

Post



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Seoul searching - April 6, 2023

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SUMMARY

Flew from Hanoi to Seoul and immediately joined up with our foodie tour only two minutes late! After introductions and an info briefing, we were able to check in to our hotel room before heading out for dinner - **delicious** fried chicken and pizza (only vegetables were a few on the pizza). Then off to the market where we were offered more food but we're too full to do more than try one bite. - Karen

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DETAIL

In theory today should be easy. We're just trying to get from our Hanoi hotel to our Seoul hotel. There, at 6 pm, we're to meet the rest of the group for our foodie tour of South Korea. We're leaving a 90 degrees climate going to a 50 degrees climate so we're overdressed (and warm) at the start of the day.

Breakfast at the hotel is just us and is made to order. Nothing fancy but good. The hotel owner pulls up on his little motor bike and ensures we get into the right taxi (pre-paid by him) to take us the airport, two kilometers away.

After we're dropped off I tip the young driver a bit who at first seems a bit confused. He asks if it's for him. The rest of the check in and security checks are boring/normal up until immigration. Karen (in a different line) goes through fine. I have to wait and wait. Maybe I'm not getting out of Viet Nam. I eventually am 'released' and all we can figure is that the color of the ink for the stamp for our entry was brown, and the background image on that page of my US passport is the same brown. They were having trouble confirming when I came in.

After coffee at Starbucks (iced and black) we're on our flight to Seoul. It's a big, full plane and a long (four hour) flight. If we're on time and get to the hotel quickly we'll be on time for our tour briefing. While boarding the flight I pause to put our two daypacks into the overhead compartment. An older Vietnamese gentleman behind me figured he could just squeeze by me, so he does. The bag he's pulling can't get by. It can't, that is, unless he pulls really hard, so he does and he is able to be on his way. We are definitely not in Kansas any more.

En route Karen rechecks her notes about Korea. Word is we can drink the water straight from the spigot. Supposedly if a local sees you do this they will give you the side eye. They think you're crazy. They drink only bottled or boiled. In the US, of course, all water is safe everywhere, right? (Wink)

We land a little bit early. It's grey and overcast, but not raining. Be thankful for small favors. We'll later learn that there were long and hard rains earlier in the day. I'm unsuccessful, for a long time, to get my All-of-Asia SIM card working. As such, we don't know that our luggage made it until we see it.

Beyond all security we see a sign held by a taller, older, impeccably groomed and dressed gentleman. We had arranged with the tour company to be picked up. He takes our two bags and wheels them through the airport, we two in tow.

We climb into the big car and marvel at the assortment of sweet and savory biscuits and snacks on offer, along with water. We help our self to a few. We eat one and save the others in our bags for another day. The driver chooses a couple of others and passes them back to us. We gladly accept them.

On the drive to the hotel we see a huge number of what appears to be cherry trees in full bloom. We're ecstatic. This is a big reason we'd come to Asia. It's cool and (now being able to get on the internet) supposed to stay that way. We're thinking we'll see more Asian spring. In any case, we've seen our Sakura. Check!

En route we marvel at the modern world zipping by outside. I message on WhatsApp with the tour coordinator as to where we are and when we're due at the hotel. It's looking good. We do arrive exactly at 6pm (our target time) and are told to go to the conference room in the hotel's basement. Success!

In the room there are nine others plus two empty chairs. On the whiteboard are a bunch of notes and a list of participants, both in English and in Korean. Dennis, our guide comes in and introduces himself and the tour. He is funny and we understand most of what we're told. There are ground rules and things we should have done prior to arriving. Given that we're just arriving now, we haven't. No worries, we're told. We then go around the room and learn where everyone's from. There's a family of three, and two more, from the UK. Others, couple and singles, from Australia, someone from Australia who is working now from Singapore, and a lone Canadian.

Class is over and we speedily check in, drop our luggage in the room, unvacuum-pack our light down jackets and find rain gear. We regroup and head out for dinner, following Dennis like ducks in a (quite disorderly) row, jabbering the whole while, getting to know our fellow tour mates. It seems this will be another fun group.

We descend some steps to the metro and wave the cards we'd been given to gain entry. Two stops later we exit and re-wave our cards. It's a learning experience but the system seems very efficient and effective.

At our restaurant we take up one of the two tables with just our group. We have KFC (Korean Fried Chicken), two ways, with pizza, two flavors, beer, and soju. It's all wonderful. We don't get sloshed but we're boisterous and there's lots of laughing and picture taking.

After dinner we pause briefly while I try an ATM pointed out by Sebastian. It seems one of the number keys was stuck and so each time I entered the PIN code it didn't work, or didn't work for some reason. Anyway, I walked away with no cash (but still had my ATM card, thank goodness).

At the night market we walked through, marveling and sniffing at all the unfamiliar foods. It's fairly crowded there. Dennis finds us a place to sit and soon we're trying Stir fried rice cake, Korean (blood) sausage, mung bean cake. Some were OK and some less so, but we were quite full from earlier.

After our metro ride home we mimic Sebastian in using a different ATM machine. It has many options and we try them all, with no success. Karen suggests we do a money advance on our credit card. Not the most cost effective solution, but better than being cashless. It works! We now have 50 crisp 50,000 Wan notes.

Back to our hotel, wash up and we're out like a light.

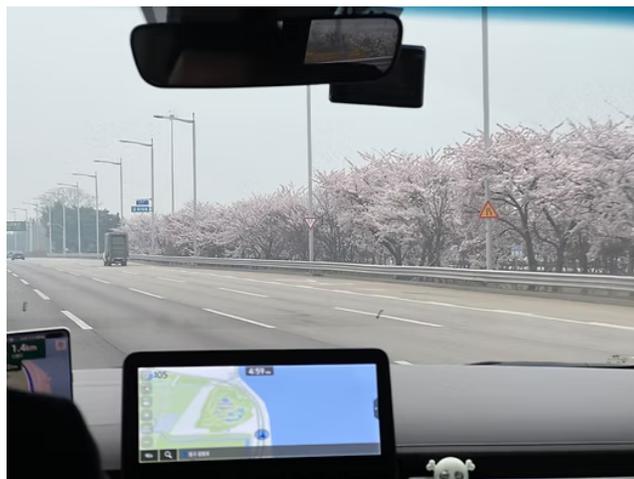
Photos



Happy to be heading to Seoul for the next chapter of our trip



Our sharp dressed driver heading to the car



On the drive into Seoul we were thrilled to see some cherry blossoms!



Meeting Dennis, our tour guide, and other tour members. They're a lot of fun. (This was pre beer and pizza)



Off for our first dinner and getting rained on. Next seven days, though, look like good weather. Fingers crossed.



On the very nice Seoul metro. Clean, easy and efficient.



Pizza, Fried Chicken and beer. We're thinking we really like South Korean food!



Next, the night market. [Wait, there's more food? I didn't know! I'm stuffed!]



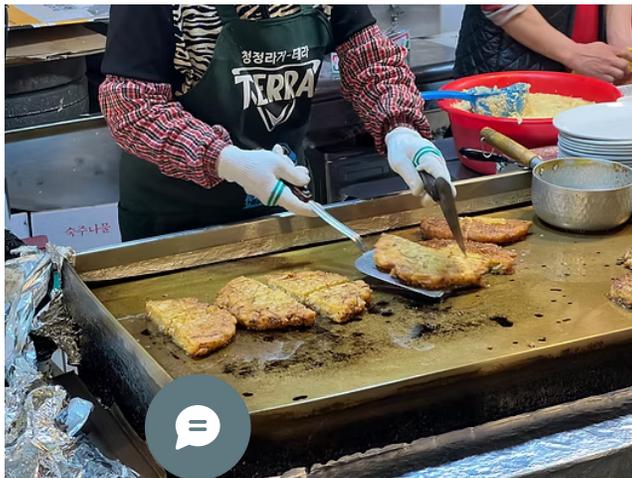
Chili sauce from which they make Kimchi,
and many other things here



So many basic ingredients that go into
Korean cooking



You can shop at the night market and...
you can eat. We're here to eat. [Burp!]



Fried mung bean cake. No skimping on
the oil :-/



Rice paste cakes in chili sauce. Kids love it.
We also had the Korean Sausage. We're
thinking blood's involved.

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