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Ajou University Exchange

Photo essay



Marek Podlaha
CTU in Prague
Czech Republic
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1. Introduction

When I was planning where I would do my exchange I definitely wanted to go to Asia. It has always fascinated me but I never had the opportunity to visit it. This then seemed like the best solution to get to know the culture. I chose Korea because they say it is the gate to Asia, mixing both Western and Asian cultures. I sure made a good choice and got to know many interesting aspects of it and many interesting people as well. I wish I could stay here for at least a month more because one semester flies by too fast when you're having fun.



2. First Expressions

Since I have already done an exchange and lived thousands of miles away from my family for ten months I wasn't nervous to come here. I don't have problems meeting people or living in unknown places. It took me a very short time to adapt but there was quite a lot to adapt to. This was the first time I had to live with someone I don't know in the same room. It's sometimes challenging to agree upon something when there are three other people in the room. But after a while I found certain affection towards my roommates and therefore I consider myself lucky to be in this room.

One thing that was shocking at the beginning was the overall availability of certain goods common in rest of the World. I came here with almost nothing in my bag to save the weight and thought I would buy it once I get here. The problem was I wasn't able to find some of it. The biggest issue all exchange students have to face is the availability of deodorants. Unlike in Europe, where deodorants are sold on every corner, it is almost impossible to get your hands on one here. And if you end up finding it, it's very expensive.

The other shock about Korea was the price of goods in grocery stores. Even though Korea is very cheap in restaurants, compared with many countries in Europe, regular stores are very expensive; especially when it comes to fruit. Korean cuisine also lacks protein which would be very hard for me to get by. Since this was only for four months I managed just fine.

3. Korea for Foreigners

I was a little disappointed with the friendliness of Korea toward tourist and foreigners who don't the language. It was not about the people but of the English information offered and the overall level of English. Without the AGA I would not be able to do many things I did while I was here. Even finding directions with public transport is almost impossible. I managed to teach myself to read Korean but even with this skill I would spend hours reading the schedules before finding the right bus.

Even in tourist locations it is almost impossible to order in a restaurant. There are almost never English menus so I would often rely on my poor reading skills not knowing what the dish is anyway. The biggest disappointment in this aspect was Busan. It is a tourist city with three times the population of Prague and even there almost no one spoke English. If I lived here I would learn the language but four months is just not nearly enough so I needed to rely on my English skills but they weren't almost of any use. On the other hand, I had a lot of fun and excitement ordering something I don't know waiting what they will bring.



4. School

School here is very different than in the Czech Republic. Here the only type of a class is a lecture. Back home we also have practical sessions where teachers talk only about the practical use of theory and explain lot of the problems to the smallest detail. I think many Korean students would benefit from this practice. In my Structural Analysis class the average of quizzes is around 20 which will be fixed by the grading curve but at CTU the teachers would not be afraid to fail most of the class. Therefore, I believe that my classmates back in Prague have a lot deeper knowledge than Korean students.

5. People

During the time I had to spend here I've met quite a large number of Koreans and I think I got a very close idea on their behavior. They are all very friendly and nice, often trying to help when in trouble. I haven't met a single mean Korean here. On the other hand they are very shy when it comes to talking. They would often blush when trying to speak English.

They are also very indecisive. I had couple of group presentations with Koreans and it would take ages before they would make a final decision on something. It was very frustrating because I am used to working fast and managing my time as much as possible. Not so much Koreans. They spend hours working on fancy presentations with a lot of animations and colors with no reasonable outcome or they go study to the library during the exam period overnight and end up sleeping there.



6. Fun

Korea is a great place for entertainment. There are so many options and people are very outgoing and make it a great fun. One of my best nights in Korea was when we went to a karaoke bar where we stayed till six in the morning singing. As the night was advancing people would start falling asleep not minding the others still singing. I think I will not forget that night.

7. Summary

I had an amazing time here, met many interesting people from so many corners of the World, tried so many new dishes and made a lot of friends. I am very grateful for the opportunity given to me and I consider myself blessed to experience such a thing.