

## South Korea – 2016

This year the annual conference I usually go to, ISMD (International Symposium on Multiparticle Dynamics) was on Jeju Island, South Korea. After some grumbling about the high travel cost, it was agreed that I could go. After some searching I found the cheapest flights to be flying from Amsterdam to Seoul and returning from Osaka, Japan, unfortunately not by a direct flight but with a transfer in Paris.

Then started intensive planning of sightseeing in Korea before the conference and Japan after. I discovered that there is now a *Michelin Green Guide* for South Korea and also one for Japan. They were, together with intensive Googling, very helpful in planning the trip.

**Wednesday, 17 August.** At Schiphol it seemed as though no one was flying. There were almost no lines at security or at passport control. Perhaps it was due to the lateness of the flight, which was scheduled to depart, and in fact did depart, at 21:35.

The plane left from the far end of the E-pier, which was nice in that it gave you a bit of movement before being cooped up in a full 747 for 10 hours. I had checked a suitcase and hence had only a small carry-on. So I didn't have to worry about boarding early enough to be sure of finding room in an overhead bin.

**Thursday, 18 August.** We landed a few minutes ahead of the scheduled 14:40, at the end of a very long pier. Walking the length of the pier only got you to an underground tram, which brought you to another building. There, after another long walk you got to immigration, where there was a huge queue resulting in about an hour's wait—could have been Disneyland. After being photographed and fingerprinted at immigration, I picked up my suitcase and went through customs. Then began the search for an ATM which would work for my foreign-issued bank card. I think I tried nearly every ATM in the airport (and that was quite a lot). Each was located next to a bank, which changed cash. When I would complain at the bank that the ATM didn't work, the answer always was “Try another bank.” After an hour or so I finally found one that worked, one that I think I had tried before. However, by this time I was so tired I took out less than I had planned, only ₩100000, which is only about €80—it's hard to get used to these huge numbers.

After another long walk (the airport is huge) I found the train to Seoul. It took about an hour to get to Seoul Station, where I had to figure out how the metro worked in order to go further. I ended up buying a transportation card for ₩5000, onto which one could load money. Then it was just like at home with checking in and out with the card. Besides the convenience of not having to buy a ticket every time, the card gave a ₩100 discount on the fare (about 8%), which I thought a nice way to encourage people to switch to the card. It turned out that the card could also be used in (at least some) other Korean cities. Even so, I certainly did not get back enough from the discount to pay the cost of the card.

The metro stations are huge, with many exits and lots of walking. An elevator or escalator is not always available. I did not, as it turned out, choose the best exit (or maybe I got off one stop too soon—the names of the two stations were very similar) and ended up walking down the wrong street. Finally, a nice young Korean couple helped me out and (with the help of their smart phones) pointed me in the right direction. I got to my guest house a bit before 8 pm.

The owner of the guest house, which is a slightly modified traditional Korean *hanok* house, with about 7 rooms, was friendly and spoke some English (as well as Japanese and Chinese, the other two main sources of guests). He showed me how everything worked: the lock on the street door, the padlock on the door of my room, the light switches, the water for the shower (which is run off the faucet on the wash basin), the wifi. The layout is in a U of rooms about a courtyard with a wall on the street side. The rooms (or at least mine) had been converted to have a tiny bathroom, which made the room itself quite small, just big enough for the mattress to be unfolded on the floor and still have space for my suitcase and a path to the bathroom.

Then I went out to find a place to eat. I found a near-by restaurant mentioned in *Lonely Planet* with no problem. I had a sort of savoury pancake filled with shrimp, squid, *etc.* and small side dishes of *kimchi*, and a couple of other things, ₩18000.

**Friday, 19 August.** (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/jeKzCDSVvUD3NZGh8>) Up at 7. I was at breakfast at 8 when it started, around the kitchen table: rice, omelette, *kimchi*, 3 other things, tea. Shortly after I started, a Chinese family joined in.

The ‘historic’ area of Seoul consists of two palace areas, and in between the neighborhood of Bukchon where there are still lots of old *hanok* houses. The oldest palace of the Joseon dynasty, Gyeongbokgung (*gung* means palace), is the one to the west. It was built in 1395, three years after the founding of the Joseon dynasty, following the relocation of the capital to Seoul, which at the time was called Hanyang. Incidentally, ‘Seoul’ means ‘capital’.

I left Gyeongbokgung for another day (21 August) and went to the eastern area, which was only a couple of blocks from my guest house. I began with Changdeokgung, and to my pleasant surprise it was free for 65 and older.

Changdeokgung was built by the third Joseon king in 1405. Why, one might ask, did he want a second palace, just 1.5 km from the first, which was only 10 years old. He gave as reason that the first one was not auspicious enough and that the principles of geomancy favored the new site. However, the official palace information booklet suggests that his real reason may have been that he no longer wanted to live in the palace where he had had his half brothers assassinated in order to claim the throne himself.

Whereas the first palace is laid out along a main axis, the classic Chinese pattern, the new palace better blends with the topography of the site, which is at the base of a mountain. This was quite innovative, and the palace is in this way rather unique in Asia.

Next to Changdeokgung is another palace, Changgyeonggung, which is older. It was built in 1104 by King Sukjong of the Goryeo dynasty as his royal residence in the capital of the South. King Taejo, founder of the Joseon dynasty, took it over in 1394 while waiting for Gyeongbokgung to be built. Later it became a sort of retirement village for kings who abdicated in favor of their sons and for widows of kings.

All three palaces were destroyed by the Japanese during their invasions of 1592–1598. Changdeokgung was rebuilt in 1610 and was the main palace until Gyeongbokgung was finally rebuilt in 1868. Changgyeonggung was likewise rebuilt in 1616 and again after a fire in 1834.

The Joseon dynasty finally came to an end when the Japanese took over the country between 1905 and 1910. Still, they had a long run, more than 500 years. How many European dynasties have ruled that long?

The buildings and layout of Changdeokgung were indeed impressive, and I prefer this layout to the rigid single-axis system. After Changdeokgung I went to Changgyeonggung, which was pretty well destroyed by the Japanese, who made it into a zoo and botanical garden. The Koreans are still working at restoring it to its former glory. There was a program going on to teach kids about the palace and Korean history. So most of the buildings were serving as temporary class rooms. This I learned when walking slowly by the first building I encountered. It was full of young kids sitting on the floor and listening attentively to a teacher. One of the staff (18 or 20 with good English) came to me explain to me what it was all about. She said that it was all volunteers running it. It made me think of Gonda with her volunteering this summer. She gave me an ornament of the style that Korean women hang from the waist of traditional clothing, except that the large silver piece in the middle of it was replaced by a wooden disc with a mandala drawn on it which the kids could then color in.

Speaking of traditional clothing, I saw quite a few (mostly young) people wearing it and shops where you can rent it. Apparently it is quite 'in'. It might also have to do with the fact that entrance to the palaces is free if you are wearing traditional clothing.

But soon the battery of my camera was empty. No problem, I had a spare. But it too was empty—dumb of me not to have checked this before the trip! And this was shortly before the tour of the Huwon, or Secret Garden of Changdeokgung, which was only accesible with the King's invitation. You could only visit the garden on a tour, which I had booked earlier in the day, and there was no time to go back to my guest house and charge up a battery. So I have no pictures of a very nice garden with various pavillions, large and small, many overlooking lakes and streams among the hills. From the upper floor of one small building on a pond's edge one king (or maybe more than one) liked to fish. Other small buildings were used by princes to study, which one depending on the season. The Huwon was in a way the nicest part of the palace.

Then I went back to the guest house to recharge batteries, the camera's and mine, and recover a bit from the bright sun, 35–40 °C heat and 80% humidity.

The final sight of the day was Jongmyo (the Royal Ancestral Shrine), where the "spirit tablets" of the kings are preserved. The bodies are buried elsewhere, but the spirit tablet is the contact, as it were, with the dead king. And so it is here that services are held in memory of the kings—still today. The shrine was built in 1395 at the beginning of the Joseon dynasty. It consisted initially of one hall with seven rooms, each to accomodate the tablet of one king and his queen(s). Later, of course, it was expanded. But you can only see Jongmyo on a tour. So I had to wait for the English tour at 4. I spent some of the time watching old, or at least not young, men playing board games in a nearby park. The buildings appear rather spartan, reflecting the Confucian influence. Then in the middle of the tour it started to rain—first a few drops, and then, as we were heading for the last building (the one with all the rooms for the tablets) it really let loose. We took shelter for a while, as the guide explained the rituals. Then when the rain seemed to slacken we headed for the gate, only to have the downpour resume heavier than before. Fortunately I had my umbrella. By the time I got back to the guest house the rain had stopped.

I went back to the same restaurant as the previous night, with the excuse that both *Lonely Planet* and *Michelin* recommend it. Tomorrow I will try someplace else. I had 6 large dumplings in a broth with, of course, a couple of sides, including *kimchi*, which they automatically bring along with a pitcher of cold water when you sit down. Very nice.

**Saturday, 20 August.** Breakfast this morning was like yesterday, but with a slightly different choice of dishes.

I took metro line 1 to go to Suwon, but didn't understand one of the announcements (which are in English as well as Korean, just as, the street signs and the signs in the metro are in Roman letters as well as Korean) that must have said that this was the branch of line 1 going to Incheon. I, of course, wanted the other branch of the line. Fortunately I realized it rather quickly when they announced the next station. I was pretty lucky; I didn't have to backtrack, being able to catch a different line that intersected 'my' line 1 a bit further up. And then, without knowing it I got an express, which skipped a lot of stations, although it made me a bit anxious wondering if it would also skip Suwon.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/sfbWwT8g6vQ7Gwy27>.) Rather than try to figure out the buses, I walked two kilometers into the center of the old city. The chief attraction of Suwon is the old city walls still surrounding most of the old city, which were completed in 1796 when King Jeongjo decided to move the tomb of his father from Yangju to Suwon. Heongjo crowned his father king posthumously. The fortifications combine various building techniques, using both brick and stone, and could withstand both arrows and firearms. The gates are large and imposing. However, it was not strong enough to escape damage in the Korean War, and extensive renovation was carried out in the 1970s. Consequently, parts of the walls look rather new. Like the palaces in Seoul, it is a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site. Unlike the palaces, it was not free for the elderly, but then the ₩1000 price was not unreasonable. It is hilly; so the wall follows the terrain and there are lots of ups and downs. Unfortunately, it was very hot, near 40 °C, and there was no shade. I walked about 4 of its 5.7 km length before deciding I had seen enough. Then the two kilometer walk back to the metro. I was pretty tired.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/WZSifpEDrcZNTVqo9>.) But the day was hardly over. I took the metro to the National Museum, which is open until 9 pm on Saturday. On one side of the museum is a nice park with Buddhist statues and stone pagodas. The museum itself is massive. It has a nice presentation of the history of Korea from paleolithic to modern time.

I ate at a restaurant in the museum—about the same prices as elsewhere. I had a “spicy beef stew” with some kind of mushroom. Actually it was more of a spicy beef soup. There was also rice and 3 side dishes, including, of course, *kimchi*.

Then I took the metro to the train station to buy my ticket to Andong on Monday, and the metro back to my guest house.

**Sunday, 21 August.** This morning there were two Japanese mothers, each with a 10 or so year old daughter. We learned some things from the owner of the guest house about eating manners. Koreans eat with a metal spoon and metal chopsticks. Whereas Chinese raise the rice bowl to their mouths and sort of push the rice into

their mouths with chopsticks, Koreans keep the rice bowl on the table and eat the rice with the spoon. Koreans only use the chopsticks for pieces of things, *e.g.*, *kimchi*.

I spent the morning wandering around Bukchon, the area between the western and eastern palaces, which has lots of old-style, *hanok*, houses. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/q3E7NJ5fWouktSoLA>.) It was a very picturesque area, though in places rather touristy, and as the morning wore on it really filled up with tourists.

I ended my walk at the Korean Folk Museum. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/7QSgiu98eqtDD8rB6>.) Like the National Museum yesterday there was lots of focus on Korean history, but also on crafts. It also provided some welcome airco relief from the hot sun. Outside there was a collection of statues and a few old buildings.

Then to the neighboring Gyeongbokgung. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/tp6BR1sBDhrHgonM7>.) By this time the sun was really beating down and it must have been at least 40 °C. After a couple of hours trudging around looking at the various buildings I escaped into the Palace Museum.

Yesterday and today I had been trying the ATM of every bank I passed, without success. Finally I found one. Not only did it work, but it did not charge a fee for its use like the one at the airport did. Playing safe, since I was worried about credit card acceptance outside of Seoul, I withdrew ₩500000.

Back at the guest house I cooled off in the shower, and then headed to a nearby restaurant (from *Lonely Planet*) for a *bibimbap* plus sides, one of which looked and tasted just like American cole sla.

**Monday, 22 August.** The breakfast was a bit different this morning. Instead of omelette there were miniature pancakes with a slice of courgette or a slice of some processed meat (looked like SPAM) on top.

I took the metro to the train station where, not having made any mistakes with entrances and exits, I arrived much too early. The country is very hilly. So the train spent lots of time in tunnels, and it was not very fast, taking 3 hours 20 minutes to get to Andong.

Andong is a relatively small city, and my hotel—a real hotel with a real bed, a PC, refrigerator, huge TV, fan and airco—was just a couple of blocks from the station. At the tourist information office at the station I got info on buses and trains. Then I got a bus to the Folk Village. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/sxVZQPpBgRq2X7hx9>.) It was billed as houses moved when they built a dam some years ago plus a few houses from elsewhere. It was nice, but small. And there were also a lot of nicer *hanok* houses. I couldn't figure out whether they were part of the open air museum or a vacation park. I rather lean towards the latter.

Then across the “longest footbridge in Korea”, 450 m. to a restaurant to eat a mackerel, a speciality of Andong, slightly salted since the sea is far away (well, about as far away as it could be in Korea), and (in the old days before refrigeration) it needed to be salted to withstand the long journey. It was split open and flattened, then grilled (or maybe fried) and served with some rice and several side dishes. Actually it was a bit difficult ordering it, since no one spoke more than a couple of words of English. They didn't understand the word mackerel, and when I tried fish they seemed to think that was way too much for one person. Finally I took the waitress and pointed to a picture on the outside of the restaurant. So then she seemed to understand. Then I found one of the apps on my tablet to translate mackerel into Korean. I showed that too her and she was much happier. It turned out to be quite tasty.

Then it was quickly back across the long footbridge and to the bus stop to get the last bus back to Andong. I needn't have hurried, since the bus was 15 minutes late. I was getting pretty worried that maybe the bus had been early and I had missed it. Tonight it is down to 25 °C, but still humid. It feels almost too cool.

Back at the hotel I discovered that the PC only understood Korean.

**Tuesday, 23 August.** I made tea in my room and ate the pastries I bought last night. Then I caught the #46 bus to the Hahoe Folk Village. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/oXbfSPEPN6dkeYDcA>.) This is an old traditional village, which has kept its *hanok* buildings, and was recognized in 2010 as a UNESCO World Heritage site on the basis of 4 of the 10 UNESCO criteria (meeting only one of the criteria is enough for recognition): a typical example of clan village showing authenticity and perfection; an outstanding example of building and architectural landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history; an outstanding example of traditional human settlement which is representative of human interaction with the environment; and association with living traditions, beliefs, artistic and literary works of outstanding universal value. And as if that wasn't enough, it was visited by Queen Elizabeth in 1999. It has been the home of the Ryu family for 600 years. The Nakdong River flows in an S shape around the village, from which the name: *ha* means river and *hoe* means turning around. There are hills across the river and behind the village.

It cost ₩3000 to get in, no discount for seniors. There were not many natives to be seen—all doing inside tasks I guess (not a bad idea in the bright sun heat, which fortunately was a bit cooler (high 20s I would guess) than in Seoul and sometimes with a refreshing breeze. Or maybe they have jobs elsewhere. A rather large number of the houses rented out rooms to tourists. There was a Presbyterian Church (actually a large number, about 30%, of Koreans are Christians of one kind or other).

Then it was a 4 km walk “along the river”, but actually pretty high above it. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/JBds7Avk9uYakwZA7>.) The first half kilometer was uphill, which would not have been bad in cooler weather and without the bugs (fortunately not the biting kind, apparently content with drinking my sweat). Then it was gently downhill or flat for a few kilometers before reaching a steep set of stairs (three flights or so) up, before being flat the rest of the way to the Byeongsan Confucian Academy, which was rather plain, but nicely laid out with lots of flowering shrubs. Then the bus, from right in front of the Academy, back to Andong. Actually, I should have come here first and then walked to the Hahoe Village—there were no ticket offices that way.

Traveling alone has its disadvantages. I wanted to eat Andong's famous dish Andong *jjimdak*, a steamed chicken and vegetable stew. But it is only made for two or more people. So instead I had a *bulgogi*, thinly sliced meat boiled with some glass noodles and a few thin mushrooms added at the end. It came, boiling ferociously, in a cast iron dish, along with 8 side dishes. It was good. Googling, I found a recipe for Andong *jjimdak* (<http://www.maangchi.com/recipe/dakjjim>). Maybe I will try it some day.

**Wednesday, 24 August.** I slept late this morning, since my train doesn't leave until nearly noon. Then I used the PC in the room to copy some files from memory card to memory stick, fortunately remembering well enough where things were in the

Windows menus. I caught the train at 11:47 and arrived on time in Gyeongju at 14:06. I found my hotel with only a little searching.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/HG2DG7hiWeUBQ6UN9>.) Then I went out to look at the tumuli—there sure are a lot of them, of the order of 200. The earlier ones had tombs constructed of wood, later stone was favored. The corpse together with a number of possessions was placed in the tomb, and then the tomb was covered with a mound of earth. The size of the mound varied a lot, the size reflecting the wealth and social status of the deceased with the largest ones presumably for royalty.

Gyeongju was the capital of the Kingdom of Silla for about a thousand years starting in 57 BC. It started as a small, local kingdom, but slowly engulfed the surrounding ones, eventually unifying the three kingdoms, the other two being Goguryeo in the north and Baekje in central Korea, which comprised Korea in 668. That lasted until 935. Although called Unified Silla, it did not actually unify all of the country; the northern-most part of Goguryeo known as Balhae remained independent. As Silla fell apart with revolts of nobles and peasants, Goguryeo (from which the modern name Korea) arose in the north, but it succumbed to its military, which imposed a dictatorship. Its last dictator founded the Joseon dynasty, which ruled from 1392 to 1910 when it was abolished by the Japanese, who had taken over the country. Thus the Silla and the Joseon dynasties ruled for most of Korean history.

Most of the area where there are tumuli is in a park, which is freely accessible, but part is in a park within a park and cost ₩2000 to get in with no reduction for seniors (the reduction, or maybe even free entry—I couldn't read any of the Korean except the number 65—was only for Koreans according to the woman selling the tickets). The paid area was indeed better maintained than the rest. In addition to cutting the grass, which also occurred in the free area, there were beds of flowers, and loudspeakers in the trees playing music, which I could have done without—but at least it wasn't odes to Chairman Mao like the last time I heard music coming from the trees (at a park in Beijing the first time I went to China, in 1995).

After walking through much of the parks, I came to an area of *hanok* houses, most rather new. There were also a couple of old ones, apparently at one time the homes of famous people in Korean history. It was next to a river, over which there was a covered bridge dating from 760, which was being restored. I had the impression that the new ones were yuppies taking advantage of the area, and hip stores taking even more advantage.

Walking back from there, it was time to eat. I went to a restaurant I just happened to be passing, but which looked interesting. It was a very modern looking place—all black and white, with its 10 tables placed really far apart. But what attracted me was that it was full. I had to wait for about 5 minutes for a table to become free. There were just two things to choose from on the menu, the third item being only for two or more people—at least that's what I think the waiter said. He told me one was *bulgolgi* and the other soup, which was only marginally helpful. I took the first: thinly sliced meat and small mushrooms, cold with a dressing, rice, and 8 side dishes, including a salad and a small bunch of grapes. Quite good, actually.

I found my way back to the hotel, stopping at a super market along the way to buy a beer, an apple, and some pastry for breakfast. Fruit is expensive. The cheapest fruit was apples: one variety was on sale for ₩3200, about €2.60, per kilo, which is sort of the price of really special types of apples at home.

**Thursday, 25 August.** I took the bus to the Yangdong Folk Village, about an hour away. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/s5eacp9QuC1vcg1U6>.) Like the Hahoe village, it is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and like Hahoe, you have to pay to get in. Unlike Hahoe, it is in the hills rather than on a flat area next to a river, and so is much more spread out, vertically as well as horizontally, though the houses still tend to be in clusters. It was very interesting, but with 35°C, a bright sun, and the hilly terrain it was also quite tiring. It was a relief to get back to my air conditioned hotel room at about 4:30.

I had a shower and copied some photos from card to stick using the PC in the room. Then I went to eat, a place in *Lonely Planet*. I had a savory pancake filled with green onions. It was not as good as the one with sea food in Seoul, being a bit more greasy, but then it cost only ₩10000 instead of 18000. I walked around in the relatively cool (only 30°C) evening; around the tumuli it smelled of hay where they had cut the grass.

**Friday, 26 August.** There has been a change of weather. It is only 22°C, cloudy, and a bit of rain—mostly just a drizzle or thick mist and often dry. At times there is also a strong wind. Nevertheless, I took the bus out to the Bulguksa temple, which was very nice. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/We31wNWb5nWVja6G9>.) I just followed a tour group in, and so doing unintentionally got in for free. Looking at the tags all of them had, it seems they were here for a convention of FIAP, which wikipedia later informed me is the Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique. That explained why they were all loaded with fancy cameras and were taking so many photos.

Despite the occasional drop of rain I decided to walk 2.2 km through the woods to the Seokguram Grotto. I hadn't realized that it was all uphill, from 350 m up to 533 m according to the GPS on my tablet. *Michelin* had only said it was "hilly". Then another 0.6 km, still uphill, to the grotto itself.

This area is part of the Korean National Park system, and the trail was paved (stone) for the first kilometer, more than wide enough for a car or truck. Then the pavement stopped, it got narrower, and there were some steps. They seem to have adopted things from the U. S. Park system: a rest area with exercise equipment, a sign of a bear warning against fire, a well-marked trail, signs informing about flora and fauna. I saw a couple of kinds of birds and heard more. And a couple of times a chipmunk scurried across my path. About half way along there was a toilet station, nice and clean with western style toilets.

The path got narrower where it had to work its way around the steep mountain side. There were nice views off down the valleys, except that they were full of mist. In some places the path was protected from falling rocks by high fences reinforced with thick steel cables.

I did not escape paying for the grotto: ₩5000, which I thought way over-priced seeing that it was basically just one thing you got to see, even if it was "one of the most brilliant pieces of the cultural heritage in terms of its religious inscrutability and artistry" and "one of the most outstanding masterpieces in the history of the world's religious art." It made me feel somewhat less guilty about not paying at Bulguksa. Photos were not allowed and there was a guard standing there to enforce it. But I did manage to sneak a couple when he was being replaced by another.

It had started to drizzle a bit harder near the end of the trail, but by the time



I finished the grotto it had stopped and the mist was clearing. So on the way back (much quicker going downhill) I could actually see the valleys. By the time the bus had brought me back to Gyeongju it was raining lightly.

I went to a restaurant from *Lonely Planet*. At least I think I did—it was the only one near the place on the *Lonely Planet* map. I had “barbecued beef”, which turned out to mean fairly thin bite-sized pieces of beef that you cook yourself on a hot plate in the middle of the table—rather neatly designed, it tilted slightly so that the fat runs off into a waiting receptacle. There were a couple of sauces to dip the meat into (to my surprize, not at all hot) and green onions, regular onions, bean sprouts, and a sort of lettuce. At another table I saw them putting the meat with the other things on the lettuce to eat: sort of a sandwich with the lettuce in the role of bread. There was also *kimchi*, which was also put on the grill, and a sort of green in a vinaigrette sauce as well as two thin slices of some root, which was quite tasty. And rice. All for ₩13000.

This evening it is down to 22°C. It feels downright cool. Tomorrow is supposed to be warmer.

**Saturday, 27 August.** Today is supposed to be mostly sunny and only up to 28°C—sounds good.

(Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/bpxKt12DU3b1zHD39>.) I went to Bunhwangsa this morning. After yesterday, it seemed like a second-rate Buddhist temple. Then I walked around in the area south of the tumuli ending up at the National Museum, which was pretty much devoted to what has been found in all the tumuli, or in other words to the Silla kingdom.

Tonight I had a fish and vegetable stew, *i.e.*, extremely well-filled soup. They warned me that it was spicy, but I didn’t find it all that hot.

**Sunday, 28 August.** It is raining this morning and only 22°C. Fortunately it is a travel day, not a sightseeing day, and the bus terminal is only a couple of blocks from my hotel. The bus to Gimhae airport (near Busan), the flight to Jeju, and the bus to the conference site on the other side of the island all went without problem.

**Monday, 29 August.** The conference is in a large, rather fancy but slightly aged hotel on the coast. I heard that it will close for renovation shortly. Maybe that is what kept it affordable for us. Back in July I had tried to pay the conference fee via their internet form, but it claimed it could not process a foreign credit card. I e-mailed them about this, and got a reply in a few days that the problem had been solved. But the same thing happened. After another e-mail they said to just bring my credit card to the conference and I could pay then; they would still give me the early registration discount. But last night they again could not process the card. This morning it finally worked.

**Wednesday, 31 August.** Today was just a half day of lectures with an excursion in the afternoon. (Photos at <https://goo.gl/photos/Soznp2zggefgebMer5>.) We went first to the Manjanggul Lava Tube. A lava tube is formed by an ‘underground’ river of lava, *i.e.*, the lava above has cooled and solidified but below the lava is still flowing. If conditions are right, when the lava stops being produced the lava in the tube will

drain out leaving a sort of tunnel. For more, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lava\\_tube](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lava_tube). Lava tubes are not that uncommon, but this one is quite long, more than 7 km, although only about 1 km is open to the public. It varies in width: up to 23 m wide and 30 m high. Along the walls and floors one sees distinctive features such as lava stalactites. It is on UNESCO's World Natural heritage list and is a Global Geopark. Quite interesting.

Then we went to Seongsan Ilchulbong (Sunrise Peak). This is the crater of an underwater volcano. Wooden steps gets one in about 20 minutes up (182 m) to the rim. There is a wonderful view, the crater is filled with lush vegetation. And they say the sunrise is spectacular, but we were there in the afternoon.

In the evening was the conference banquet, a buffet affair with mild Korean and western dishes, not all that great really, except for the good sushi, which many of us took to be starters but then found not so much left of the warm things when we got to them. Fortunately the wine was not too bad.

**Thursday, 1 September.** Tonight was the 'elders meeting'. The 'elders' are the people who have organized this meeting in the past. We decide where the next conference will be and give conditional acceptance to a group for the one after that after listening to proposals from those wanting to organize it. It used to be, back when the 'elders' were younger that everyone brought a bottle of booze from his country, and these were passed around during the meeting. Voting on anything like the next conference was never done until the bottles were all at least half empty. But in the last 10 or 15 years the tradition has changed. Now the organizers of the current year's conference host a nice dinner for the elders. Since few of the elder elders are still around, few know the old traditions, and in this case I am glad of it. The dinner this time was decidedly non-Korean, but quite good: seafood salad with Italian dressing; broccoli soup; organic greens with nuts and Balsamic; grilled salmon; grilled beef tenderloin and pan sauteed king prawns, a selection of hot vegetables; gateau chocolat; coffee or tea. And quite decent wines. Next year's conference will be in Tlaxcala City, Mexico, about an hour south of Mexico City, which because of its altitude is not too hot.

**Friday, 2 September.** The conference ended at noon. Then lunch. Then wait a while before taking the bus to the airport. I thought I had plenty of time, but the bus got caught in traffic and I was lucky to make my flight. The plane landed on time at Gimhae airport. I took the metro into Busan, finally found the right exit, and then it was just a short distance to my hotel. Good planning, except that it was raining, rather hard. After a while, when I went out to find a restaurant it had stopped. Nevertheless, it was threatening to resume. So I didn't feel like searching too long for a restaurant. Not finding the *Lonely Planet* recommendation right away, I just took one more or less at random from the great many little restaurants in the area. I had barbecue, something like in Gyeongju but more expensive, ₩20000.

**Saturday, 3 September.** The breakfast at the hotel was free, and was about what you could expect for free: a mix of Korean (rice, pickled vegetables, broth) and western (toast and jam); coffee and tea.

I went to the Jagalchi Market (fish), took lots of photos (at <https://goo.gl/photos/Sp2wKq3h7ke6javr5>). Particularly humorous were the octopuses which tried

to escape from the tubs of water they were in, but were always chased down and returned to the tub. Then I did a bit of shopping in a nearby department store, buying a 16 GB memory card for my camera, Samsung of course. So now I don't have to worry about running out of memory. I had been looking for one since Seoul, when I noticed my memory cards filling up at an alarming rate. But it was surprisingly difficult to find one. While there was a store on practically every corner selling smart phones, none that I went into had memory cards other than the very fast (and expensive) ones to put into the phone.

Then, a bit early but I didn't want to risk missing the plane like I almost did yesterday, I took the metro back to Gimhae airport. Check-in, security, immigration with no problem, although the immigration went quite slowly. Since, apart from the conference fee, my credit card worked splendidly and was accepted everywhere I tried it, I had most of my Korean won left over. I changed it to Japanese yen.

The flight to Fukuoka left only a few minutes late. Goodbye Korea.

**Summary.** Korea was quite interesting. There is nice scenery, interesting culture. In some ways I would characterize it as 'Japan light', although I doubt that Koreans would like to hear that. Compared to the Japanese, Koreans are polite, but less formal, and more open; scrupulously cleanly, but not neurotically so; well organized, though somewhat less so. The food is similar in many ways, but spicier in Korea (though much less so than I had expected). You can drink water from the tap in Japan, but that is not advised in Korea. It is not too much of a problem since all the hotels and restaurants provide drinkable water and in many places there are public drinking fountains with potable water.