

1. BACKPACKING IN WARSAW

Poland offers many cheap options to travel around. It has a well connected public transportation and special discounts for students under 26. Buses are quite cheap and special offers are abundant on Internet. Cheap accommodation is also wide-spread. Youth hostels are increasing in numbers and surprisingly very close to hot spots. I was surprised to see the number of places for backpacking nearby a Hard Rock Café! Finding a good place to rest might be a nightmare in different major cities but in Warsaw is quite the opposite. Youth hostels are run by a very enthusiastic crew who are always welcoming foreigners in the city. I have been in many youth hostels before but staying in Warsaw was different. When we arrived to the city, we did not have a room on the dormitories so we spend some time at this funky place called Oki Doki Hotel.

This was a fascinating experience. The youth hostel was pretty much at heart of Warsaw, two minutes walk away from a supermarket, very close to a MRT, to the Palace of Culture, and around the largest department store in the country. The hostel was run by a Serbian guy who was taking out all the people at hostel. He took us for a Czech schnitzels version on Monday, Old-Polish folk karaoke on Tuesday, shot bars on Wednesday and for some cultural trips as the old Jewish neighborhood and to Holy Cross Church where actually Frederic Chopin's heart is kept.

Farther more, I think the people that come to that hostel were special. Many, many backpackers just gather around to enjoy the bar, come together on the kitchen or plan trips to the city on comfortable puffs . They offer the cheapest beer on town, and there are a lot of amenities like topic-parties. You have this impression that people actually know why they are there. Most of them were not the first time there as well. People just come back to the place to know what is around. The hostel is nearby many places where you could exchange money without your passport, get fresh vegetables at the midnight or head to a sophisticated place for coffee.

However, people just love gathering around to tell stories about the places they have visited. Visitors feel like they are at home, even hosting newcomers. Many people used their third floor for cooking and having a beer around six o'clock. There were people for all around the world, most of them traveling around the region. You could get to know places and tips that you would not hear about in a travel guide. I enjoy sharing dinner with people all around the world and knowing their stories. For instance, there was this French girl who was studying at Budapest. She likes to play the guitar and eat cereal all the night long. She travels back to Poland just to enjoy what she called the 'Chopin trip'. She is into music and love to get into all the places where actually Chopin played. Also I remember this Irish script writer who was travelling the country before heading back to work. He have very interesting opinions about the future of the region and was enthusiastic about being part of its evolvement. There were also two American missionaries for Peace Corp that just finished their work in Ukraine. They were having some holidays after her duties and make very insightful comments.

Here are a picture with at the Oki Doki kitchen.



2. COOKING BY YOUR OWN

One key difference between Poland and Taiwan is that you are expected to cook by your own. After spending one year and a half in Taipei, I miss the chance to be at the kitchen. Most Polish dorms have large kitchen facilities where you could actually fried, backed or used the microwave for heating. During the night time many international students gather together to share their cuisine. I enjoy organizing trips to the wholesale or any discount store. Poland also enjoy many local markets with fresh vegetables at a cheaper price. There is a large Vietnamese community and the host what they called an 'Asian market'. You could get everything from bamboo shots to good quality tea leaves.

Warsaw have several Tesco, Auchan, Lidl and even some Aldi. Polish people invest time on their groceries and they are loyal to their preferences. Convenient stores are not around and most of the time you could only find bakeries at the metro and kebabs during late hours. Thus, doing groceries is very critical in order to provide yourself with good supplies for the week. Large discount stores do not differ a lot on prices with wholesales. It is actually more convenient to go for a wholesale where actually you could find all the brands and variety that you could expect on a capital city.

Buying spirits (especially vodka) is also more convenient in wholesales. You will be fascinating by the variety of brands, flavors and quality you could find there. Poles are very proud of their local brands and took their time to buy good vodka.

You could also get good deals with cheese, yogurt and bread. Poland is a relatively cheap country under European standards but this does not mean that they do not invest on high quality food. In fact, most of the places have very good standards and variety of food.

Once in the kitchen, people gather around very quiet to cook and move to their room where they actually host people until late night. Polish dorms have their own fridge, sofa, large closets and enough space to even do a workout! There is enough space for holding aperitifs or sharing with friends. The kitchen environment is tidy and very clean. People are really careful with using the kitchen and they do respect each others' space.

I attached a picture of myself preparing meatloaf during a weekday.



3. MOVING AROUND THE CITY

Poland MRT is one of the less developed in the world. In fact, the city only have one single line with few stops. There is large difference between what you could expect, especially if you leave from Taipei. Also MRT are not under any surveillance. You pay a fixed fee and you are allowed to use all the public transportation facilities. Most students pay the fee at the beginning of the semester.

Buses are the most convenient way to move around the city. However, there is not an easy job to connect buses. Most bus rides are connected with the tram system so you are expected to it as well. There is an application online to track how to change MRT, buses, and trams that is very useful for newcomers. It provides real time information about the public transportation rides so if you have a Smartphone you will not get lost in Warsaw.

The only MRT line connects the Northern part of the city with the Southwestern. You need to be aware that if you want to cross the river (go to the East neighborhood named Praha) you should take bus shuttles. The stadium, the river bank and the old-city is over there. If you are into soccer games, summer dances or have any keen interest on history be aware that there is no MRT to get there.

I took a shot inside Pole Mokotowskie MRT station.



4. VISITING CHURCHES IN POLAND

Poland is one of the largest Catholic countries in the world. You could tell there is a high regard about religion in the country. Even when you are in the MRT you have religious adds around. Small cities are full of religious statues as well as other type of remembrance of their beliefs. Poland history is deeply related with its religious roots and the city is an expression of it. Even though, there is a pretty secular space for developing your own beliefs, the Christian heritage of the city is fascinating.

There are great number of churches that have great importance for the city. Most them were reconstructed after the WWII was over or after the Soviet period. There are very interesting references to the role of religion on the country. Their churches are full of flags, memoirs and flowers. One important difference among Poland and Taiwan is that most Polish churches remain open all the day. Believers come in every second to offer their prayers and devotions. Students, youth groups and people of all kind come to pay a visit to the churches where actually you could buy Christian literature, spend time staring at master art pieces or dwelling in its own architecture.

Poland offers a wide variety of religious services. There churches that still practice the Old Tridentine Rite in Latin while others offer more Vatican Second Masses as well. There are Masses in many languages including Spanish, French, German, Italian, Taglog, Vietnamese, Japanese, etc... Most youth groups offers fellowships that include theater activities, trips, Bible studies and seminars on spiritual assistance. I strongly recommend to pay a visit to the historical churches and they very modern worship places as well, especially those hosting large children chorus.

Here I attached a photo from the traditional Palm Sunday on Easter



and another with the French-speaking community.



5. ASIAN CREW IN POLAND

Different business schools send their students to have a Central European experience in Poland. You will find an important number of Asian students in Warsaw due to the large number of partnerships with Asian universities. There are also some Asian students that studied on European universities as well. These group always gather for tea, singing and having dinner around. I enjoy my time with all the Asian

students. SGH provides an amazing network for Asian students with an international background. Here I attached a photo with all the rest of Asian students in Warsaw.



FINAL REPORT

SGH is the most well-known university in Poland. It is basically a business school with three main buildings in a tidy well kept residential area. The university has a long tradition to be 'build up' idea from students willing to study business. If you get to Building G you will find out many photos of alumni in the second floor and how their story about how they build up the place. It is a kind of honor to belong to this institution. You could feel it as soon as you get into the campus. Most professors were alumni as well. The alumni network is very active in promoting students. Saying you come from SGH is a distinctive tag.

When you get into the Main Building (G), you realize it is old structure. It has indeed host many important business leaders on their classrooms for a long time. There is an open yard and many corridors in the old-fashion way. You could also tell that the building was used in many different ways (the aula magna used to be a drama stage!). I like this sort of old structures. There are many places to find (and to get lost), especially at the basement corridors. Most students prefer the new building structures (Building G) but I spend most of my time at the old stairs checking out my notes.

Another important thing that you will realize immediately is how well-connected with the main employers in the country. You will find out that there are many sponsors even in the classrooms! Many important businesses and consulting firms have literally built some classrooms and you will notice their logo inside the classroom. You might realize that many visiting and associate professors come from these firms as well. There are students who are already working for them or are looking to do so by taking this or that course or by getting through the university. On the other hand, these firms and many

others are actively looking for recruiting students. You will realize that job fairs and activations are given on a daily basis at SGH. Huge banners and many very attractive stages are always around the courtyard. There are many activities done on the ground floor to attract highly motivated students or to just promote the company. You could always mingle with recruiters and get a good idea about the labor market. International students are encouraged to assist to this events however many stands are looking for Polish speakers.

The administrative building (Building A) is even an older structure. You could give your coat as soon as you get in like in a theater! You will find the international office and a short cut to the library there. The study room inside the library is one of the most beautiful places in the university. I recommend to spend at least one day per week on the study room. There is a good environment for reading your reference books there. There are many features on the building that you could appreciate as well, especially the so old-fashioned restrooms and drinking fountains!

Building C, on the other hand, is a recent construction. It was design for hosting smaller classrooms and enjoy more amenities (better wifi, a specialized cafeteria and lobby for students). Many recruiters used these facilities to interview students at the university. SGH students work very hard on their career development and you could easily heard their interviews or focus group done there. Some interviews demand Polish, English and third language skill. If you are reading for more than one hour you could easily listen the recruitment process of five or more students! During summer time there are benches for having coffee outdoors. There are some bakeries around that have some fresh croissants on the morning. This is the main building where we have most of our lectures.

The Erasmus Student Association is very active. They plan a large number of activities including trips, tram parties, international food festivals, social work and language exchange. They have a Facebook page were you could ask for updates on concerts, help with your paperwork and to dinner with people. They are all very kind and they are happy to help all exchange students with their groceries, official paperwork and to buy souvenirs. Students should not miss their activities! There is always something going on at Erasmus, at the residence dormitory where you are actually allow to party in a common room.

The dormitories, so-called Sabinki building, are shared rooms for SGH students. There are no distinction between men and women like in Taipei and there is pretty much more space there. You will enjoy a large window and so much space that you could even workout on your own room. You are expected to cook, and you own your own fridge inside your room. Showers are always tide and cleaning ladies are always kind. No one speak English around so you will always find yourself trying to communicate under different ways! There is a convenient store inside the building that opens until 11. Sabinki is very close to the university (2 min walk). It is usually a meeting point for partying as well.

The main difficulties you will find in Warsaw are basically the language and cultural expectations. Poles do not speak so much English on the streets and even in the dorms you will need people to help you around. Poles are generally speaking very opinionated and sometimes you will have the impression they are rude or feel uncomfortable dealing with some topics. Poles are outspoken and they are no afraid to

say no or make you feel that they do not agree with you. It is important to work close with your buddy to overcome any possible cultural, especially if you come from an Asian country where people do keep for their own their opinions. They also have a particular sense of humor!

It is also important to notice that Poles are not properly a highly international community so they have a high reliance on their way of doing things. You will notice that in the supermarkets, butcheries or even at the library. They are strongly nationalistic and are always chauvinistic about their history. This is less present on campus but if you hang out in the city you could notice so. This does not mean that people have prejudices against foreigners but you could easily tell that they make distinctions (some time funny distinctions!) with people from abroad. Poles are often curious about why people might choose Poland as a place to stay. Poland has a long history as being migrants so for then is unusual to heard about people coming in. The previous generation reinforce this idea that working abroad will help you to prosper by giving up your comfort zone. They might think you come in for business reasons (the economy is boosting) or because you have are in relationship with Pole.

Poles do not hang out in large groups but they do have a large number of emerging subcultures in their society. There are many lifestyles and you are expected to respect their stands. The city is generally speaking safe and you could tell people just living their lives. I heard stories before about how dangerous it could in some restricted areas but I did not feel unsafe anytime in Warsaw. There are some homeless around but they do not seem to be a threat to you. It is also a very women friendly place to be. There is a high regard for women development and you are expected to treat your female fellows as an equal in all stands. During summer women could take sun baths on the play ground, they are able engage with sport activities and they have a pretty independent environment for their development.

Another issue that might your permanence in Warsaw is winter. Wintertime is long, dry and cold. It snows a lot and you are expected to have warmer clothes than those you have in Taipei. Poles often used gloves and scarves outdoors. They are prepared for hostile winters and you need to get used to spend time indoors on the meanwhile. During winter, most students spend at their place studying or having hot chocolate. Heaters are a must on Polish furniture and you need to always check out the weather for any storm just at the corners of your plans.

The academic life in SGH is challenging. In all the courses, the professor will provide you with information about the required abilities as well as his/her expectations. There are sit down exams as well as presentations. Professors take very serious the term papers. They make remarks on class about your assignments.

Lectures last less than NCCU ones. The professor expects you have make previous readings and quick tests are often taken. Many students spend the morning discussing papers at cafeteria. During the lectures, most students ask questions about the subject and usually teachers will try to engage the rest of the class on the discussion. You are expected to be active during the lecture. Also, it is a quite often practice that the rest of the students mark their fellows. Final marks are ranked as well.

Most of the exchanges students are highly qualified and they do come from prestigious universities worldwide. You could learn a lot from the group discussions. They have different skills from their

previous educational background that you might like to include under your interests. Most of them are sociable and enjoy spending time with other exchange students. I enjoy gathering for group meetings. The teacher will encourage competition among presenting groups and it delivering presentations could be critical. I think new exchange students will increase their presentation skills by selecting SGH as an exchange option. Before school starts there are some cultural shock workshops that help students to deal with multicultural behaviors and expectations. You need to take this workshop seriously in order to make the most of your exchange!

During this exchange semester I took courses in Corporate Governance, International Logistics, Innovation Management and Competition of Regions.

Corporate Governance is a course design for students who want to understand due diligence procedures and governance structure within the firm. It was a case based course. During the last sessions we make present a paper and some slides about our main takeaways. There were some guest speakers from Brussels and Moscow during course. We also had a field trip to Warsaw Stock Exchange. There we learned about the code of best practices which listed companies hold.

International Logistics is a lecture on how logistics plays a major role in the internationalization process after the EU enlargement. The professor is the author of a book on best practices in Poland. I like the first hand experience from someone who has seen how a Central European country becomes a logistics center due to their ascension to the European Union. There were many guest speakers in this lecture as well. I liked a lecture given by the Supply Chain Manager for Avon in Europe. He explained us the how logistics is aligned with the business model that Avon pursues. There was also a field trip to Dell distribution center. The basically introduced us the factory delivery system and why this distribution center is a cornerstone for Dell's logistics system.

Innovation Management was another interesting course. We learned how to use blue ocean strategy and how do start an innovation process. There were some techniques (buyer utility map, competitor factors analysis, AS IS canvas) that I found them useful. The course ended up with the introduction to a new product or service that help will have a meaningful impact on the target group.

My last course was about Competition of Regions. The lecture was based on Porter seminal paper on the competition of clusters and how do they achieve competitive advantages. There were many references to farther research made in how to create synergy for small start ups, how far industrial policy works and how does networks worked on a knowledge based society. The lecture was given by Prof. Ewa Freyberg who has a large experience at national and European level in terms of trade and development. Some students present the case for Taichung machinery cluster and its competitive advantages in the region.

I will recommend SGH for those students who are looking to study in a well established university in Central Europe. The university is great gateway to the region. There are many notable key speakers coming to the university. There are so many access to activities such as visits to the Presidential House, cultural trips and many networking activities going on. It is also a perfect place for people seeking for job

opportunities in the region. Many firms are hiring students with different background in Poland (due to the new EU enlargement) and SGH is a good reference in your curriculum.

The university offers you a close by campus to downtown and a large number of soccer and other sport facilities around. The dormitory has its own gym facilities and other amenities (basketball field, stretching room, BBQ area). During summer time, most people come with their SGH jumpers for enjoying activities (usually BBQ or basketball games) around. However, you also need to realize that most SGH students do have a personal space and spend large amount of time alone. They do gather for having vodka and partying but they could spend hours at the park reading as well.

Warsaw is an ideal place for partying (is relatively cheap) and for traveling since it is well connected to the main cities. Ryanair and Easyjet also have operating flights in Warsaw and in the main Polish cities. You could always book your flights in advance and make the most of your budgets. Surf-coaching is also widespread and many students look around for opportunities to save money and keep traveling. You just need to ask around. Nevertheless, you need to consider that many students at SGH have already a job or have other obligations. In Poland, the main definition about happiness is about raising a family. You will find out that students give importance to going back home (even if your parents live in Warsaw) or getting back to your wife. You are expected to respect their life style and be aware that not everyone is in a party mood.

My advice for future NCCU students is to travel in groups, especially if you have not been in Europe before. Many students rush in their decisions without sorting out options, especially regarding to traveling. There are many students that got lost on many bus connections and they could not find other alternatives than buying a flight back from their own pocket. Public transportation is not as intuitive as in Taipei and you are changing countries easily. This might be a challenge. Traveling in groups will make you take wiser decisions and being more cautious. There are plenty of options around for many affordable prices. Sometimes traveling with someone else will make you have a concrete plan to stick with. You will enjoy more Poland making timely decisions as well. It is also important for your academic life. Being with someone else will help you to cope with the academic demands while being flexible to travel. Before coming to Warsaw make your mind about the people who are coming in. If there are not a lot of people from NCCU heading there try to find someone who share your same lifestyle and preferences at the Facebook group. This will help you to have an awesome exchange semester!

Finally, I will encourage new exchange students to study Polish. Polish could be the hardest Slavic language and only Poles speak it. Poles make fun that they need to learn first the grammatical exceptions to figure out the rule. It is not an easy language to learn. However, there are lots of rewards for learning some basic Polish. Being in Poland is a unique experience because Poles have always been unique. Part of their cultural heritage lies on their language. If you are able to exchange some words at the bakery and get some good understanding about some basic expressions you will eventual feel that you are more engage within the society. Poles will highly appreciate it! It is also part of your personal development and it could pay you back in the future. Good luck and enjoy SGH!