

DECEMBER 2024

UNITED ON THE ROK

*Thriving
During the
Holidays
in Korea*

**Celebrating
Christmas
in Korea**

**A Journey Through
Pyeongtaek City's
History**



HOLIDAY EVENTS AT DRAGON HILL LODGE



Saturday, December 14th

Breakfast with Santa

Join us for a breakfast buffet and a morning full of holiday cheer! Meet with a very special guest, and be sure to take lots of pictures!

Sunday, December 22nd

Storytelling with Santa and Decorating Cookies

A day full of Christmas activities. Decorate Christmas cookies and listen to storytelling with Santa.

Tuesday December 24th

Eggnog and Cookies

Celebrate Christmas Eve by filling up on holiday spirit with Eggnog, Hot Cocoa, Punch, and Cookies.

Wednesday, December 25th

Christmas Buffet

Join us for our annual Christmas Buffet on the Mezzanine, featuring a carving station, holiday favorites, and delectable desserts.



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Celebrating Christmas in Korea: A Guide for the USFK Military Community

Find all the best places in Korea to celebrate the holiday.

Cover: *Wrapped in Wonder - The Magic of Christmas Through a Child's Eyes. Hazel experiencing Christmas at Vanilla Village Cafe in Daegu.* (Captured by Ysamar Gómez Photography.)



Thriving During the Holidays in Korea

Wheels of Culture: A Journey Through Pyeongtaek City's History

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Winter fun at one of the many
festivals in Korea.
Captured by Leslie Preddy.

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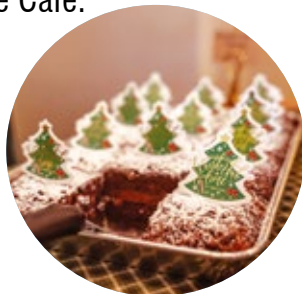
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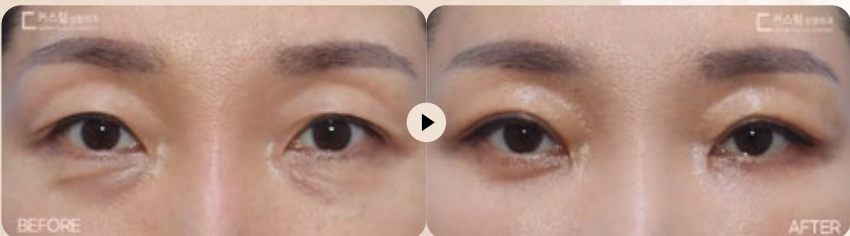
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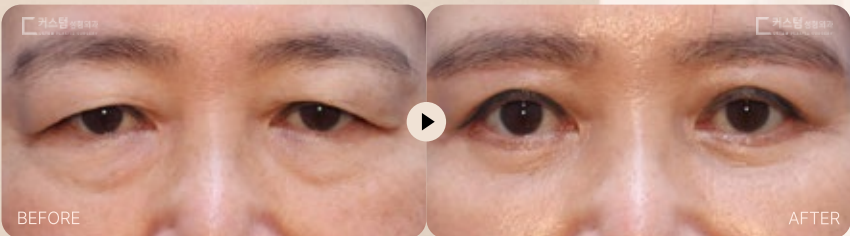
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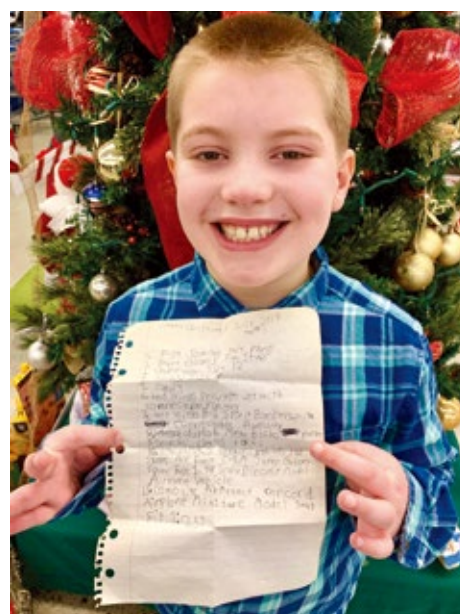


EDITOR'S NOTE

Christmas

is my favorite holiday. From the lights to the carols, to crafts and baked goods, it holds a special place in my heart. In the military community we know that the holiday season can be hard and coming together is the best way to support one other. This month I challenge you to make a deliberate effort to connect with your friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Send them an email, a text, or an invite to your gatherings. Your moment of kindness may come at the perfect time for someone who is struggling with being alone in Korea, maybe it is the first holiday without a loved one, or maybe adjusting has just been hard. Whatever the reason, know that a quick effort to reach out can drastically change someone's day.

Our first Christmas in Korea was in 2019 right before the pandemic. We were in lodging with a small silver Christmas tree with a Texas-shaped ornament we came to Korea within our carry-on, a little piece of home. The PX would have a Santa for our son to give his list to and we would start looking for our new home, praying to move into it before Christmas! Fortunately for us, we found a place before Christmas and had household goods delivered shortly after. Since then, that silver tree has been put up in various places in our house, along with a larger one. There is something special about that little tree that made a foreign country feel like home, even in a hotel! As military families, we are taught resiliency and flexibility through trial and error, but we always seem to come through for our loved ones when it matters most.



This holiday season I pray that our readers find every day to be a blessing and not something they have to drudge through. But if you are feeling that way, please read our issue, there is support for you. This issue we aimed for holiday fun, but also content that supports a healthy mind and soul this winter. For those arriving in South Korea during December, welcome and I hope you enjoy Korea as much as our family has the last five years.

Amid the holiday hustle, I hope you can find time for yourself and slow down to enjoy each moment. May your holidays be bright and shared with friends and family.



Jetta Allen
United on the RoK Editor in Chief

LIVE MUSIC&ARTS

Events & Festivals



DEC19

2024 Organ Odyssey III. White Christmas

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



DEC24

Yuhki Kuramoto & Friends

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



DEC30

MIRACLASS Concert 2024

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



JAN07

Cigarettes After Sex: X's World Tour 2025

Kintex 1 Exhibition Hall 2
globalinterpark.com



OCT27-FEB29

Seokchon Lake and Luminarie

- Venue: Seokchon Lake area
- Address: 166, Songpanaru-gil, Songpa-gu District, Seoul
- Website: yudeung.com
- Inquiries: +82-2-2147-2100



DEC01-MAR16

Garden of Morning Calm Light Festival

- Address: 432 Sumogwon-ro, Sang-myeon, Gapyeong-gun, Gyeonggi-do
- Website: morningcalm.co.kr
- Inquiries: +82-1544-6703



DEC27-FEB02

Pyeongchang Trout Festival


- Address: 3562 Gyeonggang-ro, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do
- Website: www.festival700.or.kr
- Inquiries: +82-33-336-4000
- Age limit: Open to visitors of all ages (Elementary school students and younger must be accompanied by a guardian)
- Fees: Free



JAN01-FEB15

Chilgapsan Ice Fountain Festival

Alps Village
223-35 Cheonjangho-gil, Cheongyang-gun, Chungcheongnam-do



JAN07

New Year's Concert

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



JAN12

Live Nation Presents Benson Boone

Olympic Park Olympic Hall
globalinterpark.com



JAN16-17

Jaap van Zweden conducts Mahler's 'Resurrection'


Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



JAN18

OneRepublic The Artificial Paradise Tour in Korea

Inspire Arena
globalinterpark.com



The biggest festival of lights in Korea! The annual Lighting Festival at The Garden of Morning Calm covers over 330,000 sqm and 30,000 lights, turning the snowy ground into a winter wonderland on sunset. The Garden of Morning Calm, nestled against the splendid backdrop of Chungnyeongsan Mountain, is a horticultural haven that blends the essence of Korean beauty with a diversity of themed gardens. Designed by Professor Han Sang-kyeong from Sahmyook University, this arboretum, which opened in May 1996, offers a tranquil retreat with forest paths and a dense pine nut grove for those escaping the bustle of the city.


The Pyeongchang Trout Festival takes place during winter in Pyeongchang, 700 meters above sea level. Visitors to the festival can enjoy a variety of programs including ice and lure fishing for trout, snow programs, ice programs, folk programs, and more. Any trout caught from ice fishing and lure fishing can be prepared right away in different dishes at a nearby restaurant.



JAN11-FEB02

Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival

- Venue: Areas around Hwacheoncheon Stream
- Address: 137 Sancheoneo-gil, Hwacheon-gun, Gangwon-do
- Performance time: 09:00-18:00
- Website: www.narafestival.com
- Inquiries: +82-1688-3005



FEB28

KYGO Live in Seoul

Inspire Arena
globalinterpark.com



MAR01

keshi: Requiem Tour in Seoul

Olympic Hall
globalinterpark.com



MAR22-23

Kenshi Yonezu 2025 World Tour / Junk


Inspire Arena
globalinterpark.com



APR16-25

Coldplay: Music of the Spheres Delivered By DHL


Goyang Stadium
globalinterpark.com



DEC06-JAN05

The Art of Jewellery

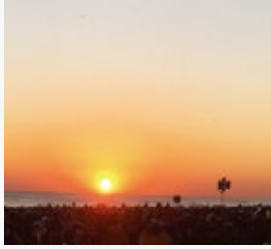
Lotte Museum of Art
globalinterpark.com



DEC31

Bosingak Bell-Ringing Ceremony

54 Jong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul
english.seoul.go.kr



DEC31-JAN01

Gyeongpo Sunrise Festival

514, Changhae-ro, Gangneung-si, Gangwon-do

Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival takes place in Hwacheon-gun, Gangwon with plenty of snow and ice, perfect for a winter getaway. It was even introduced by CNN as one of the "Seven Winter Wonders" in 2011. The main event of the festival, ice fishing, takes place on the frozen Hwacheoncheon Stream. The festival has been visited by more than a million people, attesting to the festival's charm. In addition to the various festival programs such as ice fishing, ice sledding, and bobsled, visitors can get a taste of the freshly caught trout grilled on the spot.



HOLIDAY DINNERS TO-GO



04 NOV 2024 - 03 JAN 2025



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Baked Pineapple Ham
* \$200 (Avg \$17 per person)

** Sides included:
Garlic mashed potatoes with gravy
Candied yams with marshmallows
Homestyle stuffing
Green bean casserole
Cranberry sauce
Rolls
Pie*

Turkey, Prime Rib & Ham available for purchase separately.

All orders will be cooked, chilled, and ready to heat, carve and serve.

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Hey You, Daegu!
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05 & 19 NOV 24	04 & 18 FEB 25	13 & 27 MAY 25	05 & 19 AUG 25
03 & 10 DEC 24	04 & 18 MAR 25	10 & 24 JUN 25	16 & 30 SEP 25

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

0503-363-4497
www.daegu.armymwr.com



EMERGENCY PLACEMENT CORE

Ready to join the Area IV / Daegu EPC Team?



Join us for an Informational Session @

March 7, 1330 hours
Soldier Support Center
Or
April 1, 1330 hours
USO
Camp Walker

Registration:
Contact Ms. Lisa Evergin
ACS Family Advocacy Program Manager
at:
Lisa.L.Evergin.civ@army.mil
0503-363-4456








Daytime Volunteers Needed

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FREE BOWLING FOR ACTIVE DUTY

MONDAY, 1100-1800

TWO (2) GAMES WITH THE PURCHASE OF ANY COMBO MEAL
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DAEGU SEOGU YOUTH CENTER

SIGN UP AT CAMP CARROLL OR CAMP WALKER CAC

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Camp Carroll BOSS DSN: 763-2258 COMM: 0503-363-2258
Camp Walker BOSS DSN: 763-2219 COMM: 0503-363-2219




Welcome Wagon of Korea

Volunteer Initiative

Welcome Wagon of Korea: A new volunteer program that greets new PCSers arriving to Korea at USAG Humphreys.

Mission: To welcome 10,000 Soldiers and family members to Korea each year.

Goal: To create a positive first impression for Soldiers and dependents as they arrive at their new overseas home after a long and tiring journey.

Volunteer Activities: Greeting each bus of new PCSers arriving to Maude Hall, providing them with information, snacks, and a warm welcome.

- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Six times per day, seven days a week – Incheon Arrivals. Mondays and Wednesdays - Patriot Express Arrivals.
- **Log Volunteer Hours in VMIS*:** Search for "19th HRC Welcome Wagon of Korea" to register as a volunteer.

Support Needed: To sustain the initiative, **more spouse and Soldier volunteers are needed**, as well as donations for welcome bags.

For more information contact:
Kelly Karwel-Welcome Wagon of Korea Coordinator:

EMAIL
w.w.ofkorea@gmail.com

FACEBOOK
Camp Humphreys Welcome Wagon Volunteers



* VMIS (Volunteer Management Information System) is a tool used by the U.S. Army to manage and track volunteer activities and hours.

Humphreys and Osan Update

SY 24-25 Reading Battle 4th & 5th Grade

- 1 War Stories by Gordon Korman
- 2 A Boy Called Bat by Alana K Arnold
- 3 Squished by Megan Wagner Lloyd
- 4 When You Trap a Tiger by Tae Keller
- 5 The Lost Library by Wendy Mass and Rebecca Stead
- 6 Parker Inheritance by Varian Johnson
- 7 Last Fallen Star by Gracie Kim
8. From the Desk of Zoe Washington by Janae Marks
9. Yummy: History of Desserts by Victoria Grace Elliott
- 10 Heroes by Alan Gratz

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HOMeward BOUND Osan

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HELP WITH EVENTS

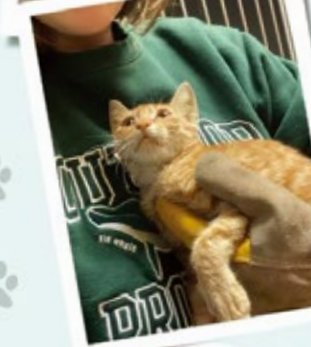
CLEAN UP AND ORGANIZE

CHECK US OUT!

Homewardboundosan.org

Homewardboundosan@gmail.com

Building 506 Osan AB, next to the Main Gate



OSAN CHESS CLUB

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UNITED STATES ARMY INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND
A major subordinate command of Army Materiel Command
ArmyMWR.com/survey

Thriving During the Holidays in Korea



Written by I Care Counseling Center
Photographed by Moris Oh, Lili Shih, Leslie Preddy, Sgt. Alon Humphrey, Heather Peet

The holiday season is a time for joy, family, and tradition. For U.S. military families stationed in South Korea, being far from home can make holidays like Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas feel a bit different. As a family supporting your loved one serving overseas, the emotional impact of being away from your usual celebrations can be tough. Distance may separate us from familiar festivities, but the warmth of holiday traditions can flourish anywhere we choose to nurture them. The true magic of the season isn't bound by location - it's in how we choose to celebrate, wherever we find ourselves.

In addition to practical strategies, prioritizing your mental health can help you and your family navigate this challenging time. Resources such as individual, marriage, and family therapy are available and can provide the tools and support you need to manage stress, strengthen relationships, and help you maintain emotional well-being.

Here are some tips, along with mental health support options, to help you and your family get through the holiday season while stationed in South Korea.

Feel What You Feel

It's okay to miss home and your loved ones during the holidays. Feeling sad, lonely, or even a little anxious is completely normal. The key is to recognize and accept these emotions rather than pushing them aside. By talking about your feelings with your family and friends, or even writing them down, you can better manage the stress that comes with being away during this time.

Counseling Option: Individual Therapy

If you're finding it hard to cope with feelings of sadness, loneliness, or anxiety, individual therapy is a great option. It offers a safe and confidential space to explore your emotions and develop healthy coping strategies. Mental health professionals on your installation or through telehealth services can provide support tailored to your needs during this challenging season. Chaplains and Military and Family Life Counseling are also available to discuss your well-being and help develop individualized strategies for your needs.

Start New Holiday Traditions

While it may be difficult to recreate everything you love about the holidays back home, creating new traditions in South Korea can help you enjoy the season in a fresh way. Consider blending American traditions with



Korean ones. You could prepare a holiday meal that combines your favorite Thanksgiving or Christmas dishes with local Korean foods or explore holiday markets and local events around the installation. Bake cookies together, build a gingerbread house as a family, or even create your own ornaments this year for a memorable memento.

Counseling Option: Family Therapy

If your family is struggling to adjust to the changes and stress of living abroad, family therapy can help everyone communicate better and feel more connected. Working with a counselor, your family can create new traditions that incorporate everyone's ideas, and develop stronger bonds during the holiday season.

Take Care of Yourself

Holidays can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially when you're away from home. That's why it's important to take care of your mental and physical health. Make time for activities that help you relax—whether it's going for a walk, reading, or practicing mindfulness. Don't feel pressured to recreate the "perfect holiday." Instead, focus on what feels right for you and your family.





Counseling Option: Marriage Therapy

Distance during the holidays can put a strain on relationships. If you and your spouse are feeling disconnected or stressed, marriage counseling can help you navigate those challenges. A therapist can assist with communication, conflict resolution, and strengthening your emotional connection, making the holidays more manageable for both of you.

Stay Connected with Loved Ones Back Home

Thanks to technology, staying connected with family and friends in the U.S. is easier than ever. Video calls, holiday cards, care packages, and even shared holiday playlists can help keep the connection strong. Setting up regular calls or planning a virtual holiday celebration with loved ones can make a big difference in feeling close, even from miles away.

Practice Gratitude

Even though you’re far from home, there’s still a lot to be grateful for—your family’s health, new friendships, and the shared experience of living in a different country. Focusing on gratitude can help shift your mood and bring positivity into the holiday season. Try writing down something you're thankful for each day or involve

your family by sharing what you're grateful for at the dinner table.

Lean on Your Military Community

You’re not alone in feeling homesick or missing family back home, wherever that may be. Many other military families are likely feeling the same way. Getting together with other families, attending holiday events, or even hosting a potluck can help you create a sense of togetherness. By supporting each other, you’ll find that the military community can feel like an extended family.

Plan Something to Look Forward To

After the holidays, it’s normal to feel a little down. To avoid the post-holiday blues, plan something fun for January—whether it’s a family outing to explore more of South Korea, attending a winter festival, starting a new hobby, or simply organizing a small weekend getaway. Having something to look forward to can help keep your spirits up after the holiday season ends. Not a fan of planning trips? Make a January trip a holiday gift to yourself, your spouse, or your family. Your installations travel agency can help you! Discover Seoul at USAG Yongsan and Humphreys, Osan Information,

Tickets, & Travel, and Daegu’s Hana Tour can help make your January weekend trip easy. Just show up, you don’t even have to drive!

Making the Best of the Holidays Abroad

While being away from home during the holidays isn’t always optimal, it is an opportunity to create meaningful new memories. By acknowledging your emotions, staying connected with loved ones, and finding ways to enjoy the holiday season where you are, you can make this time of year special, even from across the world. If you’re struggling emotionally, know that support is available. Whether it’s through individual therapy, marriage counseling, or family therapy, mental health professionals are here to help you and your loved ones navigate the unique challenges of military life. Don’t hesitate to reach out for guidance—it’s a sign of strength to seek support when you need it.

Holiday Activities in Korea

Classical and Ballet Concerts

Christmas Ghibli OST Concert

Location: Lotte Concert Hall
Address: 29 Sincheon-dong Songpa-gu Seoul
서울 송파구 올림픽로 300 롯데월드몰 8층 롯데콘서트홀
<https://naver.me/FHI9BHok>
Dates: December 24, 2024 at 7:30 PM | December 25, 2024 at 3:00 PM

Universal Ballet - The Nutcracker

Location: Sejong Center for the Performing Arts Grand Theater
서울 종로구 세종대로 175
<https://naver.me/xtg7ESnm>
Duration: December 19, 2024 - December 30, 2024
* No performances on Dec. 23(Tue) & 26(Thu)
Age limit - 48 months and over
Price Range: 20,000 KRW - 130,000 KRW
* Ticketing opened; English page available in Interpark Ticketing



Events and Festivals

Le Grand Theatre - The Hyundai Seoul

Event: Christmas Village - reservation required through Naver. There are walk-in tickets, but it is almost always sold out.
Location: Parc. 1
서울 영등포구 여의대로 108 파크원
<https://naver.me/FHI9BOJR>
Le Grand Theatre - Hyundai COEX Christmas Village (mall / Christmas Village)
Event: Christmas Village
Location: Hyundai Dept. Store Trade Center Branch
서울 강남구 테헤란로 517
<https://naver.me/FY3ncfYj>

Lotte World Mall (mall / Christmas Village)

Event: Christmas Village & Carousel
서울 송파구 올림픽로 300 롯데월드몰
<https://naver.me/IMyM5Tjk>

Seoul Lantern Festival (festival) & Ganghwamun Market

Event: Lantern, lights festival & market shopping
Location: Cheonggyecheon Stream Path Walk
서울특별시 종로구 창신동
<https://naver.me/G580LYXr>

Osan Christmas Market

Event: Flee Market, Food Market, Concerts, Carousel
Location: Osan Station Plaza, Arumdaro, and Wondong Market Street
Duration: Until December 25, 2024 (Every except Mondays & Tuesdays)
Wednesdays-Fridays = 17:00 to 21:30
Saturdays-Sundays = 11:00 to 21:00

Cheonan International Christmas Festival

(천안세계크리스마스축제)
Location: Around the area of Shinbu Culture Street
충남 천안시 동남구 신부동
<https://naver.me/FmfCN7Om>
Duration: December 17, 2024 - December 25, 2024 (starts at 7pm)
Website: cicf.kr or search ‘천안세계크리스마스축제’ on Facebook and Instagram

Apsan Christmas Festival

Event: Lights and Park
Location: Apsan Mountain Haeneomi Observatory
대구광역시 남구 대명동 1501-2
<https://naver.me/GHv15J3Y>
Duration: December 1, 2024 - December 28, 2024

Other Local Locations with Foreign Themes

Gapyeong La Petite France
Edelweiss Swiss Village
Chuncheon Santorini
Asan Mediterranean Village
Namhae Germany Village
Daegwallyeong Sheep Farm - feel the Korean Alps
Incheon Chinatown
Jeju Venice-land

Gifts That Can't Be Wrapped: The Heart of Kindness during the Holiday Season

By Tyrese Cook

As the holiday season approaches, there's a growing anticipation in the air: the smell of freshly baked cookies, the sound of holiday music echoing through shops, and the glow of twinkling lights. For many, it's a magical time filled with joy, family gatherings, and celebrations. But behind the smiles and holiday cheer, countless people are carrying heavy burdens—grief, loneliness, financial hardship, mental health struggles, or the emptiness of missing loved ones. During a time when it seems like the world is glowing with happiness, it's important to remember that not everyone shares the same experiences or circumstances.

Understanding the Real Struggles People Face

We all know that life doesn't always feel like a holiday movie. In real life, there are ups and downs we all face. During the holiday season, when there's so much focus on joy and togetherness, it can amplify the pain for those who are struggling. It might be the first holiday someone is spending alone in Korea, or perhaps they are navigating the loss of a loved one. For some, it's the financial strain of not being



able to "keep up" with the expectations of gift-giving. And for many, especially those in the military community, it might mean being stationed far from home, missing family traditions, and feeling the ache of distance.

My family has experienced firsthand how the holiday season can be particularly challenging for soldiers and families living overseas. Reflecting, I remember our first duty station in Germany as newlyweds, during my husband's

first year as a soldier. It was also our twin daughters' second holiday season, and navigating the distance from loved ones was no small feat. Here in Korea, I've witnessed soldiers and families preparing to face similar challenges. People within our community are constantly learning to adapt and find comfort within the bonds of our military family.

The Power of Compassionate Presence

You never know what someone else is going through, and sometimes, a simple act of kindness can make all the difference. In my experience as a therapist, I've learned that compassion isn't just about grand gestures; it's often found in the small, quiet moments where we show up for each other. Offering a listening ear or taking a moment to check in with someone can let them know they're not alone in their struggles.

I still cherish the memories of my family's first holiday season away from home. I remember sharing warm cups of coffee with close friends, our laughter echoing as we reminisced about childhood holiday stories. Our children played games together, their giggles filling the air, while we frequently Facetimed back home to feel close to our loved ones. We hosted Thanksgiving for a few unaccompanied soldiers, transforming our living room into a makeshift gathering place filled with a shared meal and heartfelt conversation. In those moments

we leaned into each other's company knowing that although these connections couldn't erase the feelings of isolation, they beautifully reminded us of the strength we find in togetherness. I look forward to rekindling that same bond this year on our first holiday season here in Korea. The kindness we shared was a true gift - one that made the holidays feel less like a distant memory and more like home.



Why Kindness During the Holidays Hits Differently

Kindness is powerful year-round, but during the holidays, it takes on a different kind of magic. While most people are rushing to finish their shopping lists, decorate their homes, or perfect their holiday plans, a genuine act of kindness can

break through that noise and speak to the heart. It's easy to get swept up in the demands of the season, but being intentional in offering kindness means we're not just going through the motions but truly seeing and honoring the people around us.

Showing compassion doesn't have to cost a thing. A warm smile to a stranger, a genuine "How are you doing?" or a few extra minutes

spent with someone who looks like they need it can be just what that person needs to keep going. There's something grounding about knowing that, in the midst of all the holiday "hustle and bustle," someone cared enough to reach out and make sure they're okay.

Ideas for Spreading Kindness and Compassion

If you're looking for ways to spread a little extra kindness this holiday season, here are a few simple yet meaningful ideas:

Send a Handwritten Note or Message: In a digital world, a handwritten note or a heartfelt message can feel incredibly

personal. Take a moment to send a card or text to someone who may need it, reminding them they're valued. Find your local USO for a huge variety of free, handmade cards for all occasions. Some are even blank, allowing you to truly personalize the note or message.

Donate or Volunteer Locally:

Whether it's a local food pantry, a

toy drive, or the thrift store, there are countless ways to give back to those in need. Volunteering as a family can be a beautiful way to teach kids about gratitude and giving.

Be Present for Someone Going Through Hardship: Sometimes, people just need someone who will sit with them in their pain without trying to fix it. Just being there, listening, and validating their feelings can be a powerful form of compassion.

Practice Patience in Busy Spaces: Holiday lines, traffic, and crowded stores can test anyone's patience. Try to approach these situations with kindness, remembering that everyone has their struggles and stressors.

Reach Out to Those Who Might Be Lonely: The holidays can be an incredibly isolating time for some. A simple phone call, FaceTime, or invitation to share a meal, especially for unaccompanied soldiers can lift someone's spirits immensely.

Understand Your Community Resources: Military installations offer a vast array of resources, including chaplains, who provide spiritual support; military family life counselors (MFLCs), who offer free, confidential counseling sessions; and behavioral health teams who are there for more in-depth mental health care. Taking a few minutes to understand these resources for yourself and others could be a game-changer, a lifeline for a friend, neighbor, or family struggling during this season.

Why It Matters to Me—and Hopefully to You, Too

As a mother, therapist, and military spouse, I feel an incredible responsibility to show my children that kindness is the core of who we are, especially during the holidays. Our acts of compassion don't just serve those in need; they also nurture empathy within ourselves. For my family,

these gestures are how we choose to celebrate this season—not just with gifts, but with meaningful actions that remind us what it truly means to be part of a community.

There's a quote I love: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." - Ian Maclaren. The holiday season often adds layers of difficulty to these battles, as people may feel pressure to meet unrealistic expectations or are reminded of losses they still grieve. Each small act of kindness is like a candle; it can shine a light in someone's life in a way that matters far beyond the moment itself.

Closing Thoughts

The holiday season gives us a unique opportunity to slow down and take stock of what's important. Yes, gifts and celebrations are wonderful, but there is something deeply fulfilling about choosing to be a source of kindness for others. It's a reminder that the spirit of the holidays isn't in the things we buy but, in the love, and support we extend to one another.

When we treat others with compassion, it reflects the essence of the season. And who knows? The kindness you share might inspire others to do the same, creating a ripple effect of warmth that spreads beyond what we could ever imagine.

So, as we dive into the festivities, let's remember the true gifts we can offer one another: a compassionate heart, a listening ear, and a helping hand. Let's fill this season not just with material gifts but with genuine moments of care and connection, lifting up those who need it most. Because in the end, that's what makes this time of year truly special.

In the spirit of compassion and

love, let's make this holiday season one where kindness is at the heart of everything we do.

*The information provided in this article is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended to replace professional mental health treatment or to serve as a diagnosis or treatment for any health condition. This article does not establish a client/therapist relationship between the author and the reader. Readers should consult their own licensed medical or mental health providers for personalized advice and treatment for any concerns related to their health or well-being. Always seek the guidance of your own qualified professionals regarding any specific questions or concerns you may have regarding your health.



About the Author

Tyrese Cook, also known as Re, is a devoted military spouse and proud mother to five daughters—including two sets of twins—who brings warmth, insight, and a touch of humor to every subject she explores. Tyrese, a non-denominational Christian with a master's degree in social work, is a licensed social worker in Ohio and Kentucky. Drawing on her faith and expertise, she is passionate about mental health and committed to helping others reach their full potential with compassion and understanding. Recently featured with her family on CNN, United on the RoK, and The OCONUS Project, Tyrese's life and work reflect her deep commitment to family, love, and resilience. Outside of her work and family life, she delights in cooking creative meals, diving into captivating books, and experiencing the world's diverse cultures. Follow her journey on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram @AuthenticallyRe.



Humphreys United Club is pleased to offer financial assistance to our base community through community grants and scholarships.

For clubs and organizations seeking financial assistance, our Community Outreach Committee reviews grant applications on a quarterly basis in September, November, January and March. The Humphreys United Club is eager to support endeavors with a substantial impact on the community.

Community Outreach Grants FAQ

- **When are the application deadlines?**
 - September 22
 - November 1
 - January 2
 - March 1
- **When must funds be used by?**

Any funds received as a result of this request must be used within 30 days and for the intended purpose as outlined on the request form. Exceptions to the 30-day policy must be requested in writing prior to the deadline.
- **When do recipients of grants submit receipts?**

Recipients of Community Outreach Grant funds are required to submit their receipts to the United Club no later than 30 days after the funds have been expended. Any unused funds must be returned to the United Club immediately.
- **Important recipient requirement:**

Share digital photos of the grant in action with outreach@humphreysunited.org and consent to HUC publishing photographs in any publication, electronic and print, presentation, report, and HUC-related websites and social media sites and any other similar ways deemed appropriate by HUC.



For more Information:
Outreach@humphreysunited.org

www.humphreysunited.org

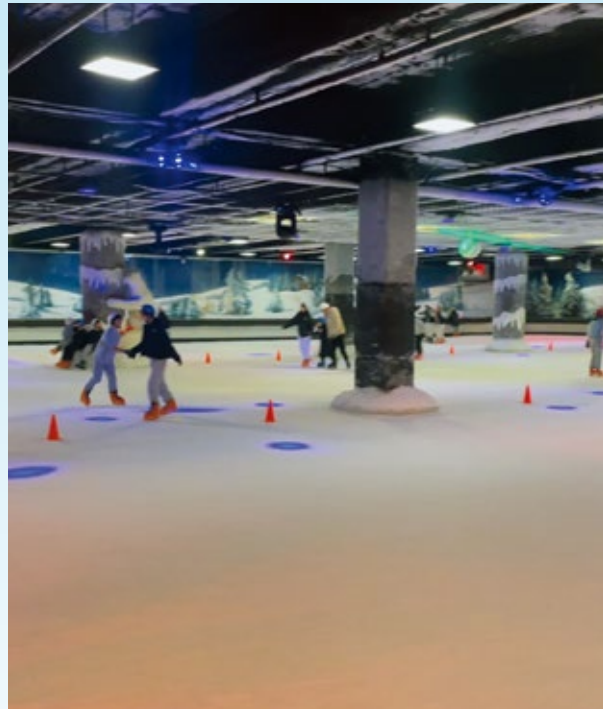
Daegu Winter Activities

By Candace Nuñez

Ice Skating: Tower 83

Enjoy winter skating at Tower 83's indoor ice rink, a popular destination for families and groups looking to escape the cold while still enjoying a fun activity.

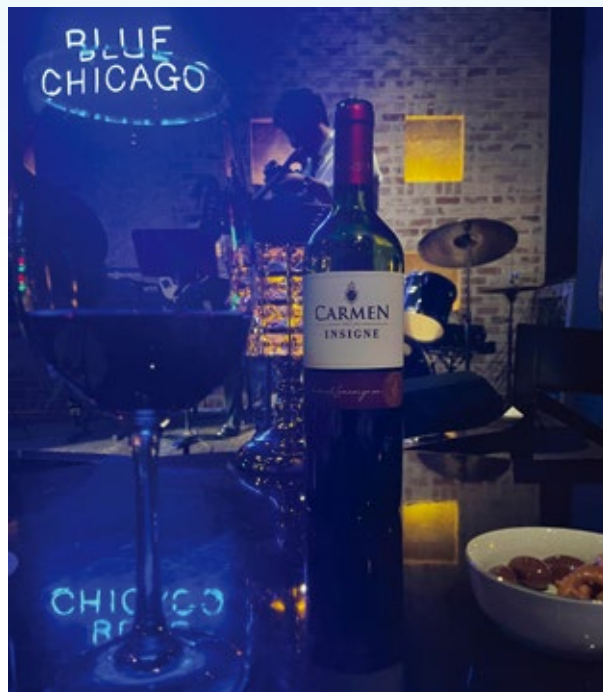
- Hours: Mon-Fri 12:00-19:00 (Last Admission: 18:30) | Sat-Sun & Holidays 12:00-20:00 (Last Admission: 19:30)
- [NAVER Map] Eworld 83 Tower Ice Rink
대구 달서구 두류공원로 200
<https://naver.me/xKEh4Qbp>
- Prices: Children - 10,000 won | Teens and Adults - 12,000 won
- Helpful Tips:
 - Helmets and gloves are required (available for rent).
 - 3-hour time limit; additional charges apply if exceeded.
- Similar Options: Daegu Indoor Ice Rink, Suseong Land Ice Rink, Daegu Ice Park



Blue Chicago Jazz Bar

Experience live jazz in an intimate setting at the Blue Chicago Jazz Bar in the Eldis Regent Hotel. Perfect for music lovers looking for a cozy night out.

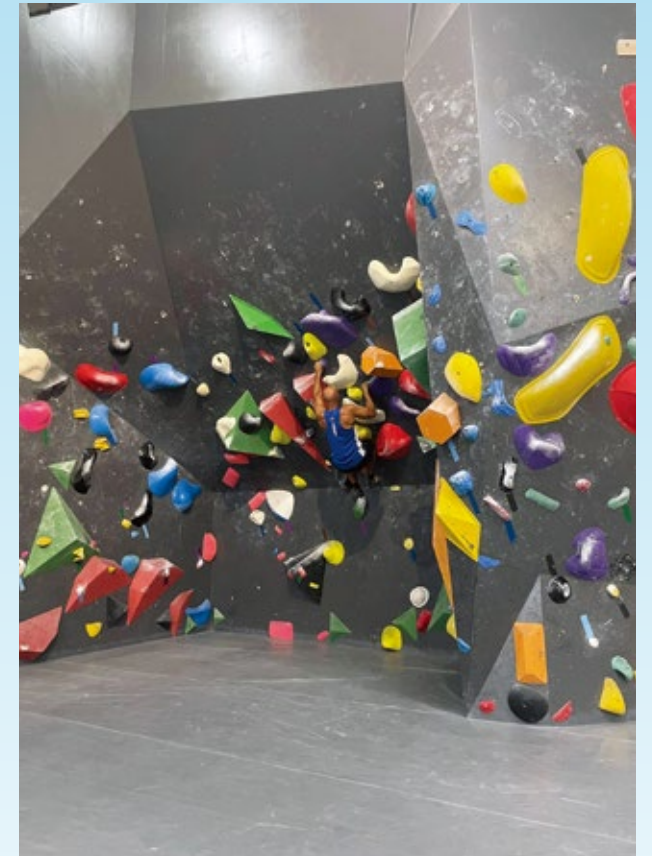
- Hours: 19:30-24:00 (Last Order: 23:00)
- [NAVER Map] Eldis Regent Hotel Blue Chicago
대구 중구 달구벌대로 2033 지하1층
<https://naver.me/x9BqgZnT>
- Prices: Admission fee of 15,000 won
- Helpful Tips:
 - Reservations are strongly recommended.
 - Live music begins at 8:30 pm with two sets and an intermission.
 - Limited food menu available.
- Similar Options: Daegu Opera House, Daegu Culture and Arts Center, Chess 154 Premium Live Jazz Club (Busan)



Bouldering - Boulder Lounge Flip

Get active with indoor bouldering at Boulder Lounge Flip, an ideal spot for beginners and experienced climbers.

- Hours: Mon-Fri 12:00-23:00 | Sat-Sun 10:00-19:00
- [NAVER Map] Boulder Longe Flip
대구 서구 달성공원로 9-2
<https://naver.me/5neQHLrf>
- Prices: Lessons: Kids - 25,000 won | Adults - 30,000 won | Day Pass - 20,000 won
- Helpful Tips:
 - Lessons available for first-timers.
 - Shoe and chalk rentals are available on-site (bring socks).
- Similar Options: Chalk-Up The Boulder Climbing (Dalseo-gu)



Sparkland - Obstacle Courses, Arcade Games

Sparkland offers a fun mix of obstacle courses, arcade games, and outdoor rides, including a ferris wheel with great city views.

- Hours: Mon-Thurs 12:00-22:00 | Fri 12:00-23:00 | Sat 11:30-23:00 | Sun 11:30-22:00
- [NAVER Map] Sparkland
대구 중구 동성로6길 61 동성로 스파크 7,8,9층
<https://naver.me/5MVGgDTc>
- Prices: 30,000 - 90,000 won, depending on package. Seasonal discounts available.
- Helpful Tips:
 - Sparkland spans multiple floors with pay-per-activity pricing.
 - Outdoor rides include a ferris wheel with panoramic city views.
- Similar Options: Elymon (3rd floor of Elybaden Sauna)



Bowling: Spare Club Bowling

Enjoy a game of bowling at Spare Club Bowling, located in Sparkland. Great for a family outing or a casual gathering with friends.

- Hours: 11:30 - 24:00
- [NAVER Map] Seupseo Club Bowling
대구 중구 동성로6길 61 6층
<https://naver.me/xiqlF2eL>

- Prices:
 - Weekday Afternoons - 4,000 won/game
 - Weekday Evenings/Weekends/Holidays - 4,500 won/game
 - Shoe rental - 2,000 won
- Helpful Tips: Children receive a 500 won discount per game
- Similar Options: Star 300 Bowling Club, Windy City Bowl & Grill (Camp Walker), Camp Carroll Bowling Center

Jjimjilbang - Elybaden

Relax at Elybaden, a jjimjilbang (Korean sauna) offering diverse amenities, including a children's play area and an arcade.

- Hours: Mon-Thurs 06:00-22:00 | Fri 06:00-24:00 | Sat-Sun 00:00-24:00
- [NAVER Map] Elybaden Sinwolseong Branch
대구 달서구 조암로 38
<https://naver.me/G58eTQwp>
- Prices: 20,000 won for Adults (6 hours) | 18,000 won for Children (6 hours)
- Helpful Tips: There is a large ball pit children's play area, arcade, gym, and rooftop infinity pool
- Similar Options: Greenville, Spa Land (Busan), Dragon Hill Spa (Seoul)

Museums - Daegu Yangnyeongsi Museum of Oriental Medicine

Discover traditional Korean medicine at the Daegu Yangnyeongsi Museum, a free museum offering interactive experiences.

- Hours: Tues-Sun 09:00-18:00 | Closed on Mondays
- [NAVER Map] Yangnyeongsi Museum of Oriental Medicine
대구광역시 달성군 옥포읍 기세리 306
<https://naver.me/FMcBu1wL>
- Prices: Free to the Public
 - Foot Bath Experience - 5,000 won
 - Oriental Soap Class - 3,000 won
- Helpful Tips:
 - Email in advance to sign up for the foot bath and soap class (dgom3359@hanmail.net).
 - English audio guides are available.
- Similar Options: Daegu Art Museum, Daegu National Science Museum



About the Author

Candace is a Co-editor for *United on the RoK*. As a military spouse and former English teacher in Virginia and Seoul, she loves learning, traveling, and sharing her experiences with others. You can find her reading, writing, or learning new recipes to cook for her family in her free time.





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- DMD, School of Dental Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, PA, USA
- Specialty in Orthodontics, Montefiore Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, NY, USA
- Speaker for Invisalign in Korea
- Invisalign Provider Since 2008
- TRICARE Preferred Dentist of US Armed Forces in Korea
- Dentist License Both in the US and Korea
- Member, American Association of Orthodontists



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- Member, Korean Dental Society of Anesthesiology
- Child Psychological Counselor Level 1 Certificate
- Youth Psychological Counselor Level 1 Certificate
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- Pediatric Director, Twinkle Pediatric Dental Clinic (2018-2021)



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- Specialty in Endodontics, School of Dentistry, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
- BS, Chemistry, Korea Advanced Institute of Science & Technology (KAIST), Daejeon, Korea
- Member, Korean Academy of Conservative Dentistry

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From Disempowerment to Empowerment Navigating an Overseas PCS

By Mary Lane Montoya
Founder of The OCONUS Project

After a 25-hour journey flying across the Pacific, I found myself in a new country. I woke up the next morning, looked out the window of our small Army Lodging room and said “Holy s**t, I am in Korea.”

I didn’t know what to do next and my mind began to race. We didn’t ship a car and we left our two dogs with my brother. My husband had left our hotel early that morning to in-process, so it was just me, my 2-year old son, and my own thoughts. We tried to at least go outside and find our way to the PX, but I still felt like I was having an out-of-body experience.

“None of this is real, right?” I would say to myself. “This is just a vacation. I will wake back up in the States in no time. Is my son going to be okay? I miss my parents.”

Despite my denial, this was 100% real. We were now temporary residents of South Korea.

While I had some idea of what to expect—thanks to the levy brief we attended at our last duty station and the stories my husband shared from his previous rotation to Korea—I still didn’t feel prepared. I was just a girl from a small town in Kentucky, where hardly anyone left the state lines in pursuit of something bigger. I had already moved several times up to this point, but this move felt different. This was the one that would test my patience and strength. I had to



grieve the things I’d gotten used to, like the convenience of calling my family whenever I wanted or going on the weekly Target run with a coffee in hand.

Moving overseas made me feel completely powerless, but with time, I slowly adjusted to our new reality. The feeling of disorientation and helplessness reminded me of something from an unexpected source: a video game. As a longtime gamer and retro console collector, I hadn’t initially made the connection, but it finally clicked after I got my hands on an old copy of a game my brother and I used to play for hours. It was then that I realized how much this experience paralleled the challenges faced in the virtual worlds I loved.

If you’ve ever played Metal Gear, Hideo Kojima’s 1987 masterpiece for

the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), you’ll understand the feeling of being thrust into an unfamiliar situation with no clear path forward. If you haven’t, here’s a brief synopsis of its somewhat complex storyline:

In an alternate timeline diverging after World War II, the U.S. is thrust into a new kind of Cold War during the 1970s. The protagonist, Solid Snake, is an operative of the special forces unit FOXHOUND and is tasked with hunting down a bipedal robotic tank, capable of launching nuclear weapons, called Metal Gear. As the player, you take on the role of Solid Snake, and your mission is to destroy this machine before further conflict ensues.

What makes this game unique is that you aren’t equipped with heavy artillery right from the start.

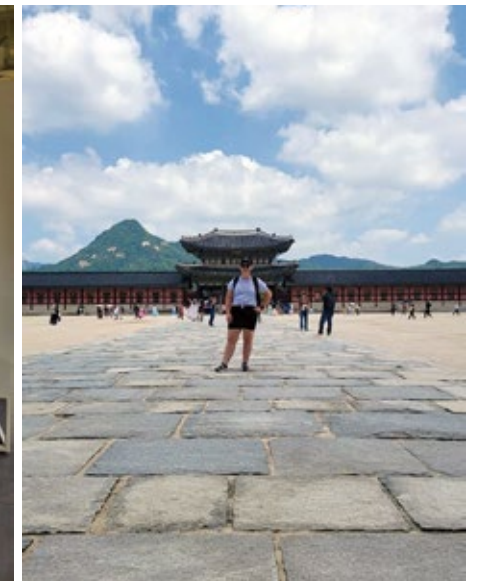
You begin the game with virtually nothing, relying on stealth to succeed. What this game does exceptionally well is create a sense of disempowerment, setting it apart from action games that came before. You’re placed in a situation where you don’t know what to do in an unfamiliar environment, and instead of shooting everything that moves, you must use the resources and knowledge around you to complete the game.

Moving overseas for the first time feels a lot like Metal Gear. Just as Solid Snake is dropped into a new mission, stripped of power and resources, you too face a situation that feels overwhelming. The feeling of disempowerment—of being out of your element—is intense. But just like in the game, you eventually learn to adapt, do a little investigating, rely on the resources around you, and push forward. Overcoming this initial sense of helplessness is key to thriving in your new life abroad.

As with any major transition, there will be moments when you struggle to process this new reality. And that’s okay. Like a character navigating unknown terrain, you’ll encounter culture shock and find yourself seeking ways to make things feel familiar again. The journey may be disorienting, but giving yourself the grace to adjust is part of the process.

If I could offer some tips on how to overcome this disempowerment, it would be these:

- Find your tribe. Just like Solid Snake has a support team to guide him through his mission, you need a community to support you. Don’t try to go it alone.
- Don’t be afraid to seek professional help. Therapy



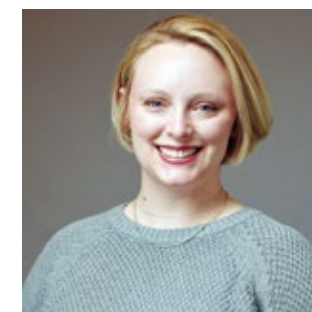
has been a critical tool for me to cope with the transition. It’s like a tactical advantage in a video game—it gives you the strength to keep going.

- It is what you make it. I know this phrase is annoying to hear sometimes, but it is so true. While venturing out into a new community can be daunting or scary, it’s one of the best ways to make your new environment feel like home. Think of it as gathering intel: learning the culture, mastering basic phrases, and understanding local customs will help you feel more connected and empowered.
- Do your research. In Metal Gear, knowledge is power, and the same is true in real life. Take time to explore installation websites, reach out to Family and Community Services, or join

local Facebook groups—equip yourself with information to ease your transition.

- Take time for yourself. Moving overseas can be overwhelming, much like navigating a tough level in a video game. Just as Solid Snake needs time to regroup, you need moments to recharge. Whether through a favorite hobby, meditation, or quiet reflection, self-care is essential. Treat it like a save point—it helps you reset and prepare for the challenges ahead.

Just like in Metal Gear, you start out feeling unprepared, but with time, patience, and the right support, you’ll find your way. You might feel lost at first, but eventually, you’ll gain the tools you need to not only survive but thrive.



About the Author

Mary Lane Montoya is a dynamic digital marketing expert with a heartfelt commitment to supporting others. Her journey towards making a difference was sparked by personal challenges encountered during an overseas military relocation. Following a tumultuous period marked by the trials of a rough PCS move, unemployment hurdles, and childcare struggles, Mary recognized a common thread among military spouses facing similar obstacles associated with overseas living. Thus, she embarked on a mission to enact positive change, birthing The OCONUS Project to address the unique needs of military families like hers.

Celebrating Christmas in Korea

A Guide for the USFK Military Community

By Heather MacLeod

As the holiday season approaches, those stationed with United States Forces Korea (USFK) might find themselves curious about how Christmas is celebrated in South Korea. While Christmas may not have the same widespread religious significance as in the United States, it is still a time of festivity, family gatherings, and romantic outings. South Korea embraces many Western holiday customs while blending them with its unique culture, providing an exciting and different holiday experience for the military community.

Christmas in South Korea might surprise you with its vibrant light displays, especially in urban areas. While Korean homes may not be decorated as extravagantly as in our home states, public spaces and commercial districts often go all out with dazzling lights and festive decor. These spots are popular spots for locals and visitors during the holiday season, offering perfect opportunities to soak in the Christmas atmosphere.

European-style Christmas markets have become increasingly popular in South Korea, with several popping up in major cities. These markets offer an array of food, gifts, and holiday activities, making them great for both shopping and experiencing the festive vibe of the season.

For USFK families, the winter season offers plenty of activities to get into the festive spirit, whether it's dining out with loved ones or attending local Christmas-themed

events. Christmas in South Korea is celebrated in a more secular and commercial way compared to the United States, but it's still full of joy and excitement. One of the traditions you'll notice is the widespread popularity of Christmas cakes. Check out your local bakeries to see if you can find a snowman cake with a carrot nose!

During the Christmas season, many feel the need to give back to the local community. This can be done through various volunteering efforts. The USFK community frequently organizes donation drives, toy collections, and outreach programs to support Korean charities or local orphanages. Department of Defense schools often host an Angel Tree where community members can choose an angel off of a Christmas tree to sponsor. Each angel is a child from a local orphanage needing a helping hand. The USO gives presents to the community each year and often needs help wrapping presents and volunteers for their holiday events. Your installation's Chaplain will also know ways you can give back. Participating in these activities spreads holiday cheer, but also strengthens the bond between the U.S. military and local Korean communities.

Christmas Lights and Displays

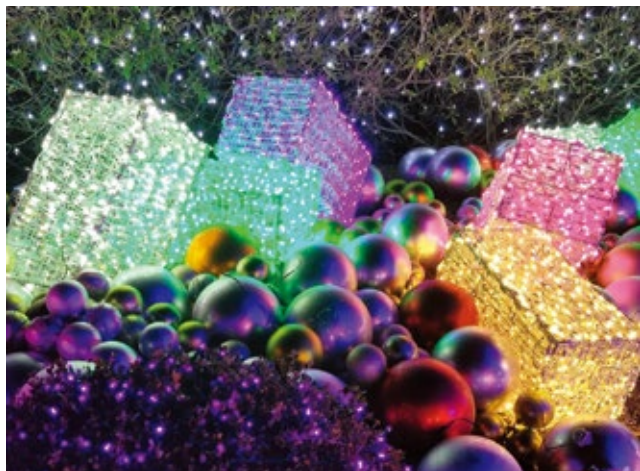
Myeongdong (Seoul): Myeongdong is a shopping hotspot year-round, but during winter, it transforms into a festive wonderland with sparkling lights and holiday-themed displays. The streets are lined with vendors selling everything from hot snacks to winter apparel, adding to the holiday cheer. Department stores in the area, such as Lotte Department Store, also go big with their holiday displays and European-style markets, making it a perfect spot for a festive evening stroll.

Lotte Dept. Store Main Branch
서울 중구 남대문로 81
<https://naver.me/5bVMWNiV>

Cheonggyecheon Stream (Seoul): A popular attraction year-round, the Cheonggyecheon Stream gets a magical makeover during Christmas, featuring beautiful illuminated installations along the water. The Seoul Christmas Festival held here is a must-see, offering light tunnels, large Christmas trees, and themed installations that make for excellent photo opportunities.

Cheonggyecheon Stream
서울특별시 종로구 창신동
<https://naver.me/GI3byDZv>





Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) (Seoul): The futuristic Dongdaemun Design Plaza is a hub for exhibitions and design, but during Christmas, it becomes a focal point for glittering lights. The plaza is often adorned with artistic Christmas trees, unique light sculptures, and festive markets, making it a perfect mix of culture and Christmas spirit.

Dongdaemun Design Plaza Parking Lot
서울 중구 을지로 281 동대문디자인플라자
<https://naver.me/5tJbl9q2>

Garden of Morning Calm (Gapyeong): If you are willing to venture a bit outside of the city, the Garden of Morning Calm offers one of the most stunning winter light festivals in Korea. The Lighting Festival transforms the garden into a glowing wonderland with millions of lights spread across trees, plants, and pathways, creating a fairytale-like atmosphere perfect for a Christmas outing.

The Garden of MorningCalm
경기 가평군 상면 수목원로 432
<https://naver.me/5UEN0aXM>

Christmas Markets to Visit

Seoul Christmas Market (Yeouido Hangang Park): This market is modeled after traditional European Christmas markets, featuring cozy stalls selling mulled wine, warm treats, and Christmas gifts. It's an ideal spot for families to explore during the holidays, complete with festive music and activities. Held along the Hangang River, the market's backdrop adds to the charm of the experience.

Yeouido Hangang Park
서울 영등포구 여의동로 330 한강사업본부 여의도안내센터
<https://naver.me/FO9g0qo7>

Itaewon Christmas Market (Seoul): Known for its international community, Itaewon often hosts a vibrant Christmas market with a global flair. You'll find stalls offering holiday treats from around the world, including American, German, and French Christmas favorites. The market is usually held in Itaewon's central streets or at Namsan Square Park, making it a fun, multicultural experience for USFK members and a short venture outside USAG Yongsan's walkout gate.

Insadong Culture Street
서울특별시 종로구 인사동
<https://naver.me/G7VPvMGw>

Sinchon Christmas Street Festival (Seoul): Located near Yonsei University, this market is a lively spot for young people and families. The streets are lined with festive stalls selling holiday-themed food, beverages, and gifts. The festival also features performances and events, giving it a lively, celebratory atmosphere perfect for a fun day out.

Yonsei University Sinchon Campus
서울 서대문구 연세로 50
<https://naver.me/5jGU0oN>

Busan Christmas Tree Festival (Nampo-dong, Busan): For those stationed or visiting southern Korea, Busan's Christmas Tree Festival in Nampo-dong is a must-see. The streets are filled with festive lights and a giant Christmas tree display. The area is buzzing with markets, shops, and restaurants, offering a holiday atmosphere with a seaside twist.

Yongdusan Park Entrance
부산 중구 광복동2가
<https://naver.me/xprkuyBK>

Christmas Sweets and Eats

Local Bakeries and Cafes: Bakeries and cafes across Korea—such as Paris Baguette, Tous Les Jours, and local patisseries—offer beautifully decorated Christmas cakes, often topped with strawberries and whipped cream. These cakes have become a must-have during the holidays. These establishments also go all out with holiday decorations, making it feel like a special occasion every visit.

Popular Western Restaurants: Korean restaurants might not serve the traditional Christmas dinner, but you can



still enjoy holiday-themed Western-style meals at restaurants in Seoul, Itaewon, Suwon, Pyeongtaek, Daegu, and Busan, which cater to international tastes.

Family-friendly Activities

Lotte World (Seoul): Korea's famous indoor theme park, Lotte World, transforms into a winter wonderland for Christmas. The park hosts Christmas-themed parades, light shows, musicals, and special-themed performances, creating a magical holiday experience for visitors of all ages.

LOTTEWORLD ADVENTURE
서울 송파구 올림픽로 240
<https://naver.me/FmfCNE2r>

Everland (Yongin): Everland is South Korea's largest theme park, and during Christmas, it becomes a must-visit for its Winter Wonderland festivities. Expect strolls through winter scenes, dazzling displays of lights, Christmas trees, and themed parades, perfect for a family-friendly outing.

Everland
경기 용인시 처인구 포곡읍 에버랜드로 199
<https://naver.me/xq3BjP1t>

Pyeongchang and Yongpyong Ski Resorts: If you're more of a winter sports enthusiast, Korea's famous ski resorts offer the perfect Christmas escape. Both Pyeongchang and Yongpyong resorts boast excellent ski facilities and often hold holiday-themed events, making it an ideal getaway for the holidays.

Christmas in South Korea offers a unique blend of familiar holiday traditions and new cultural experiences. Whether you're admiring the festive lights in Seoul, shopping at Christmas markets, enjoying a slice of Christmas cake, or hitting the ski slopes, there are plenty of ways for the USFK military community to embrace the holiday spirit. Take the opportunity to explore these Christmas events and destinations, engage with the local culture, and create unforgettable holiday memories during your time in Korea.

About the Author

Born in Trenton, Michigan, and a proud Air Force veteran, Heather now serves as an Army civilian. Passionate about exploring new places, Heather enjoys traveling throughout South Korea, immersing in its rich culture and vibrant landscapes.



Giant Bibimbop at the Samdopum Festival



Participants mixing Bibimbop with shovels



Glass Cases that protect relics at the National Folk Museum

Discovering the Beauty of Paju

By Alison Rock

The city of Paju in the northern part of the Gyeonggi Province is located just south of the 38th parallel. This historic city has an impressive background and a rich history. Many know Paju for the Demilitarized Zone, the 3rd Tunnel, the Three Royal Tombs, or the sites of Korea's film industry but that is just the beginning. Paju is quickly becoming one of Korea's international destinations for tourists due to its rich tapestry blending historical heritage with contemporary attractions.

Paju City and Paju Korean Village organized the 2024 Tongildongsan Tour hosting 37 foreigners from 19 different countries and I was lucky enough to attend. Paju Korean Village is a Korean culture experience space situated inside the Gyeonggi Mirae Campus, formerly known as Paju English Village. They provide tours of Paju for foreigners to places like the DMZ, Dora Observatory, and the Heyri Art Valley amongst others as well as teaching Korean culture through activities like Korean classes, calligraphy classes, K-pop classes and cooking classes. We participated in three different festivals in Paju on the day we went.

First, we attended the Bi-annual Paju Festa where we got to play traditional Korean games and games

from other countries like Japan and America. The festival was filled with live music, parades, and children's cultural performances.

A stone's throw away is Heyri Art Valley, a community developed by approximately 380 painters, musicians, craftsmen, and publishers. Here we attended the PAN: Peace, Art, and Nature Festival where we experienced a variety of performances allowing us to make beautiful memories with all five senses. At the Heyri Art Village, you can stroll down the streets and enjoy the view, pop in and out of local galleries, and visit artist studios and exhibits. The area is riddled with cute cafes and coffee shops where you can relax, play a board game, or visit with artists alike.

Lastly, we were lucky to attend the Samdopum Festival, where we got to participate in mixing ginormous bibimbap with garden shovels. This was a fabulous way for the community to come together through friendship and food. Speaking of food, Paju is known for jangdan bean production. The name comes from a village in Paju that existed before the Korean War and was famous for growing this shiny yellow seed that we would call soybean. This heirloom soybean makes everything from soy sauce to soybean paste to tofu. If you make it to Paju try to stop at The Table restaurant for tofu soup.

There are two museums that you shouldn't miss on your trip to Paju. First is the National Folk Museum of Korea. This recently opened museum has over 1 million artifacts across 15 areas. You can see artifacts such as Haeju jars, millstones, pottery, fishing gear, rice molds, coins, chests, and much more. The back half of the museum boasts folklife archives that preserve a wide array of records like photographs, videos, and recordings documenting the daily lives and folklore of Koreans. There are many interactive displays and visitors have access to a library with related books.

The best experience I had in Paju was visiting the HEI Museum. The museum's immersive art installations blew me away with their beauty. The artists have created a 3D experience using digital video, mirrors, and music to create an interactive exhibit that stimulates not only your eyes and ears but your emotions too. The cutting-edge technology makes you feel like you've traveled to another dimension where you can walk on pink sand beaches and interact with



The Table Restaurant's Tofu Soup



Traditional Pots where tofu is fermented in Paju

giant panda bears. There are over 20 exhibits representing everything from time to nature. The realistic sea life exhibit was better than any aquarium with its life-like creatures and aquatic scenes. If you're into that perfect Instagram reel, this is the place to film it as the museum is camera-friendly.

This only scratches the surface of what Paju has to offer so I hope that you will go explore and enjoy the sights and sounds of such an artistic historical city.

Paju Heyri Art Valley

Website: https://youtube.com/@heyriart?si=AY_7WyMVtJwxwADS

[NAVER Map]

Heyri Art Valley

경기 파주시 탄현면 헤이리마을길 70-21

헤이리 갈대광장

<https://naver.me/xwmjMzXE>

HEI Museum

Website: <https://museumhei.com/>

[NAVER Map]

MUSEUM HEI

경기 파주시 탄현면 평화로 885-43

<https://naver.me/5Vmjm9Co>

Paju Korean Village

Website: <http://pajuvillage.com/eng/>

[NAVER Map]

Paju Korean Village

경기 파주시 탄현면 얼음실로 40 상업10동

<https://naver.me/5eUKluqo>

National Folk Museum Of Korea

Website: <https://www.nfm.go.kr/paju/>

[NAVER Map]

National Folk Museum of Korea Paju

경기 파주시 탄현면 헤이리로 30

국립민속박물관 파주

<https://naver.me/xOxwKEHw>

The Table Restaurant and Tofu Garden

Website: https://pajumaru.com/html/2_4.asp

[NAVER Map]

The Table

경기 파주시 탄현면 필승로 396

파주장단콩웰빙마루 4F

<https://naver.me/FafCsmv3>



Museum HEI Photos Courtesy of Lee Seon Beom.



About the Author

Alison Rock is a graduate of the University of Southern California. She lives in Korea with her husband and teenage sons. She enjoys cooking, painting, and jewelry design and recently started a YouTube channel reviewing K-beauty products. www.youtube.com/@AlisonRockUSA



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Bridging the Gap with *Bianca Del Carmen*

Written by Ashley Courts
Photographed by Ysamar Gómez Photography

When

Bianca Del Carmen first visited South

Korea at the age of ten, she never would have imagined that one day she would be living here, playing a pivotal role in uniting people from both sides of the RoK and USFK alliance. As an American living in Korea, Bianca's journey of teaching the Korean language to fellow foreigners has been both rewarding and eye-opening. Immersed in a culture that beautifully intertwines ancient traditions with modern advancement, Bianca discovered that language is more than just words—it's a gateway to understanding the nuances of Korean society. She found that language helps bridge linguistic gaps while also fostering a deeper appreciation for culture and mutual respect. She has also witnessed how learning a new language can transform perspectives, create connections, and build a strong community, not only on the peninsula but globally.

Bianca was born in Las Cruces, New Mexico, and is no stranger to the ever-changing life of being part of the military community. Although she was not a military child, her mother was a General Schedule (GS) employee, and they moved many times during her childhood. She has lived in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arizona. This experience allowed her to learn to adapt to her surroundings from a very young age.



Bianca and Hyeong with their 3 children, Ellie and twin boys Andy and Luca.



While she was shifting her life around the US with her mother, her father's career took him worldwide. Her father first moved to South Korea when Bianca was 10 years old. She would visit him every summer, where she began learning the Korean language with a private tutor. Although she did not absorb much of the language at this time, she feels that this was the strong foundation needed to eventually gain a better grasp on becoming fluent later in life.

After Korea, her father moved to China, where the summer visits continued. And just like in Korea, Bianca began studying Mandarin. Even though she was a worldly traveler, her parents were adamant that she remembered her Mexican heritage, therefore, Spanish was spoken often at home. As an adult she now speaks four languages fluently—English, Spanish, Korean,

and Mandarin.

Bianca graduated from the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University with a major in Business Marketing. Like most new college graduates, she was unsure of what to do with her life and where she should go next. She made contact with a close friend of her father, whom she met during her summer visits to Korea. This friend had lived in Korea for well over 15 years as an English teacher and he was able to help her begin the process so that she too could come to South Korea to teach.

Bianca began teaching English at hagwons around Daejeon, where she continued to work for 6 years. Soon after arriving in Daejeon, she joined a local swing dance group to make new friends in this new country. Not only did this help her solidify her conversational Korean, but it also brought her to the city

where she would meet her husband, Hyeong Jin. After spending a few weekends traveling back and forth to see her new friends in Daegu, she decided that this amazing city was a better fit for her.

Bianca made the move to Daegu in 2017. Then, in October 2018, she walked into a Spanish-inspired restaurant near her home called Bueno Spain. The owner, who would soon become her husband, began speaking to her in Spanish. This caught her completely by surprise, as Spanish was not often spoken in Korea. Shortly after this, the pair became inseparable. Together, they transformed Bueno Spain into Casa Bianca. For several years, this was a popular place among military families in Area IV, as it gave many a little taste of home, especially during COVID-19. Bianca had originally planned to stay in Korea for only

one or two years, but now 12 years later, she is happily married with 3 beautiful children, a daughter Ellie, and twin boys Andy and Luca. After learning that she was pregnant with precious twin boys, she and her husband knew that balancing the restaurant business with three young children would not be feasible, so Casa Bianca officially closed their doors in October of 2023.

After closing the restaurant, her passion for teaching was reignited and Boram Language Institute was created, Bianca's online teaching program. What is Boram? Boram is a very special word to Bianca because it was the Korean name given to her by friends when she was younger. The word Boram (보람) in Korean means a sense of reward, fulfillment, or satisfaction that comes from achieving something meaningful and is often used to describe the feeling of accomplishment after hard work. Learning a new language can be challenging, but it can also greatly enhance your experience while living in your host country. For instance, knowing a few key phrases here in Korea can help you find a bathroom, bus, department store, and even emergency care. It can also help you receive a better course of care at off-base clinics or even coffee shops. Language and culture are very closely linked, and by learning Korean you will gain a better understanding of the Korean people, which will in turn strengthen social connections and relationships. Most importantly, it shows an effort to understand and engage with the local community, which is always greatly appreciated. Bianca hopes that she can use her passion and linguistic talents to help bridge any gaps in our cultures and continue to strengthen the alliance between the RoK and USFK.



Bianca and Hyeong made a great team and great tacos!

Boram Language Institute offers lessons in English, Korean, and Mandarin to students online, intending to begin in-person group classes early in 2025. Bianca's teaching style helps you truly understand the language you are learning, as well as the nuances behind it, which is crucial to success. She has developed an interactive program that caters to each student's method of learning. The Korean language can seem daunting when trying to learn it alone, but Bianca thoroughly explains the differences in grammar, particle/object makers, and sentence structure, which drastically differs from English. Some sounds only exist in the Korean language. Along with a tailored approach to teaching, empathy also guides her. As someone who also experienced a continually shifting childhood, she understands the challenges

that come with being a military family. This helps her relate to and appreciate the struggles that being in a new environment, especially a new country, brings. Seeing firsthand how our countries worked together during COVID-19 opened her eyes to the force of togetherness and cooperation. Therefore, her main goal is to help foreigners feel more confident about getting out into the community to enjoy the incredible wonders that South Korea has to offer. Along with Boram Language Institute, Bianca also created the "Boram Community". This community is a great way for expats in South Korea to come together to make connections, build relationships, and share resources with other foreigners, military, and civilians.

At Boram, their vision is to create a vibrant and inclusive community where families across

Korea can come together to share resources, knowledge, and support on a wide range of topics. From Korean culture, language, and cooking to pregnancy, newborn care, toddler development, and parenting, they cover every aspect of family life. Their platform also embraces homeschooling, raising twins, potty training, making affordable family meals, decluttering, donations, and everyday life admin. Boram aims to provide a space where members can connect through shared interests such as book clubs, small business ventures, reality TV discussions, and mental health support.

"No matter what stage of life you are in, there is always an opportunity for growth and learning. Embrace each moment with

courage and curiosity, and you will be amazed at the heights you can reach"
— Bianca Del Carmen,
Founder of Boram Language Institute

By bridging the gap between English and Korean resources, Bianca is sharing valuable information accessible to all, empowering families to build meaningful relationships and to support one another. Consider joining her collaborative environment that enhances

the quality of life for families across Korea, creating a stronger, more connected community.

If you are looking for a personal and interactive way to learn a new language and to gain a sense of "Boram/보람", contact Bianca and join the Boram Community.

- Website: www.boramlanguageinstitute.com
- Facebook group: Korean Language Support for the RoK Military Community & Friends
- IG: [Boram_in_Korea](#)
- YouTube: [Boram_Korean](#)



About the Author
Ashley Courts is the Area IV Coordinator for *United on the RoK* as well as an author for the publication. As an Army spouse, Ashley is very involved in her community. She believes that a strong community increases the quality of life in overseas military installations. For fun Ashley enjoys spending time with her family, traveling and hiking with friends, and making new experiences to last a lifetime.

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BREWING BONDS

Military Spouses Connect at USO Coffee Connections

By Jetta Allen

Since 2016 the United Service Organizations, better known as the USO, has intentionally focused on programs like Coffee Connections to address the needs of military spouses. Through this worldwide effort, the USO aims to empower military spouses, connect them to support in their community, and create a space that can form bonds of friendship between spouses. At Osan Air Base, the USO Coffee Connections program is more than just coffee.

Hyoseon(Sunny) Cheon, the Osan Center Operations Manager, shared that she has observed their program

changing into a dynamic, practical support for the military spouses in their community. During their Coffee Connections, spouses share their experiences in South Korea, give advice to others about shopping in local markets, how to navigate using Korean applications, and share about travel and recreational opportunities on and off the peninsula. These aren't the typical topics people think are "life-changing", but when you are new to a foreign country, these tips and topics drastically improve one's quality of life in South Korea. Coffee Connections is fostering joy, managing the anxiety of navigating a new home, and providing a forum for military spouses to improve their emotional wellness as they adjust to military life abroad.

When I visited October's Coffee Connections I met their guest speaker Dr. Monigan. She is a psychologist and the Director of the 51st Fight Wing Integrated Resilience Office. She asked the critical question, "What does a spouse do when another spouse shares about abuse?" There was a silence that Dr. Monigan would fill with crucial information about domestic abuse prevention and what to do if someone knows someone in an abusive situation. She gave them resources and materials to use or share with others too. Dr. Monigan's attendance was not by chance, but a deliberate programming decision to increase understanding around domestic violence and she stressed that trauma can impact you and your loved ones for years to come, but through counseling, you can find support and strategies.



Dr. Monigan, psychologist and the Director of the 51st Fight Wing Integrated Resilience Office spoke on domestic violence and shared strategies and solutions for military families.





delicious, homemade pineapple cream puff made by USO volunteer Ralph Nelson. Walking around the room I heard conversations covering health recommendations, the best chiropractors to help with injuries, and even spouses sharing about their children's routines and sports accomplishments. Most of the spouses had never been to a Coffee Connections and had never met one another, but you wouldn't know it by the depth of the conversations. One spouse shared she wished she would have started coming to Coffee Connections sooner! Other shared comments of gratitude to the USO Osan for allowing her children to come as they are brand new to the community. The attendees' consensus was that Coffee Connections is fantastic and everyone should come at some point during their time in Korea.

The USO Osan wants to encourage more military spouses to attend their Coffee Connections programs. In the future, they aim to have more Korean culture immersion with other agencies like the International Dharma Instructors' Association affiliated with the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. Ms. Cheon stressed the importance of community partnerships, sharing these collaborations allow the USO to expand programming and vary the options for attendees. The Osan Air Base Military and Family Readiness Center is another supporter of the USO Osan's programming. The USO's mission is truly a collaborative effort, made possible by a community that selflessly cares about military spouses.

I often say to friends, we never know what people are going through. We never know if we will be the bright spot in someone's day or the "right" person they need to talk to in a time of need. USO Osan wants every

military spouse to be the "right" person others can rely on and to be equipped with the information to build communities of support, one connection at a time! Coffee Connections continued with Halloween crafts and

At the USO Osan, there are so many wonderful volunteers. Jessica, an Air Force spouse, volunteers to help spouses network and meet new friends. She shared that volunteering has also helped her make more friends with other volunteers and by meeting new people. Ralph is a retired Air Force giving back to the military community nearly every day. If you are looking for a way to give back to your community, consider volunteering with the USO Osan or your own local USO. Volunteers power community organizations every day by creating solutions for community needs, building bridges between cultures, and being the welcoming face to newcomers and visitors to the installation! The USO values its volunteers and their contributions to the community, so what do you have to lose? Next time you're on Osan Air Base or your local installation, pop into the USO. Find out about community programs and check out how you can volunteer!

Apply to be a volunteer today!

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Email: hcheon@uso.org

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About the Author

Jetta Allen is an Army spouse stationed at USAG Humphreys. Since she arrived in 2019, she has contributed to numerous organizations in a volunteer capacity. She began her journey with *United on the RoK Magazine* in 2022 as an author of a support column for adults and children enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program. Two years later, she is an accomplished author, photographer, and content creator fulfilling the role of Editor in Chief at *United on the RoK Magazine*. She loves nature, travel, and culture, but most of all, making memories with her family. As a military spouse, Jetta understands the importance of community and how being connected can help one find the resources and networks that help them thrive.



The Delish Dish
맛있게 드세요

Food Avenue at Myeongdong

By Kate Nelson



We took in the sights at Myeongdong in Seoul and wanted to get a bite to eat. We had tried the dakgalbi featured in the area and wanted something new with different choices for the fam. A food court was in order, so we headed to the FOOD AVENUE in the basement of the Lotte Department Store. Yes, it is still located in the area of Myeongdong and can be accessed by Metro.

A plethora of food choices await you when you make your way past the perfume, make-up stores, and food gifting on level B1 and enter the FOOD AVENUE.

On the menu was delicious pho featured by a famous Korean TV show as a "must-try restaurant," támtam. I tried it and was rewarded with delicious flavors, crisp vegetables, and a generous heaping of ginger and spices to add to the mix.

Another interesting restaurant featured a hefty cup of melted cheese to pour over the cooked hamburger – bun and all! In addition, there were Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, and Korean choices at various eateries within the food court.

TASTY HINT: Seating is limited. Bring some friends to save a table or eat at the counter if going solo.

DIRECTIONS: Take the Green Line (2) on the Metro to Euljiro 1 (il)-ga to exit 7. It has an escalator! Stay on the B1 floor of the Lotte Department Store.

[NAVER Map]

Lotte Dept. store (Bus stop) 02140 <https://naver.me/GRopxJ3w>

EXTRAS: Open 10:30-21:00. Access for persons with disabilities is available.



About the Author

Kate enjoys experiencing new cultures and worldviews while sharing the love of God. As a military spouse, she encourages her children to bloom where planted and enjoy the 'now' moment in their lives. She is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite and Liberty University.

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Wheels of Culture: A Journey Through Pyeongtaek City's History

By Jetta Allen



In a captivating journey through time, a small group of about 20 service members, civilians, and their families from the Camp Humphreys community embarked on a Pyeongtaek City cultural tour on Oct. 12, 2024. Through the Pyeongtaek Cultural tour, participants were given the opportunity to experience and discover the many hidden gems of Pyeongtaek right outside the installation.

The expedition began as participants gathered at the pedestrian gate, eager to step back into Korea's storied past. All were welcomed by the We Go Together Association, a member of U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys' Good Neighbor Program. Each participant was given a bag full of goodies: doughnuts, Hodu-gwaja walnut cookies, and water to set the morning off right.

With their breakfast snacks in tow, the group loaded onto Pyeongtaek's new city bus trolley, a blend of modern technology and classic charm. As passengers step aboard, they were immediately enveloped in the warm, inviting atmosphere. The new trolley bus successfully marries the nostalgia of bygone eras with the functionality of modern transit,





Artifacts at the shrine of Gen. Won-Gyun.

creating a unique and pleasant travel experience for its passengers, perfect for a deep dive into the rich culture of Pyeongtaek and the heritage of the Joseon Dynasty.

The first stop was the Jeongdojeon Ancestral Shrine, a public school from the Joseon era. Here, visitors gained invaluable insights into the history of Jeong Dojeon (정도전), also known as Sambong, a key figure in founding the Joseon Dynasty. Tourgoers learned of the educational practices and philosophies that shaped the minds of Korea's historical elite. Tourgoers also saw preserved architecture and artifacts, which offered a tangible connection to the scholarly pursuits of centuries past. While looking around the complex structures, tour participants explored the museum, where they had the chance to practice skills with woodblock engravings. During the visit, the school held a ceremony to honor Sambong, which included traditional attire from the period.

Next, the tour ventured to the Jinwee-Hyanggyo and Shrine of Jung Do Jeon, a renowned scholar and influential politician of the Joseon Dynasty. As the group explored the sacred grounds, they learned about Jung's significant contributions to Korean politics and philosophy, understanding how his ideas continue to resonate in modern Korean society.

The group toured a Confucian school called hyanggyo, which were public schooling institutions in the

Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. Among the participants were the Mighell family who just arrived at their new duty assignment from Texas. Eager to learn more about Korean culture, the family fervently listened to the tour guides. The Mighell children enjoyed sitting in the local school room and playing traditional children's games with other Korean school children who were on a separate school tour.

Midday brought the group to a grilled short ribs restaurant. As the tour group savored the rich flavors of galbi-tang, a traditional Korean rib soup, the group delved deeper into Korean culture. The meal satisfied appetites but also provided a taste of authentic Korean cuisine, bridging the gap between past and present through shared cultural traditions.

The afternoon's itinerary led to the Tomb of General Won Gyun, a notable military figure from the Joseon Dynasty. This solemn site offered a moment of reflection on the martial history of Korea and the individuals who shaped its course through turbulent times. While there, participants visited a museum dedicated to Gen. Won-Gyun, which displayed many artifacts, including scrolls documenting his long military career, noting his tactical and strategic prowess on the battlefield.

The day's adventure through time concluded with a visit to Sopung Jeongon, a picturesque picnic garden. There, the tour group ate ice cream and strolled the grounds with new friends. Here, amidst nature's



Jinwee-Hyanggyo

tranquility, participants had the opportunity to contemplate the day's historical journey, discussing their new-found knowledge and appreciation for Pyeongtaek's rich cultural heritage.

As the trolley bus returned to Camp Humphreys, passengers carried with them not just souvenirs, but a deeper understanding of the Joseon Dynasty's enduring legacy. This immersive tour served as a vivid reminder of the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural history, offering a bridge between past and present for all who participated.

Nearly everyone on the tour would agree that cultural exchanges are extremely important for U.S. military personnel and their families stationed in the Republic of Korea. Cultural tours like this one fostered

a deep understanding of customs and traditions by exploring local treasures within the community. Likewise, participating in cultural activities allowed military personnel and their families to interact with Korean citizens in a non-military context, creating positive relationships and goodwill between the two nations. A better understanding of the cultures improves communication and cooperation between the U.S. and Korean counterparts, enhancing overall mission effectiveness. Exposure to a different culture broadens perspectives, increases empathy, and contributes to personal growth and development. Service members and their dependents serve as unofficial ambassadors. Their positive interactions positively impact the overall image of the U.S. in Korea.



Upon a hill sits a classroom used during the Joseon Dynasty, overlooking the valley and hills of Pyeongtaek.

By fostering mutual understanding and respect, cultural exchanges contribute to long-term peace and stability in the region. Peace and stability are the mission that so many have fought to preserve. Through organizations like the We Go Together Association, we can accomplish it together. Katchi Kapshida! 같이갑시다!

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Wongyun General Tomb
82 San, Doyil-dong, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/xbAZtpCK>

Sopung Garden
476-20 Gungri, Godeok-myeon, Pyeongtaek-si, Gyeonggi-do
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Kacie and Haylee Mighell, spouse and daughter of son of Staff Sgt. Tanner Mighell, Combat Engineer with 55th Combat Engineer Company, smiled as they enjoyed galbitang.

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Vanilla Village Cafe: A European Christmas in the Heart of Daegu

By Ysamar Gómez

Vanilla

Village Cafe, which changes every season, is now filled with beautiful Christmas decorations. A short 20-minute drive from Camp Walker will find you transported to a European-style cozy cafe. From the outside, you can see that the interior is filled with twinkling lights, a decorated tree, and delicious treats for a memorable holiday atmosphere. This establishment is very spacious and offers a variety of tables and chairs that can easily accommodate small and big groups. The cafe opens every day from

1100-2300 (last order by 2230) with a break time from 1530-1700. Entering you can find the dessert table where they have delicious pastries. The bilingual waitresses speak Korean and English and are very attentive to their customers. Christmas decorations are up from November 1st until December 31st and they provide various spots to take the Instagram-worthy holiday pictures.

Their menu offers various types of coffee such as Americano, latte, flat white, vanilla latte, ice cream latte, and a Viennese coffee called Einspänner. Other beverages are apricot ade, green grape ade, lemonade, grape-

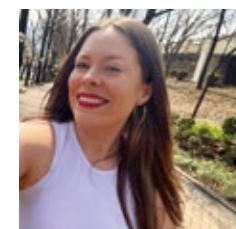
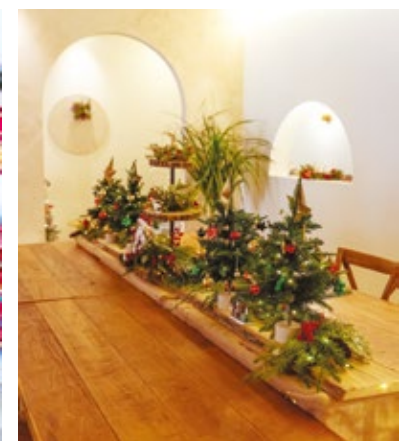


fruit ade, milk tea, and green tea latte. In the desserts, they have plain financier, chocolate financier, chocolate chip cookies, plain butter bar, yellow cheese butter bar, brownies, salt caramel, and lots of delicious pastries that change daily based on popularity and seasonal ingredients.

My daughter enjoyed this cafe and while we were having a mommy-and-me time. I loved that the excitement of the holidays was not only mine, but hers too. This place provided a calm and relaxed environment where we enjoyed the Christmas songs, delicious cookies, and cream pastry. Hazel's selection was a mouth-melting chocolate chip cookie which was fully approved by her. Come experience Vanilla Village Cafe for yourself and make a new memory this holiday season.

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About the Author

Ysamar Gómez is a lifestyle photographer based in Daegu. She loves to travel and capture life through her lenses. She owns a photography business and would love to capture your special moments. Find her on Facebook at Ysamar Gómez.



Memory Keeping Magic

By Sierra Beaton

When Ali Edwards and her memory-keeping magic came into my life, my husband and I had recently arrived in Okinawa, Japan, and were living far from base in an area that was almost exclusively local residents. We had no kids or pets, his work hours were long and unpredictable, and we were still newish to the ways of the Air Force, without many built-in social touchstones. Despite being a curious and outgoing person, I was overwhelmed by a new language and culture, and I felt isolated and lonely. Enter: The Great World Wide Web!

I did exactly what we coach people not to do, losing myself in the still new and exciting land of social media. One click led to another

(and another) before Facebook (circa 2009—don't judge!) guided me to my creative salvation. I found Stacy Julian first and through her, Ali Edwards—two celebrities within the scrapbooking community. Ali Edwards's straightforward approach to memory keeping—Words + Photos—sang to me. I searched for a way to process all the new-to-me experiences, and she presented it to me on a sticker-free platter. I unleashed myself on the interweb of wonder—publishing a weekly newsletter-style update on my blog (The Beaton Beat—it's a classic), enrolling in online memory-keeping adjacent courses, participating in scrapbook-related forums, and consuming content as fast as I could find it. I was on a roll! And then, October arrived.

I am Team Christmas: October-February. My husband is Team Christmas: Post-Thanksgiving to Pre-New Year's Eve. It's a problem, but we persevere. Okinawa was Team "You live on a sub-tropical island in Japan now. Deal with it." As my holiday spirit kicked into overdrive, without the festive societal scaffolding I was used to, it became painfully clear to me that I needed to release my death grip on past traditions and lean into the idea of rolling with the life that was in front of me. I tried to be a good sport, chuckling as I passed displays of \$10 boxes of Stove Top Stuffing and canned pumpkin that was presented and priced like a \$40 ceremonial mango, but my heart wasn't in it. I could feel homesickness trying to grab ahold again.

I needed redirection—fast—and found it in a mini-album project Ali Edwards hosts annually called December Daily®.

December Daily® is an invitation to capture a story a day in the lead-up to Christmas, helping the holiday experience be more intentional. Ali says, "My reason for embarking on this project year after year is because it helps me create, locate, and capture joy during December, even when things feel hard." Her words resonated with me. Being a "the more holiday sparkle, the better" kind of gal, I took the idea and ran with it, ultimately stretching my Holiday Memories album from late November to mid-January. With my budding knowledge of Adobe Photoshop Elements, my newbie exuberance for digital scrapbooking supplies (Who doesn't love a free download?), and gigabytes galore of pictures, I grabbed onto

this project like the metaphorical life raft it was. By the time the last of the Christmas decorations were taken down (cough, in March) I had a finished album that uniquely captured our first holiday season in Okinawa—the magical, the mysterious, and the mundane.

After a look back through my 2009 Holiday Memories album here are some reflections, in no particular order:

- Once upon a time we had flip phones, Skype was the only video app available, webcams had to be purchased separately and then attached to monitors, "The Cloud" was a new concept, YouTube was not a thing, and digital cameras were a separate (expensive) purchase. Directions to places involved written paragraphs that included sentences like: "Go down to the third stoplight, turn left, drive

until you see a bike chained to a telephone pole on your right then start counting fields. Our house is the 4th driveway after the second field, behind the yellow vending machine." Mind. Blown.

- Spatchcocking a turkey (look it up) not only helps it cook more evenly but gives you a better shot at cooking it at all in an itty, bitty oven.
- Christmas, part 2, happened in early February because that's when the rest of the items shipped from the States finally showed up. It's a mid-winter perk we should look at incorporating permanently.
- The Air Force Tops In Blue performance was amazing! I didn't realize the program had been discontinued until I mentioned the memory to my husband while writing this article. That's an unfortunate development for those



Some tips to get you started on your own project

1. This project is for everyone! Kids are cute; I love mine always and like them usually, but my most treasured album is the one that features my pre-kid life. What you are doing, eating, hearing, seeing, saying, watching, listening to, and experiencing right now matters. Someday you will look back on it with wonder (that you lived it or that you survived it, only time will tell.)
2. Write. Stuff. Down. You will forget. Don't be me and try to write it ALL down—that's madness—but do get something on record. Lists, paragraphs, quick photo captions in a smart album, blog posts, social media updates, app captures, art journals—whatever. Digital or analog—the format does not matter but capturing the moment and/or memory does.
3. Time marches on and so does technology. If you are using a format or app that may become obsolete (gasp!) try to get your words and photos backed up to a second location, or go super old school and have them printed. (Double gasp!)
4. I enjoy the repetition of a December/holiday project because life tends to be a little brighter for me during this season, but this form of memory-keeping can happen at any time. Pick a different stretch of time to pay a little extra attention to what's happening in your life and capture it then.
5. Should you happen to have other people and/or pets in your home life, please remember that you and your story still matter. So do photos of you. Include them.
6. Something is better than nothing. Seriously. It all counts and you can make it whatever you want it to be.

of you who are newer to the military or never had the pleasure of attending a show.

- I had an abundance of free time (refer to the aforementioned no kids/no pets season of life) to make my creative efforts... extra. It was the first and only time, in the 15 years since, that I have documented, created, and completed the project within the same holiday season. Many of my more recent efforts resemble half-crafted thoughts bulleted in Evernote and a photo dump contained in a digital album. I'll get back to those circa 2035 when my schedule frees up a bit.
- In a then-and-now comparison, our Thanksgiving and Christmas morning meals look disturbingly similar. I'd like to switch it up a bit but there would be absolute mutiny among my people. Holiday culinary creativity has also been put on the back burner until circa 2035.
- Travel with just two adults was SO easy. I'd forgotten. <deep sigh>
- We apparently served a local sparkling wine at our wedding and then kept additional bottles to consume during special occasions. It was obviously important at the time because I made a special note that we drank the last bottle in our stash with our Christmas morning brunch. I, having completely forgotten all

of this, am now feeling inexplicably nostalgic and may track a bottle down.

- We misjudged the commitment level needed to get one of the 38.5 live trees shipped to the BX so hung ornaments on a tiny tabletop tree and every knob or protruding object in the apartment instead. That was the year I let go of my "It's not Christmas without a live tree!" mindset and switched to Team Fake Tree. I've never looked back.

As I embark on my 16th year of participating in this project, I find myself once again experiencing a new language and culture. Living overseas is a firehose of firsts and figure-it-out moments but armed with a moderately well-honed sense of self and a smartphone that stomps on 2009-level technology, I feel better prepared to meet this cultural experience gracefully. And while my husband is TDY and unable to defend the pumpkins, I'll be quietly sneaking my Santa collection onto the shelves. I believe they can cohabitate peacefully in the month of November and shall be decorating, and documenting, accordingly.

December Daily® is a registered project by Ali Edwards, not the result of my own work. Find her website here: www.aliedwards.com



About the Author

Sierra Beaton is a prolific reader, writer, and memory keeper. She enjoys capturing daily life through photography, regularly subjecting her family to new recipes, making friends out of strangers, and is easily distracted by plants.

As a seasoned military spouse, mom to three kids, and generally curious individual, she's had the opportunity to learn a lot of things she never knew she needed to know. She enjoys sifting through her lived experiences and sharing her observations with others.



New Year, New Intentions:

Setting Mindful Goals for the Year Ahead

By Tyrese Cook

The New Year often brings unique challenges and opportunities. For military families, change is our constant. Whether it's adjusting to a new duty station, managing deployment, or finding a sense of stability amidst unpredictability, soldiers and dependents alike understand that every year brings its own demands. This year, rather than feeling pressured to dive into resolutions on January 1st, I encourage you to take some time for reflection. A thoughtful approach, especially within the military lifestyle, can help set meaningful goals that support mental well-being.

SMART GOALS



As a Licensed Social Worker who practices therapy and a fellow military spouse, I've seen how valuable a flexible, needs-based approach to goal-setting can be for individuals and families. Traditional resolutions often feel rigid and constricting, particularly when life changes fast. By taking time to assess your current needs, you'll set realistic, adaptable goals that support both mental health and resilience - without added pressure.

This New Year, let's approach our goals in a way that aligns with the pace of military life, helping you set intentions that encourage personal growth and foster a sense of well-being for yourself and your family.

Embrace Self-Reflection as Your Foundation

Self-reflection is a powerful starting point. Unexpected events can disrupt plans, so a reflective approach can give you clarity on what's truly important right now. To get started, consider asking yourself a few key questions:

- How am I feeling about where I am right now, personally, emotionally, and professionally?
- What changes in the past year have impacted me the most?
- What goals would genuinely serve me in this season of life?

Jotting down your reflections can help you set goals that feel authentic to you, not imposed by outside expectations. This process also allows you to prioritize your overall well-being, making it easier to adapt when unexpected challenges arise.

Set Intentions Rather Than Rigid Resolutions

Military life requires adaptability. Resolutions that feel "all-or-nothing" aren't always compatible with deployments, PCS orders, and training schedules. Instead of locking into a resolution, consider setting intentions—goals that act as guiding principles rather than strict mandates.

For example, rather than resolving to "practice mindfulness daily," set an intention to "prioritize moments of calm and self-awareness." This intention provides space for progress, even if a daily routine is disrupted. Intentions give you the freedom to progress at your own pace, encouraging consistency without frustration when the unexpected arises.

Set SMART Goals to Keep You on Track

A helpful tool for translating intentions into actionable steps is the SMART framework: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound goals. Setting SMART goals allows you to break down intentions into structured, practical steps that are manageable, flexible, and trackable.

- Specific: Instead of "I want to feel less stressed," try "I'll start each morning with 5 minutes of breathing exercises for a month."
- Measurable: You can count how often you complete this exercise, giving you a sense of accomplishment.
- Achievable: Five minutes is a realistic, manageable time frame.
- Relevant: Focusing on stress relief through breathing aligns with your mental health goal.
- Time-bound: Commit to this for one month, then assess if it's something to continue or adjust.

Account for Your Current Season of Life

Each stage of life brings unique circumstances. Perhaps you're a soldier adjusting to a new unit, a spouse adapting

to life at a new base, or a parent balancing family demands with the pressures of military service. Each situation has its own needs and stressors, which should influence the goals you set.

When setting goals, consider what's manageable for you in this season. It may not be realistic to set ambitious goals if you're managing a PCS or deployment cycle. For a goal like "focus on self-care," a simple step could be prioritizing one meaningful self-care activity per week, such as a quiet walk, journaling session, or coffee with a friend. This allows you to maintain mental well-being without overcommitting, making it easier to adjust when unexpected demands arise.

Build Rest and Flexibility into Your Goals

Military life can encourage high expectations, but rest and flexibility are essential for resilience. In my experience as a therapist, I've seen the mental health benefits of giving oneself permission to pause or adjust as needed. To help sustain your goals, consider building rest into your plans.

If one of your intentions is to "maintain better emotional health," give yourself space to skip a journaling session or take a day off if it feels right. Instead of aiming for perfection, focus on maintaining a steady pace. This approach helps you prevent burnout.

Celebrate Small Wins to Build Momentum

Life demands resilience, and resilience is often built through small, consistent efforts. Celebrate each step forward, no matter how small it may seem. By recognizing these moments, you reinforce progress and encourage yourself.

For example, if your goal is to "incorporate gratitude into my routine," celebrate the days you manage to list just one thing you're grateful for, even on difficult days. These small acknowledgments nurture your progress and remind you that growth is found in the every day, not only in the milestones.

Embrace Progress Over Perfection

In our military culture, there's often a focus on performance and achievement. When it comes to personal growth, it's important to remember that perfection isn't the goal—progress is the goal. Growth doesn't have to be linear.

I often encourage my clients to adopt a growth mindset: focus on improvement rather than rigid standards. Allow yourself to experience setbacks without self-criticism. Embrace each small step as part of your journey, knowing that resilience is built through experiences, both good and bad, and that growth is a journey.

Connect with Your "Why" for Lasting Motivation

In the military where life can often feel dictated by external forces, it's important to connect with your personal motivations. Understanding the "why" behind your goals keeps you grounded and your goals meaningful, rooted in what matters most to you.

Consider the following questions:

- Why are these intentions important to me?
- What drives me to pursue them?

If your goal is to "prioritize family connection," reflect on why that's significant. It might be a desire to create stability for your children or strengthen your marriage during a demanding time. Remembering your "why" keeps you focused and committed, even when life becomes overwhelming.

Moving into the New Year with Compassion and Flexibility

As we welcome another year, let's approach our goals with a spirit of compassion and adaptability. Military life is anything but predictable, so by setting intentions that support our well-being, we're giving ourselves room to grow sustainably. The New Year isn't about immediate transformation - it's an opportunity to nurture meaningful growth that serves you and your family throughout the year. Let this be a time to create SMART goals that sustain and empower you, grounded in the adaptability and resilience that define our military community.

This upcoming year, let's embrace our journey as it unfolds, honoring the small steps, facing the challenges with resilience, and celebrating the victories along the way. Here's to a new year of intentional growth, steady progress, self-compassion, and a supportive approach to goal-setting that embodies the unique strength and adaptability of our community.

*The information provided in this article is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended to replace professional mental health treatment or to serve as a diagnosis or treatment for any health condition. This article does not establish a client/therapist relationship between the author and the reader. Readers should consult their own licensed medical or mental health providers for personalized advice and treatment for any concerns related to their health or well-being. Always seek the guidance of your own qualified professionals regarding any specific questions or concerns you may have regarding your health.



Pansori

The Soul of Korean Tradition

By Seung-Kook Kim,
Traditional Culture Columnist

Korean

pansori, an art form recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, is a high-art, solo opera unique to Korea.

Unlike Western traditional opera, where multiple performers sing and act to the accompaniment of orchestral music to unfold a grand narrative, pansori is a distinctive and highly artistic Korean vocal genre in which a single singer, known as a "sori-gwangdae," narrates a grand novel through song, accompanied by the drumming of a single percussionist, a "gosu."

Pansori has been intertwined with Korea's history, expressing the joys and sorrows of its people. It is considered the essence of Korean culture, with its originality and excellence acknowledged worldwide. In 2003, it was recognized as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," and in 2008, it was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

The term pansori comes from "pan," meaning a place where people gather, and "sori," meaning song.

It is generally agreed by scholars that pansori originated and was passed down starting in the 17th century. Pansori is unique in that it is completed through active participation from both the performer and the audience. If there is an audience, the performance could take place anywhere: in a market, a yard, a room, or a stage. Initially passed down orally among common folk, pansori became more refined with literary content by the late 19th century and gained popularity among urban intellectuals.

The Five Major Works of Pansori

The background, characters, and situations in pansori are rooted in the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). The pansori singer undergoes long and harsh training to master various vocal chorals and memorize complex narratives. As they develop their unique interpretation style, many famous pansori masters have emerged, known for their distinct performance styles.

When pansori first emerged, the performances were relatively short, with twelve major pieces in total,



Korean pansori, an art form in which a single singer, known as a "sori-gwangdae" narrates a grand novel through song, accompanied by the drumming of a single percussionist, a "gosu."

including Chunhyangga, Simcheongga, Sugunga, Heungboga, Jeokbyeokga, Baebijangtaryeong, Byeongangsoetaryeong, Jangkityeong, Ongojiptaryeong, Musukityeong, Gangnyeongmaehuataryeong, and Gajasinseontaryeong.

As the stories became more elaborate, incorporating themes of loyalty, filial piety, and chastity reflective of Joseon-era values, pansori was narrowed down to five major works: Chunhyangga (the love story of Chunhyang and Mongryong), Simcheongga (the story of Simcheong, the filial daughter, and her father, Sim Bongsu), Sugunga (the tale of a rabbit, also known as Byeoljubujeon), Heungboga (the story of the poor Heungbo and his rich brother Nolbo), and Jeokbyeokga (a musical rendition of the Battle of Red Cliffs from the Romance of the Three Kingdoms).

Pansori: A Dynamic Artform with One Singer and One Drummer

Pansori involves a solo singer and a single percussionist, known as the gosu, creating a musical narrative

together. The performance combines rich vocal expressions with aniri (spoken parts), well-crafted lyrics, and energetic body gestures. This folk art form bridges the cultures of both intellectual elites and commoners, making it a truly democratic art form. Performances can last up to 8 hours, with the soloist either male or female, who sings in a spontaneous style mixing scholarly and rustic expressions to fit the rhythm provided by the gosu.

The Rigorous Path to Become a Pansori Master

Becoming a pansori master requires an arduous training process. To earn the title of master, one must master four essential skills: character portrayal, lyrics delivery, vocal mastery (deumeum), and body movements (neoreumse). The most critical skill is deumeum, which involves distinguishing the five basic sounds and mastering the ability to manipulate sounds from the five organs freely.

Moreover, a pansori master needs to have a good appearance, use clear diction, and have the ability to engage the audience with both humor and deep emo-



tion. A sori-gwangdae typically spends 15 to 30 years undergoing rigorous training before reaching the level of mastery

The sori-gwangdae must sing in various modes, such as ujogi (light and brisk), pyeongjogi (calm and slow), and gymyeon (melancholic and sorrowful), to effectively convey the underlying themes of the performance.

The Essential Role of the Gosu

A pansori performance truly shines when a skilled gosu, a single percussionist drumming, accompanies the singer. The relationship between the sori-gwangdae and gosu is paramount, as their collaborative performance brings the piece to life. Gosu needs to have three essential qualities: posture, rhythmic timing, and ability to lead the singer.

Audience Participation: Vital for the Success of Pansori

Even with a masterful singer and drummer, pansori requires the active participation of the audience. The au-

dience's vocal encouragements, such as "Eolssigu!" and "Good job!" help energize the performance and increase its emotional impact.

Pansori's Revival in Modern Times

As Korea rapidly modernized, pansori faced a crisis. In 1964, the Korean government designated pansori as an important intangible cultural asset, leading to institutional support and revitalization. However, while pansori remains one of the most famous traditional performing arts, its original spontaneity has diminished. The increasing documentation of pansori led to a more standardized form, suppressing some of its improvisational nature.

Nevertheless, this shift has paradoxically helped preserve pansori and is a crucial factor in its survival. Today, there are fewer sori-gwangdae who can fully embody the improvisational genius of traditional pansori, and audiences are not as moved by its unique improvisational style.



Regional Styles of Pansori

Like dialects across regions, pansori has distinct regional styles: Dongpyeonje (Eastern style), Seopyeonje (Western style), and Junggoje (Middle style). Each regional style has its own distinct vocal techniques and expressions, adding further richness to this traditional art form.

Pansori: A Song of Hope for a New Society and Era

As a traditional art that represents the emotional landscape of its time, pansori expresses the highs and lows of life through music, while also engaging the audience. The five major works of pansori are all designated as important intangible cultural assets, ensuring their protection and preservation.

Pansori vividly portrays the lives of the common people and reflects their hopes for a new society and era. It has served as a cultural bridge between different social classes, helping to mediate and integrate societal views. Moreover, it is an open and adaptive art form that absorbs and synthesizes elements from other traditional arts, demonstrating the full expressive potential of the Korean language.

Is there any other vocal tradition in the world that



combines a grand narrative like pansori, with such diverse vocal colors and changes in timbre? Pansori is not just Korean music—it's a reflection of the nation's spirit, history, and culture.

If you wish to experience authentic pansori performances in Korea, consider visiting venues like the National Theater of Korea (Daloreum Theater), the National Gugak Center (Umyeondang), Seoul Namsan Gugakdang, Seoul Donhwamun Gugakdang, or the National Heritage Promotion Institute (Pungnyu Theater). For more information, you can also visit the Korea Tourism Organization website (<https://www.visitkorea.or.kr/>).



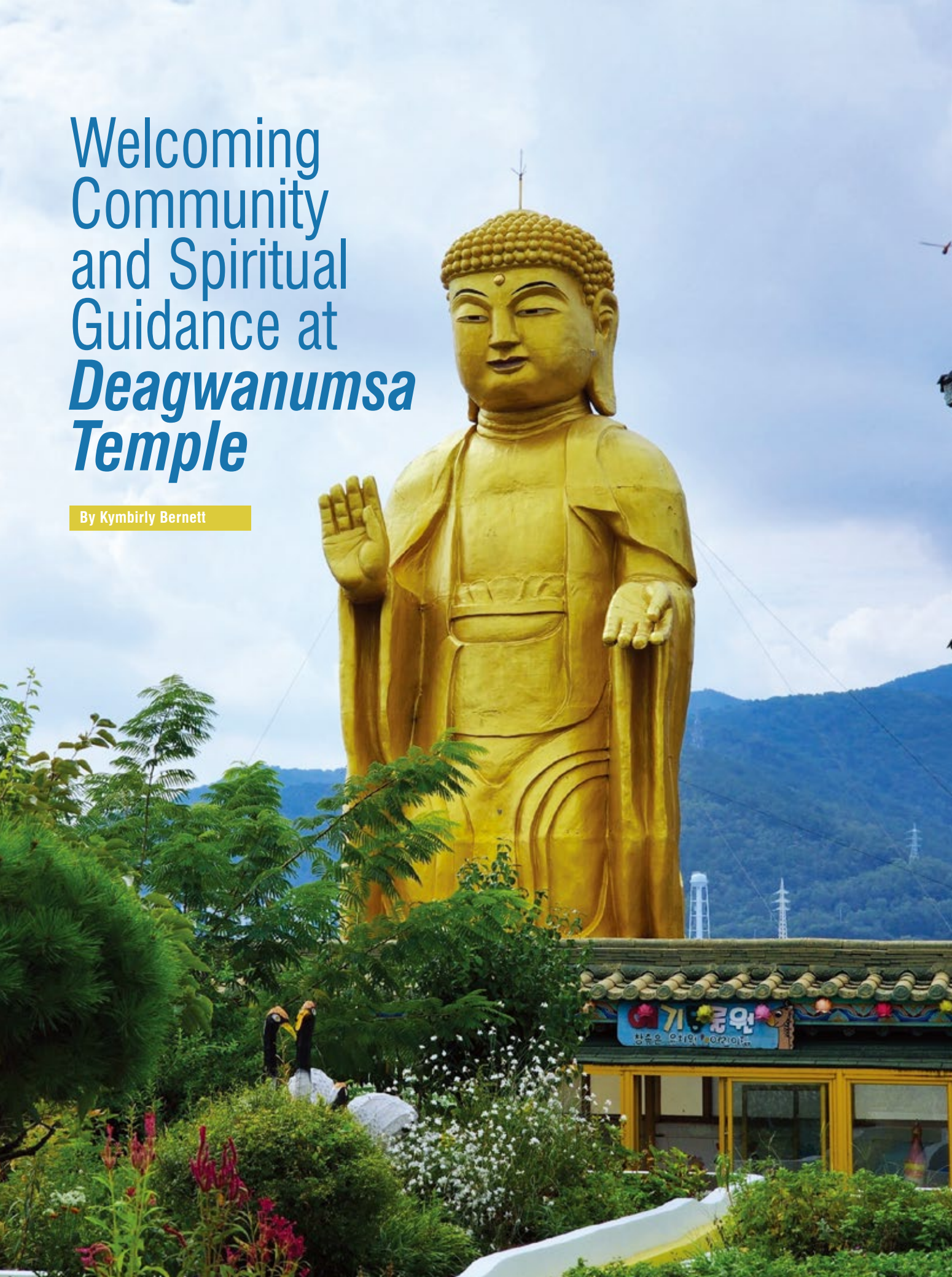
About the Author

Seung-Kook Kim is currently Head of the Traditional Cultural Contents Research Center and a contributing cultural columnist to Monthly Guest and other publications.

Formerly, he was Chairman of the Nowon Foundation for Arts and Culture, CEO of Suwon Cultural Foundation, President of Korea Cultural Arts Center Association and he has served as Chairman of the Seoul Cultural Heritage Committee.

Welcoming Community and Spiritual Guidance at *Deagwanumsa* Temple

By Kymbirly Bernett



Deagwanumsa Temple, the largest temple in Daegu, offers a peaceful refuge in the center of the bustling city. Upon stepping into its serene grounds, we were immediately greeted by the warm hospitality of the temple community who were eager to share their Buddhist faith with us. The hospitality we encountered made us feel at home as we explored a faith so deeply rooted in cultural tradition.

Our experience was enriched by Mrs. Heunju, a kind-hearted volunteer who devoted her time to guiding my husband and me through the temple. Her insightful knowledge of Buddhism allowed us to connect more deeply with the temple's spiritual significance. During the tour, she introduced us to four sacred Buddhas, each with their role in guiding worshippers toward enlightenment.

In total, the Deagwanumsa temple is home to numerous Buddhas, including the Golden Maitreya Buddha, Yaksha Buddha, and original Buddha, spread across various halls and shrines. Each Buddha holds symbolic importance, representing different virtues of Buddhist teachings.

A Hub for Spiritual Learning and Modern Community Service

Originally established as Daegwaneum Temple by Korea Buddhist University on May 15, 1992, the temple moved to its current location in 1995. Today, it is a remarkable example of a modern Buddhist facility, seamlessly integrating religious activities with educational, welfare, and healthcare services for the community. What sets this temple apart is its unique urban setting and state-of-the-art facilities. The complex is a major center of learning, offering spiritual guidance and welfare services to the local population. Each year, it continues to redefine Buddhist preaching and outreach, while remaining deeply rooted in tradition.





The Grand Hall and Its Layout

One of the most notable features of Daegwanumsa Temple is its Grand Hall, located within the Korea Buddhist University Daewoongjeon. Each floor of this impressive structure offers a distinct aspect of the Buddhist experience:

- 7th Floor: Meditation Hall
- 6th Floor: The Golden Maitreya Buddha, Traditional Culture Experience Center, Library, Press Room, and Photo Mania
- 5th Floor: Buddha Shrine Pagoda, 500 Monks, 108 Golden Sutras, Original Buddha, and Pagoda
- 4th Floor: Dafa Hall (White Crowned Bodhisattva), Lifetime Banner, Seal Lantern, and Pagoda
- 3rd Floor: Dafa Hall (Yaksha Buddha), Lifetime Throne, and Seal
- 2nd Floor: Paradise Hall, Mita Hall, and Lotus Hall
- 1st Floor: Information desk, Religious Affairs Office, Reception Room, Monk Consultation Room, Practice Counseling Room, Buddhist Bookstore, Buddhist Goods Store, Udambara Flower Shop, and Alumni Association Office



- Open-Air Hall: Great Circle Duty Shadow Bodhisattva
- Basement: Offering Hall for general believers, Conference Room, Free Soup Kitchen for the Elderly, Sales of Korean Agricultural Products, and Machine Room

Throughout the temple complex, visitors can find a variety of spaces dedicated to both spiritual practice and community service. The temple is not just a place of worship but also an educational hub, a welfare center, and a refuge for those in need. With services like a free soup kitchen for the elderly and specialized care for dementia patients, Daegwanumsa Temple takes an integrated approach to Buddhist compassion and community care.

A Symbol of Compassion and Modernity

In addition to its spiritual offerings, the temple has played a key role in fostering education and welfare. The temple's Social Welfare Foundation runs a Specialized Care Hospital for the Elderly, a Good Memory School for dementia care, and communal living programs like the Very Good Home. The Mu Medical Foundation and Good Nursing Hospital further demonstrate the temple's commitment to health and well-being.

During our visit to Daegwanumsa Temple, we met Vice-President Yeunha Jeon and President Youngae Lee. Their warmth and openness reflected the inclusive spirit of the temple, enriching our experience. Guided by Mrs. Heunju, we gained not only a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings but also a profound respect for how the temple seamlessly combines tradition with community welfare. It was a journey of enlightenment, compassion, and community care that we will remember for years to come.

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About the Author

Kymbirly Barnett is a military spouse residing in the Daegu area. She finds joy in a variety of interests, including metal detecting, motocross, crafting, and maintaining faith in God's plan for her life. Exploring new places and connecting with fellow enthusiasts are some of the things that fuel her sense of adventure and purpose.



From left: Scott, and vice president Yeunha Jeon and president

Diamonds in the Rough:

The Fallacy of Work-Life Balance

By Naomi Nubin-Sellers

What does it mean to have balance? Work-life balance moves beyond pure equilibrium and stability and becomes more complex when discussing the balance between work and life. As military-affiliated women, we all face unique challenges that often require compromise. As a military spouse, mother of four, instructor, and PhD candidate, I have faced these challenges head-on. What I have discovered is that to find the coveted balance, we must embrace the challenges instead of pushing back against them. You may wonder how you embrace something that seems to work in opposition to the life you want. Women at all ends of the work-life spectrum often make sacrifices that others don't have to consider. These processes can feel amplified for women in the military, both spouses and active duty female soldiers.

How can we dream of balance when the cards we are dealt frequently feel like the deck is stacked against us? Here is the truth. There is no real balance between professional women and budding families. I know what you've heard, but hear me out. We are often spoon-fed a steady regimen of catchy blogs and articles with titles like "10 Things to Promote Work-life Balance" and "How to Have a Family and a Successful Career" - often marketed to young and middle-aged

women struggling to find equilibrium. The truth is when you are career-building and raising a family, there will be times that you will have to make trade-offs, and anyone who tells you that sacrifices (one way or another) won't have to be made isn't necessarily sincere. This is not to say that it won't be worthwhile. Indeed, as my mother (or anyone who has lived long enough) would say, "Anything worth having is worth the trouble in the end." But, while you're in the rough of it, life can sometimes feel overwhelming. And yes, those of you who say, "I have it all and am doing just fine" -kudos! Really, congratulations. Be sure to write a book and spread the good news. This piece is for those who recognize that our shortcomings sometimes reflect the immense pressure, struggles of time management, and (occasionally unreasonable) societal expectations of family and work that women face. So this is not for or about everybody. But for those who resonate with these words, please know you are seen and not alone.

One's quest for balance will differ depending on your unique responsibilities, family needs, and future goals. Because yes, wives and moms sometimes have goals and dreams, too. Beyond our husbands, children, friends, families, and colleagues. These aspirations may be crystal clear in our minds, drive our lives, or remain in their infant stage while we are soul searching. Either way, prioritizing our wants is often a trade-off for the needs of others; finding the happy medium is balanced. Why do these goals matter?

Why do our goals and the aspirations of wives and/or mothers matter? Well, we all know a woman who has sacrificed everything. Renouncing her own ambitions, dreams, or goals. Maybe she became bitter, and maybe not, but at the least, she may have lived a life incomplete. Not unhappy, just incomplete. Prioritizing our purpose can provide a pivotal outlet to tap into our passions, talents, and unique skills. As women, we need not demonize ambition for the sake of family. The goal is to confront our shortcomings so we can all

live more complete lives.

In fact, be sure to depend on your community, support system, and, of course, your new bestie (me!) to help you as you confront these new aspects of your life. As military-affiliated women, our support system and communities may look much different than others. We typically move often, usually away from our families and friends. Creating new communities wherever life takes us. We are like sunflowers, taking root and growing wherever we are planted. We are often resourceful because we have to be. I encourage you all to lean on your created communities, and you may be surprised by the commonalities we have between us. All of us should be leaning on each other; after all, many of us have similar experiences and can learn and share a great deal. So get out there and make some new friends!

The mounting pressures that can manifest on the path to balance may seem dark, and at times, they may be. Yet, the light of sharing your burdens and insecurities and pursuing your ambitions comes from embracing our families through the equalizing force of priority ranking. As the holidays quickly approach, many of you may contemplate how to squeeze in fun family activities while balancing a busy work schedule. Priority ranking can help us uncover equilibrium by stripping away the anxiety from determining how to carve out additional space in our lives for what we want to do vs. what we have to do. When ranking your priorities, you identify your obligations and desires and communicate them to your community and support systems. For example, you





only have a few hours to spare on Saturday because of a critical deadline during the week. Take your family to the Baramsae Pink Muhly Festival, only 15 minutes from Camp Humphreys, and spend the afternoon taking family photos. A unique opportunity to connect with your family for an experience they will never forget. If you're not at Camp Humphreys, find a fun festival or park near you! Ultimately, the connections to the people you love and the memories you create with them will far outlast any work deadline or meeting. With this perspective, we are not minimizing the importance of work responsibilities; we all just have to be satisfied with the choices we make in our own lives.

Besides, this can be a very exciting time to try new, unique experiences while living in Korea. For others, it may be a source of sadness as we send messages, cards, and gifts stateside to those we hold dear. But for all of us, these feelings can also turn into a lifetime of special memories for our families by carving some time for family fun. Even with the tightest schedules, we can be surprised how prioritizing family bonding time allows us to connect with those

we hold dear in our lives.

Depleting ourselves for everyone else's needs and depriving ourselves of our personal goals are two extremes with the same result. Neither represents a healthy lifestyle or seems helpful toward the goal of balance. Thus, we find that the key to balance is not the short-cut articles bolstering work-life balance but each of us doing the hard work of finding the happy medium in our lives. This happy medium includes a unique approach based on our families, careers, lifestyles, and overall commitments. Although the task may seem daunting, we should consider it an investment in ourselves. More specifically, it is an investment to help us lead happier, healthier, more comfortable lives. Happy searching!



About the author

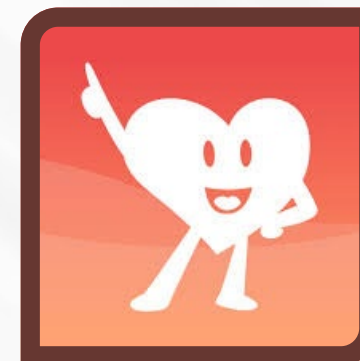
The column "Diamonds in the Rough" is about embracing the challenges of family, career building, and all the possibilities in life. The author, Naomi Nubin-Sellers, currently resides in Pyeongtaek, South Korea, with her active duty spouse and four beautiful children who range from ages 6 to 16. She is a current PhD Candidate, holding Bachelors and Masters degrees in the social sciences. In addition, she is a current instructor for a program housed at the University of Michigan. Her career aspirations include data-driven policy research, higher education, and non-profit services tailored to young mothers

Mental Health Matters

Free Resources On the Go



CBT-i Coach by the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is for people who are engaged in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia with a health provider, or who have experienced symptoms of insomnia and would like to improve their sleep habits. The app will guide you through the process of learning about sleep, developing positive sleep routines, and improving your sleep environment.



Couples Coach by the National Center for PTSD's Dissemination and Training Division is designed for partners who want to improve their relationships and explore new ways to connect. Couples choose missions to work through on their own or with their partner. The app includes comprehensive relationship info for couples living with PTSD.



Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame is a resource app for you to share with your child to help teach skills such as problem-solving, self-control, planning, and task persistence. This bilingual (English and Spanish), research-based app helps your child problem-solving by helping the monster friends take deep breaths, think of plans, and try them out!

Disclaimer: While these apps can be helpful tools for well-being, they are not a substitute for professional therapy or medical treatment. Please consult with a licensed mental health professional for personalized guidance and support.

Find more resources at: <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>



Spice, Sweetness, and Style: *The Ultimate Gingerbread Bundt Cake for the Holidays*

By Melissa Edwards-Whittington

When

the chill of winter sets in, there's nothing like the smell of spiced gingerbread wafting through the kitchen to make you feel at home. This Gingerbread Bundt Cake is a timeless holiday favorite with a moist, tender crumb and a beautifully festive shape, making it the perfect centerpiece for any holiday table. Whether entertaining guests or curling up by the fire, this cake perfectly balances indulgence and tradition.

Why Bundt Cakes Are The Perfect Holiday Dessert

Bundt cakes are a classic baking choice that flawlessly blend simplicity with sophistication. They have a recognizable shape created by the pan with

beautifully fluted edges and an iconic hole in the center unlike any other cake. Whether covered with a smooth glaze, a simple dusting of powdered sugar, or exquisite seasonal decorations, Bundt cakes stand out on any dessert table. The simplicity of the Bundt cake is that you can have maximum impact but use minimal effort since you don't need to have elaborate frosting or layered designs.

Bundt cakes are also incredibly versatile, which makes them the perfect cake for the holiday season. A Bundt cake suits every festive occasion, from spiced gingerbread and decadent chocolate to bright citrus or nutty flavors. Their dense yet tender texture makes them ideal for serving a crowd. In ad-

dition, you can choose to add toppings to your Bundt cake, such as fresh fruit, whipped cream, or a warm drizzle of chocolate or caramel sauce.

Baking a Bundt cake evokes nostalgia, bringing back memories of home, family, and cozy kitchens—just what the holidays are all about. Whether hosting a gathering or seeking a heartfelt homemade gift, a Bundt cake brings warmth, happiness, and a dash of tradition to the holiday season.

Making the Perfect Gingerbread Bundt Cake

Making the ideal Bundt cake is a culinary endeavor, but I promise it is well worth it. First, get that pan ready like a pro! To ensure your cake slips out flawlessly, ensure all the nooks and crannies are covered with flour, butter, and baking spray. Using room temperature ingredients allows for a perfectly blended batter. And be careful not to overmix! Gently mixing will keep your cake light and soft rather than dense and hefty. A

little attention to detail goes a long way to making the perfect Bundt cake.

For a beautifully even cake, tap the pan on the counter after filling your Bundt pan, which will knock out air bubbles. You must be patient once you have removed the cake from the oven. The cake should cool in the pan for at least 10 minutes before you flip it onto a cooling rack. Rushing through the cooling step will cause the cake to stick to the pan or create cracks in the cake. After your cake is cooled, it is time to choose your decoration. Whether you select a dusting of powdered sugar, drizzling of glaze, or full-on festive decorations, this cake will surely impress.

I love the bold and cozy flavors in this recipe. With the richness of molasses, the warmth of ginger, comforting cinnamon, and just a hint of nutmeg, this Bundt cake feels elegant. Here's how to bring this classic to life...

Ingredients

For the Cake:

- Baking spray with flour
- 1 cup (8 oz.) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 ¼ cups packed light brown sugar
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- ½ cup molasses
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 ½ tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- ¾ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp ground allspice
- ½ tsp ground cloves
- ¾ cup sour cream, at room temperature
- ¾ cup whole milk, at room temperature

For the Cream Cheese Glaze:

- 4 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tbsp amaretto liqueur (or 1 tbsp milk)
- 2 tbsp milk (or more for drizzling consistency)





Instructions

- 1. Prep Your Pan and Oven**
Preheat your oven to 350°F or about 177°C. Spray a 10-12 cup Bundt pan with baking spray that includes flour.
- 2. Make the Batter**
 - **Cream Butter and Sugars:** Beat the butter, brown sugar, and granulated sugar in a medium-high speed until fluffy (5-6 minutes). Scrape the sides as needed.
 - **Add Wet Ingredients:** Add eggs one at a time, mixing after each. Then mix in the molasses and vanilla until smooth.
- 3. Mix Dry Ingredients**
Whisk together the flour, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, baking powder, salt, baking soda, allspice, and cloves in a separate bowl.
- 4. Combine Milk and Sour Cream**
In another bowl, mix the sour cream and milk until smooth.
- 5. Finish the Batter**
Add the dry ingredients and milk mixture to the batter in turns: start with dry, then milk, and end with dry. Mix gently after each addition until just combined. Don't overmix.
- 6. Bake**
Pour the batter into the pan and smooth the top. Tap the pan on the counter to release air bubbles. Bake for 45-50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the cake comes out clean. Cool the cake in the pan for 10 minutes, then invert it onto a wire rack to cool completely.



- 7. Make the Glaze**
Beat the cream cheese and butter together until smooth. Add powdered sugar, amaretto (or milk), and 2 tablespoons of milk. Beat until smooth, adding extra milk if needed for a drizzle.
- 8. Glaze and Serve**
Drizzle the glaze over the cooled cake and enjoy! Perfect for holidays or cozy evenings.
- 9. Keeping It Fresh, Storing Your Gingerbread Bundt Cake**

If your gingerbread Bundt cake isn't devoured immediately (a real possibility!), these storage tips will keep it fresh and delicious. Wrap the cooled cake tightly in plastic wrap or place it in an airtight container to prevent it from drying out. You can keep it at room temperature for up to three days, but if you want to extend its shelf life, pop it in the fridge—it'll stay fresh

for about a week. For more extended storage, freezing the cake (unfrosted) is a convenient option. Simply wrap it securely in plastic wrap and foil, then place it in a freezer-safe bag. It can last up to three months in the freezer; just let it thaw at room temperature before serving. Proper storage allows you to enjoy this holiday favorite whenever the craving strikes!

Bringing the warm, spiced flavors of the holidays to life is as easy as baking this show-stopping Gingerbread Bundt Cake. Whether you're a seasoned baker or trying something new this year, this recipe will impress with its charm and rich, cozy flavors. And if you're craving extra guidance—or just want to see the magic happen—scan the QR code to watch us bake this delicious cake step-by-step on the KimchiRednecks YouTube channel. Join us for baking fun and make this holiday treat a tradition in your kitchen!



About the Author

Melissa Edwards-Whittington has been in Korea for 7 years. She and her husband have a YouTube channel, KimchiRednecks, where they share about life in South Korea, places to eat and visit in South Korea, as well as their hobbies like cooking and making whiskey at home. They are also parents to three precocious Shih Tzu daughters, Minion, Sookie, and Mayhem who are featured often in their social media. In addition to writing articles for United on the RoK, Melissa volunteers for a local organization called South of Seoul. She is a blogger, content creator, and online media manager for South of Seoul, supporting expats living in the country. She has volunteered with Pyeongtaek Insight as part of their content creation as well. Melissa is passionate about the community here in Pyeongtaek and seizes opportunities to increase the quality of life for those living in South Korea.





Top 10 K-Cosmetics for Christmas

By Alison Rock

Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and holiday parties, let's face it this is the time of year for gift-giving. For me, gifts need to be thoughtful and purposeful even if it's for a white elephant, present-swap party. When I started to think about everyone on my gift list and how hard some of them are to shop for, I realized Korean skincare is the answer. My friends and family are very diverse, not only in age and gender but in their ethnic backgrounds and personal demands so the need for a wide range of products is what brought me to Farmstay K-Beauty.

Farmstay has been around for 17 years and they make over 500 different products. They continuously experiment and develop natural products to satisfy different skin types. Farmstay embraces diversity because they believe being unique makes you beautiful. Some of my friends back home won't try Korean skincare because they're afraid if they like it, they can't get it again outside of Korea. This isn't a problem with Farmstay products because they are sold here in Korea as well as through TJ Max, Amazon, Burlington, Ross, and Walmart Marketplace. That brings me to my top 10 list for this holiday season. Not listed in any particular order, just some amazing products that you need for everyone on your gift list. You may even find them cheaper than the manufacturer-suggested price that I have listed below.

#1 Trip to Korea Mask

This 12-pack of masks is perfect for everyone and has vibrant souvenir pictures of some of the most iconic tourist spots in Korea like Seoul Namsan Tower, Jeju Island, and Gyeongbokgung Palace. These are easy to mail home and the ingredients are as diverse as the skin concerns they address. One nourishes skin with peptides, another moisturizes skin with collagen, the next hydrates with hyaluronic acid, and the final one rejuvenates with vitamin C. Each mask has a light non-sticky texture that absorbs well into the skin. The retail price for the kit is about \$18. I plan to put 1 face mask inside every holiday card I send out this year.



#2 Collagen Water Full Moist Treatment Hair Filler

One of the biggest complaints I hear from Americans here in Korea is how hard water is detrimental to their hair. If you have dry hair, thin or damaged hair that breaks easily, color-treated hair, or if you use heat styling tools, this is the product for you. Collagen Water Full Moist Treatment Hair Filler helps nourish your hair and repair rough and damaged strands. It contains a highly concentrated hydrolyzed collagen which provides amino acids that can quickly replenish nutrients in damaged hair. This rebuilds hair strength and restores hair's natural shine because it is formulated with keratin and collagen. It comes as a clear liquid in 10 individual vials that when mixed with equal parts of water turns into a thick cream. You apply it to clean wet hair, let it sit for 10-15 minutes, and then rinse it out. It has a light perfumy fragrance and retails for about \$23.



#3 Farmstay Cica Facial Wash Bubble Mask

This revolutionary new product has micro-foaming bubbles that cleanse impurities out of your pores. It has a transformative texture that goes on as a gel and within minutes turns into bubbles that gently massage the skin before getting rinsed off. It works as an exfoliator to perfectly cleanse away dead skin cells and clean pores without damaging your skin barrier. It has a cooling sensation and provides moisture to your skin. You can use it daily as a daily cleansing foam or as a cleansing mask 2-3 times a week. I love that this exfoliates your skin without the use of microplastic beads that can cause microdermabrasions. It comes packed in 20 individual cleansing pouches, so it makes it easy to take when you travel, and retails for about \$25.



#4 Revitalizing Rolling Eye Serums - Cica Farm & Collagen

Thin skin is prone to wrinkles, so we typically see them around the eyes, mouth, and neck where skin is the most delicate. Farmstay has multiple eye serums and I tried two of them, the Cica Farm and Collagen. The Cica Farm serum is formulated with centella asiatica extract to take care of thin skin prone to wrinkles and to repair damaged skin, boost elasticity, and help hydrate tired skin. It can be used as a preventative or a repair agent. It comes packaged in a tube with three roller balls allowing for easy targeted application. It has a light spa-like revitalizing fragrance and retails for about \$18.

The Collagen Water Full Moist Rolling Eye Serum is about the same price, but it hydrates and brightens your skin, improves skin elasticity, reduces wrinkles and fine lines, and reduces puffiness around the eyes because it's formulated with marine collagen. The metal applicator provides a gentle massage that's great for puffy morning eyes.





#5 Rice & Bifida - Glowing Perfect Serum & Nourishing Perfect Emulsion

There are several products in this line, so there is something for everyone. I tried the Serum and Emulsion. It has a pleasant, light fragrance, and the products retail for about \$20-\$23 each. The serum is thick and absorbs nicely leaving your skin with a healthy glow. The emulsion is thicker than a lotion but a touch thinner than a cream. It's made with fermented rice extract and bifida so it's loaded with probiotics and peptides that should improve your skin barrier, enhance hydration, reduce inflammation, and improve wrinkles. It may even be effective in reducing acne because the strong antioxidants and prebiotics should help maintain healthy microflora of the skin. It's made from the highest quality locally sourced rice from Incheon that undergoes a complex 5-stage fermentation process. The formula boasts 8 types of hyaluronic acids of various sizes and structures so it's a perfect moisturizer for everyone.

#6 Black Snail & Peptide 9

If you've read any of my previous articles you know that I love snail mucin and believe in its regenerative properties to skin. Farmstay's Black Snail & Peptide 9 line combats signs of aging to help you have younger-looking skin. It improves skin elasticity, brightens skin, and evens out skin tone while reducing wrinkles and fine lines. They have an entire line, but I tried the toner and cream. Toner is an important step of skin care because it is the first product that touches your skin after washing your face. It helps smooth out the skin texture that has been irritated during washing and quickly replenishes moisture, helping minimize dead skin cells and tightness. This line contains acetyl hexapeptide-8 to help create perfect skin full of elasticity. This formula does have a very strong fragrance but it is rich and creamy and makes your skin feel super soft. retail price is between \$23-\$32 per product.

#7 Collagen & Hyaluronic Acid All-in-One Ampoule

This is one of Farmstays best sellers, they've sold over 1.8 million jars and I can see why. It's a great value, it retails for \$23 but you can get it on Amazon for closer to \$17. The product comes in a ginormous 250ml jar. It's the size of a small jar of honey, 5 times the size of most other products. You can enjoy it as it's designed or even soak cotton pads in it and use it like a face mask. It claims to be unscented, but I think it has a nice light sea breeze fragrance. It's designed as an all-in-one ampoule with a toner + emulsion + essence function that claims to brighten skin with vitamin capsules and natural extracts. It also moisturizes and energizes skin with hyaluronic acid to improve the appearance of



fine lines. It's made with Marine collagen that is well absorbed, forming a moisture-protective film that is supposed to be 4 times better than other types of collagens. The formula also includes other extracts that are good for the skin like jojoba seed and green tea. It's not sticky and goes on the skin with a feel very reminiscent of aloe vera.

#8 Tea Tree Biome Calming Cleansing Oil

This product is brand new and if you wear make-up, it's a must-have. It's a mild, moisturizing cleanser that can get into pores that aren't visible to the naked eye. It has clinical testing behind it for an 83% reduction in blackheads. The product even boasts a 99% removal of sunscreen making it the perfect cleansing oil to try. Don't let the name Tea Tree scare you. It is very gentle having a subtle, herbal fragrance, not the strong overpowering peppermint/eucalyptus-y fragrance that I was expecting. I won't be surprised to see this product go viral very soon.

#9 Collagen Eyelash Serum

Eyelashes get damaged easily from daily mascara use, curlers, perms, extensions, and artificial lashes. Taking care of our lashes like our skin just makes sense. This is a highly concentrated water-based serum that will nourish your lashes. It has the same PH level as tears so it shouldn't irritate your eyes, but should make your lashes glossy and healthy. It should be used twice a day over a 4-week period and can be used on eyebrows too. The serum retails for about \$12

#10 Citrus Yuja vitalizing Ampoule

This time of year I love Yuja Tea. If you're new to Korea, Yuja is a sour citrus fruit with a very unique flavor. It falls between a lime, mandarin, and grapefruit. It's known to fight the common cold as it has 2.5 times the vitamin C of a lemon. Yuja boasts anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and collagen-boosting properties. It's loaded with antioxidants that help protect skin from environmental factors like UV exposure and pollution. My dermatologist always recommends vitamin C for skin so what could be better than products made from Yuja. Farmstay has an entire line of Yuja products, but I tried the vitalizing ampoule. The ampoule has an invigorating citrus smell that disappears quickly when applied to the skin. It absorbs rapidly and glides on lightly with a smooth nonsticky jelly-like texture. Application of the ampoule is said to reduce fine lines, even out skin tone, and increase natural collagen production. With a retail price tag of \$23, this is a steal.



Giving Your Children the Ultimate Gift

By Kortnee Anne



Welcome back to the Intentional Learning Corner. We hope you are staying warm as winter begins here in Korea. The gift-giving season is upon us. Many parents and children are excited and some are even overwhelmed and scrambling to find the perfect gifts. The commercialization of Christmas has made this time of year much more challenging for many families and honestly, Christmas should be an enjoyable time and not a burden or chore that you dread. All of that stress will not make your holiday happier or more meaningful. I am sure you have heard of the many ways families celebrate Christmas and I am sure the way you celebrate is the best for your family. However, do you

think your child remembers what they received last year for Christmas? Do they remember what you did as a family last Christmas? I encourage you to ask your child these simple questions and answer these questions yourself. In most cases, children and many adults often remember the experiences they had with their families and not the gifts they received. Important gifts may be remembered but eventually with time that memory will most likely fade. Watch how your child's face lights up as they explain the wonderful adventures from Christmas past. That should be enough to encourage you to give your children an experience that is just for them no matter how small. In our home we give everyone presents we have

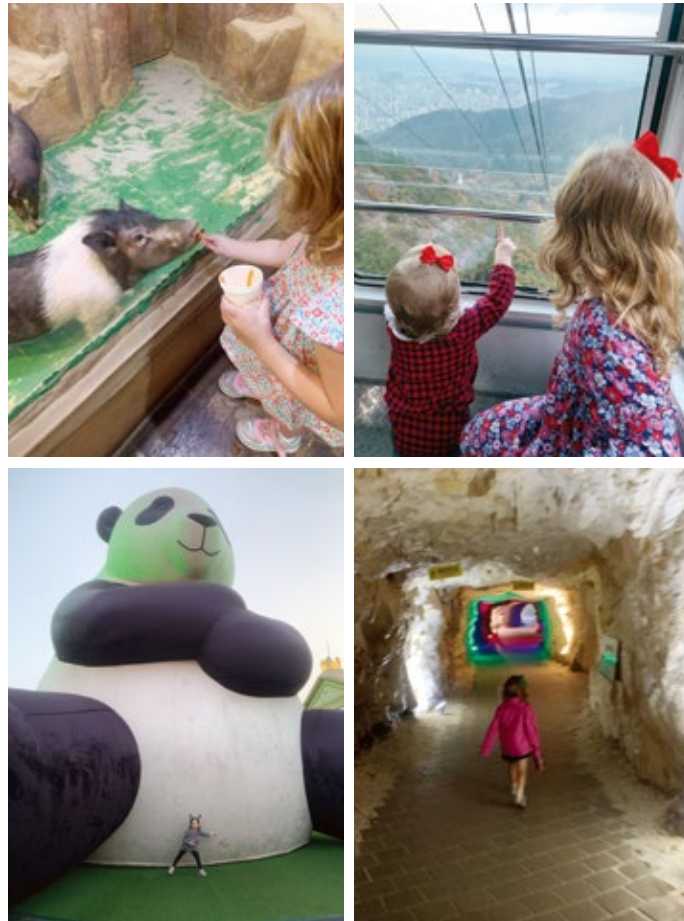
collected throughout the year while enjoying adventures together, at least one thing they have asked for, and an adventure that is just for them each year. Adventures can be simple or extravagant. Inexpensive or expensive. The choice is yours.

- 3 Tips for Gifting Adventures:
- Have everyone in your family write a list of adventures that interest them. I suggest not giving many rules for this list and keeping it for years to come until all the adventures have been completed. Feel free to have everyone update the same list more than once a year to keep the fun going for other holidays and vacations you may plan.
 - Plan ahead and prepare your children for the change in gifts if there will be a noticeable change in the quantity of gifts they normally receive. Please note that this is not the cheapest way to celebrate holidays but it sure is fun!
 - Present the adventures in a fun way such as creating tickets, printing pictures, and creating a group box that everyone gets to open together.

- Adventure Ideas:
- Aquarium
 - Coex Aquarium, Seoul
 - Busan Sea Life Aquarium
 - Zoo
 - Seoul Grand Park Zoo, Seoul
 - Zoolung Zoolung (indoor), Seoul
 - Zoo Zoopia (indoor), Cheonan
 - Museum
 - War Memorial of Korea
 - Seoul Children's Museum
 - Daegu National Science Museum
 - Rice Museum, Seoul
 - Kid's Cafe
 - Meta City Daegu Branch
 - Gonggam Kids Cafe, Asan
 - Themed Cafe
 - Monster Doughnut, Anseong
 - Trip to the Mountains
 - Gangwon
 - Trip to the Beach
 - Busan
 - YangYang
 - Mallipo Beach



- Explore a Palace
 - Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul
- Explore a Hanok Village
 - Bukchon Hanok Village, Seoul
- Explore a Temple
 - Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, Busan
 - Naksansa Temple, Yangyang
 - Gakwonsa Temple, Cheonan
- Explore a Fortress
 - Suwon Hwaseong Fortress
- Cultural Experiences
 - Harvesting Rice
 - Picking Strawberries
 - Dalgona Candy Game
- Hotel stay with Pools
 - Dragon Hill Lodge, Seoul
- Eating at a Favorite Restaurant
- Bullet Train
- Cable Car
 - Apsan Cable Car, Daegu
- Explore a Cave
 - Hwalok Cave, Chungcheongbuk
- Kayaking
- Camping
- Snow Tubing
- Skiing
 - Vilvaldi Park, Gangwon
- Tickets to a Ballet Performance
- Tickets to a Play
- Theme Parks
 - Legoland Korea, Chuncheon
 - Everland, Gyeonggi
 - Lotte World (Seoul)
- Parks
 - Nami Island, Gangwon
- Shopping Trip (remember to set a spending limit)
- A YES Day (Yes, you have to say YES all day!)



encourages curiosity, promotes critical thinking, builds stronger family bonds, fosters gratitude, and creates lasting memories. I encourage you to take a deep breath and step back this year while finalizing your gift-giving plans; remember that a simple adventure can be a beautiful way to enjoy Korea through intentional learning experiences that just so happen to also be the ultimate gift.

About the Author



Kortnee is a military spouse, a yoga teacher, homeschool mom, and published author with more than a decade of experience in early and elementary childhood education. Her goal is to take parents on a journey with their children by integrating more opportunities for intentional learning daily through play. If you would like more activity ideas follow us on Instagram @intentionallearning.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Family winter skiing at Yong Pyeong resort.
(Photo by NamGyu Kim)



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