



Konkuk University

Exchange semester

Experience Report Fall 2023

Looking back on my previous encounters, my venture as an exchange student at Konkuk University in South Korea commenced in the fall of 2023, marking the beginning of my 5th semester. As an International Business Administration student, this particular chapter occupies a unique and significant space in my academic journey.



Breathtaking sunset in one of the famous spots in Andong-si city, South Korea

Before departing, it's crucial to be aware of significant information regarding health

insurance, particularly due to recent changes in the country's policies for exchange students. When applying for your Alien Registration Card (ARC), you will automatically be enrolled in the Korean National Health Insurance (KNHI), requiring monthly payments of approximately 53 euros starting from the application month. While they advise applying for an exception to use your international insurance, the process can be challenging.

In my case, I had Young Travel Health Insurance Basic with worldwide coverage excluding the USA/Canada, along with an Additional Package Basic covering Travel Liability Insurance, Travel Accident Insurance, and Emergency Insurance (HanseMerkur Reiseversicherung AG). Despite these comprehensive packages, the Korean system may not recognize international coverage, particularly for women's health, leading to denial of exceptions. In my experience, they rejected my request twice because my insurance did not explicitly mention coverage for pregnancy and birth cases.

Considering this, there are two potential scenarios to navigate:

1. If you plan to travel after the semester, it is advisable to secure a comprehensive international insurance for the entire duration of your stay abroad. However, if you are a woman, you may still be required to pay for Korean National Health Insurance.
2. For those intending to stay in Korea for an extended period, you can opt for insurance coverage only for the initial month upon arrival. Subsequently, you will be registered for the national health insurance after applying for the ARC. Nevertheless, if you plan on traveling, it is safer to either maintain both insurances or obtain a separate insurance for the travel period at the end of your overseas stay.

Concerning the visa and flight arrangements, I opted for a cautious approach and waited until I secured my visa. The visa application process remains relatively straightforward. To initiate the process, it's advisable to schedule an appointment online at the Korean consulate in Frankfurt. If you encounter any confusion during this step, a simple phone call to the consulate can provide the necessary guidance to navigate the process effectively. One notable challenge in the process is the login procedure. To streamline this, logging in as a guest is a viable option. Additionally, using Google Translate can be immensely helpful when booking the appointment, especially since some options may lack English translations. This ensures a smoother experience throughout the entire visa application process. When it comes to packing, anticipating what you might need can be tricky. I initially believed certain items would be hard to find, prompting me to overpack. However, I discovered that

South Korea offers a wide range of toiletries and hygiene products, making it unnecessary to bring an excess of such items. The only exception is deodorant, which can be a bit pricey as it's not commonly used by South Koreans.

Aspects of My South Korean Experience That I Truly Enjoy

South Korea won me over with its charming everyday conveniences. The fact that you can easily find self-serving photobooths, 24/7 open convenience stores, and delightful ice cream shops adds a touch of comfort to daily life. Exploring the city on my first evening was magical, the vibrant streets were alive with energy yet had a calming presence. What I truly loved about South Korea is the diverse range of activities it offers. For those who appreciate a good hike, the country's love for hiking is contagious. The trails are a perfect escape into nature. Even if you're just a leisurely walker, the well-designed streets make each stroll effortless and enjoyable. The city's blend of dynamic vitality and soothing ambiance creates a warm and inviting atmosphere that feels uniquely human.



Thrilling surfing trip at Yangyang Beach, South Korea

One of the coolest surprises during my time in Korea was getting a chance to try surfing at Yangyang Beach. I never thought I'd be catching waves during my study abroad adventure, but there I was, riding the waves and loving every moment. What's even more amazing is that Korea has these stunning beaches not too far from Seoul, offering a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. I'm not really a museum person, but I found myself enjoying

every visit in South Korea. From national treasures to contemporary art and explorations of historical movements, each museum trip felt like a new and interesting chapter. And then there were the climbing lessons and my first roller coaster ride at Everland amusement park. Let me tell you, Korea has a way of keeping you entertained. The variety of activities is what makes Korea so special – every day felt like a new adventure waiting to happen.



Less Preferred Aspects of My Stay:

One thing that I struggled with during my time in Korea was the limited variety in food options. It's tough to say this because I genuinely love Korean cuisine, but if you have dietary restrictions, finding diverse and healthy choices can be challenging. Many restaurants are quite inflexible and reluctant to make adjustments for allergies or personal preferences. On

top of that, get ready for a surprise when it comes to taste – everything tends to lean on the sweet side. I thought I was mentally prepared, but the shock of sweet garlic bread caught me off guard. So, a little heads up: if you smell something savory, be prepared for a touch of sweetness, especially with bread and garlic. A piece of advice from my own experience: consider shopping at local, unlabeled markets instead of bigger ones like Emart or Lotte Mart. These local markets often offer more affordable options and some discounts. Throughout my stay, I mainly shopped at my neighbor's market, picking up basics like toast bread, eggs, slices of cheese, things that were cheaper to buy locally than to cook at home. Speaking of cooking, it might seem more cost-effective to eat out, but cooking at home can be healthier. Find your own balance, and even if fruits are a bit pricier, make sure to invest in them. I made the mistake of neglecting fruits, which led to vitamin deficiencies and a weakened immune system. Taking care of your health is crucial, even if it means spending a bit more on the essentials.

My courses:

Here are the courses I took:

1. Technical Analysis of Financial Markets and Investments:

- Attendance and Participation: 30%
- Three quizzes every two weeks (multiple questions): 10% each (open book)
- Final Term Exam: 60% (open book)

2. International Commercial Relations:

- Attendance: 10%
- Assignment: Around 10%
- Mid-Term Exam: 40%
- Final Term Exam (a mix of multiple choice and open questions, closed book): 40%

3. Current World Economic Issues:

- Multiple-choice or mixed format for both Mid and Final Term Exams: 45% each (open book) - Attendance: 10%

4. Macroeconomics:

- Multiple-choice for both Mid and Final Term Exams: 45% each
- Attendance: 10%
- Open book for exams

5. International Marketing:

- Attendance: 10%
- Presentation: 20%
- Mid-Term and Final Term Exams (a mix of multiple choice and open questions, closed book): 30% each

6. Korean Elementary:

- Attendance: 10% /Assignment: 20% /Homework: 10%
- Mid-Term and Final Term Exams: 30% each

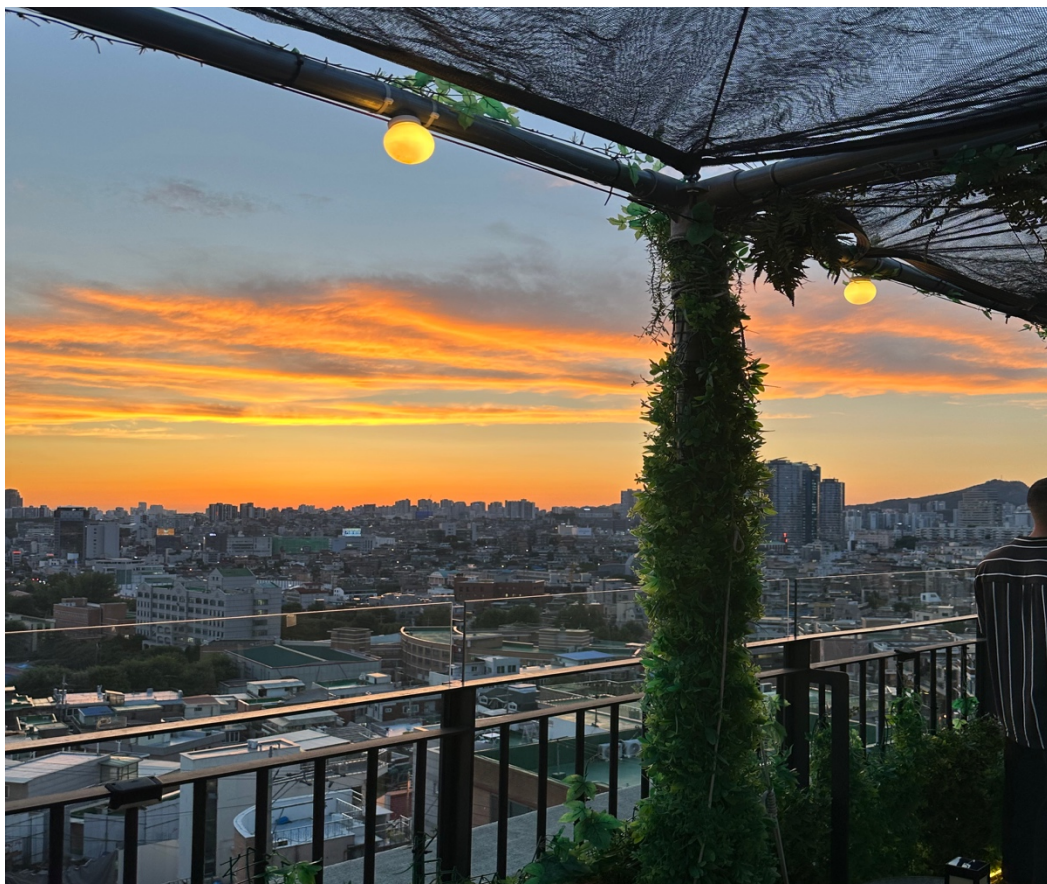
The exams were fair. Adjusting to the peculiarities of multiple-choice questions and dealing with mid-term assessments added some extra work, but it wasn't too overwhelming. One thing to note is the potential for a packed exam schedule. I had six exams in just five days, and a couple of those days had two exams back-to-back. It was a bit of a grind, especially with multiple exams from Monday to Thursday. I initially thought about dropping two courses to ease up a bit, but I stuck with it, and thankfully, I passed them all. The key to surviving, even if the classes aren't your favorite, is attendance. Keeping a perfect attendance record seems to be the magic formula. Commitment is highly valued by professors at Konkuk University, and it serves as a key factor in reducing the likelihood of academic challenges. Rather than worrying about potential setbacks, concentrate on actively participating in every lecture. The lectures were easily understandable, the professors had excellent pronunciation, and I didn't face any significant linguistic challenges during my academic experience. I am genuinely delighted to have been part of the exchange program and to have been a student at Konkuk University this past fall. It has been a fantastic academic experience, and I believe it will significantly influence my future.

Anticipations vs. Reality:

During my stay in South Korea, I was already familiar with the culture and had a basic understanding of the language, enabling me to communicate and comprehend quite a bit within the context, despite not being able to construct full sentences. What pleasantly surprised me was the genuine effort made by the younger generation to communicate in English, even if their proficiency wasn't perfect. However, there was one slightly frustrating moment. When I lost an item and needed to communicate with middle-aged bus drivers, it became a bit challenging. Throughout my entire stay, I made a conscious effort to engage in conversations with locals, using my broken Korean. This was especially true in the traditional markets in my neighborhood. I could feel the appreciation from those around me for trying

to communicate in their language. It added a personal touch to my experience, making the connections with the community more meaningful.

I expected a diverse range of attractions and cultural knowledge, including historical trips, local interactions, entertainment, and the exploration of new cities in South Korea. My expectations were not just met but exceeded during my stay. Unexpectedly, something I hadn't planned turned out to be a delightful surprise. As I mentioned earlier, the only real shocker for me was the diet, even though I had some prior knowledge. Adjusting to it was a bit challenging. However, overall, the experience was truly life-changing and transformed me into an entirely new person.



Sunset Serenity Amidst the Heart of Seoul

[Guidance on What to Avoid, What to Know, and What Not to Do](#)

What to Avoid:

- Pressing the button while waiting for the green light: It's for blind people and is signaled through vocal cues. Avoid pressing it unintentionally, as it happened to me and my European friends. It can be a bit embarrassing!

- Losing your valuables: It's a common occurrence in south Korea. keep your valuables at home to avoid any unfortunate incidents.
- Skipping classes: It might be tempting but avoiding the temptation to skip classes is crucial for not failing a class (2 to 4 skips leads to an automatic failure)

Recommendations:

- Visit a clinic promptly if you're sick: Seek medical attention on the same day you feel unwell, especially during classes. This ensures you get a medication receipt, which can be emailed to your professor to avoid absences. Note that paper receipts from the day after are not accepted, so it's essential to visit the doctor directly while you're still under the weather. Also, don't be afraid to visit the doctor; your insurance will cover 100% of your expenses.
- Consider visiting a doctor's clinic instead of a hospital, as it tends to be less expensive

For newcomers, These English-speaking clinics are recommended:

International Clinic: Ideal if you have an ARC (Alien Registration Card) or private international insurance. While it may be a bit pricey, the doctor fees, ranging from 30 to 40 euros, are refundable.

Phone Number: 02-790-0857

Korean Address: 서울특별시 용산구 한남동 737-37

English Address: 737-37 Hannam-dong, Yongsan-gu, Seoul

Itaewon Clinic(이태원의원): A public clinic that accepts ARC. Fees are minimal and depend on your condition. Having Korean national insurance entails a payment of approximately 5 euros (subject to variation based on your medical case; additional required tests may incur extra costs, which are non-refundable and constitute a partial payment).

Phone number: 02-792-5551

Korean Address: 서울 용산구 우사단로 46

English Address: Seoul, Yongsangu, Woosadan-ro 46

Key Considerations to Keep in Mind:

- Recycling procedures
- ARC application process: When applying for your Alien Registration Card (ARC), ensure you follow the necessary steps for a smooth process.

- Key deadlines: Be aware of important deadlines to avoid any complications
- Mail reception: It's essential to ensure that you are receiving your postal mail promptly, as it may contain important information or documents.

Insights and Achievements

This semester has truly been a game-changer for me. I faced a plethora of lessons and challenges that demanded my attention and resilience for personal evolution. In the process, I've learned to see the world through different lenses—socially, economically, and culturally. But perhaps the most impactful shift has been in my perspective as a human being. It's been a journey of self-discovery and a profound realization of what it means to truly grow and connect with others. Professionally, this semester has been a treasure trove of communication techniques for me. In a low-context culture, I've honed my skills of being observant, patient, and especially considerate of how others perceive respect and hierarchy. The journey has been enlightening, offering a wealth of information about the economic challenges not just in our country but also in Asia. Engaging in interactive lectures, I've delved into recent trends in trade, economics, and the financial world, gaining insights that will undoubtedly benefit both my career path and my overall knowledge.



Overall, I'm filled with gratitude and a deep sense of blessing for the opportunity our university and the international office team have given me. Their tireless efforts have made this experience possible, and I want to express my heartfelt thanks. To all the future exchange

students, I extend my warmest wishes for good luck and an abundance of joy on your upcoming journeys!