

SEOUL LAUNCHES A METAVERSE PLATFORM FOR TOURISM AND PUBLIC SERVICES



The Seoul Metropolitan Government officially launched its metaverse platform last week. The platform, named Metaverse Seoul, allows users to play games, chat, set up meetings, get advice on starting a business, file public documents and visit famous tourist attractions in Seoul.

Metaverse Seoul is available on Google Play and the Apple Store for all users traveling to Seoul. The conversations on the platform are translated into English for foreigners.

Services in Chinese and Japanese are being developed and will be available in the second or third phase of the platform, which will be launched in the next three years, said Kim Jin-man, director general of the Seoul Metropolitan Government Digital Policy Office.

In the platform's first phase, Seoul residents will be able to file official city documents and complaints, as well as get personalized answers about local taxes. Businesses can also remotely consult with experts via chat, voice, video and screen-sharing features in the platform's virtual business support center.

There is also an avatar-based counseling service called Metaforest, where students can communicate their personal and academic difficulties without revealing their identity.

Users of the metaverse platform can play games in a virtual replica of Seoul Plaza and virtually visit the Mayor's Office. They can also take virtual tours of Seoul's 10 most popular attractions, including the Blue House, Seoul N Tower, Gyeongbok Palace, Seoul Forest, Han River, Lotte Tower, Gwanghwamun Square and Bukchon Hanok Village.

Seoul City Hall Mayor Oh Se-hoon said that Metaverse Seoul "is an inclusive administrative service that everyone can enjoy without any barriers of time and space."

However, he acknowledged the digital divide between older residents and the younger, tech-savvy population, and thus the city government is considering launching an "easy mode" program in the second phase of development, which will allow seniors to use the services, offered on the metaverse platform.

The city government has spent about 2 billion won (about \$1.6 million) and plans to spend another 2.8 billion won (about \$2.3 million) this year for the second phase. The final phase will be launched by 2026.

Seoul is the first major city to launch a metaverse platform for public services. The city plans to roll out more government, business, tourism and cultural offerings over the next five years.

Since launching its three-year Metaverse Industry Promotion Act last September, the Korean government and companies have been developing metaverse platforms for various sectors.

The Korean government has already set aside about \$187 million to support the metaverse industry. The country's metaverse will be a platform that will support the virtual growth of cities, education, tourism and media.

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