Exchange Report – From Canada to Taiwan

I am an education student, and I decided to go on exchange to National Taiwan University for the fall term of 2015. There are two semesters each year in NTU, and each semester is five months long. Overall it was an exciting and fun experience; I got to meet a lot of people and travelled to a lot of places in Taiwan. I recommend everyone to take the general Chinese courses offered by NTU, because you will definitely improve in Chinese and have lots fun with your classmates in them.

Preparation for exchange

I would recommend packing light, because you can buy everything you need for cheap in the convenient stores in Taiwan. If you chose to live in the Prince dorms, you would be able to buy your pillow, blanket, and beddings at the seven eleven store next to the dorm. They only sale them in the first week of September so make sure you don’t miss it. If you are going for the fall semester, you might want to bring clothing suitable for hot humid days and a raincoat as it rains a lot during winter.

The price list from the seven eleven beside Prince dorm.
Cost of living

The cost of living in Taiwan is quite low, a lunch box costs around 70 TWD at school, which is around 3 Canadian dollars. NTU students get student discounts in some restaurants near the campus, so make sure you carry your student ID around when eating out. Most stores do accept credit and debit card payments, but cash is preferred by smaller shops. The monthly rent for prince dorm is 7400 TWD, which is around 300 Canadian dollars a month. You would have to pay for your own electricity, and it costs 500 NT each time you recharge your electricity card. If you would like to save on electricity, you can unplug the fridge when you are not using it. The air conditioner in the room uses the most electricity, if you can deal with the heat, but it is very useful for hot summer days because it can also function as a humidifier to prevent mold from growing in your room.

Transportation

I have been to Taiwan before my exchange, so I already have a basic idea of where to travel in Taiwan. The transportation system in Taiwan is super convenient; you will be able to get to different places within Taipei through the MRT (Taipei’s transit system) and the bus. The student ID that NTU provides serves as an easy card as well, which will give you access to public transportation with a student discount. To use the easy card, you would first have to deposit 100NT into the card and recharge when needed. Money could be transferred to the card through the machines inside of MRT stations and in convenient stories such as 7-11 and family mart. Money would be deducted each time you tap the card on the sensor machines. In the MRT stations, you would have to tap in and tap out every time you go through the gates in the station. Buses work differently, some buses require you to pay when you get on while some asks you to pay when you get off. However, on longer bus rides, the signs might change during the ride. In that case, you might have to tap both on and off.

During Exchange

Orientation

If you would like a tour around the school, you can sign up for the orientation online when you apply for the exchange. Based on your own language ability you can either join the Chinese speaking or English speaker tour groups. During the tour you would be shown around the school, attend an orientation presentation on tips on course selections and introduction to clubs and activities around the campus, and receive a complementary set of
NTU eating utensils, a snack box, a map, and an information booklet. At the end of the tour, you can either go pay for your internet usage fee (this is mandatory) or explore around the campus with your group leaders.

Places to visit

If you like hiking, I would recommend the elephant mountain, because it has one of the best views of the Taipei 101 Tower. If you would like to travel outside of Taipei, you can take the Taiwan high speed rail (Gao Tie). They do have an early bird and student discount, so make sure you do your research early. If you don’t know where to visit or don’t have anyone to travel with, you can take a look at the bulletin board in the dorm lobby to sign up for free trips.

The MRT station to Xin Bei Tou; famous for its natural hot springs.
Experience with courses

I took a total of 5 courses in NTU, in a total of 11 credits. I took 2 exploring Taiwan courses, which are designed for exchange and international students, a general Chinese course, a course about Taiwanese films, and one on teaching young children English. All the courses I took, except for the general Chinese course, are taught in English. Therefore, I did not have any problems with the assignments. I only had four days of school, and most of my classes are early in the morning, so I still had a lot of free time to go explore around Taiwan. Depending on the number of students enrolled in your classes, you would be attending classes in either the big lecture halls or the regular size classrooms. The grading system is different for each professor, so it is best to read over the syllabus of the class on the course selection system online before you select your courses.

Food

There are many restaurants around the NTU campus and near the ShuiYuan dorms, so there is no need to worry about where to find food. There are many types of cuisines around the area, including Thai, Korean, Japanese, and many Western styled foods as well. There are also a couple of vegetarian places with serve a number of good tasting foods. In Taiwan, it is very common for customers to buy bian dang (food to go). Customers can either pick their own choice of food (might be self-served) and pay according to the weight of food, or purchase a box set which usually includes rice, the main dish, vegetables, and
some side dishes. Something to keep in mind is that there is a one dollar charge for eating utensils in the campus, so it would be handy to keep a set of reusable utensils with you.

![The entrance to the Raohe St. Night Market.](image)

**After Exchange**

My trip to Taiwan was definitely an experience that I would remember for a life time. As an exchange student, I got to meet a lot of local students and learn about their language and culture. I also became more independent and more willing explore outside my comfort zone to try new things and interact with different people. I did feel lonely sometimes, but that is also what got me to make new friends and travel to new places together. Lastly, a tip that I would like to give is to only buy what you can carry back home. Remember that only two bags of luggage are allowed per passenger on the plane, so make sure you plan beforehand!