

Post



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Korean close-out - April 13, 2023

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SUMMARY

Finally a leisurely morning! Checked out and left our bags with the hotel. Nice hike to a very cool area with narrow streets of shops and restaurants. Good French lunch. Walked around the ancient Bukchong Hanok Village which wasn't as cool as I thought it was going to be - lots of newer buildings crowded out the old ones. From there to the Gyeongbokgung Palace where we again saw many Koreans (and tourists) in traditional costumes with their beautiful, (mostly) pastel skirts. Back to the hotel for our bags and a cab to our airport hotel.

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DETAIL

For the first time in a long while we're on our own. It's a free day in Seoul and our last full day in Korea. We need to switch our hotel from downtown to one out at the airport in anticipation of a mid-morning flight to Tokyo. We won't be gone by the end of today, but we'll be able to see the kind of airplanes that will take us away, out our hotel window.

In our morning email we learn of a new hassle to get on our eventual cruise out of Tokyo. It involves Covid testing. To board we'll now need a negative PCR test. It can be professionally administered (thoughtfully they offer that service at the port for only US\$60 per person) or you can use a home test (as long as it's professionally proctored). No word on what that costs. It's actually a good thing as some passengers (those with Covid) will be kept off the ship. That will help keep the other passengers, and the crew, healthier. Now we just have to figure out where to get our tests and hope that they're negative!

We pack, check out and leave our luggage at the hotel. We're getting good at this 'leaving our luggage' thing. We walk a mile or so to lunch. The route winds around and takes us both above ground and below (as the only way to cross certain busy streets). We're headed to a well reviewed French restaurant we found on TripAdvisor: La Maison de Paris. It's very popular, apparently, but hard to find. Karen impulsively reaches out and asks a rando passing older businessman if he speaks English. "A little." (He speaks perfect English.) He looks at our phone and then keys the name of the restaurant into his phone, and off we go. He walks us all the way to our destination and wishes us a good lunch. How sweet. There are many people waiting for their/a table, but we're all seated quickly. (The place just opened for the day.)

We sit and ask our not-Korean waitress (in French) if we should speak English or French. "Comme vous voulez." We opt for French. We split boeuf bourguignon, French onion soup and a small salad. We wash it down with two glasses of delicious French wine. This is followed by two espressos and a bowl of four profiteroles (puff pastry around vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup on top). Yum! Our waitress is young(ish). She is French (from Normandy). I ask if we should call her Madame or Mademoiselle. "Madame", she replies, wistfully. It was good speaking French again (though some of the waiters' inattention was a bit too 'on the nose' for a French restaurant).

When done we walked around the neighborhood. Quite narrow walk-only alleys with cute stores, pubs and bars, tea houses, restaurants and cafés, shooting ranges. Lots of fun. These are all in old-style, tile roof, single-story buildings, many with very aesthetic gardens courtyards. One appears to have some old narrow gauge rail tracks!

We continue on to the Bukchon Hanok (traditional style) village. We see many Asian and western girls and women (and couples and families) in traditional costume. We are underwhelmed by the village. What we saw in the preceding days was more fun, impressive, and accessible. These seemed to be people's real houses. Not sure how thrilled they are to be living in the middle of Disneyland/Time Square.

We walked from there up and down to the palace. It's where the emperor lived, with his family, but his courtiers and their staff had to have places to live, and so did the people who took care of them, so there were many buildings. The emperor needed places to have ceremonies, to entertain, and to get away from the heat, so there were many impressive buildings, one huge one built on stilts over a body of water.

We hopped a subway back to our hotel. We weren't exactly sure where we were going. People just offered to help, even though we hadn't asked. Very kind, very helpful. I left my hat on the subway and the lady next to us called me back. Such sweet people.

At the hotel we retrieved our luggage and the kind young lady at reception called a cab for us on her phone, using an app. 65,000 Korean won or thereabouts to our next hotel, the Grand Hyatt Incheon. Be sure to look for taxi number 6002!

Our driver spoke essentially zero ingrish. He was kind but we were separated by language. Did we want to go Incheon Airport? No! To Grand Hyatt Hotel Incheon. He understood "Not Incheon" and "Grand Hyatt" and so headed off in the opposite direction. Our bad. We got back on track after ten or so minutes and the ride was still 10,000 won less than estimated. At the hotel we pile out and our driver starts to unload our luggage. "No, no, no" says the bellman. "Let me see your reservation! Ah, hotels.com. It's the next Grand Hyatt Hotel Incheon... over, nextdoor." Apparently this 'East Tower' are for real people, and the 'West Tower' is for wanna-be thrifties like us (who use sites like hotels.com)!

In the end, for \$150, we have an extremely nice big room. Very quiet. We have a view of the airport and runways, but very little noise. There are a number of bars and restaurants. Two pools. An amazing garden with flowering cherry trees. We ditch our luggage (in the room) and explore. Later we grab our computer and tablet and head to the bar for a G&T and a beer (or two). We have tens of thousands of Korean won burning a hole in our pockets (about \$70).

For dinner there is a bakery/deli in the hotel, and a restaurant next door with either a la carte or buffet (with every 'greatest hits' dish in Korea). There's a large floor-to-ceiling cubical glass room in the middle of the restaurant with lots of really nice wine. We want to split one sandwich and salad from the deli. It's right next to the restaurant, so we assume we can get it at the restaurant. We ask for a table. "Buffet?" No, we answer, and are led to a very low kid's height table with matching chairs as punishment. We still get water in real glasses, cloth napkins, and leather-bound menus.

In reading the menu we discover we can not get the deli foods here (it's only to be taken back to your room). Whoops. We give up our kid-sized table and chairs. In the room we fish a couple of beers from the fridge. Cold. Nice. Opener? Nope! Back in the fridge. Probably for the best. Dinner was good and after a while we're off to bed, for our last night sleeping in the wonderful country of South Korea.

Photos



The excitement of our day started when we got to this wonderful French restaurant, the Maison de Paris!



Lunch was delicious, as was the
profiteroles at the end, with espresso



The neighborhood was fun and charming.
Some of the places had cute planted
courtyards.



As we walked to the Hanok village and temple, we passed many spectacular azalea bushes.



The Hanok village did have some impressive homes. Very well preserved.



The palace is in extremely good repair as well. Visitors in costume get in free and so there were tons of those, which was fun.



Picture taking was the order of the day for everyone, costumed or not



Where the emperor chilled and entertained



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A temple? Shrine? We didn't have our guide so we're in the dark.



Ultimately it's time to retrieve our bags and head to the airport. Not at first, but eventually we were going in the right direction.



At the airport, from our room, we could see the types of planes that will carry us, tomorrow, to Tokyo.



With nothing to do, we drink beers and G&Ts and write blog entries. Here we are, feeling no pain.



The fancy dinner place we won't be eating at with it's fancy wine storage.



Since we're NOT eating at the fancy buffet
they put us at a very low kid's sized table.

Hm...

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