

IT University Travel Report

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Hanyang University - Fall Semester of 2020

Software Development

Courses: MicroProcessor- Applications, Computer Networks, C++ Programming, International Business, Organization Theory, Level 1a Korean (Beginner)

Studying at Hanyang University

My 5th semester of Software Development was spent as an exchange semester at Hanyang University in South Korea. My courses for this semester were Computer Networks, C++ Programming, Microprocessors- Applications, International Business, Organization Theory and Korean Language Studies. My goal with the courses was to cover my corresponding curriculum at ITU. I managed to cover all but the course "Programmer Som Data", since no course at Hanyang had equivalent learning outcomes. Instead of supplementing this course, I took Computer Networks instead, which I had credited as my elective course, which usually lies at the 6th semester of Software Development. Furthermore I took intro level korean, but got no credits at ITU for this course, it was simply to have a more enjoyable exchange.

The academic level during all courses was up to par with ITU when it comes to the expected learning, but in a lot of cases the lectures, exercises and assignments did not really capture the subject as well as one could hope. My impression from the stay is that in general students studied more on their own, since the teaching was not always sufficient to pass exams and tests.

Even though everyone is tired of talking about COVID, it needs to be addressed since it had a huge impact on both my social life and school life. Nearly all courses and classes were completely online, the exception being that if you were less than 20 people in a course, it was possible to meet up online. I personally had exercise lessons in C++ programming every wednesday for 2 hours offline, and we would occasionally have small exercise classes in Microprocessor- applications as well.

This definitely caused me to not really connect with any classmates during my stay, except for in korean language class. On the bright side, it did seem like teachers were more understanding and graded generously because of the hardship of studying online.

Motivation and outcome

I have always dreamed of studying or working abroad for a shorter amount of time, I think it was mainly because I wanted to experience and live in a new culture. Korean was a fitting option since i wanted to go far away from both my home culture and country. I did not have many expectations before my trip, but if I had, they would definitely have been met. It was wonderful to experience other people's way of life and find my own place in their culture, if only for a short while. The experience did not saturate my taste for new cultures, it rather made it greater.

My stay abroad definitely made me grow as a person. I learned to be more open minded to new people and cultures. It helped me broaden my horizons when it comes to what kind of people I prefer as friends and I got a lot of great memories from both trips across mountains and parties. I think the biggest gain for my further studies and career is the ability to understand and communicate better with people different from myself.

At ITU you rarely interact with people from other academic backgrounds than yourself when it comes to school work and projects. This had clouded my judgement of how much I knew myself, but when exposed to an environment where I had to work with people who came from totally different fields such as hardware engineering or more humanitarian studies I learned to have greater respect for my own skills.

Arranging my stay and housing

When planning my stay, I found it really helpful to get basic knowledge about the different living accommodations from earlier travel reports. Especially the travel report written by Melissa from her exchange semester in the Fall of 2019.

Besides this, I was fortunate to already have a few korean friends who could tell me about what opportunities I had, even though they themselves had limited knowledge.

In the end, the main tool I used was google. I will try to outline the basics of accommodations fitting for a student.

There are mainly 3-4 types of accommodations fitting for a student in South Korea (or at least in Seoul).

1. Dormitory
2. Goshiwon
3. Sharehouse
4. AirBnB (or other rentals)

Dormitory

The main one that most students go with is the dormitory. These are living facilities owned by the school, and therefore made to accommodate students and lie very close to the school. I knew few people living in the dorms of Hanyang, but the major upsides they seemed to have was that it was easy to connect with other exchange students and make groups of friends who you were able to experience the country and culture with. Korean people would also live in the dorms, but as far as I could understand, it was hard befriending them if you did not have classes or anything else in common. Another plus of the dorms, were that they could be fairly cheap to as low as 2500 DKK.

The downsides of living in the dormitories seemed to be the very small spaces - rooms would routinely be from 4 to 6 square meters. They also had a lot of very restrictive rules, which included limiting the number of eggs allowed in your fridge, and having curfews for when you could enter the dorm. I do not know to what level people abided by these rules, but I personally think they sounded too restrictive and strange.

Goshiwon

This is a popular option among korean students since it is very cheap. In many ways goshiwon seems to compare to dorms, but in my experience they did not have as strict rules. One thing to consider is that from what I heard, they tend to be really depressing and small. I would strongly advise to have a video tour of a goshiwon to really get a feel for the space.

Sharehouse

This is the type of accommodation I personally had. The concept of a share house is one big house where different people live together and usually share a kitchen and living room.

Sharehouses are usually smaller and rarer than goshiwons and dormitories, but in my opinion that only helps to give you a greater connection to the people you live with. The upsides to sharehouses is definitely the community. I lived in a sharehouse with up to 16 people from ages 20 to 32 ish. In-between were both students, foreigners on working holiday visas, and Koreans. The sharehouse chain I lived in had a policy of having their houses be inhabited half by native Koreans and half by foreigners. This really helped with getting Korean friends. A great thing about the sharehouse is that the people living there came to Korea at a different time from yourself so they would already have an established network you would be connected with through them. I made many international and Korean friends through the friends I got in the sharehouse.

Downsides to a sharehouse would be that it is usually more expensive than dormitories and goshiwons, plus the quality of the house seems to shift a lot depending on company and place.

AirBnB (rentals)

A couple of my friends rented apartments for their stay. This in general cost more, but does also offer better quality housing.

Sidenote

In general Korean housing seems to be very flexible. Usually your contract or lease has at most one month of dismissal, and it is very easy to find a new place quickly. COVID definitely helped in finding places to live, but as far as I understood, it is in general fairly easy to find accommodations fitting for students.

Expenses and finance

When managing expenses in Korea, one thing to note is that they are big on "Cafe Culture". This means that a lot of what you are gonna be doing is going to be outside your house. This means that Koreans usually go for cheaper and smaller housing, since a lot of their time and money is going to be spent on regular cafes, internet cafes, cat cafes, restaurants, bars, karaoke cafes, living room cafes and the list goes on and on. A mistake that I made, was to budget my rent for the same amount as here in Denmark, since I did not think about all the extra expenses I would use on "living" in cafes outside my room.

Eating in Korea can be cheap, but also quite expensive. In general when eating at a traditional Korean restaurant it can be about half as cheap as a normal Danish restaurant, if not cheaper. Going about grocery shopping is actually more expensive than you might think, it can often be cheaper to buy street food or from their traditional restaurants. If you decide to buy and eat western food, then you will have to pay about as much as it costs back home.

Scholarships

I personally applied for the Lemvig Müller Foundation scholarship and the ITU Travel Pool scholarship and would greatly recommend both.