Exchange Report

I’m a fourth year Business student at SFU concentrating in Human Resources and Finance. I studied at Korea University in the Fall of 2014. I was looking at pictures that my friends have posted about their exchange experiences, and I thought that I should give it a try. I decided to apply for Korea University in Seoul, South Korea because I love Asian cultures and would love to travel around Asia.

Preparation for Exchange

After looking at this gorgeous university, are you convinced yet? If not, then keep reading. Going on exchange was one of the best decisions that I have ever made. The experience was phenomenal;
however, in order to go on an exchange, there were many things that I had to prepare for. There were many forms and letters that were required from both SFU and Korea University. I also needed to find two reference letters from my professors, applied to Korea University and wait for its acceptance before I could apply for my student visa and buy my plane ticket. Honestly, the preparation process was very tedious but it was very rewarding in the end. My acceptance letter came around two months before I had to leave for Korea and my round-trip plane ticket was approximately $1400.

The climate in Korea varies depending on when you decide to go on exchange there. If you’re going in the summer, the weather is very hot and humid, so bring light clothes; however, the winter is very cold and dry compared to Vancouver and the wind is very chilly so make sure you bring thick jackets (windbreakers if you have one) and boots. Also, Korea has many hills and it is normal to walk a lot there, so remember to bring comfortable shoes. Make sure you bring extra medication if you are on any.

There are over 10 subway lines in Seoul and they are very convenient. Before going to Korea, you should download an app called “Subway Korea” (it is a blue icon with a picture of a subway), this app will be your lifesaver! It will tell you exactly which subway line to get on and when the next subway is. You could go to a convenient store (i.e. 7 Eleven) and buy a “cash-bee” or “T-Money” card which costs around 2,000 won (approximately $2); there is no monthly bus passes similar to our UPass in Korea. You can preload money on this card and you’ll be able to use it on the bus, subway, at some convenient stores and even taxi! If you’ve run out of money on this card, you can always reload it at any convenient stores or the subway stations. There is a gate where you tap the subway card to get in and out of the subway. As for the bus, you have the option of using the subway card or pay cash.

You don’t have to buy a “cash-bee” or “T-Money” card because Korea University will help you make a student ID card that is joint card with Hana bank. This student ID also works as a transportation card where you can recharge money to use it. **NOTE**: Bring enough cash to last you until the end of September / beginning of October because the student card will not be available to you until then. Many exchange students from around the world were not told this before we came to Korea University and had to withdraw money from global ATMs and incurred fees. A majority of places take debit/credit; however, if you want street food, which are everywhere, or if you go to some markets, they only accept cash. Your student ID is a debit card, not a credit card, so you might want to bring your credit card from Vancouver to Korea if you’re planning to do online shopping or book things online (i.e. airplane tickets).

**During Exchange**

Korea University has an amazing buddy program called Korea University Buddy Assistants (KUBA); every exchange students will be given a KUBA buddy and trust me, these guys are absolutely amazing! They are Korean students who are very friendly and most of them are quite good at English. They will be there to help you throughout the whole semester and plan many interesting events for you to enjoy. The host university had a two-day orientation where they introduced us to the school, helped us fill out forms to make the student cards, and introduced us to our KUBA buddy and KUBA group. The
host university also provides an airport pickup service, so use it to your advantage, unless you know how to speak Korean or you want to get lost while finding your Goshiwon (off-campus housing facility).

If you are unable to get a dormitory, you can go to http://goshipages.com/ to find housing in Korea. Be aware that the rooms at the Goshiwons in Korea are much smaller than the rooms we have here in Vancouver so prepare yourself for the worst. If you’re able to get a dorm on campus, that’s fantastic because I think that it’ll provide a better opportunity to meet people because everyone will be living very close to each other. On the down side of living on campus is that you will have to walk up a big hill every day.

The food culture and drinking culture are huge in Korea. Almost everyone drinks in Korea; even some professors will invite you to grab a few drinks with them. If you’re a vegetarian, you might want to find a place that has a kitchen because a majority of the food in Korea has meat in it. Traditional Korean foods are relatively cheap compared to the food we have here in Vancouver; however, since a majority of the exchange students often eat out, it will add up so keep that in mind when you’re budgeting for
this trip. The Western foods are relatively expensive compared to the traditional Korean foods. Keep in mind that Korean food tends to be on the spicy side, so prepare yourself for a lot of heat.

There are many English taught courses at Korea University and the materials are similar to what we have at SFU. There weren’t any tutorials for Business classes; I’m not too sure about other faculties though. Also, there are many interesting classes that offer credits to students like yoga, swimming, tennis, etc.; however, these classes are mostly taught in Korean.

As I mentioned earlier, KUBA is a great support to exchange students. They host weekly activities to introduce the Korean culture to the exchange students. I highly suggest you go to the KUBA events because you’ll be able to get to know the Korean buddies in your KUBA group, as well as many exchange students. If you’re going to Korea University in the Fall, the KUBA buddies will take you to an event called “Koyeon Games” where Korea University and Yonsei University, two rivalry schools, will compete in five different sports to determine the winner. I highly recommend you go to this two-day event because it will be something that you will NEVER forget! Everyone was very enthusiastic during this event and the energy was just unbelievable. You will cheer like you’ve never cheered before. After the games, no matter which university has claimed the title, both universities will gather at one designated place to participate in the “Train Play”. I will let you experience this for yourself; it is impossible to describe this exciting, amazing, and never seen/experienced before event.
Reflection After Exchange

I’ve experienced many new things in Korea and learned so much about myself. I highly recommend that you have an open mind when studying abroad; that way, you’ll be able to experience everything that the country and its culture have to offer. Try to get yourself out of your comfort zone and travel to as many places in Korea as possible; consider travelling outside of Korea as well. Since you’re an exchange student, you’ll have to register for an Alien card which allows you to enter and leave Korea freely during the designated period of time, so use it to your advantage and explore nearby countries. Like I mentioned earlier, the student ID card and your Hana Bank account will not be available until the end of September, so bring enough cash. Other than that, no matter where you decide to go for your exchange, make the best out of it and enjoy yourself; you’ll have a blast!