

Language and culture guide

Korean

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Korea and Korean language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Korea

The Korean peninsula is situated in East Asia and today is divided into two sovereign states: North Korea and South Korea. The population of North Korea is 26 million and the capital is Pyongyang. The population of South Korea is 51 million and the capital is Seoul. The Korean peninsula is bordered by Russia and China, with Japan sitting to the east across the Korean Strait and the East Sea.

Language

Korean is the official language of both North and South Korea with around 80 million native speakers. Korean is a language isolate, which means it isn't part of a language family and does not descend from any other language. The official alphabet used for written Korean is the Hangul. The Hangul was developed in the 15th century, which actually makes it one of the youngest alphabets in the world. Today, the Hangul consists of 24 letters, made up of 14 consonants and 10 vowels.

Words are written in syllabic blocks with letters compiled both vertically and horizontally to form characters. Traditionally, the language was written top to bottom, but today it is written left to right with westernised forms of punctuation.

Just in South Korea, there are five different dialects of the language spoken, with slightly different alphabets and vocabularies used.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Korea is said to have one of the world's longest continuous cultures, dating back to 3000 BCE. However, since the separation of North and South Korea in 1948, the two nations have diverged and become more culturally distinct. Religious beliefs across North and South Korea are very diverse with Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism and Shamanism all existing side by side.

Politeness and customs

- Koreans are a very polite people and address each other with their full, formal title. It is considered impolite to address Koreans by their given name unless you are specifically invited to do so.
- Bowing is the traditional form of greeting, with the depth of the bow increasing with the formality of the occasion.
- In South Korea, shaking hands has become a customary greeting, but eye contact between juniors and seniors is considered impolite.
- Koreans love gift-giving and it is polite to bring a small gift when invited to someone's home.
- In South Korea it was the custom to write the names of people who had died in the family register in red ink. It is considered bad luck for living people to write their names in red pen.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Korean cultural references, such as a tiger, a lotus flower pattern, jujubes and persimmons. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of North and South Korea include:

- red-crowned cranes
- Asiatic black bears
- lynxes
- Siberian musk deer
- mandarin ducks
- common minke whales
- Korean gorals (a variety of mountain goat)
- amur leopards.

Arts

- K-pop is a popular style of contemporary music originating in South Korea. In recent years, popularity has grown, with K-pop stars performing to packed arenas around the world.
- The hanbok is the traditional Korean dress that is still worn for many formal occasions. The hanbok is a long, A-line dress, usually made from bright fabric, worn by both men and women.
- It may surprise you to learn that Seoul is known as the breakdancing capital of the world! For the past 15 years, South Korea has produced some of the world's very best breakdancers.

Food

- Korean food is delicious and healthy cuisine with meals centred on rice, vegetables, meat and lots of accompanying side dishes. Bibimbab is a dish of rice, meat and vegetables served together in a bowl with an egg on top. In Korean, bibimbab means 'mixed rice'.
- Kimchi is a traditional Korean dish of salted, fermented cabbage and other vegetables. It is served as a side dish with almost every meal. Kimchi is packed with vitamins and minerals and has lots of good bacteria that are great for gut health.
- Korean barbecue is called gogigui, which means 'roasting meat'. At gogigui restaurants, food is prepared at the diner's table with meat cooked on a grill right in front of them. At some restaurants the diners cook their own meat; at others, the chef will prepare the food at the diner's table.



Interesting topics

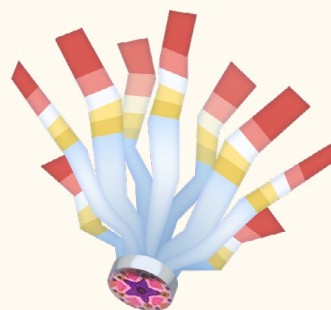
Places

- Seoul is the capital city of South Korea. It is a bustling city with world-class restaurants and shopping. There are also lots of fascinating historic sites, such as the grand palaces Gwanghwamun and Changdeokgung. A quarter of South Korea's population lives in the capital and the city is situated on the Han River.
- Pyongyang is the capital of North Korea. It is the largest city in North Korea and is home to all the major government institutions operated by the ruling party.
- Over half of South Korea is covered in beautiful forest so there are lots of places to get away from the bustle of the busy cities. The Seoraksan National Park is one of the most visited parks in the country, with unique rock formations, hot springs and ancient temples.

Celebrations

- In Korea, the New Year is celebrated on the first day of the Korean lunar calendar. The date varies from year to year but normally falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice. Korean New Year is celebrated over three days and is the most important holiday of the year.
- Chuseok is a traditional Korean harvest festival that is held at the end of summer. For chuseok, Koreans travel to their hometowns to pay their respect to their ancestors and to give thanks for the harvest.
- At the popular Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival, visitors can ice-fish in the frozen waters or try to catch the fish with their bare hands in a pool.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



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