

National Taiwan University Exchange Report

Section 1 (Arrival overseas/on site orientation)

When I first arrived in Taiwan (late August), I stayed in my family's apartment in Taipei so there was no need for me to find a place to stay before school started. However, if you are in search of a place to stay before school starts, I have heard from other exchange students that it is possible to rent a room next to the dorms and the rooms themselves are very similar if not the same as a typical dorm room. Also, keep in mind that most exchange students stay in either a single or a double so if you were to rent a room before school starts, you'd most likely be getting a single room.

Before school starts, there is an orientation and a tour of the school in which most exchange students participate in. The tour of the school takes place in the morning before orientation and involves a walk to all the major buildings on campus with a group of exchange students led by a student volunteer from the international programs department. The school campus is actually quite large and comparable to the size of UW's campus although it's not quite as large. Also, because space in Taiwan is rather limited, the amount of open space on campus is pretty small so it's much easier to get lost here than at UW. Even after going on the tour, I still got lost on my first couple days of class. Because of that, I would highly recommend going on the tour because not only will you get a slight feel for the campus, but you will also end up meeting people through the group tour.

Now for orientation, a lot of things were covered such as registration, grades, visa information, grades, etc. The two things I found most important were the visa information and also class registration. If you are only here for one semester, then you don't have too much to worry about because with a student visa, all you have to do is renew it once or twice and the semester will be over before the visa expires. However, if you are here for a whole year, be sure to pay close attention because if you do not follow the directions, your visa may expire before the end of the year which means you'd have to go to a different country to get your visa taken care of. I personally didn't have a problem with my visa but I did know a few students who had to fly to a different country around Taiwan to get their visas taken care of. The other important thing orientation went over was class registration. The orientation leaders explained how registration was a 2 week process and it works almost the same way as UW except instead of registering instantly, you have to wait a day in order to see receive your results. After

registering for your classes before the cutoff time, the system would then do its best to fit every student into their classes and you would see the results the next day. Then depending on the classes you received, you could add/drop classes during the current day's registration period and see the results the next day. However, some classes require an add code which means you have to attend the first day of class. I would highly recommend emailing the professor beforehand informing them you'd like to join their class because sometimes, a class will be full even before the first day of class. This happened to me with the Finance classes and was extremely frustrating because the classes were already full before I even had a chance to register for any classes.

Section 2 (Academics)

The classes at National Taiwan University are quite different from UW. For one, while classes at UW are generally 50 minutes, 80 minutes, or 110 minutes, most of the classes at NTU are 3 hours long and the shortest classes are 2 hours long. Although class meets only once or twice a week, I found it hard to focus during the last hour and a half or so during the three hour classes and part of this may have been because I thought 2 hour long classes at UW were long. As for the facilities, I do not believe they were any worse than UW as both schools have old and new buildings/classrooms. The new buildings had nice classrooms while the old buildings had classrooms like the ones in Denny or Condon at UW.

One thing I have found however is that students do not respect professors as much as students do here at UW. When I say this, I mean to say the students generally pay less attention to the professors and are often on their cell phones and laptops and surprisingly enough sometimes have side conversations with their neighbors. Of course this occurs at UW also but I believe it is slightly worse at NTU than UW. This is not to say that all students are like that however, many students are quite studious also but there is also a great number of the latter.

The Professors that do teach in English do a sufficient job at it as most of them have studied in the US so their English is easy to understandable and proficient. The professors are also very amiable and if you ever have questions about the material, they are very personable and especially so to exchange students as exchange students are new to the school and country. Grades are fairly straight forward as finals and midterms weigh more than group presentations and homework and if you ever have any problems with your grades, you can always discuss the issue with the professor also.

Some courses I would recommend are the Exploring Taiwan classes, the Chinese classes, and also the physical education classes. The Exploring Taiwan classes are great for exchange students because you get to learn about the Island of Taiwan such as the people, the culture, the ecology, etc. Sometimes you even get to go on Field Trips too so it's catered more towards exchange students. As for the Chinese courses, these are a great option as you get to learn the language spoken in Taiwan (both reading and writing) and because only exchange students take these classes, it's a great way to meet people around the world. Finally, the physical education classes are a great way to learn a new sport for free (as you are paying tuition already) and is also a good way to meet local students. These classes are mainly taught in Chinese but this isn't a problem as everybody in Taiwan has grown up learning English in school. In fact, they'll likely be more than happy to speak English with you.

Section 3 (Housing)

Unlike most exchange students, I ended up living in an apartment next to Taipei City Hall. I technically could have stayed in the dorms like most exchange students but seeing how my parents/grandparents already owned an apartment in Taipei, I did not think it was worth it for me to pay for the dorms. However, if you do not have that option like I did, I would recommend living in the dorms. The good thing about the dorms is that they have more pros than cons when compared with the dorms at UW. Like the dorms at UW, staying in them makes it easier to meet people and it is convenient too because you are close to campus. As for the cost, it is much cheaper than the dorms at UW and you even get your own single room. Monthly rent is only 7100 nt (\$236.67) not including utilities so it is extremely cheap compared to UW and you get your own personal bathroom and single room. I have been to some dorms before and although they are not as nice as the new dorms at UW, they are much better than the old Mercer or Lander dorms.

Section 4 (Program/Exchange Site)

The campus itself is relatively big compared to other universities in Taiwan however it is still slightly smaller than UW. Also, because the space in Taiwan is quite limited, the buildings are more bunched together so without the big open areas like UW, it is easy to get lost. The sports/athletic facilities are generally all located in the middle of campus and include tennis courts, basketball courts, outdoor track, outdoor volleyball, etc. There is also a sports center somewhat like the IMA but unlike UW, you need to pay to use it (you can choose daily monthly 6 months etc). The sports facilities here however are not as good as UW's so do not expect it to be as nice as the IMA or sports fields at UW.

In addition, I would recommend getting a bike as it is quite hot in Taiwan and I would not recommend walking all day out in the heat. Also, most people do have bikes so if you find yourself without one, traveling around campus with friends may be a slightly inconvenient.

As for the surrounding area around campus, everything is even much more tightly packed than in campus. Every building is packed next to the other and there are many small streets as there are no spaces for big streets. However, you should be able to find anything you'd ever want or need as a college students. There is an abundance of places to eat such as restaurants, café's or even convenient stores. Also, there are many outlets for clothes and all the major brands of Taiwan are there in addition to the sports brands such as Nike and adidas etc. Even electronics stores, stationary stores, bars, movie rental stores, book stores, etc are all located by campus.

Section 5 (Health and Safety)

When I was in Taiwan, I had no issues with health or safety and even while walking around outside at 1 or 2 am, I had no issues. As for health, I have only been to the hospital once for a health checkup and the dentist for a teeth cleaning (much cheaper than in the US) and both times I have felt the quality of the medical facilities were good. If you ever get sick however, there is a place on campus similar to hall health which is located right next to the main library. I have personally never needed to go there but some of my friends have visited before and they didn't have any bad comments about it.

Section 6 (Cultural Aspects)

Strangely enough, I found it slightly difficult to meet members of the community because I was already Taiwanese (or Taiwanese American). While I can speak Chinese fluently with little to no accent, I am still quite limited as my level of Chinese is probably the equivalent of a 4th grader in Taiwan (probably 2nd grader for reading and writing). This combined with the fact that I already looked Taiwanese gave people the impression that I was strange as whenever I had to buy food, I could only read 2 or 3 of the characters from the different foods and as a result I would get funny looks or they'd roll their eyes. Surprisingly, when I pretended like I didn't know Chinese and only used English to buy food, all of a sudden the people became much nicer and friendlier and keener on having a conversation as compared to if I had used my "somewhat" broken Chinese. If you are a foreigner in Taiwan, the people will love you and it is actually quite interesting as some of my Caucasian exchange students had no trouble finding language partners. I remember one funny story was how one of Caucasian friends (also an

exchange student from the US) went into Starbucks to order a drink and just by ordering a drink, the barista gave him her number so they could be language partners.

One way I did meet people however was by playing tennis at the school. By hitting with people on the tennis courts, I was able to meet some people from the team and was also able to hit with them. In addition, I joined the tennis club and although at first I wasn't able to join during the 1st semester, (I had class during the meeting/signup time) I got to know some people from the club while hitting at the courts. Then by the time 2nd semester came up, I already knew most of the officers and was on good terms with them so they let me join 2nd semester. Because their tennis club was mostly for beginners, I actually helped out with the teaching/coaching and through that I was able to meet more local students. The tennis club went on a couple tournaments and then during the summer, a group of us went down to the southern tip of Taiwan (Kenting) for a short 4 day trip. I thought this was a great way to meet local students and improve my Chinese because while I did enjoy going out with other exchange students, I felt like it was important to get to know some local students too.

One cultural aspect I found amusing was how a lot of people viewed Americans. Some of the local students in Taiwan believe in the stereotypical American/college student which in their view included drinking, partying, and being promiscuous. From what they told me, all their information came from the media such as movies. Naturally I explained that college in the US obviously does have its fair share of crazy stories but that it was still overly exaggerated in the media.

Section 7 (Financial)

Because my parents are from Taiwan, they have bank accounts there so they just made me an account that was linked to their account and through this, I didn't have to worry about transferring any money. I do know some exchange students however that used Citibank because they had a Citibank account in the US so that is one method that can be used.

The amount of money you need per month can vary depending on your activities. If you plan on doing more activities with the local students, you can expect to spend a lot less whereas if you plan on doing more activities with exchange students, you can expect to spend a lot more. A typical meal in Taiwan on average is about \$3.33 and breakfast is even less at about \$1-2. The more expensive places are \$8-15 per meal and includes a variety of places such as all you can eat bbq/sukiyaki/hot pot. And then if you go one step higher, you're looking at \$30 per meal at the gourmet dining level. If you hang

out mostly with local students, you'll tend to eat more at the cheaper places. If you hang out more with groups of exchange students you will tend to spend more as exchange students eat at expensive places much more often than local students. The living cost in Taiwan is lower than the living cost in the US and because of this exchange students can afford to eat at the \$8-15 areas. At UW your average meal is roughly \$8-10 so if you have the same monthly budget in Taiwan as you do while at UW, you can easily afford to eat at the higher end places. However, this is not to say the \$3 areas are bad in any way as they are the equivalent of a typical meal on the AVE. In many cases, I actually think they're better than many places on the AVE.

Other costs to factor in also include things such as transportation and rent. Because I lived in an apartment owned by my family, I didn't have to worry about rent but if you dorm, the monthly rent is 7100 nt (\$236.67) a month and you get your own room. That figure however does not include the electricity or air conditioning though so it'll be slightly higher.

I personally hung out more with local students than exchange students and my budget was roughly \$700-800 per month. Because I lived in my family's apartment, I didn't have to worry about rent so my entire budget went to my living costs. My living costs included things such as transportation, food, occasional shopping, traveling, and also my tennis equipment. Transportation was roughly \$1-3 a day because I took the bus to school and if I ever went to other places with people we'd travel by MRT. As for tennis, I spent about \$20 a week and for food, I mainly ate at the \$3 dollar places and would occasionally go to the more expensive places with exchange students every once in a while. As for shopping, it was mainly just clothes and Chinese music albums and I would shop maybe once or twice a month. All of this gave me room to travel around Taiwan to visit my family so \$800 a month was more than enough.

Section 8 (Program/Exchange Administration)

I went on this exchange program through the IP&E and I had no problems. The process of applying and preparing for the exchange program was very straightforward and I had no issues.

Section 9 (Program/Student Type)

I would recommend this program to any student who is interested in learning or improving their Chinese and also to any student who would like to explore an entirely different country. All of Taiwan speaks Mandarin Chinese so this is a great way to live in a country that speaks mainly Mandarin. Also,

because the people of Taiwan are extremely friendly and welcoming to people from abroad, this is really a great place to live if you are a foreigner. Taiwan is also extremely well known for their food and with their lower living cost, Taiwan is a great option to anybody from abroad.

Section 10 (Overall Experience)

Living and studying in Taiwan for a whole year has truly been an amazing experience for me. There are so many great things about Taiwan such as the extremely welcoming people, the food, the public transportation systems, and also the culture. Even though I am Taiwanese American and have been to Taiwan numerous times before in the past, it was still a huge culture shock for me because visiting for a week or two is extremely different from living there for a whole year. Even though I knew what to expect from the environment of Taiwan, it still took some time getting used to seeing it every day. Waking up to the hustle and bustle of the city, walking along the tight streets, getting used to the convenience of food being everywhere and so cheap, etc.

As for my expectations academically, I find it hard to say but I'd say I was slightly disappointed. National Taiwan University is the most prestigious University in Taiwan and yet after going to UW for 2 years, I would have to say UW is still better in terms of facilities, professors, classes, etc. It's probably unfair of me to say this as UW is ranked higher internationally than NTU but because I have attended UW for 2 years already, it's hard for me to say otherwise.

Although NTU may not live up to UW academically, I still believe NTU is an excellent choice for a study abroad program. Just having the experience of studying in a different country and meeting the best and brightest minds in a different country far outweighs the academic difference between NTU and UW. Studying abroad allows you to network on a whole different level than at UW and at the same time, gives you a view of many different cultures. Not just the culture of Taiwan, but also the cultures of other students from other countries all around the world. It was amazing just meeting students of other nationalities and I really had a great time speaking with them and sharing views and experiences. In addition, being Taiwanese American really made me want to learn about my culture and to grow myself as a person with 2 different cultures and being in Taiwan for a year has truly allowed me to do so.