A SOLO GUIDE TO THE KOREAN BATHHOUSE

# Bathe like a local.

Everything you need to walk into a Korean mogyoktang (neighborhood bathhouse) on your own and walk out with the softest skin of your trip. Paying at the desk, grabbing a seat, scrubbing with an Italy towel, and the sauna and soaking routines Koreans swear by. Think of it as K-beauty, head to toe.

PROFESSIONAL BODY SCRUB · RESERVATION REQUIRED
Advance booking is required only for the professional scrub service provided by an attendant. General admission and self-scrubbing do not require a reservation.
BOOK A PROFESSIONAL SCRUB

## Why Koreans scrub

A few decades ago, many Korean homes had no hot water, so the whole neighborhood came to the mogyoktang once a week. Parents scrubbed their kids raw, kids got banana milk afterward, and the habit stuck. Plenty of Koreans still keep a weekly or monthly scrub day, even with a perfectly good shower at home.

The payoff is skin that feels brand new. Most first-timers are amazed by how much comes off, even if they shower every day.

1. Shower before you get in any pool.
2. Nothing goes in the water but you: no towels, no hair, no soap.
3. Scrub at your seat, never in the pool.
4. No phones, no photos.
5. Rinse your seat and stool before you leave.

### If you've tried an onsen or a hammam

| | Korean bathhouse | Japanese onsen | Turkish hammam |
|---|---|---|---|
| Clothing | Fully nude, single-sex | Fully nude, single-sex | Usually a wrap cloth |
| The scrub | The main event. DIY with an Italy towel, or book a pro | Not part of it | Kese mitt scrub by an attendant |
| Heat | Warm, hot and cold pools plus a dry sauna | Hot spring pools | Steam room and heated stone |
| Tattoos | Generally OK here | Often restricted | Generally OK |
| After | Banana milk | Coffee milk | Tea |

Not to be confused with a jjimjilbang, the 24-hour spa you've seen in K-dramas, where everyone wears matching clothes and the famous sheep-head towel hat. A mogyoktang is the simpler, local, bathing-only version.

## Your visit at a glance

Give yourself 90 minutes to 2 hours. The order matters: wash before you soak, and soak before you scrub.

1. CounterPay, buy supplies, get your locker key5 min
2. Locker roomShoes and clothes in the locker5 min
3. Shower firstWash head to toe before any pool5 min
4. Claim a seatGrab a stool and a basin2 min
5. SoakWarm pool or half-body bath to soften skin15–20 min
6. ScrubItaly towel, area by area15–25 min
7. Sauna roundsHeat, cool off, rest (optional)20–40 min
8. FinishRinse, tidy your seat, moisturize10–15 min

# 1 Check in at the front desk

1. Pay at the desk. One adult visit is ₩9,000 (full price list below).
2. Pick up supplies. Like most Korean neighborhood bathhouses, toiletries aren't included. Bring your own or buy a bath kit or single items at the desk (see right).
3. Get your locker key. It comes on a numbered wristband. Keep it on your wrist or ankle the whole time, even in the water.
4. Check your valuables at the desk. Passport, cash, jewelry and electronics are safest with the staff, not in your locker.

[Illustration] Items you can buy at the front desk: basket, towel, Italy towel, soap and shampoo, locker key

### What to bring

- Hair tie, comb or brush
- Body lotion and your face skincare (toner, serum, cream)
- A fresh change of underwear: it feels amazing on new skin
- Shampoo, conditioner and body wash, or buy them here
- A water bottle, or a few thousand won for drinks after

### Hours & payment

- Open 5 am – 7 pm. The front desk closes at 7 pm.
- Closed every Tuesday.
- Aroma event bath every Thursday and Saturday in the women's bath.
- Children aged 5 and up can't enter the opposite-sex bath.
- Pay by card, Apple Pay, Zero Pay or Dongbaekjeon QR (Busan local currency).

## Admission

| Ticket | Price |
|---|---|
| Adult, single visit | ₩9,000 |
| Preschool child, single visit | ₩5,000 |
| Monthly pass (30 days) | ₩110,000 |
| Half-month pass (12 days) | ₩80,000 |
| 10-visit coupon book | ₩80,000 |

## Body scrub service · 세신

| Men's bath | Price |
|---|---|
| Adult · full body | ₩20,000 |
| Child (elementary and under) | ₩15,000 |
| Elementary student · full body | ₩15,000 |
| Middle school student · full body | ₩20,000 |

| Women's bath | Price |
|---|---|
| Back only | ₩15,000 |
| Full body | ₩25,000 |
| Basic: full body + cucumber mask | ₩30,000 |
| Half massage: + cucumber & seaweed mask | ₩40,000 |
| Full massage: + cucumber, seaweed & oil massage | ₩50,000 |

Book a scrub in English: Naver Booking

- are frail, elderly without a companion, or have dementia
- are pregnant, or bringing a child under 4
- have a cold or high fever
- have serious heart disease, or blood pressure of 180 mmHg or higher (systolic)
- have cataract concerns or facial flushing (rosacea)
- have had alcohol in the last 2 hours
- have an infectious disease

House rules posted at the front desk. If you have any other symptoms, please use your own judgment.

# 2 Locker room, then shower first

### In the locker room

- Your shoes go inside your locker with your clothes.
- Strip down completely. Korean bathhouses are single-sex and fully nude, so no swimsuits. It feels strange for about five minutes, then you realize everyone is busy with their own routine and nobody is looking.
- Take your basket, small towel and key band into the bathing area. Phones stay in the locker: no photos past the front desk.

### Shower before anything else

- Rinse and wash your whole body, including hair if you like, before you touch any pool.
- Tie long hair up so it stays out of the water.
- Your small towel never goes in the water. Leave it at your seat, or fold it on top of your head like the locals do.

## 3 Grab a seat

[Illustration] A seated wash station: a mirror and shower tap on the wall, a low plastic stool and a round plastic basin on the floor

1. Pick up a stool and a basin from the stack, usually by the entrance to the bathing area.
2. Find an empty wash station and rinse the stool and the floor with hot water before you sit.
3. Leave your basket there. That's your spot for the visit, and it's fine to leave it while you soak.
4. Use the basin to rinse: fill it from the tap and pour it over yourself, especially over freshly scrubbed skin.

Point the shower head down and toward the wall so you don't spray your neighbors.

## 4 Soak to soften your skin

The scrub only works on softened skin. Koreans call this bulligi, which roughly means “soaking it soft.”

[Illustration] Bongrae Tang water temperatures drawn to scale from 15 to 45 degrees Celsius: cold pool about 18 to 22, warm pool 40, hot pool 43

Not a fan of soaking? A gentle sauna round softens skin too, or just stand under a warm shower for 10 minutes.

## 5 The Italy towel scrub

The green mitt called an Italy towel (이태리타올) was invented in Busan in 1967 and named after the Italian viscose it was first made from. It lifts dead skin off in gray rolls called ttae (때), and it is the signature move of Korean body care.

### Choose your strength

The numbers 40, 50, 60 and 80 indicate friction strength—not yarn count or fabric thickness. The higher the number, the stronger the scrub.

Not sure? Start low. You can always add a little pressure with a gentle towel, but you cannot reduce the friction level of a stronger one.

### Step by step

1. Wet the towel, squeeze it out and pull it snugly over your hand.

2. Stretch the skin with your free hand so it doesn't move with the towel.
3. Scrub in short strokes in one direction, not back and forth. Two or three passes per spot is plenty.
4. Rinse each area with basin water as you go to wash the rolls away and see what's left.
5. Work in this order: arms  shoulders  chest and belly (lightly)  legs  feet  back.
6. When you're done, rinse well and wash with a mild body wash.

[Illustration] Arm stroke direction: short strokes along the length of the arm, one way only, while the other hand holds the skin taut

### Body map: how hard to scrub

[Illustration] Front and back body outlines color-coded by scrubbing pressure

Can't reach your back? Buy a long back-scrub towel (등밀이) at the desk, or book a professional scrub (see chapter 9).

### Sensitive skin, or not into rough scrubbing?

You can still enjoy the scrub. Dermatologists' rule of thumb: the more aggressive the method, the less often you use it, and dry or sensitive skin does best with gentle tools.

- Use the gentlest towel (friction level 40) or a soft bath mitt, and soak the full 20 minutes so the dead skin comes off easily.
- Patch test first: scrub a palm-sized area on your inner forearm. If it stings or turns red, switch to lighter pressure or stop.
- Light pressure, one or two passes. You don't have to remove every roll. Pink skin is fine; stinging, red streaks or shine mean stop.
- Skip the towel entirely. Massage softened skin in small circles with your palm and a little body wash, or use a mild peeling gel (필링젤).

- sunburn, cuts, a rash, or an eczema, psoriasis or rosacea flare
- a new tattoo, or waxing, shaving or laser treatment in the last few days
- been using retinoids, retinol or benzoyl peroxide on that area
- darker skin that marks easily: harsh scrubbing can leave dark spots, so go very gently

How often: about once a week for normal skin; every two to four weeks for sensitive skin. Korean scrub professionals advise no more than once a week.

## 6 Bathhouse beauty routine

For many Korean women, the bathhouse is a weekly body-care ritual. Here's a routine you can copy. We've marked what dermatologists back evidence and what is a well-loved local habit local. The local habits are gentle and fun, just not clinically proven.

### During your bath

- local Hair mask while you soak. Comb conditioner through your hair, wrap it in your small towel, then soak. Rinse after.
- local Warm towel on the face. Rest a hot, wrung-out towel over your face for a minute while sitting by the pool. Never scrub the face with the Italy towel.
- local Milk mask. After scrubbing, many locals smooth plain milk or yogurt over their body or face, wait a few minutes, then rinse. Milk contains mild lactic acid; skip it if dairy irritates your skin.

- local Cucumber slices on the face while resting. Cooling and refreshing.

### The finish that matters most

- evidence End with a lukewarm rinse, not hot. Very hot water strips the skin's oils.
- evidence Pat dry with a towel instead of rubbing, especially on freshly scrubbed skin.
- evidence Moisturize right away, while skin is still damp. Body lotion or cream from neck to toes within a few minutes of drying off. Exfoliated skin dries out fast.
- evidence Drink water. Heat and sweat dehydrate you.
- evidence Wear sunscreen for the next day or two. Freshly exfoliated skin burns and darkens more easily.

## 7 Sauna routine for beginners

One round is heat  cool down  rest. Two or three rounds are plenty for a first visit. Listen to your body, not the clock. Leave the moment you feel dizzy, nauseous or your heart races.

[Illustration] Timeline of one sauna round for a healthy beginner: sauna 6 to 8 minutes, cool down 1 minute, rest 5 to 10 minutes; and the heart-friendly round: warm pool 5 to 8 minutes, cool shower on arms and legs, rest 10 minutes

### Standard round · healthy adults

1. Dry off first, then enter. Sit on a towel, on the lower bench if it's your first time; heat rises.
2. Stay 6–8 minutes. Don't exceed 10–12 minutes on your first visit, even if you feel fine.
3. Cool down. Rinse sweat off with a lukewarm then cool shower. If you want the cold pool (18–22°C), lower yourself in slowly, shoulders down, for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Never jump in.
4. Rest 5–10 minutes, sitting in the rest area or on a bench, until your breathing and heart settle. Many regulars say this calm, tingly rest is the best part.
5. Drink a glass of water. Repeat up to 2–3 times.

### Heart-friendly round · heart or blood-vessel concerns

For mild, stable conditions and only with your doctor's OK. Skip the dry sauna, the hot pool and the cold pool: sudden heat and cold both put strain on the heart.

1. Soak in the warm pool (40°C) for 5–8 minutes, sitting at chest height or lower.
2. Stand up slowly, holding the rail. Blood pressure drops in warm water and quick moves can make you faint.
3. Cool gently with a lukewarm-to-cool shower on your hands and feet first, then arms and legs. No cold plunge.
4. Rest 10 minutes seated, sip water, then repeat once or twice.

- have unstable angina, recent heart attack, heart failure, severe aortic stenosis or uncontrolled high blood pressure
- are pregnant, have a fever or feel unwell
- have been drinking alcohol, or just ate a big meal
- tend to have very low blood pressure or fainting spells

If you have any heart, blood-pressure, or other chronic condition, check with your doctor before heat bathing. Don't push it. This is meant to relax you, not test you.

# 8 Half-body bath, for sauna skeptics

[Illustration] Half-body bath: sit in 38 to 40 degree water up to just below the chest, arms out of the water, for 15 to 20 minutes

A Korean favorite for anyone who finds the sauna too intense. The warm water heats you slowly from the waist down, so you sweat gently while your heart and head stay comfortable.

1. Drink a glass of water first.
2. Use the warm pool (40°C) and sit on the inner step so the water reaches just below your chest, around the bottom of your ribs.
3. Keep arms and shoulders out of the water. If your shoulders feel chilly, drape your dry towel over them.
4. Stay 15–20 minutes, or until you sweat lightly on your forehead. Take a break sooner if you feel light-headed.
5. Stand up slowly, rinse with lukewarm water and drink again.

It's also the ideal soak before your scrub.

# 9 Local tips & etiquette

## Bathing like a pro

- Soak before you scrub. 15–20 minutes of warmth and the rolls come off with half the effort.
- Scrub at your seat only, never in or at the edge of the pools.
- Rinse before every pool, including after the sauna. Sweat stays out of the shared water.
- Keep your head and towel out of the pools.
- Don't exceed 10 minutes in any single hot soak, and stand up slowly.
- Sip water throughout. There's usually a water dispenser by the rest area.

## Good to know

- Professional scrub (세신 / 때밀이). A trained scrubber gives you a full-body scrub on a table, with a rinse, and women can add a cucumber or seaweed mask and massage. Prices start at ₩15,000 (see the price list in chapter 1). Book in English on Naver or ask at the front desk. You can say “살살 해 주세요” for gentle.
- Back scrubbing. Older regulars sometimes offer to scrub a stranger's back, and expect you to return the favor. It's a sweet, old-school gesture. Say yes if you're up for it, or smile and say “괜찮아요” (I'm fine) to politely decline.
- Tattoos. Welcome at Bongrae Tang, as long as they aren't offensive or intimidating to other guests.
- On your period? Stay out of the pools and sauna. Showering is fine, or come back another day.
- Tipping isn't expected, including for scrubs.

# ? First-timer questions

### Will people stare at me?

Honestly, a few curious glances at a foreigner are possible, but nobody cares about your body. Locals come in every shape and age, and they're focused on their own scrub.

### Is that much gray stuff normal?

Yes, that's really you: dead skin cells loosened by the soak. It doesn't mean you're dirty. It happens to everyone, even people who shower twice a day.

### I don't speak Korean. Is that OK?

Totally. The routine is the same for everyone, and the phrases at the end of this guide cover the rest. Pointing and smiling go a long way.

### Should I DIY or book a pro scrub?

Try it yourself first for the full local experience. If you want the most dramatic results, or just can't reach your back, a professional scrub is worth every won.

## 10 Wrap up like a local

1. Final wash with body wash and a lukewarm rinse. Wash your hair if you haven't.
2. Tidy your seat. Rinse your stool, basin and the floor around your station, and return them to the stack.
3. Dry off before you leave the bathing area so you don't drip on the locker-room floor.
4. Moisturize head to toe while your skin is still a little damp. Then dry your hair at the vanity. Hair dryers are free.
5. Return your key at the desk and pick up your valuables.
6. Treat yourself. The classic post-bath reward is a bottle of banana milk (바나나우유), a ritual for generations of Korean kids, or sikhye (식혜), a sweet, chilled rice punch. Hold off on alcohol for a few hours while your body cools down.

## 가 Point-and-say phrases

## ※ Sources

This guide is general information, not medical advice. Temperatures and times are typical ranges. Always follow posted signs and staff instructions.


1. American Academy of Dermatology, How to safely exfoliate at home: match method to skin type, be gentle, moisturize right after, less often for aggressive methods.
2. American Academy of Dermatology, Dermatologists' tips to relieve dry skin: warm not hot water, pat dry, moisturize on damp skin.
3. Wikipedia, Italy towel: origin (Busan, 1967), once-a-week guidance from scrub professionals.
4. Duly Health and Care, Are saunas and cold plunges safe?: 15–20 minute sauna limit, contraindications, cold plunge caution for heart conditions.

5. Laukkanen T. et al., “Association between sauna bathing and fatal cardiovascular and all-cause mortality events,” JAMA Internal Medicine 2015;175(4):542–548, and commentary in PMC4409598.
6. Japan Consumer Affairs Agency guidance via Nippon.com: water at or below 41°C, soak 10 minutes or less, stand up slowly, no bathing after alcohol or meals.
7. Kormedi, 반신욕 건강법: half-body bath around 39°C for about 20 minutes, water to the solar plexus, hands out of the water.

SaunaWorks · Bongrae Tang · Busan, Korea

saunaworks.cc/bath/