

SOUTH KOREAN TOURISM THREATENED BY NORTH KOREA



The tensions between North and South Korea are affecting much more than the political ambitions of both countries and their status within the international community. This is especially true for South Korea whose tourism industry is increasingly bearing the brunt of the standoff with the North.

South Korea is the 36th most visited country in the world. It actually had over 11 million foreign visitors in 2012. This makes it one of the most lucrative and successful tourism destinations in the world. **A larger portion of its tourism industry is also made up of domestic tourism thanks to the country's extensive and well networked transport systems.**

Unfortunately, spot checks in most of the popular tourist spots in South Korea reveal a gradual and steady decline in tourist numbers – both domestic and foreign. This decline is mostly felt in the northern parts of South Korea that are at close proximity to the border with North Korea.

A good example is Imjingak which is an important historical and cultural park in South Korea. The park commemorates the struggle in the hard fought Korean War and it is a testament to the enduring will of the Korean people. Tourism numbers have continually dropped in this part of South Korea. Shopkeepers are even complaining to the governor of the province that their businesses are being hit.

South Korean business owners at areas close to the northern border are aware of the grave military and diplomatic situation but they are reluctant to move to other safer areas in South Korea. **Many of them believe that the differences between the two countries will be settled diplomatically while others are hopeful that the fear of open war would frighten both sides into a peace agreement.** However, nothing is certain.

The only sure thing is that both sides of the divide are indeed feeling the after effects of the tensions that exist between them. In South Korea these effects are increasingly being felt in terms of lost tourism visits and the corresponding loss in revenues.

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