

A step to South Korean culture

Anna Rantanen
Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
Degree program in Tourism

The guidebook has been made as a part of SAMK bachelor's thesis for West Coast Finland -project group.

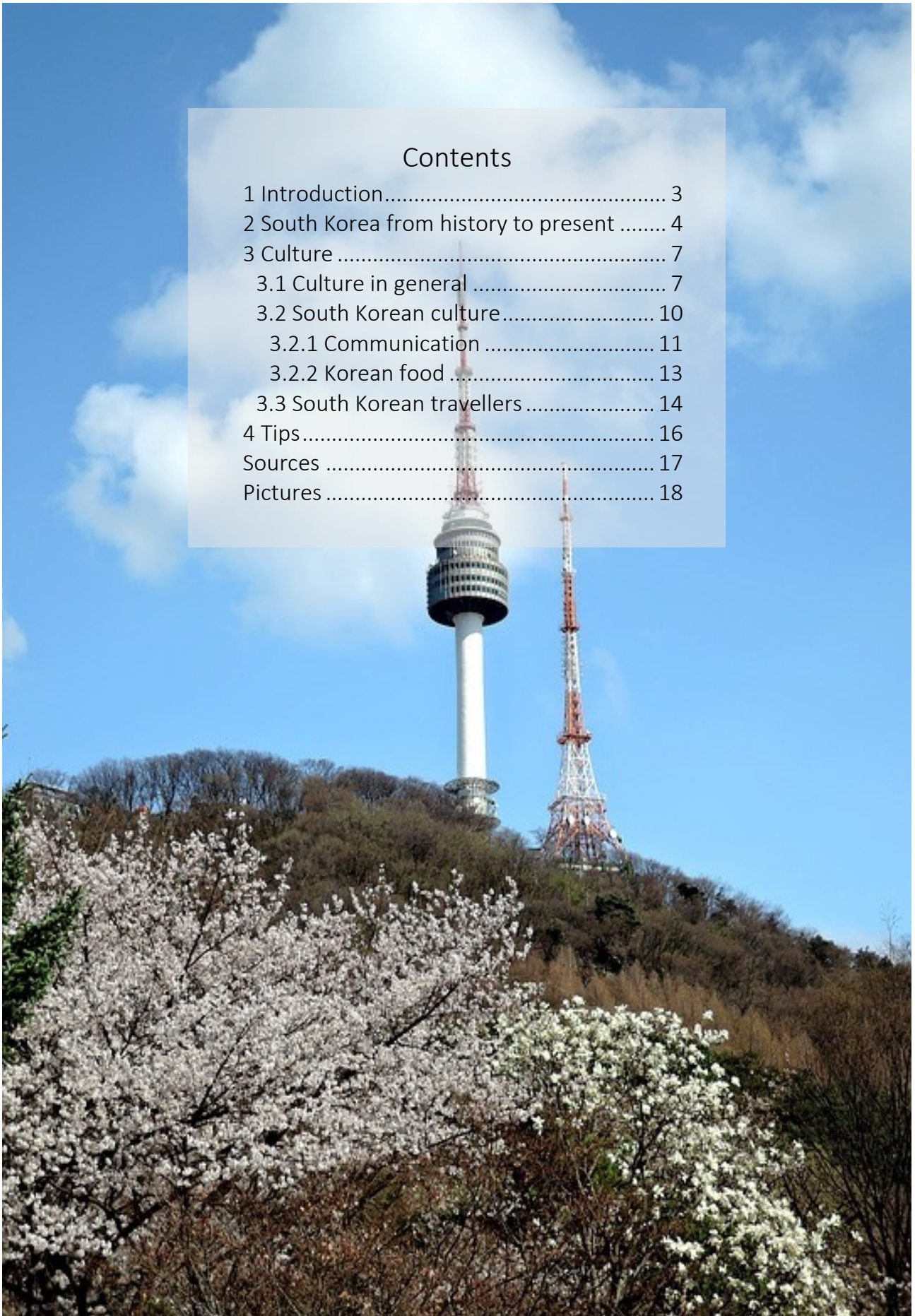


**The European Agricultural
Fund for Rural Development**
Europe investing in rural areas



Contents

1 Introduction.....	3
2 South Korea from history to present	4
3 Culture	7
3.1 Culture in general	7
3.2 South Korean culture.....	10
3.2.1 Communication	11
3.2.2 Korean food	13
3.3 South Korean travellers	14
4 Tips.....	16
Sources	17
Pictures	18



1 Introduction

This guide has been made as a part of thesis for West Coast Finland - project (Matkailuyrityksille kasvua Kiinasta). The coordinator of the project is Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. The project includes tourism companies from Satakunta and Loimaa. The purpose of the project is to make the companies more international and more fitting to China's market and also other parts of Asia. The target group for the project is mainly Asian market, but also the thought of other international tourists is in the background. (West Coast Finland - project 2017; Uusiniitty-Kivimäki personal statement 28th August 2020.)

The purpose of this guide is to guide the reader into Korean culture. The guide goes through South Korean history briefly, communication in South Korean culture, the cuisine, and the members of the culture as tourists. The last chapter gives some useful tips for the reader when hosting Korean visitors.

In the guide, the writer uses answers from interviews in the thesis. The interviewees are Jani Toivanen, who lives in South Korea and works for Business Finland, and a Korean person living in Finland.

2 South Korea from history to present

South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea) is a country in East Asia. The country is located in the southern half of the Korean peninsula and it has land border only with North Korea. The capital is Seoul. The population of South Korea is about 51 million people (2020) and over 80 percent of the population lives in cities. The currency is South Korean won. The climate is temperate, and it rains more in the summer than in winter. (Central Intelligence Agency 2020.)



The first remarkable moments in the Korean history, that lasted from the birth of unified Korea until becoming the colony of Japan, are called the Korean dynasty. It includes three periods, that are the unified Silla (668-935), Goryeo (918-1392) and Joseon (1392-1910). During these periods, the country was a monarchy. In the 1780s western people started to arrive in Korea and brought for example Catholicism to Korea. (Le Bas 2010, 24; Vesterinen, Janhunen & Huotari 2000, 105.)

At the start of the 20th century Korea became the colony of Japan. During the World War II the Allies, which included Great Britain, the US and China, decided that all the colonies of Japan would be freed. However, before freedom, Korea was supposed to be a shared jurisdiction between the Allies for five years. Korea ended

up being captured by two big powers, the US in the south and the Soviet Union in the north. The two captured areas were still supposed to be united, but the thought of that kept getting farther. (Vesterinen etc. 2000, 169-172.)

Officially the Republic of Korea got independence on 15th of August in 1948. After this the US army retreated from the country. In 1950 started the Korean war, which lead into four kilometres wide heavily demilitarised area along the border of the two countries. The truce was made in 1953 and it stopped the acts of war. (Le Bas 2010, 24-25, 41; Vesterinen etc. 2000, 169- 172.)

The economy of South Korea has risen remarkably ever since the 1960s. The country is one of the most industrialized countries in the world. The industrialization was aided by the development of the export industry and also by the skilled and educated workforce that was increasing. The government was very supportive too. At first, the country mainly focused of textile and other light manufacturing industries. Later, they expanded to the metal and chemical industries. Even later on, they focused on high technology, such as electronics. (Webpages of Britannica 2021.)



The government took control of the industrial development and gave biggest support to the large projects of the conglomerates. For this reason, the small and

medium sized industries had difficulties to finance their functions, and so they had to become subcontractors of the bigger conglomerates. (Webpages of Britannica 2021.)

In 1996, South Korea joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and so became closer to becoming an economically advanced country. In the country the gross national income per capita exceeded the gross national income of the countries around it, except Japan and Taiwan. However, these achievements have been shadowed by economic difficulties, that have been caused by both external and domestic factors. (Webpages of Britannica 2021.)

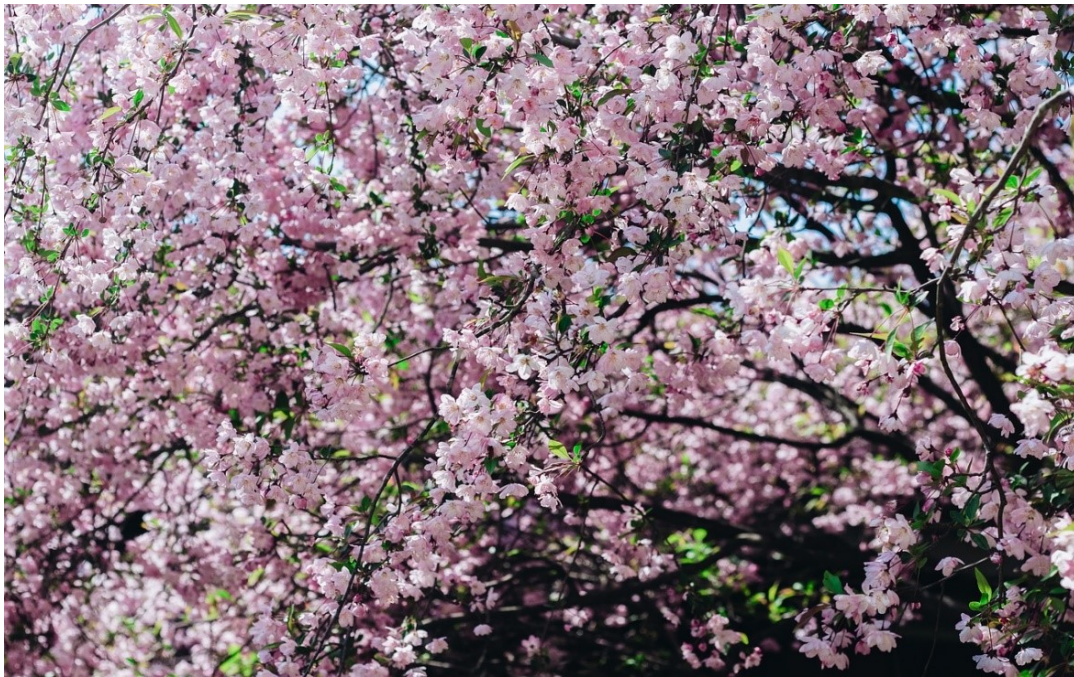
- South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea, is located in East Asia
- North Korea is the only land border neighbour
- South Korea got independence on 15th of August in 1948
- The truce was made in 1953 between the countries and it has been peaceful since then
- The growth of the economy was rapid starting from the 1960s
- South Korea is one of the most advanced countries in the world

3 Culture

3.1 Culture in general

Culture is a collective phenomenon that develops over time with the influence of the people living in the same environment. Culture is always learned and not gained by birth and it is essentially influenced by the people around you. Culture affects among other things into the way the person shows their feelings. (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, 5-6.)

Customs repeat themselves, and it starts from the day the person is born. Cultural practices and customs are the seen part of the culture. They can change over time and when technology develops, even if the ultimate values and presumptions do not change. (Hofstede etc. 2010, 10, 28.)



Culture can be divided into three categories (Lewis 2006, 27) which are linear-active, reactive and multiactive. The people in the same culture category can usually understand each other the best and get along very well. In the tourism industry, it is very important to practice the communication between different cultures. That way they could get a deeper understanding on the cultures that belong in a different culture category, and it leads to better customer service.

(Lewis 2006, 27-29.) South Korean culture is a reactive culture, as well as Finnish culture, but Finnish culture also has tendencies of the linearactive culture. People of reactive cultures are listeners and rarely start a conversation. They must not lose face. Both cultures are punctual and more introverted than extroverted.

Culture can also be divided into six different dimensions, which are power distance, individualism, masculinity – femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence – restraint. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.) The biggest differences between Finnish and South Korean cultures are in the dimensions of time orientation and individualism.



Power distance tells, how for example the younger people treat their elders. Cultures with big power distance practice hierarchy, which means that there is a specific place for each in the society. For example, in the work environment, one most probably cannot freely approach the boss, because they are in a higher placement. South Korea is considered as a culture with higher power distance, and Finland as a low power distance culture. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.) Individualism means, that an individual takes care of themselves and immediate family. People of age do not typically live with their parents. In collective cultures,

which is the opposite of individualist culture, one is very close with the relatives. It might affect one's employment as to what kind of family they were born into. South Korean culture is considered a collective culture and Finnish is more individualist culture. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.)



Both of the cultures, Finnish and South Korean, are more feminine than masculine. This means, that both think good quality of life and caring for each other are very important things. In these cultures, women can be both sensitive and tough. Both cultures are also cultures, where people avoid uncertainties. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.)

The biggest differences in these six dimensions between the two cultures are in the time orientation. Cultures with long-term orientation keep their eyes on the future, and they make sure now, that things will be good in the future. Whereas cultures with short-term orientation live in the present, and they like traditions. Any change is scary for short-term orientated people. The long-term orientated people want to develop themselves all the time. In Finnish culture, people live more in the moment, whereas the South Koreans make sure their future is secured. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.)

The sixth dimension, indulgence – restraint, tells how impulsive the members of the culture are. If the culture is indulgent, the members are optimistic and think leisure and friends are very important. Communal norms do not tell people what to do and how to do it. Restrained cultures are at the other end of the scale. The members of these groups are pessimistic, and leisure is not that important for them. The opinions of the society tell people how to act. Korean culture is more on the restrained side, whereas Finnish culture is more indulgent. (Webpages of Hofstede Insights 2021.)

3.2 South Korean culture

Korean people are patient, flexible and stubborn. Although the stubbornness can also be understood as persistence. Like Finnish, also Koreans are people who warm up slowly to other people. With drinks, it is easier to get to know the other. Koreans are a bit suspicious about new things and for example, would prefer taking their time to get familiar with a product or brand before buying it. (Le Bas 2010, 49; Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020; Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.)



There is a freedom of religion in South Korea. There was 19.7 % of Protestants, 15.5 % of Buddhists, and 7.9 % of Catholics in 2015 in South Korea. The percentage of people with no religion is 56.9 %. There are a lot of churches and you can also see many religious people demonstrating about their religion on the streets. (Central Intelligence Agency 2020; Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020.)

Some Koreans practice Confucianism in their everyday life. Shamanism has also been important part of Korean culture. It helps to get connection to the spiritual world and to foretell the future. Thousands of Buddhist temples have been built all around the country. (Commisceo Global Consulting 2020.)

3.2.1 Communication

South Korean culture is a reactive culture. It means, that Korean are good listeners, and they will not cut into another one's speech. They adjust their place in a conversation by the way the other speaks and behaves. Koreans are tactful and will not want to step on someone's toes or hurt someone's feelings. Koreans do not really like a strict no. Politics, religion and salary are a bit of taboos in Korea. (Lewis 2006, 32-38, 40; Commisceo Global Consulting 2020; Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020; Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.)

Korean people have a unique trait called nunchi. It helps the person to read the other's feelings and to understand them. This way it is easier for the Korean to behave the way they are expected to by the other person. However, not all Koreans have this kind of trait. (Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020; Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.)

"It could be hard to understand a Korean, if you haven't gotten to know the Korean culture and nunchi." Jani Toivanen

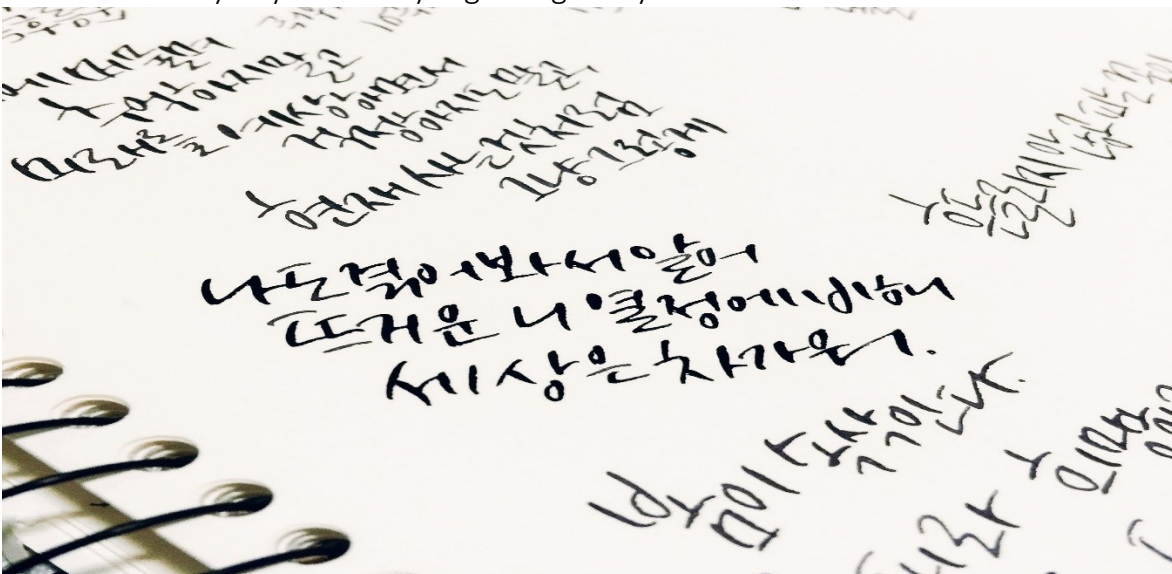
The hierarchy can be seen clearly in the language. There are a lot of different words and forms which indicate respect for the other participant. Children are taught to

respect elders. The way younger people act around each other differs a lot from the way they act around elder people. Koreans rarely call each other by first names. It is better to use titles instead whenever possible. (LeBas 2010, 50; Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020.)

When a person receives or gives out something to someone, they should use both hands. Also, when shaking hands, it is polite to use both hands; right hand shakes the other's hand and left hand supports the right wrist. If the other bows, it is polite to bow back. Business cards are read through and then placed neatly on the table or a card holder. Red is the colour of the deceased. Number four is a number of misfortune. (Commisceo Global Consulting 2020.)

Most of the younger Koreans know English quite well but communicating with the older people could be a bit more difficult. They do try bravely though. Many Koreans seem to think that every foreign person speaks English. They also like it when foreign people try to speak their language. There are a few common phrases in Korean here.

- Hello, How are you - Ahn-nyong-ha-sim-nikka
- Good morning - Jo-eun a-chimi-eyo
- Welcome - Oso-o-seyo
- Nice to meet you - Bang-gap-seum-nida
- Thank you - Kam-sa-ham-nida
- Bye bye - Ahn-nyong-hee ga-se-yo



3.2.2 Korean food

Korean food is generally very spicy. In the Korean kitchen, soy sauce, soy paste and gochujang are used a lot. Gochujang is a paste, that is made with soy beans and chili powder by fermenting. Rice and kimchi is served on every meal. Kimchi is fermented Chinese cabbage, that is spiced with red pepper, garlic, spring onion, and ginger. Kimchi is made by fermenting also and it can be stored for quite a while.

(Webpages of Korean Tourism Organization 2020.)



While traveling, Koreans are interested in trying the local cuisine. However, after a few days, they might start missing the flavours of their own cuisine. The Korean cuisine is quite important for Koreans. (Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020; Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.) Korean breakfast consists of rice, and it is eaten with variety of vegetables and oftentimes also meat. In Finland, Koreans could be served with a lot of vegetables and glutinous rice. If possible, kimchi would also be a great addition, and the Koreans would definitely appreciate it. It can be bought premade from some department stores in Finland, but it is also quite easy to make by oneself. Different soups and stews could also be a great hit for Koreans, even in hot weather.

"Koreans like to try local food, but after a few days, they start missing things like Korean noodles or kimchi stew." Jani Toivanen

3.3 South Korean travellers

Koreans travel a lot, and it is increasing all the time. Popular seasons for traveling are summer and autumn. They travel generally to Japan, China and Vietnam, but they like big cities like Paris and Barcelona. When Koreans come to Europe, they usually visit multiple countries on the same trip. In the recent years, the interest in eastern and northern Europe has been increasing. Finland is appealing for having the Northern Lights among other things. Koreans know that Finland is safe, and that the nature is beautiful and pure. They also know about the excellence of Finnish education. Finland is easily accessible from South Korea because of direct flights from Seoul to Helsinki with no stopovers. (Webpages of Business Finland 2020; Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020.)



Koreans like national parks and UNESCO sites. They also want to see the most important attractions and historical sites in the city. Finland is an excellent destination for Koreans, who like to see the city life and the nature on one trip. The younger people want to know about the trendy places in the destination. (Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020.)

When a Korean parent sends their child for a school camp, they will have to know, that their child is safe, and what their child will be learning. The parents could want a ready, clear list of things the child should learn at the camp. The school camp can not only be studying though, because then it would not be enjoyable for the children. Finnish creative thinking and way of teaching is interesting for people abroad and nature can be used in learning. (Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020; Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.)

In South Korea, customer service is superior. Koreans are used to very fast and polite service. They do not, however, expect to get as fast customer service abroad, because they know that Korean service is just exceptionally fast. But obviously, if it takes too long, it is taken as negative experience. (Korean personal statement 30th October 2020.) Customer service should be easily available and fast, so there should not be any conflicts. Smiling is always a good thing.

- South Korea has freedom of religion and over half of the people do not have religion
- Korean culture is reactive. They respect others and will not want to hurt them
- Nunchi helps to understand other people and to act the way they are expected of
- Elders are respected and there are several forms of respect in the language
- Four is a number of misfortune, and red ink should not be used
- When giving and receiving, use both hands
- Korean food is very spicy, and it is quite important for Koreans
- The Northern Lights and the schooling system intrigue Koreans

4 Tips

Koreans like fast customer service, so it would be important, that their emails are replied as soon as possible. With them should also be remembered that “yes” does not always mean yes, but that they have heard what the other has said. They do not want to say things straight forward, so that they would not offend the other by any chance. They also prefer having a while to get to know for example the product before making any decisions.

As a culture with long term orientation, Koreans think learning is essential and therefore they make sure that their children will study a lot and get good grades. Because of this, the parents do want the listing of things their children will learn in an educational camp. Koreans also think self-discipline is important, meaning they will not give in to their desires. Koreans are responsible and want to carry the name of their family with pride. They listen to and follow rules quite obediently.

Educational traveling is not that big of a thing yet from South Korea to Finland (Toivanen personal statement 21st October 2020) but continuous attempts for growth is made. The capital area does not have to be the destination for educational traveling and especially educational camps, since they will not have to worry much about getting from one destination to another efficiently. At this point, Satakunta is a great destination. There is town life and countryside with nature in Satakunta. There are also historical sites in Satakunta, that could be interesting for Korean visitors. The start of the year, January and February, is a potential time for Korean educational visitors, since they have a longer holiday from school that time.

Recipes for Korean taste can be found very easily from the Internet. A good website with English recipes is <https://www.maangchi.com/>

Sources

Commisceo Global Consulting. 2020. South Korea – Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette. Referenced on 27th of September 2020. <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/south-korea-guide#C4>

Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. J. & Minkov, M. 2010. Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind: intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival. 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/samk/detail.action?docID=6262353>

Korean person. 2020. Microsoft Teams -interview 30th of October 2020. Interviewer Anna Rantanen. Notes at the possession of the interviewer.

Le Bas, T. 2010. South Korea. 9th edition. Singapore: APA Publications.

Lewis, R. D. 2006. When cultures collide: Leading across cultures. 3rd edition. Boston: Nicholas Brealey. <https://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=63b2de28-e3f1-42b1-803a-7d727210a7e6%40sessionmgr4007&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwJnNpdGU9ZWWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=160054&db=nlebk>

Toivanen, J. 2020. Representative of Business Finland / Visit Finland in South Korea. Microsoft Teams -interview 21st of October 2020. Interviewer Anna Rantanen. Notes at the possession of the interviewer.

Uusiniitty-Kivimäki, M. 2020. Project researcher, Satakunta University of Applied Sciences. Pori. Personal statement 28th of August 2020.

Vesterinen, I., Janhunen, J. & Huotari, T. 2000. Korea: Kolme ovea tiikerin valtakuntaan. Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Webpages of Britannica. 2021. Referenced on 14th of January 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/>

Webpages of Central Intelligence Agency CIA. 2020. Referenced on 28th of May 2020. <https://www.cia.gov/index.htm>

Webpages of Hofstede Insights. 2021. Referenced on 1st of January 2021. <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/>

Webpages of Korean Tourism Organization. 2020. Referenced on 26th of November 2020. <http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/index.jsp#>

West Coast Finland -project (Matkailuyrityksille kasvua Kiinasta). 2017. Project plan. Satakunta University of Applied Sciences.

Pictures

Pictures were used on 14th of January 2021, when they were under CCO licenses.

Front cover. Taken by Seoulinspired <https://pixabay.com/photos/myeongdong-seoul-south-korea-4119806/>

Contents. Taken by kwang8788 <https://pixabay.com/photos/some-people-don-t-heaven-nature-3353029/>

Page 4. Taken by wreindl <https://pixabay.com/photos/south-korea-north-korea-dmz-korea-239106/>

Page 5. Taken by kaboompics <https://pixabay.com/photos/pink-candy-sugar-white-smartphone-791315/>

Page 7. Taken by linkjizl. <https://pixabay.com/photos/sakura-flower-cherry-flowers-2457244/>

Page 8. Taken by misterJang <https://pixabay.com/photos/korea-republic-of-korea-seoul-3756852/>

Page 9. Taken by B_Me <https://pixabay.com/photos/pedestrians-people-busy-movement-400811/>

Page 10. Taken by tampigns <https://pixabay.com/photos/changdeokgung-palace-garden-786592/>

Page 12. Taken by kangso-eun. <https://pixabay.com/photos/hand-print-hieroglyph-language-820913/>

Page 13. Taken by bourree. <https://pixabay.com/photos/kimchi-baechu-kimchi-korean-food-2449656/>

Page 14. Taken by viarami. <https://pixabay.com/photos/road-traffic-building-business-5475262/>