Overnight Layover “All Night” in Seoul 1/8/19

What happens when you book cheap flights to Europe? One finds themselves with an overnight layover in Seoul. 17 hours and 30mins. That’s how much time I had until my next flight…

What was so good about this overnight layover was

1- exploring another destination, night-time Seoul

2- adjusting my body clock.

Firstly, if you’re planning to leave the airport during a transfer, you need to fill in an arrival card. This has a big red box in the middle where you must fill in the address of your stay. Obviously, if you’re just going out for a few hours, you won’t be staying at a hotel or anywhere so just write “Transfer.” Also, don’t worry about the telephone number as many people wouldn’t have one at that stage. Don’t spend too long stressing over this like I did (I ended up having to ask an immigration officer what to write).

Incheon International Airport is on a gigantic island off the coast, so it isn’t close to Seoul CBD. There are various options to travel into Seoul but the easiest and the most economical is the Metro. Unlike many cities around the world where you pay a premium to catch the airport train, the one in Seoul is very cheap. However, if you’re carrying heavy luggage (not me) you might want to consider a bus or the express train to save you hauling it up stairs and down long transfer tunnels. To make things easy if you’re catching the metro, buy a T-money card (contactless transportation card) from a convenience store like CU, GS25 or 7 Eleven. When I got mine, you could only load up a card with cash so visit an ATM before you get one. From Incheon airport, it takes at least one hour on the metro to get to Seoul CBD depending on where you want to go. So, factor this in and allow plenty of time to get back to the airport as the frequency of the airport metro is not as high as other trains. Also note that the last trains run just before 0100 and before 0000 on weekends and the first trains run from around 0530. So don’t make my mistake and realise there wasn’t a train because it was a Sunday night.

If you need internet when you’re out of the airport, you can rent a pocket Wi-Fi at the line of kiosks near the exit doors of Terminal 1 however they charge on a daily basis so it may not be the most economical for transfers. Otherwise, you can do what I did and download Korea Tour – Offline Maps using the airport’s free Wi-Fi. It wasn’t the best maps app, but it worked without internet and was reliable because Google Maps doesn’t work well in Korea. The equivalent is Naver Maps, but I failed to find an offline function. What you can also do is download a bunch of information on your phone using screenshots otherwise Google Chrome usually retains website viewing when you’re offline. But make sure you have a map of the Metro, so you know where you are going and how to get to places.

If you want to leave your bags, there are quite a few private luggage storage stores across Seoul. There are also lockers at many metro stations, and I saw some in shopping centres like Coex mall. You pay on an hourly basis however the lockers at the metro station are closed from 0100-0500 so you are unable to collect your bag during those hours. Also, many are located outside the station gates so when I left my bag at Hongik. Uni station, I went out just to collect my bag and went back in and it charged me an extra train ride. However, it is very convenient and easy to store luggage and the lockers are generally cheaper than the stores.

Now onto the actual night life. I went to Myeongdong Night Market and wow the street food looked amazing! A lot of deep-fried mozzarella cheese, grilled cheese lobster, tornado potato, tteokbokki, hotteok, fishcakes, fried chicken you name it! Unfortunately, the markets close fairly early at 2300 so I saw the closing of many vendors. I only got an assortment of fish cakes and damn the sweet chilli here is spicy (for one who has the lowest tolerance to spice). The one complaint I had was the rubbish, there weren’t many bins so there was just a lot of used cups, plates and other food stuff just lying around everywhere so if you do come here, please put your rubbish in the bin.

Dongdaemun Design Plaza is a nice place to check out because it’s accessible 24/7. There are pianos for you to play and the building is very futuristic. It was almost midnight and people are just chilling, playing on the pianos and just relaxing. There’s also no harm in wandering around the streets at night and just enjoying the neon lights, the hundreds of electric wires strung across the poles and the empty but open stores. Another thing I realised is that most people walking around, even at this time, are females just walking alone and simultaneously on their phones. Seoul is a very safe city.

Where the city never sleeps is Hongdae. This is where all the clubs are located. Even at 3am on a Monday morning, there are long queues into clubs and a lot of traffic on the roads. There is definitely a lot of energy here. But if you’re like me and wanted some peace and quiet, try and find a café however there aren’t too many in the area. There are internet and book cafes that are often open 24/7 if you just want to relax before you take the train back to the airport.

Finally, what I want to talk about last is arguably the most important for a layover: the airport. Incheon International is a gigantic airport with many facilities so even if you do stay at the airport, there are plenty of ways to pass the time. There are Nap zones for sleeping located in various places across the airport, some are near gates and some are secluded. Make your way to the Transfers lounge and there is a large nap zone and even showers free of charge. There are many gardens, a casino, movie theatre, ice skating and many more. Free transit tours are also available but obviously they don’t run overnight.

The verdict is Seoul is a great place for an overnight layover, whether or not you want to leave the airport. It has the night life and it has the airport facilities. Although, I felt I didn’t enjoy it as much as I could as I was only there for a few hours at an unusual time so I couldn’t take in the full experience. I feel like layovers are good for places you know and already visited so you don’t waste time and eat that yummy food that you’ve been craving or go to that magical place of yours. But, hey, if you’re here by chance, why not go out and explore the nightlife of Seoul?

Thanks for reading this far (or if you’ve scrolled down), I did not expect to write this much for my first blog. If you have any comments, if you liked it, hated it, please let me know at [itsjefisfree@gmail.com](mailto:itsjefisfree@gmail.com) or through my socials.

Opal Hacks on Sydney Transport

Did you know that the Opal card has many, many perks? You may think Sydney Transport is expensive but the Opal card that serves all major transportation across Sydney is easily hackable if you know the rules. This affects trains, buses, light rail, metro and ferries.

**Save on off-peak travel**

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) advertises off peak fares as a 30% discount however, it’s better to think of it as a 30% increase in fares so you’re mentally prepared to save. This is generally the most straightforward way to maximise your savings. The peak hour times only apply to metro/trains and differ according to the station where you tapped on. Peak hour mostly covers 0600 to 0800 and 1600 to 1830 Monday to Friday.

Make sure you tap on before or after peak hour otherwise even if you’re a minute late or early then it will cost you significantly more. It’s not uncommon to see a large group of people waiting outside the gates waiting for the clock to tick past the peak hour threshold before tapping on. Note that your tap off time is not considered, only the time when you tap on.

**Zone based travel**

All fares are distanced based and separated into different zones. You can save by ensuring you don’t travel just over the threshold. For example, Blacktown to Central costs $3.60 (adult on peak, as of Dec 2019) while Blacktown to Town Hall, only one stop more, will cost $4.82 because it falls under the next distance zone. So instead of catching the train one more stop, you can either walk if it’s within walking distance (which Town Hall is) or catch the bus utilising the transfer discount. Obviously, this case applies if you have some time to spare and you’re not in a rush.

**Transfer discounts**

The most cost-saving benefit of the Opal card is that trips taken within an hour of each other are considered one single trip. Hence if you take the bus and get off at 1200, as long as you tap on again before 1300 it will count as one trip and potentially cost you nothing. For example, if you travel to one place and stay there for less than an hour, the return trip will be free. Otherwise, you can utilise this method to go to many places for a small fraction of the price. So, if you take the train from Central to Town Hall then et off and go back on and catch the train to Circular Quay and then catch the train to Museum, 3 train rides will cost the price of one.

The more commonly used feature is switching between modes of transport such as from bus to train or vice versa. When you switch, you get a large discount ($2 for adults, $1 for child/concession/senior). Often this makes a short bus trip cost only a few cents.

**Weekly travel reward**

Once eight trips are completed in a week (counting from Monday to Sunday), all trips following are half price. This is just a nice perk if you’re travelling anyways. Note the transfer discount when switching between modes of transport is also halved.

**Sunday travel cap**

All travel, regardless of how many trips you take is capped at $2.80 (as of Dec 2019, except $2.50 for seniors). So, you can use Sundays to your advantage to travel far and wide on the Sydney network, or catch those relatively expensive ferries.

Bologna: touristy without the tourists

If you were wondering (or maybe not), there’s no ‘g’ sound in Italian. It’s pronounced like the ‘ñ’ in Español or like ‘bolonya.’ Anyways, if you’re ever travelling between Rome, Venice or Florence, Bologna is a worthy destination to add to your itinerary. Unlike the other three, it lacks the crowds of tourists in European summer yet remains a tourist city where most Italians know English or cater towards tourists.

Walking the streets of Bologna, you can just feel the strong sense of culture. From the never-ending porticoes to the red roofs to the people, a strong sense of community remains in your face for most of the time. I saw a re-enactment parading a historic event, Extinction Rebellion die-in, a film festival and a student night with live music all during my 2 day stay. What made my time even more worthwhile was meeting a very friendly Kurdish-Swede at my hostel who showed me around and enhanced my interactions and understanding of Bologna.

If none of that excites you, Bologna is famous for its food. I have to say, out of around 30 gelatos I had in Italy, 3 of the top 5 are in Bologna. Just the way they make it is so creamy, fresh and flavoursome! You could stopover in the capital of the Emilia-Romagna region just to try food, a destination in itself. My only regret is I didn’t try enough.

Surreal Venice nights

Breaking down stereotypes when travelling