Jeollanam-do

Why Go?

This beautiful southwest province is one of Korea’s least developed and greenest. The heartland of Jeollanam-do (전라남도) has rolling hills, the towering Sobaek Mountains to the east and 6100km of coastline to the south and west, with over 2000 islands offshore – less than 300 of which are inhabited.

With a warmer and rainier climate than its provincial mainland neighbours, bountiful Jeollanam-do is all about agriculture – the province is famous for its food and green tea, celebrated in several festivals. For all of its rural atmosphere, Jeollanam-do has urban elements that are common to the rest of Korea; think high-speed train lines and expanding cities, chief of which is Gwangju, Korea’s sixth-largest metropolis with its own separate government and telephone code. Despite all this, the province retains a rebel edge, and is proud of its ceramic and artistic traditions, its exiled poets and prodemocracy martyrs. Jeollanam-do rewards the intrepid and really does have something for everyone.

When to Go

- **May** Summer offers a chance for visitors to cool off at the beaches.
- **Sep** The Gwangju Biennale brings the glamour of the art world to town.
- **Oct** It’s *kimchi* EVERYTHING during the eponymous festival in Gwangju.

Best Places to Eat

- Minsokchon (p208)
- House Filled with Happiness (p223)
- Jeonsama (p219)

Best Places to Stay

- Yuseongwan (p217)
- Hotel 1004 (p225)
- The Ocean Resort (p214)

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History
Far from Seoul during the Joseon era, Jeollanam-do was a place of exile, often used as a dumping ground for political and religious dissidents. The tradition of political dissent has continued; the province was a hotbed of opposition to the military governments that ruled South Korea in the 1960s and ’70s. Students and trade unionists led countless prodemocracy protests and demonstrations, until army tanks crushed an uprising in Gwangju city in May 1980 (see p355). Today about 25% of households in the province are farms, versus a national average of 7%.

Gwangju 광주
062 / POP 1.46 MILLION
Gwangju (http://english.gjcity.go.kr) may look like any other city with its shop-filled central area, an attractive riverside, busy restaurants, pubs and bars – all encircled by apartment blocks – but within this everyday exterior resides the heart of an artist and the soul of a revolutionary. Civic Gwangju emphasises the arts and the city has an important place in the history of Korea’s democracy and human-rights movement.

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Sights & Activities

FREE Gwangju National Museum (국립광주박물관; 570 7014; 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) The Gwangju National Museum’s collection traces the region’s prehistoric beginnings to the modern day, via artifacts, paintings and calligraphy. When there aren’t any visiting exhibitions, look out for the Chinese ceramics salvaged from a 14th-century shipwreck. Bus 55 (W1200, 20 minutes, every 30 minutes) runs from Geumnamno to the National Museum.

Jeollanam-do Highlights

1 Visit Gwangju (p205) for its vibrant arts and nightlife scene, urban hiking opportunities, and solemn memorials
2 Learn everything there is to know about bamboo at the Damyang Bamboo Crafts Museum (p211)
3 Savour the scenic location and flavours of the photogenic Daehan Dawn Tea Plantation (p216) in Boseong
4 Voyage to the scattered, unspoilt islands of Heuksando (p225) and fabled Hongdo (p225)
5 Marvel at the thatched-roofed houses of the immaculately preserved fortress town of Nagan Folk Village (p213)
6 Spot migratory birds feasting in the rich wetlands at Suncheon Bay (p212)
7 Partake in the mysterious ‘parting of the sea’ phenomenon known as the Ganjuyuk Gyedo in Jindo (p219)