School Is in Session

For the foreign investor with children, Korea’s international/foreign schools offer quality and varied educational choices

A common concern among foreign investors moving to Korea for business is, what about the kids? Where will they go to school?

The choices are many. They don’t call Korea an education mecca for nothing.

With 55 foreign and international schools in Korea, the options span the gamut whatever your preferred region, language or age. I’ve heard of cases where the parents will move to the suburbs of Korea for work but leave their children in Seoul because of school. But with more than half of the foreign schools in Korea being outside of Seoul, there’s no reason to split up the family.

There are two main types of schools that offer a foreign education: foreign schools and international schools. The former limits the number of ethnic Korean students that can enroll, the latter does not.

The majority of the schools offers an American or British curriculum, with courses taught primarily in English and some schools offering the International Baccalaureate program. There are, however, schools like the Lycee Francais de Seoul and the Deutsche Schule Seoul International, where the instructional language is non-English — in this case, French and German, respectively.

The number of students at a school can range anywhere from 20 to more than 500, and the levels go from pre-school all the way through high school. Of course, there are types of foreign institutions that reach the university (undergraduate and graduate) levels as well.

As a former student of Seoul Foreign School here in Seoul, I can tell you that life there was pretty much like going to school in the United States. Most of the teachers were American or otherwise foreign, the varied extracurricular activities mirrored those of the United States and we had everything from bake sales to dances — yes, prom and homecoming, too. We had lockers, sports games, Model United Nations, Parent Teacher Association meetings, even cafeteria food that tasted the distinct way American cafeteria food does.

To offer a bit of technical background — a foreign school is defined as “a school established to educate children of foreigners in Korea and Koreans who have lived abroad for more than three years,” according to the International School Information website (www.isi.go.kr). Some examples of foreign schools in Korea are the aforementioned Seoul Foreign School, Seoul International School, Busan International Foreign School, Pyeongtaek International Christian School and Korea Kent Foreign School.

According to the Korean Ministry of Education, 70 percent of the students of foreign or international schools must be foreign nationals. The eligibility requirements of the students can include that at least one of a student’s parents have non-Korean citizenship and that the student has lived abroad for three or more years. When it comes to admissions, some schools have academic requirements as well.

Another type of foreign school in Korea is the foreign educational institution, which is “an educational institution that is established in Korea by a foreign state, a foreign local government or a foreign non-profit organization, which owns and runs the institution under the provision of the legislation from the originating country,” according to the International School Information website. Examples of foreign educational institutions in Korea are Daegu International School and the State University of New York (SUNY), Korea.

The drawbacks of sending your child to a foreign or international school in Korea is that the tuition can be steep. And the academic environment is competitive, as many of the students aim to go on to top universities and colleges around the world. But if you’re looking to give your children an international education — to not let the move to Korea detract from the educational opportunities they would have gotten back home — Korea’s foreign/international schools are at the head of the class.

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