

# Testimonial Contest - 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize

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When choosing Korea University as my study abroad university, I knew that this was the right choice. Korea has always been a dream destination for me to go to, and these past few weeks exceeded my expectations. I first chose Korea due to my constant consumption of Korean media and the arts. Seeing how Korea was and what people experienced when traveling to Korea made me want to feel what they felt. Through this program, I learned so much about Korean culture and the customs that they employ here. I got to interact with some of the locals when passing through the subway cars and bus routes, such as giving up my seat for them or acknowledging them, and exchanging conversations to the best of my ability with my limited Korean language vocabulary. I realized how easy it was to just be a person going about their day and making someone else's day. An example of this is making friendships through the university and even outside of the program. As study abroad exchange programs accept students from all over the world, it creates a melting pot of identities and experiences that one may share with another or be able to be appreciated for their own traditions. I made lasting and impactful memories and friendships with the people within my cohort here, like learning how to get back from being lost on the subway to trying to not slip on the snowy roads.

Aside from just learning about Korean visual arts, media, and culture, I found solace in aspects of myself that I didn't realize until being on my own here. Traveling to different areas of Seoul alone and being myself was quite daunting. It gave me anxiety in knowing that I wouldn't have anyone to rely on, especially not knowing the train routes and how to use certain apps. However, it gave me the confidence that I'm an individual who is adaptable and flexible with every situation that I encountered. One of the biggest obstacles that I was able to overcome was the idea and concept of eating alone. Eating alone in Korea is not uncommon, rather it is normalized here in comparison to what it is like eating alone in the United States. Various friends have challenged me before coming on this trip to eat alone and experience the joy and solace of being alone while everyone else was eating. I went to eat at Oegojip Seolleongtang alone, and it absolutely changed my life for the better. I found what the joy and beauty of eating alone was like, being comforted by the food and not anything else. Being in my own presence changed how comfortable I was being in my own skin but ultimately being who I am. Through this program, I learned so much about Korean culture and customs that isn't usually shown in the media. The experiences that I have experienced are memories I wouldn't ever exchange for anything else.