

I. Life at National Taiwan University (NTU)

If you are reading this exchange report, you're hopefully making a first step towards what will surely be an outstanding exchange semester. Although moving to Asia requires a certain willingness to leave your comfort zone, I found Taiwan to be the most livable and beautiful country that I've ever been to. Taiwanese people are particularly kind and warm to foreigners, and you'll find that many people really appreciate the fact that you chose to come to Taiwan. Compared to other Asian countries I've visited, Taiwan has a very liberal and developed society, and with its mix of Chinese and Japanese influences you are in for a unique Asian experience.

NTU, like Groningen, is a top-100 ranked university and is highly regarded in all of Asia. Its campus is also one of the most beautiful campuses I've ever visited. The buildings are a mix of modern and old Japanese-era colonial architectural styles, and the campus ground itself is practically a rainforest in terms of the abundance and variety of plants, trees, and animals that it hosts.

A. Preparation and Communication with NTU

After being selected by the RuG to study in Taiwan, there is a further application procedure with NTU, which is handled by the Office of International Affairs (OIA). This is a straightforward procedure where you need to upload basic documents, and the staff at OIA are usually quick and helpful if you need to email any questions to them. For European students, the specific advisor / contact person is Ms Charlotte Chou.

As for your visa to Taiwan, most nationals from EU states have (renewable) 90-day visa-free travel to Taiwan. However, you will need to apply for a 180 day visitor visa at your local 'Taipei Representative Office' (due to its unique diplomatic position, Taiwan does not have embassies like normal other states, however, these offices *de facto* function as embassies). There are offices in most European capitals, including the Hague. It is really important to note that Taiwan only allows you to apply for your visa within the 30 days prior to your first entry into the country (i.e. if you travel to Taiwan on August 31st, you can only apply on August 1st at the earliest). Considering visas often take about a week or more to process, there is therefore only a short window about when you can actually apply and obtain your visa. Although some students get away with just the visa-exempt stamps, the official requirement if you are studying in Taiwan is to have a visitor visa lasting for 180 days. I'd therefore strongly recommend the multiple entry visitor visa, which will allow you to come and go from Taiwan as you please throughout your whole semester. I mention all this because there was some confusion among my group of exchange students last year, with some saying that simply renewing a visa-free entry stamp was sufficient. I opted for the single entry visa at first (because it was less expensive than a multiple entry) and then figured I could get a visa-exempt stamp at the airport after

each of my trips abroad. However, a border guard told me that this is not allowed and that they would be becoming more strict about this in the future with exchange students. All this advice is based off my year, and as these things change it is best to consult with NTU or your local Taipei Representative Office on what the visa situation is for your semester.

I would advise you to book flights as soon as you know that you are going to Taiwan, as the earlier you book the more likely your flights will cost between €500-600. As regards to vaccinations, you should of course consult your doctor, however, Taiwan is a very developed country with no malaria risk at the time of writing, therefore, most vaccinations are not strictly necessary. However, you should consider the countries you may wish to travel to, as places such as Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia have a higher risk for diseases.

B. Academic Life at NTU

Overall, the academic level at NTU is less intensive than what you would normally expect at the RuG. This is partly because Taiwan has a semester rather than block structure, meaning most of your assignments and exams will come at the end of the semester. Courses themselves are taught at a decent level, however, the assessments are quite straightforward and are easier to attain higher grades in when compared with the RuG. As a law student, you will likely not have any midterm exams either (unlike every other faculty!). The (autumn/winter) semester officially begun in first week of September and will end on January 15th. The first week of the the semester is quite easy going, with only orientations and welcoming activities, and you can expect exams to run through the first and second weeks of January (my last exam was on January 9th). This information might help you plan your flights to and from Taiwan. I should also note that if you choose to study at NTU, you may have class on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve (as I did!).

Course selection was certainly the most stressful and frustrating aspect of studying in Taiwan. There was a very poor choice of courses available in English for my year, and a lot of competition to get into the courses which were available. As a result, I had no choice in my course selection and was forced follow the only courses I could manage to get and which I would not have otherwise selected. Due to the lack of credits, I also needed to follow mainly master-level courses. Though, from being in both bachelor and master courses at NTU, the difficulty level between either level is not very significant.

In terms of the academic quality of the courses, generally the level is quite good, however, considering some courses are taught by visiting professors from the likes of the University of Melbourne, Harvard, and Pennsylvania State, some courses are much better than others. It's wise to keep in mind that the law courses in English which will be visible on the Course Information System (tiny.cc/ncacjz) are courses which were offered in the *previous* semester and thus may not necessarily be available in the semester you choose to study in. This is especially the case with courses given by visiting professors — I therefore suggest

to look at the name of the instructor offering the course, Google this person and you can see if they are academics from NTU or another university. If they are indeed from a foreign university, it is likely that course will not be offered in your semester. Generally speaking though, the Investment & Arbitration law, Law of Torts and WTO Law courses are offered every semester by Taiwanese professors. I followed these three courses, as well as International Commercial Arbitration, Public Health Law, Common Law of Trusts, and Insolvency Law which were all offered by visiting professors. For the 5 ECTS allowed to be spent on non-law courses, I chose the Nonprofit Organisation and Management seminar given by Professor Helen Liu. If you have any interest in working in a nonprofit or NGO at some point in your life I strongly urge you to consider taking this course — it was one of the most well-taught, interesting and enjoyable courses I've ever taken at university, and Professor Liu is an especially outstanding lecturer.

II. Cost of Living

Generally speaking, Taiwan is cheaper than western Europe, however, as you are living in Taipei (which is more wealthy than the rest of Taiwan) in many cases you may even find yourself spending similar amounts as than what you normally spend in Groningen.

A. Housing

Housing is provided on an almost guaranteed basis to exchange students if you apply on time through OIA's procedures (they'll give you plenty of heads-up and detail about this during the application process). I stayed at Shui Yuan dorms in Gongguan (a young, vibrant shopping district with a lot of great restaurants) which was a 5 minute walk from the university. There's three room options available: a single room with a personal bathroom and a shared kitchen, a single room with personal bathroom but no kitchen, and a shared room with one other person (share the bathroom, no kitchen). There are a very limited amount of students who actually get a room with a shared kitchen, and from what I understood from them, they hardly use the kitchen anyway. This is the same for privately rented apartments in Taipei, where a kitchen is usually a rare amenity to have.

The dorms themselves are quite strict and are quite far away from what students might expect from an exchange/Erasmus dorm. Parties/drinking are not allowed, you may have guests over but only until 11pm (they also have to sign in with their IDs at reception), and staff are generally quite rigid about enforcing these and other rules. Despite some of the dorm's drawbacks, the cheap rent (I paid €240 p/m for a single room with no bathroom), the convenient location, and the ability to easily make a lot of friends there is such that I think it is a better option than private accommodation.

B. Food

One thing you'll quickly notice about Taipei is that everyone eats out — in fact, as mentioned, finding an apartment with a stove/kitchen in Taipei is quite rare! If you choose to stay at the dorms, there is one or two hot plate stoves that is shared amongst about 700 students — but you'll rarely see anyone cooking with it though, and that's because of the night markets that Taiwan is so famous for. Gongguan night market is closest to the dorms and university (3-4 mins walking) and has a decent selection of food, but there are also many other (better) night markets scattered throughout the city. The cheapest place to eat in the city, however, is on campus. Here, you can get a huge amount of good quality food from the different buffets and restaurants for an average of €2. They're open for breakfast, lunch and dinner every school day and are the best value for money in the city. If you choose to eat breakfast outside of the campus, you'll likely find run into one of the small, family-run breakfast restaurants which are ubiquitous in Taipei. I'd certainly recommend you try a 'damping' or scallion pancake with egg while you're there— these are a cheap and tasty way to start the day.

C. Getting Around

Taipei, and Taiwan more generally, has excellent transport infrastructure — it's efficient and quite cheap. The metro is the best way to get around the city; it's always on time and a journey across the entire city (say 30-40 mins) would cost you about €1.30. Buses are also convenient, however, you need to have a good bus map (as most of the bus stop sign information will be in Mandarin). Youbike is Taipei's city bike rental system (similar to the likes in other European cities) and is suitable for getting short distances if you don't have a bike with you. While they've just introduced the Youbike 2.0 system, which means there are even more docking ports and bikes all over the city, it's always going to be more convenient and cost-effective to acquire your own bike at the beginning of the semester. Even if you're only staying in Taipei for one semester, it's certainly worth it; second hand bikes through the university or on Facebook buy & sell pages go for about €20-€30. In Taiwan, all public transport is paid for and used through EasyCard. EasyCard is similar to London's Oyster card system, and will work in all public transport but also for many other purchases, including for groceries in supermarkets or convenience stores for example. When you are issued your student ID, this ID functions as an EasyCard too (it is also a student version of an EasyCard, meaning you get discounted travel in the metro etc.). In terms of getting between cities in Taiwan, there is generally 3 types of trains - the slow 'stop train' (which stops almost everywhere), the moderately quick 'fast train', and the very fast high speed rail (the HSR only goes north-south along the eastern seaboard). Going from Taipei to Kaohsiung (the most southern city in Taiwan) takes about 1.5 hours on the high speed rail, where as it could be 7-8 hours on the slow stop train (however, prices vary according to the speed at which trains travel).

IV. Free Time & Travelling

Taiwan is very well located for taking flights to many other parts of Asia. If you plan a few weeks in advance, you can generally get return flights from Taipei to the likes of the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Hong Kong etc for +/- €100. Although university is rather busy towards the end of the semester, the class schedule and intensity in between is quite relaxed compared to Groningen, so it's possible to travel around without falling behind university work between the months of September to December.

Although there are many foreign destinations at your doorstep, you'll undoubtedly find plenty to do in Taiwan itself. The weather in Taiwan is usually very hot for the month of August and September (+30°C most of the time), October has the nicest weather with temperatures in the mid-high twenties, November is slightly colder, and December and January are the coldest months. That being said, it never went below 17°C during my whole time in Taiwan.

Despite being a small island, Taiwan has a lot of diversity in its nature and cultural attractions. Museums in Taipei are a good way to spend a rainy weekend and are usually free (or the equivalent of €1) for a student, there's a huge variety and the National Palace Museum has some of China's most important artefacts dating back millennia. Hiking was certainly my favourite activity to do when the weather was nice, and the northern portion of Taiwan has some of the best trails in the country. Most are just a 20-40 minute metro or a bus ride away from the dorms — you will be amazed by how quickly you can leave a bustling city of 8 million people and find yourself completely alone in a rich jungle environment. Taiwan also boasts some incredible national parks in the centre and eastern portion of the island, in addition to marine reserves where you can snorkel around coral reefs — these are a must visit!

V. Final Remarks

It may sound clichéd, but leaving Europe and studying in a completely new environment like Asia gave me a lot of perspective about what I hope to do later in my career and life. All in all, choosing to study in Taiwan was one of the best life decisions I've ever taken — my only regret is that I only chose to stay one semester!