

Title : Across the East Sea

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“Takeshima!” Mr. Kim Gyeong-jun was stunned at me for uttering this word. He stayed silent for a while and then with a sullen look, said to me in Korean, "Never use that name, Nana! The islets are called Dokdo not Takeshima." Kim is also a student to me as I teach him Indonesian. His statement was clear enough. I knew about the dispute between South Korea and Japan over the tiny islets situated in the East Sea. The two major East Asian economic powers each claim the islets as theirs. The islets, known internationally as ‘The Lian Court Rocks,’ are called Dokdo in Korean and Takeshima in Japanese. What I didn't know was that the mere mention of Takeshima would infuriate a Korean person.

Only recently I've become aware of Koreans' exceptional patriotism toward the Dokdo Islets. Dokdo, consisting of two main coral islands, holds a special place in the Korean heart as it's symbolic of Korea's sovereignty, its people and its independence. Moreover, it was none other than Japan that once colonized the Korean Peninsula in the 1900s and is now claiming territorial rights to Dokdo. Dokdo is much more than just land to the Korean people. Dokdo is comprised of the two main East (Dongdo) and West (Seodo) Islands as well as 90 islets and reefs. It's 87 kilometers away from Ulleung Island in the East Sea. The Korean government has exerted numerous efforts to advocate Dokdo as Korean territory. It issued stamps bearing an image of the islets in the year 1940 and published an ad on the cover of New York Times stating that Dokdo belongs to Korea. It's also announced the fact that currently, three South Koreans permanently reside in Dokdo. The islets also have an official address: 20-2, Dokdo-ri, Ulleung-eub, Ulleung County, North Gyeongsang Province. Koreans' patriotic fervor toward

Dokdo instilled in me the urge to visit this place. Honestly, I didn't fully comprehend Korea's magnanimous love of Dokdo. By paying a visit there, I will be able to understand why Koreans try so hard to defend and protect the islets.

Here I go! I plan to travel to Dokdo under a mission I code-named the Dokdo Fall Project. So why is a fancy project necessary for a trip to Dokdo? It's because making it to Dokdo is a tall challenge. First of all, you need to obtain approval from the South Korean government. The natural elements, strong winds and storms are probably the biggest hurdle to the journey. But here it is! My 3-day planned trip to Dokdo!

On the first day, I will leave Seoul for Pohang from where I'll head to Ulleung Island. On day two, I will depart Ulleung Port and cruise across the East Sea to arrive at Dokdo. On the third day, I will return to Pohang and then head back Seoul. Note of caution! Apart from a thorough travel itinerary, planning your budget is also a most important task before hitting the road. Travel expense includes transportation, food, lodging and emergency cash. I wrote down my anticipated expenses as follows.

1. KTX ride from Yongsan to Pohang: W35,000
2. Cab ride from Pohang train station to Pohang Ferry Terminal: W10,000
3. Ferry cost from terminal to Ulleung Island : W117,600
4. Ulleung-Dokdo-Ulleung : W45,000
5. Bus fare from Dodong Terminal to Bongnae : W3,000
6. Lodge at 'Chusanilga' Pension on Ulleung Island : W60,000 a day × 2 days = W120,000
7. Cab tour of Ulleung : W80,000 for day

8. Cab ride from Pohang Ferry Terminal to Pohang Airport : W8,000

9. Airfare from Pohang to Seoul : W50,000

10. 3-day meals : W100,000

11. Extra cash : W50,000

Total Cost : W618,600

To cover the cost, I need to save my entire monthly wage. It would be wonderful if someone sponsored my trip. Anyways, after planning the budget, I'll reserve train and air tickets and check accommodations and the ferry schedule. I'll pack my back pack, my hand bag and ready my heart. Once everything's set, I'm ready to go!

'Departure' or 'takeoff,' words that signal the start of a thrilling adventure tingle my heart as if I feel I'm floating high in the sky. I imagine the trip starting at Seoul station. I eat a sandwich and Dunkin donuts for breakfast and board the KTX departing at 5:40 a.m. from Yongsan train station. It takes 3 hours to Pohang station. I'm so excited to appreciate the vista of the fall Korean foliage during the train ride. I arrive at Pohang station at 9:30 a.m. and go straight to the Pohang Ferry Terminal. I take a ferry and reach Dodong Port on Ulleung Island. It takes about 90 minutes from Pohang to Ulleung. I arrive at Dodong Port and grab lunch before taking a bus to the 'Chusanilga' Pension where I will unpack. I pull up to the lodge at 2 p.m. and check in. The pension has "ondol" heating floors, and I experience sleeping on the uniquely Korean ondol floor during my stay. After check-in, I take a taxi tour around the pension area in the afternoon. I first head to Seokpo Observatory from where I can view the ocean and scenery surrounding Dokdo. The next stop is Bongnae Waterfall! I eat bibimbab (rice mixed with veggies, beef etc.) for dinner at a nearby restaurant. Back near my pension, I indulge in the wonderful air and smell of the ocean and finally retreat

to my room for the night

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The next day, I travel across the East Sea to land at Dokdo! I arm myself for the adventure. I wear a thick jacket, grab my camera and pack bread, gimbab (rice roll) and a bottle of water for lunch. At 10 a.m., the cruise ship 'Sun Flower' is ready to set out for Dokdo with a thousand passengers on board. We arrive at Dokdo around 1 p.m. greeted by a strong sea breeze. I plant my foot on THE Dokdo Islets I've only heard about in school textbooks and newspapers. The seawater rushing upon the shore by the fall winds becomes my travel companion for the tour of the mystical islets surrounded by the sparkling green ocean. I meet with Kim Seong-do and his wife who are long-time Dokdo inhabitants. They share their life story and experiences living on the islets. Immersed in their saga and the scenic beauty, time flies by. It's 4 p.m. I board the Sun Flower to return to Ulleung Island. I'm having so much fun; I'll probably dream about Dokdo tonight.

For my last day on Ulleung, I walk around the pension breathing in the fresh morning air before heading off to the Dokdo Museum. I take pictures to my heart's content, tour the museum and come back to the pension around noon for check-out. My next schedule is to buy Ulleung specialties and souvenirs and have lunch at Dodong Port. On the menu is the Ulleung delicacy, grilled squid with pork.

It's already 3 o'clock and time to board the ferry back to the Pohang Ferry Terminal. My flight leaves Pohang for Seoul at 8 p.m. I eat deonjangjjigae (beanpaste pot stew) for dinner at the airport and prepare to board. Koreans, all friendly and warm, have helped me along the way and made my trip easier and so much fun. The plane gradually moves away from the East Sea waters, filled

with the spirit of Korean patriotism and lasting memories of mine. As it inches closer to Gimpo Airport in Seoul, the engine makes a boisterous noise. The cabin lamp is dim. My sight of Pohang far below the ground also grows hazy. Farewell Dokdo!