

Travel Report

Winter Olympics, 2018

PyeongChang, South Korea

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Executive Summary

Petty crime, especially pick pocketing and theft from hotel rooms, is the most likely threat to affect tourists traveling to PyeongChang, South Korea for the 2018 Olympics. These are the most common types of crime in South Korea, and the large crowds at Olympic venues will likely attract opportunistic criminals. To reduce your risk of being a victim of petty theft:

- Lock and secure all valuables before leaving the hotel room. Keep passports on your person when possible and not in a bag or purse, in case of theft.
- Ensure your wallet is secure. Consider spreading your valuables around your body—cell phone in one pocket and wallet in another.

Cybercrime is also a concern, although it is less prevalent in South Korea than in other developed nations. As with petty crime, cybercriminals will likely be attracted to the large number of tourists at the Olympics and may seek to target individuals with digital attacks aimed at gaining access to personal and financial data.

Terrorism—especially lone wolf attacks—also presents a concern due to the large crowds and heavy media presence. The Olympics have historically been a prime target for extremists seeking to spread their message to a wide audience, with attacks occurring at 10 of the 22 games that occurred between 1972 and 2014. Three of these attacks—in 1972, 2008, and 2014—were successful and resulted in fatalities.

- North Korea has a history of state-sponsored terrorism, as well as targeting South Korea during major sporting events. Terrorists sponsored by North Korea detonated a bomb aboard Korean Air flight 858 nine months before the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games.

South Korea has taken steps to reduce the risks of crime and terrorism through the deployment of increased security officers. The country has invested more than \$1 billion in security efforts, including terrorism prevention and preparedness, and has conducted drills for a wide array of potential security issues. Organizers have also hired private cyber security firms to protect against digital attacks.

The outbreak of armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula during the Olympic Games is unlikely; however, such an event would have severe consequences. Rising tensions between North and South Korea, as well as increasingly aggressive rhetoric between Pyongyang and Washington, DC, have led to concerns about military action during the events. **Visitors should carefully monitor the ongoing political situation on the Korean Peninsula and cancel plans if tensions continue to rise, especially if advised to do so by the US Department of State.**

Accidents due to inclement weather are the most likely health and safety concerns to affect guests at the Olympic Games. PyeongChang receives substantial snowfall, and the cold temperatures may cause the accumulation of ice on roads and walkways, which could lead to an increased risk of injuries due to slipping and falling, as well as traffic accidents.

Medical care in South Korea is of a similar standard as that of the US, with state-of-the-art equipment and trained medical professionals. Approximately 2,500 medical staff members will be on-site for the Olympics, with medical facilities available at every sports venue. In addition, there are two hotels designated for the treatment of athletes and attendees during the events.

Location Overview

PyeongChang is a mountainous county in the Gangwon province of South Korea. It is located 110 miles east of Seoul and 50 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea. PyeongChang and the major cities in Gangwon serve as tourist and vacation destinations for the people of South Korea. Gangwon is the least populated province in South Korea with a population of 1.5 million.

The 2018 Winter Olympics will run from 9 to 25 February. The games are spread across two main venue clusters, with the outdoor sports located at the Alpensia mountain resort in PyeongChang and the indoor sports in the coastal city of Gangneung. The two exceptions to these clusters are the standalone venues for freestyle skiing and snowboarding at the Bokwang Park in PyeongChang and the alpine skiing at the Jeongseon Alpine Center in Jeongseon.

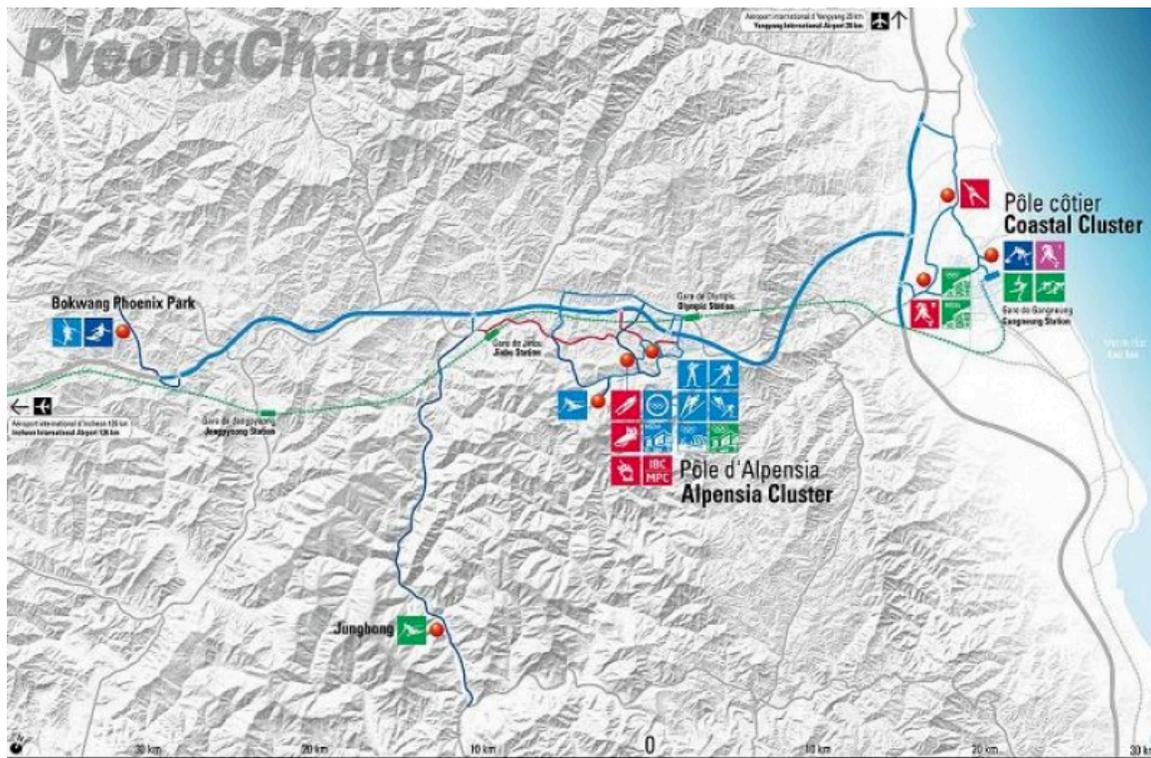


Image 1: Map of the 2018 Olympic Venues

Residents of PyeongChang largely speak Korean, and French is the other official language of the 2018 Olympics. However, the influx of foreign visitors for the Olympics means that there will be a number of languages spoken throughout the area. To facilitate communications, Korea is employing automatic interpretation and translation technologies. Additionally, a free 24-hour interpreter service is available by phone at 1588-5644.

The official currency of South Korea is the Korean won, which is exchanged at a rate of 1068 won to the US dollar as of 10 January 2018. Most hotels, restaurants, vendors, and venues accept major credit cards, and ATMs are readily available throughout the area.

The US Embassy of South Korea is located in Seoul at 188 Sejong-daero, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03141. US citizens should contact the embassy in case of emergency, arrest, or problems with a passport or visa.

- US citizens can access the embassy on weekdays from 0900 hours to 1700 hours. It is closed on weekends and Korean holidays.
- The phone number for the embassy during business hours is 02-397-4114.
- The emergency after-hours phone number for the embassy is 82-2-397-4114.

Security Risks

Terrorism

High-profile international events such as the Olympics present an attractive target for terrorist organizations and lone wolf actors. Extremists have carried out attacks against the Olympics and other major sporting events, both historically and in the recent past. The fact that the event is broadcast to a wide audience around the world makes it a prime target for individuals or groups seeking to use violence to spread a message.

- Terrorists have successfully carried out three fatal attacks at the Olympics since 1970. The most infamous was the hostage situation with, and subsequent murder of, the Israeli team perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics. In addition, a pipe bomb killed one and wounded 100 others at the Atlanta games in 1996, and a man with a knife killed an American businessman and wounded his wife and another individual in Beijing in 2008.
- In the 22 Olympic Games between 1972 and 2014, 10 experienced at least one attempted terrorist attack during the event. Another five experienced terrorist attacks in the six months preceding the games.
- Terrorists have also targeted other sporting events in recent years. Extremists affiliated with ISIS detonated suicide bombs at Stade de France in a suburb of Paris during a soccer match as part of a coordinated attack across the city that killed 130 people and wounded 413 others.

North Korea, in particular, poses an increased threat to the event, both due to its history of state-sponsored terrorism against South Korea and its increasingly provocative actions in recent months. Tensions between Seoul and its northern neighbor have led to violent actions in the past, and recent

months have seen an increase in concern as both North Korea and the US intensified their rhetoric. The US placed Pyongyang back on its list of state sponsors of terrorism in November 2017, a position that it held from 1998 to 2008 after the country was implicated in a number of international hijackings, abductions, bombings, and assassination attempts largely aimed at South Korean targets.

- North Korea has conducted 16 missile tests since the beginning of 2017, exhibiting their capabilities to successfully launch an attack on regional states.
- North Korean patrol boats crossed the maritime border and engaged South Korean forces killing six soldiers during the 2002 World Cup, which was hosted by South Korea and Japan.
- Terrorists sponsored by North Korea detonated a bomb aboard Korean Air flight 858 nine months before the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games.

The Threat of Armed Conflict During the 2018 Olympic Games

While a low probability event, the outbreak of armed conflict between North Korea and South Korea during the 2018 Olympic Games would have a devastating impact. The recent missile and nuclear tests conducted by Pyongyang have raised tensions on the Korean Peninsula and led to speculation that military action could occur during the Olympic Games. Leaders of some countries, including France and the US, have stated that an escalation of tensions with North Korea could lead them to withdraw their athletes from participation in the event. Due to the proximity of events to the demilitarized zone, as well as the large number of conventional weapons—as well as weapons of mass destruction—possessed by North Korea, any armed conflict between the two countries would likely cause significant loss of life at the Olympics. ***Visitors should carefully monitor the ongoing political situation on the Korean Peninsula and cancel plans if tensions continue to rise, especially if advised to do so by the US Department of State.***

South Korea has taken substantive steps to provide robust security and prevent any terrorist incidents from occurring. Seoul has invested more than \$1 billion in security efforts, including terrorism prevention and preparedness. More than 5,000 soldiers will deploy to protect the Olympic Games—twice the amount that were on duty when Seoul hosted the World Cup in 2002.

- Seoul created the Special Weapons and Tactics team to guard against terror attacks during the games. Additionally, the venues have contracted private security firms to run x-ray checks at the events.
- South Korea conducted a series of security drills on 12 December in preparation for the games. The exercises covered responses for terror attacks ranging from a hostage situation to a vehicle ramming a stadium to a bomb-laden drone.

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations occur frequently in South Korea, and have targeted locations associated with the US; while normally peaceful, they have become confrontational in the past. The large media presence at the Olympic Games may draw an increased number of protesters seeking to reach a large audience with their message; however, the large security presence in the area will likely be a mitigating factor in the size and aggression of any demonstrations.

- Demonstrations and rallies have occurred with some regularity at the American embassy in Seoul and other locations associated with the US.
- Hundreds of South Koreans rallied in Seoul in November 2017 in opposition to President Trump's visit to the country. The protesters voiced opposition to the US administration's aggressive rhetoric towards North Korea out of concern that the statements could spark an armed conflict on the peninsula.
- Another main point of anti-American demonstrations in South Korea in 2017 was the installation of a US missile defense system. Approximately 4,000 people marched in protest outside the US embassy in Seoul in June.

Crime

Property crime is a concern in South Korea, particularly in large cities, tourist areas, and crowded venues; petty criminals are likely to target the Olympics due to the large crowds and high number of tourists. The most common crimes in South Korea are non-confrontational petty thefts, such as pick-pocketing, purse snatching, and thefts from hotel rooms. Past Olympic Games have also had issues with petty crime, including theft and fraud, as criminals target the large number of tourists in the area for the events.

Serious offenses, especially violent crimes, are rare in South Korea; however, there have been incidents of assaults against tourists in the past. South Korea has extremely strict gun control laws, and as such, crimes involving the use of a firearm are very uncommon. Violent crimes still occur in the country, sometimes involving the use of knives or other deadly weapons.

- Violence against women has been a particular problem in South Korea. While the government has taken steps in recent years to increase the reporting, apprehension, and prosecution of these types of crimes, sexual assaults—including against foreigners—continue to occur.
- In the event of an emergency that requires a police response, call 112.

Cybersecurity

South Korea has a lower rate of cybercrime than many other developed countries, despite its position as the global leader in internet connectivity; however, the threat remains a concern. Cybercrime targeting individuals—such as phishing attacks and other methods of stealing personal digital information—is less common than in the US, the UK, and Russia, as well as in less-developed countries like Indonesia and The Philippines. However, these types of incidents have been steadily increasing in recent years.

- The Olympics will likely draw cybercriminals due to the large number of tourists present. According to reports in advance of the 2016 Olympics, the games attract a lot of people and make it “a prime target for [cyber] attackers to look at.”
- North Korea may also seek to target the games through digital means, though likely on a larger scale than individually-targeted schemes that seek financial gains. Pyongyang has developed a sophisticated offensive cyber program that may attempt to disrupt the events. “Cyber threats have increased due to external factors such as the THAAD [missile defense system] deployment and recent North Korean missile launches,” according to the South Korean Olympics committee.
- The PyeongChang organizing committee for the Olympics has hired a private cyber security firm to guard against a hacking attack from North Korea, according to news reports.

Safety Overview

Health Concerns

There are no specific health concerns for South Korea, according to the US Center for Disease Control. The CDC recommends that all travelers receive routine vaccines. While there is minor concern in some parts of the country for mosquito-borne illnesses such as Japanese Encephalitis and Malaria, mosquitoes are not active in the cold weather that will occur during the Olympics, mitigating these concerns.

- Most over-the-counter and prescription medications are available at pharmacies, though often under different brand names than in the US.
- Bring any prescription medications, as well as proof of prescription, with you to South Korea.
- A pre-approved “bring in” permit from the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety is required for specific medications. Contact narcotics@korea.kr to find out if a specific medication is considered a controlled substance.

Hospitals in South Korea are well-equipped, and high-quality medical professionals on par with the US are generally available in major urban settings. The PyeongChang area will also be staffed with medical professionals prepared to deal with health issues. Approximately 2,500 medical staff, including more than 300 doctors, will be working or volunteering at the event; there will also be a medical station in every event venue for athletes and visitor.

- There are two Olympic-designated hospitals—Wonju Severance Christian Hospital (WSCH) and Gangneung Asan Hospital (GAH)—to treat any serious injuries. WSCH will also operate a medical helicopter for any patients in critical condition.
- For emergency medical services, dial 119.

Natural Disasters

Snow and ice are the most concerning natural occurrences from a safety perspective, as they can lead to an increase in slip and fall injuries, as well as traffic accidents. The region receives a substantial amount of snowfall in the winter. Average temperatures in PyeongChang County in February range from approximately 13°F to 31°F, making ice a concern as well.

Earthquakes are rare in South Korea, although they have occurred in recent years; PyeongChang was the epicenter of a minor earthquake in 2007. The 2007 earthquake was a magnitude 4.8 event, and did not cause any injuries or serious property damage; the International Olympic Committee inspected the area after the earthquake, as well as the mitigation measures put in place by PyeongChang, and determined that an earthquake does not represent a concern for the games.

- Other recent earthquakes in South Korea have largely been restricted to the southeastern part of the country.
- A 2017 earthquake in the southeastern city of Pohang that registered as a magnitude 5.4 caused injuries to 82 people and damaged more than 2,000 private properties.
- A magnitude 5.4 earthquake in 2016 near Gyeongju in the southeast also caused some structural damage to the region.