

Students Take a Cruise on the Love Boat

Chinese- or Taiwanese- Americans Can Take Classes, Make Friends on Summer Study Tour of Taiwan

By Cindy Hong

So you don't want to go to summer school, don't feel like working, but your parents are pushing you to do something productive? Why not take a tour around the small but CROWDED island of Taiwan? What's more, if you have Chinese or Taiwanese roots, the Taiwanese government will take you on this tour, teach you a little about Taiwanese culture, attempt to teach you Mandarin, expose you to a vast world of mostly Taiwanese- or Chinese- Americans (as well as Taiwanese and Chinese students from other countries), house you, feed you and generally treat you like royalty for a rather small fee.

The Overseas Youth Language Training and Study Tour is the official name of this government program. But imagine anywhere from 250 to 700 young, vibrant, potent males and females ages 18 to 24 clumped together for six weeks, and you get the more popular name: "the Love Boat." On the Love Boat you do not take a cruise, but you can fly to Taiwan, live in dorms, take language and culture classes and embark on a nine-day tour around Taiwan with other people from America and from around the globe with Taiwanese or Chinese roots.

The study tour is a six-week program held in mid-summer at one of two locations in Taiwan: Chien Tan in Taipei, where the program was located originally, and Ocean University in Kee Lung, a port city in northern Taiwan. Chien

Tan is the more luxurious locations of the two, but participants cannot choose where they want to live. The session begins at the end of June or beginning of July and lasts until mid-August.

Paying the majority of the costs (participants pay only \$200 plus air fare), the government does not seem to gain much in the trade. But it does benefit, according to second year medical student Frank Li, who attended the program in the summer of 1988. The study tour inspired people to look at Taiwan in a different way, he said.

"I think it re-established ties for people," said Li. "A lot of people came back and even thought about working there."

Senior biology major Hannah Lee, who participated in the study tour in 1990, also said the Taiwanese government benefited from the program. While the government doesn't necessarily implement the program in an effort to get people to come back to Taiwan, she it wanted participants to remember Taiwan.

"[They] want to make a good impression on participants," Lee said.

Most of the participants have also given positive reports of their experiences. Junior biology major Judy Cheng, who participated in 1992, noted how quickly friendships were made. A Bible study group formed within the first week of the program, she said. Cheng also said she enjoyed going to Taiwan because she got to see her relatives, whom she had not seen in seven years.

Second-year medical student David Lee, who also attended the program at Chien Tan in 1992, was born in Taiwan and had not been back in 12 years. He said the program was a nice break for him between his undergraduate and professional school years. The

friendships he made were the best part of the program, he said.

Li said the programs offered many opportunities to form connections.

"You meet connections for life, (such as) business connection," he said. "Now, wherever I go, I have a place to stay."

Upon arrival in Taiwan, participants are escorted to their respective campuses, and after a couple of days, the regular schedule

kicks in. The daily routine consists of a morning language class, crafts class, lunch, an afternoon culture class, and then a field trip. Nights are usually left free as times to explore Taiwanese nightlife or to simply hang out, play sports or meet more people. There is a curfew, but it is only somewhat enforced.

Since the Chien Tan location is in Taipei, many of the folks choose to explore the city. "[Taipei] is so alive at night," said Hannah Lee, who lived at Chien Tan. "There's the night market, food, shops, clubs, restaurants and the infamous beer ally."

At Ocean, however, the night life is not as exciting as in Taipei, so people are more likely to hang around the dorm.

Students are placed into the language classes based on their performance on a test given the first few days. The crafts classes include making such items as paper yo-yos, paper carvings, flour figurines, masks and paper cuttings. The culture classes teach skills like sword-fighting, instrument playing,

martial arts, stick fighting and Chinese cooking.

Not everyone learns the art or talent, but they all attempt to learn.

"For my culture class, I had to play a Southern fiddle," David Lee said. "I sucked so bad they made me count beats instead."

First-year graduate student Mike Chen said the classes were not meant to be taken seriously.

"Nobody studies or does homework," he said. Chen attended the program in 1992 at Chien Tan.

The daily field trips are usually at places around the Taipei area. They have included such sights as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, the National Palace Museum of Art, Yeh Liu Park, the World Trade Center, a martyr shrine, an amusement park and hot springs.

After about 4-1/2 weeks of the regular schedule, everyone at both locations takes a language test for their respective class and then embarks on a nine-day bus tour around the island. It is on this tour that participants are given a glimpse of the best that Taiwan has to offer. From dramatic mountain gorges to scenic beaches, hiking trips through bamboo to shopping trips in the night market, they see and do it all.

Hannah Lee and Judy Cheng both cited Hua Lien, a beautiful mountainside beach, as being the most memorable part of the tour. "It was so beautiful," Cheng said. "I usually think of Taiwan as being really dirty. Taipei is crowded and polluted, but the water was so blue and just— beautiful."

Lee that Taiwan was interesting for her because she could see where her parents were raised and where she was born. While she



Frank Li (top row with glass raised), second year medical student, at a Hai Zhong Tian beer garden during 1988 Study Tour.



Judy Cheng(right) and friends at a Buddhist temple in Taiwan during the 1992 Study Tour.