Adventures Through Asia

Gamcheon Village, Busan

Summer 2016

Dustin Borromeo, Fish Scholar 2015-2017
Not all those who wander are lost and I had the amazing opportunity to wander through Asia during the Summer of 2016. It was an amazing two-month journey of self-discovery and global awareness. My travels through Asia was only possible thanks to the generous support of the Oscar and Rosetta Fish Scholarship for Excellence. I have always dreamed of studying abroad and expanding my worldviews as well as build international bonds with new friends and this scholarship helped me realize that dream. Without the generosity of this travel stipend I do not think I would have sought out opportunities to go abroad and expand my horizons. I am truly grateful of the doors this scholarship has opened for me and for allowing me to experience international exchange even if for just the summer. I needed to take certain classes at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa before graduation that helped prepare me for the Certified Financial Planner track so studying abroad during the actual semester was not possible for me. Thankfully there was an opportunity to take accelerated courses abroad during the only free summer I had left before graduation and I jumped at that opportunity. Where better to take summer school classes than in a foreign country?

**International Exchange**

I did my summer exchange program with the Mānoa International Exchange (MIX) office and had worked with that office to make sure that could make the most out of me studying and learning in a foreign country; in this case it was South Korea. When I travel I feel that half the fun is in planning for it and to get excited about the endless possibilities that await me. What I learned about myself from just planning out my summer abroad was that I really make my journeys through countries focused on historical sights and areas. The world is so large and what international exchange has thought me is that while
all of our pasts and histories may be separate, all of our futures are converging. My place in this world now is to understand all that has happened in the past and learn from them to help make progress towards our future. I know now the importance of international exchanges as it helps foster global awareness and understanding.

Korea University had the most compatible classes that were offered during the summer session so it became my first choice in my MIX application, followed by Yonsei University and Seoul National. These are the SKY schools of Korea and they are all located in Seoul, South Korea. The SKY schools are the South Korean equivalent to the United States Ivy League schools. If you want to work in South Korea and want to have a competitive edge, then it would be in your best interest to graduate from one of these three schools. While there are many universities and institutions in and around Seoul, these three schools are held to a higher prestige. Some of the many classes offered by Korea University were on business and economics. Since I am pursuing a dual degree in Finance and Economics, these are the classes I was looking for in the international summer programs. Ultimately I decided to address some of my Economics degree requirements and to take those courses abroad. What I appreciated about Korea University's website for the International Summer Campus was how user friendly and intuitive it was. It also helped that they had posted all the courses they had planned to offer. They also made sure to post all the necessary documents like faculty bios and the all-important syllabi. Having all of this readily available helped me immensely when I went to my adviser in the College of Social Sciences to check for course equivalencies and to make sure that credits for the classes I had wished to take were going to transfer back to UH Mānoa. With all the necessary information I was able to provide, the department head of Economics approved my classes and assured me that the classes I planned to take would indeed transfer back and be applied to my degree requirements. I think its important to remember the complexities of international exchange and that the foremost important reason in study abroad is to take classes needed to get you closer towards your degree. Having regular advising sessions (with both the College of Business and Social Sciences) also helped in making sure I was doing the right things. Support like that from my university helped remove any last worries I had about studying abroad.
Tokyo

My adventure through Asia began in the mega city known as Tokyo. Coincidentally I found myself on the same Korean Air flight from Honolulu as the Shidler PAMI Field Study students and professors. One of those students was fellow Fish Scholar Kirk. Their first stop as was also Tokyo before they went off to the handful of cities to visit in their two-week itinerary. Our flight arrived around the early afternoon so there was really no traffic at immigration and customs. Since I was staying at an AirBnB at Shinjuku, filling out the disembarkation form was a little confusing. Be sure to save all the information you have about your lodging and have them printed so that you can just have all that ready when you disembark. You will need to provide the address to where you will be staying that night. I was slightly confused since I was staying at multiple AirBnBs in Japan but after asking one of the many helpful immigration officials I was told that giving the address to where I was staying that night would suffice for the disembarkation form.

What made my trip to Tokyo extra special was that fact that all five of Fish Scholars from the 2015-2017 Cohort (myself included) just so happen be in Japan at the same time. Kirk and I were on the same flight, fellow scholars Alexis and Nikki were studying there in Tokyo, and our last fellow scholar Mia flew in hours after Kirk and I did. Kirk was with PAMI, I was going to Seoul to study, and Mia was also going to Beijing to study. It was incredible how our itineraries had aligned and allowed us to be able to meet up for dinner at a restaurant near the Shibuya station to catch up and have a spontaneous photoshoot at the Shibuya Crosswalk. The experience was surreal for me; to be able to see and meet up with friends for a casual dinner in a totally different country. Seeing some of my closest friends in Tokyo was a great start to my adventures in Asia.
**Hiroshima**

After a couple days in Tokyo I caught a train to go visit the historical city of Hiroshima. I visited the Shukukein Gardens and Hiroshima Castle and everywhere I looked there were historical markers relating to the atomic bomb drop. Making my way towards the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and walking towards the peace park, one of the first landmarks that I saw was the A-Dome Memorial. It was the shell of a building that miraculously survived the atomic bomb blast. I made my way to the rest of the park, seeing the children’s peace monument with its thousands of cranes, the eternal flame of peace, and the cenotaph for the A-bomb victims. I visited the Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims and in the center of the building was the Hall of Remembrance, a large rotunda with its walls depicting a panorama of the city as seen from the epicenter of the bomb. It was made up of 140,000 tiles; one for every person who died by the end of 1945. A fountain in the middle of the hall shows the time 8:15; when the bomb dropped, and the water is meant to be offered to the souls as they died asking for water. Visiting the park was a very somber experience and I was glad to have been able to pay my respects to the victims of the bomb.

**Miyajima**

The next day I took a day trip to Miyajima. The great floating Torii of Itsukushima Shrine is one of Japan’s three most scenic sights. With the JR Pass, the ferry from Miyajimaguchi to Miyajima is free! Take advantage of this opportunity if you are visiting Hiroshima. The various shrines on the island were all so very beautiful. I hung out with deer, took a brief hike (since the cable cars were broken), ate specialty oysters, and sat on a boulder near a waterfall while exploring the island. Soon the tides were low enough so I walked to the massive torii and ended my day trip to Miyajima with a selfie.
After a few days in Hiroshima, I returned to Tokyo for one last night before having to fly out of Japan for South Korea. The capital of South Korea was where I would be calling home for six weeks. It was the main purpose I was in Asia in the first place; to study abroad at Korea University taking some courses in economics. KU offers free shuttle bus rides from Incheon International Airport to the dorms every hour but because my flight was slightly delayed and bagging claim took longer than expected, I missed my original shuttle. I like to think that me missing that shuttle was probably the best thing that happened to me. After wandering around Incheon I found the gate where the shuttle would get us and met some exchange students who would become my very good friends by the end of the International Summer Campus program. I met Ellen from Washington D.C. and Peter from Sydney. After finally getting on the shuttle and dropping off our things at our dorms we had dinner at a Korean chicken place where we understood nothing and just pointed to menu items. That was our first meal in Korea. The next day we explored Hongdae and later met Peter’s roommate Hims from Hong Kong and Bronwyn who was also from Sydney. That night we had Korean BBQ and went to catch the fountain light show at the Banpo Bridge as we asked a random Korean couple to take our photo.

The next day was Orientation for the ISC so we met for breakfast where we met up with Beckey from Sydney. Orientation took a large portion of the day with a break for lunch. The latter half of orientation consisted of KU home students teaching the exchange students cheers about KU’s rivalry against Yonsei University and it ended with a tour of the entire campus. We opted out of getting beer and chicken with the rest of the students and instead we went to Gwangjang Market for dinner to experience eating live octopus and other more unusual Korean dishes.
For the next couple of weeks, we went through the cycle of classes during the day, exploring on our own in the afternoon and meeting up for dinner together somewhere new in the city. During the weekends we would try to go on bigger adventures. One weekend we went with Helen, a Korean to visit the Gyeongbokgung Palace. To get into the feel of the era where these palaces were used and occupied we decided to rent out hanbok and dress up. This also allowed us access into the palace without paying the admission fee so if you ever find yourself in Seoul, rent out a hanbok. It was a little strange walking from the rental place to the palace entrance but along the way you’ll see so many tourists and locals wearing the Joseon era clothing. However, this was during the summer and we visited the palace on a sunny day so we were sweating under the hanbok. I would double check to see what the temperature highs and lows are for the day so that you don’t accidently get heat stroke. The palace compound had so many buildings, courtyards, and parts to it. We saw and took the opportunity to take a “Vanity Fair” style posed photo on the steps of the entrance to one of the smaller halls. We ended our day with dinner fit for Joseon royalty at Insadong.

The summer program made our schedules so that our classes would only be from Monday to Thursday leaving our Friday’s free. What was awesome though was that Korea University had planned these field trips that students could go on for free. The first week was to a holographic K-Pop concert as well as learning some dance moves. Another week it was a temple stay. One of the day trips that I went on was to Lotte World, an amusement park near the city limits of Seoul. The admission to the park was paid for by KU and the first 500 students could redeem these tickets if they wore their KU shirts or showed their student IDs. The university took really great care of us exchange students by providing so many opportunities to be immersed in the culture. There was even Korean cooking, tae kwon do, and classical instrument classes that were offered to us and it was all for free. During finals week KU provided one last free excursion for us. They offered tickets to a baseball game for the first so many students. My friend Beckey and I wanted to experience a Korean Baseball game since I’ve heard that it would get so spirited so we decided to take advantage of this opportunity. They blocked off a section of the seats at the Doosan Stadium at Jamsil Sports complex so that we could see the Doosan Bears compete against another team. Unfortunately, we were seated behind the other team since the Doosan team’s seats were packed with faithful fans. Nevertheless, it was quite the experience since it was my first time even attending a baseball game. Even in the states I had not watched any professional
games. The fans were so passionate as they rooted for their own teams. Cheers and chants were traded between both sides and songs were sung. I’d go as far as to say that Korean baseball fans are so much more invested in the game than we Americans are. I got to see it all thanks to KU.

De-militarized Zone (DMZ)

One weekend, I went with Bronwyn to go see the DMZ and join a local tour. We had to hop on a train that took us an hour north of Seoul to Pagu, the city nearest the border. We joined a local tour that took us to the Dorasan Peace Park where you could clearly hear the propaganda from North Korea that was being blasted over the speakers. The next stop was the Dorasan Observatory and we were assigned our own guide as we were the only English speaking tourists. We were able to look into the North and see an aerial view of a ghost town in the DMZ. We also found out that our soldier tour guide at the observatory was an alumni of KU who majored in International Business. The last stop on the DMZ tour was the Third Infiltration Tunnel. No pictures were allowed in the tunnel and we had to leave all our devices in lockers. The tunnel was cold and damp compared to the humidity we experienced outside. At times the tunnel ceiling got really low so we had to be hunched over while trying to get to the end of the tunnel. The end of the tunnel was still about 250 meters away from the border of the DMZ but a wall with a window was preventing us from reaching the border and going under North Korea. Unfortunately, we were not able to go to the Joint Security Area due to military exercises. That would have been such an experience being able to be so close to the North. The trip to the DMZ via Pagu and Dorasan Station was nevertheless really intense. As we were returning to Seoul, we saw so many signs with the hope that Dorasan Station would not be the last station in the South but rather the first station to the North. They also displayed a piece of the Berlin wall with a timer counting the seconds that show just how long the two Koreas had been divided. The hope of a united Korea lives on.

Jeju Island

Jeju is marketed as being the “Hawaii of South Korea”. Its climate is pretty similar to Hawaii Island and the slower pace of life is so very different from Seoul. The island is also a UNESCO World Heritage site as it has so many natural wonders. I definitely wanted to visit the
island while I was in South Korea so I planned a short weekend trip to Jeju during the KU ISC. Wanting to make the most of my weekend, I packed my duffle bag and backpack and brought them with me to my last class on Thursday. Right when the class ended I hopped on the metro and made my way to Gimpo Airport to catch my flight out of Seoul. The flight to Jeju was roughly 30 minutes so it was really quick. I would suggest flying with Jeju Air as it was one of the cheapest options fares to the island. A round trip fare costs much less than an inter-island trip here in Hawaii. Jeju Air is technically a budget airline but my flight did not feel like a budget seat at all with so much leg room. I also rented a car for the entirety of my trip as I learned from a past Fish Scholar that public transportation takes pretty long on the island. Jeju is also very large and the places I wanted to visit were hours away even with driving. My AirBnB was about an hour away from the airport but was in such a nice and quiet seaside neighborhood that the drive was worth it. I had an amazing views of the sunset from my balcony every day. After being in such a large metropolitan city like Seoul for a couple of weeks, my trip to Jeju was a nice escape to nature where I can slow down and enjoy the peace and quiet of the island.

When in Jeju, you do lots of hikes. Many locals here like to do many hikes and there are many walking trails to choose from since there are so many volcanic features and sights on the island. One of the hikes I did was to one of the viewing platforms on Mount Hallasan (the highest point on the island and South Korea). The hike took about an hour going up and a little less coming down but the view on the top was really nice so I spent quite a bit at the peak just enjoying the sun and breeze. The formation of the island left it with so many craters, lava tubes, and many other geological formations. I did my best to visit many of them and also made a stop at the Jeju World Natural Heritage Center. On my last day on the island before I had to catch my flight back to Seoul, I woke up hours before dawn, packed my bags, checked out of my AirBnB and drove to the Seongsan Ilchulbong tuff cone to hike it up to the top and see the sun rise. Surprisingly there weren’t that many people doing the morning hike with me since Seongsan Ilchulbong peak is a famous natural attraction where one can view amazing sun rises. As I was watching the sun rise at the top, there were only 5 other people with me. Jeju was an amazing place that championed eco-tourism so I thought it was appropriate that I started my stay on the island enjoying the sunset and ended my trip enjoying an equally beautiful sunrise.
Busan

Of all the side excursions that I had taken, this trip to Busan was the only one done on a last minute whim. As my time in Seoul and South Korea was winding down I really wanted to have another city visited under my belt. Unlike my trip to Jeju island, I didn’t really plan on going to the port city of Busan. Busan was more spontaneous and was decided on between me and my friend Peter since the rest of our friends were unable to come with us. This weekend trip was the weekend before our last week of the program so really it was one of the last opportunities for us to take a trip outside of Seoul. We just decided one night to go to Busan and right then and there we booked our hotel and got Korail Passes.

Similar to the Shinkansen, South Korea had a high speed train system called the KTX. On Friday morning, Peter and I met up in front of the dorms and made our way to Seoul station. There we were able to obtain our Korail Youth Passes that would allow us to ride the KTX unlimited times for three days, very much like the JR Pass. If you plan to take a trip to Busan from Seoul, take the KTX. However, to make it even more affordable, get the Korail Pass as so that you can make stops to different cities along the way. It makes it much cheaper to travel to Busan instead of buying the train fare outright. On top of that, because Peter and I were both under the age of 25, we were eligible for the Youth Pass at a discounted price. We made our way to Busan and back for about $80 USD each with the Youth Pass. I definitely recommend this as it allowed us to stop at and visit the city of Daejeon on the Train to Busan.

Busan was hot and humid. Arriving at Busan station in the afternoon and making our way to our hotel felt like we did a marathon in an oven. This southern port city is the second largest city in South Korea so the subway was still very packed and but not too bad as Seoul. After checking into our hotel and with some daylight left we went to go see the Busan Tower and explored the area around it. The sun was just about to set when we were at the observatory level so we got to see the lights of Busan light up as the sun was dimming. The next day was a packed one as we went on a Hop-on, Hop-off tour of the city, visiting the UN Memorial Cemetery in Korea, the Oryukdo Islands, crossed many of the famous bridges, stopped at beach attractions and stopped at Gwangbok-ro so that we would go to the Busan Gamcheon Culture Village. This village had so many murals, colorful houses, statues, and many works of art. It was easy getting lost going through the alleys, streets, and lanes that we left the village when it was dark. We went back to Gwangalli Beach to watch the light show on the Diamond Bridge and enjoy some pizza. That was our last night in Busan as we got back to Seoul in the early afternoon the next day.
It was a sad thought that the next time I would be leaving Seoul, the 2016 Korea University International Summer Campus would be over and I would be leaving for another country. In the course of six weeks I made many new friends that I will remember forever, visited so many places in South Korea, tasted many new foods, experienced many different things, and created many memories. For six weeks Seoul was my home; my base from which I traveled from and back to every weekend. For six weeks it was where my friends and I would eat all the Korean Bar-B-Que, sing in all the noraeangs (Karaoke rooms), and explore. For six weeks Seoul was our playground. I have no doubt that had my flight to Incheon landed on time and allowed me to catch the earlier shuttle to KU, my six weeks would have been much different. I would not have been able to meet my awesome group of friends. They were what made my six weeks in South Korea the amazing adventure that it turned out to be.

**Singapore**

As my studying concluded in Seoul, I made plans with several other friends to meet up in Singapore. A good friend of mine, Tiga, actually lives in Singapore yet attends UH Mānoa and is in the same business club as me; the Business Executive Society of Tomorrow (BEST). The other friends that made up our Singapore group were also friends from Hawaii who were part of BEST. Fish Scholar Alumni Jessica was there too and I was excited to be gushing over my Korea University experience with her as she studied abroad at Yonsei University. We also meet up with another friend of ours from UH Mānoa who was studying at the National University of Singapore for Fall 2016. Because we were all in BEST, we became known as the Singapore Squad to our friends back home.

Singapore was a small shock to me from the Seoul since their prices were comparable to Honolulu. Coming from Seoul where food and soju was so cheap, this is felt like I was back home to expensive Hawaii. The country itself was beautiful though with its many forest reserves, laws against littering and gum chewing, and its overall cleanliness. I got to spend my first day in Singapore by myself so I got a transportation card and explored Orchard Road. I went to the Ion tower which has a free observatory deck where you can see downtown Singapore from the sky. I was able to see for miles and spotted landmarks like the Marina Bay Sands, the Eye of Singapore, the Gardens by the Bay, and the National Stadium. The Singapore Squad visited some of these landmarks as well as went to Little India, Chinatown, Clarke Quay, Vivocity, and Sentosa Resort.
Island where I went into a Casino for the first time. We were even able to meet up with yet another friend to celebrate her birthday on Orchard Road with some soup dumplings and Korean dessert shaved ice. We spent a few days in Singapore exploring, eating, and shopping together until we were off on to another country; Malaysia!

**Malaysia**

**Kuala Lumpur**

Although Malaysia and Singapore are neighbors and share a border together there are large notable differences between them. Even Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia is still quite different from the city-state that is Singapore. I suppose some of the differences I saw was how different the lifestyles were in the two capital cities. You can see the disparity between the two economies as Singapore has recently achieved high industrialization. We had many adventures in KL and visited places like the Batu Caves, Merdeka Square, and Jalan Alor. After a few days at KL, the Singapore Squad returned to Singapore and I started my journey home.

**Journey's End**

Traveling through Asia two months has changed the way I see myself and my role in this world. As small as we see ourselves, we are one part of this world we live in and thus can still make a difference. I’ve realized the importance of global understanding and awareness of other cultures and traditions. During my travels I have come to appreciate the different cultures and people that I saw, met, and interacted with. At the pace globalization is moving, it will become crucial for those in business, or anyone really, to be mindful of other countries. It is becoming clear that while all of our pasts may have been different, we are moving towards a collective future that we all have a hand in forming. I will forever remember the bonds I have built with friends from Korea University as well as the bonds strengthened with friends from back home. It was an immense privilege and honor to have studied at one of the top universities in Korea even if it was for only a brief time. And I would not have been able to go through such personal growth and realization without the generosity of the Oscar and Rosetta Scholarship. My adventures through Asia have ended for now but the journey doesn’t end for me in trying to achieve International Excellence.