GENERAL INFORMATION

South Korea has a rich and complex history that you may know little about. We encourage you to learn more about South Korea prior to departure. Here is one resource to begin that process.

FAMILY

"The family is the foundation of society and is bound by a strong sense of duty and obligation among its members. The father is the head of the family; he and the oldest son receive the greatest respect. In the extended family, the oldest members are paid the greatest honor. Although, the nuclear family is now more common, especially in the cities, sons still expect to care for their aging parents."

RELIGION

"Confucianism permeates all aspects of Korean society. It encourages such practices as worshipping at shrines and ancestral tombs. In addition, Confucianism orders social behavior, stressing righteousness and filial piety (family relationships) especially between father and son. More than one-quarter of the people follow the traditions of folk religion called Shamanism. Important to Shamanism are geomancy, divination, avoiding bad luck or omens, warding off evil spirits and honoring the dead. Nearly 30 percent of the population is Christian. More than 15 percent of Koreans practice Buddhism."

GENERAL ATTITUDES OF KOREANS

Koreans often use extreme modesty when speaking about themselves. They are reluctant to accept honors and graciously deny compliments. Open criticism and public disagreement are considered inappropriate because they can damage another person's reputation. Out of respect for the feelings of others, Koreans may withhold bad news or adverse opinions or express them in an indirect way. This could mean that you meet Korean friends who won't give opinions on your outfit or challenge your view points.
BEAUTY STANDARDS

Korea is known for both men and women fixating on their outward appearance. This article does a really good job at describing the culture and the affects it has. The culture of Korea is to conform to beauty trends and not stand out. The goal is to fit in – but with beauty, fitting in has evolved to meaning people need to have very light skin, a slim figure, v-shaped jaw, small lips, and larger eyes. Cosmetic surgery is common, as are products to lighten skin. These standards and expectations have led to a rise in people being ashamed of their bodies and having low self-confidence. This is a large issue affecting millions of Koreans and likely something you will notice. While most returnees comment on noticing signs of this culture, many say that they weren’t personally affected. However, we want to acknowledge that negative body image spans the globe and you may be worried about what living in Korea will be like. If negative body image or eating disorder(s) is something you struggle with/have overcome, we encourage you to reach out to your study abroad coordinator to discuss strategies to overcome this.

FOOD

Korean food is generally spicy. Rice and kimchi (a spicy pickled cabbage) are staples at almost every meal. Various soups are common. Rice is often combined with other ingredients, such as red beans or vegetables. Bibimbap is rice mixed with bits of meat and seasoned vegetables. Chicken and beef are common meats. Koreans also eat large amounts of fish and dok (pounded rice cake). Barley tea is served with most meals. Soju and magulli are common alcoholic drinks for socializing before meals. Fruit is popular as a dessert.

Korean meals (including breakfast) are almost always accompanied by a bowl of rice and bowl of hot soup or stew. A traditional meal contains a variety of vegetables. Korean foods are seldom deep-fried; they are usually boiled, broiled, stir-fried, steamed, or pan-fried in vegetable oil.

Koreans use a spoon to eat rice, soups and stews, and chopsticks for rather dry side dishes. They do not use a spoon and chopsticks simultaneously, nor do they hold their bowls and plates while eating.

Koreans generally believe that sharing food from one bowl makes a relationship closer. However, if you are not comfortable with this, you can politely ask the host for an individual bowl or plate.

A few dishes you will encounter:

**Bap (boiled rice):** Boiled rice, or rice mixed with barley, corn or other grains, is the staple of the Korean diet. There are many ways to cook rice, and different ingredients can be added to it.

**Kuk or T’ang (soup):** Soup will be served at most Korean meals. Ingredients commonly used in soup include meat, vegetables, fish, and seaweed.
**Bulgoki (barbecued beef):** Barbequed beef is one of the most popular dishes in Korea. Bulgoki literally means "fire beef," but it is generally called "Korean barbecue." Thin, tender slices of beef are marinated in a sauce and cooked over a hot charcoal grill.

**Kimch'i:** Kimch'i is Korea's staple side dish, which along with rice, accompanies almost every meal. It is a salted, pickled vegetable dish, often including cabbage, cucumber or radishes. It is hot and spicy, and often an acquired taste for foreigners.

**NOTE FOR KOREAN ADOPTEES**

The Korean government requires that all Korean male citizens serve military duty when they are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. However, there are exceptions for certain cases, one of which involves Korean male adoptees.

Men who were born in the Republic of Korea but adopted by parents of United States citizenship are not subject to military duty in the Republic of Korea, but only if they were naturalized before the age of eighteen. However, in order to prevent the Korean Military Manpower Agency (MMA) from mistakenly imposing conscription, these individuals must register the loss of their Korean nationality in their own family register through the Korean Consulate General.

If an individual was not naturalized before the age of eighteen, he must apply to postpone his military duty.

For further information on the postponement process and the registration of the loss of Korean nationality, please check the website of the [Korean Consulate General](http://www.mma.go.kr/eng/index.do) in each area according to jurisdiction or the MMA website.