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## South Korea

Official Name: *Republic of Korea*

LAST UPDATED: DECEMBER 30, 2015

### Embassy Messages

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### Quick Facts

- **PASSPORT VALIDITY:**  
Must be valid at time of entry
- **VACCINATIONS:**  
None
- **BLANK PASSPORT PAGES:**  
One page required for entry stamp
- **CURRENCY RESTRICTIONS FOR ENTRY:**  
None
- **TOURIST VISA REQUIRED:**  
None required for stays under 90 days or less
- **CURRENCY RESTRICTIONS FOR EXIT:**  
None

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#### Embassies and Consulates

##### [U.S. Embassy Seoul](#)

**188 Sejong-daero, Jongno-gu,  
Seoul, Republic of Korea  
110-710**

**Telephone:** +(82) (2) 397-4114 (from within Korea, dial 02-397-4114)

**Emergency After-Hours Telephone:** +(82) (0) (2) 397-4114.

**Fax:** +(82) (2) 397-4101

[seoulinfoACS@state.gov](mailto:seoulinfoACS@state.gov)

DSN: 721-4114

**U.S. Mailing Address:  
American Citizens Services  
U.S. Embassy Seoul  
Unit #9600  
DPO AP 96209**

### **Destination Description**

The Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) is a highly developed, stable, democratic republic with powers shared between the president and the legislature. South Korea is a modern economy where tourist facilities are widely available. English is rarely spoken outside the main tourist and business centers.

You can find information about tourism in the Republic of Korea through the [Korea Tourism Organization \(KTO\)](#) website (in English) or by calling 1-800-868-7567 from the United States and Canada. The KTO operates a free, 24-hour Korea Travel Hotline available by dialing 1330 within Korea or +82-2-1330 from outside Korea. The 1330 Korea Travel Hotline has English-language speakers who can provide tourism information, assist with travel reservations, address safety and medical needs, handle tourist complaints, and provide English translation services. The KTO operates several Tourist Information Centers throughout Korea that can provide in-person assistance. In Seoul, the Metropolitan Government operates the [Seoul Global Center \(SGC\)](#) to assist foreigners with a variety of services. You can reach the SGC English language helpline by calling (02) 1688-0120 or 02-2075-4180. The SGC is open from 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and is located at 38 Jong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, near Jonggak metro station, Exit 1.

Read the Department of State's [Fact Sheet on the Republic of Korea](#) for additional information on U.S.-Republic of Korea relations.

### **Entry, Exit & Visa Requirements**

You must have a valid passport to enter the Republic of Korea. U.S. citizens can enter the Republic of Korea without a visa for a stay of 90 days or less for tourism or temporary business purposes. If you are visiting the Republic of Korea for employment, for any profit-making reason, to teach English, or for stays longer than 90 days, you must get a visa at an ROK embassy or consulate prior to entering the Republic of Korea. In addition, if you plan to stay for longer than 90 days, you must apply for an Alien Registration Card.

The Government of the Republic of Korea strictly enforces immigration laws and regulations. If you plan to stay in Korea past your visa expiration date, you must contact the Korea Immigration Service (KIS) as soon as possible to apply for an extension. If you stay in the Republic of Korea beyond your visa expiration date, you will be required to pay a fine before you can leave the country. In most cases, you cannot change the status of your visa from one type to another (for example, from tourism to teaching) within the Republic of Korea. If you want to change your visa status, you must depart the Republic of Korea and apply for a new visa at an ROK embassy or consulate in another country.

The KIS collects the biometric data (digital photo and fingerprints) of foreign visitors at ports of entry (international airports and seaports). Children under the age of 17 and foreign government and international organization officials and their accompanying immediate family members are exempt from this requirement. Questions about this requirement should be directed to the [nearest ROK embassy or consulate](#) .

**For ROK-born or Ethnic Korean Visitors:** If you were born in the Republic of Korea, if you once held ROK citizenship, or if you are an ethnic Korean (whether or not you previously held ROK citizenship), you may qualify for residence status in the Republic of Korea. If you think you may qualify for this status, you should check with the Korean Immigration Service to determine what documents the ROK government will require in order to grant you this benefit. For additional visa information in English, please visit the [ROK's website on visas](#) .

**For Military Personnel/DOD:** U.S. military personnel and Department of Defense (DOD) civilians have different entry requirements, which are governed by the [DOD Foreign Clearance Guide](#) . DOD travelers must consult the Foreign Clearance Guide and follow all instructions before traveling to the Republic of Korea.

U.S. military personnel traveling to Korea on orders, including leave orders, may enter the Republic of Korea under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) using only their DOD identification card and travel orders. While en route to Korea, however, military personnel should not transit countries (such as China) that require a passport unless they also have a passport and, if necessary, a visa.

Family members/dependents of active-duty personnel assigned to U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) must have valid passports to enter the Republic of Korea and should obtain an A-3 SOFA visa before arriving in the Republic of Korea. DOD civilians, DOD contractors supporting the U.S. military in the Republic of Korea, and their family members/dependents must also have a valid passport to enter the Republic of Korea and must obtain an A-3 visa and SOFA stamp within 90 days after arriving in the Republic of Korea.

DOD civilians, DOD contractors supporting the U.S. military in the Republic of Korea, and their family members/dependents must also have a valid passport to enter the Republic of Korea, and must also obtain an A-3 visa and

SOFA stamp within 90 days after arriving in the Republic of Korea.

All DOD personnel assigned to the U.S. Embassy and their family members/dependents must enter the Republic of Korea on either diplomatic or official passports with the appropriate ROK visas, obtained through their sponsoring DOD agencies. In addition, all DOD travelers on official business require a country clearance through the [DOD APACS system](#) .

U.S. government Executive Branch personnel traveling to the Republic of Korea on official business must obtain a country clearance via the [Department of State's eCC system](#). Official travelers on official business should enter the Republic of Korea on either diplomatic or official passports. A diplomatic or official visa from the nearest ROK embassy or consulate is required.

**For Third-country DOD employees:** If you are a non-U.S. citizen DOD employee traveling on a passport from one of the following countries, you must obtain an ROK visa, regardless of the reason for or duration of travel: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, China, Croatia, Cuba, Georgia, Ghana, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

**HIV/AIDS Restrictions:** The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions for visitors to or foreign residents of the Republic of Korea. The Republic of Korea no longer restricts tourists with HIV/AIDS from visiting.

Information about [dual-nationality](#) or the prevention of international [child abduction](#) can be found on our website. For further information about customs regulations, please read our [Customs information page](#) . Visit the [Embassy of the Republic of Korea website](#) for the most current visa information.

### **Safety and Security**

**Public Demonstrations:** The Republic of Korea (ROK) is a modern democracy with active public political participation, and political demonstrations are common. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational. Avoid demonstrations whenever possible, and exercise caution if you find yourself caught up in one.

**North Korea (DPRK):** An armistice agreement, monitored by the United Nations, has maintained general peace on the Korean peninsula since 1953. Tensions have occasionally flared up because of provocative acts by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including ballistic missile tests, nuclear tests, and limited armed incursions into ROK-held territory. Some of these provocations have escalated into geographically limited skirmishes taking place primarily around isolated islands off the northwest coast of the ROK.

The Republic of Korea maintains a high level of readiness to respond to any military threats from the DPRK. Military training exercises are routinely conducted throughout the Republic of Korea during the year and include civil defense drills, which are normally held four times a year. The DPRK often issues strongly-worded and threatening messages in connection with these exercises. Please see our [Fact Sheet on North Korea](#) for more information.

**Emergency Preparedness:** The U.S. Embassy in Seoul maintains a web page with local information about emergency preparedness. Stay informed by bookmarking [Disaster Preparedness](#) page and following local current events during your time in Korea.

During the monsoon season from June - August and the typhoon season from May - November, heavy rains and flooding sometimes occur in the Republic of Korea. See general information about natural disaster preparedness at the U.S. [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) website.

If the Embassy becomes aware of any specific and credible threat to your safety and security, we will inform through our website, through social media, or by email if you register your contact details through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP).

Follow us on [U.S. Embassy Seoul's "Americans in Korea" Facebook page](#) .

To stay connected:

- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) so we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements.
- Follow the Bureau of Consular Affairs on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) .
- Bookmark the [Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), which contains the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#) as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#).
- Follow the U.S. Embassy in ROK on Twitter [Twitter US Embassy Seoul](#) and by visiting the Embassy's website
- In the event of an emergency, contact us at 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the United States and Canada, or via a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444, from other countries.
- Take some time before traveling to consider your personal security and checking for useful tips for [traveling safely abroad](#).

**CRIME:** For most visitors, the Republic of Korea remains a very safe country. When you travel, stay alert to any unusual activity around your home, hotel, or business, and report any significant incidents to the local police. For emergency assistance in the Republic of Korea, dial 112.

Compared to the United States, the crime rate in the Republic of Korea is low. The most common crimes (pick-pocketing, purse snatching, and thefts from hotel rooms or homes) occur more frequently in major metropolitan areas, tourist areas, and crowded markets.

In 2014, 18 U.S. citizens reported to the U.S. Embassy in Seoul that they were sexually assaulted. Most were young women assaulted by acquaintances after drinking alcohol socially. The ROK has specialized police and hospital units to assist victims. Women traveling alone should review our [travel tips for Women Travelers](#).

Reduce the likelihood of becoming a crime victim by taking the same common-sense security precautions you would take in the United States. Use caution in crowded entertainment, nightlife, and shopping districts throughout Korea. Exercise caution when traveling alone at night; consider traveling in groups. Only use legitimate taxis or public transportation.

Don't buy counterfeit and pirated goods, even if they are widely available. It is against Korean law to purchase these goods and against U.S. law to bring them into the United States. The [Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Division in the U.S. Department of Justice](#) has more information on this serious problem.

**VICTIMS OF CRIME:** If you or someone you know becomes the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. We can:

- Replace a stolen passport.
- Help you find appropriate medical care if you are the victim of violent crimes such as assault or rape.
- Put you in contact with the appropriate police authorities, and if you want us to, contact family members or friends.
- Provide you with the [on-line help for American victims of crime in South Korea](#) ;
- Help you understand the local criminal justice process and direct you to local attorneys, although it is important to remember that local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting the crime.

The local equivalent to the "911" emergency line in the Republic of Korea is "112" or 02-112 from a cell phone.

Please see our [information for victims of crime](#), including possible victim compensation programs in the United States.

#### **Local Laws & Special Circumstances**

**CRIMINAL PENALTIES:** While you are traveling in another country, you are subject to its laws. Persons violating the Republic of Korea's laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. The ROK's National Security Law grants authorities the power to detain, arrest, and imprison persons believed to have committed acts intended to endanger the "security of the state." Such acts include statements deemed to praise the political system and/or officials of the DPRK. In 2015, a U.S. citizen was detained and ultimately deported for allegedly making such statements. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in the Republic of Korea can be severe, and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences, heavy fines, and deportation at the end of their sentence. Possession of even small amounts of marijuana or synthetic drugs such as "spice" can result in arrest and stiff penalties. U.S. citizens in the Republic of Korea have been arrested for past use of illegal drugs based on evidence from urine tests and hair sampling. ROK authorities thoroughly screen international mail for illegal items and substances and have arrested U.S. citizens for accepting international mail packages that contain illegal drugs. See also information on drugs in the section on Special Circumstances under Customs Regulations. Engaging in illicit sexual conduct or using or disseminating child pornography is a crime in the Republic of Korea, and it is also [prosecutable in the United States](#).

**Arrest notifications in host country:** While some countries will automatically notify the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate if a U.S. citizen is detained or arrested in that country, others may not. To ensure that the United States is aware of your circumstances, request that the police and prison officials notify U.S. Embassy Seoul as soon as you are arrested or detained in the Republic of Korea.

#### **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES:**

**Special problems with dual nationality, especially relating to military service:** The Republic of Korea allows dual citizenship in certain cases, with differing rules for men and women. If you believe you may have a claim to ROK citizenship, including as a dual citizen, you should inquire with ROK authorities or the nearest ROK embassy or consulate.

Some U.S. and ROK dual nationals are subject to compulsory military service. The Embassy strongly advises all persons with possible ROK citizenship who are of conscription age to consult the [Korean Military Manpower Administration website](#)

**Customs Regulations:** If you are traveling to or from the Republic of Korea, or just transiting the ROK, you should be aware that the Korea Customs Service (KCS) strictly enforces regulations on importing and exporting items such as firearms, ammunition, explosives, narcotics and prescription drugs (see below), non-prescription health supplements, radio equipment, and gold. KCS also restricts importation of books, drawings, video or audio recordings that are considered obscene, subversive, or in any way harmful to the public peace.

Certain prescription drugs are considered controlled substances. Visitors who plan to hand-carry, ship, or import prescription amphetamines or narcotics must apply for permission from the Narcotics Control Division, Ministry of Food and Drug Safety. Instructions for obtaining the Permit Letter can be found on the [U.S. Embassy Seoul consular website health information page](#).

Customs regulations also apply to items mailed to and from the Republic of Korea. As a result, several U.S. citizens have been prosecuted for participation in drug smuggling via international mail.

Amphetamines are illegal in South Korea and even prescription amphetamines and other prescription narcotics will not be permitted into the country without advance permission from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety in the form of a "bring-in permit letter." More information on how to obtain a "bring-in-permit letter" can be found on the [U.S. Embassy Seoul, Health Information page](#).

The Republic of Korea has customs laws and regulations to prevent the spread of livestock diseases, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, known as "mad cow" disease), hoof-and-mouth disease, avian influenza, H1N1 (Influenza A), and others. The products which must be declared to ROK customs officials upon arrival include, but are not limited to: live animals, including dogs, cats, and pet birds; animal products, including antlers, bone, and blood meal; beef, pork, mutton, chicken meat, and processed meat products, such as sausages, ham, meat jerky, boiled meat, canned products, and boiled eggs; processed dairy products, such as milk, cheese, and butter; and processed egg products, such as egg, egg white, and egg powder. Further information is contained on the [Korean Customs Regulations website](#).

All travelers bringing a pet to South Korea must adhere to strict pet importation requirements. For the most current information about traveling to Korea with pets, visit the website of [Korea's Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency](#) .

Please see our information on [customs regulations](#).

Passport Seizures, Exit Bans, and Commercial Disputes: If you become involved in a commercial dispute, the Government of the Republic of Korea may seize your passport and block your departure from the Republic of Korea. While we can reissue a passport to you upon your application, we cannot lift the ROK exit ban.

Exit Permits: Usually you do not need an exit permit to leave the Republic of Korea; however, if one parent requests the Korean Immigration Service (KIS) to place a travel restriction on his or her child, Korean authorities may prevent the child from departing even if the child is traveling with the other parent.

Working in the Republic of Korea: If you are traveling to the Republic of Korea to work, including teaching or modeling, you must enter the Republic of Korea with the appropriate work visa. If you enter Korea on another type of visa, you cannot change your status from any other visa to a work visa unless you first leave the country. If you begin work without the appropriate visa, you may be arrested, fined, and deported. If you are working without a valid work permit and get into a contractual dispute with your employer, you will have little or no legal recourse under Korean law.

Teaching English: Detailed information about obtaining a visa to teach English in Korea (E-2 Visa) is available on the [U.S. embassy Seoul consular website](#).

The government of the Republic of Korea and/or your employer will require you to submit the results of a criminal records check and a health certificate when applying for an E-2 visa or extension. The U.S. Embassy in Seoul cannot provide criminal records checks or provide fingerprinting services; nor can the Embassy authenticate criminal records checks or health certificates. The ROK will accept only an FBI criminal records check. You should have these documents prepared before coming to Korea to teach.



We frequently receive complaints from English teachers at private language schools called hagwons. The most frequent complaints are that the schools and/or employment agencies have misrepresented salaries, working conditions, living arrangements, and other benefits, including health insurance, even when the employee has a written contract. There have also been some complaints of physical assault, threats of arrest/deportation, and sexual harassment. Some U.S.-based employment agencies have misrepresented contract terms, employment conditions, or the need for an appropriate work visa. In recent years, ROK police have investigated a number of foreign teachers for document fraud. Several U.S. citizens have been arrested and charged with possession of fraudulent university diplomas that were used to obtain employment in the Republic of Korea. English teachers have also been investigated for possession and use of illicit drugs. Please see our comprehensive website section on ["Teaching English in Korea"](#) for the most current information.

**LGBT RIGHTS:** Consensual same-sex sexual activity is not criminalized or specifically mentioned in Korea's Constitution or civil penal code. Same-sex activity between military service members, however, is punishable under the Military's Penal Code. Same-sex marriages or relationships are not legally recognized. South Korean citizens can legally change their gender identity.

The Republic of Korea remains a conservative country in regards to LGBT issues. The LGBT community and awareness of LGBT issues, however, are becoming more visible, particularly in Seoul. Korea has an increasing number of LGBT-oriented clubs, festivals and non-governmental organizations that advocate for LGBT issues. The ROK National Human Rights Commission Act prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of sexual orientation. There are no laws, however, specifying punishment for persons found to have discriminated against LGBT persons and societal discrimination exists against LGBT persons and persons with HIV/AIDS.

For more detailed information about LGBT rights in the Republic of Korea, you may review the [State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013](#). For further information on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) travel, please read our [Information for LGBT Travelers](#) page.

**ACCESSIBILITY:** While in the Republic of Korea, individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from in the United States. Korean law mandates access to transportation, communication, and public buildings for persons with disabilities, but individuals with physical disabilities may find less accessibility than in the United States.

Metro (subway) cars and buses in Seoul offer priority seating for the disabled. Most metro stations have escalators and elevators. Metro platforms include Braille information only in Korean. Travelers are encouraged to contact individual bus companies and subway associations for more information. Cross walks typically have audio and visual signals. Older buildings and streets are generally less accessible to individuals with disabilities.

U.S. citizens who possess ROK alien registration cards can contact their local ward office for information on assistance for individuals with disabilities that may be available to them. The assistance provided may vary by ward.

## Health

Hospitals in the Republic of Korea are generally well-equipped with state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic equipment. High quality general and specialty dental care is available in Seoul. Western-style medical facilities are available in major urban areas of Seoul, Busan, Daegu, and a few other large cities. Not all doctors and staff in these major urban areas, however, are proficient in English. Most clinics in rural areas do not have an English-speaking doctor. A [list of hospitals](#) and medical specialists who speak English is available on our website. For information on medical evacuation from South Korea, please see the State Department's brochure on [Air Ambulance/MedEvac/Medical Escort Providers](#).

Pharmacies are plentiful and first-rate, and most prescribed medications, except psychotropic medications, can be obtained with a prescription. See information on importing prescription medication in the section on Special Circumstances under Customs Regulations. Medicines often have a different brand name than that in the United States. When you visit South Korea, you should bring with you an adequate supply of any medication you require in its original container, which should be clearly labeled. You should also carry a copy of your prescription from your doctor in case immigration or customs authorities ask for it. ROK ambulances do not carry sophisticated medical equipment, and the ambulance personnel do not have the same level of emergency medical training as do those in the United States. However, ambulances operated by the fire department (dial 119) will respond very quickly and take patients to the nearest hospital.

You can find detailed information on vaccinations and other health precautions on the [CDC website](#) . For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the [World Health Organization \(WHO\) website](#) , which contains additional health information for travelers, including [detailed country-specific health information](#) .

### **Travel & Transportation**

**TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS:** While in the Republic of Korea, you may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The ROK's roads are well-paved, traffic lights are functional, and most drivers comply with basic traffic laws. The Republic of Korea, however, has a significantly higher traffic fatality rate than does the United States. Causes of accidents include excessive speed, frequent lane changes without signaling, running red lights, aggressive bus drivers, and weaving motorcyclists. You should be aware that motorcyclists sometimes drive on the sidewalks, and drivers of all types of vehicles do not always yield to pedestrians in marked crosswalks. It is safer to use pedestrian underpasses and overpasses where available.

Some traffic laws in the Republic of Korea differ from traffic laws in the United States. Left-hand turns are generally prohibited except where a green arrow indicates otherwise. You may turn right on a red light after coming to a complete stop. Seat belts are mandatory. Children riding in the front seat of vehicles must wear a seat belt or use an appropriate child car seat. Passengers on motorcycles must wear helmets. If you are a short-term visitor and wish to drive in the Republic of Korea, you must have an international driving permit issued in the United States by the American Automobile Association (AAA) or the American Automobile Touring Alliance (AATA). Otherwise, you must have an ROK driver's license.

In all accidents involving an automobile and a pedestrian or motorcycle, the driver of the automobile, regardless of citizenship, is presumed to be at fault. Police investigations of traffic accidents usually involve long waits at police stations. Police may take the passport of a foreigner involved in a traffic accident if there is any personal injury or a dispute about the cause of the accident. Criminal charges and heavy penalties are common in accidents involving injury, even if negligence is not proven. If you are arrested due to an accident involving serious injury or death, you may be detained until the conclusion of the police investigation and legal process. When driving in the Republic of Korea, you may wish to carry a disposable camera to document any traffic accidents, even minor ones.

You are considered legally intoxicated in the Republic of Korea when you have a blood-alcohol level of 0.05% or higher. The ROK police actively enforce drunken driving laws and set up DUI checkpoints that are difficult to avoid. All drivers are required to submit to a breathalyzer test. Refusal to take the breath-test can result in cancellation of your license. Driving while intoxicated can result in significant fines and license suspension or even cancellation.

For specific information about ROK driver's permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, and mandatory insurance, you can refer to our [Road Safety page](#). Also, you may wish to visit the website of the [Korea Tourism Organization \(KTO\)](#) or call the office at 1-800-868-7567 and contact the national authority responsible for road safety.

**AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT:** The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of the Republic of Korea's Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of the ROK's air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the [FAA's Safety Assessment Page](#) .

Please see Fact Sheet for this country.

### Assistance for U.S. Citizens

#### U.S. Embassy Seoul

188 Sejong-daero, Jongno-gu,  
Seoul, Republic of Korea  
110-710

- Telephone  
+(82) (2) 397-4114
- Emergency After-Hours Telephone  
+(82) (2) 397-4114.
- Fax  
+(82) (2) 397-4101
- Email  
[seoulinfoACS@state.gov](mailto:seoulinfoACS@state.gov)
- [U.S. Embassy Seoul](#)



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