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2017-18 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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11-20-2017

## Gisamun Beach, a Korean East Coast Adventure (Plus Daily Life!)

Jasmine Schmit  
*Linfield College*

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### Recommended Citation

Schmit, Jasmine, "Gisamun Beach, a Korean East Coast Adventure (Plus Daily Life!)" (2017). *2017-18 Postcards*. Article. Submission 10.  
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Jasmine Schmit

Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea

November 20, 2017

## **Gisamun Beach, a Korean East Coast Adventure (Plus Daily Life!)**



*A picture from the harbor end of Gisamun Beach.*

Annyeonghaseyo!

Life has been interesting for me, and I hope everyone else has been having good experiences in their lives as well!

10/30 to 11/5

My friends and I had wandered around Idae near the beginning of our lives here at Yonsei, and had found a chicken restaurant that sells something called Nagasaki Ddeokbokki. I fell in love with it, but we never learned the name or location. So, one of those friends and I wandered again later with finding the location as our goal and we succeeded! It's called Yangpang, and I had the chance to eat there again! Nagasaki Ddeokbokki is essentially ramen noodles, rice cake (ddeokbokki), cabbage, fish cake, and an egg in a broth. It's yummy!

I spent some time this week researching options for returning for my Master's degree or as a possible English teacher here in Korea (this was a plan I had before coming for a semester). An option for teaching English I had heard about before arriving in Korea is the EPIK program. EPIK (English Program in Korea) is sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Education and its goal is to improve the English-speaking abilities of students and teachers in Korea and develop cultural exchanges. (More information on EPIK if you're interested: <https://www.epik.go.kr:8080/index.do> .)

I went to the Hidden Coin Singer (noraebang/karaoke) with a friend, and we have decided to be weekly singing buddies! So, from now on, unless something comes up, Tuesdays are our singing days! Super

excited for it! We're going to attempt to master a set list. Our list currently consists of two songs: Nae Saranga by Lee Jonghyun and All of My Life by Park Won. We sang 25 songs on this trip. She has a gorgeous voice and is fun to sing with.

I returned to the same noraebang the next day with a Korean friend. It was entertaining to see what songs we could sing together that we both knew. He really makes the songs his and gives his all, which is awe-inspiring and entertaining. I attempted a couple of Korean songs with him. Both people I sang with this week had good voices and were lots of fun!

I explored Sinchon some more with my wandering buddy. We decided to walk straight through Sinchon because we hadn't been that way yet, and stumbled upon a park. It seemed like it was structured as a walking/exercise path or park. It was pretty, full of nature, and relaxing. We had some bikers and some joggers pass us by as we walked and talked. It was a good find!

I went back to the puppy café I mentioned in an earlier blog with the same friend that went with me the first time. We talked about life and played with puppies, it was refreshing! Then we ate at Popeyes. It was entertaining because the guy behind the counter was trying to explain the menu to us in English, and kept pointing out what was not spicy (very nice of him!). It took over three attempts at saying one option to get him to understand I was trying to order that option. It was fun. My friend's order seemed to go much smoother.

At the end of the week, I began to feel my first stirrings of homesickness. I miss being able to not have to worry about the language barrier in attempting to go somewhere new or further away than my immediate surrounding area. It's odd how familiar Seoul feels but at the same time it's so foreign to the culture and norms that I was raised in. So sometimes I forget and when I go out, the attempts to communicate catch me a little off-guard.

I was stopped during a walk across campus at the end of the week by three Korean women showing a video about "God the mother." They wanted to invite me to an hour-long seminar about it later at some point. It was an interesting, and awkward, experience because I don't have a religious affiliation and I didn't speak enough Korean to fully understand what they were saying, and they didn't speak enough English to fully understand me.

11/6 to 11/12

On Monday, through a documentary in my Korean history class, I learned about how Korea used different symbols when establishing itself as a nation. They changed their uniform, made a flag, and used the mugunghwa (the Rose of Sharon, Korea's national flower) on various different things (dishes, architectural details, clothes, etc.). The flower's name stems from the Korean word "mugung" meaning immortality, which shows the enduring nature of Korean culture ([http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/citytour/aboutkorea.kto?func\\_name=aboutkoreamain](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/citytour/aboutkorea.kto?func_name=aboutkoreamain).) The documentary also talked about a legislative building in Washington, D.C. that was taken from Korea by the Japanese and sold to the English (for cheap) and took over 100 years to return to Korea. The last living princess of Korea was living in the US, working on returning the building to Korea, and she finally had the chance to visit the building her grandfather and father had been in and worked in when it was returned to Korea's hands. It was an interesting documentary and I was glad that they got their building back and that the last princess had the chance to visit it.

I went wandering with my wandering buddy again and another friend. We took a different path through Sinchon and found our way back through Idae. In Idae, we stopped in at a restaurant that looked good and ate dinner. I ate mul naengmyeon which is cold noodles in a cold broth. A lot of people don't like it or find it plain, but it was yummy to me! I believe the broth has vinegar in it. After eating, we went into a sock stall that sold 1,000 won (~\$1) socks.

This week was registration for Linfield, and I ended up registering for my next term classes at 3:30am here. It was a success, and I got to sleep through my morning class the next day because it was canceled. Yay for good timing!

There's this restaurant in Sinchon that has a statue of a corgi (that always takes me a second to realize is not a real corgi), and it has always made me curious. It's a Korean/American diner and grocery. I went in with a couple of friends and we tried it out. I tried the chicken and fries, and it was served in a small cast iron pan, which was entertaining. The chicken and fries consisted of one or two seasoned and breaded chicken strips cut up in pieces, and four small pieces of chicken wings and fries served with honey mustard and ketchup. The aesthetic of the restaurant was rustic, and I really enjoyed it. The price was mediocre, so not a constant stopping point, but the food was good.

My noraebang buddy and I met up again on this Tuesday. Our groove was off though, we left the noraebang feeling a tad unsatisfied with our performance, but we're holding strong and we're going back next Tuesday, and we are going to kick butt! Our walk back home made up for it as we were attacked by a "killer leaf." My buddy is from Australia and says that the leaves do not get that big there, so she wasn't expecting it to be a leaf when it fell between us. She jumped, and I jumped as a result. It was entertaining.

My Mentor's Club cell had a meeting this week. It consisted of a few mentors and one or two people from the different mentors' buddy groups. We ate at a dak-galbi place, which is essentially spicy stir-fried chicken mixed with cabbage, potatoes, rice cake, and other ingredients. It was spicy, but yummy! There was an option to have a side of rice or noodles (which came in an option of with water or not with water), I had rice to help with the spice. After eating, we moved on to a bar called Thinking Inside the Box and had a drink or two and two other people showed up to join us. It was fun talking to everyone and hanging out. After that we split into three groups. One group went to sing karaoke at a noraebang, one went on to get another drink, and one went home for the night. If you can't guess by now, I joined the singing crew. I enjoyed meeting more of my cell members that I didn't have the chance to talk as much with at our first meeting and getting to know my mentor a little more.

My buddy group had plans to meet the next night, but it ended up getting canceled. The interactions with the Mentor's club seem to be less than I was expecting, which makes me a little sad, but the meetings we have had have been good.

The temperature is getting cooler now, and it makes me so happy!

I had a falling out with my friend group here, (even when you're across the world with new friends, ups and downs occur), and this week and the next were a little rough. But it hasn't dimmed my excitement and happiness to be in Korea and learning about Korean culture.

My weekend started with a school field trip Saturday morning for my history class. We went to Bukchon Hanok Village, Unhyeongung, one of the oldest, currently used elementary schools in Seoul, a church, and another palace building. We started in Unhyeongung, which was a palace/royal residence. This palace had a simple color scheme of brown and white versus the colorful palaces we had been to before, but the architecture was still really cool. There aren't as many buildings making up the palace as there used to be. Some were torn down for money in the past and became a parking lot and police station. The parking lot and police station has since been removed. While we were visiting, a wedding ceremony was being set up in one section, so we saw people in hanbok (traditional Korean clothing) which was cool. There were also families with their children dressed in hanbok doing photo shoots. It was fun to watch. After going through Unhyeongung, we visited a church that is the Cheondogyo Central Temple. It is one of the homes to Eastern religion that has its roots in Confuciansim, Taoism, Buddhism, and Korean nationalism. The building was built with more of a Western architectural style. After the church we stopped by an elementary school built in 1938 that is still in use. A man joined my classmates and listened for a minute before catching the friends he was waiting for off guard. It was entertaining. Then we visited a hanok village that people still live in. Hanoks are traditional Korean homes. It was fun to see the mix of modern

and traditional. We ended the trip at a colorful palace building that had been deconstructed, moved, and then reconstructed again. It's interesting to learn how many buildings have been moved or reconstructed (or both) throughout Korea's history.

During the field trip, we came across a food truck selling hotteok, a fluffy bread with filling. Some hotteok are savory, others are sweet. The food truck was selling one with cinnamon/sugar filling for 1,000 won (~\$1). A few of us tried them, and they were delicious! After the field trip, a few friends and I came across a club called VANK (Voluntary Agency Network of Korea) from a high school. They had brochures about a part of Korean history and would give you a question and have you find the answer in the brochure. Once you found the answer, you could get a snack baggie that had a slip of paper in it with the possibility of winning something further. I didn't get the lucky slip, but one of my friends did, and she received a pin. It was a fun experience!

After I got back to the dorm, I met up with another friend and we headed out to start our weekend beach adventure to the east coast of Korea! The first part of our trip was a 30-ish minute subway ride from Sinchon to East Seoul, where we had a short, but nice, interaction with the first American soldier I've seen in South Korea. After we got to East Seoul, we bought two express bus tickets to Yangyang, a city on the east coast. We had some trouble figuring out where to buy our tickets, but after failing at the terminal (turns out it was only for reserved ticket buying), we succeeded at the information desk and bought tickets for our return trip on Sunday from Yangyang to East Seoul as well. After waiting an hour, we boarded our express bus and around 2 hours later, we arrived in Yangyang! We found a motel to stay in for the night for about 40,000 won (~\$40) and the lady who helped us was very nice. She gave us two disposable toothbrushes, and there was toothpaste, soap, and shampoo in the bathroom, and we had a minifridge with two water bottles as well. It was clean and nice! We went to bed early, and were woken up around 2am because the ondol system made the room insanely warm. An ondol system is a heating system beneath the floor, and ours was set pretty high apparently. We opened a window and went back to bed. For those who worry ondol systems won't keep a room warm enough, I would like to share with you that they make a room perfectly warm enough.

The next morning, we got up and headed out to the beach! First, we learned we had to buy a bus ticket to go to Hajodae (a beach city I want to return to see). The guy at the bus terminal in Yangyang helped us buy our bus tickets and let us know we had to transfer to a city bus when we got to Hajodae. The first bus we took that day ended up passing our stop, and a lady on the bus let our driver know, and the driver turned the bus around to drop us off. I was surprised that the driver would turn around for us, but we were grateful! It took maybe less than 20 minutes and then we arrived in Hajodae! From there, we went into a convenience store and the lady behind the counter helped lead us to our next bus stop for our bus to Gisamun beach. A little boy rode by on his bike, and the lady asked him to point the bus stop out to us, and she waited in the street until we reached it and then went back inside. She was very nice! The bus ride from Hajodae to Gisamun took maybe 5-10 minutes. The driver was friendly and made some light conversation with us (we maybe had a handful of English words spoken to us during this trip, it was a good Korean language experience!).

We made it to the beach! It is known as a surfer beach, according to the articles I read online before we left, and isn't super touristy or crowded. This day, there were a lot of surfers out in the water, and even a kayak or two. They looked like little spikey rocks in the water from shore. The beach was gorgeous and beautiful! The weather was cooler, but was sunny, so it was still warm. We walked from one end of the beach to the other, it wasn't too long, and it was peaceful and happy. There was a military base around the corner of one of the ends, and we were yelled at (not angrily) to go back the other way by a man on the post, which we promptly did. Once we were satisfied with our beach experience, we went up to a bus stop to wait for a bus back to Hajodae.

We ended up waiting about an hour and a half before the bus came by, the public transport system is a little slower in the Gisamun area than in the large city of Seoul. Then we bought a ticket for the bus from Hajodae to Yangyang from the convenience store. Convenience stores are so useful here! Once we made it back to Yangyang, we had an hour or two before our express bus would arrive to get us from the bus

terminal. So, we found a place to eat after taking a picture of the giant mushroom statue we saw from the bus on the way into town. It turns out that Yangyang has mushrooms that they throw an annual festival around, which is why they had the giant mushroom statue. (Link for more information regarding that here: [http://eng.yangyang.go.kr/page/foreign/eng/sub04\\_03\\_01.jsp](http://eng.yangyang.go.kr/page/foreign/eng/sub04_03_01.jsp).) The place we ate at had good food, and an insane amount of banchan (side dishes). There was a little fried fish as one of our banchan, and fish cake, and kimchi, and other things. I had galbitang (short rib soup) as my main dish, and she had something with soft tofu. After eating, we waited for a short bit for our express bus, and the bus ride ended up taking 4 hours to get back to East Seoul due to rush hour traffic. It was a very long bus ride. Then we took our subway back to the dorms, and separated to prepare for classes/sleep. By the end, I think we were both a little tired and grumpy. I have learned that more time is needed for longer trips, and maybe more planning (bus ticket reservations and place-to-stay reservations). But I really enjoyed this trip, and I feel like it helped increase my confidence a little in getting around Korea, and it increased her confidence in her Korean language survival skills. It was fun, and we got to see a lot of new things!

Random journal thought:

Watching out for bicycles and motorbikes on the sidewalk is like second nature to me now. It doesn't surprise me or catch me off guard when something wheeled is moving through the swarms of people on the sidewalk. That was something I didn't expect to get used to.

Take care everyone!

Until next time,

Jasmine/SeonHwa