



South Korea

Seoul

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Preparations before travelling

Don't be too German about it! Going abroad is always about excitement. Planning all through doesn't help you a lot cause at the end most of the people were still complaining about this and that to be too stressful. At the end of the day you don't need anything besides your flight ticket, a health insurance, the suitable immunizations and the approval by Frankfurt's and South Korea's Universities. I didn't apply for a Visa cause you are allowed to stay about 90 days even as a tourist. And even if you have a Visa you still need to apply for the so called Alien Registration Card (short ARC) as soon as you've arrived to be able to stay for longer than 90 days as well as being able to leave the country without losing your normal Visa. And I'm pretty sure you will leave the borders of Korea meanwhile studying.

The Accommodation

The Sungkyunkwan University as well as other campuses offer an onsite dormitory for you to live at. You must apply for it before you leave. Most of the houses – at least if you are not studying at SKKU in Suwon – are on the campus. But this is just a random selection process.

So if you are a person that doesn't care about the regular curfew in between the week from 12 to 5 am or living together with all the exchange students in a rather regulated environment then it should be cool to apply for.

However there are other options to spend a nice time in Seoul by searching a flat with roommates owned by Korean natives or other privates. I've been living with two other roommates in a flat where we had our own rooftop, a nice living room and kitchen as well as our own rules. Of course always take care about the neighbors and don't be that kind of exchange student that is negatively noticed in the neighborhood. Just kidding. My landlord Benjamin Fallon was the kind of person that invites all tenants once a month to a BBQ party which I really liked. He is not strict about anything. A real ozzy basically. You will find it via the link: <https://www.facebook.com/simplespaceskorea/>

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Find your way around

Finding your way around in a metropolitan area such as Seoul can be a bit confusing in the beginning. Once arrived in Seoul it feels like you can barely escape this concrete jungle. Even the main city areas spread 20 to 30 kilometers in every cardinal direction. Luckily the Metro system is well connected and easy to read. Especially within the rush hour time you don't want to extend your bus drive to infinity because of traffic jams.

My advice is to start creating you a Kakao profile. Kakao Talk is the Korean WhatsApp. They have various apps, so after you set up your basic profile to be able to use those services, you can download Kakao Metro. It's a supportive app that even works in offline mode. It has a search function and shows you even a time schedule. So it's pretty handy to come with if you are not too confident with the city mapping yet.

As you can find free Wifi (iptime) at almost every crowded area or junction you can also download an app called CityMapper. This is an app exclusively for Seoul that works perfectly, but you can't use it offline. Besides Metro opportunities it also shows you cab prices as well as bus connections which can be worth much more than just a plain metro. Seoul is a hilly city, so the subway connections are sometimes about taking two or three different lines to get to a destination which is actually not that far away. Especially the area around the N-Seoul Tower that combines Line 1,4 and 6.



Kakao Metro

Free Download. Profile required



CityMapper

Free Download.

Asking people on the street has always been my favorite option because I like the social interaction. In general, though you must be aware that most of the Koreans don't speak English fluently as well as always try to be polite and answer your question – even though they don't know the answer. Sounds funny but can lead you into insanely wrong directions or streets. Sometimes when you take the time and got the right person on your side you can actually make a game out of it: “how to discover Seoul led by locals”. But don't ask for too familiar places because they might actually tell you the right way. Jokes aside – Koreans are really nice. Don't hesitate to talk to them. It even happened to me that when asking a group for directions, one of their members just temporarily left them to accompany us to find to our destination - which is ridiculously nice. Would you do that? Of course not! Should you? Most definitely after experiencing it!

Lastly my favorite option in the beginning was using cabs. Because they are quite cheap – I would say at least three times cheaper than in Frankfurt. So if you are new to the city, kind of drunk somewhere you don't remember how you did end up there:

Raise your hand as soon as you see a silver or yellow cab with LED lights on it. Most of the time that means they are free. Don't walk on the window to ask *‘could you please take me to bla bla’*.

Just get the f*** in. Greet him with a nice *annyeonghaseyo* **안녕하세요** and show him your home address. Yes, show him, don't tell him. Or her.

Because at the beginning you won't either be able to pronounce it correctly nor understand the response to your embarrassing pronunciation – no offense, I am still there. If you do understand the driver you're a legend. Or native. Congrats 🙌

So maybe just take a piece of paper that has your normal address written down in Roman as well as Hangul and a memorable bigger site close to your stay in case the driver doesn't manage to find it. I lived in Itaewon so basically every cab driver knew the main station. But my home was in a much lovelier area called Kyungridan-gil that is about 20 Minutes tough walk from Itaewon station away. Some of them didn't know Kyungridan which was shocking, but drunk me had to sort it out. So instead of steadily repeating the address the driver wouldn't find I said 'Grand Hyatt juseo' which was about 5 minutes away from my home. They all knew it. Even Donald Toupee Trump has been there. It always worked – I think you get the idea now?

Referring to yellow or silver cabs is just in my experience the cheapest way to drive. The black ones have a starting fee of about 4.600 Won whereas yellow and silver ones have 2.800 to 3.000. But you will probably find more profound info on the internet. This was just me slightly being observative. Depending on at which time you are in Seoul you can also just walk home.

If it's summer for example: don't walk. If it's winter on the other hand: don't walk.

Seoul is hilly and freaking big. I tried it. I failed. Or rather just gave up after 2 hours of walking in right or false directions. Who knows.



Being the King of My Castle

You made the decision to go abroad. So I just guess that you are willing to meet new people. Great. First step to achieve this is by getting some app called KakaoTalk on your phone. So whenever you meet locals you can just hand them over your Kakao ID, feel cool about it, pose to it, add them and hopefully meet them again. But that's up to you. I still have plenty of contacts on my phone I don't quite recall. But they were all pretty nice people, I mean they must've been. They talked to drunk me. Step 2 most definitely is to get yourself a Korean SIM Card by going into a phone shop. Bring your passport as well as your Korean address written down with you to be able to let the service person set it up for you. I won't explain the details. Just go to SKT (SK Telekom) or just KT (K Telekom) shops. They have the best options. There is also a YouTube video by some hipsters that give you (ir)relevant advice on how it works and how pricy it is. It's hard to not find it: "DON'T GET a SIM CARD [...] before you watch this video". The prices are not up to date anymore. Just go to a more professional looking SKT or KT shop and you can do the comparison to yourself. You will notice it's more pricy than you are used to.



Nightlife in Seoul



I will definitely keep it short for two reasons.

Number one: there is so much to write about because it's quite different from what we know.

Number two: where is the fun if you won't go find out on your own.

If you are a techno maniac there are only a few places to go to. Faust and Contra in Itaewon are the only places. Sometimes Cakeshop which is just below Contra. But in general you can forget about that kind of music until you return back home.

Gangnam, home of famous Korean Dancer and Singer Psy, is also a party suburb. Octagon is one of the biggest clubs worldwide. I have never been there so if you are interested in stuff like that make sure to go there.

Best and most famous party areas are Hongdae and Itaewon. Hongdae is more famous for Karaoke, but also has a lot bars and some clubs. Itaewon only has two or three karaoke bars and they are more expensive. So if you want to start off with karaoke go to Hongdae. Besides that the choice is yours to decide which one you prefer. One of the most comforting things in Korea is that either as male or female you don't have to worry about getting into fights with Koreans. If you did then it's most certainly your fault. People are much more polite so make sure to fit in and not cause any trouble.

The Metro only operates until midnight-ish. So you either party until about 4 or 5 am or just call a cab. Korean typical drinks are Soju and Makgeolli – you will begin to like them. Trust me.

Restaurants



On this one I have to hold myself back again. Not because I want you to discover it all by yourself, rather because I have so much to talk about that I could fill a whole book with it... Or at least a book for children with... well... about 10 pages.

Korea is like a two-edged sword regarding food – especially if you love food and all it's influential cultures. And I think we all do.

Lactose is something that Koreans are intolerant to. Which is normal evolution. We Europeans on the other hands are mutants. Mutants that can devour a vast amount of cheese, milk and other lactose containing products without having any other side effects than maybe turning chubby.

Gosh I miss cheese. As stupid as it may sounds – you really value the little things that you suddenly can't be anymore. After four months of shibbe-di-shopping I found a proper shop where you can buy Parmigiano Reggiano, Blue Cheese and some American Cheddar without any taste to it. But it's just not the same quality, taste and especially not price. So even if you have a kitchen at home you are way better off to have a night-out and not cook for yourself. Restaurants are reasonably priced, especially domestic Korean cuisine like Bibimbap, Gimbap, Kimchi Chicken, Korean BBQ etc. pp. is very cheap compared to cooking at home. Another disadvantage is that Korean households do not contain ovens. I need a break, got to get some more tissues. And yeah. Don't tip. It's rude.



Discover Korea

In Spring or Fall this country turns into a cherry-blossom-red-orange-hilly-nature-heaven. Time for some adventure times. Pack your backs, use the days off to escape concrete Nevada.

Bus and train is pretty cheap to move around. If you want to spend a bit more money you can either go by plane or the fast train called KTX.

Where do I go? When is the best time to go there? Ask Google, or your new Korean friends.

Busan, a city located south-east and known for certain festivals and great food was actually not that interesting for me. So I think it all comes to ones individual interests again. Gyeongju on the other hand was pretty beautiful and with its Buddhist temples around a perfect visit for nature and small city visiting. Whatever you end up doing, I'm sure you will enjoy it. Have fun in Korea. I hope this sarcastic article accelerated your anticipation.

Gamsahamnida for reading – take care.

안녕히 계세요

by [REDACTED]