

Post



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# Sampling the Buddhist Kool-aid® - April 9, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Much time on the bus today. Beautiful scenery through the mountains including lots of blooming cherry trees, planted in places, growing wild in others. We're going for our monastery stay hoping to emerge enlightened. Nirvana seems out of reach. Too many things we enjoy and are not willing to give up! Amazing how different Buddhism is between the countries we've visited but a very strong current of superstition runs through all of them. - Karen

[Photos](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

## ***DETAIL***

In the morning we luxuriate in our nice hotel rooms for a bit longer, packing, showering, flushing the toilet by merely sitting on it. We get coffee in the shop just off the hotel lobby. Others missed that and head out to find some. What they find is a shiny clean vending machine that takes credit cards. Emily comes back with a Chocolate Banana Coffee, which she swears is delicious.

Our bus heads out. We're told it's going to be around two hours and we believe Dennis this time. We'll stop at some point for a stretch and a bathroom break. We're headed to a monastery on the side of a mountain. The mountain is famous, among other things, for providing wisdom. Apparently here, as elsewhere, there's a single test that determines a kid's future (like SAT, or GRE or LSAT). Before a kid takes this test his or her parents will go visit this mountain to help ensure a good outcome. We don't hear if there's ever been a double-blind study to see if this really works.

Along the road we see so many hills and mountains. Necessarily we go through a lot of tunnels. Towards the end of each tunnel we hear a police siren, US style, but only very briefly. This seems to happen in most tunnels. Dennis explains that this is to ensure people are awake. In other tunnels there are other sounds. Sometimes a police whistle. Sometimes nothing.

This causes us to ask about all of the very visible precautionary equipment and signals we see in the hotels, subway, and elsewhere. To this, Dennis relates a sad story from seven years ago, you might want to skip to the next paragraph. On a subway some man with mental illness spreads gasoline on the floor and lights it. The conductor, much further ahead on the train, senses something is wrong and hits the panic button. Sadly one result of this is that all the doors of all the cars lock. Four hundred and some odd people die, including 300 third graders. After that the country insisted that something be done, and so now all conveyances have visible ways to open the doors from the inside, and there are recharging flashlights mounted in boxes in the halls and fire blankets, ladders, and gas masks in the subways, and the fire extinguishers in the hotel rooms and hallways are very visible.

As our coach drives along we do see more trees in bloom. Lots of cherry trees. Some roadways have cherry trees planted one after the other for a long ways. It's quite pretty.

At our lunch stop we visit the loo. There is a long line for the ladies room and we're told that it's a good way to learn about how Koreans act in queues. Elderly ladies, if they really need to use the facilities, simply push to the front of the line.

After freshening up we head to the food area. The translator on our phones help figure out which cooked 'plank on a stick' is what. Fish... different kind of fish... different kind of fish... hotdog... chicken. We get a fish and a chicken and are underwhelmed by both. They have a small fridge there from which you can get a squirt bottle of ketchup and mustard for your hot dog, and chili sauce for everything else. It doesn't help.

Back on the road we see towers for cell phones, decorated to 'look pretty'. A car zips by, covered in dense black netting held on by straps. We're told that's next year's model of some Kia or Hyundai car. They don't want pictures of the car getting out, but want to test drive it.

We use Google Maps or Apple Maps to figure out where we are. It's not so easy. We'd been told that these apps don't work so well. Why? The country is at war. Best that the enemy not have an easy time getting around.

We've been told what we'll be having for lunch but now we're told we'll be going somewhere else (but having the same thing). Why? Festival. Well, not in the sense we know it. It's not a big planned event with activities and admission fees. It's good weather and a good time of year to be going to fun places. This is a fun place.

Lunch is pork with black sauce and noodles with veggies and cooked minced chicken. The pork is in long narrow strips. It's been dipped in something and cooked. There are yummy slimy black fungus in the sauce. It's good. Others on the trip are giving a number (one to ten) for each of our meals. Are they keeping track? "Not really". We vehemently agree, number wise, for some meals and vary considerably for others.

After a bit more driving we get to a big, controlled gate. It's old and impressive and Asian style. The gate keeper discusses with the driver, and then with Dennis. All we here is "Templestay, templestay", "Templestay?", "Templestay!", "Ahhhh". We're let through. We get off the bus and our luggage is transferred to a smaller vehicle. We say goodbye to our driver (with whom we've had almost no interactions) and the bus and head into the temple complex. This is where we'll be spending the night.

It's a big space, nicely planted, with lots of monastery temple buildings sprinkled about. There's a coffee shop that closes at five. At Karen's brilliant suggestion we buy coffees and fill our insulated bottles. There will be no coffee in the morning unless we buy it now. We are given a quick tour of the various buildings and then head to our accommodations for the night. We line up and are given our pants, our vest and a hand towel.

We'd read that the sexes will be split (not spending the night with your significant other, unless you're gay, I guess). But the signs on the doors show that Karen will be my roomie again tonight. Yay! We have ten minutes to change into our matching costumes before the orientation.

We get an Intro to the place. Why it's here. Why we're here. How to bow to a monk in passing. How to formal bow to a Buddha. How to properly offer the big guy some incense. How to sit to meditate. Then we're turned over an honest-to-Buddha monk (well a monkette? or monkess? anyway, it was a she-monk). She's slight of stature but in good health, rosy skin. Her head is shaved. She is sitting in true lotus position. She shows us how to do that. Then she shows us one a little less hard and then says "or just do what you can".

After a bit it's our turn to each offer the Buddha statue behind her some incense. There's a very limited number of steps and important points to remember. We each do it in turn, but invariably we forget to do the first bow, or the last bow, or to pull down on the incense to extinguish it. Or to hold it to our forehead. So much to remember! After we've proven very few of us can do a proper offering (not me) we move on. Some free time and dinner later.

In theory we walk to dinner in silence, in a single file line, with our hands clasped in front of us, but that's just in theory. Dinner we're a bit better at. While we all wait to get into the monastery dining hall the occasional random monk walks past and we expertly do our hands together and bow. At dinner we take no more than we can eat and we sit (mostly) silently as we eat. After dinner we do our own dishes (wow!) and place them each in the correct part of the sterilizer.

After dinner there's a concert. Well, there'll be a few instruments stuck some number of times for the big guy. The drum is beat repeatedly in various melodic ways by a slow progression of monks. The hollow fish gets two rounds by a single monk (well, they're all single, but you know what I mean). The flat, metal cloud thing gets a couple of whacks. And the big, handsome, heavy bell toll repeatedly, the harmonics slowly fading, until 7pm.

Yawn. Sleepy time. No more activities so we each retire to our rooms (one per couple other than those who paid for a single supplement) and pretend not to use our mobile devices until bedtime.

In the tour documentation it said that you could request an extra cushion to sleep on. Karen did (I love that woman). At dinner, Dennis whispers in our ear that he's arranged the extra sleeping cushions. Mum's the word. We somehow got it into our heads that it's 'lights out' at 9pm. 9pm comes and goes and the lights are still on. We turn soon extinguish ours off we go (to try) to sleep.

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## Photos



"The [lovable] crazies on the bus go 'round and 'round"



Which is better, the chicken or the fish?  
Don't make me choose. They're both quite  
'not good'.



Yes the Japanese style toilets might be fun  
but they really slow down the turn around  
time to get into the loo.



Such beautiful cherry blossoms



It looks like SOMEONE's ready for lunch!



It did not disappoint. Pork with black sauce and stir-fried noodles with stuff.



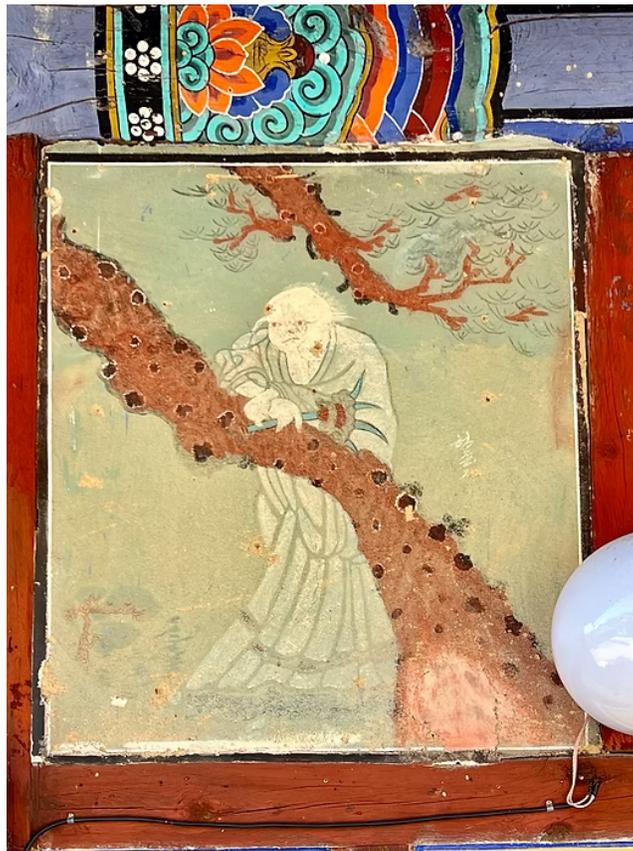
Afterwards were challenged to a race by an Asian in a German sports car.



Such amazing temples at the Buddhist monastery where we spent the night.



Beautiful flowering fruit trees there, too



All Yoda approved



Recently added Buddha statue. (That's the guy who asked for no Buddha statues)



A building dedicated to the hope for a reunification of the two Koreas one day.



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in civilian clothing for a while.



Scott and Karen in regulation dress, in front of our cell, er, room



Dinner with the monks. In silence. Only take what you can eat.



And do your own dishes



Our cell, er, room. [Fellow tour group members: please ignore those extra sleeping pads.]

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

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