

OCTOBER 2025

UNITED ON THE ROK

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UTOPIA:
A STORY OF
SURVIVAL
AND HOPE**

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Beyond Utopia: From soldier to survivor to human rights advocate, Lee So-yeon's story

From soldier to survivor to human rights advocate, Lee So-yeon's story embodies the UN's mission to protect dignity, freedom, and hope for all.



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UNESCO, Guardians of Our Past and Korea's Contributions



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The Push North to the Yalu, 75th Anniversary Series

Cover photo: The Statue of Brothers, created by Choi Young-jeep, stands in the plaza at the front of the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul. It depicts two soldiers, brothers from opposing sides. Their reunion represents the pain of the Korean War, but also reconciliation, forgiveness, unity, and healing across the divided peninsula. (Captured by Eric Park)

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The War Memorial of Korea stands as a poignant tribute to the nation's military history and sacrifices, providing a comprehensive and reflective experience for visitors. (Photo by Eric Park)

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

October marks United Nations Month, a time to reflect on the principles that unite nations worldwide: peace, cooperation, equality, and respect for human dignity. In this issue, we honor those ideals through stories of resilience, cultural exchange, and remembrance, from the harrowing escape and advocacy work of Lee So-yeon, to the historical significance of the UN's stand on the Korean Peninsula.

But perhaps, the clearest voices on the values of peace and unity come from our youngest community members; military kids growing up with a front-row seat to international cooperation. This month, we asked military kids in our communities what peace and the United Nations' principles mean to them. Their words are simple, honest, and, I believe, exactly what we need to hear.

Their words matter. In them, we hear hope, honesty, and a vision for the future. A future that is clear-eyed about the challenges yet rooted in respect, fairness, and freedom. Here in Korea, those same principles are safeguarded daily by the United Nations Command, whose mission of security, safety, and sustainment has upheld peace on the peninsula for more than seven decades. This October, as we honor the United Nations and reflect on its mission, may we let the voices of our children guide us forward.

In peace and unity,
Jetta Allen, Editor in Chief
United on the RoK Magazine

FUTURE LEADERS PRESENT VOICES

Military Kids on the United Nations' Principles

Why do you think protecting freedoms (like speech, religion, or education) is part of peace?

"I think protecting individual freedom is part of peace because it respects people's religion and their rights. It also makes a better environment by protecting those freedoms. Without freedom of speech, your rights to speak about anything can be limited. Freedom of speech is necessary to have a better understanding of things in the world. Without freedom of religion, you can't practice your religious beliefs. Protecting freedoms prevents corruption and tyranny in society from people, education, businesses, and government."



Joshua, age 14



What do you think is the hardest part about keeping peace between countries?

"I think the hardest part about keeping peace between countries is when they fight over land. Because sometimes borders are contested, and it can cause them to fight."

Wesley, age 11



Emily, age 15

What do you think is the hardest part about keeping peace between countries?

"I think that the hardest part of keeping peace between countries is the different world views between countries. Different people such as the leaders of countries were raised different, were surrounded by different cultures, and believe differently, so this can make it difficult for people to come to an agreement about certain issues which can lead to conflict and destroy any peace between countries."



Amarè, age 7

How can kids help make the world more peaceful?

"Kids can help make the world more peaceful by praying for others."

If you could make one rule to protect kids everywhere, what would it be?

"If I could make one rule to protect kids everywhere, I would give every child a chance to have healthy food and a safe home."

Nailah, age 7



How can kids help make the world more peaceful?

"By listening to one another and being respectful."

Leah, age 8



Luke, age 13

What does "peace" mean to you in your own words?

"Pace means all countries get along and don't create war."



Chloe, age 16

How do you think friendship between nations helps prevent problems in the world?

"The Earth is made up of many different countries, but in the end we all share the same world. Some of the biggest challenges we face, like climate change, pandemics, and rising sea levels, are too large for any one country to handle on its own. That's why cooperation is so important. When nations build trust and keep good relationships, it becomes easier to work together and find real solutions. Strong connections between countries can ease tensions, prevent conflicts, and help people better understand one another's perspectives"

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Events & Festivals



OCT11-DEC28

Cirque du Soleil KOOZA

Big Top in Jamsil Sports Complex
ticket.yes24.com



OCT17

2025 Changwon K-Pop World Festival

Changwon Square Special Stage
globalinterpark.com



OCT17-19

The 22nd Jarasum Jazz Festival

Jarasum
ticket.yes24.com/eng



OCT21

OASIS Live '25

Goyang Stadium
globalinterpark.com



OCT21-22

Gustavo Dudamel & LA Philharmonic

Seoul Arts Center, Concert Hall
ticket.yes24.com/eng



OCT22

Alan Gilbert & the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra with Joshua Bell, violinist

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



ONGOING -OCT26

Musical <WICKED>

BLUE SQUARE Shinhancard Hall
globalinterpark.com



NOV05

Janine Jansen & Camerata Salzburg

Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



NOV07-09

Tom Ollendorff Trio

Various Jazz Club
in Seoul(7), Jeonju(8), Daegu(9)
globalinterpark.com



NOV19

Myung Whun Chung & One Korea Orchestra <Beethoven 'Choral'>

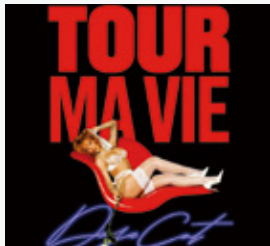
Lotte Concert Hall
lotteconcerthall.com/eng



NOV26-30

NANTA - Busan

Sohyang Theater Shinhan Card Hall
globalinterpark.com



DEC13

Doja Cat - Ma Vie World Tour

KINTEX Exhibition Hall, Ilsan
globalinterpark.com



OCT15-19

Chungjang Street Festival of Recollection

• Venue: Geumnamno 1-ga, Dong-gu, Gwangju
• Website: recollection.kr



OCT23-26

Gangneung Coffee Festival

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• Inquiries: +82-33-647-6802



OCT31-NOV02

Gwangju Kimchi Festival

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• Inquiries: +82-62-613-3955



OCT17-19

Gwanak Kang Gam-chan Festival

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• Website: www.ggcfest.com
• Inquiries: +82-2-828-5765



OCT24-26

Dongnaeupseong History Festival

• Address: 80 Munhwa-ro, Dongnae-gu, Busan
• Website: www.dongnae.go.kr
• Inquiries: +82-51-550-4092



ONGOING -NOV04

Jeongseon Arirang Festival

• Venue: Jeongseon Gongseol Sports Field
• Website: en.koreaflowerpark.com
• Inquiries: +82-33-560-3013



OCT17-19

Sunchang Fermented Food Festival

• Address: 6-3 Minsongmaeul-gil, Sunchang-gun, Jeonbuk-do
• Website: www.jangfestival.co.kr
• Inquiries: +82-63-650-1624



OCT29-NOV02

Cheongsong Apple Festival

• Venue: 269 Geumwol-ro, Cheongsong-eup, Cheongsong-gun, Gyeongsangbuk-do
• Website: csapplefestival.kr



NOV04-09

Gimhae Buncheong Ceramics Festival

• Venue: Area of Gimhae Buncheong Ceramics Museum
• Website: festival.buncheong.co.kr



OCT18-26

Yeongju Punggi Insam Festival

• Address: Seongnae-ri, Punggi-eup, Yeongju-si, Gyeongsangbuk-do
• Website: ginsengfestival.co.kr
• Inquiries: +82-54-639-6612



OCT31-NOV02

Yeoju Ogoknaru Festival

• Address: Cheonsong-dong, Yeoju-si, Gyeonggi-do
• Website: www.yjfestival.or.kr
• Inquiries: +82-31-881-9692



JAN10-FEB01

Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival

• Address: 137 Sancheoneo-gil, Hwacheon-gun, Gangwon-do
• Website: www.narafestival.com
• Inquiries: +82-1688-3005

GUARDIANS OF PEACE

The United Nations Command on the Korean Peninsula

By the Editorial Team



Gen. Xavier T. Brunson is the Commander of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, at Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea.
(Photo Credit: United States Forces Korea)



Gen. Xavier T. Brunson, Commander of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, reflects on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations Command and its enduring mission.

This year marks 75 years since the United Nations Command (UNC) was established during the Korean War. In your view, what is the most enduring aspect of the UNC's mission and legacy?

"The most enduring aspect of the United Nations Command's mission is our unwavering commitment to enforcing the 1953 Armistice Agreement – the foundational framework that has maintained peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula for over seven decades. As UNC marks its 75th anniversary, its role remains vital today, as the Korean War has not ended; the Armistice represents only a cessation of hostilities.

Created in 1950, UNC represented unprecedented global solidarity against aggression, a profound demonstration of collective resolve to defend freedom. Immense sacrifices were made to secure freedom on the peninsula, enabling South Korea's transformation. Today, UNC is a modern platform for coalition readiness, coordinating 18 member nations through unified strategic planning.

UNC honors the sacrifices of those who came before us by maintaining the peace, demonstrating our enduring commitment to securing the future."

As Commander of the UNC, what does leading such a historically significant and multinational force mean to you personally, and how is multinational collaboration central to your mission?

"Leading the United Nations Command represents a profound honor and a deeply personal commitment. I serve alongside remarkable professionals united by a common purpose and unwavering dedication to peace and security. This opportunity to command forces on the Korean Peninsula, partnered with the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, is unmatched.

My commitment extends beyond duty – it is personal, making the safety of all families paramount. This reinforces dedication to ensuring our force maintains credibility and readiness. I view this role as a continuation of a 75-year legacy born from sacrifice.

Multinational collaboration is central to everything we accomplish. "Under One Flag" – represents a binding principle of partnership. This collective strength far exceeds what any single nation could achieve. Through continuous dialogue with UN member states, we maintain strategic clarity and a unified approach."



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Lee So-yeon's Journey from North Korean Soldier to Human Rights Advocate: A Story of Survival and Hope

By Sara Torres



Lee So-yeon shares some words with the audience after the screening of the film "Beyond Utopia" on Camp Humphreys, South Korea. The film was shown to families to help raise awareness for human rights in North Korea and to share Lee's story. U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Seu Chan.

Understanding Human Rights: A Difficult Concept Under Oppression

How would you define human rights? How did you come to your understanding of that term? It may feel like this is something we have an inherent knowledge of as humans. After all, they are our rights. Unfortunately, for many people, especially those living under the influence of oppressive regimes, it may not be something they can define very easily.

When Lee So-yeon, a former sergeant in the Korean People's Army in North Korea, escaped the clutches of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) regime, she did not do so while thinking about her human rights and the violations she had endured. She was merely trying to survive.

Life in the DPRK: Harsh Realities Life After Military Service in North Korea

In 2006, after serving 10 years in the DPRK, Lee was discharged. She was sent to work in the coal mines under grueling conditions. Workers were starving, being forced to dig by hand while being prom-

ised food from the regime that would never come. "The hunger was unbearable," Lee said through translator Lee Jeong-hwan, a language specialist at U.S. Army Garrison Humphreys, during an interview, May 28. "I was not properly paid when I was a soldier, and I was embarrassed to reveal that I could not eat for three days after being discharged."

The Dangerous Escape: Crossing the Yalu River and Facing Imprisonment

With a six-year-old son at home, she was desperate to find a means of survival. There were rumors circulating the mines of women making money by smuggling goods from China across the Yalu River, which forms the border between North Korea and China. Crossing the river can be treacherous. It is heavily patrolled by DPRK forces, and the punishments for being caught crossing the river illegally are harsh. It was a dangerous task, but Lee had no other way to feed her and her son.

Several days later, she had a plan. "After school, he ran up to me on the street," Lee said through tears. "I said I would be back in two nights and that I would return with a lot of money and cook him a lot of food." It would not be two nights... She would never see her son again.

While attempting to cross the Yalu River, Lee was captured by DPRK soldiers and sent to a prison camp. She would be here for two years, working in even worse conditions than she experienced in the coal mines. Upon her release, she would be unable to reintegrate into society. Her social status in the community had been permanently tarnished. She was forbidden from contacting her mother or son.

The Perilous Journey to South Korea: Evading Capture and Trafficking

Finding herself more desperate than before, she made the choice to try to leave North Korea permanently. This would be even more dangerous than smuggling. She would need to cross the river into China, evading capture from both North Korean forces with the DPRK and Chinese forces with the People's Liberation Army due to the repatriation agreement between the two countries. If a defector is caught in China, they are returned to North Korea for punishment that often involves torture.

After making it into China, she would then have to navigate a safe route out of China and into South Korea. This would require paying brokers to help her travel through the countries, relying on strangers who may or



▲ Barbed wire in the DMZ of Goseong-gun: a harsh boundary between a life under oppression and the hope of freedom and reunion. Captured by Jetta Allen.

may not give her up to the police or do worse. Lee recalls narrowly escaping being trafficked, a fate that befalls many North Korean women and girls trying to escape.

In 2008, after her second attempt, Lee was successful this time. She made it to South Korea safely.

Adjusting to Freedom: New Life and Challenges in South Korea

Now, Lee, like many other North Korean defectors, had to struggle to adjust to a life that was drastically different from the fled. It wasn't just day-to-day life that was different. It's an entirely new way of existing in the world. The South Korean government automatically grants citizenship to all defectors and has an impressive and comprehensive support system to help them adjust. This process includes a 12-week education on things from their protected rights to essential life skills.

The determination to survive that sustained her on the journey to South Korea also helped her thrive here. She was able to find a home and work. Then, she got her driver's license and enrolled in college. It was still difficult at times. She was often working multiple jobs at a time while taking classes, running on four hours of sleep a night, and also trying to find a community. Yet, she persisted.



▲ Audience members pose for a group picture with Lee So-yeon and members of the Association of Korea-America Alliance after the screening of the film "Beyond Utopia" on Camp Humphreys, South Korea, June 18, 2025. The film was shown to community members to help raise awareness for human rights in North Korea and to share Lee's story. U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Seu Chan.

"I wasn't afraid," Lee said. "I can do anything here."

She found a community. People wanted to hear her story, and she wanted to share it, not only for her sake but also for her son's and all North Koreans.

A Mother's Pain and Resolve: The Story of Lee's Son

"Our vision that I talk about with North Korea is that I believe the Kim regime must collapse for the freedom and happiness of North Korean citizens," Lee said.

Through all of this, Lee has never stopped thinking about her son. In 2019, he tried to leave North Korea to join his mother. Lee's experience during her son's attempt was included in the documentary film *Beyond Utopia*. This film chronicles the conditions under which North Koreans live, the experiences of several defectors, and the people who help them escape.

Lee was in brief contact with her son before he left North Korea. However, he was captured in China and repatriated to North Korea. Her son was imprisoned and tortured as punishment for defecting. She was able to confirm with contacts that he was alive, but she is unable to contact him or her mother directly.

Speaking of her son, she said, "He's currently in a political prison camp and he's alive. What he's going through in North Korea is what all the North Koreans are going through, so I want to reveal everything to the world."

Her son's capture was a devastating blow to Lee, but it did not deter her. It only catapulted her resolve



▲ An audience member at the screening of the film asks Lee So-yeon a question on Camp Humphreys, South Korea. U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Seu Chan.

to advocate for the rights of those who are still being subjected to the conditions she survived. She is a prominent human rights activist who speaks out regularly against the North Korean government.

From Survivor to Advocate: Fighting for North Korean Human Rights

Last July, Lee spoke in South Korea before the first national North Korean Defectors' Day ahead of a screening of "Beyond Utopia." She said, "I didn't even know the term 'human rights' back in North Korea, so I wasn't aware mine were being violated, which was the most shocking thing I realized after coming to the South."

People may not fully understand their rights, but that does not negate their claim to them. She emphasizes how important it is to understand that North Koreans

are humans too. Humans who deserve the basic rights and freedoms that they don't even realize the North Korean regime continues to deny them.

Recognizing Human Rights and the United Nations Command Mission

Lee So-yeon's story gives us a glimpse behind the curtain of just one of the political tensions across the world. Personal stories like hers serve to remind us of the people who are the most impacted by harmful policies and the unimaginable hardships they endure as a result. The courage it took to escape under threat of torture, death, and losing family is impressive on its own, but the sustained courage that was necessary to rebuild her life and spend it advocating for others is truly heroic.

She is living a life that reflects the principles of the United Nations to protect human rights, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all humans. The UN works towards these goals on the Korean peninsula in a unique effort through the United Nations Command (UNC). The UNC is the only multinational command of its kind, whose mission is to maintain security, deter aggression, and support humanitarian efforts. The efforts of the UNC exemplify how cooperation and vigilance between nations can serve in protecting freedom and human rights.

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About the Author

Sara Torres is a mother and educator currently working on an interdisciplinary master's degree in elementary ESL education and educational psychology. Her husband is stationed at Osan Air Base in South Korea.



Beyond Utopia (2023), directed by Madeleine Gavin, follows North Korean defectors risking everything to escape one of the world's harshest regimes, guided by South Korean human rights activist Pastor Seungeun Kim. Using raw, handheld footage, defectors like Soyeon Lee share their stories of fear, loss, and courage.

On the official website, viewers can access several key sections:

- Trailer:** Watch the official trailer to get a glimpse of the documentary's compelling content.
- Synopsis:** Read a detailed overview of the film's storyline and themes.
- Host a Screening:** Find information on how to organize a screening of the documentary in your community.
- Filmmakers:** Learn about the director and the team behind the film.
- How to Help:** Discover ways to support North Korean refugees and contribute to their cause.
- Reviews:** Read critical acclaim and audience feedback on the documentary.

For more information and to explore these options, visit www.beyondutopiadoc.com
(Photo Credit: www.beyondutopiadoc.com)



Sarah and her girls with the Norwegian Epic ship behind them.

“When Are We Going on a Homeboat Again?”

By Sarah Symbolist



▲ London in front of the life preserver ring with her name on it.



▲ Norwegian Epic bunk beds in the cabin make it feel like the best of home and a fun sleepover.



▲ London with a rubber duck she found on her scavenger hunt.

We never set out to become a cruising family, but over the years, it's become our number one tradition. With kids in tow, we've sailed with Princess Cruises, Holland America, Norwegian, and MSC Cruises, through the South Pacific, around Asia, across Northern and Southern Europe, and even transatlantically from Italy to Florida.

Each cruise line offers something a little different, but the core magic is the same: we unpack once, settle into a rhythm, and wake up somewhere new each day while the kids are safely entertained and someone else handles the cooking.

When Millie was just two, she started calling cruise ships “homeboats.” And we regularly hear, “When are we going on a homeboat again?”

If you've ever dreamed of a vacation that combines adventure with ease, where your kids are thriving and you're actually relaxing, a cruise might just be the answer.

Why a Cruise Ship Is the Ultimate “Home Base”

One piece of advice I regularly share with families who want to travel more is this: younger kids do better with a home base. That's what makes cruising such a smart option.

The ship becomes their familiar place, even as the scenery changes. For little kids, this means they can nap in the same bed, fall asleep surrounded by familiar toys

and blankets, and wake up knowing what to expect. It's a huge help when trying to keep sleep schedules on track or prevent meltdowns during transitions.

Older kids benefit, too. After a day of exploring temples, they love coming back to “their” cabin and unpacking their souvenirs, grabbing a snack, flipping on the TV, and relaxing in their own space. That balance of adventure and recovery time makes a big difference in how enjoyable the travel experience is for the whole family.

On a cruise, the home base moves with you. That means fewer bags to pack and repack, fewer transitions to manage, and more stability for kids without giving up variety and exploration.

Built-in Entertainment (That Isn't You)

From the moment we step on board, my kids feel like they're in their own floating theme park. Bunk beds in the cabin? Instant excitement. Towel animals waiting at bedtime? They race to guess what creature it will be. Soft-serve ice cream on tap 24/7? A daily ritual, especially when grandparents are around.

There's bingo that welcomes kids, magic shows in the theater, pools and waterslides, and even scavenger hunts for rubber ducks, an unofficial tradition we've found on more than one sailing. Some ships offer mini golf, bowling alleys, or rock climbing. Others host kids' talent shows, family game nights, and themed dance parties.



▲ Waterslides and more on the Norwegian Epic cruise ship.



▲ London and Millie are eating breakfast in front of the balcony on the Holland America cruise ship, thanks to wonderful room service!



▲ Norwegian Cruise Lines aims to give everyone memorable experiences each trip, young and old.



▲ Norwegian Epic video arcade.



▲ Our kids feel right at home on their cruise ship turned “homeboats”



▲ Child care on the Norwegian Cruise Lines is fantastic. We dropped off Millie at the kids’ club, but picked up a Milliesaurus.

When we cruised with Norwegian Cruise Line from Rome to Cape Canaveral, we bought the arcade package for our daughter London, and it was worth every penny. When the weather was bad crossing the Atlantic and the water slides were closed, we spent a lot of time there as a family. I beat 13 levels on one arcade-style car racing game before realizing my family had left me.

Most major cruise lines offer complimentary kids’ programs divided by age group, and they’re often better staffed, safer, and more imaginative than you’d expect. Millie spent her afternoons in a bright, supervised playroom crafting sea creature masks and listening to pirate stories. London thrived in the tween lounge, playing video games and enjoying late-night sessions while we tucked Millie into bed.

On Holland America, all the movies are free and streamable in your room, ideal for quiet evenings or early mornings. And even with a huge selection, if your kids are anything like mine, they’ll choose one to watch on repeat - and suddenly, you’ll know every word to Luca.

From Buffets to Fine Dining

Feeding kids while traveling can be stressful. On a cruise? Surprisingly manageable.

We opt for early dining to avoid the overtired zone. It doesn’t take long for the staff to remember Millie needs an entire bowl of ketchup with any meal. Some-

times the girls eat before our entrees arrive, and one of us whisks them to the kids’ club quickly so we can enjoy dinner in peace.

When a sit-down meal doesn’t fit the mood, the buffet is always an option. Sometimes it’s quicker, quieter, and you don’t feel the need to overdress after a long day battling crowds in tourist areas. Buffet dining rooms often have more window seating, too, and watching the world float by while you eat is its own kind of calm.

Room service is clutch for those nights when everyone needs to decompress. Pajamas, cartoons, and chicken tenders in bed - no shoes required. Flexibility is key. Eat early, eat late, by the pool, in your cabin, or dressed up in the formal dining room. And no one blinks if your child brings a coloring book to the table. Everyone gets it.

Shore Excursions: Plan with Purpose

From snorkeling in Australia to visiting Komodo dragons in Indonesia, our port days are always memorable. I carefully vet and book excursions in advance to avoid disappointment or overbooking.

But we’ve also learned where to compromise. Wine tastings in Italy? Not yet. A day on Green Island at the Great Barrier Reef? Absolutely.

Understanding our kids’ travel styles has made excursions smoother—and prevented public meltdowns in the

middle of foreign countries.

One of the great perks of cruising is that you don’t have to plan every detail yourself. Excursions can be booked directly through the cruise line or through third-party sites like GetYourGuide and Viator. In some ports, you can even skip the tours entirely and simply explore on foot. We’ve tried all of the above, and here’s the rule of thumb I’ve landed on: if the port day is short or the tour involves a long bus ride, I always book through the ship. But if we have a full day and I find an independent tour that only takes a few hours, I’ll go that route. It usually saves money and gives us the freedom to explore on our own afterward. Still, there’s real peace of mind when booking through the cruise line, because if a tour runs late, the ship will wait for you before departing. That reassurance alone can be worth it when traveling with kids.

For families new to cruising, I always recommend booking excursions through the ship at least for your first trip. It gives you a feel for how port days run, without the extra worry.

Real Family Moments at Sea

There’s almost always an art gallery on board, and London loves to stop and admire the artwork. She especially looks forward to the free art prints they hand out, and she makes it her mission to collect them all.

Another favorite tradition? The daily jewelry shop charms. Most ships hand out a different charm each day, and London never misses a stop with her Nana to collect them. By the end of the week, she’s proudly gathered a full set.

Cruise photographers are often set up around the ship during dinner hours, offering to take family photos in front of sweeping backdrops. These snapshots become fun keepsakes—especially the time we booked a formal family session and ended up with a goofy group shot that captured everyone’s personality in full glam garb.

Why We Keep Coming Back

One night, after a formal dinner, I watched as London confidently twirled on the dance floor while the band played Christmas music. On another evening, we enjoyed laughs with the table beside us as they couldn’t contain their giggles watching Millie put on a full performance of her best silly faces. It was one of those unexpected, joyful moments that make travel with kids feel less like a challenge and more like a gift. These are the slow-motion memories we hold onto.

But traveling with kids isn’t always smooth sailing. Like the time London broke her arm just 14 hours before we were supposed to board the cruise ship, we still made it, but just barely - and then spent the next 16 days figuring out how to navigate ports, pools, and daily activities with



▲ Sarah, Millie, London, and husband Brandon are enjoying their family vacation on a Holland America Cruise.

a sling. The truth is, there are moments of chaos and stress mixed in with the magic. And maybe that's what makes the magical moments shine even brighter.

Cruising with kids offers something rare... Structure and freedom. Excitement and calm. The kids get adventure and independence. Parents get moments of rest, romance, and a break from logistics.

For military families like ours, cruising is the perfect tradition. We don't always know where we'll be stationed next year, but we know we'll cruise again. Because it works. It gives us the space to reset, breathe, and grow together.

At home, life is a blur of school, sports, and dinner. But on a cruise, time slows. We tuck in each night to a gently rocking cabin, knowing tomorrow will bring something new - and familiar.

So when Millie asks, "When are we going on a home-boat again?" We all smile. Because we know the answer is: soon!

What to Know Before You Go

Cruising with kids can be magical, but even magic needs a little prep. Here are my tips:

- Book a balcony if you can. Naps are easier when parents can step outside and still enjoy the view.
- A first-aid kit with sea bands/motion sickness patches and over-the-counter meds is a must. Don't forget the Band-Aids.
- Download the cruise app. It has daily activity schedules, menus, and check-in options for the kids' clubs.
- Bring reusable water bottles. You can refill them anytime in the buffet areas.
- Laundry service is a convenience worth paying for.
- An inexpensive, clear over-the-door shoe orga-



▲ Holland America Westerdam cruise ship

nizer organizes more than just shoes and fits over most doors.

- Ask about military discounts directly with the cruise line or through travel agents familiar with military rates. Most cruise lines offer a 10% discount.

Military Travel Resources

Aircraft and Personnel Automated Clearance System
<https://apacs.milcloud.mil/>

Theater Travel Requirements, Travel Tracker/Individual Antiterrorism Plan (TT/IATP)
<https://www.pacom.mil/Resources/Travel-Requirements/>

US Department of State Travel Advisory
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages.html>



About the Author

Sarah earned her bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas in Fashion Merchandising. She is married to her high school sweetheart and raising two fearless daughters. When she's not busy managing family life, you can find her browsing thrift stores, biking or hiking to discover new coffee shops, planning her next vacation adventure, and writing about it all on her blog at www.sarahsymbalisty.com.



Thinking About Living Off-Installation in Korea?

What SOFA Status Renters Should Know

By James Chung
 Photos Courtesy of Plus Realty

Whether you're newly arrived or considering a change of scenery, living off the military installation in South Korea as a SOFA visa holder can be a rewarding experience. From spacious apartments with heated floors to the opportunity to immerse yourself in Korean culture, housing on the economy opens up a world of opportunities if you know how to navigate the system.

This guide is designed to help USFK-affiliated military members, DoD civilians, contractors, and their families understand the ins and outs of renting off-installation in Korea.

Who Can Live Off Military Installations?

If you're USFK-affiliated, under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), you may be eligible to live off the installation in Korea if no space is available for on-installation housing.

Before you start apartment hunting, you'll need to go through the proper approval channels, beginning with your installation's Housing Office.

Start Here: Installation Housing Office & Approval Process

Every installation has a Housing Office dedicated to supporting you through the rental process. You'll need to:

1. Attend a housing briefing.
2. Determine if on-installation housing is available first, if so, you may be permitted to reside off the installation.
3. Receive a rental packet.
4. Get command approval to reside off the military installation.
5. Have any prospective home inspected and approved for safety and livability.

Tip: This process takes time, so start early to avoid delays.



Understanding the Korean Rental System

In South Korea, the rental system typically falls into two categories: jeonse (전세) and wolsae (월세). Jeonse involves a large, upfront deposit, often ranging from \$100,000 to \$300,000 or more, with no monthly rent. The landlord earns interest on the deposit, which is fully returned at the end of the lease (usually two years). Wolsae, on the other hand, requires a smaller deposit and includes a monthly rent payment.

While wolsae is the most common rental style offered to SOFA status holders, since it aligns with the Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA) reimbursement, it's important to note that, in most cases, the deposit is typically equal to one month's rent. In addition to rent, tenants may also pay a monthly gwanlye-bi (관리비), or maintenance fee, which covers services like common area cleaning, elevator use, security, trash disposal, and sometimes internet. While local realtors near military installations primarily focus on wolsae-



style contracts tailored to foreigners, understanding the broader Korean rental system helps renters make informed decisions and navigate lease agreements more confidently.

Housing Allowances

Your housing allowance will vary depending on your status in Korea, whether you're a service member, DoD civilian, or contractor. Military service members receive Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA). While this can differ between branches, it's primarily based on location. OHA rates are determined by the cost of housing in a particular overseas location and the service member's pay grade and dependency status, not the branch they serve in.

You can use the official OHA calculator to estimate your allowance: <https://www.travel.dod.mil/Allowances/Overseas-Housing-Allowance/>

What's Covered by OHA?

OHA (Overseas Housing Allowance) varies by rank, location, and dependent status. It usually covers:

- Monthly rent (not deposits)
- Utility allowance
- MIHA (Move-In Housing Allowance) for setup costs

Work with your Housing Office to ensure your lease meets OHA standards.

What If My Rent Exceeds My OHA?

By regulation, service members cannot sign a lease that exceeds their OHA ceiling (rent plus utility allowance) without prior approval. Authority to grant an "excess rent" waiver is necessary, though it may be delegated to the Housing Office Chief. The process requires submission of a DD Form 2367 (Individual Overseas Housing Allowance Report), and if the rent is above the allowance, the housing office prepares a Request for Exception to Policy (ETP) or Excess Rental Justification memorandum for the commander's approval. These measures are in place to ensure that the additional housing costs do not negatively impact a service member's financial readi-

ness. If the additional expenses are approved, the additional amount over your OHA will come out of your own pocket.

Understanding LQA for DoD Civilians

Some DoD civilians may qualify for a Living Quarters Allowance (LQA), but eligibility and application processes can vary by agency. While all agencies must follow the Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR), local command interpretations may influence how LQA is implemented. Since there's no public calculator, it's best to contact your specific agency or HR representative for details about your authorized amount in accordance with your hiring contract.



Other Housing Allowances

In addition, some contractors have their housing allowance money added into their salaries or are usually instructed upon accepting the position what additional compensation they may receive for housing. In these instances, it will be best to make sure you create a budget ahead of meeting with realtors so you know how much you are willing to allocate for your rental.

Finding the Right Place

Your best resource will be a local budongsan (real estate agent), especially those who specialize in working with foreigners near your military installation. They'll walk you through listings, translate, and even negotiate terms.

Things to consider:

- Proximity to the installation
- Proximity to the specific installation gate you need for access on weekdays and weekends
- Community features (park, gym, pool)
- DoDEA bus line (not all housing has a bus line, might be a shuttle or nonexistent)
- Furnished or unfurnished
- Parking availability (dedicated spaces vs. first-come/first-served)

- Included appliances (washer, fridge, A/C)
- Pet-friendly policies
- Elevator access in taller buildings
- Noise levels and neighborhood feel

It's important to understand that the rental market in Korea moves quickly, often faster than many newcomers expect. Apartments can be listed and rented within days, sometimes even hours. If you're browsing listings on Facebook or real estate sites, keep in mind that many of those properties may already be off the market by the time you connect with a realtor.

Because of this fast pace, it's not realistic to start your apartment search too far in advance. Instead, focus your early research on identifying neighborhoods that interest you or noting specific features and locations you prefer. This will allow you to clearly communicate your preferences when you meet with a realtor, helping them narrow down options and find a place that fits your needs more efficiently.

The Lease Agreement: Read Every Line

As a lease is a binding agreement, it is always a good idea to read and review your lease. You need to know what your responsibility is and what the responsibilities are your property manager, landlord, and/or rental agency.

Have your lease translated into English and retain a copy of all signed documents. The Housing Office must review and approve your lease before it becomes official.

Cultural Considerations

Renting in Korea often means being a respectful part of a tight-knit building community. Some key etiquette tips:

- Trash separation is taken seriously. Follow city recycling rules.
- Noise sensitivity is high. Be mindful of music, pets, or rowdy kids.
- Many landlords may not speak English. Your realtor will be a great resource to help bridge the gap.





Choosing the Right Realtor: More Than Just a Rental Agent

Since individuals with SOFA status aren't considered residents of Korea, the rental process and the role of real estate agents function differently than it does for foreigners on other visa types. Realtors who work closely with the U.S. military community often act more like concierge services than traditional agents.

They may assist with paying utility bills, ordering items online, receiving packages, and providing ongoing support throughout the lease. This hands-on approach helps ease the transition to off-installation living and simplifies day-to-day logistics for military personnel and their families.

There are many real estate companies located near U.S. military installations, but not all are created equal. Before choosing an agent, check with your installation's Housing Office to ensure the company isn't blacklisted. It's also wise to meet with several agents to compare services, personality fit, and knowledge of the local area. Since your realtor will often be your main point of contact throughout the duration of your lease, it's essential to choose someone you trust and feel comfortable working alongside.

Tips for Success:

- Use a reputable real estate agent familiar with SOFA guidelines.
- Work closely with your Housing Office from day one.
- Ask neighbors or coworkers for recommendations.
- Keep records of payments, inspections, and communications.
- Be patient and flexible; things move differently here.

Living Off-Installation: The Rewards

While housing on military installations offers convenience and a built-in community, living off the installation opens the door to a different kind of experience, one that's full of independence, cultural discovery, and everyday adventure. Off-installation living often means greater flexibility in home style and location, and a chance to truly engage with your local surroundings.

You'll find yourself discovering neighborhood bakeries tucked into side streets, frequenting mom-and-pop restaurants where you

become a regular, and exploring markets filled with seasonal produce and Korean specialties. You might learn how to separate your recycling the local way or even pick up a few useful phrases while chatting with your neighbors. These seemingly small moments add up to a deeper understanding of Korean culture and a stronger connection to your host country.

With a bit of preparation, support from your Housing Office and a great realtor, and an open mind, living on the economy can become one of the most rewarding and memorable parts of your time in Korea. It's not just a housing choice, it's an opportunity to live, learn, and grow in a truly unique setting.

Questions to Ask Before You Sign

Use these questions to help you make informed decisions about living off the military installation.

By asking these questions first, you can save yourself time and energy, helping you find the right place quickly.

- Is the apartment, landlord, community, and rental agency approved by your Housing Office? Many landlords or rental agencies can be blacklisted by the housing office. Also, if the community is blacklisted, USFK-affiliated members cannot live within those communities. Make sure to ask.
- What is the deposit and monthly rent?
- What are the deposit return conditions?
- Will you be paying rent and bills at the office monthly?
- Where is the location, and what is the nearest installation gate? When is the gate open on weekdays and weekends?
- Is the location on the DoDEA transportation line? Some are not and require a shuttle to take students to the nearest bus stop, wait for the bus, and be transported that way. Other locations may not be on the bus or shuttle line at all and require parents to transport their child every day.
- What is the pet policy?

Once you have a handle on those questions above, you can get into the specifics.

- What is the length of my lease, and what is the renewal process?
- Is there a termination clause for me or the landlord in my contract?
- Is the house furnished? If so, will there be an inventory and conditions list?
- Who pays the maintenance fees? What do these fees cover? Are there additional fees for using the gym, elevator, additional key cards, etc?
- Who pays for which utilities?
- Does the house use city gas or LPG? Since LPG is higher, this is important to consider.
- Are there solar panels to help with utility costs?
- Is the internet included?
- Some locations may include a water purifier, which gets maintenance every few months. Is this included, or do you pay for its maintenance?



- What are the trash protocols and pick-up days for typical household trash, food waste, and recycling?
- Is there an elevator?
- Are there any amenities or community features such as a gym, park, pool, etc? And are there extra fees?
- Were the photos of these amenities and/or community features taken in the last year? While there's nothing necessary wrong with old pictures being shown, it's nice to know if photos are or aren't current. Many reality offices show photos that are over 5 years old and may even feature photos of community events that no longer take place or exist anymore. This can be very misleading.
- Are there outdoor areas safe for walking and potty areas for pets?
- Parking. Is it assigned to the tenant, or is it first-come/first-served? What about visitors? Where do they park?
- Is there storage space? Check to make sure you have enough closets and or storage for your needs.
- Is there air conditioning in every room? There isn't central AC in most Korean homes the way we do in the US. There are individual units in each room that can turn on and adjust the air for each room. Not all rooms have it, so if this is a must, have the conversation with the realtor up front.
- How often is the AC unit serviced, flushed, and filters cleaned? Who is responsible for that?
- Does the unit come with a dehumidifier, or does the AC have this function built in?
- If there is a yard or grass space, who does lawn care maintenance, and how often? Make sure to find out the frequency and have it reflected in your contact.
- Quiet hours. What are the quiet hours for the building or complex?
- Does a landlord have to give notice before coming to the location to look around or talk?
- Who is responsible for maintenance and repairs? Are they professionals? What is the time frame for fixing repairs?
- Ask your realtor and landlord if there is a history of mold in the unit, and how it's typically handled. Mold is not uncommon in Korea's humid climate, especially in older buildings or poorly ventilated bathrooms. Be sure to

include clear terms in your lease about how mold remediation is managed, how quickly issues must be addressed, and who bears the cost of treatment.

- If things cannot be repaired in a reasonable time, what is the recourse? If we have to move, who pays moving costs?
- While uncommon, there have been cases where tenants had to relocate because a landlord failed to pay their mortgage, despite the tenant paying rent on time. To protect yourself, ask your realtor what the standard protocol is in such situations and clarify in your contract who would be responsible for relocation costs.

Final Thoughts: Set Yourself Up for Success

Renting off the installation in Korea as a SOFA status holder can be a smooth and rewarding experience, but preparation is key. As you begin your housing journey, be sure to thoroughly document the condition of your apartment before move-in. Take photos or videos of everything, from scuffed floors and chipped paint to damaged furniture or malfunctioning appliances. This documentation can help protect your security deposit and prevent disputes over pre-existing damage. Keep copies for your records and share them with your realtor.

Speaking of realtors, the one you choose will play a pivotal role, not just in helping you find a place, but in supporting you throughout your lease. A trusted, military-experienced real estate agent does far more than show properties. They can assist with translating documents, coordinating repairs, liaising with landlords, managing utilities, and offering day-to-day support. Choosing a reputable realtor who understands the unique needs of the military community is one of the most important decisions you'll make during your time in Korea.

Whether you're looking for easy access to base, a peaceful retreat, or a neighborhood full of local flavor, your new home off-installation is out there. By working closely with your Housing Office, choosing the right support team, and asking the right questions, you'll not only find a comfortable place to live, you'll create a meaningful and memorable chapter in your Korea experience.

About the Authors

James Chung is a Korean-American professional who has been living in Korea since 2019, with deep roots in both Korean and American cultures. With several years of experience working alongside the American community near Camp Humphreys and Osan, James offers a rare blend of cultural insight and practical know-how that makes him a standout in his field. Currently with Plus Realty, James is known for his transparent communication, unwavering sense of fairness, and commitment to doing what's right. His approachable nature and integrity have earned him the trust of countless clients navigating life in Korea. Beyond real estate, James's travel-savvy wife keeps their calendar full of off-the-beaten-path adventures, so if you're ever looking for hidden gems in or outside the Humphreys or Osan areas, he's got plenty of insider tips to share. You can contact James at 010-4245-4666 or jamezc88@me.com if you need assistance.



Established in 2009, **Plus Realty** has been proudly serving Americans in Korea for over 15 years. With deep knowledge of both American and Korean cultures, we specialize in helping U.S. military personnel, families, and expats transition smoothly into their new homes and communities.

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Wednesdays in Seoul:

Where Coffee Meets Friendship at Siiiido Place

By Sahar Amiri
Photos Courtesy of Siiiido Place

For many stationed in Korea, the question isn't just "Where do I get a good cup of coffee?" but also "How do I meet new friends outside the installation?" Hidden in the quiet streets of Yeonhui-dong, Seoul, there's a spot that answers both questions at once. Welcome to Siiiido Place, a café where minimalist design, curated music, and warm conversations come together. And if you drop by on a Wednesday night, you might just walk out with more than caffeine; you'll walk out with new friends.

A Café with a Twist

Unlike your average coffee shop, Siiiido Place is half café and half cultural showroom. The first floor greets you with sleek interiors, headsets, and CD players at every table. And yes, you actually pick music to match your drink! On the second floor, the Siiiido fashion brand displays clothing that matches the space's minimalist vibe.

The Wednesday Magic: Friends Gathering

Every Wednesday evening, something special happens here. At 8:00pm sharp, chairs and tables become circles of conversation as the café transforms into a hub for the Friends Gathering. Locals and internationals, students, travelers, workers, and even a few curious soldiers all come together to share stories, swap cultures, and practice languages from around the world. It's not a noisy bar scene or a stiff networking event. Instead, it feels like a living room full of laughter and curiosity.



Why It Matters For Soldiers

Being stationed abroad can sometimes feel isolating, and breaking into local culture isn't always easy. Friends Gathering offers a safe, welcoming environment to meet Korean peers, practice Korean phrases in real conversations while connecting with fellow expats. Think of it as a weekly reset button: midweek, mid-city, a chance to step out of the uniform and into community.

Friendship at Siiiido Place

Seoul can feel overwhelming with its endless cafés, but Siiiido Place stands out because it offers more than a latte; it offers connection. For U.S. service members in Korea, this Wednesday tradition is more than a social



night; it's a bridge into local life. So next time you're free on a Wednesday, skip the usual routine, grab your courage (and maybe a latte), and head to Yeonhui-dong. You might discover that the best souvenir from Korea isn't something you can buy, it's the friendships you make.

Practical Details

- Where:
Siiiido Place, 7-7 Yeonhuimat-ro, Yeonhui-dong 192-9, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul, South Korea
(서울시 서대문구 연희로 7-7, 연희동 192-9, 시도 플레이스)
<https://naver.me/xCtjr3Wi>
- When: Wednesdays, 8:00 pm – 10:00 pm RSVP
- Instagram: @siiiido_place
- Tip: Arrive a little early; gatherings sometimes reach full capacity. Buy a coffee, join a group, and let conversations flow.

About the Author

Sahar Amiri is an international student in her senior year at Jinwee High School, preparing for university. She is an aspiring entrepreneur and storyteller who uses her writing to illuminate Korea's hidden gems, foster cross-cultural connections, and create spaces where diverse communities can feel at home.

**This article is independently written and non-sponsored, with no monetary compensation or products received in exchange for the author's opinions, reviews, or mentions in the magazine.*

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Food

The Universal Language of Culture

By James T. Canter

Food is the common thread across the world that binds us together. No matter where you live in the world, there are other cultures and global cuisines to explore within your local community. There is such a wide variety of cuisines, just waiting for you to choose.

Breaking Barriers Through Food

Back during Desert Storm, I was living and working near MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. The base held what they called a Coalition Forces International Gala. Picture this: a massive aircraft hangar, and inside it, individuals from over 30 nations, each one with their own table piled high with the food of their home country. That night, you didn't need a translator; you just walked from table to table, eating your way into someone else's culture. There's really no better way to explore another culture than through food. In my opinion, it's really the best way.

Exploring Local Flavors and Global Cuisines

When looking to experience new cuisines and cultures, my first step is to go to restaurants around my local community or areas I am familiar with. I try to spot new foods and restaurants that expose me to various

cultures. You, too, can go into your neighborhood and choose restaurants around you to spark your curiosity. You can even start with media, like TV and social media, that showcase different types of food. You will find what either amazes you or what makes you want to know more about the culture or travel to new places. Or maybe you find out it's not for you and you can keep exploring. The point is to make an effort to see what it is all about. Do the dragons in the art at the restaurant interest you? Or maybe it's the live fire cooking and showmanship that make you stop and think... What is it all about, and what does it mean within that culture?

You don't truly know the cuisine or culture until you travel to those places, but you can get pretty close to building that foundation by visiting restaurants near you. It's not always about being comfortable; it's about going outside your comfort zone, which can be scary, at times, but just take one step, one foot outside what you are used to.

Food as a Bridge Across Cultures

Food can be a personal journey, and it is so accessible in so many ways. The levels of experiences and communal activities can be different based on your individual needs or within a cultural custom. Even trying simple switches in common places like McDon-



▲ Kkangyang Haejangguk with tripe & blood cake, rich, flavorful, and just the right kick from kimchi juice! Dish served at Yangpyeong Haejangguk near Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek.



▲ Parillada feast: California brisket, chuck steak, hot links, American sweet corn, and jalapeños grilled up by Chef James T. Canter.

ald's when you travel can give you unique insights into where you are visiting. When my family and I visited Rome, I spent my time visiting local cafes, drinking coffee, and talking with chefs, often while my family was still asleep. It was my "me time". Here we are, right by the Colosseum in Rome, and my family insists on having McDonald's. So I went with my son, and to my surprise, they offered special menu items you could only find in Italy. There was a fresh bakery, and the McDonald's even sold tiramisu. We left with our order, and I even left with some macarons. After building a relationship with the local restaurateurs, I couldn't bring myself to walk through the neighborhood holding the McDonald's bag, so I had my son do the "walk of shame" through the street on the way back to the hotel. As we passed by, we heard with disappointment, "Cheeeeeeffff", almost as if asking, "What are you doing eating that?". Food brought us a mutual understanding, even though we were from completely different countries and cultures. Food mirrors the same conversations on today's important questions about society. Who are you? Where do you come from? What is your cultural heritage? And as a person, food shares what interests you and even lets those around you understand your family values.

Preserving Culture and Identity Through Food

Many people do not realize the role food plays in preserving culture and identity, and even touching on hard topics like displacement, political struggles, and migration. Food, a lot of the time, especially in the older times, was part of oral culinary traditions and practices, passed through generations. When you have that way of recording cultural practices and continuously practicing and tweaking family recipes, and you share them with other people, people are really taking their knowledge and adding to it. With each generation comes more knowledge and the curating of these dishes with what foods are available.

Oral retelling of food preparation and family or cultural recipes preserves the idea and meaning behind food, family, tradition, sustenance, creativity, and ancestral heritage. It preserves so many different things in the grand scheme of life, family, and community. There is no better way to know someone than by what they choose to put on their plate. When food comes to the table, you can learn about the people and who they are just by the types of food on the plate and the way they display food. Food is influenced by the culture you grow up in, but also individualities, personalities,

▼ Tuna, mayo, and pickled eggplant onigiri at Onigiri Shop Mama, Shinjuku, Tokyo—so delicious! Bacon and soy-cured egg were amazing too!



▼ A flavor-packed moment at London's Curry Bazaar: three vibrant curries served with perfectly crisp tortilla-style breads, a feast for both the eyes and the taste buds.





▲ Charcuterie done right in Barcelona, Spain: cured meats, blood sausage, cheeses, anchovies, and fresh bread are the perfect pairings!



▲ Authentic Shunde Steamed Chicken from Shunde, China.

and the way we express ourselves are often preserved and reflected through food as well.

Preserving Culture and Identity Through Food

When we talk about what food reflects, it also communicates love, respect, hospitality, and celebration without words. Korean culture is a great example of that. It is all about showing love, respect, and care in food form. When I was trying to learn Hangul, as with all the languages I’ve tried to learn, I always started to learn “How are you doing?”. In Hangul, there are literal translations, but because the culture is centered around nourishing your guests with food and drink, they don’t ask “How are you doing?” but more “Have you eaten today?” It’s a response to make sure your needs and hunger are met, a way to show love, care, and concern. There is nothing more welcoming than truly understanding the personal needs of others and trying to meet them. In Korea, "서비스" (pronounced "service") has a special meaning, referring to something given for free as a gesture of appreciation. This practice is deeply embedded in the Korean food scene, especially in restaurants and cafes. These are tangible actions tied to family or personal values.

These practices aren’t just in Korea. When I lived

in South Texas and traveled within Northern Mexico areas, their culture also had specific ways of welcoming you and expressing their feelings towards you. When you attend an asada (a traditional barbecue gathering where meat is grilled outdoors), they welcome you with a cold cerveza (beer), and the abuelos (grandparents or elders, who often hold respected positions in Hispanic families) make sure you’re comfortably seated and well-fed, all these gestures showing you that you truly matter to them.

In Japanese restaurant culture, when you enter an establishment, staff members often greet you with a synchronized 'いらっしゃいませ' (irasshaimase, meaning 'welcome'), promptly seat you, and serve warm miso soup. This traditional broth made from fermented soybean paste is considered a staple comfort food and is given without you having to order it. This immediate hospitality demonstrates their appreciation for your patronage and embodies the omotenashi (Japanese philosophy of selfless hospitality) tradition of making guests feel valued from the moment they arrive.

Staple Foods: The Foundations of Civilization

Just like the miso soup mentioned before, many cultures have “staple foods”. I feel like most cultures

▼ From Netflix to my bowl: savoring the art of hand-cut noodles with the Noodle Lady at Gwang-jang Market, one of Seoul's oldest and most famous traditional markets.



▼ Freshly shucked oysters with zesty lemon cocktail sauce at Captain Pell’s in Fairfax Station, Virginia.



▲ Classic French comfort: juicy tomatoes farcies stuffed with savory beef, baked to perfection in Paris,

have some sort of starch, something to put some heft on you. These starches give longevity to your energy, which historically helped you in physical laborous activities. Rice in Asia, potatoes in Ireland, and breads from Europe would be considered staple foods in my opinion. These staple foods emerged from ancient necessity, cheap, accessible sustenance that could fill hungry stomachs while providing the energy needed for daily survival. These food staples from a variety of global cuisines are what kept civilizations alive.

Stepping Outside Your Comfort Zone

As you think about food and culture, step out of your comfort zone, try that new dish! Be brave. Make it your focus to find a certain type of restaurant in your community, learn about the culture behind it, and dive into the food. Try a culture or language exchange that revolves around food: share your traditions, learn from someone else’s, and discuss one of your favorite aspects of your cuisine with someone outside your culture. Sparks of conversation often appear in the most unexpected places. That’s what cultural and language exchanges are all about: challenging what we know, opening our minds, and learning from one another.

Food, Empathy, and Global Understanding

The learning and growth process is a lifelong journey. As you expand your experiences, you gain a broader perspective of the world and the peo-

ple in it. With this comes understanding and empathy; you start to see life through a wider lens, appreciating similarities, struggles, and joys beyond your own culture, but recognizing similarities within your own too. We are all human, and empathy and compassion are among the greatest benefits of stepping outside your comfort zone. They help you make better choices in every area of life and give you a superpower: seeing the world without snap judgments. Culture, travel, and exploring cuisines enhance this lens on a global level, helping you truly understand others.

The Power of Food to Change the World

By sharing food, language, and experiences, we humanize one another, and that simple act has the power to change the world.

If you want to change the world, there's no better way to do that than the thread of food! At the core of existence, we all gotta eat!

About the Author

Chef James T. Canter is the creative force behind Guerrilla Gourmet and a former UNESCO Chef Ambassador for the UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy project in San Antonio. With more than 30 years of global kitchen experience, he is known for uniting flavors and people, blending bold Tex-Mex roots with traditional ingredients to craft dishes that celebrate culture, connection, and community. Featured on Food Network, NatGeo, and numerous international festivals, Chef James T. Canter continues to inspire through his cooking, mentorship, and storytelling, bringing people together one shared table at a time.



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Cord Scott

The Military Comics Historian Making History Cool Again

From global classrooms to comic book archives, Dr. Cord Scott uses pop culture to connect students with military history in powerful, unexpected ways.

By Melissa Edwards-Whittington



Cord teaching in the classroom.

When

I first met Dr. Cord Scott during my time at the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) at Osan Air Base, I was setting up classrooms for the evening. I had no idea I was crossing paths with one of the most dynamic and thought-provoking scholars I'd ever meet or that we'd become such good friends. Our conversations quickly moved beyond the classroom, sparking a friendship built on a shared love of history, cultural storytelling, and community.

Right now, Cord is a professor with UMGC Okinawa. He is a researcher and a writer who brings together military history, comic books, cultural insights, and humanitarian work in ways you wouldn't expect, but that somehow make perfect sense when he does it.

His journey, from a small-town upbringing to becoming one of the leading voices in military comics history, has been as surprising as it has been inspiring.

From Minot to the World: The Early Path of Military Comics Historian Cord Scott

Cord's journey began in Minot, North Dakota, not because of the nearby air base, as he's quick to point out, but because that's simply where life started for him. His upbringing in this small, cold, and culturally homogeneous town was steady and predictable. "Exotic food," he jokes, "was just anything labeled 'Chinese,' no matter where it was actually from."

Cord may not have grown up surrounded by diverse cultures, but his curiosity was always there, and it led him to study history. His journey began at Minot State University for his BA, continued at Baylor University for an MA in International Relations, and ended with a PhD in U.S. History from Loyola University Chicago.

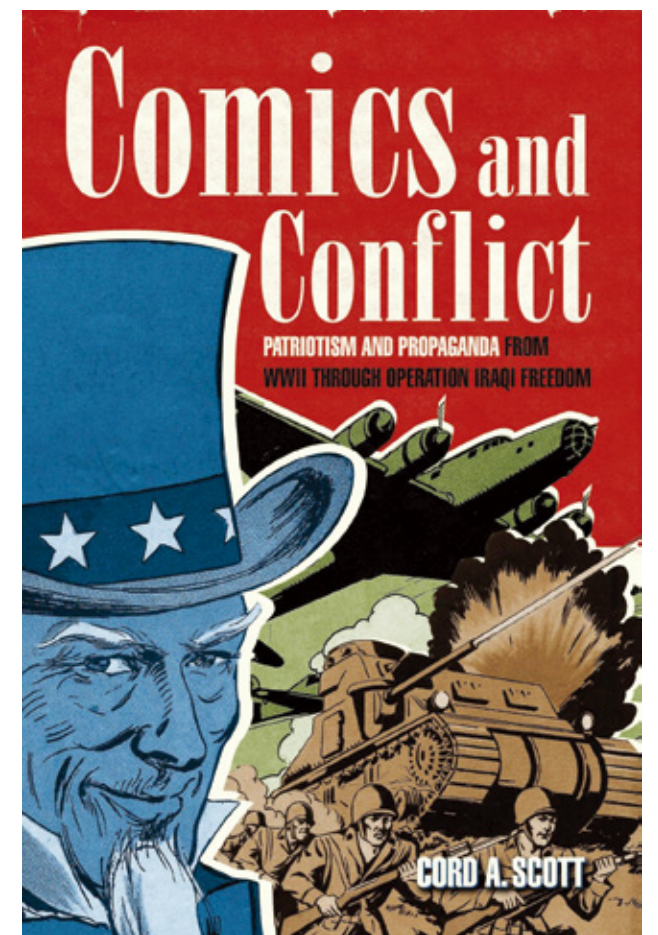
Though he didn't originally plan to teach, famously replying "not only no, but hell no" when a mentor suggested it, Cord took a leap and taught his first college course at the age of 23. That pivotal moment launched what would become a truly global academic career. He has taught in Kuwait and, for over a decade, has served as Overseas Collegiate Faculty with UMGC, teaching history, government, and humanities across the INDOPACOM region, including mainland Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea.

Comics, Conflict, and Culture

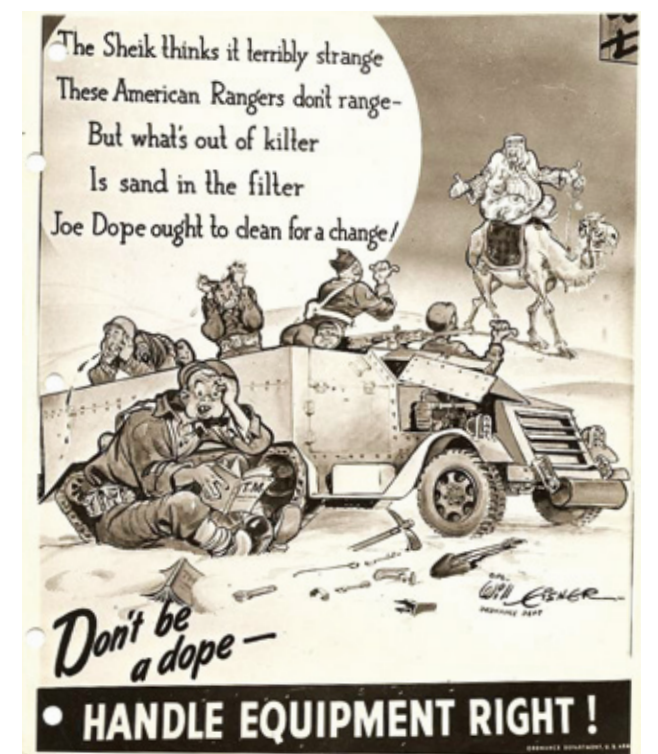
Cord has found his own corner of scholarship where comics meet conflict. Through his work, he digs into the messages tucked inside these stories and shows how popular culture has been shaping the way we see war, patriotism, and identity for decades.

"Comics are both a mirror and a megaphone. They reflect society but can also shape it."

His groundbreaking book, *Comics and Conflict* (Naval Institute Press, 2014), explores the way comic books have been used as tools of propaganda and cultural messaging, particularly in times of war. His



▲ Cord's first book, *Comics and Conflict*, from 2014 by the US Naval Institute Press.



▲ The Will Eisner "Joe Dope" poster from WWII was part of a poster series to reinforce the fact that US soldiers needed to treat their equipment with care.



▲ Picture book from WWII featuring US Marines in the Pacific. This was a commercially available comic book, albeit a very rare one.



▲ Ted Shearer cartoon from the Ft. Huachuca paper The Buffalo. The 92nd Infantry Division was a segregated unit within the United States Army. The artists were enlisted men. Shearer's cartoons are insightful and not often written about.

fascination with the topic began while teaching a class on propaganda in 2001, when he noticed how contemporary comics, like a Spider-Man issue released after 9/11, were echoing the themes of patriotism and national resilience.

“Comic creators weren’t just telling stories, they were selling war bonds, teaching camouflage, and boosting morale.”

His work sheds light on the powerful role comics have played as both reflections and drivers of national sentiment, from World War II to the War on Terror. He points to comics like Two-Fisted Tales and Frontline Combat as examples of how the medium has sometimes countered official war narratives by portraying the raw, painful realities of battle.

Teaching History Through Pop Culture and Comics

Cord doesn’t leave his research on the shelf; he brings it directly into the classroom. Whether he’s referencing war films, comic book heroes, or viral pop culture trends, he has an uncanny ability to meet students where they are.

“Students today are more visual,” he says. “Movies and comics aren’t replacements for research, but they’re great starting points.”

He teaches students to question what they see, encouraging them to analyze how historical narratives are shaped, and sometimes distorted, by the media. He even shares his own experiences, like serving as a historical consultant on a WWII documentary that ended up colorizing footage inaccurately, much to his dismay.

Despite the challenges of teaching in a fast-paced, digital-first world, Cord remains passionate.

The Cord Scott Effect: Why Students Actually Want to Learn History

In my own conversations with Cord, and with many of his students, one thing is clear: he makes history not just accessible, but enjoyable. Whether he’s covering complex global conflicts or lesser-known cultural trends, he has a unique ability to make even the driest topics come alive.

His energy, humor, and storytelling draw students in, and his passion is infectious. More than just a professor, Cord is the kind of educator who makes you want to learn.

“If students walk away with even a little more appreciation for history, or just say, ‘history doesn’t suck as much because of you,’ that’s a win.”

But Cord’s dedication to history doesn’t end in the class-



room. For him, history also lives in the field, sometimes quite literally beneath his feet.

History Beneath His Feet: Battlefield Excavations in Okinawa

Cord’s dedication to history goes beyond the classroom and into the soil. In Okinawa, he volunteers with battlefield excavation teams that search for the remains of soldiers who died during World War II. These digs are gritty, emotional, and sometimes dangerous, often yielding fragments of everyday life, coins, utensils, and occasionally, human remains.

“It’s humbling,” he says. “You’re helping give closure to families, even if the identification takes time.”

One particularly powerful moment occurred during a dig at the Okinawa Naval Headquarters. An elderly woman approached the excavation team to thank them. Her male relative had died in the tunnels during the war, and their work meant the world to her and her mother, who had served as a student nurse during the battle.

In another instance, the team recovered the ring of U.S. Marine John Quinn. His nephew, who had never left the U.S., traveled to Okinawa for the first time to see the site and hold a piece of his family’s history. “Those are the moments that stay with you,” Cord reflects.



▲ Kuentai-USA, the group Cord works with on Okinawa, conducts about four WWII recovery digs each year, including the 2022 excavation that uncovered John Quinn’s ring, personal effects, and likely his remains.

The Scholar’s Legacy: Writing, Recognition, and Cultural Impact

Cord is the kind of educator who sees history in everything from the political undercurrents of a comic book villain to the evolving depictions of patriotism in war films. He’s been recognized for his work, receiving commendations from military leaders, including a commander’s coin from Canadian Lt. Gen. Wayne Eyre.

His work hasn’t come without a cost. “I’ve been called names and even threatened,” he says, recalling moments when his research struck a nerve. But that hasn’t shaken him. If anything, it’s strengthened his resolve to tell history as it is, unvarnished, uncomfortable, and unwilling to be forgotten.

He continues to write, from journal articles and books to new projects—like his current research on overlooked WWII-era Black cartoonists. He’s particularly proud of his first published article on the 1895 Chicago car race, which was later reprinted in a book. “It’s gotten a lot of mileage,” he says with a grin.

Wisdom in the Details: Encouraging Students to See History Differently

As a professor, Cord encourages students to explore history on their own terms. “Pick something you’re interested in, even if it doesn’t seem historical at first. There’s always a connection.”

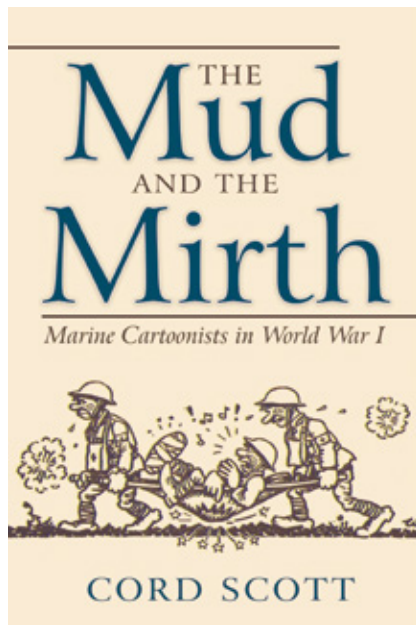
His approach is personal, practical, and deeply rooted in a belief that history matters.

“America is just one piece of a much larger picture. If we understand the history of places like Korea and Japan, we can better understand today’s world.”

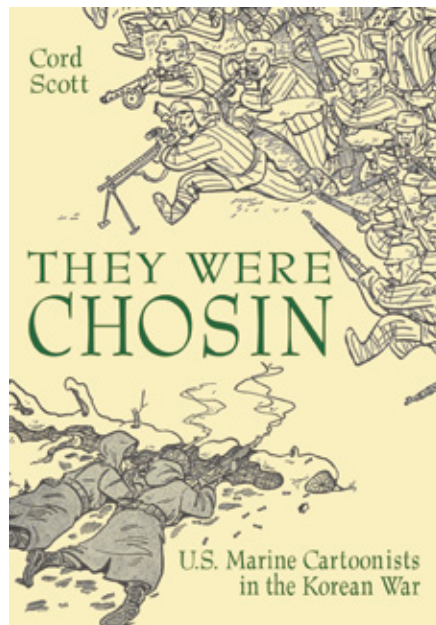
In our interview, I asked what he hopes students take from his classes. His answer is simple but sincere:



▲ Cord's second book, *Four Colour Combat* (W. Brand Publishing, 2019), explores Canadian war stories depicted in U.S. comics during WWII, especially in titles like *War Stories* and *Real Heroes* before America entered the war.



▲ *The Mud and the Mirth* (USMC University Press) explores the humor and history of the Marine Corps' earliest comics, from pre-WWI issues of the *Recruiters Bulletin*, *Marines Magazine*, and *Marines Bulletin* to the full run of *Stars and Stripes* cartoons by legendary Marine cartoonist Abian A. Wallgren.



▲ *They Were Chosin* (USMC University Press) spotlights Marine artist Norval E. "Gene" Packwood and his illustrated works, *Leatherhead* and *Leatherhead in Korea*, offering a humorous, character-driven take on the Korean War through comic art.

"That history is relevant. That it matters, that maybe, just maybe, they learned something new."

And of course, he adds with a laugh, "That I was really loud."

A Life in Service Through Scholarship and Cultural Education

Dr. Cord Scott has a way of showing you that history isn't just something in a textbook; it's something we live, share, and keep shaping every single day. If you've met him, as a professor, a colleague, or a friend, you know that for Cord, scholarship isn't just about what you know. It's about service. It's about connection. It's about the stories that tie us to each other.

I've seen it happen more than once: students walk into Cord's class slouched in their seats, convinced history is nothing but dusty dates and dull facts. Then, somewhere between a comic book panel and one of his booming lectures, something shifts. They start leaning forward, asking questions, and connecting the dots in ways they never expected. By the end of the term, they aren't just informed, they're curious, engaged, and sometimes even in love with a subject they once dreaded. That's the Cord Scott effect: history that sticks because it's meaningful, and yes, sometimes even fun.

That's his gift. That's his legacy. And for everyone who's

crossed paths with him, it's a reminder that history isn't just about what happened, it's about the people who make sure the story keeps being told.



▲ In 2019, Cord Scott posed with then-Deputy United Nations Commander Lt. Gen. Wayne Eyre at the desk where the Korean War armistice was signed. Eyre coined Scott and requested a copy of *Four Colour Combat* for a friend, retired Gen. Andrew Leslie, whose grandfather, Gen. Andrew MacNaughton, led Canadian forces in WWII and appears on the book's back cover.



Cord with his friends Chuck and Melissa enjoying an afternoon in Songtan.

Living the UN Principles: Building Bridges Across Cultures

That same commitment to making history real, relevant, and human, extends far beyond his classrooms. At the heart of Dr. Cord Scott's work is a belief that history can, and should, build bridges.

His research reminds us that events like the Korean War cannot be understood in isolation. They were shaped by the actions, choices, and sacrifices of many nations working together under the United Nations. Too often, people view the war as only a story of the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, but Cord points out that it was, in fact, a global effort. Countries from around the world stood in defense of South Korea, driven by a shared understanding of rights, culture, and self-determination. That, he believes, is the essence of the UN's mission: working together for mutual understanding, even when the path forward isn't easy.

For Cord, teaching history isn't just about recounting battles or timelines; it's about showing students how diplomacy, culture, and human rights intersect. In his classrooms and in his research, he highlights how the UN provides a forum for every nation, large or small, to have a voice in shaping our shared future. From the Security Council to the General Assembly, from post-war independence movements to

the recognition of newly formed countries, the UN has been a stage where sovereignty and cooperation meet.

Cord's career is a living example of what it means to embrace those principles. By exploring military history through the lens of comics, culture, and international engagement, he demonstrates how understanding diverse perspectives isn't just academic; it's essential for peace, cooperation, and respect among nations. In doing so, he reflects the very values at the heart of the United Nations: that even in conflict, diplomacy should always be the first choice. Through his teaching and research, Cord shows us how knowledge can build the bridges that bring us closer together.

About the Author



Melissa Edwards-Whittington has lived in Korea for over eight years and currently serves as Co-Editor and Social Media Marketing Manager for *United on the RoK Magazine*. Passionate about building community through storytelling, she focuses on connecting military and expat families with meaningful digital content. Melissa is also the Online Content Manager for South of Seoul, where she oversees blogs and supports local engagement through language exchange initiatives.

Together with her husband, Chuck, she shares their life in Korea on YouTube via *KimchiRednecks* and *Shining with KimchiRednecks*, featuring travel, food, home distilling, and their three senior Shih Tzus—Sookie, Minion, and Mayhem.

Follow their adventures:
YouTube: @kimchirednecks | @shiningwithkimchirednecks
Instagram: @kimchirednecks
Facebook: KimchiRednecks

Youth Volunteers Discover Purpose, Build Skills Through Red Cross Programs in Korea

By Sarah Masters

Military-connected teens say service brings confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging.

In Daegu, South Korea, Gyan S. Park and Erica Garringer, two young members of the American Red Cross Youth Club in Korea, started volunteering as something small, but it quickly became a big part of their lives.

Park joined the youth club in November 2023, calling it “one of the best decisions of my middle school years.” Every Tuesday after school, he reported to the Soldier Support Center for hands-on work: maintaining CPR manikins, preparing for training sessions, setting up community events, and sorting donations.

“At first, I was nervous,” Park said. “I was the newest and youngest member, surrounded by upperclassmen I didn’t know. But that quickly changed.”

With encouragement from mentors and fellow volunteers, Park said he gained confidence, learned how to lead, and discovered the power of teamwork. Along the way, he earned certifications in First Aid/ CPR/AED and Hands-Only CPR at no cost.

“What truly made the experience special was the community,” he said. “Our supervisors created a warm, welcoming environment. Their kindness motivated me to give back even more.”

For Erica, a high school JROTC cadet, volunteering began in January 2024 as a way to fulfill a service hour requirement, five hours per quarter. But over time, she said, it became something she looked forward to each week.

“I started because I had to, but I kept going because I wanted to,” Erica said.

Her work with the Red Cross has included supporting blood drives, participating in disaster preparedness activities, and helping with community health initiatives. She also completed First Aid and CPR training, which she said will help her pursue her goal of becoming a doctor.

Some moments have been memorable for their simplicity or humor, such as reas-



On Valentine’s Day, Gyan shares a message of love and encouragement with the military community, holding a sign that reads, “You Are Enough!”

sembling a bulletin board at the Red Cross office or naming a CPR training mannequin “Billy” during a class exercise.

“Service isn’t just about big gestures,” she said. “It’s about consistency, compassion, and finding joy in the little things.”

Both Park and Erica said the Youth Club has given them valuable skills, meaningful friendships, and a chance to make a difference on military bases across the peninsula.

Opportunities for Youth Volunteers with the American Red Cross

The American Red Cross doesn’t just support service members and families; it also invests in the next generation of leaders. Across military bases in Korea, youth volunteers play a vital role in carrying forward the mission of service, compassion, and community. Whether through year-round programs, leadership campaigns, or summer opportunities, the Red Cross offers meaningful ways for students to get involved, develop skills, and make a lasting impact.

Red Cross Youth Club

The Youth Club is a year-round service organization where students can connect with peers, learn leadership skills, and give back to their base communities. Members

assist with:

- Supporting base events such as blood drives, health fairs, and family days.
- Helping with preparedness and resiliency training programs.
- Engaging in community outreach projects that strengthen ties between U.S. forces, families, and host-nation partners.

Youth Club participation builds teamwork, confidence, and a sense of belonging while making service a part of everyday life.

Youth Action Campaign (YAC)

The YAC is a leadership and advocacy program that challenges students to explore humanitarian issues and find creative ways to share them with their community. Each year, participants learn about topics such as International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and then:

- Create original campaigns that raise awareness on base and online.
- Deliver presentations at schools, community events, and youth clubs.
- Develop public speaking, research, and project management skills.

By giving youth a platform to educate and inspire others, YAC builds strong advocates for humanitarian values and global citizenship.

VolunTEEN Program

The summer VolunTEEN Program allows high school students to gain hands-on professional experience while serving their community. Teens are placed in:

- Clinics and hospitals, where they assist staff, greet patients, and learn about healthcare.
- Administrative offices supporting projects that keep Red Cross services running smoothly.
- Community programs, giving them a behind-the-scenes look at how the Red Cross operates on military installations.



Gyan obtaining his CPR certification, which is free to volunteers and only \$18 in Korea for non-volunteers.

sense of purpose and community, no matter how often their family moves.

Impact on the Military Community

Youth volunteers help sustain essential Red Cross programs on military installations, from disaster preparedness to health and safety training. Their contributions strengthen the readiness and resilience of the military community while fostering connections between service members, families, and the local population.

For more information on joining a youth program, contact the American Red Cross at your military installation (Daguer, Osan, Camp Humphreys, Kunsan, etc...) or visit www.redcross.org/saf

Supporting the Military Community with the American Red Cross

The American Red Cross has a long history of standing alongside service members, veterans, and their families. Across military installations worldwide, Red Cross staff and volunteers provide critical services, from emergency communications during deployments to resiliency workshops, blood drives, disaster response, and support for daily life in the military community.

The Red Cross is more than a safety net; it’s a place where people can contribute their time and skills to strengthen the military community they live in.

How to Become a Volunteer as an Adult

Adults play a vital role in sustaining Red Cross programs overseas and on base. Becoming a volunteer is simple:

- Sign up online at redcross.org/volunteer or connect with your local Red Cross office on base.
- Complete an application and background check. This ensures the safety

of our volunteers and the communities we serve.

- Choose your role. Options range from supporting hospital patients, assisting at community events, teaching preparedness classes, serving as a caseworker for military families, or providing administrative support.
- Get trained and start serving. Training is provided, and schedules are flexible to fit military life.

How Adults Support Red Cross Youth Programs

Youth Red Cross clubs are an exciting way for teens to learn leadership, service, and resiliency skills. Adult volunteers help make this possible by serving as mentors, advisors, and coordinators. They provide guidance while youth lead their own projects, such as organizing blood drives, care-package collections, or community service days.



Gyan receiving his Presidential Service Award for his volunteerism.

Adults also support youth through:

- Supervising meetings and events.
- Teaching Red Cross values of compassion and service.
- Connecting youth programs with base leadership or other organizations.

This partnership between youth energy and adult mentorship ensures the next generation of volunteers carries the Red Cross mission forward.

How Red Cross Programs Can Support Your Clubs, Units, or Organizations

The Red Cross doesn’t just support individuals; we can strengthen your group or club, too. Our trained staff and volunteers can deliver:

- Preparedness workshops (CPR

awareness, first aid, disaster readiness, resiliency training).

- Guest speakers on topics like deployment readiness, reconnecting with family after separation, or stress management.
- Volunteer opportunities for your members to earn service hours, build teamwork, and make an impact.
- Partnership in events such as health fairs, blood drives, or morale-building activities.

Whether it’s a unit, spouses’ club, a scout troop, a sports team, or a community organization, the Red Cross can tailor its programs to add value and help your members thrive.

Why It Matters

Every Red Cross volunteer, program, and partnership contributes to a stronger, more connected military community. By volunteering, mentoring youth, or inviting the Red Cross into your group’s activities, you’re not just supporting a mission — you’re building resilience, hope, and connection for those who serve and their families.



About the Author

Over the past 15 years as a proud military spouse and volunteer, Sarah Masters has worked to create meaningful change. She served as a docent for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, led more than 40 mass food distributions during COVID, and deployed with the Red Cross to Kuwait and Iraq in support of our military. In times of disaster, she serves with Team Rubicon, and when it’s time to decompress, she helps build homes and hope with Habitat for Humanity. Her motto is: Could be better, could be worse. She tries to be like Crush from Finding Nemo — just go with the flow.



Fun Facts about Rice

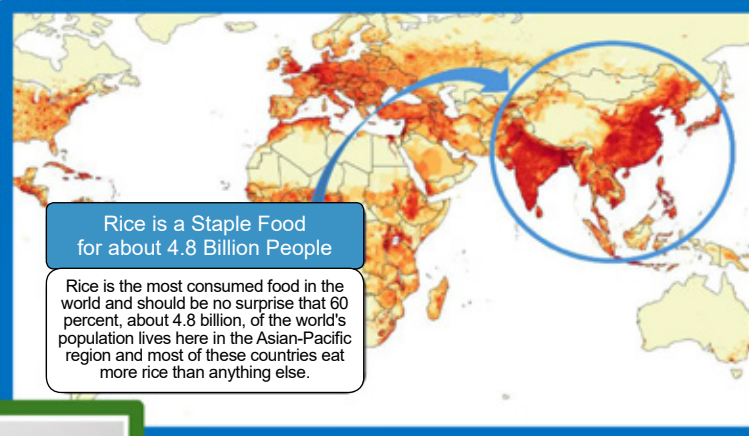
Rice is about 9,000 Years Old

The earliest known rice remains were found in China. It then quickly spread throughout Asia and then around the world.



Rice is a Staple Food for about 4.8 Billion People

Rice is the most consumed food in the world and should be no surprise that 60 percent, about 4.8 billion, of the world's population lives here in the Asian-Pacific region and most of these countries eat more rice than anything else.

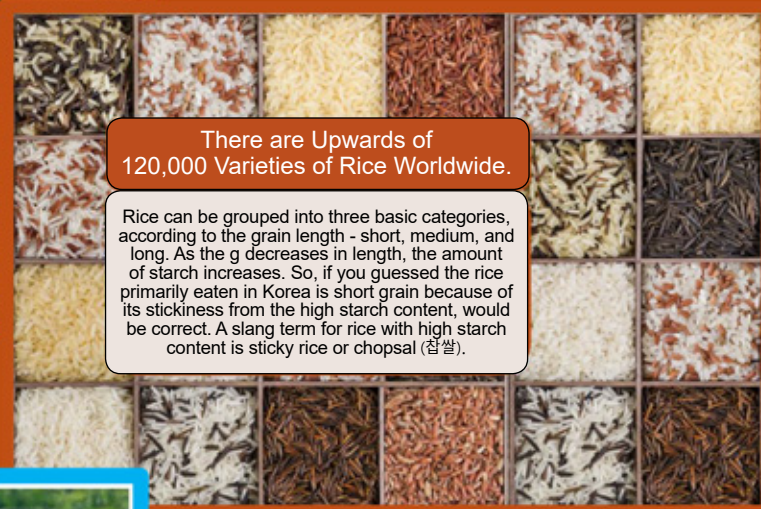


Asia Grows the Most Rice

To keep up with demand, the top ten rice producing countries are China and India accounting for more than half of the rice produced globally. The United States ranks 13th and South Korea 16th. In the more tropical countries where the weather remains warm year around, rice is grown as many as three times a year known as triple cropping or rolling fields. However, because of the climate this far north, Korea can only grow rice once a year.

There are Upwards of 120,000 Varieties of Rice Worldwide.

Rice can be grouped into three basic categories, according to the grain length - short, medium, and long. As the g decreases in length, the amount of starch increases. So, if you guessed the rice primarily eaten in Korea is short grain because of its stickiness from the high starch content, would be correct. A slang term for rice with high starch content is sticky rice or chopsal (찰쌀).



Rice is a semi-aquatic grass

Rice is similar to wheat but is different in that it requires consistent irrigation all season. Rice is grown in a variety of climates, from tropical to temperate regions.



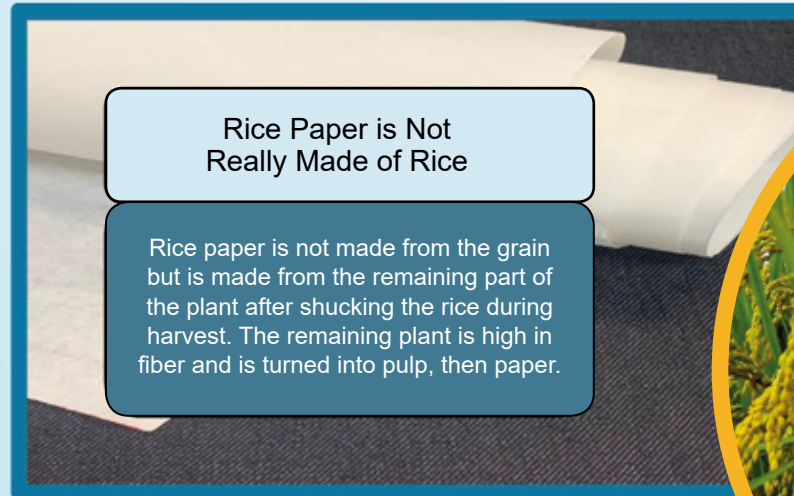
Chuseok (추석), Korean Thanksgiving and Harvest Festival, is about Family and Rice.

추석 (Chuseok) is a three-day nationwide holiday when families come together to honor ancestors, strengthen family bonds, and express gratitude for the year's autumn harvest. Rice is a central element of the festivities and represents abundance, prosperity, and longevity.



Rice Paper is Not Really Made of Rice

Rice paper is not made from the grain but is made from the remaining part of the plant after shucking the rice during harvest. The remaining plant is high in fiber and is turned into pulp, then paper.



Several Alcoholic Spirits Are Made from Rice

Rice has been fermented for centuries to make alcoholic beverages and at least two are produced right here in Korea.

- Soju is the most consumed alcoholic beverage in the world. Its popularity can be attributed to its affordability and cultural significance, as well as the new flavors ranging from various fruit flavors to honey, ginger, and even Americano. Soju is often enjoyed neat or mixed with other drinks like beer (called 소맥 [somaek]).
- Another popular rice-based alcoholic beverage from Korea is makgeolli. A cloudy rice wine that is quite strong with a slightly sweet and tangy flavor.



A Korean Proverb Uses 벼 to Express a Truth.
'벼는 익을수록 고개를 숙인다.'
'The more the rice ripens the more it bows its head.'

Ripening can refer to one gaining knowledge, power, or riches. Bowing its head can refer to being more humble from the weight of that knowledge, power, or riches. It is a reminder that humility and wisdom often accompany maturity and success.



In Korea, Rice has Four Names over Its Lifecycle



- 모 (mo). In the spring, farmers plant rice seeds in shallow trays to grow the seedlings called 모 (mo). 모 (mo) is usually grown in the climate controlled greenhouse like structures often seen near the rice fields.
- 벼 (byua). As the rice grows in the fields it is called 벼 (byua). It takes three to four months for short grain rice to fully mature, which is sometime in late August - September period, then it is harvested. The first sign the grain is ripe for harvesting is when the weight of the seeds on top of the plant causes the plant to bend.
- 쌀 (ssal). Once the rice is harvested and shucked, the grain is called 쌀 (ssal).
- 밥 (pap). Finally, after being cooked and ready to eat, it is called 밥 (pap).

Rice is a Symbol of Fertility and Abundance in Many Cultures

That is why it is often used in traditional ceremonies and rituals and thrown on the bride and groom at weddings.



Rice, a modest grain that feeds two-thirds of the world's population but is more than just a grain; it is a symbol of sustenance, culture, and history. From the lush paddies to the diverse cuisines it enriches, rice has nourished generations and played a pivotal role in shaping civilizations. As the global population continues to grow, the importance of rice as a reliable and affordable food source will only increase. It is a testament to farmers and the resilience of nature that this humble grain has sustained humanity for centuries.

Rice. The international staple



About the Author

Dan Romano retired from the Air Force after 30 years of service. Dan was based at the United States Forces Korea for several years over two assignments. He recently returned and enjoys living in Korea. He is a nature lover, photographer, and traveler. His adventures take him to some of the most beautiful places in the world, where he captures the beauty of nature both on land and in the water.

Pennsylvania National Guard
photo by Wayne V. Hall

The Colors of Fall

How to Stay Present in the Face of Change

By Alison Morogiello, LPC - Adaptable Human Solutions
Photography by Adrian Greenwood, Wayne V. Hall, Stanley James, Matthew Marcellus

The air is changing. You can feel it on your walk to the commissary or during your child's soccer practice on a Saturday morning. The humid, heavy blanket of the Korean summer is lifting, replaced by a crispness that hints at the coming cold. Here, in the Land of the Morning Calm, autumn doesn't just arrive; it makes a grand entrance. The mountains surrounding our installation across the RoK will soon erupt into a breathtaking blaze of crimson, gold, and fiery orange as fall approaches.

For many of us, this season is a welcome relief. But it's also a powerful symbol of transition. As the leaves turn, die, and fall, they offer us a profound lesson, one that is especially familiar to our lives as military members and families. We are often in a state of transition, constantly letting go of one season of life to make way for the next. The PCS cycle, the goodbyes to friends, the adjustment to a new country, these are our changing leaves.

The beauty of the autumn leaves lies in their release. A maple leaf doesn't cling to the branch, mourning its lost greenness and dreading the fall. It simply transforms and lets go. It fulfills its purpose and returns to the earth, creating the space for new life in the spring.

As humans, we're not always so graceful. We tend to resist. We often cling to the past, the duty station we loved, the friendships we miss, the familiarity of home. Or, we launch ourselves into an anxious future, "When will our household goods arrive?", "Will my kids make friends?", "What comes after this assignment?"

This is what author and spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle, in his seminal book *The Power of Now*, calls "psychological time." He argues that most of our emotional suffering doesn't come from our actual, present circumstances, but from our minds being trapped in the past or the future. In this, we struggle to accept the one thing that is truly real: this present moment.

The Pain of Resistance

Think about your own arrival in South Korea. For some, it was an exciting adventure. For others, it was accompanied by a deep sense of loss, disorientation, and stress. When we don't fully process these difficult feelings, they can form a powerful emotional pattern, like a well-worn path in our minds that our thoughts automatically follow when we're stressed.

This negative pattern is easily activated by new challenges that echo old ones, such as the stress of a



PCS move, the loneliness of being far from home, or the frustration of a language barrier. When this old pattern is running, it hijacks our thinking. Our inner monologue becomes a loop of complaint, anxiety, and sadness.

We might look at a vibrant, bustling Korean market, but we don't truly see it. Instead, our mind says, "This isn't like Target or Walmart. I don't know what any of this is. I just want to go home."

The leaves teach us a different way. Their transformation is not a tragedy, but a natural, essential process. What if we could view our own transitions, even the difficult ones, with the same sense of acceptance?

Anchoring in the 'Now' of a Korean Autumn

Acceptance doesn't mean you have to pretend to love every aspect of change. All change comes with loss. It's not about toxic positivity. It's about dropping the mental resistance to what is. And the most powerful way to do this is to pull your awareness out of your overthinking mind and anchor it firmly in the present moment, using the very environment around you.

This autumn, I challenge you to practice being radically present. Don't just let the season pass by in a blur of work, school runs, and longing for what was. Experience it.

Engage Your Senses: Take a "presence walk" through

a local park or even just around your housing area without headphones. Pay attention from the perspective of a child seeing something for the first time.

- **Sight:** Don't just see "trees." Notice the specific, impossible shade of scarlet on a single maple leaf. See how the late afternoon sun filters through the golden ginkgo leaves, making them glow. Observe the elderly couple meticulously tending their small garden patch.
- **Sound:** Listen to the crunch of leaves under your boots. Hear the cheerful chime of the sweet potato truck. Listen to the unfamiliar cadence of the Korean language around you without judgment, just as pure sound.
- **Smell:** Inhale deeply. What do you smell? The earthy scent of damp soil? The pungent, unique aroma of roasting ginkgo nuts? The sweet, cinnamon-sugar smell of hotteok (호떡) from a street vendor?
- **Taste:** Buy the hotteok. Taste the warm, gooey, nutty filling. Savor it and let the experience fill your awareness, pushing out anxious thoughts for just a moment.
- **Touch:** Feel the crisp autumn air on your cheeks. Feel the warmth of the cardboard cup of coffee in your hands.

When you fully inhabit your senses, you are, by definition, in the “Now”. In that moment, you are not ruminating on the past or worrying about the future. You are simply here. And in the here, you often find that things are okay.

Observing the Thinker

Of course, the mind will wander. The brain is built to think! A sad thought about a friend back home might arise. An anxious thought about a future deployment might pop up. Tolle's advice isn't to push away these thoughts, as fighting them only gives them more power.

Instead, simply notice them. Become the observer of your mind.

When the thought "I'm so lonely" appears, just say to yourself internally, "Ah, there is the thought that I am lonely." See it as a cloud passing through the vast sky of your awareness. You are the sky, not the cloud. This simple act of witnessing creates a space between you and the thought, robbing it of its power to define your entire reality. You are not your thoughts. You are the presence that is aware of them.

This autumn, as the Korean landscape puts on its spectacular display of letting go, let it be your teacher. Let the falling leaves remind you of the strength in acceptance. Your time here in South Korea is a season. It is unique, fleeting, and rich with opportunities for growth and experience, but only if you are present for it.

Embrace the crisp air, the vibrant colors, and the warm bowls of soup. This moment, right now, is not just a stepping stone to somewhere else. It is your life. And like the autumn leaves, it is beautiful exactly as it is.



U.S. Army photo by Stanley James



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Matthew Marcellus

Source: Tolle, E. (1999). The power of now: A guide to spiritual enlightenment. New World Library.

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About the Author

Alison Morogiello (she/her) is a trauma-informed licensed therapist at Adaptable Human Solutions. She uses effective, evidence-based approaches to help individuals, couples, and families recover from difficult life experiences, manage anxiety, and build resilience. As the daughter of two USMC officers, Alison has a special passion for supporting U.S. Military members and their families. She is also a dedicated, affirming provider for the LGBTQ+ community. Alison currently lives in Pyeongtaek with her cuddly kitten, Jolyne.



For more information about mental health services at Adaptable Human Solutions, please feel free to connect with us!

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From Glow Runs to Ghost Stories:

How to Get Involved with the BOSS Program in Korea

By Zachary Rogers

Life as a BOSS Representative in Korea

From Glow Run volunteer, DJ, and shirt handler, to Dash of Color track star (in my dreams), being a BOSS Representative has taken me on some unforgettable journeys. What might look like just handing out t-shirts or hyping up a fun run is, in reality, part of a much larger mission: building morale, strengthening community, and giving Soldiers opportunities to grow, connect, and thrive, especially while stationed far from home.

One of the most rewarding parts of being a BOSS Rep is the chance to connect with Soldiers in meaningful ways. I've had the opportunity to speak at an SFRG meeting, sharing the impact of BOSS on unit morale and participation. I've attended company events to promote BOSS and boost camaraderie. As a guest speaker at the DFAC, I've shared upcoming opportunities and recognized participants for their courage and confidence in answering tough questions in front of their peers.

Listening to Soldiers and Improving Quality of Life

Being a BOSS Rep isn't just about speaking engagements and planning; it's about listening. BOSS

Reps take the time to reach out to Soldiers and the community during our Quality-of-Life Walks. During these walks, we are asking questions and gathering feedback to make positive changes in our community. BOSS Reps collect signatures and photos to finalize "Installation Quality of Life Issues forms, ensuring accuracy in the description of the issue, but also providing recommendations for solutions. It's all part of our mission to promote health, wellness, and quality of life. Sometimes, the most impactful ideas come from casual conversations. Suggestions



like placing ice machines in high-traffic areas or ideas on how to improve the installation's bus routes can go a long way in helping Soldiers feel more comfortable and supported in the community we call home, even if only for a little while.

Volunteering Beyond the Barracks

Volunteering has been at the heart of my BOSS experience. There's something about serving alongside others that builds deeper connections. Whether it's a community cleanup or a cultural experience, each opportunity creates new bonds and lasting memories. Recently, we had the chance to participate in a traditional Korean Tug-o-War event. It wasn't just a fun competition; it was a chance to learn about and take part in a centuries-old tradition symbolizing unity, strength, and teamwork. Events like these bring people together in ways that transcend language and background. It is a tangible reminder that culture and connection go hand in hand for the US and RoK Forces as they maintain safety and stability in South Korea.

Cultural Connections in Korea

That connection deepens even further during our visit to one of Korea's historic temples. Walking through the serene temple grounds, surrounded by ancient architecture and quiet mountains, gave me a moment to reflect. There's a deep sense of peace that comes with stepping away from the fast pace of daily life to experience traditions that have stood for centuries. Being stationed overseas isn't just about serving; it's also about learning, growing, and appreciating where you are in your journey.

Facing Fears: The Haunted Side of Volunteering

Of course, not all moments are peaceful; some are downright spooky. Take our most recent volunteer opportunity: the Haunted House of Fear clean-up. Let me tell you, cleaning that place was scarier than actually walking through it. It brought one of my recurring nightmares to life: a dream where I'm walking down a hallway filled with water, footsteps echoing behind me, louder and louder. I turn around, but no one's there. I freeze, unable to move, until I see the water shifting, footsteps forming. That's usually when I wake up. But while cleaning the House of Fear, it felt like I couldn't. The echoes, the chill, I bolted. Fast. Still, I can't wait to see what they have planned for this year's Haunted House of Fear, especially with its



new location at the Outdoor Recreation Center. If the clean-up was that intense, the actual event is going to be unforgettable.

Joining the BOSS Program

If you've ever thought about getting more involved, BOSS makes it easy. You don't have to be a seasoned volunteer or a social butterfly; you just need the willingness to show up and participate. The simplest way to start is by attending a BOSS meeting or event. Meetings are open to all single service members (and geographically single service members), and you can attend even if you're just curious.

Being a BOSS Rep isn't always easy, but it's always worth it. From sprinting through color runs and getting soaked in tradition during temple visits, to running from imaginary footsteps during haunted house cleanups, every moment is a chance to build community, support fellow Soldiers, and grow in ways I never expected. Whether you're stationed here for a few months or a few years, these experiences stay with you, and so do the people you share them with.

How to Become a BOSS Representative

- If you decide you want a more active role, consider becoming your unit's BOSS Representative. Here's how it usually works:
- Let Your Leadership Know – Talk to your squad leader, platoon sergeant, or first sergeant about your interest. Units are always looking for motivated Soldiers who are willing to represent their peers.
- Get Appointed – The commander or first sergeant typically appoints the BOSS Rep. Sometimes this is done formally with a memorandum; other times it's as simple as a conversation and a handshake.
- Connect with the BOSS Office – Once appointed, you'll link up with the installation's BOSS program manager (usually through MWR). They'll give you the meeting schedule, rep training info, and an overview of current projects.
- Complete Rep Orientation – New reps typically attend an orientation or brief training session where they learn how BOSS operates, how to report quality-of-life concerns, and how to communicate event details back to their unit.
- Get Involved and Represent Your Unit – As a rep, you'll attend monthly BOSS meetings, bring

ideas and feedback from your unit, help promote events, and encourage others to participate. You're the bridge between your Soldiers and the program—your voice matters.

Becoming a BOSS Rep isn't just another duty; it's a chance to lead, influence positive change, and make your time in Korea truly memorable. Whether you're rallying volunteers for a 5K, advocating for better barracks amenities, or helping coordinate a cultural trip, you're playing an active role in shaping the Soldier experience and the broader military community.



About the Author

SGT Zachary Rogers writes monthly about the needs of service members stationed in South Korea. He encourages his readers to get out of the barracks, make meaningful relationships, and experience as much of this country as they can while stationed in Korea.





The Best Free Walks With Your Dog Near Camp Humphreys

By Elise Petersen, in partnership with the South of Seoul Blog

Dog Friendly Korea

Korea is becoming increasingly pet-friendly, with more dog parks and scenic trails catering to pet owners looking for outdoor adventures. To help fellow pet owners, I've put together a list of my favorite spots near Camp Humphreys for walking and exploring with my dog. However, keep in mind that widespread pet ownership in Korea only became common around 2014, so attitudes toward dogs—especially larger breeds—can vary.

Some Koreans may be wary of dogs, while others, particularly children, might try to pet your dog without asking. To ensure a positive experience for everyone, always follow local rules and regulations, keep an eye on your surroundings, and be prepared to politely set boundaries if needed.

Defining Dog Friendly

In South Korea, the term “dog friendly” generally refers to places and establishments that accommodate and welcome dogs, but the definition can vary depending on the type of business and location. In cities like Seoul and Busan, “dog friendly” cafes, restaurants, and parks typically allow dogs on leashes and may provide amenities such as water bowls, treats, or even designated play areas.

However, some businesses may only allow dogs on patios or in outdoor spaces, and size restrictions or breed limitations can apply. “Dog friendly” may also mean that only certain sizes of dogs are permitted, or that dogs are limited to a specific designated area within the establishment. It rarely means that dogs are allowed to roam freely or off-leash unless it's a specialized dog park or similar facility. Understanding the specific rules of each establishment is important, as Korean businesses may have different levels of comfort and policies regarding dogs.

This means that the locations recommended in this post don't allow off-leash hiking, and larger dogs may need a muzzle if requested by others on the trail.

Dog-Friendly, Free Walking Locations

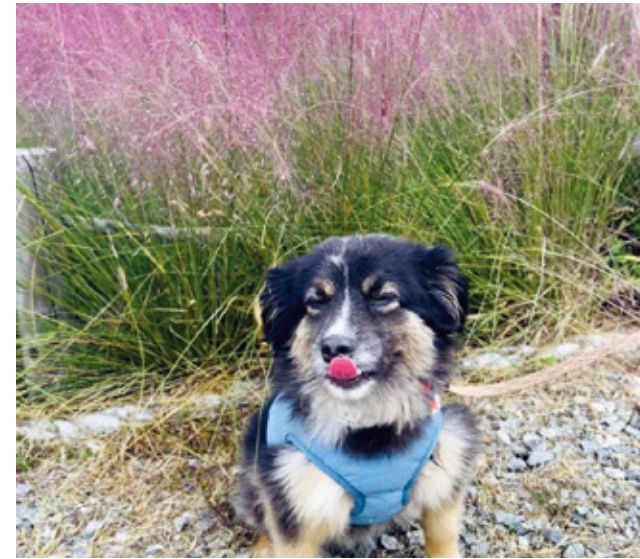
Enjoy the following dog-friendly locations, where we look forward to exercising or slow strolls with our dog. These locations are roughly organized from closest to farthest from Camp Humphreys.

Naeri Culture Park

A great place to walk your dog with well-maintained trails along the Anseong River, providing plenty of space for exercise and exploration. Whether you're looking for a playground, a jogging spot with beautiful scenery, a picnic beside the river, or a camping spot, this large park offers many possibilities. Included a pic-

ture of the map for more details. In Autumn, it is a great place to view the pink muhly grass.

Gyeonggi-do Pyeongtaek-si Paengseong-eup 260
<https://naver.me/xAAWkMUP>



Baramsae Village Picnic Garden

An excellent destination with a pet-friendly environment and beautiful seasonal foliage to include lotus flowers. Please keep in mind, dogs aren't allowed in the children's play areas. There is a free public parking lot.

Gyeonggi-do Pyeongtaek-si Godeok-myeon 476-20
<https://naver.me/xmBPYzSz>



Deokdongsan Neighborhood Park

Located in Pyeongtaek, this dog-friendly park welcomes pets on a leash. This forested park features a short hiking loop, pavilions, exercise equipment, and a war memorial. It is also conveniently situated next to Myeongbeop Temple. It's a large park located in Bi-jeon-dong with restrooms on site.

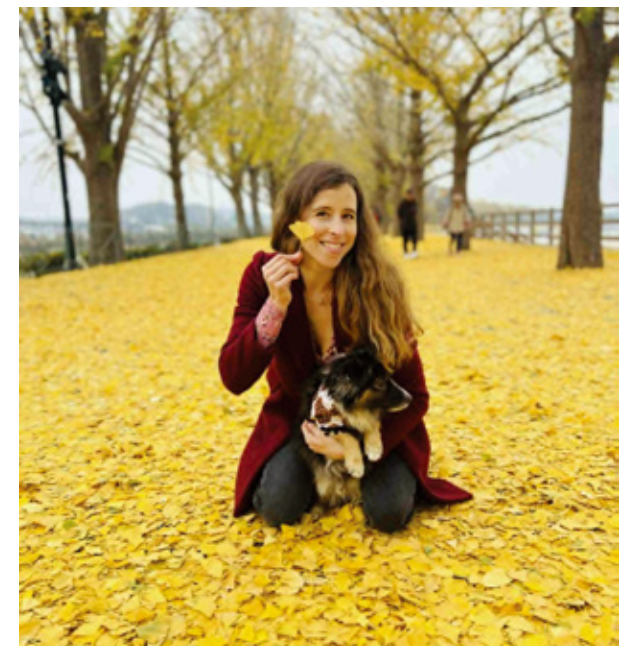
Gyeonggi-do Pyeongtaek-si Bijeon-dong 84-14
<https://naver.me/5gYrqGgK>



Asan Ginkgo Trail

A beautiful walk lined with approximately 350 ginkgo trees, especially stunning in autumn. Asan Ginkgo Tree Road is a lovely walk, especially for watching the leaves change color in Autumn. You will find cafes, a convenience store, and even a shrine along the walk. Various places to park along the walk, but the roads may be tight.

Chungcheongnam-do Asan-si Yeomchi-eup 502-3
<https://naver.me/5GG5jNKM>



Starfield Anseong Mall

Starfield Anseong is a dog-friendly mall with both indoor and outdoor options. Indoors, you can stroll with your dog along shops and restaurants, some of which are pet-friendly. Ground stickers near each store or restaurant indicate whether dogs are allowed on a leash, in a carrier, or not at all.

Outdoors, you'll find a spacious dog park for running and playing. Many locals bring their dressed-up pups, adding to the lively atmosphere.

Parking is convenient with an underground lot. Whether you prefer a relaxed indoor walk or outdoor fun, this mall is a great choice.

354 Jinsa-ri Gongdo-eup Anseong-si Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/FHlzCowS>



Suwon Hwaseong Fortress Loop on AllTrails

Enjoy a scenic 3.3-mile loop around Suwon Fortress Wall, perfect for a dog-friendly outing just an hour from Camp Humphreys. This well-trafficked trail offers historic views and convenient spots to park and grab a bite, with outdoor dining where pups are welcome.

Hwaseonghaenggung Street Public Parking Lot
52-8 Namchang-dong Paldal-gu, Suwon-si Gyeonggi-do
<https://naver.me/GQ1PLmb6>

Tips for Walking with Your Dog Near Camp Humphreys

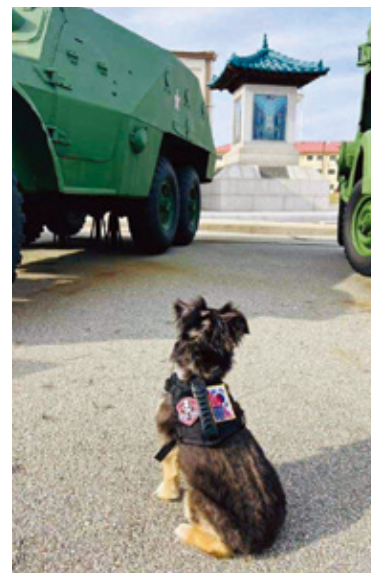
- Always carry waste bags to clean up after your pet.
- Bring water for both you and your dog, especially in warmer months.
- Be mindful of cyclists and runners on shared paths.
- Check for seasonal changes, as some paths may be muddy after rain.
- Be aware of stray dogs in some areas and avoid interactions to ensure safety.
- Be alert for stray cats, which are common across Korea.
- Be aware that other dogs and their owners will not understand English requests or commands, just as you and your dog will not understand Korean requests or dog commands.
- Watch out for food waste that could be harmful to your pet.
- Avoid food left out for stray animals, as it may contain ingredients unsafe for your dog.
- Muzzle policy for large dogs: Pyeongtaek-si and many other areas require that owners of large dogs muzzle their pets upon request. Be prepared to comply with this regulation when walking in public areas.

Join the Dog Lover's Community!

For more pet-friendly activities, check out our online Facebook Group called "The Dog Lover's Guide to South Korea". This community shares tips, recommendations, and resources to help you and your furry friend make the most of your time in Korea. I look forward to meeting you there!

Additional Information

For further questions about local pet regulations, call 1330, the Korea Travel Hotline. They provide assistance in multiple languages and can help with inquiries regarding pet policies, local laws, and more. To discover more tips on living in South Korea with pets, as well as guides on dog-friendly activities, resources, and local insights, head to the South of Seoul Blog.

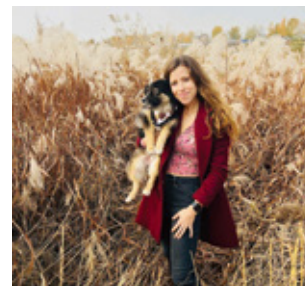


Closing Thoughts

Exploring with your dog near Camp Humphreys offers a variety of experiences, from peaceful lakeside strolls to more adventurous forest trails. No matter your dog's energy level, there's a perfect walk waiting for you. Enjoy your outings and make the most of the beautiful surroundings!

About the Authors

Elise is a military spouse passionate about helping fellow dog parents provide the best life for their furry companions while living in Korea. She loves exploring with her dog and discovering dog-friendly destinations, activities, and resources. Her goal is to make life easier for dog owners by sharing recommendations, tips, and insights on navigating Korea with their pups.



Founded in 2015, the South of Seoul team consists of volunteers on three continents working together to support English-speaking people traveling or living in South Korea. South of Seoul volunteers work with organizations and individuals across South Korea to improve equitable access to information across South Korea. Much of South of Seoul's information focuses on Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. Blogs published under the authorship of "South of Seoul" include blogs compiled by multiple volunteers to improve access to standardized information unrelated to individualized personal experiences.

Website: <https://blog.southofseoul.net/>
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STRENGTH THROUGH SUPPORT

The USO and the United Nations Command

By the Editorial Team



Douglas A. Boltuc has been the Country Director for USO Korea since 2017. In this capacity, he oversees the USO staff and volunteers as they conduct the mission delivery of USO programs and offerings at five centers, three unstaffed lounges, and eleven remote locations across the Peninsula.

Douglas A. Boltuc the Country Director for USO Korea reflects on the 75th anniversary of the United Nations Command and its enduring mission.

The United Nations Command has safeguarded peace on the Korean Peninsula for more than seven decades. From your perspective, how has the USO's presence in Korea supported the legacy of peace and international partnership over the years?

The fact that eighteen contributing nations of the United Nations Command have committed military capabilities boldly announces the broad support for and legitimacy of the freedom and democracy of the Republic of Korea (ROK). The fact that so many disparate nations from all over the globe have committed to this security guarantee speaks tremendous amounts to this vast commitment.

The UNC represents a coalition of nations committed to security and stability. How does the USO ensure that its programs, outreach, and centers foster a sense of unity and belonging for service members and families from across different countries?

Although the USO charter directs us to provide wholesome programs to US Service and Family Members, the importance of the United Nations Command allows us to broaden our patronage to include Service and Family Members of these Allies. We are extremely happy to welcome UNC Members to our programs and events.

Military operations often focus on deterrence and readiness, but the human factor is just as critical. How does the USO provide the kind of stability, morale, and resilience that enable service members and their families to sustain the demanding UNC mission?

The essence of the USO mission is connection – for Service and Family Members to connect back to home, family, and country. Many of our programs and offerings allow UNC Service and Family Members to be afforded this opportunity in their individual cases as well. In abundance, connection leads to the resilience of the both the Service and Family Members.



UNESCO, Guardians of Our Past and Korea's Contributions

By Dan Romano



The history of Korea and its rapid transition into a developed nation is a testament to the resilience of the people over many centuries. According to Korean mythology, the nation began with the founding of Gojoseon in 2333 BCE, and more tangible evidence suggests the Gojoseon era began around 1000 BCE. Evidence from this period can be seen today through distinctive artifacts and other archaeological evidence scattered about the country. Over the past 3,000 to 4,300 years, Korea's history has produced 60 significant sites, documents, and intangible practices that are recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO is the United Nations' organization that promotes peace and security through cooperation in education, science, culture, communication, and information. It catalogs World Heritage Sites and Intangible Cultural Heritage practices and maintains a Memory of the World Register that together recognizes global treasures having universal value for humanity. UNESCO helps protect and preserve these treasures to provide a framework for conservation, public education, and intercultural dialogue around the world. Korea can often be overshadowed by commercialized, generic pop culture; however, it has a deep, rich history that spans centuries and is recognized by UNESCO. Let us take a brief look at Korea's treasures recognized by UNESCO.

UNESCO World Heritage Sites

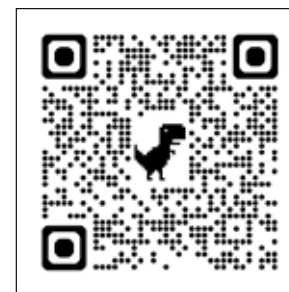
UNESCO's World Heritage Site catalog is meant to protect and preserve cultural and natural heritage sites considered to have outstanding value for humanity worldwide. Sites can be natural, for example, a forest, mountain, lake, or desert, or manufactured structures, monuments, complexes, or cities.

Korea has 17 World Heritage Sites cataloged by UNESCO, 15 are cultural sites that span thousands of years, and two are natural wonders that were carved out and developed by mother nature. Some cultural sites consist of items in multiple locations. For example, the



▲ Royal Tomb

Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty have 40 tombs scattered about 18 locations across the country; or the seven Sansa, Buddhist Mountain Monasteries are on various mountains throughout the country. Both natural sites are a must-see: the Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes, which were carved out long ago, and the Getbol Tidal Flats. There are four tidal flats, also known as mudflats, which are critical habitats for migrating birds and marine life such as clams, crabs, octopus, and many others. There are three of these habitats along the west coast and one in the south. For more information about every Korean site on UNESCO's list, scan the QR code to go to the UNESCO page!



▲ Cheomseongdae, an astronomical observatory in Gyeongju and is also on the list.



▲ Some original text of Hangeul presenting and explaining 28 new letters, 17 initial (consonant) sounds and 11 medial (vowel) sounds.



UNESCO Memory of the World Register

UNESCO's Memory of the World Register lists documents and archives that have cultural or social impact, showing a country's significant heritage. Each item has universal value and protects humankind's diverse memories, and shares them around the world. The register includes, for example, unique written content, books, manuscripts, audio-video materials, and maps.

Korea is committed to preserving its important historical records and memories and has 20 documents and archives in the register, ranking 5th in the world. Some documents include the Hunminjeongeum Manuscript outlining the principles and design of Hangeul, the Korean alphabet. Also, the Nanjung Ilgi, which is the personal war Diary of Admiral Yi Sun-sin that details the daily events of his military campaigns during the Imjin War. For more information about every document and archive on the list, scan the QR code to go to the Korean Heritage Service page. The UNESCO site does not list Memory of the World Register items by country; however, this link does.

UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage safe-guards the intangible cultural heritage. Since there is as much cultural heritage in common practices, rituals, traditions, or living expressions as there is in sites and memories, they are pre-served and protected in similar ways.

Korea has 23 practices that are cataloged by UNESCO, ranking in the top 10 countries in the world. These practices can be arts or performanc-es, rituals, held knowledge, or social practices. Korean intangible cultural performances include Jeju’s Haenyeo, who are female divers on Jeju Island who freedive to great depths to harvest seafood. Also, Kimjang, which is the communal practice of making and sharing enormous quan-tities of kimchi to prepare for the winter. One intangible practice that originated in Pyeongtaek is Nongak, or farmers’ music. It includes music, dance, and acrobatic performances to celebrate harvests and as a religious ritual. For more infor-mation about all of Korea’s intangible cultural her-itage practices recognized by UNESCO, scan the QR code and make a plan to see these intangible cultural heritage practices!



▲ Jeju Haenyeo (diver)



Safeguarding the Past for Future Generations

UNESCO designations are more than historical praises but demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding the past for future generations. By protecting the world’s ancient architecture, manuscripts, and traditions, UNESCO helps us appreciate the accomplishments of past civilizations that built the stepping stones to allow us to develop to the point where we are today. It takes a global effort to ensure important artifacts and information that define all of us are never lost. You can contribute to the preservation of our history by simply visiting a UNESCO site or seeking out performances; being a responsible tourist and mindful of the rules; and learning about a site’s history and telling a story about it. Every ticket purchased and every story you share helps to ensure a country’s rich legacy is passed on to the next generation.

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About the Author

Dan Romano retired from the Air Force af-
ter 30 years of service. Dan was based at
the United States Forces Korea for several
years over two assignments. He recently
returned and enjoys living in Korea.
He is a nature lover, photographer, and
traveler. His adventures take him to some
of the most beautiful places in the world,
where he captures the beauty of nature
both on land and in the water.

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Three Korean Poets

During the Japanese Colonial Era

By Mingyeong Kim

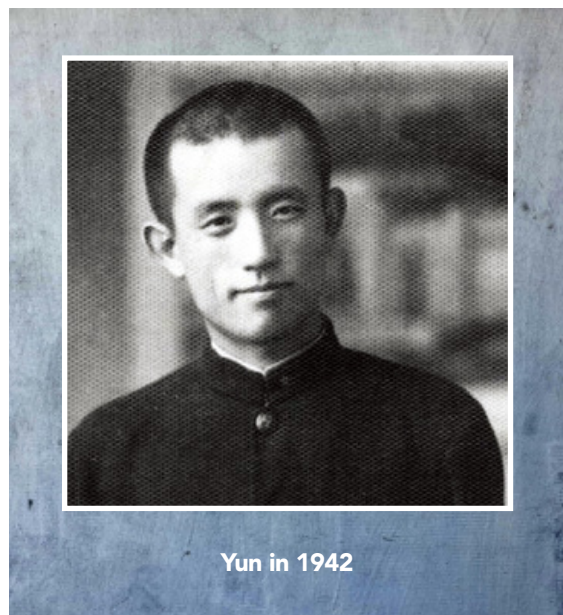
Poetry has great power. Poets can use poetry as a medium of conveying their will to fight against an illogical society's atmosphere. For Koreans living under Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), poetry became more than art; it was a voice of resistance, identity, and hope. In this article, I'll introduce Korean poets who wrote poetry to stand against Japan's suppression with courage, longing for their country's freedom, and communicating the enduring strength of the Korean people.

Dongju Yun: A Star That Burned Briefly

Dongju Yun was a Korean poet born in 1917. He started to write poems when he was in middle school. During his time at university, Yun studied English literature in Japan. While in Japan, he was well educated and lived in good conditions.

However, being Korean while comfortably living in Japan made him feel guilty during this time because Korea was standing against the Japanese occupation. Yun was arrested for participating in the independence movement by writing poems in the Korean language.

With liberation just around the corner, he died in a Fukuoka, Japan jail at the age of 28. His most well-known poem is Counting the Stars at Night. It holds the reflection on the suffering of his nation, Korea, a search for personal identity and meaning, and a longing for lost innocence and hope.



Yun in 1942

Yuk-sa Lee: The Voice of the Wilderness

Our next Korean poet, Yuksa Lee, was born in 1904. He first began his independence movement in 1925. He joined an independence group named Heroic Corps and actively participated in independence struggles. He was arrested 17 times and tortured. His final arrest occurred in Beijing, China, where he died in prison. His most well-known poems are "Wilderness" and "Climax". The poems talk about a national spirit that does not wear off and shows a strong will to stand against colonial rule.

Yong-un Han: Love and Liberation

The final poet I will introduce is Yong-un Han. Han was born in 1879. During the Japanese colonial era, he was one of the 33 national representatives who signed the Korean Declaration of Independence. He was not only a poet, but also a monk and an independence activist. While being captured in jail, he wrote the Chosun Independence Book and insisted on independence and freedom for his country from Japanese rule. He died of paralysis in 1944. His most well-known poem is The Silence of Love. It talks about the sadness of 'my love' leaving, but in this poem, 'my love' represents a stolen country and freedom. Also, the first line, "Love is gone", reads as the absence of a lover or the absence of freedoms in his country.

Closing Reflection: Poetry as Expressions of Freedom

In the Japanese colonial era, many of the Korean poets wrote a lot of poems about their desperate situation and their experience as those around them tried to silence their voice. Their legacy challenges us to live with gratitude towards everyone who protected our country by conducting various forms of independence movements, such as writing literature that promotes personal civil liberties and freedom for all. Literature is not only a mirror of its time, but also a force for change.



Yuk-sa Lee
(Photo Credit: Yonhap News)



Yong-un Han during his imprisonment in Seodaemun Prison.
(Photo Credit: Manhae Memorial Hall)

About the Author

Mingyeong Kim is a junior at Jinwee High School. She is from Suji, Korea. She enjoys studying English and is interested in writing. Her dream is to know about various cultures in the world and specialize in studying English literature.

Exploring Middle Earth

By James T. Carter

Our Lord of the Rings Road Trip Across New Zealand

By Jetta Allen



When

you were a kid, what was your favorite book, film, or even film series? What could whisk you away to another place and make reality seem just a little bit further as you fully immerse yourself in the book or film? For me, it was The Lord of the Rings Trilogy movies. It was the perfect blend of fantasy and Renaissance, good and evil. Peter Jackson's portrayal of Tolkien's text is truly a marvel compared to most text-to-film adaptations. The cast was so relatable, the lore believable and deep, but mostly, I just absolutely loved Tolkien's world on the screen! New Zealand was the perfect location for filming, yet the idea of ever visiting, of seeing this world brought to life, seemed completely unrealistic for this Texas girl.

Planning a Lord of the Rings New Zealand Road Trip

As we were planning our next possible duty station, or even retirement, my husband said we could use about two weeks of leave wherever I wanted to go. He said we could choose a couple of places for a few days each, or take one big trip. I froze. "How big?" I asked, my interest peaked. And in the most sincere tone, he said, "Anywhere you want." My answer came out before I could even think: "NEW ZEALAND?!" My eyes must have lit up; my face was sore from smiling so much! And I waited! He said yes, and the planning of my dream trip, my childhood fantasy, came to life.

That same night, I was calling friends, geeking out, finding filming locations, and planning our co-splay. We settled on a road trip starting in Auckland on the North Island, driving all the way to Wellington, then flying to the South Island. From there, we would drive through the South Island and end our trip in Queenstown. Our journey would take us through the most beautiful parts of New Zealand, which just happened to be the locations of my favorite scenes from The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and The Hobbit Trilogy. Let me share our adventure, one we shared with Bilbo, and now with you!



▲ Photo Credit: New Line Cinema, Warner Bros. Pictures, and MGM.



▲ The Allens step into movie magic at Weta Workshop Unleashed, Auckland, New Zealand.



▲ One does not simply shop without facing Smaug first!

With our flights booked, it was time to prepare the most important part of the trip: our Middle-earth identities

Cosplay and Family Fun in Middle-earth

Our bags were packed to go on another adventure. I couldn't go to New Zealand as anything other than a hobbit, of course. My cosplay was complete with multiple outfit changes, a flower crown, a cloak, and even my own Burglar Contact, ready to re-enact scenes of the Shire. My husband went as a cloaked Tolkien fan with epic T-shirts. And our son, he was the most epic teenage Nazgûl you've ever seen. The metal gauntlets were the perfect finishing touches. We were ready for Middle-earth! Our evening flight from Incheon passed quickly as we slept through the night, and by morning, we were touching down in Auckland. Dressed for adventure, we were ready to see where Tolkien's world had first been brought to life on screen, Wētā Workshop Unleashed.

Exploring Wētā Workshop Unleashed in Auckland

Walking through the doors felt like stepping into the movies themselves. Every prop, costume, and



▲ Exploring the troll animatronics at Wētā Workshop Unleashed.



▲ Even the greatest adventures lead back home at Bilbo's and Frodo's hobbit hole.

creature design brought the films to life right before our eyes. From intricately detailed swords to the miniature sets that made the Shire and characters feel so real, we were instantly immersed. Behind the scenes, visitors could explore the animatronics that brought the trolls Tom, Bert, and William in *The Hobbit* and so many others to life. In the display cases were armor from Saruman's Uruk-hai, Gondor's soldiers of Minas Tirith, and Smaug even graced the gift shop. Guarding the treasures, I am sure! Next up, drive to our hotel in Cambridge for the night and rest for the long journey to the Shire in the morning.

Visiting Hobbiton Movie Set in Matamata

The hills of the Shire are not mere movie magic. They are real in the Waikato region! Sprawling green land, speckled with sheep, rustic fences, and blue skies, welcomed us to Matamata and the Hinuera Valley, home of Hobbiton Movie Set, the perfect backdrop for depicting the peaceful and charming setting of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and *The Hobbit* Trilogy. The Hobbiton Movie Set is



▲ Our family adventure in Hobbiton.



▲ Experiencing the rush of Huka Falls with fearless barrel riders.

expansive. Our family loved opening the door to a real hobbit hole! The round doors, cozy furnishings, and tiny details, literally everywhere, make you feel as if a hobbit might appear at any moment to offer you a cup of tea. Make sure to go for breakfast or lunch and get some drinks at the Green Dragon too! If you are a true fan, you will never have enough time there to explore! That night, we stayed in Rotorua, the perfect base to prepare for our trek into the dramatic landscapes of Mordor.

Mordor and Mount Doom

The next morning, we rolled out of Rotorua ready for a big day, winding our way toward the volcanic heart of the North Island. As Huka Falls thundered, the blue-green water roared and frothed like it had a life of its own. Bilbo, Thorin, and the Company of Dwarves in barrels immediately came to mind! Next up, a helicopter flight over Lake Taupó and Rotokawa gave us a bird's-eye view of the geothermal fields, lakes, and lush hills, just as breathtaking and sweeping as the epic scenes spanning the lands of Middle-earth in the films. As we drove closer to the peaks of Mount Ruapehu and Mount Ngauruhoe, the fog rolled in thick and spooky. We couldn't ascend the mountains



▲ Joshua is living the dream, flying in a Robinson R-44 helicopter with his Mom.



▲ Aerial views reveal the beauty of lakes, hills, and open land below.



▲ Joshua at the edge of Mordor's fiery lands with Mount Doom looming.

thanks to the dense fog, but that only made them look more dramatic and looming with Mount Doom in the distance. Mead's Wall stretched out jagged and gray, and our son looked perfectly at home in this wild, barren landscape. Mordor was rocky and intimidating, but unforgettable, and totally worth the long drive. At sunset, Mount Doom had an ominous glow as if it were on fire in the distance. We spent the next day seeing some other sights, the coastline of New Zealand, and then kept on to Wellington.

Wétá Cave Tour in Wellington

In Wellington, we stepped into the very heart of Middle-earth; there is so much to do here for Tolkien fans. Our day began with the Extended Wétá Cave tour, which leans more heavily into Tolkien's world than the Unleashed tour in Auckland. We dressed up and went with anticipation to see props, costumes, and miniatures, specifically from The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and The Hobbit Trilogy. Giant trolls loomed overhead, and we were stunned at the incredible detail that brought Tolkien's words to life.

We met Mark Fry, the longest serving Wétá member of the Wétá Cave and a miniatures artist whose creativity transforms everyday materials into scaled movie magic. From small landscapes to intricate props, he showed how character wardrobes, armor, and weapons are designed from everyday objects. He focused on how art and sustainability can go hand in hand. He also appeared in The Lord of the Rings trilogy as a background character at the Prancing Pony, a Breelander, and played other minor roles. As we left his workstation, Mark gifted me a Dwarf-ven coin, sharing his excitement to see our family so dedicated to Tolkien lore, movie craft, and the creative conversations we had together. It was my first piece of Middle-earth treasure!

Next, we met Kim Beaton, a seasoned sculptor, who shared her passion for inspiring minds through science, technology, art, and a lot of tinfoil, proving that even three-story-tall sculptures can start with a spark of imagination. As we wrapped up our tour, we wandered among the props, prosthetics, costumes, and swords, soaking in the stories behind each piece and even getting to touch some of the armor and weapons from the films. We finished in the gift shop, surrounded by miniature treasures, artwork, and souvenirs.

At Mt. Victoria's Hobbit's Hideaway, we recreated the classic "Get off the road!" scene, with our son as a menacing Nazgûl searching for the hobbits among



▲ Rugged rocks straight out of Mordor.



▲ TJ gets caught by his cloak by a heinous troll in the Trollshaws by the Wétá Cave in Wellington.



▲ Every grotesque detail of the Gross Troll King comes to life at Wétá Workshop.



▲ The Pelorus River calms as barrel riders come to a halt before heading to Laketown.

the lush parkland. For dinner, we headed to The Green Parrot, Viggo Mortensen’s favorite spot, and sat where he once dined! I enjoyed a filet mignon that any hobbit would proudly serve at their table. Finally, a visit to the Embassy Theatre, which famously hosted the world premieres of all three Lord of the Rings films and The Hobbit. Our next day would take us on another adventure, this time by air.

Flying on the Wings of Eagles to New Zealand's South Island

We soared south on a Sounds Air Cessna 208 Caravan across the Cook Strait, the narrow stretch of water separating New Zealand’s North and South Islands. The rugged coastline and sparkling waters stretched beneath us, and for a moment, I imagined we were riding on the wings of the Great Eagles, descending into the wilds of Middle-earth, and yes, I was a little scared! Thankfully, the 30-minute flight was smooth and the views were breathtaking.

Our first stop brought us to the Pelorus River, home of the iconic barrel-riding scene from The Hobbit, not the thunderous waters of the early scenes, but the calm waters where Bilbo, Thorin, and Company finally come to rest before boarding Bard’s boat to Lake-town.

Next, we headed to Jens Hansen’s jewelry studio in Nelson, the very place where the legendary One



▲ The Allens at Mt. Victoria’s Hobbit’s Hideaway, recreating the ‘Get off the road!’



▲ Mouthwatering beef wellington at Thatcher & Small in Hokitika.

Ring was crafted. Holding the large replica of the ring, I could feel the weight of Middle-earth in my hand. Its smooth golden surface and flowing Elvish inscription made me giddy; I was a part of the film, if only for a moment. We left with our own precious piece of movie magic, a ring crafted by the master jeweler himself!

That evening, we wandered along the beach, scavenging for driftwood that looked like Gandalf’s staff before indulging in dinner at a local restaurant. The Beef Wellington with golden pastry at Thatcher & Small felt like the sort of treat Bilbo would sneak on an adventure. The next day, we drove along the stunning coastline, hunting for rocks in Hokitika, before making our way to Mount Sunday, the film location for Rohan.

Edoras Filming Location

Walking through the filming location of Edoras felt like we were in the heart of Rohan itself. To reach the base of Mount Sunday, you actually drive through the New Zealand Hakatere Conservation Park for about 45 minutes, winding through wide-open plains and hills, completely in the middle of this untouched land. Then you park and walk a while to the actual location. Around Mount Sunday, the plains stretch endlessly in every direction, golden grasses swaying in the wind, while a clear brook babbles and winds its way through the valley. It was so alive and open that I half expected the Riders of Rohan to crest the next ridge, their banners snapping in the wind, the thunder of horses’ hooves echoing across the plains.

The climb itself was slick and steep thanks to rain showers that refused to leave us alone, but each step only heightened our excitement to reach the summit. By the time we reached the top, drenched and cold, the reward was staggering. The Golden Hall is no longer there, but the sweeping views were enough to bring tears to my eyes. No buildings, no airplanes, just the hush of wind through the grass and the raw power of the landscape itself. In that moment, the Rohan theme played in my mind, strings and horns rising with the land around me, so vivid it was like the hills themselves were singing. For a moment, I truly felt like I was right there in the film, part of something vast and ethereal. It didn’t seem real, and I wondered if this was what Peter Jackson felt his first time viewing some of the film locations...



▲ The flag of Rohan drifts across the fields with Edoras in the background, straight out of the movies.



▲ TJ stands before the cloud-covered Lonely Mountain.

The Lonely Mountain

The next morning greeted us with a drive through a mountain range. The surreal glow of Lake Pukaki and its turquoise waters were almost too beautiful to believe. With the rocky shoreline and stillness of the lake, I could picture the weary survivors of Lake-town clinging to a fragile hope after the desolation of Smaug. Beyond it all loomed Aoraki/Mount Cook, the true Lonely Mountain, half-hidden by heavy clouds that curled around its summit like smoke. In Hooker Valley, the cloudy skies and shifting mist made the mountain seem both awe-inspiring and foreboding, as though Middle-earth itself was breathing around us and we didn’t know what would be next.

Ithilien Filming Location at Twelve Mile Delta

After leaving the Lonely Mountain, we made it to Queenstown, rested the next day, and set out for more

adventures! Next up, a hike through Twelve Mile Delta, the scenes for Ithilien. Walking through Ithilien Lookout, the forest floor felt soft underfoot, was dotted with wild mushrooms, and carpeted in moss. The air was damp and earthy, like a world untouched after the last war of men! My husband and I wandered until the trees gave way to the cliffside where Sam, Frodo, and Gollum once peered out over the valley, spotting the evil, dark march of Sauron’s armies below. In the distance, I could almost hear the slow, crushing steps of an oliphaunt shaking the ground. Of course, I had to recreate the moment, lying on the ground, looking over the edge, imagining Gondor’s Rangers hidden in the brush, eyes sharp, ready to defend their land... And perhaps ready to capture us too, along with the Ring!

Arwen’s Escape at Arrowtown and Skippers Canyon

With the remnants of Lake-town and the cliffs of Ithilien behind, we headed toward the next iconic filming location in Arrowtown, where the Arrow River winds quietly through the valley. Here, the tension of Frodo and Arwen’s flight from the Ringwraiths comes alive. The horse scenes with Arwen and Frodo escaping the Black Riders in The Fellowship of the Ring were filmed nearby, in Skippers Canyon. I could almost feel the urgency of the chase as I imagined Arwen calling the waters of the Ford of Bruinen to rise and sweep the Ringwraiths away. It was easy to imagine because the waters were quite cool and swift when we visited!

Next, my husband and I rode up the Skyline Gondola in Queenstown. As we climbed Bob’s Peak, the mountain ranges came into view, like a painting of Middle-earth itself. From Deer Park Heights to the Remarkables, it was easy to picture the Fellowship traversing Rohan’s plains or following the slopes of Dimrill Dale after the mines of Moria. Even though the gondola wasn’t in the films, standing there made it feel like the story was still being told beneath our feet, planting us firmly in Tolkien’s books and Jackson’s films. It was a world we were not ready to leave the next day, but one that would surely be impossible to forget.

Farewell to Middle-earth Until We Return

At the end of our Middle-earth journey, it was time to return to South Korea. I must admit, I wanted to stay forever! We even brought home our own treasure hoard: our own precious One Ring, a leather coin pouch from Hobbiton, a postcard with Alan



▲ “Mr. Frodo! Look! It’s an oliphaunt! No one at home will believe this.” ~ Samwise Gamgee, The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers



▲ Walking through Arrowtown’s canyon, where the river echoes: ‘If you want him, come and claim him.’

Lee’s concept art, a Frodo Funko Pop, Galadriel-inspired earrings, and a playful leather dragon pouch from a thrift shop. This magical experience fills you with feelings so deep that words almost fail. Even as I write this article, the emotions are still so strong. The screen comes to life, your childhood fantasy land becomes real, tangible, and brimming with wonder. Many people never get to feel something so moving in their entire lives. This road trip still brings tears of joy to my eyes, and I am so thankful for a wonderful husband who supports not only my community endeavors but literally makes my dreams come true. He values my quarks and embraces all of my passions, even if it means he comes along in a cloak or even as Gandalf this Halloween!



▲ Treasures from Middle-earth

Whether you’re a hobbit chasing second breakfast, a ranger roaming the wilds, or a Nazgûl with endless energy, Middle-earth is waiting. Even if you aren’t a hardcore fan, the stunning landscapes, charming towns, and epic scenery of New Zealand will captivate you. Don’t let your childhood fantasy remain just a fantasy; go experience it! Are you ready for another adventure?

Top Lord of the Rings Filming Locations in New Zealand

- Wétá Workshop Unleashed in Auckland
- Wétá Cave in Wellington
- Hobbiton Movie Set
- Huka Falls
- Heli Adventure Flights
- Mount Ruapehu
- Pelorus Bridge
- Jens Hensen Jewelers
- New Zealand Hakatere Conservation Park
- Aoraki/Mount Cook
- Twelve Mile Delta
- Arrowtown
- Skyline Gondola Queenstown

Maps and Guides for Your New Zealand LOTR Adventure

- The Lord of the Rings Location Guidebook by Ian Brodie
- The classic guide, first published during the release of the trilogy, includes detailed directions, photos, and film stills.
- Updated editions include more sites and “then-and-now” photography.
- The Hobbit Motion Picture Trilogy: Location Guide

- by Ian Brodie
- Companion to the Hobbit films, covering new South Island and North Island sites.
- Great maps, directions, and behind-the-scenes notes.
- The Lord of the Rings Official Movie Guide by Brian Sibley
- Not strictly a location guide, but full of production stories, set design, and context that add depth when visiting filming spots.
- The Art of The Lord of the Rings / The Art of The Hobbit by Wétá
- Stunning artwork and concept sketches that help travelers imagine what certain landscapes became on screen.
- Walking into Mordor – Ultimate LOTR Road Trip Online Blog
- First Light Travel – LOTR Locations Guide Online Blog
- Finding the Universe – Top LOTR Filming Locations Online Blog

Military Travel Resources

Aircraft and Personnel Automated Clearance System
<https://apacs.milcloud.mil/>

Theater Travel Requirements, Travel Tracker/Individual Antiterrorism Plan (TT/IATP)
<https://www.pacom.mil/Resources/Travel-Requirements/>

US Department of State Travel Advisory
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages.html>

About the Author

Jetta Allen is the Editor in Chief of *United on the RoK* Magazine and the 2025 Armed Forces Insurance Military Spouse of the Year for USAG Humphreys. A proud Army spouse and storyteller, she channels her love of travel, adventure, and family into writing, photography, and community-building projects that celebrate military life. From exploring Tolkien’s Middle-earth to discovering Korea’s hidden gems, Jetta believes in making memories, embracing new experiences, and connecting with others wherever life takes her and her family.

**This article contains references to J.R.R. Tolkien’s works, as well as limited use of film stills, imagery, and materials related to The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit trilogies, including content associated with Wétá Workshop. These are included under the principles of fair use for nonprofit, educational, and commentary purposes. All rights remain with the original creators and copyright holders.*



A Crafter's Paradise

My Annual Journey to Handarty Korea

By Ara Ko Lopez

In 2012, when Seoul was my home and my weekends were a blend of city wanderings and little adventures, I first stepped into Handarty Korea. I remember it vividly: walking into a hall alive with color, the air rich with the scent of fresh wood shavings, dried flowers, leather, and crisp new paper. Every turn revealed something new, delicate ceramics painted by steady hands, textiles so soft they seemed to hum with warmth, and jewelry that caught the light just so, stopping me in my tracks.

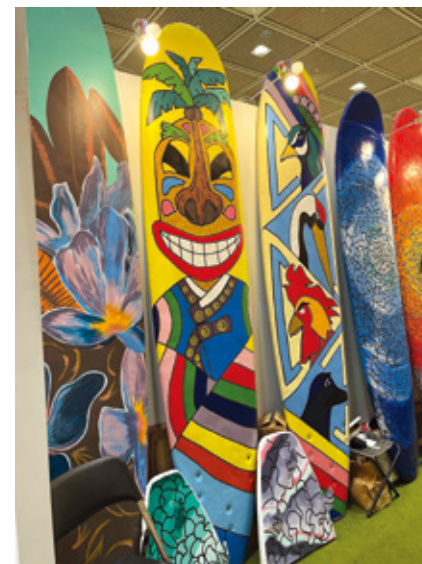
This wasn't just an exhibition; it was a living, breathing celebration of creativity.

For a few years, I went whenever I could, each visit leaving me inspired and my bags noticeably heavier. Then life carried me across the ocean to Texas, and my annual pilgrimage was put on hold.

When we returned to Camp Humphreys in November 2021, I couldn't wait to see if Handarty Korea still held the same magic. The following summer, I walked those familiar aisles again, and there it was, that same rush of discovery, the joy of shaking an artisan's hand, of hearing the story behind a handmade treasure before tucking it carefully into my tote. That day, I knew this wasn't just a one-off visit; it was the start of a new tradition.

Since then, every summer has brought the same hum of anticipation. In 2022, I attended with my husband, sharing the wonder with him for the first time. In 2023, I explored the booths with my friend Becca, our laughter echoing through the aisles. In 2024, I went with two of my craft friends, Diamond and Natasha, each of us drawn to treasures that spoke to our own creative hearts. And this year, 2025, I wandered Handarty with Diamond again, joined by Nicole and Sam, our bags steadily filling as the day went on. This year, we even booked a hotel nearby so we could take our time instead of rushing back home.

This year's visit was bittersweet; it will be my last Handarty for now, as we'll be PCSing back stateside at



the end of the year. As I strolled the exhibition halls, I let myself linger at each booth, chatted with artisans, and soaked in the atmosphere. I wasn't just shopping; I was saying goodbye to a place that has been woven into my Korea story. For anyone who loves the magic of handmade goods, Handarty Korea is more than just an event; it's a creative pilgrimage. And for me, it will forever be one of my most treasured chapters here.

What is Handarty Korea?

Held each summer for four days, Thursday to Sunday, at the COEX Convention Center in Seoul, Handarty Korea is one of the largest handmade craft exhibitions in the country. Open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., it draws artisans, hobbyists, and craft lovers from across Korea and neighboring Asian countries.

The event began in 2011 as the HANDMADE Korea

Fair before rebranding to Handarty in 2017. Rows upon rows of stalls showcase everything from fine ceramics and hand-forged jewelry to crochet creations, watercolor art, leather goods, and DIY kits for those eager to make their own. In recent years, quilt exhibitions have been added, and the stage hosts concerts, fashion shows, and other live entertainment.

Next year's Handarty Korea is scheduled for August 13–16, 2026. Early registration through their website (www.handarty.co.kr) can sometimes get you free tickets or an early-bird discount, but even regular admission is quite affordable at 12,000 won.

More Than Just Shopping

Handarty Korea is an experience. It's a place to connect with like-minded people, try your hand at new skills in on-site workshops, and support small business-



es and independent artisans. There's something special about knowing the item you're holding was crafted by the very person standing across from you.

Tips for First-Time Visitors

- Go early — the first 100 visitors sometimes receive small gifts.
- Bring both cash and card — most vendors accept cards, but some smaller booths are cash-only. Note: the entrance fee for foreigners is cash-only unless you have a Korean debit/credit card.
- Take breaks — the sheer variety can be overwhelming (in the best way). I recommend walking the entire floor first to see all the vendors, then circling back to purchase.
- Follow their IG — Check the workshop schedule in advance if you want to join a hands-on session.
- Bring a small rolling cart — it's much easier than carrying a tote bag full of treasures all day.
- Parking — COEX has parking available. Scan the QR code at the convention hall to register your car; a full day costs 30,000 won.
- Explore COEX mall — the mall itself has plenty to see, shop, and eat, making it a fun complement to your visit to Handarty. Just make sure you don't get lost because it is a maze down there.

Whether you're a maker yourself or simply someone who appreciates the art of the handmade, Handarty Korea is a must-visit. Just be warned, one visit might turn into an annual tradition. It certainly did for me.

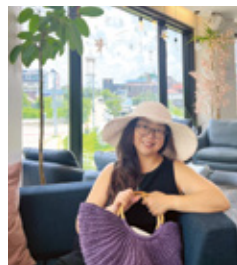
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Check out their website at: <https://handarty.co.kr/eng/>



About the Author

Ara Ko Lopez was born in Korea but raised overseas from a young age, an experience that has shaped her perspective and made her the person she is today. A proud military spouse, she has spent over 20 years as an English teacher, translator, and interpreter, and has also explored voice-over work and librarianship. Ara is the founder and owner of Crafty Ara, a cozy home-based business where she shares her love of crochet, knitting, and sewing. At the heart of her work is a simple purpose: to bring warmth, comfort, and connection to others through handmade pieces and shared stories. For Ara, crafting isn't just about creating beautiful things; it's about weaving joy into everyday life, cherishing the small moments, and sharing them with loved ones, including her two rescued kittens, Stitch and Parker, who came into her life at just two weeks old and now fill her days with playful energy. When she's not creating, Ara enjoys cooking, capturing life through photography, reading, and traveling.

You can follow her creative and travel journeys on Instagram at [@CraftyAra](https://www.instagram.com/CraftyAra), [@cupio](https://www.instagram.com/cupio), and [@feedingFOMO](https://www.instagram.com/feedingFOMO).



Creating Children's Books About South Korea and the World

By Kelly Burke-Betten
Illustrations by Matthew Ayala

Writing children's books is a hobby of mine, inspired by the people and places I've encountered throughout my life. Before meeting and marrying my military spouse, I spent over a decade as a global health professional and world traveler, living and working in four different African countries for a total of eight years. That time abroad, particularly my experience in Rwanda, led to my very first children's book, *The ABC's of Rwanda*. Now, while living in South Korea, I've recently published my fourth book: *Fun in South Korea! With your friend, Kimchi*.

Why I Create Children's Books About South Korea for Military and Expat Families

Although I love being in different cultures, I know that for others it can be daunting. This book, *Fun in South Korea! With your friend, Kimchi*, was written with this in mind and had two aims; to share the fun things that are available for kids to see and do in South Korea, and to help others who may be apprehensive about moving to South Korea to understand that it really is a great place to be (and a place that I personally consider to be a 'kids' paradise'). South Korea is a new experience for many, and it is a great place to experience so many different things. From the foods, to the history, to the outdoors, temples, parks, beaches, mountains, and kids cafes...this book just scratches the surface!

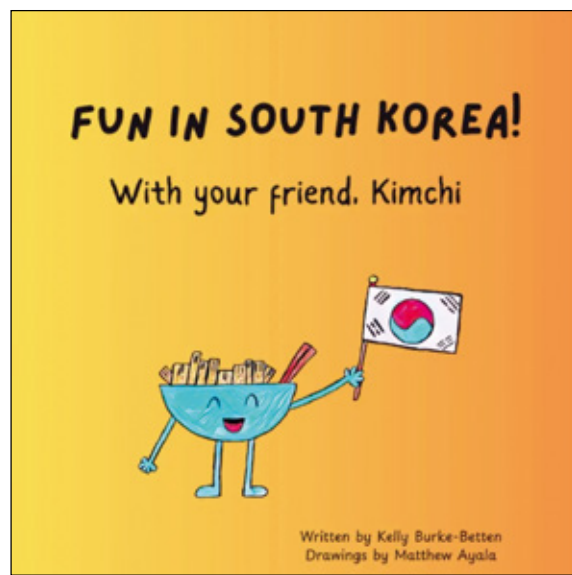
Publishing Fun in South Korea! With Your Friend, Kimchi

Not only is this children's book special because it was inspired by living in South Korea, it is also the first time I have collaborated with a child illustrator. It was amazing! With each children's book that I en-



vision, I work with different illustrators. For this book, I chose to work with a military child, Matthew Ayala, who was a 2nd grader at the time of illustrating. Matthew lives on Osan Air Base, where I also live. He is a member of Osan Elementary School's Drawing Club and draws with colored pencils.

We worked together to come up with ideas for the character Kimchi and each illustration. Matthew really brought the ideas to life with his personal touch! It is so nice to see South Korea through Matthew's eyes. Matthew's favorite part of illustrating the book was designing Kimchi. His favorite illustration is the beach drawing because it has sea creatures and a tide pool, which are some of his favorite things in South Korea.



Self-Publishing Children's Books With Purpose and Passion

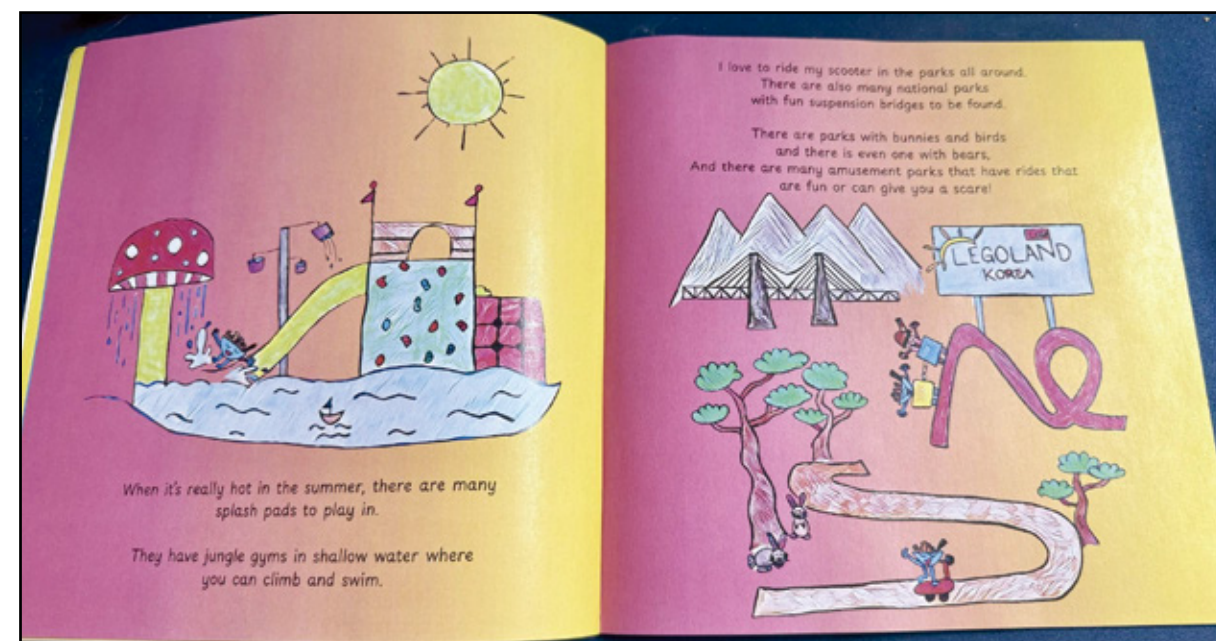
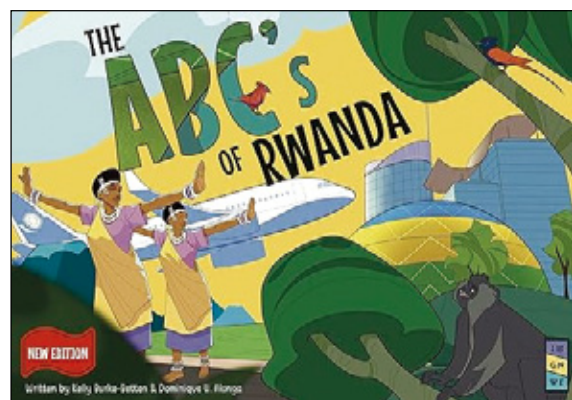
This book is published by Amazon, Kindle Direct Publishing, and is printed on demand when it is ordered. It can even be ordered through Amazon in the UK or Germany. Proceeds from the book are donated to local organizations. Donating the proceeds is very near and dear to my heart. Because creating stories for children is something I love, I use my books as a way to give back to the community. For this reason, I feel the need to use the books as a way to give back to others. Matthew and I are still working out where the donations will go as we decide who needs them the most in our local area and community.

From Rwanda to Korea: Global Inspiration for Meaningful Stories

Each children's book that I publish is unique and special in its own way. My first book, *The ABC's of Rwanda*, was inspired by the three years I spent working and teaching nursing in Rwanda. Rwanda is a beautiful country that many Rwandan children do not get to experience due to hardships. I wanted to share all of the amazing things Rwanda is known for in a book that also had children who looked like them. Often, developing countries receive book donations, but not all of them are relatable to the kids who receive them. They don't see themselves reflected within the texts, making it difficult to relate to, but this book was written exactly for them.

My second book, *Teatime for Toni...Around the World* was inspired by a young neighbor of mine in Columbus, Georgia, who loved sweet tea. The character, Toni, goes on a dreamtime adventure around the world, trying different kinds of tea. Tea was used as a common theme to show that, although they were all different teas that she drank, they were all 'yummy'. The lesson... Different is not bad. This is also a very useful lesson for anybody living overseas.

My third children's book, *On the Move*, is about the process of moving, focusing on the good. Moving doesn't have to be a bad or sad thing because new experiences always await. This is especially relevant to military children who often face move after move. Having a positive association with the move can make a positive impact on military families.



Books in the hands of children bring smiles to us all.

Get in Touch and Support Diverse Children's Books About South Korea and the World

The ABC's of Rwanda, On the Move, and Fun in South Korea! With your friend, Kimchi are all available on Amazon. *Teatime for Toni...Around the World* is already printed and available by contacting the author directly.

If you're interested in writing a children's book or would like to learn more about the books mentioned in this article, feel free to email Kelly at kellymburke11@gmail.com.



About the Author

Kelly Burke-Betten is a global health nurse and nurse educator by profession and a children's book author and world traveler by hobby. She loves to collaborate with others on children's books and her mission is to make children smile. Kelly appreciates the support of her Army husband and has one energetic son. They currently live on Osan AB.

Discover how author Kelly Burke creates children's books about South Korea and beyond, inspired by her life as a global health worker and military spouse. Featuring a young military illustrator and stories that give back.



M4A3E8 Sherman Tank leading a group of US Infantry in Pyongyang, Korea, October 1950. (Photo Credit: LIFE Magazine Archives - Hank Walker Photographer)

The Push North to the Yalu, 75th Anniversary Series

By Cord Scott, UMGC Okinawa

The month of October 1950 on the Korean peninsula was one of movement. A lot of movement. Following the landing at Incheon and the breakout of the Eighth Army from the Pusan perimeter, UN forces had driven the North Koreans back past the 38th parallel. By October 15th, Pyongyang fell to UN forces, and the US Marines were pulled out of the Incheon/Seoul area, given a brief time to rest and re-fit, then were used to land on the east coast of North Korea at Wonsan. The two main UN moves (the one in the west, which used Americans and ROK forces to seize Pyongyang) and the East, where the ROK Divisions, the US Marines, and the US Army 3rd and 7th Divisions met so little resistance that by the time the Marines landed, they were greeted by allied forces.

In the western part of the peninsula, the US, ROK, and allied forces pushed forward. The North Korean government was now forced to retreat to a location in the hills nearer the Yalu River. The US conducted an airborne drop as well, but as with the landings, this proved to be unnec-



▲ U.S. soldiers drive past a propaganda-covered building in Pyongyang, October 1950. (Photo Credit: The LIFE Picture Collection / Getty Images, 50873408)
 ▲ In October 1950, the 1st Marine Division of the United States Marine Corps executed an amphibious landing at Wonsan, North Korea, as part of the UN advance into the peninsula. (Photo Credit: USMC History Division, Archives Branch - Sgt. Frank C. Kerr, USMC Photographer)

essary as the site was already in Allied hands. In the East, the units included the US 1st Cavalry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, the 24th Infantry Division, and the ROK Capital Division, among others. There were issues with the advance as well, however.

One problem worked around the discussion of retribution of any communists and communist sympathizers. After discovering several sites where atrocities had taken place, with hundreds of civilians being executed in some cases, the Rhee government ordered retribution. This slowed down any advance, as well as making any sort of information gathering and support difficult for the local population.

The military successes led many to believe that the war would be over by Christmas and that the peninsula would be democratic in form. However, the first indications of greater problems started to emerge at this time as well. Some US units were within sight of the Yalu River, which was the border between North Korea and China. The Chinese had noted that if they made an attempt to cross or otherwise interfere with Chinese politics, they would intervene on behalf of North Korea.

There were also the first contacts between Russian "military advisors" who met in the air over North Korea. By the middle of October, the first Chinese People's Volunteers started crossing the Yalu and

engaging with UN forces. Much of this was not as well known, as this was in an era where no satellite images were available, and many of the aircraft doing surveillance did not see the Chinese, as they moved at night.

Further to the south, material for the war effort continued to enter Korea through the port at Busan. The UN forces now had a variety of units in the area. This included not only the British (fighting as ground units from Pusan up, not to mention on sea and in the air), and the Australians in the air with ground units en route. By later in the month, the Turks also started to land in Pusan. The idea was that with the war quickly moving north, the fighting would be over by Christmas. This, however, was not to be.



About the Author

Cord A. Scott has a Doctorate in American History from Loyola University Chicago and currently serves as a Professor of History for the University of Maryland Global Campus for Asia. He is the author of *Comics and Conflict, Four Colour Combat* (on Canadian war stories in WWII comic books), *The Mud and the Mirth: Marine Corps Comics of WWI*, and the forthcoming *They Were Chosin: Marine Cartoonists of the Korean War*. He has written for several encyclopedias, academic journals such as *The International Journal of Comic Art*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, and several books on aspects of cultural history. He has lived all over the Pacific and currently resides in Okinawa, Japan.

USO Culinary Kids Presents: *Tastes of Fall!*

By USO Sentry Village, Camp Humphreys



Mini Apple Crisp Recipe

Ingredients

- 4 medium apples (peeled, cored, and finely chopped)
- 1 ½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 3 Tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
(option, to keep apples from browning)
- 1 cup old-fashioned oats
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup melted butter

Directions

1. Preheat Oven. Set oven to 375°F (190 °C). Line a muffin tin with liners or lightly grease with cooking spray.
2. Prepare Apple Filling. In a bowl, combine the chopped apples, 1 ½ teaspoons cinnamon, 3 tablespoons brown sugar, and lemon juice (if using). Set aside.
3. Make the Crisp Topping. In a separate bowl, mix the oats, flour, ½ cup brown sugar, and melted butter until crumbly.
4. Assemble Mini Crisps. Spoon a layer of apple filling into each muffing cup. Sprinkle a generous layer of the oat topping over the apples.
5. Bake. Bake for 15-18 minutes or until the topping is golden brown and the apples are soft.
6. Cool & Enjoy. Let cool slightly before removing from the tin. Serve warm or at room temperature.



Apple Pie Roll-Up Recipe

Ingredients

- 2 cans of refrigerated crescent rolls (8-count each)
- 3 medium apples (peeled, cored, and finely chopped)
- 3 Tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 Tablespoons melted butter

Directions

1. Preheat Oven. Set oven to 350°F (175 °C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper for easy cleanup.
2. Prepare the Filling. In a medium bowl, mix the chopped apples, brown sugar, and cinnamon until coated.
3. Assemble Roll-Ups. Unroll the crescent dough and separate into individual triangles. Spoon a small amount of the apple mixture onto the widest end of each triangle. Carefully roll up each crescent, starting at the wide end, tucking the filling inside.
4. Brush with Butter. Lightly brush the tops of the roll-ups with melted butter for a golden finish.
5. Bake. Place on the prepared baking sheet and bake for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown and flaky.
6. Cool & Enjoy. Allow to cool slightly before serving - the filling will be hot!



Looking toward North Korea from the Dora Observatory at the DMZ. A reminder of the United Nations' enduring mission for peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Captured by Cristine Smith.



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