

# The Pyongyang subway





Built in 1970s, Pyongyang Metro may soon become the best place for north koreans to escape « fire and the fury like the world has never seen » that promises Donal Trump. It includes only 17 stations on two lines, with a total length of 30 km. In Seoul it is about 300 km. Construction of the metro service began in 1968 and was inaugurated in 1973 by Kim Il Sung, the grandfather of Kim Jong Un.

Before entering the platform, one must purchase a ticket and go through the checkpoint. The fare is cheap, only 5 won, half of a US cent.

You have to validate your ticket at one of these automatic machines. But they did not work the day I visited. Instead, a train attendant checked the tickets by hand.





Like in so many others places, the visits of the Dear Leaders are immortalized by a red billboard telling the date they visited the place.

So you will learn Kim Il Sung used this escalator. You can also find out what he has done in his life, as the North Korean propaganda set up a billboard every time they visited a place.



There are only 2 metro lines, so getting lost is not easy.

Each station is named after the revolution: Comrade, Red Star, Glory, Liberation, Signal Fire, Rehabilitation, Victory, Paradise, Restoration... not named after places though.



Going down the 120 meters takes just few seconds but you feel like being in a movie as the revolutionary music and patriotic songs are played all around from the loudspeakers. Everybody stays at his/her place, no one tries to jump the queue.



The Pyongyang Metro runs an astonishing 360 feet below street level, making it the deepest metro system in the world.



You will walk through huge and long corridors to access the platforms. The corridors can be closed with massive gates that seal the station from the outside world. It is because they are designed to serve as underground shelters in case of a nuclear attack.





The chandeliers in Yonggwang (Glory) Station represent the fireworks over the town after the war victory. The pillars symbolize victory torches bursting into flame.



The metro is a good place to meet North Koreans, you will catch up with a lot of locals during rush hours. Many look very tired, like this woman who sits on the escalator to rest a few seconds, as she is carrying a heavy bag .



The North Koreans have access to the news of the world through the state TV, radios, and newspapers. They can read them in the metro and in the workplaces. The newspapers are not sold in the street. While waiting for the train, people are used to reading the newspaper.

Mosaics in In the backbackground describe the scene: "The Great Leader Kim Il Sung Among Workers."



North Koreans are busy people reading the Rodong Sinmun , the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea. Sometimes, in order to finish end the articles, they would rather miss the train. It is because there is a huge lack of information in the country, therefore, any information, even through the propaganda lens, is appreciated. The content is about Kim Jong Un's activities, domestic news, South Korean news, and international news and sports. No Topless Pin Up in page 3.



Driver in a Dora train which was produced in West Berlin between 1957 and 1965, and withdrawn from service in 1999... but it is still being used in North Korea.

The North Korea government has removed all visible signs of the cars' foreign origins: China and Germany. In the late 90s, the Chinese carriages were replaced with rolling stock imported from Germany. The Germans asked for only a symbolic price for the wagons that would otherwise end in dumps.



The guides would tell you that the trains were made in North Korea, but the reality is: they actually came from Germany in the 90's. But when you ask the guides who did the graffiti on the window, they have no answer. The stations are entirely free of graffiti and are very clean, as everywhere else in Pyongyang.



The subway is run by the Ministry of Interior. The female train attendants monitor the escalators and platforms. They are like soldiers on active duty. They wear black uniforms, and have different ranks.



Since its opening ceremony on September 1973, the Pyongyang Metro has been the subject of continual rumors spread on the internet. Many people think that the North Koreans on the trains are merely actors of the show for the tourists.

The guides got crazy when they were told about this! For once, they did not lie and were right to be angry after the fake western propaganda as they call it.





A giant underground mural depicts Mount Paektu. in the subway.

The sacred mountain, situating on the Korean-Chinese border, is claimed to be the birthplace for Kim Jong Il (Soviet records show that he him was born in Khabarovsk, Russia).



The stations are all dedicated to the glory of the Dear Leaders with frescos, statues and mosaics, like this art piece of Kim Il Sung in Puhung Station. Sometimes you feel more like in a museum than in the metro.



The metro stations display a large collection of artworks, such as murals, mosaics (this one is called Song of a Bumper Crop), carvings and statues.



The murals depict a variety of socialist and ideological scenes, showing happy and smiling people. What a contrast with the faces of the real North Koreans!



Next to the workplace of the train attendant, there is a mural commemorating Korea's independence from Japan in 1945. The trains enter the platform every 10 minutes.



Year after year, I came visit the same place, only to find that the light was getting dimmer and dimmer. It is a way to save energy. Even in places in the underground like here in Puhung station, which means "Revitalization ».



The portraits of the Dear Leaders follow you everywhere, even inside the wagons! They are well enlightened, in a contrast to the rest of the dim area

They are hung on the former location of the manufacturer's logo to hide it was a foreign company!



For many years, rumor has it that there are only 2 metro stations in Pyongyang, instead of 17 as claimed. After a lot of negotiations, on my third trip in 2011, I was allowed to see one more : Chongsun Station. North Korea does not show them to tourists, as they are not as nice as other two.





The subway is good way to meet North Korean people and to see the diversity of the characters, like those teens wearing Puma caps in a rap style. Something that would be forbidden in open air areas always under monitoring.



During peak hours, times, the train gets very crowded and you'll be squeezed like in Tokyo, especially when there is a festival such as the National Day. People come to town for celebration with plastic flowers, which they will wave for hours on Kim Il Sung Square.



Many kids are spotted taking the metro subway alone, without their parents. The North Koreans guides explain that Pyongyang is a safe town, thanks to the regime, and that kids can walk by themselves alone in the streets, and even take the train on their own.



Shops selling all kind of stuffs (from toys to cigarettes) can be found inside the station. Smoking and eating inside the Metro system is prohibited. The walls are totally free of advertising billboards.



The rumor says the metro network can be used as a nuclear bunker, it seems to be true. As when I took this picture, a train attendant quickly came up and demanded me to delete the picture showing the tunnel, she even took my passport number. I recovered the picture with a software once in France.



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