

South Korea

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

Updated 2026-09-05

Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

For Foreign Nationals (Long-Term Residents)

- Copy of passport (photo page, entry stamp page, and long-term visa pages)
- Detailed inventory / packing list in English
- Copy of bill of lading (OBL) or sea waybill, or air waybill (AWB)
- Alien Registration Card (ARC) from the Korean Immigration Office -- must be valid for at least 12 months
- Power of attorney (for the destination customs agent)
- Customs declaration form

For Returning Korean Citizens and Accompanying Family Members

- All documents listed above (ARC not applicable for returning citizens; substitute Korean national ID)
- Certificate of entry and exit (issued by Korean Immigration Service confirming 12+ months abroad)
- Evidence in passport of at least 12 months spent abroad

For Diplomats

- All standard documents
- Application for duty exemption issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea

Specific Information

Eligibility for duty exemption on household goods:

Key operational requirements:

A person moving to Korea -- whether a foreigner intending to reside for at least one year (or 6 months if accompanied by family members), or a returning overseas Korean -- may import moving goods duty-free, provided the goods meet the following conditions:

- Goods must have been used overseas for more than 3 months.
- Goods must be registered in the name of the moving person or an accompanying family member for more than 3 months before entry.

For returning Korean citizens and those who have restored citizenship, goods used for more than 3 months abroad generally qualify for the duty exemption. Short-term residents (staying less than 1 year) may still qualify for duty-free treatment on goods used more than 3 months that are generally recognized as personal effects given the nature and duration of the stay.

- Goods must arrive at the Korean port or airport of entry within 6 months of the owner's arrival in Korea.
- Personal effects cannot be customs-cleared prior to the owner's arrival in Korea.

- All incoming shipments (except diplomatic) are subject to open inspection by the Korea Customs Service (KCS). Even diplomatic shipments must be de-vanned and trans-loaded to a mover's van within Seoul's four main gates area -- though diplomatic containers are not inspected.
- Clearance takes place at a Customs bonded warehouse (except for diplomats).

All solid wood packing materials must comply with ISPM 15 phytosanitary treatment standards.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The following items are prohibited from import into South Korea:

- Illegal drugs and narcotics
- Pornographic materials (sexually inappropriate materials)
- Counterfeit goods and materials (forged currency, bonds, securities)
- Subversive and treasonous materials
- Weapons and firearms without authorization [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Products from endangered species protected under CITES [CITES]

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Traveller duty-free allowances (accompanied baggage, persons 19 and over):

Personal goods, gifts, and new items: USD 800 total value (updated from USD 400 in an older baseline source). Separately: alcohol (1 litre total); tobacco (200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 20 ml of e-cigarettes/liquid nicotine, or 250 g of other tobacco products); perfume (100 ml / 60 ml in some references -- confirm with KCS). Alcohol and tobacco allowances do not apply to persons under 19. Persons voluntarily declaring goods in excess of their allowance receive a 30% reduction in standard customs duty; failure to declare and subsequent detection results in an additional 40% penalty tax.

Food items in household goods shipments:

Food items are allowed in sea shipments only. All food items must be sealed and labeled. Small amounts may qualify for duty-free treatment. Shipments containing excessive quantities of food may be assessed at 20% duty on the food value. Confirm food quantity limits with the destination agent.

Plants and plant by-products: Subject to quarantine inspection and approval by APQA. Denial of entry is possible. A phytosanitary certificate from the originating country's plant protection authority is required.

Arriving from countries with avian influenza or other livestock disease outbreaks: Birds, chicken meat, and all animal products (ham, sausages, etc.) from affected countries are restricted. Contact the destination agent for current restrictions.

Firearms and ammunition: Require authorization from Korean authorities. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Narcotic and psychotropic drugs: Require authorization. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Currency: Amounts of USD 10,000 or more in foreign currency or Korean won must be declared on arrival and departure.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and sea shipments.

Personal effects cannot be cleared until the owner has arrived in Korea. The shipment must arrive within 6 months of the owner's arrival. Members should ensure clients understand this timeline constraint when planning their move.

All shipments (except diplomatic) are subject to open inspection by Korean Customs. This should be factored into delivery timelines. Diplomatic shipments are de-vanned and trans-

loaded within Seoul's restricted inner-city area without inspection, but this still adds transit time. The Alien Registration Card (ARC) is critical for foreign nationals. It must be valid for at least 12 months and must be presented for customs clearance. Clients should ensure they have ARC registration arrangements in place well before the shipment is dispatched from origin. South Korea's main ports of entry for sea freight are Busan (primary), Incheon, and Gwangyang. Incheon International Airport handles air cargo. The Korea Customs Service uses an electronic clearance system (UNI-PASS); the destination agent handles all customs filings electronically.