

Americans seen by north koreans



The USA is the arch nemesis of North Korea. In July 2017, the US government will bar American citizens from traveling to North Korea because of "mounting concerns over the serious risk of arrest and long-term detention," the State Department said. Before this decision, according to the Juche Travel, the North Korean travel agency, "American tourists are permitted to visit the DPRK however they can only enter or exit the country by plane (not train), and cannot spend more than 10 days in the country."

I met many American tourists during my 6 trips, and most of them were surprised as they were well welcomed by the guides and locals alike. It was a far cry from the aggressive propaganda and menacing official statements issued by the regime. The Americans were allowed to go everywhere except the homestays in the Chilbo area where tourists sleep in [carefully selected] local farmers' seaside homes. There was no explanation given, just an "It is not possible".

North Koreans are quick to employ images and symbols of America in their own propaganda. During the Cold War, they seized the American spy boat, the USS Pueblo. It is now a Pyongyang tourist attraction. The guide on the boat explains that the US soldiers wrote letters of apology since they were so ashamed of what they did to North Korea. After Bill Clinton went to North Korea to seek the release of American journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee who were arrested by the North Koreans while researching human-trafficking, a director made a movie with the tv footages. In the giant "Gifts Museum" that displays all the gifts the Dear Leaders received from all around the world (mainly from communist countries), the guides are proud to point out Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's gift to Kim Jong-Il: a basketball autographed by Michael Jordan. No photo allowed!

Most of the propaganda posters depicting North Korea's hatred of the USA has been removed from the streets. Photographing the only such billboard I saw during my stay in Pyongyang was not easy as the guides always found an excuse not to stop the bus. "Too much traffic," they said, on an empty road. The only posters against USA I could find were in kindergartens and the old amusement park where people were shooting at mannequins dressed as US soldiers for fun.

I came across both fake and real American products, but most of the time the guides will tell you that they come from China! Once, I was taken to a study hall where I saw students working on computers running Windows. "They are using Windows?" I asked to make sure. "Yes," replied my guide proudly, unable to see where I was going with this. "Windows is made by Microsoft," I said. "Yes," he replied again, a little less certain of where this was headed. "But Microsoft is American," I finished. "Maybe," he admitted.

Ironically, what North Koreans hate more than anything else is false propaganda directed at them. For example, on many American websites, writers say that the people in the subway are actors, just there for the tourists. This is incorrect and actually increases the country's paranoia and xenophobia.

I was once having a conversation with an American citizen at a restaurant. My guide told me to end it, explaining, "He is a fox, a spy". The North Koreans use the symbol of the fox, a dangerous, crafty animal, to represent Americans. When I asked why they allow Americans to enter the country if they are spies, he answered, "Well, they pay a lot of money."

The guides are well aware that in the US, there are drugs, crime, unemployment, and strikes. They take every chance they get to say that they don't have any of these problems.

I got the chance to meet the wife of a North Korean diplomat who lived in New York City. Now she runs a restaurant in Pyongyang. She confessed that life was too hard for her in the USA, as the state does not provide for you like in DPRK. She absolutely loved the food was impressed by the fresh fish you can find in the markets. She said she met some very nice people in the US who befriended her even after finding out that she was North Korean. There were some rude ones too of course. In truth, she didn't even know if they were Americans since in so many nationalities live there!



-Did you notice that man? He's wearing an American cap!
-It's not an American cap Mr Eric; it's a Chinese one.



-Do you know the name of this character on the fan?
-No Mr Eric. It's just a mouse. I's Chinese!



-What do American tourists say after visiting the War Museum?

-They ask for forgiveness for all the crimes that their country has done during the war Mr Eric.



-Will a man be sent to prison if he steals a bicycle?
-We don't have terrorism like in United States in North Korea.



-I have read on an American website that the people in the subway are actors.
-They talk nonsense Mr Eric; I hate Americans.



- Do you follow the news of the world in North Korea?

- Of course Mr. Eric! We even follow American news... for example I know Americans have walked on the Moon!



-Is North Korea affected by the economic crisis?
-Not all Mr Eric: we're not capitalists like Americans!

Kids with Mickey bags in an Art Gallery , Wonsan. Even in the official paintings made by State artists, you can see Disney characters that came thru the chinese products that invade North Korea. Most of the people ignore the meaning.





-Why there are no American or South Korean soldiers at this moment on the other side of the border?
-(A north korean colonel) Mr Eric, it is half past 12... the Americans are having lunch!



-Today you can see the American soldiers with their Puppets Mr Eric!
-Their puppets?
-Yes, the South Korean soldiers, this is how we call them.



-(My guide) Mr Eric, Pyongyang is a nice capital to live in: there are rivers, parks, hillsides, many sorts of public transportation, and no pollution. And everything is new, due to the fact that the city was burned to the ground during the war.

-By the Americans?

-Yes Mr. Eric, the American imperialists.



-What are those blocks on the highway for?

-In case of invasion by the American tanks and their puppets. They are designed to fall on the road to block them.



-American tourists can't come to North Korea?

-Yes, they can! But we only allow them to stay for three days, and we make them pay a lot of money! Hahaha!



-Mr Eric, you speak too much to this American tourist...

-What's the problem?

-We think she is a fox.

-A fox?

-A spy.



A Korean woman who lived in New York City
(diplomat wife)

-In the U.S.A, what did you dislike the most?
-Life is a little difficult in USA. In North Korea, with our social system, we don't need to worry about the work or life in general, but in the U.S.A, money has an important role in daily life. It is the thing that I don't appreciate.



-Is there any American you admire, an athlete, a politician, an artist?

-(a student) Nobody Mr Eric!



우리의 자존심을 건드리는 자

어디에 있던

결판을 낼것이다!

2008

-You don't seem to like the Americans...

-They meddle in everything Mr. Eric! Nobody likes them! The whole world is against them: Chavez, Castro, Ghaddafi, El Assad, Than Shwe, Ahmadineja, everyone! And Guantanamo!



-Do you have homelessness in North Korea?

-No, here is not like America, Mr. Eric. Our system is much more developed! Ha ha ha!



-It's a Hummer! It's an American car!
-Yes Mr.Eric. In Pyongyang we have two.
-But... this kind of car consumes 20 litres for every 100 kilometers!
-Well that's not that good.

미국놈 때려 잡는 군사놀이 신나요



A poster in a primary school, Pyongyang
-What's written on this board please?
-«It is exciting to play soldier and to kill the Americans». Mr Eric, Americans have teased us for a long time. That's why we always give an anti-american education to our kids.



Decorated wall on a school in Pyongyang, the american is symbolized by the wolf killed by the north korean soldier.



-Well Mr Eric, there is an electricity cut...
-It happens every day?
-Yes.. That's the American imperialists fault.



-Look there Mr Eric! That dog acts like Americans: it lies down in front of North Korea!



DMZ

-Mr Eric, the soldier is asking you if you have a cigarette?

-I only have American ones!

-It is not a problem.



-Why do the children run away when they see me?
-As you have short hair, they think you're an American parachutist Mr Eric.



-There are a lot of policemen in Pyongyang...

-Yes Mr Eric, the city is very safe, you can go out at night, and will not be attacked like in America.

-But you won't allow me to go out at night!



-Many say that in your country, the only man who smiles is Kim il Sung on the posters...
-American propaganda Mr Eric... See for yourself...



-There is everything in our shops, you see Mr. Eric, the Americans tell lies when they talk about shortages!
-There are not many people in the shop...
-It is not the right time; people are working.

하루공급기준량



식품	기준량	칼로리	식품	기준량	칼로리
	324g	1143		250	55
	30	134		200	64.8
	100	92		13	18
	25	41		11	8.8
	200	120		10	92
	50	103.5			
	8	31.2		5	1.77
	10	33.7		1	2.23
	10	28			

-What does this billboard in the canteen mean?

-It is a Calorie summary table Mr Eric.

-Is it in Chonjin that you had a major starvation in the '90s?

-Yes, but now, who can say that the North Korean government does not take care of its citizens health? With this information, we avoid having fat kids like in America!

룡진

Ryongjin

Cocoda

CRABONATED DRINK

600ml



- But... This is American Coca Cola!
- Not at all Mr Eric! This is our «carbonated Cocoa», made in North Korea!
- Crabonated or carbonated?
- Doesn't matter, we don't say it in korean...



- You have « Windows » on the computers!
- Yes Mr Eric.
- It's American!
- Maybe...



Mr Eric, did you know that the national literacy rate for North Korean citizens of 15 years of age and older is over 99 percent!
-Is it more than in USA?
-It is the same.



Pyongyang fun fair

-What do the people shoot at?

-At targets that symbolize American GIs!

-And what's written on them?

-"Kill the US imperialists"



-Who are the enemies of USA?
-First are the USA, for sure!

ERIC LAFFORGUE
<http://www.ericlafforgue.com>
lafforgue@mac.com