

East Coast



For many travellers, a love affair with the east coast begins with a journey to Taroko Gorge. Wandering this bedazzling marble canyon, visitors often find a private paradise in the form of a deep waterfall-fed pool or rocky lookout. Such delight does this discovery give that most people fear losing the spot to the masses and try to keep it secret.

But fear not, there are places like this all over the east coast. This chapter will let you in on some of them, but if ever you should take our recommendation to get off the beaten track, this is the time and place to do it.

Two main highways run through the east; try to travel them both (one down and one up). Hwy 11 is the coastline route and offers stops for swimming, biking and visiting aboriginal and fishing villages. Hwy 9 runs through a wide valley, rich in hot springs and local flavour. This is also prime farmland and the vast fields of rice, backed up by dark green hills, are wonderfully photogenic.

Eastern Taiwan has the highest concentration of indigenous peoples in Taiwan and many tribal members maintain both their language and lifestyle. Visiting an aboriginal village or attending a traditional festival is a highlight for most travellers.

For years, people have been saying that the time to visit the east coast is now before its backwater charms are lost forever, but we see no danger of that happening for a while yet. In any case, if you happen to find one piece of this paradise has gotten too crowded, there's always the next valley over.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike ancient hunting trails in **Taroko Gorge** (p188)
- Raft the scenic **Hsiukuluan River** (p198)
- Cycle down the winding coastline on **Highway 11** (p192)
- Photograph colourful fields of orange day lilies on **Sixty Stone Mountain** (p200)
- Visit the wetland classroom of **Mataian** (p197)
- See monkeys and barking deer in a banyan forest in **Chihpen** (p205)
- Retrace history and nature-watch on the **Walami Trail** (p200)
- Check out the thriving local music scene at **Dulan Sugar Factory** (p194)



Culture & History

Because of its geographical isolation, the east coast was slow to develop. Before the 20th century there were few settlers apart from indigenous peoples such as the Ami, Atayal, Bunun, Puyuma and Yami.

But things began to change (albeit less dramatically than in other areas) under Japanese rule. In 1926 the Eastern Railway Line began operations and wood and sugar processing factories were established up and down the coast. These factories drew large numbers of workers from other parts of Taiwan, especially the Hakka, who over time became the largest ethnic group in Taitung County. When Taiwan was returned to Chinese rule, the east was opened further with the completion of the Central Cross-Island Hwy in 1961 and the South Cross-Island Hwy in 1972.

Today, the east coast is still a relatively undeveloped area. The real legacy of the 20th century is the diverse mix of ethnic groups and cultural traditions that is easily seen in towns across the region. The indigenous people, while not the majority, have one of the strongest influences, reflected in the large numbers of annual festivals held throughout the year and the food visitors will encounter.

Climate

It gets warmer and more tropical the further south you go and the vegetation becomes lush; you can see, feel and smell the differ-

ence. Hualien is always slightly cooler than Taitung, and anywhere in the mountains will be cooler than along the coast.

Unlike in the north, there are not afternoon showers every day in summer, which makes the area more suitable for outdoor activities. Mid-August to October is typhoon season and the east coast is frequently battered with severe storms. Winters are chilly and the pervasive dampness and overcast skies can make it seem much colder than the actual temperature. Don't go to the east coast looking to swim in winter; head to Kenting (p282) instead.

National Parks & Forest Reserves

The crown jewel of Taiwan's national park system is Taroko, with its marble canyons and ancient hiking paths. The Nanan section of Yushan National Park, no slouch itself, features the rugged Walami Trail. Chihpen, Fuyuan and Chihnan National Forest Recreation areas each have their highlights: Chihpen has a beautiful old banyan forest, Fuyuan a butterfly valley and camphor forests, and Chihnan highlights the history of the logging industry in Taiwan.

Getting There & Around

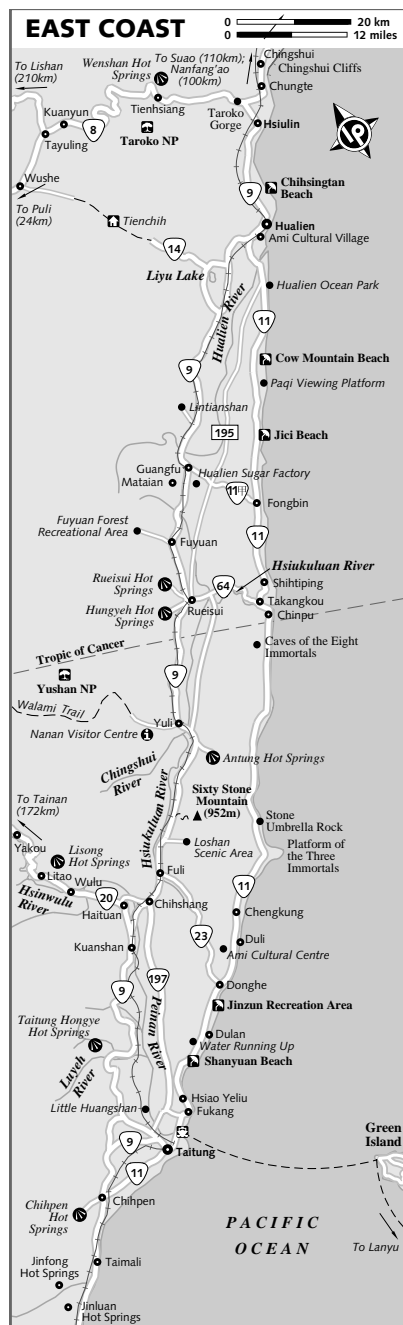
There is air and rail service to the east coast and bus service is available locally, but having your own transport is the most convenient way to see eastern Taiwan. There are simply too many places you can't get to without

EAST COAST EATING

Hualien and Taitung Counties have a diverse mix of aborigines, Hakka, Taiwanese and former mainland Chinese, all contributing to the culinary traditions of the area. One of the most influential cuisines in Hualien is that prepared by the Ami people. The cooking tends to be simple and emphasises the natural flavours of fruits, flowers, taro and wild vegetables. Dishes made from betel-nut flowers, sorghum and rattan are common and can be seen in night markets and restaurants around Hualien. For something unique, head to Mataian for hotpot made to boil with heated rocks.

Fruit grown in eastern Taiwan is often tastier and fresher than elsewhere. Pineapples, mangoes and watermelons can be seen growing (or for sale) along the sides of roads, and some orchards allow you to pick your own fruit and pay by weight. City markets have tables and carts heaped with a colourful assortment of common and exotic fruits, including star fruit, pomelos (the ones grown in Dulan are best), coconuts, durian, papaya and lychees. Taitung's custard apple, or Buddha head fruit (so-called because the bumpy ridges on the fruit resemble the head of the Sakyamuni Buddha), has even garnered its own festival; sad to say, it's pretty lame. The fruit is delicious though and really does have the consistency of custard.

Other delicacies to try include the dumplings in Hualien, the dried fish of Chengkung and the sticky rice of Taitung. Fresh seafood is available all along the coast; some of the best places to find it are Chengkung, Shihtiping and Fukang Harbour, north of Taitung.



your own wheels. That said, it's best to take the train, or fly, to Hualien as the twisting Suao–Hualien Hwy can be a bit unnerving.

Driving the highways between Hualien and Taitung (and the many splendid mountain roads connecting them) is a breeze, with light traffic on weekdays and plenty of places to pull off the road and explore.

Eastern Taiwan doesn't see as many cyclists as it deserves, which in part is why you should go. You can't ride the Suao–Hualien Hwy (and wouldn't want to anyway for safety reasons), so ship your bike down and begin at Hualien. Most riders travel on either Hwy 9 or 11, but there are numerous side routes (such as the highways connecting the 9 and 11) as well as county roads (such as the 195) that allow you to enjoy the same stunning scenery as drivers, but with far less traffic. The 11 is much more winding and steep than the 9.

There are numerous camp sites on the east coast, some overlooking the ocean, and a few that even have hot springs. If you are looking for B&Bs, you'll find them. In general you can set up a tent on most deserted beaches (just don't swim unless you know it's safe).

Past Taitung there is little of interest and in any case the truck traffic can be pretty bad. For more information, including some detailed routes, check out the website of a long-term Taiwan expat and avid biker (<http://rank.blogspot.com/2006/05/great-taiwan-bike-rides-part-1-taidong.html>).

HUALIEN 花蓮

% 03 / pop 109,324

Hualien (Huálián) is eastern Taiwan's largest city and the capital of Hualien County. It doesn't have many attractions of its own and most people can give it a miss or minimise their time here without worrying about whether they're losing out. It's best thought of as a base for visiting Taroko Gorge, Taiwan's most famous scenic spot, and other sites around the county.

Orientation

Hualien isn't a large place and it's easy to get around on foot. The city can be divided into three areas. The train station is where most travellers arrive and is surrounded by budget and midrange hotels. It's also where the bus stations are located for those wishing to go to Taitung or Taroko Gorge. The city centre features the most developed part of town, for what

