

Koryo residents enjoy festive atmosphere by playing ‘yutnori’ and having dinner together

Delivered encouraging items to Koryo residents at Jecheon City Overseas Korean Support Center; ‘I hope you enjoy a happy holiday’

This year marks the 160th anniversary of the settlement of 13 Korean families in the village of Jishinhe (Rezanovo) in Primorsky Krai in Russia. A special ceremony was held at the Jecheon City Overseas Korean Support Center in Jecheon, North Chungcheong Province, at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 12. Ahead of Chuseok (Hangawi), the largest national holiday, a harmony feast was held for the 2024 Chuseok Festival for Koryo compatriots who migrated to Jecheon from Central Asia.

Jecheon is the first local government in Korea to support the migration and resettlement of Korean compatriots in the era of depopulation and rural depopulation.

The event, which was co-hosted by Jecheon and the Jecheon City Overseas Korean Center, was attended by

more than 100 people, including OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk, Jecheon Mayor Kim Chang-kyu, Daewon University President Kim Young-cheol and Koryo residents. The Koryo community enjoyed the folk game “yutnori” and then had dinner together to enjoy the holiday atmosphere.

Celebrating first and second births to Koryo immigrant couples in Jecheon

The highlight of the day was the celebration of the birth of two precious new lives to Koryo migrant families in Jecheon. The main characters were Miss Vangai Amelia, born to Vangai Evgeny and Chagai Natalia, and Miss Polay Elizaveta, born to Polay Olga and Polay Pavel. In total, three Koryo compatriot families who migrated to Jecheon gave birth, but the third family was unfortunately unable to attend because the baby was a newborn.

Commissioner Lee Sang-duk, along with Mayor Kim Chang-kyu and President Kim Young-cheol, congratulated the couple and delivered encouraging gifts.



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk invites families who have given birth to children after settling in Jecheon to deliver congratulatory gifts and congratulate them on Sept. 12. From left to right: Daewon University President Kim Young-cheol, OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk and Jecheon Mayor Kim Chang-gyu, as well as Vangai Evgeny and Chagai Natalia, and Polay Olga and Polay Pavel.



OKA Commissioner Lee Sang-duk delivers greetings at the 2024 Korean Chuseok holiday unity event held at the Overseas Korean Support Center in Jecheon on Sept. 12.

In addition, the OKA will work closely with local governments that actively support overseas Korean migration, such as Jecheon, to promote win-win development between the home country and the Korean diaspora.

New mother Natalia: 'I am grateful to OKA commissioner'

"Koreans are polite and very kind," said Natalia Chagay, 25, a new mother who gave birth on June 6, adding especially that "I am grateful to Lee Sang-duk, the OKA commissioner, for coming from far away to congratulate me."

The couple is grateful that Chungbuk Province and the city of Jecheon recently decided to provide 10 million won (US\$7,500) in childbirth incentives.

"I want nothing more than for my baby to grow up healthy and happy in Korea," Natalia said. "I am also grateful to Jecheon for providing me with a place to live and a job."

She added that her husband, who worked at Iljin Global, an automotive parts company, quit his job to take a part-time job so that they could raise their baby together.

The Jecheon City Overseas Korean Support Center helps Koryo people who move to Jecheon find jobs at companies in the city and provides them with free room and board for four months. The center also provides education on the Korean language and the Korean culture. After the four-month protection period, Jecheon helps them leave the center and find new homes in the city.

"Korean is essential for settling in Korea, so I wish they would allow even a small number of people to receive Korean language education," said Lim Sergei (53), a former director at the Jecheon City Overseas Korean Support Center. "I would like to see more programs that provide education on language used in Korean workplaces and Korean organizational culture at work, as well as systematic education on laws and systems that are closely related to real life. I would also like to see the government ease the conditions for Korean citizenship for Koryo compatriots and also overseas Koreans."

"I wish the postpartum mothers, their families and their beautiful babies good health," Lee said, adding that creating an environment where overseas compatriots who have migrated to Korea can settle down stably could be one of the solutions to the problem of population decline and labor shortages.

There are currently 63 Koryo compatriots in 22 households who are staying at the Overseas Korean Support Center to adapt to life in Korea ahead of settling in Jecheon. Most of them are working, so the ceremony was held after work hours.

"Jecheon is actively providing short-term accommodation, Korean language and culture education, employment and housing linkages, and child care and medical support to help you settle down stably," said Jecheon Mayor Kim, encouraging compatriots to "put down their roots with a peace of mind."

Earlier, Commissioner Lee and Mayor Kim toured the Home Bakery, the Nata Supermarket and the Maria restaurant, which are community spaces for compatriots who have settled in Jecheon, and listened to their concerns.

With more than 870,000 overseas Koreans, including Koryo compatriots, living in South Korea, the OKA plans to strengthen its support for them.

To this end, starting in the second half of this year, the OKA will distribute the Guide to Supporting the Settlement of Overseas Compatriots in Korea to help them prepare for their initial settlement, as well as develop customized Korean language training programs to improve their Korean language skills.



OKA Commissioner Lee (L) poses for a photo with Valentina (C), a Koryo compatriot, after a tour of a Nata Supermarket run by Koryo people in Cheongjeon-dong, Jecheon, with Mayor Kim Chang-kyu to listen to the community's concerns.

Currently, Koryo compatriots live in Incheon, Ansan, Gwangju, Cheongju and Gyeongju. Unlike these areas where there are close-knit Koryo communities, Jecheon is characterized by the fact that the Koryo compatriots live together among Koreans. The idea is to provide an environment where they can assimilate into Korean culture quickly.

Since last year, Jecheon has been carrying out the Jecheon City Migration and Settlement Support Project for Koryo compatriots at home and abroad, and currently 172 people from 73 households have settled down, and 401 people are expected to become Jecheon citizens, including those who are about to migrate.

“We plan to increase the migration and settlement of Koryo people to 1,000 in the future and make Jecheon a center for Koryo residents,” Mayor Kim said.

**Gwangju Koryo Village begins operating Alley Tours Sept. 1
Historical and cultural experience; 1,600 people to be recruited by
end of Nov.**

Meanwhile, a tour package that explores the nooks and crannies of Gwangju's Koryo Village, which is steeped in the history of the Korean diaspora, began operating Sept. 1. On this day, Gwangju's Gwangsan-gu district and Gwangju Korean Village, a registered company, welcomed tourists who participated in the Gwangju Koryo Village Alley Tour.



OKA Commissioner Lee (L, front row) poses for a photo with Koryo compatriots at the 2024 Chuseok holiday unity event held at the Overseas Korean Support Center in Jecheon on

The Koryo Village Alley Tour is a tour package that utilizes the historical and cultural assets of the Koryo Village in Wolgok-dong, Gwangsan-gu, Gwangju, which has experienced the turbulence and hardship of modern history, including forced migration, the anti-colonial movement, the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR), returnees and the formation of a migrant society. It plans to recruit and serve a total of 1,600 people by the end of November.

Visitors can dress up in Central Asian costumes, decorate a “matryoshka” (a traditional Russian doll) and make “morkovcha,” a substitute for kimchi that was eaten in those faraway lands. There are also historical explanation events centered around the Wolgok Goguryeo Cultural Center, which houses more than 12,000 historical records and artifacts. There are four different tour courses for different groups, including families with children, student groups, adults and foreigners.

The cost is 9,900 won per person. It includes one meal of Central Asian cuisine, travel insurance and a gift certificate worth 5,000 won that can be used like cash at shops in the Koryo Village. Participants can apply for the program at the Wolgok Koryo-in Cultural Center’s website.

The Gwangsan-gu Council and the Koryo Village created the Alley Tour to promote the Koryo Village in Wolgok-dong as a historical tourist attraction. They plan to organize various travel products and events with the goal of attracting a cumulative 10 million tourists.

“We hope that visitors will experience Central Asian culture and Koryo history in Gwangju by walking, seeing and feeling the alleyways,” said Shin Jo-ya, head of the Koryo Village.



Chagal Nataliya (25), the first Koryo immigrant to give birth in Jecheon, is seen in this photo. “Koreans are polite and kind,” she told reporters. “I’m grateful to the OKA commissioner for traveling a long way to congratulate me on the birth of my baby.”

Since 2004, the Gwangju Koryo Village has been centered around Damoa Children’s Park (Hongbeomdo Park) in Wolgok 2-dong, Gwangsan-gu, Gwangju, and is home to more than 7,000 descendants of Koreans who returned from Central Asia. Some war refugees with ties to Gwangju are also residing there, including people who fled Ukraine after the Russian invasion in 2022. [창]



Koreans play “yutnori,” a folk game, at a unity event for the 2024 Chuseok holiday of the Korean diaspora in Jecheon, South Korea, on Sept. 12.