

# Frommer's South Korea





Frommer's®

# South Korea

*3rd Edition*

by Cecilia Hae-Jin Lee



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cecilia Hae-Jin Lee** was born in Seoul and is the author of several popular books including, *Quick & Easy Mexican Cooking*, *Quick & Easy Korean Cooking*, *Eating Korean: From Barbeque to Kimchi*, *Recipes from My Home*, and *Frommer's Day by Day Seoul*. She is also a conceptual and installation artist, a designer, an illustrator and a photographer. Her first and third language is Korean.

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## HOW TO CONTACT US

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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## ADVISORY & DISCLAIMER

Travel information can change quickly and unexpectedly, and we strongly advise you to confirm important details locally before traveling, including information on visas, health and safety, traffic and transport, accommodation, shopping and eating out. We also encourage you to stay alert while traveling and to remain aware of your surroundings. Avoid civil disturbances, and keep a close eye on cameras, purses, wallets and other valuables.








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## FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **special finds**—those places only insiders know about
-  **fun facts**—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **kids**—best bets for kids and advice for the whole family
-  **special moments**—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **overrated**—places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **insider tips**—great ways to save time and money
-  **great values**—where to get the best deals

The following abbreviations are used for credit cards:

AE American Express      DISC Discover      V Visa  
DC Diners Club      MC MasterCard

## TRAVEL RESOURCES AT FROMMERS.COM

Frommer's travel resources don't end with this guide. Frommer's website, **www.frommers.com**, has travel information on more than 4,000 destinations. We update features regularly, giving you access to the most current trip-planning information and the best airfare, lodging, and car-rental bargains. You can also listen to podcasts, connect with other Frommers.com members through our active-reader forums, share your travel photos, read blogs from guide-book editors and fellow travelers, and much more.

# THE BEST OF SOUTH KOREA

1

**W**e've compiled the best of the best of South Korea and we hope you'll agree. See its rugged mountain ranges slope down to pristine beaches, and experience its bustling, cosmopolitan cities surrounded by farmland. From temple stays and lotus gardens by the Han River to hiking in Seoraksan national park, the bamboo forests of Damyang and the volcanic landscape of Jeju-do, this is a land of beautiful landscapes, rife with traces of its thousands of years of history. Seoul is a celebration; an exciting metropolis that is just the beginning of your journey.

**CITIES & TOWNS** Seoul is a city to be explored all on its own with its efficient subway system that takes you everywhere from **Apgujeong** to **Changdeokgung**. Take the high-speed KTX train to **Gyeongju** to experience South Korea's historic sites, or visit the beaches of **Busan**. Smaller towns hold the greatest rewards, such as the gorgeous islands viewed from the cable car atop **Tongyeong** and the neatly lined shrubs of green tea growing on soft hillsides in **Boseong**.

**THE COUNTRYSIDE** South Korea is best explored when the cherry blossoms bloom in full force in the spring or when the fall (autumn) foliage lights up the landscape with fiery color, especially in **Seoraksan**. The country's mountainous terrain is best seen with comfortable shoes and a rental car. Deeper beauty can be found in quieter temples like **Hyang-ilam** or the unusual Buddha statues in **Unjusa** in Jeolla-do.

**EATING & DRINKING** Each region of the country has its own specialty, based on the season and what's grown nearby. Beach towns specialize in *hwae* (raw fish) and other seafood, such as shellfish hand-caught by women divers in **Jeju-do**. **Gangwon-do** is known for its potatoes, **Jinju** for its *bibimbap* (mixed rice bowl) and **Danyang** for its garlic. Grill meat on your table, slurp chewy cold *naengmyeon* (buckwheat noodles) in the summer or just enjoy some spicy *boong-uh bbang* (goldfish cookies) from a street vendor.

**THE COAST** Being a peninsula, South Korea has incredibly dramatic coasts. **Busan** has wide sandy beaches, like **Haeundae**, while Gangwon-do's rocky coasts cascade down to dramatic waves. Tiny islands stretch out as far as the eye can see off the southern coasts of **Jeolla-do** and **Gyeongsang-do**, including the dinosaur nesting grounds at **Goseong**. **Jeju-do** has unforgettable coasts, created when volcanic lava cooled quickly in the surrounding sea.

# 1 THE most unforgettable TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

- **Staying Overnight in a Buddhist Temple:** Many temples in South Korea offer temple stays, where you can enjoy meditation and perhaps a bit of inner peace. Wake up early to the sound of prayers, and cleanse your mind, body, and spirit with a bath and a meal of mountain vegetables. One of the best temples to do a temple stay at is **Hwaeomsa** in Jeollanam-do. See p. 224.
- **Hiking Seoraksan in the Fall (Autumn) Foliage:** Seoraksan is South Korea's most famous national park and you'll see why when you visit during the fall (autumn). Its rocky cliffs peek out from atop the clouds, while its bubbling waters cascade down steep waterfalls. Between its many mountains lie quiet valleys that are blanketed by snow in the winter and flowering trees in the spring. See p. 332.
- **Haggling with a Vendor in an Open Market:** South Korea's markets are bustling centers that can be found along winding alleyways and crowded streets. You haven't truly experienced South Korea until you've elbowed your way through and convinced a vendor to drop the price on something by at least a couple of won. Even if that souvenir is already dirt-cheap, it's fun to get caught up in the excitement of bargaining. The most famous is **Namdaemun Shijang** in Seoul. See p. 96.
- **Being Naked in Front of Hundreds of Strangers:** Okay, so nudity isn't the real attraction. That would be the traditional bathhouses (or even better, the water parks featuring hot springs) scattered throughout South Korea. Don't leave the country without relaxing in a hot sauna with a bunch of old ladies (or old men) or getting a water massage at one of South Korea's many spas.
- **Taking a Boat to One of the Many Small Coastal Islands:** South Korea's southern coast is littered with tiny islands, many of which can be seen on a day cruise. One of the best routes is to take a 4-hour ride from **Tongyeong**, which includes **Somaeumul-do** and other islands in the **Hallyeo Haesang National Marine Park**. See p. 285.
- **Seeing a Traditional Performance:** Whether you're in Seoul or hanging out in a rural village seemingly in the middle of nowhere, there is probably a festival going on nearby. Try to catch a performance of *pansori* (Korea's wailing blues), a mask dance, or just the hallowed sound of the bamboo *daegeum* (flute).
- **Visiting the DMZ:** The Demilitarized Zone is probably one of the least aptly named places on the planet. A result of the last vestiges of animosity between Soviet Russia and the U.S., Korea has been the only divided country in the world since the Berlin Wall fell. See p. 122.

## THE best CITY EXPERIENCES

- **Seeing the City Lights Twinkling Below from Namsan (Seoul):** The bright white N Seoul Tower perched on top of Namsan gives you the best view of the city. Enjoy an overpriced meal from the revolving restaurant on top or add a key lock to the thousands already left by lovers along the viewing platform. See p. 88.

- **Taking a Night Cruise along the Han River (Seoul):** The lights of the city's skyscrapers and bridges reflect on the waters of the Han-gahng. Catch a ferry from a dock in Yeouido to see the city from a different perspective. See p. 92.
- **Browsing Contemporary Art in Samcheongdong (Seoul):** What used to be an undeveloped neighborhood has grown into a hipper cousin to Insadong, the traditional arts district. Take a stroll along the main street to browse tiny boutiques and galleries selling the latest from Seoul's creatives. See p. 99.
- **Enjoying an Al Fresco Cup of Joe (Coffee) on Gwangalli Beach (Busan):** The Suyeong district of Gwangalli beach becomes a no-car area on weekends as cafes bring out their outdoor tables. Summer evenings are the best for enjoying live music too, after sundown. See p. 308.
- **Shopping in a Multi-level Department Store (throughout South Korea):** Enter through the glass doors first thing in the morning and you'll be greeted by bows from the department store employees lined up to serve you. Shinsegae, Hyundai, Lotte, Galleria, and the like all have floors and floors of fashion, usually sandwiched between a basement food court and sit-down restaurants on the top floors.

## THE best FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

- **Cooking Your Own Meat on a Tabletop Grill:** For the full Korean dining experience you really must try *galbi* (beef short ribs), *ssamgyupsal* (sliced pork belly), or *dak galbi* (spicy chicken) that you've cooked yourself on a grill at your table.
- **Noshing from Namdaemun Market's Many Street Vendors (Seoul):** You haven't really experienced the charm of an outdoor market until you've had a bite to eat from the street vendors in this *shijang* (market). Fuel up for your next round of shopping with a fresh flatcake hot off the griddle or *hoddeok* (sweet pancake filled with sugar, cinnamon and other delights). See p. 67.
- **Picking Your Catch at Jagalchi Market (Busan):** There's a certain power to deciding which fish is going to get sliced up for your hwaе meal. Luckily you just point and the work is done for you. It doesn't get any fresher than that. See p. 322.
- **Drinking Homemade Rice Wine in a Remote Village:** If you get a chance to travel to one of South Korea's small villages, stop under one of the thatched-roof joints to enjoy a gourd full of the milky rice wine, *makgeolli*, and some good old-fashioned, home-style food.
- **Stopping for Seaside Dining on the Rocks at Yongmeoli Haean (Jeju-do):** The women of Jeju-do set up impromptu "restaurants" preparing fresh shellfish and other goodies from the sea, right on the rocky coast of Yongmeoli Haean. See p. 385.
- **Enjoying a Cup of Tea while Overlooking the City's Shoppers (Insadong):** Seoul's Insadong district is chock-full of traditional tea shops. Opt for one on the second floor and watch the world pass by on the streets below, while sipping a fragrant brew from a hand-crafted teacup. See p. 74.
- **Scaring off Vampires with Garlic in Danyang (Chungcheongbuk-do):** In a country known for its garlicky cooking, you have to be a serious garlic-growing region to be known for it. Danyang is the place and one of the best restaurants in the area to enjoy garlic cooked dozens of ways is **Jangdali Shikdang**. See p. 179.

# 1 THE best WAY TO SEE SOUTH KOREA LIKE A LOCAL

- **Shopping for Herbs and Other Unidentifiable Dried Goods from Hwagae Jangteo (Hadong, Gyeongsangnam-do):** Local farmers bring their dried wares and other items to sell in this famous market. Local wild green tea, dried herbs, seasonal fruits, and a variety of other goods are sold here in an open market. See p. 284.
- **Belting Your Heart Out at a Noraebang (Karaoke):** Koreans love to sing and that fact is borne out with the many *noraebang* (“singing” rooms) that can be found even in the smallest of towns throughout the country. Take a group of friends and enjoy a night of karaoke in a private room.
- **Sweating Your Troubles Away in a Jjimjilbang (Korean Spa):** Before Koreans had baths in every home, they visited the local bathhouse at least once a week. Even now, South Koreans love to go to jimjilbang to sit in saunas, get a massage, or just take a nap. Those on an extreme budget can even spend the night in one, although the giant, public rooms with hard wooden floors are anything but comfortable.
- **Hiking the Baekdu-daegan (or at Least Part of It):** The Baekdu-daegan is the mountain range that is considered the “spine” of the Korean Peninsula. Although it’s not possible to traverse the entire line (now that the DMZ cuts off the trail that starts in Baekdusan in North Korea), it’s still possible to traverse this spiritually important mountain starting from **Seoraksan** (p. 326) and making your way down to **Jirisan** (p. 223). Although it would take months to actually walk the 1400-km (870-mile) trail, it’s still possible to visit the various ranges and feel the energy of the mountains.
- **Having Noodles, Fried Chicken, or Dumplings Delivered:** South Koreans enjoy having everything from *yangnyeom dak* (seasoned fried chicken) to *jjajangmyeon* (black-bean noodles) delivered to their homes. In the summer, you can even have them deliver food to your particular umbrella in crowded **Haeundae Beach** or even while you’re having a romantic stroll along the Hang-gang. Even the McDonalds in the country will bring your *bulgogi* hamburger combo right to your door.

## THE best FAMILY EXPERIENCES

- **Comparing Dinosaur Footprints to Yours at the Nesting Grounds in Goseong (Gyeongsangnam-do):** This coastal site was the former nesting ground for a variety of dinosaurs. See the imprinted footprints and fossilized eggs during low-tide as the waves splash onto the rocks. See p. 289.
- **Trying Your Hand at a Traditional Game at the Korean Folk Village in Suwon (Gyeonggi-do):** The restored folk village in Suwon, the **Hanguk Minsokchon**, is a great way to see how Koreans used to live. Visit on a weekend or holiday to try your hand at some archery, wooden seesaws, or other old-fashioned games. See p. 111.
- **Spending the Day at Everland (Gyeonggi-do):** One of the largest and best amusement parks in South Korea, there are plenty of rides and amusements for the whole family. They have a small zoo with white tigers and monkeys, a white-water rafting

ride, and a variety of festivals that change with the seasons. In the summer visit the water park next door, **Caribbean Bay**. See p. 110.

- **Splashing Around in the Seorak Waterpia:** While the kids splash around in the water park, the adults can take a relaxing soak in the mineral hot springs. After enough water fun, the whole family can enjoy a bit of ice cream. See p. 331.
- **Visiting the Lying Stone Buddhas in Unjusa (Hwasun, Jeollanam-do):** This temple is not only easy to reach (no giant mountains to climb), but also houses the most fascinating array of Buddhist statuary in the country. See p. 225.

## THE best HISTORIC EXPERIENCES

- **Touring the Huwon (Rear Garden) in Changdeokgung (Seoul):** If you want to see how Korean royalty used to live, this palace is a prime example. Its famed Huwon (“Rear Garden”) alone is worth the visit. See p. 80.
- **Seeing the Annual Memorial Ceremony for Dead Joseon Kings in Jongmyo (Seoul):** There’s a reason this *myo* (royal shrine) is a World Heritage site—it’s the most important one in the country and is home to the longest traditional wooden building left in Korea. Try to time your visit for the spectacular annual memorial ceremony for the kings of Korea’s longest running dynasty (usually the first Sunday in May). See p. 84.
- **Visiting the Prehistoric Dolmen on Ganghwa-do (Gyeonggi-do):** This island off the coast of Incheon is home to about 80 dolmen (prehistoric rock tombs), dating back thousands of years. See p. 127.
- **Listening to the Song of Two Lovers in Gwanghallu-won (Namwon, Jeollabuk-do):** Home of the legend of Chunhyang (a traditional love story about a nobleman’s son who falls in love with a courtesan’s daughter), this garden is not only a mecca for lovers, but the spot where pansori made its debut. Try to visit between April and October and catch the free performances at noon. See p. 191.
- **Walking along the Stone Fortress in Suwon (Gyeonggi-do):** The best restored fortress in the country, the Suwon Hwaseong’s impressive wall has historic gates and towers climbing a slope in the middle of the now-modern city. See p. 112.
- **Writing a Poem in Dosan Seowon (Andong, Gyeongsangbuk-do):** Established in 1574, this Confucian academy is a nice place for quiet reflection and to soak in the mountain scenery. Take off your shoes and climb onto the wooden platform to see if inspiration comes. See p. 254.

## THE best OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES

- **Biking the Historic Sites in Gyeongju (Gyeongsangbuk-do):** The city of Gyeongju is like one giant museum and the sites can be visited easily on two wheels. The roads between **Bulguksa**, **Seokguram**, **Anapji Pond**, and the rest are nicely laid out for cyclists. The city can be seen in its entirety in 4 to 5 days. See p. 232.
- **Paragliding Anywhere in South Korea:** With literally hundreds of peaks throughout the country, South Korea is the perfect country from which to paraglide. Those

who want an expansive space can launch from one of the many parasitic volcanoes in **Jeju-do** (see p. 393). From Seoul, the closest location from which to launch is **Yangpyeong** (see p. 133).

- **Hiking the Many Challenging Courses in Jirisan (Jeollabuk-do/Gyeongsangnam-do):** Of all the mountainous national parks in South Korea, Jirisan is the most favored among serious climbers. Choose from its many peaks and gorgeous scenery, best viewed in the fall. See p. 223.
- **Snow Skiing at High 1 Ski Resort in Jeongseon (Gangwon-do):** The country's most environmentally friendly ski resort also has the best courses for skiers of all levels, but it's especially favored by advanced skiers. See p. 365.
- **Walking the Easy Trails in Cheongnyangsan (Gyeongsangbuk-do):** Located a stone's throw from Andong, Cheongnyangsan Provincial Park was best known as the place where high priests and scholars lived. Its easy trails make it simple for the less fit of us to still enjoy the fresh air. See p. 263.
- **Waterskiing in Cheongpyeong (Gyeonggi-do):** Fight the sweltering summer heat with a bit of wet fun, just an hour outside of Seoul. Although the weather will be a bit chillier, waterskiing in the fall is nice in order to enjoy the scenery. See p. 136.
- **Stopping to Smell the Flowers at the Korea National Arboretum (Gyeonggi-do):** Located in Gwangneum forest, you have to make reservations at least 5 days in advance to see this well-preserved arboretum. It's well worth the trouble to see the 15 different forest areas within this garden and research center. See p. 132.

## THE best FREE & DIRT CHEAP EXPERIENCES

- **Strolling between the Lotus Flowers at Dumulmeoli (Gyeonggi-do):** Where two waters flow into the Han River is a beautiful lotus garden and a nice walking path where you can enjoy the blooming lotuses in the heat of summer. Park under the bridge for free. See p. 133.
- **Enjoying the Full Moon from Dalmaji Gogae near Haeundae Beach (Busan):** A narrow path between Haeundae and Songjeong beaches leads to a small hill where you can see both the moon and the ocean from inside Haewoljeong, a tiny pavilion built there in honor of two folk lovers, who got married there during Daeboreum (the "Great Full Moon") in December. See p. 294.
- **Feeling the Ocean Breezes from Sinseondae (Geoje-do, Gyeongsangnam-do):** Although several Korean TV and film drama productions left their sets and buildings here, they still didn't ruin the views of the surrounding ocean and rocky coast on this southern island off the coast of Gyeongsangnam-do. Best to visit in the spring when the yellow rapeseed flowers light up the hillside. See p. 289.
- **Driving the Coastal Road, Hunhwa-ro, in Gagneung (Gangwon-do):** Visit Gyeongpodae beach, then take a leisurely drive on the coastal route before enjoying a cup of joe on Café Street in Gagneung. See p. 341.
- **Seeing the View of the Seonam Village in Yeongwol (Gangwon-do):** Locals say that the view of this small village on the water is like looking at a miniaturized version of the entire Korean Peninsula. See it from Seogang Observatory or walk down into the village itself for a bit of small town flavor.



# THE best TEMPLE EXPERIENCES

1

THE BEST OF SOUTH KOREA

The Best Festivals & Celebrations

- **Catching the Sunrise at Hyangilam (Suncheon, Jeollabuk-do):** Perched on a precarious mountainside, this former hermitage is now a temple complex. Wake up early to climb up its steep steps and catch the sunrise over the ocean. You'll also miss the bus-loads of tourists, who usually arrive in the late afternoon. See p. 214.
- **Climbing up to see the Bodhisattva of Compassion at Bori-am (Namhae, Gyeongsangnam-do):** One of the three main holy sites in the country, believers come to this hermitage to pray to the Bodhisattva of Compassion. If you're pure of heart, your wishes will be granted. Even if you're not, you'll be treated to a spectacular view. See p. 286.
- **Listening to the Sound of the Drums at Sundown in Haeinsa (Hapcheon, Gyeongsang-do):** Home of the famous Tripitaka Koreana (Buddhist scripture handcarved on hundreds of wooden blocks), this famed temple (and UNESCO World Heritage site) sits in a deep forest. Try to go in the late afternoon to see the tripitaka (through locked slats), but stay past sunset to hear the sound of the gong echoing through the valleys. See p. 281.
- **Hiking the Rocky Trail to Cheongnyangsan (Gyeongsangbuk-do):** Although the temple complex itself is not the most impressive in the country, it's strategically located on the side of the Cheongnyangsan. The scenic walk to the temple culminates as you turn the corner to see the temple greeting you from its mountain perch. See p. 263.
- **Eating Feast Noodles at Naksansa (Gangwon-do):** Although this expansive temple was largely destroyed by a fire in 2008, a bright new temple has been constructed in its place. The cliffside **Hongryeon-am** hermitage is included in its grounds, so visit during lunchtime and be treated to a humble bowl of *janchi gooksu* (feast noodles). See p. 336.

# THE best FESTIVALS & CELEBRATIONS

- **The Day the Buddha Came (aka Buddha's Birthday; throughout the country):** During what is sometimes referred to as the "Festival of Lanterns," every temple in the country gets lit up like a Christmas tree in celebration of the birth of the Enlightened One.
- **Baekje Cultural Festival (Buyeo or Gongju):** Every October, this historical event celebrates the great Baekje kings with over 100 traditional performances and events throughout the area. See p. 151.
- **Boryeong Mud Festival (Daecheon, Chungcheongnam-do):** Held on the muddy beaches of Daecheon every July, this is basically organized mud play. Supposedly good for your skin, too, the dirty activities include mud wrestling, mud slides, and making mud soap. Mud pies are optional. See p. 161.
- **Busan International Film Festival (BIFF, Busan):** The largest and most renowned of Korea's film festivals, it is a wonderful showcase for current films from throughout Asia. Usually held some time in October. See p. 323.

- **Andong Mask Dance Festival (Andong, Gyeongsangnam-do):** Although the highlight of the festival is the Korean *talchum* (mask dance), performers from other countries show off their masked splendor as well. See p. 252.
- **Gangneung Danoje Festival (Gangneung, Gangwon-do):** Celebrating the traditional “Dano” (the fifth day of the fifth month of the Lunar year), it is one of the few places where you can see traditional shamanistic rituals. It usually happens some time in June. See p. 25.

# SOUTH KOREA IN DEPTH

## 2

The history of the Korean Peninsula spans more than 5,000 strife-filled years. That's ironic for a place that has been called the "Land of the Morning Calm." But because of its strategic location, the peninsula suffered a seemingly endless series of invasions by China and Manchuria from the north and Japan from the east. In fact, the last war, the Korean War, never actually ended—rather, it was halted by a ceasefire in 1953. That solidified a historic split, with a communist dictatorship ruling the North and a more democratic regime ruling the South. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the area that marks the boundary between the two Koreas, is a painful reminder of the country's war-torn past.

While North Korea has suffered poverty and famine, South Korea has made incredible strides in the past few decades in its race toward modernization. South Korea, a country roughly the size of Great Britain, is the 15th-largest economy in the world. The city of Seoul, with its towering high-rises and modern infrastructure, is a testament to the innovative spirit of the Korean people.

## SOUTH KOREA TODAY

Touted as one of the most wired (or shall we say, "wireless?") countries in the world, it's no surprise to see everyone from toddlers to grandpas texting with their smartphones on the subway. These technological advancements have not only made South Korea more prominent on the world map, but its electronics, cars, and even textiles have spread worldwide. This export of Korean goods even includes cultural phenomena, like the rise in popularity of Korean TV dramas, films, and KPop around the world.

With the opening up of the world market to Korean goods, South Korea, in return, has imported much from other countries, especially from the West. This can most easily be seen in the American fast-food chains that dot the urban landscape. However, this also means that Korea's global cuisine has come a long way. In a country where even a hamburger was hard to come by, you can now find crispy Neopolitan pizza fresh from

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wood-burning stoves, schwarma vendors on the street, and even get a croissant that tastes almost like it's come out of a Parisienne boulangerie.

Although the global economic downturn has affected South Korea, too, you would not be able to tell with all of the new road projects and construction going on in the country. Still, traces of tough economic times can be seen in empty storefronts and high-end restaurants with fewer occupied tables.

Unpredictable weather in South Korea and other parts of the country has driven up food prices, although it's difficult to tell the domestic problems, since prices remain generally stable due to the influx of cheap crops from China.

The price of gas remains high (averaging around ₩1950 per liter) so travel costs have increased. Still, public transportation remains affordable throughout South Korea.

As the country moved by leaps and bounds toward the technological age, some of the traditions and traces of its past were overtaken. However, in the past few years, the government has taken steps to try and preserve the architectural and natural resources that remain. Outside the large cities, you can still see older folk farming in the fields, making *kimchi* (a spiced dish) in the fall, and picking fruit by hand on the hillsides, they just happen to do it now on paved roads, mobile phones in hand.

## THE MAKING OF SOUTH KOREA

### Prehistory

Before humans settled on the Korean Peninsula, dinosaurs left fossils and other evidence. You can still see their footprints and fossilized eggs on the shores of **Goseong** (p. 289). The first human beings on the peninsula can be traced as far back as the Paleolithic period (about 500,000 years ago). Researchers believe that Neanderthals lived here until Paleo-Asiatic people moved in around 40,000 B.C. Very little is known about the Paleo-Asiatics, but the tools and other relics they left behind suggest that they were hunter-gatherers who also fished. It is very likely that these early inhabitants of the Korean Peninsula moved to what is now Japan about 20,000 years ago, when the Korea Strait was narrower and easier to cross.

Archaeological remains suggest that nomadic Neolithic tribes migrated from central and northeast Asia (mostly Mongolia, China's Manchu region, and southeast Siberia) to the Korean coastline around 8,000 B.C. These are the ancestors of modern Koreans, and they are responsible for the earliest versions of Korean culture and language (the Tungusic branch of the Ural-Altai language group). Traces of these Neolithic and older cultures can be seen in the *goindol* (dolmen/megalithic stone tombs) scattered throughout the land. In fact, the largest concentration of dolmen in the world is found on the Korean Peninsula. The easiest to access from Seoul is in **Ganghwa-do** (p. 127), but more can be seen around **Gochang** (p. 194) and **Hwasun** (p. 195).

In around 3,000 B.C. a larger wave of immigrants from the same areas brought more developed pottery and better tools. These new arrivals contributed to the founding of small villages of pit dwellings. With the domestication of animals and the development of farming, these tribes ventured farther inland and became increasingly less nomadic. Clans developed around the start of the Bronze Age.

However, Korean history is generally considered to start with the birth of King Dang-gun in 2333 B.C. Legend has it that Dang-gun was born of a son of Heaven and a woman from one of the bear-totem tribes (shamanism was predominant in ancient Korean religions). He established the GoJoseon (Old Joseon) Kingdom, which literally translates to the “Land of the Morning Calm.” This walled kingdom was located near present-day Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea.

## The Three Kingdoms

By the first century B.C., three dominant kingdoms had emerged on the peninsula and part of what is now Manchuria. The first and largest was **Goguryeo** (37 B.C.–A.D. 688), in the northern part of the peninsula, encompassing part of Manchuria and what is now North Korea. It served as a buffer against aggression from China. **Baekje** (18 B.C.–A.D. 660) developed in the southwestern part of the peninsula and **Shilla** (57 B.C.–A.D. 935) in the southeastern section. This time is known as the Three Kingdoms period, even though a fourth, smaller kingdom, **Gaya** (A.D. 42–532), existed between Shilla and Baekje in the southern part of the peninsula.

Traces of Baekje history can be seen in its old capitals, the now small towns of **Gongju** (p. 151), and, especially, **Buyeo** (p. 157).

Goguryeo was the first to adopt Buddhism in A.D. 372. The Baekje Kingdom followed in 384. Shilla was later and did not adopt the religion until 528. The three kingdoms had similar cultures and infrastructures, based on Confucian and Buddhist hierarchical structures with the king at the top. Legal systems were created, and Goguryeo annexed Buyeo while Shilla took over Gaya. The kingdoms became refined aristocratic societies and began competing with each other in development of Buddhist–Confucian power and an eye toward territorial expansion.

## Unified Shilla

The Shilla Kingdom developed a Hwarang (“Flower of Youth”) corps, a voluntary military organization for young men, in the 600s. This popular movement helped build up Shilla’s military strength. The kingdom was also looking outward, learning from its neighboring kingdoms and building amicable relations with the Tang Dynasty in China.

In the meantime, Goguryeo was in fierce battle with Tang China and the Sui emperor, with heavy casualties on both sides. Tang China eventually turned to Shilla for help. The Shilla–Tang forces were able to defeat Goguryeo and its ally Baekje, but Tang wasn’t about to let Shilla have control of the land. Chinese officials took the Baekje king and his family to Tang and appointed a military governor to rule Baekje territory. Goguryeo’s king and hundreds of thousands of prisoners were also taken to China. Shilla launched a counterattack against China and retook all of Baekje. In 674 China invaded Shilla, but the kingdom was able to defend itself, forcing the Tang army out of Pyongyang. Still, the Chinese forces were able to hold onto part of the Goguryeo kingdom, which is now Manchuria.

The Shilla Kingdom officially unified the peninsula in 668. Despite some turbulence, the **Unified Shilla** period (668–935) maintained close ties to China and its culture. Many Shilla monks traveled there to study Buddhism and bring back their cultural learnings. During this cultural flowering, there were new technological innovations, including the world’s oldest astronomical observatory which was constructed

in **Gyeongju** (p. 231), the Shilla capital. The town of Gyeongju is like one large outdoor museum, preserving the history of Shilla in its temples, shrines, and grassy royal tombs.

## Goryeo Dynasty

At the end of the 9th century, the Shilla Kingdom had grown weak and local lords began fighting for control. It was a period of civil war and rebellion. In 918, Wang Geon, the lord of Songak (present-day **Gaesong**), defeated the other warring lords and established the **Goryeo Dynasty** (918–1392). Goryeo, a shortened version of the former Goguryeo kingdom, is where the name Korea came from.

New laws were created based on Chinese law as well as Buddhist and Confucian beliefs. During a period of relative peace, culture flourished under the Goryeo aristocracy. Goryeo celadon pottery was developed (see **Celadon Museum**, p. 224); the *Tripitaka Koreana*, a set of more than 81,000 wood blocks used to print the Buddhist canon, was created (see **Haeinsa**, p. 281); and the first movable metal type was invented. As the official religion, Buddhism flourished under Goryeo rule—new temples were built, wonderful paintings were commissioned, and various manuscripts were created.

Unfortunately, peace didn't last long. Although Goryeo was able to thwart attacks early on, in the 12th century it suffered internal conflicts, with civilian and military leaders fighting for control. In the 13th century, the peninsula was invaded several times by the Mongolians; traces of their invasion can be seen in the distinct type of horses on **Jeju-do** (p. 368). Luckily for Goryeo, Mongol power declined rapidly from the middle of the 14th century on, giving the kingdom some respite, though it did not quell the conflicts brewing internally. At the same time, Japanese pirates started becoming more sophisticated in their military tactics. General Yi Seong-gye was sent to fight both these pirates and the Mongols, and his victories helped him consolidate power. He forced the Goryeo king to abdicate and named himself King Taejo ("Great Progenitor"), the first emperor of the Joseon Dynasty.

## Joseon Dynasty

When the **Joseon Dynasty** (1392–1910) was founded, King Taejo created a Confucian form of government that promoted loyalty to the country and respect for parents and ancestors, and in 1394 he moved the capital to what is now **Seoul** (p. 40), where many of the **palaces** (p. 79) and the **Jongmyo**, the family's royal shrine, still stand. His family, the Yis, ruled what was to become one of the world's longest-running monarchies.

Again, Korea flourished both artistically and culturally, and major advances in science, technology, literature, and the arts were made. One of the most celebrated emperors of the time was King Sejong the Great, who took the throne in 1418. He gathered a team of scholars to create Korea's first written language, Hangeul.

From 1592 to 1598, Korea was attacked relentlessly by Japanese aggressors during what is called the **Imjin Waeran** and is sometimes referred to as the Hideyoshi Invasions. Successive attacks by its eastern neighbor and Qing China from the north led to the country's increasingly harsh isolationist policy. By the time Admiral Yi Sun-shin (see **Yeosu**, p. 212) and his fleet of iron-clad "turtle" ships had fended off the Japanese for good, Korea had shut itself off completely from the rest of the world. It became known as the Hermit Kingdom, and it managed to remain relatively untouched by outsiders until the 1800s.

## Floating Turtles

Korea's most famous naval commander, Admiral Yi Sun-shin, led the navy against Japanese invasion during the wars of 1592 to 1598. Legend has it that the admiral, who was killed during a skirmish in 1598 at the age of 43, never lost a single one of the 23 battles he commanded. But he may be most famous for his use of turtle ships, boats armored with thick wood planking, iron shields, and spikes that the Korean navy used to inflict heavy damage on invading Japanese ships. Capable of ramming other ships without sustaining damage, these turtle ships are considered one of the triumphs of Korean ingenuity.

2

SOUTH KOREA IN DEPTH

The Making of South Korea

## Japanese Occupation

In the 19th century, Korea again became the focus of its imperialist neighbors, China, Russia, and Japan. By 1910, Japan, which had been exerting more and more control over Korea's destiny, officially annexed the country, bringing an end to the Joseon Dynasty. The Japanese tried to quash Korean culture, not allowing people to speak their own language, and attempted to obliterate Korean history.

When King Gojong, the last of the Joseon rulers, died, anti-Japanese rallies took place throughout the country. Most notably on March 1, 1919, a declaration of independence was read in Seoul as an estimated two million people took part in rallies. The protests were violently suppressed, and thousands of Koreans were killed or imprisoned (see **Seodaemun Prison**, p. 86). But independence-minded Koreans were not deterred, and anti-Japanese rallies continued until a student uprising in November of 1929 led to increased military rule. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press were severely curbed by Japanese rule.

A Korean government in exile was set up in Shanghai and it coordinated the struggle against Japan. On December 9, 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the exiled Korean government declared war on Japan. On August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied forces, ending 35 years of Japanese occupation. Ten days later Korea became one of the earliest victims of the Cold War: It was divided in half, with the United States taking control of surrendering Japanese soldiers south of the 38th Parallel, while the Soviet Union took control of the areas north. The division was meant to be temporary, until the U.S., U.K., U.S.S.R., and China could come to an agreed-upon trusteeship of the country.

## The Korean War

A conference was convened in Moscow in December 1945 to discuss the future of Korea. A 5-year trusteeship was discussed and the Soviet-American commission met a few times in Seoul, just as the chill of the Cold War began to set in. In 1947, the United Nations called for the election of a unity government, but the North Korean regime, dominated by the Soviet Union, refused to participate, and the two countries were formally established in 1948.

But on June 25, 1950, North Korea, aided by the communist People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, invaded the South. The South resisted with help from United Nations troops, most of whom were American. Fighting raged for 3 years, causing much damage and destruction. The war has never officially ended, but the

fighting stopped with the signing of a ceasefire on July 27, 1953, creating the Demilitarized Zone (**DMZ**, see p. 122).

## Recent History

The Republic of Korea officially became a country on August 15, 1948. Its history after the Korean War has been marked by turbulent governments. The country has undergone five major constitutional changes, along with decades of authoritarian governments and military rule. Although an electoral college was created in the 1970s, South Korea did not hold its first democratic and fair presidential election until 1987. Despite its violent past, South Korea grew by leaps and bounds, especially in the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s. It is now the 4th-largest economy in Asia and the 15th-largest in the world. It is also one of the most wired countries in the world.

The president is the head of state of the Republic of Korea and is elected by direct popular vote for a 5-year term (with no possibility for re-election). As South Korea's first president, Rhee Syngman took power in 1954 with an anticommunist platform, but his administration collapsed in the face of a student antigovernment movement, the 4.19 (April 19th) Revolution, in 1960. In 1963, Park Chung-hee was elected president, and he ruled with military might until he was assassinated by his own men in 1979 (Im Sang-soo's film, *The President's Last Bang*, is an excellent satire of the assassination). In 1980, Chun Doo-hwan came to power and continued his predecessor's authoritarian rule until a massive 1987 protest demanding democracy. At that point, Roh Tae-woo came to power, the country hosted the 1988 Olympics, and it joined the United Nations in 1991. Kim Young-sam became the country's first non-military president in 1993 and saw the International Monetary Fund (IMF) collapse during his presidency. In 1997, Kim Dae-jung was elected and made efforts toward reviving the economy, and he hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2002. The 16th president of South Korea, Roh Moo-hyun, was elected in 2003 and committed suicide in May 2009, when he was embroiled in a bribery scandal.

After one of the lowest voter turnouts in history, Lee Myung-bak of the conservative Grand National Party was elected president in 2007. The largely unpopular President Lee was the former CEO of Hyundai and served as the mayor of Seoul. Lee's term runs from 2008 to February of 2013.

With the surprise death of Kim Jong-Il in 2011, there is uncertainty as Kim Jong-eun has taken helm as the Supreme Leader of North Korea. South Koreans are somewhat used to this opaqueness from their neighbor and everyday life is largely unaffected by changes in the north.

## ART & ARCHITECTURE

### Arts

#### CERAMICS

The earliest form of art found on the Korean Peninsula is pottery. Pottery shards from the Neolithic era are prevalent. By the time of the Three Kingdoms, ceramics were in common use in everyday life. But it was during the Unified Shilla period that the pottery began taking on interesting shapes and decorative patterns.

In the Goryeo period, a ceramics culture evolved, with the creation of *cheongja* (celadon) pottery. In the Joseon era, the white ceramics of *baekja* and *buncheongsagi* were developed. Unusually, Joseon ceramics were simpler in design than those from



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