

# Experience Report Taiwan

## Zens Paul Leonard

### **A Transformative Journey: Mechatronics in Taiwan at NTPU:**

Embarking on an exchange semester at the National Taipei University (NTPU) was a decision that would redefine my perspective on life, academics, and culture. Hailing from the mechatronics program in Innsbruck, I found myself immersed in the vibrant world of electrical engineering at NTPU, situated in Taipei. This experience was not merely an academic endeavor; it was a life-changing experience that broadened my horizons and connected me with people from diverse corners of the globe.

Living in Taiwan meant experiencing a culture vastly different from my own, surrounded by a melting pot of nationalities. The international community at NTPU opened my eyes to new perspectives, ideas, and ways of life. The bonds formed with people from various backgrounds became an integral part of my journey, and I am determined to maintain these connections in the years to come.



*Figure 1: Bike trip along the east coast*

One of the defining moments of my exchange semester was the adventurous bike trip I undertook from the southernmost point of Taiwan along the mesmerizing east coast, culminating in the north. As captured in Figure 1, the fascinating landscapes and natural beauty of the east coast left an indelible mark on my memory. The wind in my hair, the scent of the ocean, and the breathtaking scenery combined to create an experience that went beyond words. Along the way, I encountered quaint villages, friendly locals and learned about the diverse ecosystems that Taiwan harbors.



*Figure 2: Green Island*

However, it was the lesser-known islands surrounding Taiwan, like Green Island depicted in Figure 2, that stole my heart. These untouched places offered a glimpse into the authentic Taiwanese way of life. Wandering through the narrow streets, conversing with locals, and indulging in traditional cuisine painted a vivid picture of the island's rich history and culture. The remote beauty of Green Island, with its rugged coastline and pristine waters, was a strong contrast to the bustling streets of Taipei, showcasing the diverse landscapes within this island nation.



*Figure 3: Participating in traditional caravan*

In these secluded places, the encounters with the locals were both charming and at times, amusing. The Taiwanese, unaccustomed to foreign visitors in these regions, warmly embraced our presence. An unforgettable experience, showcased in Figure 3, involved being spontaneously invited to partake in an ancient tradition of carrying the sea god and his entourage around the island. The rhythmic chants,

vibrant costumes, and the shared laughter created a connection that transcended language barriers. This hospitality and willingness to share their culture reflected the genuine warmth of the Taiwanese people.



*Figure 4: Ghost festival Ylan*

The Taiwanese culture, with its intricate traditions and safety-conscious demeanor, provided a rich tapestry for exploration. From the adrenaline-inducing ghost festival in Ylan, captured in Figure 4, to the mesmerizing traditional tea etiquette exhibited in Image 6, every aspect of Taiwanese life was a fascinating spectacle. The dichotomy between their safety-conscious daily life and the exuberance of their traditions created a unique and memorable cultural experience. Witnessing locals defy gravity at the greasy pole-climbing contest during the ghost festival was a testament to their fearlessness and devotion to age-old traditions.

Beyond the rural escapades, the NTPU campus, locally sometimes known as the "Park," was a hub of diversity and activity, as displayed in figure 5. Its expansive green spaces and modern architecture provided an ideal backdrop for academic pursuits and social interactions. The university's emphasis on inclusivity ensured a vibrant mix of people like families with children and the elderly, transcending traditional student boundaries. The serene atmosphere of the campus, combined with the academic fervor, created an environment that fostered both personal and intellectual growth.

The academic facet of my exchange semester at NTPU was equally enriching. Engaging in projects that delved into AI-based topics, a realm not extensively covered in Innsbruck, expanded my knowledge and honed my teamwork skills. Collaborating with individuals from different corners of the world added a dynamic layer to the learning experience. The interdisciplinary nature of the projects exposed me to new methodologies and perspectives, pushing the boundaries of my mechatronics background.





*Figure 5: Life at NTPU*

I also had the opportunity to delve into Taiwanese history and modernity through visits to iconic locations like the Shan Kai Shek memorial in Figure 6. The controversy of quiet historical landmarks against the backdrop of a bustling metropolis provided insights into Taiwan's rapid progression while honoring its cultural roots. Exploring the memorial grounds, I gained a deeper appreciation for the resilience and determination embedded in Taiwan's history.



*Figure 6: Shan Kai Shek Memorial*

But it was not just the historical sites that captured my fascination. Next to the popular locations, I was able to experience their traditional tea etiquette, as showcased in Figure 7. Engaging in the meticulous art of tea preparation and experiencing tea ceremonies became a symbol of the intricate beauty embedded in Taiwanese culture. These experiences, both historical and contemporary, allowed me to connect with the essence of Taiwan – a nation proud of its heritage yet relentlessly moving towards the future.



*Figure 7: Tea etiquette*

Living off-campus with three Taiwanese friends became an integral part of my cultural immersion. Their warmth, generosity and willingness to share their traditions and daily life made my stay even more enriching. From home-cooked meals to impromptu language lessons, our shared experiences fostered a deep sense of friendship that transcended cultural differences. The laughter, the challenges, and the genuine camaraderie formed an essential aspect of my Taiwanese experience.

I have to say the Taiwanese people are one of the nicest cultures I have ever met, especially considerable to foreigners, which is hard to find in Europe these days. Their genuine curiosity and eagerness to share their culture made every interaction memorable. Whether it was navigating through local markets, attempting to converse in Mandarin, or participating in impromptu cultural events, the kindness of the Taiwanese people transformed my stay into a cultural immersion rather than just a foreign exchange.

As I reflect on my time in Taiwan, it's clear that this was more than a semester abroad; it was a profound journey of self-discovery and cultural exploration. The friends I made, both local and international, have become an extended family. The shared stories, the mutual respect for our differences and the laughter that echoed through the dorms and off-campus apartment are threads woven into the fabric of my Taiwanese experience.

Hands-on, this was one of the best experiences in my life, and I will never forget the moments, the connections, and the lessons learned during this semester. Taiwan, with its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural tapestry, and warm-hearted inhabitants, has left an indelible mark on my soul. As I reflect upon the journey, I carry with me not only academic insights and professional growth but also a profound appreciation for the beauty of diversity and the warmth that transcends borders. This exchange semester at NTPU has not just been an academic chapter; it has been a transformative narrative that continues to unfold in my heart and mind.

The allure of Taiwan and the friendships forged during this adventure have left an undeniable imprint on my spirit. The vibrant tapestry of cultures, the unexplored landscapes, and the promise of reuniting with friends make a return to Taiwan an inevitable part of my future. The memories encapsulated in the images serve as a visual testament to an unforgettable journey that has become an integral part of my personal and academic identity. As I bid farewell to Taiwan, it's not a goodbye but a 'see you again soon.' Taiwan, with its welcoming embrace and open-hearted citizens, has become a second home, and I eagerly anticipate the day I can revisit the friends and places that have become an indelible part of my life's narrative.

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## My stay at NTPU in Taiwan

I was one of the lucky guys that could spend a whole semester at NTPU as an exchange student from Austria. I come from a relatively small city called Innsbruck in the beautiful Alps. I'm used to nice country sides peaceful nature and snowy mountains. When I applied for NTPU I was hoping for some contrast. That means big city, lots of people, new cultures and endless possibilities whether for food or activities. In retrospect Taiwan offered even more than I could have ever hoped for.



Figure 1: The friends I made at NTPU

When I arrived in August, I was overwhelmed by the sheer beauty and size of the city, the warm weather, and the people. Coming from Europe I did not know that a general population could be this nice, helpful, and loving towards foreigners. We received nothing and I literally mean nothing but love and affection from the Taiwanese. In all phases of our stay. Whether we talked to random people on the street, in a bar, or at the campus, everyone took as much time as they could possibly provide to help us with the everyday problems we faced as a newcomer in such a new country. That is probably the most impressive thing I ever experienced from another culture and I'll never forget that. Apart from the nice people we were also amazed by the cleanliness of the city and the campus, you could really see how each and every one pays attention to his or her surroundings and tries to leave the place as they would like to find it. I'll really miss the clean (and free) public toilets everywhere. The next thing I must mention is the food. In short, I can tell you it's just amazing. In the first few days it took some getting used to, don't get me wrong. The cuisine is very different to the typical European kitchen and when you are a picky eater you may have some problems at first because sometimes it is a bit of a lottery what you get. Sometimes the google translations of the menu doesn't come close to what you have on your plate later. Nevertheless, don't be afraid to experiment a bit, you might find a new favourite dish. I was often pleasantly surprised by new tastes and culinary experiences. The best thing (especially for a student) is the sheer number of different choices of cheap foods. Often, I would

just get a scrumptious bowl of chicken with rice and some vegetables for not more then 90 NTD (3 Euros).

The campus of NTPU combines the whole Taiwan experience, it has the beautiful and huge buildings that display an astonishing monument of architecture. Especially the library I think is particularly beautiful with its sophisticated and modern design it provides eye candy for every visitor, student or employee that passes by every day. The big park in front of it makes it even better as you can spend your lunch breaks sitting in the grass with your friends and admire the nice views. Sometimes we stayed until the sunset and were rewarded with an even greater visual experience of dancing colours between the intricate staircases of the beautiful library. Another favourite activity of ours was grabbing a coffee or chocolate milk from the local Family Mart, walk around the lake on the campus and socialize with some fellow students or just admire the nature and warm weather.



*Figure 2: Lampi, Leo and me doing a handstand with the library in the back*

Coming to Taiwan I was a bit worried about the lectures as I was not really used to having English classes especially not in a Chinese speaking country. I was afraid I would not understand anything in the relatively complex subjects I had to attend. None of those fears were justified as the professors of NTPU were all very considerate and paid a lot of attention to us foreign students and applied very good English in the courses and made sure that we would understand everything. They did not hesitate to reexplain certain concepts if we had any problems with it and never gave us the feeling of being ignored. The amount of work that was required to follow the courses was substantial but not exaggerated. I felt like I could learn a lot and can bring new knowledge back home. The things I learned in Taiwan are irreplaceable and I will hold dear to them for the rest of my life. This obviously exceeds the knowledge I received in the classroom. I learned so much about the culture and people of Taiwan I think it helped me a lot to in terms of how I can interact with Taiwanese and Asian people in general. Not only helped me the Mandarin course I took but also the people never hesitated to teach me different phrases or social skills that are used in their home country. It also opened my eyes in terms of how you perceive a new country as a foreigner as it really was the first time for me to experience a country and culture in such abundance I have here in Taiwan. I sure did change the way I look at the world in general.



During my time in Taiwan, I tried to explore as much of this beautiful place as possible. I specifically chose my lectures very compactly so I can spend some long weekends in different places. One of the first trips was to Green Island in the South-East of Taiwan with a group of friends I made at NTPU. My expectations were not high as we went there already after the prime summertime, but we were lucky with the weather. We experienced incredible sunsets on the beach, we discovered unbelievable spots of natural beauty and also, we got lucky as we went there during a celebration of the local sea god's birthday. It was a spectacle of culture, and the people were so happy to take us with them and show us how they celebrate their gods and even let us be part of the traditional birthday dance they performed in front of every shop or home that provided the required utensils. It sure was an unusual experience, at least for us Europeans, as it required fireworks that were set alight between our legs during the dance. Those sure made us move our legs while we carried the ceremonial carriage with the sea god sitting (or should I say dancing?) on it. We had a great time and I think we also left an impression on the local people as they had a blast seeing us struggling to dance on fireworks and carrying their sacred god. That sure was an awesome experience I will never forget.



*Figure 3: My friends and I carrying the sea god*

After this trip we were hooked to the island life of Taiwan, and we made it our goal to travel to all four major islands of Taiwan. So, in the following weeks we made trips to Orchid Island, Penghu Islands and Xialiuqiu Island. Each island had its own magic and beauty, and I had the best time on each and every one of them. If you come to Taiwan the islands are a must, especially if you come from a cold mountain country like I do. It sure provided the contrast I was looking for. Apart from the islands I also travelled to some other cities like Kaohsiung, Hualien or Tainan. They all provided extraordinary sights and foods. If you are into mountain sights and beautiful trails Taroko National Park is the place to go. A beautiful river paints the valley green and blue and shows you a whole new side of this marvel of a country. Taiwan really has it all and is packed with possible experiences. You just have to go out and make them.



*Figure 4: Kaohsiung after sunset*

In retrospect I still think there is so much more I could have done and experienced, but a semester is only so long. It sure makes me sad to leave Taiwan as I truly grew close to my heart, and it feels like I'm leaving a home and so many people I hold dear. Everything comes to an end though and that probably made it even more magnificent because I knew it will only be for a short period of time. It makes you cherish everything just a bit more. Nevertheless, the Goodbye is not only sad but bittersweet. I also look forward to seeing my friends and family again but first I have a stop in Thailand as it's only a 3.5-hour flight away. The location of Taiwan makes it easy to go to some other countries as well and the flights are cheap. As I said, I promise you will not get bored if you come to Taiwan to study and travel. When I chose my semester abroad to be in Taiwan, I was not so sure about it at first, but I would definitely do it all over again in exactly the same way. I don't think my choice could have been any better.



*Figure 5: Having a good time in Penghu*

## **A semester abroad at the National Taipei University (NTPU)**

### **Arrival and Housing**

In August 2023 I took the direct flight from Vienna to Taipei and one of my most exciting journeys started with it. For the first two weeks me and my friend stayed at a hostel in the center of the city. We thought it's easier to look for an apartment when we are there, but it turned out that it was harder than we expected. The main issue was that you need to travel around 1h from the center of the city to the university and also that a lot of landlords wanted us to rent at least for one year. However, with the help from our buddy we managed to find a nice apartment next to the Banqiao station, which is in the middle of the city center and the NTPU. I would really recommend this area if you don't want to stay at the dorms. We paid around 350€ per month per person and had a simple but nice apartment with 2 bedrooms, 1 kitchen, 1 bath and a small living room. I think it would also be possible to find something cheaper if you are okay to share your apartment with more people.

### **The city and the Taiwanese**

When I took the air train from the airport to the main station, I was completely surprised how green and clean the city was. There are huge and beautiful parks everywhere and there is no garbage in the streets. Also, the MRT is incredibly clean, because they shut it down everyday from midnight till 06.00 in the morning to clean it. However, during the day it is the most convenient way to travel around the city. It arrives every 2 minutes or even more during rush hours.

The most surprising thing though was the discipline and the kindness of the citizens. To be honest, I never felt as safe in a big city as I felt in Taiwan. It feels like there is no criminality at all and no one wants something bad to happen to anybody. Nobody is eating or drinking in the MRT, everybody stays in the queue, nobody is screaming or shouting, and everybody is kind. Especially to foreigners. You can speak to anybody you want, and you can be sure they will try to help you. Sometimes it may be a bit difficult because the average English level is kind of low, but they will always try to help you out somehow. The lack of English is the only thing which can be a little annoying sometimes, but with google translate you can always start a conversation. I still would recommend everybody to take a mandarin course at the university to learn at least the basics to order some food.

Talking about food, the variety of food you can find in Taipei is incredible. There are thousand of restaurants everywhere and the majority of the are really cheap compared to European restaurants. If you eat in local restaurants, you can get your lunch for 3-5€ (100-160 NTD). At the beginning it may seem a bit unusual, because a lot of restaurants put their kitchen outside in front of the building. However, as I mentioned before, Taiwanese are really clean and hygienic, and we didn't have a bad stomach a single time during our stay. I personally must eat gluten free, hence I am celiac. However, since most of the dishes are based on rice, it was no problem for me. Just remember that the celiac disease is not well known in Taiwan. So it is easier to just ask if there is any flour or wheat inside instead of gluten.

There are also a lot of different night markets in Taiwan. Every city has their own specialties. It is always a lot of fun to go there with some friends and discover new dishes or new drinks.

Although, Taiwanese are really disciplined and seem a little shy sometimes, the nightlife in Taipei can be awesome. You can find anything there. From nice and chill student bars, to fancy rooftop clubs next to the Taipei 101 and also Techno clubs. Of course, some places are always crowded with foreigners, but there are also a lot of locals at the clubs. Some clubs even have free entry and open bar all night.



Lambert Goetsch from the University of Innsbruck

## **University**

The course selection of the NTPU was a bit confusing at the beginning, but the coordinator for exchange students called Mandy would always help you out and reply to your messages as soon as possible. Also, the buddies that volunteer to support international exchange students are always happy to help you out. The buddies of the NTPU are a big help, especially in the beginning of the semester. We also did a lot of things together outside of the university. We went to night markets, hot springs and we travelled to the east coast together.

The campus of the NTPU is huge. They offer a big variety of sports facilities like volleyball courts, basketball courts, a gym, a swimming pool and many more things. Some things are free for students to use and some cost a small amount of money, but it is really cheap in general. On the campus of the university there are some nice and cheap canteens and next to the campus there are numerous restaurants, where you can find every different kind of food.

The lectures themselves have been quite interesting for me. Since my main is mechatronics, I spent most of my time in the department of electrical engineering and computer science. The topics of the courses were extremely interesting, because 90% of the courses deal with AI or semiconductors. Also, the classes I attended were quite small, which created a nice and familiar atmosphere. This atmosphere was also supported by the kindness of the professors. They managed to make me feel quite comfortable, but still had a great knowledge over their topic. Especially, the courses about semiconductors were extremely interesting. Our professor was a former employee of TSMC and therefore he had a great understanding of the different manufacturing steps.

For passing the courses there were different approaches. Some professors preferred to make a midterm and a final exam and some preferred projects and assignments.

I also attended a mandarin course 2 times per week. I would highly recommend to every student to attend it. Of course, I am not a native after those few months, but it really is a big help for the daily life in Taiwan. Especially for ordering food and every Taiwanese is always happy and surprised when you know some words in mandarin. The class itself was a good mix of fun and learning. We did a lot of interactive exercises together and we also learned a lot about the traditions and the traditional food in Taiwan.

## **The untouched nature of Taiwan**

When people think about Taiwan, the majority will just think about huge and busy cities and millions of people. Of course, that's kind of true for some places. However, Taiwan has much more to offer. Especially, the center, the east coast and the south of Taiwan are a good tip for everybody who loves nature. If you love hiking, you can climb one of the numerous mountains on the island. From small hikes to 3 day hikes on the snow mountain, which is about 4000m above sea level, you can find everything. There are also a lot of camping spots or cabins, where some locals will love to keep you company.

Since we are talking about an island, there are a lot of beautiful beaches and extraordinary cliffs to find. You can go surfing, diving, climbing or just relax on the beaches and enjoy the beautiful landscapes. My favorite places in Taiwan are 2 small islands, located at the south-east of Taiwan. They are called Green Island and Orchid Island. They are easy to access with the ferry or by plane and it is worth it to go there!

There are also some volcanoes on the island, which means that you can find a lot of hot springs around Taiwan. Some of them are occupied by big hotels and resorts, but it is also possible to find some

Lambert Goetsch from the University of Innsbruck

nature hot springs, where locals built some pools in the jungle or next to a river and they are always happy to share it with other people.

All in all, I would recommend Taiwan to everybody! It has been one of the best times of my life and I met so many kind and interesting people, which I will never forget and I found a lot of new friends from everywhere around the world. I also learned a lot about the Taiwanese culture and I hope that I can bring some of the Taiwanese spirit back home with me to Austria. If you decide that you want to go there and have any questions, you can always reach out to me under my email:

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Exchange semester: September 2023 – January 2024



**Exchange Semester report**  
Selina Schröter- Winter term 2017  
NTPU National Taipei University- Taiwan

Due to the international partnership of the University of Innsbruck with the National Taipei University, I had the chance to study and live for one semester in Taiwan. The administrative effort was not very much as I only had to write a motivation letter and a CV. The organisation of the visa was very easy and I didn't even have to go to the embassy in person. Only the long waiting time for a positive response was a little bit annoying. I got my acceptance in June, which was very late as the University started in September.

I am studying my master degree in "Strategic Management" at the University of Innsbruck and went abroad in my third semester.

I definitely recommend to spend your exchange semester abroad in Taiwan. It is a very beautiful and unfortunately underrated country, which is not on everyone's list, when thinking about going to Asia.

First of all the National Taipei University (NTPU) is not in the city centre of Taipei, it's located in New Taipei City, but the public transportation is very good and cheap. However there is everything important around the University campus. You will find many local and cheap restaurants, supermarkets, drug stores, convenience stores and also western food chains like Subway, McDonalds or Starbucks. Everything you need in your daily life is located close by.

I lived in the dormitory on the campus, which had the advantage of being very cheap. (400€ for the whole semester) Also it is very nice to be close to the University, if you have classes in the morning, which is most of the time the case. In addition to that you meet a lot of people in the dormitory and it's easy to make new friends.

Surely it wasn't a luxury place, as I had to share my room with two other girls: one from Thailand and one from Taiwan. Luckily we got along very well and became good friends. Every room has bunk beds and its own bathroom. Generally the standards are not as high as in Europe but you get used to it. With some decorations and private pictures the place felt like home after a few weeks. Some exchange students preferred to live in Taipei, which is definitely better for the weekends as the night transportation can be a little bit tricky. Nevertheless the prices for a room are similar to Innsbruck and they paid around 350€ to 400€ every month. The rules are quite strict in the student dormitory. Boys and girls are separated and every visitor has to sign in. Therefore if you have the money and you are looking for a bit more freedom as well as privacy it's better to move into a shared flat outside of the campus.

In my case the living situation in the dormitory gave me a good insight in the Taiwanese culture and the people itself.

In addition to that the campus is very big and nice. There is a gym, a big football field, a stadium, tennis- and basketball courts as well as a lake and lots of trees. It's very nice to walk over the campus or to sit with friends in the grass or at the lake after school or in the night.

I also joined the "Toastmaster international club"- a student association, which you can find all over the world. In this club I met a lot of international students and made many friends- local ones and foreigners. I definitely recommend you to join a club at the University, which serves your interest.

Generally Taiwan is not as cheap as Southeast Asia and as mentioned rental prices are similar to Innsbruck. Nevertheless the costs you are going to spend highly depend on your living standards. If you are okay with eating Taiwanese or Asian food you can live quite cheap. A meal will cost you around 2€ to 3€. Western food is much more expensive as well as drug store articles and luxury articles.

When coming to NTPU, I was a bit worried that the teaching level is not the same as in Innsbruck. In the end I was positively surprised with my master courses. The amount of work changes from course to course, but in general I did learn a lot, especially about businesses in the Asian region. I had to choose



three courses to get enough ECTS: I took "Strategy Management", "Staffing and Recruiting" as well as a "Research Method Course". For each course I got credited 10 ECTS in Innsbruck.

All courses were completely in English and the professors did speak very well English, as most of them studied in the USA. The grades were combined of some group tasks, the class participation and a midterm as well as a final exam. In addition to that I took a mandarin class, which was a lot of fun and made daily life a little bit easier.

Generally the University is not as good structured as the University of Innsbruck. However everyone, especially the International Office of Affairs is always willing to help and every problem I had, concerning some official documents or my course selection was solved quickly. In addition to that, the OIA did organize a lot of trips for exchange students around the country, which were a lot of fun and always for free.

I highly recommend you to travel during your stay in Taiwan. This country has a lot to offer and the nature is very stunning. If you like hiking you should not miss Sun Moon Lake and Taroko National Park. If you are more a beach person Kenting, Kaohsiung, Green Island and Liuqiu Island are the places to go. Especially the diversity of the nature fascinated me. You have high mountains, deep jungles, many waterfalls and amazing hot springs in the north and central part of Taiwan. If you go to the south you will find nice and sandy beaches with crystal clear water. Even though Taipei is a big city it is surrounded by beautiful nature, which is easy to reach for a day trip. In addition to that it is very easy to explore other Asian countries as flights are very cheap. You can go e.g. to Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand or China.

All in all, I really fell in love with the country and the people. Taipei is a very modern and super clean city. The people are very helpful and friendly and everywhere I went, I was nicely welcomed. Surely the language barrier is sometimes a problem, especially in small stores or taxis. You will definitely have some culture shocks at the beginning of your stay. You may not understand all of the behaviours but you will get used to it and accept things like e.g. wearing a surgical mask if you have a cold to prevent other people to get sick. Taiwanese people avoid the sun and they are carrying an umbrella during a sunny day, which was a bit strange for me at the beginning. There will be some days, where you are going to miss European standards or certain food but in the end your stay will be more than worth it.

I had a wonderful time at NTPU and I will definitely go back to Taiwan someday.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!

Selina Schröter

I was at the National Taipei University (NTPU) – known as Táiběi Dàxué in Chinese – for one semester in fall 2016, coming in as an exchange student of Economics from the University of Innsbruck, Austria. The first thing to mention here: the university is not in Taipei, but in New Taipei City, which is the area around actual Taipei. There is a “downtown campus”, but most courses are held in Sanxia at the main campus of NTPU. From there, it takes between 40min and 1 hour to get into the center of Taipei, with transportation being a little tricky at night. In general, however, public transport is well organized, convenient, and cheap, so getting around town or the country is easy.

The Campus is quite big and includes everything you need for everyday life: A gym and a sports stadium are part of it, as well as lawns, a lake, and some forest areas for relaxing. Supermarkets and restaurants are close by, which makes it easy to spend most of the time in Sanxia, with visits to Taipei or other parts of Taiwan always possible if you need a change. Generally it is a very nice place – if only the dorm was in better condition and basic needs like some kitchen equipment or a place to gather in groups were fulfilled, one could call it “Home” for some time.

Life in Taiwan is a very interesting mixture of “following the rules” and “easy going”: On the one hand, the rulebook of the dorm was the longest I’ve ever had to live with, with many of the procedures not seeming too logical, and it was surprisingly strictly enforced. Believing in peoples’ ability to apply rules rationally does not quite pay off if they see breaking the rules as a personal offense... As long as you don’t publicly offend or mock people, on the other hand, life in Taiwan is great, and you will find friends everywhere. The Taiwanese are awesomely friendly, always try to help you – don’t worry about language barriers! –, and not too stressed out about most things. They invite you for tea to their homes, join you for trips or give you advice, and whatever question you have: They will find someone to answer it. As everywhere, university life fits the same description as life in Taiwan generally. If you follow the rules (which does not restrict you in using your head, to say the least), there is always someone to help you, even if coordination between different departments is missing in some aspects.

Concerning my courses, however, I have mixed feelings, but I’ve had these ever since I started my studies. Most of my classes were well organized and dealt with the topics I was expecting, offering solid education without big surprises. There was an exception where reading the slides would have made more sense than sitting in class and in which I felt as bored as my Taiwanese and International classmates, but there was also a course that I enjoyed a lot, fostering discussions and critical thinking, analyzing current developments, and giving me the impression of really learning something relevant.

After all, I am very glad I got the chance to spend one Semester at the NTPU. Coming there I did not really know what to expect of Taiwan, Taipei, or the university, but after four months I leave this small country on an island with a collection of impressions that could barely be more positive. I’ve dived into cultures I had not even heard about before, I deepened my academic knowledge not only from the “European” view but also got some very new perspectives, and I’ve met a bunch of people from around the world I consider friends for a lifetime.

# Erfahrungsbericht Auslandssemester an der National Taipei University in Taiwan

Im Wintersemester 2016/17 absolvierte ich mein Auslandssemester an der National Taipei University in Taiwan. Obwohl ich mich vor Reiseantritt mit Taiwan etwas beschäftigt hatte, war ich doch sehr überrascht über das was mich letztlich erwartete.

Die Anreise zum Campus klappte, dank dem ausgezeichneten „Buddy Programm“ sehr gut. Als ich dort ankam, musste ich erst einmal die ersten Eindrücke auf mich wirken lassen. Einerseits fand ich die Anlage recht ansprechend (grosser Campus mit schönem See), andererseits stellte ich schnell fest, dass man in Taiwan keine europäischen Standards anwenden sollte. Beispielsweise erwartete mich ein heruntergekommenes, sehr dreckiges, spartanisch eingerichtetes Zimmerchen, welches ich mit drei andern Mädchen teilen musste. Es war sehr gewöhnungsbedürftig. Auch meine Mitbewohnerinnen aus Japan und Thailand empfanden dies so. Schon beim Betreten des Zimmers wurde mir klar, warum es so günstig war (Gesamtkosten für alle 4 Monate ca. 350 Euro.). Ich hatte jedoch das Glück, dass meine Zimmergenossinnen im Studentenheim unglaublich nett waren (zumindest die Mädchen die Ratten und Kakerlaken, die uns zeitweise besuchten, waren etwas unangenehm). So machten wir das Beste aus der Situation geteiltes Leid ist halbes Leid. Annehmlichkeiten, wie z.B. ein Fitnesscenter, in dem man gratis trainieren konnte, halfen uns über die eine oder andere Frustration hinweg.

Als Küche dienten uns im Studentenheim eine Mikrowelle und eine Campingherdplatte, was das Selberkochen deutlich einschränkte. Als Erklärung hierfür kann genannt werden: Taiwan wird als „Eating out Country“ beschrieben, was bedeutet, dass sich die meisten Menschen zum Frühstück, Mittagessen und Abendessen irgendwo außerhalb ihrer Wohnung etwas zu essen holen (an einem Straßenstand oder kleineren Essensabfertigungen). An den Geschmack und die Art der Zubereitung (sehr viel Fett und viel Zucker) musste man sich gewöhnen, mit Mut und Durchhaltevermögen findet aber jeder etwas was ihm schmeckt. So gab es auch rund um den Campus verschiedene Möglichkeiten sich etwas zum Essen zu besorgen, was wir – anstatt selbst zu kochen – dann auch meist taten. Ich habe jegliches „Streetfood“ probiert und auch meist gegessen. Probleme mit Magen oder Darm hatte ich keine, denn in Taiwan kann man auch Früchte, Salat und Ungekochtes (z.B. Sushi) essen (natürlich würde ich immer ein bisschen vorsichtig sein aber prinzipiell sollte es gut gehen). In der Stadt selbst findet man natürlich auch europäisches Essen, jedoch zu teuren Preisen, was ich mir dennoch ab und zu gönnte.

Durch eine sehr gut gestaltete Einführungswoche an der Universität fand man sich schnell zurecht und konnte sich recht bald gut orientieren. Ich konnte verschiedene Kurse wählen, die mir alle in Innsbruck für das Studium angerechnet wurden. Alle Kurse waren auf Englisch, wodurch ich meine Sprachfähigkeit deutlich verbessern konnte.

Das Unterrichtssystem an der Universität ist im Prinzip wie Schule – kleinere Klassen mit einem Professor der etwas vorträgt, Hausaufgaben gibt sowie Projektarbeiten und Vorträge verlangt. Gesamthaft betrachtet ist es nicht allzu schwierig, den jeweiligen Kurs zu bestehen, aber jeder Kurs ist mit viel Aufwand verbunden, da man ständig kleinere Zwischenklausuren schreiben muss oder ben Einzel oder Gruppenarbeiten zu bearbeiten hatte.



Die Professoren unterschieden sich sehr stark manche sprachen perfektes Englisch und ich habe in diesen Kursen sehr viel gelernt, andere konnten kaum Englisch und der Unterricht fand teilweise auf Chinesisch statt. Ich hatte kaum Chinesisch Kenntnisse als ich nach Taiwan kam und lebte demnach wie in meiner eigenen Gedankenwelt man bekommt nicht so viel von der Außenwelt mit, wenn man keine Schilder lesen kann und auch die Leute nicht versteht. Der Chinesisch Kurs, den ich besuchte vermittelte mir Grundlagen, jedoch bedarf es sehr viel an Übung um wirklich selbständig in Chinesisch einzelne Sätze formulieren zu können. Ich empfehle auf jeden Fall vor Reiseantritt einen Sprachkurs in Chinesisch zu machen.

Mit den einheimischen Studenten freundet man sich schnell an, da diese sehr grosses Interesse an Austauschstudenten haben und gerne mit ihnen Zeit verbringen wollen. Alle waren sehr hilfsbereit und freundlich. An die Arbeitsweise und das Lernniveau musste man sich „herantasten“. Kultur und Mentalität sind schlichtweg anders als bei uns in Europa. In den 4 Monaten meines Aufenthalts habe ich viele neue Freundschaften aus Taiwan und zahlreichen anderen Nationen geschlossen. Es war sehr spannend zu erfahren, wie andere Menschen so leben, wie sie denken und was sie bewegt. Dennoch war es für mich nicht einfach die taiwanesischen Kultur zu verstehen, zumal ich auch zu wenig Einblick in den Alltag der Einheimischen hatte. Was man sagen kann, ist dass sie sehr freundlich und pflichtbewusst, aber auch autoritätsgläubig sind. Was ich sehr geschätzt habe, ist, dass offenkundig so gut wie keine Kriminalität existiert, man fühlt sich überall sehr sicher.

An den Wochenenden machten die meisten Austauschstudenten gemeinsam einen Ausflug um die Insel und die Stadt zu erkunden, was uns natürlich zusammenschweißte. Taiwan hat unglaublich schöne Naturparks und beeindruckende Touristenattraktionen. Egal ob mit Schildkröten schwimmen, mit einem Scooter durch einen Naturpark fahren oder einfach nur einen Tag am Strand verbringen, es gibt immer etwas zu tun und zu sehen. Ich war 4 Monate im Land und viel unterwegs, dennoch habe noch lange nicht alles gesehen.

Andere Länder, wie beispielsweise Japan, Hongkong oder die Philippinen sind nicht weit entfernt von Taiwan. So haben wir auch den einen oder anderen erlebnisreichen Ausflug gemacht. Die Professoren gaben einem zum Reisen gerne einmal ein paar Tage frei, wenn man den Stoff nachholte.

Zusammenfassend kann ich sagen, dass es für mich persönlich eine sehr eindrückliche Lebenserfahrung war. Im Grossen und Ganzen ist Taiwan eine andere Welt, die es sich lohnt kennenzulernen. Natürlich hatte ich des Öfteren Heimweh, doch damit fertig zu werden macht einen schlussendlich robuster für das weitere Leben. Als ich wieder in Europa war reflektierte ich das Erlebte und lernte unsere Standards erneut sehr zu schätzen, vor allem die Hygiene. Ich kann das Auslandssemester an der National Taipei University jedem der abenteuerlustig ist, was erleben will und offen ist, weiterempfehlen.

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Auslandsaufenthalt: September 2016 - Januar 2017