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Visiting Korea from an adopted land

By LISA BRILL

Two Korean-born adoptees will be returning to their homeland on Tuesday to experience the culture first-hand.

Kim Oxenbridge, 24, and Haden Rollings, 13, are the first adoptees to take part in the trip, organised by the ACT Korean Language School principal, Joseph Yoon.

Mr Yoon has been operating the school in Canberra since 2000, teaching adopted children and their parents the Korean language and culture.

He was contacted by the Hangyere media company after they read his weekly column on the World Wide Web about adopted Korean children living in Australia.

They asked Mr Yoon to select two adoptees to participate in an all-expenses-paid trip to Korea, sponsored by the Hangyere newspaper and SK Telecom, one of Korea's largest companies.

Kim has not been back to Korea since she was adopted by her Queensland parents in 1980, when she was just two.

Left on a doorstep at birth, she has no record of her biological parents and is unsure of how she will feel when she returns to Korea.

"It'll be interesting when I get there," she said. "I've had friends adopted from Vietnam who have returned there and they loved it . . . so I'll just have to wait and see."

She had very little knowledge of Korean culture until she was 17, when she left Toowoomba and moved to Brisbane where she studied international business.

"I found the transition quite easy as I had studied Asian culture at uni," Kim said. "I think though that any Australian would find it hard to understand the culture fully."

Haden's story is a little different. He was put in an orphanage at birth, but two weeks later went to a foster home where he remained until his Australian parents, Julia and Barry Rollings, adopted him.



This will be his second trip to Korea, where he will visit his foster mother, whom he met during his first visit in April 2000.

While very excited about the trip, he was also a little nervous. "Everyone has gone to so much effort," he said. "I just don't want to do anything wrong."

Mr Yoon believes it is important to educate Korean people about adoptees in Australia as it will help bring an end to any misconceptions they may have.

"Some think they are badly treated . . . exported out of the country," he said. "Showing how loved and happy the adoptees are will change their perceptions."

Mr Yoon hopes more trips will be organised, giving other adoptees a chance to visit their birth country.

Kim and Haden will visit many different sites in Korea, including an orphanage.

They are due to return to Canberra on May 5.

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