

TAIPEI: 5 MUST DOs

THE ESSENTIAL QUICK GUIDE FOR DISCERNING TRAVELLERS.

BY APRIL THOMPSON

1 HAVE A BITE AT THE NIGHT MARKETS

You haven't experienced Taipei until you've visited its night markets. Its unusual and wonderful treats are a must-try for adventurous diners travelling a la Anthony Bourdain. Take the Metro to the Longshan Temple stop, and from there you can explore three markets: the Guangzhou Street, the Huaxi Street and the Wuzhou Street Night Markets. Rev up your palate with an oyster omelette before going into high gear with a plate of deep-fried fermented 'stinky tofu' (your nose will inform you when you're near the vendor of this beloved Taiwanese delicacy). While the food stalls are the markets' main attraction, you can shop for souvenirs, get a massage, play a game of chance or just watch the parade of happy snackers go by.

2 TAKE A HOT BATH

Located on the Pacific Rim's 'ring of fire', Taiwan is blessed with a wealth of natural hot springs. Just 20 minutes from Taipei's Main Station, Beitou is a favourite spot for springs both hot and cold, and boasts a range of options from simple bathhouses to five-star spas. Perched on Beitou's lush green mountainside, Shann Garden has had a colourful history, from Japanese Officers' club in the 1920s to the site of house arrest for Chinese general Zhang Xueliang, who masterminded Chiang Kai-Shek's 1936 kidnapping. Today, visitors can soak in the open-air pool and watch the sulphuric steam rise from the valley, sip tea in the Japanese-style teahouse or indulge in a feast inspired by Xueliang's favourites, such as Hong Kong-style abalone and Taiwanese-style pork stew rice. 34 Youya Rd; Tel: 886 (0)2 2896 5700, www.shann-garden.com.tw (in Mandarin).



3 PARTY 101

To party like a rock star, follow the hip and well-heeled crowd to the cluster of clubs next to the Warner Village Cinema complex. While clubs go in and out of style with the whims of fashion, Room 18 has held its ground for seven lucky years as a hip-hop hotspot. Cover at Room 18 and Lava, the bar next door, is NT\$700 (US\$22) (inclusive of two drinks) on Fridays and Saturdays; you'll have to add a zero if you want to get a VIP table. The unofficial dress code: women, long hair and short skirts; men, 3-D hair and kitschy T-shirts. It is located just around the block from Taipei 101, so if you get lost, just follow the long night shadow of the world's tallest building. B1, 88 Songren Road, open from 10.30pm-5am Wed./Fri./Sat only; www.room18.com.tw



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Bask in the pool at Shann Garden; ride the Taipei Metro; party in Room 18; and check out the 'stinky tofu', if you dare, at one of the night markets.



lot more than computer chips; there are more than 40,000 items for sale, including card holders made of glass, bamboo products ranging from shampoo to socks, and even replicas of some of the ancient Chinese treasures found in Taipei's Palace Museum. 1 Hsu Chow Road, open 9am-5.30pm daily; www.handicraft.org.tw

4 EASY RIDER

While it may be the destination rather than the journey that matters, Taipei's Metro (www.trtc.com.tw/e) makes that journey as pleasant as can be. With seven lines covering almost every tourist site in the capital, there is little need to rent a car or spend on taxis here. The most efficient of the world's 12 largest metros, it is a great way to see the green belt surrounding the city, and Taipei Metro's Guide to Hiking and Cycling (available at selected stations) will help lead the way. Stations

have well-marked English signage and fares start at NT\$20/US\$0.60. By year end, the city's public bicycle rental system will be up and running, with bicycles for rent near Metro stations. With 27 bike-friendly stops, cyclists can also take their wheels on the Metro.

5 MADE IN TAIWAN

The Taiwan Handicraft Promotion Center is a haven for shopping mavens. Peruse the four floors of this government-operated centre and you will realise that Taiwan makes a

FAST FACTS

- CURRENCY**
Taiwan New Dollar (TWD; also written as NT\$, NTD and NT)
US\$1 = 31.4 NT\$
- VISA**
Requirements vary. Log on to www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/2-visitor/visa_custom/index.htm for details.
- BEST TIME TO VISIT**
While Taipei is a year-round destination, the city is at its driest and most comfortable from September to November. The heat and humidity peak in summer (June to August).
- GETTING THERE**
Singapore Airlines flies up to 3 times daily from Singapore to Taipei.
- MORE INFORMATION**
eng.taiwan.net.tw

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