

## South Korea: Safe travel destination for foreign females?

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<p>The objective of this thesis was to find out if South Korea is a safe country for foreign female travellers. The aim was to study the opinions and experiences of bloggers, who had written about South Korea, regarding how safe the country is, and how foreigners and women are treated in South Korea.</p> <p>First is the theoretical background, which covers first South Korea as a country including general information, history, brief presentation of South Korea as a travel destination and definition of blogs, and an introduction of authors travel blog from South Korea. Next, safety as a concept, and the United Nations World's Women 2015 report is discussed. Following that the status of foreigners and women in South Korea is explained.</p> <p>The empirical part includes first the research methods and objectives. The research method used in the research is qualitative content analysis. Following this, the data used in the research is presented, and the research process and implementation is discussed.</p> <p>After empirical part, the results of the research are presented. Results were gained from the analysis of blog entries, which were compared to the research questions. The results showed that South Korea is a safe country to travel, but the situation between North Korea and South Korea can change quickly. In addition to this results showed that foreigners might face some discrimination and racism, but mostly foreigners are treated well.</p> <p>The idea for this research came from the authors own interest towards South Korea and its culture, and after she had been on a holiday in South Korea in the summer 2015. The thesis process was started in the summer 2015, but the writing of the thesis was only started in January 2016, and completed in May 2016.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> South Korea, safety, travelling, foreigners, women, blogs	

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# 1 Introduction

South Korea, officially known as The Republic of Korea, is located in North-East Asia and it is nowadays one of the world's leading high-technology producers. Every year millions of tourists visit South Korea and almost two million foreigners live in the country, but still a lot of discrimination and racism towards foreigners exists in South Korea. Also the role of women in South Korea has not changed along with the country's economic growth.

The objective of this thesis was to find out if South Korea is a safe country for foreign female travellers. The aim was to study the opinions and experiences of bloggers, who had written about South Korea, regarding how safe the country is, and how foreigners and women are treated in South Korea.

The main research questions of this thesis are:

- Is South Korea safe travel destination for foreign female travellers?
- Is South Korea a safe country?
- How foreigners are treated in South Korea?
- What is the status of women in the country?

The research was conducted by analysing blog entries written from bloggers that had either travelled or lived in South Korea, and were non-Koreans. The blog entries were analysed by using qualitative content analysis. The data acquired from the blog entries were then compared to themes selected from theoretical background, and to research questions. Qualitative content analysis is a good option if the material needs some kind of interpretation, for example when analysing various types of data like interviews, textbooks, websites and diaries. Qualitative content analysis involves selecting a research question and material, making a coding frame that includes two or more categories, dividing the data into these categories, analysing the material and finally interpreting and presenting the findings. Content analysis in general seeks to clear the material, so that clear and reliable conclusions can be made. (Schreier, M. 2012, 1-6; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2008, 108-115.)

The thesis is constructed in a traditional way and it consists of seven chapters. The main chapters are Introduction, South Korea, Safety and United Nations' The World's Women report, Foreigners and women in South Korea, Research process, Results and Discussion.

In the second chapter South Korea is introduced as a country. The introduction includes the general information of South Korea, its history and it as a travel destination. In the same chapter definition of blogs and travel blogs are discussed, and also an brief introduction of authors travel blog from South Korea is presented. The third chapter includes the definiton of safety, and the presentation of United Nations' The World's Women report.

The fourth chapter includes the presentation of the status of foreigners and women in South Korea. First the situation of foreigners in the country is explained, following the status of women. The chapter focuses on explaining the current situation of foreigners and how women are treated in South Korea by focusing in the areas of education, work and politics, everyday life, violence and safety.

In the fifth chapter the research process is explained. The chapter includes the presentation of the selected research method and the objective of the research. Next the data that was used in the research is introduced, and finally the detailed research process and implementation is discussed.

The sixth chapter describes the results of the research. The results are divided to four different subchapters, them being: safety, Koreans and South Korea as a country, looks and women, and discrimination of foreigners. Direct quotations from blogs are presented to support the results. The results of the research show, is South Korea seen as a safe country to travel, how foreigners are treated in the country, and what the status of women in South Korea is.

In the seventh chapter the conclusion of the results from the research are presented. The results are also compared to the research questions. The validity and reliability of the research is discussed and finally the author gives an evaluation of the thesis process and self-assessment.

## 2 South Korea

South Korea, officially known as The Republic of Korea, is located in North-East Asia on the southern half of the Korean Peninsula (image 1). It is bordered by the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea and North Korea. The total area of South Korea is 100 284 km<sup>2</sup> and it shares its entire international land boundary of 237 km with North Korea.

The total population is around 50,4 million people (The World Bank 2016) and about 20% out of the total population lives in the capital city Seoul. Other big cities are Busan (3,5 million), Incheon (2,9 million) and Daegu (2,49 million). South Korea has been ethnically homogeneous country for a long time, but the number of foreigners has increased in the recent years. In 2015 there were about 1,74 million foreigners living in South Korea and the largest nationality is Chinese. (Peterson & Margulies 2010a, vii; Korea Tourism Organization 2015a; Eum 2015.)



Image 1. Map of South Korea (CIA the World Factbook 2016)

South Korea is a republic and the constitution adopts liberal democracy as a political system. Every five years Korean citizens who have reached the age of 20 are entitled to vote in the presidential elections. The current President, Geun Hye Park, is the first female President of South Korea. She was elected as a President in 2012 and began her presidency on February 2013. The government consists of three branches: the Executive branch, the Legislative branch and the Judiciary branch. (Korea.net 2016a; Nation-sonline.org 2016.)

The official language is Korean and it is also used in North Korea. The written form of Korean language is called hangul (한글). Hangul consists of 14 consonants and ten vowels and each letter of the alphabet has its own character. Korean is the only official language but English is taught widely in all of the schools and it is the most visible foreign language in South Korea. There are four to five major religions and the largest of them are Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism. In addition to the major religions, shamanism has also an important part in people's daily lives. But on the other hand the role of religion in South Korea has been complex, and some of the traditions are seen as cultural properties rather than as rites of worship. (Peterson & Margulies 2010b, xiii-xiv; Korea.net 2016b.)

## **2.1 History**

Korea was ruled by dynasties for over thousands of years. After the end of the last dynasty Joseon in 1910, Korea was a colony of Japan for 35 years. In 1945, Korea was freed from Japan, after it surrendered in the World War 2. Korea was divided between the communist Soviet and American forces to north and south at the 38th parallel in 1945. In August 15th 1948, South Korea declared its independence with Rhee Syng Man as the first president, and North Korea on September 9th with Kim Il Sung as a leader. (Peterson & Margulies 2010c, 141; Peterson & Margulies 2010d, 179-195.)

In June 1950 North Korea started an invasion to South Korea in order to unify the two countries. This act started the Korean War, which lasted three years from 1950-1953, and in July 27th 1953 armistice was signed. The four kilometre long Demilitarized zone (DMZ) was also established to the border between the two Koreas and it was put approximately to the same place where the 38th parallel was before the war. There has been no official peace treaty made between the two Koreas even though the armistice was signed, and in practice South Korea and North Korea are currently at a state of war. (Peterson & Margulies 2010e, 195-204.)

After the Korean War with the help from the United States, South Korea started to invest more to the economic development. By emphasising to foreign trade and by normalizing the relations with Japan in 1965, as a result trade and investment bloomed. The fast expansion to light and heavy industries followed in the 1960s and 1970s, and resulted in an average annual rate of 8,6% in the economic growth of South Korea. In the 1980s and 1990s the country transformed itself into a global producer of automobiles to high-technology products. Today South Korea is one of the world's leading high-technology producer by having companies like Samsung, LG and Hyundai. (Southkoreagovernment.com 2012.)

## 2.2 Exploring South Korea

Millions of visitors around the world go to visit South Korea every year. In 2015, there were 13 231 651 visitor arrivals recorded (Korea Tourism Organization 2016a). With South Korea's long and rich history in culture and tradition, it offers visitors broad selection of options what to see and experience.

South Korea has a lot of traditional tourist attractions like museums, historical landmarks, national parks, traditional markets and theme parks. Millions of visitors every year go to these sites to experience Korean traditional and modern culture. In Addition to these traditional tourist attractions there are attractions like the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) which has become one of the most popular attractions in South Korea. South Korea has ten UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 15 relics on the Intangible Heritage of Humanity List and 11 on the Memory of the World Register. (Korea.net 2016c; Korea Tourism Organization 2015b.)

There are various types of accommodation in South Korea. Variety of hotels, guest-houses, motels and hostels are found all over the country and more unique accommodations such as *Hanok stays*, Temple stays and homestays are offered. Some of the accommodations are supported or operated by the Korean Tourism Organization. Hanok stays are an opportunity for visitors to stay in a traditional Korean house called *hanok*. Ko-reastay is a Korea Tourism Organization's brand that offers homestays in a Korean home by living with a Korean family. (Korea Tourism Organization 2015c; Korea Tourism Organization 2016b.)

Getting around South Korea is easy and there are many different ways to travel. There are airports, ferries, trains and local transportation like subways, buses and taxis. Several transportation cards are available, making the traveling easier. There are two ways to get to South Korea, by plane and by ferries.

Korean food mostly includes vegetables, mushrooms, beans, fish and clams, seaweed, meat, eggs, and spices. Korean soybean paste (*doenjang*), soy sauce (*ganjang*), red pepper paste (*gochujang*) and garlic are some of the most important seasonings in Korean cuisine. Main course is usually served with rice (*bap*), kimchi and side dishes (*banchan*). Foods like *kimchi* (fermented cabbage), *bibimbap* (mix of rice and assorted vegetables) and Korean barbecue, are one of the most famous Korean foods. Famous drinks from Korea are *soju* (strong rice liquor) and *makgeolli* (sweet rice liquor). (Korean Tourism Organization 2016c.)

### 2.3 Travel blog about South Korea

The author of this thesis made a trip to South Korea in the summer 2015 on the 13rd of June to 11th of July. During the trip author wrote a short travel blog named Exploring South Korea.

The blog was made to a free online travel diary website TravelBlog.org.

TravelBlog was founded in 2002 and it has over 200 000 and over 700 000 blog entries. To create a travel blog to TravelBlog you need to have a Facebook account or to fill a short form. (TravelBlog 2016.) The travel blog is used as one of the sources when examining the validity and reliability of this thesis' research. The blog contains short descriptions of the experiences of the author, when she was travelling around South Korea.

A Blog is a website, which is similar to an online journal and includes chronological entries or posts. Entries are made by individuals or small groups on a regular basis and blogs typically focus on a specific subject like lifestyle or food. Blogs usually include a comment area for readers to comment the posts. Blogs can be personal or they can be used for example by companies to communicate with their customers. Blogs can be created to free blogging platforms like WordPress.com or Blogger.com, or by having a self-hosted blog that cost. A blog post can be a collection of text, pictures, audio or videos. (Business dictionary 2016; How to Start A Blog Online 2016.)

Travel blogs are one kind of a lifestyle blogs that focus on traveling. Lifestyle blogs are usually personal blogs, which focus on the author's lifestyle (Mediakix 2015). Travel blogs are becoming a popular way of getting more detailed information and different views of travel destinations around the world.

Benefits of blogs and bloggers to travel and tourism industry:

- Blogs improve the search engine optimization. Blogging can increase the possibility for a business' website to appear high on search engines.
- Blogs allow to share content. You can share content across different social channels and that way reach a wider market.
- Blogs create trust in readers. Having content that covers relevant topics to the industry and to the readers, the information that is shared is most probably always relevant and interesting.
- Bloggers give their honest and genuine opinions. Travel bloggers give their honest and genuine opinions about the destinations and their experiences, which is something that usually brochures and tourism websites cannot give. Also they can give a more realistic picture of the destinations, and practical tips and suggestions to readers. (Osman 2016; Makepeace 15 December 2010.)

### **3 Safety and United Nations' The World's Women report**

In this chapter the definition of safety and its importance to tourism and travel industry is briefly presented. Safety as a concept is broad, and depending on the individuals' perception it can have different meanings. After safety, the UN's (United Nations) The World's Women report and its contents are introduced, following a brief presentation of status of women in the today's world, based on the data from the 2015's report.

#### **3.1 Safety**

Safety is a broad concept. Safety can be seen as absence of danger and risks or as an opportunity, freedom and ability for an individual to act in accordance to their rights and wants. Individuals' safety can be divided into seven different categories: economic, food, health, environment, personal, community and political safety. Depending on individual's own perspective, safety can mean different things, like for example there are no factors that can cause danger or risks, or that individual's economic situation is good and they do not have to worry about money. (Kekki 2014, 13-14; Ulkoministeriö 2014.)

For tourism and travel industry safety is considered important, even though travel experiences are mostly good and tourists do not face any situations where their safety is threatened. It is necessary for tourism destinations to provide a safe environment for tourist and visitors for them to survive, and because safety is a big factor for tourists when deciding the destination and what activities are done in the destination. As the world is becoming more insecure and threatened, travel destinations have to be prepared for safety incidents and to consequences after them. (Wang & Pizam 2011, 300-311.)

According to Finnish Foreign Ministry's travel documents of South Korea on 25.4.2016, South Korea is a safe country to travel and it is good to comply with the general caution. There is almost no crimes or robberies towards tourists, but in the districts of Hongdae, Itaewon and Sinchon of Seoul, which are favoured by foreigners, mainly had had some problems. The situation can change suddenly between North Korea and South Korea, so it is good to follow media and the bulletins from the Finnish Embassy. (Ulkoasianministeriö 2016.)

#### **3.2 United Nations' The World's Women 2015**

The World's Women report is done by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. The report was first done in 1990 and it is conducted every five years, and the latest released in 2015. The first three and the report published in 2010 analyse and compare women's situation worldwide to men's, on a

broad variety of different fields. The 2005 report analyses the national capacities to collect and report data on socioeconomic topics concerning gender issues that have been disaggregated by sex. (United Nations 2014.)

The World's Women 2015 is the sixth report. The latest statistics and analyses of women's and men's status in areas of population and families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment, and poverty, are presented in the report. The report also reviews the progress that has happened in the past 20 years towards gender equality in the world. (United Nations 2015.)

According to the 2015 report men outnumber women by about 62 million and more baby boys are born than girls. Because of the increase in education levels, later entry into the labor force and better economic independence, women are getting married later. More than half of the 58 million children of primary school age worldwide are girls and do not attend school. The number of females participating in tertiary education has overall increased and has currently surpassed the number of males in almost every developed country and in 50% of the developing countries. (United Nations 2015.)

Women work as much as men, but only 50% of working age women are in the labor force. Women are more likely to be unemployed and on average they earn less than men. The representation of women in decision-making positions is small and in most societies women are a minority in decision-making positions. Also women are still mostly excluded from governments' the executive branches, and female leaders of states and governments are exceptions. (United Nations 2015.)

Women are still subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence around the world. Most common form of violence, in both developed and developing countries, is intimate partner violence. Also in many countries women believe that beating a wife in certain situations is justified. (United Nations 2015.)

The World's Women 2015 report was utilized when the status of South Korean women was researched. The themes in the report concerning, population and families, education, work, power and decision-making and violence against women, were selected and studied in the context of South Korean women.

## **4 Foreigners and women in South Korea**

This chapter presents the status of foreigners and women in South Korea. First the status of foreigners is discussed following the status of women. Finally, the themes that were utilised later in this thesis' research are presented.

South Korea has long been a homogeneous country but the number of foreigners living in the country has been increasing since the end of the 1990s. In 2014 there were about 1,57 million foreigners living in South Korea and in 2015 13 231 651 visitor arrivals were recorded. Biggest foreign national groups were Chinese and Vietnamese. Even though millions of visitors visit South Korea every year and almost 2 million foreigners live in the country, a lot of foreigners face discrimination and racism. (Korea.net 2016d; Korea Tourism Organization 2016a; Hyams 2015a.)

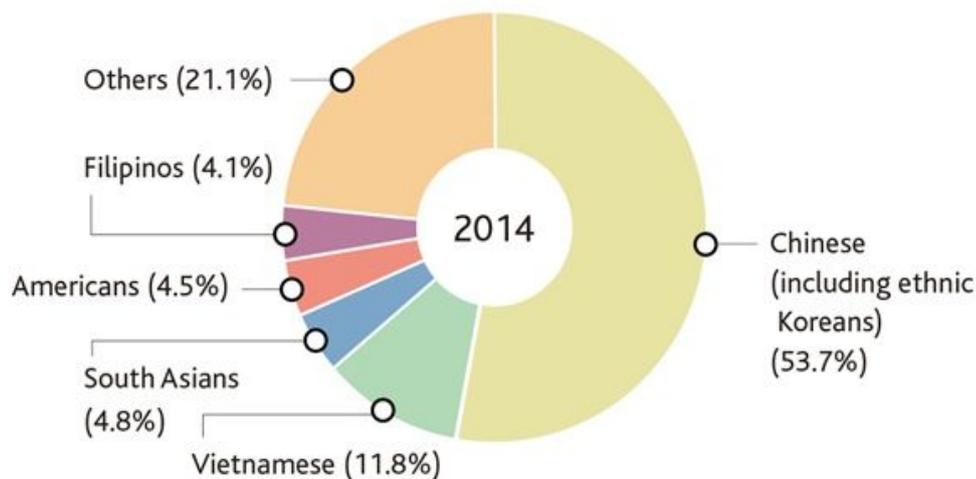
South Korean population is about 50,42 million people and 49,6% of them are females. The traditional role of South Korean women was confined to home and even though nowadays women have more freedom, women's rights are still one of the largest challenges in South Korea. In 2015, the Global Gender Gap Report ranked South Korea 115th out of 145 countries. (The World Bank 2016; Corks 2016a; Global Gender Gap Report 2015.)

### **4.1 Foreigners in South Korea**

South Korea has been one of the most homogeneous societies in the world. Until the 1990s one of its undeniable characteristic was said to be its ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Common idea was that all Koreans are the same or very similar: they look alike, believe in the same things, act alike, speak the same language and eat the same food. The homogeneity of Korean people and culture was confirmed only because of the almost rare presence of foreigners in the country. The contemporary South Korea can be stated to be a monocultural and monoethnic society. (Lie 2014, 1.)

South Korea is going through a transformation and it is becoming more multicultural and multiethnic than ever before, even though some Koreans still have goals to erase cultural differences rather than adopting or respecting these cultural differences. There is a common agreement that the transition is unavoidable, but it can also be favorable if done well. (Kim 2014, 58-59.) In 2014, there were 1,57 million foreign-born people in South Korea. Ethnic Koreans with Chinese citizenship account for the greatest proportion of foreign nationals living in the country (figure 1).

## Nationality of foreign residents in South Korea



(Source: Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs)

Figure 1. Nationality of foreign residents in South Korea in 2014 (Korea.net 2016d.)

According to official internet portal of South Korean government Korea.net (2016e), the government is taking actions to recognize foreign cultures and to avoid problems that may appear because of the introduction of new foreign cultures in the South Korean society. They also state on the website that “recent foreign arrivals are integrating well into South Korean society, and multiculturalism is bringing many benefits: there is every indication that this harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures will continue to flourish.” The website page about the South Korea’s transformation into a multicultural society, do not say anything about the fact that there has been cases of discrimination against foreigners in South Korea.

Survey released by Seoul Institute in May 2015, revealed that in Seoul discrimination against foreigners based on nationality, appearance and education has reached new levels. Seoul institute surveyed 2 500 foreigners and 94,5% of them said that they had experienced discrimination, and only 5,5% said that they had not. Two most common types of discrimination were nationality (62,2%) and appearance (28,8%). (Hyams 2015a.)

Cases, where foreigners living and teaching in South Korea report that students, students’ parents and their colleagues tell them that they need to lose weight because they are fat, have been numerous. There have also been many cases where recruitment advertisements have been racist stating that they will recruit only white people. Among recruiters, hagwons (private school) and parents, this kind of institutionalized racism is common in

South Korea. Because there is no anti-discrimination law in Korea, this kind of discrimination is practically legal. (Hyams 2015a; Hyams 2015b; Corks 2014.)

Migration to South Korea is quite recent phenomenon, but today it is a more regular due to the development of South Korea's industry. The opinions of migrants range from negative to indifferent. Migrant workers have accused South Korea for bad treatment. (Shim 2015.) Migrant workers have disadvantaged position because they are often not familiar with the culture and do not know Korean. In addition to racism and xenophobia, "fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners" (Merriam Webster 2016.), many employers take advantage of migrant workers' position by discriminating them in terms of bad treatment, living conditions and payment. (Corks 2016b)

In South Korea the origin of a person is important because of the racial hierarchy in the society. The new policies do not have particularly anything multicultural in them or neither in the society's response to the changing demographics. The confusion in the South Korean society about what multiculturalism actually means, hinders the process of policy-making. Lack of tolerance and discrimination are common social denominators in South Korea. (Denney 2015.)

#### **4.2 Women in South Korea**

The role of women in traditional Korean society was confined to home. Girls were taught from a young age endurance and submissiveness, so that they would be prepared for their future roles as wives and mothers. In general women were taught to be a good daughters, wives and mothers, and could not participate in society like men could. Women were also expected to have sons and women who had only daughters were held responsible. It was considered shameful to depend on daughters because the power of the family depended on how many sons they had. When the Republic of Korea was established in 1948, women gained rights for equal opportunities to education, work, and public life. (Korean Overseas Information Service 2016; Korea4expats 2015a.)

Nowadays number of Korean women have been delaying marriage and decide to have higher education and high paying jobs, and many others do not want to play the traditional role of a Korean wife. In 2014 Statistics of Korea released a social survey statistics report, where women were asked their opinions on marriage, and over 40% said that in the contemporary Korean society marriage is not a big deal. (Abellana 2016; The Economist 2015.)

#### 4.2.1 Education, work and politics

The 2015 Global Gender Gap Report ranked South Korea 115th out of 145 countries. The report measures the gap between genders in economic, political, education, and health-based criteria. In the 2015 report South Korea had a similar rate of primary education attainment for both male and females, but the rate for attainment for secondary and tertiary education, the female rate was over 10% lower than men's in both categories. The percentages of PhD graduates was 33% for women and 67% for men. (Global Gender Gap Report 2015.)

According to Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor website, the employment rate of females in 2014 was 49,5%, when for males it was 71,4% (Ministry of Employment and Labor 2015.). Nowadays the majority of Korean women go to a university, but when they graduate and if they get better grades than their male colleagues, there is still a major possibility that they are not hired at the same job or getting the same pay level. In South Korean society women are still expected to pour the tea and clean the desks of their colleagues. (Korea4Expats 2015b.) There is also an idea still existing in South Korean society, that housework and childcare are the only acceptable jobs for women (Kim 2015).

Many companies still hire males that are less-qualified, than hiring a woman who would probably leave the job after getting married, who would not be able to work late or socialize with colleagues because of family responsibilities. There are still some Korean companies that pressure women to leave their jobs after they get married or pregnant. (Korea4Expats 2015b.) In 2014, 20,7 % of married women had career breaks due to pregnancy, childbirth and parenting (Statistics Korea 2015). Even though there technically is paternity leave, there is no benefit for women from it because companies put pressure on men by indicating that paternity leave hinders their success at work. (Kim 2015.)

Women have also only a few leadership positions within South Korean politics. Women are viewed as unpolitical, mostly because of the gender socialization, "process by which people learn to behave in a certain way, as dictated by societal beliefs, values, attitudes and examples" (Unicef 2007), through family, school and mass media. In the past legislatures the average number of women representatives has been around two percent in South Korea. (Resos 2014.) Also in the political empowerment section there were big differences between men and women. There were only 16% of women in parliament and 6% in ministerial positions, and the same percentages for men were 84% and 94%. (Global Gender Gap Report 2015.)

#### 4.2.2 Everyday life, violence and safety

Women are encouraged to superficiality in South Korean society by teaching them that their greatest feature is their looks. This encouragement to superficiality comes from the fact that Korean women try to achieve the features of the celebrities in Korean dramas and K-Pop videos (Korean television programs and Korean pop music). According to IS-APS (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery) 4,6% of the world's cosmetic surgical procedures were done in South Korea in 2014. One in five South Korean women has had cosmetic surgery and these surgeries are considered normal and worth the investment. Many parents even encourage their children to go under the knife, to get competitive advantage in the labor markets. (Volodzko 2014; ISAPS 2014; Chang & Thompson 2014; Seoul Touch Up 2016.)

Rights of women in South Korea is one of the largest challenges in the country and it has become a major part of public discussion. The two biggest concerns are harassment and violence, and discrimination at work and within the family. In 2014 there were 29 517 cases of sexual violence crimes and 17 557 cases of domestic violence in South Korea according to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family statistics. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Violence against women data of South Korea shows that 19% of women agree that husband or partner is justified to beat his wife or partner under certain circumstances. According to a Social Survey 2014, conducted by Statistics Korea, 55,5% of South Korean women thought that walking alone at night is dangerous. (Corks 2016a; Ministry of Gender Equality and Family 2016; OECD 2015; Statistics Korea 2014.)

The Korean government has taken actions in the recent years to increase gender equality, women's economic and political participation, and female employment and education rates. The changes and actions that the government has done, have been able to make slight improvement. (United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women: Eight Periodic Report: Republic of Korea 2015; Kim 2016.)

But even today Korean culture is, to some extent, hierarchical and the women are the ones who maintain the harmony in the family. The role of women in South Korea has not changed along with the country's sudden economic growth. As a result it has left the country facing issues related to low birth rates, an aging population, and persistent inequality for working women. (Korean Overseas Information Service 2016; Ryan 2014.)

In the next chapter, the research process is presented. From the theoretical background author chose themes that are utilized when making the final conclusion to this thesis' research. These chosen themes are compared to the results of the research, to get the final conclusion to the research questions. The themes that were chosen were safety of South Korea, discrimination of foreigners and status of women.

## **5 Research process**

In this chapter the research process is explained, starting with the introduction of the chosen research method and the objective of the research. Following these, the detailed process and implementation of the research is explained, and finally the bloggers, whose blog entries were used in the research, are presented.

The idea for this research came from the authors own interest towards South Korea and its culture, and after she had been on a holiday in South Korea in the summer 2015. As the author herself was traveling in the country as a foreign female, she became interested about what kind of opinions other foreigners and females had. The author was interested about the opinions regarding the country's safety and what it is like to be a woman and a foreigner in South Korea.

### **5.1 Research method and objective**

The research was conducted by analysing data, which was obtained by researching blogs and blog entries focusing on South Korea. The blogs/blog entries were selected and analysed by using content analysis, which is a method that can be done in inductive or deductive way for both quantitative and qualitative data (Elo & Kyngäs 2007, 109). In inductive approach the analysis is guided by data that is acquired from the material selected for the analysis. In deductive approach the analysis is guided by a theory that is already existing. Content analysis in general seeks to clear the material, so that clear and reliable conclusions can be made. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2008, 108-115.)

Based on the types of the documents selected for the research, qualitative content analysis was used, and because of the objective of the research, it was seen better to conduct the analysis in a deductive way. Deductive approach was selected so that the results of the content analysis (=data from blogs) could be compared to the already existing theory, and thus get the most truthful answers to the research questions.

In qualitative content analysis the qualitative material is described in a systematic way and the research questions specifies the way how the material is analysed. Qualitative content analysis is a good option if the material needs some kind of interpretation, for example when analysing various types of material like interviews, textbooks, websites and diaries. In this research the material used for the analysis were blogs. Qualitative content analysis involves selecting a research question and material, making a coding frame that includes two or more categories, dividing the data into these categories, analysing the material and finally interpreting and presenting the findings. (Schreier, M. 2012, 1-6)

In content analysis with deductive approach, the classification of the data analysis is done based on already existing theory. The first step of the deductive content analysis is to make the coding frame. Depending on the aim of the research coding frame can be structured, where only needed data is selected, or it can be loose. Categories are then formed inside the coding frame in accordance with the principles of inductive approach, where both needed and unnecessary data can be selected from the material and put into the coding frame, or in accordance to structured coding frame. In this research the coding frame was selected to be structured so that the analysis would be clear and consistent, and the categories were selected based on the data that was presented in the theoretical background. Finally the obtained data from the research was compared to the themes selected from the theoretical background. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2008, 113-115.)

The objective of the research was to find out if South Korea is a safe country for foreign female travellers. The aim was to study the opinions and experiences of bloggers, regarding how safe South Korea is and if foreigners, especially foreign females, who travel or live in South Korea are really facing issues like discrimination and racism. Content analysis was seen most suitable for this research for two reasons: it was quick and clear way to see which blogs were suitable for the research, and it was a good way for analysing and interpreting the data received from blogs. Also it allowed the further comparison of the data to material provided in the theory part.

## **5.2 Research process and implementation**

The first step of the research was done by searching blogs about South Korea using Google. Blogs were searched by using sentences “blog from South Korea”, “I don’t like South Korea”, “bad experiences of South Korea”, “I hate South Korea” and “I love South Korea”. About 20 blog entries were chosen based on the title alone. All of these 20 blog entries and websites were read and analysed in accordance with the deductive approach of content analysis. When reading the blog entries, the texts were constantly compared to the themes selected from the theory part, and that way all the blogs that had one or several themes, were selected. As a result eleven blog entries were selected.

The eleven blog entries that were chosen were read again and printed on paper. After that the coding frame was formed. The coding frame was decided to be structured, in which only the needed information was collected to the frame, to make the analysing simple. Based on the theory part, the coding frame was decided to have only one upper class, foreigners and women in South Korea, and then from the blog entries, only data that was suitable for the coding frame was selected. As a result five different categories were formed into the coding frame as lower classes, and those categories were safety, Koreans

and South Korea as a country, looks, women, and foreigners and racism/discrimination. These categories were formed and selected based on the themes selected from the theoretical background.

Next, sentences were picked up from the blog entries and put into those five categories, according to what matter the sentence was concerning about. All the relevant sentences for the research were underlined from the texts, so that it was easy to find them again and to put them under the categories. After this all the underlined sentences were cut from the papers and put onto another paper. Each of the paper had one of the five categories written on it. This was done to make the whole analysing process clear and easy to manage.

When all the blog entries were gone through and sentences picked up, it was then examined if there were any similarities between each of the bloggers' experiences and opinions. After that the data obtained from blog entries were compared to the themes selected from theory part, to see if there were any similarities between them. The results of the comparison were analysed, and the final conclusion was made after once more comparing the results of the research to the research questions.

### **5.3 Blog entries**

As for data, eleven blog entries from eleven different bloggers were selected for this research. As mentioned earlier, when searching and deciding which blogs to use, deductive content analysis was applied from the beginning. There were not that many blogs/blog entries that could have been used, because most of the blogs had only one or two sentences related to the research. The selected blog entries had the most data that could be used in the research.

Bloggers were randomly marked with codes B1, B2, B3 etc. Codes were used instead of the names of the bloggers because some of them were using their nicknames, and that is why it was clearer to mark the blog entries with codes. The blog entries chosen for the research were all written by non-Koreans who had either travelled or lived in South Korea, and blog entries were published between years 2011-2016.

**B1** is a female and from United States and she is currently living in South Korea and is working there as English teacher. She wrote about health, dating, women's rights, foreigners and safety in South Korea in her blog.

**B2** is a female from United States and she writes a blog named as Curiosity Travels, where she has published many posts about her time in South Korea and her opinions

about the country. She lived in South Korea for two years and her blog has over 5 000 likes in Facebook.

**B3** is a female and she is from United States. She writes a blog named World Walk About together with her husband. She lived in South Korea for one year and was working there as English teacher. She wrote many posts about their life in South Korea.

**B4** is a female and she is from United States. Her blog name is I'm A Wandering Soul and she wrote about her time and experiences in South Korea. She worked as English teacher in South Korea and lived there for three years.

**B5** is a female and she is from Finland. She wrote a blog named Wind Up World, where she wrote about her experiences of her exchange year in South Korea.

**B6** is a female and she was traveling in South Korea for four weeks. She is from United States and she wrote about her opinions about South Korea and about her experiences in the country.

**B7** is a female and she is from United Kingdom. She was traveling four weeks in South Korea and she wrote about her experience to her Borders of Adventure blog. In her blog she also writes about her other traveling experiences, and her blog has over 7 000 likes in Facebook.

**B8** is a female and she is from United States. She has a blog named Willful and Wild-hearted, where she writes about her living and traveling experiences in Asia. She lived in South Korea for three years and she worked there as English teacher. Her blog has over 1 000 likes in Facebook.

**B9** is a female and she is from United States. She is currently living in South Korea and she is writing about her experiences to a blog named Western Girl Eastern Boy. Her blog has over 200 likes in Facebook.

**B10** and **B11** are writing a blog together named Eat Your Kimchi. They are a Canadian couple who lived seven years in South Korea. Their blog is popular and they have over 300 000 likes in Facebook. They also have a YouTube channel, which has the same name as their blog and it has over 1 000 000 subscribers in YouTube.

## 6 Results

This chapter presents the results of the research. First the results of the content analysis of the blogs are presented. The results are then compared to the themes provided in the end of the theoretical background.

### 6.1 Safety

According to the results, the general opinion about South Korea is that it is a safe country to live and travel. However, women should be aware of their surroundings, for example when walking at night alone, but it was not seen as a major safety issue for women. There were no mentions that foreigners should particularly be worried about their safety in South Korea. North Korea might be a possible threat for South Korea, but it is not considered as a reason for not visiting the country.

Three bloggers out of eleven had written about safety and all of them told that they feel that South Korea is very safe country. B1 said that she feels safer in Seoul than she has ever felt anywhere else and that she has never had any problems taking the public transportation. However, she points out that women should have someone with them when walking at night and should always be aware of their surroundings, even though South Korea is a safe country.

B4 has similar opinions as B1. She wrote that in South Korea she has never felt that she should watch her surroundings, and that one does not have to worry about pickpockets. Concerning safety of women, she wrote that she has female friends who like to go on late night walks after dinners, and they have never felt that they were unsafe. Also B4 mentions that North Korea might be a threat, but that life there does not give any indication that South Korea is practically at a state of war.

*“From talking with friends and discussing safety in Korea, there was overwhelming agreement that this country, considering how jam-packed it is with people, is amazingly safe and calm. We never worry for our safety while living here, which is not something most of us can say of our home countries. So don’t let yourself be concerned!” (B4, 2013).*

B10 wrote that they felt safer in South Korea compared to their own home city. Also they wrote that they do not see any vandalism or hear about any gun-crimes in South Korea. *“We don’t see vandalism here in Korea as well. Graffiti is barely anywhere. Things aren’t broken or smashed randomly. And we just never hear about gun-crime in the news, like a random person going into the mall and shooting it up” (B10, 2012).*

## 6.2 Koreans and South Korea as a country

One major opinion about South Korea as a country was that there is a lot of racism. Some parts of living in South Korea and certain aspects of the culture were seen hard to handle for foreigners. Koreans were seen as non-foreigner friendly and that some Koreans see foreigners as oddity. On the other hand, South Korea was seen as a country that has lot to offer and that Koreans are really nice and friendly when you get to know them. There was not that much difference between the opinions of the bloggers who had been only visiting the country and compared to those who had been living there.

Six out of eleven bloggers had written about Koreans and their feelings about the country. B2 had had one really bad experience in South Korea and she said that there were many other times she did not like South Korea. As one of the reasons why she did not like living in South Korea, she mentions the choice of living in the capital city Seoul, where there are a lot of people. Also she wrote that she was tired of older people for staring, and them laughing at her when she was trying to speak Korean to them. However, she wrote that South Korea has lot to offer but she was only unlucky, and she just did not understand certain aspects of the Korean culture.

*“Everyone knows that big city people are less friendly than small city people, and when you combine that with a homogeneous society, being awful at speaking the local language and having difficulties understanding certain aspects of the culture anyways, you are going to have a hard time”* (B2, 2013).

B3 said that she enjoyed her time living in South Korea, but some parts of living there were hard and that is why she only decided to live there only a short period of time. She mentions that the first reception as a foreigner is a little odd and people might even shout loudly “foreigner”, when they see a foreigner. However, she also points out that once you get to know Koreans they are amazingly nice.

According to B8, South Korea can be highly discriminatory, and that Koreans tend to believe that their race and nation is superior to others. She also notes that some Koreans still have difficulties with foreigners, even though the immigration to South Korea has increased.

*“A woman in a jimjilbang once openly talked about how my friends and I were ‘ruining the purity of the water’”* (B8, 2016).

*“Common issue for non-Koreans is being denied cab service particularly on weekends. I can’t begin to count how many times a cab driver has slowed down, saw my face, and continued to drive away” (B8, 2016).*

According to B5 South Korea is extremely racist and xenophobic, “fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners” (Merriam Webster 2016), country but that she still likes to live there, and South Korea feels more like home than her own home country. In her opinion, Koreans do not have time to adapt to the increasing number of foreigners in the country, because of the sudden and rapid change into a multicultural society. This in her opinion is one of the reasons why racism exists in South Korea.

*“South Korea is – and I kind of hate to say it aloud because I really do like it here – extremely racist and xenophobic. It’s in the society, and children pick it up from their families and the media” (B5, 2014).*

*“Taxi drivers are likely to trick you and make you pay extra unless you know Korean, because they’ll think you are an easy-to-fool tourist” (B5, 2014)*

B7 has a similar opinion and she writes that Koreans sometimes appear as cold and indifferent. She also wrote that welcoming tourists with open arms is not something that comes naturally from Koreans.

*“They are a ‘closed’ people – community and family focused and not willing to take you, the stranger, into their circle quickly” (B7, 2013).*

B6 had different experiences and wrote that she was surprised about the warmth and hospitality of Koreans, and according to her: *“I don’t think I’ve ever been anywhere where so many people have gone out of their way to make me feel welcome or to find ways to help me or share something with me” (B6, 2014).*

### **6.3 Looks and women**

How one looks is really important in South Korea. The Korean culture is centered on appearance, and plastic surgeries are common in the country. Everything you do depends on how you look and everyone is expected to look their best. Women are seen as weak and as a result women try to act cute and vulnerable to get the attention from men.

Four out of eleven bloggers had written about the attitudes towards looks in South Korea. B1 wrote that *“Everyone is expected to look their best at all times from head to toes. It can be stressful at times to be surrounded by women who try to look perfect in every manner, from what*

*they wear to getting plastic surgery done” (B1, 2015).* B2 also wrote that Korean culture is centered on appearance, and B5 wrote that Koreans favor white skin as it used to mean higher class status.

According to B8, everything one does depends on how they look in South Korea. She also mentions that South Korea is known as the plastic surgery capital. B8 writes that here is a certain image of how one should look, and it seems that people try to delete their own identities and fail to recognize their natural beauty.

*“If you meet your new students’ mothers, they’ll tell you how big your eyes are and how small your face is. If you’re like me and don’t like to wear makeup that often, your boss and Korean colleagues will constantly remind you that you’re looking sick or tired” (B8, 2016).*

Only two out of eleven bloggers had directly written about the status of women. B1 wrote that women are treated as the weaker gender in South Korea. She also mentions that a lot of women act vulnerable and cute, because that is what Korean men like. According to B3, sexism is existing in South Korea, and that women are likely to be disrespected because of the fact that they are a female.

#### **6.4 Discrimination towards foreigners**

According to the results, discrimination towards foreigners is seen as a big issue in South Korea. Discrimination and racism towards foreigners can be seen in everyday life situations like when using public transportation. In case of a Korean assaulting a foreigner, the foreigner is more likely to be blamed. However, not every foreigner has experienced discrimination and racism. Also not all of them feel that they are treated differently because of the fact that they are foreigners.

Six out of eleven bloggers had written about their experiences of attitudes towards foreigners. According to B2 there is a lot of racism in Korea towards foreigners, and sometimes people take advantage of the foreigners’ lack of rights. B2 also shared an incident, where she and her boyfriend had had an unpleasant encounter with a Korean man, which ended up in a fight. In the end, after going to the police station and as a result they had to pay to the man to settle the case.

*“The police already wanted to place the blame on us, and they weren’t being helpful on our side whatsoever. We were basically forced into settling because we weren’t Korean. This was a matter purely about race, not about the facts” (B2, 2013).*

B5 had also written that if a Korean assaults a foreigner, the foreigner is more likely to be blamed. She adds that if a foreigner fights back, it is likely that their visa is revoked and the Korean gets away with nothing or in the worst case gets a warning.

*“If a Korean assaults a foreigner – be it someone yelling at you or getting physical, theft, or sexual abuse – the foreigner is more likely to get blamed for the whole feat” (B5, 2014).*

B3 wrote that foreigners are seen as oddity and will get stared and pointed at. B9 has the same opinion as B3 and she also writes that foreigners might be stared at, teased, and discriminated for their skin color or experience racism in South Korea. B5 writes that white girls with “European” looks are often called Russian by older Korean men, and states that it means that men think the girls are prostitutes. She also writes that especially older men often yell at foreigners for speaking English, and if a foreigner speaks Korean, they will either yell at them for stealing their roots and pride, or yell that they are pretentious and will never learn Korean perfectly.

*“Sometimes, people won’t want to sit by you on the train or bus, because you are different” (B3, 2013).*

Bloggers of B10 admit that foreigners are treated differently, but as how differently it depends on the foreigner. Personally they have not experienced any outright racism, except sometimes they get stared by senior citizens who mumble something about foreigners while looking at them. However, they also admit that they have friends who have faced discrimination and racism from Koreans.

*“We have good friends, good teachers who are good people, who have been denied teaching jobs because they’re too Asian looking, too overweight, too not-white. We have good friends here who are black who have had some Korean people walk up to them and try to touch their hair or skin” (B10, 2011).*

When comparing the results to the themes selected from the theoretical background, it was seen that there were some similarities between them. The general thought in both parts is that, South Korea is seen as a safe country and that the main threat to its safety is North Korea. Also crimes and robberies against tourists exists little in South Korea, but still it is good to comply with the general caution.

The issue regarding discrimination and racism towards foreigners is seen as a big issue in South Korea. South Korea has been long a homogeneous country and some people have difficulties at accepting the change into a multicultural society, in other words difficulties at

accepting foreigners. However, not every foreigner faces discrimination and racism, or it is not that visible for them to notice it.

The status of women is better and more equal to men's, but still women are seen as weaker and their role is more confined to home. Women are recommended to be cautious when walking at night alone, but otherwise they should feel safe. South Korean culture is centered on looks and people, especially women, are expected to look good.

## 7 Conclusion

The main research question was is South Korea safe travel destination for foreign female travellers. The main question was divided into three sub questions: is South Korea a safe country, how foreigners are treated in South Korea and what is the status of women in the country. The results of the research were compared to these research questions to get the final conclusion to the main research question.

South Korea can be said to be a safe country. There is a minimal amount of crimes against tourists and usually the problems appear in Seoul's districts of Hongdae, Itaewon and Sinchon, which are favoured by foreigners. Like the results of the research show, bloggers also feel that the country is safe, but that women should be careful when walking at night alone. Also there can be a sudden change to the situation between North Korea and South Korea, but it is not seen as a reason for not traveling to the country.

In South Korea there is a lot of racism and discrimination towards foreigners. There was a survey conducted in 2015 by Seoul Institute, in which 94,5% out of 2 500 foreigners answered that they had experienced discrimination in Seoul. However, not all foreigners face discrimination or racism in South Korea. Some foreigners are really liking the country, living there many years and traveling there many times.

Korean women are usually the ones who stay at home and take care of the children and according to results are seen as the weaker gender. The status of women has been getting better in the recent years and South Korea elected its first female president in 2013. However, women are still facing discrimination in the working life, and the harassment and violence towards women are still a big issues in South Korea. Women are encouraged to superficiality, plastic surgeries are really popular and women are especially expected to look good.

Final conclusion to the main research question is that South Korea is a safe country to travel and there are almost no crimes towards tourists in the country. However, the situation between North Korea and South Korea can change quickly, and it is recommended to follow the situation. Foreigners might face some discrimination and racism, but mostly foreigners are treated well.

The author also agrees that South Korea is a safe country to travel. During her both trips to South Korea she felt safe, even though she was traveling there as a woman, and most of the time alone. She walked many times alone at night, and did not face any threatening

situations. Also she did not notice that the situation between the two Koreas was affecting her trips to the country.

While traveling in South Korea, there were some situations when the author noticed that she was treated differently because of the fact that she was a foreigner. Couple of times the author went to a restaurant, where the staff did not even say hi to her and in the end she left the restaurant because no one came to serve her. Also she experienced a similar situation, which was written by B5 in her blog entry, where older Korean man was yelling at her “Russian, Russian!” across the street. However, most of the time she was treated really well, and in her opinion South Korean people are really kind and helpful. There were many times when the author was helped by locals, when she was lost or needed to find a certain place.

The author did not experience any harassment in South Korea or neither felt that she was discriminated because of the fact that she was a woman. Actually, it felt more like an advantage that she was a woman. People were really friendly to her and came to talk to her, and also her “European looks” were complimented many times.

## **7.1 Validity and reliability**

The reliability of the research is measured with validity and reliability, but validity is getting more attention in qualitative research than reliability. In validity, the questions are, whether the research is valid, is it thoroughly done, and are acquired results and conclusions right. Also the research has validity, if the research has examined what has been promised. Reliability means the reproducibility of research results. In qualitative research, these concepts are criticized because they are made to mainly measure the validity and reliability of a quantitative research. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2013, 136.)

In qualitative research, there is no unambiguous guidelines how to measure the reliability of a research. However, the research is assessed as a whole, and then the consistency of the research is on focus. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2013) in their book *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*, the following parts of the research should be also consistent with each other, for the research to be reliable:

- The objective and purpose of the research: what is researched and why
- Own commitments as a researcher: why the research is important in your opinion, what was expected when starting the research, have the thoughts changed
- Acquisition of data: how the data is acquired, specific characteristics of the acquisition of data, possible problems and the other issues that the researcher thinks are relevant
- Informants of the research: how they were selected, how many

- Researcher-informant-relation: estimation of how the relationship worked, did their comments change the results
- The duration of the research: what was the time frame for the research
- Analysis of the material: how the material was analysed, how the results and conclusions were made
- Reliability of the research: it is needed to estimate why the research is reliable
- The reporting of the thesis: how the research material is collected and analysed (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2013, 140-141.)

This research can be said to have validity, because the aim was to study the opinions and experiences of the bloggers about South Korea regarding safety, foreigners and women. The best way for this research was to study these opinions and experiences by reading blogs and blog entries written by people who had lived or travelled to South Korea. The qualitative content analysis was seen as the best research method, because qualitative content analysis is a good option if the material needs some kind of interpretation, for example when analysing various types of material like interviews, textbooks, websites and diaries. The bloggers had similar opinions and experiences, and based on them the author was able to make some conclusions. The direct quotations in the research results also add the validity of the research. The research can also be said to have reliability because the research includes all the above mentioned parts, and they are described in detail.

## **7.2 Evaluation of the thesis process and self-assessment**

The idea for the thesis came in summer 2015, and the writing was started in January 2016. The writing process of the thesis lasted for five months. The author wanted to choose a subject that she was interested in, and which was something that no one had not done before. The author travelled to South Korea for one month in 2015 and the idea for the thesis came after the trip. The author thought of doing the thesis for a commissioner party, but because of the lack of time she decided do the thesis without a commissioner party.

The writing process of the thesis took more time than what was expected. The easiest part of the writing process was to write the theoretical part. Because of the authors own interest towards South Korea and its culture, it was meaningful and interesting to find the information. Hardest part of the thesis process was to write about the research method and to find enough relevant blog entries for the research. Also because of the fact that the author likes South Korea and she has a really positive image about the country and its people, she had to really focus on that the research and the conclusions would be objective.

After the theoretical part and the research process was written, analysing of the results was done. The blog entries were analysed many times during the acquisition of the material and the sentences were put into different categories, to make the final analysing easier. This made the analysing of the results easier and quick, and it took less time than what it took to write the other parts of the thesis.

The writing process of the thesis could have been started a bit earlier, so that there would have been more time to find more blog entries for the research to analyse. Also it would have allowed the author to research the topic more deeply than she was now able to do. However, because the topic of the thesis was meaningful and interesting to the author, it helped the author to finish the thesis in shorter time than she had expected. The benefits gained from the writing of the thesis were that the author learned how to conduct a research and how much time and effort it takes to complete this kind of a work, and that she is able to finish this kind of a large task in a short period of time.

Even though the whole process was time consuming and sometimes it was hard to progress, because the author is not really good at writing, the author is quite happy with the ending result of the thesis. With the help of the thesis supervisor, the author was able to complete the thesis on time. The author is relieved that she was finally able to complete the thesis and to finally graduate as a Bachelor of Hospitality Management.

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