

# From “j-hope IN THE BOX” to “Home Alone”

BTS's j-hope gives fans a look into his inner workings



K-CULTURE WITH JAE-HA KIM

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This morning, j-hope announced that he would be releasing a new solo single and music video on June 13: “Killin' It Girl (feat. GloRilla).” In the seven months since he finished his mandatory military duty, which is required of all able-bodied South Korean men, the BTS rapper has tackled a full schedule that includes writing “Sweet Dreams,” which he debuted at his Seoul shows, and then added another new song (“Mona Lisa”) in Brooklyn. His solo tour will take him to the 55,000-seat Kyocera Dome in Osaka on May 31 and June 1.

And in between all that, j-hope filmed the Korean reality-variety series “Home Alone,” which in Korea airs as “나 혼자 산다” (or “I Live Alone”). If you’re wondering why one of the world’s most famous men would agree to show off where he lives, it’s because he had a workaround where he could share a bit of his private life with fans, while still maintaining security. Instead of showing off his Seoul home, he let the program film him in Los Angeles, where he had rented a house to work on new music.

J-HOPE Meets Up With His Sister For A Catch Up Lunch | Home Alone EP586 | K...



While it was fun watching him go through In-N-Out’s drive through to order food by himself — *in English!* — the part I enjoyed the most was when he met up with his older sister, Jung Ji-woo, who was also in L.A. for her business.

j-hope may be a multi-millionaire, but when he's with his sister, he is first and foremost her baby brother. She takes charge and he's happy for it! Fluent in English, Ji-woo orders their meal, while he watches in awe. Asked if he's been practicing his foreign language skills, he grows bashful. She doesn't lecture him. Rather, she offers pragmatic advice that are sound. Even more importantly, she notes that they are both so busy that they don't see their parents as often as they should. Ji-woo encourages him to call their parents more often *just because*.

And when it was time to pay, his sister took care of it, as is customary in Korea for older siblings.

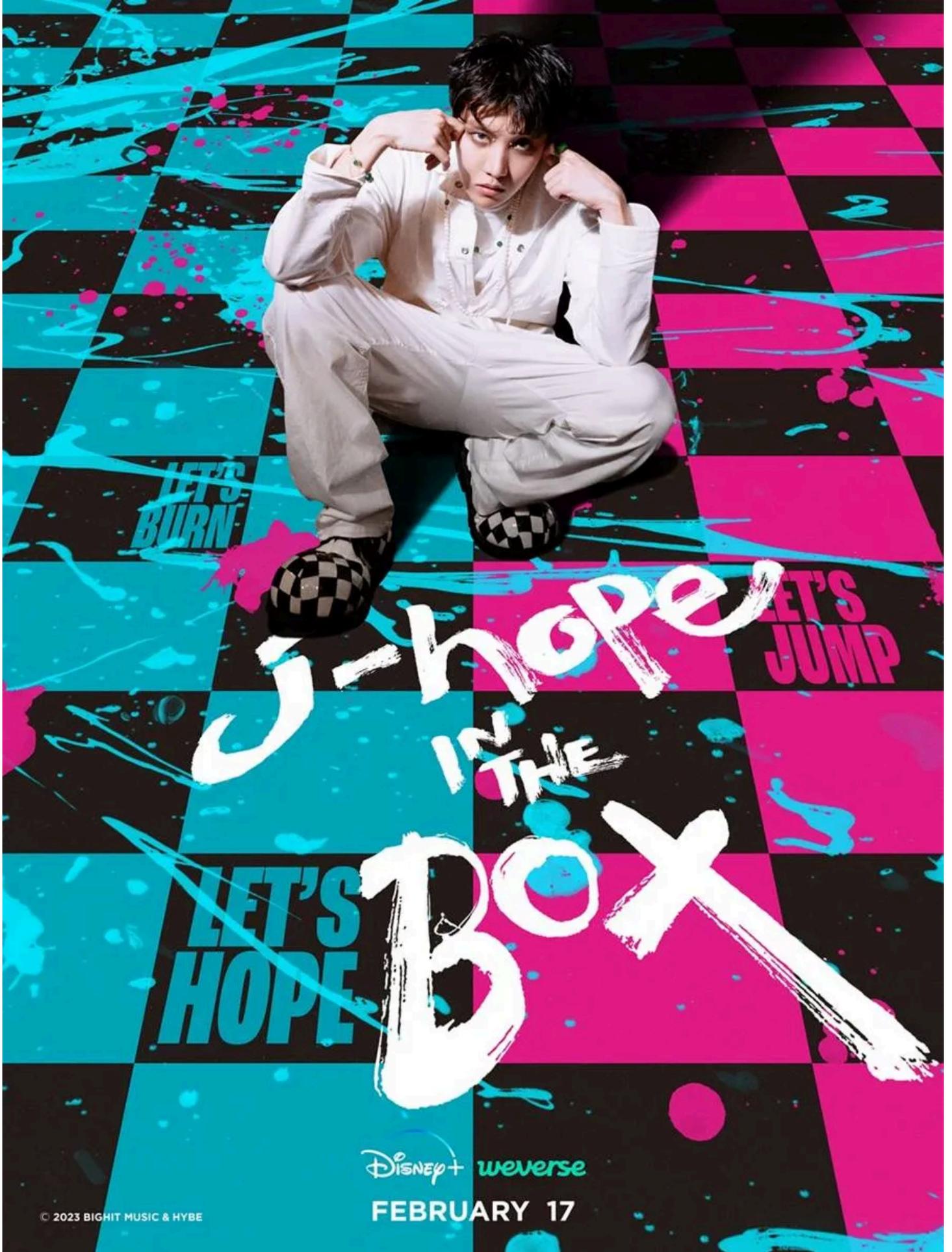
His appearance on "Home Alone" gave insight into his role as a worldwide pop star. But it was these fly-on-the-wall moments with his sister that were the most precious to me. They gave viewers insight into who he is — a man whose fame is less important than his family.

☆☆☆ (out of ☆☆☆☆)

**Airdates:** "Home Alone" is an ongoing MBC Korean show that aired its first episode on March 22, 2013. j-hope appears on episodes 585 (original airdate Feb. 28, 2025) and 586 (aired on March 7, 2025). (I watched this on Kocowa. It's also on Viki.)

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***j-hope IN THE BOX***



☆☆☆½ (out of ☆☆☆☆)

Instead of writing a reported piece or a straight-on review of *j-hope IN THE BOX*, this is going to be more of a personal recollection of how this documentary made me *feel*, which is a wide array of emotions ranging from happy, to proud, to weepy. By the time the end credits rolled with this final message — “*Special thanks to our biggest voice, ARMY*” — I was more than a bit verklempt.

*j-hope IN THE BOX* is told in a non linear way, starting in Seoul 52 days before j-hope’s performance at Lollapalooza, where he made history as the festival’s first Korean headliner — a feat that even he found surprising. The lead up to the concert — which fans dubbed Hobipalooza — depicts the meticulous plans the rapper took to ensure that his official debut as BTS’ first solo artist would be nothing short of perfection.

I will get into some of those elements in a bit, but I wanted to talk about some of the moments that meant the most to me first. There’s so much that BTS already shares with their ARMY. But one of the things the group holds most precious is their relationship with their family, who they shelter from the world’s eyes as best as they can. So when they do allow us to take a peek at the time they spend with their parents (even if the parents are off screen), it’s a precious and personal gift.

In the group's 2019 docu-series "Bring the Soul," they included small glimpses of the members connecting with home. For instance, after a concert, Jimin is in a car headed back to their hotel talking to his father. He asks whether it's raining back home in Busan. His **아빠** inquires about his health and asks if he has enough **geem/김**/seasoned seaweed. Jimin assures his father that he's fine and has plenty of **geem**. Viewers can hear as his dad cheers him on with a robust, "Fighting!" (In Korean, *fighting* doesn't have the same meaning as in English. Koreans use it as a word of encouragement.) After he gets off the phone, Jimin laughs: "My dad says he will bring us **geem**."

Flash forward to 2023 with the docu-film *j-hope IN THE BOX*, which centers on Jung Ho-seok as he's preparing for the release of his solo album, *Jack In the Box*. His preparations are so intense that when his father calls to let Hobi know he's in Seoul, the two don't actually meet up. He apologetically explains to his father that he's holed up in the studio and can't leave just yet. Anyone who has dealt with pressing work issues will understand this dilemma.

But later, viewers are privy to footage of j-hope returning to his parents' home in Gwangju — 182 miles southeast of Seoul. As I wrote in my article for *Rolling Stone*:

Gwangju is famous for a pair of 20th-century uprisings that played an important role in Korea's democracy. In 1929, the Gwangju Student Movement fought against imperial Japan's colonization of Korea. And in 1980, after university students demonstrating against martial law were beaten and killed by soldiers ordered by Chun Doo-hwan's dictatorship, Gwangju's citizens fought back against the South Korean government in what became known as the Gwangju Uprising. The official report noted that 170 civilians were casualties of what Chun's regime referred to as the Gwangju *Riot*. But experts estimate that the figure was closer to 1,000 deaths.

I mention this because while j-hope wasn't alive during either of these uprisings, his family members certainly were. In the BTS song "Ma City," j-hope raps, "Press 062-518 everyone." Gwangju's area code is 062. And 518 refers to May 18, the beginning of the Gwangju Uprising.

"I devoted all of my 20s to Bangtan, but nothing lasts forever," j-hope says in the film. "I need to experience something new to be able to really understand what I have now. I'm sure all of us doing our individual things will bring us closer together."

On this day, 174 days prior to taking the Lollapalooza stage, Ho-seok is enjoying his brief respite in Gwangju. His dog, Mickey, happily greets him. He affectionately refers to the 13-year-old dog as *grandpa*. (I think this is Mickey's age. If I've done him wrong, let me know!) He marvels at all the decorations his parents showcase that are dedicated to his work. The walls of the staircase leading up to his bedroom are adorned with photos of him and his older sister, Ji-woo.

But the sight that delights him the most is the standing stone his parents have in their yard engraved with the words *Hope World*, which is the name of his 2018 mixtape.



I don't know the backstory to this, but as someone whose father took great delight in collecting and displaying rocks in our family garden, I'm going to take a stab at the significance of the *Hope World* stone to the Jung family. 수석/suseok range in size from small, decorative stones that scholars have traditionally displayed on their desks, to larger rocks incorporated into Korean gardens to signify beauty and good fortune. I found it lovely that Ho-seok's parents commemorated one of his career milestones this way.

As he drives by Ilgok Middle School, which he used to attend, he wistfully wishes he could visit his alma mater. But it's time to go back to work in Seoul and, as he mentions, it's time to go back to being j-hope.

The documentary is told from the perspective of how many days he has before he takes the Lollapalooza stage on July 31, 2022.

Here are some of the highlights:

**D-52:** j-hope is in Seoul preparing *Jack In the Box*." He wants to show that he can create a mature sound, too. "It needs to be in line with who I am, but also with the audience in mind." He's heartened that Bang PD says he will stay on the sideline and cheer j-hope on to do whatever he wants.

**D-221:** As he tweaks every little bit of "Arson" to get it just so, the English subtitle indicates that he said *greed*. But the word he used was 욕심, which in this scenario means *ambition*. "To be honest, there's no reason to push myself this hard, but I guess this is just who I am. I could take it easy and have as much fun as I want. But I don't want that. As a result, I'm stressed out. This is how you end up in a rut and lose all interest." He also says that whenever he records songs, the first person he plays it for is Nam-joon. "He said this album sounds really new and interesting. He praised it."

**D-32:** As he sits through promotional meetings, he nervously wonders, "Guests will show up, right?" He's talking about his record release party, which isn't common in Korea. He is involved in every aspect, from the decor and sound to the food tasting to make sure everything is perfect. Suga stops by briefly, looks around and drolly comments that everything looks really expensive. Suga says he can't stay, because he has a wedding to attend.

**D-17:** His record release party is a success. He reminds his guests to take their swag bags. "I will remember this as a milestone in my career."

**D-15:** As he works on the choreography for "Dynamite (Tropical Remix)," he says, "I need courage, faith and hope more than anyone right now." Everyone is tired and when he asks his dancers if they're OK, they groan back, "Nooooooooooooo!" His hair is longer now, to complement the grungier look he wanted to present at Lollapalooza.

**D-Day:** “I’d never performed as a solo artist and here I was performing on such a big stage. I worried, ‘Is it OK for me to headline such a large festival?’ But I decided to aim high. I felt like I could do it.” As he kicks into “More,” backed by a live band, ARMY sings the lyrics right back to him.

**D-5:** He is in Chicago, remembering a shopping spree he and Jimin went on during a previous trip in 2018 or 2019. He’s not sure what year it was. Settling in for a nice lunch, he worries that they may have ordered more than they can consume. “I don’t like wasting food.” I don’t know why, but this little comment made me tear up.

**D-4:** I had no idea prior to this documentary that j-hope rehearsed for his Lollapalooza show at the Rosemont Theatre, a venue located in a small suburb outside of Chicago. “Why does this place look so familiar? I think I’ve played here before for the Red Bullet tour [in 2015].” Looking around at the comparatively small venue, he says, “Wow. I’ve come a long way.” After introducing himself to the band and dancers, he has some concerns. After watching a video of the dancers’ rehearsals with his team, he worries, “I don’t see any chemistry between them.” (His team leader points out that was the first rehearsal and that things would click in by the end of the week.) He listens carefully and points out which sections of the music are too overpowering. In short, he gets the job done efficiently and with kindness. He says that Nam-joon sent him a text early that morning telling him to hang in there.

**D-3:** We see him once again at the Rosemont Theatre where he discusses the very real concerns of managing exhaustion during the humid Chicago concert. He jokes that they should have Jimin, who’s flying in, ready in stage makeup to take his place if he passes out. As if anyone might take him seriously, he laughs and says, “Just kidding.”

**D-2:** He asks when Jimin will arrive, noting that being here alone without the rest of BTS makes he feel lonely. To while away his time, he visits an ice cream shop and says the most Korean thing ever: “I want something good that’s not too sweet.” LOL And then... JIMIN ARRIVES!!! They are at Lollapalooza as spectators when a fan spots them and says, “Oh my god!” and asks if they can take a picture with them. As security politely turns them down, j-hope says, “Sure.” Jimin laughs and wonders, “Why am I even in the photo?” — as if anyone would *not* want him included. Ho-seok’s staff points out how much happier he looks since Jimin arrived. Jimin, realizing how difficult this all must have been for j-hope, jokingly tells him, “Get it together!”

**D-Day:** He mentions that while he never dreamed that he'd be the headliner at such a huge festival, he's well prepared, but nervous. Becky G, who will surprise fans by appearing on stage with him during "Chicken Noodle Soup," comes backstage to say hi.

**D+2:** He is in New York now, relaxing. "It feels like a dream. It has been two days already but I can't believe it actually happened. My body ached all over. That's when I realized I gave it my best shot. I finally started eating again after the performance. The members who usually give me energy weren't there on stage with me, so I had to create all that energy myself. I felt burdened and worried. Now? I feel relieved. What I loved the most was the crowd's cheers." He said that Jimin's arrival was a blessing for him because his presence reassured him and helped him get in the right mode. "I love having a friend to laugh and joke with." The film flashes back to his Lollapalooza closing song "Future," which is dedicated to all of their collective futures.

**Release date:** The 84-minute documentary was released on February 17, 2023 on Disney+. For this review, I watched a screener — which may differ slightly than the final release.

## READ MORE:

- [j-hope on How His Military Service Influenced His New Solo Music: 'Experiences are Invaluable'](#) (Rolling Stone)
- [The Sacrificing of Suga](#) (K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim)
- [Is That NYT Podcast About K-pop Any Good?](#) (K-Culture with Jae-Ha Kim)
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