

TAIWAN TOURIST SHUTTLE

Exploring the Beautiful Island of Taiwan by Bus



Taiwan
THE HEART OF ASIA

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All articles in this booklet were published in the bimonthly English magazine *Travel in Taiwan* (tit.com.tw/appdownload.html).

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Produced by: Vision Creative Marketing & Media Co.

Add: 9F., No. 290, Sec. 4, Zhongxiao E. Rd.,

Taipei City, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Tel: (02) 2349-1500

Web: taiwan.net.tw



Foreword

Taiwan's geographical location just off the coast of mainland East Asia has made it a key travel crossroads in what has long been one of the world's busiest regions. The result is a land with a rich and deep cultural mix. Add to this the characteristics unique to each of its localities – dramatic topography, natural attractions, flora and fauna, weather, and so on – and the result is countless enclaves, each like nowhere else in Taiwan, and nowhere else in the world.

The number of visiting travelers has been surging in recent years, notably the number of free independent travelers. Taiwan is a friendly, welcoming, and easy-to-navigate destination for international tourists, with world-class services and infrastructure in the tourism and many other sectors.

Take full advantage of the comprehensive road and rail network by using the first-rate, inexpensive, and very convenient Taiwan Tourist Shuttle system (www.taiwantrip.com.tw), designed and overseen by the Taiwan Tourism Bureau (taiwan.net.tw). Since the system's launch, detailed first-hand introductions to many of the routes have been provided in the Tourism Bureau's official English magazine, *Travel in Taiwan* (tit.com.tw/appdownload.html), written by experienced expatriate travel writers who are long-time residents of the island. We have collected and published them in this booklet for your easy reference.



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Introduction

Launched in 2010, the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle service is designed specifically for the convenience of the FIT (Free Independent Traveler), to provide a seamless transportation service between tourist sites, Taiwan Railway stations, and High Speed Rail stations, and to serve as a model for eco-friendly travel. This is the most convenient travel method for people without their own transportation. The route network covers all areas of the main island – North, South, East, and Central – as well as the Kinmen islands. There are currently a total of almost 40 routes to choose from, and new options are added when demand is identified.

Each route is operated by a dedicated privately-run bus company; all are vetted by the Taiwan Tourism Bureau. On your rides on the comfortable coaches, which have brightly colored exteriors with the words “Tour Taiwan” prominently displayed, you’ll be accompanied by fellow visitors from overseas and local independent travelers alike, taking advantage of the low fares, expansive geographical coverage and stops at numerous prominent locations, and frequent service. Buses depart from High Speed Rail stations, regular-railway stations, and key tourist attractions, and you can hop on and off at any stop you like – notably the many well-known tourist draws featured on each route. The system gives you access to all major tourist sites on the main island and Kinmen, and a wide range of attractive travel packages and special passes are on offer.

While exploring Taiwan you’ll find that solid English-language services will at all times be available to you. When using the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle service, you’ll find detailed English on the official website, and all needed English information at the individual ticket counters and on bus-stop signs. On the coaches themselves, you’ll find the destination indicated on the front of the bus, and inside you’ll find the stops indicated in English on a panel above the driver, as well as recorded announcements of upcoming stops. (Note that the Tourism Bureau also operates a 24H toll-free hotline: 0800-011-765.)

Pay your fare at the launch-point ticket booth or when you get on the bus. Fares are based on distance/sections

traveled. There are also ultra-inexpensive bargains such as 1- and 2-day passes on offer, and super-saver special packages bringing you deals on fares and fees for bus, rail, and other services such as bike/scooter rentals, cable-car and boat rides, etc. Visit the official website (www.taiwantrip.com.tw) for a general introduction to the system and details on each route including stops, fares, schedules, and passes/packages.

The routes will take you to and through places such as Kenting National Park in the far south, which will strongly remind you of California’s Big Sur, Taitung County on the east coast, which will strongly remind you of Hawaii, magnificent Taroko Gorge, in the east coast’s Hualien County, oft called “Taiwan’s Grand Canyon,” and alpine Alishan, which has been characterized as “Taiwan’s Alps.”

To give you a taste of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle experience, let’s take a sampler ride on the Sun Moon Lake route. Located in the west-central mountains, Sun Moon Lake is one of Taiwan’s premier getaway destinations, fondly referred to as Taiwan’s “honeymooners’ paradise.” You embark in urban Taichung, paying on boarding (NT\$190 one-way, NT\$340 return). The ride one-way takes 1 hour, 50 minutes; service is from early morning until late evening. Tourist-attraction stops on the way include Taomi Eco-Village and its well-known Paper Dome, an old-time Assam Tea farm, and of course Sun Moon Lake itself. A special Sun Moon Lake round-trip package brings you special deals on the Sun Moon Lake cable car (to Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village), round-lake shuttle bus, a boat-tour outing, and bicycle/scooter rental.

The articles on the 11 routes introduced in this booklet are from the series “Backpack Bus Trip” in the Tourism Bureau’s bimonthly magazine *Travel in Taiwan*. More articles about traveling with the help of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle will likely be published in the future, so be sure to visit the *Travel in Taiwan* website (tit.com.tw/appdownload.html) to read the magazine online or download the magazine app (for iOS and Android devices), free of charge.

Selected Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Routes

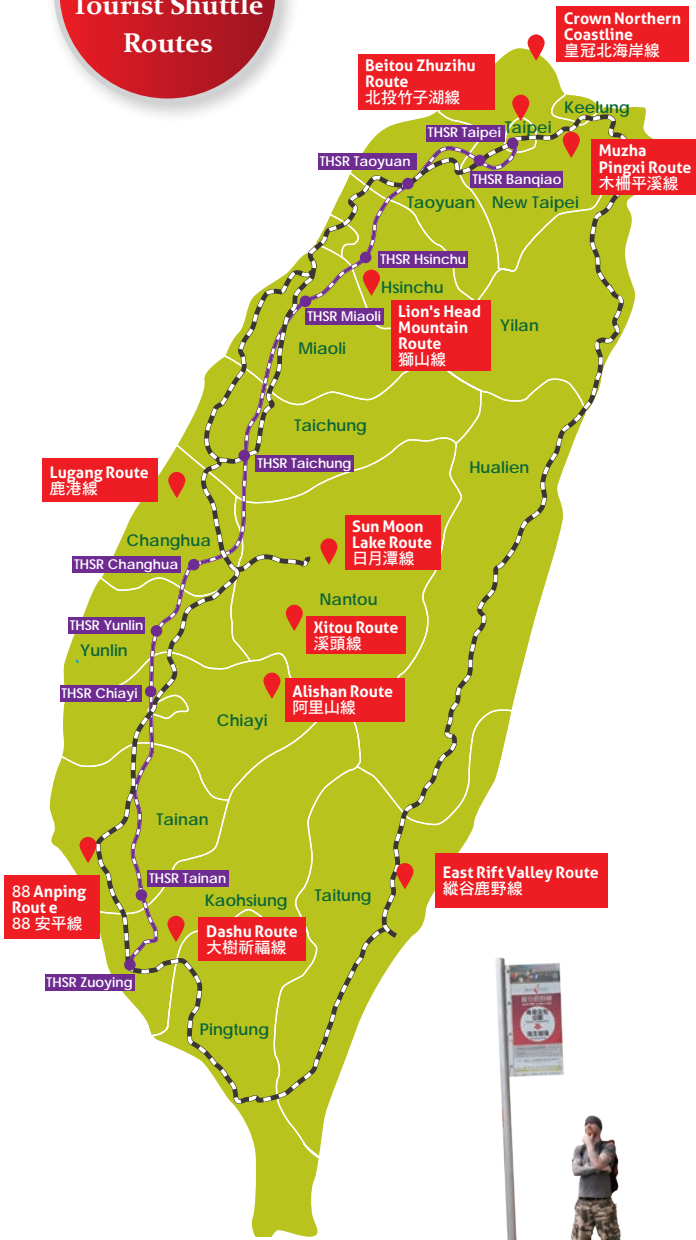


Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus Front/Back



Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus

INFO
 Taiwan Tourist Shuttle (台灣好行)
 Website: www.taiwantrip.com.tw
 Travel Information Hotline: 0800-011-765





Crown Northern Coastline 皇冠北海岸線

*A Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus Trip
from Tamsui to Keelung*

The Crown Northern Coastline route of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus network connects the town of Tamsui (淡水) in the west with Yehliu Geopark (野柳地質公園) in the east, on the way passing Taiwan's northernmost point.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Fred Cheng

I caught the first shuttle leaving from MRT Tamsui Station at 9 am and made my first stop at the Baisha Bay Visitor Center near Baishawan (白沙灣), or “White Sand Bay,” less than an hour’s ride from Tamsui. Baishawan is a good, if sometimes crowded (on weekends), spot to get some sun, and has warm, shallow water. It also has some fairly tame waves that are great for beginners to gain a bit of confidence on their first time on a surfboard. On the day of my visit I saw just one surfer out on the water, lazily bobbing up and down on the modest swells, waiting for the right wave to come along.

Just a few minutes by bus from Baishawan is the Shimen Wedding Plaza (石門婚紗廣場), a collection of pristine white arches overlooking a calm blue-water bay. This is a very popular place for couples headed to the altar to take wedding photos. After taking a few tourist shots and checking out the area, we were back on the bus, heading for the Juming Museum (朱銘美術館), two stops further along my route. The museum offers a walk through artist Ju Ming’s full career, from many decades past to the present. Starting off as a woodcarver’s apprentice in his mid-teens, Ju Ming had the courage to forego the predictable demand



Queen's Head Rock

1. Wedding Plaza 2. Kite surfers at Baishawan
3. Mazu temple in Jinshan 4. Miaokou Night Market ice treats

for copies of traditional temple carvings and choose his own artistic path, moving into abstract sculptures that would come to be celebrated worldwide by the art community. The exhibition of the museum that bears his name is 80 percent outdoors, so you can lounge about and enjoy the weather amidst approximately 3,000 of the great artist's works. Very impressive are the well known Tai Chi sculptures, laid out across a small plateau overlooking the coastal town of Jinshan.

After boarding the next shuttle bus we soon arrived in the coastal town of Jinshan and stopped along Jinshan Old Street (金山老街), where I got out to explore the historic artery and its many eateries and food stalls. One place was more crowded than most. Jin Bao Li Duck is located right in front of Guang'an Temple (廣安宮). This well-known restaurant has been serving juicy boiled duck since 1960, in front of a temple that is now over a century old.

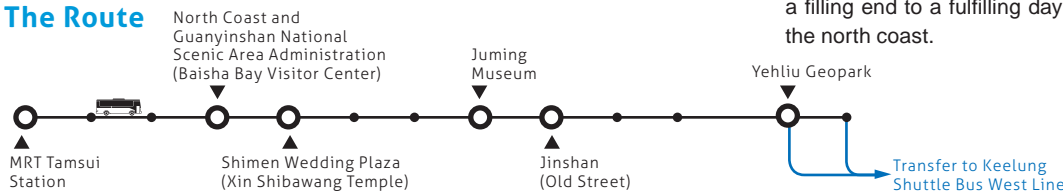
Yehliu Geopark was the next stop on my journey. Arriving at the park, I set out along the pathway laid out along the smooth, alien seaside landscape, which resembles the badland areas of North America. Beautiful sea-urchin fossils are preserved in the rock, but they did not distract me

from finding Nefertiti's Taiwan twin. When in doubt, follow the crowd, and indeed it led me to the park's best known attraction: Queen's Head Rock (女王頭). After posing for a quick picture with Her Royal Majesty, it was on to our final destination, Keelung (for that, we changed to a bus of the Keelung Shuttle Bus West Line).

It was now late afternoon, and after arriving at Keelung Railway Station we headed straight to the city's famed Miaokou Night Market (廟口夜市), which runs down a couple of long, intersecting lanes not far from the city's harbor. There you'll find food stalls with English signage advertising what each specializes in. The evening crowds get pretty thick, with local foodies and visitors from abroad keen to fill their bellies.

In the midst of this gastronomic array I ordered *ding bian tso* (鼎邊銼; fish ball soup with rice noodles), a toasted bun filled with nutritious veggies appropriately dubbed the "nutritious sandwich," a sweet, finely shaved passion-fruit ice concoction known as *pao-pao* ice (泡泡冰), bite-sized round pieces of tempura, *hong shao man geng* (紅燒鰻羹; eel head soup cooked in Chinese medicine) and, finally, some almond ice jelly to draw the feeding frenzy to a close. It was a filling end to a fulfilling day on the north coast.

The Route



Juming Museum (朱銘美術館)

Add: 2, Xishihu, Jinshan District, New Taipei City

(新北市金山區西勢湖 2 號)

Tel: (02) 2498-9940

Website: www.juming.org.tw

Jin Bao Li Duck (金山金包里鴨肉)

Add: 104, Jinbaoli St., Jinshan District, New Taipei City

(新北市金山區金包里街 104 號)

Tel: (02) 2498-1656



Thermal Valley

Beitou Zhuzihu Route

北投竹子湖線

*Taking the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus
into Taipei City's Outskirts*

Taipei is a beautiful city, with a little of something for everyone – shopping, fine cuisine, sightseeing, and much else. Another great thing about Taipei is how quickly you can leave the city center and spend a day with Mother Nature. Hiking trails, hot springs, and mountain scenery are just a short bus ride away.

Text: Dallas Waldie Photos: Maggie Song

If you want to explore the mountains just to the north of central Taipei, you can make use of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle network's Beitou Zhuzihu Route, which has stops at the MRT Beitou (北投) and Xinbeitou (新北投) stations. From the urban Beitou area, the buses head into the mountainous Yangmingshan National Park (陽明山國家公園), where you can get off at places like Yangming Park (陽明公園), especially popular during the winter flower season for its cherry and azalea blossoms, and Zhuzihu, a farm area best known for its fields of ivory-white calla lilies.

So, on a pleasant September day I headed to Beitou with a few friends to take the Zhuzihu shuttle. If you want to head straight into the mountains, you can take the MRT to Beitou Station and hop on the bus there. The 15-seater bus stops just outside the station and you can, upon boarding, pay with your EasyCard. If, however, you want to explore the hot-spring resort area of Beitou first, take the MRT Xinbeitou Line from Beitou Station to Xinbeitou Station (just one stop).

We did just that. After exiting Xinbeitou Station, you can see the entrance to Beitou Hot Spring Park (北投溫泉親水公園) across the street, which is home to the very interesting and informative Beitou Hot Spring Museum (北



Beitou Hot Spring Museum



Grass Mountain Chateau



Beitou Library



Grass Mountain Chateau

投溫泉博物館) (beitoumuseum.taipei.gov.tw) and Plum Garden visitor center, both housed in heritage buildings, the impressive green-architecture Beitou Library (台北市立圖書館北投分館), and public hot-spring pools. Further up the hill beyond the park, you come to Thermal (Hell) Valley (地熱谷), where you can examine one of the sources of Beitou's hot springs. The valley is often shrouded in mist, giving it a mysterious feel.

After checking out the Xinbeitou attractions, we hopped on a shuttle bus at Beitou Hot Spring Museum, headed for Yangmingshan. Our next hop-off was at the Grass Mountain Chateau (草山行館) (www.grassmountainchateau.com.tw). This is a complex of main building and subsidiary buildings constructed by the Japanese in the 1920s during the period of Japanese rule in Taiwan (1895–1945). The main structure is a mélange of Eastern and Western architectural elements fit for a king – or a president – which is why late president Chiang Kai-shek chose this location as his first residence in Taiwan, later using it for summer getaways. Today it is an official heritage site with a cultural-arts focus, housing an art gallery, restaurant, and artist studios, and serving as a scenic haven for tourists.

Next up was Yangming Park (陽明公園), which is a very popular destination during the flower season in late winter/early spring, when the park's cherry trees are in full bloom. But even on a hot late-summer day the natural surroundings are wonderfully attractive – go for a walk, amidst birds chirping and butterflies fluttering about. The woods and pagoda-style gazebos create enchanting scenes. You can see people of all ages spending a peaceful afternoon here in the shade of the trees, playing chess, reading books, or chatting with friends and family.

For those looking to raise their heart rate a bit, signs in English and Chinese direct you to numerous hiking trails in the area. However, be prepared for a lot of steps. Most of the larger and more accessible trails and paths in Yangmingshan feature stone-block pavement and staircases. While this might take away some of the natural feel of hiking in the mountains, it makes the terrain much easier to traverse.

It was then time to head on to our final destination on this whirlwind Beitou-Zhuzihu jaunt. Calla lilies are what draw most people to Zhuzihu (竹子湖). They bloom from March through June, and for a small amount of money visitors can even pick their own bouquet. If you come during a time when the flowers are not in bloom, you can still go for a walk through the flower fields and take in the enchanting scenery of this mountain-surrounded farm area. There are also restaurants and teahouses where you can sit back, relax, take in the mountain vistas, and eat a healthful meal or sip a fragrant tea.

Apart from the places of interest along the route of the shuttle bus, there are many more attractions in Yangmingshan that you can get to with just a little more time and effort. At the Yangmingshan Bus Transfer Station (陽明山公車轉乘站), one of the shuttle-bus stops, you can switch to bus No. 108, which takes you to such popular scenic spots as Erziping, Xiaoyoukeng, Lengshuikeng, and Qingtiangang.

At Erziping (二子坪) you can go for a relaxed walk through the forest following what is known as the Butterfly Corridor (蝴蝶走廊), a great place to spot – you guessed it – butterflies. From there, you can also hike up Mt. Datun (大屯山), which offers great views over the Tamsui River (淡水河) estuary and Taipei in the far distance. Xiaoyoukeng



Zhuzihu



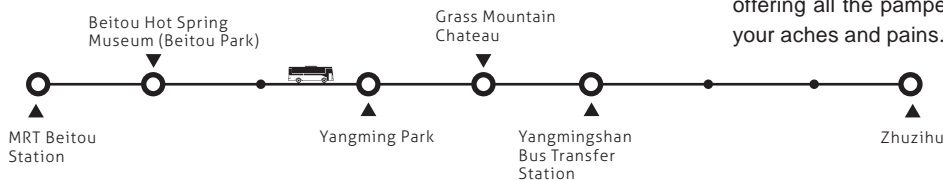
Yangming Park

(小油坑) is one of the best spots in Yangmingshan to see volcanic activity, in the form of sulfur-pit fumaroles. This is also the start of the main trail to the peak of Mt. Qixing (七星山), which at 1,120 meters above sea level is the highest mountain in the Taipei region. If you have enough stamina, hike up Mt. Qixing from Xiaoyoukeng and descend on the other side to Lengshuikeng (冷水坑), where you'll find a visitor center and a small public hot-spring bathhouse. From Lengshuikeng you can either walk or take the No. 108 bus to nearby Qingtiangang (擎天崗), an expansive grassland on a plateau with grazing water buffalo.

To return to the hustle and bustle of downtown Taipei after enjoying the scenic splendor of Yangmingshan, you have several options. From Qingtiangang you can take bus No. 108 back to the Yangmingshan Bus Transfer Stop and change to the tourist shuttle to get back to Beitou, or you can take bus S15 to MRT Shilin or Jiantan stations, both close to the immensely popular Shilin Night Market (士林夜市).

If you feel the need for some soothing relaxation after hiking in the mountains, consider one of the many quality hot-spring establishments in Beitou, ranging from the public pools in Beitou Hot Spring Park to upscale hot-spring resorts offering all the pampering you can wish for, easing away all your aches and pains.

The Route





Mini train of Taiwan Coal Mine Museum

Muzha Pingxi Route

木柵平溪線

*A Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus Trip from
Muzha to Pingxi and Back*

Most travelers visit the Pingxi area by taking the Pingxi Branch Railway Line, but this is not the only means of transport. The Muzha Pingxi Route of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle network is a good alternative and also allows you to visit some interesting places, which are not on the railway line.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Fred Cheng

The valley of Pingxi (平溪), in the eastern part of New Taipei City, was a thriving coal-mining district in the first half of the 20th century. Today it's a place where people write their hopes and dreams on the side of paper lanterns and watch them drift through the air toward the heavens.

During the roughly one-hour journey on the tourist shuttle bus of the Muzha Pingxi Route (bus No. 795), which departs from Taipei's MRT Muzha Station, I watched through the window as we passed by small towns, where young Taiwanese men and women once flocked for opportunity, now reinvented as centers where tourists both homegrown and international can go to get a feel for what life in Taiwan was like a hundred years ago.

Upon reaching Shifen (十分), I soon saw tourists releasing brightly colored paper lanterns. During the annual Pingxi Sky Lantern Festival (平溪天燈節), which takes place around the end of the Chinese New Year period, thousands of people come to the Pingxi area to do the same, filling the sky with thousands of colorful dots of moving celestial light. I would soon have my own chance, but first I was on my way to the Taiwan Coal Mine Museum, which is a bit outside Shifen.



Releasing of a sky lantern in Shifen



Shifen Waterfall



Pingxi Branch Railway

On arrival at the museum we were greeted by David Gong (龔俊逸), the grandson of the man who opened the mine here over 40 years ago. He showed us around the facility, first taking us to the 1,200-meter-long, 500-meter-deep tunnel the mine's 500 or so workers used to enter – their sweltering world of darkness and honest toil. The museum's mini-train service currently takes tourists a short distance through a forest to a dumping station where the coal was once offloaded to be conveyed to a shipping yard lower in the valley.

After learning about coal mining at the museum, we headed back to Shifen, where a lesson in lantern-making awaited. The practice of releasing lanterns is nearly as old as the village itself, originating as a safety signal during a time when the area was ravaged by roving gangs of Chinese bandits and subject to attack by indigenous warriors. Shops specializing in helping tourists to make their own lanterns line Shifen Old Street (十分老街), and can be found throughout the Pingxi area.

Local shop owner Wang Rui-yu (王瑞瑜) showed me the proper way to glue the four thin pieces of paper together, and how to affix the light wood-and-metal frame to the bottom. The frame also holds in place yellow blocks of joss paper, or ghost money, which have been soaked in oil. The oil serves as fuel, and when the paper is lit the heat causes the lantern to rise up and sail about for five to eight minutes to a height of over 500 meters.

Painting some select words upon my lantern, I held it up and watched Wang light the joss paper. The lantern slowly lifted off the ground, and with a quick count of *yi, er, san* (1, 2, 3) I released it so it could join several others already on a skyward path.

Now working our way back along the shuttle-bus route, our next stop was Pingxi Old Street (平溪老街) in the village of Pingxi. The street sits on a hillside, below a railway bridge that the trains of the Pingxi Branch Line (平溪支線) clatter by on, and has a reputation for two things – sausages and peanut ice cream. If you're wondering where to find either, just look for the lines. The ice cream is definitely unique, taro-flavored and covered in peanut powder and something you might not expect – coriander.

Not far from the street is Guanyin Temple (觀音巖), next to the Tunnel of the Eight Immortals (八仙洞). This tunnel,



Shidi Inclined Mine in Jingtong



Shenkeng Old Street

as dimly lit as the mine I had visited earlier, houses eight Buddhist idols and is an interesting sight for those not afraid of the dark.

West of Pingxi, Jingtong (菁桐) is another former mining village, its highlight a charming wooden railway station dating back to the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). Some of the former villas in the area that were once home to officials who presided over the Shidi Inclined Mine (石底大斜坑煤礦場) have been converted into quaint guesthouses, tea rooms, and coffee shops. Jingtong is also the terminal station for the Pingxi Branch Line.

From there, exiting the Pingxi valley, it's two stops on the tourist-shuttle route to Shuangxikou (雙溪口) (lit. "Mouth of Two Rivers"), where two rivers indeed converge, and where a branch road heads off to the old town of Shiding (石碇). If you want to go there, you have to transfer to another bus (No. 666) at this location. The town is known for some interesting architecture, called *diaojiaolou* (吊腳樓) or "dangling foot buildings," in which part of the building is suspended over a small river running lazily by below.

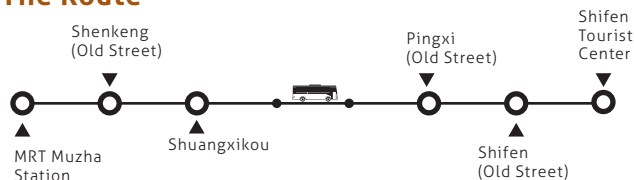
The last stop on our trip before heading back to Muzha (木柵) was Shenkeng (深坑) which is famed for tofu-based delicacies. The Shenkeng area has long been known for pristine water and the especially delicious tofu made with it. Shenkeng Old Street (深坑老街), lined with recently restored red-brick residential buildings, has numerous shops selling stinky tofu, tofu ice cream, and just about anything else you can imagine made from soybeans. One of the converted heritage residences, Dexing House (德興居), is now home to what may be the most stately ice-cream shop you'll ever come across.



stinky tofu

Then it was back to MRT Muzha Station, which is just one stop away from Taipei Zoo (臺北動物園). While it may be too late to visit the zoo after spending most of the day exploring Pingxi, there is another way to end the day on a high note. Take the MRT to Taipei Zoo Station and from there take the Maokong Gondola (貓空纜車) to the Maokong tea plantations to enjoy a cup of fresh local tea and take in the sparkling lights of the city in the distance after sunset.

The Route



Taiwan Coal Mine Museum (新平溪煤礦博物園區)

Add: 5, Dingliaozi, Xinliao Village, Pingxi District, New Taipei City (新北市平溪區新寮里頂寮子5號)

Tel: (02) 2495-8252

Hours: 9 am - 5 pm (closed on Mondays)

Website: www.taiwancoal.com.tw (Chinese)



Quanhua Temple

Arriving at the THSR Hsinchu Station, we followed the English signage to Exit 4, made a right outside the door, and quickly located the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus bound for Lion's Head Mountain (獅頭山). After about 30 minutes the bus dropped us off at our first stop, Green World Ecological Farm. The tourist shuttle stops on the highway where the access road to the farm begins; from there it is about 2km to the farm.

We called the farm and asked for the shuttle service it provides. A friendly driver from the farm soon picked us up, and in no time we were at the gate to the 70-hectare farm, which is more like a zoo/theme park. It has six different sections, each highlighting a different aspect of nature. We first stepped into the "Lovely Animal Area" to take a look at the guinea pigs, rabbits, and tiny Formosan Reeves' muntjac, also known as the barking deer because of its distinctive call.

I also couldn't pass up the chance to take a quick look at the reptile house and take a picture with a small, slithery corn snake. Then I found myself staring at a herd of hungry and curious South American camelids. Their handler gave me a bucket of alpaca feed, and in an instant I was surrounded by the friendly creatures, with a particularly bossy matriarch by the name of Coffee hogging most of the food. Then it was time for a brisk jog around the pasture, which turned into more of a grazing session than anything else. Alpacas, apparently, have the same aversion to running that I do.

Lion's Head Mountain Route

獅山線

(Lion's Head Mountain Route)
獅山南庄線

Taking the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus to Lion's Head Mountain

On a trip to the heartland of Hsinchu and Miaoli counties, you have the chance to learn about Hakka culture, take in enchanting mountain scenery, and even visit an animal farm/theme park making use of the convenient Taiwan Tourist Shuttle service.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Ivy Chen



Hakka ground tea



1. Learning how to make ground tea 2. Dried persimmon



3. Post office in Nanzhuang 4. Camelids of Green World Ecological Farm

After being driven back to the bus stop, we hopped on the next bus and made the quick five-minute trip to Beipu (北埔), a town known for its Hakka food – a branch of cuisine with roots in China that is distinct from traditional Taiwanese fare. There I wanted to try three different Hakka-diet mainstays. The first dish I tried was: *bantiao* (板條), or thick, flat rice noodles served with soy sauce, green onions, garlic, and a bit of pork.

I strode less than confidently up to a couple of gentlemen outside an establishment on Beipu Old Street (北埔老街), lined with tea shops and restaurants, and inquired as to where I might hunker down for some *bantiao*. “Right here,” the bespectacled man on my right replied in English, waving me inside. I took my time, very much enjoying the delicious, piping-hot noodles (especially good on a chilly winter afternoon). Then I launched my search for dried persimmons. The owner of the restaurant spoke English as well, and sent me a short distance to one of many stands in the area that display a wide array of the dried fruit. There, I was educated on the varying tastes and textures of pencil, stone, and cow-heart persimmons. At this point I found that I was craving liquid refreshment, for my two-course meal had left me decidedly thirsty.

So next I looked for a place selling *lei cha* (擂茶), or ground tea. Walking through a preserved Japanese colonial-era neighborhood, past the historic Jiang A-Xin Residence (姜阿新宅), I was able to find the quaint and quiet Shui Jing Teahouse down one of the narrow cobblestone alleyways. There, the kindly owner showed me how to grind the mix of dried oolong tea leaves, nuts, and grains with a small wooden pestle in a bowl. After a few minutes of grinding, the resulting fine powder was mixed with boiling water

and poured into cups containing a mix of dried rice and green beans, making for an earthy, healthy, and thoroughly enjoyable hot beverage.

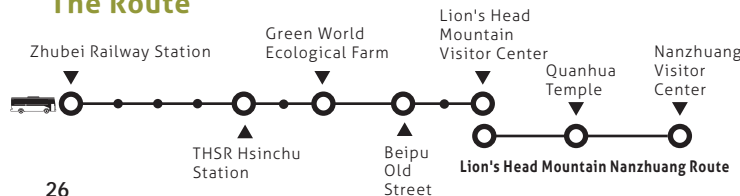
Next began the mountainous portion of our trip. First, we caught the next shuttle bus and got off at Lion's Head Mountain Visitor Center, the terminal stop on this route. Then we transferred to a smaller shuttle bus (Lion's Head Mountain Nanzhuang Route), headed for the town of Nanzhuang (南庄). There were hardly any tourists on this weekday afternoon, and I got an unexpected bonus when the affable driver introduced me to the local attractions. I got off the bus at the next stop, Quanhua Temple (勸化堂). This mountainside temple combines elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and also serves as a guesthouse for travelers. After taking pictures with some lion statues we were on the shuttle bus again.

Our final stop for the day was Nanzhuang Old Street (南庄老街). This historic street was built up around a huge temple where the Hakka have long come to give thanks for abundant harvests. There I had to find the town's old post office, dating back to the Japanese colonial era, and mail a postcard. My savior once again was a restaurateur, who sent me up some steps at the side of the temple, at the top of which the post office came into view. I picked out a card and sent it with the outgoing mail to Taipei City, with greetings from the heart of Hakka country. With the day growing dim in its final lighted hours, we took a stroll down the appropriately named Sweet Osmanthus Lane (桂花巷) to sample some local flower-flavored drinks, and took a picture at the end of the lane at an old laundry station, where the women of the town used to gather to wash their clothes in clean, flowing mountain water guided smartly down the side of the artery by concrete culverts. As I watched the cool, crystal-clear liquid pass by at this former meeting place, my day in Hsinchu and Miaoli came to an end.

Green World Ecological Farm
 (綠世界生態農場)
Add: 20, 7 Lin, Dahu Village, Beipu Township, Hsinchu County
 (新竹縣北埔鄉大湖村 7 鄰 20 號)
Tel: (03) 580-1000
Website: www.green-world.com.tw

Shui Jing Teahouse (水井茶堂)
Add: 1, Zhongzheng Rd., Beipu Township, Hsinchu County
 (新竹縣北埔鎮中正路 1 號)
Tel: (03) 580-5122

The Route





Sun Moon Lake *Route* 日月潭線

*Riding a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus
through Nantou County*

A Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus will take you from central Taichung to Sun Moon Lake (日月潭) in under two hours, and for those who want to explore Taiwan in a little more depth, lets you see some of the until-now more inaccessible treasures along the way.

Text: Owain Mckimm

Photos: Maggie Song, Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area Administration

The lake is situated in mountainous Yuchi Township (魚池鄉), Nantou County. The Sun Moon Lake Route of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus service starts about 40 km away, in Taichung City, on the western flatlands. We board the bus at Taichung's High Speed Rail station in Wuri (烏日); the city landscape quickly drops away as we speed along smooth raised highway, and by the time we enter mountain-framed Puli Basin (埔里盆地) in Puli Township (埔里鎮), 17 kilometers north of Sun Moon Lake, Taichung's urban sprawl is forgotten.

We disembark at the New Era Art Resort and Spa for – you'll surely surmise – some pampering. No, in fact we're here to visit a sculpture park dedicated to Taiwanese artist Lin Yuan (林淵). The resort has been developed around his work. A farmer by trade, Lin began sculpting at the ripe age of 65, and by the time he passed away at the age of 79 he had created over 10,000 works of art – over 3,000 stone sculptures, along with myriad paintings and embroideries. His sculptures, mostly of animals, have a primitive, totemic quality that makes them truly at home outdoors.

The sculptures are not, for the most part, pedestaled and polished as one would perhaps expect of such a respected



Lunch at New Era Art Resort



Paper Dome

artist. Rather, they peek out, half hidden, from among bushels of tropical milkweed and wild sage, or repose under tung trees wind-worn and patchy with lichen. The park's centerpiece is a nine-meter-tall megalith, made up of 234 of Lin's totems, called The Immortals' Ladder (天梯).

After we've taken in the park, we have lunch in the resort's Japanese restaurant, where two 50-year-old Chinese cedars twine and twist through the three floors like ivy through an old summer house. There is no set menu at the restaurant – the chef creates three completely different menus daily, depending on the ingredients available on the day. We opt for the mid-range menu, at NT\$1,000 a head, and are served a nine-course seafood extravaganza that includes lobster-claw soup, a medley of sashimi, stewed lobster topped with caviar, a sushi platter, and a whole roasted Japanese butterfish.

Stuffed and ready for our next stop, we catch the next Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus and disembark a few minutes down the road at Taomi Eco-Village. Tucked away on the southern border of Puli Township, Taomi was once an ordinary rural village, where the residents' primary source of income was the cultivation of bamboo. Reluctant to

industrialize their operations, however, by the end of the 20th century the villagers were struggling economically. Then, on September 21, 1999, a major earthquake struck central Taiwan and well over half of the houses in Taomi were destroyed. The people of the village saw the destruction as an opportunity to start anew. Lifelong farmers began to retrain as eco-tour guides, open guesthouses, and transform old paddy fields into a wetland.

Before we tour the village's ecological sights, our guide Pen Ei-ci (潘羿圻) shows us Taomi's main attraction: the Paper Dome. Constructed using 58 five-foot-high cardboard columns, the Paper Dome is a memorial to both Taiwan's 921 Earthquake and the Great Hanshin Earthquake that ravaged the city of Kobe, Japan in 1995. In fact, the Paper Dome was originally constructed in Kobe as a temporary replacement for the Takatori Catholic Church, destroyed in the earthquake. In 2005, however, the structure was relocated to Taiwan – a country also blighted by earthquakes – as a symbol of solidarity and friendship.

As we wander around the village's allotments, plant nurseries, streams, and lotus ponds, we learn about the area's fecund wildlife. There are about 370 butterfly species

New Era Art Resort



Sun Moon Lake



in Taiwan; roughly 220 can be found in Puli Town, and up to 180 can be seen in Taomi Village. A part of the village's eco-transformation has been to plant flowers with nectar-rich blooms to attract butterflies to the area, as well as to cultivate host plants on which butterflies can lay their eggs.

Alas, the grey skies of the morning have now released a persistent and biting afternoon drizzle, and I could murder for a cup of tea. As luck would have it, tea is not in short supply at our next destination, the Antique Assam Tea Farm in Yuchi Township. Huang Guo-ci (黃國賜), who manages the farm's 10 hectares of tea fields, greets us at the entrance to the factory and immediately sits us down on the veranda for a chat over a pot of hot black tea.

He pours us each a cup of the rich amber liquid, which he identifies as Taiwan Tea No. 18, one of several cultivars grown at the farm. The black tea grown in Yuchi was originally Assam tea imported from India by the Japanese during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). The warm, rainy climate of Nantou County was deemed perfect for black tea cultivation, and over the years the Yuchi Tea Research



Antique Assam Tea Farm

and Extension Station has tweaked the original Assam tea to create new cultivars. The most popular of these is the No. 18, which has a distinctive cinnamon scent underlain with a subtle hint of mint.

It's late afternoon when we finally arrive at Sun Moon Lake. We had originally planned to take a twilight cycle along the western, "moon"-shaped side of the lake, but the drizzle now colors the idea of a tour de lac, once anticipated with pleasure, as a damp and uncomfortable ordeal. We instead board a bus and head to the small settlement of Ita Thao (伊達邵), where we plan to stay the night, and take in the lake from the wharf. A delicate mist floats above the water; low clouds entangle the surrounding mountains; the last boats of the day dock at the piers. The lake is still and silent.



Antique Assam Tea Farm

New Era Art Resort and Spa (牛耳藝術渡假村)

Add: 1, Sec. 4, Zhongshan Rd., Puli Township, Nantou County
(南投縣埔里鎮中山路四段1號)

Tel: (049) 291-2248

Website: www.neweraart.com.tw
(Chinese)

Paper Dome (紙教堂)

Add: 52-12, Taomi Lane, Taomi Borough, Puli Township, Nantou County
(南投縣埔里鎮桃米里桃米巷52-12號)

Tel: (049) 291-4922

Website: paperdome.homeland.org.tw
(Chinese)

Opening times: Mon-Fri: 9:00 - 20:00;
Weekends: 9:00 - 21:00
Entrance fee: NT\$100

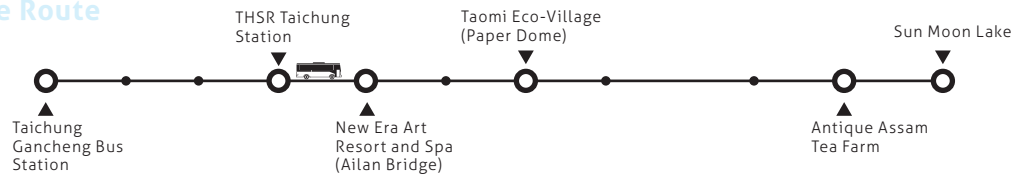
Antique Assam Tea Farm (日月老茶廠)

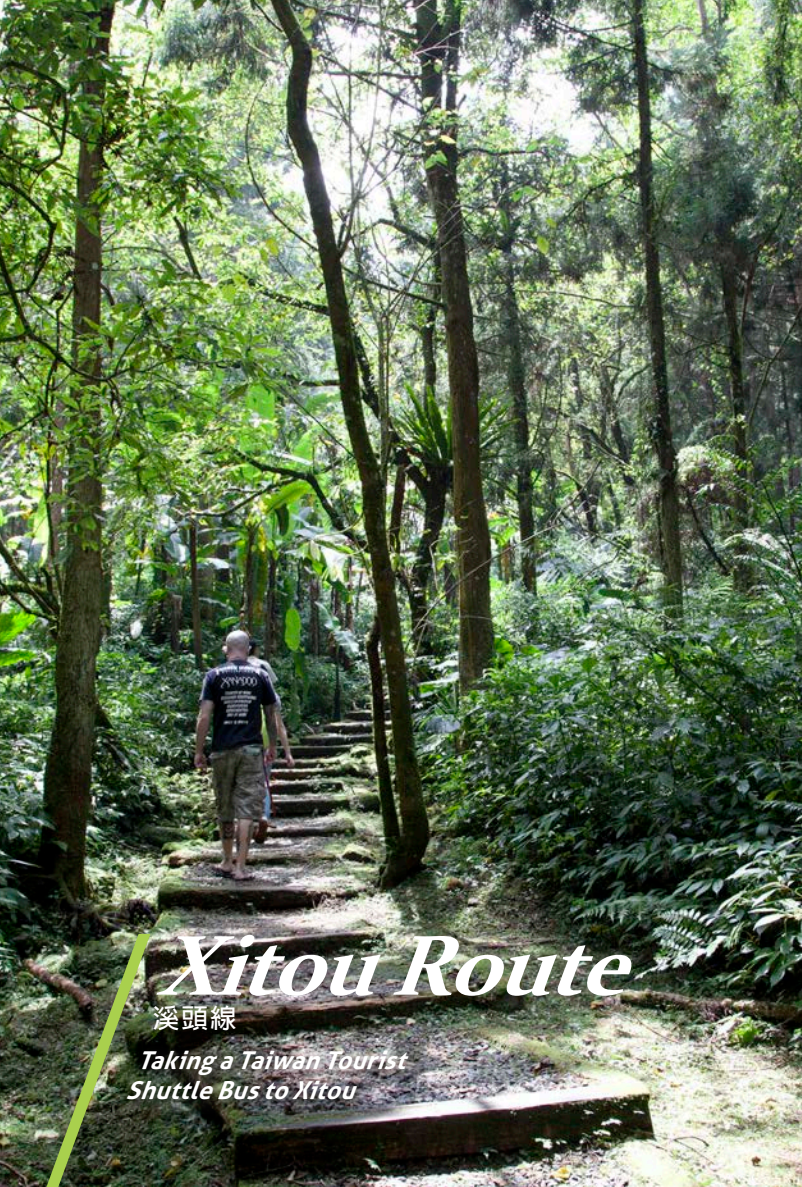
Add: 38, Youshui Lane, Zhongming Village, Yuchi Township, Nantou County
(南投縣魚池鄉中明村有水巷38號)

Tel: (049) 289-5508

Website: www.assamfarm.com.tw
(Chinese)

The Route





Xitou Route

溪頭線

Taking a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus to Xitou

The mountainous region of Xitou in Nantou County is less than an hour from downtown Taichung when taking a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus. Though not far geographically from the metropolitan hustle of the big city, quiet Xitou could not be more distant from any form of urban monotony.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Maggie Song

The Xitou shuttle buses leave from both the Taichung Railway Station and the Taiwan High Speed Rail Taichung Station at Wuri (烏日), and run south through Nantou County, passing through the town of Zhushan (竹山), known for bamboo products, and the tea-growing region of Lugu (鹿谷) before reaching Xitou (溪頭), a popular forest recreation area.

My first stop on this trip was the Evershine Lantern Factory in the Zhushan Industrial Zone (竹山工業區). Don't let the "Industrial Zone" in the name throw you. It's more a quaint collection of artisan warehouse workshops than the dusty, dirty grid of smoke-spewing factories the name might bring to mind. As for Evershine, it's a former umbrella factory that began churning out lanterns in 1960 for everything from celebrations, festivals, and weddings to funerals. Visitors learn about the history of lantern usage and what the various lantern designs mean, with English tours available.

There is also an open workshop, where a team of five expert lantern makers produce between two and three hundred lanterns per day, doing everything from making the flexible bamboo frames to cutting the cotton cloth that will be slid over them.

Though not directly on the shuttle-bus route, my next stop, Fonghuanggu Bird and Ecology Park, was nonetheless easy to reach by taking a taxi from Zhushan (30 min.; NT\$500 one way; you can also take Yuanlin Bus No. 6717, which only costs you NT\$77 but will take almost an hour). Part sanctuary, part zoo, and part research center, the park offers stunning views of Mt. Fenghuang (鳳凰山), which belongs to the Alishan Mountain Range (阿里山山脈).

A husband-and-wife volunteer guide team led me around the park, teaching me about the various plant and bird species we passed, paying special attention to those native to Taiwan, such as the Swinhoe's Pheasant. The true stars of the park are the parrots, which take the stage several times a day in their own show, which is equal parts educational and entertaining. I was introduced to Xiao-Bai, a mischievous blue-eyed cockatoo, and his somewhat grumpy counterpart Mei-Mei, a blue-and-yellow macaw whose nasty disposition was brightened with nothing more than a few sunflower seeds.

Back on the shuttle route again. The next stop, the township of Lugu, is a place known for its many tea plantations and teahouses. I strode from the bus stop over to Hong's Tea



1. Evershine Lantern Factory 2. Hong's Tea House

3. Fonghuanggu Bird and Ecology Park 4. Monster Village

House – Chun Ya Tang Tea World, where I received a crash course in tea etiquette and tasting.

My instructor, the kindly Mrs. Wu Mei-na (吳美娜), walked me through a basic “Art of Tea 101.” Basics include filling the pot a quarter of the way up with tea leaves, heating the water to a lower temperature, around 95 degrees Celsius, for a thinner taste, and higher for a thicker taste, and using the proper brewing time, 50 seconds for the first pour, going up in increments of about 10 seconds for every subsequent round.

Next up was a place well-known to tourists in Taiwan, to the tune of about a million of them per year, Xitou Nature Education Area. This park was the site of a Japanese logging operation during the 1895–1945 colonial era, during which almost all the native Taiwanese cedar was cut down. The Japanese cedar planted in its stead have since been allowed to reach up toward the sky without the threat of the saw, and the Taiwanese variety is starting to make a modest comeback.

The showpiece of the park is the aptly named Sacred Tree (神木), a 2,800-year-old red cypress that has survived no less than three lightning strikes, and was not cut down due to the fact that a fungus left it hollow and unusable.



Skywalk in the Xitou Nature Education Area

Another highlight is the Skywalk, a 220-meter-long walkway built seven-stories-high above the forest floor. It was originally built for visitors to observe canopy life from above; but since its construction in 2004, the surrounding trees have actually grown past it. Unfortunately, the Skywalk was closed for maintenance during my visit.

Conveniently located right next door to Xitou Nature Education Area is Monster Village, a quirky collection of shops and restaurants tied together with a Disney-esque horror theme. Even the food is “monstrous,” with snacks including *tang yuan* (湯圓) (boiled balls of glutinous rice flour) made to look like eyeballs, and “biting cat buns,” (咬人貓麵包) so named for their use of a stinging nettle found in the Xitou area, *Urtica thunbergiana*, commonly called “biting cat” in Taiwan. The plant, if handled, produces an itching sensation similar to poison ivy, but is perfectly edible after it’s cooked.

Speaking of which, my mission was to try this ominously named treat, and it didn’t take long to find the bakery that was the village’s first shop, opened decades ago. On the way I passed by the village mascots, Bado and Kumar, representatives of black bear and clouded leopard species native to Taiwan (the latter now extinct), and also took in a performance by an indigenous music troupe.

Evershine Lantern Factory

(光遠燈籠觀光工廠)

Add: 11, Yanping 2nd Rd., Zhushan Township, Nantou County (南投縣竹山鎮延平二路 11 號)

Tel: (049) 264-2394

Website: www.ever-shine.com.tw

Fonghuanggu Bird and Ecology Park (鳳凰谷鳥園)

Add: 1-9, Renyi Rd., Fenghuang Village, Lugu Township, Nantou County (南投縣鹿谷鄉鳳凰村仁義路 1-9 號)

Tel: (049) 275-3100

Website: fhk.nmns.edu.tw

Hong's Tea House – Chun Ya Tang Tea World

(宏記茶業 – 春雅堂名茶)

Add: 88-9, Xingchan Rd., Lugu Township, Nantou County (南投縣鹿谷鄉興產路 88-9 號)

Tel: (049) 275-5798

Xitou Nature Education Area (溪頭自然教育園區)

Add: 9, Sentin Ln., Lugu Township, Nantou County (南投縣鹿谷鄉森林巷 9 號)

Tel: (049) 261-2111

Website: www.exfo.ntu.edu.tw

Monster Village (妖怪村)

Add: 2-3, Xingchan Rd., Lugu Township, Nantou County (南投鹿谷鄉興產路 2 之 3 號)

Tel: (049) 261-2376

Website: www.mingshan.com.tw

The Route





At Lugang's Longshan Temple

Lugang *Route* 鹿港線

*Taking a Taiwan Tourist
Shuttle Bus to the
Old Town of Lugang*

The bigger cities of Taiwan are filled with interesting sights to see, but I was ready for an adventure of a different kind. I was heading with two friends to Lugang, an old town located in Changhua County on the western side of Taiwan near the Taiwan Strait.

Text: Amanda Hsiao Photos: Sunny Su, Fred Cheng

I didn't know much about Lugang before the trip, which only added to my excitement as we boarded a High Speed Rail train in Taipei. A quick one-hour ride later we arrived at Taichung's Wuri Station. At the station's information desk we were pointed to the bus stop of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Lugang Route, where our bus was already waiting (Platform 5).

After hopping off the bus at the Mt. Bagua Great Buddha Scenic Area (大佛風景區) bus stop east of central Changhua City, we walked uphill to the scenic area. Admission is free, and upon passing through the main gate we were greeted by colorful pagodas and temples and a garden. Listening to the gentle noise made by the koi fish and the soft splash of a little waterfall was the perfect way to relax.

The Great Buddha, which I was soon to find out is the largest Buddha sculpture in Taiwan, sits facing two stone lions and gazing out at the panorama of the city before him. I felt incredibly tiny standing between those lions, looking up at the benevolent figure.

The main floor houses a beautifully decorated temple with a myriad of candles lit in honor of the deity. Phoenixes soar above the altar, while elephants mark the entrance to the stairs to the higher levels inside the statue. Not knowing

much about the history of Buddhism, I was grateful for the English translation provided, and lost myself in the stories.

A small photo exhibition in a building to the side of the statue was next on my list of things to see, and a helpful guide gave me an explanation of the photos that showed the Great Buddha's history, starting with its creation in the early 1960s, down to the present.

Back down the hill, we waited a short while for the next tourist-shuttle bus, and then were back on the road heading to our next stop, Lugang Old Street (鹿港老街). Lugang is famous for its rich history and many surviving heritage structures. At one point in time, between the 1780s and 1840s, it had one of the busiest harbors in Taiwan. The town's name literally means "deer harbor," reference to the vast number of deerskins exported through it. Seeing some of the best-preserved historical buildings in Taiwan, it isn't hard to picture what the town must have looked like back in those early times.

In Lugang we visited first Yu Jen Jai, a pastry store that is one of the oldest in town. The outside of the shop resembles what it must have looked like back in 1877 when it opened. The inside was filled with eager customers. Caught up in the excitement, I picked up a few boxes of phoenix-eye cakes (鳳眼糕), the shop's signature snack, winter melon cakes, mung bean cakes, and *kousu* cookies (口酥餅), a flaky melt-in-your-mouth-cookie that immediately became my favorite.

Next, we followed a cobbled path to a tea shop that serves up a traditional specialty drink. I thought it was delicious, and learned that it was flour tea (*miancha*; 麵茶), a specialty drink of the area, served cold in the summer and hot in the winter. The tea tasted even better with the snacks I had bought earlier.

Our next destination was famed Longshan Temple (龍山寺), one of the oldest temples in Taiwan. I strolled around the temple, peering up at the old wooden beams of the roof, marveling at the fact that it was put together without using a single nail. Too soon it was time to head out, however, to my next and last stop.

Then we took the next bus into the wide open spaces surrounding Lugang, where we visited the Taiwan Glass Gallery. Once a factory, this is now a venue for glass-art



Mt. Bagua Great Buddha Scenic Area



Lugang Old Street 41



Lugang Old Street



Husheng Temple



Snack food



exhibitions and glass-making activities. There are a variety of stalls, selling everything from souvenirs to little figurines of blown glass. Surrounded by the stalls is a demonstration area where visitors learn how glass is made, and there is a DIY area for children interested in taking home their own glass figurines.

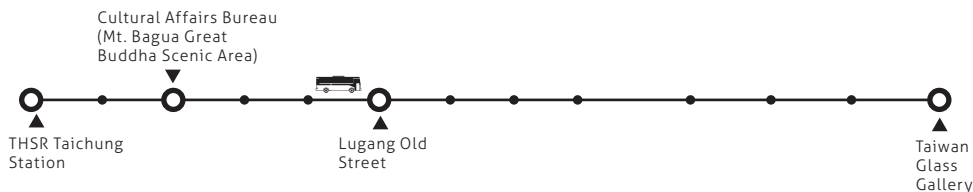
Not to be missed is the gallery's Golden Tunnel (黄金隧道). After taking off our shoes and donning a pair of gloves, we entered a hall of mirrors filled with gold- and blue-colored lights. I quickly understood the importance of the gloves as I felt my way through, marveling at the way the lights turned a tunnel into a forest of pathways. I even jumped a time or two when my own image seemed to pop out at me, or the floor appeared to disappear into an abyss.

Next to the factory is Husheng Temple (護聖宮), the only glass temple in Taiwan, built to honor Mazu, Goddess of the Sea. It was made using 70,000 pieces of glass, and is a sight to behold, whether you are viewing it in all its shining

glory during the day, or when lit up by its many colorful lights and lanterns at night. Gods, goddesses, and animal guardians made of glass protect the entranceway. Inside, a large dragon curves along the walls, and because of the large windows of glass you can't help but feel as if it is soaring above you and the pond you come to in the center of the temple. In the back is a statue of Mazu; she looks over her domain, standing in front of a 4,500-piece layered-glass sculpture of Mt. Jade (玉山), Taiwan's highest peak.

After lingering awhile, losing track of time while taking in the many carvings and statues that filled the temple, it was time to board the bus and head back to the THSR Station. As the bus passed by a number of other factories-cum-museums, as well as the places we had visited earlier, I couldn't wait for the chance to come back, this time with my family, to show them the compelling attractions of Changhua and Lugang.

The Route



Yu Jen Jai (玉珍齋)

Add: 186 Minzu Rd., Lugang Township, Changhua County (彰化縣鹿港鎮民族路168號)

Tel: (04) 2238-5356

Website: www.1877.com.tw (Chinese)

Taiwan Glass Gallery (台灣玻璃館)

Add: 30 Lugang S. 4th Rd., Lugang Township, Changhua County (彰化縣鹿港鎮工南四路30號)

Tel: (04) 781-1299

Website: www.timingjump.com.tw (Chinese)



Alishan Route

阿里山線

*Taking a Taiwan
Tourist Shuttle
Bus from Chiayi
to the Mountains*

Ancient tree at Alishan

There's nothing quite like throwing a few bare essentials in a backpack and taking off on an adventure to a place you've never been – a place where customs you've not yet experienced, a language you cannot speak, and sights both beautiful and mysterious combine for an unforgettable journey.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Maggie Song

One of the most stunning Taiwan Tourist Shuttle routes is the one that takes you from Chiayi City to Alishan. Alishan (阿里山) is not a single mountain, but a range of peaks averaging about 2,500 meters in height located in southern Taiwan's Chiayi County. Buses of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Alishan Route follow a winding road through a number of small mountain towns and villages all the way up to the Alishan National Forest Recreation Area, inside Alishan National Scenic Area.

After boarding the bus in Chiayi City I planned to make Chukou (觸口), a town known as the gateway to Alishan, my first stop. While I was watching out the window as the bus started its way towards the mountains, thick vegetation whipped by the glass, telling me that though I was not more than an hour from the modern conveniences of Chiayi City, I was already in a different world altogether – a world dominated by the awesome power of nature. Craning my neck to look out through the broad front windshield, I saw Chukou come into view and got off the bus to have a look around.

Walking a short distance down the road, I arrived at Diji Suspension Bridge (地久吊橋). This bridge, along with Tianchang Suspension Bridge (天長吊橋) just a short distance upstream along the Bazhang River (八掌溪), dates back to 1937 – a time when Chukou was a major regional commercial center. Crossing the river was then a dangerous enterprise, so the Japanese, colonial rulers of Taiwan at the time, built the two bridges. Their names together mean “everlasting” (*tianchang dijiu*; 天長地久), and today the bridges are a popular backdrop for couples having wedding photos taken. At one end of Diji Bridge, heading away from the town, is Longyin Temple (龍隱寺), an ornate place of worship that's well worth a stroll across for a photo opportunity.

After spending some time at Chukou I boarded the next shuttle that came along, an hour later, bound for Shizi Village (十字村) (bus stop name: Shi Zi Community). I wanted to check out this village's old train station, active until Typhoon Morakot took it out of commission in 2009 and trains from Chiayi stopped chugging through. I got off the bus at a rest area and took in the amazing vista below the tiny hamlet, seeing tiered tea farms carved out



Alishan Forest Railway



Alishan mountain scenery



Three Generation Tree



Sacred Tree



Diji Suspension Bridge



Alishan tea plantation

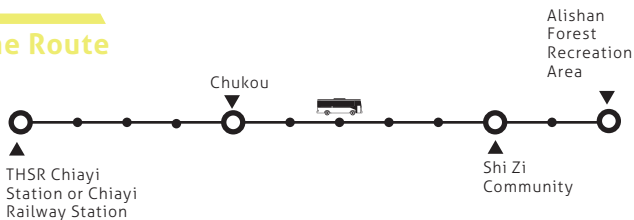
of the mountainside. Walking up a set of steps cut out of the mountain a short distance from the shop, I made my way to the station platform, moving along train tracks being reclaimed by a forest of ferns, bamboo, and pine trees. Above the old station is an observation deck overlooking yet another unspoiled, sprawling valley, and for the first time I felt a refreshing chill in the air. I was reminded that Chiayi County is one of those precious places where in the course of a single day you can experience three different climates – subtropical, temperate, and alpine – as you climb higher and higher into the heart of the verdant mountain range.

Next I wanted to take the famous Alishan Forest Railway through the Alishan National Forest Recreation Area from Alishan Station to Sacred Tree Station, check out the tree for which the latter is named, and take a walk along a hiking trail, Giant Trees Boardwalk (巨木群棧道). The trail takes visitors past 20 giant red cypress trees ranging in age from several hundred years to over two millennia. The Sacred Tree is thought to be around 3,000 years old, and although it fell in 1997 its huge remnant trunk section has been left where it toppled. People stand in awe of the natural world's immense and almost indescribable beauty.

At times I had long stretches of boardwalk all to myself as I meandered through the forest, standing below towering trees tens of meters high and several in diameter, their thick trunks humbling me. Later I stopped at the Three Generation Tree (三代木), which is actually three trees that seem to have grown together to become one over hundreds of years. Just imagine that in the lifespan of one of these giants, as many as 30 generations of people could come and go. It's an amazing place to stand and ponder such thoughts in the midst of this inspiring natural splendor.

Amidst the collection of shops, restaurants, and hotels at the entrance to the forest recreation area, tired yet elated and calmed by my surroundings, I hopped on a shuttle headed back downhill and got off at the village of Shizhuo (石棹), where a room at the mountainside Yun Min Ju Homestay awaited. It has been run for over 25 years by Mr. Liu Ning-yuan (劉寧源), who was born and raised in the former farmhouse-turned-guesthouse, along with his wife. The homestay sits amidst a tea plantation and a bamboo/cypress plantation, started by the proprietor's great-grandfather over 100 years ago. The affable Mr. Liu, who speaks both English and Japanese, heads out on the trails daily, and is only too happy to educate guests about the area's edible plants and the history of the region, or just engage in some good old-fashioned friendly banter.

The Route



Yun Min Ju Homestay (淵明居山庄)

Add: 4 Shizhuo, Zhonghe Village, Zhuqi Township, Chiayi County (嘉義縣竹崎鄉中和村石棹四號)

Tel: 0912-192-948
(05) 256-1066

Website: yunminju.ho.net.tw



Chikan Tower

88 Anping Route 88 安平線

Exploring Tainan on the 88 Anping Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus Route

Tainan is one of the most interesting and history-rich cities in Taiwan. Exploring it is easy with the help of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus service and some healthy, pleasant walking.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Rich Matheson

The 88 Anping Route (88 安平線) of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle service runs through the laid-back, sunny southern city of Tainan, long Taiwan's capital, a place where history is preserved down narrow, winding alleys and the island's international past comes to light.

After arriving in Tainan by train, I hopped on the tourist shuttle right outside the railway station. My first stop was the ruins of Fort Provintia. For nearly 40 years, from 1624 to 1662, Holland had a colonial presence in Taiwan, with Tainan its seat of power. The Dutch built the fort in 1652 to serve as both a center of trade and as a means of defense against uprisings. Today, atop the ruins of the fort is the Chinese imperial-style Chikan Tower (赤崁樓), for which the site is now formally named.

Though the structures on this site have been destroyed, rebuilt, and refurbished numerous times over the centuries, sections of Fort Provintia's original red-brick walls remain. The mortar used, a mix of sand, sugar, glutinous rice, and crushed oyster shells, has proven to have great durability. Strolling through the grounds, I saw imperial-era stone steles on which poetic verses were written in tribute to brave



Anping Fort



Tainan Confucius Temple

generals of centuries past, held up by sculptures of mythical *bixi* (甬屬), half-dragon, half-tortoise creatures.

Across from the entrance of the Chikan Tower site is a series of alleys housing a cluster of old eateries, each with its own specialty. If you're visiting during the hot summer months, stop by the verbosely named Two Silver Cents Traditional Winter Melon Tea Shop which, as the name indicates, doles out refreshing cups of tea flavored with sweet winter melon. A short walk away is Sen Maw Rice Food, which serves small but filling bowls of rice (ground rice in liquid, steamed at high temperature) with ground pork, salted egg yolk, and mushrooms.

Also in the neighborhood are a couple of historic temples; honestly speaking, you are never far from one no matter where you might be in Tainan. Grand Mazu Temple (大天后宮) is where the faithful come to worship the goddess of the sea, and is said to have been the first official Mazu temple, of which there are hundreds, on the island of Taiwan. Nearby is Sacrificial Rites Martial Temple (祀典武廟), dedicated to another widely worshiped deity, Guan Gong (關公), the god of justice, courage, and loyalty – and war. The temple, built in the classical southern Fujian style, features ornate “swallowtail” roofs decorated with carvings of the mythical *qilin* (麒麟), a creature with the head of a dragon and the body of a winged horse.

Four bus stops away on the shuttle route from Chikan Tower is the sprawling Tainan Confucius Temple (台南孔廟), erected in 1665 to honor the man revered as the father of classical Chinese thought. I walked through the Hall of Edification, the Hall of Ethics, a place where intellectuals once met to hear lectures, then the Hall of Great Achievement, in which a memorial tablet to Confucius himself is housed. All the hoary buildings are windows into the solemn world of Confucian thought and history, with perhaps no display as representative of this culture as the painstakingly crafted calligraphy in the Hall of Edification, the mere sight of which is enough to instill a feeling of peace and thoughts larger than oneself.

Next, it was time to check out a place of reverence of a different kind, the Koxinga Shrine (延平郡王祠), about 10 minutes by foot from Tainan Confucius Temple, dedicated to the military leader who expelled the Dutch from Taiwan,



Tainan specialties



Grand Matsu Temple

also known as Zheng Cheng-gong. The shrine contains a memorial to Koxinga and a hall with displays on Tainan history. Though the grounds have a history going back hundreds of years, the structures today date back only to the early 1960s, when they were restored in the architectural style of northern China.

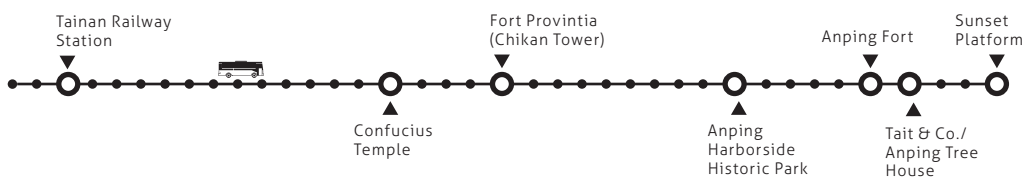
Following the shrine, I took the shuttle bus to the western part of central Tainan City and got off at Anping Historic Harborside Park (安平港濱歷史公園). First I went to the Tainan City Culture Exhibition Center of Indigenous Peoples, a place where visitors can watch traditional song-and-dance performances by people representing the various tribes that make up Taiwan's indigenous population. Walk around the harbor to the side opposite the exhibition center and you'll find Anping Old Street (安平老街), a collection of cramped alleys featuring shops and food stalls where friendly hawkers regularly call out with a ready smile, offering free samples in hope of earning a sale.

Anping Old Street leads to Anping Fort (安平古堡), site of the ruins of Fort Zeelandia, the main fortification built by the

Dutch during their Taiwan adventure. Built overlooking the harbor of the time, long since silted up, it offered protection against the local indigenous and Chinese population and protected the Dutch harbor trade.

The Dutch weren't the only Westerners to set up business in Tainan in days of old, however. The British also set up shop for a time in the 19th century, just down the road from the old fort's location. The Old Tait & Co. Merchant House (德記洋行), opened by an English trading company, has now been converted into a museum with exhibits on the progress of the area from prior to the Dutch occupation to the time of increased Han migration from China in the 18th century, with a small wax museum on the second floor. Beside this facility is an old company warehouse that, over the years, has been completely overtaken by the creeping roots and branches of massive banyan trees, which is why the building now sports the lyrical name Anping Tree House (安平樹屋) – an excellent spot to learn about the local ecology while you grab some shade.

The Route



Two Silver Cents Traditional Winter Melon Tea Shop
(兩角銀古早味冬瓜茶)
Add: 51, Lane 227, Sec. 2, Yongfu Rd., Tainan City (台南市永福路二段 227 巷 51 號)
Tel: (06) 221-6818
Website: www.come-incool.com.tw (Chinese)

Sen Maw Rice Food (森茂碗糕)
Add: 228, Sec. 2, Minzu Rd., Tainan City (台南市民族路 2 段 228 號)
Tel: (06) 222-5575



Old Railroad Bridge

Dashu Route

大樹祈福線

*Riding the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle
Dashu Route*

The best known tourist attraction in the rural district of Dashu, Kaohsiung, is without doubt the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center, a visit to which is an enlightening experience. Buses on the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle's Dashu Route will take you right to the gate.

Text: Owain Mckimm Photos: Aska Chi

Our first stop on our Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus tour along the Dashu (大樹) route is the San-He Tile Kiln, a near century-old ceramics plant. The factory's three imposing brick kilns, one of only two sets of large-scale traditional kilns in Taiwan still in use, are the last remnants of Dashu's former glory days as the brick-and-tile capital of Taiwan. "In the first half of the 20th century there was a big demand for ceramics," explains Xu Xi-ping (許西平), our factory guide, "because Taiwanese villages and towns were mostly collections of traditional courtyard houses, which used ceramics not only for basic construction but for their windows, drainpipes, and eaves as well." During the '60s, however, the concrete revolution caused the dwindling of this business.

Once a set of eight, the remaining three kilns stand side by side in the rear of the factory like three fire-blackened turtle shells. We duck inside one, its ceiling and walls hoary with the ash of decades of firing. Xu explains that after stacking the bricks or tiles in the kiln, wood and rice husks are burnt around the clock for two months in the fire-well by the door, which allows the internal temperature to slowly inch its way upward to just over 1,000° C. After that, the kiln is sealed and allowed to stew in its own heat for a fortnight; the heat is then slowly vented over another two weeks.

Visitors are offered the chance to do some DIY, including designing and making their own tableware and sculpting clay figurines, all activities costing NT\$250. I opt for a session in which you make a mosaic out of shattered tile pieces. In a moment of adopted patriotism, I attempt "Taiwan" in Chinese characters, and am complimented on my calligraphy more out of politeness, I suspect, than anything else.

With half an hour to kill while the glue on my mosaic masterpiece dries, we decide to spend a little time exploring the surrounding Education Wetland Zone (溼地教育園區). Bicycles can be rented for NT\$50 per hour at the park's Volunteer Hut (志工小棧). A paradise for birdwatchers, the zone is visited by over 140 bird species, the most common of which are identified on information boards in Chinese, though hardcore twitchers should have no real problems identifying these from the pictures provided.

Those with an interest in industrial engineering will have their appetite sated by the Old Railroad Bridge (舊鐵橋), once the longest steel bridge in Asia, which has a span of

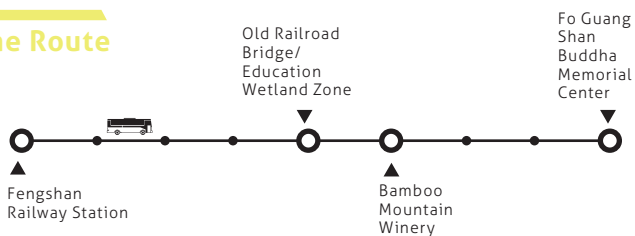
1,526 meters and crosses the Gaoping River (高屏溪). The structure, completed in 1913, undulates over the river like a colossal steel serpent, though there is today a gaping wound in this once noble metallic beast, caused by a succession of floods starting in 2005 that have washed away the bridge's mid-section.

Following our jaunt around the wetland and after picking up my ceramic art piece at the kiln, we get back on the bus and make the short ride up to the Bamboo Mountain Winery. The winery's signature product is probably the Red Yeast, Onion and Grape Wine. Though unfamiliar, the combination of flavors is pleasant, with a subtle hint of onion seeping through the medicinal tang of the red yeast. About two years ago the winery collaborated with the National Kaohsiung Hospitality College to perfect the fermentation process for this healthful wine.

After trying the healthy stuff, we move on to something harder – the winery's prize-winning Kaoliang (高粱) liquor. Kaoliang, a firewater made from fermented sorghum that is popular in Taiwan and mainland China, is the kind of spirit that first-timers might suspect would be rather effective stripping lacquer off old furniture. After holding a glass hesitantly to my lips for a moment and muttering a silent prayer to Bacchus, I knock back the clear, glassy liquid and... what miracle is this... I do not wince. I find it is much smoother than the versions I have tried before, with a pleasant roasted essence that coats the palate on its way down.



The Route



Buddha Memorial Center



Dashu Route

Bamboo Mountain Winery

It's late afternoon by now, and we ride the bus to our last stop, the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center (佛光山佛陀紀念館). This center was completed in late 2011 to house a sacred relic – a tooth belonging to Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of the Buddhist faith. The tooth was presented to the Venerable Master Hsing Yun (星雲法師), founder of the Fo Guang Shan monastic order, in 1998 by the Tibetan Lama Kunga Dorje Rinpoche, who had guarded the relic for three decades following the destruction of its original home during China's Cultural Revolution.

The center is a capacious complex covering an area of over 100 hectares, and is loaded with Buddhist symbolism. At the far western end stands the Fo Guang Big Buddha, a gigantic 50-meter-tall statue of a sitting Buddha forged from 1,780 tons of bronze and steel. In front of him is the center's Main Hall, topped with four Indian-style stupas that represent the Indian origins of Buddhism. The Jade Buddha Shrine inside the Main Hall is where the tooth relic is kept, and each hour a group of up to a hundred people is led by a master in a pre-unveiling session of meditation, explanation of Buddhist history, and prayer before paying reverence to the relic. Leading up to the Main Hall is the Great Path to Buddhahood – a paved walkway flanked by eight Chinese-style pagodas, which signify both the Buddhist idea of the Noble Eightfold Path and the religion's spread to China.

We have arrived late in the day, but you could in fact spend the whole day at the center and not find yourself lacking in things to do. The Main Hall has four exhibition rooms on Buddhist culture, and each of the eight pagodas is itself a museum of Buddhist artifacts.

San-He Tile Kiln (三和瓦窯)

Add: 94, Zhuliao Rd., Dashu Dist., Kaohsiung City (高雄市大樹區竹寮路 94 號)
Tel: (07) 651-2037 / 652-1432
Website: www.sanhetk.com.tw

Bamboo Mountain Winery (竹寮山觀光酒廠)

Add: 75, Zhuliao Rd., Dashu Dist., Kaohsiung City (高雄市大樹區竹寮路 75 號)
Tel: (07) 652-2660
Website: www.bmm.com.tw (Chinese)

Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center (佛光山佛陀紀念館)

Add: 1, Tongling Rd., Dashu Dist., Kaohsiung City (高雄市大樹區統嶺路 1 號)
Tel: (07) 656-3033 ext.4002
Website: www.fgsbmc.org.tw (Chinese)



Biking in Taitung

East Rift Valley Route

縱谷鹿野線

Taking a Taiwan Tourist Shuttle Bus Through Taitung's Countryside

The southeastern portion of Taiwan has some of the most beautiful scenery the country has to offer, with plenty of sun, bucolic mountain splendor, and thriving indigenous culture. A great option for discovering the area is taking the East Rift Valley Line of the Taiwan Tourist Shuttle bus network.

Text: Joe Henley Photos: Maggie Song

Armed with a day pack and a ticket for the city of Taitung, I took the train from Taipei down along the eastern coast. The trip to Taitung, which takes 3 hours and 30 minutes with the fastest train, is amazing in itself, with the line south of Hualien running through the long East Rift Valley (花東縱谷) between the Central Mountain Range and Coastal Mountain Range, passing small towns and towering peaks on both sides.

Taitung Railway Station is the sixth stop on the East Rift Valley Line. The tourist shuttle-bus run starts at the visitor center in downtown Taitung and ends in Luye Township (鹿野鄉). From the railway station I walked to nearby Beinan Cultural Park (卑南文化公園) (one stop from the station, if you take the tourist shuttle bus), to learn about the history and culture of the people who lived in the area in prehistoric times. I first stopped to have a look at a dig site where a portion of an ancient village, dating back about 3,500 years, has been unearthed, getting a glimpse into the everyday lives and beliefs of the prehistoric people.



Beinan Cultural Park

I learned that all houses in the village, and even their unique slate coffins, faced Mt. Dulan (都蘭山) to the north of Taitung City, a sacred site revered as a holy provider.

For more comprehensive information on the prehistoric Beinan culture, visit the associated exhibition hall, which is not far away. Visitors can view ancient weaving instruments and stone tools, along with pottery and examples of Beinan architecture. There are also explanations of rites of passage, such as the teeth-extraction ceremony performed on both young men and women to prove, through tolerance of extreme pain, that they had indeed come of age. Most of the signage around the museum is in Mandarin only, but English audio tours are available.

Leaving Beinan Cultural Park, my next stop was the Yuan Sen Applied Botanical Garden (three bus stops from the park), a mountainside area where tourists can learn all about the approximately 1,000 herbs that grow in Taitung and all around Taiwan. Over 300 are cultivated at the garden, and

tour guides are available to show visitors around (English-speaking guides are available).

The botanical garden also has a large herbal-products gift shop where you can browse through items such as tea, snacks, beauty products, and over-the-counter medicines. A short walk away from the centrally located shop is a huge herbal-hotpot restaurant, with many local greens served fresh daily. All the food available in the restaurant has been produced organically.

Next up was Chulu Ranch, the next stop on the tourist shuttle-bus line. The expansive 72-hectare ranch overlooks the botanical garden and the Pacific Ocean, in the distance to the east. The ranch is an active dairy farm, with around 200 head of cattle, along with horses, goats, ducks, turkeys, and other farm animals.

I walked past the grazing grounds and over to the milking pens. Once there, I was introduced to a few of the ranch's newest inhabitants, some calves born just a few months

Yuan Sen Applied Botanical Garden





Chulu Ranch



Biking in the countryside

before, including a rare set of twins. The curious calves caressed my outstretched hand with their rough tongues, their large eyes irresistibly adorable. Here you can see how raw milk is processed, with the opportunity to tour the working factory if you arrive in the morning, and you should also take the time to sample a few of Chulu Ranch's home-produced milk products. You can't go wrong with a tall, cool glass of fresh milk, along with some milk pudding or milk crackers.

When I got off the shuttle at Luye Visitor Center (鹿野遊客中心) at Longtian (the second-to-last stop on the bus line), I quickly found A-Do's Bicycle Rental Store and Guided Tours. A young guide named Xiao-Min, a proud member of the Bunun tribe (布農族) and at times a touring performer in an indigenous song-and-dance troupe, was ready to show me around. We hopped on a pair of rental bikes, the best way to take a relaxing, slow tour of the area, and pedaled off down the road.

During Taiwan's period of Japanese colonial rule (1895~1945) Japanese immigrants settled in Longtian (龍田) and there are still a few preserved historical buildings

from that era, including an elementary school that dates back nearly a century. We passed by pineapple and Buddha-head fruit (custard apple) farms, along with a landing area for hang gliders sailing down from the Luye Gaotai (鹿野高; Luye Plateau), that looks down over the village. A favorite spot for most tourists is the Longtian Green Tunnel (龍田綠色隧道), a road where trees on either side curve up and over the pavement, providing a natural overhang that stretches over a kilometer in length.

After my exploration of Longtian I jumped on my bike and headed off to get the bus back to Taitung Railway Station, a thoroughly enjoyable day in the city of Taitung and surrounding Taitung County complete.

Yuan Sen Applied Botanical Garden (台東原生應用植物園)

Add: 8, Shiyanchang, Mingfeng Village, Beinan Township, Taitung County (台東縣卑南鄉明峰村試驗場 8 號)

Tel: 0800-385-858

Website: yuan-sen.com.tw

Ticket for adults are NT\$250. There is also the option of purchasing entry along with a meal in the restaurant (NT\$618), and discounts for children and groups are available. Hours of operation are 8:30am to 5 pm.

Chulu Ranch (初鹿牧場)

Add: 1, Muchang, Lin 28, Mingfeng Village, Beinan Township, Taitung County (台東縣卑南鄉明峰村 28 鄰牧場 1 號)

Tel: 0800-571-002

Website: www.chuluranch.com

Ticket for adults are NT\$100.

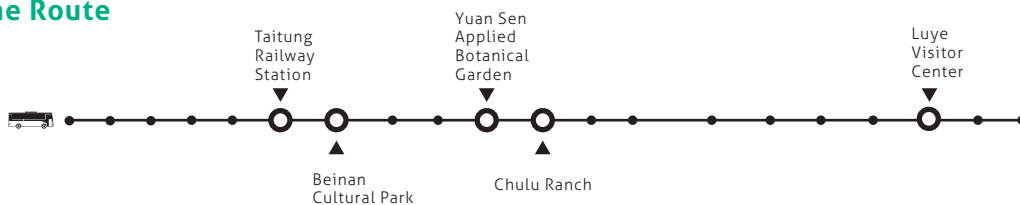
A-Do's Bicycle Rental Store and Guided Tours (阿度的店)

Add: 232, Guangrong Rd., Longtian Village, Luye Township, Taitung County (台東縣鹿野鄉龍田村光榮路 232 號)

Tel: (089) 550-706

Website: www.ado-bicycle.com.tw (Chinese)

The Route



USEFUL INFORMATION

Transportation Information

Taiwan Tourist Shuttle

(台灣好行)

Add: 9F., No. 290, Sec. 4, Zhongxiao E. Rd., Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路 4 段 290 號 9 樓)

Tel: (02) 2349-1500

Website: www.taiwantrip.com.tw

Travel Service Center of the Tourism Bureau (Taiwan Taoyuan Int'l Airport) (桃園國際機場旅客服務中心)

Add: No. 15, Hangzhan S. Rd., Taoyuan City (桃園市航站南路 15 號)

Service Hotline:

Terminal One: (03) 398-2194

Terminal Two: (03) 398-3341

Website: www.taoyuanairport.gov.tw

Travel Service Center of the Tourism Bureau (Kaohsiung Int'l Airport) (高雄國際機場旅客服務中心)

Add: No. 2, Zhongshan 4th Rd., Kaohsiung City (高雄市中山四路 2 號)

Service Hotline: 0800-252-550, (07) 805-7888

Website: www.kia.gov.tw

Taiwan Railway Administration (臺灣鐵路管理局)

Tel: (02) 2381-5226

Website: www.railway.gov.tw

Taiwan High Speed Rail

(台灣高鐵)

Service Hotline: (02) 6626-8000

Website: www.thsrc.com.tw

Tourism Information

North Coast & Guanyinshan National Scenic Area Administration (北觀國家風景區)

Add: No. 33-6, Xiayuankeng, Demao Village, Shimen Dist., New Taipei City (新北市石門區德茂里下員坑 33-6 號)

Tel: (02) 8635-5100

Website: www.northguan-nsa.gov.tw

Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area Administration (日月潭國家風景區)

Add: No. 599, Zhongshan Rd., Yuchi Township, Nantou County (南投縣魚池鄉中山路 599 號)

Tel: (049) 285-5668

Website: www.sunmoonlake.gov.tw

Yangmingshan National Park (陽明山國家公園)

Add: No. 1-20, Zhuzihu Rd., Beitou Dist., Yangmingshan, Taipei City (台北市陽明山竹子湖路 1-20 號)

Tel: (02) 286-1360

Website: www.ymsnp.gov.tw

Xitou Nature Education Area (溪頭自然教育園區)

Add: No. 9, Senlin Ln., Lugu Township, Nantou County (南投縣鹿谷鄉森林巷 9 號)

Tel: (049) 261-2111

Website: www.exfo.ntu.edu.tw

Alishan National Scenic Area Administration (阿里山國家風景區)

Add: No. 51, Checheng, Fanlu Township, Chiayi County (嘉義縣番路鄉觸口村車埕 51 號)

Tel: (05) 259-3900

Website: www.ali-nsa.net

East Rift Valley National Scenic Area Administration (花東縱谷國家風景區)

Add: No. 168, Sec. 2, Xinghe Rd., Neighborhood 17, Hegang Village, Ruisui Township, Hualien County (花蓮縣瑞穗鄉鶴岡村 17 鄰興鶴路二段 168 號)

Tel: (03) 887-5306

Website: www.erv-nsa.gov.tw