

POLITICALTOURS

Travel beyond the headlines

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South Korea: Peace on the Peninsula?

Dates:

April 2019, Saturday 20th to Sunday 28th

Seoul, Busan & The DMZ

Led by Dan Damon

We return to the Korean peninsula to examine one of the world's major flashpoints from the other side of the border.

South Korea has undergone enormous political, economic and social change since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Once far poorer than the north, it is now one of the most advanced economies in the world.

Our trip includes a visit to the Demilitarised Zone that divides the two countries. No peace treaty was ever signed after the conflict and technically the two sides are still at war. We also travel south to Busan and Gwangju to see life outside of the capital.

We meet senior intelligence and defense officials for their view on the threat from Kim Jong-un's new leadership and meet defectors from the DPRK now living in Seoul. The country's relationship with China and the United States come under close scrutiny too.

With two unpredictable leaders at the helm in Pyongyang and Washington DC, the region is one of the most important foreign policy questions in the world.

The tour is led by **Dan Damon**, a founder of BBC World Service Radio's Korean language channel and a BBC radio presenter. He has reported on Korea for over 30 years and is writing a PhD on South Korea's relations with the north.

Price: £4400.00

Single supplement: £500.00

Like all our tours the itinerary is focused on current affairs. Events on the ground may change and the final schedule may be adjusted accordingly.

Itinerary – 8 nights

Day One: 20 April – Seoul

Arrival in Seoul and introduction to the week ahead and a briefing on the peace negotiations between north and south. Overnight in Seoul

Day Two: 21 April – Seoul

The first morning we briefly visit downtown Seoul for an introduction to modern Korea; the capital reflects this country's extraordinary growth and change since the 1970s, from dictatorship to democracy, and from relative poverty – the Republic was in fact poorer than the north until the early 70s - to one of the most advanced economies in Asia. Later we visit the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a reminder that the peninsula is also one of the most volatile regions in the world. No peace-treaty was signed, UN troops continue to monitor the border to this day and the threat of a renewed conflict is frequent and real. A North Korean defector describes his own escape. *Overnight in Seoul*

Day Three: 22 April - Busan

We take the bullet train south to Busan (formerly known as Pusan) – a distance of just under 350 kilometers in just 2 hours 36 minutes. It was here that allied troops were pushed back and almost expelled from the peninsula. We soon leave the hustle and bustle of the city behind with a trip to a more remote rural area – rice paddies and villages are a reminder that Korea was largely rural and poor. At lunch we meet local families and a mayor – it's an opportunity to see how much life has changed for South Korea over the past 65 years. Are there lessons here for the north? We return to Busan and its waterfront for dinner. *Overnight in Busan*

Day Four: 23 April – Busan

Busan lies at the heart of Korea's rapid transformation; devastated by the war, overpopulated and without obvious natural resources it seemed far from likely that the country would emerge as an economic giant. We trace how that came about; from shipbuilding – Busan is Korea's largest port - to electronics and a remarkable education system. Visits include a state-of the art production line and a meeting with students from Busan University. Korea's education system is the envy of many. We also hear about the *Chaebol*, the wealthy families who continue to dominate Korean companies and politics. There's also time off to explore the city shorefront cafes and beaches. Overnight in Busan.

Day Five: 24 April - Gwangju

On our way back to Seoul we stop at Gwangju. It was here that Korean troops fired on pro-democracy students and workers in 1980, killing more than 150. It was a painful and still disputed step on the path to democracy in 1987. Gwangju is the birthplace of Kim Dae-jung, sentenced to death under the dictatorship, pardoned after intervention by the Pope, who went on to become president. The city is still very left-wing and anti-American, an important part of South Korea's story. It has a remarkable Asian Arts Centre. We meet a former ROK army colonel and now academic who believes the peace-talks with the north are the wrong approach and like many conservatives wants more pressure to be applied. We return to Seoul for dinner.

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Days Six, Seven & Eight: 25, 26, 27 April - Seoul

Our last three days are spent in the capital where we look at relations with the north in greater depth as well as local politics. An opportunity to learn from the very best analysts as well as meet leading political figures:

We get a briefing on President Moon-Jae-in's drive for peace with the north. Korea has long had plans for reunification – with a dedicated ministry – what do these involve. We get briefings from intelligence officials and think tanks on the latest situation in the DPRK. The United States has increased sanctions on the North, what impact are they having, and what do they think Kim Jong-un wants? We meet defectors from the north to hear their experiences – and meet with an NGO that supports their integration into Korean society. For most it's an uneasy task and they face considerable discrimination.

We also learn about the presidency of Moon-Jae-in – a former human rights lawyer – and his drive for better relations with the north. Corruptions scandals – two previous Presidents have recently been jailed for accepting bribes – have left the opposition weak and President Moon seems to have considerable success in courting the North and President Trump.

But Koreans – two generations now have no memory of a united Korea – have no interest in reunification and see it as too costly. We look at the possible outcome of a peace-deal with the north. What really is possible? *Overnights in Seoul.*

Day Nine: 28 April – Seoul

Tour Ends on Day Nine after breakfast

As on all our expert-led tours the groups are deliberately small and will not exceed 14 people. Most meals and all accommodation are included in the price. Flights are not included in the price and need to be arranged by customers or with an agent.

International Passenger Protection Insurance (IPP)

All our travel arrangements are covered by the UK's package tour regulations and are financially guaranteed. We are a land-only tour operator and flights are not included.