



HHN
HOCHSCHULE HEILBRONN



Exchange Semester in Pohang, South Korea

Handong Global University

Management and Human Resources
Winter Semester 2021/2022
Ms. Cornelia Bächle

Hey You!

You are interested in going to an exchange semester to South Korea? Ok, well, let me tell you how I ended up there.

My name is Fabienne, and my major is Management and Human Resources. I am learning so much about people, business and the global economy. What fascinates me, is the influence that Asia, specifically China and South Korea, has on our global economy. For me, it is very important to have an awareness of diverse people generally and in the business context as well. The best way to understand culture is to see and immerse oneself in the experiences of others. I wanted to see first-hand the root of Asia's impact.

I. Why Korea?

I had three Asian cultures from which to choose—China, Taiwan, and South Korea. The, then, ongoing political situation in Taiwan and Macau immediately forced me to eliminate options 1 and 2. That left, you guessed it...South Korea! South Korea has a rich and fascinating history. It grew from having the characterization of a third-world country after the Korean War into a major global player in just a few decades. Samsung, Kia, and K-Pop are just some examples of South Korea's influence on the world.

I was nervous before and while making application. Corona was, and still is, very much a threat, and I was uncertain if my experience abroad would be virtual or live. I continued my application with the hope of having the on-campus experience in South Korea. Once I received my confirmation and acceptance for South Korea, I was so excited that I did not notice something very important. I had been accepted into Handong Global University in Pohang instead of Inha University in Incheon. To be honest, at that time, I had no feeling that being accepted into HGU would be one of the best things that could have ever happened to me.

I was happy when I met a German girl named Sonja at the München Airport, who was also going for an exchange Semester to Handong. Although we did not sit together, it was comforting knowing that I would have someone to whom I could talk German to. Funny enough, even when we were alone, we spoke English sometimes.

II. Arriving in South Korea

We arrived safely in Seoul. Because of Corona, we had to go through different steps to be checked in and show if we were vaccinated and had a PCR test. South Korea is known for its very strict rules to prevent Covid from spreading. Consequently, we were required to download an app for our 2-week quarantine. This app informed the government of our location and movement -for the entire two weeks. Once the personnel at the airport checked that we downloaded the app, they then called a responsible person to verify that we had a place to quarantine. After we finished with the Corona related part at the airport, we had to find the bus. The bus driver told us— in English—not to take off our masks and that we were not allowed to talk at all! So, Sonja and I used the bus's WIFI to communicate. After taking the 3,5h train ride we arrived in Pohang where we had to take a PCR- Test. Here, I have to say, that I had

to take a lot of Covid- PCR tests during my time in South Korea. No test and I mean NO test in Germany was ever as hurtful as a test in South Korea. They turned the stick in your nose around like a witch stirring her potion and practically tried to poke my brains out.

Additionally, we were required to measure our temperature twice a day at a specific time. Seriously. If we did not measure our temperature as required, our phone would ring in a high tone with an ominous text. When I forgot to charge my phone at night the next morning, I would receive texts that messages were sent to the authorities because my phone was unable to be located or had been moved. Unfortunately, this nerve-racking experience happened to me twice.

Honestly, my first impression of Handong was impressive. The campus was huge, I was shocked. In comparison, the room was a normal sized room with four bunk beds and desks under each. The bathroom was attached to the room, but the toilet was separated from the sink. The shower cord was connected to the top of the sink and every time you took a shower- the entire bathroom took a shower with you. Consequently, we always took our clothes in a plastic shopping bag and hung it on the door handle.

III. Campus and General Life

After we were released from quarantine, we were able to discover the whole campus. I was not used to living on an American style campus. Handong seemed so big. We were able to find different ATMs, a couple of coffee shops, a Burger King, two cafeterias, and a few other restaurants and stores. When we wanted to go shopping or eat different food, we left the campus. There was a big field in the middle of the campus that in summer/fall was the perfect place to meet friends or just study together in the sun. I really enjoyed the „real“ student life with on campus housing. All international students, whether they were one semester exchange students or four-year matriculating non-Korean students, lived in IHouse. IHouse is a dormitory for international and Korean students who would like to improve their English and be surrounded by foreigners from all around the world. In order to enter the different dormitories on campus you needed a student ID-card. That card was also a debit card. I transferred one-time Euros to Korean Won and always paid with that card. It took the university 1 month to create the ID and Bank card. During this time, my friend had problems accessing her money. She asked me if she could transfer the money to my account so that I could withdraw it for her. I attempted to help her and caused my bank card to be blocked indefinitely. The maximum I wanted to withdraw was 200,000 ₩. Now, I know that you are probably thinking, wow, that is a lot of money, no wonder the card was blocked! But 1000₩ are only 0,70€ and 200,000₩ are only 146€. Well, anyway, I transferred the money back to her.

Initially, four people were assigned to share a room. But, because one of the girls decided to live alone off campus and the other French girl had difficulties obtaining a visa, I was sharing the room with only one other girl from Belgium. From the beginning we were happy to have the room to ourselves even though it was sometimes a bit quiet. One of our friends, who lived next door in a filled room, liked our space so much that she kept visiting us to have some silence. The Belgium girl and I had many similarities with regards to our living standards. Therefore, we were really happy with our room.

As I mentioned before, you were only able to enter the dormitories with the ID. The card was programmed so that you were only able to enter the floor of the same sex. If you were caught on a floor of the other sex, you received 5 penalty points. For not turning off the main room lights after 11 pm you received 1 point. Other ways to accumulate penalty points was to wash clothes after 11 pm or leave the dormitory for longer than a half hour after 11 pm. There were other rules that we had to follow but did not result in accumulating penalty points if broken. For example, one of my friends played volleyball on the court outside. So, not only once, she left her slippers on the main shoe rack in the hallway instead of putting them in her own shoe cabinet. Because she came back after 11 pm she had to pick up her shoes on the 5th floor of IHouse. This did not cost her any points just a reminder to follow the rules. With more than 8 points, one of the so-called punishments, they told me, would have been bringing the trash out.

I really liked the variety of courses Handong offered. I was able to choose Korean classes and I had a few taekwondo classes. Corona might have made the whole Korean experience harder in some ways, but still, it was definitely worth the extra trouble. Even taking courses online because of a case that had appeared on campus was still worth the experience because you were able to listen with your roommates or friends at the lectures. The lecturing style in Korea is very different than what we are used to in Germany. Your grade will consist of the exam, attendance, presentations, assignments and team presentations. If you really study and you have a lot of classes, your whole day is filled only with preparing for class (of course that depends on the classes as well.) For example, the 2 classes I took in business were extensive because we had to read for almost every lecture a chapter of a book. The chapter was around 60 lpad pages long. Based on those pages we had pop up quizzes with 10 questions in 10 minutes. To sum it up, I am contented with the courses I took and would choose them again.

What I was not so pleased about was the food. The student cafeteria offered typical Korean food which meant that there was rice or chicken or some type of soup. My favorite was 불고기- Bulgogi, thin sliced meat which you wrap in a salad leaf. Most of the time the food was very spicy, even if you asked for not spicy food, - so not really something for me. Other options were rice bowl, which I almost ate once a day or Burger King which I also almost ate once a day. You can understand why, since I have returned to Germany, I am trying to avoid eating rice or Burger King.

IV. Trip to the Hospital

My Campus life was interrupted when I had to leave university and go to the hospital. As I later found out, the so called „tradition“ was, that every semester one of the international students became injured. This semester, unfortunately, it had to be me.

Here's how it happened. A few friends and I went to a boulder/ climbing hall. For a few hours we had fun and enjoyed our time there. After I went down from one of the climbs (bouldering is without a security leash) I injured my knee. It did not hurt immediately, but by the end of the day it was swollen and red. By the next day I had pain and problems walking. So, I went alone to the campus doctor. There was one small problem, however, neither the assistant nor the doctor spoke English. Therefore, the next

day, I took a friend to translate. The doctor at the university referred me to a special clinic where we went right after. Here, at the clinic, the doctors and assistants didn't speak English either. Luckily, my friend was there to translate. The doctor performed an ultrasound on my knee. He told me that it had been so filled with blood that he was not able to see if something had been severely injured. It was at this moment that I started to realize that I was away from home and the German health care system. I looked at the doctor as he was speaking but I did not understand anything. I asked my friend to please translate the question: would I ever be able to walk normally again. The response from the doctor was, "we would never know." All of my emotions came over me and I started crying. South Koreans are known for not showing affection in public. In our dormitory there was a sign which said, "no PDA", meaning- no public display of physical affection. Therefore, I understood why the doctor was not emotionally reachable at all when he said what he said, but I was still shocked. So, I stayed for one week in the hospital to naturally drain the blood of my knee.

Now, I will tell you what it means to stay in a Korean hospital: 3 times a day getting rice, seaweed and kimchi (traditional meal consisting of fermented napa cabbage) served, and changing different meals like fish, crab or again- fish. The meals were served at 7:00, 11:30 and 17:20 which left me hungry at 21:00. And, there were only dried seaweed snacks. Most of my expenses were covered by my insurance I booked here in Germany, although not everything. Therefore, I suggest that you purchase the best insurance you can afford—don't save money on insurance- because I, like everyone else, did not think that I would need to stay in a hospital in South Korea!

V. Conclusion

I am very happy and thankful to have had the possibility to study abroad. I would recommend everyone an exchange Semester. You have the major possibility to widen your horizon on culture, see and learn how others are studying. I have learned so much from all the people around me, which makes it very hard to shorten my experience to just these 5 pages. I have met people from all around the world and made friends. These friendships will last a lifetime because this exchange semester was incredibly bonding. We will always have something to laugh or reminiscence about. Different countries have indeed different rules which I saw clearly in South Korea. That of course forces people to act and behave differently. This brings me back to why I wanted to go abroad— to understand why. You can read so much about culture and people, but if you experience it yourself first-hand you can relate, act and behave correspondently, because you understand why.

An Exchange Semester is one of the best things in life you can do for yourself and your career. Take the chance HHN gives you for one of their partner Universities and live a half year in a completely different country, you might not understand the language- but hey! I stayed one week in a hospital in South Korea, where no one spoke English. So, you will be able to stay on a university campus and

LIVE THE BEST TIME OF YOUR LIFE!!