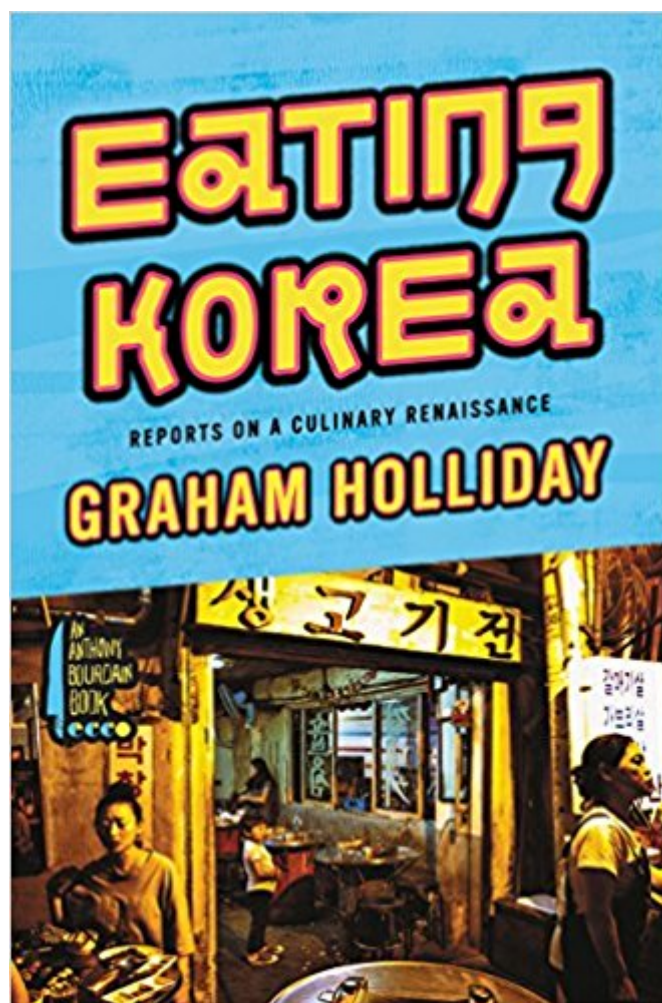


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# Eating Korea: Reports On A Culinary Renaissance



## Synopsis

An energetic, fast-paced trip through the rapidly changing world of Korean cuisine by the author of *Eating Viet Nam* Journalist, world traveler, and avid eater Graham Holliday has sampled some of the most exotic and intriguing cuisines in countries around the globe. However, none has intrigued him more or stayed with him longer than Korea's. On a pilgrimage to Korea to unearth the real food eaten by locals, Holliday discovers a country of contradictions, a quickly developing modern society that hasn't decided whether to shed or embrace its culinary roots. Devotees still make and consume traditional dishes in tiny holes-in-the-wall even as the phenomenon of Korean people televising themselves eating (mukbang) spreads ever more widely. Amid a changing culture that's simultaneously trying to preserve what's best about traditional Korean food while opening itself to a panoply of global influences, that's balancing new and old, tradition and reinvention, the real and the artificial, Holliday seeks out the most delicious dishes in the most authentic settings—even if he has to prowl in back alleys to find them and convince reluctant restaurant owners that he can handle their unusual flavors. Holliday samples soondae (or blood sausage); beef barbecue; bibimbap; Korean black goat; wheat noodles in bottomless, steaming bowls; and the ubiquitous kimchi, discovering the exquisite, the inventive and, sometimes, the downright strange. Animated by Graham Holliday's warm, engaging voice, *Eating Korea* is a vibrant tour through one of the world's most fascinating cultures and cuisines.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Holliday captures these uniquely Korean sights, smells and flavors with appetizing detail, and

along the way finds his true prize: a hard-won understanding of the nation's changing culture. • (Publishers Weekly) • Holliday has a flair for bringing unique locations and provisions to life, taking readers with him into crowded restaurants and markets, creating an exciting work for food lovers interested in a combination of culinary history, cultural analysis, and travel. • (Library Journal)

An energetic, fast-paced trip through the rapidly changing world of Korean cuisine by the author of *Eating Viet Nam*. Journalist, world traveler, and avid eater Graham Holliday has sampled some of the most exotic and intriguing cuisines around the globe. On a pilgrimage throughout the whole of South Korea to unearth the real food eaten by locals, Holliday discovers a country of contradictions, a quickly developing society that hasn't decided whether to shed or embrace its culinary roots. Devotees still make and consume classic Korean dishes in traditional settings even as the cuisine modernizes in unexpected ways and the phenomenon of Korean people televising themselves eating (*mok-bang*) spreads ever more widely. Amid a changing culture that's simultaneously trying to preserve what's best about traditional Korean food while opening itself to a panoply of global influences and balancing new and old, tradition and reinvention, the real and the artificial, Holliday seeks out the most delicious dishes in the most authentic settings—even if he has to prowl in back alleys to find them and convince reluctant restaurant owners that he can handle their unusual flavors. Holliday samples *sundae* (blood sausage); beef barbecue; *bibimbap*; Korean black goat; wheat noodles in bottomless, steaming bowls; and the ubiquitous *kimchi*, discovering the exquisite, the inventive, and, sometimes, the downright strange. • Animated by Graham Holliday's warm, engaging voice, *Eating Korea* is a vibrant tour through one of the world's most fascinating cultures and cuisines. •

Interesting Topic, boring writing style

Graham Holliday simply does this sort of thing better than almost anyone else. He's a fearless eater who asks good questions, relies on local knowledge, and has a vivid vocabulary for describing food that only occasionally gets too gonzo. And he's not afraid to say when he doesn't like something. Sometimes Holliday's commitment to depositing the reader into one street-level moment after another makes it hard to understand the big picture. I learned about a lot of Korean dishes that I'd never heard of and am eager to try (that *bibimbap* with raw beef), along with some that I am eager never to try (*hongeong*). And he paints a clear portrait of South Korea as a country in continuous, roiling transition since the war. But I'm not sure if I ended up with an understanding of

what it's like to eat in Korea or just what it's like to eat at particular restaurants that are maintaining regional traditions. Not that there's anything wrong with this focus, but I think Holliday is taking sort of a William Gibson-inspired in medias res hard SF approach to Korean food, assuming that we already know that, e.g., the ubiquity of fried chicken restaurants in Korea is crowding out traditional food. I think a lot of us (including me) are still in the "Korean fried chicken is amazing" honeymoon phase. In other words, anyone with an interest in Korean food or great travel writing should read this book, but you should know a thing or two about bibimbap, bulgogi, and gochujang before diving in.

Graham Holliday sounds like a pretty affable chap and a fun guy to have a jjigae with, and that's kind of the problem with this book. The time has long passed for books written by curious, well-meaning foreigners with no real qualifications exploring a foreign cuisine. Eating Korea is fun but full of misinformation, romanization errors, and plain old mistakes. For example, one Korean contact (who's spent decades living out of the country) tells him tteokgalbi is a new dish from the last 10 years or so. In fact it's 650 years old. Not being a food writer, and without a sense of Korean history or food, his descriptions of dishes are distracting or profane, sometimes both, and rarely helpful. He goes off on many tangents. Blade Runner is mentioned. Often. He discovers that the Korean food he loves is being replaced by the new hotness and driven under by the future. Ironically, books like his, written by people like him, are also a thing of the past. They were superseded by blogs a long time ago, and there they at least have numerous photos. Here there are none.

Two years back British writer Graham Holliday traveled around the Korean peninsula in search of the nation's culinary treasures and wrote about it, resulting in this enchanting and very mouth-watering book. Holliday writes with a keen, gentle touch, understanding more than anyone that the key into a culture is through its food. His insights are sharp, funny, and very delicious.

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