

YOUTH CORNER

Where to?

Kim Yuna

MIST Program Student

Graduate student in Hospitality Management, South Korea

Studied sustainable tourism at the CATIE (Centro Agrónomico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza or Tropical Agricultural Center of Research and Education in Costa Rica)

YunaKim@my.unt.edu; kyaa9219@gmail.com

As a graduate student in sustainable tourism, I was attracted to the synopsis of Ryusuke Hamaguchi's film, *Evil Does Not Exist*, not to its title. After 106 minutes of running time, I felt the heaviness of the ax, and the project manager guy could not swing properly to chop the wood.

A Japanese town with about 6,000 inhabitants who were deeply proud of the town's clean water encountered an entertainment enterprise from Tokyo that bought a piece of land to build a Glamping site. The company invited the residents to explain the definition of the term "Glamping (Glamorous + Camping)", which would bring a lot of visitors and money to *develop* the town. But the residents did not want more visitors. The land that the company purchased was where the deer passed through. The manager said, sitting next to one of the residents, Takumi, "Wouldn't they (the deer) go to somewhere else?" Takumi said while

driving, "To where?" Then came the silence.

Although I am not a film expert or anything, I chose to watch it in an independent movie theater in Seoul because the topic involved issues that sustainable tourism would bring. What is sustainable tourism? A white younger younger-looking woman whose husband was a doctor and already had two grandchildren asked me the same question when I just arrived in Denton to join the master's program in International Sustainable Tourism (MIST). I was not confident enough to say what sustainable tourism meant.

After three semesters studying in the U.S. and Costa Rica, I can at least answer the question. Sustainable tourism means tourists care for their impacts on destinations where they visit and travel around. When you take a cruise in the Caribbean Islands, you think of the environmental impact of fossil fuels, oil leakage, sewage and waste management, the economic

impact that stopover destinations like Puerto Rico might go through, and the socio-cultural impact on cruise employees who might be working 24/7. Although this is not a real example and an oversimplified explanation, what I learned from the program made me realize my sensitivity towards workers, animals, nature, trash, the climate crisis, food waste, and organic farming was not useless.

Before joining the MIST program, I was diagnosed with bipolar (manic-depressive disorder) and spent five years solely on taking medication and therapy sessions twice a week. It was after I worked for a Korean boss in a Colombian logistics company who was the most abusive, but the common character in South Korean society. My plan to find a better workplace was put on hold. I just wanted to be treated equally or more respectfully than my boss would do to her beloved dogs.

Getting seamlessly recovered, I delivered food on foot, sold my 2,000 words to the online marketing company for KRW2,000, taught Spanish to a 15-years-old future highschooler because his mom wanted, and taught English to elementary school kids who wanted to play outside rather than sitting to translate "I go to school." to Korean words without knowing how to pronounce the sentence.

The MIST program brought my self-esteem and self-respect to life. Not all professors devalued my existence as many Korean teachers would do if I

made a mistake and did not improve from my previous behaviors. University of North Texas (UNT) and Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) professors always made a compliment if I did well, which was different from my experience in South Korea, where we were told to be better than our present accomplishment. Studying in Costa Rica awoke my curiosity and love for nature, although I could not live more than a semester due to the giant tropical jungle cockroaches that were flying around me. However, if I did not go to Costa Rica, I would not have gained what I have now. Thinking critically, I can face any problem including the relationship with my parents, unexpected mood swings, loneliness, and anxiety about the future. I learned not to judge anyone such as a farmer who has been putting chemicals in rows of coffee trees to prevent any diseases for better harvest rate, which is not actually sustainable in a long term financially because using chemicals and coffee monoculture destroy the soil health and kill the trees earlier than they are supposed to survive with organic farming.

Unfortunately, there are no graduates from the MIST program this year. My classmate and I could not sustain our lives in Costa Rica due to the lack of resources that we would take advantage of if we studied at the UNT campus as international students. To me, UNT's counseling services for students were the most valuable ones

since I had to take care of my manic and depressive episodes. Many of the former MIST graduates remembered that the time in Costa Rica was delightful.

With sustainable tourism in mind, the best and ideal scenario for the Glamping site in the middle of a beautiful town in Japan can be produced by all stakeholders. The stakeholders are local residents, business owners (in this case, entertainment enterprise), Glamping business consultants (that the enterprise made a contract), (local) government (since the business was to get government's subsidy and required legal permission), sewage treatment experts, deer behavior experts, and even deer hunters (they were mentioned a few times in the movie). If it were in South Korea, a company that would send 24/7 security guards and cleaning

Reference

- Hamaguchi, Ryusuke. (2024). *Il Male Non Esiste (Evil Does Not Exist)*.
- McDaniel, R.R., & Lanham, H.J. (2016). Chapter 3: Sustainable Development. *Complexity,*

ladies (aged over 60) with the cheapest fare and cheap labor from Thailand and Vietnam would be included.

Takumi emphasized the importance of *balance*. I want to finalize my thoughts by referring to McDaniel & Lanham (2016). "Using ideas from complexity science helps one view sustainable development not as a goal that can be reached through the achievement of *balance*, but as a dynamic process of continuous evaluation, action, and re-evaluation."

My Korean friends who are raising children often express their jealousy over me being a single woman without any children and say I can go anywhere because I do not have any communication problems with English and Spanish-speaking people. Then I think to myself, "To where?"

balance, and a critique of rational planning. *Pragmatic Sustainability*, 2nd edition, Routledge, pp50-66.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315648545-8/sustainable-development-holly-lanham-michelle-jordan-reuben-mcdaniel>