



A Dramatic City Experiencing Seoul

Written by Truly Almendo Pasaribu
The writer is a lecturer at English Education
Study Program
Sanata Dharma University

Seoul is not only a land that gives birth to K-pop and Korean Drama, but also an area that is surrounded by mighty mountains and lovely streams. Every corner in the city gives me a sense of dramatic excitement. So, let the drama begin.

The first excitement was when Pak Kuswandono and I set our feet down in Myeongdong. We were surrounded by the valleys of skyscrapers in one of the best shopping cities in the world. It was a bit challenging to find our guest house in the myriad of streets without maps or an internet connection. But isn't it the sense of getting lost in a new place which makes traveling interesting?

The local people we asked for directions were as clueless as we were. But, they kindly showed us the directions using Google Maps. Because the information on the screen was in Hangul, Korean alphabets, we were officially lost. However, it was fine getting lost in a city which offers a lot of coffee shops along the sideways. So, we stopped at a nice coffee shop with wireless connection to open our Google Maps, which finally led us

to the guest house. Surprisingly, the guesthouse keeper was very good in Indonesian. We had delightful conversation and he informed us about some interesting places in Seoul and gave us advice about the sophisticated Korean subways.

One subway ride costs 1,350 won, which is not very cheap. But with all efficiency and facilities it offers, I think it is a great deal. In fact, the subway is fantastic for tourists who love hanging out in cool places. It has several lines, which are color coded and numbered. The visual and auditory announcements are in Korean, Japanese and English, so it is easy for tourists to visit famous spots.

Seoul is also well-known as a city where tradition and modernity meet. Myeongdong boasts brands and stores for people who love shopping and following the latest trend. Insadong offers cute and handmade souvenirs along the sideways. Another popular modern site is the Seoul tower, one of the highest locations to view the whole city. I find it delightful to visit this place on an autumn night because it offers a clear stunning nightscape of Seoul.

While the city articulates spectacular modern landscape, it also keeps the history alive with its cultural and traditional architectures.

Near Myeongdeong is the traditional Namsangol Hanok village featuring well-preserved Hanok, or traditional Korean houses. The autumn view lends its beauty to our eyes. The trees by the melodious streams are cloaked in variety of golden, umber and green hues. The traditional houses are in harmony



Edit: Sarah Photo: Truly Layout: Rene



with the natural surroundings. Exploring the traditional houses, including traditional tea houses, gives people a glimpse of a simple ancient life in Namsam.

The traditional site you should not miss when exploring Seoul is Gyeongbokgung palace, the first royal palace built in the Joseon Dynasty. This place preserves 500 years of history. Tranquil walking in this place may bring you back in time to learn Korean history. The architecture of the past sheds light on the elegance of Korean royal family. I am most fascinated by the Hyangwonjeong pavilion which is constructed on Hyangwonji, an artificial island of a lake surrounded by various kinds of trees. I think it is exceptionally dramatic when you experience it in autumn, a time when every leaf turns into a flower. The harmonious balance between nature and traditional architecture of the past makes this place very stunning.

Indeed, Seoul is a city that offers so many breathtaking sites to explore. When you go to Seoul, don't worry about getting lost because Korean people will help you find your way to exciting sites. I heard a story from a friend who also visited Korea. One day, a Korean taxi driver waited for her father nearly an hour to give the wallet that he left on the taxi.

Impressed by the act of kindness, her father asked the driver, "Why do you wait for me?"
"I want you to tell good things about Korea when you go back to your country. It is just my way of loving my country."

No wonder people love Seoul.