

Arriving at Taroko Gorge (or: Chris Begins to Scheme)

*Sunday, March 12th*

Sunday we got up bright and early to take a train around the coast to Hualien City. Our destination for the next couple of days: Taroko National Park.



*Shakadang Trail in Taroko National Park.*

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*First stop: breakfast of pineapple bread!*



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*View from the train: rice paddies.*

When we arrived in the city our host picked us up. We were staying at a small bed and breakfast a few miles from the park entrance. The lodging was scenic and they were even growing their own coffee, which was super tasty. The only complication that we were out in the country; much closer to the park than the city of Hualien, but no easy way to get there. After a somewhat comical lunch (our host valiantly attempted to find a place where we can eat vegetarian and no gluten) we arrived, unpacked and then Boya (husband to Lisa) drove us to the park. The last bus was scheduled to head back to Hualien a couple of hours later, stopping at a location a mile or so from the B&B and Boya said if we caught that he would come pick us up.

So off we went! First we watched a brief video at the headquarters. Not speaking Mandarin I can't tell if you if it said more than, "this park is pretty". Then we headed off to

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the Shakadang trail!

Pretty shortly into the trail we faced our first choice: the nifty rope bridge or boring flat, easy bridge.



*Chris makes the obvious choice.*



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*Christy Crosses!*

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*Before we left Boya eyeballed us and advised, “watch your head on that trail.”*



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*The rocks are incredible and the water is surprisingly, um, green.*

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*Taroko National Park is sometimes called Taroko Gorge but it's really hiking and driving through many of valleys. Which is*



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*awesome.*



*Keep ducking!*

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*Oh the textures!*



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*Don't worry I only have a few hundred more of these. From this first couple hours.*

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*Shakadang Trail.*



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*Looking a tad porous.*

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*So the thing about hiking in fragile gorges is that they sometimes collapse a little and maybe kill someone. The next day we would hit some trails where hard hats were highly recommended.*



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*Still in a beautiful canyon.*

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*Many bridges makeup the drive down the one road through Taroko National Park.*



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*The misty mountains.*

We made it down, feeling pretty exhausted and happy to have beaten the last bus by a few minutes. Christy asked if it was going to the stop we wanted, and the driver said yes, but once we got on it really looked like a tour bus. Regardless, it did stop at the right place, and we purchased some local fruits before Boya picked us up.

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*Fruits and a preview of tonight's festivities!*



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He had plans for the evening: a local restaurant that was well known for cooking a Taroko specialty: tiny fishes in ferns. These seemed both intriguing and since we do sometimes eat seafood and it didn't sound like it'd have any gluten, a perfect (and rare!) chance to explore some local cuisine! He got out, helped us order, and then drove off promising to be back when we were done.



*The famous ferns and fishes (left). Plus too many other dishes (more on the way).*

Oh, the little fishes. The food here was quite tasty, although follows the standard custom of saltier and oilier than we're used to. We weren't really sure about portion sizes so ended up

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ordering much more food than we could eat, although we gave it a valiant attempt. This was a tactical error as shortly thereafter our stomachs started to rumble.

Shortly thereafter consisted of Boya picking us up and then taking us into a nearby town to explain some of the local aboriginal history and culture. This was great stuff, Boya had grown as part of the Taroko people and had left for further education and to get a job in Taipei for a while. He eventually moved back and met Lisa here, and had a difficult time convincing her family that she should marry an aboriginal. Clearly he succeeded, and later he even played one of the love songs he wrote her as she sang the words. The experience was a bit awkward and totally impressive. One of the things I admire about the Chinese and Taiwanese people is their willingness to share creative outlets in ways we're sometimes embarrassed about (hence the vast differences in karaoke). Anyhow, we had a fun tour and conversation, only squirming a little bit in the car and trying not to think of all we'd just eaten.

Somewhere along this time frame, I think actually a day or two earlier, my laptop stopped working. Wouldn't power on, no lights, no joy. It uses a tiny Torx screws to hold the back in, a screwdriver that's nearly impossible to find in Taiwan. A nerd without his laptop! It pushed back photo editing and uploading by a long while.

We did make it home and spent the evening rubbing our bellies and thinking regretfully of poor choices made. We were also trying to figure out how to explore the park the next day. Boya said he'd drive us to the bus station in the morning, but it only runs once an hour up and down the park, which means waiting up to an hour after each hike. An alternate scheme was hatched...