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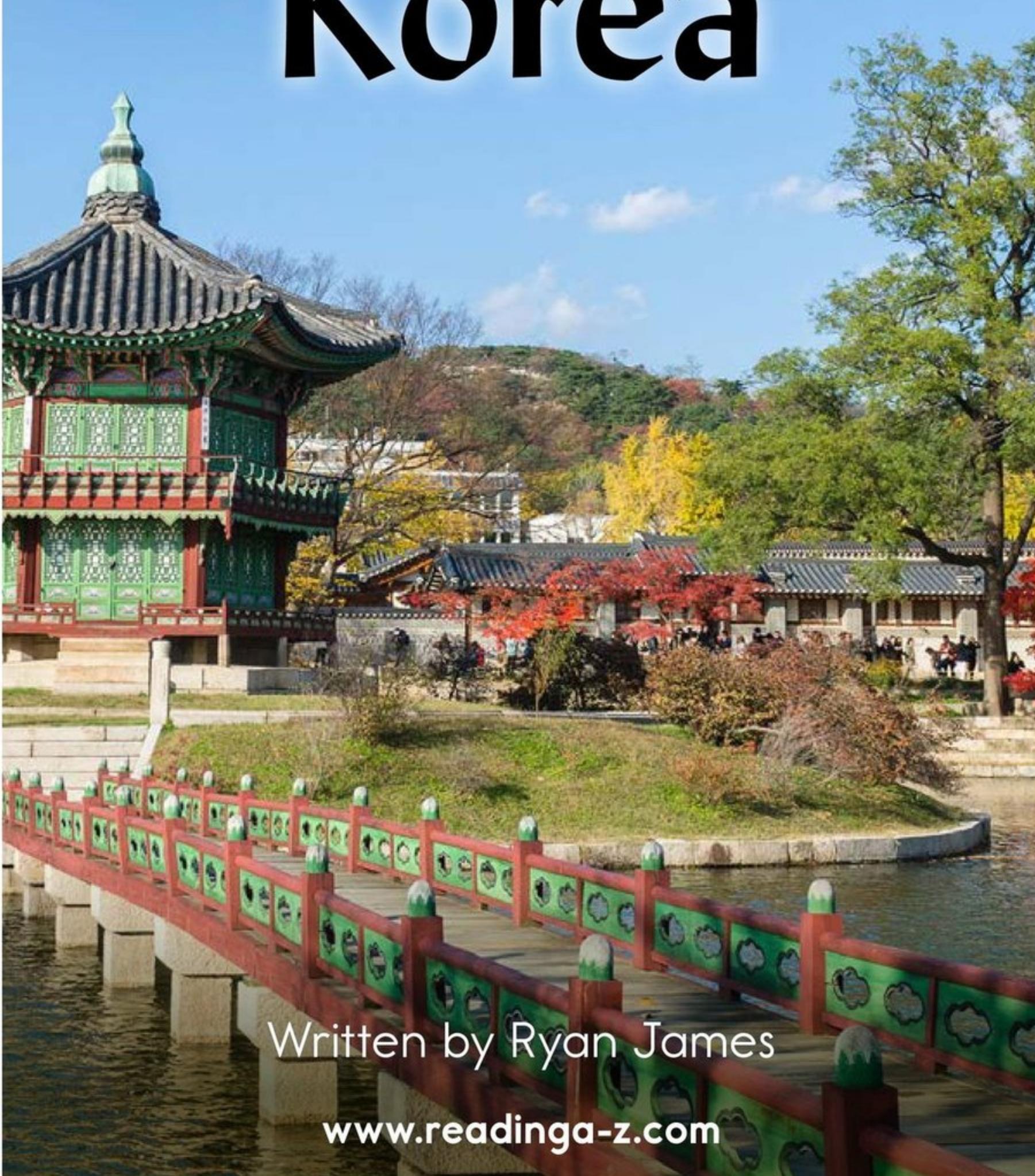
# South Korea



Written by Ryan James

[www.readinga-z.com](http://www.readinga-z.com)

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## Focus Question

What are some important things  
to know about South Korea?

## Words to Know

cease-fire  
colony  
democratic  
fertile  
generations

mystical  
peninsula  
rural  
surrender

Front cover: A view of Busan, South Korea

Title page: A palace in Seoul, South Korea

Page 3: A busy street in Seoul

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## Where Is It?

The official name of South Korea is the Republic of Korea. This country in East Asia is slightly smaller than the country of Iceland. South Korea is located on the southern part of the Korean **peninsula**. Its closest neighbor is North Korea, which is on the northern part of the peninsula.

South Korea has water on three sides. The Sea of Japan, called the East Sea by the people in the region, lies to the east and the Yellow Sea to the west. The East China Sea is located directly south.

With more than nine million people, South Korea's capital city of Seoul is the country's largest city. It's one of the largest cities in the entire world. Seoul is located on the Han River in the northwestern part of the country.

Seoul is a modern center of trade and business. It's also an important historic landmark. The downtown area is enclosed by walls built more than six hundred years ago. It contains centuries-old palaces and royal gardens.



One of the Five Grand Palaces in Seoul is in the heart of the city.

## A Respectful People

Among many South Koreans, showing respect for elders is important. People are expected to stand when an older person enters the room. If shaking hands, the younger person is supposed to wait for the elder to offer a hand.



A young boy waits to shake the South Korean president's hand in 2007.

## People

More than forty-nine million people live in South Korea. Aside from a small number of Chinese and Southeast Asians, most South Koreans speak the same language—Korean.

South Koreans work in many different types of jobs. Many people work in manufacturing, making cars, ships, and other things to sell to other countries. South Korea also has many jobs in computers and related fields.

Family is extremely important in Korean society. Sometimes several **generations** live together in a single household. Many South Koreans respect their older family members by keeping detailed records of their histories. They also show respect on holidays with special food and ceremonies.

Most Koreans see education as the key to success. Children are often excused from chores so they can study. Many sources agree that Korean students are among the best readers in the world.



A South Korean mother and her son read in a bookstore full of English language books. Many South Koreans believe that learning English is key to success.

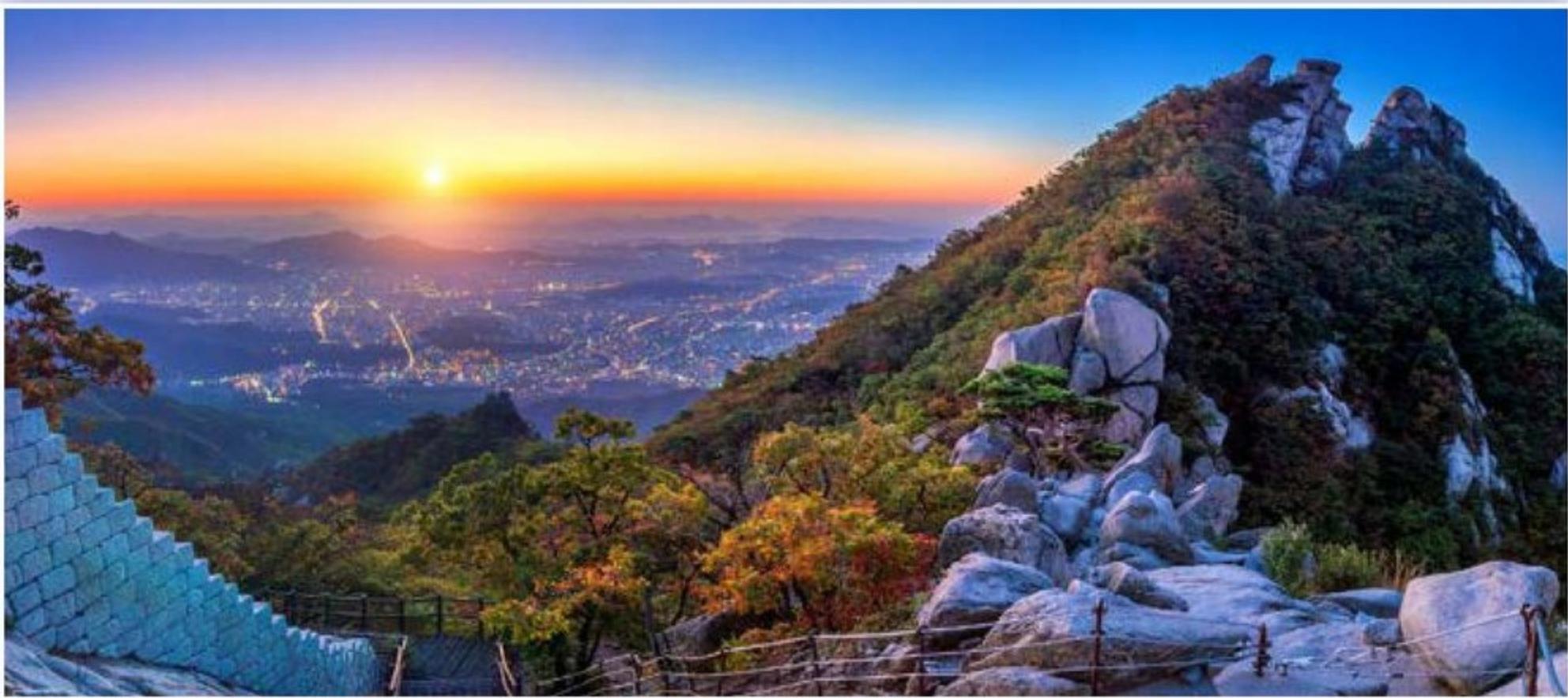
## Land

Hills and mountains cover most of South Korea. Only a small part of the land is flat enough for farming. The Taebaek (TE-bek) Mountains run along the eastern coast. Several other mountain ranges branch off, running roughly east–west.

Most of the mountains are less than 1,219 meters (4,000 ft.) tall. The highest peak is Mount Halla, a volcano, at 1,950 meters (6,398 ft.).

South Korea's eastern coastline is fairly straight. However, the rest of its coast is broken up by rivers and streams. They form countless waterways and feature more than 3,500 small islands.





The autumn view of Seoul from the mountains is beautiful.

Streams and rivers line the lowlands. These waters have some of the highest tides in the world. Near Seoul, the water level varies about 9 meters (30 ft.). That's enough to cover a three-story house built too close to the water.

Most of South Korea's **rural** population lives in the coastal and inland plains regions. The plains provide **fertile** farmland for growing foods like rice, fruits, and vegetables.

South Korea has four seasons. Temperatures average  $-6^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $21^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in winter. In summer, the highs are  $27\text{--}32^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $80\text{--}90^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). Summer also brings the rainy season, when the country gets more than half of its rainfall each year. During this season, South Korea is sometimes hit by dangerous storms. Heavy flooding is common.

## **History**

North and South Korea together are an ancient area with more than two thousand years of recorded history. People have lived in the area for at least ten thousand years. Its location kept it away from the rest of the world for hundreds of years. The result was a people with a common way of life, language, and political system.

Over many centuries, kingdoms rose to take control of the land. Korea was also controlled by China, the Mongolian Empire, and Japan.

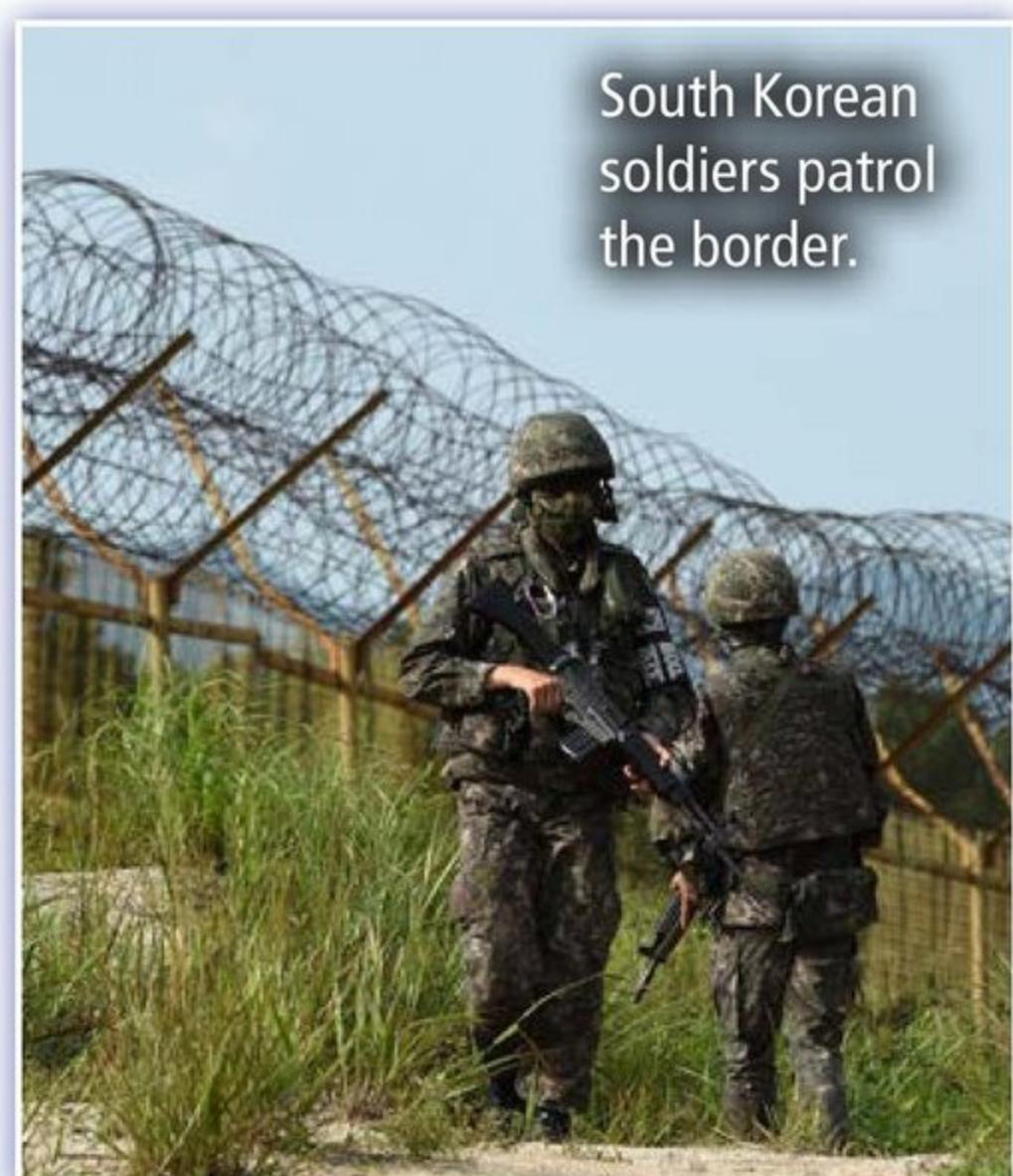
In 1905, Japan forced Korea to become a Japanese land. Five years later, Japan made Korea a Japanese **colony**. Korea remained under Japanese control until Japan's **surrender** at the end of World War II.

The United Nations planned to return Korea to self-government at the end of World War II. During that period, the United States was put in charge of the southern half of the Korean peninsula. A country called the Soviet Union was put in charge of the northern half.

However, the nations' leaders couldn't agree on how to set up Korea's new government. The United Nations ordered **democratic** elections, which South Korea held. North Korea set up a kind of government that was less free.

In 1948, the United Nations officially recognized South Korea's government as the government in North and South Korea. Two years later, North Korea moved into South Korea to try to bring the divided nation together by force. This started the Korean War, which cost 2.5 million lives and nearly destroyed both countries.

The war ended in 1953 with a **cease-fire** agreement. This left North and South Korea separated by a strip of land 4 kilometers (2.5 mi.) wide. Officially, the two countries are still at war. Although they agreed to a cease-fire, they never agreed to peace.



## Celebrations

Until the mid-twentieth century, South Korea was primarily a nation of farmers. As a result, many of its important holidays are linked to the moon calendar. New Year's Day, called Seollal (SAHL-lahl), is the most important of these festivals. On this holiday, South Koreans celebrate everyone becoming one year older with food, gifts, games, and fortune-telling.

A harvest festival called Chuseok is another important holiday. Families visit and clean their relatives' graves and leave food offerings to show their respect.

On a baby's first birthday, the parents place objects in front of the baby and let the baby choose his or her favorite. If the baby picks up a book, he or she will be smart. Picking up money means the baby will be wealthy.

At a baby's first birthday party, large amounts of food mean wealth for the child.





Customers line up to taste different kinds of kimchi in a market in Seoul.

## Food

Korean food is often spicy. Kimchi, a food a little like spicy sauerkraut, and rice are served at nearly every meal. Fish, seafood, and pounded rice cakes, called *tteok* (DAWK), are also important parts of Korean meals.

Some South Koreans have an old saying: “Food is the best medicine.” They believe that both health and sickness come from the food they eat. Another old belief is that some foods have **mystical** powers. For example, sweet red beans and rice porridge are supposed to chase off evil spirits and give long life.



The busy city of Seoul sparkles at night.

## Conclusion

Over the centuries, the people of South Korea have grown strong by working hard and showing respect for their families and for each other. This way of life has helped South Koreans win wars and stay strong during hard times. South Korea has become a modern world power—a country and people with a bright future.

## South Korea



**Population:** 49,115,196

**Land:** 99,720 sq km (38,502 sq. mi.)

**Capital City:** Seoul

**Primary Language:** Korean

**Primary Religions:** Christianity, Buddhism

**Name of Currency:** Won



Source: CIA World Factbook (May 2016)

## Glossary

<b>cease-fire</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an agreement to stop fighting for a while during a war (p. 11)
<b>colony</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a settled area that is ruled by or belongs to another country; a group settled in one of these areas or countries (p. 10)
<b>democratic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	relating to or based on a form of government that is run by the people through free elections that are held often (p. 11)
<b>fertile</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	producing or able to produce a lot of plants or crops (p. 9)
<b>generations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	spans of time, about twenty to thirty years, between when parents and their children are born (p. 7)
<b>mystical</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having a spiritual or symbolic meaning that is not easy to understand (p. 13)
<b>peninsula</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a long piece of land almost completely surrounded by water (p. 4)
<b>rural</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the country rather than the city (p. 9)
<b>surrender</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of giving up or agreeing to stop fighting, often in order to save oneself (p. 10)

# South Korea

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,081

## Connections

### Writing

Research to learn more about a South Korean celebration. How does it compare to a celebration from a different country? Write an essay explaining the similarities and differences.

### Social Studies and Art

Make a map of South Korea showing the different geographic areas. Label at least five important landforms.



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