

Exploring South Korea

Country(ies): South Korea

Tour type: Shoestring

Transport: Local Transport

Group size: Min: 4 | Max: 18

Days: 12 days

Start Location: Seoul, South Korea

End Location: Jeju Island, South Korea

Meals: Breakfasts - 4, Lunches - 0, Dinners - 2

Highlights:

Visit the Demilitarized Zone, Take a Taekwondo class and a K-pop dance class, Enjoy the great views of Seoul from Namsan Mountain, Visit Gyeongbokgung Palace, Explore Seoraksan National Park, Take a cycling tour of Gyeongju, Explore Chunmachong Ancient



Itinerary

Day 1: Seoul. Taekwondo class, cable car to Namsan Mountain

After arriving at the hostel there will be a welcome meeting with your tour guide at 2pm for a brief introduction to travel in South Korea and the plan for the days ahead. We'll then head out for a fun introductory Taekwondo Class, learning the basics of this ancient martial art from a professional instructors in an authentic location. The class will take around 1 1/2 hours and no previous knowledge or skills are required.

After the class we will head to a local restaurant in Myeongdong for our first taste of Korean cuisine (optional). Finally this evening we'll make our way to the cable car station and ride up Namsan Mountain. There are spectacular views from here of of Seoul lit up at night (approx. 20min walk from the final cable car station). This is also recognised as the most popular location in Seoul for couples, and you can lock your 'padlock of love' onto the railings at the base of Seoul N Tower. Even better views are available from the top of the tower.

At around 10pm we'll take the cable car back down and hop on public transport back to the Hongdae district where our accommodation lies. Here you can either finish the evening by strolling the streets to explore on your own or get an early night for your first full day of adventure tomorrow.

OVERNIGHT: Step Inn Myeongdong 1 or similar, Seoul

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Private Twin/Double Room Upgrade Private Single Room Upgrade

Day 2: Visit Gyeongbokgung Palace, free afternoon

We kick the day off bright and early to explore the ancient side of Seoul. We start today's tour by hopping on the metro to Gyeongbokgung Palace where you'll have the chance to watch the Royal Guard Changing Ceremony. Next we'll visit a hanbok rental store where you can rent some traditional Korean clothes (from KRW15,000) before we enter the palace which you can explore independently. Alternatively, an English speaking tour is conducted by the palace guides starting at 11.am.

The afternoon and evening are then free. You could make your way to Bukchon Hanok Village, breaking the journey at the Blue House on the way (South Korea's 'White House' - the official residence of the South Korean President, Moon Jae-in). You could also visit Insadong Art Street, explore Gangnam District, rent a bike and cycle along Han river, or visit HiKR Ground, an eXtended Reality Korea promotional hallground. Your guide will be on hand to help with suggestions and advice.

OVERNIGHT: Step Inn Myeongdong 1 or similar, Seoul

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 3: Korean Demilitarized Zone, K-pop dance class

The tour kicks off with a visit to the famous Korean Demilitarized Zone. We start by taking a bus for an hour north of Seoul to Imjingak, where you'll have the chance to grab some breakfast. We'll then continue on to Dorasan Station - the northernmost train stop in South Korea which was once intended to connect the country with North Korea. While there, you can visit the platform and buy a souvenir train ticket for 1000 KRW.

We'll get a view into North Korea next from the Dora Observatory where you can see the nearest North Korean villages through binoculars. Next, we descend into the 3rd Tunnel created by North Koreans which will take you as close as 170m to North Korea. After our time here, we head back to Seoul while having the chance to speak to a North Korean defector on the bus.

After arriving back in Seoul, we include a fun K-pop dance class for anyone keen to learn the basics of this international phenomenon. No dance experience is required and the class takes around 1 1/2 hours. Alternatively you may like visit Myeongdong Cathedral or a quirky cat café.

If you're looking for evening entertainment, we recommend a traditional Nanta Show (a comedy cooking performance), or you could explore Itaewon, best known for its endless restaurant and bar options, or head over to the ritzy Gangnam district.

OVERNIGHT: Step Inn Myeongdong 1 or similar, Seoul

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 4: Seoraksan Mountain and Sokcho

Today we depart Seoul and head to Sokcho, in the north-eastern part of the country. We'll arrive at the Seoraksan National Park in the late morning and have some free time to hike in the park, or take a cable car (for an additional 13,000 KRW fee) to one of the peaks.

There are several options here for different trails. These include

- Taking the cable car and a short 20min hike to the peak
- Hiking for around 3 hours to Bisundae and Keumganggul Cave
- Hiking for around 2 hours to Yukdam, Biryong and Towangsung waterfalls
- Hiking for around 4 hours to Ulsanbawi Rock for spectacular views over the national park.

Later in the afternoon we'll drive to Sokcho town and take the Gatbae boat across the river to Abai - a small village where North Koreans lived following the war which divided the country. Fantastic views of Seoraksan Mountain, East Sea and the Sokcho area are possible if you continue walking from the village to the Lighthouse observatory.

Later, the evening, we'll enjoy an optional dinner with the rest of the group in and around the local fish markets. While here, we recommend one of the most famous Korean fried chicken restaurants in the area - Manseok, known for its sticky sweet and sour boneless fried chicken.

After dinner, we head back to the hostel for a traditional Korean liquor tasting (min age 19).

OVERNIGHT: Haru Guesthouse or similar, Sokcho

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 5: Gulgulsa Temple stay

We start the day by driving to Geongju, stopping at the popular BTS bus stop on the beach on the way. We then continue to Gulgulsa Temple, where you'll experience an overnight temple stay. Once we arrival, we'll check into the temple and follow their schedule for the day. A typical afternoon would include an initial introduction to temple etiquette, followed by a meditation class, some communal work perhaps in the gardens, and then Sumnodo training before a traditional Buddhist vegetarian dinner of vegetables, rice and fruit. There is normally a further meditation and chanting service in the evening. Accommodation is very basic tonight, reflecting the monks' lifestyle, with blankets, sheets and pillows provided to sleep on the floor.

OVERNIGHT: Gulgulsa Temple

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 6: Morning chanting and meditation. Afternoon exploring Geongju by Bike

We start the day by joining the monks for their morning chanting and meditation session, followed by a vegan breakfast. In the afternoon, after checking into our hostel, we'll start exploring Gyeongju by bike! First up, we ride to Cheonmachong Ancient Tombs - part of the Daereungwon Tomb Complex in Tumuli Park. Later, we make our way to Cheomseongdae - the oldest existing astronomical observatory in East Asia. Overall the cycling tour takes around 45min on flat roads, and you can keep exploring the town by bike afterwards if you wish, or explore the old town on foot independently if you would prefer to skip the bikes.

If you're keen to experience authentic Korean food we suggest having dinner at Dosol Maeul - a local restaurant serving traditional Korean set meals in an equally authentic environment! You could also get your cameras out and visit Anapji for amazing night views of the palace (entrance ticket 3,000 KRW).

OVERNIGHT: Blueboat Hostel or similar, Gyeongju

MEALS: Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 7: Bullet train to Busan, Gamcheon Village, Songdo Beach

This morning we leave the hostel and transfer to Shin-Gyeongju Station to catch the bullet train to Busan. On arrival, we'll visit Gamcheon Village where you can take lunch, before we continue on to Songdo Beach and the Songdo Marine Cable Car (an additional 5,000 KRW fee can be paid for the glass bottomed cable car). Later we walk to the trendy entertainment and shopping area of BIFF Square in Nampo-dong. Here you could try some Busan style hotteok from one of the street vendors. Finally we transfer to our hostel for the evening.

OVERNIGHT: Busan Blueboat Hostel or similar, Haeundae

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 8: Haedong Yonggungsa Temple. Free time in Busan. Jjimjilbang option

First up, today, we'll head out on the bus to Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, considered by many to be the most beautiful in Korea, and a rare example of a temple situated on the shoreline rather than in the hills.

The afternoon is then free for an optional visit to a Jjimjilbang, complete with saunas, cold rooms, jacuzzis and more. Your tour leader will suggest one, normally Centum Spa Land, and provide guidelines for what to expect in a jjimjilbang, including about how to use the lockers and changing rooms, segregated areas for different genders, dress code (you'll be expected to be naked in the pools, sauna & steam rooms and wear provided jjimjilbang uniforms in the communal area), the different fomentation rooms, massage options etc. and how the payment for different options works - budget around 20,000 KRW, plus more for massages and extras).

In the evening there's an optional sightseeing trip by boat to enjoy the night views of Haeundae and Gwangan Bridge.

Later, why not enjoy a fun Noraebang (Karaoke) night out - prices vary depending on group sizes, but expect to pay around 100,000 KRW per room including snacks and fruit.

OVERNIGHT: Busan Blueboat hostel or similar, Haeundae

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 9: Free morning in Busan. Fly to Jeju

The morning is yours free to explore Busan. You could take a picnic breakfast out to the beach and enjoy your time there swimming, playing volleyball and frisbee etc. Luggage can be stored at the hostel during the day.

There is a wide range of other activities you could do today. For example, perhaps take a cooking class to learn how to make the Korean dishes you've tried throughout your trip (if you would like to do this, please advise the tour guide at the start of the trip so arrangements can be pre-booked). Alternatively, take one of the colourful train or sky pods through the Haeundae Blueline Park, or take a 4.7km hike along the Igidae Coastal Walk, one of the most scenic hiking trails in all of Busan. Other attractions include the Busan X Sky Observatory at the top of Korea's second tallest building, and a visit to Huinnyeoul Culture Village.

Later, we head to Busan Airport for the short domestic flight to Jeju Island. Upon arrival we'll head to our accommodation. Once you've had time to settle in, why not head out to the Olle Maeil Market or explore the nightlife the city has to offer.

OVERNIGHT: Shinshin Hotel or similar, Jeju Island

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 10: Jeju Island, Jjeongbang waterfall, Sunrise Peak hike

Wake up today on the beautiful island of Jeju where we'll head to Jjeongbang Waterfall. Start the day at the waterfall – the only one of its kind in Asia, this wonder of the natural world flows directly in to the ocean. After this, we'll embark on a trek along the beautiful Jeju Olle Trail.

Next, we'll take a hike to the top of Seongsan Ilchulbong, also known as Sunrise Peak. This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with a unique formation that was formed by hydrovolcanic eruptions over 5 000 years ago.

The rest of the day is then free at leisure. You could visit Jungmun Beach, Cheonjiyeon Waterfall, take a walk around the Maritime Park and Saeyeongyo Bridge, and then enjoy sunset drinks at The Cliff. Your tour leader will be there to provide information and advice on all the different options.

OVERNIGHT: Shinshin Hotel or similar, Jeju Island

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Day 11: Jeju Yacht trip, BBQ dinner

This morning you'll join your fellow travellers onboard an included Yacht trip before returning to the hotel in the early afternoon for some well-deserved rest time – the rest of the day is yours where you'll be free to explore Jeju further or just relax at the beach.

In the evening, you'll have a farewell BBQ dinner. Eat delicious food, watch the sun go down and if you want, party into the night by the seashore. Make the most of your time with your fellow travellers, as you'll be saying goodbye in the morning. Please note that occasionally the farewell dinner will take place on day 10.

OVERNIGHT: Shinshin Hotel or similar, Jeju Island

MEALS: Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 12: Tour ends on Jeju Island

Your adventure ends this morning at the hotel.

If you book a flight back to Seoul with us, then a transfer to the airport is included at 08.30am - you will need to arrange your own transfer if you make your own flight arrangements or need to travel to the airport at a different time. This is easy to do through your accommodation and your tour leader can also advise further.

If you are flying from Jeju airport to Gimpo Airport in Seoul today, and have an international flight departing from Incheon Airport today as well, then make sure to allow time when booking your flights for your international flight check in, and a 35minute metro trip from Gimpo to Incheon airport.

Additional nights can be booked in the hotel in Jeju or the hostel in Seoul if you would like to extend your time in either location.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: None

EXTRAS:

Included:

- English speaking tour leaders
- Transport, including all internal bus and train tickets
- Accommodation (including hostels, hotels and temples)
- Domestic flight from Busan to Jeju Island
- A selection of meals:
 - Simple breakfasts in the Seoul hostel
 - Gulgulsa Temple: simple Buddhist dinner & breakfast
 - Jeju Island: BBQ dinner
- Entry, transport and tour leader escort to various sites and activities including:
 - Seoul - Take a Taekwondo class and a cable car up Namsan Mountain. Visit the Demilitarized Zone, take a K-Pop dance class, visit Gyeongbokgung Palace
 - Sokcho - Seoroksan National Park, Sokcho town, traditional liquor tasting, Gatbae boat trip and visit to Abai Village
 - Gyeongju - Cycling tour of Gyeongju, Chunmachong ancient tombs, Cheomseongdae astronomical observatory, Meditation and chanting services, traditional arts performance and sunmodo lesson at Gulgulsa temple.
 - Busan - visit Gamcheon Village, take Songdo Beach Marine cable car, visit Haedong Yonggungsa Temple
 - Jeju - Hike to the top of Seongsan Ilchulbong, take a sailing yacht trip, and a trek on the Jeju Olle Trail.
- All local taxes and charges

Excluded:

- International flights
- Travel insurance (compulsory)
- Airport arrival and departure transfers
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary

- Activities and entrances not listed in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks, tips and personal expenses (eg. laundry)
- Baseball Match
- Pub Crawl

Notes

- This is an active, backpacking style tour, and there is a lot of walking and physical activity involved. We therefore set a minimum age of 16 and maximum age limit of 55. Children aged 15 or under may be accepted in some circumstances.
- This tour includes a flight from Busan to Jeju, this flight includes 15kg of checked luggage and 10kg hand luggage.

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Private Twin/Double Room Upgrade

Min numbers: 2

This option provides an upgrade from the shared hostel-type rooms used on the tour to a private twin or double room. We recommend adding this early as space is subject to availability in the accommodations used.

Note - this upgrade does not cover the nights spent on the overnight ferry or in the temple which remain as shared accommodation.

Private Single Room Upgrade

Min numbers: 1

This option provides an upgrade from the shared hostel-type rooms used on the tour to a private single room. We recommend adding this early as space is subject to availability in the accommodations used.

Note - this upgrade does not cover the nights spent on the overnight ferry, or in the temple, which remain as shared accommodation.

1. Accommodation

The accommodation used on the tour is a mix of simple stays in hostels, simple hotels and a temple stay. Each have their own unique South Korean charm, and at the same time are safe, clean, and hygienic and have either air-conditioning or fans. All have good showers, internet, and most have washing machines. The price is based on same-sex shared rooms in these hostels and accommodations, All bedding is provided - you do not need to bring a sleeping bag. Luggage is tagged and stored securely while we are out exploring during the day. The majority of other people staying in the hostels will be young people aged 18 to 35 and travelling on a budget. It's easy to make new friends and have fun meeting in the lounge areas. You can also upgrade to a private or twin room subject to availability at the time of booking. This may not extend to all the accommodation throughout the trip. Please contact us if you would like more information.

WiFi is available in all the accommodation used on the tour. During the temple stay this will only extend to communal areas.

Additional nights are available on request in the hostels used at the start and finish of the tour - please contact us for prices and to book.

2. Transport

We use public transport as much as possible on this tour, to keep costs down and to give a better immersion into the country. The normal journey times we take are shown below...

- Seoul to Sokcho is from 8am – 10:30am (bus)
- Sokcho to Seoul is from 7pm – 9:30pm (bus)
- Seoul to Gyeongju is from 10am – 12:06pm (KTX train)
- Gyeongju to Busan is from 4pm – 6:50pm (bus)
- Busan to Jeju Island is from 7pm to 7am (overnight ferry)

All the train tickets for the group will be purchased at the same time, so we normally end up sitting together. However, there is a chance may not be the case, and in these situations our tour leaders can normally arrange with other travellers to shuffle things around.

3. Transfers

Arrival into Seoul

We do not currently offer an airport arrival transfer service in Seoul airport, as the public transportation from the airport to the city centre is much more convenient and is easy to navigate.

By Taxi:

Taking a taxi from Incheon Airport will take an average time of 80 minutes given the usual local traffic conditions. For non-Korean language speakers, we recommend using the International Taxi Service, which offers flat fares of around 60,000 to 80,000 won for destinations around Seoul. All drivers are English speakers, and there are no additional toll gate fees, midnight surcharges or fees for luggage.

To book a taxi, please exit the airport through Gates 4 to 8, located in Arrivals, first level, and cross the street in order to approach the taxi stands (4D to 8C).

For regular taxis, fares are around 60,000 and 100,000 won for a ride to several destinations around Seoul. Please note that there is a late-night surcharge (+20% to the initial fare) between midnight and 04.00 am.

By Public Transport:

The 'All Stops' airport transfer trains depart every 5-10 minutes from the Incheon International Airport in to the central Seoul Station with regular stops at subway connections en-route. This takes around 55 minutes.

There is also a slightly faster Express train which goes direct to Seoul Station from where you can access the subway system.

When we send you your tour confirmation voucher a couple of weeks before departure we will confirm your first

hotel accommodation and the nearest subway stop.

Departure from Jeju:

At the end of the tour the tour ends at the hostel in Jeju at checkout time (normally 10.00am). Your tour leader will provide information and advice about how to get to the airport.

If you book a flight out of Jeju to Seoul with us then we will include the airport transfer in the price. Please contact us for details.

Note - there are two airports in Seoul and this flight arrives at the domestic airport. If you are looking to connect to an international flight, you may have to transit to the international airport. .

4. Tour Leaders / Guides

This tour is accompanied by English speaking tour leaders. These all have the knowledge and passion to help make sure you have a great time in all the places visited during the tour. We may sometimes use more than one leader for different sections of the tour but often the same person will accompany you throughout. Where they do not travel with you between locations, they will help you board and see you off, and you'll be met on your arrival at the next destination.

Each tour leader is an expert in all things South Korea. However, they are not licensed tour guides. Often they are students wanting to do some work before heading back to university or before starting a job. This often gives them more passion and enthusiasm than long-term tourist guides.

Specialist tour guides are available at many of the sites we visit along the way if you would like some more in depth information about particular sites.

5. Group Size & Operation

The minimum number of travellers required for the tour to run is 2, with a maximum group size of 20.

This is an active, backpacking style tour, and there is a lot of walking and physical activity involved. We therefore set a minimum age of 16 and maximum age limit of 55. Children aged 15 or under may be accepted in some circumstances.

This tour is operated in conjunction with one of our tour operator partners specialising in this region so you may join with travellers booking through different companies and from different countries. This can make for some really interesting groups and new people to meet.

6. Meals

Discovering the cuisine in South Korea is often a highlight of people's visit. Your tour leader will offer to take you for a group meal each evening, choosing a local restaurant they know is hygienic and has good, cheap and tasty food. There are also lots of options if you want a reminder of Western food during the trip. South Korea also has many delicious street food options to try, including Bibimbap and Theok-bokki, which are a good choice if you want to keep to a tighter budget.

With so many choices, vegetarians and other special dietary needs can generally be well catered for in South Korea. Just discuss your requirements with the tour leader and they'll be happy to help and provide advice and suggestions.

7. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about

how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

8. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

9. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

10. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and

information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

<https://x.com/encounterstravel> (yes, without the 'e')

11. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

12. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's ['Travel Aware' campaign](#) which provides further useful and invaluable information.

13. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

14. Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing

you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

15. Money

The currency in South Korea is the South Korean won, abbreviated to KRW (short for Korean Republic won), with the symbol ₩. It is subdivided into 100 jeon, but these are no longer used in practice.

You can withdraw money at ATM machines in all the main cities and tourist areas in South Korea. However, not all ATMs will accept foreign bank cards, so we recommend speaking to your tour leader for advice. We also recommend that you advise your bank that you will be travelling before you depart. Finally do make sure to check your bank's charges for foreign transactions and choose a card which is not going to be super expensive on this front.

Taking cash in US Dollars, GB Pounds and Euros and changing it into local currency while you are there is also a good option. However, exchange rates and commissions can vary widely so check carefully before you commit to a conversion.

On our Shoestring tours in South Korea we generally suggest that budgeting on around GBP 10-15 (USD 13-20) per day for food and drink.

16. Tipping

Tipping is not customary or necessary in South Korea, and you will often find staff politely refusing tips. So, you will not cause offence by not tipping. You can offer taxi drivers or street vendors to keep the change, but formal tips are not expected.

The same applies to your tour leader(s). You do not need to tip them, but if you wish to, please only do so based on your personal budget and your satisfaction with the service provided.

17. Drones

The use of Drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is not allowed while on our tours. If you are in possession of a drone when entering the country it is your responsibility to be informed of and follow all local laws. This may include registering your drone with authorities. If you violate this policy or operate a drone illegally you are subject to removal from the tour as per our terms & conditions.

18. What to Take

We strongly recommend packing very light for our Shoestring tours in South Korea. You will have access to laundry services at your accommodation throughout the trip, so you won't need to pack a new outfit for each day. Items you can mix and match are your best bet, as you'll be able to bring less clothing and thus, have lighter luggage. Ensure that you research the time of year you are travelling, so your clothing is appropriate for the

climate.

For your luggage, a suitcase is OK, but a backpack/hold-all is much more convenient. Whether you're travelling elsewhere in Asia or just flying to and from South Korea, remember to look into what the checked luggage weight limits are for your flights.

Packing suggestions:

- Flipflops / sandals
- Sensible walking shoes
- T-shirts
- Shorts/skirts
- Long pants
- Swimming costume
- Lightweight waterproof
- Warm sweater/jacket
- Towel
- Washbag
- Passport (see our Visa section for useful information)
- Cash, South Korean won or credit/debit card
- Student card if you have one, although it is not guaranteed to be accepted
- Travel insurance policy
- Photocopies of insurance policy, bank cards, passport photo page, visa
- Reusable water bottle
- Books and other entertainments for the night trains
- Mosquito repellent, sun-screen and after-sun
- Camera and charger – South Korea is a photographer's dream!
- Small first aid kit with medicine for diarrhoea, paracetamol, disinfectant etc.
- A big bag and a small rucksack. We sometimes get separated from our big bags, so you'll need to keep your valuables with you in a small bag.

Bring electronic products at your own risk. Some customers choose to travel with iPhone, tablets and laptops, but although theft is extremely rare on our tours, there is petty crime in some areas we visit.

19. Passport & Visas

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport; your passport should have at least 1 blank page for every country you are visiting on your trip. Please bring two photocopies of your passport with you in case you need them, or lose your passport.

South Korea offers visa-free entry for up to 90 days for many nationalities, including British, European, American, Canadian and Australian. However, visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

If you do not need a visa, you must still obtain a K-ETA.

K-ETA is an electronic travel authorization for visa-free foreign visitors and it is tied directly to your passport.

Please check K-ETA eligibility of your country of origin and apply through [K-ETA](#).

Please note that you'll be asked to enter postal code, road name address, detailed address and contact number when filling out the form. Please enter the the hotel's address and phone number from your tour confirmation voucher when applying your K-ETA.

If your country of origin is not eligible for K-ETA, then you must apply for the visa at the nearest embassy.

Visa information is subject to change without notice. For the most current information, please visit your nearest embassy.

20. Health & Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully covered by your travel insurance for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions.

In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

South Korea: No specific boosters or courses advised, but please read the link for more info. [Malaria map](#). Malaria risk is low throughout the year throughout the country but precautions against mosquito bites should still be taken. Yellow Fever vaccination certificates are not required.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transited through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary. Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

Printed on: Friday 1st of May 2026

Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
