



Pacific Asian Management Institute:

Asian Field Study - Summer 2016

Kirk Wei, BBA

Oscar and Rosetta Fish Scholar

During the summer of 2016, I had the once in a lifetime opportunity to take the PAMI (Pacific Asian Management Institute) Asian Field Study (AFS) course. While many may ask what is so special about a summer course, I can truly say that this experience was by far the best experience in my collegiate career. Nothing will give you a more global and adventurous academic experience than the AFS at the Shidler College of Business. I had the opportunity to go to Japan, Hong Kong, China, and Vietnam for two and a half weeks. This may seem short, but once you experience those two and a half weeks for yourself, you'll come back filled with a wealth of knowledge and memories. While the food and travel were great, the people you meet, the relationships you build, and the memories you make will be what make this course, this trip one for the books.

Before the AFS course (registered as BUS 477) started, I was not sure what to really expect and how to prepare but our instructors, Professor Jack Suyderhoud, Professor Ben Bystrom, and Grant Kim, were extremely informative and detailed about what our reading materials would be and what we needed to get done by the time class started, which happened to be the week right after spring finals. While I was very stressed and hesitant at my capabilities to be proactive and contributive in a graduate MBA course, I took a leap of faith that as long as I put in my heart and soul into my reading and work, then I will be able to add value to the class. Surprisingly, after my first day of class, I already felt quite comfortable with the MBA students. They would joke around and have fun, which was more than what I was expecting. My impression of an MBA course completely shifted from an extremely serious classroom to a friendly and welcoming environment with highly intellectual conversations and discussions. I was very fortunate I was grouped with my cohort of Full-Time MBAs, Part-Time MBAs, and Executive MBAs. They were all willing to listen to the 4 undergrads in class and gave us very positive feedback on our performance.

As the weeks went on, the reading materials, the guest speakers, and the in-depth discussions we would have in class slowly prepared me with the knowledge I needed to understand the economic development of the different countries in Asia, and who within each country was a prime innovator and entrepreneur who revolutionized the country's productivity and economic growth. We had to group together and create presentations of each country we were visiting: Japan, Hong Kong, China, and Vietnam. Working with my group on China and creating the presentation with them was really fun because I got to hear each of their perspectives and learn from them on how to think like an MBA level student. I always pushed myself to keep up to date with my materials and made sure that when I came to our group meetings, I was able to contribute a significant portion from my section.

With their help and guidance, we were able to create an amazing presentation and I was extremely proud of my team and how we presented.

When June started to roll by, our trip for Asia started! I remember feeling nervous that morning, carrying my luggage, and wearing my backpack as my friend Shiraz and I went inside the airport. But then slowly I started to see all my MBA friends show up one and after another, and the excitement inside of me started to grow. "This was going to be a trip to remember" was what was running inside my mind. Something told me that after this trip, all the people in AFS wouldn't be just classmates anymore, but it would become more than that.



Japan:

We arrived on a gorgeous night in Japan. We were able to go straight to our hotel, which was one of the most beautiful hotels I have ever seen, and settle in. I was luckily roomed with Trevor Oishi, who was the best roommate I could have ever asked for. Extremely kind hearted and understanding, he always tried to help me out when he could. He also gave me some valuable advice on life when it came to my senior year and finding a career after graduation.

Right after we dropped off our belongings in the hotel, we set out to explore a bit of the nightlife in Japan to end our first night abroad. I went to the famous Shibuya Crossing. It was just as amazing as the scenes from the movies. The second the light

was green and everyone walked, it felt as if a conductor orchestrated all the movements to perfectly flow.



The first day we were there, Grant and Ben showed us around Tokyo and took us to some great parks for pictures and tea making. Making traditional Japanese matcha tea with the traditional tools they provided was really fun. We got to drink the tea we made and try some Japanese desserts, which paired nicely with the tea.



Ben and Grant also had the opportunity to take us to try some delicious sushi. While the sushi restaurant we went to reminded me of Genki Sushi from home, the quality was definitely superior! I loved eating salmon and maguro (tuna) the most because it was freshly caught and cut perfectly so it literally melts in your mouth.

The next few days we got to go to visit companies such as the Nissan, Dentsu, Merck MSD, Fortress Investment, and Frontage. We had to dress in business formal going to these sight visits to business organizations; and it was extremely hot and humid during the day. I remembered clearly having to also rush to run into the different trains. There were times when it was so crowded that we couldn't squeeze in. I had to sometimes force myself in because you never want to be the one everyone had to wait for at the next train station since our schedule was very tight.

Some of things I remembered that stood out to me was the Nissan car manufacturing plant because I got to see its operations from creating the car parts and eventually putting together those parts to build an actual car. It was truly a sight to see. I also loved the Dentsu building's architecture. While we did not get to and meet any executives that work at Dentsu, we did get the opportunity to go inside and check out the amazing interior design and learn a little history of how and when the building was made.



One of my biggest highlights while in Japan was getting to meet up with my fellow Fish Scholars during our down time at night. We were all luckily in Japan at the right place and right time. It was quite hilarious because as much as we did not plan for us to all meet up, we were really happy we did and I think it was great to see

that they were all doing well and getting the international exposure our business is truly known for.

Hong Kong:



The next stop was Hong Kong! It was quite interesting going from Japan to South Korea to then transfer to our next flight because we got to explore Seoul's airport a little bit. I got to try some Korean snacks and finger food because our flight kept getting delayed. When we finally arrived to Hong Kong, the majority of us were so exhausted that we wanted to grab some quick food and go to sleep.

As always, the hotel we stayed at was really amazing and the room we got was so pretty. Afterwards, we met up with Wen Lau's aunt who took us out for dim sum. The dim sum was pretty good and there were really interesting designs on some of them. Since we had such a huge party, we had to order a few of the same items for the people who were sitting on the ends of the table. What was funny was that we eventually ordered too much, but we were told that we had to finish all the food

because it was a sign of respect to host. To not be disrespectful, we all tried to stuff as much as we can in our full stomach. We definitely needed to walk off the belly of food we had.



The next few days of sight seeing was really fun! We got the opportunity to check out the Hong Kong Science and Technology Park, which was a huge government funded entrepreneurship incubation campus that is trying to encourage individuals to innovate the next big product or service.

There were a lot of beautiful interior designs and the campus was full of canteens with delicious food. We had the opportunity to check out the different incubator rooms that entrepreneurs worked in. Each sight we visited, we were encouraged to ask good questions and try to pick the brain of our host. Interestingly enough, I wanted to know what was their goal. The goal of the incubation campus was to stimulate the growth of entrepreneurs and also hopefully make Hong Kong the Silicon Valley of Asia.



We also got to explore some of the beautiful sightseeing spots in Hong Kong, such as Victoria Peak. It was really beautiful to see Hong Kong from such a beautiful peak! We were lucky the weather was perfect for the views from the peak because we got to see the different Hong Kong islands and the beautiful architecture in town. The other companies we went to were: The Wave, Invotech, US Consulate General Economics Section, and Oriental Patron Investments.

One of the professionals we met that really made a lasting impression was Alvin Fan. He was the CEO of Oriental Patron Investments, which was a financial asset management and investment company in Hong Kong. He was an extremely intelligent guy who really challenged our group to some interesting and thought-provoking questions. Usually these sights we visited were more informative for us and we would listen, ask our questions, get a response, and move on to the next question. But with Alvin it was different because he asked us questions, some of which were really hard to answer. We were all surprised by that fact, but this made us so much more engaged as the audience.

During downtime, I was able to go try the food I wanted in Hong Kong: dim sum at Tim Ho Wan, bao sandwiches from Little Bao, and clay pot rice. I took my friends Akira and Mano, both were MBA students, to these places that I wanted to explore and they loved it as well! It was great to see that I got to help immerse my friends into the Hong Kong food scene and create great memories with them.

China:

With our next stop being China, it was really interesting to see how the process going from Hong Kong to China was like and whether the system in place was difficult or easy for people to go in and out of China. When we got to the immigration point, it was actually quite straight forward with our visa forms and passport. When we crossed over, it felt different even though right behind the walls was Hong Kong. From there we went straight to Shenzhen and I found out that I was going to become the translator that day! It was definitely a surprise but also an honor to utilize my Mandarin to help the AFS team out. I had to brush up on my Mandarin a bit since I haven't spoken it in a while.

Going to the different venture capital, incubators, and startup companies in Shenzhen was really interesting because it allowed us to compare what we saw in Hong Kong to China's efforts with innovation and entrepreneurship. Talking to many of the hosts in Mandarin and translating for the team was a great experience and it showed me that I still had a lot to learn when it comes to honing down my Mandarin. It made me want to train my Mandarin in the future so I can eventually successfully convey myself and conduct business in China. I am very grateful Prof. Bystrom gave me this opportunity and I hope I was able to keep the relationship between Shidler and our connections in Shenzhen strong. By the end of the day, I was so tired that I instantly fell asleep on the bus heading to our hotel in Guangzhou.



The next few days in Guangzhou, we got some opportunities to explore the amazing sightseeing spots as well as visit these companies: Esquel and different business in Shunde. One of the memorable experiences we had in China was when we got to the culinary school at one of the best universities in Guangzhou. We got the chance to dress up with some aprons and chef hats while the culinary students and teachers there taught us how to cook some of their famous regional cuisines. They would then allow us to try and cook some of the food and taste test the food we made. It was such a fun opportunity and I really am thankful for the hospitality they provided for us.



Later on that day, the American Chamber of Commerce Shunde took us to an amazing restaurant where they fed us this huge plate of food that was almost the size of the whole table! I have never seen so much food or such a huge plate before. It was definitely a feast to remember! It was filled with all sorts of delicious and expensive seafood, meat, and vegetables. I was definitely full by the end of the meal. I also got an opportunity to sit next to business professionals who had their own startup or companies. It was really interesting to learn about their perspective of the education system and business environment in China and how it was compared to the U.S.



Along with the gorgeous food, Professor Suyderhoud and Professor Bystrom were also given some great gifts from the executives at AmCham Shunde. Their hospitality was by far one of the best I have ever experienced in my life and I hope Shidler will continue to foster and grow this relationship further so future AFS students can experience this as well.

Vietnam:

Heading to our last destination in Hanoi, Vietnam, I was slowly realizing this journey we were on would soon end. While the past two weeks seemed to go by so quickly, I can't imagine how much we were able to do within those two weeks. When we finally landed in Hanoi and got to our hotel, we immediately dropped our belongings and went to grab some pho. The hotel we stayed at in Hanoi was by far the most beautiful one we got to stay at throughout the whole trip.



We visited Opec Plastics, a great plastic bag making company, and saw their operations in and out. To learn how much detail goes into the production of plastic bags and being able to successfully manufacture plastic bags globally is one of the main reasons why Vietnam is a fast growing economy and potentially for becoming the hub of cheap labor.



At the same time, we got the opportunity to attend one of the Shidler Vietnam MBA classes. The VMBA students all had outstanding backgrounds and excellent careers. When we had to introduce ourselves and give a little background about our professions. I learned that some of the VMBA students were already executives of a company or an owner of their own hospital, restaurant chain, or boba tea chain. It was really inspiring to see our business school being able to attract extremely talented individuals from Vietnam and be able to expand our network that much more in Asia with the VMBA's as the leaders for Vietnam's economic growth.

For a few nights, we got a chance to explore Hanoi's food scene and nightlife. It was super fun to try out different street foods for only \$1-\$3. My favorite is definitely the pho and the shrimp in Hanoi. It was just so fresh and cheap that I can't even believe how much I could buy with my USD currency. It really made me realize how much hard work the citizens in Vietnam have to work to make a month's worth of salary that is probably equal to most American's salary within a day. It gives you a very humbling feeling and encourages you to not take money for granted.

Halong Bay:



One of our detours in Vietnam was the chance to visit Halong Bay. I had such a mesmerizing time living on a ship and being able to wake up to this kind of a view. Every morning, I would go out to the front deck to check out the Halong Bay landscape and soak in everything. It was so breathe taking! We got to go on hikes, visit caves, and even row around the bay to explore smaller inner parts within the bay. The ship's crew was also very nice and would plan activities for us to do on the ship, such as making spring rolls from scratch. We even got a chance to have a celebratory dinner for Jack and Grant's retirement from AFS and Ben taking over the program.

Ending our two and a half week trip at Halong Bay was definitely the best. After all our hard work with the company visits and prepping for our own individual projects, we finally got the chance to relax and have some fun!

Reflection:

Nothing can ever truly explain and replace the priceless experiences and friendships I gained during the Asian Field Study trip. The AFS crew came into the trip as almost strangers to each other, and by the time we came home, we were family. We were able to experience what it meant to struggle and succeed together, and I will always place my experience in AFS as the top opportunity I had throughout my collegiate career.



Thank you so much Rikki Mitsunaga for always encouraging me to step out of my own comfort zone and challenge myself with opportunities, such as AFS. Mahalo to the Oscar and Rosetta Fish Scholarship because I wouldn't have been able to go on this adventure of a lifetime without the funding and support.

Thank you Jack, Grant, and Ben for being our instructors throughout the AFS course and trip. You all took care of us but never treated us as children and I appreciated that because I got to grow up so much more from being independent. I learned so much about Asia and the development it is going through, but importantly I learned to always surround myself with amazing people I truly respect and admire.