## Jeju-do 제주도



Set against a tropical backdrop of swaying palm trees, sandy beaches and towering volcanic features, Jeju-do (http://english.jeju.go.kr) is South Korea's top holiday and honeymoon destination. Foreign travellers, too, are quickly discovering this island paradise and the warm hospitality of its native population. With beautiful beaches, waterfalls, gardens, museums, folk villages, golf courses, casinos, scuba diving, hiking and countless festivals, there is plenty to see and do.

Most spectacular are the volcanic landscapes. Smack in the middle of the island is South Korea's highest mountain, Hallasan (1950m), a national park with varied ecological zones, cute little roe deer and wonderful azalea blooms. On the east is the incredible volcanic crater, Ilchulbong, and its black sand beaches. Nearby, on the island of U-do, black-lava cliffs contrast against a white coral-sand beach. In the northeast is Manjanggul, the world's longest lava tube.

On the south coast, eroded sheer cliffs plunge dramatically into the turquoise waters of the South China Sea. The sea temperature is the warmest in Korea and the coral near Seogwipo is as colourful as the sunsets. Whether you take the 200km challenge of hiking the Jeju Olle footpaths across the island, partake in the unique local cuisine or lie back and toast on the sand, Jeju-do is one part of Korea that you don't want to miss.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Hike to the crater lake atop volcanic
   Hallasan (p303), South Korea's highest mountain, with its spectacular views and four distinct ecological zones
- Take an underground stroll through the world's largest lava-tube cave system,
   Manjanggul (p292)
- Climb to the top of the forested volcanic crater atop Seongsan Ilchulbong (p293), cool off with a dip at the Ilchulbong black sand beach, followed by a lunch of freshly caught seafood
- Manjanggul Ilchulbong.★

  ★ Hallim Park

  ★ Hallasan

  Jungmun Resort

  ★ ★
- Explore the colourful coral and sea life with a scuba dive (p298) off the coast of Seogwipo (p296), a wonderfully laid-back town housing two amazing waterfalls
- Visit the beaches, waterfalls, museums, luxury spas and hotels of Korea's top honeymoon destination, Jungmun Resort (p300)
- Experience the island's best bits in a day at Hallim Park (p303), home to lava tubes, gardens and nearby beaches

## History

Despite being just 85km from the mainland, Jeju-do was little visited for centuries. As a result it acquired its own history, traditions, dress, architecture and dialect.

According to legend, Jeju-do was founded by three brothers (p288) who came out of holes in the ground and established the independent Tamna kingdom. Early in the 12th century the Goryeo dynasty took over, but in 1273 Mongol invaders conquered the island, contributing a tradition of horsemanship, a special horse (*jorangmal*; p302) and quirks in the local dialect.

In 1653 a Dutch trading ship was wrecked on the island (p301). A kindly Jeju-do governor looked after the 36 survivors, but when a few tried to escape they were severely beaten. After 10 months they were taken to Seoul and were forced to stay in Korea for 13 years, until some of them escaped in a boat to Japan. One of the escapees, Hendrick Hamel, published his experiences, the first detailed account of the 'hermit kingdom' by a European.

During the later Joseon period, the island became home to over 200 exiles: intellectuals.

Catholic converts and political undesirables who spent their time teaching the islanders and composing wistful poems.

Through it all, the locals carried on earning their living by fishing and farming. The island is famous for tangerines, which are grown on the southern coastal lowlands and are for sale throughout the year. Inland, pastures support horses and cattle.

Like the rest of the country, the past few decades have seen the island change radically – most of the coastline is now built up and many farms have been turned into golf courses. The catalyst has been a flood of tourists from the mainland and abroad, which peaks from mid-July to mid-August. The numbers of *haenyeo* (traditional female divers; see the boxed text, p295) are in steep decline.

In 2006 the island was made into a special autonomous province, giving it a level of self-government that is hoped will encourage further economic development.

## Climate

The island's climate is less extreme than that of the Korean peninsula, and the mild winters

