



中華民國聽障者體育運動協會
CHINESE TAIPEI SPORTS ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF



"Touch Your Heart"

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October 2004

From lush green mountains and hostels atop breathtaking cliffs, to dense city streets filled with horrible smells and poisonous cobras, Taiwan is a country of contradictions. Home to 23 million Taiwanese, the country is owned by China, but it is in a world of its own. The core of Taiwan is Taipei, home to the tallest building in the world right now—Taipei 101. Last August, I was fortunate enough to see Taipei 101 with my own eyes—and pretty much everything that I needed to see in the 218-mile long country.

After a flurry of last-minute plans, Katie Spiegel and I flew from San Francisco to Taipei, Taiwan. We were selected by the United States of America Deaf Sports Federation to attend the International Deaf Youth Camp, hosted by YMCA Taipei and the Rotary Club of Taipei Dragon River. Internationally, the word "youth" means ages 18-30, unlike in the United States, where "youth" means 18 and under. In this case, Katie and I were "campers," not counselors, which was quite a change for us, for in America, we haven't been campers at a camp since we were 16 years old!

Katie and I were under the assumption that the camp was a prelude to the 2009 Summer Deaflympics, to be held in Taipei. However, the camp was hosted by the YMCA, and served a completely different purpose. We met deaf people from 20 different countries, and participated in various activities designed to make us work together. Working with people from different countries, many of whom had a hard time communicating and gesturing, was quite a task. Nevertheless, we had a good time.

Worldwide travels did not prepare us for the differences we would encounter in Taiwan. Communication wasn't a problem, since we were accommodated—English was everywhere, and there were gestuno interpreters. Taiwan was a city that dwarfed New York City, so imagine the air pollution, heat and fact that there was never any real bread anywhere, unless you sneaked a bite at McDonalds. Even there, the Egg McMuffins tasted different.

We were Americans, in a city that was home to dozens of different variations of Asians. We stood out everywhere we went, but the Taiwanese warmly welcomed us, as evident through their friendly and open people, who never refused to let us pay for food or drink. We also saw their adoration of American culture through oversized billboards everywhere, plastered with pictures of Tim Duncan and LeBron James.

We stayed in three different hostels, two of which were in the heart of Taipei, and one atop a mountain. The mountain hostel was easily one of the most breathtaking hostels we have ever seen, and a sense of serenity and peace went hand in hand with the fog that surrounded the hostel in the mornings and evenings. Down the road from the hostel was a village. In the village, all the stores sold barrels and barrels of mushrooms. Since all the stores sold the same thing, we could not comprehend how they made profits out of the mushrooms, but since they were all still in business, they must have found ways to sell the mushrooms. One day, we went to a public spa, and were blown away by the fierce use of water. There were various pools and spas with different temperatures, and different methods of water massages. We left the spa bruised by the water, but definitely relaxed and mellow. Imagine how we slept that night!

One of the activities required us to dress up in army fatigues and take a ten-minute hike to a discovery center. We spent the day completing various activities, including a 10-second thrilling freefall that took us from a tower to the ground. That night, we enjoyed a huge bonfire, complete with tribal dances and country dances. We took the 10-minute hike back to the hostel and asked each other, "why army fatigues?" Some things, we will never know.

At nights, the markets of Taipei are amazing, with eye-popping sights, live Cobras, and endless booths of food that are indescribable. We lost ourselves amongst the endless booths and colorful lights.

The president of the Chinese Deaf Sports Federation took the time to take us to the Deaflympics planning offices, and we were impressed with their plans and visions, even though the Deaflympics are 5 years from now. The Taiwanese deaf community is determined to pull off the very first Deaflympics to be held in Asia. We also had the opportunity to visit one of the deaf schools in Taipei, and we were impressed. Home to over 350 students, the school building was huge, and it smelled just like a deaf school in America. How is it that deaf kids all over the world smell alike?

Definitely the highlight of our time in Taipei was the newfound friends we made, by way of the countries that were represented, such as Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Croatia, Portugal, Japan and Argentina, as well as Taiwan. We all clicked during the first day of camp, and our friendships grew over the course of the camp. We found ourselves in many different conversations. Those new friends definitely proved to be the highlight of our time in Taiwan, and we bid them adieu, knowing we would meet many of them again in Melbourne, Australia in January 2005 for the Deaflympics.

Taiwan's motto is "touch your heart," which we found to be ironic, since Gallaudet University has practically adopted that sentence as its own. Our trip to Taiwan was worthwhile, and we look forward to returning for the Deaflympics. Onward to Taipei, 2009!

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