

# South Korea

<b>Capital:</b>	Seoul
<b>Religion:</b>	Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, ancestor worship, Shamanism, and Ch'ondogyo are practised by two-thirds of the population. A sizeable Christian minority (28%) comprises Protestants and Roman Catholics.
<b>Government:</b>	Unitary multiparty republic, governed by a president (chief of state), prime minister (head of government), deputy prime minister, and State Council (cabinet). There is also a 299-seat unicameral National Assembly and a supreme court.
<b>Ethnic Groups:</b>	99% Korean, 1% Chinese.
<b>Language:</b>	Korean is the official language, and English is widely taught in many schools.
<b>Currency:</b>	South Korea's unit of currency is the won, indicated by the symbol 'KW'.

- Korea occupies a 1,000 kilometre long peninsula in North East Asia, surrounded by 3,900 islands. It shares most of its border with China. Mountains make up 70% of its land area.
- Evidence of human habitation within the Korean Peninsula dates back at least to 3000 BC with the arrivals of nomads migrating south from the Asian mainland.
- Korea's original name, *Choson*, meant 'land of the morning calm'.
- The Koreans are one ethnic family speaking and writing the same language with only mild dialectical variations. The language bears a strong resemblance to Japanese, and both languages have many Chinese derived words.
- A democratically elected civilian-led government runs South Korea as a business, and the major growth areas are technology and intensive heavy industry.



## Business and Social Etiquette

- Be punctual to meetings and social events. This is expected from foreigners as a sign of good business practice. Do not get upset, however, if your counterpart is late.
- Koreans often arrange one-to-one meetings (as opposed to the Japanese, who prefer group meetings).
- Bow at the beginning and end of a meeting. An exit bow that is longer than the greeting bow is an indication that the meeting went well. The handshake is increasingly practised, using the right hand, for male-male contact. Eye contact is important to convey sincerity and attentiveness to your business associate.
- Elderly people are very highly respected, so it is good manners to greet and speak to them first, and spend a few minutes with them.
- The presentation of business cards is formal (but not as formal as Japan). Present with both hands, and obtain business cards printed in Korean on one side. Cards are very important, since they indicate your rank and are a key to the respect you deserve in their culture. Never place a Korean's card in your back pocket. Never write on a business card.
- Men should wear a conservative suit and tie and white shirt for business; women should wear a conservative suit and blouse or dress (and avoid tight skirts, since many people sit on the floor in homes and restaurants).
- The basis for a successful business relationship in Korea is a respectful rapport between individuals. Personal relationships take precedence over business.
- Negotiations in Korea are much more emotional than in western countries that stress logic and the bottom-line cost.
- Do not be fooled into thinking that Korea is completely westernised because of its façade of modernisation. While the younger generation is becoming more open to globalisation, traditional values run deep. Respect for parents and ancestors, protecting 'face' (the dignity of another person), and virtues of kindness, righteousness, propriety, intelligence, and faithfulness are still revered.
- Modesty is very important in Korea. Do not enter an office or home until you are invited, and do not seat yourself until you are asked to do so. Be modest about your position and accomplishments, and if you receive a compliment, politely refute it. Brute honesty is not appreciated in Korea.



- It is still rare to have women participate in business in Korea. This means that women will have the additional challenge of overcoming this initial hesitancy. It is best to carefully consider this factor and mention to your Korean contact that a woman will be included in the team. This will allow them some time to adjust to the situation.
- Be sincere and honest in business dealings.
- Be patient. Business will tend to take place at a slower pace than in North America or Europe. Be patient with delays in decision making.
- Avoid being loud and boisterous around Koreans. Although they are more direct than most Asians, they dislike rowdy behaviour.
- Meet face to face and keep in touch after your trip by e-mail or telephone.
- It is common to be invited out after business hours to a Kisaeng house, bar, or dinner where there will be a lot of alcohol. This is an important part of establishing an informal relationship and judging the character of the other person. Do not refuse these invitations, and do not bring your spouse. Try to reciprocate before you leave. The person who invites the other(s) is expected to pay for the meal.
- Shoes are removed before entering a Korean home or restaurant, and if visiting someone's home, take along fruit, flowers, cakes or alcohol. However a present will never be unwrapped in the presence of the giver. Gift giving is also often practised within a business setting.
- Korean women cover their mouths when laughing.
- It is impolite to use an unqualified 'no', to make too much eye contact, to blow one's nose at the table, or to smoke in front of seniors.
- Today Japanese, Americans and Australians need to be especially sensitive to Koreans' feelings toward them: the Japanese because of atrocities committed during World War II, the Americans and Australians because of the long US military and diplomatic presence in South Korea.



## Language

- Family names are traditionally mentioned first. Over half of all Koreans have the family name Kim, Lee, Park or Choi (pronounced Chay). As a result, many Koreans are called by their occupation eg. Engineer Kim, or Teacher Park. This is also a good reason to remember people's full names, not just Mr Lee. Many Koreans reverse their names when dealing with westerners.
- Always use titles if known, or at least Mr, Mrs or Miss unless instructed otherwise. Given names are rarely used except with family.
- Korean women keep their own family names when they marry

English	Korean	Phonetics
Hello	Yoboseyo	Yah-bo-say-oh
Good morning	Annyong hashimnika	Ahn-yohng ha-shim-nee-kah
Good evening	(same)	(same)
Good bye	Annyonghee kaseyo	Ahn-yohng-hee kay say-o
Yes	Ne	Neh
No	Aniyo	Ah-nee-yo
Please	Chom	Chohm
Thank you	Kamsa hamnida	Kahm-sah hahm-nee-dah
You're welcome	Ch'onmaneyo	Chon-mahn-ay-yo
I don't understand	Chal morugetsumnida	Chahl mor-oo-get-soom-nee-dah

