

**EXCHANGE REPORT:  
Sungkyunkwan University  
Seoul, South Korea  
Spring 2018**

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## Seoul, South Korea

Congratulations for choosing one of the best and most dynamic destinations for your exchange studies! Life is never boring in a metropolitan city with population of over nine million people. Seoul offers something unique to each and everyone. While the capital is known for its advancements in technology as well as cosmetics and K-pop music industry, it is also filled with diverse cultural edges such as never-ending number of temples, mountain trails, markets and various traditional food places worth trying.

Living in such a vibrant city and studying at one of the best universities of the country is a privilege that many Koreans can only dream of. You have therefore made a good choice!

As for those pondering their first or next exchange destination, below are listed main reasons on why you should spend a semester in Seoul.

- Dynamic city filled with beautiful places and never-ending activities
- You won't get bored, there's always something new to explore and experience
- Life isn't so expensive, you can easily find cheap food, beverages, clothes, cosmetics, etc.
- SKKU is one of the best universities in South Korea
- Korean letters are easy to learn
- Koreans are friendly and eager to help foreigners in any situation
- People are friendly and eager to meet new foreigners – you won't get lonely at any point
- Good opportunities to travel both inside and outside the country
- Korean culture is distinct yet very unique and should be experienced by everyone

## **Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) - Seoul Campus**

Sungkyunkwan University is one of the leading universities of South Korea that takes place in the ranking of country's top five universities. SKKU has two campus area, in Seoul and Suwon. We studied in Seoul campus which is located in close Hyehwa metro station. SKKU has a close partnership with Samsung and other government funding agencies which makes it a strongly research-oriented institution that invests heavily in R&D activities mostly founded by chaebol tech-giants like Hyundai for instance.

SKKU was established in 1398 and is the oldest existing university of South Korea. The university has a great reputation across the country and studying at SKKU is therefore considered as a privilege many Koreans cannot even afford due high semester fees and challenging entrance exam procedures. We were extremely grateful for the opportunity to study at this prestigious university for free and explore its culture from the daily perspective of Korean university students.

### **Orientation Day**

Our orientation day was on February 28th and all exchange students were divided into several different groups managed by Korean tutors, also known as "Korean buddies". Our Korean buddies contacted us via email a week in advance prior our arrival to Seoul and left his contact info, in case we need help with practical arrangements for the first weeks of my stay. We met on the orientation day and there were also other exchange students with whom we had the same Korean tutor. The event itself was quite short and covered mainly practical matters regarding course selection and enrolment, the location and opening hours of health centre and other important offices as well as the functionality of campus Wi-Fi and IT services. We also got a folder filled with different SKKU brochures and documents for course enrolment. In addition, few university's activity clubs were presented and explained more about services they offer to international students.

**HI-Club** refers to Korean buddies (tutors) and also is an activity club for business students, it basically is like a local “Enklaavi” guild club of SKKU. They also have their own guild rooms **in the Student** building locating in front of **the Business Hall**. In addition, they have different sports equipment you can borrow against small payment of 10,000 won which you get back once you return the item. For example, we borrowed basketballs few times as there is a big basketball court located in the Seoul campus area. Also, there is a football field where many SKKU students play football and baseball. The latter is highly favoured by Koreans and exchange students can join the team as well. HI-Club organizes a welcoming party for exchange students. The club has its own group chat on KakaoTalk app (*Korean WhatsApp*) where all information regarding upcoming events is shared with group members. Also, they have their own Facebook page which also provides students with relevant information.

**Maple club** is organized by Korean students interested in hanging out with exchange students. The club organizes activities and different field trips for exchange students. They are also always eager to help you with practical matters, especially those that require knowledge of Korean language.

### **International Office**

In Seoul campus, the office is located on the 1st floor of International building. International office helps exchange students with course selection, application for foreign registration card (“Alien card” is mandatory for those staying in country for over 90 days) and signing other exchange-related documents such as certificate of attendance and learning agreement. Also, in case you won’t pass a certain course, you can get a document as a proof of your attendance to that course despite the final grade.

### **Housing Office**

Housing office of Seoul Campus is located on the 1st floor of 600th Anniversary Hall. It should be open normally from Monday to Friday. You can contact the staff, in case of dorm-related issues.

## **Food**

There are several food places and cafeterias on campus area. In the Business Hall Building, there is a big canteen with a food court that serve Japanese, Korean and Chinese cuisine. Noodles and hamburgers can be bought there as well. The price range is usually between 2,500 and 4,500 won which is totally inexpensive. The canteen at Business Hall is open until 7 PM, so you can have a late lunch too. Also, you can have a lunch in other buildings; the 600th Hall and Law School building. Both price and food range are almost the same, expect lunch hours differ from previous options. Eating out in Korea is surprisingly cheap and convenient, you don't necessarily need to cook food at all. Hyehwa is full of different restaurants with cheap prices for breakfast, lunch or dinner, so you won't be lost when it comes to food options.

## **Other activity clubs**

In addition to guild club, SKKU has a lot of diverse activity clubs for university students. The range goes from music, arts, dance and sports to religion and games. The participation in the club activities is usually free, but some clubs may have a member/semester fee. In the beginning of semester, the university organizes an Activity Club fair where students can learn more information about the clubs and attendance related matters. If you are interested in a particular club, remember to sign up on time and ask for a further information. These activity clubs are located in the Student Building as well.

For example, Kristiina attended the Debating club few times which was something new, yet interesting and fun. Unfortunately, this year Taekwondo classes were arranged only for those students who are enrolled for an academic year of studies, so none of us could sign up. Juhana enrolled in the Taekkyeon club, which is a traditional martial art similar to Taekwondo. However, the club was more about hanging out than actually training, it was also not well organised. This led to quitting the club halfway into the semester.

## **Initial preparations**

### **Online Application**

The host university staff will contact via email you few months before you exchange semester. We did not have to fill in an online application. The SKKU exchange coordinator simply asked us to email him back necessary documents as a confirmation for exchange studies. The required documents included a copy of passport, document of a valid travel insurance, language certificate as well as certificate of attendance at LUT. Later the exchange coordinator will send you further information about available courses and other study relating matters at SKKU.

### **Insurance**

It is important to take care of travel and health insurance in a timely manner before your exchange. This is because the university will ask you to send the official document of your insurance as an attachment to your application. For instance, Prior our exchange Kristiina had a home insurance agreement with LähiTapiola and it was therefore natural to make a travel insurance agreement with the same company. Besides it was relatively cheaper option in comparison with those offered by other insurance companies. Since the total time of our exchange exceeded three months, Kristiina had to sign a separate travel insurance that would cover unexpected health and injury expenses during the rest of the stay in Seoul. Hence, an extra fee for the extension of travel insurance agreement was required.

### **Language certificate**

This document proves your ability to speak and understand English which is a general formality in Korea. If you haven't taken any official language test, you can get a language certificate from LUT international office. Kristiina didn't have to get one, since she has an IELTS English language certificate which was used within the online application. Juhana contacted the language centre of LUT and got the needed language certification from the university.

## **Copy of passport**

You should always have few copies of your passport in case of emergency, especially if you are planning to travel both inside and outside the country during your exchange. The copy of passport will be used as an attachment for Alien Registration Card. Other additional documents you will have to submit are certificate of enrolment, academic transcript of records and participation agreement.

## **Vaccines**

Taking vaccines is not necessary when traveling to South Korea. However, already before our exchange both of us had plans to travel around Asia, especially to exotic countries, which is why it was a good decision to take all vaccines required to be done in advance. The most common ones are *Flu vaccine*, *Typhoid vaccine*, *Japanese encephalitis* and *Hepatitis B vaccine*. Although it would have been cheaper to take some of these vaccines in South Korea, we decided to do it in Finland anyway due to own health security reasons and better hygienic environmental conditions.

## **Visa**

You need to apply for D-2 student visa (approx. 50€ **in cash**) from the South Korean embassy and this should be done as soon as you get an email confirmation from SKKU international coordinator. Usually the issuance process takes up to 2 weeks, but in our case, it took only 7 working days after which the passport was ready to be collected from the embassy. Please note that your passport needs to be valid even after your exchange period.

For a further information about visa document requirements, please check this website:

[http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/fi-en/brd/m\\_9574/view.do?seq=615327&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&amp;multi itm seq=0&itm seq 1=0&itm seq 2=0&company cd=&company nm=&page=1](http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/fi-en/brd/m_9574/view.do?seq=615327&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&amp;multi itm seq=0&itm seq 1=0&itm seq 2=0&company cd=&company nm=&page=1)

## **Flight Tickets**

I bought my ticket from Finnair four months in advance prior my departure. The direct flight ticket from Helsinki to Seoul costed me approx. 395€. Finnair offers discounted prices for those belonging to age category of 16-25 years old which was applicable to both of us. However, please note that the age policy applies both to the moment of purchasing the ticket and the actual travel date. Our return ticket was also bought via Finnair and we were able to use the same discount, except the price was higher.

## Housing

### SKKU dorms, Juhana's experience

#### General information:

SKKU offers the opportunity to apply for dormitory housing during your stay in South Korea. Applications are placed during mid-January and payments are issued within two weeks of the application deadline. The initial payment for the whole semester was 1700 USD, however during the semester exchange students received a refund approximately 100-300 USD depending on the dormitory location. The money will be returned only to a Korean bank account. Opening a local bank account is quite simple and it can be done at the bank office located at the SKKU campus. I chose not to open my own account since I was able to transfer the money to my friends already existing account.

At the Seoul campus exchange students are randomly placed into mainly I-, C and M-houses. All except the M-house are twin rooms which are shared with a roommate. You cannot select your roommate for the dormitory. Each room has a shared bathroom and shower with your own work desk. All of the dormitories have a shared kitchen with all of the residents in the bottom floor. I-house is located right outside the campus gates, M-house about 10 min walk away and the C-house which is located about 30 min walk away from the campus. More information about the dormitories can be found from here:

[https://dorm.skku.edu/en\\_skku\\_seoul/lifeguide/e\\_house\\_living.jsp](https://dorm.skku.edu/en_skku_seoul/lifeguide/e_house_living.jsp)

Living in the SKKU dormitories differs from student housing in Finland. The dormitories have a set of rules which include a penalty point system. If you collect too many penalty points, you will be removed from the dormitory. Most of the rules are however common sense and following them is no issue for Finnish students. The rules include the following: cleaning after yourself, behaving respectfully towards other residents, not smoking inside etc. The most problematic of the rules was the curfew. The dormitories have curfew for all Bachelor level students. This means that during 01:00-05:00 you cannot enter or leave the dormitory. The curfew is lifted during midterm and final

exams. **The curfew does not affect Master's level students and they can enter and leave the dormitory regardless of the curfew.** You are also not allowed to bring visitors to the dormitory and there is security present at all times to enforce these rules.

### **Living in the C-house**

I applied for the dormitory to avoid all the hassle of searching about other possible forms of housing. The dormitories are well equipped for basic living and you do not have to purchase anything extra during your stay. Initially I was a little bit uncomfortable about the fact that I will be sharing my room with another exchange student. I value my privacy, but thought that 4 months is all in all a short time. Sharing the room turned out to be fine as I got along well with my roommate. I also knew beforehand about the curfew, but since I was enrolled as a Master's level student the curfew did not affect me.

The 8-floored C-house is located in the middle shops and restaurants with a busy shopping street right outside of the dormitory. You will find small convenience stores almost every 200 meters for some snacks and drinks. In the C-house you share a rather small room with one roommate. Both residents have their own desks and lots of storage space. The rooms are also equipped with a washing machine for laundry. The dormitory has a shared kitchen on the bottom floor with fridges for all of the floors. The kitchen is well equipped with stoves, microwaves, toasters and rice cookers. There is no need to purchase cooking or other kitchen equipment.

The C-house is located off campus, taking about 25-30 min by foot to get to the campus. However, it is located right next to the Sungshin Women's University metro station and the SKKU campus is located only two stations away at Hyehwa. Traveling via metro takes approximately 20-25 min with little walking. Taking the taxi straight to campus is also possible and with four people it is most likely cheaper than the public transportation. You can also take the bus, but I do not recommend it since the subway system in Seoul is super convenient and easy to use. Even the locals are sometimes confused with the buses and prefer to use the subway. Even though the C-house is located off campus I did not find it a problem. Commuting to and from the campus is fairly easy

and cheap (1250 won per trip). I also walked often to the campus, if I had class later in the afternoon, enjoying the small river view that lead almost all the way to the campus.

All in all living in the dormitory is easy since you have all necessary utilities provided. Sharing the room did not turn out to be an issue and I did not hear about anyone having problems with the conditions. However, afterwards I believe that I would have rather stayed at a goshiwan or private housing closer to the campus area in Hyehwa. Still I can recommend staying in the SKKU dormitories.

### **Chest X-ray & insurance**

If you choose to apply for the dormitory, you must provide proof that you do not have tuberculosis. This sounds strange for Finnish residents, but this paper must be issued when arriving at the dormitory the first time. Keep in mind that this needs to be proven with a chest x-ray and for example note from YTHS are not accepted, if no x-ray has been taken. Also remember to get travel insurance for your stay. **Keep in mind that the local hospitals are very expensive and will most likely want payment in advance.** This means that you have to figure your insurance claims later.

### **Other housing options, Kristiina's experience**

Ever since I found out I was accepted to study at SKKU, I was aware of the fact that I won't be staying at students housing. The idea of sharing one room with unknown person was a bit disturbing to me, because like any other Finn, I value my own privacy and personal space. I was also aware that there was only two housing options left - living in goshiwon/guesthouse or finding own /share flat. I was favouring the first option more, since finding a flat in Seoul can be quite challenging, especially if you don't have any relevant contacts that could help you with this issue. In addition, in some cases you have to pay a rental lease fee which can easily go up to 1000€. That is why I decided to go with Goshiwon as my housing option.

## **Goshiwon**

Goshiwon is a housing option favoured by many students, both Korean and foreign. Goshiwon is a very small room which has everything you need for your living. Usually there here is a bed, desk, TV, wardrobe and own bathroom. In some goshiwons however, bathroom may be located separately. Some goshiwons are better equipped than others and therefore you have to be quick in contacting the owners and booking a room for yourself. You can find available goshiwons from this website: <https://goshipages.com> .

I lived in goshiwon called “Starone Roomtel” which is located in Hyejwa area approx. a 5-10 min. walk from the university. The location was perfect as it was close to convenient stores, restaurants, coffee houses and various other places we used to spend time at. I paid approx. 350 €/month for my room which is a good price considering high prices in Seoul’s real estate market. All in all, I was happy with my decision to stay in Goshiwon, because there I got to everything I needed for my daily life. Even though the room was quite small, I did not spend much time there simply because I was either in the university area, travelling abroad or simply outside exploring Seoul.

## **Study-related information**

### **Courses**

Kristiina's courses:

#### **Basic Korean Language Program**

This course is for students with beginner level of Korean language. It was organized twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, and we had to purchase a Korean language book (approx. 5,000 won) from a bookstore located at the Business Hall building. Other necessary materials for the class were provided by the course professor.

The course included two quizzes, an oral exam, and two written exams - the first was held during midterm exam week and second at the end of the semester. We recommend taking this course for students who has no previous experience with Korean language.

#### **Contemporary Issues in Korean Culture & Society**

This course explores the cultural, economic, political, and social changes of contemporary Korean society since 1945 from comparative, historical, and sociological perspectives. The primary aim of the course is to make students familiar with the historical paths that were evolved into the contemporary Korean society and to formulate critical, balanced, and comparative perspectives on the current issues of Korea. In addition, students had to deliver a weekly paper on the four categories of the subjects such as Korean prominent public figure, business firm, non-governmental organization, and film.

#### **Human Resource Management (Bachelor's Degree course)**

The goal of this course was to provide an introduction to the core ideas of Human Resource Management and it covered a variety of activities, methods and techniques which are designed to improve HR management within an organization.

Team project was one of the course's main assignments in which we had to do a presentation and report based on our case company's HR management from a strategic perspective. The project formed 40% of the final grade, while both midterm and finals exams were 40% each out of the total mark 150%.

## **Marketing Research**

The main objectives of this course were to conduct high-quality research with scientific rigor and ethical standard. During the course, we studied different research methods and how they can be implemented specifically in marketing-related researches. After taking this course, students learn to design research (experiment or survey research), collect, analyse and interpret data as well as write methodology and gained results in English (this course was mainly for Korean degree students). Also, we learned how to use R and RStudio - a programming language for statistical computing and graphics.

Juhana's courses:

## **Internet Business Model**

This Bachelor level course examines current and projected developments of Internet businesses. Topics include the technologies upon which Internet businesses are based, such as e-businesses and mobile businesses models; the Internet infrastructure; electronic consumers and advertising etc. Lectures were held twice a week for 1,5 hour periods at a time.

The course focused heavily on the technical side of e-commerce infrastructure. Even with the introduction of new information to myself, the exams and quizzes in the course were not difficult. Evaluation of the course was as followed: 5 Quizzes & Participation 10%, 3 Exams 75%, final paper 20% out of the total mark of 105%. The lecturer was very good and lectures were interesting to follow. The final paper was instructed to be either a research paper of the e-commerce or a business plan for your Internet startups.

## **Business Mining**

This course was initially listed as a Master's level course, but was in fact a Doctoral level course. In addition to me only 3 exchange students attended this course. Even with majority of the students being local doctoral students or from local firms (LG, Samsung, local insurance companies), the course was held in English. However, the professor's English skills were questionable and a lot of the discussion within the course was held in Korean. Lectures were held once a week for a 4-hour period.

The course covered big data from the perspective of management. Course topics included the general introduction to big data and artificial intelligence as well as the application of data in supporting business decisions. Within the course we got familiar with a big data software WEKA and also conducted our own research with this software. The evaluation was as followed: 10% Attendance, 10% In-class presentations, class discussions, summary of each article, 10%

Team discussions with some experiments with WEKA, 30% TWO quizzes and 40% Term Project.

I do not recommend taking this course. The professor was respectful towards foreign students, but arrogant with some of the local students. The course lacked any demos or instructions to use the software that was required for the course. The coursework was very time consuming with the topics being advance. With the weekly article reviews as well learning to use the WEKA software, since no lessons were used to teach it, majority of my time studying was for this course.

### **Basic Korean Program**

See above Kristiina's description.

### **Economics in Global Environments**

This course will introduce general theory about international finance, global business, multinational corporations and economics. I chose this course from the exchange student course package and only international students attended this course. Lectures were held once a week for a 3-hour period. The course does not require any former economics studies, but it is suggested. The final grade will be based on four components: Attendance (10%), Mid-Exam (35%), Final Exam (35%), Homework & Class Participation (20%).

The subjects in this course were relatively easy and there was no heavy workload. Weekly homework was assigned in the form of multiple choice questions. The lecturer was not good and majority of the time would be spent listening to him talking about matters not related to the course.

### **Exams**

- **Midterms Spring 2018:** 23.04. - 28.04.2018
- **Finals Spring 2018:** 18.06. - 22.06.2018

### **Holidays**

- **1st of March:** Independence Movement Day
- **5th of May:** Buddha's Birthday / Children's
- **9th of May:** Presidential Election
- **6th of June:** Memorial Day

## Other practicalities

### Alien registration

You will need an alien card as you will be staying over 90 in South Korea. Alien card works as your ID cards during your stay and is required when travelling abroad and returning back to the country. The university takes care of alien registration related matters and you will be informed about them via email in advance. You will need a passport photo and 30,000 won (approx. 25€) in cash for the application.

The process usually takes up to three weeks, after which the card is ready to be collected from international office. The university will provide you with a further information about the alien registration. **Please note that you cannot travel outside the country without alien card.** You will have to return the card at the airport when you will leave to your home country.

### Mobile connection

The majority of international students did not open a Korean mobile account simply because the Wi-Fi connection was almost in every place of the city except for public transportation which is why it was quite convenient to stay connected without paying any extra fees. However, you can open a Korean number with a good internet connection at any mobile carrier store. Olleh and SK Telecom are the most general ones and they have multiple stores around HyeHwa and other close-by stations.

One of the stores is also located at SKKU Business Hall building on the basement floor and there is an English-speaking employee that helped us with selecting a suitable mobile connection for our use. You need to show your alien card and copy of your passport for opening a local mobile number. This because of mobile-scam related reasons.

- **Kristiina's mobile connection:** I paid approx. 40,000 won for a Korean number with limited minutes for calls and fast internet connection which I switched on only in emergency situations. Otherwise I used Wi-Fi in public places and tried to save my

internet data. All in all, the internet data lasted for about 1,5 months which was a suitable option for me as I took this mobile connection two months prior my departure back to Finland. Before leaving back to your home country, you need to terminate your mobile contract which can be done easily at the same store.

### **Public transport**

Seoul has very good metro system and you can get around places quite easily. We recommend downloading such mobile apps as *Seoul Metro* and *KakaoMetro* that are helpful in planning your route. Both apps work without internet connection. Koreans use T-money card to pay for transportation. It can be purchased in any convenience store or from ticket machines at any metro station where it can also be re-charged for additional amount. T-money card can be used around the country in buses and metros.

## Final thoughts

### **Kristiina:**

To conclude this report, I would like to say that choosing Seoul for my exchange destination was one of the best decisions I have made for my academic path. Although I have visited the country previously, this time I actually got to experience the authenticity of Seoul and different sides of Korean culture, including those that are not shown by the media. Studying abroad and living in a big city has taught me to appreciate every single day and take the most of my time. Walking in Seoul's streets by myself, surrounded by skyscrapers and electric display signs, helped me to get lost in the city and familiarizing myself with new places. Thus, getting bored is something you won't experience in South Korea as there are so many places to explore and activities to experience.

### **Juhana:**

I am truly happy that I chose Seoul as my exchange destination. In Seoul, you will experience the fast-paced life of a multi-million people metropolitan with an endless amount of opportunities. Everything from the fully packed morning subways to 24/7 K-Pop music playing somewhere in the streets. During your stay, you are able to learn about the local food culture as well as social habits, for example. SKKU is also one of the top universities in the country, where you are able to experience the differences in the Finnish and Korean studying cultures. This exchange experience has been one of the highlights of my academic career so far.

All in all, we hope this report helped you to get relevant information about your exchange destination. In case you have further questions regarding living in Seoul, feel free to contact us via email or LinkedIn. We will be glad to provide you with additional information about our exchange.

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