

Did You Know?

- The name of the men's soccer team in North Korea is *Chollima*. It's named after a mythical winged horse from Chinese legends.
- More than 40 percent of all North Koreans are in the military or the *reserves* (military units who serve when needed), and North Korea has one of the largest militaries in the world.
- In the 1990s, North Korea suffered a *famine* (a period of time where people do not have enough food to eat) that killed between 1 million and 3 million people.
- North Koreans can only access websites that the government has approved, and most people do not have internet access at all.
- All media (television shows, books, music, and movies) from other countries are *banned* (outlawed). Sometimes, people buy or watch South Korean TV shows and movies that have been smuggled in, but they must do so in secret in their homes.
- The government ranks North Koreans by their loyalty to their leaders; only the most loyal citizens can live in Pyŏngyang, the capital.
- *Tae kwon do*, a martial art that uses kicks and jumps, comes from Korea.
- At the Arirang Mass Games, thousands of dancers and gymnasts perform complex mass dances in a huge, 150,000-seat stadium. Performers practice for months to make sure their dances are perfect.
- A traditional Korean food, *kimchi*, is made from fermented cabbage, other vegetables, and spices. Each family has its own unique recipe.
- People who criticize or complain about the government may be sent to harsh work camps where prisoners are beaten, starved, and tortured. Their families, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, are often punished as well.

Flag

North Korea's flag was adopted on 8 September 1948, soon after North Korea became a *communist* country (where the government owns all property). Blue represents the people's wish for peace. Red represents *socialism* (a system where the government owns all the factories and farms, and everyone works together for the country). White represents dignity and strength. The red star in the white circle represents the Korean Workers' Party, which is a *communist* political party.



National Image

This huge statue of Kim Il Sung symbolizes how important North Korea's first leader is to the government and the people. North Koreans are raised to view Kim Il Sung (and his son and grandson) as almost godlike. People grow up hearing stories of Kim Il Sung's wisdom and compassion. They honor him for his sacrifices to help North Korea rebuild after the Korean War. But this worship of Kim Il Sung is not really a choice. If North Koreans speak out against Kim Il Sung or the government, they are punished with prison time.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 46,540
Area (sq. km.): 120,538

North Korea is located on the Korean Peninsula, between China to the north and South Korea to the south. It is directly west of Japan. North Korea is slightly smaller than Greece or the state of Mississippi. Over 80 percent of North Korea is covered with mountains and deep valleys, although there are some plains along its east and west coasts. Forest-covered mountains stretch across the northern border and the center of North Korea. The highest mountain peak, Mount Baekdu, is an extinct volcano. It is over 9,000 feet (2,743 m) above sea level and has a large crater lake at the top.



North Korea has several extinct volcanoes. The real environmental risks, however, are droughts and floods. These natural disasters have caused terrible famines in North Korea. Sometimes the country is also hit by *typhoons* (hurricanes) from the Pacific Ocean.

North Korea has a cool climate and experiences all four seasons. In the summer, between June and September, the country can be soaked by *monsoons* (heavy rains). The average summer temperature is 68°F (20°C). In winter, the weather is very cold. There is often a lot of snow, especially in the mountains. During the winter, the temperature can get as cold as -6°F (-21°F) and as high as 21°F (-6°F).

Population

Population: 24,851,627

Nearly everyone in North Korea is Korean. There is a very small Chinese community, and a few ethnic Japanese people who speak Korean. There are also ethnic Koreans who lived in Japan but immigrated to North Korea when the government promised them better education and work opportunities. Over half the population lives in *urban* (city) areas. The capital city, Pyöngyang, has a population just under 3 million. The next largest cities, Hanchun and Chongjin, have fewer than one million people.



Everyone in North Korea is divided into three classes based on their loyalty to the government. The top class, who are seen as the most loyal, get the most food and the best housing. Only people in this class can live in Pyöngyang. The middle class get less food. The lowest class is viewed as unfriendly to the government. The government forces these people to work in mines or on farms. People are viewed as disloyal for many reasons. For example, one of their family members may have criticized the government or escaped from North Korea. They might even be in this class because their ancestors helped the Japanese during the occupation.

Confucianism, a philosophy that values family and national unity, shapes North Korean society today. Values like patriotism, loyalty, and unity are very important. Above all, people must show their loyalty to their founder, Kim Il Sung, and their current leader, the founder's grandson Kim Jong Un. Nearly every building has pictures of Kim Il Sung, his son Kim Jong Il, and his grandson Kim Jong Un. Whenever something good happens, people thank the leaders and bow to their portraits.

North Korea is closed off to the world. Very few visitors are allowed inside the country. Most North Koreans are not allowed to leave. A few high-ranking government officials

or star athletes can leave the country from time to time. Some North Koreans are sent abroad to China or Russia to work, but they must send the money they earn back to the North Korean government. Everyone else is forbidden from leaving the country.

Language

The only official language is Korean. Scholars disagree on where Korean came from, but some think it came from Central Asia and is distantly related to Finnish and Turkish. Others say it has grammar similar to Japanese. Either way, some Korean vocabulary comes from Chinese.

In written Chinese, each word has its own character. It can take students years to learn the characters for thousands of different words. During the 1400s, the Korean king Sejong wanted more of his people to be able to read and write. So instead of teaching them all Chinese characters, he asked his advisors to create a Korean alphabet with a different letter for each sound. This alphabet made it much easier for people to learn to read and write. The alphabet, called *Chosŏn'gŭl* in the North and *Hangeul* in the South, has 14 consonants and 10 vowels. North Koreans still use *Chosŏn'gŭl* today.

In Korean culture, status and position change the way you speak to someone. There are three forms of the Korean language: one for addressing a superior (like a teacher or boss), one for speaking to a close friend or equal, and one for speaking to someone of a lower position or class. Although there are some slightly different accents, Korean is spoken and understood all across the country.

조선

Can You Say It in Korean?

Hello	<i>Annyong haseyo</i>	(ahn-NYONG hah-say-YOH)
Good-bye	<i>Annyonghee kasipsio</i>	(ahn-NYONG-hee kah-ship-SHEEOH)
Please	<i>Put'ak hamnida</i>	(POOT-ahk hahm-nee-dah)
Thank you	<i>Kamsahamnida</i>	(kahm-SAHM-knee-dah)
Yes	<i>Ne</i>	(neh)
No	<i>Animnida</i>	(ah-neem-knee-DAH)

Religion

Before the Japanese occupation in the early 20th century, there were several religions in Korea. Buddhism and Confucianism were the oldest religions. Confucianism strongly shaped North Korean society and values. Confucianism teaches that life is a system of relationships between the strong and the weak; the weak submit to the strong, who in turn protect the weak. According to Confucian teachings, it is also important to honor and respect your family, to be loyal to your company or school, and to keep lifelong friendships.

Today, these values are taught as loyalty to the North Korean government and its founder, Kim Il Sung. People show unity by honoring their leader, Kim Jong Un. In North Korea, it is a crime to criticize or complain about the government. Instead, people show intense patriotism and even cry when they talk about how fortunate they are to live in North Korea. Children are taught that each breath they take is thanks to the leaders of North Korea. In a way, the reverence people must show for Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un has become like a state religion. Their pictures are displayed everywhere.

Some Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries built churches in the 18th and 19th centuries. But during the Japanese occupation, Christians were either killed or forced to leave. After the Korean War, from 1950 to 1953, Christian churches and Buddhist temples in North Korea were looted and used for other purposes by the government.

Today, North Korea technically allows freedom of religion. But the leaders do not want any religion taking away from

people's loyalty to the government, so the government only rarely allows people to follow their faith. A unique religion called *Ch'ondogyo* combines Buddhist, Confucian, and Christian teachings. *Ch'ondogyo* teaches that everyone is equal and that there is a spark of godliness inside everyone. Because these teachings overlap with communist principles of equality and because it began in Korea, the government is less strict with followers of *Ch'ondogyo*. However, the government must approve anyone who wishes to practice a religion, and it approves very few religious activities.

History

Time Line

28,000 BC	
28,000 BC	People live on the Korean Peninsula
6000	<i>Neolithic</i> (Stone Age) humans settle in Korea
3000	
3000	Central Asians migrate to the Korean Peninsula
2333	According to legend, the Gojoseon Dynasty is founded by Dangun
300	
108	Northern Korea is conquered by China; the Chinese Han Dynasty divides Korea into four territories
57–18	The Silla, Goguryeo, and Baekje kingdoms (known as the Three Kingdoms) are formed
AD 300	
AD 372	Buddhism grows, and a Confucian school is founded in Goguryeo
600	
668	The Silla Kingdom unites with the Goguryeo and Baekje Kingdoms to form one kingdom across Korea
900	
918	The Goryeo (Koryo) Dynasty is founded and unites the Korean Peninsula
1200	
1231	The Mongolian Empire invades the Korea Peninsula
1300	
1392	The Joseon (Chosun) Dynasty, founded by Yi Seong-gye, gains power across Korea
	
1418	King Sejong, known as Korea's greatest king, begins his rule
1440s	<i>Chosŏn'gŭl</i> , the alphabet used in Korean, is created
1500	
1592	Japanese forces invade Korea
1598	China helps Korea force out the Japanese
1600s	Manchus invade Korea

1800		
1876	Japan forces Korea to trade with Japanese merchants	
1880s	Korea begins trading with Western countries	
1900		
1910	Japan invades Korea and makes it a Japanese colony	
1919	The March First Movement holds independence protests against Japanese rule	
1930s–1945	Koreans are forced to work in Japan's armies as soldiers and laborers during World War II	
1945	Japan surrenders, and World War II ends	
1945–1948	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) occupies northern Korea, while the United States occupies southern Korea	
1948	The north becomes the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, led by Kim Il Sung; the south becomes the Republic of Korea	
1950	North Korea invades South Korea, determined to unite the peninsula as one country	
1953	The Korean War ends with a cease-fire but no peace agreements	
1950s–1960s	North Korea begins its Paradise on Earth campaign, convincing thousands of ethnic Koreans living in Japan to immigrate to North Korea with false promises of better education and jobs	
1970s	Food and fuel shortages make life difficult in North Korea	
1990s	Damaging floods and widespread famine cause millions to die from starvation	
1991	North and South Korea join the United Nations (UN); the USSR, North Korea's former ally, breaks apart into separate countries and no longer gives economic aid to North Korea; farming and manufacturing become more difficult without outside help	
1994	Kim Il Sung dies	
1997	Kim Jong Il becomes the next ruler of North Korea	
2000		
2000	Leaders from North and South Korea meet for the first time since the war; families divided between North and South Korea are allowed to meet for brief reunions	

2001	North Korea endures the worst spring drought in history
2003	North Korea claims to be building nuclear weapons
2008	The South Korean president says any food aid given to North Korea must be in exchange for getting rid of nuclear weapons and improving human rights
2010	The government allows more private markets (where individuals buy and sell their own food and goods)
2011	Kim Jong Il dies; his son Kim Jong Un takes over the leadership of the country
2012	North Korea celebrates the 100-year anniversary of Kim Il Sung's birth
PRESENT	

The Ancient Gojoseon Dynasty

The first people living in Korea were there around 28,000 BC. These people left behind pottery and tools, but little else is known about them. Around five thousand years ago, the ancestors of today's Koreans left the mountains of central Asia and migrated to the Korean Peninsula. They survived by fishing, hunting animals, and gathering plants to eat. Eventually, they started farming crops. They believed that every object around them, from animals and plants to stones and rivers, had a spirit. This belief is called *shamanism*.



According to Korean legend, the first ruler was King Dangun. He was the grandson of the ruler of heaven, and his mother was a bear who turned into a woman. The legend also says Dangun moved to Pyöngyang in 2333 BC and built a walled city there. Whether these stories are true or not, there was an ancient Gojoseon dynasty in northern Korea around that time. Clans of Koreans built walled cities. Warriors fought with bronze and iron weapons. Iron tools like hoes and sickles helped farmers grow more rice.

Chinese Rule and the Three Kingdoms

Ancient Gojoseon's neighbor, China, invaded the kingdom in 108 BC. The Chinese conquerors forced the Koreans to pay them *tribute*, such as crops, to show their loyalty. During this time, Koreans began using the Chinese written language. They also adopted Buddhism, a religion that teaches the importance of compassion, loyalty, and purity. Confucianism, another philosophy adopted from China, emphasizes order and government.



Eventually, the Koreans formed their own kingdoms: Goguryeo in the north, and Silla and Baekje in the south. But the Three Kingdoms still paid *tribute* to China in exchange for military protection. In the mid-600s AD, the Silla Kingdom worked with Chinese forces to conquer the other two kingdoms. By 668, the Unified Silla Kingdom ruled Korea from the south up to Pyöngyang.

Goryeo (Koryo) Period

During the 250 years of the Unified Silla Kingdom's reign, noble families were given social status through a ranking system. Each family's ranking decided how large their home was, what type and color of clothing they could wear, and even how many horses and carriages they could own. Peasants usually owned the land they farmed, though they were sometimes forced to work for the government without pay. During this period, many beautiful Buddhist temples were built.

Eventually, people grew unhappy with the kingdom. Both nobles and peasants worked against the rulers. In 918, a general by the name of Wang Geon began a new kingdom. This kingdom was called Goryeo, which is where the name "Korea" comes from. In time, the Goryeo Kingdom ruled the entire peninsula. In 1234, Koreans learned from the Chinese how to print with moveable metal type (an early printing system). They also printed the entire teachings of Buddha using woodblocks.

In 1231, Mongol invaders from the north began invading the Goryeo Kingdom. By 1259, Mongol leader Kublai Khan's forces had conquered all of Korea. By the time the Chinese overthrew the Mongols and freed Korea in 1382, society had completely changed. Peasants no longer owned their lands but worked as *serfs* (unpaid workers) for nobles. Many middle-class workers had become slaves.



The Joseon Dynasty

Things began changing for Korea when a general named Yi Seong-gye took control. He began the Joseon Dynasty in 1392 and moved the capital to Seoul. Confucianism, not Buddhism, became the new state religion. Land was assigned to army and government leaders. Yi's grandson, King Sejong, ruled during Korea's Golden Age from 1397 to 1450. He encouraged inventions and enlarged Korea's boundaries. He wanted to help more people become *literate* (able to read and write), so his advisors created a new alphabet, called *Chosŏn'gŭl*.

During the 1590s, Japan tried to invade China by conquering Korea. Although the Chinese and Koreans drove the Japanese out, the attacks damaged Korean society, killing thousands and destroying crops. After more invasions from the Manchus in the north, the Joseon Dynasty decided to close off Korea's borders from its neighbors. They built a wall on their northern border and were called the Hermit Kingdom (a nickname North Korea still has because it is so closed off from the world).

Eventually, in the 1800s, Korea began to trade with other countries, including Japan, China, and the United States. Missionaries and traders from Europe also came to Korea. The country got its first railroads, telegraphs, and telephone lines.



Japanese Occupation

By the 20th century, Japan wanted control of Korea. In 1910, Japan forced the weak Korean government to sign a treaty and make Korea a Japanese colony. For the next 35 years, the Japanese used Korean crops and fishing waters. Koreans were forced to speak and write Japanese. They could not learn their history in school, and they even had to use Japanese names. Thousands fled to Russia, China, and Hawaii. When Koreans tried to peacefully protest and declare independence, they were killed by the Japanese. When Japan invaded China in the 1930s, Korean men and boys were forced to fight. Some Koreans were made to work in Japan on farms and in factories. After World War II, many of these Koreans stayed in Japan, where they faced *discrimination* (being treated poorly because of one's race). Relations between North Korea, South Korea, and Japan are still difficult today because of this occupation.



Civil War and Northern Isolation

After Japan was defeated in World War II, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States divided the Korean Peninsula between them. The dividing line ran along the 38th parallel (a degree of latitude that roughly cuts Korea in half). Both sides were supposed to let the Koreans hold their own elections and choose their own leaders. But the USSR would not allow elections. Instead, they appointed Korean communists to run the government, and Kim Il Sung became the leader of North Korea in 1948.



After the USSR and the United States pulled out of North and South Korea, the North invaded the South in 1950. Kim Il Sung wanted to unite North and South into one country again. Several countries sent troops to support the South, including the United States. After three years of brutal war, the two sides agreed to a cease-fire. The war is technically still going on, even though both sides have agreed not to fire weapons at each other.

At first, North Korea seemed more prosperous. The communist government controlled every aspect of business and government, and industries and businesses grew. Kim Il Sung encouraged the people to follow *juche*, a principle that means being self-reliant. North Koreans became proud of *juche* and proud to shut out the outside world. They wanted to stand independent, as their own country, and not depend on other countries' help. Thousands of ethnic Koreans living in Japan (and some of their Japanese spouses) immigrated to North Korea after the government promised them better jobs and free education. But a series of natural disasters soon revealed how fragile North Korea was.

North Korea Today

In the 1990s, several floods and droughts destroyed North Korea's food supply. To make matters worse, without the help of outside countries, North Korea couldn't get spare parts and fuel to repair the vehicles that transported food to the people. Normally, each family received food from the government, but soon the shipments stopped coming. Because the government was unwilling to admit there was a disaster and ask for help, millions of people died from starvation. Some people began breaking the law and growing and selling their own food. Today, these illegal private markets are still in use.



The military has become extremely important to North Korea. Kim Il Sung required every woman and man to spend time serving in the military. During his rule, suspicions grew that North Korea was secretly building nuclear weapons. After Kim died in 1994, his son and grandson, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un, publically threatened to build nuclear weapons.

North Koreans have very few rights. They cannot publically disagree with the government on anything. They often don't have electricity, and many suffer in the terrible cold of winter without heat. Electricity outages also make trains very unpredictable, because when the power goes out, the trains stop. Food shortages are still a problem. If anyone complains about these problems, they risk being sent to a prison camp where they may be starved, beaten, and tortured. Many North Koreans try to escape into China and sometimes Russia, where they hope they can make their way to South Korea.

Lifestyle

Games and Sports

North Koreans enjoy sports. Soccer is the most popular sport, and men and women each have their own soccer leagues. Volleyball is one sport men and women play together, usually in parks. Children like to do gymnastics and *tae kwon do* (a traditional Korean martial art that uses punches, high kicks, and jumps). The wealthiest North Koreans in Pyöngyang can play golf or go bowling. Other popular sports include swimming, baseball, basketball, and table tennis.



North Korea is famous for the Arirang Mass Games. In a huge stadium in Pyöngyang, 150,000 people gather to watch athletes compete in gymnastics and martial arts. There are also elaborate mass dance performances where hundreds of people perform the same dance moves. In the stadium seats, schoolchildren hold up colored cards to create detailed images and slogans. The children train for months so they can change the cards (and the image) smoothly.

Holidays

The most important holidays in North Korea are political. On Liberation Day, people celebrate gaining their freedom from Japan at the end of World War II. All over the country, people go to places that Kim Il Sung visited on Liberation Days in the past. In Pyöngyang, there is a huge dance with hundreds of people all performing the same dance steps. People also spend this holiday relaxing and visiting with their families and friends.



Another major holiday is the birthday of Kim Il Sung, celebrated on 15 April. This day is considered the most important day of the year. In 1999, Kim Jong Il called the holiday the Day of the Sun. There are dances in cities, towns, and farms. The largest dance takes place in Pyöngyang and is shown on TV in the rest of the country. In Pyöngyang, people visit Kim Il Sung's birthplace and his *mausoleum* (Kim Il Sung's former home, which now holds his preserved body kept in a glass casket). They also visit the huge statue of Kim Il Sung and lay flowers there.

Some North Koreans still celebrate traditional holidays like *Chusöök*, a harvest festival. On this day, people eat traditional foods like rice cakes and watch sports events like Korean wrestling. On 1 January, North Koreans celebrate New Year's Day.

Food

Families sit on the floor around a low table to eat. They use soup spoons and metal chopsticks. Each person at the table has a rice bowl and a soup bowl.

Korean food is often spicy. Traditionally, a meal typically included soup, fish, *kimchi* (pickled spicy cabbage), vegetables, and rice. There were usually several side dishes in the middle of the table.



Today, many of these traditions have changed because of the country's famines and the government's food restrictions. In the past, the government provided food to the people through the public distribution system. But in the mid-1990s, floods and droughts caused massive famines, and the public distribution system stopped providing enough food. Between 1 million and 3 million North Koreans died of starvation.

Today, food rations usually include only one or two meals of rice each day. Almost half of all children suffer from *malnutrition* (not getting enough nutrients). Some call these

children the "stunted generation" because, on average, North Korean children are several pounds lighter and many inches shorter than children in South Korea. *Malnutrition* even causes many children to have reddish hair instead of black hair.

Many people no longer trust the government to provide them with enough food. Often, North Koreans trade and buy food in illegal markets to get by. They can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and sometimes meat. In the countryside, people gather wild nuts and roots to add to their meals.

Schools

Adult Literacy: 100%

Education is free in North Korea, and children start going to school at age five. Students attend at least eleven years of school. Teachers are not always paid in North Korea. Often, a teacher arrives at school in the morning and copies pages from a textbook onto the blackboard for the students to copy in their own notebooks. Then the teacher leaves to go work a second job in order to make a living. Some students do not go on to study at a university. Those who do attend university have over three hundred schools to choose from. Kim Il Sung University is the best. Students there can study history, politics, the Korean language, physics, chemistry, and more.



Life as a Kid

When North Korean kids start kindergarten, boys and girls are in the same class. After that grade level, however, some kids go to an all-boys or all-girls school.

The leaders of North Korea keep tight control over information coming in and going out of the country. But sometimes children manage to watch South Korean TV shows that have been smuggled into the country. If their family is caught, though, the punishment can be serious, so families have to watch TV quietly and keep it a secret. The Korean language has become very different in the North and South, so kids have to be careful not to use "foreign" South Korean words from these TV shows when they are out in public. If they are caught using South Korean words, their family could get in trouble.



Most North Korean children live with their parents and siblings, but there are some homeless children, called *kotchebi* ("fluttering swallows"), whose parents have died or can't look after them. They survive by looking for food in the markets in town or by singing at railway stations for money.

Society

Government

Capital: Pyöngyang

Head of State: Chairman Kim Jong Un

Head of Government: Premier Pak Pong Ju

The leader of North Korea is Kim Jong Un, the grandson of North Korea's founder, Kim Il Sung. Formally, North Korea is governed by a *premier* (similar to a prime minister), with five vice *premiers* and a cabinet. These leaders are voted for by the *legislature* (lawmaking body), the Supreme People's Assembly. The assembly only meets one or two weeks out of the year. The North Korean people vote for members of the assembly,



but usually voters only have one candidate to choose from. The largest political party is the Korean Workers' Party, which is loyal to Kim Jong Un. The only other parties are very small and have no representatives in the Supreme People's Assembly. They are only allowed to exist so that North Korea can say it is *democratic* (government by the people).

Government officials all follow the will of Kim Jong Un. People are afraid to disagree with Kim Jong Un or the government because if they speak out, they may be sent to prison. People accused of crimes rarely get a fair trial, especially if they are accused of complaining about the government. Those who speak out are often sent to hard labor camps. Sometimes they are even executed without any trial. Not only are people not allowed free speech, but they also are not allowed free press. All news and entertainment from other countries is banned. People do smuggle in TV shows and media from China and South Korea, but they are punished if they get caught.

Money and Economy

Currency: North Korean wŏn

In North Korea, the government controls the economy. It owns all the land, factories, and housing. Government committees decide how many crops should be planted, what products should be produced, and what to *import* (buy from other countries) and *export* (sell to other countries). This policy helped North Korea after the Korean War. But in more recent years, the government's control has hurt the country. For example, because so many North Koreans are in the military, not enough people work on the farms and grow food. This policy made the famine in the 1990s worse. Even though it is illegal, many North Koreans grow their own crops to feed themselves. They buy and sell food, clothing, and smuggled DVDs and electronics in illegal private markets. These small acts of rebellion may someday lead to more permanent change in North Korea.

Crops grown in North Korea include rice, wheat, corn, potatoes, and barley. Farmers raise cows, pigs, and chicken, and seafood can be caught along the coast. North Korea also has iron ore, lead, zinc, and coal in its mountains. Coal is the main source of heating and electricity in the country. There is also a *hydroelectric* (water-powered) dam and some nuclear power.

North Korea manufactures some products, but most are poor quality. These goods include cement, steel, bulldozers, engines, generators, and military equipment. Along with metals and seafood, these products are North Korea's main *exports*. Their trading partners are China, Japan, and Germany. North Korea spends more money on *imports* than it makes on *exports*.

Getting Around

Because North Korea's economy struggles, many people do not have cars. Only the wealthiest in Pyŏngyang have cars, and even those are usually very old. Most people in Pyŏngyang use the city's large subway system or streetcar system. People who are better off financially often own bicycles, which they can ride to work. Many North Koreans must simply walk from place to place for their daily errands. There are trains and buses that take people between towns. However, people must have permission from the government to travel beyond their own community. In the countryside, especially on farms, people use ox-drawn carts to move goods and crops. It's also common for people to hitch a ride in army trucks.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Relaxing

Despite the difficulties of everyday life for many people, North Koreans still like to have fun. Holidays give the people a chance to relax from their daily routine and spend time with their families. For example, the birthday of the founder of North Korea, Kim Il Sung, is a public holiday. Since this holiday is in the spring (15 April), it is a little like a spring festival. Various events are held, including an art festival and a flower show, and people pack picnic lunches to take to the park and enjoy together as a family.

North Korean children celebrate Children's Union Day on 6 June. For kindergarten-age and elementary school students, this is often a fun day with games and sports.

Even when there are no special events planned, North Korean kids like to play. Children from richer families participate in organized day trips to the mountains or the sea. Other children play games outside like tag or play at home with their families.

Learn More

Contact the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the United Nations, 820 Second Avenue, 13th Floor, New York, NY 10017; phone (212) 972-3105.

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North Korea



Paektu-san, an active volcano, is the highest point in North Korea, at 9,003 feet (2,744 m) above sea level. It sits on the border with China.

North Korea occupies the northern half of the Korean Peninsula.

The lowest point in North Korea is found at sea level along the East Sea.

The Military Demarcation Line runs down the center of a strip of land that serves as a buffer between North and South Korea.

