

The 2019 ACH Invitation Program for ASEAN Fans of Hallyu
By Andrea, Jodie and Victoria (30/11/2019)

The ACH Invitation Program for ASEAN Fans of Hallyu is a special annual program that not only commemorates the favourable ties between ASEAN and South Korea, but also the spread and love for Hallyu (the Korean wave) in their Southeast Asian counterparts. As 2019 marks the 30th Anniversary of ASEAN-ROK Dialogue Relations, this year's event is especially significant to member countries and their respective participants. Our students Andrea, Jodie and Victoria were invited as representatives for Singapore and share their experiences on their 9-day 'adventure' in the home of Hallyu.

Growing up, Korean dramas were as familiar to a Singaporean as local programmes. Families gathered in front of the television during dinnertime to watch their daily weekday drama, and amongst them were our families who tuned in without fail — thus we grew up with classics like "Princess Hours", "Dae Chang Geum" and "My name is Kim Sang Soon" among many others.

The 2007 Korean Wave invited new sounds into the red dot, and the music scene has never been the same: Since the days of "Sorry Sorry", our top hits display our nation's love for Hallyu up till now, as the names of BTS, IU and G-IDLE top the charts along with the likes of Western artists like Taylor Swift and Shawn Mendes.

Despite our past visits to South Korea, the ACH invitation program for ASEAN Fans of Hallyu granted the three of us a new perspective to the booming Pop Industry — their past, present and future. Beyond further understanding of the diverse culture and history of Korea, interactions with our ASEAN counterparts led us to new discoveries about our geographical neighbours while we forged lasting bonds and precious memories.

"The ACH Invitation Program for ASEAN fans of Hallyu was a really memorable experience for me and my biggest takeaway from this trip is that I got to make lots of new friends not only from Korea, but also from the different ASEAN countries. As we spent time together throughout the 9 days trip, there were many opportunities for us to interact and deepen our friendship, which also provided us a good opportunity to understand the different ASEAN countries better. Before the trip, I was quite unsure if I could be close to the other participants from the other ASEAN countries as we all came from different backgrounds and we each have our own different and unique cultures, but surprisingly, we all hit off pretty well with each other thanks to our common interest which is our love for Korea. Even though we may have a language barrier at times, all of us are able to have fun and have a great time together when it comes to anything Korean-related such as K-pop, K-dances, and K-food. It makes me appreciate once again how the Korean Wave can bring people of different backgrounds together.

Also, what I really liked from this trip is that most of the programmes in the itinerary are quite unique. Some examples include having a K-pop dance experience at 1 Million Dance Studio, watching KBS Music Bank rehearsal and visiting SM Entertainment. These programmes are not the typical programmes that an ordinary tourist can easily experience, and it was such an eye-opener trying out a K-pop dance at a popular dance studio for the first time and watching Day6 and NU'EST, a group that I am a fan of, rehearsing live and observing how they carry out filming for Music Bank. I felt very thankful that I got to experience such things, and it gave me a slight peek into the lives of K-pop artists, and the amount of hard work they must put in. Another interesting programme was the special lecture held by the producer of Music Bank, Mr. Kim Choong. He further highlighted the amount of hard work and effort put in to carry out such shows, not only by the K-pop artists but also by the producers and the staffs. We have always watched Music Bank from the perspectives of a consumer such as the artists we would like to see during Music Bank World Tour or prices of such tickets, but Mr. Kim Choong taught us to see from the perspectives of the producers and staffs, such as the different problems they face while carrying out world tour in different parts of the world. It was a meaningful lecture and I learnt many new things about the production of such shows.

All in all, I felt that this trip was a once-in-a-lifetime kind of trip. It was a short but a really meaningful trip where I gained so much more knowledge about the Hallyu Wave and my ASEAN neighbours. Even though the trip was held during a busy period of the semester, the experience, the knowledge gained, and the friendships forged from the trip is way more precious and worth skipping a few classes for. I am still missing the time spent in Korea and am looking forward to the day where I can meet the other participants from the trip again sometime in the future." — Andrea Esmeralda Halim

"If I had to pick one lesson I learnt from this trip, it would be that life is a never-ending journey of exploration. Having visited Korea many times, I initially approached the trip with a rather assuming attitude as the places that we were going to visit during the programme were not new to me. However, as the days passed, it struck me that it was not about whether I have been there before but about the people I was there with. You can visit the same place many times but it is the people with you there that will further reveal the history of it, the richness of culture and help to form new experiences. I have always had a positive association with Korea but every time I visit the place, the feelings would grow and especially so during this programme.

As a consumer of Hallyu culture, I have never deliberated much beyond the enjoyment that I get from consuming content. However, through the various visits to different producers of Hallyu content and the special lectures about the K-wave, I learnt to appreciate the processes behind the popular culture and how much skill and determination is required in order to form such a global phenomenon. I am thankful that we got to interact with Hallyu fans from the other ASEAN countries who reminded me of the beauty and power of Hallyu in reuniting people from diverse walks of life. In Korean language, there is an idiom called 일석이조 which means "killing two birds with one stone". On top of being able to immerse myself in Korean culture, I was also able to learn more about the different cultures in South-East Asia.

However, that being said, I believe that with any new experience that we have, we should always have a curious attitude towards learning and exploring beyond one's own knowledge. It should not be about limiting oneself in achieving a specific number of goals but just being open so that you can learn as much as possible. Only when we stay humble and open, can we truly appreciate things around us and put new-found knowledge into good use for the future.

The ACH Invitation Programme 2019 has enriched me with fresh perspectives, a deeper understanding of Korean culture and re-ignited my desire to explore the global phenomenon. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and would like to thank everyone who have made this trip possible and also 지선쌤님 (Ms Chi Seo Won) for always offering such special programmes to us Korean Language students at NUS." — Victoria Ow

While the trip has come to an end, we have taken back valuable lessons and found new friendships that will remain in our hearts for a long time. We would like to thank the Korean Foundation and the ASEAN Culture House for such a memorable experience.

To fellow LAK students: Stay tuned to next year's program, and don't miss this chance!