

## **Korea, Seoul – Busan – Ulsan, 2010 December 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>**

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On the shuttle bus from Seoul's International Airport, we see hard evidence that we have landed in a country with a story to be told, we quickly lose count of all the cranes and bulldozers working on countless bridges and empty plots of land. Overshadowed by news coverage of China's booming economy, there are large efforts to transform the already mature South Korean economy to face tomorrow's challenges. This is one of the main reasons we chose South Korea as our destination, to write an article in Asia Magazine telling the story of the government's initiatives to attract foreign investment by establishing Free Economic Zones and to meet Swedish companies investing in South Korea.

Our first stop is Swedish manufacturer SKF in Busan, South Korea's second biggest city with the world's fifth largest port. In the morning we get travel from our motel by the train station to the newly built area Centum City to the high-rise where SKF has a new office on the top floor. After listening to a presentation of SKF's operations and long history of involvement in South Korea we pay a quick visit to the President of the company, present what Chalmers is doing in Asia and then head out for the factory 45 minutes away by car. The factory is located in the Busan-Jinhae Free Economic Zone and is a highly automated plant focused on manufacturing critical bearings for the automotive industry. After a guided tour from start to finished product we get a ride back to the city center and are shown the beautifully lighted streets of a wintery Busan.

The morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> we get up early and travel to west part of Busan and then further into the the Free Economic Zone to visit the planning authority responsible for attracting and servicing foreign investors. We have a range of questions about the background, motives and means related to this venture, all of which are answered by a PR-officer who also shows presentations and models of the future logistics, manufacturing and tourism-hub they envision the Free Economic Zone to become.

Before lunch we are on the road again, traveling through Busan to catch an intercity bus to the nearby city of Ulsan, a large and rich city known for the huge car and ship-manufacturing complexes operated by Hyundai. Our goal is however to visit Scandinavian Biogas, a Swedish company with a contract for increasing biogas production and reducing waste in the city's sewage treatment system. We are graciously welcomed and get to see the plant and hear about the large technological improvements they have introduced in recent years. After leaving the plant we catch a train to Seoul where we arrive late at night and find our way through the metro to our accommodation.

The next day we visit Swedish Trade (Exportrådet) in their office and hear about their success stories and also the problems Swedish exporters may face when entering Korea. After lunch we head to Chalmers' partner university in Korea, Konkuk university and see their serene campus, surrounded by skyscrapers. The last stop of our journey is Ericsson who have recently started cooperating with LG to sell solutions for telecommunication infrastructure in Korea.

On Saturday we have nothing scheduled and had planned to see the Demilitarized Zone on the border to North Korea, but due to elevated tensions much of it is closed and we instead opt for some of the impressive royal palaces and well-preserved streets of old Seoul. Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup> we rise early and are soon on a plane back to the warmth of Taiwan after an eventful and eyeopening week in a wintery Korea.