STUDY ABROAD – SOUTH KOREA

When internationality becomes part of your identity

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KEA study programme:

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Study abroad programme:

Period of study:

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Preface

In this report, I will share my experiences during my study abroad in South Korea. You will get a taste of what is it like being an exchange student in a country far in the East where almost everything is the opposite of Western culture.

I can only go in details with my department, since I am a computer science student of Copenhagen School of Design & Technology. However, I will also tell a few experiences I have heard from other exchange students to give you the best picture of the life here in Hanyang University. The report contains my personal thoughts and can be different from other students' experiences. I hope you find this report enjoyable and helpful as you read.

(Bonus: Since pictures are worth a thousand words, I made a simple website to post photos of my trip to South Korea. Link: www.exchange.joly.dk)

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INTRODUCTION

Why did I study abroad?

Before asking why I chose to study abroad, I want to explain some things about myself. I am born; raised and lived my whole life in Denmark, but being of Chinese descendant… is what I have been told. Even though my parents are Chinese, but not born in China, they moved to China and later to Denmark, it already defined my family as international. Since I have grown up speaking more than three languages and have family spread out in the entire globe, I was naturally involved with travelling around. My background and history is what inspired me to make internationality be part of my identity. Therefore, study abroad was a given, and a goal I had in mind for years. This spring semester 2018, I finally got the chance to experience how to study, work and live in an international environment.

The proper question ought to be why students in general should study abroad. Actually, I would rather ask the question why NOT study abroad. There are many reasons to study abroad as I can talk about this for hours. There are more things to gain than to lose. A life-changing experience regardless of it being good or bad experiences. It will be a time, where you learn from every aspect of life.

From what I have read from previous exchange students' reports, they all had gained an amazing and unforgettable experience back from it. Hence, I knew what I should expect, and I really did get what I expected, in fact even more! To experience another way to study, another way to live, another culture, and a new different world are just some things I have gained from a few months of studying abroad. I will tell you in details what I went through and perhaps make you feel like going abroad too.

CAMPUS COMPARISON

Before we dive into it, there are some information that is useful to know. There are two campuses of Hanyang University. Erica Campus in Ansan city and Hanyang Campus in Seoul city.

Erica Campus is known as the campus of technological and science research and is located on a flat ground area, while Hanyang Campus is located on a hill. Each particular campus has their own advantages and disadvantages.

For instance, Erica campus, which is located in Ansan, is about 1 hour subway trip away from city center of Seoul. Meaning that we did not have the time to visit Seoul every day. While Hanyang Campus is already located inside Seoul, it is possible to explore the city whenever.

On the other hand, there is an opportunity to live a different student life by staying in the "countryside". There are rarely any tourists in Ansan, so the exchange students are primarily the foreigners there and will be easily noticed by Koreans. From the experiences of some exchange students in Ansan, they felt that Koreans tend to be more curious and willingly to engage in conversations with them than in Seoul.

From my experience, Koreans in Seoul are better at English. In Ansan, almost everything is written in Korean and not many people understand English, so you must learn a bit Korean in order "survive". Hence, you get to experience a life as a Korean student than a foreign student.

There are benefits for both campus, but I certainly did not regret choosing Erica Campus.

EXPERIENCE AT HANYANG UNIVERSITY

You should know something before you choose to study in South Korea as a computer science student. Firstly, Hanyang University is the best private university as well as one of the best technical and scientific universities in South Korea. That means the courses you choose to study, especially in technical or science department, might be a bit difficult and challenging, if you have no idea how Korean education functions. Some other courses from other departments were at a lower level compared to Western standards according to the other exchange students. As for engineering courses, they are a bit more difficult. No wonder they have Samsung, LG and the world's best internet…

Study subjects/courses

I chose five courses whereas three of them are computer science courses, one of them is a design course and the last one is "Survival Korean" course. Each course is worth 3 ECTS credits:

- **Automata & Formal Language Theory, ELE3029** *(computer science)*
  Professor Kim Taehyeong

- **Computer Architecture, ENE1004** *(computer science department)*
  (Professor Park Sungju)

- **Information Retrieval, ELE4076** *(computer science department)*
  (Professor Kim Younghoon)

- **Web Design 2, APA3029** *(design department)*
  (Professor Wun Yunn Chin)

- **Survival Korean** *(language course)*
  (Teacher Kim Dae Ok)

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Course descriptions

The computer science courses were difficult due to some courses are required to have finished specific courses beforehand. However, it was still possible to choose them despite not having completed previous courses.

Not all the courses are actually in English even if it states they are, and therefore not all teachers speak the English you normally to hear, but rather konglish/korenglish, which is English with Korean accent and English words with Korean pronunciation. Since universities focus more on the theoretical part, then computer science courses are about theories of computing rather than practical programming as our version of computer science in KEA.

I will describe and rank the difficulty of the courses based on my opinion.

Automata & formal language - Hard

Automata is an abstract machine that computes certain algorithms and formal language is about definition of language (set of strings). This course was the most difficult one. There are two reasons for that. It required passing a previous course. The content was only theoretical and contained mathematical proofs. In addition, the theory I learnt must be memorized as the midterm exam and final exam were written tests and without any help or tools.

This professor had the best English skills, as well as being the most committed teacher. He was very active and tried to get your attention and concentration at all times. However, many of the Korean students who took this course with this professor had failed and had to retake the course. Most of the times he spoke Korean was when he told jokes related to the theory. There were some times where we even had to participate in Saturday classes, because of holidays and professor's own plans. I will only recommend this course if you like lots of theory, mathematics or want to understand how computer brain works in an abstract way. It is an interesting course, but also extremely difficult if mathematics related to computing is not one of your strengths.

Information retrieval – Medium hard

There are two or more requirements for this course, since it is a 4th year course, but for exchange students, it is possible to choose this as long as it was relevant. Although, we would already be lacking some knowledge before starting this course, it was very useful and interesting. It was about creating your own search engine in java. We learnt how to retrieve, separate and sort data in theory, while the assignments given were about creating algorithms in java.

However, it turned out to be difficult due to a professor who spoke "Korean-English" while explaining complicated theory. Since I understood less than half of the outcome from each class, I would always be behind and found it hard to do the assignments. The final exam was not about coding but about the theory only, so I had to study most of the times myself to catch up on it. There were no midterm exam in this course.

The professor used PowerPoint and white board for writing calculations etc., and spoke most of the time in class. The English he spoke was apparently easy for the Korean students to understand, but difficult for us exchange students. We had to spend a lot of time to guess and figure out what he said every class. I will recommend this course if another professor is available.

Computer architecture – Medium

This course was not interesting to me at first hand, but it turned out to be. The course was about the hardware of computers. Like how the inner parts worked, i.e. CPU, RAM, registers etc. It got quite interesting when I did the assignments and figured out a fascinating pattern of how computer components worked. Some of the content were difficult; some were easy, but in general not as difficult as the two earlier mentioned courses. The midterm exam was based on the first few chapters while the final exam was based on the last few chapters. We were not allowed any help or tools like Automata course, but the theory was slightly easier compared to Automata course.

The professor was very helpful and friendly. His English was good enough to understand and only spoke Korean when necessary because the Korean students were not good at English. He was not as energetic as the automata professor, and his teaching methods were rather old fashion too; PowerPoint, blackboard and speaking during the whole class while repeating what he just said at least 10 times in a row. There were quite a lot to read and study in order to keep track since this course had the largest book. I recommend this course if you are interested in computer hardware with an engineering aspect.

Web Design 2 – Easy

This course was a "part two course" continued from the previous course web design 1. Web design 2 was my favorite course and in my opinion the most relevant subject for us computer science students on KEA, because it contained practical programming, projects and group work. On the other hand, this course was easy due to the fact it was not a computer science course, but a design course. Hence, majority of the students were design students who had no experience in programming. However, it was the design theory of websites we should focus on mostly.

For midterm exam, we were supposed to create a small website in project groups over two weeks' time, but the professor changed her mind. Instead, we had to create a simple website from scratch in three hours' time. There are no test in the final exam, but instead a final project. We received the task to create our own websites using bootstrap with the design theory in mind.

The professor was Singaporean and could speak fluent English. This class was the only class where no one spoke Korean during class, since the teacher herself cannot speak Korean. I highly recommend this course, since it is interesting to see the thoughts of designers when developing a website and this could be useful for us as computer science students who lack design perspective.

Survival Korean - Easy

This course might not be relevant to any of our study programs, but it was the best way to study together with all the other exchange students. We considered it as a social gathering as we created many friendships in no time. This class was easy for some people and difficult for others who are not good with languages. It was a very useful class, especially when we had to communicate with Koreans since many could not understand you if you did not pronounce it the Korean way. Besides, it was very convenient to be able to read Korean.

The classes took place in the evening two days a week. I learnt to read as well as simple phrases, which I could use during conversations etc. Many restaurants were not English-friendly, which meant there are no English speaking staff or English written menu card. Therefore, I highly recommend taking this course even if it is not relevant to your studies. But then again, it is relevant to your survival in Korea.

In conclusion...

I learnt that Korean education system is very old fashion and relies on memorization. There are times where it gets hard to understand, even for Koreans, but in the end, your memory is what counts. Studying in Hanyang also made me realize a different way of learning by watching Koreans hard work and study approach. They are impressively good at remembering things in short time, which is what I admire, because it will come in handy sometimes. Now I can see the differences of Western and Eastern education, the flaws and the strengths of both systems.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

This semester, we were quite a lot of exchange students whereas most are from China. When studying in Hanyang University, it is important to apply for mentor program called Hanmille. It is optional, but I highly recommend it. You get assigned a buddy or a "mento" as they call it, who is a voluntary Korean student from same university. They help you with everything you want to know from understanding how things work to if you need someone to talk with.

During the Hanmille program, we got assigned to a specific mentor group with other mentors and other mentees (exchange students) too. This semester, they were doing a few extra social events, making it possible to meet all the other exchange students and other Koreans more often. They also do official Hanmille events, which could be a small trip to somewhere in Korea once a month to experience Korean culture. The more events you join, the more people you get to meet and create new relationships. In the end, I even managed to get the "mentee of the semester award" with some other students too.

How to find friends and how to network?

Participate in the survival Korean class as well as in Hanmille events are a good start. The first month is crucial, because that is the time where everyone is taking it easy and not busy with studying for midterm yet. Therefore, join every social gathering, make social activities yourself too, meet people by eating together etc.

Another way to meet people is to join clubs. Although, many Korean students are not good at English, it will be a bit hard to communicate, but they are very friendly and try to help as much as possible. I joined a few clubs, but in the end, I found myself lacking time due to catching up my classes, joining other social events and other trips.

The best way to create online network with Koreans is through "KakaoTalk". It should be the first thing to download before heading to South Korea. Download other Kakao apps too. You can check the subway/train departure and arrival times, order taxi, order food, create chat groups, check bus times etc.

What to do in city?

There are many things to do in the city of Seoul. From partying in Hongdae (Hongik University) to mountain hiking at Bukhansan to picnic at Yeouido Park. Most students already had ideas of what to see and do in Seoul, but planning to go together is also an option. For instance, some of us planned our own daytrip where we asked both Koreans and exchange students who wanted to go to DMZ or to Busan for a few days. Other than that, Hanmille do some daytrips to traditional Korean towns somewhere in South Korea.

There is also the area around Jungang Station, which is a single train stop from the station of Hanyang University at Ansan. Here you can eat at many different restaurants, party, drinking, karaoke and other activities. Otherwise, right outside the campus main gate, there are also restaurants, bars, karaoke, billiard, pc room and other entertainment to do. Ansan is not as small as you think. If you go to Ansan Station, there is an "Asian Town" with Chinese, Indonesian, Vietnamese restaurants etc. Street food can also be found in this area.

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PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

How did you travel to the country & the city of study? Where to stay?

After all the work with Visa application, host university application, housing payment, and plane tickets etc. The only thing left was finding out how to get to the university. The international coordinator of Hanyang University was very helpful when asking questions over email. The host university also sent a guideline about how to get to Erica Campus, what to do before semester start, course selection etc.

Arriving in South Korea

When I travelled to South Korea, I chose to stay in Seoul for a few days before heading to the campus in Ansan. Some students had a hard time finding the dormitory, since the campus was quite large. As a small advice for when arriving at the bus terminal or the subway station in Ansan. Grab a taxi to Hanyang University (pronounced "Hanyang dæ-hak-gyu"). Then tell the taxi driver it has to be dormitory (pronounced "gi-suk-sa").

During the stay

I stayed in dormitory. There are three dormitory buildings. We could only choose one, which was the tallest building. The price of staying in dormitory was very cheap. It was approximately 1500 DKK a month, so you could spend the rest on other stuff like entertainment and food. There is also the option to find your own apartment nearby, but it takes some time to do the process, and you probably would need help from a Korean. I recommend just staying in dormitory, because it is easier and there is the social aspect too. Since all the exchange students are staying in the same floor, it was easy for us to make plans spontaneously. The rooms are small and shared between two people. I had my own desk, a single bed and closet, while sharing bathroom.

What did it cost? Where did you eat? Etc.

I bought a T-money card to use for transportation. It can be used for convenience stores too. Transportation in general is very cheap. Taxi is worth it when you are at least three people. Subway and bus are almost the same price, and cost around 10 DKK per trip. It also counts for trips that are far away such as the one-hour trip to Seoul.

I bought a second-hand bike that I used for transportation within campus area. Bike prices are very different, but mine cost around 400 DKK, which I managed to sell again at the end of semester.

Since the dormitory only have a 7 eleven on the ground floor and some microwaves, you will not be able cook. There are many restaurants right outside campus near the main gate where you can find pretty cheap meals. Since I was staying in Ansan, prices are relatively cheaper than Seoul. Most meals are less than 50 kr. including free water in every restaurant.

Sum up…

SU was more than enough to survive throughout the month. However, if you wish to travel further away like a few days trip to Busan, Jeju or other countries during or after semester, you might want to save up a bit beforehand.

- *Return flight (Korean Air) cost around 5500 – 6000 DKK, but it is possible to find cheaper.*
- *Accommodation cost around 6000 DKK for the whole semester, which is around 4 months.*
- *Food depends a lot where you eat and what you eat. It cost approx. 3000 DKK a month.*
- *Fun and other stuff cost approx. 500-1000 DKK a month. It can easily be more the more events and trips you do.*

Total cost for me was about 35000 DKK including plane ticket to Seoul and dormitory payment. In addition, this price was included some small trips to Busan, Jeju etc.

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CONCLUSION

To what extent were your expectations met, both professionally and culturally?

At first, I did not know much about South Korea. The knowledge I had was very shallow. I was not sure what I could expect from South Korea, but I knew what I could expect from just studying abroad. Although, it did exceed my expectations. In just 4 months, I managed to learn about many cultures and not just Korean culture. Surprisingly, there was only one continent, which was not represented in this semester's group of exchange students, i.e. Antarctica. Otherwise, I found a connection to every other continent in one way or another. Meaning, I could learn many languages, try their country's food, and learning about their values and mindsets while teaching them about mine. Very fascinating to see similarities as well as differences among us.

The thing about study abroad is not just about taking classes you cannot find in your home country. I had developed myself in ways I could not do at home. Opening gates to the outside world from tiny Denmark and being one of the few people who can create connections between Denmark and other countries is what makes it special to be international.

Professionally, I now have the opportunity to work, travel and live in different countries since there will probably be someone in the particular country I visit that I might know. The whole world goes from an unknown place to my global home. I learnt how to interact with people despite their culture, values and mindsets. Just a few months on the other side of the world gave me a lot in return in terms of knowledge, friendship and opportunity.
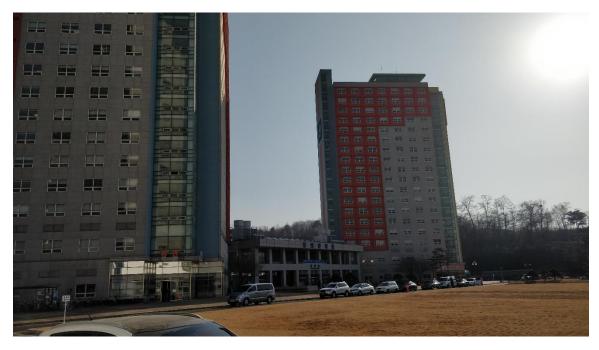
I now see the world completely different, with new eyes and a broaden horizon.

FEATURED PHOTOS

Campus

Figur 1 - The "water" & "card" room

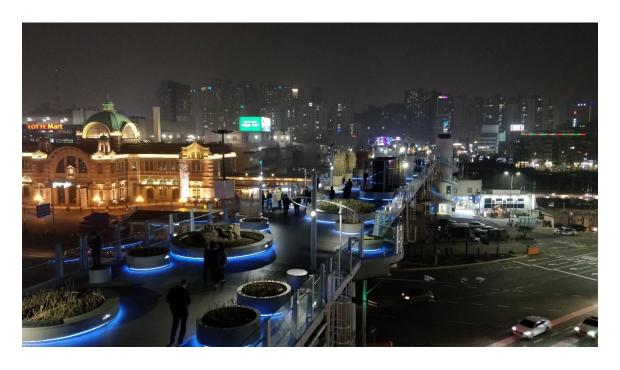*Figur 2 - Right building is the male's dorm*

Figur 3 - Area near campus

Figur 4 - Spring festival featuring Loco

Figur 5 - Inside Gyeongbokgung palace

Figur 6 - Seoul Station night view

Figur 7 - Train to Busan (Oryukdo Skywalk)

Figur 8 - Flight to Jeju (Mt. Hallasan Peak)