



IT University Travel Report

Host University: Hanyang University, Erica Campus, South Korea

Study Programme at IT University : M.Sc. Digital Innovation Management – Big Data

Exchange Agreement or Study Abroad: Exchange Agreement

Courses studied abroad: Applications of Ai, Ai Enabled Communication Systems, Bioinformatics, Malicious Code

Exchange Period: semester (autumn/spring) year: autumn 2019

If you wish to give advice to other students regarding your travels, please state your contact info here: mapr@itu.dk / <https://www.linkedin.com/in/praczki/>

Your stay abroad

What was it like to study at [the university] (including choice of courses, academic level, social life at campus)?

Teaching Style

In terms of the lectures, you will see that the structure widely differs from what you might have experienced in Denmark. At ITU, the focus is on interacting with the professor, working on projects together with your classmates, and generally figure out how to work in teams. Korean universities in general tend to provide lecture style classes, that is: you go in, listen to the lecturer, and then study on your own based on the notes you take in class. Usually two major examinations take place throughout your semester: the midterms exam and your final exam. These two examinations can take a form of a take-home essay, multiple choice, or in the case of the engineering department where I was studying, the students have to build their own project (for example come up with an algorithm for human detection in foggy conditions) or one that the professor assigns them (optimize a machine learning algorithm so that it performs better than a certain threshold, using techniques learned in class).

It is important to note however that the class's structure will largely depend on your professor. A good rule of thumb is to do your research on the lecturer: if they have studied abroad or grown up

abroad (most likely in the United States), the lecture will have more interactions; if not then chances are you will be attending lectures without communicating a lot. Of course, exceptions always exist, but this might help you making a more educated guess on what to expect.

Another important difference to keep in mind is that graduate students in Korea generally focus on their lab work, and the lectures are seen as something mandatory but not priority. For this reason, professors are more forgiving in their grading as they understand you will spend most of your time in the lab working with your personal supervisor. Of course, as an exchange student, you will not have a lab session, nor a project to work on, thus you will have half the workload compared to a local student. In some cases, your lecturer might instruct you to tie your assignment to your lab work, but these sorts of situations can be easily solved by explaining that you in fact do not have one and thus would like to come up with your own project.

Difficulties

I have received my Bachelor's degree in International Relations, following which I spent a year studying programming on my own. Mathematics was never my strong suite, but I was determined to change that. The general expectations at Hanyang is that if you are going to complete a graduate level course in Computer engineering, you already have spent 4 years studying computer science together with having a good grasp on advanced mathematics. As I was lacking most of the qualifications above, the first few lectures I attended made me realize how much work I will have to do. At ITU our Big Data specifications relies on mainly pre-packaged tools for data understanding such as Microsoft's Azure framework, Tableau and other more-or-less closed systems, while at Hanyang we are expected to build most our tools from the ground up using programming languages.

While my classmates have assured me, that by attending the lectures regularly and handing in an essay with minimal efforts should qualify me for an okay grade (something that I cannot deny nor confirm, but is certainly important to keep in mind if you are looking for a laid back semester), I was still really anxious to perform well. Unfortunately, besides one professor I was not able to receive a lot of help with my projects and more the replies I got were often rather dismissive. At ITU there is a sense of comradery that I got used to, with group chats and Facebook pages where the students can share their questions and others are keen to answer, this was certainly not the case at Hanyang. Probably this was the hardest aspect of this semester. My solution for this was to look up introductory lectures with similar topics to the ones I was attending. Namely, I enrolled to Andrew Ng's Machine learning course from Stanford (via Coursera – Free of charge) and sat through the following lecture series from MIT's Open Courseware via Youtube: 1, Introduction to Computer Science 2, Mathematics for Computer Science 3, Principles of Digital Communication I 4, Probabilistic Systems Analysis and Applied Probability. Besides these courses, Khan Academy was a great resource to refresh some of my Calculus in order to better understand the course material.

What was your initial motivation for going abroad and did your stay meet your expectations?

My motivation for this exchange semester was two-fold. On one hand, I was interested to understand a bit more on the technical side of machine learning, as I felt that ITU had put a lot of emphasis on the theoretical concepts and the issues surrounding big data processes while concentrating less on the inner workings of the algorithms, or the programming paradigms in the field. Hanyang has a great reputation in Korea as being "the engineering school" so I thought I would get to make up for the gaps in my understanding on the implementation side.

On the other hand, I had a strong personal motivation to go to South Korea in general. I have spent my bachelor studies in Seoul and have family here, not mentioning that I already had an understanding of the language. These made it an obvious choice for me to come here and certainly makes me more affectionate toward the country. Please keep that in mind while continuing reading this review and making your choice for your exchange semester!

My time at Seoul was as fantastic as it gets, it is a great and lively city with something new happening every week. Ansan, while it is also a decent area, it is definitely less exciting than the capital city. I did learn a lot, but I felt that most of that came from my own efforts rather than from the coursework. One could argue though, that if not for the pressure coming from the lectures, I would have never looked up the videos and online courses which helped me the most during this semester. Overall, I would say that unless you have a really strong secondary motivation for staying in Korea, I would not recommend Ansan as your choice of exchange campus. The distance from downtown Seoul combined with the okay academic environment would make it an overall less attractive choice in my book.

Please describe what you got out of your stay, both personally and academically, and how do you expect it to contribute to your further studies?

I am feeling more confident about the engineering side of machine learning after my stay. We spent 80% of our time looking at mathematical formulas and discussing optimization methods during my stay over here, coupled with some insights into electrical engineering. On the personal side, the biggest benefits for me were the chance to practice my Korean, spend time with family and friends, and experience life outside of Seoul as well.

Arranging your stay

Please give a short description of the process of arranging your stay:

I was staying with family in Seoul, so I won't be able to provide a lot of information with regards to how you can get accommodation near Erica campus. From what I heard, the dormitory was the most popular option among the exchange students, and probably that will be the easiest way for you to make friends as well.

The second-best option is AirBnB. Compared to Denmark the prices are decent, but make sure you negotiate the deposit well, and prepare for a plan B in case there are issues with getting your deposit back.

Besides Ansan, you can of course find a place to stay in Seoul as I did. Given that only 4 courses are necessary for you to complete your requirements, you can cram those 4 into two to three days, thus reducing your commute. Personally, I travelled 3 times a week, each way about one hour and forty minutes by train. You also have to keep in mind that as courses do get cancelled every once in a while, you will have plenty of weeks where instead of 3 days you will only have 2 workdays. If you have some friends in Seoul already, then keep this in mind: while certainly annoying, the few days of commute might be worth staying in a more exciting neighbourhood in Seoul with more internationals around.

What resources did you find helpful in planning your stay and which people did you use (if any)?

I already lived in Seoul for over 4 years before, so I am not sure how relatable my preparation would be to you in planning your trip. I am sure that the sources I used in 2013 the first time I was here, are probably outdated by now. EatYourKimchi has some timeless and easy to consume videos on Youtube that might be helpful. TalkToMeInKorean (TTMIK) is a pretty good resource if you want to learn some Korean before visiting, and Duolingo is getting better each year as well.

Trazy.com will offer you the best temporary phone plans for visiting foreigners, but I heard some Danish phone providers have data plans for Korea on this point as well so make sure to ask around!

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

See the answer above.

Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad

Flight is always the biggest expense, so make sure to book your ticket well ahead. For this time, I took China Eastern, and I would definitely not recommend it unless your height is under 170cm, but even then, be ready for some surprises. If price is your primary concern though, give them a look, you will still get to Seoul in one piece, just a bit inconvenienced. If you are looking for a good value for price, then you probably won't find a better offer than Polish Airlines (a.k.a. LOT). Other than this, travelling on the subway to Ansan from Seoul costs about 2,800 KRW one way, so that is an expense you have to calculate in your budget if you are planning to stay in Seoul.

Did you apply for scholarships and would you recommend any ones in particular?

I am not sure whether you can call the ITU Travel pool a scholarship, but yes, I applied for that specific one. I have heard that there is an alternative Korean scholarship for exchanges coming to the country, but that requires a student from the partner university who will visit ITU, their professor, and your professor to act all in concert while applying for the funds, given my timeframe this was not possible but I would certainly recommend looking into it more deeply if interested. I believe it was named "DUO scholarship", and hopefully it will still exist by the time you are reading this.

Recommendations for other students:

1, Bachelor and Master's programmes differ significantly in Korea, make sure to look for reviews accordingly.

2, Be ready for thinking outside the box in terms of administrative solutions as there can be a lot of mix-ups with exchanges. Personally, I was informed, that there will be a drop period for us to cancel courses we don't need / do not like. When I tried to go through with the process (and spent a month chasing the administration of the university), it turned out such option is only available for bachelor students even though they included it in the official advisory documents we received in the beginning of the semester. At the end, they advised me to simply fail the course on paper as it won't be registered at my home university. Doesn't look good on paper, but at least it doesn't transfer to your Danish diploma. Similar complications happen rather often, so it is handy to ask bluntly for alternative options even if they initially say: "it is not possible" and also make sure to have at least one Korean speaker friend you can call for help if things get out of hand.

3, Make sure you know which campus you are assigned to.

4, Craigslist is your friend. If you need to buy something cheap for your stay, there is a good chance you will find it on seoul.craigslist.org for either cheap or free given that you pick it up. This works primarily in Seoul, but if you are dedicated, I am sure you can bring some stuff to Ansan with

yourself by a car or public transport. One word of advice: Never pay in advance and accept only hard cash upon meeting, in case you need to sell something.

5, Google has its limitations in Korea. For maps, rely on either Naver or Kakao maps. It doesn't hurt either to learn how to spell in Korean, it only takes 15 minutes (<http://www.ryanestrada.com/learntoreadkoreanin15minutes/>) and will make your life significantly easier once you realize that almost one third of the signs on the streets are in fact "koreanized" English.