

# Say DMZ!

Taking selfies at the most heavily militarized border in the world

**SOUTH KOREA** Riding the DMZ Train, with its garish decor and piped-in K-pop, is a surreal experience—even more so when you consider that its destination is a war zone. Twice a day, the train departs from Seoul Station and, 90 minutes later, deposits passengers at the 38th parallel, the line that has divided North and South Korea for the past 63 years.

It's a drab Tuesday morning, and my husband and I appear to be the only foreigners who have opted to take the trip. Joining us are hordes of South Koreans—many old enough to have fought in the Korean War—who are laughing, singing, and swigging *soju*, the peninsula's best-loved alcoholic beverage.

"Say 'kimchi,'" chirps a pale, petite hostess, who moves along the cars snapping photos of the passengers, apparently oblivious to the armed South Korean troops who are also walking the aisles. A few braver souls make peace signs as the stern-faced soldiers pass by.

We disembark at the eerily quiet and obsessively clean Dorasan Station, the end of the line in South Korea and the last stop before Pyongyang. The station, though

fully staffed, complete with gift shops and ticket windows, is really just for show. **Morbidly curious day-trippers aside, few people have cause to visit the DMZ.**

Soon, an avuncular, gray-haired guide leads us to the Dora Observatory, which offers coin-fed binoculars that look out over a fake village and a distant flagpole, said to be one of the world's tallest, piercing the hazy North Korean sky. An elderly couple stands in front of a barbed-wire fence, brandishing selfie sticks.

"Isn't this fun?" the guide says, beaming beside a sign dangling from a rope. I ask him what the sign says, and he shrugs. "Landmines."

—LESLIE PATRICK



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