

Some Tips on Using the Seoul Subway System

Getting around in Seoul via public transport, especially by subway (metro), is a tourist's dream. The subway (called 지하철 *jihacheol* in Korean) is comprehensive and user-friendly. Maps are plentiful and each station's multiple subway exits are clearly marked. If you're nervous about doing some self-guided sightseeing because you are intimidated by the complexities of the Korean language, don't be. Click on a subway map (below) and **get out there!**

Know where you're going



Visit http://english.tour2korea.com/03Sightseeing/JourneysByMetro/03_4_1.asp?kosm=m3_4 for help, including maps of all subway lines and a trip planner (click on "Seoul Subway Map").

Don't worry about having to read Korean

All subway stations are clearly labeled in Korean script, Latin script, and even Chinese characters (as appropriate). Moreover, the vast majority of subway trains provide recorded station announcements in both Korean and English. Still other trains will also display station information (Korean & English) on computerized signboards located near the doors.

Purchase your Fare

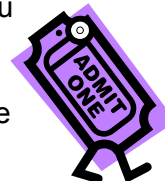
Because subway fares are calculated by means of a distance-based zone system, you need to know your destination before you purchase your ticket. You'll likely pay between ₩900 and ₩1200. To calculate your fare, read the large fare map that is typically located above the ticket machines or above the ticket sales window; it shows fares from your particular station.

Buy your ticket at either a machine or a ticket window. Using the machines is a straightforward affair; instructions appear in English. Purchasing your fare at a ticket window will require you to tell the ticket vendor either the name of your destination or the value of the ticket you need:

Please give me a 900 won ticket.	₩900 자리 표 하나 주세요.	gubaek-won jari pyo hana juseyo.
Please give me a 1000 won ticket.	₩1000 자리 표 하나 주세요.	cheon-won jari pyo hana juseyo.
Please give me a 1100 won ticket.	₩1100 자리 표 하나 주세요.	cheon-ilbaek-won jari pyo hana juseyo.
Please give me a 1200 won ticket.	₩1200 자리 표 하나 주세요.	cheon-ibaek-won jari pyo hana juseyo.

Hang on to your Ticket

To exit the subway, you need to re-insert your ticket at your destination. If you goofed and purchased a ticket that doesn't cover your fare – e.g., you thought the trip was ₩1,000 but it actually cost ₩1,200 – then go to the part of the manned ticket window that faces the subway side of the turnstiles; you can pay the balance in cash – or, if you're lucky – just get waved through.



Consider a T-Money Card

If you plan on taking more than 10 subway or bus rides while in Seoul, consider buying a T-Money card. A T-Money card, which will initially cost you ₩11,500 (~US\$10.00), makes getting around much easier. All you need to do is place the card on the sensor located to the right of each subway turnstile (or on the bus fare box) and enter. The display will tell you how much has been deducted from your card and your current balance. Remember to use your T-Money card when you leave the subway station (or bus) at your destination. If you owe an additional fare (for distance traveled), the system will automatically deduct the correct amount from your card.

You can buy a T-Money card at any place that displays the T-Money logo, including many sidewalk newspaper vendors, all LG25 stores, and any Seoul Subway station ticket window. Just ask for a T-Money card—which what they call them in Korean!—and pay your initial ₩11,500.



Please give me a T-Money card. T-Money 카드 하나 주세요. T-mani kadeu hana juseyo.

Of this initial investment, ₩1,500 covers the cost of the card itself. The balance is available for you to spend on any subway or bus in town.

Once you've purchased your T-Money card, you can recharge it at any subway station, LG25 store, or any establishment bearing the T-Money logo. Just hand the employee your card and whatever amount of money you want charged to the card (e.g., another ₩10,000). In a smooth, wordless transaction, s/he'll run your card through a machine and *voilà!* You are recharged.

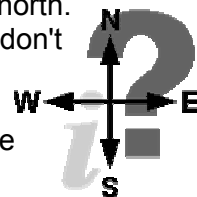
Why use a T-Money card? Let me count the ways...

- 🌀 Your T-Money card allows for easy seamless travel across trains and buses. Just remember to touch your T-Money card to the turnstile/fare box and it will keep track of how far you've gone, charging you an additional fare only if necessary.
- 🌀 The base transit fare for a T-Money card user is ₩800 (vs. ₩900 if you pay cash).
- 🌀 You get a 10% bonus when you buy a T-Money card. If you recharge at ₩10,000, you'll actually have ₩11,000 added to your card. What a deal!

Reading Subway Maps

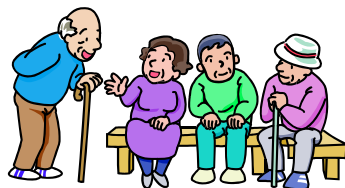
Throughout the subway system, both in the station plazas outside the turnstiles and on the station platforms, you will find numerous maps. Some are diagrams of the subway line that you're riding (often annotated with the time it takes to arrive at each station); others are diagrams of the entire subway system; still others are maps of the local neighborhood, indicating large buildings and major streets.

Careful! When reading neighborhood maps, be careful to note the direction of north. Unlike similar maps that you'd find in North America and Europe, these maps don't necessarily locate north at the top. My own experience suggests that more often than not, you'll find south near the top and east to the left (not the right). Not correctly orienting yourself on one of these maps can cause major confusion once you've emerged from the station. Trust me.



Subway Etiquette

Generally speaking, riding the subway in Seoul is safe and easy. There can be some pushing and jostling while entering and exiting trains, but I've found this jostling is no greater than what you'd find in many other big cities. It's important to realize, however, that Korean culture tolerates a higher degree of such incidental pushing, and without needing apologize every time you bump into somebody. As such, subway-riding Koreans might come across as a bit aggressive to many Westerners. Don't sweat it.



As Korean culture puts a premium on respecting one's elders, it's common to give up your seat for an older rider. In return, the person to whom you've given your seat might reciprocate by offering to hold your bag or briefcase on his/her lap. In fact, it is reasonably common for seated bus/subway patrons to hold the bags of those riders who are standing. (From what I can discern, the practice of holding somebody's bag seems to be a dying custom, with older transit patrons more likely to extend this courtesy to standees. Oh, well.)