

Taiwan Etiquette

Taiwan – A Quick A-Z

In general, Taiwanese people are not overly formal or easily offended. It is more important to bring along a generous stockpile of smiles. People in Taiwan are quite hospitable (though may be shy or nervous when meeting a foreigner), and a friendly disposition will make up for a host of faux pas.

The Taiwanese are also especially appreciative of foreign guests who are curious about their culture. An avid interest in all things Chinese, and the unique aspects of Taiwanese living, will win you lots of friends.

Airport Departure Tax – Domestic: none; International: NT\$300 (£4.68); included in the ticket price.

Banking - Most banks have automatic teller machines (ATMs) and UK credit and debit cards can be used to draw cash at most ATMs, including those at post offices, anywhere in Taiwan.

International money transfers in and out of Taiwan are also quite a common banking service. At a bank, sterling travellers cheques may be more problematic than might be expected. Aim for a Bank of Taiwan or a Mega Bank.

Business Hours –

<i>Banks</i>	Mon - Fri	0900 – 1530
<i>Commercial Firms</i>	Mon - Fri	0900 – 1700
<i>Government Offices</i>	Mon - Fri	0830 – 1230 1330 – 1730
<i>Department Stores</i>	Mon - Sun	1000/1100 – 2100
<i>Most other stores</i>	Mon - Sun	0900/1000 - 2200

Calendar – Dates in Taiwan are usually rendered differently from the Western Calendar, as they are based on the founding of the Republic of China in 1911. Hence, 2008 becomes 97.

Climate – Sub-tropical in the North, tropical in the South. The weather is warm and mild all year round, particularly suitable for travel. The mean temperature is above 25°C between June and September and over 15°C between November and March; the average annual rainfall is 2,500mm. Taipei experiences approximately 3 times more rainfall than London.

Consular Service for British Citizens –

The British Trade and Cultural Office, new office:

26F, President International Tower, No. 9-11, Song Gao Road, Xin Yi District, Taipei 11073
Tel: 02 8758 2088 Fax: 02 8758 2050

Copy Service - A cheaper alternative to the hotels' business centres are the omnipresent Seven Eleven convenience stores or film processing shops.

Credit Cards – Major credit cards are valid in Taiwan and a growing number of restaurants, stores and other establishments accept them (although Mastercard and VISA are preferred over AMEX). Nevertheless, plenty of smaller shops and restaurants do not accept them, especially outside the bigger cities – so make sure you carry at least some cash to avoid difficulty.

Drinking Water – Tap water should not be drunk. Hotels and restaurants serve distilled or boiled water, and a wide range of mineral water brands are available at all convenience stores for NT\$20 – 30 (31-46p).

Electricity – 110Volts AC. Plugs and sockets are of the two flat prong varieties.

English Directory Enquiries – Dial 02 2311 6796 or 106

English Language Newspapers – In terms of print media, Taiwan has three local English language newspapers – the Taiwan News, Taipei Times and China Post. They cost NT\$15 (23p) each and have their own particular editorial perspective. All offer reliable coverage of international and domestic news and local events.

English Language Radio Station – ICRT (International Community Radio Taipei) broadcasts 24 hours per day on FM100.7mHz and AM1548kHz. BBC World Service can be heard on AM 576 kHz from Monday to Friday only during the morning and all day during the weekend. However, sometimes the BBC is very hard to receive.

Exchange Rate – Currently approximately NT\$59.32 (as at 10.06.2008)

Face – A vital concept for all Taiwan citizens. Generally, you will discover that people insist on buying you drinks and meals, giving you gifts and food. If you refuse, they will insist some more. The more you refuse, the more they will insist, and so on. Usually, you will give up and accept what's been offered.

What is happening during these rituals of insistence and refusal is an exchange of 'face' (mian tze). The giver is actually gaining face, and while the receiver does not gain face, he or she must be careful not to appear too eager to receive a gift, or else they will lose face.

Face is something similar to the Western concept of a good reputation, only more highly valued. It is gained by demonstrating the willingness - and the wherewithal - to share. Generosity is the essence of face. And accepting friends' generosity (with a show of polite reluctance) is a way for people of lesser means and social standing to give something of value to others.

Film – Camera film and processing prices are cheaper than in Britain, and speed processing shops abound.

Gifts – When presenting a gift, money, a package or document, it is polite to offer it with both hands. This symbolizes that the present is an extension of your person.

If you receive a gift, do not open it in the presence of the giver. To do so would be construed as unseemly haste, indicative of greed.

Greetings – When they meet each other, people in Taiwan usually shake hands. They generally do not bow as in Korea or Japan, except on very formal occasions, such as when receiving an award or addressing an audience.

Health – There are very few risks to your health in Taiwan. Malaria, an endemic disease in other parts of Southeast Asia, is completely absent, as is rabies.

However, Hepatitis A can be contracted, especially in rural areas. The disease is acquired because of poor sanitation, so be careful to eat from clean glasses and utensils. Avoid drinking straight from bottles and cans.

In addition, Hepatitis B and C are present in Taiwan, though immunization programs have limited them among the younger generation.

Language – The official national language is Mandarin Chinese, and this is a compulsory subject in all government recognised schools. Many citizens also speak other varieties of Chinese, such as Taiwanese or Hakkanese. Although English is a compulsory subject in schools, the speaking and listening skills of the general population are weak, and destination cards written in Chinese are essential if you will be reliant on taxis for transportation.

Even if you're visiting Taiwan for a short period of time, mastering at least a few essential Mandarin phrases will make your stay far more fulfilling.

Taiwan uses the traditional complex form of written Chinese (not the simplified form used in mainland China).

Medicines – A large range of Western drugs and medications are available from local pharmacies, and many drugs which are available only on prescription in Britain can be purchased over the counter. Look out for "Watsons", which are all over the island, with bright blue tore fronts.

Money Matters – The official currency of the Republic of China on Taiwan is the new Taiwan Dollar (NT\$). Coins come in denominations of 1,5,10 and 50; bills come in denominations of 100,200,50,1000 and 2000.

Travellers checks are rarely cashable in stores or restaurants, but can be used in the larger hotels. They can also be exchanged for NT dollars in banks. Caveat, not all hotels will accept sterling travellers cheques (particularly outside Taipei) although US, Euro and Japanese Yen are widely accepted.

Networking – Building a network of personal connections has long been an important factor of Chinese life. It is done through a concept known as Guanshi (pronounced "gwanshi"), which simply means "relations". Guanshi is the concept of stored favours, often amassed through networking and somewhat akin to the Western 'old school tie' concept. If you need to get something difficult done quickly or cheaply, you need a little Guanshi to help oil the wheels.

Just like "face", Guanshi is an important abstract commodity in Chinese Society. It can be gained, lost or increased, and it is absolutely crucial for getting things done. Guanshi is a social bond between two people, who share an informal pact to help each other. Guanshi is a relationship that is nurtured and strengthened over time. With a network of Guanshi relationships, a person can develop business opportunities, find information and get help in times of trouble. Guanshi relationships that go far back in time can amount to very solemn commitments.

Politics – Unless you are exceptionally confident of your audience's stance, it is best to avoid discussion about Taiwanese politics which, judging by the antics of the politicians, can be remarkably physical/robust. The politics predominantly focuses on relationships with mainland China. The 'Pan Blue' party are all in favour of maintaining an insular approach, while the 'Pan Green' seek a 'rapprochement' with the mainland. Currently both the President (Ma Ying Jou) and the Executive Yuan (Parliament) are both 'Pan Blue'.

Population – The population of Taiwan is more than 22 million. The island's population density is the second highest in the world after Bangladesh, estimated at 609 per square kilometre. Taipei and Kaohsiung are the island's major metropolises with populations of 6,400,000 and 2,690,000 respectively.

Public Conveniences – Few and far between, and never equipped with paper. Make sure you carry tissues with you. The Chinese characters on the door will read:

男

Gents

女

Ladies

Queues – An alien concept. Not only will the meek not inherit the earth, in Taiwan they will never succeed in boarding a bus, buying a train ticket, or being served when it is their turn. Robust but good-humored protection of your assets is in order.

Shoes - Always take your shoes off when you enter someone's home. This rule is virtually universal in Taiwan. Your hosts will almost certainly tell you not to bother but they do not mean it. They will provide you with a pair of slippers to wear while indoors.

Do not take off your shoes in public places – it is not expected, except in a few restaurants or tea houses with tatami mats.

Time – GMT +8

Tipping – A 10% service charge is automatically added to room rates and meals. Other tipping is optional. At the finer hotels, it is appropriate to tip a bellhop.

Umbrella – An essential. More umbrellas are produced in Taiwan than any other country in the world. They are very cheap and frequently 'lost' when left in racks outside shops or office: Although there is generally a strong sense of ownership, this does not seem to apply to umbrellas which sometimes seem to be regarded almost as community property.

Useful websites -

- ❖ Weather information: www.cwb.com.tw
- ❖ Tourist Information: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/traveladvice-by-country/>
- ❖ Government Information: www.gov.tw

Newspapers and Magazines

- ❖ China Post: www.chinapost.com.tw
- ❖ Taiwan News: www.etaiwannews.com
- ❖ Taipei Times: www.taipeitimes.com/News
- ❖ Taiwan Headlines: www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw
- ❖ Sinorama: www.sinorama.com.tw/wn/

General Information

- ❖ Market Information <http://www.britishcouncil.org/taiwan-subs.htm>
- ❖ Lonely Planet Taiwan & Taipei Profiles:
www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/north_east_asia/taipei/
www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/north_east_asia/Taipei/
- ❖ Welcome to Taiwan: www.taiwan.net.tw/lan/cht/index/
- ❖ Taiwan Fun: www.taiwanfun.com
- ❖ The Community Services Centre: www.community.com.tw
- ❖ Taipei Life Website: www.taipeilife.com
- ❖ Misc links: <http://aymta.org/Resources/tailinks.html>

Telephoning in Taiwan

English Directory Enquiries 02 2311 6796 or 106

- **International Calls**

002 + country code (44 for the UK) + district code + phone number

Taiwan is eight hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, and the cheapest time to make international calls is after 23:00 on Sundays.

For operator-assisted international calls, please dial 100. Direct.

Taiwan international telephone rates are amongst the highest in the world, and the hotel surcharges are stiff. If you wish to make an international call from an outside phone box, look for the International Direct Dial phones (IDD).

- **Domestic Long Distance Calls**

These may be made on private phones or all public phones directly. Calls made in a different area code are charged as long-distance calls.

- **Local telephone calls**

The rate is NT\$1 for one minute. Calls are automatically cut off after 2 minutes. The area code should not be dialled for calls within the same area. Most public telephones take Telephone Cards which are available at kiosks and the ever present Seven-Eleven stores. Each card costs NT \$100.

Some public telephones still take real money. NT \$1, 5 and 10 coins are all acceptable: NT\$1 gives you one minute. Long distance calls within Taiwan are a bit more expensive, depending on the distance.

Instructions for use are generally in a picture format on the left hand side of the unit. The procedure is: Lift receiver, insert coins or card and dial number.

Some telephones in pubs or restaurants have a button on the left hand side of the unit. This is the 'speak button'. You must press this when your call is answered. If you do not, the person at the other end will not be able to hear you.

Major Taiwan Area Codes:

Taipei 02	Hualien 038
Taichung 04	Keelung 02
Kaohsiung 07	Tainan 06
Hsinchu 03	

Please note that Taichung County and Taichung City phone numbers have been changed to 8 digits and Nantou County phone numbers have been changed to 7 digits since 1st January 2001. In general, you should dial a '2' in front of the old digits.

- **Fax**

International hotels and many convenience stores provide a fax service within Taiwan and overseas.

Emergency contact details

❖ Emergency Services Telephone Numbers

Fire: 119

Police: 110

Ambulance: 119

❖ **English Speaking Police**

Taipei: 02 2555 4275
Kaohsiung: 07 215 4342
Taichung: 04 328 9100
Hsinchu: 03 551 1153

❖ **Consular**

The British Trade and Cultural Office
26F, President International Tower, No. 9-11 Song Gao Road, Xin Yi District, Taipei 11073
Tel: 02 8758 2088 Fax: 02 8758 2050

❖ **Hospitals**

Should you need one, there are a number of good hospitals in Taiwan. Those who prefer alternative medicine may wish to try the many Chinese medicine clinics on the island.

Chang Gung Memorial Hospital 199, Tun Hua North Road, Taipei Phone: 02 2713 5211	Jen Ai Municipal Hospital 10, Jen Ai Rd Sec 4, Taipei Phone: 02 2790 3600
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Chung Ho Memorial Hospital 100, Shih Chuan 1 st Road, Kaohsiung Phone: 07 312 1101	Kaohsiung Municipal Minsheng Hospital 134, Kai Hsuan 2 nd Road, Kaohsiung Phone: 07 751 1131
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Chungshan Medical Dental College Hospital 23, Chung Kand Rd Sec.1, Taichung Phone: 04 201 5111	Hsinchu Hospital 25, Lane 442, Chin Kuo Rd Sec. 1, Hsinchu Phone: 03 532 6151
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❖ **Dentist**

Leader Dental Clinic 11, Lane 236, Tun Hwa South Rd Sec. 1, Taipei Phone: 02 2772 2378	Dynasty Dental Clinic 2-5 Wen Heng 2 nd Rd, Kaohsiung Phone: 07 333 2109
Chungshan Medical Dental College Hospital 23, Chung Kang Road Sec.1, Taichung Phone: 04 201 5111	Mei Jih Dentist 48, Wu Chang Street, Hsinchu Phone: 03 523 2502