



Settle. Seoul

DISCOVER SEOUL · INDIVIDUAL ARTICLE PDF

Read Your Way Into Korea: The Settle Seoul Bookshelf.

Before you arrive, discover the stories. Once you're here, discover the places behind them.

Online guide · Reviewed October 2026 · Read online: www.settleseoul.com/articles/settle-seoul-bookshelf

Contents

1. The best reading changes once you move
2. Presenting K! — All The Korea You May Not See
3. Three books to pack (or download)
4. Six Korean stories for life in Seoul
5. Bookshops, libraries and a reading space
6. How to get the right edition
7. Pair a book with a day out
8. A bookshop glossary
9. Sources & verification

Links in this PDF open the official source or the online guide. Opening hours, prices, programmes and access rules change — confirm with the responsible operator before you travel.

THE ESSENTIALS

- Ten books: a featured introduction, three to read before you fly and six for once you live here.
- Use the reading selector below to find your next book by mood.
- No prices, stock or ratings are claimed — check the retailer or library before you travel.

Official routes: Kyobo Book Centre · Seoul Metropolitan Library · LTI Korea.

WHY READ

The best reading changes once you move

Before you land, books give you context: the history, the habits and a few words of the language. Once you live here, the same books become maps — a novel's neighbourhood bookshop, a museum room, a baseball stadium. This shelf mixes practical non-fiction, cultural essays, beginner Korean, strong literary fiction and ideas for bookish days out. Fiction is a window into lives and debates, not a literal guide to how every Korean person lives.

FEATURED BOOK

Presenting K! — All The Korea You May Not See

Our pick for the first week. Jaeyoung Park (박재영) wrote this English edition, published by Nanda in 2024, as a cheerful explainer for foreigners curious about Korea. (Some listings misspell the author's name; publisher and retailer records give Jaeyoung Park.) Kyobo lists both a print edition and an ebook — check which format you are buying.

Presenting K! — All The Korea You May Not See — Jaeyoung Park (박재영)

- A Korean writer's playful, twenty-chapter explanation of the country foreigners find most curious — food, transport, K-pop, Hangul, baseball and plenty in between.
- Why read it? It is written for visitors and newcomers, so it answers the small "why do people do that?" questions guidebooks skip. Dip in by chapter.
- Suits: Anyone in the first weeks, especially if you prefer light, funny non-fiction to history.

Presenting K! — All The Korea You May Not See — Jaeyoung Park (박재영)

Non-fiction · Nanda · English edition, December 2024 (ISBN 9791194171300) · separate Korean edition exists

Kyobo Book Centre · print listing →

A first-week reading list

- Presenting K! — dip into the chapters on food, transport and Hangul.
- Korea: A Very Short Introduction — the history in an evening or two.
- Five basic Korean phrases, from TTMIK Level 1 or our Korean-learning guide.

Presenting K! ebook · Kyobo →

Three books to pack (or download)

Context, history and survival Korean. If you only have a week, read the short list at the end.

Korea: The Impossible Country — Daniel Tudor

- A former Seoul correspondent's portrait of modern South Korea: its rapid development, education pressure, religion, work and social life.
- Why read it? Readable context for the speed and intensity of Korean life. Treat it as a 2012 snapshot — some details have moved on.
- Suits: Readers who want one broad overview before landing.

Korea: A Very Short Introduction — Michael J. Seth

- A compact history of the peninsula from early kingdoms through Joseon, colonial rule, division and the two modern Koreas.
- Why read it? The quickest reliable way to understand what you are looking at in a palace, museum or history drama.
- Suits: Short-on-time readers who want history without a doorstep.

Talk To Me In Korean · Level 1 — Talk To Me In Korean

- The first textbook in TTMik's grammar series: Hangul, greetings, basic sentence patterns and numbers.
- Why read it? Even a few lessons make menus, signs and delivery messages less intimidating on arrival.
- Suits: Complete beginners. Pair it with our Korean-learning guide.

Korea: The Impossible Country — Daniel Tudor

Non-fiction · first published 2012

Korea: A Very Short Introduction — Michael J. Seth

Non-fiction · Oxford University Press, Very Short Introductions

[Oxford Academic](#) · [book page](#) →

Talk To Me In Korean · Level 1 — Talk To Me In Korean

Beginner textbook · print edition

[TTMIK store](#) · [Level 1 textbook](#) →

Only one week before you fly?

Presenting K! — dip into the chapters on food, transport and Hangul. · Korea: A Very Short Introduction — the history in an evening or two. · Five basic Korean phrases, from TTMik Level 1 or our Korean-learning guide.

Six Korean stories for life in Seoul

Modern Korean fiction (and one diaspora epic) to read once the city starts to feel familiar. All are widely available in English translation.

Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop — Hwang Bo-reum

- After burning out, Yeongju opens a small neighbourhood bookshop in Seoul, and a loose community of regulars, a barista and visiting writers forms around it.
- Why read it? A gentle novel about rest, work and finding your people — very easy to read after a demanding week.
- Suits: Readers who want warmth rather than plot twists.

Love in the Big City — Sang Young Park

- Young, a gay man in Seoul, moves through friendship, love affairs, family and illness across his twenties and thirties.
- Why read it? Funny, sad and very contemporary — clubs, studio flats and late-night conversations in the city you now live in.
- Suits: Adult readers who like voice-driven, urban fiction. Includes sex and illness themes.

Human Acts — Han Kang

- Linked voices circle the 1980 Gwangju Uprising and its violent suppression, and what survivors carry afterwards.
- Why read it? A powerful literary way into a turning point in Korea's democratisation, from the 2024 Nobel laureate in Literature.
- Suits: Readers prepared for difficult material.
- Emotionally intense: depicts violence, torture and grief.

Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop — Hwang Bo-reum

Novel · translated from Korean

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 — Cho Nam-joo

Novel · translated by Jamie Chang

Love in the Big City — Sang Young Park

Novel · translated by Anton Hur

Pachinko — Min Jin Lee

Novel · written in English

Human Acts — Han Kang

Novel · translated by Deborah Smith

Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 — Cho Nam-joo

- The life of an ordinary Seoul woman, from childhood to motherhood, told in a deliberately clinical voice.
- Why read it? A widely discussed novel about gender, work and family expectation. It is fiction and sparked debate, not a survey of every Korean family.
- Suits: Readers interested in workplace and family culture; short enough for a weekend.

Pachinko — Min Jin Lee

- Four generations of a Korean family who move from Busan to Japan, facing poverty, discrimination and impossible choices across the twentieth century.
- Why read it? A gripping, long family saga about the Korean diaspora in Japan and the colonial era's long shadow.
- Suits: Readers ready for a big book on long flights or winter evenings.

Please Look After Mom — Kyung-sook Shin

- When their mother goes missing in a Seoul subway station, her family realise how little they knew about her.
- Why read it? A moving novel about family, sacrifice and the countryside-to-city generation — tissues recommended.
- Suits: Anyone missing family back home, or wanting to understand parents' generations here.

Please Look After Mom — Kyung-sook Shin

Novel · translated by Chi-Young Kim

WHERE TO FIND BOOKS

Bookshops, libraries and a reading space

Big chains carry the most English titles; second-hand shops and libraries are mostly Korean. We list official websites rather than map pins because we have not independently verified every branch address — check opening hours and the current location before you go.

Kyobo Book Centre · Gwanghwamun · Bookshop

- Large foreign-language section plus Korean books
- Kyobo's flagship central-Seoul store; use the website to check branch details and store stock before you go.

Starfield Library · COEX · Reading space

- Browse-only, mostly Korean and magazines
- A free, open reading space with towering shelves — not a bookshop and not a lending library.

Aladin used bookstores · Bookshop

- Second-hand, Korean and some English
- Affordable used-book chain; foreign-language stock varies a lot by branch.

Seoul Metropolitan Library · Library

- Korean collection with some foreign-language material
- The city's main public library. Check current membership and borrowing rules for foreign residents.

Youngpoong Bookstore · COEX · Bookshop

- Mostly Korean, with some foreign-language titles
- A large bookshop inside COEX Mall, close to Starfield Library.

Seoul Selection · Bookshop

- English-language books about Korea
- Publisher and bookseller specialising in Korea in English, near Jongno. Check its contact page for the current shop location and hours before visiting.

Seoul Book Bogo · Bookshop

- Second-hand, predominantly Korean
- Seoul's public used-book market, bringing together independent second-hand dealers.

Place	Type	Books	Good to know
Kyobo Book Centre · Gwanghwamun	Bookshop	Large foreign-language section plus Korean books	Kyobo's flagship central-Seoul store; use the website to check branch details and store stock before you go.
Youngpoong Bookstore · COEX	Bookshop	Mostly Korean, with some foreign-language titles	A large bookshop inside COEX Mall, close to Starfield Library.
Starfield Library · COEX	Reading space	Browse-only, mostly Korean and magazines	A free, open reading space with towering shelves — not a bookshop and not a lending library.
Seoul Selection	Bookshop	English-language books about Korea	Publisher and bookseller specialising in Korea in English, near Jongno. Check its contact page for the current shop location and hours before visiting.
Aladin used bookstores	Bookshop	Second-hand, Korean and some English	Affordable used-book chain; foreign-language stock varies a lot by branch.
Seoul Book Bogo	Bookshop	Second-hand, predominantly Korean	Seoul's public used-book market, bringing together independent second-hand dealers.

Place	Type	Books	Good to know
Seoul Metropolitan Library	Library	Korean collection with some foreign-language material	The city's main public library. Check current membership and borrowing rules for foreign residents.

[Kyobo Book Centre · Gwanghwamun →](#)

[Youngpoong Bookstore · COEX →](#)

[Starfield Library · COEX →](#)

[Seoul Selection →](#)

[Aladin used bookstores →](#)

[Seoul Book Bogo →](#)

[Seoul Metropolitan Library →](#)

BUY AND BORROW

How to get the right edition

Korean online bookstores are fast and deliver nationwide, but are mostly in Korean. A little search know-how goes a long way.

Buying online

- Kyobo, YES24 and Aladin all sell English-language and imported books.
- Search by ISBN to get the exact translation and edition — many classics have several translations and Korean titles that look nothing like the English.
- Stock, delivery dates and prices change; confirm on the product page before paying. Identity verification may be needed to create an account.

[YES24 →](#)

Borrowing

- Public libraries are free to visit. Membership and borrowing rules for foreign residents vary by library — check current policy and bring your residence card.
- LTI Korea's library specialises in Korean literature in translation; check its site for access and visiting conditions.
- Your district library may be closer than the central one — ask at your community centre.

[LTI Korea Library →](#)

READ & EXPLORE

Pair a book with a day out

Ideas for letting your reading lead you somewhere. These are inspirations — we are not suggesting any novel is set in these exact places.

Welcome to the Hyunam-dong Bookshop → an independent bookshop afternoon

- Find a small neighbourhood bookshop or book café, buy one thing and stay for a drink. Seochon and the streets around Hongdae are good places to wander.

[Hanok stays and Seochon →](#)

Korea: A Very Short Introduction → Gyeongbokgung and modern history

- Read the Joseon and twentieth-century chapters, then visit Gyeongbokgung and the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History on Gwanghwamun Square — then browse Kyobo across the road.

[Explore Seoul by theme →](#)

Presenting K! → food, markets and baseball

- Take the food and baseball chapters out with you: a traditional market lunch, then a KBO game in season with fried chicken in the stands.

What's on in Seoul →

USEFUL KOREAN

A bookshop glossary

Romanisation follows the Revised Romanisation of Korean.

Words to know

- 서점 (seojeom) — bookshop
- 도서관 (doseogwan) — library
- 중고책 (junggochaek) — used books
- 영어책 (yeongeochoek) — English books
- 번역 (beonyeok) — translation

Phrases to use

- 영어책 어디 있어요? (Yeongeochoek eodi isseoyo?) — Where are the English books?
- 이 책 있어요? (I chaek isseoyo?) — Do you have this book? (show the ISBN)
- 회원 가입할 수 있어요? (Hoewon gaipal su isseoyo?) — Can I sign up as a member?

Interested in a Settle Seoul book club?

We're considering a reader book club. It doesn't exist yet — tell us through the contact page if you'd join.

SOURCES

Sources & verification · Read Your Way Into Korea: The Settle Seoul Bookshelf

Reviewed October 2026. Check the official links before relying on dates, fees or rules.

- **Kyobo Book Centre · Presenting K! (print)**
<https://product.kyobobook.co.kr/detail/S000215063604>
- **Kyobo · Presenting K! (ebook)**
<https://ebook-product.kyobobook.co.kr/dig/epd/ebook/E000011424389>
- **Oxford Academic · Korea: A Very Short Introduction**
<https://academic.oup.com/book/28408>
- **Talk To Me In Korean · Level 1 textbook**
<https://store.talktomeinkorean.com/products/talk-to-me-in-korean-textbook-level-1>
- **Kyobo Book Centre · Gwanghwamun**
<https://www.kyobobook.co.kr/>
- **Youngpoong Bookstore · COEX**
<https://www.starfield.co.kr/coexmall/entertainment/ypBooks.do>
- **Starfield Library · COEX**
<https://www.coexmall.com/coexmall/starfieldLibrary/library.do>
- **Seoul Selection**
https://www.seoulselection.com/bookstore/default/contact_us.php
- **Aladin used bookstores**
<https://www.aladin.co.kr/>
- **Seoul Book Bogo**
<https://www.seoulbookbogo.kr/front/>
- **Seoul Metropolitan Library**
<https://lib.seoul.go.kr/>
- **YES24 · online bookstore**
<https://www.yes24.com/>

- [LTI Korea Library](#) · [Korean literature in translation](#)

<https://library.ltikorea.or.kr/>

Settle Seoul article PDF. Editorial guidance, not legal, immigration or medical advice — confirm requirements with the responsible office (1345 Immigration Contact Center, HiKorea). Photographs credited by name are by the photographer named. Corrections: support@settleseoul.com · [Read online](#) · www.settleseoul.com/downloads