
A Visitation Guide to North Korea for a Successful Business in North Korea

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Introduction

More and more people, working in the press, social and cultural areas, as well as in business, are visiting North Korea these days. Most of them seem to have in mind long-term business interests, but some visit North Korea just to see what it is like and do some sightseeing. In recent days people are tending to visit North Korea as often as possible to develop a relationship with North Korea in many areas from a medium and long-term perspective. Visiting North Korea is now considered an essential part of promoting a project with North Korea, while North Korea is utilizing these occasions to pursue practical interests. In the past people from South and North Korea used to meet in a third place like Beijing to negotiate and conclude contracts. But treading North Korean soil is now considered as an essential part of a successful project in that looking around the site and talking directly to the authorities of North Korea accelerate the development of project and help establish a long-term relationship. Especially for businessmen, a direct look at the factory in North Korea is important because they need to ascertain the qualifications of the potential partner. Frequent visits also build a mutual trust. Frequent visits can stimulate new pro-

jects and business ideas and thus contribute a lot to promote cooperation between Seoul and Pyongyang.

Visit to North Korea Essential to Develop New Project Ideas in North Korea

Visiting North Korea becomes easier once the first visit is made. The problem is the first visit. Who should you meet to get the invitation letter from Pyongyang, and how much will it cost? How do you determine your schedule and who do you need to talk to for help? What are the things that need to be paid attention. It is not easy to get the information about visiting North Korea despite the increasing number of visitors to North Korea. This is partly because the cost and schedule are all different visit by visit. But a more important reason is that visitors consider their experience as a sort of know-how and are reluctant to reveal their own secrets. But the first visit deserves thorough preparation because of the time and energy entailed as the well as the high cost. Whether you know the whole process of visiting or not makes a big difference in the outcome of the visit.

Invitation letters are usually issued by Choson Asia-Pacific Peace Committee (CAPPCC). But many businessmen get their invitation letter issued by National Economy Association. Some invitation letters for visitors engaged in culture and art are issued by the corresponding departments of North Korean government. Rumors about the cost involved in getting invitation letters seem to be exaggerated. Sometimes invitation costs are paid in cash, but some are paid in kind or in the form of aid materials. The invitation cost varies depending on the relationship or level of trust between the visiting party and Pyongyang. It is reported that Pyongyang has its own price guideline for the invitation in which the invitation cost varies depending on the status, organization, and capability of the visiting party. Even this guideline is not absolute in that negotiations with Pyongyang can change it.

You have to talk to agents from CAPPCC stationed in Beijing to

arrange visits to North Korea including invitation costs at the working level. These agents are dealing with all the work related to business with and visit to North Korea while staying in Beijing in the form of a three-month official trip. Sometimes prospective visitors from South Korea have to wait without a specific time limit because North Korean agents consult CAPPCC headquarters in Pyongyang on matters that they cannot determine by themselves. When these agents go back to Pyongyang, they link their successors to the South Korean parties. Sometimes they put forward a third person who will be in charge of all the communications while they are off to Pyongyang. This third person coordinates communications or sometimes mediates between the two parties in case difficult problems arise.

Smooth Consultation with Pyongyang on Visit Schedule Most Important

Visitors go through a series of working-level negotiations mostly in Beijing several days before the visit. Both parties discuss the cost, hotel, schedule, and persons to meet in North Korea. But in some cases a visiting party enters North Korea not knowing whom to meet and where to visit. A visa is issued just a day before the trip if the invitation letter was issued and visiting period was determined. Visitors have to go to the North Korean consulate in person to apply for and receive a visa. Processing time does not take long because there are only a few visitors as yet. The processing fee costs 45 dollars and you have to carry two photographs for a visa. You can get a ticket on Koryo Airline for Pyongyang only after they issue you a visa. Tickets can be reserved. A travel agency in South Korea can reserve a ticket on Koryo Airline, but it can cost a lot because of the mediator fee. It is better and costs less if you can go to Beijing one day earlier to reserve and get a ticket at the Koryo Airline office. There are 16 first class seats which cost 200 dollars a person on a one-way basis. Economy seats cost 160 dollars. Baggage is charged 2.5 dollars for extra 1 kg. Beijing-

Pyongyang flights are on every Tuesday and Saturday. Departure time in Beijing is 11:30 A.M. and arrival time at Soonan airport in Pyongyang is 2 P.M. Hotels are usually determined by the inviting party considering the visitors' status and visitors are notified one day before arrival. Some visitors notify the inviting party the hotels they want to stay in.

The inviting party comes to the airport to welcome visitors even though visitors are not VIPs. The inviting party leads the visitors to drop by places like Kumsu-san Memorial Palace, where the body of the late president Kim Il-sung is located, and Mansudae Memorial Statute before visitors check in the hotel. Problems arise most in the process of negotiation. There are more than a few cases where both sides fail to agree on the first day's schedule in North Korea and visitors are forced to stay in the hotel before they are allowed to visit only a few places just one or two days before they return. Visitors are in most cases following schedules determined by the inviting party. If you have someone or some place to see, you have to notify them in advance. In recent days, if you want to make some changes to the given schedule, the North Korean party tends to understand your request and drop some programs you don't want. If negotiations are going well, at least part of the program can be made according to the wishes of the visiting party. This is quite a new attitude and even individual activities are allowed to some degree.

When you get to negotiate your schedule, it is more effective for the visiting party to select one or two representatives and let them deal with North Korean agents. Inducing cooperation of North Korean agents is important for smooth management of whole schedule in North Korea. Sightseeing usually begins with Mankyongdae, birth home of Kim Il-sung, but in recent days the Triumphal Arch and Juche Tower are included in the route. These architectures are reported to be dedicated to Kim Il-sung by his son Kim Jong-il, which gave a son a reputation for skillful manipulation of traditional values of filial piety for governing purpose. On the first evening in Pyongyang the inviting party throws a wel-

come dinner. A city tour of Pyongyang is given on the second day for relaxation. The route includes birth home of Kim Il-sung, Juche Tower, the Triumphal Arch, Sinmiri Cemetery for Patriots, People's Great Learning Hall. Always included in the route is Shinchon Museum which is widely used as an anti-American learning place. The Mt. Myohang tour is mostly a two day course but can be shortened to one day if the visitors want. If the visitors are originally from North Korea and arrangements are made beforehand, visitors can have an opportunity to see their families and relatives remaining in North Korea. Especially new attitude on the part of North Korea is its sincere effort to find visitors' separated families regardless of visitors' status or organization. Weekends are usually spent for tourism. But if business needs to be done the inviting party accedes to work together even during the weekend. A letter of intention or a contract is signed on the last day of visit.

Don't Expect Too Much on the First Visit

Projects are all different depending on the purpose of the visitors, but what is important is to develop projects that entail continued visits to North Korea. After the first visit a channel for further communication and negotiation is set up according to the outcome of the visit. The North Korean party tend to be suspicious of too many demands of the South Korean visitors on their first visit. It is important to simplify work items as much as possible. If the response of the inviting party turns out to be "wait and see", then their response is negative. Project proposals that have more chances of being accepted by Pyongyang are those that are appealing emotionally, informal in approach, fresh in ideas, and fit the nature of the organization that visitors work for.

It takes some money on the first visit. The largest portion goes to the cost paid for the invitation which is called the "registration fee." Receipts need to be attained when the payment is made. In recent days, some North Korean agents were executed openly on charges of embezzlement of money collected from the deal with

the South Korean visitors. This led to a new practice on the part of the North Korean agents where they prefer bank deposits to cash. Once the invitation letter is issued, the inviting party asks the visiting party to pay the cost entailing their stay in North Korea. But if the cost is paid in the package, the inviting party might not demand further. The basic cost includes meals and accommodations. Rental and entertainment fees are also charged. An airplane can be rented in a tour to Mt. Myohang, Mt. Kungang and some other regions, but it is expensive.

Costs are usually paid in U.S. dollars. At some hotels, BC and Master Card are reported to be accepted, but in most cases visitors use cash. The accommodation cost varies depending on the hotel or Chodaeso (luxury villa). In the case of Botonggang Hotel, a suite costs 150 dollars a day, and a double bed about 75 dollars. A suite has two bedrooms and one sofa. In Koryo Hotel, a super deluxe room costs 160-180 dollars, while a deluxe room 120 dollars and an economy room 100 dollars. In Chodaeso you are given the whole floor. A week's stay costs about 700-800 dollars. Dinner in a hotel costs about 300-400 dollars for eight people. Koryo Hotel or Botonggang Hotel have separate business rooms. A direct call to South Korea is impossible, but a telephone call or fax transmission through Tokyo or Beijing is possible. The telephone bill is quite expensive. Accommodation costs are mostly paid in whole in advance after negotiation with the North Korean agents.

You are recommended to carry 100 dollar bills. When you purchase local products, you use "money slips" which can be exchanged with dollars. Recently issued notes are better because old notes are sometimes not accepted due to the suspicion of forgery. You don't have to exchange all of your money at once. It is better to exchange just the needed amount everyday after consultation with the guides. Guides take care of currency exchange if they are asked. For gifts, cloth for suits or neckties is preferred. But light colors like red or yellow are not recommended. For women, perfume is a good choice. Carrying alcoholic beverages is a good idea as a gift or simply to save money. Cognac is good for gifts.

Cigarettes are also a good choice for gifts to guides or drivers. Marlboro is favored while Japan-made Mild Seven is not welcome. Cheap sunglasses are also popular among guides and drivers. Products made in South Korea are useless. One company carried to North Korea a lot of electronic and electric devices for gifts but these items are reported to gain dust in the store house. Public use of South Korean products can cause charges of treachery. Give up the idea of buying gifts in North Korea. Products sold in the best departments in Pyongyang such as Lakwon Dept. Store and other shops in hotels are mostly imported ones. Office products and electronic goods are mostly made in Japan and alcoholic beverages and perfumes come from Europe.

Thorough Preparation Needed to Save Cost of Visit

On the first day, North Korean people do not accept personal gifts because they think receiving gifts at the first meeting is something awkward. But from the second day gifts are appreciated. If you have many guides, you usually give gifts to the head guide who distributes them among the guides. What is important is to give them without publicity. In some cases they don't accept the gifts. If you like to give gifts to high ranking officials, it is better to deliver them through guides. It is not a good idea to give gifts during the negotiation. If the exchange of gifts are of official nature, you should check the rank and number of agents of the North Korea party. Free shopping is allowed within the hotel. But once outside the hotel, shopping is possible only where guides allow you to shop. It is a good idea to ask your guide to recommend or buy things for you. Guides can get you a discount of maximum half the price.

You also have to be careful about your behavior. All the closed areas such as hotels have wire-tapping facilities installed. Within the hotel you are free, but outside the hotel you are supposed to follow your guide. It is better not to talk about politically sensitive topics. You can address people you meet "sonsaeng (Mr.);" or use

the title printed on the name card. It is better not to compare North and South Korea. You should not try to deliver letters or notes from South Korea.

Also it is important to care about what you carry into North Korea. Basic medicines are recommended due to the inferior medical situation there. Medicines for colds, diarrhea, insect bites, digestion are a must. Wireless facilities such as hand phones and beepers should never be carried into North Korea. One should not smoke South Korea made cigarettes in public, but foreign made cigarettes are acceptable. Do not carry gum or chocolate or small things to give out to the residents. North Korean residents hate to be given these products. Small audio recorders and hidden camera can cause unwanted misunderstanding. You can carry a camera but you are not allowed to take pictures as you please. Following the order of guides would help the smooth proceeding of your schedule. South Korean money is useless there, and it is recommended that South Korean magazines and newspapers not be shown in public.

If you would like your visit to be videotaped, it is convenient to ask "Naenara (My Country) Video Production" to do the job. The cost might be heavy but superb quality is guaranteed. All of your schedule starting from your arrival in Soonan Airport to your departure will be videotaped. It costs about two to three thousand dollars for a week-long stay. Some visitors are reported to carry a video camera and donate it after finishing videotaping. You need to exert some discretion when you ask someone to take picture with you. You have to ask and get their consent when you take pictures of the people. Random filming of buildings and people may cause big suspicion. It is better not take picture of things Pyongyang would not like to be exposed to the outside. To take pictures of outside scenes from within a car, it is also recommended to follow the guidance of your guide. You can develop your film in the photo shops in Koryo and Botonggang Hotel. They return your film and develop photos relatively quickly and you are sure to get them back on your departure day.

You should make sure that the clothes and things you carry with you do not indicate that they are from South Korea. When you enter Pyongyang it is better to wear formal dress. Visitors should bring a dark suit, shirts and shoes to visit places where a full dress is required. Frequent visitors to North Korea recommend that it is better to avoid sumptuous dress decorated with such colors as red, blue, and yellow. Visitors are now more likely to face residents of North Korea. You should not disclose on purpose the fact that you are from South Korea wherever you go or whoever you meet. It is not recommended to approach residents abruptly and ask questions or hand out gifts. One should not show yourself laughing or ridiculing with no apparent reason. Writing down something while you are talking to the residents irritates them. Care is needed in dealing with the publications. You better leave "Rodong Shinmun (Labor News)" or magazines as they were when you finished reading those materials placed in designated areas of the hotel or organizations you visit. You should not crumple or tear them off. You cannot take them for souvenirs. You have to pay special attention to the papers or materials which carry the photographs of Kim Il-sung or Kim Jong-il. Do not use your finger when you want to get the attention of the restaurant waiters or hotel employees. It is better to say politely "Would you come over here?" or "I want you to come over here." Show proper manners in eating especially considering the current food shortages of North Korea. ■■■