



Hannah

From Kitchener
To

Taiwan

Experience your happiness and think well of it

大家好 (Hello Everyone!)

Night markets, street vendors, temples, firecrackers, lanterns, motorcycles, mountains, pineapple cake, dumplings, the ocean, 7-Eleven, Buddha statues. Each of these words on its own doesn't mean too much, but when you put them all together, for me they mean Taiwan.

Like every other exchange student thinks at this time, I think "wow have I really been here for three months?" and the answer of course, is yes. There is a constant chain of new activities, people, and events, to keep your mind occupied. Alongside this, learning a new language takes up a lot of time (and brain power).

Chinese. Well now this is another story. I'd say it isn't the easiest language to learn. The biggest problem I faced, in the beginning, was the four tones (Chinese is a tonal language: rising, falling, falling then rising, and flat). Luckily, I have a very patient host mom who let me practise saying them every time we drove in the car.

Over and over I said “ma ma ma ma.” And then one day, my host mom told me that she could hear the difference, that I wasn’t saying the exact same tone four times over!!! That day was awesome. Since then, I would say my Chinese has been improving at a consistent rate. My conversational skills are of course, still fairly basic, but the more words I have in my vocabulary and the more I speak, the better I get!! There’s a lot more to learn though. A lot.

My host family in Taiwan, as well as my host Rotary Club, have been very good to me. My host family consists of my Dad, my Mom, my sister Jackie (who is 16), and my brother George (who is 14). They’re really the best, and I love living with them. It’s really special to just move in to someone’s house and have them introduce you to other people as their daughter. This is just how they are.

I go to school three times a week, and I go to Chinese Language School twice a week with other exchange students. So, three times a week I catch my school bus at 6:30am, and come home at 5:30pm (on the bright side, we have nap time!) My school in Taiwan is a vocational school, so I have a lot of different courses I would have never taken in Canada: like machinery, or computer design, or even sketching! If the Taiwanese people are one thing, they are welcoming! My classmates have been really friendly to me, and the teachers extraordinarily kind. I have teachers who take me around; hiking in the mountains, to see local agriculture, and even golfing. My principal is one of the nicest men I have ever met. I am very fortunate to be attending this school. At Chinese Language School, we work mostly on reading and writing in Chinese. In Taiwan, traditional characters are used -- which are very beautiful, but awfully hard to write (or as I usually call it, draw).

So what is Taiwan like, really? Taiwan is a place where the juxtaposition of old and new is very visible. This gives it a lot of character. One minute you could be walking down the modern, crazy, city streets then all of a sudden you’re ‘bai bai-ing’ at a temple. The different generations and traditions are sewn together in a way that neither one is dominant. I find this quite interesting.

Taiwan is also very beautiful, but in a rustic kind of way. I live in the country, so every day I see lots of rice fields, which is a pole apart from the agriculture in Canada. The mountains in Taiwan are visible from just about anywhere, and the

ocean is usually pretty close, to wherever you are. Travelling around Taiwan is very convenient too. I was shown quite early on how to use the trains, and was given my own bicycle to move around! Although Taiwan is small, there's a lot to see.

I can't list all of the places I've been because I've been lucky enough to travel quite a bit so far, which for me has been absolutely perfect! I've travelled to numerous small towns around my own to see local monuments. I've seen Taipei, of course, which was exciting. I went camping with my host family to Alishan; a beautiful, beautiful mountain range. Two weeks ago, all of the exchange students went to Kenting (where we went snorkelling and off roading and saw the Southernmost part of Taiwan), stopping in Tainan and Kaohsiung along the way.

And this past week, I was given the wonderful opportunity to travel with my Rotary Club to Japan! Japan was really beautiful but, a lot different from Taiwan, the difference did surprise me to be honest. I enjoyed my time there a lot.

A year ago, if you'd asked me, where I'd be at this time this year, I wouldn't have answered: sitting on my couch, eating rice, writing a Beavertale, in Taiwan. But that's why this year is so awesome, because it's so unpredictable. It's hard to put experiences into words, and even harder to put emotions into words. Sure, some days have been hard, but what's important is learning not to dwell on the bad ones. It's easy to be happy when you're learning, and experiencing a new kind of life for the very first time. This is what exchange is about.

I'd like to thank the Rotary Club of Kitchener for sending me here. It's been an absolutely wonderful time so far, and I'm beyond glad to be here. Also the Rotary Youth Exchange Committee of District 7080 deserves thanking as well, for all that they taught me (and the other exchange students) before we left.

There's a lot more to learn here, and I'm doing my best to figure out what that is!

Until next time!

漢娜

Hannah

(I kept my name because I could say it).