

Title : Bring Me to Korea!

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Korea?

Just three years ago, it's not a stretch to say that I knew pretty much nothing about Korea except for a few Korean dramas. The Korean girl groups and boy bands didn't impress me all that much. To be more exact, I looked down on them, thinking, "young teenagers singing??" Do I feel this way now? Absolutely not!

If I were to ask my friends to write down two words that come to their mind about me, with no hesitation, they would choose "Korea" and "K-Pop". Are they coerced in any way to respond as much? Of course not~

I don't remember exactly when I began to love K-pop, but it seems the start of it all was the Korean girl group Miss A my friend introduced to me in high school. I quickly became addicted to their powerful singing and dance and completely fell in love with Suzy, one of the four girls in the group. The thumping rhythm of their hit number "Bad Girl Good Girl" was engraved in my head as I moved closer and closer to the world of K-Pop. I worked meticulously not to miss out on any information. Come to think of it now, my obsession was hilarious.

My passion for Korea grew all the more. I took part in a Miss A lip synch contest, just for fun, and even went to a K-pop concert to see Miss A with my own eyes. Witnessing my idols at a close distance was likely the most amazing moment in my life!! This was also the very moment that Korea became the ultimate country I just had to visit by all means!

A Thousand Roads Lead to Rome, One Million Ways to Korea

Amid the rising boom of the Korean Wave pop culture phenom, many contests were hosted luring participants with the prize of a trip to Korea. I of course took part in a number of these including the 2NE1 Lonely Cover Contest, Touch Korea Video Contest, Be My Baby Cover Contest and the 2012 Bigbang Cover Contest. Any luck in prizes? Haha...unfortunately not but I didn't give up. I still had one chance: the Discover Korea essay contest! I was confident that before long, I would find myself in the country of ginseng.

My Itinerary!

I far from know every little detail about Korea, but based on information I gathered online and from travel books, I planned out a travel itinerary of my Korea trip. Follow me!

Day One -Along the Korean Drama Trail, Seoul Trip

I will first visit the Petite France neighborhood that was featured in the hit Korean drama *Secret Garden*. This was my favorite Korean drama of all time and so I absolutely must visit the place where the drama was shot. Some may question why I would visit the French town in Korea out of all places. Well, why not? It's even better to get a glimpse of France in Korea, since Europe is so far away to visit. :B

My next stop on the drama trail is Nami Island, the backdrop of *Winter Sonata*. This show has practically introduced the country Korea in Indonesia and therefore visiting the island makes perfect sense. Oh and I must not forget to take a photo in front of the statue of actor Bae Yong-jun and actress Choi Ji-woo, who played the endearing couple in the drama!

Being a Muslim, a visit to Itaewon in downtown Seoul is also a must for me. I would like to drop by the mosque to observe how advanced Islam is in Korean society and to talk with Korean Muslims. Next is shopping! I should first buy souvenirs for my loved ones. I will peruse Korean products at Dongdaemun Market, a venue recommended by many people. And just the thought of possibly buying cool printed T-shirts of the girl groups Miss A or Girls' Generation gets me excited. What's even better is that Dongdaemun Market is open all night between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m.!

Day Two - Experiencing the Real Korea

People like to take pictures in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Merlion statue in Singapore. What's the equivalent in Korea? It's of course the Gyeongbok Palace! The palace is a renowned historical site but it's also offered its grounds for the shooting of Korean historical dramas including *Princess Hours*. I will also visit the National Folk Museum of Korea to learn about Korean history.

The presidential office of Cheong Wa Dae is also on the list of things to see and then by all means a stop at the N Seoul Tower. This is where the love birds Gu Jun-pyo and Geum Jan-di fastened their love lock in the drama *Boys Over Flowers*. Standing 200 meters high, the tower offers a view of all Seoul. Awesome, isn't it? The adorable dolls at the Teddy Bear Museum inside the tower will definitely add to the enjoyment.

The next plan on my list is the Namsangol Hanok Village where I will explore a cluster of traditional Korean houses. A time traveler will guide visitors to Korea's past like in a movie. We can also try out slipping into the Korean traditional attire "hanbok."

The Gwanghwamun Plaza, Cheonggye Stream and Seoul's beautiful night scene viewed from the Han River can neither be left out in my tour of the capital city.

I will have Kodak moments at the Cheonggye Stream Plaza fountain, which glitters in three different colors, and in front of King Sejong the Great statue at Gwanghwamun Plaza. You can also take pictures wearing garments of ancient Korean court officials. Trying on the clothes is free. The climax of things to do in Seoul at night is taking in the amazing view of the Han River!

Day Three – Entertainment & Shopping Time!

In Hong Kong, you visit Disney Land. In Korea, it's Lotte World! I must try out the fantastic rides at this theme park. The various rides, uniquely designed, have been the backdrop to, again, many Korean dramas including *Full House* and *Stairway to Heaven*. Taking photos here goes without saying! Another must-do in Korea is watching the one of a kind percussion performances *Jump* and *Nanta*. Your jaws will drop and you will constantly crack up at the actors' nonverbal performance.

Lastly, I'll enjoy more shopping at the Namdaemun Market and the Myeongdong shopping district. I'll buy pretty, affordable Korean souvenirs and K-pop related items at Namdaemun and the latest, hippest goods in Myeongdong. Who knows? If I bring home things I bought here, Indonesian people may take me for the Korean heartthrob Lee Min-ho. Hahahaha...

Last Schedule - Final Must Dos

There are two particular places I really want to set aside time to visit even for a brief while: the public bathhouse called "jjimjilbang" and the Korean karaoke "noraebang," which literally means singing room. At the spa, I will do as the locals do: lie down next to Koreans for a nap, eat broiled eggs and wear a towel around my head folded in a style with two knots. These activities may seem trivial, but I do want to try. The same goes with noraebang! I don't know the

Korean lyrics but how can you not sing a Korean pop song in the home of K-pop? Last but not least, I'd very much like to sit in for the taping of a TV music show at one of the broadcast firms. I've watched Korean singers on YouTube but surely this can't compare to watching the real deal live.

Another must do is enjoying Korean food. There are many Korean restaurants in Indonesia, but I need to experience the original home taste of dishes such as kimchi, bibimbab (mixed rice with veggies), ramyeon (instant noodle), gimbab (rice roll), ddeokbokki (seasoned rice cake slices), bulgogi (barbequed beef), samgyetang (chicken stew) and so forth.

Hopefully, my detailed Korea travel plan could become a reality in the near future. Amen!!

Attached to the essay, I also sent a video of 'Bring Me to Korea,' a song I composed and wrote lyrics for. The song conveys my passionate desire of why I love Korea, what about Korea I particularly like, and where in Korea I most wish to visit.

Thank you!