



Dominic

from

Burlington Lakeshore

to

Taiwan

One word: "Grateful"

The longer I live in Taiwan, the more I start to realize how beautiful a country it is. When I first came, I saw Taiwan's beauty from the outside. I thought that the schools, cities and scenery were all very nice. However, now that I have lived in Taiwan for roughly nine months, I have started to see the beauty on the inside. Adapting as an exchange student has allowed me to connect with Taiwanese people, culture and way of life. As of now, I no longer feel like a stranger in a different country, but rather a part of my new home.

The amount of change which I have experienced in Taiwan is unbelievable. One of the biggest changes has been my school life. When I first came to my school, I was the blond boy who everyone wanted a picture with. Currently, I am a student just like them. Although it is quite evident that I am still a foreigner, I interact with my classmates just as any other student would. This is definitely one of my favourite parts of exchange, as I have various friends in my school. I have my homeroom classmates, who I spend most of the day with. There are also times where I have classes with other grades, such as drama. I am also part of the school orchestra, so I have many friends from different grades.

Not only do I have many Taiwanese friends, but I also participate in school activities like a regular student. With my class, I participated in a military song competition and a tug-of-war competition. The military song competition was quite unique as we sang and marched to Taiwanese National songs to show Taiwanese patriotism. As for the tug-of-war competition, every class had to participate. Being that I am one of the tallest in my class, I was part of the boy's tug-of-war team. In fact,

my class ended up winning both competitions! Both the amount of Taiwanese friends I have and participating in school events has truly made me feel like a normal Taiwanese student.

The more time I stay in Taiwan, the more and more integrated I become into the culture. When I first came, I thought it was quite unique how most streets had street vendors selling food. I was a little sceptical to try these foods, as I thought they might not be that good. Once I decided to try, I realized why Taiwanese people like street vendors so much. Not only is the food cheap and delicious, but it also is a social connection. After various attempts of trying to find the best 蔥油餅 (scallion pancake), I found the street vendor that I liked most. After going there a couple of times, the boss of the street vendor began to recognize me. Now, I do not even have to order, she already knows what I want. She always asks me how I am doing, how school is and what my exchange is like. There are even times that she brags about me to her other customers! The Taiwanese food culture is not only about the food, but also about the social connections you make over food.

Another part of Taiwanese culture is being very polite and devoted. Although this was something that I noticed right away when I came to Taiwan, living in Taiwan for a longer amount of time has made me appreciate these characteristics even more. The examples which I can use for Taiwanese people being polite are endless, but there is one example that is very close to my heart. On my route to school I pass many stores. Most of these stores are owned by elderly people. One time after school, I bought something from one of these stores. The elderly man who owned the store was very polite and enthusiastic; he was definitely very interested in my exchange. Ever since I shopped in his store, every single morning I walk to school he remembers to come outside and say good morning to me. Even if we just say good morning, the devotion and manners which this man has is almost unbelievable to me. This example is just one of many of Taiwanese culture and how devoted and polite they are.

Being that manners and dedication is a big part of Taiwanese culture, it has a huge influence on the Taiwanese way of life. Any person you pass on the street will say good morning to you, whether you are Taiwanese or not. If I have trouble or want to ask a question, I can ask literally anyone and they will help me. One time, I had to go on the bus, but I did not have enough money. However, three people offered to pay for me and then the bus driver said I could pay half price because that was all I had. This Taiwanese way of life is something which really amazes me. They try to be good, happy people, ones who are always willing to help. This concept has really played a huge part in my current life. If I see people on the street, I will also say good morning to them. If I see people in need, I will also help them. I believe that this way of life is truly beautiful.

Another part of Taiwanese life is to challenge yourself. However, Taiwanese people try not to worry too much. I have really tried to embrace this way of life. For example, I recently had a Chinese proficiency test (TOCFL). I was really nervous, as I decided to challenge myself and do the test recommended for Chinese speakers of 3-4 years. My host parents reminded me not to worry and to stay calm. I took this to heart and the results were amazing! The test put my Chinese ability as mid-advanced for both listening and reading. I find that embracing the Taiwanese way of life by challenging yourself without worry is an amazing way to go about things.

Through experiencing Taiwan from the inside, I have truly learned to love it. The connections with the Taiwanese people that I have made are ones that will last for a lifetime. I know for a fact that I will keep in touch with my Rotary club, my host families and my Taiwanese friends when I go back to Canada. As for Taiwanese culture, it has really enhanced my exchange experience. I have gotten to do new things and be more integrated by adapting to the Taiwanese culture. As for the Taiwanese way of life, it has really made an impact on me. Learning the Taiwanese style of life has allowed to embrace different viewpoints on many life situations.

Experiencing Taiwan as an exchange student, I can truly say that it is a beautiful country inside and out. When I think of my exchange, one word comes to mind: "grateful". I am grateful to my host families for taking care of me, I am grateful to my friends who make my exchange exciting, I am grateful to all the teachers who helped me through my exchange, I am grateful to every person who has smiled to me on the street and made my day, and most importantly, I am grateful for this opportunity. Living in Taiwan has created a second home for me, one which I will never forget. I would truly like to thank the Rotary Club of Burlington-Lakeshore, Rotary Club of Hsinchu Chumeng, RYE District 7080 and RYE District 3500. The best thing of my exchange is definitely becoming a part of Taiwan, rather than just an exchange student.

Before I know it, I will be back in Canada living my normal life. I hope all of you enjoyed reading my Beaver Tale and are possibly inspired to visit the beautiful country of Taiwan.

Sincerely,

-Dominic Haas 蘇中庸