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Land: Südkorea

Seoul National University  
Graduate School of  
International Studies

Studienschwerpunkt Frankfurt:  
International Economics and Economic Policy

### **Need a little convincing?**

You haven't decided yet where to go on your semester abroad and consider Asia? You dream of living in a bustling city with tons of things to do that are also affordable? You would love to study at a big, prestigious university with a personal buddy to show you around and introduce you to their lifestyle? And finally, you are eager to dive into a new, totally different culture?

Choose Korea as the destination for your semester abroad!

### **Application process and pre-arrival preparation**

Going abroad requires some paperwork before the fun part starts. It is not complicated to gather all the documents, but you will need to put in some time and effort, especially for your motivational letters and the Visa procedure. Rest assured – it will all be worth it in the end!

Seoul was my first choice, and I was more than happy when I got the notification of acceptance from the global office in Frankfurt. Seoul National University is very big (about 30,000 students in total) with lots of internationals as well. Consequently, their enrolment process is well structured, and communicating with them is easy. You will receive clear guidance on what to do and which documents to provide. You will receive your certificate of enrolment in June, which means plenty of time to apply for your Visa and other necessary documents before going to Korea in August. It helps if you schedule your Visa appointment at the consulate in Frankfurt as soon as possible though. The semester in Seoul starts 1<sup>st</sup> September.

You will have to choose your courses before the semester begins. The whole process is quite tedious, but the SNU global office will provide a very long document that explains every step in-depth. You will find a description of the classes I took in a section below. There is a course selection "trial" period to practice for the actual course selection. Some courses will exceed the maximum quota, so you have to be on time to get into the courses you want when the selection period starts (which will be early in the morning Korean time, so night-time in Germany).

### **Arrival**

You fly into Incheon airport, which is an hour train ride located outside of Seoul. Make sure to buy a SIM card at the airport (for your first week) and get some cash out as well. Many people struggle with withdrawing money from the ATMs at the airport. My card (Mastercard) worked at the ATM near the Airport Railway station, but if you want to be sure, exchange some money at the currency exchange counters in Seoul or Frankfurt. Afterwards, you can easily follow the signs to the airport train that directly leads you to the city. It is the fastest and cheapest way to get to Seoul.

I would recommend you arrive at least one week before your semester starts. Book yourself a hostel (you can use the app hostelworld for example) in the popular parts of the city (Hongdae, Itaewon) so that you can already explore some of the major sights in the city and get used to transportation, food, and life in Seoul. In my first week, I met students from other universities as well as from SNU at my hostel, which made it easy to connect and explore Seoul together.

### **Transport**

The best way to get around in the city is by metro. Get yourself a T-Money card (prepaid card for all public transport) at any convenience store, which are all over the city. You can top up the card with cash and even use it to pay in some convenience stores.

In general, public transport is very cheap in Korea. You will be charged a base fare of about one euro per ride and will add to it depending on how far you travel. There is also a 30 min transfer time, so if you switch to the bus or just have a quick stop, you won't be charged the base fare again.

The best app for navigation in Korea is Naver (or Kakao Maps if you can type in Korean). Unfortunately, Google Maps does not really work in South Korea, so best download Naver before coming to Seoul. The metro does not run between midnight and five o'clock in the morning, but there are night buses that run fairly frequently throughout the night. If you have a Korean phone number, you will also be able to sign up for Kakao Taxi. It is the Korean version of Uber and much cheaper than taxis in Germany.

### **Accommodation**

I applied for the student accommodation on campus but only received my confirmation in late September when I had already signed a lease agreement. If you want to save money and don't mind sharing a room, this is the best option. It's worth waiting a bit even if your number on the waiting list is at the very bottom, because many people withdraw their application in the first weeks. Chances are high that you will get a dorm room within the first weeks of September.

If you prefer a bit more privacy but still want an affordable room, you can look for a Goshiwon. It translates to "study room" and is literally a room with a bed, desk, and bathroom on 10sqm. I stayed in one of these during my exchange semester. It was not the nicest option, but cheap and directly next to SNU station.

The global office of SNU provides an overview of the different types of housing on their website. Go check it out to familiarize yourself with the available options. In general, the housing market in Seoul is very flexible and fast paced. It changes quickly from week to week, so don't panic if you can't find a room immediately.

### **Food**

Seoul is a huge metropolitan city where you can find any food you like. Eating in restaurants is usually cheaper than in Europe (starting at 5 euro) and water is always free. However, it can be difficult to find vegetarian options, especially at uni. There are multiple canteens on campus, but especially in the main one you will sometimes not find any meatless option at all. The good thing is that the meals at the canteen are incredibly cheap (starting at 70ct), and no matter what there will always be rice and Kimchi available 😊.

### **Courses at SNU**

I chose three courses instead of four to have enough time for travelling and exploring the country. However, it highly depends on the professor how demanding your classes will be. In hindsight, I would have liked to do four courses (30 CP in Frankfurt).

None of my classes had any weekly assignments and the midterm exams as well as finals were much easier compared to courses in Frankfurt. You should read up carefully on the course description and decide accordingly how many classes you want to attend. Some are very demanding with weekly assignments and reports, which will restrict your travel time by a lot. The drop out period for classes ends within the first weeks of the semester. The grades will be published by the end of the term. Attendance as well as participation in class, exams and assignments will count for your final mark.

#### *Comparative studies in regional integration – Prof. Woosik Moon*

This class discusses the economic and cultural development of European economies in comparison to the development in Asian countries. It gave me a great insight on how Asia perceives Europe and how culture influences economic development. The midterm exam was a group presentation, the final exam was based on reading assignments. Professor Moon is very nice and highly appreciates questions and active participation in class.

#### *Financial development of the world – Prof. Woosik Moon*

Professor Moon used to work for the Bank of Korea (the Korean central bank). He will teach you (based on his book) how central banks are organised, how they work and how the board of directors make decisions. I really enjoyed the personal insights he gave us, along with the class excursion to the Bank of Korea that he organised for all of us. I learned a lot about central banking, and the exams were fair.

#### *Understanding Korean Economic Growth and Development – Prof Hyeok Jeong*

This was my favourite class. Professor Hyeok Jeong researched for years on how Korea was able to transform its economy into a high-income country within only a few decades. He also advises other countries on how to design their economic policies and will share interesting facts and details about his work in class. I was able to learn a lot about Korean growth, especially in comparison to other countries, but also about the underlying data and - to an extend - how research in this field is conducted. There was no midterm exam but a big final group report and presentation to hand in at the end of the semester.

### **Buddy Program**

One of the best things about studying at SNU is for sure their Buddy programme. You will be informed per e-mail on when and how to sign up – you won't regret it! You will get a personal Korean buddy alongside with 4-5 other international students. Together with other buddies and their students you will form a bigger group that plans activities together every week. Some of the bigger events like the temple stay or the weekly pub event will include everyone and is a great opportunity to make friends and get to know Korean culture. It was definitely one of the highlights of my stay in Korea, so don't miss out!

### **Useful Apps for your time in Korea**

Papago	Translation
Naver	Navigation, Google Maps does not work properly in South Korea
Wise	International money transfer (e.g., to pay rent or buddy program fee)
KakaoTalk	Korean WhatsApp, requires Korean SIM
KakaoT	Kakao Taxi, the Korean Uber
Seoul National University	SNU app
LearningXstudent	Uni app for tasks and announcements by your professors
SNU Menu	Canteen app