

## Your Korean Apartment

*Free rent, whaaat?* Yep. Your employer will provide you with an apartment of your own, **rent-free**. For the extent of your contract, the apartment is at your disposal to make as much or as little like home – yet another perk of teaching ESL in South Korea!

Some teachers convert their apartments into full-blown bachelor pads, complete with a home bar featuring top-shelf western spirits and a hookah lounge in the loft. Some decorate their walls with posters and pictures of their dearest friends back home. Still others use their apartments for eating ramen and sleeping in winter coats because they're too cheap to turn on the in-floor heating during the winter. **The choice is yours.** And regardless of what you choose, think of what you don't have to deal with:

- No noisy, drunk roommates stumbling in after hours.
- No cleaning up after other people's mess – no picking up your roommate's wet towels, doing their dishes, or throwing away the leftover McDonalds.
- No parents to nag you – the right to leave your dirty clothes on the floor, to not do your dishes, to decorate however you want.
- Or, be as nit-picky clean and tidy as you'd like, and transform your space into a trendy studio apartment!

Hey, we're not here to judge your lifestyle, we're here to help prepare you a smooth transition into your Korean apartment. Here are some tips to help you know what to expect:

**Apartment Cleanliness:** In Korea, the previous tenant is responsible only for getting all of their items out of the apartment before the next tenant arrives. They are not responsible for sweeping the dust-bunnies, getting the dirty scuff marks off of the floor, or cleaning the hair that inexplicably accumulates in the corners of the bathroom. This is an unfortunate reality. Some schools are very good at making sure the apartment is clean before the new teacher arrives, but sometimes, new native teachers walk into an apartment that looks like an empty storage unit, or worse. If this happens to you, don't worry! Truthfully, most teachers will want to give their apartment a good cleaning before they start unpacking anyways.

**Expat Voices:** "One of the cool things about my apartment is that everything I need is either in my building or a block away from my building. The grocery store? First floor. My bank? Second floor. Decent shabu shabu restaurant? First floor. Cafes? Yup, two of them, both on the first floor. Gym? Across the street. Top of the line department store? Not like I ever go there, but it's a block away. Even many of my fellow expat friends live in the same apartment building, many of them seasoned expats, brimming with knowledge of Korea. Once you get over the language barrier, you'll be surprised how easy life in Korea is."  
- Phil, Gyeonggi-do

**Pay it forward** - Remember when you walked into your apartment on the first day of your contract, and you were less than impressed with the cleanliness? The temptation in situations like that is always to say, "Well, I experienced a messy apartment, so I don't see why the next person shouldn't have to as well," but at the end of the contract, it'd mean a lot to the next native teacher if you gave your apartment a thorough scrub-down.

**Expatriate voices:** "When I first came to Korea, I thought it'd be the perfect time to start cooking more meals. I was coming in to an apartment that had pots, pans, glasses, cutlery, and a rice cooker. Or so I thought. When I got to my apartment, the only piece of kitchen equipment I was provided with was one chopstick. Not one set of chopsticks. One single, wooden chopstick. What on earth am I supposed to do with that? Needless to say, I ate out a lot my first month.  
- David, Gyeonggi-do

**Apartment Furnishings:** David (left) is a relatively special case, but the fact remains that "Furnished Apartment" is a very relative phrase to Korean employers. We at Adventure Teaching are unable to guarantee what will be in your apartment when you arrive. Typically apartments have a bed, a few dishes, and *maybe* a couch or T.V. Sometimes teachers luck out with more items and you can always try asking your school for more... there is just no guarantee that they will provide it.

**Tip for the adventurous, thrifty types:** You can often find free furniture around your apartment building and other buildings in your neighborhood. There is usually a place designated for "large garbage" at each building. We've all had experiences finding great stuff, in like-new condition, and it's all free! During our time in Korea, we found leather couches, chairs, wall units, TV stands, tables, desks etc. Just start poking around different buildings in your neighborhood. It might take a little while, but you'll start finding heaps of stuff once you discover the "hotspots."

**Blog Opportunity:** Of course, the adventure is always figuring out how to get the big items home. If you've somehow managed to transport a terrific trinket from ten blocks away, recount the episode and send it our staff members at [socialmedia@adventureteaching.com](mailto:socialmedia@adventureteaching.com). Include pictures. You'll be a legend with our readers!

If you're a more traditional consumer, you can peruse Emart or Lotte Mart (Gigantic Wal-mart style mega-retailers). Hop into a cab and say "E-mah-tuh ka-joo-say-yo," and they will bring you to the nearest Emart. You'll be one step closer your ultimate studio apartment. Just make sure you know how to tell them to bring you home!

**Drinking Water:** Although the drinking water in Korea is "supposed" to be potable, no one drinks the tap water. Most Koreans use expensive filtration systems, buy bottled water, or have drinking water delivered to their homes. We highly recommend drinking and using filtered or bottled water to avoid any risk. There are traces of sediment in the water taken from the faucets. If you boil the water out of a pot, you'll notice a light dusting on the bottom of the pan. You can purchase water

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at convenience stores and supermarkets, or if you're like us and you hate plastic waste, check out the **Brita pitchers** from **The Arrival Store** – you'll save money in the long run when you're not having to constantly buy bottled water... not to mention it's better for the environment!

**Toilet Paper:** Yes, it's okay to flush toilet paper down the toilet. In most public restrooms you will find a wastebasket next to the toilet, and many Koreans continue to throw away their toilet paper in the wastebasket out of habit, but now it is appropriate to flush the toilet paper pretty much anywhere in Korea. If you see a sign that says, "Don't flush toilet paper down the toilet," follow the directions out of respect, but even still, it probably won't clog the toilet.

**Washing Machines:** Each apartment comes equipped with a washing machine. If your washing machine doubles as a dryer, there will be some red writing with temperatures listed. More often than not though, you will only have a washing machine. And



that's fine, as dryers in Korea tend to shrink your clothing (and racks up the price on your monthly electricity bill). It might take you a few times practicing before you get the washing machine figured out because all of the buttons are labeled in Korean. Simon and Martina from [Eatyourkimchi.com](http://Eatyourkimchi.com) have put together this useful, informative (albeit, a little "dry" [laundry humor, yuk yuk]) [youtube video](#) translating the Korean and walking you through the process. If you don't have Internet access, a few things to remember:

- 1) When you turn on the machine, the default is the normal load. That should be okay for most clothing.
- 2) There will be a little compartment (most likely a little drawer) that you pull out to put in your liquid or powder detergent. This little drawer is most likely divided into two compartments, one for fabric softener and bleach, and the other for the detergent. The detergent typically goes on the left hand side.
- 3) The washing machines are characteristically a bit rougher on clothes than are western machines. If you have some precious clothing items, make sure you run the machine on delicate (pronounced *lan-jay-ree*, which is how the French pronounce "Lingerie.") And don't skimp on the fabric softener!



**Drying Your Clothes:** You will most likely need to buy (or be provided with) a drying rack to dry your clothes. A drying rack is a collapsible rack, usually made of aluminum, that you can drape your clothing over. After your clothes are dry you can collapse the rack and put it back in a closet.

**Refrigerator:** If you happen to find your refrigerator where you thought your first closet was going to be, you're not alone. Many native teachers later recount their feelings of surprise as they open one of their closets and find out that

it's actually a refrigerator/freezer. They then go on to recount the time they went to look into that sad empty refrigerator and gasped with a "what is that smell???" Unless you have a brand new refrigerator, the most surprising thing about your refrigerator is going to be the foul "Kimchi-mold" smell.

*Ah yes, Kimchi.* So delicious to taste... so stinky to smell in your fridge. If you haven't heard about Kimchi yet, rest assured – you will! You will soon encounter Kimchi (fermented cabbage) at every Korean meal. You may become addicted to the stuff, and might actually start keeping the stinky staple food in your refrigerator as well. All well and good, but remember to keep it sealed! Kimchi has a very strong odor, which often seems to stick in the refrigerator. The odor is so pungent that it taints the other foods if it's not properly sealed. Many, if not all Koreans (and newer apartments for that matter) keep their Kimchi in a *Kimchi Fridge*, dedicated only to Kimchi. Although it is almost impossible to completely extinguish the smell, thoroughly scrubbing the refrigerator and leaving an open box or bag (yes it comes in bags in Korea) of baking soda in the refrigerator at all times will certainly help conceal the odor!

**Garbage and Recycling:** Koreans take recycling very seriously. They recycle just about everything, even things like plastic chip bags, egg cartons, old food, cellophane, batteries, milk cartons, cardboard and just about anything metal – all using a very meticulous system. In the parking garage, or ground floor of every apartment building, you will find a garbage area and a recycling area. There will be a designated bin for each recyclable material (paper, plastic, glass, metal etc), a dumpster or bin for food waste, and another dumpster for the rest of your garbage. In some cities, there is no dumpster and you will be asked to leave your rubbish outside, by a designated streetlight, after dark. For an easier time, just separate your garbage and recycling from the beginning!

But don't go throwing your rubbish into the dumpster just yet. Garbage must be put into specific garbage bags in order to be put into the dumpster. Each neighborhood has its own garbage bags, typically denoted by color. The bags cost a little bit more because the extra cost pays for the garbage service (the extra cost is minimal, you might not even notice the difference!). You will be able to purchase these bags in your local convenience store or supermarket. They come in various sizes, and 10-liter bags are usually a good size to start with. They also have another colored bag that is designated to "food waste." These bags are typically pretty small and get put into a separate dumpster in the recycling area. The food bags are a brilliant idea, as it keeps your garbage from smelling bad and you can take it out more often. Please note: Korean apartments do not have garbage disposals, so don't throw food down the sink!



If this garbage and recycling system sounds overwhelming, or needlessly complicated, you're not alone! Adventure Teaching's co-founder Scot Sustad, and his wife, Kimberly, developed the Sustad System, a simple but effective rubbish management system that has served many native-teachers well in Korea. We are about to deliver this proven method of success to you, free of charge, so listen carefully:

- 1) Keep a garbage bag, a recycling box, and a food waste bag under the sink.
- 2) Put all of the recyclables in the box and sort them at the recycling center at the bottom of the building.
- 3) Take the food waste bag out a couple times a week in order to avoid bad odors.
- 4) Take all other garbage out as needed.

Everyone should be excited to live in their own apartment in Korea, and it's a luxury we should graciously thank our employers for. However, the real fun for many of us is experiencing the adventure of living abroad. From removing the Kimchi stench from your Korean refrigerators, to deciding whether to furnish your apartments with new furniture from Emart or old furniture from the apartment building ten blocks away, to discovering that your closet is actually a refrigerator – all these small things are what makes living so far from home an adventure every day. Remain flexible, greet each day with an open mind, and you'll have an unforgettable journey!

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