Introduction

- Partner university, country, your major/faculty, dates/term(s) of exchange.

  Seoul National University, South Korea, Computer Science/ Applied Science. I attended SNU from March to June, but I was in South Korea from September to August.

Preparation for exchange

- Include information you would have found valuable when planning your exchange

  There is a bunch of annoying paperwork you've got to do and the bureaucracy can be pretty frustrating. Make sure you have all your application documents in order before heading the consulate/embassy to get your visa, and bring an ample supply of patience.

- Packing, what to bring

  Your cell phone. Everyone here uses a program called KakaoTalk to communicate (it’s basically whatsapp). Other than that just standard travel stuff.

- Travel and transportation

  Don’t worry about getting to the university from the airport, both airports in Seoul (Incheon and Gimpo) are connected to the excellent subway network. It’s really easy to get to anywhere you need to go in the city, Seoul National University included. Just look at the subway map. If you’re going to SNU head to Seoul National University Station. Just ask which bus to hop on to get to SNU from the subway stop, it’s about a 15 minute ride to campus.

- Financial details (i.e. cash/credit card based society, cost of living as compared to Vancouver)

  Credit/debit are if anything more widely accepted in Korea than in Vancouver. Also, having a card gives you access to online shopping which is much, much more developed in Korea than it is in Canada. Grocery delivery etc are all quite easy to set up. It can be a bit of a challenge to navigate the sites though as they’re in Korean. Best bet is to make friends as soon as you can!

During Exchange

- Arrival and orientation

  The university people don’t meet you at the airport or anything, but the people in the exchange department are really good with getting in touch via email to tell you what/when/where the orientation meetings are. The meetings are helping and you get cool free stuff if you go. In general though, if you ever feel lost you can just ask an SNU student what to do/ where to go (most of them speak excellent English) or you can send an email to the exchange coordinator you’re assigned.

- Accommodation and living

  I lived off campus with a roommate. It worked for me, but I missed the dorm experience a bit. If you live in the international students dorm you’ll meet people from all over the world in the same situation as you which leads to lots of great friendships, so that’s what I’d recommend overall. The on campus meals are subsidized (at least some of the cafeterias are, sorry no subsidized coffee shops) and are not too bad
either. You’ll actually get a good exposure to Korea cuisine if you eat there, plus it’s the cheapest meal in town owing to the subsidies. Just ask around for which place are cheap on campus.

- **Academic details (lecture format, schedules, grading, etc.)**

Basically the same as SFU in terms of lecture style. Profs don’t really do office hours though, and I didn’t see a tutorial or anything offered. In general there is less extra help available if you need it, so be sure to be proactive and reach out if you feel you need a hand. Most of the time TAs will be happy to help.

The workload is higher than SFU – SNU is “Korea’s best University” and the students represent literally the top 1% of all students in Korea. Giving how study obsessed people here are that’s really saying something. The end result for you is that the work load is heavier than at SFU, and the professors expect you to have a lot more background knowledge then you may or may not have. It can be pretty tough sometimes, at least in Computer Science.

- **Country information (culture, weather, places to visit, etc.)**

South Korea is great, good mix of western and eastern influences. Weather gets fairly cold in winter (-10 or so is as bad as it gets), summers are quite hot (30 degrees+). Seoul is a good place to start exploring the country, but be sure to head out of the city too. Luckily Korea is so small you can pretty much go anywhere you want. If you’ve got the money you can take the KTX which is Korea’s high-speed rail networks which will get you pretty much wherever you want to go. If you’ve really got the money Jeju Island is a very popular tourist destination in the south, it’s great but quite expensive.

- **Social and extra-curricular activities. Please be mindful that your exchange report will be posted publicly online. While it is great to recommend nightlife destinations, be reminded that when on exchange you are an ambassador of SFU and your exchange report should reflect that.**

If you’re at SNU, **join the SNU Buddy program!** It’s a group that connects SNU students and exchange students that organizes fun events every semester. Great way to meet not only Koreans but also other exchange students from all over the world. Good mix of events that expose you to not only Korean culture but also plain old fun stuff.

**Reflection After Exchange**

- **What you’ve learned and the challenges you faced**

Getting all the paperwork together – I’ve gotten good at managing bureaucracy. Getting through the language barrier, learning new languages – made my brain more flexible, more empathetic to exchange students at SFU. Seen that the world is much larger than the borders of Burnaby – horizons broadened.

- **What you wish you knew before you left**

I wish I had known earlier that living abroad is such a great thing to do; I would have done it way sooner. Also it’s a lot easier to do that I thought. The “I just don’t have time/ I want to graduate on time” excuse doesn’t really fly. You learn so much more studying and living abroad it really doesn’t even compare to a semester at SFU where you’re in your comfort zone. TLDR: just do it already.

- **Words of wisdom for other students**

In total I’ve been in Asia for almost 3 and a half years now. Best decision I ever made in my life. My words of wisdom: just do it. Stop thinking so much and just do it.