

Airbnb In North Korea





The roads on the east coast are very muddy and filled with potholes that workers have tried their best to fix. . I see an electric fence lining the beach as an attempt to stall possible Japanese invasion.



There is a disparaging difference between the attitudes of the children in metropolitan areas and those of the children in the rural areas. Many wave hello and gaze at me with astonished faces.



From the comfy seat in my bus, I see old, dilapidated houses with roofs ready to collapse. Only huge murals of the smiling Kim Il Sung bring color to these bleak landscapes.



After hours of travelling along this bumpy road, the bus finally arrives at our destination near a little bay adjacent to a rocky mountain. A bridge over a river serves as the perfect vantage point to survey the calm beach.



Jung Pyong Ri seems to be a community that has received ample government funding. Only 23 families resided here.



The Chief of the village, a tall, friendly looking man with a flat cap, takes my bags and leads me to his home. "What a privilege this is," my guide tells me. Like many people I encounter here, the Chief looks nothing like the image many of us have in mind of North Koreans. He greets me with a warm smile, not speaking a word of English. He tries his very best to explain all the activities I can participate in during my stay, with an emphasis on swimming.



He recounts the best day of his life. "It was when the Great Leader Kim Il Sung visited the village. We all wept. He was already quite old at this time, and it was such a great honor to meet him. Coming from a poor family, it motivated me to work harder for my leader's country."



The decoration is pretty kitschy though, consisting of huge plush toys one might find at a carnival, plastic flowers, and of course, propaganda. The living room seems to double as a greenhouse, with plants growing in large pots in front of the sofa. On the wall, the Dear Leaders watch me through their ubiquitous portraits.



In the living room, I see a Mickey Mouse picture frame holding a faded photo of a soldier. "He's my son," says the chief. "He is doing his military service. He is a sergeant." I ask when he will return home. "We have not heard anything from him in a long time. We'll see him after the reunification of North and South Korea," he responds, his voice betraying his pain.

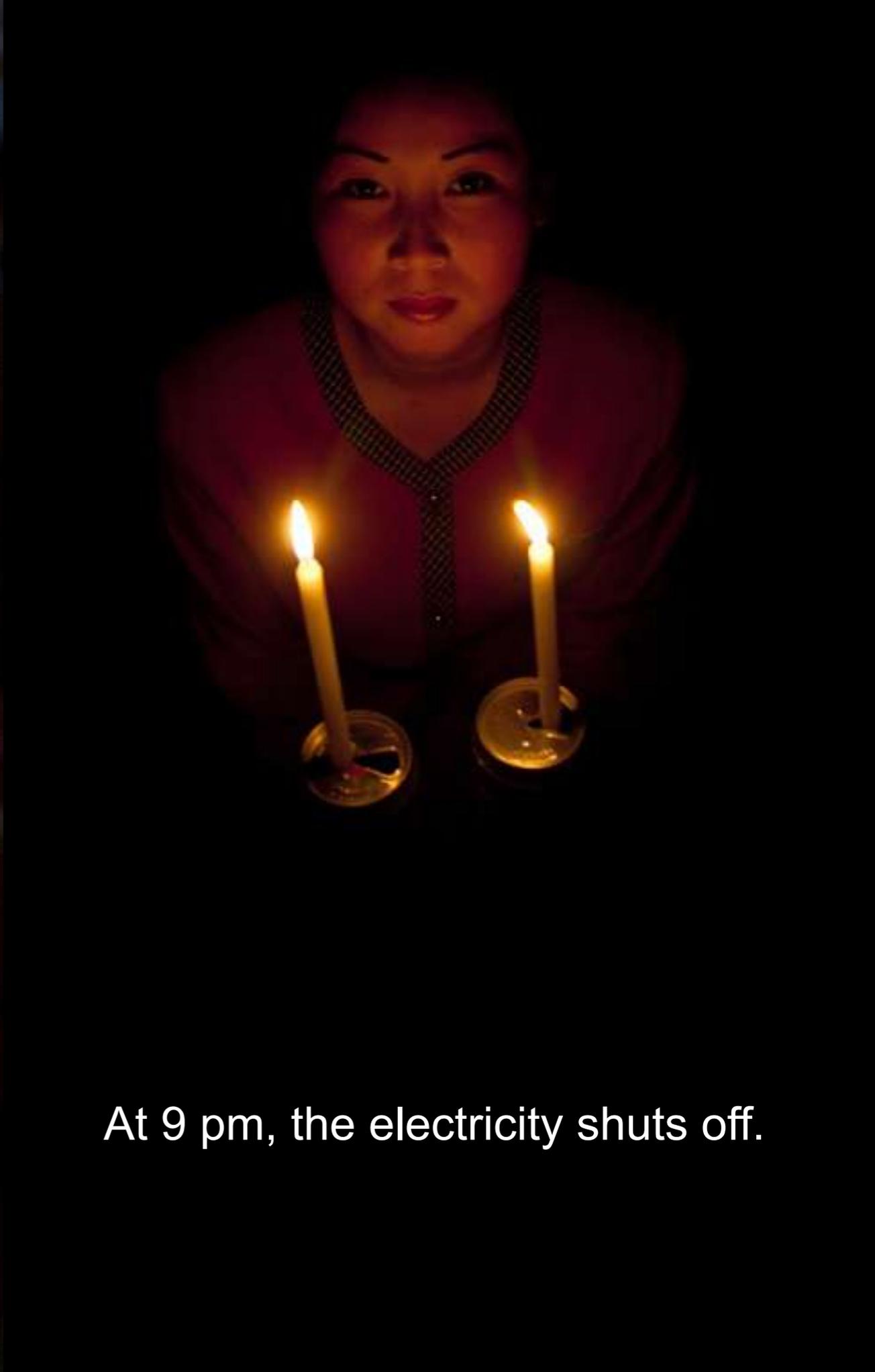
right: the wife soldier



The atmosphere is very relaxed. My guide changed his vynalon black suit and Kim Il Sung pin for a blue sweatsuit. This is the first time I do not see him wearing his pin. North Koreans have been charged with treason for this. He tells me that he feels more at home here.



Tonight's prix fixe includes "sea duck". I rack my mind for what kind of duck this might be. I begin to imagine I was eating a Jonathan Livingston Seagull. I don't have much luck identifying the rest of the food, but my guide and driver are very appreciative of the "feast".



At 9 pm, the electricity shuts off.



it is time to enact the North Korean version of "The Voice". Under the light emitted from my LED, everyone begins singing. The program ends with our rendition of the "International Worker's Anthem"



My room is quite satisfactory, very clean, with wallpaper from the 60s. It's only missing one thing: a bed. Apparently, I'm going to sleep on the floor on something resembling a very light futon.



Drying weeds in the garden



At 6 in the morning someone enters my room without warning. A “do not disturb” sign was never provided to me – probably a bad imperialist habit anyways. I’m still naked as the chief brings me a bucket of water. He explains that it will become hot once I put the antique electrical warmer in it. My morning bathing will end prematurely as I am doubled over at the electric shock I feel as I put my hand in the bucket.



Private garden. North Korean can now gardening and sell or keep the vegetables and fruits they grow in front of their house.



says “Kim Jong Il visited this house on December 12, 2004”. The homeowner is a nice, shy woman who begins to sob as she recounts the story of Kim Jong Il’s visit. “I did not know General Kim Jong Il would come. It was a great surprise for me. The neighbors were so jealous. As we took a picture together, which I will forever treasure, he told me the house was nice. This made me so happy.”



초대장

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I ask to have a look at the family photo album. She agrees, and tells the story of her life through these photos. She was a pioneer when she was young, and once had the chance to go to Pyongyang. She kept the red permit, and guards it as if it were the most precious thing she owns, as North Koreans cannot travel within their own country without permits.



The sandy beach we go to is rather nice and there is not a tourist to be seen. I see a large sign on a fence with the word “stop” on it. Over the fence, children are playing. I exchange a few words with them in English. They are part of the national karate team and enjoy vacationing at the beach.



I ask my guide to go see the neighboring village but he claims that it is not worth since it's exactly the same as the one I'm currently in.



It's 5pm, and I am asked to go rest in my room as it seems I'm too undisciplined! I've been put on North Korean timeout. The guides wanted to hide from me the reality of this life, but from my bedroom window, I can see emaciated oxes with carts full of wood and women carrying heavy loads.



I see some girls picking grass in Red Cross bags to eat for lunch.



I also see girls picking flowers for a bouquet



At night, I'm invited to a BBQ. The chef rolls out a rug in the garden, sets down a plate of clams and abalones – “it makes the man's cannon rise » says my guide-, sprinkles gasoline all around, and sets it ablaze with a match. The fumes fill the air. This moment is especially odd since the country is under an oil embargo! Everyone loves the flames flickering in the night though. I do however have a strange feeling that I'm eating in a mechanic's garage or a gas station.



the night ends with music. Young twins perform, but their guitars strings are so old that they cannot be tuned.



To thank the teens, I offer them a French football magazine. Inside, they find photos of their national team and beam with excitement.



Like in any friends separation, we make a photo souvenir. They ask me to come back. I promise i will. I avoid to invite them to my home in France, as i know they may feel uncomfortable : impossible for them to go out of the country as they are not part of the Elite. Unfortunately, i won't be able to keep my promise, as i've been banned from North Korea.



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