

A semester abroad at National Taiwan University (NTU)  
College of Life Science

Home University: Albert-Ludwig Universität Freiburg, Germany  
Study subject: Liberal Arts and Science (LAS), major in Life Science  
Time Frame: Spring Semester 2023 (Feb – June)

My experience of NTU and Taipei, overall, was quite diverse and exciting! Here, I'll explain and reflect on this experience, giving some tips and advice for anyone interested in studying in Taipei as well.

Countless times since deciding to go on this exchange have I been asked – both in Freiburg and here – why I choose to go to Taiwan, and my answers have been very varied. I think, a lot of reasons came together to form my decision to live in Taipei for half a year and study at NTU. But most centrally, it is the outlook on life of wanting to explore and extend known horizons. I knew little of Taiwan before organizing this exchange, and this exactly was my goal: To live and to study in a culture and setting unknown to me. Taiwan seemed like the perfect place with its nature and culture and the opportunity to study at its No. 1 university in the capital city. Thus, my expectations were focused on the navigation of a completely new setting.

And looking back on a semester overflowing with experiences, faces, places, moments, I know the semester at NTU was the right choice for me.

At the international office Freiburg, Jens Langer is responsible for the Asia exchange, always quick to reply and help. As our university is lucky to have an exchange program with NTU, I did not need to go through the procedures of a visiting student. Nevertheless, I needed to submit a full-scale application to the exchange portal of NTU a few months prior to my stay. Via email, the Office of International Affairs informed me of all the steps and deadlines in advance, providing a good communication basis. They also replied to my emails in a timely manner, although those answers turned out to be unhelpful as they only repeated the information on the websites. The health form of NTU gave me quite a few headaches, but it ended up being possible to complete the checks at the university hospital in Taipei for those, who had had trouble doing so prior to their arrival. The visa process – an application requiring sending documents and your passport to Munich, Taipeh Vertretung (for everyone resident in Ba-Wü and Bayern) – went very smoothly; I can highly recommend giving them a call if something is unclear, and they were quick to reply. Within 7 days, I had a visa stamped in my (German) passport.



National Taiwan  
University

Main Campus  
2023



Another rather headache-inducing part of studying at NTU was the living situation for me. There are different dormitories that you can rank according to preference, with options of a single room, two-bed rooms, and four-bed rooms. Searching for your own place/shared flat from abroad is not easy but I know many who succeeded – try Facebook marketplace and Facebook groups. I ended up living in Yuan Tong Dormitory located in New Taipei (approx. 45min from the main campus), with three roommates. We each had a bunk bed and a desk, drawers, wardrobe underneath it, and a bathroom and shower attached to the room. As I was not used to sharing my private space with other people, this living arrangement turned out to be rather tiring for me and so, to anyone in a similar situation, I would recommend searching for a different place.

Course registration at NTU is confusing. The online course catalogue provides the name of the courses, but often no description. Looking back, I would advise to sign up for as many courses as you can that seem interesting and try to send emails to the coordinators for more information. In the first two weeks of classes, it's still possible to drop an unlimited number of courses in an easy online procedure. I can recommend the courses called “Exploring Taiwan: Film and Social Culture” if you're interested to learn a little about Taiwanese Film and contemporary history. Another course, although also not connected to my major, that I enjoyed was “Asian Democratization Seminar”. I also signed up for the Chinese course, which takes place 2-3 times/week. It is very intense in the amount of work required, but worth it for me to be able to navigate daily life in Taiwan and get a general feeling of the language. This is also where I met a lot of other exchange students who are now close friends of mine.

The NTU campus is located quite conveniently within Taipei, and I really did fall in love with the city. There is so much to see and experience, with lots of daily life happening on the streets; there are little food stalls everywhere and many small parks to hang out. My top random recommendations for Taipei: Yongkang Sliced Noodles, Da'an Park, Fuhe flea market (weekend), Maji Square (especially when they organize their queer trash party), Café Dalida (Gay bar/Drag shows), Newbloom (if you're interested in political/activist events), Waiáo beach, Jiaoxi hot spring baths (behind the bus station), Rev Now Blues Jam (live music and jams, bar), Sappho Live (also music/bar), Fine Arts Museum, and just roaming the night markets. The festivals and holidays are also always a good place to experience Taiwanese traditions and culture, so be on the lookout! Lastly, it is quite easy to get around Taiwan via trains and renting scooters is never a bad idea, i.e., to explore Taroko Gorge or Liuqiu Island, there is so much to see!



Left:  
Jiufen  
A daytrip  
From Taipei

Right:  
A Pagoda  
In Kaohsiung,  
Southern Taiwan

