

TRAVEL

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White sand and mellow waves

A 45-minute bus ride from Tamsui, Baishawan offers a modest but pristine beach, little man-made noise and relaxing hikes

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It doesn't have the year-round sunny skies of Kenting (墾丁), nor does it enjoy the popularity of Fulong Beach (福隆海灘). But on a good day, Baishawan (白沙灣, white sand beach) makes for the perfect escape from Taipei's noise and summer haze. It's easy to get there, and once you arrive beachside comfort is just a brief stroll away.

The beach, aptly named for its fine white seashell sand, extends along a 1km strip and sits at the edge of the Provincial Highway No. 2, also known as the Coastal Highway, that runs from Tamsui (淡水) to Jinshan (金山). The roar of the ocean and its light, salty breezes greet you as soon as you step out onto the parking lot or bus stop. To the west, you'll see volcanic rock formations that form the tip of Cape Linshanbi (麟山鼻) and, to the east, Cape Fukui (高貴角), the northernmost point of Taiwan proper.

Aside from the ocean-side setting, Baishawan's charms lie in what's missing: jet skis and other motorized vehicles are not allowed, with the exception of lifeguard vehicles; there is little unnatural noise, save for an occasional bullhorn call from a lifeguard; and there is very little trash.

"It's probably the cleanest beach in northern Taiwan," says Shih Yen-tsang (施晏蒼) who runs CU Surfing School, a Baishawan surf shop that offers surfing lessons. Shih, who goes by the name AC (阿西), attributes the cleanliness to strong initiatives from the local community. His shop also organizes cleanup sessions every few months or so.

Though Baishawan is not known as an exciting surfing destination, the mellow waves and "clean environment" make it a very "suitable" place for beginners, says AC, 38, who moved to the area five years ago from Taipei but still works evenings as a hair stylist in Shilin (士林).

Baishawan is also orderly — clearly marked areas for surfers lie on both sides of a swimming area that runs for about 120m and is marked by ropes with floating buoys. This makes it safer for both swimmers and surfers, says AC.



His shop is painted in bright yellow, with surfboards lined up on one side and a cocktail bar on the other. Like most of the shops on the roadside, AC leaves his front and back doors open for direct access to the beach. A few shops have patios facing the ocean, where you can sit, sip beer or coffee and listen to music. AC's shop favors reggae, which played as I watched the sun dip below the horizon on a Friday evening.

I had spent the afternoon lazing about on the beach, alternating between swimming and sitting under a three-sided white canvas tent, which can be rented along with a large bamboo mat for NT\$250 a day. The tents, held up by a series of connecting bamboo poles, are just big enough for a family of four to lounge comfortably.

Sunbathers can set up behind or past the tents, where roughly 500m more of beach extends toward Cape Linshanbi. Near the cape is a smaller swimming area, probably a better choice on weekends if you're wary of crowds.

But don't get your hopes up too high for absolute quiet on weekends — Baishawan has seen a growing number of visitors over the past five years, says AC, who observes that more Taiwanese than ever "are making leisure activities a bigger priority" in their lives.

Which has meant better business for the area — and fortunately, Baishawan hasn't gone the route of food stands crowding its sleepy roadside (at least on weekdays). The local shops are either mom-and-pop stores selling cold drinks and beach toys, or sit-down cafes, the most prominent being



Hana's Beach Cafe, which sells fresh coffee and tea drinks (prices average NT\$120 to NT\$140), alcoholic drinks (NT\$100 to NT\$300) and light meals (NT\$150 to NT\$350). Up the road before the neighborhood temple there is a non-descript noodle shop serving *dan zai mian* (擔仔麵) and a few seafood restaurants for larger groups.

Before visiting the cafes and eateries, you can clean up at the showers next to Hana's, which cost NT\$20. But you'll only be paying for the convenience — there's a public shower (with partitions and doors) and restrooms on the road heading to Cape Linshanbi just past the temple. It's cleaner, but expect long lines at day's end and on weekends. A couple of sausage vendors are stationed there all day.

Sitting on the beach, lulled by the soothing crashes of ocean waves, I nearly forgot to check out the tree-covered trail that circles Cape Linshanbi and runs up a gently sloping hill. The trail starts from the public shower and runs next to the main road, with several lookout spots that have nice views.

From the east end of the beach, it takes about 15 minutes to get to the first lookout spot, which lies off a path from the main road and offers a view of Cape Linshanbi. At the next lookout, which provides a full view of Baishawan, there's another public shower that sits under a charming wooden deck with a set of chairs and tables. Another trail leads down to the western end of the beach.

At the lookout the sun had set and it had grown dark. I headed back to the main road and noticed some words spray-painted on the road: "many thieves here" (小偷很多). Dogs barked in the distance, and a hissing chorus of locusts grew louder as I headed back toward the bus stop.

When I got back to the stop, most of the shops except for Hana's were closed, and I made a note to myself to bring a book next time for the bus, which takes between 45 minutes and an hour from Danshui MRT Station.



Clockwise from top left: Tents can be rented with a bamboo mat for the whole day for NT\$250 at Baishawan; Late afternoon at Baishawan; Baishawan's white sand beaches and easy access make it a pleasant destination for families; This gate marks the entrance to a neighborhood temple and is also a landmark for the walking trail to Cape Linshanbi; Baishawan's beach extends along a 1km strip.

PHOTOS: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

IF YOU GO

GETTING THERE

>> Baishawan is on the Provincial Highway No. 2, also known as the Coastal Highway, that runs from Tamsui (淡水) to Jinshan (金山), in Shihmen Township (石門鄉), Taipei County. Take the Tamsui-Jinshan (淡水-金山) bus, which departs from the bus stop directly across from the Danshui (Tamsui) MRT Station (淡水捷運站), and get off at the Baishawan stop (白沙灣站). Buses run every 20-30 minutes; tickets are NT\$50.

FACILITIES

>> Public showers and restrooms are on the road to Cape Linshanbi, west of all the shops. Pay showers (NT\$20) are next to Hana's Beach Cafe. Lockers for rent are also available at Hana's

ON THE NET

>> www.northguan-nsa.gov.tw

