



Traditional wooden canoes are a common sight in the islands.

Taiwan's paradise lost

If you are after a beach holiday full of action and adventure Taiwan's rugged and remote islands are just the ticket

One version of a tropical paradise involves a fruity drink permanently attached to the preferred drinking hand in a poolside cabana surrounded by beautiful people.

If this happens to be your version, Taiwan's rugged islands are not for you. But if you fancy yourself as an adventurer with a hankering for the road less travelled they will make for a rewarding holiday. Although some of the islands are more touristy than others, you won't see much English beyond the odd road sign, so swot up on a few choice words in Mandarin Chinese or make quick friends.

While there are a number of islands, such as Orchid and Little Liuchiu, which make for better day trips, I'm focusing on Green Island and Penghu Island – Taiwan's developed (term used loosely) islands – because they're both worth a few days.

Green Island

It's not called Green Island without reason, although it wasn't always so. Now a lush land,

the indigenous people of this region found Burning Island a more suitable name due to its once violent volcanic past. These days craggy rock formations dart up from the sea around the island.

You'll find world-class snorkelling and diving just 30km off the south-east coast of Taiwan, as well as a fascinating human-rights past – Green Island was a dumping ground for political prisoners during the country's infamous 'White Terror' in the '50s. Its main concentration camp, New Life Camp, has been turned into part of the Human Rights Memorial Park.

Elsewhere on the island, there are stunning views, the best of which is the Little Great Wall, the nickname for a beautiful wall that runs up the coastline at Haishenping. Here, you can see the Pekinese Dog and Sleeping Beauty – two volcanic rock formations made to boost profits in the postcard industry.

Nightlife is patchy at best. Your best bet is along Nanliao Road through the main village of the same name, but all the evening action

is at the Sunrise saltwater hot springs. One of only three saltwater hot springs in the world, these natural volcanic springs draw Taiwanese from the mainland to soak in the natural seaside jacuzzis or in the man-made facilities built further out from shore. Despite their sulphur content, they don't stink. For some, a dip here is worth the trip alone.

Penghu Island

Penghu Island is the largest of 64 small islands that make up the Penghu Archipelago off the west coast of Taiwan. It's the most developed and tourist-friendly of Taiwan's islands.

Despite having actual seashell and sand beaches, there isn't a single resort here. Still, Penghu is worth a few days of your time. The wind here could fuel an America's Cup yachting race, so windsurfing has quickly become a popular activity for enthusiasts around the world. If that's too active for you, there is plenty more fun to be had to pass the days.

For a fascinating glimpse into what the Taiwanese consider fun, spend an afternoon 'fishing' at one of the spring fish farms.

BY KEVIN RAUB



'It's not called Green Island without reason'

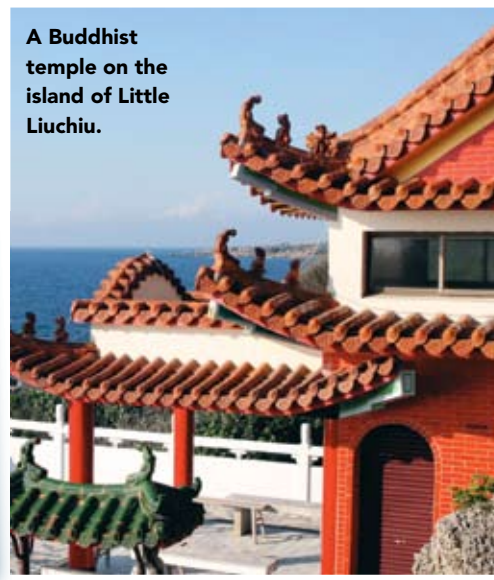
Green Island is a lush land with an interesting history.



A Buddhist temple on the island of Little Liuchiu.



Traditional homes on Jibeh Island.



Tourists are whisked off to a small ocean farm where trapped spring fish practically jump out of the water to eat the small fish used as bait. Of course, there is no actual catching or releasing. The Taiwanese, however, seem enthralled by this.

They also love to go jet skiing, banana boating and tubing. However, due to the population's horrible swimming record, none of these activities can be done alone. But on Jibeh Island, the most beautiful of Penghu's outer islands, each activity will cost around \$12.50. Here you'll also find the best beach in all of Taiwan's islands.

Back in Makung, a charming little town full of diversions along its main thoroughfare Zhongheng Rd, there is a colourful mix of army cadets, stray dogs, bubble-milk tea stands and 7-Elevens.

Here you'll find things that consistently shock the senses. And it starts early. The six-man band that blared at full throttle from the lobby of a local hotel from 8am in the morning eliminated all need for caffeine in the waking-up process.

At night the road comes alive as well, with spots like the Sunny Colony Bar catering to

locals and tourists alike, knocking back specialty cocktails made from a local red cactus juice mixed with various liquors (you may have trouble ordering this drink given that its name is xianrenzhang zhi).

Now, if only there was a quiet spot to sleep off the hangover.

Getting there

TRANSPORT: Green Island: Far Eastern Air Transport operates round-trip flights from Taipei to Taichung (around \$200). From there catch the East Island ferries (\$38 round-trip). Penghu Island: Uni Air has three flights daily from Taipei (\$116.50).

ACCOMMODATION: Green Island: Sunrise Ocean Bed Hot Springs, 089 671018, Nanliao Rd, Nanliao. Penghu Island: Jih Lih Hotel, 06 9265898, 25 Huaming 1st Rd. www.geocities.com/jihli2003, Makung.

FOOD: Green Island: Fisher Man, 089 671022, Nanliao Rd, Nanliao. Penghu Island: Saraithung, 06 9263693, 14 Shinshong Rd, Makung.

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