

Podcast Chingu

Ep 02. 한국에 살면 어떨까?



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Hey everyone! Even though I've been living abroad for seven years, I still don't have many people to chat with, so once again my mouth is *really* itching to talk. I'm Garam, your **Korean Booster Chingu**! So, what should we talk about today? I've been thinking... What would it be like to live in Korea? Today, I'd like to talk about the pros and cons of living in Korea. Maybe some of you have thought about living in Korea one day but weren't sure what it would actually be like. If that's you, I hope today's episode helps you decide whether it's something you'd like to try.

First, let's talk about the advantages of living in Korea. The first advantage is the food. There is just so much delicious food! You already know dishes like bibimbap, tteokbokki, and samgyeopsal. What else? Gimbap, fried chicken—you definitely can't leave fried chicken off the list. When you think of Korea, you have to think of fried chicken! Anyway, there are so many different Korean dishes that I couldn't possibly list them all. Personally, I think this is not only the first advantage of living in Korea but also the biggest one.

Have you ever seen another country that's as passionate about food as Korea? We don't even really have an equivalent of "How are you?" in everyday conversation. Asking, "How are you feeling today?" isn't what usually comes to mind. Instead, we ask things like, "Have you eaten?" or "Did you have your meal?" Whether you've eaten or not is actually a really important question in Korean culture. And it's not just whether you ate—it also matters what you ate. I think that's one of the reasons Korea has so much amazing food. Just look at convenience stores. There are so many kinds of lunch boxes, triangle kimbap (rice balls), and all sorts of desserts. Convenience store chains like GS25, CU, and 7-Eleven are constantly competing with one another. Almost every month—or at least every season—they release new menu items. Desserts, especially, are always changing. There's constantly something new to try. That's why food YouTubers make review videos every time a new dessert comes out. Korean people really are passionate about food and desserts.

Not only is the food delicious and varied, but food delivery is also incredibly convenient. You can order food almost anytime you want. Sure, other countries have delivery apps like Uber Eats or Glovo, but I don't think many places deliver in the middle of the night. In Korea, though, imagine this: you're suddenly starving, but it's already 2 a.m. and every restaurant is closed. No problem! You can either go out and grab something from a convenience store or simply open a delivery app and have food delivered right to your door, even in the middle of the night. That's why I think this is one of the best things about living in Korea.

The second advantage of living in Korea is the transportation system. Korea has one of the best public transportation systems in the world. Even if you don't own a car, you can get almost anywhere by subway or bus. On top of that, public transportation is very punctual. As long as you have a transportation app on your phone, you can check when your bus will arrive, leave your house at the right time, and the bus will show up almost exactly when it's supposed to. You don't have to stand around waiting for ages. Of course, if there's an accident or unexpected traffic, there can be some delays... but we're usually talking about five minutes. Waiting twenty or thirty minutes? That's almost unimaginable in Korea.

Another great thing is the low fare, no matter how far you're traveling. That's really important. For example, if you take a bus in Korea, the adult fare is 1,550 won, while teenagers pay only 900 won. That's about one euro! The fare isn't based on how far you travel. It's basically a fixed price. On top of that, Korea has a fantastic transfer system. Here's how it works: if you get off one bus or subway and transfer to another form of public transportation within 30 minutes, you don't have to pay another full fare—you can transfer for free. Isn't that amazing? Just be careful about one thing. Before you get off the bus or subway, make sure you tap your transportation card when you exit. Otherwise, the free transfer won't be applied. Got it?

The third advantage of living in Korea is that administrative procedures are fast. You know the Korean **"ppalli-ppalli" (hurry hurry)** culture, right? Koreans are always in a rush. We're not exactly known for having a lot of patience. Because of that, administrative work gets done much faster than in many other countries. For example, if you apply for a passport, it's usually issued within just three or four days. That's incredibly fast! And in many cases, you don't even have to go to your local government office. There are so many things you can do online. Official documents like a resident registration certificate, a family relationship certificate, or a marriage certificate can all be issued online for free in less than a minute.

Spain, on the other hand, is known as one of the slower countries in Europe when it comes to administrative procedures. Maybe it's because I'm Korean, but it drives me absolutely crazy. There are so many moments when I feel like I'm going to explode from frustration. Anyway, not only is administrative work fast in Korea, but package delivery is incredibly fast too. If you order something through an online shopping app like Coupang, it usually arrives the next day. Isn't that convenient? If I suddenly need something, I just open the app, choose what I want, place the order, and it's sitting right outside my door the very next day.

Now, let's move on to the last advantage of living in Korea: the healthcare system. Honestly, I don't think I've ever seen a healthcare system that's as fast, convenient, and affordable as Korea's. Even if you don't have an appointment, you can simply walk into a neighborhood clinic. You check in, wait a little while, and then see the doctor. If you've ever been to a hospital or clinic in Korea, you'll know they have incredibly modern medical equipment. For

example, when I have a blocked nose, I can tell the doctor, "Doctor, please help me clear my nose," and they'll use this cold silver suction device to remove all the mucus. It feels so satisfying! Every time I catch a cold here, I find myself missing that treatment so much.

So then, does that mean Korea is the perfect place to live? Of course not. After all, I'm not living in Korea right now. One of the biggest reasons I don't live there—or don't really want to—is the work culture. I'm sure many of you who are currently working in Korea can relate to this. Korean work culture is incredibly demanding. The workload is on a completely different level compared to many other countries. The whole system is very hierarchical and conservative, so communication with your boss is often one-sided. Can you even call it communication? If your boss says, "Do this," you're expected to answer, "Yes." If your boss teaches you something that's actually wrong, how many employees feel comfortable saying, "I don't think that's right"? Probably not many. That's also why it's difficult to say "no" when you're expected to work overtime or attend company dinners. On top of that, many Koreans are completely overwhelmed by work, so they have much less free time or time for hobbies than workers in many other countries. In other words, work-life balance is almost nonexistent.

Another reason I don't really want to live in Korea is the intense competition. People joke that Koreans are born competing with each other. It's a joke... but it's not entirely untrue. Competition is deeply rooted in Korean society. There's competition to get into the best universities, competition to get hired by the best companies as quickly as possible, and that competitive mindset exists throughout society. It doesn't stop there. People compare who drives the nicer car, who carries the more expensive handbag, and so on. Growing up surrounded by constant competition, I didn't realize how much pressure I was under until I moved abroad. Living outside Korea made me realize just how stressful that environment had been.

Recently, something really shocked me, and I think it shows another downside of Korea: housing prices. Homes have become so expensive that many people simply can't afford to buy one. Because of that, the government builds and provides public apartment complexes called LH apartments. These apartments can be rented or purchased at prices that are about 20–30% lower than regular market prices. Do you know what some people call those who live in these apartments? They call them "Elsa," referring to someone who lives in an LH apartment. It's not just a harmless abbreviation—it's a derogatory term used to look down on them. What's even more shocking is that young children are using this word. You hear stories of children at the playground saying things like, "Hey, isn't that kid an 'Elsa'? My mom told me not to play with them because they live in an LH apartment." To me, that's heartbreaking. A society that constantly compares people and pushes them to compete is affecting children too.

The last disadvantage of living in Korea is what Koreans call **nunchi**—constantly being aware of what other people think. In Korea, there's a very strong culture of not wanting to inconvenience others. Of course, that's a good thing to a certain extent, but I think it sometimes goes too far. For example, here in Spain, if I need to breastfeed my baby, I can even do it in a restaurant without much concern. In Korea, breastfeeding in a public place or restaurant? It's almost unimaginable. Somehow, people see it as something that might make others uncomfortable. It's not just breastfeeding. Even if you've achieved something you're

proud of, many people hesitate to talk about it because they worry that others might feel bad or think they're showing off. As a result, many people end up hiding their accomplishments or holding themselves back. They spend so much time worrying about what others think that they don't do what they truly want to do. I used to be like that. My friends are like that. My family living in Korea is like that too. And if someone doesn't care what other people think, society often labels them as "trying too hard to stand out" or "showing off." That's why I think people from cultures that place a high value on individual freedom may find this aspect of Korean society a little suffocating.

After hearing all of that, you might be thinking, "Then I should never go to Korea!" or "I would never want to live there!" But that's not what I'm saying. No country is perfect. Spain has its pros and cons. France does too. The United States does too. Every country has strengths and weaknesses. Even with everything I mentioned today, I still believe Korea is a wonderful place to live for many reasons. I just hope you don't have unrealistic expectations about Korea, but at the same time, I also hope you don't develop a negative prejudice against it. Think carefully about both the advantages and the disadvantages, and then decide for yourself whether living in Korea is something you'd like to experience.

What about you? Have you ever lived in Korea? What did you love about it, and what felt the most unfamiliar or surprising? Let me know in the comments. Thank you so much for listening to today's episode.

I'll see you again in the next episode with another topic.

Until then, take care!