



Home away from Home

By Kesilyn Thea Lizama

My name is Kesilyn Thea Lizama. I was born and raised in Belize City, Belize Central America. Growing up in a sporting family that was very familiar with the ballpark, volleyball court or track field I found much of my grounding in these areas. As I got older and found interests of my own and eventually, I would stumble upon the Scout Movement and it was there that I first discovered giving service to my community and began my growth towards Nursing and continued service to the communities around me.

"Think globally but act locally", this idea is central to the international leadership movement in scouting. In recent years, it has come to shape my outlook on how I approach life. The balancing of these two perspectives has helped me in my professional life as well as my personal endeavors, constantly shaping my growth. As I present to you some insight into my life and my time here in Taiwan, I think it is important to point out that I am nurse and a scout. Though I may act in different capacities in these roles, both complement the other by creating a supportive environment that allows me to flourish. Perhaps of the two, scouting has most provided me with that global perspective, and this has encouraged in me the sense of duty I feel to my own



▲ Morning hike to Battleship Rock with friends (right 1)

country.

Nursing is how I have decided to be of service, and I take great pride in my choice. As I continue to further my education here in Taiwan in the International Health Program, it is exactly that of thinking globally and acting locally. It is taking lessons from outside of Belize in order contribute to a better healthcare system within Belize. The search for higher education is often filled with much anxiety and uncertainty as we weigh whether or choices will be the right one. The decision to apply to NYMU and Taiwan-ICDF was no different, fast forward one year later I am glad that my decisions have given me one of the most rewarding years.

Taiwan was not my first choice, but I am satisfied, and content that it was my final choice. I felt at home at NYMU even before arriving in Taiwan as all the correspondences were always warm and welcoming and arriving on campus only helped to increase those feelings. I can honestly say that I am beyond grateful for the staff at the IHP Department and OIA. There is no shortage of assistance and everyone is just an email or message away.



▲ Orientation IHP 2018



▲ Jota-Joti Scouting Event in Taipei

Off-campus the warm welcoming was no different, many local Taiwanese were willing to help give directions, read menus, and even recommended many of their favorite spots. Though the stares were something to get used to, I took it as an opportunity to smile and share some that Belizean greeting that I had been taught to share with the world. I quickly fell in love with the hills and scenery from NYMU, though eventually I would make promises with myself to exercise more often so I can take on the challenge of climbing them daily. The diversity of my Masters class was surely exciting to see and made me feel much at home as it was a melting pot of different cultures and academic backgrounds. I felt secured in knowing that my choices had led to a place where I would be challenged and supported.

In the first few weeks of school I marveled at the wealth of knowledge that my colleagues and professors shared and felt greatly inspired to think of many projects that would be beneficial in my little Belize. Perhaps of great importance was the spirit of the International Health Program that seemed to bounce along the walls of the Department. Everyone interacted asking frequently about the progress of the classes and course content, I always knew that if I had a question or two (or even three) I would be able to steal away a few minutes of work time from the senior students. The course contents are rigorous and sometimes fast paced but most certainly informative and strategically constructed. Noteworthy is the Introduction to Taiwan's Public Health System that took us on a weeklong tour of various government departments that are responsible for the health and well-being of Taiwan. It was a pleasure to see how skilled professionals share the work that they have done and how they continue to do so knowing the great benefits it will have on communities and in turn the world around them. I am thankful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful education in and out of the classroom.



▲ As the emcee at the opening ceremony of "International Center for Students and Scholars"



▲ Holi Festival Taipei

As I tried my best to adjust to life in Taiwan I quickly sought out the things that always made me feel welcomed: Scouting and Sports! Prior to my arrival in Taiwan I had reached out to the Scouting Committee in Taipei requesting permission to meet up with a local Scout Unit and I was through-the-roof excited when I found out that they were able to place me with a group. I quickly dusted off my uniform knowing there would soon be events to attend. This was a blessing in disguise as I immediately felt as I had more purpose during my first event. In the arena of sports, I came across a softball team practicing on the activity field and immediately asked if I could attend practices. I had found two things that were sure to help me adjust quickly. Though I wish now I was able to keep up with both, I do believe that they came at a time I needed them to help make this big change seem less daunting.

Outside the classroom and off the field, there have been many attractions and activities to brighten the dull days shadowed by papers, assignments and



▲ Toroko Gorge, Hualien with friends



▲ Birthday Celebrations

projects. Taiwan is home to many other residents, and it is through these communities that I found many friends to travel and explore with, learning more about Taiwan and falling more for the comforts of being here. I enjoy walking and exploring the safe streets, and tour sites and happy to say I have felt very secured in knowing that I can go out late alone or forget my phone in a coffee shop and return later to find it there safe and sound.

Surely, technological advancements are of no shortage here, I have grown accustomed to the reliability of the MRT, the ease of escalators and automatic almost-anything! Though the crowds at Main Station made me weak in the knees the first few tries, I am proud to say that I have successfully guided two visiting friends as though I had been living here a much longer time. The refreshing outdoor sites even within the heart of Taipei are some of the many things that help me to enjoy where I am. I love the cool evenings in Daan Park with friends, unwinding after a long week of classes and work. As we sit in the park looking at the families go by, we all share our experiences and how Taiwan has grown on each of us in different ways.

I have been fortunate so far to be able to travel outside of Taipei and visit Taichung, Kaohsiung, Pingtung, Yilan, Yuchi and Hualien. I have enjoyed every single trip I have taken, and I am excited to do more in the upcoming months. I have met so many hospitable Taiwanese and I know for certain that my experiences would be much less if that was not a contributing factor to me not getting lost, not feeling alone in cafes and not missing my train stop. As I look around there are many things I wish I could take home with me; the families enjoying evening walks together, the clean and safe public parks that children and their grandparents play races in, the civic pride that keeps the cities clean and the community action that allows people to represent those who cannot or are notable to speak for themselves just yet.

Taiwan and Belize have a friendship spanning 30 years and so this year is surely one to celebrate and be a part of that friendship. In June 2019 I officially became a committee member within the Belize-Taiwan Association, that was assembled by students and professionals living in Taiwan to help other Belizeans remain connected to home whilst learning and helping them to become more accustomed to their temporary homes. Though it has only been a few months in this role it has been an honor of mine to serve both Belize and Taiwan.

Last but most certainly not least, Taiwan, Taiwan-ICDF and NYMU have blessed me with great friendships. I

am thrilled knowing that I have found friends to share meals and memories with...and lots and lots of 珍珠奶茶 (bubble tea) ! They have all helped to make being away from home a little bit easier and I cannot wait to cross the finish line on this journey with them.

Surely, the adjustment from Belize to Taiwan was a big one with all the changes I've experienced in the last year that have been filled with meeting new friends, colleagues and learning so much more about the world around me and myself. I am glad to say that as I head further into my second year, Taiwan and NYMU feels even more like home and as I see the university growing and expanding I cannot help but feel that I am a part of all the magic that goes into making the university be prepared and ready for a new set of scholars that may too one day find a home here. I don't know where life will take me at the end of my studies but what I do know for sure is that in this tiny slice of time Taiwan has left its mark on me, and for that I am forever grateful. ■■■

► Bubble Tea



▲ Shenao Elephant Trunk Rock with Belizean students

