

S Korean fans bid farewell to internet-famous panda Fu Bao

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Zookeepers pose for photos in front of a vibration-free special vehicle carrying giant panda Fu Bao.

Thousands of well-wishers gathered Wednesday to bid farewell to the first giant panda born in South Korea, Fu Bao, who left for China in a high-tech non-vibrating vehicle typically used for transporting semi-

conductors.

Beijing has long used "panda diplomacy" as a form of soft power, and Fu Bao's parents—Ai Bao and Le Bao—were gifted to South Korea in 2016 by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Fu Bao—which means "treasure that gives happiness"—was born in 2020 and is a celebrity in South Korea, with her videos on the zoo's YouTube channel attracting around 500 million views.

The Everland amusement park, where Fu Bao lived, says approximately 5.5 million people—around one-tenth of the entire South Korean population—have visited the park to see her.

Thanks to her popularity, the number of visitors to Everland's Panda World doubled last year to 2.15 million, compared to 1.07 million in 2020 before Fu Bao's arrival, the [theme park](#) said.

Fu Bao welcomed her younger twin sisters last year, named Rui Bao and Hui Bao, whose births also triggered an outpouring of excitement online in South Korea.

Beijing only loans pandas to foreign zoos, which must usually return any offspring within a few years of their birth to join the country's breeding program.



Panda fans wait for Fu Bao during a farewell ceremony at Everland amusement park in Yongin on April 3, 2024.

Under an [agreement](#) between Seoul and Beijing, Fu Bao's parents can stay in South Korea until 2031, but her twin sisters, like Fu Bao herself, must return to China before they turn four years old.

"Fu Bao left Everland at around 11 am," the zoo said in a statement, adding the panda will leave for China via the Incheon International Airport on a chartered plane.

Before leaving Everland, the panda bid farewell to some 6,000 South Korean fans at a brief ceremony.

She was moved on a special non-vibrating vehicle typically used for semiconductor transportation, the facility added.

Zookeeper Kang Cheol-won, who is famous in the South for his bonding with Everland's pandas and is widely referred to as their "grandpa", read out a letter at the ceremony, the park said.

Kang is accompanying the panda on the journey to China until Fu Bao arrives at the country's Shenshuping Panda Base in Sichuan Province, Everland said.

"You will be forever (my) baby panda, even after 10 or 100 years. Thank you for coming to grandpa. I love you Fu Bao," Kang said in his letter, referring to himself as her grandpa.

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