

Taiwan Year Abroad Handbook

2022-2023

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Applying for a Visitor Visa

The first bureaucratic step in the year abroad process is applying for your visa to travel to Taiwan. The visa process that we had to go through was as follows:

- Applying for and entering Taiwan on a visitor visa (<180 days) for the purpose of studying. This visa was valid for 90 days.
- Once in Taiwan, towards the end of the 90 days visa, we applied for a residents visa for the purpose of studying which then lasted through to the end of the year abroad
- Within 14 days of receiving your resident's visa you have to apply for an Alien Residency Card (ARC) which becomes your ID in Taiwan.

Note however, that this process might be slightly different if your application process isn't affected by covid. For example, you might be able to apply to first enter Taiwan on a residents visa in the first place, so make sure you follow the instructions given to you by the MTC.

The London visa office is very fast, and if you pay for the express service (recommended) then your passport and visa should be back with you within two weeks. If you're applying in Scotland, the Edinburgh office is also very fast.

Here is a list of documents needed, in print, for your visa application:

- A printed copy of your completed online application form, signed (https://visawebapp.boca.gov.tw/BOCA_EVISA/, choose 'general visa applications')
- Two colour UK passport style photos taken within the last 6 months.
- Your passport
- A photocopy of your passport
- Your flight confirmation/reservation details
- Proof of financial support (three months of bank statements or scholarship details). Note that some people got away with not including this but this may have changed.

A health certificate isn't needed for applying for a visitors visa, this is only needed once you're in Taiwan and you're going for your residents visa.

Tips

- If you're applying by post, send your passport and application pack at the post office and ask them to also include a pre-paid return envelope too. This way, you can track your package on its way to the visa office and the way back and can make sure it's signed for.

Getting a Sim Card

Getting a sim card is one of the first things you'll have to do in Taiwan, for obvious reasons, and will be a good way to test out your Chinese skills. You can often get good deals on sim cards at Taoyuan airport when you land and so this might be good to tie you over in the short term. In the long term, this is the recommended course of action:

Zhonghua Telecom (中華電信)

It's highly recommended that you use Zhonghua Telecom for a SIM card. This is the company that all of us went for. Zhonghua Telecom provides great service and coverage not only in the urban areas of Taiwan but also the remote areas and the mountains. Though it's slightly more expensive than the other providers, the level of convenience it offers is worth it. The best way to enquire about the different plans they offer is to go into a physical store, as the online information is very confusing. There are many stores around Taipei, including one on the same road as the MTC:

Chunghwa Telecom Shida Service Center

No. 182之2號, Section 1, Heping E Rd, Da'an District, Taipei City, 10645

<https://goo.gl/maps/k6JrLj3BXvoJVSHg6>

Plans

China Telecom offers several different plans for students, so make sure you bring your MTC admission letter or MTC student card along with you when you buy your SIM card. You'll also need to bring your passport.

120 Day-Pass - 2300NTD

Unlimited data

100NTD of SMS/Voice call credit

90 Day-Pass - 1800

Unlimited data

50NTD of SMS/Voice call credit

60 Day-Pass - 1350NTD

Unlimited data

50NTD of SMS/Voice call credit

45 Day-Pass - 1050NTD

Unlimited data

50NTD of SMS/Voice call credit

When your contract expires, you can either go into the store to add more days (加日子) or you'll be text a link to do it online. Note that you can't extend your contract before it ones out, only once it's run out so make sure you keep a note of when this will be so you're not caught out with no access to mobile data.

Money in Taiwan

Cash Culture

Taiwan is very much still a cash culture. Although there are alternatives such as LINEPay, they don't seem to work with foreign cards and not everywhere accepts them. You can pay in quite a few places with an EasyCard (see the section on transport for more details) but these still have to be topped up with cash so they just add an extra step.

UK Bank Accounts

Most UK bank accounts don't work too well in Taiwan, and have expensive exchange rates. It's highly recommended that you get a card with Starling Bank and use it a bit before you leave as they work the best in Taiwan. You can take out up to £350 worth of Taiwanese dollars per day with no fees. The best ATMs to use to take out money with a Starling card is Cathay United ATMs, which you'll notice by the green tree logo. They don't charge you to take out money and you can choose whether to use their conversion rate or Starling's (the majority of the time Starling's is better) These ATMs are in every metro station in Taipei and are in many convenience stores, so you'll never be far from an ATM.



國泰世華銀行
Cathay United Bank

Receipt Lottery

At most places in Taiwan, the receipts you get with your purchases are actually lottery tickets! Every two months winning numbers will come out for the previous two month period (eg, the winning numbers for January-February come out at the end of March) and you can check them against the numbers on your receipts to see if you've won any prize. For most of the prizes, you can take your receipt down to a convenient store to exchange it for cash and if you're lucky enough to win a large prize you can take it down to the bank. If you don't want to have to check through all your receipts yourself you can use an app to scan the QR codes on your receipt and then it will automatically check for you when the time comes and tell you if you've won.

If you don't want to have to collect paper receipts however, the most convenient thing to do is to use the cloud receipt function on the app. These generate a personalised barcode for you which you then show to the shop assistant to scan before you pay. You won't get a paper receipt, but you'll still be entered into the lottery and if you win you can take your digital receipt record to a convenience store/bank to claim your winnings.

Apple App:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/雲端發票/id512920023>

Android App:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.cloudmobile.einvoice>

Cloud receipt guide: <http://taipeiexpat.com/cloud-invoice-app/>



Opening a Taiwanese Bank Account

Opening a bank account in Taiwan is a little frustrating to say the least, so unless you're receiving a Taiwanese government scholarship then avoid opening one as there'll be no need for it. If you are receiving a scholarship however, then you'll have to quickly open an account when you get to Taiwan in order to get your money. Here's what to do.

Step 1 - Getting your ID Number

First you need to find out what your Taiwanese ID number is. This requires a visit to the:

National Immigration Agency Taipei City Service Center (移民署臺北市服務站地址)
15, Ghuang Jhou St. Taipei (臺北市中正區廣州街15號)

You'll need to bring your physical passport, as well as photocopies of the visa page and the photo page (they have a photocopier there if you need to use it, although you'll have to bring some coins with you to pay). You'll also need to fill at a form called 'Record ID Number in the ROC (至移民署申請統一證號)' which you can get from them there. You'll receive a form in return which has your 'UI number' written at the top.

Step 2 - Getting your seal

To do any kind of banking in Taiwan you have to bring a seal with your Chinese name on it (yes, really). There are many different shops around Taipei that can produce a seal for you (look out for signs saying 刻印 and NTNU has two in the vicinity:

106台北市大安區泰順街3號 No. 3, Taishun St., Da'an Dist., Taipei City

106台北市大安區泰順街38-2號 No. 38-2, Taishun St., Da'an Dist., Taipei City

Ask the shopkeeper if they can make a seal for you to open a bank account. You can expect to pay around 50NTD-150NTD, and you don't need to buy any ink as they have ink at the bank.

Step 3 - Opening the bank account

Finally you can open a bank account. The only place that will let you open a savings account without an Alien Residence Card (which you won't get until about three months into Taiwan) is the post office. There are many of these around Taipei, including two very close to NTNU. If you find the banking section and tell them you'd like to open an account they'll be able to do it for you. However, the process takes quite a long time (around half an hour, it involves the bank clerk filling in a lot of paper forms) and the workers have been known to simply refuse to open an account for you if they can't be bothered so don't go in groups of bigger than two and avoid going at lunch time if possible. You'll have to give a 4 digit pin code and a 6 digit pin code (the 6 digit code is the one that you'll actually use) so remember to make a note!

Things you'll need to bring:

- Passport (with photocopy)
- Student ID card
- Your address details
- A 100NTD deposit
- Your seal
- Your UI number and form (that you got from the immigration agency)
- Your UK national insurance number (if you have one)



These accounts are very limited. There's no online banking function and you can't transfer money in from the UK so if you do get scholarship money put onto it it's best just to take cash out of it, for example to pay rent.

Applying for a Resident Visa

Before your visitor visa runs out, you need to apply to change it to a resident visa. Again this is a multi-stage process that involves going to do a few different places around Taipei and dealing with a lot of bureaucracy in Chinese.

Step 1 - Getting a health check

You need to get a health check from a Taiwanese hospital before you apply for a residents visa. This involves checking for syphilis with a blood test and checking if you have any breathing issues with a chest x-ray. The three hospitals you can get a health check at are:

1. 台北市立聯合醫院-和平 Taipei City Hospital Heping Branch
2. 台北市立聯合醫院-仁愛 Taipei City Hospital Renai Branch
3. 台北市立聯合醫院-中興 Taipei City Hospital Zhongxing Branch

You'll need to bring around 2,000NTD, your passport with a photocopy, and two passport sized photos. Most of the hospitals have a photobooth to take photos if you've run out.

It's also highly recommended you bring your UK vaccination records with you, as without them the hospital will have to run an extra blood test on you to check for different antibodies which will cost more money. You can get your vaccination records by emailing your GP in the UK.

The results of the health check will take about a week to come out, after which you can collect a certificate from the hospital. Make sure you leave enough time for this.

Step 2 - Getting your documents from the MTC

To apply for the resident visa, you'll also need several documents from the MTC showing that you're a student there. They should email you about this in good time, but if not you can enquire at the office about the documents.

Step 3 - Apply Online for the Visa

Similar to the visitor visa, you need to apply for a new visa online and then print out the form and sign it. This time you'll want to choose an 180+ day stay. The purpose of travel is still 'studying' <https://visawebapp.boca.gov.tw>

Step 4 - Head to the Bureau of Consular Affairs

Once that's all done, you can head to the bureau of consular affairs to finish applying for your visa. They'll then give you a date to come back on, around a week later to collect your passport with the new visa

Bureau of Consular Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部領事事務局)
3-5F, 2-2, Sec.1, Jinan Rd., Zhongzheng Dist., Taipei City, Taiwan

You'll need to bring:

- Your printed online application form, signed
- Your passport, with photocopies of the photo page and visitors visa page
- Passport sized colour photos
- Health certificate from hospital, with a photocopy
- MTC Documents
- Your Oxford Bod Card (with photocopy). If you don't have it email Oxford for a record of enrolment form.
- 3000NTD

Applying for an ARC

The one final hoop to jump through is applying for an Alien Residence Card. You have to apply for this within fifteen days of receiving your residents visa, and it then becomes your ID in Taiwan.

1. Visit the link below and complete the Students Online Application System- Foreign students and Overseas Chinese:

<https://coa.immigration.gov.tw/coa-frontend/student/entry/foreign-student>

(You can switch the page language from Chinese to English in the upper right corner)

2. Take photos of the passport information page and visa page, then upload the photos to the system.

3. Upload a color passport-size photo to the system.

4. Take photos of the admission letter of MTC, then upload the photos to the system.

5. Take photos of your bod card/Oxford enrolment form, then upload the photos to the system.

6. Take photos of your flat lease in Taiwan, which must include address, commencement, and termination dates, landlord's name and signature, tenant's name, and signature.

7. Pay the fee of 1,000NTD. This can be paid online with a Starling card, or you can pay at a convenience store.

It's recommended to use a small file type such as a JPG and scale down all the photos to ensure they fit the file restrictions.

You'll then get a digital ARC once it's approved. Some of us were also given physical ARC cards to pick up from the National Insurance Agency but some of us weren't. It just depends how your agent is feeling that day! Once you have your ARC you're finally settled in Taiwan. The ARC still doesn't allow you to do any paid work but it allows you multiple entries/exits into Taiwan and means you're officially a resident.

Packing Tips

Hand Luggage

- Laptop and charger (and adapter!)

Most people in our year group brought their laptop and/or iPad to do work on. It is very easy to get these insured on your university insurance and is definitely worth doing considering the risk that comes with travel/ living in shared accommodation.

- Mobile Phone

Everyone in the year group brought their normal phone and bought a Taiwanese sim card to use during the year. If you end up needing a new phone there are plenty of places to buy them and people have said they are cheaper than in the UK!

- Travel documents

passport/visa

ticket/boarding pass

address of hotel/ Airbnb/ quarantine hotel

photocopies of travel documents

spare passport photos

- Wallet with international card, pounds and NTD (To be on the safe side we recommend getting some NTD while in the UK but don't panic too much if you can't get hold of any, there will be plenty of opportunities to get cash out once you land. It is very important however that you have a debit card that works in Taiwan as you will need to take cash out constantly because almost everything in Taiwan runs on cash.

Clothes

- When you arrive in Taiwan it will probably be very hot and humid (yay!) so it is worth having plenty of summery clothes, including light long sleeved clothing as the mosquitos will be out to get you.
- In Taipei it rains! A lot! So it is also very much worth investing in a waterproof jacket, umbrellas are very cheap so it is probably easier to purchase one here.
- Taiwan does have a brief winter that can get to single digits on the odd occasion, so we'd recommend a couple of jumpers and maybe one warmish coat.
- Buying clothes in Taiwan is very convenient and cheap so if you forget anything don't worry you can easily find it (perhaps in Ximen, or if you're splashing the cash, XinYi)
- If you have larger feet, shoe shopping can also become difficult, so be sure to bring several pairs of suitable footwear.

Household

- You can bring sheets and pillowcases, but this isn't crucial. Most places don't provide bedding but there are plenty of furniture shops including IKEA where you can get everything you need.
- The same goes with furniture items, you can buy all of that in Taiwan and so don't waste your suitcase space on it.
- If you're bringing any electronics from home, like a laptop, you will need an adapter. Electronics in Taiwan tend to have two or three pins (not the same as in the UK) but most of them are two pins so those are the ones most worth buying.

Medication

Although most things are readily available in Taipei pharmacies, it is a good idea to bring some medication from home when you come to Taiwan

- Painkillers

You can definitely buy painkillers in Taiwan but it might help to bring a couple boxes from home for the settling in period in case the need arises and you don't quite feel confident enough to speak to a pharmacist.

- Vitamins

Again, there are plenty of vitamins in Taiwan, but they can be helpful for the settling in period especially when adapting to a new diet at the same time.

- Prescriptions:

If you're on prescribed medicines, make sure you get a prescription to last you the whole time you're in Taiwan. If you run out and can't source them from a Taiwanese pharmacy/ doctor, the best solution would most probably be getting them shipped over by friends/ family with the prescription note in case it gets intercepted by the border force.

- Stomach upset tablets:

You may get an upset stomach whilst in Taiwan due to the new cuisine. We would advise that you bring your own tablets from home to deal with this for convenience's sake. If you have the tablets with you already, then when food poisoning does strike, you can stay in bed complaining to all your friends on Line instead of having to go out feeling awful to try and buy some.

- Things like plasters, hand sanitiser and anti-septic wipes are so easy to get hold of that you don't have to bother bringing these things yourself.
- Other things to consider bringing are sun cream and mosquito repellent—see the medication section.

Other

- It is a good idea to take down your credit/debit card numbers, passport numbers and insurance policy numbers and leave them with a trusted person back home (i.e. mum) so that if you lose any of these or have them stolen you can more easily get your cards stopped and get replacement documents. Alternatively, think about setting up a Card Protection Policy (CPP) before you go so you can cancel all your cards and order replacements with one phone call, rather than 5.
- A Lonely Planet, Rough Guide or similar guidebook is definitely worth investing in, especially if you are intending to travel in Taiwan.
- Bring your books from Oxford for the year abroad

You can buy stationery really easily and cheaply here, so for the very beginning just bring a couple of pens and a notebook.

- Completely indispensable in Taiwan is the smartphone app Pleco, available on iOS and Android smartphones and tablets. Pleco offers character recognition, has a highly comprehensive and expandable dictionary, and is affordably priced (free, if you don't get the useful add-ons, which can be bought at a student price). Plus, if it's already on your phone, there's no need to carry around another device to decipher what those 汉字 on subway ads are! There is even a classical add-on.
- Contact lenses/ spare glasses

If you are a contact lens wearer, we recommend bringing a month's worth of lenses to last while you get settled in but then it's super easy to buy them in Taipei as there are opticians on every corner and you don't need an official prescription to buy them.

- Something to remind you of home.

It is a good idea to combat homesickness by bringing photographs or mementos from home. You can also bring some of your favourite food (i.e chocolate, peanut butter, marmite etc.) with you to help you as you settle in during the first few weeks in Taiwan.

It's also worth bringing your vaccination record (for all vaccines, not just covid) before you leave for Taiwan as it'll help you out when you're doing your health check for your residency visa. You can email your GP to get it when you're out here, but it's obviously easier to sort out when you're in the UK in case you need to ring them up.

Concise Checklist

- Passport
- Plane ticket
- Taiwanese Dollars (NTD)
- Bank cards
- Photocopy of passport/bank cards
- Copy of insurance information/certificate
- MTC admission letter
- Hotel/hostel/Airbnb/quarantine hotel/MTC address in Chinese
- Guidebook

- Money belt
- Padlock (for lockers, bags, etc.)
- Camera
- Chargers/cables
- Spare passport photos
- Laptop
- Adaptor plug
- Clothing (summer and winter)
- Toiletries (deodorant can be difficult to find here)
- Medicines (plasters, paracetamol/ibuprofen, immodium, contraceptive pill)
- Vitamins
- Books, notepad and pen

Accommodation

There are a few different options for finding your long term accommodation in Taipei. They each have their pros and cons, and no apartment is perfect, so you'll have to think about what your priorities are in finding an apartment. Things to consider are price, location and proximity to the MTC, how many people you want to live with, whether you're fine sharing a bathroom and what communal space(s) the flat has.

591.com

<https://www.591.com.tw>

This website is all in Chinese, and is used by locals in Taiwan so is slightly more complicated to use but you might be able to find cheaper places because of it. You can put in lots of different filters to make sure you find the right place, and if you're interested in a flat you can message the landlord/agent on LINE to make an enquiry. It's especially useful for if you want to live in a slightly larger group, because you can filter by number of rooms.

Facebook Groups

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1425899014386679/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1834309463450416/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/464870710346711/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/taipei.taiwan.apartment.rentals/>

Using Facebook is probably the most convenient way to find an apartment in Taipei. New apartments pop up on these groups daily with all different kind of criteria. You can also make a post with your requests on and landlords can contact you directly. Some of the groups are in Chinese, some are in English and it's highly recommended you make use of them, even if you don't end up renting through them, because you can see what to expect for different price ranges/locations in Taipei.

Borderless House

<https://www.borderless-house-zh.com/tw/>

Borderless House is a flat share company in Taipei. You'll get a discount if you show your MTC admission letter, but none of us used this company so we can't speak to its merits/drawbacks. Some of the rooms require you to share with a roommate though, which is unnecessary for the price of accommodation in Taipei, so be careful!

Tips

- Finding accommodation for one, two or three people is easy. Finding accommodation for any numbers greater than that is hard. If you're really eager to live in a big group then one idea might be to split up and find two apartments near each other.
- It's not uncommon for rooms in Taipei to have no outside windows. Avoid these rooms. You might think they'll be fine at first but if you have to stay there all year you'll go crazy. Make sure you ask explicitly about this as some landlords put curtains in a room so that it looks like there's a window in the photos.

Should I find a long-term apartment before I leave the UK?

This question is a tricky one. It's obviously very convenient to have a place ready to move into before as soon as you get to Taipei (or when you come out of quarantine) but you run the risk of not being able to properly see the place before you sign the contract.

If you decide to stay in temporary accommodation first before you find your long term apartment, your best bet is AirBnBs (although they are quite expensive in Taipei). Alternatively, if you see a place you like before you leave for Taiwan you could ask the landlord if you could sign a short lease (eg 1 or 2 months) and then determine whether you actually want to stay there the whole year before the time is up.

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Finding an apartment from the UK was a mixed bag, because obviously you've got the worry that you're going to be scammed and you can't see the apartment in person before you sign the contract and pay the deposit. On the flip side though, it means it's one less thing to worry about when you actually get to Taiwan. If you do decide to do it, just be careful and make sure you ask to do a video tour of the apartment, ask for as many details as you want and thoroughly think it through.

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Will I have to pay a deposit?

Yes. This is generally equivalent to two months' rent and hopefully you manage to get it back at the end! Take pictures of your room as soon as you move into it (before you unpack) in case your landlord claims any damage that was already in the room is actually yours.

What will my landlord want to see before we sign a contract?

Generally, your passport, visa and maybe your MTC admission letter. Before you send pictures of these documents/if you give them photocopies, right 'for rental use only' (and/or 僅供租屋使用).

Turing Scheme

The Turing Scheme is a government grant scheme established after Brexit to replace the Erasmus scheme for year abroad travel. Everybody on the year abroad is eligible for this scheme, and there is a (quite substantial) base level that is paid to everyone as well as extra based on means-testing. Extra funding is available for:

- Students with a low household income (annual household income of £27,500 or less);
- Students who are care-experienced;
- Students who have caring responsibilities;
- Students who are estranged (studying without the support and approval of their families);
- Students receiving Universal Credit or income-related benefits because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them, such as a child or partner;
- Refugees and asylum seekers; or
- Participants with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This may include a sensory or mobility impairment, a long-term illness or health condition, or mental health condition, an autism spectrum condition, or a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD.

At some point before you leave for your year abroad, you should expect to receive an email from 'UAS StudyAbroad (studyabroad@admin.ox.ac.uk)' with details of the grant and how to get it. This will require getting forms signed by both Oxford and the co-ordinator at the MTC. Oxford will only approve your forms if your risk assessment and insurance have been approved. For any signatures required from Oxford, this can be done by your tutor at your college. 80% of the grant is paid first, followed by the remaining 20% at the end of the year abroad once you've filled out a few more forms.

Student Finance

- The first important thing to remember is to register for your second year at Oxford, otherwise your regular student loan will not be released. As in first year, the money comes in three instalments at the beginning of each academic term, to the bank account you requested
- When you are on your year abroad, Student Finance offer travel grants which are reimbursement for necessary travel and visa-related expenses: These will typically include flights, visa fees and necessary medical fees outside of your Oxford travel insurance (e.g. the health check for your resident permit)

Student Finance Organisations for each country in the UK have different policies on reimbursement and on what they will cover:

Student Finance England

According to SFE 'The amount (of reimbursement) you get depends on your total household income. This means your income, if you have one, combined with that of your parents or guardians, or spouse or partner if you live with them. Do not count income from other family members you live with. You must pay the first £303 of your travel costs - and your travel grant will be reduced by £1 for each £8.73 of household income over £39,796.'

If you are eligible, you will automatically receive two forms after you have applied for Student Finance:

1. The Course Abroad Form which should be completed by the university (e.g. by Rosanna Gosi) or college to confirm the period abroad.
2. The Travel Expenses Form which you should complete.

Student Awards Agency Scotland

The same as in previous years, Scottish students are entitled to full reimbursement for flights and medical insurance (if they choose not to take Oxford's insurance). This is unconditional and will not be affected by their household income. Scottish students will not be asked to cover any of their travel expenses.

You will receive an email containing the relevant form from SAAS to personally fill in.

Student Finance Wales

In a change from last year, Student Finance Wales has removed the household income element of their travel grants. This means that all Welsh students will be able to claim the 'reasonable costs' of travel. Like English students, Welsh students will also be required to contribute the first £303 of their travel costs.

The form to claim is available on the SFW website (see Sources).

Student Finance Northern Ireland

Northern Irish students get very vague information about the travel grant they will receive. SF Northern Ireland simply states it 'depends on your household income' and that every student must cover the first £309 (a whole six pounds more than Wales and England) for each separate claim application themselves.

To note:

SF England, Wales and Northern Ireland have similarly worded statements on the reasonableness of expenses incurred, and while there is no similar warning from SAAS to Scottish students, you'd still best not try and claim business class flights.

Many of our year group had to wait to receive the reimbursement from SFE and so filled out the form using a PDF version that they then uploaded to their 'files and documents' page on their SFE account. As for the receipts we believe that they can also be uploaded online however we do not know for certain as we have not completed out applications yet.

As for 'evidence' of the obligatory year abroad, apart from the form Student Finance provided, past students had tutors write them a letter of confirmation that, yes, students definitely do have to go to NTNU in their second year. You should want to get the department to sort out the paperwork for you in Trinity Term (it is much easier when you are still in Oxford). The claims form lists everything you can claim for, but keep receipts for anything you reckon you can claim some eligibility for—it is worth trying.

As said above, you can leave the form at home for your parents to sort out as you accumulate Chinese receipts and send scans of these for them to collate alongside British receipts, but bear in mind that, given the form itself requires the physical signature of the student/claimant, you might wish to sign the blank form before you leave in the summer!

You can start claiming at any time, but consider that for each separate list of claims you send off, that £303/£309 excess applies, so if you can, wait until you've collated all of the things you want to claim and submit just one big claim and pay that excess once.

Past students have submitted this in early Spring after we had booked our final flights home. The system is complicated and you may face bureaucratic failures at several points, so keep on your toes.

Sources

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/travel-grants-students-england/overview>

Wales:

<http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-students/new-students/what-financial-support-is-available/travel-grant.aspx>

Scotland

http://www.saas.gov.uk/_forms/sas4.pdf (page 18)

Northern Ireland

http://www.studentfinancenir.co.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/NPIPG001/NPIPS001/NPIPS087/TRAVEL_GRANT_FACT_SHEET_1617.PDF

EU-Taiwan Connectivity Scholarship & ICL

As part of your year abroad you might receive a scholarship from the Taiwanese government, the 'EU-Taiwan Connectivity Scholarship'. The stipend is 100,000TWD and will be disbursed to your Taiwanese bank account after you arrive in Taiwan and open it (take note there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in opening a Taiwanese bank account and will take some time, so do not expect to receive the first scholarship payment until around December). Once you've opened your Taiwanese bank account, you then send your details to the office at the MTC and they will send them off to the Ministry of Education who will then sort out the scholarship for you. The second instalment will be paid to your account later in the year abroad, shortly after Chinese New Year.

ICL

As a recipient, you are required to participate in a service-learning program and this program is called "ICL". You may find more details at: <https://icl.tw/index/index/lang/en>. There will be an orientation after you are allowed to enter the campus. Also, you need to participate in a "Chinese Language Achievement Presentation" to present your Chinese learning outcomes at the end of this year.

For ICL everyone will have to sign up for a weekly slot to talk to a class of elementary or middle school children for about 40 minutes over Skype. This runs from as soon as you have received the relevant information from ICL until roughly early January. As part of ICL you will also have the opportunity to join one or more free trips to the schools. You are encouraged to go on the trip to the school you have been paired up with, but you are also free to join as many others as you like. The trips are not compulsory, but are encouraged and a good opportunity to travel outside of Taipei.

As for the ICL sessions themselves, you will be paired up with a Taiwanese partner and the two of you will have to negotiate the organisation of each session, including making PowerPoints, etc. The idea is to share the culture of your country with the children, so choose topics that you think the children will find fun and informative. For example, you may choose to make presentations on food, leisure activities, music, and holiday festivities for your sessions.

Even if you don't receive the scholarship, you can still opt in to taking part in the ICL scheme. It's a great way to see different parts of the island for free, so definitely consider getting involved for a term.

Healthcare in Taiwan

Pre-existing Conditions

The key with pre-existing conditions, when it comes to coming to Taiwan, is preparation. Once you have the university insurance all sorted, it is important to know what medications you will need and how easy it is to access in Taiwan. Some medications are illegal in Taiwan or cannot be brought into the

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From experience, don't wait to be bitten before you seek mosquitos repellent as your first few bites by the Taipei mosquitos tend to cause the most dramatic reaction.

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country such as painkillers containing codeine. In addition, you can only take up to 6 months' worth of any medication so you will need to bring appropriate paperwork to be able to get more in Taiwan. Medication can typically be bought from any pharmacy as long as they stock it - if it is harder to find you may need to go to a hospital to get it. They will often ask for proof/evidence so it is important that you have letters from appropriate doctors and a list of your prescribed medications from your GP.

It is also important that you are aware of stigma and attitudes to your condition before coming - particularly mental health conditions (which will be covered later) and allergies. Allergies are harder to deal with in Taiwan. There is far less information on menus and people are less aware of cross-contamination. It is important to make clear whenever you order something you haven't tried before that you have an allergy.

What to Do If You Are Ill

Firstly, as soon as you develop concern for your illness, it's best to tell your flatmate/ friends about the problem. Whether or not they provide sufficient reassurance, if you feel the need to see the doctor imminently, then do so. Typically, you can visit a clinic or pharmacy without an appointment. If you cannot attend class, be sure to email your teacher beforehand.

Alternatively, it is strongly recommended to visit your course coordinator in their MTC office. They are the BEST person to seek when in need of instant advice on any issue you come across in Taiwan. Once they know the details of the illness, they will advise you if you should pursue further medical attention. Further, your coordinator can help you find a clinic that can see you immediately or one with an English-speaking doctor if you are worried about miscommunicating the issue.

Recommended Chemists (藥妝店) are: Cosmed (康是美) and Watsons (屈臣氏). For a Pharmacy (藥局), the National Health Insurance Administration (全民健康保) is easy to find and recommended by MTC.



Don't forget you can claim back some medical expenses. For more information on contacting the university's insurance provider, see the 'Insurance' section.

Mosquito Advice

Be sure to seek mosquito prevention once you arrive in Taipei as local repellent is especially effective and can be found in any 7/11 or pharmacy. For aftercare, tiger balm is soothing, however Mentholatum (曼秀雷敦) can also be found in most convenience stores and is recommended by many locals. However, if these do not suffice, cream and medicine can of course be prescribed upon visiting the doctor. For more information on this, see the section on 'What to do if you are ill'.

Mentholatum (曼秀雷敦)

Medical Emergencies

If there is a medical emergency call 119 (the emergency number for an ambulance or a firetruck in Taiwan). You will need to speak Chinese on this number. Ideally, have a friend, your class rep or your MTC contact come with you to the emergency room (急診室). If you are alone, it is best to try and contact one of these people ASAP as it is useful to have someone help you translate.



Mental Health & Welfare

Everyone will experience mental health challenges on the year abroad - and it is nothing to be ashamed of. Moving to a brand new country is extremely difficult and the culture shock and homesickness can lead to some very challenging times. As with pre-existing conditions, preparation is key. You need to ensure you have a support network back home who you can contact when needed. As a result of the pandemic, fortunately many mental health resources have moved online. It is now possible to contact the university counseling services and other therapists online from Taiwan and I would recommend you are prepared to take advantage of these resources when you are struggling.

Common mental health struggles in Taiwan

- "Taiwan insomnia" - for some unknown reason, many of us Oxford students (and our rival Cambridge students) have had major issues when it comes to sleep since coming to Taiwan. While relatively inconsistent, many of us have encountered brief periods of insomnia which as you would expect poses a challenge to regularly attending class.
- "3-month blues" - Around 3 months into your time in Taiwan, around the time Christmas approaches, will typically be challenging when it comes to your mental health. As you begin to settle into life here, you may find that you question why you're here and your homesickness will begin to set in. It is important more than ever at this point to reach out to those around you - both on your course and back home for support.

Mental health stigma

Particularly for those with diagnosed mental health conditions, the stigma towards mental health in Taiwan can pose a significant challenge. While seemingly more westernized than mainland China, there is still a strong stigma when it comes to mental health in Taiwan. Unfortunately, this is something one has to accept and learn to live with - be prepared for difficult questions and a lack of understanding from locals. When it comes to teachers and classes, it is best to go through your MTC contact and your year abroad coordinator who are in the best position to help you and allow for understanding when it comes to classes and needing to take time off.

Life at the MTC

Classes

We have about 15 hours of classes a week at the MTC (Mandarin Training Center at NTNU university). Each lesson is 1hr 50mins, including a 10-minute break in the middle. Be careful about missing hours – you need to attend at least 70% of lessons in order to pass and if you miss more than 12 hours a month your scholarship will be compromised.

The MTC assigns everyone a language partner for speaking practice. There is no pressure to make friends but many partners go out for coffee or dinner to get to know new people and make friends in Taipei!

Language Class

Language classes are every morning and for us this was between 10:20-12:10. The cohort is split up into groups depending on language level, varying between 3-7 people per class. Lessons are based on the textbook series A Coursebook in Contemporary Chinese. Homework tends to be set based on the grammar exercise in these books and the accompanying workbook with further language exercises testing vocab and grammar. Language classes tend to be spoken mainly in Chinese, which seems daunting at first but you get used to it quickly and it really helps with listening skills.

Classical Chinese Class

One afternoon lesson a week from 2:20-4:10pm. Texts studied include:

- Shi Ji: Ci Ke Lie Zhuan (Assassin Retainers)
- Shi Jing (Book of songs).
- Tang poetry

Literature Class

One afternoon lesson a week from 2:20-4:10pm. Texts studied are the short stories:

- On the Road at 18 by Yu Hua,
- Glory's by Blossom Bridge by Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai
- Ling Shan by Xingjian Gao.

Translation Class

One lesson a week from 2:20-4:10pm. No set curriculum but based around translating English news articles into Chinese and studying the skills needed.

Exams

On arriving in Taipei you will have Oxford collections on the Colloquial Chinese textbook. Then, in February, you have 'mid-terms', also set by Oxford, testing Classical, Literature and Translation content.

Holidays

Holidays are relatively regular: about six days off in November as well as the odd three day weekend, two weeks off for Christmas and New Year between December and January. Between January and February you get two weeks off for Chinese New Year. Between February and March you get another week of holiday. Tomb Sweeping day holiday lasts for about six days in April, then finally a week off in early June before breaking up for the summer a few weeks later. The MTC handbook will be more specific about term dates so remember to check that.

These are great opportunities for travelling, with everywhere in Taiwan readily accessible by train or bus. Train tickets can be purchased through 7-Eleven easily. Just have your passport number to hand when buying tickets.

Extracurricular Activities & Sports

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At NTNU there are a wide variety of clubs and extracurricular activities on offer. There will be an online clubs fair at the start of term, but all the information is available online should you miss it, given how busy you will no doubt be at the start of your first term. NTNU has pretty good sports facilities, including, but by no means limited to, a running track, basketball courts, a gym, and a swimming pool. Most sports clubs and teams are organized over group chats on LINE and all are very easy and usually free to join. Whether you are looking for something competitive, or seeking more casual recreation, NTNU has it all. I for one can highly recommend NTNU's fantastic Sepak Takraw club, commonly known as kick volleyball. One really won't be disappointed.

Outside of sport, the sheer variety of other activities on offer at NTNU is, undoubtedly, marvellous. Ceramics, choirs, concert bands, discussion groups on a wide range of fascinating topics; whatever tickles your fancy, NTNU will surely not disappoint. Furthermore, should your regular Chinese classes not whet your linguistical appetite, this truly fantastic institution also offers a wide range extracurricular language courses, for a small price, of course.

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Sports

Outside of the sports teams that NTNU has, you can also become a member of the gym for 500NTD/month or 1200NTD/3 months. If you're a regular gym goer, this is the best value for money that you'll find for a gym anywhere in Taipei. The gym isn't anything special, and has slightly odd opening hours but you really can't beat value for money.

One great thing about gyms in general is that most of them offer single passes for quite cheap. If you don't want to commit to a monthly membership at the NTNU gym, then check out the sports centres in each district. They offer a discounted swimming price per student (80NTD per session) and 50NTD per hour at the gym. If you're an avid gym user and swimmer then you can get a monthly package that allows you to use them both, and these packages have discounts if you're a resident of that district.

How to Purchase a Ticket

There are multiple ways of buying a ticket for the MRT: The most popular being single-use Token and the recommended Easy Card.

Single-use Token

If you don't ride the MRT or bus too often, then the token is probably more convenient for you. Just walk up to the ticket machine, look upwards at the map to find the destination, and buy a ticket for that amount (from NT\$20-NT\$65 depending on distance). The machine is in English and is quite easy to use. Be sure to hold on to your token to deposit it at the gate when you exit the station.



EasyCard

Using an EasyCard is highly recommended due its ease of use and convenience. Often your student ID will also act as an EasyCard which is extra convenient. Using the EasyCard on the MRT gives a 20% discount and saves travellers some headache while figuring out fares. A single ride costs about \$20NTD (About £0.50) so topping up \$500NTD (£14) should last for a good 10 days or so depending on how much you use the MRT. When using this method, remember to swipe on both entry and exit.

The more times you take the MRT, the higher the level of discount they could receive. For example, 10% discount is given for 11–20 rides; 20% discount is provided for 31–40 journeys; the highest discount is 30% off for more than 50 rides. The discount is considered a rebate, and is deposited to your card starting the first of each month from the previous month

There are other types of ticket including a 'One-Day Pass' (NT\$150), a "Two Day Pass" (NT\$280), a "Three Day Pass" (NT\$380) and a One-Way Bicycle Fare if you're taking a bike with you on the subway...for some reason. (NT\$80).

Train times

The first trains leave from their respected terminal stations around 6AM and the last trains leave from their respected terminal stations around 12AM midnight. On average a train will come every 4-5 minutes during the day and every 10 minutes after 11pm. However, for precise timings the Metro Taipei App (pictured below) is an easy and reliable way to check train times.



Buses

Taking the bus in Taipei is one of the best ways to get around. The bus lines will usually have a lot of stops some quite close to each other, especially towards the centre. In the city you'll have two types of buses: the numbered buses and the main lines. The main lines buses are usually a bit more modern but all of them will have the same system. The buses won't necessarily stop on every stop unless you wave them down to get on, and press the stop button to get off. Paying for the bus is super straight forward, like the MRT you can just pay with your EasyCard (which doubles as your student card, which gives you a discount). There are machines at the front or middle of the bus that you swipe when you get on and off the bus. Or you can pay with exact change in coins which you deposit next to the driver. You can't ask for change and prices will range between 15 to 25 NTD, and most buses within Taipei are 12NTD if you pay by EasyCard. You can also take the bus when going on day trips is also pretty straight

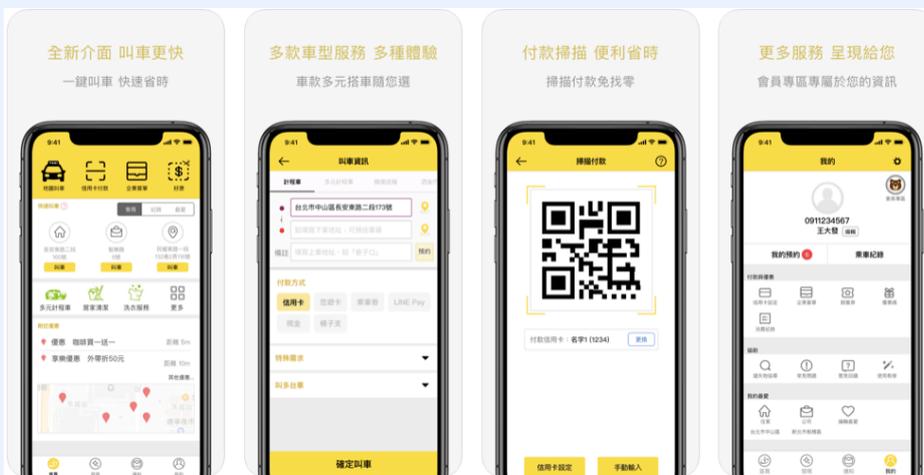
forward, but keep in mind that you need to have enough money on your EasyCard and that in general trains are quicker and more comfortable.

Taxis

Taxis are expensive in comparison to public transit but are cheap when compared to taxis in the UK. The taxi fare in most parts of Taipei is generally the same, except for suburb or mountain areas. All taxi service in Taipei charges by meter and the minimum charge is NT\$70. One normal taxi can take 4 people. The rate is a minimum charge with a minimum mileage of 1.25 km plus NT\$5 for every 200 meters travelled and another NT\$5 for waiting for over 80 seconds. Passengers taking taxis from 23:00 to 6:00 will be charged at the night-time rate, that is, NT\$20 extra on the original fare. During Lunar New Year, passengers taking taxis during the day are surcharged at the night-time rate. Taxis with a symbol of Easy Card can be paid with an Easy Card. However, cash is preferred. If you are going out of town or a long-distance travel, the meter charge may not be applied. So, you are suggested to confirm charging method before getting in taxi.

A very convenient aspect of travel in Taiwan is that Uber is available in certain cities (Taipei, Taichung, Kaohsiung, Taoyuan, and Hsinchu). It works exactly the same as it does in the UK, and you don't need to download a different app. I would recommend using a card such as one provided by Starling Bank, as you can avoid extra "non-GBP transaction fees" (about £0.20-£0.50 per ride).

Aside from Uber, Taiwan Taxi (55688) is Taiwan's most popular taxi company. The service hotline of Taiwan Taxi is 55688 by cell phone or 405-88-888 by pay phone. Taiwan Taxi provides taxi service around the clock in Taipei metropolitan. The app (pictured below) works like Uber, the GPS will find where you are and then all you must do is type in where you're going and see the cost estimate. Once you're in the car, the cost of the ride is done according to meter just like a traditional taxi. The easiest way to pay for these taxis is in cash. You can also wave these yellow cars down if they have their red lights on saying 空車.



Trains

Trains in Taiwan are both reliable and fairly cheap. Aside from the MRT (subway) and High-Speed Rail systems, the most common form of train on the island are called the TRA (named after the rail authority in Taiwan).

The TRA is the oldest and most expansive rail network, passing through every county in Taiwan albeit at a slower pace than the High-Speed network. Some trains can have a lot of intermediate stops between their origin and terminal stations, but this can vary according to exactly which services you board.

There are mainly four types of trains: Tzechiang Express, Chukuang Express, Fuhsing Semi Express, and local ordinary trains. Tzechiang is the fastest with the least intermediate stops and the highest ticket price, then Chukuang, and then Fuhsing. Local trains are the slowest running for short-distances and stop at all stations on the way.

Ticket types are divided into two: standard reserved seats, and non-reserved seats. Trains aren't usually packed (at least for longer journeys), but it is very easy to select seats while purchasing your tickets.

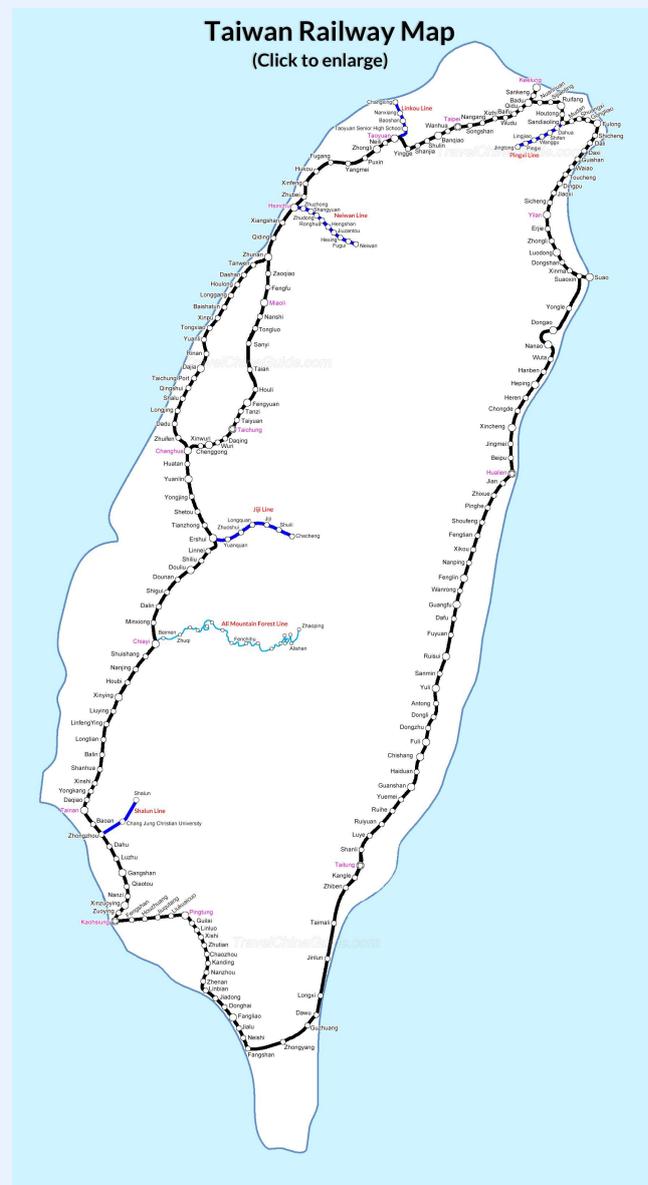
In order to purchase TRA tickets, you can buy them from:

1. The official TRA website (https://tip.railway.gov.tw/tra-tip-web/tip?lang=EN_US) – note: booked tickets will need to be collected from a convenience store or High-Speed Rail station.
2. Any convenience store (7/11, FamilyMart, OK Mart, Hi-Life) using the automated Ibon printing machines.
3. Any High-Speed rail station with ticketing machines or booths.

Please note: You will need to provide your passport or ARC (if you have one) number in order to buy/collect tickets, so it is advised to bring one of these just in case, or commit the number to memory before going to the convenience store.

Once you get to the point of putting your passport number in on the website, it books your tickets for you (and then expects you to pay). If you accidentally reserve tickets too many times without cancelling them/paying for them you'll be banned for booking train tickets for a month so be careful! The same applies for if you 'choose' a train time on the convenience store train booking machines.

Ticket prices are not usually very expensive. For example, you can travel from Taipei Main Station to Hualien Station (e.g. to visit the very beautiful Taroko Gorge!) for little more than 400NTD per person. Another bonus is that you get a nice view of the island's East coast along the way!



High Speed Rail

Taking Taiwan's High Speed Rail (高鐵) is a great, although slightly pricier, way to get around the west coast Taiwan that cuts down travel time significantly.

Similar to the normal trains, you can book online (<https://www.railway.gov.tw/tra-tip-web/tip>), at a convenience store, or at a train station. You can choose to pay buy card online (Starling works fine) or at convenience store after booking. A similar principle applies about reserving tickets. If you go too far in the ticket inquiry process it books the tickets for you even though you've not paid and so you have to cancel the booking if you don't actually want those tickets.

Tickets come out a month in advance, and the earlier you book the more money you get off thanks to their early bird (早鳥) discount system. If you combine this with the student discount available you can get the price down significantly, making it almost comparable to getting one of the slower trains. You can only get these discounts if you use the Chinese language option on the website, not the English!

The high speed rail can be quite pricy, but if you're going down south (eg to Tainan/Xiaoliuqiu/Kending) and can justify paying it for at least one leg of the journey it's definitely a very nice way to see Taiwan.



The Different Areas of Taipei

Taipei is a big city, but not so big that it feels intimidating to get around. Below you'll find a description of some of the different areas of the city that we live in, all of which are close enough to the MTC to be viable housing options.



Guide to Da'an

Overview

Da'an district is the location of the NTNU main campus and the MTC, and is a wonderful place to live. It's a little quieter and less touristy than areas like Ximen and Xinyi, but is still lively and interesting. It's full of students, leafier and slower-paced streets and scores of cafes and restaurants. There are loads of great bars around the Taipower Station MRT. While it's a little further from some of the clubs, the proximity to the MTC is very useful, and it's a very homely, comfortable neighbourhood to live in. The side roads on either side of the MTC are full of Taiwanese-style food stands, and there's a particularly good selection of vegan and veggie restaurants in the area. Da'an is about twenty minutes from Taipei main station, Zhongzheng, and Xinyi, which are areas you're quite likely to frequent.

Da'an Forest Park

In the middle of the district is Da'an forest park, which is a lovely space for a walk/run/work in the open air. Green space is relatively hard to come by in Taipei so it's a really great thing to live near.

Shida Night Market

Shida night market is just next to NTNU and is great for lunch in between classes or dinner in the evenings. There are a mix of cafes, restaurants, food stalls and even clothes shops to cater for your needs and the market spills over into many little side streets meaning there's lots to explore.

Guide to Xinyi

Key Landmarks

Taipei 101

This is the tallest tower in Taipei and a very iconic landmark. You can pay to go up to the observatory on the 89th floor for around 600NTD, but if you fancy a cheaper option (and a picturesque place to do your Anki) there is a Starbucks located on the 35th floor. You need to book the day before by calling +886 2 8101 0701 and the minimum spend is 250NTD.

Taipei 101 Shopping District

This is a very large and significant shopping area located around the base of Taipei 101. There is a fairly good range of shops but they tend to be on the higher end. There are also a good range of restaurants, bars and clubs. I would recommend visiting at night especially around Christmas because there are lots of nice lights and street performers.

ATT4Fun

Technically ATT4Fun is in the shopping district but I think it deserves its own section because we somehow always end up here! ATT4Fun is a slightly more budget shopping mall, it has a number of more affordable shops including:

- Zara Home
- Bershka
- Pull&Bear
- GU (a budget clothing store)
- Uniqlo

As well as a load of shops, ATT4Fun also has a number of bars and clubs, Frank and Babylon are located on the roof and there is a lovely view of Taipei 101 so on a clear night these can be a good night out. (It should be noted though that Frank and Babylon can be a little hit and miss depending on the night). They also tend to be on the pricier side for drinks (but we have found there is a little bit of an older crowd and therefore these nights have nevertheless been quite cheap).

Tonghua Night Market

This night market can be found right on the border between Da'an and Xinyi. It is a good spot for finding both clothes and food. The food here does tend to be on the more traditional side. Our favourites are the 生前包 which can be found right at the entrance and the (vegan) sweet potato wedges are also delicious.

Xiangshan

Xiangshan is a mountain is right on the edge of Taipei. It takes around 20 to 30 minutes to climb. The way up is all steps. From the top you can see a gorgeous view of Taipei.

Eslite Xinyi

This is a bookstore which is open 24 hours. It has a really great range of English books (and Chinese ones too) it also has a food court and a range of other goods.

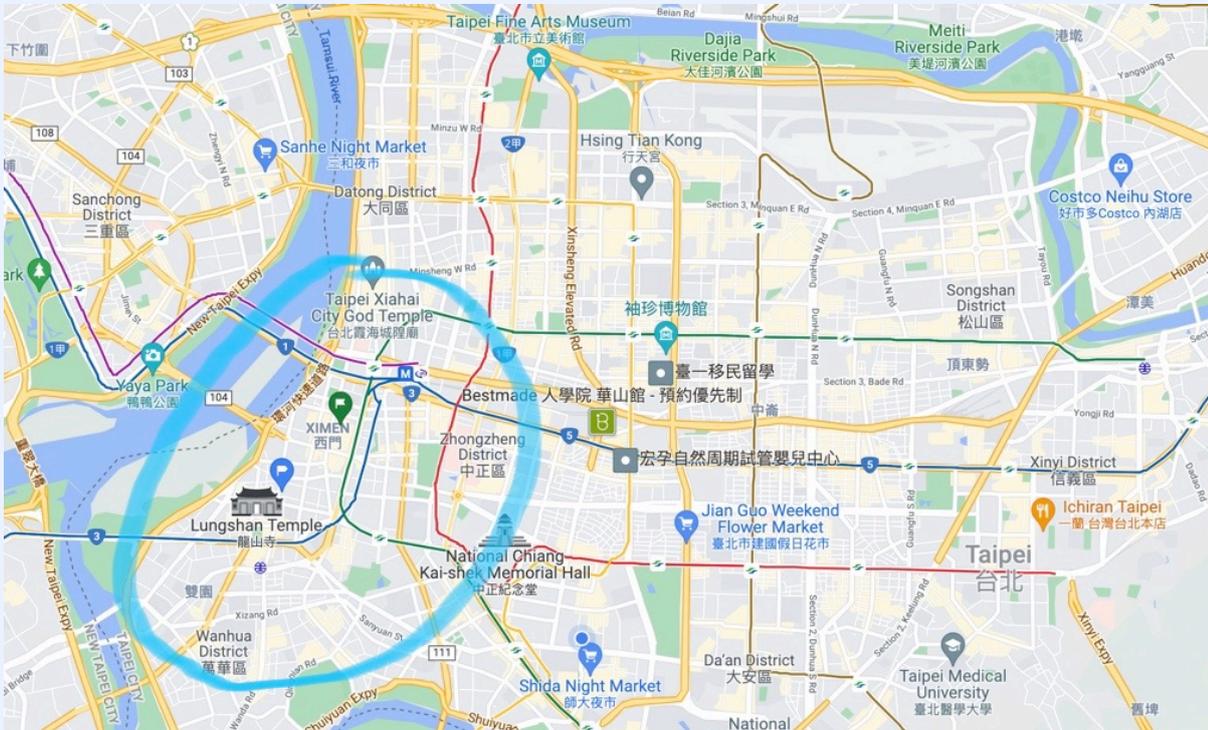
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Personally, I have found Xinyi to be a very convenient place to live. It is typically thought to be the an expensive part of the city and it can be, but the rent on our apartment has not been any more expensive than other people who live in other parts of the city. Xinyi is known for having many of the most popular bars and clubs in the city and therefore very convenient for nights out! It can however be difficult to find cheap places in Xinyi for shopping or eating and drinking. It is also very great for YouBiking because it has bike lanes!

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Guide to Wanhua/Ximen

Ximen is a vibrant and lively district in Taipei, which plays host to a good number of shops, restaurants, parks and interesting historical sites.



Located in the Western part of Taipei City, Ximen is a well-connected district that is very close to the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall and only a 15-minute cycle ride (or 25-minute walk and MRT trip) away from the MTC.

Ximen is often known as the ‘young people’s district’ as there is a large shopping area and night market in the centre of the district. There are also plenty of cinemas, bars and speakeasies around, especially in and near the ‘Red House’.



The main square of ‘Ximending’, where you will find many shops, cinemas, street markets, bars and the Ximen MRT Station (Blue + Green Lines).

Shops

You will find plenty of shops in Ximen and shouldn't struggle to find what you need. Notable shops and areas include:

Carrefour 24/7 Supermarket, Guilin Road

This supermarket is very big, spanning two floors. The first floor is for all kinds of electronics, appliances, homeware, cookware, stationery, toiletries, medicine and even clothing. The second floor is home to all of the food, which includes not only all the fruit, vegetables, meat and snacks/alcohol you could ever need, but is also home to an in-store bakery and other food counters. The store is open at all hours of the day, every day of the week! The building also contains various fast food outlets such as McDonald's, Starbucks and Sushi Express. Helpfully there is also a YouBike station outside if you need to cycle somewhere else too.

Ximending Pedestrian Area

This main square and adjacent streets contain a plethora of clothes stores, ranging from H&M and Nike to smaller local ones, as well as many restaurants, cinemas and food stalls. Many of these will be open until late on weekdays. The MRT station can also be found here.

Restaurants, Cafés + Bars

Ximending

The pedestrian area has many food stalls at night, as well as brick-and-mortar restaurants. A lot of these are chains, be they Starbucks cafés, hot pot restaurants or Korean BBQ joints. Although the choice can be a little overwhelming, you have plenty of time throughout the year to wander around and find some local favourites. Food is very cheap (you can usually find a meal for \$200 NTD and below), so it is best to try some places that look interesting and take note of the ones you like.

FUFU Cat Café

Unless you're allergic to cats, this is somewhere we'd definitely recommend checking out. This café is in the middle of the pedestrian area, somewhat hidden away by a staircase that leads up to a café one floor up from the market street. When you arrive you will find around a dozen different cats (varying in furriness, colour and temperament!) wandering around a large room containing toys, beds and seats for customers. In the adjacent room is a café area with tables if you prefer to get some work done, but the main attraction of this place is, of course, the cats. They are all very friendly and enjoy human company, so this can be a very relaxing activity to do with friends if you're suffering from a bit of stress or would like something new to do on the weekend. The café charges by 15-minute increments (not applicable if you don't go into the cat room), but it is quite fairly priced so you can easily spend the best part of two hours with the cats for around \$400 NTD. For an additional fee of only \$100 NTD, you can get unlimited cups of whichever tea, juice or coffee you like – a true bargain!

One of the adorable cats you can visit and pet in the FUFU Cat Café, Ximending.



Hanko 60

Ximen is home to many interesting bars, but Hanko 60 is certainly one of the coolest. This speakeasy is somewhat hidden behind a false sliding wall, which looks like the exterior of an old-school cinema from the street. Drinks can be a little pricey, but this is a nice place to go for special get-togethers or occasions.



The interior of Hanko 60 – if you can find it!

The Red House

The Red House is a courtyard-esque area right next to Ximending plaza, where you will find a number of bars (some all-you-can-drink!), many of which are gay bars. Drinks aren't too expensive in some of them and the atmosphere can be pretty good on weekends. You will sometimes be able to see local festival celebrations and concerts in the Red House too. To find it easily, follow the labelled exit sign out of Ximen MRT Station.

Places of Interest

228 Peace Park

Created to commemorate the victims of the 228 massacre, the Peace Park is a tranquil place to go for a walk on the weekend. The park is also home to the National Taiwan Museum, which is an interesting place to visit to learn more about Taiwanese history and culture. Aside from the museum, memorials and greenery, you will also find some charming little koi ponds! Though not strictly in Ximen district, C.K.S. Memorial Hall is also a great walking spot, well within walking and cycling distance from Ximen.

Longshan Temple

Longshan Temple is a religious temple to the south of Ximending, where you will be able to observe the local people worshipping and celebrating various festivals throughout the year. Longshan is considerably larger than the shrines you otherwise see around Taipei, so it is worth a visit. There is also a handy Blue-Line MRT Station here, as well as bus stops that you will be able to catch buses to the MTC from if you prefer the extreme sport of Taipei bus-hopping.

Bopiliao Historic Block

Ever wondered what a Taipei street looked like in the 18th Century? Bopiliao Historic Block is the place to go if so. The entire block has been preserved for people to view the architecture from the era, and at night you will find lanterns hanging along the street that might remind you of Jiufen (another must-see place in Taiwan). Although there is a visitors' centre and small museum, feel free to walk into the neighbourhood and just have a wander.



Bopiliao Historic Block is quite quiet during weekdays, and a good time to visit.

Guide to Zhongzheng

Zhongzheng Overview

Zhongzheng's name lends itself to Chiang Kai Shek (adopted name Jiang Zhongzheng 蔣中正), whose eponymous Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall (中正紀念堂) is one of the most famous images of Taipei. It's situated on Freedom Square, which as its name clearly indicates, you can get into gratis, without even as much as a bag check or prior booking. It's a magnificent space, also home to the National Concert Hall and National Theatre Hall opposite each other.

Most government offices are situated in Zhongzheng district, including the Presidential Office, the official residence of the President of Taiwan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Taiwan Immigration Agency are both in Zhongzheng, so you will definitely become familiar with at least some of the district, as you'll likely be making multiple trips to these offices to get the next document you need in order to stay in Taiwan, ending with the ARC.

Taipei Station is in Zhongzheng as well. You can get to pretty much anywhere in Taiwan from there.

Gongguan

Gongguan (公館) is an area within Zhongzheng worth visiting. It is the next stop after Taipower Building on the MRT Green Line. Its attractions are diverse, including:

-Taipei Drinking Water Museum

-PIPE Live Music and the surrounding waterfront area with outdoor bars, sometimes also with live music outdoors

-Treasure Hill, an artist colony with an interesting history. They sometimes have exhibitions in the former air raid shelter there. It's an interesting area.

-Gongguan Night Market, probably one of the best areas for street food in Zhongzheng

I think Gongguan is one of the nicest areas of Taipei to live in. It feels greener than a lot of areas, you can cycle or stroll through the National Taiwan University (NTU/台大) campus. It feels modern and alive, bustling with shoppers, night-market-goers, and so on. Highly recommended.

Guide to Zhongshan/Songshan

Zhongshan

Zhongshan is in the north of Taipei's centre. I lived in Zhongshan (roughly on the border with Songshan) after leaving the quarantine hotel. I lived there for about a month and a half, and to be honest, I don't personally recommend living in Zhongshan District. I lived near Rongxing Park and I found the commute pretty annoying, as it took about half an hour to get to NTNU every day. 麻煩死了... An advantage of living in Zhongshan is that you're closer to Maji Square, which is where some of us like to go clubbing. I still definitely wouldn't say it's worth it though.

Overview of Zhongshan

This is just based off personal experience and the vibe I got, but Zhongshan feels like a very traditional area. The streets of Zhongshan, particularly where I lived (near Rongxing Park), often have stalls selling interesting traditional foods, such as squid balls, mini hot pots, and lots of small local restaurants selling local staples like meatball soup (貢丸湯) or fish ball soup, and simple noodle and rice dishes like 陽春麵 (a simple, mostly plain noodle dish) and 魯肉飯 (rice topped with pork). They're often run by friendly old ladies.

Places of interest in Zhongshan include Xingtian Temple, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Lin An Tai House and Museum, and the National Revolutionary Martyrs' Shrine.

The walk between MRT Zhongshan station and Shuanglian station (technically called 'Zhongshan Metro Linear Park' is quite nice, a green park area lined with clothing shops, cafes and bars. In this area I can particularly recommend Bei Feng She, an upstairs teahouse/cafe with a very traditional feel. It's a really nice place to study or relax, and it's open til midnight.

Zhongshan is a big area, but due to Taipei's unofficial 'Red Lights District' being around the Linsen North Road area, Zhongshan has a reputation to some people as a bit sketchy. I've been told there's a stereotype of Japanese businessmen frequenting Linsen North Road area and yeah... it's grim around there. Unfortunately, that's also where a fair few of Zhongshan's bars are. This is actually relatively near to the Zhongshan-Shuanglian walk, but that's far enough away for it not to feel sketchy. Linsen North Road itself is home to Taipei's only bilingual comedy club, Two Three Comedy. I've heard good things, not been yet. Just stay clear of alleyways and side streets and you won't see much.

The Linsen North Road area is a shame, because in my experience, Zhongshan's lanes and alleys are often bustling with life, commerce, and variety, topped with a traditional feel. But it's given Zhongshan something of a bad name to some locals (going off locals have told me) so it's not the best place to live or visit.

To me at least, it sort of feels like inner Taipei stops above Minzu West Road (ie between Yuanshan and Jiantan stations on the red MRT line), but Zhongshan does nevertheless stretch up into Jiantan area, north of which it then borders Shilin District. Jiantan has good public transport routes to the National Palace Museum, which is a 非去不可的地方 - a must-see! It also may prove helpful for the museum essay, if you also have to do that essay.

Since Maji is in Zhongshan, I'll briefly introduce it, but you'll hear plenty about it anyway. Maji is a Taipei INSTITUTION, absolutely 非去不可. Basically, it's an indoors area with clubs and bars, most notably Triangle and 23 Music Room. You can also have drinks with friends on benches in the general Maji Square space. It's not really a 'square' like an open-air 廣場, it's semi-indoors so it's not too cold or exposed. That being said, it's a public place, so the square itself doesn't 'shut' per se to my knowledge. Every 同學 has their own opinions on Triangle's bars and clubs, particularly Triangle, but I recommend you go and see for yourself. It's easy to get there before midnight as it's right next to Yuanshan MRT, on the red line. Otherwise people usually cycle or get a taxi/Uber.

Songshan

Generally speaking, there's not much to see there, other than an airport. It's also just as far north as Zhongshan for the most part, so living there isn't recommended.

Songshan is home to a pretty great night market, called Raohe Night Market, right next to MRT Songshan station at the north end of the green line. Next to Raohe Night Market is Ciyou Temple.

GABEE Cafe is one of Taipei's best cafes according to Wikivoyage, which is near MRT Zhongshan Junior High School station.

Honestly though, that's about it for Songshan. It's a residential area with buildings in it, few of them noteworthy. It's just a place.

Venturing Out in Taipei

Hiking in Taiwan

Hiking in Taiwan is one of the easiest things to do and generally requires very little planning, there are a few things to keep in mind however. Since hiking is such a common hobby in the country a lot of trails will have public bathrooms along the way, although that is not always the case, but they rarely provide toilet paper so always bring tissues with you. Despite having locks the trails don't have water fountains, so definitely bring enough to last the whole way. I would also not recommend starting the hikes too late, the sun sets quite early in Taiwan and the paths aren't super clear or well marked, so I would avoid trying to do them when it gets dark especially if you haven't done it before. Taiwanese trails are also very rough with loads of dirt trails and some steep rock steps, so avoid rainy days at all costs. It also gets very windy so bring a jacket or windbreaker.

A great hack if you want to properly take up hiking in Taiwan is downloading the AllTrails app, it will show you all the different trails and give you a proper map of all the paths that you can download before you go.

Wulai

Wulai is a district south of New Taipei City, it's known for its beautiful mountains and greenery, as well as hot springs. The region is also home to a big indigenous community. Going to Wulai from Taipei is generally really easy, the 849 bus will take you straight there and the journey should take you around an hour and a half and cost 100 ntd return (sitting on the right side of the bus will guarantee you a great view on the way there). You can go for a day trip, visit the waterfall and indigenous culture museum, and try the local food in the town's old street. However, if you want to stay overnight the town has a lot of hotels with in-room hot springs that can be super affordable if you're going with friends.

Jiufen

Jiufen is a mountain town in the northeast of Taiwan known for its lantern-lit alleyways resembling Studio Ghibli's Spirited Away. Honestly, if you're a big fan of the film I wouldn't expect it to look exactly the same, but it was still gorgeous. The journey there from Taipei takes around an hour and a half and costs around 200 ntd total. You can easily do everything in half a day. The A-Mei tea house is the most famous place in Jiufen, followed by the old street. The ideal time to do both of those would be the afternoon, asking for a table by the windows or on the balcony is also the best so you can watch the sunset. The two things to keep in mind are, depending on the day you go the old street shops don't stay open that late, and also be careful not to miss the last bus, it can also get chilly at night depending on the time of the year. Another cool thing we did was get off the bus back to Taipei at the stop next to Raohe night market and went there for lunch as well.

Neihu

Neihu is a neighbourhood in the north of Taipei, it tends to be less busy than places like Daan or Xinyi. It has a lot of galleries, a few cafes, but the area is known for its parks, hikes, and nature. Jinmianshan trail is a great hike which will take you up to a viewing point overlooking all of Taipei. The hike has quite a bit of uphill, but depending on the path you take it's super manageable and will take around an hour and a half to two hours.

Fuyang Eco Park

This Eco Park is located towards the bottom of Daan, it's a quick walk from Linguang station (MRT Brown Line). It's a park with multiple paths, with different difficulty levels and lengths. Depending on the path you take you will find yourself on points with great views of Taipei 101 and the whole city on clear days, but at the same time you are completely surrounded by nature.

Beitou

Beitou is the only metro-accessible hotspring area of Taipei. Some people will book a room in a nice hotel with a private in room hotspring for a night, others will go for a day trip and just soak in the public springs for a bit. Other things to visit include the Beitou library and museum.

National Palace Museum - Shilin

The National Palace Museum is a bit far out from the center but definitely worth the journey, not just for the exhibitions but also for the building and scenery. The entrance is free for students so you can take advantage of that. To make the most out of the trip to Shilin, go to the Shilin night market as well, it's considered to be one of the biggest and most famous markets in Taiwan.



Travelling in Taiwan: Hualien

Travelling to Hualien

The train was a very convenient and easy way to travel to Hualien. We caught it from Taipei Main Station and it took around 2.5 to 3 hours. We paid around 300 to 400 NTD.

Accommodation

We stayed in a place called Wow Hostel, it was opposite the station so in a very convenient location. (Especially because the bus to Taroko Gorge departs from here!) The hostel is lovely inside and very clean. 4 of us stayed in a private room with a bathroom, it was around 400NTD each (around £11!). It also felt very safe, especially with our private room. The hostel also offers shared rooms, our room had lockers to keep our stuff safe so I assume that this would be the same in a shared room. The hostel also had a shared kitchen and a communal area, we didn't use these facilities, but they looked good and clean. There is also a breakfast place located pretty much opposite which was great for an early morning meal before Taroko.

Attractions and Places to Eat

Hualien Martyrs Shrine

This is a free attraction in Hualien, it was walking distance from the hostel. There isn't much information available about it, but from speaking to the staff we were able to understand that it is dedicated to those who lost their lives fighting against the Japanese occupation. The view from the shrine is also beautiful.

Pine Garden

This was historically a Japanese military officials' residence during the Japanese occupation. It is a sombre place as it was the last place that many Kamikaze pilots stayed before their final flight. It is a beautiful house and they often hold art exhibitions here. If you have your student ID with you, you can pay the student rate of 40NTD.

Dongdamen Night Market

This was one of the highlights of the trip and definitely worth a visit! It is an enormous night market, it had three sections, one for indigenous food, one for Chinese food and another for Taiwanese food. There are pretty much unlimited options and all for a very good price. There are also a number of games and clothing stalls which makes it a good evening out.

Taroko Gorge

Taroko Gorge is a beautiful national park which is located around an hour away from Hualien. You don't need to pay to enter the park. It is an absolutely stunning place with gorgeous scenery. There are a number of different trails that you can take through the park. I would recommend looking these up beforehand and planning your time and route accordingly, especially because we found that each walking route is not necessarily clearly signposted. (You can use this website to plan your route through the park <https://www.taroko.gov.tw/en/AttractionTrail.aspx?type=Trail&n=7900&sms=11273>) It is important to note that the national park is enormous and impossible to do all of it in one day so it is better to pick the bits you're interested in and plan accordingly.

At the top of the park there is a lovely restaurant, it was a little on the expensive side but still affordable. From memory there were both vegetarian and meat options but the menu was very limited. They also sold ice-creams and drinks.

Getting to Taroko Gorge

There is a bus which goes from Hualien Train Station (I think it's the 310) to Taroko Gorge. Online it states that this bus departs every hour, but we discovered that this is actually not the case. If you plan on getting the bus, I recommend going to the bus stop the day before to check the departure times. When we went (on the morning we planned to go) we found out that we had not only missed the bus and would have to wait two hours for the next one, but also that the return bus times did not work well with the train we had booked back to Taipei. In short, do not trust google!

The bus costs 250NTD for a day ticket, this includes being able to hop on and off inside the park.

Getting a taxi to Taroko Gorge ended up being the cheapest and best way to get there from Hualien. The taxi there and back from Taroko cost 1150 NTD. We were a group of 6 and this meant that after splitting the bill we paid around 260NTD each. In the morning, we were also able to make an agreement with the cab driver to pick us up later in the day which was very convenient.

Travelling in Taiwan: Xiaoliuqiu

Xiaoliuqiu is a must see when you have three/four days free and the weather is forecasted to be nice. It's a small island off the western coast that is famous for it's clear waters and turtle inhabitants that you can swim with.

Travelling to Xiaoliuqiu

Travelling to Xiaoliuqiu is a three stage process. First you want to get either a train to Xinzuoing or a high speed rail to Zuoying (they're two sides of the same station in the same location, despite their different names). Then you want to get the tourist shuttle to Dongliu Ferry Terminal, or a taxi if you want to get their quicker. Finally you take a ferry to Xiaoliuqiu. It's quite a bit of travel but definitely worth it!



Accommodation

We stayed in the 'Village Hostel' which is in a great location, not far from the ferry terminal and close to the high street with lots of different restaurants and shops on. The 'classical quadruple room' (which sleeps 4 people across 2 double beds) was amazing, with a lovely balcony and great amenities but the 'double room' didn't have a window and wasn't worth it, so only choose this hotel is you book the quadruple room.

<http://www.booking.com/Share-R3VYmU>

Things to Do

It's highly recommended that you rent electric bikes when you visit Xiaoliuqiu as there's no public transport to speak of and the island is quite hilly. These aren't too expensive (300-400NTD/day) and when the battery runs low you simply take the bikes back to wherever you rented from to swap them out for different bikes. You don't need to show any kind of license to rent these types of bikes and they're super fun to ride round the island on. Doing a tour of the island on the bike is very much an activity in and of itself, especially around sunrise or sunset.

Secret Beach

Xiaoliuqiu has many beaches, and this is one of them. The water there is lovely and clear, and you can easily spend hours sunbathing and having a dip. It's also quite clearly signposted so it's not too difficult to get too if you're riding round the island without looking Google Maps.

Swimming With Turtles

The best thing to do in Xiaoliuqiu is to rent snorkles/flippers from one of the beach shops and head to Vase Rock to go swimming with turtles. You can pay to go on tour groups to swim with turtles but these are expensive and unnecessary. There are lots of turtles in the clear waters around Vase Rock, but going too close to them or attempting to touch them is strongly prohibited.

Nature Trails

There are several nature trails around the island and with one ticket you can visit them all in one day. They're not particularly challenging trails to traverse but offer some beautiful views and scenery.

Food in Taiwan

Overview

In Taipei, eating out is generally cheaper than cooking for yourself. Fresh ingredients like fruits and vegetables are much more expensive than you'd find in the UK, and are much more affected by seasonality than in the UK. Taipei has no shortage of delicious food spots and so you can very much get through the year abroad without ever cooking for yourself. A meal in a typical food spot is between 100-200NTD (£2.50-£5.00), but this definitely increases if you choose to eat at a more high end establishment or a western style restaurant.

Night Markets (夜市)

A key part of Taiwan's eating culture is its night markets. There are many of these around Taipei and around Taiwan in general, each with their own specialities and hidden gems. They typically have a variety of food stalls and restaurants and are very reasonably priced. They also stay open very late into the night so are extremely convenient. If you live near a night market, such as Shida night market (師大夜市) you'll quickly find your favourite places to eat at.

Re Chao (熱炒)

Re Chao are a type of restaurant where you order lots of different 'hot dishes' to share with a group of people. These places often have beer fridges and bottle openers one each table with little glasses to encourage sharing. If you're eating with a big group of people and want to get into the culture of food sharing with a lively atmosphere these restaurants are the place to go as you can try out loads of different dishes for quite cheap. One great Re Chao can be found near Chiang Kai Shek memorial hall, not far from MTC:

大撰生猛活海鮮

No. 43, Section 1, Roosevelt Rd, Zhongzheng District, Taipei City (台北市中正區羅斯福路一段43號)

Eating Vegetarian/Vegan

Eating vegetarian is very easy in Taiwan! Thanks to the long history of Buddhism in Taiwan, vegetarianism is firmly rooted into Taiwanese eating culture and there are plenty of options available. Veganism is slightly harder but very much doable and again there are plenty of options available.

Key terms:

- 素 - vegetarian in general (could be vegetarian, could be vegan)
- 蛋奶素 - vegetarian (with eggs and milk)
- 全素 - vegan (also often excludes the buddhist 'five fragrant spices' such as spices and garlic)
- 五辛素 - vegan (includes the spices, but not really used in spoken language, just sometimes written on things)

Look out for 素食自助餐廳 (vegetarian self-serve restaurants). Here you can fill up a plate from a buffet with as much delicious veggie/vegan food as you like and then pay by the gram. They often come with unlimited rice/soup and are a great option for both lunch and dinner, whether you eat vegetarian or not.

Allergens

Eating with allergens is the one place where Taiwan food culture really falters. The vast majority of places have no allergen information available on their menus, and so you have to enquire with the staff. Food contamination isn't given the most consideration so if your allergies are more on the severe side you'll have to exercise an abundance of caution. The traditional, cheaper, Taiwanese restaurants might be a bit risky but if you go to slightly newer establishments then you'll have an easier time finding out about their allergen policies and whether you can safely eat there.

Speaking Chinese

Taiwanese Chinese Pronunciation

In general, the Taiwanese accent doesn't use 儿/兒 and so people will say 這裡 or 這邊 instead of 這兒. 和 is pronounced hàn instead of hé but people will understand you fine if you say hé. A few words have slightly different tones in Taiwan as opposed to China but these come with practice and most people will understand you anyway.

Useful Phrases to Know

Here is a very much non-exhaustive list of words and phrases that will help you out when getting settled in Taiwan. Part of the year abroad is learning new words by trial and error but this should get you started on your way.

Transport	
捷運 <i>jié yùn</i>	Taiwan's mass rapid transport system. Used instead of 地鐵
計程車 <i>jì chéng chē</i>	Taxi. Used instead of 出租汽車
腳踏車 <i>jiǎo tà chē</i>	Bicycle. Used mainly instead of 自行車 however they're more interchangeable than the two phrases above.
Household	
垃圾 <i>lè sè</i>	Rubbish/trash. Pronounced <i>lè sè</i> , not <i>lā jī</i>
Eating	
買單 <i>mǎi dān</i>	To settle up/pay the bill. eg when you want to pay at a restaurant you can say 「要買單」
內用 <i>nèi yòng</i>	To dine in
外帶 <i>wài dài</i>	To takeaway
外送 <i>wài sòng</i>	To deliver
蛋奶素 <i>dàn nǎi sū</i>	Vegetarian
全素 <i>quán sù</i>	Vegan (sometimes also 純素)

再一個/份 <i>zàiyígè/fēn</i>	Another one/portion of... Useful for one you're ordering more in a restaurant (eg 要再一個三明治)
General Life	
不好意思 <i>bùhǎoyìsi</i>	Sorry (less formal than 對不起), the kind of sorry you'd give if you bump into somebody in the street.
發票 <i>fāpiào</i>	Receipt
學生證 <i>xuéshēngzhèng</i>	Student card
充電 <i>chōngdiàn</i>	To charge a battery
繳費 <i>jiǎofèi</i>	To pay a fee (eg 繳健身房費, to pay for a gym membership)
夜店 <i>yèdiàn</i>	Nightclub
救護車 <i>jiùhùchē</i>	Ambulance
急診室 <i>jízhěn shì</i>	Emergency room/A&E