When preparing for my exchange semester I had to apply for a student visa as a Canadian citizen at the Korean Consulate located in Downtown Vancouver. The process was rather simple and only takes about one week from start to finish. [Note from ISS: Visa processes for all students may be different and the processing time may differ from the time of this report.] Make sure to visit the Korean Consulates website before you plan your visit as the application hours may be a little odd. When packing for Korea make sure to not over-pack and just bring the essentials. Korea is known for its shopping and fashion so you will be purchasing a lot of clothing in Korea. Traveling around and getting from place to place is super simple in Seoul as all public transportation systems use a “T-Money” card, essentially their version of a Compass Card. Trips are relatively cheap and the subway network is extremely far reaching. Seoul is a largely cash based society but many places do accept credit or debit cards. Most importantly, cost of living is extremely cheap and you can easily live under 15000 won a day on food. Tipping is not required in Korea and I found that restaurants are about half the cost of restaurant meals in Canada making it extremely worth it to eat out.

Before arriving to Korea University, I applied for the schools dormitories. Luckily I got accepted into a triple room with two other roommates. I really liked living on dorm as it was really convenient and very cheap for the whole semester. I paid about $1000 Canadian Dollars for my dorm for the whole semester. Korea University does course registration completely differently from SFU. All students of a specific year register for courses at the same time. While exchange students do have priority with course registration, they only have a limited amount of seats per class (the registration system will specify). This system lead to everyone login on and
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trying to get into their courses at the same time which created long loading times and thus a lot of students did not get into courses that they wanted or needed.

When I arrive at Inchon Airport, some Korea University Students picked us up and we were sent on a bus to our living accommodations (a service you can sign up for). The bus dropped me off at my dorm and then I proceeded to explore around the school campus and its neighbourhood. Upon exploring I found many unique restaurants and all sort of cuisines for very reasonable prices. The first couple of days of arriving to Korea were orientation days. During these days the KUBA buddies gave us a tour around campus, showed us what student life was like, and helped us set up our student and bank cards. Students are also placed in a KUBA group where you do weekly activities, typically about 2 – 3 times per week. Everyone in these KUBA groups are exchange students so you will make many friends.

Classes and lectures at KU are a lot different what I’m used to. First of all, KU does not have any tutorials, only lectures. Second, the grading is graded on an absolute scale, something I am not used to as an Economics major at SFU which is graded on a bell curve. Lastly, attendance tends to be quite strict, professors typically take attendance at the beginning of class and attendance counts towards your grade.

Korea is well known for its night life. Night life in Korea is very enjoyable and you will never run out of things to do here at night. There are some very popular places for exchange students to visit such as Itaewon, Gangnam, and Hongdae. These areas are bustling at night and you will find yourself in these areas most of the time. Korea’s night life will ensure that you will have an amazing time and will make new friends.
Korea also has many activities and places to sightsee so it is advised that you make plans to travel outside of Seoul to places such as Jeju Island and Busan. Since you are in Asia, it is also very cheap to travel to other countries in Asia. Many students went to countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand. Speaking of traveling to other countries, as a student you cannot leave the country until you obtain your Alien Registration Card. This process was rather annoying as many people did not get appointment times very late into the semester. Essentially you can apply for an ARC appointment a day or so after you land into Korea but Korea University Students are only allowed to go to a specific branch to apply for the ARC card. Since there were well over 700 exchange students in my semester, you can imagine how long of a wait time there was to get an appointment. This can hinder your travel plans as you may not leave the country until you get your ARC.

One thing I wish I did before I came to Korea was to bring more cash before arriving. The student card / bank account that the school helps you set up took a whole month to receive, which means I had to withdraw money via my debit card before then. Doing this will incur more fees, thus costing you more. Once the bank account is set up, you can freely wire transfer money over to the account and reducing the fees you have to pay withdrawing from a Canadian bank account.

Something else I wish I didn’t do was that I treated this exchange more like a vacation when in reality I was still in school. I thought that I would be out all the time and wouldn’t be studying or be home a lot, but that was not the case. Being in a city for a whole semester there is only so much you can do and so much you can site see. Knowing this beforehand would’ve been better as I would’ve known that there is so much I can really do.
On the peak of Gwanaksan Mountain with the city of Seoul in the background
Bukchon Hanok Village

Everland Amusement Park

Busan Gamcheon Culture Village