淡江大學

Tamkang University

Experience Report

Tamkang University - 淡江大學

Taipei, Taiwan

WS 24/25

Management, Economics and Social Sciences (B.Sc.) (Term dates: 01.10.2024- 12.01.2025)

Completed Courses:

Finance and Technology, Democratic Politics, Political and Economic Development of Northeastern Asia, Taiwan's Foreign Economic and Trade Relations, Museum Survey, Basic Chinese Listening and Speaking I

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Tamkang University:

The Tamkang University (TKU) is in the very north of Taiwan in Tamsui District, New Taipei City and is Taiwan's oldest private institution of higher learning. Although TKU oWicially has four campuses, most students, especially exchange students, are housed at the Tamsui campus, which oWers a unique blend of traditional charm and modern amenities. The Tamsui campus is large and located on a small hill, which means that walking from one building to another takes some time and eWort. The campus is made up of a variety of buildings belonging to diWerent faculties. They can be roughly categorized into two styles: traditional Chinese architecture and modern buildings. All my courses took place in the modern buildings, which are equipped with contemporary facilities. In general, the campus is modern and very green featuring traditional parks with Chinese pavilions, benches, and even a pond filled with turtles. Scattered across the campus, you'll find trees, green spaces, koi ponds, and small waterfalls, creating a serene and welcoming atmosphere.

For daily necessities and meals, the campus oWers plenty of options. There are two FamilyMart convenience stores, several cafes, and a large food court located beneath the Sung-Tao Hall, the female dormitory. This food court features over 12 eateries serving a wide variety of dishes, open from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Beyond the campus, the surrounding area provides endless dining choices, ranging from Asian cuisine to Italian and American fast food.

Navigating the campus is straightforward, thanks to a campus navigation system similar to those at many European universities. Each building is labeled with a distinct letter, and rooms are numbered in ascending order, with the first digit indicating the floor. However, because of the campus's hillside location, determining which floor is the ground level can sometimes be confusing. Fortunately, clear signage is abundant, and the helpfulness of fellow students makes finding your way easy.

If you want to do sports during your exchange, you have many options. You can join one of the many clubs or visit a large fitness centre, which is free for students. There is also a swimming pool, training rooms for various sports, an outdoor running track, a football pitch, basketball courts and three tennis courts in a central location.

In addition to academic and recreational facilities, the campus seamlessly integrates with the surrounding city. It is well-connected, with two bus stops oWering regular services to the MRT station, which is also within a 15-minute downhill walk. Alternatively, the Light Rail station is just a 9-minute walk from the other end of the campus.

Getting to Taipei from TKU campus is straightforward and convenient. Taking the MRT Red Line is the most common option, with a travel time of around 45 minutes depending on your destination. As Tamsui is the first station on the line, you often have the advantage of securing a seat. However, it's important to note that eating, drinking, or even sipping water on the platform or train is strictly prohibited and can result in a fine.

TKU Events:
There are plenty of events happening on the TKU campus throughout the semester. At the beginning of the term, there is a 1-2 week period where all the clubs introduce themselves, allowing students to explore and join. While most clubs primarily operate in Chinese, they are often very welcoming and will do their best to include you.

In December, the campus transforms with a mix of a night market and a Christmas market. There are numerous food stalls, photo booths, small merchandise, clothing stands, stages with performances, and a large Christmas tree that creates a festive atmosphere.

The university also organizes many events specifically for exchange students, and you'll receive direct notifications about these through Line. You can choose to sign up for activities like farewell or Christmas parties. Additionally, there are flea markets on campus selling second-hand (and sometimes luxury) clothing, bags, games, and more.

One unique experience I had was being invited to represent Germany at an elementary school. I prepared a presentation in English for the students and received a certificate for my efforts. Another memorable opportunity was participating as a model in a charity fashion show organized by the university, which was a lot of fun and a great way to connect with others.

Before Arriving

Essential Checklist:

- **Visa:** Technically, you can stay in Taiwan without a visa if you leave the country every 90 days. However, all of my friends opted to get a visa. Personally, I had to apply for one because I received a Taiwanese scholarship. Be sure to check for the latest update.

- **Medical Check-Up and Vaccinations**: A medical check-up and specific vaccinations are required not only for the visa application but also by all Taiwanese universities. I strongly recommend completing these in your home country rather than in Taiwan. You can find an example of the required medical form here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pYAmmBstMad9Xqh6UlLovhaouQwd1iBF/view?pli=1. Be sure to check for the latest version.

- **Visa/MasterCard**: From my experience, all major cards work consistently in Taiwan. However, make sure to have at least one credit card and check any fees for ATM withdrawals or online payments. I also opened a Taiwanese bank account due to my scholarship, but this is not strictly necessary. Personally, I used VISA Hanseatic/Barclays and VISA DKB credit cards without issues.

- **Medical Overseas Insurance**: I purchased mine from HanseMerkur, but there are many providers offering similar coverage.

- **Accommodation**: Ensure you arrange housing ahead of time. Dorms or private apartments are both viable options.

- **SIM Card**: My university provided me with a SIM card, but I recommend researching options beforehand. An unlimited data plan is very useful.

Recommended Apps to download:

- **Google Maps**: Essential for navigation in Taiwan
- **Google Translate**: Useful for basic translations
- **Papago**: A better option for translating Asian languages
- **Uber**: Convenient for transportation, especially in larger cities
- **Line**: The main communication app in Taiwan. Download the Asian version after arriving to access additional features like Line Pay
- **Pleco**: Excellent for translating and identifying Chinese characters

Preparation and Organization

Visa:

The first step is to decide whether or not you need a visa. I highly recommend applying for one. If you are staying for just one semester, you will need a Visitor Visa and the following documents:

- **Completed application form**: https://visawebapp.boca.gov.tw/BOCA_EVISA/
- **Passport** (original and photocopy): Your passport must be valid for at least six months and have blank pages.
- **Two passport-size photos**: While oWcially two are required, they returned one photo to me after processing.
- **Certificate of admission**: Send a photocopy only; this is issued by the Taiwanese university.
- **Certificate of enrollment**: Provide proof of enrollment from your home university (e.g., University of Cologne). Ensure the document is in English.
- **Proof of payment**: Evidence of the visa fee payment.

If you want your visa and passport returned via post, include the following additional documents:

- **Explanation of postal dispatch**: Fill out this form: Erklärung auf Postweg, https://www.roc-taiwan.org/defra_de/post/1180.html
- **Return envelope**: Include a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

To apply, you must locate a Taiwanese mission, as there are no official Taiwanese embassies in Germany. A list of missions can be found here: https://www.roctaiwan.org/portalOfDiplomaticMission_en.html#Europe.
I applied through the Taipei Vertretung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Büro Frankfurt am Main, and I was able to complete the entire process via post—there was no need to visit in person.

Tip: I strongly recommend applying for a multiple-entry visa rather than a single-entry visa to give you greater flexibility during your stay.

Life in Taiwan

Accommodation

I chose to apply for on-campus housing and was allocated a room in the Sung-Tao Hall dormitory**,** which is a female-only residence on the TKU campus.

If you prefer to live independently, finding a flat in Tamsui is relatively straightforward. Apartments in Tamsui tend to be more affordable compared to Taipei. However, it's important to consider how often you'll need to commute to campus and your personal preferences before deciding where to live.

Some of my friends opted to stay in an Airbnb initially, while others searched online or worked with local agents to find suitable housing. Below are some helpful websites and resources for finding accommodation:

1. **Suei Ma Ma** 崔媽媽: https://rent.tmm.org.tw /
2. **Formosa** 雲端租屋生活網: https://house.nfu.edu.tw/TKU
3. **TKU Talk Rent Center**: https://www.facebook.com/groups/tkutalkhouse/?ref=bookmarks
4. **Looking for Roommates or Apartments in Taipei and Taiwan (in English)**: https://www.facebook.com/groups/Taiwanapartmentsandroommates/ ?ref=bookmarks
5. **My Room Abroad** (Price range: 9,000 - 16,000 NTD/month): http://www.myroomabroad.com/
6. **Live in Taiwan** (Price range: 9,000 - 35,000 NTD/month):
    - Email: service@liveintaiwan.com
    - Website: https://www.liveintaiwan101.com/products/apartment-rentalservice
7. Rooms.Taipei (Price range: 8,500 - 17,000 NTD/month):
    - Website: https://www.rooms.taipei/
    - Facebook: www.facebook.com/rooms.taipei/reviews

For those considering staying in one of the TKU dormitories, I'd like to share my personal experience.

There are two main dormitory options: the International Dormitory, located about 15 minutes off-campus and housing both male and female students (on separate floors, with a mix of international residents), and Sung-Tao Hall, a female-only dormitory primarily accommodating Taiwanese students. Regardless of your choice, each dorm room typically houses four people. Occasionally, only three beds might be occupied during your stay.

I personally stayed on the first floor of Sung-Tao Hall. One important note: there are no elevators in this building. If you're assigned to a higher floor (e.g., the sixth floor), you'll need to carry your luggage up and down the stairs, so make sure to find some help! Each room is furnished with bunk beds, a desk, and a cupboard for each resident. Privacy is limited since there are no curtains around the beds, but I found this manageable. There is a single changing curtain in the room for anyone who prefers privacy while changing. The cleanliness of the rooms could be better. When I moved in, I had to clean my bed before placing my mattress. Brushes are available for borrowing, but they're difficult to locate, and I rarely saw other residents cleaning their rooms. Additionally, there are no vacuums, so the floors may remain a bit dusty or has some hair on it. Each room is equipped with a powerful air conditioning unit. You'll receive an AC card upon moving in, which needs to be charged for usage. Roommates typically share the costs of AC.

The bathroom facilities are shared among the entire floor, with one or two large bathrooms per floor. Each bathroom has around ten shower cabins and two large sinks. Be aware that while there are plenty of toilets, most are traditional Asian-style squatting toilets. Only 1-2 European-style toilets are available, and you may need to queue to use them. You'll also need to bring your own toilet paper and soap every time you visit the bathroom. Although the bathrooms are not spotless, they were manageable for me.

Sung-Tao Hall is strictly female-only, and boys/men are not allowed inside. Security is very strict but there is no exit restriction and its no problem to enter or leave at any time. Access to the dorm is only possible by scanning your student ID card at the door. If you lose or forget your card, you'll need to report to security. While service hours might be required for repeated instances, my experience (and my friends') suggests this rarely happens. For example, my Taiwanese roommate lost her card three times without facing any consequences. Overall, while the dorms may not be luxurious, they provide a convenient and affordable option for students, particularly those new to Taiwan.

There is no collection point for rubbish. Instead, a rubbish lorry comes to the dorm from Monday to Friday and sometimes on Saturdays and stands there for about 1.5 hours. During this time you can throw in your rubbish. This is quite normal in taiwan, as it is forbidden to throw rubbish on the street. That's why other people stand on the street at night and wait to throw their rubbish directly into the rubbish lorry.

Roomates

All of my international exchange student friends, including myself, who lived in the dorm had three Taiwanese roommates. The relationship between international and Taiwanese roommates can vary greatly depending on individual personalities and circumstances. Personally, I was extremely lucky. All of my roommates were super kind and open.

Of course, it took a little time for everyone to warm up to each other, but they were always helpful and even made an effort to speak English when I was around so I could understand their conversations. We became so close that we went on a weekend trip to Sun Moon Lake together, and I was even invited to visit their families in their homes. To this day, I'm still in good contact with them and would happily live with them again anytime! That said, some of my friends had a very different experience. A few never spoke to their roommates

at all, and some Taiwanese students didn't speak any English. However, even those who couldn't speak English often used translators to communicate and were generally polite.My advice would be to stay open-minded and proactive. Do not hesitate to initiate conversations, even if it's just small talk or asking questions. Food is always a great icebreaker – sharing snacks or discussing local dishes can be a fun way to connect. Being open to new situations and finding common ground can lead to meaningful friendships with your roommates. I am still in good contact with them and all three will visit me in the summer in Germany.

When you are staying in Sung-Tao Hall, here is the dormitory's website and mailing address:

- **Dormitory Website**: https://sa.tku.edu.tw/spirit/?page_id=649
- **Mail Address (Chinese)**: 松濤館 Sung-Tao Hall, 251301 台灣新北市淡水區英專路 151 號松濤館 房號???
- **Mail Address (English)**: No.151, Yingzhuan Rd., Tamsui Dist., New Taipei City 251301 Taiwan (R.O.C.), Sung-Tao Room No.XXX
    - XXX → You have to put your personal room and bednumber in

Activities

Taiwan offers a diverse array of activities, catering to those who love nature, culture, and city exploration. Many attractions are conveniently located in the north near Taipei, but the entire island has much to offer.

Tamsui and Taipei:

- Tamsui Old Street
- Fisherman's Wharf: Host a firework and streetfood festival when I arrived
- Eco Trail & Mangrove Forest
- Cycling Along the Riverbank
- Taipei 101
- Elephant Mountain
- Night Markets: Shilin Night Market is the largest market near TKU with a variety of food options, including vegetarian-friendly dishes
- Museums: National Palace Museum, Chimei Museum (Tainan)

Cities to Explore:

- Taichung
- Tainan
- Kaohsiung
- Nantou: Sun Moon Lake
- Hualien & Taitung
- Kenting
- Jiufen & Shifen

National Parks:

- Taroko National Park: Due to the April 2024 earthquake, some areas may still be closed – check conditions and opening times in advance.
- Kenting National Park

Countries I travelled during the semester:

- Phillipines
- Hongkong & Macao
- Singapour
- South-Korea
- Japan
- China

Countries I visited after the semester ended:

- Vientnam
- Thailand
- Cambodia
- Malysia
- Indonesia

Road Trips Around Taiwan:

I personally did a road trip with three friends around the island, which was an incredible way to explore the diversity of Taiwan's landscapes and cultures. Alternatively, you can cycle around Taiwan, a popular activity among locals and visitors. Renting a car in Taiwan can be tricky, particularly if you require comprehensive insurance coverage. Not all rental companies offer full insurance to foreign drivers, so be sure to check this in advance. You'll need an International Driving Permit IDP to rent and drive in Taiwan. However, the IDP must be validated in Taiwan, which involves an additional step at a local Motor Vehicles Office, what we did not know before and took us two visits in the office.

Night Life:

There are several bars in Tamsui but the are not cheaper than in Taipei. Here are not clubs but we often went playing pool together next to the campus and really cheap with long opening hours. Therefore we would recommend Taipei to go out. There you can meet also amny other international students but also many Taiwanese. My favorutie bar was an Irish Pub called Aye Taipei and Bar Shock. Babylon is a famous roof-top club with great view at Taipei 101 and many student parties for international students. Really good is also Wave. It is in the top 32th Cluvs worldwide. Check out their special offers. During my stay women could enter and drink for free and men could drink for free and only had to pay a small fee. The MRT operates until around 1:00 AM from Taipei, with the first train departing at 6:50 AM. If you're looking for a faster option, taking an Uber is a great alternative. The ride takes approximately 30 minutes and costs between €30–€40. Traveling in a group can make this option more aWordable, especially during late hours when most establishments, including McDonald's, are closed until 6:00 AM. Ubers are easy to find in Taipei, making them a convenient and eWicient choice when the MRT isn't available.

Food and Shops:

There is no shortage of restaurants and cafés in both Tamsui and Taipei. While Taipei offers a more international variety of cuisines, Tamsui primarily has Chinese-Americanstyle dishes that are both delicious and very affordable. Tamsui is also home to many cake shops and convenience stores, making it easy to grab snacks or essentials on the go. As mentioned earlier, there is a large food court conveniently located beneath the Sung-Tao Hall dormitory, offering a variety of meals at reasonable prices. In Taipei, you'll also find more European-style cafés, which are great for those craving familiar flavors or a cozy coffee shop atmosphere. However, be prepared for slightly higher prices compared to the local options. If you miss German bread there is a German bakery in Taipei called "Omas German Bakery". Shopping in Taiwan, especially in Taipei, is fantastic and offers everything you might need. While prices are not significantly cheaper than in Europe, the styles are often more modern and trendy. This makes it a great destination for fashion and accessories. If you're traveling to Taiwan, consider saving luggage space by purchasing essentials upon arrival. From clothing to everyday items, you'll find plenty of options in local stores, boutiques, and shopping malls. Whether you're looking for trendy outfits or unique souvenirs, Taipei has it all.

Public Transportation:

- **High-Speed Rail (HSR)**: Tickets are priced based on distance and remain consistent regardless of the booking time. While convenient, HSR isn't cheap, especially for longer distances. On Sundays, especially in the evening, trains heading toward Taipei are often fully booked, so plan accordingly to secure your ticket in advance (at least two days before).
- **Standard/ Local Trains**: Regular trains are a more budget-friendly option and still offer decent comfort.
- **Bus System**: really good and cheap bus system. Make sure that you nearly always have to change your online ticket to a paper tickets at a counter at the bus station. The drivers will not ait one minute for you if you are late or only have the online ticket.

Completed courses:

In total, I enrolled in 6 courses. To meet the University of Cologne's requirements, I would only have needed to take 3 courses. However, I decided to take more classes due to my scholarship conditions. The scholarship requires that I earn 4 credits in Chinese. Besides Basic Chinese, my other Chinese course was Museum Survey**.**In general, the academic workload was manageable. Taiwanese students typically take up to 20 classes per semester**,** so their stress stems from balancing numerous assignments, presentations, and exams. However, these assignments aren't the most difficult, and the level of education is not particularly high. I would say that while the academic rigor may be lower, there is a strong emphasis on interaction and connection with professors. Most subjects include group work, and the final grade is usually based on several components, as outlined in the syllabus. The course selection process takes place after your arrival. During the first week, you can attend any class to get a feel for it, meet the professor, and understand the requirements and exam dates. Afterward, you need to finalize your

courses, and attendance will be recorded from that point on. In December, there is a drop period after the midterms (usually held in the first week of November). Any courses you drop during this period will be noted on your transcript as "dropped."

1. **Finance and Technology:**
   This was by far the most challenging class. It was the only course without mandatory attendance, but I still missed only two classes. Often, we had only 510 students present, and the professor engaged us with frequent questions. Attending the class made it easier to pass because we were thoroughly informed about the teacher's expectations. The professor spoke excellent English and had a deep understanding of the subject. We had one midterm and a final group presentation (with the same group throughout the semester), and each group had to submit a report alongside the presentations. Although the class content eventually felt somewhat similar to my Data Science course, as we covered neural networks and various forms of AI, I still gained a lot of valuable knowledge.

2. **Democratic Politics:**
   As an MES student, this subject was relatively easy for me. The course required us to attend classes and read and summarize a text each week before the class. Participation in class discussions was also expected. The professor, who was Brazilian, spoke excellent English. I found the class to be very straightforward but enjoyable, and I met great people from various countries. The midterm was a 5page paper (including references) on any topic related to democratic politics. The final paper required us to extend this paper to 7-10 pages.

3. **Political and Economic Development of Northeastern Asia:**
   This class was interesting, especially with guest lectures from diWerent experts. The professor was Japanese, and we worked in groups of three. At the end of each class, we had to discuss the topic and present our thoughts for 1-3 minutes. The midterm involved writing a report based on a guest lecture (though it was in Chinese, we later received English slides to use). The final was a 3-10 minute presentation on any topic, with internationals encouraged to discuss connections between their home country and Taiwan.

4. **Taiwan’s Foreign Economic and Trade Relations:**
   This class was more challenging compared to others. The professor, who completed her PhD at the University of Cologne, spoke excellent English. She is part of a Taiwanese government research group focused on negotiations and economic aWairs. The midterm and final were both group presentations and reports on specific topics related to Taiwan’s economic relations. The standards in this class were higher, more in line with those in Germany. Participation in class was also credited, and I found the course well-structured and informative. We learned a great deal about Taiwan's trade agreements, its history, and its relationship with China.

5. **Museum Survey:**
   I took this course to fulfill my Chinese credit requirement, as my schedule didn't allow me to take Calligraphy (which would have conflicted with other courses). Although it was supposed to be taught in English, the professor had limited English skills, so we made a deal: internationals who didn't speak Chinese were not required to attend classes, but instead, we were responsible for independently visiting museums around Taiwan and writing reports on our experiences. The final report had to be in Chinese, but since I didn't speak Chinese, I wrote it in English, using a translator and the help of my Taiwanese friends to refine it.

6. **Basic Chinese Listening and Speaking I:**
   This class was also quite challenging. The problem in my year was that they restructured the Chinese lessons, and it was a bit chaotic. So, this class is called Listening and Speaking I, so reading and writing was more in demand. Most of the Asian students in the class had already been learning Chinese for over a year and were at a completely diWerent level to us Europeans, who had only been able to say ni hao until then. We tried a diWerent course once, which takes place four times a week and was perfect for our level as it was for total beginners. But due to our scholarship we were not allowed to attend. The teacher was strict but friendly and fair. Once she noticed that we really do not understand her she changed the tempo and tried to help us a lot. Chinese was the only subject that took place twice a week for two hours each time (Monday and Thursday from 6-8pm). The intermediate exam consisted of an individual 5-minute presentation and the final exam was a 45-minute listening test. We had two homework assignments per week, which we had to hand in online. You can download the book as a pdf online.

Conclusion

I really enjoyed my time in Taiwan. I made wonderful friends from all over the world and am certain I will return in the future! The most important advice I can give is to stay openminded and not set overly high expectations, everything will fall into place over time.

Taipei, while not as modern as other Asian capitals like Tokyo or Seoul, has a unique charm. It feels more like a typical “older” Asian city than Seoul and Tokyo, but after some time, I grew to love it deeply, even in the unbelievable high amount of scooters. Taiwan is very clean, and the people are friendly, open, and genuinely interested in getting to know you. While the general level of English may not be very high, locals will make an effort to communicate, even if that means using a translator. I never faced major challenges in making myself understood. I would recommend Taiwan to anyone looking to experience a daily life in Asia with some western influence but not too much. It is perfect for those who want to avoid living in a massive, overcrowded metropolis while still being close to a vibrant and sizeable city.Taiwan’s climate is another highlight. When I first arrived, it was incredibly hot (42°C), but the widespread availability of air conditioning made it manageable. Also the heat feels different than In Europe so you will sweat a lot but it felt

less exhausting. Autumn, however, was fantastic. I never needed a heavy winter jacket, just layers for the cooler days. It didn't rain excessively during my stay, either. I experienced two Taifuns and therefore had three days additional free.

Given the chance, I would definitely choose Taiwan and Tamkang University (TKU) again. My time there was fulfilling and memorable in so many ways. If you have any questions about studying in Taiwan or at TKU, feel free to reach out – I'd be happy to help!