

IDENTITIES ABROAD: SOUTH KOREA*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for South Korea as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. IEGI understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to South Korea, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Seoul

Population: 51,835,110 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): Korean, English (widely taught in elementary, junior high, and high school)

Religions: Protestant 19.7%, Buddhist 15.5%, Catholic 7.9%, none 56.9% (2015 est.) **note:** many people also carry on at least some Confucian traditions and practices

Ethnic groups: Homogeneous



Korea, an East Asian country, is the 28th most populous country in the world, with a largely homogenous Korean population. It was declared independent from Japan on August 15th, 1945. After the end of the Korean War in 1953, the peninsula was divided into North and South and the countries have experienced a tense relationship since then. Since then, South Korea has experienced great economic growth and is now considered an advanced economy with all of the luxuries of most developed nations. Education is highly valued in South Korea and the country now attracts students from around the world because of the

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improving quality of higher education. The official language is Korean, but English is widely taught in junior high and high school. 83% of the population lives in an urban area, with the largest population being in the capital, Seoul. Economically, it is considered to be an industrialized, developed country.

Travelers can explore some of the [best places to visit in South Korea](#). Recognized as a [World Bank High-Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living in South Korea](#) is 3.37% higher than in United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not taken into account). If you plan on renting, expect monthly costs for a single person to be around 45.97% lower than in United States.

On the micro level, the average cost for a three-course meal for 2 at a mid-range restaurant is between \$20-78 USD (about 25,000-95,000 KRW) while a meal at an inexpensive one might cost about 7 USD.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for South Korea:

- [U.S Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to South Korea](#)

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors Report 2019, 3,929 students from the United States studied abroad in South Korea, a roughly 4.2% increase from the previous year recorded.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SOUTH KOREA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

Korea is an extremely homogenous country. While it has been reported that the chance of racially-based harassment is low, the odds go up if you are a dark-skinned male. It has been said that most cases of harassment are verbal in nature, but situations involving alcohol may be worth extra precaution. Generally speaking though, while Korean people may not be used to seeing non-Asian tourists, and students of color may feel intimidated. Most of the time, however, people have reported little reason to fear for their safety outside of the usual concerns of an urban environment in the U.S.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Student Reflections on Diversity Abroad](#): Seoul, South Korea
- [3 Tips for Being Black in South Korea](#), CIS Abroad
- [An \(Asian\) American Abroad](#)
- [Study Abroad in South Korea: What they Never Tell You as a Black Woman Abroad](#)
- [Experiencing Traditional Life in South Korea as a Black Student Abroad](#)

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN SOUTH KOREA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

The response to homosexuality is mixed in Korea. While there are no specific laws that discriminate based on sexuality, same-sex marriages are not legally recognized. There is an LGBTQ subculture in the more urban cities but it is not openly displayed in public, although platonic displays of affection between same-sex friends is very common.

As is often in the case in a society that is both homogenous and traditionally conservative, it is the experience of many students that being open about your sexuality in any context is seen as unusual and curious, sometimes shocking.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Global Gayz](#), a gay-owned charitable travel and culture website focused on LGBT life in countries around the world
- [LGBT Travel Information, U.S. Passports & International Travel](#) (see Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [The International LGBTQ+ Travel Association \(IGLTA\)](#), the Leading Global Resource in the LGBT Tourism Industry

- [LGBTQIA rights and resources](#) gathered on an (incomplete) map of the world, many popular study abroad destinations are featured - UC Davis
- [Lonely Planet LGBTQ Traveler guide](#) for South Korea
- [LGBT Rights in South Korea](#), Equaldex
- [Queer Identity in Korea](#), CIEE

PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN SOUTH KOREA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

Generally speaking, most facilities in Korea have been made to be accessible. Larger tourist attractions are accessible by wheelchair and may even offer disability discounts, though this is less often true in smaller organizations. Wheelchair rental is often offered at accessible locations, although proof of identification is required. Major tourist sites and transportation facilities, especially in urban areas, are equipped with ramps as well as accessible restrooms.

Students with physical disabilities may find it difficult to navigate public transportation in Korea. Access to transportation in most areas is somewhat limited, although there are various government initiatives designed to make public transport more accessible. Students with vision impairment may have difficulty, as most Braille or audio transportation information is exclusively in Korean.

Traditional Korean markets are very lively, crowded areas, which may be an issue for students with service animals or with limited mobility. For those students, it is generally recommended to consider shopping in department stores and larger shopping malls, which traditionally have more accessible facilities and greater range of motion.

NOTES:

- If students are hearing impaired, or traveling with someone who has a hearing impairment, they should check with potential hosts to determine whether they have: visual adaptation aids for telephone ringers, smoke alarms, fire alarms, doorbell, audio loop systems, amplification on telephone handsets and televisions with teletext.
- For travelers with visual impairment, it is important to check whether accommodations welcome their guide dog, as well as: having markings denoting changes in floor space and height, braille instructions for appliances and controls and use of large print.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Mobility International USA, Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities](#)
- The Lonely Planet, [Traveling with a disability in South Korea](#)
- [Information for Students with Disabilities Traveling Abroad](#), U.S. Department of State (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- Food Allergies - [Select Wisely](#)
- [Accessible tourism: disabled Korean globetrotter blazes trail for travellers with disabilities, and Seoul has heard the message](#)
- [Tourism for All Korea \(T4AK\)](#), breakdown of accessibility across transportation in South Korea
- [Travel in Seoul: Accessibility and Barriers, Wheelchair Traveling](#)
- [Wheelchair Accessible Travel Guide, Wheelchair Travel in South Korea](#)
- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications, Transportation Security Administration](#)

RELIGION IN SOUTH KOREA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

Korea does not have a homogenous religious culture and throughout its history, a wide variety of religious movements such as Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and Christianity have shaped the culture dramatically.

Korea is a fairly secular country, with nearly half of Koreans identifying with no major religious groups. The two largest religions in Korea are Christianity, followed by Buddhism. Generally speaking, religious discourse is fairly uncommon in public life, although the country is said to have a high level of religious tolerance and acceptance and freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Korean constitution. Traditional Confucian-beliefs as well as Korean Buddhist philosophies are very common in Korea as well, even amongst non-religious people.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Yeah That's Kosher, Kosher things While Abroad](#)
- [Synagogues in South Korea](#), Kosher Delight
- [Prayer Times in South Korea](#), Islamic Finder
- [Directory of Catholic Churches](#) in South Korea
- [Rutgers Grad Creates Guide to Navigating Identity While Studying Abroad](#), an account from a Muslim woman who studied abroad in South Korea. See the link to her guide for additional resources. See her guide [here](#).

WOMEN IN SOUTH KOREA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

Many women travelers who have spent time in South Korea have noted that the country is one of the safest environments they've experienced. Some have even reported feeling safer in the larger South Korean cities than in some U.S. cities. There are still cultural norms that women travelers should be aware of. Women traveling alone is considered an oddity and traveling solo may attract some stares.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Tips for Women Travelers in South Korea](#), Frommers
- [10 Tips for Women Travelling to Seoul, South Korea](#), Zafigo
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook 2019](#) Online
[CIA World Factbook](#) | [IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet South Korea](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in July 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.