

Living and Studying in Taipei City – My Experiences as an Exchange Student (Olivia Windisch)

As my International Business program requires students to stay abroad for two semesters, I decided to spend one of them at the *National Taipei University of Technology (NTUT)* in Taiwan. The semester began in September 2023 and lasted until January of the following year.

Before starting the semester

Thanks to NTUT being a *partner university*, the application process was quite simple. I put NTUT into my top three partner universities on the form I had received when the time came for my mandatory semester abroad, and after being nominated by Trier University of Applied Science, I was sent all the documents I needed to fill out by Mr. Lex. Furthermore, Prof. Richter was kind enough to write me a letter of recommendation.

Shortly after, I was invited to the *2023 Fall Taipei Tech Exchange Program Online Orientation*. In addition to some general information about the university, we were informed on how to get a SIM card and finding an accommodation. The student dorms are very cheap; however, you will have to share a sleeping room with 2 to 4 other students, and I had heard some questionable stories about them from other people. For this reason, I decided to look for a room on one of the sites recommended to us, myroomabroad.com.

I recommend searching for your room and texting landlords before arriving in Taipei, then you can book a hostel or airbnb for 1.5-2 weeks and see the rooms in person. If you start your search at arrival, there might be a chance you won't find a room as quickly. In general, you should be prepared for rooms to be small and not include any kitchen gadgets - many landlords even forbid tenants from cooking. Having said that, this usually isn't a problem: Eating out is actually cheaper than buying groceries, and there is plenty of fun food to try in Taipei 😊.

Since I was told that people with German passports do not need a visa if we leave the country every 90 days (visitor visa will be renewed upon entering again), I did not apply for one and instead took that time to visit other east asian countries – Malaysia, Singapore and Japan. This would however not work if I had planned to stay for two semesters and it caused me a bit of stress during my exam phase (we did not get many public holidays and a lot of classes had mandatory attendance, leaving me little free time for "forced vacation").

Studying at NTUT

According to my learning agreement, I had to gain 30 ECTS during my semester abroad. One Taiwanese credit corresponds to 2 ECTS and most classes would reward you with 3, which meant I would be taking 5 courses.

At the beginning of the semester, the university offers a so-called "drop-in" period during which students will be able to attend all classes they are interested in before enrolling or applying for those with limited capacity. Most of the classes available to me (business-related and in english language) were part of a master's program, however I did not feel unprepared – in fact, some of the classes were part of my bachelor's program in Trier already! I ended up selecting:

- Strategic Management,
- Environmental Economics and Environmental Policies Analysis (I highly recommend this class for anyone who wants to see how we can apply the “dry” economics theories we studied in our bachelor’s program to real world issues),
- Supply Chain Management,
- Corporate Leadership,
- Business Projects’ Profitability Analysis,
- And a Chinese language class.

The main difference between university in Taiwan and Germany in my opinion has been the focus on group presentations and projects, as compared to exams. Nearly every class put us in groups and required presentations on a frequent basis. If we had exams, they were divided between mid-terms in November and finals in January.

In order to help integrate us into university life, NTUT had assigned student buddies to us exchange students. I was glad to get to know my buddies and kept in contact with them outside of campus as well. I also took part in a language exchange program that partnered students of all university departments together in groups of half native mandarin speakers and half foreigners.

Living in Taipei

In general, costs of living seemed to be lower than in Germany. I payed around 300 euros for a small room with its own bathroom in a convenient location – close to Da’an Park and in walking distance to university, which also saved me a bit of money and stress compared to other students who took the MRT in the morning. I also did not have to pay any study fees due to the partnership.

Fruits and vegetables you find at the grocery stores tend to be on the expensive side – I preferred to visit day markets in my area for those, and maybe grab a 蛋餅 on the go!

The student ID I received after a mandatory health check doubled as an “EasyCard” which could be charged at MRT stations, and used for public transport as well as in various shops, e.g., convenience stores.

Stores are open every day of the week and usually accept VISA cards, however I found it helpful to open my own bank account and also carry a bit of cash with me, especially for street markets. I opened a bank account with Changhwa Bank and the process was not difficult, however I would recommend informing yourself on the documents you need to show (especially Taiwan ID or ARC for people staying two semesters) before you run around all day looking for certificates like I did...

Before coming to Taiwan, I had expected more people to speak English as it is one of the national languages – this however was not really the case outside university. I had to rely a lot on Google Translate at markets and outside of Taipei City. Nonetheless, Taiwanese people were very friendly and often tried to help me out even if my Chinese was not the best.

Since my weeks were pretty packed with classes, I didn’t get to experience much of Taiwan itself aside from Taipei City. This is why after my semester had finished, I did not immediately fly back to Germany and instead took a bit of time to enjoy nature and other parts of this

beautiful island. One of my favorite experiences during this time had to be staying in Hualien at the east coast of Taiwan for a few days and going on hikes in Taroko National Park.

All that said I would recommend a semester abroad to anyone, mandatory or not. Since I had not been outside of Europe before, Taiwan was a somewhat scary but, in the end, very rewarding destination, and I am glad to have made all these experiences and met so many great people during my stay as well.