

Sleeping in Seoul - Notation

Notes -

1. 24/7 City = Flexible Sleep Schedules

Seoul is famous for never sleeping—literally. Cafés, restaurants, spas, and even libraries often stay open all night. This creates an environment where late-night lifestyles are normalised, and many locals, especially students and office workers, adopt non-traditional sleep schedules.

2. Jjimjilbangs: Communal Sleeping Heaven

One of Korea's most iconic sleep experiences is the jjimjilbang, a gender-segregated bathhouse and sauna that often doubles as a cheap overnight stay option. Think heated floors, comfy mats, and sleep rooms where people nap in shorts and T-shirts alongside strangers. Going out after work or on a night out is common to decompress.

3. Compact Living = Creative Sleep Spaces

In Seoul's dense housing market, many live in goshiwons (tiny rooms often large enough for a bed and desk) or one-room apartments. This has sparked a trend toward multi-functional furniture and minimalist sleeping setups, such as floor mattresses or futon-like beds that can be folded away.

4. The Subway Nap Phenomenon

Sleepy commuters catching power naps on the subway is a common (and endearing) sight in Seoul. Because the subway is safe and punctual, many people trust themselves to nap between stops—some even set alarms based on the average travel time.

6. Pressure to Perform = Sleep Deprivation Culture

Korean work and study culture is known for its high pressure and long hours, which often means chronic sleep deprivation. Students, especially, face long nights due to academic competition, leading to naps during the day or at school—a trend that's culturally recognised and sometimes even accommodated.

8. The Ondol Floor Heating Tradition

Traditional Korean homes (and many modern apartments) use ondol—a heating system that makes sleeping directly on the floor quite comfy. Some still sleep on your (padded mats), embracing a more traditional, minimalist, deeply cultural setup.

9. Late-Night Eating Before Bed

The culture of “yasaik” (야식) or late-night snacking is strong. From ramen to fried chicken, eating heavy food late is common, which can impact sleep, but is a cherished ritual for many. There are even dedicated delivery services for these post-midnight cravings.

10. Capsule Hotels & Sleep Pods for Urban Dwellers

As an alternative to expensive hotels or cramped apartments, Seoul has seen a rise in capsule hotels, especially in high-traffic areas like Gangnam or Hongdae. These are clean, compact, and surprisingly cosy for short stays or emergency naps.

Jae Seong, 20 - student at the University of Seoul, spent time in Madrid and London.

“It is very different; we take sleep less seriously. Or I guess we are more flexible, at school you sleep when you can and then don’t when you are busy.”

“People are not shy about sleeping either, sleeping for longer trips on the subway is safe, people use alarms to be safe”

“At home, it's different as well. I have a mat here. I had a bed in Madrid and the same in London. I like the beds I had, but they're unfamiliar, so I will say I prefer the mat.”

“There are also more places to sleep in our neighbourhoods. We have cafes where workers can nap during breaks.”

“They are very small though, it is not like a hotel with lots of rooms, they are like bunks, we always have creative sleeping spaces, it is unusual for people from Europe, but it works.”

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