TAIWANESE STUDENTS LIFE

ACADEMIC LIFE
The Taiwanese value education. They believe that in order to have a better life, a good education is required. Because students strive to satisfy their parents and teachers, Taiwanese students generally have one goal in mind - to pass the high school entrance exam and get accepted by a top university.

Taiwan’s school system consists of Elementary (grades 1-6), Junior High School (grades 7-9) and Senior High School (grades 10-12). In grade 9, students prepare for the senior high school entrance exam because it is very competitive getting into top senior high schools. Students often have difficulties maintaining their stellar grades when they transfer into top senior high schools. Teachers tend to give lower grades to push students to study harder.

Students begin school between 7:30 a.m. and finish approximately 5:30 p.m. Students stay in the same class throughout the day, while the teachers move from room to room. Classes are taught in a very passive learning environment with class sizes of 35-50 students. Students are given an immense amount of information, and are rarely given the opportunity to question or criticize what is taught by the teacher. There is also not a lot of interaction between teacher and students. After school, most students go to cram schools from 6:30pm to 9:30pm, which are specialized schools that train students to meet academic goals, specifically high school and college entrance exams. Students are not familiar with writing essays, so they may need guidance regarding research and analytical schoolwork.

Studying abroad is seen by parents and students as a competitive advantage over their peers. Although students are required to repeat a year when they return to Taiwan, studying abroad is considered a life experience. In addition to learning about the American culture, they are interested and encouraged to acquire people skills, and to participate in activities not available in Taiwan.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES
One of the major struggles for Taiwanese students is English. Because other subjects are higher priority in schools, their English speaking ability is very limited. Students study English grammar in books, but they rarely speak aloud in class. Students will need to be encouraged to share their voices.
Because they are not comfortable speaking in English, they do not speak up because they are afraid of embarrassment.

**FAMILY LIFE**
Most Taiwanese are somewhat reserved expressing their feelings toward their parents. Some children feel uncomfortable expressing their feelings to their parents, so they may seem quiet at first when you ask them questions. In the first few weeks, students may not understand the conversation, and they will not know how to participate. Be specific when asking questions, as opposed to asking, “How was your day?” It is rare for Taiwanese children to tell their parents, “I love you” in front of other people. Studying abroad has proven that students become more expressive when they return. Natural parents are usually touched by tears when their child hugs them upon their return.

Parents have a strong influence in all aspects of their child’s life, especially during their high school years, and it is common for parents to decide their child’s educational major and focus. Taiwanese children are raised having their lives arranged for them. It is important to offer guidance in certain situations, which include explaining how to express themselves and communicate in a mature way. Because their days are spent studying, they may also need help managing free time.

The Taiwanese value their relationships with extended family members. Grandparents often live with their grown children throughout their lives, as their wisdom is valued. Therefore, it is common for young people to continue living with their parents after they graduate from school out of respect and responsibility to their elders. On the other hand, some teenagers become dependent on their parents when they graduate and don’t feel pressured to find a job.

**LIVING SITUATION**
Most Taiwanese youth live in a city atmosphere, with 24-hour convenient stores and access to public transportation, including subways and buses. Although students may seem bored, they would benefit from activities after school to keep them busy.

Taiwanese students spend their rare free time on the internet. Host families should clearly communicate computer rules from the very beginning of the program.

Due to the amount of time that they spend studying, students do not interact much with their parents. Obtaining good grades becomes their household responsibility. Many students do not help with many household chores because their time should be spent studying. A clear list of responsibilities should be outlines for them to follow as they may not need to do these chores back in Taiwan.
CONFRONTATION/MODESTY
Taiwanese students obey the rules set for them, as they generally do not ask too many questions nor fight for their rights. **When confronted with host family challenges, they would prefer to have private conversations with their Community Representative (CR) as opposed to speaking in front of the host family.** Students do not want to offend the host family, or feel like the CR and the host family are against the student. Students want to know that they can trust the CR’s.

Taiwanese often speak in an indirect way, which may lead to confusion. **They may not say “no” in fear of hurting others’ feelings.** Continue to encourage students to express their true feelings as this will make the living situation much better for everyone.

The Taiwanese are very modest with their accomplishments. To brag and boast about their accomplishments is seen to be inconsiderate and rude. **It may seem that students lack in confidence or do not want to share their lives, but they fear being disrespectful.**

GREETINGS:
Taiwanese people shake hands when meeting people, as they seldom hug or kiss. **They are generally shy when they first meet people and are not expressive to strangers.** Students are always shocked at how open Americans are with each other.

Asian students are often confused by expressions, such as “See you later” or “We should hang out sometime.” **They may take these expressions literally and it would be good to explain to them that these are just forms of expression when people part.** Another similar expression that students do not understand is “How are you?” in passing. They may not understand why people ask this question but hardly ever listen to the answer. These expressions often need explaining.

RELATIONSHIPS:
In general, boyfriends and girlfriends are not allowed. Taiwanese teenagers are considered conservative in physical appearance and openness when compared to the western teenager.

UNIQUE TAIWANESE FOODS:
In Taiwan, food plays a major part in their lives. Dinner is usually the most important meal of the day, and students may feel disappointed if dinners consist of microwaveable, fast food, or canned food. **You might suggest having them cook and share their foods with you.** The Taiwanese generally do not eat large portions of food at one time, and may express their concern about gaining weight. **Most Taiwanese foods are eaten temperature hot, so they may not feel comfortable eating cold foods, such as salads and cereal.**
**TABOO TOPICS:**
It is offensive to say that mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong citizens are all the same, as they each have their own distinctive culture and characteristics. Avoid saying that Taiwan belongs to China, as this will always offend Taiwanese students.

**MAJOR HOLIDAYS IN TAIWAN:**
Students may feel homesick during national holidays, which are usually spent with family. You might want to ask them to share their festival with you.
Lunar New Year (Spring Festival): end of January/beginning of February (Lunar New Year)
Mid-Autumn Festival (Moon Festival): September (based on the lunar calendar)

**ABOUT TAIWAN**
Taiwan is a small island located southeast of China across the Taiwan Strait with a population of 23 million. With a beautiful scenery of steep mountains, lush forests and modern cities, travel time by express train from northern to southern Taiwan takes roughly four hours. Although there are several dialects spoken in Taiwan, Mandarin is the official language. Taiwan’s culture is a blend of its distinctive Chinese, Japanese and Western influences. Over 93% of Taiwanese are adherents of a combination of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Baseball is considered Taiwan’s national sport. Taiwan is also one of Asia’s four industrialized developed countries, known as the “Four Asian Tigers.”

**FURTHER RESOURCES:**
http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/
http://www.go2taiwan.net/
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/taiwan