

Taiwan Summer Institute Program 2013

Internship in the research group of Prof. Dr. Chou
Department of Industrial management and engineering
National Taiwan University of Science and Technology

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1) Preparation and Introduction Week

The Taiwan Summer Institute Program is based on the cooperation between the National Science Council of Taiwan (NSC) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) that enables Taiwanese as well German students to get in acquaintance to another culture while doing a two-month scholarship abroad. Each of the 25 students received around 2000 Euro (incl. flight) for the stay in the Taiwan this summer.

Through the well-organized exchange program there are not a lot of aspects to worry about. In this report I would like to share my experiences, impressions and memories with you.

For a stay of up to 90 days German citizens do not need a visa to travel to Taiwan and study there. Anyway, the passport should be valid for at least half a year after the arrival in Taiwan. There is also no need about vaccinations because there are no special ones are needed; only the basic ones as Hepatitis are recommended. In any case, the DAAD group is covered by the insurance of the scholarship.

The organization of DAAD booked a group flight for all of us, so we met up at the check-in counter at Frankfurt airport. We firstly took the flight to Taipei, after we had a connecting flight to Kaohsiung. After the arrival in Kaohsiung, friendly Taiwanese advisors already waited for us to take the bus to Tainan. In Tainan, we were welcomed by a committee of members of the Coastal Ocean Monitoring Center of National Cheng Kung University and a few Taiwanese students.

We spent the first four days in Tainan where we had nearly 2 days of Chinese classes and discovered the environment in this area. The committee in Tainan supported us in several matters e.g. how to apply the tax-ID and where to buy a SIM card, handed out the scholarship (in cash) and were reachable 24 hours for us. On our last evening they took us out to a KTV Karaoke bar which is really famous in Taiwan. They were also the ones who kept us updated about weather conditions and especially typhoon warnings during our entire stay in Taiwan.

2) Taipei and the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology

On Friday we transferred to our internship universities. I was the only student who went to the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, but I arrived with the other five students of Taipei. I was picked up by two international students and my advisor, one of them was Indonesian and two of them Vietnamese, so I could communicate with them in my second native language Vietnamese (included information: I am a banana as some people would say → Asian people with “yellow skin” who grew up in a Western culture are bananas – From the outside “yellow” and from the inside “white” ☺).

Anyway, these kind students and especially my advisor helped me with all necessary formalities at the beginning such as paying for the dormitory and getting settled. That was really helpful, because not lot of people used to speak English in Taiwan, later we figured out body language is the most convenient language in Taiwan to get along on the streets.

Till the end of my stay in Taiwan (beginning of October), I was able to stay in my own room in the international dormitory directly on the Campus. I lived in the 15th floor of this building, so I always had a nice walk in the morning and evening. Normally, male and female students are strictly separated in the dorms (even the lifts!!), but I had a special floor with mixed rooms and really good conditions. Consequently, my rent was more expensive than the others.

Staying in this single-bed-room costs 20.000NTD for two months (approx.500Euro). For me, this price was quite affordable and about the average of student residences in Germany, but I would prefer a two-bed-room with a Taiwanese roommate. My room had all electronic devices which I needed (an air-conditioning, a TV set (never used), a fridge). Luckily, I had a bed with a mattress with a quilt a pillow, but in any case I was prepared and equipped with a thin mattress, a thin blanket and a small pillow which our hosts bought in Tainan for us. They consisted of a thin bamboo mat with 3cm of padding on top of it. It is recommendable to bring a sheet and bed linens.

There is no kitchen in the dorm, but it is common to have all meals outside as the prices are quite cheap and affordable compared to Germany. There are many food places right around the corner or on the campus itself; they offer lots of tasty dishes. If you are not in the mood to have lunch or dinner in one of this food places, the convenience store Seven/Eleven is waiting for you 24hours a day – You can get there everything, you need. Many of us got almost addicted to Milk tea and Soymilk which was available everywhere.

My university is located really close to the center of Taipei. In Taipei itself you can discover so many places, also during the week after work. Everything is close together to the campus. There is a gym (one can buy either a membership card or just pay for every visit), many sport fields and a swimming pool that is free of charge (with a student ID). It is important to know that a bathing cap is needed. Girls usually wear bathing suits and you do not really see any girls wearing bikinis.

Getting around the city is quite easy with the "EasyCard" for MRT or renting the orange bicycles. A single ride by MRT costs around 15 NTD up to 45NTD. Renting the bikes for the first 30minutes is free, after every half an hour costs 10NTD. The "EasyCard" is a prepaid that you can load money to in all the convenience stores and then use on all the public transportation, in convenience stores or for buying tickets. It is recommendable try to get the student version of this card and to use it in all these matters for getting a fare discount, sometimes even 50%.

If you want to get more around Taipei or to another city, there are lots of buses and trains. Especially the buses are great and cheap, because they run up every couple of minutes from Taipei to close places like Keelung or Hsinchu. A one-way ticket costs only around 55NTD and takes about 35-40minutes.

Taipei offers and enables you the best chances to have a great time with great sightseeings. There are lots of temples to visit and great memorial halls. After the work, I went every week up to one of the beaster mountains (Elephant mountain, Tiger mountain, Panther mountain, Lion mountain) and have been to nice parks (Peace Park, Creative Park). Many museums, crazy restaurants (toiletrestaurant, hospitalrestaurant,...), awesome shopping places (Ximen Nightmarket, Shida Nightmarket, Shilin nightmarkets), but I also discovered lots of great local nightmarkets with less tourists in the west of Taipei. The nightlife is also really great in Taipei, you can just go for a nice dinner or discover one of several bars and clubs, for everything is something suitable in this place.

The seventh month of the old lunar calendar is the ghost month. People believe that during this month the ghosts of dead people return to earth. Therefore many people immolate food and paper money to calm the ancestors. During this time there are many celebrations and one of greatest one takes place in Keelung. This year it was at the end of August. A festive parade is held and at the end all the colorful paper temples that were carried along during the parade are set on fire and let onto the water. This is really a festival that I wouldn't miss if you come to Taipei.

3) The internship – Work in the lab

For these eight weeks at NTUST in Taipei, I worked in the Department of Industrial Management and Engineering in a computational dynamics lab. Both Bachelor and Master students work in this lab.

My professor Dr.Chou gave me a project to work on. My project was built on the topic “Foreign Direct Investment in Asia – Analyzing and determining technological factors influencing FDI.”

During my first week I got an overview of this topic. The focus lies on understanding the cultural differences and requirements between some Asian countries (HongKong, Malaysia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan) with technological background.

My supervisor wanted me to develop a new fuzzy MCDM model to help the investors determining the suitable places to invest. Analyzing the key determinants and factors for FDI inflows and their trends with some given paper and my own research helped me to understand different matters of Asian countries. After getting familiar with the topic I had to present my results to other students of my group which also worked on economical topics which should add my thinking.

Two weeks later, I started working on the simulation program for the model with some students who helped me to understand the software. I had to do an TOPSIS approach which helped me to determine and rank the most attractive location influencing for FDI, among ASEAN countries according to main factors those are determinate FDI inflows. Basically, firstly I had to calculate weights of the evaluation criteria with the pair-wise comparison matrix. Then I had to construct a normalized matrix. This step converts the various attribute dimensions into non dimensional attributes. Finishing, this step allows me to calculate the weighted normalized decision matrix. As a result, I could identify the positive ideal solution and negative ideal solution and figure out the relative closeness to the ideal solution.

Another part of the group worked on other countries or helped me to understand the trends of these countries. Some also tried to find a way of getting better solutions as the TOPSIS approach. During those weeks I learned a lot about cultural differences between Asian countries itself and the reconstruction to put this in a model together. In this case, it was really helpful to use the simulation programs to understand the different approaches to rank the countries. Sometimes, there were some problems with calculating the matrix because there were not always exact data about the countries, so consequently, it was really an approach.

4) Travelling around Taiwan

All of us used the weekends to travel as much as possible. Getting around Taiwan is easy and cheap.

There are mainly three different options:

1. The High Speed Rail (HSR) connects Taipei in the north and Kaohsiung in the south. It is very fast as the name already implies, but is also one of the more expensive solutions. For the entire trip one needs only two hours. The only problem is that most stops are not in the city center. Taipei is an exception where the HSR station is the same as the main station. Thus if you want to take the HSR, you usually need to take the bus or a taxi to get to the city. The regular fare for the entire distance is 1500NTD. However, there are certain trains where students can get a discount of 30% or 50%. This is possible with a Taiwanese student ID and sometimes with an international one (it depends on the person selling it).
2. Besides the HSR, there are regular trains. You can find several different ones: express trains, local trains etc. , but all of them are much more slower than the HSR. Instead of 2hours, you will need 5hours to travel from Taipei to Kaoshiung. The fare is about 800NTD. It is important to buy the ticket in advance because seats are usually sold out if you buy the ticket on the same day. It is still possible to take the train without reserved seats but that usually means that you have to stand the entire time.
3. The last option for travelling around Taiwan is by bus. There are long distance busses to almost any destination. They are comfortable, run frequently and are cheap. For having a comparison, a bus ride from Taipei to Kaoshiung costs 400-500NTD and the bus needs about 5hours if there are no traffic jams. For long distances, I would also recommend to buy the ticket in advance if you want to travel during peak hours such as Sunday afternoon.

Hostels are very easy to find in Taiwan. There are plenty of them and can find them everywhere. One night in Taiwan usually costs around 500NTD. In general, the hostels were very nice and clean and the service really friendly. Booking can be easily done by internet sites as www.hostelworlds.com.

There are too many places to visit for the few weekends, we had in Taiwan.

Most beautiful and recommendable places are the following ones:

Around the main city Taipei:

- Danshui: a district of Taipei with a harbor and especially a sea shore promenade
- Beitou: a beautiful parc with hot springs
- Maokong: A small beautiful town up the mountains where you can find several nice teahouses. Most of them have a fabulous view of Taipei. Among them are tea houses with funny names such as “ Pinguins are going ahead”. Before going up to Maokong, you can visit the big and awesome Taipei Zoo, after you can take the Gondola from there and enjoy the nice view.
- Yangminshan Nationalpark: This parc is located in the north of Taipei and is a great place for hiking, hot springs and waterfalls. One of the most beautiful places that I have visited in Taipei.
- Wulai: Wulai enables you enjoying the nature in a different way and having a bath in the hot springs. We took a small slowly gondola up to the waterfalls.
- Jiufen: A small town up in the mountains with a cute shopping street. Jiufen is definitely worth a visit and a good place to do some souvenir shopping. There are also many small restaurants and tea houses that have a wonderful view of the sea which is especially nice at night.
- Hsinchu: A city in northern Taiwan. Hsinchu is famous for its Science-based Industrial Park, was first developed in 1723. The Hsinchu plain slopes upward to the east, and merges into Eighteen Peaks Mountain and Niupu Mountains. Most of the eastern part of the county is covered with foothills and small mountains.
- Keelung: Keelung belongs to northern Taiwan, with mountains surrounding on three sides, while Donghai (The Eastern Sea) in its north front. Serving as a natural harbor with immense water, Keelung has its bay cut into downtown deeply.
- LongDong: Long Cave (Longdong) is the largest bay on the Northeast Coast. It is favored with clear water and abundant marine life, including large numbers of colorful tropical fish, making it an out-standing spot for snorkeling and scuba diving. Also, the schools of fish that gather here make the bay a highly popular rock-fishing area.

Places further away:

- Kenting: This is a Nationalpark at the southern tip of Taiwan which also offers a couple of beaches (Beaches are rare in Taiwan). We rented Scooters here and went on a ride around the park. During the weekend the beaches are very crowded. Kenting is a paradise for surfers when the wave conditions are good (Take care of sun burn!!). The weather in the south is very hot, even in September when the temperatures in the north can already drop significantly.
- Sun-Moon-Lake: The lake is one of the most popular tourist destinations and as expected quite crowded during summer vacation (which end at the beginning of September). Nevertheless, we went there in August and escaped from crowds by cycling around the lake. Most tourists took their car around the lake to important photo spots.
- Hualien: Here, we went to the famous marble Taroko Nationalpark. A really great place to get around with scooters. You can have occasional stops and go for hiking in between. Accidentally, we found a hell with small waterfalls. If you pass that, it's a great challenge, but if you come out, there will be a view of great nature and lake for you.
- Penghu Islands: Penghu is known as the pearl of the Taiwan Strait. Composed of 90 islands, the county is steeped in history and culture, with magnificent ocean views and many other natural wonders. They offer really great opportunities for sailing, and have great blue seas and beautiful white beaches.

5) Important information / Things to remember

There are a couple of things that you should not forget when packing the suitcase:

- Sunscreen/ Body lotion:
Since Taiwanese women like to stay pale sunscreen often contains skin whitener. Sun Sreen is definitely important in Taiwan, because it is significantly further in the south than Germany.
- Mosquito spray:
It is really recommendable for hiking trips or in the evening at the beach.
- International driver license:
For renting a scooter this is usually required. Some scooter rentals also accept the German one but not all of them.

- International student ID:
This Card is really useful to get discounts in any kind of tickets in Taiwan. The pool on the campus is also free with such an ID.
- LAN cable/adapter:
To use the internet in the dorm rooms a LAN cable is needed. Remember the adapter for electrical devices (Taiwan also offers some plug as in the US).
- Home presents:
It is really common to bring some small presents at all kind of occasions for your host professor and your lab colleagues.

6) My impression of Taiwan

Taiwan is a really highly recommendable place to visit. I don't know where to start, but I think Taiwanese people are the first thing that should be mentioned. Always friendly and helpful in every kind of matters even those who do not speak English so well. My lab colleagues took me out for lunch and gave me lots of tips to get around Taiwan. At the beginning, it was hard to build up conversations due to language problems and cultural diversities with them, but later I understood you have to approach them, than they are open and kind. Sharing different cultural values and issues enabled both sides to understand people from the other country.

I used to travel a lot around Asia, but Taiwan is different. Taiwan is quite small, but offers a great variety of cultural sightseeing and crazy nightlife. It is really rare that I feel safe in a country, but Taiwan is one of the places where I was never afraid to go alone at night. Getting here shows you another part of the Asian community and gives you the impression that you arrived. People seem not so poor as I expected. Prices were in two different levels, food and clothes were quite cheap but sometimes prices of the rent or electrical devices do not differ a lot from German standards.

During my internship I got some more insights in the cultural differences influencing the FDI and learned how to deal with simulation programs for creating a fuzzy model which might be really useful for writing my bachelor thesis. The internship also enabled me the possibility to learn how to deal with researches which I have never done in this dimension before.

In a nutshell, I am really glad participating the Taiwan Summer Institute Program. It was definitely a great decision. I would like to express my big gratefulness to DAAD, NSC for this awesome opportunity and all the people who made my stay so comfortable and unforgettable. A special Thank you also goes to my host professor and my lab colleagues who supported me in every kind of matters. I really appreciate understanding another part of the world. Never forget be open and smile in Asian countries!