

# My exchange experience – 4 months at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea

## About me

My name is Ebba Jakobsson and I'm enrolled in the bachelor's program in Strategic Communication at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg. I studied 4 months at Ewha Womans University, fall semester of 2018 (HT18)

## About Seoul

Seoul is one of the biggest cities in the world. Around 9 million people live in Seoul, but the greater area with suburbs (or other cities really) is home to over 25 million people. That's 2,5 times the Swedish population. Seoul is divided in 25 *gu*'s, similar to arrondissements in Paris. Ewha is located in Seodaemun-gu together with 8 other universities, such as Yonsei and Sogang. This makes the area very young and vibrant, except during exams... The area around the university has many restaurants, cafés, 24h convenient stores, and beauty shops.

Ewha has its own metro station situated on line 2. This makes it possible to go to downtown Seoul in under 20 minutes. It's also located 2 stations from the Hongdae area, which is filled with restaurants, bars, clubs, and karaoke places and it's very popular among the younger generation in Seoul.

## Ewha Womans University

Founded in 1886, Ewha Womans University is one of the oldest universities in Korea. They were the first all-female university in the country and is the world's largest female educational institution. I promise you that the name is not spelled wrong. The meaning behind the name "Womans" instead of "Women's" is that it is for every individual, and not the female collective. It also represents the foundation of the school, which only included one woman. Although it is a womens university, male exchange students are allowed and have a designated dormitory on campus.

Ewha currently has 25 000 students, of which 5 000 are international students. Thus it is a bit smaller than Lund University with 40 000 students. Unlike Lund University, Ewha Womans University consists of only one big campus, and it is truly beautiful. On my way to school I had to criss-cross between many tourists wanting to take pictures at the iconic campus, especially the Education Campus Complex. Just like the rest of Seoul, the campus is situated on multiple hills. Either you could take the shuttle bus around campus, or walk and get your exercise done at the same time.

On campus you can literally find everything; convenience stores, restaurants, reading rooms, a gym, multiple coffee shops, printing shops, office supplies, souvenirs, and even resting rooms for when you get tired. The restaurants and coffee shops are not as good (or cheap) as the ones that you find outside of campus, but it's good when you have little to no time and need to run to your next class.

## Arrival at the university

I arrived to Seoul on the 29th of August, one day before the Welcome Ceremony hosted by the International Office and the PEACE Buddies. PEACE stands for Professional Ewhaians at Cultural Exchange and the buddies were Korean students who devoted their time to help and

hang out with the international students. We were divided into buddy groups and apart from showing us around during the first day, we had weekly lunches throughout the semester.

Before arriving to Ewha, a lot of documents and information was distributed by the International Office of the university, such as student-ID, how and when to apply for courses, important dates, etc. At the Welcome Ceremony, more practical information was given as well as information regarding getting a Korean bank account and the Alien Registration Card (ARC, see more below). Overall, the International Office was very informative and helpful both before and during the stay.

## **Courses**

In Korea, all courses are given at once and most of them are 3 credits (in the Korean system). You can enroll in a maximum of 6 courses per semester. I took 5 courses, after a discussion with my study counselor in Sweden. All of those courses were taught in English. If you want to take courses in Korean, you need to have to prove that your Korean is sufficient.

All courses have a midterm exam in the end of October and a final exam in the middle of December. The exams differ from the one's at Lund University. All of them use multiple choice questions and fill-in the blanks. Some of them have essay questions, but it was rare. As opposed to the Swedish system, where focus lies on the ability to analyzing and independent thinking, the Korean system focuses on cramming information and repeating it.

One big difference from Lund University, is that all lectures entails mandatory attendance. This is a part of your final grade. A maximum of 6 absences is tolerated for a pass, but some courses have a restriction of how many classes you can miss before it affects your grade (ranging from 1-5). The grading is A-D, but it is worth noting that the Korean students only think it's acceptable with grades A-B. This is because of the high competition.

### *My courses*

#### **Advertising and Consumer Psychology. Prof. Seung-Chul Yoo**

Focusing on studying consumers and the psychological factors behind decision making. Professor Seung-Chul was engaged in all of the classes and very passionate about his subject. Besides the midterm and final exam, we also did two blogpostings, one re-branding project, and one consumer journey paper. In my opinion, the pace was good but the syllabus was a bit messy.

#### **Advertising Management. Prof. Soon-tae An**

Focusing on brand management and communication planning, with a lot of focus on different cultures. This was my favorite course and teacher. The class was fairly small, permitting a lot of discussions among students and the professor. During the course, all students had to do one individual presentation and one group project.

#### **Global Communication. Prof. Jihyang Choi**

Focusing on communication in a global setting, touching everything from journalism, cultural imperialism, and popular culture. It was an interesting course and I learned a lot about communication from a different perspective than my own (the Western world).

### Introduction to International Politics. Prof. Leif Eric Easley

A very interesting course on international politics with an Eastern Asian focus. This was the hardest course I took, but also one of the most interesting ones. I am new to political science, so it was a challenge. We talked a lot about relationships between countries; US and China, Japan and South Korea, North Korea and China/South Korea/US. This class is taught by an American professor, who really likes to teach and interact with students. This was the only course that had somewhat of an analytical focus when it comes to exams. Other than the exams, we also did 10 online discussion questions, talking about everything from the rise of China and the regional politics to terrorism and cyber security.

### Introduction to International Relations. Prof. Yong Kyun Kim

Unlike the course in International Politics, this course had a broader focus on the research area of International Relations. We talked about wars, human rights/security, and the environment. Overall the focus was global challenges, both in the past and in the future. After every class, we took a 4 question quiz that was a part of our final grade. This course was a good complement to the International Politics course, making me understand the background a bit more.

## Housing

Ewha provides housing for international students in the I-House on campus. Most of the students share room with one or more roommates, but a few single rooms are available. Since I didn't want to take my chances, I got housing outside of campus.

I stayed in what is called a Goshiwon. Goshiwon comes in different sizes and qualities, but in general they range from 6-10 m<sup>2</sup>. My room was 9,9 m<sup>2</sup>, and had a bed, desk, chair, closet- and storage space, a fridge, a TV, a toilet, and shower. I shared a small kitchen with 10 other tenants and included in my rent I got free rice, kimchi, instant ramen, tea, coffee, and laundry detergent. This was really convenient and saved me some money on food.

The goshiwon I stayed in was called PRIME Oneroomtel, and was situated 3 minutes from the main gate of the university. Most goshiwons are one-sex only, and so was mine; only female tenants were allowed. I paid 400 000 won per month, which in today's currency is 3173 SEK or 358 USD. On-campus housing costs between 437 500-717 500 won for a single room and 325 000-480 000 won for a double (for fall semester 2018, this may change in the future).

From what I heard about the I-House on campus, there was not a proper kitchen on each floor as I had in my housing. Some of my international friends loved the on-campus accomodation, and some found it annoying having to share their rooms. I loved my housing, and would recommend goshiwons for everyone, but either way housing is not a problem. For more information about housing in Korea, I recommend Goshipages. It's a site for booking a Goshiwon, but it also has a blog with good information in English regarding housing types in South Korea (<https://goshipages.com/>).

## Food and entertainment

One of the reasons I had for chosing South Korea as my study nation was the food. And I was not disappointed. I love Korean food. In general, it's spicy and a lot of meat. Even a dish that may look vegetarian on the menu, such as kimchi stew, it has a little meat in it. Thus, it's not ideal if you're vegetarian or vegan.

A lot of Korean meals are meant to be shared. The most famous one being of course the Korean barbeque. You order your meat, get kimchi and other *banchans* (sidedishes) and then cook your meat on the table on either a coal grill or gas burner underneath a metal sheet. Then of course you can order soju, the Korean drink of choice. Soju is a distilled rice beverage that is usually poured in shotglasses. It is on average 20% of alcohol and can be flavoured or just served natural.

I will not list all of the great foods and many food markets that I visited, but I will recommend everyone to go to Gwanjang market, and try as many foods as you can. My personal favorites is pajeon, a Korean pancake with green onions and seafood, and jeyuk bokkeum which is a stirfried pork in chilisauce, served with lettuce, rice, and banchans.

Enough about the food. Korea is famous for its popular culture, and it is everywhere. K-pop is played in every store, and famous K-pop-stars are on every ad and even have their own products, ranging from coffee to lipsticks. I had little to no knowledge about the K-pop industry before moving to Korea, but I must say I think that it is truly fascinating. Music is a big part of Korea, and in almost any street, you can find karaoke clubs, called noraebang. Unlike Sweden, almost all of these karaoke places are small rooms that you either rent by the hour, or pay per song. Some serve alcohol, some allow you to bring your own. It was fairly common that me and my buddy group went to dinner and then finished off the night with some noraebang.

### **Costs**

Seoul is said to be one of the most expensive cities in the world. I agree that it's not cheap. However, I live in a student apartment in Sweden and pay roughly 4700 SEK (530 USD) in rent each month. So my rent was a lot cheaper in Seoul. I ate almost all my meals out, which is cheaper than in Sweden. Depending on where you go, a lunch could cost between 4 000-9 000 won per person (30-70 SEK, 4-9 USD). However, buying groceries to cook for yourself, was really expensive.

A metro ride costs 1 250 won (10 SEK, 1 USD), which is quite cheap. Depending on how much you intend to ride, this cost could be way more or way less than you spend in Sweden. In school, most of my literature was available online or at the printing store for a very low cost. This was both convenient, and saved me a lot of money compared to my textbook costs in Sweden.

Overall, it is hard to say whether or not it is more expensive in Seoul vs. Helsingborg as far as living goes. To me, it was about the same. Some things are cheaper here, some things are cheaper there. However, a round-trip plane ticket ranges from 6 000-10 000 SEK (600-1 000 USD), and the visa cost me 480 SEK plus the train ride to Stockholm. I also paid 40 000 won (400 SEK, 40 USD) for my ARC. Those are costs that I wouldn't have had in Sweden, but it was worth it to say the least.

### **Cash is king, especially on the metro**

Korea is a country that uses a lot of technology. In restaurants you order via a screen, people pay with their phones, etc. After all, it is the home of Samsung and LG. However, cash is still king. You need cash for a few vital things, such as buying metro tickets and metro cards. You can only recharge your metro card, or T-Money card as they are called, by using cash. I therefore advise you to take out some cash before coming to Korea.

You can buy a T-Money card in almost any convenience store at the airport. The card costs around 3 000 won, and then you have to top it up with additional money. You can use the T-Money card on the buses, trains, and metro around Seoul, and for airport transportation. The bus costs 10 000 won, and has fewer stops (one of which is Ewha Womans University). The metro costs 4 900 won, but includes a transfer and a bit of walking. Taxi from airport to the university can cost quite a lot due to tariffs on the bridge between Incheon (city where the airport is) and Seoul.

### **The Visa process**

Any person can enter South Korea and stay for 90 days without a visa. If you are going to study for one semester, you need a D2 visa. I am a planner and like to get things done way ahead of time. This is quite hard when it comes to the Visa. You need documents from the university in Korea, to prove that you are going to be a student there. These documents are sent to Lund University, and you have to pick them up in Lund. These documents arrived in the beginning of July when I applied.

There are quite a lot of paper work you need to fill in. However, the Embassy of South Korea in Stockholm were really helpful when I emailed them all of my questions. On their webpage, they recommend you to apply for the Visa in person in Stockholm. I sent my visa "REK-brev" and had all the appendices and the Visa fee (in cash) in the same letter. It took about a week, and then I went and picked it up. Note that they do not send the Visa via mail back to you. There are some Visa agencies that do that, for an additional fee.

### **The ARC – Alien Registration Card**

I applied for a single entry Visa, meaning that once I had entered the country, I could not go out of the country and then back in again with the same Visa. I therefore had to get an Alien Registration Card at the Immigration Office in Korea. This means that you are a registered immigrant in Korea for a certain period of time, and can travel like a Korean. For example, I flew to Japan and at the airport, I could take the "Korean Passports" line at the safety control. Very convenient. The same thing applied coming back from Japan.

The process was a bit tricky, since all information only exists in Korean and Chinese... At Ewha, they invited an agency that helped all the international students for an additional fee of 10 000 won (the card itself costs around 30 000 won). I strongly advise you to take this help. You will spare two visits to the Immigration office (5 000 won back and forth in metro costs) and you can be certain that you have all the documents and photos needed.

### **Contact information**

This was a lot of information, and perhaps a bit disconnected. If you have any questions at all about South Korea, Seoul, Ewha, the everyday life, or anything, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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### **Spara och skicka i Word-format till [outgoing@sam.lu.se](mailto:outgoing@sam.lu.se)**

Ange i emailens ämnesrad "Reseberättelse: Land, universitetets namn och ditt namn." Om du vill vara anonym så skriv "student XX" i stället för ditt namn.