

John's Korean Adventure – Part One

Hi everyone and welcome to what I hope will be the first of many updates on me and my crazy Korean adventures!!!

I am in my new home for the next year right now. I live with four other English teachers in an apartment/dorm above our school. It's pretty nice!

Now, as a special treat for you all, here is a first-hand account of what it is like to fly to Korea from the States, taken directly from my journal. Hope you enjoy!

Thursday, 11am EDT (12 midnight in Korea)

I'm sitting at the gate in Pittsburgh. Of course, my flight is delayed. It's only 45 minutes late, so I shouldn't have a problem with my transfer in DC. I have tons of books with me, but I don't feel like reading quite yet. Instead, I'm listening to the continuous loop of recorded announcements.

First, a man's voice: "Caution, moving walk is nearing its end. Please watch your step. Thank you."

Then the woman: "Moving walk is nearing its end. Please prepare to exit and watch your step. Thank you."

Man: "Caution, moving walk is nearing its end. Please attend to children and watch your step. Thank you."

Woman: "Please watch your step, moving walk is nearing its end. Thank you."

Man: "The red zone is for the loading and unloading of passengers only. There is no parking in the red zone."

OK, I was kidding about the last one. I hope all you *Airplane!* fans appreciated it!

Only 21 hours to go...

12 Noon EDT (1 am in Korea)

I'm on the plane to DC and it is small! When I sit up straight, my head touches the ceiling. Good heavens! The seats are so small that my laptop doesn't even fit under the seat in front of me.

I was up until 3am packing last night, and I woke up at 5:30am this morning, so I'm ridiculously tired. I'm trying to stay awake until I get on the flight to Seoul. If I nap now, I'll never be able to fall asleep later.

If the plane to Seoul is anything like this one, I'll lose my mind.

1pm EDT (2am Korea)

I'm at Washington Dulles Airport. The flight was bumpy but I survived. I think I saw my next plane as we were landing! It's sky blue with a dark blue and red yin yang on the tail. Kind of like the old Pepsi logo. Oooo!

Dulles is a little difficult to navigate. The signs aren't too clear. As I wandered around, trying to figure out where to go, I realized that I forgot the one thing my future roommates asked me to bring for them: extra sharp cheddar cheese. The big block I bought is sitting on the bottom of my mom's refrigerator. I hope you enjoy it, Mom!

I'm now at the gate, and it's hit me: everyone is Asian! I guess this is what it's going to be like for the next year.

Wow.

I ended up having to leave the security airport, re-check in, and go through security again. The attendant at ticketing was very friendly - he recommended an aisle seat with an empty seat next to me, rather than the middle seat of an exit row. Whether or not it was a good suggestion remains to be seen...

I've had my first interaction with Korean people! The man next to me in the line boarding the plane asked, in excellent English, "What are you writing? Why are you going to Korea? Where in Korea? Did you just graduate?" Not at all nosey or impolite, just curious. Then, another man goes out of his way to let me know that I've gotten in the line for the wrong section of the plane. Is it just me, or would an American just let me get to the front of the line and realize my mistake for myself?

On the plane, my seat looks pretty good. All three seats next to me are empty, so far... I was offered a Korean newspaper, but funny, it's in Korean, so I declined.

7,000 miles to Seoul.

4am Korea (3pm EDT)

I'm flying! So far, so good. I had a moment of near panic when I thought to myself, "I've made a terrible mistake. I have to go back!" I'm sure it's not the last time I'll think that, but for now the feeling has passed.

I understand now how people get culture shock. It's not necessarily the language or that things are dramatically different. It's more knowing that they're going to be that way for a while. It's not like I can say, "I've had enough of this. I'm going to go back to American culture now." Scary.

The map on the movie screen says that we're flying north - it looks like we're going over the top of the globe! (Judy, you were right!) Our in flight movies today: *Harry Potter* (seen it), *Oceans 11* (haven't seen it) and *Take Care of My Cat* (!) Right now I'm watching Korean news with English subtitles. The top story: World Cup! World Cup! World Cup!

5am Korea (4pm EDT)

I had my first Korean meal: Bibimbap (Korean rice & vegetables), seaweed soup and pickles. The attendant gave me a card with instructions on how to eat bibimbap. You take a bowl of rice, add it to a bowl of vegetables, add sesame oil and hot pepper paste and stir. It's not bad at all. The seaweed soup was pretty hateful. It was just seaweed in broth, but it had a very fishy taste. I ate it all, mostly so I wouldn't have to smell it. The pickles were OK - it's a different kind of vegetable and they're bright yellow. The flavor is different from American pickles, too. For dessert, thankfully, I had cheesecake. I inhaled it.

By the way, they gave out silverware, not chopsticks!

All in all, I'd call my first meal a success. But a whole year of this? What I wouldn't give for a Big Mac!

On the movie screen is some sort of concert. They had a Phantom of the Opera section (in Korean, of course) but now it's a lady singing a tango-like number. What's next?

According to the map, we're over the center of Ontario.

6am (5pm EDT)

I'm trying to sleep. There's a sitcom on called *Hip Hop Daughter-in-Law*. I'm having another "What have I done???" moment.

9am (8pm EDT)

I'm watching *Harry Potter*...and I'm missing *Survivor*! OH NO!!!

4pm (3am EDT)

The flight's almost over. I did manage to sleep for a lot of the past several hours. I watched *Take Care of My Cat*, which gets at Jack of Clubs when Diamonds are trump on the John Halmi euchre rating system.

All in all, it wasn't too sucky a flight, with two exceptions:

I slept through *Oceans 11*, the only film I actually would have liked to have seen.

I've lost my leather jacket. I left it behind somewhere back in the States. I'm not happy. Let's hope it's not an omen of things to come.

They're showing a fascinating program on why you should declare livestock and produce. It has lovely images of dead sheep being bulldozed and burned because of foot and mouth disease. The narrator is saying that, with my help, Korea can maintain its independence and dignity. Huh?!?

6pm (5am)

I'm on the ground! Right now, I'm on an express bus to Gimpo Airport. I had a little trouble finding it. I got directions from two separate information kiosks,

both of which were wrong. But I've found it now, I've got all my things (minus one leather jacket and one block of cheddar cheese) and I'm enjoying the ride. To our right is a large body of water - perhaps the Yellow Sea? Everywhere else, pretty green hills that quickly become mountains. I'm not in the city yet, we're 30 miles out of Seoul.

I can't believe I'm here!

7:15pm (6:15am)

I'm waiting for my plane to Gwangju. I'm at Gimpo airport. It hasn't been too difficult so far. A very nice man translated for me at check-in. At first I thought he was an employee, but no, he's just some guy from Maryland! Small world!

I was hungry, so I went looking for a food stand. Two of the first places I saw were Dunkin Donuts and Burger King. I was sorely tempted, but I decided against it. Somehow, having my first meal in Asia at an American fast food place seemed wrong. I got a ham, cheese and potato salad (!) sandwich at a snack bar instead. Still not too authentic, but it's all I could find.

I was leaving home in Edinboro about 24 hours ago.

And that's all I wrote! There's more to report, but I'll save it for next time.

Talk to you all soon!

Love,
John
The Traveling Man