

Google chief's daughter on 'strange' N.Korea visit

January 21 2013



Photo taken by KCNA on January 8, 2013 shows Google chairman Eric Schmidt (3rd L) visiting an e-library at Kim Il-Sung University in Pyongyang. "Our trip was a mixture of highly-staged encounters, tightly-orchestrated viewings and what seemed like genuine human moments," Schmidt's teenage daughter Sophie wrote in a blog post.

The teenage daughter of Google chairman Eric Schmidt has shed some light on her father's secretive trip to North Korea, writing a first-hand account of the visit to a "very, very strange" country.

In a blog posting at the weekend entitled "It might not get weirder than this", Sophie Schmidt provided a candid take on the controversial three-day trip earlier this month that was criticised by the US government.

Schmidt, 19, had accompanied her father on the visit as part of a delegation led by Bill Richardson, the former US ambassador to the United Nations.

On their return, the two men answered a few questions about the nature of the visit, but Sophie Schmidt's informal account was in many ways far more revealing.

"Our trip was a mixture of highly-staged encounters, tightly-orchestrated viewings and what seemed like genuine human moments," she wrote.

"We had zero interactions with non-state-approved North Koreans and were never far from our two minders."

While much of the blog posting is taken up with the sort of observational musings common to any first-time visitor to Pyongyang, it had some interesting insights into the official side of the delegation's trip.



Sophie, daughter of Google chief Eric Schmidt, is pictured at the National Museum in Baghdad on November 24, 2009. In a blog posting at the weekend entitled "It might not get weirder than this", Sophie provided a candid take on the controversial three-day trip to North Korea earlier this month.

In particular, it fleshed out the main photo-opportunity of the entire trip when they visited an e-library at Kim Il-Sung University, and chatted with some of the 90 students working on computer consoles.

"One problem: No one was actually doing anything," Sophie Schmidt wrote.

"A few scrolled or clicked, but the rest just stared. More disturbing: when our group walked in... not one of them looked up from their desks. Not a head turn, no eye contact, no reaction to stimuli.

"They might as well have been figurines," she added.

One of the world's most isolated and censored societies, the North has a domestic Intranet service with a very limited number of users.

Analysts say access to the Internet is for the super-elite only, meaning a few hundred people or maybe 1,000 at most.

On his return, [Eric Schmidt](#) said he had told North Korea it would not develop unless it embraces Internet freedom—a prospect dismissed by most observers as inconceivable.

Sophie Schmidt's description of the "unsettling" e-library visit suggests the delegation was all too aware that it was being shown a facade.

"Did our handlers honestly think we bought it? Did they even care? Photo op and tour completed, maybe they dismantled the whole set and went home," she wrote.

And her top "take-aways" from the whole experience?

- 1) Go to [North Korea](#) if you can. It is very, very strange.
- 2) If it is January, disregard the above. It is very, very cold.

(c) 2013 AFP

Citation: Google chief's daughter on 'strange' N.Korea visit (2013, January 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-google-chief-daughter-strange-nkorea.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--