



AUTUMN COLOURS: SEORAKSAN

Asia's best kept secret

Tom Weston, Audley's North and Central Asia programme manager, introduces South Korea and suggests some itineraries for visiting this fascinating country.

As a tourist destination South Korea is often overlooked, sandwiched as it is between its more recognisable cousins, China and Japan. What the country lacks in famous must-see sights, however, it more than makes up for in the warmth of its people, its unique cultural destinations and events, and spectacular scenery.

Those visitors who do make it here rarely venture beyond its modern and thriving capital city, Seoul. As the usual entry and exit point to the country this is a regular first stop, and has more than enough places of interest to fill several days of sightseeing, but to leave without venturing further afield does an injustice to the wonderful scenery and cultural

highlights found across the country. The Korean Peninsula is still largely covered with beautiful forested mountains, and its long, rugged coastline is interspersed with stunning beaches and spectacular

The capital of the ancient Shilla Dynasty has been dubbed the 'Museum without Walls'

cliffs. At only around 300 miles from north to south, and with a well developed transport infrastructure, getting around is quick and easy, be it by train, high-speed bus, or utilising the cheap

and convenient air network. Distances are not great, and so for the more adventurous car rental is another option offering the freedom and flexibility to explore off the beaten track.

Korea's wonderful national parks are one of its best kept secrets, with Seoraksan in the northeast, Sobaeksan and Songnisan in the centre, and the remote Tadohae Haesang Marine Park off the southwest coast offering a varied and spectacular taste of the peninsula's mesmerising scenery. The small city of Gyeongju in the southeast is a magnet for those seeking Korea's cultural heritage. For a thousand years the capital of the ancient Shilla Dynasty, it remains sufficiently blessed with temples, tombs, shrines and palaces to have been dubbed the 'Museum without Walls'. It has recently been awarded the UNESCO World Heritage Site status, and is a magnificent place to spend a couple days strolling and soaking up the atmosphere.

Nearby Andong and Hahoe give further glimpses of Korea's Confucian heritage, and the beautiful Buddhist temples of Tongdosa and Haeinsa allow visitors to experience a different tradition. Many of these temples also offer the unique opportunity to stay in traditional lodgings and join the monks in their daily routine of prayer and ceremony. More typical accommodation of all standards is of course available across

the country, in western or traditional Korean Ondol style, and for visitors keen to experience modern Korean life, home stays are also easily arranged.

For the Koreans themselves, the southern island of Jeju has long been regarded as the tourist destination of choice. With its sandy beaches, subtropical climate and dramatic volcanic interior, the island is often referred to as Korea's Hawaii, and with a different

atmosphere and pace of life from the mainland it is well worth a visit.

Korea has four distinct seasons and a generally temperate climate, though the extremes of temperature in winter and summer are more marked than in the UK. The ideal times to visit are in spring before the July and August rainy season, and autumn, when the turning leaves transform the mountains into a fabulous riot of colour.

Direct flights operate regularly from Heathrow to Seoul, and Korea is easily combined with neighbouring China or Japan for a multi-destination trip. Also possible is a stopover at one of the super beach resorts of Thailand or Malaysia, easily arranged at little extra cost for a bit of relaxation before returning to the UK.



Classic Korea

Spend two weeks exploring the highlights of South Korea on a private tailor-made tour costing from £2,350 per person.

Day 1 Depart the UK.

Day 2 You arrive in Seoul this morning. Take the airport shuttle bus to your city centre hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure to recover from your flight.

Day 3 This morning you'll join a half-

day city tour of Seoul, taking in the Gyeongbokgung Palace, the National Folklore Museum and the Jogyesa Temple. Have the afternoon at leisure.

Day 4 Today you'll join a full-day tour to the DMZ between North and South Korea, including the Freedom Bridge and the 3rd Tunnel.

Day 5 After a morning at leisure join a tour taking you to the Korean Folk Village at Suwon.

Day 6 Your guide will come to your hotel

and drive you across to the beautiful Mt Seoraksan National Park in the northeast of the country.

Day 7 Have the day exploring the Mt Seoraksan National Park.

Day 8 Head south down the stunning coastal road to the town of Andong. You'll drive through the beautiful Puryong Valley and stop off at Beseoksa Temple.

Day 9 Tour Andong city and surrounding area, including a visit to the Tosansowon Confucian Academy and the Hahoe Folk Village before continuing south down to Gyeongju, former capital of the Shilla Kingdom.

Day 10 Take a full day tour of the highlights of the ancient city of Gyeongju, including Tumuli Park, Chomsungdae Observatory and Anapchi Lake.

Day 11 Drive the short distance south to Busan, stopping in at the Tongdosa Buddhist Temple along the way. This is the largest Zen temple in the country, and is set in beautiful mountain scenery. Continue on to Busan airport where you take the short flight across to Jeju Island.

Day 12 Time at leisure to explore.

Day 13 Time at leisure to explore.

Day 14 Head back to the airport and fly back to Seoul this morning and connect with your flight back to the UK.

Korea Uncovered

A 10-day, private tailor-made tour that aims to get 'under the skin' of Korea with stays in temple lodgings and local homes, as well as hotel accommodation. The tour costs from £1,950 per person.

Day 1 Depart the UK.

Day 2 You arrive in Seoul this morning. Transfer to your city centre hotel. Later join a half-day city tour of Seoul, taking in the Gyeongbokgung Palace, the National Folklore Museum and the Chogyesa Temple.

Day 3 Transfer to Seoul Station and travel down to Gwangju in the southwest of the country. Change here to a bus that takes you to your temple. Join the monks in evening ceremony.

Day 4 Join the temple programme in the morning, and in the afternoon visit the Soswaewon Garden.

Day 5 Transfer by express bus to Busan, and pay a visit to the Jagalchi Fish market, Yongdusan park and Busan tower. Travel to Beomeosa by local coach and train and spend the afternoon at Beomeosa temple.



Day 6 After breakfast, head the short distance to Gyeongju, Korea's cultural centre, and spend the afternoon exploring Gyeongju National Museum, Anapchi Lake and Tumuli Park. Transfer to Golgul-sa temple and join in the traditional Sunmudo training.

Day 7 This morning you will visit Andong Hahoe Folk Village, Hahoe Mask Museum, and stay overnight in a homestay in Andong city.

Day 8 Leave Andong by express bus and

return to Seoul. Have a free afternoon for sightseeing and shopping in the bustling street markets.

Day 9 Today you will join a full-day tour to the DMZ between North and South Korea, including the Freedom Bridge and the 3rd Tunnel.

Day 10 Transfer to the airport for your flight back to the UK.

For further details about all aspects of travel to South Korea please call our specialists on 01869 276 217.