

TUTORIAL
6.7

Culture snapshots 1

This tutorial looks at two different cultures - Jamaican and South Korean - by giving a brief description of some of the things that are important to people in those cultures, and some of the culture threads that are evident in their societies.

Introduction

We are going to take a snapshot - a brief look at - two different cultures. Our purpose isn't to stereotype or pigeonhole the individuals within those societies. We simply want to look at some common threads in each one in order to develop an overall picture of the fact that different cultures handle the same issues and problems in a variety of ways. We also want you to think about your own perceptions as an outsider and how those views have been formed.

Jamaica



Before you read our brief introduction to some aspects of Jamaican culture, think about what you already know and think about Jamaican people - and the stereotypes you may already have in mind. How were your views formed?

1. Communication

Language: English (official), and Creole. English is the official language of Jamaica. However, Patois (Creole), a combination of English and some African languages, is spoken in rural areas and is used increasingly in urban areas. Most Jamaicans can speak or understand Patois, but there are few written materials in Patois. The Bible was translated into Patois in 2011. Jamaican speech, even in English, has a distinctive rhythmic and melodic quality.

The most common greeting is the handshake with direct eye contact, and a warm smile. You could look up some videos on YouTube of people greeting each other in Jamaican Patois.

Once a friendship has been established, women may hug and kiss on each cheek, starting with the right. Men often pat each other's shoulder or arm during the greeting process or while conversing.

People are addressed by their honorific title (Mr, Mrs, or Miss) and their surname until a personal relationship has developed. It is normal to wait until invited before using someone's first name. As friendship deepens, a person may be asked to call someone else by their nickname.

Jamaicans can be direct communicators and are not afraid to say what they think. They expect others to be equally direct. At the same time, they value tact and sensitivity and dislike overt aggression. They will politely tell you what they think, even if they disagree with what you have said. They appreciate brevity and are not impressed by too much detail. When dealing with people at the same level, communication can be more informal.

Jamaicans stand very close when conversing. A man may touch the arm or shoulder of another man, or even touch his lapel, while speaking.



2. Life Values

Jamaicans have a healthy distrust of those in authority and prefer to put their faith in those they know well, such as their extended family and close friends who are treated as if they were family. This can be seen in the fact that many still prefer to form a "partner" with friends and family rather than go to a bank to secure a loan. A partner is a financial arrangement between friends and neighbors. Each person in the group agrees to contribute a set amount into the partner for a specific number of weeks. Accumulated funds are used to make down payments for large purchases such as buying a house or a business. The basic requirement of the partner is trust. To become a member of the elite group, a person must be recommended by a friend or relative.

Jamaicans value logic and linear thinking. They expect punctuality although they are not always successful at arriving on time themselves.

3. Relationships

Relationships are viewed as more important than rules. The Jamaican family includes a close-knit web of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Families are close and provide both emotional and economic support to its members.

Although it is not imperative that you be introduced by a third-party, such introductions can speed up the time it takes to develop the personal relationship so necessary to conducting business successfully.

Networking and relationship building are crucial. While Jamaicans are outwardly warm and friendly, they often appear standoffish at the initial introduction because they are reserved until they get to know someone. Socializing is an important part of developing a relationship.

Status is respected in Jamaica. It is quite common to hear someone referred to as "bossman" or "bosswoman" when the person addressing them is not an employee. It is imperative to show deference and respect to those in positions of authority.

4. Identity

Ethnic Make-up: black 90.9%, East Indian 1.3%, white 0.2%, Chinese 0.2%, mixed 7.3%, other 0.1%.

Religions: Protestant 61.3% (Church of God 21.2%, Baptist 8.8%, Anglican 5.5%, Seventh-Day Adventist 9%, Pentecostal 7.6%, Methodist 2.7%, United Church 2.7%, Brethren 1.1%, Jehovah's Witness 1.6%, Moravian 1.1%), Roman Catholic 4%, other including some spiritual cults 34.7%.

The family is the most important group a person belongs to, and as such, it is the group with whom a person spends most of his/her time developing and maintaining cordial relations.

Religion is fundamental to Jamaican life, which can be seen in the references to Biblical events in everyday speech. The island has the highest number of churches per capita in the world and more than 100 different Christian denominations. Most Jamaicans say they are Christians; the largest denominations are the Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Brethren and Roman Catholics.

Christmas is typically observed by various denominations with Communion services, candlelight ceremonies, concerts, all-night prayer meetings and the singing of Christmas carols.

There are three types of Rastafarians in Jamaica; Rastafarians believe they are one of the lost tribes of Israel who were sold into slavery and taken to Babylon (Jamaica) and that they must return to Zion, which they hold to be Ethiopia. The movement does not have organized congregations, it does not have a paid clergy, and it doesn't have a written doctrine.



South Korea



What views do you already hold about South Korean culture? Do you know any South Korean people or perhaps know something of their culture from TV, local restaurants, reading, etc.?

As you read the introduction of Korean culture below, think about how much the four areas - communication, life values, relationships and identity - are interconnected and interwoven and really can't be separated as 'neatly' as we would like.

1. Communication

The Koreans are one ethnic family speaking one language. The Korean language is spoken by more than 65 million people living on the peninsula and its outlying islands as well as 5.5 million Koreans living in other parts of the world. The fact that all Koreans speak and write the same language has been a crucial factor in their strong national identity. Modern Korean has several different dialects including the standard one used in Seoul and central areas, but they are similar enough that speakers and listeners do not have trouble understanding each other.

South Koreans are extremely direct communicators. They are not averse to asking questions if they do not understand what has been said or need additional clarification. This is a culture where "less is more" when communicating. Response to questions is direct and concise. Since there is a tendency to say, "yes" to questions so that there is no loss of face, questions should be phrased so they require a direct response (e.g. It is better to ask, "When can we expect to leave?" than "Can we expect to leave in the next hour?").

Greetings follow strict rules of protocol. Many South Koreans shake hands with expatriates after the bow, thereby blending both cultural styles. The person of lower status bows to the person of higher status, yet it is the most senior person who initiates the handshake. The person who initiates the bow says, "man-na-suh pan-gop-sumnida", which means "pleased to meet you." Information about the other person will be given to the person they are being introduced to in advance of the actual meeting.

A visitor should wait to be introduced at a social gathering, and when leaving a social gathering, should say good-bye and bow to each person individually.



There is often a strict protocol to be followed when dining as well. A visitor must wait to be told where to sit. The eldest are served first. The oldest or most senior person is the

one who starts the eating process.

A person should never point with his chopsticks, or pierce food with them. Chopsticks should be returned to the table after every few bites or when drinking or speaking. Chopsticks should not be crossed when put on the chopstick rest and should never be placed parallel across the rice bowl. Fruit should be speared with a toothpick. The first offer of second helpings is always refused.

2. Life Values

Family welfare is much more important than the needs of the individual. Members of the family are tied to each other because the actions of one family member reflect on the rest of the family. In many cases the family register can trace a family's history, through male ancestors, for over 500 years.

Kibun is a word with no literal English translation; the closest terms are pride, face, mood, feelings, or state of mind. If you hurt someone's *kibun* you hurt their pride, cause them to lose dignity, and lose face. Korean interpersonal relationships operate on the principle of harmony.

It is important to maintain a peaceful, comfortable atmosphere at all times, even if it means telling a "white lie". *Kibun* enters into every facet of Korean life. It is important to know how to judge the state of someone else's *kibun*, how to avoid hurting it, and how to keep your own *kibun* at the same time. In business, a manager's *kibun* is damaged if his subordinates do not show proper respect. A subordinate's *kibun* is damaged if his manager criticizes him in public.

Nunchi is the ability to determine another person's *kibun* by using the eye. Since this is a culture where social harmony is crucial, being able to judge another person's state of mind is critical to maintain the person's *kibun*. *Nunchi* is accomplished by watching body language and listening to the tone of voice as well as what is said.

Koreans may arrive up to 30 minutes late to an invitation without giving offence. Shoes must be removed when entering someone's home.

3. Relationships

The family is the most important part of Korean life. In Confucian tradition, the father is the head of the family and it is his responsibility to provide food, clothing and shelter, and to approve the marriages of family members. The eldest son has special duties: first to his parents, then to his brothers from older to younger, then to his sons, then to his wife, and lastly to his daughters.

The teachings of Confucius describe the position of the individual in Korean society. It is a system of behaviors and ethics that stress the obligations of people towards one another based upon their relationship. The basic tenets are based upon five different relationships:

1) ruler and subject, 2) husband and wife, 3) parents and children, 4) brothers and sisters, and 5) friend and friend. Confucianism stresses duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority, and sincerity.

Gifts express a great deal about a relationship and are always reciprocated. It is inconsiderate to give someone an expensive gift if you know that they cannot afford to reciprocate accordingly. Fruit or good quality chocolates or flowers are appropriate if invited to a Korean's home.



Gifts should be wrapped nicely. The number four is considered unlucky, so gifts should not be given in multiples of four. Giving seven of an item is considered lucky. Gifts should be wrapped in red or yellow paper, since these are royal colors - or yellow or pink paper which denote happiness. Gifts should not be wrapped in green, white, or black paper, and a card shouldn't be signed in red ink. Both hands should be used when offering a gift. Gifts are not opened when received.

South Koreans prefer to do business with people with whom they have a personal connection.

It is therefore crucial to be introduced by a third-party. Relationships are developed through informal social gatherings that often involve a considerable amount of drinking and eating.

Individuals who have established mutual trust and respect will work hard to make each other successful. Under no circumstances should someone insult or criticize another person in front of others. Sensitive matters may often be raised indirectly through the intermediary that first made the introductions.

4. Identity

Ethnic Make-up: homogeneous (except for about 20,000 Chinese). Koreans share certain distinct physical characteristics which differentiate them from other Asian people including the Chinese and the Japanese, and have a strong cultural identity as one ethnic family.

Religion: Ancestors are based on the male family line. Children are raised to believe they can never repay their debt to their parents, hence the popularity of ancestor worship. They hold ancestral ceremonies for the previous three generations (parents, grandparents, and great grandparents) several times a

year, particularly on Chusok and New Year's Day. On Chusok, people cook and set out food to celebrate their ancestors.

Do some research online about the growth of Christianity in South Korea.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Based on what you know about the two cultures we have looked at in the tutorial, Jamaica and South Korea, is there one that appeals to you more as a place to live (if you were choosing a place to live)? Why - on what are you basing your preference?



ACTIVITIES

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1. Did you notice any *similarities* between the cultures of Jamaica and South Korea? One of the most obvious is the importance placed on “family” in both cultures. There were other similarities as well - list as many of those similarities as you can.
2. There are also obvious differences in the way Jamaicans and South Koreans live and relate to one another. Imagine a family from Jamaica is moving to live in South Korea - what are some of the specific things you think they would find challenging or would need to adjust to?