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# SEAMK THROUGH OUR EYES

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this article three international students, Shraddha Sharma, Alisha Prasain and Bidhan Pandey engage in a relaxed dialogue about their experiences at SeAMK in Seinäjoki, Finland. From the application process to life on campus, they share insights on a variety of topics, offering their perspective on what it's like to study and live in Finland.

## 2 ARTICLE AS A DIALOG

### **“I found out that SeAMK was voted the best university in Finland”**

— I came to SeAMK through a consultant while trying to reach Finland. The consultant was very helpful throughout the process and suggested SeAMK as the best place for me. I accepted their advice, so it was a very easy process for me.

— Well, I actually visited many consultancies, but I didn't apply through any of them. I just went there to get an idea of how things work. I did my documentation and everything by myself. I found SeAMK through the website [studyinfo.fi](http://studyinfo.fi) and applied. SeAMK, along with Vaasa, were my only options, so that's how I ended up at SeAMK.

— To be honest, I applied to another university during the joint application, but it was taking a lot of time, and I'm quite an impatient person. I was looking for a university where I could apply separately to avoid a long wait. A friend of mine, who had just been admitted to SeAMK, recommended that I look into it. After researching SeAMK and other universities, I applied through studyinfo.fi. I received offer letters from two other universities, but when I found out that SeAMK was voted the best university in Finland based on graduation feedback surveys, I decided to accept the offer. I officially became a SeAMKilainen.

### **Did you have any contacts with anyone from the university during the application process?**

- I didn't have any connections with anyone at SeAMK before coming.
- The internet was all I had – no real human contact before I arrived here.
- I was in contact with the admissions office. I'm a curious and impatient person, so whenever I had questions, I sent email them, and they always responded. I had a pretty good experience with them.

### **“I imagined Seinäjoki to be very remote, with just one or two shops”**

- When I arrived in Finland, I traveled from Helsinki to Seinäjoki by road, not by train. We hired a person through our consultant to welcome us at the airport and take us to our doorstep. He showed us how to buy groceries and explained the shopping system here. We did some basic shopping at midnight and then reached our place through Sevas. On my first orientation day at the college I lost my way because I had to walk just 800 to 900 meters to the university, but I didn't know where it was. I used Google Maps, but it took me on a longer route. I eventually found my way to the university.
- I actually arrived a month before school started. Helsinki was already a bit too quiet for me – so few people, so little going on. When I came to Seinäjoki, it was even quieter. I lived in Larvakuja, where there were no

international students, only Finnish people. I met very few people and visited the school a few days before it opened. I explored the campus and familiarized myself with the place about a week before orientation.

— I studied my whole first year online, and my friends who were living in Seinäjoki described it as a village. I imagined it to be very remote, with just one or two shops and no facilities. But when I arrived, I was pleasantly surprised. Seinäjoki is really beautiful and has all the facilities a person needs. I was even more surprised by the campus area. I never imagined a university could be located in such a beautiful and convenient place, with everything within walking distance. I've been living here for about a year and have never needed public transport. Everything is within walking distance – workplace, city center, train station, grocery stores, Asian market, and more. However, my friends were somewhat right; it isn't as crowded as other big cities. But the campus location is so beautiful, I was positively surprised. I thought, "Why did they describe it that way to me?" Maybe because my friends hadn't found jobs for a few months.

### **“The orientation was very informative because I was physically present”**

— I joined the first day of orientation online because I was jet-lagged and couldn't attend in person. I found some parts of it a bit too long and boring. There were people explaining about Samo and Moni info, and I thought, "We don't even know what Samo is." Then the teachers came, and we were introduced to our subjects and how to use Moodle & Teams. I missed the campus and city tours, which my friend attended in person. She told me it was a good tour, and they got to know the city around the campus, about a five-kilometer radius.

— I liked the orientation program. I remember meeting Päivi for the first time, and we had tutors who were very helpful. Getting used to the SeAMK intra, Google, and all these things was new to me, so the orientation and subsequent programs were useful in helping me adjust. We downloaded Tuudo, which was very helpful. We also visited the city a little bit. I remember going to Valkoinen Puu on the first day, meeting

new friends. It was very informative because I was physically present. I think it would have been very boring online because you're just sitting in a room by yourself.

— I attended orientation online, and it wasn't a good experience at all. Sitting in one room, just listening while other students were physically present, going on tours, and making new connections – I felt I was missing out. But I did learn more about SeAMK and how things work at the university in Finland. Interestingly, when I joined my class physically in the second year, I met Andres, our International Students Coordinator. He showed me where everything was, like the restaurants, washrooms, classrooms, library and student office. I attended the campus physically during the 2023 batch's orientation day, and I even had the opportunity to guide them as their IB Buddy. It was my first day on campus, and I was guiding new students – it was such a good experience and a lifetime memory.

— And I remember me and Alisha made friends very quickly.

— Hehe, yes.

### **How did you find networking in Seinäjoki and at SeAMK?**

— In the classroom, it was good. We didn't know anyone at first, but there were many of us, and we had name tags. There were small namestands on the tables in front of everyone so that the teacher and we could remember each other's names. We got to know each other through some activities and games, learning about each other's countries, past experiences, jobs, or studies. For me, being present in school from the very beginning helped a lot. I could meet new colleagues personally, and we had orientation activities that brought us closer. I remember we went to a nearby lake after a week or so, and that was when most of us really got to know each other. We played games, had fun, and bonded more during the trip than the actual orientation program. Being present physically really made a difference. I would recommend that anyone try their best to be here during orientation and the first few weeks because they are very different – there's no study pressure, and you get to learn

many new things that will be helpful later. If you have any problems, you can directly ask your tutors or counselors.

— For me, I studied online, so we often had group assignments. I was more familiar with names than faces because not many people turned on their cameras. But when I came to campus, it was easy to talk to my classmates because we were already connected. Integrating after arriving in Seinäjoki became easier when I got an internship opportunity with WIISE. It was a ready-made connection where we spent time with members, had coffee, shared interesting ideas, and made new connections. I also participated in every on- and off-campus activity, which helped me build a good network. Sometimes, I would go to Café Kismus to learn crochet and made a few friends there. I also went to church, where I met my Finnish “grandma”. She introduced me to some of her friends, and so on.

**“Luckily, my flat mate (a Finn) was very friendly, and all the new friends I made in Seinäjoki were his friends.”**

— We had one subject where it was compulsory to form groups with no two nationalities the same. If I had one Asian member, one had to be Finnish, and another from a different nationality. Through that subject and group work, we got to know how Finnish people are, what they like, their priorities, food, etc. We also made Finnish friends outside of college. For example, we met a photographer who took us to places like Alavus and Tuuri, showing us traditional Finnish markets. We learned how Christmas is celebrated differently here. So, we had Finnish friends from the very beginning.

— When I came here, it was during the peak of COVID-19. Most international students didn’t have their visas yet, and I got my room in Larvakuja, where there were mostly Finns. Luckily, my flat mate was very friendly, and all the new friends I made in Seinäjoki were his friends. He showed me around places like Ideapark and the city center. We would roam around when we had nothing to do. That’s how I got to know other people and places. In school, there was one other Nepali guy, but he was studying online. Most of the people present in school

were already living in Finland, so my only option was to make friends with Finnish and Russian students. I didn't have any Nepali friends for months in Seinäjoki.

— I did my first year online, so I didn't find any Finnish friends in remote classes. But after I came to Finland and started working, I made some Finnish friends at my workplace. I'm always ready to make connections, so I started building good relationships with them. They showed me how things work. After I went to campus, I made quite a few Finnish friends. We would sometimes get together for pizza parties. I also have a Finnish "grandma" who took me to experience a Finnish summer cottage and to Keskinen shopping mall in Tuuri, Finland's largest village shop. She introduced me to many Finnish foods and customs. I also have a Finnish "aunt" who took me ice swimming, which was a really good experience. I'm enjoying the connections I've made with Finnish people.

### **Do you get any support during your studies?**

— During our studies, SeAMK provided support by taking us on visits to companies, helping us learn about the businesses in Seinäjoki. These visits were useful. We also participated in activities through SEIES and WIISE, which were fun and enjoyable. The work-life balance in Finland is one of the best things, and we got to know about activities here that don't even exist in our home countries.

— I've received a lot of support from SeAMK, especially with finding internships. There's also mental health support, which is really important for international students like us who are far from home. There are times when we feel frustrated and don't know what to do, so the psychological support from the university is invaluable. Additionally, there's an entrepreneurship society run by students from SeAMK. If we have any business ideas, we can discuss them there, and it's overseen by SeAMK students. I first met Andres, who gave me a brochure with all the details about the city, including maps and everything we could do in the area. SeAMK is very supportive and genuinely concerned about the well-being of international students, from the initial stage of relocation to the new country and city until graduation. They also help us enhance

our work skills by providing internship opportunities and social media promotion opportunities.

— I studied on campus during my first year. We had group projects and activities that helped us understand many things. From the middle of the second semester, I started taking classes online and moved back to Helsinki. Whenever I needed support, I always contacted Päivi because she was our main contact person, and she was always helpful and available. We could also talk to our teachers if we were falling behind, and they would support us. SeAMK has a really good support system for its students, understanding that many of us come from international backgrounds and different cultures. They have a great system for supporting us during our studies and preparing us for life after graduation.

— And if you're aware of the emotional support they offer, like the psychologist who helps students who are homesick, feeling lonely, or going through a tough time, that's another great aspect of SeAMK's support. The support during studies isn't just academic; it's also emotional, helping us balance our studies with our personal lives. That was something I really appreciated about SeAMK.

**“Without a good social life, especially during winter, even Vitamin D and Omega-3 can't help you.”**

— I think it depends on the person. For me, it was pretty good because my first flatmate was a fun, outgoing guy. I met some friends through him, and his friends became my friends. Even though I didn't know many people in Seinäjoki – maybe 6 or 7 outside of school – we would always hang out, almost every week when we could. Social life is very important here, especially during the winter. Without a good social life, even Vitamin D and Omega-3 can't help you. It's really important to have friends, whether in school, in your apartment, or elsewhere.

— When I came to Seinäjoki, there were a lot of Nepalese students, so I didn't really feel homesick. It felt like I was in Nepal. During festivals and celebrations, we would have good gatherings, and there's a strong

Nepalese community here. As for student life, I love being active in every activity. I always participate in extracurricular activities, and SeAMK has never failed to give me opportunities.

— Yeah, for me, it's similar. I'm very active, and I like going out and participating in activities. Many times, Alisha and I were together in activities like the Food Fest and Easter egg painting.

— There are also many other activities on campus after classes, maybe around four or five o'clock. You can get free and enjoy with your friends – snowshoeing, Megazone team games, and many more. Outside of campus, we have friends who make our life easier by celebrating festivals and events, both Finnish and from our home countries. We've balanced learning new traditions, like snow-sledging and snowshoeing, with celebrating our own festivals. We're enjoying our social life alongside our studies.

— One thing I like about this place is that when I first arrived and lived in Larvakuja, there were no immigrants. I rarely saw any non-white people there. But since I came here two or three weeks ago, I've met so many random people and had random conversations, most of them from South Asia. It feels more like home. Larvakuja was completely different – people didn't talk to each other, and nobody really hung out outside their apartments unless they were with someone. Here, people are always around, so I think for new students, especially international ones, it's better to live closer to the center. It's really different here.

— Yes, they'll feel like they're still in their home country because they get to see so many people like them.

**“If we're serious about learning the language, we should do it in college itself, not wait for an extra year.”**

— I feel like we're only lagging behind in language. My experience was that, of course, we had Finnish as a compulsory subject, but we also attended extra classes that were offered in the city center every Monday for newcomers to Finland. These classes were free, and the teachers made small groups of two to three people, so we received one-on-one

attention. We could ask any questions, even the ones we felt shy about in the classroom. The teachers spoke good English to help us understand meanings and translations. It was a really good experience, but I still think I should learn more Finnish.

— We need to dedicate some time to it, or if we're serious about learning the language, we should do it in college itself, not wait for an extra year. We should aim to complete all the levels of Finnish offered, from one to six, so that we can work in offices where Finnish is the primary language. Even small instructions or notices are in Finnish, and we're lost if we don't know the language.

— If we want to build a career in Finland after our studies, it's impossible without proper Finnish language skills. Business studies aren't just about skills; we have to sell ourselves, and that's going to be impossible without Finnish. It's also important to take language classes outside of school because the four courses offered at SeAMK are good, but not enough. The city's courses are much more fruitful, filled with immigrants from all backgrounds, and they really help if you're learning from scratch.

— I'd also like to add that if you have Finnish friends, it helps a lot. Our teachers always encourage us not to stick to our own nationality groups but to go out and network. Finnish friends can tell you new facts and help you practice the language. Even small phrases and sentences become familiar, and that's really helpful.

— Language is really important. I studied Finnish 1, 2, and 3 online from my home country, so when I arrived in Finland, I could understand some basic Finnish. Even though Finnish people speak English well, they're often shy to start a conversation in English. Even after recognizing that we're not Finnish, they'll speak to us in Finnish first, and we have to ask them to switch to English. So, language is important, not just for career prospects, but also if we plan to live here long-term. I suggest joining city language courses to strengthen language skills, and making Finnish friends is also a good idea.

— I was amazed to learn that different companies provide language courses to their employees to improve their Finnish. A good example of this is the S group.

### **“She jogged with me all the way to my destination.”**

— I think people here are very good. My experiences have always been positive because people are so trustworthy. They believe you, are honest, true to their word, and really supportive. I remember one experience: I was supposed to meet someone when I was still unfamiliar with the city, and Google Maps was showing me the wrong location. I asked a lady who was jogging, and she jogged with me all the way to my destination, even though I was on my bicycle. She then turned back and continued her jog. I’ve had many experiences like that, and I really like the people here.

— I had a similar experience. When I was new, I had to go to the KELA office, and I wasn’t familiar with Google Maps. I was confused, and then I met an old lady who could barely walk properly. The destination wasn’t far, but she walked with me to show me the way. I was so surprised because in our country, people just point and say, “It’s over there.”

— Yes, in our home country, if someone asks for directions, we just tell them to go right or left, or we show them a landmark.

— That’s very true. People here are honest and friendly, but only once you get to know them or if you approach them. Nobody is going to come and talk to you like in other places. But once you start a conversation, they can become really good friends. They can recommend you for a job or help you with basic things. Generally, people are good, though in bigger cities, you might not find the same level of friendliness.

### **How was your experience with practical training?**

— Mine was very good because I only applied to one place, and I was confident I would get it. SeAMK offers some opportunities to do practical training at the University. You can work as a teaching assistant, help the teachers, and get to know the staff more while learning practical things

about how the Finnish office system works. I'm working as a teaching assistant, and it's been a great experience so far.

— I actually applied to a few other places as well, but nobody replied because my Finnish isn't very good. SeAMK is a great place for practical training, and I recommend other students consider working here. Many people I know either do their practical training back in their home country or work at places like Burger King, which isn't helpful for building a career. Flipping burgers at Burger King can be a job, but it won't lead to a career. I'm really glad I'm working as a teaching assistant at SeAMK.

— I agree. I already have 13 years of teaching experience, and being at a teaching institution like SeAMK is a great honor for me.

— I did my internship with WIISE. As someone from an immigrant background, it was fun to work with them. I improved my language skills and met people from different backgrounds, learning about their struggles to find good jobs and learn the language. It was a good experience, and having this experience is valuable. It's not about the money at the initial stage of our careers; it's about gaining experience and knowledge.

### **“We should aim for better jobs after graduation.”**

— Getting a job in Seinäjoki is quite difficult compared to Helsinki because Helsinki is more international. Most jobs in Seinäjoki require Finnish language skills, even for cleaning and other basic jobs. It's hard, but not impossible.

— Yes, it's not impossible, but once you graduate from such a good university, why would you choose a cleaning job or delivery job? We should aim for better jobs after graduation. Suitable jobs for graduates include working in bilingual offices, but again, language skills are crucial. Finnish is necessary to have good job opportunities in Finland, whether in Seinäjoki or in the southern part of the country.

— Very true. We are young students just graduating and don't have much experience in business or the market. A good job for us would be an entry-level position like basic marketing or customer service.

— There are small jobs like cleaning, but that's not a career – it's a survival job. To build a career, you need good language skills.

### **What are the suitable jobs after graduation for SeAMK students or anyone studying in Finland?**

— It depends on the individual and their interests. Jobs in marketing, business development, HR, and sales are common, depending on the field you're proficient in.

— If you're not strong in Finnish, you might consider jobs that require less interaction with customers or dealers, perhaps back-office roles. But again, the system is in Finnish, so there should be offices where both languages are used.

### **What type of job are you looking for after graduation?**

— I'm quite interested in accounting and marketing, but it's hard to find a job in that field because of the language barrier. I need to learn the language first and then think about it for the future.

— If I talk about my job, I want to be in a teaching institution again, maybe continue at SeAMK if I get the chance, or work in another school or institution, or maybe in counseling. Teaching or using my knowledge would be ideal.

— As for me, I don't have good Finnish language skills yet, so it's difficult to find a proper job that could lead to a career. It's very important to be careful about the jobs we take after graduation because once you get used to doing random jobs, it's hard to get out of that trap. We have financial and other responsibilities to consider. I don't actually know what I'm going to do in the future. I'll try to hustle and find something here in Finland, maybe start a business, but if it doesn't work out, I'll probably go back to Nepal and do something meaningful with my life.

— I've lived in Helsinki and Hyvinkää for about three years now, and when it comes to jobs, there are many options. But for jobs that can lead to a career, Finnish language skills are very important. Connections are also crucial – someone who can recommend you.

— I'll probably try something for a few years and maybe start my own business. As young people, we need to be mindful of the jobs we take after graduation.

### **Can you see any entrepreneurship opportunities?**

— If you can hustle a bit, there are lots of entrepreneurship opportunities here, and there's a strong support system built around entrepreneurship. If you use those forums and make connections, people will really help. It's important to have good language skills, networks, and connections that can vouch for you. But once you have those three things, it's a great place, especially in Southern Finland.

— Yes, there are organizations that help people who want to start a business. SeAMK has a place called Y-Zone where you can share your business ideas, and people there will help you develop them. They can assist with getting loans, securing properties, making agreements, bank securities, and more. There are great opportunities in Seinäjoki, and you can even go on with English language skills alone.

— We went to a SEIES meeting and learned a lot about how to start a business.

— Seinäjoki is also one of the fastest-growing cities in Finland. Many new entrepreneurs are emerging. Even a first-year international student from SeAMK has started his own business, Dr. Pesu, which is a good example of how supportive this city is for entrepreneurs.

— The whole area around SeAMK is dedicated to business and entrepreneurship, and they're always helping students or anyone who wants to start their own business.

— I've heard that Finland doesn't require Finnish language skills for one business – logistics. If you're a logistics partner or start a business in

logistics, you mainly deal with international clients, so there's no need for Finnish. That's one business idea that comes to mind.

### **So, friends, what are your plans for the future?**

— I don't have a clear plan for now. My goal is to finish my internship, thesis, and studies. Let's see how the market treats me in Finland. I'll try a few things, but if it doesn't go well, I'll go back to Nepal. I'm not going to waste my time doing odd jobs. I'm unsure about the future, but I'll know better after I graduate.

— Honestly, I don't have any future plans. The only thing I'm focused on is graduating and learning the language. After that, I'll leave it to destiny.

— My future plan is to move to Helsinki and work in a school. If SeAMK doesn't continue with me, I'll look for opportunities in other schools or institutions, or maybe in counseling. Teaching or using my knowledge would be ideal. I'll definitely dedicate a year to learning the language, but if I get an opportunity before that, I'll join a school or teaching institution where I can work with my degree and experience. I'll also need to get my degrees evaluated before applying for a teaching job here.

### **“If you want to study in a beautiful location with a quality, practical-based education, SeAMK is the place.”**

— SeAMK is great. In my personal experience, the teachers are very helpful, and the school is quite international. When I came in 2020, there were only a few Nepali, Indian, and Bangladeshi students. Most of the students were Finnish, with a few Russians. But now things have changed, and there are many more international students. Seinäjoki is also a good place to study. It's not a big cosmopolitan city like Helsinki, but it's growing rapidly. There are lots of opportunities here, especially for people who don't speak Finnish fluently. At the end of the day, the school is what matters most, and SeAMK is amazing. Päivi is great, Nicolas is great, all the staff are great – that's why someone should come to SeAMK.

— Seinäjoki is a good place to study because of the supportive teachers, the international-friendly environment, and the world-class education system. The teaching and learning process at SeAMK is great; it's like a job readiness program. We graduate with practical experience in our hands, ready for the job market. SeAMK focuses on practical knowledge rather than just theory. When I compare my home country's education system with Finland's, I realize I've never felt the pressure of exams here like I did back home.

— I don't feel any pressure from exams, and that's another reason why someone should choose SeAMK. If you want to study in a beautiful location with a quality, practical-based education, SeAMK is the place. The campus is in a very beautiful location, and if you're ever stressed, the peaceful environment really helps you relax and focus on your studies. That's why someone should choose SeAMK.

— The location is one reason: it's on the riverbank, so it's beautiful. Another reason is the teachers and staff. The teachers have great subject knowledge and teach you to be both casual and professional. They help you become a confident business person, teaching you how to present yourself and communicate effectively. There are many presentations in class, so by the end, you're well-versed in speaking confidently. This will help you in the future.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

— All names, experiences, and facts in this article are 100% real – nothing has been changed, because who needs fiction when reality is this interesting? And yes, the people in the photos are not just random strangers; they're totally involved and have everything to do with this article!



Photo 1. Sharma and Bidhan doing a great job as interns in SeAMK (Päivi Uitti, 2024).



Photo 2. Alisha is impressed by the library's wide selection (Juha Jormakka, 2024).