

All Settled in Seoul

SEP 1, 2023

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This month was where things got real here in Seoul! It started out with me getting my household goods delivered to my previously empty apartment. I also stepped up my language academy study and my self study as I continue to prepare for various language tests and interviews coming up. More importantly, I finally received my Resident Card which is absolutely crucial to all modern conveniences here in Seoul! Without this card (like my Social Security Number), I couldn't order anything, get a phone or internet plan, start a bank account, pay rent/utilities, etc., so getting it was a big deal. As soon as I got it, I was able to start a new phone and internet plan at a local provider, and was able to start a bank account apply for a Korean credit card...using Korean for nearly every step! I had to get some English help for two steps of the bank account process, but I was proud of myself for navigating this as a new foreigner without a Korean friend helping me along. It also turns out that phone salesmen are the same everywhere...I had to continuously stand up for myself and the plan that I wanted in spite of their insistence that I get the TV bundle or home phone bundle, etc. It was frustrating, but I was able to hold my own when it felt like they were trying to take advantage of a foreigner.

To celebrate finally being able to "verify" myself on the Korean delivery apps, I made my first of several food delivery orders via the "Coupang Eats" app on my phone. I never ordered food delivery in America, both because I had a car and could just pick it up myself, and also because the fees, tips, etc. have just become ridiculous in recent years. It couldn't be more different here in Korea. You can browse one of the food delivery apps (similar to an Uber Eats or Grubhub), select whatever you want, and in 15-20 minutes, the food is outside your door and you get a text that it was delivered. The best part is it's so affordable and the delivery fees are maybe like \$1-3 if there is any at all, and because these companies pay their employees a living wage, there is no tipping culture here.

Speaking of food, this month, another Olmsted Scholar (Eddie, OSC'22) and his wife Grace were visiting Korea, so we grabbed Pyongyang style cold noodles at the famous 우래옥 restaurant. After dinner, we explored Insadong and happened to meet a famous Korean movie/TV star 류승룡 while he was promoting his new Disney+ show "Moving" (무빙). It was great hearing all about their Olmsted experience in Europe and being able to chat casually in Korean with them. I've also met up with a few other old Air Force friends who're passing through Korea for one reason or another, and it's always great to see a familiar face and grab some delicious food.



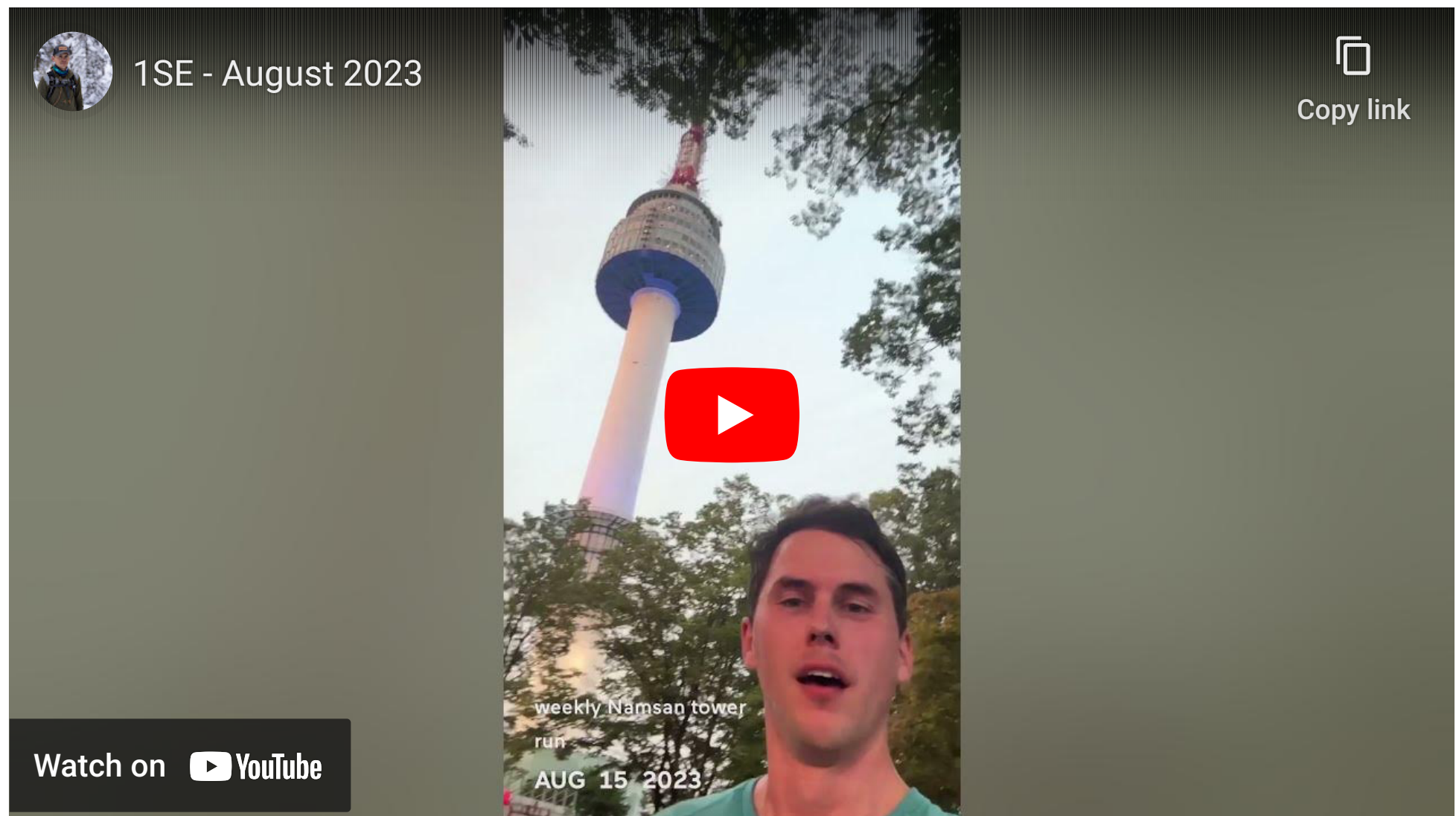
As far as language training, I've been using more and more Korean every day as I branch out and meet more people. I started going to a running club here a few days a week, and I've been able to practice some Korean with the Koreans in the club! I do intend to try and join a purely Korean speaking club at some point though. I've also continued going to language exchanges which has been generally fun, even for an introvert like myself. And finally, my language academy was a lot of fun this month! Starting in September, I'm attending a language academy at a university though so I can audit some classes and get my way into the university system before applications open. I took a written Korean essay and interview placement test this past week to determine where I start at the University, and I think they went well? I had fun at least, and I'm sure that I'll make the most out of whatever level they place me in. I felt bad switching schools from a small business to a big university program, but I think I'll go back for their conversation-only class once I see how my new schedule goes and what options they offer for pure conversation time. I really enjoyed my time there and would've continued if they offered a higher intensity course for people with more time to spend. The program I'm switching to is also famous for churning out good Korean speakers (as opposed to the other universities which tend to focus on high writing or reading comprehension skills), so I can break through this speaking plateau.

I've also started trying to immerse myself deeper even if that means I just don't understand as much. For example, instead of going to see normal western movies with Korean subtitles, I've tried going to the movies to see purely Korean movies with no subs at all. I've also been watching Korean dramas while doing treadmill cardio at night, and I've started turning off subtitles except for the occasional rewind if I think I missed something important to understand the story. I sacrifice a little bit of nuanced understanding of the dialogue, but it's time I step out of my comfort zone and make my brain work a bit harder during passive learning time. When I include English subtitles, I try my best to avoid looking at them unless I need them, but I think my brain is still somehow absorbing some of the peripheral reading because it feels quite different with no subtitles at all.

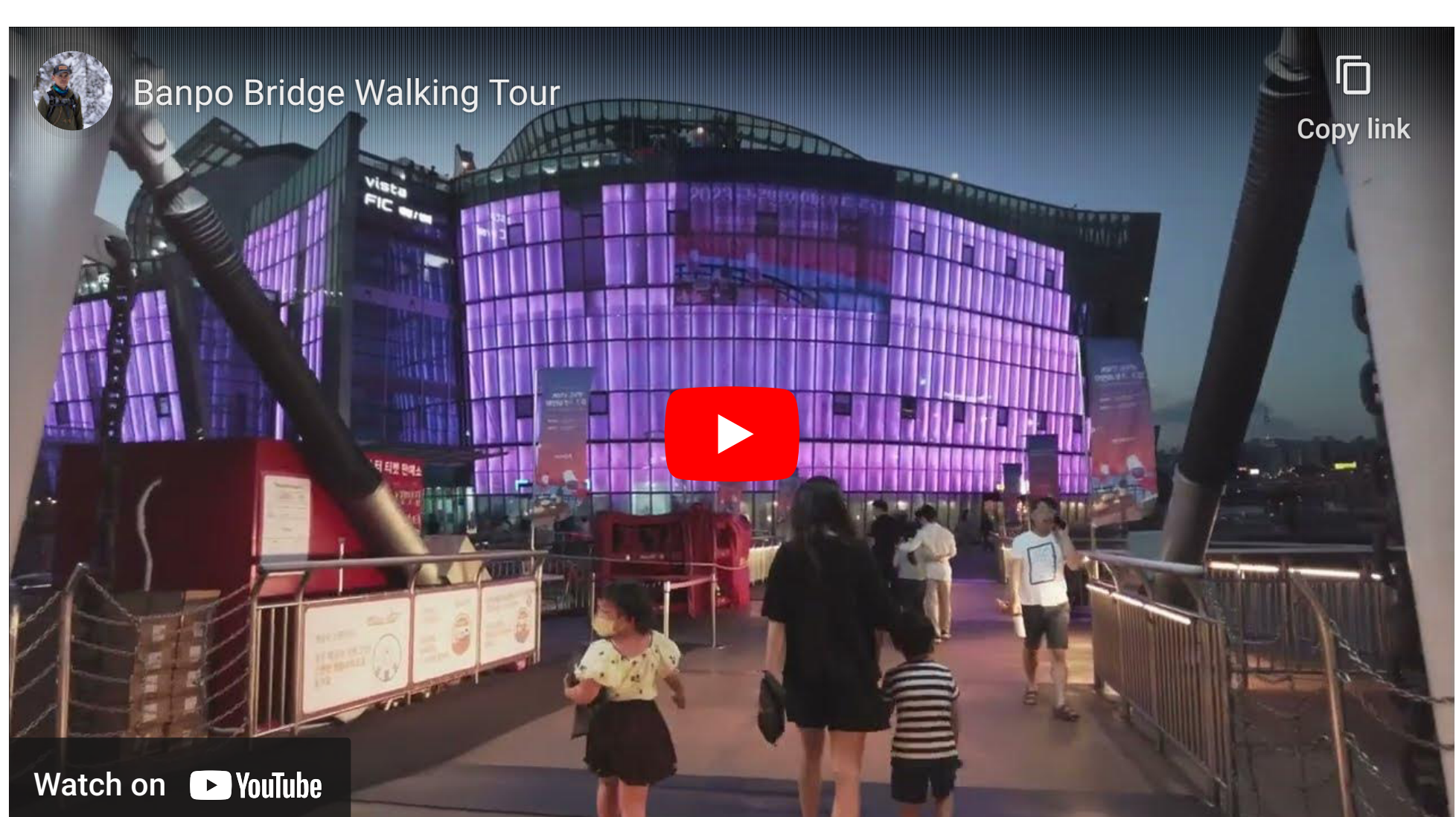


GSM Tables Language Exchange in Gangnam

In other news, I've been keeping up with documenting my time here too and started making different kinds of videos too. My August "1 Second Everyday" video is below:



I also enjoy watching "walking tour" videos to wind down before bed, so I thought I'd start filming some of these I go walking at night. You can see two I filmed while doing other things. You can also just scroll along to see what it's like walking in a Korean street or in a night market.



I have plenty of video ideas and plans for the coming months, so stay tuned for more :)

Until next time! 안녕! 🍵

-Sean