



OSAC Country Security Report

South Korea

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This report is intended to supplement the U.S. Department of State South Korea Travel Advisory and [South Korea Country Information Page](#).

Embassy & Consulate Contact Information

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OSAC Country Chapters

The Seoul OSAC Country Chapter is active and meets approximately once every four months.

Contact [OSAC's Asia team](#) with any questions.

South Korea Travel Advisory

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses that travelers should exercise normal precautions in South Korea.

Crime

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Seoul and Busan as being **LOW**-threat locations for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Crime "C" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Korea.

The crime emergency line in South Korea is **112**.

By U.S. standards, crime rates throughout the Republic of Korea (South Korea, or ROK) are low. For most visitors, South Korea remains a very safe country. Stay alert to any unusual activity around your home, hotel, or business, and report any significant incidents to the local police. The most common crimes (pocket picking, purse snatching, and thefts from hotel rooms

or homes) occur more frequently in major metropolitan and tourist areas, and crowded markets.

There have been few reported incidents involving U.S. victims. Most crimes reported by U.S. expatriates involve non-confrontational theft. Overall, most crimes are non-violent in nature, although there have been reports of more serious crimes, such as sexual assaults and murders. Corresponding to combatting the four “social evils” campaign, South Korea made numerous amendments to laws related to sex crimes. With these sweeping changes, and a focus on enforcement, Korean National Police Agency (KNPA) crime statistics show an increase in reported incidents in various categories of sex crimes over the past several years, particularly higher numbers of reported crimes, apprehensions, and cases prosecuted.

The Embassy regularly receives reports of sexual assault from U.S. citizens. Most cases involved young women assaulted by acquaintances they met on social media, dating, or messaging apps. Alcohol is often involved, and Korea’s overall low crime rate can create a false sense of security. Specialized hospital units and police are available in South Korea to assist victims, however services in English and responsiveness to the crime are not always consistent. In general, sex crimes are not punished as harshly in South Korea as in the United States, and the road to prosecution is a challenging one for victims.

Burglaries of occupied residences are rare.

While crimes involving firearms are extremely rare due to stringent gun control laws, violent crimes sometimes occur, often involving the use of knives.

Travelers should remain vigilant: exercise caution in crowded entertainment, nightlife, and shopping district; if traveling at night, consider traveling in groups; and use legitimate taxis or public transportation only.

Authorities may detain, arrest, and imprison persons believed to have committed acts intended to endanger the “security of the state,” including statements deemed to praise the political system and/or officials of the DPRK.

Itaewon, Sinchon, Myeongdong, Gangnam, and Hongdae are well-known entertainment and shopping districts in which crowds, alcohol, foreigners, and a higher prevalence of drug activity present a higher risk for crime. In general, tourist sites and crowded markets experience the highest incidences of opportunistic crime. In most instances, criminal perpetrators are usually deterred by the risk of confrontation and engage principally in crimes of stealth.

Kidnapping Threat

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Kidnapping “K” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Korea.

Kidnappings are not common in South Korea, but they do occur. KNPA does not categorize a specific crime for kidnapping as in western countries, and instead includes kidnappings into a statistical category of “illegal detention,” or persons being held against their own will. KNPA crime statistics for this category in 2019 reflect a total of 1,243 such incidents. Some notable cases of kidnapping in the past include a U.S.-South Korean dual citizen in late 2011 kidnapped and reportedly murdered by a South Korean relative because of an inheritance dispute. In April 2012, a Chinese national of Korean ethnicity kidnapped and murdered a woman in Suwon; the case was mishandled by police, became a national scandal, and led to the resignation of the KNP Commissioner General.

Terrorism

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Seoul and Busan as being **LOW**-threat locations for terrorism directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Terrorism “T” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Korea.

While U.S. citizens in South Korea are subject to the worldwide threat from international terrorism, no information suggests any specific terrorist threats directed at U.S. citizens or U.S. interests. Although there has not been a terrorist incident against U.S. interests in South Korea in recent history, the possibility of a lone actor attack or transnational terrorist organizations attempting to operate cannot be ruled out.

Political Violence and Civil Unrest

The U.S. Department of State has assessed Seoul as being a **MEDIUM**-threat location and Busan as a being **LOW**-threat location for political violence directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests.

North Korea and South Korea technically remain in a state of war. There is peace on the Korean peninsula because of the armistice agreement that has endured since 1953; in the past two decades, the number and type of political, economic, and social interactions between the Koreas have increased. Nonetheless, bilateral tensions remain moderately high and have escalated to limited military confrontations in the past.

In the last decade, provocations from the North have included ballistic missile tests, nuclear tests, and attacks on South Korea-held territory. Recent hostile activity by North Korea includes the blowing up a North-South Korea joint liaison office in the town of Kaeson on the north side of the DMZ in June 2020, and the shooting of a South Korean government worker who crossed the maritime border with North Korea in September 2020. As of this report’s publication, since the beginning of 2022, North Korea has conducted more than 100 weapons tests. Such actions have derailed advances in peace talks initiated by the U.S. and South Korean governments in recent years.

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Civil Unrest “U” Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Korea. Civil unrest can develop quickly without prior notice, often interrupting logistics and services. Avoid demonstration activity, as even those planned to remain peaceful have the potential to turn violent.

Elections/Political Stability

South Korea is a democratic republic which is considered politically stable. There have been no security-related matters surrounding elections in recent history.

In December 2024, President Yoon Suk-yeol declared martial law, later rescinding the decree roughly six hours later. This eventually led to his impeachment, and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo took over as acting president. However, Han was also eventually impeached, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy and Finance Choi Sang-mok assumed the acting presidency.

In June 2025, South Korea held a presidential election to replace former president Yoon. Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) candidate Lee Jae Myung was elected.

Protests & Demonstrations

Political demonstrations are extremely common. In recent years, there has been a marked decrease in violence associated with political demonstrations, but even demonstrations intended to be peaceful have the potential to turn confrontational quickly. In 2023, more than 79,000 demonstrations were permitted nationwide.

Many demonstrations are held on Gwanghwamun Plaza, located in front of the U.S. Embassy and alongside many Korean government offices and buildings, to include Seoul City Hall. Demonstrations also frequently occur at Seoul Plaza, approximately 900 meters south of Gwanghwamun Plaza. With the relocation of the president to the Yongsan area (Samgakji) many of the demonstrations that took place in Gwanghwamun plaza have relocated outside the Yongsan Presidential Office (YPO). Protests can often exceed 50,000 participants, and result in marches throughout downtown Seoul. Although the KNPA monitors demonstrations, and typically keeps traffic lanes open during protests, traffic becomes congested during large demonstrations, especially in the downtown Seoul area.

Demonstrations are registered at least 48 hours in advance by the protest group, and security is coordinated by the KNPA. Travelers should be aware of their surroundings, and leave the area immediately if they are in the vicinity of a protest and/or demonstration.

Generally, protests against U.S. policies and U.S. military presence on the peninsula are peaceful in nature, remain small in size, and are well monitored by the South Korean law enforcement.

Anti-U.S./Anti-Western Sentiment

South Korea is overwhelmingly pro-U.S. However, with approximately 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in country, there have been periods with increased anti-U.S. sentiment due to high-profile accidents/crimes committed by U.S. service members, and as relations develop between the U.S. and North Korea on denuclearization and bilateral issues. For example, in 2011, there were mass protests in Seoul against the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement; in 2019 there was increased protest activity against the U.S. government's proposed increase for the cost sharing agreement by the South Korean government for U.S. military assets stationed on the Korean Peninsula, known as the Special Measures Agreement (SMA); in 2020 a crash involving a U.S. military vehicle killed four Korean civilians that sparked protests and anti-U.S. sentiment. Such incidents often result in increased anti-U.S. protest activity.

Law Enforcement

Under the Ministry of Public Administration and Security, the KNPA is the national police force for South Korea. With nearly 150,000 officers, the KNPA is responsible for criminal investigations, public/cyber safety/security, traffic affairs, counterterrorism, riot control, dignitary protection, and various other law enforcement responsibilities. The KNPA Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit is the premier civilian authority charged with counterterrorism operations and responsible for serving high-risk arrest warrants, hostage rescue, and other acceptable high threat missions. KNPA SWAT teams are well-equipped with the latest equipment/ technologies and appear to be well-organized and trained. The KNPA has also invested heavily in police education and training, to include having an established Korean National Police University, Police Human Resources Development Institute, Central Police Academy, and Police Investigation Academy. Through these police-affiliated institutions, police officers are provided with knowledge/information related to investigations, counterterrorism, and enforcement of Korean laws.

The Supreme Prosecutors' Office (SPO) includes prosecutors and investigators. Unlike prosecutorial services in most developed countries, SPO possesses investigative authority usually exercised by police. SPO representatives can detain/arrest subjects and execute warrants. Issues occur between KNPA and SPO since they have overlapping jurisdictions and investigative powers. Legislation passed in 2020 to reform authorities between SPO and KNPA limits the type of investigations SPO can initiate (e.g., narcotics cases, sexual crimes); these reforms are under review by the constitutional courts.

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) is Korea's foreign intelligence service, but it also has a quasi-law enforcement function in that it is responsible for counter-terrorism activities and security planning for major international events (through its Threat Information Integration Center).

The Presidential Security Service (PSS) is independent from other agencies, administered from the YPO, and responsible for the protection of the president, the YPO, and other presidential

sites, and of the U.S. president and secretary of state when in South Korea. Of note, other U.S. cabinet officials that qualify are protected by the Dignitary Close Protection unit of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency (SMPA).

Civilian authorities maintain effective control over security forces, and the government utilizes effective mechanisms to investigate and punish abuse of power. There have been no reports that members of the security forces committed serious abuses.

Police Response

Police are generally competent and provide travelers with assistance. Some victims have reported that police procedures appear to be less sensitive and less responsive to victims' concerns than similar procedures in the U.S., particularly in cases of domestic violence and sexual assault. Investigations of sexual assault often occur without a female police officer present, and police may ask questions considered insensitive by western cultures. The KNPA maintains a "tourist police" unit responsible for patrolling major tourist areas in Seoul and Busan, whose officers are fluent in English, Japanese, and Mandarin.

Foreigners who are arrested or detained by police are treated with respect. Upon arresting a foreigner, police will usually notify the KNPA Foreign Affairs Division for liaison. If the crime is a misdemeanor, the police will generally release the individual on his/her own recognizance after confirming the individual's ties to Korea through verification of the subject's address, telephone number, and employment.

Travelers with Special Considerations

For [specific traveler concerns](#) in South Korea, review the local laws and circumstances on the Department of State's Country Information Page.

- [Women Travelers](#)
- [LGB Travelers](#)
- [Travelers with Disabilities](#)
- [Student Travelers](#)
- [Faith-Based Travelers](#)

Rule of Law, Arbitrary Detention, Official Harassment, Corruption, & Transparency

The U.S. Department of State has not included a Risk of Wrongful Detention "D" Indicator on the Travel Advisory for South Korea.

South Korea is a constitutional democracy. Korean law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respects judicial independence and impartiality. Korean law provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association; freedom of internal movement, foreign travel (except to North Korea), emigration, and repatriation; the ability to choose the government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot based on universal and equal suffrage; and establishes criminal penalties for corruption by officials.

There are no particular security concerns associated with any of the topics listed in this category.

Cybersecurity

The Republic of Korea is a world leader in Internet connectivity, reportedly having the world's fastest Internet connection speed and the highest internet penetration in per capita. Internet penetration rate is over 85%, and smart phone penetration rate is 80%. On an individual level, the threat of cybercrime is moderate but steadily increasing; phishing schemes and theft of Personal Identifiable Information (PII) for criminal intent have increased, as has defamation, which is considered a criminal offense. At the institutional and multinational company level, South Korea has experienced an increased number of intrusions, Distribution Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, and the use of malicious software to disrupt networks. Hackers have also targeted South Korean financial institutions, stealing Korean Identification Numbers (KIDs) and other PII, with financial motives. KID is similar to a U.S. social security number and is used in Korea as a primary identifier for personal and financial transactions. The use of malicious software to disrupt or shut down government, public, and private networks continues to impact the economy negatively, jeopardizing the security of critical infrastructure. In 2014, malefactors used malicious software to gain access to the Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Company. KNPA statistics reveal more than 230,000 cybercrimes reported for 2020, up from just more than 180,000 reported in 2019.

North Korean actors have increased their cyber capabilities and efforts in targeting South Korea in recent years. South Korea's NIS estimates have placed the number of cyberattacks from North Korea on South Korea's public sector at nearly 1.6 million per day in 2020. Roughly 40% of these attempts focused on financial gain, rather than intrusions into critical infrastructure, government, or military assets.

Import/Export Restrictions

South Korea has made significant strides in its protection of intellectual property rights in certain respects. It cooperates aggressively with U.S. law enforcement to pursue criminal investigations and to seize counterfeit goods, including luxury items.

Industrial espionage, however, remains a high-profile concern. Open sources have reported that South Korea may have attempted to compromise protected technology of U.S. F-15 fighters it purchased.

There is strict enforcement of regulations on importing and exporting items such as firearms, narcotics and prescription drugs, non-prescription health supplements, radio equipment, and gold. Importation of materials deemed to be obscene, subversive, or harmful to the public peace is also restricted. If traveling with pets, see Korea's Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency website.

There are no known restrictions on the import of satellite phones. Drone importation is permitted, but their use requires coordination and approval by local authorities.

A country-specific listing of items/goods prohibited from being exported to the country or that are otherwise restricted is available from the U.S. International Trade Agency [website](#).

Additional resources and reports can be found in the [OSAC Traveler Toolkit](#).