

SOUTH KOREA

Dynamic & Traditional

8 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Seoul

Arrive in Seoul/Incheon, South Korea and transfer to our hotel.

Seoul is a city of contrasts. In this rapidly evolving metropolis, the traditional exists with the modern in a state of harmony. For over 500 years the seat of Joseon Dynasty kings, Seoul is now the beating heart of modern Korea, the centre to which all else in the country is drawn.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Seoul City Touring

This morning we start with a visit to Gyeongbokgung Palace, where we plan to arrive in time for the very colourful changing-of-the-guard ceremony.

Of all the tourist attractions in Seoul, the Joseon Dynasty Palaces and, particularly Gyeongbokgung Palace, are the most tangible link between modern Korea and its not-too-distant monarchical past. Not merely inert relics, they are symbols of a deep history and rich culture. Although substantially reduced in number, the remaining palace buildings provide a glimpse of traditional architecture and the overall organization of a palace grounds.

As part of our visit, we also include the National Folk Museum, contained within the palace. This excellent museum presents historical artifacts that were used in the daily lives of Korean people in the past. Through the displays, visitors can learn about the domestic and agricultural lifestyles, as well as Korea's cultural beliefs.

After a break for lunch, we proceed to Jongmyo, a royal shrine dedicated to the performance of ancestral rites for the deceased kings and queens of the Joseon Dynasty. Being the place where the royal ancestral tablets are enshrined, Jongmyo's atmosphere is solemn and sacred rather than splendid like the royal palaces. The simple and elegant buildings of this shrine have faithfully kept their original forms since the 16th century.

We finish our day at Namsan Seoul Tower, built in 1969 as Korea's first integrated transmission tower beaming television and radio broadcasts across the capital. Since opening to the public in 1980, it has become a much-loved Seoul landmark. The tower's main attractions include multi-coloured digital art projected onto the tower at night, a digital observatory, a roof terrace, and a number of viewing platforms where visitors can enjoy the cityscape. 32 LCD screens recount the 600-year history of Seoul.

This evening we'll have our dinner at the top of the tower and enjoy a typical Korean meal and nighttime views of the city.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Seoul & The DMZ

This morning we hit the ground running with a full highlight-packed day.

After an early departure we travel along the Jayuro (Freedom Road) to Imjingak, the northernmost point bordering North Korea.* On the way, we will be able to view barbed wire fences and military guards on duty all the way along the river. At Imjingak, we visit the Mangbaedan Memorial ritual altar which was established in 1985 for those who were separated from their families or displaced from home during the Korean War. It is a symbolic spot used to hold traditional memorial services for ancestors or to pray for separated family members living in the North and for reunification of the country. We will see the Freedom Bridge, the very locale where 12,773 Korean War prisoners walked to freedom to South Korea in 1953.

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We then board a tour bus that will take us to the 3rd infiltration tunnel dug up by North Koreans. On the 20-minute ride to the tunnel, we pass through the check points, military camps, and mine fields. Before going down to the tunnel, we will view a short video presentation and visit exhibition hall for information on the divided Koreas. A seven-minute tram ride (if available) or a walk down a steep access through a narrow and steep interception tunnel, leads us to the lower platform, a point where we are only 170 meters from the Military Demarcation Line.

Our next stop is the Dora Observatory where we can see the whole expanse of the Demilitarized Zone, North Korean propaganda village, Gijeong-dong, where the world's largest flag hangs on a 160 meter-tall flagpole, South Korea's northernmost village of Daeseong-dong and Panmunjom where the ceasefire that ended hostilities was signed.

We return to Seoul in time for a break for lunch in Insadong, a lively district known for its vast array of restaurants, small museums, and shopping. Insadong was originally two towns whose names ended in the syllables "In" and "Sa". They were divided by a stream which ran along Insadong's current main street. Insadong began 500 years ago as an area of residence for government officials. Today Insadong has some of the tastiest food vendors in all of Seoul. One of the main attractions in the area is the 'Kings Dessert' or the 'Dragons Beard Candy', 16,000 strings of honey wrapped multiple times with a flavouring of either almond, peanut or chocolate on the inside. There are also gooey pancakes and spicy Korean dumplings to sample.

From here we proceed to the War Memorial of Korea, an excellent tie-in with what we experienced at the DMZ. This huge museum documents the history of the Korean War (1950-53) with documentary footage (with English commentary) of the main battles and events. Along with photos, maps and artefacts, the films give a fascinating insight into what the war was like. There's also plenty of military hardware outside - tanks, helicopters, missiles and planes, plus stirring war memorials.

* Due to an ever-changing security situation, our activities today may be altered, re-routed, or curtailed without notice.

Overnight in Seoul.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Seoul - Fly to Jeju Island

This morning we transfer to the airport for our short flight to Jeju Island.

Jeju Island, also known as the "Island of the Gods," is a popular vacation spot for Koreans and foreigners; indeed it remains the top honeymoon destination for Korean newlyweds. The island is known for beaches, rugged coastal scenery, volcanic geography, and a unique culture which stands in stark contrast to the mainland (and much of Asia) as being matriarchal. Stemming from this basis, and some odd tax reasons, the role of seafood gathering on the island has been dominated by women. As such, a common sight around Jeju's coastline is that of the "haenyoo" or "woman diver", a figure that has become somewhat iconic of the island.

After our arrival we'll have a break for lunch, then visit the Jeju Folklore & Natural History Museum, located in Jeju City. The museum offers an excellent introduction to the island's distinctive culture - its volcanic geology, the matriarchal society that grew from it, the legendary origins of the Jeju people, and the traditional tools and customs of everyday island life. Intelligently laid out and genuinely informative, it sets the context for everything we'll encounter over the next two days.

We also visit Jeju Stone Park, which showcases the cultural significance of stone in Jeju Province. The park features various stone structures, including a stone pagoda and traditional Jeju stone houses. It also includes a large garden themed around Jeju's mythology.

Overnight on Jeju Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Jeju Island Touring

Early this morning, we'll head to Sunrise Peak (Seongsan Ilchulbong) for a breathtaking view of this unique volcanic crater and its surroundings. Next we'll visit the Jeju Haenyeo Museum, dedicated to the island's remarkable female free divers. Finally, we'll explore Ilchul Land, a park featuring themed gardens, sculptures, and the intriguing Micheon Cave, a lava tube formed by volcanic activity. Jeju has an extensive system of lava tubes, natural conduits through which magma once flowed, now empty caves that are some of the largest in the

world. The insides of the tube is adorned with multi-coloured carbonate decorations and innumerable cave formations commonly found in lava tubes. They include lava stalactites and lava stalagmites, lava columns, lava flowstone, lava helictites and lava blister, cave corals, benches, lava raft, lava bridges, lava shelves and striations.

Overnight on Jeju.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Jeju Island - Fly to Busan: City Touring

This morning we fly to Busan, South Korea's second largest city and largest seaport.

Busan is known for its beaches, hot springs, nature reserves, and events such as the city's renowned international film festival held each fall. Busan is a good destination for those seeking a more laid back atmosphere than Seoul. Located at the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, Busan's important port gives the city an international flair, with sailors from around the world trooping through and a growing number of tourists.

On arrival we'll visit the Gamcheon Cultural Village (a UNESCO site), spread out in a panorama of endless rows of low-rise cubicle homes climbing up the steep hillsides, earning it the nickname "Santorini of the East." The cheerful blue, yellow and pink hues a delight to the eye. Narrow stone and concrete alleyways wind their way through the homes, yielding something new at every turn. The village used to house the city's poorest people, but during the Korean War, refugees fled their homes for Busan, which was the only area which was free from fighting.

We'll head to the Jagalchi Fish Market for a break for lunch, followed by a visit to the impressive UN Cemetery.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Busan: Gyeongju Excursion

This morning we head out of the city to Gyeongju, located on Korea's southeast coast. This was the capital of the 1,000-year Silla dynasty, and is known for its extensive historical remains. We'll visit the 8th-century Bulguksa Temple featuring twin stone pagodas, a series of wooden staircases, and a large bronze Buddha.

Afer a break for lunch in Hwanglidan-gil we'll continue to Tumuli Park, which contains 23 of the over 200 royal tombs found in Gyeongju. At times, the sense of history, and of secrets buried along with the royals, is almost palpable in the quiet between the large grass-covered mounds.

We'll visit Cheomseongdae, the oldest astronomical observatory in all of Asia The 362 stones that make up the 27-level structure represent each day of the lunar year. Built during the reign of Shilla Queen Seon-deok, it was used for observing the stars in order to forecast the weather.

Our last stops include Gyeongju National Museum, largely devoted to relics of the Silla Kingdom; and Donggung Palace and Wolji Pond, once part of the palace complex of ancient Silla. Return to Busan.

PLEASE NOTE: owing to the length of the day and the probability of a busy trave day tomorrow, your Tour Leader may choose to include lunch today and leave dinner to yourselves this evening.

Overnight in Busan.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Departure from Busan

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Departure from Busan.

BON VOYAGE!!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast