



S(e)oul eXchange

Honza Ustohal

Introduction

After these 4 months I can't even believe I was actually deciding whether I should come to Seoul or not. What was I thinking for God's sake. What would possibly be better than spending 4 months in a country where girls wear heels and short skirt, the McDonalds has a delivery service and where tomorrow really means today, because there is a 8 hour time difference.

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"So it begins..."

September 2011

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8.9.2011 // 안녕하세요

Writing a diary does not work for me. The longest time I was able to regularly update a diary was about 2 weeks. The problem is not lack of interesting stuff to write down. The problem is either too much stuff to write down or good ol' laziness. Especially the latter, which also causes that there is still no post about my Kenyan adventure, even though those 15 days were überawesome. Anyway, here I will try to write down some interesting points about my 4 months in Seoul, South Korea. Btw. I have no idea what "soul exchange" could possibly mean, I just liked the joke in it. And if you don't consider it funny...

28.8.

- Emirates cabin crew's portfolio of languages is very impressive
- The last Pirates of Caribbean are boring. On the other hand, The Best Movie Ever Sold is hilarious.
- Dubai Airport is boring. Everything is supersized and full of bling. And there is not enough space to sit down. Seriously, people, 30 seats at the gate are not enough for a flight that is operated by 500+ Airbus A380. However, the airport is quite cheap. A McD menu is 24 of their funnymoney (United Arab Emirates Dirham, to be precise), which is around 4,60 Euros. And you don't have to pay extra for ketchup.
- Airbus A380 is H-U-G-E! It's like a A320 after three years on steroids. And the ICE on-board entertainment system is supercool. They did not have Fight Club or Bring Me The Horizon on it, though.
- Incheon airport has a cool train between the terminal and main building.
- It was supercool that my mentor picked me up at the airport. I was just a little disappointed that he did not have a big sign with my name:)
- Seoul is less dense than I expected. It perfectly fulfills the idea of an Asian supercity, though.

- Kia, Hyundai, Kia, Daewoo, Hyundai, Samsung (!), Kia, Ssangyong, Chinese Mercedes rip-off, that's how the streets look like. Ah, there is one BMW, nice. The import tax on non-Korean cars is so high that people can't afford them (I heard).
- I think I might be a little too old for a shared room in a dorm, where toilets and showers are shared with another 10 people. Makes me miss my spacebox...
- Korean TV shows are just insane!

29.8.

- Cold noodles for lunch. Seriously?
- KIMCHIIII!!

30.8.

- Rice + soup + Kimchi = Korean breakfast. No, thanks, once was more than enough.
- No internet access for us yet. Sad sad situation. Thanks god for Kim's network.
- Orientation!
- Mobile phones everywhere. IM-ing or watching TV, everybody plays with his phone.
- Once you get used to their kind of beauty, Korean girls are pretty.
- Immigration office is a bureaucratic mess. Thanks god we had an appointment set by the uni.
- A/C everywhere. It's quite uncomfortable to change environments so often, because outside it's hot and humid and inside it's freezing.
- Lunch with the dean. Free food!
- Mentor-mentee meeting. My mentor absent, though. Took that opportunity to join the group with the pretties mentor around.

31.8.

- This uni has some cool spots at the campus.
- My registration for the school portal does not work.
- Korean culture demonstration. Trying on clothes and eating some sweets.
- Internet in the dorm. Amazing!
- Bud Bar in the evening. A 3L pitcher of Cass for 11,000 KRW (less than 6E). First late night return to the dorm. Welcome, exchange.

1.9.

- School starts. Well, no classes for me yet, but still...
- The portal registration still does not work for me.
- Party night in Hongdae. Dinner (very spicy), beers and then Cocoon club. Sweet dance moves, me being the second tallest guy around, our group dominating the stage (hell yeah!), coming back at 6AM.

2.9.

- Hangover.
- Still no portal access.

3.9.

- Being touristic — visiting the National Museum of Korea and taking zillions of photos.

4.9.

- Lazy sunday
- First time to the KAIST gym. It has several advantages - it is 24/7, it is close and it is for free. /me likes it.
- First week in Seoul is done. And it was awesome. Another 15 to go!

9.9.2011 // Explanation

Just to make sure that everybody knows what's going on...

As you might know, I am doing my MSc. in The Netherlands, at the Delft University of Technology. Last year I found out that our faculty has several agreements with universities all around the world regarding exchange programs. Well, that naturally caught my attention so I started thinking about going further abroad for another semester. I have decided to go to Asia, because Europe does not make sense for me and I did not feel like going to the USA or another English-speaking country. Moreover, the Asian culture is so different from Europe that any experience with it might be very valuable. There were basically three choices — Harbin in China, Tokyo in Japan and Seoul in Korea. Because Harbin was only for two months and Japan is quite expensive and maybe a little too weird different, I have decided to come to KAIST Business School in Seoul, which is a MBA oriented part of the otherwise technically oriented KAIST university in Daejeon.

The application and organization was a bit of a struggle, but luckily everything worked out fine and I was admitted to the Fall 2011 Exchange program. I am focusing mainly at Information and Media MBA, which is in line with my planned master thesis direction. I will spend 4 months here and then come back to Delft to start working on my master thesis. So, that's why I am here and not in Europe. Simple, right...

Published on 9.9.2011 at 13:25:57

10.9.2011 // **Trip tomorrow!**

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If your energy begins to flag, consider taking a swig of the Korean hiker's friend: pine-needle soju (local vodka-like brew). One mouthful should be enough to help you make it to the top. Well, that's what Koreans claim anyway.

-Lonely Planet guide entry for Bukhansan National Park

Yep, that's where we go tomorrow!

13.9.2011 // A fortnight

Splendid! Two awesome weeks that felt like at least a month. Last week the classes have (finally) started. In the first half of the semester I am taking 4 classes — two “real” (Growth Strategy and Valuation of IT Media Business) and two “exchange” (Korean for Foreigners I and Korean Business and Culture). This should keep me relatively busy, but still leave some time for fun and traveling and other things exchange students usually do. The class schedule here is quite interesting. Classes are only 80 minutes long, and there are usually two each week (Mon+Wed or Tue+Thu). Out of class work seems to be less extensive than in Delft so in general the workload might be lower. However, it has still been only a week, so I don’t want to make premature conclusions.

I have to say that I am more than happy with my choice of subjects. I picked the courses so they would support my current direction, because I did not want to spend this semester doing meaningless courses just to bring some ECTS home.

Enough of school, though. As announced earlier, on Saturday we went to the Bukhansan National Park for some hiking. Well, Korean hiking is certainly different from the European. It all started with about 300m of altitude of stairs. Yes, steep stairs like in a mall. On the left from the stairs there was a wall, on the right there was a fence and a military area with forbidden access. Fun fun fun. Unfortunately, thanks to all the smog, the view on Seoul was not very god either, so we just had to keep climbing up.



Tha hikin’ gang

Funny thing about this national park is that since it is close to some military facility, every visitor has to fill out a entry form and gets a badge. In the form there is a list of rules such as "Photographs can be taken only at designated spots" and "No alcoholic beverages can be consumed inside the park" etc. Sounds like a exciting trip, right. Well, so we kept climbing until we got to the top. There was a small plain with a lot of Koreans, that were having lunch, and few security guards that were taking care that no one is breaking the aforementioned rules.

The rest of the trip fortunately went better. Even though the whole was basically between the fence and the wall, the nature around was more interesting and once we even reached some kind of a pine groove that allowed us to walk next to the stairs like real hikers. Yeah!



The badge



Lunching on the top



Keep dancing till the world ends...

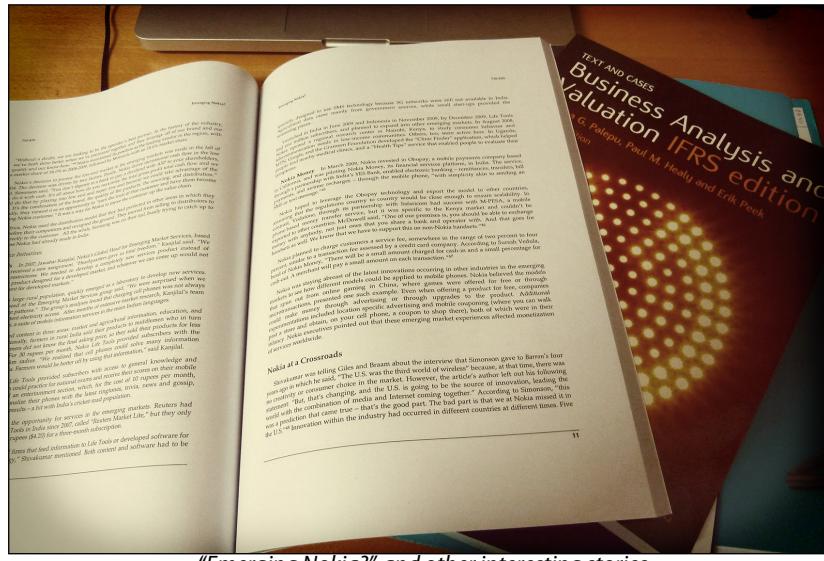
In the evening we were planning to go clubbing to Gangnam's Club Eden. Eden is supposed to be the biggest/most famous/bestest club in Seoul / Korea / Asia / World / Universe, so we wanted to experience it as well. Our plan did not quite work out, because we ended up in Itaewon in Club Volume, where we did not have to pay the cover to get in. Well, the party was nice, even though I liked the Cocoon Club a little more. From unknown reasons I prefer mostly Korean clubs, because otherwise I feel like in some European city. Since Itaewon is quite an international part of Seoul, the club was full of int'l's, including a Dutch girl from R'dam, who's parents were living in Prague. After coming home at 7am we had a quick breakfast with Rik and Lauriane at the roof of our dorms and then off to bed for 9

hours of well deserved sleep. It's quite funny that I basically went to bed in European time, since 7am here is 12pm in Europe.

Published on 13.9.2011 at 1:48:46

15.9.2011 // Study time again

Assignments, cases, tests, here we go again...



Published on 15.9.2011 at 19:8:18

16.9.2011 // **Eden or Hell**

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If Eden looks like Club Eden, than I really don't know what religion is for...it was more like Hell...

Published on 16.9.2011 at 16:47:46

17.9.2011 // **The best city tour ever and the tower of love**

City tour. We have all been there. Unknown city or place, a bus full of people, boring commentary (stupid jokes included). Well, since we are not only students, but also tourists here, we have decided to give it a go. Well, Karin has decided and few of us joined her. We had nothing to do anyway, since it was Chuseok Monday and most places were closed. The plan was to take the night tour, which is a 1:30h bus tour through the Seoul city center, including the N Seoul Tower. And the plan failed big time. Now we know that it can take more than a hour to get from our campus to the Gwanghwamun station. Yes, despite our heroic effort and a subway transfer sprint, we missed the bus. Well, both of them, actually — OK, Time For Plan B. We have decided to roam around the neighborhood, look at the statue of King Sejong and other things. And it was really nice.

We saw a Chuseok celebration with some acrobats/dancers, which was awesome. Since we were quite close to the "cozy part of Seoul", which we discovered after our "hiking" trip, we decided to go there and try find some nice place to get food and drinks. That proved to be quite difficult, because nearly all places were either closed because of Chuseok or were closing because it was already around 9:30pm. Eventually we found a nice place, where we got delicious dumplings. Huge and delicious. They are filled with minced meat and some veggies, and fill you up immediately. And they are not that spicy!

Tuesday was more exciting. Not only the shops and restaurants were open again, but we also decided to go to the N Seoul Tower, which is, for unknown reasons, portrayed as a love tower. Supposedly, the Namsan Mountain, where the tower is located is some kind of a "first love" place. Some say, that you should go there with your first love and put a lock with some personal message on the fence there. The fence is just packed with locks, and

they even have to take some away every year, otherwise the whole thing would be too heavy and there would not be any place for another firstlovers.

I was quite surprised by the number of people around the tower. I honestly expected that it would be nearly deserted place, but the park around the tower was packed with people, mostly Koreans. Seems like Namsan is a favorite place to hang out in Seoul. Anyway, the view was terrific and we even managed to locate our campus. Or at least the black spot where the campus was supposed to be. Guess we should have told someone to light a bonfire at the roof for better identification.

Anyway, sometimes it is nice to be a tourist, especially when you know the place a little. There are still thousands of places in Seoul that are worth visiting, from the Dongdaemun market to the War Museum. We also want to visit the DMZ and some other places in Korea, of course. But we'll see, school is getting more and more intensive and even though this is an exchange, one has to work as well.

Published on 17.9.2011 at 1:20:17

24.9.2011 // Autumn in Seoul

No, wait, sorry, it's still summer...the weather is going quite crazy. Long pants, short pants, sweatshirt, t-shirt, shirt, you never know what to wear. I was quite happy that we finally got the real autumn weather, when t-shirt is still OK but sweatshirt is fine as well, however, today the weather proved me wrong, because it is around 25°C again. Well, that does not really help me not feel sick.

Apart from the crazy weather, the school is getting more and more intense as well. Assignments, presentations, here we go. On top of that, I still have to finish our report from Kenya (duh!) and work on a project for one course in Delft. And have fun, right:) Talking about schoolwork. Almost every course has some group project associated to it, which is quite similar to Delft. The only difference is, that the groups here are usually selected by teachers, so you can't really influence the team composition. For increased variety and "multiculturality" exchange students are in most cases assigned to different groups, which is fine, because you at least get the chance to see how Korean groupwork works (?). And that is the problem. Why? Let me explain something about Korea first.

The Korean culture is very much based on hierarchy and status. Are you older? You are superior. Do you have a better job than me? You are superior. Are you a young foreign student? Go screw yourself. Ok, that is a little exaggerated. The point is that the group dynamics are sooooo different compared to Europe, and The Netherlands in particular. Over there, all the group members are equal. You have something to say? Then go for it. If it's crap we will tell you, never mind. All the little fights inside the group are expected and even induced, because they lead to a better result. In Korea, however, the discussion is much more "civilized". Everybody is so respectful, that they are not able to criticize other's ideas. Every idea is good, only some are better. And every

idea has to be approved by the eldest person in the group, otherwise it is not considered acceptable. I find this rather annoying, because I am used to "say stuff". Throwing ideas, comments, feedback, criticism at others, and letting them do the same. Here it is not possible. Not only that criticizing older people is not acceptable, but since I am usually the youngest in the group, no one expects me to do so.

I know that now you might think how unadaptable I am, but it is really hard to switch to a completely different behavior. I am trying, trust me. Thinking twice before saying something and trying to obey the rules they have. I am in fact happy about this experience. I think it will really help me in dealing with people, because until now, I always had the advantage of the home environment and this is the second time (after Kenya) I am an alien in a completely different cultural environment.

And in Korea I am literally an Alien — I have finally received my Alien Registration Card, which is quite essential if you want to do something here. Not only you need it to open a bank account or to get a mobile phone, but it also serves as a multientry visa, so you don't have to pay additional \$50 when you want to go to China or Japan and then come back.

Since I was sick and I had stuff to do, last week was quite dull. The highlight was Mark's B-Day party, which started with a pre-game at the 7th floor (soju + beer) and then continued in Hongdae in Cocoon. It was fun, even though some people suffered from a premature ending and went back to the dorms before we reached the club. I managed to retain my sobriety, so the morning was pretty acceptable.

However, I hope that the true highlight, the summit, the peak, the apex of this week is still ahead, because tomorrow, my friends, tomorrow we are going to conquer the LOTTE WORLD!

Published on 24.9.2011 at 21:18:34



The birthday boy



Me and Florian in Cocoon Club



Crazy Riki



Lotte World



Lotte World

26.9.2011 // Finally mobile

As pathetic as it might sound, in a country with mobile phone penetration of almost 99%, until today, I was offline. Well, I had my EU phone, which perfectly works here (it's a Samsung, btw.), but roaming is quite expensive for everyday use, so I wanted to get a Korean phone. Before coming here, my good friend Roman gave me the phone he used while he was on exchange here, so I just needed to get it registered on my Alien ID. Therefore, when our uni arranged some phones for us, I politely declined the offer, thinking that I will simply register the phone I already had.

Now you might think "*Registered? What do you mean?*" or simply "*WTF, dude?*", but bureaucracy rules Korea, and **every** Korean phone needs to be registered with their Ministry of Telecommunications or something like that. And registered means that the S/N of the phone is paired with the SSN of the owner. Do you also feel a little bit of 1984? Because of that, some phones do not even have SIM cards, but function merely on this registration basis with regular pre-paid plan.

Unfortunately, Roman forgot to deregister his phone before leaving Korea. And since his Alien ID has already expired, the phone is basically a useless piece of ancient electronics unless he comes here and deregisters it.

Since everything is easier when you speak Korean, I took my buddy Hojoong with me and went phoneshopping. Despite his negotiation efforts, all the offers were too expensive for me. I really don't need to buy another phone, *감사합니다* (*kamsahamnida*). Fortunately, thanks to Jin from the KBS International Center, I managed to contact the company that gave other students the phone deal (which is much cheaper, since they only rent the phone instead of buying it) and today, their guy came to KAIST and handed me my brand new Korean phone. Awesome!

The phone is quite cool actually. It is a Ever (KT Tech) EV-W450 phone, that is manufactured exclusively for KT Telecom (hence, KT Tech). It is a “slider”, which is currently the most popular kind of phone, apart from touchscreen smartphones, and it is a regular feature-phone, so it has Bluetooth and other useful thingies, however, it lacks WiFi or other internet connectivity. And it has, wait for it, Mobile TV a.k.a. DMB! I can watch gameshows and soap operas 24/7, for free! Frankly, I think I won't use it even once, but whatever. Who can say he has a TV in his phone, right:)



My collection of Korean phones — Samsung SGH-i600, Anycall (Samsung) SCH-C320, Ever EV-W540

29.9.2011 // **Lotte World...**

...a place where your dreams come true and where unsuccessful Russian ballet dancers perform in ridiculous costumes.

Lotte World is a theme park. According to Koreans, it is the biggest indoor theme park in Asia, which does not surprise me, because they are simply obsessed with superiority. As one presenter told us today during the Korean Business and Culture lecture, Koreans do not have fast food, they have *aster* food. The park is located in Gangnam-gu (강남구), close to the Olympic Park. It has two parts — one big hall and the Magic Island, that is literally an island with a castle. Since this castle also dominates the Lotte World logo, when you see it, you can't stop wondering "Hmm, this seems familiar!". A little hint — Disney.

I won't spend time describing the park, since it is a typical theme park with rollercoasters, merry-go-rounds, thrill rides, water rides, big looping thingie, free fall tower, lots of junk food and little screaming kids. The hall with an indoor rollercoaster is cool, especially because they managed to squeeze a looping inside it. The sightseeing balloon ride around the hall was also fun — a nice way to calm down after the endorphin and adrenaline shots on the rollercoaster. The best attractions were on the Magic Island, though — Gyro Swing and Atlantic Adventure really made my day. The first one is a giant pendulum with a rotating platform at the end, while the latter is a rollercoaster with a launch start and few steep drops.

It was a nice day, I have to admit. Theme park is exactly the kind of activity that allows you to shut down your brain and just enjoy the thrill. You are screaming like a little kid, eating hamburgers for both breakfast and lunch and just having a good time. It is even better when you do it with a group of friends, because a shared experience is always better:)

I took quite a lot of pictures, so there is a selection of the best/most interesting ones.

Btw. there was one thing that really surprised me. LW was full of couples. That's not that surprising, right, but these couples were in many cases wearing the same clothes, or at least t-shirts/sweatshirts. I can't imagine that a European guy would do something like that. Not talking about the headbands with ears that both girls and guys were wearing. I guess that's simply Korea.

Oh yeah, I nearly forgot the Russian thing. Apparently, some Russian/Ukrainian dancers are working in LW as, well, dancers and performers. It was quite surprising to see white people performing in a Korean theme park, but I guess there is simply a limited market for ballet dancers in Europe:)

30.9.2011 // **Apology to Korean culture**

I just realized that in my previous post about the group work here I might have been too European, too mean and self-centered. And that is bad. I greatly admire the respect Koreans show to each other, and I am convinced, that European, or Western culture has a lot to learn from them. We will never be able to be like Koreans, and at the same time, Koreans will never be like us, however, both cultures should try to exchange the positive aspects, because that would bring them closer. Consider this an apology to all my groupmates that might have been offended by my "Westernity" — I'll to conform and absorb instead of fighting with the culture.

Published on 30.9.2011 at 2:26:42

"I wonder if you know, how they live in Tokyo..."

October 2011

Strikeout • fml • NRB • We didn't start the fire... • It's raining in paradise • Culinary adventures I.

2.10.2011 // **Strikeout**

The last time I have been to a baseball match was two years ago, when Kotlářka played at Markéta. And that was only as a spectator. I don't even remember the exact date of my last game as a player — I only remember it was the final game of the 2004 Czech championship, where we played against Krč, and despite our underdog position, we managed to keep up until around 7th inning. We lost, unfortunately, but for me the silver medal was nearly as valuable as the gold one from the previous year, because we had a "weaker" team. Hmm, I think I got carried away a little.

Anyway, me and other intl students from KAIST decided to go see baseball game at the Jamsil Stadium. You might not know that, but baseball is one of the most favorite sports here. The professional league comprises 8 teams, and since now it's getting into its post-season phase, it is one of the hottest topics among sports fans in Korea.

We went to see a derby between Doosan Bears and LG Twins. The teams in KBO league are named after a sponsor instead of a city, and they sometimes take inspiration from the MLB (Twins, Lotte Giants, Kia Tigers). This two teams don't stand a chance getting into the post-season, so it was merely a game of honor for them, because both come from Itaewon and both have the Jamsil Stadium as their home ball park. Because the Bears part of the stadium was already sold out long before the game, we had to get seats in Twins' section. As it turned out later, that was the only glitch of the game.

Baseball in Korea is not only a sport, but also a show. People come to watch the game and have a tremendous amount of fun. Each team has own cheerleaders and an entertainer that tells people what to do. Since everybody has a cheering stick, the stands turn into a sea of red/white/... every time people go crazy. It's impressive. Moreover, (almost) every player has it's own song that is played through the PA when he's at bat, and of course, all the people know these songs, so with every new player the stadium (or at least half of it) turns into a huge karaoke. Every good action leads to another wave of craziness, even if it's just a single hit. You can't even imagine what happens when someone scores a homerun.



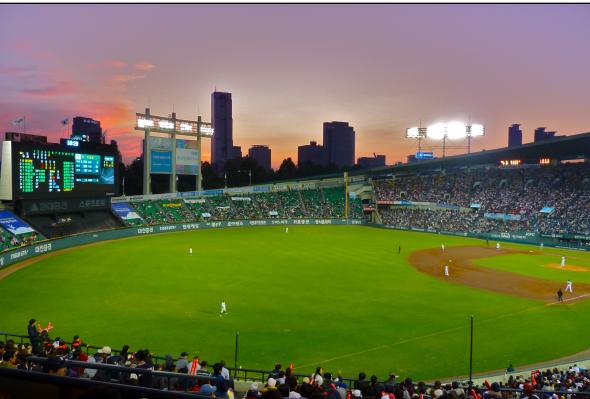
Doosan fans with white cheering sticks

As I said, our location was not perfect. From unknown reasons the Twins fans are not as crazy as the ones of Bears, so our side of the stadium was rather lame. This was also caused by the development of the game, because even though the teams were tied in second, from fourth on Bears started kicking Twins' ass. The main reason were the Twins' pitchers, giving BBs and serving nice hitting material to Doosan hitters. I was quite surprised by the eventual humiliation (9:1), because Bears are the second to last team while Twins are 5th, the first team not to go to the play-offs. Despite the loss, I have really enjoyed the match. Watching nice baseball after so may years really brought back my baseball memories and reminded me of all the nice moments of my career.

Published on 2.10.2011 at 22:5:6



The stadium



Beautiful sunset



The game is on



"Our" cheerleaders

5.10.2011 // **fml**

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Dear professors,

thank you for piling up all the crap into one week. I really, really appreciate it.

Your sincerely

Jan Ustohal

7.10.2011 // NRB

NRB stands for Norebang (노래방), which is a combination of song (노래) and room (방). So, who knows what a song room is? You? Or you? Nobody? OK, I'll tell you...it's KARAOKE!

On one September night we have decided to go for some karaoke. South Korea is, as almost all Asian countries, crazy about karaoke. There is about 35000 Norebangs in Korea, and they are a integral part of South Korean culture. A typical evening might start with a Korean BBQ with lots of Soju, then a bar with some "Soju and hof" (basically soju and beer) and when everybody is drunk and nearly unconscious, they go to a Norebang to sober up and have some fun. We chose the more direct way — from our dorm directly to the norebang. Even though our campus is located in not that cool part of Seoul, there are about 6 karaoke places within the walking distance, which is awesome. We were quite a big group (cca. 15 people), so it was guaranteed that we will have a good time. And we indeed had.

The karaoke room was quite "normal" — sofa, table, TV, speakers, remote control. And 3 books with songs in English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish, Russian and quite a few other languages.

At the beginning, when everybody was sober, nobody wanted to sing. That is understandable, though, since we did not know each other that well and embarrassing yourself in front of other people requires either big balls or big bowls of alcohol. We chose the second way, so we started ordering beers and soju to get the party started. If I remember correctly, the first volunteer was Simone or Mario, however, soon after the first performance everybody got into the right mood and the hell has broken loose.

We planned to spend around 2 hours there. We ended up singing for 4 hours straight, before our vocal cords gave up and turned us into a group of whispering rockstars. During the evening, we went through all the "classics" such as Queen, The Grease, ABBA, U2 or Backstreet Boys ("I Want It That Way" by Mark and me was simply the best performance of the evening.), as well as some contemporary crap such as Justin Bieber ("Baby, Baby, Baby, Ooooooh!"), Wiz Khalifa or Justin Timberlake. We also drank a ridiculous amount of beer and soju, but that's just what you do.

At 2am we finally finished, partly because we were tired and partly because there was no more beer in the place. Yes, we drank it all. Each of us paid 20,000KRW (12EUR), which is fairly cheap for the amount of fun (and alcohol) we had, and went home or to the Burger King for a little snack. The next day I was barely able to speak, but it was definitely worth it, because:



*Am I your fire,
your one desire,
believe when I say,
I want it that way*

Btw. pictures are stolen from Marc, because he was the only one taking pictures, as far as I know. Thanks, man!:)

Published on 7.10.2011 at 23:45:37

11.10.2011 // We didn't start the fire...



*Lots of work
Take a break
Fireworks
Boom bang bang!*

I couldn't resist to put this little pop-culture reference here, even though I doubt that someone will recognize it:)

On Saturday we went to see the annual Seoul International Fireworks Festival, that took place in the Yeouido Hangang Park, at the bank of the Han river. It is a one day event, organized by a explosives company called Hanwha, and this year there were teams from Korea, Japan and Portugal showing their fireworks skills.

Our Korean friends told us that it is going to be crowded. And they were right. When we saw the masses of people in the subway we realized that leaving the dorm at 6pm was maybe a little too late, considering that the first show was scheduled for 7:30pm. After getting to the subway line 5, we quickly found out that "crowded" was a mere underestimation of the situation. Everybody in Seoul went to see the fireworks. Or at least it seemed so.



The whole population of Seoul gathered at one subway station



Crowding out the escalator

Inside of the trains it was like a frotteur's dream. As more and more people were pouring in at each station, it was getting more and more uncomfortable, with people pushing from all sides, trying to get through. This crowd had one advantage, though. Since we were not sure where to get off the train, we simply waited until the sea of people washed us out. At the station the situation repeated — people, people, people. Fortunately, Koreans have anticipated this situation, so the vestibule was full of people in reflective vests with shining cheering sticks, that were managing the crowd, trying to distribute the mass of human bodies equally between the subway exits. And honestly, they managed quite well. We were still moving forward, without unnecessary waiting.

The situation outside was fortunately better — some streets were closed for traffic, so there was enough space for all the people to spread out. Soon after we left the subway, the first show started, so we just found some place where we could see the sky and watched the fireworks. I don't know if it was the Japanese one or the Portuguese, though. After the first one we moved to the bridge, close to which was the pier the fireworks was

launched from. The police was trying to keep the traffic going, however, since only one line was open and there were people running across the bridge all the time, it was quite difficult. Later on we managed to get across the bridge, which really gave us nice view on the fireworks. I tried to take some pictures, however, it would require a tripod and a SLR to make it look awesome. So it is just nice...



The fireworks

After the fireworks we went to the building "63", which used to be the tallest building in Korea, or even Asia, where we had a dinner and then we set off for home the dorm. The problem was that there was still a lot of people, so when we came to the subway station, the entrance was simply closed and guarded by police and

subway officials. To prevent overcrowding of the subway, they let people in only when there was enough space. They also distributed people between the different entrances, so none would get clogged. Well, it worked quite well. I have to admit, Koreans are so orderly and well organized!</p>



4xD + 1xCZ



Crowded Noriangojin station

The ride back was one of the moments when you just wish you were home, because you are tired and the subway is packed and everything is annoying etc. But we made it, and the final walk from Hoegi, with a short stop for a "meat on the stick" was a nice ending to a tiring afternoon.

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15.10.2011 // It's raining in paradise

"Thunder and lightning, not so frightening, anymore..."

After several nice days the hell has broken loose in here. The rain was so heavy that only going from the dorm to the SUPEX building made me wet completely soaked. I have a feeling that it might have something to do with my non-existent umbrella, but that's just me. Me and Marc were planning to go to Lotte Dept. Store, because he needed some clothes and I need some shoes, since my beloved Nike's gave up and fell apart. Since we are no wusses, we decided to walk to the subway station, despite the thunderstorm and rain, so I only had to stop at 7eleven to buy an umbrella (a lovely umbrella, branded "Pierre Balmain — Paris", for 9000KRW), to be able to make it to Hoegi station without melting (because I am such a sweet guy). Since the subway was completely packed, you can imagine the "atmosphere" there, created by wet people and umbrellas. Fortunately, the other train from Wangsimni was less crowded and better ventilated.

Anyhow, there is no point in describing our shopping. I can only say that Marc bought his stuff, while I did not find any nice shoes (except for one Fred Perry sneakers, which were however a little too expensive — I keep them as a last resort backup). The best part of the trip was however the visit to the shooting range. At the Lotte complex at Jamsil station, there is, apart from Lotte World, Lotte Hotel, Lotte Dept. Store, Lotte Cinema and Lotte Mart (damn, there is a whole lotta Lotte!) a small indoor shooting range. Both me and Marc tried the world famous Glock 17, a rather small 9mm semi-automatic gun.

We each fired 10 rounds, Marc scored 97, I did only 91, but it was not about the number. The mere feeling of holding the gun is so awesome and frightening at the same time. When you fire, you just need so little force to



Glock 17

unleash a force so much bigger and powerful. I definitely want to repeat this some day, preferably more rounds, but I think I don't want to own a gun. Ever

On a completely different note, we have decided to go to Tokyo after exams, so "YAY!". On top of that, sunny times are supposedly over, since the have already turned on the heating in the dorms. Bye-bye aircon, sun-dresses and shorts. Hello heaters, coats and long pants.

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22.10.2011 // Culinary adventures I.

One of the basic rules of blogging is: "*Never start a post with 'I don't know what to write'. If you don't know, then just **don't write anything!**'*". Sometimes that's easier said than done. You know, when you get used to blogging about your life and other peculiarities regularly, you miss it when there is nothing interesting going around. For me, blogging became some kind of relax, during which I still do something useful and refresh my mind and brain. Today, I really felt like blogging to take a break from all the pressure and stress about assignments and exams, however, the topic was nowhere to be found. And then it struck me — food! I haven't told you about food here. And because it is quite an extensive topic, let's take it easy and slow.

Since there is no kitchen in the dorms, we are not able to cook for ourselves. That implies, that we have to "eat out" for both lunch and dinner. First choice we have to make is whether to go to the cafeteria or not. The KAIST cafeteria is located at the campus in the Union building, and for 3000KRW offers two kinds of meal (international and Korean) for lunch and one for dinner. They also have breakfast, but that is a typical Korean breakfast (i.e. rice, kimchi, soup, ...), which I am not able to process. The quality of the meals in the cafeteria is very unstable. Some meals, such as chicken curry, hamburger or japanese noodles are very good, but in other cases it is really not my kind of tea. From that reasons, I quite hesitate before I go to the cafeteria, because in most cases I pay for food that I 1) don't like and 2) won't finish. Not a good deal, right...

The second choice is "eating out out". The neighborhood around our campus is quite restaurant-rich, so there is plenty of places to choose from. By now, we have established a bunch of places that we go into, and I will quickly introduce each one of these. Please note that in most cases I don't know the real name of the place, so I will refer to them using our nicknames.

The regular place

This place was discovered by Marc and it soon became our favorite place to eat. It is just a small room with a counter and a kitchen, where you order your food and get it packed in styrofoam boxes for take away. If you don't want to do take away, they have a room in the basement, where you can eat your meal. Simple, huh?

There are two things that are perfect about this place — it is fast and it is cheap. And it is also good. Most meals are a combination of some meat (pork, chicken, hamburger patty, tuna) and rice, with kimchi and the yellow reddish as side dish. Our most favorite combination is 빅치킨마요 and 군만두 (big chicken mayo and kunmandu), which is rice + chicken + egg + kimchi + mayo and Korean dumplings, filled with a mixture of meat and vegetables. All this awesomeness for only 4400KRW (2.7EUR).



Two weeks ago we have realized that we keep going to the same restaurants over and over again, which gets a little stereotypical. Therefore, Marc and I have decided that every Sunday evening, we will go to a new place in the neighborhood to try something different. I will try to keep you updated about our adventures, as well as describe other "regular" places, such as the curry place, the omelette place, the rice place, the chicken steak place, the dumpling guy or the japanese place. Stay tuned for another episode of CULINARY ADVENTURES with 얀!

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"The most expensive month so far..."

November 2011

December 2011
