

Please cite this paper as:

OECD (2009), "Chapter 8: Temple Stay Programme, Korea", *The Impact of Culture on Tourism*, OECD, Paris, pp. 115-127.



# The Impact of Culture on Tourism

**CASE STUDY OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
KOREA**

**Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism  
Republic of Korea**



Centre for  
Entrepreneurship,  
SMEs and Local  
Development



## **Temple Stay Programme, Republic of Korea**

### ***Introduction***

Theme-based tourist attractions are enjoying increasing popularity, particularly as a means of diversifying the tourist product and adding attractiveness to local territories (Grege, 1996). A differentiated theme may capture the attention of potential visitors and may become an attraction in its own right if it is presented and interpreted well and is coupled with services that meet visitor requirements. Cultural tourism can be one of theme-based tourist attractions. The development of tourism has been traditionally related to the development of culture. The unique cultural resources of a territory serve as a basis for the cultural supply required by the local community, as well as contributing to increased tourism attractiveness.

Puczko and Ratz (2007) suggested that, as tourism products, cultural resources have several characteristics that ensure a unique role for this type of product in the development of tourism, because they can:

- Be developed with relatively small investment.
- Diversify and spread demand for tourism in time and especially in space.
- Contribute to the utilisation in tourism of unexploited resources.
- Develop new segments of demand for certain types of tourism (*e.g.* cultural tourism, heritage tourism, etc.).

As a cultural resource, the Temple Stay Programme is a good example of a theme-based tourist attraction. It is a cultural experience programme designed to help visitors understand Buddhism in Korea better and contributes to enhance attractiveness and competitiveness of local territories as cultural tourism resources. In this sense, the project focuses on introducing the best practice among Temple Stays in Korea, identifying successful factors for enhancing destination competitiveness, and suggesting

strategies and policy recommendations, as well as proving lessons learnt by the public actors and others.

### ***Background***

A Temple Stay is a cultural-experience programme designed to help people understand Korean Buddhism better. Temple stays offer various kinds of practicing methods such as *yebul* (ceremonial service involving chanting), *chamseon* (Zen meditation), *dahdoh* (tea ceremony) and *balwoo gongyang* (communal Buddhist meal service). Participants can find their “true self” amongst the harmony of nature while staying at a temple. Temple Life, the experience of temples is another programme designed to help people understand Korean Buddhism and the life of monks better.

Buddhism arrived in Korea over 2 500 years ago from China, absorbed some of this country's early shamanistic beliefs and evolved into a distinct form. Early Korean monks, convinced that the beliefs coming from China were inconsistent, developed a holistic approach involving three elements: meditation, studying sutras and chanting.

That balance between the three elements of Buddhist practice still exists, and has an appeal to many foreigners.

### ***Typology of the programme***

An innovative programme that is opening up Korean Buddhism to the world is the temple stay programme organised by the Chogye Order. Since it started in 2002, at least 6 000 foreigners as well as more than 30 000 Koreans have stayed at the 44 temples in the programme. The number of participants is increasing dramatically. In the first year of its operation less than 1 000 foreigners participated in the programme. In the first seven months of this year, more than 2 000 have already participated. The programme offers visitors a chance to sample monastic life amongst the artifacts, treasures and cultural memories housed in Korea's ancient monasteries. Most participants find it an enriching experience. Korea's monasteries are usually in mountainous, tranquil areas so participants have the chance to look inside themselves.

The programme is not perfect but each year the monks and nuns of participating monasteries gain more experience and learn more skills. An unplanned benefit of the programme is that foreigners return home with a new view of Korea. Because of the Korean War and tensions with North Korea, foreigners often have a one-sided view of the country that changes after their temple stay. They leave with a new perspective of Korea, a new understanding of Korean Buddhism and perhaps a better understanding of themselves.

The programme has grown swiftly over the last six years from 14 temples to 72, with 69 280 participants in 2007. Currently there are 72 temples participating in the programme nationwide. The basic 24-hour programme (including one overnight) can be simplified to a half-day programme (3.5 hours), or be extended to three- and four-day experiences. Six temples are always open to individual participants while groups may make reservations at any temple all year long.

Major activities in the programme include attending the Buddhist ceremonial service, Seon (Zen) meditation, tea ceremonies that elevate one's meditative efforts, Buddhist meals with traditional bowls, community work and informative tours around the temple grounds, forest meditation to maximise oneness with nature, and hikes to nearby hermitages. Some temples offer special training programmes in Seon (Zen) meditation and Buddhist martial arts, lotus lantern-making, prayer bead (rosary) making, and other activities.

Most temples participating in the programme are located either in national or provincial parks which feature well preserved natural environments. Thus, the programme provides participants with an opportunity to relax, reflect and revitalise themselves in the tranquillity of nature.

The Temple Stay is a cheap and stress-free vacation, with all meals, clothing and housing provided, and is organised around a planned schedule. While for some this may sound like signing up for military training for the weekend, it is the ideal environment in which to simply let go of everything and relax. When guests arrive at a temple, they first change into a comfortable uniform. The schedule allows for participants to take part in temple activities alongside the monks or nuns, such as meals, bowing, and chanting. Other activities include hiking, a tea ceremony, martial arts, and Seon meditation. While the monks will not coddle guests while guiding them through various forms of bowing, chanting and eating the traditional four bowl meal which is a part of some Temple Stays, they have always been free and open when it comes to answering any questions. Rich with legend and tradition, the Seon, or Zen School is known for its simple approach, and its belief that people can walk the path to awakening with a minimum of accessories. While certain aspects may be emphasised in different temples, the benchmarks of Seon Buddhism are meditation and Hwadu, or Koan practice.

Temple Stay has huge potential to be a competitive tourism product as a cultural resource, attracting visitors to local areas in Korea. It creates a positive image for the Korean tourism destination as well. In particular, Temple Stay can be one of sustainable tourism, keeping three principles in

cultural tourism development: environmentally-sound, socio-culturally identifiable, and economically viable.

The Korean government has been promoting Temple Stay programmes actively as a differentiation strategy to enhance attractiveness and competitiveness. The Korean government has supported this programme with a Tourism Development Fund<sup>1</sup>. In 2007, more than KRW 1.5 billion was provided to promote the Temple Stay programme, including development of infrastructure (such as accommodation facilities, roads, toilets, etc.), publication of promotional materials such as guide books, videos, magazines, FAM (familiarisation) tour, training programmes, etc. The Korean government will finance the Temple Stay programme for more than KRW 248.9 billion within a ten-year period for developing cultural tourism product as a cultural resource in Korea.

### *Survey on visitors' experience*

A survey was conducted to investigate visitors' experience and perception of the Temple Stay. The purpose of the survey was to explore current situations of the Temple Stay and its potential as a cultural tourism product. A total of 360 foreign visitors responded to self-administered questionnaires from October to December 2007.

From the respondents, 151 were male (41.9%) and 205 were female (56.9%). In terms of civil status, 223 (61.9%) indicated they were single while 133 (36.9%) stated they were married.

With respect to religious distribution, 84 (23.3%) were Catholic, 79 (21.9%) indicated "Other", 71 (19.7%) had no religion, 60 (16.7%) were Christians, 22 (6.1%) were Buddhists and 3 (0.8%) were Muslim.

Regarding the nationality of visitors, the largest group was from the U.S. (19.7%), the second largest was from Canada, and the third largest was from Germany (8.9%). Other participants were from France and the U.K. (6.4%) and participants from the Czech Republic (4.4%).

The survey showed that the foremost motivations for participating in the Temple Stay programme were to "experience Korean Traditional Culture (Buddhism)" (55.8%) followed by "interest in Buddhism" (21.1%) and "desire to have an opportunity for self-reflection" (5.8%) (Table 8.1). The motivations which were ranked second were the "desire to have an opportunity for self-reflection" (15%), "interest in Buddhism" (13.6%) and to "experience Korean Traditional Culture (Buddhism)" (13.6%).

**Table 8.1. Motivations for selecting the Temple Stay Programme (%)**

ITEMS	1ST MOTIVATION	2ND MOTIVATION
Experience Korean Traditional Culture (Buddhism)	55.8	13.6
Have leisure time in Temple	2.5	6.7
Interest in Buddhism	21.1	14.7
Escape from daily routine	2.8	6.4
Leisure time for relieving tension and fatigue	1.4	4.2
Desire to have an opportunity for self-reflection	5.8	15.0
Appreciation of beautiful scenery	1.1	8.3
Interest in religion, philosophy	8.1	17.2
Others	0.6	5.8
No answer	0.8	8.1
Total	100	100

Regarding barriers to participate in the Temple Stay Programme, the survey showed that a large portion of respondents were prevented from participating in the Temple Stay because of lack of time (40%), followed by lack of information (29.2%), inconvenient transportation (9.2%), religious reason (7.8%), and economic reason (3.1%) (Table 8.2).

**Table 8.2. Barriers to participate in the Temple Stay Programme (%)**

BARRIERS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Lack of time	144	40.0
Lack of money	11	3.1
Inconvenient transportation	33	9.2
Lack of information	105	29.2
Religious reason	28	7.8
Others	23	6.4
No answer	16	4.4
Total	360	100

Most respondents expressed benefits from the programme: “new cultural experience (Buddhism)” (54.2%), “understanding Korean traditional culture” (9.2%), “opportunity for self-reflection” (7.8%), and “enhancing interest in Buddhism” (7.5%) (Table 8.3).

**Table 8.3. Benefits from the Temple Stay Programme participation (%)**

ITEMS	1ST BENEFIT	2ND BENEFIT
New cultural experience (Buddhism)	54.2	8.3
Understanding Korean traditional culture	9.2	28.6
Enhancing interest in Buddhism	7.5	13.9
Understanding tourist destination around temple	-	1.1
Leisure time for relieving tension	1.1	5.8
Opportunity for self-reflection	7.8	13.6
Appreciation of beautiful scenery	2.8	8.1
Others	4.3	2.8
No answer	13.1	17.8
Total	100	100

A survey on the potential of Temple Stay to be developed as a travel destination for cultural experience (Table 8.4) showed very positive results as shown in the following table. More than 79% of respondents expressed that the programme has high potential to be developed as a cultural tourism resource.

**Table 8.4. Development potential as a travel destination for cultural experience**

ITEMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Never	5	1.4
Seldom	3	0.8
Neutral	45	12.5
High	163	45.3
Very high	124	34.4
No answer	20	5.6
Total	360	100

A survey on the potential of the Temple Stay programme to be developed as a travel destination for the place for mental recreation showed 4.16 points, high potential based on 5 point Likert scale. 40% of the respondents were neutral and 35.6% marked “very high potential” (Table 8.5).

**Table 8.5. Potential as a travel destination for the place for mental recreation**

ITEMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Never	3	0.8
Seldom	5	1.4
Neutral	54	15.0
High	144	40.0
Very High	128	35.6
No answer	26	7.2
Total	360	100

A survey on the potential of Temple Stay programme to be developed as a Korean traditional cultural experience recorded the highest potential with 4.21 points out of 5 point Likert scale. 45.3% of the total respondents expressed that the Temple Stay has high potential (Table 8.6).

**Table 8.6. Development potential as a Korean traditional cultural experience**

ITEMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Never	2	0.6
Seldom	3	0.8
Neutral	43	11.9
High	163	45.3
Very High	126	35.0
No answer	23	6.4
Total	360	100

The result of a survey on the potential of Temple Stay programme to be developed as a family-oriented travel product with educational purpose (Table 8.7) also showed positive results.

### ***Successful factors and lessons learnt***

The Temple Stay is a unique cultural resource, which over a relatively short period of time has gained iconic status in the Republic of Korea and progressed both the concept of Buddhism and its host territories.

**Table 8.7. Potential to be developed as a family-oriented travel product with educational purpose**

ITEMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE (%)
Never	9	2.5
Seldom	52	14.4
Neutral	120	33.3
High	93	25.8
Very High	59	16.4
No answer	28	7.5
Total	360	100

The success of the Temple Stay demonstrates how an entrepreneur with a creative way of thinking in developing cultural tourism products and innovative problem-solving can build a dream into a reality. The resulting relationship between tourism and Temple Stay is mutually beneficial. The Temple Stay provided insight into how innovative partnership between the government and religious organisations can work to create attractiveness of the destination.

There are various ways in which public-private partnerships can be formulated because the nuances of the particular contributions of public sectors and private organisations will be dictated by circumstances unique to each context. However, public-private partnerships can be classified into three major categories and these provide the framework for the development of cultural tourism resources by such partnerships.

The first major category consists of joint ventures in which the public sector plays the dominant role in developing new cultural tourism facilities. The second type of partnership is that in which the public sector engages in pump-priming to facilitate new cultural tourism development. The third category comprises situations where the public sector uses existing cultural resources owned exclusively by the private organisation. The public sector's contribution either entices the private sector to make their cultural resources available for public use or improves the prospects of such facilities to be attractive.

These three categories may be conceptualised as being on a continuum that reflects the magnitude of the public sector's cultural resource commitment and involvement. This increases if the public agency assists the development of cultural resources through pump-priming and is maximised in joint developments with the private organisations.

Key benefits commonly derived from the public-private partnership are (Poetschke, 1995):

- Reduced antagonism between the public and private sectors.

- More effective use of resources (money and time).
- Avoiding duplication.
- Combined areas of expertise.
- Increased funding potential.
- Creating a “win-win” situation.

In this perspective, the Temple Stay increases the private religious organisation's capability to enhance attractiveness of religious sites as tourism destinations by introducing public funds, technology and human resources, thus contributing to economic benefits for the local territories. It also supports private religious organisations through public capital and administrative support, thus overcoming shortages of investment capital and upgrading credibility.

This public and private partnership for developing cultural resources as cultural tourism products or destinations is rapidly becoming essential to being competitive in today's global tourism industry. It is particularly relevant to the development of cultural tourism, given their relatively isolated situation and often smaller financial resources, to overcome the unique challenges from other tourism resources.

In addition, marketing should be considered as an integral element in the planning and management process adopted for the Temple Stay programme. In doing so, however, one must think strategically about the Temple Stay product, its market, and effective positioning as a cultural tourism resource. No cultural tourism product, nor any product for that matter, can be everything to everyone.

One of the biggest mistakes of inexperienced managers in Temple Stay is to assume that the Temple Stay programme or experience has universal appeal. Because of this belief, managers in the Temple Stay embark on a series of unfocused promotional activities that send out unclear messages aimed at no one in particular.

It is essential for temples receiving significant numbers of visitors to address the latter's needs by providing necessary facilities and services. The planning and development of facilities and services need to be well considered, as undue “commercialisation” will detract from the conservation/preservation and presentation of the temple and its overall aesthetics. The conservation of the historic temple buildings and character

and authenticity of the temple are thus seen as influences on visitors' expectations.

Operational plans should aim to anticipate and pre-empt problems. In many cases, services, such as hospitality operations, provide invaluable revenue flows; therefore, to maximise benefits these should be of good quality with attentive customer service. Within this context, management should adopt and promote environmentally-friendly practices and encourage visitors to behave accordingly. There should be a clear environmental policy and an environment management system in temples, an approach that could be part of the marketing strategy.

### ***Conclusion and policy implications***

Temple Stay is a truly unique and special type of accommodation that offers the opportunity for tourists to stay overnight in a Buddhist temple. It is recognised, however, that the main obstacles to develop the Temple Stay as a cultural tourism are “inconvenient and old accommodation facilities in temples”, “lack of convenience facilities”, “lack of efficient guide system”, and “lack of skilled human resources”.

In order to enhance attractiveness of the Temple Stay as a cultural resource, close collaborations are essential. The government, private religious organisation (Jogye Order of Buddhism in Korea), and other private expert organisations in terms of operational excellence should be involved in developing cultural resources efficiently and effectively. Above all, the central government (Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism) should establish a relevant long-term plan to develop the Temple Stay programme as the most attractive cultural tourism product in the world. The programme should also benefit from private expertise in terms of operation and management.

There are a number of strategies to develop the temple resources into cultural tourism attractions:

First, it is to build a convenient, clean, and comfortable infrastructure including accommodation facilities, meditation places reflecting the traditional cultural spirit, and restaurant facilities to experience Buddhist food, etc. The government's role is to finance the construction of this infrastructure. In fact, the Korean government plans to invest more than 80% of the total cost of innovating facilities, while religious organisations share about 10% of finance.

Second, it is to bundle available cultural attractions around temples to create a themed set of attractions that collectively constitute a primary attraction. According to Mc Kercher and du Cros (2002, p. 112), “bundling is

common in tourism, with the packaged tour representing a prime example. Airfare, accommodation, ground transport, and a variety of other services are combined to create a new product. Bundling, within a cultural tourism context, typically involves combining a variety of similarly themed products and experiences and promoting their collective consumption to the visitor.” The Temple Stay should be bundled with other tourism assets that exist in local communities. In this way, the economic benefit of cultural tourism is dispersed more widely. More important, bundling helps create a theme for a place, creating a stronger sense of destination for the tourist by invoking many places with similar meanings (Mckercher and du Cros, 2002). In line with this implication, community involvement in the development and sustainability of cultural tourism should be made.

Third, it is very important to foster skilled human resource for the Temple Stay. The programme for training the guide should be provided by the public and private sectors. The Temple Stay guide is an individual who helps domestic or foreign tourists with cultural experiences by explaining them and imparting an accurate understanding of Korean Buddhism and cultural relics and local culture. The programme aims to recruit and train Temple Stay guides to satisfy the demand related to tour packages, including cultural experience products and the facilitated discovery of historical relics, rather than the simple experience of the temple.

The demand of both Koreans and foreigners for cultural tourism products have diversified as their travel experiences have increased. To accommodate new high value niche markets, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism has established a guide plan in co-operation with religious and educational organisations and trains the guides and volunteers at selected local colleges or museums in various municipal and provincial areas.

Moreover, innovated programmes and information network should be provided. For these efforts, public-private partnership (PPP) is essential. Through the PPP, a step-by-step strategy should be adopted from building infrastructure through enhanced awareness of the Temple Stay to globalisation.

In conclusion, the Temple Stay Programme as a cultural attraction in qualitative environmental settings creates a destination’s distinct profile and generates visitors. Temple Stay Programme is a cultural asset to enhance attractiveness of local territories, contributing to the national tourism improvement in terms of the provision of cultural richness, diversification and differentiation of tourism resources, and suggestion for best public-private partnership. Sustainable tourism management, enhancement, interpretive management and constant monitoring of temples and heritage

assets should be major tasks for temple managers, public sectors and local communities.

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## **Note**

- <sup>1</sup>. The Tourism Promotion and Development Fund has emerged from the Tourism Promotion Fund Law that was passed in 1972. The purpose of the fund is to secure more capital for the growth of tourism industry. The Fund supports the construction of basic tourism facilities, construction and renovation of overall basic facilities, the development of accommodations and resort business, and for research activities that contribute to balanced tourism industry development.