



IT University Travel Report

Host University: Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea

Study Programme at IT University : MSc Digital Design and Interactive Technologies

Activity Abroad: Visiting Student

Exchange Period: Autumn 2019

Your stay abroad

Please describe your stay abroad:

My stay abroad was really great. Before going, I had made a great effort to learn as much of the language and culture as I could. Also, I had tried connecting with other students online before going, and joined clubs and befriended as many native students as I could while being there. All of this really paid off, and I felt like I became really immersed in Korea and its culture.

However, it is also very different from back home, so there was a bit of a culture shock. I (and all the other exchange students) definitely stood out, and it got a bit frustrating being stared at all the time. Moreover, there is definitely a language barrier, as many signs, menus, etc. are only in Korean, and many older shopkeepers speak no English at all. The spicy food (and extremely sweet bread, pizzas, and chips) took some getting used to as well.

Academically, it is very different from Denmark and ITU. Firstly, attendance is mandatory, and more than 3 or 4 missed classes (depending on the professor) was an automatic fail – a few students got in trouble for this. Also, there are way more papers, presentations, group projects, weekly assignments, midterms etc. than most foreign students were used to. Each class I had was 3 hours of lecture, with no exercise classes and only very short or no breaks. All of my professors spoke English very well, but I heard of other students where this was not the case (and where they would speak Korean part of the class as well).

They grade you based on a “scoring” system, where each class attended, your participation in class, as well as your scores from tests and papers all accumulate to your final grade. While this felt like a lot of pressure to perform all the time, I found that it felt fairer, compared to having one exam determine your grade for the class.

Yonsei's location can't be beat by other universities in Korea. The campus and nearby "student city" Sinchon was fantastic and filled with cheap restaurants, cafés, and bars – and it seemed like there was always a festival, event, or concert going on. Moreover, it was extremely close to Hongdae, which was the preferred party-spot for many.

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

My motivation for studying abroad at Yonsei was to grow both academically and personally. Since Yonsei is one of three very prestigious universities in South Korea (known as the SKY-universities), that are known for their high academic level, I hoped to expand on my knowledge and tools within my field. Moreover, Seoul is known to be an IT- and innovation-*hub*, which I hoped would further provide me with a lot of new knowledge and inspiration.

Furthermore, I wanted to dive headfirst into a very different country, far away from home and with a very different language and culture, in order to expand my worldview and connect with people from all over the world.

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?

Personally, I grew a lot as a person, as I had to go through practical and social situations entirely by myself, in a different country, with a very different language and culture. It was difficult getting used to living abroad far away from Denmark, but extremely maturing as well. Quickly, you learn how much you are capable of doing yourself when you have to.

Academically, I learned a lot from my different courses. The courses were usually much more focused on theory than real-life examples, which was quite different, but also expanded my knowledge greatly and provided me with a toolbox for my further studies. Even if some of the courses touched on subjects similar to what I had already been taught at ITU, it always had a different angle and viewpoint from both the professor and the other students from all over the world. Also, working together on group projects with several people from very different countries, cultures, and academic backgrounds provided me with some valuable experience in global teamwork.

Arranging your stay

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

As a freemover, everything was a bit more complicated, since I was in charge of applying both to ITU and to the host university. I highly recommend starting a few months before the deadlines, since it can take a lot of time to gather all of the documents.

For example, I needed to send my TOEFL results directly to the host university as part of my application, and there is both a long wait to even take the test, and it can take several weeks for them to send the results. I also needed a recommendation, which I got from my bachelor-thesis counselor.

Moreover, I needed to provide Yonsei with a mobility confirmation form (very time-consuming to get a signed copy of this from SAP), a signed copy of my grade transcript, a confirmation of enrollment at ITU, a copy of my passport, proof of vaccines and health insurance etc. All of this took weeks to prepare.

At the same time, I had to apply for pre-approval of courses and individual specialization at ITU, as well as provide them with my letter of acceptance as I got into Yonsei.

Getting courses at Yonsei is luckily not as complicated and competitive as other places, as they switched from the “all-sign-up-at-the-same-time-quickly”-system to a “bidding”-system, where you can allocate a certain number of points in each course you are interested in. The students who bid more are then more likely to get the course. However, the amount of relevant courses was suddenly reduced by a large amount on the day of bidding, which made the process of getting relevant courses (and getting them approved by SAP) extremely frustrating and time-consuming, as there isn't a lot of flexibility.

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

I spend a lot of time reading travel reports (from both ITU and other universities such as CBS), watching YouTube videos and reading blogs from former students. Moreover, it was nice to follow some relevant pages and hashtags on Instagram (e.g. Yonsei's different pages and the hashtags #yonseiabroad #yonseistudent etc). Lastly, I joined all the new Facebook pages for students studying abroad in autumn 2019 to get advice and to connect with a few people before I arrived. This was such a nice way to already have a few connections before landing in a completely new place.

How did you arrange practicalities such as accommodation?

I applied for one of the two dorms available for international students. This process is extremely competitive and initially I did not get a spot. However, I signed up for the waitlist, which ultimately landed me a single room (with own bathroom) in SK Global House. I highly recommend living in the dorms for the ease (on campus, helpful reception desk, social life), but otherwise there are plenty of sharehouses or goshiwons in the nearby area, which I know other people were very happy with.

Expenses and Financing

Please comment on expenses connected to your stay abroad

Most of the expenses I had was from the preparation of going abroad. The TOEFL-test, visa, vaccines, travel insurance etc. were all very expensive when added up. Moreover, I had to pay all of my tuition (later “reimbursed” by the SU Udlandsstipendium) as well as the whole semester's housing fee in one go. Also, I had to pay an application fee to the host university.

Food, drinks, and transportation are very cheap in Korea compared to Denmark. However, you will most likely eat out every day, which obviously adds up. I recommend applying for as many scholarships as possible, as well as saving up as much money as you can.

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

Among others, I applied for, and received scholarships from: Lemvigh-Müller Fonden, Nordea Fonden, Knud Højgaard's Fond, and William Demant Fonden. They are all pretty straightforward to apply to and quick to reply to any questions.

I signed up for legatbogen.dk, which made it very easy to find and apply for scholarships (also, they help make a schedule for when to apply to which). Applying for scholarships is time-consuming and draining, so set aside a little time every day to do it.

Recommendations for other students:

Write down and remember ALL important deadlines regarding course-registration, application for dorms, applications for scholarships, applications for the buddy-program etc. So many students missed one or more deadline, which made their stay much more complicated.

Join clubs or buddy-programs where you will meet both international and native students in order to get the most out of your experience abroad. It can be very easy to just stay in your room/apartment or hang out with the same 4 people all semester, but I highly recommend joining every event, dinner, and party that you can, even (especially) if you don't know anyone there.

Know a bit of Korean before you go. Knowing at least the alphabet (hangul) will help a lot, but knowing phrases so you can order food and take a taxi will make your stay a lot easier.

Trendy clothes are very cheap to buy anywhere in Korea, however I highly recommend bringing plenty of shoes, pants and bras (!), as most international students I know had a lot of trouble finding these in the right sizes.

I was personally very happy about staying in the dorms. Moreover, opening a Korean bank account made everything easier (for example ordering stuff online, getting food delivered, etc.). This way I also did not have to carry around a lot of cash.

Go see Korea as much as you can. It can be tempting to stay on campus or in the same bars every weekend, but Korea is much more than Seoul and has some incredibly beautiful areas (e.g. Jeju or Busan). If you go in autumn, then use the Chuseok vacation (also known as the Korean "thanksgiving") to go on a trip around the beautiful Korean countryside. If you don't want to plan it yourself, then there are plenty of very cheap trips planned by tour-guides, where you can go with a bunch of other international students.