

Travel report of exchange study period – Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU), fall 2016

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Orientation days

The orientation day was on Aug 31, and it included practical matters including HI-Club (meaning the buddies) and Maple (Korean students interested in hanging out with exchange students), the housing, campus wi-fi and IT services, as well as campus tour although that was cancelled due to bad weather. Afterwards there was a welcoming party organised by the HI-Club.

Language course information

There were two different kinds of language courses available. The Regular Language Program (RKP) is taught from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 16:30, and covers beginner, intermediate and advanced language levels. The Korean Language Program for Exchange Students (KLP) is taught two days a week (Mon & Wed / Tue & Thu) from 16:30 to 18:00, and gives beginner's command of the language. RLP is worth 12 SKKU credits (24 ECTS), and KLP 3 SKKU credits (6 ECTS). You need a letter of motivation (for RKP 2, for KLP 1) and the filled application form to apply. At least the KLP is taught entirely in Korean.

Start/end dates of studies

The semester began on Sep 1, and ended Dec 22, 2016.

In Korea, the academic year starts in March and ends in December.

Holiday periods at the host institution

SKKU holidays:

- University Foundation day Sep 25
- Confucius Birthday Sep 28

National holidays:

- Chuseok, 3 days in September or October (In 2016: 14-16 Sep)
- Korean Foundation Day, Oct 3
- Hangeul Proclamation Day, Oct 9

Exam periods

In 2016: Midterms 20-26 Oct, Finals 15-21 Dec. However, it was not unusual to hold the exam a week outside the exam period.

Descriptions and review of the courses you did during the exchange

I took only exchange courses as I decided to study Korean language and culture and make it my minor in LUT. I took the KLP course which I would have liked the language course to be more fast-paced, but I did still gain a good base of Korean language. Introduction to Asia (originally called Understanding Asian Culture) was my favourite course: the professor was excellent and we covered historical and cultural topics of China, Korea and Japan, and I felt I learned a lot. Contemporary Korean Society and Culture also was taught by a great professor and provided a lot of information about the Korean culture. The last course, Comparative Thought and Culture: Horizons East and West, was based on scrutinizing Eastern and Western cultures through watching movies of the same topic from different countries. I did not like this course as it was not very insightful and there was hardly any theory.

Practical issues to be considered

Chest X-ray & insurance: You need to prepare a chest X-ray (to show you don't have tuberculosis), and you need to hand it in when moving in to the dorm. Also get a travel insurance and the certificate of insurance.

Visa: You need to apply for a D-2 (Student) visa from the consulate. The handling takes about 2 weeks after which you can collect your passport. Check the required documents on this webpage, part 'Common documents' and part C (exchange student): <http://fin.mofa.go.kr/english/eu/fin/visa/issuance/index.jsp> .

Housing: Before the semester begins, the SKKU international office will offer you to apply for dormitory housing. If you apply, you will pay for the whole rent period at once. For my semester it was 1600 USD. If due to exchange rates you have paid too much or too little, they will return the excess money or ask for additional payment. However, they will only return the money to a Korean account, so if you don't have one, you can ask for your buddy or a Korean friend to receive the money on their account and give the money to you in cash. The rent payment includes a deposit which you will also get back before the end of the semester. For my semester, they agreed to give it in cash. The check-in was on Aug 29, 2016.

There are 4 dormitories for Social Sciences and Humanities Campus (Seoul campus) and one for Natural Sciences Campus (Suwon). You can not apply to a specific one, but state your campus and the rest will go by lottery. I was lucky enough to get into I-House which is conveniently close to campus. Others are usually a few metro stops away. In dorm you will have a roommate, and a curfew (1 am – 5 am) during which you cannot either enter or leave the dorm (or you get penalty points). Some other students applied to live in a goshiwon which I don't know much about except that they are typically small rooms, you don't necessarily have room mates and there's no curfew.

Health Services: On the 1st floor of Student Building, there is the Health Centre where you can go if you get a cold or other health problems. They will prescribe you medicine and give them to you free of charge. Usually they only give one day's supply and ask you to come back if the symptoms continue.

International office: Located on the 1st floor of International Building, the International office organises and helps with everything from applying for foreigner registration card (obligatory for everyone who stays in country for over 90 days), selecting courses.

Housing office: Located on the 1st floor of 600th Anniversary Hall, you can contact the housing office (of Seoul campus) if you need any help with the dorm issues.

Public transport: The metro system in Seoul is very efficient and an easy way to get around. The best way to pay for transport is to use a T-money card on which you can charge money, and it works everywhere in Korea and on both buses and metro. You can also use it to pay in convenience stores. You can get the card in any convenience store, and they will ask you to show your passport. After you get your SKKU student card (some weeks after the semester begins), you can also use that for public transport as it includes T-money card functionality. Sometimes the bus is faster as the route might be more straight than that of metro.

Activity clubs: The university has a lot of different kinds of activity clubs, from sports to music, art, religion and games. Some clubs have a member fee or semester fee, but some are for free. You are free to join as many as you want. The clubrooms are located in the Student Building. I highly recommend joining at least one club. Taekwondo is the most popular among exchange students. Remember to sign up on time.

Food: On campus, there are several restaurants/cafeterias. On the 1st floor of the Business Building you can find a food court that has a Japanese restaurant, Korean restaurant, Chinese restaurant, noodle restaurant and a hamburger restaurant etc. The prices are typically between 2,900 and 4,000 won. Also in the area behind the library you can find many nice restaurants for lunch or dinner, but they typically don't have an English menu. In Korea, eating out is so cheap you don't necessarily need to cook lunch or dinner.