

Main Spots to Visit in South Korea

SEOUL

Gyeongbok Palace

Gyeongbokgung, also known as Gyeongbok Palace, is a royal palace located in the north of Seoul. First constructed in 1394 and reconstructed in 1867, it was the largest and most important of the Five Grand Palaces built by the Joseon Dynasty. Nearly destroyed by the Japanese government in the early 20th century, the walled palace complex is gradually being restored to its original form. The first phase of the restoration project was completed in 2010, and the second phase began in 2011, with plans for 2030. The goal is to recover the original appearance and iconic symbolism of the palace.

The Blue House

The Cheongwadae, also known as the Blue House, is the executive office and official residence of the President of South Korea. The Korean name literally translates to "pavilion of blue tiles." The Blue House is a complex of buildings, primarily designed in the traditional Korean architectural style, with some modern elements. Situated on the site of the royal garden from the Joseon Dynasty, the Blue House now consists of the Main Office Hall, the Presidential Residence, the State Reception House, the Chunchugwan Press Hall, and the Secretariat Buildings. The entire complex spans approximately 250,000 square meters.

Jogyesa Temple

Jogyesa is the chief temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, a role it has held since 1936. The temple was first established in 1395, at the dawn of the Joseon Dynasty. The modern temple was founded in 1910 under the name "Hwanggaksa," which was later changed to "Taegosa" during the Japanese occupation, and finally to its present name in 1954. Within the temple grounds stands Natural Monument 9, an ancient white pine tree. Jogyesa gained international attention in December 1998 when several monks occupied the temple in a power struggle between factions of the Jogye Order.

The Korean Folk Village

The Korean Folk Village is a living museum in the city of Yongin, a satellite city of Seoul. It is to display elements of traditional Korean life and culture. The park is divided into several sections, featuring replicas of traditional houses representing different social classes (peasant, landowner, yangban) and various regions. It also includes a traditional street market, restaurants, and demonstrations of traditional metalworking techniques. There are performances of traditional dances, equestrian skills, marriage ceremonies, and recreational activities.

Suwon Hwaseong Fortress

Hwaseong (Brilliant Castle), the wall surrounding the center of Suwon, the provincial capital of Gyeonggi-do, was built in the late 18th century by King Jeongjo of the Joseon Dynasty to honor and house the remains of his father Prince Sado. Prince Sado had been murdered by his own father, King Yeongjo, who locked him alive inside a rice chest after he failed to obey the king's command to commit suicide. Located 30 kilometers south of Seoul, the fortress encloses much of central Suwon, including King Jeongjo's palace Haenggung. In 1997, UNESCO designated the fortress a World Heritage site. The Suwoncheon, the mainstream in Suwon, flows through the center of the fortress.

DONGDAEGU

Mt. Gaya National Park

Mt. Gaya Mountain National Park covers more than 80,000 square kilometers, stretching from the Southern tip of Gyeongsang province to the bottom of North Gyeongsang province. The Sobaek Mountain range runs through this area. On this mountain, there are two major peaks: Sangwangbong Peak, which rises to 1,430 meters, and Chulbulbong, which reaches 1,433 meters above sea level. Declared Scenic Site No. 5 by the Korean government in 1966, the area turned into an official national park in 1972. The park's main attractions are Haeinsa, a standing Buddha figure carved into a sheer rock face, Yongmun Falls, and Hongnyudong Valley. It is also home to 380 species of plants, as well as 100 species of birds and animals that roam freely.

Haeinsa Temple

Haeinsa, meaning "Temple of Reflection on a Smooth Sea," is a prominent head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, located in the Gaya Mountains. It is best known as the home of the Tripitaka Koreana, a complete collection of Buddhist Scriptures carved onto 81,350 wooden printing blocks, which have been preserved there since 1398. As one of Korea's Three Jewel Temples, Haeinsa represents Dharma, or the Buddha's teachings. It is still an active practice center in modern times.

GYEONGJU

The Anapji Pond

This is an artificial pond, located in Gyeongju National Park, was part of the palace complex of the ancient Silla Kingdom (57 BCE - 935 CE). It was commissioned by King Munmu in 674 ACE and is situated at the northeast edge of the Banwolseong palace site in central Gyeongju. Oval in shape, the pond measures 200 meters from east to west and 180 meters from north to south, and it features three small islands.

Cheomseongdae Observatory

Cheomseongdae, meaning "star-gazing tower" in Korean, is an astronomical observatory located in Gyeongju. is the oldest surviving observatory in East Asia and one of the earliest scientific installations on Earth. It dates to the 7th century under the Silla Kingdom, which had its capital in Gyeongju. Constructed from 362 pieces of cut granite, which some claims represent the 362 days of the lunar year. The tower is 5.7 meters wide at the base, 9.4 meters tall, and is filled with earth up to the level of its central window.

Bulguksa Temple

Bulguksa is a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. It is home to seven of South Korea's National treasures, including the Dabotap and Seokgatap stone pagodas, Cheongun-gyo (Blue Cloud Bridge), and two gilt-bronze Buddha statues. In 1995, Bulguksa was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the Seokguram Grotto, which lies four kilometers to the east. The temple is considered a masterpiece of the golden age of Buddhist arts in the Silla kingdom.

Royal Tumuli Park

The park features three groups of royal tombs, known as tumuli, most of which are shaped like domes or mounds of earth. However, some take on unique shapes, such as gourds or half-moons. Excavated tombs reveal wooden coffins covered with gravel, along with rich grave goods, including gold, glass, and quality ceramics. A famous example of a tomb in this park is the Heavenly Horse Tomb, which contains a mural painting on a birch bark saddle flap depicting a winged horse.

ANDONG

Andong is known as a centre of culture and folk traditions. The surrounding area maintains many ancient traditions, which are celebrated annually during the Andong Folk Festival in mid-October. Among the highlights of these cultural festivities are the Andong masks. The Hahoe Folk Village is perhaps the most notable folk village in South Korea. In 2010, it was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, alongside Yangdong Folk Village, by the South Korean government.

BUSAN

Busan is South Korea's second-largest metropolis after Seoul, with a population of around 3.6 million. As the largest port city in South Korea, it ranks as the fifth largest port in the world. Situated at the southeasternmost tip of the Korean peninsula, Busan is called the "summer capital" of Korea, attracting tourists from all over the country to its six beaches. Haeundae Beach is lined with luxury hotels and a carnival boardwalk, while Gwangalli Beach has cafes, bars, and restaurants, with views of the Grand Gwangan Bridge.

DAEGU

Located 80 km from the coast, Daegu is the third largest city in the country. Combining modernity and authenticity, it is famous for its deep-rooted cultural heritage. There are still numerous amazing temples and beautiful traditional houses to visit. Daegu also offers interesting places to hike such as the Palongsang Mountain and Haeinsa Temple.

GANGHWADO

Ganghwado, the fifth-largest Korean Island, has been inhabited since pre-historic times. Today, it is a famous tourist destination after a long period marked by several military conflicts. This site is known for its abundant historical relics dating back from the Bronze Age, such as the 80 dolmens and the tombs of the former rulers of Ganghwado.

GWANGJU

Gwangju, the capital of the southeast region of Jeollanam-do, is a major artistic hub of the country. Major attractions include Art Street, the National Museum, and the famous Annual Kimchi Culture Festival. Beyond the city, the province and its surroundings offer impressive tea and bamboo plantations.

GAYA NATIONAL PARK

Gaya Mountain National Park spans over 80,000 km² and is traversed by the Sobaek Mountain range, with its two major peaks, Sangwangbong Peak (1,430m) and Chulbulbong (1,433m). Designated as Scenic Site No. 5 by the Korean government in 1966, it became a national park in 1972. Celebrated since the Joseon Dynasty as one of Korea's eight most beautiful landscapes, the park is home to many attractions such as the Haeinsa Temple, Yongmun Waterfalls, and Hongnyudong Valley. It also serves as a haven for biodiversity, with 380 plant species and over 100 species of birds and animals.

JEJU ISLAND

Jeju Island is a volcanic island dominated by Halla Mountain, a 1,950-meter-high volcano, and the highest mountain in South Korea. Formed entirely from volcanic eruptions around 2 million years ago, the island is primarily composed of basalt and lava. It has a humid subtropical climate, warmer than that of the rest of Korea, with four distinct seasons. Winters are cool and dry while summers are hot, humid, and sometimes rainy. A UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site, Jeju is renowned for its Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes. Due to its relative isolation, the island has developed a unique culture and a rich heritage of local legends and folklore.

MOUNT SEORAK

Seoraksan, the highest mountain in the Taebaek mountain range and the third-highest mountain in South Korea is a renowned national park. It attracts visitors all year round, with autumn being the peak season. The autumn colors in the area are considered amongst the most beautiful in Korea. The red and yellow forest is interrupted by rocks and small mountain streams flow amidst this.

PANMUNJEOM AND DMZ

The Korean demilitarized zone was created in the wake of the Korean War (1950-1953) with the signing of the Panmunjeon armistice along the 38th parallel, the peninsula into two parts. Heavily guarded by over 400,000 South Korean soldiers, Panmunjeon is the only point of communication between the North and the South within the DMZ. Nowadays, the area is officially called JSA or Joint Security Area. The DMZ has also become a paradise for wildlife, with local fauna and flora, including thousands of herons and white cranes that migrate there in winter.

SONGNISAN

Registered as a National Park, this Mountain Range covers about 230 km², with its highest peak, Cheonhwangbong, reaching 1,000 m above sea level. An ideal spot for hiking, numerous walks take you through the picturesque cliffs and the magnificent Beopjusa Temple.

ULLEUNGDO ISLAND

Located 120 km east of the Korean peninsula, this volcanic Island covers 70 km² and rises to 980 m in height, offering breathtaking landscapes ideal for hiking. Besides hiking, fishing, and water sports are also enjoyable, though reaching the island remains a challenge due to its remote location.