

## Over the handlebars: Guandu-Danshui, Shezi Island Bikeways

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By Dan Hiestand Special to the China Post



Editor's Note: The Taipei City Government's Bureau of Transportation recently finished a phase of construction that links several riverside bikeways-walkways in the Taipei area. These connections form a system of trails stretching 100 km. This is the final piece in a six-part series by the China Post that examined the different trails that make up these 100 km.

For some strange reason, it feels like I'm cheating. As I bounce along with the waves of the Danshui River, I can see other bikers, walker and joggers on the shore close by. Heart rates

pumping, sweat rolling, lungs burning.

They are on their rides, their walks, their runs, and I'm ... here, in this boat, sitting comfortably in a chair. A life-saving river breeze runs over me. I'm sweating only because of the heat of the day, and not the veracity of my 'bike ride.'

The only 'exercise' I'm getting is lifting my neck to look out over the shoreline, dotted with cement pilings and long-billed, orange-necked birds, dipping down into the dirty water. Art-covered flood walls, draped in images ranging from sea life to city temples to sports figures, canvas the distant shoreline.

And to be honest, this whole non-exercise thing is pretty cool with me. It's the anti-bike ride.

I estimate the pleasure cruiser I'm in seats about 30 to 40 passengers, but it's only half full. My bike is laying down on the open-ended bow of the boat, and I'm headed north to Danshui - - via one boat ride from Dadaocheng Wharf in Taipei City to Guandu Wharf — and then a quick ride from the wharf up the river's edge to my final destination.

Behind me, as river spray crashes in, a wide-eyed elderly man has an iron death grip on the empty blue plastic seats around him. His knuckles are white. Our young, grinning driver seems to be dizzily writing the alphabet in the empty Danshui River, mostly 'S's' and 'O's.' There are no other boats moving within view. The waterway is his — his own chalkboard.

After about 25 minutes, we arrive at Guandu Wharf. Class dismissed. The passengers on our boat offload onto a larger boat already docked, pass through its interior and hit the land on the other side.

The ride from here to Danshui parallels the MRT all the way to the end. It winds through mangrove trees, trickling creeks, bird-watching opportunities and views of Bali's mountains on the other side. There are also lots of older, traditional homes along the river that form a nice partnership with the natural setting.

The trail itself goes through a slight metamorphosis along the way, and in some spots it can be confusing to follow. However, metal plates embedded in the bikeway with images of a bicycle help riders stay on track.

At one point, just past the Hongshulin MRT, is a military facility. Riders can go through a first gate, just before the main gate guarded by soldiers, and continue down the hill to the right. It joins up to the trail again about 100 meters later, and Danshui MRT station is just a few minutes from here.

If you are headed to Taipei City after finishing your trip, you can either take the MRT home (the closest bike-friendly station is Hongshulin), or boat it back from either Fisherman's Wharf or Guandu Wharf to Dadaocheng.

A nice, lazy trip done in conjunction with the Danshui ride was found along the Shezi Island Bikeway. The bikeway, in the far northwestern portion of Taipei City, is the quiet attic in Taipei's busy house. The bikeway traces the Danshui River to where it overtakes the Keelung River, near Guandu Nature Park, and then east, toward Chengde Bridge on the Keelung River.

Minquan West Road MRT station is the eastern trailhead, while the western trailhead is Dadaocheng Wharf. Eventually, the trail will connect with the Keelung Bikeway, which continues out to Neihu.

An early evening trip offers orange peel and cherry-colored skies — as well as cooler temperatures on this mostly shade-less trail, which can bake during the days. Guandu Temple and the mangrove swamps lie across the Keelung River from the sleepy northwestern-most portion of the trail.

## How to Get There

**Shezi Island Bikeway:** Trailheads are found at Dadaocheng Wharf (on river off of Minsheng W. Road) and near Minquan W. Road MRT station.

**Guandu-Danshui Bikeway:** Bikers can access the Guandu-Danshui trail near several MRT stations close to the trail. The closest bike-friendly stations are: Hongshulin, Zhuwei and Guandu. Bikes are allowed on MRTs on weekends before 4 p.m.

**Boat info:** Boat service between Dadaocheng Wharf and Guandu Wharf is available on weekends, starting around 10 a.m. and running till early evening. Without a bike, it is NT\$150; with a bike it is NT\$200 (one way). Boat service between Dadaocheng and Fisherman's Wharf in Danshui runs NT\$300 with a bike (one way). Chinese-only Web site: [www.uuboa.com](http://www.uuboa.com)

## Trail Tips

**Route Info:** The 17.25 km Shezi Island Bikeway takes about 75 minutes to ride by bike going at a normal speed. From Guandu Wharf to Danshui's riverside walk area, count on

about 50 minutes.

Renting a bike: The Cycling Lifestyle Foundation has a Bike Service Center at the Guandu Wharf, as well as one at Dadaocheng Wharf. Bicycles, depending on the model, run between NT\$120 and NT\$260 (weekends/holiday prices) per day. They also have hourly charges and bike trail maps. Make sure to bring an I.D. card.

Lunch is served: The street food in Danshui is always an experience, with lots of fare to choose from. My favorite option is the no-frills 'Ladu Indian Kitchen.' A fat, mouth-watering Indian Chicken Tikka Roll (NT\$70) and Indian Mango Yogurt drink (NT\$50) are great choices. The yellow-signed Ladu is near the McDonalds on the waterfront. Consider normal prices for Indian food in Taipei, and this place is a steal!

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