I’ve always wanted to do an exchange in East Asia, and when it came time to choose what university KAIST stood out as having the most courses relevant to my specific interests (Neuroscience). You can see what classes KAIST is offering at https://cais.kaist.ac.kr/totalOpeningCourse. I originally wanted to take only one or two classes and spend the bulk of my time travelling, but SFU said I had to take 12 credits worth. I was still able to do quite a lot of travelling, though, as it seems KAIST doesn’t usually have classes on Fridays.

Laundry is available in the dorms, though it costs 1000KRW to use the dryer and you need to buy your own detergent. In regards to how much clothing to bring, I brought 11 days worth with me (as my Japan trip was 10 days [Chuseok knocked out my Mon-Wed classes, so I skipped Thursday to make it a 10-day trip]) and that worked alright. The weather will change drastically in your time there, though, so either bring spare sets or be prepared to buy clothes and shoes. If you’re coming in the fall, your first few weeks will see absurdly hot temperatures (worst was ‘38C, feels like 46C’) and extreme rainstorms (my shoes were ruined within a week of me arriving), while your last few weeks will be very cold (coldest was -10C). Clothes and shoes cost around the same as here at home, though. One big thing to bear in mind are the different plugs; I got by with a couple converters and a Canadian powerbar, though in this situation you’ll want to bring spare chargers as a charger with Canadian plugs will be impossible to find in Korea and $50 to ship from Canada to Korea. You might want to just buy Korean chargers while you’re there, though this won’t work as well if you plan on travelling to other countries (e.g. Japan, which uses the same plugs as Canada). There’s also a small convenience store in the dorm itself (though it only opens at 6PM and not every day of the week), so you can get snacks there if need be (no fridge in the dorm unless you buy one yourself).
To get from KAIST to elsewhere in Daejeon, you can either take buses from around campus (which run fairly often; the NAVER map app has excellent tracking of when the buses will arrive), catch a taxi and/or walk 30min to the nearest metro station. There’s two bus terminals in town (Yuseong is smaller but close to KAIST, Daejeon Bus Terminal is further away but huge), and a major train station accessible by metro. Daejeon is a major transportation hub in Korea, so it’s very easy to get anywhere from here. One benefit of coming to KAIST instead of Seoul is that it’s cheaper and faster to get to cities in southern and eastern South Korea, such as Gyeongju, Busan and Gwangju. You’ll be further away from the two major airports of Incheon and Seoul, but your proximity to Daegu, Cheonju and Busan airports will give you
more options in flights. My usual course of action if I was flying somewhere with a heavy bag was to take a taxi to the nearest metro station, then head to Daejeon Station from there.

For cost of living, Korea is largely similar to Vancouver except that the food is much cheaper. Cafeteria meals will run you around $5, while eating out will usually cost around $10-15. I don’t drink, so I don’t know if the beer’s significantly cheaper or not.

(The Lotteria (fast-food joint) on campus, with some questionable English)

(Typical cafeteria fare)
KAIST will email you instructions about how to get to campus, what you need to do for registration and orientation and such things. They’ll also match you up in a buddy program, where 3 local students have 3 exchange buddies each. The local buddies will help you adapt to Korea and figure things out, while the other exchange buddies will be your first friends in the new country. One thing I will suggest is to not let KAIST take care of your ARC application, but instead deliver it personally to the Daejeon Immigration Office once you have it ready to go. The ARC is necessary to travel in and out of Korea once you start your term, and I got mine almost a month ahead of my peers because I delivered my application personally.

My dorm was a little ways away from campus, in Mir Hall. I originally planned on using the bike rental system, but I ended up not using it at all since the closest station was a few buildings down and the campus was quite walkable. KAIST will randomly match you up with another exchange student to be your roommate; mine was an electrical engineer from Poland who was a pretty nice guy. The rooms are fairly small (I’d guess 25 square meters, not including bathroom or shower), though they have lots of storage space under the bed and in the closet. Each student gets a closet locked with a PIN and a drawer locked with a key, so you can use that to store valuables. I think Mir Hall is the dorm mainly used for exchange students, so if you make friends of the other exchange students you’ll often run into them in the halls and such. Also, they don’t allow cooking, so don’t bring any crockpots or the like.

KAIST doesn’t have much of a clubs scene. There’s maybe a half-dozen clubs that allow non-Koreans to join, and most of them are sports clubs. The only one I ended up joining was Starflower, the astronomy club that met once a week to look at the moon and complain about the sports field’s lights being too bright. You have to pay a club fee to participate, and since I was travelling every weekend I managed to get my fee cut down since I wasn’t really participating in their major events. If you play Pokemon Go, there’s a lot of players on campus and throughout Korea and Illumises are worth a lot on the trade market there. There’s a small district near KAIST called Rodeo Street that has lots of arcades, PC banks, bars and chicken & beer restaurants. There’s one pub in particular that me and my friends frequented called Santa Claus that’s open till 3am, and has a pool table, a couple foosball tables and a dartboard. KAIST will also organize some events over the course of the term, from a templestay (go stay overnight at a Buddhist temple), to a Halloween party, to various free concerts held in the auditorium. There’s also various events happening in Daejeon; the nearby park held a
flower festival in September, and I happened to get a discount ticket to a professional volleyball game in October that was quite entertaining.

(A typical Starflower meeting)

(One of the free auditorium shows; a performance by the Canadian pianist Charles Richard Hamelin)
(Rodeo Street, both in and out)
I did a LOT of travelling while I was in Asia, and while it was very fun I was quite worn out by the end of it all. Make sure to take care of yourself, and keep things flexible so you can take a weekend off if you’re running yourself ragged. I saved Seoul for the end since a Korean friend from Canada was flying in after the term was over so we could explore it together, but you might want to visit Seoul a few times since there’s so much to see there and lots of events. I visited Gyeongju, Muju, Mongolia, Japan, Jinju, Gwangju, Busan, Taiwan, Jeju, Beijing, Macau, Hong Kong, and Seoul over the course of my trip, and altogether the term cost around $9k CAD. I’d recommend all of them, but particularly Mongolia (go early in the term before it gets too cold), Japan (watch out for public holidays), Busan, Taiwan (go late in the term when it cools off), and Jeju (get an international drivers license so you can rent a car there). The ones I enjoyed the least were Beijing (go there for the Great Wall and Forbidden City, but the haze is awful. You’ll need a visa unless you visit on your way in or out from Canada) and Jinju (watch out for typhoons ruining festivals).
All in all, I’m very glad I went. I’ve learnt a lot about Asian culture from my trips to the various countries, and I had my first big independent experience going so far from home. I’ve also made some international friends that I’ll hopefully keep for the rest of my life, and maybe I’ll go visit someday.

Main tips for other students:

- Try to figure out your travel schedule ahead of time. Look online to see what festivals are happening while you’re there, and go experience them. A good resource is [http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_2_2.jsp](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_2_2.jsp). I particularly recommend the Muju Firefly Festival and the Busan Fireworks Festival (don’t buy a seat, go to Millak Park 3 hours before the show to get a good view). Chuseok will knock out a few days of classes, so if you don’t mind the cost of skipping classes (usually 1-2%/skip) you can turn that week into a 10-day trip somewhere (I took a ferry to Japan and visited Osaka-Kyoto-Fuji-Tokyo).

- Learn some Korean before you go. People say that everyone in Korea speaks English, but that is absolutely not true. The KAIST professors speak pretty good English and many students speak English, but outside of campus you’ll rarely encounter anyone who speaks it. Most signs will have some English on them so you can still get around, but most of the time I had to order food by pointing at a picture and going ‘Is this spicy?’ through a translator app.

- Prepare yourself for the typhoons. Picture the worst rainstorm Vancouver’s ever had, squared. It’s crazy.

Best of luck!

- Aaron, BNSS
(You can always go find this sign in E11 that places us by Powell River (?) if you feel homesick)

(Don’t worry, they’re just as nerdy as us)