Selected projects from 1993 to present. We thrive on exchanging ideas and launching projects to give people the opportunities that interaction brings.
The experts in tourism, films, sports, and cultural projects in the DPRK (North Korea).

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koryostudio.com
Koryo Tours is a British-run travel company based in Beijing and specialising in travel to North Korea. Koryo Studio is the cultural section of the company focusing on film, sport and cultural projects in North Korea, developed through the knowledge and expertise accumulated on our more than monthly visits to the country since 1993.

We believe passionately in engagement. Seeing the impact that our various projects have had on the ground demonstrates the power of this approach. We thrive on exchanging ideas and launching projects to give people the opportunities that interaction brings. We love a challenge and our list of achievements is testament not only to our efforts but additionally to those of our Korean partners.

Our projects are all designed to take small steps towards better engagement.
KORYO TOURS & STUDIO - HOW IT ALL STARTED?

Koryo Tours was established in 1993 by Joshua Green and Nick Bonner (inset) as a travel company to promote cultural exchange to DPRK (North Korea). Joshua had worked in Pyongyang for over a year setting up TNT courier company and through his contacts arranged the first tour. Nick was trained in Landscape Architecture and used his skills in design to develop the Studio and engagement side of the company. Simon Cockerell studied philosophy at University and his passion for travel led him to Koryo. He joined the company in 2002 to specialise in travel and sport exchanges whilst Nick continues to mainly work in art and film.

TIMELINE

1993
- Nick Bonner and Josh Green, two Brits living in China, found Koryo Tours. The duo leads a group of seven people on the company’s first-ever tour of the DPRK.

1995
- The Festival for Peace is held in April. Guests include Muhammad Ali, and over 100 tourists in attendance thanks to Koryo, which arranges for them to watch the WCW’s Ric Flair wrestle Japan’s Inoki in a 150,000-capacity stadium. It’s the first time that Western tourists visit Pyongyang in significant numbers.

1996
- The start of our humanitarian aid projects as the food crisis worsens, includes work with orphanages and a blind school.

2001-2007
- Koryo Tours and VMS productions start filming their trilogy of documentaries for the BBC. The award winning films cover the World Cup football heroes of 1966, the training of two schoolgirls in the lead up to the mass games, and the US soldiers who defected to North Korea in the 1960’s never to be seen again.

2007
- Koryo starts work on a feature-length romcom with Belgian producer Anja Daelemans and DPRK’s April 25th Film Studio. The resulting movie, Comrade Kim goes Flying, premieres at Toronto International Film Festival in 2013 and goes on to become the first DPRK film to be shown at a public screening in South Korea, when it is selected for the Busan International Film Festival.

2009
- Koryo Studio is invited to commission artwork for the first inclusion of DPRK at the Asia Pacific Triennial (Queensland Art Gallery). The show is a critical success but the Australian Government refuses permission for the Korean artists to attend.

2010
- After eight years of letters, proposals and meetings, Koryo finally succeeds in its efforts to have restricted areas of the east coast — such as Hamhung and Pujon — opened up to its tourists, who become the first Westerners many Koreans in that region have ever seen. Koryo’s mission to engage rather than isolate continues with the 2013 opening of Sinuiju, new routes in the northeast, and much more.

2014
- Koryo Studio is invited to commission artwork for the joint Korea Pavilion at the Venice Biennale as well as providing pieces from its collection. The Pavilion won the Golden Lion, the festival’s top prize. The exhibition tours in Seoul & New York.

2016
- In 2014, Koryo Tours manages to organise entry for amateurs to the Pyongyang Marathon. In 2016 Koryo is appointed as the race’s exclusive partner, with over 600 overseas amateur entries.

2017
- An exhibition of Nicholas Bonner’s book ‘Made in North Korea: Graphics From Everyday Life in the DPRK’, is published by Phaidon. This catalogue of North Korean graphic ephemera is based on more than two decades of travel to the country and is exhibited by ‘The House of Illustration’ in London and Seoul. This is the first time that people in South Korea are able to have such an insight into North Korean culture and daily life.

2019
- Koryo produce the ground-breaking two part travel series Michale Palin in North Korea for Channel 5. We accompany Michael on a special tour of North Korea, showing him – and his audience of millions – a side of the country that is rarely represented in western media depictions. The series was nominated for two BAFTA for camera and sound.
COMMISSIONS FOR UTOPIA

2010

WHAT
Setting an unusual brief that would reveal the design process of a North Korean architect. Although North Korean architects now use digital design they are still expert in rendering their drawings by hand, creating artworks in their own right.

WHY
The brief was to create imaginative designs based on ‘sustainable architecture for tourism’. Many of the principles behind the architects design were based on communal interaction.

HOW
We commissioned a project from a North Korean architect to explore ideas for a sustainable future for tourism which would also be linked to the country’s distinct architectural styles. In the brief we asked for fun, innovative designs, not to be restricted by practicality, and to explore what may be possible with future materials and techniques. Using various symbolic motifs, from a traditional hand wheel to a bird’s nest, the hand drawn designs suggest a new kind of tourism in North Korea, intertwining nature, tradition and technology.

“From hovership holiday homes to high-tech treehouses and pink boudoirs perfect for Lady Penelope, a new exhibition called Utopian Tours shows the brave new world North Korean architects would build if there were no constraints”

Oliver Wainwright
The Guardian

Visit Koryo Studio website

Left:
Silk Co-operative, 2011
Paektu Academy Architect
Acrylic on paper
50 x 75.5cm
An exhibition of artwork & photographs from the Koryo Archive, as well as commissioned work from North Korean architects, displayed at the joint Korea Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The Pavilion won the Golden Lion, the festival’s top prize.

The joint Korea Pavilion was the world’s first dialogue between architects from both parts of the Korean peninsula, on display for the international community. The exhibition allowed North Korean architects to explore ideas about sustainable tourism and the country’s unique architectural style, all through the lens of a collectivist society. This perspective offered the North Koreans an opportunity to express their creativity with more freedom than they are typically permitted, and allowed the rest of the world to witness the vibrancy of North Korean artistic vision.

The work was then exhibited in New York at the Tina Kim Gallery and surprisingly in Seoul at the ARKO Museum (funded by the Arts Council Korea and supported by the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Unification).

International participants were invited to respond to the theme ‘Absorbing Modernity’. Minsuk Cho, curator of the South Korean Pavilion, wanted to attempt an ambitious project that united both North and South Korean art, architecture and ideas. Unable to contact North Korean artists directly, Cho approached Koryo Studio, who were able to make his vision a reality.

“A rich body of work in a highly charged political situation. It is research-in-action, which expands the spatial and architectural narrative into a geopolitical reality.”

Rem Koolhaas
Architect and Director of Venice Architecture Biennale 2014

Visit Venice Biennale official website
A collection of North Korean art from the 1940’s to contemporary works. The collection includes propaganda works (with examples of the original work with printed copies), but the highlights are the oil sketches from the 1950’s (including works from artists who were born in South Korea) plus major ‘chosunhwa’ ink works from the 1970’s to 1990’s.

The collection is for research and exhibition only, and exists as a resource to help develop public understanding of North Korean art and culture.

The collection is a result of over 25 years of visiting North Korea, with Nicholas Bonner’s background in the arts informing his critical eye of unique artworks.

Visit Koryo Studio website
The first ever exhibition in the United States of North Korea’s linocut prints, showcased in partnership with the Korea Society. The 24 images spanned three decades of North Korean artistry and offered Americans their first exposure to North Korean conceptions of daily life, work, family and the “Fatherland”.

The 24 images were all from the Koryo Archive, one of the world’s largest depositaries of North Korean art and culture outside the DPRK. Koryo Studio worked with the Korea Society to take the exhibition on tour for three years throughout the United States, including a stint in their institute in New York and nationwide in various university galleries.

The tense relationship between North Korea and the United States creates a demand for images based on curiosity and kitsch. These linocuts satisfied that curiosity, but as Assistant Professor at The Centre for the Study of Korea in Toronto, Janet Poole explained, visitors ultimately ended up with a more nuanced and indeed humanising view of North Korea: “this exhibition expands the parameters of what might be considered things North Korean: into the realms of work, art and utopian dreams.”

“With this exhibition the Society hopes to create many small ripples that will multiply and combine to become a larger wave of appreciation and understanding of Korea (both South and North) and its culture, kindling curiosity and encouraging further explorations.”

Jinyoung Kim
Gallery Director, Korea Society
A collection of eight paintings by a group of North Korean artists working in collaboration with a pair of British creatives — Nick Bonner and Dominic Johnson-Hill. The show debuted in Caochangdi as part of Beijing Design Week 2013, before moving to the Art Labor Gallery in Shanghai, and then the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in Taiwan. The images also became a huge hit in China where they were the top trending item for three days straight on Weibo (China’s Twitter, with more than 300 million active users).

Nick Bonner of Koryo Studio, and Dominic Johnson-Hill of Plastered 8, Beijing’s most famous streetwear brand. They have both been based in China since 1993 and during this time the country changed at breakneck speed, with endless debate and discussion from around the world. This inspired the duo to explore the topic through a prism left untouched by all others — North Korea. And so Bonner and Johnson-Hill sought to use their connections and creativity to provide a platform for North Korea’s oft-ignored artists to add their voice and unique outlook to the debate.

Each of the eight pieces that make up The Beautiful Future were painted in Pyongyang, and based on sketches by Bonner and Johnson-Hill, who provided the North Korean artists with ideas drawn from their time in China. Together — over a period of two years — they created an imagined Beijing, where strong socialist traditions are sharply juxtaposed with present-day pleasures and symbols of China’s unprecedented development. And so a group of outsiders with very different backgrounds combined to take a fresh look at China’s past, present and future, with The Beautiful Future portraying a place lost in time — where socialism is both celebrated yet fits awkwardly with modern day living.

“The results give an intriguing insight into the North Korean artists’ vision of what Chinese modernity might be like in a land they will never know.”

The Guardian
The first Australian exhibition of contemporary paintings from DPRK with a special body of work created for the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA)

Every three years, QAGOMA hosts the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) of Contemporary Art, one of Australia’s flagship art events, which draws millions of visitors. Dedicated to reflecting the diversity of work across the Asia-Pacific region, the organisers were unable to include any art from North Korea until the event’s sixth edition, thanks to Koryo Studio’s involvement, having been approached by QAGOMA to help in its quest to reach North Korea’s artists.

Koryo’s founder Nick Bonner co-curated the exhibition, he spent more than three years visiting the DPRK’s art studios to ensure the success of this project, searching out the best talent, convincing them to come on board and commissioning the art.

The resulting body of work addressed, among other things, the nature of labour and collectivism, and allowed the artists space to work outside of the rules usually required by North Korea’s socialist realism art world, and towards a style that revealed a more intimate portrayal.

The gallery invited the Korean artists to attend the opening, but the Australian government refused their entry. Their artwork, however, remains in QAGOMA’s collection on long term loan.

“Propaganda or ground-breaking work by North Korean artists? Propaganda, says Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith; ground-breaking contemporary art, says the Queensland Art Gallery. As for what the artists themselves think and feel, we will never know.”

Sydney Morning Herald

Read on Sydney Morning Herald
A series of ten linocuts created by famed North Korean artist Hwang In Jae, derived from a comic strip imagined by illustratorCha Hyon Sam in response to an unusual brief from Koryo Studio.

A brief that allowed artists to explore the themes of ‘Heroines and Villains’. The initial sketches all involved anti-US themes but one piece explored a boulder on the railway as ‘the villain’ and the railway guard as ‘the heroine’.

Bonner and designer Oscar Venhuis set Cha the brief of creating a comic strip about a heroine who will save the DRPK from a threat. Bonner and Venhuis selected individual panels from the strip for Hwang to painstakingly turn into linocuts.

“We continue to work with extremely talented artists in expanding the breadth of work they can undertake- creating briefs that not only challenge the artist but are also of great interest us. We are fascinated to see the resulting work – it is always surprising how the Koreans interpret what we give them.”

Nicholas Bonner

Visit Koryo Studio website
An exhibition of North Korean art from Koryo Studio, showcased at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii and co-curated by Leiden University's Koen de Ceuster. The exhibition was the most diverse selection of North Korean art ever seen outside the country and timed to coincide with the conference of the Association of Asian Scholars.

An opportunity to show the multi-faceted nature of North Korea's ideologically-driven arts world, Touching the Hearts and Minds of the People offered the opportunity to associate North Korea with that very human urge, to create and represent our lives through art.

Bonner's extensive collection of North Korean art, from propaganda posters to traditional ink brush paintings, are a result of his decades of engagement with the country.

"Little known abroad, misconceptions about art in North Korea abound. Art is not the free realm we are accustomed to, but this does not mean that there is no art at all."

Dr. Koen de Coester
Lecturer of Korean Studies at Leiden University

TOUCHING THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE PEOPLE

2011

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Visit East-West Center website
In 2012 Koryo Tours visited Nosotek, the German-backed computer programming joint venture based in Pyongyang. While there they met some recent graduates of Kim Chaek University of Technology who, in their spare time, had been developing a very basic race game using photographic images of the city’s buildings, cars, and propaganda posters for the race course. Koryo's designer Simo Herold asked if he could contribute input to develop the game and make the course more exciting. The result was Pyongyang Racer, a retro arcade influenced game, where the player drives a Mercedes around the streets of North Korea's capital, ensuring they keep the car full of petrol and avoid hitting obstacles.

North Korea’s first ever video game may not have made the bestseller lists, but it did exemplify the continuing engagement work of Koryo Tours where opportunities, no matter how esoteric, are grasped in order to demonstrate the shared humanity between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The retro-styled Pyongyang Racer launched to what can favourably be called mixed reviews. Vice called it a “profoundly uninteresting game”, while Kotaku added, “It’s not as bad as it could be” but perhaps the most representative review came from The Verge, who said at the time, “the entire experience looks like it was pulled straight out of the 32-bit console era, yet we still stuck with it through an entire race”. In fact, despite the negative reviews, or perhaps even because of them, Pyongyang Racer was an unequivocal smash hit, with so many people logging on to ride the course that the website crashed.

Play it on pyongyangracer.co
A series of 17 original linocuts depicting man’s exploration of the furthest reaches of our universe: outer space and the ocean floor. The works are a collaboration between Koryo Tours founder Nicholas Bonner and North Korean artist Kim Kwang Nam. The series has been exhibited at the Shanghai Design Exhibition, the Jorgensen Gallery (University of Connecticut) and the Anna Schwartz Gallery, (Melbourne).

Having grown up under the influence of the Cold War in Britain and North Korea respectively, the two men share a nostalgia for the imagery of their childhoods. North Korea and the West have a shared history of publishing adventure comics and books about adventures in space and underwater. The Future is Bright is the result of these shared memories and is, in part, a response to that pre-existing dialogue.

As with many of the projects Bonner has worked on in North Korea, this series developed through the input of both parties, but using the highly developed skills of the North Korean artist to create the final pieces. Kim trained at Pyongyang Central Art Academy and after qualification worked at the prestigious Mansuade Art Studio, specialising in linocut.

“The linocuts are intended to create an instant impact – we created the simple images that have the same wonderment and dynamism we both experienced as children. On reflection, it is the immense emptiness and isolation that the subjects are abandoned to that I was drawn to... This is my first time to work in collaboration with a foreigner and on such unusual subject matter. It reminded me of being young and lost in my imagination”.

Kim Kwang Nam

Left: Robotter Drive 2015
Kim Kwang Nam with Nicholas Bonner
Linocut on gloss paper
42.50cm
An ink on cotton board map of Pyongyang by artist Gareth J Fuller. The map tells stories about identity and culture while playing with our ideas of cartography, illustration and psychogeography. His prints have been acquired by The British Museum, Museum of London for their permanent collections.

The Pyongyang map is part of the artist’s ‘Purposeful Wanderings’ series: a 15-year-long artistic odyssey to document his understanding of the world through what he describes as “maps of the mind” - visual representations of the significant places he has explored.

We arranged for Gareth to walk the streets of Pyongyang rather than the normal fixed itinerary of visiting revolutionary museum and monument. Gareth used Koryo Studio’s archive of North Korean travel brochures and maps to help him complete this mammoth task of documenting Pyongyang.

“Pyongyang panorama pulls back curtain on city of mystery”.

The Guardian
Working with Korean and Western designers to produce a series of designs using the letters of the alphabet. We used the letters as a neutral ‘logo’ which had to be incorporated in the design.

Parallel Papers is a graphic design and packaging design artist exchange in comparing how Western and Korean artists respond to a brief. The project observed the development of a concept, the design process and the techniques of expressing this in graphic form.

Korean graphic artists nowadays work in digital medium but we wanted to explore the beautiful hand painted graphics in which they are still trained.

**PARALLEL PAPERS**

**2020**

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Above: Simo Herold’s design for the letter Y

Left: Industrial Design Studio, design for the letter Y
An award-winning documentary directed by Daniel Gordon and associate-produced by Nicholas Bonner. In 2003 Bonner and Gordon took the 1966 North Korean World Cup football team, who had stunned the world by reaching the quarter-finals, back to Middlesbrough where the sporting history had been made and where the players had become underdog heroes to this large post-industrial town English town.

A lifelong football fan, Gordon, by his own admission, knew little about North Korea beyond the 1966 team. So he travelled to Beijing to meet Bonner and to partner with Bonner’s contacts and gain insights into this secretive country. With Bonner’s expertise, the two managed to find the 1966 team and arrange permission for them to return to the scene of ‘The greatest shock in World Cup history’ in Middlesbrough.

“There was no one in the world with not just Nick’s contacts but Nick’s way of doing things. He and I hit it off immediately and completely...we had a lot in common, we both try and see everyone on a human level,” said Gordon. This shared focus on the human element, the players individual histories and team relationships, the friendship between these men and the locals in Middlesbrough, are the heart and centre of the film. The result was the first western-made documentary about North Korea to shun a political perspective of the country and focus on the personal.

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A BBC documentary (Daniel Gordon - director, Nicholas Bonner - associate producer) that follows the lives of two North Korean schoolgirls as they prepare for the mass choreography spectacle that is the Mass Games.

After the success of Gordon and Bonner’s first documentary, The Game of Their Lives, which was broadcast on television more than ten times in North Korea, the two had the bug and the access for another North Korean project. The decision was to shine a light on what it takes on an individual, human level to participate in a show of 100,000 performers.

Bonner and Gordon negotiated with the North Korean authorities to gain unprecedented and unrestricted access to the homes and lives of 13 year old Pak Hyon Sun and 11 year old Kim Song Yon as they trained for this extraordinary event. The documentary took the best part of a year to shoot, as the girls went through an elaborate training schedule leading up to their opening performance.

“The footage of the games is magnificent but it is the insight into Korean lives that is breathtaking. A beautiful film.”

The Sunday Times

“You have to understand, no one has ever been allowed to see, let alone film, what you are witnessing.”

North Korean production advisor

A STATE OF MIND

2004

WHAT

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A VeryMuchSo production in association Passion Pictures, BBC, ARTE and WNET

Format: Multi-region DVD, 80min

Available at the Koryo Tours office. Contact us for more details
CROSSING THE LINE

2006

WHAT

A ground-breaking documentary, narrated by Christian Slater, telling the story of Joseph Dresnok, the US soldier who defected to the DPRK in 1962, remaining there for the rest of his life.

WHY

As a natural consequence of the country’s long-held policy of isolation, North Korea is a country of myth and mystery. Rumours about the country and its inhabitants spread unchecked and it is increasingly difficult to separate fact from fiction. The story of Dresnok is one such legend; when Koryo Tours founder Nicholas Bonner and director Daniel Gordon met him in North Korea, they knew that they had a unique opportunity to tell his story.

HOW

Bonner and Gordon had previously raised the notion of meeting and perhaps interviewing Dresnok with their contacts in North Korea on multiple occasions, and were repeatedly told it would be absolutely impossible. Having long since resigned themselves to this being one North Korean story they would not be able to tell, they were suddenly summoned to a meeting at the film studios in Pyongyang when, says Bonner, “we were taken into this dark room and this giant of a man appeared – Joe himself. It was like meeting Elvis, only more surprising”.

“A tale of alienation and adaptation both miraculous and strange”

Los Angeles Times

“Riveting”

New York Times

NY Times article

Crossing the Line (2006)
A Very Much So / Passion Pictures presents in association with BBC, E Pictures, Koryo Tours, IFG2, Cinequanion and Dongsong Art Center Format: Multi-region DVD, 90min

Available at the Koryo Tours office. Contact us for more details
"If you insult me then you invite trouble." So speaks Kim Yong Mi, the eponymous heroine from the unlikely film festival hit of 2012, the Belgian-British-North Korean romantic comedy, *Comrade Kim Goes Flying*.

**WHY**

Telling the story of a rural coalminer who dreams of being a trapeze artist in Pyongyang, *Comrade Kim Goes Flying* is the co-production of Koryo Tours' founder, Nick Bonner, Oscar-nominated Belgian film producer Anja Daelemans and North Korean film producer Ryom Mi Hwa.

The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival followed by the first screening for cast and crew at the Pyongyang International Film Festival. In October that year, the film was shown at the prestigious Busan International Film Festival – the first time a North Korean film had been publically screened in South Korea. Bonner, Daelemans and Ryom shared a vision of a co-produced film with an all-Korean cast that could reach audiences both in North Korea and further afield, and unite those audiences with the simple universal message: follow your dreams and you can make the impossible possible.

In 2009, the head of the Korea Film Export Import Corporation told western co-producers Daelemans and Bonner that 'film is not a commodity' and should only be used for political instruction. However after years of painstaking negotiation, in 2012 *Comrade Kim goes Flying* was accepted for local distribution and became the country’s first film officially recognised as ‘pure entertainment’.

"Comrade Kim has the makings of a cult heroine"

*Variety*

“A telling glimpse into an enigmatic culture”

*Hollywood Reporter*
A film by and about an Australian director who travels to North Korea in order to learn how to make a propaganda movie — nominated for ‘Best Direction in a Documentary’ at the Australian Film Institute’s 2014 awards.

Determined to stop gas fracking operations near her Sydney home, filmmaker Anna Broinowski wanted to make a movie to get her message across. She struck upon the idea of travelling to Pyongyang — and its propaganda-heavy movie industry — for inspiration. The plan was to connect with the leading lights of the DPRK’s film business and get their input on how to make something to help her cause.

Broinowski didn’t have permission to travel to the DPRK and film until she connected with Koryo, and its founder Nick Bonner. Once the latter came on board as associate producer things were able to move from theory to reality, with Bonner using his contacts to gain access to North Korea’s top directors, composers and film stars — as well as sorting Broinowski’s travel, and securing her the permission to film there.

“I accompanied Anna Broinowski for the recce. She had a rather cold reception, sat in front of a room of North Korea’s most famous directors. She explained the synopsis of the film and there was silence. She then asked director if he had heard of global warming. He turned to the other directors with humour and wry smile said, ‘Does she think we’re from the moon?’. This broke the atmosphere and the conversation began.”

Nicholas Bonner

AIM HIGH IN CREATION!

2013

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2013

WHAT

A film by and about an Australian director who travels to North Korea in order to learn how to make a propaganda movie — nominated for ‘Best Direction in a Documentary’ at the Australian Film Institute’s 2014 awards.

WHY

Determined to stop gas fracking operations near her Sydney home, filmmaker Anna Broinowski wanted to make a movie to get her message across. She struck upon the idea of travelling to Pyongyang — and its propaganda-heavy movie industry — for inspiration. The plan was to connect with the leading lights of the DPRK’s film business and get their input on how to make something to help her cause.

HOW

Broinowski didn’t have permission to travel to the DPRK and film until she connected with Koryo, and its founder Nick Bonner. Once the latter came on board as associate producer things were able to move from theory to reality, with Bonner using his contacts to gain access to North Korea’s top directors, composers and film stars — as well as sorting Broinowski’s travel, and securing her the permission to film there.

“I accompanied Anna Broinowski for the recce. She had a rather cold reception, sat in front of a room of North Korea’s most famous directors. She explained the synopsis of the film and there was silence. She then asked director if he had heard of global warming. He turned to the other directors with humour and wry smile said, ‘Does she think we’re from the moon?’. This broke the atmosphere and the conversation began.”

Nicholas Bonner
The first ever time-lapse video made in North Korea, which immediately went viral and has been viewed over 5 million times.

Koryo Tours were approached by Shanghai-based filmmakers Rob Whitworth and JT Singh, who between them had a number of wildly successful, technically innovative short films under their belt. Taking their particular brand of site-specific “flow-motion” filmmaking to Pyongyang was an opportunity to showcase the city like it had never been seen before.

A time-lapse film requires the crew to stay in each single location for hours, taking thousands of photographs before stitching them together in a painstakingly technical post-production process. Only Koryo Tours had the trust of local partners needed to arrange access for this demanding project.

After months of negotiations, permission was granted and in April 2014 Whitworth and Singh hit the ground running, accompanied by Koryo’s Creative Projects Manager Vicky Mohieddeen, who was crucial for continual on-the-ground negotiations to ensure specific access for crucial scenes.

Watch Enter Pyongyang on Vimeo
Two time-lapse videos of North Korea, one on the Mass Games and one on Pyongyang, using unique tilt-shift photography to capture the capital city as a tiny diorama.

Joerg Daiber’s Little Big World project aims to “turn the most beautiful, interesting and also awkward locations on earth into adorable miniature models”. When he approached Koryo Tours with the proposal of applying his techniques to Pyongyang, we saw an opportunity to present the North Korean city to the world in a way that it had never been seen before. With the Mass Games returning in 2018, we knew that Daiber’s signature style could be put to dramatic effect.

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A ground-breaking two part travel series for Channel 5 in which we took Michael Palin on a special tour of North Korea, showing him – and his audience of millions – a side of the country that is rarely represented in western media depictions. Nominated for two BAFTA for camera and sound.

Palin, a beloved comedy star and national treasure in the UK, is also a hugely popular travel broadcaster. Taking him to North Korea was an opportunity to give audiences around the world a never before seen insight into the DPRK

Arranging special access for Palin and his crew took more than two years of negotiations. Our longstanding relationship with the North Korean tourism authorities was instrumental in the success of this project. On the trip itself, guides who we have worked with for many years took Palin and his team around the country, ensuring that they had the smoothest possible trip and were able to visit truly unique locations and film extensively inside this elusive nation.
An annual international film festival held in Pyongyang, for which Koryo Tours is the official foreign co-ordinator and tourism partner. The festival shows films from around the world to a domestic audience in Pyongyang.

We believe in the power of cinema to broaden horizons and facilitate cultural exchange. As well as the Koryo co-produced documentary The Game of Their Lives being premiered at the festival in 2002, Koryo has brought films such as Bend It Like Beckham, Bean: The Ultimate Disaster Movie, Atonement and March of the Penguins to the audience in Pyongyang.

Koryo Tours was approached by the festival organising committee to assist in programming more international films. At the same time, we were receiving enquiries from filmmakers who had been invited to attend the festival but were unsure how to proceed. By helping the North Korean co-ordinators in both the cultural and tourism elements of the festival, we have helped its development into a successful annual event.

“The festival is a rare opportunity to mingle with North Korean people – and to see how they react to cinema.”

The Guardian
An ongoing project to distribute North Korea’s unique film culture – from revolutionary epics to light comedy, all laden with political messages – to an international audience. We have arranged DPRK film programmes at various events including Melbourne and Singapore International Film Festivals. Koryo Studio also holds one of the most extensive collections of DPRK film posters produced for local & international audiences.

Sharing North Korean cinema with the rest of the world helps demystify some aspects of the DPRK’s culture. Along with the films, short interviews with the North Korean directors and actors are shown, creating a personal interaction with the Western audience.

We work with the Korea Film Export Import Corporation to arrange permission for these films to be shown abroad, and maintain our own film collection as a rental library and film information resource.

"Since the Bruce Lee times we haven’t experienced such spontaneous and widespread fascination. Postcards and letters flooded our magazine."

Film magazine (Poland)

In 2016 we showed a collection of DPRK films at the Five Flavours Film Festival in Poland, most people came to watch the two films that starred Ri Yong Ho to reminisce about their mysterious film star from the Far East.
In 2004, Koryo Tours and Ealing Studios jointly presented the 2002 British football-themed comedy-drama Bend It Like Beckham at the 9th Pyongyang International Film Festival. The film was a smash hit and seen by a total of 12,000 Pyongyang locals. In 2010, the film was broadcast nationwide in DPRK.

In 2009, in discussion with the British Embassy in Pyongyang, Koryo Tours suggested a nationwide broadcast of Bend It Like Beckham on North Korean television. This event was to mark 10 years of UK-DPRK diplomatic relations.

Once the British Embassy was on board, considerable negotiations took place with the DPRK government to agree to broadcast the film on national television to the whole population. It became the first (and, to date, the only) European film to be broadcast in the country. North Korean friends reported the streets were quiet as everyone was at home watching their tv.

“This would be the first occasion in which a film made in the West, portraying contemporary life outside this country, had been broadcast nation-wide in the DPRK. The affect this could have on the population will be immeasurable in terms of their knowledge of conditions outside of their country, and their understanding of modern western life.”

Peter Hughes
British Ambassador to North Korea, (DPRK)

The Guardian article

Left: Audience excited about watching the film
As part of our ongoing work in developing the North Korean film industry’s links with the outside world, we organised for an old 600-seat cinema in the Pyongyang International Cinema House to be renovated, with the purpose of screening foreign films – a first in North Korea’s history. The cinema was fitted with the countries first ever Digital Cinema Projection, a bar, and a souvenir shop. The cinema now shows Korean films for tourists and international films for locals, as well as occasional events such as Q&As with actors and directors.

The ability to share film culture is something we feel very strongly about and the only opportunity for locals to see foreign films prior to this was the biennale Pyongyang International Film Festival. We hope to show a varied selection of foreign films throughout the year.

In 2013 Koryo Tours approached the Korean film authorities to see if it would be possible. In 2018 we completed renovations of the cinema.
A photographic feature on Pyongyang, shot by a North Korean photographer, in *Wallpaper*, a design and architecture focused magazine. This was the first time that foreigners had commissioned a North Korean photographer for a major shoot. The creative collaboration gave us the opportunity to see how they interpret a brief and their visual style.

North Korea in the early 2000s received fewer than 1000 foreigners a year and had not yet opened its doors to Americans. *Wallpaper* proposed bringing a journalist and photographer to capture this singular city, a time capsule of socialist design. Koryo Studio embarked on two years of negotiations. The unprecedented nature of the project meant that authorities were not likely to give permission to the magazine’s photographer – therefore the commission was given to the official photographer from the Korea International Travel Company, shooting on a medium format camera. All 25 photographs published in the magazine were taken by the North Korean photographer.
The first art photography book on North Korea by a western photographer. Accompanied by guides at all times, Crane adopted absolute neutrality, leaving viewers to draw their own conclusions. Welcome to Pyongyang was the winner of the British Journal of Photography International Prize, who called it “a revealing insight into the secretive state’s self-image”.

Bonner and Crane felt that by directly addressing the North Koreans self-perception, rather than by any hidden-camera voyeuristic exposé, outsiders could better understand North Koreans image of themselves.

Koryo founder Nicholas Bonner and photographer Charlie Crane embarked on a project (three shoots in the country) featuring large-format portraits of Pyongyang public and tourism guides. Accompanying texts were taken verbatim providing an intimate story of the protagonist.

“The way that North Korea (or anywhere) wishes to present itself is likely to be as revealing as any investigative photojournalist’s account of how the place ‘really’ is. There’s a tendency to want to consider photographs either as propaganda – whether commercial or ideological – or as ‘Truth’, as if the choice is always one or the other. Yet isn’t it the case that nearly all published photographs are in fact a mixture of both? ... As it happens, I think Charlie’s photographs are unusually open – so open they are practically raw – in the best tradition of documentary photography, which is very much part of their attraction.”

Chris Boot
Publisher
A photography project looking at the core elements of the Mass Games, a spectacular extravaganza of gymnastics, synchronisation and music involving over 100,000 performers.

Take tens of thousands of children, place them in one of the largest stadiums in the world, arm them with giant flip-books containing hundreds of coloured panels, train them to move in perfect unison and you get the awe-inspiring human mosaics of the Arirang Mass Games. In 2005 Koryo Tours arranged special permission for Werner Kranwetvogel to photograph the enormous show Arirang with over 100,000 performers.

The Mass Games are composed of three different elements: gymnastics, backdrop, and music. Each of these components is essential for a successful performance but they are not identical in their degree of importance.

Probably the most spectacular part of the show is the backdrop. This field of synchronized humanity spreads across one whole side of the stadium and contains up to 20,000 individual students, each holding a large book with pages of block colours which, when seen as a whole are combined to huge pictures. When the students turn the pages simultaneously, the whole scene, or just individual elements, change. It’s a gigantic display formed with “human pixels”. Kranwetvogel was interested in isolating individual performing groups. With a telephoto lens he was able to zoom in on single movements, gestures, and heads from within the ever-shifting carpet of colour created by the masses.

‘A Night in Pyongyang’ was published in 2007 by German publisher Nicolai co-written with Nicholas Bonner of Koryo.
A series of more than 100 portraits of local North Koreans photographed using a 3D stereoscopic technique, a short documentary charting the process of creating the portraits and a critically-acclaimed 3D art book by the award-winning photographer Matjaž Tančič.

Tančič’s unique 3D photography medium provides a depth of image that normal photography cannot. The resulting photographs were showcased through interactive pieces in CNN and The Guardian, as well as being exhibited in Beijing, Hong Kong, Houston and Pyongyang – the latter being the first time that Western photography was shared with a local audience.

Capturing the portraits via the 3D technique required patience and understanding on the part of the subject – standing motionless for minutes while photographs are captured to cover the requisite perspectives. In a country where people are understandably wary of the Western-wielded camera, and guides are not naturally disposed to prolong the process of taking photographs in public spaces, the successful completion of the project was possible thanks to Koryo Tours’ creative producer, Vicky Mohieddeen, who accompanied Tančič as he travelled the country.

Left: The 3DPRK photography set became an international hit and currently is in its third edition
A collaboration with Dutch photographer Eddo Hartmann on a project documenting the North Korean architectural endeavour to shape the ultimate socialist city and the lives of the people therein. The photographic book Setting the Stage was published in 2017.

Pyongyang was designed to be a city where every North Korean would feel like a truly modern socialist – the architecture proposed to speak the language of socialism and progress to all its citizens. Setting the Stage, is Hartmann’s exploration of the line between fact and fiction as seen through the lens of Pyongyang’s architecture.

Hartmann’s exploration of the stage-like nature of Pyongyang’s architecture, required multiple trips and corresponding red tape but our Korean colleagues liked his work and permissions were given.

“A considered, slow-burning meditation – one fascinated with public space.”

TIME magazine
A free exhibition held in Pyongyang at the Chollima House of Culture in Pyongyang, showcasing work by Slovenian 3D photographer Matjaž Tančič and Dutch architectural photographer Eddo Hartmann. Hundreds of North Koreans visited the exhibition over 10 days, viewing 35 photographic works, both of their own country as seen through the eyes of these foreign artists, and of Tančič and Hartmann’s work from around the world. This was the first time that art photographs by foreign photographers and from foreign countries were publicly exhibited in North Korea.

In 2014, Koryo Studio brought Tančič and Hartmann, both exceptional European photographers, to Pyongyang to produce two new collections of photographic works. Wanting this project to go further, Koryo Studio’s Creative Producer Vicky Mohieddeen approached local partners to suggest an exhibition in downtown Pyongyang. To Koryo’s surprise, the local authorities said yes.

For many years, Koryo Studio has been proud to introduce North Korean art to a wider global audience, and has facilitated the production of foreign-authored art in North Korea. But until this exhibition in 2015, Koryo Studio had never been able to share this work with a local audience.
A hugely ambitious project, taking Magnum photographer Carl De Keyzer on a 60 night tour to every single one of North Korea’s provinces, making him the first Western photographer to ever do so. The photographs were for Koryo’s dedicated DPRK-travel website (koryotours.com), as well as his own portfolio. The work was shown publicly for the first time in summer 2017, at American University Museum, Washington, accompanied by his book D.P.R. Korea: Grand Tour.

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is one of the hardest places in the world to photograph. Tourists have to follow strict guidelines and photographers are not allowed to go on professional trips. Taking De Keyzer in on an approved photographic tour allowed him a unique view of almost everything there is to see as a foreign visitor to the DPRK, giving outsiders the opportunity to see the country through the lens of a globally renowned multi award-winning photographer.

With more than two decades of experience in the DPRK and trusting relationships, we were able to convince the North Koreans that this would be a worthwhile project. Because of De Keyzer’s partnership with Koryo and because both parties were upfront about the aims of the trip from the beginning, he was allowed the time and space to properly observe the places he visited.

“We like to see DPRK as the next big enemy, if only to sell papers and media. I could be wrong of course, there is a decent amount of manipulation going on with visitors, but I would say that a lot of information is exaggerated.”

Carl De Keyzer

All images are credited to Carl de Keyzer/Koryo Studio
The five Revolutionary Operas which were written to encourage the North Korean public in the tasks of revolution and construction and had always fascinated us. In 2015 we had worked with Slovenian photographer Matjaž Tančič on the project 3DPRK and we thought his style would be perfect to document this artform.

It is hyperbole to say North Korea is the least photographed country in the world, but access to capture anything off the tourist route is rare. This project presented an enormous challenge, getting access to an art form that is regarded as sacrosanct due to its association with the leaders of the country. Most of the time photographs of the people from North Korea are the “stolen” photos of nameless, emotionless passer-byes but Tančič wanted to challenge that with more theatrical, closeup portraits.

After 2 years of negotiations Tančič received permission to photograph the opera, and in November 2019 he took the Air Koryo flight to attend the performance at the Pyongyang Grand Theatre. However, on arrival the Koreans only gave permission to shoot from a fixed seat during the performance and without lights or flash. After a day and a half of discussions access was granted not only to photograph from the wings but also on-stage after the performance.

**PHOTOGRAPHING A REVOLUTION IN OPERA**

**2019**

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Left: Photographing the Revolutionary Opera from the stage
The world’s first exhibition dedicated to North Korean movie posters, and an accompanying limited-edition book containing information about each film. Film posters are where art and movies come together — the graphic artist encapsulating the director’s work as a still object. Each of the DPRK’s film posters tells a unique story. We wanted to share these little-seen images with the world, and spark discussion around what each one says about the country’s film industry, and narratives.

The importance placed on the artistic merit of these posters can be seen by the fact that the film studios in Pyongyang each have their own graphics departments. The artists follow the shooting of the film — during which time they develop sketches and themes.

The Art of the DPRK was the world’s first exhibition dedicated to the DPRK’s film posters, and featuring pieces collected directly from Pyongyang by Koryo Studio — our art wing. The posters were originally used in the country’s cinemas, as well as those published for promotion abroad (often in French or English language aimed for countries of the non aligned movement).
MADE IN NORTH KOREA: 
GRAPHICS FROM EVERYDAY LIFE

2017

WHAT 
Koryo founder Nicholas Bonner’s collection of North Korean graphic design as seen on daily ephemera, from cigarette packets to coasters to tinned fruit. The collection was published by Phaidon, including eight short essays written by Koryo General Manager Simon Cockerell. The House of Illustration, London put on a 3 month exhibition of the work after which it was shown at Hongik Daehangno Art Centre in Seoul. This was the first time North Korean graphics had been publicly shown in the country.

WHY 
When Bonner started visiting North Korea, his eye was caught by the strikingly attractive graphic designs which adorned everything from the intricately decorated sugar sachets presented alongside a coffee on an Air Koryo flight, to the cheerfully painted rows of pink peaches livening up an otherwise plain tin of fruit. Bonner started collecting these snatches of frivolity, which represent a surprising contrast to a country known for its brutalist buildings and intimidating military propaganda.

HOW 
After decades of visiting the country and gathering those examples, Bonner had amassed the most comprehensive collection of this little known anomaly in graphic design history. Partnering with Phaidon ensured this collection would reach a wider audience.

A new publication from North Korea specialist Nicholas Bonner offers new insight into this isolated, fiercely ideological society by showcasing its visual culture.

The Guardian
A Thames and Hudson publication by architects Cristiano Bianchi and Kristina Drapic in collaboration with Koryo Studio. The project decodes the narrative content of the architecture and urban space of Pyongyang, a city conceived as a model for the entire state and for a new society. Introduction by writer Pico Iyer who we took to Korea in 2015.

Beijing-based Drapic and Bianchi approached Koryo to arrange access to the “open air museum of socialist architecture” that is Pyongyang. There aim was to explore the narrative of the city, and to document the original buildings before the renovations.

The isolation of the DPRK has meant limited access to the unique and peculiar features of Pyongyang, which result from the city being devastated during the Korean War and then rebuilt as a model city. Its utopian ideals make it unlike and other city in the Communist-bloc, or even the world. We arranged for Bianchi & Drapic to have access to the architects and the architecture. In additions The Koryo Archive has two decades worth of publications, photographs, films and recordings about Pyongyang’s design and architecture.

Pyongyang’s Retro Sci-Fi Architecture...home to a bizarre array of museums, halls and skyscrapers.

The New York Times Sunday review
A collection of prints dating from the 1950s to the twenty-first century of State approved wood and linocut prints offering a rare glimpse into the country and the creativity behind the propaganda.

The project’s intention was not to produce an ‘art book’ but rather to tell anecdotes based on the imagery. Together with specialists Koen de Ceuster, Simon Cockerell and James Banfill the linocuts reveal elements of the lives of the country’s train conductors, steelworkers, weavers, farmers, scientists, and fishermen.

Nicholas Bonner started collecting woodcuts and linocuts in the early 90’s from the art studios and various contacts he made over the years.

Depicting everyday lives, these unique lino-cut and woodblock prints are a fascinating way to explore the culture of this still virtually unknown country. Together, they are an unparalleled testament to the talent of North Korea’s artists and the unique social, cultural, and political conditions in which they work.

Victoria & Albert Museum
‘Songs of the Hermit Kingdom’ the first ever western radio show recorded in North Korea. BBC presenter Andy Kershaw travelled with Koryo Tours to make a radio programme on the contemporary music scene. The two part programme was Sony nominated.

To provide a more unusual insight into the rather mysterious world of the DRPK. Recording in the DPRK, whether film or radio, is going to cause issues and has obvious sensitivities, however the theme of ‘music’ allowed us to receive permission and build a picture of the country around the various musical interludes.

“This is the last great adventure on planet Earth”

Andy Kershaw.
BBC Radio, presenter and journalist

Above: Nicholas Bonner and Andy Kershaw at the top of the Juche Tower
The North Korean leg of British soul singer Joss Stone’s world tour – an ambitious plan to play a gig in every country in the world!

Stone’s concert had the dual purpose of promoting North Korea to her audience of millions of fans, as well as introducing a rare glimpse of western contemporary music to North Koreans. A short trip, a short gig, but something a bit special – we hope that before too long foreign artists will be able to visit regularly and play official concerts, Joss Stone helped to nudge the door open another millimetre toward this goal.

In March 2019 we arranged special permission for Stone and her crew to come to North Korea and create a unique itinerary that included a local concert. Joss and her guitarist Leon came for 3 days, visited a music shop to try out some local instruments, learned a Korean song (Arirang) with the local guide and filmed the performance. We cleared permission for her to sing at our bar in the Yanggakdo International Cinema House, attended by around 60 tourist, cinema staff and local Korean guides along with members of the British Embassy. As well as her own hits she played a very sweet version of the iconic Korean anthem ‘Arirang’ with the guides with whom she had been practicing.

Joss Stone official website

Joss Stone: Total World Tour - North Korea
KORYO TOURS TRAVEL EXPERTISE

1996 onwards

| WHAT    | Koryo Tour’s bread and butter is taking tourists into North Korea; since we started in 1993, we have been responsible for bringing over 50% of tourists into the country. Because of this deep expertise about travelling in the DPRK, we have been responsible for a number of ground breaking journalistic projects in North Korea, including: Michael Palin in North Korea (Channel 4); Songs From the Hermit Kingdom (Channel 4); DPR Korea Grand Tour (Magnum); The Great Leader, the Dear Leader and the Tour Leader (BBC); and many, many more. We have also advised on the North Korean editions of global travel guides, such as Lonely Planet, Rough Guides and Bradt. |
| WHY     | Koryo Tours’ mission is to offer a human insight into a country that is often viewed through a solely political lens. By taking hundreds of tourists to North Korea, we allow North Koreans and outsiders to meet and learn from each other’s differences. We believe in the power of engagement to break down barriers and the importance of seeing the human side of North Korea |
| HOW     | As well as the journalistic projects that we have directly facilitated, Koryo Tours’ team of North Korean art, architecture, culture and travel specialists are frequently called upon by news and current affairs programmes. We have been interviewed by the New York Times, CNN, Sky News, The Washington Post, and the BBC. Our length and depth of expertise in North Korea has meant that we are now the go-to organisation for information, images and analysis relating to travel in this enigmatic and largely unknown state. “Koryo Tours, a company that has established itself as one of the leaders in the DPRK tourist eld and has done much to increase our understanding of that country. Koryo Tours, through its different enterprises, has complemented the embassy’s work and in some ways done more than the embassy has been able to achieve. It has brought knowledge of the outside world to the DPRK, but has also operated in the other direction, bringing foreigners to the country and showing them the human side of what is often depicted as a strange and unknowable place.” |

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| State secrets | Martin Parr penetrates North Korea |

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| State secrets | Martin Parr penetrates North Korea |
Visitors to the country find their movements much more restricted and curtailed than almost anywhere else, with large areas of the country remaining off-limits to foreign visitors. In the early 90’s tourists were initially limited to just Pyongyang, the Kaesong/DMZ area, and Mt. Myohyang. Koryo Tours has been instrumental in opening many areas of North Korea to tourists and expanding the range of possible experiences for visitors to the country as well as maximising interaction opportunities in what can politely be called challenging circumstances.

It has always been Koryo Tours’ mission to open more of North Korea to international tourism; to expose as many locals to as many foreigners as possible, and vice-versa, in the belief that human contact, no matter how fleeting, helps to foster an understanding that there are commonalities in people all over the world that are often overlooked while the macro-narratives which overlook the vast majorities of the human population on all sides dominate.

A chronological selection of some landmark steps forward in the field of tourism can be found on the left page.

**TIMELINE**

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>American tourists visit Pyongyang for the first time on the occasion of the World Peace Festival (attended by Muhammed Ali among others). Over the next decade opportunities for visitors from the US are few and far between.</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Wonsan opens for tourism; making a journey to the east coast of the country a viable option for the first time.</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Arirang Mass Games happens for the first time. This event is to be repeated sporadically until 2013, becoming the main tourist attraction in that period.</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>The first amateur football tour by a western team (Beijing Celtic FC) takes place. From this time Koryo organises a range of sports tours including cricket, volleyball, frisbee, and more.</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Access to local sports matches for tourists begins. Local and international football being the most popular for visitors.</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>After many years of effort the industrial city of Hamhung opens to tourists, along with the mountain range of Kumgangsan and the hiking trails contained in that stunning part of the country. Making trips to the east coast much more viable.</td>
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<td>2013</td>
<td>Sinuiju, the largest border city in the DPRK and a place long open to Chinese tourists, is opened to western visitors.</td>
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<td>2014</td>
<td>The biggest mass-participation sports event in the country, the Pyongyang Marathon, is finally opened to foreign amateurs. Koryo Tours become the official partner of the race and add a 10km and 5km options to increase accessibility and participation. This rapidly becomes one of the major events on the tourism calendar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Cross-Country local train. Opening not only places but opportunities for interaction with locals has been a focus for Koryo. Offering tourists the chance to ride the rails with local passengers from Pyongyang all the way across the country from Pyongyang up to the remote Rason Economic Zone via the east coast is another step on that path.</td>
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**KORYO TOURS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

1993 onwards

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A chronological selection of some landmark steps forward in the field of tourism can be found on the left page.
Since 1996, we have facilitated a number of travel programmes in North Korea, which would not have been possible without our contacts in the country and the trust that we have established with the relevant authorities.

**Travel documentaries (film):**
- Travelogue: North Korea with Andy Kershaw (Channel 5, 1996);
- Departures: North Korea (National Geographic 2010);
- Op Reis-North Korea ‘Nord Korea’ with Floortje Dessing (Dutch TV, 2011);
- Reizen Waes with Tom Waes (Belgium TV, 2015);
- Michael Palin in North Korea, BAFTA craft award nomination (Channel 5, National Geographic, 2018).

**Travel documentaries (radio):**
- The Tour Leader with Tony Pletts and Nicholas Bonner, Sony nomination (BBC Radio 4, 2005).

Koryo Tours access allows a foreign audience to see more than the limited view presented by the North Koreans or western media. Even with limited access the travel programmes we have produced manage to provide more of an insight into the country and its people.

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The team’s underdog success story has been the subject of Gordon and Bonners award-winning documentary The Game of Their Lives. After the film’s premiere in Pyongyang, Bonner and Gordon concocted a plan to reunite the players with their fans in Middlesbrough, where they had their initial matches and had been adopted by the town as the local team.

With the support of the British Embassy in Pyongyang, Bonner and Gordon brought the team to the UK to visit the Houses of Parliament and various football clubs, where over 100,000 British football fans turned out to greet them.

“Rapprochement on the field of sport is set against a very different political backdrop…President Bush has declared that North Korea is part of the “axis of evil”. None of this makes sense when you meet Pak Do Ik or Ri Chan Myong or any of the remaining magnificent seven.”

The Times of London

“It was the day I learnt football is not all about winning. When I scored that goal, the people of Middlesbrough took us to their hearts. I learnt that playing football can improve diplomatic relations and promote peace.”

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Left: The players received a standing ovation as they returned to Middlesbrough FC in 2003
A visit from the Middlesbrough FC Ladies to Pyongyang – the first time that a British football team had ever visited North Korea.

The team played two friendly matches, with the final match broadcast that evening on national television. Despite losing 6-2 then 5-0 to the home sides, the Middlesbrough ladies were treated to rapturous applause from the 7,000 strong crowd.

The tour was to mark ten years of diplomatic relations between the UK and the DPRK. Middlesbrough was chosen for a reason: back in 1966, the industrial town hosted the World Cup where the North Korean team had shocked the world by beating Italy to reach the quarter-finals. Since then, there has been a mutual fondness between the DPRK and the town of Middlesborough.

The exchange was organised in collaboration with the British Embassy in Pyongyang and the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Koryo Tours had facilitated a number of sports exchanges between foreign and North Korean teams, the norm being that the visiting team imparts new skills to the locals. On this occasion, the tables were turned as the North Korean women’s football team is one of the best in the world: “they taught us a thing or two,” said Middlesbrough player Rachel Hines.

“After the match we ran around the stadium meeting the fans, the British Ambassador said that in half an hour we had spoken to and shaken hands with more Koreans than he had in two years!”

Marrie Wieczorek
Middlesbrough Manager
In 2012 we helped 14 Americans from Coaches Team International (CTI) — an NGO based in Seoul — travel to Pyongyang for the first-ever DPRK-USA basketball exchange.

Coaches Team International (CTI) is an American non-profit organisation with a strong focus on basketball development in Asia. Its members in Seoul were, of course, extremely aware of their neighbours to the north, and keen to use the power of sport to help break down the walls thrown up by negative stereotypes and political barriers.

CTI’s founder Luke Elie contacted Koryo for help in making this project a reality, and so we set to work producing a trip that would deliver positive engagement through basketball. In the end, we were able to arrange for 14 basketball coaches and players, all American, to share their knowledge with a number of North Korean youth teams.

CTI ran training sessions at different locations including the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren’s Palace, and Kang Bank Sok Middle School, with the kids improving their basketball skills, as well as learning to engage with their American guests on a more human level. Of note was the mixed match that took place — with North Koreans and Americans working together as a team (on a trip that pre-dated Dennis Rodman’s more famous and controversial efforts).

“Kids are kids everywhere, and it is essential to keep working with them as much as possible. Isolation will only hurt their overall development. Interaction between North Koreans and Americans is positive for both sides.”

Luke Elie
CTI founder
The DPRK’s biggest annual sporting event, which now includes foreign runners thanks to the advocacy of Koryo Tours. The race starts and finishes in Kim Il Sung Stadium and is the only event where foreigners are allowed to run free through the streets of Pyongyang, alongside and cheered on by thousands of locals.

Sport is a great bonding activity, and gives tourists the opportunity to high five local spectators and builds relationships between North Koreans and foreigners on a human level.

For several years, the National Olympic Committee of the DPRK had rejected our requests to enter foreign semi-professional runners to participate in the annual race. In 2013, we organised a 5km fun run with 50 foreign runners. This created enough of a stir for the authorities to decide that an event with foreign runners would be possible, and the following year we brought in 200 people. In 2016, we registered 1,100 foreign runners and were appointed as the Western exclusive partner for the marathon with the responsibility of maintaining the event as bronze standard of the International Association of Athletic Federation.

“We were told to line up in straight, orderly lines of eight. Not being Korean, we were all pretty rubbish at this, and far too excited. When our lines finally formed, we were moved into the stadium like lemmings, to the roar of 40,000 North Koreans clapping and cheering.”

Nick Butter
Ultra Runner, Endurance Athlete
Since 2003, Koryo Tours has brought over ten amateur sports teams from around Asia to Pyongyang for friendly matches with the North Koreans. Many of these have been football, or other familiar sports such as volleyball or ice hockey. However we’ve also introduced some new sports to Pyongyang, such as ultimate frisbee and cricket, with the first ever Pyongyang Cricket Club being formed in 2008.

We believe in the power of person-to-person contact to facilitate mutual understanding and exchange. The first sports team we took to the DPRK was the Beijing Celtic football team for a match on the Yanggakdo Football Club training pitch that was not strictly ‘allowed’ but after being seen by the authorities the idea of friendship football was accepted.

Koryo founder Nicholas Bonner described Beijing Celtic’s original proposal as “a batty but beautiful idea” – one which he persuaded the North Koreans to come on board with. Since then, the only barrier to bringing sports teams to North Korea has been funding. Koryo Tours encourages any potential teams or sponsors to get in touch to continue this great tradition of coming together under sport.

“Koryo have made their own contribution towards putting a different face on North Korea and its people from the simple stereotypes so heavily promoted in the West and the Rest. Seeing people at work, rest and play differentiates them from the politically constructed images political leaders prefer to deal in. In 1945 the famous English essayist George Orwell wrote following a tour of the United Kingdom by Moscow Dynamo that, ‘sport is an unfailing cause of ill will’. Koryo have proved him wrong on this occasion at least.”

Glyn Ford
Author and politician specialising in East Asia

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**VARIOUS SPORT EXCHANGES**

**Football, Ultimate Frisbee, Ice-Hockey, Volleyball, Cricket and more**

**ONGOING**

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Author and politician specialising in East Asia
An annual programme of two short but intensive language sessions with Western teachers for the students at the Pyongyang College of Tourism. Students at the PCT receive training in English, Chinese and Russian, but this is generally taught through traditional vocabulary lists, with little interactive learning and no interaction with native speakers. This limits their ability to communicate meaningfully with tourists once they qualify as tour guides.

In 2015, Koryo Tours along with professional language teacher Ronny Mintjens approached the PCM to offer to provide more practical teaching skills to their lessons. Mintjens works with the college annually to develop their existing curriculum but also to demonstrate practical ways of teaching interactive, exciting and challenging learning activities that help the students to develop their confidence and practical skills.

**ENGLISH TEACHING:**
Professional Language Teachers for Pyongyang College of Tourism

**2016 Onwards**

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Koryo has worked on a number of projects, ranging from the renovation of an orphanage, the production of new braille dictionaries, the delivery of 3,000 kilograms of milk powder for babies and 50 tons of flour to orphanages and blind schools. Our work continues in this field, only providing material not cash, and all deliveries are monitored.

Being the only travel company working in North Korea in the mid 90’s, we were able to introduce NGOs to the country at a time when the DPRK was experiencing a severe famine. Since then we have followed the practice of responsible tourism, using our status and contacts in North Korea to give back something to those less fortunate.

None of our humanitarian work would be possible without the generous support of the tourists, in some cases for years after they first travelled to North Korea. We are fortunate to have met various individuals who finance our humanitarian projects as well as continued support from previous tourists who raise funds for specific projects.

The team at Koryo maintains an attitude of presuming that something might be possible to achieve in the local environment, rather than presuming it will not be. For them, that is part of treating people respectfully. As a result, opportunities present in which all parties (foreign and local) can engage and share a joint sense of accomplishment.

Dr Sarah Gollan
Korea Maranatha Foundation (humanitarian aid to DPRK)
End.
More Projects Coming Soon.
**Architecture**

- Venice Biennale official website: https://www.abbienale.org/en

**Art**

- The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) of Contemporary Art:
  - Official website: https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au

- Touching the Hearts and Minds of the People:
  - East West Center: https://www.eastwestcenter.org

- Pyongyang Racer:
  - Official website: http://www.pyongyangracer.com

- The Beautiful Future:
  - Official website: http://the-beautiful-future.com

**Film**

- Pyongyang International Film Festival:
  - Website: http://pyongyanginternationalfilmfestival.com

- Crossing the line:
  - NY Times article: https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/10/movies/10line.html

- Comrade Kim goes Flying:
  - Official website: http://comradekimgoesflying.com

- Aim High in Creation:
  - BBC article: https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35385142

- Michael Palin in North Korea:
  - Channel5: https://www.channel5.com/show/michael-palin-in-north-korea/

- Bend It like Beckham
  - Guardian article: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/31/north-korea-david-beckham-film

- Little Big World:
  - Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/littlbigworld

- Enter Pyongyang:
  - Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/120351905

**Photography**

- A Night in Pyongyang
  - Official Website: http://www.massgames-pictures.com

**Music & Radio**

- Radio Programmes:
  - BBC Audio: https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p005y2pj
  - Joss Stone:
    - Official website: https://www.jossstone.com/
    - Total World Tour North Korea Page: http://totalworldtour.com/tour/north-korea

**Tourism**

- N/A

**Sports**

- Pyongyang Marathon:
  - Website: http://pyongyangmarathon.com

**Education**

- N/A

**Humanitarian Projects**

- Humanitarian Projects:
  - Koryo Tours: https://koryogroup.com/engagement