

Seoul First-Timer Checklist

Apps, transport, money, packing, food and the little things that make a first Seoul trip feel much easier.

Plan less. Experience more.



START HERE

Your Seoul trip does not need to feel complicated.

Use this as the practical layer underneath your itinerary: the things to download, save, carry and know before you start chasing cafés and neighborhoods.

HOW TO USE THIS

Read it once before your flight. Screenshot the pages you will actually need. Then stop researching every tiny detail and enjoy the city.

01

PREP

Set up your phone, hotel address, payment backups and airport route.

02

MOVE

Learn the few transit habits that save the most time.

03

EXPLORE

Group neighborhoods instead of zig-zagging across Seoul.

04

ENJOY

Leave room for the meal, café or street you did not plan.

THE SEOUL EDIT RULE

Prepare enough to feel confident, not enough to turn your holiday into homework.

BEFORE YOU FLY

Do these before airport day.

The boring prep is what makes arrival feel easy.

SAVE OFFLINE

- Your hotel name, address and phone number in both English and Korean.
- Flight, hotel and ticket confirmations.
- Your airport-to-hotel route, including the transport option you plan to use.
- Any eSIM or SIM activation instructions you might need before data works.



PACK SMARTER

- One main payment card and one backup stored separately.
- A small cash buffer rather than a huge stack of won.
- Portable battery, cable and comfortable already-broken-in shoes.
- Enough phone storage for photos, videos and screenshots.

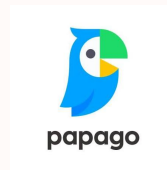
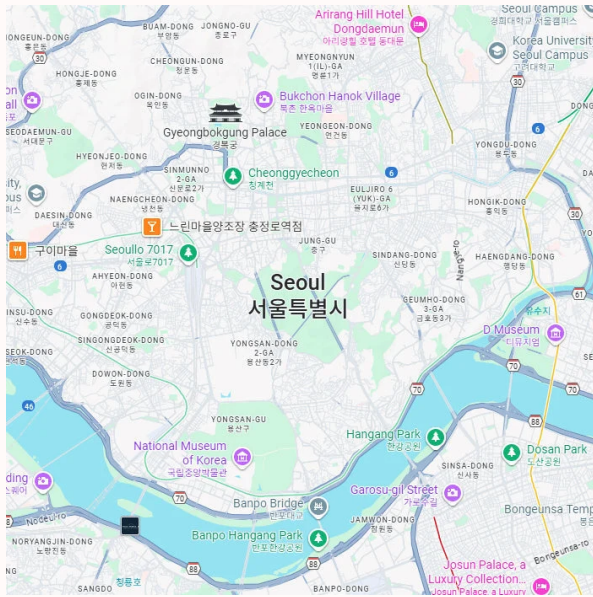
SCREENSHOT RULE

Anything you might desperately need while tired should exist offline.

ESSENTIAL APPS

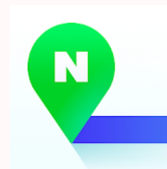
Three apps first. Everything else can wait.

Set these up while you still have reliable Wi-Fi.



NAVER MAP

navigation



PAPAGO

translation

NAVER MAP

Use it for place search, walking routes, subway and bus directions, saved spots and station exits. Save your hotel immediately so 'home' is always one tap away.



KAKAO T

taxis

DO THIS BEFORE YOU LAND

Search your hotel in Naver Map. Translate one sentence in Papago. Open Kakao T and look at the interface. Five minutes now saves confusion later.

ARRIVAL DAY

From Incheon Airport to your hotel.

Your first two hours should be simple, not ambitious.



01

ARRIVE

Follow the current immigration and arrival instructions.

02

CONNECT

Turn on data and make sure your map can locate you.

03

TRANSIT

Choose AREX, airport bus or taxi based on your hotel and luggage.

04

PAYMENT

Get only the cash or transit setup you actually need.

05

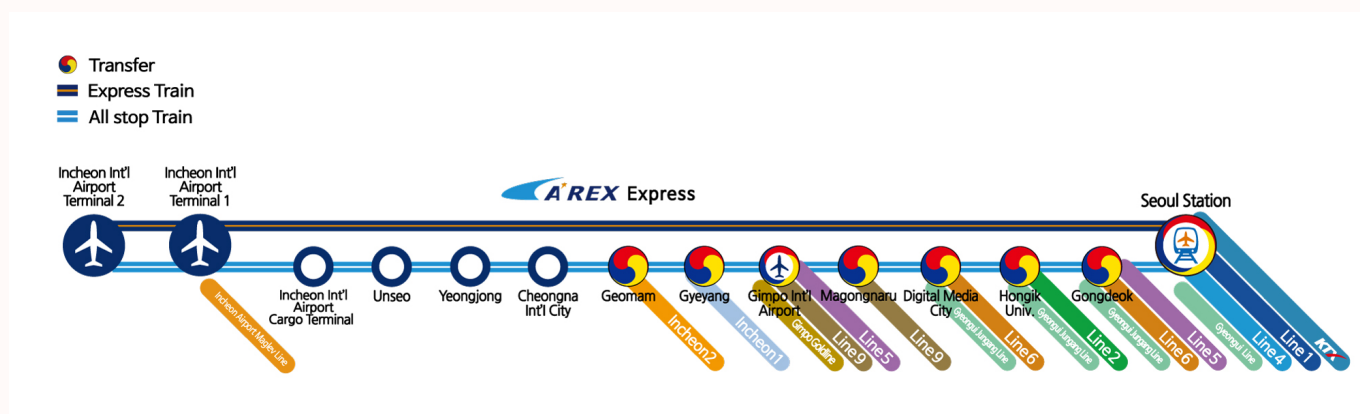
GO

Open the Korean hotel address before leaving the terminal.

AIRPORT TRANSPORT

AREX, airport bus or taxi?

Pick the option that fits your hotel, arrival time and luggage, not the one social media says everyone must use.



AREX

Useful when your route connects cleanly with Seoul Station or the all-stop line.

AIRPORT BUS

Often convenient for hotels near a direct limousine-bus stop, especially with luggage.

TAXI

The easiest door-to-door option, but usually the most expensive.

LATE ARRIVAL?

Check the last train or bus before you fly. Do not assume your preferred airport route will still be running after a delayed landing.

GETTING AROUND

Subway first. Then bus. Taxi when it makes sense.

The station exit can matter almost as much as the station itself.



EXIT NUMBERS MATTER

At large stations, the wrong exit can put you on the opposite side of a huge road or several minutes away from where you meant to be.

TRANSIT HABITS

- Check line, direction and transfer before boarding.
- Keep your route open when using buses.
- Look for elevators when you have large luggage.
- Save your hotel so the route home is always easy.

T-MONEY & TRANSIT

Keep transit boring and easy.

A pay-as-you-go transit card is one less decision to make every time you move.



T-MONEY

Load it, keep enough balance for the day and tap correctly when entering or exiting transit. Treat your transit balance separately from your normal shopping budget.

QUICK REMINDERS

- Do not assume every Seoul-only pass works outside Seoul.
- Keep the card somewhere easy to reach, not buried under your passport.
- If a gate rejects your tap, do not panic. Ask station staff for help.
- For long or awkward routes with luggage, paying for a taxi can be worth the saved energy.

MONEY & PAYMENT

Card-friendly does not mean backup-free.

The best payment setup is the one you barely have to think about.

01

PRIMARY CARD

Use your normal travel-friendly card for most purchases.

02

BACKUP CARD

Keep a second card separate from the first.

03

SMALL CASH BUFFER

Useful for markets and the occasional payment problem.



BUDGET FOR THE UNPLANNED STUFF

The extra coffee, photobooth, convenience-store snack, Olive Young stop or taxi is usually what sneaks into a Seoul budget.

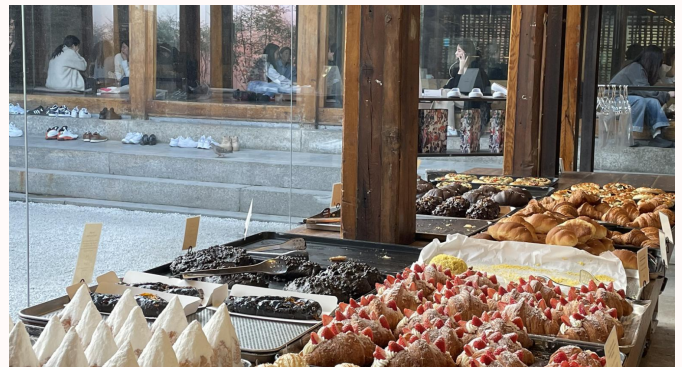
WHERE TO STAY

Choose by your itinerary, not just hotel aesthetics.

Put your saved places on a map first. Staying closer to your actual plans can save hours.

**HONGDAE****MYEONGDONG****SEONGSU**

Pop-ups · fashion · café culture

**ANGUK / JONGNO**

Palaces · hanok · culture

ALSO CONSIDER

Gangnam for south-of-river plans. Itaewon for international food, bars and central access. There is no single 'best' area for every first trip.

CLASSIC SEOUL

Give old Seoul its own half-day.

Palaces, hanok streets and Jongno feel completely different from the glass-and-neon side of the city.



A SIMPLE CLUSTER

GYEONGBOKGUNG ▯ ANGUK ▯ BUKCHON ▯ INSADONG ▯ JONGNO

You do not have to do every stop. The point is to keep nearby places together instead of crossing Seoul back and forth.

PACE IT

A palace can take longer than you expect, especially if you rent hanbok or stop for photos. Leave breathing room.

SEOUL BY SEASON

Pack for the Seoul you are actually getting.

Check the live forecast close to departure. The four seasons are not interchangeable.

**SPRING**

Layers · light jacket · umbrella

**SUMMER**

Breathable clothes · sunscreen · fan

**AUTUMN**

Layers · light outerwear · walking shoes

**WINTER**

Warm coat · gloves · scarf · warm socks

Weather can change how much walking, café-hopping and outdoor sightseeing feels comfortable. Build one indoor backup into each day.

YOUR DAY BAG

Carry enough to stay out. Not enough to hate your bag.

Seoul days can quietly become long days.

- | | | |
|----|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 01 | POWER | Portable battery + cable |
| 02 | RAIN | Compact umbrella |
| 03 | TRANSIT | T-money / transit card |
| 04 | BACKUP | Second payment method |
| 05 | SMALLS | Tissues · lip balm · foldable tote |
| 06 | OFFLINE | Hotel address + key screenshots |
| 07 | COMFORT | Water when needed + comfortable shoes |

SHOES > OUTFIT

You can dress cute. Just remember that stairs, transfers and bills are part of the look too.

EATING IN SEOUL

Save options, not obligations.

Good meals get easier when you know the few restaurant quirks that can surprise first-timers.



BEFORE YOU GO

- Check break time and last order, not only opening hours.
- Save a Plan A and Plan B in the same neighborhood.
- Search the Korean place name if English results are weak.

AT THE TABLE

- Some dishes have minimum portions designed for two.
- Water, cutlery or side dishes may be self-service.
- Do not assume every viral place is worth crossing Seoul for.

CAFÉ CULTURE

Leave room for the cafe you did not plan.

A Seoul café stop can be part dessert, part design inspiration and part rest break.

**BEFORE YOU ORDER**

Check opening days, last order and whether the café has multiple branches. Some places may expect one drink per person.

THE BETTER WAY TO PLAN

Choose the cafés you genuinely care about. Let the rest happen naturally between neighborhoods. Your trip should not become a race between desserts.

CAFE ETIQUETTE QUICKIES

order first · notice seating rules · clear your tray if asked · keep an eye on closing time

USEFUL SEOUL STOPS

The places that quietly save a travel day.

Convenience stores and Olive Young are not just shopping stops. They solve little problems fast.

**CONVENIENCE STORE**

Drinks, snacks, quick meals, tissues, umbrellas and late-night emergency purchases.

**OLIVE YOUNG**

Skincare, masks, personal-care basics and the K-beauty products you forgot you wanted.

DON'T OVERPACK 'JUST IN CASE'

For many everyday basics, you can buy what you need after arriving instead of filling your suitcase with backup versions of everything.

USEFUL KOREAN

Eight phrases worth saving.

Polite + clear + Papago gets you very far.

Hello	안녕하세요	annyeonghaseyo
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Thank you	감사합니다	gamsahamnida
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Excuse me / over here	저기요	jeogiyo
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This one, please	이거 주세요	igeo juseyo
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How much is it?	얼마예요?	eolmayeyo?
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Where is the restroom?	화장실 어디예요?	hwajangsil eodiyeoyo?
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It's delicious	맛있어요	masisseoyo
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Please help me	도와주세요	dowajuseyo
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EASIER THAN PERFECT PRONUNCIATION

For addresses, restaurants and hotel names, showing the Korean text on your phone is often easiest.

FIRST-TIMER MISTAKES

Small things that quietly waste time.

None will ruin your trip. They are just easy to avoid.

01 Planning by social media instead of geography

Group saved places by neighborhood.

02 Trying to do too much

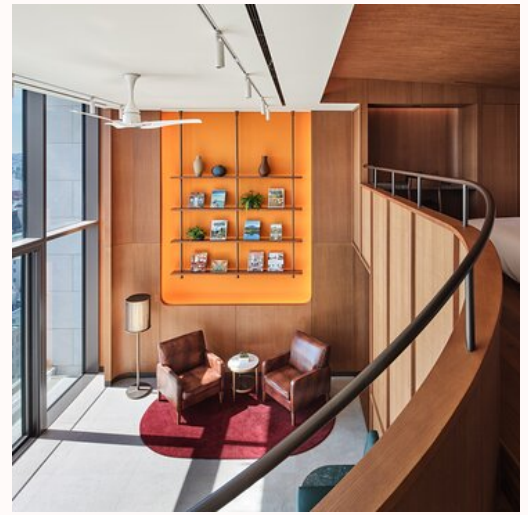
Three good things beat eight rushed things.

03 Ignoring station exits

Check the exit before going above ground.

04 Wearing brand-new shoes

Your feet will meet stairs, hills and transfers.



05 Relying on one card

Keep a backup somewhere separate.

06 No weather backup

Save one indoor option for each day.

07 No offline screenshots

Battery and data problems happen.

THE ITINERARY TEST

If one thing takes an hour longer than expected, does your entire day collapse? If yes, remove something.

A SIMPLE 4-DAY SHAPE

Think in neighborhood clusters.

This is a planning shape, not a rigid itinerary.

DAY 1

ARRIVAL

Check in · easy neighborhood walk · dinner · convenience-store stop · early night.

DAY 2

CLASSIC SEOUL

Palace area · Anguk/Bukchon · Insadong · Jongno or market dinner.



DAY 3

TRENDY SEOUL

Seongsu · Seoul Forest · café/shopping · Han River around sunset.

DAY 4

PICK YOUR VIBE

Hongdae OR Myeongdong/Namsan OR Gangnam depending on your priorities.

CLUSTER, DON'T COMMUTE

The goal is not to see less Seoul. It is to spend less of your holiday underground getting from one saved pin to another.

[SAVE THIS PAGE](#)

Your final Seoul checklist.

Screenshot this the night before you fly.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

☐ Passport + entry requirements checked☐ Hotel address saved in English + Korean☐ Mobile data plan ready☐ NAVER Map downloaded☐ Papago downloaded☐ Taxi app ready if needed☐ Airport-to-hotel route saved☐ Transit card/pass plan decided☐ Primary + backup cards packed

READY FOR SEOUL

☐ Small cash buffer packed☐ Comfortable shoes packed☐ Portable battery packed☐ Weather checked☐ First-day plan saved☐ Backup food option saved☐ Bookings screenshotted☐ Emergency numbers saved☐ Enough phone storage for photos

YOU'RE READY.

You do not need to understand Seoul perfectly before you arrive. Get the essentials in place, leave breathing room and enjoy the city.

THE SEOUL EDIT



Have the best time in Seoul.

Save this guide to your phone, send it to whoever you're traveling with, and come back to The Seoul Edit whenever you need your next café, food spot, neighborhood idea or useful Korea guide.

Good trips. Brighter days.

THE SEOUL EDIT

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