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Travel Writing

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A Seoul Full of Coffee

In recent years, Seoul, South Korea has become a tourist mecca for not only Americans but also many other cultures. In a city with a vast landscape of parks and wildlife there is an alternate view of high-rise buildings and busy streets and subways. Just like any city, social life revolves around food, drinks and fun. As the sun rises, around 5 a.m., so does the city and along with that comes a culture that brings together many people.

Coffee is a staple in many countries. In some, like America, people look at coffee to wake them up. In other countries, coffee beans are grown and are a delicacy. In Seoul, coffee is a culture, a way of life.

“Coffee shops in Seoul are social playgrounds — they make for ideal, cozy settings where friends can interact, study and even date. As a result, the coffee culture in Seoul has really taken off,” said Gregory Curley, a copy editor living in Seoul.

Like many Asian countries, South Korea, used to be a tea-drinking culture. It wasn't until the late 19th century that the coffee market started to flourish in the city of Seoul. It has been said that more than seven million tourist travel to Seoul each year. That number, along with the different kinds of people the city caters to, adds to the different types of coffee that is served. Although tourists add to the coffee culture, Seoul residents tend to think of coffee as their social activity.

“The interesting thing about Korean culture is that people mostly socialize outside their homes. For Koreans, instead of inviting a new friend over to their home, they’ll meet them in a coffee shop. This is probably why coffee shops are so crowded here in Seoul,” resident Hannah Bae said.

It is also typical for coffee to be incorporated as part of a routine, not just a social aspect. More coffee shops are popping up in malls, street stores and even offices.

“There’s actually this portmanteau that’s been created in recent years – “coffice” – that refers to a coffee shop that serves as an office for independent freelancers who would rather set up shop in a coffee shop than have an official office,” Bae said.

A day in the life of a typical Seoul resident can include more than just one morning cup of Joe, which is typical in America as a “wake-me-up” type attitude. It is popular for coffee to become a type of relaxing and hangout rather than a grab and go.

But, just like in most cultures, grab and go coffee is good for the workday. One visit to Seoul, and anyone could see that the appearance of the city and the people in the city is important. It would come to no surprise that brand names are a staple in some of the lives of the residents. The same goes for coffee, too.

“ A lot of people love to hold to-go coffee cups from popular coffee businesses to show off their brand name,” student Rochelle Jeon said.

Seoul is home to many coffee houses. The most popular brand names, like Starbucks and Coffee Bean, reside in the heart of Seoul. Korean chains, like Holly’s,

compete heavily with the big brand names as well. The Korean coffee chains tend to attract more than just culture and are blended in to some of the most cultured parts of the city. Independent coffee houses are also big in Seoul. Since coffee has become such a staple, small stores are fighting for the affection of the Seoul people.

Lastly, just like the Korean culture, coffee is an innovative art form. It is not just a regular drink but it is appreciated for the way coffee shops have innovated the drink to a culture that fits any type of person. Just in one day in Seoul, a coffee shop can be found for any type of person: the indie, the sports person, families, friends, avid coffee drinkers and even dog lovers. Something Korea does very well, besides opening up their amazing city, is combining different things that people love. Coffee is not beside that. If you are a dog person, believe it or not, Seoul actually has dog café's where you can drink coffee and play with your favorite type of dog.

"My favorite? Dog Café! Not only did I get to enjoy my yummy coffee, but I got to watch and play with many different types of dogs," Jeon said.

The Korean culture is home to loving people. It is home to many different activities and the coffee culture is just a small part that makes tourists and residents alike, fall in love with the city. Seoul: where coffee goes from a pick-me-up to a way of life.