

● 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.

DISCOVER KOREA: ITS HISTORY AND CULTURE

KOREA = The Hermit Kingdom? Not anymore. The country, which was called "Hermit Kingdom" during Joseon Dynasty, has long scratched this namesake off their image. Sure, the world has yet to discover the beauty of this little country in the east, and a lot of people around the world – including me – are getting curious about this country where tradition/culture meets modernization. In the past, Korea closed up itself from the world as a result of trauma from neighboring countries like Japan and China – thus earning the name "Hermit Kingdom" – but this is no longer the case. Korea has now opened up its doors to the world, and the world's growing curiosity is prevalent nowadays with the sudden boom of Hallyu and KPOP.

Korea has a very rich, and not to mention intriguing, history which has been the very foundation of Korean tradition and culture. Joseon Korea's history is currently represented to the world by the 5 Grand palaces of Korea. Personally, I am someone who is usually fascinated about other country's Royals and dynasties, especially with East Asian Royal families and dynasties. Visiting any one of these Grand Palaces will let me somehow get a feel of how it was during Joseon dynasty where Korean Royals still exists, and there was only one unified Korea. It's really regretful that these palaces have only been restored to less than 50% of their original state – with Gyeongbok Palace (경복궁) having most of the restoration done of 40% from its original state. But then, it's better than not having it restored at all. I also have a feeling that visiting these palaces will make me somehow have a deeper understanding of Korean culture as well as about what Korea is right now.

Moving on to a more recent – but equally as important – part of Korea's history, is the sad and unfortunate fact that although there is only one Korean Peninsula, it is currently divided into two. North and South Korea (known formally as Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea respectively) is currently separated in half by Korea's Demilitarized Zone, or DMZ for short. Korean DMZ stretches across the peninsula and is 250 km long –approximately 4 km wide – and is the most tensed and heavily militarized border zone in the world. Though there is this tension about DMZ's existence, on a lighter side, the zone actually boasts of its wildlife reserve, which is a result of the border being off-limits from the general public and human habitation. The isolation of the border from human habitation led to the border to unexpectedly develop its nature reserve. This wildlife reserve of course is what deserves a visit from tourists around the world.

Personally, I would really like to see the two Koreas united as one again, but somehow there is this hesitation within me because this will also mean that the DMZ will be demolished and the wildlife reserve that it currently houses will be disturbed and risked getting damaged or destroyed. This is the reason why I have also wanted to be able to visit the DMZ, if given the chance to visit Korea someday, and witness it in person.

To be able to get a feel of Korea's modern culture, I would really like to visit modern tourist spots like Hongdae District, as well as the Namsan Tower. Hongdae houses the busiest shopping stops, and is known as the fashion district in Seoul. From there I would be able to witness Korea's youth culture, as well as try go clubbing and experience Seoul's exciting night life.

Namsan Tower, also known as the N Seoul Tower and CJ Seoul Tower, is also a favorite modern tourist spot in Seoul. Aside from the popular tradition of hanging padlocks by lovers as a famous activity in the tower, I would also like to try the cable car ride up the tower and the revolving restaurant. Also, being able to view the entirety of Seoul would be an exhilarating experience, and viewing its skyline during night time would capture the scenery that would captivate anyone who experiences it, even set a romantic ambiance for couples. Besides, a view of any city's skyline is always best when done during night time, with all the colorful building lights, car headlights, and street lights up and twinkling along with the stars. A best romantic view for any couples out there would be the best way to describe it, as I have mentioned previously.

To be able to appreciate Korea's nature, and more of its culture and tradition, Jeju Island, more locally known as Jeju-do (제주도), would be one of the best destinations to visit. Personally I think visiting the island during spring time would be the best time to travel there when most trees and flowers are in full bloom. Also, because of the isolation and separation of the island from the rest of Korea, the people here developed a culture of their own, which has its difference from the culture in the mainland Korea. One such example is their matriarchal family structure against mainland's patriarchal structure. In Jeju-do, women are the breadwinners of their family, where they own their living from free-diving without any gears. Also, Jeju-do is home to a number of urban legends. Witnessing and comparing the differences between mainland's culture vs. Jeju-do's culture even though they are in the same country will prove to be interesting in my opinion.

Despite the tranquil nature of Jeju-do's environment, one should not forget that the island is actually a volcanic island – that is, an island dominated by a volcano, specifically named Halla-san (한라산). Halla-san – or Mt. Halla – is the highest mountain in Korea, and a view of it is also a must see for any tourist who would visit the island.

The reason why I wanted to visit Korea and why I took interest about the country is not just because of KPOP or Hallyu craze. Sure, I do include myself in the fandom, but it's not just

because of that. It is also because I've grown to be curious and also like the culture of the country, its history and people. This is the main reason why I really wanted to be able to visit Korea. Having these tourist spots in mind makes me feel a lot thrilled, as well as the never-ending interest and curiosity about Korea. I've grown fond with Korea, its people, culture, and even had myself study their language. Definitely, if I'd be given a chance to visit this country I'd want to be able to visit these places and experience how it is to be in the Land of the Morning Calm.