

Preparing to study abroad

You'll likely hear many tips and recommendations on preparing for life in Korea. However, if you'll be staying in Korea from December - February, prepare for freezing temperatures and chills that make Berlin winters seem mild in comparison. Luckily, as winter approaches, you can easily prepare; a lot of Koreans don the iconic "heattech" undergarments that you can easily acquire in department stores and malls around Seoul, and you'll be able to purchase winter jackets/coats at comparatively cheaper prices than in Berlin (buying new clothing in Korea generally is more affordable than in Berlin; unfortunately Seoul/Suwon doesn't have nearly as big of a thrifting/second-hand scene as Berlin).

If you'd like to avoid large department stores as you try to find clothing for Korea's winters, you could visit some of Seoul/Suwon's iconic underground shopping centers for steep discounts that you won't be able to find in department stores. Through they're all over Seoul, some of the more iconic underground shopping centers are at Myeongdong station and Yeongdeungpo Station!

Academic Life at Ajou

The academic experience at Ajou begins with course planning and registration. Myself and many other peers who studied at Ajou would strongly recommend: don't wait until the last minute to browse through the course catalogs and pick your preferred classes! If you're only taking English-language courses, some courses listed as "taught in English" on Ajou's English-language course catalog are only partially taught in English, and some professors may refuse to admit students who do not possess a certain level of Korean language skill. Getting spots for the courses you want are competitive at Ajou. Thus, if you don't check the language requirements of each of your preferred English-language courses and find yourself kicked out of class, you may find yourself unable to enroll in a suitable backup Class.

Once the semester starts, professors keep track of students' attendance much more strictly than in Berlin! Each professor sets their own minimum attendance policy, and racking up a certain number of absences or tardies will result in an automatic failure, so ensure that you check each of your professors' absence policies!

Advice for academic life

Ajou releases an updated list of all courses offered in English during the semester a few weeks before the start of the semester and the period for enrolling in courses. If you cannot speak Korean well enough to take your courses in Korean, make sure to separately contact

the professor of your preferred courses well before the start of the enrollment period to inquire if the class is taught FULLY in English, as some professors may elect teach their courses listed as „English-taught“ somewhat or mostly in Korean. Tldr; some courses listed as „English-taught“ on Ajou’s list of English courses may in fact be only partially taught in English.

In case you hold dual Korean citizenship and are male:

As I hold dual Korean-American nationalities, I did not have to apply for a visa. However, male Korean dual citizens who didn’t forfeit their Korean citizenship as children (in case there are ever any in the future), first contact the Korean consulate in the country of your non-Korean citizenship to potentially postpone your mandatory conscription.

Then, and before you arrive in Korea, I recommend contacting the Korean Military Manpower Administration (병무청 in Korean) to verify your eligibility to study in Korea without having to serve in the military. If you’re studying at Ajou, there’s a 병무청 office in

Suwon that you can call to double check that you can study as an exchange student in Korea without needing to fulfill conscription duties. Maybe there won’t ever be another Korean dual citizen male exchange student from the FU studying in Korea, but for the off chance that there is, I hope that this short guide helps!

Meal restrictions at Ajou

For students with dietary restrictions, especially those who are vegetarian/vegan: to the best of my knowledge, Ajou university does not offer either fully vegetarian or fully vegan meals in its numerous student canteens. There may be vegetarian snacks/light meals in the convenience stores on campus depending on their stock, but the most reliable method is simply to prepare your own meals from your room/studio.

While being vegetarian/vegan in Korea can be challenging/lonely, reach out to other exchange students who may be facing similar challenges! All exchange students have the chance to join one massive Kakao group chat with all other exchange students at Ajou, and during the Winter 2025/26 semester, a few vegetarian students found each other through this group chat and formed a separate chat to share nearby vegan/vegetarian restaurant recommendations and tips for living as a vegetarian/vegan in Korea.