

JRR Tolkien wrote:
*“It’s a dangerous business,
going out your door.”*

Jason Risley explains: *“These are the dangers we generally concern ourselves with: bodily harm, robbery, murder, and terrorism. But these aren't the only perils you come across whilst travelling. There's one danger that's unavoidable - you get to meet great people. They become a part of your life and you share every second with them for days, weeks or even months”.*

But therein lies the danger! You become one. A relationship is formed. Inevitably, at some point in time, you have to part company and follow your own path.

And some of these great people turn out to be special people, people who provide you with moments of pure magic, warmth, inspiration and perhaps even a fresh outlook on life. They arrive out of the blue, when you least expect, and only when they depart do you fully appreciate just how special they really are.

I met such a person during my recent travels; she was beautiful, intelligent, warm and inspirational. It was only a brief moment, but we shared an adventure, and when we went our separate ways I felt so desperately sad. So you see, such are the dangers of travelling!

Taiwan - Ihla Formosa – Beautiful Island

“With lush mountains, pulsating cities, stunning basalt cliffs, excellent hiking, not to mention some of the world’s best hot springs, Taiwan cuts a figure as one of the most diverse destinations in Asia.

True, Taiwan hasn’t yet made it to the top of everybody’s ‘to visit’ list, but one can only assume that this is partially a result of people not quite knowing what Taiwan has to offer. But within the borders of this small, sweet-potato-shaped island barely the size of many American states lies a world of contrasts and a melange of cultural influences you’re not likely to find anywhere else on the planet.

Taiwan offers visitors a hypermodern skin, an ancient Chinese skeleton and an aboriginal soul. And more than that, Taiwan has some of the world’s warmest people, affable to a fault and so filled with ‘personal affection’ that very few people who come to Taiwan a stranger leave that way.”

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Despite being an ardent supporter of Lonely Planet Publications, the above guidebook proved to be extremely inaccurate and made planning my journey an unbelievable challenge. In the end I gave up and just went with the flow.

Taipei – the capital of Taiwan.

Once the ugly duckling of East Asia, Taipei has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last two decades turning the city into one of the region's most dynamic, sophisticated, exciting, and beautiful metropolises. Taipei offers a huge variety of sights and attractions, and the city's street-food scene is second to none. Taipei is a city to explore; I just wish I'd had more time to do so!



Breathtaking Taroko Gorge

Taroko Gorge – eastern Taiwan.

Just a short bus ride from the large and friendly city of Hualien sits Taroko National Park, Taiwan's top tourist destination. With its marble-walled canyons, lush vegetation and mountainous landscape, it really is a breath taking place to visit. The gorge itself is 19km long and features a white water river, towering cliffs and excellent hiking trails. Regular local busses travel the length of the gorge so it's very easy to hop on/hop off and explore.

Yuli – eastern Taiwan.

Wisdom House is, without question, THE place to stay. This enchanting guesthouse sits in an orchard high above a rift valley with breath taking views towards Chikha Mountain. “The furnishings are country quaint, the bathrooms are large and modern, and the owner's original artwork adds to the alluring and homely charm”. The sumptuous breakfast, shared with fellow guests, and the never-ending supply of freshly ground coffee, is a great way to kick start the day.

Wisdom House is a place to relax and relax I did! Its garden, where the cool mountain air provides a welcome respite from hot and sticky Taipei, is simply delightful.



Relaxing in the garden of Wisdom House

Only a few distractions have the potential to drag you away from its comfort:

1. The Walami Trail - a really excellent hike, which starts high above the Nanan River, about 12km southeast of Yuli. Along the narrow, and sometimes precarious path, lie high waterfalls and long suspension bridges. The trail cuts through dense jungle and the ear shattering sounds of the resident wildlife is unbelievable. The views down the valley, and across the mountains, are stunning. The 28km return trip takes just under 10 hours to complete.
2. Antung Hot Springs - about 8km south of Yuli, is a great place to sooth aching limbs after a long day on the Walami Trail.
3. Yuli night market bombards your senses with a delightful array of smells, sights and sounds, that's if you can find it!



Beautiful Green Island

Green Island – just off the east coast of Taiwan.

Beautiful and lush, boasting great beaches and one of only three seawater hot springs in the world. Green Island is a popular resort destination for Taiwanese looking for rest and recreation. The island is ringed by a 19km road and can be explored quite easily using the local tourist bus. There are some interesting places to visit and the snorkelling and scuba diving are out of this world.

Western Taiwan.

Apart from Penghu Archipelago (which I did not have time to visit) the western side of Taiwan has little to offer the traveller. The only two stops I made, on this side of the island, were:

Tainan

The oldest city in the country, the main draw being the numerous temples – dating back hundreds of years. There's a wonderful walking tour, taking in 12 of these beautiful temples. Covering 6km and taking around five hours to complete, it makes for a fascinating day. If you want to include temples in your Taiwan itinerary then this is the place to do it.

The Jiji Line - Changhua

Branching off the west-coast trunk line in flat rural Changhua, this 29km former narrow-gauge railway line chugs past some lovely stretches of rural Taiwan. Whilst the ride might be short (45 minutes), the list of things to see and do is long.

Taiwan general

I stayed mainly in hostels and home stays, which were excellent in every respect. The food was absolutely amazing, all except the stinky tofu, which I refused to try. And strangely, tempting as they were, I couldn't bring myself to eat the deep fried duck heads either!



The effects of an earthquake

Getting around was easy, using the super efficient Taiwanese railway network. I enjoyed sitting back and taking in the Taiwan scenery on 6 separate train journeys. Travelling round the island took 15 hours. All the trains were spotlessly clean and all of them kept to a meticulous timetable.

Public transport announcements and signposts were readily available in English; not only in the

capital but also in many of the other places I visited, despite the very low presence of western visitors.

If I had my time again I would go in the spring or autumn because it's unbelievably hot and sticky in the summer.

As some of you know I have recently been drawn into the world of Apple – I'm now the proud owner of an iPhone, iPad, and more recently an iMac. Therefore my favourite quote at the moment has to be:

“For the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.”

Steve Jobs, 1955-2011.