

## Seoul, South Korea

### Seoul National University of Science and Technology

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#### Introduction

I have always wanted to go to exchange while studying so when I had the opportunity and money to do so I decided to go forward with my plan, I wanted to explore a different society altogether than the ones in Europe, to experience a more culturally distant society, as I have traveled much in Europe already. I chose South Korea because, I was fascinated with its history, especially the recent history, where South Korea came out of a brutal civil war during the early cold war period and experienced an amazing economic development that brought the country out of poverty and transformed it into one of the wealthiest country in Asia and the world.

## Seoul National University of Science and Technology



### On Campus

The university that I attended during my exchange program was called Seoul National University of Science and Technology or shortened; Seoultech, It is located outskirts of Seoul to the north-east but still within the city proper, the university is a giant campus area with several buildings serving different functions altogether, they have several halls or buildings dedicated to the different majors that the students can enroll in, for example they have a building called the Davinci Hall where they have design and ceramic students enroll also other halls dedicated to technical engineering etc.. On the campus are several dormitories (I lived in the dormitories), some of the dormitories are signed to either men or women and either are allowed to visit one another, also there is a dormitory for international students called Sungrim Dormitory (that is where I was staying during my semester). The accommodations are fine in general but be aware that the rooms aren't always super clean and that you have to do some cleaning yourself when you get to your room, I am not fanatical about such matters so I came out just fine, but some are and it might be an issue to those.

On campus there is a cafeteria and several cafés where they serve various drinks and type of coffees along with cakes and snacks etc. you can select one of several meal options according to your desires, but they come at a cost.

Also it is very important, if you stay in the dormitories, that you listen to the messages that comes forth because they give you vital information, but still, if you are unsure about anything ask the dormitory office instead of doing nothing, as I did, when I misinterpreted a messages and was close to be locked out site my dormitory room simply because they changed all door codes the last day and I had a two-day extension so I was still assigned to my room when they changes all door codes.

I had chosen several courses that I wanted to enroll myself to from back home, and therefore I did not know if they were relevant to my major as an Architectural Technologist.

My following courses were:

- HVAC system for buildings – dropped
- Architectural Design Studio
- Basic Korean for foreign students
- Global Architecture
- Research Methodology

### **HVAC Systems for Buildings**

As you can see I dropped the course, namely; *HVAC system for buildings*, I thought we were going to learn about HVAC systems in building the way we learn about such matters back home but after several lectures, we were basically just doing normal math; equation, Calculation and the like. I felt that I was wasting my time because we were not introduced to new programs or system that could have been useful.

### **Architectural Design Studio**

Architectural Design studio was interesting and was mainly focused on the design aspect of architecture, it was very design based. We had to design a building on a certain location in Seoul and beforehand we made a site analysis, analyzing the traffic, sound and light etc. to develop our understanding of the considerations one must make before designing a building. We went to the site where the building were to be placed to better understand the physical limitations of space and the congestion of vehicles etc., the end result was a design board and a physical model that we had to present to the class and our teachers.



This course gave me 6 ETC points compared to the other courses that I took and therefor I had to invest more time in this course, also we had more deliveries and presentations throughout this course at the early stage, afterwards we began working more independently as our individual work progressed.

### **Basic Korean for Foreign Students**

Basic Korean was a course that I chose because I wanted to learn some basic Korean in order to understand the written and spoken language, but I realized that Korean is very difficult to learn and requires much practice before one can communicate in Korean, on basic level, so do not expect to learn Korean in 4 months, but the course does offer you basic reading and writing skills to recognize some basic sentences.

### **Global Architecture**

Global Architecture was a course offered at the university and I thought it could have been relevant in regard to future architecture and sustainability and offer me some insight into what ideas and/or principles that connect modern architecture today, but it did not really provide me with useful knowledge but instead we learned about the basic idea of the concept; *architecture* and also we learned about *Korean architecture*; its

history and development, which in itself was interesting, but otherwise not really relevant for my mayor as an architectural technologist.

In *Global Architecture* we had to write an essay about global architecture in which we choose a topic; it could be 3D printing, planned cities or building materials for modern building etc., the essay had to have relevance for the concept; *global architecture*

### **Research Methodology**

I chose the course; Research Methodology and, basically, it is about how to conduct in research, how to write a research report and understand the concept of research validity. In this course we had to make reports about several already-published research papers and analyze whether they had validity of different kinds or, said with other words, if they were valid research papers.

As our examination project we made a research proposal with introduction and expected result etc. to present for the class and our presentation was evaluated by our teacher.

### **English Skills at the University**

All of my courses (Global Architecture, HVAC Systems for Buildings, Architectural Design Studio 2, Basic Korean 1 for Foreign Students and Research Methods in Planning and Design) were taught in English but the level varied, my Korean teacher in the course: Basic Korean 1 for Foreign Students, barely spoke a word English therefore it was sometimes difficult to understand what she tried to explain because I get "lost in translation", in regards to the course: HVAC system for building, the teacher spoke and wrote very good English, the spoken and written language was very easy to understand.

In the courses: Architectural Design Studio 2 and Research Methods in Design and Planning: the English spoken was good enough for you to understand but sometimes I missed some of the key points because I could not always understand the accent and, at the same time, the teacher also had to speak Korean half of the time because a lot (almost all) of our Korean classmate could not communicate in English which slowed the entire learning process for everyone. Regarding: Global Architecture, the English level was fine.

## Seoul



Seoul is a gigantic mega-metropolis, it is colossus in scale and span across a huge area, it houses 23 million people or over a third of the country's entire population. It is an interesting city indeed but also a toxic, smelly and ugly city with very few public parks and some would, at first glance, proclaim it an architectural and artistic desert, but do not be fooled by appearances, Seoul has more to offer than you think. Seoul has some very interesting places with to visit during your stay but do not expect a European style glamour and elegance. Seoul is, unlike Copenhagen, very car-based and has lots of traffic everywhere, a six lane highway crosses Gangnam for instance, so expect traffic. Itaewon is a culturally heterogeneous area with a large immigrant community and foreign restaurants both Asian, middle Eastern and European and it is relatively touristed. Gangnam is another borough or district that is known for the Youtube hit; *"Gangnam Style"*, it houses the more prominent shops, restaurant and cafés etc. and is rather expensive but not very touristed.



Myeongdong is the most well know area of Seoul and by far the most touristed, it is located south-east of the Gyeongbokgung Palace and it is the *"real Seoul"*. Myeongdong is known for the neon light signs lighting up the entire district, to a point where it is almost as bright as daylight, a rather interesting

experience altogether, there are many different shops and boutiques in this area too but many of these restaurants in Myeongdong smell like tourist traps, so be careful.

In Seoul there is a palace called the Gyeongbokgung Palace, already mentioned, which is the largest of all the palaces in Seoul and the most centrally placed one. Between this palace and another palace, called the Changgyeonggung Palace, is an interesting quarter of Seoul where



many old traditional Korean courtyard houses still remain and they are charming and beautiful with their cozy interior and exposed wooden constructions, it is a must if one is to see some part of the ancient Seoul.

Seoul has a very well-developed metro system which connects all boroughs and neighborhoods to each other but the fact that the metro runs underground and because Seoul's mere size, you sometimes feel trapped underground but it is the best way to see Seoul and get from one neighborhood to another relatively shortly. Also, one can travel by bus and try the many routes, I however, rarely traveled by bus and therefore it is impossible for me to guide you on this part. But all in all, Seoul has a developed public transportation system so do not worry about finding your way through the city.

The areas stated above are only a fraction of the places to visit in Seoul but they are nonetheless very interesting and one has to explore Seoul to see its beauty unlike European cities lined with beautiful buildings and boulevards, Seoul looks rather uninteresting and grim at first glance so one has to be curious and willing to explore the various neighborhoods and visit the great many cafes, galleries, restaurants, etc. around Seoul in order to experience the city properly.

### **Weather**

The weather in Seoul, South Korea, is very diverse and there is a great difference between summer and winter with hot humid summers with 30 degrees Celsius to icy cold winters with minus 10 degrees Celsius during the night so be prepared and make sure that you have; winter jackets, gloves, a scarf etc. with you, but anyway you can always buy winter clothes in Seoul.

If you visit Seoul from August to December, as I did, keep in mind that the temperature drops significantly in the late autumn and suddenly it gets exceedingly cold very quickly, so if you do not have winter clothes buy them in early October at latest.



## Communication



In order to communicate with my Korean buddy, ordinary Koreans, teachers and other foreign exchange student or basically anybody in Korea we had to download; Kakao Talk on our phone as an app, it is the Korean equivalent to Facebook/snapchat and is super easy to use, it allows you to communicate with everyone in Korea that has a Kakao Talk account, which is; everyone, as long as you are friends on that app, just like other social media platforms back home in the west.

## Prices and Cost of Living

The cost of living in Seoul is slightly cheaper than in Copenhagen, things like coffee to go and take away food is cheaper than in Denmark, but clothes is more or less within the same price range as back home. Restaurants and fine dining are cheaper, but the quality of food is not near as good. So, whatever you plan to do remember that South Korea is not a cheap country to live in or visit so have enough capital to finance your stay. I have heard from my fellow exchange student, however, that the flight to Tokyo should be very cheap.

## Tips and advices

You may experience certain failures when using your credit card in Korea, I certainly did although I had an ordinary Visa Credit card, in most shops and even on certain websites and in some ATM as well, my credit card was rejected, so be aware that it might happen and have sufficient amount of cash on you always, make sure that you can pay with cash if needs be.

Remember to have at least two credit cards with you, but not on you of course, so if you lose one credit card you have another one. It is important that you can always pay your way out of a certain desperate situation or have the ability to pay, for example if you find yourself in a; *if-you-are-lost-and-your-phone-is-dead-and-need-a-taxi-home-sort-of-situation*. So do not forget the Gods love the rich and are merciful to those who can afford it, but to the rest Satan is there so fill the void.

In regard to language skills, do not expect the natives to speak English most of them do not speak English and can barely understand it either, so if you can learn some basic phrases in Korean or is somewhat familiar with the language it could help you a lot during your stay in South Korea.

Another thing one has to be aware of is that *Google Maps* **does not** work in South Korea at all, well it works but the images are blurry, and it is almost impossible to decipher any building or location properly, so what one should do is to download an app called *Kakao Map* which works a bit like *Google Maps*, it is also in English, it can tell you how to get from A to B and it shows which metro lines leads to where etc., it is really useful, because Seoul is, in terms of layout, plan and organization, very confusion and you will need a guide to some extent in the beginning of your stay.

