw in Mandarin but with pictures; 105 Rueili Village; 瑞里村105號; d/tw 2800/3200, weekdays NT2000/2400). Another new kid on the block, boasting about the best views you can find here from their patio deck. In the late afternoon you can witness a 'sea of clouds' fill up the deep valley below and the

sun setting over the distant mountains (the patio faces due west). Oh, and the rooms are pretty good here too with nice soft beds and simple modern comforts.

Roulan Lodge (若蘭山莊; Ruòlán Shānzhūāng; ☎ 250 1210; fax 250 1555; 10 Rueili Village; 瑞里村幼葉林10之1號; d/tw NT1800/2400, cabins from NT3200) This has long been one of the most popular places to stay in Rueili. Every night the owners, who have often appeared on Taiwanese TV for their efforts to preserve the natural heritage of Rueili, show a film (English available) to introduce fireflies and the local history. They then invite guests to make tea and traditional snacks in a quaint old room filled with farm tools and curios from the past. During firefly season, nightly tours to prime watching areas are arranged. But book early: in 2007, rooms for all of April were reserved by early January. There is a weekend discount of 30%. The rooms above the reception area are getting pretty old and are not as good value as other places in town for same price (of course those other places don't have the nightly entertainment). The cabins though are lovely and range from aging but full of character to sleek and modern. The lower cabins are prime spots for watching fireflies. As the owner says, you must keep your mouth shut down here, not even whisper a 'wow!' or the fireflies (which are so numerous) will fly into your mouth.

Eating

Most hotels have their own restaurants though there are scattered places around town as well. Most are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but don't try to eat too late midweek. An average set meal will cost NT100 to NT200. There's a small grocery store in town selling instant noodles, canned goods, eggs, fruit and veggies, and drinks.

Getting There & Around

If you aren't hiking from Fenchihu, take a Chiayi County Bus Company bus (NT189, two hours) from Chiayi. At the time of writing the schedule was 9.30am and 4.30pm.

You can also take the Alishan train to Chi-aoiping (交力坪; Jiāolǐpíng; NT174) and then call a hotel in Rueili to pick you up. If there are enough of you, the hotel probably won't charge anything. Otherwise, the pick-up fee will be around NT300.

FENGSHAN 豐山

☎ 05 / pop363 / elevation 750m

In the strongly aboriginal Alishan National Scenic Area, Fengshan (Fēngshān) is a bit of an anomaly in that it is exclusively ethnic Chinese. This doesn't make it any less interesting a place to visit and if you are tired of the tame resort atmosphere at Alishan Village, a scooter ride to this remote corner of Taiwan will reward you on so many levels.

First of all, there's an appealing ruggedness to the place. Stratified canyons rise up sharply from stony riverbeds, and dark green mountains fill up half the sky. The village and the pesticide-free fields of tea, sugar cane and mountain vegetables seem as if they remain there only by the grace of God. And in many ways they do, as typhoons and landslides (and the occasional earthquake) ravage the area almost yearly.

Outside of the little village there is precious little development and few good roads (though road reconstruction is ubiquitous). In fact, without a 4WD vehicle you will probably have to walk to most sights, though a scooter can probably make it if you are careful.

You can visit all year round. Summer is a great time to visit for swimming and river tracing. The weather is more stable than in the north, and there are no daily afternoon showers to dampen your plans. Be careful when typhoons come, as rivers become dangerously swollen and roads get washed out. It's always best to call ahead to check on road conditions before you head out.

Autumn and winter are dry and warm and a good time for hiking and exploring canyons.

Orientation & Information

Fengshan village is pretty much in the centre of the three sights we list in the next section. There's a basic map of the area available in local B&Bs. Bring a compass to help orientate yourself.

Sights & Activities

The various natural sights around Fengshan include **Jialong Waterfall** (蛟龍瀑布; Jiāolóng Pùbù), which at around 1000m is the highest waterfall in Taiwan. It's bone dry in winter but has a magnificent flow in summer. The fall is southeast of the village, about an hour's walk.

We've never seen so many deep valleys cut into a picturesque landscape as in Fengshan. One of them, **Shimeng Valley** (石夢谷; Shímèng Gǔ), a rough canyon west of the village, is a must-visit in summer as it has one deep **swimming hole** after another. It takes about an hour to walk to the area with the swimming holes and three hours to the valley itself. The trail is actually a very rough road almost impassable even with a jeep.

Shipan Valley (石盤峭谷; Shípán Qiàogǔ) used to have six waterfalls along its hour-long path but several of them have been destroyed over the years by earthquakes and typhoons. It's still a scenic place to explore, and during summer the remaining falls have a heavy flow. There's an interesting rock-climbing area at the end of the trail. The valley is about a 40-minute walk north of the village.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a few local eateries around the village and the B&Bs have their own restaurants.

Fengye Shan Zhuang B&B (楓葉山莊; Fēngyè Shānzhūāng; ☎ 266 1197; fongshan123@yahoo.com.tw; d/tw NT1800/2500, weekdays NT1500/2200) Has simple rooms in a guesthouse with spacious grounds located down a quiet rural lane. The owner is a very friendly, helpful local who really knows the land. To get to the B&B, keep going down the main road after crossing the bridge, and turn left at the corner just past an orange house on the right. Take the second left and the B&B is prominent on the right.

Shopping

You usually can't buy tea in Fengshan as it's mostly grown for individual consumption, but you can purchase unusual coloured teapots (NT1500) made from calcified limestone. The teapots have a light sandy colour (they look like you could eat them) and sparkle as if loaded with fool's gold. Calcified limestone is in fact sometimes called 'gold-plated stone'.

Getting There & Around

Fengshan is about a 40-minute drive (15km) from Rueili. As you drive up county road 149甲 (169 on some maps) you'll see the sign for Fengshan on the right. Turn and cross the new bridge (it should be ready by the time this book is out) and follow the road right as it heads into the village.

You'll need your own transport to get to Fengshan. Once there it's best to walk.

ALISHAN FOREST RECREATION AREA

阿里山

☎ 05

The high mountain resort of **Alishan** (Ālìshān; adult/child NT150/100, during holidays NT200/100) has long been one of Taiwan's top tourist attractions. While many other spots around the island are as scenically splendid, Alishan has a peerless draw in the wonderful old narrow-gauge railway (one of only three in the world) that still runs the route up from Chiayi. Alishan is also one of the best places to see the sunrise, the sunset, and the glorious 'sea of clouds' phenomenon.

You can visit Alishan at any time of year, but weekdays are best as the crowds are thinner. The climate is cool even in summer (at least compared to lower altitudes). In spring

and summer late-afternoon thunderstorms are common. During winter the mountain-tops may get a light dusting of snow. Summer temperatures average from 13°C to 24°C, while those in winter are 5°C to 16°C. You should bring a coat or sweater and an umbrella or raincoat, no matter what time of year you visit.

Orientation

Despite its size, it's simple to get your bearings in Alishan. Most people stay in what is technically Zhongzheng Village, though most just refer to it as Alishan Village. The village comprises a car park, post office, police station, bus station, visitor centre and most of the hotels and restaurants.

Paths around the park are broad and attractions are usually marked with signs in English. Traffic is not permitted in the park, so you can walk on roads as well as trails without concern. With our basic map of the area you will have no trouble finding your way around.

Information

For information about train and bus schedules, hotels, attractions and weather, check out the official website (www.ali.org.tw/en-index.php). There's an ATM in the village post office on the Cirrus network but you'd be advised to bring some cash with you.

Public health clinic (Weishēngsuǒ; ☎ 267 9806) The clinic has irregular hours, but is always open in the mornings

and usually the afternoons. The clinic is just down the road from the Catholic Hostel, near the entrance gate to the park. **Visitor Centre** (☎ 267 9917; ☎ 8am-5pm) Maps and brochures in English are available, though you can find the same ones in visitor centres in Taipei and other urban centres.

Sights & Activities

ALISHAN FOREST TRAIN

For many people, taking the train up to Alishan is the peak experience of their entire trip. For this is no ordinary train and certainly no ordinary ride. The Alishan Forest Train runs on narrow-gauge track (762mm) and begins at 30m, ascending to above 2200m in 3½ hours. The total length of track is 71km and includes 49 tunnels and 77 bridges. Along the way it passes through three climatic zones: tropical, subtropical and temperate.

Yes, there's a lot to take in; it really is as exciting as it sounds and the train ride is probably a must-do. Suffice to say the ride offers a very pleasant trip on a very special small train up very scenic landscape.

For more check out the forestry bureau's website on the train (<http://railway.forest.gov.tw/index-eng.asp>).

SUNRISE

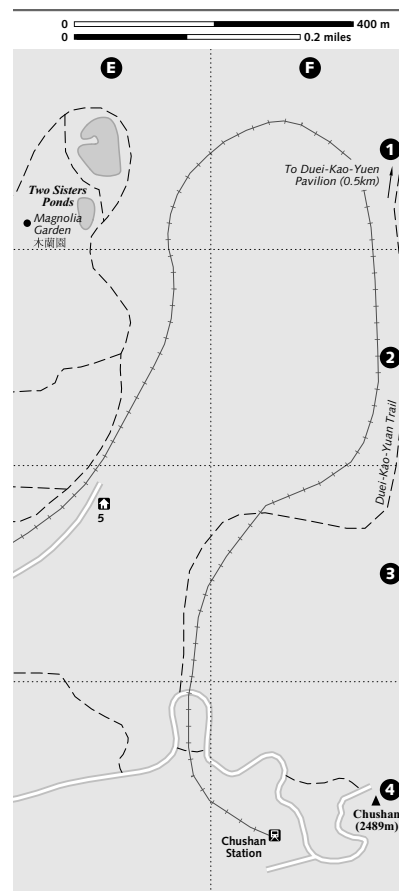
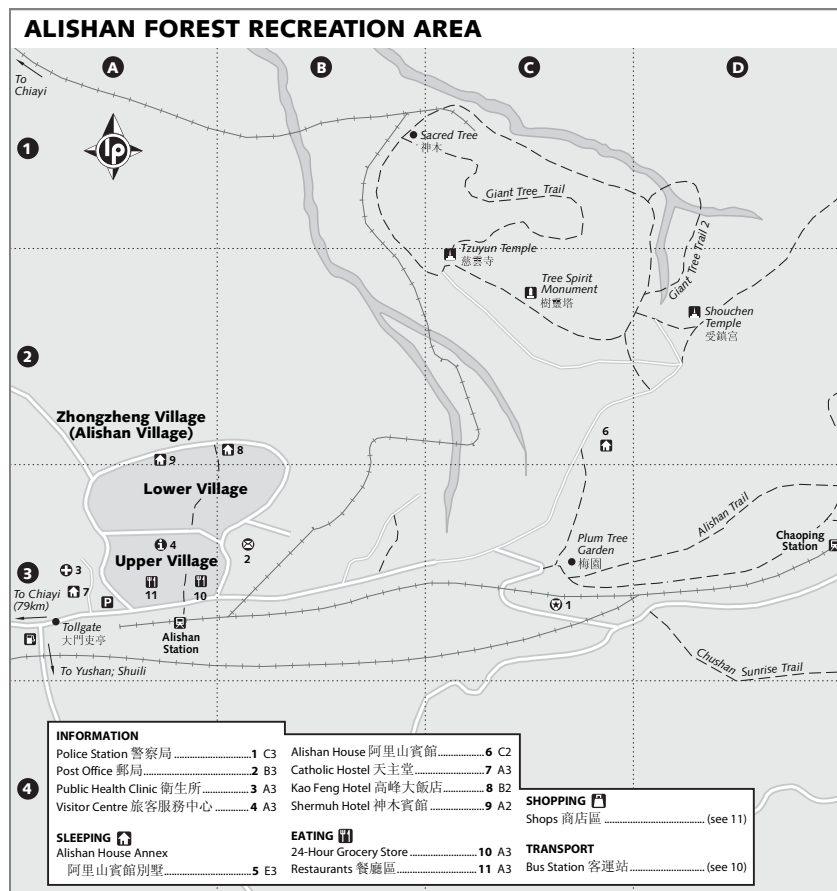
We're not big fans of sunrise viewings but it's *de rigueur* here. When you check into a hotel you will inevitably hear the question, 'Yàobúyào kàn rìchū?', which means, 'Do you want to see the sunrise?' Say no, and you'll get a funny look as if you just committed a huge cultural faux pas.

Assuming you do go, there are two main viewing venues: the summit of **Chushan** (Zhùshān; 2489m) and **Tatajia** (Tàtǎjiǎ), a mountain pass 2610m above sea level in nearby Yushan National Park.

To reach Chushan you can either take the train from Chaoping station (one way/round trip NT100/150, departure time varies according to the season), or hike up along the **Chushan Sunrise Trail** (Zhùshān Guānrìchū Bùdào). The train takes about 25 minutes, while hiking can take up to 1½ hours if you start in the village.

If you wish to see the sunrise at Tatajia, pay for a seat on one of the sunrise-tour minibuses (NT300, three hours). Every hotel can arrange it for you. Buses come directly to your hotel.

The minibus has several advantages over the train in that it stops at numerous scenic locations, such as the monkey-viewing area



and the site of a few ancient trees on the way back from the sunrise viewing.

HIKING

There are many trails in the park, ranging from strolls around flower gardens to hikes up mountaintops requiring several hours or more to complete. On the **Giant Tree Trail** you'll find majestic old cypresses that are up to two thousand years old. For a bit of peace and quiet and a few hours workout on a natural path, the **Duei-Kao-Yueh Trail** (對高岳步道; Dùigāoyuè Bùdào) is just the ticket. The Chushan Sunrise Trail and the viewing platform, so busy at dawn, empty of people by the late morning.

For more information, including times and distances for trails, pick up the brochure at the visitor centre.

Festivals & Events

The **Cherry Blossom Festival** runs in March or April for two weeks while the trees are in bloom. This is an extremely busy time for the park. To our eyes though, Taiwanese cherry trees look splendid.

Sleeping

Alishan has more than a dozen hotels, but on weekends, during Chinese New Year, or the Cherry Blossom Festival, when more than 10,000 people a day visit the park, you could find yourself without a room if you didn't book in advance. The majority of hotels are in the village, behind and down from the car park. This is a convenient place to stay as there are a dozen or more places to eat, but it does feel as if you are staying in a big car park.

Most hotels offer weekday and low-season discounts, which can be up to 50%. Though heating in rooms was not standard a few years ago, it does seem to be now and there is usually no extra charge for it in winter.

Catholic Hostel (Tiānzhūtáng; ☎ 267 9602; dm/d/tw NT250/1000/2000) The hostel is not always open (especially on weekdays) so call before you go.

Shermuh Hotel (Shěnmù Bīnguǎn; ☎ 267 9511; fax 267 9667; s/d/tw NT1000/3200/4000) This newish hotel has clean, simply furnished rooms. For single travellers there are a limited number of tiny single-bed rooms that go for NT600 midweek.

Kao Feng (KF) Hotel (Gāofēng Dàfāndiàn; ☎ 267 9411; www.alishan.net.tw/kaofeng/kf-2_e.htm; d/tw NT3600/4800) Rooms at this new hotel with a modern look have comfy beds, wooden floors and a fairly spacious design.

Alishan House Annex (Ālīshān Bīnguǎn Biéshù; ☎ 267 9811; 6-/8-person cabins NT5060/7700) Part of the Alishan House group, these charming cabins are set back among flowers and shrubs. Beatrice Potter would be right at home here. Note that the six-person cabins have a single open room, while the eight-person have sleeping and living quarters.

Alishan House (Ālīshān Bīnguǎn; ☎ 267 9811, ext 6; r from NT6000) Set in a remodelled Japanese-era building, this is Alishan's top hotel. We love the new patio in the back, with its expansive mountain views, but feel some of the old-world charm has gone out of the place. But if you get a room on the west side you can see just how good the original design was: your chaise lounge by the window lets in mountain views during the day, sunsets in the evening, and moonlight during the night.

Eating

Most of the restaurants in Alishan are clustered around the car park and serve similar decent fare at similar prices: hotpots, stir-fries and local vegetables and meat dishes for around NT100 to NT200. Most are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, though occasionally places close for one shift. Menus are starting to be available in English.

Note that while the Alishan House used to have a lovely old-fashioned dining room, it has been remodelled into a soulless banquet hall.

There is a 24-hour grocery shop in the car-park area. Instant noodles and hot and cold drinks are available. The shop has a microwave for heating up food.

Shopping

Alishan High Mountain Tea (Ālīshān Gāo Shān Chá), dried plums, cherries, fruit liqueurs, *tóngzǎi mǐgāo* (sticky rice) in almost every conceivable flavour and aboriginal crafts are sold in the shops back from the car lot.

Getting There & Away BUS

From Chiayi buses to Alishan (NT214, 2½ hours) leave from the Chiayi County Bus Company station about every two hours from early morning to late afternoon. You can find the full schedule (in English) at the visitor centre in the train station at Chiayi or posted at the bus station itself. From Alishan

to Chiayi buses leave from outside the 24-hour grocery store. The return schedule is posted in English.

TRAIN

There are three train stations in Alishan: the main Alishan station in Zhongzheng Village (this station was being rebuilt at the time of writing but we have been assured it will be ready by the time you read this). This is close to the main hotel area and most passengers disembark here. Chaoping is a few minutes away up the track. Chushan station, 25 minutes away, is where the train takes passengers in the morning to watch the sunrise.

The Alishan Forest Railway leaves Chiayi station (NT399, 3½ hours) daily at 9am and 1.30pm. Return times are 1.18pm and 1.40pm. During Chinese New Year and holidays extra trains are scheduled.

DANAYIGU ECOLOGICAL PARK

達那伊谷自然生態保育公園

If you have your own vehicle, plan on a side trip to Shanmei to see this remarkable **park** (Dánayī Gǔ Zìrán Shēngtài Bǎoyù Gōngyuán; ☎ 05-258 6994; adult/child NT100/60, weekday NT80/40, parking scooter/car NT20/50; ☎ 8am-5pm).

From 1989 to 1999 the Zhou people closed off the dying 18km Danayigu Creek to all outsiders. The plan was to clean up the river and protect and restock the dwindling fish population. The success of the project amazed everyone. Today, in certain natural river pools, literally hundreds of fish squirm and wiggle in as little as one shallow square metre of water. The concentration of fish is more akin to a healthy coral reef than a mountain stream (though some speculate that the Zhou stock the stream).

The surrounding parkland is a model of ecological diversity. Zhou tribesmen give tours of the park and while they speak only Mandarin, it can still be worthwhile to join in if only because you will be forced to stop every few feet to discover yet another species of plant life.

Food is available at several rustic shops. The barbecued wild boar and sausages are lean and delicious. At the time of writing a new walkway was being built around the park and you could not access the more interesting pools. Everything should be back to normal by the time you read this.

To reach the park, take Hwy 18 east of Chiayi towards Alishan. At Lungmei (龍美;

Lóngmǐ) you will see a sign directing you to Shanmei and Danayigu (Tanayiko) Ecological Park via County Rd 129 south. The trip from Chiayi takes about an hour by car. There is no public transport.

YUSHAN NATIONAL PARK

玉山國家公園

As hiking enthusiasts, Yushan National Park (Yúshān Guójiā Gōngyuán) gets our heart beating faster every time we hear its name or, better yet, pore over its borders on a map. The park takes its name from one of the highest mountains in East Asia. Yushan, which means Jade Mountain, attracts climbers from all over the world. The route up to the 3952m peak is surprisingly straightforward and is completely doable for anyone in decent shape.

In recent years a number of old trails throughout the park have been repaired and opened for the general public. Some of these trails cross the entire park and take a week or more to complete.

There's never been a better time for foreign visitors to come to Taiwan to climb its high mountains or just traverse across its alpine ridges. Why? The routes are in good shape, with well-located huts or camping grounds, and water sources in strategic locations. Trails are marked with distance posts and map boards. Good maps are available of the routes (though in Chinese only), and the restrictive Class A permit system has been altered so that local guides are no longer needed and you do not have to travel in large groups. A pair of foreign travellers, with the proper equipment, can now head out to explore some of the most pristine and beautiful parts of Taiwan.

Yushan covers over 100,000 hectares, or 3% of the landmass of Taiwan. It's the largest and most undeveloped of all the parks in Taiwan. It is also the grandest. There are 30 peaks over 3000m and six vegetative zones harbouring 50% of the endemic plant species in the country. The landscape is strikingly rugged, with deep valleys and high mountains. In general, the park tends to be wet in summer and dry in winter.

Yushan is not part of the Alishan National Scenic Area, but it is so close that many people come here on a day trip to admire the clear alpine views and perhaps do a few short hikes around the Tatajia area.

Orientation

Yushan National Park covers areas of Chiayi, Nantou, Kaohsiung and Hualien counties. A 20km drive west will take you to the Alishan Forest Recreation Area, while a drive from Tainan to Taitung on Hwy 20, the South Cross-Island Hwy (see Map p247), takes you through the southern portion of the park. From Yuli in the east, you can reach the Nanan section of the park, with its fantastic Walami Trail.

MAPS

Climbers can pick up maps of the area and hiking routes at the park headquarters in Shuili and outdoor shops, including those around the train station in Taipei. The maps give detailed daily itineraries including how long (in hours) each section takes to hike and the distances covered. They are in Chinese only but on the national park's website you can get general itineraries.

If you can get someone to translate the itinerary and pertinent places on the maps (cabins, peaks, water sources etc) you can use them in conjunction with the large park map (in English) that you can pick up at the national park visitor centres, or download from the website (www.ysnp.gov.tw); note you should go to Site Map first, then Downloads, then Mountain Hiking Route Map.)

At most visitor centres you can pick up a brochure called *Yushan National Park: Eco-tourism Guide*, which has a map of the main peak trail with useful warnings and notices: safe here, foggy here, landslides common here, and so on.

Information

Other than in Meishankou and Tienchih in the south, and Dongpu just outside the park boundaries in the north, there is no accommodation. The park has a very informative website (<http://english.ysnp.com.tw>). For information on permits see p330. Note that the Yushan Main Peak Trail is a very popular route and only 150 hikers a day are allowed on it. You have almost no chance of getting a permit on the weekend. If this is your only available time, contact a hiking club (p330). Other routes through the park are less popular.

For information on hiking routes, as well as current trail, road and weather conditions, and details of the plant and animal life in the park, check out www.ysnp.gov.tw.

There are four visitor centres for the park: Meishankou (p263); Nanan (p200); the park headquarters at Shuili (p221), an hour north of the actual park; and **Tatajia** (☎ 049-270 2200; ☎ 9am-4.30pm, closed 2nd & 4th Tue of every month. If these are national holidays, closed Wed), which is the visitor centre closest to the trailhead for the main peak. All can provide maps (in English), brochures and information on current trail conditions.

Hiking

On the trails, signs are usually in English and Chinese, and there are distance posts every 500m. Cabins are simple and have rough bedding, and some have running water and solar lights. If you are doing the Yushan peaks trails you will have no worries about water, but for other areas confirm with the national park that the water sources on the maps are stable (according to the authorities we spoke to at the time of writing they are, but please confirm before you head out). Before beginning any hike make sure you drop into the local police squad and park office to have your mountain permit checked. For the main Yushan peak you do this right at the start of the trail at Tatajia. If you are starting in Dongpu, carry your papers with you.

The best time to hike in the park is in the autumn and early spring (October to December and March to April). May has monsoon rains, and typhoons are a problem from June to September, though if there is no typhoon you can certainly hike (though the sun is awfully fierce). In winter the peaks are covered with snow.

Note that there is nowhere to buy supplies in the area. Be aware that fog can come in anytime and bring your hike to a halt. Have everything you need for overnights when you head out.

Note also that Yushan peak is usually closed for almost two months every winter to give the environment a rest.

YUSHAN MAIN PEAK 玉山主峰

The trail to the **main peak** (Yùshān Zhǔfēng) starts in **Tatajia** (塔塔加; Tǎtǎjiā) a mountain pass where people often go to watch the sunrise on an excursion from Alishan. It's about 8.5km or a five- to six-hour hike to the **Paiyun Cabin** (排雲山莊; Páiyún Shānzhǔāng), where hikers can spend the night. The next day, a 2.4km climb (about three hours) leads to the summit

(3952m). After resting, climbers then return to Paiyun Cabin (1½ hours), gather their gear and hike back to Tatajia (four hours).

It is also possible to climb Yushan starting in Dongpu in the north, or starting in Tatajia and then continuing on to Dongpu (this is a good option for people without transport). This is a longer route and takes three days to complete but many people consider it to be the more scenic way.

To do all five peaks of Yushan (main, north, south, east and west) takes about five days.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION ERA BATONGGUAN TRAVERSING ROUTE 八通關日據越道線

This 90km-long trail (Bātōngguān Rìjù Yuèdào Xiàn) was constructed during the time of the Japanese occupation to facilitate a policy of carefully managing aboriginal groups in remote mountainous regions. The trail is remote, and for years it was in rough shape, with washed-out bridges and barely passable sections of trail. After three years of reconstruction it was opened to the general public in late 2005.

The trail starts in Dongpu and ends in Nanan, near Yuli on the east coast. It takes seven to 10 days to complete. There are cabins, camping grounds and water sources along the way. The area is still prone to landslides and washouts, so always check on conditions before heading out.

SOUTH CROSS-ISLAND HIGHWAY SECTION 2 TRAIL 南二段線

This seven-day trail (Nán Èrduàn Xiàn) runs from Dongpu to the South-Cross Island Hwy. Though a long hike it is considered easier than the Japanese Occupation Era Batongguan Traversing Trail and can be accomplished by most hikers who are fit and carrying the proper equipment. There are cabins, camping grounds and water sources along the length of this incredible trail.

One notable section of the trail passes **Jiaming Lake** (嘉明湖; Jiāmíng Hú), which was formed by a meteorite strike 4000 years ago. You can camp out here, and enjoy one of the most inspiring alpine scenes in all Taiwan.

Other hikes include Walami Trail (p200) and Guanshan (p263).

Tours

The park organizes hikes to Yushan main peak (around NT5000) twice a month from October to December. Call one of the visitor centres for reservations. If you are looking for a hike where English is spoken, contact Freshtreks (www.freshtreks.com) or 523 Mountaineering Association (www.523.org.tw/English/index). The latter can help with hiring drivers.

Getting There & Away

Public transport is limited but most trails can be done this way (for information on hiring a driver, see p330). Hikers can reach the trailhead to Yushan main peak by taking a sunrise shuttle bus from Alishan. Since there is no transport back from Tatajia they should continue on to Dongpu as there are buses from this location.

DONGPU (TUNGPU) 東埔

pop 500

Just over the northern tip of Yushan National Park, or directly south of Sun Moon Lake, sits the hot-spring village of Dongpu (Dōngpǔ; elevation 1200m). The village is a popular destination for hikers looking for a good workout, good weather, remarkable scenery and the chance to soak in a nice tub at the end of it all. Of course, lovers of hot springs are fond of the place, too. The spring is a carbon-acid hot spring, delivering clear and odour-free water with an average temperature of 50°C that's considered to be of quite a high quality.

For hikes through Yushan National Park see the previous section. If you just want to hike for the day you can go along the trail to Yushan for a few hours without the need for a permit. Make sure you are well prepared for all hikes to higher elevations and always ask about conditions before you head out.

There are plenty of hot-spring hotels in Dongpu. For an inexpensive option, try the **Youth Activity Centre** (青年活動中心; Qīngnián Huódòng Zhōngxīn; ☎ 049-270 1515; 64 Dongpu Village; r from NT700) at the high end of town.

You can take a Yuanlin bus (NT112, 80 minutes) between Dongpu and Shuili. They run approximately every hour between 6am and 5pm.

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