

Exchange Semester 2014/15 – National Taiwan University

NTU - 國立臺灣大學

The NTU is known to be the best University in Taiwan and is one of the top universities of Asia and the world. 35.000 students study there with exchange students coming from all of the world but mostly from Asia thanks to its central location in the heart of Asia. For this reason it's a great place to learn about Asian culture, politics, economics and language.



The exchange process is well organized, most questions can be answered by the “NTU guide for exchange students”. In addition to that, every incoming exchange student can ask his student volunteer or contact directly the Office of International Affairs.

Courses

In general, the NTU offers many courses but most of them are held in Chinese. If you depend on courses in English then there might be only a few that fit your profile, especially if you are a grad student. The professors are excellent and the lectures are very good.

The course application process is complicated and divided into several stages, the guide book can help you a bit. Also your volunteer can assist you. The online application process for classes starts well before the semester starts, keep that in mind. There's no bonus for exchange students, some classes even got filled first with NTU students and only if there were seats left, exchange students were allowed to enroll. When I finally arrived at the NTU, things went much easier. During the course shopping week many professors made exceptions or found other ways to let exchange students take part in their classes.

Language

If you want to learn Chinese (Mandarin), you should know that contrary to China, Taiwan uses traditional characters. This means that many, but not all characters are different from the simplified character set China uses. But with some experience it's easy to recognize simplified characters if you know their traditional counterpart. The pronunciation and grammar is, except for a few cases, identical to China.

The Chinese classes are very good, I took the Chinese Main Class (6 hours each week) and an Enhancement Class (4 hours each week, focus on conversation). Mandarin is a difficult language to learn if you never had any contact with an Asian language, so it takes some time to get proficient at it. In addition to the time sitting in the classes you will need quite some time to learn and recap, the classes progress very fast and it's easy to fall behind. Keep that in mind when you plan your course selection.

Money

The easiest and cheapest way I know for Germans to obtain local currency is to get a credit card that allows free money withdrawal. Don't exchange for Taiwan Dollar in your home country, its way to expensive. You will need quite some money when you arrive for initial expenses (mostly for the dorm) and the ATM machines (at the airport but also in general) mostly have a limit for each transaction of 20.000 TWD. Just use the machine twice if you can't retrieve enough on your first try. And don't forget that credit cards usually have a limit on how much you can retrieve each day, raise it if necessary for the first week in Taiwan.

I was not able to receive SMS by using my German SIM card even though my German provider told me it would be possible. That blocked any online banking for me, you might want to consider other options.

Pollution

A big reason for me to go to Taiwan and not to China was the pollution. The air quality in Taipei is ok, in most of Taiwan its good except maybe for Kaoshiung. But even Kaoshiung is heaven compared with how bad it is in most major cities in China. The tap water in Taiwan is good, though most locals prefer to boil it first. If you must you can buy 6 liter bottles of water in most stores, but its better just to use the drinking fountains in the dorm and on the campus to fill your bottle. Taipei itself is very clean, you can hardly find any litter on the ground.

Living

I lived in the Shui Yuan Dorm which consists of three buildings with each around 14 floors. The application process was easy, the rooms are clean, big enough and reasonably priced (a single room costs NTD 7,400 a month). But you have to follow some rules like no visitors after 11 pm, no parties, guests have to register at the entrance and leave their ID. They have laundry facilities and are in walking distance to the NTU. The Gongguan night market and many restaurants are around the corner, there is also a subway station. You can buy a used bicycle at the beginning of the semester for only a few Euros, but you will have to stand up very early to get one.