

1.1 Why choose Taiwan?

So, you're considering Taiwan. Not just as a travel stop, but as a place to live, really live. Good. But let's kill the fantasy early: Taiwan isn't some exotic halfway house for digital nomads who can't pick between Tokyo and Bangkok. It's a sharp-edged, contradiction-rich society that rewards the prepared and spits out the clueless.

Economically, Taiwan isn't some sleepy island, it's the beating heart of the global tech supply chain. Semiconductors, biotech, green energy: if it runs on electrons or ambition, Taiwan's in the game. And TSMC? That's not just a company. It's a geopolitical chess piece. The chips they manufacture fuel your phone, your car, and probably half your nervous system if you're into wearables. The West protects Taiwan not out of love for democracy, but because without those chips, everything stops.

Survival Hack: Mention TSMC in any job application, even if you just read about it yesterday. It signals you know the game here.

Taiwan's future is wired into innovation, but don't expect trickle-down prosperity.

While the island thrives on exports and FDI, local salaries haven't kept pace with rising living costs. You'll see tech billionaires in the headlines, and cashiers in Taipei barely scraping by on NT\$35,000. That's around €1,000. And rents are climbing.

If you're earning foreign money, you'll live well, but keep it quiet. There's tension in the air: Taiwanese millennials grinding 50-hour weeks while remote workers sip flat whites in Da'an cafes on five times their income. Politeness masks resentment. Don't confuse the two.

Avoid This: Bragging about your income. You'll lose respect faster than you can say "location-independent."

Let's talk government incentives. The Gold Card program is real, and powerful. Three years, open work permit, tax perks, and the legal right to say "no thanks" to exploitative job offers. But it's not handed out like candy. You'll need to prove your worth: high income, rare skills, or documented achievements. If your LinkedIn is all fluff and no results, forget it.

Now, salaries. Taipei's median monthly wage floats around NT\$42,000. Kaohsiung and Taichung trail behind. Rent for a decent studio in Taipei? NT\$18,000 easy. Utilities, food, transport, NHI premiums, add it all up and the math only works if you're in tech, teaching, or working remotely. Hospitality wages? Brutal. Retirees? Possible, but you'll need savings and low expectations.

Insider Tip: Tech jobs in Hsinchu pay better than in Taipei, and the cost of living is lower. The air's worse, but your bank account won't care.

Taiwan's famous for its work ethic, and that's not a compliment. The local term 加班 (jiābān) means overtime, but really it means unpaid loyalty theater. You're done at 6pm? Great. Now stay until 8 to show you're a "team player." Foreigners often get a pass on this, but don't push your luck.

Startups and international companies are better, looser hours, real sick leave, sometimes even work-from-home options. But in local firms, hierarchy rules. Your boss speaks, you nod. You speak, they nod, and ignore. Feedback culture is indirect, wrapped in politeness and laced with subtext.

Unspoken Rule: Leaving the office before your boss = social suicide in local firms.

Time your exit strategically or risk the side-eye of doom.

Still, Taiwan isn't a dystopia. Far from it. It's one of the safest places on Earth. Violent crime? Nearly non-existent. You can leave your laptop in a café, walk out, come back 20 minutes later, it'll still be there, untouched. The National Health Insurance (NHI) system is efficient, affordable, and shockingly good, even for foreigners. Forget €60 consultations and endless waiting lists. Here, it's NT\$200 and you're out in 10 minutes.

Schools? Competitive. Brutal, even. High PISA scores come at a price: cram schools until 10pm, burnout before adulthood. Not ideal for expat kids unless you go international, and that means pricey tuition. Press freedom is decent, but partisan. Every outlet has an agenda. Read with both eyes open.

And the climate? Humid. Oppressively so from May to September. Typhoons hammer the coasts. Earthquakes jolt you awake now and then. Air quality in Kaohsiung and Taichung? Let's call it "smoked industrial." But outside the cities? Mountains, forests, hot springs, Pacific beaches, all within two hours. Taiwan doesn't just let you escape, it dares you not to.

Connectivity's another win. High-speed rail shaves hours off cross-island trips. Metro systems are spotless and intuitive. Buses snake into rural zones. Scooters are everywhere, chaotic, yes, but efficient once you learn the dance. And the internet? Among the fastest in the world, even in mountain villages. You'll never blame the Wi-Fi here.

Survival Hack: Get an EasyCard your first day. It covers metro, buses, trains, convenience store purchases, even some vending machines.

On the legal front, Taiwan plays hard but fair. Immigration is structured, and the Gold Card opens real doors. Just don't expect hand-holding. Forms are often in Mandarin. Bureaucracy is slow. But once you're in the system, it works. Visas, tax ID, banking, doable if you follow the steps.

But don't bank on dual citizenship, Taiwan's strict. And if you're fleeing a war zone or political nightmare, don't expect asylum. Taiwan's refugee policy is polite but nearly non-existent.

Unspoken Rule: A smile here doesn't mean "yes." It often means "no, but I'm too polite to say it." Learn to hear what isn't said.

So, why choose Taiwan? Because it works. Because it's safe. Because it's honest about its flaws. You won't be coddled here. You'll be challenged, welcomed, tolerated, and occasionally confused. But if you want a country that lets you build something real, and doesn't treat you like a walking wallet, Taiwan's waiting.

And it doesn't care whether you're ready. It just wants to know if you're serious

1.2 What to expect in practice

You've landed. The adrenaline's fading, and now reality kicks in: Taiwan works, but it doesn't work fast. Not for you, anyway. The machine moves, but it's wrapped in formalities, indirect answers, and a language you don't speak. If you're the kind who thinks "efficiency" means "instant," buckle up.

First lesson: even when things go smoothly, they rarely go quickly. That fabled Gold Card visa? It's real, but the wait can stretch from three weeks to two months depending on your profile. If your LinkedIn screams "elite tech bro," you'll fly through. But if your application raises even a single bureaucratic eyebrow? Expect delays. They're not ghosting you, they're just quietly confused.

Then comes the ARC, your Alien Resident Certificate. It's not optional. It's your legal existence. Without it, you're a tourist. With it, you can open bank accounts, get internet, join the health system. Processing takes two to four weeks after arrival. In theory. In practice, it depends on the clerk, the branch, the phase of the moon, and whether your rental contract has the landlord's correct stamp.

Avoid This: Showing up at the immigration office without printed copies. Yes, even if you uploaded everything online. Taiwan runs on hard copies and ink stamps. Bank accounts are hit or miss. If you have an ARC and a utility bill with your name on it, you'll walk out with a debit card the same day. If you don't? Two weeks, maybe more. Some banks want a Taiwanese reference. Others just want you to smile and not ask too many questions. It's a coin toss. CTBC tends to be foreigner-friendly. Chunghwa Post, less so.

And the NHI? Ah, the crown jewel, cheap, universal healthcare. But unless you're employed by a local company, you'll wait. Six months if you're self-sponsored. During that time, you're paying out-of-pocket or relying on a private plan. Don't get sick early. Or do, it'll teach you the system faster.

Survival Hack: Buy private insurance before landing. Even basic plans will shield you from ruin if you end up in ER after trying stinky tofu from a street cart.

Now let's talk numbers. The budget of a remote tech worker, say NT\$120,000/month, leaves plenty of room after rent, healthcare, food, and transport. You'll eat well, live well, and stash savings. An English teacher on NT\$65,000? Tight, especially in Taipei. After rent (NT\$18,000), utilities (NT\$2,000), food (NT\$10,000), transport (NT\$1,500), and NHI (NT\$1,500), you're not broke, but don't expect extravagance.

Retirees and students survive, not thrive. A retiree on a fixed income must avoid Taipei. Go south. Go rural. A student? Learn to cook, say goodbye to imported snacks, and get used to rice. Digital nomads? Depends on your niche. Writers struggle. Developers coast. Coaches and consultants land somewhere in between.

Unspoken Rule: No matter how much you make, you'll eventually start thinking in NT\$ and tracking egg prices like a local. Inflation is real, and it hits quietly. And then there's tax. Taiwan slaps you with 18% in your first 183 days. After that, it drops to around 5–6% depending on your income. You'll get some of it back during annual reconciliation, but only if you file correctly, on time, and in person. Yes, online portals exist. No, they don't always work. Especially not in English.

Rental inflation is creeping. Taipei's prices are rising like mold in the summer. Southern cities are cheaper, Kaohsiung, Tainan, Taichung, but you trade convenience and English signage for cost. Whether that's a win or a loss depends on your threshold for friction.

Speaking of friction, bureaucracy. Taiwan's efficient in its own way, but it's not streamlined. Most forms are in Mandarin. Some have unofficial English translations. Some clerks are helpful. Others act like you've personally insulted their ancestor by asking for assistance. Apostilles are mandatory for marriage, birth, and divorce certificates (unless you're American, thank your lack of Hague Convention adherence). Physical presence is required for nearly everything. No online notaries here. Insider Tip: Need a document legalized or translated? Go to the consular section of your TECO office early in the morning. After lunch, the mood sours.

Cultural mismatch hits early. Taiwan is conflict-averse. "No" rarely means "no." It means "maybe later," "let me check," or "smile and ignore." Communication is indirect, layered, and polite to the point of obfuscation. If you're used to bluntness, dial it back. Your sarcasm? They won't get it. Or worse, they'll take it literally and wonder if you hate them.

Workplaces mirror this. There's a rigid respect for hierarchy, yet after-hours drinks can turn formal colleagues into drunken karaoke partners. The gap between public formality and private informality is a minefield. You're not in on the jokes, yet. But watch, adapt, and they'll slowly open the circle.

Avoid This: Making someone "lose face" in public. Correct them gently, or better yet, don't. Fix it yourself quietly. They'll notice, and they'll respect it.

Now the invisible expenses. Two months' rent as deposit is standard. Utilities might be excluded. Add Wi-Fi, gas, electricity, garbage bags (yes, you pay for those). NHI doesn't cover everything. Private top-ups exist, especially for dental, psych, or better hospital beds. Translation costs, apostilles, notarization fees, all stack up fast. ATM withdrawals? Foreign cards bleed you with fees.

You'll learn. You'll adapt. But you'll pay tuition in time, money, or mistakes. Integration doesn't happen in your first month. In Taipei, the expat bubble is real. You can survive without learning Mandarin. But you won't connect. Locals take time to trust, but once you're in, you're in. Friendships run deep. In smaller towns, people will stare. Then help. Then invite you to dinner if you're not a weirdo.

Want to integrate faster? Join something. A hiking group. A language exchange. A badminton club. Taiwanese society is built around shared routines, not spontaneous conversations.

Unspoken Rule: The person who seems distant at first might become your lifeline six months later. Show up consistently. That's how trust is earned here.

So what should you expect in practice? Delays, yes. Misunderstandings, definitely. Costs you didn't plan for. Rules you didn't know existed. But also: order. Clean streets. Quiet nights. Surprising generosity. And systems that, once cracked, become shockingly reliable.

Taiwan isn't chaos. It's a machine. Just don't expect it to explain itself to you. Learn the gears. Or get left behind.

1.3 Quick cultural overview

Before you start speaking Mandarin or signing leases, you'll be learning another language entirely, Taiwan's cultural code. It's quiet, layered, and doesn't come with subtitles. You'll miss the signals at first. That's normal. But ignore them too long, and you'll hit walls you didn't see coming.

Start with the values. Taiwan is Confucian at the core, respect, harmony, education, but it's wearing modern clothes. Yes, the youth dye their hair and binge on Instagram. But the current still runs deep: know your place, don't rock the boat, think of the group before yourself. You're not just "you" here, you're part of the context. Trust in institutions is surprisingly high. People follow rules. They queue. They pay taxes. They believe in public systems, and by some miracle, those systems often work. But don't confuse public order with personal warmth. Politeness is standard. Inclusion isn't. You'll be welcomed, with distance. You're interesting. You're exotic. But you're not inside. Not yet.

Unspoken Rule: A smile means "we see you," not "we're friends." Inclusion has to be earned, over months, not drinks.

Taiwanese communication is a masterclass in reading between the lines. If someone says "maybe," they probably mean "no." If they say "we'll see," it's a soft rejection. And if they're silent? That's not awkward. It's respectful. They're giving space, processing, or just avoiding discomfort. You'll need to tune into tone, body language, and context. This isn't a country that rewards bluntness.

You'll notice the nods, subtle, rhythmic. Eye contact with elders is limited. Public emotion is minimal. Even arguments happen quietly, behind closed doors, never at the dinner table. Disagree too loudly and you won't just lose the conversation, you'll lose the room.

Avoid This: Public confrontation. You may feel righteous. They'll feel embarrassed, and you'll be quietly frozen out.

Family remains the nucleus. Respect for elders isn't a slogan, it's daily life. Adult children care for aging parents. Multigenerational homes are common. The idea of sending grandma to a retirement home? Offensive to many. As a foreigner, you won't be expected to follow this, but understanding it helps decode everything from real estate patterns to dinner seating.

Gender roles are shifting, slowly. In Taipei, you'll see career-driven women, queer couples, and a general "live and let live" vibe. But outside the cities, traditional roles persist. A man is expected to provide. A woman is expected to care. LGBTQ+ rights are legally advanced, same-sex marriage is recognized, but socially, it's uneven. Age and geography matter. You'll find progressive bubbles and conservative stares just a metro ride apart.

Insider Tip: Don't assume tolerance = understanding. You may have rights, but you might still feel invisible outside urban centers.

Military service? Still mandatory for men, though shorter now. It's more ritual than readiness. But it shapes the psyche: discipline, hierarchy, group over self. You'll see it echo in workplace dynamics, education, even casual group outings. Orders are followed. Roles are accepted. Deviance isn't celebrated, it's politely ignored.

The urban–rural divide is real. Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung? Global, connected, multilingual. People are used to foreigners. English menus exist. Queerness, tattoos, eccentricity, tolerated, even trendy. But head into the countryside, and it's another world: more conservative, more curious, more cautious. English dries up. Your presence becomes more noticeable. But the rewards deepen. Integration outside the cities is slower, but more genuine.

Survival Hack: In rural areas, routine is your bridge. Show up to the same shop, same café, same class, and people will start to open up.

Infrastructure, job access, healthcare, all still skew urban. The best schools, hospitals, and salaries cluster along the west coast. Eastern regions, especially indigenous areas, lag behind. But that imbalance also means fewer expats, more opportunity to stand out, or blend in, if that's your goal.

Taiwan's cultural calendar is dense and vibrant. Lunar New Year isn't just a holiday, it's a national reset. Streets go quiet, temples fill, firecrackers echo at dawn. The Dragon Boat Festival turns rivers into battlegrounds of honor and sweat. Mid-Autumn is all mooncakes and smoke, barbecues line the sidewalks. These events aren't staged for tourists. They're visceral, chaotic, and woven into the rhythm of life.

And then there's the glue that holds it all together: night markets. Part circus, part kitchen, part gossip channel. You eat standing. You haggle. You bump into neighbors. And for locals, it's not just dinner, it's communion. Temple fairs, too, are more than folklore. They blend religion, politics, community pride. You'll hear drums, smell incense, dodge firecrackers, and witness the living pulse of Taiwan.

Unspoken Rule: If you're invited to a temple event, go. It's not about belief. It's about showing up.

Leisure? Baseball is the national obsession. Basketball is close behind. And eSports? Practically a religion for the under-30s. You won't need to understand the rules to join the fever. Just pick a team, learn one chant, and shout in unison. Belonging happens in the noise.

Celebrities here aren't Hollywood imports, they're variety show hosts, pop idols, YouTubers, and food influencers. You'll hear the same names in taxis, family dinners, and student convos. It's a media landscape built on charm, not scandal. Fame is a performance of likability, not edginess.

And finally, the daily rituals. Umbrellas are sacred, for sun and rain. Don't drip on floors. Don't leave it in a doorway. Shoes come off indoors, always. Gifts are wrapped, presented with both hands, and rarely opened on the spot. Refuse three times before accepting praise or a second helping. And if someone gives you something with both hands, receive it like it matters. Because it does.

Taiwan doesn't shout its identity. It hums it, in rituals and gestures and silences. To integrate here isn't to "adapt" in the Western sense. It's to listen longer, speak softer, and take nothing at face value.

If you do that, the island starts whispering back.

1.4 Political environment & freedoms

If you're coming from a Western democracy, Taiwan will feel oddly familiar, until it doesn't. The rituals of elections, press freedom, street protests? All there. But scratch the surface and you'll find a political system shaped by historical trauma, unresolved identity, and the looming shadow of a neighbor that doesn't believe Taiwan should exist at all.

Taiwan is a democratic republic, not “kind of,” not “aspiring to be,” but fully, unapologetically. Every four years, the country elects its president in a high-turnout, high-stakes national vote. It's loud, messy, and real. And no, China doesn't get a say, though it tries. Billboards, speeches, candidate parades with megaphones strapped to trucks: democracy here comes with street noise.

Insider Tip: If you're around during election season, avoid political debates with locals unless you know who you're talking to. People take sides seriously. Families split over party lines.

The two major players are the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party), broadly pro-independence, and the KMT (Kuomintang), historically closer to China, though that's a simplification. The polarization is intense, and it shapes everything from textbooks to TV news. Politics here is identity. Nationalism, history, even language choices, all are loaded.

Unspoken Rule: Never call Taiwan “China.” Even by accident. You'll burn trust you didn't know you'd earned.

That said, civic participation is strong. People care. They vote, protest, petition, and argue. The democratic spirit is alive, not just in law, but in behavior. But it's not utopia. The judiciary, while technically independent, is often described as slow, opaque, and old-fashioned. Civil cases, especially housing, contract disputes, or business issues, drag. Months can stretch into years.

And unless you're fluent in Mandarin or come with a very good translator, navigating the legal system is a labyrinth. The Judicial Yuan, which oversees the whole machine, doesn't go out of its way to simplify things for foreigners. Don't expect English forms. Don't expect sympathy. Expect procedure.

Avoid This: Signing anything in Chinese without full translation. No matter how friendly your landlord, employer, or agent seems. Contracts are not suggestions here. On paper, Taiwan guarantees freedom of speech, assembly, and protest. And to its credit, those rights are exercised. You'll see marches, pride parades, labor protests, even demonstrations against urban development. Police generally keep their distance. Tear gas isn't part of the default toolkit. Dissent is tolerated, even expected.

Digital privacy? Improving. But don't get too comfortable. Surveillance exists. LINE, the country's go-to messaging app, isn't encrypted end-to-end by default. And while Taiwan isn't building a surveillance state à la China, the legal framework still has gaps. Data protection laws are evolving, but they're not airtight.

Survival Hack: Use Signal or ProtonMail if you're discussing anything remotely sensitive. It's not paranoia, it's just smart hygiene.

Social liberties are where Taiwan stands out. Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2019, the first in Asia. LGBTQ+ rights are ahead of the region by a long shot. You'll see rainbow flags in Taipei and real legal protections. But socially, it's mixed. Acceptance varies by age, region, and family. In rural areas, people may tolerate but not understand.

And yes, you can protest here without being "disappeared." You can criticize the government. You can hold up signs. Just don't mistake this freedom for indifference. People here care deeply about the island's fragile status. Talk about independence with nuance, or don't talk about it at all.

Now let's talk media. Don't believe the headlines without asking who paid for them. Taiwan's media landscape is a warzone of biases. Every outlet leans, sometimes dramatically. TVBS, Apple Daily, SET News, all have clear party loyalties. The tone shifts depending on the topic, and "neutral" coverage is the exception, not the norm.

Independent journalism exists, small outlets, underfunded, often digital. They're worth supporting. But they lack reach. The average Taiwanese gets their news from TV or LINE, short, sensational, and emotionally charged.

Avoid This: Taking one article as gospel. Cross-check. Use English-language sources like Taipei Times or Focus Taiwan, but even those come with filters.

Censorship isn't formal, but self-censorship exists. Especially on anything related to China. Journalists know the lines not to cross. Businesses don't want to lose access to mainland markets. And while the government won't silence you, subtle pressure circulates, especially in academia, arts, and media.

Corruption? Lower than most of Asia, but not nonexistent. The Control Yuan investigates scandals, and every few years, something erupts: bribery in construction, rigged bids in infrastructure, misuse of public funds. Whistleblowers have legal protection on paper, but enforcement is weak. You blow the whistle, you risk isolation.

Insider Tip: If you're doing business here, especially in real estate, development, or public procurement, get a local partner who knows the informal power maps. It'll save you time and legal headaches.

In short, Taiwan's political climate is pluralistic, passionate, and imperfect. It's freer than almost anywhere in Asia, but it's not frictionless. You'll find democratic institutions that work, but not always for you. You'll have rights, but no shortcut around the culture. And you'll feel safe expressing yourself, as long as you know when to listen more than speak.

This isn't just another stop on your expat bingo card. Taiwan is a democracy that earned its scars. Respect that, and you won't just live here. You'll understand why so many choose to stay.

1.5 Social fractures & tensions

Taiwan looks polished from the outside, clean streets, low crime, good infrastructure. But scratch the surface, and you'll see cracks. Not dramatic. Just persistent. Like hairline fractures in a structure no one wants to admit is aging unevenly.

Let's start with geography. Most of Taiwan's wealth hugs the west coast, Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, Kaohsiung. That's where the jobs are, the hospitals, the universities. Go east, to Hualien, Taitung, the mountain villages, and you'll see a different story: crumbling clinics, erratic buses, fewer schools, fewer options. It's not that the government ignores these areas. It's just that budgets follow votes and investment follows returns. And both flow west.

Unspoken Rule: Locals from the east often joke that they live in Taiwan, but not the one you see on postcards. Listen when they do. It's not just humor. The tax structure doesn't help. Urban residents, with higher declared incomes and denser tax bases, fund more public services. Rural communities see less, even when their needs are greater. There's no real fiscal decentralization. Small towns can't easily decide where money goes. They wait, they request, and often, they're forgotten.

Then come the people most often ignored in glossy brochures: Taiwan's indigenous communities. Sixteen tribes are officially recognized, each with its own language, culture, and territory. But recognition isn't the same as power. Land rights are weak. Political representation is symbolic at best. And while cultural festivals are celebrated, systemic issues, poverty, unemployment, health disparities, remain invisible to most urban voters.

Insider Tip: If you attend an indigenous event, don't treat it like a safari. Learn the name of the tribe. Ask about their language. Show you're not just here for the selfies.

Migrant workers, mostly from Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, are the quiet engine behind Taiwan's elder care, construction, and manufacturing. And they're also among the most exploited. Contracts are rigid, salaries often below legal minimums, days off rare, and abuses underreported. You'll see them on scooters at dawn, in hospital wards, on scaffolds. But you won't see them in expat spaces. They live in a parallel Taiwan, physically present, socially erased.

Linguistically, Taiwan is diverse, but dominated. Mandarin is the lingua franca, taught in schools, used in government, broadcast on TV. But beneath it, you'll hear Hokkien, Hakka, and Austronesian languages. Not relics, living, spoken identities. Yet speaking them openly, especially Hokkien, still carries generational scars. During Martial Law, it was repressed. Mandarin wasn't just taught, it was enforced.

Avoid This: Calling Mandarin "Chinese." Locals know what you mean, but politically, it's loaded. Say "Guoyu" or "Mandarin" instead. It shows you're listening.

Urbanization adds another fracture. Taipei is efficient but choking. Rents keep climbing. Green space is shrinking. High-rises go up faster than social housing. Families are pushed to the fringes. Young adults live at home longer, not out of choice, but necessity. Meanwhile, rural towns empty out. Schools close. Local businesses die. Only the temples remain, and even those struggle to find volunteers.

Infrastructure in mountainous and indigenous zones? Spotty. Roads collapse during typhoons. Clinics lack staff. Schools double as shelters. During emergencies, the state response is slower. Not malicious, just distant. You'll see donation drives and volunteers filling the gap. Civil society steps in where bureaucracy stalls.

Religion here isn't optional background noise, it's woven into public life. Taiwan is officially secular, but temples are political powerhouses. They fund campaigns, mediate local disputes, bankroll social programs. Buddhism, Taoism, and folk traditions dominate, often blended in ways even locals can't fully explain. Temples organize charity, festivals, even disaster relief. Forget sterile faith, this is religion with muscle.

Survival Hack: If you move into a new neighborhood, go to the local temple's next festival. Introduce yourself. It buys you goodwill faster than any government form ever will.

Christianity is growing, quietly, steadily, especially in youth circles and urban areas. Churches offer community, language exchange, even job leads. It's not dominant, but it's visible. And it's reshaping parts of the cultural map, especially among new middle-class families and students who study abroad.

Then there's the history no one fully agrees on how to teach: Taiwan's Martial Law period, the White Terror (1947–1987). For four decades, the island was under authoritarian rule. Surveillance, arrests, disappearances. Families silenced. Entire generations told not to ask questions. And while the democracy that followed is real and vibrant, this past still casts a shadow. Many older Taiwanese won't talk about it. Some don't even know their family's full history.

Museums and textbooks are changing, slowly. The Transitional Justice Commission was created to confront this past. Some monuments have come down. Some streets renamed. But many wounds remain unacknowledged, especially in indigenous and rural communities who bore the brunt of both colonization and state control.

Unspoken Rule: Don't ask older locals "when did you come to Taiwan?" Unless you already know they're not indigenous. It's a political landmine wrapped in an innocent question.

Taiwan's national identity is still being negotiated, in museums, in politics, in families. Who belongs? What gets remembered? What language do we tell the story in? These are not academic debates. They shape how policies are made, how people vote, how strangers treat each other on the street.

As an expat, you won't be expected to have answers. But you will be judged on whether you notice the questions. This is a society held together by cooperation, but haunted by fracture lines it doesn't always name.

Live here long enough, and you'll feel both.