

COUNTRY DATA

POPULATION

With a population of 20.8 million, Taiwan is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The people are primarily Chinese, descendants of immigrants who came from Fukien and Kwangtung provinces on the mainland about a century ago. There are also some non-Chinese tribes, particularly in the mountainous interior. About 20 percent of the population are descendants of the 1.2 million people who came to Taiwan with the Nationalist government following the communist takeover of Mainland China in 1949.

Over 90 percent of the population is literate. The standards of education are among the highest in the world. The system is limited only by its capacity to provide a sufficient quantity of graduate and post-graduate education, but the situation is being corrected. Average life expectancy is 75 years.

LAND AREA

Taiwan is situated in the Pacific Ocean, 150 kilometres east of the People's Republic of China (PRC), 1000 kilometres south of Japan, 500 kilometres northeast of Hong Kong and 300 kilometres north of the Philippines. Similar in size to Vancouver Island, the main island is 384 kilometres long and 128 kilometres wide, for a total area of 36,000 square kilometres. The Tropic of Cancer crosses the southern part of Taiwan. A range of mountains runs from north to south, with some 60 peaks over 3000 metres. Only a quarter of Taiwan, mainly along the north and west coasts, is arable, and it is here where the majority of the population lives. Taiwan has few natural resources, apart from its able and hard working populace. Taiwan includes Penghu, a group of 64 islands, also known as the Pescadores, and 21 other scattered islands, including Lanyu (Orchid) Island and the chains of Quemoy and Matsu. Over half of the island of Taiwan is covered by forest and only about one-third of the island is arable (894,974 hectares), primarily on the western plain. The remainder of the island is covered by rugged foothills and mountain ranges.

CLIMATE

The climate of Taiwan is subtropical with an average annual temperature of 21.7°C (75.1°F) in the south. Summers last from May through September and are usually warm to hot with daytime temperatures between 27°C and 35°C. Winters are short and mild, lasting from December through February. Humidity is high all year around. The rainy season is May and June. Visitors are advised to wear lightweight clothing from April through November. Sweaters and topcoats are usually necessary from December through March.

MAJOR CITIES

Taipei is Taiwan's largest city with approximately 2,702,000 people. Taipei is the capital city, as well as the political, cultural and business centre of Taiwan. Kaohsiung has a population of over 1,374,000 and is Taiwan's major industrial port and one of the largest ports in Southeast Asia. Taichung, located at the centre of the island, has 745,000 inhabitants and is the seat of the Provincial Government. Tainan has a population of 676,000 and is located on the southwest corner of the island in close proximity to Kaohsiung. Tainan is also the former capital with many ancient temples and forts.