

# TAIWAN

POPULATION: 22,858,872

Real GDP per capita .....\$29,600

Adult literacy rate .....98% (male); 92% (female)

Life expectancy .....78 (male); 81 (female)

## Region & History

Covering 13,892 square miles (35,980 square kilometers), Taiwan is a subtropical island about the size of the U.S. state of Maryland. It is located about 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of mainland China. The government of Taiwan also controls the Penghu Islands (off Taiwan's west coast) and islands near China's coast (Chinmen, Matsu, and Wuchiu). The island is subject to numerous small earthquakes every year and larger quakes on a less frequent basis.



## History

Chinese immigration to Taiwan began as early as the T'ang Dynasty (AD 618-907). In 1628, the Dutch took control of the island. In 1683, the Manchus of mainland China conquered it and made it a province of China. The island was ceded to Japan following the Sino-Japanese War (1895) and remained under Japanese control until 1945. During that period, forces on mainland China battled for control of China's government. A successful revolution inspired by Sun Yat-sen founded the Republic of China (ROC) in 1912, but the new government was overshadowed by the activities of contending warlords. Sun's Nationalist, or Kuomintang (KMT), political movement was led by General Chiang Kai-shek after Sun died (1925). Chiang battled the Communist forces of Mao Zedong, but they both fought against the Japanese (1937-45). After Japan was defeated, the civil war continued. Mao's growing army forced Chiang's troops to flee to Taiwan, where Nationalists expected to regroup before returning to the mainland. When a return proved impossible, Chiang declared the KMT the legitimate government of all of China.

Plans by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to invade the island were blocked in 1950 by the United States. In 1954, the United States signed an agreement to protect Taiwan in case of attack from the mainland. Much of the world recognized Taiwan's



sovereignty as the ROC. In 1971, however, the PRC was admitted to the United Nations in Taiwan's place. In 1979, the United States normalized diplomatic relations with the PRC and broke them with the ROC. However, Taiwan-U.S. relations continue on an unofficial basis. In fact, many countries with no formal political ties to Taiwan enjoy relatively strong economic relations. The KMT ruled Taiwan as a one-party state under martial law. The National

Assembly members who took office in 1946 on the mainland held power until the late 1980s, when lifetime legislators were replaced with elected local representatives. After Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, his son Chiang Ching-kuo succeeded him as president. Taiwan directed its greatest efforts at modernization and developed a thriving economy. After martial law was lifted in 1987, a multiparty democracy began to emerge. The KMT's Lee Teng-hui, elected president by the National Assembly in 1990, became the first native Taiwanese to lead the country. In 1996, Lee became Taiwan's first directly elected president.

### **The Sticky Issue of Independence:**

On the strength of Taiwan's booming economy and new democracy, voices calling for the island's independence have grown louder. Many people do not wish to pursue unification with China and see the island as having a separate identity. China clearly opposes this view and has warned Taiwan not to declare independence. Warnings have included military movement and threats of invasion. In 1997, many pro-independence politicians won local offices, and Taiwan dismantled its provincial government—a symbol of Taiwan's status as a province in greater China. In 2000, Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected president, ending 50 years of KMT rule. Chen narrowly won reelection in 2004 but resigned as party leader when the DPP suffered a major defeat in January 2008 parliamentary elections. The KMT's Ma Ying-jeou was elected president in March 2008. While tension continues to underlie relations with China, Taiwanese leaders have chosen dialogue over confrontation.

### **Population**

Taiwan's population of 22.9 million is growing by 0.3 percent annually. The three largest cities are the capital of Taipei, the southern commercial city of Kaohsiung, and Tai-chung in the west. *The original inhabitants of Taiwan constitute only 2 percent of the population.* They are divided among several ethnic groups, some of which maintain their native languages and traditions. The rest of the population is

compromised of ethnic Chinese. They include Taiwanese (84 percent) and mainland Chinese (14 percent). The latter group migrated to the island after World War II. The Taiwanese are descendants of migrants who left China between the 17th and 19th centuries.

### **Language**

Taiwan's official language is Mandarin Chinese. However, most residents also speak Taiwanese, the language of the first Chinese immigrants. Hakka is another Chinese dialect spoken on the island. Some older people know Japanese, and the aboriginal peoples speak their own native languages. English is a popular second or third language for students and is widely understood in urban areas.

**It's Not Easy:** In Taiwan, schoolchildren use a simplified character system that helps them "sound out" a word – something impossible to do with the standard characters that must be memorized. Westerners have developed various systems of romanization (representing Chinese characters and words in roman letters) that have been adopted by the government to help foreigners sound out names, read signs, and follow maps. The average Chinese would not understand or use romanization. Romanization systems differ; for example, the character for "please" can be written Qing or Ching. Pronunciation remains the same (cheeng). Chinese is a tonal language. Each one-syllable word can have many different meanings, depending on the tone (voice inflection) with which it is spoken. For instance, the word ma can mean "horse" or "mother" and can even function as a question mark. Religion. Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Taiwan. Ninety - three percent of the population practices a combination of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

Confucianism, which emphasizes ancestor veneration, is not regarded as a religion among the Chinese. Rather, it is a *philosophy* that orders social patterns and relationships and forms the Chinese value system. It does not proclaim loyalty to any specific deity. Worship rituals and beliefs come mainly from Buddhism, including a belief in reincarnation and in karma, or that good deeds bring good fortune while bad deeds have negative consequences. About 5 percent of the people are Christians of various denominations.

### **Generally Speaking:**

People in Taiwan are reserved, quiet, generous, and friendly. Frankness or abruptness, especially in offering criticism of any kind, is avoided. Causing public embarrassment or bringing shame to anyone (a "loss of face") is unacceptable. Even if one disagrees with another person, one would not express opposition to that person in public. Loud or boisterous behavior is regarded as being in poor taste. The Confucian ethic of proper social and family relationships forms the foundation of society, although rising rates of violent crime indicate that economic prosperity is eroding that foundation. Schools and government foster/reinforce the tradition of

respect for, and obedience to, parents. An individual's actions reflect on the entire family, and people act with this in mind. Taiwanese are group and community oriented. Young men must serve one year either in the military or performing community service. As society changes, people are adjusting to new social patterns and concepts. When new ideas conflict with traditional ideas, tensions increase between the older and younger generations. Traditionally, men and women do not show affection for each other in public, although this is changing in the larger urban areas. While people value material possessions, they most desire a good education. They appreciate those who are diligent and hardworking.

### **Personal Appearance**

Western-style clothing is the norm in Taiwan – especially in large urban areas, enjoy the latest fashions. Adults prefer conservative clothing.

Cleanliness and neatness are the most important factors in appearance. Western suits and ties are the most common attire for businessmen.

Businesswomen wear skirts or pantsuits. For everyday wear, women usually wear jeans or other casual clothing. Most women reserve dresses for special occasions.



### **Greetings:**

Asking others if they have eaten (Chyr bau le meiyou?) is a common Chinese greeting that stems from the tradition to never let anyone go hungry; it was always polite to ask if others had eaten and offer them a meal. Today it is used simply as a "How are you?"

The greeting Ni hau ma (How are you?) is somewhat formal; it is used when people have not seen one another in a long time. More common greetings are Ni hau (Hello), Zao (Morning), and Ching tzuo (Please sit); the latter is spoken to visitors in the home. After initial greetings, polite questions may follow. Adults often ask young people about their schoolwork; the elderly appreciate inquiries about their health. When being introduced, Taiwanese nod the head and smile. They may also shake hands, although handshaking is most common in business and on formal occasions. A slight bow shows respect. Acquaintances and close friends grasp each other's hands to show hospitality, sincerity, and warmth.

**Names:** Chinese names are arranged with the family name first, followed by a one or two syllable given name. Acquaintances and friends call one another by full name. Otherwise, one generally addresses others by their surname followed by a title: Yu Shian sheng (Mr. Yu), Wang Shiau chie (Miss Wang), or Kao Jing li (Manager Kao). People do not address others by last name alone, and they rarely use given names alone. Friends who have adopted Christian or Western given names may address one another by that name.

**Body Language:** One points with the open hand, not the index finger. To beckon, one waves all fingers with the palm down. People commonly “write” a character in the air when explaining it. Young female friends often hold hands in public. Putting one’s arm around the shoulder of another usually is inappropriate. However, individuals converse within touching distance and may touch each other’s arm or shoulder while talking. Shaking one hand from side to side with the palm forward means “no.” People do not use their feet to move objects such as chairs or doors. While sitting, one places one’s hands in the lap. Winking is impolite. One gives an object to another person, especially an older person, with both hands. In conversation, one refers to oneself by pointing to one’s nose.

Visiting is an integral part of Chinese culture. Social visits occur mostly in the home. Friends and relatives may come unannounced, but most people prefer advance notice. People usually remove their shoes before entering a home, and they wear slippers inside.

**Guests acknowledge and greet the elderly first.** It is polite to stand when a guest, a superior, or an elderly person enters a room. Visitors are likely to receive tea, candy, fruit, or a soft drink. Dinner conversation often centers on the meal—how it was prepared, what ingredients were used, and where the ingredients were obtained. *First-time visitors present hosts with a small gift.* Friends and relatives take gifts when visiting on important holidays such as the New Year, Dragon Boat Festival, or Mid-Autumn Festival. **People exchange gifts with both hands and do not open the gifts in the presence of the giver.** Visitors are careful not to admire an object too much, as the host may feel obligated to present it as a gift.

**Eating:**

Dinner, the main meal, includes soup, rice, and meat and/or vegetable dishes. People typically eat with chopsticks and a soup spoon. Each person at the table has a personal bowl of rice. The diners are served or serve themselves from dishes at the center of the table, placing small amounts of food in their rice bowls as often as necessary. They hold the bowl near the mouth to eat. Leaving rice in the bowl is

considered impolite. Indeed, children are taught to finish all of their food out of respect for farmers and parents.

When finished, a person places the chopsticks side by side on the table. Dining out at restaurants or outdoor night markets is convenient and popular. At a restaurant, a host expects to pay. Guests may offer politely to help but do not insist. If using a toothpick, one covers the mouth with the other hand.

**DO NOT WALK OUT OF THE RESTAURANT “PICKING” YOUR TEETH OR WITH A TOOTHPICK IN YOUR MOUTH.** *You’re not in Kansas anymore, Dorothy....*

Family. Families in Taiwan traditionally have been large, but dramatic economic change and a government family-planning campaign have reduced the number of children in a nuclear family to nearly two.

**Social Issues:**

Except in urban areas, Western-style dating is not common in Taiwan. Students concentrate on their education and associate with peers but seldom date as couples. Serious dating generally begins once people are working or pursuing higher education. Those who do date enjoy going to movies or dining at restaurants. People generally marry between the ages of 27 and 31.

A mother is expected to rest for a month after giving birth; she may spend the entire time in bed, often cared for by her mother-in-law. Male babies were traditionally more highly regarded than female babies, and today, red “good luck” eggs are still given to family members only when a boy is born.

A baby is considered age one when he or she is born. Important milestones for young people are turning 18 (when one may drink legally and obtain a driver’s or marriage license) and 20 (when one may vote and sign contracts). Males are regarded as adults when they finish their education and military conscription, usually by age 23 or 24. Women are traditionally considered adults when they marry, though this is changing as more women pursue careers and marry later.

**Cultural Oddity:** Taiwanese funerals are times of mourning but also have a festive atmosphere. A colorful funeral procession accompanied by loud music is the norm. A truck decorated with flowers and a portrait of the deceased leads a motorcade of jeeps and trucks covered with wreaths. Mourners parade behind. *The traditional funeral color is white.* Close relatives dress in white and wear different colored hoods representing their relationship to the deceased. Other attendees can wear any color as long as it is not too bright. Friends and relatives give white envelopes containing money to the deceased’s immediate family. Cremation is typical, as grave sites are

expensive. Family members visit the place of interment 30 days and one year after the funeral.

*Close relatives traditionally do not engage in any fun social gathering for one hundred days after the funeral. As a sign of mourning, many people wear a small white patch on their shirt sleeves for a month, although this practice has diminished in recent years.*

**Recreation:** The most popular forms of recreation in Taiwan are watching television and movies and listening to music. People also enjoy basketball, table tennis, baseball, and badminton. Baseball is extremely popular among the youth, and Taiwan's Little League champions consistently do well in the Little League World Series, which is played in the United States. Taiwan has professional baseball and basketball leagues. The elderly enjoy tai chi (a martial art) and folk dancing for exercise and relaxation. The Arts. Taiwan's arts reflect mainland traditions.

**Economy:** Despite setbacks such as the Asian economic crisis (1997-98), Taiwan has maintained a dynamic economy for three decades. Taiwan has a highly skilled labor force, and a strong middle class enjoys a high standard of living. The currency is the New Taiwan dollar (TWD).