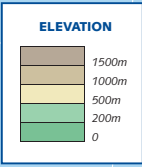
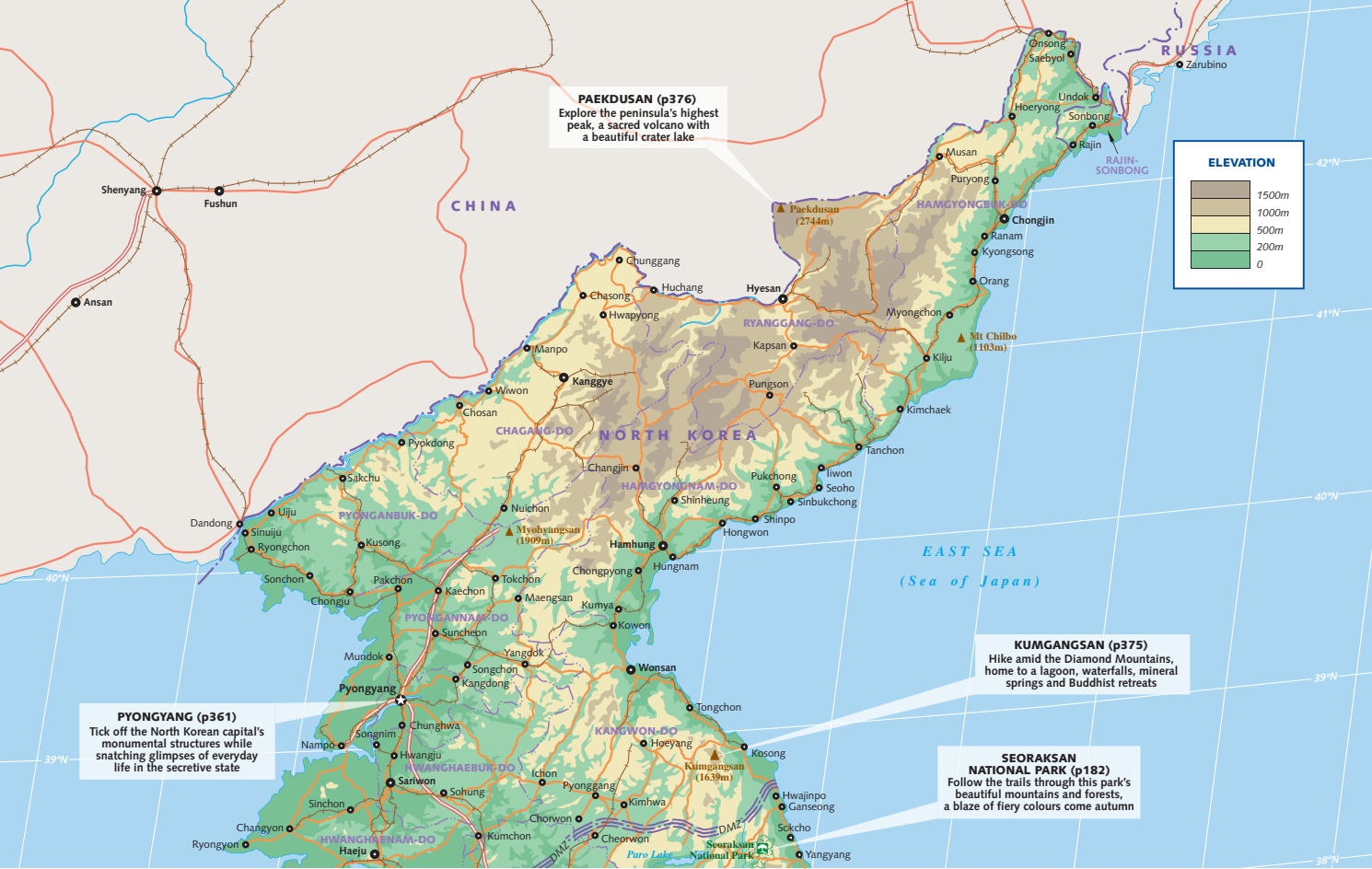


Korea



Simon Richmond

Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, César G Soriano, Rob Whyte



PAEKDUSAN (p376)
Explore the peninsula's highest peak, a sacred volcano with a beautiful crater lake

PYONGYANG (p361)
Tick off the North Korean capital's monumental structures while snatching glimpses of everyday life in the secretive state

KUMGANGSAN (p375)
Hike amid the Diamond Mountains, home to a lagoon, waterfalls, mineral springs and Buddhist retreats

SEORAKSAN NATIONAL PARK (p182)
Follow the trails through this park's beautiful mountains and forests, a blaze of fiery colours come autumn

CHINA

RUSSIA

NORTH KOREA

EAST SEA
(Sea of Japan)

Pearl Lake

D.M.Z.

Seoraksan National Park

Shenyang
Fushun

Ansan

40°N

39°N

42°N

41°N

40°N

39°N

38°N

Zarubino

Gnongsong

Saebiyon

Hoeryong

Undok

Sonbong

Rajin

RAJIN-SONBONG

Musan

Puryong

Chongjin

Ranam

Kyongsong

Orang

Myongchon

Kilju

Kimchaek

Mt Chillo (1103m)

Pungson

Hyesan

Chunggang

Chasong

Huchang

Hwapyong

Manpo

Kanggye

Wiwon

Choson

CHAGANG-DO

RYANGGANG-DO

HANGYON-NAM-DO

MYOLLYANGSAN (1909m)

Hamhung

Chongpyong

Hungnam

Kumya

Koywon

Wonsan

Tongchon

Kangwon-DO

Hoeyang

Kosong

Kumgongsan (1639m)

Pyongyang

Kimhwa

Chorwon

Cheorwon

D.M.Z.

Pearl Lake

Seoraksan National Park

Yangyang

Dandong

Uiju

Sinuiju

Ryongchon

Sonchon

Chongju

Pakchon

Kaechon

Tokchon

Maengsan

Suncheon

Pyongyang

Mundok

Songchon

Kangdong

Chunghwa

Nampo

Songnim

Hwangju

Sariwon

Sinchon

Changyon

Ryongyon

Hwanghae-NAM-DO

Haeju

Pyongan-BUK-DO

Sakchu

Pyokdong

Pyongan-NAM-DO

Changjin

Shinhung

Shinpo

Hongwon

Pukchong

Iiwon

Seoho

Simbukchong

Tanchon

Changju

Nuichon

Changjin

Shinhung

Shinpo

Hongwon

Pukchong

Iiwon

Seoho

Simbukchong

Tanchon

PANMUNJOM (p152) & CHEORWON (p183)
Feel the chill of the Cold War at two different points on the 240km-long DMZ separating North and South Korea

GANGHWA-DO (p169)
Escape the urban grind on this island littered with historic sights where you can indulge in seafood feasts

SEOUL (p86)
Dive into South Korea's hyperdynamic, increasingly eco-friendly capital, a showcase for the country's traditions and forward thinking

WEST SEA
(Yellow Sea)

DAECHEON BEACH (p331)
Get dirty on the west coast's best beach during its nine-day mud festival held every July

GONGJU (p324) & BUYEO (p328)
Be dazzled by Baekje dynasty tomb treasures

JIRISAN NATIONAL PARK (p258)
Hike around wonderful mountains, home to attractive Buddhist temples and South Korea's second-highest peak

DADOHAE HAESANG NATIONAL PARK (p281)
Hop between the thousands of unspoilt islands in this marine park, where life is lived in the traditional way

JEJU-DO (p282)
Enjoy the spectacular volcanic landscapes of this activity-filled holiday island

ULLEUNG-DO (p222)
Savour the spectacular *Lord of the Rings*-style scenery of this remote and rugged volcanic island

HWASEONGUL (p194)
Marvel at the limestone wonders of this cathedral-like cave, one of Asia's largest


HAHOE FOLK VILLAGE (p231)
Slip back in time wandering the lanes of this charming village of *hanok* (traditional mud-walled and timber-framed houses)

GYEONGJU (p208)
Explore the temples, pagodas and royal tombs of what was once the capital of the Shilla kingdom

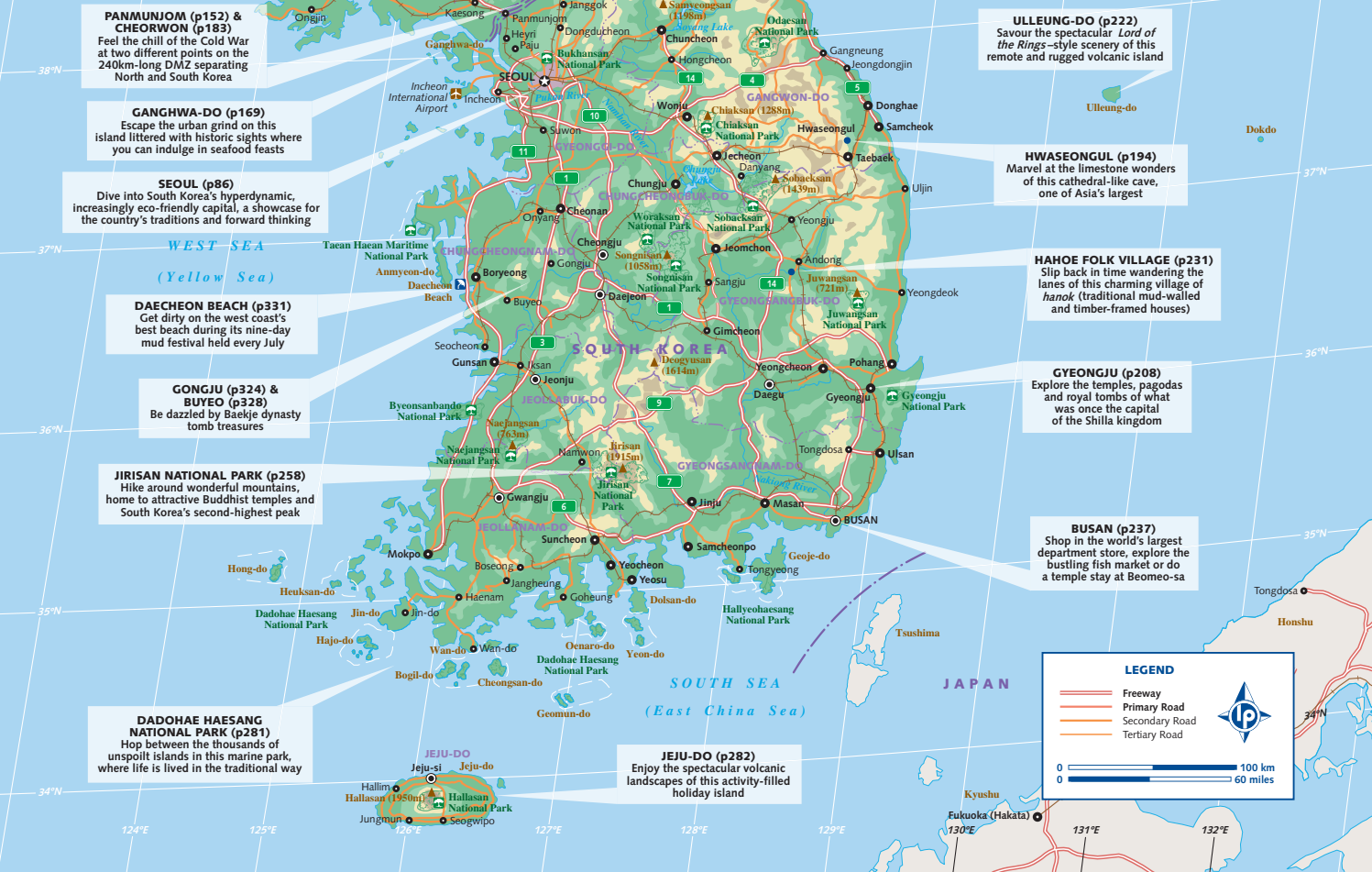
BUSAN (p237)
Shop in the world's largest department store, explore the bustling fish market or do a temple stay at Beomeo-sa

LEGEND

- Freeway
- Primary Road
- Secondary Road
- Tertiary Road



0 0 100 km
0 0 60 miles



On the Road



SIMON RICHMOND *Coordinating Author*

In the midst of typhoon-strength winds and rain I fronted up at the Boryeong Mud Festival (see boxed text, p332), stripped off and splashed around in the mud pool. Apart from being huge fun it's said to do wonders for your skin.



Yu-Mei Balasingamchow

On the climb up to this enigmatic rock-carved Buddha image in Woraksan National Park (p343), I fell into step with a couple of fashionably dressed hikers. Although they spoke barely any English, our temporary communion was sealed when they offered me the Korean equivalent of trail mix – a raw cucumber, crunchy and sweet.



César G Soriano Baseball, as in America, is South Korea's national pastime. The game is more or less the same, but instead of hot dogs and pretzels vendors sell dried squid and sushi. My seatmates at Gwangju's Mudeung Stadium (p265) plied me with *soju* (the local firewater) and taught me naughty Korean baseball chants. I'm not in Camden Yards anymore!



Rob Whyte I've just finished a 20-minute uphill march to Bongnae Pokpo (p225) on Ulleung-do. It's not a large waterfall, but it's a worthwhile trip because the path weaving through a thick forest leads to a delightful discovery: a cool cave that maintains a year-round temperature of 4°C.

Destination Korea

Yin and yang: the blue and red circle at the heart of the South Korean flag neatly symbolises not only the divided Korean peninsula but also the fluid mix of ancient and modern aspects of the country officially called the Republic of Korea (ROK). For the vast majority of visitors a trip to this part of the world means spending time in South Korea. Unfairly overshadowed by the headline-grabbing antics of its bad-boy neighbour, South Korea is a dream destination for the traveller, an engaging, welcoming place where the dazzling benefits of a fully industrialised, high-tech nation are balanced alongside a reverence for tradition and the ways of old Asia.

Academics still quibble over whether the Land of the Morning Calm (a term coined by travel writer Percival Lowell in 1885) is an accurate translation of the old Chinese characters by which all of Korea was once known. Dive into Seoul, powerhouse of Asia's third-largest economy, and calm is likely the last thing you'll feel. This round-the-clock city is constantly on the move, its 'work hard, play hard' population the epitome of the nation's indefatigable, can-do spirit.

Dubbed the world's Design Capital in 2010, Seoul is midway through an ambitious frenzy of reinvention that promises grand architectural statements, greener spaces and cultural rather than industrial targets. Softer 21st-century aspirations aside, the 600-year-old city is founded on a bedrock of tradition that manifests itself in the daily pageantry of the changing of the guard at its meticulously reconstructed palaces and the chants of a shaman on a hillside. You can hardly turn a corner without stumbling across a tourist information booth, a subway station or a taxi that can smooth your way to the next discovery in this multifaceted metropolis.

South Korea's excellent transport infrastructure and compact size mean that within an hour of the urban sprawl more tranquil moments are achievable atop craggy mountain peaks enclosed by densely forested national parks threaded through with picturesque, challenging hiking trails. Get further off the beaten bath than you could believe possible by sailing to remote islands, where farming and fishing folk will welcome you into their homes and simple seafood cafes. Or sample the serenity of a Buddhist temple retreat where the honk of traffic is replaced by meditation and the rhythmic pre-dawn chants of shaven-headed monks.

If all this sounds a little too peaceful for your travelling tastes, rest assured the ROK also knows how to rock. A countrywide itinerary of lively festivals and events means there's almost always a celebration of some sort to attend. If nothing else your tastebuds will be tingling at the discovery of one of Asia's least known, but most delicious cuisines. Friendly Koreans will happily share this and other aspects of their culture with you, regardless of language barriers.

An undercurrent to this bonhomie is the tension rippling out along the 38th parallel separating the two Koreas. The Cold War that has swirled around what is known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) for over half a century got a little hotter during 2009 when North Korea, in the face of international condemnation, went ahead in May with its second ever nuclear test explosion (the first being in 2006). The rogue state followed this up with a short-range missile test. Even though experts believe that North Korea has yet to develop a ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, there was understandable nervousness in Seoul (just 55km south of the border) as well as in Tokyo and Washington.

FAST FACTS: SOUTH KOREA

Population: 49 million

GDP per person:
US\$27,646

Life expectancy: 79.1
years

Inflation: 2.16% (August
2009)

Unemployment: 3.8%
(July 2009)

Percentage of the popula-
tion with the surname

'Kim': 21%

Prior to this, relations between the two Koreas had been deteriorating since the election, in December 2007, of Lee Myung-bak as South Korea's president. Heading up the conservative Grand National Party (GNP), Lee had campaigned on a platform of taking a tougher line with the North than had been practised under the previous left-wing government's 'Sunshine Policy' (see p44) – under Lee there would be no more unconditional economic aid. The public were particularly angry about the fatal shooting in 2008 of a South Korean tourist at a resort in North Korea's Kumgang mountains (p375) and the North's refusal to cooperate in a subsequent investigation. Tourist visits from South Korea to the North – a growing source of much-needed foreign income for the dictatorship – were subsequently suspended.

It hasn't helped that all this has been taking place in an environment of uncertainty caused by a physically ailing Kim Jong-il and a lack of clear knowledge of who would take over as the supreme North Korean leader after his demise. The Dear Leader did show up, looking gaunt, for a photo op in August 2009 with former US president Bill Clinton, who had made a surprise visit to gain the release of two female US reporters who had been found guilty in March of entering North Korea illegally. A few weeks later Hyundai Group chairwoman Hyun Jeong-eun prevailed in a similar mission to free a South Korean hostage held by North Korea.

At the August 2009 funeral of Kim Dae-jung, the democracy champion and Nobel Prize winner who was the chief architect of the 'Sunshine Policy', President Lee also met with North Korean envoys. The thaw in frosty North-South relations continued as talks recommenced on allowing brief reunions between Korean families divided by the border, and regular access was restored across the DMZ to the jointly run industrial park in Kaesong. However, the pendulum swung back slightly in September 2009 as the North fessed up to being responsible for a mysterious flash flood on the Imjin River that killed six South Koreans.

While South Korea and Japan remain united in their condemnation of the North's nuclear ambitions, the way some locals rail at their Far East Asian neighbour you'd be forgiven for thinking that WWII had only recently ended. The dispute over ownership of the group of islands and rocks known as Dok-do to the Koreans and Takeshima to the Japanese (p36) looks set to run and run – it's a battle that has as much to do with national pride as it does with the financial implications of Korea surrendering lucrative fishing grounds and the potentially large gas reserves in this part of the Sea of Japan (or East Sea as Koreans would have it). To mark the centenary in 2010 of the start of Japanese colonial rule on the Korean peninsula, President Lee extended an invitation to Japan's Emperor Akihito to visit Seoul, hoping that it would 'put an end to the sense of distance' between the two countries.

President Lee has also been attempting to build better relations with the US, which still has 30,000 troops stationed in the country. However in the summer of 2008, the president and his party were put on the defensive as large, occasionally violent demonstrations against resumed US beef imports brought central Seoul to a standstill. Lee's popularity plummeted and he was forced to apologise for not heeding public concerns over the safety of imported US beef. He also had to backtrack on a long-cherished plan to build a grand canal across the peninsula linking Seoul and Busan.

Hoping to regain his citizens' affection, the man known as 'the Bulldozer' (he was once CEO of Hyundai Engineering and Construction) moderated his tough-guy stance by proposing the kind of eco-friendly, green growth policies (p66) that had stood him in good stead when he was Seoul's mayor.

FAST FACTS: NORTH KOREA

Area: 120,540 sq km

Population: 24 million

Currency: North Korean won (unofficial rate on the black market: 4200KPW = €1; official rate 211KPW = €1)

Minimum military service for men: three years

Unemployment: 0%

Number of internet cafes: none

Getting Started

South Korea is a compact nation, an hour by plane from north to south. Trips can be tailored to suit all budgets and getting around is a breeze thanks to excellent transport infrastructure. North Korea is a whole other story – see p349.

WHEN TO GO

The best time of year to visit is autumn, from September to November, when skies are blue, the weather is usually sunny and warm and the forested mountainsides are ablaze with astonishing fall colours.

Spring, from April to June, is another beautiful season, with generally mild temperatures and cherry blossoms spreading north across the country in April. Camellias, azaleas and other plants and trees flower, but, as with autumn, some days can be cold and wet, so bring warm, rain-proof clothing.

Winter, from December to March, is dry but often bitterly cold, particularly in northern parts. Siberian winds drag January temperatures in most of the country (except Jeju-do) to below zero. This is the time of year when you really appreciate *ondol* (underfloor heating) and *oncheon* (hot-spring spas) as well as the ubiquitous saunas and spicy food. White snow on *hanok* (traditional house) roofs is very picturesque, and winter is the time for skiers, snowboarders or ice-skaters to visit.

Try to avoid peak summer, from late June to late August, which starts off with the monsoon season, when the country receives some 60% of its annual rainfall, and is followed by unpleasantly hot and humid weather. Although air-conditioning makes summers much more bearable these days, many locals flee the muggy cities for the mountains, beaches and islands, which become crowded, and accommodation prices double. There is also the chance of a typhoon or two.

COSTS & MONEY

For a developed country, Korea can be a remarkably inexpensive place in which to travel. Transport, simple Korean meals and snacks, alcohol and

View www.kma.go.kr for detailed weather forecasts in English. Also see Climate Charts (p389) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Checking whether you need to apply for a visa (p395).
- Learning to read the 24 *hangeul* characters (p411) so you can figure out business signs, menus and bus destinations.
- Studying the Food & Drink chapter (p68) so you know the difference between *samgyetang* (ginseng chicken soup) and *samgyeopsal* (barbecued fatty pork).
- Checking your socks have no holes in them as you must remove your shoes to enter Buddhist shrines, traditional restaurants and private homes.
- Packing your hiking boots, as Korea is stuffed with scenic mountains and well-marked trails.
- Improving your skill at charades and gestures as not many Koreans understand English.
- Practising being naked in front of strangers so you can enjoy Korea's many excellent and reasonably priced hot-spring spas (p82).
- Packing a pair of sheets if you're planning to stay in budget accommodation, which often only provide quilts.
- Bringing personal hygiene and brand-name medical items that may be difficult to obtain.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Bballi, bballi! (Quick, quick!) – Korea has built a blockbuster economy on this mantra. The local stereotype is that everything – plans included – can be done hurriedly, at the last possible minute. While this is never the best way to plan a trip, Korea doesn't present a lot to fret about before you touch down.

Think about booking ahead if you wish to stay at a *hanok*, or traditional house, as by design these old structures only house three or four rooms in total. In addition, the top-end international chain hotels can book up when conferences are in town. Hiking on the weekend can be a madhouse. If possible, consider taking a hike on a weekday instead – the same goes for skiing trips in the winter.

Call a few days ahead for the best seats at cultural events, and book the USO tour to the DMZ (p152) as soon as you can, as these fill up. If you're planning on travelling over any of the major holidays (p392), you should book your bus or train travel well ahead of time.

admission prices to many sights are relatively cheap or even – in the case of the country's network of splendid national parks – free.

Budget travellers, staying in backpacker hostels or the cheaper motels or *yeogwan* (p388), avoiding pricey course meals and travelling on buses, can easily get by on around W50,000 a day, probably even less if they are careful spenders. For those who wish to travel in more comfort, a budget of around W100,000 a day is more realistic. If your travel requirements run to four-star or higher accommodation and more lavish cuisine, this jumps to at least W300,000.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Unless you're already based in Asia a journey to Korea not using a flight is most likely off the cards. When the rail link between North and South Korea resumes it will open the way to the development of a Seoul–London train journey. For now though such a trip remains a distant dream.

The most direct rail route for getting to this side of the world from Europe or Asia is to ride the Trans-Siberian Railway: Lonely Planet's *Trans-Siberian Railway* guide provides the low-down on how to get to Vladivostok, from where it's possible to hop on a ferry to Sokcho (p179). There are also regular ferries to Korea from several ports in China (p165) or from Japan (p250).

Once in Korea it's far easier to do your bit for the environment by using the country's excellent public transport system. Seoul's extensive subway and train system is particularly impressive and the city is in the process of moving over to low-polluting natural-gas buses as well as full-hybrid and fuel-cell electric buses. As part of its 'low-carbon, green growth' strategy (p66) the government is promoting cycling and rolling out a raft of other environmentally friendly projects.

Most garbage is recycled – you can help by putting your rubbish in the appropriate bins for paper, cans and plastic. If you rent an apartment you will need separate rubbish bags for food waste, plastics, metal, paper and so on. The concierge will show you the system. Also try to cut down on waste by refusing unnecessary packaging in shops. A few stores discourage the use of plastic bags by charging for them.

A culture of volunteering is taking root – for options see p396. Organic and vegetarian restaurants are also becoming more popular as part of a boom in general wellbeing or LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) business and products. The Korean Standards Association has even developed a certification system for them – see <http://korealohas.or.kr> for some details in English.

HOW MUCH?

Local newspaper	W1000
Food-court lunch	W5000
Cinema ticket	W9000
Steak dinner	W40,000
Motel room	W40,000

For more detail on rail-ferry connections to Korea see www.seat61.com/SouthKorea.htm.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Meeting Mr Kim by Jennifer Barclay (2008) is a recent addition to the limited selection of travel literature on South Korea – a few things are dated since it's based on the author's experiences in 2000 but overall it's an amusing, easy read with some fresh insights into Korean culture.

Brother One Cell by Cullen Thomas (2008; cullenthomas.com) reveals a side of Korea that few visitors ever get (or would want) to see – the inside of a Korean prison. A kind of Korean *Midnight Express*, it's the author's memoir of his 3½-year incarceration for smuggling hashish into the country in 1994.

Korea Bug by J Scott Burgeson (2005; www.kingbaeksu.com) is a Seoul 'zine turned book, featuring interviews with a fascinating set of Seoul characters, including a shaman, a *gisaeng* (similar to a Japanese geisha), artists and directors.

A Peep into Korea by Kevin J Hayes (2006) documents the sporadic adventures of the author and his Korean wife across the country, including to places seldom visited by Western tourists.

Diamond Dilemma by Tariq Hussain (2006) is an outsider's perspective on how Korea is shaping up economically in the early 21st century and how it needs to change to achieve its full potential.

Korea Unmasked by Rhee Won-bok (2002) takes an illuminating and humorous look at contemporary Korean attitudes in a cartoon format by comparing Korea to neighbouring rivals China and Japan.

Korea by Simon Winchester (1988; www.simonwinchester.com) sees this talented writer vividly describing encounters with Korean monks, nuns, artists, marriage arrangers, US generals and, most memorably, a barber during his journey from Jeju-do to Seoul.

Korea and Her Neighbours by Isabella Bird (1898) is an account of the intrepid Victorian author's travels around Korea at a fascinating time in its

DECIPHERING KOREAN ADDRESSES & WORDS

In this guidebook we don't use full addresses for places since, in Korea, the actual 'address' is seldom very useful. There are very few signs labelling street names. Indeed, most streets do not have names at all. Every house and building does have an official number, although it's rarely to be found on the outside – and, if it is, it's likely to be in *hangeul*. To complicate matters further, since numbers are assigned to houses when they are built, house No 27 could be next to house No 324. Many larger buildings have names – knowing this may often prove more useful than knowing the address.

A *gu* (구) is an urban district in large cities like Seoul. A *dong* (동) is a neighbourhood inside a *gu*. A single *gu* contains many *dong*. An address like 104 Itaewondong, Yongsan-gu means building No 104 in Itaewon neighbourhood in Yongsan district. However, you could wander around Itaewon for hours without finding this building, even with the help of a Korean friend. It's best to phone the place you're looking for and get directions.

The word for a large street is *ro* (로), which is sometimes spelled as *no*. So, Jongno means Bell St. Large boulevards are divided into sections called *ga* (가). On a Seoul subway map there is a station at Euljiro 3-ga and at Euljiro 4-ga – these are different sections of Eulji St. A *gil* (길) is a street smaller than a *no* or *ro* – Insadong-gil is one such example.

We've provided *hangeul* throughout this book for map references and points of interest, especially where there is no English sign. To transliterate *hangeul* we have gone with the NAKL system used by the Korean government (p411) – you'll still see words when travelling in Korea spelt under a previous system of romanisation, hence the older-style Pusan rather than Busan. Where there are two commonly used transliterations we note that and if a business or organisation sticks with the old method of English spelling or alternative we use that too.

TOP PICKS



KOREAN MOVIES

For more about Korean cinema see p58.

- *Mother* (2009) – director Bong Joon-ho's tense drama about a mum who fights to prove the innocence of her son accused of murder
- *Old Partner* (2008) – this moving documentary – a surprise local hit – follows the twilight years of an aged farmer, his wife and his ox
- *The Host* (2006) – this symbol-laden paean to classic monster movies juggles humour, poignancy and heart-stopping action
- *King and the Clown* (2005) – a surprise Korean blockbuster about two court jesters during the Joseon dynasty, with a homosexual subtext
- *Taegukgi* (2004) – a big-budget (by Korean standards – US\$12 million) hit about two brothers caught up in the Korean War
- *Oldboy* (2003) – a disturbing yet brilliant tale of revenge that won the 2004 Cannes Grand Prix
- *Memories of Murder* (2003) – this dramatisation of a real-life serial murder case is a flawless, riveting meditation on Korea's modern history
- *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate* (2002) – director Hong Sang-soo's trademark ad-libbing brings naturalism to this tale of a man confronting life's disappointments
- *Oasis* (2002) – a difficult, powerfully acted tale of the unexpected love that develops between a sociopath and a severely disabled girl
- *JSA* (2001) – a Park Chan-wook thriller about a friendship between soldiers on opposite sides of the DMZ, and its tragic outcome

ORIGINAL KOREA

- Listen to the ancient chants of shamans on the hills of **Inwangsan** (p109)
- Go inside a **North Korean submarine** (p190)
- Rise pre-dawn to chant sutras with Buddhist monks on a **temple-stay program** (p388)
- March along a North Korean invasion tunnel under the **DMZ** (p152)
- Admire phallic sculptures at **Haesindang Park** (p194)
- Hike in the **world's largest lava tube** (p292)
- Strip off in the luxurious **public bath** (p241) within the world's largest department store
- Sit inside a Buddhist version of paradise in a replica of **King Muryeong's tomb** (p325)
- Go shopping for herbal medicines at Daegu's vast **medicinal herb market** (p204)
- Enjoy a night's stay in a **hanok guesthouse** (p120) in Seoul

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

For more on Korean festivals see p390.

- **Chuncheon International Mime Festival** (May; p174) – Asia's largest mime fest
- **Incheon Bupyeong Pungmul Festival** (May; p164) – Korean folk music and dance
- **Jongmyo Daeje** (May; p119) – stately Confucian rites procession
- **Boryeong Mud Festival** (July; boxed text, p332) – get down and dirty on the beach
- **Chungju World Martial Arts Festival** (September/October; p342) – includes break dancing and music, too
- **Pusan International Film Festival** (September to October; p245) – Asian film jamboree
- **Andong Mask Dance Festival** (September to October; p229) – featuring masks from around the world
- **Gwangju Biennale** (September to November; p266) – top contemporary arts event
- **Baekje Cultural Festival** (October; p325) – huge costumed parades and fireworks
- **Namdo Food Festival** (October; p270) – major foodie celebration

history – when it had only recently emerged from its hermit-like existence and was starting to be colonised by Japan.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Galbijim (<http://wiki.galbijim.com>) Fun wiki site offering detailed, often quirky information about a whole range of topics and places Korean.

Hermit Hideaways (<http://hermithideaways.com>) Beautiful inspirational photos of the country by Gregory Curley.

Hi Korea (www.hikorea.go.kr/pt/index.html) A one-stop government website about studying, investing, working and living in Korea.

Korea4Expats (www.korea4expats.com) This comprehensive expat-penned site is a very useful resource on many aspects of Korean life, as well as having details on what to do in Seoul.

Korea.net (www.korea.net) The official website of the Korean Culture and Information Service is a treasure trove of background detail on the ROK.

Korean Tourism Organisation (www.visitkorea.or.kr/intro.html) Tons of useful tourist info in nine different languages.

Learn Korean Language (www.learnkoreanlanguage.com) Get the hang of *hangeul* with some free online help.

Life in Korea (www.lifeinkorea.com) Features an overview of Korea.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Book Seoul accommodation and read the latest Thorn Tree traveller's tips on Korea.

The Marmot's Hole (www.rjkoehler.com) Korea in blog form – this round up of Korea-related posts and news by resident expat Robert Koehler is eye-opening, entertaining and addictive.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

DISCOVER KOREA

Two Weeks / Seoul to Jeju-do

Set aside four or five days for nonstop **Seoul** (p86), including a day trip north to the **DMZ** (p152). Next head east to **Chuncheon** (p174) where you can cycle around the lake and sample the town's famous chicken dish, *dakgalbi*.

Dine on fresh seafood in **Sokcho** (p178), then hike around the stunning peaks and waterfalls of **Seoraksan National Park** (p182). Follow the coast south to **Gangneung** (p185) to view well-preserved Joseon-era buildings, quirky museums and a tiny North Korean spy submarine at **Jeongdongjin** (p189). Use **Samcheok** (p192) as your base for exploring the huge caves **Hwaseongul** and **Daeguemgul** (p194), as well as **Haesindang Park** (p194), packed with phallic sculptures.

Travel back to feudal times at charming **Hahoe Folk Village** (p231). Continue exploring Korea's past at **Gyeongju** (p208), ancient capital of the Shilla kingdom, where you can spend a couple of days exploring royal tombs, the treasures of its excellent museum and the World Heritage-listed grotto at **Seokguram** (p213).

If you're running short of time, finish up in the bustling port of **Busan** (p237), just three hours by the fastest train to Seoul. It would be a shame, though, to miss the scenic delights and adventure activities of **Jeju-do** (p282), the number one honeymoon destination of newlywed Koreans.

Starting in scintillating Seoul and finishing on the beaches of Jeju-do, connected by frequent and inexpensive flights to Busan and Seoul, this 850km route offers a broad sweep of city delights, historical sights, scenic vistas and unique dining experiences.



North Korea can only be seen as part of a guided tour; for more information see p349.

GOURMET FEAST

Two Weeks / Seoul to Jeju-do

This lip-smacking tour combines sightseeing with the best of Korean cuisine. In **Seoul** (p86), between palace-, museum- and gallery-hopping, feast on everything from royal cuisine to humble street snacks. Be sure not to miss out on the **Noryangjin fish market** (p111).

Fine Chinese food can be found in Incheon's historic **Chinatown** (p164), a subway ride west of Seoul. Another subway ride south of the capital, tuck into *galbi* (beef ribs) after walking the ramparts of **Suwon's fortress wall** (p156).

An hour's bus ride from Daejeon is **Geumsan** (boxed text, p327), centre of Korea's ginseng industry, and packed with shops and restaurants selling all manner of products and dishes using the wonder root. Continue south to **Jeonju** (p306), birthplace of the classic rice dish *bibimbap*.

Learn about Korea's human rights and democracy heroes in **Gwangju** (p262) then sample the area's great selection of *kimchi*. Towards the south coast is the beautiful green-tea plantation **Boseong Daehan Dawon** (p273), where you can enjoy food and drinks made with *nokcha* (green tea).

Nagan Folk Village (p270) is a gorgeous destination at any time of the year, but foodies will want to head here in October for its food festival. *Ureok* (rockfish) is the speciality of **Busan** (p237), which also has a great seafood market – the best place to sample *hoe* (raw fish).

Fly on to **Jeju-do** (p282) where you can dig into the island's unique dishes, such as *jeonbokjuk* (abalone rice porridge) and *heukdwaeji* (black pig pork), between touring the sights, such as the world's longest system of lava-tube caves (p292).

Korean cuisine covers such a multitude of flavours and styles that it would take a lifetime to sample everything, but this 1000km itinerary hopping between some of the country's gourmet hotspots is a good start.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

WEST TO EAST SEA

Two Weeks / Incheon Airport to Ulleung-do

From **Incheon International Airport** (p145) it's a very quick hop to the small, idyllic island of **Muui-do** (p168). Direct buses from Incheon mean there's no need to head into Seoul to reach your next destinations: **Gongju** (p324) and **Buyeo** (p328), the ancient capitals of the Baekje kingdom.

After enjoying the sands and seafood of **Daecheon Beach** (p331) sail to the serene island of **Sapsi-do** (p332), before touring pretty **Anmyeon-do** (p333) and watching the sunset from **Mallipo Beach** (p334).

Travel inland to Daejeon where you can soak at **Yuseong Hot Springs** (p321). From here make your way to Cheongju and on to **Songnisan National Park** (p340), covering central Korea's finest scenic area and home to a 33m-tall gold-plated Buddha statue.

Chungju is the gateway to the equally lovely **Woraksan National Park** (p343) and for a two-hour scenic ferry trip across Chungju Lake to sleepy **Danyang** (p344), small-town Korea at its most charming. From here explore nearby **limestone caves** (p344) and the stately temple complex of **Guin-sa** (p346).

In Taebaeksan Provincial Park visit the mountain-top **Dangun altar** (p196), which honours Korea's mythical half-bear founder. Then board the train in **Taebaek** (p196) bound for Donghae on the coast, from where you can take the ferry to **Ulleung-do** (p222). This sparsely inhabited, ruggedly beautiful volcanic island is a truly off-the-beaten-track experience.



There's a lot to recommend in Seoul, but if you'd prefer to avoid the capital it's possible on this 750km coast-to-coast itinerary starting on the island of Muui-do and finishing 135km out in the East Sea at spectacular Ulleung-do.

Fast trains and buses can whisk you from Seoul to Jeonju in less than three hours to start this 850km route around Korea's least-developed region, which offers the opportunity to visit hundreds of unspoilt islands, dine in countless seafood restaurants and dig deep into artistic traditions.

THE DEEP SOUTH TRAIL

Two Weeks / Jeonju to Busan

The rural southwest is Korea's greenest region. Start your explorations in **Jeonju** (p306), provincial capital of Jeollabuk-do, which has a fascinating *hanok* village crammed with traditional houses and buildings. See the rock-pinnacle garden and climb a horse's ear at **Maisan Provincial Park** (p311), then go hiking or skiing in beautiful **Deogyusan National Park** (p312).

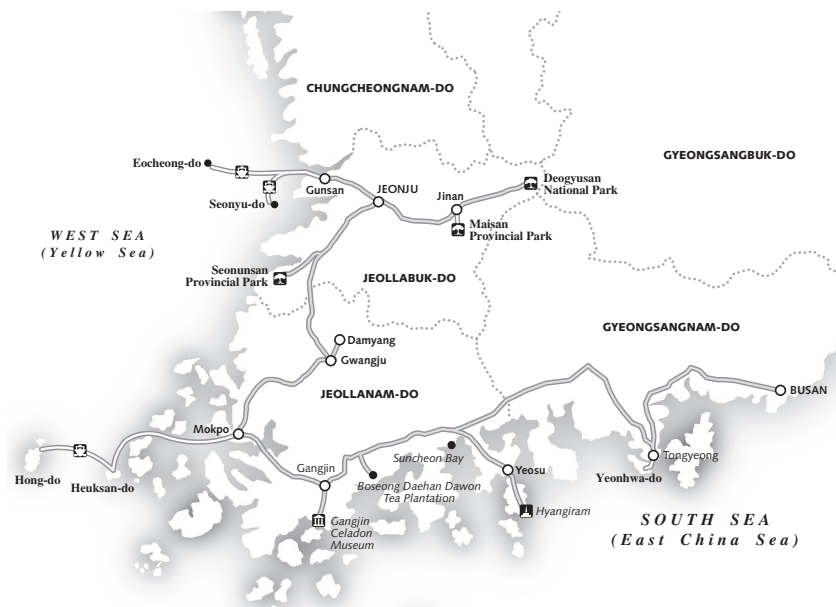
Scenic splendours and an ancient Buddha carved on a cliff await you at **Seonunsan Provincial Park** (p315). Take a ferry from Gunsan to a slice of island paradise called **Seonyu-do** (p317) or to rarely visited **Eocheong-do**, which attracts bird enthusiasts.

Further south, **Gwangju** (p262), home to several interesting historical sites and museums, will soon be home to a major arts complex. Also don't miss the bamboo town of **Damyang** (p269).

At Mokpo visit the **museums** (p279) before taking a boat to the remote havens of **Heuksan-do** (p281) and **Hong-do** (p281). Admire Korea's centuries-old tradition of pottery at the **Gangjin Celadon Museum** (p274) and taste food and drinks made from healthy green tea at the beautiful **Boseong Daehan Dawon Tea Plantation** (p273).

Go birdspotting in the Ramsar-listed wetlands of **Suncheon Bay** (boxed text, p270), then continue along the coast to Yeosu, where you can hike up to **Hyangiram** (p273), a Buddhist temple perched on a cliff with awesome coastal and island views.

For a final eco experience don't miss the beautiful hike on the unspoiled **Yeonhwa-do** (p253), which is easily reached by ferry from Tongyeong. The trail finishes at the bustling port of **Busan** (p237), Korea's second-largest city.



TAILORED TRIPS

KARMA KOREA

Like all journeys, this one around Korea's Buddhist temples begins with a single step. First, learn something about the religion during a temple life program at Seoul's **Jogye-sa** or **Bong-eun-sa** (p113).

Contrast highly modern **Guin-sa** (p346), the headquarters of the Cheontae sect, with **Magok-sa** (p327), an ancient temple in a remote spot with a hall of 1000 pint-sized disciples that are all slightly different.

Daegu can be used as base for trips to stunning **Haemin-sa** (p207), housing a World Heritage-listed library of over 80,000 14th-century woodblocks, and **Jikji-sa** (p207), a magnificent temple dating back to the 5th century.

Jinan is the access town for **Tap-sa** (p312), a tiny temple surrounded by two 'horse ear' mountains and an extraordinary sculptural garden of 80 stone pinnacles (or towers) that were piled up by a Buddhist mystic, while from Gwangju you can visit **Unju-sa** (p268), with its fine collection of stone pagodas and unusual twin and reclining Buddhas.

Tongdo-sa (p252), said to be Korea's largest and most important Buddhist temple, has an excellent Buddhist art museum containing 30,000 artefacts. Nearby **Seongnam-sa** (p252) is a visual masterpiece set in a provincial park.

Finally, **Bulguk-sa** (p213) is a World Heritage-listed temple that represents the crowning glory of Shilla architecture.



KIDS KOREA

This two-centre itinerary is ideal for parents looking to balance their own travelling needs with those of their toddlers and teens. **Seoul** has an abundant number of kid-friendly attractions (p118) including amusement parks, regular parks, aquariums and, in summer, outdoor swimming pools. Older kids will most likely be happy cruising the capital's vast **shopping malls** and **department stores** (p144) or being part of the audience for the filming of an **e-sports show** (boxed text, p52).

Day trips include the beaches of the **West Sea islands** (p166), Korea's biggest amusement park **Everland Resort** (p158) and the **Korean Folk Village** (p158). These last two can just as easily be visited from **Suwon** (p155), where everyone will have fun hiking around the walls of an 18th-century fortress. North of Seoul the modern village of **Heyri** (p154) is an opportunity to relax and distract small children with some inventive sculptures and art exhibits.

Hop on a flight to **Jeju-do** (p282), an island blessed with a fascinating volcanic landscape and dozens of sandy beaches. Amusement and water parks, circus shows, cycle and skate hire, and a whole raft of adventure activities from quad biking to balloon rides are possible on this fun-packed island with plenty of world-class resorts.



WORLD HERITAGE KOREA

South Korea has eight cultural properties and one natural property inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage list (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/kr>). Several of them can easily be visited in or around Seoul, including the royal ancestral shrine **Jongmyo** (p107), the beautiful palace complex **Changdeokgung** (p105), and sites of the royal tombs of the Joseon dynasty at **Samreung Gongwon** (p112) and **Donggureung** (boxed text, p152).

Within day trip range of the capital is Suwon's impressive fortress **Hwaseong** (p156) and mysterious stone **dolmen sites of Ganghwa-do** (p170). It was on Ganghwa-do that the Tripitaka Koreana, 81,258 wooden printing blocks containing Buddhist scriptures, were originally carved. They now reside at the World Heritage-listed temple **Haein-sa** (p207).

The historic surrounds of **Gyeongju** (p208) – ‘the museum without walls’ – are sprinkled with outstanding examples of Korean Buddhist art in the form of sculptures, reliefs, pagodas and the remains of temples and palaces. Nearby, in the mountains above the temple Bulguk-sa, is a superb mid-8th-century stone Buddha that resides in the **Seokguram Grotto** (p213).

Lastly, three sites on the volcanic island of Jeju-do – the mountain **Hallasan** (p303), the lava-tube caves at **Manjanggul** (p292) and the crown-like peak of **Seongsan Ilchulbong** (p293) – are testament to Korea's natural beauty.



ACTIVE KOREA

Hiking, skiing, cycling, rafting – name the activity and you'll find battalions of Koreans fully kitted out and crazy for it. Limber up in Seoul by hiring a bike to pedal along the **Han River** (boxed text, p113), or hop on a subway to reach **Bukhansan National Park** (p151), where there are many hiking trails.

Serious hikers will want to tackle **Hallasan** (p303), South Korea's tallest peak, as well as follow 200km of marked trails that make up the **Jeju Olle** (p286). Other favourite hikes includes those in **Wolchusan National Park** (p277), Korea's smallest, which includes a vertigo-inducing 52m bridge spanning two ridges, and **Jirisan National Park** (p258), where 12 peaks over 1000m form a 40km ridge.

Want to get wet? Then join a white-water rafting or kayaking trip on the fast-flowing rivers near **Cheorwon** and **Inje** (boxed text, p176). Or fully submerge yourself off **Seogwipo** (p296), Korea's best scuba-diving destination, with colourful corals, kelp forests and dolphins.

If winter sports are your bag, then the best ski resorts to head to are **Alps** (p185), which has Korea's heaviest snowfall, **Yongpyong** (p190) and **Muju** (p312) in picturesque Deogyusan National Park. Ice climbers can try scaling the frozen waterfall at **Gangchon** (p177).



The Authors



SIMON RICHMOND

Coordinating Author, Seoul, Gyeonggi-do

Long before he became a travel writer and photographer Simon spent several years living in Japan. He finally made it to Seoul in 2004 on a brief visit that left him hungering for more – especially of the deliciously spicy food. The six-week research trip for this guide allowed him to dig deeper into what makes this fascinating country tick, to sample a far wider range of its cuisine and to get excited about its high-tech future. Simon has authored many guides for Lonely Planet in the region, including *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei* and the *Trans-Siberian Railway*. See photos and read some of the background to his research for this guide at simonrichmond.wordpress.com.



YU-MEI BALASINGAMCHOW

Food & Drink, Gangwon-do, Chungcheongnam-do, Chungcheongbuk-do

After years of lapping up Korean food and film, Yu-Mei made her first foray into South Korea for this guidebook. During her research trip, she tramped for miles along quiet stretches of coastline (and even quieter stretches of hiking trails), scrambled guiltily over limestone formations at the behest of a cave guide, and wrestled with squirming *sannakji* (raw octopus) as it tried to writhe off her chopsticks. Her only disappointment was not making it up Taebaeksan because of bad weather. Yu-Mei lives in Singapore, where she writes about travel, food, history and the arts. She worked on the latest edition of Lonely Planet's *Vietnam* guidebook and has co-authored a popular history of Singapore.



CÉSAR G SORIANO

Active Korea, Jeollanam-do, Jeju-do, Jeollabuk-do

César's first trip to South Korea was not by choice. As a young US Army soldier in 2000, he was deployed to Seoul and later to an undisclosed bunker near the North Korean border, having never seen beyond Itaewon. For this book, César made up for lost time by exploring the southwest on land and sea, eating several pigs' worth of *bulgogi* (barbecued meat slices) in Jeollabuk-do, drinking too much *soju* (local vodka) in Jeollanam-do and working it off by hiking and diving in Jeju-do. A career journalist and former USA TODAY foreign correspondent, César has authored several Lonely Planet guidebooks. You can follow his exploits on his website (www.cesarSORIANO.com). César and his wife, Marsha, live in Washington, DC.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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**ROB WHYTE** **The Culture, Gyeongsangbuk-do, Gyeongsangnam-do**

For the best part of 15 years, Rob has been living in Korea. He teaches the past tense to college students and twists Malcolm Gladwell's ideas into talking points for elementary and secondary school teachers. A shocking example of someone who never bothered to formulate a life plan, his advice for anyone with hopes of becoming an English teacher in Korea is simple: don't get too comfortable, otherwise you might end up staying a lot longer than you ever imagined. Rob lives in Busan with his family, where his only regret is the lack of affordable golf.

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North Korea was newly researched for this edition, but we have chosen not to identify our author so as to protect his identity and that of the North Koreans who assisted him on his travels.

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