

Exchange Semester in Taiwan at the National Chengchi University (NCCU)

The organization of my exchange semester was pretty easy. The best part was that nobody but my friend, [REDACTED], and myself applied for it. I guess Taiwan is too unpopular. After spending 5 months in this country I do not know why. Not only is Taiwan one of the most beautiful countries with the most amazing landscape I have ever visited but moreover, the locals are very generous and friendly to foreigners and the university is ranked the second best within Taiwan. Since there is nothing important to say about the organization, I would like to part my report in three main categories: Living in Taiwan, Studying in Taiwan and Travelling in Taiwan.



Living in Taiwan

In general it is to say that living in Taiwan is very easy. As soon as you apply for your exchange semester, the NCCU asks you what your living priorities are: international house, dormitory (on-campus living) or off-campus living (finding your own flat). The easiest choice would be to try to get a place in the international house. It is very clean and modern and you walk about 5 minutes to the school. The dormitories are mostly dirty, old and if you are an undergraduate you will most likely share your room with three others. As a graduate you have the priority for a double-room.

However, what you have to keep in mind is that the university is far away from the city center. It will take you at least 45 minutes to get to the sightseeing or shopping area and to most of the famous night markets.

This leads to next point: Taiwan's culture. I experienced it and I was told many times, Taiwan's culture is about food. While we would meet in a bar to drink a beer, Taiwanese will meet up for a tea, for lunch and dinner and for meeting at the night market. A night market consists not only of clothes and some nice souvenirs (depends on how touristic they are) but also and most importantly of food. The night market snacks are tremendously delicious even though you might need to get used to the smell of stinky tofu.



Let me answer two questions I was mostly asked:

How is the food? Delicious! You will find the curiosities in Beijing but not in Taiwan. Of course, there are some specialties like the already mentioned stinky tofu, the blood cake (nothing different than a blood sausage), chicken legs or chicken hearts. However, as all the vegetarians I met got along very well, I am sure you will also find something you will really enjoy. I never had any problems.

Do I need to speak Mandarin? No. The university offers a basic course and if you are interested you might want to consider applying for it. You will have to pay a fee in advance (about 250 Euro) However, if you do well you will get your money back. In my daily life in Taiwan I never really had to use Chinese. Taiwanese people are very friendly and eager to help you in any circumstances.

Studying in Taiwan

The NCCU is ranked as the second best university in Taiwan after the NTU (National Taiwan University). Therefore, the local students had to pass a very difficult exam to be able to study there. You recognize that as the professors ask a lot from you. Studying is time consuming, As a graduate you have to write many papers (but do nearly have no exams in return) and as an undergraduate you will have to pass the mid-term and the final exams.

The library is well equipped with not only books and magazines but with international newspapers too. They offer you access to The Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Economist to name just a few.

As a Finance-Student I mostly applied for investment courses that offered a brought understanding of the industry. The most challenging and most interesting course was *Investment Decisions and Management*. For this course we had to discuss case studies weekly and also had to write a term paper. It was time consuming but increased my knowledge about the investing industry tremendously.

Most courses are arranged so that you have to work in groups. The professors are eager to foster the collaboration of local students with exchange students. This was challenging as the cultural differences are an issue not to be underestimated. However, after observing how local students tend to work, you can arrange yourself to it. Taiwanese students are very nice to exchange students and are eager to get to know and to help you. They are as interested in

your culture as you are in theirs. Going for lunch with them gives a great opportunity to understand the way of living and working in Asia.

Most students going abroad are afraid of living in an *exchange student bubble*. Of course you can do that. However, I recommend you to spend as much time as possible with your Taiwanese colleagues as they are approaching you anyway. Besides being friends with international students, I find many Taiwanese friends too. That is what I most appreciated in this semester.

Travelling in Taiwan

It would be a lie to tell that studying abroad does not include travelling too. Getting around in Taiwan is very easy. Next to the good train system (there is also a high speed train you should to consider taking at least once) the bus network is very good. Taiwan has many hiking trails to offer, for which I personally enjoyed to spend my free time with. The mountain scenario in Taiwan is just tremendously beautiful (especially because they are so different to Austrian mountains since it is kind of a jungle).

Next to the main cities: Kiaoshung, Tainan, Taipei and Taichung, a trip to the east coast is what I would recommend to everyone. The Tarokko Gorge is impressive even for people having grown up between the Alps. The best thing about travelling in Taiwan is that you can do most of the things in a day or a weekend trip. Hence, you will not lose much time for studying issues.

As exchange students like to experience different countries, the destinations of choice were mostly: Philippines, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan.



Conclusion

I enjoyed living and studying in Taiwan. My goal was to better understand the Asian culture, which I reached. Whenever I had problems with the cultural differences, I found myself to have support from Taiwanese students who explained and helped me to get along with it. Even though I am glad to be back to my home, my family and friends, I do not want to miss the great experience I made there and just can strongly recommend to everyone to do the same.

