

## NEIGHBOURHOODS

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- **Gyeongbokgung** (p38)  
Seoul's grandest palace includes two museums
- **Changdeokgung** (p39)  
A unique World Heritage garden adjoins the palace
- **Deoksugung** (p42)  
Includes a tea pavilion and two art galleries
- **Jongmyo** (p42)  
Confucian shrines honouring 500 years of Joseon royalty
- **National Museum of Korea** (p73)  
Ancient treasures displayed in a modern setting
- **War Memorial & Museum** (p73)  
A wonderful exhibition brings the Korean War to life
- **Seodaemun Prison** (p74)  
Torture chambers and an execution room
- **Jogyesa** (p49)  
Colourful temple with Buddhist art-and-crafts lessons
- **Olympic Park** (p67)  
200 wacky sculptures, five stadiums and three museums
- **World Cup Stadium** (p75)  
With a park, cinema, mall, spa and more

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# NEIGHBOURHOODS

Seoul's main historical and sightseeing area is bustling downtown Gwanghwamun, which includes a handful of feudal-era palaces and museums as well as artsy-crafty Insadong and Samcheong-dong. Seoul Plaza, outside City Hall, and the Cheonggyecheon Plaza frequently host events in a city with more festivals than days in the year. To the north lies Bukhansan National Park, with a cobweb of hiking trails that lead up through densely wooded hillsides to picturesque Buddhist temples and granite peaks. The park is packed with hikers at week-

ends, so it's best to come during the week and avoid queuing for the summits. Seoul is surrounded by mountains, which is why King Taejo chose the city as the capital 600 years ago.

To the east is the student and theatre district of Daehangno, which has street sculptures and murals, a jazz academy and a very lively drama scene. Over 50 small theatres compete for business, covering the neighbourhood with posters advertising their shows. Further east is an eclectic band of traditional markets that sell clothes and collectables, accessories and antiques, Asian health foods and medicines. The reopening of the Cheonggye stream means you can walk along it from downtown to Dongdaemun Market.

To the south, within walking distance of City Hall and downtown, is the ever-popular fashion shopping and entertainment area of Myeong-dong, which lures thousands of young people and tourists every evening. Brand names aimed at young and old hang out here, and you can lose yourself for hours in the latticework of narrow, quiet streets, the underground shopping arcades and the four-in-a-row Lotte department stores.

Just over the road the huge Namdaemun Market is very traditional, from the lack of price tags to the pork-hock meals and the money-changing grannies sitting outdoors on stools. Further south, walk or take the cable car up Namsan (South Mountain) and visit the landmark N Seoul Tower, jutting from the mountaintop, for another perspective on Seoul. Namsan used to be a Japanese enclave during the colonial era, but the area is being returned to nature and this splash of green is becoming popular with early morning joggers.

South of Namsan is the busy tourist shopping and expat entertainment area of Itaewon – a different atmosphere to the rest of the city. It's a UN of eating establishments and gay and hostess bars, with street stalls blocking up the pavements and lots of foreigners walking around.

To the west, just a short subway ride from downtown, is the buzzing student neighbourhood made up of Hongdae, Sinchon and Ewha. Hongdae has the indie bands, clubbing and quirky cafés, Sinchon has the restaurants, bars and love motels, and Ewha has the fashion and beauty shops, including a street of designer wedding dresses with starkly contrasting styles, all extravagant.

The majestic Han River (Hangang) winds through the city, its banks dotted with cycleways, swimming pools and parks. In the river is the island of Yeouido, a financial and administrative hub that is home to the stock exchange and the National Assembly.

South of the river, the upmarket residential and business neighbourhood of Gangnam includes Apgujeong, with global and local brand-name boutiques, plush department stores and luxury hotels. Garosu-gil is an interesting Euro-Korean street of bistros and boutiques, while a galaxy of restaurants, bars and shops clusters around Gangnam station. Further east is Jamsil where the giant COEX Mall and Conference Centre, the multifaceted Lotte World and the sculpture-filled Olympic Park are located. These all represent modern Seoul, while the atmospheric temple Bonguensa and a trio of royal tombs in a rare patch of greenery are reminders of the past.

The excellent foreigner-friendly subway system brings the many attractions beyond central Seoul within easy reach, including the parks and mall at the World Cup Stadium, a massive zoo, must-see museums and art galleries, a horse-racing track and Ttukseom Seoul Forest Park.

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