

## Living the Korean dream – Judith Nivard



From August 29<sup>th</sup> until December 21<sup>st</sup>, I studied at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea.

## **Preparation**

There are many things you need to take care of before leaving for Korea.

After being nominated by the Erasmus School of Economics, I had to start my online application at Sungkyunkwan University. It was a pretty straightforward form and I had to submit it before May 15<sup>th</sup>.

After your application is confirmed, you have to get a D-2 student visa. This visa gives you single entry to South Korea. Once you are in Korea, you have to apply for an alien registration card. This card gives you multiple entry, be aware however that it takes quite some time to get this card (I got mine in October). If you want to travel outside of Korea before the semester starts, you should not enter Korea before leaving on your travels. For the application of your D-2 student visa, you need several documents. You can find this on the website of the Korean Embassy in the Netherlands. Most of these documents will be sent to you by Sungkyunkwan University. The visa costs 54 euros and you can only pay by cash.

If you want to stay in the dormitories, you have to apply for this as soon as possible. Usually, they offer housing to everyone who applies before the deadline. Because there is not enough space in the International Houses sometimes, some international students can be placed in one of the Korean residences. After you have been placed in one of the dormitories, you will receive a payment request to pay in Korean Won or US dollar. If you are going to live in the dormitories, you have to get a tuberculosis test as well. Furthermore, I would recommend you to get some vaccinations like DTP, Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.

In your summer break, you have to apply for courses. The course guide tells you which courses are available to you. It is very convenient if you know which courses you want to take before the course application opens. Within one minute, every course will be full. Don't be afraid if you have not applied for every course during this chaotic application. In the first week of the semester you will get a second chance. If you go to the professor of the course you want to take, they will usually allow you to follow the course by giving their signature.

A few practical things you have to think of before leaving is applying for a credit card (this may take a few weeks) and you have to check if your health insurance also covers all costs across the border and if you have a travel insurance.

## **Arrival**

I could check in to the dorms on my third day in Korea, so before my arrival, I booked a hostel for the first two nights. I would recommend you to choose a hostel close to your dorm. Then you don't have to travel with all of your bags two times. There is a direct bus that goes from the airport to the University area. The subway station close to the university is called Hyewha. If you want to save a few euros, you can take the subway as well. The subway takes around 1.5 hour and includes one transfer.

Another thing you have to do immediately upon arrival, is buying a T-money card. You can use this card for every form of public transportation in Korea and you can even use it to pay in some supermarkets.

One of the things I found difficult in Korea, was getting cash from an ATM. Withdrawing money is only possible at Global ATMs and some of these ATMs let you pay an extra fee for withdrawing money. KB was one of the banks that always offered Global ATMs.

On August 31<sup>st</sup>, Sungkyunkwan University organized an introduction day. During this day, we got general information about the university, Korea and other practical stuff. Furthermore, HI-club (an organization for international students) organized a dinner party in the evening. I would definitely recommend you going to this HI-club event as it will help you to quickly meet other exchange students.

## **Courses**

I took 5 courses at the university. Three of the courses were given at the economic faculty and the other two courses were only given to exchange students. Every course was worth 3 credits which is the same as 6 ECTS.

- **Microeconomics**

I applied for this course thinking it was a more advanced course in microeconomics. It turned out to be a beginners course in microeconomics. This made the course relatively easy. The course aims to teach students how firms behave and how they make profit by discussing monopolies, perfect competition, elasticity and other basic microeconomic concepts. The grade consisted of homework and attendance (20%), a mid-term (40%) and a final exam (40%). The professor made a lot of jokes during the lecture and had a nice way of teaching. I mainly enjoyed this course because there were only two other exchange students taking this course. It was nice and often very funny to have a lot of Koreans in class. The course, however, did not teach me a lot of new insights in microeconomics.

- **Industrial Organization**

This course was about imperfectly competitive markets. During the semester we discussed things like price discrimination, vertical integration, Bertrand and Cournot. The grade consisted of several components: Attendance (10%), two quizzes (20%), a midterm (30%) and a final exam (40%). The contents of this course were advanced, but the professor usually gives you a passing grade if you attend the exams and score just a few points. I thought this course was very interesting and a little bit more challenging than microeconomics. On the other hand, the professor discussed his slides by talking very monotone and the class was not interactive at all. This made the lectures a bit boring.

- **Monetary Policy**

This was a course about Central Banks, how they implement policy and macroeconomics. I thought the subject of this course was interesting, but the lectures were extremely boring. The professor was writing down his notes on the board for 1 hour and 15 minutes and we had to write this down in our notebooks. Because I was busy keeping up with his writing, I did not learn anything during the lecture. The information given was not really hard, but you

did have to put effort in it, because the professor asked many details in his exams. The grade was based on attendance (10%), 2 midterms (15% and 25%) and a final exam (25%).

- Korean Language Program

This was one of my funniest classes. Although Korean is entirely different from western languages, this course is very easy to pass. You will learn to read the Korean alphabet, how to order in a restaurant, how to count and how to introduce yourself or how to talk about what you want to do in the weekend. The grade is based on two small quizzes, a midterm and a final exam. I would recommend you to take this course, because it is very nice if you understand a little bit of the Korean language and it is a really fun class. You can use it when you want to order in a restaurant.

- Contemporary Korean Society and Culture

This course is only available to exchange students. You will gain knowledge about the culture, politics and history of Korea after 1945. The professor was a very old and gentle man, who could tell from his own life experience. He joined some bloody student protests as a student and he was a kid during the Korean war. This made this course very interesting. You will have to write four papers (20%), about a Korean film, public figure, firm and a NGO of your choice. Furthermore, there was compulsory attendance (10%), a mid-term (30%) and a final exam (40%).

## Finances

I spent around 7000 euros in total. I only had a few earnings like the ESE scholarship (500 euros) and the public transport reimbursement (only for Dutch students), this is 100 euros per month. I spent a lot of money on travelling and food. Supermarkets are relatively expensive, especially fruit and vegetables. For 5 apples I usually paid around 5 euros and if you cook a really simple, vegetarian pasta, it costs around 4 euros. For this reason, I went out for dinner every day. Public transport in Korea is cheap. Below I give you small statement of some costs.

Costs	
Dorm	1300 euros for the whole semester
Return flight Amsterdam - Seoul	630 euros
Simple Korean meal (Bibimbap, kimbap)	3.50-6 euros
Korean BBQ or western food	7-12 euros
Subway ride	1 euro
Korean simcard incl. 2 GB for 4 months	40 euros

## Daily life

I really enjoyed living in Seoul. Korea has a unique culture and a very interesting history. They have their own movies (K-dramas), music (K-pop), traditions and the people are extremely kind. Because Seoul is a huge city with a population of 10 million people, there are

many things to do. The touristic highlights are Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung (the main palaces), the Korean War Memorial museum, a trip to the border with North Korea and the Namsan Tower which gives you, especially at night, an amazing view over the city. Besides these highlights, I also enjoyed walking along the Han River, shopping at Myeongdong and going out in Hongdae, Itaewon or Gangnam. In Seoul, my life was never boring. The one day I would sing some karaoke and go to a club, the next day I would drink coffee at a Sheep or Raccoon café or eat a delicious Bibimbap at Gwangjang market and in between there is always time for some amusement at the arcade.

One thing I was worried about, was if it would be exhausting to live in such a big city. This was not the case. Seoul has some crowded shopping streets with lights and music everywhere, but you can easily escape from this. There is a national park which you can reach by subway and there are many other (smaller) mountains inside the city. Every week, there were free night hikes organized.

Furthermore, I was surprised by the beauty of the fall in Korea. All the trees had amazing red, yellow or green colors. I went to Nami island, because this island is famous for its fall colours and I would really recommend you going here during the fall. Besides Nami Island, I also went to Namhae island, Muuido island, Busan and Suwon and outside of Korea I travelled in Japan for three weeks and spent a weekend in Hong Kong.

All these cultural and travel experiences made this the best few months of my life. I did not regret my choice for Seoul or my choice to go on an exchange for a single moment, so I am sure that you will have a great time if you choose to go on an exchange to Korea.