

Campus Asia study abroad experience in Korea University

-2024 spring and fall semester-



Introduction

This spring and fall semesters, I had a great opportunity to study abroad in Seoul, South Korea as a Campus Asia exchange student at Korea University. I am really grateful to this program for allowing me this life-changing experience. This period is definitely the most brilliant and energetic period of my life to date.

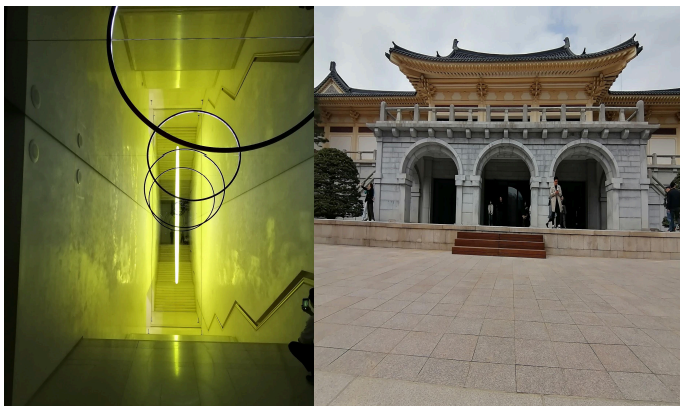
Ever since I entered university, I have been looking for an opportunity to study abroad in Korea. My plan was to begin a one-year study abroad in Korea from the spring semester of my sophomore year of college. However, the general study abroad programs were not offering studying abroad opportunities starting in the spring semester, then I found the Campus Asia program. I chose to study abroad through this program because the vision of this program was aligned with my objectives of deepening the

academic knowledge in political science and economics and of experiencing Korean culture in order to gain the ability to contribute to the development of larger society and to better understand Korean society, where I was brought up when I was little.

This one-year study abroad in Korea has given me much more than I expected and has helped me grow a lot in many aspects. Let's go over what it was like to lead a life in Korea, along with photos.

Academics

The first thing I can remember is the course registration. The course registration system of Korea University is first-come-first-served, which is different from that of Waseda University, so I needed to apply for the courses I wanted to take as soon as the registration period started. Since I needed to take the modules conducted in English and there were fewer seats for exchange students, the competition for the courses was really intense. In total, I registered for 12 credits, with 4 courses being 3 credits each in the spring semester and 18 credits, or 6 courses in the fall semester.



The courses I took in the spring semester were “Political Process”, “Media and Democracy”, two of which were conducted in English, “Economic History of East Asia”, and “Japan and East Asia”, two of which were done in Korean. In the “Political Process”, I gained the foundational knowledge about political processes, institutions, and public engagement in

democracy. The most enjoyable course in the spring semester was “Media and Democracy”, in which firsthand experiences and journalism were put an emphasis on. The professor, who has a lot of connections, often planned field trips and brought students to many places, such as Leeum and Hoam museums, orchestra at Lotte concert hall, and KBS, South Korea’s top public broadcasting network. The professor was so generous as to treat all participants to a Korean barbecue!



In the fall semester, the modules I took were “Principle of Economics I”, “East Asian Politics”, “American Politics”, “English Reading and Writing”, “Introduction to English Linguistics”, and “Learning and Memory”. The two of the academic English courses honed my English skills further. In the psychology module, “Learning and Memory”, I found it very interesting as it provided me with the knowledge about behavior in terms of stimulus-response relations and about neuroscience. It also allowed me to realize that the field of psychology is closely related to the field of language education which is my major. In the political science and economics courses, I learned the importance of theories and models as they can simply explain causes and consequences of complex phenomena, and can be applied in different contexts to predict the future. Overall, interdisciplinary academic exploration has given me a broader perspective on my academic knowledge.

School events



Throughout this year, a lot of exciting school events were held. Those events provided students with many opportunities to experience Korean culture and to build connections with people from diverse backgrounds including local students. Without those events, I wouldn’t have been able to build many of the relationships I now have. There are some events held for every student and others especially for international students held by

KUBA, which is the abbreviation of Korea University Buddy Assistants.

KUBA

KUBA is the organization where local students with a certain degree of English proficiency provide international students with full support in their student life through the buddy system. Each semester, more than one thousand international students are automatically enrolled in KUBA, which ends up having seven or eight groups in total. Within these groups, each local student is assigned approximately five to eight international students. A buddy is supposed to provide them with various information necessary for enjoying life in Korea and opportunities to deepen friendships through projects that introduce Korean culture. I was assigned to group 3 in the spring semester and to group 7 in the fall semester.

Orientation



KUBA helps to erase the anxieties of international students from the very beginning of their study abroad experience. The first event is orientation. Here, students are given advice and tips on student life in the foreign country.

Orientation is also the first chance to meet other international students. I happened to have a light conversation with a student from Germany who was seated beside me. This friend provided me with many opportunities to interact with a variety of people, which was something I was not

accustomed to. I still keep in touch with him to this day.

Cheering events

There is another orientation. It is the cheering orientation, in which students can experience Korea University's proud cheering songs and accompanying movements in unison. This is held to ensure the success of Korea University's cheering at various events such as cheering competition between Korea University and its rival, Yonsei University, and sports events between the two universities called *고연전* (goyeonjeon), similar to *早慶戦*.



This event is rarely experienced at other universities as it allows students to experience a sense of togetherness and passionate cheering, shoulder to shoulder, regardless of age, gender, or nationality.

Field day



Rather than just cheering for students, they actually become participants and compete in a sporting event known as Field Day. In this event, students compete against

each other in groups in a variety of sports such as tug-of-war, dodgeball, soccer, roping, and relays. These activities help to strengthen group unity and foster teamwork. I participated in almost all of the competitions, and had a great time enjoying the sports and building friendships with my group members. Fortunately, in the fall semester, group 7 was able to win the championship.

ISF



ISF stands for International Students Festival, an event where the cultures of countries around the world, from Europe to Asia, can be experienced through costumes, foods, games, and performances prepared by students from each country. At the end of the festival, the booths of three top countries with the most visitors were announced and awarded prizes.

I contributed to the Japanese booth both in the spring and fall semesters as a member of the game team. In the game section,

wearing a Yukata, a traditional Japanese costume, I introduced Kendama, ring toss, and water balloons, which were enjoyed by many visitors. Thanks to the hard working and collaborations of members, the Japanese booth won the first prize in the spring semester and came in third in the fall semester. After the festival, most members gather together to enjoy an after party using the prize money.



IPSELENTI



The biggest event of all the events throughout the year was IPSELENTI. IPSELENTI is the special celebration event for Korea University students and led by the university's cheering squad on the last night of 대동제 (大同祭), Daedongje, festivals for unity. This is the day-long event filled with crowd enthusiasm, exciting music, and crimson red, climaxing with performances of well-known artists including NewJeans. As I stood all day until the festival ended, my legs were so tired, but it was a nice experience because this kind of event can't be experienced on other occasions.

Farewell party



Towards the end of semester, international students are invited to a local restaurant, which is decorated with memorable photos and nice decorations to farewell their KUBA buddies and members.

At the farewell party, students can look back on how the semester was like with a video, which a group member edited, while enjoying the last group meal. Other than this, there would

be a Bingo competition for KU goods and an award ceremony for the best buddies. I enjoyed this moment with my close friends while looking back on the semester.

Everyday life

In addition to school work and school events, everyday life enriched by various activities was a part of my study abroad experience. My life in Korea was filled with plenty of new activities and experiences I am going to describe below.

Dormitory life



In the spring semester, I was successfully accepted into one of the on-campus dormitories of Korea University, which was called Anam International House, located at the top of the hill where it takes about ten to fifteen minutes walk from the main campus.

As it was my first time living with a roommate, I had no idea what it would be like to live together with someone else besides family members. My roommate was an older Korean student, who lived there as a RA. Fortunately, the lifestyle and routines were not so different from each other, so there was no inconvenience in living. He was a reliable brother who helped me whenever I was in trouble.



Share house life



In the fall semester, I chose to live in a shared house, where international students and workers lived together, as my father's acquaintance introduced me to the place. It was located about one hour away from the university by train and walk but the monthly fee was really cheap.

The house environment was really international. In the house, multiple languages such as Mongolian, Nepali, Korean, Japanese, and English could be heard being spoken. When I had dinner with housemates, I enjoyed each country's foods. They treated me as if I was a family member. When I had difficulties, they consulted with me, and helped me like family. Also, on special occasions such as birthdays and farewells, everyone celebrated with a big party. Although I couldn't spend much time with housemates since I usually came back home late from the university, all the time I spent with them was really fulfilling.

Language exchange



One of the most valuable benefits of living abroad is language acquisition. KUBA buddies would contact international students who are able to use the language they want to learn. In both of the semesters, my buddies were Korean who wanted to learn Japanese. Usually, the language exchange took place at a random cafe and through the language exchange, I taught them

some Japanese and in turn they taught me Korean, which I wanted to learn more.

My buddies could already understand Japanese to some extent, so the communication between me and them was smooth enough to learn the language at a high level. I think the language exchange was meaningful as it allowed me not only to learn more Korean but also to strengthen the relationship with them.



Sports



Finally, one of the most important aspects of my daily life is sports as it allows me to stay physically and mentally fit, and to expand my social circle. Sports climbing is such a sport for me. Climbing, being physically and mentally demanding, helps me stay fit or even makes me stronger.

More Importantly, it provides me with the opportunity to interact with many people beyond gender, age, or nationality. Same is true for many other sports I experienced during semesters.



Cultural experiences

Cultural experiences enriched my life in Korea and made me love Korea more. South Korea has a rich traditional and modern culture. I am going to introduce some parts of Korean culture I experienced.

Food



Having food is essential for vitality for various activities, social bonding, and cultural exchange. Throughout the year, I enjoyed many different types of food including meat dishes, soups, street foods. My favorite food was 떡닭, Tteugalg, as shown in the photo. This food was good value for money and nutritious. I often visit the restaurant to enjoy this food with my friends.

In Korea, I usually went out for meals with friends, unlike in Japan

where I often dined alone. I ate out almost every day, and what I noticed was that there are fewer people who eat alone in Korea than in Japan. Since I rarely ate with people other than my family in Japan, I was not used to eating in a group very much when I first came to Korea, but now I can understand how good it is to eat with people.

Cafe



There are various kinds of cafes in Korea, ranging from traditional Korean cafes to modern cafes. I don't usually go to a cafe but I realized it is a good place to socialize with people.

The first cafe I went to with a big group was a cafe which sells traditional Korean teas and sweets. I could smell like herbal medicine from the tea and taste bitter and sweet at the same time when I drank it.

If you like animals, you can visit an animal cafe. I visited a dog cafe in Hongdae, which is known for its urban arts and many other entertainments, with my friends for the first time in my life, and inside the cafe there were many different kinds of dogs from big to small. I could take a picture with the big dog shown in the photo.

Another special cafe I visited in Hongdae was a painting cafe, where you can enjoy painting while having tea. If you can find someone who has the same hobbies and tastes, such as animals or paintings, I recommend you visit the cafes

with friends.

Photobooth



One of the cultures of Korean students is taking photos in photo booths. I have many memorable photos of my time in Korea but photos with people are the most memorable. All of the pictures in the photo were taken during the semesters with my friends. Whenever I want to remember my days in Korea I will look back at these.

Karaoke



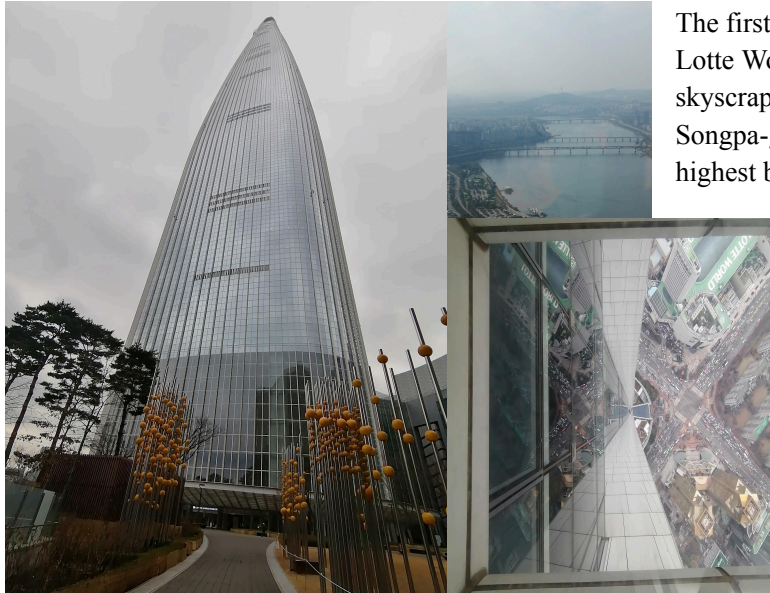
Not only in Japan, Korea also has an active karaoke culture. I rarely go to karaoke because I feel uncomfortable singing in public but I tried it several times in Korea.

My voice was always small due to a lack of confidence, but witnessing my friends enjoying singing to the fullest and singing with confidence made me realize that the more I open up, the louder my voice gets. So now I think of karaoke as an opportunity to open up my heart and to deepen friendships through singing.



Exploration

Towers



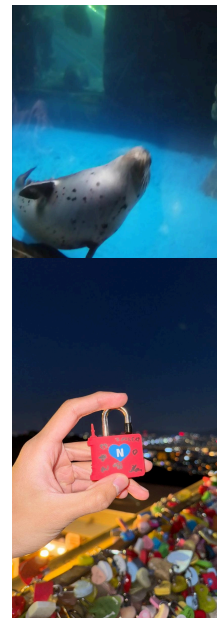
The first tourist spot I visited in Korea was Lotte World Tower which is a 123 story, 555 m skyscraper, located in Sincheon-dong, Songpa-gu, Seoul, South Korea. It is the 6th highest building in the world. This building is

versatile; not only is there a concert hall, but there is also an observatory on the top floor and a cafe where visitors can enjoy a drink while admiring the spectacular view. The top floor commands a panoramic view of the city of Seoul, and the first thing that catches the eye was the Han River, famous for “Miracle on the Han River”, a term referring to the rapid economic growth of South Korea during the latter half

of the 20th century.



The area is occupied by Lotte buildings including Lotte World, which is a major recreation complex in Seoul, consisting of an indoor theme park, an outdoor amusement park, and many other facilities. Other than this, I visited Lotte World Aquarium, where I enjoyed watching many different kinds of creatures including beluga whales and seals.



Another tower I visited was the N Seoul Tower, located on the summit of Namsan Mountain. I took a bus to the top of the mountain with my friends, and what we witnessed was a nice landscape and many dating couples. In the summit area, there was a spot where you can hand a heartlock with a message. Among many romantic messages, I remember my friends and I locked the message that said something like “Friendships Forever!”.

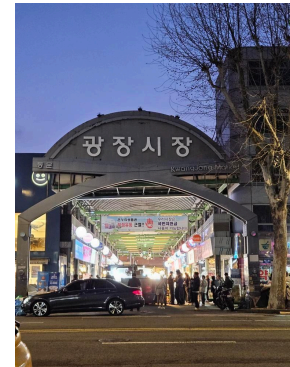
Traditional sites



About twenty minutes by bus from Korea University is one of the oldest and largest street markets in South Korea, Gwangjang Market, with thousands of shops

and visitors. I visited the market several times since it's located near the university and an easy place to hang out with friends. As I walked through the market, I could hear ladies at the stalls trying to attract customers by calling out to them in Japanese, Chinese, and other languages, indicating that there are many tourists from abroad.

From my experience, there is one thing to be careful of as a foreign visitor: rip-offs. When I first visited with a friend from Germany, we were easily ripped off. After finishing eating, I was told the price, and I couldn't believe it because it was so expensive for the quantity and quality of the food. However, I didn't dare to fight back in Korean and rather decided to pay. In retrospect, there were a few strange points but I couldn't notice while eating. I recommend you visit with locals.



Another place you can experience traditional Korean culture is Korean Folk Village. You can experience traditional Korean life and culture as if you time-travelled back to the late Joseon Dynasty. Not only can visitors try on traditional Korean clothes and explore the village with replicas of traditional houses of the

different social classes, but they can also watch traditional culture performances.

Nature



As I mentioned earlier in the “*Towers*” part, flowing through Seoul is the Han River, which has sustained Korean civilization. At the foot of the river, there are Hangang Parks, consisting of twelve parks in total. The most famous one is Yeouido Park, where you can enjoy street food, street music, riding bikes, and many other things.

Various events are held according to the season from spring to winter. In spring to summer, Hangang Park is the best place to go for a picnic. In October, the Seoul International Fireworks Festival will be held near Yeouido Park. When I saw the fireworks, especially at the climax, I was overwhelmed by the brightness of the light and the sound pressure. There are millions of visitors every year, so I had to wait for hours until it became relatively less crowded before heading home.



In summer, I went paragliding in Yangpyeong County. It was my first time going paragliding, so I was excited and anxious at the same time. I was really nervous right before I took off from the ground, and to take off from the

ground it took much more strength than I expected because of the strong wind. Once the flying was settled I was able to concentrate on the beautiful scenery. I felt like a bird. When descending, there were two choices: descend calmly or descend crazily. Of course, I chose the latter, so I descended, spinning and swinging wildly from side to side, which was exhilarating. This paragliding offers different scenery, depending on the seasons, so if I have an opportunity to go paragliding next time, I would like to go in winter.



Mountains

About 70 percent of the land of South Korea is covered with mountains. On holidays, there are many people who go hiking in the mountains. I also climbed several mountains, such as Gwanaksan, Palbongsan (South Chungcheong), and Bukhansan. In Bukhansan, I witnessed many kinds of animals including a wild boar!

Each mountain is relatively easy to access from the city center, so you can easily go climbing with friends. I like hiking very much because it makes me feel good to talk with friends while enjoying nature, and the view of the city after the summit is spectacular.

DMZ(DeMilitarized Zone)



Since the end of World War II in 1945, the Korean Peninsula has been politically divided between North Korea (DPRK) and South Korea (ROK) at 38th parallel. Running across the Korean Peninsula near the 38th parallel is a heavily militarized zone, DMZ.

Early in the morning, a limuzine bus took the tourists to the DMZ. Before actually entering the DMZ, young men serving in the military checked all the passengers' passports. In the DMZ, you can experience and learn many things. I came to know about the history of Korea since the end of the war, the harsh lives of people and defectors of North Korea, people's awareness of the division issue and so on.

What impressed me the most was seeing North Korea with my own eyes through a telescope. I was able to see the Peace Village, or "propaganda village" as it is called, with shabby buildings and people walking in white shirts and grey trousers. From the observatory to the village it was only a few dozens of kilometers.

You can get even closer if you go through to the end of the cold and narrow "3rd Tunnel", one of the four tunnels under the border between two Koreas, which was turned out to

have been designed for a surprise attack to Seoul from North Korea. I was in a place that was only a hundred or so meters from North Korea, a memory I will never forget.



Campus Asia activities

The Campus Asia program provided me with many opportunities to interact with students from Korea, China, Singapore, and Japan, and to get to know each others' country.

Campus Asia Youth Talk – Campus Asia × Beyond



Beyond is the international politics society of Korea University, which was founded to discuss and explore topics related to international politics. Through weekly seminars, students can focus on international politics and diplomacy and develop their expertise through discussions with students from various backgrounds centered on current issues in the changing international community. Other than its weekly seminar,

Beyond often collaborates with other countries' student groups. There are collaborations with students from Campus Asia as well as with Waseda University's circle, Seiyukai.

Youth Talk is such a collaboration event, where Campus Asia and Beyond students give a presentation on any topic related to their respective countries' societies held at Smart Startup Square, which is a cafe operated by Korea University based on the project purpose of supporting various creative and productive activities of local residents and students. This cafe is frequently used by groups but also open to individuals.

In the Youth Talk, I gave a presentation on the topic of comparison on education both in Korea and in Japan, and listened to other students' interesting topics.



Jeju trip



Every semester there is a field trip. The destination varies from semester to semester, but in the two semesters I was studying, the destination was Jeju island. Since I participated in Jeju trips in both of the semesters, I decided to summarize them together. It would be too long to describe each semester's trip. The basic schedule of this trip was the same, with the only differences being the length of the trip, accommodation, meals, and sightseeing spots, etc.

On the first day, the Campus Asia party attended a special lecture at Jeju Peace



Institute. In the lecture, we learned about the tragedy of the April 3rd incident and the significance of Jeju island as a promoter of peace. Other than the special lecture we took a tour around 4.3 Memorial Hall, Jusangjeolli Cliffs, Jeolmul Natural Forest Resort, and enjoyed black pork for dinner, which was one of the best foods I had during my stay in Korea.



Second day was basically a whole day tour. We visited Cheonjeyeon Waterfall, Altturu Airfield, Yongmeori Coast, Songaksan Oreum Trail, Sanbangsan Mountain, and Dongmun Traditional Market. Jeju's nature was so beautiful that I can still vividly remember it and the clean air was refreshing. The fruits and seafood dishes nurtured by Jeju's

rich nature were superb. I am so grateful to the Campus Asia program for making my study abroad experience rich and unforgettable.



Conclusion

All in all, I believe my one-year study abroad in Korea helped me grow a lot. There was more to this study abroad experience than what is written here and I believe all of my experiences including these made me what I am today. I am sure these experiences will energize me in the future.

Finally, I would like to thank the Campus Asia program again from the bottom of my heart for giving me this valuable experience in Korea.



