

My Korean life: The land of Kimchi and more

If you decide to go on exchange, you should have an open mind to do new things, try new foods and experience the culture of the country where you decide to go. I wasn't very sure about what to expect from Korea because, as a Latin American, I didn't have much exposure to this country's culture; but I was surprised that even Taiwanese people would know little about Korea.

Perhaps one of the most Korean things there is, is kimchi. It's served everywhere and for every occasion, whether you are in the school cafeteria or even at a fancy restaurant. Koreans eat it all the time and I even heard they claim that kimchi is beneficial for health, and because of it, Korea was not so affected by the bird flu virus. This cold dish made out of cabbage and spicy sauce has a very unique flavor that doesn't leave anyone indifferent: either you like it or you hate it. Luckily, I was on the first category. I don't think it's the best thing I've ever tried, but at least tasted the same everywhere I went, and honestly, it was a good snack if you went for drinks.

The drinking is also a very important part of the Korean culture. College students go out for drinking as a "bonding activity" and office workers are expected to go drinking with their bosses if he/she demands it. For me, this was a little shocking because of how different it was compared to Taiwan. I won't judge and say whether it's better or worse, but it is certainly very different. Koreans like to drink soju, a spirit made out of potato and with very high alcohol volume. They drink it straight or mixed with beer in a drink called somaeg. I tried both of them, but I will not recommend it. If you can't drink too much, just don't do soju. Trust me!

If you don't like to drink, there are other "very Korean" activities to do with your local friends. Like all over Asia, karaoke is very popular. In Korean is known as noraebang (노래방), and when you start to read Korean alphabet, you realize there is one in every street of Seoul. Koreans just love it! Of course, most of them only have Korean songs, but I've heard that this is also a very good way to improve your Korean.

And of course, I can't talk about Korean culture without talking about K-pop. I started knowing about this genre until I came to Taiwan, because in the Western hemisphere is practically unknown. PSY and its "Gangnam Style" became a global hit, but it was interesting to discover there are other Korean bands that are more famous than PSY. I particularly remember one time walking in front of a Olympic Stadium and watching huge lines of girls all dressed up like they were going to a fancy ball. It was a Girl's Generation concert.

Korean culture is very special and, if you go with an open mind, you can experience many things that can help you understand they way its people are. Located in the middle of two powerful cultures as Chinese and Japanese, Koreans are fighting really hard to keep up with their traditions at the same time when they become an advanced and modern country. The result is an interesting mix that will certainly caught your attention.