**Taiwan Blog Post [1.10.17]**

**Edits RD1:**

* Stories/anecdotes/examples
* Things in Taiwan cost less and are convenient – how else do we survive?
* Purpose of work
* Low cost stores, little regulation compared to US, need to survive – do some research

Format:

* Maybe bullet points work! We can try it out.
* I’d like to put some pics throughout the piece. Try to keep my face out for now, show TAIWAN.
* Keep it casual. It’s just a record of your life.

Let’s break it up:

* A little about the trip. Went for 11 days, visiting relatives, first time I’d gone since 4th grade.
* Observations I made – comparing Bay Area to Taiwan. Some pics!!
* Wrapping it up.

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Hi everyone! This is the first official blog post I’ll be making documenting my life. This past winter break, I visited Taiwan for the first time since 4th grade (ages ago). It was a really interesting experience, and below are some of the thoughts that passed through my head during my time eating and exploring, as well as some pics for the especially curious! Without further ado, let’s get started:

1) **RAPID TRANSIT IS CONVENIENT.** I spent a large amount of my time in Taiwan in Taipei, where my grandmother lived. The city itself wasn’t as grand as San Francisco or urban centers in the Bay Area, but it was still bustling. People were always walking out and about, there were small shops set up everywhere, and cars were merciless. Something I found very convenient was the Taipei Metro, or MRT for short, which you could ride anywhere in Taipei. Trains arrived every 5 minutes or so, so there was never a need to worry about missing a train. There were also guardrails and line aisles setup to organize people getting onto the train, which I found pretty intuitive (why don’t we have these on Bart?). It was also pretty clean on the train—why, I found out with good reason. On one of my earlier trips, my friend offered me a candy on the train, and we were promptly berated by a bystander for eating on the MRT—apparently not allowed. While we became law-abiding citizens after that incident, it struck me that as far the MRT was concerned, Taiwanese people exhibited strong mutual responsibility. It was their duty to each other to keep the MRT as clean as possible, for everyone who used it.

2) **1 CARD = UNLIMITED ACCESS.** There’s something in Taiwan called an EasyCard, which you can think of as a very universal gift card. You could use it to pay for the MRT, to rent bikes sponsored by the same company, and even for seemingly random things, such as when I discovered I could swipe my way into the Taipei zoo with it. A quick Google search later on showed that there are adult and student card variants—the easy accessibility starts at a young age. EasyCard felt like an enhanced ApplePay that links to my Clipper card—just one thing to keep track of to pay for everything. Really easy.

3) **NIGHTLIFE IS LIT.** There’s just this awe-inspiring feeling you get when you’re on your way to one of the many night markets in Taipei and you see mobs of people on the MRT also headed to the same destination. Brotherhood, of and by the stomach. Most of the people I saw at the markets were young people, maybe in their teens and their 20s, but there were some families too. The nightlife itself seemed pretty vibrant, with plenty of talking, some street performers, and just faces everywhere you turned. Of course, inexpensive food didn’t hurt either ;)

4) **SMALL BUSINESS CULTURE.** As brilliant Taiwan may seem, with Taipei 101 and all the convenience and culture, it does have its downsides. Wages in Taiwan are low, and even highly-educated professions such as doctors have to work long hours for much less income than in the US. As a result, people either setup small businesses to supplement their income or to support themselves entirely. Booths were common around Taipei, whether simply on the sidewalk, in the night market, or even in a temple that I visited. They were typically packed next to each other, or just jumbles of crates and tables stacked together to take up space. While I can’t argue for the hygiene of this establishments, the employees were nice. Almost every employee from every “shop” that I went to did their best to make small talk, smiled often, and tried to cater to my needs, even if it didn’t require selling something. Even when they tried to coax me into buying noodles or whatever they were selling, they did so with great energy and seemed genuinely interested in my wellbeing. Whether it was amazing sales tactics, or true kindness, I felt welcome; when I did end up buying food, it was never bad either, so their tactics were justified ;)

5) **TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITIES:** Truth be told, I don’t have a substantive sample size to claim that all communities in Taiwan are extremely close. I only have one reference point, and it’s in Taipei, which is different from other urban areas in Taiwan, and even more so from the rural regions. But, based on the community my grandmother lived in, and in which I stayed, I could really see a community that was active, supported its youth, and just seemed fun to be around. On the first weekend I was in Taiwan, my grandmother took me to watch a taichi club, which she was a part of, perform in a park near her apartment. It seemed pretty cool to me how at 7-8 in the morning, taichi groups and many other people were exercising or conversing out in the open. The park was next to a sports center, which we also visited. Inside, people were already walking up and down the halls; I peeked into one of the rented rooms and saw a choir class performing; we went to the top floor and people were already hitting it hard at the gym. The tennis and badminton courts were similarly occupied. Later on, my grandmother’s neighborhood held a Christmas celebration—they decked out their apartments with overhanging lights, and then on Christmas Eve, they brought a youth orchestra outside to play! It was actually really cool: they had a Santa you could take pictures with on the sidewalk, people making bowls of tang yuan for people to eat, fortune-telling, the list goes on and on. I was in awe at the event, and later on, it just struck me how much manpower and collaboration had to go into organizing the whole event. It seemed crazy how this community could work together to bring out something so endearing and complete not just for the youths, but for families and the elderly as well. It was super impressive.

**IN CONCLUSION:** Taiwan was really a blast, and worth the 8-9 years of wait. The food was good, the community was good, I finally put my Chinese to good use—what more could I ask for? I definitely hope to come back in the future…but for now, there’s a whole gambit of Asian countries to explore. We’ll see where we land up next!

‘Til next time!

Michael, signing out.

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What I thought about:

* MRT was really clean and convenient. You ride it anywhere in Taipei, and People were mutually responsible for keeping it in tip-top condition.
* Yoyo Card was also really convenient. It was applicable in so many situations—zoo ticket, MRT, renting bikes, probably other things I don’t know about.
* As a matter of fact, public transportation was just good. Only got on one late bus, but they were all comfy and had good seats and leg room.
* Food was inexpensive and REALLY good. It was prepared streetside often. But I got sick of it over time because I was eating so much. Pretty rich, oily stuff.
* Night life in Taiwan was a big cultural component. Around 8-9 PM (?) everyone, especially a lot of young people/couples, showed up at the night markets.
* The communities seemed very tight-knit. Cue the Christmas picture. There was a youth orchestra playing, fortune-telling, a sidewalk Santa, and everyone just seemed really cheery. My grandmother was part of a taichi club, and going out on a weekend morning, there were many elderly people outside exercising. Next to where she lived was a sports center, with a lot of rooms rented out; choir classes, gyms, everything – everyone was really active!
* Small business culture. Everyone and their mother had a small booth somewhere selling food, clothing, or some other goods, whether it was around a shrine or right next to the doors to their apartments. All employees were cordial, made small talk.
* *Conclusion:* all-in-all, a great trip. Taiwan was a fantastic place to visit, and really made me wonder, seeing such a different culture for the first time since 4th grade (last time I visited!). Definitely hope to come back sometime in the future, but in the meantime, other Asian countries I want to explore. There’s really nothing bad you can say about the food, either—if you’re a foodie, you’ll want to check Taiwan out.
* You should check Taiwan out!! If you know Chinese, you’ll have a blast.

Where I went:

* Taipei Zoo
* Hot springs
* Night markets
* Restaurants w/ dad’s friends
* STEM universities

Pics: