



Post



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# Stair Masters - April 8, 2023

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## **SUMMARY**

On to the big yellow bus headed for Sunchang province, famous for their gochujang chile condiment and a hands-on class on how to make it. It's like chocolate  I wonder how in the world anyone ever came up with the method they use. While Step 1 cooled we moved on to making ramen noodles with gochujang broth which we ate as our "second breakfast". Back to finish our gochujang (although it needs to age 1 year). After lunch we went to Mount Gamgcheon for a hike that absolutely kicked my butt! I've never claimed so many tall, steep stairs. (On one small segment I counted 330!) Back to Jeonju and our new hotel then dinner (Bibembap

which the town is famous for) then a craft brewery for beer and popcorn. - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

We each emerge from our Hanok (traditional Korean house) into the bright sunshine and blue sky. The air is cool and crisp. It's 38° now (36° 'feel's like' temperature), but it went down to 34° overnight. The heated floor makes the single room very comfortable (if not overly warm). In two nights we'll be up in the mountains at a monastery, again sleeping on the floor, and word it it's going to be even cooler.

It's 8 o'clock and there's breakfast for us. Well, at least food. There are perfectly formed sandwiches on toasted bread. It's some delicate meat and cheese and strawberry jam. There are also many perfect, juicy and sweet strawberries and oranges, cut in half with the bottoms trimmed off so they sit perfectly on the plate. The rind has been scored to make them easier to eat. It's all served on a small tray, very civilized. Outside. There's no coffee. OK, maybe not totally civilized.

Our Hanok has a sleeping loft, but the two around the corner, to our right, do not. Instead there's a nice sitting area on the roof with benches, a table and some chairs. We haul ourselves up there, enjoy the sun and eat our breakfast, dreaming of coffee. Our luggage was left in front of our 'homes' packed and ready to go. We have a long drive ahead of us today, and a walk in the mountains, though we'll end up back at here in Jeonju, albeit at different accommodations. Supposedly it's a different Hanok (traditional, sleep on the floor again) which seems odd.

Dennis, our guide's MO is to under promise and over deliver. We're told it's a two hour drive and in forty minutes we're at our destination. It's supposedly designed to make us happy(er). "Yay, it's wasn't two hours!" Yesterday we learned to make kimchi (from the master), using chili paste, but from where does chili paste come? That's this morning's class. Again from a master. Again, a non-English speaker, but they're all very smiley. We're pointed to a grouping of overstuffed couches and chairs inside, in the sunshine by the front window. We all obediently sit. No! Drop your jackets and stuff there.

We don our aprons and hairnets, adjusting them into berets and other shapes. Step one: have enough energy, so we make soup with (what else) chili paste (and dry noodles, fish cake, spring onions, sliced carrots and rice paste 'fingers'). It's good.

We learn what's in the magical paste (called gochujang) and how it's made. There's lots of soaking, mashing, forming, drying, breaking up and grinding. And that's just the mung beans. The salt can only be sea salt. The wheat is cleansed in fresh water many times and dried each time in between, after which it apparently sort of just falls into small uneven pieces.

Over heat, in an odd metal bowl, we make some thick sticky mush. While Peter stirs, I hold the bowl with my potholder glove, alternate between almost catching it on fire and dipping it into the mush. We add other things, stir. Next we're supposed to wait for three days and then many months. We realize we won't have enough time. She gives us all a cute small jar and we're on our way.

Across the street is a very large and very well done museum of chili paste. About this Korean staple we learn more about the history, ingredients, process than you'd ever want to know. They have a display of the products from around the world they say trace their roots back to cochugang, including A1 steak sauce and Pace Picante sauce. (It must be true, they had bottles of each on display.)

Next stop is lunch. We're having "Pakpan" which means (really) "Rice and stuff". We sit on the floor, cross legged, at a low table, where there are already sixteen small bowls of "stuff". We're each given a bowl of rice, and an empty bowl for soup. They bring out soup, egg soufflé, fish, and some sort of tempura vegetable. We try a bit of rice with each thing and eventually we're full. We wash it all down with water.

Next stop is hiking in the mountains/hills. We're told that 76% of Korea is mountainous and it definitely looks like the MASH TV show I grew up with. There are cherry trees in bloom, mostly a tad past their peak. Most other trees are mostly bare, just starting to show leaves, which makes the hillsides look barren.

The hiking park is immaculate. The paths are paved and there's not a speck of litter. There are lights and guard rails. At one point the path divides, with the paved part continuing on, and a wooden pathway leading up, pretty much in parallel, up some stairs. We're feeling adventurous, so we take the stairs.

We do approximately one million stairs, and come to a fork. Continue on the low path or continue up? "Is that the top?" we ask Dennis. "Yes", so up we go. A million stairs later we're ready to kill Dennis. Our legs are like jelly. Most groups he's lead stay on the lower paths. Those who do the summit are in their 20s. We're dying.

Eventually back on the flat, wheelchair accessible trail we stop at a coffee shop. We get hot or cold tea to go. Both are served in 'made on the spot' cans. The hot tea in an aluminum can and the cold in a clear plastic can. Both have aluminum lids with pop-tops. Amazing.

Back at our new accommodations we find it is the fanciest hotel you could imagine. There's a tall machine in each room to steam and dry your clothes. The toilet is a bidet-style, of course, but has no flush handle. When you stand it knows, instinctively, to flush.

Dinner is Bibembap, which is mixed rice, or what I might call "rice and stuff". This time, rather than sampling one thing with a little rice, over and over, you just mix it all together. This we have with an egg volcano soufflé and rice wine. Dennis brings dessert, a brown warm beverage. It smells delicious and chocolatey. We drink a bunch and ask what it is. "Coffee". Yikes!! You evil man!

A few of us enjoy craft beer at a local brewery, back to the hotel we do some quick laundry (which we leave to dry in the tall machine) and off to bed. (Or not... damn you, "dessert"!)

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## Photos



Breakfast on the roof of our Hanoks



Our teacher, the master, (in the middle). All of us with our hairnets making the Korean sign for 'Heart'



Our teacher (the master) with all of the best ingredients to make gochugang (just add water, kind of)



Gochugang soup, aka Korean Happy Meal



Joke not to be repeated



At the gochugang museum. This is the well known "King's Dinner". 23 dishes. Each with a key ingredient from one of the provinces. One is off? There's something rotten in that province. Time to investigate!



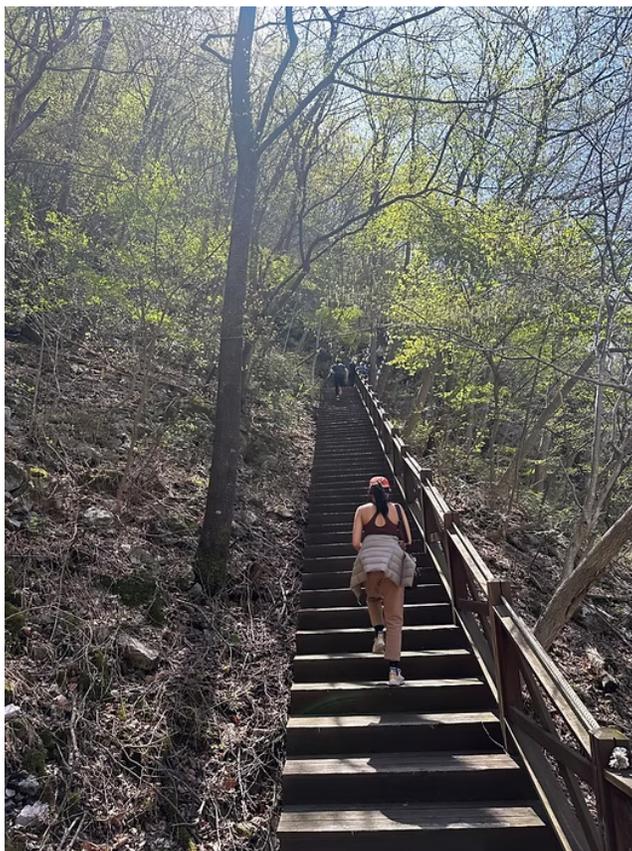
Lunch (minus a few key things). So much little stuff!



Speaking of "Little stuff", Karen was thrilled to have to duck to get into the ladies' room



A cherry tree in bloom beyond (what we're calling) the bridge of sighs



Stairs. So many stairs!



But the view at the end was pretty good. If you look closely you can see the suspension bridge below, in the distance, that we almost visited.



Hot and cold tea. "Cans" made real time.



Waterfall, so pretty in the afternoon sun



No hiking area would be complete without an area to blow the detritus off your boots with compressed air



Bibimbap, mixed rice



Of course, "with stuff"



7pm traffic

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