

Hello everyone! 大家好!

My name is Leire Uriarte and I live in a small town named Pamplona, which is located in the north of Spain. I'm studying at University Public of Navarre, located in the same city I live. I am an engineering student and I was offered to be part of the exchange program the last semester of my master. Of course, I accept it.

Everyone asked me why I had chosen Taiwan. The election of this country was by chance, other classmate had chosen European countries and therefore I was assign with an Asian country. At first I was quite nervous about coming to such a different country but after spending here 6 months I can affirm that it has been a great experience.

I still remember when I said to my parents that I was going to come to Taiwan. My mom's answer was "Are you sure you want to go so far?" It was very difficult to explain to my grandma where this country was and me myself I wasn't able to locate Taiwan in the map and I didn't know that it was an island! So when in January 2015 told me I was going to spend here 5 months I started studying things about the country.

By the time I had realized that I was going to go to a country so far from home (10,000 km!) it was the date of our departure. Together with my friend Juan, who was also coming to Taiwan, we left Pamplona in February 8<sup>th</sup>. It was a cold morning. We took the train to Madrid and from there, the plane to Taipei. Before arriving to Taipei we changed the plane in Istanbul.

We arrive to Taipei the 9<sup>th</sup> February at night. We had already booked two beds at the Eight Elephants Hostel, near the NTU in the east of Taipei. The next day we went to Tainan to spend some days in the most ancient city of the country. In this city we tasted meatballs, rice cake (for breakfast!) and fish soup among other weird food. We are really grateful to our guests for so warm welcoming to the country.

Some days later we moved to Hualien and we spent a week living in a hostel near the train station before moving to National Dong Hwa. During that week we walk a lot around Hualien City: we went across the river and we visit Pine Garden, we got lost in Meilunshanshengtai Park and we visited the Martyr's shrine. We also took a bus to Liyu Lake and we went to Qixintan Beach to enjoy a sunny day. While we were sunbathing in Spain was snowing so were really glad to be in this country!

The 19<sup>th</sup> February we moved to National Dong Hwa University. We took a taxi (500NTD) in the train station that left us in the dorms. I remember that day as a chaotic day, I felt totally

disoriented and without bike it was impossible to move around the campus. Hopefully, next day we got our bikes and we started investigating the area of the University.

The first Sunday in the university we went to Baibao River with our new Hindu friend Rao. It is one of the most beautiful scenic areas in the surroundings of the campus. It was a great day but when I went home I realized I was full of mosquito bites! Since then, I have got used to it. If you don't wear long sleeves and long trousers they will bite you, no matter how much repellent have you put on your body.

Even if I was supposed to do my Master's Final Work during my stay in the university, I took some courses. Even if in my hometown I was studying engineering, I decided to choose courses from Business Administration department because they were related to my studies. I chose Strategic Marketing Channel Management, Human Resource Management and Chinese. The course about Marketing is given by Professor Sophia Wang. She is a great teacher! She makes us quizzes each week which is a way to study every week and be more relax when the final exam arrives.

In Human Resources class we are all international students and that is great! You can find people from many different countries: Gambia, Mongolia, Vietnam, China, France and Poland. The teacher, Kerri Chen, is really nice and she takes care of her students. One day, after class she took us to Liyu Lake to watch fireflies. It was an amazing evening! Last week, after the final exam, we went to Holiday KTV to celebrate we have finished and we had a lot of fun.

Chinese course has been the most difficult for me. Before coming to Dong Hwa I hardly knew how to say hello in Chinese. Now I'm able to recognize a lot of characters and even some words in a dialogue. *Lao shi*, is a very good teacher and he explains everything in a very clear English. Almost weekly we have homework to do, but I totally recommend doing it. If no, it will be more difficult when facing the exam. He also suggested doing a class-trip but I wasn't able to join it. However, I know they had a lot of fun.

During Eastern Holidays (at the end of March), my family and my friend Xabi came to visit me. It was awesome spending with them some days. I went to pick them to Taoyuan International Airport and we spend several days in Taipei. In those days we visited Chiang Kai-Shek memorial and we watched the "changing of the guard". It was incredible how coordinate were they! We also went to the Taipei 101 area and we observed the sunset from Elephant Mountain. It has one of the most amazing views of the whole city. As our hostel was near Shilin night market we went there several days. I think it is one of the best places to go shopping in Taiwan.

As tourist life is quite hard, after a tired day we took a relaxing bath in Beitou's hot springs. I really recommend going to these hot springs in the evening.

From Taipei we moved to Hualien and of course, we went to Taroko National Park. It is said that you haven't been in Taiwan if you haven't visit this park. It's an incredible place. I have gone several times since that first time and it still removes my breathing. Eternal Spring Shrine, Swallow Grotto, Shakadang Trail, Zhuilu Old Road... Everything in this area is impressive. Taking a scooter and going to Taroko is one of the best plans for a sunny weekend!

Around Dong Hwa University there are more places to visit. We went to hunt clams near in Lichuan Fisheries, near Promise Land Resort, within a trip organized by the English Tourism studies. It rained but we enjoyed the day! We have also been in the beach near Fanglory Ocean Park and we have swum in the river. There are a lot of things to do in this area!

We went to Kaoshiung to celebrate Dragon Boat Festival. During that day (9<sup>th</sup> June) there are races in the river and it is really exciting. Before leaving we are planning to go to Kenting to relax some days before starting the trip back home.

If you are looking for party, I believe this is not the right place. However, there is a pub in Hualien called *The River* where they play good music and drinks are quite cheap. Besides, you can always go to a KTV and drinks some beers while you sing a great hit. If you want to party like we do in Europe you should go to Taipei or Kaoshiung. In Kaoshiung there is a club called Brickyard. We went there during our stay in the city and it was great. On Wednesday is Ladies Night and therefore, girls have free drinks. If you show you're student ID you will have free entrance.

The best party in Taiwan you will find it in Taipei. Wave and Myst Club are incredible places. Although the entrance is quite expensive (around 700NTD, it is usually cheaper for girls) it worth it. Nothing can compare to be dancing while you can watch the 101 so close to you.

During these stay I have met people from all over the world: Swaziland, Gambia, Tuvalu, Indonesia, Russia, Chekia, USA... It has been one of the best experiences I have never had. That is why I would like to thank Public University of Navarre for giving me opportunity to be a part of this amazing experience studying abroad and for their financial support. And I would like thank National Dong Hwa University for everything they have done for me. Thanks a lot!

There are a lot of signals all over the country with the next motto: "Taiwan, touch your heart". And after my experience I can confirm it, TAIWAN TOUCHES YOUR HEART. I'll come back! 再見!