

Testimonial NSYSU Kaohsiung Taiwan

September 2023 - June 2024



Pre-departure organization

1. Finding Information

To gather information before my stay, I mainly used the website of the International Office Freiburg, the website of the Auswärtiges Amt, the website of my host university and other exchange student's testimonials.

The International Office website helped me find out about all the requirements and prerequisites for the application. Information about Taiwan was also easily available on the website of the Auswärtiges Amt and via its link to the German Embassy in Taiwan. Personally, testimonials and YouTube videos from other exchange students were very helpful. I couldn't find any German reports for my host university National Sun Yat-Sen University Kaohsiung, which is why I'm happy to provide my testimonial now.

2. Visa

There are two important points to note when it comes to visas:

Depending on where you live, you have to contact a different responsible office of the Taiwanese embassy in Germany (all original documents including your passport must then be sent there by post, so you should make sure that you do not need your passport during this time. However, the processing time is quite fast.

The visa requirements vary depending on the length of your stay. You should know, however, that the host university (NSYSU Kaohsiung) also requests the health certificate for semester-long stays, which is otherwise only required for longer visa! Unfortunately, semester exchange students also have to fill out this certificate and take the appropriate tests (I mention it specifically here because many people did not know this), so you should take care of doctor's appointments in advance.

About this health certificate: The Taiwanese government requires a very meticulous health check, which requires things that, from a medical point of view, you would never do in Germany without a medical reason (x-ray of the lungs). I recommend that everyone contact their family doctor early on to see if they are prepared to issue a certificate stating that this is not necessary.

3. Health insurance

The visa required a certain type of health insurance, which is why I did some research first. In the end, I had to book an additional package on top of the normal insurance in order to meet the requirements (but this may change in the future, it is still due to Covid-19). My insurance was from Hanse Merkur, the Young Travel travel health insurance Basic (worldwide excluding the USA/Canada) for people up to their 35th birthday with the additional package:

Travel property insurance

Basic - travel liability insurance

Travel accident insurance,

Emergency insurance

4. Accommodation

This point is very important to me, as I have learned a lot about it in the meantime. First of all: NSYSU offers very affordable two- or four-room student dormitories on campus. You cannot choose whether you get a double room or one with four people. From the experience of other exchange students I can say that the dorm, of course, has pros and cons. They are on campus

on a hill, so you get to class fast but sweaty from the heat in Kaohsiung. You also live with monkeys (more on that later) and cannot open your windows. Still, for a semester exchange it is a very good choice and you can meet people easiest that way. There is also a cheap cafeteria and convenience store nearby. Personally, since I stayed for a year, it was clear to me from the start that I would prefer to move into a shared apartment off campus. However, no one ever responded to me via the 591 app (which is common here in Taiwan for finding accommodation), and at some point I didn't know what to do. I got in touch with a real estate agent through contacts and then found out that it is very common here to find an apartment through a real estate agent, especially if you don't speak Chinese very well. That's how it all worked out, and it is definitely a possible option (even before you arrive. However, it is very quick here and you can easily find an apartment within a week). But I would still like to share another advice. After the first semester, I had to move unexpectedly and was looking for an apartment again. Since I now speak better Chinese, I wanted to try it myself to save money. Now I can give better tips:

- on Facebook in Chinese (if it's difficult, use Google Translate) join groups about the housing market (important: in Chinese. There are also English groups, but they are not recommended in comparison). Also, try 591! They do have good options, the problem is just how to contact them.
- within the group, but also within Facebook in general, search in Chinese for keywords such as "rent, Lingya District" or "apartment Yancheng District" (in the respective preferred area of Kaohsiung)
- Now: write to them. First write to every apartment that comes into question, everything is very informal here, just ask briefly via Messenger "is the apartment still available?" (I mention this specifically because we are also used to pouring our heart and soul into these messages due to the Freiburg apartment search). For 591: if you can, contact them via Line. If they do not have Line, you have to call them and ask if the place is still available. Maybe you can get your buddy to help you with that.

Studying at NSYSU Kaohsiung

1. Living in Kaohsiung

I want to start by talking about Kaohsiung. Kaohsiung is in the South of Taiwan and its second biggest city after Taipei/New Taipei. It's a very unique city and you have to travel to other places of Taiwan to really understand its vibe, but I will say a few things. It is very hot and humid, the whole year. After Typhoon season in August/September, it feels like summer almost the whole time, and winter takes like 4 weeks that feel like German spring. The city is a little like a village stretched out over the size of a big city. There are small food or drink shops everywhere and people walk slowly and are very kind and helpful (especially compared to Taipei the feeling is very different, Taipei is more crowded and hectic). Also, there are times at which you will feel like no one lives in this big city, when you walk around the pier by day and see almost no one. There are two Metro lines and one line called Light Rail which is a tram. Buses can be extremely unreliable but operate throughout the whole city and will sometimes be the easier option. There are also City Bikes that you can lend with your Student ID Card and biking around certain parts of the city (the Pier, Love River and the Campus mostly) is very beautiful. In the city traffic however you have to be careful, as people in the

South of Taiwan (especially scooter drivers) drive very recklessly and often do not stop at lights or let you pass the street.

In Taiwan, it is common not to have a kitchen but to eat outside all the time, since it is cheaper and very convenient here. If you want to cook you can go to the dorms or the common room or actively search for a flat with a kitchen.

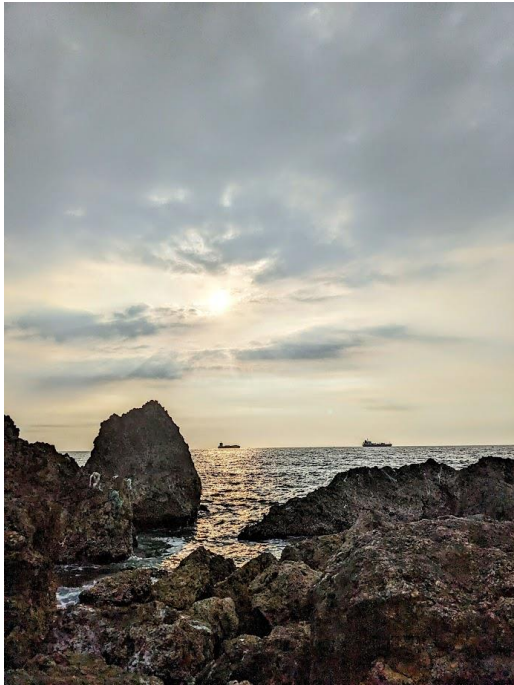
Kaohsiung has mainly two beaches, one on our campus and one on Cijin Island, you will definitely go to see both during your exchange. You can even surf on Cijin or take classes at NSYSU. Kaohsiung also has some nice museums which I would recommend (especially Fine Arts and Alien Art Museum), and Night Markets are a must-do. There is a mountain / forest with many hiking trails close to campus and you can explore the coast line from the Liberal Arts building on campus, so there is definitely a lot to do. Also, for nightlife, there are many bars and clubs, personally I would mostly recommend Coco (just to see it once as it is very very Taiwanese) and Brickyard (it has the most friendly vibe, compared to Lamp and Muse). If you like Techno you can go to Oto Basho, I never went but it was recommended by some friends. You should definitely try KTV since it is a very special experience in Taiwan/East Asia.

2. Life at NSYSU

NSYSU has the most beautiful campus I ever saw. It is located close to a mountain and has its own beach. The vibe on campus is very calm and chill (aside from the scooters) and there are many beautiful spots. Orientation can be a bit difficult but after a while you will understand how everything works (get the Bus Plan if you have classes in the Liberal Arts College). Even if you don't have classes there, I recommend you go there at some point to explore the coast line and "secret beach" and see the view of the ocean from up the hill.

Some advice for life at NSYSU:

- the beach has a sign saying swimming is not allowed, but no one actually prohibits it actively, so you can still go there to swim and it is very common. Some Taiwanese people do not like to swim in September ("ghost month") for religious reasons, but you will probably hear about this from your buddy or another friend.
- Places to eat on Campus are: Milo (at the dorms), which has the longest opening hours; the food court next to Family Mart, the Convenience Store by the Administration Building (they offer lunch boxes that I would recommend) and the Coffee Shops (at the Administration Building and across from the Chinese Language Center).
- There is a Doctor, a laundry place and a Post Office on Campus, so oftentimes you do not need to go outside



A picture of the beautiful coast line you can access from the mountain of the Liberal Arts Building.

Student Clubs / Meeting Taiwanese people

There are a lot of Student Clubs that you can join (they really have everything from Astronomy to Surfing to Chinese Medicine). Many Taiwanese people are very serious about the clubs and put in a lot of work, so if you participate in the activities you should also take them seriously (especially for the Dance Clubs, they are a big thing here and if you sign up for a performance you should plan enough time for that). But, you can of course just go to the classes and club activities that you find interesting. There is a club fair at the beginning of the semester which I recommend you go to.

Going to the clubs is probably one of the easier ways to meet Taiwanese people besides the buddy groups. It can be hard to get to know locals since some people are pretty shy when talking to foreigners, but it depends and there will always be some very open people as well. At the clubs you will see them go all out and it feels like a different world (again, especially Dance Club).

Another way to meet people is through your classes, maybe try to group up with Taiwanese people during some group projects for example. Personally, I found it easier to connect to people from the Liberal Arts / Foreign language department. I found that they were more open and similar to me. Language exchange would be a third advice, many Taiwanese people want to learn another language and you can try to find a language partner through university or ask people on your own. If you're going just one semester, the second option can be easier.

In general, I would advise you not to pressure yourself to only meet Taiwanese people. It is normal that it's easier to connect to the exchange students since they are going through the same thing and often share some cultural similarities. You should have people to talk to when you're feeling down, and it can be easier to discuss stuff like that with another exchange student. It can also be an opportunity to get to know people from other places in the world! Of course, still try to talk to Taiwanese people and don't feel like they are not interested in you, many people can just seem shy but open up after a while! Keep in mind especially the buddy

group members are willing to meet exchange students and often more open to speak English, so that can be a good start!:))

Courses

There are many English courses at NSYSU and the amount is growing. If you need the grades for your degree, I recommend you to take English courses unless your Chinese is very good. Do not be afraid to take Master Courses if you're in your Bachelor's degree, especially in the Liberal Arts Department. Course selection can seem a bit complicated, but NSYSU will provide a very step-by-step explanation on how to work with the system, so it will be fine. I recommend anyone to take the free Chinese classes, they are very good and all of the teachers I had and heard about were very nice. Most NSYSU Courses are organized a little more like Seminars in Germany, most of them take attendance and have several exams or presentations, not just one final exam. However, you will still have enough time to travel, go out and get to know Taiwan on the weekends, and you can ask for a leave if you want to travel. In most cases, there is no problem at all. There were some exchange students even traveling for 2 whole weeks during the semester. As long as you turn everything in on time and organize your presentation dates well, it will be fine. Before selecting the courses, you should have a good look at the course requirements and see if you want to take courses with higher or lower workload.

Monkeys

There are a lot of monkeys on the Campus. Especially around the dorms, at Liberal Arts and sometimes around the Administration Buildings. They are cute and not really dangerous, but they steal your food and drinks, climb into rooms and even open backpacks if they smell food. You should never walk around eating food but try to eat inside and store your food in your bag. If they come really close and you have food in your hand, just give it to them to avoid them jumping on you (that's my advice at least). Since NSYSU implemented a new rule, you can now get your monkey for your food back if you take a picture of the monkey with it after he stole it from you. There is also a monkey tour offered from the university which you can attend to learn more about them. Keep in mind the monkeys were there first :)

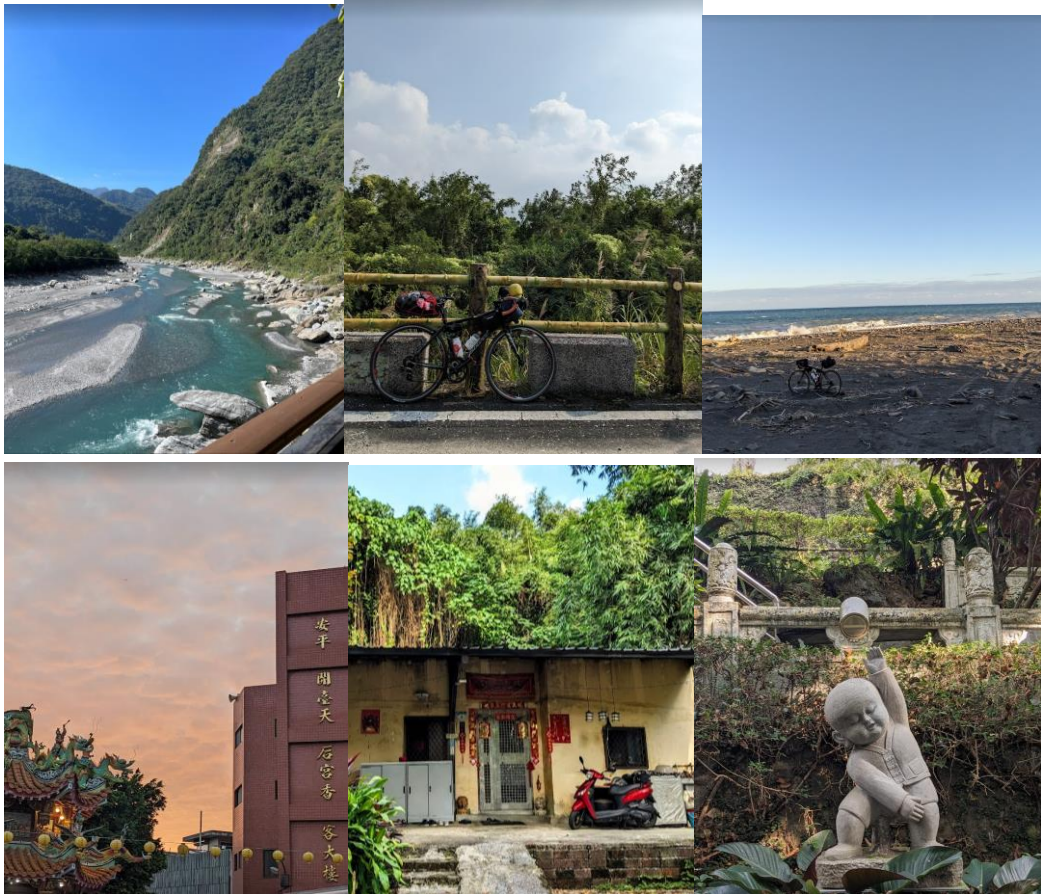


3. Some advice for Taiwan

Last, I want to give some advice for Taiwan in general, and what I like most about it.

- Try not to be too loud in the public transport and in the trains. People use that time to sleep after work and you should try to adapt to the volume of other passengers
- If you want to travel around Taiwan, you can use the HSR on the West Coast, trains all around Taiwan or buses. It can take longer than expected to plan ahead:)
- If you're vegan or vegetarian: look for Buddhist places and ask people for “素食”. They might ask you if you can eat Egg and Milk; but also, if you eat Onion and Garlic (Buddhists sometimes do not eat Onion and Garlic, and the word “素食” is often taken as equivalent to a Buddhist diet)
- If someone seems chill, you can easily ask them about political topics (with a little caution of course). People value harmony in conversations, but many are willing to talk about Taiwan's political situation
- Connected to that point: Taiwan has a very unique culture due to its history. Taiwanese culture is not the same as Chinese, Japanese or Korean. They do have the typically Japanese manners, friendliness and respect, but most people are more open with personal matters. As with any destination, try to inform yourself a bit beforehand (especially about white privilege!), but try to keep an open mind and be ready to change your opinion many times.
- Travel recommendations for Kaohsiung: Cijin, Buddha Memorial Museum, Fine Arts Museum and the Park around it, Shoushan (the mountain close to the campus, watch out for monkeys!), Lotus Pond, Shinkuchan Shopping District close to Central Park, Ruifeng and Nanhua Night Market, Pier-2 Night & Arts Market on Saturday and Siziwan Pier
- Travel recommendations for Taiwan: definitely go to Taipei at some point, Hualien, Sun moon Lake and Alishan are nice for hiking and beautiful nature, Xiao Liuqiu and Lü Dao are beautiful Islands and Kenting is easiest to reach for a nice beach. During my time, I made a bike trip along the East Coast, which is my biggest recommendation. You can rent or buy a bike and stay at hostels or camp (we slept in hammocks and its allowed besides some national parks). Personally, this was one of the best experiences I had in Taiwan and I would consider it the most beautiful way to get to know the country.

What I like most about Taiwan is its nature and its safety. You can camp on a beach without having to feel scared, and walk home at night in the city. Also, people are very nice and often very willing to get to know you, which can be the start of beautiful encounters, especially when traveling. There is so much culture to get to know and even after 11 months I still do not really feel like I understand Taiwan. I would definitely say I experienced culture shock, but this also depends on how long you stay and what your expectations are. In a weird way, its both wrong to assume Taiwanese people are all shy and quiet or that they are open and easy to get to know, which is why giving advice on this is hard. Another thing I really like are the colors of Taiwan and how there is so much art and comic/anime decorations everywhere. There are many young artists selling and presenting their work on flea markets, and every announcement or advertisement around the city is cute and makes your day a little funnier. I like that you can have both peace and quiet, but also laugh and go all out in other situations. Taiwan is very special and I don't think it really compares to any other place <3



I hope you have a wonderful time in Taiwan!:)