

TOUR '09 - SOUTHEAST ASIA - TOUR JOURNALS

WITH THANKS TO JENNI WOODCOCK AND HEATHER RUSSELL

April 26 – Pretour concert

Our final concert on Canadian soil! I'm very nervous about our capabilities. I feel, in spite of the numerous reassurances from friends and family, that we were lousy, or at least – not all we could be. With this lump of doubt in mind, and in the hope of getting better as the concerts pile up – I set off for Asia tomorrow morning!
Emma

April 27 – To Korea

Waiting at the ferry terminal; I am a complete jumble of nerves. I have checked and re-checked my packing list and bags so many times I feel I could recite them from memory. With a hug and a kiss to Mom and Dad I join the other choristers and settle in for a long hall.
Emma

April 28 – To Korea (continued)

We have arrived! I've been awake now for over 24 hours and so am very, very tired. We are staying with a lovely host family a good hour or more from the University. Danielle and I lugged our bags onto the metro -then the bus -then through the busy streets of Seoul. I don't know which of us is more tired at this point. We're staying in our host's (Ah-ra Kim) brother's room. He's in the serving in the Korean army for his required two years. Tomorrow we see palaces! I wonder what will be for breakfast?
Emma

Apr 29 - Seoul, Concert

Well, today was the first official day in Korea, as we arrived the night before. This day was spent entirely with our host families, with the exception of the concert that evening. This fact makes this journal a bit redundant, as we all have different experiences of the day. Nevertheless, I will still document my day.

Beginning with a 5 AM wake-up (thanks time change), I enjoyed a traditional Korean breakfast that included beef, rice, noodles, anchovies (yuck), and the only Kim Chi I enjoyed all trip. As had been decided the night before via Korean MSN Messenger, my Host (Kevin), his girlfriend (Anna) and I were going to the National Museum in Seoul. After a short ride on the ridiculously fast subway we ended up at the largest museum I have ever seen.

Entrance to the museum was free, but it just so happened to be elementary school tour day. As we wandered through the museum, droves of small Korean kids passed by. It should be noted that I am at least 10" taller than most Koreans I met, this made for some stares from the kids. My favourite moment to this effect was when one of the kids passed very close to me stopped and stared straight up at me (90 degree bend in his neck) and said "whoa!" It turns out Koreans are very proud of their history, and I learned a lot from Anna, who it turns out had spent some time in Canada and thus had stronger English skills than Kevin.

After we finished in the museum we went to return to the bus stop to head for lunch, however not before I pulled out my little Frisbee and played with Kevin. A small Korean boy and his mother stopped to watch, so Kevin invited him to play, which was at first refused until his mom encouraged him. The kid made a couple of efforts and then continued on his way, as we continued on to our lunch.

We ended up in downtown Seoul in a traditional market of sorts. There were many merchants approaching us with products and interesting things to try. Following suit with my hosts, I ignored them. We went to a restaurant that apparently is very popular for visiting Japanese businessmen, we had to wait about 7 minutes for a table, and in that short time a large line had formed behind us. I have no idea what I ate, only that it had noodles in soup and was delicious. Same cannot be said for the Kim Chi; I hated that Kim Chi, and even Anna said it was too strong.

Our next stop was the former royal palace which I attended with just Anna as Kevin had class. We were lucky to arrive just prior to the changing of the guards ceremony. We also bumped into Will and his host. After a short tour of the temple it was time to return to Kevin's house to change and head to our dress rehearsal for the concert. The concert itself was phenomenal (especially considering how tired we all were). Bruce decided that we would sing Arirang (the Korean folk song) and it went over beautifully. Because the audience was primarily our host families we got a great reception. My hosts thought it was quite good and even complimented us on speaking the Korean in Arirang well enough to be understood. After the concert finished, we witnessed the beginning of a phenomenon that would follow us throughout Korea; beautiful Korean women going crazy over Alex Granat (AKA Hugh Jackman). Needless to say he sold many a CD.

After the concert, I went for dinner at a McDonald's in Seoul where they have a Bulgogi Burger. This features spiced beef and cabbage, amongst other things. It was quite good. I did feel a little out of place wearing my formal concert dress in McDonald's. I also made the discovery that Korean McDonald's delivers... ON SCOOTERS! Before the night was out we met up with Kailee, Cassie, Jacquie and others I can't recall, for drinks. We then decided (more like Kailee and Cassie decided) to go to Karaoke at some place nearby. It was fun (private rooms) but I only lasted a few minutes. Sheer exhaustion had me feeling nauseous and after a trip to the bathroom (where I smoked my head on a low doorway) I was quite ready for bed. After, a long taxi ride home, I got some sleep and prepared for the next day.
Brad

Apr 30 - Seoul, to Daejeon, nunnery

Been a long and busy day, left our wonderful hosts @ Hanyang University (we were picked up from our dorms in a black limo-van that was used to transport Barack Obama when he visited Korea during the campaign). We departed on a very full bus (couldn't fit all our luggage in the cargo hold so a half dozen suitcases clogged the aisle) this morning to head out to Sung Kyul University where we performed a short programme in a lousy acoustic for a captive and mostly sleeping audience, apparently we interrupted their naptime.

Then they led us to a much nicer hall in order for us to listen to their handbell choir practice for a half hour, then back to Seoul, where we did another mini-concert for the Seoul Women's Chorus. On the drive there, we saw some riot police quelling a group of protesters, we couldn't figure out what they were protesting though. After the concert, we led a workshop on African choral music (thus tying in the rep from the end of our full show)... was pretty cool teaching the Korean women to boogie! Afterwards the ladies took us out for this wonderful chicken feast involving small game hens stuffed with rice and stewed in small individual iron pots, yum!

We then had a 2+ hr bus ride to Daejeon, our HQ for the next 2 days. Our original accommodations got messed up, so we were diverted to... a CONVENT! So, no drinking and we're expected to be very quiet. There was some further confusion on room assignments, as Greg, Alex, Rick & I were given a tiny closet of a room with only 2 eensy beds... yeah right, we'll get lots of sleep there! We got it worked out though, and even discovered the nunnery has a good wifi connection, enough for a decent skype call home even!

Busy day tomorrow and the phone's running out of juice, so I'd best sign off.

I leave you with today's strange misspelled (?) product: the Crunky bar... I suspect they maybe meant CrunCHy or CHunky, but who knows? G'nite!
Wade

May 1 - Nunnery Concert, Church Concert

Today was the fourth day in Korea. Although we had some free time in the morning, it's been a long and tiring day.

Breakfast was at 8am, we had pancakes, ban, ham, soup, and salad. After that we had free time until lunch time. Most of us went out wandering around town, but most stores weren't open until 9:30 or 10:00. It was fun looking around in the stores, and at things that are unusual in Canada, especially the Lotte Mart!

We had lunch at the University as well. The concert was at 2pm. We had rehearsal at 1:30pm. Most of the audience was music professors and students. We had a full performance except for o vos omnes and including Arirang, the two south african songs and Sipoonoo. We had to run to the bus to go visit the museum about the tomb they found in 1972 of the 25th king of Korea who ruled from 501 to 523.

Our next stop was dinner at a really nice buffet restaurant provided by the church in Daejeon which we would perform at later that night. The food was good, and we had lots to choose from. The restaurant also provided two plates of meat: ribs and beef. They were both really nice too! We went back to the University for about an hour to rest and then went to the church for rehearsal at 9:30. We sat in the cafe while they did their thing. We started to perform at 10:30 which was too late to sing. We'd had a long day and lots of people were really tired. We had to cut some of the songs because of the difference in religions and because we were short on time, but they clapped their hands so hard and looked like they enjoyed it so much. After singing all the songs on the program and some other added songs, we had to come back on the stage to sing another song because they were such a nice audience and Bruce had to tell them that was the last song. Although it was a day with some rest and free time, it was also a really long and tiring one. I'm sure everyone enjoyed it!

Riva

Our two days and nights at Shim-nae Baptist Theological Seminar University were a pretty good example of tour members working out accommodations to take care of everyone involved. Youn-nam and I had a good room ourselves, and in the end most seemed to handle floor sleeping well enough. The weather's been a very comfortable warm temperature. Our afternoon concert at the university was attended by about 70 faculty and student, many of whom are in the music department. Needless to say, they were an excellent audience and thoroughly enjoyed our material. The hall there was the best acoustic of our trip so far. This was our first experience of the 'groupie mob' effect.

With a department store nearby, Bruce attempted to get glasses made with some (though not total) success. We were treated to a rather amazing buffet dinner at Robinson's Seafood & Grill Restaurant in town. The town, incidentally, is called Yu-seong, near the large center of Daejeon. We were pretty leery of our evening performance. Who has a choir concert at 10:30 pm? The church in question, it turns out, has a 10pm~12:30 am service every Friday. The audience was very receptive, energetic and appreciative of the full diversity of our repertoire. At the end, the head pastor said prayers and made a short speech to us in a sort of cafeteria room. He later presented Bruce with a gift of 1,000,000 won (about \$1000.00) which we found out later, came out of his own pocket. Being as the church appears to be very VERY wealthy itself, and that he wore a very nice looking suit, I surmised that perhaps that gift might not have set him back very much. However, Youn-nam learned that along with the transformational experience he described as having been brought upon him by his discovery of Christ, he gave away all his personal assets to the church and lives very simply, owning almost nothing. Therefore the gift has that much more meaning.

Graham

May 2 - to Sokcho, trad. village

May 3 - Sokcho, to temple - a.k.a. Mario Kart Race Day

The day began with a harsh early morning Wade-up call, "Salish Song" style. We were sleeping peacefully in our traditional-style huts in the Sokcho City Museum, when our soon-to-be conductor came around to rouse us, insisting that we all sing "Salish Song" in our sleepy state. Many of us, however, chose to ignore his request and stayed in the huts to sleep just a little bit more, bathe, or pack. Then the numbering-off began! Wade had us line up across the green tarp outside the huts from shortest to tallest, chanting for those who were missing to join the group. At this moment, we all renounced our personal identity for a number by which we would be known for the remainder of the trip. I was no longer Karolien but the number 27.

That morning I was feeling rather exhausted from all the early mornings, concerts, and activity-filled days of Korea. Rather than go with the rest of the group to the Expo Tower, I opted to stay behind with Graham's wife, Youn Nam, to get some rest. We planned to go relax at the local spa, but due to changes in the tour schedule, we ended up just sitting and chatting at Felipe's house for an hour with his adorable son and very sweet wife. Little Kanoa was a bundle of joy to be around at aged two and a half, and we spent our time tickling and giggling. My favourite Kanoa quote was, "Daddy, I love you soooooo much!" which he shouted out the window with arms wide open in the shape of a hug as his dad drove by us in his truck.

After this short break, I met with the rest of the group back at the museum to watch the drumming group Gaet Madang, who apparently performed at Graham and Youn Nam's wedding. They were dressed traditionally with long white ribbons hanging from their hats, which they managed to twirl as they danced, amazingly without tripping on them. Following the performance, we had a few minutes to explore the museum, which contained a number of traditional games. The most popular game was surely the stilts, which took me some time to manoeuvre appropriately - unlike Nikki, who seemed to pick up the art immediately. There were also horseshoes and a game involving a big metal ring that you were supposed to roll along the ground with a stick.

Upon leaving the museum, we took the bus to this beautiful Buddhist temple called Dae Soon Jili in Sokcho. It was surrounded by gardens filled with purple and pink flowers, ponds, and waterfalls, evoking images of Victoria's Butchard Gardens. I wanted to curl up on the grass with a book and spend the day there dozing off in the sun, but we only stayed for a few hours. It was just enough time to stroll through the grounds and to have another Korean buffet lunch. By this time, my patience for Korean food was wearing rather thin, so I did not much enjoy the food. Particularly disgusting was the large mound of flavourless jelly-like material that they served for dessert. I shudder with the thought of eating it!

Finally, we made our way over to Baekdam Temple to enjoy our Temple Stay experience. The bus ride up the mountain where the temple was located was an experience in itself. Driving on a narrow, curvy road and with only cliff, rocks, and river to the left of us, we sped up the mountain jerkily - a ride which I found surprisingly enjoyable but which others found terrifying. Upon leaving the bus, Braidon began kissing the ground in joy to have survived the journey.

We quickly settled into our rooms, which as was common in Korea, contained heated floors and thin floor mats as beds. These were somewhat thicker than some of the mats we had used in past nights but were still rather thin. Thankfully, at this time, we were beginning to get used to floor sleeping (if that is possible). Dinner was once again a buffet, this one seemingly even grosser than the last. It was made even more disgusting by the obnoxious "sneezing" sounds we continuously heard coming from the kitchen. They were so loud that they boomed throughout the eating area, attracting the attention of all. Shortly afterward, a woman scurried out of the kitchen leading away a man who could barely hold himself up and whose face was covered in some substance. Thus, it appears that the "sneezing" was very likely actually vomiting,

which makes me thankful that none of us became ill from eating the food.

After dinner, we all tried unsuccessfully to pile into a small space where monks were chanting and praying. We were quickly told to leave, likely because there were way too many of us and we were proving to be a distraction for the monks. We were, instead, led to a different room where everything was already set up for us to participate in a tea meditation. There were two large tables with large empty bowls and small cups of tea leaves on them for every choir member. We were then told to retrieve a thermos filled with extremely hot water and a small towel to bring with us over to our place at the table.

A very pleasant and funny female monk led us through the meditation, instructing us to pour the thermos water into the bowls and then to sprinkle in the tea from up above. We were then to place our heads into the bowls, covering our heads with the towels to receive the full effect of the steam. We were told to remain in this position for quite some time, breathing in the tea and reflecting on the question "Who am I?" I, surprisingly, found the experience to be quite relaxing and very cleansing for the sinuses. It would have been even more relaxing if not for the loud crashing sounds that occurred every so often as choir members knocked over their thermoses. When we lifted our heads, our faces were all bright red and covered in sweat. We were told to massage our sweaty faces with our hands, were asked to perform a few stretches, and then were made to flex our fists open and closed 200 times. During this torturous exercise, the monk kept telling us to smile, knowing full well the amount of discomfort we were experiencing. She made us all laugh.

Following this, we were told to drink the tea. It was quite delicious, but I did find it rather strange to be drinking the tea that my head was just hovering and sweating over for the past 15 minutes. And if I thought that was bad, afterwards, we were instructed to place our hands in the tea. Thankfully, that was the end of the meditation, and we were not asked to drink from the bowl again. I was afraid for a moment...

After the meditation, a few of us decided to take a short walk around the temple before bed to enjoy the peacefulness of the surroundings. The air was fresh, the sound of the river was soothing, and the lanterns placed around the grounds for Buddha's birthday were beautifully lit up. It was an amazingly beautiful evening and the perfect ending to a great day in Korea, one of the last ones we would experience before moving on to our next destination, Cambodia.
Karolien

After an excellent night of drinking and shenanigans, we went to sleep in the museum exhibit in Sokcho. However, for those who got any sleep, we were rudely awoken to a loud rooftop Salish song. As for myself, I got out of bed and ran over to join, of course :) you always need more altos.

Anyways, after that, Wade attempted for a long time to get us lined up so we could do a number off, but there were a few people who thought that we had to have everything ready to leave, so they wouldn't come out. Not to name anyone, *cough BRYDIE cough* but I had to run and go get her, since she stayed in the same building as me. That might have been the day we discovered those cooling wicker cylinders that you spoon with and the air circulates underneath you... After finally getting everyone together, we bus off to breakfast. As the usual, there's plenty of tofu and kimchi, but this time we discover that there is a coffee machine and everyone is thankful. I'm fairly certain we were made fun of by the locals, since we couldn't figure out how to use the machine for the longest time! Luckily, I didn't have to bother, since I wasn't feeling as bad as others were... despite the previous night's festivities.

After breakfast, we went to the expo building. This was when we got to rent mini motorbikes! And travel up the very tall building that gave an excellent view. I'm sure total, we may have hundreds of pictures of the same things between everyone from that day. Even Bruce rented one! Hopefully no one burned, it was another hot, sunny day. After some racing and fun in the sun, we headed back to the museum for the traditional drumming and dance performance (which was incredible!) We all figured they were incredibly hot from the clothing and imagined that their necks were very sore. But it was still very entertaining. After that, we had some extra free time around the museum. Many of us attempted the stilts, some played ring toss, and others went to view the wildlife. Then we went to another temple, where we finally found the 1337 bus! (Even though I swore I had seen one earlier that didn't look the same.. I'm fairly certain they had a few different kinds of license plates) We had a temple tour and had lunch, then garden walk. The flowers were beautiful and everywhere... There was even a waterfall towards the end that many people took pictures of.

After that, we went back to the expo park for more free time: more bikes, dune buggies, ice cream (including Pokeman shaped ones!), pc stores (or the hunt for them, anyways), and twotwo chicken. After the last substantial portion of our free time, we headed towards the Buddhist temple, up an incredibly long, windy and steep road - I think Hillary believed she was going to die. Once we reached the top, Braden passed out. Or that's what it seemed he was doing at first, since he was so attached to the ground! We got to look around our new host site, and at the appropriate times, we had prayers and an incredible tea meditation. To each a different effect (or lack thereof) but it was one of the most relaxing things on tour. I think that we all needed a break. It was incredible to feel how different everything seemed after having your head above a steaming hot bowl of water (and tea leaves) with a towel covering your head for a few minutes - even though to some of us it may have seemed like a few hours!

After the meditation, we got ready for alas, more sleeping on mats. The floors were heated though, which we thought was silly since it was already so hot! I suppose it may be for the cooler seasons though. We were afraid it was going to burn through the floor! This was maybe one of my favourite days. :)
Missy

May 4 - temple hike, to Yang Yang, spa
"There's twinkies and wagon wheels for breakfast!" That's how I was greeted that morning.

I was very drowsy when I woke up and bought this explanation completely. I shot out of my freezing bed, just to have Dave inform me that I had been had. No big deal, I didn't really want breakfast that day anyway.

There was much talk that morning in our guest temple, or whatever its name was, mostly complaining about the cold room (someone entered in the night and left the door open), and the lack of meat in their morning diets. This may not sound like a very good time, but everyone was having a blast. The tea meditation yesterday left us all in a good mood indeed, and we met the coolest female monk ever.

Time was of the essence, so I had my shower and discovered when I left the guest house that people were being blindfolded just outside. Jenni approached me and explained that this was a "trust walk", and asked me if I would like to partake in a blind stroll around the temple area. Well of course I would! We set off at the back of the group, and Jenni explained to me that she had done one of these trust walks before. When I wasn't veering off course, the conversations we had were quite nice. We crossed a bridge and entered the woods, and soon it was time to switch roles. So we did, and continued on our way at the back of the line. The next part of the path was harder to navigate, and I think Jenni did a better job directing me than I did for her. Oh well, it was really fun anyways. (Edit from Jenni: Braden was a fabulous guide... I don't think I hit my head even once!)

We received a bag with some rice balls and cucumbers in it, and assumed that we should not eat them until a certain point. We did some singing at the spot where we ditched our blindfolds, and began the real hike. I never really hiked much back at home, but even though this took some 2 hours to complete, it was not difficult. There were many things to see on the way, like chipmunks and such, and the scenery was truly stunning. It was surprisingly quiet, besides the couple of conversations I was

eavesdropping on.

We arrived at a second temple and ate the rice balls that had been given to us at the start (most people had already eaten their cucumbers), and sang some more. People crowded around to listen wherever we spontaneously burst into song, and we received a request from the female monk to sing Ave Maria (which we did). (Edit by Jenni: Eventually, after Bruce finally believed that it had been requested!)

Time for the trek back. Pretty much the same as before, except I was walking with a different section of the group, and Bruce was having an easier time on the return. I stopped to take a couple of pictures of the temple, and also of Emma, who was resting her sore feet in the river. It is hard to describe how beautiful that temple was, and about the only letdown was the long (and somewhat scary) bus ride to and from. We departed at 11 and stopped for some lunch, upon which Bruce made an unfortunate discovery: the meal that he thought was going to be covered was not, and it was not that good a quality either. He said that what frustrated him the most was that if we had to pay, we should be able to choose what we eat. I was able to order mine without an egg at least, but by this time I was getting rather sick of Kimchi. I also experienced a squat toilet for the first time (and hopefully never again). Bruce ran into even more trouble when he contacted the choir's new hotel and found out that we would not be able to check into this lovely spa until 3pm. He managed to fix that issue with help from Youn Nam, and also Filipe.

Now, this is the kind of digs a guy could get used to. Large rooms with real beds and flat-screen TVs, fridges with bottled water and a shower with a piece a glass separating it from the other things in the bathroom (namely, my clothes), and the Spa! Well, it was Dave, Connor, Lowell, and I in the room, a combination that worked, as we had discovered a couple of nights before. We unanimously agreed that we need to checkout the spa before and after our evening concert, so we set off just down and around the corner to reception. At this point, I was accustomed to taking off my shoes whenever I went through a doorway, so I thought I would save myself the trouble and just not bring shoes at all. I also put some swim trunks and a T-shirt on, because I was not sure what to expect from this Spa. When we got there, we were made to put our shoes in a locker, in order to get a key that we needed to exchange for another key and some for the spa's swimsuits. We didn't need these swimsuits, of course, because this was a nude spa.

We entered the change rooms and got undressed – and, well... It was a little awkward. It's not like I've never seen a naked dude before, but the concept of prolonged nudity made me feel a little uneasy. To my surprise, this feeling passed in about 5 minutes. This spa was really enjoyable, featuring many different types of hot-tubs and small pools. There was even a steam-room, sauna, and a little outdoor hot-tub, concealed from any wondering eyes (Edit by Jenni: You guys got an OUTDOOR hot tub?!). The four of us were joined by other Prima guys, like J-Row and Patrick, and we all spent about 35-40 minutes in the spa (and all agreed to come back to it after the show). It was at this point that I had one of my most stupid moments on this tour: When I got back to the room, Dave and I started washing clothes in the sink, and at this time I was still in my swimsuit, so when I finished washing my underwear I realized that I had washed every pair I had! "Well, this is bullshit", I said. I did not want to go to the concert commando, so while the boys in the quad were laughing their asses off, I came up with a plan (a very bad one, I might add). My swimsuit was still rather wet, so Connor gave me a pair of his really dirty underwear. There was no way in hell that I was letting those touch my skin, so the compromise was this: I left the swimsuit on and put the underwear over top of it, so that my Tux would not get wet, and Connor's little boxers would not touch me. The others in the room thought this was the dumbest thing I had ever thought of, but it worked.

We left the Hotel in our formal dress uniform, and I was surprised to hear that we were going out for dinner first. It was a nice meal, but I will never get used to sitting of the floor and crossing my legs. The concert that evening was our last one in Korea, and it was held in a large rectangular building close to downtown Sokcho. The acoustics were nothing to write home about, but at least there was a large Green Room to stay in. We worked out the marching for Mulligan's Musketeers that night, and it was a bit of a gong show - Very funny, but also very bad. The concert itself was pretty straightforward, and went off without a hitch (as far as I can remember). About the only awful thing was the smell in the Green Room at the halfway point in the concert (which I believe Jackie described as "rank").

Back to the room, and back to the spa. This time, almost all the Prima guys were there. And once again, we all had a blast. I can't remember how long we were in there, but when we got out we (the quad) went back to our room to do what we had planned to do since we got to the Hotel: overdub Korea TV shows with our own stupidity. We were doing well for awhile, but then Missy showed up and we decided to drink all the booze that we had bought during the trip (including the Soju). The conversations and the web browsing got really bad, and then I passed out on the floor and the rest is history. I may never know what went on while I was asleep, but for those of you who were there, may our secrets never be revealed *wink wink*.

Braden

May 5 - to Phnom Penh

I woke up early, before 6am because the bed I had won drawing straws was too hard and hurt my back. Irony. Luckily I accidentally woke up Nikki who offered to show me where the Hot spring baths were. We took the secret way through the parts of the hotel that weren't used anymore. Even another unused spa area. When we arrived we put our things in a locker and gave the key to a man who gave us another key... OK. There were hot pools from 39°-44°C *ouch* and two cold pools one of which was an acid pool with Fe, F, CO2? & more. It tingled the skin and other unmentionables; very weird. Breakfast in the hotel restaurant consisted of fruit, french fries, waffles, sausages medley, scrambled or boiled eggs, croissants, pastry bits, and the usual korean foods that I am by now avoiding (kimchi /barf). Today we also said goodbye to Youn Nam and Graham as they were staying in Korea. At a rest stop on the way to the airport (to Cambodia!) we saw a deer in a concrete cage. :(The flight was relatively uneventful and had no personal tv (sniffle). We watched Inkheart (meh) and tried to do some early matchmaking with Lowell and Missy (heehee). Arriving in the airport we felt a heatwave exiting the plane, it was a balmy 27° at night. Cambodia first impression was of much street garbage and kids asking for money and showing their thin bellies. Oh thank you air conditioning and rooms with no windows??. Tomorrow at 4:30am or so we go on a bus ride to the beach!

Kim

"Today was one of the roughest days I've had so far on this trip. We left our hotel in Korea this morning and departed back to the Incheon Airport to head to Cambodia! I was pretty nervous as is because I've been constantly told that I will have huge culture shock in Cambodia. Even though I had been prepared for it though, I was still hit full force.

The flight to Cambodia was one of the worst flights I've been on. I hate flying and heights to begin with, and you can ask anyone I sat next to on a plane on the tour: I'd panic at the smallest turbulence. It was a very bumpy ride and the entire experience felt ominous. As we flew over the country in preparation to land, Karolien and I were pointing out the very few lights we saw along the ground (it was around 10 PM Cambodian time,) which was apparently a good indication of how poor the country is.

When the plane landed, the captain announced that it was around 10 PM and 30 degrees Celsius or so. As soon as we exited the plane, we were hit with humid and hot air and about a billion mosquitoes.

By the time we reached customs, it was apparent to quite a few of us that there was something pretty wrong with Hilary. She was feeling very sick, and we were a little uneasy due to the fear of being quarantined. I had already passed customs by then, but apparently, she stuck her ten dollar bill (which required to exchange for Cambodian currency with Arne later) in her passport, which she gave to the customs officer. By the time she left, she mysteriously lacked a ten dollar bill: the officer pawned it! We figure it's because he thought she was bribing him to let her out of customs quickly; he didn't even stamp her passport, so in a way she was like an illegal immigrant during her stay! Shortly after being passed by customs she ran off to the bathroom.

So it was a shocking start to Cambodia to begin with, and it got more shocking from there. We met with Arne and the Cambodian students outside of the airport, and they exchanged our money for us and helped haul our luggage into these two small busses which didn't look anything like the tour busses in Korea. We rode together through the streets on Phnom Penh, whose roads were dominated by chaos and entire, four-person families sharing single scooters. There was near constant honking in the background.

Then, when we reached the Mekong Palace Hotel, about four things happened at once. First, a child tried to steal somebody's luggage when it was placed onto the sidewalk. A beggar with deformed feet and no teeth begged for cash from us. A white man walked by with what was clearly a prostitute (wearing a leather dress,) and a random Cambodian man who knew English asked me to tell him what room I was staying in so he could visit.

Needless to say, I pretty much convulsed with culture shock! Hilary and I checked into our hotel room (and couldn't help but notice the hundreds of geckos on the walls, the intense heat, and the overall feeling of being incredibly unsafe) and I lay down on the bed, wide-eyed; more or less the state I stayed in for the rest of the night."

Erin

May 6 - Kep Beach

4.45am Five in the morning

Why does that demon bell blare?

Beach day for Prima.

6am Khmer kids on the bus

Souas'dai. What is your name?

Unpronounceable.

9am A stop for "breakfast".

It's not kimchi - I'm happy.

Beggars in the street.

10am Such a long journey

Raucous showtunes pass the time.

Bump, bus, bump, bus, bump.

11.30am Arrive at beach. HOT.

See us mill about like sheep.

Who is in charge here?

12.30pm Aquatic football

Dead jellyfish and cut feet

Warm water salty.

1pm Rocks, dirt, and fire ants.

Crowded outdoor rehearsal.

Bruce is unimpressed.

1.30pm Crab with red armor

I shall call you Sebastian.

Your flesh is tasty.

2.30pm Bus bus bus bus bus

Bus bus bus bus bus bus bus

Long bus ride is long.

5.30pm Home at last - hoorah!

Shower never felt so good

Salt and sweat, be gone.

7pm Who turned out the lights?

Building baskets in black while we're

Foraging for food

10.30pm Early to bed and

Early to rise in Khmer land.

Another full day.

Caitlin (in Haiku!)

We were awoken at 5 am by Arne's singing wake up call. We had gone to bed at 12:30 am so there were a few tired faces as we got on the bus. The streets of Cambodia were already very busy and full of people. At 5:30 am in Fort McMurray the only people that would be up would be the oil and workers in the Tim Hortons lineup. We split up onto two buses and sat with members of the Cambodian choir. I met a man named Rin, his wife and child. We then had a four hour bus ride to Kep beach. Our bus was quiet and full of sleeping people but apparently the other bus didn't feel the effects of the early morning wakeup and they sang for the better part of four hours. I personally, was happy to catch up on sleep.

We were fed a breakfast of a fruit that tasted an awfully lot like peas and some bread. The streets of Cambodia are fascinating to watch as we drove along. There is always something to see. Bruce has called Cambodia "eye candy" and that is a very true statement. There are skinny oxes everywhere and houses that are built like treehouses so people can lie in their hammocks in the shade, underneath the house, when it gets really hot out. Everyone seems to ride a motorcycle and were constantly on the lookout for one with six people on it. We saw many with families of five and the motorcycles always seemed like they were going to crash, but we never saw an accident in our whole time in Cambodia. We passed by rice fields, schools, and busy market corners. As soon as we arrived at Kep Beach, everyone jumped in the water as fast as they could. The waters were as warm as could be and very enjoyable. I brought a little green football into the water and we passed it around with the Cambodians. We had a quick rehearsal at the top of the hill, which was not very focused as we were all quite wet and standing on ant hills. Bruce wasn't too worried though, because it seemed like the joint pieces would come together.

We then had a FANTASTIC lunch of all you can eat crab, rice and jackfruit. We were able to sit on the tables and look out at the water as we ate. It was definitely an interesting experience. Afterwards some of us played hacky sack with the Cambodians and had some group bonding. They were all very good, and although there was a language barrier, they just acted like typical boys. They kept on picking on Lindsay and Jacqui. We then hopped on the bus for the four hour trip back. Some of us sat at the back of the bus and played headbands and the party game to pass the time. Those games got us through some very long trips on the bus. We got back to the hotel around seven and everyone ran to the showers. The power went out on the whole street block so as soon as everyone was ready, a huge group of us headed out for supper. We found a fantastic restaurant a couple of blocks from the hotel which was very cheap and had great food! I checked out the night market with Jacqui, Heather, Emily and Jeremy and we bought some bananas for the next morning for only 50 cents. We took a tuk tuk back to the hotel and went to bed by 10 because we were exhausted. What a great first day in Cambodia!

Kailee

May 7 - KAVTV, RUFA, Russian Market

City traffic conditions necessitated a 6:30 am start - as a "night person" who dislikes steaming hot weather, I could see both sides of this decision! Bearing some sample gifts from choir members, we descended upon KAVTV, the Cambodian Support Group-related project that trains disabled people in the electronics industry. Students also live above the work area (separate floors for males and females, with the guys being particularly cramped, and dealing with minimal kitchen and bathroom facilities). At first the students kept focused on their work, but there were many smiles and waves as we interacted with them with sign language and smiles.

During our KAVTV stop, Bruce, Arnie and Chantavouth were being interviewed in our hotel lobby by a reporter from one of the 2 English-language daily newspapers in Phnom Penh. She and someone from the other paper, plus 2 TV cameramen, came to our later rehearsal today.

Our next stop was the Royal University and National School of Fine Arts (university and school sharing the same "campus" on the outskirts of the city). We arrived an

hour earlier than we were expected (8 instead of 9 am), so we broke out a frisbee and encouraged some locals to join in. Some of us found a room in which 3 girls were singing fairly ornamented melodies while tapping the beat, under the watchful eye and ear of a teacher. I also found a rather dusty music library and instrument storage room that included some traditional folk instruments. Breakfast (fried rice and welcome cold drinks) arrived at about 8:40, and after that we were taken to a large pavilion in which we observed a multitude of young classical Cambodian dancers, age 7 and up and overwhelmingly female. Their grace, balance and expertise were amazing, and a discussion ensued about how they flex and train their fingers to bend backwards at such an angle. (Unfortunately we missed the folklore dancers in an adjacent building.) The choir received an enthusiastic response to a short programme that featured pieces with movement. In the nearby university building, the water and electricity were not operating, which we understood was not unusual. The Director of the university explained their programmes and invited us to volunteer teaching time there. For many reasons, their enrolment has been shrinking, to the point that they now have only 30 students, which I think surprised all of us.

A sobering visit to the area containing Phnom Penh's garbage dump brought our bus into narrow streets festooned with sagging electric wires that had to be held out of the way as we passed under. At the dump itself we saw families and independent people (including children) who appeared to live at and off of the dump – collecting saleable, tradable or edible debris. We distributed small useful items like toothbrushes and soap, finishing with something "lighter" – small containers of bubble liquid with wands for making bubbles. There were smiles all around, but the situation was certainly dire.

Our next stop really impressed upon us the oppressiveness of the climate compared to our own. At the "Russian" market many who hadn't already purchased a fan came out waving one! Amid the grid of tiny shops under a huge roof, Bruce & I found a fancy wall hanging and pillow cases for our daughter & her husband, and I joined a few others for a delicious lunch of aromatic vegetable-laden soup. It was an odd choice, though, since we were all experiencing a perpetual "hot flash" (which I prefer to think of as a "power surge"!).

At 2 pm the main focus of our trip came to the fore as we gathered at the beautiful and spacious Chaktomok Theatre for our first indoor rehearsal with the Cambodian choir. After we got the washrooms unlocked and the hall air conditioning turned on (!) and we mingled with the local singers, everyone demonstrated great enthusiasm. The combined repertoire became stunning from my perspective in the audience area, and our group's own pieces were quickly organized.

Back at our hotel I spent a while organizing gifts and thank-you notes for disadvantaged folks and our hosts, and we witnessed a thunderous downpour. In search of groceries and CD blanks (to record on and then fill the 10 empty tour CD cases), Bruce & I took a tuk-tuk to "Pencil" and another department store, carefully memorizing the travel route so that we could walk back. After an internet stop, we had dinner at a back-street diner at which the 10-year-old daughter turned out to be an excellent English-speaking waitress.

A few minutes of TV-watching before sleep reminded us to wash our hands a lot and avoid the swine flu – both the focus of BBC World News and Bloomberg News, the latter of which was largely related to economics. What a day!
Connie

Today was a fairly eventful day on the tour. It started out at 6:30 am with a trip to KAVTV (Khmer Association for Vocational Training and Vocation). The purpose of the facility is to train handicapped students to repair basic electronic devices. An interesting place, but a bit small.

Next stop was at RUFA (Royal University of Fine Arts). We watched a traditional dance routine and then performed a few pieces for the students.

At 10:30 am we headed off to the garbage dump to observe the difficult lifestyle of many of the children in this part of the country. The kids would pick their way through the dump trying to find anything useable. Here we donated some of the toothbrushes, shirts, etc. that we collected from the choir.

Next we went to the Russian market, so named for the period of time when there was significant Russian presence in the city. Mostly trinkets, food and stuff.

At 2:00 pm we had a (slightly too long) rehearsal at Phnom Penh's Chaktomok theatre.

Finally we headed back to the hotel. This was the funniest part of the day for me. Wade suggested we go out for a massage. I elected to stay and relax at the hotel, and eventually found a great little market row directly behind us. Wade referred to his "relaxing" massage as pure torture. I don't think it made him cry, but you may want to ask him about it.

Rick

May 8 - Museums/women's voice centre/concert

Today we slept in! Hooray! (and by slept in I mean like, 8:30am.) It's a good thing we were able to sleep in too because today was a BUSY day!

First, I went to a street market with Shane, Caitlin, Jenni, and Jackie to buy breakfast. We bought mangoes and bananas and bread for like, \$1.50 US. So delicious. Cambodian market, I heart you. After breakfast the choir went to the Cambodian National Museum at 10am. Even though it was this early in the morning, we were already sweating grossly. When we got into the museum there were all sorts of neat cultural heritage displays, statues, ancient writings, and other stuff to see.

After the museum we went to the Artist's Market. You only had to go into about three of the vendor's shops because they all had essentially the same paintings but they were all so pretty. I definitely wanted them. So, after our quick little jaunt up and down the Artist's Market, we gratefully boarded the deliciously air-conditioned bus which took us to the Women's Voice Center for lunch. The Women's Voice Center is a group that works with the Cambodian Support Group and they sponsor people to go to University (a cost of about \$2000 US a year for tuition, room, and board.) We met the organizers and the sponsor students – three women and one man. There was delicious curry, fruit, and bread to eat for lunch, as well as water and pop. When we were getting ready to leave, we sang 'You are my sunshine,' and 'If you're happy and you know it,' with the sponsor students (they started it).

Next we had the option of going to the Genocide Museum or going back to the hotel. I went to the Genocide Museum. I'm glad I did even though it was a horrendously depressing experience. I'm not really sure how to describe it so I'm not going to try but it was an eye opening experience. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to go through the entire museum before we had to go. Most of us only made it through half of the museum.

We left the Genocide Museum to go back to the hotel with enough time for us to eat, shower, and generally get ready for our concert this evening. We left the hotel at 5pm to get to the theater for 5:30 so we had time to rehearse a little bit before the concert at 6:30pm. We were wearing our formal wear for this concert and it certainly was hot.

The concert started late by about 15 minutes because people were still showing up. We started the concert with the Canadian choir and the Cambodian choir on stage and we both sang our respective National anthems. After that, the Cambodians sang first and then we sang. After we finished singing there was supposed to be an intermission so we filed off stage but the house lights stayed down and nothing really happened for 15 minutes. Fail intermission = fail. After the non-intermission intermission, solos happened and then our choir sang again. During "If ever I would leave you," (that's the song right? I didn't write its name down!) Vouth missed his solo. Luckily all of us could sing it! Apparently Vouth went backstage to get a drink before he was supposed to come on and he got locked out somewhere and couldn't get back in.

Main notes about the concert:

Arnie is disorganized

Vouth is disorganized

Speeches are long

Children are noisy

Giving out flowers takes FOREVER.

H'anyways, a little after 8:30 we were done and we went back to the hotel. We tried to go to the cheap awesome restaurant we had gone to the night before but it was closed. A lot of things were closed that night – apparently it had been some sort of holiday or something. Shane and I ventured across the scary Intersection of DEATH

(when facing away from the hotel if you went to the right) to find a Mexican restaurant called Cantina. The food was expensive (\$12 US) and we ate things like lettuce and tomatoes that we probably shouldn't have, and the meat should've been cooked a little longer, but we ate the food nonetheless and we did not get food poisoning!
Chris and Shane: 1, Asia: 0! After that we came back to the hotel, showered, and slept.
Chris

May 9 - Palace? Friends Restaurant, Concert for poor/disabled

May 10 - Bus to Siem Reap
?Jenni

May 11 - Angkor Wat, Silk Factory, Temple Sunset

I woke up at 4:17 am without the aid of an alarm. Neither Jeremy nor I had had the foresight to bring one on the trip... a fact that would become obvious to the whole tour the next morning when we left for the airport. I'd woken up several times before this, convinced that it was time to go. But this time it actually was. Jeremy was even less excited by the idea of getting up than I was. People seemed reasonably alert on the ride out to the park. Bananas were passed around as a light breakfast and Arne gave a short history lesson that we may not have been entirely capable of absorbing at the time.

At the park entrance the process of getting passes was quick and easy. Minutes later we were at the main gates of Angkor Wat. Walking across the uneven stones of the walkway that led toward the main temple, I could hear the chirping of grasshoppers (or something like them) over the voices of a horde of visitors. Walking up the stairs and through the corridors, I came across a few hallways lined with headless sitting Buddha statues. A main portion of the temple had apparently been built in honour of the Hindu god Vishnu. However, by the time of the temple's completion, Buddhism had become prevalent in the region and so it became a Buddhist shrine. Just hang up a sign on the door that reads "under new management". No big deal.

Leaving Angkor Wat, the group was mobbed by zealous children looking to sell us anything we could want (or not want, as the case may be). Their tactics were varied, but the common theme was high pressure sales. Once everyone was safe on the bus, we drove for all of about 30 seconds to a restaurant for breakfast... because full service bus transportation means recognizing that I shouldn't have to walk anywhere in order to sit and stuff my face. The next two temples will be better reflected in people's pictures than in any description that I could give. Climbing on trees and temple stones and trees growing out of temple stones made for some good exercise.

The afternoon's options were given to us on the bus. They included a visit to a silk farm or a traditional village before returning to Angkor Wat and hiking up the hill and then singing. These all sounded fun and interesting. Unfortunately, I can't tell you about any of them because I (and others) went in to Siem Reap and drank instead. I'll admit, some of us were a little activity'd out for the day. So, after hanging out at the hotel for a couple of hours and eating/relaxing, Connor, Jeremy, Danielle and I took a tuk-tuk into town and went to the market. After some bargaining warfare, we decided to celebrate our victories (purchases really, but it sounds so much better when you call them victories) with 50 cent draft beers on pub street. It was one of the best nights out on tour and I'd like to thank those people for their participation. We then returned to continue the festivities at Will's birthday celebration extravaganza. And the next day we awoke to leave for Thailand. Some people got up on time. Jeremy and I (as was previously mentioned) basically got up when the bus was supposed to leave. Oops. Well, that was pretty much my day. Temples and beer. It was a good day.
Graeme

Heather R

May 12 - to Bangkok

Today was the end of our week-long stay in Cambodia. We had to be on the bus at 6:45am to head to the airport in order to check in by 7:45. At the airport we had to say good bye to Arne, Chantavout, & Rotana. They worked so hard and made our time in Cambodia so amazing! It was sad to have to say our good byes.

A lot of people bought breakfast at the airport. Prices were really high (something we're not used to after being in Cambodia for a week!). At 9:45, we boarded our flight to Thailand. I really didn't know much about Cambodia before coming on this trip so I didn't know what to expect but I really enjoyed our time here. We had a lot of really amazing experiences, like getting to visit all the CSG partner organizations, and I feel like we definitely got to see a lot more than the average tourist. I was sad to leave Cambodia but also excited for Thailand.

The flight was short. It felt like as soon as we were up in the air, we were starting our descent. We were met at the Bangkok airport by Nikolas Tribesh, who is the man organizing our stay here. He is the head of the Fine Arts department at Ruamrudee International School, which is the school hosting us here.

We bussed to the school where they had food waiting for us. It was really good. I got to try some more new fruits - guava, green mango, and a type of Thai apple. The school is really nice. They even have their own pool!

We watched performances by their bands and choirs in their gym. After the performance, we got assigned to our host families. Some people were put with students and others with staff from the school. Emily and I were assigned to a secretary at the school. She lives about an hour-long drive away from the school. There was a lot of traffic when we were driving back. Unlike Korea and Cambodia, they drive on the left side of the road here, which was hard to get used to!

The family we stayed with lives in a house that's 4 stories high. Every floor has about 2 rooms. It's a different style from most houses in Canada. They have 2 little kids. A 5 year old boy and a 7 year old girl. They are so cute! When we got to the house, our host took us to the little outdoor market right beside her house. Emily and I definitely stuck out there as the only caucasians!

We picked up some fruit and then she went across the street and got us some noodles for dinner. They were really good!

After dinner, we played with the kids for a little while. They don't speak much English but they understand a lot. We were also able to check our email, which was nice. The internet is slow here, but not as slow as in Cambodia! We were pretty exhausted, so we had an early night and went to bed around 10pm.

Mika

May 13 - Bangkok touring

I got to sleep-in a bit this morning because my host, Mai, lived downtown just a couple train stops away from Siam Paragon; our morning meeting place. Connor and his host, Not, had stayed the night at Mai's place so they could come out for dinner with us since Not lived too far away to be able to come out with us otherwise. When I woke up, Not and Mai had already left for school, so I got dressed and woke Connor up and we ate a leisurely breakfast, something we hadn't had in a while. Breakfast was ham sandwiches, fruit, yogurt and milk; still not a western breakfast, but a step closer than kimchi. After breakfast my host mom, Mui, drove me and Connor first to her office to set me up a cellphone for my stay here (I kid you not), and then to the BTS station equipped with change for us to get tickets. Me and Connor navigated Bangkok's transit like pros and were at Siam Paragon long before the bus carrying our fellow primates had arrived. When the bus arrived, we organized ourselves (as best we could) and made our way back to the BTS station and hopped on a train to the river for our boat ride. Most of us rode the boat to Angkor Pho to check out the Reclining Buddha which was way more enormous than I had expected. I took a video walking from one end of it to the other to truly be able to stress its hugeness to my friends at home. After wondering around the temple, me, Brydie, Jenni and Dave wandered around the neighbourhood surrounding the temple. There were a lot of pharmacies for whatever reason, and school must have just gotten out because there were a ton of kids wandering around in school uniforms. We bought some incense and hit up 7-11 for some M&Ms and made our way back to the dock. We rode the boat back to the original dock to meet up with Natasha and Walter (a couple teachers at Ruamrudee) who took us back to Siam Paragon to eat lunch. The Siam Paragon food court was huge, so huge that my two-week old wish for peanut butter and jam finally came true. A whole bunch of people went to see Star Trek, but Mai, Daniel (Shane's host) and Nice (Karolien and Heather's host) met up with those of us who were too cool for Star Trek and

took us to the better, cheaper mall known as MBK. Me and Missy shopped with vigour as we only had an hour and a half before we had to be back at Siam Paragon. Once we had all gathered at Siam Paragon, Walter and Natasha took us on the BTS to Lumpini Park, the biggest park in Bangkok as well as the home of the Lumpini Night Market. We walked through the park and saw many stray cats, hundreds of people exercising in synchro and a pair of lizards beating each other up. The Night Market was just opening when we got there and most people had dinner (and long island iced teas) on the brain, but I got right to the haggling. The majority of the choir had only an hour at the Night Market because they had to catch the bus back to Ruamrudee, but since my host lived downtown, I had all evening. Shane, Karolien and Heather also got to stay late, so we wandered the market together, bought some awesome tea and met up with our hosts. It was 9:30 before we started heading home. We dropped Daniel and Shane off at their place and got to Mai's around 10:30. We chilled in front of the TV with some ice cream for awhile, but I was exhausted and fell asleep fast. Hilary

Approx. 0400 - Wake up naturally. Suspect permanent damage to sleep cycle from ridiculous tour schedule.

0600 - Wake up for real. Sample some strange-looking Thai fruits the names of which escape me. Depart for school at 0625.

0645 - Arrive at school. Wander around with Riw and try to stay out of the rain.

0700 - Meet Cassie randomly, discover we need to be at the PAC by 0730. Riw departs, and we're left at the mercy of my poor sense of direction. Fail to stay out of the rain.

0745 - Bus departs for downtown. Estimated arrival at Siam Paragon: 0900 - 0930. On a related note, Riw said it doesn't open until 1000.

0915 - Riw is right.

0940 - Appreciate that Bangkok transit is less congested than Seoul's. Travel along river to look at really big Buddha, awesome statues of pug dogs and tophatted guardians.

1030 - Resist temptation to purchase street meat.

1100 - Rendezvous back at the pier. Make inefficient journey back to downtown.

Noonish - Back downtown. Need to find lunch.

1230 - Mos Burger is so delicious. I will steal their recipes, bring them to North America, and start a knock-off chain called Nom Burger.

1400 - Apparently going to see new Star Trek movie.

1645 - Movie was awesome, theatre was cheap & had reclining chairs. <3 Leonard Nimoy.

1700 - Count off for journey to Night Market. Disagreement among our guides about how best to get there.

1800 - Beer garden!

1850 - Regret I was too busy at the beer garden to see the rest of the market.

1900 - Bussing back to Ruamrudee.

2000 - My taxi driver for the last leg of the journey is half-blind and speaks no English. Oh god.

2040 - After much muttering and backtracking, am delivered safely to homestay.

2100 - Make awkward conversation with homestay.

2145 - Examine eclectic DVD collection of the 16 year old boy I'm staying with. Shakespeare in Love? Sex and the City? Really?

2200 - Zzz.

Lowell

May 14 - Workshops/Concert at Ruamradee

May 15 - Ancient Siam, to HK

Had we voted this AM on another sightseeing tour, I think the bus would have been pretty empty. Most of us are whacked with fatigue and in need of sleep. Those with coughs and colds are more numerous, and several worse than yesterday; what's more, several are concerned of being quarantined in HK. Good thing tour is at its end because I'm down to my last 3 doses of antibiotics despite several shopping sorties to pharmacies in Cambodia and Thailand. Pharmacies in Cambodia especially are almost as numerous as corner stores at home. They don't require prescriptions and sell a wide range of prescription medicine at very reasonable prices. Most have the more expensive European-made drugs as well as the same generic brands made in India (which produces very good quality generic meds for the third world) at about 1/4 of the price. Was able to get Azithromycin (broad spectrum drug for traveler's diarrhea and bronchitis) for \$4 in Siem Riep, compared to about \$30 in Canada. But I digress from my task to describe today's adventure.

We awoke to rain (which had been quite heavy most of the night) which resulted in the cancellation of the school assembly and our planned thank-you's and good-byes. So it was onto the bus when everyone had arrived (well actually, we were all on for quite awhile before number 23 finally showed up!). He got a fairly lame horses-ass chant in response to his tardiness - that is in comparison to the boisterous one I got earlier in Korea for only being 5 minutes late. Haven't been able to determine if that was because most folks were already asleep or if he had so much "dirt" on everyone that they were afraid to give him the raspberries.

Those that had expected a 20-minute bus ride to the Ancient City had a knee-knocking experience prior to arriving at the attraction's toilets over an hour later. Then off to a tour of scale replicas of Thailand's important sites by shuttle buses complete with narrator equipped with a very-loudspeaker system. The whole site is spread over several acres laid out in the shape of the country, and each province is represented by ancient relics/temples/palaces, or by examples of the rural life-style most supported there. These included authentic transportation carts, fishing traps, musical instruments, houses, milling stones, or rice paddies etc. By the third stop for closer looks at the exhibits, the rain was steadily increasing and we were all pretty well soaked to the ass and ready for lunch - which turned out to be a tasty buffet at the floating market (named after an earlier time when goods, produce, fish etc were sold from boats, which interestingly closely resembled the canal boats of Venice). While a number of us reconnected with the bus for much needed sleep, several of the more adventurous back at the lunch spot applied engineering principles to the construction of an beery-amid (carefully constructed from an impressive # of beer cans emptied during that long period of intense study).

Finally it was back to the bus, and as anyone could have predicted, the moment that we were all safely aboard and on the way to the airport, the rain stopped. The luggage van arrived at the same time as the bus and then we said goodbye to Mr. Nicholas, the tour organizer, who incidentally was my host (which explained why I got to things on time). After a quick change into some drier clothes, and some hacky sac for some, it was through the check-in (thanks to Connie's efficient processing of passports and getting us boarding cards), and in a more relaxed pace onto the plane. I was relieved to see my winger, Alex Dunn, at the airport. While we had been touring and sleeping etc, he had been teaching guitar all morning, so was more than ready for rest (that is, after he checked for some free Wi-Fi signals).

Lots of spare seats on the Thai Airlines flight, so as soon as the seatbelt sign went off, it was musical seats and a rush for sleeping rows. I had lemon chicken and rice, although the curry dish was very tempting and probably a better choice. Managed to talk our beautiful stewardesses into a group picture, and perhaps in response for my genuine compliments of their service and appearance, was rewarded with a Thai orchid slipped into my hand as she collected an empty glass.

The danger of truthfully answering health questionnaires became apparent as three of our singers were whisked out of the arrivals line and descended the escalator to

answer more health queries. With some insistence, I managed to talk my way down to the same area and sat with them, prepared to intercede with the public health authority if necessary should there be any question of quarantine. As it turned out, there was nothing to fear - just good medical surveillance being practiced. Finally we were re-united and enjoyed a luxury bus ride, complete with lovely leather seats and guide introducing us to this modern cosmopolitan city, to our WMCA lodging (which for those of us in doubles, was more like an international 2-star hotel). As an aside, compared to WMCA's I stayed at when I was a backpacking youth, there are a lot more lovely young women (legally) on every floor now. Connecting with our luggage, which had already been delivered, and getting to our rooms was quite painless.

Now this is the life-style - high-class accommodation in a cosmopolitan safe city. Hang the stuff up, scrub-a-dub in relative luxury, then to bed. But first, having decided to finish my journal entry for today, I plugged myself into MP3 headphones and dissolved into ethereal choral singing. Sometime later I became suddenly aware of my roommate, Alex Dunn, sitting up, roused from his much needed sleep asking me if I was aware that I was humming quite loudly. Had it been Bruce, I would more likely been challenged about my pitch! At that, I decided it was time to make the transition to a very long sleep.

Greg (aka Doctor Greg)

May 16 - HK, Jazz Club

May 17 - HK, Tour Awards

May 18 - to Home

Well, the final day has finally come. Although I would probably enjoy more time in some of the places we visited, I can truly say I am ready to go home. It was an amazing tour, but I'm wearing out and can see the same expression on the faces of a lot of the people who were waiting in the lobby at 8:15am this morning (It looked strangely similar to the faces of people who were getting up after celebrating their last night with a few beers, hehe). The trip to the airport was uneventful, though the bus guide was a little more chipper than the rest of us and seemed quite out of place.

When we finally got to the airport, me and Peter went straight to our Gate and rested/read books while we waited for the plane to arrive. It may be at this point that people will remind me that I left Alex Dunn's tux at the hotel and had a frantic time trying to get it back (ended up having to ship it to Canada) but this is of course false. I'm pretty sure I would remember something like that (note to self: find out cost from Alex so I can pay him back...).

The plane finally showed up and I spent the trip to Seoul, South Korea, sitting next to Matt Foster. It was a quick flight, and the TV show that was on was too boring to go into much detail about. We mostly slept.

From Seoul to Vancouver I sat next to Mika Banerd which was fun. Got to know her a bit more, and get some exercise in the process (how many times did you have to get up, Mika? Was like doing sit-ups, hehe). Mostly she slept, and mostly I watched movies. I pulled off four movies before my eyes were too sore to watch anymore, and spent the rest of the time chatting or playing yatzee (score: 350. Oh ya...). Finally we arrived in Vancouver and did the whole mushy goodbyes bit, which thankfully wasn't too mushy or too long, then I hopped in my parent's car and headed home. First they made me help them pack their trailer up because they were camping. Ah well, at least I didn't have to take the bus. When I got home, I hung out with my family for a bit and then crashed, as I hadn't slept for almost a day and a half. Yay.

Andrew

We all smell truly awful.

Almost a month of incivility, sin, and downright naughtiness across Southeast Asia was coming to a drawn out close as we piled onto our final plane ride. With half of us asleep and the other half on the verge of death, I sat and wondered "what the hell just happened?" It took some while, shuffling through broken memories of Seoul; getting lost in the seedy area of town and eating some awesome pork thing, being the only person on tour idiotic enough to forget their blazer and borrowing Graham's (kamsamida sir), and the first of what would be many epic performances; to jumpstart my memory of the entire trip.

Korea was largely a blur (due to ridiculous amounts of Soju), but many memories stuck out. Memories like the awesome dancers at the traditional Korean village with sweet hats and agility like some kind of terrestrial dolphin, singing traditional European sacred music for Buddhists high in the mountains, and motor-scooting around Sokcho with a mild hangover in the warm morning glow.

Cambodia, what the hell even happened? Closing my eyes, I remembered faintly Brad eating too much Mexican food (yea, we shared a room... thank god there was a fan), witnessing the sheer massiveness of the temples of Angkor Wat as well as a brief dusk concert featuring the Cambodian Orphan's Christmas Song Troupe apparently, some of the worst smells in the observable Universe, being touched by the selfless charity of the Women's Voice Centre, playing Frisbee with some of the awesome Cambodian students, and sweating profusely for the entire duration.

Thailand and Hong Kong should have been the freshest in my memory due to the proximity in time, but the alcohol consumption at that point hit a steep exponential incline. Thailand was a mixture of singing New York, New York absurdly loud with Peter and Matt and Brad whilst quaffing Singha, tickling a gigantic Buddha's mother-of-pearl encrusted bunions, the horrendous overuse of lens flare in Star Trek (which was awesome nonetheless), that strange Japanese burger joint that had possibly the greatest food I've ever experienced (Lowell would remember the name), and a whole hell of a lot of pointy colorful buildings.

Hong Kong somehow still remains nebulous to me, but of what I do remember it was equally as amazing as the other locations along the tour. Although at first Hong Kong seemed like it would consist entirely of the vital functions of my body extinguishing themselves and a two day coma, I recovered quickly with an injection of Starbucks to the heart and bounced up to eat at the most lavish Pizza Hut in the Universe (no questions asked), go to an awesome Jazz Bar to listen to some Dixieland and have the best Manhattans ever, and spend the second day hung over with a high fever and some how end up singing bastardized versions of the songs we had recited for the past three weeks.

Now on the plane, looking out over the city of Vancouver as it coalesces below, I seem to be able to recover most of the trip in my memory and the amazing people who made it as great as it was. I feel privileged to be able to have spent such a large sum of time with you all and I'm sure I can speak for us all when I say that this trip has changed our lives either subtly yet profoundly. I really need to shower now.

Will

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