

In the Czech Republic

Because our university in the Czech Republic offers a lot of exchange programs I was very excited to choose one that is outside Europe. I have already been to Switzerland and I wanted to try something different. We could choose from 7 universities within Taiwan and I chose National Dong Hwa University because of the opportunity to live in the campus and because of the nature that is in Hualien County. I am not a fan of big cities and therefore NDHU was the choice number 1.

In Taiwan

Before coming to Taiwan, me and my 3 classmates, we spent 2 weeks in Thailand that was a nice beginning of the adventure in Asia. When we arrived to Taipei, we were a bit disappointed because it was around 9°C and it was raining. We were not ready for such weather but we hoped that it would be better in other months.

After 3 days in Taipei we finally arrived to Hualien (by train) where there were 2 students (Su and Una) who helped us with school shuttle bus, our dormitory and other administration stuff. I really appreciate their help because without them we would be lost. All 4 of us, we had our helpers who were interested in our stay in Taiwan and who applied for exchange program in the Czech Republic for next year. We could share with them our culture and prepare them for leaving their home country.

School and courses

In National Dong Hwa University I took 5 courses. My university required 3 courses plus if we wanted some physical education classes. Therefore I chose 3 regular courses as Fundamental Chinese, Introduction of Taiwan, Language and Culture in English Movies and 2 sports – Badminton and Table Tennis.

Fundamental Chinese

This class wasn't proposed for the first time and we were asking for it. Finally we were lucky because school found us a teacher and enough students to open this course. Our teacher Yee was very nice, friendly and good teacher of Chinese language. She always tried to make Chinese easier and understandable for us. I am glad that I could learn some phrases, Chinese characters and Chinese songs but I do not think that 1 class per week is enough for studying

such difficult language. Additionally, this class was held very late from 18h to 21h and this was not good time for paying attention.

Introduction of Taiwan

This course was led by Dr. Lu that is very nice teacher with a lot of international experience. He had an assistant Susi who was from Indonesia and who helped us with our problems. We were divided into groups and within our group we were practicing drumming, tai ji and mazurka dance. In this course we could also practice our presentation skills and we could share our cultures. Almost at the end of this course we went to Shoufong Junior High School where we performed what we had learned in this class. It was very interesting event for me because I became a celebrity for a few minutes.

Language and Culture in English Movies

This course was the number one for me at school. Our teacher (James Callow) was from England and he was really knowledgeable about this topic. We were watching some movies and then discussing them from different aspects - plot, characters, themes and style. At the end of this course I realized that I was watching movies but without watching details and without thinking about themes and lights or music. Also I had never liked black and white movies but James showed me some of them and I changed my mind. I am very glad that I took this course because it was very beneficial for me.

Physical education – Badminton and Table Tennis

I really loved these classes especially because of the teacher Vincent Chu who is very nice person, very funny, friendly and can speak English. Every class he supported us and made some fun. At the beginning we learned basics and some history of these sports, then we played with each other and finally we had a small competition among groups. Vincent was very good influencer and at the end of the semester he convinced me to participate in swimming competition that turned out as amazing idea. If anybody wants to take a PE class I have to highly recommend this teacher.

Campus life

I lived in Dormitory number 2 that was for bachelor students and it meant that I had to live with other 3 girls. It was not a problem to share a room with other students but they did not

speak with each other. There were 2 Taiwanese girls, 1 girl from China and me and we were there in silence. Sometimes it was fine but sometimes I felt like they are afraid of me. But it turned out that they cannot speak English. I think that for next years it should be changed that exchange students should live with students who can speak English.

At the beginning of the semester we got a card for entering our dormitory with a key from our rooms. We also had to buy mattresses, blankets and pillows because school did not provide it for us. What was different from previous years was the possibility to get a bicycle from school. This year, we had to buy it by ourselves. It was not such a big deal because in the campus there are 3 places where we could buy the bicycles. But be careful and lock your bike because once I did not do it and I had to seek my bike around the campus. Somebody just borrowed it from me.

If I take into account dormitory radio, I was disappointed because everything they were speaking only in Chinese language. Once when we had to attend one out of two drills I heard them speaking in English. Because my roommates were speaking only in Chinese language I could not ask them to translate it for me. Also when there was an earthquake (my first earthquake) I was in my room alone and the radio was speaking only in Chinese and I did not know if they are saying something important or not.

What was very difficult for me was the humidity what is very high here. I am not used to it and my entire stay I was sweating. Sometimes I also had a problem with my blood pressure that is very low and when there is a high humidity it is a bad combination. If I take into account my room I was very lucky because in my room there was a fan and therefore there was no mold. On the other hand, my classmates from my country had mold in their rooms and they had to deal with it, sometimes they had to throw away their stuff. I could dry my clothes in my room and nothing happened.

Concerning food, we were eating in restaurants in Zhixue Street that is next to our campus. We were lucky because almost all the restaurants that we liked had English menu and therefore we could chose properly. Some restaurants they didn't have any English menu but every time there was somebody who could translate the menu for us or we just used Google translator.

Position of the campus is very nice because there are mountains and lakes. The environment is very natural and I felt here like in some fairy tale village. I was also enjoying the school

equipment as swimming pool – outdoor and indoor, gym, running oval, bicycles, and possibility to borrow tennis rackets and so on.

Concerning international students, in the first month I thought there were only Chinese students and we - 4 people from the Czech Republic. Later I met a few students from different countries but I was still confused about it. But because we lived in the old dormitories we could not meet the international students because the majority of them were living in the new dormitories. It was a pity. Sometimes OIA invited us to some international event but it was not so often. In my country there are meetings with international students every week and I think it is better for knowing each other and for making friends.

Travel

Because we wanted to travel a lot within Taiwan, we decided to rent a scooter but nobody wanted to rent it to us in Hualien therefore we went to Kaohsiung where there lived our friend from our country and we rent the scooter there. We could easily explore Hualien County but also Kenting, Green Island, Kaohsiung, Taroko and Yilan.

Taiwan has also very good position for traveling abroad and that is why we visited Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore and Bali. If we would visit these countries from Europe it would be very far and expensive but from here it was very close and cheap. Also because we did not have so many courses we had a lot of free time for ourselves, it means for doing sport, for traveling abroad or within Taiwan, for making friends and so on.

Conclusion

I am very glad that I could live and study in the National Dong Hwa University. I could explore some Asian countries, learn basics of Chinese language, meet people from different cultures, and improve my English.

I will highly recommend the National Dong Hwa University for next year because I think that the nature, mountains, lakes and calm environment are very good elements for relaxing and cleaning our thoughts.