



## **ADAPTING TO A NEW SCHOOL AND CULTURE: INSIGHTS FROM AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT**

**What is one of the biggest things you've learned coming into a new school environment?**

I've learned that just because people don't say hello first doesn't mean you're not welcome. Unlike in many Asian countries, Australian schools don't have the same concept of a single group of students staying in one classroom all day. Instead, students move between classes, so the faces around you change regularly. If you expect others to be instantly interested in you just because you're new, you might feel disappointed. Some students might be curious but are unsure how to approach you, especially if they're not sure whether you speak English. It can be helpful to take the first step and introduce yourself. Even if that feels daunting, don't worry—give it time, and you'll start to feel more settled.

**What could have helped you prepare for this experience before coming?**

Homestay: Having a written document with the house rules and daily routine would be really helpful for exchange students. Adapting to a new life, routine, and environment takes more energy than you might expect. Having a clear schedule, including things like school times, weekday activities, and meal times, would make the transition easier for both the student and the host family.

**What advice would you give international students about fitting in with their homestay family and at school?**

With your host family: Don't just stay in your room except when you sleep. Getting to know your host family is crucial since they'll be like your family for the next year. Spend time with them, even if it feels easier to retreat to your room.

At school: Step out of your comfort zone, which for most students is sticking with friends from your home country who speak your first language. Make an effort to befriend Australian students and try to act as they do. Making new friends is challenging, especially when you have to do it in a second language, but remember why you came to Australia in the first place. Focus on that goal and keep pushing yourself.

**Before coming here, what were your expectations of the Sunshine Coast, and how has the reality been different?**

I didn't find much information about the Sunshine Coast before coming, but I did find a lot about Brisbane, which is nearby. This led to some confusion—I thought the two places were quite similar! Brisbane is a big city, but the Sunshine Coast is much more nature-oriented, with fewer tall buildings. It's been a pleasant surprise to experience this more laid-back, natural environment. The Sunshine Coast feels like the real Australia in a way I didn't expect.

Food is a big part of any culture. How have you adjusted to the different cuisine, and what advice would you give to other international students?

The biggest difference for me is that Australians don't treat lunch as a main meal like we do in Korea. In Korea, schools provide lunch, but in Australia, lunch is more of a snack, and if you bring a full meal like you're used to, you might feel out of place. Another thing to keep in mind is that groceries are priced differently here. For example, seafood is cheaper in Korea, but in Australia, many types of seafood are expensive because they're exported. Don't assume your host family is being frugal; it's just the way prices are here. Also, you don't need to pack lots of food from home—there are plenty of Asian grocery stores, including Hanaro Mart.

What has helped you the most in improving your English?

To improve your English, you need to practice speaking as much as possible. Don't worry too much about getting the grammar or vocabulary perfect—just focus on communicating. If your friends speak too fast, don't hesitate to jump in and talk, even if it's not perfect. Another thing to keep in mind is the volume of your voice. Australians tend to speak louder than you might be used to, and when speaking a foreign language, people often lower their voices without realizing it. If you speak too softly, it's harder for people to hear and engage with you. In Korea, we say, "The loudest person wins," and that applies here too. Speak up, and your conversations will flow more easily.

Manners vary across cultures. What has your experience been in Australia, and have you encountered any challenges?

In Australia, saying "please," "thank you," and "sorry" is very common and shows respect. In Korea, we don't use these phrases as often—"please" can sound like you're begging, "thank you" is for special occasions, and "sorry" is for serious situations. But in Australia, you say "please" when asking for simple things like passing the salt, "thank you" when someone holds the door, and "sorry" for even small bumps on the street. It's important to adapt to these cultural differences, especially when you're learning a new language. Language reflects culture, and understanding these manners will help you improve your English and connect with others better.

