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SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Plus
THE 10 WHO'LL TAKE OVER

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How Koreatown Became the Cool Center of L.A.
The place is so un-Hollywood that you won’t just forget what city you’re in. You’ll forget what planet you’re on.

Growing up in Los Angeles, I knew Koreatown mostly as the neighborhood where I’d been born and raised. (Shouts to Wilshire Boulevard Temple) Like a lot of big cities, L.A. is really a cluster of self-contained communities: Westside movie execs get to go to the beach, Eastside hipsters get to have poke bowls in Silver Lake, and never the twain shall meet. Unless you’re in Koreatown, that is, where the twain meet every night over a bubbling pot of galbi jjim, accompanied by multiple pitchers of beer and chased with a half-dozen tacos to ward off the sips. When I finally moved to K-town last year after nearly a decade on the East Coast, it took me approximately 24 hours—and an irresponsible amount of robotically spicy food and perfectly frosty beer—to realize how much I’d been missing. These three square miles constitute some of the wildest, most diverse turf in America, thanks largely to generations of Latino and Korean residents who’ve opened a litany of thrilling bars and restaurants. And the wonderful, unlikely, Can this really be L.A.? part: You don’t even need a car.

You’ll stay at The Line, the hotel that’s anchored everything new and cool in the neighborhood since opening in 2014. Its floor-to-ceiling windows are responsible for all of your friends’ drooling-instagram-photos. You could conceivably spend an entire weekend here, dining at local legend Roy Chol’s rooftop Donamuri and drinking at the lobby bar, which becomes a hive on weekend nights—and sells Chol’s sticky-sweet wings. But if you never left, you wouldn’t get to drink at Dan Sung Se: a Korean pub covered in permanent-marker graffiti, the booths encircling a central grill cooking up smoking-hot chicken feet, gory-crappy rice cakes, and lethal corn cheese. (It’s cheese, with corn, at a Korean restaurant in a city with a massive Mexican population. The president shudders.) Nor would you get to drink at The Prince, where the only thing better than the horseshoe bar and retro interior is the Korean fried chicken. You’d also miss the Walker Inn, the secret excellent cocktail spot tucked behind the public bar of the Normandie Club. So, you know, make sure you leave the hotel. And when you do, block off time to hit Sun Nong Dan for that galbi jjim and Buaugutsa for impossibly dark molo, and Here’s Looking at You for the kind of over rotating menu of small plates that will confirm you’re in America’s greatest food town. Burn off dinner crushing golf balls on the four-story driving range at Aroma Spa & Sports, a handy reminder that a future that looks like Blade Runner isn’t necessarily a bad one. And then, because this is Koreatown, sing karaoke at Cafe Brass Monkey. It will be loud, and vaguely tiki-themed, and the drinks will be a little too strong. Finish your night at the very old dive HMS Bounty, which looks not unlike an old wooden ship. You will toast tacles with someone a few decades your senior, and then a fashion model, and then a skate crew. It’s a weekend night in Koreatown, the wildest neighborhood in all of L.A., and that alone is cause for celebration.

—SAM SCHUBE