

My semester abroad in Taipei (Taiwan) - during the corona crisis 2020

Maria Lex, June, 2020

In mid-February 2020, I arrived to National Taipei University (NTPU) in Taiwan. I went there to complete my Master degree in Economics during a four and a half month semester. With the following report I want to share my experiences during that time - the every day life at university, my living situation, the Taiwanese culture, my free-time activities and my experiences during Corona crisis.

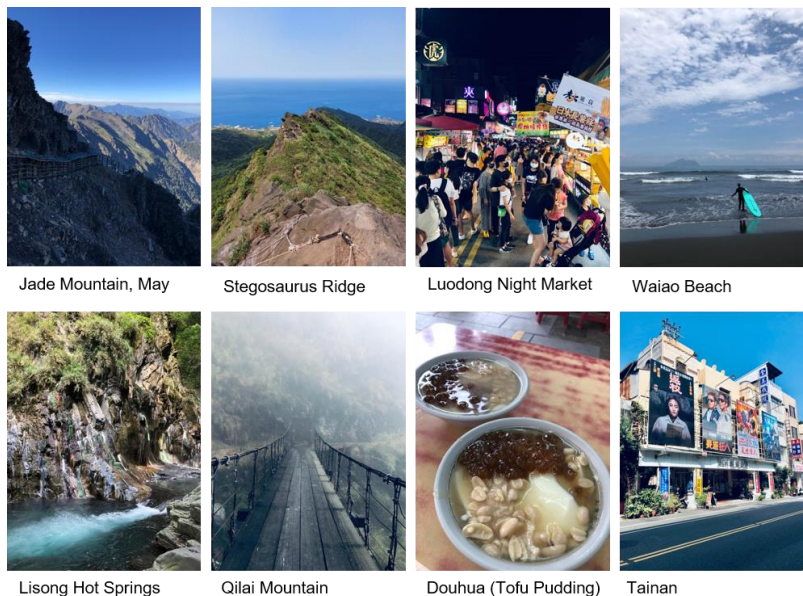
The university campus of the NTPU is located in Sanxia, a district of New Taipei City. Taipei City (or Taipei 101) can be reached by bus in about one hour during daytime. In the evenings or at night, it becomes much more complicated to use public transportation between Sanxia and Taipei City. So, if you prefer to live in the centre of Taipei, you should start looking for accommodation early. As Taipei is one of the cities with the highest rents worldwide, rental prices of about 500€ are not very student-friendly in 2020. But this is made up for by the amazing city and very open and friendly culture. If you prefer to stay at campus, this is a comparably affordable and also attractive option – but not central. The campus offers a huge variety of activities besides everyday university life, for example, the recently opened fitness studio or the swimming pool.

After arrival, I stayed at one of the dorms on campus. Boys and girls are accommodated in individual dorm buildings, which differ greatly in their equipment and room layout. In the girls' dorm you are accommodated with three other students, mostly Taiwanese, in one room including bathroom. This is a great chance to get in contact with local students. In the boys' dorm, double rooms are offered. Since I wanted a place to myself, I anyhow moved to a private room in a shared flat with five Taiwanese girls very close to the university after the first two weeks. There we had a great cross-cultural experience, for example, joint cooking evenings, excursions, or deep late-night discussions on our balcony. It was good to have an open ear for my questions or problems. Not everything is obvious for us Europeans. Besides cheap rent (about 300€), the area around the university also offers some adventurous and cultural options for during the week. I can highly recommend Sanxia Old Street, Wuliao Jian Hike, Manyueyuan National Forest Recreation Park, Yingee Old Street, as well as Yunsen Waterfall.

The International Office of the University offers in its Exchange Program a buddy system - every foreign student gets assigned a local student who takes care of the newcomers, especially in the initial phase. My buddy and I were both very motivated to climb the local mountains. Therefore, we spent many of our weekends and spring holidays together in the mountains (Jade Mountain, Qilai Mountain). She also always helped me with communication or organizational difficulties outside of university. This was of great help. Communicating in English in Taiwan can be difficult, depending on the region and neighbourhood. The International Office has also been very helpful and supportive at all times. Because of the language barriers I recommend everyone to take the Chinese 1 language course at the university. The language professor teaches the basics of the Chinese language with a lot of fun and games. Uniclubs, open groups at university, offer activities besides the lectures. Here you are always welcome. As a master student I even got my own research desk at the Department of Economics. Accordingly, I spent most of my lunch breaks or dinners with my fellow students and found good Taiwanese friends.

Of course, I also encountered some cultural differences in Taiwan, which I had to learn from in everyday life. In Taiwan it is very unusual to cook at home. Especially students go to restaurants for all three meals of the day. Alternatively, you can go to one of the many night-markets in the evening. Usually, restaurants do not offer an English translation of the menu. Stinky tofu, tofu pudding, beef noodle soup and bubble tea are among the culinary highlights of Taiwan. Yes, and Taiwanese love everything that is fried, very sweet or contains meat. For me as a vegetarian it was sometimes not so easy. But tofu and soy milk served me as good alternatives. Taiwanese people are rather shy, but very helpful and hospitable as soon as you start talking to them. If you cannot progress any further with English, there is always a mobile app that is fluent in Chinese.

The most exciting part of my stay, however, was the crisis management by the local government during COVID-19. In March, masks became mandatory in supermarkets, public transportation, and university campuses throughout Taiwan. Since we exchange students could not buy masks in pharmacies, we were able to buy them at the International Office for 14 days. Every morning in front of the university we had to queue up to pass the first temperature check in front of the campus and the second check at the department building. After successful control, the student identity card was checked. With a colourful sticker on your t-shirt as sign for "corona-free" you were exempt from the checks for the rest of the day. In the lecture halls all windows and doors were left open at all times to keep the draught in the room and thus minimize the probability of transmission. From the very beginning, both students and teachers adhered strictly to the obligation to wear masks and to regularly disinfect their hands. The SARS epidemic in 2002 and 2003 cost Taiwan many victims. For this reason, COVID-19 was taken very seriously in the country and appropriate preventive measures were taken early. Unfortunately, the measures included the entry ban for EU citizens, which made it impossible for my family and friends to visit me. In addition, we unfortunately also had to cancel our trips to the neighbouring Asian countries. Nevertheless, the successful risk management by the Taiwanese government has enabled us to feel very safe in the country at all times. While the rest of the world went crazy, we in Taiwan were able to live our lives freely without any lockdown thanks to the effective crisis management of Taiwan.



Taiwan is a dreamlike and green island, with unlimited hiking possibilities and nature experiences. Lisong Hot Springs, diving on Green Island, sunrise on Jade Mountain and the Taroko Gorge were the highlights of my trips. For hikers and surfers Taiwan is a paradise. Finally, a little tip from my side with regards to traffic in Taiwan: Don't forget your international driver's license. Compared to other Asian countries, Taiwanese do not like to deviate from given rules. Renting a car or scooter without an international driving licence is not possible. To summarize, I had an unforgettable time in Taiwan which was characterized by an exciting university life with very interesting discussions with professors and students, unforgettable hikes, culinary experiences and new friendships. I am already looking forward to meeting some of my Taiwanese and international friends again in Europe or other places in the world. Finally, I would especially like to thank my Buddy Ling for the time she has taken to explore the most beautiful places of Taiwan with me and to make my time in this country unique.

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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 associations, 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.

Nathalie Grätzer

Auslandsaufenthalt: September 2016 - Januar 2017