

Sky Lanterns by Night, Marble Cliffs by Day

A 5-Day Taiwan Itinerary

Taiwan in five days: a first night riding the elevator up Taipei 101's 101 floors and into a night market for pepper buns straight from a clay tandoor, a day trading the National Palace Museum's imperial jade for Jiufen's lantern-strung stone stairways and a sky-lantern release over the old railway tracks at Shifen, then a coastal express train south into Taroko Gorge for two days of marble-walled trails, a swiftlet-nested cliff face, and a night inside the only hotel built into the canyon itself — with real hotels, real train fares, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION

5 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

October–November & March–April (Shoulder Season)

Typhoon season (July–September) and summer humidity ease off, days stay mild in Taipei and dry along the Taroko Gorge trails, and hotel rates sit well below the Lunar New Year and summer-holiday peaks.

FROM

\$740 USD / person
for 2 people

Day 1

Arrive in Taipei

Touch down at Taoyuan International Airport and ride the Airport MRT straight into a city where century-old temples sit in the shadow of a former tallest-building-in-the-world, then climb 101 floors for a first look at the skyline before a night-market dinner.

Taoyuan Airport MRT to Taipei Main Station

~40 minutes · NT\$160 (~\$5 USD) / person

A direct express train links Taoyuan International Airport to Taipei Main Station every 15–20 minutes, skipping the highway traffic a taxi or shuttle bus would sit in.

Taoyuan Airport MRT · tymetro.com.tw

Taipei 101 Observatory

~1.5 hours, self-guided · ~\$18 USD / person (5F–89F indoor observatory)

The world's tallest building for six years after opening in 2004 still anchors the Xinyi skyline; the 89th-floor deck looks straight down over the city and out to the 660-ton tuned mass damper that keeps the tower steady in typhoons and earthquakes.

Taipei 101 Observatory · taipei-101.com.tw

Dinner — Raohe Street Night Market

~1.5 hours, self-guided · \$3–\$8 USD / dish

One of Taipei's oldest night markets runs from a century-old Ciyou Temple gate down a covered lane of stalls, best known for hu jiao bing — black-pepper pork buns baked against the inside wall of a charcoal-fired clay tandoor.

Overnight — Palais de Chine Hotel

From \$150 USD / night, for 2 people

A five-star boutique hotel across the street from Taipei Main Station, with art-filled interiors from local architect Ju-Shen Chen and easy access to the metro, high-speed rail, and airport train.

Palais de Chine Hotel · palaisdechinehotel.com

Day 2

Imperial Treasures to Lantern-Lit Streets

A morning with the National Palace Museum's imperial collection and a working temple thick with incense gives way to an afternoon and evening out in the hills — Jiufen's red-lantern stairways and a sky lantern released over Shifen's old railway tracks.

National Palace Museum

~2.5 hours, self-guided · NT\$350 (~\$11 USD) / person

One of the world's largest collections of Chinese imperial art, evacuated from Beijing's Forbidden City in 1948, includes the Jadeite Cabbage and the Meat-Shaped Stone — arrive at opening to beat the tour-group crowds around both.

National Palace Museum · npm.gov.tw

Longshan Temple

~45 minutes, self-guided · Free

A 1738 Taoist-Buddhist temple thick with incense smoke and carved stone dragons, where worshippers toss red crescent-shaped jiaobei blocks on the floor to ask yes-or-no questions of the resident deities.

Jiufen & Shifen Sky Lantern Tour

~5 hours, small-group guided · \$55 USD / person, incl. transport & one sky lantern

A minibus climbs into the hills to Jiufen's red-lantern-strung stone stairways and teahouses overlooking the sea, then drops down to Shifen to brush a wish onto a paper sky lantern and release it over the old coal-mining railway's tracks.

Overnight — Palais de Chine Hotel

From \$150 USD / night, for 2 people

A second night back in Taipei before tomorrow's train south to Taroko Gorge.

Palais de Chine Hotel · palaisdechinehotel.com

Day 3**Taipei to Taroko Gorge**

A morning express train threads the Pacific coastline south to Hualien, then a local shuttle climbs straight into a nine-mile marble canyon for an afternoon on trailside paths and a swiftlet-nested cliff face.

Taroko Express Train — Taipei to Hualien

~2 hours · NT\$440 (~\$14 USD) / person

TRA's Taroko-class limited express hugs the Pacific coastline south from Taipei; reserve seats online through the Taiwan Railway booking system a week ahead in high season, as this route sells out fastest of any on the island.

Taiwan Railway Administration · railway.gov.tw

Taroko Gorge Tourist Shuttle Bus

Day pass, self-guided · NT\$250 (~\$8 USD) / person

A hop-on hop-off shuttle bus links every trailhead along the single road that runs the length of the gorge, timed around the park's main hikes.

Shakadang Trail

~1.5 hours round-trip, self-guided · Free

A flat, marble-dust path clings to a cliff above a river run jade-green by dissolved limestone, passing small stalls run by the local Truku Indigenous community selling wild-boar sausage and mountain vegetables.

Swallow Grotto (Yanzikou)

~40 minutes, self-guided · Free (helmet required, free at trailhead kiosks)

Swiftlets nest in hundreds of pockmarked holes in a cliff face carved by the Liwu River, above a road blasted straight through solid marble — hardhats at either end of the trail guard against occasional rockfall.

Overnight — Silks Place Taroko

From \$230 USD / night, for 2 people

The only hotel inside Taroko National Park, built into the canyon wall near Tianxiang with a rooftop pool looking straight up at the marble cliffs.

Silks Place Taroko · taroko.silksplace.com

Day 4**Deep Into the Gorge**

A full day inside the gorge climbs behind a waterfall through a hand-dug, unlit tunnel, pays respects at a shrine built into the cliff for the road's fallen workers, and closes on a coastal cliff where the mountains drop straight into the Pacific.

Baiyang Trail & Water Curtain Cave

~2 hours round-trip, self-guided · Free (flashlight rental ~\$2 USD at trailhead)

Seven unlit tunnels blasted through the mountain lead to a natural curtain of waterfall spray inside a dripping cave — a flashlight and poncho (or a willingness to get soaked) both help.

Eternal Spring Shrine (Changchun Shrine)

~30 minutes, self-guided · Free

A pagoda-shrine clings to the cliff face above a spring-fed waterfall that pours directly out of the mountain, built to honor the 226 workers who died carving the cross-island highway through this gorge in the 1950s.

Qingshui Cliff

~30 minutes, self-guided · Free

Taiwan's tallest sea cliffs drop more than 800 meters straight into the Pacific along the old Suhua Highway, a short drive north of the park — one of the island's most photographed coastal viewpoints.

Dinner — Tianxiang Fanguan

~1 hour · \$10–\$18 USD / person

A simple noodle-and-rice-bowl restaurant near the Tianxiang trailheads, serving home-style Taiwanese cooking to hikers coming off the day's trails.

Overnight — Silks Place Taroko

From \$230 USD / night, for 2 people

A second night inside the gorge before tomorrow's train back to Taipei.

Silks Place Taroko · taroko.silksplace.com

Day 5

Return to Taipei & Departure

A final express train retraces the coastline back to Taipei, connecting straight through to the airport for the flight home.

Taroko Express Train — Hualien to Taipei

~2 hours · NT\$440 (~\$14 USD) / person

The return leg retraces yesterday's coastal route north, connecting at Taipei Main Station to the Airport MRT platform one floor down.

Taiwan Railway Administration · railway.gov.tw

Airport MRT — Taipei Main Station to Taoyuan Airport

~40 minutes · NT\$160 (~\$5 USD) / person

The same direct express line that brought you in on Day 1 closes the loop back to the airport.

Taoyuan Airport MRT · tymetro.com.tw

Departure — Taoyuan International Airport (TPE)

Self-guided

Five days that ran from Taipei 101's observation deck and a night market pepper bun to a sky lantern over Shifen and two days of marble cliffs inside Taroko Gorge.