



Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles

Simon Winchester

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles

Simon Winchester

Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles Simon Winchester

In the late 1980s, *New York Times* bestselling author Simon Winchester set out on foot to discover the Republic of Korea -- from its southern tip to the North Korean border -- in order to set the record straight about this enigmatic and elusive land.

Fascinating for its vivid presentation of historical and geographic detail, Korea is that rare book that actually defines a nation and its people. Winchester's gift for capturing engaging characters in true, compelling stories provides us with a treasury of enchanting and informed insight on the culture, language, history, and politics of this little-known corner of Asia.

With a new introduction by the author, **Korea** is a beautiful journey through a mysterious country and a memorable addition to the many adventures of **Simon Winchester**.

Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles Details

Date : Published May 31st 2005 by Harper Perennial (first published 1988)

ISBN : 9780060750442

Author : Simon Winchester

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Travel, Nonfiction, History, Cultural, Asia, Autobiography, Memoir

 [Download Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles Simon Winchester

From Reader Review Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles for online ebook

Meri says

I'm glad I waited until I had been here a year to read this book. Simon Winchester writes about walking across South Korea over 20 years ago. Sometimes I glimpsed a Korea that no longer exists. South Korea is no longer under an authoritarian regime. There are not fences on all of the beaches. Jindo dogs are no longer confined to an island. A lot of what Simon saw, I see here today, which is a testament to Koreans' determination to hang onto their culture.

I have to say I was pretty offended at times. Simon gets uppity about America's imperialism without a hint of irony (Simon, you're British.) He loves all the pretty girls who giggle, rub his arms, and give him lap dances (and am I really supposed to believe you kept your pants on the whole time?) without once mentioning Korea's ass backwards gender politics. On an interesting side note, every foreigner he meets who professes an undying love for Korea is a man, himself included. Just sayin.

He admires Kim Il Sung, which is less shocking if you realize that South Korea was also being ruled by a dictator of sorts at the time. He has a simplistic view of the foreigners living in Korea: foreigners who stay forever are sages to be admired. People who are just stopping through are taking advantage and don't appreciate the culture.

That being said, this book does paint an accurate portrait of Korea, a country with much to love and much to throw your hands up at.

Geoffrey Rose says

I just moved to South Korea and I found this book a reasonably good introduction to the country and it's culture.

A few caveats, the text was written in 1988 when South Korean's government was far more authoritarian. Thus, the contrast with the North wasn't near as striking as today. Winchester is a bit harsh at times on American imperialism (coming from a Brit, this is at times particularly rich) and seems to only encounter the most vulgar, most ignorant Americans he can find.

I also found Winchester's claim to be a sexual magnet to all Korean women coming into his presence a bit hard to take it times.

Overall, the book felt like it was written by say Paul Theroux's younger, less intelligent or insightful brother.

But it was still a good read nonetheless.

Recommend.

Aoi says

This book has a precious little to recommend for itself.

It reads more like a white man's fantasy - encountering hordes of natives fascinated by his 'foreignness', Korean girls desperate to get a piece of him and the author's own offensive viewpoints on culture.

Robert Sheard says

Simon Winchester has written about a wide range of historical subjects and has produced bestseller after bestseller. Some of his more famous works include *The Professor and the Madman*, *Krakatoa*, and *The Map that Changed the World*. So when I discovered recently that he wrote a book in 1988 about Korea, I thought it would be a good chance to learn a bit more about the country I'm researching.

But *Korea: A Walk Through the Land of Miracles* isn't a traditional history text. After a handful of trips to South Korea for other purposes, Winchester decided to learn more about the country simply because it fascinated him. He knew, however, that only visiting Seoul or driving through the country wouldn't put him in contact with the kinds of interesting people he hoped to meet, so following (more or less) the path of a group of 17th-Century Dutch sailors who had shipwrecked on the Korean coast and had been taken north to the capital, Winchester decided to walk the length of Korea's western coast from the southern island of Cheju-do to the 38th parallel—the Line of Demarcation between North and South Korea, a distance of a little more than 300 miles.

Each chapter opens with a passage from *The Description of the Kingdom of Corea*, written in 1668 by Hendrick Hamel, one of the Dutch sailors, and the first Western account of the "Hermit Kingdom." In each chapter, Winchester describes his physical journey as well as the geography and atmosphere of his surroundings, but the bulk of each chapter grows into an account of the people he meets, and the reminders of Korea's history he finds along the way.

So the book's as much a travelogue as it is a history. But it's really Winchester's enthralling portrait of a country he finds simultaneously beautiful, mystifying, and inviting. His one regret is that he must stop at the border with North Korea. As much as he didn't want his journey to end, I didn't want his account to, either. I don't know if South Koreans today have as antagonistic view of Americans as Winchester suggests they did in the 1980s. This concerns me for my own potential trip there next summer, but at the same time, his book makes me more eager than ever to see some of the country for myself.

Linda says

Simon Winchester is awesome; this we know. In this book, in particular, he does a few awesome things. Among them: walking - yes, walking! - Korea from the southern coastal town of Mokpo to the DMZ, plus a Jeju stint to kick things off; calling out governments, often the South Korean government, on their mistakes; reporting the utter vulgarity of the behavior of the majority of the U.S. armed forces stationed in Korea/anywhere; paralleling his chapters with Hendrik Hamel's 1668 account of Korea, including quotes from that centuries old tale. That last in itself is SO interesting because it's a fascinating story nobody knows about Dutch sailor who shipwrecked in Korea and were held for 13 years before they escaped and wrote the

first account of this mysterious kingdom for Western readers. All told, Simon Winchester has done a very good deed by writing this book, and as his preface to the second edition reports, he later visited North Korea when he got the chance. YAY HIM!

Carol Douglas says

Simon Winchester is a famous British journalist and travel writer. In this book, first published in 1988, he tells about walking the whole length of South Korea. There is a great deal of information about Korea, though some of it is now out of date. When Winchester went to South Korea, it was still a dictatorship.

He retraced the route taken by the first known Europeans to see Korea, seventeenth century Dutch seamen and merchants who had been shipwrecked and were virtual prisoners but who nevertheless left a written record.

Winchester loves Korea, and he writes well. There is a more recent foreword in which he talks of traveling to North Korea and of being fond of the people there, too, despite the regime. He seems a little too forgiving of that regime, and says nothing about starvation or prisoners, which of course he didn't see.

I did learn from this book, especially about the horrors of the 1980 massacre of thousands of young people in Kwangju by President Park Chung-hee after there were demonstrations. I also learned more than I had known previously about the Korean War. I didn't realize that the North had captured Seoul twice.

Winchester also spends a great deal of time talking about the people he met, from farmers to Buddhist monks and nuns, Irish Catholic priests, businessmen, and guides. His cheeky descriptions of interactions with women who he says offered themselves to him were hard for me to take.

He writes about the Korean "economic miracle" and sees Koreans as the hardest-working people in the world. He compares them to the Irish, and sees both peoples as cherishing their melancholy over their histories of occupation. Does he think those memories could be forgotten?

Nonetheless, I learned from this book. I hope I was able to understand all his biases and evaluate the book accurately.

Jenni says

Although this book is quite dated (the author did his walk through South Korea in the late 80s), and I've been to South Korea in the last couple years and much has changed since this book was published, this was still an enjoyable read. Part travelogue, part history lesson, part social commentary, I thought it was an interesting chronicle of a journey on foot from the southernmost point in South Korea up to the North and South Korean DMZ. I didn't particularly like the author - he seemed a bit smug about his white-ness and how "exotic" that would be to the locals - nor do I really believe that he turned down so many opportunities to, let's say, get friendly with the local women - so that drops it a star for me. But otherwise, a good choice for those who enjoy hiking/trekking memoirs and a decent armchair adventure narrative.

Tom Romig says

Simon Winchester is, as usual, a pleasure to read. The problem with the book is that it's about South Korea 30 years ago when he walked the length of the country. At that time, the "miracles" referred to in the subtitle had to do with economics, not government, which was a despotic military regime.

Even granting how long ago the book was written, it's striking how little Winchester comments on the desperate plight of women. He is, in fact, rather cavalier about the widespread prostitution he chronicles.

Oddly, Winchester ends the account with kind words for North Korea. His 2004 preface to the second edition continues this bizarrely benign appraisal of the North: "however grim and impoverished and unfree it may be, there is some credit for the fact that it has as yet not been entirely swallowed up by the globalized Coca-Cola culture of its neighbors." Sort of like, on the downside I'm being tortured to death, but on the upside at least I can't get a Coke.

John says

I liked *Outposts* and *Fracture Zone; Korea*, however, was the end of line for me. Winchester makes a repeated point of how popular he is among South Koreans by virtue of his being English; that was snotty enough by the third go-round. He managed to find one old soldier, fawningly pro-British, as though the U K had been the ones who saved South Korea. What did me in was the time he arrived at a U S base, browbeat them into letting him stay there (when they didn't have to), and then proceeded to trash just about every single U S military person he ran across after accepting their hospitality. He also had a penchant for running into anti-American Koreans; you'd think they were rife, along with all of the many prostitutes throwing themselves at him.

There's well-researched history here, although it didn't fully redeem the book for me.

Denice says

Once when I became very ill in the Peace Corps, the Medical Officer handed me Winchester's *Krakatoa*, and ever since I have been a huge fan of his writing. While living in Korea, I happened across this book about his walk from the South to the North in the 1980s. While it took some getting used to recognizing the old Romanization of names (he apologizes beforehand, and obviously it's not his fault), I learned so much about the peninsula's history- perhaps more so than I have learned living in the countryside for a year and a half! One complaint was that he seemed to spend a lot of time with other foreigners (although it seems as most of us expats do the same). Obviously it's just one man's experience and was seen through a filter and presented to him as a foreigner (he does mention that even parts of his books are sugar-coated due to the nature of the times).

One fact I noticed was that he mentioned Korea is the only country to celebrate its alphabet, which I know to be untrue! There is also an Alphabet Day to celebrate Cyrillic in Bulgaria (and an entirely separate day to celebrate its creators).

All in all, I recommend it to expats living here or people who are interested in Korea.

V says

I learned a fair amount about Korea that I didn't know, which is the positive thing I can say about this book. But the vaguely creepy paternalistic narration was extremely off-putting - it's very much a book written by a white man with a particular (and not appealing) perspective on what Korea "truly" is. The weird overuse of the word giggling is notable and telling. Extreme lack of self-examination when it comes to the author's encounters with Korean women.

Grizol says

While doing some due diligence on the book before diving into it, I found in one review someone describe it as being similar to a long article in a periodical, lacking in that essential style that makes or breaks a piece of travel literature, it being concerned, principally in my mind, with the relation of the author to the place at hand, not with the place itself per se. I'd have to agree.

The premise: the author, principally a journalist (and oh, how it *_shows_*), is interested in Korea and decides, for whatever reason, to start in the south and travel northward, covering the ground of the Dutchmen who shipwrecked there centuries ago. They were confined to the peninsula by the king for reasons of national security and only after a decade of forced military service were some of them able to escape. One member wrote a book about their experiences, the first Western account of the place, a natural (if forced) source of inspiration and guidance for our author's own tour of the country.

This premise is really an overabundance of form. The author does not seem to really be interested in Korea in the traditional literary sense, but instead is interested in Korea as a geopolitical entity - concerned with those details that make their way into an Economist article the middlebrow can regurgitate with smug self-satisfaction. My gripes with the aesthetic style is nuanced to the point of being, admittedly, indefensible - but allow me to try.

Consider the following scene: a man, guidebook in hand, visits a country in search of its soul. He knows his companion text in and out, and throughout his walk is quick to bring up any factoid he recalls and connect it to the scene at hand. More likely, he to and from the places described in the book and, sizing up the entry before him, confirms with an absurd self-satisfaction that what he reads and what he sees (through the context of his book, like a crutch beside him) match.

Of course, our author does not do something so cliché, but my claim is that he, in his own way, approaches the spirit of the portrait above. Instead of a guidebook he has a more "literary" equivalent of a historical account of travels through the country. In exchange for mere facts, he has broad stroke opinions and views undifferentiated from the general Western perception of the country at the time to regurgitate with a pretense of introspection.

As such, if you are looking for a cursory view of a country, the likes of which a Wikipedia article or variety of Economist articles can impart, then this is a sufficient substitute. If you are looking for travel literature proper, then this is nothing of the sort.

There is no introspection here, nor romanticism, nor moments of delightful triviality. Chapter after chapter we get the details of his journey from one side to another. Sometimes it rains, and often his feet hurt. He meets a variety of "pretty" women who either serve him a drink, present him a room, or try to sell themselves to him, all of these things being quite incidental to his primary aim of doing his Important Walk. In fact, if the author weren't so insufferably literal, I'm convinced he would occlude these things entirely, he certainly doesn't have anything interesting to say about them, or really any thought about the people he meet at all. He is instead content to talk about how "Korea is a miracle" or, more concretely, various factoids that he presents in lieu of insights and observations of the country and people itself.

He brings up, multiple times, how he wish he could go all the way to North Korea, but you are left wondering what purpose could that possibly serve? You find that it is because he has misconstrued the _route_ for the _walk_. This confusion extends even to the preface of the second edition, where he mentions his visits to the dictatorship after the book has been published and how he felt it was vaguely more Korean than it's democratic counterpart. This fits in quite nicely with the manner of his writing and account, which is concerned primarily with the content of histories and factory floor pamphlets. The actuality of Korea and the Korean peoples must, necessarily, be far away from the true Korea, then, which in his mind is something that was written down once, like a national decree, and must be played on loud speakers across proverbial DMZs.

Frank Theising says

I've spent just short of a year here in Korea and on a friend's recommendation read this book. It provides an intriguing snapshot into 1980s Korea. A period of significant transformation for the country both politically (at the time it was still very authoritarian) and economically (the country was just beginning its impressive economic expansion). Its been interesting to see how much has changed since this book was published in 1988. The author walks the length of the country from Jeju Island in the south to the DMZ at Panmunjom. Along the way he highlights many of the cultural oddities of the Korean people (the role of marriage brokers in a country with fewer men due to the Korean War, the historical significance of Buddhism, the sadistic enjoyment Koreans take in recounting their history of constant invasions and oppression, and how social gatherings are structured to guarantee intoxication of all involved (his description of the Soju hangover is both comical and accurate)).

He likewise delves into some more depressing fare as well (the plight of women, who seemed to prostitute themselves at just about every stop (which he didn't seem to mind very much), the crude and demeaning behavior of American service members towards their Korean hosts (thankfully the behavior described has been nothing like my experience here this year), and the violent suppression of student uprisings in Gwangju at the hands of an authoritarian government (the fear of communist influence was no doubt a contributing factor to the government's response though I've no doubt the threat was exaggerated to justify their actions)).

He repeatedly laments his belief that the Korean people seem to be losing some unnamed but essential quality of their Korean-ness as a result of their economic modernization. This leads to some oddly disturbing praise for the North Korean people near the end of the book, whom he thinks seem to remain more true to the Korean ideal because they are not faced with the challenges and changes that accompany economic prosperity. I understand his point however, I think every culture, not just the Korean, has faced dramatic changes as a result of economic prosperity and globalization. I believe it was simply his ability to experience that culture at a time of dramatic transition that made it more powerful in his imagination and thus more regrettable.

Wendell says

Some interesting info about the country, but it was overshadowed for me by the author's tone when it came to speaking about women and describing some aspects of Korean culture. It would have been a good book if he had left his commentary out of it.

Travis says

Living in Korea has been great. Reading about Korea from the framework of someone who decided to walk across it was even better. I loved Winchester's use of his walk as a framework for going on all kinds of descriptive tangents about Korea: ginseng, barbershop/massage parlors, shipbuilding, food, North Korea, and most especially some of the complexity of the American Presence in Korea. It really made me want to walk across Korea, and I'm already starting to float that idea by my son. Great style, and great way of describing a country. Wish I could find a book like this on every country and state!
