For my international experience, I participated in National Taiwan University’s (NTU) summer program Biodiversity, Agriculture, and Culture of Taiwan (BACT). The BACT program also offered an addition called Lab Research Work and Internship (LRWI). Together, the two parts of the program amounted to eight weeks mainly in Taipei but also in other parts of the island. I chose to participate in this program because I had previously done a language-focused program with the same university and knew I would have a high quality experience.

The LRWI part of my international experience took place the first month I was there. I was placed in an office called Smart Agriculture, which works closely with my assigned professor, who is part of the Department of Bio-Industry Communication and Development. While at the Smart Agriculture office, I had little involvement with their projects. Instead, the office boss and my professor wanted to expose me to agriculture in Taiwan. For about 4 days I went to help with a CSA located in Ilan County (about a 50-minute bus ride east from Taipei) called Land Dyke.

Land Dyke was started in 2012 by four women either part of or supporters of the LGBTQ+ community. During my stay, I helped the two main farmers, in their mid-20’s, with their bamboo shoot field. My responsibilities included looking for shoot growth, applying liquid fertilizer, etc. Although the work was physically demanding, the most difficult part was dealing with mosquitos. Taiwan has a hot and humid climate, easily reaching up to 100 degrees F during the day, making it the perfect place for mosquitos. Taiwan also has a local species of mosquito called xiaoheiwen (literally little black mosquito) that swell up the area it has bitten. Since my body has never encountered xiaoheiwen before, sometimes the swelling would last a few days, especially if I was bitten multiple times. But overall, it was a great experience working in the field with two young women farmers and interacting with other local people outside of Taipei.

The second part of my international experience was the BACT program, which took place the second month. BACT had an extremely packed schedule in order to fit in all the lecture and field activities within the span of a month. However, that also became the best part of the program because we got to see parts of Taiwan that usually doesn’t attract foreign tourists, or even local tourists. For example, we stayed at the Shueili Wood Utilization Center in Nantou County for 2 days and 1 night to learn about the wood production process. We also had the opportunity to create a small wood project that we could bring back home.

I believe we were able to visit so many locations is because (1) NTU owns roughly 1% of Taiwan’s land and (2) the professors associated with BACT have an extensive network that opens up these opportunities for us students. There were roughly 10 professors who gave brief lectures about their area of study, and among those ten, about 5 professors came along on the field trips. The professors were extremely helpful during the most crucial part of the program. We spent 6 days 5 nights in Sitou Experimental Forest where we had to conduct a research project with a group. My group had trouble at first with creating a specific research topic on a
scale that could be completed in a few days. The professor who we went to for help gave her 110%, assisting in any way she could.

BACT also proved to be a valuable experience in a non-academic way. Spending almost every hour of the day for a month with 20 other students was the fastest way to make friends from all around the world. There were only three other American students, which made it easier to learn more about Taiwanese and other cultures since we weren’t in a bubble for the month. The experience was also interesting because aside from the Singaporeans, everyone had varying levels of English—the primary language of the program. I quickly found that I use a surprisingly large amount of slang and pop culture references in daily speech, forcing me to learn how to explain words and concepts in descriptive ways using simple words for the others to understand.

Overall, I had a great two months packed with activities and lessons I wouldn’t have had had I been just a tourist. I highly recommend everyone go to Taiwan at least once in their lives. Taiwan may be a small island, but it’s filled with enormous amounts of hospitality and friendliness from the locals. Taiwan also has an endless amount of cheap but delicious food with many vegetarian and vegan options. For those who decide to visit Taiwan in the summer, I highly recommend carrying an umbrella with you at all times. Although it rains usually in the late afternoon during the rainy season, there are sometimes random showers that can catch you off guard.

*Please enjoy some pictures on the following pages.
↑ Land Dyke’s bamboo shoot field
↑ Maze at Meifung Farm
↑ View from temple nearby accommodation
↓ Peak of Cising Mountain
↓ Sitou Experimental Forest
↓ Demonstration at Shueili Wood Utilization
↑ In front of temple in Lugang Township

↑ Taijiang National Park

↑ Tree House in Tainan

↑ Peak of Hehuan Mountain

↑ Inspiration of tea house in Japanese film Spirited Away (Jiufen)

↑ Cingshui Cliff

↑ Taijing National Park