

Exchange experience report National Taiwan University, Autumn 2019

Study Programme

When I went to Taiwan, I was just starting my third year as an LLB student in International and European Law. Due to my programme, I was required to only take law or law-related courses and ended up taking eight courses in total, four of which were intensive courses. The course selection was smaller than I expected, which meant that there was not much room to choose. Most of the intensive courses I took, such as AI & Robot Law or Health, Policy and Law, were very interesting and doable, while some could stretch over several weeks with a lot of assignments. With some exceptions, I would say that most courses were interesting. Only a few, such as Law of the WTO or Investment Law Arbitration, were less engaging.

The level of difficulty was not as high than in Groningen; however, throughout the semester there were a lot of assignments which made the amount of work almost equal. The ways of examination consisted primarily of open-book or take-home exams and sometimes just essays.

Language

The spoken English in Taiwan is surprisingly good! Young Taiwanese people are basically fluent whereas older Taiwanese will still understand some or will at least try to communicate and help. Most Taiwanese are a little shy initially but are most of the time happy to talk to you and interested in your story. Most street signs and public announcements on trains and metros are also in English, which makes life in Taiwan very easy. Overall, it is easy to get along without speaking Mandarin.

Finance and Other Conditions

There are quite a lot of initial costs which I did not anticipate, including medical bills, visa fees etc. Apart from that, however, life in Taiwan is relatively cheap. The rent for the student dorms is quite low and basically covered by the Marco Polo Grant. On top of that, food is very cheap as well, with meals ranging from 1,50€-4,00€. Keep in mind, though, that cooking is way more expensive and just not really a thing in Taiwan. It is way more common, and definitely cheaper, to go out for food with every meal.

Furthermore, public transportation is quite cheap as well, and there is also the possibility of just buying a bike or renting a U-bike for a few hours with your student-ID. Thus, traveling in and around Taipei with public transportation is convenient and will not cost you much.

Preparation and Contacts with the Faculty Before, During and After the Stay

There was a lot of preparation before coming to Taiwan, including vaccinations, doctor's appointments and a lot of paperwork. The international office at NTU was usually helpful and replied timely. Still, the preparation for the visa and the enrollment was quite stressful.

It was very nice that every exchange student was assigned a buddy that would help with basically anything. I had a very nice buddy, who picked me up from the airport and always answered questions I had. This made me feel very welcome from the start. We also had introductory events and got a tour of the campus, which was very necessary since the campus is massive! On top of that, the law faculty organized a few events to get to know people and involve exchange students.

One area with a lot of room for improvement is the course registration phase because it was unnecessarily chaotic. After the first registration phase, I only got registered for two courses, which was way too little in order to satisfy the credit requirements. Almost everyone else was in the same situation and not much information and guidance were provided, which meant that everyone was panicking. In the end, everything worked out and we all registered for enough courses. However, it was still very stressful and cumbersome.

Culture

Taiwan has an amazing and very interesting culture, partly due to its unique political situation in regards to China. Taiwanese are very liberal and open people, and there are definitely interesting subcultures to explore in Taipei. At the same time, it is a very collectivist society in which people are always helpful and polite.

Food is also a very big part of Taiwanese culture and there is a lot to try, such as stinky Tofu and of course bubble tea. Personally, I was not the biggest fan of the cuisine, but you get used to it and it is nice to go out for food so regularly and enjoy eating with your friends.

Free Time

I felt like I had not as much free time as I would have liked. However, I think this has to do with taking law courses as most of my other friends, who studied something else, had very easy-going classes and a lot of free time. Attendance is most of the time mandatory, which means that skipping classes too often is not really an option. At any time of the semester, there was at least a presentation to prepare or an essay to be written, which made it feel like it was always busy.

Nevertheless, I still found time to travel and explore the country, so it is not too bad.

Travelling

Travelling was really a big thing among the international students, involving a lot of weekend trips to different countries. Taipei is not far from many major cities, which means that it is all of the sudden possible to fly to Hong Kong for a longer weekend. At the same time, Taiwan is a beautiful country and there is so much to explore for way cheaper. There are beautiful hiking trails just outside of Taipei and bullet trains will take you to the very South of Taiwan in no time. Overall, there is plenty of opportunity to travel no matter the budget.

Other

I really enjoyed my stay in Taipei and would not change a thing. Nevertheless, this exchange was definitely not as chill as I would have liked it to be and at times the workload was quite high.

Therefore, I would definitely recommend going to Taiwan. Just be aware that it will not be the most relaxing exchange (if you study law)!