

## Blog 40 --- Taiwan Hualien

From Taipei, we took a train for almost two hours to Hualien. The minute I stepped out of the train, I realized that this station only has one platform and one cozy waiting room. It is the cutest train station I have ever seen! I feel that to me, Hualien is like a big town in the countryside areas of the U.S. We figured it would take less than an hour to drive in from one end of the city and out the other. Hualien has many farms, orchards and tea fields placed here and there around the county. In Taiwan there are many beaches, but they are not the same. In Hualien, we went to the Qi Xing Tan beach and were surprised by its uniqueness. We also visited the Taroko National park and an Ocean park right next to our hotel! There we saw a wide variety of underwater creatures and rode a couple of roller coasters just like the Sea World in Florida.



I've been to many beaches in Florida and the most of them are made of sand and sea shells. Before the trip, I heard that Hualien's beach is made of rocks and stones. It was a windy day and the sky was grey, but we still decided to drive down to the famous Qi Xing Tan beach and take a look. It definitely was my first time to visit a shore made of pebbles and rocks. I really didn't feel like taking my shoes off there because there's no doubt it would've hurt! At first, I didn't know that the waves curling up along the shore were going to be so huge! I decided to stand along the edge of the water thinking the waves would be calm and only cover my ankles every time they reach the shore. But as a wave three times my height came crashing onto the pebbles in front of me, I began running towards the car as fast as my legs could take me. I sure didn't want to be caught by those monstrous waves. As I ran, I could feel those droplets covering my back and making my shirt moist and salty. Even from 20 meters away, I could still feel and taste the spray of salt water on my skin. On our way back to the car, we met a two year old Husky playing around in a grassy area. We went over to say hi when she jumped up on me and gave me a very warm and welcoming hug. She even licked my face!



Taroko National park, established 27 years ago, is one of the eight national parks in Taiwan. The word Taroko means “magnificent and beautiful” in the Truku language of the Truku indigenous tribe. The park was built on the mountain ranges in Hualien and the path that we took was one that people carved into the sides of those rocky cliffs and mountains. On one side was a cliff with a rapid river flowing at the speed of a cheetah, so cold it could freeze you till you were numb! On the other side was the towering mountain, daring us to drive under with the little rocks breaking off of it piece by piece. Even when we were parked under a bridge to get off and take a look outside, I’d be scared rocks would collapse on someone any minute. One of Taroko National park’s most famous landmarks is its Taroko gorge, well known for its nickname: “The Marble Gorge” since it contains a lot of valuable marble. Not far from the Marble Gorge, there was a suspension footbridge hanging high in the air, tempting me to take the journey across the rapid river below. But it was closed that day for some mysterious, unknown reason...I was so disappointed. My mom said that she wouldn’t take the challenge even it was opened since she is severely afraid of heights. Every time she got on one of those bridges, her legs would transform to noodles and her hands would be covered in sweat.



Next to our hotel (located on the top of a hill) there was an Ocean Park within walking distance. I went there with my friends for a day of pure fun and games. That day, my parents were resting in the hotel to catch up with their sleep. Ever since the last time I went to the Sea World in Florida, which was almost four years ago, I didn’t go to any amusement park in China. So boy was I excited to go to that one ever so close to our hotel. At the park, we watched the dolphin show first. It seemed like a tradition for me to watch the dolphin show every time I visit Sea world. The park has a huge aquarium full of all different kinds of sea creatures. There, I saw a real eel almost twice as long as I am! A magnifying glass was displayed right up against his face. It looked so freaky that I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck sticking up! It looked just like the eels from the Little Mermaid movie, Flotsam and Jetsam!! We saw the staff feeding the big fishes with chunks of bloody, cold fish meat and the sea lions playing around with their mini hula-hoops in their small pools. The roller coasters there weren’t that big, except for one. It reminded me so much of the Splash Mountain ride in Disney!! Even though it was right there with no one in line, ready for me to take the ride, I didn’t go since I still was a bit scared of roller coasters. When I came back and began writing this Blog, I looked through many pictures of Orlando, Disney, Universal Studios and Sea World. I thought I was tired of them, but now I miss them so much.



We only visited two counties during our one week trip in Taiwan. My parents and I agreed that it wasn't enough. On our way back to Taipei, we started planning our next trip to Taiwan. I heard that a couple of scenes from *The Life of Pi* (directed by a Taiwanese director, Li An) was taken somewhere in southern Taiwan. I will make sure that we will include that in our next trip!