



Muzha's Skyline Cable Car

A new kind of enjoyment to tour around Taipei

By Iya Chen • Photos by Wang Neng-yu

When Harry Potter first hopped on the train to Hogwarts, he couldn't believe what he saw. With the breath-taking landscapes whooshing before his eyes, he stared at the magnificent views without blinking and couldn't keep his mouth shut. Taipei City has no magic, but soon will give all of us the same kind of experience.

Travelers to Taipei City will be shuttling between the lush valleys and green mountains in little white jewelry boxes while taking a bird's-eye view of Taipei City's splendid landscape or being dazzled by the sparkling stars in the sky.

These little white boxes are Taipei City's new skyline cable cars.

Taipei City's first skyline cable car system

"It will be the first skyline cable car system in Taipei City and the whole line, extending to 4.03 kilometers, will be the longest in Taiwan," said Chen Ya-huei (陳雅慧), subdivision chief of Taipei City Government's Department of Transportation. The skyline cable car system, extending into the mountainous areas of Taipei City's Muzha District, has six intermediate terminals, with only four stops allowing passengers to hop in and out—Taipei Zoo, Inside Zoo, Zhinan Temple and Maokong. The Taipei Zoo Cable Car Station is about 500 meters away from the Taipei Zoo MRT Station and is always considered by many travelers as the best starting point to launch their Cable Car Journey from.

Built and installed by a French company, POMA, the skyline cable car system has a total of 145 cabins with each having a capacity of 6-8 passengers. It can transport as many as 2400 persons per hour at a speed of 6 meters per second.

Illustrated by
Chen Jia-huei



Cable cars traversing along the sky of Muzha and overlooking the flowers in bloom.



Operated by the Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation (the same company runs Taipei City's metro MRT system), the system is currently under a trial run and will soon start its operation. (The opening date is set for late-June, but is subject to change depending on the progress of a series of trial runs.)

"The cable car system not only has a recreational function to help develop local tourism, but also can ease traffic over the mountain and shorten traveling time to Maokong," Chen said. While driving from Taipei Zoo to Maokong may take nearly an hour, passing through small mountain valleys and being stuck in traffic, it takes only 14 minutes from Taipei Zoo to Maokong via the new cable car system.

A one-way ticket will cost less than NT\$50 (US\$1.50). Travelers are allowed to use the same easycards which are used in Taipei's metro system and there will also be a one-day tour package designed especially for tourists, including cable car passes and admission to a variety of recreational destinations. "Because the Muzha area is noted for its tea culture, the station was designed incorporating the idea of tea culture experience," the designers told reporters at a press conference. The cable car's first stop, Taipei Zoo Station, is a four-story building with its glass panels painted with tealeaves. It is situated outside the Taipei Zoo's entrance and next to the Zoo Mall, about 500-meters away from the Taipei Zoo MRT station.

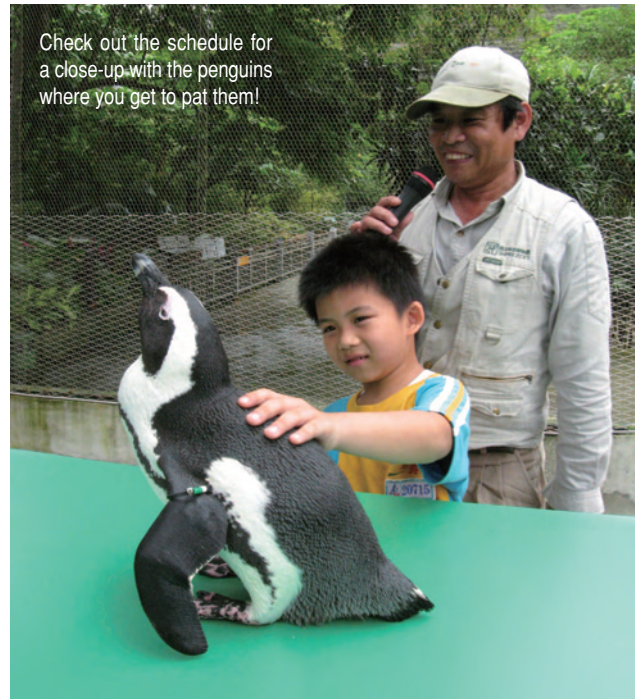
The Cable Car Journey Begins— How to reach the Cable Car facility?

Travelers can take the MRT system to Taipei Zoo and make a right turn after exiting the station. Then walk straight ahead for 5 to 10 minutes. Visitors can easily spot the Cable Car's Taipei Zoo Station and start their cable car journey from there. Besides taking the MRT, travelers can also reach the cable car facility by bus. Take Bus # 236, 282, 282-subline, 295, 611, S12, B11, B15, B3, B6, G1, 237 or 294 and get off at the Taipei Zoo stop then walk to the Cable Car's Taipei Zoo Station.

For those who drive to the zoo, the cars can be parked in the Zoo's parking lot and you can then walk to the Cable Car Station.

Stop 1: Taipei Zoo Station—A relaxing journey accompanied by nature and wildlife animals

Before hopping on any cable cars, visitors can choose to go into the Taipei Zoo first and take a peek at the cute koalas and other wildlife animals, or go wandering through the tress to get close to the nature. Being over 182-hectares and covering the whole hill, the zoo is divided into indoor and outdoor ecological areas, accommodating rarely found species from Asian rainforests, to Australia, Africa, the desert



and temperate zone, such as Asiatic black bears, the oryx, various antelopes and lions and leopards. The most eye-catching animals for children are penguins and koalas from Australia. Inside the Penguin House, two species of penguins—King and African—are currently on exhibition. Their clumsy movements and unexpected dives into the pond always draw a series of "Wows" from the spectators.

Another sought-after exhibition in the zoo is the lovable koalas from Australia's Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary. The first two koalas arrived at Taipei Zoo in August, 1999 and two more koalas came a year later. The koalas, will sleep up to 17 to 20 hours a day and are usually found dozing between the leaves. But once in a while, they will lift their heads to look around and scratch at their fur with chubby paws. These charismatic cuties have drawn in millions of children and adults alike since they first made their debut at the zoo.

For opening hours and more information, please check out <http://www.zoo.gov.tw>.

Stop 2: Inside Zoo Station— Taking a paramount view of Taipei City

The second stop, Inside Zoo Station, is situated right inside the zoo (hence the name), next to the zoo's Wetland Ecology Educational Park.

Visitors may also choose to take the Cable Car from the Taipei Zoo Station to Inside Zoo Station, and enter the Taipei Zoo from this stop. There will be an internal shuttle train service taking visitors to different animal houses and connecting the first two cable car stops.

For those who choose to take the cable car from the Taipei Zoo Station to Inside Zoo, they will fly over lush valleys and take in a breathtaking view of the zoo from the sky. Despite being unable to spot any animals, passengers can still catch a glimpse of the splendid mountain view and appreciate the beauty of the world's tallest building, Taipei 101.

Continuing the journey, the next stop will be Zhinan Temple. At this stop, a journey of nature will be transformed into a journey of religion.

Stop 3: Zhinan Temple Station—A Journey to experience traditional Chinese religion

After getting off the cable car at Zhinan Temple Station, visitors can take just a 5-minute walk to Zhinan Temple and seek blessings from the Gods.

Zhinan Temple (指南宮), perching atop the mountain and encompassing an area of 70 hectares, is a major worship location for Daoism in Taiwan. The temple, founded 2 century ago, consists of 3 major palaces, which are labeled as third-class historic landmarks.

Drawing 800,000 followers all over the world, the Daoist temple serves one of the Eight Daoist Immortals—*Lu Dongbin*. In ancient legend, Lu was a scholar and wanted to pass the imperial examination to take a position in the government. But he repeatedly failed the examination. On his way to yet another attempt, he met one of the immortals who gave him a magic pillow. He then fell asleep on that pillow and had a dream that he successfully passed the exam and became a high-ranking official living in a wealthy life. However, in his dreams, during the high peak of his political life, he was framed and put in jail. All his family members got killed or lived a terribly poor life.

After having experienced all this in his dream, he awoke and came to realize that a man should not pay too much attention to transient glory and success, and that a man's life was nothing but a dream. So he continued to develop himself and eventually became one of the immortals.

By worshipping Lu, followers of Lu believe that they can get internal peace and a “positive force” to develop oneself. Indeed, by strolling around the temple, travelers can immerse themselves in the tranquil atmosphere. Taking a walk along the traditional Chinese-style arcades, having the magnificent ancient construction in sight and breathing in the freshest of aromas from the natural surroundings, one can easily find an inner peace, long lost in hectic daily life.

Besides having those amazing legendary stories and the century-old ancient architectures, the temple is also noted

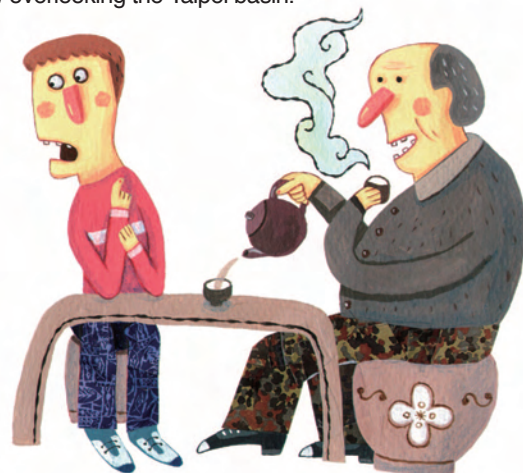


(Left) Catching a glimpse of the mountain and city view while traveling on the cable car. (Right) Zhinan temple is situated in the tranquil atmosphere where worshipper can focus on their inner peace.

for its 1000-step stairs leading to the major palaces.

There's a rumor that couples going to Zhinan Temple and climbing on the 1000-step stairs will eventually break up. However, such a rumor was proven false, as the chairman of Zhinan Temple Gao Zhong-xin (高忠興) and his wife have been married for 40 years and they have lost count how many times they had climbed the stairs.

At this stop, visitors can experience the culture of traditional Chinese religion, and the temple also has a great view overlooking the Taipei basin.



Illustrated by Chen Jia-huei

Stop 4: Maokong Station—A Journey to explore Taipei's Tea Culture

Maokong Cable Car Station, situated in downtown Maokong, is surrounded by lots of teahouses, with many of these being within walking distance and visitors can learn about Taipei's tea culture and taste the famous *Tieguanyin tea* (鐵觀音茶). Maokong, if translated directly into Taiwanese, means “Cat's Cave.”

A stream runs through the eastern side of Maokong and, after tens of millions of years, the stream eroded the riverbeds, leaving hundreds of small holes covering the riverbanks. This is a landscape of streambed potholes. But the locals believed that these small holes were left by cats' claws walking on the riverbed, so they called this place "Cat's Cave"—Maokong.

Maokong has been viewed as a sacred place for lovers to have a romantic date while overlooking the night view of Taipei City, for tea lovers to taste the famous *Muzha Tieguanyin* (木柵鐵觀音) and for a group of friends to party all night at one of its famous tea houses.

Maokong's Tea Culture

Maokong has been home to Tieguanyin Tea since the Ching Dynasty, and with a superiority in quality and quantity, Maokong's Tieguanyin Tea has become world renown, drawing tens of thousands of tea lovers from all over the world to visit here specially for tea-tasting.

In ancient Chinese legend, a man named Wei, was on his way to worship to the Goddess *Guanyin* when he saw an extraordinary tea tree growing between the mountain rocks. He removed the tea tree and re-planted it in his plantation. Later, he found that the tealeaves hide a spectacular fragrance and were the colour of iron. So the farmer called this kind of tea *Tie* (meaning iron in Chinese) *Guanyin* (Goddess of Mercy).

In 1895 during the Ching Dynasty, a tea master called *Zhang Nai Miao* (張迺妙) brought the *Tieguanyin* plants from *Anxi Fujian* Province of China to Muzha and began to develop the land. With his endeavors, Muzha's tea plantation won the top prize of a gold medal from the Japanese Colonial Government. In remembrance of the contribution and great achievement of the tea master, the locals set up

a *Zhang Nai Miao Memorial Hall* (張迺妙茶師紀念館). The two-story memorial hall showcases a variety of teas with an instructor explaining the origins and history of each tea. (Admission Fee: NT150)

To learn more about Muzha's tea culture, tourists can also pay a visit to Taipei Tea Promotion Center for Tiekuganyin Tea and Paochong Tea. This Taipei City Government-affiliated tea center consists of a showroom which introduces the tea-growing process and a lecture area which holds lecture symposiums to teach visitors how to make and serve tea. (Free admissions)

After being a tea-growing place for nearly two centuries, Maokong's tea farmers, instead of just planting and manufacturing the tea, combine tea growing with leisure activities by setting up teahouses and restaurants. With lots of tea houses sprouting one after another in Maokong area, visitors can't help but be seduced by the world-renown Tieguanyin Tea and the delicious meals made using tea and tealeaves as their main ingredients.

The night view of the whole Taipei Basin is another attraction to visitors. Lovers arrive at Maokong's tea houses to share a romantic moment while appreciating the night view, with love and the lights of Taipei City sparkling in each other's eyes. Friends can make a toast with tea and party all night in the happy atmosphere.

For those who are health conscious, Maokong is a must-see—while drinking tea has already been proven by many academic papers to be beneficial in the fight against aging, hiking along Maokong's hiking trails can speed up your metabolism and benefit your health.



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Maokong's Hiking Trails

Maokong Cable Car station also leads to a hiking trail, referred by the locals as Ancient Tea Pathway, which was the only pathway used by tea growers to ship their products down to hill in the old days. The pathway runs from Zhang Nai Miao Memorial Hall all the way to Zhinan Elementary School and connects with another pathway to Zhangsan Temple. With a length of 9.1 kilometers, it may take hikers some hours to complete the whole route. But these hiking trails are well paved and are considered easy for first timers or for those who are not that sporty. Along the way, one can stop by nearby farmhouses or temples to take a break and enjoy a cup of tea, before continuing on to enjoy the natural beauty of the countryside. Besides, while taking a glimpse of green plantations and breathing in the aroma of tea, visitors can easily forget their sore muscles and fatigue.

Maokong's Tie-dye

Visitors can also make their own tie-dye clothes at Maokong area. Zhanghu Workshop is situated right along the Ancient Tea Pathway and has been formed by a group of environmentalists who would like to educate both locals and tourists about how to achieve a balance between developing local tourism and protecting the natural environment. A stop at the workshop will be both rewarding and educational.



U-theater Drumming Performance

At Maokong Station, visitors cannot only get healthier by tasting tea and going hiking, but can also experience the energy of the amazing U-theater drumming performances. The drummers swing their arms to beat against the drums, with muscles on their backs and upper arms forming a perfect figure and the powerful beating sound, echoing down the valley, always shatters the souls of their audiences.

While being in the area, why not make a reservation to watch the performance by the amazing U-theater?



Established in 1988, U-theater combine music, art and Taoism belief all together in their

drumming performances. And to perfect their performances, the drummers not only complete countless rehearsals in the deep mountains of Muzha, but also practice Tai-chi, take martial arts lessons and meditate every day. They believe that these daily lessons can give troupe members enormous levels of stamina and energy, and maintain their inner peace so that they reflect their inner strength while beating the forceful tempo on the drums. Their state-of-art drumming skills have won standing ovations from all over the world and they are frequently invited to perform abroad.

Travelers who want to appreciate the performing art should visit their website: <http://www.utheatre.org.tw> to make a reservation or to get more information. ☎

Taipei City's new Cable Car One-day Tour:

Take the MRT to the Taipei Zoo. Make a right turn after exiting the station and take a 5 to 10-minute walk to reach the Cable Car's Taipei Zoo Station.

Cable Car Stop	Location	Things to Do
Taipei Zoo Station	500-meters away from Taipei Zoo MRT Station	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tour around Taipei Zoo and enjoy the company of wildlife animals. 2. Overlook the whole Taipei Basin from the Cable Cars.
Inside Zoo Station	Inside Taipei Zoo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take the cable car from Taipei Zoo Station to Inside Zoo, and enter the Zoo from this stop. 2. Take an Internal Shuttle Train to tour around Taipei Zoo and reach the different animal houses.
Zhinan Temple Station	5-minute Walk from Zhinan Temple	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experience Taiwan's culture of religion by paying a visit to Taoist Zhinan Temple and appreciating the beauty of ancient structures. 2. Overlook the whole Taipei Basin from the temple.
Maokong Station	Situated in the center of many tea houses and leading to various hiking trails	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn about Maokong's tea culture by visiting Zhang Nai Miao Memorial Hall and Taipei Tea Promotion Center for Tiekuganyin Tea and Paochong Tea. 2. Taste Tieganyin Tea and have a tea meal at teahouses and restaurants. 3. Appreciate the night view of Taipei City at Maokong. 4. Go hiking along mountain trails. 5. Learn the art of Tie-dye and the importance of environmental protection. 6. Watch the magnificent performances of U-theater drummers.