

Gyeonggi-do 경기도



The province of Gyeonggi-do hugs Seoul like a reverse letter 'C,' providing excellent day trips or longer expeditions to some of Korea's gems. Often overlooked due to its proximity to the *Bladerunner*-esque cityscape that is Seoul, Gyeonggi-do is a varied province: rivers and rice fields, shrines and scenery, timeless temples and ever-present smiles. Slip into the quiet fishing life on a West Sea island, walk on a deserted beach or a wave-smoothed mud flat, or go inland and take in fantastic vistas from hiking destinations such as Bukhansan National Park or Namhan Sanseong Provincial Park.

For a chilling reminder of cold-war animosities and the almost anachronistic threat of war, hop on a DMZ-bound tour bus and catch glimpses of North Korea, barbed wire and the paradox of Panmunjom. Shoppers looking to take home a piece of Korean art should hit the Korean Folk Village or Icheon Ceramic Village. When you've seen enough museums, travellers with children can enjoy Seoul Grand Park and Everland, or hit the slopes in winter for great skiing.

Suwon and Icheon are the area's biggest cities; the latter has its own local government and telephone code and is the port for ferries to nearby islands, Jeju, and even China. Ganghwado, a nearby island, is still relatively unspoilt, and has dolmen (ancient tombs), a mountain-top altar, fortifications and an interesting history, making it a perfect place to recharge your batteries if Seoul's nightlife starts to wear thin.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike up to granite peaks and an ancient fortress in **Bukhansan National Park** (p141)
- Get dirty on the amazing mud flats of the **West Sea Islands** (p153)
- Feel the chill of the Cold War at **Panmunjom** (p158) in the DMZ
- Go back in time at the rustic, laid-back **Korean Folk Village** (p147)
- Stroll around **Suwon** (p144) and admire its neon charms
- Head to **Icheon** (p147) for pottery and relaxing hot spas



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 031	■ POPULATION: 10.3 MILLION	■ AREA: 10,189 SQ KM
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History

Gyeonggi-do's history is rife with pilgrimages, plundering, plots and plans, infiltrations, defeats and surrenders. Its nearby islands and many coves have been used repeatedly to gain access to Seoul or defend against attacks from China, Japan, France and the United States. Its current border with North Korea makes it a front line for this war (technically, a formal peace treaty ending the Korean War was never signed), and even today tunnel-detection teams operate in hopes of fending off North Korean incursions.

National & Provincial Parks

Gyeonggi-do is so close to Seoul that most of its parks are easy day trips, though hikers

may want to budget more time to stop and smell the flowers along the way. The closest is Bukhansan, a beautiful park with a serene peak that overlooks Seoul. Its proximity to this giant metropolis means that the serenity is often shared with hundreds of other folks also looking to get away from it all; minimise the crowds by starting early or visiting during the week.

Namhan Sanseong Provincial Park is nearby, an easy day trip from Seoul that offers hiking, wildflower and bird viewing, and interesting meandering along ancient fortress walls.

Also nearby is Suraksan (p143), not a national park proper, but still a beautiful area well worth visiting if time allows.

Getting There & Around

All of Gyeonggi-do is within day-trip distance of Seoul, making it a great place to escape to, even if you don't have a lot of time. Buses and trains, and in some places even subway lines, make for speedy, inexpensive travel. Taxis are economical, even for longer jaunts, but are especially useful for quick trips once you've reached your destination.

SEOUL GRAND PARK 서울대공원

The zoo (☎ 02-500 7114; <http://grandpark.seoul.go.kr>; adult/youth/child W3000/2000/1000; 11 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct-Mar) in the park is set among the forested hillsides south of Seoul. A river runs through the park and families picnic along its shady banks. You can hike along a number of marked trails which are 2km to 6km long. Admission is cheaper from November to March (adult/youth/child W1500/1200/700).

The zoo is home to a long list of exotic creatures including the popular African ones, and has a long history of breeding successes, including tigers and panda bears. Cage quality varies: some are lush and green (especially the aviary), others are muddy and a bit depressing. The zoo features cranes, swans, pelicans and other large birds, and an indoor botanic garden houses a forest of cacti, numerous orchids and carnivorous pitcher plants. Ants and swimming beetles are on display in a 'miniature creature' exhibit, plus there's 'Squirrel Plaza' and other displays.

A fun dolphin-and-seal show costs W1500 and shows three to four times per day. If you still haven't gotten your fill of animal shows, you can watch a girl dressed in pink chase flamingos around to the cheers of kids and crowds. It's cute, and the birds probably need a little exercise, but they don't do much more than run around.

The large and striking National Museum of Contemporary Art (☎ 02-2188 6000; www.moca.go.kr; adult/youth/child W1000/500/free; 11 9am-6pm Tue-Sun, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb) is spread over three floors and also has sculptures in the garden. You are unlikely to miss one exhibit: a huge pagoda-shaped video installation that is 18m high and uses 1000 flickering screens to make a comment on our increasingly electronic universe. It's the work of Paik Nam-june, a video artist with an international reputation, and is entitled *The More the Better*. Free films are shown on Saturday during August, concerts are held in July and music and dance performances are put on in

October. To get there, walk up to the entrance of Seoul Grand Park and bear left.

Getting There & Away

Take subway Line 4 to Seoul Grand Park station (W900), which is 45 minutes from City Hall. Leave by Exit 2 and then either walk (10 minutes) or take an elephant-inspired tram (adult/child W600/500) to the entrance of the park. Another option is to take the cable car (adult/child W4000/2000). A free shuttle bus runs every 20 minutes from the subway station (outside Exit 4) to the National Museum of Contemporary Art, or it's a 20-minute walk. A combo ticket includes the tram, chairlift and zoo admission at a slight discount off the individual fares.

BUKHANSAN NATIONAL PARK

북한산 국립공원

This national park (☎ 02-909 0497; www.npa.or.kr; adult/youth/child W1600/600/300; 11 sunrise-sunset), made up of a granite peak and surrounding area, is visible from the city itself (and is so close that it's possible to visit by subway). It offers sublime vistas of mist-shrouded mountains, maple leaves, rushing streams and remote temples. The park is sometimes crowded, especially on weekends. Rock climbers particularly enjoy Insubong (810m), which is a free-climber's dream, with some of the best multipitch climbing in Asia and routes of all grades.

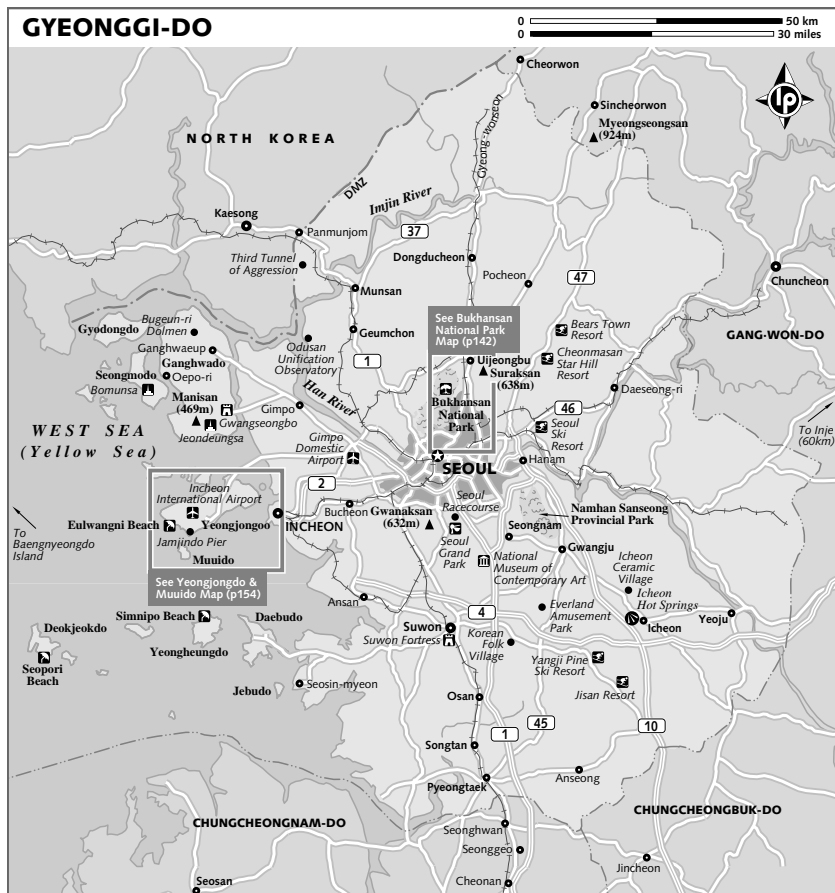
Camping is possible in summer or you can stay in basic mountain huts, but they are not usually open in winter. During peak periods (10 July to 20 August and 1 October to 14 November), on public holidays and weekends, some huts and camping grounds have an on-line reservation system (www.npa.or.kr).

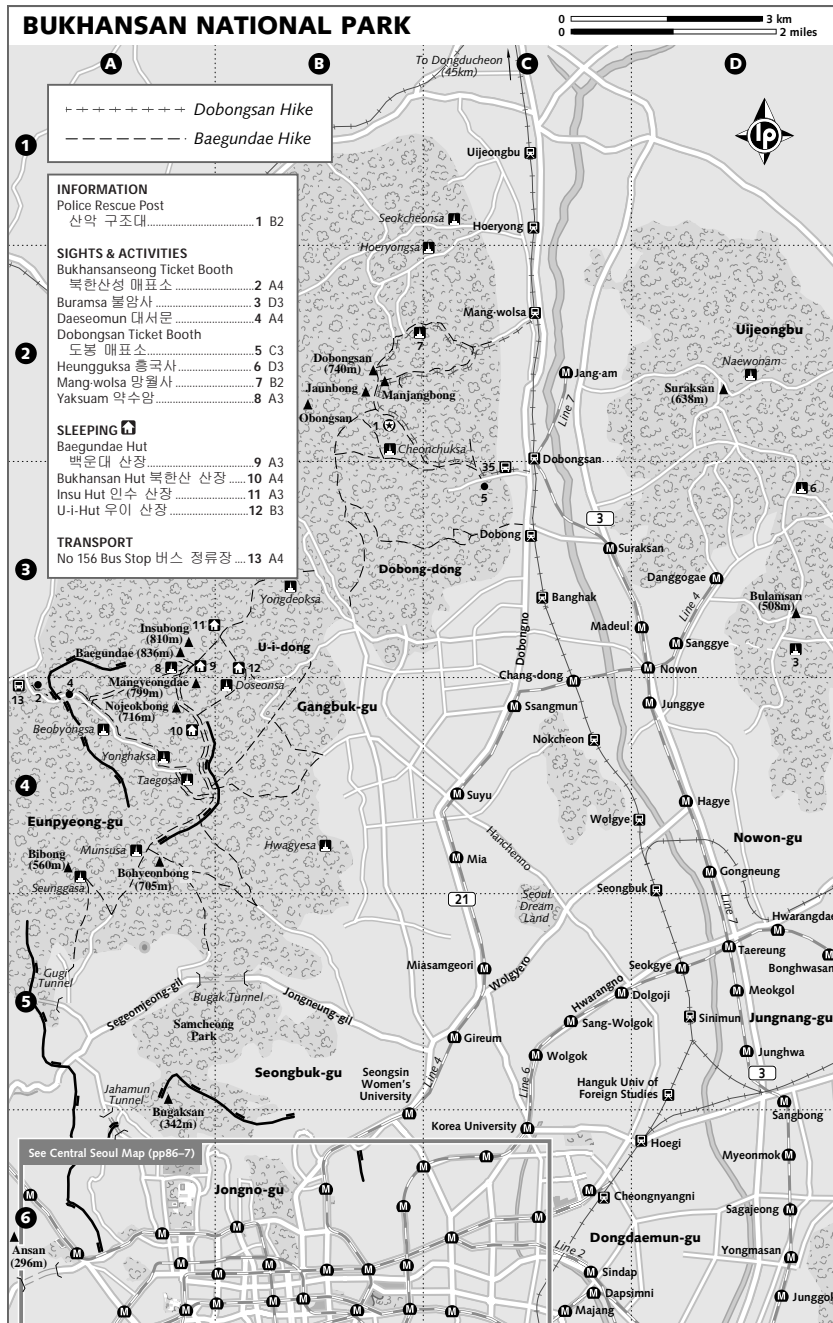
The following two hikes are recommended – both are all-day hikes so you need to be reasonably fit to complete the full course. If your energy begins to flag, consider taking a swig of the Korean hiker's friend: pine-needle *soju* (local vodka-like brew). One mouthful should be enough to help you make it to the top. Well, that's what Koreans claim anyway.

Baegundae Hike 백운대

This moderate-to-strenuous hike takes six hours, including short breaks.

Leave Gupal station by Exit 1, walk straight for 100m to the bus stop and take bus 704 (W900, 10 minutes, every 15 minutes) to the Bukhansan bus stop. Get off with the other





hikers, walk straight and then turn right. The ticket office is 500m from the bus stop.

The park's highest peak, Baegundae (836m), is 4km or two hours away. A five-minute walk brings you to the fortress wall and Daeseomun gate. Fifteen minutes after leaving the gate, the road crosses a bridge. Fork left following the sign to Baegundae and keep a look out for little striped ground squirrels. Spring water is available at Yaksuam, a hermitage that you reach 45 minutes after leaving the road. Past Yaksuam there are stairs up to another fortress gate, and then you use metal cables to haul yourself up Baegundae peak. Surrounded by granite cliffs and with a 360-degree view, it's a top-of-the-world feeling.

Dobongsan Hike 도봉산

Dobongsan is a mountain with three rocky peaks. This cool, shady 10km hike takes about five hours, but add time for a picnic lunch. Moderate fitness is required.

Take subway Line 1 north to Dobongsan station (W900). It takes 45 minutes from City Hall if your train goes all the way (not all do). Exit the station and follow the other hikers across the road, through the market and food stalls and past a bus terminal to the ticket booth.

Keep on the main path, following the sign to Jaunbong, one of Dobongsan's peaks, which is 2.7km away. Five minutes past the spring, turn right, following the sign to Manjangbong (another Dobongsan peak). Keep a look out for woodpeckers and squirrels.

About an hour from the subway station, you arrive at Dobong Hut. Bear right following the sign to Mang-wolsa. Then follow signs to Jaunbong, go past the police rescue post and up the final steep and rocky stretch to the top which is between two rocky peaks. Here the adventure begins as you scramble down a ravine helped by metal cables, then up and along a rocky ridge and through narrow crevices.

Follow the signs, descend via Mang-wolsa or turn right at the sign marked 'Wondobong Ticket Box' for a less-used short cut down the hillside past a small spring. Half an hour from the right turn you join the main track down to the car park. Follow the road, bearing left as you enter the town, to Mang-wolsa subway station (Line 1).

SURAKSAN 수락산

To the east of Bukhansan National Park is Suraksan (638m), another attractive climbing

TOP FIVE CAMPING ESCAPES OUT OF SEOUL

- Bukhansan National Park (p141) – great hikes, awesome views and right in Seoul's backyard.
- Seoraksan National Park (p172) – one of the most gorgeous parks in all Korea, pretty at any time of year.
- Chiaksan National Park (p185) – lush greenery, rushing rivers and ancient temples abound.
- Gyeongpo Beach (p176) – hang out on the beach and party with a mellow, young-ish crowd.
- West Sea Islands (p153) – highlands, mud flats, beaches and ancient tombs.

and hiking area. It's not a national or provincial park, but expect crowds at the weekends or other peak times. One relatively easy hike is to take subway Line 4 to Dangggogae station and hike up past Heungguksa to Suraksan peak, and then descend to Jang-am subway station. A shorter hike from Dangggogae station is up to the top of Bulamsan (508m) and then on to Buramsa and down to Sanggye station. Either way you'll be glad you got out of the city, if only for the afternoon.

SEOUL RACECOURSE 서울 경마장

The racecourse (Map pp84-5; ☎ 509 2054; www.kra.co.kr; admission W800; 11 9.30am-6pm Sat & Sun) has a comfy lounge area in the grandstand on the left for foreigners – take a lift to the 4th floor, turn right and it's near Block A. Short races over 1km or 2km take place every half hour between 11am and 5.30pm at the weekend, and there are night races in July and August as well. The racecourse is closed four weekends of the year – check the racing calendar on the website for details. There are plenty of canteens and fast-food outlets. The Small Equine Museum (☎ 509-1287; admission free; 11 9.30am-6pm) is worth a peek, with a modest but interesting collection of horse-related artefacts and displays.

Getting There & Away

To get there, take subway Line 4 to Seoul Racecourse station (W800) and leave by Exit 2. A covered walkway leads almost all the way to the entrance.

NAMHAN SANSEONG PROVINCIAL PARK 남한산성 도립공원

Completed in 1626, Namhan Sanseong (☎ 743-6610; www.namhansansung.or.kr), a temple/fortress complex and wall 20km southeast of downtown Seoul, is famous for its beautiful pine forests, wildflowers and oaks. It once guarded the city's southern entrance, while Bukhan Sanseong guarded the northern approaches. Buddhist monks – soldiers rather than pacifists in those days – lived here and kept watch. Numerous hiking options wind through the forests, some of them paralleling the old fortress wall, providing fantastic recreation in a site that's very accessible from Seoul.

SUWON 수원

pop 1.04 million / 120 sq km

Suwon, 48km south of Seoul, is the provincial capital of Gyeonggi-do and a city of sensual neon, exotic flavours, all-night discos and ancient history. The faithfully restored fortress of Hwaseong draws tourists from around the globe. It was built between 1794 and 1796 during the reign of King Jeongjo and has been designated a World Heritage site. Suwon is also close to the Korean Folk Village (p147) and makes an easy day trip from Seoul.

Information

The main tourist information centre (☎ 228 4672; www.suwon.ne.kr; 11 9am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb) is outside the railway station, and another tourist information booth (11 9am-6pm) is near Paldal-mun at the start of the fortress walk. Numerous PC bang (PC방; internet room) offer internet access for about W1000 per hour.

KING SEJONG THE GREAT: FATHER OF HAN-GEUL

Honoured as one of only two Korean rulers to have the moniker 'the Great,' Gyeonggi-do's own King Sejong might have had less impact on Korean history were it not for the wisdom of his two elder brothers. Both felt that it was their younger brother who was right for the throne, yet for him to ascend they would first have to be banished. By pretending to be boors, the two elders were deemed unfit to rule and the mandate finally fell on the third brother.

A good thing, too, as Sejong was indeed a remarkable man. Grasping that literacy was a key to a powerful nation, he created the Han-geul writing system, a simple alphabet that (it was said) 'anyone could learn within two months'. In addition to following the already accepted Confucian rules of yin and yang, the characters' shape actually instructed readers where they should place their tongues – making it even easier for uneducated peasants to grasp.

King Sejong was hated by the scholarly elite, who felt literacy was a birthright reserved solely for nobility. Many scoffed at the idea of learning Han-geul; some refused. Yet his effectiveness dealing with the scores of Japanese pirate ships and his understanding of technology won him a revered place in Korean hearts and history – and a spot on the face of the W10,000 note.

Sights

HWASEONG 화성

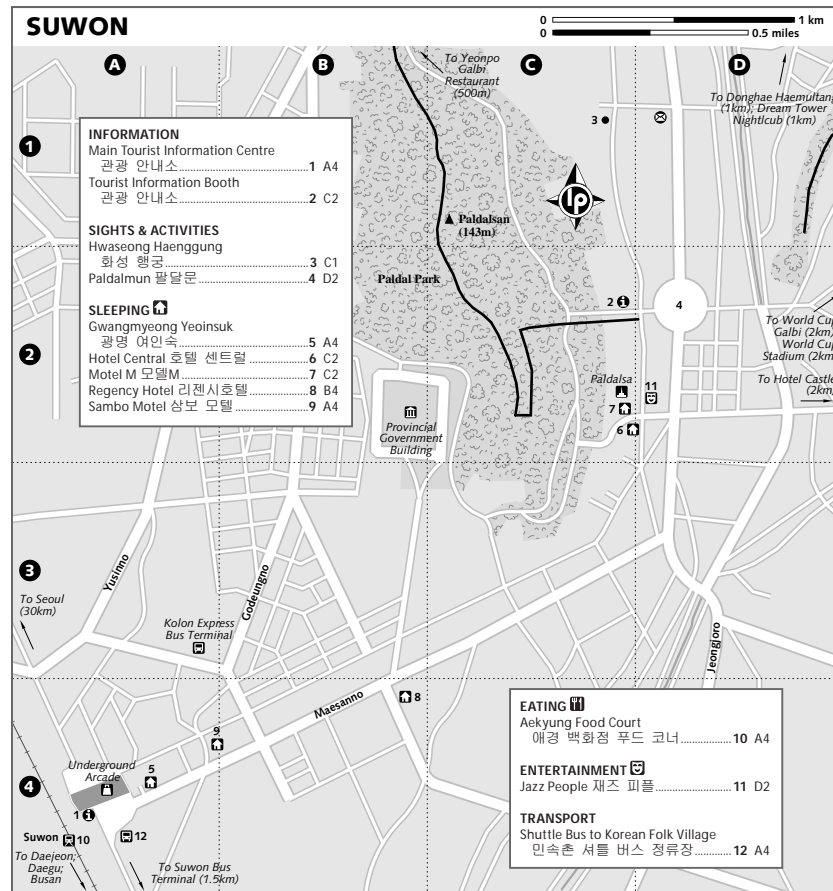
Suwon's impressive fortress wall (admission free; 11 24hr), made of earth and faced with large stone blocks, stretches for 5.7km: 95% of it has been restored. Hiking round the wall with its command posts, observation towers, entrance gates and fire-beacon platform makes for a fascinating two-hour historical walk. Start at Paldal-mun, also known as Nammun (South Gate), and follow the sign. Walk along the wall up to the top of Paldalsan (143m), a good viewpoint, where you might hear and see cuckoos.

HWASEONG HAENGGUNG 화성행궁

Before setting off around the fortress wall, you can visit the palace (http://ehs.suwon.ne.kr; admission W1000; 11 9am-5pm, Tue-Sun) that was originally built by King Jeongjo. Courtyard follows courtyard as you wander around the large walled complex where King Jeongjo's mother held her grand 61st-birthday party (the 61st is considered particularly auspicious and marked a major date in an ancient Korean's life). The palace was destroyed during the Japanese occupation, after which a hospital and school were built on the site. You can try your hand at traditional Korean archery here (W1000 for five arrows).

Festivals & Events

Every October a grand royal procession is re-enacted as part of Suwon's annual festival. It's a grand affair, with colourful costumes and lots of onlookers taking photographs. Visit http://shcf.or.kr for more info.



On weekends from March to November, a re-enactment of the changing of the guard occurs at 3pm (Saturday) or 2pm (Sunday), with a procession, drums and fanfare.

Sleeping

There are very few midrange and top-end hotels. The best deals are love hotels, which offer squeaky-clean rooms, amenities and often internet for about W35,000 (sometimes less).

Gwangmyeong Yeoinsuk (☎ 254 3701; r with/without bathroom W15,000/10,000; a) Right in front of Suwon Station, this typical budget yeoinsuk (family-run hotel) has no beds, only yo (padded quilts) on the floor. The sign, down a dark alley off Maesanno, is easy to miss.

Motel M (☎ 254 4673; r W30,000; a) Rooms in this definite love motel (can't miss the rayc DVDs or the gratis condoms!) are sparsely furnished, but the owner is kind (though no English is spoken). Look for it near the fortress wall, where a long, green carpet of astroturf leads up to the doorway from the street.

Sambo Motel (☎ 242 5776; r W30,000, Sat W35,000; a) Almost impossible to find without calling ahead, the Sambo is in a nest of similar motels; the rooms have cable TV, video, attractive wood linoleum floors, and beds rather than yo.

Regency Hotel (☎ 246 4141; www.htregency.co.kr; r incl breakfast W88,000; a i) Glitzy, big and noisy at times if the function rooms are being rented, this top-end choice offers small rooms, comfy

beds, carpeted floors, gold trim and a fake rose on the table. It's close to the Gyodong Sageori intersection.

Hotel Central (☎ 246 0011; fax 246 0018; d/tw/stg ₩88,000/99,000/180,000; a i) Some rooms overlook the fortress wall, but it's a bit pricey. The hotel has a funky restaurant/bar with retro-style purple couches that's oddly incongruous with the rest of the hotel.

Hotel Castle (호텔 캐슬; ☎ 211 6666; d/tw/stg ₩225,000/275,000/350,000; a i) The expansive marble lobby sets high expectations. Helpful, English-speaking staff, rooms with internet access and AC inverters, a business centre, men's sauna and popular nightclub all help make the Castle stand out. Downsides are minor: the plush rooms are a bit cramped for the price and the dark, carpeted hallways are vaguely reminiscent of *The Shining*. The white grand piano is a tasteful touch, and there's live easy-listening music in the evenings.

Eating

Aekyung Food Court (meals up to ₩6000) On the 2nd floor of the railway station, this smart and clean food court has a bunch of outlets that cook up more than 60 different Korean-style dishes. It's a great place to meander until you find something that suits you.

World Cup Galbi (월드컵 갈비; meals ₩5000-25,000) Overlooking the World Cup Stadium, the best lunch deals are *galbi jeongsik*, a banquet with excellent side dishes or *galbi* (beef ribs). Try the *galbitang* and *naengmyeon* (buckwheat noodles in an icy beef broth, garnished with chopped vegetables and half an egg).

Yeonpo Galbi Restaurant (연포; ☎ 255-1337; meals ₩6000-25,000) Scrumptious smells will guide you here; halfway round the fortress-walk at Hwahongmun, walk down the steps to this popular restaurant, which serves *galbi* and the famous Suwon version of *galbitang*: big portions of beef ribs in a broth served with spicy side dishes.

Donghae Haemultang (동해해물탕; ☎ 206-5333; h 11.30am-11.30pm; platters small/large ₩40,000/60,000) Huge seafood paella-style platters so spicy that your eyeballs scald just looking at it, but mouth-wateringly good if you can stand the capsaicin. The smallest platter will feed a decent army. If you're still hungry afterwards, ask for rice – they fry it to crispy with the platter leftovers. It's in the same building as the Dream Tower Nightclub (see right).

Entertainment

Jazz People (재즈피플; ☎ 243 8802; h 11.30am-2am, 11.30-4am Sat) With a bird's-eye view of Suwon, this comfortable 8th floor hang-out has live music for half an hour every day at 9pm. A mix of soft Korean or foreign love songs make it a popular blind-date spot, and affordable beers and coffees (₩4000) probably help out as well.

Dream Tower Nightclub (드림타워나이트클럽; ☎ 205-7163; women/men ₩35,000/39,000; h 8pm-4am) In the upper floor of a neon-washed building, this hip club caters to a younger, college-age crowd.

Shopping

At the end of the fortress-walk is a large market with fruit, veggies and a variety of other comestible and clothing items, as well as some department stores offering stylish Korean clothing and goods. Prices are comparable to Seoul.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Catch bus 5, 5-1 or 7-1 outside the railway station to go to the Suwon bus terminal. Buses depart from there for:

Destination	Price (₩)	Duration	Frequency
Busan	25,200	5hr	10 daily
Daegu	12,200	3½hr	7 daily
Gwangju	11,800	4hr	every 30min
Gyeongju	18,000	5hr	9 daily
Incheon	3600	1½hr	every 15min

TRAIN

From Seoul take subway Line 1 to Suwon but make sure the train has 'Suwon' (수원) on the front. It costs ₩1200 and takes an hour.

From Suwon, trains depart frequently to cities all over Korea:

Destination	Price (₩)	
	S class	M class
Busan	30,500	20,800
Daegu	21,400	14,500
Daejeon	9500	6400
Jeonju	17,700	12,100
Mokpo	28,200	34,700

Getting Around

Outside the train station on the left, buses 11, 13, 36, 38 and 39 go to Paldalmun (₩700) for the 'round-the-fortress' walk. A taxi is ₩3000.

KOREAN FOLK VILLAGE

한국민속촌

This beautiful folk village (☎ 288 0000; www.koreanfolk.co.kr; adult/youth/child ₩11,000/8000/7000; h 9am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb) has a large collection of thatched and tiled traditional houses that take at least half a day to look around. Set around a quiet river are a temple, a Confucian school and shrine, a market, a magistrate's house with examples of punishments, storehouses, a bullock pulling a cart, and all sorts of household furnishings and tools. In this historical and rural village atmosphere, artisans wearing *hanbok* (traditional Korean clothing) create pots, make paper and weave bamboo, while other workers tend to vegetable plots, pigs and chickens. Even the confections (some of them anyway) are handmade: look for the 'magician' making dragon's beard candy – it's made from honey hand-pulled to widths of a human hair.

Traditional musicians, dancers, acrobats and tightrope walkers perform, and you can watch a wedding ceremony. These events happen twice daily and usually start around 11am and 3pm.

Next door is an amusement park (adult/youth/child ₩16,000/14,000/13,000) aimed at children (price includes admission to the folk village), an art gallery (admission ₩3000) and a world folk museum (adult/youth/child ₩3000/2500/2000). A combo ticket to all three gives you a discount off the separate admission fees.

Getting There & Away

To get there take subway Line 1 to Suwon station (₩1400, one hour). Leave the station, turn left and walk a short distance to the Tourist Information Centre. Here you can purchase tickets for the Korean Folk Village and catch the free shuttle bus (30 minutes, every hour). The last free shuttle bus leaves the folk village at 4pm. After that time, walk to the far end of the car park and catch city bus 37 (₩900, 30 minutes, every 20 minutes) back to Suwon station.

EVERLAND 에버랜드

An expensive amusement park, Everland (☎ 759 1408; www.everland.com), an hour southeast of Seoul, is divided into four separate parts.

The **Ho-Am Art Museum** (호암미술관; ☎ 320 1801; www.hoammuseum.org; adult/child ₩3000/2000; h 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) houses one of Korea's major art collections with 91 Korean national treasures, foreign 20th-century art and a sculpture garden. A free shuttle bus runs

on the hour from outside Festival World Entrance B, which is near the buses to Seoul.

Caribbean Bay (adult/child ₩45,000/35,000 Jun & Sep, ₩55,000/45,000 Jul & Aug; h 9.30am-6pm, closes later Jul & Aug) has an outdoor section (h 1 Jun-15 Sep) with a wave pool, sandy beach, tube rides, body slides, spa pools, a surf pool, lazy pool, an adventure pool and a scuba diving pool. The indoor section (adult/child ₩25,000/18,000) is all that is open from September to May.

Festival World (adult/child day pass ₩28,000/20,000; h 9.30am-6pm, closes later Jul & Aug) follows the Disneyland formula with fantasy buildings, thrill rides, impressive gardens and so on.

Getting There & Away

To get to Everland take subway Line 2 to Gangnam station, leave by Exit 6 and walk to the Everland bus stop (Map pp96-7); take bus 5002 (₩1400, one hour, every 15 minutes). Other buses go to Everland from outside Suwon's train station – take bus 66 or 6000 (₩1400, one hour, every 30 minutes). See the Everland website for up-to-date transport details.

ICHEON 이천

pop 187,000

Just 60km southeast of Seoul is the mountain-surrounded city of Icheon (not to be confused with Incheon on the west coast), famous for its numerous potters, ceramic vendors, Ceramic Village and a relaxing spa. There's no nightlife, but the city has a quiet charm. Shoppers and ceramic lovers may want to stay here overnight to have time to look around or dabble in making something at a hands-on workshop.

There are excellent maps at the visitors centre (☎ 644 2020; h 9am-5pm) near the Seolbongho reservoir. Along with pottery, Icheon is famous for its rice, which some claim is so good that 'it needs no side dishes'. Tourists may find that to be stretching the truth, but the good news is that it's always served with side dishes – and the rice is certainly good, often proudly served in Seoul's finer restaurants.

Miranda Hot Spring Spa 미란다 온천

The splendid **Spa Plus** (스파플러스; ☎ 633 2001; www.mirandahotel.com; adult/child ₩10,000/7000, Sat & Sun ₩12,000/10,000; h 6am-9pm) is a large complex that has ultramodern facilities. Treat yourself to hot, warm and cold baths, a waterfall bath, and rice wine, herbal, pinewood and fruit baths. The spa is next to the Miranda Hotel, which is just a five-minute walk from Icheon bus terminal.

Yeong-woram Hermitage 영월암

Founded by the Jogye sect in the interests of promoting self-cultivation, this 1000-year-old hermitage is perched high above the town, a steep 20-minute walk uphill from the visitors centre. Ancient ginkgo trees shade the brightly painted buildings (burned, unfortunately – the hermitage was carefully restored in 1991). Moss, a giant bell and a carved cliff-face Buddha overlooking the sleepy city all make this a fun place to visit.

Icheon Ceramic Village 이천 도예촌

Don't come here expecting picturesque riverside huts or wispy-bearded characters labouring over kick wheels: the Icheon Ceramic Village (Icheon Doyechon) is a busy town with a main street full of traffic, and the many potteries are spread out over a wide urban area. It's not as scenic as some places, but the huge selection of wares make it a fascinating destination for ceramics lovers or shopping aficionados.

Catch a taxi (W5000) or local bus 114 (W1300) from outside the bus terminal and get off after 15 minutes near Songpa Pottery (송파 도예; ☎ 633-6587; www.songpadoye.com; 9.30am-4.30pm), the large traditional building with blue-green tiles. Inside is unusual crystal-line pottery with fern-like designs as well as traditional inlaid celadon and *buncheong*-style pottery. Don't break anything – it could cost you W1 million. Some household items are W10,000 but a tea set is W60,000.

Walk along the main road and over the bridge to the town and you'll come to a sign in *Han-geul* indicating a right turn to Haegang Museum (a 20-minute walk from Songpa Pottery). Haegang Ceramics Museum (해강 도자 미술관; ☎ 634 2266; adult/youth/child W2000/1000/500; 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) has some interesting old kilns outside that are still used.

If you fancy making your own cup, bowl, or million-won vase, visit Namyang (남양; ☎ 632 7142; adult/child W15,000/10,000; 10am-5pm) where you can don a smock and sit down at a slippery mass of spinning clay, or hand-build something. If you like what you create, Namyang's friendly owners can ship it to you (even overseas) for an additional postage and handling fee (W40,000 or so, depending on weight and destination).

Festivals

From late April through early June, the yearly World Ceramics Festival (www.wocef.com/biennale/eng)

is held, a massive event with potters, vendors and viewers world wide.

Sleeping

You probably want to do Icheon as a day trip from Seoul, but if not, there are numerous options to choose from.

Jeong-eon Park Motel (정연파크 모텔; ☎ 635 1661; r W30,000; a i) Rooms are small, musty and have deep-red track lights if you need 'ambiance'; however, it's the nearest accommodation to the bus terminal, only a one-minute walk away, and the owners are welcoming (though no English is spoken).

Hiwon Hotel (하이원호텔; ☎ 637 3100; r W40,000; a i) Rooms are clean, dark and utterly characterless, but it's a nice option for folks who don't want a love hotel and it's not far from the bus station. Japanese tour groups often stay here, which can sometimes mean a bit of noise.

Now It's The Moon Time (☎ 633 7373; r W45,000; a i) Gets points for the crazy name, but it's also (admittedly, a love hotel) spotlessly clean, brand new and very tastefully done, with heated toilet seats, a DVD collection (not only racy titles, but normal ones too). Many rooms have Jacuzzi-style baths.

Miranda Hotel (미란다호텔; ☎ 633 2001; www.mirandahotel.com; r W236,000; a i) Located next to Spa Plus (p147), where guests receive a 20% discount, and overlooking a small lake with a pavilion on an island, this is the snazziest hotel in Icheon. It has a small business centre and a bowling alley (per game W2800, shoe hire W1000; open from 10am to 10pm). The lobby has fine examples of locally made ceramics.

Other motels can easily be found around Icheon bus station and in Icheon Ceramic Village.

Eating

Near the bus station there are lots of small eateries and restaurants, with the usual Korean fare: *ssambap* (assorted ingredients with rice and wraps), *sundae* (noodle and vegetable sausage), noodles and beef. If you want something more authentic, try one of these:

Yetnal Ssalbapjip (옛날 쌀밥집; ☎ 633 3010; meals W9000-15,000; 9.30am-10pm) Near the Songpa Pottery showroom, you sit on cushions on the floor and eat a banquet of over 20 dishes. Cold plum tea rounds off an excellent feast. The more expensive options include additional steak, crab and fish dishes.

Gomijeong (고미경; ☎ 634 4811; meals W10,000-30,000; 11.30am-9.30pm) On a hillside outside town, Gomijeong claims its rice is 'so good no side dishes are needed'. They may not be needed, but the side dishes are fantastic – a wonderful assortment of preset courses that vary by price. The paper screens, floor seating and delicate lotus-patterned walls all make this a treat worth taking a taxi for. If they have it, the sweet-pumpkin soup is as good as it gets.

Getting There & Away

Bus routes from Seoul's Gangnam bus terminal (Map pp96-7) and Dong-Seoul bus terminal (Map pp98-9) to Icheon (W3600, one hour, every 30 minutes).

INCHEON 인천

☎ 032 / pop 2.5 million / 958 sq km Icheon, a bustling industrial port 36km west of Seoul, is big enough to warrant its own subway line. The international airport sits on an offshore island, so be sure (if you're heading to the airport) that you don't go to Icheon proper. Instead, take a direct bus from Seoul. (A subway service is scheduled to open in

late 2007.) The city has a nice waterfront area with amusement rides, sushi shops, stores and ferries, as well as a very accessible Chinatown right opposite the Line 1 Icheon terminus. Come here for a great day trip out of Seoul, sample some different foods, stroll along with the dating couples or tour groups in Wolmido waterfront, or use Icheon as a skipping stone to the more remote islands.

Icheon became briefly famous in 1950 when the American General Douglas MacArthur led UN forces in a daring landing there behind enemy lines. Military experts doubted that such a tactic could succeed, but it did and within a month the North Koreans were all but defeated. The tide turned again in November of the same year when large numbers of Chinese troops stormed across the border.

Today the Chinese are still crossing the sea to South Korea, though now they have tourist or business visas. Icheon is a cosmopolitan city with docks full of container ships and giant cranes. It has its own metropolitan government, is not part of Gyeonggi-do and has its own telephone code. Ganghwado and other West Sea islands are also part of the Icheon municipality.

SKI RESORTS

Gyeonggi-do has a handful of ski resorts within easy reach of Seoul (an hour or less by bus) and they all provide shuttle buses (around W12,000 return) to and from the capital during the ski season from December to February. Prices vary and travel agents sell package deals that include transport, accommodation, ski-equipment hire and lift passes. Some Koreans ski and snowboard like they drive, so expect a few bumps.

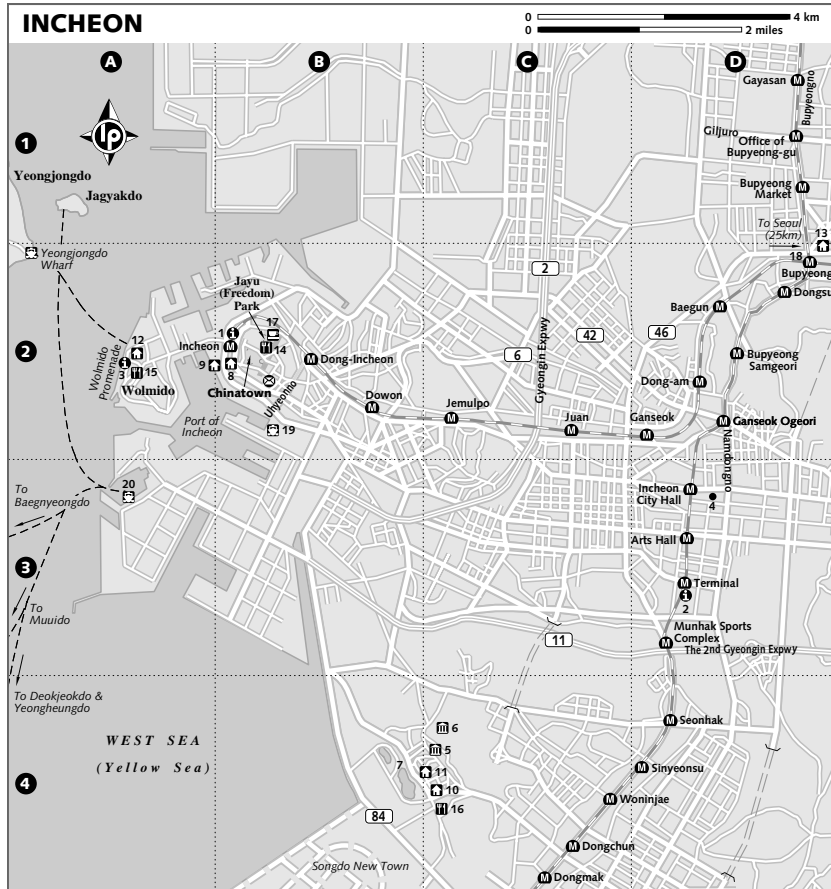
Bears Town Resort (☎ 02-594 8188, 031-540 3156; www.bearstown.com) Located 50 minutes northeast of Seoul, this resort has 11 slopes, two sledding hills and nine lifts, including the Life Line Little Bear, Big Bear, Polar Bear and (you guessed it) Panda Bear. Accommodation includes a youth hostel and a condominium; facilities include a supermarket, heated pool, sauna, bowling alley and tennis courts. English-speaking instructors, snowboarding and night skiing are available. USO, the American troops' activities organisation (see p159), runs ski tours to this resort and anyone is welcome to join. The resort also has its own golf course to attract visitors outside the winter period.

Cheonmasan Star Hill Resort (☎ 02-2233 5311, 346-594 1211; www.starhillresort.com) Just 40 minutes northeast of Seoul, this place has five slopes and seven lifts. The hotel has a heated pool and a 'plastic slope' so skiing is available year-round. English-speaking instructors are available.

Jisan Resort (☎ 02-3442 0322, 031-638 8460; www.jisanresort.co.kr) This resort has nine slopes, snowboarding slopes and four lifts. English-speaking instructors are available. Because it's close to Seoul it gets a lot of office workers and couples. There's even a dedicated 'couples slope' as well as summer grass-skiing. It's located 60 minutes southeast of Seoul.

Seoul Ski Resort (☎ 02-3487 0761, 031-592 1220; www.seoulresort.co.kr) One of the oldest and closest resorts to Seoul (just 40 minutes east of the city), Seoul Ski Resort has three slopes, three lifts, a sledding hill and hotel accommodation (66 rooms).

Yangji Pine Ski Resort (☎ 02-540 6800, 031-338 2001; www.pineresort.com) Fifty minutes southeast of Seoul, this resort has seven slopes, one sledding hill, six lifts and great views from the top. Accommodation is in a hotel or condominium and the latter has a heated pool and bowling alley.



Information

The principal tourist information centre (☎ 435 7257; 9am-6pm) is outside Incheon subway station and the staff are very helpful, with lots of excellent maps, tourist info and suggestions not only for the city, but for the surrounding islands as well. Smaller information centres are in the bus terminal and on Wolmido promenade (☎ 765 4169; 10am-noon & 1-6pm).

Sights

Songdo Resort (☎ 832 0011; admission ₩3000) has a fairground with thrill rides, paddle boats, a water slide and swimming in a large salt-water lake that is popular in summer. A Big Three ticket is ₩10,000, a Big Five ticket costs ₩15,000.

Also in Songdo is the **Incheon Landing Memorial Monument Hall** (☎ 832 0915; admission free; 9am-6.30pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb, closed Mon). Old newsreel films of the Korean War reveal the ugly reality of modern warfare. Sixteen countries sent troops or medical units to help South Korea, and 70,000 UN and South Korean troops took part in the surprise landing in Incheon in 1950, supported by 260 warships.

Next door is **Incheon Municipal Museum** (☎ 832 2570; adult/child ₩400/free; 9am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb, closed Mon), which has an excellent collection of celadon pottery that spans 19 centuries.

Wolmido enjoys sea breezes and is one of the nicer places in Incheon, though nice depends on your definition. The bus/taxi

INFORMATION

Tourist Information Centre
관광 안내소..... 1 B2
Tourist Information Centre
관광 안내소..... 2 D3
Tourist Information Centre
관광 안내소..... 3 A2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

City Hall 시청..... 4 D3
Incheon Landing Memorial
Monument Hall
인천 상륙 작전 기념관..... 5 C4
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Hong Kong Motel 홍콩 모텔..... 8 B2
Paradise Hotel
파라다이스 호텔..... 9 A2
Ramada Songdo
라마다송도..... 10 C4
Songdo Hilltop Hotel
송도 힐탑 호텔..... 11 C4
Sophia Motel 소피아 모텔..... 12 A2
Utopia Motel 유토피아 모텔 (see 12)
Venus Motel 베니스모텔..... 13 D2
Buanbu 부엔부..... 14 B2
Jjangu Jonghap Bunsik
짱구중합분식..... 15 A2

Multeombeong 물텀벙..... 16 C4

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Café Castle 카페캐슬..... 17 B2
SHOPPING
Underground Shopping Arcade
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TRANSPORT

Bus Terminal
종합 버스 터미널..... (see 2)
International Ferry Terminal 2
국제 여객 터미널..... 19 B2
Yeonan Pier
연안 부두..... 20 A3

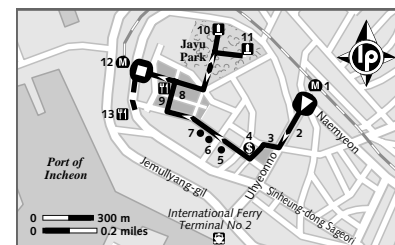
ride passes some amazing container ships, port loading docks, cranes and machinery... interesting, yes, but not quite 'scenic' beauty. The waterfront promenade is a popular place with dating couples. In summer young people gather here in the evening to listen to music, drink alcohol and let off fireworks. On off days or when it rains there is very little to do.

An amusement park has the usual rides for around ₩3000 each. Frequent ferries leave from here to Yeongjongdo, the airport island with a popular spa, beach and seafood restaurants.

Walking Tour

The walk is only 2km and takes an hour, but more if you linger and explore.

Take the subway to **Dong-Incheon station** (1). Follow the exit signs for the **Sinpo underground shopping arcade** (2), and spend some time window shopping. Turn right at the **Gyeongdongsa 4 Geori intersection** and onto **Sinpo Fashion Street** (3). Turn left after the **Keum Kang shoe store** and head for **SC First Bank** (4). Turn right again and look on the left for three historical Japanese bank buildings (5, 6, 7), which date back to the 1890s when Korea was opened up to foreign companies.



Chinatown (8) deserves a good meander. It has a new gate, new lamp posts and interesting murals. Stores sell souvenirs, clothes, shoes and other goods, but restaurants can be pricey.

You can munch scrumptious dumplings at the **Wonbo Dumpling Shop** (9), where three big dumplings filled with meat, mushrooms, noodles or tofu cost just ₩3000.

Up the steps is **Jayu Park** (Freedom Park) with commanding views over the city, and several statues: the **US Treaty Memorial** and the **Korean Centennial** (10), and the statue of **General MacArthur** (11), who changed the course of Korean history with his daring landing at Incheon in 1950.

From the park, walk back down to **Chinatown** and **Incheon subway station** (12). If you want a drink, a meal or to play with a one-armed bandit, head to the **Paradise Hotel** (13) with its views over the busy port.

Tours

You can pick up two tours outside Incheon subway station. The **City Tour** (adult/youth/child ₩1000/500/300) takes four hours and runs eight times daily.

The **Airport Island Tour** (adult/youth/child ₩4000/3000/1300) takes about three hours. Contact the Incheon subway station tourist information centre (see Information opposite) for tour departure times, which vary depending on the season.

Sleeping

Old-fashioned *yeogwan* (motels with small en suites) are scattered all over Incheon, but they cluster around **Bupyeong subway station** (take Exit 6 and walk towards the golf driving range) and in **Wolmido** and **Songdo**.

NEAR INCHEON SUBWAY STATION

Hong Kong Motel (☎ 777 9001; r W30,000; a) One of the best budget options, this place has love-hotel touches but is clean, with crisp sheets, linoleum floors and even small sofas in the rooms. It faces the Paradise Hotel on the opposite side of the street.

Paradise Hotel (☎ 762 5181; www.paradiseincheon.co.kr; d/tw W192,000/276,000; a i) Built on a hill overlooking the port, this long-established hotel has a small casino. Steak meals cost W36,000 in the Western-style restaurant. Korean or Western-style rooms are available and there's a sauna as well (W15,000). Turn right as you exit the subway station and follow the road, looking to the right for the hotel on the hill.

NEAR BUPYEONG SUBWAY STATION

Venus Motel (베니스모텔; ☎ 524 0945; r W25,000, Fri & Sat W45,000; a) Some rooms are a bit stale, but this is one of the nicest cheap options in Incheon and the staff are friendly. Triple rooms are available for W30,000 (W45,000 on Friday and Saturday). It's located on a small side street to the left of the station, just next to the larger, fancier (and less friendly) Plaza Motel.

A number of other motel and *yeoinsuk* (family-run hotel) options are on the same street, and there are other options nearby.

WOLMIDO

A number of motels are dotted around Wolmido, although many of them have seen better days. Among the better options are the **Utopia Motel** (☎ 764 6353; r W30,000, Sat W35,000; a), which is a far cry from utopian, and the **Sophia Motel** (☎ 773 1783; r W25,000; a).

SONGDO

Songdo Hilltop Hotel (송도힐탑호텔; ☎ 834 3500; r W40,000, VIP room W60,000; a i) Dark, almost gothic décor. VIP rooms are slightly fancier and all include PCs, but some standard rooms have computers as well as no extra charge.

Ramada Songdo (라마다송도호텔; ☎ 830 2200; www.ramada-songdo.co.kr/eng/default.asp; r W252,000; a i) The luxury-accommodation choice with posh furnishings, beach and ocean views, three restaurants, a sauna and gym, a business centre and an internet line in every room. *Ondol*-style rooms (with underfloor heating systems) are slightly cheaper than Western-style ones.

Eating & Drinking
WOLMIDO

Prices are high here, but dishes are meant for sharing and you can order *gonggibap* (steamed rice) to cut down on the number of seafood dishes. Sushi, sashimi and beef are popular.

If you want something easier on the wallet, try the spotlessly clean **Jjanggu Jonghap Bunsik** (장구중합분식; ☎ 765-6501; meals W2000-6000; h 9.30am-10pm), right across the street from the noisy carnival, for nice *gimbap* (Korean sushi) and *mandu* (filled dumplings). It's open 365 days of the year.

SONGDO

Restaurants in this touristy neighbourhood tend to be more Western than Korean, but by Ramada Songdo is **Multeombeong** (meals W20,000), which offers fish and crab meals.

CHINATOWN

From the Line 1 Incheon subway stop, head across the street and up the hill for a variety of Chinese restaurants.

Buanbu (부안부; ☎ 765-7787; www.bunbu.co.tv; meals W4000-6000, set menus from W15,000; h 11am-10pm) On the left at the top of the first intersection, Buanbu ('Bu and Bu') offers great spicy noodles, clam soups and a variety of other scrumptious dishes.

Café Castle (☎ 773 2116; www.cafecastle.co.kr; coffee, sweets W2000-7000; h 11.30am-midnight) Enjoy fantastic views of the port from this small, leafy, intimate café. It's at the top of Chinatown, right near the steps to the park. Be sure to tell them beforehand if you don't like your coffee sweet.

Getting There & Away
BOAT

Yeonan Pier and International Ferry Terminal 2 are the departure points for regular international ferries to a number of Chinese cities (see p399). Yeonan Pier also has a domestic ferry terminal where boats leave for Jeju-do (W46,000 to W90,000) and 14 of the larger inhabited islands in the West Sea, which cost from W5500 to W30,000 depending on the distance and the speed of the ferry. A more frequent service is provided in summer, when many holidaymakers head out to the beaches and seafood restaurants on these attractive and relaxing islands. A regular ferry (W1500, 25 minutes, every 20 minutes from 6am to

9.30pm) runs from Wolmido promenade to Yeongjongdo.

BUS

From Seoul, it's faster, cheaper and easier to take the subway to Incheon. But from other cities it is not necessary to go to Seoul first, as there are direct buses to Incheon. From Incheon you can get a bus to these destinations:

Destination	Price (W)	Duration	Frequency
Cheonan	6000	1½hr	every 30min
Cheongju	8300	2hr	every 30min
Chuncheon	9900	3hr	hourly
Gongju	9500	2½hr	every 1½hr
Incheon	5000	1hr	every 30min
Int'l Airport			
Jeonju	10,300	3hr	hourly
Suwon	3400	1hr	every 20min

The bus terminal has a department store, chemist shop, post office, cinema and a tourist information centre.

TRAIN

Take subway Line 1 from Seoul (W1400), which takes around 70 minutes, though it branches at Guro and not all trains go all the way to the Incheon terminus. Incheon city has its own subway system, which doesn't cover the tourist areas but does go to the bus terminal.

Getting Around

BUS & TAXI

Buses (W900) and taxis leave from outside Dong-Incheon and Incheon subway stations.

To get to Songdo, hop on bus 6, 9 or 16, or take a taxi (W5000).

To Wolmido, it's a 20-minute walk from Incheon subway station or a W2200 taxi ride. To get to Yeonan Pier, take bus 12, 24 or 28, or hail a taxi (W5000).

For the International Ferry Terminal 2, take bus 23 or a taxi (W1900). If you go to the wrong ferry terminal, a taxi between the two costs W5000.

Bus 306 goes to Yeongjongdo (W3600, every 20 minutes), the airport island, where Yeongjongdo market and Eulwangni Beach are worth a visit (see right).

SUBWAY

Incheon has one subway line, running in a north-south direction. It intersects with the

KNR line at Bupyeong station, where there is Lotte Mart, an underground shopping arcade, a budget food court, cinemas and a cluster of older-style *yeogwan*. If you arrive at Incheon bus terminal, you can walk down to the subway station. The basic subway fare is W800 and Seoul subway cards can be used on the Incheon line.

ISLAND HOPPING IN THE WEST SEA

Sandy beaches, sea views, rural scenery, vineyards, fresh air and fresh seafood – the West Sea islands are a different world to Seoul. Dozens of islands are technically part of the Incheon municipality, even though it can take hours to reach them by boat. The islands are mostly rocky, though coves hide a few excellent sandy beaches. Some islands have rare smooth-stone beaches. The stones are called *mongdol* and it takes centuries of tidal action to produce them. It is illegal to collect these stones, so don't try to take any home with you.

For the Koreans, a major reason to visit the islands is to indulge in a *saengseon hoe* (raw fish) culinary safari. Island restaurant menus typically include *saengseon chobap* (vinegared rice with raw fish), *saengseon-gui* (grilled fish) and *mae-untang* (spicy fish soup). If seafood appeals to you, be sure to ask the price first – the species of fish as well as the season and the cooking (or noncooking) method greatly influence the price, which can vary from so-so reasonable to 'Oh-my-god-it-costs-that-much?' outrageous.

Before embarking for the islands, stock up with sufficient cash – money-changing facilities and ATMs are next to nonexistent in this far-flung corner of Korea.

Minbak (private homes with rooms for rent) and *yeogwan* cost W20,000 to W30,000, but prices double in July and August when the island beaches become crowded. However, at other times (even warm weekends in June and September) you'll probably have the beach to yourself.

Yeongjongdo & Muuido

영종도, 무의도

Although Yeongjongdo is home to Korea's busiest international airport, the western beaches are not disturbed by the air traffic. The seafood market at Yeongjongdo Wharf and a flashy seawater hot spa are other popular attractions. In the north of the island, Airport

Town Square has been developed with half a dozen new midrange hotels, a guesthouse and apartments for airport workers.

Yeongjongdo Wharf Market sells fish, shellfish, crabs and other varied seafood, which nearby restaurants will cook and serve for you (see opposite).

Behind the market, take bus 202 (W1200, 20 minutes, hourly) and ask the driver to drop you near Jamjindo if you want to visit Muuido. From the bus stop, walk over the causeway from Yeongjongdo to the islet of Jamjindo (잠진도) and enjoy the views. A 15-minute walk brings you to the small ferry to Muuido (W1000, at least hourly).

On Muuido Wharf, try a delicious, fresh shellfish barbecue – a big bowl costs W25,000 (feeds three or four people) and octopus *pajeon* (green-onion pancake) is W4000. Then it's a 10-minute walk to the fishing village, where you can turn right and walk over the hill past cherry trees and grapevines for 15 minutes to Keunmuri Resort (큰무리 리조트; admission Jun & Sep/Jul & Aug W1000/2000, huts W30,000/42,000) where there are camp sites, pine trees, a sandy beach and a swimming pool. At

low tide you can walk across to the unspoilt and uninhabited islet of Silmido (실미도).

Return the same way you came, and on Yeongjongdo you can catch a bus or hitch a lift to the popular western beaches. Eulwangni Beach (을왕리 해수욕장) is 10 minutes from the Jamjindo drop-off point by bus and has new motels, *minbak*, *noraebang* (karaoke rooms) and many restaurants. This beach is the most popular because the sea doesn't recede at low tide leaving behind huge mud flats, as it does along most of the west coast.

For a quieter beach, walk north to Wangsan Beach (왕산 해수욕장). The western beaches, set among rice fields and vineyards, are attractive (nearby Incheon International Airport doesn't affect them) and the mud flats harbour clams, sea worms, birds and mudskippers. Take bus 301 or 316 (W1300, 15 minutes, every 30 minutes) and get off at the last stop.

Haesupia Spa (해수피아 스파; % 886 5800; adult/child W6000/4000; 11am-8pm) is a luxury sea-water hot spa with nice views and restaurants, located on the road between Yeongjongdo Wharf and Jamjindo. Shuttle buses run there from Yeongjongdo Wharf.

SLEEPING

Eulwangni Beach

A wide range of accommodation is available by Eulwangni Beach – everything from small bare rooms to luxury suites with a balcony. From the airport, use bus 301 or 316 and get off at the last stop. There's beachside camping near the pine groves.

Chowon Motel (초원 모텔; % 746 3369; rW30,000, Sat & Sun W40,000; a) Small but modern rooms right on the beach; prices double in summer.

Carib Beach Hotel (카리브 모텔; % 751 5455; rW50,000-80,000; a) Shaped like a ship, but this love motel isn't as ship-shape as it could be. That said, views are fantastic from the 'porthole' windows and it's just steps away from the water. There's a karaoke bar in the basement. Prices are up to 50% higher on Saturdays and during summer.

Airport Town Square

Airport Town Square is a relatively new town that has been built on Yeongjongdo a few kilometres from the airport, not to be confused with the even-closer-to-the-tarmac Airport Business District; the latter is essentially a few large business hotels and accompanying stores. Most accommodation in both places is quite new, and either town could be good for an overnight stay after you come or before you leave. Bus 223 (W900, 10 minutes, every 30 minutes) and 203 (W1300, 10 minutes, every 30 minutes) run between Airport Town Square and Incheon International Airport. There is also a free shuttle bus service (10 daily) from the airport (3rd floor exit, Gate 5). Some hotels provide a free pick-up or drop-off service to and from the airport, but others charge up to W20,000. Bus 111-1 runs between Town Square and Incheon city.

Guesthouse Korea (게스트하우스코리아; % 747 1872; www.guesthousekorea.co.kr; s/d or tw W38,000/48,000; a i) This unusual guesthouse has large, light, modern, motel-style rooms on various floors in a new building in the Airport Business District. Spacious rooms have kitchenettes, cable TV and free internet. Deluxe rooms are nicer, bigger and (amazingly!) cost the same; some even have a washing machine. Free pick-up from the airport is also provided.

Hotel Airpark (호텔 에어파크; % 752 2266; www.hotelairpark.com; r W80,000; a i) Another newish hotel with a restaurant, bar and a coffee shop. Rooms have real-wood floors

and a feng-shui feel. Baths are attractive, with frosted glass walls.

Hub Herb Hotel (허브허브 모텔; % 752 1991; r W80,000; a i) Ask for a discount, as the price varies on availability. Lamé bedspreads seem more Versailles than Korea. Rooms are cramped but clean.

Hotel Sky (호텔 스카이; % 752 1101; www.hotelsky.co.kr; r W90,000; a i) Faded but friendly, with black marble in the lobby and one building that's entirely reserved for nonsmokers. Facilities include a business centre, restaurant and coffee shop.

Incheon Airport Hotel (인천에어포트 호텔; % 752 2066; www.incheonairporthotel.co.kr; s/d & ondul W115,000/135,000; a i) All rooms have a TV, DVD players and (yes, ugly) fridge-sized vending machines, while special rooms have snazzy triangular whirlpool baths, desktop PCs and fax machines. A golf driving range is on the roof. Advance reservations can drop the price by W20,000 or so.

EATING

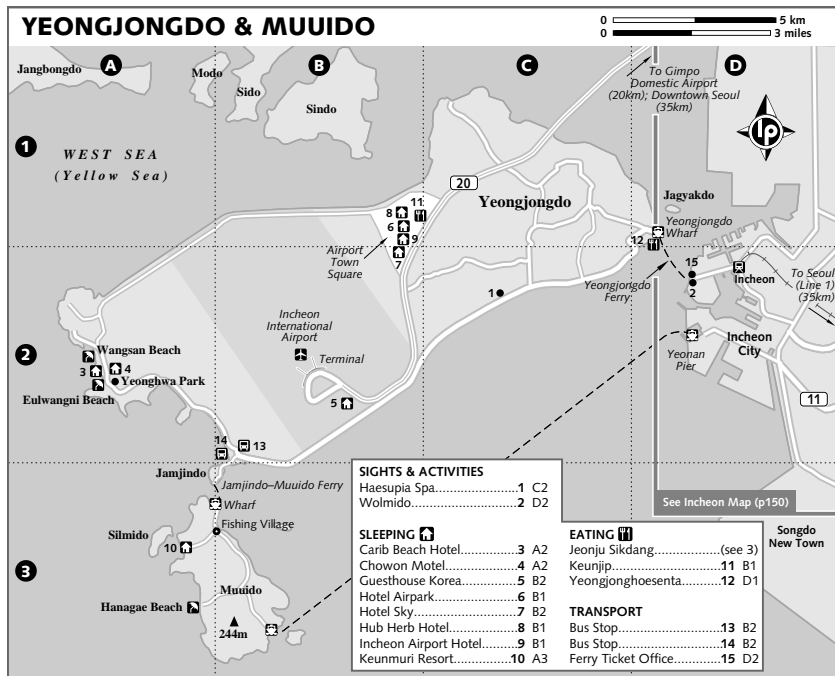
You can buy fish, shellfish, prawns or blue crabs at Yeongjongdo Wharf Market and take them to a restaurant such as Yeongjonghoesenta (영종 회센타; % 032-746 0155), where you can have it cooked and served with quail eggs and shellfish soup for W5000. Popular raw fish such as the black-skinned *ureok* or *gwang-eo* (flounder) cost around W10,000 each, while prawns or blue crab are around W20,000 per kg. It's a much better deal than you get in Wolmido.

Keunjip (큰집; % 752 1442; meals W5000-10,000; 11am-10pm) In Airport Town Square, this place cooks up a tasty *ppyeohaeganguk*, a hotpot of big meaty bones served with rice.

Jeonju Sikdang (전주식당; % 746 2115; soup W5000; 11am-11pm) Handmade, udon-style noodles in a delicious, nonspicy broth make the seafood soup a winner. Look for this greasy-spoon in the first floor of the Carib Beach Motel.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To visit Yeongjongdo and Muuido, take subway Line 1 to Incheon station and then a taxi (W1500) to Wolmido. On the promenade is the ticket office for the car ferry to Yeongjongdo. The adult/child fare is W2000/1500 for the 20-minute trip and ferries run every half hour from 7am to 9pm daily. Cars cost an additional W6500. An alternative way



GYEONGGI-DO

GYEONGGI-DO

to or from Muuido is by a high-speed ferry (W8900, 20 minutes, 10.30am) or regular ferry (W5650, one hour, 8am and 5pm), which travel between Incheon's Yeonan Pier and the port on the south of Muuido island.

If you don't need to go to the port (and onward to Muuido or other islands), just take an express bus to the airport (W8000) from Seoul and then use local buses, shuttles, or taxis from there.

Jagyakdo 작약도

In summer the landscape of this tiny island is decked out with *jagyak* (peonies), thus the island's name. The island is also heavily forested with pines. Jagyakdo is just 3km north of Wolmido, but you don't get the boat from there. If you'd like to spend the night, there is one *yeogwan* and 15 bungalows for rent on the island.

Ferries (W7000, 30 minutes, hourly from 10am to 5pm) depart from Incheon's Yeonan Pier.

Yeongheungdo 영흥도

Simnipo Beach, at the northwest corner of the island, is 30km from Incheon. The beach has a 4km-long pebbly stretch and a 1km sandy stretch.

The ferry (W25,000, four hours, four a week, but more often in summer) leaves from Incheon's Yeonan Pier. With the new bridge to the island, you can also reach the island by bus (four a day).

Deokjeokdo 덕적도

This is one of the most scenic islands that can be reached from Incheon, and the high-speed ferries make a one-day excursion from Seoul possible. But why be in a rush to leave? Sit back and relax. The island is 77km from Incheon, and along its southern shore is Seopori Beach, which is 2km long and lined with a thick grove of 200-year-old pine trees. The beach is spectacular and easily the most popular on the island. The island also has many unusual rock formations and it's worth climbing the highest peak, Bijobong (292m) for the grand view.

There are plenty of *yeogwan* and *minbak* as well as a camping ground at Seopori Beach.

No matter which ferry you take, you will be dropped off at Jilli Pier on Deokjeokdo. From there, it's a 20-minute bus ride to Seopori Beach. The high-speed ferry (W17,500,

50 minutes, 9.30am and 3pm) is the best option, although there is a cheaper regular ferry (W12,000, 2½ hours, 1.30pm and 7.30pm).

Baengnyeongdo 백령도

Far to the northwest of Incheon and within a stone's throw of North Korea is Baengnyeongdo, a scenic island that is attracting an increasing number of tourists. The island is South Korea's westernmost point and is notable for its remoteness and dramatic coastal rock formations – taking a tour around the island by boat to view these unusual rock shapes is a 'must do'. With North Korea a stone's throw away, the military presence is visible.

Sagot Beach is 3km long and consists of sand packed so hard that people can (and do) drive cars on it. In contrast, some of the other beaches in the area are pebble. The Koreans like to walk barefoot on the pebbles or even lie down on them, because they believe that the resulting acupressure is good for their health.

The island is served by a high-speed ferry (W43,700, four hours, twice daily) and a regular ferry (W29,500, eight hours, once daily). Both ferries leave from Incheon's Yeonan Pier.

GANGHWADO 강화도

☎ 032 / pop 57,700 / 319 sq km

Famous for its 'stamina producing' ginseng, Ganghwado is still a rural island that seems oddly distant from the bustle and craziness of Seoul, despite the fact that it is less than a two-hour bus ride away. Egrets stalk through verdant rice fields, gulls chase french fries from the ferries and the pace of life is slow – boring even, but boring in the best of ways.

Attractions include numerous small fortifications; one of Korea's largest dolmen (a prehistoric burial chamber) which is a World Heritage monument; Manisan with an ancient stone altar on its summit; and a 10km coastal bicycle track.

A short ferry trip away on Seongmodo is one of the country's most important temples, Bomunsa, with a cliff-carved Buddha and beautiful old pines. Numerous sashimi and seafood restaurants make dining a pleasure, though you may find seafood is the only item and it can be pricey.

Ganghwa-eup 강화읍

The main town, Ganghwa-eup, is not particularly scenic, but is just 2km beyond the

northern bridge and makes a good base for visiting the island's attractions. The **tourist information centre** (☎ 930 3515; www.ganghwa.incheon.kr; ㄱ 9am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5pm Nov-Feb) in the bus terminal has helpful English-speaking staff.

A palace surrounded by an 18km fortress wall was built in 1231 and 2km of walls and three major gates have been renovated. The fortress was destroyed in 1866 by French troops, who invaded Korea in response to the execution of nine French Catholic missionaries. The French army burnt many priceless books and took 300 back to France where they still remain, though recently the French government has been less opposed to returning this part of Korean heritage.

The market near the bus terminal sells locally grown ginseng and *hwamunseok* (화문석), which are large reed mats with floral designs that are beautiful but very expensive. Woven baskets are cheaper, easier to transport and have similar designs.

Springtime brings the Dolmen Cultural Festival (celebrating this unique ancient burial ground with festivities that include a dolmen construction re-enactment) and the Ganghwado Azalea Festival, both held in October.

Gourmands will want to try the grilled eel and the (in season) Large Eyed Herring sashimi, both of which are island specialties.

There are *yeogwan* scattered around the town centre.

The accommodation nearest the bus terminal, **Hyatt Motel** (하얏트 모텔; ☎ 933 0710; r W35,000, Sat & Sun W50,000; a i), has large, comfortable rooms, dark hallways and a friendly owner. Internet rooms cost W5000 more. Turn left outside the bus terminal and it's a five-minute walk along the main road.

Namsan Youth Hostel (남산 유스호스텔; ☎ 934 7777; dm/f W12,000/40,000) offers cheap beds for solo travellers but is a 20-minute, 2km walk southwest of the bus terminal, so you might want to take a taxi.

Ganghwa Bus Station restaurants (☎ 934-1239; meals W2000-6000; ㄱ 10am-9pm), in the bus terminal on the second floor, offer various Korean meals. There's a coffee shop as well (open 8.30am to 8pm).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses to Ganghwa-eup (W4400, 1½ hours, every 10 minutes from 5.10am to 9.45pm) leave from Sinchon bus terminal in Seoul.

Around Ganghwa-eup

The small but modern **Ganghwa History Hall** (강화역사관; ☎ 933 2178; adult/youth & child W1300/700; ㄱ 8.30m-7pm Mar-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Nov-Feb) reveals the island's interesting history and is located near a fortification (Gaggot Dongdae) close to the northern bridge. If you want to visit ask the bus driver to drop you off there rather than in Ganghwa-eup bus terminal, or else you'll need to take a taxi.

Even if history isn't your thing, there's a fun cycle path here that goes to Gwangseongbo, 10km away along the coast. It's a scenic, mainly flat jaunt, though the summer sun can be scorching. Rent bikes from the **bicycle rental shop** (☎ 933 3692; mountain bike/tandem per hr W2000/4000, per day W8000/12,000) but return them by 6pm. Eel restaurants, rice fields, flowers and seagulls will greet you along the way.

Buses (W900, five minutes, every 1½ hours from 6.20am to 7.45pm) go from the museum to Ganghwa-eup bus terminal, which is 2km away. Otherwise hitching a lift into town should not be a problem.

Manisan 마니산

This **park** (☎ 937 1624; adult/youth/child W1500/800/500; ㄱ 6am-6pm) is in the island's southwest, 14km from Ganghwa-eup. On the 468m-summit is **Chamseongdan** (참성단), a large stone altar said to have been originally built and used by Dan-gun, the mythical first Korean, who was born in 2333 BC. Every 3 October on National Foundation Day (a public holiday), a colourful shamanist ceremony is held here. The 3km walk to the top from the bus stop includes over 900 steps, takes an hour and on a fine day the views are splendid.

Buses from Ganghwa-eup run to Manisan (W1300, 30 minutes, every 50 minutes from 6.50am to 7.30pm).

Jeondeungsa 전등사

This **temple** (☎ 937 0125; adult/youth/child W1800/1300/1000; ㄱ 6am-sunset) built inside a fortress is famous for the 80,000-plus wooden blocks of Buddhist scriptures, the Tripitaka Koreana, that were carved here between 1235 and 1251 and later moved to Haeinsa Temple (see p195).

Bugeun-ni Dolmen 부근리 고인돌

The biggest dolmen (admission free; ㄱ 24hr) on Ganghwado is an impressive sight and has a top stone weighing more than 50 tonnes. Replicas of other ancient relics such as Stonehenge

and the Easter Island statues can be seen there too. The site can be visited by bus (W900, 15 minutes, hourly from 6.20am to 8pm) or taxi (W2500, 10 minutes).

Oepo-ri 외포리

If you have been yearning for a close look at seagulls, come to Oepo-ri, a fishing village on the west coast about 13km from Ganghwa-eup. 'Flocks' is too small a word to describe the number of happy 'rats with wings' that follow the ferries between Oepo-ri to Seongmodo.

Even if you stay on land, there's a quiet beauty here. The views of the harbour, mud flats and (yes) seagulls seem to be cut from a Korean silk painting. Fishing trawlers, either sun dappled or mist cloaked, chug in and out of the port, through a backdrop of lavender-coloured islands; it's not hard to imagine that life here has been little changed for decades.

The seafood market (turn right after you get to the water) has good prices and there are decent restaurants and *yeogwan*. It's also the terminal for the ferry to Seongmodo (석모도), where the main attraction is the temple Bomunsa.

Ganghwa Youth Hostel (강화 유스호스텔; ☎ 933 8891; www.gh-yh.co.kr; dm/f W12,000/70,000), an institutional-style youth hostel, doesn't have the ambience of some and is a bit off the beaten path, but offers a cheap night's sleep for the budget traveller.

At the **Blue Moon Motel** (블루문 모텔; ☎ 933 4056; r W30,000, Sat W40,000; a) rooms are smallish and a bit stuffy, but clean, with the usual love-hotel amenities and a choice of *ondol* or Western options. Tinted windows offer privacy whether it's needed or not, and the location makes it a good choice for those planning to head to Bomunsa the following day.

Buses from Ganghwa-eup (W1100, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes from 6.40am to 6.40pm) take a scenic cross-island route. Ferries depart from the two tiny terminals for Seongmodo (right), as well as other islands.

Bomunsa 보문사

Situated high (steep walk, many stairs, catch your breath at the top) in the pine-forested hills of Seongmodo island, this temple (☎ 933 8271; adult/youth/child W1500/1200/800; ㄱ 8am-7pm) has some superbly ornate painting on the eaves of its various buildings. The grotto and 10m rock carving are standout features. Korean women come here in hopes of conceiving sons, and

the Korean grandmothers you see are not praying for sons for themselves but for their daughters. Resorts and restaurants are dotted around the island's coastline, but you can also make this a day trip from Seoul if you don't mind getting up early and returning late.

Ferries (☎ 932 6007) depart Oepo-ri for Seongmodo (adult/child W1600/800, 10 minutes, every 30 minutes) between 7am and 8.30pm. The ferry also transports cars (W14,000 return). On Seongmodo a bus (W1000, hourly on weekdays, every 30 minutes on weekends) takes you to near the temple but it's a steep climb up. *Steep*.

PANMUNJOM & THE DMZ TOUR

관문점

Panmunjom, only 55km north of Seoul, is the only place in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) where visitors are permitted. This is the village established on the ceasefire line at the end of the Korean War in 1953. In the blue UN buildings in Panmunjom, peace discussions still take place, though there's something surreal, almost comic, about the pomp and precautions. Perhaps even more surreal is the giant, ultramodern train station at the border, empty save for tourists, yet ready to serve a united Korea the minute the boundary lines are lifted.

There's nowhere else in South Korea where you can get so close to North Korea and North Korean soldiers without being arrested or shot, and the tension is palpable. And yet, at the same time, there's a theatrical aspect here too, with posturing on both sides. Though your tour will likely be a quiet one, the soldier 'tour guides' will happily remind you that gun battles erupt in this frontier village – and that North Korean spies still slip across the border from time to time. (Such incidents usually end with the spies getting caught, being shot, or swallowing poison and committing suicide. And you thought that only happened in B-grade Hollywood movies, right?) Sabre rattling or no, the threat of North Korea remains a big issue in the region and conflicts flare up from time to time. Shots were fired in 2001 and 2003, and in 2006 North Korea successfully tested missiles and seemed bent on attaining nuclear capabilities despite international pressure for disarmament.

The DMZ, a strip of land 4km wide and 248km long, divides the two Koreas and is one of the most heavily fortified borders in the

world. Even a hungry opossum would have a tough time slipping through the high fences topped with barbed wire, watchtowers, anti-tank obstacles and minefields that line both sides of the DMZ.

Both US and South Korean troops live in Camp Bonifas, which is 'In Front of Them All' and would face the brunt of any surprise attack from the North. At one point around 1800 soldiers were stationed here. Now it is about 600, most of which are South Korean men serving their required two years of military service.

There are only two villages in the DMZ, and they're both near Panmunjom – and within hailing distance of each other if you have a big enough loudspeaker. On the south side is Dae-seong, a subsidised village with a church and high tax-free incomes. Each family there lives in a modern house with high-speed internet connection, and each farms seven hectares. All 230 residents must be at home by the 11pm curfew, and soldiers stand guard while the villagers work in the rice fields or tend their ginseng plants.

Gijeong, the North Korean village in the DMZ, is even more unusual because all the buildings are empty and always have been. According to the US soldiers, it's a ghost town whose only function is to broadcast propaganda to anyone around for six to 12 hours a day, using ultra-powerful loudspeakers as big as a house that any rock band would love to own. The village also has a 160m-high Eiffel Tower-like structure, flying a flag that weighs nearly 300kg. The North Korean flag

is larger than the one on the South Korean side. Giant *Han-gul* letters on the northern hillsides spell out slogans such as 'Follow the way of the Leader', while on the South Korean side the message 'Freedom, Abundance and Happiness' is lit up at night.

The tour includes a visit inside one of the UN buildings, where official meetings are still sometimes held, and which look like temporary classrooms with simple tables and chairs. Both sides constantly monitor the rooms so everything you say can be overheard. On the ceasefire line soldiers from the North and South stand only centimetres apart. The South Korean soldiers stand guard in a modified 'taekwondo' stance, and North Korean soldiers sometimes peer – expressionless – into the windows (making for great photo ops). Dangerous or not, posturing or not, it's a surreal experience that will make a clear impression.

See the excellent film *USA* for a dramatic story set in the DMZ about what happens when ordinary soldiers from both sides meet by accident.

Getting There & Away

Access to Panmunjom is permitted for tour groups only – this is not a do-it-yourself trip. You must have your passport or you won't be allowed to board the tour bus, and unlike the immigration checks at most world airports, here they actually look at your photograph closely and compare it with your face. Vital too is that you follow the dress and behaviour codes (which, among other things, forbids wearing jeans!), and before you enter the DMZ all visitors must sign a document absolving the UN and the South Korean government of responsibility in case of any injuries due to 'enemy action' while on the tour.

The **United Service Organizations** (USO; ☎ 724 7003; www.uso.org/korea), the US army's social and entertainment organisation at the Yongsan base, runs **tours** (Tue-Sun, US\$40/W40,000, cash only) that include the Third Tunnel, which was dug by the North Koreans, but not lunch. They start at 8am and finish at 3pm. To reach the USO take subway Line 1 to Namyong station. It's about 10 minutes' walk from Exit 2 – go straight, looking to the left for the USO entrance gate.

Most foreigners will find the USO tour is fine, but if you'd rather not take it, there are other options. Half-day tours with Korean

DMZ NATIONAL PARK?

The DMZ separates North and South Korea. It is surrounded by tanks and electrified fences, and is virtually sealed off to all people. Ironically, this has made it something of an environmental haven. No other place in the world with a temperate-zone climate has been so well preserved. This has been a great boon to wildlife: for example, the DMZ is home to large flocks of Manchurian cranes. Environmentalists hope that the day the two Koreas cease hostilities, the DMZ will be kept as a nature reserve. With undetonated landmines still in place, the zone won't be seeing tour groups anytime soon.

THE UNDERGROUND WAR

A brass plaque in Panmunjom gives the following account of the North Koreans' tunnelling activities.

'On 15 November 1974, members of a Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) patrol inside the southern sector of the DMZ spotted vapour rising from the ground. When they began to dig into the ground to investigate, they were fired upon by North Korean snipers. ROKA units secured the site and subsequently uncovered a tunnel dug by the North Koreans that extended 1.2km into the Republic of Korea. On 20 November, two members of the UN Command (UNC) investigation team were killed inside the tunnel when dynamite planted by the North Koreans exploded. The briefing hall at Camp Kitty Hawk is named after one of the officers killed, Lieutenant Commander Robert N Ballinger.

In March 1975, a second North Korean tunnel was discovered by a UNC tunnel detection team. In September of 1975, a North Korean engineer escaped and provided valuable intelligence concerning the communist tunnelling activities. Acting on the information, a tunnel-detection team successfully intercepted a third tunnel in October 1978, less than 2km from Panmunjom.

Today the North Koreans continue to dig tunnels beneath the DMZ. The UN and ROKA have fielded tunnel-detection teams, which drill around the clock in hope of intercepting new tunnels.'

Since the plaque was put up, a fourth tunnel extending 1km into South Korean territory was discovered (in 1990).

companies cost around W40,000 and full-day tours cost around W60,000. Not all the tours are the same, and use caution before putting money down. Ensure they include Panmunjom. Some trips include a visit to the Third Tunnel and some don't. Visiting the tunnel is worthwhile and you should make sure it's included in the tour before handing over the cash. Also be sure to check the refund/rescheduling options if a tour is cancelled.

ODUSAN UNIFICATION OBSERVATORY

오두산 통일 공원

The Unification Observatory (Tong-il Jeonmangdae; ☎ 945 3171; www.jmd.co.kr; adult/youth W2500/1300; ㄱ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5.30pm Oct, Nov & Mar, 9am-5pm Dec-Feb) at Odusan is as close as most Korean civilians can get to the DMZ. Panmunjom, north of Seoul, is actually inside the DMZ and can be visited by foreigners, but Korean civilians are not normally allowed there (so make sure you don't plan on bringing a Korean friend when you take the USO tour). This large, futuristic building has a viewing area, museum, gift shop and auditorium. Festivals and events are sometimes held here; check the website for details.

Since the Unification Observatory does offer South Koreans a rare peek at the forbidden North, tourists by the bus load turn up here daily throughout the summer months, and it's also popular with tours from Japan and Taiwan. It isn't quite the same as going to Panmunjom – there's little of the tension since the Unification Observatory isn't actually in the DMZ but is instead a few kilometres away. If you want to see anything at all (such as the UN post, the North Korean post – only just – and the North's propaganda signs), you have to use the pay telescopes for viewing. It's calm and non-threatening, but still interesting.

Getting There & Away

To get to the observatory from Seoul's Seobu bus terminal in Bulgwang-dong, take a bus (50 minutes, every 40 minutes) to Geumchon (buses to Munsan stop in Geumchon). Or from Seoul train station, take a train to Geumchon (one hour, hourly). From Geumchon bus station, take a local bus (30 minutes, every 40 minutes) to the Unification Observatory (these buses are marked Songdong-ri).

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