

HAVE YOU BEEN TO SOUTH KOREA? IF NOT, YOU SHOULD



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I've learnt a lot about this small country, but my trip to Jeju university conference filled me up with a new interest to South Korea.

The Republic of Korea is a sovereign state in East Asia, in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. South Koreans lead a distinctive urban lifestyle, as half of them live in high-rises concentrated in the Seoul Capital Area with 25 million residents. The capital Seoul is the world's 16th largest global city with the fifth largest economy and is the seventh most sustainable city in the world.

South Korea, along with Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong (China) is one of the four high-tech industrialized developed countries often referred to as the Four Asian Economic Dragons.

South Korea is a technologically advanced developed country and, globally, it ranks highly in personal safety, job security, ease of doing business and healthcare quality, with the world's third highest health adjusted life expectancy and fourth most efficient healthcare system.

You can see marvelous mountains on the way from Incheon airport to Seoul. They are not high, but green, densely covered with trees. That is a little differing from rocky mountains in Uzbekistan, the tops of which may be covered with snow even in early summer.

I knew a lot about this small country in the south of Asia before going on our business trip. This time I shall tell you about some facts that may give you some picture of this beautiful, surprising country which attracts a lot of tourists as a small wonder.

We admired the old **Korean architecture**. Traditional architecture can be seen in the palaces and temples, preserved old houses called "hanok" and special sites like Hahoe Folk Village, Yangdong Village of Gyeongju and Korean Folk Village.

Bulguksa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site



Korean architecture entered a new phase of development during the post-Korean War reconstruction, incorporating modern architectural trends and styles. Now high skyscrapers are well-mixed with ancient buildings with curved tiled roofs with lifting eaves. Instead of air heaters, Koreans have heated

floors. And people eat, sleep, and watch TV on the warm floor. This tradition is coming to other countries as well as Uzbekistan. A lot of new householders have projected heated floors.

What greatly impresses you is that South Korea is a high-tech advanced developed country. Wi-fi is in each hotel, guest house, restaurant, café, shop, airport, everywhere! And that is very comfortable.



I could see that all young South Korean people own a smartphone of Korean production. All cars running in Seoul streets are also of Korean production.

Seoul seems to be a **giant shopping mall**. There are a lot of people wandering in the streets late at night without any fear of being robbed or murdered though I was warned to take care of my bag. South Koreans love shopping, and the country has some of the biggest shopping malls in the world. Some stores are

open until 4:00 in the morning. And people feel secure wandering about the streets till morning.

South Korean people love make-up, Like there are a lot of drugstores in Tashkent, every other shop in Seoul is make-ups and cosmetics. It seemed to me that people of both sexes are too keen on their appearance. South Korea is the plastic surgery capital of the world.

By the way, for those who are in Seoul for the first time: **taxis** in South Korea are color coded according to the level of service offered. A gray or white taxi is a basic car with a qualified but potentially inexperienced driver, while the black cabs are luxury cars with experienced drivers. So their price is twice as much. If you take an orange taxi, your pocket won't lose much.

The population of Seoul is about 11 million, and what it is amazing, all **the people** are very kind, easy to help you. Once we got lost in this gigantic city and asked an old woman and her daughter the way to the hotel. They showed us the way, but had misled us as it turned out. They were running for half a block to catch us and show the right way. It's another telling feature of the Korean character, their kindness. We were strangers to these women.

All young people speak English, a lot of them get Master's and PhD in the USA which is surprising me because I think European education is not worse than American as well as ours (if you are asked every now and then where you learned English).

On **Jeju**, South Korea's largest island, **giant stone statues** known as *dol hareubang* (old grandfather) can be found along the beaches. Newlywed women believe that if they touch the statues' long, broad, phallic-looking noses, they will be blessed with fertility.





South Koreans have a very **unusual approach to age**. Every South Korean child is considered to be one year old when he/she is born, and he/she will turn two on the next lunar New Year. They celebrate a person's first birthday in the most festive manner. The birthday baby wears a hanbok, Korea's traditional garment and a traditional hat. There is expected a full table of traditional food for the occasion. Parents place several objects on the table and let the child pick his/her favourite. If the child picks up money, it means wealth, if the child picks up food he/she will never be hungry, etc. So it's a kind of predicting the child's fortune.

The Korean people are known to be **extremely respectful of their elders**. South Koreans who live to be 60 years old are often thrown a lavish party called **hwangap**. It was started in the past when very few people lived to that age. It is also a significant birthday because the traditional Korean calendar is based on a 60-year cycle. Korean people in Uzbekistan have preserved this tradition and celebrate their 60th anniversary as a great day. I have had the same festive party on my 60th, too.

Korean meals were not a surprise for most of us as we are good learners of Korean restaurants and cafes in Tashkent. Korean cuisine is largely based on rice, noodles, tofu, vegetables, fish and meats. Every meal is accompanied by numerous kimchi, a spicy vegetable dish. While being hosted by Korean professors, walking in the mall or having meals in a small restaurant I watched what native people were eating. Usually it was steamed rice, “bab”, which is commonly served at every meal with all kinds of kimchi, may be, more than ten. We usually call them salads.

Koreans eat “kimchi” at nearly every meal. It is South Korea’s national dish which is a combination of vegetables and spices. It is served with almost everything at breakfast and lunch.

When taking a photo, South Koreans say “kimchi” instead of “cheese.”



I saw there were many fastfood restaurants. South Korean snack companies, such as Lotte, are famous for making a wide range of Korean or other Asian-inspired snacks. Most restaurants, including McDonald’s, will deliver food straight to homes in South Korea. But I didn’t see many overweight South Koreans. They are mostly thin, slim.



The most common family names in South Korea are Kim, Lee, Park (Pak), Choi. Half the population has identical surnames.

People with the same surname can’t marry each other because “purity of kinship”. The law against same-surname and family origin dates back to choson era and still exists in Korea and also in Uzbekistan. It’s not only a kind of having the same surname, but there is some implicit family background, a better protection against incest.

These are my big, but hopefully not last impressions of South Korea that I decided to share with you.