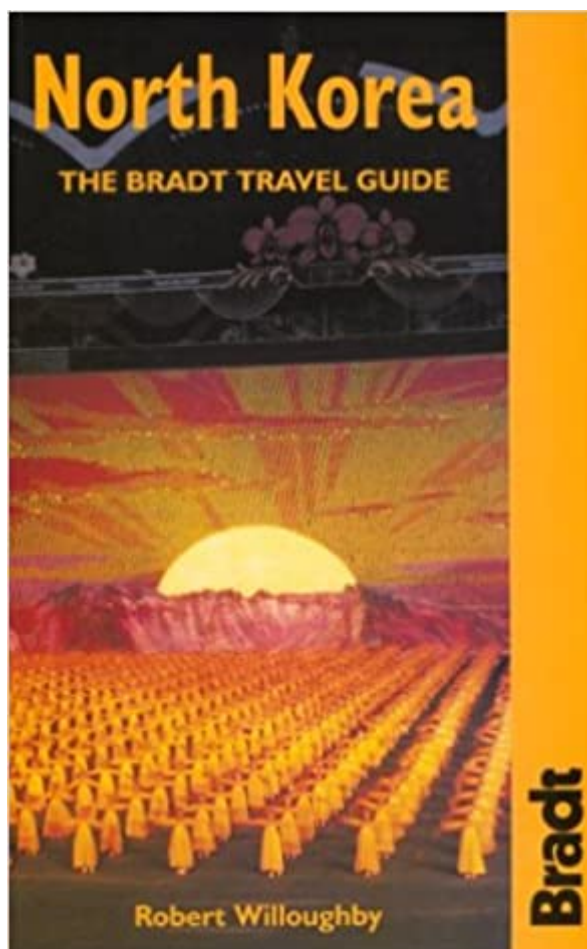


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# North Korea: The Bradt Travel Guide



## Synopsis

This new Bradt guide explores every aspect of visiting North Korea, from day-to-day practicalities to an overview of the history that lies behind this troubled region and the culture that still unites the Korean people. While travelers are obliged to be part of a formal tour, there are plenty of possibilities for the more adventurous, including the Pyongyang International Marathon and the opportunity to traverse the country by motorbike. Routes outwards from the capital, Pyongyang, and via the Hyundai ferry from the South are explored in depth, ensuring that travelers are aware of both the possibilities and pitfalls of travel in this relatively untrodden part of the world. A whole range of information is provided--from red tape and security issues for the independent traveler to festivals and natural history of the mountain landscape for those wishing to explore the background of North Korea either while touring or from an armchair.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This new Bradt guide explores every aspect of visiting North Korea, from day-to-day practicalities to an overview of the history that lies behind this troubled region and the culture that still unites the Korean people. Inside you will find: information on organized tours and independent access from China; the capital, Pyongyang, in detail; red tape and security; cultural do's and don'ts; restaurants and nightlife; national parks and mountain walks; clear maps and town plans.

Robert Willoughby is a freelance journalist who has worked and traveled extensively in Asia, much

of it with the British Council. He has written numerous articles for the British and international press about his traveling experience in China, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

Robert Willoughby's travel guide to North Korea is fascinating on two counts. In the first instance, on the travel front itself, the author has covered several far-flung corners of the country, going beyond the more accessible capital city of P'yongyang, the Diamond Mountain resort, and the tourist-oriented luxuries of Mount Myohang. Although it is not always clear how Willoughby--or those others who contributed to his book--won permission to visit these remote locations, the guide book is explicit in pointing out that few if any foreigners are free to roam the country at will. Visits must generally be part of package tours, most of which originate in China, and the severely underdeveloped road and public transportation systems limit the number of cities that can be accessed. On the second front, that of a descriptive journal, Willoughby's guide contributes to the outside world's knowledge of North Korea, the most secretive and hermetically-sealed of all nations on earth. Nearly all daily news reporting in the United States focuses on a North Korea that is obsessed with acquiring nuclear weapons and has clearly earned its place in the "axis of evil." It is therefore a delight to be offered detailed descriptions of the country's geographic features and flora and fauna and to find out how ordinary people go about their everyday lives. It is also a welcome surprise to learn that in some areas, such as Mount Paektu on the northwest border with China, North Koreans are both gracious and relaxed in dealing with visitors. Willoughby's book benefits greatly from his wonderful writing skills, his British sense of humor, and the careful background research he used to flesh out first-hand observations. I found many details in this book fascinating and available for the very first time, and I would have loved to have had the guide available while I was still an intelligence officer following North Korea in the 1970s through 1990s.

Very decent and very informative guide. Very helpful in preparing for our upcoming trip. Ironically, we have been advised not to bring any books on North Korea with us.

I found the Bradt travel guide indispensable. I traveled to the DPRK in August 2005. I am a U.S. citizen. The trip was arranged through the National Lawyers Guild. I and another lawyer from the US represented the NLG at the 60th Anniversary Liberation Day events in Pyongyang. The trip was routed through China. I believe the NLG picked me because I have good contacts in China and I speak Chinese. As a result of the 1945 Teheran Conference, the Soviet Union agreed to enter the war against Japan. VE day was May 8, 1945. It took several months to move sufficient Red Army

forces from Berlin to the Manchurian border. Chiang Kai Shek's nationalist army never really fought the Japanese, so the whole Northeast (except for the rural base areas of the Chinese Communist guerillas) was under Japanese occupation. The US was counting on Soviet help to rout the Japanese in Manchuria and Korea, and then help with the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands. The U.S. got its wish. Two days after the August 6, 1945 Hiroshima bombing, Soviet forces smashed across the Manchurian border and liberated all of Korea and north China in less than a week. Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. In both Koreas, August 15 (VJ Day) is Liberation Day. In the face of U.S. demands, the Soviets agreed to withdraw north to the 38th parallel. U.S. forces then entered the south. That's how the division of Korea into two hostile states began. The trip I was on was for a conference in Pyongyang celebrating the victory over Japan and pledging international support for Korean unification and support for North Korea against the threats made by the U.S. Government. There were about 100 delegates from around the world. We all stayed in Pyongyang at the Yanggakdo Hotel on Yanggak Island in the Taedong river. The hotel was full. In addition to the conference people, there were hundreds of rowdy Chinese tourists from Beijing tour groups. Room prices are posted on an electronic sign in the lobby. All prices are in Euros. Third class rooms were 70, 80 and 95 Euros/day. 2nd class were 140, 150, 160 and 170/day. First class was 170 and 180. Deluxe rooms were 370 and 420. I picked the 80 Euro room, guessing that it would be higher and have a better view. I guessed correctly. I was assigned room 34-2. My large, new, air-conditioned room had a refrigerator/freezer, big bathroom and a great view, facing upriver toward the Juche Tower. Room prices included all meals, which were scheduled around our itinerary. I was not told that meals were free. When I paid my bill (for seven days), I was charged only 420 Euros for my room, food, conference registration and transportation. The guide/minder sought a "donation" for the minders. I donated 80 Euros. So, the cost for everything, including the tip, was 500 Euros for the week. If you have a choice, avoid this isolated hotel and try to get into the Koryo, which is downtown and near the postage stamp store and a department store. You will have little contact with ordinary Koreans if you stay at the Yanggakdo Hotel. I got my visa in China, in Shenyang, Liaoning Province. Shenyang is the site of the DPRK Consulate nearest the DPRK border. No one was allowed into the DPRK Consulate. It looked like an impressive two story colonial building. A burley Korean was standing at a small opening in the gate and collecting stacks of Chinese passports for visas to Pyongyang. I told him, in Chinese, that we were there to pickup our visas. But he did not speak Chinese! He waived us away when he saw my American passport. A tour operator who spoke Korean interceded for us. The official eventually took our two passports and told us to return in an hour. When we came back, the burley official smiled and returned our

passports. They had DPRK visas stapled inside. We next went to the DPRK airline company (Koryo) in a hotel in Shenyang. The clerk spoke Chinese. I told him we had visas and showed him our U.S. passports. As soon as he saw the passports he said, "No ticket, no way!" But I told him we already had a reservation. He checked his reservations computer and found our names. He then agreed to give us round trip tickets. The fare was \$150.00, round trip, Shenyang to Pyongyang. We left the next day, August 10. It was a forty minute flight to Pyongyang. For me, the high point of the trip was the drive from the airport to the city. It's a 30 minute ride through rolling green countryside. There were cars, trucks and bicycles on the wide road. There were hundreds of busy peasants walking along the roadside carrying tools and leading water buffalo. They looked poor, but no worse than the peasants I saw in rural China, in Sichuan, on this same trip. Some of the peasants were smoking, so they must have had some disposable income. Rolling through the gradual hills I suddenly saw the monumental Arc de Triumph on the road ahead. Through the arch I could see the monument to Cholina, the flying horse, and then huge revolutionary tablets capped with red flags. These were like the monuments around Tiananmen Square in Beijing, but they were on a much larger scale and very impressive. No city in the world has monuments on the scale of Pyongyang. Wow!

No, I haven't been to North Korea, but who has? This was a quirky and fun book for an armchair traveller. The Bradt travel series prides itself on going where Lonely Planet fears to tread - places like Iraq and Kabul - as well as the world's most bizarre country, North Korea. The author briefly mentions how difficult it was to write a travel book where museum employees refuse to give opening hours or phone numbers of their establishments, and where special permits are required to travel from one city to another. I suspect the author could write a second book about what he went through to write this book. Part I consists of 91 pages of background (history, politics, entry documents, etc.), and Part II is about 120 pages of typical travel information regarding hotels (not that you have any choice), restaurants, shopping (hahaha), attractions, and so on. There are 22 color photos, 27 maps, and some black and white drawings. A brief language guide gives translations of such useful phrases as "Yankees are wolves in human shape" - the author does have a sense of humor - as well as more commonplace words and phrases. There is almost nothing here about atrocities or the dire poverty that others have noted. However, the author does coyly mention that it would be pointless to write his book in such a manner that it was banned from being brought into North Korea.

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