

Seoul Insider Guide

Essential Tips for Any Trip to Korea

Includes recommendations for
restaurants, bars, cafes hotels

By Seoulistic.com

SEULISTIC

Seoul Insider Guide

Hi, I'm Keith, founder of Seoulistic.

And I understand you. Yes you! The traveler, the resident... the non-Korean in Korea (or at least on your way to Korea).

When I first came to Korea, I was a fish out of water.



I was ripped off, taken on extra long taxi rides and scolded hard for cultural mistakes I made that I didn't even know about.

I had to pay for it with my wallet and my pride...

I was **lost**, **confused** but still **very excited**.

Those scenic taxi rides allowed me to see every nook and cranny of Seoul.

The scoldings taught me how to not piss people off as well as how to make long-lasting local friends. And I never lost money getting ripped off.

I only **gained invaluable experience**.

Lucky for you, you can do all that without all the hardships!

In this ebook, you'll have access to years and years of experience to uncover the secrets of this amazing country, its people and the culture.

Here's a list of different secrets that you'll learn:

1. **Subway Short Cuts to Popular Areas in Seoul (p3)**
2. **Cultural Mistakes to Avoid in Korea (p7)**
3. **How to Not Get Ripped Off by Taxis (p12)**
4. **Free Things to Get in Seoul (p17)**

Follow:



5. Essential Korean Phrases (p23)

6. Favorite Underexplored Areas of Seoul (p25)

7. Favorite Bars, Restaurants, Cafes and Clubs (p31)

But that's not it! You also subscribed to the Seoulistic newsletter, and with it you'll get exclusive information only for our email subscribers, special deals that I personally recommend and content updates on Seoulistic.

And don't worry. We never sell your email address. I take privacy seriously, and I only send you what you signed up for: crucial information that'll help you to understand, enjoy and survive Korea.

To ensure you get all the crucial information for your stay in Seoul, make sure we don't end up in your junk folder. Add contact@seoulistic.com to your email program's contact list, white list, or safe sender's list.

Here's to your great Korea adventure!

Sincerely,

Keith Kim
Founder
Seoulistic.com

P.S. If you signed up to the Newsletter with a dummy email address, you'll miss crucial and exclusive information. [Click here to sign up with an active e-mail address.](#)

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1. Subway Short Cuts to Popular Areas in Seoul

When I first came to Seoul, I would look destinations up on the internet. Usually most of the sites were helpful and gave the closest subway station. But after living here for so long, I learned a few extremely helpful subway shortcuts on my own. They have helped me save time by eliminating unnecessary transfers and also allowed me to travel to other places more easily. If you're going to travel to these popular Seoul downtown areas by subway, keep these shortcuts in mind.

Myeongdong

Myeongdong is Seoul's oldest downtown area and one of the first places people visit when exploring Seoul.

To get there, most people take Seoul Line 4 to **Myeongdong Station** (exit 6), which lead to the heart of Myeongdong. But you can also take Line 2 and get off at **Euljiro 1-ga Station** (exit 5). This is very useful as there are other popular destinations in Seoul that are on Line 2 (Hongdae, Gangnam, Shinchon, Coex, etc.). Leave exit 5 of Euljiro 1-ga Station and keep walking until you see the entrance to Myeongdong on your left.



How to get to Myeongdong:

1. Myeongdong Station (명동역) - Line 4 (Exit 6)
2. Euljiro 1-ga Station (을지로입구역) - Line 2, (Exit 5)

Hongdae

Hongdae is a vibrant college town with tons of restaurants, bars, clubs, cafes, shopping streets, and anything else you can think of. Most people new to Seoul access the area via the accurately named **Hongik University Station** (Line 2 or Airport Express Line, Exit 9). But you can also access Hongdae via **Sangsu**

Follow:





Station (Line 6, Exit 1 or 2). Sangsu Station is a good option if you want to avoid the big name chains and explore the back alleys and indie stores that Hongdae is so famous for. Use this option if you're headed to or coming from another popular Seoul destination, Itaewon (Line 6).

How to get to Hongdae:

1. Hongik University Station (홍대입구역), Line 2, Airport Express Line (Exit 9)
2. Sangsu Station (상수역) - Line 6 (Exits 1 or 2)

Gangnam Station

Gangnam Station is a concentrated area full of restaurants, cafes and bars. And most people access the area from **Gangnam Station** (Line 2, Shinbundang Line - Exit 10 & 11). But if you're coming from Incheon (Airport) or somewhere from northwest Seoul, Line number 9 might be the better option to get to Gangnam Station as it cuts across the city diagonally, and there's an express train, whereas Line 2 loops around the city and makes only local stops. Get off at **Sinnonhyeon Station** (Exit 5 & 6, Line 9, Line 2), and you'll get to the same general restaurant, cafe and bar area of Gangnam Station, just on the other end.

How to get to Gangnam Station:

Follow:





1. Gangnam Station (강남역) - Line 2, Shinbundang Line (Exits 10 & 11)
2. Sinnonhyeon Station (신논현역) - Line 9 (Exits 5 & 6)

Gyeongbokgung



Gyeongbokgung, the royal palace of Korea's last dynasty, is Seoul's number one historical tourist attraction. Most people take Line 3 to **Gyeongbokgung Station**. It'll get you straight to the gate; it is very straightforward. But if you want to kill two

Follow:



Seoul tourist attraction birds with one stone, you can also get off at **Gwangwamun Station** (Line 5, Exit 2). Although the station is a few minutes farther than Gyeongbokgung, there's a few other Seoul tourist attractions (i.e. Cheonggyecheon Stream and Gwanghwamun Square) you can see before or after you visit Gyeongbokgung. Also, if you're coming from other tourist areas such as Hongdae, Shinchon, Ehwa, Myeongdong (see Myeongdong above), you can get off **City Hall Station** (Line 1 or 2, Exit 3 or 5). While it's a little less than a 10 minute walk, you can also visit Deoksugung Palace and City Hall.

How to get to Gyeongbokgung:

1. Gyeongbokgung Station (경복궁역) - Line 3 (Exit 5)
2. Gwanghwamun Station (광화문) - Line 5, (Exit 2)
3. City Hall Station (시청역) - Line 1, 2 (Exits 3 & 5)

Insadong

Insadong is a Seoul sightseeing attraction because of the well-preserved traditional Korean culture (i.e. Korean crafts, antiques, art, tea houses, etc.) and alleys and side streets. Most places on the internet will tell you that Insadong can be accessed via **Anguk Station** (Line 3, Exit 6). But what local Koreans know is that you can save a transfer if you're already on Line 5. You can get off at **Jonggak Station** for a short little walk over to Insadong. If you are taking this alternative route to Insadong, you can also check out Jonggak, a centuries year old bell that is set in the middle of Seoul's modern office buildings.



How to get to Insadong:

Follow:



1. Anguk Station (안국역) - (Line 3, Exit 6)
2. Jonggak Station (종각역) - (Line 5, Exit 3)

Coex

The largest underground mall in the world, COEX Mall, was just recently renovated. It now includes some of the most popular restaurants in Seoul along with popular fashion brands. Along with the renovation came a new subway station.

Originally, the only subway access was through Samseong Station, (Line 2, Exit 5). But if you get off of Bongeunsa Station (Line 9, Exit 7), you'll now also be able to reach COEX as well. Use this option if you're coming from northwestern Seoul. Also, you can stop by one of Seoul's most beautiful temples, Bongeungsa Temple (Exit 1) before heading to COEX.



How to get to Coex:

1. Samseong Station (삼성역) - Line 2 (Exit 5)
2. Bongeunsa Station (봉은사역) - Line 9 (Exit 7)

These areas are great places to stay if you're visiting Korea. On top of having great public transportation, there's plenty to do in all the above listed areas.

If you want to find out more about places to stay in Seoul, I have a few personal favorites.

[Click here to find Places to Stay in Seoul](#)

Follow:



Follow:



2. Cultural Mistakes to Avoid

Although I grew up in a Korean home and community and learned many of the customs and manners expected of a respectful Korean, that didn't prepare me nearly enough for Korea! Most of the manners I learned were lessons for kids — I knew table manners and learned how to be respectful to adults. But as an adult, I never knew drinking etiquette or business interactions. I still had a lot to learn as an adult. So I learned by observing everyday interactions, talking with friends and relatives living here, and even getting scolded by strangers. Here's some of the most important lessons I learned.

1. Receiving with one hand

There was an incident in the news a while back when Bill Gates came to visit Korea. There was a picture of him shaking hands with Park Geun Hye, Korea's president. While shaking hands with the president, he had the other hand in his pocket. It



caused him to be heavily criticized and to be labeled rude and disrespectful. A few weeks later Larry Page of Google came to Korea and shook the president's hand with two hands, prompting the Korean media to praise how respectful he was.

It's a basic principle of Korean culture that exists in nearly any interaction. Giving and receiving with two hands is considered a sign of respect, and should be applied to when giving/receiving gifts, shaking hands, pouring alcohol, paying for a meal, or a myriad of other situations. It's a basic manner that most people learn right away. Watch from the people around you. There'll be plenty of opportunities to learn how it's done.

2. Sitting in priority seating (public transportation)

If you're taking the subway and the only seats you see are at the far end of the subway car (the priority seats reserved for the elderly, pregnant or handicapped) you might be tempted to take a seat. But I'd suggest standing, even if the entire subway car is full or if you think to yourself, "I'll just get up when someone who

Follow:



needs it comes along.” The culture in Korea is to never sit there, even if you have the intent of getting up later, or if the entire subway is full.

Able-bodied commuters should not sit here.

I remember once a young woman was sitting in those seats as the subway was full. Soon enough an elderly man came in and saw her sitting in those seats and started scolding her very badly, even though there were plenty of other priority seats available. To him, she did not belong in those seats. If you don't qualify for the seats, try to stay away.

3. Sticking your chopsticks in your rice

In traditional Korean culture (as well as other Asian cultures), people hold ancestral rites ceremonies to honor deceased ancestors (called 제사 / jesa). To “feed” their spirits, they prepare a meal and stick chopsticks straight up into a bowl of rice. Koreans believe the spirits of their ancestors come and use the chopsticks to eat. To do this outside of the context of this ancient tradition is a huge faux pas. Even though my family never held these ceremonies, I was taught NEVER to do this. It doesn't matter if the people you are with practice this tradition or not. NO ONE does this.



4. Refusing a soju shot

I didn't drink much when I first came to Korea and would often not drink alcohol, even when offered. While I was never scolded, many people would tell me to just take the first one together. I quickly learned that at least taking the first drink together was a sign of togetherness. Most people don't let others drink by themselves, and will at the least have one drink together. While togetherness is a common reason to not refuse a drink, if someone of a higher rank offers you a drink, refusing it could be taken as a sign of disrespect. Instead, what people do is receive the drinks poured to them (even if they don't plan on drinking), take a small sip and leave the half-full glass the rest of the night. If you can't even take a sip (i.e. religion or medical reasons), explain your reasons and fill your glass with water. This will show solidarity with the rest of the group, without making you compromise.

Follow:



5. Facing a person of higher rank while taking a drink

My father would often bring me along on dinners where drinking would be common. I would always observe these interesting moments where it seemed like my father (or the other person) would cheers with their glass and turn their heads slightly to the side to take the drink.



I later learned that to face someone

while taking a drink is to essentially stick your nose up at someone, which also causes one to look down on the person as they drink. To avoid this, Koreans turn to the side when taking a drink.

P.S. If you're with friends or in a casual setting, don't worry about this one too much. This rule is for more when you should be on your best behavior in formal settings (i.e. business meetings, meeting in-laws, first-time meetings, etc.).

6. Pouring water for yourself

While eating out with friends, I'd always see my friends and family pouring water for others first before they poured for themselves. I thought they were just nice people at first, but then I realized that everyone did this. It's another basic of Korean culture: considering others before yourself. While it's not considered rude to pour yourself a glass of water, it could be seen as inconsiderate if you didn't pour for others first. Instead, check everyone's cups to see if they need a refill first.

Remember to pour water for the oldest one at the table first before others. While not necessarily a cultural blunder, it's something that can impress the Koreans that you're with. And while pouring water is a specific example, this basic rule can be applied to a variety of situations (i.e. pouring alcohol, handing out utensils, sharing snacks at the office, etc.). The basic rule: consider others before yourself.

7. Touching someone of a higher rank on the head or shoulder

Follow:



12 of 40

I grew up being very casual and friendly as an American, and would place my hands on people's shoulders to show affection. When I did it to my uncle in Korea, however, he quickly pointed out that what I was doing was quite disrespectful. When Koreans touch someone's head or shoulders, it is usually to a child or someone younger than them. If you touch a senior on the head or shoulder, it can be very degrading, impolite and disrespectful. A good example of when you can and can't do this is when I'm with my younger step-brother. While it's totally ok for me to put my arms around his shoulders, he's never done that to me.

Route:	Approximate Price:
Hongdae Area <—> Itaewon	~10,000 won
Hongdae Area <—> Myeongdong/Insadong/City Hall	~10,000 won
Hongdae Area <—> Gangnam Area	~20,000 won (maximum 25,000 won)
Gangnam Area <—> Itaewon	~15,000 won
Gangnam Area <—> Myeongdong/Insadong/City Hall	~15,000 won
Myeongdong/Insadong/City Hall <—> Itaewon	~8,000 won
Inter-Gangnam (Gangnam, Yeoksam, Cheongdam, Apgujeong, etc)	~10,000 won
Inter Hongdae/Shinchon/Ehwa	~5,000 won
Inter Insadong/Myeongdong/City Hall	~5,000 won



3. Taking Taxis: How to Not Get Cheated

Although I'm a Korean-American, my accent is not perfect. And when I first came to Korea, some taxi drivers would hear me speak, instantly label me a foreigner and mark me a target for unnecessarily long rides. And while my accent still isn't perfect, I am no longer a target. Why? I've learned the ins and outs, and know what to expect and how to prevent myself being ripped off.

Note: Most taxi drivers make an honest living, and attempts to rip tourists off are not very common. But it does happen. Here's how to be prepared.

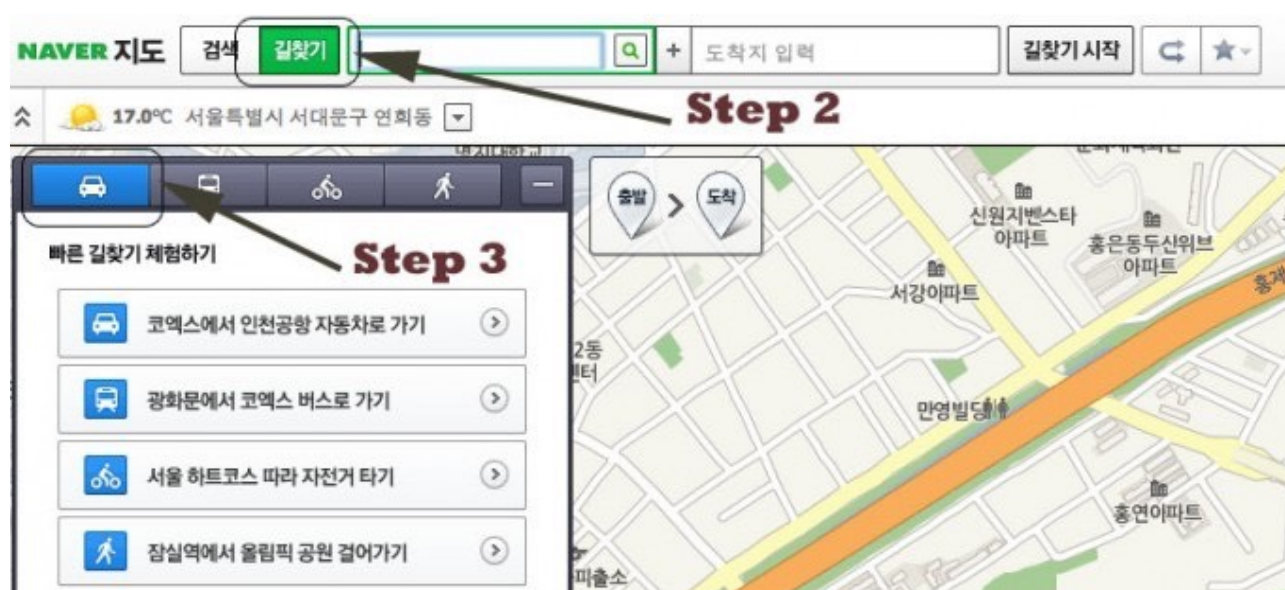
1. Naver Maps

One of the most under-utilized but most helpful resources is Naver Maps (the Korean version of Google Maps). Enter two locations and Naver Maps will provide an approximate taxi fare between the two distances. Although the entire process is in Korean, you can still do it if you can copy and paste the Korean address.

Step 1: Go to <http://map.naver.com>

Step 2: Click on “길찾기” (Find directions)

Step 3: Make sure the car icon is selected.

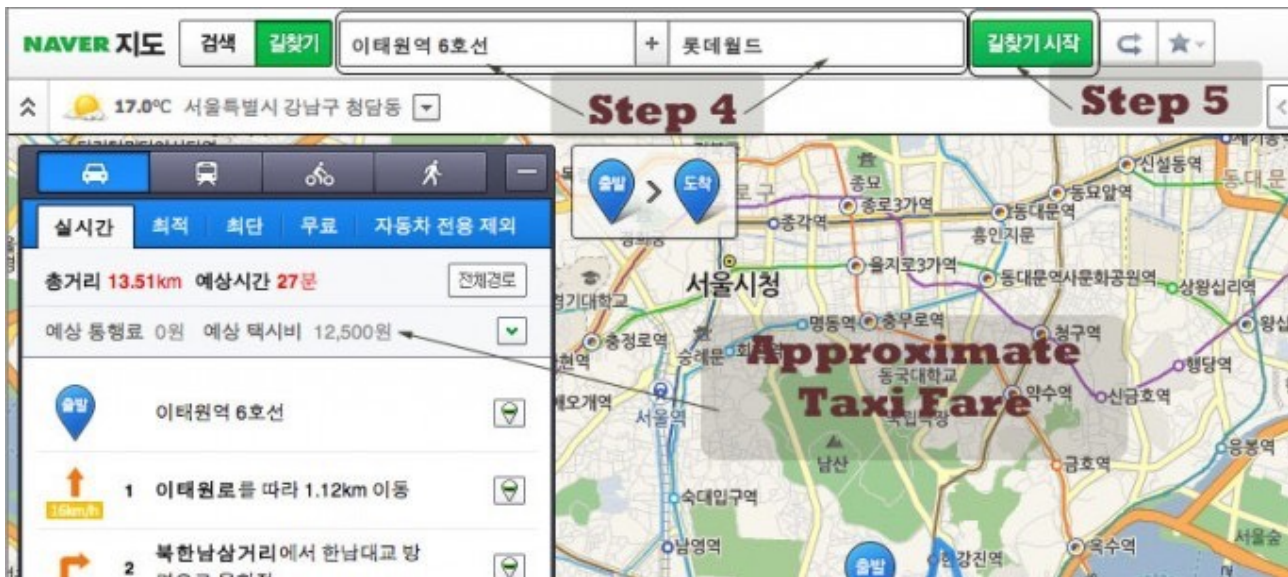


Step 4: Enter your starting point and destination (must be entered in Korean).

Follow:



Step 5: Click “길찾기 시작” (start search).



2. Approximate Fares from Popular Areas

If you don't want to bother with specifics, here's a small chart with **approximate** prices between popular areas frequented by tourists. These prices may vary by as much as a few thousand won.

*Note - The areas are grouped into general areas. Here are the general neighborhoods and which specific neighborhoods are included:

Gangnam: Gangnam Station, Nonhyeon, Cheongdam, Yeoksam, Apgujeong, Samseong.

Hongdae: Hongdae, Sinchon, Ehwa

Myeongdong: City Hall, Insadong

Follow:



15 of 40

3. Know the Roads

(This tip is more useful for those living in Korea than tourists.)

Another great way to prevent any Korean taxis from taking unnecessary scenic routes is to tell the taxi driver the specific roads to take. If you've taken taxis in Seoul before, pay attention to the roads and remember the fastest and cheapest way to get home. That way you'll be able to tell your Korean taxi driver the specific roads to take.

Note: Most roads in Korea are nameless. Instead, most people give directions as "left," "right," "straight" or "Please take Gangbyeon Highway," "Please take Mapo Bridge."

Language Tip:

직진하세요 (jikjin haseyo) – go straight

우회전하세요 (uhoejeon haseyo) – turn right

좌회전하세요 (juahoejeon haseyo) – turn left

강변으로 가주세요 (gangbyeongeuro gajuseyo) - Please take Gangbyeon Highway.

올림픽대로로 가주세요 (olympic-deroro gajuseyo) - Please take Olympic Highway.

마포대교로 가주세요 (mapodaegyoro gajuseyo) - Please take Mapo Bridge

4. Fake Confidence

When I first came to Seoul, I was unsure and timid, especially with taxi drivers. But after gaining confidence living here, I also became more confident taking taxis. And I realized the more confident I was in my speaking, the less I was targeted as a victim. And this is one of the simplest tips I can offer: fake confidence. Instead of getting in a cab and stating your destination with a question mark at the end of your sentence, being assertive and confident will give the taxi driver second thoughts of ripping you off. Having some decent Korean pronunciation helps tremendously as well.

Language tip:

‘명동’ 가 주세요 (“myeongdong” ga juseyo) – Please go to “Myeongdong.”

Follow:



5. Call a Cab

Just like in many places in the world, you can call a taxi to wherever you are in Korea. These are called 콜택시 (Call taxi) services and are especially helpful if you have a lot of luggage or if you're on a street that doesn't have too many cabs. It's also really good for ensuring a fair price and rate for your trip to Seoul. The companies that perform this service generally don't have a reason to rip you off; the driver's getting paid the same, and they need to keep up a reputation. The only thing extra it will cost you is about 1,000 won for the direct pick up. Get a friend or the hotel staff to call you a cab.

5.a. Call a Cab from your Phone

Apps, of course, are the easiest and simplest way to get a cab to your door. Also, since they're called from your phone, you have their info, and there's no reason for them to rip you off. If you have an Uber account in your home country, you can use it in Korea too, but there's a catch. They only use "luxury" vehicles which you have to pay a premium for. For just normal taxis at normal rates, the most common is KakaoTaxi. The app is all in Korean, and it requires you to have a working Korean phone number, so there are a lot of hurdles to jump. But you only need rudimentary Korean to enter your current location and your destination.

Here are the download links: [App Store](#) | [Google Play](#)

6. Take a Luxury Taxi Cab (Black Cab) – 모범택시

There are many different types of taxis in Korea. The best kind is a luxury taxi, called 모범택시 (mobeomtaeksi) in Korean. Literally translated, 모범택시 (mobeomtaeksi) means exemplary or model taxi, and only taxi drivers with 10+ years of a clean record are allowed to drive these types of taxis. This all equates to better and more trustworthy service. They are a bit more expensive than regular taxis, but it



Follow:



definitely ensures a fair price. Also, you'll get more leg room and a more comfortable ride.

Tip: Luxury cabs are not as numerous as regular cabs. Flag one down if you see one, but many times, you'll have to call one to your door.

7. Write Down the Taxi Driver's Credentials

If you're absolutely sure a taxi driver is ripping you off, this is a last ditch effort to not pay an unfair fee. If your bill comes out to a ridiculous number (see approximate fares above), you can write down the driver's credentials. By doing this, you're basically sending a message that you'll be reporting them to the authorities. When you do this, make sure the taxi driver sees you writing down his credentials. Many times this leads to a change of heart and a more accurate fare. If not, you can actually report the driver to the authorities. If you must report drivers, call '120' from any phone (if in Seoul).

Tip 1: Be careful to do this only when you are sure you are being ripped off. Some Korean taxi drivers can get very angry when in an argument and disputes may escalate.

Language Tip: 신고 할 거예요 (shingo hal geoyo) – I'm going to report you.



4. Free Things in Seoul

Seoul is generally a very affordable city (depending on where you live). But even still, everyone loves free goods. Here's a list of my favorite things you can get for free in Seoul:

1. Free Wifi

Free Wifi (via Seoul Metropolitan City)

Seoul City is expanding its efforts to provide a totally connected city, and part of that is offering free wifi to everyone. There's no annoying logins or email addresses you have to give. Instead, just connect to "**Seoul Wifi**" and you'll be online hassle free. As this is government sponsored free wifi, the speeds are slow, so more bandwidth heavy tasks (i.e. streaming videos, downloading media, voice call apps, etc.) is not easy. But simple online interactions (i.e. sending email, text messages, etc.) can be done smoothly.

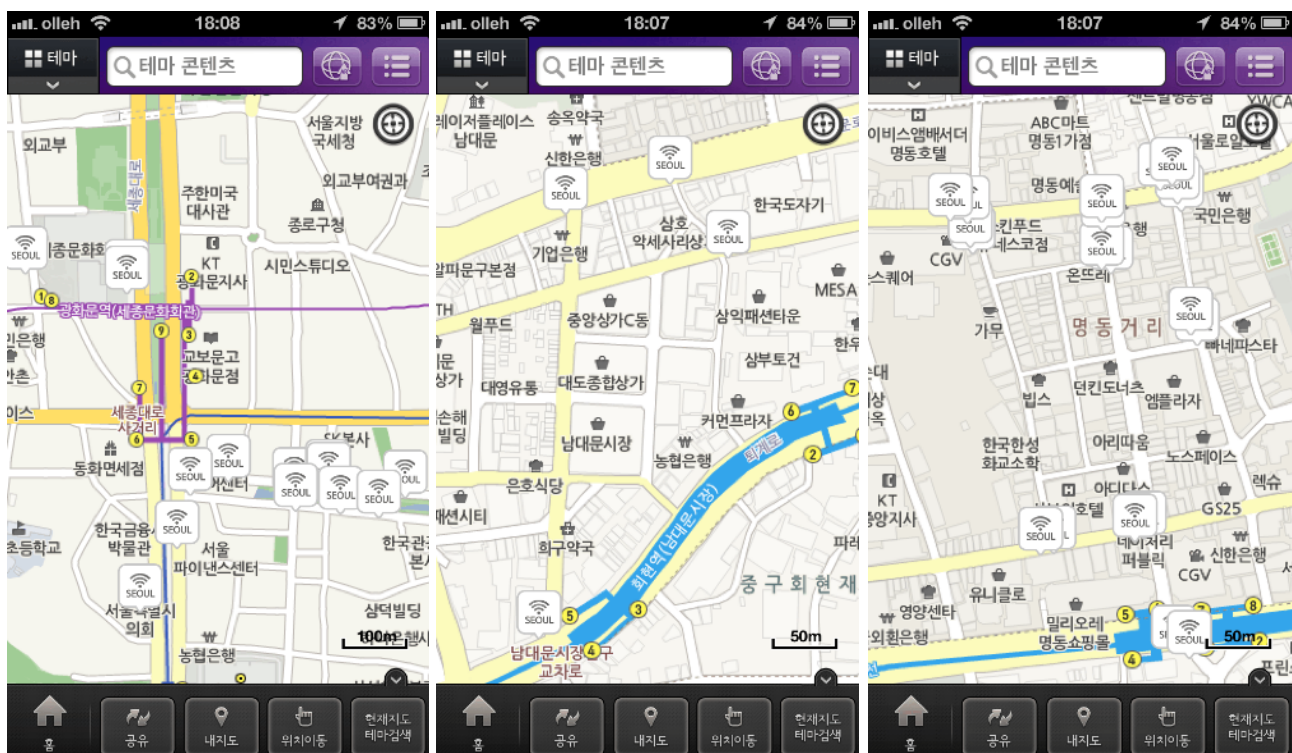
Locations:

There are literally more than 10,000 wifi hotspots that the government installed throughout the country. Most of them are in areas with high amounts of traffic (i.e. Myeongdong, Insadong, Yeouido, etc.). So there's no way I can list them all. Instead, you can download an app created by the Seoul government (Korean only).

Gwanghwamun

Namdaemun Market

Myeongdong



Follow:



[Click here for Android](#) | [Click here for iPhone](#) (must have iTunes Korea account)

I've included a few screenshots from the application of some popular areas in Seoul. But if you want a more detailed list of where to find these free wifi hotspots, check out this post on [10,000 Places to get Free wifi in Seoul](#).

Free Wifi Piggy Backing

Korea has a number of popular routers that come with factory set passwords. Although people do change them, a surprising number of people leave the factory passwords as is. Many businesses and major corporations in Korea also regularly offer wifi, but don't readily reveal their passwords. If you want to get free wifi in Korea, find the wifi name below and try out the password. It's not guaranteed to work, but chances are high that you'll be scoring some free wifi anywhere you go in Korea.

Wifi Spot	Password
KT SSID , KT_WLAN	1234567890 123456789a 1234567890c
HellowD (헬로우 디), Hellowireless, SO070VOIP	534f4b4354
Tbroadnet	123456789, a123456789
Egg 택시 (taxi)	SHOW3382
KWI-B2200T, KWI-2200	SHOW3382 password
myLGnet, myLG070	123456789a 987654321a 1234567890 myLGNetfe07
SK	a123456789
세븐일레븐 (7-Eleven)	2127393302
맥도날드 (McDonalds)	16005252 (McDonald's delivery phone number)
tobis	1234
파리크라상	vkflzmfftktd

Again, these are only the factory set or default passwords, so you'll have to get lucky. But I've personally tested out several of these, and more often than not, I can connect.

2. Free “Service”

Follow:



To keep customers happy (and to keep them coming back), many businesses in Korea will give away free things — called “service” (서비스 – seobiseu). The free things you can get differ from the type of business, and not all places willingly give *service*. Here are the basics:

Where Can I Get Service?

Although you can find some *service* at big name chains and franchises, you’ll have the most luck with privately owned businesses. Many businesses also advertise on fliers what they’re giving away. They might even have workers on the street enticing potential customers to come in with *service*.

The three most common businesses that offer *service* are Korean BBQ restaurants (i.e. galbi, samgyupsal), bars and noraebangs (karaoke rooms). Other types of businesses also offer *service*, but these are the most common.

Service at Galbi & Samgyupsal Restaurants

A common way to finish off a typical BBQ meal is to order *doenjang jjigae* (soybean paste stew) or *naengmyeon* (cold buckwheat noodles) after all the meat is done. And these two items are sometimes offered as *service*.

Noraebang (Karaoke Rooms)

When going to a noraebang in Korea, you’re charged for the time you spent in the room. But since pushing a few buttons to give you more time doesn’t cost anything to the business owners, most noraebang owners will be agreeable to giving you extra time as *service*. This is especially true if it’s off-peak hours and there won’t be anyone using the room anyway. Other types of *service* include free drinks (alcoholic & non-alcoholic).



Bars

Follow:



While upscale bars will almost never offer *service*, local Korean bars (called “hof”) that serve beer and soju, are cheaper and more agreeable to offering customers with *service*. Most Korean’s usually order food — called *anju* — to snack on when drinking. The more you order, the more likely you are to receive free *service* (usually in the form of anju).

How to Get Service

Privately owned businesses are usually more likely to offer service than popular places or chains. Keep that in mind when asking. Most of the time if you simply ask, they’ll agree. Here’s a few different ways to ask:

- 1) → 서비스 없어요? (seobiseu eopseoyo?) – Is there no *service*?
- 2) → 서비스으로 주시면 안 되요? (seobiseueuro jusimyeon an doeyo?) – Could we get this as service, please? (specific item)

But here’s a few other ways to up your chances:

Spend a lot (or go with a lot of people) - *service* is designed to bring customers back and to keep them loyal. Of course, businesses appreciate their highest spending customers. Spending a lot also gives you a lot of leverage if you want to negotiate before booking a place.

Be nice and friendly – Being nice and friendly in general with the owners/managers/ staff will definitely help you get some free *service*. A friend of mine had a conversation with a cafe owner for an hour just talking about what he was doing in Korea and about the coffee shop owner’s business. Throughout the rest of his trip, he kept going back to the cafe, and each time the owner would just give him *service* each time.

Be indecisive – If you’re deciding between two noraebangs right next to each other, you can always see which one is willing to give you the most service.

3. Free Help

Follow:



The Korea Tourism Organization offers an amazing service that anyone visiting Seoul should know about. Simply call 1330 from any phone and you will be connected to operators that will look up anything for you. You can use this to ask for restaurant recommendations, bus schedules, or things to do in Korea. Whatever you need help with, just call this number and someone will help you out. And if they can't tell you, they'll look it up on the internet while you wait.

Tip 1: Although this is geared towards tourists, foreign residents of Korea can also use this service as well.

Tip 2: Not just Seoul, this service is also available in cities across Korea. Add the city area code to the front of 1330 to call the city-specific tourism hotline. However, not all will offer the service in different languages.

[See KTO's official page for more info.](#)

4. Free Phone Calls

No matter if you're traveling or living in Korea, there may be a few situations where you will be without a phone but need to make a call. Luckily, the Seoul Metro created an easy way to get in contact with your friends, and it's all for free.



Seoul's subway system is littered with "Digital View" booths, which have maps of surrounding areas, coupons, weather information and news. But one of the most useful features are free phone calls. Pick up the phone and you can make any domestic call within Korea for free. Just pick up and dial. It's that simple. Be warned, however, that phone calls come with a time limit (with commercial messages), so you can't have full conversations. Instead, they're more useful for quick exchanges of information such as when and where to meet.

Follow:



Tip 1: These cannot be found at all Seoul subway stations. Instead, they are available in busier stations.

Tip 2: The number that will show up when you call from this will start with 070. Warn your friends beforehand if you can. Some people might not pick up as 070 might seem to some like a telemarketing number (it's actually for internet phones).

Follow:



5. Essential Korean Expressions

Common Essential Phrases

안녕하세요. [an-nyeong-ha-se-yo.] = Hello

Typically, this is said with a small bow. For business situations, a handshake usually accompanies the bow.

안녕히 계세요. [an-nyeong-hi gye-se-yo.] = Good bye. (When you are the one leaving.)

안녕히 가세요. [an-nyeong-hi ga-se-yo.] = Good bye. (When you the other party is leaving.)

There are two ways to say goodbye in Korean. Use 안녕히 계세요 / an-nyeong-hi gye-se-yo (the first one) when you are the one leaving (and the other party is staying). Use 안녕히 가세요 / an-nyeong-hi ga-se-yo (the 2nd one) when other party is leaving or when everyone is leaving.

감사합니다. [gam-sa-ham-ni-da.] / 고마워요. [go-ma-wo-yo.] = Thank you.

There are two ways to say thank you. There is no difference in meaning or politeness. Choosing which to use is just a matter of preference.

죄송합니다. [joe-song-ham-ni-da.] / 미안해요. [mi-an-hae-yo.] = I'm sorry.

These two ways to say sorry have a difference in politeness level. The 1st is more formal and can be used with business associates, people you've only recently met and people higher than you in confucian hierarchy (i.e. older, bosses, parents, etc.). While the 2nd is still polite, it is less formal. It can be used with those that are lower in status in confucian hierarchy (i.e. younger, subordinates, etc.).

얼마예요? [eol-ma-ye-yo?] = How much is it?

This is a useful phrase that can be used for any shopping situation.

Follow:



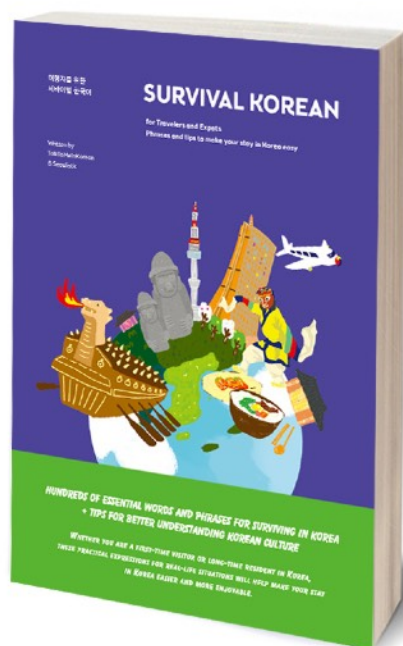
이거 주세요. [i-geo ju-se-yo.] = Please give this (one).

You can use this phrase while pointing to an item, often used in when ordering at a cafe or restaurant.

Excuse me

저기요 [jeo-gi-yo]: excuse me

저기요 [jeo-gi-yo] is the phrase to use when you want to get the attention of servers at restaurants and cafes. Most of the time, servers won't come around to check if you need anything, and servers actually expect to be called over if customers need something. This sometimes requires saying “저기요” louder than the murmur of the restaurant patrons. It may be considered rude to speak so loudly in other parts of the world, but in Korea, at least when you are calling the server, it is common to say 저기요 [jeo-gi-yo] loudly.



This section of the ebook is an excerpt from our ebook: [Survival Korean](#).

To learn essential language skills as well as cultural tips to survive in Korea...

[Click here to check out the book!](#)

Follow:



6. Favorite Places in Seoul Most Tourist Never Visit

Part of the reason why I wanted to start my own website was because of the issues I have with Korea's official stance on tourism. They want to present to the world a polished country that brushes aside anything that's not new or modern. But I actually think that's doing a disservice to people that want to really experience Korea. Sure the glamour and glitz of Korea's newfound riches are fun to take part in. But where would Korea have been without the gritty spirit of old Seoul?

(By the way, do me a favor and don't tell too many other people about these neighborhoods. I want them to stay our little secret.)

Yeonnam-dong (연남동)

If you've been reading the blog, you know that I love getting lost and just exploring neighborhoods for fun. One day while I was riding my bike, I went the other way from the main area of Hongdae and discovered tiny little streets with eye-catching signs that looked like they were from 1950s Korea. I soon found out that this was a blossoming neighborhood, called Yeonnam-dong. Originally a neighborhood filled with authentic immigrant food (mostly Chinese), the tiny back alleys of Yeonnam-dong has become home to artistic and creative types tired of the massive increase in people in Hongdae proper.



I love this area because of the small side street alleys that are so easy to get lost and find quaint shops and cafes that have become the anti-chains. There's also excellent food — after my initial discovery, I learned that there are number of famous restaurants in the area that people all over Seoul come to eat. My particular favorites are the Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese restaurants. Also, the coffee shops and bars are tiny and kitschy; they're my favorite places to sit down and read a book. I love the unique flavors that each store has. For the time being, the buildings and roads are too small for the large chains and the area still remains mostly a residential neighborhood. I hope it stays that way.

Follow:



How to get to Yeonnam-dong:

Hongdae Station (Line 2, Airport Express Line), Exit 3

Go straight down along the grass island. And make a right when you reach the first intersection.

Geondae University Area (건대입구)

When I first came to Korea, I would hang out in the popular areas that most places know about (i.e. Hongdae, Gangnam). Those areas are popular because they're known to be chic, stylish and trendy. But after a few of my friends moved to the Konguk University Area (Geondae Station, Line 2 & 7), I found that popular areas don't have to



feel that way at all. While the crowds in Geondae have the same energy that a lot of Korean college towns have, none of them are “realer” than the people in this area. What I mean by that is a lot of areas in Seoul take pride in their image and try to keep up with trends. But Geondae is what it is without any apologies — they're not trying to impress the rest of Seoul. And that's exactly what I love about the area. It radiates excitement and vibrance without the pretentiousness that other areas can sometimes have. And the reason for that is because it's very much a local's hang out for North Eastern Seoul. It's for North Eastern Seoul residents that don't want to spend the time or money to go to other popular areas of Seoul.

But I understand that Geondae is not for everybody. So if you're looking for well-designed cafes, high-quality food or upscale bars don't come here. Instead make this your destination if you want to hang out at cheap dive bars with locals in their own backyard.

P.S. Across the main street from the Geondae area is an authentic Chinatown with authentic Chinese immigrants. They're famous for their authentic Shabu Shabu and lamb skewers.

How to get to the Geondae:

Follow:



Konguk University Station (Line 2, 7 — Exit 2)

Gyeongridan Gil (경리단길)

A few years back, Itaewon was regarded as a disgusting foreigner district with a reputation for entertaining drunk soldiers. My how a few years change things. Itaewon is now one of the most popular areas in Seoul. It has tons of eats, is the leader in Korea's International food scene, and is a popular nightlife area with tons of



people traversing the streets until late at night. All this, however, has created crowds and brought in tons of chains. Gyeongridan is a small alley a few minutes walk away from the main Itaewon area. It is literally a single road (길, gil in Korean means road), but it's packed with excellent restaurants and bars. As Itaewon is known for its food and bar scene, Gyeongridang is a place with excellent restaurants in intimate settings. And although it still has a sizable crowd, it doesn't have the massive crowds of the main Itaewon area. The restaurants are small and intimate, and they all have great food (mostly non-Korean).

How to get to Gyeongridan-gil:

Noksapyeong Station (Line 6, Exit 2) - Walk down until you reach the underpass. Take the underpass to the other side of the street and turn in on the first road to the right.

Garak Market (가락시장)

My cousin used to live near Garak Market, but for whatever reason, I never went there. I knew Garak Market to be a general wholesale food market (which it is), and since it had everything, I thought that the seafood there couldn't be as good as Seoul's specialized (and most famous) fish market, Noryangjin Market. Boy, was I wrong!

Both markets are quite good for that quintessential Korean seafood market experience. You go to a vendor, pick what you'd like to eat, and bring your food to a

Follow:



rustic restaurant out back to have it cooked for you. All of this good fun could be had at both markets. But the reason I like Garak Market better than Noryangjin Market is because it's much less touristy and is much more for local residents. And that's as close to a guarantee as you can get for getting fair prices for fresh seafood. I've been to Garak Market a few times now, and each time I went, I've always had excellent food with a lot of "service" (see "Free things" section of this ebook). It's the same authentic Korean seafood experience you can get at Noryangjin, but with a more laid back and "local" feel to it.

One time at Garak Market I was there for king crab (an expensive night out), so I wanted to be sure I was getting the best. The vendor clearly divided his crabs into separate tanks, each with specific grades. He explained to us that the difference between the crabs were the amount of meat inside; he taught us how to feel for the meat in the legs. He took two crabs out from the two different tanks, and told us to squeeze down on the legs to feel for the meat in the crabs. There was clear difference in meatiness. Then I tried to haggle down the 150,000 won price tag. He said he couldn't go any lower on the price, but instead gave us a bag full of large clams and shrimp that could have been a meal itself for. I'm not sure if I could have gone to other vendors to haggle down lower prices, but I felt good about buying from him. He taught me how to look for good meaty crabs, and gave me a lot of free "service."



Garak Market is a far way out from the city center, and unless you're staying nearby, it might not be worth the trip. But if you're looking for an authentic local market experience without having to deal with "tourist hassle," this is the place to be. But be warned: it's a marketplace that has both seafood and vegetables, and in the summertime, the area can start to smell.

How to get to Garak Market:

Garak Market Station (Line 3 or 8, Exit 1)

Bukhan Mountain (북한산)

When I first came to Korea, I had a day off from work and wanted a one-day getaway. I was sitting in front of a computer for weeks at a time and needed a break from anything with a screen. So I looked at a map, found a big mountain and started to climb. Looking back, I should have prepared a lot more; I didn't bring lunch or enough water,



and my shoes weren't designed for hiking, so I almost slipped off a rock face with a 100 foot drop! But even though I almost died, Bukhan Mountain was exactly what I wanted. I was on top of Seoul alone with my thoughts and a journal, and I got some exercise and fresh air while I was doing it. The summer sun was beating down on me, and I was sweaty, but I loved every minute of it. On the way down, I found a Buddhist Temple near the base of the mountain that had some fresh and clean water that trickled down from the top of the mountain for anyone to drink. It was one of my most memorable days here in Seoul. And now, whenever I have a free day, I try to head up a new course I haven't been on.

If you want a less intense climb, there are many mountains easily accessible even in downtown Seoul. Bukhansan Mountain is definitely not for everyone as travel time to the mountain can be quite far (especially if you're in Gangnam), you need at least 5-hours for the actual climb (includes time coming down the mountain), and you should be well prepared (i.e. shoes, clothes, food/snacks, etc.). But it is a national park accessible from Seoul and it is absolutely beautiful. If you do decide to come here, be sure to be prepared. For the intense hiking routes, proper hiking shoes are highly recommended (some routes have very steep climbs that have climbing ropes). And although some of the trails have stores that sell snacks and drinks, other trails may not have them. Remember to bring enough water and food for the day.

Follow:



I haven't been on all the courses, but the ones I have been on are the Bukhansanseong Fortress Course, Mangwolsa Temple Course, and the Obong Course. The Bukhansanseong Fortress Course was very memorable because of the steep climb with climbing rope, and climbing along the fortress wall was a great reward to see when reaching the top. Mangwolsa was also intense, but not as intense as the Fortress Course. Of course, the best part of that course was visiting the temple on the way down and drinking the clean mountain water. And while the nature on all the courses were great, I enjoyed the natural scenery on the Obong Course the most. There's a waterfall along the way and the peak is quite beautiful.

How to get to Bukhansanseong Fortress Course:

- Gupabal Station (Line 3, Exit 1)
- Take bus 704 Bound for Bukhansanseong Fortress (북한산성)
- Get off at Bukhansan Mountain Entrance Stop



7. My Favorite Restaurant / Cafe / Bar / Club

1. Favorite Korean Restaurant in Seoul: Hadongkwan

Hadongkwan might be Korea's most famous restaurant, and it might be attributable to a famous story that involves the president of Korea in the 1970's, Park Chung Hee. He was away on a trip to Jeju Island but missed the food here so much that he requested a bowl of the soup to be flown down for his



breakfast. Although I can't have it brought to my door, I'm just like him. There are days I just want to eat this food. For me, I want to eat it because it reminds me of my grandmother's cooking. It's an ultra simple bowl of soup made from beef broth, rice and slices of beef. That's it. There's nothing fancy about it, but that's exactly why I love it. It's that home-style Korean comfort food that I just need to have every now and then. It's my (along with a lot of other people's) number one restaurant recommendation in Seoul.

Tips:

- Pay before you sit.
- Breakfast and lunch only.
- Very crowded during lunch time hours (you may have to squeeze into tables with strangers).

What to eat:

Regular gomtang (보통/botong) - 10,000 won

Special gomtang (특/teuk) - 13,000 won
(has extra meat as well as tripe)

How to eat it:

- Add some spring onions for freshness.
- Add salt and pepper to taste.

Follow:



- Ask for kimchi brine if you want a bit of spice to the soup

“Please give me kimchi brine.” - 김치 국물 주세요. (kimchi gungmul juseyo)

- Free soup refills

“Please give me more soup.” 국물 더 주세요. (gungmul deo juseyo)

Located in Myeongdong (Original)

Address:

서울특별시 중구 명동1가 10-4

(10-4 Myeongdong 1(il)-ga, Jung-gu, Seoul)

Closest Subway Stations:

Myeongdong Station (Line 4), Euljiro-1-ga Station (Line 2)

[Click for Google Maps Link](#)

Other Locations:

Yeouido: 서울특별시 영등포구 은행로 3 익스콘벤처타워

(3 Eunhaeng-ro Ikseuconbencheo Tower, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul)

Seolleung*: 서울특별시 강남구 테헤란로78길 16 노벨빌딩

(16 Novel Building, Taeheran-ro 78 Road, Gangnam-gu, Seoul)

*Special note: Food is a bit different here as this branch was opened by a different family member.

2. Favorite Non-Korean Restaurant: Brick Oven Pizzeria

I grew up in New York eating the best pizza in the world. But I knew moving abroad it'd be impossible to find good pizza. It's hard to find good New York style pizza outside of New York, let alone the country. For most of the pizza I've eaten outside of New York, instead of the crunchy crust, it is often doughy and soft. And you know that picturesque image of stringy

cheese when you pick up a slice? I never get that anywhere but New York. But Brick Oven Pizzeria seems to have cracked the code. The owners spent several years in New York mastering the art of pizza, and they serve the best slice on this



Follow:



side of the globe. Luckily for me (and every other person that loves New York Pizza), they haven't localised the menu. They try to keep it to those uniquely Italian-American toppings so specific to New York. They even have red pepper flakes and parmesan cheese in the same shakers as the ones in New York. The pies are large and are good for 2-3 people. They also have larger sizes, for more people (4-5). At about 23,000 for a plain pie (around 30,000 won with toppings), it's pricier than local Korean pizza chains, but to me it's worth every penny. Also, if you don't want an entire pie, you can pay by the slice (about 4,000 won) at their Express Bus Terminal Station location. If you're coming here during peak times (weekends, dinner time) be sure to make reservations.

Located in Gangnam Station Area

Address:

강남구 강남대로102길 31

(Gangnamdae-ro 102-Gil 31, Gangnam-gu)

Closest Subway Stations:

Gangnam Station (Line 2, Shin Bundang Line) & Sinnonhyeon Station (Line 9)

[Click for Google Maps](#)

Express Bus Terminal Location

Located inside Famille Station (connected to Express Bus Terminal Station - Line 3, 7, 9)

3. Favorite Cafe: the Famous Lamb

I love a cup of good drip brew coffee. While I don't consider myself a coffee snob, I think I've drunk enough coffee to appreciate a good cup. And the Famous Lamb in Hongdae prides itself on their drip coffees. They have all the popular beans you'd find in a place that knows

its coffee (i.e. Ethiopia Yirgacheffe, Kenya AA, Colombian Supremo etc.), and they have their own house blended roasts as well. They pride themselves on their coffee so much that they give customers a cup of these blends as a "service" (see free section above). But even if you're not versed in coffee beans around the world, no worries. All their espresso based drinks (cappuccino, latte, etc.), teas, juices,



Follow:



smoothies and other drinks are all carefully prepared with expert hands. They have great presentation as well; many of their drinks are served in elegant cups and kitschy mason jars. They even serve their water in unique flasks that looks like it came from science class. And if you missed breakfast, don't worry. They have a wide selection of cakes and desserts that they make in-house as well as sandwiches for those looking for a meal. And while good food and drinks make excellent cafes, ambiance and service make excellent cafes as well. These are two areas where the Famous Lamb excels. The cafe is located in the "local's Hongdae," away from the massive crowds, where all the local Hongdae folks live. The interior is well-thought out and designed, with good lighting, artwork hanging on the walls and comfortable and unique chairs. Their service is top-notch. The servers are very professional and make you feel like it's a 5-star experience.

I've had nearly every drink on their menu, and my personal recommendations are any of their drip coffees; I like my coffee bitter and strong, so I often order Kenya AA. I'm also a fan of their cappuccinos and strawberry smoothies. If you're hungry, I like all their salmon and chicken sandwiches. But honestly, I like everything about them. I think you will too.

Located in Hongdae

Address:

서울 마포구 월드컵북로 19

(Seoul, Mapo-gu Worldcupbuk-ro 19)

Closest Subway Station:

Hongik University Station (Line 2, Airport Express - Exit 1)

[Click for Google Maps](#)

4. Favorite Club in Seoul: Octagon

Octagon had the perfect formula to turn me off. Rather than massive spaces with large crowds, I favor smaller, intimate venues. Instead of EDM, I'm more of a hip-hop guy. Instead of being stuck to a table, I like to float. But the massive super club made me a believer! And every time I've been back, I've always had a good time.

With three levels of seating, Octagon is massive. But because it spreads out more vertically than horizontally, it still feel like an intimate venue. And while EDM was never my choice of music, I became a fan because of the the world-class DJs that

Follow:



play there weekly. When internationally recognised acts come to Korea for music festivals (i.e. Ultra Music Festival), they often play at Octogon for after parties. Also, they created a hip-hop lounge that's intimate and plays awesome music. But regardless of the type of music, the reason I like Octogon the most is because



of the crowd. They're into the music, friendly, like meeting new people and just know how to have a good time. For all these reasons, it's been ranked in the top 10 clubs of the world (by DJMag) consistently for the past few years,

I'd personally recommend getting a table if possible. It gets crowded in the regular admission areas, so it's nice to have breathing room and a place to sit if possible. Prices are often over 1000 USD for one table (fits approximately 8). But you'll have to make reservations in advance as they get booked to capacity often. There's door entrance as well (30,000 won normally), but for special parties, it'll be pricier (anywhere from 40,000 won to 50,000 won) and there will be lines. And while I recommend going here on any weekend, I especially like Octogon on Thursdays. It's the same type of fun that you'll get on the weekends, but without the massive crowds the weekends bring.

Located in Nonhyeon-dong

Address:

서울특별시 강남구 논현동 152-4 뉴힐탑호텔

(Seoul, Gangnam-gu Nonhyeon-dong 152-4 New Hilltop Hotel)

Closest Subway Station:

Hakdong Station (Line 7, Exit 4)

For taxi, tell the Driver: "New Hill Top Hotel" (뉴힐탑호텔)

[Click for Google Maps](#)

Website: <http://www.octagonseoul.com/>

5. Favorite Bar in Seoul: Nabi-do Kkotieotda (나비도 꽃이었다)

Follow:



My favorite places are the hard to find ones. When I find a gem, I feel like I've got a secret that no one else knows about. And that description fits this bar perfectly. Tucked away in a small alley away without any awnings, this bar is the type of place that made Hongdae so famous.



Floor seating, hookah (aka shisha) and great ambiance are the reasons why the local Hongdae “cool” types frequent this place. It’s famous among the locals, but even still, it’s almost never packed to capacity. And even if it is packed, it always feels intimate. The seating is cozy, and some of the seats have cushions for lying down to get even more comfortable. The cushions are part of the comfort, but I also come here for the ambiance. It’s a great place to sit around a water pipe, listen to music, have a few drinks and tell stories with friends.

It’s a great venue for everyone: close friends, new friends, dates and even family members. It’s a relaxed atmosphere with good vibes that I think anyone can enjoy.

Located in Hongdae

Address:

서울특별시 마포구 와우산로17길 19-9

(Seoul, Gangnam-gu Wausan-ro 17-gil 19-9)

Closest Subway Station:

Sangsu Station (Line 6, Exit 1)

Hongik University Station (Line 2, Airport Express, Exit 9)

[Click for Google Maps](#)

Follow:



Final Words

Personally, I think Korea's one of the best kept secrets of Asia. It's a dynamic, exciting and unique country with a vibrant culture, delicious food and beautiful people. There's so much more to discover, and I hope you're excited for an awesome trip! Watch out for my e-mails; I'll highlight more awesome things to do, see and eat!

To Exploring Korea Together!

Keith Kim
Founder

Other Recommendations

DMZ Tours

One of the most unique places to visit is the DMZ, the border with North Korea. It's a very memorable experience that leaves a lasting impression. It is my number one recommendation for every traveler to Seoul.

The most popular tour, the JSA Tour (which allows you to step into North Korea), sells out every month, usually a month in advance. If you're about a month away from your trip to Korea, I'd recommend booking it, even if you're not sure at least you'll have the option to ensure a seat and cancel later if you decide not to go. If you're already coming to Korea, you can find a number

[Click to find out more.](#)

Essential Seoul Tour

Short on time to plan your trip? If you want to see all of Seoul's essential sites, you can do so with the Essential Seoul Tour. It'll take a single morning, and will take you to Seoul's must-see sites with transportation and a guide. All for the low price of \$35!

[Click to find out more about the Essential Seoul Tour.](#)

Follow:



Where to Stay in Seoul

The neighborhood you stay at can make or break your trip. Hopefully, I can help you pick the right place. Get to know the popular neighborhoods around Seoul to make sure your stay in Seoul is exactly what you're looking for.

[Click to find out more.](#)

Survival Korean

If you've ever spent more than 5 minutes asking for a plastic bag at the convenience store, failed to communicate using body language, and just felt overall lost, I know exactly how embarrassing and frustrating it is. That's why I compiled all my best survival tips into one book: Survival Korean.

[Click to find out more](#)

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