

## **My Korean life: First day in Seoul**

When I decided to go to Sunkyunkwan University (SKKU) for exchange, I started reading a lot about Korean history and its people. I learn about the horrors of the Korean War, and how Korean people were able to reconstruct their country, in what has been called “the miracle on the Han river”, and how today, is a developed country with a growing economy. But all the reading could not compare to the actual feeling of arriving in Seoul. Those very first hours are an unforgettable memory.

My very first impression was from the ultra modern Incheon Airport. This architectural wonder has been ranked as one of the best airports in the world and, at least for me, it was still very convenient and easy to use. It was the end of February when I arrived in Korea and the days were still very gray and you could still see piles of snow along the runways. After spending a year and half in Taiwan (where the winters are rainy but never cold enough for it to snow), Seoul weather was the very first challenge I faced. Luckily I was prepared for this and I have a couple of heavy winter jackets and proper boots for the snow.

I was really nervous about making my way to my dorm, but I prepared myself thoroughly by looking for all the information on the internet and Google Maps (I even looked at how was my street supposed to look like!). I took a bus that would take me as close as possible to my new home, but once in, I was so tired I feel asleep. When I woke up, I wasn't sure if I had missed my stop so I freaked out for about a minute. Suddenly, the bus stopped and in proper English, the driver announced: Sungshin Women's University station. That was my stop! I had just woke up before getting there. I was so lucky! Although I was going to study at Sungkyunkwan University, I lived in a dorm outside of campus, called KoartVille. It was only two metro stations away from school, and it was located in a very active area with many restaurants, shops and even another University nearby (hence the name of the subway station where I had to step down of the bus).

After walking for a couple of minutes, I finally saw SKKU on the front of a modern eight-story high building: I had arrived at KoartVille. It might sound like something very simple, but try to do it with one heavy suitcase, a carry-on, a backpack, and on top of everything, with a temperature of 0°C. I was so happy of arriving! The building was quite new, and the rooms were clean and spacious. I had my own bathroom and even a fridge inside the room.

I soon found out I had a roommate, who turned out to be a Taiwanese guy, also from NCCU. His name was Jerry. He was a nice guy and soon we became friends. He was an undergrad student from the Korean Language Department, but his English was not so good. In the end, he would help me learn a few Korean phrases, I would help him improve his English, and when we didn't understand each other, we would end up trying to speak Chinese. It might sound confusing, but this is the kind of cultural exchange you experience when you go abroad. And this was only the beginning!