

## **Travel ban: Why millennials should not be traveling to North Korea**

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July 22, 2017

The State Department's decision to ban travel by Americans to North Korea was the right thing to do for reasons of safety, morality, and foreign policy. As an American who has spent the past summer in South Korea, I can attest to the necessity of this ban on all three levels.

The Republic of Korea is a fledgling democracy with a dynamic economy and a vibrant culture. From ornately-decorated ancient temples and historic military sites to all-night charcoal-roasting barbecue joints and intense nightclubs, there are endless reasons to visit South Korea.

Why visit North Korea? The intriguing mystery of a country completely closed off from the world is perhaps understandable, but on the orchestrated trips controlled by the government, foreigners won't get to see the real North Korea. Foreign tourists are under the close watch of North Korean government tour guides all day and are not allowed to go out on their own. They can only see carefully selected sights meant to craft a propagandistic version of harmony. Tourists are even forced to bow to a 72-foot-tall statue of Kim Il-Sung, the current dictator's grandfather, and place flowers, as Jieun Baek wrote in her book "North Korea's Hidden Revolution."

Yet deluded millennials, the same demographic who powered Bernie Sanders' improbable rise, are taken in by the ruse. Sixty percent of tourists are millennials for one company that operates North Korean tours.

Alex Hoban, one of Otto Warmbier's fellow travelers, described the atmosphere of their trip as "misbehaving twentysomethings looking for thrills, spills and stories to brag about back home."

Such propaganda tourism cannot be defended simply as a poor life choice on the part of the American traveler, however. The negative impact of such travel also hits innocent North Korean civilians and American taxpayers.

The revenues foreign tourists bring in help fund the Kim mafia's lavish lifestyles and solidify its power-grip over the nation and its people. Every tourist that so much as crosses the border into North Korea helps pay for the regime's continuing development of nuclear weapons and the imprisonment of citizens — some jailed for something so simple as watching foreign DVDs.

Kim Jong-un understands the value tourism brings to his regime. That's why he set a goal of one million tourists, and that's why he's spending money to build a ski slope for wealthy and naive foreigners, instead of using that money to feed his poor citizens.

Heaven forbid an American is arrested and held for an unreasonably long term, as is bound to happen when enough tourists visit the regime, then the U.S. State Department will have to spend money and valuable time to free them. This negatively impacts the country's ability to combat North Korean aggression.

There is a debate about whether banning travel by law would really work and whether it would be ideologically pure. Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute argues that Americans could still get to North Korea through China and that Americans should have the freedom to travel anywhere they would like to go.

This may be so, but I urge Americans to consider the ramifications and possible outcomes of traveling to North Korea; decide for yourself that going is a bad idea. If not concerned for your own safety, think about the North Korean people and our allies in the South who face the brunt of hundreds of artillery guns aimed at them daily.

Americans should visit North Korea years from now, after the abusive dictatorship is overthrown.