Congratulations on being selected as an AFS participant and welcome to the AFS family. Your AFS host chapter, host family and host community here in Korea are all looking forward to your arrival and the intercultural experience which is about to begin.

“Welcome to Korea” is full of important information to help you get ready for your AFS experience in Korea. This sudden immersion can be exhausting and this guidebook has been created to help you start getting prepared for your experience here. Read it carefully and give it to your parents or guardian to read as well. Then, bring it with you to Korea for the adventure of your lifetime!

“It’s not better, it’s not worse, it’s just different.”

Nobody knows exactly what kind of experience you will have because there is no typical AFS experience. This will be a unique moment that you share with your new family and friends in Korea. Come with an open mind, one that is ready to see and live or try many new things both exciting and difficult. Almost every AFS participant has some hard times, but these are the times you will learn the most about Korea, the Korean and yourself. You should anticipate it!

See you soon!
Your Host Family

Don’t be afraid to talk to your host parents, as this is a sure way to get to know them better and to show interest. In Korean families, talking is a significant way to connect with family members, it will be most welcome if you take part in the discussion and are honest with them about how you feel. Expressing your satisfaction or comprehension will help your host family to get to know you better too. On the other hand, it might seem sometimes that your host family is trying to put some distance between them and you. This is actually their way of showing their respect to you and your privacy.

Korean parents are quite cautious about their children’s school results and outings. You may also find that you have less independence here than in your own country. Children are required to ask for permission if they want to go out, they have to let parents know where and with whom they are going and they have to respect a curfew. Your host family is not a hotel and they will expect you to respect their family rules and to share interests and participate in activities.

Please note that your integration into your host family is a very important part of your AFS program. You will be asked to make the effort to do so; if your host family thinks that you are not making any efforts to integrate, local volunteers will meet with you and your host family to discuss the issue, and will give you some advice to help you to make things better. If your local volunteers feel that you still don’t show any effort, you might be moved to a different host family or even sent back home.

Your host family is volunteering to receive you in their home, not getting anything else than the pleasure to meet you. Make sure to bring a small present for family members to thank them. You should also bring a few typical items from your country (recipes, clothes, music, etc.) that you could introduce to your family, but also at school.

Contacting home, internet, laptops and cell phones

We encourage you not to contact your family and friends back home too often. Too much contact, especially daily online chatting, will affect your integration process. If you miss them too much, we suggest you write your experiences each day in a draft message and then send it to your family and/or friends once a week. Phone calls and online chatting should be reserved for special occasions en planned in advance. Also, know that phone calling and internet fees are quite expensive in Korea, you shouldn’t use the phone without your host family approval.

We strongly discourage you from bringing a laptop with you. It is very rare to see a Korean high school student to have its own laptop and you won’t need it at school. But more importantly, it will keep you separated from your host family instead of allowing you to share family time. It will also be a temptation for constant online chatting with home, and will keep you awake late at night considering jetlag. If necessary, your host family and/or volunteers might decide to take your laptop away at nights, or for a certain period of time.

On the other hand, we encourage you to be equipped with a Korean cell phone plan which will help you keep in touch with your new Korean friends, and will also enable you to call your host family or AFS volunteers in case you have a problem/you’re late somewhere. Also, know that most of Korean people have at least one cellphone and are over-connected people. So it will be much less expensive than using you own phone plan from home. Don’t hesitate to ask for help from your host family and make sure you have your cell phone unblocked before coming so you can use it in Korea. But remember, your cell phone bills will be at your own cost!

Finally, be extra cautious with Facebook/blogs and anything you, or others, post online about you. Always favor private messages. Never post anything public about your family, friends or AFS. Never publish a picture online of anyone without their consent.

Inside the home

Upon arrival, you’ll want to discuss the daily routine with your family and check how the family organization works: how is the laundry handled, at what time you have to be home after school, whether you can help yourself or not in the fridge, what chores you are expected to do? Etc.

Many families are cautious with home expenses. You should always turn the light and electronic devices off when you leave a room. Water is also expensive and showers should not last more than 10 minutes, and you should turn the water off while cleaning your body/teeth or dishes. Winter in Korea can be very cold but families will favor wearing more clothes than using too much the heater.

Most houses in Korea are equipped with a TV. There are a lot of different channels, mostly from the three largest broadcasting companies: KBS, MBC and SBS. Korean people like to watch popular talk-shows or games hosting famous people and «dramas» (series). We believe that you will grow fond of those programs if you spend time watching it with your family. You can also watch foreign movies in their original language on a few available channels.

Most houses in Korea have a computer and internet access. However, the computer is shared with all the family in a common room and you shall not monopolize it, especially if it’s not for school work. Note that South Korea has one of the toughest anti-piracy laws in the world. You should never download music or movies illegally from your host family’s internet. If you do, they can be tracked down by the Government, get a very expensive fine and be cut from internet access.
Your Host School

You will notice that Korean school system is quite competitive and very demanding so you will probably feel very tired during the first weeks of your experience. There are different kind of school in Korea: Only boys and only girls, general and specialized, international, private and public...

High school in Korea lasts three years and students are between 17 and 19 years old then. A school year begins in February and ends in the end of December. A typical day of school begins with classes at 8:00am and ends at 5:00pm. All in all, you will have 8 classes of about 50 minutes each with a 10 minutes break between each class.

Also, because students want to study hard to get in a good university, even if classes finish at 5:00pm, most of students stay at school or go to a study room to study until 11:00pm or even later. People say that a high school student sleeping 4 hours per night will end up in a very good university. A student who sleeps 6 hours will get into university. A student who sleeps 8 hours won’t go to university. It shows how much high school is challenging and difficult in Korea.

During those classes, you will be able to study Korean history, Music, Maths, Science, etc. but you are also welcome to study your Korean language through your own material. You will also have P.E. class where you will be able to practice baseball, football, jogging and so on, so you need to bring sportswear and shoes to practice at school.

Korean high school students also wear a uniform. They have a winter uniform and a summer uniform that your host high school will provide you. You still need to know that if the school doesn’t have any uniform of your size, you will have to buy your own.

You will have lunch at the high school cafeteria between 12:00pm and 1:00pm. And after afternoon classes, you will have to help cleaning rooms, hallways, stairs, toilets, outsides etc. because Korean high schools don’t hire professionals and it teaches students to take care of their studying space.

There are national holidays but Korean high school also have their own vacation. Summer vacation are during August and Winter vacation begins right after Christmas day and lasts until the end of January.

“Through this experience, I became closer to the students in the classes below and above me and made new friends. I’ve found that Korean students can be very competitive and I admire their persistence to do well!”

“I knew that becoming a high school student in Korea would be a challenge due to the rigorous study habits of Korean students. Although I was expecting the students here to study a lot more than I was used to, I don’t think I was prepared for the amount. I find it really shocking that these students are studying so much and working so hard.”

Erin from Australia

Attendance

Your host school is welcoming you voluntarily as one of their students. Teachers can be very strict and they will expect you to attend classes everyday and to behave properly (no talking, no texting on your cell phone, no sleeping...). Any missed day will be noticed to your host family and AFS by the school. Going to school is a part of your AFS program and you might be sent home immediately if you don’t go or do any effort to participate in school classes and activities.
Your Host Chapter

There is, at the moment, only one office in Korea which is the national office located in Seoul. Upon your arrival, you will receive the office contact and you will be assigned to one of our staff or volunteer who will be your «contact person» and keep in touch with you along your stay in Korea. Do not hesitate to contact your contact person whenever you have a question or do not feel very well. This person is there to cheer you up and advise you!

Whenever you have a problem or question, you must contact your contact person, or any volunteer you are easily in contact with, instead of sharing your issue directly with your family, who will feel helpless and who will probably make things worse than they need to be. The best and quickest way to seek help is to share your issue with volunteers from AFS Korea. They are here to help you!

AFS Korea and AFS national office of your native country also work very hard to make your AFS experience a success. Whatever your issue or request might be, be assured that we take it very seriously and your natural family will be contacted if necessary. Just trust us!

Contacting the national office

You can also call directly our national office if you don’t feel comfortable calling your volunteer. The office is opened from Monday to Saturday, from 9:00am to 6:00pm (from 10:00am to 5:00pm on Saturdays). Our phone number is 02-555-3115.

If the office is closed, and ONLY in case of emergencies, you may call this same number which will redirect you to the duty officer.
Survival Korean

Hello/Good morning. - [anyeonghaseyo]  
I'm leaving/I'm going to school. - [hakyo tanyeo ogesseumnida]  
I'm back/Welcome back home. - [tanyeo wasumnida]  
Annyeonghaseyo. - [anyeong i thumseyo]  
I'm sorry, I did not understand. - [tjuesonghajiman ihaehaji mottaesumnida]  
Can you repeat more slowly ? - [tjogum tsheontseoni malh ae juseyo]  
What does that word mean ? - [i taneonun museun meunseu tteushieyo]

My stomach/head/back hurts. - [naneun paega/meoliga/deungi appayo]  
I need to see a doctor. - [naneun byeongwone kayahaeyo]

I'm lost. - [gileul ileoessayo]  
Excuse me ! - [shillehamnida]  
Could you show me the way to... ? - [...]lo kanun beobeul alyeojushigesseoyo

I missed the bus. - [beoseuleul nochyeoessayo]  
I arrived late at school. - [naneun hakkyo e jigaehayeoyo]  
What time does the Korean class start ? - [kugo sueobeun myeotshie shijak haeyo]  
Where is room 1 for fresh year ? - [il haknyeon ibaneun eodie innayo]  
I'm sorry, I forgot my textbook at home. - [tjoesonghaeyo tije tshaegul nokko wasseoyo]

Hello ? (When answering the phone) - [yeoboseyo]  
Who is asking ? - [nuguseyo]  
Hold on, I'll get him/her on the phone. - [tjamshimanyo bakwo teulilkeyo]

I would like to order. - [djumun halkeyo]  
I'll take bibimbap with a bowl of rice please. - [bibimbap han geuleu tjuseyo]  
May I have the bill please ? - [kyesan buthak teulimnida]  
How will you pay ? Credit card/cash. - [kyesaneun mweollo hashigesseoyo khadeu/hyeongeum]
Facts and Culture

한국- Korean ID

Name: 대한민국 - Dae Han Min Guk - Korean Republic
Nickname: 한국 - Hanguk
Anthem: ≪애국가≫ - «Patriotic Song»
Motto: ≪홍익인간≫ - «Benefit Broadly the Human World»

Flag: 태극기 - Taegukgi
National flower: 무궁화 - Rose of Sharon
Alphabet: 한글 - Hangeul

Geography

As of June 2012, South Korea counts 50'832'898 people (source: Ministry of Public Administration and Security) which makes it the 25th largest among 238 countries in the world. Korea is divided into 17 metropolitan councils and 227 district councils. Seoul and its vicinities are commonly referred as the «Capital area». 50% of the entire Korean population lives in this area, including 10 million people in Seoul, 2.8 million people in Incheon and then 12 million people in the rest of the «Capital area».

The only country with a land border to South Korea is North Korea with a 238km (148 miles) of border running along the DMZ (Korean Demilitarized Zone). After the Korean War, in 1952, the DMZ formed a barrier between both countries and is the 38th parallel of latitude. This zone is heavily guarded by Korean and US army forces and a 4'000 meter wide strip of land divides South and North Korea.

South Korea is then surrounded by water which makes 2'413km (1'499 miles) of coast line along three different seas. In the West of the country we have the Yellow sea, in the South we have the East China Sea and in the East is the Sea of Japan. South Korea’s land mass is approximately 100'032 square km (38'623 squares miles) and 290 squares km (110 square miles) of this land is occupied by water.

Weather

South Korea has four distinct seasons and temperatures goes from -10°C in the North in winter to 35°C in the South in summer.

Spring (March to May) is usually warm even though mornings and evenings can still be chilly. You can expect temperatures between 3°C and 10°C in early spring during the day. Even when trees and flowers start to bloom in March you might still need to wear your winter clothes outside. People start to wear lighter clothes in April and it can also get very hot from May.

Summer (June to August) is quite hot with temperatures ranging from 25°C to 35°C across the country and is also quite humid. Heavy rain (Jangma) frequently comes between July and August. Temperatures reach their highest in August before cooling down during September. A few typhoons with heavy rain and wind might visit the country as well.

Fall (September to November) sees its temperatures going down from 25°C to 10°C. November might be as cold as winter for several provinces. People prepare themselves for winter by taking out winter clothes and checking heaters at home. Most of the population enjoy fall the most because of nice temperatures after a heavy summer and because of the beauty of fall colors in Korea.

Winter (December to February) sees its temperatures going down from 10°C to -10°C mostly in Seoul. During this period of time, the weather seems to play with three very cold days followed by four cooler days. Snow and harsh wind are to be expected, we may have about 8cm of snow in Seoul and much more in Eastern provinces.
Food

A traditional Korean meal is made of a bowl of rice, a bowl of soup and side dishes. Similar to a soup, Korea also eat very hot stews. Side dishes are mostly vegetable, steamed food, hardboiled food, roasted meat, stir-fried food and pan-fried food. One of the most popular side dishes is kimchi which is a kind of spicy pickled napa cabbage. As a substitute for rice, Korean people will sometimes prefer to eat hot or cold noodles. Most of Korean food is very spicy when you're not used to spices. Also, while eating at home, you will have your own bowl of rice but side dishes are shared with everyone in the same dishes.

You will be glad to know that tap water is drinkable in Korea. However, the installations which clean tap water are still quite new which is why you will see that most Korean people still prefer to use a water purifier. At home, your family might be of the one boiling water to make a weak tea out of it and you'll be able to drink this water once it is cold.

In most Korean families, breakfast (between 6:30am and 8:00am) is served and eaten at home, you will eat your lunch (between 12:00pm and 2:00pm) at school in the lunch room and dinner (between 8:00pm and 10:00pm) is often eaten outside. You might end up joining your host family somewhere to eat with them or eat with your classmates before going back home or still eat dinner at home but it wouldn’t have been prepared by your host mother.

Money/Currency

The currency used in Korea is «Korean won» (symbolized by W) and in early December 2014, the exchange rate was 1'000₩ = 0,90$ = 0,73 €.

Korea is cheaper than European and North American countries and we believe that you should plan a minimum of 70'000₩/month to cover your personal expenses (cell phone plan, club activities, school trips, clothes, time out with friends: movies, coffee place, etc.). Being a minor, you can open a bank account but you will be provided with a withdrawal card only. Citibank Debit Card might be the easiest way for your parents to deposit your pocket money in your account and most of ATMs in Korea accept withdrawals from a Citibank Debit Card. We recommend you to bring a withdrawal card, or at least a few travellers cheques (instead of a huge amount of cash) because opening a bank account might take a few weeks depending on cases.

You can find below a few examples of prices of usual items in Korea.

- Bottle of water: 1'000₩
- Meal at an average Korean restaurant: 7'000₩
- Burger meal at a fast food restaurant: 6'000₩
- Regular cup of coffee: 4'500₩
- Can of soda: 1'400₩
- Liter of gas: 2'000₩
- Cinema ticket: 9'000₩
- Pair of shoes from famous brand: 115'000₩
Holidays in Korea

Samil-jeol - March 1st - Samil Independence Movement Day
Seokgta Tansil-il - April 8th - Buddha's Birthday
Eorini-nal - May 5th - Children's day
Gwangbok-jeol - August 15th - Independance Day
Gaecheon-jeol - October 3rd - National Foundation Day
Seongtan-joel - December 25th - Christmas Day

Seollal - January 1st - First day of the Lunar New Year
Seollal marks the entrance in a new lunar year. This celebration lasts three days: the day before, seollal day and the day after. Seollal is a worship to family's ancestors and at this occasion, Korean families visit the elders in their hometown and bow to their parents in sign of respect. Parents give wishes of happiness and money to their children. Then, they visit all together their ancestors tumbs.

Dano - 5th day of 5th month in Lunar Calendar - High Day
Dano is a traditional holidays which celebrates the end of sowing season. At this occasion, you can witness spiritual rites and enjoy song dance and wine. The most famous Dano festival in Korea is Gangneung Dano Festival designated by UNESCO as a «masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity».

Chuseok - 15th day of 8th month in Lunar Calendar - Harvest Festival
Chuseok is a harvest festival which lasts three days. Like most harvest festivals around the world, it is held around Autumn Equinox. At that time, Korean people go back to their hometown and enjoy a feast made of traditional Korean food with their family.

Fun Fact

In Korea, a newborn baby will already be one year old while he would still be less than one year old in the western style. Then, this baby gains one more year at the start of a new Lunar year. For example, a baby born on December 31st is one year old but he will turn two years old on the next day, January 1st, beginning of a new Lunar year.

Korean people also like to celebrate their birthday from Lunar calendar along with their actual day of birth corresponding to the Gregorian calendar.
Popular Culture

1- Kim YuNa, is a former figure skater who always ended up being on the podium whenever she was in a competition. She retired in February 2014 after winning a silver medal at the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

2- King Sejong, was the 4th king of Joseon and is famous for creating the actual Korean alphabet which enabled the Korean population to communicate by writing and to learn from books written, from that moment, in Hangul.

3- Ryu HyunJin, is a very popular baseball player who played for Hanwha Eagles for seven years. He’s now playing in Los Angeles Dodgers team since 2013 and being the pride of his country.

4- Kim SooHyun, is a very popular actor who started his career in 2007. The TV series «You Who Came From The Stars» from 2014 in which he plays an extraterrestrial made him famous internationally.

5- The World Cup 2002 was the first to be organised in Asia, and the first to be organised by two different countries, Korea and Japan. The Korean football team was able to go into quarterfinals against Germany, it was the first time in The World Cup history that an Asian team went so far in the competition.

6- 명량 (The Admiral), is a historical movie from 2014 talking about admiral Yi SunSin who handled his thirteen turtle ships against Japan’s three hundred vessels and won No-Ryang battle.

7- 엽기적인 그녀 (My Sassy Girl), is a romantic comedy from 2001 with Jeon JiHyeon and Cha TaeHyun telling the story of a boy falling in love with «the girl» even though she is mischievous, insolent and makes him having a hard time.

8- Lee MiJa, is a Trot singer who is popular since the late 50’s. Trot music is the oldest kind of Korean pop music. At the invitation she received in 2003, she was the first South Korean singer who ever performed in North Korea.

9- The April Revolution in 1960 was a large-scale non-violent student protest who walked from Korea University to the Blue House to ask for the resignation of their president. After being joined by their teachers, citizens and police who refused to attack the protestors, the president had to step down from power and Korea entered its 2nd Republic.
Travelling

Remember that your host family is not here to take you sight-seeing all around Korea. However, you'll probably have several occasions to travel, especially since Korean has a wide railway and bus network at affordable fares.

During several Korean specific holidays like Chuseok, many Korean families take the occasion to visit family in their hometown which can be in another part of the country. You might also have the opportunity to take school trips. Also, during summer school vacations you might want to ask us to participate in the AFS Study-Tour which is an optional extra trip. All those trips are AFS approved, but in case they take place abroad, your natural parents will have to sign an authorization through the sending and hosting AFS offices.

Independent trips

An independent trip is a trip that is neither organized nor sponsored by AFS. It is submitted to strict rules that are set to guarantee your safety and adaptation:
- One single independent trip can be allowed during your program.
- Year-program students alone can be allowed an independent trip. They are strictly forbidden to shot term-programs students.
- Independent trips can not take place before Summer vacations.
- Independent trips can not be organized during school periods.
- Independent trips can not last more than 10 days.
- Independent trips in North Korea are forbidden.
- Independent trips must take place under safe conditions. For instance, hotel accommodations and night train without family members or family adult friends are forbidden.
- Independent trips plans must be formally notified and submitted for authorization to your contact person at least one month before, and you'll have to supply this request with detailed information such as dates, places, transportation, accommodation, contact details, etc. AFS will not allow any trip without the consent of your contact person who will inform the national office of their final decision.
- Independent trips must be authorized by your natural parents who will have to sign a Travel Waiver through the sending and hosting AFS offices.
- This Travel Waiver releases AFS from any responsibility of care, welfare, travel arrangements, arrangement of medical services, food and lodging or financial assistance during the entire duration of the independent trip.

Visits from your natural family

The experience on which you are embarking is one of slow adaptation to a new environment. Therefore, in order to avoid switching back and forth from the Korean culture to your own, we do not favor visits from your natural family during your stay nor do we favor trips with your natural family or friends from home, especially during family times such as Christmas. This is also a mark of respect towards your host family. However, a visit from your natural family can be tolerated towards the end of your program. This visit must be approved in advance by your host family, contact person and AFS Korea national office. In the case that your family wants to visit, tell them to contact the AFS office of your native country. Please, also note that your host family must not feel obligated to host your natural family and that it is more polite for your natural family to seek their own accommodation.

Visa and travel abroad

Any AFS student coming to Korea is requested to have a passport valid until the end of the AFS program. A visa is mandatory to stay in Korea for more than 3 months. It will be issued by the Korean consulate in your home country and your AFS office will help you throughout the application process.

If you have the opportunity to travel abroad, whether by yourself, with your school or with your family, it is your responsibility to make sure your are legally allowed to do so by contacting the Embassy of the country you wish to visit. Depending on your nationality and the country of destination, you could be denied the right of entry. Thus, make sure to always get a written confirmation from the country Embassy or one of its consulates. Every country has its own immigration and entrance laws and AFS Korea cannot be held responsible for your being unable to enter a foreign country other than Korea.

Any trip taken without the authorization of AFS is a reason to be sent back home immediately!
AFS Rules
If you break one of the following rules, you will automatically be sent back home:
- No driving of a motorized vehicle on public areas
- No hitch hiking
- No use of any drugs
- No binge drinking
- No breaking of the law

Sexual behavior & harassment
You might find that Korean teenagers are generally distant from one another because of «non dating» school's rule and because they are really busy studying to get into the greatest universities. Thus, Korean high school students don't have any sexual life. Also, with school's and society's influence a high school student wouldn't be able to buy any condom.

Even though, in some situation you might feel unsure whether you are being sexually harassed or not. Your host family, friends and volunteers will be able to tell you what is considered a normal behavior in Korea and what is not.

Agressions
Korea is not a particularly dangerous country. Of course delinquency and crimes are a reality as in any other country. But the daily life of Korean people is rather safe and comfortable.

To avoid problems, do not carry a large amount of money, do not show your wallet on the street and public transportation, keep your bag closed and under your supervision in crowded places. Do not bring expensive items to school and not leave expensive belongings (bike, bag, etc.) out of sight. Remember AFS does not have an insurance against theft! Stolen items will not be reimbursed by our insurance. Keep a copy of your passport and visa in your wallet, and keep the originals in a safe place. Do not answer to strangers who are obviously trying to bother you, do not accept a ride in a car if you don't know the driver and do not walk alone in the streets at nights.

If you feel you are in danger or being followed, enter the nearest public place (shop, hotel, restaurant, etc.), explain what is happening to you and call your host family. If this is not possible, use your cell phone and loudly explain where you are (which you should also systematically do when you use a cab). In case you are a victim of any kind of aggression, report it to your host family, local volunteers or AFS Korea national office immediately. We will be able to help and advise you.

Insurance Medical Care
During the whole duration of your program you will be covered by a medical insurance contracted by AFS. There are a few exclusions to this insurance (eye and dental care except if due to an accident, vaccinations, expenses related to a pre-existing condition, contraception, etc.), for more information contact your sending AFS national office. In case you don't feel physically well, make sure to tell your host family. They will probably send you to a hospital who will check up your health. Your host family will pay for those charges and we will reimburse them. Direct payment can be made from our office in case of expensive medical care (hospitalization, surgery, etc.). Bring your immunization records with you, as well as any useful medical record that you might need during your program in France.

Substance abuse: Alcohol, cigarettes, drug
Alcohol
The legal age for drinking and buying alcohol in Korea is 20. You might have the occasion during family events to taste some Korean alcohol, but don't feel obligated to drink if you don't want to. High school students are prohibited from drinking alcohol or they could have troubles with their family and school. Any inappropriate behavior with alcohol, including getting drunk, will lead to an early return in your home country.

Smoking
Even though a lot of adults (mostly men) smoke in Korea, the legal age for smoking and buying cigarettes is also 20. Smoking is forbidden to all people under 20 years old. Smoking in any public place (even highway rest places) is strictly prohibited in Korea since 2012. And, from January 2015, smoking rooms and areas will also be banned from all public places.

Drugs
Any drug use means an immediate return back home. Never accept to smoke drugs with anyone, even just to try. Try to avoid situations which could lead to any drug consumption.