

J-1 Journeys

MARCH 2013

VOL 2 ISSUE 3

Moving In!

Apartment-hunting in the US



In this issue: **Exchange Visitor of the Month** on pages 1-3, **Apartment-hunting tips** on pages 4-5, **City Spotlight** on page 6, **Dear Jane** on page 7 and **Easter Tradition** on page 8.

Exchange Visitor of the Month

Peiyu Kuo



Peiyu Kuo is a social worker with a vision to enhance options for people with mental illness in Taiwan by nurturing the emerging clubhouse movement. In her J-1 training program at Fountain House in New York, she's learning how to create a community that makes a difference.

What is Fountain House?

It's a community-based program to help facilitate recovery for people with mental illness.

What makes Fountain House different from other programs?

It's special because the members and staff work together to run the organization and its programs. They create a real community where people can contribute, be valued, and form relationships. Although it's

important to help members with housing, employment and continuing educational goals, the foundation of it all is a sense of community, friends and mutual support. It's different from other social services, which just help them apply for benefits, like Medicaid. Members support one another by helping other members get their GED and go back to school.

Are there other organizations like Fountain House around the world?

Fountain House was founded 65 years ago (in 1948) and it is the oldest clubhouse in the world. Now there are 341 clubhouses, in Argentina, Paris, Denmark, Norway, Hong Kong, China, Korea, Japan—all over the world. People, despite mental illness, still have the need to be loved and to be a part of a community. That's beyond language and culture—it's universal. So that's how the clubhouse model has been disseminated around the world.

(Continued on next page)



Satellite view of Taiwan. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

What tools do they use to maintain the cohesiveness of the community?

Fountain House works very hard to maintain the cohesiveness of the community. There's a house-wide meeting every week, with maybe 80 to 100 people there, and they make announcements. They ask for news, have discussions. Each computer has a screensaver with pictures and a calendar to make announcements. And of course, we use online tools like email and Facebook. If a member hasn't been in attendance, we will reach out and let them know they are missed.

Another thing is that because Fountain House is the biggest clubhouse in the world, people are coming from different countries to train. I meet a lot of people from around the world. It's a very cultural experience to talk to different people, with people who do not have English as a first language. It's very interesting. We cook different food from different countries. It's easy to get connected with people through food.

What is the situation for people in Taiwan with mental illness?

After the diagnosis, the responsibility lies with the family to care for the individual. We have social services, but Taiwan needs more community

services--not just to give medication and stabilization, but also to provide active opportunities to be more included and integrated into society. Because mental illness has ups and downs, it's very hard to accomplish this. If someone has mental illness, sometimes it's hard for others to understand, not only because of the illness itself but also the stigma surrounding the illness. Because of the stigma, people with mental illness are also associated with other bad things. We still need to advocate [against that stigma].

What specific things have you learned here that are you excited about taking back to Taiwan?

Not only the things I've learned about the clubhouse program itself, but also about the administrative

"Because this is an English speaking environment, it took me a while to get used to the environment and understand what was going on around me. Once I started to understand more, I was able to be a better leader. It's a process of self-discovery."

roles at the organizational level, like non-profit management, leadership and development. I learned some things about New York state mental health policy, so that's a very interesting experience for me, because I can compare and contrast my experience [in Taiwan], so I'm learning very useful things. Besides the administrative level, I'm also involved in some innovative programs, like a social cooperative for members (people with mental illness at Fountain house are members rather than patients) to start their own businesses. They have partners to start the business with. One business may have 3-5 partners. They have meetings to decide who they want to hire and make other business decisions. One business trained dogs to detect bedbugs. We want to keep the businesses small so that people can get to know each other well. The staff doesn't get involved in the business, but they are in an advisory role to support and advise. It's like an egalitarian relationship.

(Continued on next page)

What things have you learned here that are applicable to the situation in Taiwan and what things are not applicable?

There are differences and similarities. Talking to donors is very hard, but I've found that it's a very rewarding experience because you meet different people who have different relationships with the organization. Every university and nonprofit has a hard time in fundraising. That's something I can really bring back to Taiwan. Communicating clearly what I want to say and what they want to know [is a useful skill anywhere].

The insurance system is different here than in Taiwan. In the US, it's all Medicaid and private insurance. In Taiwan, we have universal health insurance for everyone. If that's not enough, people purchase private health insurance.

What are some things you've learned about how to be a good leader in this context?

It's not easy. But for me, in my personal experience, because this is an English speaking environment, it took me a while to get used to the environment and understand what was going on around me. Once I started to understand more, I was able to be a better leader. It's a process of self-discovery.

How do you like New York?

New York is a big city and it's similar to Taipei in some ways. It's too cold for people from sub-tropical countries. It's a privilege to be here. I live in Hell's Kitchen, so it's very close to Broadway. There are world class plays, theatre, musicals, art, and a combination of many, many talented people. Sitting in Central Park for an afternoon and watching the street artists is amusing enough. There are so many things going on everyday. So many resources.



[Another great thing about being in New York is that there are many] different accents from different countries. So when I speak, I don't feel weird [because of my accent]. I'm more relaxed when I talk with people, and I learn to listen and understand what people are saying.



What are your favorite American foods?

Two things. I love nachos and I also learned to make guacamole. That's something I will bring back to Taiwan. Shake Shack has really good hamburgers too!

I think it's good to talk about food. Food is all about culture. I took several friends to have hotpot in Chinatown. They said "We should have hotpot in Sweden. We'd eat it every day."

Being in New York, you can always eat food from different countries. I've tried Ethiopian, Korean, Japanese. It's a great experience.



Have you had a chance to travel to other parts of the US?

I just got back from Los Angeles for Chinese New Year. I went to Disneyland for the first time in my life. It's a great experience, because I've been watching Disney cartoons since I was very, very young. It's like being a kid again.

In LA, people have to drive. There may be 4 cars in the family. To save the earth, gas, everything, it's not good. Why cities develop this way. It's not about this is right, this is wrong, but it makes me think more about what American cities look like and why they developed that way.

Do you have any advice for J-1 exchange visitors?

Being alone in a country, in a new environment, can be very intimidating at first. But I would say it's also a process of self-learning, self-knowledge. If you know more about yourself, you'll know more about others. I think it's a very important experience.

(The End)

VOCABULARY FOR APARTMENT HUNTING

Types of Rental Properties

1. APARTMENT:

An apartment is a single unit within a larger building complex. The smallest type of apartment available, the studio apartment, is just one room (often with a bathroom partitioned off). Larger apartments may include one or more bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen.

2. LOFT:

Lofts are usually re-made from old factory space, meaning that they have high ceilings, large windows, and open space. One can usually find these kind of apartments in large cities, like downtown New York.

3. TOWNHOUSE:

This is a residence style that has at least one wall separating itself from another residence, usually another townhouse. They tend to be more expensive because of the increase of privacy.



4. CONDOMINIUMS

Condominiums (also known by the shorter name “condo”) usually are one building or multiple buildings split up into multiple units, which are individually owned. These units usually contain their own kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and living room. However, the owners will usually share a facility like a game room, yard or recreation space. Condominiums are usually rented from the owner of that unit. You may also have to pay a “homeowner’s association fee” to cover trash removal or lawn service.





APARTMENTS 101

Your Lease:

A lease is the agreement between the tenant (you) and the landlord for long term occupancy (usually a year or six months). A month to month lease is often more expensive. The apartment lease agreement is something to be reviewed very carefully, as it is a binding legal document. It includes information about termination, maintenance inspection, deposits, parking and other things. Before signing a lease, research your rights as a tenant. Tenant rights vary from community to community.

What Can You Afford?

You may have to fill out a rental application form in order for the landlord to see if you have the money to pay the rent. (The person who rents out their apartment or home to you is called your “landlord”). The form might ask for your Social Security Number and proof that you can afford an apartment. A pay stub from your internship or training program can also prove that you have an income. You may also be asked to pay a small application fee or allow a background

check. If you do not have a sufficient income, someone else may need to sign on to the agreement with you, called a “co-signer”. If you cannot pay the rent, the co-signer is legally obligated to pay it for you. Apartments are usually unfurnished, meaning that they come without a bed, chairs, table or other furniture. If you don’t want to spend time and money decorating, you might want to look into getting an apartment that is already furnished. You can spend no more than 30% of your income on rent, although this can vary due to your needs and circumstances.

Damages:

When you sign your lease, you become responsible for any damages to the apartment. It is therefore very important for you to inspect your apartment carefully and take notice of any previous damage. You should inform the property manager of this. If this is not done, the landlord may deduct some or all of your security deposit when you leave the complex. Talk to your landlord about what needs to be done in order for you to get a full refund of the security deposit when you leave the apartment.

If there are damages in your apartment that you did not cause, you should first tell your landlord what is wrong and what needs to be fixed. Next, you should write a letter to your landlord explaining the damages and keep a copy for yourself. Finally, you should call your local housing office and ask for an inspector. If your landlord does not fix the problems, you may be able to make a legal charge against the landlord--but make sure you didn’t cause the damages yourself!

Follow the clues to...



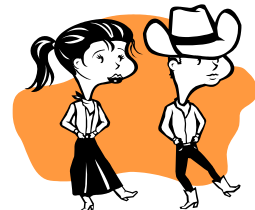
What tourist town
is also known as



+



+

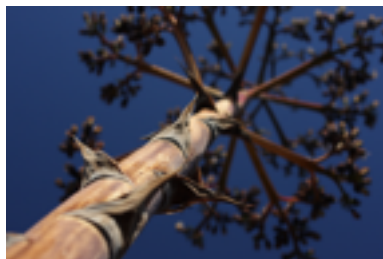


?

If you want
to see



,



OR



...it's the place to be!

This month, we will post more clues on Facebook. If you can guess the name of the city, write a comment on Facebook for a chance to win a prize!



Dear Jane,

I found an adorable condo, close to my internship and with a view of the beach! This place is perfect in every way except one--my roommate is driving me crazy! What should I do?

-Can't Take it Anymore

Dear Can't Take it Anymore,

When the sink is always piled with dishes and the bathtub drain is stuffed with hair, it can be hard to maintain your sanity. Set an appointment with your roommate to talk about these issues. Choose a time when you are both calm and collected, and avoid talking about sensitive topics when you or your roommate are hungry, tired or upset. Talking at a bad time will only heighten the tension between you.

I recommend writing an agreement or posting a chore chart on the refrigerator so that each roommate has a clear understanding of his or her responsibilities. Be aware that some of the things you do are probably annoying your roommate, so if you want to see your roommate's behavior change, be ready to make some changes yourself.

Having a safe, peaceful living environment is key to enjoying your time in the US. Don't let squabbles with your roommate ruin your J-1 Journey!



Unfortunately, some roommate concerns go beyond squabbling, and a roommate agreement won't solve every conflict. If you feel that your roommate is a danger to himself or others, you don't have to handle the situation on your own. Call a community crisis center or your host company's Employee Lifeline to speak with someone who can offer you some advice on the situation. If you don't know where to seek help, call IEC--your J-1 Program Sponsor at (202) 507-7500, and we will help you find help in your local area.

Finally, never stay in a situation where you feel unsafe--even if it has a great view of the beach!

Best Wishes,

Jane



The White House Easter Egg Roll

President Barack Obama cheers on a young contestant

Photo by White House (Pete Souza)

In the mid-1870s, children celebrated Easter, the Christian holiday to remember the resurrection of Jesus, by rolling Easter eggs on Capitol Hill. They damaged the grounds so much that Congress passed a law in 1877 forbidding children from playing on the Capitol lawn. The President at the time, Rutherford Hayes, was more hospitable. He invited the children to roll eggs at the White House instead. The tradition has continued until today.

Thanks for reading J-1 Journeys!

Keep in touch...

CONTACT US:

J1program@immcouncil.org

202-507-7500

www.internationalexchangecenter.org



**INTERNATIONAL
EXCHANGE
CENTER**

AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL

Find us on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/internationalexchangecenter

Mailing Address:

**THE INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE CENTER
AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL
1331 G STREET NW, SUITE 200
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
USA**