

Le Thuan Ngo

Zeitraum:
01.09.2022 –
28.02.2023

Land: Südkorea

Studienfächer:
Graduate
School of
International
Studies

Gastinstitution:
Seoul National
University

Forschungs-
/Arbeitsgebiet/
Studien-
schwerpunkt:
Money and
Finance

(* bitte tragen Sie hier nur Ihren Namenskürzel ein!)

Datum: 08.02.2023

DAAD-PROMOS – E R F A H R U N G S – B E R I C H T

As an Asian student in Germany, I always dream of returning to Asia and spending longer than a short summer vacation in the region. For the exchange semester of fall 2022, I chose Seoul National University among all possibilities. The university ranks as one of the best universities in the world and the best university in South Korea, which offers a wide range of high-quality courses, particularly in economics and finance. Furthermore, Seoul is a highly dynamic, historic, charming, and diversified city with which one can hardly get bored. Also, from Seoul, travel to other cities and countries is very convenient since Seoul is a major transportation hub of East Asia. Consequently, one can easily travel around and discover different areas apart from Seoul during the exchange semester.

"In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take" – Lewis Carroll. Had I not conducted the exchange semester in Seoul, it would have been one of the biggest regrets in my studying life.

Application process:

I find the application process not complicated but relatively tedious. On the ground of the partnership between the Seoul National University (SNU) and Goethe University (GU), two exchange slots are provided each year, one for MMF and one for MIEEP, respectively. Firstly, I had to apply at the International Office of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and compete with fellow students. Details about requirements, evaluation, and deadlines can be found on the [website of the Faculty's International Office](#). Because SNU was quite popular among students, the competition was pretty fierce. After being chosen as the nominee by the faculty, I had to apply again at SNU. SNU's inbound student manager and the faculty coordinators, Ms. Anette Zell and Ms. Melanie Voigtländer, provided information regarding where and how to apply. Moreover, I applied for the [DAAD PROMOS scholarship](#) to find financial support. A letter of

recommendation (LoR) from a professor at GU was compulsory for these two applications. I recommend requesting a LoR from a professor who knows you personally or in whose courses you performed well so that the LoR could be as detailed as possible.

Preparation for the exchange semester:

As soon as I received my admission to SNU, I started to deal with four crucial things: visa application (**D-2-6**), travel insurance, international payment card, and accommodation.

For the visa application, the Certificate of Admission (CoA) provided by SNU is the most crucial document, which was sent to me via email in the middle of June. For students residing in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg, and Bavaria, the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Frankfurt is responsible for visa issuance. For a D-2 visa, I recommend arranging an appointment via [their official website](#) about two months in advance to secure a favorable time slot. In my case, I was too late in seeking an appointment. Consequently, I had to apply for my visa at the Embassy Branch Office of the Republic of Korea in Bonn. Although I was officially ineligible to apply there since the Branch Office was not responsible for students in Hesse, the officers were very flexible in accepting my application after acknowledging my situation. The visa processing took about one week, and I could conveniently download and print the visa from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website.

Since March 2021, all exchange students have been obligated to subscribe to the Korean National Health Insurance, which costs more or less than KRW 52,000 per month as of the fall semester of 2022. The insurance contribution is payable from the date of issuance of the residence permit, called the Alien Registration Card (ARC). Each student can apply for ARC at the Immigration Office, but most conveniently, on a specific day on the SNU campus. The exact date, procedure, and necessary documents were communicated via email. In general, it takes about one month to process an ARC application, leaving students one month without health insurance. Therefore, purchasing international health/ travel insurance for this period is recommended. In my case, I chose TravelPlus of Envivas in partnership with TK. This insurance costs 11,90 EUR annually and covers up to 60 days of international travel each year.

As South Korea, especially Seoul, has been attempting to become a cashless society, payment with credit/ debit cards and other electronic methods are very popular. I possess a Deutsche Bank Card Plus, a debit card directly linked to my Deutsche Bank account. With this card, I could efficiently conduct international transactions and withdraw cash up to 1,000 EUR daily with a minimal fee. However, cash remains an essential part of daily life, particularly in loading T-Money Cards, the payment method for public transportation, at vending machines or 24/7 convenience stores. Besides, each student can open a Korean bank account. However, the

application requires the residence permit (ARC), which is only available from around the second half of September. Considering the short duration of an exchange semester, opening a Korean bank account is probably not the best idea.

Being an exchange student, one can apply for the on-campus dormitory. There are many types of rooms at relatively low price levels. Nonetheless, the application, communication, and internal rules are significantly cumbersome, resulting in various students opting for off-campus accommodations. Most students live around Seoul National University Metro Station (Gwanak-gu Office), followed by Sillim and Nakseongdae. Around the SNU Station are various shops, restaurants, supermarkets, convenience stores, and other facilities, as well as frequent free shuttle buses to and from the university campus. The station is on metro line 2 – the most critical line in Seoul. Hence, one can easily travel around and get to important places.

Unlike Europe, where an upper limit exists, the deposit for renting accommodation in South Korea could be considerably high, sometimes more than ten times the monthly rent. Consequently, many exchange students choose Goshiwon, a small, cheap, deposit-free accommodation option to avoid paying this excessive amount. For more information regarding Goshiwon offers in Seoul, I strongly suggest [Goshipage](#). In my case, I spent four months living in Hi Guest Oneroomtel, 5 minutes away on foot from the metro station. The place was also relatively clean and well-equipped, costing 450,000 KRW monthly for a room as large as 8m². Installing KakaoTalk, the most common communication app in South Korea, is recommended. [Here is the KakaoTalk link, where you can connect and communicate with the manager.](#)

Language:

One can get on well with daily life on the campus easily with English. However, the situation changes outside of the campus, particularly in small cities outside Seoul. The proportion of Korean who could understandably communicate in English is not high, especially outside of urban areas. Therefore, it is advisable to learn basic Korean before beginning the exchange semester and install Google Translate or Papago in case of linguistic difficulties.

Life in Seoul:

Seoul and the surrounding satellite cities form one of the biggest metropolises in the world. Seoul metropole is very populous and offers an exciting combination of modern and historical spirits, with which one can hardly get bored. Each city quarter provides exclusive features and vibes. Jongno district is called the "old Seoul", where many historical palaces, pagodas, museums, and houses are located. Hongdae district is famous for being a place for youngsters to find many good restaurants and shops and enjoy fantastic street performances. Dongdaemun and Myeongdong are the perfect spots for those who want to go shopping. These two districts have a variety of cosmetics

and clothing shops to offer, apart from a wide range of street vendors and drugstores that sell traditional Korean medicine. Gangnam is the wealthiest district in Seoul, with numerous high-end bars, clubs, and shopping malls full of luxury brands. For food lovers, traditional markets such as Namdaemun, Gwangjang, and Tongin might be the perfect places, especially regarding traditional Korean cuisine.

Studying at Seoul National University:

In South Korea, SNU is the best university with the most outstanding reputation. The Gwanak campus is the university's main campus, which is gigantic and offers a wide range of essential facilities. It has a hospital, cafeterias, libraries, restaurants, banks, police stations, convenience stores, and stadiums. Apart from free shuttle buses around the campus and from the campus to Sillim and SNU metro station, many stations connect the campus to the city center and airport via public buses. As an exchange student from GU, I was allocated to the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS), which offered various courses in the field of economics and policies. Theoretically, each student can choose any course at the GSIS as long as there is no restriction. However, one should pay attention in selecting courses that align with the major at GU since the examination office cannot accredit those deviating from the major. In this regard, it is advisable to complete the Learning Agreement with the examination office of FB2 as soon as possible to ensure their approval.

Each course at the GSIS generally has three credits, converted into 7.5 credits at Goethe University. Due to this conversion, if one chooses four courses, he or she will get the full 30 ECTS. However, I do not recommend doing this because the workload would be very significant, particularly for an exchange semester. I chose to take three courses, which are convertible to 18 credits at Goethe University. The selected courses are as follows:

Financial Development of World: Unlike the name, this course concerns the monetary policies of South Korea and various countries worldwide. The highlight of the course is probably the explanation of why false monetary policies resulted in the severe consequences of the 1997 currency crisis in South Korea. The professor of the course, Prof. Moon Woo-Sik, was a member of the Monetary Board of the Bank of Korea who could deliver insightful lectures about the promulgation and implementation of Korean monetary policies. Moreover, the professor organized for his students three free-of-charge field trips during the semester: one to the Global Knowledge Exchange and Development Center, one to the Bank of Korea, and one to the Demilitarized Zone. Finally, attendance accounted for 20 percent of this course, whereas midterm and final exams made up 40 percent of the final grade, respectively.

Foreign Direct Investment: This was the most interesting but also the most burdensome course that I picked. Assistant professor Wenyan Yin was the lecturer, who was highly supportive and energetic. During the semester, various delightful aspects of FDI were delivered, including the comparison between trade and FDI, the motivations behind FDI, its socioeconomic impacts, and the evaluation of national competitiveness in attracting FDI. The final grade was divided into 25 percent for attendance, 25 percent for weekly assignments, 25 percent for two group presentations in the semester, and 25 percent for a final report which was a self-research project. Despite the considerably high workload, one can learn numerous enlightening concepts and always receive generous support from the professor. It is also probably the only course dedicated to FDI at SNU. Therefore, I highly recommend this course.

Understanding Korean Economic Growth and Development Process: As the name says, this course provides students with the history and comparisons of the Korean economy with various countries worldwide. Professor Jeong Hyeok, who specializes in economies, was in charge of the course. He could deliver very appealing lectures and tell stories based on data and figures. He organized a get-together for students twice in the semester and spent time acknowledging students' demands and expectations. For the performance record, 20 percent, 30 percent, and 50 percent were given to attendance, final group presentation, and final group report, respectively. Due to the high number of attending students (up to 60), each group could consist maximally of 5 students. In the final project, each group had to compare an economic aspect of Korea and a developing country before proposing some development policies.

Registration for courses takes place before the beginning of the semester on a portal of SNU. All information regarding available courses, the registration process, and the deadline are communicated via email. Interestingly, SNU offers one chance to try and test the platform before the real registration period begins. All courses at the GSIS are given on a first-come-first-serve basis. Hence, getting familiar with the registration portal and securing a reliable internet connection on the registration day is recommended. One could have time until the middle of the semester for course deregistration.

SNU Buddy:

Participating in SNU Buddy was an absolutely right decision, which left me with a fantastic time, beautiful experiences, amazing friends, and unforgettable memories. If I had to choose only one thing to remember about my exchange semester in Seoul, it would be naturally SNU Buddy. I wholeheartedly recommend any exchange student to join SNU Buddy to have a chance to enjoy such a great semester.

The registration period for SNU Buddy takes place before the beginning of the semester. The International Office and SNU communicate detailed information regarding the deadline and process via email. The most crucial part about SNU Buddy is that one has to decide on a "personal buddy" who will support the personal exchange student during his or her time in Korea. In my case, the list of Korean buddies and their information were provided on a central platform shortly before the registration period began. One would be allocated to one of ten buddy groups by choosing a Korean buddy. Beside inter-group activities, Korean buddies in a group also create various intra-group plans specifically for exchange buddies in that group. In the fall semester of 2022, notable inter-group activities include SNU Buddy Olympics, Amazing Race, Calligraphy Class, Food Festival, Temple Stay, and MT (Membership Training). Interestingly, MT does not comprise any technical training as its name says. Instead, it provides all participants of SNU Buddy the precious opportunity to gather, play games, drink, and create a fun time together. Meanwhile, outstanding activities in my group include, particularly but not restricted to, Gyeongbokgung Tour, Weekly Dinners and Lunches, a Day Trip to Gangneung, Boardgame Café, Picnics, Hiking, Nami Island, and Ice Skating. To make a long story short, one will never regret spending the exchange semester with SNU Buddy!

Some personal recommendations:

1. Download some apps in advance since they might be significantly helpful: KakaoTalk (similar to Whatsapp, extremely popular in Korea), KakaoMaps, or NaverMaps (in combination with Google Maps, which unfortunately cannot show walk, drive, or bike routes in Korea), KakaoTaxi (to book taxi), MySNU (the portal of SNU, a combination of QIS, OLAT, and Webmail), SNU Map (detailed map of SNU campus), Papago (translation), Coupang (for online shopping and food delivery)
2. Be prepared to have uncomfortable encounters with mosquitos! There are numerous mosquitos in Korea, especially in the months of summer and fall
3. SNU Buddy! SNU Buddy! SNU Buddy!
4. Learning some basic Korean will be beneficial because not so many people can easily communicate in English, especially in small cities
5. Autumn in South Korea is considerably impressive, yet very short. Therefore, one should plan carefully to enjoy Korean autumn to the fullest
6. Some recommended regions in South Korea to visit apart from Seoul: Jeju, Busan, Gyeongju, Yeosu, Suwon, Gangneung, Sokcho, Jeonju, Asan
7. Korean are obsessed with MBTI, and it is one of the simplest topics to break the ice

8. South Korea is very hilly, and hiking is a popular pastime. Therefore, one should bring at least a good pair of running shoes
9. Be careful if someone approaches you too actively on the street. Various extreme religious organizations in South Korea will annoyingly follow you to make you join them
10. Public toilets can be found at every metro station, which are clean and free of charge. However, public waste baskets are nearly nowhere to be found!