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Go away with ... Peter Thurnwald



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

Peter Thurnwald as Alex in episode 104 of XO, Kitty.



By **JAE-HA KIM**

UPDATED: July 11, 2023 at 8:40 PM CST

In the Netflix series “XO, Kitty” – which has been renewed for a second season – Peter Thurnwald plays the role of a high school teacher who happens to be a Korean adoptee who grew up in Australia. In real life, Thurnwald also was adopted from South Korea to Australian parents. “For me growing up in Australia, I didn’t really have any role models at all that were Australian Asian,” Thurnwald, 25, said in a Zoom interview from his Brisbane home. “I do think we are getting more shows with people of color, particularly of Asian descent, who are being represented more on television. I’d love to see that representation in all forms of media, not just on TV shows, but also with journalists and our sports people and [more].” Fans may stay in touch with the actor on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/peterthurnwald/>).

Q: As an adoptee, what was it like for you to return to Korea to film “XO, Kitty”?

A: As soon as I touched down, I felt like I was home. I was with people who looked like me. Even the language. There was something beautiful about listening to that. And so there were often times where I would just walk around the streets for hours when I was in Seoul just taking it all in. It gave me an immense sense of pride being there and seeing how Koreans conducted themselves and how they live their daily lives and how different it is to my life. And in an alternate universe, that could have been me. And that was an extremely cathartic experience to have.

Q: Did the locals assume you were a Korean citizen by your looks?



A: People with a keen eye noticed that I have a different facial structure, I'm quite tanned [which most Koreans aren't] and the way I hold myself is different. So when Koreans approached me, most would speak English rather than Korean to me. But there were also times I went to order something and they would speak to me in Korean and I would tell them I don't speak Korean. For a split second, they may have thought, "Oh, he's a fake Korean." And then they spoke English to me.

Q: What do you love about Brisbane?



A: I could have moved to Sydney or Melbourne. I love both of those cities and have lived in both. But the thing for me is Brisbane is a bit of a quieter city that still feels very lived in. I really enjoy the fact that even though I'm still in a big city, people still want to have great conversations with [others]. Sydney can feel quite isolating as a local, especially as someone from the Gold Coast who is used to going to a cafe and having a conversation with someone in the morning over coffee. And there also is just so much to do in Brisbane. If you're a foodie, the food here has just gotten exponentially better over the past five years. There's so much more development popping up - I think because of the 2032 Olympics that's happening here. I love outdoor activities. I swim, I hike, I do everything and Brisbane is central to so many different things. The same can be said for the Gold Coast. Growing up on the Gold Coast, I was so used to doing outdoor activities, plus the beaches are 10 minutes away from my house. A few weeks ago, I went into the water and even though it's winter [in Australia], it was so warm that you could just sit

A: I understand that it's kind of a must-do career move. And to be honest, I quite like L.A. I know a lot of people there now. I lived there for about seven or eight months while shooting another show ["Players"]. But I just can't. I just love South East Queensland. It's peaceful. The weather is amazing at all times during the year. I cannot speak more highly of being in Australia and it's honestly why I don't want to leave – because it's so nice.

Q: Besides L.A., where else did you visit in the United States?

A: I haven't experienced too much of America to be honest. I went to New York when I was 12 and that was amazing. I love New York. I really want to go back. We did the whole Disney World in Orlando thing. So we kind of did the east side of America on this little family trip. Then for "Players," we were able to travel all up and down that coast for filming opportunities. I also spent three days in Philadelphia, which was quite nice. It wasn't too hectic. I had to try a Philly cheese steak, which was disgusting. I think I got a bad one.

(Jae-Ha Kim is a New York Times bestselling author and travel writer. You can respond to this column by visiting her website at www.jaehakim.com. You may also follow "Go Away With..." on Twitter at [@GoAwayWithJae](https://twitter.com/GoAwayWithJae) where Jae-Ha Kim welcomes your questions and comments.)

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Originally Published: July 11, 2023 at 4:40 PM CST

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