

Gyeonggi-do & Incheon-gwangyeok-si

경기도 & 인천광역시



Encircling Seoul are the province of Gyeonggi-do and the metropolitan area of Incheon-gwangyeok-si, which includes the expanding city of Incheon and the nearby islands flaking into the muddy West Sea like crumbs from a doughnut. Here lie illustrious historical sites – several of them World Heritage listed – timeless temples, cultural villages, sandy beaches and tree-covered mountains that are crying out to be climbed in summer and skied in winter.

All the region's destinations are within easy day-trip range of Seoul, although to get the most from some places it's best to stay overnight or even longer. Incheon International Airport's excellent transport connections and location on the island of Yeongjong-do means that you needn't even go into Seoul first to visit many places.

The ancient dolmen (simple stone tombs) scattered across the island of Ganghwa-do are proof of the area's long and fascinating history. It was here that the 'hermit kingdom' started to be forced out of its self-imposed isolation in the mid-19th century. The resulting mingling of cultures several decades later in nearby Incheon can still be viewed in the port's colourful Chinatown.

For a chilling reminder of cold-war animosities, hop on a DMZ-bound tour bus and catch glimpses of North Korea from the Joint Security Area. Impressive fortifications (minus the barbed wire and landmines) are the principal draw of Suwon, while in Incheon the lures are a chance to buy beautiful Korean pottery or wallow in hot-spring baths. Travellers with children can enjoy Seoul Grand Park, Anyang Art Park and Everland Resort – Korea's answer to Disneyland.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike to the granite peaks and mountainside temples in **Bukhansan National Park** (p151)
- Discover Korea's colonial past and **China-town** (p163) on a walk through Incheon
- Fathom the bizarre terror-meets-tourism experience of a trip to the **DMZ** (p152)
- Stride along the World Heritage-listed **fortress wall** (p156) of Suwon then enjoy a meal of **beef-bone soup** (p157)
- Chill out in **Heyri** (p154), a quirky contemporary village devoted to art and low-key architecture
- Escape to one of the lovely islands of the West Sea such as **Muui-do** (p168)





History

As an important place since the Three Kingdoms period (p26) over 2000 years ago, the area's history is practically wrapped up with that of the peninsula, although it really started to come to prominence with the ascendancy of the Goryeo dynasty in the 10th century. The province's current border with North Korea makes it a front line for this war, and even today tunnel-detection teams operate in hopes of fending off North Korean incursions.

Gyeonggi-do's designation as a province dates from after the Korean War. The seat of regional government has been Suwon (p155) since 1967. Incheon-gwangyeok-si was hived off from Gyeonggi-do in 1981 and continues

to grow with giant areas of landfill in the West Sea having been converted recently into the new urban centres of Songdo International City and Cheongna.

National & Provincial Parks

The proximity of beautiful **Bukhansan National Park** (opposite) to Seoul means that the splendid views from its multiple peaks often have to be shared with hundreds of other hikers; minimise the crowds by starting early or visiting during the week.

Namhan Sanseong Provincial Park (p160) is also an easy day trip from Seoul that offers hiking, wildflower and bird viewing, and interesting meandering along ancient fortress walls.