

# Korea

Asian Tiger, a seriously wired country or the world's most heavily fortified border? All are accurate descriptions of South Korea though none fully captures the essence of this fascinating, complex nation. Social relations may be grounded in ancient Confucianism but South Korea is most decidedly a forward thinking country thanks to its hurry-hurry approach to everything, an insatiable appetite for technological advancement and an indomitable *cando* attitude. No one knows where the country is headed, but it's fast-forward all the way. That's what makes South Korea so exiting and at times unnerving; it's a country of endless possibilities with limits imposed only by you.

New York might be the city that never sleeps, but Seoul is the city that never stops. Late night traditional markets, early morning cinemas and 24-hour public baths are all available before and after you've visited the galleries and toured the palaces. There's an infectious energy in Seoul and it's easy to get caught up in the Korean *joie de vivre*, one best experienced with a group over a barbecue dinner and several bottles of *soju* (the local, distilled brew) to bridge cultural gaps, nullify language barriers and build a spirit of conviviality that could last well into the morning, and perhaps a lifetime.

Few international travellers explore the countryside, which is a tragedy and a blessing. Serene temples, picturesque mountains, lush rice paddies, unspoiled fishing villages and endless hiking opportunities are so far off the beaten track, it's unlikely you'll meet any Westerners on the road less travelled. English-language services are rare in the countryside, but that's part of the charm. Come as an explorer, seek out adventure, cut your own trail. Challenge yourself and you may develop an appreciation for South Korea's rich cultural tapestry and a newfound sense of personal freedom, the hallmarks of any truly great journey.

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# Getting Started

Squashed onto its small patch of hilly peninsula, South Korea is a compact nation, just an hour by plane from north to south, so it's easy to tour around the country's bundle of delights. Hike through green forested mountains and national parks, listen to shaven-headed monks chanting in remote, colourful Buddhist temples, and step ashore onto unspoiled islands populated by bronzed fisher folk who turn into chefs in the evenings. Explore the relics of ancient Korean dynasties, tour round the extraordinary volcanic scenery of its two largest islands, Jeju and Ulleungdo, and experience the warlike menace of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) border with impoverished, dictator-worshipping North Korea.

Discover the country's unique barbecue and seafood cuisine; knock back pine-needle *soju* (Korean vodka) one-shots with new-found friends in convivial bars or on scenic mountainsides; and immerse yourself in boisterous traditional markets or glitzy modern malls. Here, the most wired, busy-busy cities on the planet are straining every sinew to become Asia's IT, cultural, sporting and style leaders, the hub of a global trading empire with a GDP that's already in the world's top 10. Everybody is hard at work, but somehow they find time to befriend foreign visitors and make their visit memorable. Only in Korea do taxi drivers turn down tips, and drivers go out of their way to drop hitchhikers where they want to go.

Transport on planes, buses, trains, subways and taxis is a reasonably priced marvel, while smart new US\$35-a-night motels provide clean, facility-filled rooms to stay in all over the country. If no one understands what's coming out of your mouth, simply think back to party charades and use the language of gesture and mime. If you get lost, don't worry as someone is bound to offer to help, especially if you're a solo traveller.

Korea in a word? Dynamic. Korea in two words? Dynamic and conservative. Westerners see this as a (sometimes infuriating) contradiction, but to Koreans its yin and yang, two linked aspects that make up the circle and cycle of life.

## WHEN TO GO

Korea has four very distinct seasons, each with its own special characteristics. The best time of year to visit is autumn, from September to November, when skies are blue, the weather is usually sunny and warm and the forested mountainsides are ablaze with astonishing fall colours.

Spring, from April to June, is another beautiful season, with generally mild temperatures and cherry blossoms spreading north across the country in April. Camellias, azaleas and other plants and trees flower, but as with autumn, some days can be cold, so bring warm clothing.

Winter, from December to March, is dry but often bitterly cold, particularly in northern parts. Siberian winds drag January temperatures in most of the country (except Jeju) to below zero. This is the time of year when you really appreciate *ondol* (underfloor heating) and *oncheon* (hot-spring spas) as well as the ubiquitous saunas and spicy soups. White snow on *hanok* (traditional house) roofs is very picturesque, and winter is the time for skiers, snowboarders or ice-skaters to visit.

Try to avoid peak summer, from late June to late August, which starts off with the monsoon season, when the country receives some 60% of its annual rainfall, and is followed by unpleasantly hot and humid weather. Although air-conditioning makes summers much more bearable these days,

many locals flee the muggy cities for the mountains, beaches and islands, which become crowded, and accommodation prices double. There is also the chance of a typhoon or two.

View [www.kma.go.kr](http://www.kma.go.kr) for detailed weather forecasts in English.

## COSTS & MONEY

Korea is a developed country, but you can get by on a modest budget, although the ever-rising won (appreciating 10% a year against the US dollar) has been making the country more expensive for foreign visitors. Accommodation is always the main travel expense, and comfortable, en suite rooms cost around W30,000 (approximately US\$33) in smart new motels or W5000 less in older-style *yeogwan* (motel). Top-end hotels are rare outside major cities, but their rack rates are generally heavily discounted to around W200,000 to W250,000. Midrange hotels are being squeezed by the new high-rise motels, and their normal W150,000 rates are sometimes discounted below W100,000.

Transport, Korean meals, alcohol, saunas and admission prices to sights and national parks are still relatively cheap, so careful-spending duos travelling around Korea can manage on W70,000 a day, while W100,000 a day allows for some luxuries – classier rooms, more taxi rides and *bulgogi* (sliced beef) instead of *samgyeopsal* (sliced fatty pork). The ultra-thrifty could hope to reduce their costs to W50,000 a day by staying in youth-hostel dormitories or rather grotty rooms, taking advantage of hospitable Koreans they meet, and living on a diet of *gimbap* (rice rolled in dried seaweed), *bibimbap* (vegetables, meat and rice) and *ramyeon* (instant noodles). Staying in Seoul is cheaper than touring the country. Splashing out on luxury hotels, top-class meals and duty-free shops ups the budget to W400,000 a day or more.

## BOOKS & BLOGS

The best-selling *Korea Unmasked* by Rhee Won-bok (2002) takes an illuminating and humorous look at contemporary Korean attitudes in a cartoon format that compares Korea to neighbouring rivals China and Japan.

*Korea and Her Neighbours* by Isabella Bird (1997) is an insightful account of the intrepid author's travels around Korea in the 1890s.

## DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Studying the food chapter (p62) so you know the difference between *samgyetang* (ginseng chicken soup) and *samgyeopsal*.
- Checking your socks have no holes in them as you must remove your shoes to enter Buddhist shrines, traditional restaurants and private homes.
- Packing your hiking boots, as Korea is stuffed with scenic mountains and well-marked trails.
- Improving your skill at charades and gestures as not many Koreans understand English.
- Learning the 24 *Han-geul* letters (p410) so you can figure out *Han-geul* motel and restaurant names, *Han-geul* menus and *Han-geul* bus destinations.
- Practicing being naked in front of strangers so you can enjoy Korea's many excellent and reasonably priced hot-spring spas (p76).
- Packing a pair of sheets if you're planning to stay in budget accommodation, which often has just quilts.
- Bringing personal hygiene and brand-name medical items that may be difficult to obtain.

## HOW MUCH?

Local newspaper	W700
Food-court lunch	W5000
Cinema ticket	W7000
Steak dinner	W25,000
Motel room	W30,000
See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.	

## TOP TENS

## Only in Korea

- Venture inside a **North Korean spy submarine** (p179) near Jeongdongjin on the east coast.
- Peer inside the Korean president's bedroom in **Cheongnamdae** (p327) in Chungcheongbuk-do.
- Hike inside the **world's largest lava tube** (p281) on Jeju.
- Get up at 3.30am to chant sutras with Buddhist monks on a **temple-stay programme** (p384).
- March along a **North Korean invasion tunnel** under the DMZ (see boxed text, p160) that the North claimed was a coal mine.
- Admire **giant penises** at Haesindang Gong-won (Penis Park; p183) and Totem Pole Park (p316).
- Dive with sharks (and live to tell the tale) in **Busan Aquarium** (p76).
- Sit inside a Buddhist version of paradise in the replica of **King Muryeong's tomb** (p313) in Gongju.
- Squeeze yourself into a goblin-sized **teashop** (p129) in Insadong, with birds flying around.
- Discover the **Secret Garden** (p101) inside a Seoul palace where kings wrote nature poetry and students sweated over their exam papers.

## Cultural Icons

- *banchan* – small side dishes such as *kimchi* that accompany nearly every meal
- ceramics – world class celadon (green-tinged pottery) that was produced during the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392)
- *dancheong* – ornate and multicoloured eaves that adorn Buddhist temples and other buildings
- embroidery – superb craftsmanship is shown in this traditional female art
- *hallyu* – the wave of recent Korean TV dramas, films, fashions and music that has proved popular all over Asia from Mongolia to Malaysia
- *hanbok* – traditional gown-like clothing that is more admired than worn
- *Han-geul* – the Korean writing system that was invented in the 1440s but which took over five centuries to replace Chinese characters
- *hanok* – traditional wooden buildings with a tiled or thatched roof that were grouped around a courtyard and heated with *ondol* (underfloor heating system)
- *samul-nori* – a lively and popular farmer's drum-and-gong dance that is full of colour and rhythm
- taekwondo – Korea's famous martial art with a kick

## Natural Wonders

- Hallasan – an extinct 1950m volcano with a crater lake on Jeju (p292)
- Seongsan Ilchulbong – another spectacular extinct volcanic cone on Jeju (p282)
- Ulsan Bawi – giant granite cliffs in Seoraksan National Park (p173)
- Gosu Donggul – a huge limestone cave near Danyang (p340)
- Manjanggal – the world's largest lava tube, on Jeju (p281)
- Maisan – two rocky peaks in Jeollabuk-do that look like a horse's ears (p300)
- Seonyudo – an island jewel off Jeollabuk-do (p305)
- Chungju Lake – Korea's largest and most scenic waterway in Chungcheongbuk-do (p328)
- Ulleungdo – a beautiful, rugged volcanic island in the East Sea with an off-the-beaten-track atmosphere (p212)
- Dokdo – remote, rocky islets in the East Sea that are claimed by Japan (p215)

## TOP FORTRESS PICKS

- A World Heritage marvel, **Hwaseong** (p144) was built in the 1790s by King Jeongjo and winds around part of Suwon city for 5.7km.
- South of Seoul, **Namhan Sanseong** (p144) has walls that stretch for nearly 10km and provided a refuge for King Injo in 1636.
- The south coast fortress of **Jinju** (p245) was the scene of carnage when the Japanese attacked it in 1592.
- Near the west coast, **Haemi Fortress** (p322) was where early Catholic converts were imprisoned and executed during the 1860s.
- The walls of the well-preserved, 15th-century **Gochang Fortress** (p304) in Jeollabuk-do are nearly 2km long.

*The Koreans* by Michael Breen (1999) is an expat but expert analysis of the complex and often baffling Korean psyche.

*Palaces of Korea* by Kim Dong-uk (2006) covers the unique Confucian palaces in detail with the help of photos and illustrations.

*A Walk Through the Land of Miracles* by Simon Winchester (1988) describes a classic walk from Jeju to Seoul that vividly describes encounters with Korean monks, nuns, artists, marriage arrangers and US generals. The highlight is a visit to a barber shop.

*To Dream of Pigs* by Clive Leatherdale (1994) describes a journalist's jaunt around North and South Korea and the oddball characters he meets.

View <http://throughwhiteeyes.blogspot.com> for quirky commentary about life on planet Seoul plus links to other blogs, or go to <http://realtravel.com> and enter 'South Korea' into 'search' for a bounty of blogs by expat English teachers with time on their hands.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Korean Culture** ([www.korea.net](http://www.korea.net)) A treasure trove of all things Korean, including literature and folk tales.

**Korean Films** ([www.koreanfilm.org](http://www.koreanfilm.org)) Reviews of the best Korean movies.

**Korean History** ([www.kimssoft.com](http://www.kimssoft.com); [www.froginawell.net/korea](http://www.froginawell.net/korea)) Online browsing for history buffs.

**Korean Language** ([www.learnkoreanlanguage.com](http://www.learnkoreanlanguage.com); [www.learnkorean.com](http://www.learnkorean.com)) Get the hang of *Han-geul* with some free online help.

**Korean Martial Arts** ([www.koreanmartialarts.com](http://www.koreanmartialarts.com)) Covers taekwondo (the one with high kicks and breaking wooden blocks with your bare hand) and *hapkido* (the one that includes a bit of every other martial art).

**Korean News** (<http://times.hankooki.com>; [www.koreaherald.co.kr](http://www.koreaherald.co.kr); <http://english.joins.com>) News updated daily, plus classified ads, archive articles and links.

**Korean Tourism Organisation** ([www.tour2korea.com](http://www.tour2korea.com)) Tons of useful tourist info.

**Living in Korea** ([www.g4f.go.kr](http://www.g4f.go.kr)) A new one-stop government website about studying, investing, working and living in Korea.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Book Seoul accommodation and read the latest Thorn Tree traveller's tips on Korea.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### DISCOVER KOREA

10 days / 750km

This classic route traverses mountains, rice fields and lakes to the sandy beaches and seafood restaurants of the east coast.

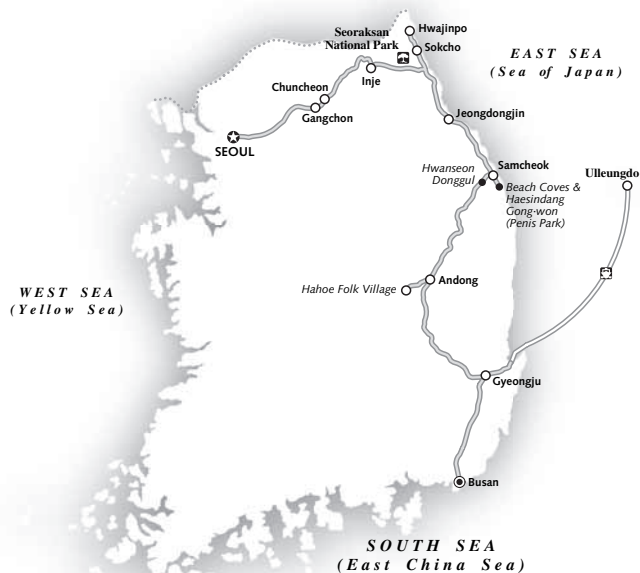
Catch a bus or train from Seoul to Gangchon (p166) and cycle to the waterfall. Hop on a bus to the lakeside city of Chuncheon (p163) and cycle along the lake shore. Head to Soyang Dam, take a boat trip to Yanggu and paddle down an unspoilt river in Inje (p167).

Dine on fresh seafood in Sokcho (p170) and then hike around the peaks and waterfalls of Seoraksan National Park (p172). Next, journey north up the coast to relax on the sandy beach at Hwajinpo (p171), home to some historical holiday villas. Head back south to the small seaside resort of Jeongdongjin (p179) and venture inside a tiny North Korean spy submarine. At Samcheok (p182) explore the huge cave at nearby Hwanseon Donggul (p183). South of Samcheok, check out the unforgettable Haesindang Gang-won (Penis Park; p183).

Travel back to feudal times at Hahoe Folk Village (p220) and don't miss the cultural museums of Andong (p217). Then on to the tour highlight – Gyeongju (p197), the ancient capital of the Shilla kingdom – for two or more days among the royal tombs and Buddhist treasures.

Board a ferry in Ulsan to rugged, volcanic Ulleungdo (p212) for a special off-the-beaten-track experience. Back on the mainland, arrive in Busan (p227), a bustling port city with fast ferry connections to Japan.

This route is 750km of shifting countryside, historical sights, succulent seafood and sandy sunrise beaches, with a relaxing hot-spring spa at the end of the road.



### HONEYMOON ISLAND

1 week / 300km

A constant stream of flights and ferries provide speedy and convenient transport to Jeju-si on Jeju-do, Korea's holiday and activities island, where palm trees and orange groves add an exotic Mediterranean feel.

The entire island is black volcanic rock which makes for outstanding scenery. Hike up the gentle slopes of Hallasan (p292), where gentle roe deer roam; head east from Jeju-si and be awed by the world's longest and largest lava-tube cave, Manjanggul (p281), and on the island's eastern tip, climb up 'sunrise peak' Seongsan Ilchulbong (p282). Then explore nearby Udo Island (p283), which is touristy but still full of rural charms, and one of the places where *haenyeo* (female divers) still gather seafood from the ocean floor.

The island's unique culture and rural past can be experienced at Seong-eup Folk Village (p284) and Jeju Folk Village (p285) in the south east. Just a generation ago, before the age of tourists and guidebooks, Jeju-do was a different place.

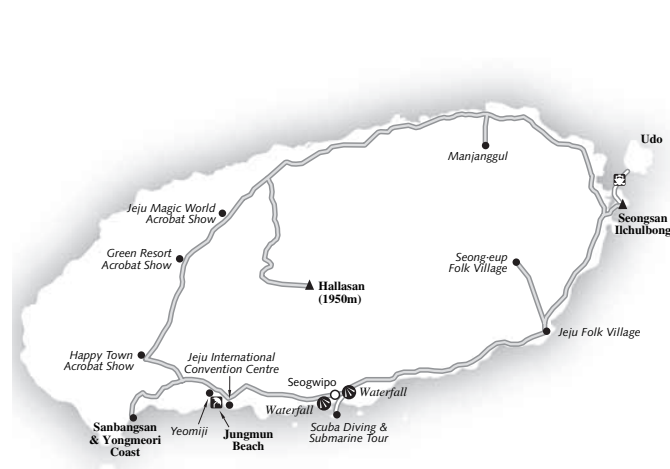
In Seogwipo enjoy waterfalls (p286), a submarine tour (p286) or scuba diving (p287) around islands of colourful coral, with fish that look as if they're heading to a fancy-dress party. Honeyymooners staying in the luxury southern coast resorts at Jungmun Beach (p289) put on identical T-shirts and stroll hand in hand and mouth to mouth under the palm trees at sunset.

Two giant glass buildings near Jungmun Beach are Yeomiji (p289), an indoor and outdoor botanical garden, and the Jeju International Convention Centre (p289).

On the southwestern coast soak up ancient Zen spirituality in a cave at Sanbanggulsu (p290) and take a short hike along the dramatically eroded Yongmeori Coast (p290) where the cliffs look like catacombs.

It's impossible to do all the activities and see all the island's gardens, museums, art parks and sights, so pick what appeals most. But don't leave without seeing at least one of the three amazing Chinese acrobat shows at Green Resort (p291), Happy Town (p291) and Jeju Magic World (p291).

Leg it through lava-tube caves, venture up extinct volcanoes, wonder at waterfalls, sup on seafood, scuba at Seogwipo, bask on beaches and be awed by acrobats – you'll soon discover why Jeju-do is Korea's favourite holiday island.





## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### COAST TO COAST

2 weeks / 800km

Journey through glorious mountain scenery, feast on pheasant and unwind on sandy beaches and in hot-spring spas. Along the way visit the presidential summer villa and admire treasures from the Baekje dynasty.

From Seoul take the subway to Suwon (p144), hike around the World Heritage 18th-century fortress, eat the best *galbi* (beef ribs) in the country and lose yourself for hours in the Korean Folk Village (p147). Next stop is near Cheonan at the Independence Hall of Korea (p322), which charts the history of the epic but unsuccessful Korean struggle against Japanese colonialism before WWII. This is followed by two days of historical sightseeing in the Baekje kingdom's ex-capitals of Gongju (p312) and Buyeo (p316).

Next, head to Daecheon Beach (p319) for the best beach and seafood restaurants on the west coast. Cruise around quiet offshore islands and stay and eat with a fisherman's family on Sapsido (p320), before touring pretty Anmyeondo (p321) and watching the sunset from Mallipo Beach (p322). Travel inland via Haemi Fortress (p322) to Daejeon and Yuseong Hot Springs (p309).

Buy ginseng products in Geumsan (p311) and then stay in a W30,000 (US\$30) motel castle in Cheongju (p325) and dine on black chicken in a mountain fortress (p326). Next day, tour the lakeside presidential villa Cheongnamdae (p327) with its own golf course and splendid gardens.

Spot a shy goral antelope in Woraksan National Park (p339), rejuvenate tired limbs in Suanbo Hot Springs (p338) and feast on pheasant. Take a two-hour scenic ferry trip from Chungju across Chungju Lake to sleepy Danyang (p340). From there explore nearby limestone caves (p340) and Gu-insa (p343), an amazing temple complex. Go bush in remote Jeongseon (p184), where you might see an ox-drawn plough. In Taebaeksan Provincial Park visit the mountain-top Dan-gun altar (p184), which honours Korea's mythical half-bear founder. Finally dive into the East Sea at a beach near Samcheok (p183). See p18 for Samcheok and beyond.

From the buzzing streets and flashing neon of Seoul to remote fishing villages, from motel castles to mountain fortresses, from lakes to caves and from ancient tomb treasures to a presidential villa: travelling from the sunset coast to the sunrise coast is a great way to experience the variety on offer in Korea.



### THE GREEN TRAIL

2 weeks / 1200km

The Jeolla provinces have always been the rice bowl of Korea and still retain a semblance of the traditional agrarian lifestyle. The region is famous for its fresh food, traditional crafts like paper making, *pansori* opera, dissident poets, Goryeo-dynasty ceramics and political protest. The south coast is Korea's greenest coastline, where hundreds of rural, relaxing islands and their pristine beaches invite island-hopping jaunts far from the madding crowds.

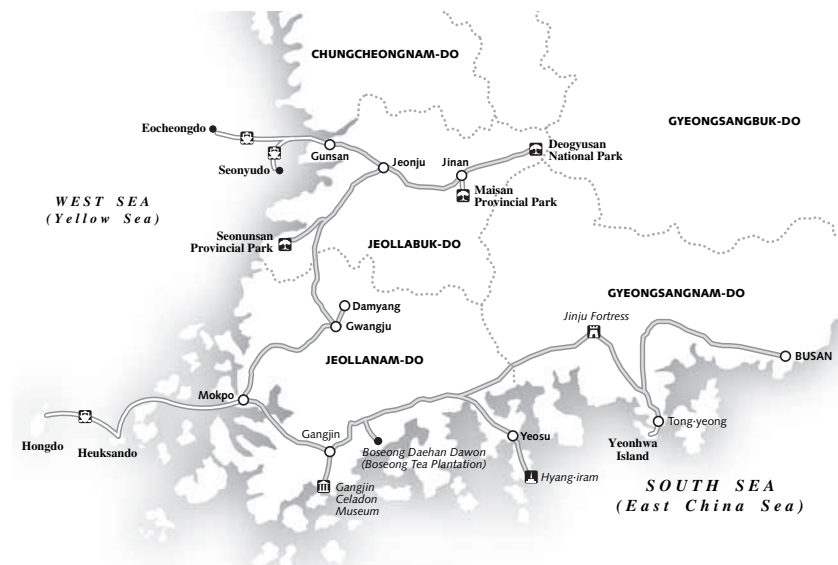
Jeonju city's fascinating hanok village (p297) is crammed with traditional houses and buildings. You must eat Jeonju *bibimbap* (rice topped with egg, meat, vegetables and sauce) and try *moju*, a sweet gingery alcoholic drink. See the rock-pinnacle garden and climb a horse's ear at Maisan Provincial Park (p300), then go hiking or skiing in beautiful Deogyusan National Park (p301). *Bokbunja* juice (an alcoholic drink made from berries), scenic splendours and an ancient Buddha carved on a cliff await you at Seonunsan Provincial Park (p303). Take a ferry from Gunsan to a slice of island paradise called Seonyudo (p305) or to rarely visited Eocheongdo (p305), which attracts bird enthusiasts.

Further south in Gwangju, visit the May 18th National Cemetery (p253), a sombre reminder of the 1980 uprising against the military government of the time. Admire the ceramics in Gwangju National Museum (p252), explore more art and craft in Art Street (p256), eat in a duck restaurant (p256) and don't miss the bamboo town of Damyang (p257).

At Mokpo visit the museums (p267) before taking a boat to the remote havens of Heuksando (p270) and Hongdo (p270). Mould your own ceramic pot in Gangjin Celadon Museum (p262) and taste food and drinks made from healthy green tea at the beautiful Boseong Daehan Dawon (Boseong Tea Plantation; p262). From Yeosu, hike up to Hyang-iram (p262), a Buddhist temple perched on a cliff with awesome coastal and island views.

Jinju fortress (p245) has a terrible story to tell, and for a final eco experience don't miss the beautiful hike on the unspoiled Yeonhwa island (p243), which is easily reached by ferry from Tong-yeong. Finally, the Green Trail comes to an abrupt end in the bustling port of Busan (p227), Korea's second largest city.

Enjoy the green landscapes and healthy food of Korea's least developed region, with hundreds of unspoilt islands, countless seafood restaurants and artistic traditions.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### KARMA KOREA

Located in beautiful forest-covered mountain areas are some of Asia's most outstanding Buddhist temples, where monks and nuns still live and pursue their dream of enlightenment and freedom from the chains of desire. Their remoteness often makes the pilgrimage by bus difficult and the journey covers around 1500km, but it begins (like all journeys) with a single step. Buses go to all the temples, but often there is a 'mind-washing' walk through the forest before you finally reach the temple buildings. Try to leave the cares of the world behind when you enter the gates of a temple, in order to get the most out of the experience.

Buses from Seoul run to Gu-insa (p343), the headquarters of the Cheontae sect and quite different from any other Korean temple, with multistorey modern buildings lining both sides of a steep valley. It has a Utopian atmosphere, and delicious, free vegetarian meals are available. From here take a bus to Danyang and on to Gongju and Magoksa (p316), an ancient and traditional temple in a remote spot with a hall of 1000 pint-sized disciples that are all slightly different. Can you find the one that looks most like you?

Journey southeast to Daegu and on to stunning Haeinsa (p195), which houses a staggering library of over 80,000 World Heritage 14th-century woodblocks. They were carved in an unsuccessful attempt to ward off Mongolian invaders. Back in Daegu, an hour on the bus takes you to Gimcheon, the gateway to Jikjisa (p196), a magnificent temple dating back to the 5th century. A soldier monk from here, Sa-myeong, led the fight against Japanese invaders in 1592. Interestingly, monks were not pacifists back in those days, whenever the nation was under threat.

Return to Daegu and then take a bus to Jeonju and another bus to Jinan, the access town for Tapsa (p300), a tiny temple surrounded by two 'horse ear' mountains and an extraordinary sculptural garden of 80 stone pinnacles (or towers) that were piled up by a Buddhist mystic, Yi Kapmyong.

Return to Jeonju via Jinan and go south to Gwangju and on to Unjusa (p257). This temple has a fine collection of stone pagodas and Buddhas including unusual twin and reclining Buddhas – legend has it that the site originally housed 1000 Buddhas and 1000 pagodas. Returning to Gwangju, catch a bus eastwards to Busan and on to Tongdosa (p242), said to be Korea's largest and most important Buddhist temple, and housing an excellent Buddhist art museum containing 30,000 artefacts. Catch a bus to Ulsan and from there to Seongnamsa (p242), a visual masterpiece set in a provincial park.

Finally return to Ulsan and press on to Gyeongju and Bulguksa (p202), a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage-listed temple replica that represents the crowning glory of Shilla architecture and is constructed on a stone terrace.

Nearby, in the mountains above Bulguksa is another World Cultural Heritage-listed site: a superb stone Buddha, hewn in the mid-8th century, that resides in the Seokguram Grotto.



### GOURMET GALLOP

Korean cuisine outside Seoul covers such a multitude of flavours and styles that it would take a lifetime to sample everything, but here's a start.

Red-bedecked restaurants in Incheon's Chinatown (p152), a subway ride west of Seoul, offer delicious Chinese food including the famous *jajangmyeon*, a Korean/Chinese noodle dish.

Sokcho, a fishing port on the east coast, is noted for squid *sundae* (squid stuffed with all sorts of goodies). Enjoy it in upmarket and green surroundings at the well-known and well-regarded Jinyang Hoejip (p170).

In Daegu city, take a break from Korean food at the ultra-romantic Dijon (p192) with its high-class euro food, candles and a beautiful rose on every table.

After a hard day touring Shilla relics in Gyeongju, satisfy your appetite with the wholesome fare at Kuro Ssambap (p206). Enjoy the folk museum ambience and feast on a banquet of more (refillable) side dishes than even the Joseon monarchs could handle. Wrap side-dish combos in lettuce and other leaves before popping them in your mouth.

Further south in Busan, drop into Grandmother Lee's Raw Fish House (p236) near Hae-undae beach for sushi served straight from the tanks outside. The owner speaks English and loves to explain why Koreans adore raw fish.

Head west along the south coast until you reach the beautiful green-tea plantation Boseong Daehan Dawon (Boseong Tea Plantation; p262), where you can try shakes, yogurt and ice cream all made with *nokcha* (green tea). Lunch in the restaurant on green-tea flavoured *jajangmyeon* or *bibimbap*.

Then take a bus to Mokpo, where Igabon-ga (p269) offers a splendid *tteokgalbi*, a giant meat patty with seafood, bamboo shoots, salad and side dishes served on leaves and decorated with flower petals.

Head north to the stylish and smart Bakmulwan Apjip (p257) in Damyang. It specialises in bamboo dishes. Rice topped with nuts and beans are cooked inside a bamboo stem, the *doenjang* (soybean paste) soup is flavoured with bamboo shoots, and bamboo leaf tea is free. Diners can take home their bamboo rice container as a souvenir.

The next stop north is Jeonju in Jeollabuk-do, the birthplace of *bibimbap*, and Hankookkwan (p299) is a buzzing restaurant that serves up this classic dish with a bowl of *moju* homebrew. Order *dolsot bibimbap* if you don't want raw meat.

Then head on to Daejeon city, where Pungnyeong Samgyetang (p310) is a large, unpretentious restaurant that cooks up an excellent *samgyetang* (ginseng chicken) served with foreigner-friendly lettuce and delicious cucumber side dishes.

From Daejeon take a short, scenic bus ride south to Geumsan (p311), known as Ginseng Town, where restaurants and stalls sell *samgyetang*, *insam twigim* (ginseng in batter) and *insam makeolli* (ginseng rice wine), and hundreds of shops and stalls sell ginseng tea, liquor, sweets and other ginseng products.

Next up is a detour to Suanbo Hot Springs in Chungcheongbuk-do, where Satgatchon (p339) serves up a seven-course pheasant meal that includes pheasant *mandu* (dumplings), mini pheasant kebabs, pheasant steamboat and pheasant soup.

Back in Daejeon, Seoul is less than an hour away on a KTX train.



# NORTH KOREA

## INTRODUCTION TO DPRK

A standard tour to North Korea lasts roughly a week, but it's amazing the number of sights that can be packed in, with the guides keeping you busy day-in day-out with a seemingly endless stream of revolutionary sights.

On day one, you'll take the short flight from Beijing into another world, landing in **Pyongyang** (p358), where the rigorous pace of North Korean tourism quickly becomes apparent. Spend two full days taking in this unique city with its barrage of monuments, statues, museums and other 'attractions'. From here, head south down the Reunification Highway to the ancient city of **Kaesong** (p368), where you'll be able to visit the country's most atmospheric hotel, the **Kaesong Folk Hotel** (p369), and see what for many is the highlight of their trip: the DMZ at **Panmunjom** (p369). From the tense heart of conflict on the Korean Peninsula, you'll normally be taken to relax in the mountains, North Korean style. Usually this will be in **Myohyangsan** (p370) where, as well as mountain walking along concrete steps embellished with revolutionary slogans, you'll pay a visit to the utterly bizarre **International Friendship Exhibition** (p370), with every gift ever presented to the two Kims displayed in huge vaults built into the side of a mountain. The last day is usually spent in Pyongyang and a visit to the incredible **Mass Games** (p355) between August and October, before boarding the overnight train back to Beijing.

## OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

You don't get much more off the beaten track than North Korea itself, but if you're determined to see parts that no one else has seen then there are some options. Of course, you'll still have to be on a tour (or at least with two

guides) but you can really get out and see places few others do. While you'll fly or take the train to Pyongyang, there's still a huge amount in the city that isn't usually included on tours: request the zoo, a trip to the shooting gallery, the film studios and the three revolutions exhibit, for example. From Pyongyang, a charter plane can fly you up to **Paekdusan** (Mt Paekdu; p372) for a visit to Korea's holy mountain and the magnificent crater lake Chon, mythically associated with the anti-Japanese struggle and the birth of Kim Jong Il. Returning by plane to Pyongyang, having seen one of the remotest areas of the country, move on to the little visited east coast of the country. Overnight in the major port city of **Wonsan** (p373); from there a trip into the beautiful **Kumgangsan**

(p371) is possible. If you really want to go the whole hog, a flying visit (again, by charter plane unless you enter overland from China) to the 'Special Free Trade Zone' of **Rajin-Sonbong** (p375) is about as different as you can get. You're pretty certain not to meet anyone else who has been to this oddest area of an extremely odd country.



# Snapshot

Given the country's appetite for change, Korea's evolving outlook on the world is hardly surprising. Increasingly, the American government is perceived as a barrier to a fruitful dialogue with the North. The apex of this sentiment was a fringe-group campaign to raze a statue of General McArthur. The man surely had his faults, but McArthur's legacy includes one significant accomplishment: he saved South Korea's ass. If it weren't for McArthur, South Korea's citizenry could conceivably find themselves bowing to Dear Leader and watching reruns of last year's Mass Games on a black-and-white TV while eating tree-bark soup.

The US is reducing troop strength in Korea by a quarter, or more. Some bases have been closed, like Busan's Camp Hialeah; others will be relocated, such as the Yongsan Garrison near Itaewon. Base closures and relocations are opening up large tracts of land in urban centres, but the future of this real estate is uncertain. Rumours about parks persist though it's difficult to remain optimistic, given the country's tradition of apple boxes filled with 'cash gifts' and penchant for 25-storey residential towers.

Japan and Korea continue to act out their own version of *Mad* magazine's Spy Vs Spy. Much of the wrangling concerns a territorial dispute over Dokdo (p35), a handful of islets 200km off Korea's east coast. The attachment to Dokdo is emotional – the prospect of Japan snagging a piece of territory is gut wrenching for every Korean – and financial: sovereignty over the rocks ensures territorial rights to fertile fishing grounds and a seabed of energy reserves.

Most Koreans are warming to the idea that building ties with North Korea yields benefits, despite the costs. Undeterred by the North's admission of nuclear-weapon capabilities, the government clings to the Sunshine Policy (p42). Aid, coupled with investments in the Kaeseong industrial park, is viewed as a long-term strategy to stabilise the North, build links where none have existed for 50 years (such as rail lines and roads) and make a few bucks for South Korean companies who pay the North Korean government US\$60 per month per factory worker to churn out pots, auto parts and electrical components.

Free trade is sharpening Korea's international economic focus. Talks with India, Japan, Canada and the US are at different stages. During preliminary negotiations with the US, Korea argued that goods manufactured in Kaesong should fall within the scope of a free-trade agreement. Only the future will tell if this puzzling idea is a stroke of genius or a sterling example of lateral thinking gone too far. Trade liberalisation is the future, it seems, but it's going to take a wizard to get through Korea's domestic politics, which include a vocal agricultural sector regarded as a loser in any future deal. Most people agree that protecting a national industry is important, but at some point someone has to ask why a small bag of locally grown carrots costs more than a kilogram of imported beef.

## FAST FACTS:

The average employee in Korea works 2423 hours per year, the highest level among 30 OECD countries

40,000 women in Korea are registered as *mudang* (female shaman)

78% of Korean homes have a computer

Household savings in Korea as a percentage of disposable income in 1994: 20.7%. In 2004: 5.1%

Average life expectancy in Korea in 1960: 52 years. In 2003: 77 years

Korean-American video artist Baek Nam-june coined the phrase 'electronic superhighway' in 1974

Koreans can earn up to W10 million by snitching on manufacturers or distributors of counterfeit goods

Online commercial transactions in Korea totalled US\$10 billion in 2005





## MARTIN ROBINSON

### Coordinating Author

This is the second *Korea* guide that Martin has coordinated. He also authored the last two editions of Lonely Planet's *Seoul* guide. Before that Martin lived in South Korea teaching English, working in a provincial governor's office and writing a hiking guide to Jeollabuk-do. Other Asian experiences have included a stint with the British Council in Tokyo and writing travel articles for newspapers. He's married and lives in New Zealand. For this edition, Martin wrote the Getting Started, Itineraries, Environment, Food & Drink, Jeollanam-do, Jeju-do, Jeollabuk-do, Chungcheongnam-do, Chungcheongbuk-do, Directory and Transport chapters, and contributed to Korea Outdoors.

### The Coordinating Author's Favourite Trip

Jeju-do (p271) has fantastic volcanic landscapes, tangerine orchards and a laid-back attitude. I hire a scooter in Jeju-si (p275), munch barbecued pheasant for lunch and head east to Manjanggul (p281), the world's largest lava tube. I stay the night in Seongsan-ri with a great view of Ilchulbong (p282), a volcanic crater which I climb up for the sunrise (5.30am) next morning. After that I take a boat trip to Udo Island (p283) for a scoot round its black lava cliffs and white coral-sand beach. I spend the night in Seogwipo (p285) and enjoy a scuba dive, a balloon ride, and an acrobat show at Happy Town the next day. On day four I hike up Hallasan (p292), Korea's highest and prettiest mountain, hoping to spot a cute roe deer.



## RAY BARTLETT

Ray Bartlett began travel writing at the age of 18, when he jumped a freight train for 500 miles and sold an article and photos about the journey to a newspaper. More than a decade-and-a-half later, Ray is still wandering the globe with pen and camera in hand. He regularly contributes to *Cape Cod Life* magazine, is a staff author for Lonely Planet specialising in Japan, Korea and Mexico, and his prose and photography has been published in a variety of newspapers, magazines and essay collections including the *Seattle Times*, *Denver Post*, *USA Today* and the *Miami Herald*. He lives on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. For this edition Ray wrote the Gyeonggi-do, Gang-won-do and Gyeongsangbuk-do chapters, and contributed to Korea Outdoors.



## ROB WHYTE

For 11 years Rob has lived in Korea, teaching the past tense to college and university students. A shocking example of someone who never bothered to formulate a life plan, let this be a lesson to anyone with hopes of becoming a teacher in Korea: don't get too comfortable otherwise you may end up staying longer than you ever imagined. A one-time civil servant at Busan City Hall, he and four others were the first foreigners employed by a municipal government in Korea. Rob lives with his family in Busan, where his only regret is the lack of affordable golf. For this edition, Rob wrote the Destination, Snapshot, Culture, Seoul and Gyeongsangnam-do chapters, and contributed to Korea Outdoors.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**North Korea** was newly researched for this edition, but we have chosen not to identify our author so as to protect his identity and that of the North Koreans who assisted him on his travels.

**Dr Trish Batchelor** wrote the Health chapter. She is a general practitioner and travel-medicine specialist who works at the CIWEC Clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as being a Medical Advisor to the Travel Doctor New Zealand clinics. Trish teaches travel medicine through the University of Otago, and is interested in underwater and high-altitude medicine, and in the impact of tourism on host countries. She has travelled extensively through Southeast and East Asia and particularly loves high-altitude trekking in the Himalayas.

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