

Post



Scott Farnsworth

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Free luggage... right here! - April 12, 2023

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SUMMARY

Up very early for group (yucky) breakfast before catching the train back to Seoul. Very good lunch makes up for disappointing breakfast! Delicious pork dumplings and brothy noodles at a Michelin guide mentioned restaurant. To hotel for free afternoon. Scott worked on catching up on the blog and I went to a Korean bath house with two women from our group. We had a blast getting scrubbed within an inch of our lives and alternately boiled and frozen in the bath offerings. Truly, it was great and don't feel sorry for Scott - he was invited and declined to attend! Last group dinner and one of the best - Korean barbecue with copious amounts of beer and soju. Sad

goodbyes with this great, fun group of people and our wonderful guide, Dennis!
- Karen

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DETAIL

When it rains it pours! Well, thankfully it's not raining here today, but our dance card for the day is extremely full. If all goes according to plan, we'll start the day as an organized tour in Busan and end it as individuals and couples, in Seoul, tour over. This last prospect makes us sad, indeed.

We wake and pack and check out of the hotel early. We have a train to catch. First, though, we have to get to the train station, so we walk to the subway and use our T card, that works on subways and buses all over South Korea. At the train station the plan is to leave our luggage and head out as a group to breakfast. Those of us new to Korea (all of us) take the "leave our luggage" as a figure of speech, but no, we're leaving our luggage.

We group the luggage into a respectable blob, in the middle of the cavernous waiting room, and hike the half mile to breakfast. We're looking at each other with incredulity. What?? No one's going to steal it?? In theory not. To make matters worse there is one of those crazy inflatable men, in an official railroad uniform, waving his arm, saying (in effect) "all tracks are that way". But since we piled all our worldly possessions at his feet, he seems to be saying "Free luggage... get your free luggage here!"

Breakfast is right around the corner from Texas Street, that pleases us no end. On the menu today is typical breakfast fare: Thinly sliced pork in broth and rice and other typical condiments on the side. It took some doctoring but in the end many of us thought it was exquisite. Others, with apparently poorer doctoring skills, give it a two or three out of ten.

Back at the station we hold our breath as the space where we left our luggage comes into view. Sure enough every piece is accounted for. Is this a great country or what? We freshen up, get coffee and food for the train, and soon we're quietly speeding back towards Seoul. The train has good wifi and electricity (limited number of outlets, though). We spend the time catching up on blog entries.

In every car, every three or so meters or so, there's a TV built into the ceiling. Out of the corner of my eye, as I work on the blog, I gather the various uses for the TV. For a while it was teaching us (in detail) how to do CPR. There's sports, general interest stories and news. There's a news ticker, normally in Korean, streaming across the bottom of the screen saying who knows what.

For a short period, during our ride, the news ticker switches to English and we learn that 1) the off his rocker North Korean dictator is saber rattling again, and 2) no one in Pyongyang has answered the special governmental North Korea - South Korea security phone in five days. [Karen, when do we fly out of Seoul??]

Back "home" in Seoul we hop the subway to our previous hotel near city hall. It's close to noon and understandably our rooms aren't ready yet. What to do? We're pro's at this. We leave our luggage. The group heads out to our second meal of the day together. We're having "hand cut noodles" at a Michelin-listed restaurant (Myeongdong Kyoja). I'm mesmerized by their menu. It has four thing. Four. Knock me over with a Korean chopstick.

Everyone is expected to get the noodles and most of us do, but I opt for the dumplings. With peer pressure my table-mates try to convince me I want the noodles. I hold my ground and get the dumplings, which I share. Everyone agrees they're heavenly. As are the noodles. Karen and I share one (big) bowl. I augment it with a couple of macerated dumplings. Such a good lunch we almost miss that some of the waiters are robots. They blithely deliver the bowls of soup and dumplings to different tables. (Ours were all delivered by old-school human waiters). The Koreans to whom the robot waiters deliver the food seem nonchalant with the experience. We're enthralled.

Lunch, and robot ogling, over, we head back out onto the sun drenched street. We're willing to put up with the temperature in the upper sixties. Life is good. Karen, Emily and Cathrine head off to the 'spa' to be scrubbed and hot tubbed. Old fuddy-duddies Scott and Peter slink back to our hotel rooms to carry the luggage upstairs and unpack.

Before long it's time to eat again. (Say what!?) It's the last group meal of the tour. After tonight, we'll just be normal people. This has been a great group and we'll miss them. First, though, Korean barbecue. The place is open and airy. There are pipes hanging down from the ceiling everywhere, sucking the smoke out, mostly. There's already many little dishes of 'stuff' on the table, in cute little bowls. This came from a counter, off to the side, with stores of more 'stuff' for future clients. This isn't a 'self-serve' arrangement. If you want more kimchi, peppers, lettuce, onions, or radishes, you should ask. So they have a big sign, near the counter of stuff, explaining this. We don't know what the wordy Korean admonishment says, but in English it says "It's not Self!" Words to live by.

Dennis has gotten a cake for Sarah, since it's her birthday, and soju (potent rice wine) and beer flows freely. Earlier in the trip it was always tour guide, and Korean-speaker, Dennis who procures additional bottles of beer for us (which we'd pay for, per tour policy). Tonight we quickly learned that if you just hold up a single finger, and point to the empty bottle, another magically appears. This is going to work out swimmingly. We have thick slabs of pork belly and beef, cooked by each of us to our liking. The pieces are big but the large pair of scissors makes quick work of divvying stuff up.

After dinner we seem to all agree that parting is, indeed, sweet sorrow. There is certainly lots of hugging, after which us old farts head back to the hotel while the tour youngsters (and Dennis) head out to terrorize some poor karaoke bar. Cathrine and Peter have a very early flight. As for us, I don't know what our excuse is!

Photos



Heading to the Busan train station for our eventual ride back to Seoul



Along the way we get more of these reminders of how badly Busan wants to be selected to host the 2030 World Expo



We simply leave all our luggage in a big pile in walk away, being guarded only by this guy, who seems to be saying "Free luggage! Get your free luggage here!"



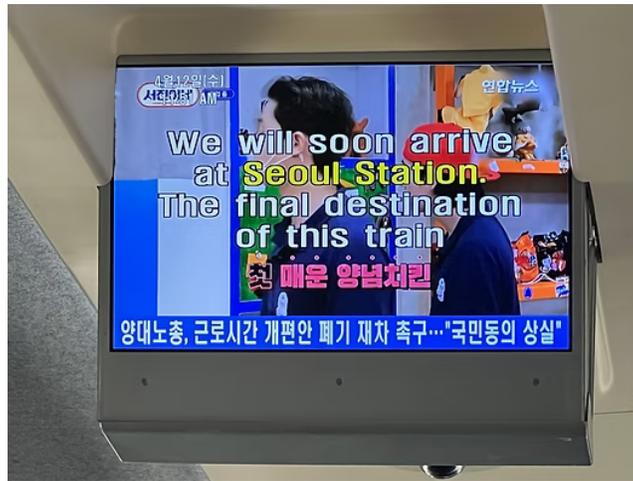
And with that we head out to breakfast, a good twenty minute walk away. Karen seems to be waving Bye-Bye to her luggage.



The pork in broth for breakfast got mixed reviews, but I (and some others) thought it was stellar.



On the train we were mostly quiet. We only got admonished maybe a couple of times.



The TVs were silent and in Korean most of the time, but announcements were in English for arrivals at stations and crazy acts by the head of state in the country to the north.



Lunch of hand-cut noodles with dumplings was outstanding.



The menu has but four (count them, four) things (and we only had two of them!)



Some of the waiters were extremely efficient, non-complaining robots.



Back on the street the mid-day action was heating up.



On our walk back to the hotel Peter and I saw some remarkable public art



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At dinner the "extras", as always, were already on the tables



But those extras are not 'Self-Serve' as this  tried to make clear



The pork and beef were tender and tasty.
Dennis proved he's a true BBQ master.



The shape and intense heat of the charcoal
were amazing



A highlight of the evening was the cake for Sarah's birthday

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