

Our exchange semester at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, Korea

As a couple, we went to South Korea for our exchange semester at the end of our undergraduate studies in Political Science and Anthropology. Ewha is located in the heart of Seoul, at one of the major subway lines just three stops away from City Hall. The campus is beautifully aligned to the mountain with a mix of 19th century British campus architecture and modern buildings. It is equipped with almost everything one could need, especially lots of convenience stores, shops, and restaurants. The dorms are also located on campus. As it is quite big and has multiple entrances and exits, be prepared to spend some time searching for everything.

We started off with a welcoming ceremony, where all exchange students met for the first time and were introduced to their buddies. The PEACE-buddies each help around five to ten exchange students in their daily and campus life, and are really helpful (and might become good friends). The ceremony introduced us to all necessities for our academic stay, including course registration, campus rules, etc. You will be offered to pay ~20.000W (15€) for one semester of free medicine and examination at the University Health Service Center. Be sure to do so, as it is really convenient to have English speaking medical staff right at your hand.

Ewha offers a medium number of English-taught courses in almost every discipline. Most of them are open to Korean students as well. As an exchange student, you are free to choose courses from almost all majors, independently of your own major. Also, you are free to join Korean-taught classes. Be prepared, however, that course registration is extremely (absurdly) competitive, which you will be told multiple times. We each looked up several courses, ending up only getting registered to two each. The course registration portal opens at a specific time, at which you should be sitting in front of a computer, being completely prepared to be as fast as possible. In our cases, one course was full five seconds (!) after the portal opened, and we ended up not only with very few classes, but also not the ones we were most interested in. Korean semesters usually consist of 18 credit points, you must take a minimum of 9, maximum is 21. You cannot register overlapping courses. If you have an academic agreement from your home university, be prepared to be unable to fulfill it.

Our courses turned out to be very interesting and diverse, especially for international students. English levels are varying not only for students, but for professors, too. Don't be afraid if you are not very comfortable in speaking English, as for most students (both Korean and exchange) the same applies.

Ewha offers a lot of different Korean courses. You should definitely take one, as reading the Korean alphabet and knowing some basic vocabulary will help you a lot in getting around. There are two different language courses for beginners, practical and academic Korean (level 1). Both are said to be open for students without any knowledge of Korean, but academic Korean (the course we took) requires you to know the alphabet very well, which you won't be told before the first class. The course is entirely taught in Korean, asking questions can be quite difficult. Also, it seems to be addressed to people with at least some knowledge of Korean, or students from east Asia who have differing levels of identical words with their mother tongues. If you take the academic Korean course, you will learn lots of Korean in very short time, which is very satisfying for living on Korea. At the same time, however, it proved to be extremely time consuming, hard and sometimes frustrating for us, as we had to study literally all day long to keep up. The practical Korean course, on the other hand, is quite touristy, you won't learn to write in Korean and will only learn the very basics. A course

between the levels of practical and academic (or academic for “western people”, as Koreans would call it), would be nice.

We both were lucky to be recipients of the Ewha-Göttingen Scholarship Exchange Program (EGSEP), offering us 1.000.000 KRW (800€) monthly allowance while being in Korea. It was almost sufficient for our daily expenses and the rent. Living expenses are slightly higher than in Göttingen, be prepared to spend 800-1000€ monthly. As Ewha is a women’s university, accepting males only as exchange students, the dorms are strictly gender separated. That – and the competitive application for dorms and not too cheap rents – made us search for a commercially offered flat off campus. We found a nice place, very close to the campus, but it can be very difficult to find a fully furnished place online in English. It’s not too difficult to find a place once you are in Seoul, especially with the help of Korean friends or your buddy.

Ewha is located in Yongsan, close to Sinchon and Hongdae. All three neighborhoods are focused on student life, with lots of bars, cafés, restaurants, karaoke-rooms, shops and shopping malls all over the place. While living in Seoul, you would most probably be able to live without ever leaving this area, which is not recommended, of course.

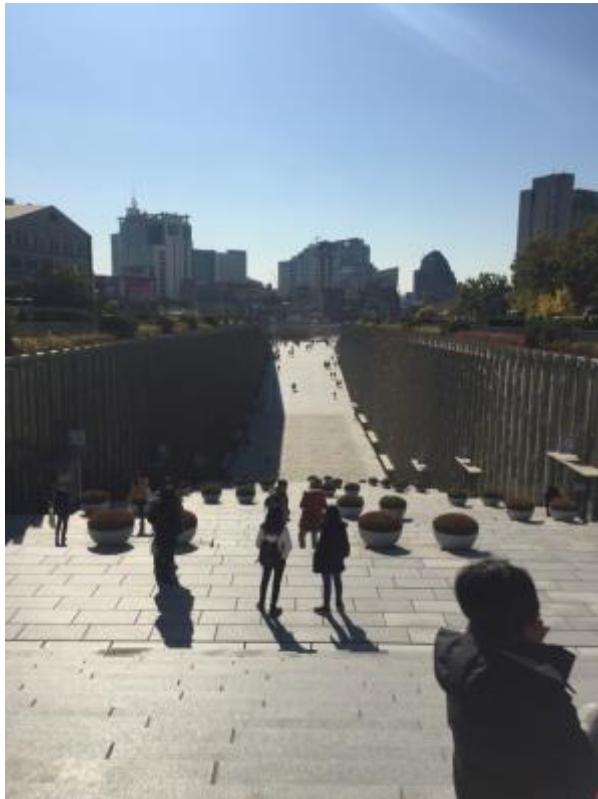
Seoul is a huge, foreigner-friendly city with many beautiful sights and places to visit. You won’t feel too alien, here, and will always have something to do. Metropolitan Seoul has 25 million inhabitants, but it doesn’t feel crowded (except for the rush hours). The subway can take you everywhere in short time, and is very cheap. Seoul is really comfortable to live in, as shops are mostly open around the clock and everything can be done at any time. Transportation is easy, once you learn how to master Naver, the Korean Google maps.

After the semester, we travelled for a month around the country. There are cheap and fast intercity busses from everywhere to everywhere, and lots of cheap motels in even smallest cities. The countryside is beautiful, and very different than Seoul. Visiting Jeju and the south is heavily recommended. Outside of Seoul and Busan you might feel a little alien, however. People are (almost) always happy and friendly to see foreigners, but especially old people can be a little too curious. Be sure to try out Korean food. There are loads of dishes that are quite unique and very tasty. Don’t stop with the usual few dishes, as many foreigners do. We did not have any health problems with Korean food, and we even tried sea cucumber once. You will adjust to the Korean spiciness levels, but they can be challenging in the beginning.

All in all, we would very much recommend to go to South Korea for an exchange semester. Ewha is a lovely place with nice and helpful people, and interesting courses. If you have any problems, the Office of International Affairs and the PEACE buddies will always be happy to help. Be prepared to have difficulties with getting the courses you would like to, or need to get. We had a really good time!

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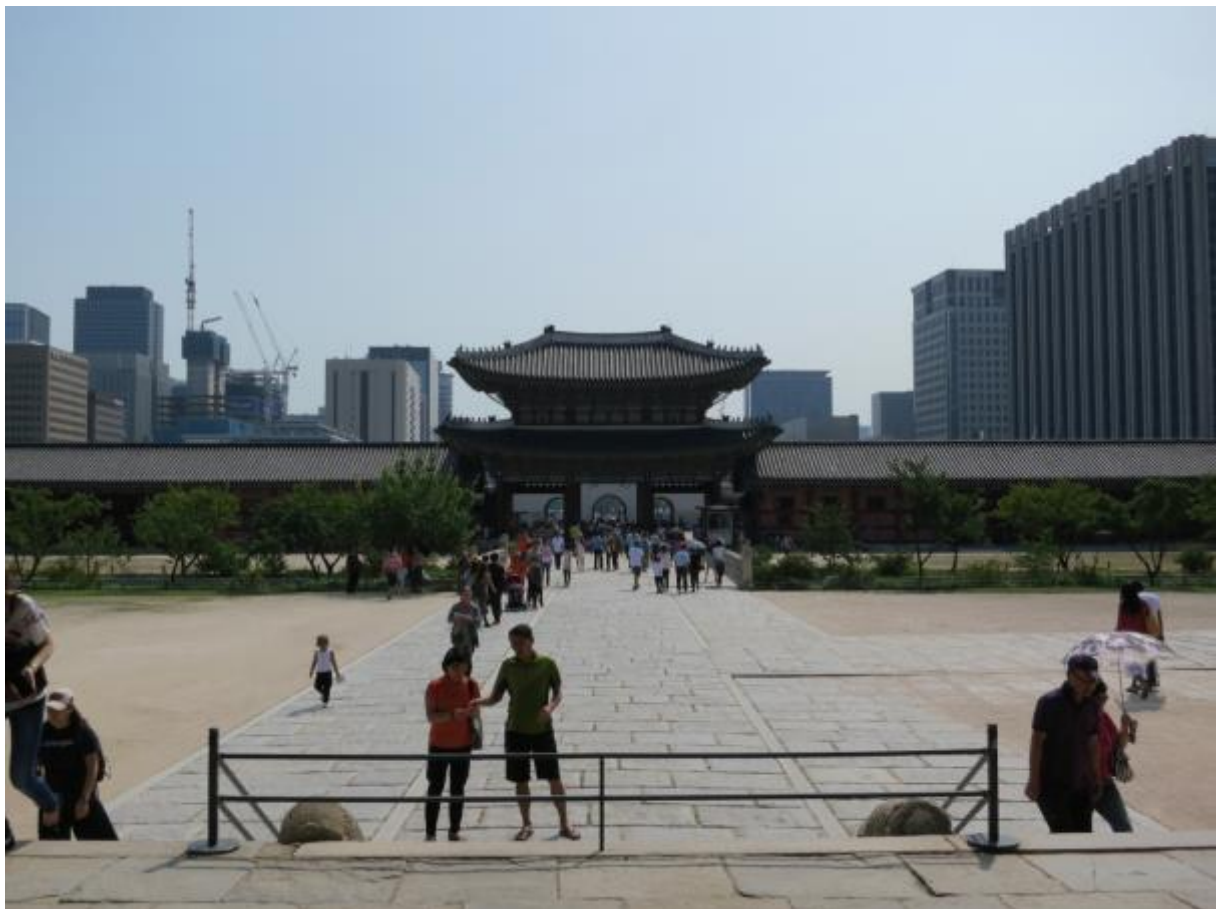
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Ewha Campus Complex



Main Hall



Gyeongbok palace



A tiny part of Seoul



Seogwipo-si, on Jeju island