

My Experience at Taiwan

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As I was studying during my medical training, I became interested in the field of Public Health and was intrigued to learn more about the differences in health services and surveillance systems that different countries have to offer.

Honduras, my home country, is located in Central America next to Guatemala and Nicaragua. All of them are Spanish-speaking countries and are very similar in terms of culture and traditions. For this reason, I decided to expand my horizons and understanding by pursuing further studies outside my home country in order to better understand how these health systems work and gain new insight to how different the diseases are in the rest of the world. If I stayed back home, I felt that I would be limited to learn only what is in front of me and not able to develop more critical thinking. Furthermore, I was looking forward to go to a country that was not culturally similar to mine as I was looking into the opportunity to explore new cultures and languages that have never seen.

While I was searching for various options to study abroad I came across Taiwan. Honduras has a very good relationship with the Taiwanese government and I had heard that many Hondurans that have studied in Taiwan were very satisfied

and enjoyed their stay. In addition, I have never been to Asia and would love to learn to speak another language such as Mandarin that currently is gaining importance in the world and I was interested in its Universal Health Insurance system that provides medical services to the population as in my country there is no such thing.

I became very interested to study in Taiwan so when I heard the Taiwanese Government was offering the possibility to study abroad I decided to approach the Taiwanese Embassy in Honduras. There, I found out information about the



▲ Visit to Chinese Medicine Research Institute



▲ Doing my own rice cake at OIA activity center

Ph.D. degree in International Health provided by this university through the ICDF Scholarship Program. I began researching about Yang-Ming University to get a better idea of the program and found out that the university is among the best medical universities in Taiwan and has a very good reputation. What is more, their International Health Program was directed mostly to foreigners as all the courses are all in English, but they still offer Chinese lessons for those who are interested in learning the language.

Coming to Taiwan was definitely a lovely experience. I was scared of going to an entirely new place completely different from everything I was used to. In the beginning, I naturally felt the cultural shock as Taiwan was very different to my home country in every sense: they used a different language, different foods, different traditions, etc. It was hard moving around and ordering food when you cannot understand the signs nor menus and you do not know how to ask questions. However, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Taiwanese are generally very friendly and polite toward foreigners. They are always willing to help you even if they cannot speak your language and I have never felt unwelcome in Taiwan. People are very friendly and like to ask you who you are and about your country and I never had an instance where they were rude to me. One of the things I love about Taipei, in particular, is how



▲ Visit to NTU with Yang-Ming University student volunteers

easy it is to move around the city. The MRT system is very clean, reliable and easy to use. For the places the MRT cannot reach, you can get there by bus or a taxi which is not very expensive. If you feel like walking or you feel like looking around you can always rent an Ubike as a cheap and convenient alternative to move around.

On the other hand, something that really surprised me was the vast number of motorcycles driving down the roads



▲ Pagoda at Taroko Gorge, Hualien



▲ Visit to Jingzaijiao Salt Fields in Tainan

and how most drivers tend to drive very fast and on some occasions drive recklessly. I do not think I would like to drive in Taiwan very much, but as I can see there is no need to do so. Taiwan is very safe, no matter how late at night it is can always see youngsters hanging around and seniors walking their dogs with no care in the world. Back at home, I used to drive all the time so having the chance to walk and bike around in a safe environment is certainly a nice opportunity. I also had the chance to use the High-Speed Rail since I have never done it before as my country does not have one. In less than 3 hours you can already be at the south of Taiwan. Another thing I discovered is that in Taiwan you will never go hungry. Taiwan has a very varied gastronomy and the food is both cheap and delicious. I love to eat at the stands of the night markets that are always selling delicious dishes especially seafood. There are also many restaurants that sell Thailand, Korean, Vietnamese, Italian food among other cuisines so you will always have something to eat without ever getting bored. If it is still not enough you can always find a 7-11 or a Family Mart to get something to eat as there is one in every street you pass by. So you can shop for food even at 2:00 am. Different parts of Taiwan also say cuisine so one can appreciate the cuisine differences. However, no matter what I do not like stinky tofu nor pig blood cake. Even though Taiwan is a small country, it is very rich in

culture. It also has a lot of religion diversity which allowed me to learn of them. There are dozens of wonderful sightseeing places and you will never get bored. If you like mountains you can go to Yang-Ming-Shan, if you want to go to the beach you can go to Fulong, or want to visit traditional places you can go to Jiufen or throw a lantern at Pingxi.

You can go to Maokong Gondola and visit Tea houses and visit the Taipei Zoo which was very lovely. My favorite part of the zoo was to see the Pandas! Besides Taipei, you can visit other cities like Tainan or Kaohsiung that are both modern and filled with wonderful places to visit. You can even see snow if you go to Hehuan Mountain.

Even though they still celebrate Christmas and New Year they usually do not have holidays unlike the western hemisphere so imagine my surprise that in my first year I has exams on Christmas Day. Back home that day is usually a holiday and I do not remember ever having class or work on that day.

On the other hand I got to experience Chinese New Year. During that time everywhere gets very festive and people are very busy. It is enjoyable but if you are a foreigner you tend to starve on Chinese New Year because all businesses are close so you have to buy food beforehand. I enjoyed the red



▲ Lanterns during Chinese New Year

envelope tradition and on some occasions even received one. I like this university a lot. It has a very nice campus and nice buildings. It is an honor the Professor Liang who invented the GEE (Generalized Estimating Equations) a renowned method used in biostatistics was our President. In my program, we have very good teachers. They are always worried about their student and try to make sure we International Students are adapting well. The program assistants are always there to help us out if we are having problems or when we do not understand Chinese instructions. They are very friendly and ready to help us at any time even if it is after hours.

My Ph.D. Advisor is also very kind. He has a lot of patience towards me and is always willing to help me regardless what the problem or time it is. I have never done laboratory work until I came here and my professor helped me get trained at the Taiwan CDC in order to prepare for my research. Coming to Taiwan and being at Yang-Ming has been a wonderful experience. I have the chance to meet people from all over the world and get to know their traditions and customs that I would never have the opportunity to do back home.

In summary, Taiwan is a wonderful country to come to study. It is full of history, culture and its citizens are all very polite



▲ Visit to Taiwan Centers for Disease Control

and friendly. There are so many places to see and travel and to move around is very convenient and safe. National Yang-Ming University is a university with great prestige both in Taiwan and around the world. I am very grateful and have great pride that I came to study at this university as I have the chance to meet wonderful people and enjoyed many experiences. I would definitely recommend other students to come to Taiwan and to come to this university and tell them that there is no need to worry about the language and culture as it is not as shocking as expected. ▬

▼ Dinner at former President Liang's Home

