Korean Cultural Kit
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Korean Won (한국 현금 1000원)

The citizens of South Korea use the Korean Won as their national currency. 1000 WON is equivalent to about 0.89 US dollars. The 1000원 is always the same size, shape and color. However, the other Korean bills of different value vary in color, design, and shape.

The very first WON currency was introduced as the replacement to the yang. In 1909, the Bank of Korea was founded in Korea’s capital, Seoul, and began printing out this new currency at the central bank of Korea.

The Bank of Korea went through three different currency transformations since 1962. The most recent version of the Korean WON was created in 2006 and is the version that is still used today. The Bank of Korea is the only institution in South Korea that can reproduce banknotes and mint coins. A government-owned corporation called KOMSCO prints the banknotes and they are delivered to the Bank of Korea Headquarters.

Every year, around Korea’s two major holidays, Chuseok (추석) and Seollnal (설날), the Bank of Korea distributes large amounts of currency to the commercial banks throughout South Korea as a national traditional gesture that imitates the tradition of elders giving money to the younger children who pay their respects to their elders by bowing during these two holidays.

Resources: Korean Exchange Rate Updates: http://fx-rate.net/KRW/
The 100 WON coins have the exact same size and shape as the US quarter. Until 1966, the only coins in circulation were those that were equivalent to 1 and 5 WON. The 1 WON was made with brass and the 5 and 10 WON were introduced in bronze.

100 WON nickel coins were introduced in 1970. In early 2006, the Bank of Korea decided to redesign the 10 WON coin by the end of that year. It cost 38 WON to make one 10 WON coin so a new coin (which is the present day 10WON) made of copper-coated aluminum with a smaller size was created with the same design as before.

100 WON costs 58 WON to make and 10 WON costs 35 WON to produce.
These two stamps here are government issued 400WON (about 0.40 cents) and 80 WON (about 0.08 cents) stamps. In Korea, it would take about 240 WON for an average letter to be mailed. Many of the designs are intricate and unique, featuring items such as birds like these two samples.

The 400 WON bird is a “청화백지수탉형연적” which is a unique bird symbolizing the “Blue House”, which is the house where the President lives. The second stamp is the “동박새”, which roughly translates as “copper bird”.

Joseon began issuing their first stamps on November 18, 1884 when the first postal service was created. Eventually there were seen as having little use because the postal office was burnt down during a revolt in December of the same year.

The next set of stamps did not emerge until 1895, all bearing the same design of the Korean flag (“태국” tae-geuk) symbol.

Resources:
1. Visit Korean Stamp World in Korea: http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SI/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=769297
3. How to send mail in Korea: http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/AK/AK_EN_1_5_8.jsp
The subway system is used by the citizens of South Korea to easily maneuver throughout Seoul. In one day, nearly 7 million people use the subway system’s 18 lines and 328 stations to get around to work and school among the plethora of locations.

The Urban Rails consist of 5 different services: Seoul Metro [서울메트로] (Lines 1,2,3,4), Seoul Metro Rapid Transit Corporation [서울특별시도시철도공사, 서울도시철도] (Lines 5,6,7,8), Seoul Metro Line 9 Corporation (Line 9), Incheon Metro (transportation to the airport), and Uljeongbu Light Rail.

It’s a cheap and convenient alternative to taking a taxi or owning a car, particularly in the city areas where there is a lot of congested traffic and difficulties driving and finding parking.

By using what are called “T-Money” cards that are charged with money, you swipe your way into the terminal to get onto the subway. The fare differs by age, though the initial amount does not exceed more than 1,050 won (about 1.00USD). Each subway station has a name, number, and coordinated color, which represents that line. When two or more lines intersect, it’s called a transfer station and they are marked differently on the map for your convenience.

Resources:
How to Use the Metro Today:
http://www.visitkorea.or.kr/ena/TR/TR_EN_5_1_4.jsp
Timeline of Subway System:
https://www.seoulmetro.co.kr/eng/page.jsp?code=A040020000
The map of Seoul is widely used by the millions of tourists who come through Korea each year. 2012 is the second year of the “Visit Korea: Official Korea Tourism Organization” promotion which hopes to increase the tourism sector of Korea’s economy as it showcases much of Korea’s history and present day culture for visitors to enjoy. This map aids Korea’s visitors to find street directions and geographical references but also find the best hotels and restaurants, listed by affordable and quality measures. It also provides helpful tips like which tour buses go through which areas. The map provides a wide variety of activities and helpful suggestions on what to see and do during your stay.

Resources:
Wooden Masks

Masks are used for a variety of different contexts in Korean culture. Historically, soldiers as well as their horses have worn them ornamentally in war. In burial rite ceremonies, masks in jade and bronze are used to drive away evil spirits. Death masks are used to remember historical figures.

Korean wooden masks are most often seen in elements of entertainment through ritual dances and theatrical performances. The masks are usually replications of noblemen, scholars, brides, and monks to tell a story. Many times they are also incorporated into shamanistic rituals. Those masks are grotesque or unpleasant looking to evoke fear and humor in ceremonial rites. They are usually made of alder wood with lacquer to make them shiny. Sometimes they are painted and even come with hinges for the jaw and mouth sections to move, imitating real figures.

In present days, wooden masks are generally sold in miniature sizes to share Korean culture with tourists or as accessories around the home.

Resources: http://www.mask.kr/coding/english/sub08.asp
These miniatures are imitations of the large mushroom like statues found on the tip of Korea on Jeju Island. Generally, the originals are about 3 meters high and made from porous volcanic rock. They are considered to be representations of gods offering protection and fertility. Four such sculptures were built from 1763-1765 at the north, south, east, and west gates of the Jeju city fortress to protect the city. Against demons traveling between the physical and spiritual worlds.

They have exaggerated figures with the characteristics of the original Jeju statues: grinning, jolly expressions, bulging eyes, and long, broad and bulging noses. They have protruding bellies and their hands are always clutching their bellies on either side. The hats they wear are part of the original creation, which denote the mushroom-like look. The related imagery with this item has great importance and shows up on ancient crowns and funeral urns. It depicts the power of shamanism and mushrooms as a powerful entity of that religion. Today, they are sold in miniatures as tourist items to collect and remember Jeju Island.

Resources: Visit Jeju Island’s Stone Sculpture Park
http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SI/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=1056580
This particular fan comes from a fan design series known as the Lovely Fan Series (아름다운 우리부채 시리즈) in the ocean wave design. The frothy ocean design depicts nature in soft, natural hues. Fans are made out of strips of bamboo wood and rice paper, which are delicate materials. They can also be made out of silk, bamboo, and feather embellishments too. These fans are folding fans; they fold back like an accordion.

Many fans are handmade and the designs on the fans are like copyrights of the artist, very valuable and special markings of their craftsmanship. The fan was given as gifts on special occasions as a symbolic gesture of friendship, respect, and good wishes. Today they are more commonly used as stage props in many different performances such as the traditional Korean fan dance.

Fans also come in varying sizes for ornamental display purposes or also in smaller hand-held versions for cooling down practically in the summertime.

Resources: More about Korean fans
This ornamental lucky pouch is associated with the celebration of the lunar New Year (설날, seul-nahl) which is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in Korea. Many Korean families decorate their homes with colorful lights and gather the family together to celebrate together. Many families dress up in the traditional Korean costume (hanbok) and the younger children bow to their elders in exchange for blessings, money, and treats. In return, the elders give the young boys and girls money and treats which are then placed in these ornamental “lucky pouches”.

These pouches are associated with something special and valuable. Today in Korea, apart from the holidays, these lucky pouches may be seen more regularly in some jewelry shops who use them as gift bags for the pieces they sell. These pouches have been used since the ancient times and inspire the hanbok style with their different colors, textures, and patterns. The ones used on the lunar holiday may be more intricately embroidered with ornate designs but the more commercialized version like the one pictured below is a derivative of the original and is more readily visible.

Resources: Visit Korea for lunar New Year Celebrations!
http://www.korea.net/Government/Current-Affairs/Others/view?affairId=189&subId=186&articleId=977
There are two types of written Korean, one that is the modern alphabet (see Modern Korean Alphabet poster) and the other is Korean calligraphy, known as “hanja” (한자).

Students in kindergarten and elementary school ages use these books to practice their alphabet and handwriting. Similar to the English practice notebooks, while the English ones are used for handwriting and cursive, with a dotted line dividing the space to distinguish between capital letters and lower case letters, Korean alphabet notebooks are divided into a graph series instead. Students are asked to write the letters out in each designated square for practice. Eventually, when they learn their alphabet, they begin to form words. Words are made up of a “block” of syllables. These syllables can be written in each block too.

In Korea, these notebooks come in a variety of styles and designs to fit your taste. Along with them come a series of matching folders, pens, pencils, and pencil cases.

Resources: Your very own Korean practice notebook
http://www.and-spring.com/
Pencil cases are used by students of Korea all the time. While students study, they might have an assortment of different pens, pencils, highlighters, and erasers. Since it would be inconvenient to carry them all individually, a pencil case provides a stylish and concise way to carry goods.

This specific one is hanbok (traditional Korean costume) inspired as can be seen through the colorful stripes and the yellow ornamental handle to the zipper. However, there are many different creative designs of pencil cases. Some come in stuffed animal shapes while others are more practical in shape and color. Like the practice notebooks, there are a large variety to choose from based on your personal preference.
Hangul is the official native alphabet of the Korean language that is used by all its citizens today. It consist of 19 consonants and 10 vowels. King Sejong, the fourth king of the Choseon Dynasty, created the modern Korean alphabet in 1443. King Sejong explained that the Korean language was fundamentally different from Chinese (which was what they had used up until this point) and the privileged male aristocrats were the majority demographic of individuals who could read and write fluently. In order to improve the Korean literacy rate, King Sejong invented the Korean Alphabet so that even the common man could obtain knowledge of reading and writing. In South Korea, Hangul has a counterpart called “hanja” which is augmented by Chinese characters. Most of “hangul” in calligraphy is “hanja”. Korean is written in blocks, which form a syllable. Generally one syllable consists of three different letters and includes at least one consonant and one vowel. There is a stroke order for writing the letters, quick similarly to Chinese characters.

Resources: Learn how to read, write, and pronounce Korean
http://www.omniglot.com/writing/korean.htm
Legend has it that the secret of origami art was kept a secret in China for several hundred years until a Buddhist monk carried the secret out of China to Korea and then finally into Japan.

In Korea, ancestral tablets were made of paper called “jibang”, which were folded and passed down through the generations to be used during ancestral worship.

In Korea today, all individuals enjoy the art of paper folding. It is a fun way to learn a new hobby for people of all experience levels. Origami design can be as simple as a boat hat or a paper airplane. It can also be as challenging as a model of the Eiffel Tower or other types of animals. While traditional origami strictly adhered to paper or foil with linear construction lines, these days, artists have taken the liberty to add textures with crinkling techniques, wet-folding (dampening paper to allow finished product to hold folds sharper for a more polished final look), as well as unit origami (assembling smaller origami forms to create a bigger whole).

Resources: How to Make a Crane: http://www.monkey.org/~aidan/origami/crane/
The Moneybag is symbolic within Korean folklore. The story that inspires the keychain is similar to that of Aesop’s fables, retelling a story that tells a good moral. The story goes that there was a poor young couple living together in the woods. Because they lived kind and selfless lives, the old sage (presumably a god) rewarded them with a magic money bag. This money bag was empty but when the wife or husband reached into the bag once a day as they were instructed, they brought out a silver coin. Soon, they began to live comfortably enough to sustain themselves and have some left over to save for the future.

After a while, the husband wanted to spend everything now, not later. He didn’t understand why he’d have to wait to have a coin a day instead of all the coins at once. Without telling his wife, he reached into the moneybag, against the god’s instructions, multiple times at once. He reached into the bag five times and pulled out 5 coins. When he pulled out the fifth coin, the coin disappeared and so did all the things that had been bought with the coins from the magic moneybag. The moral of the story is to be patient and not greedy, or else you will lose even what you had. Being thankful for what you have instead of craving for more is the golden moral that this story conveys.

The moneybag keychain is a tangible allusion to this Korean folktale and is a symbol of prosperity and luck, since it was a gift from a god to generate wealth.

Resource: Read the full Magic Moneybag Story!
http://www.mikelockett.com/stories.php?action=view&id=113
Mini Spinning Top

During the Korean New Year’s celebration, which is more commonly known as the Chinese New Year, top spinning is one of the games that are played in celebration of the holiday.

The rules to the game are quite simple. There can be as many players as you’d like to have. Each person has a spinning top. Dropped simultaneously, the person’s top that is left spinning the longest wins the game. In the original game when it first began, there was a whip to help keep the top spinning the longest while attempting to knock over your opponents’ tops.

This game can be played on ice, which challenges the players even more because the tops spin faster and players require greater concentration to whip the top to keep it going and make sure not to slip themselves.

Nowadays, the spinning tops have been adapted and sold in smaller, more accessible sizes, like this one below. These tops are still spun, but are conveniently smaller so they can be played anywhere at anytime.

Resources: http://blogs.transparent.com/korean/new-years/
Like European Jacks, “gonggi” is a popular children’s game that has been passed down through the generations. Originally played with small pebbles, now it is used with colorful plastic stones like these pictured below.

The pieces are called “gong-gi-ddol” (공깃돌) and can be played on any flat surface. There are five levels of difficulty to gonggi; each start out with all the pieces strewn on the playing surface.

- **Level 1**: Player throws up 1 piece and picks up 1 new piece before catching both in hand. Repeat until all 5 pieces are in the hand.
- **Level 2**: Player throws 1 piece up. Pick up 2 at a time until all pieces are in the hand.
- **Level 3**: Player throws 1 piece up. Picks up 3 pieces. Catch 4 pieces. Throw 1 piece up, still holding onto the remaining three in palm and picking up the remaining 1 piece. Catch all 5 pieces.
- **Level 4**: With all 5 pieces in hand, player throws 1 piece in the air. Places all pieces in hand on the surface. Catches 1 airborne piece. Throw 1 piece in the air. Pick up all 4 pieces lain on the surface. Catch 1 airborne piece.
- **Level 5**: Player tosses all 5 pieces into the air so that they land on the front of your hand. Toss them up and catch (hopefully!) all 5 pieces. The number of pieces that you catch is your final score.

The person with the most pieces in hand wins!