

Korean War Veteran

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**Commonwealth Revisit scheduled for April 20-25
Thinking of Revisiting Korea? Now is the
time to make your move**



Composite rendering shows new Lotte World Tower with Lotte World Hotel, where veterans will stay, to the left of the soaring glass skyscraper. The new tower will top out at 1,800 feet, the tallest building in all Korea. Little more than a decade ago the Daelim 620 Tower located along the Han River in Seoul was a wonder for all of southeast Asia, with a total of 62 stories. The Lotte World Tower eclipses it by far with 123 stories; a magnificent symbol for the free and energetic Korea that the veterans fought to liberate and defend. The mighty Han is visible and you can see some of its many bridges. Remember, the hotel is on the left side of the photo. You can see the name 'Lotte World' on the roof of its adjoining *adventuredome*.

Veterans who are successful in applying for the 2015 Korea Revisit program will have a splendid time by the looks of the new agenda being worked up by Korea's Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs.

This year, the winning bidder for the hotel business has been the Lotte World Hotel in Samsil in southern Seoul. It is a historic year for the hotel to host the revisits. The adjacent Lotte World Tower, the tallest skyscraper in Seoul is nearing completion and its connecting Lotte World Mall opened just last October. In the longer view 2015 also marks the 65th anniversary of the start of the Korean War in June, and the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Korea from occupation by Japan in August.



Photo taken from across diminutive Seokchon Lake shows Lotte World amusement park on island, with Lotte World Hotel in background. To right can be seen the new Lotte World Tower, in an earlier stage of construction. It is still being built, but lower floors are accessible and the new Lotte Tower Mall that adjoins it is now open. The Mall features a high-fashion section called *Avenue1*, which introduces 33 new foreign brands to Korea and also includes flagship outlets for well-known luxury marques like Chanel, Hermes and Louis Vitton. The Mall also includes the largest theatre complex in Korea, with 31 screens and seating for 4,600 patrons. Also located in the new mall is Korea's largest aquarium, stocked with 650 marine species.



Construction progress photograph taken several months ago shows the new Lotte World Tower standing majestically with the mall complex in the foreground. Note the highway to the left, one of South Korea's excellent high-speed thoroughfares. It gets bound up in rush hour traffic, especially at the bridge intersections. The Lotte World Tower will house a 33-story luxury hotel that will begin on the 86th floor and end at the 119th floor.

The five-star Lotte World Hotel, which has hosted veteran revisits in previous years, is a breathtaking facility with finest appointments throughout, from its marvelous lobby and dining rooms to the guest rooms with their down-filled duvets.

In the dining room, there are counters where entrees are prepared freshly while guests load the fine foods onto their plates, or in some instances, even prepared custom ordered to suit.



Dining room where veterans will take their meals is finely appointed and the food, prepared at open galleries, is among the finest available in Korea.

Standard offerings for dinner include giant scampi, beef steak, lamb chops, many kinds of seafood, and a grand banquet spread of Korean specialties. Gourmets will be more than satisfied with the ambience and food quality... and probably will eat too much.



Lotte World Hotel lobby will wow the veterans as they enter as special guests of the Government of Korea. Note the glass lifts on the left.



The Lotte World Hotel connects to its own adventure dome, shown here in winter with skaters on the ice. By summer the floor level holds merry-go-rounds, other amusement rides and booths. Note the balloons near the glass ceiling. They are gondolas that patrons can ride in for an eagle's eye view of the goings on below.



Want to swim? The hotel has its own warm indoor pool, a magnificent sauna and a well-equipped exercise room. In the Korean tradition it also has its own golf driving range. However, one thinks the MPVA will be providing most of the exercise the veterans will need – getting on and off the buses, and for those who can, short marches at various ceremonies.

Rules of eligibility

Without getting too much into the hotel experience, it should be noted that the veteran revisits for 2015 are offered with much the same rules as in the previous year, with some special adjustments.

The program gives priority to veterans who have never participated in a revisit before. Next in line are veterans who have been on a previous revisit, but not within the past five years. *In some countries false information has circulated that length of time from the previous visit is just three years, but the MPVA is emphatic that the five-year rule is still in place.*

The MPVA and KVA Korea provide air fare subsidies of 50% for the veteran and 30% for the accompanying immediate family member or caregiver.

Commonwealth Revisit

The first round of five-night/six-day revisits – *the Commonwealth round* – is scheduled for April 20 – 25.

In total, there are openings for 90 veterans from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The agenda looks exciting although it does not deviate much from previous Commonwealth revisits, but there are enhancements.

As usual the Commonwealth veterans will travel by KTX bullet train to Busan for ceremonies at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery. The train fare is paid by the MPVA.

New this year will be a tour of the newly opened UN Memorial Hall, a spectacular new museum, which is located quite close to the cemetery.

Ample time for shopping is programmed in, if desired, or participants may elect to use the allocated time for rest at the hotel.

Shopping destinations include a choice of the Insadong art and antique area or of the Itaewon "foreigners district," which has many clothing, low-cost jewelry and souvenir shops.

When the MPVA took active control of the revisit program some years ago things like the visit to an alleged "amethyst factory" were dropped. Unknown to the veterans, the "factory" was a big retail store and the tour guides received a small stipend that depended on how much the veterans purchased there. The merchandise was marked up high and veterans given alleged special discounts.

Now the program is straight and true and one of high honor for all participants. The MPVA revisit team works extremely long hours daily, including weekends on this and many other programs. The revisit rounds go on throughout most of the year so as to include veterans from all of the UN Allied Nations, and give a high proportionate share to veterans from the United States, in that the U.S. provided more than 90% of the entire UN Command and UN naval forces during the war.

The revisit team also works hard on the Peace Camp for Youth programs in July, which are open to grandchildren of some of the UN nations on application through the Korean embassies in the various nations. The veteran associations in each nation also assists in locating and preparing documentation for candidates.

The same holds true for the bereaved family member program, in which the next of kin of service personnel who lost their lives in the Korean War are hosted in Korea by the Korean Government, with air fare fully paid for the principal bereaved family member.

The MPVA also holds what it terms comfort and commemoration events for veterans within their own home countries and this entails a great deal of planning and hectic travel for the MPVA planners and officials, including Honorable Park Sung Choon, Minister of Patriots and Veterans Affairs.

There is a special revisit program in November when the MPVA holds its national Turn Toward Busan program on November 11, and veterans groups in the various UN allied nations hold corresponding ceremonies to acknowledge comrades who fell in Korea, including the many who are still buried there. The national ceremony takes place in the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan.

Veterans interested in participating in a revisit should contact the appropriate revisit coordinator within their own country for information and applications.

Bon voyage!