



Chungcheongbuk-do

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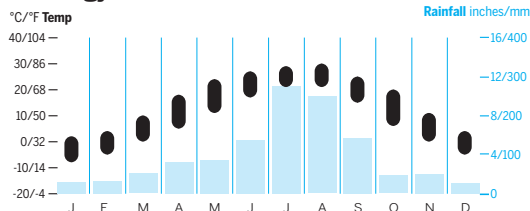
Why Go?

The only landlocked province in the South, Chungbuk (충청북도) as it's known informally, is largely mountainous and agricultural. The province is a sleepy sort of place and its major cities are not particularly compelling, though bibliophiles may be inclined to make a pilgrimage to Cheongju, where in 1377 Buddhist monks printed the world's oldest extant book with moveable metal type.

The province's charms can better be appreciated in its smaller towns and three national parks, which are also home to an assortment of intriguing Buddhist sites. There's plenty to see and do here: climb the azalea-covered peaks of Sobaeksan, descend into the otherworldly caverns of Gosu Donggul, or simply savour the views along the river and at nearby Chungju Lake. Visit Guin-sa, a Buddhist temple enshrouded in a tight valley, as imposing as the mountain slopes on either side of it. If you have a few days to while away, this is the place to do it.

When to Go

Cheongju



Apr The flowers in the national parks come alive, plus the weather is mercifully cool for hiking.

Jun Low season; you'll get in just before the heat wave, summer rains and price hikes.

Dec Sure it's cold but the sights are often coated in picturesque sheets of snow.

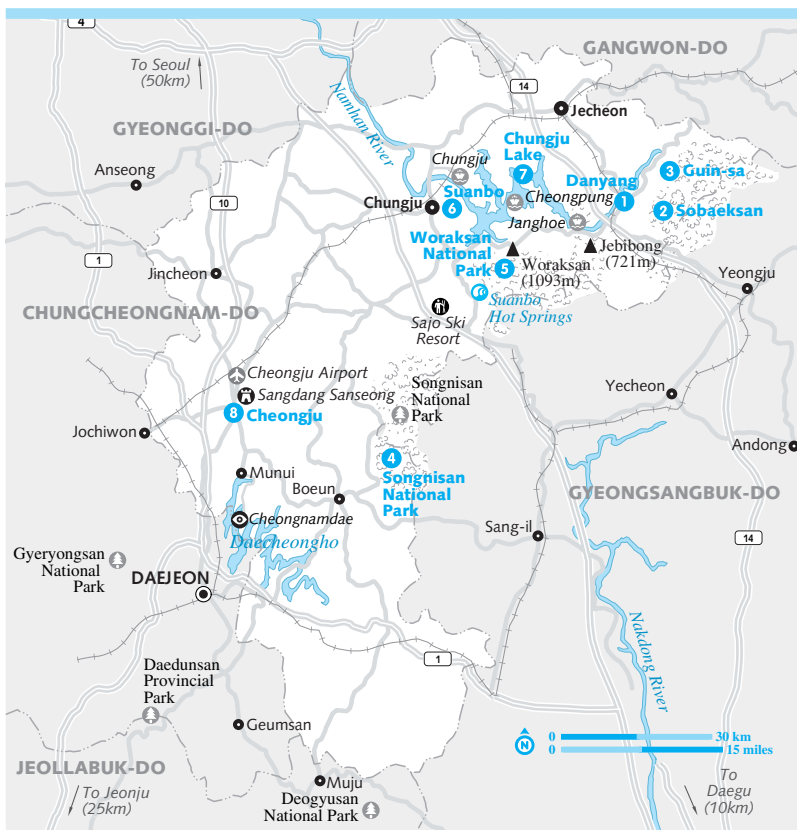
Cheongju 청주

☑043 / POP 668,000

Like most provincial capitals, Cheongju (<http://english.cjcity.net>) – not to be confused with nearby Chungju – is not terribly captivating. Its primary claim to fame is as

the place where the world's oldest book was printed using moveable metal type.

As a modern city it's somewhat redeemed by a youthful vibe, thanks to its universities, but if not for its proximity to Songnisan National Park and presidential villa Cheongnamdae, there'd be little reason to stop here.



Chungcheongbuk-do Highlights

- 1 Wake up to glorious mountain views in **Danyang** (p298)
- 2 Hike up nearby **Sobaeksan** (p300), where azaleas bloom in May
- 3 Sign up for a Templestay at bustling **Guin-sa** (p300), a modern but awe-inspiring hillside temple complex
- 4 Admire the gold-plated Buddha at Beopju-sa in **Songnisan National Park** (p293), then overnight at a charming *yeogwan* (motel) beside a burbling river
- 5 Meditate on ancient Buddhist carvings and the evocative ruins of Mireuksaji at **Woraksan National Park** (p297)
- 6 Soothe your stresses at an *oncheon* (hot-spring spa) in **Suanbo** (p296)
- 7 Admire the scenery as you cruise down **Chungju Lake** (p295)
- 8 Learn all about the *Jikji*, the first book printed by movable type, in the province's capital of **Cheongju** (p293)