

South-Korea a truly memorable experience



Ever since I went on a gap year after high school I dreamt of continuing my travels and further exploring the world. To learn more about different cultures and make new friends along the way.

So I thought what better way is there than doing an exchange semester in a foreign country where most likely other like-minded people are doing the same.

Now why especially South-Korea you might ask...

After getting a small introduction into Asian culture a few years back in Indonesia and Malaysia I got really interested in the people and their culture. The way of living and attitude was just so different that I wanted to travel to more Asian countries.

Therefore I am really thankful that the chance to go to the INHA University in South-Korea was presented to me by my home university the Carl-von-Ossietzky University of Oldenburg.

How would it be to live there? What should I pack? Will the people be nice? Will they even understand me? Those were questions in my head before I left home to venture into a new chapter of my life...

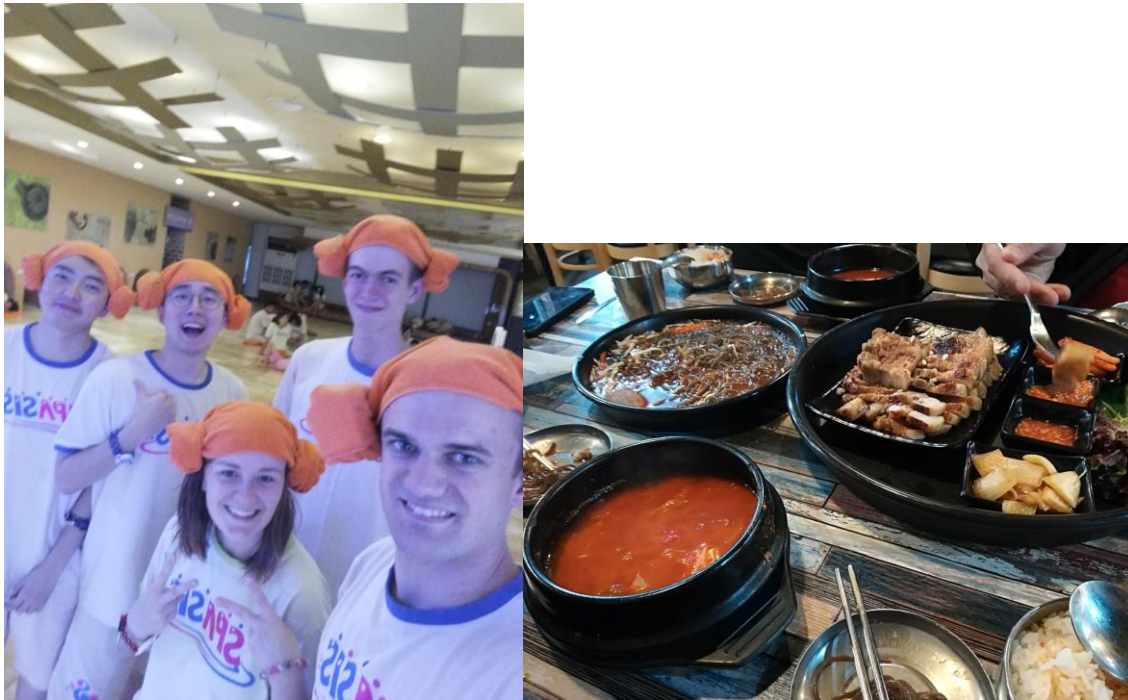
Going abroad, leaving your home always makes you worrisome there are a lot of unknown events, mistakes you might make and people you don't know. But overcoming

those, learning out of your mistakes making them a lecture for life and getting to know those strangers who might become lifelong friends is what makes it all the more exciting. So I was a little bit anxious when I arrived in South-Korea as I did not speak the language at all and I was not aware of all the dos and don'ts at that time. Even though I tried my best to read up on those before my journey began. But because I had been abroad before, I was still confident I would find my way through the new country. I was excited to learn a completely different language and meeting new friends. Therefore my mind was already set on making South Korea my new home and getting the most out of it for the upcoming semester or well how it turned out, two semesters.

How was it to live there?

Short: It was awesome.

The overall atmosphere on campus and with the other exchange and local students was splendid. Every day we'd go out for food or drinks in the superb so called "Backgate Area" right next to University where there are tons of cheap bars and restaurants gathered all in one place. On weekends we took the subway to Seoul for sightseeing trips, picnics or experiencing the club culture of Seoul on vivid streets by night.



I especially enjoyed the Korean Sauna (Jjimjilbang, left picture) and the insanely tasty food (here Bossam with Naengmyeon, right picture).

I lived in the student dormitory in the first semester with three other students (two Korean students and one American) in a roughly 3x5 room, bunk beds and your own desk underneath. This could be uncomfortable for some, but throughout the semester I became unbelievably good friends with my room mates. So it was an absolute win to be cramped into such a small place with them. We worked out in the dormitory gym together, ate cup Ramen at 3am, complained about the curfew and talked about all nonsense we could think of.

The first semester came to an end way quicker than I would have imagined... The new life I built up should come to an end, but I was not ready to leave yet... There was still more to learn, more to explore and I absolutely did not want to leave my newly found friends behind as I enjoyed the exchange so much. When you are abroad it is similar to starting a completely new identity where you meet people for the first time again and can be whoever you want to be. So thanks to the good partnership between my home University and the INHA University I was able to spontaneously extend my stay for another semester. Even after the second semester my Korean is still flawed but I got to know many new people, made even more friends and deepened my friendship with the local students.

I can certainly say it was a superb experience and definitely an enrichment of my personality. You don't learn how to live your life in a foreign country just by reading books or studying at Uni. You learn it by just going and live there. For sure it is helpful to gather knowledge and know about the country you want to go. But you will still be surprised, excited, joyful, sometimes sad or maybe even devastated at times, but I ensure you after looking back you will be happy that you did it.

Similar things and experiences will probably happen to you as well if you go on an exchange. I highly recommend trying it out for yourself. Of course it doesn't have to be Korea, look around you research on the internet find your country of interest and just do it!