



Settle. Seoul

DISCOVER SEOUL · INDIVIDUAL ARTICLE PDF

Coffee in Korea: From Dabang to Iced Americano.

One country. Thousands of cafés. A whole culture in a cup.

Online guide · Reviewed October 2026 · Read online: www.settleseoul.com/articles/coffee-culture-in-seoul

Contents

1. More than a caffeine stop
2. From a meeting room to a cup on the move
3. What is a dabang?
4. Find your cup
5. Build your coffee order in Korean
6. At the kiosk, one screen at a time
7. Coffeehouses worth building a day around
8. What might a cup cost?
9. The small rules that make a café work
10. Follow a coffee trail
11. A tiny café glossary
12. 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

- A coffee can be a quick commute ritual or an afternoon destination.
- Learn one order; ask before adding milk alternatives or decaf.
- Use official café links to check the branch before you travel.

A DAILY RITUAL

More than a caffeine stop

In Seoul, ‘shall we get coffee?’ can mean a catch-up, a study session, a date, a pause between errands or simply five minutes to yourself. A tiny takeaway counter and a destination roastery are part of the same story: one values speed, the other invites you to linger. Neither is the ‘correct’ way to drink coffee.

106,452 coffee shops • 2023

- Nationwide, not Seoul alone, and not an October 2026 count. The government’s 21 August 2026 release reports 2023 coffee-shop numbers, representing 13.4% of foodservice establishments.

₩3.74 trillion • 2024

- The same release estimates the domestic coffee products market in 2024. This is not a figure for café takings or the price of going out for coffee.

Find your own rhythm

Try a budget takeaway on an ordinary morning, then give one slow café visit a whole afternoon. The contrast tells you more than a list of fashionable addresses.

THEN & NOW

From a meeting room to a cup on the move

Coffee reached Korea in the late Joseon period. Emperor Gojong is often associated with its early court history, but the familiar royal story is not proof of a single first cup or the beginning of everyday café life. The social rooms, instant packets and espresso bars that followed each changed who coffee was for.

1. **Late Joseon • an unfamiliar drink** — Coffee initially circulated in limited diplomatic and elite settings. Avoid reducing a much longer cultural story to a royal anecdote.
2. **Mid-20th century • the dabang** — Tea and coffee rooms became places to meet, listen to records and exchange ideas. Hakrim’s 1956 beginnings and Dok-Dabang’s student and literary history are surviving examples, not a template for every dabang.
3. **1976 • the small sweet packet** — The Ministry of Culture dates Korean coffee mix to 1976: instant coffee, creamer and sugar made a warm cup quick to prepare in homes and workplaces.
4. **Late 1990s onward • espresso & craft** — International espresso chains expanded, followed by a specialty scene focused on roasting, beans and brewing. Today cheap takeaway and careful hand-drip thrive side by side.

OLD SEOUL, SLOWLY

What is a dabang?

다방 (dabang) literally points to a tea room, but its Korean cultural associations extend well beyond tea. Think of a room where the soundtrack and the conversation matter as much as the cup. In the literary and student venues described here, photographs, records and memories are part of the atmosphere. The term has varied across eras and settings; not every dabang is a historic music café.

Hakrim • a surviving classic

- Established in 1956 in Hyehwa/Daehak-ro, with a history tied to artists and university intellectuals. Visit Korea highlights Vienna coffee and cream cheesecake.
- Go for a deliberate pause around the theatre streets, not an assumption that every seat is a laptop workstation.

Coffee Hanyakbang • contemporary nostalgia

- Its operator describes a hidden Euljiro alley setting and coffee made with the care of a herbal prescription. This is a modern nostalgic coffeehouse, not a centuries-old dabang.
- Enjoy the mood without mistaking antique styling for a documented operating history.

Dok-Dabang • a continued story

- The Sinchon meeting place closed in 2005 and reopened in 2013, according to Visit Seoul. Old photos and a bulletin board connect the present café with its student and literary past.
- A reopened heritage venue is not the same thing as an unchanged interior operating continuously for decades.



A TASTING NOTEBOOK

Find your cup

Start with the everyday staples, then follow your taste toward cream, filter coffee or something without coffee at all. Korean menus borrow international names freely; the same drink can have a different recipe from one shop to the next.

Americano • 아메리카노 (amerikano)

- Everyday staple
- Espresso and water, usually without sugar. 아아 (aa) is shorthand for iced Americano; 얼죽아 (eoljuk-a) jokes about choosing it even in freezing weather.

Café latte • 카페라떼 (kaperatte)

- Everyday staple
- Espresso softened with milk. A plain latte is not automatically sweet; recipes and milk choices vary.

Vanilla latte · 바닐라라떼 (banillaratte)

- Sweet favourite
- A milky espresso drink with vanilla sweetness. Ask about reducing syrup rather than assuming the recipe can change.

Hand-drip coffee · 핸드드립 커피 (haendeudeurip keopi)

- Slow & specialty
- Filter coffee brewed to order. Ask which beans are available; an iced version may use a different brewing recipe.

Dalgona coffee · 달고나 커피 (dalgona keopi)

- Trend, not universal
- Whipped sweet coffee over milk, associated with the 2020 home-drink trend. Not every café serves it; it is distinct from the crunchy dalgona candy.

Sweet potato latte · 고구마라떼 (gogumaratte)

- Without coffee
- A sweet, often thick milk drink made with sweet potato. Usually not an espresso latte; ingredients and seasonal availability vary.

Yuja tea · 유자차 (yujacha)

- Without coffee
- Citrus preserve diluted with water, usually sweet. Some cafés offer an iced version; it is not the same as brewed black tea.

Einspänner · 아인슈페너 (ainsyupeneo)

- Specialty menu
- Coffee under a thick cream layer. Vienna coffee and modern einspänner recipes differ; some contain milk, and many are iced-only.

Coffee mix · 믹스커피 (mikseukeopi)

- Everyday instant ritual
- Instant coffee, sugar and creamer in a small packet. Common in offices and homes, not a guaranteed café menu item; usually prepared hot.

Matcha latte · 말차라떼 (malcharatte)

- Without coffee
- Green tea and milk, often sweetened. Contains tea caffeine even though there is no coffee; ask about the base mix and milk.

Misutgaru · 미숫가루 (misutgaru)

- Grain drink
- Roasted mixed-grain powder blended with water or milk, often sweetened. Grain mixes can contain allergens; confirm ingredients rather than assuming it is gluten-free.

Ssanghwacha · 쌍화차 (ssanghwacha)

- Traditional tea
- A dark herbal-style tea associated with traditional tea rooms and some dabang. Ingredients and toppings vary; check allergies and do not treat it as medical advice.



Korean	Say it	Drink	Hot / iced	Good to know
아메리카노	amerikano	Americano	hot / iced	Espresso and water, usually without sugar. 아아 (aa) is shorthand for iced Americano; 얼죽아 (eoljuk-a) jokes about choosing it even in freezing weather.
카페라떼	kaperatte	Café latte	hot / iced	Espresso softened with milk. A plain latte is not automatically sweet; recipes and milk choices vary.
바닐라라떼	banillaratte	Vanilla latte	hot / iced	A milky espresso drink with vanilla sweetness. Ask about reducing syrup rather than assuming the recipe can change.
아인슈페너	ainsyupeneo	Einspänner	iced	Coffee under a thick cream layer. Vienna coffee and modern einspänner recipes differ; some contain milk, and many are iced-only.
핸드드립 커피	haendeudeurip keopi	Hand-drip coffee	hot / iced	Filter coffee brewed to order. Ask which beans are available; an iced version may use a different brewing recipe.
믹스커피	mikseukeopi	Coffee mix	hot	Instant coffee, sugar and creamer in a small packet. Common in offices and homes, not a guaranteed café menu item; usually prepared hot.
달고나 커피	dalgona keopi	Dalgona coffee	iced	Whipped sweet coffee over milk, associated with the 2020 home-drink trend. Not every café serves it; it is distinct from the crunchy dalgona candy.
말차라떼	malcharatte	Matcha latte	hot / iced	Green tea and milk, often sweetened. Contains tea caffeine even though there is no coffee; ask about the base mix and milk.
고구마라떼	gogumaratte	Sweet potato latte	hot / iced	A sweet, often thick milk drink made with sweet potato. Usually not an espresso latte; ingredients and seasonal availability vary.
미숫가루	misutgaru	Misutgaru	iced	Roasted mixed-grain powder blended with water or milk, often sweetened. Grain mixes can contain allergens; confirm ingredients rather than assuming it is gluten-free.
유자차	yujacha	Yuja tea	hot / iced	Citrus preserve diluted with water, usually sweet. Some cafés offer an iced version; it is not the same as brewed black tea.
쌍화차	ssanghwacha	Ssanghwacha	hot	A dark herbal-style tea associated with traditional tea rooms and some dabang. Ingredients and toppings vary; check allergies and do not treat it as medical advice.

YOUR FIRST CONFIDENT ORDER

Build your coffee order in Korean

One cup, the temperature you want and whether you are staying or taking it away. Optional additions are phrased as questions: decaf, alternative milk and recipe changes depend on the café and may cost extra. For an allergy, confirm ingredients and cross-contact directly; this order is not an allergy guarantee.

Ready-made orders

Say this	Romanisation	Meaning
따뜻한 아메리카노 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Ttatteuthan amerikano han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One hot americano, please. To take away, please.

Say this	Romanisation	Meaning
아이스 아메리카노 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Aiseu amerikano han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One iced americano, please. To take away, please.
따뜻한 카페라떼 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Ttatteuthan kaperatte han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One hot café latte, please. To take away, please.
아이스 카페라떼 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Aiseu kaperatte han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One iced café latte, please. To take away, please.
따뜻한 바닐라라떼 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Ttatteuthan banillaratte han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One hot vanilla latte, please. To take away, please.
아이스 바닐라라떼 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Aiseu banillaratte han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One iced vanilla latte, please. To take away, please.
아이스 아인슈페너 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Aiseu ainsyupeneo han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One iced einspänner, please. To take away, please.
따뜻한 핸드드립 커피 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Ttatteuthan haendeudeurip keopi han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One hot hand-drip coffee, please. To take away, please.
아이스 핸드드립 커피 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Aiseu haendeudeurip keopi han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One iced hand-drip coffee, please. To take away, please.
따뜻한 믹스커피 한 잔 주세요. 포장해 주세요.	Ttatteuthan mikseukeopi han jan juseyo. Pojanghae juseyo.	One hot coffee mix, please. To take away, please.

Add-on requests

Korean	Romanisation	Meaning
디카페인 되나요?	Dikapein doenayo?	Is decaf available?
우유를 오토밀크로 바꿀 수 있나요?	Uyureul oteumilkeuro bakkul su innayo?	Can you replace the milk with oat milk?
얼음을 적게 넣어 주실 수 있나요?	Eoreumeul jeokge neoeo jusil su innayo?	Could you use less ice?
시럽을 적게 넣어 주실 수 있나요?	Sireobeul jeokge neoeo jusil su innayo?	Could you use less syrup?
샷 추가 되나요?	Syat chuga doenayo?	Can I add an espresso shot?
포장해 주세요.	Pojanghae juseyo.	To take away, please.
매장에서 마실게요.	Maejangeseo masilgeyo.	I'll drink it here.

The website builds these sentences interactively; this print table shows the same phrases. Ask politely — not every café offers every option.

SMALL PRACTICAL WINS

At the kiosk, one screen at a time

Kiosks differ, but the sequence is usually familiar. An English menu may help; if you cannot find it, show your Korean order to a staff member rather than guessing through paid options.

- Choose the menu** — Look for coffee or beverages, then your drink. Names may appear in Korean or English. Check the item picture, size and total rather than assuming the first tile is the basic version.
- Set temperature & options** — HOT / 따뜻한 (ttatteuthan) and ICE / 아이스 (aiseu) are common. Select extra shots or syrup only if wanted; some signature drinks have a fixed recipe.
- Here or takeaway, then pay** — 매장 (maejang) means in-store; 포장 (pojang) means takeaway. Check the final amount. Foreign cards do not work on every kiosk or domestic payment option; ask staff if your card is

rejected.

4. **Keep your number** — Take the receipt or order ticket, watch the collection screen or listen for your number. Some shops give a vibrating pager. Collect at the counter, then return reusable cups and trays where requested.

SEVEN STARTING POINTS

Coffeehouses worth building a day around

A curated starting list, not a ranking or a live opening-hours feed. Historic rooms, contemporary nostalgia, roasting craft and architecture each offer a different reason to go. Follow the operator or tourism listing to confirm the branch, menu and access before visiting.



Coffeehouse	Area & address	Why go	Pair it with
Hakrim Dabang · 학림다방	Hyehwa / Daehak-ro — 119 Daehak-ro, Jongno-gu · 2F	A café established in 1956, tied to artists and intellectuals. Visit Korea highlights Vienna coffee and cream cheesecake; listen to the room as well as ordering a cup.	Daehak-ro theatre streets and a book from your reading list.
Dok-Dabang / Doksuri Dabang · 독수리다방	Sinchon — 36 Yeonseo-ro, Seodaemun-gu · 8F	A student and literary meeting place whose story continued with its 2013 reopening. Visit Seoul describes the photos and note-sharing bulletin board.	A look around Sinchon's university neighbourhood.
Coffee Hanyakbang · 커피한약방	Euljiro — 16-6 Samildaero 12-gil, Jung-gu	A contemporary nostalgic coffeehouse hidden in older commercial alleys. The operator's herbal-prescription metaphor is about care in brewing, not medical benefits or centuries of café history.	A considerate wander through Euljiro's working streets.
Fritz Coffee Company · 프리츠도화점	Mapo / Dohwa — 17 Saechang-ro 2-gil, Mapo-gu	An independent roasting-and-bakery stop for comparing a crafted coffee with your everyday takeaway. Use the official directory to select Dohwa rather than another Fritz branch.	A neighbourhood stroll around Mapo and Gongdeok.

Coffeehouse	Area & address	Why go	Pair it with
Anthracite · Hapjeong · 앤트러 사이트 합정	Hapjeong — 10 Tojeong-ro 5-gil, Mapo-gu	Visit Seoul describes a former shoe factory retaining industrial elements. Come for the conversation between a working building's past and a contemporary coffee space.	Hapjeong's smaller streets and nearby bookshops.
Onion · Anguk · 어니언 안국	Anguk — 5 Gyedong-gil, Jongno-gu	A hanok café and bakery described by Visit Korea. Traditional architectural surroundings do not make this a historic dabang; it is a contemporary café experience.	Anguk and a respectful daytime neighbourhood visit; follow Bukchon's visitor restrictions.
Center Coffee · Seoul Forest · 센터커피 서울숲	Seongsu / Seoul Forest — 28-11 Seoulsup 2-gil, Seongdong-gu	A specialty coffee stop beside Seoul Forest, with a park-facing setting described by Visit Korea. Check the current beans and brewing menu at the shop.	A Seoul Forest park break and Seongsu's contemporary streets.

Hakrim Dabang — official listing →

Dok-Dabang / Doksuri Dabang — official listing →

Coffee Hanyakbang — official listing →

Fritz Coffee Company · Dohwa — official listing →

Anthracite · Hapjeong — official listing →

Onion · Anguk — official listing →

Center Coffee · Seoul Forest — official listing →

Venue details come from operator or official destination listings reviewed October 2026. Check current hours, closures and seating rules before you go.

BUDGET WITHOUT SURPRISES

What might a cup cost?

Illustrative planning estimates only, not live menus, guaranteed prices or quoted offers. Size, hot/iced versions, location, beans and additions all change the bill. Look at the displayed menu before ordering.

Budget takeaway · ₩1,500–3,000

- A rough Americano allowance. Mega Coffee, Compose Coffee and Paik's Coffee are examples of budget chains, not endorsements or promises of a particular current price.

Standard chain · ₩3,500–6,000

- A useful ballpark for a basic coffee; larger sizes, seasonal menus and milk drinks may fall outside it.

Specialty espresso · ₩5,000–8,000

- You may be paying for bean selection, roasting and an individual shop's setting as well as the drink. More expensive does not automatically mean better for your taste.

Cream signatures / hand-drip · ₩6,000–10,000+

- Rare beans and elaborate signature recipes can cost more. Ask about a hand-drip bean's price before choosing it.

Two different purchases

A budget coffee buys a convenient cup. A specialty visit can buy a little time, attention and discovery. Leave room for both, rather than treating one as a cheaper version of the other.

The small rules that make a café work

A comfortable seat does not mean an unlimited desk rental. Policies belong to the individual café; ask before settling in for a long reading or work session.

Seats & screens

- 1인 1음료 (irin il eumnyo) means one drink per person; some seated venues require it.
- Check laptop, outlet, photography and time-limit policies. Avoid occupying a large table alone when a small shop is busy.

Pay & return

- Payment is commonly taken when ordering; follow the shop's process. Tipping is not usually expected in ordinary Korean cafés.
- 반납대 (bannapdae) is the return counter. Return trays, reusable cups and pagers where staff indicate.

Quiet & considerate

- Keep calls brief or step outside. Ask before photographing identifiable customers or staff; a beautiful room is still someone else's afternoon.
- Do not assume an atmospheric heritage café welcomes prolonged laptop work.

Reading without rushing

- Pick an appropriate café and a quieter time, buy a drink, then check whether you may stay with your book. Libraries offer a different kind of long reading session.

[Find a book on the Settle Seoul Bookshelf →](#)

THREE AFTERNOONS

Follow a coffee trail

These are self-guided inspirations, not measured walking routes or guaranteed business itineraries. Check each venue first, adapt to weather and energy, and leave space for an unexpected bookshop or side street.

Euljiro · alleys & nostalgia

- Begin with Coffee Hanyakbang's operator link, then explore the surrounding working streets and retro storefronts. Respect workshops and deliveries; do not wander into private premises for a photograph.
- Pair the coffee pause with a look around central Seoul's older commercial neighbourhoods.

[Coffee Hanyakbang →](#)

Seongsu / Seoul Forest · a newer scene

- Explore converted industrial spaces and contemporary café design, then take a park break around Seoul Forest. Choose the café from its current branch listing rather than treating an online photograph as a locator.
- This is an area to explore, not a claim that every roastery is in a former factory.

[Explore Seoul's neighbourhoods →](#)

Hyehwa · pages & performance

- Make Hakrim the coffee stop and Daehak-ro's theatre streets the backdrop. A book or a performance can turn a caffeine break into a cultural afternoon; check theatre language and booking details separately.

[Choose something to read →](#)

A tiny café glossary

Romanisation is a pronunciation aid, not an exact substitute for listening. Showing the Korean text is often the clearest way to order.

The counter

- 커피 · keopi · coffee
- 다방 · dabang · tea/coffee room
- 한 잔 주세요 · han jan juseyo · one cup, please
- 추천해 주세요 · chucheonhae juseyo · please recommend something

Checking the menu

- 디카페인 되나요? · dikapein doenayo? · is decaf available?
- 달아요? · darayo? · is it sweet?
- 우유가 들어가나요? · uyuga deureoganayo? · does it contain milk?
- 포장 · pojang · takeaway / 매장 · maejang · in-store

A little Korean goes a long way →

SOURCES

Sources & verification · Coffee in Korea: From Dabang to Iced Americano

Reviewed October 2026. Prices in this guide are estimates, not live menu prices.

- **MAFRA / Korea.net: coffee industry release, 21 August 2026**
<https://www.korea.net/Government/Briefing-Room/Press-Releases/view?articleId=2018368&insttCode=A260109&type=N>
- **Ministry of Culture: The Dynamic Evolution of Korea's Coffee Scene, March 2026**
<https://www.mcst.go.kr/english/useful/month202603.jsp>
- **Visit Korea: Hakrim**
<https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/contents/contentsView.do?vcontsId=47863>
- **Visit Seoul: Dok-Dabang (updated 28 September 2026)**
https://english.visitseoul.net/eat/doksuri-dabang_/28403
- **Coffee Hanyakbang: operator website**
<https://coffeehanyakbang.com>
- **Fritz: official store directory**
<https://m.en.fritz.co.kr/contact.html>
- **Coffee Hanyakbang: official destination listing**
<https://english.visitseoul.net/restaurants/coffeehanyakbang/ENPyiaqhs>
- **Anthracite · Hapjeong: official destination listing**
<https://english.visitseoul.net/area/Anthracite-Coffee-Roasters-Hapjeong-Branch/ENP020585>
- **Onion · Anguk: official destination listing**
<https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/contents/contentsView.do?vcontsId=191156>
- **Center Coffee · Seoul Forest: official destination listing**
<https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/contents/contentsView.do?vcontsId=177422>

Settle Seoul sample PDF · pilot design for editorial review. 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; other images are original Settle Seoul artwork. Corrections: support@settleseoul.com · www.settleseoul.com/downloads