

National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan.

Exchange: Semester Two 2016

BA Chinese

I have just recently completed my exchange at the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) in Taipei, Taiwan. With this exchange, I have also completed my Bachelor of Arts Degree, majoring in Chinese.

1, Accommodation:

For my exchange, I decided to live in the campus dormitories. It is an attractive option as university accommodation is free for a semester. However, you must pay for the electricity bill that is split with your roommates every two months, which was about 250 TWD (\$13 NZ). The furnishings are brand new and modern. In each room, you will have a bunk bed, a desk, a desk light, a wardrobe and an air-conditioner. By living in the dorm, you can make friends easily with other exchange students, as there are two to three people stationed in each room.

The dorms are located at the Gongguan Campus of NTNU. Your classes are held on a different campus, but it is very easy to get there from the Gongguan Campus because there is a bus stop nearby, only a 2-minute walk from the campus. The dorms are also convenient because there are "Seven Eleven" convenience stores, two canteens and a school shop nearby.

For other accommodation options, you can choose to rent a room or to rent an apartment. NTNU provide a great list of options to choose from. I would strongly recommend this option if you prefer living alone or have a specific lifestyle in mind.



My room in the dorms of NTNU

2. Classes at National Taiwan Normal University

I decided to do three classes at National Taiwan Normal University.

Chinese Language (Pronunciation)

This class was held for two hours on Tuesday for once a week. It was useful because it helped me to hear the teacher talk with the 'Taiwanese accent' and aided me to improve my tones! This class was also taught entirely in Chinese and attended by a lot of foreign students. At the beginning of the semester, I couldn't understand anything, but as the semester progressed, I could comprehend a lot more than I used to. I recommend this course if one cannot find a good course that is suitable for one's linguistic level.

The coursework was not too heavy. Every week, I had to do a recording of myself, saying a passage. I also had a mid-term exam, which involved speaking in front of the class, and reading out a passage in Chinese. For the final exam, I had to read out loud a speech that I had created.

Cultural Class (Traditional Chinese Culture)

This class was taught for two hours a week and was taught in English. This course was particularly interesting; I had the opportunity to learn about important philosophies, such as Confucius and Taoism, Chinese myths and the book of I-Ching. I also liked how the course incorporated 'practical' elements; for example, we spent a whole hour doing calligraphy and learned to do Taiqi outdoor with a real expert!

However, do not be fooled! The workload was rather heavy. You have to keep in top of all your readings and attend every class. Fortnightly, we had a five-minute quiz and we had to do a presentation on Chinese culture. We also had two major mid-term and final exams, which incorporates testing your knowledge about Chinese Culture and essay writing.

Cultural Class (Discovering Taiwan)

This class was held for two hours once a week and was taught in English. In this course, there were many exchange students, as it was designed for exchange students. The course was a great introduction to the Taiwanese culture; it gave me the opportunity to learn about the Taiwanese language, the Japanese colonial period of Taiwan, entertainment and food!

The highlight of the classes was two field trips: the first was a trip to National Taiwan University and the Aboriginal Centre. The second was a visit to the National 2.28 Memorial Museum. The workload was fine as there was a great emphasis on participation; you get the opportunity to learn about different cultures and at the end of the year, we had a chance to make a group presentation and to produce a term paper.

Mandarin Training Centre

I decided to do two classes at the Mandarin Training Centre. These classes do not lead to any credits, but it was worthwhile!

Mandarin Training Centre (Group)

This class is held twice a week for three hours. The type of class you will be placed in will differ depending on your linguistic abilities. The class sizes are small (no more than 10 students) and this course is free for the first semester for exchange students!

I strongly recommend taking this class because you have the chance to work seriously on your listening and your speaking skills. I also learnt to read traditional characters, which I could not do previously. I had a fantastic teacher who would let each student speak a lot in the class all the time. If we made mistakes, she would always correct us and tell us what was wrong. We also had dictation on the vocabulary and sentences twice a week and would do homework from our homework books. Even better.... She never taught us in English!!!

Mandarin Training Centre- Individual One to One

This was the best class that I took during my semester overseas! This class is not free but it was worth it. Depending on the number of classes you wish to take, the price and time will vary. In this class, you can also choose the content you wish to learn, so you can proceed through the content at a faster pace.

This class was held twice a week for two hours. I had one-to one lessons with the teacher and we went through the content together, speaking and listening in Chinese all the time. The only drawbacks to these lessons may be that these start very early in the morning (8:10 a.m.) and you will receive a lot of homework; however, your Chinese will improve dramatically! At the beginning of the classes, I could hardly understand and had to resort to English, but at the end of the class, I could speak completely in Chinese and understand my teacher. So, I could feel that my Chinese has improved immensely!

Note: Make sure you are on time for your payment. For example, if you want to do one month classes for October, you have to pay at the last week of September. If you miss the deadline, you cannot have your private lessons!



NTNU Campus



Mandarin Training Centre

3. Taipei Food

The food in Taipei is excellent. There are so many varieties of food that you can try including Taiwanese, Japanese, Thai and Western cuisines. Apart from eating at cafes or department stores, having a meal is very cheap as you can find delicious meals between \$100 to \$150 TW (5-7 NZ\$).

Campus Food on Gonguan Campus Dorms

Western Gonguan Campus Shop: Located in Dorm 7, this small restaurant supplies delicious omelettes for breakfast. Although I do not recommend their risottos, I strongly recommend that you try their pastas, especially the White Sauce Chicken Pasta.

Taiwanese Food Campus Shop: Located in Dorm 7, this is a small buffet restaurant which has a range of Taiwanese food. You can choose from a huge range of food and price is determined by the weight of the food.



Breakfasts:

Anonymous Breakfast Shop: I am not sure about this shop's name but it is only a 5-minute walk from the dorms at NTNU. They serve cheap traditional Chinese breakfasts, which you can eat there or take away. My favourite food they have been danbing, which is a crepe wrapped around meat, cheese and egg and mantoudan (special Chinese bread with egg inside).

Summery Bakery: This is a favourite place of mine, which is in the main food court area near Shida Campus 2. They have a range of delicious breads at reasonable prices and you can buy some tasty coffees and teas. If you are having a social occasion, I recommend that you buy the taro cake.



Quick Lunches:

W.E Kaffe: This is a great place to have delicious Hong-Kong style meals, which is at the main food court area near Shida Campus 2. They have very good meat and rice dishes, such as roasted pork and barbecue duck on rice.

Italian Restaurant: This restaurant is right next to W.E Kaffe on Shida Campus 2 and serves Taiwanese Western-influenced pizzas. If you show your student card, you can get discounts and have a special meal no more than 100TWD.



Dinners:

Yong Kang Street: This is located at Dongmen station and its full of gorgeous cafes, cute little local stores, and some cute restaurants. They also have delicious mango shaved ice cream at Ice Monster Shop and delicious beef noodles.

Taiwanese Dumpling Shop: Located opposite Shida Campus 2 and near to the banks, this place is the place to go. Their pot-sticker and steamed dumplings are often sought after and their black sesame noodles dish is to die for!



Night Markets:

Gonguan Market: This market is only open at night and they have various shops, where they have a range of Taiwanese food and drinks. This is a great place to go because it is near to the university dorms.

Shilin Night Market: This market is very famous and opens at night. This place gets very lively and crowded. I would strongly recommend going with a Taiwanese friend, because they can recommend you some great Taiwanese food options to try.

Cafes:

Mr Brown Coffee: This is located in Taipower Building. This café is known for its delicious coffees and for its fantastic range of teas. They also serve breakfast, brunch, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and dessert. This also is a fantastic café to study, to practice your Chinese in or just hang out with friends. My favourite coffee to have there is the green tea latte.

Ribanyso Café: This café is located in Ximending and is very special because it has traditional Japanese décor with tatami mats and is a fantastic place to try Taiwanese oolong tea. I also recommend that you try a plate of Taiwanese desserts.



Department Store Restaurants

Taipei City Hall Department Store: Here, they have a great American restaurant called Friday, which makes excellent ribs, pastas and pizzas and has a wonderful Hong Kong Style sit down bar, where their stuffed buns and Singapore fried noodles are stunning!



4. Travelling in Taipei

Within the exchange, there wasn't so much opportunities to travel around Taiwan. However, at the weekends and after my semester ended at NTNU, I took up the chance to travel as much as possible.

Places to visit in Taipei

Xinyi District: This is the commercial place in Taipei and is the most popular place to go shopping. There are many department stores, which you can visit such as Taipei City Hall Department Store, Breeze Centre and the Bella Vista. In this district, you can also visit Taipei 101, which is the tallest building in Taipei, where you can have a beautiful view of the city. I also recommend that you watch a movie at Vieshow Cinemas and visit the 24 hour Eslite Bookstore.



Ximending District: This is known as the student area in Taipei and this is a great place to buy things with cheap prices and has a range of restaurants to eat at. It is also a great place to get electronics and to have a pedicure at the spa at affordable prices. The Red House is a great place to visit.

Zhongshan District: This district is a great place to go shopping and I strongly recommend that you visit the Mistskoshi Department Store. They have beautiful clothing shops, gorgeous cafes and great restaurants. You must try a famous restaurant called Din Tai Fung, which is on the ground floor of the restaurant and try xiaolongbao! Another area of interest to go to is the Good Tea Taiwan tea shop. This is a fantastic place to buy tea because the teas are all very great quality and you can experience a traditional Taiwanese tea ceremony.



South of Taipei: I strongly recommend that you visit Taipei Zoo, where you can see varieties of animals from the giant panda, zebras to penguins. For a day trip, I also strongly recommend that you visit Maokong, where you can take a gondola and observe the fantastic scenery. Once there, there is a market, where you can try a variety of Taiwanese food and you can try authentic Taiwanese tea at a tea house.

Places to visit outside Taipei

For travelling outside of Taipei, I recommend that you visit the cities that can be reached easily by taking the MRT in Taipei.

Tanshui: This is just outside Taipei in a city called New Taipei City. In this small coastal town, you can go to the market and buy its fantastic seafood and try their famous desserts, such as Taoyuan. You can also do activities such as shooting balloons to get a prize and you can take pictures with a moving 'statue' guy. I also recommend that you take a boat to the other side of the river and that you rent bikes, where you can look at the beautiful view of the river.

Xinbeitou: This is a fantastic place to go to because you can see the restoration of Japanese houses in the colonial times and is the prime stop to try the famous hot springs. You can visit places such as the plum gardens, the Beitou Hot Spring Museum, the Ketagalan Culture Centre and the Beitou Garden Spa.

However, if you are looking to have day trips that are a huge distance from Taipei, I also strongly recommend that you go on an International Cultural Trip with NTNU students. You will be notified by email and make sure that you sign up quickly, because there are very few spaces available. This was amazing because I had the opportunity to visit places outside Taipei, such as Taizhong and the beautiful Sun Moon Lake! You also can have the opportunity to try Hakka-Style food and can go to a unique Taiwanese garden.



Conclusion

My semester at NTNU has been a success and I thoroughly enjoyed this exchange. My Chinese has improved immensely and I am very pleased with the results!