

SEOUL

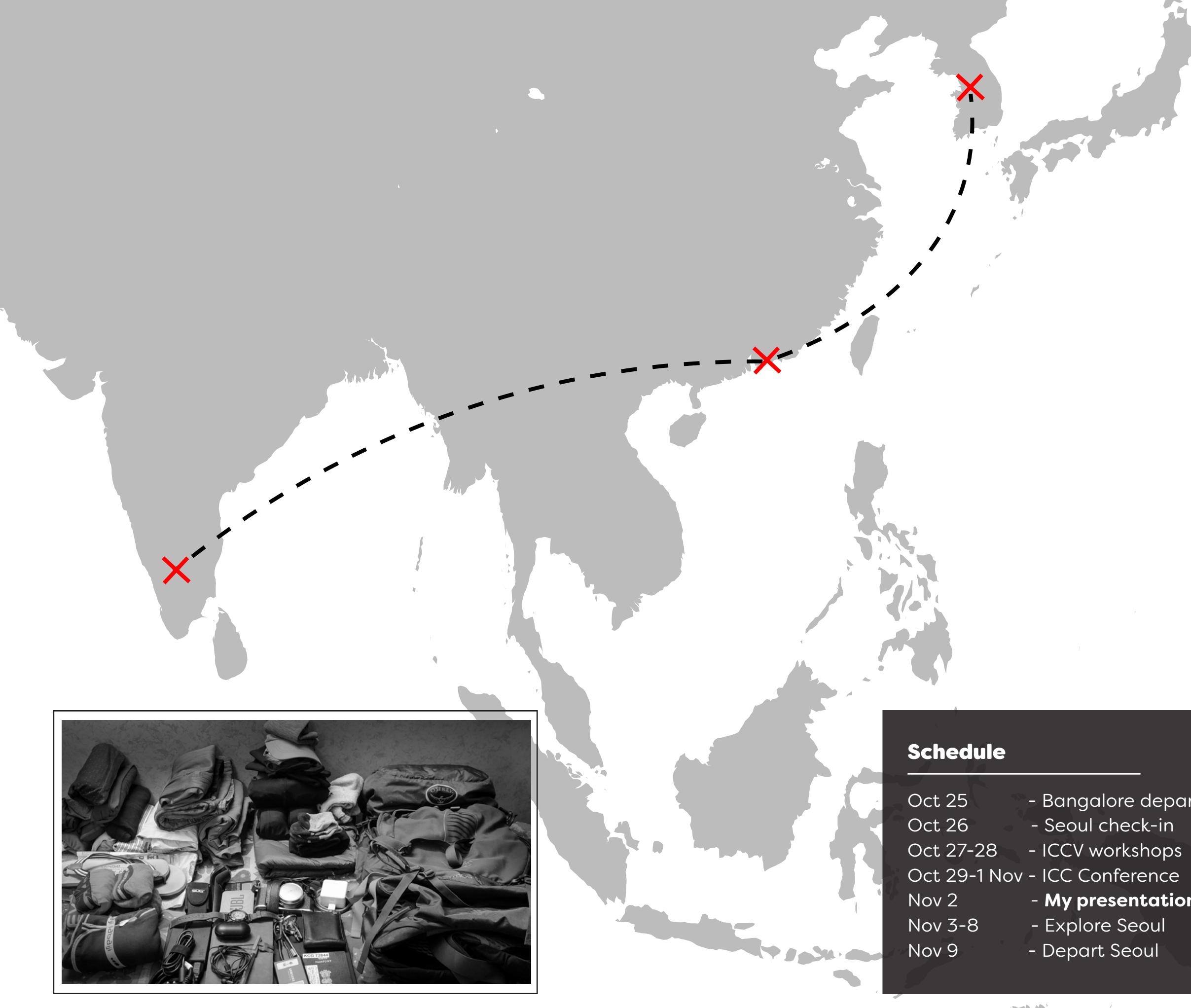
KLN's travelogues, Nov 2019



Eighteen months of my research and engineering work finally culminated as a technical paper acceptance in the AutoNUE workshop at the ICCV-2019 conference. The venue was Seoul, South Korea. It was a week-long conference, so I took a week off after the event to explore Seoul. It was my first time in the country. I had no itinerary what so ever and had not researched anything about the city. My office sponsored the flight journey and accommodation for the first week, and then I was on my own. Held up with work till the day of travel, the only effort I had put in was to book a stay at a hostel recommended by a friend I had made during my recent Nepal travel. With a place to stay, everything else would fall into place once I get there, I figured. And it turned out to be one heck of a solo trip unlike any of my past experiences!

Here are some of my vivid memories from the trip.





Schedule

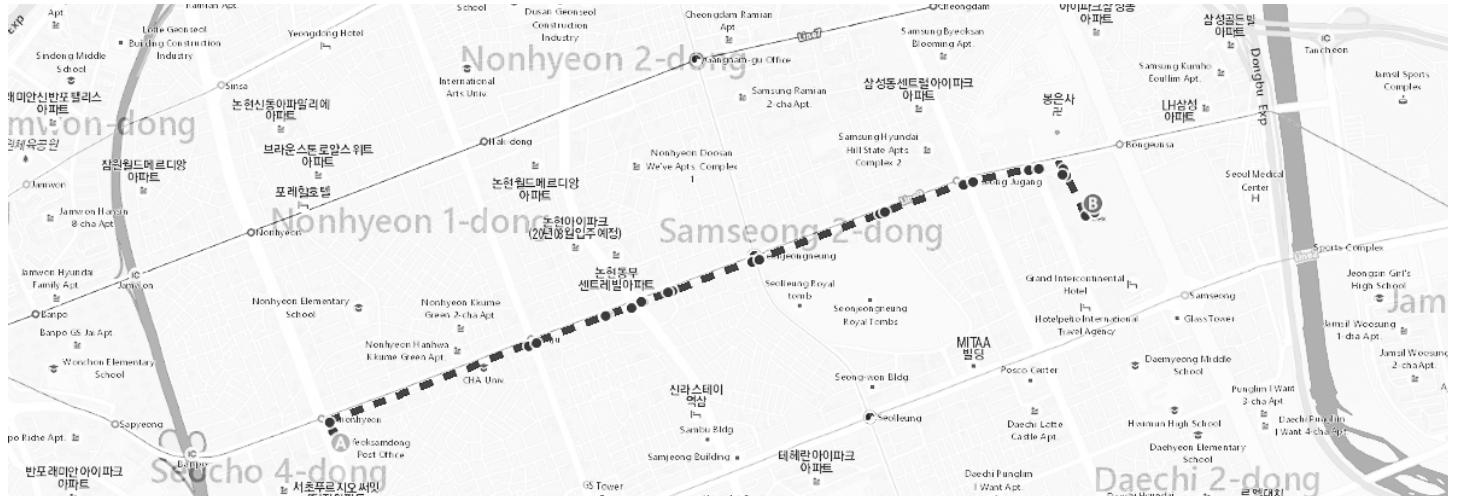
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| Oct 25 | - Bangalore departure |
| Oct 26 | - Seoul check-in |
| Oct 27-28 | - ICCV workshops |
| Oct 29-1 Nov | - ICC Conference |
| Nov 2 | - My presentation |
| Nov 3-8 | - Explore Seoul |
| Nov 9 | - Depart Seoul |



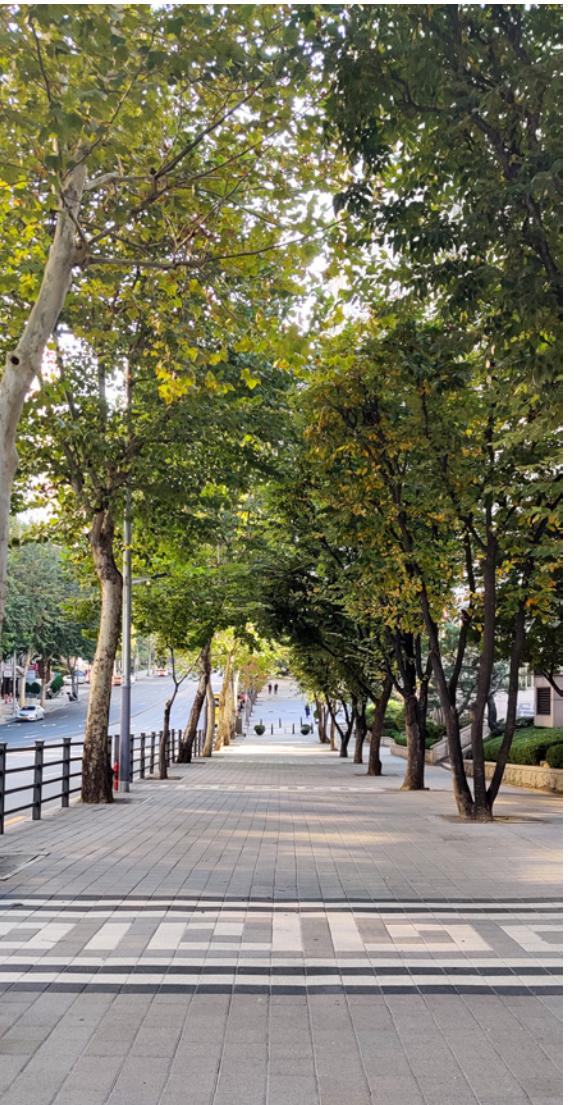
I was lucky to get a stay at the Le Meridien. Even more to get a free upgrade to the master suite. Being on the high floor came with added benefits. For a week I enjoyed beautiful sunrises from my hotel window. The night view was equally amazing too.



A daily walk of 45 mins from my hotel to the conference venue. The Coex plaza.



The route to Coex



Lush green trees and colorful flowers decorated the walkway.







Urban Vistas

The scenes were vibrant.
The compositoins were endless.
And my X100F was just perfect.
The love for **monochrome**.

The Conference - ICCV 2019



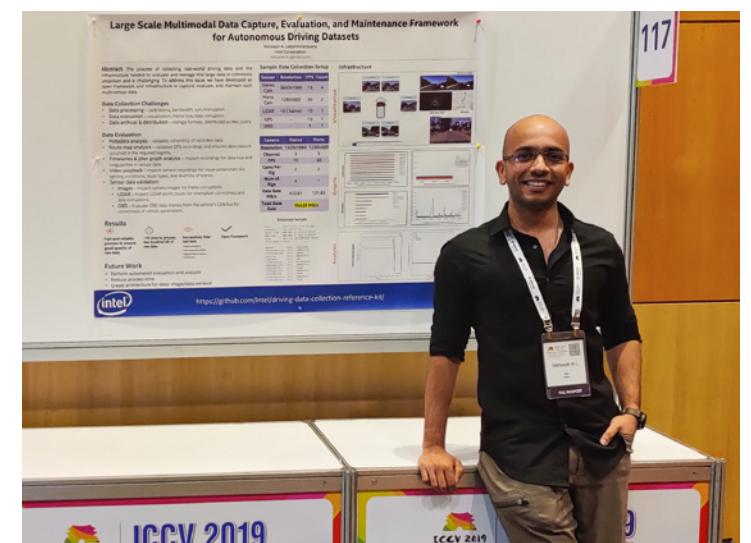
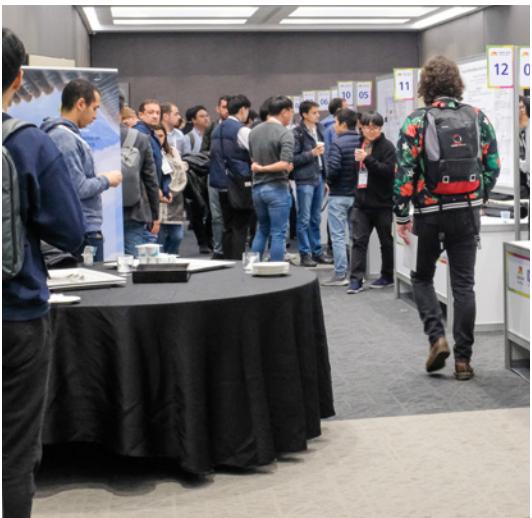
The International Conference on Computer Vision (ICCV) is the premier computer vision conference in the world. Top researchers in the field gather here to present their work, discuss and collaborate on new ideas. As an aspiring researcher working in computer vision, it is a big deal to have paper acceptance here. Although mine was a workshop paper and not a conference paper, it had

the same profound effect on me. Many of the professors from the grad schools I was applying to were here. Hundreds of graduate and post-graduate students presented their ideas. It was fun to talk to them directly about their work. In short, it was the nirvana for computer vision nerds.

explain it to the visiting audience. There were hundreds of posters per session, and there were three sessions per day, and there were five such days. To say it was a bit overwhelming would be an understatement!

I can go on for several pages describing my experience at the conference. But this is a travelogue. So I will limit it to this one page. What you see in these pictures here are talks presented by researchers at one of the many workshops. Others put up their work as posters and

Below is the poster of my work, and the researchers and professors from IIIT-H along with Anbu, my colleague from office. None of this would be possible without their support. I hope we get to collaborate more in the future, leading to more such conferences and travel across the world!

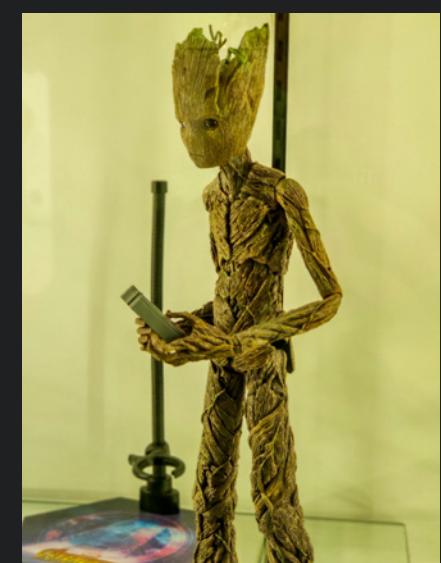
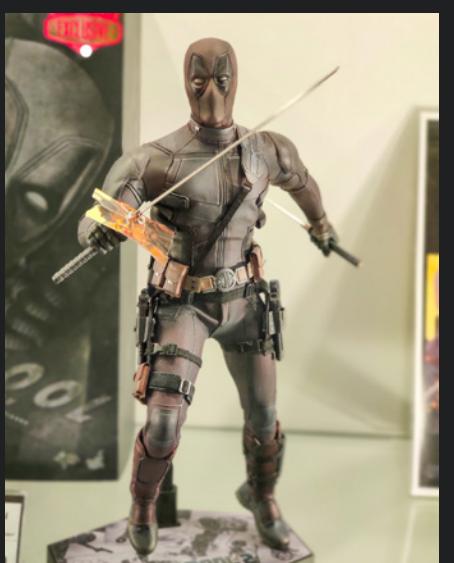


The Coex plaza



Yes, those are books. Yes, that is a library—the Starfield library in the Starfield mall at the Coex plaza. Probably the largest open-air library there is. This Coex plaza is so vast that it has three separate malls inside the building.





A visit to the Marvel store. Who is your favourite?



The Custom tailor shop next to the hotel. Fancy a bespoke suit? Reminds me of the Kingsman.

There was no dearth of Baristas in Seoul. One at every corner. I visited this cozy Barista every evening on the walk back to the hotel. Nothing like a cup of hot chocolate to beat the cold.



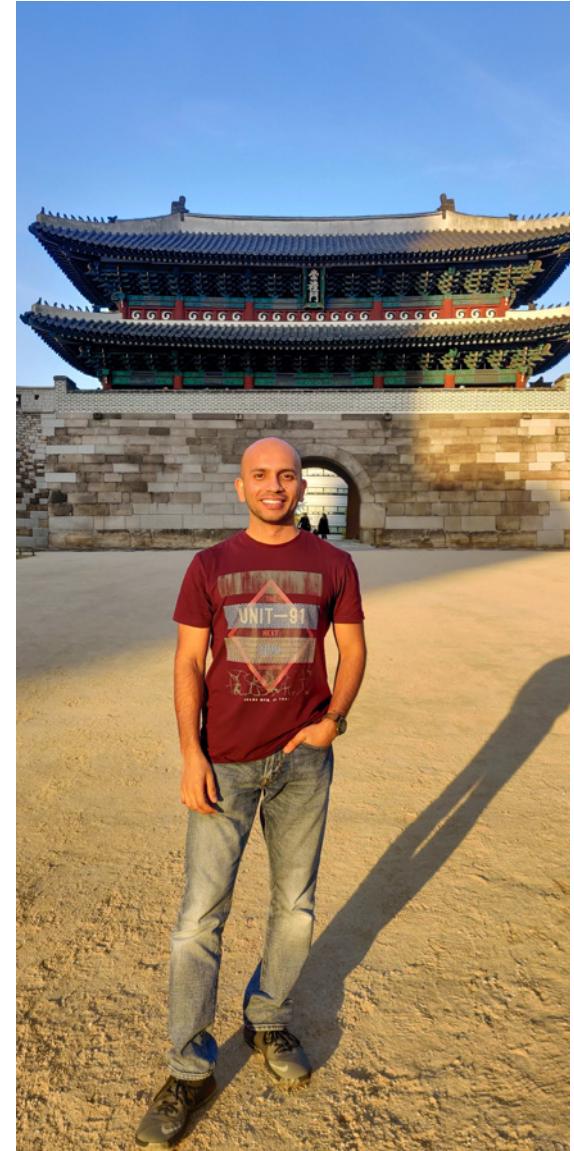
Sungnyemun Gate



A visit to Namdaemun

Namdaemun gate, officially also known as Sungnyemun Gate, is one among the eight imperial gates of Seoul. Namdaemun is also one of the many local markets in the city. This part of the old city. On one of the evenings during the conference, we decided to go out and visit the old city. I had a week after the conference to explore, but others did not. So we made the most of the free time we got. Until now, we were in the financial district for the conference, where people dressed trim and were extremely fashionable. Namdaemun was a stark difference to that. The old city, old market, loads of street food. The vibe is similar to all the markets in India, but just that it is far more cleaner here.

We explored till nightfall and then ventured into a local bar to sit and chill. I did not find any pictures of that bar, but it seemed like a shady place. The host treated as well, though. And then I got introduced to Soju!



One of the many street food stalls



Chicken broth. Not a Korean delicacy, though.

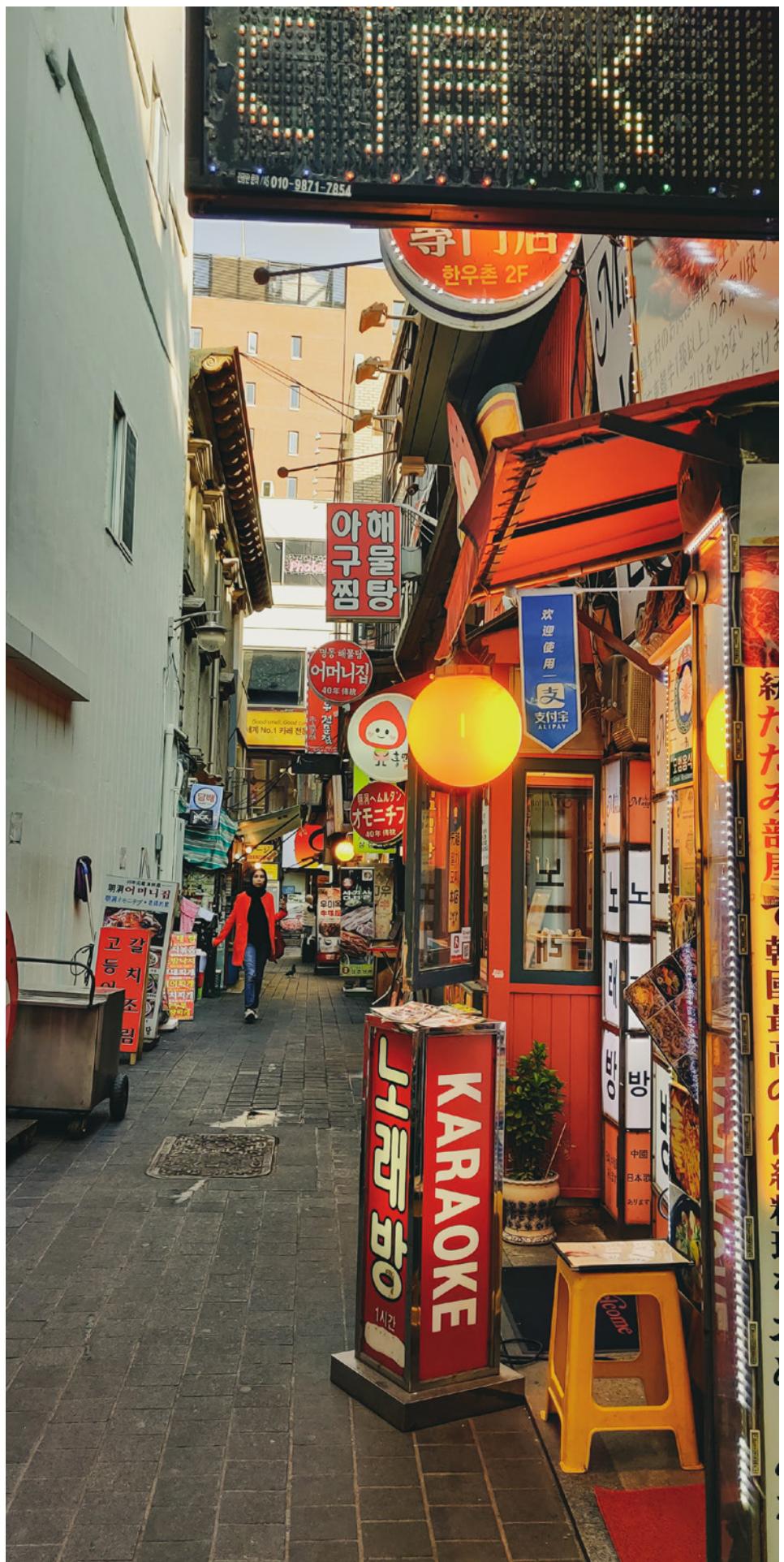
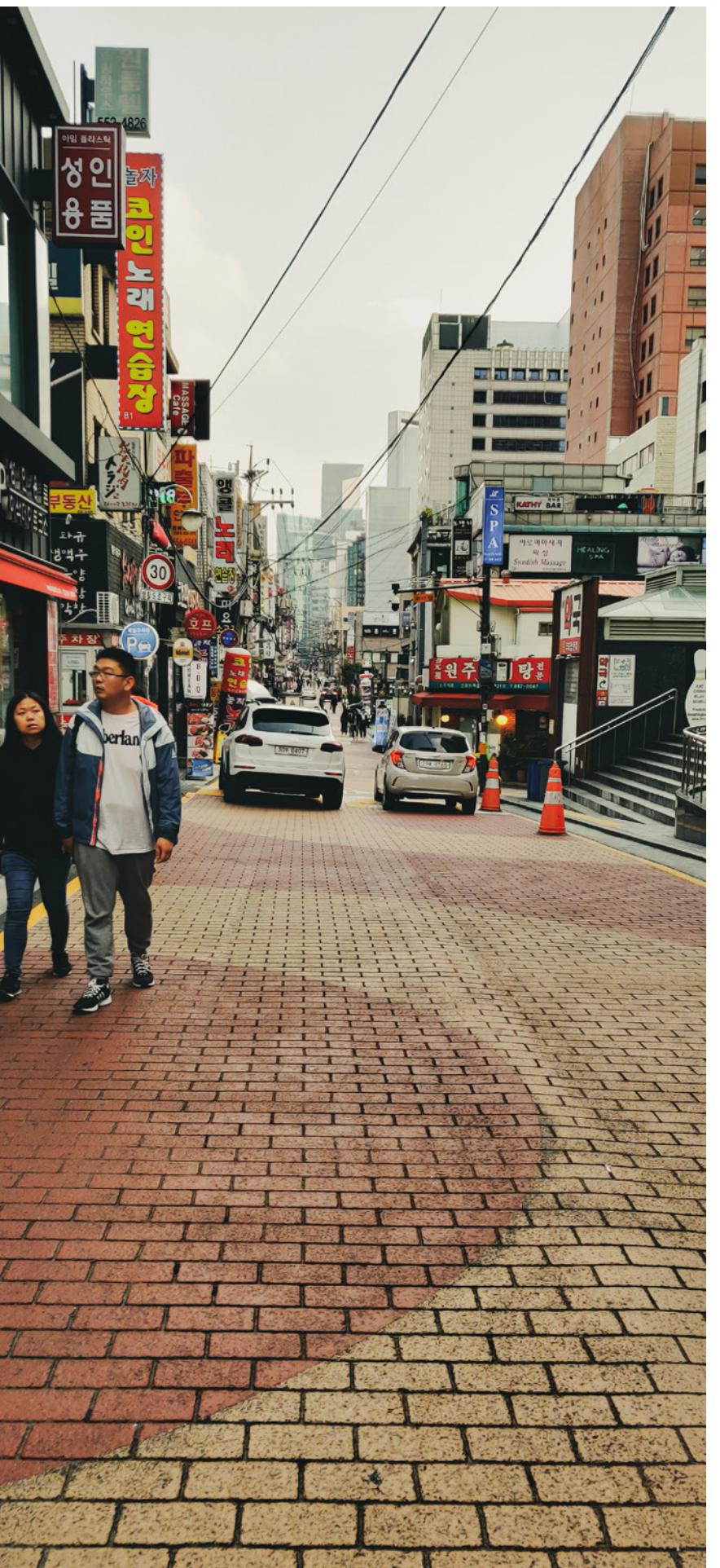


My first Soju. Ahhh!



Namdaemun at night.







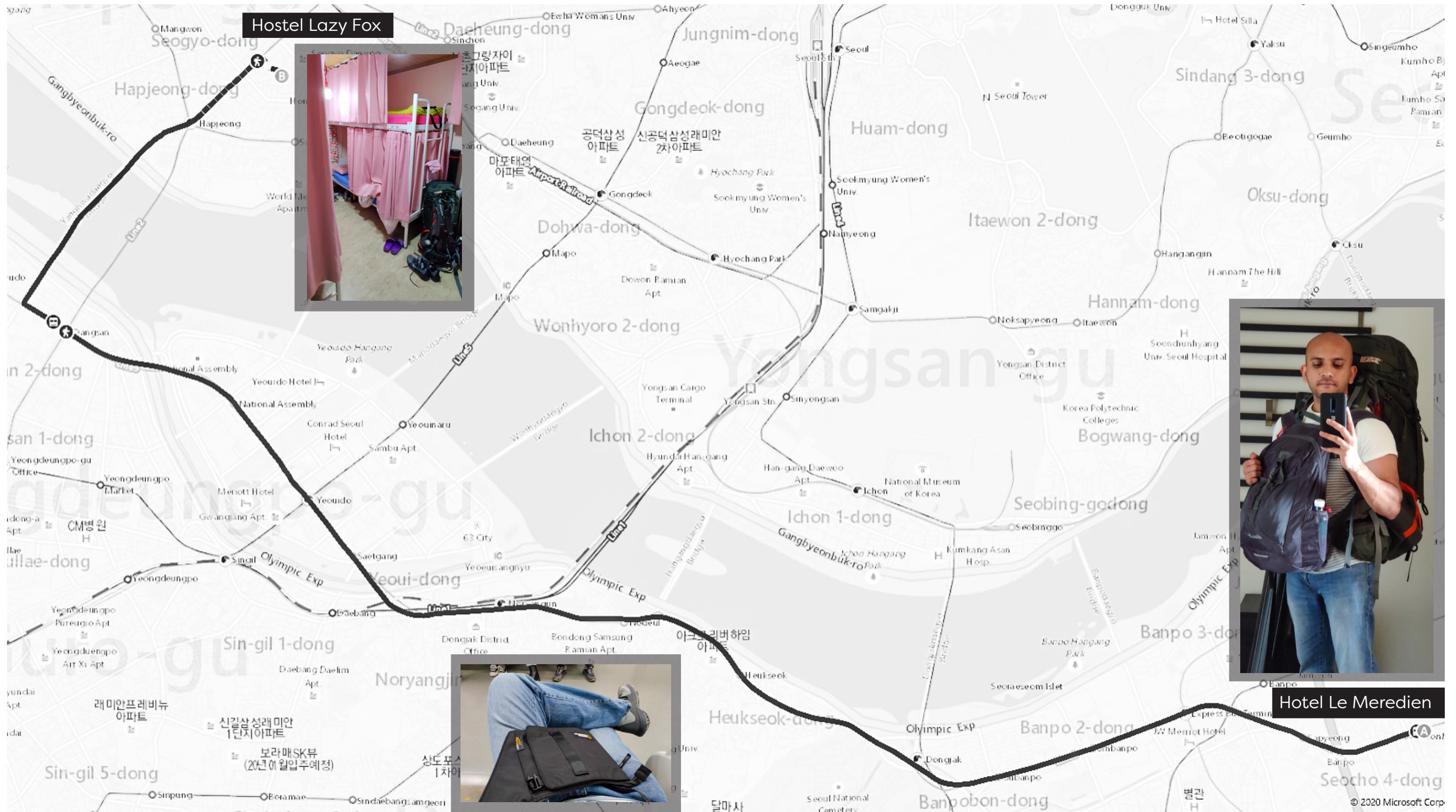
Last day in Gangnam

The conference came to an end. New friends, temporary friends, all bid adieu, and took off. As the last day in Gangnam, it felt appropriate to spend a few minutes at the Gangnam sculpture. That's right. It is a sculpture, installed by the government, to commemorate the Psy's Gangnam Style music video that went viral across the world. Seoul, you are so cool!

Gangnam is the financial district of Seoul. Also renowned for its high-end fashion. Now I know why the music video was titled 'Gangnam Style.' I felt like a hippie amidst them for a week. But it was now time to check-out from the lavish hotel and go backpacking. No more scholarly and corporate attire. It was time to go free.



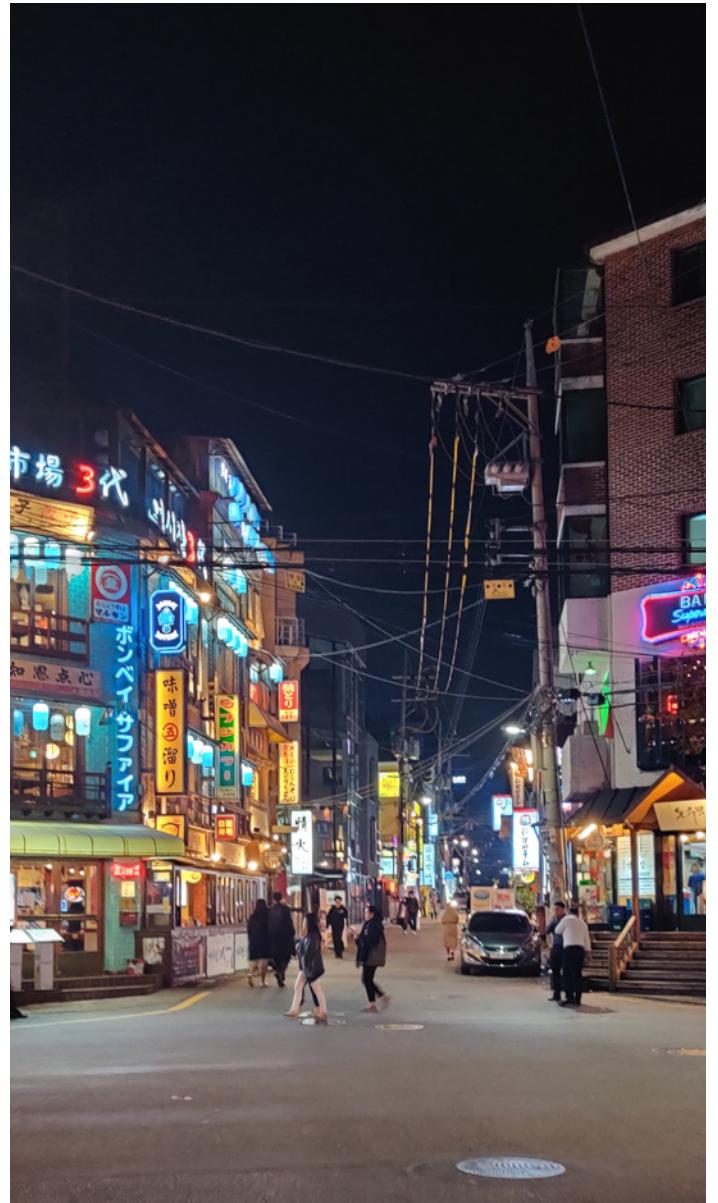
From a master suite to a tiny bunk bed



Couldn't resist buying this fancy NatGeo hip bag. Used heavily for rest of the trip.

The view from the hostel terrace was not bad, though.

Hostel Lazy fox in Hongdae was my stay for the week. Hongdae is the university area, mostly occupied by students. You can converse with people in English here. The area is also quite happening, with a good nightlife, plenty of cafes, restaurants, and pastries. People also are not as fancy as in Gangnam. They are chill. I felt the vibes here similar to Koramangala and Indiranagar in Bangalore.



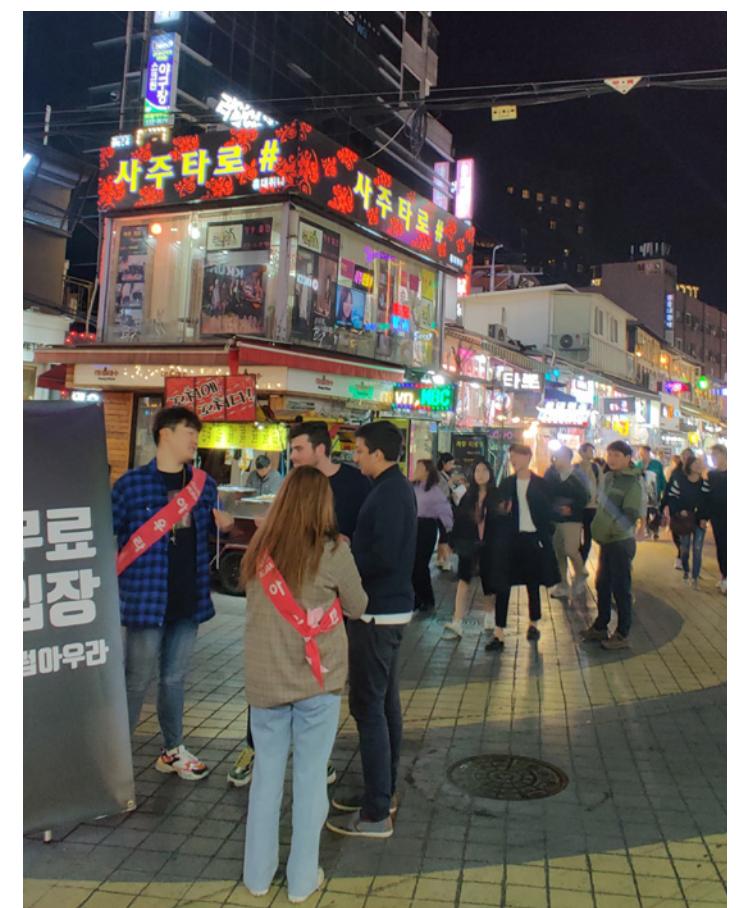
The Black-out night...

I made friends with two other Europeans, Timothy, and Elijah, who also checked-in at the hostel that evening. After a long casual discussion about our travels so far, we decided to go out for dinner. It was the all-you-can-eat barbecue night. For two hours, you can eat and drink as much as you want. Neither of the three had eaten anything since breakfast, so we went in guns blazing and had a feast. I am not good with hard meat, so I limited myself to only a few varieties. However, Soju was my new favorite drink. I had not had it after that night at Namdaemun. I had no conference or meetings to worry about the next day. So in the two hours, I consumed four bottles of Soju, apart from the one at the hostel. It was like a fruit punch, so I tried all the flavors available there.

By 10 pm, we were the only ones left in the restaurant, and the staff had to guide us out gently. Being German and French, Tim and Elijah gulped several jugs of beer. We were tipsy without a doubt. Hongdae is a

university area, so the nightlife scenes were good. We loafed around the neighborhood for a good one hour or so, talking to random people on the streets and asking the way to a karaoke bar. It was crazy fun to see Tim stop strangers on the road and ask about some random/unknown Korean who is supposedly fighting at the border. I have no clue who or what it was, but I could not stop laughing, looking at their reactions at Tim. And that is the last good feeling I had for that night. Nausea hit me, and it hit me hard. As we reached a square with a public washroom, I could not hold it anymore and went puking. And this continued for almost an hour until I drained out, but it would not stop. Poor Tim and Elijah waited for me kindly all along. They were talking to some other Russian couple over a smoke while I continued my business at the corner. And then, I suddenly realized someone was holding my hand and checking for my pulse. Talking to me in a French accent and telling me that it is all okay, I am alright, and that I am safe

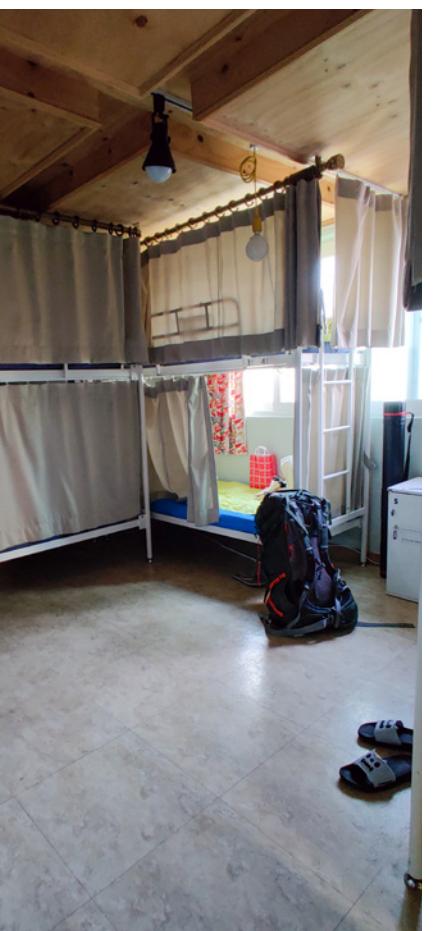
and my friends are here. I noticed a crowd, mostly travelers, had gathered around me in the square. I had no idea what had happened until I saw my watch and it read 2 am. What!? The last I remembered was around 12:40-ish. And that is when I realized I had completely blacked out! Damn! Tim and Elijah came back to me and were laughing at me. “Don’t worry bro, it happens. We’re here. We’ll take care of you,”—they said. I felt pathetic at myself as I had never lost control of myself like this. But also, I felt immensely happy and respectful of the two. They helped me get back on my feet, bought me bottles of water, and we started to get back to the hostel until I realized we were going in the wrong way! They had no internet and no google maps. I shared mine, and we got back on route. And to make it worse, the winter was settling in, and that night, the temperature plummeted to the lowest in the past two weeks. I had not expected any of this and was out with only a thin jacket. It was around 3 am when we finally reached the hostel. I was frozen and went directly to the shower. I sat under the hot shower for a good 30-40 minutes. With not a single ounce of strength left, I fell on the bed like a rock and passed out until later in the evening. This was the first time I had experienced anything like this. I was happy to be safe. I decided not to have any more meat and Soju for the remainder of the trip!



I shifted to a new bed the next day. Found an Indian restaurant two miles away and treated myself to some good Indian food. It had been about ten days since I had any Indian delicacies.

Spent the remaining of the day in planning the next four days properly, so that I make the most of my stay here.

The hostel had some hip wall art!



Bikes of
Seoul!

Changdeokgung Palace









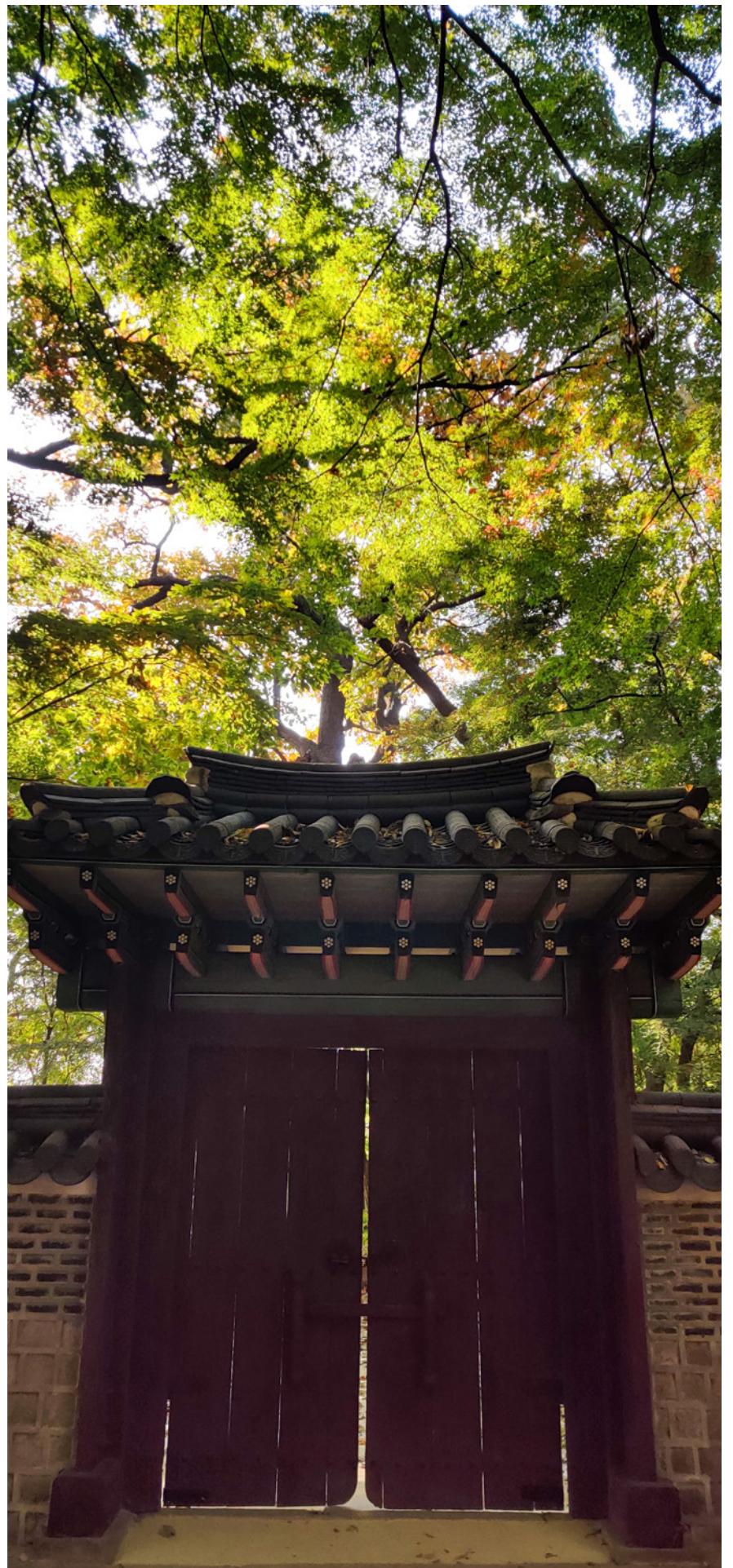
The Imperial Garden - attached to the palace is the private garden of the king and the queen.



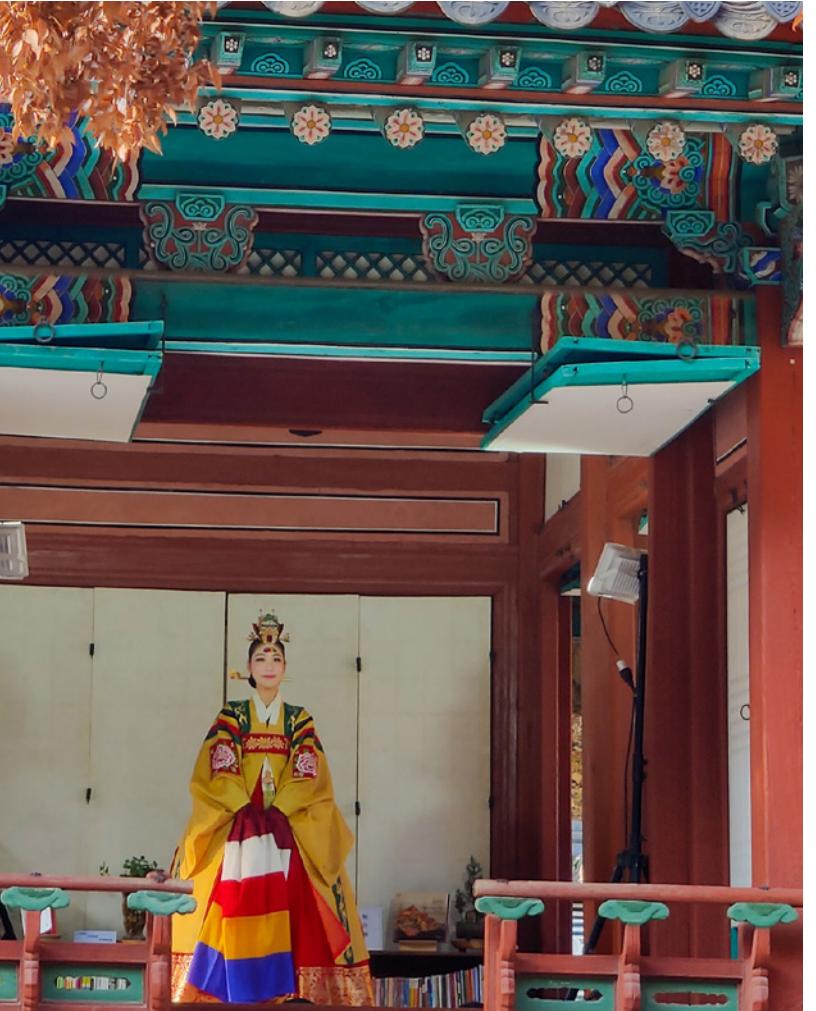
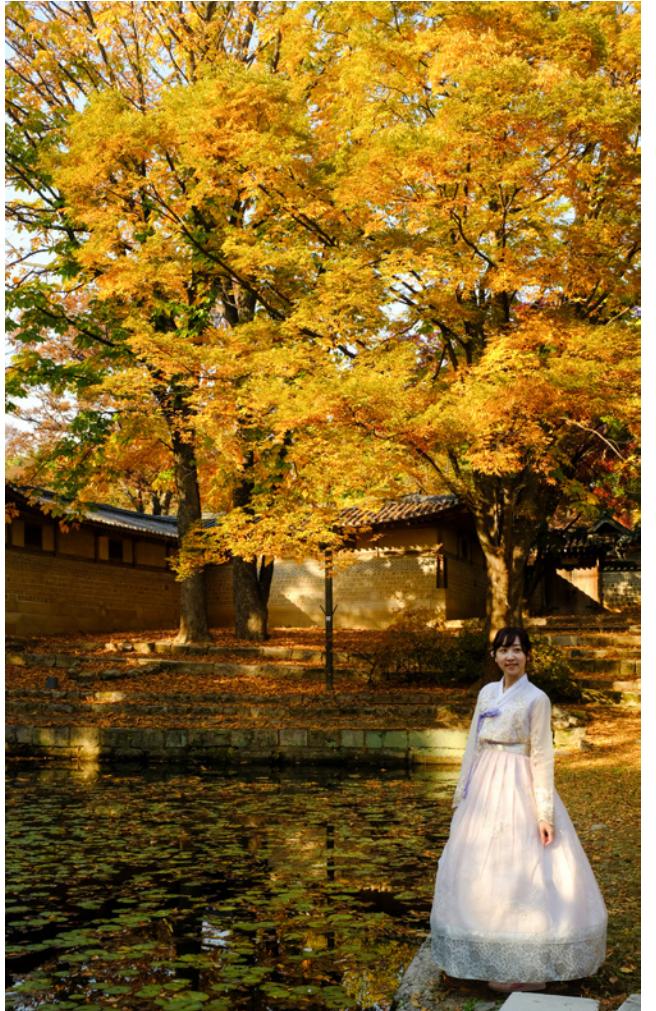


The colors were
spectacular!

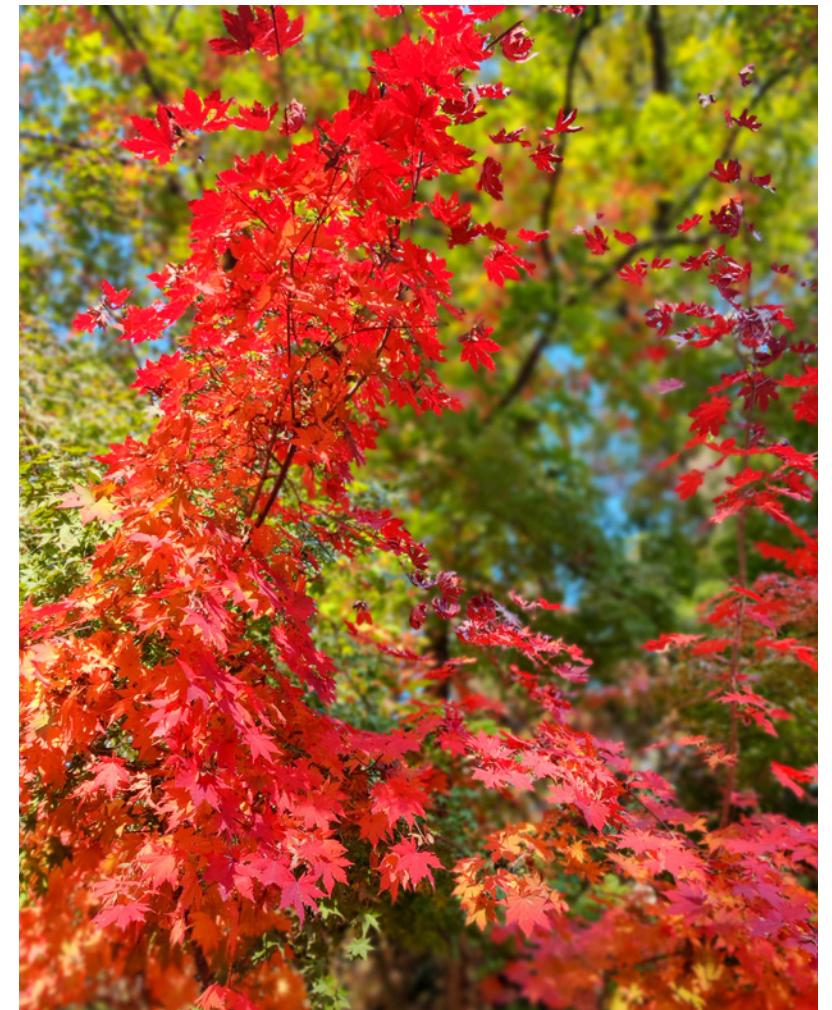
It is a Korean tradition to
dress up in imperial wear
when visiting these palaces
and gardens.







Couldn't resist the urge to get my picture clicked, nor could these pretty ladies. That ain't no doll!

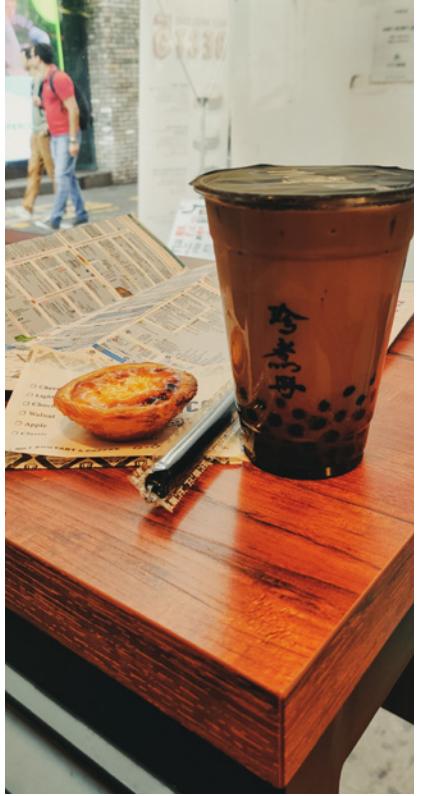


Bukchon Hanok Village - the traditional village between the two palaces. A 600-year-old urban environment.









Spent the next day roaming and shopping around the city. For souvenirs, electronics, gifts for family and friends.

Finally met Jiheon for dinner. Jiheon was a friend of Geet. They met on a cross-Mongolian train during Geet's semi-world tour a few years ago. Jiheon had helped me with the basics of how to navigate in Seoul. Google maps and navigation did not work here. Had to use other Korean apps. Also, Geet had sent some things to her, so I had to deliver them as well.

Jiheon took me to an authentic Korean restaurant in the city. After the recent mishap, I stuck purely to veg food. The pink radish soup was super tasty! She then gave me a few pointers on some of the chill places to hang out in the city and left.

The hot water bath/spa/sauna, or Jjimjilbang as they are called, is something I wanted to try but could not, unfortunately. I could not visit the DMZ either as it was closed.

Oh well, a bunch of things to do for the next time!



Seoul had an impressive subway and public transport system. I never had to use a cab during my entire stay (apart from the airport pick up and drop - courtesy of my office). Some of the escalators here were three stories high!

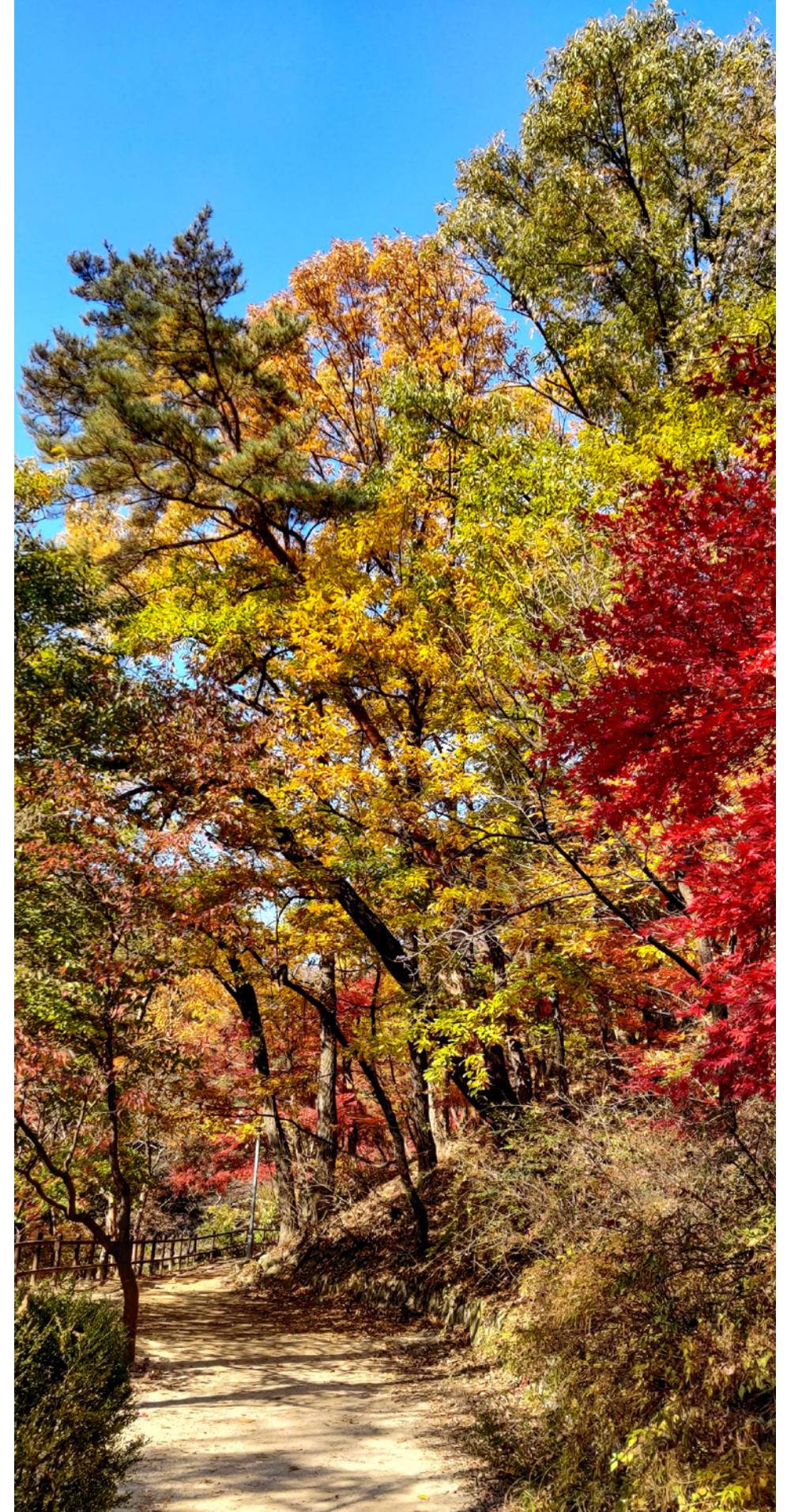
Bhukasan National Park Trek - doing what I do best.

Unlike cities, national parks are my comfort zone. Trekking in the wilderness is a joy like no other. I got to know about the national park from one of the hostel guys who had just returned from camping in the park. Knowing there was a national park nearby, and that I could reach there by metro, there was no way I was going to miss visiting it. The next day, I woke up early, had breakfast at the Indian restaurant, packed some food and essentials, and left for the trek.

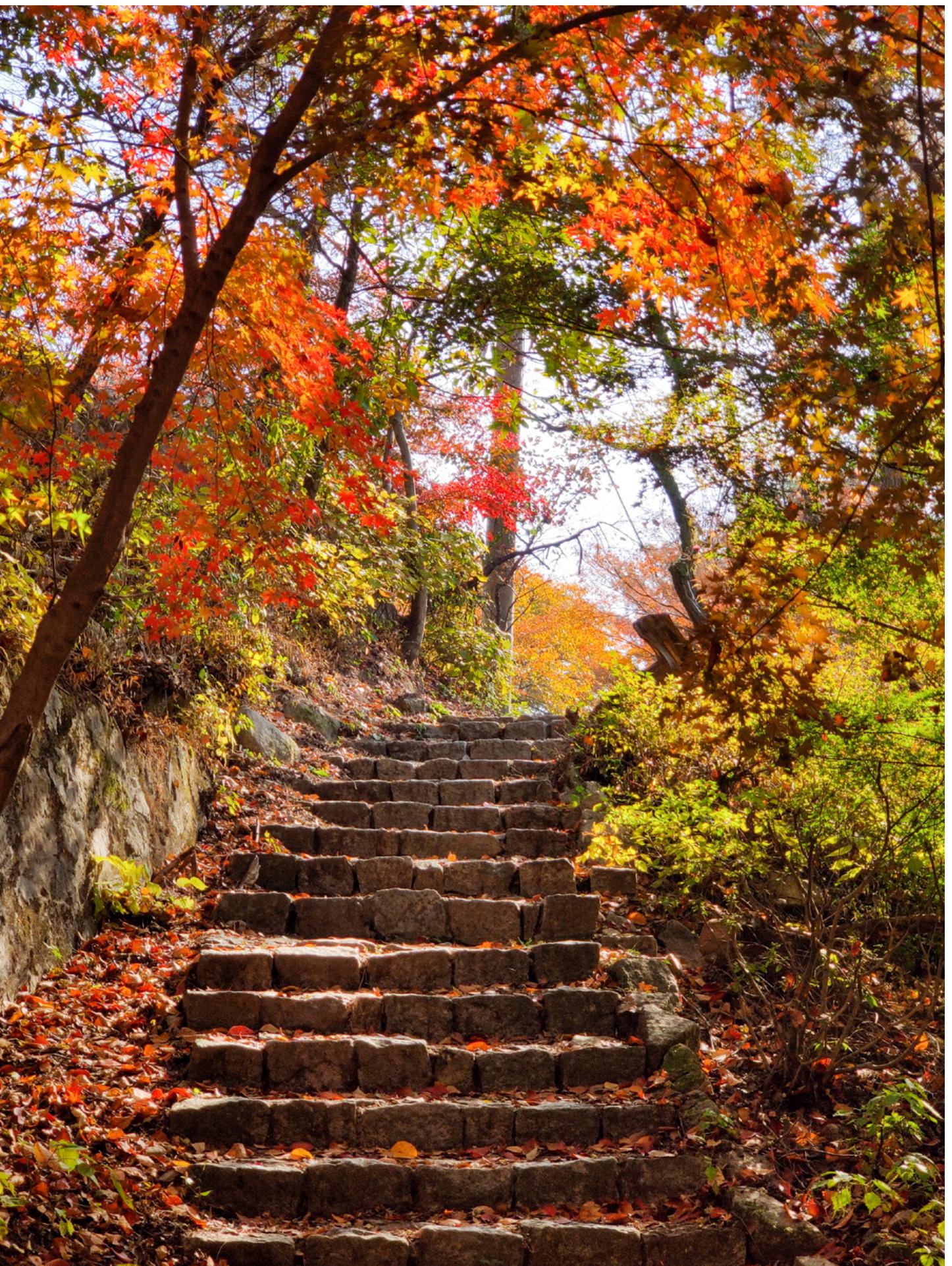
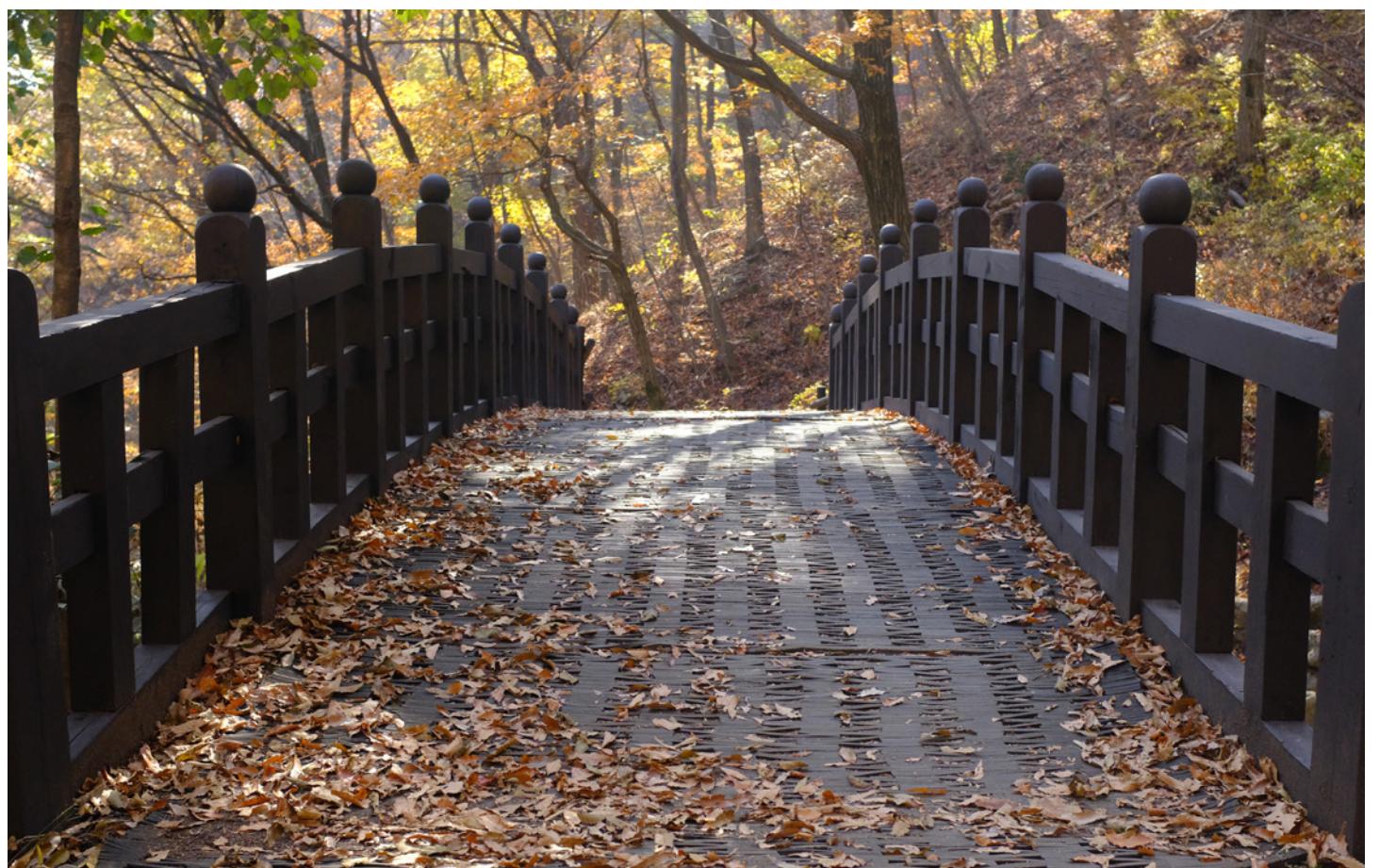
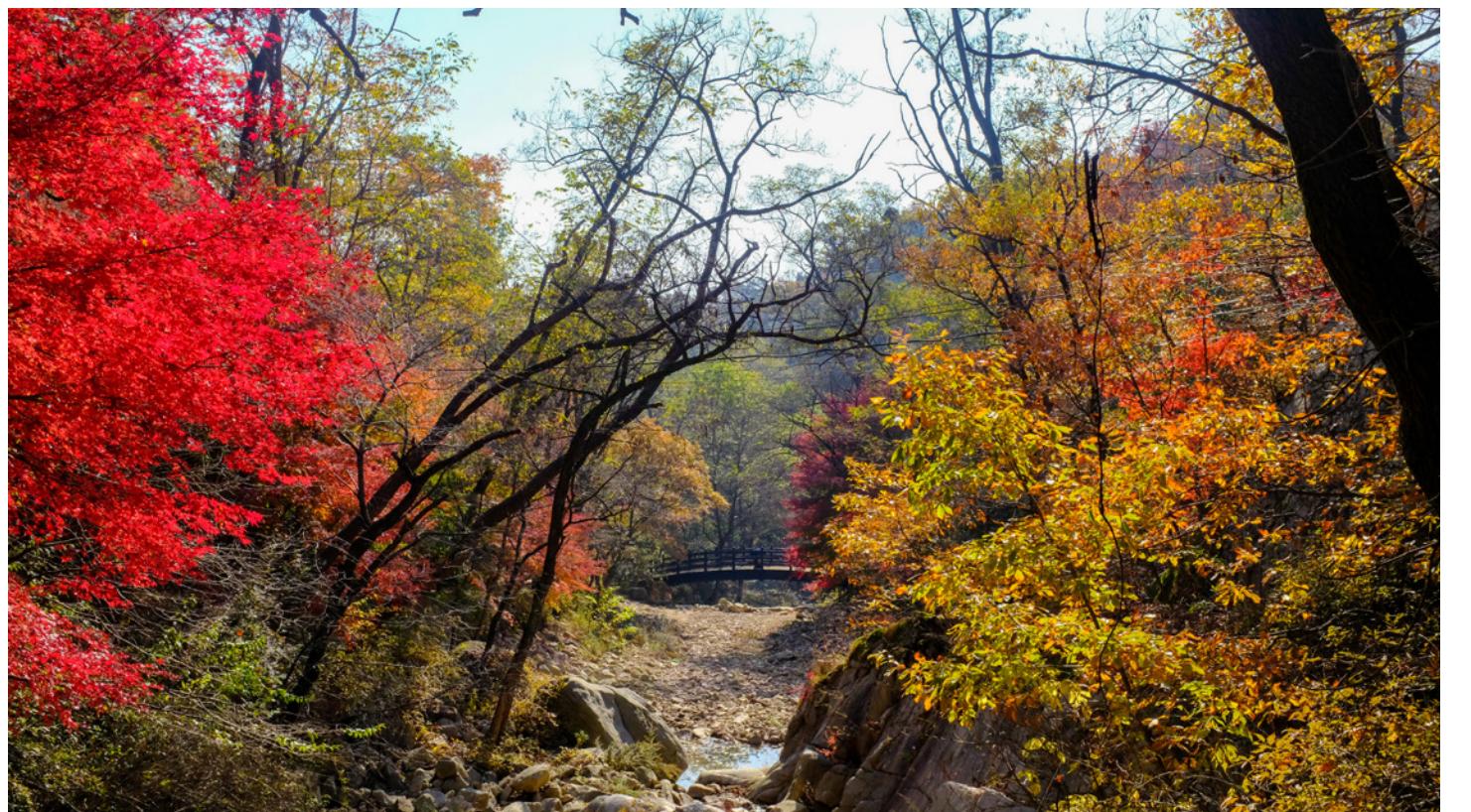
A long train ride followed by a short bus ride takes you to the park entrance. The ranger at the park entry was super nice and helpful. She helped me pick a trail, given that I had to return to the city by evening. There was even a free photo service. I trekked the 'Bogugmun' trail.

It was a 2.4km trail to the top. The trail was very well maintained. The first part of the trail, 500m or so, was gradual and easy. The next part was more arduous until the top. Slopes were steeper and rockier. But the route was scenic throughout and was painted by magnificent fall colors. I had no idea that South Korea had such a beautiful fall!

I shall let the pictures do the talking.





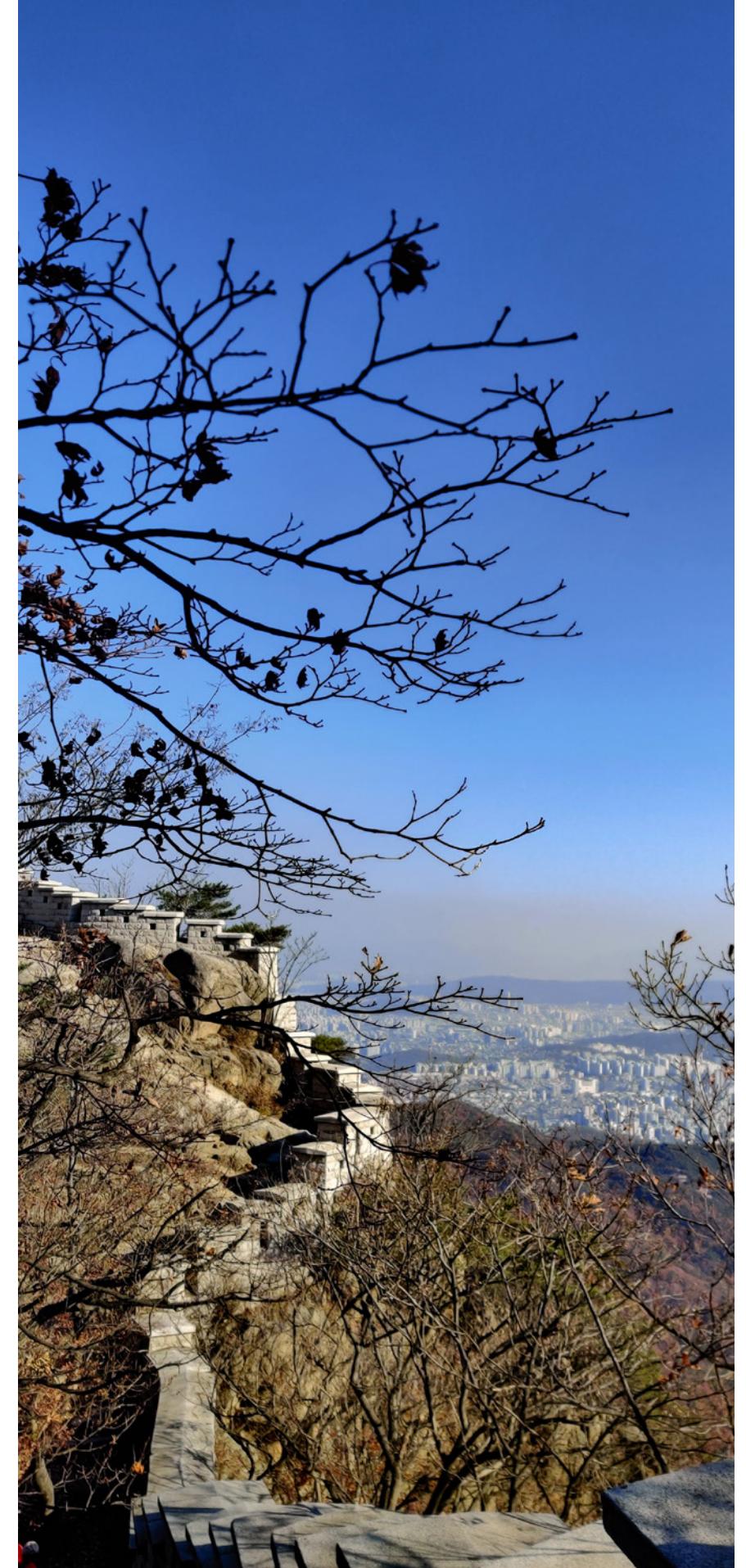
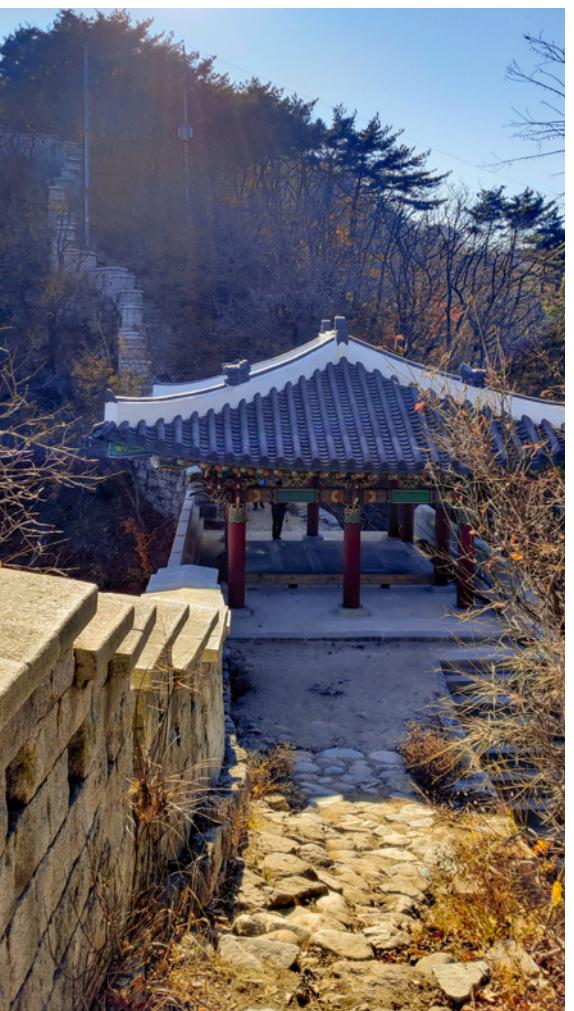
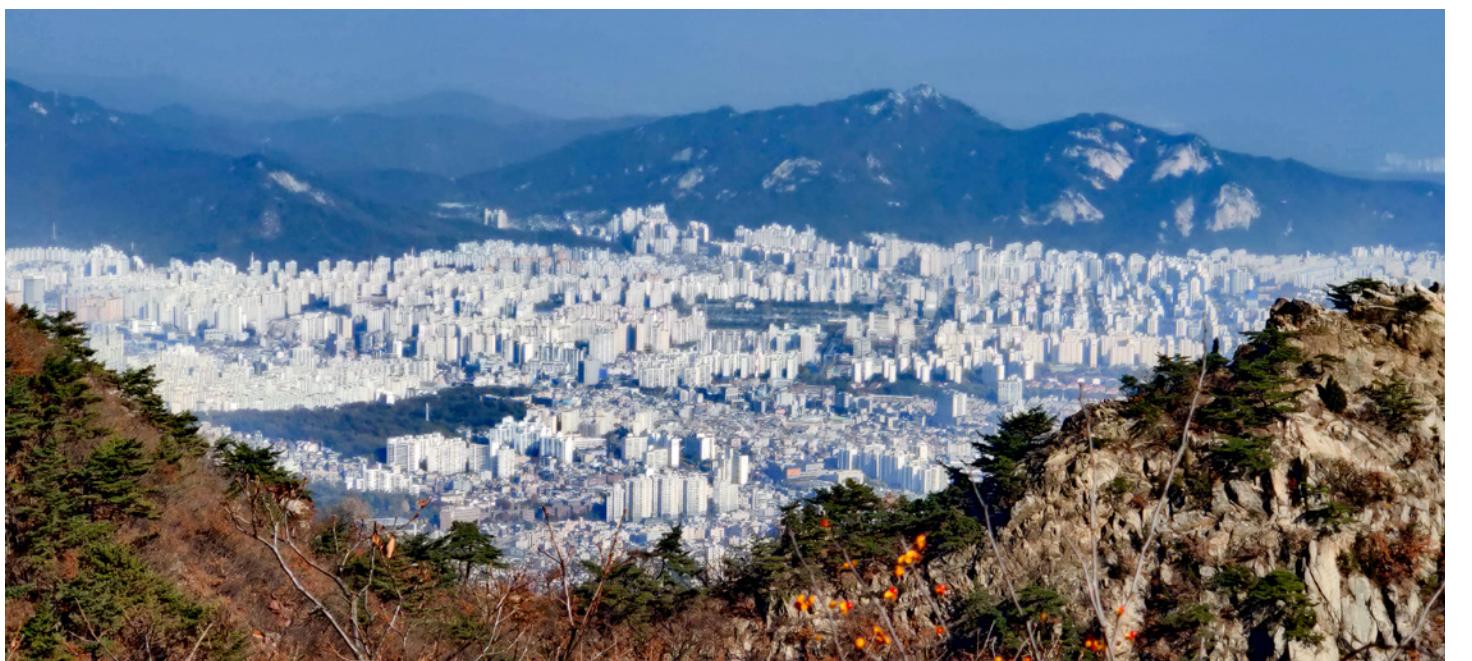
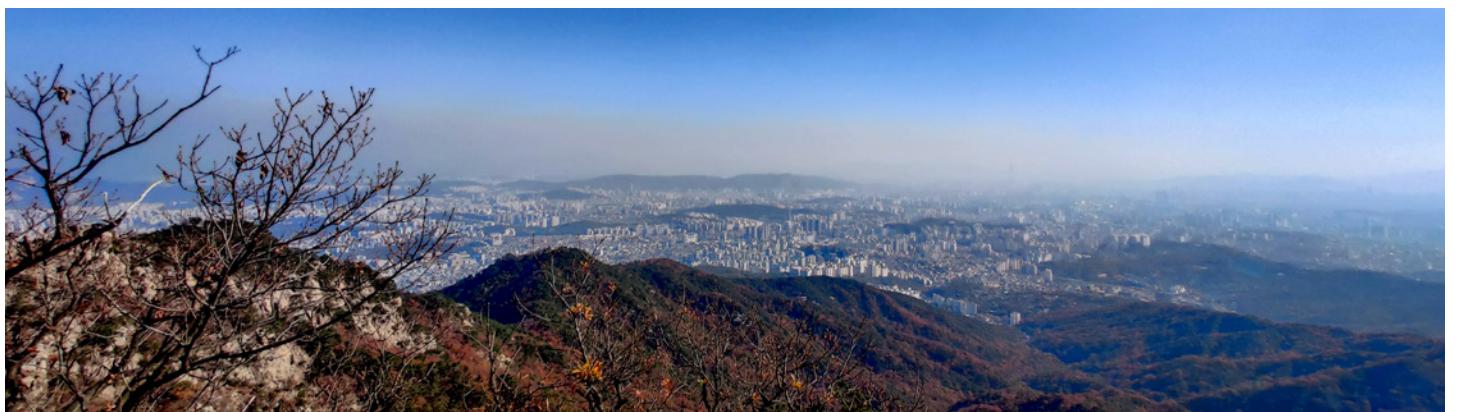


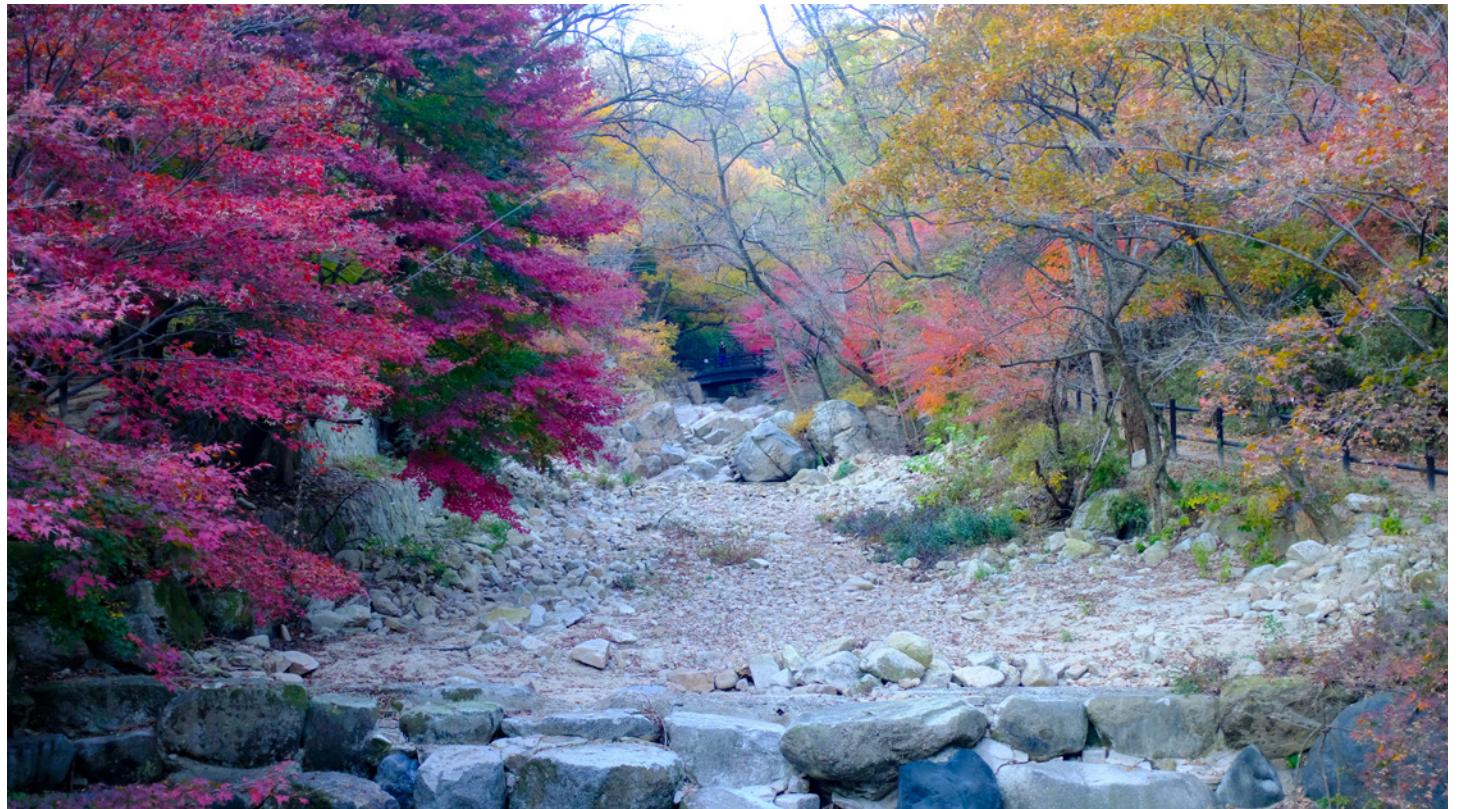


A happy soul



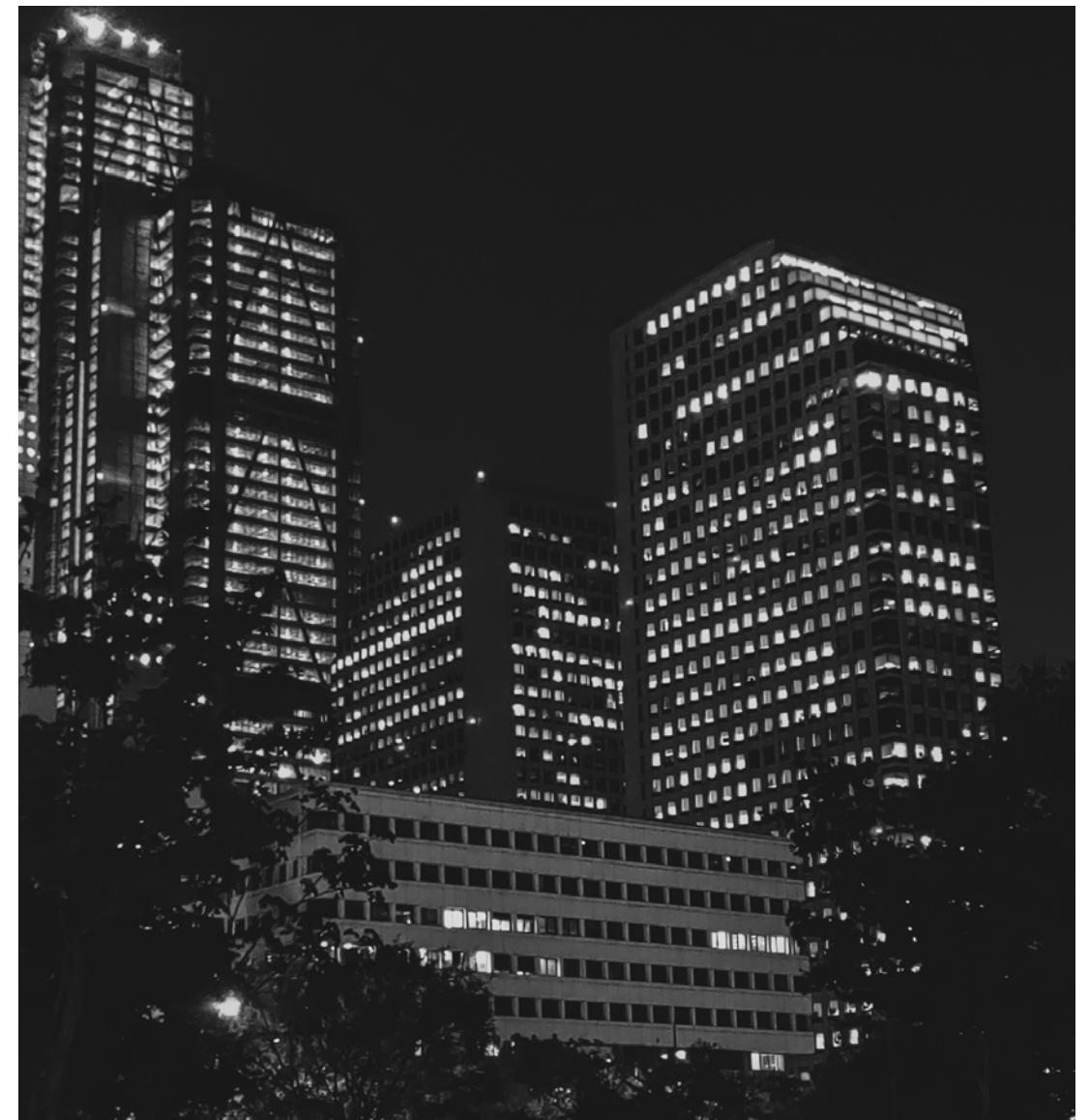
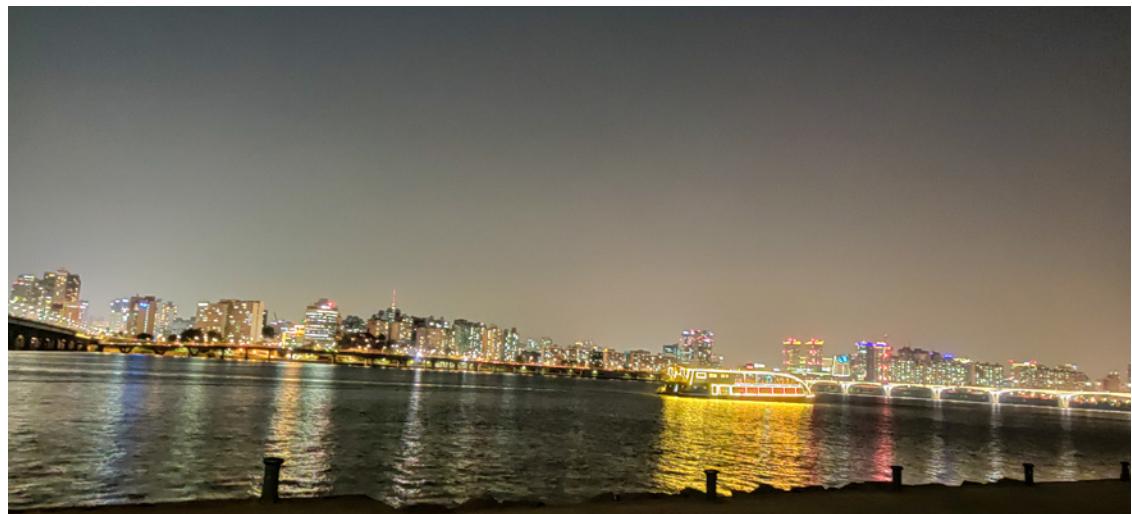
Views from the top





The last night

It was late evening when I reached the city from the national park. The next day was my return flight home. I wanted to spend the night in a calm place and reflect on the last two weeks. Jiheon had suggested Yeouido Hangang Park, among other places, and it seemed like the right place to spend the last night. It was a huge park situated on the riverfront, with a view of the city's colorful high-rises across the river. I had packed for a nice small picnic here and chilled for a while with good music. Reminiscing with content, I took a few last pictures and bid farewell to Seoul.





Boomdeyada! Seoul, 2019

"GAMSAHAMNIDA"



KLN's Travelogues are a series of travel memoirs by Nitheesh from his travels. Visit <http://nitheeshkl.in/blogs> for his other travelogues.

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