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Exploration and Kitties!

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October 28, 2017

Exploration and Kitties!



Side dishes (banchan) at the restaurant in Myeongdong

Hello readers/Annyeonghaseyo,

I hope you are all doing well! Here are some more of my experiences from my life in Korea.

9/24/17 to 9/30

Monday was my first cell meeting in Mentor's Club. If you read my last blog/journal entry, you might remember that a Mentor's buddy group is made up of a mentor (a native student) and 5 exchange students (in my case 4). A cell is made up of 4 or 5 buddy groups. My entire buddy group attended this cell meeting. Our cell meeting had 4 groups attend. Everyone was nice, and it was fun getting to know new people! We visited Gyeongbokgung, a palace, at night. It was my second time to this palace, and it was a different experience at night than during the day. The palace was lit up and it was really pretty. A group of us (including all my buddy group members) wore Hanbok, a traditional Korean outfit, into the palace. The rental price was 10,000 won/~\$10 per hour (we kept it within the hour). My mentor had a nifty hat with his outfit. We took a lot of pictures, and because it was dark out, we ended up using our cell phone flashlights as lighting for them. It was entertaining to watch people be surrounded by cell phone flashlights, and a little intimidating when you were the person being surrounded. After the palace, we returned our hanboks and went to a pub for food and drinks. One of the cell members entertained the rest of us with magic tricks, which was a lot of fun to witness!

This week I explored Itaewon a little with a friend. It is known as a foreigner district in Seoul. I went to Itaewon because it is one of the places in Korea that sells larger US clothing sizes. Most clothing shops around Seoul sell up to a US size 12 in jeans and generally up to a US L/XL in shirts. Though there are

some shirts that fall around a US size XL to possibly 2XL due to the oversized fashion trend in Korea. Since I am above a size 12 in pants, and I had lost some weight, I needed to buy some new pants. There were many stores in Itaewon that advertised “big size” or “free size” on the front of their shops. Most of the shops (clothing-wise) aren’t very wallet-friendly in Itaewon. I went to OKBT (OKBigTall), because it was recommended in the research I did before going to Itaewon. The prices were more acceptable, but still higher than I would have liked to pay. The staff was very helpful, and I would recommend this store if you visit Korea and need larger sizes; they carry up to a US size 22 I believe. I would also recommend bringing the clothing you need if you are a larger size, if you visit Korea, to save some money and spend it on the different types of foods here instead! Another option for plus-sized clothing in Korea would be online shops: Gmarket is one example. (http://global.gmarket.co.kr/Home/Main?ctnakey=03-485-5-351987&jaehuid=200007953&gclid=EAIaIQobChMImr_q4qqT1wIVxn-9Ch0VTgKoEAAAYASAAEgLDfD_BwE)

My friend and I wandered around Itaewon a little after shopping and we found a street that was dedicated to antique shops. The whole street was lined with them. It was a calm, quiet street and felt almost a little like home, which was unexpected. I think it might have been the lack of people on the street. Then we turned the corner and we were back into bustling streets and shops!

I visited my first cat café this week with one of my friends! A white kitty named Coco sat on me. Coco had the head of a big feline, and stood out from the others. My legs fell asleep, but I loved it! There were a lot of kitties in the café, but most of them surrounded what seemed to be two regulars of the café. One kitty had a lion shave haircut; it was adorable. It was a good experience and cost 9,000 won (~\$9) for any amount of time and a free drink. I chose a strawberry banana smoothie for my drink.

Some people in the dorms are having mosquito issues in their rooms. I have been lucky and managed to escape that particular issue so far.

There was a dance off/dance circle in Sinchon! My friend and I were just walking around when we saw it, and we had the chance to watch some of it. It was really cool! There were different dancers and dance groups. There were also a few songs where the dancers would pull in audience members to dance to popular songs such as PSY’s “New Face” and “Gangnam Style”. They were fun to watch and had talent!

I also stopped into a vision store this week and learned that eye exams are free (at least at this chain). I ended up buying contacts for the first time in a long time. I got colored and clear ones. They seem to be less expensive than what I would have had to pay in the US. It was nice when it rained one day, and I didn’t have to wipe my glasses off!

Found a new restaurant that has good food with some friends in Idae! My favorite thing was the Nagasaki Ddeokbokki dish, which was ramen, rice cake, fish cake, and some veggies, mixed in a broth. I plan to go back some time! They also had a carbonated peach flavored soju that was light in alcohol content (3%), which was delicious.

My classes are going all right. The content in all of them is interesting to learn about, though some of the teaching styles are a little hard to follow. I have one teacher who goes off topic quite a bit, and assignments in a couple of my classes can be vague in their requirements. But I’m learning new things and doing my best!

On Saturday, I had my first field trip with my Korean history class. We visited Gyeongbokgung, which was my 3rd time to the palace. We also visited Jongmyo shrine. It was a really hot day for the field trip, and I learned that all our class field trips will take place on Saturdays at 10am (I’m very, very sad that the class takes up some of my Saturdays since that makes it harder to travel on weekends). In Jongmyo shrine, there was a pathway that had a raised middle part of the path that some of our class was walking on. When we stopped to talk about one of the buildings, the TA looked over and told us that while no one would ask us not to walk there, it was the path for deceased ancestors to walk and it was sort of disrespectful. Almost all

of us instantly jumped off the path. I couldn't understand why that wasn't something that was mentioned before we walked down the path at all, but it was interesting to learn about. There are also basins put at the corner of the buildings outside that were filled with water to show the spirits their own reflection, so they would scare themselves away.

My sister had an incident at her school, no one was hurt, but I've noticed, one of the hardest parts of being abroad is not being able to be there for bad news/anything big with family members back home.

10/1 to 10/8

This week was a holiday week. The 3rd of October was the National Foundation Day of Korea. Chuseok fell over the 4th through the 6th, and the 9th was Hangul day.

National Foundation Day is known as Gaecheonjeol. It is about the start of Korean history and Korea's creation myth. Links for more information on Gaecheonjeol: <https://www.90daykorean.com/national-foundation-day-in-korea/> and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaecheonjeol>.

Chuseok is Korean Thanksgiving Day. The day before and after the Chuseok day are also a part of the Chuseok holiday. During this holiday, family time is important, and people will go back to their hometowns to gather with their families. There are some traditions that occur during this holiday, such as preparing food and setting it up in a certain way on a table to offer to ancestors. After honoring their ancestors, the family will eat together. One of my Korean friends, Boram, told me a phrase that is common to say during Chuseok ("Ma-eumkkaji neokneokhaejineun pungseonghan hangawi bonaeseyo"), which essentially means "I wish you a heart full of warmth" or prosperity or happiness. Links for more information on Chuseok: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuseok> and <https://www.90daykorean.com/chuseok-in-korea/>.

Hangul Day, or Hangul Proclamation Day, is a celebration of King Sejong creating the Korean alphabet (Hangul) in the 15th century. Links for more information on Hangul Day: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hangul_Day and <https://www.90daykorean.com/hangul-day/>.

Went wandering with two friends earlier this week and found a Japanese ramen place. The food was all right. The dorms also did room checks during the holiday week to check who was in and who was out for the week.

Visited Myeongdong for the first time with a friend. It is a super crowded shopping district in Seoul. It has lots of street food to try and different types of shops: mostly skincare, makeup, shoes, and clothing. There were people standing amid the crowds of people with menus for their restaurants, which was kind of cool. My friend and I tried one that caught our eye, and the food was all right and not too pricey.

Went to DDP (Dongdaemun Design Plaza) with a couple of friends. On our way there, there was a pigeon with a subway plastic bag stuck around it. I helped a man help remove the bag from the pigeon. So, we helped a bird on our way to the DDP, which felt good. We visited the Dongdaemun History and Culture park and walked around the DDP a little. We also wandered around Myeongdong a bit. Then we met up with another friend, and went to watch the water show at Banpo Bridge Rainbow Fountain. They would play music as the show started, and when the water show ended, so did the music. It was a pretty show and the music was kind of fun! There was also a guy singing under the Banpo bridge behind where we were sitting. There were a lot of couples at the water show and also, surprisingly, a lot of food delivery. We ended the day eating at a subway restaurant. I had Soba noodle naengmyeon. Which is cold soba noodles that you dip into a cold broth. It was yummy. I have yet to try original naengmyeon which is served with the noodles already in the broth and isn't made with soba noodles.

I had my first taxi ride in Korea with some friends on the way back from Itaewon this week. It was kind of fun. This taxi ride wasn't scary at all, and it was pretty cheap, under \$10 or 10,000 won. The driver rolled up the windows when we went through a tunnel and rolled them back down after we got through. I'm curious about this and will have to research why that is!

I also saw my first sunrise in Korea this week. It was calm and pretty!

One of my friends had a birthday this week, and we went out to a Korean bbq, noraebang (karaoke), and club in Hongdae. I made a new Korean friend through my other friends. The noraebang we went to had 4 mics, which was awesome because there were 6 of us, and most of the noraebang I've been in have only had two mics. One of the others and I skipped the club part of the evening and went back to the dorms, chatted a while, and went back to our rooms. It was a good night. I've decided that noraebang is good for my hangul reading speed practice!

My time here feels like a whirlwind; time is passing too fast! I almost feel like I'm under pressure to have so many amazing experiences while I'm in Korea, but to me, life feels normal in Korea. The language may be different, and there are different cultural aspects, but it doesn't feel hugely different to me. This may be because I still live sheltered from most of the culture in my exchange student bubble for the most part. I'm trying my best to learn what I can, though, and experience the culture and life here in the ways I am able to!

Jasmine/SeonHwa