

# Exchange Experience Report – National Taipei University (NTPU)

## 1. Introduction

During my exchange semester at National Taipei University (NTPU) in Taiwan, I had the opportunity to gain valuable academic, cultural, and personal experiences. Studying abroad at NTPU allowed me to deepen my understanding of Asian academic culture, improve my intercultural competencies, and broaden my personal perspective. This report outlines my experiences regarding housing, university life, travel, daily life, administrative processes, and personal development during the semester.



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## 2. Housing

Exchange students at NTPU generally have two main housing options: living in university dormitories or renting a private or shared apartment. Most international students choose to live in the dormitory, mainly because of the affordable price and the convenience. The dormitory costs approximately 500 euros for the entire semester, which is very reasonable compared to European standards. Students usually share a room with up to four people. Despite the shared living situation, the rooms are modern and well equipped, and the dormitories are located close to the campus.

Another option is to rent an apartment or a room in Taipei or nearby areas. The monthly rent for a shared apartment usually ranges between 400 and 550 euros. Apartments can be found through Facebook groups or platforms such as MyRoomAbroad. I would recommend sharing an apartment with other international students, as living with local Taiwanese roommates can sometimes feel unsocial due to cultural differences and

busy schedules. Since the university is located about one hour away from central Taipei, living with other international students also helps to build a social network more quickly. In my case, I lived in a shared apartment with roommates from Indonesia, Uganda, and Taiwan, which was a very enriching multicultural experience.

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### **3. University and Academic Life**

The academic experience at NTPU differs in several aspects from European universities. Course selection depends strongly on the department, and it is important to make use of the add-and-drop period at the beginning of the semester to adjust one's schedule. NTPU is located approximately one hour away from Taipei city, which makes commuting an important factor in daily planning.

Most courses last three hours and include mandatory attendance. Depending on the professor, students are usually allowed to miss between two and five classes. Compared to my home university in Innsbruck, many courses at NTPU felt slightly easier in terms of workload and difficulty. The teaching style is more like school education, with professors acting more like teachers and placing a strong emphasis on attendance, participation, and continuous assessment.

The campus itself is very large and modern. It offers excellent facilities, including a swimming pool with sauna, a gym, basketball and tennis courts, sports fields, green areas for relaxation, and several convenience stores. NTPU also provides a buddy system, which helps exchange students integrate more easily at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, I would recommend taking a Mandarin language course for students who are genuinely interested in learning the language and understanding Taiwanese culture more deeply.

Students should not worry too much about their English skills. In general, the English level of Taiwanese students and professors is often lower than that of European exchange students, which makes communication manageable even for those with limited academic English experience.

From a practical perspective, it is highly recommended to schedule courses between Monday and Thursday if possible. This allows students to use long weekends for traveling within Taiwan without missing classes.



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#### **4. Travel Experiences**

Taiwan offers outstanding travel opportunities, and exploring the country was one of the highlights of my exchange semester. It is strongly recommended to visit Taiwan's islands at the beginning of the autumn semester, as winter can be very windy. Particularly recommended islands include Green Island, Orchid Island, Xiaoliuqiu (Lambai Island), the Penghu Islands, and the Matsu Islands. Green Island and Orchid Island stood out as especially beautiful due to their nature and relaxed atmosphere.

In addition, students should visit Kenting, the east coast of Taiwan, and cities such as Kaohsiung. The east coast, especially Dulan, is well known for surfing and its laid-back lifestyle. Sun Moon Lake and road trips through central, southern, and eastern Taiwan are also highly recommended.

Many exchange students also travel to nearby countries such as South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, or the Philippines. While international travel is exciting, I would advise not to travel too frequently outside Taiwan, as the country itself offers an incredible variety of landscapes, cities, and cultural experiences.



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## 5. Daily Life and Practical Tips

For daily life in Taiwan, there are several practical recommendations. First, it is important to buy a Taiwanese SIM card with a local phone number immediately upon arrival. This is useful for communication, banking, and online services. Additionally, purchasing an EasyCard is essential. The EasyCard can be used for public transportation such as MRT, buses, and YouBike, which is the Taiwanese equivalent of bike-sharing systems like Nextbike.

Students living in Taipei should also consider buying the T-Pass, which costs around 30 euros per month and is extremely useful and cost-efficient for commuting. While English is commonly spoken in Taipei city, ordering food in restaurants may sometimes require the use of a translator or tools such as ChatGPT.

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## 6. People and Social Life

The Taiwanese people are generally very friendly, polite, and helpful. However, compared to European cultures, they can appear more reserved and shy, which sometimes makes it difficult to build deep social connections. While some Taiwanese students are very interested in connecting with international students, others tend to remain within their existing social circles.

Nevertheless, I was able to make friends from all over the world, including Poland, Slovakia, Malaysia, and other countries. The international student community at NTPU is diverse and open, which makes it easier to find like-minded people.

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## **7. Climate**

The climate in Taiwan is humid throughout the year. At the beginning of the semester in September, temperatures can feel close to 40 degrees Celsius. During December, long trousers are usually necessary, but wearing a T-shirt is still often possible. Taipei generally experiences more rainfall than central and southern Taiwan, where the weather is mostly sunny.

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## **8. Application Process and Visa**

The application process for NTPU is straightforward and well organized. For the visa application, students need to send their passport to a Taiwanese office, for example in Munich for students from Bavaria, or visit the office in person. The visa costs around 100 euros, and it is recommended to apply for a multiple-entry visa to allow travel during the semester.

Additionally, students are required to complete a medical examination before the semester, including an X-ray or blood test to confirm that they do not have tuberculosis. In my case, my health insurance covered the costs, as the exchange was considered a school-related stay.

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## **9. Personal Reflection**

Finally, it is important not to expect a perfect semester abroad. While an exchange experience can be incredibly rewarding, it may also come with challenges such as loneliness, cultural differences, or difficulties in forming deep relationships. Some international students struggle with superficial conversations or the lack of close connections.

However, these challenges can also lead to significant personal growth. During my semester at NTPU, I learned a great deal about myself, my expectations, and my ability to adapt to new environments. Overall, studying abroad in Taiwan was a life-changing experience that I will never forget. I would strongly encourage students who are considering an exchange semester abroad to take this opportunity, as it offers invaluable academic, cultural, and personal benefits.

# My stay at the NTPU 2024/25

Dear reader,

if you are reading this to decide whether or not to go to Taipei, I will make it quick for you: Go!

I was there during the winter semester 2024/25 and it was the best semester of my life. I loved every second of it.

I was most amazed by the people. Everyone I met here was incredibly kind and welcoming. It didn't take long to make new friends, with whom I had an extraordinary semester.

I lived in a student dormitory with three other girls and everyone was of a different nationality, which made it very interesting and opened my mind to so many different things.

The Taiwanese students were always helpful, they helped us whenever we needed help, they showed us their local food, gave us good tips on where to go for lunch or dinner and one of them even invited us to their home in the south of Taiwan. In this moment I was so overwhelmed by their hospitality, I will never forget it. I hope I can bring some of their kindness back to Austria.



*Figure 1: My friends and me at the Wulai Waterfalls*



Figure 2: the Taiwanese family invited us to their city

Here are some of the things that might be helpful in planning your semester:

## LIVING

If you go to the NTPU you will ask yourself where you want to live. There are two options: Either you share a room in the student's dormitory or you rent an apartment in Taipei. I lived in the student's dormitory and was really happy about my choice. It is very cheap, you were always around friends, close to the university and also the mountains around where pretty cool.

If you rent an apartment in Taipei it is easier to go to bars or clubs in the night, because there where no public transportations in the night from Taipei to the Dorms. It will be as expensive as in Innsbruck and organizing it might be a little difficult.



Figure 3: My bed in the dorm

## TRIPS

Taiwan is a very beautiful country and there are many places you should visit when you spent there one or two semesters. I always used this website to do a little research about where to go: [Home - Taiwan Obsessed](#).

My favorite places are:

- the Pescadore Islands (Figure 4)
  - o These islands are located between China and Taiwan and are really beautiful. I rented a

scooter to drive around the island and I've discovered so many beautiful corners and beaches I had all to myself. I talked to some locals who told me that they had never seen a non-Taiwanese tourist before. In general Taiwan is not very touristy in general. I think it is very underrated. Getting to those islands was a bit of a challenge because I couldn't find any information about the ferries, so I'd suggest flying there. There were just no flights available when I tried to book them, which was a little spontaneous.

- the area around Alishan National Park
  - o the Alishan National Park is one of the three most touristic areas in Taiwan for a good reason. It is very stunning, not just the park itself but also the area around it. If you rent a car and just follow some mountain roads in this area you will see many amazing views.
- the Xueshan Mountain(Figure 5)
  - o This mountain is the second highest mountain in Taiwan. I have also been to the highest mountain, but I have to say I liked this one better, because we could see more wildlife and the landscape was more varied. You need a permit for both mountains, so make sure to get it in advance.
- the whole east coast
  - o The east coast is just amazing. I don't have many words for it. Drive it down with a car or a bike and just enjoy the ocean view, go surfing or hiking.
- The Liesong Hot Springs (Figure 6)
  - o Those are the best natural hot springs you can visit. You have to hike down 45min to a cold river. Then cross the river and climb upwards till you reach a hot waterfall and hot springs. It is nature at its best, but it is also very hard to reach by public transportation.

Those are trips you need 3 to 4 days for, but there are also very nice one-day-trip adventures to do. Like going surfing, hiking to some waterfalls and nice views or exploring some old streets. The possibilities are endless.



Figure 4



Figure 5

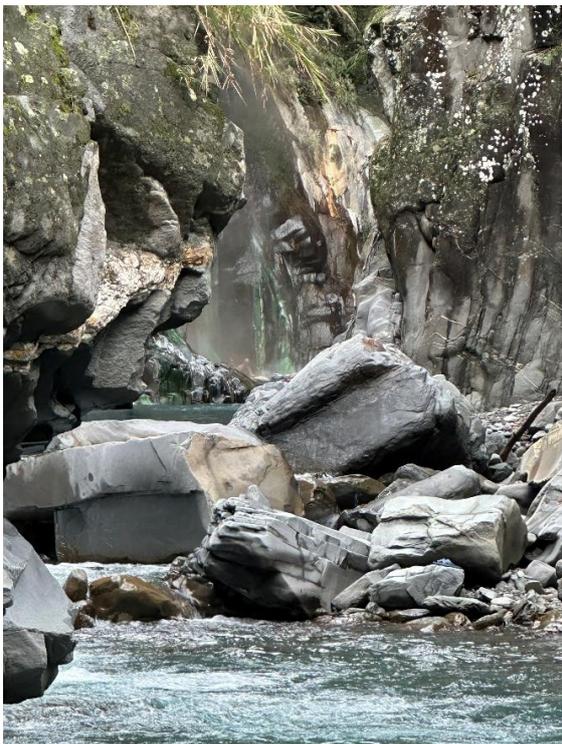


Figure 6

## GETTING AROUND TAIWAN

Taiwan's rail network is great, with local and high-speed trains running along the coast. There are buses in the mountain areas too, but not that many. Local trains are pretty cheap and you get to see some great views. Depending on when and where you're going, it's best to buy tickets in advance. You can do this at the train stations or on the [Taiwan Railway Corporation, Ltd.](#) Website.

## FOOD

I really enjoyed the food in Taiwan, though I guess that's pretty subjective. I'm not sure it has the best cuisine in Asia, but there are some great options. I tried a lot of new dishes, some of which I loved so much that I tried to recreate them back in Austria. Some weren't as nice, though. Overall, the food is very spicy. But whether you like that or not, you will get used to it and in the end probably love it.

## UNIVERSITY

As I said before, NTPU is about an hour out of the city centre in Taipei, in the New Taipei City area, which is called Sanxia District. Sanxia has everything you need: good restaurants, a big farmers' market, mountains, a river and you can rent bikes. The campus is huge and has a swimming pool, a gym, basketball, baseball, track and field and volleyball courts. There's a big canteen, a library, a Family Mart and a 7-Eleven.

The Office of International Affairs at NTPU is really helpful. So, if you have any questions about your schedule or any problems that might come up, just ask them. They'll get back to you ASAP.

## USEFUL FACTS :

- Easy card
  - o An easy Card is a card you can use for nearly everything. You can use it to take public transportation, you can pay with it and rent bikes with it. The student ID is also an easy card, so you don't have to buy one. But if you arrive a little earlier, I would recommend to buy one because you need it for everything and without is possible but harder. You can buy it at every 7 Eleven or family mart for 3€.
- Google translator
  - o I tried many translators and I think the Google translator is the best for translating menus.
- Food to try:
  - o Don't miss the Mango season. Mangos are so good over there.
  - o Another fruit I discovered was the cinnamon apple. The region of Taitung is famous for those and they are very delicious.
  - o I loved Hot Pots, Udon Noodle Soup, Bibimpap and so many more dishes.
- Cultural exchange events
  - o The university offers many cultural exchange events for free. Those are very cool to meet people from around the world and learn something about Taiwan and other cultures as well.



Figure 7: One of many cultural exchange activities

- International Driving Licence
  - o I had the international licence and I was pretty happy about it, because renting a car wasn't very expensive and for some places it is very useful to have.

I hope I have given you a good insight into my semester in Taiwan. When you go there, and you have any questions just let me know. I will try to help you. You can contact me here:  
[sophia.bienert@student.uibk.ac.at](mailto:sophia.bienert@student.uibk.ac.at)

Have a great time in Taiwan 😊

## Exchange student report

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### **PREPARATION**

As I had been interested in spending a semester abroad outside Europe since my Bachelor's degree and was denied this opportunity due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I looked around for a semester abroad in Asia during my Master's degree and finally decided on the National Taipei University in Taiwan.

I had never been to East Asia before and was therefore very interested in getting to know this culture. At the same time, I was also a little curious about what life in Taiwan would be like as a European exchange student if you don't speak Chinese and haven't dealt with the cultural peculiarities beforehand.

The application process was relatively straightforward. After applying to the university with a letter of application at the end of February, I was accepted just one month later. I then had to submit individual documents, such as letter of recommendation, letter of motivation and a "Health Check" form. The International Relations Office at the University of Innsbruck was always available to answer any questions I had.

The application for a Student visa went really smooth, all I had to do was send the confirmation from the NTPU together with my passport to the Taiwan representation in Munich and a day later I had already registered my visa.

I applied for a scholarship from the University of Innsbruck, which gratefully supported my stay abroad with €400 per month.

### **LIVING**

The National Taipei University offers every exchange student a place in a hall of residence close to the campus, but you can of course also arrange your own accommodation. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. I decided to move into the dormitory so that I could connect with the Taiwanese and international students more quickly. The rent was also very cheap compared to Taipei. The dorm rules weren't too strict either, you had to be quieter after 11pm and not do any more laundry, besides that you were relatively free. I shared a room with a Slovakian, a Japanese and a Chinese-Frenchman and living together was always peaceful and harmonious.

### **ARRIVAL**

I arrived at Taoyuan Airport at the end of August, a few days before I could move into the dorm. I decided to live in Taipei for a few days first to get to know the city a bit. Before our stay, the NTPU provided us with a buddy, who kindly picked me up at the airport on the day of my arrival and accompanied me to Taipei. Thank you for that, Gary! There is an Airport

Express from the airport to Taipei Main Station for around 160 NT Dollars (around 5€). However, there is also a direct bus (connection 1968) to the NTPU, which costs around 115 NT dollars (rund 3,50€).

## **UNIVERSITY**

The university area is a very nice complex with some stores and restaurants nearby a canteen with several food stalls where you can eat well and cheaply. The complex itself is centrally located in the city of Sanxia District and includes not only the lecture halls, but also dormitories, libraries, sports facilities and a park with a lake.

However, the university system is very different compared to the University of Innsbruck. You could compare it more to a University of Applied Sciences in Germany, as there are many assignments and oral participation as well as attendance that also count towards the grade. The courses are kept small with a maximum of 10-30 students, which has the advantage that the professors and assistants can respond better to the students and can teach them the topics better.

Unfortunately, not too many courses were offered in English for my Information Systems degree program, which is why I chose a lot of courses from the Business Administration faculty to earn credits.

It should also be noted that all courses must be selected in advance and that places are limited due to class sizes. The courses can only be changed afterwards in an "add/drop period" after which you can only drop one course. All further courses not attended will then be counted as failed. It may also happen that you do not get the courses you want in the selection process. You should therefore still go to the courses during the add/drop period courses and ask the teachers to be included in the course.

Every student is also offered free Chinese courses and I strongly recommend taking advantage of this offer. The course is two hours twice a week and I would say it was the most intensive but at the same time the subject I most enjoyed studying for.

If any problems or other concerns should arise, the National Taipei University has the Office of International Affairs (OIA) and for the dorm the Office of Student Housing, which are all very friendly and deal with all inquiries very quickly.

## **TAIWAN**

Taiwan's position makes it an excellent starting point for other Asian travels, but at the same time, the island itself has a lot to offer: It has steep gorges, towering mountains, rich woods, beaches, islands, and coral reefs. The south is more tropical, while the north is subtropical. Because of the island's terrain and there are many typhoons approaching, the east is very lightly populated, but the west is nearly entirely built up.

Taiwan experiences year-round warm weather. In the winter, temperatures rarely fall below 10°C, while summer temperatures hover around 35-40°C. Nevertheless, the humidity is very high, which means that the winter is also very uncomfortable. In addition, although the dorms are equipped with air conditioning, but not with a heating system. For this reason, it is essential to bring warm clothing.

In general, Taiwanese people are very friendly and helpful. They are open and receptive to foreigners. Some can be shy at times, but if you approach to them in a friendly manner, they

will open up very quickly and you can find new friends in them. One should start learning Chinese before coming to Taiwan or at least learning it during the stay to make it easier to converse with the Taiwanese, as their English speaking skills vary very heavily. You can see a difference in the students who have been to an exchange semester abroad, they are usually the most proficient in English.

In addition, many restaurants only offer menus in Chinese, so it is helpful to use the Google Translate App function in this case.

In terms of food, the country has many exotic but very tasty things to offer. Culinary Taiwanese highlights include beef noodles, stinky tofu, dumplings and bubble tea. Many dishes from Japanese cuisine (such as curry, gyudon, onigiri or bento) as well as Korean and Vietnamese cuisine can also be found in Taiwan. There are also Western fast-food chains and, rarely, restaurants with European dishes.

Costs in Taiwan are generally lower than in Austria, especially public transport, traveling, eating out or service charges. However, Western branded goods or food can be just as or even more expensive.

## **SIGHTS**

Taiwan is a fascinating island full of cultural and natural highlights that impressed me with its diversity during my stay. The lively night markets offered delicious food and also an insight into the vibrant everyday life of Taiwanese culture.

An absolute highlight is the Raohe Street Night Market in Taipei. This charming market, framed by the majestic Songshan Ciyou temple complex, offered a wealth of Taiwanese delicacies.

Equally memorable was the Ningxia Night Market, which is known for its authenticity and concentrated selection of street food. Compared to other markets, it seemed more manageable, but offered an incredible variety of specialties.

Another highlight is a hike up Elephant Mountain (Xiangshan) in Taipei. The short but steep climb was rewarded with a breathtaking view of the Taipei skyline, especially at sunset when the Taipei 101 is enlightened.

A visit to the cities of Taichung and Tainan is also a must. Taichung impressed me with its artistic Rainbow Village, while the Gaomei Wetlands with their spectacular scenery and sunsets were unforgettable. In Tainan, the oldest city in Taiwan, I was able to visit historical sites such as the Confucius Temple and enjoy the incomparable local dishes - a culinary paradise!

The hike up Yushan Mountain, the highest mountain in East Asia, was undoubtedly one of the biggest highlights of my stay. Yushan, also known as Jade Mountain, rises majestically to 3,952 meters and offers an experience for those looking for the challenge of climbing a mountain while enjoying the beautiful scenery of Taiwan. The hike begins at the Tataka ascent point. The first sections of the trail were moderate and always offered fantastic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys. You spend the night at Paiyun Lodge, before climbing to the summit early the next morning. On the way up, you have picturesque seas of clouds, rugged rock formations and impressive views of the surrounding peaks. The moment when you finally arrive at the summit of Yushan is really indescribable. I also went on trips to Hong Kong, Macao, Shenzhen/China and Shanghai/China during the semester.

## **CONCLUSION**

I can highly recommend a stay abroad in Taiwan. The country has a lot to discover and is definitely worth the trip. It is modern and there is no need to fear a culture shock. I have grown fond of the country, its people and its culture and I will most likely return again.

September - Dezember 2024

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# 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 NTHU*

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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September 2023 – Januar 2024

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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*