



The pursuit of outdoor adventure in Southeast Asia's tropical summer heat can be a mixed bag. While there are countless opportunities in the region for getting out and exploring some amazing terrain, the sweltering heat and humidity of many destinations can present a frustrating challenge for even the hardiest of souls as they embark on cycling, hiking, climbing, or other human-powered sports.

A great solution is to take to the water, and one of the coolest outdoor adventures is found in the steep mountains and cascading river canyons of Taiwan, where groups of locals and foreigners alike swarm every spring and summer to beat the sweltering heat of summer: go canyoning.

#### CANYONING BASIC

First practised by ancient samurais in Japan, canyoning, or "river tracing" is a mixed-form of mountain adventure that combines hiking, rock climbing, swimming, rappelling, mountain climbing, orienteering, and exploration, all with the refreshing effects of cool mountain whitewater to make the sweltering city seem a million miles away.

Simply put, canyoning involves navigating a steep mountain river – upstream. Routes are selected based on difficulty level, current river flow conditions, length, and types of technical challenges presented by the river canyon. Such technical challenges can include moderate hiking in shallow water, swimming upstream, scrambling and rock-climbing over boulders in the river, traversing slippery rock walls along the sides of the canyon, rappelling off rock faces or bridges into the river, Tyrolean traverses (using via ferrata equipment and techniques), natural water slides, spectacular jump-offs from high points into deep water pools, and even climbing directly up powerful waterfalls.

# Canyoning Formosa

## RIVER TRACING IN TAIWAN

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PHOTOS BY In Motion Asia

#### CANYONING IN TAIWAN

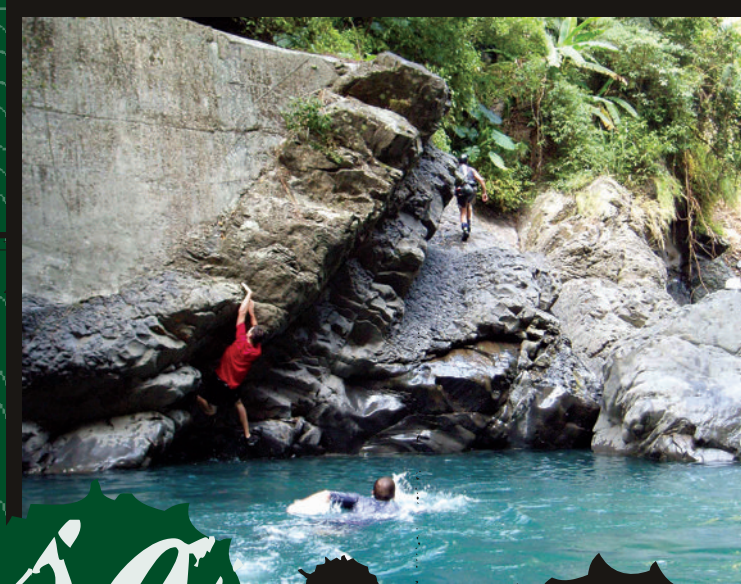
Taiwan is widely recognised as having the best canyoning routes in Asia, with mountain streams cascading rapidly down steep valleys fed by tropical rains high in the island's central mountain range. The cool waters and narrow canyons thread through lush mountain forests teeming with wildlife and offering stunning vistas. There are high mountains, steep valleys, waterfalls, hot springs and traditional aboriginal villages along many of the canyoning routes – all

within an hour of downtown Taipei City – with some of the best routes finishing at natural hot springs, offering a perfect conclusion to the day.

There are at least a dozen main areas around Taipei that offer world-class canyoning opportunities, from entry-level rivers suitable for first-timers, up to advanced whitewater routes requiring expertise in technical river tracing, rock-climbing equipment, and bouldering savvy.

On any trip, the day begins with a riverside introduction to the route, the types of challenges to be encountered, and the equipment to be used.

Canyoning guides are experienced in a wide range of disciplines including water sports, rock climbing, and wilderness first aid, which ensures the safety of all participants.



#### WHERE TO GO

Several of northern Taiwan's best canyoning routes, including the Jiajiuliao river near Wulai, for example, start out with a major rappel. At Jiajiuliao, it's a 20m rappel off a bridge into the river canyon below. Guides are present both on the bridge and below to ensure everyone safely negotiates the free-hanging rappel, which can be an eye-opener for first-timers – who find themselves hanging by a tiny metal device on a 10mm strand of rope seven stories above a raging river.

After the rappel, groups head upstream. Jiajiuliao offers great swimming holes with spectacular leaping-off points (these are optional, with a 10m rock jump merely requiring a further short hike around that section of the river), some great easy bouldering above a natural pool, and a breathtaking, high-speed slide down a river-polished groove in the rock that twists and

turns before delivering you down a steep drop into a refreshing pool of deep water. At all times during the adventure, participants wear helmets and life jackets, with guides at the ready to throw a rescue rope or intervene if needed.

The climax of the Jiajiuliao river route is a climb up a spectacular 10m waterfall (with a top-rope belay set by the guides) that appears impossible, but turns out to be quite easy, once you go for it.

Groups usually break for lunch atop the scenic waterfall on a sunny beach beside the river for photo ops. Usually a bit footsore after a relaxing lunch above the canyon, teams make the short hike back to the road where they're met by a van, taking them to the well-earned reward of a relaxing soak in one of Wulai's famous hot springs, or depending on the tour, an aboriginal dinner overlooking the river.

### EQUIPMENT

Special felt-soled canyoning shoes, helmets, personal flotation devices, and climbing harnesses are all mandatory. For routes requiring rappels, a figure-8 device for descending the rope is necessary, and gloves are useful.

Water and food supply are key as canyoning is definitely a calorie-burning activity. Sunscreen is also crucial as it's easy to forget

about those UV rays while you're navigating upstream.

In winter and early spring, wetsuits are a must, as the water from the high mountains remains brisk until early summer.

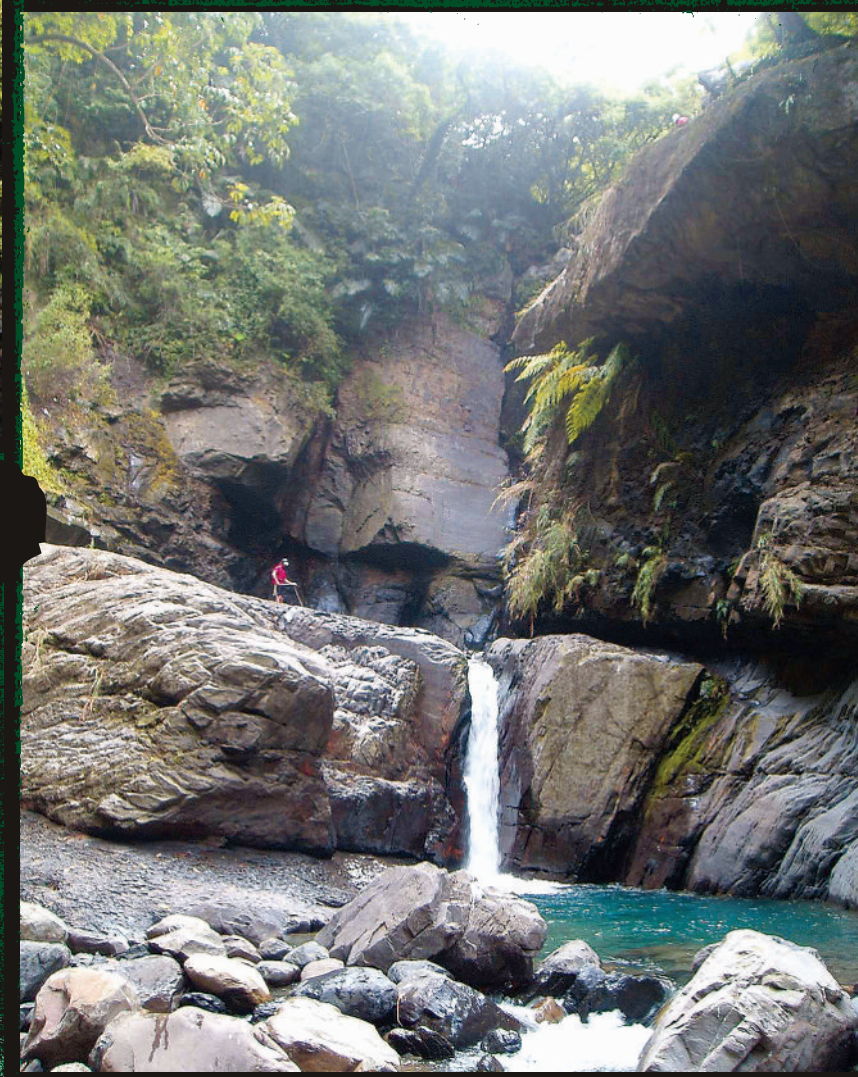
Group equipment includes climbing ropes, rock-climbing hardware, and first-aid kits, with guides arranging all required personal and group equipment.

### SEASON

Canyoning in northern Taiwan is possible year-round, though the best seasons are late spring through summer and into early autumn.

### GETTING THERE

A number of airlines fly direct to Taipei, from where you can access these canyons by car or with a booked group excursion.



### GUIDE SERVICE

Outfitters like In Motion Asia lead full-service canyoning trips to all the best rivers in Northern Taiwan.

Trips include full transport from Taipei Taoyuan International Airport, accommodations (in Taipei or at a hot-springs resort near the activity venue), meals and refreshments, all necessary safety equipment, transportation, and professional English-speaking guides.

Visit In Motion Asia ([www.inmotionasia.com](http://www.inmotionasia.com)) for more information on canyoning and other custom adventures in Taiwan.