# The International Student's Accommodation Checklist: South Korea Edition

### Your Home Away From Home in Korea!

Welcome to South Korea! Embarking on your study abroad journey is an incredible adventure, and finding the right place to live is a huge part of that experience. The process can feel overwhelming, especially from afar, but this checklist is designed to be your trusted guide. It will help you understand your options, evaluate properties like a pro, ask the essential questions, and steer clear of common scams. Think of this as your roadmap to securing a safe, comfortable, and happy home in Korea.1

## Section I: Know Your Options – A Quick Guide to Seoul Student Housing

Before you start looking at individual listings, it's crucial to understand the different types of off-campus housing available to students in Korea. Each option offers a unique balance of cost, privacy, community, and convenience. A student on a tight budget will have very different expectations about space and amenities compared to one with more financial flexibility. This table provides a quick comparison to help you narrow your search to the housing types that best fit your needs and budget.2

**Table 1: Quick Guide to Seoul Student Housing**

| Housing Type | Avg. Monthly Rent (KRW) | Typical Deposit (KRW) | Key Pros | Key Cons |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Goshiwon (고시원)** | ₩300,000 – ₩600,000 | ₩0 – ₩1,000,000 | No/low deposit, bills included, fully furnished, free rice/kimchi, flexible contracts.3 | Extremely small (3-6m²), shared facilities, thin walls, limited privacy, can be windowless.4 |
| **Share House** | ₩400,000 – ₩650,000 | 1–2 months' rent | Social environment, foreigner-friendly, often furnished with bills included, more spacious than a Goshiwon.4 | Shared kitchen and bathroom, potential for noise and roommate conflicts, less privacy than a studio.8 |
| **One-Room (원룸) / Studio** | ₩700,000 – ₩1,200,000 | ₩1,000,000 – ₩5,000,000+ | Full privacy, private kitchen and bathroom, more space, independence.3 | Higher cost, larger deposit required, utilities are separate, may require a longer lease (1+ years).8 |
| **Officetel (오피스텔)** | ₩1,000,000 – ₩2,000,000 | ₩5,000,000 – ₩20,000,000+ | Modern, high-security buildings, great locations near transport hubs, often includes gym/concierge.8 | Very high deposit, long-term contracts, higher maintenance fees (*gwanlibi*), can be hard to secure for students.8 |

## Section II: The Virtual Tour Walkthrough – Your Eyes on the Ground

Since you're likely searching from India, a live video tour is your most powerful tool. It's more than just a passive viewing; it's an active inspection and a test of the agent's transparency. An honest representative with a well-maintained property will have nothing to hide and will gladly accommodate your requests. Do not be shy about asking them to show you specific, even "boring," details. Their willingness to do so speaks volumes about their professionalism and the property's condition. Always insist on a live tour over pre-recorded videos, and take screenshots or record the session (with permission) for your records.14

### General Condition & Space

* [ ] **Overall Cleanliness:** Is the space tidy? Look for signs of neglect, dirt, or leftover items from previous tenants.15
* [ ] **Walls & Ceilings:** Ask to see all surfaces up close, especially corners and behind furniture. Look for water stains (yellowish marks), peeling wallpaper, or significant cracks.17
* [ ] **Mold (곰팡이 - *gompangi*):** This is a critical check. Due to Korea's humid summers, mold is a common problem, particularly in older buildings (*villas*) and basement units. Explicitly ask the agent to show you inside closets, behind the bed, and around window frames.15
* [ ] **Windows & Doors:** Request that a window and the main door be opened and closed. Do they seal properly? Can you feel or hear a draft? Condensation between double-glazed panes is a red flag for poor insulation, which will lead to a cold and expensive winter.18
* [ ] **Storage Space:** Ask to see inside all closets, shoe racks, and built-in storage. Is there enough room for your belongings?.18

### Kitchen & Bathroom

* [ ] **Water Pressure & Hot Water:** Ask the agent to turn on the kitchen and shower taps. How strong is the pressure? How long does it take for the water to get hot?.17
* [ ] **Drainage:** Watch the water drain from the sinks and shower. Is it slow? This could indicate plumbing issues.18
* [ ] **Included Appliances:** Confirm which appliances are included. A refrigerator, washing machine, and air conditioner are standard in most student-focused units. Ovens and clothes dryers are very rare.20 Ask to see them turned on briefly to confirm they work.
* [ ] **Ventilation:** Look for extractor fans in the bathroom and kitchen. Poor ventilation is a primary cause of mold.18

### Essential Systems

* [ ] ***Ondol* (온돌) - Underfloor Heating:** This is the main heating system in Korea. Ask the agent to show you the boiler control panel and explain its functions (e.g., 실내 for room temperature mode, 온돌 for direct floor heating). Ask if it has been recently serviced and if there are any known issues with uneven heating. A faulty *ondol* system will make for a miserable winter.24
* [ ] **Air Conditioner (에어컨):** Absolutely essential for the hot and humid summer months. Ask for it to be turned on. Does it blow cold air? Look for any signs of leaks or mold on the unit itself.17
* [ ] **Electrical Outlets:** Note the number and location of outlets. Are they sufficient for your needs (laptop, phone, etc.)?.23

### Building & Neighborhood

* [ ] **Security:** Ask to see the building's main entrance and the apartment's door lock. Digital keypad locks are common, convenient, and secure. Ask about CCTV in common areas.18
* [ ] **Noise Levels:** During the call, listen for noise from the street or neighbors. Ask who lives next door (students, families, etc.).18
* [ ] **Garbage Disposal:** This is more important than it sounds. Ask to see the designated garbage disposal area for the building. Korea has extremely strict and complex rules for separating general waste, food waste, and recyclables. You must purchase specific, city-approved bags for general waste. Failing to follow the building's rules can lead to fines and conflicts with neighbors. Understanding the system from the start is crucial.29

## Section III: Key Questions for the Landlord/Agent

Once you are satisfied with the physical state of the property, it's time to clarify the financial and legal details. Have these questions ready and take notes. It is highly recommended to send a follow-up email confirming the answers to key financial points in writing.

### The Money: Rent, Deposit & Fees (The ***Wolse*** 월세 System)

* [ ] "What is the exact monthly rent (월세 - *wolse*) and the security deposit (보증금 - *bojeunggeum*)?".33
* [ ] "Are there any options to adjust the deposit and rent?" (For example, in some cases you can offer a higher deposit in exchange for a lower monthly rent).17
* [ ] "What is included in the maintenance fee (관리비 - *gwanlibi*)? Does it cover internet, water, and building cleaning?" This fee can vary significantly, so clarity is essential.35
* [ ] "Which utilities are billed separately, and what are the average monthly costs for gas and electricity?".36
* [ ] "Is there a real estate agent's fee (중개수수료 - *junggaesusuryo*)? How much is it and when is it paid?".19

### The Contract: Lease Terms & Conditions

* [ ] "What is the minimum lease period? Is it a 1-year or 2-year contract?".38
* [ ] "What is the penalty if I need to terminate the lease early?" This is a critical question. Breaking a lease in Korea can be difficult and costly. Often, the tenant is responsible for rent until a new tenant is found, and the deposit may be withheld.40
* [ ] "Can I review a full copy of the rental contract (임대차 계약서 - *imdaecha geyakseo*), preferably with an English translation, before making any payment?".42
* [ ] "After I move out, what is the exact process and timeline for returning my security deposit?" While landlords should return it promptly, disputes can arise. Knowing the process helps protect you.43

### Legal & Documentation

* [ ] **(NON-NEGOTIABLE)** "Will you provide all necessary documents for my Alien Registration Card (ARC) application, including a signed copy of the lease and a copy of your ID?" An international student staying over 90 days *must* obtain an ARC, and this requires proof of residence from the landlord. A landlord who is unwilling or unable to provide this is an immediate deal-breaker. It indicates they may be renting illegally to avoid taxes or are simply inexperienced with foreign tenants, both of which pose a significant risk to you and your visa status.42
* [ ] "Can you show me the official property registration document (등기부등본 - *deungibudeungbon*) to verify that you are the legal owner?" This is a standard request in Korea to protect against scams where someone rents a property they do not own.17

### Living Rules & Practicalities

* [ ] "Are there any specific building rules I should know about, especially regarding noise, guests, or pets?".4
* [ ] "What is the process for reporting repairs? Who is the emergency contact if the boiler (*ondol*) breaks in winter?".18
* [ ] "Can you please explain the garbage and recycling rules for this specific building one more time?" (Reconfirming shows you are a responsible tenant).29

## Section IV: Red Flags – How to Spot a Scam!

Rental scams frequently target international students, preying on their urgency and lack of familiarity with local processes. Scammers create a simplified, fraudulent process that seems plausible to an outsider, replacing Korean legal norms with pressure tactics and emotional stories. Your best defense is to be vigilant and recognize the warning signs. If an offer seems too good to be true, it almost certainly is.1

* 🚩 **Pressure to Pay Before Viewing or Signing:** A legitimate landlord or agent will never demand a deposit or rent to "reserve" a property before you have had a chance to view it (even virtually) and sign a formal lease agreement. This is the most common and definitive sign of a scam.1
* 🚩 **The "Landlord Abroad" Story:** The owner claims to be out of the country for work or personal reasons and insists the entire transaction must be handled remotely, often promising to mail the keys after you send money. This is a classic scam tactic used worldwide.1
* 🚩 **Unrealistically Low Rent:** The price is significantly below the market rate for the area. Scammers use this bait to attract many potential victims quickly. Research average rents for the neighborhood on platforms like Naver Real Estate or Zigbang to get a sense of realistic pricing.1
* 🚩 **Refusal of a Live Video Tour:** They will only provide photos or a pre-recorded video and make excuses to avoid a real-time call. They do this because they don't have actual access to the property.1
* 🚩 **Request for Untraceable Payment Methods:** The "landlord" asks for payment via wire transfer (like Western Union), cryptocurrency, or gift cards. Legitimate transactions in Korea are done via domestic bank transfer.1
* 🚩 **Vague or Unprofessional Communication:** Listings and emails are often filled with grammatical errors, use generic language, and are vague about the property's address or specific features.1
* 🚩 **Hesitation to Provide Official Documents:** A scammer will make excuses when asked for the property registration document (*deungibudeungbon*) or the paperwork needed for your ARC application, because they don't have them.17
* 🚩 **Use of a Non-Korean Bank Account:** A landlord renting property in Korea should have a Korean bank account. A request to transfer money to an overseas account is a major red flag.

### What to Do If You Suspect a Scam

1. **STOP** all communication immediately. Do not engage further.
2. **DO NOT** send any money or copies of personal documents like your passport or visa.
3. **REPORT** the fraudulent listing to the website or platform where you found it.
4. **CONSULT** your university's international student office. They are often aware of common scams targeting students and can provide valuable advice and support.1

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