

## **My fellowship experience in Taiwan.**

Overseas training or fellowship is supposed to be the last mile of the subspecialty journey. Every trainee who chooses their destination, does so for different reasons. Personally, I chose to go to Taiwan as I wanted to enhance my minimally invasive skills in hepatopancreatobiliary surgery, and at the same time, I had hoped to brush up on my Mandarin. The decision wasn't an easy one, as COVID had hit, and many countries were still restricting foreign visitors.

After a few delays, I finally landed in Taipei, Taiwan in March 2022. I was quarantined for 11 days in a quarantine hotel, before I was allowed to be out in the public. Even then, I was required to not eat in public for 7 days. Thus, the journey truly began. I had to look for accommodations and familiarize myself with the city. As it was during COVID, the required visa took multiple steps, and required multiple visits to government centers for approval.



The system in the hospital of attachment, was also different and required some getting used to. I certainly had quite a fair bit of practice with my Mandarin during this time. The next learning curve was indeed the minimally invasive surgery itself. My mentor, Dr. Chen Kuo-Hsin, was not only well established in HPB surgery, but in all abdominal MIS surgery. I had the opportunity to learn new techniques even in hernia itself (as abdominal and inguinal hernia was a personal interest of his).

My learning of MIS HPB was not only limited to the operating theatre. Dr. Chen constantly challenged me into reading more in depth in anatomy, and techniques. He would often discuss about methods to overcome certain limitations and complications during surgery. I had the honor to present in a few meetings while in Taiwan, to further solidify my knowledge. I also took the opportunity to go to IRCAD to learn robotic HPB work, to get another view of surgical options that may be offered to patients in the future.



All work and no play make Jack (in this case Ian) a dull boy. Hence, I did not hesitate to travel around Taiwan, and enjoy their beautiful nature. As time passed, there were more Malaysians who came to Taiwan as well, and as any birds of the same feather, we flocked together (over food no less). We shared our experiences, our pains, and our joys. I had the opportunity to even join a local run with a friend, just to experience Taipei in a different light.



The year indeed went by in a blink of an eye. It was an enriching experience not just for my medical career, but for my personal growth. As I reflect on the year, I realize there is so much more to learn, and I am probably still in my journey of doing so. As Aristotle said: “The more you know, the more you realize you don’t know”, I will continue to be eager to learn.

