

ASIA · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · MOUNTAINS



North Korea

North Korea is travel at its most controlled: visits run only through approved tour operators, with state guides at your side throughout. In return you see Pyongyang's monumental avenues and deep metro, the Demilitarised Zone from the northern side at Panmunjom, and mountain scenery few outsiders reach. Read the FCDO advice before anything else.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all but essential travel to North Korea.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Pyongyang	 CURRENCY North Korean won (KPW)	 LANGUAGE Korean	 BEST TIME May–Jun, Sep–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £170–£360 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, F 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 16h via Beijing ~£900–£1,500 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+9 standard time

No other country is visited quite like North Korea. Tourism, when open to Western visitors, happens only on pre-arranged tours, usually entering from China, with two Korean guides who stay with the group from arrival to departure. Itineraries centre on Pyongyang's showpieces: Kim Il Sung Square, the Juche Tower, the Mansudae statues and the metro. Most tours add a day trip south to Kaesong and Panmunjom on the Demilitarised Zone, and longer trips visit Mount Myohyang, the east-coast city of Wonsan or Mount Paektu on the Chinese border.

The experience is fascinating and disorientating in equal measure. Every day is scheduled, photography is restricted at times, and you cannot wander off alone, talk freely with locals or easily spend local currency. Tours are relatively expensive because accommodation, meals, transport and guides come bundled in one package price, and hotels such as Pyongyang's Yanggakdo are comfortable but dated. It suits curious, patient travellers who want to see the country's self-image first-hand. Many are struck by the emptiness: wide roads with little traffic, fields worked largely by hand and the sheer choreography of public life.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

ARCHITECTURE

Kim Il Sung Square and the Mansudae monuments

The parade square faces the Juche Tower across the Taedong River, while nearby the giant bronze statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il on Mansudae Hill are where every tour group lays flowers and bows.
- 2

HISTORY

Panmunjom and the DMZ

On the North Korean side of the Joint Security Area, blue conference huts straddle the Military Demarcation Line, and the hall where the 1953 armistice was signed stands nearby; a sobering counterpoint to tours from the South.

3

HISTORY

Kaesong

Capital of the Koryo dynasty (918–1392) for most of its history and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with the Koryo Museum in a former Confucian academy, royal tombs and a hotel of traditional tiled courtyard houses.

4

NATURE

Mount Myohyang

Wooded mountains north of Pyongyang hold the International Friendship Exhibition, a vast hall of gifts presented to the leaders, and the Buddhist Pohyon Temple, founded in the 11th century, with walking trails to waterfalls.

5

NATURE

Mount Paektu

The sacred volcano on the Chinese border is Korea's highest peak at 2,744 m, with the crater lake Chon at its heart. Tours fly to Samjiyon, then drive and walk up to the rim, stopping at revolutionary sites below.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Pyongyang

≈ 3 million people

The showcase capital is the core of every tour: monuments on a colossal scale, a deep Soviet-style metro with chandeliered stations, and wide boulevards lined with new high-rise districts.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Hamhung

≈ 770,000 people

North Korea's second city, an industrial centre on the east coast rebuilt with East German help after the Korean War; it rarely features on tour itineraries.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Chongjin

≈ 670,000 people

A steel and port city in the far north-east, long closed to outsiders and seen only on rare itineraries combining the Rason economic zone and Mount Chilbo.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to North Korea

Best time: **May–Jun, Sep–Oct.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

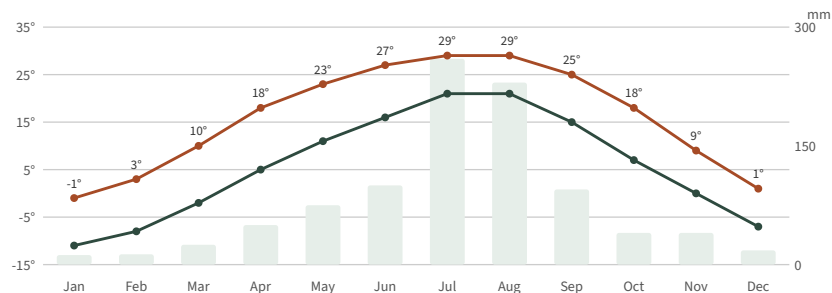
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Pyongyang

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

- Apr

Pyongyang Marathon

The Mangyongdae Prize International Marathon, held each April, has at times opened to foreign amateurs, who run full, half or 10 km courses through the capital, starting and finishing in Kim Il Sung Stadium.
- Apr

Kim Il Sung's birthday

The founder's birthday on 15 April is the year's biggest holiday, with mass dancing in Pyongyang's squares, flower shows and lines of people laying floral tributes at the Mansudae statues.

How much does North Korea cost?

SHOESTRING £170 per person / day hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £240 per person / day 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £360 per person / day 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

- ### Pyongyang naengmyeon

Chewy buckwheat noodles in a chilled, tangy beef broth with pear, egg and meat, eaten year-round and most famously at Okryu restaurant beside the Taedong River.
- ### Pyongyang onban

A comforting bowl of rice in hot chicken broth, topped with shredded chicken, mushrooms and a mung bean pancake; a traditional Pyongyang speciality.
- ### Taedonggang beer

A malty lager brewed in Pyongyang on equipment shipped from the old Ushers brewery in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, and served in hotel bars.

Getting around

Independent travel is not possible. Groups move by coach or minibus with their guides and driver, on routes fixed in advance. Tours have typically arrived on Air Koryo flights from Beijing or Shenyang, or by train via the Chinese border city of Dandong. Some longer tours fly by charter to Samjiyon for Mount Paektu, and groups in Pyongyang usually ride a few stops on the metro.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C F 220V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance 110 Fire 110 Not confirmed by the FCDO — services may be unreliable. Ask your accommodation for local numbers.
DIALLING CODE +850	TIME ZONE UTC+9 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right
TIPPING Tipping your guides and driver at the end of a tour is expected; your tour operator will suggest an amount, usually paid in euros or yuan.	

ETIQUETTE

Follow your guides' lead at the leaders' monuments, photograph statues whole rather than cropped, never fold or discard printed images of the leaders, and keep political opinions to yourself.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Pyongyang Sunan International Airport (FNJ), Pyongyang

Visas & entry for North Korea

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter North Korea.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic 6–8 weeks before you go. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B Japanese encephalitis Measles Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Very low risk of malaria

- There is a very low risk of malaria in some southern areas of North Korea: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in North Korea

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Mon 16 Nov 2026	Mother's Day
Sun 27 Dec 2026	Socialist Constitution Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sun 7 Feb 2027	Korean New Year
Mon 8 Feb 2027	Founding Day of the Korean People's Army
Tue 16 Feb 2027	Day of the Shining Star

Wed 17 Feb 2027	Day of the Shining Star
Sun 21 Feb 2027	Daeboreum
Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day
Mon 5 Apr 2027	Cheongmyeong Festival
Thu 15 Apr 2027	Day of the Sun
Fri 16 Apr 2027	Day of the Sun
Sun 25 Apr 2027	Founding Day of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army
Sat 1 May 2027	International Workers' Day
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Foundation Day of the Korean Children's Union
Tue 27 Jul 2027	Day of Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War
Sun 15 Aug 2027	Liberation Day
Wed 25 Aug 2027	Day of Songun
Sat 28 Aug 2027	Youth Day
Thu 9 Sep 2027	Founding Day of the DPRK
Wed 15 Sep 2027	Chuseok
Sun 10 Oct 2027	Foundation Day of the Workers' Party of Korea

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Korean

ENGLISH	KOREAN	SAY IT
Hello	안녕하십니까	<i>AHN-nyong-ha-SHIM-nee-kka</i>
Thank you	감사합니다	<i>KAHM-sah-hahm-nee-dah</i>
Please	부탁합니다	<i>poo-TAHK-hahm-nee-dah</i>
Excuse me	실례합니다	<i>shil-leh-HAHM-nee-dah</i>
How much is this?	이거 얼마입니까?	<i>EE-guh UHL-mah-eem-nee-kka</i>

Know before you go

Check the FCDO travel advice first: North Korea has opened and closed to Western tourists at short notice, and only specialist tour operators can arrange visits.

Bring all the cash you need in euros, Chinese yuan or US dollars, in small notes; foreign bank cards don't work and visitors rarely use the local won.

Leave religious, South Korean and political material at home, expect phones, laptops and books to be inspected on arrival, and never remove posters or signs as souvenirs.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.