**A Weekend in Samcheok**

by [Tamara Povarchook](http://www.footprintsrecruiting.com/about-footprints/footprints-staff/1213-tamara-povarchook), Placement Coordinator for Korea & China

When we lived in Korea, my friend Amber and I would try to get away as often as we could on the weekends to see the countryside. We would flip to random pages in our travel guide to decide which places to visit. One fateful weekend, our random search landed us on the beautiful east coastal town of Samcheok.

It took us five hours to get there from Seoul. There were no facilities on the bus – unlike the comfortably-equipped charter buses we’re used to in the Western world – and I was in desperate need of a restroom three hours into the trip. I waddled up to the bus driver with my phrasebook in hand to ask him when we were going to stop for a break. He explained that there wouldn’t be a break, and that we had two hours to go. Near tears, I looked up the Korean words for “toilet” and “emergency” and simply stood there yelling, “Hwajangshil, unggup sanghwang! Hwajangshil, unggup sanghwang!” until he finally agreed to pull over at the next rest stop. Ahhh…relief!  
  
We arrived in Samcheok and wandered through town until we found a cheap place to stay: The Moon love motel. We dropped off our bags, grabbed a $5 pizza for lunch, then hopped in a cab and asked the driver to take us to Haesindang Park, a sculpture park listed in our guidebook as one of Samcheok’s most popular attractions. A forty-minute drive through the mountains and $30 fare later, we arrived at the park which – much to our bewilderment – consisted of gigantic sculptures of male genitalia. It was both an educational and slightly disturbing experience: some of them had creepy-looking faces and others had objects or animals carved into them, such as the ones in the Chinese Zodiac display.

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| Penis Face | Zodiac Penis |
| That's some nose! | A very phallic Year of the Ox |

We ended up spending a few hours at the park, taking plenty of photos and losing track of time. It was after 8pm when we finally left, and we realized that the place was deserted. All the shops had closed and there wasn’t a soul in sight, and of course we didn’t have the phone number for the cab company. We trudged up to the highway through the rain, and thankfully found a bus stop. We waited in the smelly bus shelter for about 30 minutes, with no sign of a bus coming any time soon.

Eventually, a car with two young Korean men inside pulled over. The passenger rolled down his window and said, “No bus, no bus, you come with us!” Amber and I exchanged slightly hesitant glances, shrugged our shoulders, and got into their car – what other option did we have? They turned out to be very friendly, and we managed to have a conversation in very basic English. About halfway back into town, they asked us if we would like to join them at their hotel to drink Jack Daniel’s and try our luck at the casino. We were up for it at first, until we found out that they were staying about 100km outside of Samcheok. We politely declined, and they dropped us off on the side of the road and called a cab to that exact location.   
  
A cab decked out in black lights and blasting techno music showed up to take us back into town. As we were walking through the door of our motel room, the telephone was ringing. I answered, and it was the guys who had picked us up, inviting us out for dinner. This time we used our better judgment and turned them down. They must have called our hotel and said “We’d like to talk to the foreign girls”!   
  
The next morning, we decided to avoid the hassle of the bus and the potential of having to hitchhike again, by renting a car. We showed up at the car rental shack – it was a tiny little office in a parking lot and they seemed to have only one car. The woman took photocopies of our driver’s licenses (our Canadian ones – we did not have international licenses which are legally required to drive in a foreign country), we paid her $70 cash, and we took off on a joy ride. We spent a beautiful, leisurely Sunday cruising around to seven different beaches.

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| Lifeguard Tower |
| We stopped at this beach for the sole purpose of this photo op. |

Around 5pm that evening, I got a phone call from the woman who had rented the car to us. She and I struggled to communicate with each other, but the gist of it was that she wanted us to return the car the next morning at 9am. I tried to explain to her that we were actually leaving that night so we’d have to bring it back to her today, but she was already closing up shop at that time. Even after speaking to her husband I still was not able to explain why we couldn’t bring the car back to them the next morning, so I said that was fine – we’d bring it back in the morning.  
  
Amber and I showed up back at the car shack around 10:30pm. We parked and locked up the car and pried open the window to the office. Amber chucked the keys inside and they landed right on the desk. I scratched a note reading “Thank you kindly from your Canadian patrons!” and I tucked it into the door handle.  
  
We laughed hysterically as we booked it to the train station (after my protests against riding another bathroom-free bus home) and we caught the train back to Seoul just in time. While musing over what a crazy weekend we had just had, I got a text message from the car lady. She wanted to confirm again that we would definitely bring the car back to her the next morning, and I assured her we would be there, with a smiley face and all. I can only imagine how puzzled that poor woman must have been when she showed up to work the next day!  
  
We finally got home around 8am on Monday, exhausted. We slept until the afternoon and made it to work just in time for our evening classes.   
  
I have many more adventures like this one to share. Stay tuned…

**The Boryeong Mud Festival**

by [Tamara Povarchook](http://www.footprintsrecruiting.com/about-footprints/footprints-staff/1213-tamara-povarchook), Placement Coordinator for Korea & China  
  
One of the most memorable events I attended in South Korea was the Boryeong Mud Festival on Daecheon Beach. This festival has been happening annually, for a week in mid-July, for the past 15 years. It attracts locals, young and old, and hundreds of expats.  
  
The mud at Daecheon Beach is sought after for its cosmetic properties. The mud is collected, processed and poured into buckets on the beach for everyone’s mud-bathing pleasure. You literally paint the mud onto your body with paint brushes, and let the sun do its work before rinsing off in the warm waters of the Yellow Sea.



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| Beautifying my skin in the hot sun. |

The mud is also made into various beauty products, including soap, shampoo and mud masks, which are available for purchase at stands along the beach. I bought myself a lusciously muddy gift set that I brought home to Canada with me, and I have used the glorious product sparingly to make it last. It smells lovely and makes your skin feel so soft and smooth!   
  
My friends and I went to the festival with a tour group called Adventure Korea (on a side note, this company does trips all over South Korea and is a great way to have fun, meet fellow expats and explore the country on weekends and national holidays). We spent one night there, and our accommodations were very Korean in the sense that we slept 8-10 people to a room, on a linoleum floor with nothing but thick blankets and hard pillows. Oh, and we had no hot water for our showers. It’s all part of the experience, right? One uncomfortable night on the floor was definitely made up for by a weekend of mud-packed fun! (And there’s nothing a little Soju can’t remedy…gun bae!)  
  
We got up early in the morning to take part in mock military training on a much muddier beach about a ten-minute bus ride from the main festivities. We donned army fatigues, crawled through the mud on our bellies, had a mud ball fight, built human pyramids, and simply rolled around like swine until we were bemired to our hearts’ content.

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| 2012-03_Tamara_27-1 | Tamara in the mud |
| Military Drills | Drenched in muck and loving it. |

Other awesome activities back at the main beach included a mud wrestling pit and a slippery mud slide. All in all, this was quite the unique experience. The Boryeong Mud Festival is a messy but marvelous summer event that I highly recommend to anyone traveling to South Korea. Go ahead, get dirty!

**Had a chance to visit the cherry blossom festival in Jinhae?**

by [Dave Harvey](http://www.footprintsrecruiting.com/about-footprints/footprints-staff/508-dave-harvey), Operations Manager

They cherry tree is one of those icons synonymous with spring. It evokes thoughts of warm days, bright sun and sweet smells of new growth. In East Asia, and especially Korea the cherry blossom means time to get outside and enjoy the many festivals that spring has to offer.  
  
Having lived in both Japan and South Korea, I’ve enjoyed the many spring festivals surrounding the cherry blossoms. It’s a great way to get out after winter, see somewhere new and hope that summer is around the corner.

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Where to go? Anywhere you go in South Korea you’ll find cherry trees. Korea does have indigenous cherry trees, however many of the ones you’ll see today in Korea were introduced during Japanese rule. Sure every big city has beautiful avenues lined with the pink trees; however no city does it like Jinhae. Jinhae located west of Busan and is technically part of the great Changwon city area in Gyeongnam province. At 170,000 people, it’s a small city for Korean standards. Its island studded port, condensed downtown and naval base make it a great place to experience the blossoms at least once during a visit to Korea. It could be due to the naval base (developed by the Japanese Navy in the early 20th century) that Jinhae is so famous for the cherry trees, however today it’s Korean through and through.   
  
When to go? The festival this year runs from April 1st to 10th, 2012, however be sure to check locally when the peak blossoms will happen depending on the weather. Make plans early as buses and trains to Jinhae will fill with over 2 million people flocking here each year to see the blossoms.

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| Cherry blossoms by the harbor |

What to see? Jinhae’s many avenues lined with thousands of cherry trees are a photographers delight. When the wind picks up, it could be mistaken for a snowstorm with millions of petals in the air. Aside from the beautiful trees, street vendors with all manors of tasty Korean food and traditional Korean festival sites, one other thing makes this festival unique; the navy base. For one weekend a year the Jinhae Navy base is opened to the public where you can see some of countries naval vessels and one of the most unique military ships in the world. The replica of the Turtle Ship is an armoured sailing vessel from the 1500’s. The ship itself is open to the public for a peak at life in the 1500’s as a Korean sailor.