

Gwanghwamun & Jongno-gu

GWANGHWAMUN | INSA-DONG | BUKCHON | SAMCHEONG-DONG

Neighbourhood Top Five

- ➊ Admire the scale and artistry of **Gyeongbokgung** (p50), the largest of Seoul's palaces, fronted by the grand gateway Gwanghwamun, where you can watch the changing of the guard.
- ➋ Discover Huwon, the serene traditional garden secreted behind **Changdeokgung** (p52).
- ➌ Learn about Buddhism at **Jogye-sa** (p55), one of Seoul's most active temples and epicentre of the spectacular Lotus Lantern Festival in May.
- ➍ Browse the impressive collection of contemporary art at the **Arario Museum in SPACE** (p59).
- ➎ Get lost in picturesque **Bukchon Hanok Village** (p53), the city's densest cluster of traditional-style homes.



For more detail of this area, see Maps p210, p208 and p212 ➔

Explore: Gwanghwamun & Jongno-gu

Although their size and splendour have been greatly reduced from their heyday in the 18th century, Seoul's royal palace compounds, in the district of Jongno-gu, provide a glimpse of what it was like to live at the powerful heart of the old city. The area is also referred to as Gwanghwamun after the majestic gate to the main palace of Gyeongbokgung and the elongated square in front of it.

Save for the odd painted screen and altar, the large palace buildings are mostly empty, allowing you to appreciate the Confucian ideals of frugality, simplicity and separation of the sexes in the architecture as well as the gardens.

Between Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung, stroll around Bukchon ('north village'), which covers several smaller areas including Samcheong-dong and Gahoe-dong, famous for its traditional houses. Centuries ago this is where the *yangban* (aristocrats) lived but most estates were divided into plots in the early 20th century to create the smaller *hanok* (wooden houses) you can now view around Gahoe-dong. West of Gyeongbokgung smaller clusters of *hanok* can be found in Seochon ('west village'), an increasingly trendy area of Seoul.

South of Bukchon are the equally dense and mazelike streets of Insa-dong, one of Seoul's most tourist-friendly areas, packed with craft shops, galleries, traditional teahouses and restaurants, and Ikseon-dong, another compact area of *hanok* beginning to blossom with bars and cafes.

Local Life

- **Teatime** Take a breather from sightseeing over a beverage in one of Insa-dong, Bukchon or Seochon's charming traditional teahouses or contemporary cafes.
- **Jongmyo Square** The park in front of this venerable shrine (p54) is a daily gathering spot for Seoul's senior set who come to natter, play board games such as *baduk* and *janggi* and sometimes dance to *trot* (traditional electro-pop music).
- **Streamside Wanders** Stroll along the landscaped paths either side of the Cheong-gye-cheon (p56); if the weather's fine, cool your heels in the stream.

Getting There & Away

- **Subway** Lines 1, 3 and 5 all have stations in this area with Anguk being the best for Insa-dong and Bukchon.
- **Tour Bus** The Seoul City Tour Bus has stops around the palaces and Insa-dong.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

If you plan to visit all four of Seoul's palaces – Gyeongbokgung, Changdeokgung, Changgyeonggung and Deoksugung – and the shrine Jongmyo, you can save some money by buying a combined ticket (₩10,000) valid for up to a month. The ticket is sold at each of the palaces and also covers entry to Huwon at Changdeokgung.

Best Places to Eat

- Rogpa Tea Stall (p63)
- Balwoo Gongyang (p65)
- Ogawa (p64)

For reviews, see p63 ➡

Best Places to Drink

- Sik Mool (p66)
- Dawon (p66)
- Story of the Blue Star (p67)

For reviews, see p66 ➡

Best Places to Shop

- KCDF Gallery (p69)
- Insa-dong Maru (p69)
- Kyobo Bookshop (p68)

For reviews, see p68 ➡