

Welcome to Korea

Split by a fearsome border, the Korean Peninsula offers the traveller a dazzling range of experiences, beautiful landscapes and 5000 years of culture and history.

Ancient & Modern

The blue and red circle at the heart of the South Korean flag neatly symbolises the divided Korean Peninsula, but also the fluid mix of the ancient and the modern in the country officially called the Republic of Korea (ROK), where the vast majority of visitors will spend their time. South Korea is a dream destination – an engaging, welcoming place where the benefits of a high-tech nation are balanced by a reverence for tradition and the ways of old Asia.

Urban Marvel

Korea might be known as the Land of the Morning Calm, but dive into its capital, Seoul, the powerhouse of Asia's third-largest economy, and serenity is the last thing you'll feel. This round-the-clock city is constantly on the move, with its work-hard, play-hard population the epitome of the nation's indefatigable, can-do spirit. You can hardly turn a corner without stumbling across a tourist information booth, a subway station or a taxi in this multifaceted metropolis where meticulously reconstructed palaces rub shoulders with teeming night markets and the latest technological marvel.

Gorgeous Countryside

South Korea's compact size and superb transport infrastructure mean that tranquillity can be found in easy reach of the urban sprawl. Hike to the summits of craggy mountains enclosed by densely forested national parks. Some of those same mountains transform into ski slopes come winter. Get further off the beaten path than you thought possible by sailing to remote islands, where farming and fishing folk welcome you into their homes and simple seafood cafes. Chill out in serene villages surrounded by rice fields, sleeping in rustic *hanok* (traditional wooden house) guesthouses.

Festivals & Food

Rest assured the ROK also knows how to rock. A packed calendar of festivals and events means there's almost always a celebration of some sort to attend wherever you are – it might be Boryeong for its mud fest, or Gwangju for its Biennale or its annual salute to that most Korean of foods: kimchi. Friendly Koreans are always delighted to share their culture with visitors – often that means over a shared meal with a tantalising array of dishes and plenty of toasts with local alcoholic beverages.



Why I Love Korea

By Simon Richmond, Author

For all of its headlong rush into the 21st century on a *hallyu* (Korean popular culture wave), what charms me most about the ROK is its proud promotion of age-old traditions and culture. I fondly recall meditating at a Buddhist temple retreat where the honk of traffic was replaced by the rhythmic predawn chants of shaven-headed monks; hiking along Seoul's 600-year-old city walls; and walking parts of the Jeju Olle Trail, connecting with history and island traditions on the way. My taste buds also tingle with the memory of one of Asia's least known, but most delicious, cuisines.

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Above: Hwaseong (p101), Suwon