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A former wire factory gets a makeover and becomes a popular space for coffee, craft ale and culture

HAVING ALREADY visited some of the most recognisable places on an earlier trip, I'm keen to discover what else Busan has to offer on this, my second visit, to South Korea's second most-populous city and the country's economic, cultural and educational centre. I'm also excited about travelling in first-class on the high-speed KTX train for the first time – a trip that will take some two-and-a-half hours from the station in Central Seoul.



Visitors walk through the bamboo garden.

Once on the train, I make my travelling companions from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam laugh by wondering out loud if a zombie virus might break out and threaten our journey, just as it did in the hit South Korea thriller “Train to Busan” back in 2016. But nothing could be further from the horizon as we settle with snacks and a free bottle of water from a vending machine while taking full advantage of the strong Wi-Fi signal and mobile charging.

I already know I will be returning on this trip to Nurimaru Apec House on Dongbaekseom

Island, which was built to house the Apec meeting in the city and is today used as a conference hall. The three-storey building is a modern take on the traditional jeongja, or pavilion, with a roof shape symbolising the ridgeline of its home island and its terrace towering over Oryukdo Island, Gwangang Bridge and Dallmaji Hill.

Another stop will certainly be Haedong Yonggung Temple, a beautiful Buddhist temple on the shoreline, which boasts a three-storey pagoda with four lions symbolising joy, anger, sadness, and happiness in addition to 108 stairs and stone lanterns lining the rocky landscape.

But this time I am also taking in new sights and the first of these is F1963. The coach drops us off at a parking lot and we walk up the hill following signs for the Kiswire Centre and F1963. The entrance is a reddish brown door that looks like it's made of rusty steel. It opens into a bamboo garden which, we learn, is testament to the entrepreneurial spirit and corporate philosophy of Kiswire. The qualities and characteristics of the bamboos resemble those of wires and like the bamboo tree that stands firm yet flexible on solid foundation, Kiswire has always been solely focused on wire.



F1963 Square A is for seminars, performances and concerts.

I learn the company's short history from a sign. Kiswire is a global steel wire company that built its first factory in 1963 and later left it behind after relocating out of the city in 2008. Recently, the old factory underwent a major interior renovation with some of the intact factory machine parts decorated for the Busan Biennale. Now the 10,560 square metres of the former factory have been transformed into an art space similar to the Tate Modern

Collection in London and the Lingotto Concert Hall in Turin and also serve as a multi-faceted cultural space. The “F” in the name stands for factory while “1963” denotes the year.

Before we begin our tour, an official suggests we follow three overlapping quadrangles. The innermost quadrangle is a prime outdoor space for concerts, performances, parties

and seminars. The second quadrangle is a commercial zone complete with Terarosa Coffee, a well-known hand drip coffee shop, and Praha 993, a Czech craft beer bar, while the outermost quadrangle refers to the exhibition hall.

Inside the factory-turned-cultural centre, we taste makgeolli (traditional Korean rice wine) at Boksoondoga, a beer brewed to the original recipe of Czech monastery brewers and made with ingredients imported from the Czech Republic at Praha 993, and finish with a cup of coffee at Terarosa Coffee.



Korean people enjoy a spot of relaxation at Terarosa coffee shop.

This coffee shop is well known for its made-to-order, hand-drip coffee, brewed with a variety of coffee beans including Guatemala Tulio and Ethiopia Yirgacheffee. In addition to freshly baked bread, the cafe serves croissants, scones, pound cake, cookies, tiramisu and tarts. I manage to resist the sweet treats and opt for an iced coffee instead.

The coffee shop is part of the used bookstore, which take up the remaining space, and is also used as a gathering place for artist and youth communities. The brick-and-mortar used bookstore is expected to expand various cultural contents through the concept of a “book”, and thus be much more than a place for selling titles.

During our visit, we have a chance to appreciate the works of British visual artist Julian Opie, who is showing for the first time in Busan. The exhibition features 48 works from his London studio as well as three large-scale installations of heads.

The outside is devoted to giant timber bamboo and water lilies. A sign explains that factory's wastewater treatment plant has been transformed into an ecological garden, harbouring diverse species of bamboos, water lilies and aquatic wild plants. A nearby greenhouse offers visitors the opportunity to buy some cuttings as well as gardening equipment.

Characterised by a harmony between the old and the new – its remodelled interior and its restored exterior – F1963 is a great place to chill when you're next in Busan.

The writer travelled courtesy of the Korea Tourism Organisation.

IF YOU GO

>> F1963 is easily accessed by public transport. Take Metro line 2 to Suyeong Station and use exit 5. Bus No 54 takes you to the Kiswire stop.

>> Alternatively, get off at Mangmi Station on Metro line 3 and use exit 2. Transfer to mini bus No 2 and get off at the Sanjeong Apartment stop. The centre is a short walk away.

>> For more information, please visit <http://www.f1963.co.kr/en/>



Beer, books, bamboo and Busan

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