

Exchange Report 2020

National Taiwan University

(國立臺灣大學)

1 Arrival

Arriving in Taipei in early September meant stepping out of the airplane into a humid heat that most Europeans are not used to. Heavily jet-lagged and after a two-hour check-in procedure at the Shuiyuan Dorms (reminder: photo-copies have to be done at the 7-11 around the corner) we still went to IKEA to buy mattresses, which was definitely the best option considering I wouldn't have wanted to sleep on the super thin mattresses available in front of the dorms. The shops do have a lot of useful things like Wifi routers, cleaning utensils and the like, but one has to be quick in order to not find everything sold out.

2 Dorms

I got to stay in one of the single suites that include basic furniture, a fridge and a private bathroom, which already exceeded my rather low needs in living quality. As the reader might know from other exchange reports, cooking is not necessary in Taiwan since eating out is very affordable. Thus, the dorms don't provide designated kitchen areas, however there's a microwave available on the ground floor.

The dorms have rather strict visitor rules which is hard to get used to for most Europeans: Every visitor has to sign up at the 24h front desk and has to leave the room at 11 p.m. Not doing so will result in a warning and in case of repeated violation, being banned from the dorms.

3 Cuisine

Despite the strict rules in the dorms, I enjoyed living there a lot. Not only is the rent quite affordable (for European standards) but also since most internationals live there, eating out with friends is a very fun and social two-times-a-day activity.

There are a lot of noodle shops (50–100 NTD) close to the dorms in Gongguan area, a couple of vegetarian/vegan buffet places (70–120 NTD), and also fancier but still very affordable restaurants of all kinds, from Hot Pot (around 150 NTD) to Korean BBQ (200 NTD) and other food from all around the globe.

I specially enjoyed going to 水源市場 (the market between the first and second street of the Gongguan night market) for a 50 NTD lunch with rice and four kinds of vegetables of my own choice. I basically went to the same stand for a year – multiple times a week – and was warmly welcomed by the sweet old lady every time.¹

Apart from that, there's a big variety of smaller snacks available, from 飯糰 (a kind of rice ball I usually had for breakfast) to sliced or unsliced fruit. Especially the night markets that Taiwan is famous for come with a great selection of all different kinds of salty and sweet food.

Finally, it is very common among Taiwanese to buy a drink at one of the ubiquitous 飲料店, especially 珍珠奶茶 (pearl milk tea / bubble tea) and 芋頭牛奶 (Taro milk, my personal favourite).

4 Study at NTU

4.1 The environment

The campus is beautiful, very green with a big boulevard in the middle and the library in its center. It's right next to the Gongguan area where most students live, with a lot of restaurants, board game cafés, book shops and the like. It's very well accessible by MRT (公關站) and thus directly connected to the airport and literally anywhere else in Taipei.

In my second semester, uBike 2.0 was intro-

¹The specific place is called 祥滿, which happens to be where these two guys go in [this video](#). The nice lady appears at 1:40. Make sure you check it out!

duced, providing very convenient bike sharing. It is still advisable to get one's own bike, though, or one might end up having to deal with the uncertainty of empty stations.

4.2 Course selection

Course selection is quite a pain in the beginning but once you got it it works pretty smoothly. As opposed to attending courses in Germany, at NTU you have to sign up for every course you'd like to take beforehand and assign priorities, according to which the available capacity will be distributed. This is repeated in a second phase. This means that for popular courses one is very likely to not get in during the first two phases, but you're always free to attend the first session and ask the lecturer for a registration number so you can still take it. The whole procedure is explained very thoroughly in the orientation week, though.

There is quite a good variety of courses available in English (which can be found in the [NTU Course Information System](#)).

4.3 Taking courses

Teaching quality is – as at most universities – strongly dependent on the lecturer. If courses are taught in English, teachers will not necessarily be incredibly fluent in it, but I was rather lucky. Also, many courses are held in Mandarin with slides, material and exams in English, so for advanced Mandarin learners these might be even more worth it as one gets a lot of listening practice.

One is allowed to drop as many courses as desired during the first two weeks, whereafter only one more may be withdrawn ("W" on the transcript). Other courses not completed will count as failed and thus show up with an "F" on the transcript, so it is advisable to only continue with courses one really wants to take.

5 Chinese courses

In the second week, a Chinese assessment test is conducted for everyone with any preknowledge in Mandarin. It's strongly based on the book series 實用視聽華語 which is also mainly used in class. There are 7 course levels² of which I took Intermediate II in the first semester and skipped to Advanced in the second one. Most teachers are very reluctant to deviate from traditional teaching methods involving a lot of memorizing and

²More information can be found [here](#).

a strong focus on handwriting characters which some international students might regard as not useful. However, discussions in class are usually welcomed and students are encouraged to talk a lot (as long as they stick to Chinese). We would play games, sing songs together and even make excursions, and as somebody who generally loves to write Chinese, I always looked forward to Chinese class a lot.

6 Student clubs

At one Saturday during the first weeks, the famous club fair is held, meaning that every of the hundreds (no joke) of student clubs gets their own stand to present themselves. Clubs range from music- over sport-related clubs to all different kinds of interests – there is even a BDSM club.

I highly, highly recommend and encourage any exchange student to join one or two of the clubs. They are the best opportunity to find local friends (since one already shares a common interest) and make the whole study experience a lot more wholesome. I myself joined the gymnastics club (which is a lot of fun even for total beginners as they go to a big gymnastics hall once a month and they have trampolines), the MLC language exchange club (which organizes a room with one table per language once a week and is a great way of starting to converse with locals) and the NTU Gay Chat Club for gay students (which provided presentations and activities on all different kinds of LGBT-related topics and gave me a great impression of how liberal of a country Taiwan is despite being in Asia).

7 Conclusion

The exchange year I spent in Taiwan was without question the best year of my life. I love Taiwan as a country, Taiwanese people as a society, and Mandarin Chinese as a language. After short trips to Vietnam and the Philippines, I took the last month I had after finishing the second semester to go on a road trip around the formosan island with three German and three Taiwanese friends and made some of the dearest memories of my life. Now that I returned to Germany, I am preparing to apply for a Master's degree program at NTU after finishing my Bachelor's and I cannot wait to go back to this wonderful little oasis right in the middle of our crazy world.