

*Dear fellow explorers! Please read this information carefully and attentively.
There will be no excuses for not having done so. M*

NORTH KOREA – a mini-guide by M.T.

First and golden rule: When in doubt, ask. Always and anywhere.

Second: In North Korea we will at all times be accompanied by our Korean hosts from the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, who are my long-time friends and collaborators. It's these guys who are doing all the ground work for making the concert happen and they are open-minded, fun and easy-going people. Names to remember of those who will be with us all the time: Mr. RI YONG MAN (Koreans put family name first and first name last) / MR RI for short (pronounced more like *Li*) and Mr. HONG CHOL HAK (Mr Hong). You will also at some point meet Mr. RYU KYONG IL, who is the director of the CCRFC Europe Department and also an essential key player in this project. Great guys. I love them.

Thirdly: Another key player in our group will be Ms. MARY SUN KIM (SUN for short), who will be our translator and interpreter. Sun is born in Seoul but is an American citizen currently living in Brussels. We have worked together in several of my previous North Korean projects, so she is well known by the CCRFC and vice versa, and Sun has also worked as a tour group leader in North Korea on several occasions. Love her too.

Then, the basics:

What am I allowed I bring in?

Laptops, photo cameras, video cameras, mobile phones /iphones/smartphones, tablets, iPads etc = no problem at all.

Your phones will not work on the North Korean network though, and there is no wireless available anywhere. You can phone home by landline from your hotel, which is possible but expensive. Those with pressing needs for connectivity can purchase a North Korean mobile phone subscription for around 200 EUR (startup fee), which has mobile internet (coverage limited to Pyongyang and near surroundings, which is where we'll be staying mostly anyway apart from a day trip down south to the DMZ – the military demarcation line). It includes a certain amount of data usage, after that you can top up your credits pay-as-you-go. Which is also quite expensive so do bring at least 2-300 EUR for phone credits if this is your plan. If not, well just enjoy the silence. How often do you have the chance to be off the grid for a whole week? **Books and magazines** are OK as long as it's nothing sexy or clearly politically negative towards North Korea. Travel books, like Lonely Planet's or Bradt's North Korea guides are no problem.

What NOT to bring?

There is ONE EASY rule here which must be observed:

Please check ALL MEDIA UNITS that you are bringing in for ANY “funny videos”, stills pictures or anything – anything at all – which directly makes fun of or criticizes the North Korean state and/or its leaders. Yes, I know this is obvious and sorry for treating you like little children, but let's put it this way, through experience I have earned my right to be cautious

about this. Another no-no is **pornography**.

Apart from that, whatever most countries don't want you to import: drugs, weapons, raw meat, Ebola, STDs, bad mood/attitude/breath etc.

Money

North Korea is not connected to the global economy so there are **NO cash machines / ATMs**.

Cash is king – foreigners are not allowed to use North Korean won (you can, however, buy a set as souvenirs). Preferred currencies are **EUR, USD** (yes, really) and Chinese **RMB** (yuan).

Whichever of those you choose to invest in is fine. So get that travellers' money belt out from the closet and rediscover that backpacker feeling.

Expenses

Those of you who are paying your own accommodation (which means, not Laibach) should prepare **110 EUR per person per night (x 7 nights = 770 EUR)** to be paid in cash to our hosts in the Committee for Cultural Relations upon arrival.

These 110 EUR include:

- * accommodation at the mid-range Haebangsan Hotel, Pyongyang
- * three meals a day – breakfast, lunch and dinner. Mineral water is included but soft drinks and beer you need to pay for additionally and the bill is settled when you check out. One tasty 0,6 l bottle of Taedonggang beer = approx. 1 EUR, same as a can of soft drink.
- * all excursions and transport inside and outside Pyongyang
- * translators/guides who will follow us everywhere

Pocket money : this is basically up to you. If you're on a tight budget, you can get by with next to nothing, say 10 EUR a day for a beer, a soft drink and a Kim Jong Il leaflet or two. However there's plenty of cool souvenirs to buy (examples: hand-painted propaganda poster – usually around 40 EUR or tailor-made Korean-style suit or dress around 120 EUR, books, DVDs, CDs etc.) and we might want to eat out a night or two. As you can't just go to an ATM, my view is it's always better to take a little more than you think you will spend. Around **50 EUR per day** is usually more than enough but like I said, you can manage easily with less too.

Health / facilities

North Korea, and especially Pyongyang, is a clean place with no danger of tropical diseases or anything like that. Depending on how sensitive your system is to new food / bacterial floras, you might have a bit of "traveller's belly" for a day or two but most people usually have no problem adjusting to Korean cuisine. Painkillers and some anti-diarrhea medication is always good to bring wherever, apart from that any personal medication is totally OK too.

The toilets in your hotel will have toilet paper, but other public buildings and not least outside if Pyongyang you will do wise to bring a roll or some paper towels / moist napkins or such if you have big business to do.

Clothes

It can and probably will be quite hot in Korea in mid-August (around 25 C usually) so pack your clothes according to that. It's also possible (and not very expensive) to have laundry done at the hotel.

* Most occasions will be relatively informal. However it's always good to stay on the "**smart casual**" side (a good rule of thumb: like you would dress for a job interview).

Shorts are fine for a outdoors sightseeing tour around town but do bring at least **one decent pair of trousers (in other words: not jeans full of holes or camo pants)**, as there will be some occasions where it will be expected that we wear a bit more formal clothing. For guys, also bring at **least one shirt and tie. Bare, male feet in sloppy “vacation” sandals** is the work of the Devil and is hereby banned by me in the name of Good Taste. You women have already noticed that most of my worries here are for the guys – I trust far more your instincts and notions of appropriate elegance.

Most of the time, a relaxed dress code is fine, jeans and T-shirt is OK, although here as elsewhere please use your common sense and refrain from openly provocative **Tshirt** logos with for example Satanist goat and/or pentagram images, really loud heavy metal Tshirts etc etc – you get the idea.

Since you Laibachers might – and by all means should - wear some of the band’s rich merch selection then please **avoid** following motifs (from <http://wtc.laibach.org/t-shirts-man/>) :

Freedom of speech go to hell, Drummer Boy, Spectre Tour, We come in Peace, Think Negative, We Believe in God. The rest of the selection should be no problem.

Behaviour

Be yourself and everything will be fine (unless yourself is an asshole of course).

Behave unto others as you would like others to behave unto you. As long as you’re not openly critical of the system/ provocative / picking a fight it’s just a positive to be curious about people’s lives and North Korea in general in a friendly way. Most Koreans don’t speak foreign languages, although some do understand a little English. Our guides from the Committee for Cultural Relations speak English, as well as our own translator Sun, will be with us all the time so communication’s in the best of hands.

Remember that we are all pioneers – the Korean side and ourselves – in this project and a lot of experiences will be new to everyone. Not least in the technical setup field, there will be challenges which need to be approached with a creative and positive mind.

If not, we will waste a great adventure on going around being annoyed.

Be patient and generous. And the world will smile at you.

Taking photos is generally not a problem, except of soldiers and in general people in uniform (at the DMZ, it’s OK and the officers there will even pose with you) and in “military sensitive” areas (including military checkpoints, insides of airports and on the road approaching Kaesong and nearby DMZ). When photographing people close up, show normal respect like you would in any other country and ask first.

Even those who say no, will do it in a friendly way. Here as everywhere, people love and are proud of their children and will be happy to have you photograph them. A nice little gesture is to show the photo to the objects afterwards if it feels natural to do so, but no big deal if not.

Here also, the guiding principle is: When in doubt, ask.

Drugs and alcohol

To any “jazz tobacco” enthusiasts: Narcotics in any form or shape - **Don’t even think about it.** In the very unlikely scenario that somebody in a hotel would offer you something, chances are big it’s a setup. **Just say no.**

Alcohol and cigarettes, however, are something of a national sport in Korea, at least for the male

population (women are expected to behave more “gracefully” (one popular Korean song is called “Women are flowers” – at least as long as they’re young and beautiful. Old hags are free to get pissed and have a good time.) And Koreans in general are an easy-going bunch who do like to party.

Collectivism / Freedom of movement

Just to be clear: There is no freedom of movement for anyone in North Korea. Not for Koreans themselves, but even more so for foreigners. For instance, it is not allowed to leave the hotel on your own (you’ll get lost pretty soon anyway). We’ll be moving around mostly as one big group, Japanese-tourist style, except for some occasions with different parallel work activities when we’ll split into two or three groups, each with their own Korean guides.

It’s very different how people visiting NK for the first time react to this, some have no problems with these enforced restrictions on movement, some do. My advice is not to let this given condition – which is equal for everyone – annoy you. Look at it as part of the authentic NK experience.

Film crews and media

In Trbolvje in July, the Laibachers already met with director Ugis and DOP Valdis from VFS Films of Riga, Latvia, who are making the documentary not only about the NK concert itself, but also about the road there and the process around it. Release sometime in 2016. We also have two other film crews on board: one is Norwegian director Tommy and his DOP Svein-Erling, who have the main focus on a big visual arts project I’m doing in NK next year but who will also contribute as co-producers for the VFS documentary. Then there’s the lone ranger Jure Tepina from POP TV, Slovenia’s biggest TV channel. Jure will be more focused on news coverage which will be broadcasted both during and after our trip. In addition, we have stills photographers Jorund Pedersen (Norway) and our old friend Jean-Emmanuel Simoulin (Valnoir).

So you better get used to the idea of having cameras in all your body openings 24/7, sometimes they’ll be a fly on the wall, sometimes an elephant in the porcelain shop.

Anyway, I ‘m very happy that this historic project will be so well documented by so many talented people, as it deserves to be. So please wish those media bastards welcome in our midst!

Food

For a touring band who’s used to all kinds of mutant junk food on the road, North Korea will be a piece of cake. The hotel serves both European-ish dishes, based on East Asian reconstruction of rumours about what people eat in Europe, Chinese and Korean cuisine. Have fun with ordering to beautiful waitresses who don’t speak a word of foreign language! The hotel food is in general good and the selection is quite big, although a bit boring after 3-4 days so we really should go out to eat an evening or two – there’s a quite good selection of restaurants in Pongyang these days (approx. 20 EUR per person for a several-course dinner and drinks). There is also a currency shop in the hotel’s ground floor where you can buy snacks, drinks, pot noodles, mineral water and various consumer goods from early morning to late evening.

Electricity

North Korea has the same current as Europe (220V) but sockets vary. Some places, they are of the continental European kind, some places of the East Asian kind. It’s therefore strongly recommended that all of you bring at least ONE universal travel adapter for your own use.

Presents/tips etc

In a true socialist paradise, you are not expected to tip neither hotel staff nor waiters/waitresses. Hagglng is also a largely unknown concept in the places where we'll be shopping. However, it is common at the end of the trip, to collect a little parting gift for our driver(s), who have spent the whole week and worked hard for us.

Something like 5-10 EUR per person (in total, that is – if there is more than one driver they'll split it between themselves) -will both be appreciated as a gesture and add up to real money for them. Our guides from the CCRFC are not expecting any tips or money of this kind as they are taken care of by a part of the money we are paying for the accommodation package.

It is, however, a good idea to bring some presents for our hosts of the Committee for Cultural Relations, as well as the musicians and direction of the Kim Won Gyun school where we will perform and the Kum Song School where the musicians performing with us will come from. It can be anything from your home country, a nice bottle of something alcoholic, and especially samples of your work. Each item doesn't need to be big or expensive, it's more the gesture that is important. Use your imagination.

Paying respect

In the old days, all visitors to North Korea – even diplomats – upon arrival were driven straight from the airport and to Mansu Hill, where they were expected to bow to the giant statue of Kim Il Sung (thesedays it's both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il). It's more relaxed these days, but a visit to the Mansudae Grand Monument, as it is called, is still a compulsory stop on any visitor's itinerary. Just as a travel experience, it's a very interesting experience and highly recommended (dress code: smart casual).

It usually works like this: Everybody lines up in rows at the foot of the monument, whereafter the leader(s) of the group of visitors / head of delegation lays down flowers and the whole group takes one short, collective bow. I've personally never had a problem with it, when in Rome do as the Romans do etc. But some visitors have ethical issues with this, don't want to bow to dictators etc etc. This is totally fine, as long as you let me know in advance (the night before).

I do want to avoid a situation where some people in front of the statue bow and some don't. For those who don't want, it's better to stay in the hotel for that particular visit. I don't need to know numbers now, this is something you can consider if needed until we arrive.

That's your first and only theoretical North Korea lesson folks,
next lessons will be practical and in-the-field.
Have a good time – all of the time!

Stockholm, 2015.08.08.

Great Artistic Leader

Nor Wei Nol Sae

Morten

morten@traavik.info / mob (+47) 48 03 92 24