

Taiwan through My Eyes

By Le Nguyen Thu Phuong

► Sakura blooming in NYMU



My name is Le Nguyen Thu Phuong, also known as TP in English and 黎秋芳 in Chinese. I was born and raised in a small Vietnamese family in Hanoi, Vietnam. My interest in the field of medicine started at a young age. Born and raised in a family where two previous generations are made up of general doctors, I have always been fascinated with the human body and the environment around me.

I remember vividly, the first time my father bought me *Atlas der Anatomie des Menschen* by Frank H. Netter, a book dissecting all the details of the human body. The most fascinating aspect of this book was how the body parts seem so invisible to our naked eyes but are profoundly understood by scientists. Through this interesting thought, I realized how the anatomy of the human body is an ongoing scientific evolution as vast as the unexplored oceans. From that moment, I had decided to join the field of medicine and to become someone who can contribute to this ongoing research of humanity.

I had studied in University of Science and Technology of Hanoi (USTH) that matched with my interests in biotechnology. Later on, after completing the first two years of my Bachelor degree, I was chosen as one of the internship students at National Yang-

Ming University in 2017's program. During my five months of testing the anti-aging drug, there was not a single moment where I regretted what I was doing. In fact, being at such a prestigious university like NYMU, my view of the scientific world positively expanded. My learning curve has been boosted tremendously during my time here. It was not only the results from the lab that made me happy, it was also the experience which I have gained during my five months internship. I had never experienced living in a dormitory before, but it was very enjoyable and I became more self-aware after this experience.

After I came back to Vietnam and graduated from USTH in

► Family Outing - Taipei Trip 2018



October, 2017, I was thinking either to further my study or to find a job. After a long period of thinking, I decided to pursue higher studies because it is a great opportunity to work closely with the professors so that I can expand my knowledge and skills in order to get a good job in the future. Since then, I have been looking for the scholarships from Western countries or US; however, my heart always heads towards Taiwan. I could not help but appreciate the memories I have from this country. Luckily, I was offered admission to the Master program in NYMU.

It is no exaggeration to say Taiwan is one of the safest countries all over the world. The high level of education, low exposure to crime, economic freedom and good healthcare system are few examples of why Taiwan is ranked 2nd on the annual Peace Index. Especially, the education system of Taiwan is outstanding! As an international student who has been living and studying for the first semester, I agreed that Taiwanese universities in general and NYMU specifically offer rigorous academic programs. Furthermore, I have been learning from enthusiastic and inspiring professors. They not only give lectures but also interact with students to understand more about our interests and fields of research. Besides, they are so reality that they assigned essays to us directly about how could their lectures apply in our later researches.

NYMU also provides two available summer courses: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Microbial Biotechnology and Drug Discovery – both of which I have attended this July. In the TCM



▲Our Beautiful times in Fulong Beach

course, I got a chance to experience the field that I have never tried before such as practicing acupuncture, cupping, scraping, observing TCM's doctors for patient treatment, and visiting herbal medicine street. It was unforgettable experience because I myself witnessed its application in real life. Thanks to that course, I have known many acupuncture points so that I can treat for my family and friends.

Taiwan not only mesmerizes me with its academic programs, but also with its infrastructure and climate. My dormitory is on the mountains so that the environment even more clean. It gives me refreshing mornings where I can breathe in fresh air from

▼The spring time in NYMU





▲ Jiufen Day with Taiwanese Friends

botanic gardens. It will be ashamed to not mention the kindness of Taiwanese people. They are an incredibly friendly and helpful group of people. I remembered during my internship period, my friend and me were lost in the street and could not find the metro station. One student came to help us and he was so eager to lead us all the way to our school. Another time when I was in a restaurant struggling with ordering some food. A woman came to my table and helped me out with the translation. Since then, I was pleased enough to know that Taiwanese in general are immensely affable. People were curious about where I came from. Not only they want to know more about my culture, but they also want to make sure foreigners like me are comfortable with Taiwan's transportation system.

Whenever people ask me “How is the transportation in Taiwan”, I could say it remarkably convenient. Taipei has a public transportation network – MRT for the whole city that I can get around easily. Besides, the high speed rail lets people transverse from the North to the South of Taiwan in a short amount of time, specifically just for few hours.

One of the most attractive aspects about Taiwan is their lively and exciting festivals and other traditions. Various notable festivals include Chinese New Year, Tomb Sweeping Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Lantern Festival; Mid-Autumn Festival, The Moon Festival, National Day and so on... I was fortunate enough to have attended The Dragon Boat Festival twice. It was bustling and had many rewarding



▲ Magnificent Chimei Museum

outdoor activities such as making traditional rice dumplings, boat racing which brought me a vibrant and unique experience into Taiwanese culture.

The museums in Taiwan deserve to have their own mention due to how stunning and magnificent they are. I fell in love with the National Palace Museum in Taipei, a world-class museum that hosts an eclectic collection of treasures kept by generations of Emperors ruling from the Forbidden City. In WWII, Nationalist troops seized the most important pieces in order to prevent invaders from ransacking national treasures. A twist of fate eventually brought these treasures to Taiwan. The museum is home to hundreds of thousands of historical relics which make up the world's most comprehensive and precious collection of ancient Chinese art and antiquities. The entire collection covers 5,000 years of China's historical and artistic achievements. The museum is a must-see on any visitor's itinerary.

Also, I had a chance to visit Chimei Museum in Tainan. It is an extraordinarily beautiful and also the must see museum in Taiwan.



Chimei Museum is a comprehensive museum with wide collections of Western art, musical instruments, weaponry and natural history. There are four exhibition rooms, one temporary exhibition gallery and a sculpture hall in the main building.

How can I not mention about food and night markets when it comes to Taiwan? The “must try” food when you first come to Taiwan is Niu Rou Mian, which was known as Beef Noodles Soup. There are two kinds of beef noodles soup, traditional clear broth alongside vegetables, and spicy red braised broth with tomatoes, or Chinese herbs. Beef slices and chewy noodles in the broth are definitely the best way to dive into Taiwan cuisine. Next is Xiaolongbao, also known as soup dumpling, which is one of my favorite Taiwan dishes. The dumplings with translucent skin are traditionally filled with pork. After steaming, the fillings produce lots of broth inside the dumplings and make a juicy morsel of heaven.


Another heavenly dish is mango shaved ice which is a must have in Taiwan, especially because CNN named it as one of the best desserts in the world. An avalanche of shaved ice piled high with cubes of fresh Irwin mango, mango pudding, mango sorbet, and condensed milk in a bowl is the greatest joy on a hot summer day! What's next is Bubble tea, also known as "pearl milk tea," is made of a mixture of black tea, milk, and tapioca pearls. When you visit Taiwan, you can not help noticing that there is a tea shop on almost every corner. The combination of fragrant milk tea and chewy pearls has made this beverage popular not only in Taiwan but in many other countries as well. Night markets are one of the most essential places we must go when visiting Taiwan.

Shilin Night Market or Ximending are two night markets most familiar to me. The Shilin Night Market in Taipei is one of the largest, most popular night markets in Taiwan with regard to food, and also one of the most popular points of Taipei's night life among visitors. The maze of alleyways is filled with a variety of local, traditional, and international merchandise that

attract locals and foreigners alike.

Many of Taiwan's traditional foods can be found and bought for reasonable prices from the friendly locals who are eager to let you taste the unique flavours of their traditional recipes such as *Giant Fried Chicken Steak*, *Tempura*, *Bubble Tea*, *Oyster Vermicelli Oyster Omelet*, *Fried Buns* and of course, the most notorious Taiwanese goodie, *Stinky Tofu*.

Taiwan and National Yang-Ming University are the places in which I get to know a lot of good friends from many countries including Spain, Finland, USA, Singapore and of course, Taiwan. Another inevitable part of my experience is the professors who aid me in my academic endeavors. I am forever grateful for the invaluable experience that these people have given me. But this is not the end of my Taiwanese chapter. I will continue to stay here and study at Academia Sinica for my PhD degree – an opportunity that will open many more doors for my future. Continually continuously, I will make endless memories with my professors, friends, and the beautiful humans of Taiwan.

The story of my life, my experiences and my study has just begun. Stay tuned. 

▼ Monochrome TP in an Imperial Red - Grand Hotel Taipei

