

# Americans Have Been Told to 'Leave North Korea Immediately'

All Americans who are currently in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea, have been ordered to leave the country as two of the leading companies that host tours of the country say they have been told to expect a complete travel ban announcement as soon as next week.

The ban will also include Christian missionaries and Americans who are working on humanitarian aid projects. It's not believed the ban is related to an impending attack, but rather on a new round of stiff economic sanctions aimed at the Hermit Kingdom.

North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un, as has his father before him, made it a practice of kidnapping Americans in response to sanction announcements. The most notable of these cases is that of Jewish-American college student Otto Warmbier, who was kidnapped, charged with a crime against the state and sentenced to prison—where he was brutally beaten, resulting in his death last month.

Currently, three other Americans are in North Korean custody:

- Kim Dong-chul, a 62-year-old South Korean-born naturalized U.S. who was sentenced to 10 years of hard labor in April of 2016 for alleged spying;
- Korean-American professor Kim Sang-duk, also known as "Tony" Kim, who worked at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology and was detained without official cause in April; and
- Kim Hak-song, who also worked at PUST and was detained in May on suspicion of "hostile acts" against the state.

Young Pioneer Tours, which hosted the tour group from which Warmbier was taken, issued this statement:

We have just been informed that the U.S. government will no longer be allowing U.S. citizens to travel to the DPRK (North Korea). It is expected that the ban will come into force within 30 days of July 27th. After the 30-day grace period any U.S. national that travels to North Korea will have their passport invalidated by their government. We will update further as more information becomes available.

The other leading tour-guide group, Koryo Tours, released a similar statement:

We have been informed that the U.S. will introduce a law banning U.S. citizens from visiting North Korea as tourists. This ban is expected to be announced on July 27th and come into effect 30 days later. From that time forward, it will no longer be legal for anyone travelling on a U.S. passport to visit the DPRK as a tourist. This news has been expected but nevertheless is something of a shock, and we're sorry for anyone who had planned a trip or who had hoped to visit and who now will not be permitted to do so. If you are a US citizen and had booked a trip with us, we will get in touch with you shortly.

Some of the difficulty in assessing this news comes from the diplomatic arrangement between the U.S. and the DPRK. Because the two nations do not have formal diplomatic relations, Switzerland acts as a go-between for communications.

President Donald Trump could issue the travel ban via an executive order. However, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Asian and the Pacific Subcommittee is scheduled to meet next Thursday to discuss draft legislation, the North Korea Travel Control Act, that would impose such a ban. It would take a few days to walk it through the full committee, the full House, and then the Senate before the president could

sign it into law.

So far, the Department of State has given no indication that such a travel ban is imminent. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has told reporters he favors a “geographical travel restriction” for North Korea.