



KCON LA 2017 RECAP

Date Published: September 9, 2017

Date of Revision: N/A

Revision No.: N/A

Table of Contents

List of Figures	4
Extract	5
Disclaimer	5
An Introduction to KCON LA.....	6
Planning for KCON LA	6
The Deciding Factor	6
Ticket Sales	7
Convention Tickets	10
Additional Events	10
Accommodations and Flight	10
Transportation	11
Communication.....	11
Fan Boards	12
KCON LA 2017 – DAY 0 (Thursday)	15
KCON LA 2017 – DAY 1 (Friday).....	16
KCON LA 2017 – DAY 2 (Saturday).....	21
KCON LA 2017 – DAY 3 (Sunday)	31
LA – DAY 4 (Monday).....	39
Conclusive Findings.....	46
Food	46
Public Transit and Traffic	46
Traffic Congestion	46
Commuter Concerns	47
Public Transit: The TAP Card	47
Public Transit: The System in Practice	47
Alternative Methods of Travel	49
Environment	49
Safety	49
Accessibility.....	50
Accommodations	53
KCON LA	54
Environment	54

Convention.....	54
Food	55
Concert.....	56
Organization.....	56
Value	57
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	58

List of Figures

Figure 1 – KCON LA 2017 Daily Lineup	7
Figure 2 – KCON LA 2017 Ticket Tiers and Prices	8
Figure 3 - KCON LA 2017 Seating Plan	8
Figure 4 - Fanboard for ASTRO's Moonbin	13
Figure 5 - Headband for GOT7's Jinyoung (prior to addition of LED lights)	13
Figure 6 - Fan Banner for Wanna One	14
Figure 7 - 5th Street and San Pedro (a)	25
Figure 8 - 5th Street and San Pedro (b)	25
Figure 9 - 5th Street and San Pedro (c).....	26
Figure 10 - 5th Street and San Pedro (d)	26
Figure 11 - 5th Street and San Pedro (e)	27
Figure 12 - KCON LA 2017 Artist Engagement Schedule.....	31
Figure 13 - Artist Engagment Games Segment Legend	33
Figure 14 - Underside of Pedestrian Bypass on the West side of 5th St and Flower St.....	50
Figure 15 - Accessible Pedestrian Signal (APS) at SW corner of 5th St and Flower St	51
Figure 16 - Tactile Plate (Tactile Walking Surface Indicator; TWSI) at SW corner of 6th St and Western Ave	52
Figure 17 - Textured Curb at SE corner of 3rd St and Hill St	52

Extract

The enclosed document comprises of all processes directly undertaken for KCON LA, including planning for the convention as well as international travel. Uncertainties regarding the event itself are defined, and measures taken to ensure a smooth flight and concert experience are also described in detail. Conclusive Findings of the journey can also be found towards the end of the document.

The aim of this document is to provide insight on KCON LA 2017 as an international attendee, as well as expand on personal experiences gathered while exploring Los Angeles over a brief four-day period. In no way is this document intended to promote, nor depreciate, specific businesses or services.

Disclaimer

It should be noted with pervasive consideration that the enclosed document merely retells the KCON LA experience of a singular international, first-time attendee with specific values and perspectives, and that similar experiences are not guaranteed to fall upon other participants. This document aims to share the complex feelings of anxiety associated with the stages of planning, execution, and, most importantly, post-convention feedback. Any content included in this document is written from a subjective manner, and should not be perceived to be written in favour, or against, any particular entity or party.

An Introduction to KCON LA

KCON LA is a three-day convention held between the Los Angeles Convention Centre and Staples Centre that celebrates “All Things Hallyu”. The event celebrates a broad selection of interests, ranging from Korean dramas (“*K-Dramas*”), traditional and modern Korean food, Korean pop music and pop culture (“*K-Pop*”), Korean Beauty (“*K-Beauty*”), and much more.

KCON also exists in other parts of the world such as Mexico, Japan, and France, with some executed as a joint effort between Mnet / CJ E&M. As one largely unfamiliar with the event(s)’ past happenings, further comments cannot be made on the basis of insufficient knowledge. Readers are encouraged to learn more about the event and its history on the official website: www.kconusa.com

Planning for KCON LA

KCON LA 2017 comprised of two portions: *Convention* and *Concert*. The Convention included panels, gatherings of like-minded fans, and a range of special events, while the Concert spanned two nights and included a lineup of twelve artists/groups and two special guests.

With the promotions for KCON LA circulating social media, the artist lineup was revealed little by little as the convention date neared.

The Deciding Factor

As the K-Pop artists were announced, minimal attention was paid towards the girl groups and idols whose songs never made their way to personal social media feeds. **SF9** was the first to pique any sort of interest, followed by **ASTRO** – both idol groups were strong contenders from the 2016 rookies, and it had been an unspoken mission to witness ASTRO perform live at some point in the future. However, the announcement of only two groups of interest was inadequate in establishing motivation to attend.

Produce 101 Season 2 garnered quite a generous amount of attention from both domestic and overseas K-Pop fans; yours truly was not exempt from this online engagement. The eleven winners of the season were crowned as the debuting group, **Wanna One**, and was later announced as part of the KCON LA lineup for their first overseas schedule. Their contract was temporary and would be in effect in December 2018, causing many North American fans to consider attending the event to support the group.

Wanna One’s fans – referred to as **Wannables** – quickly earned themselves a reputation for being overzealous, regardless of whether showing supposed support by forming incredulous lineups outside sponsorship shops and concert merchandise venues or promoting their beloved idols on the Internet. The overwhelming actions of both domestic and international fans was truly frightening, and ultimately deterred the decision to attend despite how avidly the season had been streamed.



Figure 1 – KCON LA 2017 Daily Lineup

The number of days shortened until the release of concert tickets, with only a few artists remained unrevealed. All thoughts of attending the event had been banished until a shocking revelation was made: **GOT7** was added to the roster only two days before Combo tickets would be released. Moreover, they were noted to be performing on the same day as **ASTRO** and **Wanna One**.

IGOT7 is stamped on this very forehead. When one's favourite group is added to the lineup, it's almost a sin to stop oneself from hopping on the ticket bandwagon. **GOT7's** appearance was the deciding factor in this situation.

Ticket Sales

Prior to contemplating accommodations, method of transport, and flights to Los Angeles, it was imperative to ensure that concert tickets could be purchased first.

Four types of tickets were available for purchase: Platinum, Diamond, Combo and Single Tickets.

Platinum and Diamond Tickets, priced at \$1500 USD and \$800 USD respectively, granted ticketholders access to a designated General Admission standing area for the both nights of the Concert, in addition to special events access and benefits. The hefty cost deterred many from purchasing, myself included.



Figure 2 – KCON LA 2017 Ticket Tiers and Prices

Regular tickets could be purchased as Combo or Single. The Combo Tickets included a pair of same tier (same seat) tickets – one for each night of the concert – at a reduced price when compared to purchasing individual tickets; Single Tickets were unique to each night of the concert. Single Tickets allowed the flexibility to choose different tier tickets for each night, should the artist(s) of either night not rank equally on one’s interest list.



Figure 3 - KCON LA 2017 Seating Plan

Within the regular tickets were five categories, or tiers, that granted ticketholders access to varying Benefits and seat distances from the stage. The tiers ranged from P1 to P5, with P1 being of the highest level. For example, P1 ticketholders would be seated closer to the stage and receive a package

containing guaranteed Artist Engagement Benefits, while P5 ticketholders would be seated further from the stage and with no guaranteed access to Artist Engagement sessions.

The types of Benefits associated with each ticket included:

- Artist Engagement: Hi-Touch
- Artist Engagement: Audience
- Red Carpet
- Merchandise Bag (Gift Bag or Goody Bag)

While the details regarding the Artist Engagement(s) and Red Carpet were nowhere to be found on the official KCON USA website, several FAQ documents circulated forums for clarification and personal feedback. The Artist Engagement sessions comprised of Q&A and Hi-Touch sessions, and potentially a games segment as well. Hi-Touch pass holders would receive the opportunity to hi-five the artist, while Audience pass holders could participate in the session but not exchange hi-fives.

The most crucial aspect of the Artist Engagement sessions is that all Benefits included with one's ticket(s), regardless of tier, would be distributed *at random*. In other words, it is not guaranteed that ticketholders will receive their artist(s) of choice for Hi-Touch even while a Hi-Touch pass is guaranteed to be received.

More details can be found on the official KCON USA website: <http://www.kconusa.com/kcon-la-tickets/>

Combo Tickets were released two days following the announcement of the final artist, while Single Tickets followed suit a week later.

KCON LA tickets were sold online at the AXS website, which was immediately rendered a battlefield in the hours leading up to the release. A waiting room opened approximately 30 minutes before the release, permitting virtual entry until the site opened.

AXS operated on a very confusing "Best Seat Available" basis, which forbids buyers from selecting his or her desired tier. Specific seat selection was, of course, unavailable either. The purchasing process was incredibly grueling and involved at least five captchas per attempt. It should be noted that not each attempt was successful, and one would be thrown back into the server should any ticket be digitally relinquished to the pool at any point in time.

A P2 ticket in Section 119 was secured after ten minutes of painstaking clicking. Thirty minutes of trying for a P1 later, the white flag was raised. It wasn't until afterwards that KCON made attendees aware that more tickets would be released at a later date.

The tickets were ultimately released in waves on two different occasions, allowing eager convention-goers such as myself to obtain higher tier tickets and trade/sell lower tier tickets to other participants of the event through forums/group pages.

Quirky Tip: Ticket tiers/seats CANNOT be chosen and are assigned randomly. Ensure that a strong, stable network connection is within reach and that a mouse is handy, since the major playing factor is luck.

Convention Tickets

Apart from Platinum and Diamond ticketholders, Convention tickets are not included in one's Concert ticket fees. Single-day Convention Tickets were priced at \$15 USD, and three-day tickets at \$25 USD.

As a convention is unlikely to ever sell out of tickets, these were not purchased until closer to the date. Audience Engagement sessions were to take place in the Los Angeles Convention Centre, which required a Convention Ticket for entry.

Mentioned above was the random artist distribution of Artist Engagement passes. The schedule for Panels and Artist Engagement sessions was not to be released until the Thursday before the convention, which meant that it was impossible to determine whether one could simply purchase a single-day Convention Ticket to attend the desired sessions, or be coerced into purchasing the three-day ticket in case the sessions were scheduled to take place throughout the weekend.

Eventually, a three-day Convention Ticket was purchased since the difference between the two was a measly \$10 USD and the three-day option offered greater flexibility.

Quirky Tip: Purchasing the three-day Convention Ticket permits the greatest flexibility and allows room for attendance in "what-if" situations.

Additional Events

Additional Events such as Klub KCON and Flower Boy Café also required extra tickets to access. However, neither of these events were of interest to me.

Accommodations and Flight

Following the purchase of Concert Tickets, the next step was to secure a plan ticket and place of stay for the weekend excursion. Each additional night would incur extra costs, so it was imperative to weigh the cons and benefits of extended stays.

The original plan was to arrive on Day 2 of the convention (Saturday), visit the Convention portion of KCON LA, possibly explore a small section of downtown Los Angeles, attend the Day 2 Concert/Day 3 Convention (Sunday), and conclude the trip on Monday evening. A three-day stay meant two nights of accommodations were required.

However, this plan was unable to be realized due the uncertainties of the ticket Benefits and lengthy period of time required for Registration. One would not be able to unveil his or her Benefits until Registration (Friday) (or Pre-Registration on Thursday afternoon); should one receive passes to Artist Engagement sessions taking place on Friday afternoon, there would be no room to trade for other artists if the passes already expired at the time of receipt. Moreover, should the Registration lineup consume too much time, the Artist Engagement session would pass before one could enter the Convention.

For ease of mind, the final decision lay with flying in on Friday (Day 1 of the convention) and staying for three nights at the chosen accommodations.

Quirky Tip: It is recommended to fly in on Thursday to get a head start on Registration processes. Artist Engagement sessions take place as early as Friday afternoon (Day 1 of the convention), making it unwise to rush to the Convention Centre immediately after landing. Should any obstacles hinder one's arrival, ticket-/pass-holders may lose the opportunity to trade passes and obtain the artist(s) of his or her choice. Any residual time following registration can be utilized towards exploring the nearby area and preparing oneself for the packed weekend to come.

Transportation

Once both flight and accommodation details have been ironed out, the next factor of focus should reside with transportation. This not only includes the method of travel to and from the Los Angeles International Airport to one's place of stay, but also extends to the trips taken between one's place of residence to the Los Angeles Convention Centre, Staples Center, and other spots of interest.

From personal experience, KCON LA-goers primarily chose to reside in hotels in downtown LA or hotels/motels/Airbnb housing in Koreatown.

The former option is a tad pricier, but grants convenience and proximity to the convention grounds; being able to walk to one's area of residence in between events and after concerts offers more time for exploration during the day and ease of mind at night. Select hotels also offer free shuttle service to and from LAX, so it is important to take advantage of these services if present. Unfortunately, not all hotels offer a shuttle service, so it is recommended to have cash on hand for taxi or shuttle services.

Koreatown housing is the more economic choice, but should be avoided if not travelling and residing in a group. The area is undeniably not the safest during dimly-lit conditions. One would also be relying on Uber as the primary method of transportation between the airport and convention grounds; these costs can add up quickly if not split amongst several parties.

The Los Angeles public transit system is another approach to exploring the area on a budget. Fare options were found on the LA Metro website (<https://www.metro.net/>) – loaded tap cards and day passes seemed to be the most fitting for a weekend trip. These were intended to be secured at the 7th Street/Metro Centre station on the day of arrival.

Quirky Tip: Koreatown housing is more economic, yet also comes with the added concerns of safety and ease of transportation if travelling alone. The downtown Los Angeles region is closer to the convention grounds, which is more preferable for solo travellers, should one's budget permit the hotel stay. DTLA also enables easy access to the LA Metro system should one decide to explore nearby neighbourhoods during one's stay.

Communication

The final item of worry on the list was whether it would be possible to maintain communication while travelling abroad. Domestic trips pose less of a headache since mobile plans and currency need not be altered/exchanged at all.

A few years back, a T-Mobile SIM card had been obtained for a weekend in San Francisco. The inner fangirl had once been a diehard “**Baby**” for **B.A.P** and a SIM was needed to maintain communication whilst I joined the endless lineup for General Admission. The Pay-As-You-Go plan did not entitle data usage, so a Simply Prepaid plan needed to be purchased before departure.

This process was nowhere as easy as it sounded, though, since the plan was not set to be in effect until the Tuesday following KCON weekend. A call was made to T-Mobile in hopes of pushing the effective date earlier, but, in the end, resulted in complete agony and consistent forwarding to different departments throughout the corporation. The call centre attendants utterly failed to understand the problem at hand, yet oddly took drastic measures to verify the nonexistent PIN associated with the SIM card. Two and a half hours later, all patience had been lost for the service provider and their absolute incompetence in dealing with overseas troubles.

A portable Wi-Fi hotspot was the next alternative, though proved to be a hassle to rent for a solo adventurer. The Wi-Fi “eggs” seemed to be available only at airports and at steep prices too (USD nonetheless!). After conversing with a frequent traveller friend, it was suggested that international roaming plans be evaluated. Sure enough, Rogers’ Roam Like Home plan saved the day. Google Maps would be within fingertips after all.

With a handful of uncertainties in place, vast efforts were made to ensure that the trip would be as organized as possible, and that any unexpected changes could be anticipated with minor adjustments. Multiple Plan B’s were in place for the sake of an OCDer maintaining sanity. KCON LA was an enormous challenge to plan strategically, especially since the headliner for the Day 2 Concert had only been announced a few weeks prior to the event.

Fan Boards

Crafting fan boards/fan banners in support of one’s favourite artist(s) is very much an optional component of the concert-going experience. That being said, waving one’s own customized fan board during a concert – in conjunction with official artist lightsticks (if available) – brings out immense joy that simply cannot be attained by simply throwing one’s hands up in the air.

Drastic scheduling measures were taken to craft three unique fan boards in preparation for the three artists of interest that would be performing on Day 2 of the Concert: **GOT7**, **ASTRO**, and **Wanna One**. Designs were drafted for each board, with each proceeding blueprint increasing in complexity. Online tutorials had not been researched prior to commencing the project, which was a fault on my behalf, but every kink along the way contributed to the learning process.

The completed trio included:

- A 11 in x 11 in board featuring a glow-in-the-dark crescent and strings of blue and white battery-operated LED lights for **ASTRO**’s Moonbin (*Figure 4*)
- A 20 in x 11 in board featuring a flashing glow tube and red fairy light outline in support of **Wanna One**’s Kang Daniel
- A bulky headband of pink and green fairy lights lined with feathers reading “**넌기탱기**” for **GOT7**’s Jinyoung. (*Figure 5*)



Figure 4 - Fanboard for ASTRO's Moonbin



Figure 5 - Headband for GOT7's Jinyoung (prior to addition of LED lights)

At the last minute, a lighter, letter-sized fan board (*Figure 6*) was created to support three members (Kang Daniel, Ong Seungwoo, and Lai Kuanlin) of **Wanna One** should they be chanced upon during the convention. The fourth design was intended to be simple and portable, and therefore did not include LED lights as the boards intended for concert usage.



Figure 6 - Fan Banner for Wanna One

Tutorials for the aforementioned designs shall not be provided, as majority of the crafting process was based off trial and error. Those keen on attempting similar projects are suggested to conduct research in preparation, and familiarize themselves with security restrictions if travelling across the border.

Quirky Tip: Thoroughly research potential designs before commencing any work, as trans-border and luggage size restrictions may affect designs severely. Allow oneself time to source materials at the most economic rate possible, whether that be via online shopping or one's local craft store.

*The most straightforward tutorial involving LED lights that has surfaced is the following:
<http://kaibaibou.tumblr.com/ledsigntutorial> ; it is especially ideal for those with no prior experience of connecting circuits.*

KCON LA 2017 – DAY 0 (Thursday)

KCON USA listed Thursday August 17, 2017 as a “Pre Check-In” day, meaning that convention-goers had the option of registering both Convention and Concert Tickets one day before the official kickoff of the three-day event.

According to KCON’s official Schedule (KCON USA, 2017), Pre-Registration was set to take place between the hours of 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM PST.

This additional check-in date was said to have been added to disperse attendee flow and prevent overwhelming the system on Friday (Day 1 of the Convention). The format works in favour of local residents or those that are not inconvenienced by arriving in California one day earlier. However, to the majority of fans travelling on Friday, it was not a feasible option as rigid flights had already been booked.

[Please note that upcoming content will be shift towards a first-person recount, as it pertains strictly to personal experiences.]

While I did not have the luxury of extending the weekend trip for an additional day (and extra night of stay), I was thankful to be acquainted with a group of friends whose leader resided just outside of downtown Los Angeles. She took upon the responsibility of registering the Convention and Concert Tickets for every single member of the group, waiting in the registration line for our sake, and then making the exhaustive 2.5 hour-drive home through LA traffic. Her selfless actions saved the remainder of the group a significant amount of time and enabled first day in the city to proceed without issues. Words could not express how deeply I appreciated her help.

Should one be travelling solo and without such grand assistance, it is highly recommended to arrive on the Thursday of the Convention to iron out any uncertainties prior to commencement of KCON.

KCON LA 2017 – DAY 1 (Friday)

The aim was to arrive in Los Angeles by late Friday morning or early Friday afternoon, just in case we happened to encounter any unforeseen circumstances along the way.

I had managed to secure myself a spot on the same departure and return flight as a friend (whom I regularly refer to as my “favourite fangirl”), thus we were able to travel together and keep each other company during the brief periods before our flight.

International flights generally suggest that fliers arrive at least two hours in advance of the estimated departure time, though three hours is the window that guarantees the highest level of safety. I pulled in about two and a half hours before the stated departure time, and proceeded to spend just over one hour to undergo security inspections after dropping off checked baggage.

I successfully made it through the gates with about twenty minutes to spare. In the end, our flight was delayed by a half hour anyway. The body of the plane was relatively new and spacious; no obstacles were experienced en route to LAX. (For the first time *ever* in all my travels to the West Coast, the passenger in front did not recline his/her chair to the height of my nose during flight.)

Despite the delayed takeoff, time was caught up during the flight and we landed at LAX only ten minutes behind schedule. Disembarking the aircraft, I set off to locate the baggage claim area. Signage was plentiful and the area was, in fact, fairly close to the arrival gate.

The street exit was conveniently located next to the baggage claim area, and across the street was the hotel shuttle pick-up area. I initially attempted to find the shuttle corresponding to my place of stay, only to later discover that shuttles were not offered for my selection. Alternatives of taxis, Uber, or Super Shuttle were made aware to me. At this point, I had already waited close to one hour for a hotel shuttle.

The next step of action was to locate the Super Shuttle stop. From the information of two traffic regulators, I retraced my steps to find the Super Shuttle pickup area. Then, I relayed my desired destination to the man at the stop. He inquired if I had a reservation, to which I responded in the negative. My name was added to the list of passengers in need of a ride to downtown Los Angeles. More waiting was involved.

I almost collapsed in relief when the sight of a packed shuttle bus came into view. Stained, cramped seats were no longer of my concern – I merely wanted to drop off my belongings and begin the West Coast adventure.

Of course, the ride did not progress as smoothly as I would have liked. Congestion on the highway was ridiculous for a weekday morning – at off-peak hours no less! – and being the second-last stop on the shuttle, I did not arrive at my place of stay until *three hours* after I had landed.

After obtaining room keys and laying out my belongings in an orderly fashion, I changed into attire more fitting of LA conditions and set out to obtain a Tap card at 7th Street/Metro Centre.

Orangecane had warned me of the homeless culture in Los Angeles, though I had been much too distracted by the insane amount of construction taking place to acknowledge this. 7th Street/Metro

Centre is listed as a main transfer point on the LA Metro Map, hence I had expected at least one service attendant available to answer my concerns regarding the public transit system. Instead of attendants, three to four fare machines were situated next to the turnstiles.

I descended the stairs while still gazing around in hopes of finding someone of greater knowledge to speak with. When my prayers were not answered, I strode onwards to the fare machines, only to recoil in shock upon laying eyes on a homeless man curled up behind one of the pillars. He had been entirely camouflaged from view until I had reached the underground level, rendering his appearance even more startling.

Reinstating focus towards the fare machines, I followed prompts for purchasing a Tap card with a loaded fare and a Day Pass. I had assumed the Tap card to work similarly with PRESTO in the GTA and Compass in British Columbia, while the Day Pass would be a separate, single-use card like TTC's version. Little did I know that all fares were issued in the form of Tap card – both loaded fares and day passes. Before I had realized, I had purchased two identical-looking tap cards for \$1 each. Worst of all, I tapped the wrong one when entering the turnstiles.

Further transit woes can be found in

Conclusive Findings.

I had taken the time to download and visually scan the LA Metro map before departing, but still found the platforms difficult to navigate with limited familiarity. Directions (North/East/South/West) were not to be described anywhere. Wilshire/Western station was my desired destination, but there was no way of determining whether a train would be taking the Purple Line to Koreatown or Red Line to North Hollywood.

Somehow, I was able to reach Wilshire/Vermont station (the splitting point for the Purple and Red Lines) without having to backtrack. It was also a miracle to successfully join the remainder of the group at Palga Grand Hotel with zero knowledge of downtown Los Angeles and its neighbouring areas.

It was nearing 4 PM PST by this point, and not a single proper meal had been consumed since evening EST hours the night before. Palga Grand Hotel was not a hotel by any means – the rundown environment and lack of air conditioning was an immediate turnoff. Had my favourite fangirl and her friends not chosen such a questionable place of residence, I would have ducked out of the area immediately. The surrounding shops and businesses were dilapidated and well deserving of concern.

Not a single, normal-looking establishment was in sight, so the only option for soothing ravaging appetites was the Korean restaurant situated at the base of the motel – no, hostel – status building.

Sauntering in well after peak lunch hours, there was not but a single soul in Ondal, except the Korean aunties leisurely chatting away while watching TV. Their expressions informed me that service would be limited, if not nonexistent, and that I was more than welcome to walk right back out and leave them to their lazing about. My appetite required tending to though, so as much as I would have loved to sit myself down in a Subway or Quiznos, neither was a privilege I had access to.

The interior was reminiscent of any traditional Korean restaurant, so before menus had even been placed before me, I requested a bowl of Cold Noodles (물냉면). The middle-aged lady scoffed at me. “We are not a Korean restaurant! Seafood!” she spat at me.

Close to fainting, both from heat and hunger, I didn’t feel as if my desperate cry for sustenance justified such a crude response. Hurriedly scanning the two pages of items, I pointed towards one of the scarce few that did not feature a red chili pepper icon adjacent to it: Soybean Soup. The lady, in turn, wrinkled her nose at me.

I asked – almost pleaded – for a dish that would arrive quickly, yet instead the lady took her leisurely time in processing the order and spinning on her heel five minutes later to tell me that the spicy crab-based dishes would be faster picks.

The rest of the group joined me in good time, though it wasn’t until all orders had been placed that banchan were served to us. The side dishes were followed shortly by a small bowl of white rice and a bubbling pot of Soybean Soup.

Contrary to its supposed omission of spice, the broth was lined with a fiery film of vivid orange. Those with decent spice tolerances found the soup extremely mild, though the successive hits of spice gradually became too hot for me to handle. Within a couple of minutes, I had succeeded in shovelling down half the bowl of rice, all while speedily plucking banchan from the table spread.

At \$9.99 USD (before tax and tip), my dish was amongst the most wallet-friendly of the menu selection. However, the price remained significantly higher than it was worth. No matter the quality, speed of delivery, dining environment, and service (or rather, lack thereof), Ondal failed to meet the fundamental requirements of a no-frills diner.

Washroom stalls were not present within the restaurant either: two stalls were located in the lobby of Palga Grand with number locks. Oddly enough, the bathrooms were the cleanest spaces in the entire structure.

The rest of the group ordered savoury pancakes, crab, and bulgogi platters. Ultimately, the meal extended past 4:30 PM, causing me to miss the Jrodtwins performance panel entirely.

A fan panel for **VIXX** was set to take place at 4:30 PM, and seeing as the rest of the group was largely comprised of **Starlights** (**VIXX** fans), we set off to the convention centre after wrapping up the meal.

The fan-operated panel neared its end as we crept in through the doorway. It was of minimal interest to me, though we had arrived after the Artist Engagement sessions I had managed to secure passes for and the booths located within the convention were set to close at 6 PM anyway.

The girls voted in favour of retreating to their depressing dump of a hotel, while I was keener to explore Koreatown before convention activities picked up the next day.

The ever-kind California local offered to drop me off at Wilshire/Western station – bless her boundless generosity! – where I happened to chance upon **SF9**'s Meet & Greet at the AT&T store. A lengthy lineup snaked around the corner of the building; I observed as girls with signed posters giddily trekked out of the entrance and made their way across the street to where I had positioned myself.

Pausing briefly at the north side of the intersection, I caught faint views of Inseong, Dawon, Rowoon, Taeyang, and Jaeyoon from in between lofty security guards and passing vehicles.

When my stomach alerted me that dinnertime was near, I waltzed into Nature Republic for a quick browse before heading over to MaDang Courtyard.

The three-level plaza was home to The Face Shop, Paris Baguette, Beard Papa's, Daiso, H-Mart, CGV Cinemas, and more. Fighting fatigue and suppressing gustatory desires for a little longer, I managed to make quick rounds into several shops of interest before finally collapsing at Bento Bae.

Majority of the restaurant was filled with diners at this time, though there were surprisingly few customers in the lineup. The girl taking my order was not only patient with my indecisiveness, but also caring enough to suggest swapping not-so-fresh rolls from my customized bento set for better quality ones.

Bento Bae offered clean bathrooms (with hooks!), outlets, lemon-infused water, and password-secured Wi-Fi to diners – all of which were of utmost importance to frenzied travellers with dying phone batteries. Like Panera Bread and recent McDonald outposts, electronic discs/remotes were presented upon completion of orders; these remotes would buzz to notify clients when their meal(s) were ready for pickup from the counter.

Due to extreme famine, I cannot recall the precise names of the rolls that made up my customized Chef's Special Bento Box. However, I can firmly state that some pieces were fleshy and well-seasoned, while others were on the stale side. Nine pieces of sushi proved successful in curbing my appetite.

This was not synonymous with lack of room for dessert, however.

SomiSomi, a relatively popular soft serve ice cream shop, was conveniently situated next door. The lineup had extended across Bento Bae's storefront when I had passed by earlier, though had been reduced to half its original length when I made my departure.

Without much thought, I joined the seven parties ahead of me. The line inched forward at a slow yet reasonable pace. Turning around some few minutes later, I realized that more eager ice cream-goers had been stepped into the lineup. There appeared to be a never-ending wave of customers for soft serve in starchy fish-shaped cones.

Research had been conducted via Yelp prior to this visit, so I was already somewhat familiar with the ordering process. Many remarks were in agreement regarding the speed at which the soft serve melted. I was particularly alert about this comment, not only because items that quickly disintegrate bother me tremendously, but also since I was carrying more items than normal, even for the regular commuter. Sticky hands, heavy bags, and a clean camera do not make for a pleasant combination, ever.

SomiSomi offered four flavours of soft serve: Ube, Milk, Matcha, and Black Sesame; two different flavours could be swirled together every other week. For my visit, I chose to have Ube and Milk swirled together and topped with Oreo bits and Fruity Pebbles. The fish-shaped waffle, or "bunggeoppang" as the shop denotes it, appeared soggy and too satiating for a post-dinner treat. Having excluded this doughy component and its custard/Nutella filling, the total cost of the soft serve was a meager \$3.75.

Ube, otherwise known as purple sweet potato, carried a blue tint that caused it to exhibit an almost-lavender tone. Unlike its appearance though, its flavours were barely discernible underneath the gentle sprinkle of toppings.

Milk, on the other hand, was sweet and creamy, embodying the very essence of classic Vanilla. Neither excessively rich nor sugary, it provided the appropriate dosage of sweet satisfaction.

Admittedly, the portion of soft serve received was much greater than anticipated. While the centremost section of the swirl was hollow, the quantity of ice cream was still more than that of Toronto's independent dessert parlours. In addition, I was pleasantly surprised to find that its rate of dissolution was nowhere near as rapid as other reviewers had commented. This may have been owed to the omission of a piping hot fish waffle though.

I was impressed with SomiSomi on a general note: numerous times have family-operated businesses in the GTA climbed to the top of the hype ladder via social media from offering subpar food items at ridiculously high prices. This Koreatown shop not only went above my expectations by producing a delightful, attractive dessert, but also maintained efficient, assembly line operations and friendly service to boot.

H-Mart was the last stop I had wished to make before departing, but exhaustion had stopped me from venturing further. The trek back to Wilshire/Western was more tiring than before. The subway was nowhere to be seen either.

Frankly speaking, the subway station was eerily quiet for a weekday evening. Streetlights were also few, so waiting for the bus was honestly quite nerve-wracking. Several orange buses passed by before one headed in the direction of DTLA finally arrived.

Once again, I somehow managed to make my return in one piece, all while in a groggy daze. Perhaps having a compass on hand was more useful than I thought.

Behold my Day 1 purchases!

As a result of pure luck, I had also managed to trade the Artist Engagement passes I received (but weren't too fond of) for **GOT7** Hi-Touch and **SF9** Audience passes. This had been executed internally within the group, and would pave the way for a 11:00 AM Artist Engagement session the next morning.

KCON LA 2017 – DAY 2 (Saturday)

The night had been spent in distress. Maybe it was thin walls that caused sounds of running water and booming television programs to be heard even while lying in complete darkness, or maybe it was the riotous whirring of construction equipment that contributed to endless restlessness. I tossed and turned underneath the weighty blankets, coming face to face with the red glow of the digital clock once every hour. Just under six hours had managed to be scraped together by the time striking UV rays beamed through the tall curtains.

I had intended to stop by Blue Bottle Coffee on the day of arrival, but found 4th Street to terminate at a covered parking building shortly after embarking on the journey. It did not connect from Flower to Hope. Reviewing alternatives on Google Maps, I discovered that I could also head north to 3rd Street and continue westward until Broadway.

Unbeknownst to me was the presence of the Third Street Tunnel – a two-lane, one-way covered bypass in the form of a chillingly quiet tunnel. Cracks were seen propagating on the underside of the entranceway, while lumpy clusters of mold and other foreign substances lined the entire span of its curved walls.

Despite the comfortable weather conditions and very fact that it was still broad daylight, the bypass gave off an ominous aura not dissimilar to those associated with 3 am crime scenes. *Drip drip* could be heard echoing between the whizzing by of cars. The silhouette of two pedestrians trudged ahead of me in the far distance. The light at the end of the tunnel seemed close at first, but the trek along this stretch of 3rd Street felt incessant.

I picked up speed, hoping to terminate the tunnel trip as soon as possible, especially when a troubling gust hit me from behind. There were no shadows that could be seen – only the silent streak of a man on his bicycle. He gave me a quick nod before continuing his way. Craning my neck to inspect my surroundings yet again, I heaved a sigh of relief upon seeing that there wasn't a single body within my 50 m radius.

Exiting Third Street Tunnel provided me with peace of mind. Not too far from its east entrance was Grand Central Market, and near it my source of refuge: Blue Bottle Coffee.

The café retained a layout similar to that of Rocanini in Steveston, but with a heavier use of exposed concrete pillars and matte-white Greek columns – Corinthian, to be exact. Seating was ample, ranging from communal tables with tall stools, ground-level tables for small parties, and even individual seats along the Cold Brew Bar.

I was greeted immediately upon entry, and took the opportunity to inquire about their best-selling beverage. The New Orleans Iced Coffee was recommended to me; at \$4.00, it was quite a substantial price tag for a drink devoid of additional espresso/flavour shots. On the other hand, the inclusion of whole milk rendered it comparable to an iced latte, which isn't a competitive item to begin with.

The New Orleans Iced Coffee wasn't particularly strong-tasting in terms of boldness, however its steady strength was sufficient to wake me from an uneasy night of tossing and turning.

Since I couldn't afford to survive another day on wretched gruel such as the low-quality scraps from Ondal, it was of top concern that I obtain something of substance to start my second day in the city properly. Many con-goers had advised bringing snacks to sustain oneself through the weekend, though I can't agree with that suggestion. Solid meals should be consumed to maintain energy, nutrition, and stamina.

Heartier than the standard baked good, I opted for a \$6.00 cup of Muesli. Frankly speaking, it was probably one of the least economic breakfasts I had ever swiped for. In spite of this, I had not a single regret regarding my choice. The cup consisted of overnight oats, several crunchy bits of fruit, and crispy pumpkin seeds; each spoonful instilled energy and boosted vitality. Most importantly, it was tasty and satisfying without being satiating. Come to think it, it was actually priced on par with Toronto cafes too, post exchange rate.

Grand Central Market had originally been dismissed from the to-go list in fear of the presence of the homeless population. But seeing as it was on route to the bus stop, and still very early in the day, I crossed the street for a swift tour of the food stalls anyway.

The homeless population apparently hadn't risen yet, since the bulk of Grand Central's customers were clad in pristine t-shirts and knee-length shorts. Some were evidently tourists, cameras in hand and sunnies on forehead, while others were locals looking to grab a quick bite with friends and family.

As orangecane had mentioned, the line for Eggslut was tremendous, much lengthier than any other vendor. Other shops retained decent wait times (and extraordinary fumes). As expected, Grand Central Market was essentially DTLA's version of St. Lawrence, just on a smaller scale with fewer souvenir shops and produce stalls.

I zipped through without making a single purchase, since I could not afford to be delayed for my first Artist Engagement session of the weekend. Twenty plus-minutes later though, I found myself snapping photos of flowers while anxiously poking my head onto the street to verify the degree of lateness for the bus.

Eventually, I found myself on the appropriate route and sat myself down next to a girl donning an identical convention wristband. She was a local, and more than happy to guide me through the convention booths before I had to run for **SF9**'s session.

An Audience pass secured me a spot in the crowd to watch **SF9**'s Q&A and Games sessions, in addition to a view of their interactions with the Hi-Touch pass recipients. As a being of small stature, little could be seen behind the rows of phones and signs. On tiptoes (and with occasional bunny jumps), I caught sight of the members' heads from time to time. This became a rather unfortunate case during the Games session (ie. impromptu dance time), as the only unblocked view I managed to capture with strained calves was from the waist up.

I enjoyed this experience nonetheless. It was fun and most definitely engaging, even if I hadn't been a part of the Hi-Touch crowd. Conversations were also exchanged with those nearby and friendships were established quickly. An astounding number of attendees had decided to participate without the company of friends. Personally, I didn't feel as if this mattered at all, for not all friends would share the same musical interests nor Artist Engagement passes anyway.

The convention booths located on the lower level of the Los Angeles Convention Centre was an extraordinary collection of Korean food-, beauty-, fashion-, pop culture-related stands. Many even offered free samples and goody bags with the mere prompt of a social media button. Lineups coiled around the booths where K-Pop artists were anticipated to reveal themselves, so extra care was taken to avoid such areas.

By chance though, we happened to be leisurely waltzing about when **Kevin Woo**, member of K-Pop group **U-KISS** and fixed MC of After School Club, made his grand entrance at the Star Square booth. The crowds were smaller at this time of the day, but **ASTRO**, **VIXX**, and **Wanna One** were bombarded at the Toyota and Innisfree booths.

The KCON Food Street found outside of the convention centre operated throughout the weekend in a night market fashion. Bubble tea (or “boba” in the United States), takoyaki, egg waffles, grilled seafood, and other popular street snacks could be found being retailed at standard night market prices.

I made a beeline for Boba Bear’s Mason Jar Milk Tea, but was utterly disappointed when a typical plastic cup was handed to me after the relinquishing of five dollars. My shock was met with the response that mason jars could not be offered on the basis of KCON’s “no glass” policy. The contents of the cup itself were honestly very average.

Traditional Korean snacks weren’t exactly economic either. Soondae, ddeokbokki, and kimbap were spotted selling for \$10 each. We settled on splitting the kimbap and consuming six to seven rolls each.

Since the stout middle-aged lady refused to approve my re-admission onto convention grounds solely based on my possession of a Sharpie, I headed elsewhere instead.

Little Tokyo proved to be a challenge for the average commuter. My overall lack of understanding of the Tap card fare deduction also worked against my favour. I found myself awkwardly standing off to the side and counting coins upon being met with a “Fare card too low” message on the Tap machine.

I arrived at 1st Street and Judge John Aiso Street – *what a name huh?* – within good time. Little Tokyo was an eclectic, hip neighbourhood that was bustling with tourists, both local and foreign. Nisei Week had just begun on the 19th, so I just so happened to find myself amidst a lively street festival.

The atmosphere was wonderful, albeit congested. Vendors had taken to setting up merchandise tables within the plazas of Little Tokyo for the festival, while live music played in the rotunda.

Lunch had been had not too long ago, so I weaved around the bakery stall and restaurants without casting much of a glance in their direction. An oddly-placed Tony Moly caught my attention instead. A life-sized Seo Kang Jun standee invited into the air-conditioned space; the pricey merchandise lining the beauty store’s shelves soon encouraged my exit though.

My days of obsessing over anime and cosplay are long gone, but my fondness for all things soft and adorable shall never wane. Next to the purikura booths was a table lined with Pickles the Frog merchandise.

Several years back, when annual trips to Seattle from Vancouver were still somewhat consistent, I obtained my first Pickles from a Sanrio retail store in Bellevue Square. Nakajima products are generally

arduous to find in North America, so an entire assortment of familiar-looking, vivid-toned frogs drew me in immediately. I ultimately couldn't help but pick up a few items before continuing on my way.

The mercury surged as the sun eased across the sky. I contemplated turning back, until pinkberry's green-blue storefront caught my eye. Past my beloved froyo shop was what seemed to be another festival. Upon closer inspection, it was merely a series of information booths about studying abroad. A water truck was spotted at the perimeter of this info-gathering event, so I took to re-hydrating before enduring the weather for a tad longer.

From prior research, I knew that there was a tea house located in the vicinity. However, I could not recall its name. Somehow arriving at 2nd Street and San Pedro, I encountered a café/dessert parlour by the name of Midori Matcha. It was more modern than the shop I had researched before; croissants, cold beverages, and soft serve ice cream were on offer at this cozy little shop.

I requested a Houjicha and Matcha Swirl Soft Serve in a cup, for nothing beats the heat like ice cream. Both flavours were surprisingly distinct – utterly unlike tea-infused desserts from back home. The formula was smooth and silky with boundless depth of flavour: houjicha was smoky, while matcha sweet and grassy. The basic requirement of resisting dissolution was also met and exceeded.

Other items on the menu were not quite as economic as the soft serve – matcha tins were well over ten dollars and Matcha Lattes at \$6 USD. The Matcha Pistachio spread was of great interest to me, though my shoulders cried against the impulse in agony.

Midori's back door connected to more shops and even greater adventures, but fatigue held me down and sensibility reminded me that energy should be reserved for the Day 1 Concert.

A visit to the single stall bathroom was made. Cleanliness was not in the cards, despite the sophisticated appearance of the shop itself. The password-locked stall was dim with yellow-tinted lights and reeked of cigarette smoke.

I consulted Google Maps for my return route: heading south to 5th Street and San Pedro would enable me a trip back to the DTLA without the need to transfer. This seemed straightforward enough, so I gathered my things and set off.

Lofty commercial buildings provided shade for the walk. "This is a nice, quaint district." I thought, "I'd definitely like to explore further on a future trip." The area was almost reminiscent of Yonge and Finch's newer parts, or so I thought until I reached 3rd Street and San Pedro.

The north and south sides of the intersection differed vastly: where one side was filled with newly-paved sidewalks, tall structures, and luscious shrubbery, the opposing end was dreary and dirty. I persisted forward, as this was the route that Google Maps had provided, but jitteriness and fear welled up inside me with each step.

At first, I thought nothing of the abandoned car repair shop and its dusty, tan-hued surroundings. I even dismissed the weird glances I received from the man in front of me holstering a garbage bag over his shoulder. After passing 4th Street and San Pedro, I knew I had made a terrible mistake.

My eyes bulged at the sight of tents on the sidewalk. Lanky, dark-skinned beings stood hunched around me, appearing to be looking off in the far distance.



Figure 7 - 5th Street and San Pedro (a)

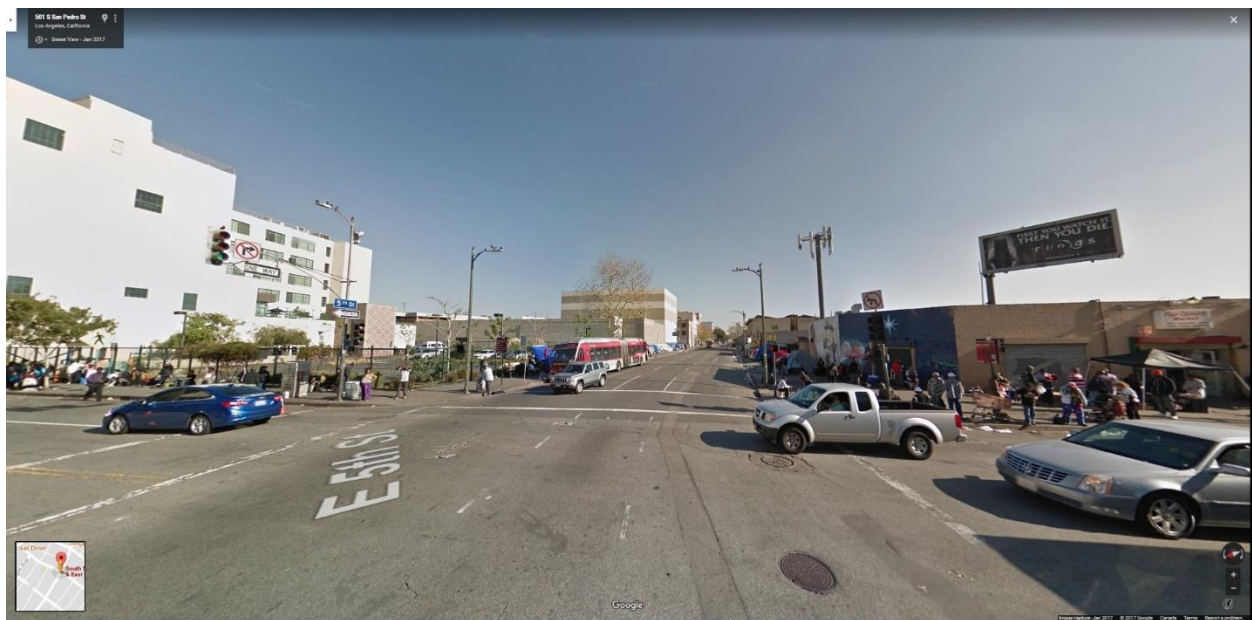


Figure 8 - 5th Street and San Pedro (b)

I had hoped that the worrisome area would end as I reached the bus stop. To my utter tremor and dismay, the number of tents multiplied as I continued southbound. The tents extended outwards, almost consuming the entirety of the unlevel sidewalk.

When I had finally reached 5th Street and San Pedro, my alertness radar shot off the chart. Not a single corner of the intersection was free from them. To my right was an endless series of tents and zombie-like citizens; to my left were more of these freakish beings huddled in a heap. In the distance, a lady lay sprawled out the sidewalk, as if making others aware that this garbage-laden strip of government-owned pavement was her territory.



Figure 9 - 5th Street and San Pedro (c)



Figure 10 - 5th Street and San Pedro (d)

On the northeast corner of the intersection was my bus. The pedestrian signal showed the outline of a large red hand, though there was not a single car passing by the intersection.



Figure 11 - 5th Street and San Pedro (e)

“I feel very very unsafe right now.” were the only words that ran through my mind as I dashed across the street, checking left and right for any zealous vehicles.

Huffing and puffing, I reached the doors of the bus without a single soul-less body on my tail. The bus driver never appeared more angelic to me for not pulling away at the sight of me panting across the street. I shall be forever grateful to him for not only allowing me to board with insufficient funds on my Tap card, but also answering to my transit-related concerns.

*Remember folks: **San Pedro between 3rd and 5th Streets should be avoided AT ALL COSTS.***

Once again, I’m uncertain of how I successfully made my return to civilization. The experience was beyond traumatizing. It wasn’t until much after a revitalizing shower and change of clothes that the ordeal sank in.

I set off for the Day 1 Concert around 6:20 PM. It was significantly later than I would have liked, as the tight schedule contributed extra pressure on finding the correct subway platform and also prevented me from obtaining food before joining the ridiculous lineup for concert entry.

My favourite fangirl offered me a fruit scone from her day’s travels, which I gratefully scoffed down before entering the bag check room. Backpacks were scanned with scrutiny through bulky machinery deserving of airport security status. Water bottles were demanded to be tossed, and all LED fanboards were inspected.

While I did not carry any of my fanboards for the first night, I asked the guard in preparation for the second night. He responded that all signs would be allowed should not exceed the size limit of 11 in x 17 in. This brought about intense worry, since my largest sign measured 11 in x 20 in. My backpack also just barely made the cut for size restriction.

The group had secured a spot towards the front of the lineup, but after spending eons to pass through security, we did not find ourselves inside the venue until well after 7:20 PM. I wasn't too content with missing majority of the Concert Pre-Show – popular YouTubers such as JuNCurryAhn, KRNFX, and Lydia Paek were part of the lineup – though I was glad to be one of the luckier few that managed to obtain her seat prior to the start of the official concert.

Day 1's Concert was delayed significantly – no surprise, given the extensive security check and inadequate staffing. Lights only began to dim closer to 8:00 PM, approximately twenty-five to thirty minutes after the intended start time.

The show commenced with introductions of the performing artists; all groups would line up along the perimeter of the stage, wave at the crowds, and then duck back into the waiting area until their turn to perform. A supposed 360-degree stage had been implemented for this year's KCON LA, promising that views would be better than the S-shaped formation of the previous year. Platinum/Diamond ticket holders had access to a designated GA pit, while P1 GA would consume the area around them. P2 GA were situated at the other end of the stage. I deemed these two sides the "front stage" and "back stage" respectively.

The rundown was as follows, exempt from special MC and games segments:

Table 1 - KCON LA Day 1 Concert Rundown

	Artist(s)	Song/Act Performed	Front Stage	Back Stage
1	Leo (VIXX), Minah (Girls' Day)	Piano Performance	X	
2	All	Artist Introduction	X	X
3	SF9	<i>Fanfare</i> (팡파레)	X	
		<i>Jungle Game</i>		X
		<i>Easy Love</i> (쉽다)	X	
4	Cosmic Girls/WJSN	<i>HAPPY</i>	X	
		<i>I Wish</i> (너에게 닿기를)	X; 2 nd half	X; 1 st half
		<i>Secret</i> (비밀이야)	X; 1 st half	X; 2 nd half
5	Seventeen (Subunits)	Misc. Subunit Performances	X	X
6	Girls' Day	<i>I'll be Yours</i>	X	
		<i>Something</i>	N/A	N/A
		<i>Ring My Bell</i>	N/A	N/A
7	Cosmic Girls/WJSN	<i>I Need You</i> (BTS Cover)	X	
	SF9	<i>Sorry Sorry</i> (Super Junior Cover)	X	
	WJSN + SF9	<i>Sorry Sorry</i> (Super Junior Cover)	X	
8	Super Junior – D&E	<i>Growing Pains</i> (너는 나만큼)	X	
		N/A	N/A	N/A
		N/A	N/A	N/A
		<i>Oppa Oppa</i> (땀다 오빠)	X	X
9	VIXX	<i>Shangri-La</i> (도원경/桃源境)	X	
		<i>Black Out</i>		X
		<i>Fantasy</i>	X	
10	Seventeen	<i>Don't Wanna Cry</i> (울고 싶지 않)	X	
		N/A	N/A	N/A
		N/A	N/A	N/A
		<i>Very Nice</i> (아주 Nice)		X
11	All	Artist Closing	X	X

Note: N/A denotes uncertainties

Speaking candidly, I was only familiar with a few of the groups performing on the first night, and only specific songs at that.

SF9 was the only group on the lineup that I had a strong enough desire to watch live; **VIXX**, while I knew enough songs from, was an artist that I had already had the opportunity of meeting at Toronto K-Pop Con 2016. Personally, I found that utilizing **SF9** as an opening act was extremely rude of Mnet. **SF9** is no longer a rookie group and therefore deserve a more fitting spot on the schedule. Moreover, they

already gained experience performing at other overseas events and similar conventions (KCON NY). The crowds were cold during their song set, and reasonably so as the first night's concert had barely begun. I felt that their performances received poor feedback as a result of their premature positioning. Their professionalism was perceived, nonetheless. Witnessing such highly synchronized and laborious choreography was a fantastic sight – the nonet deserved more of the evening's spotlight in my opinion.

VIXX's *Shangri-La* and **Seventeen's** *Very Nice* were the only other two tunes that had me nodding. The former was sleek and edgy, while the latter was cheerful and fun. Minah's high note in *I'll Be Yours* is also not to be taken lightly. I suppose I was slightly disappointed when **Super Junior – D&E** did not perform *Still You* (아직도 난), as it was a song that I associated deeply with feelings of comfort and reassurance.

My seat in PR17 enabled me a clear picture of all the evening's performances, regardless of whether I was staring at the artists' backs or their fingernail-sized heads. It also provided me with a view of my seat for the following night and granted a "trial run" of the concert check-in experience.

With this newly-acquired knowledge, I felt great and ready to take on the next day, especially seeing as it entailed GOT7!

KCON LA 2017 – DAY 3 (Sunday)

Evidently (and utterly unfortunately), my mind was not on the same page as my body. While I insisted on ensuring myself a good night's rest in preparation for a day filled with concert activities, my body opted to operate at its own pace. Two hours of turbulent slumber later, I awoke to a horrid headache and nauseating stomachache. Things were not looking too pleasant.

I immediately recalled the Kimbap I had consumed earlier in the day, along with the fruit scone from Alchemy my favourite fangirl had so graciously provided me with. Neither had seemed unhygienic nor powerful enough to disrupt my sleep patterns, yet I was wide awake against my very will.

As soon as the clock struck 5 AM, I lethargically dragged myself to order something that would appease the queasiness. *"GOT7 awaits me!!"* An angry voice echoed within me. *"Being well is not an option. I shall pull through. I must."*

Congee soon arrived with a pitcher of warm soy milk in accompaniment. An odd selection of toppings also made an appearance: Chinese pork floss, pickled pink ginger, kimchi, Korean yellow radish, and Japanese umeboshi stared me in the face.

While chicken noodle soup may be the go-to sick food of many Canadians, I was raised off of lightly salted congee. The unassuming soft rice porridge worked miracles, for I fell into a peaceful state of unconsciousness for at least one hour after its consumption. Three hours of hibernation is undoubtedly inadequate for taking on a packed schedule, but it remained a more favourable situation than no sleep at all.

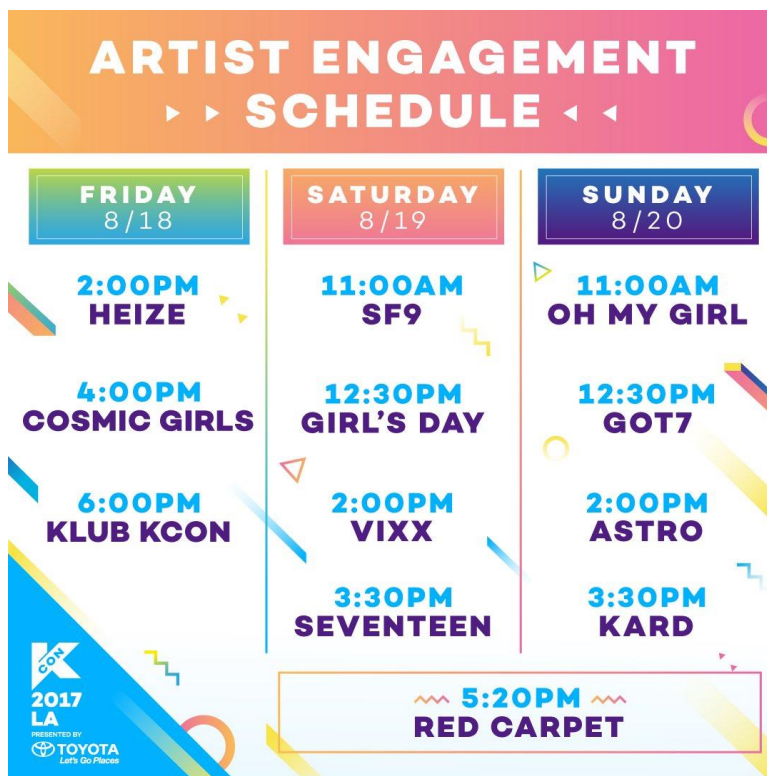


Figure 12 - KCON LA 2017 Artist Engagement Schedule

As shown in *Figure 12*, Day 3 of the Convention comprised of back-to-back Artist Engagements for **GOT7**, **ASTRO**, and Red Carpet. Artist Engagement sessions, as noted in previous sections, comprised of Hi-Touch and Audience. While Hi-Touch pass holders were provided a separate waiting area and lineup for earlier access to Concourse Hall, Audience pass holders were simply thrown into a general lineup. The number of Hi-Touch passes was significantly less than that of Audience, and reasonably so. Groups of greater popularity, though, seemed to have a greater ratio of Audience to Hi-Touch passes.

The Audience area operated similarly to General Admission sections in concert venues: pass holders queued anywhere between thirty minutes to two hours before the listed start time to obtain the most ideal spot possible. **GOT7**'s immense popularity resonated through the first floor of the convention centre, for the Audience lineup was on par with overhyped fusion food debuts in the downtown core.

Not displayed in *Figure 12* were Star Square and surprise artist appearances at designated convention booths. In the case where one was a diehard fan of **Wanna One** yet also had an **ASTRO** Artist Engagement pass in possession, he or she would need to determine which event ranked higher in priority, then proceed to line up as one's heart dictated.

My first event of the day was **GOT7**'s Artist Engagement. The elimination of **Wanna One** Artist Engagements had resulted in a sudden influx of interest in the multilingual veteran group, though I hadn't exactly realized this until encountering the mob of fangirls camped outside the meeting grounds at 10:30 AM. Some had purchased their Audience passes for \$20-\$50 USD; even some members of the lucky Hi-Touch group had relinquished \$200 or more to obtain their exclusive pass. I had managed to obtain my own without much hassle, but apparently this was not the norm.

The clock neared noon as attendees of the previous Artist Engagement session vacated the hall. Shortly afterwards, the Hi-Touch pass holders were invited inside, just after the Platinum and Diamond ticket holders had a chance to grab their front row spot. Many of us were impassioned supporters of small stature, meaning that capturing a shot of our favourite idols wasn't the easiest task to accomplish. It was very fortunate that the two girls in front of me were kind enough to allocate a spot in between their shoulders for my camera to peek through. Friendly actions of this sort had been unthinkable in the Audience section.

With a second row-view secured for the entirety of the session, I managed to capture quite a selection of crisp shots from behind the burly media crew and Go Pro-equipped KCON staff members.

Leading up to the event, music videos played in a loop on the screens adjacent to the stage. The crowd cheered for NCT 127 and Wanna One, though the largest reactions was in response to *Never Ever*. The atmosphere was nothing short of amazing: determined **IGOT7s** effortlessly completed the fanchant in perfect harmony.

Kevin Woo of **U-KISS** first made his appearance as the MC of the Artist Engagement session. **GOT7** then made their grand appearance and took turns introducing themselves. A brief Q&A session – or a short interview – took place. This was then immediately succeeded by a Games segment, which entailed each member to roll a large inflatable dice and act according to the number on which it landed.

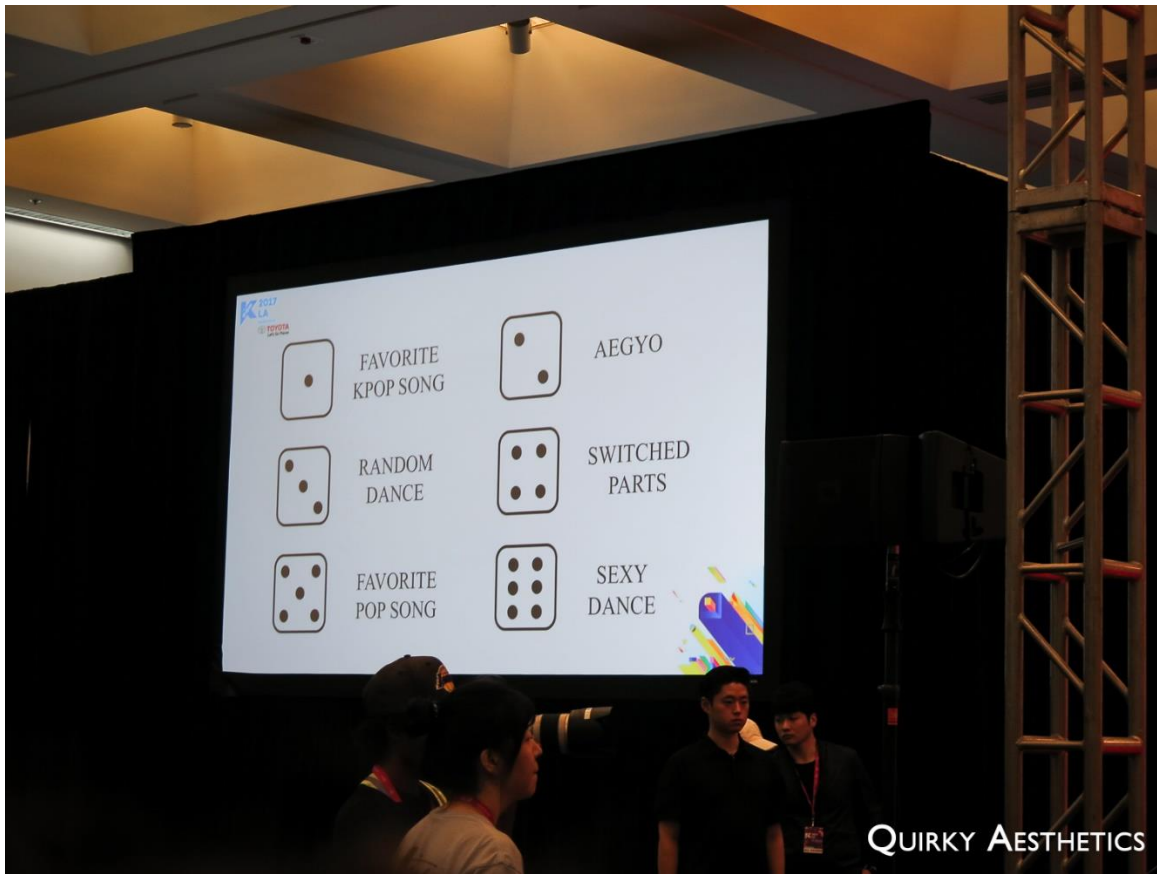


Figure 13 - Artist Engagment Games Segment Legend

Each member took a turn at rolling the dice and attempting the challenge placed before them. Mark and Bambam landed on #2 Aegyo, while JB did a smooth jig upon landing on #3. Youngjae's imitation of Bambam's rap in *Never Ever* deserved much applause, as did Jackson's efforts to encourage the crowd to sing along to *Stop Stop It*.

Jinyoung is my favourite member of the group, if this space hadn't made readers aware already, and I subconsciously found myself chanting "*Six, six!!*" when his turn arrived. My not-so-silent prayers were answered, and the next thing I knew, he tossed his embarrassment aside for a squeal-worthy take on Rihanna's *Work*. My insides became a confused mix of bewilderment and elation; I was cheering so loudly the girls next to me would have gone deaf had they not been in an equally tumultuous state.

Members holding a Hi-Touch pass was then instructed to form a line in preparation for the event. I staggered into the queue while gripping my **넝그탱그** headband, willing it to remain steady until I reached the stage.

Oddly enough, the butterflies in my stomach from the previous night had vanished entirely at the moment I ascended the mini staircase. Meeting the seven members of my favourite K-Pop group again was fun albeit a little nerve-wracking. A part of me honestly found it comfortable and familiar at the same time.

My personal recount of the Hi-Touch is as follows:

- Bambam; "Say hi to Shabu Shabu!" while grabbing his hand with both of my own. This was met with no response. (I might add: his new silver hair looks *phenomenal*.)
- Yugyeom; I did not say anything and just hi-fived him.
- Jinyoung; "건강 하세요 제발" hands (roughly translates to "Be healthy, please") while clasping his hand with my two hands. This was met with no response from what I can recall, though footage captured by members of the Audience reveal that he actually nodded in my direction. Whether he understood my poor pronunciation is another story altogether though.
- Youngjae; I mistakenly said "목소리 좋다" instead of "목소리 최고" while clasping his hand with my two hands. Again, there was no response. He merely continued smiling.
- JB; "Best leader Im Jaebum" while clasping his hand with my two hands. Similarly, there was no response.
- Mark: "Welcome Home!" followed by a brisk hi-five
- Jackson: "唔好再瘦啦！要身體健康" (roughly translates to: "Don't become any skinnier! Be healthy!") in Cantonese), while clasping his hand with my two hands. He appeared beyond haggard and, again, gave me no response or return of expression. To me, he looked exhausted, undernourished, and much too thin for someone of his physique.

One could say that I was utterly disappointed by the lack of response I received from the members, but it did also feel as if they were in a slight daze themselves. I did not regret a millisecond of the interactions though – **GOT7** is my ultimate bias group and I was thankful that I hadn't forgotten the phrases I carefully considered beforehand, regardless of whether it made it into their ears or not.

With the conclusion of the Hi-Touch session, the session concluded with a group selfie (which KCON has yet to publish for our pleasurable viewing at the time of this writing).

Side: A girl holding a "Wang" sign took extreme measures to make it into the photo, going as far to yank my shoulder back and attempt to wedge herself in between me and the girl in front. "*My friend saved this spot for me!*" she declared in a thick Chinese accent. Not a single soul turned in her direction to validate this statement. I merely winced that she had invaded my bubble and scoffed at her tall tale. *Sorry, but it's First Come First Serve in North America.*

As soon as I made my departure from the **GOT7** Artist Engagement, I immediately found myself lining up to attend **ASTRO's** session. I had retained an Audience pass for Fantagio's only male idol group and took to joining the general lineup for a glimpse of the six members.

Those that hadn't been occupied with the previous Artist Engagement session were already spotted squatting in the general waiting area. Much to my dismay, I was already at the back of line.

By the time I re-entered the premises, **ASTRO** had already made their way onto the stage. A sea of cocked heads, smartphones on selfie sticks, and fanboards blocked my view entirely. Even the adjacent screens were camouflaged from view.

I stood on tip toes for the bulk of the games session, but could put up with the crowds no more by the time Hi-Touch rolled around. Moonbin and Rocky's freestyle dances were entirely hidden from my position in the Audience viewing area.

My departure from Concourse Hall was followed by more lining up – this time for Red Carpet.

With new friends in accompaniment, I joined the lineup once again. Staff members shifted us up and down the corridor several times before finally deciding to split us up into three lines.

Red Carpet was, hands down, the most excruciating event of the day. As if the previous two waiting sessions hadn't been enough, Red Carpet was a prolonged two hours. Mid-shift, I had sensed the attendee behind me try to cut the line. I managed to block his attack, but ultimately suffered major carpet burn from the exposed section on my jeans.

There was no warning as to when we would be permitted inside, so we – my new acquaintances and I – took turns keeping our place in the line while we swapped for restroom runs.

The interior of Concourse Hall was quite well-ventilated – chilly even. However, this changed promptly when sandwiched between a multitude of bodies. Packed as tightly as a can of sardines, I didn't think the crowd could compact itself any further until **Wanna One** was announced as the first group to appear. A sudden wave from behind pushed us forward, smothering tiny beings such as myself against other similar parties. Strands of hair were entangled, backpacks were squished, and Tap cards were knocked off. Mayhem had arisen, and the only thing I could do was protect my delicate fanboards from sustaining damage while being buried in the chaos.

Needless to say, I couldn't even spot the tops of **Wanna One's** heads. Phones and fans blocked my view, as did the presence of media crews and loftier entities. A select few opted to vacate the premises with the rookie group's departure, though had minimal luck.

While I tried to stand my ground without inconveniencing those before me, I was ultimately shoved further and further away from my original standing position over the course of artist introductions. Fansites, and their strategically concealed DSLRs, remained until the conclusion of the event before roughly elbowing their way out, almost smashing my fanboards in the process.

Of all the events of the day, Red Carpet is the one I would willingly sit out of if given a second chance. In addition to possessing the longest wait time, it proved to be the stuffiest and most uncomfortable crowd to participate in.

We rushed to the Day 2 Concert lineup after catching our breaths. I feared that the disorganization from the previous day would re-surface, resulting in incredulous wait times on top of meticulous bag inspections. To my utter disbelief, neither my backpack nor substantial LED fanboards caused me much delay. The staff for the second night were efficient and much friendlier than the first. I was even able to find an outlet for last-minute charging before the Pre-Show.

Dinner was a greasy, heavily-salted pretzel from one of the Staples Centre food vendors. (Cheers to a new friend for obtaining this for me as I kept watch over my dying electronics. *Haha.*)

The Day 2 Concert assumed a similar format to Day 1; the exception was that my P1 seats in Section 119 were *tremendously* closer than PR17. Little had I known that there was a cutout in the section five seats to my left. This happened to be *precisely* the corridor through which the artists entered and departed the stadium. *A fortunate coincidence*, if I do say so myself.

The rundown was as follows, exempt from special MC and games segments:

Table 2 – KCON LA Day 2 Concert Rundown

	Artist(s)	Song/Act Performed	Front Stage	Back Stage
1	All	Artist Introduction	X	X
2	KARD	<i>Oh NaNa</i>	X	
		<i>Don't Recall</i>	N/A	N/A
		<i>N/A</i>	X	X
3	Oh My Girl	<i>Coloring Book</i> (컬러링북)	X	
		<i>CLOSER</i>		X
4	Heize	<i>Don't know you</i> (널 너무 모르고)	X	
		<i>Star</i> (저별)		X
5	Kim Tae Woo x ASTRO	Collaboration Stage(s)	X	X
6	Kim Tae Woo	<i>Following</i> (따라가)	X	
		<i>Love Rain</i> (사랑비)		X
7	Wanna One	<i>Energetic</i> (에너제틱)	X	
		<i>Burn It Up</i> (활활)		X
8	JJ Project	<i>Tomorrow, Today</i> (내일, 오늘)	X	
9	Wanna One	<i>Never</i>	X	
		<i>Pick Me</i> (나야 나)	X	
10	ASTRO	<i>Breathless</i> (숨가빠)		X
		<i>Polaris</i> (북극성)	X	X
		<i>Baby</i>		X
11	NCT 127	<i>Firetruck</i> (소방차)	X	
		<i>無限的我</i> (무한적아; <i>Limitless</i>)		X
		<i>Cherry Bomb</i>	X	
12	GOT7	<i>Never Ever</i>	X	X
		<i>Everyday</i> (매일)	X	X
		<i>Hard Carry</i> (하드캐리)		X
13	All	Artist Closing		

Note: N/A denotes uncertainties

Seat selection aside, the Day 2 Concert was undeniably the better night of the two. While performances from the first night weren't exactly lacking, I personally found more enjoyment in participating in the second night. The set consisted of popular tracks I had either heard once before or tunes that repeatedly made it into my driving playlist.

KARD was a stellar opening act. Their confident aura and smooth delivery caused me to wonder why I hadn't given them a chance prior to KCON. While they were indeed rookies in the K-Pop scene, their stages were powerful and engaging.

Oh My Girl and **Kim Tae Woo** had been added to the KCON Artist Lineup after announcement of ticket sales, though it hadn't been confirmed which night of the concert they would be performing, if at all. As it turned out, both secured spots for two songs each on Day 2. **Oh My Girl's** "*Closer*" was a somewhat recognizable sound to my ears, but nothing noteworthy in my opinion. On a general note, I am relatively incompetent in distinguishing between girl groups, especially if they favour cute concepts.

I'm probably not the only one to declare **Heize** as a total sweetheart. My knowledge regarding the singer did not extend past the fact that she had once collaborated with Dean. Listening to her perform live had me awestruck at her singsong vocals and effortless verbalization. In contrast to her strong image, her songs were mellow and easy to pick up. I also couldn't help but share a soft spot in my heart for her at the sight of her emotion overload towards the boundless ocean of smartphone lights.

Kim Tae Woo's collaboration stage with **ASTRO** was a wonderful way to ease the seasoned vocalist into the array of youngsters. The combined styles of the two was successful in creating a sound that was pleasant to all age groups. It also paved the way for two of **Kim Tae Woo's** well-loved classics. I hadn't heard of the man before KCON, but was thoroughly impressed by the way he easily communicated with the audience in attendance.

Wanna One's appearance caught me by complete surprise, as I hadn't expected them to appear immediately after Markson's hilarious MC segment. The *Energetic* choreography was difficult to see from my seat, though *Burn It Up* on the back stage ensured that I had a crystal clear view of Kang Daniel's defined abdominal muscles (both times!).

When the eleven members disappeared down the stage after performing their two title candidates, I couldn't help but wonder why they had been limited to just two songs. These thoughts were soon dismissed though, since a beat that was all too familiar to me filled the stadium.

My eyes welled with tears.

A touched gasp escaped my lips.

The song I had hoped to hear ever so dearly was playing before me.

It was *Tomorrow, Today*.

The scene was indescribable. Since **JJ Project's** long-awaited comeback, I had been chanting the entire EP for the entire four weeks leading up to KCON LA. The fanchant was engrained in my head, and I wanted nothing more than to hear the song and witness the mirror choreography with my very own eyes. Their performance was extra significant to me in that it was **JJP's** very first time performing the song outside of domestic promotions.

They had chosen KCON LA to be the location of *Tomorrow, Today's* first overseas performance, and I could not have been more moved. Dying whale sounds were heard all around, for I could not have wished for a more blessed evening.

I screamed my lungs out – obviously – and bolted for the cutout in our seat section as JB and Jinyoung swiftly departed the stage. JB passed by our waving hands without so much as a glance and quick nod. Meanwhile, I carried out screaming for Jinyoung while clutching my LED headband in a death grip.

It was at that moment that the unthinkable happened.

Jinyoung, while not looking up, reached upwards to grab my hand, squeezing it briefly before continuing into the changing area.

HE RAISED HIS ARM UP. HE FOUND MY HAND. HE SQUEEZED MY HAND.

IT WAS INTENTIONAL.

Through yelps of excitement, I wondered if he had recalled my presence from the Hi-Touch session, and wanted to reassure me that he would stay healthy. Unlikely that this was the case, but hey, a girl can dream right? *AHHHHHHHHHHHHH*

Wanna One re-entered the stage in school uniforms to continue with *Never* and *Pick Me*. I decided to try my luck again, receiving a touch from Bae Jinyoung and a partial touch from Sungwoon. Neither Ong Seungwoo nor Guanlin made contact with me, but it didn't matter. Daniel, my **Wanna One** bias, gave me a soft hi-five on his way in. The same boy that some fangirls had paid hundreds and thousands to earn a Hi-Touch raffle ticket for had matched palms with me. *How did I get so lucky?!?!?*

At this point I was told off by a girl sitting in the aisle spot and refrained from running over when **ASTRO** made their exit in fear of causing unnecessary conflict.

ASTRO, now no longer a newcomer to the KCON stage, was a group with stable vocals and perfect synchronization. Each song displayed their growth and increased professionalism. Rookies no more, they astounded me with their flawless stages, despite the chipmunk-tuned mics.

Admittedly, I was surprised when they performed *Breathless* as opposed to *Confession*, a more recent release. Nonetheless, *Baby* being performed on the back stage meant that I would be able to witness my favourite title track in the flesh. (Moonbin was so cute in person!)

The happy vibes continued with **NCT 127's** appearance. First was *Fire Truck*, a track I knew and loved all too well, followed by two songs that were less known to me. Their choreography was surprisingly elaborate for hypnotic, typically SM-style creations. I couldn't find myself approving of their outfit selection, but I did catch myself following one member throughout the dance arrangements: Johnny. Almost unrecognizable with jet black hair, the Lipstick Prince Season 2 cast member had me tracing his every move and facial expression on stage. Doyoung was the member I had been accustomed to seeing on screen (being an Inkigayo MC with Jinyoung and Gong Myung's brother on *We Got Married*), yet his cute appearance wasn't adequate in drawing my attention from Johnny. I've since learned to appreciate another group and their distinctive style.

GOT7 – or “GOD7” as I like to call them – closed off the Day 2 Concert as well as KCON LA as a whole. My favourites performed three songs that I hadn't yet had the opportunity to hear live, stealing my heart all over again. It's amazing that no matter the number of times I've watched them in 1080p, they still continue to astound me with each and every live performance. Adorable dorks behind the camera, each member transforms into a star-studded idol upon stepping foot on stage, charisma oozing with each breath. The boys deserved the ahgabong ocean, and so much more.

To say that I love them would be an understatement, as there are always new reasons to fall head over heels for them.

The Artist Closing was a blur for me. I recall Jinyoung not touching my hands when GOT7 left the stage after their song set, neither again when they re-entered for the farewell stage, nor when all artists departed the stadium. (Perhaps he thought I was being excessive and could recognize me?) Youngjae touched my hand once, and Jackson twice. JB made a few attempts to touch outstretched hands on his way out, though did not meet mine.

Wanna One's Bae Jinyoung succeeded in touching most of the fans in the aisle, while Daehwi was only able to sweep my fingertips due to lack of height. Guanlin paid absolutely no attention to any of the attendees. Ong and Minhyun also did their best to satisfy the bottom rows of the section, though failed to meet outstretched limbs at my height. **KARD's** J.seph ensured that not a single hand was left unswatted by jumping up and acknowledging each and every one of us. B.M had fewer issues as his loftiness enabled him to include us in his direct line of sight.

KCON Day 2 was an unforgettable night filled with surprises upon extremely lucky happenings upon more surprises. I wanted to marinate in those moments for a tad longer that evening, however, the excitement and sleep deprivation from the previous day sent me directly into deep, undisturbed slumber. The glory of being noticed by my UB hazily washed over me as I drifted into dreamland.

LA – DAY 4 (Monday)

I awakened to the startle of my alarm – an 8:30 AM timer that I had forgot to pause from the morning prior. Only a mere six hours has passed since the previous evening's extraordinary happenings, yet I felt well-rested and ready to take advantage of my final day in LA.

With a red-eye flight scheduled to depart around 10 PM PST, I anticipated just enough time to breeze through Koreatown once more and grab a bite before checking out. My early awakening had actually been beneficial to the voyaging process, as it allowed freedom for unplanned detours and room for potential commuting mishaps (not that they happened).

A plain croissant and Cold Brew later, I was on my way to 7th Street/Metro Centre.

Office workers dressed in freshly-ironed slacks and tall red heels flooded into the Financial District. It was only then that I came to the realization of time: it was Monday morning after all. The scene was similar to weekdays in Toronto's downtown core, though the vibe I perceived from the West Coast was primmer and slightly more intimidating.

My second time on the Metro platform was met with a mother of two, all clearly tourists like myself, inquiring about whether the train pulling in traversed on the Red Line.

"This is the Purple Line." I confidently replied with a smile. The first car of the train had displayed so, as did the LCD display hovering above. It was odd to think that someone who had barely explored the city had been asked for directions on her day of departure.

Arriving at Wilshire/Western station, I made Madang Plaza my first stop. During evening hours, traffic flows were heavy and shop details had become faint. Daylight allowed for a better view of the shopping centre and its enclosed retail points; it also provided me with sufficient time to locate (and explore) H Mart – a spot I hadn't had enough patience to hunt down on my day of arrival.

The top level consisted of a theatre, several eateries, a bookstore of substantial size and product range. Across a turquoise-hued bridge was Book Monster, an establishment that retailed anything from Korean novels to manhwa to select K-Pop merchandise.

Majority of the GOT7 Just Right USBs could be found, with the exception of Jinyoung (and JB I believe?). Kakao colouring books and exam prep guides were also available.

Half of the second level had been allocated to a fitness centre; the remaining space was consumed by Sul & Beans, SomiSomi, and Bento Bae.

Retreating to the first floor (ground level), I circulated the area again in search of the pedestrian entrance to H Mart. None could be found, so I took to asking one of the taiyaki soft serve shop owners for directions.

As it turned out, one needed to descend the escalator to the basement level to find the “No. 1 Asian-American Supermarket in U.S.A.”.

Quite frankly, this location was smaller than most that I’ve visited in the GTA. While it contained fresh produce, raw meats, a cooked food section, and aisles upon aisles of packaged snacks and instant ramyeon, stock was quite limited. Snacks were found to be extremely pricey, especially taking into consideration the Canadian equivalent after the exchange rate was applied.

I skimmed on non-perishable souvenirs for friends – since who can afford \$3 USD Pocky?! – and settled for snapping photos of Jinyoung’s tea and an adorable cloth monkey instead.

Having already stopped by Daiso and possessing no desires for beard papa’s or Paris Baguette before noon, I decided to stroll aimlessly in the vicinity for something of interest.

Bumsan’s bubble gum pink exterior came into view. The location of the Organic Milk Bar was random: squarely in the middle of a parking lot, causing colour shock to its dull, drab surroundings.

While I was intrigued, the wacky little shop hadn’t yet opened for the day. It was also nearing lunchtime.

Within a minute of continuing north, I came across California Marketplace. Its exterior, as well as product layout, was reminiscent of grocery franchises such as T&T on No. 3.

The east entrance of the supermarket led directly into a covered parking lot. With no visible method of exiting onto the street, I climbed the escalator to the second floor.

Awaiting me were two Korean beauty shops, a plethora of empty, unoccupied spaces for rent, and home décor/café/beauty shop hybrid.

An exposed third floor could be reached by either climbing baby teal-coloured stairs or ascending another escalator. The scene that welcomed me was a sight to behold: patio umbrellas, shrubbery, and boxy wooden seating could be at all corners of the space. To one side was a café, and beside it a shiny new playground.

Cafe Bora appeared a recent addition to Square Mixx, with congratulatory orchids were placed near the entrance and promotional banners situated throughout each level of the building in abundance.

Serene like Soohyang yet lively like The Cups, the atmosphere contained slight confusion within its calmness. A few older gentlemen were chatting away when I arrived; in front of the cashier were middle-aged ladies happily chirping amongst themselves while deciding on their orders. Two young men worked the cashier with sloth-like speed, while a female member of staff was spotted crafting desserts in the open preparation area. An ahjussi donning slicked hair and a fitted navy blazer was overseeing the operations occurring in his business (presumably) in their entirety.

Muted wooden elements were the primary source of furnishings, while bold blotches of warm violet attributed the setting its name. Seating ranged from booths with round cushions to benches akin to picnic tables. The afternoon sun was diffused by airy, beige curtains, transforming harsh UV rays to a soft orange glow in which customers could enjoy their iced treats in peace.

The menu was compact and revealed emphasis on mini tiramisu pots and purple yam shaved ice. Each of the dessert offerings was inclusive of intricate details and appealing presentation.

Admittedly, they were on the pricier side given its portion size. A solo traveller seldom has the option of splitting costs, so I decided to try a carbonated beverage to alleviate the warming effects of the California sun.

The young man behind the cashier waited a few minutes before dragging himself over to serve me. I guess “POTENTIAL CUSTOMER” did not radiate from my somewhat disheveled appearance. He furrowed his brows at the menu when I requested a Green Apricot Sparkling Water – noting to himself that it was synonymous with 매실 (aka Sour Plum).

“We’ll call you when it’s ready...” he muttered as he trailed off in the direction of the other staff members.

“But how can you call me if you didn’t provide an order number nor take my name?” I wondered.

It was later discovered that his definition of “calling” involved peeking over the bar area, lifting my drink in the air, and flatly announcing, “Your drink.”

Suffice to say, I expected more amiable service and a higher degree of professionalism from an establishment of such exquisite décor. In the territory was not a single party that did not speak standard Korean, and as the odd one out, I truly felt the feelings of exclusion.

Four dollars was an appropriate price tag to place on the drink – it was refreshing, carbonated, and just sweet enough for my liking. A few sips in though, I realized it bore a strong resemblance to Yuzu and brought it to the attention of the front line staff.

They informed me that it was indeed Green Apricot (Sour Plum), to which I responded in surprise. As I was about to settle on the beverage and take my leave, the man of manager-like authority stepped in and asked it to be remade.

Honestly, I could feel the bitter glares in my direction already.

The re-made version was intensely sweet, but still very similar to the original in terms of taste. Towards the bottom of the beverage were crunchy blossom bits – something I had initially perceived to be slivers of yuzu peel.

I took a few moments to appreciate the soft plastic sleeve and its Space Violet-like tone before moving on to the next destination.

The original anticipation for Los Angeles' Koreatown varied not too vastly from that of our own – you know, that tiny stretch between Christie and Bathurst? (Don't get me wrong, I love it nonetheless.)

Imagine my surprise at discovering the expansiveness – not to mention *grandeur* - of California's only from the brief trek between Western and Normandie. Regardless of whether I strayed north or south from the major streets, I continued to encounter endless strips of independent shops, restaurants, plazas, and more.

Copious commercial buildings lined Wilshire Blvd, with the most prominent one being that of The Korea Times. The curved buildings loomed above me, leaving me to gaze in awe at the size difference between the lush shrubbery and series of fountains centred between them.

Weather was wonderful and the path free was of society's outcasts. The only downsides were the steep surges in temperature and lack of cloud cover causing the walk to be more draining than relaxing.

I debuted a sticky forehead upon finally arriving at the doors of CoCo Curry.

Officially referred to as "Curry House CoCo Ichibanya", the chain of Japanese curry restaurants has locations throughout Asia as well as several in California and Hawaii. The idea of journeying to the spot for lunch had been proposed by yours truly after a memory jog from a grueling hunt for bubble tea in Taipei a few years back.

While en route, I had called (long distance, mind you) to ensure that there would be seating available for the entire party amidst the lunch peak. The male that answered the phone could have adhered to a more pleasant tone of voice, though the point was that we would not arrive and need to wait for a table.

Frankly speaking, I could have omitted this step since over half of the restaurant had vacated by the time of our arrival.

CoCo Curry's Koreatown location was a typical casual diner serving up Japanese-style curry plates in a no-frills environment. Cooking fumes were strong, the environment was loud, and laminated menus were placed directly at the table. Choices were plenty, encompassing anything from salads to udon to omurice.

Spice levels could also be customized to one's liking: Regular was the mildest option we were offered (though I believe there is in fact a "Mild" on the menu), while Level 10 was the most extreme. Although I don't believe any member of our party took to adjusting the rice and sauce portions, the menu clearly stated the associated charges (or credits) with each upgrade/downgrade.

The plates appeared much too significant for me to consume in one meal, so I pitched the theory of sharing to my favourite fangirl. She rejected this approach, for she was confident in her consumption capabilities.

In fear of being unable to finish my desired item selection, I almost veered in the direction of the kids' meals and appetizers. However, my heart spoke loud and clear – *Curry Omurice!!* – shattering hesitation in all forms.

As the single member in desperate need of vacating the premises in a timely manner, I requested placing my order sooner than the others. The waitress, though, made no attempts to quicken the processing of orders. Respecting the other members of the party is important, but crucial is arriving at the airport in time for a flight. Thankfully, CoCo was swift in its operations. Our table was lined with the comforting fragrance of sweet roux in under ten minutes.

I salivated at the sight of my Chicken Cutlet Omelet Curry Rice, bathing in its savoury, herby aroma and fluffy omelet casing. It wasn't long before I succumbed to its beckoning.

The first few spoonfuls were phenomenal! The combination of delicate egg, warm rice grains, and mild curry sauce was satisfying and absolutely delicious. The curry sauce itself was none too reflective of Japan's lighter palate, but rather a thicker, more flavourful rendition to suit the tastes of North Americans diners. Chicken katsu pieces decorated the surface of the dish. To my delight, they were crisp without being greasy, and tender without exhibiting signs of dryness.

It would have been nice to see additional preparation efforts being put towards the rice. The norm is to serve omurice with ketchup fried rice, though plain rice was ultimately revealed as a more appropriate choice to combat the boldness of the curry sauce.

In my haste, I hadn't reviewed the downgrade (rice reduction) details as meticulously as I should have, for I was only able to consume half of the dish before admitting defeat. Others around me found themselves in a similar situation; it was as if the fare had instantly settled into one's digestive system, bringing about sluggishness and food coma(s). I could have easily saved the remainder for another meal, but transporting perishable foods on a stifling subway then to the airport did not sound too appealing a task.

Several visits were paid to the bathroom during this occasion, each proving worse than the previous. Firstly, the door to each gender-separated stall was locked. Keys could only be obtained at the reception area should a member of staff be available to find it. Along the perimeter of the ladies' stall was the thickest layer of dust bunnies in existence – more compact than the layers of soy curds found within firm tofu. The toilet handle had detached completely from the apparatus and could only operate by forceful rotation. Two paper towel dispensers were located on either side of the sink and mirror, though its levers were partially dysfunctional. Unpleasant odours escaped the garbage bin, and more dust surrounded the sink and its dispenser of commercial pink soap.

Truth be told: CoCo's bathroom was only a smidgen more favourable than the 7 Eleven at Donlands and O'Connor. And that's saying quite a bit.

I relinquished my fifteen dollars and zoomed back to Downtown LA in hopes of capturing a few more shots.

A nearby bakery by the name of 85 Degrees had caught my attention for its close proximity to my place of residence. With a little under fifteen minutes to spare, I detoured to its sleek storefront, only to find a weaving lineup forming inside the premises. Mondays were apparently discount coffee days.

A friendly man opened the door for me, but upon seeing the endless lineup, I thanked him and bid him good day.

My Super Shuttle had been booked in advance for 5 PM. The online confirmation noted an approximate arrival window of fifteen minutes, so I grabbed my belongings and took a seat amidst the humidity in anticipation of this ride.

Minutes passed, yet the Super Shuttle was still nowhere in sight. When a familiar-looking blue vehicle pulled in at thirty minutes past, I jumped with joy and darted towards the driver. He, looking rather disgusted, informed me that he was only dropping off passengers, and that I should be searching for the vehicle number corresponding to my booking.

The confirmation mentioned nothing in terms of a vehicle number. Therefore, a long-distance call was prompted to confirm this piece of information. After two broken connections on the company's end, I was re-directed to a customer representative that commenced the conversation with a crude "What is your question?!"

After much prying, she answered that "Your driver is about a mile away."

In all honesty, this meant next to nothing to me as one who seldom uses metric units. Upon requesting additional clarification though, she simply spat, "I don't know how long that is. It could be five minutes. It could be longer. I don't know the traffic intersections in that area...." As she trailed off, I could not believe the level of common sense and degree of severe inefficiency I was hearing over the phone.

With a dying phone battery, I continued to wait. Editing time had been lost. Stress levels had reached new heights. Anxiety was as prominent as ever.

At 5:40 PM, an automated call was received. The recording notified me that my driver would be arriving in approximately eight minutes, and that I should be ready to leave as to not hinder other passengers. *Well I'll be. I truly wonder who was the real hindrance in this equation.*

At 6:00 PM, exactly **ONE WHOLE HOUR** after my specified pickup time, the Super Shuttle pulled in. The driver, a jolly old man, waddled from the seat and heaved my luggage in the back.

At 6:05 PM, we were *finally* headed in the direction of departure.

It wasn't long before we hit the infamous LA congestion, but fortunately there was minimal volume on the highway.

At 7:00 PM, the other passengers on the shuttle had disembarked, leaving me to roll my baggage into the Air Canada with no assistance.

For a self-proclaimed "airport shuttle", Super Shuttle's ridiculous delay was wholly unacceptable. Their lax attitude certainly did not go unnoticed either (no pun intended).

Security procedures were quicker than when departing Toronto, so I managed to salvage a solid hour for souvenir browsing and sustenance acquisition before rushing to the boarding gates.

As expected, the flight was delayed, with the excuse being that the aircraft had yet to be cleaned. When we finally boarded, it was observed that the ancient aircraft hadn't been cleaned at all. The washrooms reeked and the garbage bins were overflowing with nastiness.

A red-eye flight meant unanimous snoring in all parts of the aircraft, so I suppose the status of the facilities mattered the least in this particular flying instance. For our overall wellbeing though, they could have lowered the A/C several notches.

The flight attendants were at least reasonable this time around.

Man, it's good to be back.

Conclusive Findings

Food

A four-day weekend trip - with an effective exploration period of three complete days was insufficient in trying out all that the city had to offer. However, amongst the tried items, majority were fantastic, far exceeding the expectations that had been retained for Los Angeles fare.

It should come as no surprise that the West Coast possesses a broader selection of cuisines, especially in terms of seafood and trendy import creations. Generally speaking, lower associated price tags also prove true in modern eateries.

- Overall consumption levels were low due to a chaotic, convention-bound schedule, so food spendings were minimal. However, it was observed that most items were significantly cheaper than its Toronto counterparts. Portion sizes were quite fair and even the extremely hyped food items (such as Taiyaki Soft Serve) were several notches cheaper than similar spots back home, even with the exchange rate taken into consideration.
Quality was also far better than expected. Most overhyped items in Toronto are merely visually appealing with lacklustre taste and incredulous wait times, causing continuous disappointment. A prime example of this would be the melty gelato from Kekou and despicable Oshizushi from Momo San versus shockingly tasty soft serve from SomiSomi and suprisingly satisfying Chicken Katsu omurice from CoCo Curry.
- Exceptionally friendly customer service was another factor that I had not expected. It was a shocking contrast to the disconcerted attitudes of baristas in the downtown core.
- Assortment and accessibility of food choices within the Financial District of DTLA is extremely limited. During evening hours, many shops had already closed, shifting one's focus to franchises with slow-moving lines - if they remained open at all. For tourists living in the Financial District, it is suggested to purchase several backup meals at H Mart/Koreatown in case of emergency hunger pangs.

Quirky Tip: For tourists living in the Financial District, it is suggested to purchase several backup meals at H Mart/Koreatown in case of emergency hunger pangs.

Public Transit and Traffic

Traffic Congestion

- Los Angeles traffic is horrendous, with a degree of congestion impossible to imagine if not witnessed firsthand. The effects of extreme population density were observed through snail-like speeds on the highway, which ultimately contributed to a travel time of 1.5 hours, and during off-peak hours no less.

Commuter Concerns

- Downtown Toronto is a "pedestrian's world", as drivers and TTC vehicles are careful to stop at intersections where citizens may cross unexpectedly. The opposite theory applies to Los Angeles, where vehicles take predominance of the road and pedestrians, in turn, are commanded to be alert for the sake of maintaining personal safety. A significant number of locals drive at aggressive speeds; at red lights or pauses in traffic, many can also be spotted checking their mobile devices and fidgeting with various applications while behind the wheel.
- The average weekend traveller has little to no access to rental cars, and thus becomes dependent on public transit.

Public Transit: The TAP Card

- In order to utilize the public transit system, commuters must first purchase a Tap card on which transit fares can be loaded. On the LA Metro website, a map of TAP card retailers can easily be determined. Most large transit stops and Metro subway stations will comprise of Tap card machines, but, oddly enough, not a single staff member for providing assistance to new riders.
- TAP card machines enable users to:
 - Purchase a TAP card for a \$1 non-refundable fee
 - Equip a TAP card with a designated amount of transit fares ("Load")
 - Contribute funds to an existing TAP card for further use ("Reload")
 - Purchase 1-Day and/or 30-Day transit passes

It is vital to note that Day Passes are not issued as separate cards or slips of paper like TTC Day Passes/Metropasses or single-use GO Transit tickets. Rather, Day Passes are "loaded" onto TAP cards. In short, purchasing a TAP card is inevitable.

Preferably, TAP cards with loaded Day Passes should adopt a different appearance than those with a loaded fare. This would minimize confusion if both types are purchased on the same day, but intended to be used throughout a designated period.

- Fare gates with TAP card platforms are situated at the front doors of buses in a similar manner to buses in most Canadian municipalities and throughout Metro subway stations. They can also be found in the intermediate areas connecting subways lines. Keep in mind that these fare gates will continue to deduct fares from TAP cards regardless of the last time it was tapped. They do not in a similar manner to PRESTO, as they are incapable of preventing further deductions from double-tapping or unnecessarily tapping at transfer spots if only passing through.

Public Transit: The System in Practice

- Each individual trip on the LA transit system is \$1.75 USD, with no indication of a transfer window if taking multiple routes to one destination.
- Los Angeles' public transit system is quite elaborate when viewed on paper, though in practice, it's inefficient and somewhat confusing to maneuver. The entire system is a comprehensive

network of LA Metro subway lines, bus routes, and DASH routes (Bus Rapid Transit). Some of the LA Metro lines even operate as light rail vehicles in less dense areas - for example, Pico Station on the Blue Line and stations south of it.

- Bus frequencies are high, and many stops are shared between several bus routes. Though, this does not necessarily guarantee swift trips within DTLA. Buses commonly experience delays: Approximate time of arrivals could be found on Google Maps as well as the official LA Metro smartphone app, but these were solely estimates and the actual arrival time(s) were much later than scheduled.
- Transit security was spotted patrolling the 7th Street/Metro Centre station on a regular basis during daytime hours.
Come sundown, subway frequency at Wilshire/Western was reduced to every 20 minutes after 8 PM. Patrolling staff were also fewer than during the day, causing the station to appear eerie and quiet.
- Located in the centre of DTLA at 7th Street and Flower Street, 7th Street/Metro Centre is a stop that joins several subway lines, acting as a primary transfer point. Should one be travelling to Koreatown from 7th Street/Metro Centre, one can either ride the Purple Line to Wilshire/Western station (the terminal stop) or ride the Red Line to Wilshire/Vermont station and walk the remainder of the way west. Alternatively, one could also disembark at Wilshire/Vermont station on the Red Line before it continues northwest to Hollywood and wait for the next Purple Line train.
- Riding and transferring on the Metro subway system is easier said than done, as subway platforms do not indicate direction of travel. Directions (North, East, South, West) are uncommon descriptions for many local transit riders, and most rely on the name of the terminal station to determine whether they are travelling in the desired direction.
- As both the Purple and Red Lines utilize the same tracks until the splitting point at Wilshire/Vermont station, it is important to ensure that one is boarding the correct train if getting on east of Wilshire/Vermont. Before the train nears the platform, one can determine which Line's train is approaching by checking the LCD screen above the platform. The name of the Line can also be confirmed by the display on the front of the first subway car. It should be noted that the LCD screens are not always in operation though, so one may need to listen carefully to the train announcements to ensure proper time of disembark.

Quirky Tip: Purchase a TAP card and default to a using a loaded fare if travelling will be kept at a minimum. Purchase a TAP card and load a 1-Day Pass if usage is anticipated to exceed four individual trips, as the cost of a 1-Day Pass is \$7.00 USD. As 1-Day Passes expire the morning of the following day regardless of purchase time, it is advised to purchase as early in the day as possible to take advantage of its services.

Alternative Methods of Travel

- Uber was a frequently heard name during the weekend stay, amongst both hotel staff and international/local con-goers. Travelling solo, the smartphone-operated service was the least cost-effective choice; traffic congestion in LA also posed a problem for swift travel. However, those that were knowledgeably acquainted with the service and had company to split costs with showed preference towards Uber over public transit.
- SuperShuttle was listed as a reliable method of transit between the Los Angeles International Airport and hotels in DTLA. The service operated by picking up a full load of passengers in a minivan and transporting them one-by-one to the desired destination.

Speaking from personal experience, SuperShuttle services are not recommended at all due to their inability to provide the reliability of punctual and courteous customer service. While it was stated online that reservations would not be necessary when travelling from LAX to Downtown Los Angeles, the extensive wait time and lacklustre response from SuperShuttle staff at the airport proved this claim false.

Travelling from the DTLA area to LAX, an online reservation secured for an inflexible evening flight should have been resulted in a worry-free journey with the shuttle arriving within the fifteen-minute time frame that was stated. Not only was the self-proclaimed “airport shuttle” late to the specified destination by one hour, a sincere apology was not iterated at the eventual time of arrival. Technical customer service representatives answered to frenzied interrogations curtly and with limited degrees of common sense and respect.

Therefore, it is in the traveller(s)’ best interest(s) to avoid SuperShuttle at all costs.

- Rental cars, while pricey, provide travellers with the freedom to explore the city at his or her leisure. One should keep in mind that driving in Los Angeles is not an uncomplicated task, as one-way streets are frequent, pedestrians saunter onto the streets without warning, and aggressive drivers are everywhere.

Quirky Tip: There is no single best method of travelling around Downtown Los Angeles and its surrounding neighbourhoods, but it is advised to avoid renting a car without adequate knowledge of the roads and only look towards SuperShuttle as the very last possible resort.

Environment

Safety

- Districts in Los Angeles vary drastically by neighbourhood. While Financial District and Little Tokyo are modern and pristine, veering slightly from such areas could result in the sudden discovery of homeless communities and laying eyes on severely more primitive sectors. It is unlikely for travellers to familiarize themselves with satellite images of the various districts prior to travel, so the only word of advice would be to be vigilant of one's surroundings and consider

alternate options should Google Maps suggest a particularly worrisome path through 5th and San Pedro.

- Gradual sunsets are nonexistent. The sun casts a harsh glow on the city and the sky dims shortly after with no gradients whatsoever. It is easy to see why many local photographers enjoy shooting portraits during “Golden Hour”, for the soft glow behind one’s silhouette creates a surreal effect. For commuters and drivers though, it’s an urgent signal to head home.
- Street lighting is insufficient in most areas of DTLA and Koreatown.
- Several large structures such as bridges exhibit cracks and weathering, which is an indication of nearing maintenance procedures.



Figure 14 - Underside of Pedestrian Bypass on the West side of 5th St and Flower St

Accessibility

- An aspect of the city, or rather its lack thereof, that made itself prominent throughout the trip was accessibility. As a factor of critical importance to the overall standard of life of citizens of Downtown Los Angeles and its surrounding neighbourhoods, the work done to remove existing barriers lagged far behind that of Ontario, especially since the passing of the AODA. The implementation of tactile plates, auditory pedestrian crossings, and sloped curbs dawdled behind the GTA as well as Metro Vancouver. Linear depressions could sometimes be found at major intersections, while the rare yellow tactile plate would only make an appearance on recently completed roadwork assignments. Some curbs on small side streets and at minor intersections did not exhibit sloping at all. Unsuspecting voyagers, local or foreign, would need

to constantly scan the pavement underneath one's feet to prevent accidental trips from poor government planning.



Figure 15 - Accessible Pedestrian Signal (APS) at SW corner of 5th St and Flower St



Figure 16 - Tactile Plate (Tactile Walking Surface Indicator; TWSI) at SW corner of 6th St and Western Ave



Figure 17 - Textured Curb at SE corner of 3rd St and Hill St

- Ramps were extremely minimal, with only a few situated along the perimeter of the Los Angeles Convention Centre and almost always absent in commuter-dense districts.
- Trip hazards were present on numerous occasions: from the sudden tile jumps on the surrounding streets near Wilshire/Western station to areas amidst construction in the Financial District. Municipal government authorities in the GTA aim to reduce such accessibility barriers on existing sidewalks, and rectify them during rehabilitation projects; majority of the time, any sudden jumps and uneven concrete panels will be coloured with vivid spray paint to improve visibility.

Accommodations

- Potential accommodations for those looking to enjoy a weekend stay in Los Angeles include franchise hotels, locally-operated hotels, motels/hostels, and Airbnb housing. Hotel chains can normally be found in Downtown Los Angeles, while independent hotels are dispersed throughout Koreatown and other suburbs.
- Franchise hotels provide spacious rooms, prompt service, and a pristine, relaxing environment, though they are not necessarily close to public transit routes/LA Metro subway stations or points of interest. Food is also difficult to find – at odd hours especially – if not ordering room service or visiting restaurants in the hotel lobby.
- Establishments in Koreatown are fairly closely intertwined and offer longer operating hours than similar restaurants in the Financial District. Koreatown accommodations can usually be found within close proximity to LA Metro subway stations and at lower rates than international counterparts. However, certain degrees of uncertainty lie within the reputation of these establishments; it is highly advised to check user reviews online before booking.
- Should KCON LA be the primary focus of one's trip, the JW Marriot would grant both convenience and accessibility. It is within walking distance (approximately five minutes) to the convention grounds, eliminating post-concert travelling woes. Guests are also granted with the option of leaving heavy objects such as fanboards in one's room and retrieving it with ease when necessary. There would also be no need to involve oneself with transit passes or the LA public transit system.
- Travellers looking to explore the city in addition to enjoying KCON LA may wish to choose an alternative place of stay to provide better access to the public transit system and broader selection of food sources.

KCON LA

Environment

- KCON LA 2017 provided a platform for fans across the state as well as from abroad to connect and share interests on a very personal level. An astounding number of fans chose to attend the three-day event without the company of family or friends, though this was by no means synonymous with failing to enjoy their stay. The atmosphere was extremely welcoming and flooded with like-minded individuals looking to enjoy themselves while bonding over artist(s) and music genres of interest.
- New faces that were encountered over the weekend were more than open to discussing and exchanging opinions on Korean pop culture-related topics, especially during the seemingly endless waiting periods before Artist Engagement and Red Carpet sessions.
- I met a number of friendly KCON-goers who were more than willing to share their knowledge of transit options to the convention, the most intriguing K-beauty convention booths, and even their portable batteries to charge my aging, dying smartphone.
- Keep in mind that these statements does not necessary hold true for all citizens of Los Angeles outside of KCON LA, as this account is merely based off of personal experience.

Quirky Tip: Wall outlets are not always available for charging electronics, so bringing a heavy duty portable battery is highly recommended.

Convention

- Initially believed to only consist of Artist Engagement sessions, it came as quite a surprise that occurring simultaneously were YouTuber panels, group dance events, surprise artist appearances at designated booths, K-Beauty activities, fan get-togethers, buy/trade/sell sessions, and more.
- For those with a plethora of interests, it is crucial to prioritize the events of interest on the schedule such that they can be experienced during one's stay. Personally speaking, there were a few YouTubers that I would have loved to meet and see live performances of, including the Jrodtwins and Sunny's Channel, however it was impossible to situate myself at the designated venue for the scheduled durations when other events of great interest were also taking place at the same time.
- Most interactions between fans/attendees take place during the Convention, especially those looking to buy, trade, or sell Artist Engagement passes for artists they would prefer more. The convention grounds can quickly transform into a battlefield, so it is important to stop oneself from getting caught up amidst the chaos.
Be prepared that many fans will take drastic measures to secure Hi-Touch and/or Audience passes for their favourite artist, even going as far to purchase one off another attendee at an ungodly amount.
For reference: **GOT7** Hi-Touch passes ranged between \$200-\$500 USD, while winning **Wanna One** Star Square raffle tickets were inflated to a shocking \$1000 USD. These costs can quickly

add up and the total may emerge to far exceed the combined price of Concert and Convention tickets. Refraining from engaging oneself in such stressful activities will lead to a greater amount of enjoyment.

- Wait lines for entry to Artist Engagement and Red Carpet sessions can be grueling and long. While the Los Angeles Convention Centre is sufficiently ventilated and lined with carpeted flooring, take heed to prevent accidentally subjecting oneself to rug burn and contact with foreign objects. (I arrived home with a painful rug burn on an exposed knee and several lengthy bruises on my legs.)

Quirky Tip: Review the Event and Panel schedules in advance and narrow down the one(s) of greatest interest. Artist Engagement schedules are released at a later date, so it is important to plan around them should Hi-Touch and/or Audience passes be received at Check-In. Be careful to avoid entangling oneself in a raging battle for a popular artist's interaction pass.

Food

- KCON LA consisted of two components: Convention activities during the day and two Concerts that took place on the evenings of Saturday and Sunday. All Convention activities took place at the Los Angeles Convention Centre, while the Day 1 and Day 2 Concerts were viewed at the Staples Centre located directly across the former.
- Within the convention, food options were limited to the minimal styles of street food prepared by KCON Food Street vendors and the cafeteria-style fare inside the convention centre. KCON Food Street primarily retailed night market-esque food groups: egg waffles, bubble tea, burgers, etc. The interior of the Los Angeles Convention Centre offered either takoyaki or katsu, neither of which could be defined as a proper source of nutrition though appropriately fell within the category of "street food".
- Sports bars and expensive eateries could be found immediately outside the convention grounds. Their convenient location succeeded in luring in exhausted, famished tourists with ease, but as many were dine-in restaurants with slow service and high gratuity costs, many KCON-goers were in favour of more casual grab-and-go options.
- Given that Pico station (one stop south of 7th Street/Metro Centre on the Blue Line) was within walking distance, one would have expected an abundance of familiar franchises in the area. This was unfortunately not the case, and even when franchises were present, operating hours did not extend into the early evening. Concert-goers were either left hungry or salvaging the remnants of their lunch.
- Previous year(s)' attendees suggested hauling snacks to the convention grounds as "KCON food was pricey". While five-dollar bubble tea did not seem particularly costly, arriving with a prepared stash of sustenance is highly recommended. As opposed to carb-laden snacks and sodium-slathered potato chips, non-perishable meals would be a much more sustainable, and healthier, alternative.

Quirky Tip: Instead of waiting in lengthy lineups for street food at KCON Food Street, bringing non-perishable foods will keep you satisfied and fueled for the hectic convention activities. A quick trip to H-Mart, or any local grocery store, should provide you with hassle-free, healthy meals that require little to no effort to bring and consume while waiting in Artist Engagement and/or Concert admittance lineups. Personally, I am in favour of hard-boiled eggs, onigiri, fruit slices, and lightly salted crackers. If remaining indoors, the air conditioning will be sufficient in retaining the freshness of most food items, in which case cheese and crackers would also be a viable choice.

Concert

- The Day 1 and Day 2 Concerts - officially termed the M Countdown Concert - were undoubtedly the highlight of the three-day event.
- Despite the horrendous ticketing struggle, the results of such efforts were well justified. The entire lineup totalled twelve artists plus two special guests; in addition, renowned YouTube musicians and special MCs also took to the stage during the Pre-Show.
- According to previous year(s)' attendees, the concept of the 360-degree stage was debuted this year. Instead of front-facing performances on an S-shaped stage, the current year's proposal was intended to provide viewers of all ticket tiers with unobstructed views from all angles.
- It can be confirmed that all holders of Regular tickets (P1 to P5) benefitted from this proposal. As P1 to P5 were elevated across the stadium, all attendees could obtain a view of the artists (front or back) in addition to the LED screen above. Crowds in General Admission areas (Diamond, Platinum, and P1/P2 GA), on the other hand, did not obtain the best view of the concert. Artists took turns performing at each end of the rectangular stage, with artists from the Day 1 Concert placing emphasis on the side facing Diamond/Platinum Ticket-holders - the "Front Stage".
- In regards to my personal experience, it is undeniable that luck was on my side when it was discovered that the artists entered/departed the stadium from a corridor cutout in my seated section. Likewise, unexpected appearances down specific aisles also granted audience members additional exposure.
- For personal recounts of the Day 1 and Day 2 Concerts, please refer to the associated blog posts:
 - [DAY 1 Concert Recap](#)
 - DAY 2 Concert Recap

Organization

- KCON USA's belated announcement of the Artist Engagement schedules resulted in strenuous planning difficulties, especially since flight bookings and accommodations were dependent on such information. For international attendees, the organization and determination of transport methods, currency exchange, and international data and roaming plans contributed an incredulous amount of stress.
- The lineup for Sunday's Red Carpet event was highly disorganized and involved staff shifting the line back and forth several times, ultimately splitting the section into three smaller lines. This enabled pesky line-cutters to gain an advantage over the attendees that had patiently sat in silence.

- Some Artist Engagement sessions had begun before all attendees had been permitted into Concourse Hall.
- Staff members were strict to enforce a “no running” policy in Concourse Hall and its waiting area. However, no action had been taken to prevent shoving amongst Audience pass holders, nor to enforce KCON’s “no DSLR” policy.
- The Staples Centre, in which both Day 1 and Day 2 Concerts were held, retained impossibly strict security measures on the first evening, though were inconsistently lenient on the second evening. It was also found to be incredibly disturbing that staff members would scold attendees earnestly asking loud and distracting attendees to refrain from standing/jumping/blocking one’s view, yet take zero action on ensuring that attendees seated further from the stage could enjoy and partake in the show equally.

Value

All aspects taken into consideration, it can be concluded that KCON LA 2017 was a phenomenal and extremely worthwhile experience, on a personal basis anyway.

The Convention granted the rare opportunities to interact with various K-Pop artists through Artist Engagement Sessions, in addition to renowned YouTube beauty gurus, musicians, and comedians through their respective panels and performances. Keen dancers could partake in flash mobs with those of similar interests, while drama-lovers and K-beauty fanatics could indulge in the activities offered by convention booths. Even Convention-only attendees can enjoy themselves thoroughly with the ceaseless count of fun activities.

The Concert lineup was substantial and offered thousands the chance to witness breathtaking performances by Korea’s hottest groups and solo acts. Existing fans can find joy in watching their favourite group(s) perform before their very eyes; the Concert(s) also act as a fantastic portal to learn about groups that were of less interest prior to attending the event. The Concert(s) allow audience members to broaden their listening spectrum, gain exposure to numerous talented artists, and witness boundless charisma and professionalism.

In order to make the most of KCON LA, checking the following criteria is suggested:

- You are interested in aspects of Korean culture such as food and dance
- You enjoy watching Korean dramas/movies
- You listen to Korean pop music (K-Pop) and follow Korean pop culture trends
- You follow and watch YouTube beauty gurus, musicians, and comedians and would be intrigued to see them in person
- You are familiar with at least three groups/solo acts on the Artist Lineup on either day of the Concert; or
- You are open to familiarizing yourself with the artists’ music beforehand and listening to different genres of music
- You are open to making conversation and connecting with like-minded individuals
- You remain open-minded about expectations of the three-day event

If at least one of the above criteria is satisfied, KCON LA would prove to be a worthwhile experience.

Bibliography

- 1) A Day at the Beach! (ADATB). (2016). A Day at the Beach! (ADATB). *KCON 101: Your Ultimate KCON Guide*.
- 2) KCON USA. (2017). KCON USA. *KCON LA - Tickets*.
- 3) KCON USA. (2017). KCON USA. *KCON LA - Schedule*.
- 4) KCON USA. (2017). KCON USA. *KCON LA - Artists*.