

My Study Abroad Experience in South Korea or Republic of Korea (ROK)

The three-week experience we had at Keimyung has changed my life in the best way. It has solidified the career path I wish to take for myself in the future: a career in English as a Second Language Education in South Korea. I was hesitant about this future because I did not know if I would enjoy living in the country. However, I absolutely cannot wait to return. The language class, though structured differently than the U.S., taught me so much. Also, I feel that I have been able to retain the information better and gained a renewed strength in learning the language according to the new methods I learned. The culture-studying aspect of the program has also piqued my interest in returning. Every cultural experience felt like a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence. The program has opened my eyes to what I want to do as a career in the future. The highlights from both the language-learning aspect and the culture-exploring aspect are too bright to ignore.

During this program, I tested into the highest level of learning class. Even though I was hesitant to join at first, it was the perfect fit for me. The content was neither too hard nor too easy for me. I realized that I need to brush up on vocabulary to reach the level I would like in the future. The teachers of the class were splendid, and their teaching styles, though very different, taught me something about the way I learn. The first teacher, who was also the head coordinator of the program, would utilize the whiteboard instead of using the computer which was preferred by the other teacher. These classes were a little harder to keep up with because her handwriting was difficult to read at first, but my reading skill increased as she would supplement her lessons with worksheets. The second teacher would utilize the computer to supplement her lessons. She used a PowerPoint using the books we were given, and write everything she said in a word document which she shared on the board. Also, she would utilize *Naver* to help out when we did

not know something such as a specific food, sport, place, etc. For me, this style of teaching was much easier to keep up with, and I responded better to this method of teaching. The teacher of this class also created a more laid-back environment that encouraged learning. She spoke in a less-complicated manner and encouraged us to speak back to her in simple terms. We would hold conversation-like discussions using the grammar and vocabulary we had learned that day. These methods increased my confidence regarding speaking because she would type what we said and make slight changes while explaining why those changes would increase our fluency and skill. In both of the classes, students were encouraged to interact with each other while learning the lesson. Doing this increased the chance for all of us to benefit from the different skill levels that we possessed. It did not feel like any of us were out of place and instead made it feel like we were just having a normal conversation amongst friends that we had just learned. Overall, the class was extremely beneficial to my Korean level.

While we were participating in the program, we got to explore not only Daegu but also other cities in ROK for a very enriching time. I think I speak for most of the participants when I say that these experiences were the best part of the program. The cultural experiences that we took part in like the dry sauna, the tours we took in Busan and Gyeongju, and various other experiences have impacted my life immensely. I made discoveries about my preferences and educated myself on daily practices and manners that we needed to have while we were enjoying these experiences. The most enriching cultural experience, for me, was the visit to Seoul when we went to Insadong street and had traditional snacks. I enjoy the more traditional aspects of Korean culture more than the more modern culture. The class in which we learned how to play traditional drums was also one of my favorite experiences. When we went to Insadong, I was able to visit one of the traditional Hanok villages, try traditional tea, and buy traditional

handmade crafts from the shops in the plaza. The cultural experiences were meaningful for me because I had never been able to experience or partake in the culture first-hand. Experiencing everything first-hand was excitingly different from studying them and looking at pictures. I feel like for any student this would be the case. However, it was meaningful being able to experience something that I had always wanted to try and had researched for years. The culture of ROK, though I had done plenty of research for years, surprised me. I will be spending more time on the cultural studies aspect of my Korean studies minor. It seems like I have only begun to scratch the surface of everything there is to know, see, or explore in South Korea.

Overall, this program was life-changing. It has made me see myself, the country, and others that I have met in a new light. It has solidified the goal of becoming an English teacher in South Korea and living there. The city I would like to live in has since my visit. To my surprise, I enjoyed staying and navigating Daegu more than Seoul. It just goes to show that you never know truly what a place will be like until you stay there for an extended period. The month that I spent in ROK has changed me and my perspective for the better. I can't wait to return and begin a new adventure after I graduate.