

Swinging Pyongyang

The hidden side of the North Korean Capital





Kim Jong Il decreed that North Koreans should have access to foreign cuisine. A pizza parlour was opened, run by chef who trained in Rome, creating pizzas based on fresh produce brought in directly from Italy. A pizza costs 10 Euros. Recently, the Leader has spoiled his loyal subjects: they now can consume Caviar in the best restaurant of Pyongyang, which has an aquarium filled with sturgeons in the lobby!





In the capital, the luxury food shops offer Evian, Nutella, Swiss Chocolate... Prices are displayed in Won and Euros.



Everything is possible in Pyongyang, even come across an American Hummer which consumes 22 litres of petrol every 100 kilometres in a country currently under embargo (forbidden photo, obviously). The legend of the carless capital is no longer true: traffic is now a reality, and we now see signposts indicating petrol pumps.



Besides the propaganda posters, the only billboards are for cars made in North Korea. Very few people can buy them, salaries being so low. The majority of cars that I've been able to see were company cars with a chauffeur at the front and the government official in the rear. The car is baptized "Car of Peace".



Taxis are more and more present on the streets, and seem to represent the growing individualism amongst North Koreans. This can be understood when seeing the massive queues at bus stops...



The antique busses which display a collection of stars on their sides (1 star = 50000 accident-free kilometres, some having 25!) are being progressively replaced by new vehicles which give the town a distinctly British touch!



A symbol of the vitality the government wants to display: after 16 years on stand-by, the construction of the Ryugyong hotel has restarted, with its futurist look, 105 floors and 5000 announced rooms! The Orascom Egyptian group has taken over the building site in exchange for exploiting the country's mobile phone network. The objective was to open the hotel before 2012.

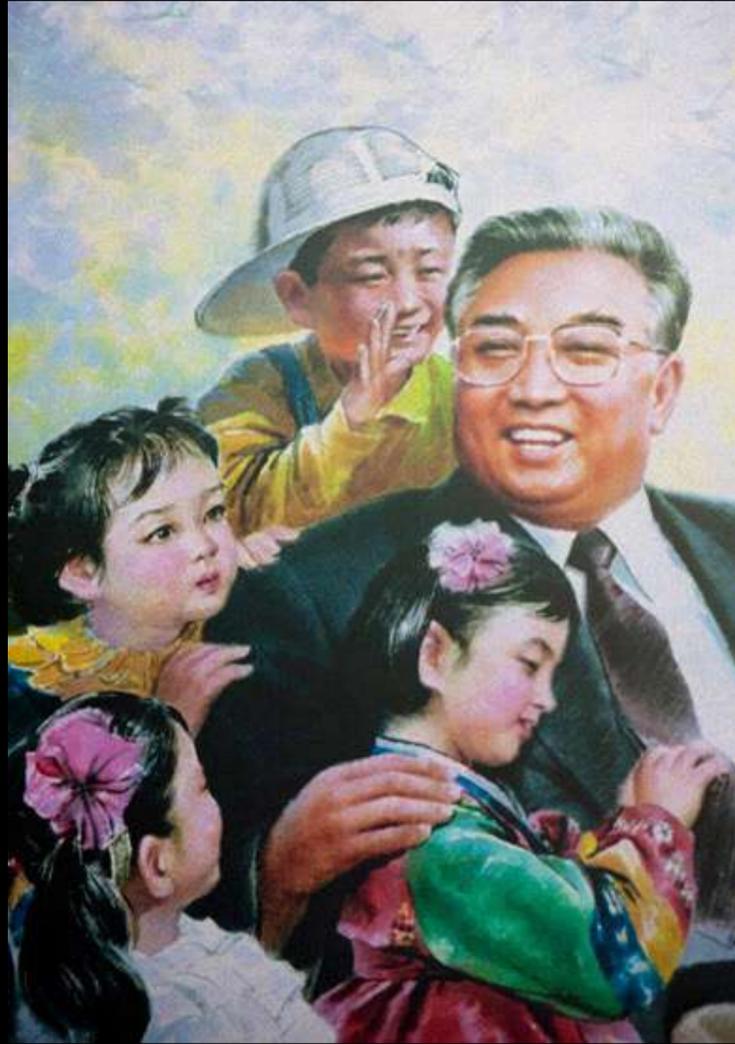
Many buildings are under construction in Pyongyang, many taking on a Chinese design which isn't in the best possible taste. The living quarters which were recently built are reserved to the elite. The city really needs them, for from my hotel, I saw a General exiting a huge, run down, 20 story block of flats, in the middle of common folk taking down their chamber pots, and passing people on their way to get some water from the well... In the middle of the central part of town.



Mobile phones are everywhere in Pyongyang! Subscriptions are paid every three months, and cost about 5 Euros a month, which includes 150 sms and 150 calls. The down side: the telephones (made in China) are sold for around 200 Euros! But even at that price, they are sold easily. The network is 3G, but international calls, web or WAP surfing are blocked.

The mobile phone is often the only way for families to get news from their sons away on military service (which lasts several years) and distant friends. To understand the importance of telecommunications nowadays, all you need to do is look at the city nightline, the only lit up buildings are the Juche Tower, the statue of Kim Il Sung... and the Telecom building!

Cameras are also now everywhere, creating a financial crisis for the many professional photographers who set up shop near the monuments!



The young people of Pyongyang ostensibly follow occidental fashion. Most of the clothes originate from China, but also Europe. You can also find in Pyongyang some real Adidas shoes (which will set you back 100 Euros a pair) and even a Tissot watches retailer! Copies are rife, with Prada, Pierre Cardin, Puma, and even the Simpsons and McDonalds! The propaganda machine has adapted to the evolution of fashion, by representing laughing children wearing baseball caps while in the arms of Kim Il Sung.





Me: Did you see, he's wearing an American cap!
The guide: *it's not American, it's made in China.*

The same dialogue will happen again when I notice Puma or Simpsons t-shirts, Mickey Mouse backpacks...



View from the front: school kids walking slowly, singing patriotic chants on the first of May, the day celebrating the workers.



View from behind: a collection of backpacks with Mickey Mouse plastered all over them!



Casinos were already available in Pyongyang's luxury hotels, but were reserved to foreigners (mostly Chinese) and rich North Koreans. But since recently, Fruit machines are freely available in Pyongyang on the first floor of the Bowling alley. But for now, the 'one-armed bandit' addicts only play "for fun", only winning free games.



The 9 hole golf course, seen from the Yanggakdo hotel, which is used by diplomats but also by affluent North Koreans. Another golf course is available: Kumgang Ananti Golf .



A gesture that would seem totally incongruous a short while ago: a young couple holding hands in the streets of Pyongyang.

In North Korea, decency is not an old fashioned concept.

Seeing my surprise witnessing men dancing together during a giant ball, while lots of girls were alone, my guide explained:

“it’s their first ball, they are shy. In your country, when it’s their first ball, do boys find the courage to ask girls to dance?”, which left me speechless.





In the Pyongyang fun fair, a shooting range displays: “let us destroy the imperialist Americans”.

The people of North Korea don't hesitate to name the USA as the enemy, but have no qualms about copying Coca Cola! With, incidentally, a spelling mistake on the label...



During the late afternoon, the Kim Il Sung square is taken over by teenagers who come to roller-skate under portraits of Marx and Lenin.



Propaganda billboards in Pyongyang. Regularly changed, they give an idea of the politics adopted by Kim Jong Il. Many announce a new political agenda and a shiny future, all the while giving the army an advantageous image.

First from left: “65th year anniversary of the workers party: let us make this year a milestone in the ‘construction of an economical superpower’.

Second from left: “we must surpass the most developed technology/ higher, faster”.



CNC: Computer Numerical Control. The government launched this campaign to control the digital tool machines in the whole country. Even in the countryside, the CNC acronym has started to appear...



The multimedia room in the People's studies palace. The visitors have access to an intranet, internet being reserved to a "safe" elite. The government communicates across the country on e-libraries which allow a massive and immediate access to databases, of which the most famous is the story of Kim Il Sung's access to power.





Children in a holiday camp playing a video game. North Korea is partnered up with occidental companies to create video games, as well as comics and cartoons.



Pyongyang Bowling alley, where people play under the slogan “let us accomplish the words of the president Kim Il Sung, our great leader, pronounced during his life”. The translation of the slogans is always a tricky thing to do for the guides, who are always afraid to make mistakes. The slogans are sacred...



Top technology in the Kim Il Sung stadium during a football match, displaying a huge screen. But at half time, it's back to reality with broadcasts of Karaoke over military backgrounds.



Wind turbines in the countryside. North Korea is trying every sort of technology to overcome its energy shortage. Even going so far as putting its antique steam powered trucks back into service!



The town of Wonsan can allow itself to light up its buildings and streets, due to the fact that the electricity production is above requirements thanks to a favourable environment. It somehow has the look of a Chinese town.

남녀즉효성(20분)성기능촉진.
남성음위증에 신기한 효과
여성성기능 저하증에 특효.
허리아픔, 콩팥염, 관절염, 비만, 간염 등에 특효.
천연면역부활제, 강장장정제.

Instant stimulant (20min) to sexual function of male & female.
Mysterious effect on impotence of male.
Special effect on hypogonadism of female.
Special effect on lumbago, nephritis, obesity and hepatitis.
Natural immunopotential, aphrodisia, tonic.

Немедленное ускорение (20м.) половой функции мужчин и женщин.
Чудесный эффект к половому беспочию мужчин.
Особый эффект к половой гипофункции женщиню.
Особый эффект к боли в поже, корнулезии, гепатиту и т.д.
Масса натурального иммунного воскрешения, тонические средства и афродизиака.

男女即效性(20分钟)性机能促进. 阴痿症治疗特效.
对女性性机能障碍特效. 腰疼, 肥膀, 肝炎等特效.
天然免疫复活, 长寿.

1. 1g x 3bot.
(0.45g x 6tab)

네오비아그라 - Y.R.

НЕОБИАГРА-Y.R.

新那 哦伟哥 - Y.R. NEOVIAGRA-Y.R.



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And for those of you how want to escape the city (and its pure air): in winter, you can ski at the local Gsdaat (Mount Paektu), and in summer, you can lounge around on the fine sand and clear watered beaches in Chiloe, on the east coast of the country. These activities are open to tourists, but are not really advertised much. I was the first tourist in 7 years to visit the beach, according to the village's inhabitants.

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lafforgue@mac.com

www.ericlafforgue.com