

Trying out 'gat' hats from 'KPop Demon Hunters'; foreigners fall for Korea

Gat popular at 'hanbok' rental shops near Gyeongbok Palace; tourists visiting 'KPop Demon Hunter' locations

Also wearing hats with 'Umma' written in Hangeul; 'Jjimjilbang' and 'bibimbap' cited as attractions

"Korean cowboy hat!"

Cody, a Canadian I met recently in an alley near Gyeongbok Palace in Seoul, where "hanbok" rental shops line the streets, pointed to the "gat" on his head and said this.

The gat is one of the costume props worn by the male idol group Saja Boys in the Netflix animation "KPop Demon Hunters," which is set in Korea. While it's an unfamiliar prop to foreigners, Cody said many people in Canada also know about the gat from watching "K-Pop Demon Hunters."

KTO unveils 'Style of Joseon, gatjan'

Considering this response, the Korea Tourism Organization also recently unveiled K-souvenirs selected through a contest, including "Come over here, the scenery of gat" and "Style of Joseon, gatjan," featuring the gat motif.

"We've had many customers seeking the gat from Saja Boys since a month ago," an employee at a hanbok rental shop said. "Although the heat wave has slightly reduced foot traffic, the 'KPop Demon Hunters' effect has indeed been noticeable."

Google Trends search interest from countries like the United States, Japan and France since the animated film's release indicates heightened interest in traveling to Korea.

Looking at the top 52.4 percent of related search terms for "KPop Demon Hunters," searches for specific Korean locations like Bukchon (11.8 percent), Naksan Park (9.6 percent) and the Olympic Main Stadium (9.6 percent) -- actual locations depicted in the film -- showed a high proportion.

Ann Katrin, who traveled to Korea with her husband Max from Germany, remarked, "'KPop Demon Hunters' aired after we booked our flights, which heightened our anticipation for Korea."



Foreign tourists visiting Gamcheon Village in Saha-gu, Busan, pose for a commemorative photo wearing hanbok. Gamcheon Village has been named to the "Top 100 Korean Tourist Attractions" list, selected every two years by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Tourism Organization, six consecutive times.



Tourists cool off at the royal pharmacy within Changdeok Palace in Jongno-gu, Seoul. According to the Palace and Royal Tomb Heritage Headquarters of the Cultural Heritage Administration, visitors can sample traditional herbal teas like “jeho-tang” and “omija” berry drinks while resting in the medical facility.

Among the places we visited, the rainbow fountain at Banpo Bridge was the most fantastic,” referring to the location that appeared in the film.

Bukchon (11.8 pct) is most popular location in Korea

They also showed interest in hanbok, Korea’s traditional attire. Ann Katrin pointed to the hanbok her husband wore, featuring a dragon design, and introduced it as “the king’s robe.”

Perhaps due to their fondness for Korean culture, tourists accompanied by professional photographers were noticeable along the stone wall path of Gyeongbok Palace, having their pictures taken in hanbok.

Foreign tourists found not only traditional culture like hanbok and ancient palaces fascinating but also everyday experiences, such as Korean food and play culture.

Cody, who was wandering the alleys of Bukchon wearing a traditional hat, said: “I went to a jjimjilbang, and it wasn’t just a place to bathe. There were areas to eat food and even sleep, which was fascinating,” highlighting the public sauna as one of the charms of traveling in Korea.

Marie Bon, from France, said: “My daughter has been studying in Korea for two years, so this is my first time visiting. I enjoyed eating bibimbap and kimbap.” When asked if she had tried Buldak Bokkeummyun she laughed and said, “I knew about it even before coming to Korea, but it’s too spicy for me to eat.”

Foreign tourists cited K-pop and K-dramas as reasons for visiting Korea

On Aug. 28, foreign tourists wearing hats with “Umma” written in large Hangeul letters were spotted at Seoul’s landmark Lotte World Tower. They appeared to be traveling with family members.

Foreign tourists encountered that day cited K-pop and K-dramas as one of the reasons for visiting Korea.

Richard, a British national currently traveling through five countries, including Korea for a month, explained: “One reason I chose Korea was K-pop. I like the singer HyunA, and I got hooked on the music a colleague was listening to at work.”

Positive influence of favorable attitudes to K-content

A friend traveling with Richard also mentioned knowing Korean singers, saying he liked the song “Apt.” by BLACKPINK’s Rose and pop star Bruno Mars.

The positive influence of K-content seemed not just a fleeting trend but one with lasting impact.

When asked why she had traveled to Korea, Annika, visiting from Germany for her summer vacation, answered, “Because of K-dramas.” She explained that watching the 2009 drama “Boys Over Flowers” sparked her fondness for Korea.

“After seeing that drama, I always wanted to visit Korea,” she said with a smile. 🇰🇷

Yonhap News Agency reporter Kang Ae-ran