



An Island of Dreams: Formosa



By Diego Serafin Martinez

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, the sun entered through a small space between the blinds and the wall; when I woke up emotion invaded me.

Twenty-one days had passed since I had first set foot on the island of Taiwan. Today I would finish my mandatory quarantine

days and I would finally get to know my university, my classmates, and the place where I would live for the next two years. As I began to prepare my luggage to finally reach my dorm room, it was impossible not to think about when all this adventure began.

I still remembered the emotion when receiving that email with the subject line: "We are pleased to inform you that you have been admitted to the International Health Program," sent by the International Relations Office of the National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University. All this euphoria was followed by the frustration that would continue in the following months, since we were faced with the uncertainty of not knowing when the country would open its doors to receive all the foreign students who would come, like me, to study some degree and postgraduate program, which would

▼ Me with the view of Taipei 101 in the back.



end up receiving us in October of the year 2020. This would be my first time on the Asian continent, and the feeling of excitement for the unknown as well as the fear of being exposed to a completely unknown country, culture, and language are the only things that I can remember.

It would be until October 2nd on ANA flight 179 that I would begin my trip to Taiwan, with a journey from Mexico City, with a stopover in Tokyo to finally reach my destination, my new home. On the way from Mexico City, I would meet my first and great friend, Fabiola. It was almost impossible to start talking with her and learn that we were both originally from the city of Puebla, in Mexico, and that we had even studied at the same university, knowing that I have no doubt that it's a small world.

Upon landing on Taiwanese soil, and leaving the plane, the sanitary measures imposed by the country were notorious: the airport personnel wore white protective suits, and a PCR test would be waiting for us at the end of our passage through customs, to later be guided by personnel from the MOE to our taxi, which would take us straight to a "relaxed" vacation in a quarantined hotel room for fourteen days, which we were not to leave under any circumstances.

The quarantine hotel room was not bad. It was a relatively small room of seven square meters, with a window that faced the street from which I could see a supermarket, a McDonald's, and a sports store. As the days went by, I had to report my temperature regularly, everyday, to both the university and the hotel staff, as

well as if I had any symptoms. In the same way, the hotel staff sent my food three times a day on a strict schedule. At first, the food wasn't bad, but with time, it became a real penance to eat the same thing, and not be able to interact with anyone other than digitally.

Two days after finishing my stay in the first quarantine hotel, a bus went directly from a hospital to perform another PCR test on me. That day was really exciting since it would be the first time that I had contact with individuals and that I would be allowed to leave my room.

At the end of my fourteen-day stay in the first quarantine hotel, a taxi would be waiting for me to transfer me again to a new hotel, where I would spend seven extra days of self-monitoring. Here I would be allowed to leave the room, but not go to crowded places or take public transportation. To my surprise, my friend Fabiola would be transferred to the same hotel as me, offering me a familiar face with whom to go out and see the city and talk. Those seven days of self-monitoring were the best since I had started my journey, as I got to know too many places, impressive temples, and the best thing would be the impact of seeing the Taipei 101 building for the first time. No doubt the "holidays" would end, and real life would begin.

I would be transported by taxi from the Ximen district (which is basically in the center of Taipei) to the Beitou district (which is in the north of the city), and I would be accompanied by one of my classmates, Ayleen,



▲ My friend Ayleen and me in Yinhe Cave Cross-Ridge Trail.



▲ My friend Fabiola and me in Fugueijiao.

who was enrolled in my same program. She would become the first friend I would make with my classmates.

The journey from Xiamen to Beitou would take approximately twenty minutes, which would fly by since between talking and getting to know the city during the journey, which was totally unknown to us, we would arrive in the blink of an eye. Upon arriving at the Yang Ming campus, we would be received at the International Relations Office by Meggy, who gave us our provisional credentials as well as indicated the procedure for checking in within the university facilities. Also a second-year classmate year, Felix, would give us a tour of all the university facilities, and would do us a great favor by guiding us throughout Taipei to get our supplies that we would need to start our lives from scratch.

That first day at the university would be the most tiring, overwhelming, and above all exciting since I had arrived in the country. Taking the subway in a completely unknown country, going to stores with a completely different language and the long walk we had to make to get from the mattress store to buy food for the rest of the week would be a challenge for us.

The next day would be the one that we would finally take face-to-face classes with our teachers and classmates. Arriving at the classroom, it was impressive to physically meet my classmates and experience how the interaction that had

▼ *International Center for Students and Scholars in Yang Ming campus.*



started with online classes would change into physical interaction. A vibrant mix surrounded the atmosphere of that first day, with people from all over the world – from America, Africa, and Asia – filling each desk. The variety of points of view that the program would have was also noticeable since it would have minds from various degrees ranging from chemists, psychologists, and nurses to doctors and engineers.

Over time we got to know each other more and more, the interactions grew deeper allowing us to get along more or less with each other, but all those affinities and differences became nothing when it came to being united by the same task, such as when we went to the TICA Cup in the city of Taichung where student recipients of the ICDF scholarship throughout the country would compete in various sporting events and in which my classmates and I would represent our program and our university, the brand new and forever champion NYCU.

Our first semester was coming to an end, and it was impressive how we had known so many places in such a short time. So far one of the most interesting and at the same time most tiring trips had been the one we had made as a group to Sun Moon Lake, a city located in central Taiwan by a lake. The tour that our program staff had organized had been really enriching and interesting, and the place was simply beautiful. We



▲ *Tica cup (an ICDF event) in Taichung city. In the photo from left to right in the next order Ahmed, Ayleen, Arnat, Lila, Karina, Me.*


had been fortunate to visit different temples, as well as places of interest within the area.

But social life is not only to be found within the classroom, as for my part I believe that this country is a perfect place to make friends from all over the world who, being in an "expatriate" condition, share the need to look for people who sympathize with that feeling. Friends on whom you can lean when the loneliness of finding yourself immersed in a country where everything and everyone is completely unknown lightens that feeling, and with whom you can also get to know interesting places in the country. Places that can take your breath away because of how beautiful, fascinating, and above all different they are.

This country is perfect for all foreigners in every way. It has a stable economy; an enviable transportation system that allows you to get to know every corner of the country, whether by train, subway, or bus; people who are friendly and, in most cases, have knowledge of the English language or at least will help you with signs and gestures so that you can achieve your goal. It also has gastronomy that is diverse, with different nuances and flavors.

For my part, I have fallen in love with dumplings, and it is perfect for people who like sweet flavors in general, since you can find a wide variety of foods with these features. Something super crazy that I have only seen

here is the strawberry flavored "Lay's" chips, a unique flavor that I never thought I would associate with a salty product.

There are so many curiosities and opportunities that you can find in this small country, so many nuances that make each day completely different from the previous one. That is why I continue to discover this beautiful country now, and I can say that thanks to Taiwan I have been able to have an excellent academic experience, within an excellent environment. I don't know if one day I'll get tired of this island, but I can't wait to see what else Formosa Island has in store for me. 

Me in Sun Moon Lake in a field trip offered by IHP Office.



My classmates and I went to the TICA Cup in the city of Taichung.