Korea University, South Korea, Business, Spring 2018, February 20 - June 30

Preparation for exchange

It is crucial to have legal documents in order, I recommend applying for Visa at least 4 weeks in advance. Often times the Korean consulate is closed due to various holidays and has limited service time. Especially I had a hard time because I am ethnically Korean. I had to prove that I don’t hold any Korean citizenship status. I called my parents and had to ask them to send over their documents and passports.

I recommend exploring your housing options in advance. Although I have applied for on-campus dormitory on time, I did not get a room. There are many guest houses nearby the campus. However, I found them quite pricey. I've heard that some places overcharge if you are the foreigner or you don't speak Korean. I stayed at a guest house and the was quite small which is very common for Korea. I would recommend making a reservation at least 4 months in advance.

As for academic resources, I was pretty lucky and a lot of business students had been to Korea University so it was easy for me to see what courses will transfer. The enrollment website is a bit tricky to use. So I recommend logging in beforehand and make sure you are comfortable with the website. The spaces are very limited and there is a limitation on how many exchange students can take the class. Most of the times courses will be offered in both English and Korean.

For tickets would recommend using Korean Air. They have great service, but it is a bit more expensive. The ticket cost me around 1200 Canadian dollars. If you want to save some money buying a ticket with Chinese airlines might do the trick. The transportation system itself is great, it's easy to use and very accessible. I would recommend downloading transportation apps like Naver map, Kakaomap or even Kakaotaxi.

Since my semester started in February and ended in June, I had to pack for all four seasons. I would recommend bringing a warm jacket. I feel like winters in Korea are colder than in Vancouver, while summers in Korea are hotter. I
recommend buying an electronic mini fan that you can carry around, they usually cost around 10 to 15 Canadian dollars. (10 000 - 15 000 won)

I wish I did bring more cash because you wouldn’t be able to get bank account right away, it took around one month. Most of the times in Korea you won’t need to carry around cash, but I would recommend having around 20 000 Korean won on hand just in case. The cost of living is similar to Vancouver. It really depends on what you spend your money on. An average meal food costs around 8 000 to 10 000 Korean Won.

**During Exchange**

I was greeted at the airport by Korea University exchange buddies. Korea University had a schedule of shuttle buses for exchange students. All of the exchange students were taken to their accommodations and helped with the check-in.

During the orientation, you would meet your exchange group, your group leader, and your buddy. The group includes around 35 exchange students and 10 students from Korea University who volunteered to be part of the program. There were a lot of activities that they offered like picnics, weekly dinners, hiking, and day trips.

Academically I think studying at SFU is more challenging than studying in Korea. Normally at SFU, I take around four courses each semester, while in Korea I took five courses with four of them being business major courses and one Korean writing course. The workload was not heavy because normally Korean students take around 7 courses per semester.

I would recommend exploring other cities outside of Seoul. For example, Busan or Jeju Island. Don’t postpone the travelling until later because the time would fly by really fast. Try to find some Korean friends so they can show you some hidden gems of Seoul. Seoul is notorious for its nightlife. The popular areas to hang out at night are Gangnam, Hongdae, Itaewon.

**Reflection After Exchange**
Being ethnically Korean I still felt different from everyone. It was interesting to reflect on why my mindset is like that and why do I think in certain ways. Going through a certain culture shock makes you question your own perspective and your biases. When I first came to Korea I thought it still remained conservative, but I was gladly surprised by how Korea now is more liberal and more accepting.

I think it is extremely helpful to know some Korean or research a bit about Korean culture. Try to learn some basic phrases like “hello”, “thank you” and “sorry”. I noticed that Koreans appreciate your effort to learn about their culture and language.

I did not know that I have to apply for an Alien card (Foreigner ID). Without the card, you can't leave the country to travel. Korea University students are only allowed to apply for the card at only one branch. So I would recommend doing some research beforehand and make an appointment close to your arrival date. For me, it took around three weeks to receive the card. It also serves and an ID, a lot of places do not accept our local BCIDs and driver licenses.

Although 4 months seemed like a long time, by the end I wished I had more. So please my fellow students plan your trips ahead so you can experience Korea at its fullest.

Photos:

1. Namsam tower. One of the biggest landmarks in Seoul.
2. Gamcheon Culture Village in Busan
3. Korea University at night
4. Line store in Seoul
5. Bukchon Hanok Village
6. Lotte world amusement park
7. Cherry blossoms in Korea