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SPH A SINGAPORE PRESS HOLDINGS PUBLICATION

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 4 2013
MCI (P) 123/11/2013
mypaper.sg



PHOTO: INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/AFP

A shot for peace: After days of street battles, tensions appeared to have eased in Bangkok, ahead of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 86th birthday tomorrow. Security forces brought down barricades and handed out roses to anti-government protesters, one of whom decided to take a photo with this Thai policeman.

FULL REPORT: NEWS A9

CHARITABLE GIVING //////////////////////////////////////

A stranger asks for help, we look away

That is what a global study says. Singapore residents are among the least helpful in the world when they encounter strangers in need. Out of 135 countries, only Cambodia fares worse on this score. Some say we are in too much of a hurry, others insist that it's because we are shy. We seem to be more liberal when it comes to donations and volunteering, though. Still, is it time to re-examine our attitude towards strangers?

FULL REPORT: NEWS A2

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WEDDING REPRISED: The writer and her husband Leonard posing for wedding shots, this time in the Jeju countryside. PHOTO: KOREAN WEDDING PHOTOS



SAY CHEESE: The cobalt-blue beaches in the Jeju countryside, an hour's flight from Seoul, make for a colourful backdrop. PHOTO: LEONARD OW


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Summer Sonata in South Korea

BY ANA OW

LET'S face it: We've known that South Korea is cool for a while now – arguably overtaking Japan in the pop-culture stakes.

But apart from its music and entertainment scene (I include its talented plastic surgeons in this category as well), there are more subtle ways to experience South Korea enjoyably.

In fact, the city of Seoul combined with the island landscape of Jeju make for a wonderful honeymoon-type getaway.

Here are our recommendations for what to do in South Korea if your idea of a vacation is a little romance and a whole lot of urban-style downtime.

HAVE YOUR PICTURE TAKEN

If you've always dreamt of being a fashion model or celebrity on a photo shoot for a day, there's no better way to experience that than with Korean Wedding Photos (koreanweddingphotos.com).

While most of the couples who do a Korean-style photo shoot are the soon-to-wed, there's no rule saying that those who have already tied the knot can't have the same experience.

We had ours with a company that is an expert organiser in fabulous destination-wedding couple shots that have all the cinematic quality of carefully prepped hair and make-up (at Wedding Ever studio, and which takes no less than three hours), terrific photography and stunning scenery.

The shots we took were in the Jeju countryside an hour's flight from Seoul, so we had the added enjoyment of lush fields of buttercups, long cherry-blossom-lined streets and cobalt-blue beaches.

The whole works include having an assistant to carry the train of your dress and

have your coat at the ready – it was a brisk spring morning – and a photographer who captures your best angles and knows all the best locations to snap a pic.

FASHION 101

Back in the city, we soaked up the atmosphere from about mid-morning to almost dawn.

Step aside, New York, because Seoul is the new city that never sleeps – special thanks to the fact that it boasts the highest concentration of coffee places than any other city in the world, with a per capita consumption of coffee five times greater than the rest of the entire Asia-Pacific.

So, yes, coffee snobs, rejoice!

While wide awake and after a cuppa at any one of the local joints, such as Tom N Toms, Beans Bins or Caffe Bene (try their famous Misugaru Latte!), check out the night stalls around Dongdaemun or go all upmarket at Doota mall, which is open until three in the morning.

Tip: If you want flash for less cash, Pyoungghwa Fashion Market right opposite Doota is teeming with cutesy clothing and random fashion items like sunglasses, suspenders and sunhats going at wholesale prices.

Beware though: Some shops will sell only in bulk, so if you want 10 of everything, this is for you.

Elsewhere and during saner hours, stroll the pretty shops in neighbourhoods such as Samcheongdong, Hongdae and Garosugil for some refined boutique shopping.

For something truly different, embark on a vintage buying spree at the wonderful Gwangjang Market in Jongno-gu.

Have a bite of sumptuous street fare on the ground level before heading up to the

CONTINUED ON JOURNEYS A15

Head to
CATS FASTADS in
The New Paper
for education options!



CL/News55g



BRIDAL BLOOMS: A field of buttercups in the Jeju countryside lends colour to the writer's wedding shots. PHOTO: KOREAN WEDDING PHOTOS

FROM PAGE A14

maze of stalls on the second floor where you can find anything from original rock-concert tees to US\$10 (S\$12.60) maxi skirts from the 1970s.

FOOD 101

Sure, you can stumble around in the hope of finding the city's best eats, but if you're on a tight schedule, why not let the experts do the hard work?

Book a walking food tour through back alleys and little lanes with O'ngo Food Communications (www.ongofood.com).

Founded by food connoisseur Daniel Gray, the tour features an array of specially curated toothsome treats of the local variety and also lots of fun and entertainment – from drinking games to street hawkers with stories to tell or raps to recite.

If on the Night Dining tour of local eats, wear sturdy shoes and be prepared for some unusual flavour combinations. The Koreans seem especially fond of combining spicy kimchi base with a starch base topped with melting cheese.

It started at about 6pm and lasted about four hours. We had appetisers at a dinky but delicious little barbecue place, followed by a visit to a local Dragon's Beard candy shop in Insadong, where we marvelled at the candy-maker's goofy chatter and deft fingers.

Another star find was the "drug kim-bap" on the street level of Gwangjang Market.

So named because of its addictive quality, the kim-bap is basically a rice roll wrapped in seafood, much like sushi.

Pancakes are also a staple hot snack – it's more of the yam-cake variety rather than a crepe, though.

The food tour will just about bust your gut, but if you're still somehow peckish after that, grab some fried chicken at one of the myriad chains that are spawning all the way out of the country and into our local malls.

We like the Frypan, which piles its gigantic chicken atop a mountain of potato chips.

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YUMMY: Savoury beancurd, a staple dish, served in a beancurd restaurant on the O'ngo food-tour route. PHOTO: LEONARD OW



KOREAN TAKE: The Korean version of steak tartare is savoury Yukhoe, infused with sesame oil and thin pear slices. PHOTO: LEONARD OW

» Getting there

HOW TO GET THERE

Many airlines fly to Seoul, with even some budget ones getting in on the action. We were pleasantly surprised with China Eastern Airways, which flew us out on a red-eye, thus letting us start bright and early on our first day in. The planes are nice and new, with plenty of legroom, even in Economy.

Book your tickets through sg.ceair.com.

WHERE TO STAY

For a unique experience, check out the Imperial Palace Seoul in the now-famous district of Gangnam.

The hotel has an opulent Art Deco style so it's no place for a minimalist. But if you desire comfort and thoughtful service in a great location for a reasonable price, you can't go wrong here.

From arranging itineraries to suggesting places for a romantic anniversary dinner, the staff are attentive and ever willing to go out of their way to help.

I even found little takeaway snacks of fruit and biscuit that accompanied a typed note of things to buy in Jeju – just because I had mentioned to the concierge that we were headed there.

For great rates and benefits, book your stay through the Preferred Hotel Group at preferredhotelgroup.com/summit/ destinations/korea-south/seoul/imperial-palace-seoul

Alternatively, go local and check into a Hanok-style house. A Hanok is a traditional Korean-style village home with wooden floors, paper walls and a stone courtyard.

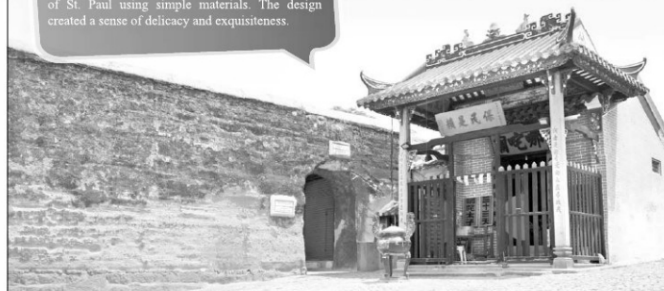
We like the Soriwool Guesthouse in Bukchon where the owners are fine musicians and serve a warm, organic breakfast during your stay. There's also a killer dumpling-noodle place just two doors down.

Reserve your room in advance at www.soriwool.com

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