

SOUTH KOREA

Location

Northeast Asia.

Area

99,313 sq km (38,345 sq miles, excluding demilitarised zone).

Population

49 million (2009).

Population Density

493.4 per sq km.

Capital

Seoul.

Population: 10.3 million (Seoul Metropolitan Government 2005).

Government

Republic since 1945.

Language

Korean, with English widely taught in school and generally understood in major centers.

Religion

This is one of the world's most homogeneous populations, but faith is divided largely between Christianity (14%) and the country's traditional faith of Buddhism (50.7%), with 34.3% choosing no religion. Confucian philosophy is generally followed out of generational habit, while Shamanism and the belief in ghosts and spirits are also strong. Cheondogyo is a Korean faith that has grown up out of Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity, and there is a small Islamic population.

Time

GMT + 9.

Electricity

110/220 volts AC, 60Hz. Government policy is to phase out the 110 volt supply and many hotels now have a 220 volt supply.

Head of Government

Prime Minister Chung Un-chan 2009.

Head of State

President Lee Myung-bak since 2008.

Telephone

Country code: 82.

Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with a few mobile phone companies - check before departure. You may still have to hire a relevant Korean handset even though your SIM card works. Pre-booking for handset hire is recommended.

Internet

Internet is widely available in Korea. The country is the sixth highest user of Internet in the world; according to the OECD, Korea is the fourth-most connected broadband country of all OECD countries. There are Internet cafes around the country in public places such as airports, train stations and bus terminals in Korea. 'PC bangs' are rooms full of computers, predominantly started for people to play games. They are cheap and many open 24-hours with snacks available.

Media

There are four major national terrestrial networks that dominate TV viewing in South Korea. Many Koreans are connected to cable TV services and digital satellite TV service and there are more than 100 daily Korean Cable/Satellite TV Networks. *Arirang TV* provides a fairly slick and comprehensive series of public service programming in English and is usually available in hotels. There is also patchy reception on the US forces station *AFN*, which broadcasts American-orientated TV such as news, sitcoms, drama and movies.

Post

Airmail to Western Europe takes up to 10 days.

Post office hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1800. Gwanghwamun main post office in Seoul: Mon-Fri 0900-2000; Sat-Sun 0900-1800.

Press

- English-language national daily newspapers include *The Korea Herald*, *The Korea Times* and *JoongAng Ilbo*, published as a daily insert in the International Herald Tribune.
- Other newspapers include *The Hankyoreh*, which has a good English-language online presence (website: www.hani.co.kr), as does *Chosun Ilbo* (website: <http://english.chosun.com>).
- *Seoul Selection* is a useful English-language lifestyle magazine.
- Go to *Bandi & Luni's* Bookstore at the COEX Mall in Seoul for an excellent selection of English-language newspapers, magazines and books about Seoul.

Radio

- Public operator *Korea Broadcasting System (KBS)* operates six networks.
- Public operator *Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation* operates *MBC Radio* and music-based *MBC FM*.
- *Seoul Broadcasting System* operates *SBS-FM*.
- *Buddhist Broadcasting System (BBS)* is a Buddhist network and *Far East Broadcasting Corporation (FEBC)* also has religious content.
- *American Forces Network Korea (AFN Korea)* is a station aimed at US military personnel.

*Date to be confirmed.

Below are listed Public Holidays for the January 2011-December 2011 period.

1 Jan New Year.

4 Feb *Sollal (Lunar New Year)*.

1 Mar *Independence Movement Day*.

1 May *Labor Day (not an official public holiday but many companies and financial markets close)*.

5 May *Children's Day*.

10 May *Buddha's Birthday*.

6 Jun *Memorial Day*.

15 Aug *Liberation Day*.

13 Sep *Chuseok (Harvest Moon Festival)*.

3 Oct *National Foundation Day*.

25 Dec *Christmas Day*.