

Things People Like About Korea

Actual commitment to recycling. At first figuring out which recyclable went into which bin was a hassle and the odor from the wet trash bin is truly disgusting sometimes, but when it comes to socially responsible disposal of garbage, Korea is top notch and I'm proud to be 'walking the talk'. America should be ashamed for how little they recycle in comparison (especially considering that they're still the #1 producer of waste).

Fresh fruit trays as bar food. For the price of one cocktail at a nice place in NYC, you can usually get a giant platter of fresh fruit, beer, and a thing of soju cocktail to share among friends. Going out in Korea is a whole different thing - I imagine it's tougher to meet people, but I'd MUCH rather go out with good friends for some food and drinks than sit with strangers somewhere with overly loud music. I always thought I didn't like going out, but after spending time in England, Greece, and Korea, it turns out that I just don't like going out in the US.

Public social affection. Even my high school boys rest their heads on each other or hold hands in class (on the downside - somehow deep-seated homophobia coexists with this uber-homosocial behavior)

Beer and barbeque - Grilled belly pork, a bowl of dwenjang chigae and a cold beer is one of the best things about Korea. Chatting with friends, cooking your own food and leaving the restaurant smelling like charcoal and pig. An experience I could never get back home.

Lost and found. So many times, friends have mine have lost or forgotten wallets, purses, umbrellas, bags, ipods and numerous other items in cafes, bars and restaurants. Yet these items do not disappear (most of the time), they remain in their location, looked after by kindly staff or strangers who return the missing objects intact. Of course this is only my opinion, but I know that your chances of getting back missing items here is far greater than in London....

Everything is open all the time.

Convenience, convenience, convenience. Shops open here longer and later. Sunday may be the holy day of rest in some countries, but in Seoul I can get what I need late on Sunday night without even having to worry about early closing. Plus the joys of 24 hour convenience stores still amaze me.

More festivals and special events than you can shake a stick at.

Dear god, there are too many of them. Every weekend there seems to be something going on (usually for free) and if you are so inclined then you can spend all your free time attending the most interesting and esoteric events.

Food Carts, Orange Tents and Vegetable Sellers.

On my way home I can walk past fresh fruit and veg for sale at remarkably low prices. The quality is always good and the sellers are friendly. I'd much rather buy my mushrooms by the side of the road than from E-mart. Damn sight cheaper and a lot tastier. The food carts and orange tents allow us a myriad of tasty experiences as long as we don't think too hard about the lack of running water or health and safety standards.

Immediate repairs/installation.

No "wait three weeks" or "we will arrive between the hours of 6.00am and 9.00pm". If you need something fixed, delivered or installed then it can usually be done in a flash. If I have a problem, I call someone and they fix it almost immediately. No waiting, no snarky customer service and no long slide into depression

- Incredibly cheap taxis (I can get across town for \$5)
- Reservable seats in movie theaters
- Cheap, fast national train system (suck it, Acela)

Things People Like About Korea.

Food I cannot stress this one enough. The food is healthy, cheap, tasty and has you wanting more. I love Korean food with every cell in my body. For about \$3 I get a nice meal with vegetables, meat, soup and free side items. Yes I said

FREE side items. When you order the main dish in Korea, all side items are absolutely free; not only that, you get free refills regardless of how many times you request more. So if you are a pig, Korea is the place for you to pig out and enlarge your frame.

Alcohol One of the girls I used to work with is a top drinker; trying to out drink her is like trying to out drink Poseidon. So, if you like to drink until you can't feel your face and the ambulance have to pick you up from a soju tent, then you will love Korea. I have seen people so drunk that they don't even bother to go home; they just sleep on the side of the road. What is great about this is that the cops just drive by and I get a great laugh out of it. I even see people carrying beer as they walk down the street and it is perfectly legal to walk on the street with liquor in your hand in Korea. If you are looking to join AA meetings when you go back to your country, Korea is a good start for you. You can buy a bottle of soju at the grocery store for less than \$2 and at a soju tent for a couple cents more because they keep it cold to aid you in your aimless life of drunkenness.

Public Transportation Public transportation is God-given in Korea. Most Koreans use public transportation to get around. It is only about \$0.80 cents to ride the bus which is equivalent to 1,000 thousand Korean won depending on exchange rate. The base rate for a taxi is \$2 less or a bit more, again depending on exchange rates. Which is still very cheap compared to my home town in U.S. To take the train is also very cheap; a ticket costs about \$4 if in the Seoul area and a bit more in the rural and also depends on where you are going.

Safety Korea has got to be one of the safest countries in the world. I know this might sound strange to some people because North Korea is the crazy neighbor whose windows never open. From international viewers it might not seem like Korea is a safe place but it is. I see children walking home in the middle of the night and women exercising at the park and walking alone at very late hours. And since I have been here, I have not heard of any mass murderers or children killing their entire family then killing themselves as I we frequently read about in U.S newspapers. I think this is because Koreans see themselves as one; it is even embedded in the language. They refer to each other as brother, sister and so forth. Of course I am not aware of everything that happens in Korea but from my observation and experience here, it is hell of a lot safer than the U.S, especially for women and children.

Togetherness

Koreans are very friendly people once you get to know them. And ones you are in their circle of friendship, you are a friend for life. Most friendships with Koreans once established can last a lifetime. It is beautiful thing to watch two Korean friends. In my culture (U.S), if we saw two Korean friends we would automatically think "yep they are gay." I see friends in Korea holding hands, even kissing each other on the cheek both guys and girls; they are as close as family. Their sense of togetherness either freaks you out or intrigues you.

Patience

Most Koreans especially the older folks are very patient (well, depends on the situation because they are not patient in lines. They cut right in front of you in fact.) They are as patient with each other as they are patient with their children but I have seem a angry Korean and is not a pretty site to see.

Taking off shoes

I like taking off my shoes to go into restaurants or into school or at home. It's nice. Although, it's kind of extreme when people take off their shoes when moving heavy furniture. Still after getting used to this, I can't imagine walking around home any more with shoes that have been walking around 'dirty' outdoor spaces like public bathrooms.

Things People Like About Korea

Covered markets – those semi-outdoor, traditional bazaar-style markets you find in the older parts of the city or town, where old folks give you great prices or freshness, or just a taste of how things used to be.

Restaurants with one thing on the menu -and old people lined up out the door to eat there. Lots of restaurants get lines out the door, but if OLD people willing to wait, you can be sure it's not because the place is trendy because the food is, cheap, delicious, and generously portioned..

Public transportation – especially in the city, but even if you're traveling around the country, if you're handy with a transit card, good at reading bus schedules, and not above hailing a cab from time to time, there's no need to own a car here. You can also get from city to city easily by bus or train. LOVE the KTX.

The tourist help lines here's the place to find all the local numbers – Korea's really made an effort to become more accommodating to tourists who don't speak the language, and this is one of the absolute best initiatives they've come up with so far.

People-watching (and eye candy) everywhere – old people playing baduk in parks, little kids splashing in public water fountains, couples speaking in goopy voices in coffee shops... or breaking up loudly on the steps to a subway station..., little kids wearing hanbok on festival days... and at every crosswalk, whether you dig XX or XY chromosome sets, there'll be at least one person coming the other way who's an eyeful of style, beauty, handsomeness, high fashion or immaculate grooming, to give your eyes a treat as you pass.

The food

The food in Korea is absolutely delicious. From soups to Kimchi to fried pork, it tastes very good. Your staples when eating are rice and soup. I do miss a variety of foods, but I can always go to Seoul to get pretty decent beer or westernized food.

Quiet Many times I have gotten on a bus or subway with many people on it, and it is extremely quiet. It's a little bit different if you're on a subway/bus in Hong Kong or New York City. Maybe a sociologist would be more adept at answering this discrepancy, but I think it's due to societal pressures. Some subways can be very loud, and I guess it depends person to person, but the quiet can be soothing at times, especially if you want to hear that last bit of "This American Life" or the newest album from "Arcade Fire."

Fashion orientation

Many Koreans dress stylishly. How you look is very important in the culture. Style isn't exactly a word people use to describe me, unless it's used like, "He has no..." but I can appreciate a good outfit as much as the next guy can.

Conformity You usually know what you're getting into when you go places in Korea. It is very similar across areas, as far as I can tell. This might sound like a backhand compliment, like, "Your butt doesn't look as fat in those pants," but I think that conformity, as a Confucian trait, has intrinsic value. You produce diligent workers who don't complain. Your education system tops the world in terms of math and science. Your economy has grown thousands of percentage points since the 1960's. Plus, you can answer questions about Koreans pretty easily. For example, I am always asked questions like, "Is it like this in America?" and the truth is always that I can't speak for all of Americans, because we are so widely different. (Insert fat joke). Korea has a distinct cultural heritage that they are very proud of, and they have many reasons to be wary of foreigners, but I think that have easily primed themselves to be a world power. Now, they just have to deal with this North Korea thing.

Things People Dislike About Korea

The TP situation.

OK, I can accept that toilet paper is not always provided in public facilities and we need to BYOTP, but for the love of God Korea, please flush the toilet paper. I understand that decades ago, toilets were not up to the task, but most plumbing systems these days can handle it. Really! Most airports, govt buildings, and sites that get int'l traffic have no TP receptacles in the stalls and things seem to flow just fine. To sit down to 'do your business' next to a bin full of shit-filled TP is definitely my #1 dislike about life in Korea - not only is it disgusting, it's very unhygienic. Not to mention that the resulting stench is why I assume public bathroom doors are so often left open so passersbys can wave to me as I'm standing at the urinal.

Korean cutesy girl style. ㅇㅇ ㄱㅇ

I honestly can't comprehend how the guys can stand it – especially any western guys dating Korean girls. ㅇㅇ ㄱㅇ is how Korean girls act with their boyfriends. There is no equivalent word in English, because this act just doesn't exist (like there is no Korean equivalent of 'chav') so I will try and explain it. They act cutesy and child-like, using baby talk, but also whiny and annoying because they think this makes them appear attractive. They try to seem coy, pout and jump up and down and hit things (or their boyfriend) when they get upset.

No decaf. Not even Starbucks has it.

Rude kids. Seriously. Little kids will run up and point at you and scream to their mother/teacher "oma! waygookin! pwayo!" (mom, look! a foreigner!). Kids old enough to be taking English will run up, wave in your face, scream "hello, how are you!" and laugh hysterically. Last week, I even had a few middle school-ish aged boys run up to me and scream "FUCK!" in my face and run away. What happened to respecting one's elders? Good grief.

Working harder, not smarter. I respect the diligent work ethic, but Koreans need to understand the law of diminishing returns. Having students study from 7am~midnight or salarymen stay until 9pm every night is inefficient and really hurts the quality of life here for most Koreans (not to mention me since I'm expected to stay at my desk until 4:30p, even if I finish teaching and lesson planning at 2:00)

Xenophobia Now I can't blame all Koreans for this because a lot of them are simply curious, even fascinated by westerners, however some people, usually old people or fat, suited, middle aged men are just straight rude. This is usually expressed in petty ways such as looking at me like I'm not welcos. Often there is a tangible air of tension in everyday situations like taking a taxi, but I'm happy to say that when I break the ice and show an interest, particularly when they realise I speak some Korean, they pretty almost always warm to me.

Spitting

Spitting is disgusting, yet Korean males of all ages do it everywhere – indoors and outdoors. I'm not completely naive, I know this isn't unique to Korea, but it makes me feel sick every time I am walking along a corridor and see a pool of saliva. Yuk. And oh, the two part sound. First you hear the haaack and you just have to wait for the 'ptooey' to come.

Lack of Common Courtesy.

My number one pet peeve about Korea - people who don't wait for others to get off before they shove their way into an elevator, bus, or subway car. To me it shows a complete and utter disregard for others. All it takes is one small thought, "Maybe someone might want to get off", to stop you barging on before others have gotten off. It's an absence of the most basic form of manners.

Finger jabbing

Korean children have a 'fun' game, whereby they jab each other (and unsuspecting foreign teachers) up the butt with their first two fingers. Don't ever turn your back to a Korean child. You've been warned.

Things People Dislike About Korea

Shopping Stalking & Hawking

Shopping is a mixed bag in Korea. Some points for ubiquitousness and late hours, but the downsides are:

A) the employees that stalk you as you walk around certain shops - matching you step for step and readjusting an item you pick up and put back. Talk about counter-productive! I usually just flee to another store that will ignore unless I ask for help

B) The megaphone wielding dudes who hawk the 'blue light specials' at stores like HomePlus and Emart. I'm standing 2 meters away from you. Do you really need a megaphone? Do you really need to keep repeating the same thing over and over again. Announce a special, OK. Then leave us to shop in peace please.

Koreans repeating "facts" about Korea.

*"Did you know Korea is most scientific alphabet in world?"

*"Did you know Korea is most beautiful country in the world, because it has four seasons?"

*"Kimchi, it is most healthy food in the world."

Okay, it's kind of charming and adorable when kids say this stuff, but it makes it tough to take an adult seriously when he tells me that kimchi saved Korea from SARS (no joke, that happened). Also, Koreans are constantly shocked that I am able to eat spicy food. After years of Indian and Mexican food, I definitely have a higher tolerance for spice than my host family, but teachers in my school are still floored when I eat a pepper.

The Korean education system. What a double-edged sword! Yes, these kids outscore American kids by huge margins, but at what price? At my host sister's age, I was taking bike rides to the beach, making up talent show dances with friends, going to the mall after school and the movies on the weekends. My host sister gets home at 3pm and then practices violin and piano, takes a break to hang with her brother when he gets home, has dinner, and then most nights gets tutored until around 9. She's up doing homework until at least 11:00. She's 12 years old, in her last year of elementary school - it's only going to get exponentially worse until college.

Materialism and bragging.

Koreans are extremely materialistic. It's rare to see anybody without a high end designer bag. People openly brag about where they live and how much it costs. Second hand cars are practically non-existent. Everything is based on brand, which means everything is branded. Apartment complexes are branded, like chain stores. While hiking Mount Bukhansan, many of the Koreans we came across were dressed head to toe in expensive branded hiking gear with their hair and make up perfectly done. An older Korean friend dragged me shopping with her once, where she 'had' to buy a bag of a certain brand because all of her friends had recently bought one. If she didn't, they would think it was because she couldn't afford one.

Last minute

I like to plan things in advance if possible and I am sure a lot of people can agree with this. Although you get used to it fast because you have no choice, Korea should be known as the last minute country. You will find out about a new student in your class as you are going to class. You will find out about your vacation days two days before your vacation. You have to ask before you can know. If you don't ask you are doomed for surprises and even if you ask, you don't always get the answer that you need.

Animal Treatment

Visiting Korea you will see a lot of cats with short tails, dirty coat and rawboned body. Since few people have cats as pets, they are being seen as vermin it hurts my heart to seem them so neglected. Concern for animal welfare seems to be improving but, as evidenced by how many strays there are, it has a long way to go. I'm not sure if coloring your dogs ears pink is considered 'mistreatment', but it definitely qualifies as weird.

Things People Dislike About Korea

Lack of concern for others/public safety.

Koreans tend to be very kind and hospitable to people they know, but if you're a stranger, forget about it. Whether it's openly cutting in line or ignoring public examples of child or spousal abuse, if it involves someone you don't know, it doesn't matter. I cringe everytime I see an ambulance, sirens wailing, stuck in traffic as drivers make no effort to get out of the way. I can't help but think of the poor soul waiting (maybe dying, literally) for it to arrive. I suspect this might also be at the cause of driving habits here. Most people don't use blinkers, follow basic traffic rules, or hesitate to cut other drivers off. If they knew that the person driving next to them was their 선배 would they drive that way?

Racism and Xenophobia.

Both are directed at foreigners, but the worst racism is reserved for South Asians, Southeast Asians and Africans or African-Americans. A Korean, whom I otherwise like and respect, told me that black men "don't look quite human", while my Korean students, whenever they see a picture of a black person, always say how 'ugly' he or she is. This is not just the attitude of a few people, but is widespread among Koreans.

The lack of direction on sidewalks and stairways. I'm told that traditionally Koreans walked on the left side, but these days the signs say to walk on the right, but in practice people walk on either side, switch sides randomly or change their minds mid-stride and turn around. I'm willing to abide by whichever side you want, but please pick a side and stick with it.

Litter

On one hand, Korea is great about recycling. On the other hand, streets are littered with throw-away debris because there are so few public trash cans here. I am appalled by the scattering of flyers in entertainment districts. On weekend nights, the streets are literally covered with them. Besides being ineffective, it's an environmental felony.

Public Drunkenness.

Koreans never talk about this, but it's a serious problem. When you see, almost every night, several drunken businessmen, college students, or other Koreans throwing up on the sidewalk or staggering drunkenly home supported by friends, and it's not even 10 o'clock yet, you know there's a problem. It also bothers me how easily drunkenness is used to excuse bad behavior. "Sure, he hit his wife, but he was drunk, so he didn't really mean it!" NOT OK.

Apartment Intercoms

If the building is on fire, OK make an apartment wide announcement that will wake me from my nap. But the latest updates on adjumma meetings or tenant misbehavior regarding recycling habits can (and are) posted by the elevator without waking or annoying anyone.

Criticism

This one should be number one. Koreans don't like it when and if you don't like something about Korea. They get defensive as if it was a personal attack or that you are not supposed to have an opinion about their country. This baffles me, I don't expect Koreans like everything about the U.S. and often agree when they or other non-Americans criticize the U.S.

Noise Pollution.

Bongo trucks selling fruit and vegetables driving slowly through the neighbourhood with loudspeakers on top volume blaring "생굴" FRESH MANDARINS over and over again. People who think it's acceptable to vacuum and hammer nails into the wall at 3am. Advertising trucks and noisy businesses which set up speakers outside, doing permanent ear damage to anyone who walks by. At least there are less dickheads with loud cars over here.

Things Non-Koreans Like about Korea	Things Non-Koreans Dislike about Korea

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