The Li Po Chun – DPRK Goodwill Initiative

2011 Report

INTRODUCTION

A group of 19 students from Li Po Chun United World College (LPCUWC) visited North Korea in August 2011, accompanied by the Head of Languages, Mr Ronny Mintjens, and a representative of the Rotary Club of Kowloon North, Mr Ramesh Chugani. This was the seventh group of students from Li Po Chun UWC to visit North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as it is officially known.

The students who undertake the trip are selected each year upon application for their skills of diplomacy, their interest in the Korean situation (and in more general issues of peace, conflict, socialism, the Cold War, and so on), as well as their willingness to make a substantial effort in reaching out to others, especially during the visit to the schools and in relations with senior officials, whether they are from the DPRK government, from the Travel Agency that organizes our trips in cooperation with Beijing-based agent Koryotours, or from NGOs and other organisations that operate in the DPRK.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in previous years, this year's goodwill trip to North Korea was made possible through the generous sponsorship of the Rotary Club of Kowloon North, and on behalf of the students who benefitted from this support, I wish to express my profound thanks. Our North Korean initiative has the potential to change the political face of East Asia, and the far-sighted vision of the Rotary Club of Kowloon North is deeply appreciated. We were very grateful to have Mr Chugani on this trip – a true Rotary presence and a wonderful companion !

I would also like to thank the other well-wishers and donors whose contributions have made it possible for more students to join this trip. I would like to especially thank Mr Mark Zelinski for his donation of wonderful coffee table photo books that were not only used in our fundraising drive, but copies of which were also donated to the schools that we visited in the DPRK. A word of thanks also goes to the Board of the Li Po Chun UWC of Hong Kong as well as the College's Graduates and Alumni Organisations for their continued and very firm support for this Initiative. Finally, our thanks also go to the Lee family in Hong Kong, and to Mr Naude du Plessis (LPC Graduate) for their kind support.

THE AMBASSADORS

This year, the group comprised 3 students from Hong Kong and one student each from Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Serbia, Swaziland and the United States. Given the large size of the group, Mr Chugani, a representative of our main sponsor, the Rotary Club of Kowloon North, accompanied the Li Po Chun UWC Head of Languages who led the group. This trip brought the total number of students from the College who have had the opportunity to serve as ambassadors of goodwill in North Korea to 113.

Aine – Ireland

Andres – Nicaragua

Antonio – Italy

Bheki - Swaziland

Camilo - Mexico

Cheryl – Hong Kong

Clara – Brazil

Colin - USA

Danika – Indonesia

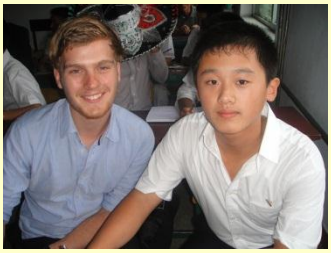
Jerry – Hong Kong

Jovita – Hong Kong

Laura – Germany/UK

113
Liilia - Estonia

Matija - Serbia



Peter - Denmark

Queeny – Netherlands

Robson – Canada

Sadnam - Bangladesh

Verity - Australia

Air Koryo Beijing-Pyongyang !

113 students !

OBJECTIVES OF THE INITIATIVE

The objective of this visit was similar to that for the earlier trips – to advance the relationships previously established with DPRK schools and the Ministry of Education, and build goodwill and trust so that the way could be opened for North Korean students to attend United World Colleges in the years ahead. This long-term initiative is built on the belief that East Asia, and indeed the world, would be a more peaceful and stable place if some members of the next generation of North Korea's leadership could be educated on full scholarships in United World Colleges. To further this primary aim of the trip, a formal written proposal to establish educational links was presented to the DPRK Ministry of Education through the Principals of the two Secondary Schools that we visited, as well as through the Chief Executive Officer of the Korea International Travel Company, who was equally happy to take our message of goodwill and invitation further up into the establishment. Furthermore, specific efforts have been made in the past months to reach out to the DPRK Consulate in Hong Kong, which is now fully aware of our mission and of our interest in welcoming DPRK students as soon as possible. Further lines of communication are presently being explored.

An equally important aim of the trip was to give students at LPCUWC the opportunity to experience life in the unique society that is North Korea, with a view to building a deeper understanding of peace and international issues in such a way that they might become sources of information to others about the situation in North Korea today. The students' responses to their experiences indicate that they did indeed find the experience to be mind-broadening, challenging, provocative, and in several cases, potentially life- changing. At the same time, the DPRK remains an enigma to all those who try to look deeper into the issues, and often the visitor leaves the country with more questions than answers. Processing the experiences and trying to understand the country's complex situation makes for extremely challenging discussions and reflections that push the boundaries of our beliefs.

Those students who were fortunate enough to participate in this trip will now involve themselves in a series of lectures and presentations at the College and in the wider Hong Kong community. They will also share their experiences and reflections with their home communities.

THE ITINERARY

The itinerary for this year's group was very ambitious, with long days (usually starting with breakfast before 7 am and with the day's activities ending no earlier than 10 or 11 pm …) and a very tightly packed schedule. However, it is to the students' credit that not a single complaint was uttered. All the excursions, visits and activities were undertaken with big smiles, with a high sense of curiosity, with great interest and with plenty of energy. Just like last year, we were privileged to be able to visit Mount Paektu, regarded by Koreans from north and south as the sacred source of the Korean nation. Mount Paektu is famous for its cold, wet weather and fog-shrouded conditions. We certainly got our share of fog and wind, but the hike up the mountain was a pleasure, and the bonding at the top (mainly in order to try and warm ourselves !) was a moment to remember.

Mount Paektu has an almost mystical significance for Koreans, enhanced by the DPRK government's claims that the Great Leader Kim Il Sung directed the anti-Japanese struggle from a secret camp on the slopes of the mountain, and the claim that his son, the Dear Leader Kim Jong Il, was born under Jong Il Peak in the secret camp in 1942.

In preparation for the 100th birthday celebrations of Kim Il Sung in 2012, a large amount of work is underway to improve and refurbish buildings and infrastructure in the DPRK (especially in the capital city, Pyongyang). The Grand Statue of Kim Il Sung was not accessible at the time of our visit, and some areas of the city are currently sealed off because of the ongoing construction work – photography strictly forbidden ! It is even claimed that Secondary School and University students have been forced to leave their classrooms and help out in the construction work. However, I was not able to have this claim confirmed. One of Pyongyang's best-known landmarks, the Ryugyong hotel, now seems close to completion – almost 15 years after construction was started. Its gleaming glass facades dominate the Pyongyang skyline and give it a touch of modernity. The quality and quantity of food and other goods in the shops, as well as the number of shops accessible to visitors, seem to improve each year also; standards of living seem notably better now than they were a few years ago when the College's North Korean initiative began, and access to the people of the DPRK is becoming more and more easy.

We were privileged to visit a number of places of interest that are not on the usual visitors' program. We spent time at the Kaeson Fun Fair, we had a wonderful afternoon at the Kang Bang Suk Secondary School, we had a guided visit of the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital, we made an ad-hoc stop at Pyongyang's first Pizzeria, and our visit to the Paektu Milyong waterfalls quickly turned into a fun photo session with a large group of soldiers who were on a day out to the falls. What also stood out was the fact that the local guides in the places of interest, who have been trained to deliver their speeches and wave goodbye to their visitors, were very keen to spend extra time with and to answer very probing questions from the group, well beyond the scope of their work.

The following pages contain a detailed review of the day-to-day program, the many activities and excursions that the group undertook, and the many experiences that were lived. I hope that the accompanying photos offer a deeper insight into the essence of the LPC-North Korea Goodwill Initiative and that the reader will, after reading through these pages and looking at these photographs, have just as many questions as the participants had !
RM

DAY 1 : SATURDAY AUGUST 6TH – BEIJING - PYONGYANG

10.30 am, Beijing Airport – all the students are present and have big smiles on their faces, ready for the unknown and the unexpected. We decide to leave two big bags at the Left Luggage for the week– no need to take redundant kilos into the DPRK. At 11 am we check in and wait for our plane by Gate 9. We do a quick re-cap of some of the essential agreements and of the arrival procedures in Pyongyang. The boarding call comes at 12.30 and we are on our way to Pyongyang, DPRK.

After a comfortable flight in a Russian-made Tupolev, we land in Pyongyang at 15.30 local time, in nice sunshine. During the flight we were provided with rather tasty food, and the inflight entertainment was a conversation with an Iraqi employee of the United Nations Development Fund.

At Pyongyang airport we enter through the new arrivals hall. This temporary structure is a no-frills facility that will disappear as soon as the 'old' terminal building, one of Pyongyang's famous landmarks, has been fully upgraded in preparation for the 2012 celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth. We have our visas and passports checked, we collect our luggage, and clear customs. All the mobile phones are left behind in a small black bag, but laptops and other electronic devices are freely allowed into the DPRK.

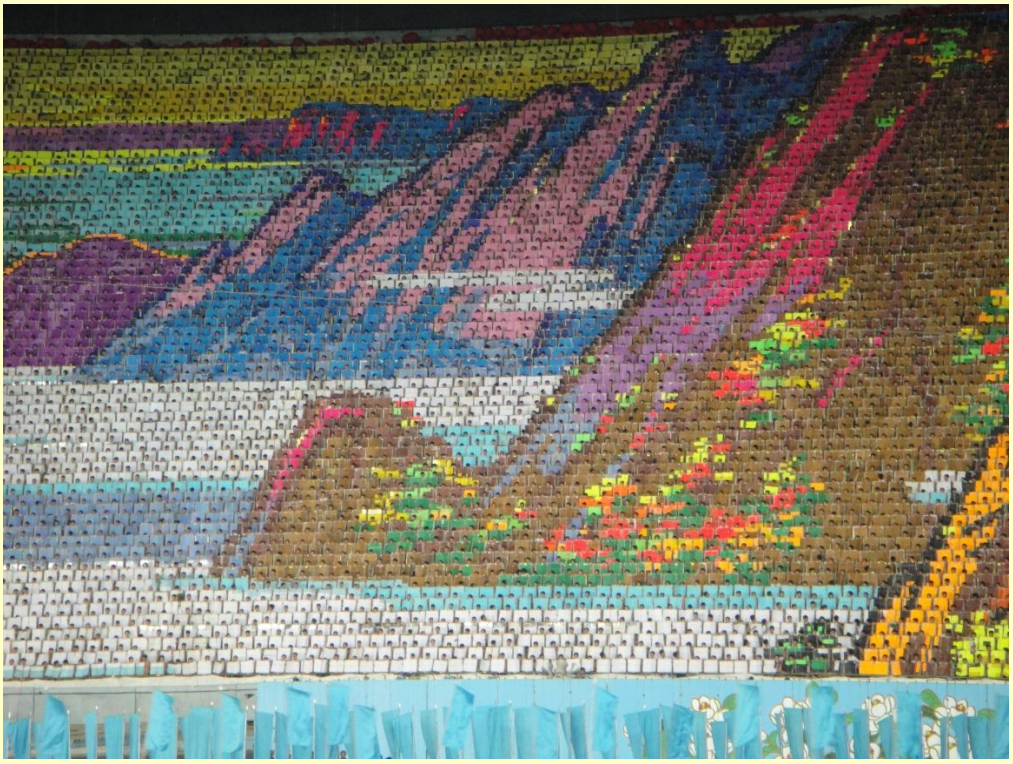
At the Customs we meet our three guides : Mr Rim Jong Hyok, Ms Pak Un Jong and Ms Kim Su Ryon. Mr Rim is the senior guide and speaks English with remarkable ease. Ms Pak is a student who is working towards becoming an official government guide. All three guides are extremely friendly and welcoming; we look forward to a great week with them. We also meet our driver, Mr Che Won Pil, who has been a driver for over 20 years and who knows Pyongyang and its traffic very well.

The drive into Pyongyang from the airport is 26 kms long and takes about 30 minutes. As there is a beautiful sun starting to set in the sky, we stop first at the Tower to the Juche Idea. We are met by a local guide, a lady who has been stationed there for at least 4 years, since I remember her from my last visit. She takes us around the back of the Tower, where we receive detailed commentary on the origin of the Tower, the Juche ('Self-Reliance') philosophy, the symbolism in the Tower, and the Monument to the Intellectuals, the Workers and the Peasants. We take some photos and our first official group photo, and head for the inside of the Tower. We take the lift up to the top, 150 metres above the ground, and enjoy the fantastic 360 degrees view over Pyongyang. We are told that the torch at the top, which is lit at night and can be seen from anywhere in Pyongyang, adds another 20 metres and 40 tonnes to the Tower. Across the Tadong river, we see the Grand People's Study House and Kim Il Sung Square, famous from the military parades often shown on TV.

We descend again, some students start their shopping at the gift and souvenir stall inside the Tower, and we return to the bus for our next discovery. We drive to the Monument to the Korean Workers' Party, a huge stone and concrete tribute to the three corner stones of the North Korean society : the Intellectuals (in the middle, because "without them there simply is no progress"), the

Peasants and the Workers. We meet another wonderful local guide, dressed in traditional Korean costume, and receive commentary in Korean, duly translated by Ms Pak. Across a green esplanade, we see the Mansudae Grand Monument to the Great Leader, Comrade Kim Il Sung, which we will visit tomorrow.

From here, we are taken towards a wonderful Korean restaurant where four tables have been reserved for us. One table is dedicated to vegetarianism, and 7 participants gladly seat themselves at this table. We are treated to a wonderful array of meat, vegetables, potatoes and rice, as well as sparkling orange juice and water. The conversation quickly turns towards our first impressions of what we have seen and heard this afternoon. We agree to continuously bounce off impressions and new understandings so that the overwhelming flow of information is somehow managed. The restaurant is very hot, more than one member of the group starts to sweat, and the windows don't open. But the food more than makes up for the climatic inconvenience. Nobody manages to finish all their food, and suddenly, at 8 pm, we are told to quickly get on the bus. Something special is in store !



We all get on the bus and are taken to the May Day Stadium, the venue for the Arirang Mass Games performances. We enter the stadium, which has a seating capacity of 150.000. This may well be the biggest all-seater stadium in the world ! We quickly find our seats and watch as the thousands of children in the opposite stand warm up for their incredible mosaic-like picture book contribution to the show. At exactly 8.30 pm the stadium lights go off and the show starts. What follows is very hard to describe in fleeting words. An hour and a half of unbelievable dance, acrobatics and music, with thousands upon thousands of performers who deliver their acts in total synchronicity – a sight to behold, and unique in this world. The biggest cheers are reserved for groups of young children, some as young as 5 years, who perform gymnastics as well as panda dances. Throughout the show, the school boys in the opposite stand produce a wide range of murals / mosaics with their picture books, and provide a sensational background to the action on the field. The history of Korea, the story of Arirang, the struggles under Japanese colonialism, the pain of the war

and the division, the growing relationship with China, the desire for reunification, the veneration of the leaders and the love for the fatherland – all are clearly portrayed in a show which easily classifies as the greatest human spectacle in the world.

The show ends at 10 pm, and we drive to our hotel, the Ryanggang hotel. A very pleasant surprise awaits us : the hotel is fully air-conditioned, the rooms are neat and tidy, the showers are warm, and the shops downstairs sell cold water, juices, soft drinks, snacks etc. This will be our home base for the next week, and the first impressions are excellent. We bid goodnight to our guides, and it's off to bed. Tomorrow morning we will be awoken at 06.30 !

DAY 2 : SUNDAY AUGUST 7TH – PYONGYANG

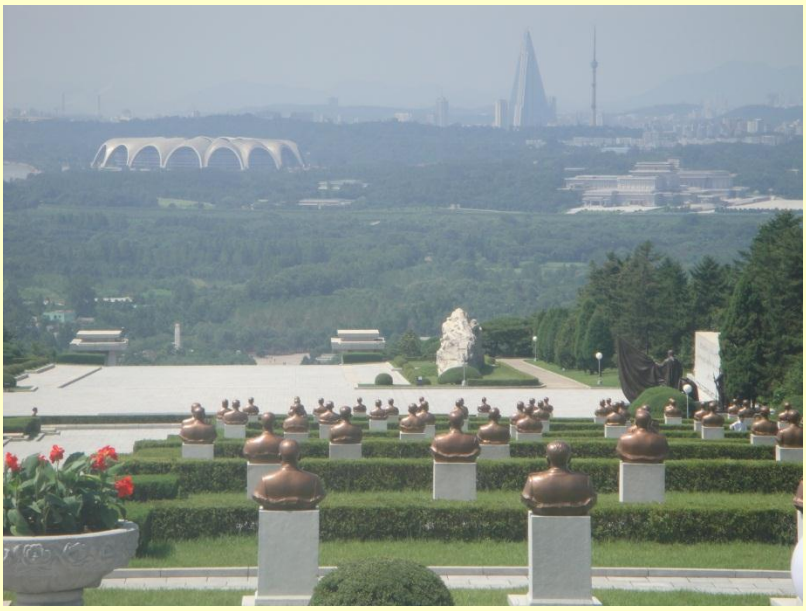
An early rise and early breakfast – which consists of bread, butter, vegetables, omelettes, coffee, hot milk, and a couple of other dishes that are yet to be identified. Certainly plenty of food to kick-start the morning. We set off at 07.50 and head for the Mansudae Fountain park, where we admire the beautiful white statues and fountains – one of them a "jet d'eau" that squirts the water meters high in the air. A refreshing place, and even the locals get close, very close, to the water on what promises to become a very hot day. After the excessive rains of the previous week, which have caused floods in the countryside and landslides in South Korea, the sun is out in all its glory and the

predicted maximum temperature for the day is 33 degrees Celcius.
We walk across the Fountain Park where the bus awaits us for the next leg of the day's journey. Near the Fountain Park we see the Mansudae Grand Monument, a 20m high bronze statue of the Great Leader, Comrade Kim Il Sung, but because of renovations for the upcoming 100th anniversary celebrations of his birth in 2012, the area around the statue is closed to the public. This is most probably the first LPC trip that does not have the honor and duty of laying flowers at the feet of the statue and bowing to the Great Leader. However, I am still told to buy bouquets of flowers for later in the day, when we will visit the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery.

From the Fountain Park we drive towards the Kumsusan Memorial Palace where we will view the body of the Eternal President, Kim Il Sung, lying in state. After his death in 1994, his offices were converted into a mausoleum, and according to our guides, only few 'ordinary' North Koreans ever get to visit the Mausoleum, which is now however increasingly accessible to foreign visitors. Interestingly, our guides don't mention the word 'died' when talking about the Great Leader. Instead, they tell us that he 'passed'. At the Mausoleum, visitors are first dropped off at the 'waiting room'. After a short wait during which the group spends time talking with our guides and getting to know them better, we are asked to make rows of four people and start walking towards the

Mausoleum. The voyage from the waiting room to the actual Mausoleum takes about 15 minutes and takes us through corridors, on escalators and one of the longest travelators ever seen. Strict silence is observed, since the Mausoleum is a place of national importance and of respect. Once we are in the Mausoleum, we are taken through the "Lamentation Room", in which the scenes of extreme grief and pain, hysteria and mass mourning, experienced by the North Korean society after the passing of Kim Il Sung, are illustrated by huge murals and reliefs. All visitors receive a handset with a recording about the days in 1994 when the nation was in mourning. The next corridor leads us to an elevator which takes us to the upper floor of the building. Here we are asked to make one line and walk in fours – towards and around the glass case in which the body of the President is preserved and displayed. All visitors are required to pay their respects by bowing on all four sides of the glass case, and the mood is somber yet respectful, with a soft Korean tune playing in the rooms on this floor. The room with the President's body is dimly lit, and photography is completely forbidden. The elevator takes us back downstairs, where we can view the train carriage in which the President used to travel (and work), as well as his Mercedes. After retrieving our cameras we go on the huge esplanade in front of the Mausoleum, where we take some photos and where we admire the North Koreans who have come in their traditional costumes to see their President. Visits for North Koreans can only happen in groups, and are usually organized by the workplace of the residents – unless they belong to schools or to the military. The number of soldiers and army personnel present outside the Mausoleum is staggering.

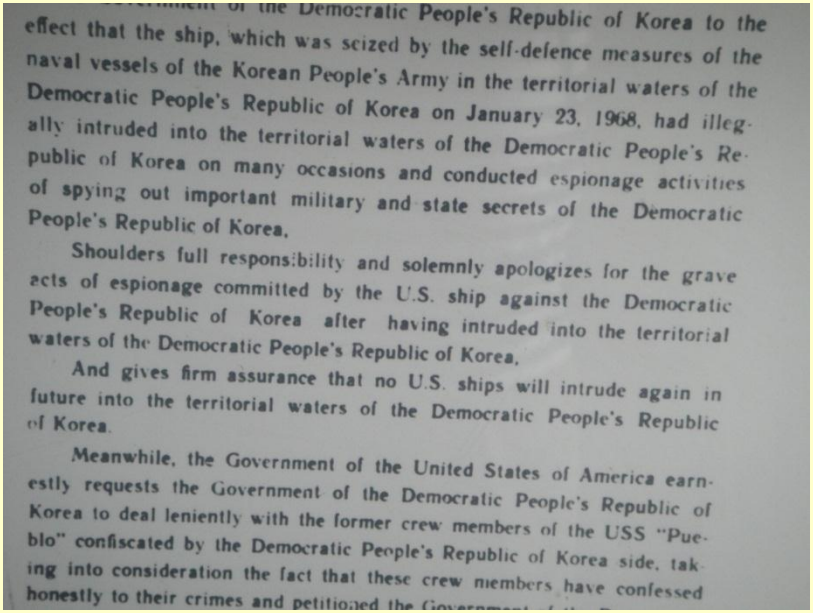
The bus then takes us on to the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery.
Upon arrival we lay flowers at the memorial stone to the Martyrs, and bow. A bit higher up the hill we lay flowers at the monument to the mother of Kim Il Sung and bow again. From the cemetery both the Martyrs themselves and the visitors enjoy great views over the city of Pyongyang.



We continue to the Foreign Languages Bookstore where the students buy lots of gifts and souvenirs. Getting change is a bigger problem, for future trips we need to remind students that payments in RMB are now possible more or less everywhere, and the exchange rate is fair. The most popular items sold her are propaganda posters, books about the DPRK, stamps and pins. Prices are fixed and pretty much the same as in all other souvenir and gift shops.

We have lunch in our hotel and change back to our casual clothes (the Mausoleum visit required very formal clothing).

We start the afternoon program with a visit to the American spy-ship USS Pueblo. We are shown around the war trophy captured off the US Navy in 1968. The ship, clearly on a spying mission, had already made 17 illegal intrusions into North Korean waters, and was finally captured at the expense of one American life. Despite the US President's denials of any spying activities, the captain and crew of the ship eventually (after 11 months of interrogations) admitted that such activities were indeed the purpose of the ship, and after a written confession and apology, the crew was released. The written confession and apology are proudly displayed on the ship.



...Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the effect that the ship, which was seized by the self-defence measures of the naval vessels of the Korean People's Army in the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on January 23, 1968, had illegally intruded into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on many occasions and conducted espionage activities of spying out important military and state secrets of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Shoulders full responsibility and solemnly apologizes for the grave acts of espionage committed by the U.S. ship against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea after having intruded into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

And gives firm assurance that no U.S. ships will intrude again in future into the territorial waters of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Meanwhile, the Government of the United States of America earnestly requests the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to deal leniently with the former crew members of the USS "Pueblo" confiscated by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea side, taking into consideration the fact that these crew members have confessed honestly to their crimes and petitioned the Government...

Just before visiting the Arch of Triumph, we stop at a new shop that has recently been opened up to visitors, and which is probably the largest shop accessible to visitors in Pyongyang. Food and drink, Korean dresses, posters, paintings, sweets, items of clothing, many kinds of alcohol, tobacco and medicinal plants and herbs are available here. The prices are pretty much standard and still given in Won – currently convertible as 140 Won to a Euro and 14 Won to a Yuan.

After taking our pictures of the Arch of Triumph, we cross the road through the underpass and visit the huge mosaic outside Kim Il Sung stadium.

The mosaic depicts Kim Il Sung delivering his victory speech on the spot where the Arch of Triumph now stands. We have a quick peak inside the stadium, which is used for the DPRK's football teams' international matches. We then start our walk up Morangbong hill and seem to take a shortcut as we climb up a never-ending stretch of stairs straight to the top of the hill. Sweaty and with shaking knees (the students at least) we walk through this wonderful park where many locals are having a picnic, an outing with their children, or where they come and wash their hair – or dogs ! We then make a stop by the Soviet War Memorial monument dedicated to the soldiers who helped the DPRK during the Korean War. Suddenly our guide accelerates and goes to speak with a group of elderly North Korean people who are spending their day in the park. When the students arrive, three musicians start to play the drums and the flute, and at least 12 of the elderly ladies start to dance traditional dances. They invite the students to join them, and soon we have about 30 or 40 bodies moving beneath the pavilion. Of course our students pick up the steps and the moves very quickly, and the dancing continues for about 45 minutes ! Lots of smiles, lots of laughter, lots of fun and all in all a magical moment. To top it all, the students perform the Indonesian dance that they have prepared for their cultural

exchanges. The audience is enthralled ! For the Sabor Latino bonus we have Camilo, Andres and Clara strutting their stuff !

After the dances and lots of 'goodbyes', we head down the path and back to the bus. We are taken to a restaurant where we are served mutton barbecue for dinner. Whilst we are enjoying this meal, the waitresses pick up a microphone and start serenading us. Again we are invited to dance with them, and now we start to look like specialists and experts in North Korean traditional dance.

After dinner our schedule tells us to head for the Kaeson Fun Fair, but the students are starting to get nervous about their performance at the next day's school visit and ask if they can spend the evening rehearsing. This request is granted, and we will see if we can visit the Fun Fair later in the week.

DAY 3 : MONDAY AUGUST 8TH – PYONGYANG - KAESONG

Wake-up call at 07.00, breakfast at 07.15, and we leave the hotel at 8 am. First stop today is the famous Pyongyang Metro. This metro, most probably the deepest in the world, is said to double up as a nuclear bomb shelter should a conflict break out. The escalator leading from the entrance to the platforms is certainly one of the longest in the world.

We enter the Metro at Renaissance station (also called Rehabilitation or Puhung station), where we admire the huge mosaics on the walls of the platforms. We let one or two trains pass, as we are busy taking photos or checking out the news in the free newspapers that are posted on the platforms. We board the next train and take the 2 minute ride to Glory (Yonggwang) station. We disembark (visitors normally only get to visit these two stations) and once again we take photos of the murals and of the people embarking and disembarking. The Metro certainly looks like a very popular means of travel with the locals. A Metro ride costs 2 Won (a negligible amount in any other currency) and the fare

is the same, no matter how many stations one travels through. It is estimated that each day, up to 400.000 locals make use of the Metro.

From the Metro we head for the Victorious Fatherland War Museum, where we meet a familiar guide – the same lady who showed us around the MS Pueblo. She introduces us to the developments before and during the Korean War. Detailed maps and displays provide an excellent insight into how the War was conducted, how both sides advanced and retreated (and it must be added that a fairly accurate account was given, even though this included admitting that the enemy also had its victories on the battlefield), how the tactical and strategic decisions of the Korean leaders paid off, and how the outcome of the War created the current situation on the Peninsula.

The basement of the Museum houses aircraft, amphibian ships, torpedoes and tanks. The upper floor has a rotating diorama that shows the impact of the war on the villages in Korea – and how the people pulled together as one in their struggle against the enemy. A very enlightening and interesting Museum with excellent commentaries and opportunities for questions and answers. The guide is very keen to answer probing questions from our students, and takes obvious pride in the exploits and military genius of her country's founding President.

Our next stop is the Grand People's Study House. This enormous building, which overlooks Kim Il Sung Square and which is often depicted on TV when there are military parades in the DPRK (they pass in front of this building), houses a library allegedly containing more than 30 million volumes, many study rooms (for all kinds of subjects, including language courses, IT courses etc.), and reading rooms open to the public. Many locals come here in order to study by themselves or in order to attend lectures and courses. The interior is made of marble, the spaces are enormous, and the mood is serene. One unique feature of the reading room is the fact that the reading desks were 'designed' by Kim Jong Il himself. When he visited the Study House, he noticed that the desks all had the same height, yet the people using them didn't. He therefore provided wise guidance and instructed that the desks should have adjustable heights. Thus, the desks were all equipped with an accordion-like adjustable spring that allows the user to lift or to lower the desk – thus providing a comfortable reading environment for each individual.

At the end of the tour, we go out in the rain on the main balcony and take photos of Kim Il Sung Square, the surrounding museums and neighborhoods, and the Tower of the Juche Idea, which we can see across the Tadong River.

Lunch today is on Pyongyang Number One boat, a floating restaurant that only leaves the bank of the river when it is full – not the case this time. We do however have a wonderful meal and briefly meet with Mr Ham, one of the managers of the local tour operator, Korea International Travel Company (KITC). In my personal discussion with Mr Ham (and while the students are feasting on a delicious lunch) we talk about how to take our Goodwill Initiative further, as his travel agency (the only one in the DPRK) has obvious links with the establishment. Having now visited on an annual basis since 2005, Li Po Chun has established an excellent rapport with this travel agency, and Mr Ham promises to take up our cause and try and assist by taking our message of goodwill and cooperation to the relevant ministries and decision-makers.

After the lunch, we all change into our formal clothes or national costumes, as we are going to head for our first school visit, to the June 9th Secondary School. A sudden change in the program has prompted a switch from a school in Kaesong to this school in Pyongyang. When we arrive at the school, we are warmly met by the Headmaster (still the same Headmaster as in 2007), and we are taken to an English language class with about 20 students aged 14 to 17.

The English teacher (still the same English teacher as in 2007) welcomes the group and teaches our students the name of the school in Korean.

Our students show their linguistic abilities and 10 minutes later they are told that they are excellent students of Korean ! The teacher then asks all the students, who have paired up, to spend some time exchanging information with one another, and the classroom becomes an interactive and very lively chatroom. All the students are very engaged in the discussion with their buddies, and a lot of information is passed on. Some of the Korean students have a rather weak foundation in English, but sign language and lots of photos helps ease the communication. After about 20 minutes, some of the pairs present their conversations in front of the whole class.

Next, we are treated to an amazing musical and dance performance in the school auditorium. The local students present a couple of songs and dances, and the volume of the band is amazing. An impeccable show, choreographed to perfection. During the final Korean dance, members of our group are invited to join, and suddenly everybody is on the dance floor. When the local students have finished their presentation, it is our students' turn to perform. They offer a perfect Indonesian dance, two wonderful Chinese songs and a very lively 'Waka Waka' dance that brings the house down. Our group then engages the local students for a short dance, after which we take lots of group photos, we donate one of Mark Zelinski's photo books to the school, and we also present the LPC banner to the Headmaster. Because of the rain that day, the football field has become waterlogged, so unfortunately our traditional match against the local school can not take place. Altogether a very successful and very enjoyable visit, during which new friendships are made.

Our bus then takes us to Kaesong over the Reunification Highway, the road that connects Pyongyang and Seoul – an impossible journey at the present time.

After the two hour drive, we check in at the Minsok Folk hotel in Kaesong. In this traditional Korean-style hotel, we will spend the night sleeping on mats on the heated floor. A light drizzle fails to dampen our spirits, and we have a sumptuous dinner, sitting on mats on the floor at a long table. Riddles about collapsing bridges keep everyone's mind active, and it won't be until the next morning that Laura finds the answer … The air in this part of the world is pure and fresh, and quite a few comparisons are made with the environment back in Hong Kong.

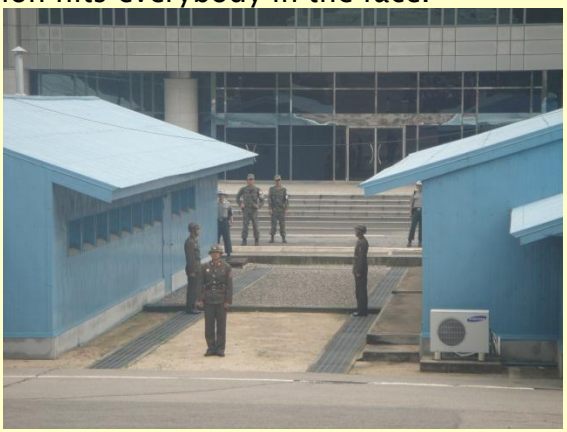
Day 4 : Tuesday August 9th – Kaesong - DMZ

We have breakfast in the Folklore hotel and head for Kaesong City, where we first visit the Kim Il Sung statue. We then go to the Koryo Museum, which is slightly reminiscent of the Forbidden City in Beijing, at least in its lay-out. This open-air museum houses artifacts, maps and replica tombs from the area, and provides a good insight in the historical and cultural importance of Kaesong. Outside the gates of the museum we take a short walk over some boulders and rocks, and have a nice view over the old part of Kaesong. The rooftops, all in traditional Korean style, weave into what looks like an undulating sea. Some young children rush up the hill to come and greet us.

Our next destination is the DMZ and Panmunjom Truce Village. After a visual introduction to the lay-out of Panmunjom, we are led into the Demilitarized Zone (supposedly a buffer zone without any arms) and visit the building in which the 1953 Armistice Agreement was signed between the DPRK and the United Nations. According to the guide, the United States Command used the United Nations as a guise under which to fight the Korean War. When it was time to sign the agreement, the DPRK representatives, under the command of the Chief of the General Staff, Nam Il, brought its country's flag, while the US command brought a United Nations flag – which they left behind after the signing ceremony. Copies of the Armistice Agreement are exhibited in the room, as well as the axe which had become a lethal weapon in the 'Axe Incident' in 1976.

The military personnel near Panmunjom are strikingly taller and more robust than most of the soldiers we have so far met in other parts of the DPRK. There is clearly a no-nonsense approach in this part of the country, and we are accompanied by on-duty military personnel wherever we go from here. Our bus takes us to Panmunjom, where we first receive detailed commentaries on the large slab of concrete that bears a message and the last signature of Comrade Kim Il Sung. We then walk around the border pavilion and suddenly find

ourselves within 30 metres of the negotiation huts – the famous small blue buildings that straddle the Military Demarcation Line between North and South. The tension hits everybody in the face.



About 12 North Korean soldiers stand guard outside the huts, in between the huts and just next to the thin concrete slab that marks the actual border between the two countries. Across the slab, about 6 South Korean guards stand half-concealed behind the huts, looking into the DPRK side. A bit further two US soldiers stand in a much more casual stance, equally observing who is visiting on the DPRK side. We can't help but notice – or at least feel – that we are being observed and maybe even profiled, and that there is an incredible amount of tension in the air. This is the place where the conflict, the stand-off and the intimidation are at their peak. Our local guide starts to tell us about the huts and their significance, and as we are preparing to walk down the steps and towards the huts, we are suddenly told to turn around and go inside the pavilion – a huge concrete building with a terrace overlooking the area. By the time we get onto the balcony (about 2 minutes after leaving the steps), all but two of the North Korean soldiers who were standing guard by the huts have disappeared.

There are now just two soldiers left, guarding the entrance door to the central hut. A number of tour groups have shown up on the South Korean side, and we are told that we will not be able to enter the huts. Apparently somebody on either side had been making some signals to a group across the border. The result is that the North Korean side of the hut remains locked – after all, it is the US army that controls who enters and who doesn't enter the huts, and they seem quite keen to give priority to the visitors on the South Korean side. From what we heard later, no groups coming from the North Korean side had been able to enter the huts for at least three consecutive days … Rather than feeling disappointment at not being able to enter the huts, this episode serves as a visual and tactile reminder of the tension and the hostilities – one wrong move can, most probably, trigger serious conflict in this spot. I promise the students that I will share with them my photos from the 2007 trip, during which we were able to enter the negotiation huts. At the end of the visit, we ask our military guide if we can take a photo with him, and he gladly agrees. Photography in this part of North Korea is strictly controlled, what with all the military installations and the sensitivity of the area, but after a successful visit, even the military personnel seems to relax a little bit and are keen to answer questions and have their photo taken.

On the drive out of the DMZ we take a look at the DPRK flag that rises above the only village inside the DMZ – a village of farmers who tend to the agricultural fields inside the very fertile DMZ area, but in the West often labeled as nothing

more than a Propaganda village. The flagpole, at 160 metres tall, is the tallest in the world, and the DPRK flag, weighing 270 kilograms, is the largest on-duty flag on the planet. Surprisingly, our senior guide is not aware of these facts, which can be found in the Guinness Book of World Records … Once he finds out though, he can hardly conceal his pride …

After this very intense experience in one of the world's most volatile conflict zones, we head for lunch in a traditional restaurant in Kaesong City. The conversation is of course dominated by what we have just observed, and each participant tries to make sense out of this human and political conflict that has been dragging on for almost 60 years now. What are the viewpoints involved ? What are the possible solutions, or at least some of the constructive ways forward ? A very difficult discussion, with so many interests involved. What is clear though is that this is not just a matter between North and South. There are global interests and policies at stake, and lots of opinions are offered – a great exercise in tolerance, in listening, in absorbing and in agreeing to disagree. At the same time though, every participant in the group has a sense of "surely there must be some solution to this", and talk about the Mission of the United World Colleges movement starts to surface. Change probably does start with small steps, and I hear a general sense of commitment from the participants to try and be, in one way or the other, part of some change, somewhere, sometime. Parallels are drawn with the ongoing revolutions in North Africa and in the Middle East; differences between the different situations are considered; cultures and values are discussed … One of the best discussions on the trip, triggered by one of the most surreal sights on the planet.

An equally intense visit awaits us in Sinchon, a small town between Kaesong and Pyongyang. Sinchon was the site of several deadly conflicts between the North Korean army and the US forces during the Korean War (or the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War, as it is known in the DPRK). In Sinchon we start with a visit to the Museum of US War Atrocities. Not unlike the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, this museum provides a very visual and extremely discomforting account of the war atrocities that were committed in the area. Our local guide takes us through a number of rooms that abound with black and white photos and oil paintings of dismembered bodies, acts of torture, killings and destruction. In an exceptionally violent push against the North Korean forces, the US Army massacred a large number of civilians, including mothers and children.

One of the photos in the museum is of an order by US Commander Harrison, which reads : *"My order is the law. Outlaws will be shot to death. Destroy all red bandits to free the (sic) North Korea from the communist monsters. Hunt and kill all the communist party members, civil servants and their families. Kill their sympathizers too."* The visit of this museum is a very sobering experience, and few participants speak at all. It is simply impossible to imagine how such acts can be committed between human beings. With every room, the stories become more unsettling and horrific, and eventually the group is told about a

massacre of mothers and children who were burned to death in a locked bunker. After visiting this bunker and laying flowers out of respect for those who gave their life for the revolutionary struggle, we are taken to a nearby village where we meet with one of only three survivors of this massacre. As a five-year old, Mr Kim Myong Gum was one of the small children forcibly separated from his mother, and he was forced to watch how his mother was burned to death. The children heard the screams and the pain. A little bit later, the same ordeal befell the children, but three of them managed to find a way out of the inferno. Now an old, frail man, Mr Kim vividly remembers that fateful day, and he speaks about it in a dignified yet very realistic manner. His words are not about revenge or hatred – his message is one of hope for a better future, and a need for humanity to avoid the conflicts that have brought so much pain and devastation.

At the end of this visit we manage to discuss further with our local guides and ask them about the current feelings towards the historical aggressors. We are told very clearly that the North Korean people hold no grudges against the people of either Japan (the colonial ruler) or the United States – instead, the hatred towards Japan is directed at this country's government and its policies. When asked what would allow the North Korean people to move on from the pain of the past, the guides are unanimous in stating that a formal apology from the Japanese government would be a starting point. There is obviously a lot of anger still brewing within the DPRK, and it is hoped that steps will be taken in order to try and find some common ground, so that the region as a whole can move forward in a direction that is beneficial to all.

We say our grateful goodbyes to our local guides, and the bus takes us back to Pyongyang where we have dinner in our home-base, the Ryanggang Hotel. Just before entering the city we make a brief stop at the Reunification Monument (officially called the Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification).

DAY 5 : WEDNESDAY AUGUST 10TH – SAMJIYON

Once again we wake up early as we need to leave for the airport. Today we are heading for Samjiyon, a town in the north of the country, near the border with China and at the foot of Mount Paektu (Paektusan). We leave most of our luggage in my room at the Ryanggang Hotel and rent the room for 10 Euros. No need to take all that luggage on an overnight trip !

The check-in for the domestic flight is very straight-forward, and soon we are on our 90-minute flight. We take off in fog but arrive in sunny weather. In Samjiyon there is no need to clear customs : our bus is waiting for us right on the runway and the two suitcases that we have brought with us are delivered on a small tractor.

Our bus takes us straight to the starting point of the hike up to Mount Paektu, where we are surprised by the cold and a very, very strong wind. We quickly put on some warmer clothing and start the walk up the mountain. As we ascend along a neatly landscaped path, the wind becomes stronger, the fog becomes more and more dense, and the temperature drop closer and closer to zero. Some of the students are so fit that they manage to run up the path, only for them to realize they are out of breath 200 meters further on.

Mount Paektu rises to an altitude of 2,744 meters, and the thin air can certainly be felt. The whole group perseveres in its ascent towards the top, but once there, visibility is reduced to about 10 meters. We can just about make out the metal chains that stop visitors from falling into the crater below, and we shield from the cold and the strong wind. The dynamics of this group are such that the potential for disappointment at not seeing the spectacular scenery turns into a wonderful bonding exercise where everyone cuddles up and tries to stay out of the wind.

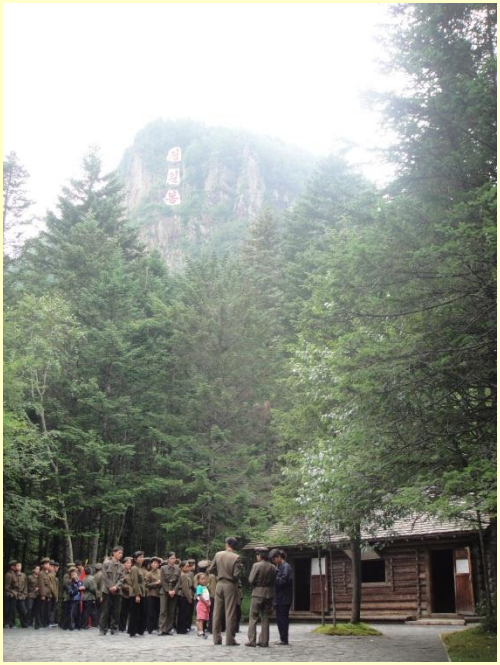
There is laughter, there is joy, there is a sense of camaraderie and there is appreciation for the fact that we are standing on top of North Korea's most

mythical mountain – a place of great historical and political significance, and a place of unrivalled natural beauty. Because of the weather conditions, descending on the wooden staircases that lead into the crater is discouraged, and we jointly agree to put our safety ahead of our curiosity. The group spends about an hour at the top, and there is even an opportunity for some of the participants to take (quick) photos in bikini ! A clear sign that different people have different thresholds of pain and of climatic tolerance …

We eventually descend back towards visibility and towards our bus, and are greeted by warm sunshine when we reach the parking lot. We take a few minutes to defrost, and get in the bus in order to find a picnic place for our lunch. After a few kilometres, the driver stops the bus in the middle of nowhere and in the middle of the road, and we all take our packed lunches, sit down in the middle of the road, and have a wonderful picnic that is only occasionally disturbed by a passing truck full of waving soldiers …

We spend our lunchtime talking about our experiences in North Korea so far, we exchange impressions and opinions, and we also revisit the objectives of our trip. Here, in the middle of the road and in gentle sunshine, the group decides that our stories need to be told to the whole LPC community and beyond, and we also learn more about our intention to bring North Korean students to the UWC family. Our discussions are so interesting that even butterflies and wasps (of the non-stinging variety) come and join us. They land on our arms, hands, necks and hair, and seemingly provide a very attentive audience for our talks.

After lunch the bus takes us to the most famous one of thirteen Secret Camps. It was from this location that Comrade Kim Il Sung directed the war against the Japanese, and in a nearby hut his son Kim Jong Il was born. One thing that immediately catches everyone's attention is the sheer number of young soldiers who seem to be marching all over the roads in this area. This is obviously a place of great historical significance for the North Korean nation, and the discipline amongst these young soldiers is spectacular. With no signs of any kind of public transport, these youngsters must be walking hundreds and hundreds of kilometers in order to see the place from where the war was won, and one can not help but be impressed by their devotion, their respect for the leader, and their patriotism.



The hut from which Kim Il Sung directed his troops is located in a densely forested area and right at the foot of a vertical cliff of at least 500 meters high. At the top of the cliff, the Korean words for "Jong Il peak" are carved out of the rock. Inside the hut where Kim Jong Il spent his childhood, we learn that the little boy was very fond of toys such as a pistol, a pair of binoculars, a map of Korea and number blocks. The story also goes that his father read him battle reports as a lullaby …

Our next stop are the Paektu Milyong waterfalls. The water from these falls comes from Mount Paektu, which is many kilometers away. The falls spread like a fan over the rocky hillside and form a very picturesque backdrop to hundreds of photos. Our visit coincides with the visits of hundreds of soldiers who at first look at us as much as we look at them, but who then suddenly invite us to take photos together. There is a sudden spontaneity in them – they become playful and noisy, they smile and laugh, and are in awe of some of the taller members of our group. One of those moments where we feel that there is a certain connection with the locals, and where the potential barrier of a military uniform becomes inexistent.

After this very successful stop, our bus takes us to our base for tonight : the Pegaebong Hotel in Samjiyon.

Having missed the view over Mount Paektu in the morning, we discuss with our guides the option of waking up very early the next morning, checking the weather, and possibly returning to Mount Paektu to try and see the scenery under the sun. Surprisingly, the guides do not reject the suggestion, and agree to get in touch with their Head Office. There may be a small extra cost for the fuel. The greater concern is the time it takes to return to the top of the mountain. We need to catch our flight back to Pyongyang at 2pm, and the guide is concerned that we may not make it to the airport in time. The aircraft is 'ours' for these two days, as we have chartered it for the exclusive use of our group, but it needs to be in Pyongyang by 3.30 pm the next day for its next mission. Because of the time constraints, we agree to stick to the original plan

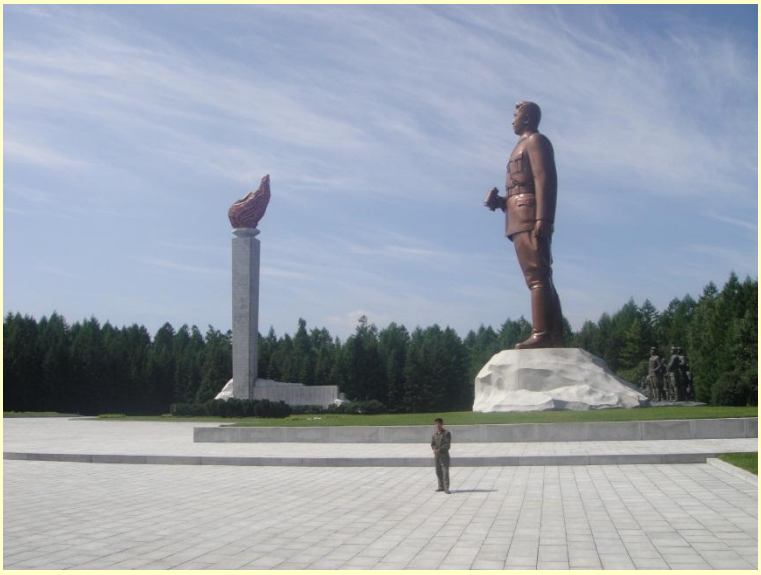
and will spend the next morning in Samjiyon, visiting fascinating places of interest. And what a great decision it was !

That evening, the group rehearses its cultural performances some more, as we still have a second school visit coming up soon. Below the huge mural depicting Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il in front of Mount Paektu, the practice goes on for about an hour, and is then followed by a table tennis competition in the games room …

DAY 6 : THURSDAY AUGUST 11TH – SAMJIYON - PYONGYANG

We wake up at 7.15, take our breakfast, and start our visit to the Samjiyon Grand Monument and the Three Ponds of the Revolutionary Struggle. The Grand Monument is truly grand, and the lay-out of the esplanade, with a 'miniature' (but still 40 meters tall) Juche Tower, a huge bronze statue of Kim Il Sung (holding binoculars as he directs the war against the Japanese), and very fine reliefs and monuments to the soldiers and families who fought for their land, is a sight to behold. Hundreds of young North Korean children, all dressed in the Party's uniforms, listen to their teachers but keep one eye on these foreign visitors, of whom this region sees few. In the background we see Mount Paektu

in all its glory, and the three lakes in the area provide us with a wonderful walk through forests. We get to sit on special "massage benches" and visit a pavilion from where the three lakes can be seen.



A truly serene environment with very, very clean air. We all make plans to set up the next UWC right there ! The area exhales a certain sense of magic and mystery, and it is clear that the North Korean people have successfully managed to elevate this region to a very special place of pilgrimage – because of its historical significance.

We take another fifty photos of the beautiful white statues against the deep blue sky, and then we head for the Samjiyon Regional Museum. This museum, not too big in size but very well set up, provides an interactive insight into the history of the area. One of the videos in this museum shows Kim Jong Il

speaking the only words he has even spoken in public : 'Glory to the heroic soldiers of the People's Army.' A historic moment !

We take a quick lunch in our hotel and head for Samjiyon airport, where our metal bird is faithfully waiting for us. I ask the pilots if we can make a loop over Mount Paektu (remember, this is our own plane !), but take-off is in the opposite direction and straight south towards Pyongyang. We'll have to come back to see Lake Chon in all its glory. The flight takes about 80 minutes and provides some students with a chance to catch up on sleep while others write their journal or discuss the visits of the past few days.

Upon arrival in Pyongyang we go straight to Mangyongdae, the 'official' birthplace of Kim Il Sung. The students are shown around the area while I have a quick mid-trip debriefing with Amanda from Koryotours, who is here with her own group. "All is going fantastically well, the students are extremely happy and impressed, the guides are wonderful … ".

Amanda informs me that her group was also barred from entering the negotiation huts in Panmunjom, and I wish her the best of luck with the weather around Mount Paektu, where she will be heading next.

I catch up with our group and we drive to the Mangyongdae School children's Palace. A new palace has been built since 2007, and this new facility is very impressive in its design and size. We visit several practice rooms where we find children playing music, dancing, painting, drawing and singing. From here we are taken to the main auditorium where we witness an incredible spectacle of sound, light, dance and smiles. A fast-paced performance in which children, some as young as 6 years, demonstrate incredible skill when playing music, dancing and doing hundreds of pirouettes, controlling hulahoops and singing. It is easy to have mixed feelings about this performance and to ask questions about the treatment of the children, but one can also only admire the incredible creativity and ingenuity of the human being.

On a high from the show we have just witnessed, we go for dinner in a local restaurant and choose between boiled rice and noodles. The downstairs area provides some nice opportunities for shopping – with only two days remaining, we need to decide on which souvenirs and gifts to take !

The day is not over yet. After dinner we make our long-awaited stop at the Kaeson Fun Fair. This hugely popular amusement park, very modern and with mostly Italian-made rides and attractions, provides a great opportunity to mix and mingle with the local population. Because our system of paying for the rides (a bit like ordering dim sum in Hong Kong !) is different from the system for the locals, we are whisked straight onto the rides rather than waiting in line.

This makes some of us uncomfortable at first, but this is how things are done and the North Korean visitors just show curiosity at this group of smiling, laughing and fun-loving youngsters. On the rides, we sit next to the locals and go through exactly the same physical and emotional feelings as them. Some of the more challenging rides, such as the Vominator and the Deathifier, can be considered the great levelers. It does not matter whether you are North Korean or a foreigner, child or adult, on these rides everyone's physical torment is very similar !

When everyone has had their fair share of the rides, we drive to the Yanggakdo hotel from where we can post our last postcards. Some students also have a look at the casino downstairs – the only in in Pyongyang. This hotel, generally considered the top hotel in Pyongyang, does offer Internet facility but also looks like a much busier and less 'authentic' hotel than our very own Ryanggang hotel. So we gladly head back to our own home base and prepare for our penultimate night in the DPRK.

DAY 7 : FRIDAY AUGUST 12TH – MT MYOHYANG - PYONGYANG

Our last full day in North Korea, and it promises to be an action-packed one. We depart from our hotel at 7.45 and take a 2 hour drive to Mount Myohyang, about 150 kms northwest of Pyongyang. Here we will visit the Friendship

Exhibition, a complex that consists of two massive palaces dedicated to the gifts received by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il respectively. This Exhibition emphasizes the respect that the two leaders have enjoyed and continue to enjoy from 'well-wishers' from all over the world. One can not help but notice that the vast majority of the gifts were donated by leaders and visitors from countries with similar or related ideologies, but there are the occasional gifts from Western leaders and personalities such as Jimmy Carter, Madeleine Albright and Pelé. The gifts are sorted by country, and all the students spend a couple of minutes going through the contributions from their respective countries. The local guide shows a great interest in the various countries that our students come from, and has a good understanding of the geography of the world. She also wants to know more about our college, about our reasons for visiting the DPRK, and about the students' impressions of her country.

From the Friendship Exhibition we make the short drive to the Pohyon Buddhist Temple, where we are shown around one of North Korea's few accessible places of worship. According to the guide, there is no real restriction on religion, and century-old religious traditions are continued to this day. In the main temple we briefly speak with the resident monk, and then we head back to the bus. We take lunch in a local restaurant and enjoy another fine meal.

We hit the road back to Pyongyang and we arrive at 3.30 pm at the Maternity Hospital. We change into sterile gowns and shoes and start to feel like doctors when the local doctor-guide comes to meet us and takes us around the wards. We are shown to the areas where the prematurely-born babies are cared for, we see triplets, we watch a video about the hospital and about how families are very well taken care of under the guidance of the Dear Leader.

From the hospital we drive to the Kang Bang Suk Secondary School, where we are very warmly welcomed. We receive a brief guided tour of the school buildings and the labs, and then our students join a class of 25 and spend about 20 minutes exchanging life stories. Then a few pairs inform the group about what they have discussed, and the local English teacher sings us a song ("If you're happy and you know it clap your hands") – the whole class joins in. We then go to the school auditorium and listen to a remarkable performance of singing and music. Our students respond with a Chinese song and an Indonesian dance, both very well received by a very enthusiastic audience. From the auditorium we go to the school office entrance and present Mark Zelinski's book "From the Field", which is gratefully received by the school Principal and which will be added to the school library.

The climax of the school visit is the international football match between the local students and the LPC team. A very tightly contested match is played in a wonderful spirit, chances present themselves at both ends, and the condition of the field adds to the excitement. The football field is just next to the street, and in no time about 100 passers-by have gathered and watch this incredible sporting spectacle. Along the lines there are hundreds (well, maybe tens) of very vocal fans of both teams. Eventually the guests win by the smallest margin,

but the score is the least important part of this encounter. After the final whistle both teams salute and thank each other, and the LPC team donates two brand new footballs and pumps to the hosts. We present them with the LPC banner and also wish the boys the best of luck in their upcoming matches. Both teams retreat to the changing rooms, and our students present their gifts to their buddies, and lots of goodbyes are exchanged. This was an outstanding visit to a very welcoming school and very friendly students. Certainly worthy of repeat visits and further donations.

It is now 8 pm, and we have an appointment for dinner in a local barbecue duck restaurant scheduled for 7.30 pm … It has been that kind of day, packed with events and visits, and the school visit lasted longer than planned. However, as this is one of the highlights of the Goodwill trips, nobody minds and we even make a stop at a local Pizzeria to have a quick look. Few customers, but a very attractive restaurant that may be an option for future trips. The chefs, all North Korean, have been trained by Italian chefs who came to the DPRK to train the locals, and who continue to make occasional trips into the country in order to train more chefs.

We head to the Barbecue Duck restaurant and have a wonderful dinner – plenty of food, many side dishes, and a very pleasant atmosphere with wonderful smiles from the waitresses.

After dinner we drive to the hotel (it is now past 10 pm !) and decide to have a presentation for our guides. This being our last night in the DPRK, and in the knowledge that the morning will leave no time for too many goodbyes, we thank our guides and driver with kind words and a lot of gifts. Some tears of sadness

flow, showing exactly the impact the past week has had on the students and on the guides. More tears will certainly flow tomorrow morning at the airport. However, we all realize that our guides will be okay and that they can look forward to further progress and development in their country. They ask us to talk to as many people as possible about the DPRK and to try and encourage more people to visit.

After some final shopping for gifts and souvenirs, we retreat to our rooms at 23.30.

DAY 8 : SATURDAY AUGUST 13TH – PYONGYANG - BEIJING

We wake up early one more time and take our final breakfast in the DPRK. Soon enough it is time to check out of the rooms and to head for the airport. We say our goodbyes to our guides and wish them all the best. We pick up our mobile phones, check in our luggage, receive our boarding passes and are driven to our aircraft. A few minutes later we leave the DPRK, completely satisfied with the week that we have had, the experiences that we have been through, and the friendships that we have made.

A very foggy Beijing awaits us. We retrieve the left luggage, have a quick debriefing about safety and security, and the students are on their way towards the city – or Hong Kong. Mission accomplished !

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TRIP EVALUATION BY STUDENTS

The students who participated in the 2011 trip were asked to evaluate the various aspects and parts of the trip.

In terms of the excursions, outings and visits, there is unanimity that the program was very rich, very diverse, very interesting and very challenging. The trip has been described as a 'roller coaster of emotions' that constantly challenged everyone's perceived knowledge, everyone's personal understanding of the history and the culture, and everyone's view of the 'truth'. The week in the DPRK has given everyone a very real sense of how a socialist society works and operates, and what its effects are on the people who live in it. All of us have left the country with as many questions as answers – and this is of course one of the main objectives of this Initiative. The discussions that have been generated on a daily basis, and that continue to take place, are testament to the value of this Initiative and confirm that every participant, no matter his or her background, gains enormously from the visits that we have made and from the conversations that we have had.

Some of the outings that scored extremely high in the students' evaluations are the following :

- The Tower to the Juche Idea
- The Arirang Mass Games
- The Kumsusan Memorial Palace
- The Pyongyang Metro
- The Victorious Fatherland War Museum
- The Grand People's Study House
- The DMZ and Panmunjom
- Sinchon and the US War Atrocities Museum
- Hike up to Mount Paektu
- The Secret Camp and Samjiyon Grand Monument
- The Mangyongdae School Children's Palace
- The Maternity Hospital
- The Kang Bang Suk Secondary School

Several of these visits are on most travellers' itinerary, but the 'added value' to the Li Po Chun trips, which includes visits to the Maternity Hospital, the Kang Bank Suk Secondary School, the Sinchon Museum and Mount Paektu, has certainly been appreciated. In consultation with our agents in Beijing and with the Korea International Travel Company, we continue to explore new opportunities and push the boundaries of our experiences in the DPRK. It is great to see that these resonate well with the students, and that all of these are given a very positive evaluation. They most probably do provide the more 'genuine' experiences. One case in point is the football match that we played at the Kang Bank Suk Secondary School. Having gone through several days of very structured visits, it was great to let our guard down for an hour and meet the local people in a game where the rules and the playing field are the same for all those involved. Several students commented very positively on the hour that was spent playing football or cheering from the sidelines.

Some of the outings received less impressive marks, but the students realized very well that the success of these depends, to a great extent, on external

factors, such as ongoing construction and restoration of monuments and/or buildings, on the weather, or on the mood of the US military personnel in the DMZ.

The participants were also highly enthusiastic about the level of service and information provided by our three guides. Before any trip to the DPRK, the guides are normally understood to be government minders who watch our every step. The reality in the DPRK is different though : our guides quickly become the students' best friends, they soon start to share life experiences, jokes and songs, and of course they are the students' window into the fascinating country that is the DPRK.

The guides obviously respond very well to the insightful and respectful questions that our students ask, and they also enjoy learning more about our college and its location in Hong Kong, as well as about the students' home countries. We are very grateful to Koryotours and to the Korea International Travel Company for providing us with guides who enjoy working with young adults and whose sense of humor blends in very well with a group that is on the go from 6.30 am to 11 pm every day !

The overall rating of this trip is an overwhelming 5 out of 5 ! Every single student has commented that it was an incredible experience and an enormous privilege to be part of the 2011 Li Po Chun DPRK team. They will all continue to

follow the developments on the Korean peninsula and they will share their learnings with as many people as possible in the weeks, the months and the years to come.

A SELECTION OF STUDENT COMMENTS

1. <u>The highlight of the trip for me was …</u>

… either the visit to "The US War Atrocities Museum" or the football-match at the school-visit. The museum had a great impact on me, not because I was shocked by the atrocities that the American soldiers supposedly committed to the Korean people (although it was truly terrible if true), but because of the way it was presented. Never before have I been presented with oil-paintings as proof of historical events to the same extent that they were used at this museum. Also, throughout the visit, a clear notion of hatred towards the "American Imperialists" was evident, especially from our local guide, who expressed a wish to crush, revenge and bring down the USA. This made me reflect on several things. First of all, the question of how a nation heals wounds as deep as this. Do you (as we discussed on the bus after the visit) let it go and instead focus on healing and initiating dialogue, or do you keep it deep in you and nourish it for future generations ? Certainly the latter is the case in the DPRK, and the extent to which it has defined the DPRK as a nation is devastating. This was clear after the meeting with the survivor, who

throughout the talk seemed more keen on an apology from the US, in the same way that Germany apologised after the second World War. The younger ladies however, were militant in their language and expressed violent wishes about the US. This sparked a debate within the group of what would happen if the US actually came to apologize. How would the nation of DPRK react ? How would it shape its national identity after that?

The second highlight of the trip, was the football-match. This stood out for me as a highlight, because I feel that, of all the encounters we had throughout the week, this was the single most honest exchange of them all. Whenever we met adults, they would be on guard/duty/job and they did not always appear 100% sincere or relaxed. The same was true for the children : it was clear, given the questions that they asked us such as: “What do you feel when you look at this country?”, that their words had, to a large extent, been rehearsed and that they had been instructed on what they should talk about. Therefore, it was an incredible experience to meet them on a football field that I perceived to be completely neutral. It might have been staged with political thoughts in mind, but for every single one of those minutes where we ran about on the muddy and bumpy field, we were united by the same idea and the same rules. To me, the casual nature of a football match in North Korea was astonishing.

… the trip to Kaesong. It was very enjoyable, especially as we got a chance to see the countryside and some of the less developed parts of Korea when traveling.

… the Arirang Games because it was something I had never seen or imagined before. The out-of-this-world coordination and content of the show is comparable to nothing in the world and it may have been a once in a lifetime opportunity to witness this spectacle.

… the reflections and discussions that members of the trip and guides had during/after visiting important places of North Korea.

… the Museum of US War Atrocities closely followed by the Kim Il Sung Mausoleum. The reason for both of these is that they gave us an insight into the North Korean mindset. The cult of personality, the hatred for foreign powers and their reverence of the Juche idea. It made me think a lot about the nature of forgiveness and happiness in a North Korean context and for that reason I think I gained the most from these particular experiences.

… the second secondary school that we visited. I'm not sure if it was just me who felt this way, but despite the fact that we were the first group of foreigners to visit the school, the students seemed to be a lot more comfortable with us and willing to talk to us. Perhaps it was because of

the football match, which relaxed everyone a lot, but overall, I think that the interactions that we got to have with North Korean students were the most valuable.

… the Mass Games, the Grand People's Study House, Mangyongdae Children's Palace, The Museum of US War Atrocities and the Maternity Hospital. The Mass Games probably don't really need any explanation as they were just mind-blowing. I liked the Grand People's Study House a lot because it was one of those places where I really felt how big of a bubble the local people there live in. Of course we were shown the flat screen computers and people using them and the room with radios and TVs on tables. However, I don't know about the rest, but I could really feel that it was more of a show rather than the truth. Of course I might be wrong, but that's the feeling I got. The Museum of US War Atrocities really explained the North Korean side of the story. How they feel about the Americans and most importantly why they feel that way. Of course the evidence in that museum could be questioned, but I guess that is not really the point. Because we were not there to say what is right or wrong, but just to understand the people, their history, culture and expectations. The visit to that museum touched on those points very thoroughly. The Mangyongdae Children's Palace was also a very impressive place. Just like for the Arirang Mass Games, the Children's Palace was a place where I couldn't really question anything. In the Museum of US War Atrocities one

might have some questions about the evidence presented, and in the Grand People's Study House one could question the actual number of books. However, in Children's Palace I could just sense the hard work. The truth there is that they simply just train and train every day, making their performance perfect. And they truly were perfect. The palace itself was quite impressive as well. The Maternity Hospital was the one of the pearls of this trip. The video, the statistics they told us about and the so called 'advanced equipment' was quite unbelievable but at the same time very interesting. Showing the pictures of the equipment, which is mostly of Russian origin, to my family will be quite fun, as they probably have a lot to say about how those machines were also used in Estonia.

… watching the locals go about their daily business, because there were a few great places, like the Fun Fair and the walk in Moranbong park, as well as our bus rides. I felt that we could really learn a lot about the North Korean people just through observation.

… the Children's Palace in Pyongyang because I believe the people of the country are what makes and defines the country. All the people in North Korea, and especially the children, should have all the opportunities in the world to learn and to shine. In the Schoolchildren's Palace it was amazing to see the artistic accomplishments of all the young students studying there. It was a pleasant surprise to discover that they go there because of what they're good at and what they like doing. Studying and learning in the Schoolchildren's Palace is an honour for the selected children. I'm glad to see that people in North Korea have a chance to develop and nurture such amazing talents. My only hope would be for them to be recognized and have the chance to train with people of the same caliber all over the world. After all their hard work, they deserve that.

When I went to North Korea, I did not realise how much the people of North Korea love their country. All the North Koreans I met were very patriotic. In many places of poverty and authoritarian rule, signs of discontent and dissent are seen. However, North Koreans are always so open and genuine about their feelings for their Great Leader and the country he has shaped. The monuments they built to honour him, the figures they memorize, and the praises they sing for him; they all come from a place from where they truly have such admiration and love for their country. From their patriotism, they have also developed a strong sense of belonging. Without going to North Korea, I would never have been able to imagine how much North Koreans desire reunification with the South. Maybe they have been taught from a very young age to love their country, but I think staying loyal to your country, no matter what light other people see it in, is admirable in itself. I've met dozens of people who despise their government, their country and who they are. North Koreans don't shy away from who they are. They are proud of being part of their country and being North Korean. I think being in North Korea was the first time I saw so many statues with Asian features. They might just be repeating what they've been taught, but at the same time I think that they are staying true to themselves because it's what they truly believe in. They taught me that no matter how other people see you and your opinions, you should always stay true to what you believe in.

… very hard to choose, but I would say that the Maternity Hospital was the best thing we saw. The interesting thing about it was that is not meant to be a tourist place, and you can see the level of development of an urban, sort of luxurious hospital of a country like the DPRK.

… the school visits because that was where we managed to get in touch with local children. We got to see in which conditions they study and spend most of their day time. I was impressed when I saw how the boys were training football in the mud while it was raining. We got to talk with the students and hear what their lives are like, what their families are like and also some personal information such as if they have girlfriends/ boyfriends and other things typical for teenagers. I was also very happy to explain to them where my country is, what my life is like and to share some information from the outside world that was probably unknown to them.

2. <u>The main thing that was different to what I had expected was …</u>

… the openness and the welcome we received in some places; places that you don't usually visit when you travel to another country, for instance a hospital).

… the friendliness of the guides and the kindness and warmth of the North Korean people.

… the atmosphere. I expected to be scared or feel tension or something because it was North Korea. After the introduction of the guides I just felt very much at ease. North Korea is not as scary as I thought it would be.

… how nice the people in North Korea were. I was expecting locals in North Korea to be very wary of foreigners and perhaps even a bit unfriendly towards us, but instead, I found out that the people I met in the country were perhaps the most hospitable and friendliest people I've ever met anywhere.

… seeing a lot of modern electronics and cars. I guess I was excepting to see more poverty. But the elite in Pyongyang actually had digital cameras, cell phones and a few fancy cars. Therefore, the communication with the outside world in Pyongyang must be a lot more significant than it is actually reported in the media. Our own guide was on the phone very often. I also did not expect to see that many foreign products like Sprite, Coca-Cola, Twix etc. Of course most of the things sold there are imported, but I was expecting more things from China. I was also expecting their dislike or maybe even hatred towards the US and Japan to be more prominent. But it wasn't like that at all. Of course there were more negative feelings towards those two countries than towards any other, but it seemed it wasn't a feeling that came from their hearts but

rather from textbooks or propaganda. The US War Atrocities Museum was maybe an exception because after the visit, when we talked with the ladies and the survivor, they talked very passionately about the fact that they want America to apologize for their atrocities.

… how open the guides were to answering our questions. In addition to being an invaluable resource in terms of knowledge, our guides were also incredibly kind and it was great to observe how they got more comfortable with us (and vice versa) as the week progressed.

… the first few seconds in the Vominator at the Fun Fair.

… how close we actually were with the guides

3. <u>I will never forget …</u>

… the visit to the mausoleum, without a doubt. The most fascinating thing about the trip for me was attempting to understand the mass psychology behind the cult of personality, and I think this was the most interesting way to examine this.

… when our guide Rim was talking only to Ronny in the bus about why he thought North and South Korea could not be reunited, and what was needed for a better communication towards this goal.

… the time when we were dancing with the elderly in the park. It was very unexpected but when we had overcome our initial jitters and awkwardness from dancing with the Koreans, we truly enjoyed the experience. It was something that no one can ever buy with money.

… the discussion we had about forgiveness with the Sinchon museum guide and the man who survived the US atrocities.

… the Arirang Mass Games. Before I ever knew of the event, I didn't think that North Korea could be capable of something so artistically beautiful and intense. I didn't think that the country would contribute so much time and effort towards a performing arts show. The Arirang Mass Games made me see North Korea as a country of possibility with the potential to achieve anything, even change.

… the Arirang Mass Games, our guide Rim's jokes and him being so open towards us only after a few days, the Fun Fair, the visits to the schools, the ladies in one of the restaurants where we ate the Korean BBQ for the first time, the way they danced, sang and just were very positive.

… seeing the very fragile looking houses along the road from Pyongyang to Kaesong and in Kaesong as well, dancing with the elderly, the almost pitch-black city after dark, but pretty much the whole trip; because every day had something in it that I will never forget.

… the moment when one of the students at the second school we visited not only immediately asked me about Cambridge when I told him where I

was from and asked whether I supported ‘City or United’, but also offered me his pin. Although I did not get to keep the pin, it was a great honour.

… the stories about American atrocities during the Korean War. I’ve always known that coming to North Korea would be a chance to explore a side of the story that’s never been told. North Korea has lost a lot of credibility in the international arena. We never hear their voice. Most of the attention they receive come from their so-called nuclear threats. As a student of history, I know how easy it is to cover up the truth, particularly for stronger nations. It is always the winner’s version of history that gets told, and always the loser’s military officials who get tried as war criminals. War crimes exist in every single battle in wars, and although I knew that war-torn countries suffer a lot, the extent of which they do is unimaginable to most of us, who’ve grown up during times of peace. It’s not only the images and stories of what the North Koreans have gone through that will stay with me, but also the injustice of the whole affair. International law and international courts are supposed to protect people during wartime. Instead of getting compensation and an official apology and acknowledgement from the US, the stories of North Korean suffering are unheard. North Korea is demonized and denounced by the entire

international community. Blame was placed on them without any acknowledgment of their pain. I saw most people comment about North Koreans moving on but without any acknowledgement of their suffering and an official apology there's no closure. I believe it's a great injustice done to them because it is unlikely the truth will ever get out. There is no comparison between North Korea and Germany because the Germans have paid for the war and it's a crime to cover up what they've done. Unlike Germany, there's very little chance that the United States will acknowledge and even apologize to North Korea because in the eyes of the international community, they have done nothing wrong. It can be said that they have done the world a favour by getting rid of communism.

… the really touching moments when we were saying bye to our guides. During that one week they put a lot of effort to make our stay perfect. We also got to talk to them a lot so we have established a very strong connection. In the beginning they were quite serious, but after a short while they were always smiling and making jokes with us. It seems that we made them happy so at the end it was really sad because we had to leave them.

4. <u>The worst thing about the trip was …</u>

… that it is difficult to keep focused for an entire week, especially when tired and with friends, and so I hope I absorbed enough during the week.

Maybe we should suggest to future participants to arrive into Beijing a few days prior to departure, if possible, in order to combat jet lag and travel exhaustion.

… that it was too short and all our activities had to be packed into one week.

… Mount Paektu, for sure. Not only was it freezing cold during the hike up (and down), but when we reached the summit, we couldn't even see anything more than two feet ahead of us! It was like we climbed all of it for nothing. If we had been able to see the lake at the top, the hike would probably have been worth it, but all I could see was white fog because we were walking through a cloud. Plus, it was so cold that we had to huddle together. But then again, that was fun !

… the occasional brown bath water. Aside from that, every experience was certainly worth it. I felt like I could have easily spent an additional hour or so at each of the places that we visited.

… well, nothing. The trip was actually really well organized and I don't have any complaints. I just wish the weather was nicer when we were climbing Mount Paektu.

5. Improvements I would suggest for future trips are …

… if possible, to have students eat together with the guides. Conversations would be very interesting and it would add to the amount of understanding you get from the guides.

… for our students to meet Korean students of their age, if this is possible.

… an increase in the duration of the trip, and more public interaction, if possible.

… to visit more schools, although this may be impossible to do. I know that it is mandatory for LPC to visit all the other tourist destinations, making it difficult to fit more schools into the schedule, but I think that the schools were the most valuable parts of the trip. Being able to interact with North Korean students who are quite close in age to us was something that we wouldn't have been able to experience at all in the other tourist destinations. The other sites that we visited are significant

and interesting as well, but I think that if future trips can go to more places where students can really interact with locals, that would be great.

… to make sure that the participants keep on schedule. I was a shame that we couldn't attend the lecture at the Grand People's Study House because of our poor timekeeping skills.

… very few. The week I spent in North Korea was very eventful and packed and I liked that we got to see all the important historic sites. I would like a chance to interact with people more our own age. Comparison between people of different cultures is difficult if the people you meet have other priorities, if they're in a different stage of life from you. I met 14-year olds and they gave me an understanding of what they're going through, but I would be really interested in seeing what people my age are going through, because it's the transition from a teenager to an adult that would determine what you could and would do with your life. I'd like to know more about that. I am aware that we were supposed to meet university students and I was very disappointed about not meeting them because people from our group were late for half an hour in the morning. I suggest for future trips, we should leave people who fail to be punctual at the hotel.

… more school visits, possibly with students of the same age as us, because their English is good and therefore we can have better communication with them.

6. <u>The advice I would give the students preparing for future trips is …</u>

… to spend some time reading up on Korean history before coming on the trip. Each bit of information that you get on this trip is far more exciting if you have a background to hold it up against.

… to go with an open mind, and pay attention to the details in the country, as these will provide you with the richest understanding.

… to read some books about various aspects of the country beforehand. People who had done so had really interesting perspectives to offer throughout the trip.

… to read about North Korea before the trip, observe everything you can during the trip (how the tour guides act…), and whatever you are planning to do to reflect on North Korea, do it immediately after the trip. If not, you will never do it.

… that the amount they gain from this trip is positively related to the amount of research and reading they do before the trip. Read a variety of resources and try not to get sucked into all of the sensationalist documentaries which are concerned with discovering more than the DPRK is willing to reveal. Instead, focus on the human aspect of the DPRK.

… to research, research, research about the probable places that they would visit, because otherwise the museums would be just like any other museum. By doing research, we can better understand the two different perspectives once we are there.

… to read up about North Korea, watch lots of documentaries and refer to the notes our group made on the little things that you may want to pack.

… to bring RMB, not Euros or US dollars. It is definitely much easier to buy water and small souvenirs with RMB, since denominations aren't so large. Also, bring a heavy jacket for the hike up Mount Paektu!

… to choose simple and well-rehearsed dances for the performances in the schools. Songs and performances on musical instruments are recommended.

… to keep a list of questions that they would like to ask the guards as they are reading and researching.

… to familiarize themselves with North Korean history before going there. The trips to the various monuments and places will be made even more profound by the background knowledge of what North Korea was going through when events happened. It would also be very nice to be able to compare different versions of the same event, for example the Korean War. We went to several sites where it was made clear to us what the North Korean stance on the war was. The point of having information from both sides is not to determine who was right and who was wrong. I

don't believe in absolutes. We might see similar events in history that had a very different outcome. Chance plays a large part in determining a war and shaping a country. Come to North Korea knowing what people say about it, yet still keeping an open mind about it would let students benefit most from the trip. According to the Chinese, history is completely neutral but bias and selection of historical facts often result in an incomplete account of what really went down. Adding the media into the mix would certainly produce a less-than-truthful account of what happened. Coming to North Korea is a great chance to see for oneself what the truth (if that can even be uncovered) is.

… to have an open mind. I think that one of the issues that forbid some people from getting to understand what they were seeing with their own eyes was that they arrived with a preformed idea of what North Korea is. They saw everything through very narrow lenses… I would advise future LPCers to read as much as they can about the DPRK, but especially to think that the western media is just saying their part of the truth, and that in order to judge, it is necessary to understand the fuller picture.

… to get informed as much as possible, to know which kinds of questions to ask the guides and to have them ready, and also to try not to build any strong beliefs before the trip. They should build their opinions during and after the trip.

7. <u>If someone asked me to describe the DPRK in two sentences, I would say that it …</u>

… is unlike any other country. The belief of a whole people in the leadership and political system of the country is mind blowing.

… is completely different from anything you have ever experienced, yet strikingly similar to what you have read about so much in history books.

… is a country where there is more than meets the eye; a country incomparable to any other.

… remains a proud and proudly individual nation state in a world of increasing globalization and homogenization. Its pride and individuality are both its biggest flaws and assets.

… is a very special country, with extremely talented and proud people.

… is a place that will challenge your idea of normal. It will challenge how you see and think about certain things.

… is a country with potential for anything. From the outside, it may seem like a country with so many problems, and in a way, this is true, but

what's important is that I don't doubt the ability of the nation to make things better in the future.

… is impossible to do that. ☺

… is one of those places you definitely cannot judge before going there yourself. The media and some other countries tend to judge the DPRK very easily and mostly in a negative way. Those who judge often simply don't understand the context or the environment the Korean people live in. But if I would try and describe it shortly, I would say that the DPRK is a very peculiar and interesting place stuck in time.

… is impossible to know where to begin. North Korea is incredibly insightful, yet strangely surreal.

… is a place worth exploring, not only because of its beautiful natural landscape and impressive monuments, but also because of the loyal and open nature of their people.

… a nation whose population has been victim of foreign powers' rape through its short history. The DPRK can only be understood if we

understand its genesis: formed as a nation state when the Russian troops took over the northern part of the peninsula, and obliged to fight one of the battles of the Cold War in its territory.

… is a unique place where people have strong beliefs in their leader. They all live and work as one.

8. <u>As a result of this trip I intend to …</u>

… publicise what I thought of the trip to the DPRK, hopefully in LPC, Hong Kong and in my home country. It is definitely a trip which I will remember and I hope to share some of the things I learned on the trip.

… travel to other places that have been labeled as “evil” countries (for example Iran), and thus gain a better understanding of how the country works, much like I did in the DPRK.

… continue trying to learn more about North Korea and to further attempt to understand the nuances of the culture.

… visit North Korea again, and give support on the betterment of this country, to my full extent.

… encourage all the first year students to go next year ! But I'm sure that won't be the only result.

… visit again sometime in the future. By then, I'm sure, North Korea would have at least changed a little, and for the better. I also plan on making sure that all the first years are excited about and considering the trip!

… speak about my experiences of the trip to the college and wider community so as to promote a better understanding of the trip as a goodwill initiative, advertise the trip to future participants and contribute to the fundraising efforts for next year's trip.

… spread awareness among my peers about what North Korea is really like. There's a lot of information on North Korea, most of it depicting it in a less than flattering way and I feel it's very unfair to condemn an entire country with words when they have none to defend themselves. Thus I would encourage people who talk about North Korea to keep an open mind about them. As a debater I know there is always more than one side to an issue, and I would like people to know the whole picture. North Korea deserves to be heard.

… be part of the effort to make North Korea more open. They don't deserve to be isolated and shunned by the international community. Granted, they do believe in self-reliance but that does not mean they deserve to have an embargo placed on their goods or exclusion from international gatherings at conferences etc. Their country's poverty partly stems from the fact that they are completely closed off, unable to buy new technology. The UWC movement is attempting to draw students out of North Korea so that more information can be exchanged between the two. Hopefully, this will be a step in opening up the country.

… get to understand better their reality and spread the voice about the conflict that persists in that part of the world.

… get more involved in similar actions in the future, become a better person and share an amazing experience with the people around me.

9. Any other comments …

- The trip was really amazing and I think that it was definitely worth it. To be able to see the DPRK from within is an opportunity that very few people in the world have. I'm really grateful that I got to be part of the trip.

- What we did with Powerpoints and presentations in preparation for the trip was very useful and that should definitely continue.

- Just the feeling of humility of having been part of this amazing experience.

- I'm already really looking forward to our North Korea (and veggie table!) reunion :D

- It has been the greatest trip in my life. Thanks for giving me this opportunity.

- I would like to say that 'grateful' is a small word for what I feel for all the people who have contributed to this trip. Without their help many of us could not afford to have such amazing experience.

- IT WAS AWESOME RONNY!!!

CONCLUSION

The DPRK remains an enigmatic country. Being able to compare the situation in 2011 with that of 2007 though, I feel that the doors of goodwill and friendship have opened up quite a bit. Throughout this summer's trip I had the feeling that the College has gained a lot in standing and respect with the North Korean authorities, and it is safe to say that we are becoming better and better known, not only as a college but also as a movement. A lot of the credit for this ever-improving relationship goes to the students, who are outstanding ambassadors for their college, for the UWC movement, for Hong Kong and for their respective home countries. I received a lot of praise from the local guides and from other people that we met, but maybe more importantly, our students also caused a lot of curiosity in those that we came across. Our group is not only there to learn and to take, but just as much to teach and to give. We received many requests to 'come back soon !', and we promised to be back very soon. Our group was able to interact with a large number of young people. We all truly believe that the youth are the future of the country, and judging by the welcomes we received and the increased openness with which the local youth engaged with us, we must be very hopeful that a true relationship is being established between the DPRK youth and our own student groups.

At the same time, efforts are being made outside the scope of this particular annual trip to take our message of goodwill higher up into the corridors of government and leadership. At the time of writing this report, some extremely interesting and encouraging developments are taking place in this respect, and as soon as some decisions have been made and significant progress has been achieved, all the interested parties will be informed. The Consulate of the DPRK in Hong Kong is also being kept informed of the progress made, as they will most definitely play a crucial role in the eventual admission of North Korean students to our College.

For some students the road up to Mount Paektu was long and arduous. For all of us, the road towards the objectives of this Initiative is much longer, and much more arduous. However, all the students reached the top and felt the satisfaction of achieving their goal. This Initiative will reach its objectives, thanks to the belief of many and the support of even more. The day that the first North Korean student sits in a classroom of a United World College is closer than ever …

Further viewing :

A number of video clips from our August 2011 trip have been uploaded to YouTube. Feel free to follow these links and enjoy the viewing. Alternatively, log on to the "Passwordforgetter" channel, where you will find all these clips.

Arirang Mass Games
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01KaiPIaQc4&feature=related
This is video 1 of 17 clips – they all line up on the right of the screen.

School Children's Palace performance
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1px5LTVIR3A
This is one of 5 clips

Kaeson Fun Fair
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYZ3FYgwdcI
This is one of 6 clips

Dancing in Moranbong Park
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vowzYp-VRM

The DMZ
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHD4FaUqmF8

Pyongyang Metro
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5-dFsvRG3g&feature=related

Ronny Mintjens
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