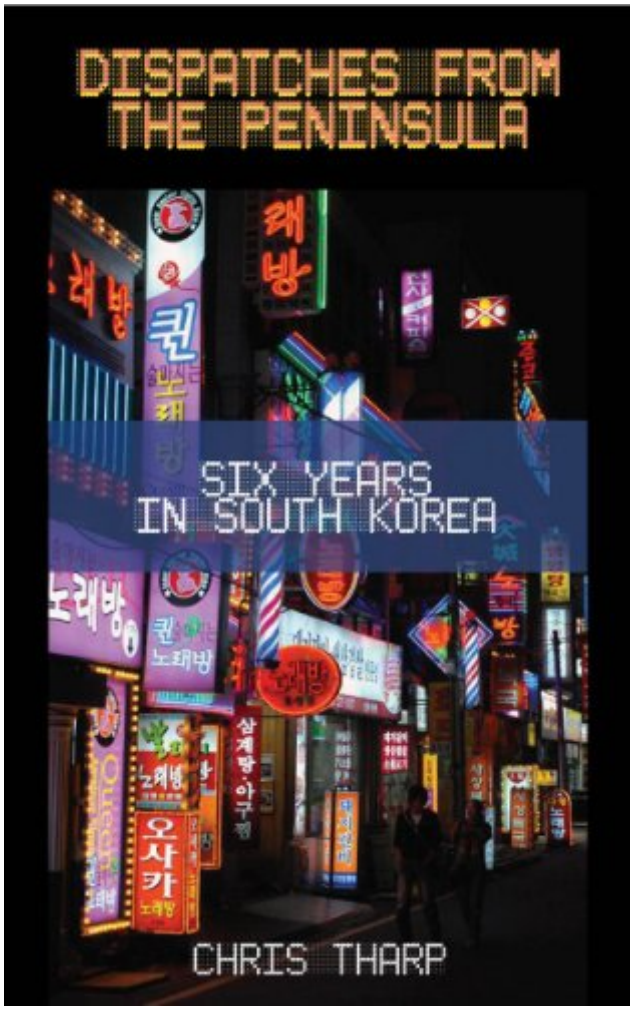
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Dispatches From The Peninsula: Six Years In South Korea



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Synopsis

Thousands of young adults pass through South Korea each year, teaching English in private schools that together make up one of the country’s largest industries. Korea, long isolated by culture and geography, with a complex language and set of social mores, can be a difficult place to call home. Chris Tharp has begun to make a name for himself as a travel writer, and in this gruff but affectionate memoir, explains why Korea can be both hard to like and hard to leave. He navigates his way through the timeless alleys and neon streets of KoreaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s cities, painting a picture of a society that is at once ancient and utterly modern; he serves in the trenches of the English teaching industry, working his way from the private, for-profit academy to the university; he treks through the peninsulaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s mountain valleys and rides deep into the countryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s rural soul on the back of his motorcycle; he also explores the internal geography of Korea, from nearly being deported over a comedy performance, getting caught in the middle of a street riot, to staring face-to-face with North Korean soldiers along the DMZ. During this six-year journey, Tharp must also deal with the death of his parents, which forces him to ask the question: Is home a place that weÃ¢â ¬â„¢re from, or is it something we take with us wherever we go?

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Customer Reviews

This is not only an account of the authors initial years as an expat in Korea, it also attempts to act as a sort of basic guidebook for those who might find themselves in the country for whatever purpose.The author relates what is surely by now a stereotypical Korea ESL experience: the hogwon, kimchi and noraebangs. The result is a very generic standard Korean-expat memoir.The writing is average and some might say anodyne, although the Tharp's glint of humour and upbeat tone result in a nice overall effect- which is refreshingly different to the typically negative lowlife ESL account. While he does indeed touch on the usual obsessions of single western males- the drinking, the prostitution etc he has an essential innocence and happy-go-lucky approach that lightens the whole.

Dispatches from the Peninsula is about an AmericanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s indoctrination into work, life, and leisure as an expatriate English teacher in South Korea. Author Christ Tharp, a native of the Pacific Northwest, recounts his first impressions, observations, and challenges that come with life in a foreign culture. He writes with honesty and truthfulness as illustrated in the following excerpt that reports on his first experience at the Busan Fish Market:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“At one point I saw a crafty fellow escape his prison and make a break for it, correctly heading in the direction of the sea. He made it about fifteen feet before his minder-another rubber-and-visor-adorned grandmother-noticed his attempt. She rose from her stool and tromped over to the octopus, grabbed it firmly by its head, and flung it back into the bucket. No gentle keeper, she punctuated this move with a barrage of verbal abuse delivered from the depths of her throat. There is no room for sentimentality at the fish marketÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (location 847 on Kindel).This excerpt shows Tharp is the kind of author who chooses his words with evident skill. Not surprisingly, my observations are parallel to reviews written by writeronbike, dk pan, SeoulBigChris, and fade2blk01. I would like to add that Tharp separates himself in the way he writes openly and candidly about the loss of both his parents during his time abroad and spares no expense in explaining the fallout from babopalloza, a satire comedy sketch that went awry and nearly got him deported. Reflecting on these adversities with such candor, the reader is not only bare witness to the authorÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s growth and maturity as a person, but also to some of the more grim realities of living in a country that is not too far removed from a military dictatorship.For a person who arrived in Korea with no requisite knowledge of the countryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s history or language, Tharp sure learned and experienced a lot within the

space of six years. TharpÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s travels to all parts of the peninsula and his willingness to cling soju shots with random bystanders along the way showcases his adventurous spirit. The book is replete with vivid, often humorous observations. But at the same time, Tharp includes references to Korean phrases and cultural norms, which speaks to the reality that he is not the type of author with ethnocentric views (e.g. see Jackie BolenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s How to get a job at a Korean University), but rather one who is invested in the merits of ethnography. Fittingly, towards the end of the book, Tharp explains, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“This is my home now. This is where my life is. My parents are gone. My girl is here, as are many friends, my house, most of my possessions, and two adorable, naughty catsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (location 3853 on Kindel).

More than just a memoir about a US citizen living in Korea, this is a highly entertaining and personal account of what it's like to discover a new way of living. Overall, it's the author's brutal honesty about his ex-pat experience that makes this book a real page-turner. That, and it's funny as hell.Chris Tharp is obviously not a man to shy away from danger, as displayed in the difficult areas he chooses to visit (poor, remote areas of Korea, to the infamous "dog market"), the characters he interacts with along the way (some really mean, drunk English teachers, not to mention the terrifying kids he has to teach), and the subjects he chooses to write about (so-called "yellow fever," some "dark nights of the soul," as well as the death of his parents).In a sense, it's a love story between a man and a country: the awkward initial flirtations, the crush blossoming into full-blown love affair, and the doubts and difficulties thereafter.One of the most fascinating aspects of the book is how Tharp explores the concept of a "free society." He finds many everyday fears people have in the US are virtually non-existent. Yet a few run-ins with the law prove that other freedoms Americans take for granted are not as sacrosanct in Korea.Overall it's a fascinating, funny, and moving memoir, that at times evokes a less drug-addled Hunter S. Thompson, or a drunker, American Geoff Dyer. Not just for ex-pats or those considering the lifestyle, this book is for anyone who's ever wondered what it would be like to leave their home on a whim, and wind up all alone in a strange, new country.

Chris Tharp's book is a lively and colorful memoir of time spent as an expat in South Korea. Having done the English teacher thing myself and loving the hell out of it, I sought to see if anyone had written about their own experiences. Having read what Chris has gone through, I went through a personal journey of my own reliving similar memories. Working and living in South Korea is an experience few people ever forget, and I believe it changes most for the better. Chris has a great way of detailing his most adventurous exploits, as well as getting into the culture a little bit. The

book is incredibly easy to read, and I got through it rather quickly since I was enjoying it. I look forward to more writings from the author. Anyone who has thought of teaching in South Korea, is a current expat, or has been in the past would find this book enjoyable.

This is Tharp's first full length book although he has been writing awesome shorter pieces for years. He writes with an intensity that makes you feel like you are there with him sharing a bottle of Soju and some Kimchee. While many expats come to a foreign country and watch from the cheap seats, Tharp dives in with arms wide open, destine to make a new life for himself and experience all that Korea has to offer. He pulls no punches in this book. It is guaranteed to make you laugh out loud, cringe and cry. The book is not only entertaining, it is also immensely informative about Korean people, their rich history and what it is like to be an outsider trying to figure it all out. I highly recommend this book. I can't wait for his next one.

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