



NORTH KOREA IS HOSTING ITS FIRST AIR SHOW

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If you've ever wanted to attend an air show in the world's most repressive and paranoid country, now's your chance: North Korea has scheduled its very first such event. The Wonsan Air Festival will feature North Korean military and civil aircraft of all types. It will happen this September.

The secretive North Korean regime traditionally keeps its military away from the prying eyes of the world, so it's more than a little unusual that the country would invite outsiders to see its air force. But paranoia or no paranoia, those space rockets and nuclear weapons don't grow on trees, and the country needs ways to extract hard currency from the outside world.

The air show will run from September 21-28 at Wonsan Airport, a civil-military airport on the country's east coast. Kalma, as the airport is called, was recently renovated by a Chinese architectural firm. The airport's mascot is a giant, broad-faced smiling sun—somewhat reminiscent of Kim Jong-un himself—tattooed into the ground and visible in Google Earth, greeting visitors as they land. Curiously, not a single vehicle—car, truck, helicopter or airplane—is visible there on Google Earth. The airport could be still under construction, but there are no signs of construction vehicles, either. On the other hand, it looks quite nice inside.

The show promises fighters, bombers, trainers, and transport aircraft from the air force. The most likely show participants are the country's 35 MiG-29 fighters, purchased in the late 1990s from Russia. Other crowd-pleasers will include the country's Su-25 "Frogfoot" ground attack planes that are variants of those currently used by Russia in Syria, MiG-23 "Fulcrum" fighters, and MiG-21bis fighters, one of the last versions of the venerable Cold War fighter.

The country's national (and only) airline, Air Koryo, is expected to contribute planes as well. The airline's meager fleet of less than two dozen aircraft consists of aging Soviet-era airliners including the Tupolev Tu-154 and the Ilyushin Il-62.

This air show won't be just sitting in a review stand watching things—you'll get to actively participate in events too. There will be opportunities to fly in passenger liners, skydive, and "participate in mass hot air balloon ascents". You'll watch Tae Kwon Do demonstrations and visit waterfalls. There's even a scheduled aviation quiz, with prizes awarded.

Finally, the event promises a fireworks display over Wonsan harbor and a "mass dance" in the city square, no doubt similar to the dances at the Arrirang Mass Games. But wait, there's more: the event will also include North Korea's first beer festival!

Tour pricing was not available at time of publication nor details regarding accommodations. Only 636 spaces for international visitors are available, and North Korean citizens are not allowed in.

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