

NSF IRES Summer Research at KAIST in Korea –Summer 2016

General Tips

Skype: This is an affordable way to keep in touch with people in the US from Korea. However, it's important to load up on Skype credit **before departing the US**. Skype credit allows you to dial any phone number in the US. If you attempt to load credit in Korea, you'll have to have some bank account in Korea. I think \$20 provides several hours of talk time.

Pack light: Novice travelers have a "pack this item just in case" mentality. I strongly suggest limiting yourself to only a carry-on, especially since its summer and clothes are light (see *weather* below). Many items like hair dryers, shampoo, iron, hangers, umbrellas, blankets, towels, etc can be borrowed from Hubo Lab members or **cheaply** purchased at local stores. Another reason is that large and heavy luggage will restrict your mobility. Most likely, you will need to take buses, taxis, subways, etc when you move from location to location (e.g. Airport to KAIST, KAIST to Seoul, etc). Korean taxis also have about 0.5 the trunk room of American ones because they are natural gas vehicles (NGV). The larger your luggage, the more headaches you'll encounter.

Spending: Many personal items like shampoo, hair dryers, etc are quite cheap (perhaps even less than Walmart). On-campus stores are quite well-equipped; they serve many students living in the dormitories. Also, E-mart is Korea's version of Walmart. There is one in Daejeon – and Hubo folks can steer you there.

Going places: Accents and speech speed (both by the speaker and listener) may make communication difficult. I suggest asking a Hubo Lab member to write your desired destination in Korean (Hangul) – so that you can show it to someone – be it before boarding a bus, subway, taxi, etc. I'd also carry with you at all times, the address of your (1) dorm; and (2) Hubo Lab, in Hangul – so that a taxi driver can get you there if you get lost.

Taxis: Do not be intimidated to take a taxi in Korea – especially if you have a note with the destination in Korean – and perhaps an emergency contact's phone number. Taxi drivers will phone the contact if s/he needs more information. Taxis are very affordable – I'd be surprised if fares are greater than \$10 for destinations within Daejeon.

Food: Cuisine is often a reflection of culture – so it's important to explore local foods. Korean food is characterized by stews, broths, vegetables, meats, and fish. There are many American restaurant and fast food chains. Also, E-mart features some foods/snacks that you might miss from home too.

Electricity: Korea's sockets are round-plug 220VAC. US laptop adapters often feature voltage regulation, so all you'd need is an adapter (flat male to female round). I believe KAIST's on-

campus stores have such adapters (about \$1). No need to purchase/carry those expensive multi-country adapters.

Weather: June to August temperatures range around 80 to 90 Fahrenheit, somewhat similar to temperatures and humidity in New York City. It can get really muggy at times. This is important because some air conditioning can be very cold – especially in subway cars and department stores. Transitioning from extremes, the sudden chills can risk body chills and hence sickness. You may find it useful to carry a handkerchief with you because of the humidity.

It's common for Koreans to shower one or even twice per day given the summer's humidity. Wear loose clothing and perspiration-absorbing clothes. KAIST dorms have washers and dryers, so I'd calculate only packing up to 7-days of clothing and laundering weekly. Again, clothes are cheap (think Walmart prices) for things like socks, t-shirts, under-shirts, and even shoes etc – if you really need more things.

Money Exchange and Credit Cards: Many stores and restaurants in Korea (like in the US) accept credit cards (but not debit cards). Taxis (but not subways or buses) accept credit cards. I suggest getting a credit card that does not charge foreign transactions fees. Regardless, these fees are small (about 1%). Upon landing in Incheon Airport, I believe having **300,000 Won** (about \$200) will be enough cash to keep you going for a week as you settle into Daejeon/KAIST. There are on-campus banks which probably offer better exchange rates than at the Airport. I also believe ATMs will also dispense Korean Won.

Dormitory: I believe Hwaam Hall is where you'll be staying. This is apparently a dorm for those from abroad and is located about a 30-min drive from campus. Hwaam Hall requires a **100,000 Won** (about \$100) security deposit – probably in cash. So, you really should exchange money (see above note) when you arrive at Incheon Airport.

Gifts: It is Korean etiquette for a guest to give his/her host some token gift when they first meet. Your host will likely have to spend a lot of time helping you settle in, guiding you around, etc. Thus, on your first introductory meeting, a gift (like a UNLV t-shirt, pen, keychain, etc) with a "Thank you for your trouble" will help "lubricate" the relationship. Also, when you finally depart, giving symbolic gifts to those who helped host you – would be a kind gesture. Examples include wine, confectionary (like nice chocolates, special cookies), a photo of you two in a frame, etc.

Meeting Koreans: IRES is just as much about cultural training as it is technical. So often, IRES fellows gather with other non-Koreans; many can be seen at KAIST cafeterias and dorms. However, you must remember that your cultural training is about **Korea**, so you need to frequently interact and socialize with Koreans.

There are several ways to do so – especially if you are more introverted and shy about your Korean language skills.

- KAIST Gymnasium: Sports is a great way to interact – be it a pickup game of basketball, indoor tennis, or perhaps even sign up for Tae-Kwon-do lessons. KAIST Hubo Lab members might be able to point you in the right direction. Otherwise the KAIST Office of International Student Services (OISS) could be helpful.
- Language Exchange: Korean students are always eager to learn and practice English. Offering to meet 1 to 2 times per week for language exchange, say over coffee or a meal, could be a good way to interact
- Hobbies and Courses: Besides athletics, perhaps on- or off-campus lessons could be interesting. Examples include calligraphy, cooking, painting, etc – and perhaps you can barter with 1-hour English lessons for 1-hour of courses.