



Photographs

Foreigners are closely followed at all times and are prohibited from leaving their hotels at night. Photographs are only allowed in a small number of state-approved locations and under no circumstances may they be taken of military personnel. In order to document real life in North Korea, Daoust made use of a hidden shutter-release cable to take photographs secretly in the non-approved locations.



Prison/Concentration Camps

North Korea currently operates sixteen confirmed concentrations camps where up to 200,000 men, women and children are incarcerated. Some are the size of cities and mortality rates are high since prisoners are forced to perform dangerous slave work and are regularly tortured. Note: Many of those imprisoned are not guilty of any real crime: one man was sent to prison for ten years for absent-mindedly using a newspaper printed with a photograph of Kim Jong-Il to mop up a spilled drink.



Pleasure Brigade

The Kippumjo or Gippeumjo (translated variously as Pleasure Squad, Pleasure Brigade or Joy Division) is an alleged collection of groups of approximately 2,000 women and girls that is maintained by the head of state of North Korea for the purpose of providing pleasure, mostly of a sexual nature, and entertainment for high-ranking Workers' Party of Korea officials and their families, as well as occasionally distinguished guests.



Bicycles

The late Kim Jong Il reportedly felt that the sight of a woman on a bike was potentially damaging to public morality. It was the last straw when, in the mid nineties, the daughter of a top general was killed on a bike. From this point forward, the law has periodically banned women from riding bicycles and they are generally restricted from holding driving licenses.



Restricted Movement

It is illegal for North Koreans to move from one city to the next. If you wish to travel to another part of the country, you are supposed to have a specific purpose and obtain permission from your work unit. Access to the city's capital Pyongyang is particularly limited and restricted to the political elite. The regime has also forcibly relocated hundreds of thousands of North Koreans to less favorable parts of the country as a form of punishment and political persecution.



Arirang

The Arirang Mass Games is performed simultaneously by 100 000 gymnasts and celebrates the heroic exploits of North Korea's great leaders. Behind them, 30 000 children hold up coloured cards to create a 'human billboard', where each child becomes a pixel in a constantly changing backdrop. Children as young as five are selected for the Games and trained twelve hours daily during the months preceding the event.



Mass Gathering

The North Korean constitution guarantees the freedoms of speech and assembly but in practice the regime does not tolerate any challenge to its authority or propaganda machine. Gatherings outside state-organised civic events and ceremonies are strictly prohibited in order to prevent the spread of dangerous liberal ideas.



Transport

Transport in North Korea is constrained by economic problems and government restrictions. Public transport predominates, and most of it is electrified. Bicycles are increasingly common but remain a luxury item especially for electric models. Although cars are largely absent from the country's highways, normal citizens may only travel in the slowest lane at 25 mph and are not allowed to overtake.



Juche Tower

Juche Tower was built to celebrate Kim Il-sung's 70th birthday and comprises 25 550 pieces of stone, each representing a day of his life. *Note: The tower is thought to be based on the Washington Monument, which it surpasses in height by less than a meter.*



Health Care

In 1947, free healthcare was introduced for all citizens in North Korea, but the system collapsed in the late eighties. Many hospitals operate without electricity or heat and all patients have to buy their own medicines. While visiting a hospital we were told that no handicap children were born in North Korea since the 1950's due to their strong genes.

Note: A North Korean doctor who defected, Ri Kwang-chol, has claimed that babies born with physical defects are rapidly put to death and buried.



Traffic Lights

Virtually none of the traffic lights in North Korea operate due to constant electricity cuts and poor maintenance. Instead, policemen and women operate like machines, standing at the centre of many intersections, to control the few cars on the road.



Schooling

Education is universal and state-funded. According to the CIA North Korea has a 100% literacy rate and students have to complete a three-year, 81-hour course on Kim Jong-un.

Note: In the 1990s all teachers were required to pass an accordion test before being able to receive their teaching certificate.



Income

More than 12 million people in North Korea live in extreme poverty. There are various tales to what the monthly average salary is but reports go from 100\$ to as little as 1\$ a month. Food rationing is widespread and many are forced to work in illegal factories, making shoes and clothes to earn money on the black market.



Elections

Elections take place every five years and all citizens are obligated to vote. Voting lacks any real political significance since ballot papers list only ONE candidate. In practice, elections are used by the government to keep track of their people and to uncover possible defectors.



Famine

The famine (1994 to 1998) stemmed from a variety of factors. Economic mismanagement and the loss of Soviet support caused food production and imports to decline rapidly. Known as the “Arduous March” it killed between 240,000 and 3.5million people. Among other unconfirmed cases, at least one person was arrested and executed for cannibalism during the hunger



Amusement Park

Kaeson Park is North Korea's equivalent of Disney World and dates back to 1984. It offers ten or so roller coaster rides, providing a rare situation in which the government actually encourages leisure and enjoyment. However, the rides are said to cost more than half an average monthly salary which clearly puts them beyond the reach of most of the local population. *Note: It has been reported that in order to ensure safety, the rusted roller coasters are regularly tested by local farmers.*



Child Performances

Young children perform complex routines for tourists and achieve disturbing levels of perfection. Although it is an honour for a child to be selected for these performances, children are regularly coerced and mistreated. Food, water and visits to the toilet are withheld in order to install an early sense of discipline.



Kim Il-Sung Square

Kim Il-Sung Square is a central focal point in Pyongyang for frequent rallies, dances and military parades. Similar in design and function to Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the square measures 75,000 square metres and can hold up to 100,000 people. Portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-Il are displayed on buildings surrounding the square where portraits of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin once stood.



Subway

The Pyongyang subway has seventeen stops and consists of two separate lines. Buried at a depth of one hundred meters, it is one of the deepest commuter systems in the world. As a result, it takes passengers nearly four minutes to descend to the platform by escalator. The subway system also doubles as a nuclear bunker in case of attack and all hallways are protected by thick steel blast doors.



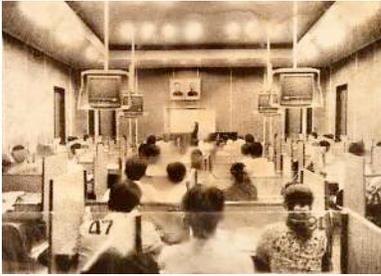
Songbung

In a three-caste system called Songbung, the designation “friendly”, “neutral”, or “enemy” determines whether someone will gain access to education, employment opportunities and membership of the ruling party. The system is based on a person’s family history. Kim Jong Un’s mother was half Japanese, the lowest status for a North Korean. After Kim Jong-il’s death, her personal information, including her name, became state secrets.



Three Generations of Punishment

North Korea law specifies ‘three generations of punishment’. If you commit a crime, your children and grandchildren will also receive the full brunt of punishment, which often involves a lifetime in prison. Children born in prison are raised as prisoners because their “blood is guilty”. Instituted in 1950, this law was supposed to eliminate the blood lineage of counter revolutionary North Koreans after the war.



Higher Education

Kim Il Sung University, founded in October 1946, is the country's only comprehensive higher education institution offering Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral degrees. The University plays an important role in preparing the ruling elite for positions in the party and government. Students have access to a research room with internet access but websites are monitored and restricted, while all books and material are pre-approved by the government.



Juche Calendar

North Korea uses the Juche calendar, which was introduced in 1997 and is based on Kim Il-sung's date of birth: 15 April 1912. The year 1912 is used as Juche 1 and there is no Juche 0. It is presently the year 105 in North Korea.



Military

Military service is mandatory for all citizens, being currently 7 years for women and 10 for men, plus 1 or 2 years of voluntary extension. After their service all militaries have to join a military reserve, which is equally compulsory until the age of 60. It is the largest paramilitary organization on Earth. This number represents 25% of the population.



Kim Jong-il

Kim Jong-Il was the Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea between 1994 and 2011. Affectionately referred to as the "Dear Leader", Kim Jong-Il presided over a highly repressive regime that controlled virtually every aspect of political, social and economic life. Note: The North Korean government website once stated that Kim Jong-Il was the world greatest golfer and never needed to urinate or defecate.