



Chungcheongbuk-do

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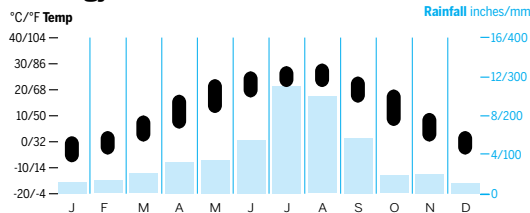
Why Go?

The only landlocked province in the South, Chungbuk (충청북도) as it's known informally, is largely mountainous and agricultural. The province is a sleepy sort of place and its major cities are not particularly compelling, though bibliophiles may be inclined to make a pilgrimage to Cheongju, where in 1377 Buddhist monks printed the world's oldest extant book with movable metal type.

The province's charms can be better appreciated in its smaller towns and three national parks, which are home to an assortment of intriguing Buddhist sites. There's plenty to see and do here: climb the azalea-covered peaks of Sobaek-san, descend into the otherworldly caverns of Gosu Donggul, or simply savour the views along the river and at nearby Chungju-ho. Then there's Guin-sa, a Buddhist temple ensconced in a tight valley, as imposing as the mountain slopes on either side of it. If you have a few days to while away, this is the place to do it.

When to Go

Cheongju



Apr The flowers in the national parks come alive, plus the weather is mercifully cool for hiking.

Jun Low season; you'll get in just before the heat wave, summer rains and price hikes.

Dec Sure it's cold but the sights are often coated in picturesque sheets of snow.

Cheongju

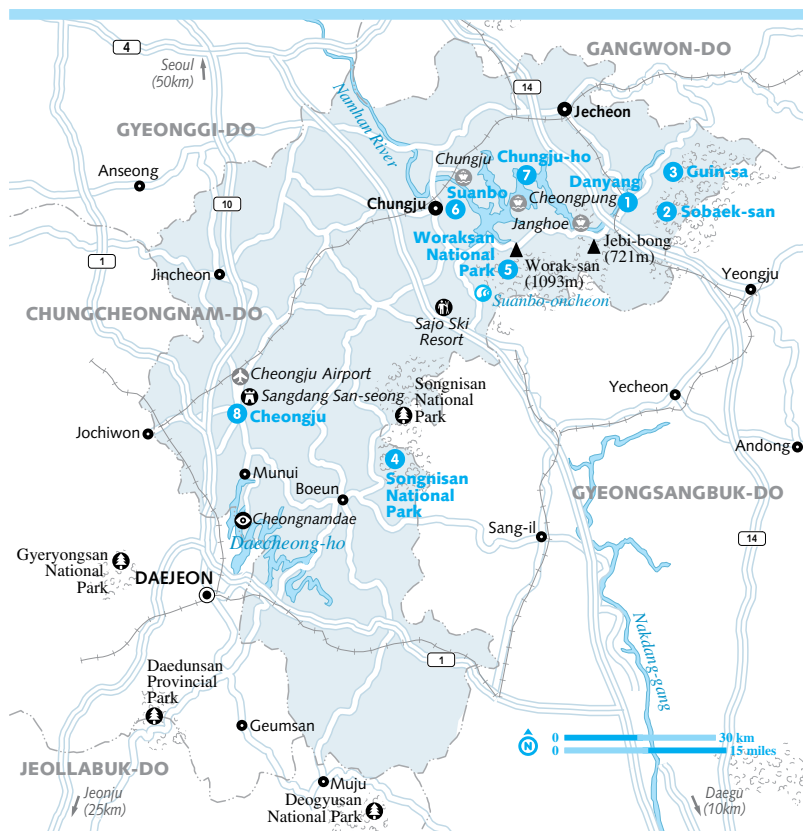
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Like most provincial capitals, Cheongju (<http://english.cjcity.net>) – not to be confused with nearby Chungju – is not terribly captivating. Its primary claim to fame is as

the place where the world's oldest book was printed using movable metal type.

As a modern city it's somewhat redeemed by a youthful vibe, thanks to its universities, but if not for its proximity to Songnisan National Park and presidential villa Cheongnamdae, there'd be little reason to stop here.



Chungcheongbuk-do Highlights

- 1 Waking up to glorious mountain views in **Danyang** (p302).
- 2 Hiking up nearby **Sobaek-san** (p304), where azaleas bloom in May.
- 3 Signing up for a templestay at bustling **Guin-sa** (p304), a modern but awe-inspiring hillside temple complex.
- 4 Admiring the gold-plated Buddha at Beopju-sa in **Songnisan National Park** (p298), then overnighting at a charming *yeogwan* beside a burbling river.
- 5 Contemplating ancient Buddhist carvings and the evocative ruins of Mireuksaji at **Woraksan National Park** (p302).
- 6 Soothing your stresses at an *oncheon* (hot-spring spa) in **Suanbo** (p300).
- 7 Admiring the scenery as you cruise down **Chungju-ho** (p300).
- 8 Learning all about the *Jikji*, the first book printed by movable type, in the province's capital of **Cheongju** (p294).