



Report on my Experience Abroad

Exchange Spring Semester 2021

Basic Information

Faculty/Major:	Faculty of Humanities/Korean Studies
Semester:	8
Host Country:	South Korea
Host University:	Ewha Womans University
Type of Stay:	Exchange Semester
Time of Stay:	SoSe 2021 (Spring Semester 2021)
Period of Stay:	5 months (09.02.2021 – 30.06.2021)
Mobility Program:	Central Exchange, Hamburglobal
Application Round:	November 2020/2021



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1. Preparation & Arrival

As a Korean Studies major, an exchange semester in South Korea, including a Korean language course, is mandatory. Applying to Ewha Womans University through the Central Exchange Program was suggested to me by my professor, who assisted me throughout the application process (e.g. selecting courses, writing a letter of recommendation, signing and stamping required documents, etc.). Furthermore, all the necessary instructions and forms needed for the successful application can be found on the Central Exchange's website and easily uploaded through Mobility. In case of further questions, I could always contact the Study Abroad Team, upon which I received quick and helpful response.

1.1. Visa

Staying in Korea for more than 90 days with the purpose of studying requires the D-2 student visa, for which I applied at the Korean consulate in Dubai. It took exactly 14 days to issue my visa, and it cost 360AED (82€). Ewha sent their official letter of acceptance along with other documents needed for the visa application via email only instead of per post due to the delay in shipments caused by Covid-19 (it was sufficient for the consulate nonetheless).

However, Ewha sent those documents relatively late compared to other Korean universities, barely making it in time for my visa appointment and adding a little stress. After eventually receiving my visa in time, I flew to Seoul 3 weeks before the semester began, leaving enough time for a 14-day quarantine and orientation week. I took a direct flight from Dubai To Seoul via Emirates Airlines, and the round-trip ticket cost around 4,000AED (923€), providing 30kg of checked-in luggage and a 7kg cabin bag. For an extra fee of about 1,000AED (230€) I had an additional 15kg of luggage to and from Seoul.

1.2. COVID-19 & Quarantine

Due to Covid-19, several changes and adjustments had to be made. First and foremost, I could not proceed with my initial application at Central Exchange and Hamburgglobal for Fall Semester 2020 since traveling abroad at that time was banned. I had to freeze my application till the following Spring Semester 2021, but a new application was not needed. Instead, I had to resend/re-upload updated versions of some documents, such as my certificate of enrollment (Immatrikulationsbescheinigung) or list of courses.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, I had to add an extra two weeks to my travel plan in order to conduct a 14-day mandatory quarantine. Though Ewha suggests a governmental quarantine facility, I found it too expensive (1,108€ for 14 days including daily meals) and privately booked an Airbnb instead (580€), which was kindly covered by Hamburgglobal as "extra costs due to Covid-19". Additionally, I had to take a PCR test before flying to Seoul, before and after quarantine, and before leaving Seoul.



Upon arriving at Incheon Airport, I had to undergo many Covid-related procedures. I had to stand in multiple queues to get my temperature checked, have my quarantine address confirmed by officers who called my Airbnb host, download a mandatory quarantine app that tracks my location during isolation, etc. Overall, it took about 4-5 hours after landing until I was able to leave the airport.

Furthermore, there was a special transportation system designated to quarantined travelers. After arriving and completing all steps at the airport, travelers are escorted to the health center located in the same district as their quarantine facility. There, they take a PCR test free of charge and are then transported to their address. There are three ways to do this: 1) Ride the designated quarantine taxi, which takes you to the health center, waits for you to take the PCR test, and then takes you to your quarantine facility (₩70,000-₩90,000). 2) Ride the bus from the airport to the health center, take the PCR test, and be transported by another van to your quarantine facility (₩16,000). 3) Be picked up privately by friends or family, take the test, and directly go into quarantine.

In case of late arrival, one must head to their quarantine facility first and then take the PCR test the next day. Going to the health center the next day can only be done through a quarantine taxi, as using public transportation while quarantined is not permitted. A quarantine taxi can be booked online (<https://www.enkor.kr/taxi/>), and it waits for you to take the test and brings you back (₩10,000 per 30 minutes). The same has to be done again about two days before getting out of quarantine. Ewha well provides all this information in advance as PDF brochures and PPTs, and the airport staff also provides all the instructions needed.

During quarantine, one must submit four health surveys daily, where the body temperature and overall health condition are checked. Two are through the quarantine app downloaded at the airport, and two are through a google link provided by Ewha. If not submitted, one is contacted by an official or by Ewha through phone call or Kakaotalk to make sure everything is okay.

Moreover, although online grocery shopping and food delivery are widespread in Korea and very convenient, it is hard to access any form of Korean online banking before obtaining the Foreigner Registration Card (FRC). Most applications and websites do not accept foreign credit cards and are in Korean language only. However, I recommend two options that do accept foreign credit cards and are in English: 1) Shuttle application for food delivery and 2) SSG.com for online (grocery) shopping.

1.3. Health Insurance

When applying at Ewha, one must submit proof of health insurance. You can either apply for the Ewha Collective Insurance, which is 24,000KRW for 1-semester-students (valid for 6 months) and 44,000KRW for 1-year-students (valid for 12 months), or submit proof of international health insurance from your home country, which offers similar coverage to Ewha's insurance.



Additionally, the National Health Insurance (NHI) has become mandatory for international students since March 1st, 2021. It is additional to the Ewha Collective Insurance or the one from your home country and is 39,450KRW per month. Though it is possible to apply for NHI only, it is not sufficient, as it does not cover many important aspects, especially accidental death-related benefits. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to have an additional insurance plan such as Ewha's or from your home country. In some cases, students can ask to be exempted from NHI if they provide proof of another insurance with more coverage than NHI, which must be translated into Korean.

2. Funding

2.1. Financial Support

While applying at Central Exchange, I was informed about Hamburgglobal, a funding program designed to financially support students during their stay abroad. The application process is almost identical to the one of Central exchange, as the required documents are the same. I received 1,800€ for one semester while I was in quarantine, and later an additional 581€ for my quarantine costs. Besides Hamburgglobal, I did not receive any other financial support.

2.2. Finances

The following is an overview of some prices and monthly expenses:

- Quarantine facility: 581€ for 16 days (Airbnb)
- Dorm room*: 2,698,190KRW per semester / 27,438KRW per night (I stayed an extra 6 nights)
- Sim card: 50,000KRW for 4 months / 10,000KRW per additional month
- Health insurance: 24,000KRW per semester + 39,450KRW per month (4 months)
- FRC: 30,000KRW
- PCR test for departure: 110,000KRW

Monthly expenses** excluding dorm:

- Feb: 540,000KRW
- Mar: 610,000KRW
- April: 820,000KRW
- May: 1,000,000KRW
- Jun: 950,000KRW

*Dorm rooms are assigned randomly and prices start from 1,507,100KRW.

**Monthly expenses include an average of 2 meals at a restaurant daily, coffee, groceries, public transport (subway, bus, taxi), household items, toiletries and personal products, clothes, travel expenses (domestic flights, bus, train, accommodation, etc.), entertainment, hair salon, and more.



2.3. Tips

The following is an overview of some prices and monthly expenses: Eating at local restaurants is fairly cheaper than cooking at home, as groceries (especially fruits and vegetables) are relatively expensive. Cafes, on the other hand, can get pricey. Shopping is average but local shops near Ewha or Hongdae, for example, are very affordable. Transportation is super cheap, including subway, taxis, and even domestic flights.

3. Accommodation

3.1. Dormitory Types

There are three dormitories at Ewha Womans University: I-House, E-House, and Hanwoori House. Exchange students are usually admitted into I-House, which has five buildings (A-E). Only A, B, and C are for exchange students. Buildings A and B are joined and are a little older, while C (also called Ewha Samsung International House) is newer and more expensive. Each of the buildings has facilities such as laundry and ironing rooms, computer rooms with printers, study rooms, a common room/lounge for guests, and a gym (currently closed due to Covid-19). The housing office is in building A/B, and the big common kitchen is in building C but can be used by residents of buildings A/B.

Moreover, each floor in each building has shared bathrooms and showers, as well as a small kitchenette equipped with a kettle, microwave, small toaster oven, and hot/cold water dispenser. The rooms have a bed with mattress and pillow, bedding and pillowcase (blanket can be rented at housing office), desk and chair, storage space, closet (no hangers), a small fridge, floor heating, and air conditioner.

The following is an overview of different room types and prices per semester:

Building A/B:

- Single room with en-suite bathroom: 1,871,720KRW
- Single room with shared bathroom: 1,507,100KRW
- Double room* with en-suite bathroom: 1,871,720KRW

Building C:

- Single room with en-suite bathroom: 2,698,190KRW
- Double room* with en-suite bathroom: 2,698,190KRW
- Double room* with shared bathroom: 2,698,190KRW

*Double rooms are assigned to one person only due to Covid-19.

Disclaimer: Students do not get to choose which room they want. Rooms are assigned randomly and cannot be changed.



3.2. Dormitory Check-in

One can check in on the official check-in day or any other day during office hours, but early check-in is unavailable. To check into the dorms, a negative PCR test and a tuberculosis test are required. The PCR test can be the same as the one done before ending quarantine if it is not older than five days. You can take the tuberculosis test in your home country or at a health center in Korea. I recommend the latter, as it is more convenient and affordable. There is a health center at Sinchon Station Exit 6 called 대한의료영상의학과의원 (02-717-3305). The test costs 15,000KRW, and you can collect the result right away.

3.3. Pros and Cons of living at Ewha's Dormitory

Pros:

- Excellent location: central (nearby restaurants, cafes, shops, convenience stores), easy transportation (nearby subway and bus stations)
- Campus life: meeting other exchange students and making Korean friends, cafeteria, library
- Facilities: laundry and ironing room, kitchen, computer room with printer, vending machines
- No curfew
- Cleanliness
- Privacy
- Safety

Cons:

- Less freedom and independence: there are many rules (e.g. must inform the housing office about staying out overnight, must wear a face mask when using common areas, no guests are permitted, etc.)
- Daily Health survey: checking body temperature and symptoms daily
- Demerit points: if one does not abide by the rules, they receive demerit points, and once a certain amount of demerit points is reached, students can be evicted
- Frequent announcements by the housing office through central speakers, usually around 9 am or 9 pm can get annoying
- Occasional noise by other students late at night, cleaning staff very early in the morning, or nearby kindergarten

4. My Stay Abroad: General Information

4.1. Routes & Distances between Facilities and Accommodation + Transport

- 5min walk from I-House to ECC (main building)
- 8-10min walk from I-House to nearby restaurants, cafes, shops, and bus stops
- 13-15min walk from I-House to Ewha Womans University Subway Station (이대역)



- 25min walk from I-House to Sinchon (nearby busy area with lots of restaurants, cafes, shopping centers and a big Emart for groceries)

Public transportation is very well and conveniently designed. The subway is very affordable, and its lines go everywhere, including areas outside of Seoul. Buses are also inexpensive but not convenient during rush hour due to traffic jams. Taxis are cheap and good to reach more remote places with few transport options. They are good to share but can also get stuck in traffic jams. Bikes are not as convenient as in Germany since most of the time there are no proper bikeways, except at parks, and there are too many people on the street.

4.2. Formalities

4.2.1. Foreigner Registration Card (FRC)

Any person willing to reside in Korea for more than 90 days must apply to obtain the Foreigner Registration Card within 90 days of their arrival. I recommend doing so as soon as possible, as the FRC facilitates many things like permitting the exit from and re-entry to Korea, serving as identification, opening a bank account and online banking, etc. To get the FRC, you should apply for an appointment at the immigration office, where you submit the required documents and pay a fee of 30,000KRW.

The required documents include the application form, passport, color ID photo, certificate of studentship (provided by Ewha in student package), and proof of address. The whole process takes about a month from the appointment date, and the card can be picked up personally or delivered to your address. In case you move to a new address or get a new passport while in Korea, you must report to the immigration office within 15 days, upon which they will apply any changes to your FRC. All detailed instructions are provided by Ewha as PPTs during orientation week.

4.2.2. Bank Account

Opening as well as closing a bank account is very simple and straightforward. I opened mine at Shinhan Bank campus branch, which made the process extra easy for exchange students. I received the application form and required documents in my student package provided by Ewha, and it also contained all the instructions on how to open a bank account on campus. Though your passport is enough to open a bank account, online banking can only be accessed if you register your FRC. In this case, the order of your name on the FRC has to be identical to the one you opened your bank account with (last name first, then given name).

Additionally, your phone number should also be registered with the FRC and not with the passport. Opening the account takes about two weeks, while closing it can be done on the same day. I personally recommend opening a bank account, even if it is just for one semester, as card payments are preferred in most places, and some places don't even accept cash at all.



4.2.3. Sim Card

Having a Korean phone number is essential. It is needed for all the above-mentioned steps and processes. I got mine on a group offer at an SK Telecom shop in Hongdae. If you buy it with a group of 3 people or more, it costs 50,000KRW for four months. 10,000KRW sim card fee and 40,000KRW for unlimited data and free calls within Korea. The shop location is 10, Hongik-ro, Mapo-gu, Seoul 04055 near Hongdae Station Exit 9. The FRC is not needed to get a sim card there, as you can use your passport. However, I recommend going back there and registering your FRC after receiving it to be able to apply for online banking at the bank.

4.2.4. Korean Language Requirements

Basic Korean skills are definitely needed for everyday communication, as most people, especially elders, do not speak English. It is mainly required to communicate at cafes or restaurants when ordering since many menus are in Korean only, but also to communicate with locals when asking for directions or with taxi drivers. However, touristic places do have English-speaking staff, and most young Koreans have no trouble communicating in English. Signs and announcements in buses and subways or at public touristic places are usually in Korean and English, so it is easy to get around even with little Korean language skills.

5. My Stay Abroad: Studies

5.1. Curriculum

During my semester at Ewha, I attended two courses which were both online: 1) Korean III (6 credits) and 2) Everyday Life in Modern Korea (3 credits). Korean III was an intensive language course that was more advanced and demanding than the Korean language courses I had at UHH. It was three hours a day, four times a week, and it was taught by two Korean teachers. We had a total of four books, two of which were workbooks. We finished the first book and workbook Ewha Korean 3-1 before the midterms and continued with Ewha Korean 3-2 after the midterms until the finals.

Additionally, we had about 30 worksheets for each half of the semester. Each of the books and workbooks was divided into 7 to 8 lessons, and each lesson had four parts: grammar, listening, speaking, and writing. In one semester, we learned a total of 60+ grammar rules while focusing more on speaking and writing but less on vocabulary. We had regular assignments and quizzes and two main exams, the midterms, and finals. The lectures were on Zoom, while assignments and quizzes were on Cyber Campus or Google Classroom. Even the midterm and final exams were online, and they consisted of a reading and writing exam and an oral exam, both held on different days. Overall, I noticed an enormous improvement in my Korean language skills within a short time and really enjoyed the class.



In the course Everyday Life in Modern Korea, we had to watch two lectures a week on Youtube and had a short Zoom discussion once a week, where we review and discuss the lectures and readings assigned. We also had regular assignments and one group presentation. Even in this course we had midterms and finals, which consisted of writing an essay. The topics discussed in this course were highly interesting and very enjoyable.

5.2. Contacts

The contact between exchange students and Ewha is very well established through the Office of International Affairs (Ewha OIA) even before arriving in Seoul. They are always quick to respond and show cooperation when needed. They are also really helpful in assisting exchange students with assimilation and integration by providing all necessary instructions and documents needed for things like the bank, health insurance, dorms, etc., making the process of settling down much smoother.

Meeting Korean students was more complex than usual due to Covid-19. However, through Ewha's Peace Buddy Program, I was introduced to Korean students and was able to hang out with them often. My Peace Buddy would take me to different Korean restaurants and introduce me to new friends, which added fun to campus life.

The contact between students and teachers was very casual and smooth. We could always text our Korean class teachers through Kakaotalk and ask anything we wanted whenever we had questions. Though all lectures were online, our Korean class teachers made the effort to organize an offline meeting where we could introduce ourselves and get to know each other on a more personal level. They also prepared goodie bags for us filled with snacks and Ewha souvenirs. Overall, students can always find strong support when needed.

6. Daily Life & Free Time

I personally really enjoyed my lifestyle in Korea. There is so much to do and see and many unique ways to make beautiful memories. I would often go to a café to study, as the café culture in Korea is very widespread. Trying out different Korean dishes at local restaurants was always a new experience every time. Visiting touristic places is nice but also taking random walks in narrow alleys without having any expectations ends up being a magical experience. Seeing beautiful views and sceneries of gorgeous nature mixed with historical sites and modern buildings all at the same moment is truly mesmerizing. Meeting new people every day, be it locals or other fellow international students, makes the whole experience richer and more memorable, which is why I recommend to go out as much as possible. I also think traveling around Korea and visiting other cities such as Sokcho, Suwon, Busan, Jeju, etc., is a must.



In terms of safety, Korea is one of the safest countries I have ever visited. I never worried about pickpocketing or such. I also had absolutely no experiences with racism or scams, though I know very few people who did slightly encounter things of these sorts. The locals are very friendly and helpful, though some elders tend to sometimes stare at foreigners out of wonder.

As for the weather, it is constantly changing. In February it was very cold and snowy with temperatures like -9°C or -10°C . Every house is equipped with floor heating, but in my case, the floor heating at my quarantine Airbnb was not warm enough and I needed extra warm clothes. From March to May it slowly becomes warmer with temperatures in the high 10s to low 20s. It is often windy and rather chilly at night. In June the temperatures are very nice and refreshing with a few rather hot days. By the end of June raining season starts so it rains almost every day and can get very warm and humid.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say this exchange semester is one of the best experiences I have had in my life. I learned so much, academically and also personally, about myself and my preferences. I learned to be more open to new experiences and more flexible. I learned to live without any expectations and to be grateful for every day passing by while I get to make beautiful memories. I am very happy to see a massive improvement in my Korean skills, which would not have been possible if I hadn't interacted with locals on a daily basis. My stay in Korea inspired me to find a topic for my bachelor thesis but also to seek new goals for my next chapter in life. I am grateful for all the new friends I got to make, the new people I got to meet, and for getting closer to the ones I already had in Korea. Overall, it is safe to say that this semester will remain one of the most memorable times in my life, and I would love to have the chance to do something like this again.

8. Photos



Jeongbang Waterfall, Jeju Island



Ingwansan, Seoul



Art Valley, Pocheon



Yeongeumjeong, Sokcho



Suwon Hwaseong, Suwon



Gamcheon Culture Village, Busan



Ewha Womans University, Seoul