

72 HOURS IN Taipei

If you have traveled around Asia, Taipei may seem strangely familiar at first: it has the quirkiness of a Japanese town, the grittiness of a Chinese megapolis, and the efficiency of Singapore. Yet, explore more deeply and you'll discover a gem of a city with its own unique qualities

Words by Chris Schalkx



There's a vibe to Taipei that's hard to find elsewhere. A collective desire to make life in the Taiwanese capital as pleasant as possible has resulted in ample green space, excellent food at every price point, and neighborhoods peppered with boutiques, art parks, and "locavore" restaurants that sport their "Made in Taiwan" badge with pride.

FRIDAY MORNING

Breakfasts are a big deal in Taiwan. Often eaten on the way to work, they're carb-heavy and usually involve multiple dishes of fried and steamed goods. For an authentic breakfast experience, head to Fu Hang Dou Jiang, a local breakfast institution at Huashan Market. The specialty here is *shao bing* you *tiao*, a sesame flatbread wrapped around crispy Chinese crullers, usually ordered with a sweet or salty soy milk on the side. Lines often stretch out onto the street, so arrive early to beat the crowds.

From here, it's a 15-minute stroll to Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, one of Taipei's most iconic landmarks, built to honor the nation's first political leader. Two 89-step stairways lead to Chiang's bronze statue, seated under the country's national flag that's intricately hewed out of the domed ceiling. The museum on the ground floor exhibits memorabilia from the late leader's life, which give a great insight into the country's history. Arrive just before the top of the hour to catch the changing of the guards ceremony in the main hall.

Join local worshipers on a merit-making session at the colorful Bao'an or Confucius temples

AFTERNOON

Taipei's winding alleys offer a welcome respite from its hectic main roads. Many are practically car-free and packed with all kinds of restaurants, food stalls, and hidden surprises. This makes them great for cycling – the city has an excellent bike-sharing system with numerous docking stations. If weather permits, hop on a YouBike and cycle down to Shi Yu for lunch. Hidden on the second floor of an unassuming walk-up, this noodle joint serves up home-style beef noodles in a retro living room.

Then cycle to Songshan Cultural and Creative Park, a former tobacco factory transformed into a hotbed for the city's burgeoning creative scene. Here, cool concept stores and cutting-edge galleries breathe new life into the dilapidated warehouses, with highlights including the Taiwan Design Museum, Songyan Gallery for quirky Taiwan-made souvenirs, and Yue Yue & Co., a bookstore and café housed in a cozy Japanese log cabin.

EVENING

With easy access to the freshest seafood and high-quality produce from the country's varied and fertile farmlands, many of the city's top chefs have returned to



their roots and honor Taiwan's rich bounty on their menus. At Longtail, Chef Lam Ming Kin dishes out pan-Asian fusion fare like foie gras dumplings, *kanpachi* sashimi, and kaya toast with soy caramel – most locally sourced, all exquisitely presented and undoubtedly worthy of the Michelin star the restaurant bagged in 2018. Linger around for a cocktail or two, as the drink list is exceedingly good.

Head to HANKO 60 for a nightcap. Hidden behind the façade of a retro movie theater in bustling Ximending, this tiny speakeasy concocts some of the most creative cocktails in town. Expect your drinking vessel to be

Above: Taipei 101 is the city's tallest tower, at 1,667 ft. Below: The National Theater & Concert Hall is located in the Boai District of Taipei

a Chinese vase, miniature bathtub, or popcorn bag – and your drink to include ingredients like booze-infused boba pearls, pink salt, or rhubarb. For something a little more serious, the expertly crafted drinks at Ounce or Indulge will surely please the palate.

If you still have energy left, head over to the 24-hour Eslite Bookstore for the sheer novelty of browsing coffee-table books way past bedtime.

SATURDAY MORNING

Start the day at Good Cho's, a military complex turned into a creative hub in the shadow of Taipei 101, the city's tallest tower. It's a long-standing local favorite, and for good reason: its bagels (with flavors like chocolate banana and sweet potato) are the best in town. Grab one to go and browse around the "Made in Taiwan" goods on display, or the craft market that pops up on the premises multiple weekends per month.

Next, hop on the MRT to Yuanshan to join local worshipers on a merit-making session at





Clockwise from left: The Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall gateway; the vibrant shopping district of Ximending; a Taiwanese temple adorned with auspicious animals; the MRT on a street in Taipei

the colorful Bao'an or Confucius temples. Amid a cacophony of prayer chants, clinking fortune sticks, and cackling aunties, people from all walks of life gather to pray to richly decorated altars surrounded by thick clouds of incense smoke.

AFTERNOON

Dating back to Japanese Colonial times, Dadaocheng was once a bustling trading district for tea and dried spices. While most of the action has now moved elsewhere, its streets are still lined with Chinese apothecaries and spice wholesalers. Look behind them, however, and you'll discover a creative breeding ground unfurling. Attracted by its low rents, the city's entrepreneurial creatives have opened design studios, concept stores, and cafés in the Japanese-era shophouses lining its main thoroughfare.



Start from the southern end at OrigInn Space, a cozy café selling retro furniture and homeware from around the globe. Walk northward and stop by ArtYard to pick up one of their dim sum containers, then hop over to Peacock Bistro for an East-meets-West lunch made from mostly locally sourced ingredients. Next door, the excellent Museum 207 regularly hosts free exhibitions on

subjects like Taiwanese 80s pop music and local gifting customs. Don't miss its rooftop terrace that boasts fantastic views of the district. Stop by the recently refurbished Hoshing 1947 for delectable rice cakes, steamed right behind the counter.

At the end of Dihua Street, Sunrice Yehjinfa sums up the essence of Dadaocheng perfectly: this historical rice mill has been given a sleek makeover by a local architecture firm, preserving its old identity in a modern context. It now serves as a platform to promote local agriculture, selling products such as high-quality rice and soy sauce in wrappers that make them perfect for gifting.

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EVENING

You haven't experienced Taipei until you've eaten at one of its hectic night markets, where the fiery woks and sizzling grills show you exactly why Taiwan is such a world-renowned street-food nation. The lively Ningxia Night Market fringes Dadaocheng and makes for an excellent grazing ground for local street eats. To scout out the best snacks, joining the longest lines is a fail-safe strategy. For starters, seek out Rong's Pork Liver for its soup, Lin Ji Mochi for chewy rice balls, and Lai Ji for crispy oyster omelets.

Dadaocheng isn't exactly big on nightlife, but plenty of watering holes can be found if you know where to look. At the beginning of Dihua Street, the Taipei outpost of Danish craft beer brewery Mikkeller is hard to miss. Housed in a historical building, this bar has more than 20 different brews on tap – some flown in from Copenhagen, others brewed locally by Taiwan's leading craft brewery, Taiwan Head Brewers.

GETTY

Finding Lok Hue Hng is a bit more challenging: it's tucked away on the second floor of a nondescript shophouse in a small alley. This neon-lit watering hole draws inspiration from the neighborhood for its drink list, featuring locally sourced teas and herby, punchy cocktails.

SUNDAY MORNING

While Taiwan is known for its high-quality tea and scenic teahouses, coffee has steadily caught up as the beverage of choice. Nowadays, Taipei is considered one of the world's top cities for specialty coffee, and finding a flat white, cold brew, or perfect drip coffee is often just a matter of turning around the corner.

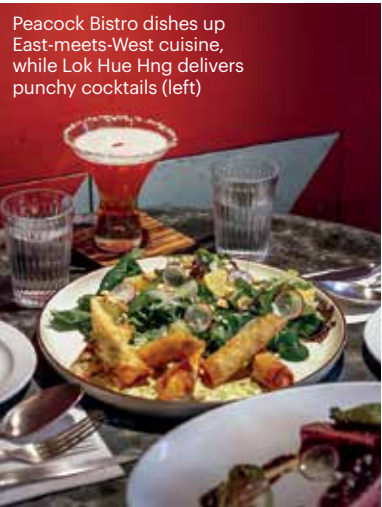
A great place to explore Taipei's vibrant café culture is Fujin Street, a leafy lane home to dozens of specialty coffee shops and brunch spots. Here, savvy locals rummage through vintage vinyl at Beans & Beats, sip lattes by award-winning baristas at Fujin Tree 353 Cafe, or

score a new outfit at the Taipei outlet of Japanese label BEAMS. After your caffeine fix, explore the streets around Minsheng Park, where small-scale galleries, concept stores, and art studios occupy the ground floors of typically Taiwanese apartment blocks. While you're around, pick up a box of Taiwanese pineapple cakes at local favorite SunnyHills.

AFTERNOON

For lunch, seek out Din Tai Fung for its legendary *xiao long bao*: juicy soup-filled dumplings folded with the utmost precision (exactly 18 folds on each little packet). The chain's original restaurant in Xinyi has wait times of well over an hour, so visit the Fuxing outlet where lines are noticeably shorter.

The nearby Eastern District is dotted with boutiques and stylish select stores like Hotel V, Groovy Store, and Artifacts, alongside a slew of international Indie labels. When the wallet is empty and shopping bags are filled, take a window seat at one of the area's



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many bubble tea or dessert parlors for some serious people-watching – this is where the city's most fashion-forward folks strut the streets.

EVENING

Arrive at Xiangshan (Elephant Mountain) just before sunset to observe the city from its finest vantage point. It's a strenuous 20-minute climb to the top (and you *will* be dodging the selfie sticks of half of Taipei's tourist population), but it's worth it for

the phenomenal view that awaits at the summit.

For dinner, try the Michelin-starred Tairroir, a Taipei culinary hotspot. Here, Chef Kai Ho combines French cooking techniques with indigenous ingredients, resulting in intricately plated dishes such as pu'er tea silkie egg with sweet potato fondant and buckwheat tile, and Tainan asparagus velouté with salted egg gougères: a great final feast in the Taiwanese capital.

Where to stay - Taipei



Palais de Chine

Experience an elegant mix of Chinese culture and Western aesthetics at the sumptuous Palais de Chine. The horse sculpture and magnificent bookcase on the first floor symbolize the essence of traveling, while in-room amenities echo the design of traditional Chinese snuff bottles. Enjoy leisure facilities such as the Vite Gym, while Le Palais restaurant has been awarded a Michelin three-star rating for its superb Cantonese cuisine.



Grand Victoria Hotel

Located in the Dazhi Miramar business district, Grand Victoria Hotel fuses classic Victorian architecture with 21st-century design elements. This theme is evident in the stylish guestrooms that merge minimalism with classic décor motifs such as wallpaper and velvet upholstery. Dine on mouthwatering meals at N168 Prime Steakhouse or relax by the fourth-floor pool sanctuary surrounded by exotic blooms.

➡ For information and reservations, please visit PreferredHotels.com