

After I was accepted into this program, I found myself scrolling through countless pages of Taiwan travel advice. To keep count of everything, I created a new note in my notes app: Things to do in Taiwan. On it I added:

- Eat shaved ice
- Go to jiufen
- Go hiking
- Go to a temple
- Eat at a night market
- Go to the beach
- Hot spring

Once I arrived and exchanged plans with my friends, I added:

- Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall
- KTV
- Eat lu rou fan
- Go to a waterfall
- Ride the high speed rail
- National palace museum
- Cliff jumping
- Go to the top of Taipei 101
- Clubbing
- Din tai fung
- Biking by the river

and much more. Though I completed every item on this bucket list by the time I left (I completed the shaved ice one about 15 times) the list barely begins to explain what made my time in Taiwan special.

For example, I hadn't written down that I hoped to spend a weekend with my coworkers to visit one of their families in Tainan, drink, eat, and watch the Olympics in a hotel room, and play pinball for a sausage in the night market while they cheered me on. In fact, I hadn't expected to make friends with my coworkers at all. On the first day, I was too shy to speak Chinese and they were too shy to speak English. But after a few days of warming up, they began to treat me with such warmth and friendliness that I felt extremely comfortable among them. They were always laughing, calling each other “强”, and making fun of each other. They translated their jokes for me, until I began to understand some on my own. My coworkers Ping Cheng and Xiao Ji took me to their hometown Daxi to see a festival for Guan Gong, and I had an amazing time watching fireworks and eating squid and 豆花, though I did get home at 2 A.M. on a Monday night.

I also hadn't written about going on a weekend trip to Taizhong, sleeping in a very comfy hostel with the rest of the program, and drinking Taiwan's original bubble tea. Nor had I planned to take my friends surfing with my cousin, only to get absolutely battered by extreme waves. I had never foreseen running 7 miles through a typhoon at midnight to autoclave my flasks and

take advantage of the slightly cooler weather. Nor had I imagined how much fun I would have during that same typhoon cooking ramen and playing photo roulette and pictionary with the friends in my dorm. I did write down that I wanted to bike by the river, but I didn't know that it would be in the middle of the night with Jay and Julie, and that we would spend an hour talking in an empty skate park or that we would end the night drinking Taiwan beer with an American bartender.

When I wrote out my bucket list, I never planned that I would transform from someone who panicked at having been left alone in a lab to someone who could confidently manage their own research and think of new ways to address problems as they came up. Staying late at the lab gave me ownership and pride over my research that I had never experienced at UChicago. I learned when to lean on my postdoc for support and when to trust myself to solve problems. I wrote a presentation and report on my research independently for the first time, and I finally found that I could see myself becoming a PhD student in the future.

Though the most rewarding aspects of my experience came from outside of the bucket list, I will say that the extensive list helped me change my attitude towards the world and towards my life. Every weekend, rather than lying around on my phone, I thought about how to make progress on my bucket list. The sense of urgency because I only had two months led me to explore Taipei and other cities in Taiwan in a way that I had never done before. Leaving Taiwan after the best summer of my life was extremely hard. But I think that from now on, I can approach the rest of my life at UChicago and beyond in a new way. I will make lists of concrete goals that will allow me to make the most of the city and environment I live in while still allowing for fun surprises and relationships to develop. Hopefully, this will allow me to keep some of the magic that I found this summer in Taiwan alive.