KOREAN STUDENT LIFE

ACADEMIC LIFE:
Parental dedication to children’s education is prominent, as parents strongly believe that graduating from a prestigious university leads to success. **Education is highly concentrated in university admission.** Most students will attend after-school programs that are operated by small private institutions, or parents hire private tutors.

In large classes of 35 to 45 students per class, students’ regular classes generally begin at 8 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. and include 13-15 different subjects. After regular classes, students further study at private institutions past midnight. Students passively learn in their classrooms, where teachers will talk for the entire class and the students listen while taking notes. **Most teachers consider quiet students to be well-mannered**, and questions are asked of the teachers after class. Students generally stay in the same classroom for one full year, and the teachers are the ones who change classrooms.

Students take only two written exams per semester. Korean students **may not understand the importance of quizzes** in American schools, so it might be helpful to explain this to them.

Most students spend all three years in high school studying for the major exams to be accepted into a better university. They **sleep less than five hours each night**, and call themselves “study machines.” Due to their full schedule of subjects in one classroom, students **rarely have the chance to make friends** outside of their own class. They are **not accustomed to socializing after class**, as they are expected to go to private institutions for additional study time. Athletics and physical education is not considered important.

Students are **very competitive with each other** in many different aspects of their lives, including grades, possessions, wealth and family status.

Korean students place high regard to studying in the U.S. **After their AYUSA program, it is common that students strive to enter private high schools and universities in the U.S. Although students and natural parents are told at their pre-departure orientation, please remind the students that they cannot stay after their one-year program.**
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES**

Koreans learn in a passive environment, where the teachers speak, and the students listen and take notes. They **rarely have the opportunity to practice their spoken English**, unless they have a foreign English teacher to visit once per month. They are taught with American English tapes, but the English speed on the tapes is very slow. **Please be patient when you speak with them, as they are not used to thinking in English.**

**FAMILY LIFE**

Koreans are very proud of their strong family relationships. Young people seldom outwardly show their love towards their parents. Respect for the elders is the noblest attribute of Korean society. They feel that their devotion to education brings their parents honor, so they show their love in this way.

Because parents emphasize education, **children are not expected to do household chores.** They are expected to study throughout the day.

Children **rarely have time to talk with their parents** when they return home late at night. The topics they usually discuss at dinner time are usually surrounding school subjects. **Rarely, do they discuss topics unrelated to school.** Some students may feel that it is bad manners to talk during meals. You may need to initiate conversations by asking specific questions about their culture and their interests. **It may be too broad of a question to ask “How was your day?”** After dinner, teenagers go to their rooms, close their doors to study or go on the Internet.

Korean parents usually devote their lives to their children. **Korean parents are usually heavily involved with their children and their schools.** Parents **take the authority to interfere in their children’s lives**, so Korean youth may feel entitled to this. This is explained to the student that their first point of contact on our program is the CR, and not their parents. Please reiterate this point to them.

**LIVING SITUATION**

Korean students who participate in the AYUSA program are **mostly wealthier students**, whose parents have an average annual household income of $100,000-$150,000. Families, comprised usually of two parents and one or two children, live in big apartments with 3 or 4 rooms and 2 bathrooms. Korean houses are bright and quiet, and have unique under-floor heating system. Koreans usually take their shoes off when they enter a home, and may feel uncomfortable in a carpet environment at first. A lot of Korean students may **feel cold in their host families’ homes in the winter.**

**GREETINGS and NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Korean students usually do not express themselves to strangers. **To be outspoken is seen as rude, impatient and impolite.** Koreans will generally not stare at your eyes, but look at your lips or neck. This is out of **respect that they do not look at the person’s eyes.**

When Koreans meet, they usually bow or shake hands, as **hugging is not common in Korean culture.**
UNIQUE KOREAN FOODS

Korean food is very different from American food, so you will need to be patient as Korean students may need to get used to the foods, eating styles and portions. Korean food is largely based on rice, noodles, tofu, vegetables and meats, and many dishes are spicy. Most meals usually include one soup, 4 or 5 small dishes, and white rice. Some Koreans may not feel completely full without a bowl of soup and rice, as potatoes are not seen as filling. Foods are not usually scooped onto their own plates, but eaten communally with chopsticks. Desserts, which are usually fruit, are not always included with every meal. Although not considered healthy, they are familiar with American fast food chains.

Foods that students usually bring with them from Korea are instant ramen packages, which are very different from Top Ramen. Some students may feel like they need to hide their foods in their rooms because they are afraid that host families will not allow them to eat their own food, and insist that they only eat American foods. It is important that you discuss this issue with students when they arrive, and to let them know where they can keep their food in the kitchen pantry. Food is very different in Korean culture, so it is comforting to enjoy the taste of home.

POLITICS and TABOO TOPICS:

South Koreans are sensitive when talking about North Korea and Japan. Japan invaded Korea for 50 years, and there are still arguments regarding Dok-do Island and the East Sea (or Sea of Japan, according to the Japanese.) The Japanese and Korean both lay claim to this island and body of water.

RELIGION

Korean culture includes a wide variety of religions, including Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Confucianism.

MAJOR HOLIDAYS IN KOREA

Students may feel homesick during national holidays, which are usually spent with family. You might want to ask them to share their festivals with you.

- Harvest Moon Festival (Chuseok): early October
- Lunar New Year (Seollal): Mid-February
- Buddha’s Birthday: mid-May
- Christmas Day: December 25

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT KOREAN CULTURE:

http://koreanfocus.org/
http://www.korea.net/
http://www.kaanet.com/
http://www.koreasociety.org/