

CET Taiwan, Spring 2026 | Anonymous Student

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Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece? "Latino students, first time abroad/living away from home."

The Beauty of Exploring

I had many expectations of how my time abroad in Taiwan would go. While some of those predictions were true and I did experience culture shocks in social interactions. It was more good than bad. I ended up gaining a lot more than I struggled. I assumed living for the first time alone would be a bigger challenge due to my health but to my surprise I flourished in this new freedom.

I was able to keep up with daily tasks and participate in chores around the apartment. This experience opened my eyes to my abilities and possibilities available to me outside of my comfort zone and home. Despite cultural differences (the food was delicious but it's not the same spices or flavors I am used to) I felt at home. My race and color of my skin were no longer at the forefront of me as I walked the streets. I was just another foreigner living in Taipei.

I have always welcomed conversations with others on American culture and how it impacts different ethnicities living there. I have had many deep and interesting conversations about my country and government since there is a sense of responsibility to put people at ease. And people have been respectful and curious about it which I appreciate and welcome. Conversations on how I identify as Mexican-American and how I feel equally both those identities.

I have learned that this dual identity is not as common as it is in the US since to them identifying as Mexican-American means I have one parent who is Mexican and another who is American. I have found that those that are asking me questions generally want to know the why behind it and listen carefully in our conversations.

As expected, people (mostly children) did stare which I was prepared for and used to. I was able to walk around without a care in the world and become invincible in the crowd. I felt comfortable roaming the streets at any time and getting to explore. This sense of freedom and anonymity allowed me to explore my identity outside of my nationality and ethnicity. I began to explore with my style, hair, and jewelry. I was in a place where I wasn't tied to social expectations related to my Latina background. It was refreshing to not feel like I had to perform a certain way like I would feel in the US.

I was also meeting new people who I could share my culture with and bond over finding good Mexican food. I began to find other Latinos living in Taiwan and connect with them over being away from home and tips on finding our seasoning. I was responsible for myself and daily life

activities that I struggled with came with ease while abroad. I was able to rely on myself in ways I never thought were possible and a new respect and love came with it.

Being independent while abroad and away from close family and friends is different than when I am independent back home. Home is familiar and secure whereas abroad, as lovely as Taiwan was, is unfamiliar and brings anxieties of dealing with things alone. You learn to solve problems that come up, gaining new lessons or skills along the way.

I learned to give myself grace in challenges and to give praise when I overcame situations. Making sure to take it all in as every one of those experiences helped shape me and my time in Taiwan. Getting to study abroad and surrounding myself with different cultures allowed me to explore mine and grow as a person.