

Taiwan (Formosa)

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Location and area

Taiwan is an island in East Asia, and since 1949 the seat of the Chinese Nationalist government (not recognized by the People's Republic of China). It is separated from the Chinese mainland by the Taiwan (Formosa) Strait and is bordered on the north by the East China Sea, on the east by the Pacific Ocean, and on the south by the South China Sea. Taiwan also encompasses a number of island groups: the P'enghu Islands or Pescadores, the small Quemoy Islands off the mainland city of Amoy (Xiamen), and the Matsu group off Fuzhou (Foochow). The People's Republic of China claims Taiwan as one of the provinces of its republic. The area of Taiwan is about 36,000 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Throughout almost the entire length (about 360 km) of the island of Taiwan extends a lofty, forested mountain range, reaching a maximum elevation of 3,997 m above sea level. East of this central chain the land is hilly, terminating in cliffs that rise precipitously from the ocean to heights of up to about 750 m. To the west, a broad, fertile plain slopes gently down to the shallow Taiwan Strait. With the exception of this plain, the average elevation of Taiwan is some 1,200 m. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

All Taiwan's rivers originate in the mountains and have short, rapid courses. The longest rivers are the Choshui, Kaop'ing, Tsengwen, and Tanshui, which is the only one that is navigable. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The warm, humid Taiwan summer extends from May until September; temperatures average about 28° C. The mild winter season lasts from December until February; January temperatures average about 18° C. Typhoons occur between June and October. Average annual precipitation is about 2,500 mm. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Approximately 55 % of the land of Taiwan is forested. About 25 % of Taiwan's land area is suitable for crops. The chief agricultural enterprises of Taiwan are located on the fertile western plain, with rice as principal food crop (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Peatlands

No peatlands are known from Taiwan.