K12 ACADEMICS — INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERIES

Studying in South Korea

A guide for international students & families — how Korean higher education works, the D-2 student visa, affordable tuition, English programs, the GKS scholarship, and work.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — for every kind of learner.

WORLD-CLASS, AFFORDABLE, AND GLOBALLY CONNECTED

South Korea hosts **200,000+ international students** and is racing toward 300,000 — drawn by **world-class universities (SKY, KAIST), affordable tuition, cutting-edge tech, and global K-culture**. Non-EU students get a **D-2 student visa** and, after arrival, an **Alien Registration Card**. The government's **GKS scholarship** is among the world's most generous. This guide walks it in **ten steps**.

General guidance, not legal or immigration advice. Korean immigration rules, tuition, and the funds requirement change (recent reforms to work hours and financial proof). The figures here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with Study in Korea, the Korea Immigration Service, and your university**.

1

STEP 01 OF 10

Understand Why Students Choose South Korea

WHAT TO KNOW

South Korea offers **globally ranked universities, affordable tuition, world-leading tech and research, a vibrant culture, and generous scholarships** — plus a growing number of English-taught programs, especially in STEM and at graduate level.

BY THE NUMBERS

World-class	Affordable	Tech & K-culture
SKY, KAIST	+ generous scholarships	global appeal

HOW TO HELP

Weigh Korea's **quality, affordability, and scholarships** against the language (Korean helps a lot) — for tech and STEM especially, it's a top-tier Asian destination.

GOOD TO KNOW

Korean tuition (~₩3–7M/year) is **far lower than Western equivalents** for comparable quality.

2

STEP 02 OF 10

Understand the System

WHAT TO KNOW

The leading universities are the **"SKY"** trio — **Seoul National University (SNU), Korea University, and Yonsei** — plus **KAIST** and **POSTECH** (science/tech) and **Sungkyunkwan (SKKU)** and **Hanyang**. English-medium instruction (EMI) is growing, especially in STEM and at master's/PhD level.

BY THE NUMBERS

SKY	KAIST / POSTECH	English (EMI)
SNU, Korea, Yonsei	science & tech	growing, esp. STEM

HOW TO HELP

Choose among the **SKY universities, KAIST/POSTECH, and others**, and check whether your program is in Korean or English — EMI is expanding, particularly in STEM and graduate programs.

WATCH OUT

Confirm your university holds **IEQAS certification** (required to issue the admission letter used for the visa) via the Study in Korea portal.

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STEP 03 OF 10

Get the D-2 Student Visa

WHAT TO KNOW

For degree programs you need a **D-2 student visa**. First secure a **Standard Admission Letter** from an accredited (IEQAS-certified) university, then apply at a Korean embassy (processing ~2–4 weeks). After arrival, register for an **Alien Registration Card (ARC) within 90 days**.

BY THE NUMBERS

D-2 visa	Standard Admission Letter	ARC
degree study	from an IEQAS university	within 90 days

HOW TO HELP

Get your **Standard Admission Letter**, apply for the **D-2 visa** at a Korean embassy with funds proof and documents, then register for your **ARC within 90 days** of arrival.

GOOD TO KNOW

Only **IEQAS-certified universities** can issue the admission letter used for the D-2 — check your university's status before applying.

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STEP 04 OF 10

Apply to Universities (or GKS)

WHAT TO KNOW

Apply **directly to universities** (two intakes: **March** and **September**) via their international offices, or through the **Global Korea Scholarship (GKS)**. Undergraduate programs often require **TOPIK Level 3+**; English-medium programs use **TOEFL/IELTS**. A health exam (TB) is often required.

BY THE NUMBERS

Apply directly	Or GKS	TOPIK 3+
March & Sept intakes	government scholarship	or English (EMI)

HOW TO HELP

Apply **directly to universities** (or via GKS) by the intake deadlines, and meet the language requirement — TOPIK Level 3+ for many undergrad programs, or TOEFL/IELTS for EMI.

GOOD TO KNOW

There are **two intakes (March and September)** — plan around them, and apply to GKS separately (embassy track deadline ~March).

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STEP 05 OF 10

Plan for Tuition & Scholarships

WHAT TO KNOW

Tuition is **affordable**: roughly **₩3,000,000–7,000,000/year** ($2,200–5,200), with national universities cheaper. The **Global Korea Scholarship (GKS)** fully funds tuition, a monthly allowance (~₩900,000), airfare, insurance, and a year of Korean language training. Universities also offer **20–100% merit waivers**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Tuition	GKS	Merit waivers
~₩3–7M/year	fully funded	20–100%

HOW TO HELP

Budget the **affordable tuition** (national universities cheapest), and pursue the fully-funded **GKS** or university merit scholarships (20–100% waivers are common for strong applicants).

GOOD TO KNOW

The **GKS** is one of the world's most generous scholarships — full tuition, a living stipend, airfare, and Korean training.

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STEP 06 OF 10

Meet the Financial Requirement

WHAT TO KNOW

For the D-2 you must prove funds — the standard threshold is about **₩20,000,000 (~$15,000)** in a bank account, **deposited at least 28 days** before applying (a recent reform lets some **TOPIK Level 3+** students in designated programs skip this). You also enrol in **National Health Insurance (NHIS)** (~₩40,000/month).

BY THE NUMBERS

Funds	Seasoned 28 days	NHIS
~₩20M (~$15,000)	not last-minute	mandatory (6+ months)

HOW TO HELP

Prepare **proof of funds** (~₩20M), kept in the account for 28+ days (avoid last-minute deposits), and plan to enrol in **NHIS**; note the TOPIK-3 financial-proof exemption if it applies.

WATCH OUT

Funds must be **seasoned (28+ days)** — a last-minute deposit is a red flag. TOPIK Level 3+ students in designated programs may be exempt.

7

STEP 07 OF 10

Meet Language Requirements

WHAT TO KNOW

Most **undergraduate** programs require **TOPIK Level 3+** (Korean); many **master's/PhD and STEM** programs are **English-medium** (TOEFL/IELTS). GKS recipients get a **free year of intensive Korean** before their program. Korean strongly helps daily life and work.

BY THE NUMBERS

Undergrad	Graduate/STEM	GKS
TOPIK Level 3+	often English (EMI)	1 year Korean included

HOW TO HELP

Meet your program's language requirement (TOPIK 3+ or TOEFL/IELTS), and learn Korean regardless — it strongly helps daily life, part-time work, and job-hunting.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can study STEM/graduate programs **in English**, but Korean **markedly improves** daily life and job prospects.

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STEP 08 OF 10

Prepare for the Move

WHAT TO KNOW

After arriving, register for your **ARC (within 90 days), enrol in NHIS, and open a bank account** (with your ARC). University or private housing is available; **Seoul is pricier** than Busan, Daejeon, or Pohang. Budget roughly **$800–1,000/month** total outside Seoul.

BY THE NUMBERS

ARC + NHIS	Housing	~$800–1,000/mo
first tasks	Seoul pricier	total (ex-Seoul)

HOW TO HELP

Handle arrival admin — **ARC, NHIS, banking** — and choose housing with cost in mind (regional cities are cheaper than Seoul).

GOOD TO KNOW

Health coverage (**NHIS**) is **mandatory for stays over 6 months** and kicks in after your ARC — keep private insurance for the gap.

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STEP 09 OF 10

Understand Work Rules

WHAT TO KNOW

After **6 months** of legal stay, D-2 holders can work part-time **with a work permit** from immigration — recently **up to 20–35 hours per week during term** (varies by level/Korean ability) and full-time during vacations. Not all jobs qualify.

BY THE NUMBERS

After 6 months	~20–35 hrs/week	Full-time
work permit needed	in term (recent reform)	in vacations

HOW TO HELP

Apply for a **work permit** after 6 months to work part-time (recently expanded hours) during term and full-time in vacations — confirming the current limit for your level.

WATCH OUT

You need a **work permit** and 6 months of stay before working — and the hour limit depends on your study level and Korean proficiency.

10 STEP 10 OF 10

Thrive & Work After Study

WHAT TO KNOW

After graduating, you can switch to a **D-10 job-seeking visa** to look for work in Korea, then to a work visa once employed. Korea's strong **tech, semiconductor, and R&D sectors** (Samsung, LG, SK) actively recruit international graduates.

BY THE NUMBERS

D-10	Then	Tech & semiconductors
job-seeking visa	work visa	strong demand

HOW TO HELP

Plan for the **D-10 job-seeking visa** and the switch to a work visa, build Korean and networks during study, and target Korea's tech and semiconductor sectors.

GOOD TO KNOW

Korea's **D-10 job-seeking visa** plus its tech sector make staying on realistic — confirm current conditions.

QUICK REFERENCE

Studying in South Korea: The Essentials

A snapshot — figures change (recent visa/work reforms), so confirm everything with Study in Korea, the Korea Immigration Service, and your university.

The system

SKY (Seoul National, Korea, Yonsei), KAIST, POSTECH, SKKU, Hanyang; growing English-medium instruction (EMI), especially in STEM and graduate programs; two intakes (March, September).

Visa & ARC

Degree students need a D-2 visa (via a Standard Admission Letter from an IEQAS-certified university), then register for an Alien Registration Card within 90 days of arrival.

Tuition & scholarships

~₩3–7M/year (national universities cheaper); the Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) fully funds tuition, a stipend (~₩900k/month), airfare, insurance, and a year of Korean; university merit waivers (20–100%).

Money & language

Prove ~₩20M (~$15,000), seasoned 28+ days (TOPIK 3+ exemption in some programs); NHIS mandatory; TOPIK Level 3+ for many undergrad, TOEFL/IELTS for EMI.

Work & after

After 6 months, work part-time with a permit (recently ~20–35 hrs/week), full-time in vacations; a D-10 job-seeking visa leads to a work visa (tech/semiconductor demand).

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