

Letter to the editor Holiday in North Korea (PG#47)



Benjamin Kuck & Nils Christian Schwarz

In addition to that very interesting article, we would like to share some experiences from our 10-days-trip last winter: Our guides seemed to be a little less severe, so we had more freedom when taking pictures and filming clips while walking through the streets or during different visits. One of the guides spoke German impressively well.

We spent a lot of hours on motorways with very little traffic. These freeways are full of road holes, that our Chinese manufactured bus did not absorb well... we definitely had to get used to this... From time to time the engine went out at full speed but the driver always restarted it somehow.

The countryside presumably looked like China 30 years ago: a lot of cyclists everywhere. In Pyongyang we also saw numerous cars from international manufacturers. Interestingly, we could

take a look at their own car brand in the National Industrial Exposition Centre but our impression was: too heavy, too slow, and completely unable to match international competition.

When we were travelling far from the capital we sometimes saw street hawking along the roadside. We were surprised that this seemed to be tolerated, considering the strictly non-market economy. In the countryside, people seemed to be more interested when they saw us, even though there was no real interaction with anyone who was not integrated in our tourist program. In Pyongyang we felt very ignored by the crowds, especially in the subway, just as described in last issue's article.

It appeared to us that the living standard in Pyongyang was relatively high compared to the rest of the country. Albeit goods of any kind are

often pretty rare here too, compared to our globalised consumption society.

In addition to the urban bus transportation system there is also a tramway. In fact, it is the Prague Tram from the 1970s that they got at a cheap price. Public transportation is completely over-crowded, but the people seem to be used to it.

In general, we felt safe in North Korea in the sense that the regime has total control of public spaces.

When we looked around and down at the city from the 170 meters high Juche Monument, we became aware of how compact the city actually is: more than three million people live in a space that can easily be overlooked. We also drove along a planned boulevard with a total of 50.000 flats in gigantic apartment blocks. Pyongyang seems to be the last planned socialist city par excellence.



Figure 1-4: Some impressions of our trip

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Source of all pictures: Benjamin Kuck.