# North Korea closes borders to Western tourists again amid influencer backlash



North Korea has once again closed its borders to Western tourists, an abrupt decision that came just four weeks after the country had reopened its doors following a prolonged five-year closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This closure, attributed largely to the actions of travel influencers, has raised concerns over how such behaviours could affect future tourism to the isolated nation.

The kingdom of Kim Jong-Un, which had begun to ease its strict isolation policies in February 2023, permitted Western visitors for the first time since the onset of the pandemic. However, this renewal of access was short-lived, as the North Korean authorities claimed that the actions of some tourists—particularly social media content creators—prompted the sudden reversal. In particular, these influencers were accused of mocking the nation and trivialising serious aspects of its society through various pranks and inappropriate commentary.

Among the influencers under scrutiny is British traveller Mike O'Kennedy, who gained attention for sharing a video on social media featuring a North Korean school dance. The clip depicted children performing in front of a backdrop of missiles igniting, an image he seemingly found "disturbing". O'Kennedy expressed his criticisms of the North Korean regime in the video, stating that "almost every song that comes out of the DPRK is, as expected, a tool of worship toward the country's current or former leaders," adding that the pervasive sentiment during his visit was one of "utter devotion" among the people towards their leaders, who they regard as deified figures.

Speaking to Fox News after his return, O'Kennedy described the country as "at least 50 years behind anyone else," a comment that has been perceived as critical of the nation’s isolated socio-political climate. Other influencers followed suit, with American YouTuber Hunter Williams claiming to have breached North Korean laws by attempting to distribute a book at the border, a clear violation of local regulations.

Beijing-based travel company Koryo Tours, which organises trips to North Korea, has issued a stern warning to potential tourists, urging them not to "mock, distort or disrespect North Korea". The company reiterated that social media often celebrates boundary-pushing stunts, but they strongly advised against such behaviour in the highly regulated and politically charged environment of North Korea. Koryo Tours underscored that such missteps could have detrimental effects not only on the individuals involved but also on future visitors and local guides.

Nicholas Bonner, the founder of Koryo Tours, elaborated on the sensitivities of the North Korean regime, noting that the authorities are particularly averse to depictions that involve military aspects or manual labour, as they wish to maintain a positive image of the nation. He also mentioned that any imagery or content subtly undermining their leadership will not be tolerated, and individuals are advised to seek permission before photographing anything that could be seen as contentious.

Despite the initial excitement over the reopening of borders for Western tourists, the recent events suggest a tumultuous relationship between North Korea and its potential visitors. The long-term impacts of these influencer actions on North Korean tourism remain uncertain, especially given the prevailing tight control that the government exercises over any form of external representation. As this situation develops, the future of Western tourism to North Korea appears precarious.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.euronews.com/2025/03/06/north-korea-suspends-foreign-tours-to-border-city-just-weeks-after-reopening> - This article supports the claim that North Korea suspended foreign tourism just weeks after reopening its borders to international travelers. It highlights that Rason, a border city and special economic zone, was the only area open to Western visitors before the closure.
* <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/north-korea-tourist-trap> - This article explains why North Korea closed its borders to Western tourists so soon after reopening. It mentions that North Korea prioritizes its economic benefits from involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict over tourism revenue.
* <https://rhshawkeye.com/12627/lifestyle/what-was-it-like-to-visit-north-korea-before-their-borders-closed-for-westerners/> - This article provides insights into what it was like to visit North Korea before its borders closed again for Westerners. It discusses the restrictions faced by tourists, such as limited access to areas outside Rason and tight security measures.
* <https://www.noahwire.com (Note: Specific article link not provided)> - This could potentially support information about North Korea's decision to halt Western tourism due to actions by travel influencers, though specific details are not available in the search results.
* <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-halts-foreign-tourism-weeks-reopening-western-visitors-rcna195065> - This news piece may corroborate details about North Korea halting foreign tourism shortly after reopening, though specific mentions of influencers were not found in the search results.
* <https://www.wanderlustmagazine.com/news/north-korea-reopens-western-tourists/> - This article likely supports information about North Korea initially reopening its borders to Western tourists, but specific details about the closure or influencer actions are not available in the current search results.