

**EXCHANGE REPORT****Name****Year and term for exchange**

Rebecka Karmakar

HT19

Exchange university

KAIST

Degree programme

Biotechnology

Four months is too little to stay in a country as amazing as Korea!

Before departure

I wanted to go to Korea as it worked out very well with my program. They had many interesting courses that fit in with what I study in Sweden and everything was practically in English. I did not have a lot of expectations as I did not want that to destroy my experiences while in KAIST.

Before the departure I checked what potential vaccines I was recommended to take and applied for visa with the directions from the university. KAIST supplied with a lot of information and a check list of what I need the do. So before going to KAIST I had applied to a dorm and courses. It was very comforting, as they helped me with different questions I might have. I also entered their buddy system and said I wanted to take part in that exchange between Koreans and exchange students.

Upon arrival

While some people came a couple of days before the move-in date for the dormitories, I came on the same date. It was honestly quite easy to get to Daejeon, which is the city KAIST is situated in. There are couple of option how to get there, and the school provides with a clear description. But I felt adventurous and took a bus to a KTX train station. It was easy to find the right bus and train with just a quick google, and whenever I was unsure, I asked people.

Even though English might not be as used in the same way as it is used in Sweden, the Korean people were very eager to help, and I always found very kind people who tried their best to understand me and explain to me. Most Koreans have a good understanding of English also, so it was possible to communicate. Of course, it is easier to understand them if you speak their language.

Coming to KAIST there were some introduction days. We got to walk around campus, meet some students and had some lecture about campus life at KAIST. Some student clubs also show cased their skills which was really cool to see.

Financials

Financials was something I did not worry too much about. The food was to a reasonable price, and the dormitory fees were quite low. I could easily travel every month and it was more important to me that I had fun, then that I tried to live on a tight budget. Be prepared to use all of your CSN if you want to travel alot, but of course it is possible to do things at a cheaper price and one can find food for varying prices! For example, sometimes I could eat all my meals for 100 SEK or less in a whole day.

Be aware though of all the fika places, as Koreans love to fika or coffee. It was therefore a bit too easy to spend money on fika or snacks. Be also aware of the fashion in Korea. If you are like me and love fashion, it will be easy to fall for the cute or cool styles that exists in Korea. Koreans are really fashionable and stylish.

I do recommend keeping a spreadsheet of how much money you use every day and to what. It was really helpful for, because then I could realise if I bought too much fika or clothes (haha...).



Accommodation

Depending if you chose to stay at the campus dormitories or not, the accommodations will look a bit different.

If you live in the dormitories, then you will most likely share a room with someone else, and will have a bathroom, desk and bed. There will be no availability to cook, unless you rent a kitchen space and laundry machines are shared. However, all dormitories are on campus, therefore one has easy access to the all the facilities at the University. There is also a gym at almost every dormitory and a convenience store, which is great for late night snacks! Living on campus makes it easy to go to the pool on campus, or library to either study or chill (as they have movie rooms), and there are cafés everywhere! Which is great for that daily coffee/tea intake!

Living off-campus will mean that you get your own apartment. As I lived in a dormitory, I cannot say much about it unfortunately. However, you will most likely have your own kitchen and will not be sharing the apartment with anyone. You can probably get help from friends or websites to find some nice apartments.

University and studies

The university is quite big, and it almost felt like a town within a town. Most things that were not within the university, existed either just 20 minutes away by walking.

For a Graduate/Master student, I found myself studying at a quite relaxing pace. It was comfortable, and that is likely due to the many varying courses I could choose from. Almost all courses are in English, regardless of what year one is in, and the teachers are at least as fluent as yourself, if not even better. I know some of my friends struggled and I almost did so myself, however, the first week or two is an add-drop period. This means one can drop courses and/or add them to one's curriculum without much problem. I utilised this to change from one course to another.

I also found the system to not be structured the same as KTH, which was surprising when for example writing exams and there were no thorough run through as it is here in KTH, in other words no tentavakter (exam guards?). It was also easy to schedule as they had block schedule, so every week looked the same.



Courses

At the graduate level, the courses will mainly be lectures, but some might have homework or projects. However, those courses were often electives, in other words for both undergraduate/bachelor student and graduate/master students. I found my courses to be quite comfortable and consisting of lectures that I went through by myself. This gave me a lot of free time to do other things, like hang out with my friends or join a club at KTH.

Even though the courses run through the whole semester (compared to at KTH where it's separated into periods), I still had two exams for each course which was quite nice. Once I had the exam on the specific subject, it wasn't revisited.

Also, all courses are not exam based, one of my courses was project based. This meant that I had homework and a project that decided my grade for me.

City and country

While Daejeon did have many interesting things, it surprisingly did not feel as a big city, even though it is the same size as Stockholm. It could be hard to get to the KTX trains or transfer busses, but once one was there, it was easy and fast access to the rest of the country. I travelled many times to Seoul (4 times), and once to Gyeongpo beach and once to Busan. All three places were great and I do recommend exploring the country more than I did, that will most likely be my only regret.

Korea is really a great country to be adventurous in, as it is quite safe anywhere you go and people will always try to help you if you ask them. They might be shy, but they are so kind once you get over the shyness. It is also great to travel as all the travel systems in every city is connected to one card. You can even use that card to pay for other things than just the subway or busses.



Leisure and social activities

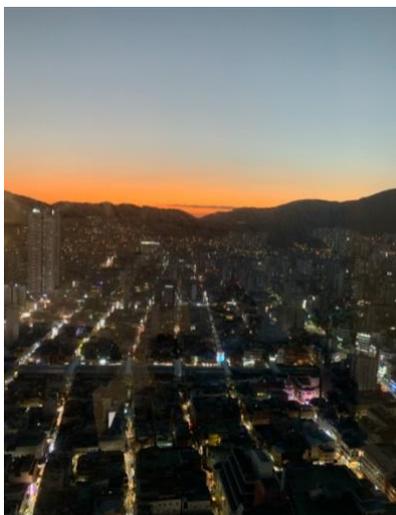
In my spare time I danced a lot and hang out with friends and ate. It is possible to join many different clubs at KAIST which enables one to meet Koreans and other exchange students. There was also an international group that arranged many international events for students. In this way one could experience the Korean culture. There were also many times the university had some arranged events by students, actually almost every week.

It was really easy to have a social life if one wanted to, and one could always hang out with other exchange students.

Other recommendations and observations

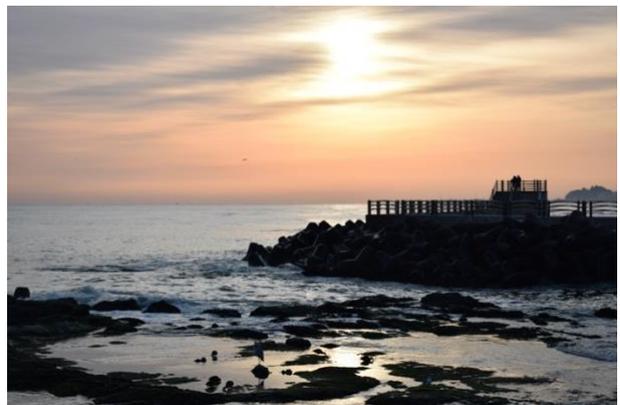
Korea is such a beautiful country; I can only say that you should travel around as much as you can. You are defiantly bound to meet a lot of fun people and no matter where I went, people was always so friendly. I really enjoyed my time and learning about the Korean history, as it is long and very interesting. Don't be afraid to try to food also, it is so good and healthy. Finally I just want to say that this semester was made perfect thnks to a friend I met in Korea. Even though she is from KTH and study almost the same program as me and we have shared friends, it required a travel across the world to meet each other. She truly made me feel so happy and it would not have been the same without her. So make friends, some of them might stick for life! Here are some more pictures. (There so many more pictures I want to share, but I think it's already too much haha sorry.)

Busan





Gyeonpo area





Seoul





