

1500 word report about the stay at NDHU

by Vladimir Tichy

My name is Vladimir Tichy. I live in a small border town Náchod in the Czech Republic. I am studying at the University of Hradec Králové. I am glad that I could be the part of the exchange program at Dong Hwa University.

I got a lot of questions about why I had chosen to go to Taiwan. I am going to write down some main reasons. My university has exchange programs with many European countries. But there are only two countries in Asia we could study in as exchange students - Taiwan and Thailand (Thailand exchange program is new from 2015 and is offered only in winter semester). So Taiwan was the most exotic place I could go to. And I also heard only good things from former exchange students.

Second reason is that Taiwan has comparable prices to my country; something is even cheaper, so the living costs are not so high as in many European countries. I am also quite experienced at searching for cheap flights so even the flight ticket was not that much expensive.

Third reason is traveling. I like traveling and I think I would not be able to visit Asia without the financial help of my university. This was a chance to visit not only Taiwan, but some other countries on the way there or during the stay.

I wanted to meet people from other countries with different culture and a distinct way of thinking. Czech culture and Taiwanese culture are very different and I think it is very important to see the world from a different point of view. I think that living in another country is a must try in this age.

The reason for choosing Dong Hwa from all the options I had in Taiwan (National Dong Hwa University, Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages, National Sun Yat-Sen University, Chang Jung Christian University, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Kao Yuan University, Soochow University) is actually very simple. Dong Hwa was the most budget friendly university of all as the dormitory is free for exchange students from our university. I like sports too and the big campus with lots of sport grounds sounded pleasant to my ears. There is also a great amount of roads suitable for cycling, activity that I enjoy very much. And the environment in which it is located is absolutely gorgeous. Plus, Taroko Gorge is probably the most extraordinary thing I have seen in my life.

As I had the money from the scholarship I could spend three fabulous weeks in Malaysia and Thailand with my girlfriend before finally arriving to Taiwan. These three weeks were great and my first time in South East Asia. Paradise one could say.

After a day long stopover in Macau I arrived to Taiwan on February 17. It was a nice cool change from scorching hot grounds of Kuala Lumpur where temperature was as high as 32 degrees. I spent one night at the main station and continued my journey to the final destination, Hualien. I had to book the train in advance, something that is very unusual in Europe. Also, the railways online system and the booking procedure is for foreigner nothing short of a hell.

In Hualien, everything was ready for the arrival of exchange students. Kind volunteers had noticed me immediately and put me on a bus to Dong Hwa. I was the only passenger. That is the moment where I started to feel a bit worried about the presence (or absence) of other exchange students. In the end, there were only three exchange students from Europe which I naturally became the best friends with.

The arrival at Dong Hwa was horrible. I was assigned a room with three other undergraduate students in the old dormitory. The room was filthy way beyond my worst expectations. And I usually do not care much about the environment as I like to spend whole weeks in the nature. Luckily, and thanks to my best friend Ian, I was able to change the room on the second try. The rest of my stay I stayed in the new dormitory for undergraduates with just one roommate who was a good guy. He even started talking to me after few weeks and his spoken English got so much better. The room itself was clean and I finally stopped regretting coming to Taiwan.

I have to mention the big helping hand that I was given by my volunteers (especially Penny Lin). They helped me a lot in the beginning and we became good friends. At one time, we even visited Penny and her friend in Taipei where they showed us around and invited us to dinner with Penny's family.

Studying at Dong Hwa involves a lot of moving around as the campus is huge. So from the very beginning I was in a high need for a bicycle. I did not want the offered old bikes because I wanted to use the bike outside of the campus too. I wanted to do an island-round trip. So I bought a great road bike online for just 7000 NT thinking that I will sell it afterwards.

At least three courses were required by my university. And according to NDHU, at least one of the courses had to be from my department and one had to be Chinese course. I chose these courses – English for Business from my department, Fundamental Chinese and English Learning and Popular Culture.

I also wanted to try some sports, but according to the experience from the former exchange students from our university it is very hard to sign up for them. So I decided not to sign up for any and try to do some sports on my own instead. I ended playing badminton and tennis with my friend. There is also a soccer team FC NDHU that is open to everyone but the trainings were more organized than I hoped allowing us to play only one hour out of three at maximum.

Let me share some opinions about the selected courses. English for Business was a fairly easy and enjoyable class in spite of three hour long lessons. I can not say a bad word about the teacher Reyna Lee who tried to make every class interesting. There were practically no exams, just presentations and filming a video advertisement. Also, absence of homeworks helped me to focus on my main objective in Taiwan and that was traveling.

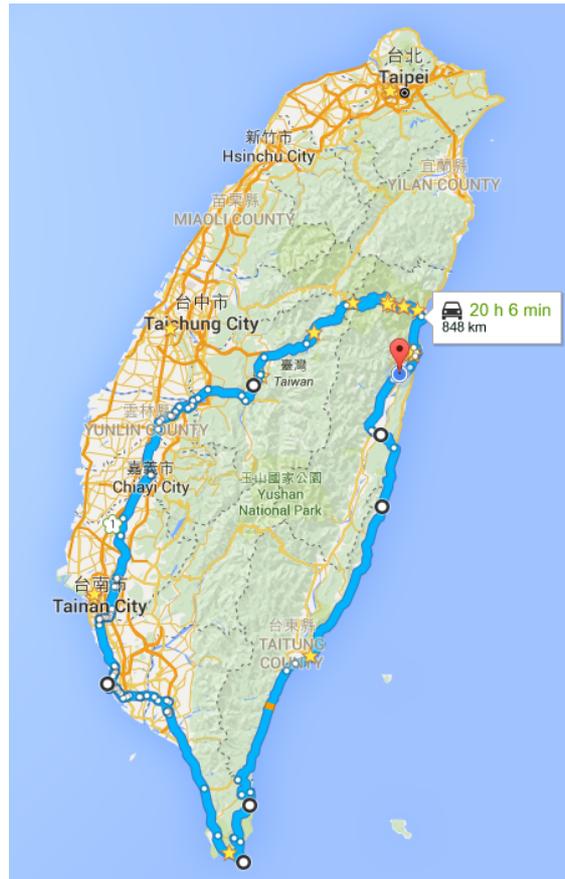
Fundamental Chinese was a good course for students wanting to pick up basics of Chinese Language. The level was high and the speed of going through new material was quite fast. I felt discriminated as my first language is nothing similar to Chinese, thus learning characters, pronunciation, etc is very difficult for me. But I was not alone in this situation. The speaking part of the final exam was very difficult according to almost everyone. If I was really devoted to learn Chinese, I would appreciate this class even more.

Last but not least, English Learning and Popular Culture was a relaxing afternoon class that gave me some understanding of the old rock music scene in the US and Canada. I enjoyed attending the lessons. If only some of the students were better presenters as half of the lesson was always dedicated to students giving presentations about their favorites songs. In the other half, James was going very thoroughly through every discussed song's lyrics, maybe even too slowly.

As I already mentioned, I like traveling. I have participated in one school trip to the Taroko National Park. The trip was very organized and I can not say that I enjoyed it much apart from the provided lunch. We did not see much of Taroko during that trip. I had to fix that on my own by visiting the Taroko National Park later three more times. Taroko Gorge is spectacular and I feel that no words can describe it. I applied for a permit (actually 2 permits) to go on the Old Zhuilu Trail, that was fantastic.

I had to do one "visa-run" because the visa exempt for EU citizens is only 90 days. I went to Okinawa, Japan. I enjoyed the trip so much that I will come back to Japan as soon as possible.

But the main highlight of the whole semester was the bicycle trip that I managed to do in 10 days. Going all the way to Kaoshiung and then taking the Cross Central Highway, sleeping without a tent on the way, being bitten by various insects and most importantly being close to the nature and the local people. This was the moment where I felt truly alive.



The best thing about Taiwan is the spectacular nature closely followed by the kindest people in the world. And I am so glad that I was able to enjoy both to the fullest.

I would like to thank my beloved University of Hradec Králové for giving me the opportunity to study in this beautiful country and for their financial support. And I would like thank National Dong Hwa University for everything you have done for me.