

## **MY EXPERIENCE AS EXCHANGE STUDENT IN NATIONAL DONG HWA UNIVERSITY, TAIWAN.**

Around September 2 of 2016, I arrived in Hualien City, Taiwan. My final destination: National Dong Hwa University (NDHU), which is located in the nearby small town of Zhixue. Then I did not know it, but I was about to start one of the best semesters of life.

My name is Sergi Feliu, I'm 21 years old and I'm from Barcelona, Spain. I'm studying a Marketing and Business bachelor's degree in Escola Universitària Mediterrani, Barcelona.

I have always been fascinated in learning foreign languages. The first language that I learned is English, and when I started my degree in Barcelona I started to learn Mandarin Chinese because it was included as a mandatory language in the degree's program of the university.

After studying three years of Chinese Mandarin, in third course the university offered me the opportunity to take the first semester of fourth year in Taiwan. They just signed an exchange agreement with a university there and our promotion would be the first one to can take this opportunity.

Before making my final decision to come to Taiwan I also considered to go to another place. But after gathering more information and think about it a lot, I chose Taiwan. I thought that an opportunity like this, an opportunity to study what you like in a completely different culture in the other side of the world, not everyone has it, and I would regret in a future if I didn't take it. So, I accepted the place. And there I was, on September 2, 2016, ready to start my new adventure.

From the very first time interacting with Taiwanese people, I already felt the friendliness of the Taiwanese. I think this is one of the things I will miss the most: people. For example, when I was asking for direction in the Taipei Main Station they even walked me to the direction I wanted to go since they knew I was a foreigner and did not really understand Chinese that much. The Taiwanese are

not only friendly but also very polite. They are always willing to help you, even if you do not ask for it. If they see you lost do not hesitate to come and ask if everything is right, and they help you in everything they can. It's really amazing the mentality they have here ... I've learned a lot from them. I did not use to say "thank you" as often as I do now and I learned it from the Taiwanese people.

Another good thing that I learned here is to give my seat to elderlies, kids, pregnant women and disabled people (if they are not on the wheelchair) when I am in public transport. I was moved when I saw a young Taiwanese stood up and let an elderly to take her place on a bus. People here have a lot of respect for these things. Preferred seats on public transport are always empty, and people queue in the subway to wait their turn. If they see that there are many people just do not go up and wait for the next one. From these two interesting facts, I think I could understand why foreigners love living in Taiwan.

One of the things that also surprises you the first time you leave the airport is the weather. In summer, it is very hot and very humid. But in winter this becomes a positive thing because temperatures do not usually fall below 18 degrees. You can go short-sleeved in December. It's fantastic! However, in Taiwan it rains a lot, especially in winter so the umbrella and raincoat are two things you can never forget, unless you want to go back dripping to your bedroom. At first it may seem annoying, but you get used to it. You cannot ask to live in a paradise surrounded by vegetation without a cost.

As I explained at the beginning, the university is located in the small town of Zhixue, 20 minutes from Hualien City. The inhabitants of Zhixue are sweet, friendly, and warm-hearted. It's like a big family. Everyone knows each other. There are few older people who speak English there, so sign language becomes your routine when you go to eat in a restaurant or to buy at the supermarket. The situation is very funny! Not knowing what you are ordering to eat is a fantastic opportunity to try new dishes. And the Google translator will become your best friend during the stay.

My first culture shock took place when I arrived at the NDHU old dormitory. I sat comfortably waiting for “my mattress” for my bed. My roommate asked “Are you not going to unpack?” and I replied yes but I am waiting for my mattress. He suddenly looked at me and said “there is no mattress, this is the bed”. I had to go and buy a kind of mattress in the supermarket, no thicker than 20 cm. I thought it would be really hard to sleep 4 months there but surprisingly in the end you get used to it and it is no so uncomfortable as it seems.

And the university...wow! National Dong Hwa University (NDHU) is very beautiful and spacious, and has many facilities and departments, including art, environment, management, marine, etc. Not only local Taiwanese students are interested in studying on this campus, but there are also many foreign students as well. There are currently students from China, India, Indonesia, France, Czech Republic, South Africa... You get to meet wonderful people from all over the world.

My second shock which still grips me is the fact that Taiwanese do not greet people when they meet each other, especially in the room. In my country, if I see you and do not greet you, it means you have offended me and I am keeping grudge against you. My roommates will just enter the room and sit down without a word to me. It was very strange to me at the beginning.

I was thinking whether to live in the residence or out of the campus, but I finally decided to try living in the residence. The rooms are for 4 people, very basic and a bit old, but for 4 months is fine. My experience sharing room with 4 Chinese has been highly recommended. I have been able to integrate more and I have been able to know more about this fantastic culture. In addition, the fact to live in the campus is very comfortable because you are less than 10 minutes from everywhere. Most of the local and foreign students prefer to live in a dormitory at NDHU for all these reasons, as well as being the cheapest option.

The bicycle is something necessary to be able to study in this university. I bought it the first day I arrived. Almost all campus destinations can be reached in around 10 or 15 minutes. In addition, most of the other students as well as the professors

do not use cars or motorbikes. As a result, the air quality is very clean and fresh. The feeling of cycling surrounded by nature every day of the week is something incredible and that is appreciated, although at first it can make you a bit of laziness.

The lecturers at NDHU are all very friendly and they care deeply about their students. They are also disciplined, hard working, and dedicated to both the local and foreign students. Initially, I felt that there was too much to learn in too little time. But I quickly adjusted to the pace and I am thoroughly enjoying my experiences here. At the beginning of the course, I was very reluctant to see students sleeping in class since this in Spain is unthinkable. It is very funny to watch students snore while the teachers are giving the lessons.

You have the opportunity to take free Chinese courses but I finally decided to do a language exchange with a girl from China. The reason was that the classes are traditional Chinese and I had been studying 3 years of simplified Chinese. So, I decided that I would prefer to organize a "course" for me. I taught her Spanish and she taught me Chinese. The experience has been fantastic and I highly recommend it.

In conclusion, I would like to say that studying in Taiwan has given me invaluable life experiences. I have not only studied Chinese language and Taiwanese culture but also the Taiwanese courtesy and virtue. I have met wonderful people from all over the world and I have had the opportunity to meet different cultures in first person. I would definitely recommend this experience 100%. Taiwan is a spectacular country, with wonderful people, amazing food, and incredible places, where nature and the big city melt into one. I could not have been more comfortable. I will miss many things here. Thank you NDHU for this opportunity.

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