



Dominic

from

Burlington Lakeshore

to

Taiwan

“Things I Never Thought Would Happen on Exchange List”

The continuation of my exchange in Taiwan has allowed me to learn many things. There are various topics including Taiwan, culture, language, and even myself. Over the past six months, I have definitely learned more than I could have ever imagined. What I have started to realize more and more is that I should not be keeping a “Bucket List”, but really a “Things I Never Thought Would Happen on Exchange List”. It sounds silly to say, but this list is quite possibly the most meaningful of all.

The first thing I never thought would happen on exchange is how fast time flies! I know this is stereotypical, but it is so true. Was I not just writing the last edition of the Beaver Tale? Each day, each week, each month goes by in the snap of a finger. Exchange students fulfill every day with enriching experiences. Time flies because as an exchange student we are always occupied! Whether it is learning more of your country’s language or spending time at school, somehow exchange students always find a productive way to spend time. It is unbelievable to think that I am over halfway through my exchange. I never expected how fast my time in Taiwan would go by, but at least it shows what a great time I am having!

Another thing I never thought about is how enriching learning a new language is. I think there are two really amazing things about learning Chinese: Learning the language itself and the results you get. Chinese is not an easy language, we all know that! Although it might be a little tricky to learn, learning is the fun part. Some people consider mistakes to be bad, but I think they are amazing. The time I learn Chinese the most is when I am speaking with people and they help me fix my mistakes. From my

mistakes, I learn many intriguing things. One of them is how the grammar between the languages changes. For example, in Chinese, the place goes before the action. While we say, "I swim at the swimming pool," Chinese grammar is, "I, at the swimming pool, swim". There are multiple differences between English and Chinese which I find very amusing, so the process of learning a new language is very fascinating!

As for results, my Chinese ability has definitely improved since the last Beaver Tale. In fact, I even got 1st place out of 41 exchange students in our Rotary District Mandarin Speech Competition. With my host family and Rotary club I only speak Chinese. Of course, there is always room for improvement. The more I improve, the more immersed I feel in Taiwan. From talking to classmates in Chinese, to being able to buy things completely in Chinese, to dreaming in Chinese! The results of learning a new language are truly rewarding. The enriching experience of learning a language from scratch is an experience I never thought would be so amazing.

One of my favourite "things I never thought would happen" is for me to love the food so much! Food is a really big part of Taiwanese culture. During the Chinese New Year, you eat a lot. The time Taiwanese people like to connect is while drinking tea and eating. I love the Taiwanese food so much as every city has its own specialty. My city, Hsinchu, is known for their pork balls. Yes, there may be a couple of odd dishes. Just to name a few: Chicken feet, eel, noodle soup, duck blood...I think you get the picture! Although I may not enjoy every dish, food is actually a huge part of my exchange! Food is something I never thought would influence my exchange, but trying new delicacies and the food culture is really an awesome part of it.

The experiences I have had on exchange are more things to add to my "Things I Never Thought Would Happen on Exchange List". As an exchange student, I find myself being very adventurous. During my trip to the East Coast of Taiwan with my host family, I woke up at 4 a.m. to see the local fish market. Despite the pouring rain, despite the smell, I still went to the market (of course with their permission). In Canada, I probably would have thought, "It is too early, I will go another time". But in Taiwan I embrace every opportunity I have, even the slightly crazy ones! The list of experiences goes on and on, including but not limited to, going naked in a hot spring with my host family, biking up a mountain at 5 a.m., and getting a pedicure from fish! Some of these experiences might seem odd, but that is the beauty of an exchange. You do things you never thought you would end up doing!

Speaking of experiences, the cultural experiences I had were just as amazing. Taiwanese people *really* like fireworks. During both the New Year and the Chinese New Year, fireworks frequently go off. I got the pleasure of going to Taipei for New

Year's Eve, so I saw the famous Taipei 101 fireworks. An unforgettable sight! Chinese New Year was also an amazing experience. Everything is red: clothes, calligraphy paper, and red envelopes! It is a tradition to hand out red envelopes with cash inside on Chinese New Year; I was very grateful that both my host families gave me a red envelope. For Chinese New Year, it is also a tradition to go to a temple to pray. Going to pray includes using Moon Blocks. Moon Blocks are praying blocks which answer your questions from the Gods. My entire host family, including myself, got the chance to use them. It was a very unique experience, especially as the God's kept on responding yes to my questions (a sign of good luck)! The amount of culture I have learned is something I did not expect before my exchange, but it really is one of my favourite parts.

The most significant item on my list is that I never thought I would be having so much fun on my exchange. When you are back in your home country, everyone says that an exchange is the experience of a lifetime, a life changing endeavour. Before my exchange started, I wondered if it was really true. I have learned that in fact it is! Exchange is the experience of a lifetime. I am doing things that I would never do in Canada. I am even doing things that I never thought I would do on exchange! How many people can say that they lived in Taiwan, all by themselves, for a year? How many people can say that they have immersed themselves into a new country without any prior relation to the country? As exchange students we live the dream. I never thought I would be having such a spectacular time on exchange, but I undoubtedly am.

Exchange is a beautiful thing in so many ways. You are thrown into a foreign country and forced to adapt. Through this you learn so much about yourself, the country, and so many other things. Even though over half of my exchange is over, I know that the next five months will be a blast. Before I know it I will be back in Canada! I would like to thank the Rotary Club of Burlington-Lakeshore, RYE District 7080 and RYE District 3500 for this opportunity.

Until next time! I am sure I'll have a couple more items to add to my list.

Sincerely,

-Dominic Haas 蘇中庸