

South Korea Facts

Fast Facts

Population:

50,458,052

Capital:

Seoul; 9,592,000

Area:

99,250 square kilometers (38,321 square miles)

Language:

Korean, English (widely taught)

South Korea Facts Flag



Religion:

Christian, Buddhist

Currency:

South Korean won

Life Expectancy:

76

GDP per Capita:

U.S. \$19,600

Literacy Percent:

98



The Republic of Korea, or South Korea, consists of the southern half of the Korean peninsula in East Asia and many islands lying off the western and southern coasts. The largest island, Jeju, has the highest mountain in South Korea at 1,950 meters (6,398 feet). The terrain is mountainous, though less rugged than that of North Korea.

Major population and industrial centers are located in the northwest (Seoul-Incheon area) and southeast. To overcome distance and traffic congestion, South Korea launched a high-speed rail service between Seoul and Busan in 2004. English is taught as a second language in most schools, and more than 1.5 million ethnic Koreans reside in the U.S. In 2000 the government introduced a new phonetic system for transcribing Korean into English, changing names like Cheju to Jeju and Pusan to Busan.

Starting in the late 1970s this capitalist prodigy matured into the world's 12th largest trading nation and a major exporter of cars, consumer electronics, and computer components—due in part to huge export-oriented conglomerates called *jaebols*. From 1980 to 1990 economic growth averaged 10 percent a year—more than three times that of the U.S. and twice that of Japan. However, the Asian financial crisis caused a deep recession. Economic growth rebounded in 1999, and the economy continues to perform well thanks to vibrant exports.

After the Korean War, South Korean society has shifted from being 75 percent rural to being 82 percent urban. Since 1987 it has grown as a multiparty democracy, and the government has pursued peace initiatives and trade with the unpredictable North Korean regime. Road and railway projects are under way to link the two Koreas, and in 2003 more than half a million South Koreans visited the North—and 1,023 North Koreans traveled to South Korea, mainly for joint sporting events. The potential military threat posed by North Korea keeps some 37,000 U.S. troops here.

ECONOMY

- Industry: Electronics, automobile production, chemicals, shipbuilding, steel, textiles
- Agriculture: Rice, root crops, barley, vegetables; cattle; fish
- Exports: Electronic products, machinery and equipment, motor vehicles, steel, ships, textiles

—Text From *National Geographic Atlas of the World, Eighth Edition*

North Korea Facts

Fast Facts

Population:

25,252,775

Capital:

Pyongyang; 3,228,000

Area:

120,538 square kilometers (46,540 square miles)

Language:

Korean

Religion:

Buddhism, Confucianism

Currency:

North Korean won

Life Expectancy:

63

GDP per Capita:

U.S. \$1,000

Literacy Percent:

99

North Korea Facts Flag



The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea, occupies the northern part of the Korean peninsula in East Asia, with mountains covering more than 80 percent of the land. A Japanese possession from 1910 to 1945, Korea was then divided, with Soviet troops occupying the north and the U.S. the south. In 1950, two years after they had been made separate states, North Korea invaded South Korea. This began the devastating Korean War (1950-53), with the North, receiving Soviet and Chinese help, fighting a U.S.-led coalition of UN forces. The war caused an estimated three million casualties. After an armistice in 1953, a UN-monitored demilitarized zone was set up along the cease-fire line—dividing the two nations.

One of the few remaining communist states, reclusive North Korea has been one of the world's most secretive societies. The country lost subsidized trade relationships with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. After the death of dictator President Kim Il Sung in 1994, his son, Kim Jong Il, took control. North Korea, lagging far behind South Korea in economic development, devotes large amounts of money to the military, while its people suffer from chronic food shortages. Some experts estimate that at least 2.5 million people have died of starvation or hunger-related diseases since 1994. An estimated 300,000 North Koreans have fled to China as of 2004, where they hide from Chinese authorities who do not recognize them as refugees—and would force them to return. Despite severe shortages of food and electricity, North Korea maintains the world's fourth largest army, a nuclear weapons program, and missiles that threaten South Korea and Japan.

In December 2011, Kim Jong Il died of a heart attack, ending 17 years of rule. His youngest son, Kim Jong Un, is his father's successor.

ECONOMY

- Industry: Military products, machine building, electric power, chemicals, mining
- Agriculture: Rice, corn, potatoes, soybeans; cattle
- Exports: Minerals, metallurgical products, manufactures (including armaments), textiles

—Text From *National Geographic Atlas of the World, Eighth Edition*