

Twisted metal flapped noisily in the breeze. Okpo Land was once a popular theme park at the southern tip of South Korea. As though people just forgot about it, the place had been left to sink into the forest.

This was my Jurassic Park. I half expected to see a velociraptor emerge from behind the swinging Viking ship. I quietly reminded myself to stay away from kitchens and tall grass.

Near the entranceway, two old Korean ladies were picking blackberries from a bush that had grown over a pile of discarded dodgem cars.

Entering under a large welcome sign, which groaned like an old beached vessel in a rising tide, we came to a carousel. The rusted floor had caved in. The gaily painted horses had fallen through in places. Some were defaced with black spray paint. Made lame by neglect. One horse had lost two legs and was half submerged in the cesspool of weeds and rusted metal shards. I patted the horse and felt a strange emotion, akin to pity for it.

It was as though people left in a hurry. The Pompeii of fairgrounds. Perhaps South Koreans lacked the morbid fascination with derelict buildings that had me and my friends enthralled.

In one hut, hundreds of pamphlets had been tipped over and littered the floor. An unwanted plastic bag lay in the corner, still zipped up and covered in cobwebs. It was perhaps best left that way.

Vines were consuming the metal structure of a rollercoaster. The cars were shaped like smiling ducks. One hung down from the rails, suspended. A reminder of why the park closed (after two fatal accidents involving the rollercoaster in the Nineties the park was deemed unsafe).

We kicked a volleyball around. I got carried away. The ball disappeared into a thick knot of weeds and bushes. Another human creation reclaimed by nature here.

The town of Okpo nearby is a shipbuilding hub. Standing on top of the highest peak of the duck rollercoaster, I looked north to the port where huge cranes were loading parts onto half-finished ships. This whole world seemed either half complete or half decayed.

The sound of the distant construction reverberated off the surrounding hillside. It sounded eerily like the clack-clack of a rollercoaster ascending slowly before the drop. New vessels mimicking the ghosts of the old.

It was nice to know that something so forgotten could still inspire so much joy. For the two days I was there, I became that seven-year-old boy again in the cinema watching Jurassic Park, exploring a long forgotten treasure.

We exited under the rusted metal entrance gate that read "Thanks for Visiting Okpo Land". As we walked back down into Okpo town, I was on the lookout for old Korean ladies selling blackberry crumble.

I turned for a last look. I could have sworn I saw a velociraptor slink away into the bushes.

Starting sentences with the present participle

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Standing on top of the highest peak of the duck rollercoaster, I looked north to the port where huge cranes were loading parts onto half-finished ships.

Expanded Noun Phrases for vivid description

old beached vessel

rusted metal entrance gate

unwanted plastic bag

Using similes to paint interesting pictures

groaned like an old beached vessel in a rising tide

like the clack-clack of a rollercoaster ascending slowly before the drop

travel writing





openings

Clutching our one-dollar tickets, we board Yangon's circular commuter train, pushing past saffron-robed monks and bellowing snack-sellers to find a place to sit. The train's meander belies its busy interior, in which benches are crammed with chatting women and betel nut-chewing men, who flash red-teethed grins our way.

We have climbed about 4,800ft up the Pyrenees on the first day of our pilgrimage to Santiago. A thick mist is pressing in on us. The wind is lifting my rain poncho so it balloons around me, allowing the relentless rain to run down my soaking trousers into my sodden shoes.

Robben Island, Cape Town, where even the plants grow in browning, unhealthy clumps, like sparse hair on an old man's scalp. We pass a dead boat tilted to one side, pirated by gloomy Cape cormorants. Wood has flaked from it on to an ugly gravel beach, which is pockmarked with other rubbish. This is a landscape painted by a depressive. Even the sky seems less blue than on the mainland. When we came over in the boat, it was hard not to feel a sense of gloom.

Sundown falls swiftly upon the desert. The heatwaves haunting the horizon dissipate, and shadows begin to gather beneath the mountain. For a few fleeting moments the vast expanse of sand, so simple beneath the brutal glare of the sun, appears complex and textured. Colours are released from the contours and the mountain ridge is lit in impossible shades of green and purple, crimson and gold. A rockscape rainbow. But the moment soon passes, the colours soon fade, and then there is only the night.

But at that moment, and for the first time in my life, I felt not like a tourist but like a traveller, even a pioneer. All too soon the group arrived and we moved off – more cliffs to scramble down, more paths to negotiate and, for me, another mule waiting at the bottom.

The following morning, as I drank a cup of yak-butter tea on the hostel roof, my illusions about the romantic nature of life in Xiahe were shattered. The neighbouring field was dotted with locals, monks, pilgrims and schoolchildren, all squatting, robes thrown out behind them, to perform their daily ablutions. As the pot-bellied pigs roamed among them, I made a mental note never to eat pork in Xiahe.

As I stand beside the memorial, I'm wet, cold, hungry and exhausted, yet I've never appreciated how lucky I am more than right now. Within the Auschwitz Museum hang the words: "The one who does not remember history is bound to live through it again". I decide my mother was right – everybody should go to Auschwitz. The world should never forget.

The Pag Bora wind dries the seawater droplets that blow in off the sea and scatters the salt dust across the sage-covered island; a flavoursome diet for the sheep.

I tasted the salty aromatic sheep's cheese and knocked back another slug of belly-burning rakija. British men could keep their garden sheds; I wanted a Croatian basement.



endings