



## Kia 360

### Around the world for a round of Kia

Miscellaneous | Apgujeongrodeo is the most posh shopping street in Seoul (South Korea). This is where all the famous fashion houses have their "flagship stores"; prestigious buildings with striking shop windows and fine furnishings. For K-Pop bands, it is also the "Walk of Fame" that draws droves of fans. Right here you will also find "Kia 360": a visitor centre showcasing Kia's past, present and future. Autozine visited.

To show how posh Apgujeongrodeo is: the wealthy visitors from the various fashion houses and jewellers drive their cars haphazardly onto the footpath and get out. It is then up to the security of those shops to park the car in a decent spot. It is not the customer's problem that the shop has no parking space! Kia, on the other hand, is one of the few companies on Apgujeongrodeo with its own parking, as it houses both the head office and a dealership as well as the visitor centre. And despite not being a fashion house, jewellery or perfume shop at Kia, the premises look at least as prestigious.

"As in an efficiently laid out theme park, every space is utilized with screens, projections, scale models, dioramas and, of course, real cars"



### Creativity

And with that, the first step is taken: Kia wants to put itself on the map as a high-end brand, and by associating itself with the most upmarket labels in town, the brand is succeeding well. The "360" in "Kia 360" refers to the fact that visitors can walk around and then come into contact with all aspects of the

brand. Moreover, the name is a hint to the K-360: a legendary three-wheeled commercial vehicle from Kia.

The (free) visit starts with design. Kia's "Opposites Unite" style is explained with comparisons in art and nature. Moreover, visitors can unleash their own creativity by using their mobile phones to connect with a huge video wall (dialogue entirely in Korean). Their inspiration and style are then visually blended with Kia's corporate identity. Very creatively done!



Because electric driving is the future for Kia, an "experience centre" has been set up outside to familiarise visitors with charging and route planning. However, due to the extreme cold during our visit, that exhibition was closed.

## History

Centrally in the building is a room where a short film (Korean spoken, English subtitled) shows the history of Kia, from the very beginning to models that had not been officially unveiled at the time of our visit! As Kia celebrates its 80th anniversary, most of the space during our visit was used for a look at the brand's history. That starts with the manufacture of bicycles (1944), followed shortly after by motorbikes with Honda engines. The first "car" was a "T-series" three-wheeler meant for rural use and urban distribution.

When Kia wanted to expand into passenger cars, the

oil crisis struck (early 1970s) and the Korean government forbade wasting fuel on unnecessary luxuries like personal transport. Kia therefore devoted itself entirely to developing commercial vehicles, resulting in the highly successful "Bongo". This small van remained in production for a long time and as a tribute, a fully restored example is now on display at Kia 360. The restoration took six months and "an undisclosed sum many times higher than the new price," said a spokesperson.



In the 1980s, Kia contacted with Mazda for a collaboration. However, the Japanese engineers openly doubted Kia's knowledge and skills. This insulted the Korean engineers so deeply that they found new inspiration in it. Soon after, Kia made great strides with the Pride, Sephia and Sportage. With the latter, Kia showed not only craftsmanship, but above all insight. Well before the rise of the SUV, Kia saw demand for these luxury off-road vehicles for recreational use. To show how the SUV has developed at Kia, the first Sportage and latest EV9 are displayed side by side. The development of the small car is shown by the Pride and EV3 side by side.





Because Kia 360 is aimed at Korean visitors, most of the documentation is in Korean. However, the various films are subtitled in English and when tourists scan QR codes they get English-language backstories. In short: if you are shopping in style in Seoul, be sure to drop in at Kia 360. ■

In the late 1990s, Kia became part of Hyundai. The quality of its cars was improved and to differentiate itself from its parent company, Kia put more emphasis on design. Design centres were set up around the world and thus Kia literally and figuratively pushed the boundaries. By 2015, Kia already had 19 overseas offices and 4,000 dealerships in 17 different countries. Although Kia made little publicity about it during our visit, it is also nice to see the various models that are not sold in the Europe, such as the stately "K6" and the super-cheap electric "Ray".



## Conclusion

"Kia 360" is Kia's visitor centre in South Korea. It gives an insight into the brand's origins and development. In addition, Kia 360 serves as a showroom and houses Kia Korea's headquarters (not global). As in an efficiently laid out theme park, every space is utilized with screens, projections, scale models, dioramas and, of course, real cars. Although space is limited, there is therefore quite a lot to see.

