



Taiwan is an island that sits about 120 miles off the coast of Mainland China. It's 250 miles long and about 90 miles wide at its widest point. A chain of mountains form a spine down the center of the island with more than 200 peaks rising over 10,000 feet. The rain that falls on these mountains flows into rivers that bring water and soil to the sea-level plains that make up the western part of the island.

The fields are ideal for agriculture and for hundreds of years they have attracted farmers who came to Taiwan from Mainland China. Taiwan has held on to most of the ancient principles of Chinese culture and at the same time incorporated the most modern aspects of western society. Taiwan's surface is clearly western. But just beneath that surface is a bedrock of ancient Chinese culture. And it is this ancient culture that supports the western façade.

You are never more than a few blocks away from a temple where gifts are offered to the gods and the gods respond with advice about your future. Each morning the parks are filled with people practicing the art of Tai Chi. They are balancing their mind and body. For hundreds of years the Taiwanese have worked to balance the modern culture of the west with the ancient wisdom of China. In the process they have become masters at balancing almost everything.



About 23 million people live in Taiwan, and nearly 98 percent of them are ethnically Chinese, which means that at some point in the past, they or their ancestors came here from Mainland China. From the middle of the 1600s to the end of the 1800s the island of Taiwan was ruled by the Emperors of Mainland China.

In 1895, China ceded Taiwan to Japan at the end of the Sino-Japanese War. Japan occupied Taiwan until the end of the Second World War when it was given back to China. In 1949, the communists took control of Mainland China and hundreds of thousands of people left the Mainland and settled in Taiwan.

Very often when a community leaves its ancestral home and settles down in some other part of the world, it makes a great effort to preserve its ethnic history. The community wants to hang onto its culture, and to a great extent that is what has happened here in Taiwan.

While the communists went through a period of trying to destroy every aspect of traditional Chinese culture, the

Taiwanese were very busy preserving it. As a result, you can see more authentic features of traditional Chinese culture here in Taiwan than anywhere else in the world.

The National Palace Museum in Taipei opened in 1965 and holds over 700,000 works. They represent over 5,000 years of the most important arts and crafts. It is the largest collection of Chinese art in the world. When the Japanese attacked China in 1931, the treasures were boxed and for 16 years shuttled around China to keep the Japanese from finding them. There were thousands of crates so this was a pretty serious shuttling.

After the Japanese surrendered in 1945 and it looked like the communists would take over China, 4,800 crates of the most valuable works were shipped to Taiwan for safekeeping. Amazingly, not a single piece was ever lost or damaged. There are 4,400 ancient bronzes, 24,000 pieces of porcelain, 13,000 paintings, 14,000 works of calligraphy, 4,600 pieces of jade, and 153,000 palace records.

Most of the collection is held in storage rooms that were dug out of the mountain behind the museum. The objects are periodically rotated but it would take someone twelve years to see the entire collection.

## MODERN TAIWAN

Taipei is not only the capital of Taiwan; it is the economic heart of the country. Until the mid-1960s, Taipei had few paved roads; today it is one of the most modern cities in Asia.

At the end of the Second World War, Chiang Kai-shek led an exodus of soldiers, industrialists, craftsmen, artists and intellectuals across the Straights to Taiwan. Following Chiang's death in 1975, a memorial was built to honor his contribution to the nation's history. Today it's a major tourist attraction.

Modern Taiwan is a world leader in the production of computer chips, chemicals, and hi-tech components. It's also the world's leading manufacturer of laptop computers. Thirty-five percent of its university students study engineering and they are building a nation that reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century technology.

The engineers of Taiwan may be constructing some of the tallest buildings in the world but they also have their feet on the ground.

Many of the crossing lights give you a visual count down



along with the image of a little green man walking. When it gets close to the end, the guy starts running, and so should you.

## WHAT'S COOKING IN TAIWAN

Intellectuals and artists were not the only ones who left the Mainland for Taiwan. Many of the great chefs of Mainland China came along too. In fact, anyone interested in Chinese cuisine will find a greater variety and a higher quality here than anywhere else.

L.F.Huang is the master chef in charge of the Chinese kitchens of The Grand Formosa Regent in Taipei. I asked him to show me a classical dish from each of the most important regional cuisines of China. He started with Cantonese. The food of Canton is considered to be light. It's the most expensive, elaborate and exotic of Chinese regional cuisines. It uses seafood that has been lightly steamed. Fruit is often mixed with seafood, chicken or pork.



If you like spicy food, Sichuan is your ticket. It uses lots of chili oils, hot sauces and dried chili peppers. The spiciness is often balanced with sweet and sour flavors. Taiwanese food combines cooking traditions from the Fujian province of China and Japan. It uses lots of local seafood—clams, oysters, and freshwater shrimp.

The most famous Taiwanese recipe is a noodle dish called *Dan Dan Noodles*. A fisherman invented the dish in 1895 during the months when the fish were not running. It's a bowl of fresh noodles mixed with bean sprouts and seasoned with cilantro and a pork sauce, no fish.

The Hakka people came to Taiwan from northern China. Their dishes are considered peasant food. A dish of stir-fried eggplant is a good example. Shanghai cuisine is known for seafood which is often combined with delicate vegetables.

The most famous dish from Peking is Peking Duck. It's sometimes called "duck three ways" because the crispy skin is served first, then the meat, and then a rich broth made from the bones. You'll often find dishes in Peking that come with wheat pancakes or a sesame seed bun. That's because in northern China, wheat flour is more common than rice.

Taipei has a unique approach to fast food. It is the Ting Tai Fung Dumpling House and there is always a line of people waiting to get in. In order to keep your waiting to a minimum the wait-staff starts waiting on you while you are waiting outside. They give you a menu and relay your order to the kitchen on their wireless intercoms. While you are waiting, the dumpling masters are doing their thing. Table spotters on each of the restaurant's four floors alert the outdoor wait-staff when your waiting is over. And you arrive at your table seconds before your food.

A great dumpling is juicy, the filling is packed with flavor, and the dough is thin and light. We had hot and sour soup, shrimp dumplings, pork dumplings, vegetable dumplings, crab dumplings and for dessert, dumplings filled with a mash of

## WHERE TO EAT

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sweet red beans. These are great dumplings and worth the wait.

In addition to knowing what to eat, it's helpful to know how to eat. Rather than greeting someone by saying "how are you?" Many Taiwanese will open a conversation by saying "have you eaten yet?" The theory being that is, if you have eaten, you're okay. If you have not, there's some kind of problem.

Dishes are shared, usually one dish for every diner. Each person gets a bowl of rice. You take what you want from the communal dishes and place it on your rice using the serving spoons rather than your chopsticks. It's also polite to take the item nearest you. Hold your rice bowl close to your face and use your chopsticks to move the food into your mouth. And never leave your chopsticks standing vertically in the rice bowl. It mimics the sticks of incense in a bowl of ashes and is considered a sign of death.

Though people will squabble over the bill, whoever invited the guests is expected to pay for the meal. In Chinese culture, food is often used as a metaphor to make a point. A great Taoist teacher once said that a government should govern its country the way you fry a small fish. Don't turn things over too much. Keep the heat low. Be careful and delicate.

Considering the economic condition of some of the governments in the United States. It's probably a good idea to add the point that it's helpful to be able to pay for the fish before you cook it.

## THE WAY OF TEA

Taoism tells us that the way to have a good life is to line yourself up with the ways of nature. It is an idea that constantly shows up in the daily life of the Taiwanese, even when it comes to something as simple as having a cup of tea. The Wisteria-House opened in 1981 as a meeting place for artists and

## Taipei, Taiwan

scholars who wanted to discuss their ideas for improving the nation. Today it is a Taipei City historical site and the perfect spot to experience the Tao of tea.

The way to start the way is to place a square tray on the table. In Chinese symbolism the earth is square, similar to the square of a rice field. The teacups and utensils rest on the earth. You select your tea and perhaps some cookies or dried fruits to go along with it. The elegance of the room represents heaven. The quiet environment is designed to rid the drinker of the tensions of daily life. The tea will help you concentrate and gain clarity. The roundness of the cups reminds you of the roundness of life. The possibilities for completeness that should not be forgotten. The tea becomes the connection between earth and heaven.

Some of the world's finest tea is grown in the mountains of Taiwan. The folk legends that tell of the origin of tea describe it as an accident in which a tea leaf drops into someone's boiling water and they date that event back about 4,000 years.

If you think you might enjoy buying some top quality tea you might want to stop into the Wang De Chuan Tea Shop. The setting is elegant. Antique French cabinets. Traditional red tea canisters for holding the tea. And Ming Dynasty furniture for the tasting area. They offer some of the world's finest teas, but even if you are not interested in buying any tea it's still worth



a visit. The staff is interested in raising your interest in the subject and will gladly prepare a few samples.

## RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

In spite of Taiwan's rapid shift from an ancient agricultural society to a modern industrial nation, or perhaps because of it, Chinese folk religion has remained an important part of the culture. Originally Taoists and Buddhists worshipped in separate temples. But between 1895 and 1945 the island was occupied by the Japanese who persecuted the Taoists. The Taoists continued to worship their gods but they did so secretly, inside the Buddhist temples. By the end of the Second World War when the Japanese were expelled from Taiwan, the two religions had blended together into a single form of worship that included Taoism, Buddhism and folk gods. In the west, we tend to think of Buddhism and Taoism as organized religions, but in reality they are much more like a set of general instructions on how to behave properly and have a happier life.

There are over 10,000 places of worship in Taiwan and they are easily accessible to the visitor. They need to be because you never know when you are going to require help from a departed ancestor or a powerful god.

The Paoan Kung Temple is over 200 years old and dedicated to the God of Medicine. As you enter the building, you'll see carved dragons on the main support column. The Dragon is a symbol of strength, intelligence and good luck.

Inside the temple there are images of 36 different deities. They are assistants to the main god and each is responsible for a specific illness and its cure.

You stand in front of the appropriate deity, explain your problem, and make your request.

Most people come to a temple to ask a god for a favor or for some advice. They start by burning a few incense sticks while mentally repeating their names, birth date, address and the question they have or the favor they want. Then they drop two crescent-shaped pieces of wood to the floor. If they land with one round side up and the other down the answer is "yes." Things look good, go for it. If both curved sides are up, the answer is "no" forget about it. If both flat sides are up it's neutral and you should ask again later.

The Hsingtien Temple is dedicated to the red faced, black bearded god of war, martial arts and money management. He is also the patron saint of businessmen who come here to pray and ask for guidance. Unlike most temples, it does not accept donations, and it discourages the burning of spirit money as an offering to the gods. Recently it has come out against the shredding of corporate documents.

Gods, ghosts and ancestors play major roles in Chinese folk religion. When you pay your respects to an ancestor you thank them for the life they have given you. And the offering you make helps them with their life in the other world. It connects you to the past. And because the same rituals are taught to the children in your family, it connects you to the future.

Connecting the past to the future is one of the essential aspects of Chinese culture. One of the nicest things that you can take home from a visit to Taiwan is a reminder of the good feelings that can come from family traditions.

## TO LEARN MORE . . .

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## WHERE TO STAY

While I was in Taiwan, I stayed at the Grand Formosa Regent. The word "Formosa" is Portuguese and it means "beautiful island". The Portuguese were the first Europeans to see the island of Taiwan and Formosa was what they called it. Like other institutions in Taiwan, the Grand Formosa is faced with the challenge of balancing the traditional values of Chinese culture with the demands of modern society and it has had an interesting response. The public areas of the hotel are wide open and spacious. It's what the ancient Emperors liked to come home to after a hard day of managing the empire.

But the Emperors also liked to keep in touch. So the entire building is equipped with wireless Internet service. You can set up your computer laptop anywhere in the hotel and connect with the worldwide web.

The Emperors spent a lot of time stretching out in bed or on couches so pillows were very important. Accordingly, the Regent offers you a selection of eight different pillows. They have a hard pillow, a tealeaf pillow, a goose down pillow, a memory pillow, a wood pillow, an air pillow, a non-allergic pillow and a feather pillow.

Emperors liked to be physically pampered. They would have loved the Regent's Wellspring Spa. The idea was to create a relaxing coddling environment right in the center of the city.

The Emperors were into food. No problem. The Regent has ten different restaurants. Lan Ting offers elegant Chinese cooking with a special emphasis on the traditional foods of Shanghai.

The Brasserie has an all-day buffet. You can pop in for breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea or dinner. It was originally opened for hotel guests but over the years it has become a favorite eating spot for locals who come here throughout the day.

Robin's Teppan is a traditional teppanyaki restaurant where seafood and steaks are cooked in front of the diners.

And let's not forget... Emperors were into stuff. The Regent Galleria has two floors of the world's most famous stuff. And when the Galleria couldn't hold any more shops they began opening in the nearby streets. It was good to be Emperor.





## SAUTÉED EGGPLANT WITH BASIL

The Grand Formosa Regent Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan

*Makes 4 servings*

- 1 cup vegetable oil*
- 1 large eggplant, cut into bite-size pieces (6 cups)*
- ½ cup scallions, cut into 1-inch strips*
- 2 cloves garlic, minced*
- 1 red bell pepper, coarsely chopped*
- ½ teaspoon hot chili flakes, or 2 small hot red chilies, cut into thin strips*
- ¼ cup soy sauce*
- 2 cups basil leaves, or spinach leaves, lightly packed*

1. In a wok or large high-sided sauté pan, heat the oil until just shimmering. Add the eggplant and fry for 30 seconds. Remove the eggplant from the oil, and remove all but 2 teaspoons of the oil from the wok.

2. Reheat the wok. Add the scallions, garlic, red bell pepper, and hot chili flakes and stir-fry for 1 minute. Return the eggplant to the wok and continue stir-frying for 1 minute. Add the soy sauce and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the basil or spinach and stir-fry for 1 minute. Pour the wok's contents into a serving bowl.



## STIR-FRIED NOODLES, MING JIANG STYLE

The Grand Formosa Regent Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan

*Makes 8 servings*

- ½ pound flat thin noodles*
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil*
- 4 cups sliced cabbage*
- ½ cup sliced mushrooms*
- 2 cups sliced carrots*
- 2 cups green beans, cut into bite-size pieces*
- 1 cup precooked ham or precooked bacon, cut into bite-size pieces*
- 1 cup chicken stock*
- ¼ cup soy sauce*
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper*

1. Cook the noodles in at least 1 quart of boiling water until they are just done. They should be firm to the bite, not soft.

2. While the noodles are cooking, heat the vegetable oil in a wok or high-sided sauté pan. As soon as the oil is hot, add the cabbage, mushrooms, carrots, green beans, and ham or bacon, and stir-fry for 2 minutes.

3. When the noodles are cooked, drain from the water and add to the wok. Stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the chicken stock, soy sauce, and pepper and stir-fry for 2 minutes more.



## BEEF WITH GINGER AND BELL PEPPERS

Executive Chef Ip Chi-chiu, Grand Formosa Regent

*Makes 4 servings*

### For the Marinade:

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce*
- 1 tablespoon dry sherry*
- 4 teaspoons sesame oil*
- ½ teaspoon sugar*
- 1 teaspoon rice wine vinegar*
- 1 pound flank steak, sliced against the grain, on an angle, cut into 4-x-½-inch strips*

### For the Stir-Fry:

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil*
- 2 medium cloves garlic, sliced*
- 4 teaspoons peeled minced fresh ginger*
- 3 bell peppers, 1 red, 1 yellow, and 1 green, seeded and cut into 1-inch pieces*
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt*
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper*
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce*
- 1 teaspoon Chinese black vinegar or balsamic vinegar*
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch dissolved in 1 tablespoon water*

1. TO MAKE THE MARINADE: In a medium bowl, whisk the ingredients together, add the flank

*Continued on page 6*

steak, stir to coat the meat, and marinate at room temperature for 45 to 60 minutes.

2. TO STIR-FRY: When ready to serve, heat a large skillet or wok. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil and stir-fry the garlic and ginger over high heat for 30 seconds. Add the peppers, stir-fry for 3 minutes, and season with the salt and pepper. Transfer the peppers to a bowl and keep warm.

3. Heat the remaining oil in the pan, add the beef, and stir-fry over very high heat for 2 to 3 minutes. Return the peppers to the pan, add the soy sauce and vinegar, and combine with the beef. Add the dissolved cornstarch and continue cooking for 1 minute, until the sauce begins to thicken. Transfer to a platter and serve immediately.



### SQUID WITH SESAME OIL FUKIENESE STYLE

The Grand Formosa Regent Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan

*Makes 4 servings*

- ¼ cup soy sauce*
- ¼ cup rice wine vinegar*
- 2 tablespoons sugar*
- 1 cup vegetable oil*
- 2 cups squid, cleaned and cut into bite-size rounds*
- 2 tablespoons Chinese sesame oil*
- ½ cup fresh or canned bamboo shoots, cut into bite-size pieces*
- 4 cloves garlic, minced*
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger*
- 1 cup basil leaves, or spinach leaves, lightly packed.*

1. In a small mixing bowl, blend together the soy sauce, vinegar, and sugar and set aside.

2. Over high heat, warm a wok or deep-sided sauté pan. Add the oil and heat until just shimmering. Add the squid and fry for 2 minutes. Drain the squid from the oil and set aside. Pour the vegetable oil out of the wok.

3. Over high heat, rewarm the wok and add the sesame oil. As soon as the oil is hot, add the bamboo shoots, garlic, and ginger and stir-fry for 1 minute. Return the squid to the wok. Add the mixture of soy sauce, vinegar, and sugar and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the basil and stir-fry for 1 minute. Empty the wok into a serving bowl.



### SESAME WALNUTS

The Grand Formosa Regent Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan

*Makes 2 cups*

- 2 cups shelled walnuts*
- 2 cups sugar*
- 2 cups vegetable oil*
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds*

1. In a wok or large sauté pan, over high heat, bring 3 cups of water to the boil. Add the walnuts and cook for 1 minute. Drain the nuts from the water and pour the water out of the wok.

2. Return the wok to the heat and over high heat, bring ½ cup of water to the boil. Add the nuts. Add one cup of the sugar. Cook and stir until almost all of the water has evaporated. Remove the nuts from the wok and drain them away from any remaining water.

3. Over high heat, warm the empty wok. Return the nuts to the wok. Add the remaining cup of sugar and 1 tablespoon of water. Stir-fry for 2 minutes. Remove the nuts from the wok.

4. In the wok, over medium heat, heat the vegetable oil. Add the nuts and deep-fry for 2 minutes. Drain the nuts from the oil and place them into a mixing bowl. Blend in the sesame seeds.

