



Korea was long renowned as the “hermit kingdom,” a place separate from the rest of Asia, while absorbing its many cultural influences. Korea today reflects a heritage that has well preserved much of Asia’s past, while having become a thriving trade metropolis on the international scene. Wherever you go in Korea, you are reminded that Koreans take pride in their heritage and find preserving history a high priority.

From well-forested national parks and Seoul’s sprawling metropolitan area in the north, to pristine, wide beaches along its coasts, to romantic island getaways on Cheju-Do Island south of the mainland, Korea packs a lot into its peninsula and beyond, and almost any destination can be reached in an hour or less by air from any other part of Korea.

SEOUL AND ITS VICINITY

Seoul and its neighboring cities in Korea’s northeast corner comprise the bulk of metropolitan city life in Korea, and are home to more than half of Korea’s 45 million people. Steel and glass skyscrapers make seemingly unlikely neighbors to Confucian shrines and meticulously maintained pagodas and parks.

Visitors may want to take a guided tour of the city before striking out on their own because Seoul can be an imposing city if left to find out its secrets and charms merely by chance. The subway system looks like an elaborate maze at first, but once you get used to it there’s no better way to get around. Taxis and buses are also well organized and timely, but many locations in Seoul do not have a street “address” as we think of them and are found by the closest landmarks.

Nestled among the towers of Seoul are part of an original city wall, five ancient gates, shrines and palaces.

Taking a walk up Sejongno Street one catches a glimpse of the old and new Seoul. The Anglican Cathedral sits adjacent to Toksugung Palace.

The Kyobo building contains a number of large bookstores, some of Seoul’s largest.

Kyongbokkung Palace, built in 1394 in the third year of the Chosŏn Dynasty, is located behind Kwanghwamun Gate and within walking distance of City Hall. Within its walls, the national folk museum showcases the religious rituals, housing, household tools and implements, food and social dynamics of traditional Korean life.

Just east of Kyongbokkung is the Ch’angdokkung Palace, which is best known for its secret garden which includes 78 acres of landscape pavilions, ponds and wooded areas. Daily guided tours of the garden are available in English, Japanese and Korean.

Hung-injimun is the original east gate of the ancient city wall, also known as Tongdaemun. Tongdaemun and its market offers a variety of bargains, clothes, textiles, sporting equipment and home electronics.

Nearby, Tapkol Park is commonly called Pagoda Park because it contains a Chosŏn Dynasty pagoda located at its center.

From this park in 1919 independence-seeking Koreans demonstrated against Japanese occupation and because of this movement, March 1 is celebrated today as Korean Independence Day.

Near the park is Insa-dong, a narrow street lined with antique stores, bookstores, art galleries and curio shops. There are also bargains in calligraphy, paintings and artifacts from Korea’s past.

of MORNING CALM



Korea National Tourism Organization (KNTO) operates a tourist center in its building on Ch'onggyechonno Street. Videos, presentations, maps and displays can help those new to Korea make their way around.

Myong-dong is a popular shopping and entertainment center that includes five major department stores and the booths of major fashion designers. Many great bargains can be found along Myong-dong's tree-lined, brick walkways.

Near Myong-dong is Namdaemun, a big open-air market that can be enjoyed after midnight when store owners come to buy at wholesale prices. The market is popular among local residents and tourists for its bargains in clothing, flowers and food items.

Just south of Namdaemun is Seoul station, which connects Seoul by rail to all of Korea's major cities.

Namsan is a granite mountain located just south of Namdaemun, in the heart of the city. From the Seoul tower, visitors can take in a panoramic view of Seoul while they eat or drink. Namsan Park features a botanical garden and statues of famous Korean historical figures.

Korea National Theater is located on the eastern slope of Mount Namsan. It houses several large and small performance halls and stages, with the largest holding 1,500 people. Performances by music, dance and drama companies are available year round.

A 15-minute walk from Yongsan Base, It'aewon is Korea's most popular bargain hunter's paradise. The area's main street is lined with stores, boutiques and sidewalk stalls, selling almost anything, but especially shoes and clothes, for every budget.

In 1994, Koreans opened the War Memorial. Documents and war memorabilia from 5,000 years of conflict are reflecting in the war memorial's displays. In addition, the weapons manufactured by other countries are displayed in an outdoor exhibit.

The Korean Folk Village is a miniature re-creation of the lifestyle of the 1400s. Live Korean artisans, such as potters, weavers and blacksmiths, practice their trade with traditional craftsmanship. There are also 240 traditional homes and a small amphitheater for music and folk dances.

The enormous Seoul Grand Park in the southern suburb of Kwach'on offers a geological garden and dolphin show. Also located there is Seoul Land, a fully outfitted amusement park and botanical garden.

Lotte World, located at the Chamsil subway station, is an experience in itself. The area features a shopping mall, amusement park, hotel, folk village, ice rink, swimming pool, country-themed areas and street entertainment.

A five-minute ride from Lotte World is Olympic Park, which features weightlifting, fencing gymnasiums, a gymnastics hall, and an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool. The park also features a Sculpture Park with 200 metal, glass, wood and stone sculptures donated by artists from 66 countries.

KOREA ON THE WEB

The following websites can be handy online tools for finding out extensive information about Korea's popular destinations, tourist information, and practical guides to travel in Korea.

Korean National Parks: www.npa.or.kr/eng/eng.main.asp
Korea National Tourism Organization: www.knto.or.kr/english
U.S. Forces Korea: www.korea.army.mil/welcome

www.pcs-tdy.com

EAST COAST

From Seoul, take the Yongdong Expressway to the scenic east coast, notably Kangnung. There are several beach towns north of Kangnung including Naksan Beach and the fishing port of Sokch'o, the gateway to Mount Sorak-san National Park.

With its granite peaks, lush valley and dense pine forests, Mount Sorak-san is a key attraction for visitors.

Sorak-dong is a resort village near the entrance to Mount Soraksan National Park and hosts inns, hotels, and campsites as well as other public facilities. A cable car connects the village to an old mountaintop fortress.

Mount Odaesan National Park is located just south of Mount Soraksan and includes two of Korea's oldest temples, Woljongsa and Sang-wonsa. Just south is the Yong Pyong Ski Resort, a very popular skiing attraction in Korea. Also in the area is Mount Ch'iaksan National Park with its magnificent rock formations and Buddhist temples.

SOUTHEASTERN KOREA

Southeastern Korea has some of the most splendid parks and tourist attractions in the country. It is home to the ancient Shilla Kingdom, which founded the cities of Kyongju, Pusan and Taegu.

Tumuli Park contains a collection of royal Shilla tombs and is located in the middle of Kyongju. Among the open tombs is Ch'onmach'ong (Flying Horse Tomb), which was excavated in 1974 and in which was found more than 10,000 national treasures. These can be found today in the Kyongju National Museum.

The museum itself preserves much of the Shilla heritage including magnificent gold crowns, pottery, sculptures and Buddhist artifacts.

A 20-minute walk from the museum will get you to the Punhwangsa Temple. Today, only three stories of its original nine stories are left standing.

In addition, the Pulguksa Temple, located in Southern Kyongju, is one of the most frequented temples in the area.

SOUTHWESTERN KOREA

Southwestern Korea is often called the "rice bin" of Korea. Its central city is Chonju. Here you can find shops specializing in Korean mulberry paper; Hanji.

About 20 miles southwest of Chonju is the beautiful Kumsansa Temple and Mount Naejangsan National Park, which is famous for its fall colors.

Kwangju is Korea's fifth largest city and lies four hours south of Seoul by car. The city is famous for its culinary arts because the nearby lush plains provide abundant produce to cook with.

North of downtown Kwangju is the Kwangju National Museum built to house the contents of a 600-year-old Chinese shipwreck discovered in 1976.

There are also prehistoric remains of the Kwangju area, including archeological artifacts and paintings and other works of art.

For those who like bamboo and bamboo ware, the Tamyang Bamboo Museum exhibits over 1,000 works of modern bamboo. It is located in the provincial town of Namwon, the gateway to Mount Chirisan National Park.

Mount Chirisan National Park was the first national park established in Korea and is the second highest mountain, shorter only to Mount Hallasan on Cheju-Do Island.

The foot of the mountain is known for many Buddhist temples and many remnants of Korea's past. Some of the more popular temples include Hwaomsa, Songgwangsa and Unjusa.

The southwest corner of Korea's peninsula lies the port city of Mokp'o, known for its fine seafood. Just off the coast is Chin-Do Island. Twice a year a land bridge is created here by very low tides.

CENTRAL REGION

The major city in central Korea is Taejon, about two hours south of Seoul by car. Just west of Taejon lies Mount Kyeryongsan National Park. Hiking trails lead from the park up to the Kapsa and Tonghaksa temples.

Northwest of the park is Kongju, an ancient capital of the Paekche Kingdom. The national museum in Kongju features treasures from the 6th century of King Mungong.

In nearby Ch'onan lies the Independence Memorial Hall of Korea. The hall displays historical artifacts related to Korea's resistance to outside aggression and its fight for independence.

To the northeast of Taejon lies the Mount Songnisan National Park which includes the Popchusa Temple displaying a 108-foot-tall bronze Buddha.

The most famous cave in the region is the Kosudonggul Cave. Located near Tanyang, its breathtaking stalactites have earned it the name Underground Palace.

CHEJU-DO ISLAND

Located an hour's flight from Seoul, Cheju-Do Island is a popular retreat with a romantic tropical image. In summer, temperatures range from 72-80 degrees while its average temperature is 60 degrees, making for a mild climate.

Cheju on the island's north shore is the main tourist center with an international airport and many western-style hotels.

On the coast of Cheju is an unusual lava formation called Yongduam Rock, which appears like a large dragon with its mouth gaping open. Within the city are also the Cheju Folklore Museum and the Cheju Folkcraft and Natural History Museum.

A long-extinct volcano, Mount Halla-san, towers over the island and is credited for its formation by volcanic eruption. Its snow-covered peak is visible from almost anywhere on the island and rises to a peak of 1,950 meters, making it the country's tallest mountain.

San-gumburi Crater is one of three major craters on the island. About two kilometers in circumference, the crater is home to 420 different species of subtropical, temperate and alpine plants.

Nearby Manjanggul Cave, located on the northeast coast, is the longest lava tube in the world.

