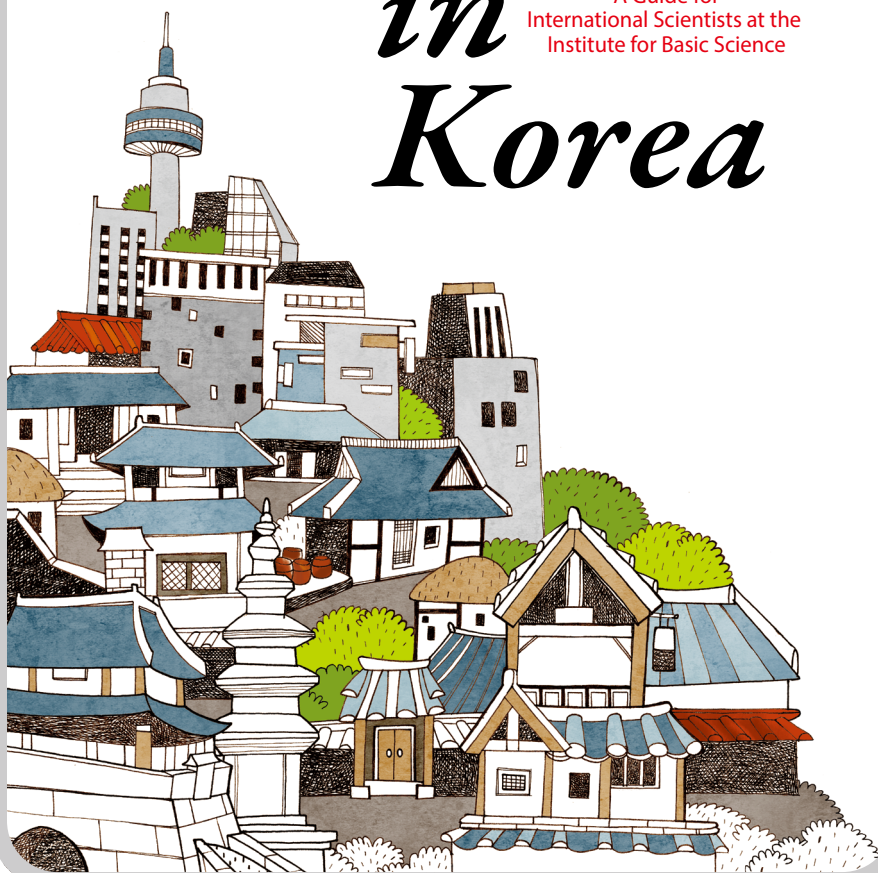




Living in Korea

A Guide for
International Scientists at the
Institute for Basic Science







2022 Edition

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at the Institute for Basic Science

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Living in Korea





Dear Fellow International Staff,

Issues that pop up in our personal lives become stumbling blocks for our professional and social lives. Living overseas only increases that complexity and we know that our international researchers need additional support systems. This is the third print version of *Living in Korea* and is a highly shortened version of what is available online. This book version is meant as a stepping stone into what life in Korea is like and for further information, including hundreds of additional pictures, please visit the website at www.ibs.re.kr/livinginkorea. A link is also provided from the fifth tab on www.ibs.re.kr. The contents are specifically written to support the international researchers of the Institute for Basic Science and their families but we hope other expats will benefit as well as everything is available to anyone with an internet connection.

Instead of each Research Center creating their own contents, it makes more sense to create one primary source for information and ask your Center's admin staff or the Global Help Desk for help when necessary. As I am a fellow expat with over a decade of living in Korea, I hope that you can learn from my mistakes and avoid some of the issues I've had over the years. In the process of creating this resource, I have learned more than I knew previously. But one person's experiences cannot match everyone else's so we do ask for your feedback both on content clarity and what you would like added to the website.

To aid in your understanding of Korea, I have added Korean language where appropriate, their Chinese roots if they exist, and the phonetic spelling. Knowing the term for something in Korean, or even being able to physically point to a word, will greatly help in communication.

While the book contains primarily static information, the site itself is comparatively more dynamic as contents will continue to be created. A long list exists of what else should be added, including information for families, food, shopping, taxes, and the four national insurances which will be spread out over new sections. Beyond that, additional pages will be created as a direct response to the information users request, so please do take advantage and let us know what you want. I look forward to adding to the site to make it as useful as possible for you.

From all of us at the Global Relations Team in Daejeon, we wish that our efforts help you thrive while you live in Korea, not simply survive.

Sincerely,
Richard Moore
Content Creator

Institute for Basic Science



About the Institute for Basic Science

The Institute for Basic Science (IBS) was founded in 2011 to foster outstanding researchers through world-class basic science research conducted on the Korean peninsula. IBS seeks to ensure excellence in research by selecting leading scientists as directors and promotes a supportive and nurturing environment that enables scientists to fully engage in research. The Research Centers of IBS conduct large-scale, mid- and long-term group research that is unavailable at other universities or government-funded research institutes in Korea. Motivated by a driving curiosity about the unknown, the institute was founded with the vision "Making Discoveries for Humanity & Society." As researchers unleash their creative potential most effectively when they perform adventurous research in an autonomous research environment, scientists themselves choose research themes that are usually novel concepts in their fields.

Using RIKEN and Max Planck Society as benchmarks, IBS aims to establish itself as a global research hub for basic science while also fostering the next generation of leaders in basic science research. It is our belief that advancement in basic science leads to both economic and intellectual progress of society, creating a brighter future for mankind. IBS' support of basic science will help solve global challenges and offer solutions to fundamental scientific puzzles in a wide array of scientific fields.

To achieve such goals, IBS has four operating principles; excellence, openness, autonomy, and creativity. The first principle is about establishing excellent Research Centers capable of conducting world-class basic science research. Nobel Laureates and renowned scholars make up panels to reform rigorous selection and evaluation procedures. Openness is about using Centers as channels to bring in professors or researchers from outside institutions. The flexible personnel structure, joint research, and the shared use of equipment with local institutions help to create dynamic research hubs where exchanges of world-leading talent and advanced knowledge actively occur. Centers enjoy autonomy in their research and operation as directors are encouraged to venture into

new research areas by independently selecting research themes and recruiting the workforce necessary to achieve those themes. Creative ideas require unique research equipment, so IBS purchases large-sale infrastructure and has engineering support ready to provide the necessary modifications for the needs of the research.

Support for International Researchers

Roughly one-third of all researchers at the Institute for Basic Science are from overseas. These approximately 300 international researchers have three support options to adapt to life in Korea. First, IBS supplies a service called the Global Help Desk. More commonly called GHD, this service offers personalized help via email and telephone in addition to sending out newsletters. You will need to contact your Center's admin staff to get their email address and phone number as they are only to assist international researchers in IBS Centers.

Second, IBS has created its own support website called Living in Korea, which you are now reading a condensed version of. Based off of the completely rewritten 2019 book by the same name, the website is an expansion of the 160-page book into what is now 130 subsections, 680 pages, and 840 images divided among Overview, Housing, Transport, and Banking. Created in house by international staff for international staff, the website is a collection of information and support so you thrive, not simply survive. While the target audience is those employed at IBS Centers, this resource is open to the public. The website is planned to roughly double in size when completed as four additional sections will slowly be opened, dealing with Driving, Medical, Family, and Misc. Direct link is www.ibs.re.kr/livinginkorea or go to www.ibs.re.kr and click on the 5th tab named Living in Korea.

Third, every Center has several admin staff who help with a number of work and non-work situations. If you need some support, please also talk with your admin staff.



Global Help Desk

The Institute for Science gives all international employees free access to a service we call the Global Help Desk. Frequently shortened to GHD, this is a service which provides individual support via email and phone calls. We suggest you add their phone number to your smartphone and confirm it is current at the start of the year as it might change. Do not call GHD for emergencies. If you have an emergency, dial 119 and the emergency operator will get an interpreter from 1330 on the line to assist. While GHD can only be used by international members of IBS, these other support groups are available for everyone.

The service is to help international IBS researchers to adapt to life in Korea and will help you when you need specific information or assistance on a wide variety of issues. If you do not work at an IBS Research Center, please visit the section Other Support Groups on the Living in Korea website to learn about the Korea Travel Hotline & Complaint Center and BBB Korea.

The Global Help Desk also sends out a newsletter, helps with special events for international members of IBS, and assists in filing Korean taxes in mid to late January. Please send them an email if you are working at an IBS Center and aren't getting the newsletter as they sometimes send out other announcements as well. Here is their flyer that has been sent out to individual Centers and is viewable in the Portal system.



Changes to Global Help Desk

The Global Help Desk (GHD) underwent changes at the end of 2021. The support phone number (031-XXX-XXXX) is no longer available. In its place we suggest you add several new numbers to your phone.

| Phone-based Support

119: Emergency

It's always a good idea to have this phone number saved. Interpretation is available.

1330: Korea Travel Hotline and Complaint Center

This government-supported service provides interpreters for emergency services, medical needs, tourist complaints, Ministry of Justice, and other call centers. We suggest you utilize this 24/7 multilingual service.

1588-5644: Before Babel Brigade Korea (BBB Korea)

A volunteer-based interpreter service that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism started for the 2002 World Cup. 24/7 support in 20+ languages.

| Email-based Support

The email address will remain open and available. On 31 December 2021, the account was transferred to CHOI Insun and Richard MOORE of the Global Relations Team at IBS HQ. Feel free to contact us by this method and we will do our best to help you.



Korea 101



History

Foundation Myth

Looking at mythology, Korea is traced back to events which occurred at Baekdu Mountain (백두산, *Baekdusan*, 白頭山) around 2333 BCE in which a bear and a tiger wished to become human. They were given the opportunity on condition that they eat only garlic and mugwort and stay out of sunlight for 100 days. The tiger gave up but the bear succeeded, turned into a woman, and her descendants later became the Korean people and the first kingdom of Joseon. Mythology aside, this foundation story highlights the importance of Baekdu Mountain to Koreans, which is why it is often referenced in both Koreas and the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture in northeastern Jilin Province, China. As half of the dormant volcano lake is in China, and half is in North Korea, it is difficult to visit.

Where to Begin?

There is archaeological evidence going back several thousand years of stone age farmers, a bronze age, and later iron so it is difficult to place a clear start date on when people first lived on this peninsula but it is clear peoples have lived here for at least several thousands of years. According to the Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms (삼국유사, 三國遺事, *samguk yusa*) which a collection of historical accounts, legends, and folklore written around 1280 BCE, the previously mentioned legend is connected to the foundation of the Gojoseon kingdom (고조선, 古朝鮮). The Go at the front was added later as another Joseon kingdom also used the name from 1392 CE and something was needed to differentiate the two. It is also worth noting that National Foundation Day (개천절, 開天節, *gaecheonjeol*), which is a holiday in both modern Koreas, is held to commemorate the legendary formation of this first Korean state. The kingdom's capital was in Liaoning City of modern day China, and later moved to Pyongyang. This kingdom saw the first rice cultivated, bronze and iron tools, and changes in pottery. When Gojoseon fell, it splintered into various smaller states which lasted for multiple decades.

Three Kingdoms

When you learn about Korean history, most sources start with the Three Kingdoms of Korea which started around 57 BCE and ended around 668 CE but this disregards tribal states in the southern region and comparatively larger than tribal states more north around Manchuria. The big three that people focus on are Baekje (백제, 百濟), Silla (sometimes spelled Shilla, 신라, 新羅) and Goguryeo (고구려, 高句麗) which was later shortened to Goryeo (고려, 高麗). This last kingdom's shortened name is where the modern name Korea is derived and is the Korean spelling of Korea University.

Baekje was in the west area of modern South Korea and Silla to the east. The militaristic state of Goryeo took a significant amount of land extending from roughly where Seoul is to modern Russia and China and was largest in the 5th century. Baekje was known as a maritime power and is the reason many things were disseminated, from Buddhism throughout Asia, to culture and technology to ancient Japan. Under attacks from Goguryeo, the Baekje capital was relocated several times before their fall to Silla in 660 CE.

Silla later took the northern kingdom of Goguryeo in 668 which unified the peninsula under one rule. It is debated when Silla established a centralized government and is either mentioned as the first of the three kingdoms to do so or the last. Regardless of their starting date, their diplomatic methods for alliances helped grow their nation. The last few hundred years of Silla (668-935) was a prosperous time for art, culture, and Buddhism.

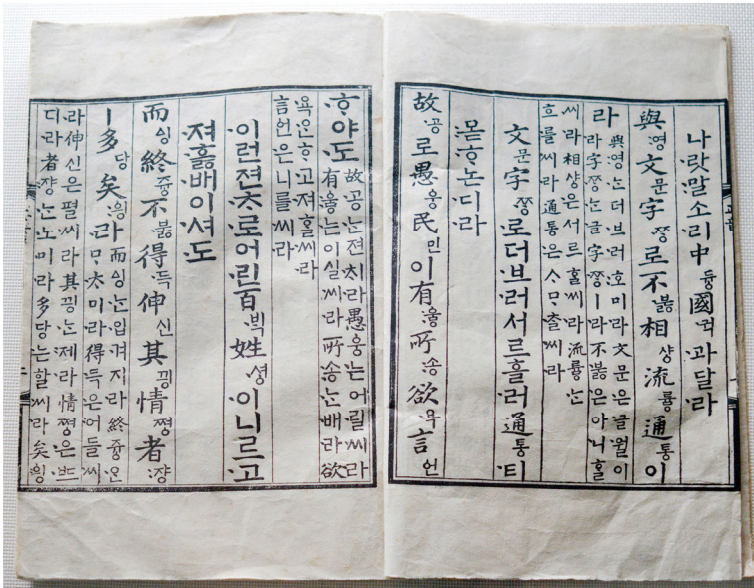
Towards the end of Silla, the ancient states of Baekje and Goguryeo went through revival leading to Goryeo (고려, 高麗). Buddhism was the national religion and the Tripitaka Koreana was created on 81,258 wooden printing blocks at this time. International trade flourished with merchants as far away as the Middle East. Pottery and ceramics, especially celadon which were glazed a jade green color, greatly advanced. Metal-based movable type was created. Diplomatic relations extended through embassies into the southern kingdoms of China. The first Muslims arrived in 1024 and later built several mosques in the capital city of Gaeseong (개성시, 開城市). Soju was also first distilled during this kingdom and spread throughout the peninsula. The highest educational institution was Gukjagam (국자감, 國子監), which was the cornerstone of the Confucian reform leading up to an alter being built in the palace in 1398. The end of the dynasty saw a number of shipboard artillery advancements involving gunpowder artillery and perhaps an early version of the Hwacha; a rocket launcher that simultaneously fired up to several hundred arrows.



The Last Dynasty

The final dynasty of Korea is that of Joseon (조선, 朝鮮). Founded by Yi Seong-gye in July 1392 in a coup d'état, the name of the kingdom was changed to Joseon, sometimes spelled Chosŏn or Chosun, to signify the change of leadership and quiet the threats of mutiny from nobles loyal to Goryeo. The change also resulted in the founding of a new capital in what is present day Seoul. Buddhism suffered a great loss going from the state religion to occasional persecutions while Neo-Confucianism became the new dynasty's state ideology.

King Sejong (세종, 世宗), the king you'll hear the most about, was the fourth ruler and one whose rule resulted in the title "The Great" (대왕, 大王, *daewang*) being added to his name. He encouraged advancements in scientific technology but is better known for personally creating and promulgating the Korean alphabet Hangul in 1443. Going from tens of thousands of Chinese-based characters to the phonetic alphabet shifted literacy from being reserved to the noble classes and extended it down to the common people. Viewing large scale literacy as a threat to the elite's power, Hangul's study and publication was banned in 1504 and it was hundreds of years later before it was widely used. Sejong is on the front of the modern 10,000 won bill and scientific advances are mentioned on the rear of the currency. A number of streets, parks, cultural buildings, and even a city have been named after him.



Hunminjeongeum, the document that King Sejong distributed to the people introducing the alphabet.



Korea 101 15

Reading Korean Maps

While not the catchiest of topics, knowing the difference between a -gu, -do, and -gun can occasionally come in handy. Government designated divisions differ between the two Koreas, and for our purposes we'll just focus on South Korea. When the more general sounding term "Korea" is used, we are talking about South Korea.

Unlike Japan which uses prefectures, Korea is like China as the term "province" is used. Province is 도 (道, *do*) and the official names of provinces include a "-do" like Gyeonggi-do. Many people translate 도 to "province" like Gyeonggi Province, and sometimes just omit it all together, i.e., Gyeonggi. There are historically five provinces; Chungcheong, Gangwon, Gyeonggi, Gyeongsang, and Jeolla.

Cities are 시 (市, *si*) and often written as "-si" at the end of a city name; if used at all. Cities are defined as having a population of at least 150,000. If an area has a population under 150,000 it is called a county (군, 郡, *gun*).

If a city has a population over 500,000 the city can be subdivided into districts (구, 區, *gu*). Gu are similar to a borough or district in some Western countries. To make government offices more accessible in larger cities, most if not all paperwork you can do in a city hall (시청, 市廳, *sicheong*) can be done in a gu government office, neighborhood office, town office, township office, and some community centers.

Seoul is the only "special city" (서울특별시, 서울特別市, *Seoul Teukbyeol-si*) as it is both the largest city and the capital. While it is in the middle of Gyeonggi-do, as of 1946 it technically is separate and doesn't belong to a province. Of the 51 million people who live in Korea, nearly 10 million of them officially live in Seoul. We say "officially" here as like other large cities, they keep growing which results in merging with or engulfing other cities, which makes it difficult to know where the lines should be drawn. This larger megacity is sometimes called the Seoul Capital Area or Greater Seoul Metropolitan Area in which 25 million people reside; half the national population. Although not recommended, going from one end of the subway system to another end can take 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 hours.



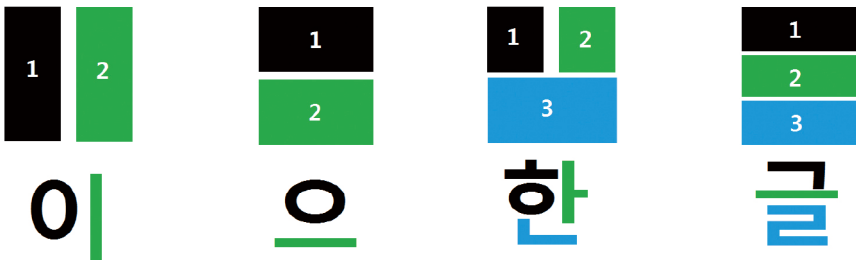
Korean Language

From the 4th century, the Korean language used to be a right-to-left vertically written language using Han Chinese characters with Korean pronunciation. Learning tens of thousands of individual Chinese characters was only doable by noble classes which led King Sejong (세종대왕, 世宗大王) in the 15th century to develop a phonetic alphabet known today as Hangul in South Korea and Chosŏn'gŭl in North Korea. Full adoption of the alphabet took around 500 years, only gaining fully widespread usage in the 1990's or 2000's.

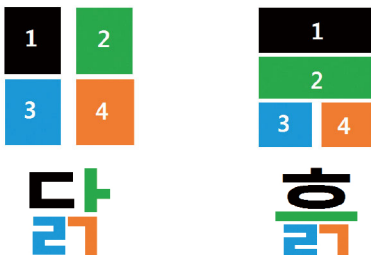
Learn to Read Hangul

The great thing about Hangul is that it's very easy to learn, with only 10 consonants and 14 vowels. This means that you can read it similar to reading the alphabet in English, by sounding out each letter or syllable.

Letters or characters are divided into vowels and consonants and consist of basic geometric shapes. Some fonts highlight the circles and 90 degree angles, while other fonts are more stylish in their approach. Over time a number of these letters have dropped out of usage, making the system easier to learn. Unlike European languages where each letter stands alone, Korean words are written in syllable or morpheme blocks of 2, 3 or 4. How the letters are arranged in the block depends on the shape of the letters.



Blocks with four characters are written top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right or top, middle, bottom left, bottom right.



The pronunciation of consonants depends on their placement in the blocks at the initial or final position. If a block ends with two consonants, or if one block ends in a consonant and the next block starts with a different consonant, either the sounds blur together or one dominates the other. Instead of just showing all the consonants, it is much easier to learn them in groups where patterns can easily be seen.

Plain Consonants

Blocks cannot start with a vowel, so when a block needs to start with a vowel sound, the ㅇ letter is a silent placeholder when in the initial position of a block. You'll notice many of the letters have two different sounds; the first sound is when the consonant appears at the start of a syllable block, and the second sound is when it appears at the end of a syllable, called a 받침 (batchim).

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ	ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ
g/k	n/n	d/t	r/l	m/m	b/p	s/t	(silent)/ng	j/t

Tense Consonants

Once you know the plain consonants, it is easy to learn the tense consonants, which are simply doubled versions of some of the plain consonants. A few of these can only be used in the initial position within a block. To correctly pronounce these and the last group of consonants, you'll need to ask a Korean speaker for verbal examples as the Romanization does not accurately portray their different sounds.

ㄲ	ㄸ	ㅃ	ㅆ	ㅉ
kk/k	tt/(none)	pp/(none)	ss/t	jj/(none)

Aspirated Consonants

The last group of consonants are aspirated forms of a few previous consonants and are written in a similar way to the plain versions.

ㅋ	ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅊ
k/k	t/t	p/p	ch/t

Simple Vowels

Like we did with the consonants, let's break up the consonants into a few groups; simple, plus Y, and combos. If you can learn the first group, the other two groups can be learned quite easily. For this and the rest of the vowel section, English words with similar vowel sounds are written below as an added help.

ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ	ㅛ
a father	eo dog	o home	u moon	eu good	i see

Plus Y Vowels

With the simple vowels learned, let's look at what I call the Plus Y group. You'll notice these four letters are very similar to the first four simple vowels, except each of these letters have parallel small lines. Parallel lines indicate a "y" sound added to the front. That's it.

ya yard	yeo young	yo yo	yu you

Vowel Combinations

Vowel combinations are just that, combinations of vowels. Under each vowel combination is written what vowels are used to create the combination. It will be very hard to tell the difference between and and even Koreans have trouble with telling them apart on occasion. When Koreans want to clarify, they say for and for .

ae face	yae yay	e face	ye yay
oe wait	wi weed	ui goeey	
wa water	wo wonder	wae wet	we web

Calendar and Holidays

While Korea has officially used several calendars in the past, the type most used today is the Gregorian solar calendar. Many people used to know both their solar and lunar birthdays, but as generations change people more and more only know, and only celebrate, their solar calendar birthday. Several national holidays are held according to their date on the lunar calendar. This includes Solnal, Buddha's Birthday, and Chuseok. Lunar and solar dates will differ annually so their dates are not written below. As this duality of calendar systems exists, certain lunar days are written on calendars in a smaller font size.

Sundays and the dates of national holidays (국경일, 國慶日, *gukgyeongil*) are written in red. If a holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, politicians sometimes move the holiday to a weekday (대체휴일, 代替休日, *daechehyuil*) so workers can get the day off, but don't count on this happening. Nicknamed "red days", these holidays close businesses, schools, banks, and some restaurants. Election days are also holidays with the aim to get higher voting turnout. The list of holidays and national holidays below is mixed, so we'll put all public holidays, i.e., work holidays, in red to mimic calendars you'll see.

In some languages, English included, each month has a name, i.e., January, February, March, etc. In the Korean language each month is a number followed by the word for "month" (월, 月, *wol*), i.e., 1월, 2월, 3월.



1월 - January

- **1 - New Year's Day** A common image you'll see from this public holiday is people standing along the east coast to see the first sunrise of the year. One of the most popular towns visited is Jeongdongjin (정동진) near Gangneung which part of the 2018 Winter Olympics were held.
- **Year-end Tax Settlement** 연말정산 (年末精算, *Yeonmaljeongsan*) sometimes called the Year-end Tax Adjustment, tax season starts in mid-January and ends mid-February, around the 20th of each month. Specific dates for filing change slightly year to year. The process can be completed online.

2월 - February

- **Lunar New Year** 설날 (*Seollal*) is a three day holiday and is timed on the lunar calendar; specifically the last day of December and the first two days of January. This is some of the worst traffic conditions of the year as roughly 25% of the overall population travel to be with relatives. Bus, train, and airplane tickets sell out several months ahead of time so try to buy them as early as you can. Married people usually spend a day or two with one set of in-laws and then another day or two with the other set of in-laws. The primary day in this holiday is the middle day. Many restaurants and grocery stores are closed for the middle of the three days, so make sure you have enough food to get you through the holiday.
- **14 - Valentine's Day** In Korea this day is celebrated with women giving chocolate to men. Not fair? Don't worry, as men are expected to give chocolate to women next month. This is not a requirement at the workplace but a few people might bring in some candy to share.

3월 - March

- **1 - Independence Movement Day** 삼일절 (三一節, *Samiljeol*) is literally "three + one + anniversary" and is a holiday to commemorate the resistance which occurred on March 1, 1919. This is a very patriotic holiday so expect to see a lot of Korean flags and historical movies on TV.
- **14 - White Day** This is the day that men give chocolate to women. Just like Valentine's Day in February, this is not required for a workplace to partake in.

4월 - April

- **14 - Black Day** 블랙데이 is a phonetic spelling and is "celebrated" by single people who didn't get chocolate on Valentine's Day or White Day. In theory, they will eat the black colored sweet jajangmyeon noodles (자장면, 炸醬麵) in a Chinese restaurant, but in reality this doesn't really occur. This is more of a junior high or high school student thing, and most singles don't participate. If you get some delivered to your home, make sure you leave the bowl outside your front door as someone will come by later to pick it up.

5월 - May

- **Buddha's Birthday** 석가탄신일 (釋迦誕辰日, *Seokgatansinil*), or 부처님 오신 날 (*Bucheonim osin nal*) meaning "the day when the Buddha came", is on the 8th day of the 4th month in the lunar calendar, meaning it can be held anywhere from the end of April to the end of May. The month

preceding the holiday is marked by colored paper lotus lanterns hanging in rows in public spaces and significant numbers near and in Buddhist temples. Many of these temples give free food, typically bibimbap, and tea to visitors. The Lotus Lantern Festival (연등회, 燃燈會, *Yeondeunghoe*) is also held at this time. Roughly a week or two before the holiday, Cheonggyecheon Stream in Seoul has a number of large decorative lanterns in exhibition above the water. The temples Jogyesa and Bongjeonsa organize a large street lantern parade over several streets in Jongno, which is closed to cars for a few hours.

- **1 - Labor Day** 근로자의 날 (勤勞者의 날, *Geullojaui nal*) is a partial holiday that has changed over the years and is still a bit confusing for who gets the day off and who needs to work. The short answer is government employees must still go to work. This means post offices, public schools, government ministries, and local government offices are open. However, the definition of "government employees" is a bit unclear, so some national universities are closed while others are open.
- **5 - Children's Day** 어린이날 (*Eorininal*) is a holiday to celebrate the youth, especially children and their part in society. This is a common day to eat out as a family or take kids to a park or museum. Some kids will get presents from their parents as well or in place of going out to eat.
- **8 - Parent's Day** 어버이날 (*Eobeoinal*) is a holiday but not a public holiday which means we still need to work. Mothers and fathers are honored together on this day, but they still go to work.
- **15 - Teacher's Day** 교사의 날 (教師의 날, *Gyosai nal*) is a holiday of sorts but is difficult to celebrate without a day off and without presents. Usually parents would send gifts to the teachers of their children, but after the 2015 Improper Solicitation and Graft Act (부정청탁 및 금품등 수수의 금지에 관한 법률) came into force in 2016 limiting the value of gifts to avoid potential bribery, gifts are rarely given and are sometimes returned to the parents depending on the attitude of the school administration.

6월 - June

- **6 - Memorial Day** 현충일 (顯忠日, *Hyeonchungil*) is to commemorate those in the military who died while in service to Korea. Since 1956, a ceremony has been held in Seoul National Cemetery at 10 AM. A siren rings and the flag is at half-mast.
- **25 - Korean War Anniversary** Frequently written as 6.25전쟁 (六二五戰爭, *Yugio jeonjaeng*) which means the June 25th War, is not a holiday but is a solemn occasion as people remember the start of the Korean War on this date in 1950. The armistice was signed on July 27, 1953 but technically the war never ended as no peace treaty was signed. The war forever changed the peninsula and continue to effect a number of things today. Depending upon the political climate, the two nations sometimes arrange meetings of separated families on this day.

7월 - July

8월 - August

- **15 - National Liberation Day of Korea** This holiday is celebrated in both Koreas with the South

calling the day 광복절 (光復節, *Gwangbokjeol*) and the North calling it 조국해방의 날 (祖國解放의 날, *Jogukhaebangui Nal*). This day coincides with the end of World War II as it was also the end of occupation of the peninsula. The holiday is political and the president makes a speech on TV recounting the occupation. Many Korean flags are posted on light posts and on apartments. This is the only public holiday celebrated by both Koreas.

9월 - September

- **Chuseok** 추석 (秋夕), also called Korean Thanksgiving in American English, is a harvest holiday spent with family celebrated on the 14th, 15th, and 16th days of the 8th month of the lunar calendar on the full moon around the time of autumn equinox. This three day holiday is a major holiday where people head back to their ancestral hometowns and/or the husband's parents' home. Many gravesites are visited, cleaned, and worship/respect rituals are performed either at the gravesites or at home. Along with the lunar New Year, this is the most congested roads will be during the year as a significant number of people are traveling. The first day and last day are the busiest, and just like other big holidays, stock up on food as a lot of eateries will be closed one or more days.

10월 - October

- **3 - National Foundation Day** 개천절 (開天節, *Gaecheonjeol*) is a holiday celebrating the foundation of the Korean state of Gojoseon in 2333 BCE. The holiday used to be held on the 3rd day of the 10th month on the lunar calendar, but changed in 1949 to October 3rd of the Gregorian calendar. While this is celebrated in both Koreas, it is only a public holiday in South Korea.
- **9 - Hangul Day** 한글날 (*Hangeullal*) is held to commemorate King Sejong's invention and proclamation of Hangul. On the 563rd anniversary (2009) a 6.2 meter statue of Sejong was unveiled in Gwanghwamun Plaza in Seoul in close distance to Gyeongbok Palace and the presidential Blue House. The date of the holiday has shifted several times in the past and gone back and forth from public holiday to holiday and back again. In 2013, the president declared it to again be a national holiday. North Korea also celebrates creation of the alphabet but on January 15 and under the name Chosŏn'gŭl Day (조선글날, *Joseongeullal*).
- **31 - Halloween** 할로윈 isn't usually an event in Korea outside of some kindergartens, Itaewon, and some expat bars or restaurants. People have a general idea about the day but it is mainly celebrated by college students and kindergarten students. Costumes and specialty candy are still very difficult to find but this has been rapidly changing.

11월 - November

- **11 - Pepero Day** While not close to a public holiday, this chocolate holiday is to sell Pepero (빼빼로). The chocolate sticks look like 1s and four in a row resemble 11/11, hence the day was selected. You'll see chocolate sticks, plush toys, and other chocolates for sale, primarily at convenience stores as that is where most students will pick up some snacks to give as presents and eat together with friends.

- **21 - Institute for Basic Science Foundation Day** 연구원 창립 기념일 (연구원 創立 紀念日, *Yeonguwon Changnim Ginyeomil*) can be directly translated as "institute foundation day" and is a private holiday for those employed at the relevant institution. The Institute for Basic Science was founded on this day in 2011. Like other government funded research groups in Korea, this is a holiday for IBS employees.
- **College Scholastic Ability Test** 수학 능력 시험 (修學 能力 試驗, *Suhang Neungnyeong Siheom*) or more commonly called suneung (수능, 修能) is the university entrance exam. The testing takes place this month and only this month as the test is only once a year. Students that take the test again are referred to as 재수생 (再修生, *jaesusaeng*) and test takers in general are referred to as 수험생 (受験生, *suheomsaeng*). The test begins at 8:40 AM and finishes at 5:40 PM. The results of this test determine what university students can enter, which determines which jobs are available for them, which also determines other significant aspects of their lives years later. Most offices tell their staff to arrive one hour later so the streets are open for students to easily go to their testing locations without traffic. If students arrive at their testing center late, they are denied entry and must wait one more year until the next exams are held. In rare cases, a student might call the police and get a police escort to avoid being late. Younger students and families often gather by the gates of the school to cheer on the test takers.
- **Gimjang** 김장, sometimes Romanized as kimjang, is when families make large quantities of kimchi together to ferment through the winter. Kimchi making season usually takes place in November but sometimes occurs in early December as well. The process is labor intensive and involves vast numbers of cabbage and the related ingredients. Families usually make it together and can easily spend an entire day or two preparing a year's worth of this side dish. As people are becoming more independent, more busy with work and life in general, and in years in which the price of cabbage goes up, it can be easier and sometimes cheaper to purchase premade kimchi in a grocery store.

12월 - December

- **25 - Christmas** 크리스마스, which is the phonetic spelling of Christmas, is more of a couple's holiday and a shopping holiday instead of a family event. If you are expecting extravagant holiday decorations you will be disappointed as things are more muted than in Europe or North America but are slowly getting bigger than years past. To see decorations or hear holiday music, head to busy shopping areas and keep an eye out for photo zones. Christmas is not a true Korean holiday, so Christmas is what you make of it. Make sure to get out and spend time with friends and do something special. If you are used to a large celebratory holiday, be careful not to isolate yourself as being alone while living overseas can be more depressing than you expect, especially if you are used to being with people. Make sure you have some plans.
- **31 - New Year's Eve** While not technically a holiday, many people take this day or a half day off to get a head start on the holiday and beat the traffic. However, many people share this same thought so the traffic can get pretty bad. If you plan to travel, make sure you get tickets far ahead of time. Also, check with your management to see if there is a New Year's Eve dinner (신년 전야 만찬 행사) as sometimes they get planned.

Embassies

After you arrive in Korea it is a good idea to know where your country's embassy is located and register if necessary. If you haven't lived abroad, or even if you have, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with what services are offered, including mailing lists or upcoming events. Search in Google to find your embassy's website, address, and phone number. All embassies in Korea are located in Seoul with a majority in the districts of Jongno and Yongsan with a large number in Itaewon within Yongsan. Embassies frequently have shorter hours than business hours and are closed for holidays in both their country and Korea. To avoid wasted trips, we suggest you confirm your embassy is open on the day you want to visit and check to see if you need to make an appointment ahead of time.



Housing



Types of Accommodations

Listed below are the most common types of residences in Korea. Population density means almost every place available for rent will be a multistory building. Single story homes and dwellings exist, but are not as common and rare to find available to rent. Regardless of the type of residence you get, chances are you will live above someone else. Being a good neighbor means keeping noise levels down in the evenings, including TV volume, laundry machine usage, barking pets, and running children.

Roof access depends on the height of the building as the higher the roof the bigger the injury if someone falls. Apartments and dormitories usually block access to their roofs. If you have access, you'll notice the roof is flat and is green colored due to the waterproofing chemicals. Viewed from a distance, this waterproofing can appear like grass. Roofs can be used to dry clothes, grow vegetables in pots, and host a dinner party under the stars. Please ask your landlord if there are any restrictions with using the roof.

Apartments/Flats

Apartments are the most popular housing option among Koreans. The term in Korean is a shortened version of apartment (아파트, *apateu*) and frequently written as APT. In Korea, an apartment is actually defined as an apartment complex consisting anywhere from eight to sixteen buildings, each of which over 15 stories tall. In less populated areas and with older complexes, the average height will be smaller and can be as few as four buildings. City, location in city, view, transportation availability, south facing for sunlight, building age, number of parking spaces (Korea experienced a rapid increase in vehicle ownership in just a few decades which resulted in many apartments lacking spaces as the math kept changing), existence of underground parking, and brand name of apartment all highly influence the price.

Least sought after units are ones on the first or second floor as they are noisier with outside noise and people entering to access the elevator. They are also more affected by outside weather as the elevator access means outside air frequently comes to their front door. First floor units frequently become daycare centers as they are cheaper,

easier to access than other floors, and children don't need to climb stairs or an elevator. Cheaper units are also ones at the very top of the building or at one of the two ends as their ceiling and/or one of their major walls do not have a neighboring unit which can provide insulation.

The best units within an apartment complex are called 로얄플로어, literally "royal floor" or 로얄층 (로얄층, *royal cheung*). These are the floors that have the best sunlight. For example, if a building is 10 floors tall, the "royal floors" might be from the 6th floor through the 9th floor as these floors' sunlight will not get blocked by nearby buildings. Sometimes they also have the best views as there will be no buildings directly in front of them or the nearby buildings will be shorter. If the entire building fits this description, it can be called 로얄동 (로얄동, *royal dong*) as 동 means a particular building. For example, a complex might have 12 buildings, going from 600동 to 612동. Within that complex, let's say 607동 and 608동 are right by the river, have great views of the water, and will never have their sunlight be blocked by neighboring buildings.

Drawbacks to living in apartments include limited parking in older or cheaper units. Apartments built in the 1980's and 1990's did not construct as many parking spaces as would be made today as car ownership was lower. The culture has adapted by being very lenient on illegally or double parked cars as there sometimes is no space to park. Double parked cars are supposed to be left in neutral, allowing people to push them out of the way of cars they are blocking. Also almost all cars and trucks have a cell/mobile number written and placed on the dashboard. If the vehicle is blocking traffic, anyone can call that number and tell the offender to move their vehicle. Apartments and sometimes universities will enforce parking by attaching a large A4-sized sticker on a window of the car. Bright yellow in color, this is both a shaming strategy aimed at attracting negative attention to the offender and a significant annoyance as the adhesive used is surprisingly strong.

Officetels

Officetels (오피스텔, *opiseutel*), are a combination of office and hotel. Intended to be used as a very small office space/living space for an individually owned company, they come furnished with the bare essentials and provide minimal residential facilities. As more Koreans are living away from family before getting married, officetels have become popular for renting to singles who don't need a lot of space and who don't want to buy large housing items, like a bed or washing machine. They are located above storefronts, have elevator access and usually share long hallways. Intended for business usage, their utility bills are smaller than official residential areas.

Villas

Smaller single apartment buildings are referred to as villas in Korea (빌라, *billa*). As these are individually owned, there is no brand name and each building will have its own design. Chances are your landlord lives in or near the building, so getting face to face time could be as easy as going up or down some stairs. Usually under five floors, they don't have elevators, and there are only one or two residences per floor. It is for these reasons villas are less desirable than proper apartment complexes. The rent is usually lower and the size is usually bigger than apartment complexes.

Studio Apartments

Studio apartments are called one-room (원룸, *wollum*) in Korean as they consist of one room. Cheaper than officetels, many are located near universities, organizations, or institutes. Larger versions are called 투룸 (*turum*) or 쓰리룸 (*sseurirum*) as they have two or three rooms, respectively. These are usually types of villas, but not necessarily. They can come as furnished or unfurnished.

Dormitories

At the north side of the HQ campus in Daejeon are two adjacent dormitories, the IBS Dormitory and the UST Dormitory. If you are interested in staying in one of these, contact your immediate supervisor and they will contact the dormitories on your behalf. The dedicated website for the IBS Dormitory was closed December 2019 and related information will be migrated onto a new section of the Living in Korea website. If you Center is located within a university, you might be able to live in one of their dormitories (기숙사, 寄宿舍, *gisuksa*). As there are a large number of Centers located in university campuses, inquire your Center's staff to see if you can have access.

Rooftop Room

There isn't really a standardized name in English, but in 옥탑방 (屋塔房, *oktapbang*) are small single rooms built on top of a villa, usually after the primary construction was completed. The size is very small, they are very cheap, and the walls do not insulate very well which makes the occupant(s) very hot in summer and very cold in winter. The price is attractive to college students, but can be found away from university areas as well. A maximum of one will exist per roof so residents have no neighbors next to them and sometimes have great city views. The rest of the roof is sometimes claimed by the rooftop room tenant, rightfully or not, giving them additional space outside of their four walls.



Paying Rent and Utilities

In years past, each separate utility had a separate bill with a different due date. Electric, water, gas, and management fees have mostly been combined so you get one item in the mail and pay once but some residential types might still get two or three. This author received separate bills for administrative fees, electric, and gas when living in a villa before he moved into an apartment and started to receive one consolidated bill for everything. Each type of utility has its own page with links to the left but information on the bills themselves and payment will be on this page you are reading now. The paper that bills, taxes, and fines are printed on are usually a light yellow color but consolidated bills for apartments are usually more white in color. When scanned, the scanner frequently adjusts the color to more of a white, which is the case on multiple examples on this page. If you are ever confused about a bill, bring it to your workplace and show it to a member of your admin team so they can explain what something is.

If you live in a dormitory you should have internet installed and working and not have to pay a separate fee. If you live in something other than a dormitory, expect to create a separate internet plan and see if you can combine it with your smartphone for simplicity and frequently a lower price. The longer the plan you make the lower your monthly payments will be for internet and smartphone but you will be limited by the validity of your visa. As most working visas are only good for one year at a time, it'll be difficult to get a deal. Some buildings have a physical cable for limited but free TV access but most people pay for a TV plan, usually bundled with their internet and smartphone.

South Korea typically ranks within the top five countries in terms of internet speed tests. The national government provides the fiber backbones and rents access to various telecommunication companies who offer a number of plans and speeds. KT Olleh, SK Broadband, and LG U+ are the three major companies that offer internet access. Dormitories typically provide internet for free but normally other housing options will require you to pay for your own internet access.



General Trash

Trash is thrown away in official plastic trash bags with the price of the bag covering the cost to dispose of the containing items. Therefore, the garbage system in Korea is based on how much you throw away, as opposed to a monthly general payment system. Trash bags are sold on a district by district basis (구, 區, *gu*) and are sold at convenience stores, neighborhood grocery stores, and larger chain grocery stores. General waste is everything that can fit inside a standardized trash bag that isn't food and isn't recyclable. Certain electronics, items that are too big to fit in one of these bags, or are too heavy that they would rip the bag open, should be disposed of separately.

Bags usually are sold in groups rolled together as shown directly below on the left, or are folded in groups as shown in a later image.



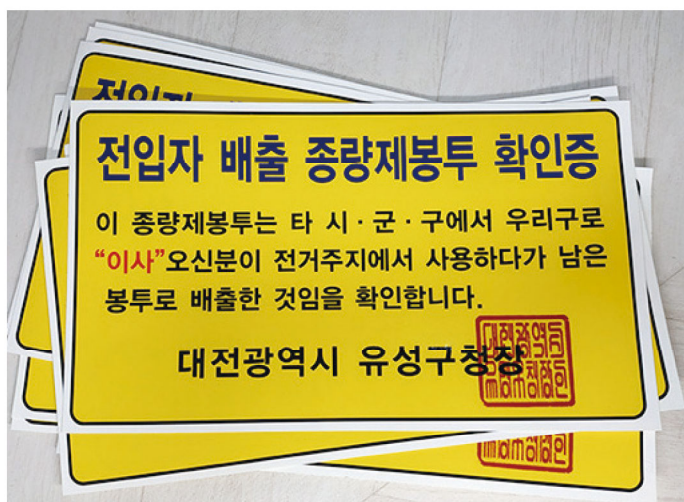
The bags themselves say their district in Korean and might or might not be bilingual. This bag mentions 대전광역시 for Daejeon City and then 유성구 for Yuseong-gu, i.e., Yuseong District.



As the government is clamping down on stores providing white plastic shopping bags, many stores are selling these official trash bags as an alternative. If you visit a store and only buy trash bags, you may be restricted to buying them with cash, but this seems to be the exception and not the norm. The prices of trash bags, sizes, and colors will vary district to district. The image below is from a larger chain grocery store and has various trash bags on display for two different districts as the area gets shoppers from both areas. Yuseong-gu bags are on the left and Seo-gu bags are on the right and both are unfortunately the same color. It is hard to see in the image, but there are white labels above each section indicating which bags are for where.



If you use bags from the wrong district you can get in trouble as the district picking up the trash was not paid to dispose of it. If you visit your local government office you can buy stickers so that trash bags purchased in one district can be used in another. This is primarily used for when people move and have a stack of extra trash bags leftover. The number of districts this sticker rule applies to was expanded in autumn 2019, but still does not apply to all districts. The term for this sticker will also vary city by city or sometimes district by district, like in different areas of Incheon.



There are two types of bags, general trash (일반용 쓰레기봉투, 一般用 쓰레기封套, *ilbanyong sseuregi bongtu*) as shown previously, and food trash (음식물용 쓰레기봉투, 食物用 쓰레기封套, *eumsingmuryong sseuregi bongtu*). Some apartments use a weight system and charge by weight to discourage food thrown out unnecessarily. This system was thought of to be the new norm but in reality has spread very slowly.

Bags are sold in liters and the most common sizes for general trash bags is 10, 20, and 100. The most common sizes for food trash are 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, and 10 liters. Some districts will require you place the food trash bags in plastic containers so street cats and bugs cannot rip open the bags. If you do not separate your food trash from your general trash, or if you use the wrong bag, you may receive a penalty from your district. Usually they take a picture of the offending trash bag, a picture of the offending food item within the trash, and a picture of contact information indicating you are responsible – usually an envelope with your name and address. These images and a fine will be sent to your residence.

Sometimes you'll see stickers on offending trash with the idea of using this as a teaching moment and for the offender to repackage the trash properly before it is picked up by the garbage man. The notices below state that these items, which are recyclable, were not properly disposed of and therefore will not be collected by the trash collector until properly disposed of.

Both general trash bags and food trash bags will have a dotted line near the top of the bag. This is a maximum fill line and penalties exist for overflowing trash bags. Only fill the bag to that line, tie it closed, and place it at the appropriate disposal location on the correct day and within the correct hours.



Fines for Improper Disposal

Not throwing away trash properly can result in you getting a fine. Penalties and fines will differ city by city and district by district but the following are a good general overview of potential fines that exist.



- ✓ Disposal of trash on wrong day
- ✓ Disposal of trash at wrong location
- ✓ Littering, i.e., cigarettes butts, gum, other small items
- ✓ Mixing general waste, food trash, and/or recyclable items within the same trash bag
- ✓ Overflowing trash bag, i.e., careful of the dotted maximum fill line as shown above
- ✓ Not using an official trash bag, i.e., using a generic plastic bag



Internet and Phones



Internet Plans

For many years, Korean internet speeds have been some of the fastest in the world thanks to a dense population in the greater Seoul area and the government installing the internet backbones and renting access to the telecom providers. Getting a low price for internet access does not mean low speeds.

The initial cost for installment is about 30,000 won and a technician will visit your home to connect you by setting up the modem and Wifi if you purchase a Wifi plan. Monthly service charges start around 25,500 or 30,000 won before VAT and will vary greatly depending on the service provider, the length of plan, and which plan you select in which maximum speed offered is sometimes an option. You will also be required to pay rental fees for the modem and access point.

In general, contracts vary from one year to three years but you will be limited to the length of validity of your visa as stated on your Alien Registration Card. Discount rates depend on the length of your contract and if you connect TV and/or smartphone(s) to the same account. If you cancel your service before your contract ends or need to shorten the length of your contract, expect to get hit with a cancellation fee.



Internet Cafés

Internet cafés in Korea are now called PC cafés (PC카페, *PC kape*) but for decades were translated as internet rooms or more commonly as PC rooms as those are direct translations of PC 방 (pc bang). Internet cafés in Korea have traditionally been used to gain access to faster gaming PCs and are a fun place to play online games with friends as a number of titles are preinstalled and people often visit with friends. It is worth noting that games popular in Korea will be preinstalled, which may differ from game titles popular in your home country. They usually have a printer and Microsoft Office installed but it is best to confirm that with staff before you pay and sit down.

If you don't yet have internet installed at your home or need access to a full PC instead of your smartphone, an Internet café can be a good option. They are much cleaner than years past and now offer a variety of junk food options which you can eat without leaving the comfort of your chair. Previously, customers would grab a card with an ID number from a tray near the entrance and use that ID number to login to a PC, which then starts a usage clock. That format is going away as many internet cafés require you to pay in advance at a central touch screen terminal. If English support does not exist, grab the eye of an employee, look confused, and they will come over and help you.



Phone Carriers

SK T World, KT Olleh, and LG U+ are the major carriers for telephones in Korea. You'll notice these are the same companies as in the internet section, but other brands exist as well. While their websites are adding support for English, the information will be very limited compared to the Korean language version of their sites. It can also be difficult to find the English version of their page if you start at their Korean language site. You may need to do an internet search with the name of the company and "English". The phone plans will also be different, so it is recommended to check the options in Korean with someone who can translate for you.

As you have citizenship outside of Korea, typically you'll be limited to prepaid plans or a contract no longer than your visa is valid. The validity of your visa will be on your Alien Registration Card and this is the identification necessary for most smartphone plans. If you do not have an Alien Registration Card, getting a prepaid plan will be a better option, but might be more expensive. Prepaid plans really aren't normal here and so people generally don't know where to go to purchase one and usually advise you to visit a smartphone store and ask.

If you brought your own smartphone to Korea, there is a good chance it will work but you will need to confirm it at the store as some phones will not be compatible with some carriers. Outside of iPhones, almost all smartphones sold in Korea are from a Korean brand. It is rare to see phones from another country sold in Korea. Support for these phones, including confirming if the phone will work with a telecommunication company in Korea, can be difficult as most stores have minimal experience with non-Korean phones outside of iPhones.



Transport



Transportation Cards

Called transport cards, transportation cards, or even sometimes traffic cards, 교통 카드 (交通 카드, *gyotong kadeu*) are the norm. They will speed up your usage of public transportation and will provide free transfers between subways and buses, and buses with other buses, as long as the transfer is done within a time limitation of around an hour, which allows people to easily transfer to buses that don't come often. They also give users a lower rate for riding public transit and can be used in taxis, convenience stores, toll roads, some vending machines, and some public pay phones.

Trying to understand who owns which subway line, or even which section of a specific subway line, and the operators of various bus lines, can be very confusing. Despite the large number of operators of public transportation systems used in Korea, they can all be used with a single transport card. The one known exception is the U Line in north-eastern Seoul as they did not have an agreement as of this writing. Embedded with an RFID chip, standalone cards and smaller versions the size of cell phone charms can be purchased in convenience stores, some subway stations, and other random stores. If you are planning to use public transit in Korea, they are well worth the money. Here are several versions, including a much older version on the bottom right.



Each rider needs their own card, but there is an exception for riding a bus. When you board a bus and want to pay for several people with one card, do not scan your card. Tell the driver how many people. He will instruct you to wait a moment while he presses a special button to charge you for several riders. Once this is pressed, he'll signal when you are free to scan your card. If you do not wait for his prompt, you will not be able to pay for multiple passengers.

You do not need to pull out your card to use it. Many people leave their card in the outermost card slot of their wallet or smartphone wallet case or sometimes place it directly behind their smartphone and enclose it with a case. The signal is strong enough to read through wallet thickness leather but if you have another RFID card nearby the reader might get confused and give an error message. If you are on a bus, the error message will be an audio recording saying 카드를 다시 대주세요 (*kadeureul dasi daejuseyo*), meaning you need to scan the card again and might need to remove it from your wallet for it to properly scan.

When you use one of these cards in a subway station, approach the entrance gates with the card in your right hand. Scan the machine to your right in order to pay for yourself. If you scan to your left, you'll be paying for someone else to enter the system. This also means that person will have trouble exiting the system as their card never officially paid to enter.



Purchase and Refill

Transport cards can be purchased in convenience stores and refilled both there and in subway stations at ticket machines. Cards can come empty or with an initial balance and both can be refilled up to a few hundred thousand won. Here is a smaller privately owned store near an apartment complex. The sign hanging from the roof is a promotion for T Money and the purple sign on the right states they sell and refill transport cards.

If you are inside a subway station, you will be able to get a single-use ticket at a machine and refill an existing transport card, but will not be able to purchase one at these machines. Here are two versions of machines found in subway stations in Seoul. These are frequently located near the paid area of stations and sometimes a machine is located just within the paid area for individuals who don't have enough value in their card and need to add a little cash before they can exit.



City Buses

This section is related to urban buses. For longer distances and much higher speed buses, check our section on intercity and express buses which go on highways, have only one or a few stops, and will need to purchase separate tickets prior to departure.

While English can use the terms bus stop and bus shelter (정류장, 停留場, *jeongnyujang*), the term bus stop is more common. The bus stop itself is the only place you will be able to board a bus. It doesn't matter if you are along the route and see the bus between stops as it will not stop for you. Safety and travel time are bigger priorities than picking up as many passengers as possible. Don't try to flag down a bus that is not at a stop as it will completely ignore you.

When you want to ride a bus, stand up near the street edge and make eye contact with the bus driver. It isn't necessary to use your hand to signal the driver. If your body language suggests to the driver that you want to ride the bus, then the bus will stop so you can get on. Depending on the city and the bus operator, buses might be required to fully stop at all stops and might be required to open and close the front door, even if there aren't waiting passengers.

Not as common except for parts of Gyeonggi Province, Sejong City, and some other locations, are BRT or Bus Rapid Transit. Modeled off of Bogota's BRT system these buses are in a semi closed system where only buses are allowed and the bus stops are in the middle of the road.



Getting On and Off

General city buses usually have a step up, but some are the more convenient and more expensive low floor buses (저상버스, *jeosang beoseu*). When a bus pulls up and opens its door, this is what you'll see.

The driver is in their own protective shell to limit outside distractions and interference from passengers. On the door to the enclosure, and directly in front of us is the price listing for passengers. Keep in mind that prices will differ by city and will change with time. In addition to saving time, getting free transfers, and getting credit toward your taxes, using a transport card will also save you money with a lower price than paying with cash. If you want to pay for two people with your transport card, clearly tell the driver and wait for him to instruct you to scan your card as he needs to set the card machine to charge for two people.

If you are new to Korea or just staying for a short trip, you may not have a transport card. In this case you'll need to use cash. The driver does have the ability to give you change, but can only give you coins. Try not to put in a 5,000 won note or larger if it can be avoided as you may drain them of change. Place your cash and/or coins into the top of this unit, just below the handle and then take your seat. The driver will pull a switch which will drop the cash further into the basin. Some buses have had automatic switches that seem to operate on a timer.





Seoul has also been trialling “cash free” buses on several bus routes from 2021. Bus stops on these routes have a machine that lets you charge your card or get a QR code that can be used to board the bus. Overall, even if you’re just in Korea for a short time, a transport card will make your life much easier and is recommended if you’re getting around by bus or subway.

As soon as everyone is inside the bus, the driver will usually shut the door and start driving, even if you haven’t finished paying yet. Don’t expect the bus driver to wait for you to be seated or grab a handle before the bus starts moving. Keep proper balance or you may fall down and be especially careful if the floor is wet as rain water as snow travels inside on shoes. Likewise, when alighting at your stop make sure to stand up well in advance and wait by the door as drivers won’t often wait for long. While you’re waiting to pull up your stop, don’t forget to tap your transport card one more time otherwise you’ll be charged more than what you actually traveled!

Intercity And Express Buses

Intercity (시외버스, *sioebeoseu*) and express buses (고속버스, *gosokbeoseu*) have many similarities, yet at other times are distinctive. Compared to city buses, which stay within a city or maybe just pass into neighboring cities, intercity and express buses go much farther distances. City buses stop at bus stops, while intercity and express buses stop at terminals. Sometimes a bus terminal services only intercity or express buses and sometimes a bus terminal services both. As these are separate services, with different websites and separate apps, do not expect them to service the same cities or have similar departure times.

For example, in Seoul most intercity buses operate out of Nambu Terminal (남부터미널, *Nambu Teomineol* sometimes called Seoul Southern Intercity Bus Terminal), while most express buses are serviced by Express Bus Terminal (서울고속터미널, 서울고속터미널, *Seoul Gosong Teomineol*, Express Bus Terminal Station) and Dong Seoul Bus Terminal (동서울터미널, *Dong Seoul Teomineol*) as 동 means “east”, it may be called “East Seoul Bus Terminal.”

Intercity buses frequently stick to routes that are less than 100 km in distance and can have several stops before the final bus terminal. Express buses usually travel distances more than 100 km, stop only at the final destination, do not offer youth discounts, and also include a VAT. Intercity buses usually stick to national highways (국도, 國道, *gukdo*) while express buses use highways (고속도로, 高速道路, *gosong doro*) “more than 60% of the time.”

Tickets

Tickets can be purchased offline at a bus terminal, online with a smartphone app, or online on a website. If you purchase online, you’ll need to retrieve a physical ticket at a terminal before boarding or scan your smartphone when entering the bus. If you need to pick up a physical ticket, make sure you bring the debit/credit card used to make the transaction and you might need to know the matching phone number as well to prove you are the ticket purchaser.

The main way people purchase tickets is through smartphone apps. The company T Money has the [공식]시외버스 티머니 app for intercity buses and the separate [공식]고속버스 티머니 app for express buses. These apps are Korean language only and have been region restricted in the past and possibly now as well. The T Money ticket website is available in Korean, English, Chinese, and Japanese. As these two apps are nearly identical, the color scheme is slightly different with the intercity bus app using a green motif and the express bus using a blue motif.

Express bus tickets can also be purchased on the Kobus website. The site is available in Korean, English, Chinese, and Japanese but you’ll need to click a button in Korean in order to select another language.



Taxis



택시 - General Taxis

The most common colors will be orange, gray, and white but sometimes they can be black depending on the city. By far the most common type of taxis are classified either as “general” (일반, 一般, *ilban*) or “privately operated” (개인, 個人, *gaein*). General taxis are owned by a company and are driven by drivers working directly for the company. You'll see a sticker with the name of their company and a single digit number of 1-6 to indicate which day they are not allowed to work. This corresponds to a small calendar inside the vehicle.

Privately operated are taxis that are owned and operated by the driver and this is their personal vehicle. Due to high turnover rates in the industry, some people prefer to use privately operated



taxi as these drivers typically are doing this as their profession. If the taxi is privately owned, you will see 개인 marked on the vehicle. This sticker will be on the trunk and also the sides of the vehicle. The color of the sticker will corresponds with 가 나 or 다, which, like the company taxis, is to declare the days they are not allowed to operate.

모범택시 – Deluxe Taxis

Frequently translated as “Deluxe Taxis”, 모범택시 (模範택시, *mobeom taeksi*), they can be directly translated as “exemplary taxis” or “model taxis”. Despite 모범 in 모범택시 and 전국모범운전자연합회 (全國模範運轉者聯合會, *jeongung mobeom unjeonja yeonhapoe*) of the Best Driver Program, these are unrelated. However, the bar for entry is more difficult for both companies (requirement for business management, receipt printers, credit card payment option, etc.) and private taxi drivers (5 years of driving a private taxi without collisions, operating day restrictions, etc.) when compared to general taxis.

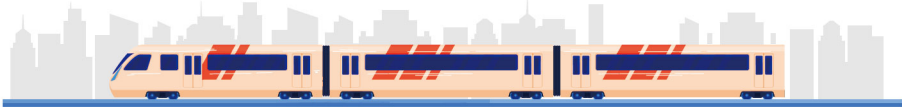
The name of this type of taxi signifies a smoother ride, a more professional driver, and better all-around service. Due to this inferred quality, the start fare is a little higher, roughly KRW 1,200 to KRW 2,800 more than a standard taxi. The starting rate for taxis will be determined by negotiations between the city transit authority and taxi groups or unions. As this is city specific, expect the price to be slightly different when you travel to another city or another region of the country.

Other Types of Taxis

There are several other types of taxis that you may encounter in Korea. International Taxis are orange in color and have International Taxi written in large letters on the side along with English, Chinese, or Japanese as the language the driver has shown efficiency in. The concept is to provide service which international travelers can more easily trust, as they can speak in a language they are more confident in and can easily communicate if there is a problem.



Types of Trains



Trains

KTX (Korea Train eXpress)

The KTX and KTX-Sancheon trains are high speed trains that can travel at a speed of up to 305km/h. The first KTX trains began service in 2004 and the number of new high speed rail routes continues to grow rapidly. As you might expect, KTX services are expectedly a bit pricier than other options but KTX services are great if you have to travel across the country but don't have a lot of time as a trip from Seoul to Busan averages around 2hrs 30mins. KTX-Sancheon trains are newer than KTX trains but there are no major differences between the services. KTX and KTX-Sancheon trains service most major cities.

Cities the KTX trains travel to include: Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, Daegu, Gwangju, Ulsan, Gyeongju, Jinju, Mokpo, Ulsan, Pohang, Changwon and Yeosu. See the map below to view all KTX stations.

You may find old information about KTX services that depart from Incheon International Airport. Please note that as of 2018 these services no longer operate.



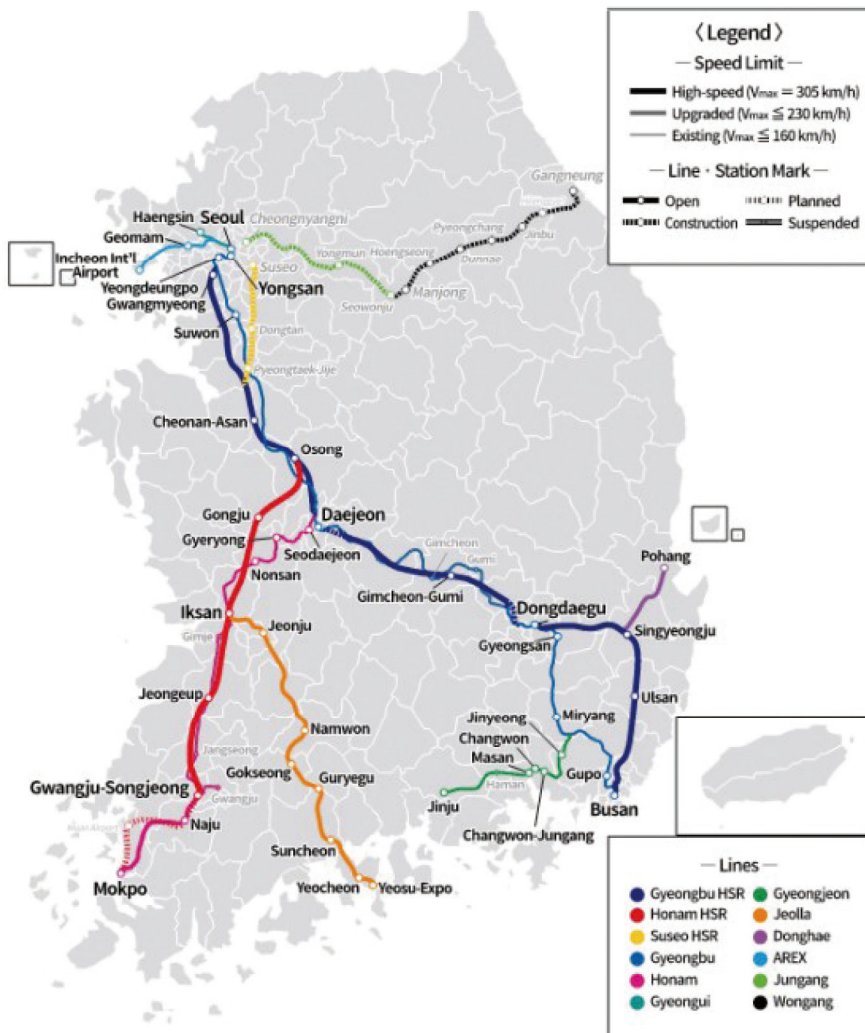


Image copyright: Wikicommons

ITX-Saemaeul



The ITX-Saemaeul is an express train that is half the speed of the KTX. It has more stops and serves many main train routes around Korea. The prices are about 20 to 30% cheaper than the KTX. The ITX-Saemaeul is a relatively new train which began replacing the original Saemaeul trains in mid-2014. There is still one Saemaul service which operates on the Janghang Line.

KTX-Eum



The KTX-Eum is a new high speed train that can travel at speeds of up to 260 km/h and began transporting passengers in January 2021. The train currently operates on the Jungang Line from Cheonyangni to Andong and will also operate on the Dong-hae Line from Suncheon to Pohang from the latter half of 2021.

Mugunghwa

The Mugunghwa is the cheapest and slowest type of train in Korea. However, a ride on this train is also a special experience. It takes you back to a time before high speed trains and is a fantastic way to see the Korean countryside. The trains are roomy inside and have space above seats for luggage. These trains are available on most routes, though less common than they used to be with the development of high-speed rail.

Nuriro

Nuriro trains are a combination of traditional and commuter rail. You buy tickets for these trains just as you would for other trains, but they stop at more stations than other services generally would. Be careful of old information regarding these trains as services in many areas were cut. Nuriro services currently operate on the Yeongdong Line (Donghae - Yeongju & Donghae - Gangneung) and the Jungang Line (Cheonyangni - Andong).

Sightseeing Trains

There are also a number of sightseeing train services around the country. Many operate all year round, while some only operate at certain times of the year. Sightseeing train tickets can generally be booked via the Korail website like other train services. One exception is the "Rail-cruise Haerang" which must be booked via the website.

For more information on sightseeing trains you can contact Korail's international Customer Service Center on (+82) 1599-7777.

Purchasing Train Tickets

Train tickets can be bought on the Let's Korail website or at stations which service passenger trains. Tickets are sold via self-ticketing machines and can be also bought over the counter at major destinations. Ticketing machines have an English option available and are fairly easy to use.

Korail also has an official app "KorailTalk" which can be used to book train tickets straight from your smartphone or mobile device. Search for it on the App Store or Google Play. There are both Korean and English apps available, but be aware that some users have experienced issues using the English.

Korail Pass

The Korail Pass is a multi-day train pass aimed at visitors from overseas which makes it more affordable to travel around Korea by train. Note that the Korail Pass does not include SRT, metro or tourist trains. To reserve a pass or find out more information, please visit the Korean website at www.letskorail.com.

Catching Trains

Catching passenger trains in Korea is very easy. For most services, once you have your ticket you can simply get on the train. You do not need to show your ticket or pass through a gate. On arrival at the station, check the information boards and head to the gate your train leaves from. Find your car number, board the train, find your seat and wait to depart.

Do make sure you keep your ticket with you at all times as staff will come through and check that passengers are in the right seats using mobile devices. You may also need to show it to other passengers if you find someone else sitting in your seat. Sometimes passengers with standing room tickets may also be in your seat as well. Just show them your ticket and they'll get the message.



Air Travel

Korean Air is the flag carrier of Korea. The other primary domestic airline is Asiana, which was bought by Korean Air in 2020. While the Asiana brand remains for now, it will eventually fade into history once the merger is complete. Both these, a growing list of low-cost carriers, and a number of overseas airlines service Korea. When searching for airline tickets, you might want to check with several companies and several airports to see the best price and best times for your trip. Most domestic travel websites are Korean language only, but the websites of the airlines tend to be multilingual.

Most major cities are accessible by airplane, with the route from Gimpo (Seoul) to Jeju Island being the busiest in the world with almost 80,000 flights operated between 2018-2019. Although cities like Daegu, Gwangju and Busan all have airports, when travelling from Seoul it's often more common for people to use KTX or SRT high-speed trains as there is not much of a time difference. It's recommended that you check the websites of airports and airlines for any requirements related to COVID-19.



E-scooters and Personal Mobility Devices

Introduction and History

Over the past few years, the popularity of motorized or electric scooters has exploded across Korea. In 2020 there were an estimated 35,850 personal mobility devices in Seoul. By 2021, this number had grown to over 68,000.

While some people ride their own device, the majority of people use shared e-scooters which you can find throughout most cities. Before using these devices, make sure you're familiar with the rules and how to use them.

Be careful of outdated rules and information online regarding e-scooters as the rules have changed several times over the past few years.



- ✓ Always look out for pedestrians
- ✓ Wear a helmet
- ✓ Don't pass by pedestrians at high speeds
- ✓ Do not operate under the influence of alcohol (maximum 200,000 won fine)
- ✓ Don't wear earphones or use your phone while riding
- ✓ Avoid using electric scooters during bad weather



Renting an Electric Scooter

Borrowing scooters is usually done by downloading the scooter company's app and then scanning a QR code on the scooter. Be aware that you will need to set a payment method too. Some apps may have English options, but expect to come across a lot of Korean. Searching blogs for the specific brand may help you. Some scooters also have English instructions on them, but again this depends on the brand.

Rules and Regulations

A Can anyone ride electric scooters?

Q No. You must hold a Korean driver's license to legally use electric scooters in Korea. Teenagers aged 16 years (international age) that have a motorcycle license can also use e-scooters. The fine for an underage person caught using e-scooters is 100,000 won with a maximum fine of 200,000 won.

A Can I ride them on the sidewalk?

Q While you may see people doing this, according to the current laws motorized scooters must be ridden on the edge of roads or using any available cycle paths.

A Can my friend ride with me?

Q Electric scooters must be used alone and being caught giving someone a ride could result in a 40,000 won fine with a maximum fine of 200,000 won.



Image copyright: Seoul Metropolitan City

- A** Do I have to wear a helmet?
- Q** Yes, being caught without a helmet could lead to a fine from 20,000 to 200,000 won. Be weary about information related to this rule as it has changed multiple times over the years.
- A** Where can I park my scooter?
- Q** Electric scooters are convenient, but have been gaining a bad reputation due to users leaving them on the sidewalk or other places in the way of pedestrians. Around cities you will see areas where other scooters and bicycles are parked. Please leave your device in these areas.



Image copyright: Seoul Metropolitan City



Image copyright: Seoul Metropolitan City

In some cities (including Seoul), scooters can be towed if parked in areas such as on tactile surfaces or in front of pedestrian crossings, fire equipment, bus stops and subway entrances. The fee for towing in Seoul is 40,000 won.

Shared Bikes

While the number of shared bike programs is expanding, we'll briefly touch on two of the programs.

Seoul

Ddareungi is Seoul's official bike rental system which has operated since 2015. The bikes are available in many places all around the city and can be found around popular destinations such as subway stations, residential complexes and other high foot traffic areas.

It's important to note that there are two types of Ddareungi bikes: Ddareungi, and New Ddareungi. To rent Ddareungi bikes, download the app on the App Store or Google Play by searching "따릉이" or "Seoul Public Bike". Users that sign up to the service can register prepaid T-Money cards within the app for quick and easy payment.

Renting a bike

Ddareungi

Purchase ride coupon > Select location > Enter verification code > Use bike

NEW Ddareungi >

Purchase ride coupon > Press the rent button > Scan the QR code > Use bike



Daejeon

Daejeon's bike rental service is called Tashu and bikes can be rented from dedicated stations around the city. To rent a bike you can either use the kiosks at the stations or the smart-reader device attached to the bike itself. After you have finished using the bike, you will need to return it to one of the bike stations.

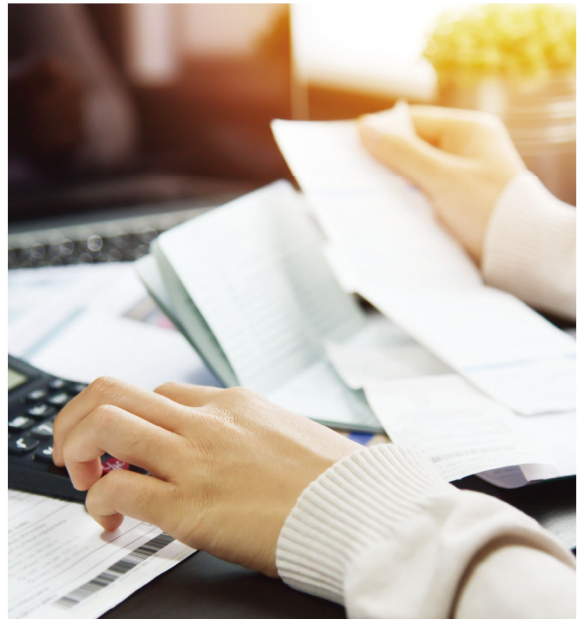
Banks



Quick Intro

Banks will require an Alien Registration Card and/or a passport and sometimes proof of employment to open an account in Korea. Due to the sheer number of banks and the variety of accounts they offer, we cannot 100% say what is required for each. If you setup an account with your passport, they'll only have your passport on file and the passport will be necessary to bring in person to do certain transactions. If you opened your account with only your passport and are going to live in Korea more than a few months, take both your passport and your alien card and inform the teller to add your domestic ID to your account.

While joint accounts, for example that of a married couple, are common in certain countries, they are nearly nonexistent in Korea. While it is possible to get an account with two cards, one name will be attached and that will be the sole owner of the account. Some dating couples do this and each put in a small amount each month with the express purpose of using it for dates. However getting an account with two owners, AKA co-signers, is difficult if not impossible to do.



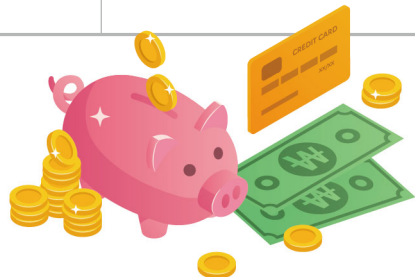
List of Banks

Major Banks







Names and logos	Website	International call center
 SHINHAN BANK  신한은행	www.shinhan.com English, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Thai, Mongolian	1577-8380 English, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mongolian, Thai, Russian, Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian
 WOORI BANK  우리은행	www.wooribank.com English, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Mongolian - Woori Card website www.wooricard.com	1599-2288 English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Uzbek, Russian, Thai, Mongolian, Japanese - Woori Card Customer Service 02-2169-5900 English
 KEB Hana Bank  KEB 하나은행	www.kebhana.com English, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese	1599-6111 English, Chinese - Overseas: +82-42-520-2500 (ext. 8)
 KB Kookmin Bank  KB 국민은행	www.kbstar.com English, Chinese, Japanese	1599-4477 English, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Vietnamese, Russian, Cambodian
 citibank 한국 씨티은행	www.citibank.co.kr English	02-3704-7100 English
Standard Chartered SC제일은행 	www.standardchartered.co.kr English	1577-7744 English

Government Banks

Names and logos	Website	International call center
 Industrial Bank of Korea	global.ibk.co.kr English, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Uzbek, Filipino, Nepalese, Cambodian, Russian, Thai, Sinhala	1566-2566 English, Chinese
 NongHyup Bank  NH 농협은행	banking.nonghyup.com English, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, Russian, Mongolian, Cambodian	1588-2100 English, Japanese, Chinese
 KDB Bank  KDB 산업은행	www.kdb.co.kr English	1599-6111 English, Chinese, Japanese
 Korea Eximbank <small>THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF KOREA</small>  한국수출입은행 <small>THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF KOREA</small>	www.koreaexim.go.kr English	N/A
 Sh SUHYUP  Sh 수협은행	www.suhyup-bank.com Korean only	N/A



Local Banks

Names and logos	Website	International call center
 BNK Kyongnam Bank BNK 경남은행	www.knbank.co.kr English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian	N/A
 BNK BUSAN BANK BNK 부산은행	gbank.busanbank.co.kr English, Japanese, Chinese	N/A
 DGB Daegu Bank DGB 대구은행	www.dgb.co.kr English, Chinese	N/A
 Kwangju Bank 광주은행	www.kjbank.com English	N/A
 JEJU BANK 제주은행	www.e-jejubank.com English	N/A
 전북은행	www.jbbank.co.kr Korean only	N/A



Domestic Transfers

If you would like to send money to other accounts in Korea, you can transfer money at a bank, ATM, the bank's website, or with the bank's smartphone app. You can transfer funds up to your current balance. If you transfer money to a different bank, you may incur a transaction fee depending on your bank's policy and agreements with other domestic banks.

If sending a transfer through a teller, you will need a few items. You'll need identification, the same identification you used to open the account, so either your passport or Alien Registration Card. You'll also need to bring your bankbook or debit card to send funds from your account.

Automatic Transfers or Payments

If you would like to make a regular automatic transfer, you can visit a bank branch and request for automatic transfer (자동이체, 自動移替, *jadongiche*). You need to fill out an application form indicating the amount of money and deposit account information. If you transfer money to a different bank, you may incur a transaction fee depending on your bank's policy and agreements with other domestic banks. You can also set auto payment for the monthly housing management fee.

Overseas Transfers

If you would like to send money overseas, you can transfer money at a bank. At designated foreign exchange banks, you can annually transfer up to \$50,000 USD (remittance + fees). If you are sending a large amount you may be asked to produce a document that tells how the money was acquired, sometimes translated as certificate of earned income. Different banks charge different fees and apply different restrictions on transfers. Therefore, it is recommended that you compare information from different banks before setting up your account or you can set up an account at another bank later.

Depending on the bank and the destination country, you can send funds via an ATM or the bank's website. Korean banks only deal with a limited number of currencies. If you are sending money overseas into a currency your bank does not normally work with, you may have your money transferred into a major currency first, for example Euro or USD, and then into the destination currency. Some Korean banks allow foreign currency accounts. Even in these cases, incoming funds get converted into Korean won.

Digital Certificates

A digital certificate (공인인증서, 公認認證書, *gongininjeungseo*) is an electronic certificate stored on a smartphone, hard drive, and/or USB stick. Even if you have a security card or OTP, you will not be able to do electronic banking without one of these. It seems that all banks require this in order to transfer funds electronically, i.e., via smartphone or their website. Some banks require these for login while some let you use a separate ID and password. Here is the dual login system at KEB Hana's English website.

Digital certificates are backed by the Korea Financial Telecommunications & Clearings Institute (KFTC) which allows Yesign to provide them to the public. You'll see both of these names on occasion while doing banking online.

Log in with a digital certificate

Digital Certificate Login

Digital Certificate Center

Digital Certificate Login

Settings

Termination

Be sure to remember your user ID and password as they are required to use the Digital Certificate Center.

Log In ID

ID

Password

Log In

Find ID

Both user ID/password and digital certificate logins will be disabled after 5 consecutive wrong-password attempts.

Clear Password Registration/Change Error

In addition to logging in and transferring funds, you will also need to have a digital certificate in order to file taxes. The certificate is how you login to the Korean government tax websites. It also is how you prove your income, where you spent money, and what kind of deductions you can get – all of these things are connected to this certificate.

You can create a certificate for free or you can pay money to get a paid version of the digital certificate. For price and other related information on the paid version, you'll need to check your bank's website for details. If you are unsure which version to get, go with the free version as you can go to the paid version at any time.

As these certificates are your financial identity online, one person can have only one. Even though many people have several bank accounts, they cannot have several certificates; they can have only one certificate. If you have two bank accounts you will need to get it issued at one bank, and then register it at the other banks. The process can be troublesome, especially if you've never done it before, but it is possible. To do any of these options, you'll need to go to your bank's digital certificate center. They will all basically have the same options, but their design can be very different.



Debit Cards

Debit cards, usually directly translated as check cards (phonetically written as 체크카드), will be the easiest to obtain. They are directly tied with your bank account and can only be used if your account has enough funds. If you try to withdraw more than is in your account, the transaction will be declined. There is no financial penalty for when this happens. Usually a vague message appears on the register and you may get an error text message on your smartphone telling you about the insufficient funds.



When getting a new card issued, banks normally mail the card and require you sign for it. As packages get delivered during working hours, you should consider getting it sent to your work as it will be easier to sign for it.

Korean citizens can more easily get a debit card with deferred payment transportation card built in. This kind of debit card can be used as a debit card and also for public transportation. Mass transit charges are totaled at the end of the week or month and are then deducted from the bank account. This service has existed off and on for international residents depending on the year, the bank, and what services that banks offer with normal or speciality versions of their debit cards. As this is a case by case situation which changes even within the same bank, you will need to talk directly with your bank to see if your debit card can have transportation card functionality.

Security Cards

A security card (보안카드, 保安카드, *boan kadeu*) is an identification card with many sets of numbers that are used for internet or mobile banking. This will come necessary near the end of a transaction as a safety feature to make sure no one hacked your account. The banking site will ask for the first two numbers on a certain line and the last two numbers of another line. In the example below, they want the first two numbers next to 25, which are 56 and the last two numbers next to 16, which are 34.

The front of the card shows the bank and the back of the card has all the important security information. These cards have a special ID number at the top right of the card.

citi 씨티은행 NO. *****

1	7	13	19	25	56	78
2	8	14	20			
3	9	15	21			
4	10	16	12	34		
5	11	17	23			
6	12	18	24			

Sample

- Enter 56 or the first two digits of 5678, which is No. 56 password
- Enter 56 or the last two digits of 1234, which is No. 34 password

First two digits of No.25 password		Last two digits of No.16 password	
56	**	**	34

Image provided by Hi Korea eGovernment for Foreigners

This eight-digit code identifies the card and connects the card to your account. Most of the cards displays 30 random number combinations, each four digits long. When you want to complete a transaction, you'll be asked to enter the first two numbers from a randomly selected section and the last two numbers from another randomly selected section. If you lose your security card, you will get another one with different sets of numbers.

In order not to bring another plastic card in a wallet, some people take a picture of their card and save it on their phone. This is a security flaw as anyone with access to your phone could have access to your security card and accordingly be able to withdraw money. Unfortunately, this is not theoretical as there have been instances in which someone's account has been hacked and money stolen electronically. During at least one investigation, it was discovered that the victim had a picture of their security card stored within their smartphone. The court has ruled that based on this lapse in security done by the victim, the bank was not responsible for the breach and related theft and therefore was not responsible to repay the stolen funds to the victim. With this in mind, we highly recommend you do not store an image of your security card in your phone or anywhere else.

While plastic and the same size as a credit card, these are slightly thinner so feel different to the touch. When the bank distributes these cards, they come in a semitransparent plastic wrap that is significantly blackened so even the tellers cannot see the numbers. This should be an indication to you that the card should not be shown to anyone, including banking staff.

Living in Korea

A Guide for
International Scientists at the
Institute for Basic Science



ibS Institute for Basic Science

55, Expo-ro, Yuseong-gu, Daejeon, Korea, 34126

Tel: +82-42-878-8114 **Fax:** +82-42-878-8079

www.ibs.re.kr

ISBN: 978-0-578-35808-6



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