On the Road

SIMON RICHMOND  Coordinating Author
In the midst of typhoon-strength winds and rain I fronted up at the Boryeong Mud Festival (see boxed text, p332), stripped off and splashed around in the mud pool. Apart from being huge fun it’s said to do wonders for your skin.

Yu-Mei Balasingamchow
On the climb up to this enigmatic rock-carved Buddha image in Woraksan National Park (p343), I fell into step with a couple of fashionably dressed hikers. Although they spoke barely any English, our temporary communion was sealed when they offered me the Korean equivalent of trail mix – a raw cucumber, crunchy and sweet.

César G Soriano
Baseball, as in America, is South Korea’s national pastime. The game is more or less the same, but instead of hot dogs and pretzels vendors sell dried squid and sushi. My seatmates at Gwangju’s Mudeung Stadium (p265) plied me with soju (the local firewater) and taught me naughty Korean baseball chants. I’m not in Camden Yards anymore!

Rob Whyte
I’ve just finished a 20-minute uphill march to Bongnae Pokpo (p225) on Ulleung-do. It’s not a large waterfall, but it’s a worthwhile trip because the path weaving through a thick forest leads to a delightful discovery: a cool cave that maintains a year-round temperature of 4°C.

For full author biographies see p420.
DISCOVER KOREA

Two Weeks / Seoul to Jeju-do

Set aside four or five days for nonstop Seoul (p86), including a day trip north to the DMZ (p152). Next head east to Chuncheon (p174) where you can cycle around the lake and sample the town’s famous chicken dish, dakgalbi.

Dine on fresh seafood in Sokcho (p178), then hike around the stunning peaks and waterfalls of Seoraksan National Park (p182). Follow the coast south to Gangneung (p185) to view well-preserved Joseon-era buildings, quirky museums and a tiny North Korean spy submarine at Jeongdongjin (p189). Use Samcheok (p192) as your base for exploring the huge caves Hwaseongul and Daegeumgul (p194), as well as Haesindang Park (p194), packed with phallic sculptures.

Travel back to feudal times at charming Hahoe Folk Village (p231). Continue exploring Korea’s past at Gyeongju (p208), ancient capital of the Shilla kingdom, where you can spend a couple of days exploring royal tombs, the treasures of its excellent museum and the World Heritage–listed grotto at Seokguram (p213).

If you’re running short of time, finish up in the bustling port of Busan (p237), just three hours by the fastest train to Seoul. It would be a shame, though, to miss the scenic delights and adventure activities of Jeju-do (p282), the number one honeymoon destination of newlywed Koreans.

North Korea can only be seen as part of a guided tour; for more information see p349.
GOURMET FEAST  ••  Classic Routes

This lip-smacking tour combines sightseeing with the best of Korean cuisine. In Seoul (p86), between palace-, museum- and gallery-hopping, feast on everything from royal cuisine to humble street snacks. Be sure not to miss out on the Noryangjin fish market (p111).

Fine Chinese food can be found in Incheon’s historic Chinatown (p164), a subway ride west of Seoul. Another subway ride south of the capital, tuck into galbi (beef ribs) after walking the ramparts of Suwon’s fortress wall (p156).

An hour’s bus ride from Daejeon is Geumsan (boxed text, p327), centre of Korea’s ginseng industry, and packed with shops and restaurants selling all manner of products and dishes using the wonder root. Continue south to Jeonju (p306), birthplace of the classic rice dish bibimbap.

Learn about Korea’s human rights and democracy heroes in Gwangju (p262) then sample the area’s great selection of kimchi. Towards the south coast is the beautiful green-tea plantation Boseong Daehan Dawon (p273), where you can enjoy food and drinks made with nokcha (green tea).

Nagan Folk Village (p270) is a gorgeous destination at any time of the year, but foodies will want to head here in October for its food festival. Ureok (rockfish) is the speciality of Busan (p237), which also has a great seafood market – the best place to sample hoe (raw fish).

Fly on to Jeju-do (p282) where you can dig into the island’s unique dishes, such as jeonbok juk (abalone rice porridge) and heukdwaeji (black pig pork), between touring the sights, such as the world’s longest system of lava-tube caves (p292).

Korean cuisine covers such a multitude of flavours and styles that it would take a lifetime to sample everything, but this 1000km itinerary hopping between some of the country’s gourmet hotspots is a good start.
WEST TO EAST SEA Two Weeks / Incheon Airport to Ulleung-do

From Incheon International Airport (p145) it’s a very quick hop to the small, idyllic island of Muui-do (p168). Direct buses from Incheon mean there’s no need to head into Seoul to reach your next destinations: Gongju (p324) and Buyeo (p328), the ancient capitals of the Baekje kingdom.

After enjoying the sands and seafood of Daecheon Beach (p331) sail to the serene island of Sapsi-do (p332), before touring pretty Anmyeon-do (p333) and watching the sunset from Mallipo Beach (p334).

Travel inland to Daejeon where you can soak at Yuseong Hot Springs (p321). From here make your way to Cheongju and on to Songnisan National Park (p340), covering central Korea’s finest scenic area and home to a 33m-tall gold-plated Buddha statue.

Chungju is the gateway to the equally lovely Woraksan National Park (p343) and for a two-hour scenic ferry trip across Chungju Lake to sleepy Danyang (p344), small-town Korea at its most charming. From here explore nearby limestone caves (p344) and the stately temple complex of Guin-sa (p346).

In Taebaeksan Provincial Park visit the mountain-top Dangun altar (p196), which honours Korea’s mythical half-bear founder. Then board the train in Taebaek (p196) bound for Donghae on the coast, from where you can take the ferry to Ulleung-do (p222). This sparsely inhabited, ruggedly beautiful volcanic island is a truly off-the-beaten-track experience.

There’s a lot to recommend in Seoul, but if you’d prefer to avoid the capital it’s possible on this 750km coast-to-coast itinerary starting on the island of Muui-do and finishing 135km out in the East Sea at spectacular Ulleung-do.
**THE DEEP SOUTH TRAIL**  
**Two Weeks / Jeonju to Busan**

The rural southwest is Korea’s greenest region. Start your explorations in Jeonju (p306), provincial capital of Jeollabuk-do, which has a fascinating hanok village crammed with traditional houses and buildings. See the rock-pinnacle garden and climb a horse’s ear at Maisan Provincial Park (p311), then go hiking or skiing in beautiful Deogyusan National Park (p312).

Scenic splendours and an ancient Buddha carved on a cliff await you at Seonunsan Provincial Park (p315). Take a ferry from Gunsan to a slice of island paradise called Seonyu-do (p317) or to rarely visited Eocheong-do, which attracts bird enthusiasts.

Further south, Gwangju (p262), home to several interesting historical sites and museums, will soon be home to a major arts complex. Also don’t miss the bamboo town of Damyang (p269).

At Mokpo visit the museums (p279) before taking a boat to the remote havens of Heuksan-do (p281) and Hong-do (p281). Admire Korea’s centuries-old tradition of pottery at the Gangjin Celadon Museum (p274) and taste food and drinks made from healthy green tea at the beautiful Boseong Daehan Dawon Tea Plantation (p273).

Go birdspotting in the Ramsar-listed wetlands of Suncheon Bay (boxed text, p270), then continue along the coast to Yeosu, where you can hike up to Hyangiram (p273), a Buddhist temple perched on a cliff with awesome coastal and island views.

For a final eco experience don’t miss the beautiful hike on the unspoiled Yeonhwa-do (p253), which is easily reached by ferry from Tongyeong. The trail finishes at the bustling port of Busan (p237), Korea’s second-largest city.

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Fast trains and buses can whisk you from Seoul to Jeonju in less than three hours to start this 850km route around Korea’s least-developed region, which offers the opportunity to visit hundreds of unspoilt islands, dine in countless seafood restaurants and dig deep into artistic traditions.
KARMA KOREA

Like all journeys, this one around Korea’s Buddhist temples begins with a single step. First, learn something about the religion during a temple life program at Seoul’s Jogye-sa or Bong-eun-sa (p113).

Contrast highly modern Guin-sa (p346), the headquarters of the Cheontae sect, with Magok-sa (p327), an ancient temple in a remote spot with a hall of 1000 pint-sized disciples that are all slightly different.

Daegu can used as base for trips to stunning Haein-sa (p207), housing a World Heritage–listed library of over 80,000 14th-century woodblocks, and Jikji-sa (p207), a magnificent temple dating back to the 5th century.

Jinan is the access town for Tap-sa (p312), a tiny temple surrounded by two ‘horse ear’ mountains and an extraordinary sculptural garden of 80 stone pinnacles (or towers) that were piled up by a Buddhist mystic, while from Gwangju you can visit Unju-sa (p268), with its fine collection of stone pagodas and unusual twin and reclining Buddhas.

Tongdo-sa (p252), said to be Korea’s largest and most important Buddhist temple, has an excellent Buddhist art museum containing 30,000 artefacts. Nearby Seongnam-sa (p252) is a visual masterpiece set in a provincial park.

Finally, Bulguk-sa (p213) is a World Heritage-listed temple that represents the crowning glory of Shilla architecture.

KIDS KOREA

This two-centre itinerary is ideal for parents looking to balance their own travelling needs with those of their toddlers and teens. Seoul has an abundant number of kid-friendly attractions (p118) including amusement parks, regular parks, aquariums and, in summer, outdoor swimming pools. Older kids will most likely be happy cruising the capital’s vast shopping malls and department stores (p144) or being part of the audience for the filming of an e-sports show (boxed text, p52).

Day trips include the beaches of the West Sea islands (p166), Korea’s biggest amusement park Everland Resort (p158) and the Korean Folk Village (p158). These last two can just as easily be visited from Suwon (p155), where everyone will have fun hiking around the walls of an 18th-century fortress. North of Seoul the modern village of Heyri (p154) is an opportunity to relax and distract small children with some inventive sculptures and art exhibits.

Hop on a flight to Jeju-do (p282), an island blessed with a fascinating volcanic landscape and dozens of sandy beaches. Amusement and water parks, circus shows, cycle and skate hire, and a whole raft of adventure activities from quad biking to balloon rides are possible on this fun-packed island with plenty of world-class resorts.
WORLD HERITAGE KOREA

South Korea has eight cultural properties and one natural property inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage list (http://whc.unesco.org/en/statlist/kr). Several of them can easily be visited in or around Seoul, including the royal ancestral shrine Jongmyo (p107), the beautiful palace complex Changdeokgung (p105), and sites of the royal tombs of the Joseon dynasty at Samreung Gongwon (p112) and Donggureung (boxed text, p152).

Within day trip range of the capital is Suwon’s impressive fortress Hwaseong (p156) and mysterious stone dolmen sites of Ganghwa-do (p170). It was on Ganghwa-do that the Tripitaka Koreana, 81,258 wooden printing blocks containing Buddhist scriptures, were originally carved. They now reside at the World Heritage–listed temple Haein-sa (p207).

The historic surrounds of Gyeongju (p208) – ‘the museum without walls’ – are sprinkled with outstanding examples of Korean Buddhist art in the form of sculptures, reliefs, pagodas and the remains of temples and palaces. Nearby, in the mountains above the temple Bulguksa, is a superb mid-8th-century stone Buddha that resides in the Seokguram Grotto (p213).

Lastly, three sites on the volcanic island of Jeju-do – the mountain Hallasan (p303), the lava-tube caves at Manjanggul (p292) and the crown-like peak of Seongsan Ilchulbong (p293) – are testament to Korea’s natural beauty.

ACTIVE KOREA

Hiking, skiing, cycling, rafting – name the activity and you’ll find battalions of Koreans fully kitted out and crazy for it. Limber up in Seoul by hiring a bike to pedal along the Han River (boxed text, p113), or hop on a subway to reach Bukhansan National Park (p151), where there are many hiking trails.

Serious hikers will want to tackle Hallasan (p303), South Korea’s tallest peak, as well as follow 200km of marked trails that make up the Jeju Olle (p286). Other favourite hikes includes those in Wolchusan National Park (p277), Korea’s smallest, which includes a vertigo-inducing 52m bridge spanning two ridges, and Jirisan National Park (p258), where 12 peaks over 1000m form a 40km ridge.

Want to get wet? Then join a white-water rafting or kayaking trip on the fast-flowing rivers near Cheorwon and Inje (boxed text, p176). Or fully submerge yourself off Seogwipo (p296), Korea’s best scuba-diving destination, with colourful corals, kelp forests and dolphins.

If winter sports are your bag, then the best ski resorts to head to are Alps (p185), which has Korea’s heaviest snowfall, Yongpyong (p190) and Muju (p312) in picturesque Deogyusan National Park. Ice climbers can try scaling the frozen waterfall at Gangchon (p177).
The Authors

SIMON RICHMOND  Coordinating Author, Seoul, Gyeonggi-do
Long before he became a travel writer and photographer Simon spent several years living in Japan. He finally made it to Seoul in 2004 on a brief visit that left him hungering for more – especially of the deliciously spicy food. The six-week research trip for this guide allowed him to dig deeper into what makes this fascinating country tick, to sample a far wider range of its cuisine and to get excited about its high-tech future. Simon has authored many guides for Lonely Planet in the region, including Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei and the Trans-Siberian Railway. See photos and read some of the background to his research for this guide at simonrichmond.wordpress.com.

YU-MEI BALASINGAMCHOW  Food & Drink, Gangwon-do, Chungcheongnam-do, Chungcheongbuk-do
After years of lapping up Korean food and film, Yu-Mei made her first foray into South Korea for this guidebook. During her research trip, she tramped for miles along quiet stretches of coastline (and even quieter stretches of hiking trails), scrambled guiltily over limestone formations at the behest of a cave guide, and wrestled with squirming sannakji (raw octopus) as it tried to writhe off her chopsticks. Her only disappointment was not making it up Taebaeksan because of bad weather. Yu-Mei lives in Singapore, where she writes about travel, food, history and the arts. She worked on the latest edition of Lonely Planet’s Vietnam guidebook and has co-authored a popular history of Singapore.

CÉSAR G SORIANO  Active Korea, Jeollanam-do, Jeju-do, Jeollabuk-do
César’s first trip to South Korea was not by choice. As a young US Army soldier in 2000, he was deployed to Seoul and later to an undisclosed bunker near the North Korean border, having never seen beyond Itaewon. For this book, César made up for lost time by exploring the southwest on land and sea, eating several pigs’ worth of bulgogi (barbecued meat slices) in Jeollabuk-do, drinking too much soju (local vodka) in Jeollanam-do and working it off by hiking and diving in Jeju-do. A career journalist and former USA TODAY foreign correspondent, César has authored several Lonely Planet guidebooks. You can follow his exploits on his website (www.cesarsoriano.com). César and his wife, Marsha, live in Washington, DC.

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ROB WHYTE  The Culture, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Gyeongsangnam-do
For the best part of 15 years, Rob has been living in Korea. He teaches the past tense to college students and twists Malcolm Gladwell’s ideas into talking points for elementary and secondary school teachers. A shocking example of someone who never bothered to formulate a life plan, his advice for anyone with hopes of becoming an English teacher in Korea is simple: don’t get too comfortable, otherwise you might end up staying a lot longer than you ever imagined. Rob lives in Busan with his family, where his only regret is the lack of affordable golf.

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

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