



# Day Trips from Seoul

## Demilitarized Zone & Joint Security Area p134

For history buffs and collectors of weird and unsettling experiences, a visit to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) buffer between North and South Korea is not to be missed; in the Joint Security Area (JSA) you can straddle the line between the two countries.

## Heyri p136

The art and culture village of Heyri is a charming place to browse galleries and while away time in cafes; nearby Paju Book City is all about its contemporary architecture.

## Suwon p137

Stride around the World Heritage-listed, 18th-century fortress walls, drop by the restored Joseon-dynasty temporary palace and enjoy the charms of the Korean Folk Village.

## Incheon p140

Korea opened up to the world at the end of the 19th century in this port city where you'll find a colourful Chinatown, creative Art Platform and pleasant beaches on nearby islands.

## Ganghewado p143

Connected to the mainland by bridge, this island has a rich history that briefly saw it as the capital of Korea in the 13th century. Today it's all about peaceful surrounds, temples and delicious seafood.



## TOP SIGHT DEMILITARIZED ZONE & JOINT SECURITY AREA

The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a 4km-wide and 240km-long buffer splitting North from South Korea. Lined on both sides by tank traps, electrical fences, landmines and two armies in full battle readiness, it is one of the scariest places on earth. It is also one of the most surreal since it has become a major tourist attraction with several observatories allowing you to peek into North Korea. The key sight is the Joint Security Area (JSA), inside of which is the truce village of Panmunjeom – there's nowhere else in South Korea where you can get so close to North Korea (and its soldiers) without being arrested or shot, and the tension is palpable. The only way into this heavily restricted area is on an organised tour.

### JSA (Panmunjeom)

Unquestionably the highlight of any trip to the DMZ is a visit to the JSA at Panmunjeom. An improbable tourist destination, it's here where the infamous **Military Demarcation Line** separates South and North Korea. Soldiers from both sides often stand metres apart eyeballing one another from their respective sides of the blue-painted UN buildings. You'll be taken inside the **meeting room** – where the truce between North and South Korea was signed – the only place where you can safely walk into North Korea.

Tours kick off with a briefing by US or Republic of Korea (ROK) soldier guides at **Camp Bonifas**, the joint US–ROK army camp just outside the DMZ, before being transferred to another bus to the JSA.

Within the blue **conference room** at the JSA, where official meetings are still sometimes held, microphones on the tables constantly record everything said, while ROK soldiers stand guard inside and out in a modified taekwondo stance – an essential photo op. Their North Korean counterparts keep a steady watch, usually, but not always, from a distance.

Though your tour will be a quiet one, the soldier guide will remind you that this frontier is no stranger to violent incidents. One of the most notorious being in 1976 when two US soldiers were hacked to death with axes by North Korean soldiers after the former had tried to chop down a tree obstructing the view from a watchtower. Camp Bonifas is named after one of the slain soldiers.

Back on the bus you'll be taken to one of Panmunjeom's lookout posts from where you can see the two villages within the DMZ: **Daeseong-dong** in the South and **Gijeong-dong** in the North. You'll also see the site of the axe-murder incident and the **Bridge of No Return** where POW exchange took place following the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1953.

The forested surrounds are Korea's most ecologically pristine and allegedly home to the Siberian tiger.

### Observatory Decks

At **Dora Observatory** (binoculars ₩500; ☀10am–5pm Tue–Sun) you can peer through binoculars for a closer look at **Kaesong city** and **Kaesong Industrial Complex** in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea), where cheap North Korean labourers are employed by South Korean conglomerates.

### DON'T MISS

- JSA (Panmunjeon)
- Dora Observatory
- Third Infiltration Tunnel

### PRACTICALITIES

- **Location** 55km north of Seoul
- **Tours** Koridoor Tours and Panmunjeom Travel Center are the two main tour operators.