



## **South Korea 2012 Crime and Safety Report**

Stolen items; Theft; Assault; Other Threat / Incident; Floods; Drug Trafficking

East Asia & Pacific > South Korea > Seoul

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### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

#### Crime Threats

While infrequent by U.S. standards, street crimes do occur. The common-sense security precautions a person would take in any large U.S. city are appropriate throughout the Republic of Korea. While police statistics reflect a small increase in both violent crime and street crime over the past few years, there have been few incidents involving Embassy, U.S. military, or expatriate victims. One young, American citizen, English teacher reported being raped by a taxi driver in Daegu in late 2011, but such reports are very rare. Most reported crimes involve pick-pocketing in tourist areas and crowded markets, and most crimes are non-violent. Korea has very restrictive gun control laws so few crimes involve firearms. The crimes that most frequently occur--e.g., pick-pocketing, purse snatching, assault, hotel room and residential crime--occur more often in major metropolitan areas than elsewhere in the Republic of Korea. Itaewon, Shinchon, Myeongdong, and Hongdae are well-known entertainment and shopping districts in Seoul in which crowds, alcohol, and a higher prevalence of drug activity also present a higher risk for crime. Visitors should use caution in all crowded entertainment, nightlife, and shopping districts throughout Korea. Criminal perpetrators are usually deterred by the risk of confrontation and engage principally in crimes of stealth; burglaries of occupied residences are also rare.

#### Road Safety

Korea's roads are generally well paved and traffic signals operate. Nonetheless, traffic fatalities per driver are almost two times greater than in the U.S. Drivers are aggressive, especially in Seoul. Causes of accidents include frequent, abrupt, unsignaled lane changes, running of red lights, and aggressive bus and taxi drivers. Pedestrians should be aware that vehicles frequently do not yield to pedestrians in marked crosswalks.

#### **Political Violence**



## Historical Perspective

Technically, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea, DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea, ROK) are still in a state of war. There is relative peace on the Korean peninsula because of the armistice agreement that has lasted for close to 60 years, and in the past two decades, the number and type of political, economic, and social interactions between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea have increased. Nonetheless, tensions remain moderately high between the two countries and have on occasion flared up into limited military confrontations.

In the last decade, provocations from the North have included ballistic missile tests, nuclear warhead tests, and limited armed incursions into ROK-held territory. In recent years, some of these provocations have escalated into limited skirmishes near five geographically isolated islands off the northwest coast of the ROK. The unprovoked sinking of a ROK naval vessel (the Cheonan) by the DPRK in March 2010 and the DPRK artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong island off the northwest coast of the ROK in November 2010 significantly increased tensions; and the ROK government stated that it would respond militarily to any further provocation.

The sudden death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 led to widespread speculation about his successor Kim Jong Un's intentions. Many observers do not expect significant provocation before the April 2012 100th anniversary of the birth of Kim Sung Il, but other observers have highlighted the possible need for Kim Jong Un to take actions to firm up his own military credibility within the DPRK.

The ROK maintains a high level of readiness to respond to military threats. Military training exercises are conducted throughout the country throughout the year, including civil defense drills, which are normally held at least quarterly. U.S. citizens should stay informed through local media about upcoming military exercises and civil defense drills that sometimes occur at short notice and for which the Embassy may not always be able to provide advance notification. Although the DPRK typically responds to such activities with strong rhetoric, these situations rarely escalate beyond that.

## Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Because of globalization and the increased diversification of the Korean economy, the ROK has witnessed a small increase in organized crime activity (e.g., by Eastern European and West African groups) and an increase in crimes committed by foreign nationals (i.e., often



workers from poorer Asian nations).

### International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism

While Americans in Korea are subject to the worldwide threat from international terrorism, no information suggests terrorist threats directed at Americans or U.S. interests in South Korea. While there has not been a terrorist incident against U.S. interests in South Korea in recent history, the possibility of al-Qai'da or other transnational terrorist organizations attempting to operate here cannot be ruled out. Americans can reduce their personal risk by avoiding political demonstrations and by avoiding confrontations with protestors.

### Civil Unrest

The ROK is a modern democracy with active public participation. Political demonstrations are very common. In recent years, there has been a decrease in violence associated with political demonstrations, but even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational quickly. Visitors should avoid demonstrations if possible and exercise caution if within their vicinity. In most cases, rallies and demonstrations are so frequent and so quickly arranged that the U.S. Embassy Seoul will not send out an emergency message to U.S. citizens regarding them.

### Post-Specific Concerns

#### Environmental Hazards

The ROK has only experienced very minor earthquakes with minimal or no damage in recent history.

The monsoon season runs from June to August. Damages from flooding vary from year to year, but flooding is a problem, primarily in rural areas. In September 2010, Typhoon Kompasu, the strongest to hit Seoul in 15 years, killed at least three people and injured dozens more. More than 120 flights were cancelled, and power cuts hit major parts of the subway network.

#### Industrial and Transportation Accidents

Industrial accidents with resulting injuries are common in the ROK, especially in its heavy industries and shipyards. Poor safety regulations and inadequate evacuation plans are often



to blame for the large number of injuries and fatalities.

### Kidnappings

Kidnappings are rare in Korea, but they do occur. Government statistics indicate an average of 3-5 reported kidnappings annually. In 2011 a dual Korean-American citizen was kidnapped and allegedly murdered by a Korean relative because of an inheritance dispute.

### Drugs and Narco-terrorism

Narcotics production or abuse is not a major problem in the ROK. However, continuing reports indicate that an undetermined quantity of narcotics is smuggled through South Korea en route to the U.S. and other countries. In response, the South Korean government has taken significant steps to thwart the transshipment of drugs through its territory. There have also been increasing reports of use of "spice," a manufactured drug with marijuana-like effects, including by U.S. service members stationed in Korea.

### Police Response

Foreigners who are arrested or detained by police are treated with respect. Upon arresting a foreigner, the police will notify the Korean National Police (KNP) Foreign Affairs Department (FAD), which will assume responsibility for the investigation. 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.

Foreigners should call the police emergency telephone number 112 if they are the victim of a crime or need police assistance. Officers with English-speaking capability are on duty 24-hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Medical Emergencies

South Korea has a very good emergency response capability. However, Korean hospitals generally do not accept medical insurance and normally expect advance payment for services in the form of cash or credit cards from foreigners. In an emergency situation, a hospital may perform triage but will generally refuse surgery without payment. Additionally, outside of Seoul, there have been confirmed reports of hospitals refusing to treat foreigners, even in life and death situations, because they are not clear about liability issues. In the event of an



emergency, dial 119 for an ambulance.

#### Contact Information for Local Hospitals and Clinics

The following hospitals are located in the Seoul metropolitan area and meet Western medical standards.

Samsung Medical Center: 50 Ilwon Dong, Kangnam-gu, Seoul  
Tel: 3410-2060 (ER) and 3410-0200 (International Clinic).

Seoul National University Hospital: 28 Yungun-dong, Jongno-gu, Seoul  
Tel: 2072-2473 (ER) or 2072-5050 (International Clinic).

Yonsei Severance Medical Center: 134 Shinchon-dong, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul  
Tel: 2228-8888 or 2227-6566 (ER) 2228-5800 (International Clinic).

Ajou University Hospital: San 5, Won Chong-dong, Youngtong-gu, Suwonsi, Kyungki-do, Seoul  
Tel: 031-219-5114 or 031-219-7777 (ER) or 031-219-4312 (English speaking on-call).

Asan Medical Center: 388-1 Pungnap 2 dong Songpu-gu, Seoul  
Tel: 3010-5001 (International Clinic) or 3010-3333 (ER).

#### Air Ambulance Services

While in Korea, American citizens can call the Seoul "SOS" office at 3140-1700 in the event emergency medical evacuation is required. Travelers should consider obtaining temporary medical insurance prior to departing the U.S. Information on purchasing medical insurance and evacuation assistance can be obtained at: [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com).

#### Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Street crimes involving foreigners usually consist of robberies and pick-pocketing/purse slashing in tourist areas and crowded areas such as buses, subways, hotels, department stores, and markets. These encounters are predominantly non-violent. While violent crimes involving firearms are rare due to stringent gun control laws, violent crimes sometimes occur, often involving the use of knives.



American citizens should remain alert to their surroundings and avoid carrying anything that is not needed while traveling around the city. Avoid carrying valuables in backpacks, which are more easily targeted by pickpockets. Itaewon, Shinchon, Myeongdong, and Hongdae are well known entertainment and shopping districts in Seoul in which crowds, alcohol, and a higher prevalence of drug activity also present a higher risk for crime. Visitors do not need to avoid these areas but should use caution in all crowded entertainment, nightlife, and shopping districts throughout Korea.

### **Further Information**

Consular Section

E-mail (all public inquiries): [SeoulInfo@state.gov](mailto:SeoulInfo@state.gov)  
Fax: 82-2-397-4080; DSN Fax: 721-4080

U.S. Passport inquiries only: 82-2-397-4040  
DSN: 721-4040

All other American citizen services inquiries: 82-2-397-4114; DSN 721-4114

All Visa inquiries: 82-2-397-4373

Telephone inquiry hours:  
08:30 - 4:30 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday  
08:30 - 4:00 Wednesday

For American citizens with after-hours emergencies, please call 82-2-397-4114. If you have access to DSN, please call 721-4114.

Regional Security Office (RSO): Tel: 82-2-397-4161;  
Fax: 82-2-397-4382  
E-mail: [DS\\_RSOSeoul@state.gov](mailto:DS_RSOSeoul@state.gov)

Foreign Commercial Services (FCS): Tel: 82-2-397-4535  
Fax: 82-2-739-1628;  
E-mail: [Seoul.office.box@mail.doc.gov](mailto:Seoul.office.box@mail.doc.gov)

Embassy Switchboard: 82-2-397-4114



Duty Officer: Cell phone: 82-11-9101-9057

Medical Unit: 82-2-397-4140  
Fax: 82-2-397-4566

Political Section: 82-2-397-4210  
Fax: 82-2-733-4791

Economic Affairs: 82-2-397-4400  
Fax: 82-2-722-1429

### **OSAC Country Council**

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