Erfahrungsbericht

Studiengang: Wirtschaftsinformatik
Austauschjahr/Semester: HWS 2012
Gastuniversität: National Chengchi University (NCCU)
Stadt: Taipei
Land: Taiwan


Introduction

As a Mannheimer student most of us have the great opportunity go to abroad for an exchange semester. No matter which place you want to go, I’m sure that the semester abroad will be a very unique one. You will meet a lot of people from all over the world, discover new cultures and learn a lot for your future career. However, it also means that you need to do a lot of preparations and paper works and most important is that you should be ready to accept their culture. It is wise to do a little research about the country before you make your final decision.

Actually Taiwan was my second priority but at the end I didn’t regret going to this nice and beautiful country. My roommate (Exchange student from US) used to describe Taiwan as a “Happy Country” and I totally agree.
Preparation

The whole procedure was not as complicated as I thought. Just follow the instructions of the international office (AAA) and watch out for the deadlines. If you want to apply for an “Auslandsbaufö” then you should do it early enough (around 6 month before your exchange semester).

After I got accepted, I had to wait for the response of the partner university, which can take another few months. During that time I was looking for my foreign health insurance and went see the doctor for the vaccinations. Although my doctor recommended me to get some vaccination before I leave Germany, but at the end I did not get any since I was already a little bit familiar to Asia and I know that Taiwan is a safe country. But everyone should decide if they want to get it or not. One thing I almost forgot: please make sure to select the courses (refer to the previous year) in advance and try to get all learning agreements before you leave. Don’t worry if the syllabus indicates that one course was in Chinese (for more detail in the chapter Study Abroad).

Accommodation

There are three options for exchange students to accommodate during the semester: school’s dormitory (dorm) on the campus, iHouse or live outside the campus. You can set your priorities in your application, however there is no guarantee that you will get a place.

The dorm is very cheap (around 324€ for the whole semester) and it is non-mixed. You share your room with 3 other guys. Each floor has its own public bathroom, which will be cleaned daily. There is no kitchen and the rooms are quite small.

The iHouse is a little bit more expensive (around 324€ per month for a single room). It is very new, modern and mainly for international students. The iHouse is outside the campus and is quite “isolated from the campus” in my opinion.

I applied for the iHouse but got assigned to the school’s dorm number 6, which was located uphill of the campus. My buddy helped me a lot during my first move-in to the dorm in September. At first I was really shocked about the environment and I thought I wouldn’t survive a week with three other guys in that small room. It was not clean at all and everything was below the western standards. However I told myself to at least give it a try and I’m really surprise how much I’ve changed during the stay. I adapted to the environment really fast and got used to the area. And the most important thing is that I got the best roommates and neighbors, which will make the whole environment a lot better. You will also meet a lot more local students in the dorm than in the iHouse – that’s for sure. At the end I didn’t regret being in the dorm, because it was not as bad as the beginning and I saved a lot of money as well.

Study Abroad

The course selection was not too difficult due to the fact that we got great support from Melody (incoming student coordinator). Just make sure to check your emails everyday and follow the instructions – you won’t miss anything!

Unlike Mannheim, where you have a large lecture with 300 students, the audience in NCCU is a lot smaller (between 10-20 students in a lecture). The workload is distributed all over the semester and usually only counts 20-30% of the final grade. Most undergraduate courses require attendance (the professor will check if the students attend).

The courses I took (refer to the list on the last page) were really good although all of them were in Chinese, which I really didn’t understand. I made a lot of learning agreements before my arrival, so I chose a lot courses (most of the in Chinese) and dropped most of them afterwards. I visited all lectures in the first week of the semester begin and talked to
each professor about my condition as a non-Chinese speaker. While they say that the lecture was in Chinese but all lecture slides and exams were in English. The good thing about this: they all welcomed foreigner because most international students were not dare to take these courses :)

So basically you are the only foreigner in that course and you will have more chance to get closer to local students than international courses, which is in my opinion a very good opportunity to discover more from the Taiwan’s culture.

You can give it a try and drop them afterwards. However, just make sure that you have learning materials in English and also make sure that the exams are in English. The exams are a lot easier and you have usually three hours.

Course database: http://courses.nccu.edu.tw/qrytor/default.aspx
Leisure Time

NCCU is located on the mountain area and it takes around 20min with the bus to reach the downtown (Taipei City Hall – 101). One thing I really like about NCCU is the connection to the nature: it was not the typical city life I expected from Taipei. I used to jog along the riverbank or climbed up the mountain. NCCU also has a gym room and a swimming pool that I visited more than 3x a week. If you like to join a sports club such as Ping-Pong or soccer team, then go for it! Just don’t be shy and ask them. It is also a great opportunity to meet people there.

I was quite lucky because I got a very caring buddy and he also introduced me a lot of friends. So I was hanging out with my buddy and other local students most of the time. Don’t expect them to go out clubbing with you or any kind parties that are associated with alcohols. If you want that kind of lifestyle, then you should think carefully if you really want to go to Taiwan and not any other western countries because the Asia culture is different.

Besides the campus life there are a lot to discover in Taiwan. I didn’t travel around Asia and only stayed in Taiwan. It is very convenient to go to the big cities such as Taichung, Kaohsiung or Tainan by train or High Speed Railway (HSR). Usually my friends planned my trip and I just joined them. I had a lot of fun travelling with a group of friends and I think you if you should have the opportunity to do this, don’t miss that!

Btw I spend around NT$ 20.000 (500€) per month
(Rent, shopping, travel, food, entertainment, basically everything...)

Cat Village “Houtong” – We saw more than 100 wild cats
Facts

I’m going to list some random facts and things that can be helpful during your stay in Taiwan and NCCU:

- People in Taiwan speaks and mandarin Chinese with a different accent
- Taiwanese likes to drive their motorcycle, so expect to see a lot of them
- They have a very unique drinking culture: you see a lot of drink shops (Bubble Milk Tea)
- The large size of drink you get in McDonald is HUGE
- Do not throw the toilet paper into the toilet as it will stuck the pipe
- NCCU has 70% female and 30% male students
- There are less smoker on the campus compared to Mannheim
- Wi-Fi is available on the campus – but every time you need to wait for the login screen popping up
- There are free Wi-Fi in every MRT stations in Taipei
- McDonald has corn soup for breakfast
- The subway offers breakfast from 8:30 – 11:00
- There are NT$200 and NT$2000 banknotes but they are very rare :)
- The guy on the NT$100 is Sun Yat-Sen
- In the underground mall of Taipei Main Station there are a lot of claw cranes (夾娃娃機) which I love them so much
- If you hear a loud music outside – it's no the ice cream truck… it’s the garbage car!
- The music of the garbage car plays everyday is either “Für Elise” or “A Maiden’s Prayer” (very funny)
- There are water dispenser everywhere on the campus, so you don’t need to buy water actually
- Most garbage bin are in buildings and not outside
Conclusion

I hope the list above has already given you a little impression of Taiwan. You shouldn’t be afraid of the culture shock as I think Taiwan is a lovely and happy country. Although Taiwan is considered as a part of China but the people there appeared friendlier and more sympathetic. Their kindness and helpfulness makes the whole country even more attractive. I never met such friendly people – they are always ready to do everything to help you and not expect any returns. I cannot really describe them with words but I just can say that I love this country very much because of the kind people.

It is always difficult to be alone in a foreign country. Foods are different; sometimes toilets are not even according to the “our standards”. But the local people try their best to make our exchange semester as comfortable as possible and I really appreciate that. Everything takes some times. I must say that I get used the environment and food really fast. I remember that at the beginning I really disliked the most foods just because I was not familiar with them. But now I love the food so much that I even bought the ingredients and learned how to make them. I love the culture and the people. You cannot compare Taiwan with China, as the people and their culture are totally different.

One thing that I really did not like was the fact that some international students did not really respect the Taiwanese culture. If you really want to go to such a nice country like Taiwan, you have to be ready to accept changes. We are the one, who needs to adapt to the environment and not they. I’m really surprise how much I’ve changed. This semester was the best during my whole study.

If you have the opportunity, then go for it because you won’t have this kind of chance anymore in your future once you start working. It is a big difference going to a foreign country as a tourist than as an exchange student. Don’t miss this great chance!
An der ausländischen Partnerhochschule besuchte Kurse:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kursbezeichnung</th>
<th>Kurs</th>
<th>SWS/Credits</th>
<th>Anerkennung an der Universität Mannheim</th>
<th>Bemerkungen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000321011</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grundlage der Statistik (8 ECTS)</td>
<td>Chinese, exam and lecture in English; Very simple mathematics. Attendance required (!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>753883001</td>
<td>Advanced Database Systems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Datenbanksysteme (8 ECTS)</td>
<td>Chinese, exam and lecture in English; Requires a SQL knowledge. My favorite course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703027001</td>
<td>Computer Network</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Computer Network (6 ECTS)</td>
<td>Chinese, exam and lecture in English; Very practical due to Lab. NS2 and Linux knowledge will be helpful. Little programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SWS = Semesterwochenstunde