

# Literary agent recounts her journey in new travel memoir

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Barbara Zitwer poses for a photo with her new book "The Korean Book of Happiness."  
(Barbara J. Zitwer Agency)

A travel memoir, "The Korean Book of Happiness," by a New York-based literary agent who has represented big-name Korean writers such as Han Kang and Shin Kyung-sook overseas, hit the shelves on March 2, published by Short Books, an imprint of the Octopus Publishing Group.

Barbara Zitwer shares her insights and experiences with Korea – which boasts a flourishing culture while also upholding the ages-old principles of "han" (resilience) "heung" (joy) and "jeong" (generosity) – thus the subheading: Joy, Resilience and the Art of Giving.

"I actually started the book three years ago. I was thinking about some successful books (like 'Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life' and 'The Little Book of Hygge' from Denmark, which were really popular," said Zitwer.

"I wanted to write something about Korea, because I have much experience and many stories to share. I felt my life changed so profoundly for the better because of my relationships with my Korean authors, and the way of life that I found in Korea that I didn't find in these any other books."

She has visited Korea many times to meet with her clients and now friends. She takes the readers on her journey as she traverses the lively cities of Seoul and Busan, and ventures to the southern island of Jeju, regaling readers with amusing tales of her cultural blunders and recounts of her travels.

Zitwer starts off with the story of how she started handling Korean literature – over a dinner with her co-agent – and her first Korean book to sell, Kim Young-ha's "I Have the Right to Destroy Myself."



She also talks about her visit to a Buddhist temple in the mountains near Incheon during her first trip to Korea. She had been very anxious and stressed about her husband's health – he had had an organ transplant after being diagnosed with liver cancer.

While taking tea with a Buddhist monk, she found herself in tears. "Suddenly I started crying and I got emotional. I didn't realize that I was overwhelmed. Then the young monk looked at me and said, 'We are happy now.'" The statement was what inspired Zitwer over the years.

In her book, each section of destinations ends with a Korean recipe provided by some of her Korean friends and her clients. The recipes include Shin Kyung-sook's beef dumplings, Sohn Won-pyung's egg soy sauce rice and J. M. Lee's spring onion cakes.

"My best friend Shin (Kyung-sook) always says to me, 'Every book has its own destiny. Don't worry,'" Zitwer said. "I think my book had a destiny and it is now."

"The Korean Book of Happiness" will also be translated into Korean.

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