

welcome to Korea



Yin & 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), where the vast majority of visitors to this part of the world will spend their time. South Korea is a dream destination for the traveller, an engaging, welcoming place where the benefits of a fully industrialised, high-tech nation are balanced alongside a reverence for tradition and the ways of old Asia.

Ancient & Modern

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, the powerhouse of Asia's third-largest economy, and calm is 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. Founded on centuries of tradition that manifest in the daily pageantry of the changing of the guard at meticulously reconstructed palaces, or in the chants of a shaman on a hillside, Seoul is nonetheless



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

(left) Cityscape, Gangnam, Seoul (p82)
(below) Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul (p39)



a contemporary urban marvel. You can hardly turn a corner without stumbling across a tourist information booth, a subway station or a taxi that will smooth the way to your next discovery in this multi-faceted metropolis.

Contemplation & Celebration

South Korea's compact size and superb transport infrastructure mean that tranquillity is achievable within an hour of the urban sprawl. Hike to the peaks of craggy mountains enclosed by densely forested national parks. 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. Sample the serenity of a Buddhist temple retreat where the honk of traffic is replaced by the rhythmic pre-dawn chants of shaven-headed monks. If all this sounds a little too peaceful for your travel 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, and friendly Koreans are happy to share their culture with visitors, regardless of language barriers. If nothing else, your tastebuds will be tingling at the discovery of one of Asia's least known, but most delicious, cuisines.