The Tourism Bureau has been holding the Taiwan Lantern Festival for years to attract visitors and raise the international profile of the cultural attractions of Taiwan. Traditionally, the festival has been celebrated by carrying hand lanterns. The Taiwan Lantern Festival adds a high-tech touch to this traditional custom and brings the event to the international stage. From the theme lantern displays to folk arts and performances, the festival has become a favorite of both locals and foreign visitors.
PingXi Lantern Festival
(During Chinese New Year / around January to March)

Tradition has it that the “sky lantern” was invented during the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220-265) by Zhuge Liang. At first it was used to transmit military information, different from beacon towers yet ingeniously serving the same function, and is now generally recognized as the earliest ancestor to the hot air balloon. In the early 19th century the Lantern Festival was brought to Taiwan, where every year, at the beginning of the spring planting season, people would release “sky lanterns” into the air as a prayer for the coming year. Because in olden times marriage was for the purpose of “adding a son” and increasing manpower, people went to the temple to pray for blessings and released sky lanterns on which they had written things like “May a son soon be born.” and “May the harvests be bountiful.” Sky lanterns were released to follow the wind, rising up to the ancestors to report that all was well and to pray for blessings. Slowly this evolved to become a local event for the Yuanxiao Festival in the Pingxi area. Through many, many years of changes, the one thing that never changed was the reflected lives and hopes of the people as the sky lanterns slowly rose aloft.

For many years the “Pingxi Sky Lantern Festival” has had a brilliant history. In addition to enjoying its reputation as part of the traditional description of this Yuanxiao or Lantern Festival in Taiwan—“Sky lanterns in the north, beehive fireworks in the south.”—the Pingxi Sky Lantern Festival was voted by the Discovery Channel as the second biggest New Year’s Eve celebration in the world, a festival whose sky lanterns carry the prayers and vows of the people and by which they seek the purification of their souls, a festival that advertises the Taiwan spirit to the world. In addition to the folk performances, lantern riddle contests, and street folk carnivals that are organized every year, the sky lanterns carrying prayers aloft remain the focal point of the entire event. The lanterns are lit, hopes slowly rise, and the flames of prayer dance in the air as the lanterns magically transform into wings of hope and desire, turning the night sky of this mountain town into an expanse of unimaginable beauty. The visual enjoyment of his fantastic and magnificent sight transcends cultural barriers so when festival time arrives each year, Pingxi is always overwhelmed with visitors. The sight of sky lanterns with their lights rising slowly into the sky is for many Taiwanese a beautiful memory and the beginning of happiness and dreams.
The fireworks display at the God of War Temple in Yanshui, Tainan City, is one of the most popular and anticipated events of the Lantern Festival.

The display starts one day before the Lantern Festival, when the deity tours the town in his sedan chair, accompanied by the discharge of firecrackers and bottle rockets. The noise, lights, and rituals that follow the god continue well into the following morning.
Mazu, the Goddess of the Sea, migrated to Taiwan with the people of Fujian Province in the 17th century to become one of the most revered deities on the island, where today about 870 temples are dedicated to her worship. Mazu's birthday falls in the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar, and at that time temples all over the island hold birthday activities including the burning of incense and tours of the deities around their domains. Some of the largest of the celebrations take place at Dajia's Zhenlan Temple in Taichung City, Lugang's Tianhou Temple in Changhua County, Chaotian Temple in Yunlin County, Datianhou Temple in Tainan City, and Fengtian Temple in Chiayi County. Zhenlan Temple's is the largest celebration of all, and also has the longest history.

The pilgrimage from Dajia's Zhenlan Temple takes place during the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar, around the time of Mazu’s birthday. All sorts of festive activities are arranged at this time, including puppet stand theater performances, displays of embroidered banners, float parades, dragon and lion dances, and other events as the procession passes by. The nine-day procession passes through Changhua and Yunlin counties, and terminates at Fengtian Temple in Xingang, Chiayi County. Many devotees walk the whole trip.

The Mazu image which the pilgrims carry along with them is warmly welcomed at Fengtian Temple. The devotees prepare meat, fruit, and vegetables as offerings; firecrackers are discharged, and incense is burned. Another climax of the activities occurs when Mazu returns home to Dajia in her palanquin; along the route, one can see hundreds of thousands of devotees holding parties for friends, relatives, and the returning pilgrims.
Harvest Festival of the Amis tribe
The Harvest Festival is the largest festival of the Amis tribe. Different villages hold separate festivals during July and August; the festival has three stages, including welcoming the spirits, feasting the spirits, and sending the spirits off. In modern times, the ceremony has been shortened and the religious ceremonies simplified. Several activities have been added, including a race, tug-of-war, and arrow shooting competition. The festivities, once limited to tribal participation, are now open to the general public.

Flying Fish Festival of the Yami (Tao) tribe
The lives of the Yami (Tao) people are closely intertwined with the Flying Fish Festival. Each year the flying fish come with the Kuroshio Current from January to June, and this brings a rich harvest of fish for the Yami (Tao) living on Orchid Island. That is why the tribe’s people believe that these fish are gifts from the gods, and why they treasure this natural resource. Some of the tribe’s social customs and taboos are also closely associated with the coming and going of the flying fish. The Flying Fish Festival consists of ceremonies that begin in the second or third month of the lunar calendar and run for approximately four months. The festival is divided into different parts, including the blessing of the boats, praying for a bountiful catch, summoning the fish, first-fishing night ceremony, fish storing ceremony, and fishing cessation ceremony. The men of the tribe wear loincloths, silver helmets, and gold strips, and face the sea to pray for a bountiful catch. Participation is restricted to men.
The Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is celebrated from the first to the fifth day of the first month of the Chinese lunar calendar. Literally, Chinese people refer to this festival as "passing the year," which means shooing out the old and welcoming the new; it is considered the most important Chinese holiday of the year. There are a number of related customs and traditions that go along with the festival. Normally, on the 23rd or 24th day of the last month of the Chinese lunar calendar, people sacrifice to the Hearth God and send him off on his annual journey to Heaven; this signals the start of the Chinese New Year holidays.

On the Chinese New Year's Eve, families complete their spring cleaning, signifying the sweeping away of the misfortunes of the previous year. After the spring cleaning, a New Year's cake is made (the cake is a symbol of "reaching new heights"). The second to last day of the last month of the Chinese lunar calendar is when families stick up spring couplets and New Year's prints on their doors and windows to bring good luck. On the last day of the last month of the Chinese lunar calendar, families gather together for a New Year's Eve dinner, called the "Gathering around the stove." Adults then give the younger members of the family, particularly children, red envelopes with cash inside. This monetary gift is thought to bring peace and good fortune to the recipients. Then there is the "Keeping of the Year," which is seeing the old year out and the New Year in by staying up on New Year's Eve. This starts after the family has finished eating the New Year's Eve dinner. Once the clock strikes midnight, people set off firecrackers to welcome the arrival of the New Year.
Together with the Chinese New Year and the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival is one of Taiwan's three major annual traditional holidays. Because of its origins and customs, it is closely related to the remembrance of Qu Yuan, a poet who lived during the Warring States Period. That is why, from ancient times, people have also referred to the Dragon Boat Festival as the" Poet's Festival."

At the time of the Dragon Boat Festival, the most common customs are holding dragon boat races and eating glutinous rice dumplings called zongzi. Legend has it that when the poet Qu Yuan jumped to his death in the Miluo River, the local people rowed their boats to and fro in search of him. Later, this practice slowly evolved into the dragon boat races. Today, dragon boat races are a popular activity in Taiwan and abroad, and many local areas in Taiwan hold their own races. Every year, there is also an international dragon boat race with competing teams from Taiwan and abroad.

The practice of making zongzi came from the people who tried to save Qu Yuan from being eaten by fish by stuffing rice into bamboo sections and throwing them into the river to feed the fish. Today, the dumplings are wrapped in bamboo leaves and eaten by people.
The seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar is Ghost Month. Traditionally, it starts from dawn on the first day of the month, when the gates of the netherworld open, and ends on the 29th day of the month, when the gates close. During the festivities of the month, which reach a peak on the 15th day, people hold rituals to solicit salvation from disaster and misfortune.

Traditionally, on the day of Zhongyuan Festival every household has to prepare meat, fruit, fresh flowers, and other sacrificial items, which they offer to the “hungry ghosts” at temples or on temporary altar tables set up in front of their homes. They also ask monks to say prayers for their deceased loved ones as well as those lost souls who have no living descendants left on earth. This is known as Zhongyuan Pudu, or Universal Salvation.

The ceremonies take place in temples and on streets. On the afternoon of Pudu, local residents prepare offerings and carry them to the main altar at a temple to join in the ceremonies there. For the street festivities, local residents prepare chicken, duck, and fish as offerings in front of their homes in a ceremony known as “doorway worship.”
Launching of the Water Lanterns
The launching of water lanterns is a longstanding custom. The purpose is to help light the way for the lost souls in the water, call the souls to come on land to enjoy the offerings prepared for them, and pray for the early reincarnation of these souls. It is also said that the further a lantern floats on the water, the better the fortune that the clan it represents will enjoy in the coming year.

Grappling with the Ghosts
Grappling with the Ghosts is a pole-climbing competition held during Ghost Month. In Taiwan, it is carried out only in Toucheng, Yilan County and Hengchun, Pingtung County. Of these two locales, Toucheng has the larger celebration.

In the early days, people migrating to Yilan from Guangdong and Fujian provinces were beset by natural disasters, accidents, and diseases, and many of them died. They were afraid that nobody was going to be left alive to make offerings after they were gone, and that their souls would have nowhere to go. Therefore, they held pole-climbing ceremonies to commemorate those who had passed away during the year. Since Toucheng was the first city to be developed in the Yilan area, residents of its eight major districts jointly organize the Universal Salvation ceremony. On the last day of the month - the day when the gates of the netherworld close - they also hold a big Grappling with the Ghosts pole-climbing competition.
The Taroko Gorge Marathon is an annual event that takes place in the world-renowned Taroko National Park in Hualien since 2000. It is the only marathon in a place entirely surrounded by mountains and nature. Runners have beautiful scenery along the way and get to experience the beauty of nature.
Taiwan does not have too many dedicated Christmas-themed events to enjoy, but Christmasland in New Taipei City is probably the biggest. Held in Banqiao, Christmasland sees a huge swath of New Taipei being turned into a true Winter Wonderland. Highlights include Taiwan’s tallest Christmas tree, a huge Christmas market, a Christmas fair with rides for all the family, carol singers galore, and of course some of the best Christmas decorations in the whole country.
What makes the Taipei New Year’s Eve Celebration special is that it is different from the fireworks and performances put on by Sydney Australia, the second city to celebrate New Year’ Eve, and also different from the countdown and lowering of the ball in Times Square in New York City.

At Taipei’s 101 building when the countdown enters the final stage, the building itself lights up floor by floor from the bottom up for the New Year’s countdown, making Taipei 101 the biggest New Year’s Eve countdown clock in the world. After the countdown is over, fireworks are immediately set off, a star-studded group gathers on the spot to accompany a variety of activities and special ceremonies, and a special, exciting, out-of-the-ordinary Taipei New Year’s Eve celebration is on display!