

Taiwan: a Taste of China on One Small Island

Breathtaking scenery, world-class cuisine, and new direct flights to the mainland make Taiwan even easier to sell.

GAIL. P. DUBOV

With less than 100,000 American tourists visiting Taiwan in 2008, it's clear this island nation, one of Asia's most dynamic economies, has been sorely misunderstood. But with an



JANICE SHE-JEN LAI

ambitious tourism campaign in place and new direct flights to mainland China, that may soon change. Within the borders of this small, democratic island, slightly larger than Maryland, lies a world of glaring contrast and cultural influences that will impress even the most well-traveled client. "An island of infinite variety," writes its Tourist Bureau, Taiwan has something to offer every traveler, whether a sophisticated shopper, a discriminating gourmand, or a

nature-loving hiker. Its people have been called the friendliest in Asia; its food the number one reason many visit. Its cities are vibrant and colorful, from the tallest skyscraper in the world affirming its modern spirit to quaint one-story dwellings, reminders of its ancient Chinese soul. World class hotels are growing in number. A solid infrastructure boasts a high speed bullet train. Direct flights are now available to six cities on the mainland. Taiwan is safe, easy to travel, and one of the most underrated destinations in Asia. Whether your clients are eager for something new and exotic or planning a trip to the mainland with a stopover in the "other" China, they'll surely agree that good things come in small packages.

Ilha Formosa—Beautiful Island

Taiwan, the seat of the Republic of China, lies in the western Pacific less than a hundred miles across the Taiwan Strait from mainland China. Straddling the Tropic of Cancer, its climate is tropical in the north, subtropical in the south. Winters are cool, summers hot but not severe. Two-thirds of the island is mountain range, running like a lush, steep spine down the length of the country. Early Portuguese sailors inspired by this rich landscape named it Ilha Formosa, or "beautiful island." But it was the Dutch who first established themselves, and in the following 400 years Spain, England, Japan, and China fought over its rule. Its seminal year was 1949 when Mao Zedong's Communists defeated Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists, beginning a wave of Chinese immigration to the

island which changed its profile forever. Politics aside, this rich history gives Taiwan its color, its cultural layers, and a variety of regional cuisines rarely seen elsewhere in Asia.

Taipei, Taiwan's capital city, has struck a fine balance between business and beauty. Walking paths line its river bank. Camphor trees shade the main boulevards. An efficient light-rail network helps make exploring the city easy. Taipei 101, the world's tallest building, towers 101 floors over the Xinyi District. On a clear day, its indoor and outdoor observation decks offer unparalleled views of Taipei and surroundings. For clients who find more thrills shopping than riding the fastest elevator in the world to its 89th floor, the first five floors are upscale boutiques by Armani, Gucci, and others. But the most popular sites honor the country's political and religious past. The Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, a massive white marble structure, is surrounded by gardens in memory of the former president. Martyr's Shrine, with its guard-changing ceremony performed in perfect precision, is a popular tourist stop. Longshan Temple, built in 1738, is the religious heart of the city. More than a hundred deities are worshipped in this temple, built in traditional architectural style, a reminder of the country's strong spiritual foundation.

Taipei's colorful night markets celebrate two of the city's major passions—food and shopping. Shilin Night Market, its largest, offers a wide variety of trendy clothing and a bounty of snacks ranging from oyster omelets to pearl milk. But the city's cuisine spans night market street food to haute cuisine, from truffle dumplings to stinky tofu. A mandatory stop on its restaurant scene is the famous Din Tai Fung, known for its famous specialty, xiao long bao, or steamed soup dumplings. But the jewel in Taipei's crown is the National Palace Museum, the home of the finest and most extensive collection of Chinese art in the world. As respected as the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum, it houses artifacts dating to the earliest days of Chinese civilization. Wandering through the galleries, your clients will see Ming dynasty pottery, bronze vessels and one of the museum's most popular pieces—jade delicately carved into a cabbage!

The Grand Hyatt Taipei, the largest Hyatt outside the U.S. and Canada, is the only internationally managed hotel in the city. Built in 1990, it was originally called a "white elephant," rising above a new district with the Taipei world trade center and convention center, and little else but barren fields. Today, the area is called the "Manhattan" of Taipei, surrounded by hip, new restaurants and designer shopping. "From day one

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the hotel has been very successful," said the affable General Manager of the Grand Hyatt Taipei, David Pacey. Even in this economy, the Hyatt's 856 rooms have an occupancy rate of 68-70%. "We're still holding our heads up high." Pacey said, anticipating the approaching high season from March through June. Fam trips are scheduled on a regular basis through Hyatt's NY, Chicago or L.A. office.

Exploring the Island

Though Taipei has endless diversions, a trip out of the city north along the scenic coast will take clients to Yehliu, famous for its bizarre and much-photographed rock formations. A pampering day can be spent soaking in one of Taiwan's world famous natural hot springs. It's a short trip to Beitou's sulphurous waters, on the outskirts of the city or farther south to the sodium carbonate springs of Wulai, along the banks of the Nanshi Creek. For a few days of real R&R in a tranquil setting suggest a stay at Sun Moon Lake. The largest freshwater lake in Taiwan, Sun Moon Lake is in one of thirteen National Scenic Areas under the management of the Tourism Bureau. One of the country's leading tourist destinations, zen-inspired hotels like The Lalu and Fleur de Chine dot the rim of this mist covered lake, a picture-postcard Chinese landscape. Attractions include Wen Wu Temple and the Formosan Aboriginal Cultural Village.

To the southwest is Kaohsiung, Taiwan's second largest city and nation's largest port. A city that has seen a radical transformation in recent years, it was chosen as host city for the World Games (second only to the Olympics) this July. The Love River winds through the city, bordered by promenades and outdoor cafes, with evening cruises a popular activity. The majestic red brick British Consulate at Takou, built in 1865, overlooks Kaohsiung's harbor, offering spectacular sunset views and a popular place for dinner or drinks. The old lighthouse on Cijin Island has views of the city and harbor and a long strip of sandy beach for those clients who must dip their toes in the Taiwan strait.

"Tourism in Taiwan has great potential for the American traveler," Janice She-Jen Lai, Director-General, Taiwan Tourist Bureau told Travel World News. Figures indicate that almost 400,000 Americans arrive each year, though only one quarter are leisure travelers. "In the past, most Americans only knew Taiwan as an island of industry," Ms. Lai added. In a few short decades, this one time maker of textiles and cheap consumer goods transformed itself into the world's leading high tech producer. But its other strengths are now being discovered. "Taiwan is rich in natural resources, culture and friendly people," the Director-General continued. Taiwanese friendliness—listed in a tourism survey as the number one reason visitors enjoy the country (food is #2)—helped coin the Bureau's current tourism campaign "Taiwan: Touch Your Heart." American tourists are the island's #3 tourism market



Taiwan's National Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall.

following Japan and Hong Kong. But the economic downturn is hitting and with it, decreased tourist arrivals in 2008. Special packages are being offered, including the \$79 Island Paradise—one day tour and hotel—targeting the US market. In conjunction with the 2009 World Games to be held in Kaohsiung this summer, the Tourism Bureau has developed "Tour Taiwan Years 2008-2009" to promote their mountain climbing tours, medical tourism, hot spring and spa vacations, ecotours and rail and cultural travel.

Direct to the Mainland

With Taiwan's President Ma Ying encouraging warmer relations with mainland China, the door is opening to unlimited tourism opportunities. Until last year, a Taiwan/China itinerary meant a stopover in Hong Kong (or other intermediary spot) before continuing on to the mainland. China Airlines (CAL) now has direct, daily flights from Taipei to Shanghai, and frequent flights to Beijing and other mainland cities. This opening of cross-strait exchange—both trade and travel—is creating a buzz throughout the country. With a billion close neighbors sharing the same language, culture, food and discretionary income, the Taiwan hospitality industry is preparing for an influx of Chinese visitors.

Direct flights to six Chinese cities is a further incentive for American tourists to cross the Pacific, first stop Taipei, second stop Shanghai. CAL is offering special Dynasty Tour packages to mark its 50th anniversary this year with further discounts for any client who's also just celebrated their 50!

**Taiwan Tourism Bureau, eng.taiwan.net.tw,
www.china-airlines.com**

THE RESIDENCES AT W KOH SAMUI: SLICE OF TROPICAL PARADISE



Pristine, private and perfect island life will make a splash off the Gulf of Thailand, when W Koh Samui Residences' 17 luxury villas are ready on Maenam Beach.

Scheduled for completion later this year, the joint venture between the vibrant Amburaya Hotels & Resorts and innovative Dubai-based Nakheel, debuts a wonderland with signature touches, services and style that have made the W Hotels an iconic global presence.

Available in three-, four- and five-bedroom configurations, the stunning all-villa real estate development is among the first W residential projects in Asia and is positioned on 27 headland acres of Thailand's most prestigious tropical property, featuring a private beach that sprawls over a half mile.

Adjacent to W Koh Samui Retreat, owners have privileged and exclusive access to all hotel facilities and amenities, as well as receive a complete suite of complimentary W lifestyle benefits and services inspired by tropical Zen architecture with charming exotic details.

"In an up market resort destination such as Koh Samui, quality is a big driving factor in smaller boutique developments where thoughtful, indulgent facilities and services take the place of overcrowded beaches and tourist traps," said Sunny Bajaj, Managing Director of Amburaya Hotels & Resorts.

"W Koh Samui Residences is moving away from the mass market and catering to an elite group of luxury real estate owners who want to be wowed by the finer things in life—particularly those inspired by W's unique mix of innovative design, comfort, fashion and art."

Just 15 minutes from Koh Samui International Airport, a fre-

quent and regular schedule of flights serviced by international and regional airlines to major metropolitan hubs such as Bangkok, Singapore and Hong Kong is a value-added convenience for many travelers.

W Koh Samui Residences range from approximately \$ 2,768,705 to \$5,538,935 million, with some of the most exclusive villas already sold. The first villa show suite is scheduled to be complete this month.

W Koh Samui Retreat & Residences,
www.kohsamuiridences.com

CREATIVE TRAVEL JOINS EUROMIC AS WORLD AFFILIATE FOR INDIA

The Destination Management Partnership euromic has unanimously approved the addition of Creative Travel in India.

Creative Travel planners, based in the capital city of New Delhi, is among India's largest and one of its most respected destination management companies. Founded over 30 years ago, the company prides itself on its commitment to customer relationships and ability to deliver outstanding travel products. Core to these practices is adherence to the old Indian saying, "Atithi Devo Bhava"—or, "the guest is God," referring to the ethos of hospitality so important to a culture dedicated to family and friendship. A privately-owned transport fleet and dedicated PCO and high-value divisions allow Creative Travel to efficiently service any request.

India is the world's largest democracy and has one of the strongest, fastest growing economies in the world. Rapid modernization over the past decades has provided service from 50 international airlines and a reliable network of highways and high-speed and commuter rail lines. Added to these conveniences, contemporary luxury and an ancient culture make India an ideal destination for MICE customers. An expected addition of 3000 new hotel rooms in Mumbai by 2010 will serve to make India even more attractive than ever.

"We at Creative Travel are delighted to join the euromic family. It is a pleasure to be in such an astute group of owner-driven companies. Our attention to detail and creativity in planning is fostered by the independence given by our family ownership, which I would consider to be one of our biggest strengths. This, against our more corporatized competitors, gives us an inherent advantage in quality control, continuity in projects and accountability," said Rajeev Kohli, Director of Marketing. "Backed by a team of over 120 professionals, the Kohlis and Creative Travel have earned a reputation for being among India's most quality conscious travel companies. What we offer is our reputation for our integrity, our creativity and our experience in managing travel to India and her region for over three decades. We are a company that believes that business is about building relationships. Reputation cannot be bought and we would never do anything to compromise the integrity and standards of our partners."

Creative Travel, www.creativetravelinc.com;

Euromic, www.euromic.com

ANDBEYOND OPENS FOURTH LODGE, BANJAAR TOLA, IN INDIA



Taj Safaris' fourth jungle lodge, Banjaar Tola, is now open, marking the completion of India's first tiger circuit. Situated on the edge of the Banjaar River overlooking Kanha National Park, Banjaar Tola was designed with a light footprint and the charm and luxury for which all andBEYOND safari lodges are known.

Banjaar Tola is a collection of two camps (each with nine tented suites), spacious guest areas, swimming pool, comprehensive library and plenty of places for al fresco dining. Locally crafted furniture and textiles designed in tones of saffron and muted green, with rich block-printed Madhya Pradesh cottons and silks, adorn the guest areas. Each suite has a contemporary feel with sweeping canvas roof and walls, pressed bamboo floors, and glass doors leading out onto a veranda overlooking the river.

Daily safari excursions include interpretive morning and evening drives in the jungle with expert andBEYOND-trained naturalists and tiger viewing by elephant. Kanha is one of India's largest national parks, covering 750 square miles, located in the Maikal Hills of the Satpura Hill range in the southeastern part of the state of Madhya Pradesh. In 1973, when Project Tiger was launched to save the tiger, Kanha was one of nine reserves selected for the project. It is prime tiger viewing country and is the project's star success story.

Within the park's borders, approximately 22 animal species are regularly spotted, including the more unique species such as the three-striped palm squirrel, common langur, jackal, wild pig and black buck. Striped hyena, leopard, mouse deer and porcupine also reside here, as do the chinkara and ant-eating pangolin. Kanha features 70 different trees and is a birdwatcher's paradise with over 200 recorded bird species.

Guests visiting Banjaar Tola fly from Delhi to Jabalpur, followed by a five-hour chauffeured journey by road to the lodge. Alternatively, they may fly from Mumbai to Nagpur, followed by a five-hour chauffeured journey by road.

The circuit consists of Mahua Kothi (Bandhavgarh National Park), Baghvan (Pench National Park), Pashan Garh (Panna National Park) and Banjaar Tola (Kanha National Park).

AndBEYOND, www.andbeyond.com

GOWAY HAS GREAT BALI STIMULUS PACKAGE

Goway is taking a bite out of the current global recession by offering amazing travel deals to Asia, especially Bali. "Bali is back on high on the wish list of travelers and is a beautiful, safe and friendly destination which Goway now has on sale," says Doug Vogl, Product and Marketing Manager, Asia. "Bali has become a great one-stop destination with many choices of beaches and tours to choose from."

Goway's Bali Beach Escapes Packages start at \$249 for an eight-day holiday or \$459 for a 13-day vacation at a modern and popular three-star property (Oasis Boutique Beach Resort) with other choices of hotel accommodation ranging up to spectacular five-star resorts. These packages include return airport to hotel transfers, daily breakfasts, a welcome bottle of wine, a choice of a 90-minute massage and spa or a Balinese dinner show plus a combination of three or five half- and full-day tours around Bali!

Once in Bali, travelers enjoy the fantastic sunny beaches and can embark upon tours to monkey forests and ocean temples. They can witness Balinese dance performances, view spectacular rice terraces and visit artsy Ubud in the centre of the Island.

Goway offers excellent airfares when combined with the above land packages available on Cathay Pacific, Japan Airlines and Singapore Airlines. Additionally, Goway offers several flexible modules that can be combined to create a custom vacation to include different destinations around Bali.

Goway, www.goway.com

VISA AND PATA SURVEY NAMES TOP TRAVEL DESTINATIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC

The Visa and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Asia Pacific Travel Intentions Survey 'Determining Travel Preferences in 2009 and Beyond' has named Asia Pacific as the number-one region for those intending to travel overseas in the next two years. Of the 5,554 people surveyed from 11 tourism source marketplaces in August 2008, 60 percent said they would travel to Asia Pacific. North America and Western Europe trailed at 35 percent of respondents. The top three destinations leisure travelers surveyed were considering between now and 2010 were Australia (43 percent), Japan (37 percent) and Hong Kong (35 percent).

The survey asked 5,554 respondents from 11 key Asia Pacific travel source markets (Australia, China, Chinese Taipei, France, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States) about past and future travel plans. For each market, respondents were Internet users, aged 18 years or above, had traveled for holidays in the past two years or have the intention to do so in 2009 or 2010. The current iteration of the survey was expanded to include Australia and New Zealand as potential destinations for the first time.

According to the survey, the top three leisure destinations travelers actually visited in the past three years were China (32 percent), Thailand (31 percent) and Hong Kong (30 percent).

Visa Asia Pacific, www.visa-asia.com; PATA, www.pata.org

**TRIP ADVISOR NAMES
COOK ISLANDS'
PACIFIC RESORT AITUTAKI
BEST LUXURY HOTEL
IN THE WORLD**

Cook Islands Tourism has announced that Pacific Resort Aitutaki has been named one of the Best Luxury Hotels in the World & the South Pacific by TripAdvisor® in its 2009 Travelers' Choice Awards.

The TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards honor the world's best hotels based on the millions of real and unbiased reviews and opinions about hotels on tripadvisor.com and content from across the web.

Pacific Resort Chief Executive Officer Greg Stanaway says, "This award provides further testament to Pacific Resort Aitutaki's position as one of the world's leading luxury resorts." The resort has received the following accolades in 2008 alone: World's Leading Boutique Island Resort (World Travel Awards), Top 20 Resort—Australia & Pacific (Conde Nast Traveler's Reader's Choice Awards), Luxury Island Resort (World Luxury Hotel Awards), Australasia's Leading Boutique Resort (World Travel Awards), and Cook Islands Leading Resort (World Travel Awards).

Pacific Resort Aitutaki has just 27 luxurious 'absolute beachfront' bungalows, suites and villas all with their own personal, panoramic view of Aitutaki's world-famous lagoon.

Pacific Resort Aitutaki,
www.pacificresort.com; Cook Islands,
usamanager@cookislands.travel,
www.cookislands.travel

**FEEJEE EXPERIENCE
BACKPACKER TOUR
FINALIST IN PRESTIGIOUS
FIJI TOURISM AWARDS**

Feejee Experience, THL's Fiji "sister" to hop on, hop off tour bus operator Kiwi Experience, was a finalist in the coveted "Fiji Experience" category at the 2008 AON Fiji Excellence in Tourism Awards this month in Fiji.

The awards gala features the 'who's who' of Fiji's tourism industry—including island

resorts, five-star accommodation providers, environmental projects and various tour operators, and Feejee Experience was up against Great Sights Fiji, Kula Eco Park and Sigatoka River Safari's for the award.

Although Kula Eco Park and Sigatoka River Safari's jointly won the award, Feejee Experience Sales Manager Casey Quimby says it was an honor just to be a finalist in an award category that doesn't usually include tours for backpackers. "Feejee Experience was the only backpacker product to be a finalist in this category," Quimby says. "We're absolutely thrilled to be included among such high-quality products and it's a real credit to the excellent service provided by the Feejee Experience team."

The appeal of Feejee Experience is that it offers customers a unique way to see Fiji, says Quimby, giving them the chance to stay at some of Fiji's most amazing beaches, interact with local culture on a daily basis, and participate in adventure activities such as sandboarding, a jungle trek, river tubing and bilibili rafting. Feejee offers trips from four days to 14 days, but customers can extend their pass to twelve months if they want to spend longer at any of the stops. There are also many options: travel to islands such as Mantaray Island, Robinson Crusoe, and Vorovoro Island.

Feejee Experience,
www.feejeeexperience.com

**SWAIN WINS 'BEST
BROCHURE' IN NORTH
AMERICA FOR 2008/2009**

SWAIN has been awarded North America's 2008/2009 International Brochure of the Year. Judging criteria ranged from compelling front cover and overall presentation of products, to quality of the brochure itself, number of pages, and the inclusion of unusual and unique destinations.

"We have always been proud of our signature marketing piece," said Ian Swain, President and Owner, "and this recognition affirms what a great resource our South Pacific brochure is for both consumers and travel agents to gain a detailed insight into

what the land Down Under is all about. In this age of e-technology, it's good to know that there is still huge merit in producing a printed brochure; even though most travelers will research their trip online, many still prefer to choose and purchase their travel options from brochures," he said.

With their 2009/10 brochures hot off the press, SWAIN looks to continue inspiring travelers across North America to venture Down Under in 2009.

SWAIN is a specialist in customized travel arrangements to exotic destinations including Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific, Africa, China, Japan, South East Asia and India. Its programs emphasize value for money, whether for suites in luxurious properties, or a great downtown location for the more price-conscious traveler. Day tours and transfers are guided step-by-step by a staff of experts who are either from, or have traveled extensively through the destinations SWAIN serves.

SWAIN, 800-227-9246,
www.SwainTours.com

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