

Enjoyable Experiences of Studying in Taiwan

By Do Minh Tam (杜明心)

Postgraduate education is a common career path for most of health science workers. I believe that they all want to receive the highest-quality training, but seeking for an appropriate program is never an easy task, especially when the program is abroad. Tons of concerns need considering when one aims to study in a foreign country: what the lifestyle is like, how the food would taste, how I pay my living and bills, etc. I am, now, eager to share with you my story of studying for a master degree in public health in one of the best university of the friendliest country I have ever been to.

My name is Do Minh Tam (杜明心), I am currently enrolled as the second year master student in International Health Program (IHP) in the National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University (NYCU). I obtained my medical doctor degree 5 years ago, and worked in a medical university and a children hospital after my graduation. I have joined a few research and intervention projects targeting kids and adolescents' health behaviors, but the desire in me was to learn more to do beneficial activities for the young



▲ This was me running in the Eva Air Marathon in October 2020.

generation of my home country. Therefore, I began to search for a suitable master course in relevant academic fields for my next training plan.

A lot of criteria should be met: program appropriateness, admission requirements, affordable living cost, scholarship or financial aid opportunities, travel time back and forth (from Vietnam), living conditions, and so on. Luckily Taiwan has appeared as a reasonable choice regarding aforementioned criteria. Taiwan has a diversity of universities that offer many English-taught postgraduate programs with generous financial schemes; Taiwan is quite close to Vietnam



◀ During the walk along the old street, my professor let me try the traditional beverage of Taiwan: 彈珠汽水. This was my very first time to open a special bottle like this!

➤ *Snow! Snow everywhere! I was so excited to see this spectacular scenery in Yangming Mountain. My two falls worth it!*

— only 3-hour flight, and Taiwanese lifestyle is quite similar to my homeland.

Among several potential master programs in Taiwan, International Health Program offered by National Yang-Ming University (NYMU, now known as NYCU) caught my attention. IHP has a multicultural environment with students coming from all over the world, which offers a huge chance of knowledge and experience exchange. Background diversity of the students brings multitudinal perspectives regarding the big picture of healthcare as well. Studying in Taiwan, and specifically in NYCU, has been an excellent choice till now.

Studying in Taiwan means tons of enjoyable experience one can hardly have anywhere else. The thing that gives me the first favorable impression is Taiwanese night markets. Night markets could be seen in any city across the island, from northern Taipei to southern Kaohsiung, from eastern Hualien to western Taichung. Taiwanese night markets are a special feature of local culture. Although visitors can easily find online information about unique vendors or food shops for each place, everytime I explore the same market gives me a lot of surprises to figure out new stuff to try.



Ximending is one of the most famous night markets in Taipei for its colorful clothes and accessories shops. Ximending is especially popular for youth and foreigners; it has many art performances on the street and the featured fried chicken. Raohe is another crowded market which is famous for the herbal pork rib stew. The dish is well known for its delicious braised pork rice along with herbal spices which generate special tastes.

Taiwan has many mountains along the spine line of the country. This characteristic leads to the second experience I would like to share: hiking trails. Our campus locates at the foot of Yangming Mountain; therefore, there are lots of slopes around the school, and the school itself has a hiking trail to the Battleship Rock. I was surprised to see many elderly people were hiking along the road leading to my department's building when I first came to NYMU. For several weeks it was not an easy task to go to classes as I needs to 'climb' the hill for around 700 meters every morning. I think it can help students and faculty be healthy climbing like that (LoL).

I like to hike the Qixing Mountain in Yangmingshan. The trail is not very far from our campus and the views

◀ *This was the riding trip from Chiayi to Kaohsiung. We rode on cycling routes and also on big streets connecting the counties.*





as well as fresh air are worth the effort. I was so lucky to have a chance to watch snow on Yangmingshan, which was said to be quite rare. This was my very first time to watch snow in my life, too; I was so excited for the trip. The tracks were super slippery (I fell twice, ouch!) but nothing can beat the precious chance to explore the white coat on the shoulder of the volcano. Beside Yangmingshan hiking trails, there are many other trails in Taipei worth exploring, for example the Elephant Mountain (Xiangshan) trail which offers magnificent view of the landmark Taipei 101, especially at twilight.

I am quite into activities, especially outdoor sports. My third experience was unique in many ways: riding bike from Chiayi to Kaohsiung. This is an annual event organized by Ministry of Education to promote the New Southbound Policy in education of Taiwanese government. The activity comprises three routes: first route circles the north, second the central, and third one the south of Taiwan. It was an August morning when my department officer contacted me regarding the activity. I was so excited hearing about a chance to ride on beautiful cycling roads as well as travel from Chiayi to Tainan and Kaohsiung by bicycles.

The trips lasted for 6 days; we cycled around 40km a day and transport the rest of the trip by shuttle bus. I have had the chance to see many beautiful types of scenery along the road: salt fields in Tainan, Love River

➤ After the first year, there were more friends joining me running. The Eva Air Marathon was the first race we ran together. Run NYMUers!

➤ *Running is my favorite hobby. When I knew the Dentistry Department would organize a race called "Tooth Brush Road Race" (2020), I registered without hesitation.*

in Kaohsiung...I also met and had new international as well as Taiwanese friends from the trip, tried new (and tasty) food every time we stopped in a new town. This was an unforgettable memory of the journey in Taiwan.

Before I came to Taiwan, I usually ran long distances in Vietnam for fun, and I kept training when I got to NYMU. Taiwan is a special country where so many people take running as a hobby. My favorite places to run is the tracks and field on the hill top of our campus and the cycling route along the river (just 500m from Qilian Station to the river bank). Anywhere I practice, I can easily see many people of all ages (not babies) joining the run with me. Those lots of frequent running trainees motivated me to train in the first year, although I always ran by myself.

A turning point came in summer break when some of my friends in my department and others decided to practice running and even registered for a marathon in Taipei. Running is way more fun when you have friends. We practiced hard and together ran in Eva Marathon and Taipei Marathon, which I thought two of the featured races in Taiwan. In 2019 I participated in Taipei Marathon alone, but in 2020 I ran with a lot of friends. The feeling that we together crossed the finish line was very special.





◀ *Our soccer team fought fearlessly although we have only trained for several days (for some of us, very first time to hit a ball LOL).*

and practical insights, but also helped building the bond between IHP students.

The last thing I would love to share and I thought it would be the best, was the time I had with my friends in International Health Program. We came from the hot and humid countries of South East Asia, beautiful beaches of St. Vincent and Caribbean and culture-rich Sub-Saharan countries. Beside coursework, we shared a lot of fun and happy moments together, and I valued all of them. IHP had several field trips to our friends' universities in other counties or health organizations. Those trips not only helped us gain more knowledge

In addition to academic activities, we fought in soccer games where almost half of the team were inexperienced (I seldom play soccer), we formed a volleyball team and practiced for only two weeks before the official match and left the tournament with the impression of fair-play and sportsmanship (we did not win though), we danced and sang when the finals were near, which meant some of us were about to graduate.

When I saw my classmates rushing on their work and presentations, I knew the time was about to come. Two years are not a long period of time, but it could give you a lot of experience and memories. Two years are quite short for me to know and understand more about the beautiful country I am living in. Two years of a journey is coming to the ending point which opens possibilities worth looking forward to. Who knows in the near future I would have another chance to explore more about Taiwan. ▬▬

✔ *This is a picture of my classmates and professors visiting Taoyuan. Those field trips gave me hundreds of valuable memories.*

