

# Studying Abroad in Seoul, South Korea

## Introduction

Hi, my name is **Anna**, I am 25 years old and study **International Logistics Management** at the OWL University of Applied Sciences and Art. During the winter semester 2021/2022 I have been a visiting student at the **Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, South Korea**. Originally, I had planned to go to the Shih Chien University in Taipei, Taiwan in the winter semester 2020/2021, but then the pandemic happened and after only changing the year at first, I also had to change my destination in the end. Just like many other students I have met.



## Preparations

Since there are no suitable partner universities in the countries that interested me, I decided to go abroad as a free mover. I did not want to do all the planning and communication by myself, so I decided to go with an organization.

The organization I went with is called **Asia Exchange**. They are from Finland, so all the communication is in English. On their website they introduce all their partner universities and list the documents needed to apply. For me, the needed documents were the following:

- Form with general information
- Curriculum Vitae (Lebenslauf)
- Passport Photo (needed for the student ID of the host university)
- Scan of my passport
- Certificate of enrollment (from TH OWL)
- Current transcript of records
- Personal Statement on “Why I want to study at HUFs” (around one page)
- Reference Letter from one of my professors, that states that my English level is at least B2 (before the pandemic, an English certificate was needed; they changed it to make it easier for students)

I had first applied for a university in Taiwan, for which I got the approval in less than two weeks, later changed the year and then switched the other university in Korea. Asia Exchange is very flexible and quick in answering all your questions. I know students that got their approval in less than a week. They also have a chat on their website, where you can talk to

employees of the organization in real time. This was helpful for quickly having questions answered while filling out the form on their website.

Asia Exchange charges a fee of 75€ for the administration. I find this quite cheap for what they are offering. Besides answering all your questions and doing all the communication with the host university, they also hold webinars and give out guides for each country.

Through the **webinars**, we created WhatsApp groups with other exchange and visiting students going to the same university. I also met most of my close friends through one of the WhatsApp groups and someone who had the same flight as me. Her name is Yi Wen, we wrote almost every day for more than a month before the exchange started and became good friends.

Besides getting a study place at the host university, I also had to organize my **visa**, my **quarantine accommodation**, my **pcr-test**, my **general accommodation** and my **financing** of the semester abroad. As far as I know, Germans usually don't need a visa to enter South Korea, but due to the pandemic the rules are currently different. And of course, everything I am stating in this report about rules is only a snapshot and could be outdated by the time you want to enter Korea.

### **From departure till quarantine**

My **flight** started in Frankfurt, went over Doha where I switched airplanes, and ended in Incheon. I know a lot of other students that took the direct flight with Lufthansa, I however preferred flying with Qatar Airways, because it was the cheaper option for me.

The flights were quite alright, my time at the airport in Incheon however was very exhausting after the long travel. It took us more than four hours to get through all the checkpoints, because the waiting lines were so long. They had different checkpoints for everything: the visa, the pcr-test, the quarantine accommodation, the passport. And when we were finally through, a quarantine taxi took me right to my quarantine accommodation.

During the time that I entered South Korea, a **14-day quarantine** was mandatory and had to be self-organized. One way to find a quarantine accommodation through Airbnb. Before booking, the host needs to be contacted and must agree to you using their place for quarantine. Another option to find a quarantine accommodation is Stay14. This is the option that I used. Stay14 specifically offers quarantine accommodations in Incheon and Seoul and can also help you ordering a quarantine taxi and getting some food and water into your place.

The rules for and the organization of quarantine was quite confusing from time to time. When arriving with the same flight, it was **possible to do quarantine with someone else or with a group**. Some people said that everybody needed their own bedroom, some said that everybody also needed their own bathroom. Some students got a call from their health center at the beginning of quarantine, some didn't hear anything from theirs. Most students had to have a pcr-test at the beginning and the end of their quarantine (which is for free in Korea btw), I had to do a third test after the first six days. Some students got a food package from their health center, some didn't.

I quarantined by myself, because I didn't want the company of a stranger for 14 days that I couldn't flee from. I chose a place in Seoul, which then got cancelled, and I had to stay in Incheon instead. This is not a bad thing in general, just know that most delivery services are not available there when choosing your location. I had also overread, that the food and water would not be there right away, but would be delivered the next day, so I didn't bring anything from Germany and went to bed hungry the day I arrived. Additionally, the warm water wasn't working in my accommodation and the bed was extremely hard. Harder mattresses are common in South Korea, but the one in my quarantine accommodation was especially hard compared to the ones I slept on afterwards. I was having a hard time getting used to it, since I prefer my mattress in Germany being soft. And now that I am already complaining, I want to add that the blanket felt like plastic, I couldn't open the windows because my place was right next to the highway, the food package from Stay14 was shitty frozen microwave food and the other food I ordered was hella expensive.



But putting all these things aside, quarantine wasn't that bad. I had lots of natural light, enough motivation to get some exercise every day, a TV, the option to walk to the Health Center when I had to get tested and some good snacks. I am also more **introverted** than **extroverted**, so I don't have a problem being by myself for some time. I have heard from some extroverted students that they were having a difficult time being all by themselves in quarantine, so if you are extroverted you might want to consider doing quarantine with others.

Another helpful information: At the airport, you are asked for a Korean phone number, so it's helpful to already get one in Germany. It makes the process easier. There are also two apps needed for quarantine, which you can install in advance. The apps are used by the health center to track your location and ensure you stay at your place. And don't you even think about going outside without your phone. There are cameras everywhere.

## Accommodation

My accommodation story is not the shortest one, but let's start at the beginning. From the beginning I knew that I didn't want to stay at the **dorms**. There is nothing wrong with dorms in general (maybe besides some strict rules) and they are great for socializing, however, my university only offered shared bedrooms. As I have mentioned, I am more on the introverted side of the spectrum, which is why I need some private space to recharge. I applied for the dorms anyways, just in case I couldn't find anything else.



Other than the dorms, you can stay a) in an **Airbnb**, b) in a **share house**, or c) in a **regular flat**. Airbnb's can be nice, but also really expensive, depending on your standards. It's best to share an Airbnb, because it's easier to find options in a good price range. Share houses can also be a good option. It's important to take a closer look (if that's even possible while you're still in your home country), because some are of bad quality. I have friends who moved out directly because of the poor standards, but I also have friends who were happy with their rooms. By the way, in a share house you usually have your own room and bathroom, and then share a kitchen and sometimes some kind of living area.

I stayed in a regular flat by myself, but please don't ask me about the process of finding a flat, because I just happened to experience some lucky circumstances. The webinars held by Asia Exchange included an interview with a student who was in South Korea already. I followed her on Instagram to get some first expressions of Korea and she was also in one of our WhatsApp groups. One day she sent a long text into the group about one of her friends looking for a new flat mate during the upcoming semester.

That's where I took my chance and just texted him. He agreed on me moving into the free room, we set up a contract and I cancelled my dorm room. A couple of weeks later, he texted me that his current roommate now wasn't sure he was going to move out and that we might have to find a different solution. He ended up finding a different place to move in and gave up his current room for me. Here comes the twist. He was annoyed by his flat mate about first saying he would move out and then not doing it, that he didn't tell him any information about me, including my gender.



He found out the day I moved in. In case you're wondering why I am mentioning this: It is very unusual for opposite sexes to live together in Korea. And he felt extremely uncomfortable with the situation. Three weeks later he moved out but kept paying half the rent because I couldn't find a new flat mate during the semester. So, I had the flat all to myself, but was only paying half the rent.

### **Studying at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS)**

To begin with, I want to inform you that my semester abroad was an additional one and not one to replace a semester in Germany with. I didn't need any of the credits and didn't have to think about getting my modules credited. I was free in studying whatever I wanted to.

I had three modules: Understanding Culture, Global Manners and Etiquettes, and Survival Korean I. Due to the pandemic, all my **lectures and exams** were **online**, so there is not that much to report about in this chapter. Lots of exams are single choice exams, in some modules you have to write a paper in the end or several during the semester. Attendance and

participation are part of the final grade as well as a midterm most of the times. There are modules in Korean but mine were all in English since I didn't know any Korean when I first arrived. I still feel like I don't know any Korean besides hello, thank you, goodbye and being able to read Hangul.

Available **spaces for courses are limited** by the way. There is a period of one week, where you can try to get into the modules you want. You can create a list of courses the week before to find them faster, but it's not that easy, because it's in a different system and not everything is available in English.

## Financing and Costs

The two years before my semester abroad, I was a **working student**. Thanks to that and the fact that I was still living with my parents, I was able to save up a lot of money beforehand. From my savings I could have financed the semester without any help. Nevertheless, it's always good to apply for **scholarships**. There are not many students from the business department of our university that want to go abroad and due to the pandemic, there were less students going abroad, especially out of Europe, in general. I applied for Promos, Go Overseas and Women Worldwide, got all of them and was able to finance most of my semester with the scholarships.

Here are the most important costs:

- Tuition Fee: 2,290€
- Flights: around 1,000€ (I booked them separately, because originally, I wanted to fly to Australia afterwards. If you book the flights together, they should be around 750€)
- Quarantine: around 700€ (including accommodation, food, quarantine taxi)
- Flat: around 260€/month + Deposit 3,000€ + Electricity/Gas/Water (comparable to costs in Germany)
- Transportation: around 50€/month (depending on how much you use the subway; the costs are around 1€/ride)
- Food: I am unsure, because I didn't track it at all, but maybe between 300 and 450€/month.

## Helpful Apps

- **Duolingo**: I used the app to learn Hangul (Korean Alphabet).
- **Naver Map**: The app is perfect for navigating and saving locations, Google Maps is not the best option in Korea. Naver can also be used for navigation and finding busses and subway connections.
- **KakaoTalk**: Instead of WhatsApp, a lot of people use KakaoTalk. I used the app to talk to my quarantine officer, hosts and some friends. In KakaoTalk you can also find the



QR-code used to check in when entering restaurants, cafés, malls and more (it can only be created after getting the alien registration card).

- **KakaoMetro**: My personal favorite for finding subway connections.
- **Papago**: The app is a translator and can be used on pictures to translate Korean into English. It also has writing and speaking options.
- **Kakao Taxi**: On a map you can choose your starting point and your destination and then call a taxi. This way, the taxi driver knows exactly where you want to go without communication problems. The app shows you the estimated price for the route and the number plate of your taxi.
- **Seoul Bike**: Through this app you can rent bikes all over Seoul, which is especially nice along the river.
- **Trazy** and **Shuttle**: During quarantine, you can use these apps to order food. I only used Trazy to order groceries, but they have a lot more options. Shuttle was not available where I quarantined but it is good for Seoul.

### Daily life, free time, travelling, thoughts and feelings

Since I only had three courses, of which two were prerecorded lectures, I barely had any structure. I mostly met up with other students during the day to **explore Seoul, go shopping, have some vanilla latte and cake at a café or go out for lunch and dinner.**

At the beginning of the semester, I tried to do something every day. I had big plans, wanted to go **hiking** a lot, work on my **bouldering** skills and just get the most out of it. My mood changed after some time, because I noticed it was just too much for me. This gigantic city with all these people, running around every day, meeting so many other students. It was just not for me. I started taking days off socializing, just staying at my flat a bit more to have the chance to **recharge**.

In Germany, I like to keep my circle small, and the semester abroad showed me, that that was just right for me. South Korea also never really got to me, it didn't excite me and early on I knew, this was not going to be my new favorite place. But that's okay.

You often hear students say, "It was the best time of my life." when talking about their semester abroad, but



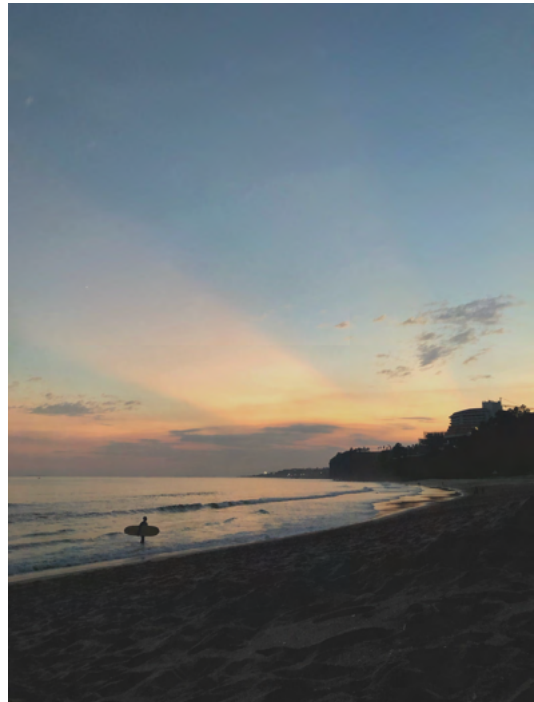
please, don't put that pressure onto yourself. **Of course, it often is a great time, but it should really be taken as it comes. Without any pressure, as an opportunity to learn about yourself and grow.**

After some time, I had finally found my circle and had made some great friends. It made things easier when I didn't have to meet new people all the time. With one of my friends, I flew to **Jeju**. The Island is the most popular national holiday destination and the flights only cost me around 35€. The island has beautiful places, and I had my first ever surf lesson there. It's a must see when coming to Korea.

With other friends I did trips to **Busan, Jeonju and Gyeongju**. All cities are easily reachable by Bus, just as many more. Some cities are reachable by train as well. Busan is the second biggest city in South Korea and is located right by the sea, while Jeonju and Gyeongju are smaller and with lots of culture. In Jeonju we rented Hanboks (which can also be done in Seoul) and slept in a traditional guest house. In Busan I visited a temple right by the ocean and tried living octopus.

Besides living octopus, I tried many other Korean dishes for the first time (Before coming to Korea, I had never tried any Korean food). To be honest, I am not that big of a fan of the **Korean Cuisine**, not only because they like spicy food. After some time, I mostly stopped eating Korean food and had Western, Indian and Japanese food instead.

I really don't want to put South Korea down too much, but another thing to consider is the **bad air quality** as soon as it get's colder. If you are someone having problems with that, Korea is not the place for you. I don't know if it was solely because of the air quality, but the last three months of my semester, I had lots of problems with a hurting throat, feeling unwell, and coughing. Having to always wear a mask outside (even when no one is close to you) probably hasn't helped either. I was basically sick the whole time, which is why I didn't fulfil my plans of hiking and bouldering a lot. It's also another reason that keeps the semester from being close to the best time of my life.



I know some other students who were not that excited about Korea, but I know many that loved their time in Seoul, too. Some even decided to stay for a second semester. **Seoul has great restaurants and cafés, fun karaoke places, good public transportation, museums and exhibitions of all kinds, and lots of culture to explore. The city is surrounded by many mountains that are great for hiking. There is a convenience store on every corner that's open 24 hours on seven days a week. Walking home by yourself at night doesn't feel unsafe. And**

that's great. The city and the country have a lot to offer and if you consider spending a semester abroad here, please do so.

I am crossing my fingers for you, that you have a better situation concerning the pandemic. South Korea is handling the pandemic well more or less, but not without rules. So be prepared for not being able to do whatever. You'll still be able to have a good time. And I am sure you will not regret it.

### **Some more photos**



Bukchon Hanok Village in Seoul



View on Seoul from Ahasan Mountain





Haedongyonggungsa in Busan



In front of Woljeonggyo in Gyeongju



Culture Village in Busan



Nami Island in Autumn





Jeju Island



Wudo Island by Jeju Island