

# Southern Taiwan



In the south, people's ties to rural folk culture are strongest. Local gods are more fervently worshipped, traditions more respected, and a clannish regard for kith and kin more obvious. And in a land of hospitable people, southerners shine as the most hospitable of all.

Outside of Taipei, the only cities really worth visiting are in the south: ie Tainan and Kaohsiung. Tainan has a temple heritage second to none, and a great array of local foods to sample. Kaohsiung is a harbour city on a mad drive to make up for decades of lost development time. Ten years ago we could hardly stand to drive past it. But these days you can feel the buzz (much like Taipei a decade ago) and couple of days here soaking it in would be well spent.

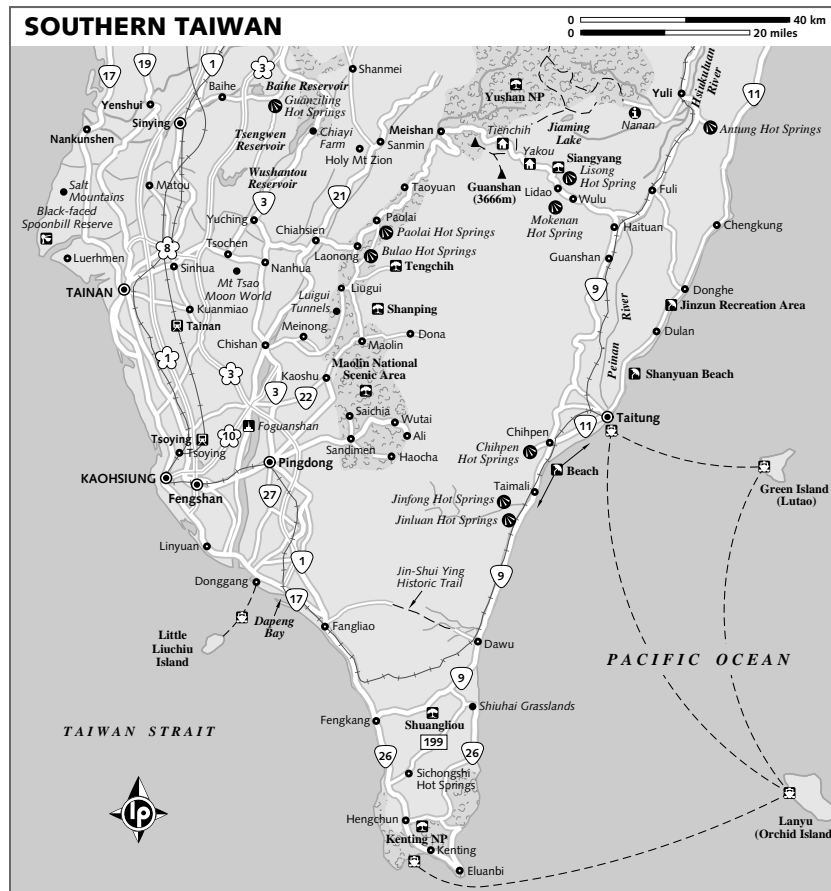
For some of the best mountain scenery in the country head to the South Cross-Island Hwy. This route literally crosses the island, and can be used as a walking path, with side trips up to 3000m-plus mountains and down to beautiful natural hot springs in the river valleys.

In fact, the south pretty much has it wrapped up for the nature-lover. There are two butterfly valleys – one of which (in Maolin) has recently been put on equal footing with the Monarch Butterfly Valley in Mexico – and a winter resting ground for the rare black-faced spoonbill. The southern landscape also varies from coastal mud flats, to grassy headlands, to majestic cypress forests.

Weatherwise, the south is hot and sticky in summer and warm and dry in winter. If you want to swim in January, head south.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike ancient forests and soak in natural hot springs along the **South Cross-Island Hwy** (p260)
- Bike through lush fields, eat traditional foods and shop at **Meinong** (p274)
- Explore Taiwan's temple heritage in the old capital of **Tainan** (p248)
- Swim or surf year-round in **Kenting National Park** (p282)
- Visit the winter resting grounds of the purple butterfly in **Maolin** (p277)
- Cross the southern tip of Taiwan on the **Jin-Shui Ying Old Trail** (p280), a steamy jungle route once used by the Qing dynasty military
- Get rained on with fireworks at **Yenshui** (p259)
- Scooter and snorkel around Taiwan's only coral island, **Little Liuchiu Island** (p281)
- Watch a ceremonial boat burn to the ground in **Donggang** (p280)



## National Parks & Forest Recreation Areas

There are three national parks in the south. Beautiful, remote Maolin is a stronghold for aboriginal culture but also holds an important winter resting ground for the purple butterfly. The South Cross-Island Hwy runs through the southern end of Yushan National Park and there's some excellent hiking to be done there. Kenting National Park is a beach playground, though there are also some interesting protected areas few people venture into. Siangyang Forest Recreation Area is an excellent bird-watching venue. Shuangliou Forest Recreation Area has a gorgeous waterfall, while much of Tengchih Forest Recreation Area boasts intact virgin

forest. Shaping Forest Recreation Area offers peaceful trails, abundant plant life, and excellent bird-watching. There's something for everyone in this part of Taiwan.

## Getting There & Around

It's easy to get to and around the major urban centres by public transportation. The High-Speed Rail (HSR) is convenient for travel to Kaohsiung but not Tainan (the station is 40 minutes walk from downtown). Scooters and cars can be hired in the cities and are recommended for travel into the countryside where public transportation is poor, such as in Meinong, Maolin and along the South Cross-Island Hwy.

## TAINAN CITY 台南市

‰ 06 / pop 754,917

We've always been very fond of Tainan (Táinán), and always impressed with its array of temples and historical relics. But we often wondered if we simply needed to get out more. So one day we travelled to Beijing and saw some of the greatest architectural wonders of the Chinese world. And then we returned to Tainan and found we were no less impressed with it than before. No, it couldn't compare directly to Beijing, but then travel is not a zero sum game in our opinion, and the wonderful deserves to be praised as much as the amazing.

Tainan is the oldest city in Taiwan, and the fourth largest. It was here that Taiwan's

modern history began and it is here that much of its traditional culture continues to thrive. Outside Dutch-built forts, lively night markets sell dishes exclusive to the region. Inside hundreds-of-years-old temples, people *bobui* (toss divination sticks) to determine the best course of action, just as their ancestors did when the temple first opened. The only difference is that today, people then jump into their cars and head to air-conditioned homes.

But no-one seems worried by the dichotomy. Modernity is embraced in Tainan as much as the past is respected. There are shopping malls, luxury hotels, sharp-looking cafés and trendy bars. But there is also an approved NT3-billion-dollar budget for re-

living and restoring the old harbour area of Anping and its trove of historical sights. Tainan has industries producing metals, textiles and machinery, a few old masters working on traditional crafts, as well as a new science park that promises to bring the city into the avant-garde of Taiwan's hi-tech revolution.

You can visit Tainan any time of year, though we love winter when it's warm (in the high twenties on average) and dry, and few tourists are about (try and find all those conditions in Beijing). Traditional festival days are of course a great time to come, as are the birthdays of temple gods. Give yourself at least a couple of days here to see the sights and observe the local culture.

## History

The Chinese first settled in the Tainan area in 1590. Not long after, the Dutch arrived. After colonising the island, the Dutch used Tainan as a base for their trade with Japan and China. The Dutch ruled from 1624 until 1662, the year they were expelled by the Ming loyalist Koxinga.

Koxinga established his central government in Tainan and built up the city. In 1683, when the Qing dynasty regained control of Taiwan and turned it into an official province, Tainan was chosen as the capital. Tainan remained the political, cultural and economic centre of the island until 1885, when the capital moved to Taipei. If you have a discerning eye, Tainan's pedigree is apparent by the stately quality of the city's temples and historical sights.

## Orientation

Almost all the sights in Tainan are concentrated around the city centre (west of the train station) and the Anping District. Both areas are compact enough to get around on foot, though you may want a taxi or bus to take you from one area to the other.

Please note the English spelling on road signs in Tainan has changed since the last edition. It may change again before the shelf life of this one expires.

## Information

Tainan is probably the most English-friendly city in Taiwan after Taipei. Nearly every sight worth seeing has English interpretation signs around it. Large map boards guide you along a walking-tour route similar to ours, though not identical (ours was first).

## CULTURAL CENTRES

**Tainan Municipal Cultural Centre** (Map pp248-9; ‰ 269 2864; 332 Jhonghua E Rd, sec.3; 11 9am-5pm)

## INTERNET ACCESS

**National Museum of Taiwanese Literature** (Map pp248-9; ‰ 221 7201; www.nmtl.gov.tw; 1 Jhongjheng Rd; 11 8am-5pm, closed Mon) You can get free internet access in the library here.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Tainan City Government** (www.tncc.gov.tw) A good resource, especially for anyone staying in Tainan long

