

Leaving Taiwan

Friday, March 17th

On Friday we took the hotel shuttle (like the genius travelers we are) to the metro station and then a route down and back out of Taipei way out to the airport. In the final train they had those open shelves by the doors to store luggage. In typical Taiwanese style there were cloth straps that you could hook over the outside of the shelf to close it in a bit, which seemed like total overkill, and the scene was completed when a passenger sitting a few seats away noticed the train was about to depart and nobody had closed them so stood up and fastened them all himself.

The people in Taiwan were very friendly and generous to us, somewhat reserved, and big on queuing up. They seemed a somewhat anal and anxious people (and who wouldn't be given their political situation?). It's my kind of culture!



Also: they have things like random vampire banana statues in the airport.

What we saw of the island was beautiful and filled with miles of impressive but aging infrastructure. Lots of old looking concrete bridges and buildings, big rail stations with patchwork paint jobs, all of which might have looked worse because of the humid climate and giant storms and earthquakes they experience. The country has the feel of one that recently took a great leap forward economically and technologically, but has now entered a time of uncertainty. I kept thinking about how America has been avoiding dealing with similar issues for years, and wondering how much of what I thought I was seeing here represented my fears from home.



One Chain to Rule Them All

You know what else is strange about Taiwan? 7-Eleven. A chain with more history than presence in the US is *everywhere* in Taiwan. It is the dominate corner store and a country

with this kind of population density has a lot of corner stores. I can't remember when I was last in one in the US, but in Taiwan we ended up in several picking up snacks along our way.

Last random memory from Taiwan: umbrella stands outside most establishments. It rains a lot there, so everyone just puts their umbrella outside and trusts them to be there when they're done. Umbrellas are cheap and ubiquitous there, but it was still startling to leave any possession outside and hope for the best. But the Taiwanese have created a culture where they can do so.

We'd had a great week here and now it was time for a short plane ride to Shanghai.