



THE ENGLISH TEACHER'S GUIDE TO KOREA

Living, Working, and Thriving in Korea Sparkling

By
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Matt Henderson

ATEK Press

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*This book is dedicated to all the teachers:
those that have come before,
those that have gone on,
and those that remain,
at or far from home.*

There is a Korean word, *sinparam*, that expresses the pathos, the inner joy, of a person moved to action not by coercion but by his own volition. *Param* is the sound of the wind; if a person is wafted along on this wind, songs burst from his lips and his legs dance with joy. A *sinparam* is a strange wind that billows in the hearts of people who have freed themselves from oppression, regained their freedom, and live in a society of mutual trust.

--Cheong Kyeong-mo

FOREWORD

From its quiet beginnings in 1883, when the Korean government opened up the first English language school to train interpreters, teaching of English has developed into a three trillion won a year industry. English proficiency is required to be competitive in law, finance, and many other professional fields. An English test is even an entrance requirement to become a police officer today.

For the first 100 years, the teachers were looked up to. Many were missionaries who, most Koreans feel, came to help their forbears in a spirit of self-sacrifice. Later, in the 1960s and '70s, they were young American Peace Corps volunteers, many of whom, like the present American Ambassador to Korea, Kathleen Stephens, went on to contribute to the country in other ways.

Then, things seemed to get more difficult. I don't know if this was the start, but I recall a howl or protest about 25 years ago after a Frenchman wrote an article in *Le Monde*, the French daily, describing how he had enjoyed life in Korea, drinking, seducing women and teaching language despite being completely unqualified. After this, people started looking askance at foreign teachers, and the authorities introduced regulations requiring them, somewhat unnecessarily as many were just conversation teachers, to have university degrees. As their image in the media worsened, additional regulations followed, with the introduction of fingerprinting for foreign residents (now repealed, but still favored by some government officials), and recently, the introduction of drug and HIV tests.

Ever since, it seems, despite their contribution and the appreciation of colleagues and students, expatriate teachers of English have had to contend publicly with unfair accusations about their behavior, often backed with completely misleading statistics and/or statements reported in the press. The long-suffering English educator community took this in stride, and they continued to come to teach, dutifully meeting the requirements set for them. However, they lacked a unified voice with which to appraise the media and government of their needs.

Now, with the formation of their first association, I sense that this situation is about to turn into something more appropriate and professional. And, here in your hands, is the first piece of evidence to support my assumption. *The English Teachers Guide to Korea* was conceived by the founders of the Association for Teachers of English in Korea (ATEK) to help make the transition from the normalcy of home to expatriate life a little easier. And it does a very good job of doing so, with its practical advice and historical lessons. It's better than anything else we have produced so far in the expatriate community. But that, I guess, that's how it should be. The writers are teachers, after all.

--Michael Breen, author of *The Koreans*

PREFACE

Looking back on our experiences in Korea, there were times when all of us lost time, money or sanity because we were lacking accurate information. How many things have each of us learned through trial and error? The English Teacher's Guide to Korea was conceived of to help make the transition to expatriate life a little easier.

When the ATEK founding directors were deciding what benefits to offer members when ATEK launched, we knew that our most valuable asset was information. We developed concepts for wikis, directories, and this book. Initially we were only going to offer it to members, but after some discussion, we realized that holding this information back from any English teacher just isn't right: we need to offer something to everyone.

--The Authors

I would like to thank my better half, Wu Junjun, for being patient and encouraging, even when my duties with ATEK took me away from her. Ben Wagner, Professor of Law at Kyung Hee University, very graciously dogged a Korean prosecutor for a legal citation I needed, and his tireless work for the rights of expatriates in Korea is appreciated. I am forever grateful for his support. Alan Timblich and Simon Hong at the Seoul Global Center have provided ATEK with top notch business consulting, and helped to find us the answers which we could not retrieve on our own; for that I am also grateful. Heekyoung Han at

the Seoul Global Center is chiefly responsible for the joint ATEK-SGC publishing effort that resulted in 1,000 copies of this book being made available free to English teachers in Korea. Most importantly, I'd like to thank the other authors: Tom, Jason, and Matt, for putting up with my demands and working so hard on the material they contributed. It shows, and I could not work with a finer group of educators. My deepest appreciation and sincerest thanks goes to them.

--Tony Hellmann

I'd like to thank all those people who encouraged me to pursue the idea of ATEK, and all those who have helped me out along the way. Whether it was Mr. Sung first taking me out to lunch to discuss the idea of setting up a teachers' organization, teachers phoning me to talk to me about the everyday issues they face, our legal counsel who has encouraged us to pursue this idea in new and novel ways, my friends at Amnesty International Korea and G48 who have always provided me with encouraging words and mental support, or those who worked with us closely along the way, they all deserve my deepest gratitude.

I would also like to say that ATEK has been very fortunate to have some very impassioned and hard-working people dedicating countless hours and resources to this guide. Lastly, I'd like to thank my family here in Korea and back in New Zealand, especially my loving fiancé who has stood by me, helped with translation work, withstood my moments of inspiration, and been my pillar

of strength and support and my truest confidant.

--Tom Rainey-Smith

My thanks to teachers Kim Seok-cho and Hwang Hyeon-su for their comments on earlier drafts related to ELT and co-teaching. Special thanks to every member of the Korean Teachers Union for their tireless efforts to change the status quo, and to my ATEK colleagues for the same.

--Jason Thomas

I'd like to thank my wife for allowing me time away from her and our baby son while I was writing my contribution to this book. Thanks also to the Seoul Metropolitan Government, the Seoul Metropolitan Rapid Transit Corporation and the Korea Tourism Organization for their excellent interactive online English language maps and information systems. Thanks also to The Yongsan City Government for their excellent handbook, *A Guide for Expats Living in Yongsan* which is available for free in the foyer at the Yongsan-gu office.

--Matt Henderson

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INTRODUCTION

Living and working in a foreign country where one doesn't speak the native tongue presents significant challenges. How does one access services? For that matter, what services are available, and how do they compare and contrast with services in one's country of origin? What does one need to know in order to minimize potential conflicts in a workplace with a substantially different set of expectations and social mores? What does one who has never taught before need to know before they step into an English classroom as a teacher for the first time? The questions are both substantial and without end.

This book is designed to help provide answers to some of these questions, and to report good, accurate information from reliable sources. Much of the information in this guide is scattered across the Internet on websites that cannot verify the truthfulness of statements contained therein. Other information is available only in Korean, and has been translated and presented in this guide. Still other information is original work written specifically for inclusion in this book. We hope this guide makes expatriate life a little more convenient, a little less perplexing, and generally better. There is something in it for everyone.

Chapter One provides social, political, economic, cultural, and historical facts about Korea, to give you a sense of Korea's present situation, and how it has arrived at it. It also presents some information on Korea's spoken and written language.

Chapter Two explains the Korean education system,

beginning with a broad history of education in Korea, a more specific look at the history of English education, and then a detailed profile of the current Korean education framework.

Chapter Three covers the visa system for English teachers (and some others) in Korea and provides a description of different types of jobs for English teachers. Finally, an article is presented which provides information on how to find a job, including what to look for, what to watch out for, and what particulars you need to know before signing a contract.

Chapter Four details things one needs to be aware of when interacting with Koreans (both students and coworkers) in a work setting. Cultural and communicative differences are explained. There is an article on working with a co-teacher which may be of particular interest to public school teachers. There are resources for those seeking information on how to actually teach, including lesson planning, activity preparation, and classroom management.

Chapter Five introduces a variety of goods, services, and activities essential to (or convenient for) daily living. The health care system is covered in greater detail than most other guides (I interviewed a Korean doctor for part of it). Transportation is covered in depth as well.

Chapter Six attempts to explain everything a foreign resident of Korea needs to know to understand their rights as residents, as workers, and as immigrants (whether temporary or otherwise). Criminal and traffic law are covered in some detail, and civil law is touched upon as well. Labor standards are also outlined.

Chapter Seven covers travel, detailing immigration permits and procedures. It also provides information on airports and airfields around Korea, and foreign embassies.

Finally, the appendices provide additional information of use: an extensive list of “survival phrases” written in English and Korean is available; a great number of Korean foods are listed, along with their macronutrient compositions; and a detailed lesson plan is presented.

This guide is a work in progress, with the first edition is a starting point. Future editions will expand upon the information presented herein, and provide new information as well. I and the other authors hope that some of what we've written is of use to you.

--Tony Hellmann, Editor of the First Edition