

# The Dragon Boat Race

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Every year in April, the city of Ulsan hosts The Whale Festival. This is a festival which showcases many traditional cultures of Ulsan and Korea in general, including traditional dance, song and costumes. It is also the venue for The Dragon Boat Race, an exciting boat racing tournament for teams of 20 people. There are tournaments for both foreigners and locals.

This year, a group of friends and I formed a team of twenty guys, and entered The Dragon Boat Race. We decided to paint our faces in a variety of colors, such as Spiderman, The Joker, and a variety of flags from our respective nations. The face painting was a lot of fun and got us in the spirit to have a great time with local Korean people and new foreign friends we would be competing against.

The races took place on the Taehwa River, the main river which flows through Ulsan. Ulsan is Korea's seventh largest city with a population of 1.1 million. Many local people came out to enjoy the festival and to see what these foreigners were doing. This was a great opportunity for local people and foreigners to enjoy time together, sharing cultural experiences and good times despite any language barrier.

Each team needed a drummer (to provide a rhythm for rowing), a pilot (to steer the boat from the back), and eighteen rowers. Each race had three or four boats.

We competed in two races. The first race was a disaster! We hadn't practiced at all, and as soon as we started rowing we found ourselves going in the wrong direction and ending up behind the starting line! Needless to say we finished last in that race. For the second race, we decided to change our drummer to someone with better rhythm, and we enlisted the help of an experienced Korean Dragon Boat racer to steer for us.

Before the race started, the drummer of our boat and the drummer of the boat next to us had a "drum off", a competition to see who was the best drummer! Fortunately, our drummer put on a better display and we found ourselves inspired and ready to race! The starting horn sounded, and we were off! At first, the boat next to us was leading the race. But suddenly, they lost their direction, and started to turn sideways instead of moving forwards! At that point, we sensed victory and pushed hard all the way to the line. As we turned around to see our rivals, we saw that their boat had capsized and their teams were climbing out of the water! Thankfully, a rescue boat was quickly on the scene and no one was hurt. We celebrated our victory with a cheer, and went off to take photos and enjoy a hot dog and a drink with our new friends.

The Dragon Boat Race isn't just a huge amount of fun. It is also for a great cause. A local, Ulsan-based organization called T-HOPE Korea (Teachers Helping Other People Everywhere) organizes the races, and all funds go to local orphanages and other community based charities throughout Korea. So not only did we have a fantastic day enjoying the festival, we also

helped needy people in the country which has welcomed us. I was grateful to all the volunteers and supporters who helped make the day such a memorable one, and to my teammates for making me laugh and smile so much despite our less than perfect rowing performance. What a fantastic experience!

