

Taiwan (2018-2022)

Jess Gosling: Married with one child

Taiwan presents a wonderful option within Asia if you like to have seasons (we have all four!), scenery, and outdoor pursuits. As an island, it offers a coastline within one hour of Taipei and also mountains a short ride from the city. Teachers are generally outdoors types: they enjoy bike riding, running, and hiking. In summer, you can do river tracing and swimming.

The country is very safe, crime is very low and it is a place you can leave your bag unattended and it will stay safe. The people are generally helpful when they can be, but be aware the level of English is low (or the confidence is) so it certainly helps to learn Mandarin. You can get by with English within Taipei but outside of Taipei, it is more challenging.

In terms of travel, you can buy or hire a car here. This is popular due to some of the most beautiful places being a little difficult to reach by public transport (especially if you are a keen hiker). However, public transport is excellent and plentiful. There are high-speed trains to get you across country plus it is possible to fly. Taipei has a highly efficient MRT service and bus service.

Health Service is excellent, there are excellent hospitals, doctors and dentists across the region. There can be a struggle to communicate needs, especially in an emergency situation without Mandarin.

However, you can get by. You pay into a National Health Service which covers most things, including dental health check every 6 months. The charge is around 5gp per basic service at the dentist and doctors.

Covid has impacted Taiwan, as Taiwan has just begun to get cases around the 40,000/50,000 daily mark. Venues are remaining open

however, including restaurants, which is excellent. Currently, as for the past year, masks have to be worn everywhere outside of the home. The current quarantine period for arrivals is 7 days, although this may change at any time.

Highlights of the region include Sun Moon Lake, Taroko Gorge, Kenting, Alishan Mountain, Nantou, CingJing Farm, and historical Tainan.

Taipei

Housing is generally good in Taipei, water should be filtered but the apartments have all the modern conveniences you would expect. The further away from the city/international schools, the cheaper the rent is. The area Tianmu, around the international schools, is quite expensive for a property.

Teachers usually live in apartments, as houses are rare and can be very expensive. However, there is one housing block in Shipai which is more reasonable, but still not such a great price as an apartment. Apartments are much more expensive if they are newer, or have conveniences such as a pool or gym.

In terms of restaurants, you can get most cuisines here. However, for varied cuisines outside of Taiwanese/Chinese, Mexican and American, you need to travel into the city. International food is more expensive than local food, around 3x the price.

Shopping is the single biggest expense here. We do not buy extravagantly nor too many Western products but our shopping bill runs around \$180 per week. There are three of us. The main supermarkets are Carrefour and PX Mart, but there is also Costco. You can shop in markets of course to save a few pennies.

There is quite a lot to do here. Taipei does not offer the attractions of Hong Kong or Singapore, but there is enough in terms of outdoor

pursuits. There are a few museums and one amusement park for kids. There are plenty of parks and green spaces, and nearly all of these have brilliant playgrounds.

Shopping in terms of clothes can be limited. The main western brand stores are H and M and Gap. You can find a cheaper alternative for basics and work clothes, called Net. There is Ikea, B and Q, and Hola, all great shops for buying furniture. Facebook groups often advertise second-hand furniture and a nice group for general information is 'Friends in Taiwan'.

Phone contracts and the internet are easy to get. Most shops selling the phone contracts can speak English. You can set up high-speed internet through your landlord.

Most jobs can be done through the landlord. When you sign a deal on your apartment they can charge one- or two months' rent, so check their fee. Also, your deposit will usually be two months' rent.

The ex-pat community is small, generally teachers and wind farmers. There are only two main big international schools in Taipei.

Work

As a teacher, I have a good work/life balance. The children I teach are of primary age and mainly of Taiwanese families. Like all children, they need routines to support them and they respond well to praise and positive encouragement. Parents often take their children to 'bushybans', after school lessons, so academically the children are strong. Many children go to bed late which can be an issue when they are tired in school.

