

## The List

5 GREAT GIFTS  
TO BRING HOME



VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI

### 1

#### TEA TOWELS

Splashed with decorative motifs from foreign locals, they make an inexpensive and lightweight kitchen helper, table topper, or work of art.

### 2

#### SPICES

A packable, portable taste of your destination.

### 3

#### COMPACT DISC

A slim way to bring home a foreign culture's special sounds.

### 4

#### ARTISANAL SOAP

A luggage-friendly whiff of where you went.

### 5

#### PLAYING CARDS

Imprinted with scenes from your trip, they add some exotica to your game.

VICTORIA ABBOTT RICCARDI

## Sunday Morning

SAN ANTONIO

Mission San José rises from atop a hill on the outskirts of San Antonio, its sandstone walls still retaining the luster of a bygone era when Texas was under Spanish rule. At its height, the mission, built in 1721, would hold close to 300 people, working as a church, farm, and ranch. Franciscan friars gathered the native population, converted them to Roman Catholicism, and taught them to live like Spaniards.

I arrive an hour before the noon Sunday service to grab one of the coveted seats for visitors at the weekly Mariachi Mass. I stroll from the visitors center under a sunny azure sky that illuminates the blue-and-white dome and warms the almost Moorish-looking walls.

Standing in the same spot in 1882, Oscar Wilde said, "Those old Spanish churches with their

picturesque remains and domes and their handsome carved stonework, standing amid the verdure and sunshine of the Texas prairie, gave me a strange thrill of pleasure."

From a pew in the back of the church, I listen to the service, eagerly awaiting the finale when the 10-member mariachi band plays and the much larger choir sings within the excavated walls of the outdoor patio. Regardless of religion, the mariachis' lyrical strumming and the choir's ethereal voices will help smooth the frayed edges of anyone's soul.

6701 San José, [www.nps.gov/saan/planyourvisit/sanjose.htm](http://www.nps.gov/saan/planyourvisit/sanjose.htm). Free; arrive early to secure a seat.

STEPHEN JERMANOK



SACVJ

## Reader's Rave

MEXICO

JOCOTEPEC — Five of us had spent a great day exploring Guadalajara. We decided to take the long way back to my brother's home in Ajijic so we could stop at this very rustic barbecue place. Our expat friends Donna and Mike had been raving about it so we decided to give it a try. It's one of those unexpected finds. There isn't even a sign out front, but the billowing smoke told us we were in the right place.

It was excellent barbecue and a fun experience. They cook in brick-lined pits, smoking chicken, pork, sausage, and lamb all day. Delicious! Though it was a little too much meat for my wife, Susan, who leans toward vegetarianism.

I believe they're only open on Saturday and Sundays. This guy must make enough money those two days so that he doesn't need to work the rest of the week. To find it, head north from Jocotepec on MX Route 15.

ROY KRANTZ  
Jamaica Plain



ROY KRANTZ

## The Tip

DUBLIN'S FREE MUSEUMS

The free National Museum of Ireland is perfect for a rainy day. The Kildare Street archaeology branch contains Celtic and medieval art, Egyptian mummies, and a well-preserved "bog man."

Housed in former military barracks, Decorative Arts & History on Benburb Street features Irish artifacts. The "Dead Zoo" (inset), Merrion Street's natural history section, holds cabinets jammed with stuffed animals. The National Gallery of Ireland on Merrion Square is also free, with Irish and European painters. [www.museum.ie](http://www.museum.ie)

MARTY BASCH



MARTY BASCH  
FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## To our readers

You are invited to share your travels in two new features.

In **Reader's Rave** tell us about your favorite place to visit, eat, or stay. Send 150 words or less to [travel\\_raves@yahoo.com](mailto:travel_raves@yahoo.com). In **The Sight** show us what you saw. Send your photo and a 25-word caption describing it to [travel@boston.com](mailto:travel@boston.com).

# A beauty in the middle of Taiwan's 'beautiful island'

By Marie Elena Martinez  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

SUN MOON LAKE, Taiwan — With two-thirds of Taiwan covered by the east coast's mountainous terrain — much of it uninhabitable — the west coast's big cities are home to most of the island's 23 million residents. Though these concrete jungles are surrounded by lush greenery, soaring mountains, and peaceful meadows, it wasn't until I escaped Taipei for Sun Moon Lake in Nantou County — located in the geographical heart of the island — that I truly understood why Formosa, Taiwan's original name, means "beautiful island."

The largest body of water in Taiwan, Sun Moon Lake sneaks up on you as you wind your way along entry roads. Morning sunrises are hazy. The dew is palpable, a heavy mist over the many floating fields of vegetation that were planted long ago by aborigines and brim with small purple buds, sky-reaching orchids, and various vegetables. Frogs cling to the bark of betel nut trees and butterflies flutter on a breeze that alternates with the aromas of pure lake air, grass, and flowers.

The bounty of nature is one of the reasons visitors flock to Sun Moon Lake. With 14 hiking trails detouring off a 33-kilometer circuit, the region is a must for outdoor enthusiasts. Some hikes rise to great heights; others pass by historic monuments. Morning runs along the pathway around the lake were the highlight of my day. Families trying to position children for photographs, passing bikers, solitary fishermen, and couples having picnics waved as I passed. It was easy to envelop myself in the spirituality that permeates Taiwanese culture. Fittingly, on one of these runs I stumbled upon Wen Wu Temple.

The striking shrine can be reached by the Wen Wu Hiking Trail, a short ¼-kilometer ascension of 366 steps that represent the days of a leap year and are surrounded by bells that ring to commemorate blessings. The temple itself, watched over by two menacing red lions, is consecrated to Confucius and contains the only Confucius statue in Taiwan. Tourists populate the courtyard, as well as earnest students who come to ask Confucius to enlighten them.

The Mount Maolan Hiking



PHOTOS BY MARIE ELENA MARTINEZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Sun Moon Lake, the largest body of water on the island of Taiwan, supports a fishing culture. Below left, tourists in Ita Thao Cultural Village shop for food and handicrafts, or stroll one of the many lakeside hiking and nature trails.



Trail, a 3-kilometer path that tops off at just over 1,000 meters, brings you past another oft-visited place of worship: The Matchmaker Temple where the county government holds group marriages every year. As I passed, single men and women entered the small grounds to pray for their perfect mate.

Mount Maloan's path traverses the larger Assam tea-producing grounds that surround the lake. The Japanese brought the plants from India during their occupation of Taiwan in the early 1900s. Now towering trees and low-lying tea plants line the electric green hills. If the cultivation of tea intrigues you, a trip to Hugo Assam Tea Farm a short drive from the lake should be on your to-do list. Here you can learn how tea

is made, as well as taste emerald, Assam, jade, and ruby varieties.

Those who prefer sailing to hiking can join boat tours that leave from Shuishhe Pier and last a couple of hours; more independent types can rent rowboats and captain their own excursions. The highlight of any trip is Lalu Island whose name comes from a traditional Thao word meaning "after," and is a nod to the aborigines, a group numbering about 600 that still lives in and influences the community. Legend has it that Thao hunters chased a white deer for days before it led them to the lake's emerald waters. Upon discovery, they moved their tribe here.

To understand the history of the area and its aboriginal



roots, you can book passage on the Sun Moon Lake Ropeway, an environmentally friendly gondola ride above the lake that connects to Sun Moon Lake Activity Center. Here, the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village — a kitschy theme park that celebrates the cultures of indigenous people with dance, song, and rituals — offers two to three shows per day at the Naruwan Theater.

Another way to experience the Thao flavor of the area is to spend a day exploring the Ita

Thao Village on the southeast side of the lake. Here streets overflow with vendors selling local handicrafts and food stalls showcasing delicacies like herb tea eggs, wild boar sausage, pork with sesame seeds, and fried shrimp lettuce wraps. Take your to-go snacks and settle down on Ita Thao Pier for beautiful lake views and terrific people-watching.

At the end of the day, check into the Fleur de Chine Hotel on the northern tip of the lake. Preserving the Japanese stamp

## If you go . . .

### What to do

#### Wen Wu Temple

63 Zhongzheng Road  
Shuishhe Village  
Formosan Aboriginal  
Cultural Village  
No. 45, Jintian Lane  
Dalin Village, Yuchi Township  
011-886-49-289-5361  
Includes cable car ride and full-day pass, about \$18-\$23.

#### Hugo Assam Tea Farm

5, Xiangcha Lane  
Yuchi Township  
011-886-49-289-7238  
[www.assam.com.tw](http://www.assam.com.tw)

### Where to stay

#### Fleur de Chine Hotel

23 Zhongzheng Road  
011-886-49-285-6788  
[en.fleurdechinehotel.com](http://en.fleurdechinehotel.com)  
All 211 rooms at this Japanese-style resort feature lakefront views, balconies, and natural hot spring bathtubs. Rates from \$295.

#### The Lalu

142 Jungshing Road  
011-886-49-285-6888  
[www.thelalu.com.tw/en/menu\\_e.htm](http://www.thelalu.com.tw/en/menu_e.htm)  
The region's most expensive guest house, from \$395.

### Where to eat

#### Ita Thao Cultural Village and Zhulu Farmers' Market

Dehua Street  
Sun Moon Village  
Food stalls abound, serving local delicacies, some that can be had for less than \$1.

#### Rainbow Cloud

Fleur de Chine Hotel,  
23 Zhongzheng Road  
011-886-49-285-6788  
[en.fleurdechinehotel.com](http://en.fleurdechinehotel.com)  
Teppanyaki-style 12-course, set menus from about \$60.

left on Taiwan before World War II, this is a minimalist luxury establishment that functions like a modern ryokan, even providing traditional loungewear (blue for men, red for women) and slippers for use throughout the common spaces. The floor-to-ceiling glass windows enhance the lake views, and all rooms feature natural hot spring bathtubs.

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