

Axel Montoya

NSF IRES Taiwan

Research & Cultural Experience

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When I was first selected to participate in the international research experience for students in Taiwan (IRES Taiwan), I was nervous as it was my first international research experience. My professors were a great support to feel more comfortable for this experience. During the semester prior to this summer, I was familiarized with the country and the laboratories I could be working under. During the first weeks of the summer in Taiwan, I was assigned to a laboratory specialized on pulsed laser deposition in which I was introduced to the research group. I was assigned to the high entropy ferroelectric thin films project under two of the PhD students to learn their methodology and experimental data. During this time, I learned about the different electric materials and the motivation behind their study. I was exposed to their experiments and projects for the following weeks. My shadowing consisted of multiple students specializing on a specific experimental part of the projects and carrying them out regularly. I got to shadow multiple students to their specific instrument in which they were the expert and learn about their process and individual projects. Some of the instruments I learned about include laser pulsed deposition, thermal deposition, scanning electron microscopy, x-ray diffraction and ferroelectric testing. This was a very exciting opportunity as some of these instruments are not available at UTPB and are hard to come across with. I made the most of my shadowing time learning about how they came to learn an expertise on their specific instrument and their stories. This experience was a great motivator for me to want to learn more and pursue knowledge.

Being part of such a big research group made me feel very comfortable and motivated to keep showing up and learning more.

Moreover, this summer was a very eye-opening experience as I was exposed to the Taiwanese culture and academic life of NTHU. Taiwan is full of kind people, delicious food and interesting traditions. Being exposed to a different way of living opened my eyes to how closed minded I still am. There is beauty in learning someone else's traditions and how they see the world. I got to discuss with some of the research group students how they see my culture and how I see theirs. Being a Mexican American I am used to the western way of living; it was very refreshing to see Taiwan, a completely foreign way of living. I found myself contemplating cultural differences, how these came to be and how does it shape their culture? I find it very interesting to observe and learn about different cultures. I also recognized home on the night markets, community, kind and hardworking people all around Taiwan. I found that the night markets from Taiwan have a lot of similarities to the stand markets in my hometown, reminding me that we are not so different after all. I felt very welcomed as a foreigner even when language barriers arose. During free time, we explored everything Hsinchu had to offer. We visited multiple night markets and tried different food every time. As well as any restaurant near the area that we had not tried yet, ranging from traditional Taiwanese cuisine to Chinese to Japanese and even Indian. Aside from night markets and food, we explored shopping markets where I found most of my souvenirs. We found that Hsinchu contains a number of small markets worth the effort and time to explore. During the weekends, we had the opportunity to visit other cities including Taitung, Kaohsiung, Taoyuan and New Taipei. One of the memorable things during these trips was the opportunity to ride a high-speed rail train for the first time. Taiwan's public transport is something I wish we had at home. Taitung was my favorite place we visited. The

owner of the hotel we stayed at offer us bicycles in which we explored some of the city on our way to night markets. Taitung has a beautiful scenery as well as a calm beach just outside the city. This was one of my favorite sceneries to witness and experience. In addition, the city of New Taipei was also a remarkable experience. This beautiful was very fun to explore between markets, food and interesting buildings, we had a great experience.

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