



Travel

Fields, Mountains, Hot Springs, Architecture, Cuisine; Experience Jiaoxi's diversity and the authentic Yilan lifestyle.

An Architect's Top 10 Secret Spots

Small Joys in Jiaoxi

Jiaoxi, this enchanting town of all things to all travelers, is actually encircled by water. Without a walk along the water, heading out towards the Pacific, no trip to Jiaoxi is complete.

Text: Lin Jing-yi | Photo: Guan Li-heng | Photos provided by: Jiaoxi Township Office

Alain de Botton once wrote in *The Art of Travel*: "If our lives are dominated by a search for happiness, then perhaps few activities reveal as much about the dynamics of this quest – in all its ardour and paradoxes – than our travels." Travel symbolizes a desire to escape

from the rigors of everyday life. This escape is a chance to explore life's possibilities, and to understand the small joys hidden around you.

In late May, Taiwan's weather is unpredictable. One moment it's thunderstorms, and the next, it's blazing with sunshine. The rainy city of Yilan, however, has long become used to this weather. What kind of philosophy of life has this environment given rise to? Why is Yilan such a favorite for artists?

The convenience of the Snow Mountain tunnel means many have forgotten that Yilan is a good place to stay for a while. Now we have come to this rainy city, so close to Taipei, yet so different in spirit.

Check In: Firm of Field Office Architects & Associates

If you're new at it, the simplest way of gaining insight into a city is to have an architect guide you. An architect

sees the light in the sky, the water on the ground, the connection between man and earth, and the changing seasons. So we decide to check in first at Field Office Architects & Associates.

"Wait a moment, where has our guide (Field Office Chief Architect, Huang Sheng-yuan) gone?"

"I'm back!" We see Huang climb the stairs with a coffee in hand. "I just had a break. The rain had stopped, so I popped over to Longtan for a swim.

Jiaoxi's Top 10 Secret Must-See Places

The fountain there is amazing!” A Yale University educated architect, Huang has not left Taiwan since coming to Yilan in 1994.

Huang says that, living in Yilan, one must first learn to breathe freely and relax. “Live life your way.” In this rainy city, there is never anything that must be done today, and meeting times are only approximates. There is no pressure on either party. “Limiting yourself to precise time schedules of must-do tasks is just looking for trouble.” From this, we can see the Yilan philosophy of life.

Where is best to begin experiencing this brand of philosophy? To breathe freely, one needs unspoiled nature, and the warmth of a hot spring to relax the body. Only in Jiaoxi can all this be found.

Jiaoxi is the closest town to Taipei, with the island's only flatland hot springs, also deemed the original hot springs. In Jiaoxi, nature abounds.

“Jiaoxi is set to become Yilan's biggest city; only 10 minutes to the sea, and

5 minutes to the mountains,” says Huang. Two of Field Office's young architects, Wang Wei-jie and Guo Sheng-quan, take us through one of Taiwan's top ten small town destinations: Jiaoxi.

Check In: Downtown Jiaoxi

Jiaoxi satisfies the needs of all travelers. Foodies will love the local snacks, such as scallion pancakes and Jiaoxi meat stew. Choices for a soak in the hot springs are endless: Tangweigou Hot Spring Park, Jiaoxi Hot Spring Park, Japanese style springs, and outdoor foot spas... But where do the locals go?

“We usually go to Chun-he”, say the two young architects, as we warily follow them down an alley by a roadside temple. Suddenly we find, hidden among the trees, individual private hot spring rooms, offering a great view of the mountains as you relax in the hot spring water. The VIP spa room, complete with a small classical rock garden, was featured in the hit movie, Jump Ashin! Head over any day of the week for a rejuvenating soak; only

\$800NTD for 40 minutes.

Looking for an architectural tour? Experimental architecture, usually seen only in first-tier cities, can be found in the small town of Jiaoxi. The innovative structures of the Jiaoxi Household Registration Office/Health Center, Jiaoxi Township Office, and Cherry Orchard Cemetery, were all designed by Field Office. The asymmetry of the Jiaoxi Household Registration Office evokes the mountainside; pillars formed from Snow Mountain sandstone, and handrails fashioned from fish hatchery pipes. These whimsical structures harmoniously merge Jiaoxi's old and new areas. At one end of the local road is the new Provincial Highway No.9, and at the other is the street of the old.

Check In: Wufongqi Waterfall Scenic Area, Linmei Shih-pan Trail, Houdongkeng Waterfall, Longtan Scenic Area

Off to the waterfalls! First stop is the

Wufongqi Waterfall Scenic Area, and then onwards to tackle the peak of the St. Mary Pilgrimage Trail for a boundless view of the Lanyang plains. At the foot of the hill, on Wufong Road, is a temple constructed of driftwood that blends in seamlessly with its surroundings. It sits beside the Hotel Royal Jiaoxi, sharing the same view of the magnificent mountain range. Then, if you have the strength for it, head over to the Paoma Historic Trail for a stroll.

Additionally, by the Jiaoxi golf course is the entrance to the Shih-pan Trail, where you can experience rich biodiversity and invigorating fresh air.

Just a few minutes' walk away from Nanxing Temple is Houdongkeng Waterfall. On a hot day, taking a dip in the pool beneath is incredibly refreshing.

Check In: Dawen Fish Hatchery, Jiaoxi Tidal Gates, Zhuan Bridge

A visit to Jiaoxi is not just about

the hot springs. To be complete, you must walk along the water, towards the Pacific. So we follow our guides onwards along the wetlands, rivers, ditches, and lakes.

The Pacific wind caresses this home of the hot springs. Fish hatcheries can be found along Jiaoxi's aqueducts, with interconnecting pipes out to the ocean. If you get closer, you can even smell the ocean spray. Outside of the hot spring areas, the Pacific wind is the scent of Jiaoxi.

Gueishan Island offshore is the daytime North Star; look for it to lead you towards the Pacific Ocean. Dezikou

River is Jiaoxi's primary tributary, originating from Hongludi Mountain. The river's middle stretch is called Erlong River, which is the venue for the famous Erlong Village dragon boat race.

Erlong Village comprises only two villages: Kibannoran and Zhouzaiwei. In the past, every house sat by the river, and there were many accidental drownings. The two villages then began rowing dragon boats to

appease the river, leading to a 200 year-old tradition now held on the day of the Dragon Boat Festival. This “race” is unique in that there are no judges or points; it is entirely a game between gentlemen. If you're in either village, ask the friendly village clerk to show you the dragon boats!

To the east of Erlong River is low-lying Shichao Village, guarded by the Jiaoxi tidal gates. Follow the Dezikou River cycling path, and once you pass Shichao Bridge, you are greeted by a majestic row of the sky blue tidal gates. Atop the observation platform, you can see the rivers flow out to the ocean.

The downstream stretch of Dezikou River is called Zhuan River. Take a left after the gates for Zhuan Bridge, and you'll find Wang's secret sunrise viewpoint. As the sun rises, it illuminates a panoramic view of the Pacific and faraway Gueishan Island. “The view unwinds you.” This is Jiaoxi: hot springs and nature to relax you, and a view of the Pacific Ocean to unwind any tension.