

A Sunday in North Korea



What do you do on a Sunday when you live under a dictatorship? You can hardly fly out of the country for the weekend or drive to the beach...

So, Sunday is the time when North Koreans enjoy simple activities but also the best time for foreigners to meet them as everyone is more relaxed, including your own minders!



Fishing is one of the best loved activities for men on Sundays. They fish in the Taedong river, which is believed not to be polluted. It is also a good way to get fresh food for North Koreans.



On Sundays, cars are not allowed in town. But in fact, as most cars belong to officials or high-ranking people, this rule does not change anything. North Koreans like saying that on Sundays, they can enjoy pure air on their walks.



For very few North Koreans, Sunday morning is when they go to church or the Protestant temple. It is hard to say whether these religious places are fake – and just set up for foreign visitors to see – or if they are real, as freedom of religion is not an option in North Korea.



Every Sunday, parks get filled with people enjoying Korean barbecue with friends. The park becomes smoky and the air is filled with the scent of soju (rice alcohol), which North Koreans are happy to share with foreigners. This is for wealthy people who can afford to buy meat.



This less well-off family is having a small picnic to enjoy their Sunday. They were surprised to see a car approaching while they were eating in the middle of the road in the suburbs of Pyongyang.



Karaoke is very popular in North Korea and on Sundays, people who have mobile equipment enjoy singing patriotic and melancholy songs. This is the only time when you can see people be really relaxed.



After a few drinks, everybody gets in high spirits and starts dancing. Most of the time, Sunday leisure activities are also organized by the Party or by the factories for their employees, like these workers from an electric factory.



Sunday is the best time to meet North Korean families. During the week, it is very hard to meet people as they are working at the factory or staying at home. But over the weekend, I was even able to wander in the park without my guides.



Leaving Pyongyang for the weekend is very difficult as you need special permits to travel inside the country. So, locals enjoy a boat ride on the Taedong river. The safety equipment is made from old lifebuoys.



Culture is everywhere on Sundays. North Koreans can enjoy circus shows, classical concerts and many other events. But they all tend to promote the regime.



The bowling alley is one of teenagers' favorite place to meet their friends as well as girls. People do not entertain guests at home, so they enjoy meeting in places like this.



Roller skating has been very popular for the past few years since China flooded the country with roller blades. The huge Kim Il Sung Square in Pyongyang is the perfect place to practice.



On Sundays, Young Pioneers wear their uniforms and walk around in the streets. This girl was a very proud Pioneer and wore on her arm the red star indicating that she is her class leader.



A visit to Kim Il Sung's Native House in Pyongyang on a Sunday. I asked people how many times they have come here and some told me that it was their 7th visit. Usually, the visits are organized by schools or by the Party.



If you live in the countryside, you will be able to visit Pyongyang on Sundays. This is a great privilege and it will remain as a great memory in one's life. A visit to pay respect in front of the giant statues of the Dear Leaders is a must.



Sunday is also a time for showing that you are a good citizen by joining public works. This group of adults from Pyongyang has been sent to help rebuild a road. You have no choice and even children must take part in these tasks.



Going to a very modern restaurant to have a 7 Up and a burger of sorts is something new for North Koreans. But like everywhere else, children pester their parents to go there, even though it is not cheap.



At night, people like having fun at the Kaeson Youth Park in Pyongyang. This was the first time I saw people fighting in North Korea – they were waiting in line for the rollercoaster when someone tried to cut in and a fight broke out.



On Sundays, young women wear their latest clothes made in China, very fashionable outfits compared to the dull uniforms they have to wear at school, university or the factory...

