

Korea Survival Guide

A practical survival guide for foreigners and short-term residents — covering transportation, apps, language, and dining.

SERIES 1 | TRANSPORTATION | ESSENTIAL APPS | KOREAN LANGUAGE | FOOD & DINING

🚇 Transportation

- Get a **T-money card** at any convenience store — works on subway, bus, and some taxis
- Use **Kakao Maps** or **Naver Maps** for transit directions — **Google Maps is unreliable in Korea**
- KTX bullet train connects Seoul to Busan in **under 3 hours**

📱 Essential Apps

- **Kakao Talk** — the primary messaging app used by nearly everyone
- **Naver Papago** — best translation app, includes camera translation
- **Coupang Eats / Baemin** — food delivery with English interfaces available

🗣️ Korean Language

- Learn **Hangul (한글)** first — mastered in 1–2 days, unlocks menus, signs, and maps
- Key phrases: **감사합니다** (thank you), **얼마예요?** (how much?), **어디예요?** (where is it?)
- Use **존댓말** (formal speech) with strangers and elders to show respect

🍜 Food & Dining

- **Banchan** (side dishes) are free and refillable — **don't hesitate to ask for more**
- Tipping is **not customary** — it can cause confusion
- Look for **백반집** (baekban restaurants) for a hearty home-style meal under **₩8,000**

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Transit Cards & Subway Guide

🚌 T-money Card

Your essential tool for getting around Korea. Pick one up at any convenience store (GS25, CU, 7-Eleven) or subway ticket machine.

- **Card costs ₩2,500–₩4,000;** recharge at any convenience store or kiosk
- Works on **buses, subways, taxis,** and some bike-share services
- Transfer discounts apply **automatically** — no extra steps needed

🚇 Using the Subway

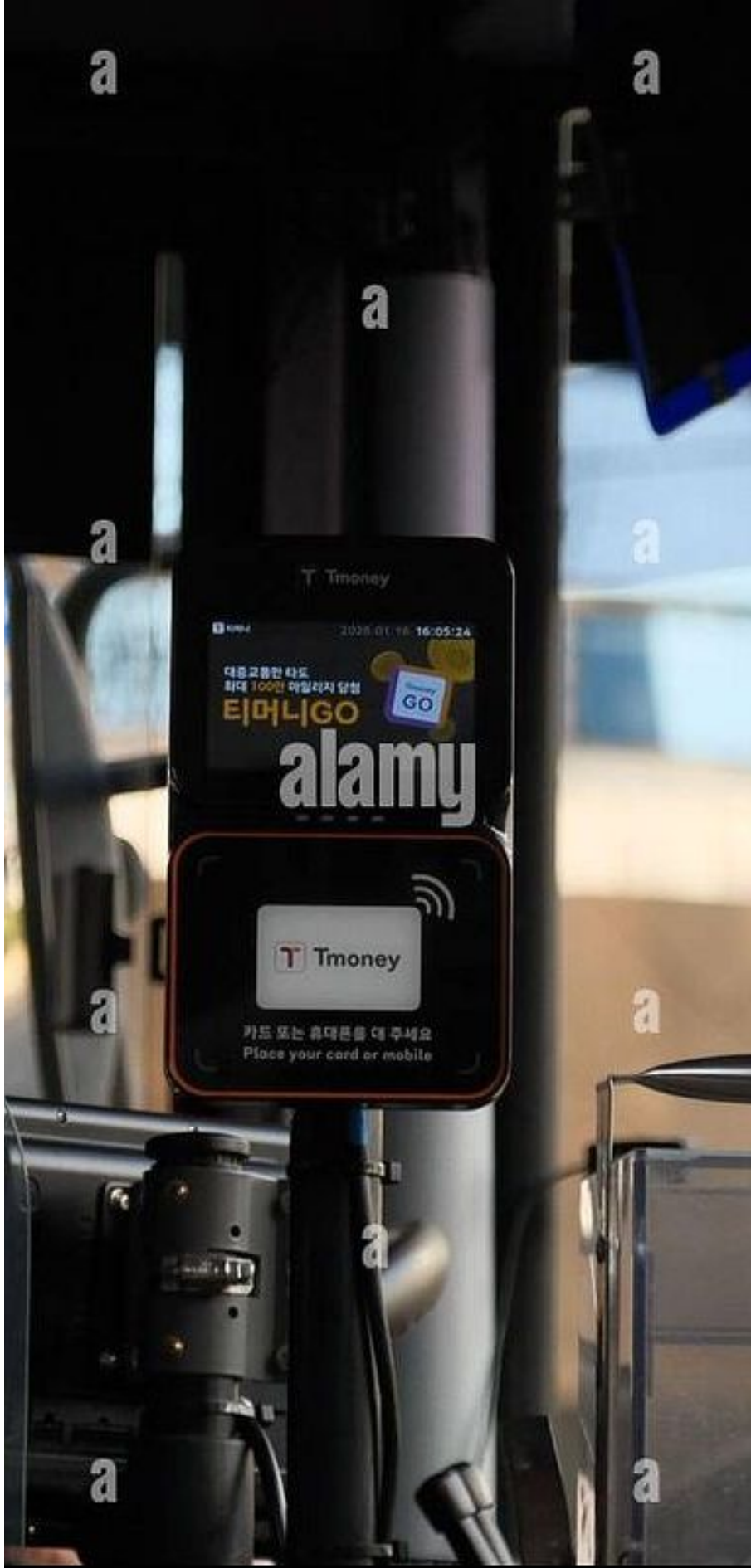
Seoul's subway covers 9 major lines and is one of the most punctual systems in the world.

- Always **tap in AND tap out** — skipping tap-out results in a penalty charge
- **Trains run approx. 05:30–24:00;** announcements in Korean, English, Chinese & Japanese
- Download **Kakao Maps** for real-time navigation and platform guidance

🔄 Transferring & Saving

The transfer system saves money — here's how it works.

- Free or discounted transfers within **30 minutes** of tapping out (subway↔️bus or bus↔️bus)
- Up to **4 transfers** allowed per journey; **night buses (N-buses)** are excluded
- Use **Kakao Maps** to plan routes and see estimated fares



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Reading Station Signs & Using the Bus



🚉 Reading Station Signs

Signs are bilingual (Korean & English). Follow **line colors** to identify your route — **Line 2 = Green, Line 5 = Purple**, etc. At transfer stations, look for your connecting line's color circle.

- **Platform screens** show arrival time, destination, and stops remaining.
- **Exit maps** are posted at every stairwell — check before heading up.

🚌 How to Use the Bus

Raise your hand to signal the bus to stop — it won't stop automatically. Tap your T-money card at the **front door** when boarding and the **rear door** when exiting to get transfer discounts.

- Press the **bell button** one stop before your destination.
- Use **Google Maps or Naver Maps** for real-time routes and arrival info.

Bus color = type: **Blue** = Trunk, **Green** = Branch, **Red** = Wide-area, **Yellow** = Circular

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High-Speed Rail, Intercity Bus & Taxi



🚄 KTX High-Speed Train

The fastest way to travel between major cities, operated by **Korail**.

- **Book via the Korail app** or station kiosks — **seat reservation is required**
- Foreign visitors can save with the **Korea Rail Pass (KR Pass)** for 2–5 consecutive days
- Arrive **10–15 minutes early** — trains depart on time



🚌 Intercity & Express Bus

A budget-friendly alternative connecting cities **not on the KTX network**.

- Departs from dedicated terminals — Seoul's main hubs are **Seoul Express Bus Terminal** (Gangnam) and **Dong Seoul Terminal**
- Book via the **Kobus** or **TmoneyGO app**, or at terminal counters
- Choose **Premium (우등)** class for wider, reclining seats on longer trips



🚕 Taxi

Widely available and **affordable for short distances**.

- Use the **Kakao Taxi app** to book — shows fare estimates and supports English
- **Regular (orange/silver)** taxis start at ~₩4,800; **Deluxe (black)** taxis offer more comfort
- **Late-night surcharge (~20%)** applies **midnight–4 AM**; show your destination via Naver or Kakao Maps

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Missed Your Stop? & Essential Apps

😅 When You Miss a Stop

Bus: Get off at the next stop and re-board. Your T-money card allows **free transfers within 30 minutes**.

Subway: Exit and cross to the opposite platform. Lines run every **3–5 minutes**, so the wait is short. **Transfers within the paid zone are free.**

KTX / Bus: Alert staff immediately — you may need a new ticket for the return.

Taxi: Say *"다음 코너에서 내려주세요"* (next corner please) — no extra charge for a small overshoot.

Korean transit is frequent and forgiving. Most mistakes are resolved in 5–10 minutes.

📱 Essential Transit Apps



KakaoMap / Naver Maps

Real-time routes, live bus arrivals, and subway exit numbers. Naver Maps has better English support.



Subway Korea

Full subway map in English — works offline. Shows transfer stations, travel times, and last train schedules.



Kakao T

Book taxis, track your driver, and pay with an international card — all in English.



Korail Talk

Book, cancel, or refund KTX tickets. Foreigner discount passes also available.

Tip: Download offline maps before your trip and carry a portable charger.

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Top 10 Essential Apps for Foreigners



🏛️ Government24

Government services & documents

- Apply for residency certificates & official documents online



🗺️ Naver Maps

Korea-optimized maps & navigation

- More accurate than Google Maps; real-time bus & subway arrivals in English



💬 KakaoTalk

Essential messenger & payments

- Used by virtually everyone in Korea; includes KakaoPay & Kakao T



🍽️ Baemin

#1 food delivery app in Korea

- Huge restaurant selection; look for "1인분" single-portion options



🏥 Yogiyo

Food delivery alternative

- Different listings than Baemin — worth comparing; discount coupons for new users



🚕 Kakao Taxi

Taxi booking with no language barrier

- Set destination in advance; shows estimated fare & English "International Taxi" option



🌐 Papago

Best Korean translation app

- Superior to Google Translate; camera mode for menus & signs, works offline



🏦 Toss

Banking & money transfers

- Instantly send money & view balances; requires ARC card to sign up



🛒 Coupang

Fast online shopping & delivery

- Rocket Delivery: next-day or same-day on groceries, electronics & more



🚇 Subway Korea

Subway map & routes in English

- Covers major cities; works fully offline with fares & exit numbers

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Essential Korean Phrases for Daily Life

Koreans appreciate any effort to speak their language — even a few words go a long way.

🙏 Basic Greetings & Politeness

안녕하세요 = Hello (formal)
감사합니다 = Thank you
죄송합니다 = I'm sorry
네 / 아니요 = Yes / No

💡 *Bow slightly when greeting — it's a sign of respect!*

🚌 Transportation & Directions

여기서 내려주세요 = Drop me here (taxi)
~에 어떻게 가요? = How do I get to ~?
길을 잃었어요 = I'm lost

💡 *Show the Korean address on your phone to drivers!*

🍽️ At a Restaurant & Shopping

이것 주세요 = I'll have this (point at menu)
얼마예요? = How much is it?
안 맵게 해주세요 = Not spicy, please
계산서 주세요 = Check, please

💡 *Many restaurants have picture menus — pointing works!*

🆘 Emergency & Practical

도와주세요! = Help me!
화장실 어디예요? = Where is the restroom?
천천히 말해주세요 = Please speak slowly

💡 *Save 119 (ambulance/fire) and 112 (police) in your phone!*

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How to Use Korean Restaurants

Entry

Most restaurants are seat-yourself — just find an open table. At popular spots, look for a kiosk or QR code at the entrance for a waiting list.

Ordering

Scan the QR code on the table to order, or shout "여기요!" to get staff attention. Look for 추천 (Recommended) dishes for the house specialties.

Side Dishes (Banchan)

Always free and refillable — say "더 주세요" for more. **At BBQ restaurants, staff will cook and cut the meat for you at the table.**

Payment

Pay at the front counter after your meal. Cards, cash, and mobile pay (Apple/Kakao/Samsung Pay) all accepted. No tipping — ever.



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Korean Food Types & Ordering Tips





💡 Ordering Tips

- **Solo dining is fine** — look for **1인분 (single-person) menus** at noodle and rice spots
- **Banchan (side dishes)** are **free and refillable** — press the call button or wave to staff
- **Water and utensils** are often **self-serve** near the entrance; **no tipping** expected
- Dishes marked with chili icons are spicy — ask for **"덜 맵게" (less spicy)** if needed

First time? Try **Bibimbap** (mild, customizable) or **Samgyeopsal** (pork belly BBQ) — both are **beginner-friendly** and widely available.

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Life in Korea — Now With Confidence!

One transit card, a few essential apps, and some basic phrases — and life in Korea becomes a whole lot easier.

🚇 Getting Around

- T-money card — buy at any convenience store for ₩2,500; reload at subway machines or stores
- KakaoMap — most accurate navigation app with real-time bus, subway, and walking routes
- Kakao T — hail taxis instantly; AREX connects Incheon Airport to Seoul Station in ~43 min

📱 Must-Have Apps

- KakaoTalk — the #1 messaging app; used by businesses and delivery services
- Naver Papago — best Korean translator; camera mode reads menus and signs
- Coupang Eats / Baemin — food delivery with English interface; accepts foreign cards

💬 Key Phrases

- 이거 주세요 — "Give me this one" (point and use anywhere)
- 얼마예요? — "How much is this?"
- 화장실이 어디예요? — "Where is the bathroom?"

🍽️ Dining Tips

- Press the call button on the table to summon your server
- Banchan (side dishes) are free and refillable — ask with "더 주세요"
- Convenience stores like GS25 and CU serve surprisingly good hot meals

Coming up next: Opening a bank account, using medical services, and making the most of convenience stores — stay tuned!

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