

● Essay

※ You may also include video/audio content, webtoons, sketches or other creative works in addition to the written essay. The length of all videos or audio content must be less than two minutes and if there is a narration please include the script.

Discovering Korea: A Trip to My Daughter's Dream

I'm Edna Rico, a 53-year old mother of 2 and a government employee for 27 years. Last year, my daughter went to Korea to study Masters in **Kangwon National University**. It has always been her dream to study there, and more importantly; her ultimate goal is to be fluent in Korean language. I feel really blessed that even though I cannot support her studies in Korea, she was chosen as one of the scholars by GKS (Global Korea Scholarship). Now, it has been almost a year since she left to pursue her dreams. As her mother, I feel proud yet also worried about her all the time. I'm proud of my daughter because not everyone knows what they really want in life; not everyone works hard to attain it, and not everyone who works hard to attain his dream is determined enough to grab the perfect opportunity when it comes. I'm proud of her for being all not everyone can be. But no one can take away the anxiety I feel being away from my only girl. Although she always tells me that Korea is such a safe and beautiful place, I can't help worrying about how she spends her time in a country which I know nothing about. If not for her, I never would have become interested in South Korea. But it is like her second home now. And I guess it's time I get to know it too.

Actually, it's not the first time that she left for Korea. 4 years ago, she'd been there to study Basic Korean for 4 months. She was able to go there through the generous sponsorship of KOICA. Back then, I was not really curious why she loves Korea and Korean language so much. I was just happy with the thought that she got a rare opportunity to study abroad and discover the world from a different place, with a new set of people. I can still remember her stories after coming back from Korea – her trips to the palaces of Seoul; her amazement when she first experienced autumn and was surrounded by red and orange trees; her first time to do calligraphy and try pottery; her breathtaking rides in **Everland**; and her memorable day at **Nami Island** with the Korean professor she regards as her second mom. That time, the thought of going to Korea did not occur to me. However, seeing my daughter apply for a 3-year scholarship there changed my mind. Three years isn't a short time, and I don't understand why my daughter chose to stay and study there without thinking twice, as if she's going back to a place similar to her home. What is in that country that captures many people's hearts? What is in there that inspires my daughter so much?

She's been telling me to go and visit Korea, so that I'll understand how it feels being there. She keeps on promoting Korea as if it's a must-see place on earth. Strangely, I also started to feel like

I want to go there too. At first, I thought that it's only because I missed my daughter so much and I just wanted to see her. You know how parents are; they can go anywhere as long as they can be with their children. But then I realized that it's not just about meeting her there. The feeling of wanting to see Korea actually came from my own desire to understand her more. Maybe she's asking me to go there not only because she wants to spend time with me too. She wanted me to see her other world, no not her 'other' world but a 'part' of her world – a part of her being I still haven't met. She wanted me to see the things she see and experience for myself the things she could only tell me.

However, I'm well aware that it's not easy to go there just because I want to. If only I was able to save money for travelling, I would not have had any problems going to Korea. But I don't regret a bit. Even though I wasn't able to spend the money I earned for my own pleasure, all those money were well spent – for the education and comfort of my children. I believe I raised them well, and their love for me gives me strength to continue working hard. In order to support my two children, I work as a nurse and as a teacher too, not to mention many other sidelines that have helped us get through financial problems. This is why when I think about how I have been living my life, I believe I deserve a break; even just a week of relaxation in a beautiful place would be more than enough. Now that I think about it, knowing more about my daughter through going to that place she likes so much is such a sweet thought

I thought that whenever someone wants something, he only has to wait for the perfect timing. One has to wait for signs and 'act' positively when an opportunity arrives. That's why when my daughter sent me the link to this essay contest, I did not think twice and started to write this piece. I know what I want now. I'm not getting any younger, so aside from working hard to pay our house and continue to support my beloved family; I know it's time to indulge myself too. It's good while I can still walk fast and use my teeth to chew delicious food. Who knows, a few years from now I might be too weak to enjoy the beauty the world can offer me. So it doesn't matter if I travel alone as long as I can have time with 'myself'.

My daughter wanted to take me to Korea too. She told me to get a passport and I did. She told me to save a certain amount of money and that she'll try to save money too so she can tour me to her favorite places there. But no matter how we try to save money, my monthly salary isn't enough to pay even our house bill. I know she wants me to enjoy life and travel, to be away even just for a short time, from this busy and problematic world I'm stuck in. But I don't want to burden her by asking her to pay for my travel abroad. Now that saving money can't be an option, I'm writing this essay for Korea to invite me in her land – in the Land of the Morning Calm, where my daughter's dream is. I'm sure Korea doesn't give opportunities only to young people like my daughter, but also to the not-so-young ones like me.

If I'd be given a chance to go to Korea and I'd be asked to make a 3-day itinerary of the places I want to visit, I would like to go to the places my daughter has already visited. I shall arrive to Korea at 8 or 9pm so I can have time to sleep and re-energize for the following day's trip. My daughter always boasts about **Incheon International Airport**; its elegant structures and convenient facilities, so it's great that I would be able to see for myself the world's best airport.

On the first day, I shall wake up at 7am and eat **Bokkeumbap** (fried rice) for breakfast. I'm curious how Korean fried rice is different from the one most Filipinos cook at home. My daughter told me it's not spicy so it's the best breakfast meal to energize me throughout the day. I admit I cannot eat spicy food well. My first day would be in **Seoul** so I want to visit the great palaces in the morning: **Changdeokgung, Gyeongbokgung, and Deoksugung**. It would also be great if I could try wearing **Hanbok** and be able to take a picture wearing it in front of one of these palaces. I'd like to eat lunch at a nearby Korean restaurant and taste Korea's famous side dishes. **Bibimbap** would be nice, as long as not too many **gochujang** are put in it. But aside from spicy food, I heard Korea offers a lot more different kind of dishes so I need not to worry about what to eat. After eating lunch, going to the famous **Seoul Tower** is one of my goals. I saw its picture through my daughter's Facebook account so I want to go there too. I shall not miss one of Seoul's most famous tourist spots, that is Seoul Tower. I also heard there's a **Hanok Village** near Seoul Tower so it's great if I could get a glimpse of it too. At around 3pm, I would love to visit the **National Museum of Korea** and then walk around the streets of **Myeongdong**. My daughter said there are lots of clothing stores as well as street food there. I'm more interested in trying Korea's street food so I want to go there. After a whole day of walking, a night cruise in **Han River** is the best way to rest and relax while eating a light dinner. I'm very interested in seeing the night view of Seoul while listening to good music. Since I'm not as energetic as a 20-year old lady, I think getting home by 10pm is okay. I should save my energy for my 2nd day tour.

On the 2nd day of my stay, I want to experience Korean culture by trying **Calligraphy** and watching cultural performances. Watching a **Samulnori** performance tops my list. After watching the said performance, it would also be great if I'd be given a chance to learn how to play **Janggu** (from Samulnori) because my daughter has also tried playing it. She said she felt really good while playing Janggu and that she's confident I would like it too. I'm interested in music so it excites me to learn how to play one of Korea's traditional instruments. She also likes **Nanta** very much so I want to know why she said I must watch it if I ever I'd go to Korea. Learning to prepare a Korean dish would also be good. My daughter once tried to make her own version of **Haemul Pajeon** but it did not taste good. She said she will try making one again sometime. I wanted to learn how to make it too so I can make it for our family when I go back to the Philippines. In the afternoon, I would like to go to **Lotte World** because I heard the Korean drama 'Stairway to Heaven,' as well as many other Korean dramas was filmed there. When my daughter went there for a school field trip, she arrived late so the bus left her and so she went to Lotte World by

herself. Feeling so guilty of being late, she did not dare riding even one of the rides there. This time, I want to try riding even just 3 rides, look around Lotte World and take lots of pictures. I know it sounds weird for a 52-year old woman to want to go to an amusement park, but it's not just the rides that I want to see but the performances as well as the splendid sights inside the said theme park. After spending around 3 hours in Lotte World, I want to go visit **Namdaemun** and **Insadong** to buy souvenirs and eat dinner.

Visiting **Chuncheon** is a must if ever I'd be given a chance to go to Korea. My daughter studies there so I want to see the place that is close to her heart. She always says Chuncheon is very clean and quiet and that she likes studying there. She said she likes it more than Seoul because of its atmosphere and great sceneries. And so on the 3rd day, I shall wake up at 7am and eat **kimbap** for breakfast. My daughter said it takes around 1 ½ hours from Seoul to Chuncheon. If possible, I want to try riding the **ITX** to Chuncheon and take a bus to her university (Kangwon National University). After looking around her university, I want to try her favorite **Kalmaegisal** which can be bought at the back gate of her school. She knows I cannot eat spicy food that well so if I don't want to eat **Dakgalbi**, she suggested trying kalmaegisal. After eating lunch at the back gate of KNU, I shall ride a bus to **Chuncheon Myeongdong** and walk around that area. She said it's one of the filming locations of the drama 'Winter Sonata' so I want to go there too. I will also go to Myeongdong's Underground Shopping Mall to buy my own pants. After spending around 1 ½ hour in Myeongdong, I shall go to **Gongjicheon** and take a lot of pictures at my daughter's favorite spot – at the **Gold Scales Theme Street**. If it's not too cold, I also want to try riding the '**duck boat**' and then eat Chuncheon's famous **Makguksu** at a nearby restaurant. My daughter said she likes makguksu and that it's not spicy so I have to try it. If I remember it right, the name of the restaurant she likes is '**Gongjicheon Dakgalbi**'. At around 4:30pm, I shall go to **Animation Museum** and then eat dinner at **Santorini Gubongsan**. My daughter has been there just a few days ago and she said it's also a good place to visit for you can see the beautiful night scenery of Chuncheon.

I have so many other places that I want to visit but since we were asked to do only a 3-day itinerary, I shall stop writing here. Aside from the places I mentioned above, I shall not miss going to **Nami Island** and **Jeju Island** if ever I'd go to Korea. It's because those are two of the places my daughter really likes.

Writing this essay really made me want to go to Korea even more. They say if you don't write your feelings, you might not be able to understand yourself that well. Now that I think about it and after re-reading this piece, I realized I've long been wanting to go to Korea but that 'desire' was just suppressed by the reality of living here in our country, of my demanding role as a mother and as an employee that I did not dare pursue going there. I just keep on telling my daughter I will go to Korea too someday. I don't want to waste any opportunity that comes, and

so I'm joining this contest to make this new dream come true. I've always been thankful to Korea because it has never failed to help my daughter reach her dreams, not just once, not even twice, but thrice. That's why I can understand my daughter's never-ending passion to study Korean language and her unwavering admiration for Korea and Korean people. Now is her mother's turn to work in pursuit of my new goal -- that is to meet the land of her dreams.

I know many other people also dream of going to Korea. There are millions of K-Pop and Korean drama fans all over the world, and their only reason for going there might just be to see their idols, and/or visit a famous filming site. They start to like Korea because of someone from Korea, which is quite different from my case. I started to have interest in Korea because of my daughter's unwavering passion for it. So to me, it's not just about taking pictures of those famous filming locations and meeting famous Korean stars. It's 'meeting' the land where my daughter's dreams came true. It's seeing for myself what my daughter always talks about; feeling what she felt when she first arrived there; and being able to understand her thoughts through discovering a part of her being I still haven't met yet, that is Korea. It's discovering Korea as it is, without the glitters of Kpop and/or Korean drama. It's experiencing its culture and tasting its food, it's seeing its nature and breathing its air; and it's meeting its 'people' and not just focusing on the famous ones. Of course, I don't deny the fact that it's like hitting two birds in one stone. If ever I'd go to Korea, not only can I meet my daughter's dream but I can also get a whole week of relaxation, a time of discovering a world different from where I live, and a time to just enjoy and be with 'myself'.

Although it's much better to travel Korea with her (my daughter) as my guide, tracing the places she had been would be an equally wonderful and gratifying experience. I can't wait to see Korea's warmth welcoming me, like what it did to my daughter 4 years ago. 😊