



Driving in South Korea

What You Need to Know

Contents

Requirements for driving in South Korea	2
Renting a car.....	3
Getting around: How to use the Korean GPS.....	4
Getting around: Information on expressways and tolls	7
Costs of driving	8
Extra tips and information	8
Road trips.....	9
Checklist for Driving in South Korea	10
Quick Lookup: GPS phone numbers.....	11
About this guide	12

Requirements for driving in South Korea

You **MUST** have a valid International Driving Permit (IDP) or a valid driver's license issued in Korea. If you are a foreign traveler, you have to get your IDP in the same country that issued your driver's license. Always bring your driver's license with you, as the IDP is only valid when accompanied with a valid license. Also, the full name listed on the IDP and your passport must be identical.

Note that IDPs recognized in Korea are only those issued by member states of the [Geneva convention](#) or the [Vienna convention](#) – click the links to see which one your country is using.

If you don't have an international driving permit yet, find out how you can get one from your local automobile association **BEFORE** leaving for your trip. Google “international driving permit + [your country]” and make sure that the website you land on is legitimate.

When you pick up your rental car, make sure to bring your passport for identification purposes. The attendants may make a copy of it, for security reasons. Vehicle rental fees must be paid with the driver's credit card.

Driver qualifications differ according to the rental company, but generally, for small or medium cars, you must be 21 years old or older with at least one year driving experience.

It's also smart to pay for insurance. Baseline rates for car rentals usually include basic general insurance, but confirm this when you get your car. Also, if you plan to drive, you might want to get a travel insurance that covers damages to a rental car as well as damages or bodily harm to a third party caused by an accident while you are driving.

Renting a car

It's best to make a reservation online in advance. This is good practice as this not only assures you that you'll indeed get a car but also allows the rental company to prepare your car and all paperwork involved in advance, so less waiting time for you.

Major car rental companies in South Korea include: AJ Rent-a-car (affiliated with Avis), Lotte Rent-a-car (affiliated with Hertz), Sixt, and Jeju-do Car Rental Business Association.

I've personally booked cars from AJ Rent-a-Car and Sixt Rent-a-car via the [Rental Cars online booking platform](#) and had great experiences so far. The staff in both companies were very helpful – despite the language barrier, they managed to teach me how to use the Korean GPS. The cars I got were all in good condition, and in my experience, the charges were upfront (that is, no hidden fees).

You can reserve a car online from any of the major car rental companies listed above via [Rental Cars](#) – the online service gives you options from all the rental companies, which allows you to compare prices, car models, and inclusions easily, plus they give you instant confirmation and free cancellation. Plus, they also give deals and discounts for booking through them.

Personally, I always opt to pay for full protection insurance – but this depends on your personal travel insurance's coverage. Also, don't forget to reserve a GPS – an English one if it's available, but a Korean one will do just fine.

[You can get a car from these locations.](#)

Getting around: How to use the Korean GPS

One of the reasons I urge you to book your car rental in advance is so you can reserve your English-language GPS. Even then, this is only available in certain car rental locations (usually the ones at the airport), so you'll have to learn how to use the Korean GPS.

The really nifty thing is that you can use phone numbers for the Korean GPS. Just input the phone number of the place where you want to go and then start your drive.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how to use your Korean GPS using phone numbers (you can also refer to the infographic on the next page):

1. On the main interface, click the tab that says: **길찾기** (Translation: Get directions)
2. Select the phone icon: **전화번호검색** (Translation: Search phone number)
3. Key in the destination phone number
4. Confirm your destination by pressing this button: **바로탐색** (Translation: Quick navigation)
5. Wait for your route then press the button to begin driving: **안내시작** (Translation: Guide start)



Quick Guide

How to use the KOREAN GPS

-  **길찾기**
Translation: GET DIRECTIONS
On the main interface, click the GET DIRECTIONS button
-  **전화번호검색**
Translation: SEARCH PHONE NUMBER
Select the PHONE icon
- 3 Key in your destination's phone number
 Save this post for a list of handy phone numbers to use on your GPS!
-  **바로탐색**
Translation: QUICK NAVIGATION
Double check then CONFIRM your destination
-  **안내시작**
Translation: START DRIVE
Wait for your route then press the PLAY button to begin your drive

♥ LITTLEHOLIDAYS.NET

How to find your destination's phone numbers for your Korean GPS

Here are resources you can check out to find your destination's phone number:

- This guide!
- [Korean Travel Organization's official website](#) – they usually list contact details at the end of each destination's information page, including a phone number you can use for your GPS
- If you're already driving around, you'll notice that establishments put up their phone numbers in big print over their store facades. If you plan to go back later on, write down the numbers to use for your GPS
- For your accommodations – search for the phone number of the hotel or any nearby establishment.

Other maps and navigation apps you can use

- [Waze](#) – This app is great for city driving as it will find the best routes based on traffic reports and can also find you a parking space.
- [Mapquest](#) – This is useful for planning out your routes in advance so you have a general idea of how long a drive will take. You can view it on a web browser or download an app.
- [Maps.me](#) – This is a handy offline map you can download before setting off. This is particularly useful if you don't plan to rent a mobile Wi-Fi. Currently, there are two maps available for South Korea.
- [Apple Maps](#) – If you're using an iPhone, this is also handy. Just take note that you need an internet connection to use it. Also, in my experience it sometimes gets lost, especially when driving on an overpass or particularly twisty streets. Be warned also that some establishments are tagged with the

wrong coordinates (I once ended up on an empty lot while following directions to my hotel – which was actually 15 KM away) – double check with other maps.

- A printed map – It's always good to have a print map. [Get one online](#) or pick one up from the local bookstore. It's a real life-saver, especially when all the apps and technology just fail.

Navigating in South Korea can be a bit tricky for non-native speakers, but the good news is, road signs have English translations. When driving long distances and using expressways, use the maps just to make sure you are going the right general direction.

Getting around: Information on expressways and tolls

If you are driving long distances, you will likely use the expressways. Expressway tolls can be paid using cash, major credit cards, or a Hi-Pass card.

When approaching a toll gate, there are two types of lanes in the expressways: the blue lane is for cars that come with an On Board Unit (OBU), which is a gadget that automates the toll charging so cars can pass the tolls without having to stop. The other lanes are for cars *without* this unit.

So far, all my rentals didn't have the OBU. If yours don't have it either, remember to not use the blue lane and stop at the toll gates to get your ticket (at the entrance) and pay for it (at the exit).

Costs of driving

One of our most important considerations when thinking about driving in South Korea would be the cost. Here are some estimates you can use.

Notes on some assumptions I made: I assumed you will be driving an average of 200 kilometers per day, using 7.5 liters of gasoline per 100 KM. The estimates may be higher or lower, depending on your gas usage. You also need to consider the cost of tolls in expressways, although this wouldn't inflate the estimates a lot as tolls are surprisingly affordable.

Sample costs of car rental in South Korea

	1 day	3 days	7 days
TOTAL	USD 90	USD 260	USD 560
Cost of car rental including basic insurance and a GPS unit	USD 70	USD 200	USD 420
Cost of gas at 200 KM/day	USD 20	USD 60	USD 140

Extra tips and information

1. South Korea drives on the right side of the road.
2. Hazard lights mean “watch out!” I noticed that whenever there's something peculiar on the road ahead, like an accident or a car suddenly swerving or even just a truck stopped on the shoulder, the drivers will use their hazard

lights. They also do this when they have to make a hard brake, sort of like an extra alert to the driver behind them.

3. Don't drink and drive. I was once stopped before entering an expressway for a random breathalyzer test.
4. CCTVs are everywhere. If you commit a traffic violation, your rental agency will be charged and they in turn will charge your credit card.
5. Pull down your window when someone's trying to assist you so they can see you're not Korean and that you probably can't understand what they're saying.
6. Despite the language barrier, it's surprisingly easy to find your way around South Korea. From personal experience, 100% of people I've had to ask for directions, buy a ticket from, follow instructions from, and basically interact with while driving have been helpful and accommodating beyond expectations.
7. Downsides to driving in South Korea: Cities like Seoul and Busan can be congested – allot extra time for traffic jams. Parking is also expensive in cities. In touristy areas like Jeju, rental companies run out of cars especially during peak season, so it's best to reserve it in advance.
8. Road trip essentials – it's handy to have a [car charger](#) with you as well as a mobile Wi-Fi.

Road trips

All set to drive? Check out the [South Korea travel guides](#) on the Little Holidays website for inspiration and resources. You can also [email me](#) for quick suggestions.

Checklist for Driving in South Korea

Requirements - secure before you travel

- ☐ Make sure that you are qualified to drive in South Korea. For most rental companies, you must be at least 21 years old and with one year of driving experience
- ☐ Valid driver's license from your country
- ☐ International driver's permit obtained from your country's automobile association
- ☐ Driver's passport
- ☐ Driver's credit card

Renting your car

- ☐ [Book your cars online in advance here](#)
- ☐ Check the terms and conditions if you need additional requirements
- ☐ Reserve a GPS
- ☐ Get an insurance
- ☐ Save your confirmation/booking slip

Quick links for traveling in South Korea

- ☐ [Online booking: accommodations](#)
- ☐ [Online booking: rental cars](#)
- ☐ [Updated list of GPS phone numbers](#)

Quick Lookup: GPS phone numbers

SEOUL Area Code: +2	BUSAN Area Code: +51
- Namdaemun market – 753-2805 - Myeong-dong shopping district – 774-3238, 778-0333 - Insa-dong shopping district – 734-0222 - Gyeongbokgung Palace – 738-9171 - Namsan Cable car to N Seoul Tower – 753-2403 - Tongin Market – 722-0911 - Lotte Department Store – Seoul Main Branch – 771-2500	- Haeundae Beach – 749-5700 - Gwangalli Beach – 622-4251 - Dalmaji-gil Road – 746-6670 (Note: This is the phone number of Opera restaurant, one of the restaurants along Dalmaji-gil Road.) - Taejongdae Recreation Center – 405-2004 - BIFF Square – 253-8523 - Gamcheon Culture Village – 291-1444 - Shinsegae Centum City – 745-1400 (Note: This is the phone number of the ice rink.) - Haedong Yonggungsa Temple – 722-7744, 722-7755
JEJU Area Code: +2	ANDONG Area Code: +54
- Jeju International Airport – 797-2525 - Cheonjiyeon Waterfall – 733-1528 - Seongsan Ilchulbong – 783-0959 - Seongsan Port – ferry to Udo Island – 782-5671 - Hallasan National Park – Eorimok Trail – 713-9950 - Udo Island – Seobinbaeksa Beach – 728-3393 - Jeju Love Land – 712-6988 - Lotte Mart Jeju – 798-2500 - Dongmun Traditional Market – 752-3001 - Gwandeokjeong Pavilion – 728-8665 - Jeju National Museum – 720-8000 - Jeju Stone Park – 710-7731	- Andong Hahoe Folk Village – 854-3669, 852-3588, 840-6974 - Andong Folk Museum – 821-0649
JECHEON Area Code: +43	CHUNCHEON Area Code: +31
Cheongpung Cultural Complex – 641-6734	Nami Island – 580-8114 (Note for visiting Nami Island: drive to the Nami Island Ticket Office or Nami Island Dock. Park your car there then take the passenger ferry to the island.)
JECHEON Area Code: +43	GYEONGJU Area Code: +54
Cheongpung Cultural Complex – 641-6734	Gyeongju Yangdong Village – 762-6263, 779-6123

Notes:

- [Check the updated list here.](#)
- If you're driving in a busy city (like Seoul and Busan), enter the phone number into your GPS then look for nearby parking lots. Usually the listed phone number gives directions to the establishment's operations office.
- For big complexes and districts, enter the phone number listed here then drive to the nearest parking lot to your destination.
- If you're driving outside the city/region you are in, don't forget to enter the area code.
- **ALWAYS double check your destination after you enter the phone number and before starting your drive.** You can do this by zooming out of the map and comparing it with another map ([Maps.me is a good offline map](#)).

About this guide

Thank you for downloading this guide! I hope you find the information here useful and I wish you happy road trips in South Korea. Feel free to forward it to your friends.

You (or your friend) originally downloaded this guide from the [Little Holidays travel website](#). The information is current as of February 2017 – check the website for updates or visit the relevant links listed in the guide for current information.

If you have more questions about travel in the area, send me an email (hello@littleholidays.net) and I'll be happy to help you!