Partner University: Yonsei University  
Country: South Korea  
Major: Economics  
Term of Exchange: Spring 2017

**Preparation for Exchange**

When I was planning and debating on whether or not I should attend the exchange program, it mainly came down to three main factors: interest, financial cost and opportunity cost.

While students from the Yonsei exchange program were different in their nationalities, personalities and goals, they all had one thing in common: an interest in studying and exploring a place that was away from home. As a part of the exchange program, you are exposed to people from all around the world whom you could potentially see everyday as you greet, live and laugh with them throughout and past the semesters. Besides the social life, being keen on the surrounding culture, in this case which was South Korea also placed emphasis on my decision to go. Aside from these two personal reasons, there are a plethora of other subjective and unique reasons that people may of used in their decision to attend exchange, which makes the decision-making process that much more interesting.

Aside from being interested in the program, there are also the obvious financial costs of going on exchange. There are grants given by the government that could be found through the SIS system that can help partially pay for the program. For students with good academic records, there are several scholarships that are offered for the general population of exchange students as well as faculty specific ones. Personally, I was able to attain a $1000 scholarship called the International Mobility Award. As exchange was a great experience for me, I believed that it was worth the financial cost personally, as I was able to grow, learn and achieve my goals in a foreign country. However, it is understandable for other students if the financials are just too much to bear for this experience.

Lastly, opportunity cost should play a huge role in the decision to go on exchange. The meaning of opportunity cost is to compare the current opportunity of exchange to other opportunities that you may forgo if you were to commit to exchange. For example, I had to evaluate whether I wanted to seek for a coop or internship program for the summer, as the spring semester in South Korea overlapped the beginning of summer back home. It is also possible other students are in unique situations such as being in the midst of running a business, starting a club or attending to other personal matters that may outweigh the worth of going on the exchange program.

Academically, researching for courses was a tad bit confusing, as the Yonsei portal system was not properly updated until a week or two before the course enrollment process began. Therefore, it is possible that there may be some last minute course planning issues. It is recommended that you email your faculty the course syllabuses of courses that you are interested in to receive a reply on whether or not it will be properly transferred back.
Packing wise, the process was simple as I was keen on bringing just one large suitcase, since I decided to travel Southeast Asia after the exchange program had ended. Make sure to plan for the weather changes; in particular, Korean winters are very cold while Korean summers begin to get very hot. Also, weigh your suitcase beforehand to make sure that you purchased the right luggage allowance on your flight to your exchange destination.

In terms of my flight, I booked it with Air Canada after scavenging through several comparison sites (Google Flights, Kayak, Skyscanner) to find the best deal. Go with a company you trust and that you are comfortable with, as it will be a long haul flight to South Korea.

Lastly, Seoul is a society that is built on a hybrid of cash and credit systems, depending on what you are spending money on. Many restaurants will offer you the ability to use credit, but cash is handy especially when splitting payments and in tight and unforeseen scenarios. I recommend students to look for a foreign exchange credit card, as I used the “Amazon Rewards Visa” which waved the foreign transaction fee of 3.5% upon my purchases. However, it is possible that these promotions come and go so please properly do your research. We were also required to open up a bank account with Woori Bank on campus to pay for or to receive money from the Yonsei Housing Department, so if you are looking to transfer money from your bank account from home, that is another applicable option.

**During Exchange**

Luckily, SFU had detailed instructions on how to get to Yonsei’s campus, making the whole process easier. Upon arrival and checking in, I decided to attempt to beat my jetlag by going to the gym, something I do not recommend ever again! As someone who was living in a single bedroom, I believe that it was quite worth the extra couple hundred dollars to make the jump, as you will eventually meet people regardless of whether or not you have a roommate, and everyone has their own way of maintaining their bedroom and living space. Unfortunately, the kitchen at SK Global House was less than adequate, making it unappealing to cook meals on campus. If you would like to make the effort to cook, there are supermarkets nearby and you can rent your own cubby hole for your kitchenware, however I decided that it was going to be too much of a hassle for the 4 months I was there, so I splurged on buying meals at the cafeteria and in the nearby city everyday.

As for the classes and lectures, I would say that in my experience, the internationally offered classes for foreign exchange students were much easier than the ones meant for your major. Taking my core Economics classes was a difficult task, even with the pass/fail requirements that made it less stressful than if it were counted against your GPA. Besides office hours that the professors offer, the TA’s were barely of any help in most of my classes, making it necessary for students to find classmates to exchange information and to help each other out. Since this is exchange, this task should not be too hard to do!

I cannot even begin to describe how different the culture is in Seoul in comparison to Vancouver. Seoul is a vibrant, busy, on the go and fun city. It offers
many opportunities for exploration during the daytime, whether that is walking into random restaurants in the Hongdae area to try the vastly diverse Korean cuisine or venturing into large palaces (Gyeongbokgung) and historical villages like Bukchon, there are many things that this city can present. As for the nighttime, the city undergoes a dramatic change: shopping in Myeongdong district, seeing the view of the city from Namsan Tower and participating in the outgoing nightlife culture of Korea are just previews of what living in Seoul is really like. My recommendation on how to tackle this city is to allow yourself to take risks by trying things you’ve never done before, for example, eating raw octopus!

Reflection After Exchange

As I took an extended vacation after my exchange period, it has then only dawned on me as I get back to the city of Vancouver, on how important and impactful exchange was to me. You are given an opportunity to temporarily transport yourself to a new country, knowing almost no one, allowing you to take the social risks and exploration risks that you may not have taken back home. In an honest perspective, one of the best ways that increased my exchange experience was to open up to people: Share your stories, compare and contrast your cultures, learn new things and create lasting relationships. Yonsei University, especially living on campus enhances that experience for you as it gives you a vibrant environment for everyone to comfortably become close to his or her roommates and classmates. If you can make the financials work, this is a great opportunity to discover more about yourself and to meet people that you will never forget. During the pre-departure meetings and the signing-up process, I would laugh at how everyone said the exact same thing: exchange was amazing; you’ll never experience something like it again. But upon living that exchange experience, all I can do is reiterate the same thing that others have told me: you will have lots of fun.
Bukchon Hanok Village
Hike on Mt. Bukhansan
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