

# My semester abroad

An experience report of studying in  
South Korea

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## **Introduction**

Studying abroad was special experience that seemed scary at first, is not always easy, but ultimately creates lasting memories. My semester abroad in Korea was an unforgettable journey, filled with learning, exploration, and personal growth. This essay aims to capture the essence of my time in Korea, highlighting the cultural experience, my time in and out of university. Furthermore I will present some pictures and answer questions for people who are interested in studying in South Korea.

## **Before going abroad**

In preparation for my Korea semester abroad, I made sure to acquire some valuable knowledge and basic language skills regarding Korea. I enrolled in a language course at university to learn basic Korean and I tried to read as much as possible about my hosting country. I can highly recommend the book Fettnäpfchenführer Korea which was entertaining before my stay and seems even funnier after experiencing Korea firsthand.

Additionally I tried to plan for any inconvenience that could happen during my stay. That included signing up for a health insurance as well as figuring out where to stay in Seoul.

## **During my stay**

### **Culture**

During my semester abroad in Korea, I was impressed by the country's strong emphasis on politeness and its unique cultural etiquettes. I was struck by the respect exhibited by the locals in their daily interactions. Embracing Korean etiquette became an essential part of my cultural immersion, allow-

ing me to connect more genuinely with the people and truly understand their way of life.

Korean society places a significant value on hierarchy and respect for elders, which is evident in their language and behaviour. In Korean class, I quickly noticed the importance of using appropriate honourifics when speaking to elders or those in positions of authority. Using what I had learned in class, respect and awareness, formed deeper connections with locals. Often leaving people with a smile which had a lasting effect on my interest for the Korean language and culture.

Korean dining provided yet another fascinating aspect of Korean culture. Dishes are more often shared than presented on an individual plate. Due to that dining felt more like a social event and thus conversations flowed more easily during a meal. Compared to Germany I would describe Korea as having an eating out culture, which was perfect as a student.

## **University**

During my time at EWHA Woman's University as a male studying architecture, I had a unique and enrich-

ing experience. Being one of the few male students in a



**EWHA WOMAN'S  
UNIVERSITY**

dominantly female institution made me feel uncomfortable entering the classroom for the first time. The collective culture of my colleagues however, helped me seamlessly integrate into the class.

I choose three courses in total: Architectural design studio 3, Korean Ceramics and Academic Korean 1.

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## Architectural design studio 3



Collaborative projects in my design studio allowed me to work closely with talented locals who taught me a to see architecture with different eyes. While Germany teaches a rather rational approach, in Korea



we were allowed to dream bigger than what structural engineering would dictate. It felt like it is the part I was missing out on in Germany.

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## Korean Ceramics

Taking the Korean ceramics course has been an interesting experience for me. Through the delicate process of shaping clay into beautiful forms, I've not only honed my artistic skills but also gained a deeper appreciation for the value of imperfection in art. In the be-



ginning, I strived for perfection, aiming to create flawless pieces that mirrored traditional Korean ceramics. However, as the course progressed, I realised that true beauty lies in embracing the unique quirks and imperfections that make each ceramic piece one-of-a-kind. As an architecture stu-

dent, this opened mindset enriches my creativity and design approach in the future.

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## Academic Korean 1

Academic Korean 1 was a demanding course with 12 hours per week. The early morning classes from 8:00 am to 11:00 am required a lot of dedication. There was homework almost everyday, hand in papers every week and quizzes scheduled every two weeks. We went thru two books in one semester. Despite receiving a bad grade, the experience was still invaluable. The demanding schedule pushed



me to immerse myself fully in the language, providing a deeper understanding of Korean grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Although the grade may not reflect it, I emerged from the course with newfound language proficiency and a sense of accomplishment, laying a strong foundation for the future.

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## Differences to the lectures in Germany

German lectures and Korean lectures differ significantly in their approach to attendance and its impact on the final grade. In Korea, attendance is usually mandatory, with a direct correlation to the final grade. Regularly attending Korean lectures becomes crucial as it can significantly influence the final score/grade. As an example: 20% of the grade in Academic Korean 1 was attendance.

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## Mid-terms and finals

EWHA Woman's University had midterms and finals during the semester. The grades however were calculated differently among my chosen courses. While the midterm was not as important in one class it was all the more important in the other. Making sure how a grade is calculated during the initial time of a course is crucial to avoid a bad grade at the end.

## Advise/recommendations for students interested in going to Korea

1. Learn basic Korean before your stay.
2. Make sure to get as much information about the processes of your hosting university as possible. (How is the grade calculated? How many times can I be absent until I fail a class? When should I choose my courses?)
3. If you have health insurance from Germany which is mandatory you can apply for exemption of the national health insurance of Korea. This will save you about 70.000₩ per month. (However you will have to pay for medical expenses by yourself and submit the bills to your insurance company at a later point.)
4. Get a transportation card in convenience store.
5. Try to travel Korea by bus. The Bus is super cheaper and brings you everywhere in Korea. Or go to Jeju by overnight ferry.
6. If you have a hobby like running, dancing or hiking that you would like to continue doing in Korea, try to find a Naver Cafe and meet some locals to run, dance or hike together. (The Naver Cafe website is only available



in Hangul, try Chrome to translate it if your language skills are insufficient.)

7. Download Naver Map, Kakao Map, Karrot (like eBay Kleinanzeigen), Intercity Bus App, Korailtalk App, Darungi (Bicycle renting)

## **Conclusion**

My semester abroad in Korea was a transformative chapter in my life, leaving an indelible impact on my identity and view on architecture. The cultural immersion, academic pursuits, valuable friendships, and personal growth I experienced enriched my life in ways I never anticipated. As I returned home, I carried with me not just good memories but also a greater understanding of a different culture.