

The Summer Study Tour to South Korea was a resounding success! Here is a synopsis of our activities and highlights from the students' journals that captured their feelings as we traveled.

### Seoul (June 22)

Our first day in Seoul was a whirlwind of information and experiences. We began with visits to the US Embassy and the Korean National Tourism Organization headquarters, and spent the afternoon at Gyeongbok Palace and the National Folk Museum, followed by a quick sampling of the market at Insadong Antique Alley.



### Haein Temple (June 23-24)



This overnight temple experience was an immersion in a day in the life of a Korean Buddhist monk. Haein temple is famous for housing the Tripitaka Koreana, one of the world's most significant collections of Buddhist sacred texts. It is preserved perfectly on over 80,000 wood blocks.

This was the highlight of the trip for many of the students.

*"Awakening... my first dose of awakening came during the prayer in the evening. The voices of the monks were so strong and full of energy. Though I couldn't understand the words, I felt the presence of something greater than myself and my physical surroundings. I felt overwhelmed with an indescribable feeling and began to tear up. I left the building feeling lighter and filled with a sense that everything is going to be alright... The day was filled with what I believed to be living meditation."*

### Gyeongju (June 25-27)



As the capital of the Silla Dynasty for over 1,000 years, Gyeongju is full of important historical and cultural sites. We visited Seokguram Grotto, which houses a majestic Buddha and several dozen guardians, and Tumuli Park, where 23 tombs of Silla royalty are buried in Egyptian style, although on a much smaller-scale. We also practiced sunmudo, a Korean martial art, with the masters at Golgalsa.

## Ulsan (June 27)

The phenomenal economic growth of the past 50 years is apparent in Ulsan's heavy industries. A tour of Hyundai motors and shipbuilding left us speechless as we tried to absorb the sheer size of these operations.



*"It's funny how in Hawaii we almost never see Hyundai vehicles, but here in Korea they are everywhere! ...The industry and company help support much of Korea's economy... We were able to see the assembly line of the cars being made... Then we drove to Hyundai's shipping harbor.... The cranes there were huge. Coming from a place where our biggest harbor, Matson shipping dock, barely holds 2 ships, the Hyundai harbor seemed endless and a bit unbelievable to me."*

## Busan (June 28)

A short visit to the bustling seaport of Busan was made special by a morning visit to a foreign language high school for cultural exchange and new friendships. Our students practiced hard to perform a Hawaiian song and dance to the delight of their new Korean friends.



*"In the school we visited, the students even with their heavy load of schoolwork, were happy... Even though I met them for only a couple of hours, it felt like I knew them ALL MY LIFE. They were such good people... Today was a really happy day. I enjoyed meeting girls of my age. And even though we're so far away geographically and educationally, we could still relate together and that was awesome. So far, this has been my greatest experience in the trip. NOTHING will ever compare to this."*

## Gunsan (June 29-30)

This off-the-beaten-path location was emotional and difficult for many students as we learned the tragedy of the Saemangeum wetlands and the reclamation project (construction of a 33 km sea wall which is 90% completed) which threatens the livelihood of thousands of villagers who work on the tidal flats, as well as the many species of birds who migrate there every year.



*"When I first heard of this I felt so angry... The*

*government is developing (the land), so people are forced to change their ways. The same thing is happening in Hawaii. People want to develop Moloka'i, but the community fights for it to stay the way it is. They say that the place and lifestyle are unique, and people like to see that. But it won't be unique if you turn it into a tourist attraction."*

### **Seoul (July 1-4)**

On Friday, we made kim chee and tried on the traditional Korean hanbok. This was the first of two mornings that a local syndicated news program, Arirang, shadowed our students. The segment on our group was aired locally on Sunday night.

That afternoon, we switched gears and had a sobering experience at the War Museum.

*"I saw the list of names on the wall. Names after names of people who died in the Korean War... I thought about the lives of these soldiers, their families, their hobbies, what they lived for, and how they died in the war. It was rather depressing, especially because Korea is still divided... despite the many lives lost. I really pray for peace in Korea and the world."*

The next day, we spent the morning teaching English lessons to elementary school children, again, filmed by Arirang. This was a morning the students will treasure in their memories.

*"When it was time to leave the students, I became pretty sad. I realized then why teachers do what they do and I gained a new appreciation for them. The students at the school were very well-behaved and also very intelligent. Having the chance to teach these students has been very rewarding personally and I will never forget it."*



Then we had the chance to visit the DMZ and look across the border into North Korea.

*"I looked out into the horizon and wondered about the world there. Life must be different... I wondered if those people are happy in there. They live in a pretty different world. I wonder what kinds of things they are taught. I wonder if they are satisfied with what they have, or just don't know any better."*

After experiencing heavy emotions ranging from the excitement of being on television to the anger of a country divided senselessly by war, it was a welcome change to unwind by combing the busy markets for the perfect souvenirs to take home.