

Walking Tours ■

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Walking Tours

URBAN WALKS

Walking around Seoul is generally not that great. Hurry-hurry pedestrians who knock into you, numerous intersections that slow progress and an unattractive urban landscape that's a jungle of tile-covered concrete, glass, signage, power lines, neon and traffic, mean that taking the subway or a taxi or is the best way to get around (except for short distances). An exception is the walk along the newly revealed and beautified Cheonggye stream that used to be covered by a road but now runs for nearly 6km through the heart of Seoul from Sejongno to beyond Dongdaemun market. It features fountains, Joseon stone bridges and massive tile artworks. The first two easy downtown walks below explore interesting neighbourhoods near palaces, while the other two head uphill for a magpie's-eye view of the city.

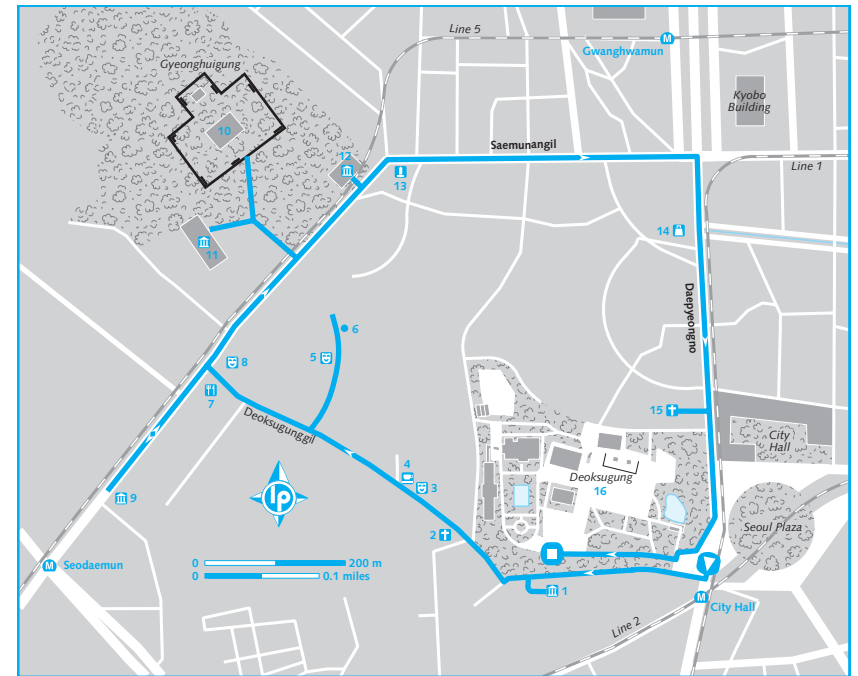
AROUND DEOKSUGUNG WALK

Take subway Line 1 or 2 to **City Hall station** and leave by Exit 1. Turn right and then go left along Deoksugung wall. It's a pleasant walk with shady trees and little traffic. After five minutes, **Seoul Museum of Art 1** (p56) on the left is worth a visit. The nearby **Chungdong Methodist Church 2** was built in 1898 and is the oldest Protestant church in Seoul.

Carry on straight ahead and on the right is **Chongdong Theatre 3** (p100), which puts on traditional music, song and dance shows. The well-known **Todam Teashop 4** (p107) has a rustic interior and sells lots of teas including alcoholic ones and *sipjeon daeboatang*, a tea with 13 medicinal ingredients.

Continuing along the road, turn right at the sign for a short detour to **Nanta Theatre 5**, (p101), where the long-running musical *Nanta* has proved popular. At the end of the road is a white tower, which is all that remains of the **Russian Legation Building 6** where King Gojong sought refuge for a year in 1896.

Back on the main road is a budget restaurant **Gimbapgwamandusai 7** (p92) and the **Star Six Cinema** and the **Tokebi Storm Theatre 8** (p102). Turn left at the main road for a short detour to the brand new **Agriculture Museum 9** (p54). Walk back to the cinema and cross over the main



road to Heunghwamun, a traditional gate, in front of **Gyeonghuigung 10** (p50), a palace (admission free) that has been only partially rebuilt. On the left is the **Seoul Museum of Arts Annex 11** (p52).

Next door is the **Seoul Museum of History 12** (p52), which focuses on Joseon-dynasty Seoul but will only interest die-hard history buffs. From here cross over the road to the moving giant statue of a **Hammering Man 13** (p50). Walk down to Sejongno and turn right for **Donghwa duty-free shop 14** (p119). Also on the right is the **Anglican Church 15** (p54), one of Seoul's few Renaissance-style Asian fusion buildings. Finally, if you have the energy, take a look round **Deoksugung 16** (p54) or leave it for another day.

WALK FACTS

- Start Subway Line 1 or 2 to City Hall station, Exit 1
- End Deoksugung
- Distance 2km
- Time 3 hours
- Fuel stop Todam Teashop, Gimbapgwamandusai Restaurant

BETWEEN THE PALACES WALK

This walk is shaded by trees most of the way, avoids crossing major roads and covers a conservation area that is filling up with intriguing shops, galleries and small museums (although many close on Monday). It's like Insadong but more upmarket and less swarming with tourists.

Leave Anguk subway station via Exit 1 and turn right along the main road until you reach **Dongsipjagak 1**, an old Joseon-era watchtower. Turn right and pop into **Seoul Selection Bookshop 2** (p119) and **Beomyeonsa 3**, an unusual Buddhist temple with a shrine on the 3rd floor of a modern concrete building. Further on are **Gallery Hyundai 4**, **Jewel Button 5** (p119), **Kumho Museum of Art 6** and **Kukje Gallery 7**.

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WALK FACTS

Start Subway Line 3 to Anguk station, Exit 1

End Insadong-gil

Distance 3½km

Time 3 hours

Fuel stop Samcheong-dong Sujebi, Solmoemaeu, Sipseon Daebotang Teashop

At the fork either take a short detour (less than 1km) by carrying on straight ahead to look at the presidential Blue House from the main road, or fork right past small craft shops such as **Gypsy 8** (p119), and restaurants such as **Samcheong-dong Sujebi 9** (p88) and **Solmoemaeu 10** (p88). **Sipseon Daebotang Teashop 11** (p107) specialises in red-bean *juk* (rice porridge) and medicinal teas. Turn right and cross the road to visit the green oasis of **Samcheong Park 12**, where a short 15-minute loop walk takes you through attractive woodland. The spring water here is popular.

Cross back over the road to look round one lady's magnificent obsession, the one-room **Owl Museum 13** with 2000 owl objects at the last count. Then walk down the hill to Bukchonhanok-gil on your right. Follow this alley through a quiet neighbourhood of traditional *yangban* (aristocrat) houses hiding behind high walls. At the end of the alley (building number two faces you) turn left and walk uphill. At the top is a splendid **viewpoint 14** of tiled rooftops that hasn't changed much in the past 100 years. The *yangban* monopolised this auspicious

suburb between the palaces while the poor lived in thatched houses south of Jongno.

At the next junction turn right, and then left at the red-brick public bath chimney. Turn left again at the end of this alley and on your left is the new **World Jewellery Museum (15; adult W5000; 10am-7pm Tue-Sun)**, which proves with some well-lit displays that small is beautiful. Further on is the **Tibet Museum (16; adult W5000; 10am-7pm)**, which has a small but interesting collection of Tibetan items and Chinese teapots.

At the crossroads is **Art Sonje Centre 17**, another well-known art gallery with an Indian restaurant inside. At the main road, turn left for Anguk subway station or cross over the road to visit **Jogyesa 18** (p53) and **Insadong 19** (p52).

INWANGSAN SHAMANIST HILLSIDE WALK

On this short, but uphill, walk you can see Seoul's most famous shamanist shrine, visit small Buddhist temples and see part of the Seoul fortress wall. The walk only takes an hour if you just want a quick look but it's sensible to take longer and soak up the unique atmosphere.

From subway Exit 2 turn down the first small alley on your left. Walk uphill past the golf driving range and grocery shops for 10 minutes, and you should see a colourful **temple gateway 1** on your left. Walk through it to the large notice board.

Turn left to walk around the **village 2** where small Buddhist temples and traditional wooden houses cling to the rocky hillside, suspended high above the concrete city. The temples have colourful murals on the outside walls of birds and blossom, and wind chimes clink in the breeze.

Back on the main path, a bronze bell marks the entrance to **Bongwonsa 3**, the largest of the temples. The paintings on the entrance gate doors depict the guardian kings of heaven who protect Buddhists from evil and harm. The shrine hall has five golden Buddha statues and a side shrine for the three main shamanist deities – Sansin (mountain god), Dokseong (river god) and Chilseong (the seven stars of the Big Dipper). Buddhism and shamanism have coexisted peacefully in Korea for over 1500 years.

Carry on up the steps to Seoul's most famous shamanist shrine, **Guksadang 4**. It was originally built on Namsan by order of King Taejo, the founder of the Joseon dynasty, who established Seoul as Korea's capital. But in 1925 Guksadang was demolished by the Japanese, so Korean shamanists secretly rebuilt it on Inwangsan. The shrine is small but many of the paintings inside are historic and valuable, and the altar is often loaded with offerings of food for the spirits – rice cakes, fruit, meat and a pig's head. Shamanists believe that the dead still need food and drink. Natural springs in the area provide fresh water.

Walk left and up some steps to the extraordinary **Zen rocks (Seonbawi) 5**, which look like a Salvador Dali painting – two large rocks have been so eroded that they look like two robed monks. At the altar in front of the rocks, women still come to pray for a son.

The hillside above is full of eroded rocks that create an eerie atmosphere. In front of small crevices are candles, incense sticks and offerings of sweets for the spirits. Climb up the hill for 10 minutes and you reach an **exercise trail 6** and after another 10 minutes you reach an outdoor altar with a small **Buddha rock carving 7** on the left. Turn right here to see other makeshift altars including a **Sansin statue 8**. Carry on to look at the renovated **Seoul fortress wall 9** before heading back to Guksadang.

People have been visiting this sacred area for thousands of years. One rock embodies the spirit of a famous general, while another is where children's spirits shelter. Shamanists perform their ceremonies under the

WALK FACTS

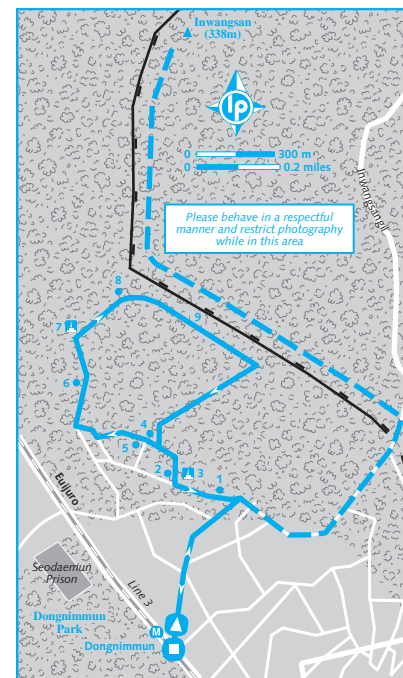
Start Subway Line 3 to Dongnimmun station, Exit 2

End Dongnimmun station, Exit 2

Distance 2km, or 5km if you climb Inwangsan

Time 1½ hours, or 3 hours if you climb Inwangsan

Fuel Stop Take a picnic



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SHAMANIST CEREMONIES

Ceremonies called *gut* usually take place outdoors. They involve contacting departed spirits, which are attracted by music, chanting, waving flags and lavish offerings of food and drink. During some *gut* drums beat and the *mudang* (female shamanist priest) dances herself into a frenzied state that allows her to communicate with the spirits and be possessed by them. Another *gut* helps to guide the spirit of a recently departed person to find peace. Resentments felt by the dead can haunt and plague the living and cause them all sorts of misfortune, so upset or angry spirits need placating. For shamanists death does not end relationships, they simply take another form. Smartly dressed couples come to Guksadang shamanist shrine to ask for good fortune with a business project, make contact with a deceased relative or cure an illness (see p12).

shade of the trees – an old lady is bowing and waving five different coloured flags to attract the spirits, and a young girl is drumming and meditating. You can sense the ancient atmosphere here, even though the traffic and the modern world is only a 20-minute walk away. All visitors should treat the area and the people with respect, and remember that taking a photograph could interfere with an important ceremony.

At the temple gateway you can walk on and hike along the other side of the fortress wall up to the top of Inwangsan. Slogging up the steps takes less than an hour. The walk can also be combined with a visit to Seodaemun Prison (p62), which is on the other side of the main road.

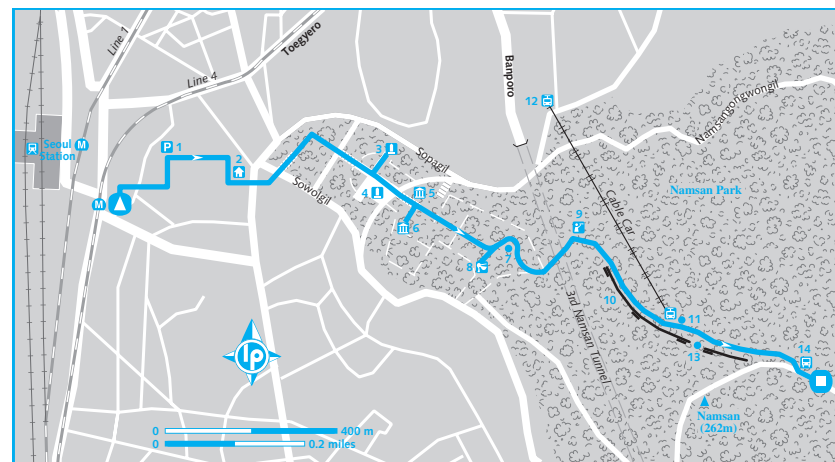
NAMSAN & SEOUL TOWER WALK

It's uphill all the way but the view from the top is worth the climb.

Take subway Line 1 or 4 to Seoul Station and leave by Exit 10. Walk up the steps and turn right towards the Hilton Hotel, then take the first left towards the **multistorey car park 1**. From there turn right up the steps and into and through the small hillside park. At the **Millennium Seoul Hilton 2** (p136), go right and walk round to the front of the hotel. Cross the road, bear left, cross the second road, and go up the steps into the park.

Walk past the children's playground and the old men playing Korean chess, cross the road and go up more steps. Keep going straight and cross another road. Go up yet more steps. Here you will see a **statue of Kim Koo 3** (1876–1949), a Korean independence fighter who led a very eventful life. Ahead is a **statue of Lee Si-yeong 4** (1869–1953), another independence movement leader. Cross the road and up more steps. On the left is **Seoul Science Park 5**; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri), a rabbit warren of a children's science museum. On the right is the **Ahn Junggeun Museum 6**; adult W1000; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri), which displays the life of another independence hero.

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From here walk to the **indoor botanical garden 7**; adult/teenager/child W500/300/200) and on the right is a **mini zoo 8**; admission free), with some birds and animals in cages.

The walk up Namsan begins to the left of the indoor botanical garden. On the way is a **lookout deck 9**, part of the **Seoul fortress wall 10** and some Joseon-era **signal beacons 11**. If you don't want to walk up, take the **cable car 12**; adult/child one way W4800/3000, return W6300/4000; ☎ 10am–11pm). It takes less than 30 minutes to walk up the steps to **Seoul Tower 13** (p56).

Just 50m past the Seoul Tower is the stop for **yellow bus No 2 14**; W500, every 10 minutes, 8am to midnight), which runs to Namsangol Hanok Village, the National Theatre of Korea and back to Seoul Tower. Pick up the yellow No 2 bus by Exit 4 of Chungmuro station (Line 3 or 4) if you want to take the bus up to Seoul Tower and then walk down.

WALK FACTS

- Start Subway Line 1 or 4 to Seoul station, Exit 10
- End Seoul Tower; yellow bus No 2
- Distance 1½km
- Time 1–2 hours
- Fuel stop Seoul Tower restaurants or take a picnic

MOUNTAIN HIKES

One of the main reasons that Joseon's first king selected Seoul as his capital was that the city is surrounded by mountains. Back in those early days defence was the primary consideration and besides Seoul's long fortress wall, other fortresses were built in the mountains to the north at Baekundae (now part of Bukhansan National Park) and to the south in Namhansan. These days the fortresses attract hikers who come to see these historical monuments and enjoy a day in the forest-covered mountains that are located so conveniently close to Seoul. Fresh air, natural surroundings, countryside food and outdoor exercise combine to lure jolly crowds into the mountains every day of the year. If your energy flags, take a shot of the hiker's friend, pine-needle *soju* (vodka), and it should power you to the top.

BUKHANSAN NATIONAL PARK

Straddling the northern border of Seoul is this **national park** (Map p216; ☎ 909 0497; www.npa.or.kr; adult/teenager/child W1600/600/300; ☎ 7.30am–6pm). Seoul is lucky to have such a great hiking area that can be reached so easily by subway. The park features forests,

rivers, Buddhist temples and many rocky peaks over 700m. Hiking is such a popular activity in Seoul that it is best to avoid weekends and the hordes of well-equipped hikers toiling to the summits. Seoulites are the world's best-dressed hikers – check out those red waistcoats, black ninja outfits and Darth Vader sunvisors. Basic hiking huts (*sanjang*) are available. The national park receives over four million visitors annually and to reduce environmental damage, footpaths are closed in rotation, but alternative routes are always open. The ticket booths sell a detailed hiking map (mostly in Korean) for W1000. The following all-day hikes are recommended, the first in the north of the park and the second in the southern section.

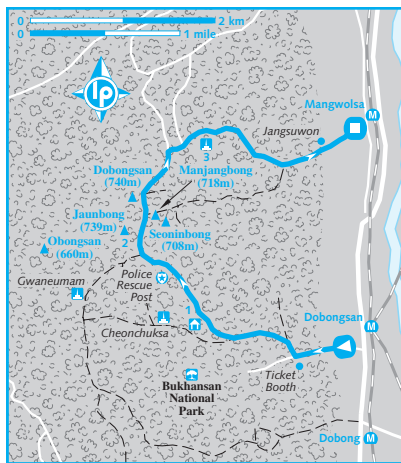
Dobongsan Hike

This is the most popular hike and is easy to reach as it is within walking distance of the subway station. The hike is cool and shady but moderate fitness is required.

Take subway Line 1 or 7 north to Dobongsan station (don't get off at the previous station, Dobong). Follow the nattily dressed Korean hikers across the main road and up

WALK FACTS

- Start Subway Line 1 or 7 to Dobongsan station
- End Mangwolsa subway station
- Distance 10km
- Time 5 hours
- Fuel stop Restaurants near the ticket office



through the long lines of hiking-equipment shops and food stalls. The best restaurants are near the ticket office under the trees and overlooking a stream, and one sells four-colour tofu. It's a 15 minute walk to the ticket office.

Dobongsan has three peaks clustered together – Seoninbong (선인봉, 708m), Manjangbong (만장봉, 718m) and Jaumbong (자운봉, 739m) – so follow signs that indicate any of these peaks.

On the main path, follow the sign to Jaumbong, 2.7km away. Five minutes past the spring, turn right, following the sign to Manjangbong. Keep a look out for woodpeckers and squirrels.

About an hour from the subway station, you arrive at **Dobong Hut 1**. Bear right following the sign to Mangwolsa, then follow the signs to **Jaumbong 2**. Go past the police rescue post and up the final steep and rocky stretch to the top, which is between two rocky peaks. It's here that the adventure really begins as you scramble down a ravine (helped by metal cables), then up and along a rocky ridge and finally through some narrow crevices.

Follow the signs to the mountain temple, **Mangwolsa 3** (망월사), and then continue down to the road, bearing left as you enter the town to reach Mangwolsa subway station for the trip home.

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Baekundae Hike

Leave Gupabal station by Exit 1, walk straight for 100m to the bus stop and take bus No 704 (W900, 10 minutes, every 15 minutes) to the Bukhansanseong bus stop. Get off with the other hikers, walk straight and then turn right and the ticket office is 500m from the bus stop.

The park's highest peak, Baekundae (836m), is 4km or two hours away. A five-minute walk brings you to the **fortress wall 1** and **Daeseomun gate 2**. The wall is 9.5km long and was made of earth in the Baekje dynasty. It was rebuilt with 13 gates and stone blocks in 1711 during the reign of King Sukjong and encircled 12 Buddhist temples and numerous wells.

Fifteen minutes after leaving the gate the road crosses a bridge. Fork left following the sign to Baekundae – keep a look out for little striped squirrels. Spring water is available at **Yaksuam 3**, a hermitage which you reach 45 minutes after leaving the gate. Past Yaksu-am there are stairs up to another fortress gate and then you use metal cables to haul yourself up bare rock to **Baekundae peak 4**. Surrounded by granite cliffs and with a 360-degree view, it's a top-of-the-world feeling.

The easiest option is to return the same way, but it's more interesting to turn left on the stairs and walk along a scenic, rocky route to **Yongammun 5**, another fortress gate 35 minutes away. Then walk along the remains of the wall to **Dongjangdae 6**, a command post, and on to **Daedongmun 7**, which is 40 minutes from Yongammun.

At Daedongmun, walk down to the toilets and take the path that follows the river bed. There is no sign but the track is clear. The path goes through an attractive valley and passes three small temples, **Taegosa 8**, **Yonghaksa 9** and **Beobyongsa 10**, to the beginning of the road, which you reach after 45 minutes. From here it is another 40 minutes back to the bus stop.

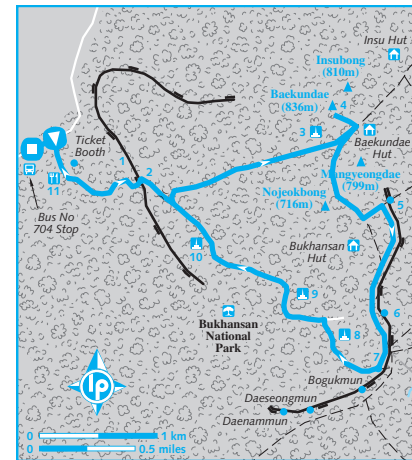
Palgakjeong (11; Map p216; ☎ 354 4440; meals W6000-11,000; 🕒 10am-9.30pm), a large restaurant at the Baekundae entrance, has plenty of indoor and outdoor seats. The side dishes are above average and the *sanchae bibimbap* (rice topped with egg, meat, mountain vegies and a chilli sauce) is crunchy and has a distinctive flavour. The free *sikhye* (rice punch) is good too. The *seonggejuk* is clam and seaweed soup.

WESTERN NAMHANSANSEONG HIKE

This relatively easy hike in Namhansanseong Provincial Park, 20km southeast of the city centre, follows part of the ancient fortress wall, which is 3m to 7.5m high and stretches 9.6km (although the inner circle is only 6.5km). Completed in 1626, Namhansanseong guarded the southern entrance to Seoul, while Bukhansanseong guarded the northern approaches. It was garrisoned by tough Buddhist monks who were soldiers rather than pacifists in those days. In 1636 King Injo fled to this fortress when the Manchus invaded from China. After a siege of 45 days the king surrendered and his son was kept hostage in China for eight years.

WALK FACTS

- Start Subway Line 3 to Gupabal station, Exit 1 & bus No 704 to Bukhansanseong bus stop
- Finish Bukhansanseong bus stop
- Distance 9km short route, 12km loop route
- Time 6-7 hours
- Fuel stop Palgakjeong



WALK FACTS

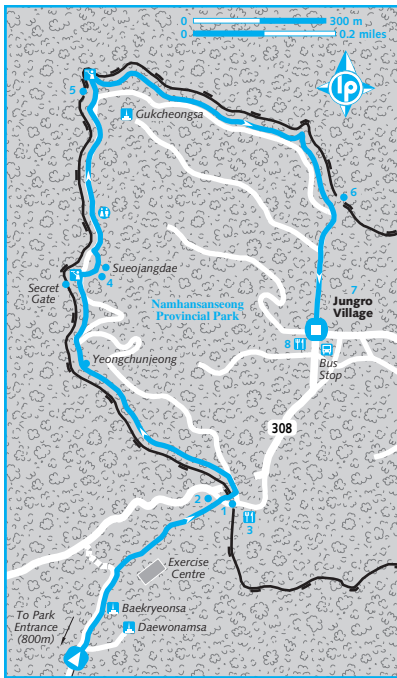
Start Subway Line 8 to Namhansanseong

End Jungro Village; bus No 9

Distance 4½km

Time 2 hours

Fuel Stops Nammun Gadeun, Jangseong



To get there, leave Namhansanseong station by Exit 1. Take any bus the short way up the road to the park entrance (Namhansanseong *ipgu*) because it's a 30-minute walk.

At the entrance is a large **handicraft shop** (☎ 749 7976; ☹ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) on the right. An uphill walk for 30 minutes along a concrete path takes you past small temples, stone pinnacles and an exercise centre to **Nammun 1**, the South Gate. The fortress **ticket office** (2; adult/teenager/child W1000/600/300; ☹ 7am-8pm Apr-Oct, 9am-7pm Nov-Mar) has a free map in *hangeul* (Korean phonetic alphabet) only. Near the gate is **Nammun Gadeun** (3; ☎ 031-743 6608; meals W5000-8000; ☹ 9am-midnight), which serves up *kalguksu* (thick, handmade noodles in broth), a *pajeon* (green-onion pancake) as big as a pizza and *sanchae bibimbap*.

Walk north along the inside of the fortress wall, which soon offers extensive views as well as big butterflies and golden dragonflies in summer. After 15 minutes is **Cheongnyangdae 4**, the shrine to Yi Hoe who was executed after false accusations were made that he had embezzled funds meant for the fortress's construction. His wife and concubine both committed suicide when they heard of his execution.

Ten minutes further on is **Seomun 5** (West Gate) near another panoramic viewpoint, and further on is **Bungmun 6** (North Gate). From here you can carry on round the wall for another 4km to fully appreciate the colossal effort that went into building this huge but hard-to-defend fortress. Otherwise take a five-minute stroll down to **Jungro 7**, a village of restaurants that offers culinary adventures involving chicken, duck, wild pig, pheasant, goat, rabbit and

dog meals. At **Jangseong** (8; ☎ 031-743 6600; meals for 2-3 W40,000; ☹ noon-11pm), which has funky little private rooms for diners, the *tokkitang* (a large rabbit stew with potatoes and green vegetables in a red but not too hot sauce) is recommended. It comes with interesting side dishes and is served in a big ceramic bowl that is kept warm on a table stove, with *sikhye* (rice punch) to finish.

From the bus stop near the roundabout bus No 9 (W800, 10 minutes, every 15 minutes) can drop you near Namhansanseong subway station.

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