









South Korea - Low



South Korea Country Map

-  POLITICAL
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-  HEALTH
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Last Published: 10 November 2025

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea (ROK), holds a geographically and politically important position in the region. The country has excellent relations with the United States, China, and increasingly Japan. The ROK's most substantial

threat comes from North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The ROK's alliances are mainly used to help manage the continued threat from the DPRK. Low-level border skirmishes have taken place historically, especially over the disputed Yeonpyeong Islands, and the North regularly conducts provocative missile tests into the East Sea.

The US maintains a force of nearly 30,000 personnel in the ROK to assist in the country's defence. South Korea's relationship with Japan is a difficult but improving one. Korea was formerly a Japanese colonial possession. The Korean population was poorly treated during this time.

## CULTURAL INFORMATION

### Cultural Tips

- The national language is Korean. It is written in Hangul, a phonetic alphabet created in 1446. Although not related to Chinese, Korean mixes Chinese words and characters with the Hangul script. Though English is taught in the schools, communicating with locals in English can be difficult.
- Visitors should avoid public criticism and disagreement.
- Gift-giving is a common practice. Businessmen often give gifts as a means of obtaining favours, and accepting a gift carries the responsibility of reciprocity.
- In public, touching older people and members of the opposite sex is inappropriate.
- If invited into a home, visitors should remove their shoes upon entering.
- Korean business culture is conscious of hierarchies. The highest-ranked businessperson is expected to enter and exit a meeting-room first.
- Women and men often eat and entertain separately.
- Homosexuality is legal in South Korea, but same-sex marriage is not recognised LGBTQ individuals may experience discrimination, especially in rural areas.

<b>KEY FACTS</b>	
<b>CAPITAL</b>	Seoul

<b>KEY FACTS</b>	
<b>CAPITAL CITY PHONE CODE</b>	2
<b>COUNTRY PHONE CODE</b>	82
<b>CURRENCY</b>	South Korean Won
<b>ELECTRICITY</b>	220 V, 60 Hz
<b>GMT</b>	+9
<b>LANGUAGES</b>	Korean
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	President: Lee Jae Myung
<b>OFFICE WORK WEEK</b>	Monday - Friday
<b>OFFICIAL COUNTRY NAME</b>	Republic of Korea
<b>PLUG STYLES</b>	Types C and F
<b>RELIGION</b>	Protestant 17%, Buddhist 16%, Catholic 6%, none 60%
<b>TIME ZONE OFFSET</b>	UTC +9
<b>TYPE OF GOVERNMENT</b>	Republic

## RISK SUMMARY

**Political - Moderate**

South Korea is normally a stable democracy. Civic society is politically active, and demonstrations are common but rarely turn violent.

On 3 December 2024, former President Yoon imposed martial law across South Korea, marking the first such declaration since 1979. The declaration triggered the immediate deployment of military and police forces to the National Assembly, where they faced resistance from counter-protesters. Six hours later, the National Assembly voted 190–0 to overturn Yoon's declaration, with members of his own People Power Party (PPP) joining the opposition in rejecting the move.

The Assembly voted to impeach Yoon, and an arrest warrant was issued for his arrest on 31 December 2024. He was detained on 15 January 2025. After the court annulled his detention on 08 March 2025, Yoon was released while remaining on trial. He was charged with insurrection on 26 January 2025. This means that Yoon became the first sitting president to face criminal charges in South Korean history. Yoon was impeached by the Constitutional Court on 04 April 2025. Former president Yoon has since been rearrested on 09 July 2025.

On 03 June 2025, a snap election resulted in Lee Jae Myung, the candidate for the opposition Democratic Party, assuming the presidency. He defeated the PPP candidate Kim Moon-soo, who had attempted to distance himself from Yoon. Lee campaigned on economic redistribution, welfare expansion, and debt relief. His foreign policy stance is viewed as pragmatic, with an emphasis on transactional engagement with other states. Notably, Lee has signalled a willingness to re-engage with North Korea and indicated an intent to hedge between Beijing and Washington.

The reunification of the Korean peninsula is a key issue in South Korean politics. Events in, and relations with, its northern neighbour are often central to the political climate in the country. Under the Panmunjom Declaration signed at the inter-Korean summit on 27 April 2018, the nations pledged to agree on a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War, alongside several other commitments to build inter-Korean ties and reduce military tensions. In November 2023, the inter-Korean military accord was suspended by the South Korean Cabinet after North Korea launched a spy satellite. Following the suspension of the accord, the South Korean military has resumed reconnaissance and surveillance flights in border areas. This action prompted North Korea to immediately restore all military measures in the border areas.

## Armed Conflict - Moderate

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remains the Republic of Korea's (ROK) largest threat. Intermittent and sporadic incidents occur in the border areas. In August 2015, several South Korean soldiers were injured by North Korean land mines. This incident escalated into both sides shelling each other. In November 2023, the inter-Korean military accord was suspended by the South Korean Cabinet after North Korea launched a spy satellite. Following the suspension of the accord, the South Korean military resumed reconnaissance and surveillance flights in the border areas. This action prompted North Korea to immediately restore all military measures and deploy more powerful armed forces in the border areas. After taking office, President Lee has expressed his desire to improve relations with the DPRK.

The disputed Yeonpyeong Islands remain a contentious issue. In 2010 the North shelled these islands killing two Republic of Korea (ROK) Marines and two civilians. On 4 January 2024, North Korea fired more than 200 artillery rounds near a disputed maritime border with South Korea. These prompted South Korea to call for an evacuation of Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong islands. A decision that was later overturned. No impacts were reported in the firing. In response, South Korea conducted live fire drills.

There are often cross-border incidents and missile tests along the North-South divide. While these act to increase tensions, they have relatively little impact on travel except in those specific border regions where an increased security force presence may be felt.

## Terrorism - Low

The risk of terrorism in South Korea is currently assessed as low. The country's limited involvement in global peacekeeping efforts means it is not considered a desirable target for major terrorist organisations however, due to the large numbers of US soldiers in South Korea, military areas could be targets for a terrorist attack. The likelihood of this is still low. A terrorist incident conducted by North Korean operatives is also a possibility.

In recent years, South Korean media has increasingly reported on “Mudjima” crimes (“don’t ask why”, or abnormal motive crimes). These are seemingly random attacks that can occur anywhere and without warning and are typically carried out with low-sophistication weapons such as knives. Mudjima attacks are not motivated by ideology or personal relationships with the victim. In July-August 2023, two unrelated Mudjima attacks occurred in the South Korean cities of Seoul and Seongnam. Whilst these crimes are not officially designated as terrorist attacks, they share similarities to low-sophistication terror attacks in the West and are indiscriminate. There is also a realistic possibility of copycat attacks occurring soon after high-profile Mudjima attacks that have made headline news.

### Crime - Low

Crime rates are low in the ROK. There have been cases of assault against foreigners generally reported in areas in proximity to nightlife venues. There have also been reports of low-level petty crime, primarily targeting tourists in major metropolitan and tourist areas. This includes pickpocketing, purse snatching, and thefts from hotel rooms. Such cases are normally non-violent in nature. Foreigners are also frequently targeted for scams and overcharging by local businesses.

Penalties for possession, use, and trafficking of illegal drugs can result in long jail sentences and large fines. These include the personal use of small amounts of marijuana.

### Civil Unrest - Low

On the whole, protests in South Korea rarely turn violent, although they are frequently very large in scale, particularly during periods of high political tension. Many demonstrations are held on Gwanghwamun Plaza, located in front of the US Embassy. Other popular areas for demonstrations are Yeouido (National Assembly) and City Hall in Seoul. Protests are also commonly held outside the Yongsan Presidential Office (YPO) and the Constitutional Court.

Protests on a large scale over issues independent of political such as over labour conditions or medical issues are commonplace and have previously had success

in bringing about change. Anti-war protests have previously demonstrated against the large United States security presence in the country. Be aware that is against South Korean law for foreign nationals to take part in political activities when in the country.

## Maritime and Piracy - Low

Apart from disputes with the North, the ROK also has sovereignty issues with Japan. The Liancourt Rocks are controlled by the ROK but also claimed by Japan, whereas Japan controls the Dokdo Islands claimed by South Korea.

The South Korean coastguard regularly finds Chinese boats fishing illegally. Regular disputes have resulted with the coastguard firing weapons at the illegal fisherman.

In July 2023, the first US nuclear-armed submarine arrive in South Korea, prompting North Korea to threaten South Korea and the US with the use of its own nuclear weapons.

## Health - Low

The quality of medical provision is good in South Korea but expensive. Hospitals adhere to Western standards, with well-trained staff and suitably modern facilities. Several cases of Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) have emerged in South Korea. Screening is in place at airports and those arriving from MERS-affected countries may be tested further. There is a risk of mosquito-borne diseases in the ROK, especially in Gyeonggi and Gangwon provinces, close to the border with the DPRK.

Air pollution, including yellow dust pollution, is common in South Korea, especially during spring months. When the concentration levels are high, residents are advised to remain inside with doors and windows closed. This is particularly important for any elderly travellers or travellers with respiratory problems.

## Environmental - Moderate

Typhoons typically hit the Korean Peninsula between June and November. The monsoon season runs from late June to late August. Flooding and mudslides during this period are common. Particularly severe flooding has in the past resulted in significant travel disruptions across major cities and power outages across the peninsula.

Air pollution can be an issue in major cities. Seoul has similar air pollution levels to large US cities. Air quality in Seoul is monitored daily and has an average of 57 AQI - considered Moderate.

High magnitude earthquakes are rare, the majority of earthquakes in South Korea are between 2.0 and 5.0 on the Richter scale. These are usually felt as light shaking at most. Wildfires are a threat in the spring months and have previously led to evacuations in rural towns.

Forest fires are also a threat in South Korea, with driest season running from March through to May. In March 2025 the large Uiseong forest fire complex in North Gyeongsang province claimed multiple lives and led to mass evacuations and destruction of property.

## Transportation - Low

Korean Air and Asiana, the two major domestic airlines, provide flights to and from a dozen local airports and usually charge identical but reasonable fares. Gimpo International Airport handles nearly all of Seoul's domestic flights, but Incheon International Airport also has a handful of domestic flights to Busan, Daegu, and Jeju-do. The Incheon International Airport (ICN) is a highly efficient transport hub.

It is possible to enter the country by sea from, China, Japan, and Russia. There is a regular ferry shuttle between Busan and four Japanese cities: Fukuoka, Shimonoseki, Osaka, and Tsushima. Korea also has an extensive network of ferries that connects hundreds of offshore islands to the mainland.

South Korea has a comprehensive long-distance bus network that caters to almost all of the country. These buses generally run for 15 minutes between major cities and towns, and at least hourly to small towns, villages, temples, and national and provincial parks. Listed bus frequencies are approximate, as buses don't usually run on a regular timetable and times vary throughout the day. Bus

terminals have staff on hand to ensure that everyone boards the right bus, so help is always available.

Driving in South Korea is difficult and can be dangerous due to the high levels of traffic on the road. Travellers who wish to hire a car must be 21 years old or over and must by law have an International Driving Permit obtained in their own country. Penalties for drinking and driving are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05 per cent. If you are suspected of drink-driving, your licence could be confiscated on the spot. Taxis are numerous almost everywhere and fares are inexpensive. Every taxi has a meter that works on a distance basis but switches to a time basis when the vehicle is stuck in a traffic jam. Drivers are required to take precautionary measures when parking on hills/slopes. Stops have to be placed behind every wheel, or else drivers must turn the steering wheel to ensure that the front wheels of the vehicle are angled toward the curb.

Six cities have underground systems system: Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, Daegu, Gwangju, and Incheon. The underground is a cheap and convenient way of getting around these major cities. Signs and station names are in English as well as Korean.

With effect from 28 September 2018, changes to Korean Traffic Law came into effect - all passengers in cars must wear seat belts and

On 29 December 2024 a passenger plane flying from Bangkok crashed while landing at the Muan International Airport. Two people were rescued however the other 179 are presumed to have died in the crash. The exact cause of the crash is unknown however unverified reports point towards a bird strike damaging the landing gear.

<b>EMERGENCY DETAILS</b>	
<b>IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY CONTACT SOLACE GLOBAL 24/7 OPERATIONS CENTRE AT +44 (0)1202 795 801. LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICES CAN BE REACHED BY DIALLING 119, ALTHOUGH RESPONSE SERVICES MAY BE LIMITED.</b>	
<b>POLICE NUMBER</b>	112

<b>EMERGENCY DETAILS</b>	
<b>AMBULANCE NUMBER</b>	119
<b>FIRE NUMBER</b>	119
<b>EMERGENCY DETAILS</b>	02-112 from a cell phone

## TRAVEL

### TRAVEL ADVICE

Although South Korea can be considered very safe, it is advisable to remain aware of your surroundings to at least the same degree as you would in any other developed country. Take extra care of passports, credit cards, and wallets/purses when in crowded areas. Take extra care when travelling alone or at night, and make sure to use a legitimate means of transport, such as public transport or metered taxis. Be sure to carry a form of ID as well as details of your next of kin. Avoid carrying any valuables in a backpack as this is an easy target for thieves.

Should you visit during typhoon season, monitor the advance of any storms and follow the instructions of local authorities. When air pollution is high, follow local advice and stay hydrated, indoors, and with the windows closed when possible. South Korean security forces often hold civil emergency exercises in major cities, usually involving evacuation to a safe area such as a metro station. Although you do not have to participate as a foreign national, it is best to follow the instructions of the authorities when the sirens sound, indicating an exercise.

Be aware that the judiciary has been accused of bias against foreigners and will nearly always side with locals in any disputes. This includes incidents involving being assaulted by a local, so it is best to avoid retaliation unless your life is under threat. There are heavy penalties for drug offences, even for personal use and foreign nationals can be detained purely on the basis of drug tests.

## SIGNIFICANT DATES

**FEBRUARY 14, 2026**

- **Valentine's Day:** South Korea - Observance

**MARCH 01, 2026**

- **Independence Movement Day:** South Korea - National

**MARCH 20, 2026**

- **March Equinox:** South Korea - Seasonal

**APRIL 05, 2026**

- **Arbor Day:** South Korea - Observance

**MAY 01, 2026**

- **Labor Day:** South Korea - Local holiday

**MAY 05, 2026**

- **Children's Day:** South Korea - National

**MAY 08, 2026**

- **Parents' Day:** South Korea - Observance

**MAY 15, 2026**

## SIGNIFICANT DATES

- **Teacher's Day:** South Korea - Observance

**MAY 24, 2026**

- **Buddha's Birthday:** South Korea - National

**JUNE 06, 2026**

- **Memorial Day:** South Korea - National

**JUNE 21, 2026**

- **June Solstice:** South Korea - Seasonal

**JULY 17, 2026**

- **Constitution Day:** South Korea - Observance

**AUGUST 15, 2026**

- **Liberation Day:** South Korea - National

**SEPTEMBER 23, 2026**

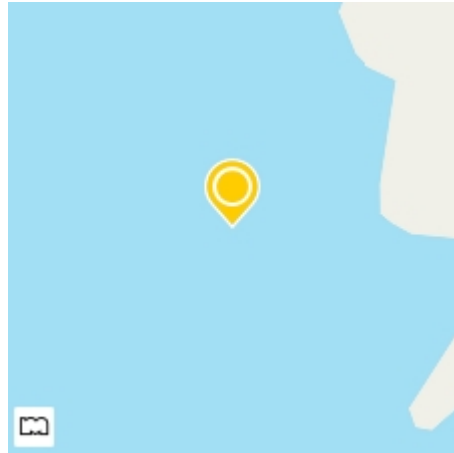
- **September Equinox:** South Korea - Seasonal

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2026**

- **Chuseok Holiday:** South Korea - National

## RECENT ALERTS

### FIRE AT THE SPC SAMLIP SISHWA FACTORY IN JEONGWANG-DONG



**Category:** Caution - **Risk:** Moderate

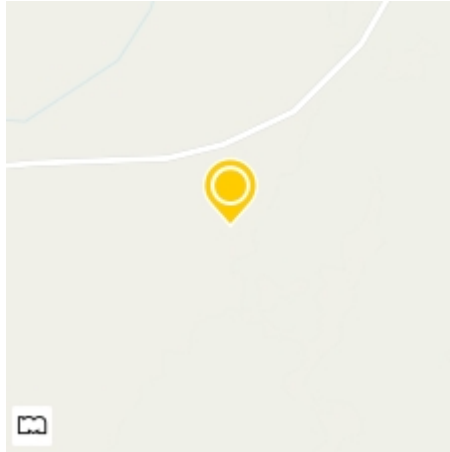


03-Feb-2026 07:25

Local media reports a fire at the SPC Samlip Sihwa factory in Jeongwang-dong, Siheung-si, Gyeonggi-do. Reports of the fire were received at 1506 local time raising a level 1 response by the fire department. Photos online show thick plumes of smoke over the plant which can be seen from surrounding areas. There are currently no reports of casualties or the extent of damage caused by the flames. The cause of the fire remains unknown at this time.

### LARGE FACTORY FIRE REPORTED IN EUMSEONG COUNTY

## RECENT ALERTS



**Category:** Caution - **Risk:** Moderate

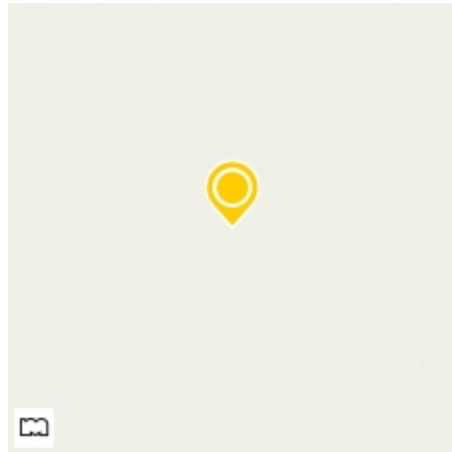


30-Jan-2026 07:55

Local media sources report a large factory fire in Eumseong County, which has reportedly spread to a nearby mountain area. Footage circulating online shows large plumes of smoke and visible flames. The National Fire Agency has issued a Level 2 response order amid concerns over further spread. The cause of the fire is undetermined. Currently, there have been no reports of any casualties. However, at least two people have been reported as missing. We will continue to monitor the situation and update accordingly.

**ACTIVE FOREST FIRE REPORTED IN GUPYEONG-DONG AREA, SOUTHEAST OF GUMI**

## RECENT ALERTS



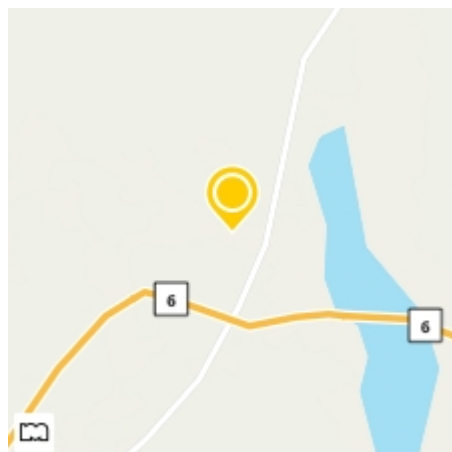
**Category:** Caution - **Risk:** Moderate



25-Jan-2026 05:49

Local media sources have reported that firefighters are responding to an active forest fire in the Gupyeong-dong area, located southeast of Gumi in North Gyeongsang Province. Authorities have reported that they believe the fire was caused by the burning of waste at a nearby apiary. Around 140 firefighters including 12 helicopters have responded. No casualties or damage to property has been reported at present.

## ONGOING WILDFIRE IN GWANGYANG, SOUTH JEOLLA PROVINCE



## RECENT ALERTS

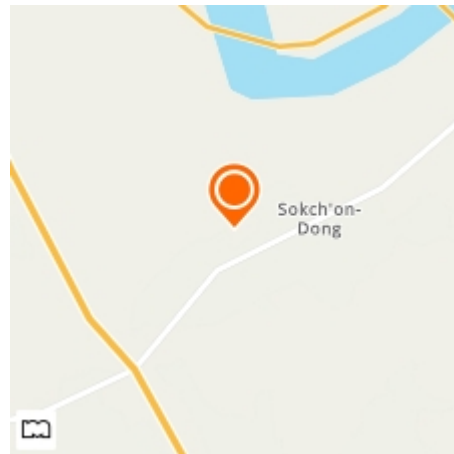
**Category:** Environmental - **Risk:** Moderate



21-Jan-2026 10:43

According to local media sources, emergency services are responding to an ongoing forest fire near Gwangyang, South Jeolla Province. Authorities have stated that the fire was first reported at roughly 15:30 local time and has intensified due to dry and windy conditions in the area. Reportedly, 19 helicopters and at least 31 fire engines have responded to the fire which is affecting an estimated 50-100 hectares at present. There have not yet been any reports of casualties oalthough at least one building has been destroyed. Further information remains limited at this time.

## ONGOING FIRE IN GURYONG VILLAGE, SEOUL.



**Category:** Caution - **Risk:** High



16-Jan-2026 00:37

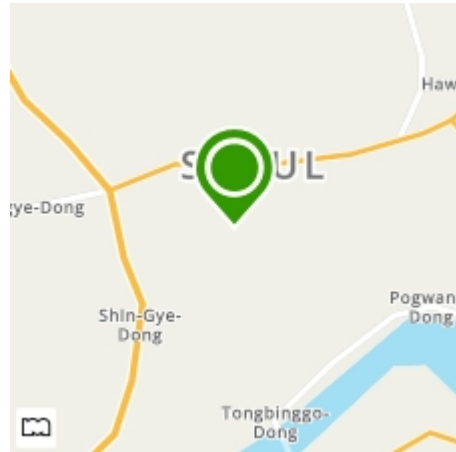
Local media reports an ongoing fire burning through several buildings in Guryong Village in Seoul. Emergency services are on the scene, and additional

## RECENT ALERTS

personnel are being deployed. Reports suggest that a helicopter was requested to the scene but was unavailable. The fire broke out at around 0500 local time on 16 January and has developed since then. Fire authorities have warned that there is a risk of the fire spreading to nearby hills. Footage circulating online shows that many firefighters are present and multiple structures are on fire, the area is surrounded by heavy smoke.

**UPDATE: SEOUL CITY BUS WORKERS UNION LAUNCHES COORDINATED MASS STRIKE**

## RECENT ALERTS



**Category:** Travel Information - **Risk:** Low

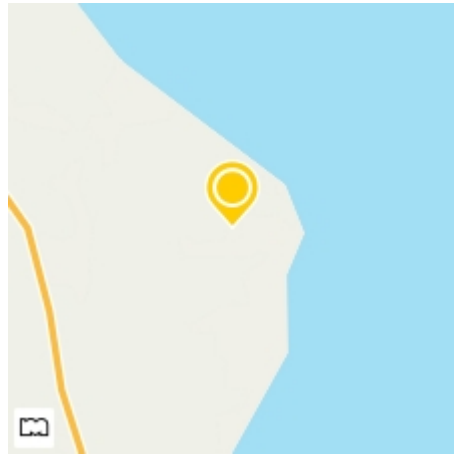


13-Jan-2026 02:27

According to local media, a mass strike coordinated by the Seoul City Bus Workers Union (SCBWU) has been underway since 04:00 local time, resulting in the suspension of over 394 bus routes across the city. The strike is in response to wage disputes with the government that have been ongoing since early December 2025. To mitigate disruptions, local authorities have extended subway services during peak hours and introduced shuttle bus services on key routes across 25 districts. The strike is presently set to last through 14 January; however, further industrial action by the SCBWU cannot be ruled out.

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES RESPONDING TO WILDFIRE IN SIMGOK AREA OF GANGNEUNG**

## RECENT ALERTS



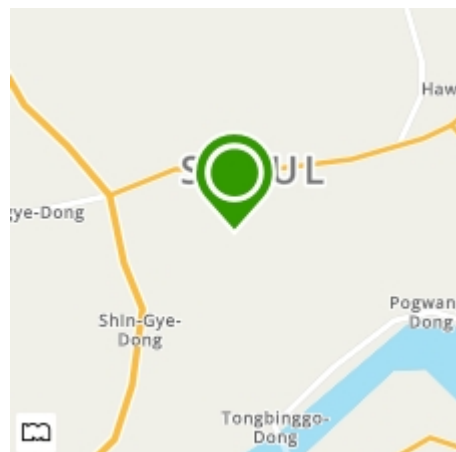
**Category:** Environmental - **Risk:** Moderate



26-Dec-2025 02:28

Local media sources report that emergency services are responding to a wildfire in the Simgok area of Gangneung. Ground sources report that at least two helicopters, 14 personnel and 16 pieces of equipment have been deployed to actively control the fire. Images circulating on social media show a large plume of smoke in the affected area. At this time, it is unclear whether there are any casualties, as the full extent of the situation remains unknown. Further information is limited.

## SEOUL BUS WORKERS STRIKE PLANNED FOR 13 JANUARY



## RECENT ALERTS

**Category:** Travel Information - **Risk:** Low

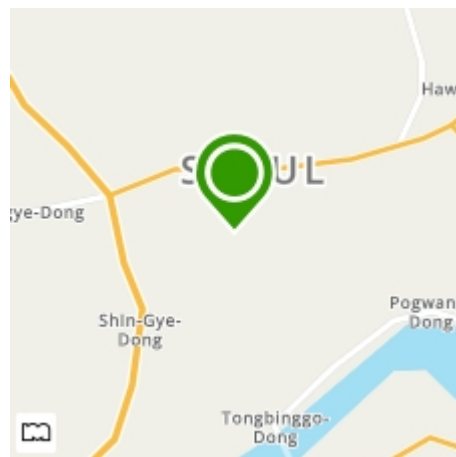


24-Dec-2025 03:13

Local media sources have reported that the Seoul Bus Workers' Union has announced plans for a general strike on 13 January. The decision to strike reportedly comes after negotiations with city management over wages broke down. It has not yet been reported if further negotiations are planned to avoid the strike.

This announcement comes only a day after a train drivers' strike was avoided following last minute negotiations. Substantial disruption to travel in Seoul can be expected if the strike goes ahead.

### NATIONAL RAIL STRIKE PLANNED FOR TUESDAY 23 DECEMBER



**Category:** Travel Information - **Risk:** Low



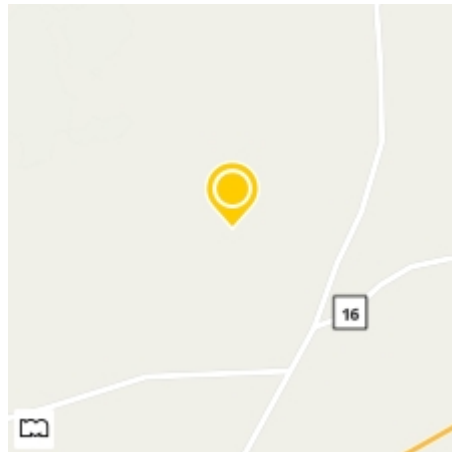
22-Dec-2025 02:02

The Korean Railway Workers' Union has announced it will launch an indefinite general strike from 09:00 local time on Tuesday 23 December due to a dispute

## RECENT ALERTS

with the government over bonus payments. Local sources report that this announcement comes after a previous agreement with government ministers collapsed. The strike is planned to coincide with a rally near the presidential office in Seoul on Tuesday. An estimated 12,000 workers are eligible to take part in the strike. Safety-critical roles will continue to be filled under essential maintenance rules, however it is expected that rail services will be significantly affected for the duration of the strike.

### ACTIVE FIRE IN INDUSTRIAL AREA OF TOPYEONG IN SEOGWIPO



**Category:** Caution - **Risk:** Moderate



01-Dec-2025 23:18

Local media sources report an active fire in the industrial area of Topyeong in Seogwipo. Ground sources report that the fire has spread to a nearby factory, and emergency services are responding to the situation. Images circulating on social media show large active flames and a large black plume of smoke.

Images on social media show at least six firetrucks responding to the fire. Ground sources have not reported what type of factory is involved in the fire. At this time, it is unclear whether the flames have been brought under control, and

## RECENT ALERTS

it is unknown whether there are any casualties. Further information remains limited.

# FCDO SUMMARY

Last updated: 12/30/2025 11:34:26

## Warnings and insurance

### Before you travel

No travel can be guaranteed safe. Read all the advice in this guide. You may also find it helpful to:

- see [general advice for women travellers](#)
- read our [guide on disability and travel abroad](#)
- see [general advice for LGBT+ travellers](#)
- read about [safety for solo and independent travel](#)
- see [advice on volunteering and adventure travel abroad](#)

### Travel insurance

If you choose to travel, research your destinations and [get appropriate travel insurance](#). Insurance should cover your itinerary, planned activities and expenses in an emergency.

### About FCDO travel advice

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) provides advice about risks of travel to help you make informed decisions. Find out [more about FCDO travel advice](#).

### Get travel advice updates

Sign up to [get email notifications](#) when this travel advice is updated.

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- [travel advice on X](#)
- [travel advice on Facebook](#)
- [Travel Aware on Instagram](#)

## Entry requirements

This information is for people travelling on a full [‘British citizen’ passport](#) from the UK. It is based on the UK government’s understanding of South Korea’s current rules for the most common types of travel.

The authorities in South Korea set and enforce entry rules. If you’re not sure how these requirements apply to you, contact the [South Korean Embassy in the UK](#).

## Passport validity requirements

To enter South Korea as a tourist for up to 90 days, your passport must have an ‘expiry date’ after the date you are leaving South Korea.

To enter South Korea on a long-term visa, your passport should have an ‘expiry date’ at least 6 months after the date you arrive.

Check with your travel provider that your passport and other travel documents meet requirements. [Renew your passport](#) if you need to.

You will be denied entry if you do not have a valid travel document or try to use a passport that has been reported lost or stolen.

## Dual nationals

When returning to the UK, British citizens must carry a valid [British passport](#) or [certificate of entitlement](#). See [Dual citizenship](#).

## Visa requirements

You can enter South Korea for up to 90 days for short-term business or tourism. You must have an onward or return ticket. It’s illegal to be employed in South Korea while visiting visa-free, whether as a teacher or in any other capacity.

South Korea operates an electronic travel authorisation system called K-ETA. Anyone eligible for visa-free entry to South Korea is usually required to get K-ETA approval before departure. However, British nationals travelling visa-free to South Korea are temporarily exempt from requiring a K-ETA until December 31, 2026.

Further information about the K-ETA exemption can be found on the [K-ETA notice board](#).

If you need to apply for a K-ETA, you should ensure that you apply through the Korean government's [official K-ETA website](#). Other sites offering K-ETA application services are generally scams. It can take up to 72 hours for K-ETA approval to be granted.

If you are travelling for any purpose other than short-term business or tourism, check visa requirements with the [South Korean Embassy in the UK](#).

For those in South Korea on a work visa, all employment changes must be authorised by Korean Immigration.

## **Re-entry permits for long-term visa holders**

Most foreign nationals in South Korea on long-term visas are allowed to re-enter South Korea within one year of departure without the need for a re-entry permit. Check with the [Korea Immigration Service](#).

If you are resident and intend to spend more than a year outside of South Korea, in most cases, you must apply for a multiple re-entry permit via the [Hi Korea website](#) before departure. If you require a re-entry permit, engage early with the immigration authorities and apply for a re-entry permit at least 4 working days ahead of any planned travel.

## **Visas for working as an English teacher**

To get a visa to teach English in South Korea, you must have a 3-year university degree. A Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) qualification alone is not enough. If you are found to have a teaching visa by deception, you will be detained and deported.

British nationals teaching English in South Korea have sometimes found living and working conditions to be below their expectation or have had difficulties getting the correct visas and residence permits. Some also report more serious problems such as breach of contract, confiscation of passport, payment being withheld and inadequate insurance.

Check all terms and conditions of your employment carefully. If possible, speak to other teachers from the place where you plan to work before accepting any offer.

If you are in South Korea and in need of assistance, you should contact the [British Embassy in Seoul](#).

## Entry declaration form

Foreign nationals entering South Korea are required to submit an entry declaration form (arrivals card) to the immigration officer upon arrival. From 24 February 2025, passengers may submit an e-Arrival card online in advance instead of submitting a paper form to the immigration officers.

The e-Arrival card can be submitted up to 72 hours before arrival in South Korea. There is no fee to submit the e-Arrival card. Travellers should visit the [e-Arrival card website](#) for further details on the e-Arrival card submission process. Paper entry declaration forms will still be available.

## Health screening

All travellers arriving in South Korea from 'Strict Quarantine Inspection Required Areas' (including those who have transited in a 'Strict Quarantine Inspection Required Area') need to submit a health questionnaire, either through the pre-entry Q-Code system or by completing a paper-based questionnaire on arrival in South Korea. Travellers arriving in South Korea from 'Quarantine Inspection Required Areas' who exhibit symptoms must also submit a Q-Code or paper-based health questionnaire.

As of 1 August 2025, the UK is designated as a 'Quarantine Inspection Required Area', meaning that if you have any symptoms of illness you must submit a Q-Code or paper-based health questionnaire on arrival.

Travellers should check the full list of [Quarantine Inspection Required Areas](#) prior to travel, as the countries on the lists change frequently. If you need to submit a questionnaire, you should also review the [Q-Code submission process](#). Failure to complete required health screenings could result in a fine of up to KRW 10 million.

## Vaccine requirements

For details about medical entry requirements and recommended vaccinations, see [TravelHealthPro's South Korea guide](#).

## Customs rules

There are strict rules about [goods you can take into or out of South Korea](#). You must declare anything that may be prohibited or subject to tax or duty.

## Safety and security

### Terrorism

There is a high threat of terrorist attack globally affecting UK interests and British nationals, including from groups and individuals who view the UK and British nationals as targets. Stay aware of your surroundings at all times.

UK Counter Terrorism Policing has information and advice on [staying safe abroad](#) and what to do in the event of a terrorist attack. Find out [how to reduce your risk from terrorism while abroad](#).

### Terrorism in South Korea

Although there's no recent history of terrorism in South Korea, attacks cannot be ruled out.

### Political situation

The level of tension and the security situation on the Korean Peninsula can change with little notice. Tensions can rise after missile tests by North Korea and during the regular South Korean-US military exercises, which take place throughout the year. Follow the advice of local authorities and keep up to date with developments, which will be reported on news broadcasts.

The demilitarised zone ([DMZ](#)) separates North Korea and South Korea. Peace has been maintained under an armistice agreement, but no formal peace treaty has ever been signed. If you're in the area of the [DMZ](#), you should exercise caution and follow the advice of the local authorities.

### National service

If you are a British male of Korean origin whose name appears on the Korean family register, you may be liable for military service even if you are travelling on

your British passport.

## Demonstrations

Public demonstrations in South Korea are common, particularly at times of elevated political tensions. These gatherings are mostly peaceful and well-policed. Be aware that under Korean law, it is illegal for foreign nationals to take part in political activities when in the country. While in South Korea, pay attention to media reporting on political tensions and planned demonstrations, follow the advice of local authorities, and avoid large public gatherings.

## Civil emergency exercises and advice

South Korean authorities sometimes hold civil emergency exercises. You'll hear sirens to mark the start of the exercise. All vehicles must stop and sometimes people will have to descend into designated metro stations or basements. You do not need to participate but do follow any instructions from officials during these exercises.

## Contingency planning

The government's Emergency Ready App, available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#), explains the possible civil emergency alerts which would be pushed to your mobile in an emergency.

As part of your own contingency planning, make sure you have easy access to your passport and other important documents such as nationality documents and birth and marriage certificates, as well as any essential medication. Consider saving the [contact details for the embassy](#) so that you can access them quickly if needed. Make sure to share your contact details with your family and friends.

## Crime

Crime against foreigners is rare but there are occasional thefts. Take extra care of passports, credit cards and money in crowded areas and in areas visited by foreigners, such as Itaewon.

While most reported crimes are thefts, there have been cases of assault, including sexual assault, particularly around bars and nightlife areas. Take care when travelling alone at night and only use legitimate taxis or public transport.

# Laws and cultural differences

## Personal ID

It is a legal requirement to carry some form of identification, but people are rarely asked to show it.

## Illegal drugs and prison sentences

If you're convicted of possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs you can face a long jail sentence and heavy fines. This applies even to personal use of small amounts of marijuana. British nationals have been detained solely on the basis of drug tests.

## Transport risks

### Road travel

If you are planning to drive in South Korea, see [information on driving abroad](#) and read the [Korea Tourism Organization's driving in Korea guidance](#). The guide lists driving regulations and other legal requirements you need to be aware of.

You'll need to have both the [1949 international driving permit \(IDP\)](#) and your UK driving licence with you in the car when you drive in South Korea. You cannot buy an IDP outside the UK, so get one before you travel.

The police take the position that car and motorbike drivers are at fault in accidents involving cyclists or pedestrians. If you injure someone in an accident, you are likely to face criminal charges and heavy penalties, even if guilt is not proved.

The legal limit for alcohol in South Korea is less than half the limit in England, and penalties for drink-driving include prison and fines.

### Taxis

Taxi drivers tend to speak little or no English. It is helpful to have your destination written in Korean – if possible with a map.

## Extreme weather and natural disasters

If there is a natural disaster, or the threat of one, the South Korean government will publish updates in Korean and English to the [Natural Disaster Safety Portal](#).

The government's Emergency Ready App, available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#), explains the possible alerts which would be pushed to your mobile.

Find out what you can do to prepare for and respond to [extreme weather and natural hazards](#).

## Typhoons

The typhoon season normally runs from June to November. Monitor the progress of approaching storms with the [Korea Meteorological Administration](#) or call 131 in Korea to get an accurate weather forecast in English. Always follow any advice given by the local authorities.

## Flooding and landslides

South Korea has heavy rainfall across the country during the summer rainy season, usually in June and July. Torrential rain may cause flooding near rivers and creeks, including in built-up areas. Flash floods are common in areas downstream from large reservoirs or rivers, even after relatively short periods of intense rainfall. Landslides are possible in hilly and mountainous areas.

Monitor forecasts for heavy rainfall with the [Korea Meteorological Administration](#) and follow any advice given by the local authorities.

## Earthquakes

Strong earthquakes are unusual in South Korea but do happen. Most earthquakes in South Korea are relatively weak. The [Korea Meteorological Administration](#) publishes information on earthquakes.

Read up on the any guidance from local authorities on safety procedures in an earthquake and check the safety tips from the [Seoul Metropolitan Government](#).

## Forest fires

Forest fires may occur in South Korea. Pay attention to warnings from local authorities and follow any safety instructions that they issue. Korean-language emergency alerts will automatically be sent to your mobile phone if you are in an affected area, and English-language translations of emergency alerts can be accessed on the [National Disaster and Safety Portal](#) and in the [Emergency Ready App](#).

You can track the location and progress of fires through the Korea Forest Service website in [English](#) and [Korean](#).

## Health

Before you travel check that:

- your destination can provide the healthcare you may need
- you have [appropriate travel insurance](#) for local treatment or unexpected medical evacuation

This is particularly important if you have a health condition or are pregnant.

## Emergency medical number

Call 119 and ask for an ambulance.

Contact your insurance company quickly if you're referred to a medical facility for treatment.

## Vaccine recommendations and health risks

At least 8 weeks before your trip:

- check the latest [vaccine recommendations for South Korea](#)
- see where to get vaccines and whether you have to pay on the [NHS travel vaccinations page](#)

See [what health risks you'll face in South Korea](#), including:

- malaria
- insect and tick bites
- tick-borne encephalitis

Air pollution, including yellow dust pollution, is common, especially during spring months. Follow local media reporting and check the [Korean Meteorological Administration](#) website. On days when concentrations are high, most residents will stay indoors or use face masks outside. It's also important to drink plenty of water.

## Medication

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or bought in the UK can be different in other countries.

South Korean customs authorities allow you to bring small amounts of medication for your personal use, if it is kept in carry-on baggage. Take an English language prescription from your doctor at home for both your prescription drugs and non-prescription medicines. Consult the website of the [South Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety](#) before you travel to South Korea.

Read [best practice when travelling with medicines on TravelHealthPro](#).

## Healthcare in South Korea

Medical and dental care in South Korea is usually of a good standard, but can be expensive. Staff may not speak English. Make sure you have adequate travel health insurance and accessible funds to cover the cost of any medical treatment abroad and repatriation.

If you need to stay in a South Korean hospital, particularly if your condition is severe, the hospital may ask you to bring a guardian or 'bohoja' to assist you with basic care needs such as trips to the bathroom, washing and exercise. It is possible to find agencies who will provide a caregiver or 'ganbyungin' for a fee, but these caregivers generally do not speak English. If you know that you may need to enter a Korean hospital, you should try to organise a guardian such as a friend or relative in advance.

ECDO has a [list of medical providers in South Korea](#) where some staff will speak English.

There is also [guidance on healthcare if you're living in South Korea](#).

## Doctor shortage

South Korea is experiencing an ongoing doctor shortage which could cause disruption and delays at hospitals nationwide, including at large hospitals with international clinics. Patients may experience postponed surgeries and cancelled medical appointments. Some hospitals are prioritising access to emergency care based on the severity of injury or illness, which may result in complications

accessing emergency care. Private hospitals and clinics are generally less affected but may still experience some disruptions.

The South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (MOHW) maintains an [online database](#) (in Korean) of emergency services at available medical centres nationwide.

## Medical tourism

If you are travelling to South Korea for elective treatment, such as cosmetic surgery or a dental procedure, consider that no medical procedure is risk-free. Make sure that your travel health insurance covers complications that may arise and repatriation to the UK if required.

## Travel and mental health

Read [FCDO guidance on travel and mental health](#). There is also [mental health guidance on TravelHealthPro](#).

### Getting help

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) cannot provide tailored advice for individual trips. Read this travel advice and carry out your own research before deciding whether to travel.

## Emergency services in South Korea

Ambulance: 119

Fire: 119

Police: 112

## English language support

The Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) operates a [travel](#) hotline to provide assistance in multiple languages, including English. The hotline also offers interpretation services, including support for three-way calls (e.g. between British

nationals, the hotline and emergency services) from 7am to midnight. Call 1330 to contact the travel hotline.

Remote interpretation services may be helpful in the case of emergency or out of hours support. The following call centres offer interpretation support, including three-way calls, to foreigners in South Korea:

- Dasan Call Centre (+82 2 120) – available 9am to 6pm Monday-Friday
- Danuri Call Centre (1577 1366) – available 24/7

## Contact your travel provider and insurer

Contact your travel provider and your insurer if you are involved in a serious incident or emergency abroad. They will tell you if they can help and what you need to do.

## Refunds and changes to travel

For refunds or changes to travel, contact your travel provider. You may also be able to make a claim through insurance. However, insurers usually require you to talk to your travel provider first.

Find out more about [changing or cancelling travel plans](#), including:

- where to get advice if you are in a dispute with a provider
- how to access previous versions of travel advice to support a claim

## Support from FCDO

FCDO has guidance on staying safe and what to do if you need help or support abroad, including:

- finding English-speaking [lawyers](#), [funeral directors](#) and [translators and interpreters](#) in South Korea
- dealing with a [death in South Korea](#)
- being [arrested or imprisoned in South Korea](#)
- getting help if you're a [victim of crime](#)
- what to do if you're [in hospital](#)
- if you're [affected by a crisis](#), such as a terrorist attack

## Contacting FCDO

## Help abroad

See [how to get help from the UK government abroad](#) including in an emergency.

## Help in the UK

You can call [ECDO](#) in London if you need urgent help because something has happened to a friend or relative abroad.

Telephone: 020 7008 5000 (24 hours)

[Find out about call charges](#)

## Get travel advice updates

Sign up to [get email notifications](#) when this travel advice is updated.

Follow [ECDO](#):

- [travel advice on X](#)
- [travel advice on Facebook](#)

## Risk information for British companies

The Overseas Business Risk service offers [information and advice for British companies operating in South Korea](#) on how to manage political, economic, and business security-related risks.

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# PACK SMART

Only pack items you can replace, leave valuables at home. You will be less likely to attract criminals and if threatened, you won't be tempted to put up a fight to save your belongings.



Carry a duplicate wallet with small denomination notes and old cards that you could relinquish if threatened by robbers. Only pack items you can replace, leave valuables at home. You will be less likely to attract criminals and if threatened, you won't be tempted to put up a fight to save your belongings.



Always check the destination restrictions regarding medications when planning your trip.

### **STAY SAFE: Hotels**



Request a hotel room between the third & seventh floor. Ground floor rooms should always be avoided as they are easily accessible from the outside. Higher levels mean in the event of a fire there are many stairs to navigate and in some countries firefighters may not have ladders capable of reaching higher than the seventh floor.



Check your room phone works in case you need to call reception for help.



Know where your fire exits are. Count the number of doors to the fire exit from your room so you can feel your way in the event of a fire and a smoke-filled corridor.



To prevent unauthorised entry into your hotel room, make sure the windows and doors lock. Bolt the deadbolt and use the door wedges you've brought with you from home to wedge the main door closed.

### **TRAVEL SAFE: Out & About**



When you are out and about, be aware of your surroundings - don't display obvious wealth, such as expensive jewellery, watches and mobile phones.



Use ATMs inside banks and shopping centres, where there is greater security and CCTV. Safety in numbers. If you are travelling with colleagues, stay together for meals and trips out. If you are alone, avoid quiet areas and trust your instincts.

### **Road traffic accidents are still the greatest threat to travel safety.**



- Use licensed taxis.
- Always wear a seat belt.
- Keep doors locked & windows up.
- Avoid night-time driving.
- If the driver is using a phone or driving dangerously, insist they slow down/stop using their phone.

Check in regularly. Use the 'Check In' button on the Solace Secure app so your location can be monitored and you can view all intelligence alerts within your vicinity.

## SAFE TRAVEL: Health Tips

See a medical travel specialist at least 4 weeks before travel.

Ask about recommended vaccines for specific destinations.

First aid kit with regular & special medication for trip - carry in hand luggage.

Evacuation & travel insurance to cover health emergencies while abroad.



Take an extra month of prescribed medication for pre-existing conditions.

Risk of malaria - take precautions to prevent mosquito bites and take malaria pills as advised.



Avoid drinking alcohol and becoming dehydrated.

Verify & consume safe water and food. Have a supply of medicine for self-treatment of diarrhoea.



Excessive sun exposure should be minimised by the use of sunscreen - sun can be more intense over water, snow and at altitude.

Leave animals alone. Animal bites or scratches can transmit rabies.

## THINK SAFE: Know Your Destination

Understand the culture of your destination. Dress and behave so as not to cause offence or draw attention.



Know if the tap water is suitable to drink if not; only accept water from a sealed bottle.

Avoid ice in your drinks & salad washed in tap water.

Research where you are travelling to. Make a note of the local emergency services number. Know the current security and medical threats and advice. See the FCO website for general information ([gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)).

## **DOCUMENT SAFE:** Know Your Destination

Take photos/scans of your essential documents and email them to yourself. You can then access them remotely if your belongings are stolen:

- Passport
- Driver's Licence
- Travel Insurance Document
- Visa
- Medical Certificates

For 24/7 travel risk advice and emergency assistance contact Solace Global Risk operations: + 44 (0)1202 795 801

The Solace Secure desktop and app provide up-to-the-minute alerts, providing latest information on your travel location even when you are there.

### CONTACT SOLACE GLOBAL RESPONSE TEAM

This report has been prepared for you by Solace Global Risk Ltd.

If you need urgent help, advice or assistance at any time please contact the 24/7 Response and Assistance Team.

If you have a question about this travel advice or any other location please email [SGR@solaceglobal.com](mailto:SGR@solaceglobal.com) for further safety and security information.

For support using your Solace Secure platform or app please contact [support@solaceglobal.com](mailto:support@solaceglobal.com).

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