

Taiwan

台灣

and

Hong Kong

香港粵語



October 2017

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Taiwan and Hong Kong, October 2017

This is our first visit to Taiwan and we have been very impressed by everything we have seen. We didn't know exactly what to expect (a small "China", perhaps; maybe over-crowded; maybe a good deal of poverty?) but we certainly didn't anticipate the breadth of things that we would experience. The overall impression of the island is that it is quite prosperous and although the "Made in Taiwan" label is certainly a truism, it's not the cheap clothing or high-end brand "knock offs" that one might expect. I guess we knew intuitively that many of the components in all our electronics are made here but their manufacturing technology goes far beyond that and they are world leaders in computer numerically controlled machinery amongst many others. Despite few natural resources (trees, water and precious stone seem to be the major ones), Taiwan has a very Western and sophisticated infrastructure, with amazing roads, "bullet trains" and cities to match those anywhere. It also has amazing coastal and mountain scenery and a long history and culture reflected in its temples and museums.

The political situation in Taiwan is, of course, somewhat sensitive. The world in general seems to have accepted the "One China" policy expressed by Beijing but clearly that is not popular in this country. Trade and tourism between the two countries appears to be prevalent and there is a lot of movement across the straits. The Taiwanese want "to be close, but not too close" with the mainland, and Chinese tourists are, if anything, more welcome than those from other Southeast Asian countries ("They spend more!")

There is, however, a close affinity with Japan as Taiwan was under Japanese occupation until 1945 and anyone of more advanced years was educated in Japanese. Oddly enough, even on the flight from Tokyo to Taipei and after we had spent only a day or two in Taiwan, we felt that the locals were more like Japanese than Chinese in their mannerisms. Clearly we are by no means experts in Asian cultures but we found the Japan-Taiwan similarities interesting and—as we found out—should not have been entirely unexpected. Whatever their affinity, the Taiwanese are very friendly and hospitable people and, for a small country (about the size of England) with only 23 millions population, they have a very well developed infrastructure and sense of history and culture.

The six days we spent in Hong Kong were far less hectic than those in Taiwan as we have visited this city several times and feel that we know our way around quite well. Consequently, we arranged no organized tours and we did all our sightseeing on foot and using the excellent public transport system—bus, subway, tram and ferry boat. And we too things at a more leisurely pace, selecting one "destination" each day to fill our time.

We feel very fortunate to be able to visit such exciting and different regions of the world and, particularly, to be able to see not only what these cultures have to offer (and it is a lot!!) but how they are changing (or not) as the years and political situations change.

Taiwan and Hong Kong, October 2017

Thursday October 12/Friday October 13

We had stayed at the airport Marriott and were up shortly after five to get the 5:45 shuttle to the airport. Check-in and Security moved quite well (although there was a surprising number of people about at this early hour) so we had plenty of time to stroll to the gate for our 7:15 flight to Atlanta. We had about 1 ½ hours in the lounge there before boarding our flight to Tokyo and settling in for a 13 1/2 hour flight across the US, Canada, northern Alaska, the Pacific Ocean and Russia before crossing northern Japan.

The flight was generally smooth and we both got a little sleep between meals, although it certainly felt like a LONG flight. We arrived in Tokyo at 2:30pm local time (it was now Friday) to thick clouds and rain and a temperature near 60F. We had to pass through a security check (relatively fast) and then take a shuttle bus to another terminal. Here we eventually found the China Airlines (very poorly sign-posted for efficiency-conscious Japan) and had over two hours before our final leg to Taipei.

It was raining very heavily as we left Tokyo (a little late) and the weather didn't improve as we journeyed south. We had a very good hot meal on the China Airlines flight (why can't Delta serve their meals hot?) and then slept until we were nearing Taipei. The approach through dense cloud seemed to last forever but we were actually circling for quite some time before approaching the airport. We were almost down and in sight of the ground when the pilot suddenly turned full throttle, put the wheels up and we began to climb quickly. After a while the captain announced that "traffic and clouds" had forced a "go around" and it would be about ten more minutes before we landed. This actually was closer to 25 minutes but we finally landed safely in very strong winds and heavy rain. After years of flying with few incidents, this is the second time in as many months that we have done a touch and go.

Once on the ground, we moved quite quickly through Immigration (despite filling out forms "on the fly") and retrieved our bags. The driver of the transfer taxi was waiting for us (now about 1 ½ hours late) and we were soon in the car and headed on the expressway into the city. The drive – again through torrential rain – took about 45 minutes so it was almost midnight when we checked in at the Westin Hotel, almost exactly 30 hours after leaving the hotel in Cincinnati.

We unpacked, showered, had a drink and then went to bed where we both slept soundly until almost 8am.

Saturday October 14

We had breakfast in the concierge lounge and then took a brief walk just a couple of blocks around the hotel. It was raining heavily (and forecasted to continue for the foreseeable future) so we found an ATM, got some local currency and returned to the shelter of the hotel, hoping to get out a little later in the day. This turned out to be a false hope as we both fell asleep and didn't wake up again until almost 5pm.



First glimpse of a cloudy Taipei

I took advantage of the Business Center to do some printing, etc. and then we got ready for dinner. We chose to eat in one of the seven hotel restaurants. We had an excellent Chinese dinner but, as usual, we ordered too many dishes. However, everything was good so we had a good sampling of about eight dishes and a very pleasant bottle of wine. We returned to the room about 9:30 after a very relaxing day but one in which we got to acclimatize and also see a little of the local culture. We always enjoy simply watching the locals and seeing how they behave – generally in a much different manner than that we are used to at home.

Sunday October 15

We had a relatively poor night of sleep and were up soon after 6am. Presumably the sleep yesterday afternoon didn't help us get over jet lag.

We ate in the main dining room today (cooked breakfast) and then had a lazy morning before our afternoon tour. It was raining again but we were able to see the five main attractions on the almost four hour tour.

In addition to the usual "Local Arts" store (obligatory on all city tours worldwide, it seems) we went to the National Museum (which was very good but needed much more time) in which we saw some beautiful ivory carvings and the most-visited piece, the Jadeite Cabbage. The sculpture (from a single piece of

green and white jade) has been considered an allegory of female virtue with the white stalk symbolizing purity, the leaves denoting fertility and abundance and locust and katydid representing children. Although it seems to be by far the most popular piece in the museum, it is actually not listed as a national treasure and is much less significant than many other objects that were brought from the mainland after World War II. We were told, in



fact, that over 990% of the Chinese Dynasties' treasures now reside in Taipei, not Beijing.

There were three additional sites visited on the tour, each of which were spectacular and very colorful.

One was a beautiful Taoist temple which is very much in the Buddhist style in its ornate carvings, gold and incense but has no Buddha images. It is claimed that Taoism began in China about 100 years before Buddhism was brought to that coun-





try but to Westerners the two appear very similar. It was relatively small but the 180 year old temple demanded more time than the 20 minutes visit we had.

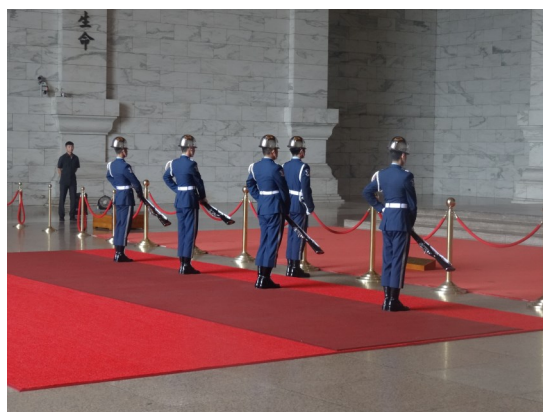


Similarly, the vast monument to Chiang Kai-shek is set in a huge park complex containing, among other things, a concert hall and the National Theater.

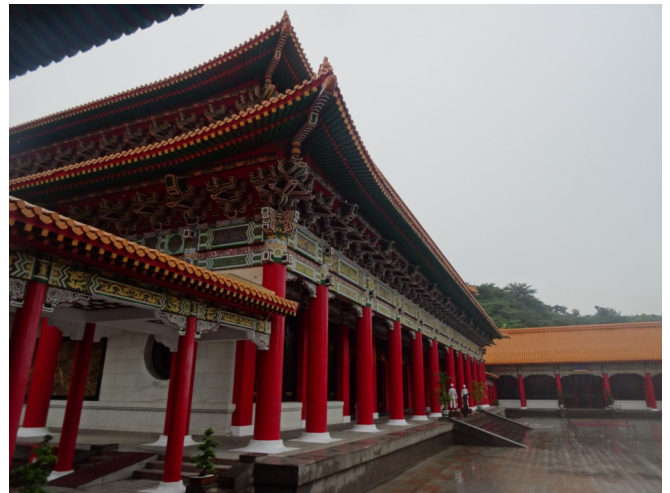




The memorial hall itself (with its imposing statue of the leader) is relatively plain (although the ceiling is magnificent) but the highlight here was the hourly changing of the two Air Force guards. It is a short 10 minute ceremony but drilled to perfection and in a marching style that seems strange to Western eyes.



The Martyr's Shrine is another magnificent venue dedicated to the 330,000 Taiwanese who lost their lives in World War II.



At that time, Taiwan was under Japanese rule (having occupied the country as a result of the China-Japan war of the late 19th century) and the Taiwanese were therefore fighting against their mainland “brothers”. All casualties were buried in China but the memorial here has a hall with wooden spirit tablets – one each for officers and larger ones representing 100 soldiers killed. The shrine is built in a similar manner to, and is very reminiscent of, the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Despite the weather, this tour provided us with a good introduction to this large city which is very spread out and contains ultra-modern buildings side by side with more typical Chinese structures. Hopefully we can explore more when we return from our tour of the island next weekend.

Tonight we ate in the hotel's Italian restaurant and enjoyed a Caprese salad and a shared pizza.



Our Driving Tour of Taiwan

Although we had enjoyed our rather damp introduction to Taipei—and looked forward to seeing more of the city when we return—this five day guided tour of the whole island was the primary reason for our visit. The tour promised to show us much of the scenery of this small island as well as take us to historic, cultural and religious sites.

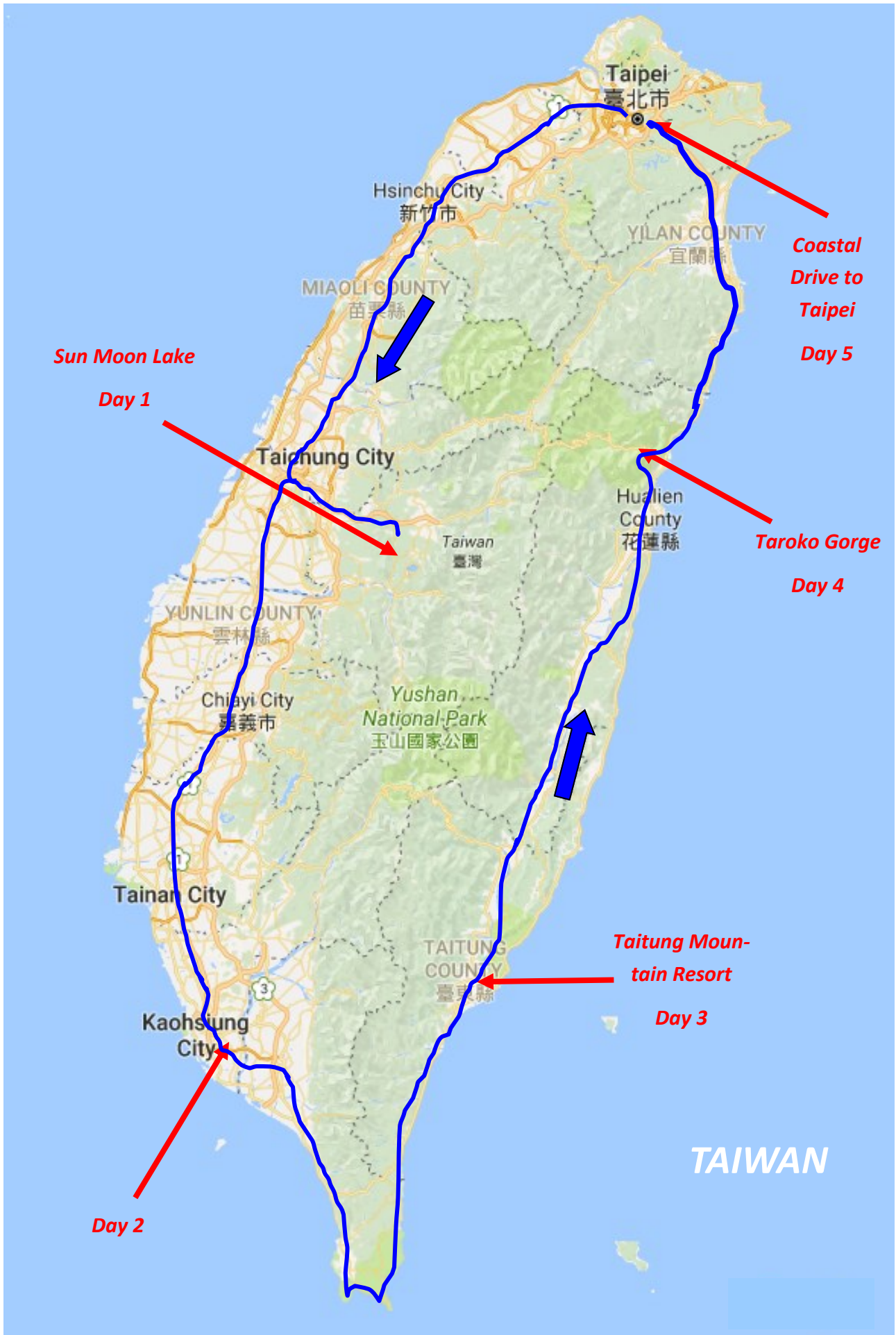
The route (shown opposite) would take us down the western side, which is the highly industrialized part of the island and includes the largest cities. This side of Taiwan is only about 100 miles from mainland China across the East China Sea or the Luzon Strait, although we were generally inland from the coast until we reached the southernmost tip.

The east coast—along the Pacific Ocean—has far fewer cities and towns but has the scenic attractions of the coastline and mountain ranges so we were expecting some of the “best of both worlds” as we traveled around. We were not disappointed!

Taiwan is a mountainous island. It has the largest number and density of high mountains in the world. There are 286 mountain summits over 3000 meters (9,800 feet) above sea level on the island, with Yushan (13,000 feet) being the tallest mountain in both Taiwan and East Asia.

The entire coastline of Taiwan is just under 1000 miles but it is the Pacific Coast that is the more spectacular as the steep mountains climb directly from the sea. As we would discover, this creates a drive that is at least comparable to that of California Route 1 and in many ways is even more impressive.

So, with a little knowledge and a good deal more anticipation, we began our tour.



Taiwan, officially the Republic of China (ROC), is a state in East Asia. Its neighbors include China (officially the People's Republic of China, PRC) to the west, Japan to the northeast, and the Philippines to the south. The country has a population of 23 millions and covers 14,000 square miles—about 1/10 that of California.

The island of Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa, was inhabited by Taiwanese aborigines before the 17th century, when Dutch and Spanish colonies opened the island to mass Chinese immigration. The island was later annexed by the Qing dynasty, the last dynasty of China who ceded Taiwan to Japan in 1895 after the Sino-Japanese War. While Taiwan was under Japanese rule, the Republic of China (ROC) was established on the mainland in 1912 after the fall of the Qing dynasty. Following the Japanese surrender to the Allies in 1945, the ROC took control of Taiwan. However, the resumption of the Chinese Civil War led to the ROC's loss of the mainland to the Communists, and the flight of the ROC government to Taiwan in 1949. Although the ROC continued to claim to be the legitimate government of China, its effective jurisdiction has, since the loss of Hainan in 1950, been limited to Taiwan and its surrounding islands, with the main island making up 99% of its de facto territory. As a founding member of the United Nations, the ROC continued to represent China at the United Nations until 1971, when the PRC assumed China's seat, causing the ROC to lose its UN membership.

Taiwan entered a period of rapid economic growth and industrialization in the early 1960s, creating a stable industrial economy. In the 1980s and early 1990s, it changed from a one-party military dictatorship to a multi-party democracy with a semi-presidential system. Taiwan is the 22nd-largest economy in the world, and its high-tech industry plays a key role in the global economy. It is ranked highly in terms of freedom of the press, healthcare, public education, economic freedom, and human development. The country benefits from a highly skilled workforce and is among the most highly educated countries in the world with one of the highest percentages of its citizens holding a tertiary education degree.

The PRC has consistently claimed sovereignty over Taiwan and asserted the ROC is no longer in legitimate existence. Under its One-China Policy the PRC refused diplomatic relations with any country that recognizes the ROC. To-day only a few countries recognize the ROC as the sole legal representative of China but many other states maintain unofficial ties through representative offices and institutions that function as de facto embassies and consulates. Although Taiwan is fully self-governing, most international organizations in which the PRC participates either refuse to grant membership to Taiwan or allow it to participate only as a non-state actor. Internally, the major division in politics is between the aspirations of eventual Chinese unification or Taiwanese independence, though both sides have moderated their positions to broaden their appeal. The PRC has threatened the use of military force in response to any formal declaration of independence by Taiwan or if PRC leaders decide that peaceful unification is no longer possible.

Monday October 16

We were up at six and had breakfast in the Concierge lounge before completing our packing and checking out. At a little after eight our tour guide, David, showed up in the lobby and we boarded our bus to start our five day/four night tour of the island of Taiwan.

From Taipei we drove perhaps 100 miles south on a major expressway. We passed a number of fairly large cities (of the order of one million population), a number of large industrial estates, many rice fields and large residential tower blocks. Taiwan has a population of 23 millions and seems to have made a huge commitment to manufacturing of all kinds – from semiconductors to CNC machines. We were told, for example, that all iPhone chips are made here as well as 95 % of all components in racing bicycles, regardless of the make.

There has been an equally impressive investment in the infrastructure also, with four nuclear power plants and a large number of hydro- and fuel-fired electricity generating facilities. The expressway we traveled was elevated above the ground for our entire journey, as were most of those that crossed our route. Whether this was to minimize the “footprint” or whether the ground was too much of a swamp to support a conventional road was not clear, but the engineering feat is significant.

As we traveled south the surrounding landscape became increasingly hilly and forested, although many of the trees were not of a variety that was familiar to us. Nevertheless, the scenery was beautiful, although difficult to capture in photos from a moving bus.



We made two stops at rest areas (an example of one is on the right) and a third in a small town inhabited mostly by an aboriginal tribe at the edge of Sun Moon Lake where we were on our own for lunch at any of a large number of street-side stalls selling all kinds of foods, few of which were identified in English. We settled for a cup of tea which was quite refreshing in the 80 degree heat and high humidity. We have already concluded that Taiwan can be as oppressive as Singapore or Cambodia in this respect – and may even approach that of Burma if the sun continues to shine as it did today.



After lunch, and now having left the expressway, we climbed a narrow, twisty road alongside Sun Moon Lake to visit a Buddhist Temple and a “nearby” pagoda. The Xuanzang Temple is famous for its relic of a monk who traveled to India 2500 years ago to bring back and translate the teachings of Buddha for

Sun Moon Lake is the largest body of water in Taiwan as well as a major tourist attraction. The area around the Lake is home to the Thao tribe, one of aboriginal tribes of Taiwan. The east side of the lake resembles a sun while the west side resembles a moon.

Sun Moon Lake is located about 2500 feet above sea level. It is 90 feet deep and has a surface area of approximately 3 square miles. The area surrounding the lake has many trails for hiking and cycling and the lake water is used for hydro-electric power generation.

While swimming in Sun Moon Lake is usually not permitted, there is an annual 3-km race called the Swimming Carnival of Sun Moon Lake held around the Mid-Autumn Festival each year. In recent years the participants have numbered in the tens of thousands.

*The lake and its surrounding countryside have been designated one of thirteen national scenic areas in Taiwan. **Wen Wu Temple** was built after rising water levels from building a dam forced several smaller temples to be removed. **Ci En Pagoda** was built by the late President Chiang Kai-shek in 1971 in memory of his mother and is located near the **Xuanzang Temple**.*

both the Japanese and the Chinese. The small relic was in Japanese hands following the 1895 to 1945 occupation of Taiwan but Chang Kai-shek persuaded them to return it following World War II and then brought it to Taiwan when he left the mainland at the end of the Civil War in 1949.



The temple and its grounds are magnificent and certainly rivals many we have seen in other parts of Southeast Asia, including Japan. Typically, there are

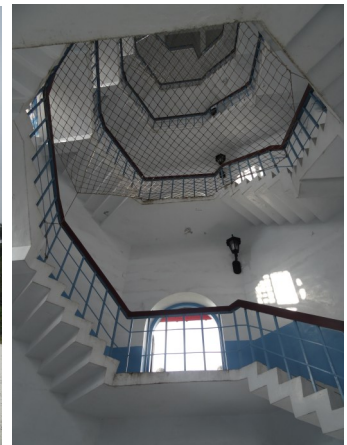
several levels involved in its construction so a number of steps are involved to visit the entire complex.

Xuanzang Temple





Nearby the temple is the Ci'En Pagoda that Chang Kai-shek had had built on a hilltop overlooking the lake. "Nearby" and "up a few steps followed by a flat walk" were pseudonyms for a very difficult and steep climb of almost a kilometer which would have been a challenge on a cool English day but in this heat and humidity no words (that can be used in polite company) aptly describe the ascent. The pagoda is worth seeing however and most of our bus party made the trek, including a couple celebrating their 53rd wedding anniversary. Once at the site, there are even more steps inside the pagoda to give an additional 100 feet altitude from which to view the lake and surrounding countryside. I admitted defeat on those stairs after climbing about a third of the way up. The walk down to the bus was considerably easier!



*The Pagoda, Sun Moon Lake from the top,
and the "short", much easier walk down!*



Our final stop was at another temple (Wen Wu) built of three terraces, one of which was dedicated to Confucius and had a beautifully carved wall which was built in a jade-colored stone in stark contrast to the reds, oranges and whites of the more typical temple. Again, this wall was well worth the climb – but this time up only a hundred steps or so.



*Wen Wu
Temple*



From this temple it was a very short bus ride to our hotel on the edge of the lake. Our guide had claimed that all our accommodation was to be Five Star and, if this one is anything to go by, he wasn't exaggerating. We were quickly settled in our room (complete with a tub fed by a hot spring) and relaxed for a couple of hours before dining in the hotel.



We ate in the Chinese full service restaurant rather than the buffet and had an excellent meal: three dishes and rice to share, and a bottle of wine. Everything was very good and the cost was very reasonable. We finished in the lobby bar with a dessert to share and coffee (Irish in one case).

Tuesday October 17

We had breakfast in the hotel and at 9am left on the bus. We made several short stops throughout the morning; one at the Sun Moon Park Visitor Center for views of the lake, another at a train station built by the Japanese during their more accommodating occupation (not much to see but of historical significance as a piece of Japanese investment which seems to continue to this day) and finally at the "Earthquake Temple".

In 1999, Taiwan suffered a 7.3 earthquake which clearly did a lot of damage, particularly in this central region of the country. A temple here was "destroyed" and a new one was built to replace it right next door – in the space of just two years, all the money being raised by public donations. There is an interesting story in that the "watchman" for the old temple had a series of dreams telling him to take a black statue (about 8 feet tall) from "this place". The dreams were checked with the gods for their truthfulness and, having been found to be true, the statue was removed to a safe place just before the earthquake. After things had settled down, another series of dreams asked that the statue be returned – not to the destroyed but to a new home; hence the new temple.



The “destroyed” temple is by no means habitable any more but it didn’t collapse entirely. The first level appears to have crumbled and the upper levels and roof have buckled into strange shapes creating something of a “Disney” effect. The building is still clearly identifiable as a temple and much of the statuary and the coloring are essentially like new, but obviously could no longer be used, let alone house the famous statue. This now stands proudly in the new temple.



The Earthquake Temple and its replacement



Following lunch at an expressway service area, we drove to the major attraction of the day, the enormous Fo Guang Shan Monastery complex which not only serves as a major place of worship but has school and university facilities on site. There are about 600 monks in residence, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of whom are women. We spent about twenty minutes with one of those who answered questions (through our guide as interpreter) about the faith, her life in the monastery and the teachings that she has devoted the rest of her life to. It was a fascinating talk, despite the fact that some of our group seemed to ask some rather inane questions and clearly had no previous introduction to the Buddhist religion.





One of the monks took a small group of us to a calligraphy hall where we were given a sample sheet to complete in Chinese characters. Another monk took us

to a room where we were served hot tea and ice cold water – both of which were very refreshing in the 85F heat and high humidity of this sunny afternoon. Finally, we were able to get a close look at a standing gold Buddha which must have been 50 feet in height. In Taiwan we have seen a number of Buddhas of all shapes and colors but most are in a standing position, unlike most others we have seen in other Asian countries.

Fo Guang Shan, literally: "Buddha's Light Mountain" is an international Chinese Buddhist monastic order and new religious movement based in Taiwan. The headquarters of Fo Guang Shan, located in Kaohsiung, is the largest Buddhist monastery in Taiwan. The organization is also one of the largest charity organizations in the country. The organization's counterpart for laypeople is known as the Buddha's Light International Association.

Founded in 1967 by Hsing Yun, the order promotes Humanistic Buddhism and is known for its efforts in the modernization of Chinese Buddhism. The order is famous for its use of technology and its temples are often furnished with the latest equipment. Hsing Yun's stated position for Fo Guang Shan is that it is an "amalgam of all Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism. In Taiwan, Hsing Yun is popularly referred to as one of the "Four Heavenly Kings" and Fo Guang Shan is considered one of the "Four Great Mountains" or four major Buddhist organizations of Taiwanese Buddhism.

In 1967, Hsing Yun purchased more than 30 hectares in ,Kaohsiung County as the site for the construction of a monastery. The groundbreaking ceremony was held on 16 May 1967. Fo Guang Shan embarked on many construction projects, including university buildings, shrines, and a cemetery. In 1975, Fo Guang Shan's 36-metre tall statue of Amitabha Buddha was consecrated. In 1981, 15 years after its establishment, the Great Hero Hall was built. During these times, many other Fo Guang Shan temples outside the order's mother monastery were also built.



The monastery and its grounds (see photo from web site) are absolutely enormous and, having done a little additional research into the site, it is clear that we saw only a tiny fraction of the whole. Nevertheless, what we saw was very impressive and an exquisite combination of magnificent buildings and serenely beautiful open areas. It really was a highlight of our visit in many ways.

From the Monastery we drove a short distance to make two more stops in our destination city before being taken to the hotel. One was a 35 minute cruise on the Love River (again, there is a story attached to its name based on a couple who drowned here having been denied the chance to marry—somehow that sounded very familiar!) which gave us a view of the modern skyline of the city, Kaohsiung, Taiwan's second largest.



The last stop was at the night market where we were given an hour to stroll past the many food stalls and few souvenir stalls. 30 minutes would have been sufficient for us and this market didn't compare with other night markets that we have seen in Cambodia, Thailand and elsewhere.

We arrived at the hotel soon after 6:30 and made our way to the room on the 16th floor. We cleaned up and selected a restaurant for dinner. We chose an American steakhouse, which might seem a little odd but we figured that with another week in Taiwan and almost the same in Hong Kong we will have plenty of opportunities for authentic Asian cuisine.

Wednesday October 18

We had breakfast in the hotel, checked out and were leaving the bustle of Kaohsiung City by 8:45. Today was to be mostly driving with an emphasis in the scenery rather than temples and other points of interest. We made several stops along the China Sea and, later, the Pacific Ocean coasts to admire the cliffs, the beaches and the surf. At one spot, the most southerly in Taiwan and at the spot where the China Sea and Pacific Ocean meet, we also visited a lighthouse – probably an essential navigational tool at this specific location.



*Maobitou Park,
with "Cat Rock"*

Eluanbi Lighthouse is a lighthouse located on Cape Eluanbi, the southernmost point of Taiwan. The lighthouse is built between the Pacific Ocean and the Taiwan Strait, facing toward the Luzon Strait. Thus, the lighthouse has a splendid panorama. Today, Eluanbi Lighthouse is called "The Light of East Asia", because its intensity is the most powerful among Taiwan lighthouses.