

ISSF 2017 Reflections

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My weeklong journey in Busan came with disbelief: five-star service, global networking, and a warm, fun-loving tour guide I'll never forget, Kiwook Hwang. On the night I arrived, I was missing a towel, a poster, and a warm meal, but the Korean Science Academy took care of me and assured I had everything I needed and more (e.g. snacks, cold water bottles, Wi Fi) to live comfortably for the next-week.

I woke up the next day to find my buddy Kiwook on the ground floor. He escorted me to breakfast and then onwards to a day of touring the campus. The first stop was an innovation center where I got the chance to see and learn about 3D and large-screen technology. The next stop was an observatory located in the tallest building on campus. Here, I stood learning about the school's astronomy department, while being surrounded by Busan's city skyline. The last visit was to the chemistry and biology laboratories, which as a researcher I've oddly never been inside before. An abundance of glass chalk boards and biochemical devices overwhelmed me. The overall feeling I left the tour with was amazement.

After the tour, I played a Korean board game with Kiwook and a couple of friends and then presented my scientific poster, covering how neurobehavioral biomarkers can be a potential gateway into offsetting coronary heart disease risk in adolescents. Discussing my research helped me understand its true meaning in the scientific community and getting the chance to listen to projects from other countries, especially those which are impoverished, brought a large sense of inspiration and pride for researching in general. The last box to check on my research agenda was a scientific presentation, which my partner and I won the "most ambitious research" award for. I spoke in front of four judges and an audience for 15 minutes, and the experience was really self-fulfilling, as it had topped all the hard work I had done last summer.

Following the poster and digital presentations, I had a drone-building workshop to attend. Here, I got the chance to spend five-hours constructing a drone-guard with a group of international students. Even though the event was a competition, our group talked throughout the building process, and by the end, I not only won second in the design competition but also left with a group of unforgettable friends. In addition to a small workshop competition, there was also a large group sustainable city building competition, where I got to work in a small group of international students again and my favorite: a bucket of LEGOs. By the end of the competition, my group won second! Our city included the Statue of Liberty, the Sears Tower, and a Sky Railroad Train.

At the end of the trip was a visit to one of the top universities in the world (the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology), the national science museum, and the local Lotte mall. The next day though I had to say good bye to all the friends I made during the week. Before though, we agreed to play a large game of soccer at the academy's main field. I hugged

them hard then and said goodbye. I said goodbye to some of the most intelligent and fun-loving people I had ever met as well as to a country which I was near to calling home.