

Say Kimchi:

Tips and Tricks for living in South Korea

by Suzanne Faust

Dear Reader,

My family and I moved to Daegu, South Korea in February 2015 when my husband got a GS job at Camp Walker. We moved again to Pyeongtaek, South Korea in April 2017 when he got a different GS job at Camp Humphreys. We moved back to the US in May 2019. In total we spent a little over four years in Korea. Most of my experience is with USAG Daegu and USAG Humphreys. But we visited Osan and Yongsan regularly. The military bases changed so much in our time there. For example, when we arrived Yongsan was the major hub of the peninsula, where all of the active duty soldiers and their families came to inprocess. Now, Humphreys is the hub and Yongsan is preparing to close at the end of this year.

Our time in Korea was such a wonderful experience. There were highs and lows. But I am so thankful for the time that we had in South Korea.

Often I would meet people coming to Korea or new to Korea and they would be so nervous or afraid about life here. I thought I would write a book to help ease some fears and give you some tips to make life easier along the way. Since we were civilians, our experience will be slightly different than that of an active duty or contractor family. But much of the day to day life is the same. I try to share what I know about active duty and contractor differences in this book as well.

In this book, I will use the words base and post interchangeably (usually base is Navy or Air Force and post is Army). There are also random acronyms that I have become accustomed to during my stay in Korea. If I use an acronym, I will try to write out the words in parentheses, at least the first couple of times.

Some of the information is repeated in this book. I didn't know if you would read the whole thing or just skip to the sections you were interested in. I wanted to make sure that you received all of the information that you needed.

The information is accurate to the best of my knowledge as of the publishing of this book.

Feel free to contact me or read more about our adventures on my blog www.nextdoormama.com. If you go to the travel section on my blog, I have pages specifically for South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong since those were the three countries we visited during our time in Asia. There is also a search function on my blog, so you can look something up like how to get to the airport and you may find an article for what you are looking for.

Always,
Suzanne Faust

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Chapter 1. Before you arrive in Korea

A. Job Search

Most overseas government job opportunities are on the website USAJobs (<https://www.usajobs.gov/>). Make sure you look at the job description carefully. Not all jobs are created equal. Just because a job claims to be in your field and grade doesn't mean that it is a good fit for you. When a job is offered, make sure to ask for clarification on the job description before you accept the offer.

Usually, a job will be posted on USAJobs (<https://www.usajobs.gov/>) for about a week. If the job is posted for only a day or two, the hiring manager usually has someone in mind for the job already and they are just posting the job because they have to legally. If a job is posted for several months and lists multiple grades, you really won't hear back until the job posting closes and you may not want to wait 9-12 months to hear back from a job.

Once the job posting closes, you will get an email within a few weeks that says either you were rejected for the job because you are unqualified or you may be qualified and your application will be sent on to the hiring manager. At this point, the process either stalls or you will receive an email asking for an interview within a couple of weeks. After your interview, it takes a while for Human Resources (HR) to make a tentative offer. If you accept a tentative offer, they may give you several things to complete before you can receive an official offer. If you are already in federal position, it may be faster. After someone has accepted an official offer, HR is supposed to close out the job and all of the other applicants should receive an email that they are not chosen.

Depending upon if you need a security clearance or background check for your position, you could be set to begin your new job in as little as six weeks, or it could take months before you report (PCS). The hiring agency will eventually present you with Orders which allow you to travel and move all of your household goods.

When you sign your contract, your transportation agreement it will tell you how long your contract is. Most federal jobs overseas are two or three years, depending on the agency. After your contract is over, you can usually choose to extend or go home. If you were in a federal position before moving to Korea, you may have return rights to that job. The maximum time a GS employee can remain overseas (unless they are a teacher for DoDEA) is five years at a time. The transportation agreement will say that you have to complete your entire contract for the government to move you back to the United States. This is not entirely accurate. You must complete at least one year at this job so that you will not have to repay the government for your move. After the one year, you can actually start applying for other jobs that say they offer relocation assistance. The new job will pay for you to move to this location. (Please note that if you stay in an overseas location, the time from your first job counts towards the five years. Your time overseas does not start over until you move back the United States.) If you finish your contract and do not have a job to go back to, you can go on the Priority Placement Program and the government will find you a new federal job in the United States at the end of your contract.

B. Passport

Most jobs will require you to have an official passport for PCS travel. HR for your new job will give you the paperwork to fill out for this process. They should also pay for the passports. You will only be able to use this passport for official travel like moving or business trips (TDY). If you want to visit any other

countries during your overseas tour, you will need a tourist passport. The government does not pay for the tourist passport.

C. International Driver's License

As long as you have a valid driver's license in the United States, when you get to your new job, you will be eligible for a USFK license. This will allow you to drive in South Korea both on and off base. If you desire to travel to other countries and plan to rent a car in these other countries, you will need an International Driver's License. It is much easier to apply for this before you leave the USA. These are usually good for one year.

Please note: We have not actually done this. We use public transportation when we go on vacation. It takes a little more planning but we don't have to worry about what side of the road to drive on or how to read signs in a different language on vacation. But other people swear by renting a car.

D. Sponsor

When you accept a job offer, you should be in contact with your supervisor. At that time, your supervisor should assign you a sponsor to help you prepare for your move to South Korea. This should be a coworker who can answer your questions, help set up your mailbox, etc. If your supervisor doesn't automatically assign you a sponsor, ask for one.

E. Facebook groups

Before I moved to South Korea, I never had access to a military installation. I had no idea what the rules were or how to learn new information. About six months into our tour, one of my friends mentioned the spouse page. I had no idea what she was talking about.

Facebook can be a very helpful tool when preparing for your move. Search for the name of the installation you will be assigned to. There are usually facebook pages for the base itself, MWR (the recreation department on base), library, CYS (child and youth services), a spouse page, and even yard sale pages. Some bases also have a homeschooling page, a family page, and all kinds of other groups to join. For example, if I were moving to Daegu, I would search either Daegu Spouse Page or Camp Walker Spouse Page. Camp Humphreys has a spouse page as well.

These facebook groups are helpful in the beginning. You can ask about what activities are available for your kids or where to sign them up for school. Most of the time this is the standard garrison page and so there are mostly active duty spouses on the page with the smattering of contractor and civilians as well. Some rules are different for active duty than for civilians so sometimes it is confusing or even frustrating to get information for things like medical care. Camp Humphreys actually has a facebook page for Civilians and contractors (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1843006535966724/>) and it has been very helpful. Look to see if your base has a civilian page. If not, start your own or just join the regular spouse page.

Some places are more dramatic than others. I usually join these groups and turn the notifications off. Then I ask my questions or use the search feature on the page.

F. Insurance

If you are bringing a car to South Korea, you need to tell your auto insurance company before you ship your car in order to insure the transportation of your vehicle. Many insurance companies will not insure a car in a different country. USAA (<https://www.usaa.com>) does do auto insurance in South Korea. We have had great experience with them. Our price went down from what we were paying stateside and our coverage was great in the one minor car accident that we had in Korea. The first year that we were in Korea we didn't have a car. It is possible to get insurance while you are living in South Korea if you buy a car in country.

The first year we were in South Korea, we purchased renter's insurance through Samsung. I didn't realize that USAA would insure our apartment in South Korea. I messaged them and they added our South Korean apartment to our existing policy for our house in the USA. It adds about \$12 to our car insurance payment each month so it's very reasonable.

When we arrived, my husband asked the people at his office which health insurance they recommended. They all said Foreign Service Benefit Plan (<https://www.afspa.org>) and then just pay out of pocket for dental and vision. That is what we did and we were happy with our decision. There were a few local hospitals in each city we lived that direct billed our insurance. Once we went to a different hospital and we just asked for an English itemized receipt after we paid with our credit card. I submitted the bill online and was reimbursed in about two weeks. If you just need a dental cleaning twice per year, paying out of pocket should be less than \$100 USD per person. If you usually have fillings or need things like crowns or if your kids need braces, I would suggest getting dental. I have seen that a lot of the dentists take Met Life. But I don't have experience with that particular insurance. Ask the people at your office what they recommend. Vision insurance isn't really necessary either. You can walk into any eye place and get an exam for free and then order contacts or glasses. If they carry your contacts, you can buy them on the spot. And if you see frames you like, they will make your glasses for you in about ten minutes while you wait. The prices are great too. Also, you don't even need an exam. You can show them your old box of contacts and they will sell you a new one, no problem. Even if it's been a while since you had an eye exam.

G. Banking and Credit Cards

When you arrive, you will be required to choose a bank on post for direct deposit. Your choices are Community Bank (Bank of America) and Navy Federal. The purpose for this is because every year, you will receive a deposit for your Living Quarters Allowance (LQA- basically your rent and utilities money for the year). You will have to get the full amount in cash from the bank (like \$35,000), which is why you will need one of these two. Both banks have ATMS on base.

People say that you get a better exchange rate for your money off base. They will go to the ATM on base, pull American money and then go to an exchange place off post to get Korean Won. I say, it depends on how often you use won and exchange money. This may matter if you are active duty and need to change 1,500-2,000 USD into won each month for rent. But we use our credit card everywhere for the points. I might only pull \$100 a month from the ATM. To me, its just easier to pull it in won from the ATM. I might get a worse exchange rate, but it sure makes my life easier.

As far as credit cards go, Visa or Mastercard with a chip is your best bet. They don't take Discover at all in Korea (not even at the base ATM) and American Express is not accepted everywhere. Your main goal here is to have a credit card with no foreign transaction fees. If you pay off your balance in full each

month anyway, the APR isn't important. There are plenty of cards available that don't have an annual fee. As far as rewards go... On post the charges may show up with the correct category. If you buy anything off post, you will not get credit for a specific category as they just have Korean names on your bill and the credit card company won't know what kind of place you spent your money.

I will say that if you have an Amazon Prime account anyway, the Amazon card is our favorite (and no, I don't make a commission if you get that card). Also, I have heard our entire time in Korea, that randomly USAA debit cards don't work on the economy. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. It's just really random.

H. What to pack in each shipment

Suitcase:

There are certain documents that you will need for in-processing once you arrive in Korea. Put them in a folder and put them in your carry on so that you have them available. Make sure to bring passports (official and tourist if you have both), a copy of your orders, driver's license, marriage license, birth certificates, and social security cards.

In my opinion, you don't need to bring a ton of cash. If you have a credit card with no foreign transaction fee, they will take that at pretty much everywhere in the airport. If you do not have someone picking you up and will need to take the subway or a taxi, you will want some cash to exchange. Otherwise, you can wait until you get to your destination.

You will be living out of a suitcase for quite some time. You are usually allowed 10 days in a hotel before you leave the US. When you arrive in country and are looking for a house, you are allowed full per diem for 30 days and a lesser amount of per diem for a total of 90 days. You need to bring whatever you need for hotel life in your suitcase.

You are allowed two suitcases per person on an international flight. I would caution you that you will have to transport these suitcases with you in airports and taxis so it is better to pack light if you can. But you will not receive your unaccompanied baggage for at least 6 weeks.

Bring at least a week's worth of clothes, toiletries, vitamins, and medicines. There are laundromats at all of the bases and if you stay in on base in a hotel, there should be laundry in the hotel. Ask your sponsor how long it has been taking people to find an apartment or house to rent. If it isn't taking very long, you may want to pack some linens like sheets, blankets, pillows, pillow cases, and towels for each person. You can borrow furniture from the base for 90 days until your things arrive, so I wouldn't worry about air mattresses in your luggage.

Each base should have a lending closet at Army Community Services (ACS). You can ask on the spouse page where their lending closet is. You can borrow things like plates, cups, pots, pans, and silverware until your unaccompanied baggage arrives. They usually don't have linens to lend. However, each base should also have a thrift store. You can look for linens there.

Unaccompanied Baggage (UAB):

This is the first shipment that will arrive to South Korea. You are allowed to bring 350 pounds for each person over the age of 12 and 175 pounds for those under the age of 12.

Pack the rest of your clothes, shoes, and linens. Bring any other toiletries, vitamins, and medicines that you have at home. Cribs can go in this shipment if they can be taken apart. Kitchen items that you use regularly should go in this shipment. You can send a TV or computer as well.

A note about electric items- We sold everything with an American plug before moving to Korea. Some things are dual voltage and we just brought those and bought different plugs. But we sold or gave away our vacuum and all of our small kitchen appliances like toaster, blender, and microwave. That was a mistake. In Daegu, the realtor gave us transformers to use in our apartment. We could have used our American plug stuff. In Pyeongtaek, we lived in a new apartment that was dual voltage so our American plug appliances can actually plug into the wall.

As stated above, you will be able to borrow furniture for 90 days until your household goods arrive. Don't worry about putting furniture in your unaccompanied baggage.

Household Goods (HHG):

You do not need to bring large appliances with you to Korea. The Army (or Air Force) will let you borrow a refrigerator, washing machine, and dryer if there is not one provided for you in your apartment. You will want to use the Army stuff because they will service it for you. If you bring your own washing machine and it breaks, you will have to fix it yourself.

You are allowed to bring 18,000 pounds of household goods to Korea. (I think we only have about 6,000 pounds worth of stuff) Bring your furniture because you will not be able to borrow things like beds, tables, and couches for the duration of your tour. Beds are really hard in Korea so I would definitely bring your beds. The Post Exchange (PX) has furniture but it is a very limited selection and the quality isn't amazing. You can buy from Korean stores as well, but it is just easier to bring what you like. (I will say, there is an IKEA in Seoul, so if you live in Seoul or Pyeongtaek, that it is an option as well. Daegu is five hours from IKEA)

Your housing allowance (or Living Quarters Allowance) is going to be plenty. When you meet a realtor, you tell them your rank or grade and they will know exactly how much your housing allowance (LQA) is and only show you things in your price range. Your LQA will pay for your rent and utilities for the year. Your apartment or house will be large enough to fit whatever fits into your American house so things like a king sized bed are fine to bring.

If you are particular about brands of shampoo or deodorant or something like that, bring a supply with you for several months. The PX may not carry the brand you want and it will take a while to find a place that may ship to you in Korea.

It is hard to find plus size clothing in Korea (When we arrived in Korea I wore an American size small and was horrified that I had to buy a size xl in pants). I would make sure that each member of your family has enough clothes for each season before you come. They don't have a large selection of winter coats, kids soccer cleats or shin guards, or things like that at the PX. If you know you will need things like that, I would bring extra with you.

Non-temporary Storage:

In full disclosure, we did not put anything in storage before we left. We were of the opinion that if we didn't need something for 3-5 years while living overseas that we didn't need it at all. We gave away or sold anything we were not planning to bring with us to South Korea.

That being said, if you have a full house of furniture or an extra car that is paid off, and the government is willing to pay for storage for your items until you come back, you may want to consider it. When we came back from South Korea, we had to wait about three months for our furniture to arrive. It would have been helpful to have some furniture in storage that could be delivered to our new home in America. It would have been cheaper than buying new furniture and it would have been more comfortable than sitting on folding chairs and sleeping on air mattresses for three months.

Some people also store a car. This way, you have a vehicle right when you arrive in the United States upon your return.

Privately Owned Vehicle (POV):

We survived our first year in Korea without a car. Daegu is the fourth largest city in South Korea and the public transportation is amazing. We were able to get to post, shopping, and fun things downtown using the bus or subway. The frustrating part was grocery shopping because then I had to carry my groceries to the bus to get to my apartment.

If you have a car that is paid for, I would bring it to Korea. I wouldn't bring a really nice sports car though. Car accidents here are very common and so your car will likely get at least some scratches and dings during your tour. The government will pay to ship one vehicle for you. Keep in mind that it takes 4-6 weeks to ship your vehicle.

When you arrive, you have to get an exception to policy to have a second vehicle. If you are in Daegu and live off post (which isn't a problem for civilians because they can't live on post), it is very easy to get an exception to policy. Camp Humphreys doesn't like to approve a second vehicle even if you live off post unless you have a very large family or both adults in the family work. If you are bringing a vehicle, make sure your entire family can fit in the vehicle. If you are allowed to have a second vehicle once you are here, you have a few choices. Military Auto Source on post sells cars for cheaper than retail. But then you have a car payment. There are a lot of older cars for sale. Most people call them hoopties. It is usually an older Korean car that has been passed down from one person to another. They usually cost less than \$2,000. Some people don't ship a car and just buy a hooptie when they arrive in Korea.

Chapter 2: Welcome to Korea

A. Hotel Life

This is where being on a facebook page is helpful. Most bases have a lodge on post. The lodges aren't the nicest things around, but it is at least on base which is great when you don't have a vehicle yet. If your lodge is full, or you want to venture off post, I would ask on the spouse page where everyone stays off post. Find out which will be a good fit for you. For example, for a couple with no small children, Novotel (<https://www.accorhotels.com/gb/hotel-7038-novotel-ambassador-daegu/index.shtml>) is in downtown Daegu and near a lot of restaurants and night life. But if you have kids, on post makes life way easier.

You should be allowed 10 days in a hotel before you leave the United States. When you get to Korea, take a few days to get over jet lag before you even start looking at houses. It will take a few days to get your IDs and find your way around. You are allowed 30 days in the hotel at full per diem (and up to 90 days at a lower rate), which is lodging and food. Take advantage of it. We had a toddler so we did not. We wanted to get out of our off base hotel as quickly as possible. We rushed things and honestly could have found a better place to live if we waited.

Take this time to figure out which part of town is your favorite. Is it easy for everyone in your family to get to and from base without a second vehicle? Are you near a bus stop or train station? Is there a playground for your kids nearby? Trust me, it is better to be uncomfortable in the beginning and find your best place to live in the long term.

While you are in-processing, you will have to pick a local bank. There are two- Community Bank (Bank of America) and Navy Federal. You have to set up direct deposit to this bank for paying your rent. We used Community Bank and they were fine. They had the most ATMs on post. You could pull money in both American dollars and Korean won.

B. Realtors

When you arrive, there should be a list of approved realtors in the housing office. I would take that list and then ask on one of the facebook pages to see which realtors are a good fit for you.

They call them realtors but it is not the same as realtors in the United States. These "realtors" are really property managers. Each realtor has a different list of properties that they can show. I would go to several different realtors. Figure out which one you like interacting with the most. Also look at the different places that are available. For example, when we went to Daegu, three different realtors told us that nothing was available. Then we went to a different realtor and she took us to three different apartments that afternoon.

Make sure they speak good English and understand how Americans like to live (ahem air conditioning and filtered water...). If they don't want to listen to what you are looking for and try to tell you that you want something else, move on to a different realtor.

Your realtor will ask about your rank or pay grade and family size. They aren't doing this to be nosy. This helps them to know what your maximum LQA (Housing Allowance) is. They are only going to show you places within your price range.

C. House Hunting

As I said before, it is important to check out several different realtors and properties. In most cases, apartments are available. Near Camp Humphreys, there are some houses available. You may also want to ask on the spouse page to see where other people enjoy living. You can ask them questions about why they like to live there.

Here are some things to consider when choosing a place to live:

Is it big enough for your family? Does it have a playground for your kids? Does it have easy access to grocery shopping or to base? Is it close to public transportation? How many air conditioners are in the apartment? Are there other Americans nearby? Does the school bus from post come to this place (if you are planning to send your kids to school)? Do you want to live near other Americans? Will your landlord pay for things like an extra air conditioner, fans, a water filter, or air purifiers? If you don't ask before you sign the lease, you may not get these things, so ask in the beginning. (I would make sure that there is an air purifier and air conditioner in each bedroom you sleep in as well as the living room).

As a civilian, you should be able to borrow big appliances like a refrigerator, washing machine, dryer, or oven from base for your tour. Active duty can borrow all of these- plus furniture. Contractors cannot borrow anything from base.

In Daegu, we lived at Yulim Norwegian Morning (also known as KPARK). It was the last stop for the school buses (not that our daughter was old enough to go to school). It was about halfway between Camp Walker and Camp Carroll so there were several families in our high rise that worked in either location. It was across the street from a bus stop (you can take bus 564 to gate 6 of Camp Walker), and a 20 minute walk in two directions to both the green subway line and the red subway line (and you could take either 564 or 561 to the red subway line). We liked being a little farther away from base. We had lots of fun walks in multiple directions to explore. We could also walk to emart, a kid café, and several playgrounds. The longer we lived there (and the more Americans came to the complex), the Koreans seemed to be less friendly to Americans. Not everyone. But when it was just a few of us, it was better.

In Pyeongtaek, we lived at Brownstone. We honestly had very mixed feelings about Brownstone. It was a huge complex with 17 buildings and 960 apartments. There were plenty of playgrounds (4) in the complex, a park across the street, and easy access to the farmer's market, several grocery stores, and restaurants. But there was also plenty of drama and poor construction. Some apartments were fine but others had mold. It was about a 15 minute walk to base, which was nice in the spring and fall but unbearably hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It had easy access to the 20 bus so we could go to AK Plaza easily (the train station) or Good Morning Hospital (<https://en.goodmhospital.co.kr>) If you have FSBP for health insurance they have an international department for an interpreter and direct billing which is nice.

As a civilian employee hired from the US, you should be entitled to a housing allowance called LQA. In Korea, you will choose a realtor and an apartment. Then, you will go to housing and set up a housing inspection. Once your apartment passes the safety inspection, you will set up an appointment for lease signing. After the lease is signed, you can move in. At your lease signing, the housing office will tell your

landlord how much the government is willing to pay rent. Eventually, DFAS (the office that deposits your pay check) will put a deposit in your account for this amount which includes rent and utilities for the year. You will then call the bank to see if they have this much in cash at the bank (we're talking anywhere from \$30,000-\$40,000). When the money is available, you take out the money- in cash- and bring it to your realtor.

Another thing I will add about housing in Korea. It is different than in America. Most apartments have what looks like wall paper on most walls. However, this is not the same as American wallpaper. It is actually called a paper wall. You can't just replace a small piece of it. You have to replace the entire wall if there is damage (think cats and small children...). Koreans are very in to appearances so the wall paper style will change each year making it impossible to match what is in the house if you move out after more than a year after the building is built. Some landlords will want you to replace the entire room of wallpaper instead of just the one wall. Also, the floors are not really hardwood. They are more of a cheap laminate usually and scratch and dent easily. When you move out, your landlord may want to charge you for each dent as well. Make sure you have a small savings cushion (up to \$2,000) when you move out to pay for damages, especially if you have kids or pets. You don't pay a security deposit, so everything comes out of pocket for you.

D. Base Access

In America, my husband always worked on a military base, so he had an ID that would let him on base. I did not. In Korea, all dependents will receive a dependent ID and therefore will have access to base.

There is a **commissary** for you to get American food. You will need both your ID and a Ration Card in order to access the commissary. The civilian employee will have to fill out forms and get you into the system for this to happen. Some bases require you to attend spouse orientation first. Meat will be cheaper at the commissary than anywhere else in town. The produce will probably be bad and very expensive because of the distance it has to come (it is better to buy local produce at supermarkets or the local farmer's market). They do take coupons, up to six months expired. They sell items at cost, so the price should be the same all year. They don't have a lot of sales unless they are going to stop carrying an item. If your favorite snack suddenly goes on sale for half price, you should stock up! If the weather is bad or there is a typhoon in the pacific, shipments will be late so there are often times where the commissary runs out of milk and yogurt. They are starting to carry more gluten free and dairy free options at the commissary as well. Another thing to keep in mind is that the baggers at the commissary work for tips. They will give you a dirty look if you don't tip them, so carrying won or cash is preferable for this.

There is also an **exchange** for you to shop (PX on an army post or BX on an air force base). Your ID and ration card will let you shop at every exchange on the peninsula. The PX will also take expired coupons for six months. There will be some clothes, shoes, house items, toiletries, and entertainment items. It's definitely not as well stocked as a Target or Walmart, but you can find a lot here. Many people will order things they can't find here either on Amazon or will just shop in town at the local Emart or Home Plus. Keep in mind that the PX sells things at regular retail prices and only does sales (usually on electronics) for Christmas. They do price match with Amazon if you go to customer service, but not on the Black Friday deals.

Also located on each base is a **thrift store**. Some thrift stores are better than others, but all are a great place to donate unwanted items. They all have clothes, shoes, books, and housewares. You can go to

any base, you don't have to stick to the one you work on. Some thrift stores take credit card and tack on a fee but most only accept American cash.

My daughter's home away from home was the **library**. Walking into the library, you may not think it is that impressive. There are several different selections of books and computers. But the thing about the library is that all of the army libraries in Korea are connected. If you have an online account, you can go online and request a book from any army library in Korea (the air force has its own system). You can request up to five books at a time. Each library has its own maximum number of items you can check out a time due to the size of the library. Especially when you consider the collection as a whole, it is very impressive. You can borrow books, audio books, ebooks, video games, and movies. Each library also has a story time and tutoring available.

If your children will participate in any kind of activities on post (like sports or recreational classes) or child care, they will need to be registered with **Child and Youth Services (CYS)**. Each base does this a little differently and the base systems are not connected so if you go to a different base, you will have to register again. Usually you need a shot record, a physical, and two emergency contacts that are not parents. Some bases have more classes available for kids than others, but they are usually reasonably priced. They have a Child Development Center (CDC) as well as a School Aged Center (SAC) and a Teen Center for before and after school care. Each quarter they try to offer a parent's night out for \$5 per hour for each kid. At Camp Humphreys, they also offer a monthly family field trip on a Saturday where they provide transportation for \$10 for family (\$15 if your family has more than 5 people).

Daegu, Camp Humphreys, and Osan all have **schools**. Other bases will have a stipend to help you pay for an acceptable school nearby off post. Children of active duty, GS, and NAF employees are eligible to attend the school on post. Children of contractors have to pay \$25,000 per year tuition (usually paid by the employer) or you can pay for an off post school which is usually cheaper. The on post schools follow the common core curriculum.

As civilians, we were allowed to use the **legal office** for free. We used them to write our wills and create power of attorney.

There are **recreational facilities** (MWR) on each base. This usually includes several adult gyms, a pool, track, basketball courts, and tennis courts. Each base also has adult aerobic classes like crossfit and Zumba, usually for a small fee of \$3-\$5.

E. Cars

When you arrive, you have to get an exception to policy to have a second vehicle. If you are in Daegu and live off post (which isn't a problem for civilians because they can't live on post), it is very easy to get an exception to policy. Camp Humphreys doesn't like to approve a second vehicle even if you live off post unless you have a very large family or both adults in the family work. If you are bringing a vehicle, make sure your entire family can fit in the vehicle. If you are allowed to have a second vehicle once you are here, you have a few choices. Military Auto Source on post sells cars for cheaper than retail. But then you have a car payment. There are a lot of older cars for sale. Most people call them hoopties. It is usually an older Korean car that has been passed down from one person to another. They usually cost less than \$2,000. Some people don't ship a car and just buy a hooptie when they arrive in Korea.

In order to drive on post you will need a USFK Driver's License. The test is very easy if you read the book and most of the rules are the same in Korea as the US.

Read the rules to learn them, but driving in Korea is very different than the US. For example, stop signs, red lights, and speed limits are just suggestions unless there is a traffic camera. If there is no one at the intersection (and no camera), people usually just keep going. The yellow light is not very long so I always wait a full 3 seconds when the light turns green so that I don't get hit by a car running the red light. One thing that is helpful is that if the traffic is bad up ahead, they will put on their four ways so you know to slow down. But they also use this as an excuse to do whatever they want and just use the four ways to say "I'm sorry."

There aren't many Korean Policemen (KNPs) driving around on patrol. If you have a Korean GPS or use waze, it will usually alert you to a traffic camera. If you are speeding along the highway and people suddenly slow down, it's probably due to a camera.

If you are caught on camera, you will receive a ticket in the mail. Many people told me about speeding tickets and parking tickets, but in our four years in Korea, we never received one. If you do get a ticket, you can go to your realtor or a Korean bank to pay the ticket. The same is true for tolls. If you go through the wrong line in a toll (hi pass), they will just mail you a bill for the toll. You can pay these at a Korean bank or even 7-11 and GS25.

F. Animals

There is an on post veterinary office at each base. However, they are usually understaffed and the mission comes first, which means that personal pets are not the top priority. If you have pet care needs like nail trims, shots, and spaying/neutering, try the on base vet first. If there is no availability you will need to go off base. The Korean vets are knowledgeable enough. Some speak more English than others. Ask the vet clinic for recommendations or ask on the spouse page. It will definitely be more expensive if you see a Korean vet though.

In order to bring your cat or dog to Korea, your pet will need a microchip, a health certificate, and a FAVN test. If you are sending your pet either before or after you arrive, you will need to choose a pet shipper. I recommend First Class Pet (<https://www.facebook.com/TFCPKorea>). When leaving Korea, you will need a health certificate and a current rabies shot. FAVN is only necessary to go to Japan, Hawaii, or Europe from Korea. I wrote a blog post (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/05/17/taking-your-pet-home-from-south-korea/>) about bringing my cat home from Korea.

In Korea, cats don't seem to be as popular. The dog section is much larger in the pet store. Big dogs aren't really a thing here either due to most of the population living in an apartment. If you are bringing a big dog, think about how they will do in an apartment. Many families rehome their dog or leave them with someone stateside during their tour in Korea. A lot of Koreans seem to be afraid of large dogs. Small dogs are a different story. They walk their small dogs in baby strollers and carry them in purses!

G. Climate

The climate in Korea is slightly different depending on where you are on the peninsula. In general, Korea has four distinct seasons. The other thing about Korea is that the temperature can vary widely each day,

especially depending on your location. There can definitely be a 30-40 degree difference once the sun goes down compared to the middle of the day.

Spring starts in March and is beautiful with the cherry blossoms. In the beginning of spring, you will need a jacket as it will be 40-50 degrees during the day, but as the spring progresses it will warm up.

Summer will hit by May or June. Summers can be brutal in South Korea. The temperature can be over 100 degrees for a month straight. There is supposed to be a monsoon season in July and August. We only had a true monsoon one summer of our four in South Korea. That summer was the mildest because the rain would cool the temperature down somewhat. The air is usually very humid. The thing that makes it feel worse is the lack of central air conditioning in many places in Korea. Your apartment will have air conditioning in some of the bedrooms and the living room, but not every room in your house. Electricity is very expensive, so most people do not leave their air conditioner on the entire day. As a civilian, your utilities are included with your rent, so use your air conditioner as much as you want, even if your realtor tells you that you are using too much electricity. You have already paid for it...

Fall will start in September or October. It is another beautiful time in South Korea when the leaves change. However, it is usually short lived. Winter can start as early as November. Once the leaves change, it will usually cool down in one or two weeks to where the high temperature will be about 30. One of my four winters in Korea it snowed a lot. The rest of the time it was what we called "Korea cold" but didn't snow more than one dusting per year. The wind is awful in Korea and January is the coldest month. I just remember my first January in Korea, my phone said that the temperature was 18 but feels like 3 for like the entire month. Again, you feel it more because of the way of life in Korea. We only had one car so instead of just walking to my car in the cold, I had to walk to the bus or subway and then to my destination in the cold and wind.

Daegu is in a bowl, so when a front moves in, it kind of gets stuck there. It will stay really hot or get really cold and remain that way for a long time. Daegu is the hottest place in Korea in the summer. My Korean friends further north refer to Daegu as "Dafrica" (like Africa) because it's so hot.

H. Air Quality

The air quality is different depending on the time of year and also the location that you are in. The air quality seemed to be worse in Pyeongtaek than in Daegu, simply because of its proximity to factories, Seoul, and the winds from China. The first two years that we were in Korea, we didn't worry about air quality for most of the year, only when the yellow sand would come from China for a few weeks in the spring.

The last year that we lived in Pyeongtaek, the air quality was worse than normal. Even my Korean friends said that it wasn't normal. I don't know if that is indicative of a change in air quality overall or if it was just a bad year. The first year that we were in Pyeongtaek, we worried about the air quality for the spring and random days throughout the year. The second year, it seemed that we wore masks for like 6 months straight.

You can download an air quality app (<https://www.airvisual.com>) on your phone. Usually 0-50 is considered healthy. 51-100 is yellow, so unless you have really bad asthma, you are probably okay. Once the air quality gets above 100 though, many people start to notice a difference. When you look outside your window, it may look foggy, but it is probably just the air quality. The PX sells reusable vogmasks

(<https://www.amazon.com/Vogmask-NewFly-VMCV-Medium>). You can also buy them at Amazon. Korean stores like E Mart or even GS25 and 711 will sell disposable masks. You need to make sure that it has at least the number 94 or it isn't a good quality mask.

Our family has a lot of seasonal allergies. My husband and I especially needed a mask if the air quality was over 100. After that point, I would get a headache and could feel dirt and other particulate in my throat. My daughter usually didn't notice until it was over 150. If the air quality is over 200, the government will advise you to stay inside and use public transportation instead of driving your own car in order to cut down on the pollution.

Would I still move to South Korea if I had known about the air quality? Yes. But if someone in my family had severe asthma or other respiratory problems, I may think twice about it. I would have also started tracking the air better from the beginning. I had random issues in Daegu and really didn't attribute it to air quality since it was once in a while and not consistent. But being prepared ahead of time would be helpful.

In Daegu, we knew we had allergy issues so we kept our windows closed most of the time. When the realtor realized this was why our energy costs were higher than most families, she had the landlord buy us an air purifier. But we only had one. In Pyeongtaek, when we moved in, we asked for two air purifiers. One for each bedroom. I would ask the landlord for an air purifier for each bedroom that is used for sleeping as well as the living room before you move in.

Chapter 3: Transportation

A. Driving in Korea

Driving in Korea was scary to me at first. Driving culture in Korea started in the 1980s, so it is still a relatively new thing. Most senior citizens don't know how to drive. I thought it was really scary at first because it didn't seem like everyone followed the rules. But I have gotten used to it. I will say that if you are from a big city, driving will probably be fine for you. Also, Seoul and Daegu (any big city) will be more stressful than in the country like Pyeongtaek.

The driving age in South Korea is 18. If your teenager has a permit or driver's license, they will be allowed to drive on base only. If they are over 18 and have a USFK license, they will be able to drive off base as well. In order to obtain a USFK license, you will need to take the written driver's test. They will give you a driver's license that will last until your DEROS (Date of expected return from overseas- basically until the end of your contract). You will be expected to carry both this orange license and your United States license at all times while driving. You can ask for the manual at spouse orientation or at ACS (Army Community Services). The book makes it seem like Korea has similar driving laws to USA. You will need to be able to convert basic speeds from kilometers to miles (10km is about 6 miles).

In a city, the bus lane will be the lane to the far right and is marked in blue. You are not supposed to drive in this lane. On the highway, usually the far-left lane is the bus lane, also marked in blue. Enforcement of traffic laws is very different in the USA in that there aren't many traffic cops. Instead, there are cameras. Certain roads and intersections have red light cameras and speed cameras. If you break the rules, you get a ticket in the mail. Your realtor can help you pay any tickets you receive. Or you can go to 7-11 usually to pay them as well (won only- no credit cards). There are not many stop signs off base. And red lights get run regularly. Make sure you take an extra second and look both ways before you go on a new green light. Yellow lights are very short. Another thing that is different is that usually you can only turn left with a green arrow unless there is a blue sign that shows a left turn.

Some people use a GPS and others just use the waze app. Both are helpful for navigating Korean roads. They both also usually warn you about speed cameras and red light cameras.

Depending on the military installation you are attached to, most families are only allowed one vehicle. Mopeds, motorcycles, and bicycles do not count towards your number of vehicles. Make sure that your vehicle can fit each member of your family. If you are allowed a second vehicle, you have a few options. Military Auto Source (MAS) is affiliated with AAFES and usually housed somewhere near the PX. They sell new and used cars at a discount to active duty, civilian, and contractors. You can see what they already have on peninsula, or you can order something to be shipped here. Another option is what most people call a hooptie. People are usually in Korea for one to three years so they get a cheap car (usually less than \$2,000) for their tour and then sell it to someone else.

B. Gas

Gas is definitely cheapest on post. The gas station should be open each day but not 24 hours. Only people with IDs and ration cards are allowed to get gas. You can pay with cash or credit card. It's like your typical gas pump in the US.

Off post, gas is a little different. First of all, gas is sold by the liter and it is very expensive. Some gas stations have an attendant to pump your gas. If that isn't an option, you will need to figure it out on your own without any English. Usually, you put your credit card in like you would in the US. Then you need to pick a number so the gas pump knows how much gas to give you. For example, if you choose the 2, the pump will stop when you reach 20,000 won (about \$20 USD). If you press 10, the pump will stop when you reach 100,000 won (about \$100 USD).

C. Hi pass

Most major highways in Korea have tolls. You can go through and get a ticket and then pay at the end with won like in the United States. Or you can get a Hi pass from a rest stop (ask on facebook when you arrive which places near your installation have hi pass). You will pay 50,000 won (about \$50 USD) for the device itself. Then you will need to charge your card. If you happen to have a Korean bank account, you can link it to your card and your card will pull directly from your account. If you are like most foreigners and do not, you will need to charge your card manually. There are two ways to do this. One way is to visit a GS25 (a convenience store like 7-11) and let them charge your card with won. If you don't have time for this, you can go through the toll, get a ticket, and when it is time to pay, hand them 50,000 won and say "charge- E." This will pay your toll and put the rest on your card for the next toll. If you happen to go through the hi pass lane and don't have enough money on your card, you will receive a bill in the mail for the toll and an extra 1,000 won (\$1 USD) charge.

The hi pass lanes are clearly marked above the lane and also on the road. It is the blue lane and usually the far left and far right. The sign says that you are supposed to slow down to 30 km (about 18 mph) when you go through for the device to be read. We have gone through it faster than that though.

D. Busses and Subways

The public transportation system in Korea is wonderful. Most cities have an extensive network of busses. The larger cities will also have subways. Both systems use the same card. There are a few different brands. You can get cash bee or T-money from most 7-11 stores. You can recharge at a GS25 like you would your hi pass. There are also machines near the entrance to each subway. You just put your card in, feed the machine won, and it charges your card.

Some bus stops are nicer than others. Some are just labeled as a bus stop and will say the name of the stop in Korean (sometimes English). The stop before and the stop after are usually also listed. Some of the nicer stops will have a covered bench to sit on and a screen that tells you how many stops away each bus is. If there is a number next to the bus number, that is how many minutes away that bus is. If it just has one symbol or two of the same symbols next to the bus number, the bus is either one stop or two stops away. As the bus approaches, you will want to be standing and hold your arm out so the driver knows to stop. If you are just sitting down, the bus driver may keep going.

For a bus, there will be a card reader next to the bus driver. You scan your card when you get on the bus. If you are going to get off the bus and transfer to another bus or the subway, you should scan your card at the card reader on the middle of the bus when you get off. This way, you will not have to pay again on the next bus or subway. You have 30 minutes to get to the next place or it will charge you again. Each ride is pretty cheap though, 1,250 won (about \$1 USD). If you don't have a card, you put won in the box, but it will cost more, about 1,500 won. Depending on the city, the bus will play a recording at each stop and tell you the current stop and the next stop. In Seoul and Daegu, they will say

it in Korean and English. In Pyeongtaek it is only Korean. You will want to keep track of your stop or learn how to say it.

When you want to get off the bus, you need to get to the middle doors of the bus and press the red button. If you do not do both things, the driver may not stop or open the doors because he doesn't know you want to get off.

The subway stops are usually labeled in Korean and English and they will announce the current stop and the next stop as you are approaching the stop. In order to enter the subway, you will have to put your card on the scanner. The scanner will tell you how much money is left on your card. The cost to ride the subway is the same as a bus and uses the same card.

When the train approaches, you will wait behind the yellow line. Let everyone off the train before you enter. If there are seats on the train, you should let the elderly and pregnant women sit first. If the train is crowded, you may have to stand.

You don't have to do anything special to get off the train. Just exit at your stop. The train will stop at each station. To exit the station, you will need to swipe your card again.

A note for families of small children:

As a one car family, I spent a lot of time on public transportation with my daughter from 18 months to age 5. On a bus, a stroller isn't super practical. It's hard to balance carrying your small child, your folded stroller, and waving your card on the scanner. There isn't a place to store your stroller on the bus, so you will have to hold it while either sitting or standing. A baby carrier to wear your baby would be ideal in this situation.

The subway is a little more stroller friendly in that most subway stops have an elevator. You will have to wait in line for all of the elderly people to pack into the elevator before you can attempt it though so you may have to wait a cycle or two. But you can definitely keep your child in the stroller to walk through the station and onto the train itself.

On post, there is usually a post bus. Some busses are more helpful than others. For example, Daegu is four small posts that combine to make the garrison so the bus goes around to three of the four bases once per hour. This isn't super practical so I usually ended up taking the bus or subway to base and then walking to wherever I wanted to go on base. On Camp Humphreys, there are three different busses that go to different places and come every 15 minutes or so. You will want to use the busses on Humphreys because the bus is so large and you won't want to walk 3 miles in one direction to get somewhere. But the base busses have a place for you to store your stroller and will stop to let you put the stroller on and off the special compartment at the bottom of the bus.

E. Taxis

Taxis in South Korea are reasonably priced compared to large cities in America. There are a few different options. There are taxis that can only go on post. There are also AAFES taxis which can be driven on post as well as off post. There used to be an app to order a taxi on your phone. Now you have to make a phone call. AAFES taxis usually hang out near the px of Camp Walker and Camp Humphreys, Dragon Hill Lodge on Yongsan, and near the walk in gate of Camp Humphreys. There are also taxis near the outside of the walk in gate of Camp Humphreys off post.

If you take a regular taxi home from somewhere like the airport, train station, or downtown, most can get you near the gate of a military base. Then you'd have to walk on base and get an AAFES taxi if you want to go on post. But if you live off post, a normal taxi can take you wherever you want to go.

Some taxi drivers will take credit card. But most only take won, T-money, or cashbee (yes your bus/subway card).

F. Travel to other bases

If you are in Daegu and want to go to a different base within USAG Daegu (Walker, Henry, George, Carroll), there is a post bus that you can take hourly. There should be a time schedule at each bus stop. You can also take a bus from Daegu to different bases like Humphreys, Osan, and Yongsan. These only happen once or twice per day and sometimes there is a small fee (less than \$5).

Each base will have a way to get to other bases on peninsula. The USO usually has a schedule. But it could also be posted online and at certain bus stops. I know you can get to Yongsan, Osan, and Daegu from Humphreys as well.

You can also take a taxi, but I only recommend that for bases that are close together like within Daegu or from Humphreys to Osan. The other bases are too far to make it worth the cost of the taxi.

G. Trains

The train system in Korea is wonderful. The trains go to many cities within Korea. If the train doesn't go to a specific city, you can usually get close with a train and then take a city bus to the city you need. There are different companies that offer train services. There are regular trains and high speed trains (KTX and SRT). KTX has a website that you can buy train tickets online (<http://www.letskorail.com/ebizbf/EbizBfTicketSearch.do>). SRT doesn't have that option for foreigners yet, so you would need a Korean friend to help you or just go to the station to buy a ticket ahead of time.

Prices are reasonable. You can take the SRT from Pyeongtaek to Seoul for 14,000 won (less than \$14 USD) round trip for an adult. Tickets from Seoul to Daegu or Pyeongtaek to Busan are closer to 80,000 won (like \$70 USD) round trip because it is a farther ride. But it is a two hour travel time by train instead of 5 hours by car so it's worth it.

The train stations will have big signs that show which track the train is on and what the final destination of the train is (usually Seoul or Busan). This will be written in Korean and then switch to English. They usually announce it in both languages as well.

You can eat on the train. They will come by on a cart to sell food and drinks. There are usually vending machines on certain cars of the train. Each station has at least a convenience store but many also have restaurants you can eat at before or after your train ride anyway.

H. How to get to and from the airport

There are multiple ways to get to the airport. Daegu has an airport in the city. The subway isn't super close to it though so you'd be better off driving or taking a taxi.

If you want to get to Busan airport and you live in Daegu, the best way is to take the bus. We drove once and almost missed our plane due to inadequate parking. The long term parking was full so we waited almost an hour to get to the short term lot and a week of parking cost us about \$115 USD. You need to go to the Dongdaegu bus terminal (you can get there by city bus, subway, or taxi). From the terminal, you buy a ticket on the airport limousine bus to Gimhae airport. The trip lasts about 70 minutes and there are no stops. The tickets cost about 10,000 won (\$9 USD) and the bus comes several times per day. You can either go to the bus station and buy your ticket in advance or get there about an hour early and buy your ticket the day of your trip. On your return trip, you can take the bus back to Dongdaegu.

From Camp Humphreys and Yongsan, there is a free base bus that will take you to Incheon Airport a few times per day. The USO should have the bus schedule as it changes periodically. Osan has a bus that will take you to the airport, but there is a fee of \$35 per person.

You can also take a city bus. Busses leave from Pyeongtaek bus station to go to both Incheon and Gimpo at least once per hour during the day. There is also a bus across from the Anjeong-ri Gate of Camp Humphreys, in front of the Volvo building and the purple Christine Realty. The bus stop will have a schedule. For this bus, you pay the bus driver either in won or T-money card. You need exact change. The adult fare is 13,300 won (\$12 USD) for adults and 6,700 won (\$6 USD) for children. The bus will take you from the bus stop to both terminals of Incheon Airport. The bus will stop a few times to pick up other passengers, but there is not enough time to get out and stretch your legs or go to the bathroom. The trip takes about 2 and a half hours.

When you return, you have several options to return. In the far corner of terminal, there is a sign for USFK. You can sign up to take the bus back to either Camp Humphreys, Osan, or Yongsan. Active duty and people on PCS orders have priority so you may have to wait several hours. If that is not an option for you, you can take a bus back to either Anjeong-ri or Pyeongtaek station to get back to Camp Humphreys. There are city busses to take you near Yongsan as well.

I. Travel to Other Countries

We went to Mainland Japan three times, Okinawa, and Hong Kong during our tour in South Korea. You can read about all of our adventures in the travel section of my blog (<https://nextdoormama.com/category/travel/>). We barely scratched the surface. If finances allow, Korea is a great jumping off point to see Asia. I have friends who also went to Australia but it is a 16 hour flight, so it's up to you if that's worth it or not. The time zone is only an hour different though. Some countries require visas ahead of time and others do not, so check online before you book your trip. Also, there is a facebook group called Tips for Asia Travel (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/tipsforasiatravel/>). It is mainly for military and civilians stationed in South Korea and Japan. You can ask for tips and recommendations from other American families.

J. Space A travel

Full disclosure, I have never personally done Space A travel. For one thing, we are one of the bottom categories so we're less likely to get a flight. Another reason is that they usually go to Seattle and sometimes Travis AFB In California. My family is on the east coast so it would be a lot of hassle and I

would still need to pay a lot of money to get to my destination. However, if you have family in Seattle, I would try.

I have several friends who love to use Space A. It can be very easy to get from Osan to either Yokota or Misawa (Japan). If you want to take a hop to Japan, go for it. We just never did because if we were going to Japan, my husband was going to and we didn't want to waste any leave with potential travel plans instead of definite ones. But, I have friends who have traveled to Japan, Guam, Okinawa, Hawaii, and Alaska this way.

Chapter 4: Medical Care

A. Insurance

As I shared before, when we arrived in Korea, my husband asked the people at work what they recommended for insurance. They said to go with Foreign Service Benefit Plan (<https://www.afspa.org/>) for medical and pay for dental and vision out of pocket. We were very happy with our choice to do this.

Each city will have different hospitals that direct bill your insurance. You can find a list of member hospitals on their website (https://www.afspa.org/fsbp_detail.cfm?page=Overseas-Information). These hospitals all have an international office and will send a translator with you to all of your appointments. Many times you get to skip the long line of patients waiting to see the doctor because the international office went and pulled a number for you when they first arrived in the morning. If you choose to go to a hospital out of their network, it isn't a huge problem. You pay out of pocket during your visit and then ask for an itemized English receipt (or translate it yourself) and submit it online. You will be reimbursed by direct deposit in about two weeks.

The yearly physical that you are allowed will cover more than it did in the United States so you will get more blood work and potentially things like mammograms, endoscopy, chest x-ray, or bone scan. I prefer to stick with one hospital in an area. That way, they can keep track of my deductible. If I go to multiple hospitals, I could potentially overpay and eventually get reimbursed.

We chose not to get dental insurance. We still get our teeth cleaned twice per year, but we pay out of pocket. Because we don't usually have cavities or need extra work done, it is actually cheaper for us to pay for the cleaning than to pay for insurance. If you have a large family or need a root canal or braces, it will be more expensive though and worth the insurance.

We also did not get vision insurance. You don't really go to an eye doctor in Korea. They have special shops all over the place for contacts and glasses. You just walk in. You can hand them your old box of contacts and they can sell you a new box without a vision test or prescription. If you need an eye test, they can do that pretty quickly. They use numbers instead of letters, so you don't have to worry about being able to read Korean. If you need glasses, they can make them on the spot in about ten minutes. I have also found that the price of contacts and glasses is also cheaper than what I paid in the United States.

Because we pay for medical and dental out of pocket, we have a Flexible Spending Account or FSA (<https://www.fsafeds.com>). I usually take the sales receipt from the eye doctor or the dentist and make my own receipt in English. Then, I submit it for FSA and get reimbursed that way. Another thing to note, FSBP also has an allowance for dental cleanings, it's not that much, like \$35 or so. But I also submit a receipt to them to get reimbursed for part of my dental appointment.

B. Korean hospitals

In general, as a civilian, you will not use the on base medical facilities. They have a hard enough time keeping up with the active duty families. Some of them will let you be seen on a space available basis, but you have to call the day of after 12pm. I have honestly never tried this, so I don't know how

effective this is. We always just go to the Korean hospitals because I know insurance will pay and I can set up an appointment ahead of time that meets my schedule.

I have a few blog posts about my Korean hospital experiences (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/09/07/our-first-and-second-korean-hospital-experience/> and <https://nextdoormama.com/2015/11/10/my-first-korean-physical-another-korean-hospital-experience/>).

In America, you go to the hospital and they can help you with most things because they are a full service hospital. Basically, in Korea, the hospitals are very specialized. There is a spinal hospital. In Daegu, we went to a woman's and children's hospital (<http://hshp7070.cafe24.com/eng/>). In Pyeongtaek, we went to more of a general hospital (<https://en.goodmhospital.co.kr>). The University hospitals have the most equipment so they do things like oncology and radiology and many other things. Only a few hospitals actually do labor and delivery. We do all of our medical appointments in the hospital. We don't go to a regular doctor's office. This seems to be pretty normal, at least for foreigners.

Any hospital on the list of direct billing for your insurance should have an international office. The phone number is usually on their website, or you can email them to set up an appointment. This office specializes in foreigners so they will be familiar with your insurance and billing. They will know what is covered and what you need to pay for. They also speak English. Someone from the international office will accompany you on your appointments and translate for you.

If you need a prescription, you will fill it before you leave the hospital. The medicine is usually divided up for you into little baggies so that you know which pills to take at which meal. Long term medication is a little trickier. In Korea, they usually only give you a prescription for one or two months at a time and then you have to go back for a re-check. We don't have a lot of long term medications so I don't know if there are ways around this, like taking your prescription to the pharmacy on post.

C. Dental care

We have been to a few different dentists. The experience has generally been the same at all of them. The prices for a cleaning can vary a bit. Ask around and see where your co-workers go. Some Korean dentists take American insurance (usually the ones where the active duty families can go) and others don't. The ones that don't, you can get an itemized English receipt and submit to be reimbursed.

Be prepared for a different experience than your American dentist. The Korean doctor cleans your teeth fine. They talk about brushing your teeth four times per day so it is common to see ladies in the bathroom at a subway stop or restaurant brushing their teeth. The teeth cleaning itself is usually pretty quick. They use pressurized water so there isn't scraping of your teeth. The thing I wasn't prepared for was the towel that they place on your face. There is a towel that goes over your face with a hole in it for your mouth. This way, your face doesn't get stuff on it, but you can't see anything.

I blogged about our first dental visit (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/11/28/my-korean-dentist/>).

Another thing that is really popular here is adult braces. They are cheaper in Korea than in America so adults will often get their teeth straightened during their tour of Korea. There are the usual metal braces, but most use the Invisalign. You can ask on the spouse page where everyone goes for that.

D. Eye care

You don't really go to an eye doctor in Korea. They have special shops all over the place for contacts and glasses. You just walk in. You can hand them your old box of contacts and they can sell you a new box without a vision test or prescription. If you need an eye test, they can do that pretty quickly. They use numbers instead of letters, so you don't have to worry about being able to read Korean. If you need glasses, they can make them on the spot in about ten minutes. I have also found that the price of contacts and glasses is also cheaper than what I paid in the United States. You can read about my experience (<https://nextdoormama.com/tag/korean-eye-care/>).

Another thing that is cheaper in Korea is LASIK and PRK eye surgery. I have so many friends that have gotten this done in Korea for less than half of what you pay in the United States. Again, ask on the spouse page. Many of these surgeons give a discount to foreigners, especially if you pay with cash.

E. Prenatal Care and Childbirth

Childbirth culture is very different in South Korea than in America. The active duty wives can deliver their babies at the American Army Hospital which is moving to Camp Humphreys (Pyeongtaek) in the fall of 2019. I only know of one civilian who delivered at the Army Hospital and she worked for the clinic so I don't know if that is why. Most of the time, civilian and contractors deliver off post at a Korean hospital. Active duty wives will too if they live farther away like in Daegu or Busan.

In Daegu, Hyosung Hospital (<http://hshp7070.cafe24.com/eng/>) and Medi Park (<https://www.facebook.com/Women-Medi-Park-Hospital-112359092177313/>) were the two most popular places to deliver babies. In Pyeongtaek, some ladies went to Dankook (<http://www.dkuh.co.kr/eng/03/01.php>) in Cheonan or went to one of the many options in Seoul. There are two facebook groups to join for this. Pregnant Army Wives of South Korea is the most popular (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/105659286141411/>). You can join even if you are a civilian. Pregnant in Korea (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/pregnantinkorea/>) is another great resource. You can ask the ladies where they have delivered and if they had good experiences. There are also usually American lactation consultants and doulas in these groups as well.

I know that Koreans do pain medication differently than Americans. When my friends had c-sections, they were sent home with Tylenol and motrin but nothing stronger than that. I also had a friend who had a c-section who wasn't allowed to hold her baby for four days because she was still taking pain medication. Her husband wasn't even allowed to hold the baby until then. I have also heard that the epidurals aren't as strong in Korea and you still feel the contractions.

I didn't actually deliver in South Korea, but I did receive prenatal care there. Prenatal care was very different than what I received in America with my first daughter. Every time I went to the obgyn, they did an ultrasound, checked my weight, and checked my blood pressure. They gave me a pink book to record my information in. When I left Korea at the end of twenty weeks it was difficult to get my records. They were confused as to why I wanted them and didn't translate them for me. Some parts were English but most was in Korean which made it hard to find an ob to accept me as a patient when we arrived in America.

If you plan to fly during the second half of your pregnancy, some airlines will require a “fit to fly memo.” This is basically a letter from your doctor that states your due date, that you have received prenatal care, and that you are healthy enough to fly. At 20 weeks, I had this document but no one asked for it. Airlines have different rules about flying after 30 weeks so be aware of how far along you are when you are going to fly somewhere.

Chapter 5: Shopping

A. Grocery Shopping

In some ways grocery shopping in Korea is similar to grocery shopping in America and in other ways it is very different.

The cheapest and freshest place to buy produce or seafood is at your **local outdoor market**. Usually there will be signs that have the price for each food written on a piece of cardboard. Or the vendor will show you on a calculator, how much you owe. You need to pay with won (cash). Some of the vendors will speak English, some will not. Usually, they will give you your produce in a small black plastic bag. You will want to bring a large bag or wagon to bring your food home if you usually buy a lot of produce.

Near Camp Humphreys is what they call the 3/8 market. In the middle of ville, there is an open market on every day that has either a 3 or an 8. I wrote a blog post about the 3/8 market (<https://nextdoormama.com/2017/06/05/38-market-tour-with-one-stop-realty/>).

There are **local supermarkets** on many street corners. These supermarkets will sell produce, canned goods, cereals, dairy products, frozen products, and meat. There is usually a lot of seafood available. The fish and crabs will still be alive and swimming in their tanks. The fish that is sitting on ice will still have eyes and scales. But the quality will be excellent. These stores will usually take won or credit card. The prices will be fair. The prices should be marked on grocery shelves. Grocery bags do not come standard with your items. You will need to pay extra for bags. It's not super expensive, somewhere between 100 and 500 won (0.10-0.50 USD) per bag. Some stores have generic bags. Others give you a bag that you can use again later for your city trash bag. You are welcome to bring your own bags from home.

There are also **large chain stores** that sell a little of everything like a Target or Walmart. In Korea, these stores are called Emart, Home Plus, and Lotte Mart. Some cities even have a Costco. The produce prices will be slightly higher than the neighborhood grocery store. But the quality of food will be good. Again, you will have to pay for bags if you want a bag. These chain stores are closed on the second and fourth Sunday of each month in order to encourage people to shop at the local stores. I am not sure if this actually accomplishes the purpose, but you will want to remember this fact if you are planning to shop on a Sunday.

At both the supermarkets and the chain stores, there will be people with samples or trying to sell you things.

You will also have access to the **commissary** on base. This will be the best place to buy American items like peanut butter and dairy products. Meat will also be a reasonable price at the commissary. I do not recommend produce. It has to come a long way on a boat from America to Korea and so it doesn't last long. I prefer to buy my produce from the local market. You can use expired coupons up to six months at the commissary. The commissary sells items at cost so they don't go on sale very often. You can get bags at the commissary or bring your own. However, the baggers work for tips and they do expect a cash or won tip when you go through the line.

B. Buying clothes

Koreans are built differently than most Americans. They are usually thinner and less curvy. I was horrified our first summer in Korea that the shorts that I bought were size xl (when I would be a small or medium in America). I would recommend bringing clothes for at least the current and next season with you to Korea so that you have time to buy whatever else you need.

The dressing rooms are also different. Dressing rooms feel like a box that you have to step in to. I am not sure how large they actually are. But it was hard for both me and my three year old daughter to fit inside at the same time. The mirror is also on the outside of the dressing room so you have to go out to look at yourself in the mirror.

You can buy clothes at the big chain stores like Lotte Mart, Emart, and Home Plus. There are also outlets and malls. The outlets aren't usually that cheap though. Korea does have H&M, Uniqlo, and a bunch of stores that I don't recognize. The sizes are different though because they are based on centimeters.

For children, if a child is 110 centimeters tall, she should fit in size 110 clothes. For adults it is based on the width I think so a woman may wear a pair of pants that is like size 77 or 95.

Shoes are in centimeters as well. But they do have many of the same name brand stores that you are used to in America. I have seen Nike, Adidas, and New Balance in every city we have been to.

They have several malls in Korea as well as department stores. They are hit or miss. I have reviewed several of them on my blog. In general, malls will have several different stores like an American mall would. The prices will be better at a mall than a department store. Department stores are usually very expensive but several floors high.

Every base will have a px. Some are better than others. Usually the larger bases like Osan or Camp Humphreys will have the better px. You can find some American brands at the px. They will have American clothes and shoes as well. But they don't always carry enough of each size. The px is catered to the active duty military members. They don't usually sell things like soccer cleats for the on post soccer team or winter coats in all sizes for kids. If you need a specific brand of shampoo or diapers, they may not carry your particular brand. But they do have diapers and baby clothes.

Some online stores will ship to South Korea. It's hit or miss. Some of them will require a VPN (so the website thinks you are in America). Most things on Amazon will ship to your APO address. Old Navy and Children's Place will also ship to your APO address. I don't know which other ones will.

Some people swear by shopping in Seoul. There are some larger malls there that may have international brands. Coex (http://english.visitseoul.net/shopping/COEX-Mall_/271) and Lotte World Mall (<https://www.lwt.co.kr/en/main/main.do>) are our favorite malls, though I am not a huge clothing shopper so there may be better places to go. Gangnam (<https://www.koreatodo.com/gangnam-shopping-street>) and Myeongdong (https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=264312) are huge shopping districts that will have a lot of name brand stores. Itaewon (https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SH/SH_EN_7_2_6_1.jsp) is close to Yongsan Garrison and has several international stores as well.

If you prefer to make your own clothes, my friends loved Dongdaemun (http://english.visitseoul.net/shopping/Dongdaemun-Market_/62) to buy fabric. There was also shopping there. The best and cheapest places are open in the middle of the night, but not on Saturday night. We went on a Saturday, so we didn't see everything but you can still read about our experience (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/02/15/girls-trip-to-seoul/>). If you live in Daegu, Seomun Market (http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/SHP/SH_EN_7_2.jsp?cid=1271098) will have fabric. Pyeongtaek people can go to Happy Quilt (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Happy-Quilt/508608612529762>) or the Stinky Knit (very close to Osan, listed in Waze).

C. Stores that have everything

Lotte Mart, **Home Plus**, and **Emart** are like Target and Walmart in that they sell a little of everything. Some branches of the store will be better than others so you may end up going to different emarts until you find your favorite one. You can buy groceries, clothes, household items, and even car items.

Most large cities will have a **Costco**. I have heard that your American membership card will work in Korea. Another Costco type place is called **Emart Traders**. It is similar to Costco in that you can buy things in bulk. However, you do not need a membership card. Everyone can use Emart Traders.

There are also malls and department stores that will have clothes, shoes, skin products, housewares, and grocery stores. Usually there is a food court or several restaurants. The malls will usually be cheaper than department stores. But lotte mart, emart, and home plus will still be cheaper.

D. Our favorite stores

After four years in Korea, we had some stores that we prefer over others.

My favorite stores for stationary, craft supplies, and cute things to decorate your house are Muji, Flying Tiger Copenhagen, Butter, Miniso, and esDot. These are usually housed in a mall.

Daiso has a little bit of everything and will remind you of a Dollar Store or a Dollar General.

Clarissa's favorite toy store is called Toy Kingdom which will have a little of everything including Legos. You can usually find these in a Shinsagae mall or department store.

Tim's favorite store is Electromart. This will have electronics, video games, appliances, and other sections of the store catered to men, including alcohol. Some even have a barber stop included. This is also a Shinsagae brand.

Another Shinsagae brand is PK Market. This is a high end grocery store which reminds me of a Whole Foods because it has several brands of natural or organic food and household items.

E. Online shopping

You will find out quickly that not every store ships to APO. Just because you have an American mailing address, doesn't mean it will ship to you on base. We have gotten around this a few ways. Sometimes, you can order something from Amazon Japan or Amazon UK and it will ship to your Korean address.

Another option is to send your order to someone in the United States and have them ship it to you. For whatever reason, some stores won't ship to us but individuals can ship the same items.

Amazon Prime is wonderful! If you are brand loyal, the commissary or px, may not carry your item. But if you can find it on Amazon, usually it will ship here. Some specific items won't on prime, but if you switch to a different seller they will. Some electronic items won't ship at all. Amazon is very consistent that a prime item should arrive in 7-10 days from your order.

Some stores will ship here, but you need to use a VPN to order through their website. A VPN is basically a proxy that your internet connection uses so that the website you are using thinks that you are physically in America. We used Express VPN and were happy with it (<https://www.expressvpn.com>). This is true on websites like Target.

You can order photo prints and gifts from Shutterfly and ship it to APO. However, depending on the item, you will need to plan ahead. Prints (and things like Christmas cards) will ship media mail which will eventually come to you but will take 6-8 weeks to arrive! Things like photobooks and other things will come by regular mail and take about a week.

In general, don't choose media mail if you aren't willing to wait 6-8 weeks for something. In my opinion, it's worth it to pay for the first class shipping to get it in a week instead of two months. Expedited shipping isn't really worth the extra though. It will get quickly to Chicago or California and then still take a week (or it can still go by boat and take another 6-8 weeks).

Also some help on filling out your address on those orders:

If you are shipping to a Korean address, ask your realtor to text you your address so that you can copy and paste for an international order.

If you want to ship something to your mailbox on base,

City: APO

State: AP (if AP isn't available, sometimes CA will work)

Zip: your five digit zip code

Country: USA

F. Facebook groups

Each base or surrounding area has several facebook yardsale groups. There are various rules to join and some of the rules about posting are silly. But the admins can be very serious. Active duty members are not allowed to bring much weight with them in their shipment. So when someone arrives or is leaving, they are usually ready to buy or sell something cheap. This can be a great way to get a good deal on an item. Camp Humphreys also had a buy nothing facebook group where everything was free.

My frustration with these groups was that since you didn't always know the people you were talking to, it could be tricky to arrange pick up of items. Sometimes people would say they were going to buy something and back out or just not show up. It was very frustrating. The buy nothing group was the same way.

Chapter 6: Everyday Life

A. Base Access

In America, my husband always worked on a military base, so he had an ID that would let him on base. I did not. In Korea, all dependents will receive a dependent ID and therefore will have access to base.

There is a **commissary** for you to get American food. You will need both your ID and a Ration Card in order to access the commissary. The civilian employee will have to fill out forms and get you into the system for this to happen, some bases require you to attend spouse orientation first. Meat will be cheaper at the commissary than anywhere else in town. The produce will probably be bad and very expensive because of the distance it has to come (it is better to buy local produce at supermarkets or the local farmer's market). They do take coupons, up to six months expired. They sell items at cost, so the price should be the same all year. They don't have a lot of sales unless they are going to stop carrying an item. If your favorite snack suddenly goes on sale for half price, you should stock up! If the weather is bad or there is a typhoon in the Pacific, shipments will be late so there are often times where the commissary runs out of milk and yogurt. They are starting to carry more gluten free and dairy free options at the commissary as well. Another thing to keep in mind is that the baggers at the commissary work for tips. They will give you a dirty look if you don't tip them, so carrying won or cash is preferable for this.

There is also an **exchange** for you to shop (PX on an army post or BX on an air force base). Your ID and ration card will let you shop at every exchange on the peninsula. The PX will also take expired coupons for six months. There will be some clothes, shoes, house items, toiletries, and entertainment items. It's definitely not as well stocked as a Target or Walmart, but you can find a lot here. Many people will order things they can't find here either on Amazon or will just shop in town at the local Emart or Home Plus. Keep in mind that the PX sells things at regular retail prices and only does sales (usually on electronics) for Christmas. They do price match with Amazon if you go to customer service, but not on the Black Friday deals.

Also located on each base is a **thrift store**. Some thrift stores are better than others, but all are a great place to donate unwanted items. They all have clothes, shoes, books, and housewares. You can go to any base, you don't have to stick to the one you work on. Some thrift stores take credit card and tack on a fee but most only accept American cash.

My daughter's home away from home was the **library**. Walking into the library, you may not think it is that impressive. There are several different selections of books and computers. But the thing about the library is that all army libraries in Korea are connected. If you have an online account, you can go online and request a book from any army library in Korea (the air force has its own system). You can request up to five books at a time. Each library has its own maximum number of items you can check out a time due to the size of the library. Especially when you consider the collection as a whole, it is very impressive. You can borrow books, audio books, ebooks, video games, and movies. Each library also has a story time and tutoring available.

If your children will participate in any kind of activities on post (like sports or recreational classes) or child care, they will need to be registered with **Child and Youth Services (CYS)**. Each base does this a little differently and the base systems are not connected so if you go to a different base, you will have to

register again. Usually you need a shot record, a physical, and two emergency contacts that are not parents. Some bases have more classes available for kids than others, but they are usually reasonably priced. They have a Child Development Center (CDC) as well as a School Aged Center (SAC) and a Teen Center for before and after school care. Each quarter they try to offer a parent's night out for \$5 per hour for each kid. At Camp Humphreys, they also offer a monthly family field trip on a Saturday where they provide transportation for \$10 for family (\$15 if your family has more than 5 people). You can read about one of our trips (<https://nextdoormama.com/2017/10/14/seoul-grand-park-zoo/>).

Daegu, Camp Humphreys, and Osan all have **schools**. Other bases will have a stipend to help you pay for an acceptable school nearby off post. Children of active duty, GS, and NAF employees are eligible to attend the school on post. Children of contractors have to pay \$25,000 per year tuition (usually paid by the employer) or contractors can pay for an off post school which is usually cheaper. The on post schools follow the common core curriculum.

As civilians, we were allowed to use the **legal office** for free. We used them to write our wills and create power of attorney.

There are recreational facilities (**MWR**) on each base. This usually includes several adult gyms, a pool, track, basketball courts, and tennis courts. Each base also has adult aerobic classes like crossfit and Zumba, usually for a small fee. There is also usually an arts and crafts center on base as well.

Keep in mind that in order to have a second vehicle for your family, you have to fill out a form and obtain an exception to policy memo. Honestly, these exemptions are hard to get, but not unheard of. We never qualified for one. Think about how you will want to access on base when choosing an apartment. Will you be able to share a car with your spouse? Will you have a second vehicle? Can you walk to base? Can you take public transportation to get there easily? If it is hard for you to access base, you probably won't be using all of the facilities available.

B. Mail and Online Ordering

You will find out quickly that not every store ships to APO. Just because you have an American mailing address, doesn't mean it will ship to you on base. We have gotten around this a few ways. Sometimes, we can order something from Amazon Japan or Amazon UK and it will ship to our Korean address. Another option is to send your order to someone in the United States and have them ship it to you. For whatever reason, some stores won't ship to us but individuals can ship the same items.

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Also some help on filling out your address on those orders:

If you are shipping to a Korean address, ask your realtor to text you your address so that you can copy and paste for an international order.

If you want to ship something to your mailbox on base,

City: APO

State: AP (if AP isn't available, sometimes CA will work)

Zip: your five digit zip code

Country: USA

There are also Korean websites that you can order from. Some foreigners have a good experience with gMarket (<http://global.gmarket.co.kr/Home/Main>). You can order pretty much anything to be delivered to your Korean address. We had some issues with them not accepting our credit card. But other people I know didn't have any problems ordering things like a Korean microwave or humidifier.

Coupang (<https://www.coupang.com>) is another one that is similar to Amazon (Amazon isn't officially in Korea). But they aren't really set up for foreigners. I have a Korean friend who will order certain things for me. It gets shipped to her house and I just give her won when it arrives.

When shipping things to or from our post office, you will need to fill out a customs form. It will add a few minutes to your time in the post office or you can do it online. Anything you ship to the USA (besides paper) will need a customs form. The same is true if someone sends you a package from America.

C. Apartment Life

I never lived in an apartment in the United States so I don't really know if apartment life is different than in Korea. What I do know, is that most people in Korea live in an apartment. They expect it to be quiet most of the time. Some neighbors will understand that you have a two year old who walks like an elephant but will only be awake for certain hours during the day. Others will be upset and complain to your realtor who will ask you to buy rugs and padding for your floors and try to keep your children quiet.

We knew that when we moved to our second city and I hated telling my toddler that she couldn't run or jump or be loud in the house. In our new apartment, we lived on the third floor. However, our apartment was directly over the bike rack so my daughter could jump all she wanted because it isn't the ceiling for our downstairs neighbors. I don't mind the ceiling noise from my upstairs neighbors as long as it's during the day and not at 2AM while I am trying to sleep...

One benefit to living in an apartment is that there are usually other children around to play with and multiple playgrounds.

D. Trash/food waste

Recycling in South Korea is serious business. If you live in an apartment complex, the trash area will usually be rather large.

There will be one section for actual trash. You will need to purchase a specific trash bag for your city or district in order to put your trash here. You can buy these bags at neighborhood grocery stores and convenience stores like GS25 and 7-11.

Then there will be a recycling section. It's not enough to just put your recycling there. You need to sort it into each large bag or box. There will be a space for plastic, paper, plastic bags, Styrofoam, glass, and cans.

Then there is food trash. In Daegu, I had to use a card and dump my food scraps in this large bin and it weighed it. At the end of the month, I think the landlord had to pay per kilogram for whatever food trash we used. In Pyeongtaek, I had to purchase 5 ml or 10ml orange food trash bags. I put my food waste in the bags and had to put my bags in the designated section of the trash area. This was probably my least favorite part about life in Korea. My food trash was always in a bucket with the bag inside and it stank horribly. Some people said that they put their bag in the freezer and it didn't stink as bad, but I never tried that. This system really made me think twice about what we used and threw away.

When you move in to your apartment, ask your realtor what the protocol for trash and recycling is in your complex. There is usually someone in the apartment complex who will go through and straighten the trash and make sure that the recycling is in the correct place.

E. Air Quality

The air quality in South Korea got progressively worse while we lived here. The first year, I noticed people wearing masks in the spring and I always assumed that they were sick or had asthma. Our third year, we moved to Pyeongtaek and the air was worse. In the spring, yellow dust comes from China and makes the pollution worse. But Korea has its own pollution with the coal factories.

By the third year, we had to check the air quality daily. I recommend putting an app on your phone like Air Visual (<https://www.airvisual.com>) to check the air quality each day. If the air is green or yellow (0-99), you will can go outside and play all you want. You don't need a mask. If the air is orange (100-149), you will probably want a mask on when you go outside. At this point you start to notice dirt or other particulate in your throat. When the air is red or purple (150-250), we try not to go outside if we don't have to. We would pretty much all feel sick by the time we came inside with a sore throat, runny nose, and a headache.

In Daegu, we knew we had allergy issues so we kept our windows closed most of the time. When the realtor realized this was why our energy costs were higher than most families, she had the landlord buy us an air purifier. But we only had one. In Pyeongtaek, when we moved in, we asked for two air purifiers. One for each bedroom. I would ask the landlord for an air purifier for each bedroom that is used for sleeping as well as the living room before you move in.

F. VPN

Some websites don't care that we live in South Korea. Others do. For example, amazon.com works in Korea. You can send things to your APO address (prime) or you can ship something to your Korean address (which is helpful if you are ordering something that is 220v from either Germany or the UK). Korea has Netflix, so you can get Korean Netflix on your normal internet connection without a problem. But the offerings are different than American Netflix. Sometimes that is cool because you get to see shows you might not in America. But other times it is annoying because the show you are in the middle of stateside might not be on Korean Netflix.

Enter a VPN (Virtual Private Network). We used Express VPN (<https://www.expressvpn.com/>) for four years in South Korea. My husband has it set up on the TV and all of the computers. This is helpful if you want to stream things like Amazon Prime or Hulu. Or if you want to watch American Netflix. A VPN will also let you order things from websites that don't work in Korea like Target.

G. Public Toilets

Public Restrooms in South Korea have similarities and differences to public restrooms in America. For example, most of the time, there is a separate restroom for male and female. Sometimes there is a family restroom in a department store or large place like that.

Then there are things that are hit or miss depending on your location. For example, sometimes there are western toilets available and other times there are only squatties (a glorified hole in the ground) or a combination of the two.

A lot of the plumbing in Korea is old and so if there is a trash can in your restroom stall, you should put your toilet paper there unless there is a sign that specifically says to put the toilet paper in the toilet. Also, pay attention to if there is toilet paper available. Some times the toilet paper dispenser is at the entrance to the main restroom and not in the stall. Other times toilet paper is not available at all, so it is best to keep an emergency supply in your purse.

The other potential difference is the soap. In Korea, there are often bars of soap hanging from the wall instead of soap in dispensers. Some people are uncomfortable with the communal soap. If this bothers you, you may want to carry your own soap or hand sanitizer.

H. Driving

Driving culture in South Korea is relatively young, with the majority of the population not having personal vehicles until the past twenty or thirty years. The rules seem to be pretty subjective.

In order to drive in South Korea, you will need to take the USFK drivers test. It is a written test and once you pass it, they issue you an orange license that you need to carry with you along with your driver's license from the United States. If you do not have a license in the US, you are not eligible for a USFK license. Also, the driving age in South Korea is 18. American 16 year olds with a drivers license can drive

on base only until they turn 18, at which point, they will be allowed to drive off post. Read the drivers manual first and take your test. Most of the rules are the same as in the USA.

The main differences in the rules are that usually you need a green arrow to turn left at an intersection. Sometimes there is a blue sign with a left turn on it, and that means "unprotected left turn." That is the only place that you are allowed to turn left without a green arrow. The speed is also in kilometers instead of miles. An easy thing to remember is that if you run a 10K, you run about 6 miles. So if the speed is 30kph, you multiply 3x6 and the speed is 18mph. The common speeds are 50kph (about 30mph), 60kph (about 35), 80kph (about 50mph), and 110 (about 65mph). On base, the speed limit numbers are posted in kilometers like they are off post.

There are lanes specifically for busses. Sometimes in town but definitely on the highway. If you register your nine passenger van, you are allowed to drive in this lane. However, other cars are not allowed to use it. If you are caught driving in this lane (usually by a camera), you will be ticketed.

So remember all of those things for your drivers test. But this is the way Koreans actually drive...

It is rare to see a traffic cop in South Korea. What you do see are a lot of cameras, or threats of cameras. There are speed cameras and red light cameras. Most of them are listed on the GPS you can buy in the px or on waze. When you are near a camera, you need to follow the rules. If there isn't a camera, people don't pay attention to the speed or a red light.

Yellow lights are really quick here. I often wait at least 3 seconds before I go on a green light. The reason is that almost always someone runs the red light before I go through and I don't want to be in a car accident. There is no such thing as 100% fault in Korea. They will do 80% and 20% or 50/50 but that's about it. It is also beneficial to have an in-dash cam. Everyone has a front camera, but not everyone also has a rear camera.

Parking can be tricky. Koreans are experts at backing in to a parking space. Parking spots are way smaller in Korea than in the US. It is beneficial to bring a smaller car here with you. Once you park, you probably also want to turn in your sideview mirrors. Many Koreans have their phone numbers listed on the dashboard of their cars because they will park you in and either leave their car in neutral so you can push it out of the way, or you can call them to move their car out of the way. In Daegu, it was common to find people parked on sidewalks or randomly on the side of the road. Also, people were parked in the bus line that I wasn't allowed to drive in (there must not have been a camera in those locations). Other places, you will get a ticket for parking in an unmarked spot. Look at where the Koreans are parking before you park...

If you receive a ticket, it will come to your APO mailbox. Then you can go to a specific place like 7-11 or your realtor to pay the ticket. There is usually a deadline to pay your ticket that is only a week or two from when you receive it because it had to go to America first before it comes to your APO box.

Many roads have tolls. If you have a Hi Pass, it makes it easy to breeze through the tolls. You just keep your card loaded and go through the express lane. There are always at least one toll lane with a teller so you can pay your toll that way. You must have won for your toll, but it doesn't have to be exact change. If you accidentally go through the Hi Pass lane or you don't have enough on your card, you will just receive a bill in the mail with the cost of the toll plus a service fee. I don't remember how much the service fee was but it was less than \$5.

Change lanes at your own risk. Turn signals are definitely optional. However, if you do something dumb, you put on your four ways as a way to say "I'm sorry." Most people don't honk either.

There are not many stop signs. It is rare for someone to stop at a flashing red light. I don't know why they even bother with flashing yellow. Sometimes there is a random red light at an intersection and it is usually because someone died there trying to cross the street. Also, there are cross walks, but people don't always use them so be prepared for random people to cross the street at any time. The older population is famous for this.

I. Public transportation

The public transportation system in Korea is wonderful. Most cities have an extensive network of busses. The larger cities will also have subways. Both systems use the same card. There are a few different brands. You can get cash bee or T-money from most 7-11 stores. You can recharge at a GS25 like you would your hi pass. There are also machines near the entrance to each subway station. You just put your card in, feed the machine won, and it charges your card.

Some bus stops are nicer than others. Some are just labeled as a bus stop and will say the name of the stop in Korean (sometimes English). The stop before and the stop after are usually also listed. Some of the nicer stops will have a covered bench to sit on and a screen that tells you how many stops away each bus is. If there is a number next to the bus number, that is how many minutes away that bus is. If it just has one symbol or two of the same symbols next to the bus number, the bus is either one stop or two stops away. As the bus approaches, you will want to be standing and hold your arm out so the driver knows to stop. If you are just sitting down, the bus driver may keep going.

For a bus, there will be a card reader next to the bus driver. You scan your card when you get on the bus. If you are going to get off the bus and transfer to another bus or the subway, you should scan your card at the card reader on the middle of the bus when you get off. This way, you will not have to pay again on the next bus or subway. You have 30 minutes to get to the next place or it will charge you again. Each ride is pretty cheap though, 1,250 won (about \$1 USD). If you don't have a card, you put won in the box, but it will cost more, about 1,500 won. Depending on the city, the bus will play a recording at each stop and tell you the current stop and the next stop. In Seoul and Daegu, they will say it in Korean and English. In Pyeongtaek it is only Korean. You will want to keep track of your stop or learn how to say it.

When you want to get off the bus, you need to get to the middle doors of the bus and press the red button before you arrive at your stop. If you do not do both things, the driver may not stop or open the doors because he doesn't know you want to get off.

The subway stops are usually labeled in Korean and English and they will announce the current stop and the next stop as you are approaching the stop. In order to enter the subway, you will have to put your card on the scanner. The scanner will tell you how much money is left on your card. The cost to ride the subway is the same as a bus and uses the same card. If you do not have a subway card, you can go to a machine and pay the exact fare for your trip and it will print out a ticket you can put into a slot in the turnstyle.

When the train approaches, you will wait behind the yellow line. Let everyone off the train before you enter. If there are seats on the train, you should let the elderly and pregnant women sit first. If the train is crowded, you may have to stand.

You don't have to do anything special to get off the train. Just exit at your stop. The train will stop at each station. To exit the station, you will need to swipe your card again.

A note for families of small children:

As a one car family, I spent a lot of time on public transportation with my daughter from 18 months to age 5. On a bus, a stroller isn't super practical. It's hard to balance carrying your small child, your folded stroller, and waving your card on the scanner. There isn't a place to store your stroller on the bus, so you will have to hold it while either sitting or standing. A carrier would be ideal in this situation.

The subway is a little more stroller friendly in that most subway stops have an elevator. You will have to wait in line for all of the elderly people to pack into the elevator before you can attempt it though so you may have to wait a cycle or two. But you can definitely keep your child in the stroller to walk through the station and onto the train itself.

On post, there is usually a post bus. Some post busses are more helpful than others. For example, Daegu is four small posts that combine to make the garrison so the bus goes around to three of the four bases once per hour. This isn't super practical so I usually ended up taking the bus or subway to base and then walking to wherever I wanted to go on base. On Camp Humphreys, there are three different busses that go to different places and come every 15 minutes or so. You will want to use the busses on Humphreys because the base is so large and you won't want to walk 3 miles in one direction to get somewhere. But the base busses have a place for you to store your stroller and will stop to let you put the stroller on and off the special compartment at the bottom of the bus.

J. Churches

There are several off base churches near each military base. Many of them are Baptist. Some are run by missionaries. Others have a Korean congregation and an English congregation. If you google English speaking churches near your military installation, you will find a list. It doesn't hurt to check each one out. One thing many of these churches will have in common is that there is usually a shared meal after the service.

If you are stationed at Camp Humphreys or Osan, we attended New Creation Church (<https://www.facebook.com/ncc.py.kr/>) near the Camp Humphreys main gate for two years and really enjoyed it.

Each post will also have several chapel services to choose from. Depending on the size of the installation, there will at least be a Catholic congregation and a Protestant congregation. But most of the time there are several different choices. There should also be Bible studies offered through the chapel on post. You do not have to attend the Sunday services to attend the Bible study. PWOC is Protestant Women of the Chapel (you do not have to be protestant to attend). Some posts have a Catholic women of the chapel. There is also usually a men's Bible study or two as well. There is usually some kind of child care or Sunday school available for the kids and often a youth group as well.

If you want to volunteer to teach Sunday school, help at Vacation Bible School, or work with the youth, you will need a background check. The chapel can give you the packet. It involves filling out a form for references, releasing medical information, and fingerprints, in addition to an interview.

K. Making friends

Korea can feel lonely at first until you make some friends. You just need to put yourself out there. Go to some events. Talk to people at your spouse orientation. Attend a Bible Study. Take your kids to story time at the library. Bring your kids to the playground. Everyone is new or relatively new (Active Duty families are usually only here for a year or two and even Civilians are usually only here 3-5).

Even the big bases will feel like a small town where you run into the same people at the commissary or PX. When you find someone that you like talking to, or your kids find a playmate, be bold. Exchange phone numbers or become facebook friends. Sometimes I never see those people again, and sometimes they become my best friends.

L. Adjummas

Americans refer to old Korean ladies as adjummas. I really thought that is what they were called.

Adjummas and Atashis (the male version) are all over the place, especially on public transportation. They don't have a filter so they tell you everything. They yell at you for not having your baby in a sweater when it is 80 degrees outside because your baby (eggi) will get cold. If it's sunny, Koreans usually use an umbrella because they don't want to tan so if you are waiting to cross the street, they will hold their umbrella over your baby.

They also don't have boundaries. They touch pregnant bellies and babies without asking. They will try to take your baby out of your hands or out of the stroller. They aren't trying to be mean and they won't steal your baby. They just want to hold them and love them. This is especially true of blonde hair or blue eyed babies because that is definitely not something they see every day. I had someone tell me once that they needed to buy a lottery ticket because seeing my blonde hair blue eyed baby was "good luck."

Needless to say, my daughter was afraid of adjummas for a few years. To the point that when we went to America for a visit, she would not go anywhere near my husband's grandmother who is white and speaks English. She was terrified of all "old" people for a while. I learned to bring a stuffed animal with us everywhere she went. This way, she could put the stuffed animal between herself and the adjummas. It helped substantially and the adjummas just laughed. They weren't offended.

When we got to Camp Humphreys and I started making Korean friends, I found out that I was actually an adjumma. Adjumma means middle aged married lady. Oops.

Chapter 7: Kids in Korea

Korea is a very kid friendly place. The older generation especially oohs and awes over little kids, especially the blonde haired, blue eyed variety. Stealing is not a big deal in Korea so if you leave your toys at the playground or sandbox and come back an hour later, your toys will still be there. Someone else may be playing with them, but they aren't going to leave the playground.

A. Kid cafes

In most places that have military bases in Korea, families live in apartments. The complexes should have playgrounds for kids. But not all housing areas have a playground. Enter kid cafes. Korea has a kid café for just about everything.

We have been to a bird café, a racoon café, a bunny café, and a fishing café. There are several kid cafes that have trampolines for your kids to jump. There are kid cafes with climbing walls. Some of them are very inexpensive and you pay like 3,000 won per hour for kids and adult admission includes a drink like soda or coffee. The cafes will sell snacks and drinks too as well as real food like pizza or hamburgers. Others are really large and may cost 20,000 won for two to three hours of play.

You will have to take off your shoes upon entering a kid café. They will usually have slippers at the door for you to wear instead.

Kid cafes are very popular so if you go on a weekend or Korean holiday, they will be crazy busy. You can still go. But I prefer to go on a less crowded day.

B. Playgrounds

Korean culture is so different than American culture as it relates to children. In America, we are taught to be with our young children at all times for supervision. When I moved into my apartment, my realtor showed me how I can see the CCTV for the playground in my apartment so that I could let my three year old go to the playground by herself and still keep an eye on her. I never let her go to the playground by herself. But it is not uncommon to see children as young as five years old at the playground without their parents.

C. Schools

As a DoD civilian, your children will be allowed to attend the schools on post at no cost. Active duty families will enroll their children there as well. Contractor families have to pay tuition of about \$25,000 per year for their children to attend. This is often built into the contract and the employer pays the school directly.

If you want to give your children a dose of Korean culture, you can send them to a Korean school. Many friends have enjoyed sending their children to Korean day care and preschool and their young children actually learned to speak a lot of Korean. It is also possible to register your school aged children in the local Korean elementary school. Instruction would be mostly in Korean though, so you may have to supplement some English grammar at home. But the math would be great and your kids would learn a lot of Korean. Koreans do learn some English in school, but not until about third grade.

D. Hagwon

Korea is a very competitive culture. When the high school students take their college entrance exams, the entire country has to be quiet for two hours. No flights are allowed to happen in the country in an effort to keep the noise down so that students can concentrate on their tests. Also, the suicide rate among teens is very high at this time of year. This happens in November.

In an effort to help children succeed, parents send their children to hagwon in addition to traditional school. Hagwon is meant to help your child get ahead academically. There are hagwons to learn math, science, and English as well as extra curriculums like piano or taekwondo.

Foreigners looking for a job can often find a job teaching English at a local hagwon.

E. Modeling

Another popular activity for children of foreigners is modeling. If you get a facebook friend request from a random Korean, they often work for a modeling agency. They will ask you about your children and ask you to send them pictures and heights and weights, things like that. This is especially true if your child does not look like a Korean and has blonde or red hair, curly hair, or blue eyes.

As a dependent, your SOFA stamp does not allow you to work off base. There is a special visa that you have to apply for to be eligible to work off base. This includes children modeling. However, most of the people that I know don't bother with the visa because the modeling agencies pay kids under the table with cash.

My husband has a security clearance so we didn't mess with modeling at all. If my daughter was super interested in all of the modeling agencies that contacted her, we would have done all of the necessary paperwork to do the visa.

F. Adjummas

Korean culture is so different from American culture, especially as it relates to how generations relate to each other. Like in most Asian societies, there is a hierarchy based on age. You should always show respect and defer to your elders. You don't question them. Just smile and nod to keep them happy.

Koreans treat little kids like they are pets. They literally want to touch them and pet them and ooh and awe over them. Especially if your child has blonde hair and blue eyes. A lady once told me that blonde haired children bring good luck so she needed to buy a lottery ticket that day because she saw my daughter.

It is common for an older lady (that Americans will refer to as an adjumma) to want to hold your baby. She may try to take her from your hands or out of the stroller. She is not going to kidnap your baby and will definitely bring her back. But she isn't going to just stand across the subway car and look. She will come over and touch.

This scared Clarissa at first. She was only 18 months when we came to Korea and was very blonde with blue eyes. They kept saying "ye-po-nah" (beautiful) and "nan-gu-ta" (doll). They would get in her face

really close. We eventually learned to carry a stuffed animal. This way, there was a barrier between her and the adjummas. If she was uncomfortable, she could put the stuffed animal in front of her face and the adjummas thought that was really cute and backed off a bit.

As a caveat, I guess that I should say that my daughter was 18 months old when we moved to South Korea so I don't have as much experience with how people responded to young children in America as I do in Korea. But it seems like Koreans are more in your face than in America. There is no such thing as personal space. They don't usually ask permission to touch your baby.

The adjummas mean well. Especially when Clarissa was very small, she received presents everywhere we went. On the train, adjummas gave her candy. Especially if she is upset about something. Once we were going on a trip and had suitcases and someone gave her money for the trip. Another time around Children's Day, a random stranger gave Clarissa 10,000 won (about \$10 USD) to pick something out at the toy store.

The adjummas are also very opinionated, but they mean well. If it is below 80 degrees F outside and your baby doesn't have long sleeves, they may yell at you that your child will get cold. Also, they use umbrellas when it gets sunny outside so that they don't tan. If Clarissa and I were walking somewhere, it was pretty common for someone to put an umbrella over her stroller while we waited at the crosswalk.

Because I usually had my toddler in my arms, we usually wore rain coats instead of using an umbrella in the rain. Once, we had random Koreans hold the umbrella for us for an entire mile. When we got off the bus, one young college man held his umbrella for us until we got to post. Then he told his friend to hold her umbrella for us until we got to the building we were aiming for. It wasn't even the building she was going to, but she walked us there anyway. I don't think that would have happened in America.

Chapter 8: Korean Culture

A. Elders

Korean culture is very Confucian so respect for your elders is very important. To the point that if anyone is older than you, even by one year, you are supposed to defer to them. My friend's son is about 6 months younger than his friend, but a year behind him at school and he is supposed to show him respect because he is older.

I always feel bad for teenage and young adult men on public transportation. They are never going to be allowed to sit down because you have to defer to elders and pregnant ladies. That isn't fun after a full day of exploring. Once in Seoul, Clarissa and I were sitting on the subway after a full day of exploring (Tim's watch said 20,000 steps). He was tired too and sitting down next to me on the train. He got yelled at by an older man because he is "young" and should stand. I was allowed to sit because my toddler was in my lap.

The older generation will definitely let you know what they think, especially the older ladies. They will touch your baby and try to hold them. They aren't going to steal your child; they just want to hold them. And they get upset if you don't let them. They also have opinions about what your child should be wearing. If it's less than 80 degrees Fahrenheit, your child needs a jacket, at least according to them. And an umbrella to stay out of the sun on a sunny day.

B. Safety

In South Korea, theft isn't a big thing. It is common to go into a restaurant or store and leave your stroller outside. You don't worry about anyone taking your stroller or anything inside of it. Also, if you leave your phone or wallet somewhere, it will stay where you left it. If someone does pick it up, they will try to return it to you. But nothing will be missing.

C. Shoes

In Korea, you take off your shoes when you enter someone's house. Repair men will take their shoes off at the door so that they don't dirty your floor.

Many restaurants or kid cafes will require you to remove your shoes at the door as well. There will be a large row of bookshelves to deposit your shoes. Usually there are also slippers that you can put on your feet while you are in said establishment. When you go to the bathroom in these places, there is a different set of shoes. You are supposed to take off the restaurant slippers and switch to bathroom slippers in the bathroom and then switch back to the normal slippers when you leave the bathroom.

Shopping malls and grocery stores will let you keep your shoes on.

D. Sun

Koreans don't like to tan. They like to stay their skin color. If it is sunny outside, you will see Koreans walking around with an umbrella to keep the sun off of them. Big hats are normal as well.

I did not see a single Korean wearing a bikini during our four years in South Korea. Foreigners may wear them at the beach, but the locals do not. Men usually have shirts on with long swim trunks. Kids wear rash guards. Ladies have a swim suit cover up with pants usually.

E. Restaurants

Restaurants in South Korea are different than Western restaurants. For one thing, you are not supposed to tip. It is considered rude. At the same time, the service is not the same as in a restaurant where you are expected to tip.

Usually you walk in to a restaurant and either order at the counter or sit down and a server will come to see you. Often after the server takes your order, you will only see them again when they bring your food. They don't come back to check on you periodically to see if you need anything. However, many restaurants will have a call button at the table that you can press if you need your server to come back for something.

Water is often served in a pitcher at your table so that you can refill it yourself. Silverware is usually at the table as well. And by silverware, I mean that there will be chopsticks and spoons at your table in a drawer. Some restaurants will have forks available by request. There are not usually knives. If there is a lot of meat at your table, there may be scissors though.

F. Holidays

South Korea is not a western country, and therefore, has different holidays. They have their own versions of Labor Day, Independence Day, etc. May 5 is Children's Day and the kids get spoiled that day with a day off from school and presents. There is a combined Parent's Day on May 8. Valentine's Day isn't a thing either. Couples celebrate Black Day and White Day. One is February and for the men to give gifts to the women, the other is March and for the women to give gifts to the men.

Christmas and Easter aren't a big thing in South Korea unless you are a Christian. There is a Sunday at the end of November called Thanksgiving Sunday where Christians celebrate what God has given them. Christmas is Jesus's birthday and not a big commercial holiday with Santa Claus. There will be Christmas trees and lights in Seoul but not all over the country. By the same token, Easter is Resurrection Day and just celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. The only place you will find Easter baskets, Easter eggs, or the Easter bunny is at the PX on base.

Chuseok (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuseok>) and Seollal (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_New_Year) are the two major holidays in South Korea. They are based on the lunar calendar and so they change dates each year. Chuseok is like a Korean Thanksgiving and is celebrated in early fall with three days of feasting and family. There is also a time of going to honor and pray to the ancestors. Seollal is similar in that it is three days of feasting and family and a time of honoring ancestors. People wear a traditional hanbok and children receive money as a gift.

Most of the country shuts down for Chuseok and Seollal. Tolls will be suspended on the highways for these holidays. Booking a trip during this time needs to be done way in advance because the trains will be booked for people going to their hometowns to visit their families. Stores will be closed around these holidays as well.

G. Food

Street food is a big deal in South Korea. If you go to a festival, event, or market day, there will be food trucks or food stalls everywhere. Some food will look “normal” to you and others will look different. Meat on a stick is usually a good choice or any kind of pastry. But you may want to ask how spicy it is if you can’t handle much spice. Another rule of thumb is that the redder it is, the spicier it is.

When the server brings you appetizers, he may call them “kimchi.” There is spicy kimchi and just side dishes. I have tried several different kinds. They may look different than what you are used to, but try it. You will be pleasantly surprised.

Bibimbap (<https://nextdoormama.com/2018/04/06/bee-bim-bop/>) is a very popular dish in South Korea. It basically means “mixed rice.” So anything with rice and something mixed in can be called Bibimbap. Traditional bibimbap will usually have some veggies as well as eggs and maybe meat and rice. Dolsot Bibimbap will be served in a hot stone dish and will cook on your plate. Different regions will have different versions of bibimbap. We visited Jeonju during our stay to see “the birthplace of bibimbap” (<https://nextdoormama.com/2016/03/07/ah-bibimbap/>).

Another fun thing is Korean Barbecue (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/03/22/normal-life/>). They bring the meat to your table with some sides and you cook it yourself at a charcoal grill built into your table. You can choose the size and cut of meat that you like as well as which sauces to add or how long to cook your food. There is usually rice on the table as well as different kinds of green leaves to put your meat in. Some Americans (especially the ones in Seoul) refer to this dish as beef and leaf (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyB3bhKiffM>). Again, there will be spoons, chopsticks, scissors, and tongs at your table.

We also found a fun Shabu, Shabu (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shabu-shabu>) place where we lived in Daegu. Translated, Shabu, shabu means “swish, swish.” It is another dish that you cook yourself at the table. There will be a big soup pot (or two) over a burner on your table. Usually you can choose between spicy broth and regular broth. You order the side of meat that you want and then go over to a buffet style table to pick out the vegetables and noodles to add to your pot.

The vegetables will cook much faster than the meat, so I recommend putting the meat into the broth first and adding the veggies towards the end. You can usually go back for seconds (and thirds) on the veggies. But the meat you will need to pay for if you want a refill. There are some unlimited meat shabu shabu restaurants though.

We have a few restaurants that we frequented outside of the bases.

Near Camp Walker Gate 4, we have two favorites, Awesome Burger (https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g297886-d12061888-Reviews-Awesome_Burger-Daegu.html) and Italy & Italy. Awesome Burger has great burgers and fries. Italy & Italy is a made to order Italian restaurant so you can choose what kind of pizza or pasta you want, along with the sauce and toppings.

Near the Main Gate of Osan is a Thai restaurant called Sawatdee (<http://sawat.365food.com/>). The location has moved at least three times, but the quality has been great for 15 years (my husband has

been visiting since 2005). As of this publishing, go down the main strip and take your second right at the Star Kebab. It will be on the second floor on the right up a wooden staircase across from Sasquatch.

Across from Camp Humphreys Walk in Gate is Sushi In Jay

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Sushi-Restaurant/Sushi-in-Jay-982112681874496/>). That is our favorite sushi place in that area.

Chapter 9: Basic Korean Phrases

Korean is a very easy language to learn to read. It is only 24 characters and very phonetic. I was able to learn to read it very quickly and it was helpful, especially if you plan to use public transportation. Not all the signs will be in English so it was helpful to see where I needed to go.

The grammar of Korean, however, is very different than most Western languages. If you know Chinese or Japanese, you will be able to learn Korean easily. But I had a hard time with the grammar part. If my pronunciation wasn't perfect or I forgot the article, many Koreans had a hard time understanding me. Thankfully, most Koreans start learning in English in third grade, so most places I could find someone to understand me in English.

I will also add that while Korean is a language available on google translate, I didn't find it super helpful most of the time. Once, we had a repair man working on our heat and he couldn't fix it. I knew someone else would come so I was asking him about that. I don't know what he thought I wrote in google translate. But his response to me was something to the effect of, "My uncle who works in the saloons..."

There are two different number systems. When you go to the market or the store, often someone will show you the price on a calculator. If it's less than 5 you can just use your hand to show how many that you want.

That being said, there were several phrases in Korean that I learned that were helpful. I will list the pronunciation and meanings below.

An- yong- ha- say- o – Hello, goodbye, good morning, good night
An- yong- the informal version of hello and goodbye
Shil- ay- ham-knee-da- excuse me (like if you are passing by someone)
Kam- sa- ham-knee-da- thank you
Tack-shi- taxi (they will recognize the word "taxi" but not "cab")
Cha- car
Chin- gu- friend
Egg- e – baby/small child
Ye- poo-na- cute baby/pretty baby
Oma- mom
Appa- dad
Ad-jew-ma- middle aged married lady (Americans think it's old lady though)
A-ta-shi- middle aged man (Americans think it's old man though)
Neigh- yes
(using your arms to make a big x)- no
Air con- air conditioning
Byoung- won – hospital
Go- yawn-gi- cat
Bus-uh- bus
Cop-e- coffee
Mott- if you are at the market and want to ask if you can taste something
Service- free
Bap- rice

Mull- water

Kim- sea weed

Jew- say- o – give me (so whatever you want, then say jew-say-0 at the end)

Pon- uh- phone

Some Konglish...

Change-e- if you need to change something

Charge- e- if you want to charge your tmoney card

KNP- police

Chapter 10: Other Resources

A. South of Seoul App (<https://blog.southofseoul.net>)

South of Seoul is an app on your phone. You can search based on category and neighborhood to find things like kid cafes and restaurants.

B. DMZ to the Sea (<https://www.humphreysunitedspouses.com/dmz-to-the-sea>)

The military spouses got together to make a book that you can also download online. This can be helpful with things to do but a lot of the information about rent and medical is for active duty people, so some of it won't apply to civilians and contractors.

C. MWR Magazines

Humphreys Happenings is the MWR magazine for Camp Humphreys. It comes out monthly and will advertise some of the events on post. The MWR magazine for the Camp Walker area is called Outlook. Each base should have their own version of this magazine that will list activities on post for you.

D. Garrison facebook pages

Each post should have its own website and facebook page. I would look for the military spouse facebook page for your installation as well as check to see if there is a civilian page (Camp Humphreys does for sure). MWR and the library should have a facebook page as well.

E. Blogs to check out

Beyond the Ville is a blog written by some spouses at Camp Humphreys. They discuss some of the culture things as well as some fun adventures to take nearby (<https://beyondtheville.wordpress.com>)

Korea Tourism Organization is the English version of the Korea Tourism Organization website. It will list several tourist attractions in English and discuss things like the price and how to get there using public transportation (<http://english.visitkorea.or.kr>).

Next Door Mama is my personal blog (<https://nextdoormama.com>). Full disclosure, it's not all about South Korea. But I do have a travel section on my blog (<https://nextdoormama.com/category/travel/>). In this travel section, you will find information about all of our travel adventures throughout Asia. You can look up certain cities in South Korea (<https://nextdoormama.com/category/travel/south-korea/>) and Japan (<https://nextdoormama.com/category/travel/japan/>) as well as Hong Kong (<https://nextdoormama.com/category/travel/hong-kong/>).

I will link some helpful posts here.

The first couple of months we lived in South Korea, I wrote a four part series about my observations of Korean Culture.

(<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/03/09/korean-culture-part-1/>,
<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/03/29/korean-culture-part-two-2/>,
<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/04/10/korean-culture-part-3/>,
<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/07/02/korean-culture-part-4/>)

I wrote blog posts about our favorite places to visit with kids in South Korea (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/01/04/our-top-10-places-to-visit-in-south-korea-with-kids/>) and Seoul (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/04/05/our-top-10-things-to-do-in-seoul-with-kids/>).

There is also a list of our favorite children's books about South Korea (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/01/25/our-favorite-books-about-south-korea/>).

I also wrote about our experiences at a Korean hospital (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/09/07/our-first-and-second-korean-hospital-experience/>), getting a physical (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/11/10/my-first-korean-physical-another-korean-hospital-experience/>), and a dentist (<https://nextdoormama.com/2015/11/28/my-korean-dentist/>).

The Epilogue: Returning to America

We had mixed feelings about returning to America. On the one hand, we would have loved to have stayed overseas and tried living in Japan or Europe. On the other hand, we were looking forward to having a baby in America and letting our five year old daughter make some memories with grandparents while they were still healthy.

Usually, you can only stay overseas as a DoD Civilian (GS employee) for five years at a time before returning to America for at least two years. If you are a DoDEA teacher, NAF Employee, or a contractor, the rules are different. We were in South Korea for four years and about three months. We would like to try another overseas location so we wanted to go to America to reset or time so that we could accomplish that.

We were operating on a few assumptions with our job search back home. Tim started applying for jobs about a year before we were scheduled to finish his contract because we didn't know how long it would take to get something that he was interested in. Once you get to four or six months before the end of your contract (depending on the length of your contract), you can go on something called the Priority Placement Program. This guarantees you a job in your career field at around your grade and step in America. You can stay past your DEROS as long as you are on Priority Placement (PPP). Sometimes you have return rights to your former federal position if you return within five years. In this way, whenever you are ready to head home, you just fill out the paperwork and exercise your return rights and go back. No job search needed.

With priority placement, you don't have to do an interview. You just fill out a form and wait. It could be months before you hear anything, but eventually someone will offer you a job. The catch is that you have to take this job or you will be taken off priority placement immediately. This means that you will be required to leave Korea at your DEROS. If you complete your contract, your losing agency will pay for you and your family to return to your home of record; your plane tickets, unaccompanied baggage, household goods, personal vehicle, and some hotel time before you leave Korea. When you get to America, the money stops.

When you take a job with priority placement, they should help you pay for a few things stateside like some hotel time when you first arrive. If you are applying for jobs outside of priority placement, you need to make sure that the job says it offers relocation assistance. Your Korea job isn't required to pay for your return if you leave before the end of your contract.

Tim was only applying for jobs that said they offered relocation assistance. He applied for a job in the fall and interviewed in December. In February, they gave him a tentative job offer that he accepted. At this point, we should have verified that the job was willing to pay relocation. We assumed they would because that is what the job posting said. We accepted the final offer in April and then asked about how long they would pay for a hotel once we arrived in America. It took them two weeks to tell us that the posting said, "May offer relocation assistance" and they weren't planning to give us any relocation assistance at all. At this point, we only had two weeks before we left Korea and there was nothing we could do about it. We quickly talked to our Korea HR person who made sure that they paid for their part of the move. But the money definitely stopped once we reached America.

The other thing to think about is the taxes involved in the move. When we moved to South Korea, the government was taking taxes out of our hotel reimbursement, but that was all. The tax laws have since changed and now we will receive a tax bill for additional items like our plane tickets, household goods, and the shipment of our vehicle. This in addition to not receiving hotel money made us decide to sell our car in Korea and start over once we got to our new location in America.

Our orders were cut the same week that we left Korea, so we didn't have a lot of time before our things were shipped out. Some people have orders a month or two ahead of time so you can ship your things out early. While in Korea, the bases will have furniture that you can borrow up to 90 days before you leave the country. That allows your belongings some time to get to your destination before you arrive. We didn't have that luxury. We had to wait three months to get our furniture. When you get to America, the government doesn't offer any kind of furniture to borrow while you wait for your things. I think this coupled with the tax issue, we should have sold more of our furniture and started over in America. We certainly would have been more comfortable in our new house.

All of this to say, you will want to make sure that you have a nice savings cushion when you return to the United States. You may have to pay for a hotel until you find a place to stay. Then you will need to pay a security deposit as well as your first month's rent. A week in a rental car is about equivalent to a monthly car payment which is another thing to consider when deciding if you want to ship your car. You may need furniture in your new house, or things to get by until the rest of your things arrive. You also have to start over with your spices and pantry items. Depending on the size of your family, even \$10,000 will go quickly.

If you are exercising return rights and going back to a place that you are familiar, it will probably be a much easier transition and your start up costs won't be as high.

The other thing that surprised me was how much we really were starting over. We went to Washington, DC area. We grew up in Virginia and Pennsylvania, so it wasn't a completely foreign area and we had some family nearby to help. But the day to day really was starting over. In South Korea, most families are only there one to three years. People are used to recognizing that you are new and trying to help you because they remember what it is like. We didn't move right next to a military base, so that wasn't the case when we arrived in Washington, DC. People are already established in their lives, some for decades, and are not necessarily looking for new people to bring into their groups.

There were a few other things that were more difficult than I had anticipated. We bought a car before we found a place to live. It was going to be very difficult to secure a loan without a permanent address. We could use my aunt's mailing address temporarily but even that was going to be hard. Thankfully, we had USAA for insurance and they are used to having people in transition so they happily financed our car loan for us.

The other big thing that was difficult was prenatal care. I was 20 weeks pregnant when we left South Korea. I had received prenatal care at a Korean hospital and had a copy of my medical records. The problem was that half of my records were written in Korean and prenatal care is different in Korea so they weren't "as complete" as providers in Virginia were looking for. They wanted to see certain things on ultrasounds and bloodwork that my Korean doctor just didn't do. I did have in English a document that said I was having a normal, healthy pregnancy and had received prenatal care. But it was hard to find a doctor who would accept my paperwork. I eventually had to start going into ob offices with my

records and explaining my records in person. I finally found one that said, “Oh the government sent you to Korea? Then we can accept your records.” But if I had just been in Korea as a missionary or an English teacher, they would not have accepted my records.

Do I regret moving my family to South Korea for four plus years? Not at all. Would I do it again? Yes!

You can read my blog post about our PCS experience (<https://nextdoormama.com/2019/05/10/what-a-pcs-really-looks-like-for-a-civilian/>).