

The Ultimate Guide to an Exchange Semester at Hanyang University

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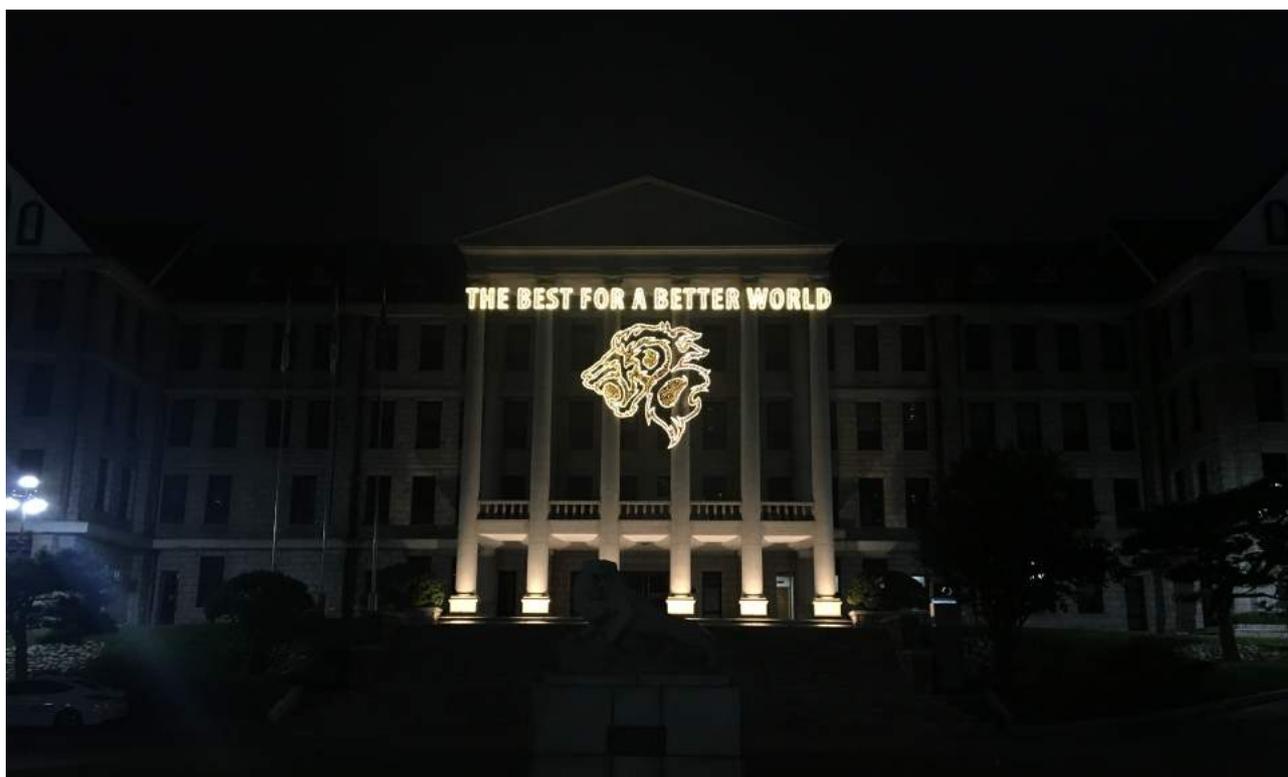
Why Study Abroad?

There are many good reasons to go abroad. Here are my favorites:

1. **You will learn a lot of new things (not only academically).** It's impossible to go through a semester abroad without learning about a new culture, learning more about yourself, and discovering new hobbies through the experiences that you will have. Oh, and you might learn a few things in school as well. When I was in Korea, I gained confidence in my social skills, I started running, and I now drink my coffee black. Who would have thought? Staying home is safe, but a little boring, so go out there and get out of your comfort zone! I promise you that you'll be surrounded by people trying to do the same thing.
2. **You will meet a lot of cool people.** There will most likely be several other exchange students at your new university (at HYU there were several hundred!). They come from all sorts of backgrounds and places in the world, and it might seem that the only thing you have in common with them, is that you are studying in the same place. If this is the case, don't let it scare you. Use the opportunity to learn about new cultures, hear crazy stories and explore the country together. The people you meet on an exchange will be one of the biggest factors in shaping a great semester, so enjoy getting to know people and going through the exchange semester together. And afterward, you'll have a whole network of friends around the world that you can visit.
3. **It gives you perspective.** It's often when you are away from home, that you learn the most about it. Why does no-one ask questions in class? Why should you always pay for dinner at the register? How is soju so cheap? These are questions you might be asking yourself while in Korea. A lot of things will be different, and you will quickly see the good and bad about Denmark as well as Korea.
4. **You will forever feel a special connection to the city you studied abroad in.** Imagine having a second home away from home. That's how it feels returning from an exchange. Seoul will forever have a little place in my heart and I will definitely return sometime. I have come to love Korean culture, Korean people and Korean food. And I will never forget my wonderful, confusing, amazing and transformational time there.

A QUICK NOTE BEFORE I BEGIN THE GUIDE

I studied abroad in autumn of 2019. Things probably have changed since then and will not be the same, should you decide to go to Korea. See this as a rough guide and not a fact list. Especially when it comes to prices and courses at the university, which change all the time. I also want to mention that I will not go through the ITU application process or the process of getting a South Korean visa. There are way better and more accurate resources for that.



Main square of Hanyang University

Hanyang University

Hanyang University is a great university to pick if you want to live in the heart of Seoul. There are always things to do and see, and fun cafés and nice restaurants around every corner. HYU has a big campus with many courses in English, and you will most likely meet several other exchange students in each of your classes. They also do a great job of making exchange students feel welcome and have a big music festival every fall, where they invite famous Korean musicians.

Courses

Finding courses that match the ones at ITU can be a bit of a mess, so be prepared for that. Do not go on an exchange thinking you will get all the courses you wish for and that it will all work out perfectly because you will probably get disappointed. But don't let that change your mind about an exchange. No matter what happens, it will all work out at the end.

Below are the courses I took at HYU and the corresponding courses at ITU. Just because I had them approved in 2019, does not necessarily mean that you will also get them approved, but they might give some inspiration as to what courses can replace others.

Hanyang University	IT University of Copenhagen
C++ Programming	Operating Systems and C, 7.5 ECTS
Organization Theory IT Project Management	Forretningsprocessor og organisation, 15 ECTS
Computer Vision	Elective course, 7.5 ECTS
Korean Language Level 1	Nothing. I took this one just for fun.

There are several rounds of (stressful and competitive) course registration, which the university will give information on. But you can change your courses into the first week of the semester, so don't worry too much if it all doesn't work out in the first try. I only got one course in the first round of course registration, but I ended up with all the courses I wanted anyway.

It can be hard to find courses that match your exact academic level. Some classes will be too hard and some too easy. In my case, I ended up with one hard class and four relatively easy classes, which meant I had a lot of free time. Although the teaching style is a bit different from what we are used to in Denmark, I found most of my classes interesting and I got a lot out of them. Having more free time also meant more time to reflect on the stuff I was learning, and to dig further into the things I found intriguing, which ultimately made me learn even more.



Left: Crowd at concert, Hanyang University | Right: A friend cooking dumplings in our shared kitchen

Student Life

HYU has a student association called Hanyang Global Lions, which welcomes exchange students to the university. It's made up of a large group of committed Korean students, who want to give you the best experience possible. In my semester they arranged a Welcome Party, a Farewell Party, and made several clubs for the exchange students including a cooking club, a K-pop dance club, and a football team. I was part of the Hiking Club, which I enjoyed a lot.

Hanyang Global Lions also has a “buddy program”, which is a program in which you are set up with a local student. Each local student has two or three buddies. It is up to you what you want to do together, but most people choose to meet a few times for dinner or a beer during the semester.

Housing

There are many different options when it comes to housing in Seoul. Here are the ones I either have experience with myself or that I heard about from other exchange students. No matter if you find a place to stay several months in advance, or just find a place when you arrive in Korea (both are possible), I recommend looking into your different options beforehand. Most exchange students I met lived in either a goshiwon or an exchange student dorm.

Dorm - cheapest option

When you get accepted at Hanyang and fill out their information form, it is possible to tick off a box with “wish to get student dorm” or something like that. And although you cannot be completely sure to get it, and the facilities aren’t great, it is by far the cheapest option. The price for a full semester is 1.080.000 won (~6.100 kr) or around 270.000 won (~1.500 kr) per month. It is important to note that double rooms are most common when it comes to this type of accommodation, so you will most likely be sharing the room with one other student. Make sure to check house rules in your dorm. Some dorms are gender-segregated and some have curfews.

Goshiwon - medium-priced option

A goshiwon is a small room in a “kollegium”-style building with your own (tiny) bathroom and a shared kitchen. The price varies a lot depending on the quality of the room, but are usually at around 300.000 - 600.000 won (~1.700 - 3.400 kr) a month. Sometimes the price also includes things like free rice, ramen, and eggs, but it depends on the place. You can find goshiwons on www.goshipages.com, but I recommend seeing the room before paying, as the pictures might be deceiving. Goshiwon-places are very different, so do your research if you want to find a place with a good social atmosphere with chances to meet other residents.

I lived in a goshiwon myself, which I was very happy with. The place I lived in is called H-stay and is right next to Sangwangsimni Station, which is two metro stops away from Hanyang Univ. Station. I had a small room with a tiny bathroom, and I paid 500.000 won (~2.900 kr) per month. In my semester it hosted mostly exchange students, not only from HYU but also from other universities around Seoul. I met a lot of my closest friends there, so I’m very happy I ended up in the place I did.

Exchange Student Dorm - expensive option

This housing option is very similar to goshiwons, as you get a private room in a “kollegium”-type dorm. This option is more expensive than the rest, but you can also be sure to get a great social atmosphere and meet a lot of other exchange students. I met many people who picked this kind of accommodation and loved it, their only complaints being noise because of partying. The price

for a room generally ranges from 600.000 to 900.000 (~3.400 - 5.100 kr) per month. Book a room a long time in advance if you want this option, as they fill up quickly. I met many people who lived at Unidence and Hanayng Habitat, which are two dorms in this type that are very close to Hanyang.

Your own room/apartment - ranging from cheap to expensive

This is the accommodation option I know least about since I only met 3 people who had done this. If you are looking for a room in an apartment, there are many Facebook groups in which you can find people who are renting out a room. If you want a whole apartment, you will have to go through a real estate agency. It's not too difficult to find one, but make sure they speak English! A thing to note is that this option also requires to put down a deposit (or "key money" as it is called in Korea). The general rule is that the higher the deposit is, the lower the rent will be.

My friend used the real estate agency Stayes, and she says they were really friendly and considered her budget. She had a small apartment in a good neighborhood and paid 750.000 won (~4.250 kr) per month with a 2.000.000 won (~11.300 kr) deposit.



Left: My goshiwon room for the first month (I later switched to one with a better window) | Right: Chuseok ("Korean Thanksgiving") dinner with other exchange students from my building

Money

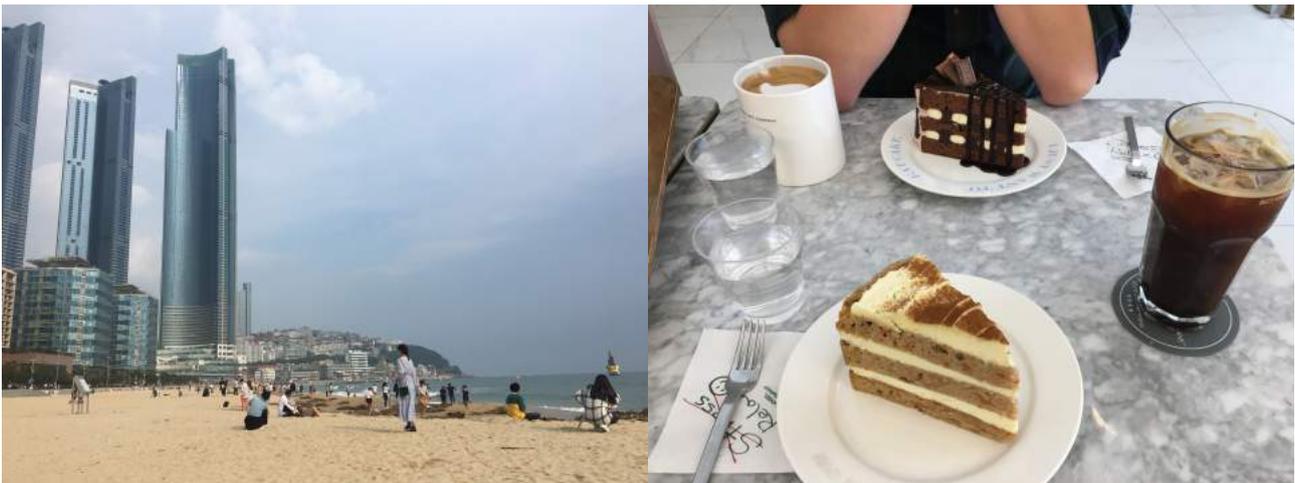
You are going to spend a lot of money going abroad. Everyone I talk to who has been on an exchange says they spent a lot. Luckily, HYU is a partner university of ITU, so there is no tuition fee, which helps a lot. There are also a lot of grants you can apply to, including ITU Travel Pool. I won't go through applying for grants, but I do want to say that it can be worth looking into very specific grants that you might be eligible for. Sometimes high schools, municipalities, and local clubs have grants you can apply to.

Common Expenses

It is not super common to hang out with each other at home, so I spent a surprisingly large amount of money on coffee and tea in cafés. Cafés are everywhere in Seoul, as is the no. 1 place for meeting friends, studying and getting your daily caffeine fix on the go. Café-coffee in Korea is cheaper than in Denmark, with an espresso-based drink costing around 20 kr if you don't go to the big franchises like Starbucks or A Twosome Place. Some cafés on the school campus had even friendlier student prices with coffee at 12 kr.

Food is a great way to explore Korean culture, and groceries can be a bit expensive if you are only shopping for one, so most of the people I knew ate almost all their meals out. A meal in a restaurant can cost anywhere between 20 kr and 150 kr, depending on if you are eating kimbap or Korean BBQ with beef. The Hanyang University campus has several canteens, serving large meals for around 18 kr.

Getting around with public transportation within Seoul is both easy and cheap. You can get anywhere in Seoul (that can mean up to an hour by metro) for only 7 kr. Going further - for example going from Seoul to Busan - is closer to Danish prices. A ticket is around 450 kr or 230 kr, depending on if you take the two-and-a-half-hour or five-and-a-half-hour train.



Left: Haeundae Beach, Busan | Right: Coffee and cake from Korean café

Card vs Cash

Both card and cash are used in Korea, but foreign cards don't work everywhere, so I recommend always keeping some cash on you. Cash is used slightly more than in Denmark, as you can only pay with cash at food stands, and some landlords prefer that you pay rent in cash. Not all ATMs work with foreign cards in Korea, so you often need to find an ATM tied to a bank to withdraw. If you are worried about not finding a working ATM when you arrive at the airport, it might give you some peace of mind to bring Korean won from home.

Fun fact: in Korea, there is a word for 10.000 - "man" - so if you have to pay 30.000 for something, they will tell you "sam man won", which means "three ten-thousand won".

Other practical things

Alien Registration Card

It's not enough to have a Korean visa when you are going to live in Korea. You also have to get an Alien Registration Card. If you don't get it, you will be considered an illegal alien after 90 days. Getting the card also allows you to freely move in and out of the country, even with a single-entry visa. There are specific days where you have to go and register with a bunch of paperwork, and later go to an immigration office and give fingerprints. It is very important it gets done, but Hanyang University will provide all the information you need,

Getting a Korean SIM Card

Although you can find free wifi in almost any building in Korea, it might be nice to get a Korean SIM card with data. Getting a prepaid SIM card is expensive, but I thought it was worth it. I never really found out what the best/cheapest option was, so I can only tell you what I ended up getting.

I bought a prepaid SIM card from Korea Telecom (KT), which I had to top up every month. They had stores all over the place, including on the school campus, so that was easy enough. The SIM card itself cost 40.000 won, and topping it up during the four months I was there was around 110.000 won in total, meaning I paid around 150.000 won (~850 kr) for 4 months of data and calls.



Left: Hiking at Bukhansan, Seoul | Right: Hiking at Hallasan, Jeju Island

Which Apps to Get

Google Maps doesn't work very well in Korea, so they have their own similar app, **Naver Map**. It works well and can be used as a "Rejseplanen"-app as well. My only small complaint with it is that you often have to spell place names in English exactly right for Naver to find it.

The most used social media app in Korea is **KakaoTalk**, so be sure to install it before you arrive. It works similarly to Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp, and it used both between friends and professionally.

You might already have the Google Translate app on your phone, but you should also install **Papago**. It has all the same features as Google Translate, but works a lot better for Korean.

If you have a Korean SIM card and KakaoTalk, you can also install **Kakao-T**. It's a taxi-hailing app that lets you order a taxi to your location. It can be useful as Uber and Grab do not work in Korea.

Lastly, if you go to Hanyang University, consider getting the **Hanyang University app**. When you get an ID and password, you can log into the app and use it to access the library instead of using your student card. You can also check your grades there at the end of the semester.

T-Money

T-Money works like a “Rejsekort”, which can be topped up at any station and works all over Korea. You can buy them in most convenience stores and in some T-Money vending machines. They almost always feature cute animated characters from the Kakao Friends series.

Korean Language

If you are the slightest bit interested in languages, then use the chance to learn Korean! Hanyang University offers Korean Language Classes at all levels that you can take for free as an exchange student from a partner university. It's a lot of fun, and a little bit of Korean goes a long way when getting around and ordering food at restaurants.

If you don't want to learn Korean, but still want to help yourself a bit, I recommend just learning the Korean alphabet. It has fewer letters than the English alphabet and it's relatively quick to learn. A lot of English words have snuck themselves into the Korean language, like 커피 koh-pi (coffee), 택시 taek-shi (taxi) and 아이스크림 a-i-se-ke-rim (ice cream). So being able to sound out words on menus and signs is useful.

Fun fact: Korea uses a lot of abbreviations that come from English, but are not actually used in English. So when Koreans say “SNS”, they mean social media, as it comes from “Social Network Service”. And when Koreans speak of the “PPT”, they mean the PowerPoint presentation.

Final Notes

I absolutely loved going to Korea on an exchange semester. Korea sounds like a very different and faraway place, but I kept having the experience of expecting a thing to be a lot different culturally, and then it wasn't. I highly recommend going if you want to get out of your comfort zone, but still want to live in a modern and safe country, with lots of fun things to do and see.

If you have decided to go, and have the chance, arrive in Korea a bit of time ahead of semester-start. It will give you the chance to get used to the country and get settled before all the school things start. It's also a good chance to travel to other parts of the country, as the weekends during the semester are scarce and will go by super fast.

