

# Secrets of South Korea

## 5000 years of culture and history

A compact country full of delightful contrasts, South Korea's juxtaposition of ancient tradition and fast-paced modernity make it truly unique. Travel in the company of Professor James B Lewis, Associate Professor of Korean History at Oxford University, on a journey exploring this incredible country. From tranquil Buddhist temples and UNESCO-listed fortresses, tombs and villages, to shimmering Seoul, South Korea's economic powerhouse, you will discover the country's culture and traditions, kept alive through its traditional music, poetry, religion and dance.

### Day 0: Flight from the UK

Those who have purchased flights from Temple World will depart today on an overnight flight arriving the next day.

*\*Please note, if you book your own flights, we can book a transfer for you (at extra cost).*

### Day 1: Tour starts in Seoul

The tour starts this morning in Seoul. Those that have booked their flights with Temple World will be met at the airport. Check-in to the hotel from 2pm onwards, and relax this afternoon before meeting for an introductory talk, followed by dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight at the Amid Hotel Seoul or similar.

Overnight: *AMID Hotel Seoul* | Meals: *D*

### Day 2: Seoul

After breakfast, start our exploration of the city with a visit to the excellent National Museum of Korea, a repository for over 5,000 years of Korean art, culture and history. The wonderful artifacts on display include the stunning Gilt-bronze Incense Burner of Baekje, excavated in 1993 and considered a masterpiece of Korean art, and the golden treasures from the royal tomb of Silla at Hwangnam.

We will then visit Bukchon Hanok Village, Seoul's largest concentration of traditional Korean homes, called hanok, followed by Changdeokgung Palace, which dates back to 1405 and set within wonderful gardens. The most beautiful of Seoul's five grand palaces, it was built by the kings of the Joseon Dynasty and royal descendants lived here until 1989.

The last visit of the day will be to the Jongmyo Shrine, the oldest and most authentic of the country's Confucian royal shrines. Dedicated to the forefathers of the Joseon dynasty (1392- 1910), the shrine in its present form dates to the 16th century and is UNESCO listed.

Return to the hotel to freshen up before walking to a nearby meeting room for a talk by Professor Lewis, followed by dinner together as a group this evening.

Overnight: *AMID Hotel Seoul* | Meals: *B, L, D*

### Day 3: Seoul

Continue exploring Seoul today, starting with a visit to Gwanghwamun Square, once a 16 lane highway and now paved over to make a large pedestrianized plaza right in the centre of the city which leads to the city's historic walls and Gwanghwamun Gate.

Here, you'll discover Gyeongbokgung Palace, the main royal palace of the Joseon Dynasty. We'll try to time our visit to catch the daily royal guard changing ceremony, which reenacts the palace's guard-changing procedure that took place during the Joseon dynasty, and uses costumes and weapons based on historical records.

Also in the area is the Cheonggyecheon Stream, a pedestrian-only urban waterway and public walkway opened in 2005 replacing the city's original stream which had been paved over by the city's highway. Here, families, couples and office workers can picnic on the banks, hike or enjoy a paddle in the shallow waters.

Whilst in the area, we'll pop into Gwangjang Market, which sells everything from silk to street food. If you feel like it, you'll have the opportunity to try snacks such as Mayak gimbap – rice and pickled vegetables rolled up in seaweed and covered in sesame seeds, or some Hwareo hoe, Korean sliced raw fish similar to Japanese sashimi. Gwangjang Market is particularly famous throughout Seoul for its delicious fried mung bean pancakes, known as Bindaetteok, usually served with a side of soy-vinegar sauce and a bowl of kimchi.

Return to the hotel for an evening at leisure (dinner not included this evening).

Overnight: *AMID Hotel Seoul* | Meals: *B, L*

### Day 4: Seoul to Andong

Check out of the hotel this morning, and depart for Andong, a three and a half-hour drive.

On arrival, visit UNESCO-listed Hahoe Folk Village, known for its traditional hanok houses, which are still lived in today by descendants of the village founder.

The village is also home to a beautiful Confucian seowon (academy), built with typical punsu-jiri (feng shui) principles to maximise gi (chi). Visit a hands-on museum showcasing the manufacture and traditional origins of Andong's famous Soju (rice and grain spirit).

Check into our hotel for the night, the CM Park Hotel in Andong. Enjoy dinner together as a group this evening.

Overnight: *CM Park Hotel Andong* | Meals: *B, L, D*

### Day 5: Andong to Gyeongju

After breakfast at the hotel, check out and continue travelling south to a rural, mountainous part of the country containing the Sobaek Mountain Range (around two hours' drive). Here, we shall visit Mount Gayasan National Park, one of the country's most scenic, and a popular weekend hiking spot for Koreans

With its topography making the region tricky for invaders to conquer, this area is home to some excellently preserved historic Korean sites. We will visit the most iconic of these, Haeinsa Temple, first built in 802 AD and famous for its complete Tripitaka (Buddhist texts). Carved laboriously by monks over several years and completed in 1251, the library they are contained in was the only part of the temple to escape a devastating fire which burned down most of the temple buildings in 1817. The historic library and the scripture blocks were UNESCO Heritage Listed in 1992.

After lunch we shall continue by road to the enchanting city of Gyeongju, known as the 'museum without walls' for its streets littered with palace ruins, temples, pagodas and Buddhist statuary. Capital of the Kingdom of Silla for nearly 1000 years (from 57 BC), fifty-six kings ruled here in succession, and their huge grass-covered burial mounds create an unusual tumuli landscape.

On arrival, visit the UNESCO heritage-listed Bulguksa temple and complex, considered a masterpiece of the golden age of Buddhist art in the Silla kingdom, and containing seven of South Korea's National Treasures, including the Dabotap and Seokgatap stone pagodas.

Check into our hotel, and enjoy a talk by Professor Lewis before dinner together.

Overnight: *Commodore Hotel Gyeongju* | Meals: *B, L, D*

### Day 6: Gyeongju

Enjoy a full day in Gyeongju to immerse yourself in the remarkable monuments of the ancient Silla Kingdom. Start by visiting the wonderful Gyeongju National Museum, which houses many of the dazzling jewels and weapons found around this ancient royal capital, including many from excavations of the Daereungwon Royal Tombs which we visit after the museum.

Head to the Tumuli Park next, an unusual landscape of high grassy mounds containing the Daereungwon royal tombs, which were excavated in 1973. The tombs represent an incredible record of a 5th/6th century royal burial, and many remarkable artefacts were discovered within the tombs, including a cheonmado, 'heavenly horse' of inestimable value. Also visit the Cheomseongdae Observatory, the 'Star Gazing Tower', one of the oldest in the world.

The last visit of the day will be to Wolseong Forest, known for its beautiful cherry trees and the remains of a Silla Fortress, and Wolji Pond, a stunning reflecting pond built as part of a Korean palace complex in the 7th century.

Afterwards, return to the hotel. The evening is at leisure (dinner not included).

Overnight: *Commodore Hotel Gyeongju* | Meals: *B, L*

### Day 7: Gyeongju to Busan

After breakfast at the hotel, check out and travel by road to Busan, Korea's second city (around 90 minutes away). Busan was the only territory not colonised or destroyed by the North Koreans during the Korean War.

On arrival, we'll spend the day getting out into nature, exploring the glorious coastline surrounding this vibrant city.

Start with a visit to the lovely Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, built in 1376 during the Goryeo dynasty and unusual for its striking coastal setting.

Busan's coastline is blessed with lovely beaches, and we'll spend a little time today at Haeundae beach, one of the country's best, with a 1.5km shoreline of golden sand and an attractive, calm bay. Haeundae is named for the Silla-era scholar and poet Choe Chi-won, who was so fond of the beach that he carved his pen name, Haeun, into a nearby rock.

We'll have some time to wander on Dongbaek Island, a very picturesque, forested promontory with numerous scenic walking trails to a number of lookouts (note, there are quite a lot of steps as the area is hilly). Lunch is provided today.

Check into our hotel for the next two nights, and after a chance to freshen up, head out before dinner on foot to a local meeting room for a talk given by Professor Lewis, followed by dinner as a group.

Overnight: *Busan Avani Central Hotel* | Meals: *B, L, D*

### Day 8: Busan

After breakfast, head out for a short walk on the Oryukdo Skywalk, a glass-floored viewing platform off the side of a 35-meter coastal cliff, so you can view of the crashing waves below through the transparent floor.

Continue to Gamcheon Cultural Village, known as 'Korea's Santorini' for its jumble of houses perched on a steep mountainside slope (although Busan's version are painted a variety of pastel colours). A UNESCO heritage listed neighbourhood, this former slum is now a maze of streets and alleys filled with murals, cafes, art galleries, and quirky shops. There are also numerous street food stalls, so this is the perfect area to find a

vendor selling the city's famous ssiat hotteok, a delicious fried pastry stuffed with sugar, honey, nuts and sunflower seeds

In the afternoon, visit Gukje Market, one of the city's largest, which sells cooked and fresh food, produce and household items in stalls packing narrow alleyways. The market's name 'gukje' means 'international' in Korean and references the origins of the market which was started by refugees displaced by the Korean War who settled in Busan and set up stalls selling smuggled or imported products. For those who wish to explore further, we can also visit Jagalchi market, Korea's largest seafood market, well-organised and modern, and mainly staffed by women (many of whom are the wives and family of the fishermen who re-stock the stalls day and night with their catch.

After our tour, return to the hotel. Dinner this evening is at leisure to enjoy one of Busan's many excellent eateries (own expense). As the country's largest port, seafood features prominently on many menus. Eomuk (fish cakes) can be found at many a street-food stall, Dwaengi gukbap, a warming pork and miso-based soup is another local speciality, as is Milmyeon, wheat noodles in a chicken or beef broth, served chilled rather than hot, on a summer's day.

**Overnight:** *Busan Avani Central Hotel* | **Meals:** *B, L*

### **Day 9: Busan to Seoul**

After breakfast, check out of the hotel and take the KTX (Korea Train Express) to Seoul. The high-speed line was built in 1992 and will take around 2 hours 40 minutes.

On arrival, visit the War Memorial Museum, which documents the history of the Korean War (1950-1953) and features engaging multimedia exhibits, documentary footage as well as weapons, uniforms, tanks, helicopters and planes used in the conflict. A somber memorial walkway honours all the South Koreans and UN soldiers who participated and lost their lives in the war.

Afterwards, travel to the city's Namsan Park, located on the slopes of Mount Namsan, offering panoramic views over the Seoul skyline. Atop the mountain is the N Seoul Tower, an iconic city landmark used for broadcasting since the 1950's, offering birds-eye views. The tower is lit up at night with an array of colourful LED lights using the latest technology.

Afterwards, check in at our hotel, which will be the same one stayed at during the first three nights of the tour.

Dinner this evening is at leisure to enjoy some of Seoul's excellent eateries (your guide will be happy to assist with recommendations).

**Overnight:** *AMID Hotel Seoul* | **Meals:** *B, L*

### Day 10: Seoul

Our last day in Seoul will be spent exploring the extraordinary demilitarized Zone that separates North and South Korea. Begin with a visit to Imjingak, a park along the banks of the Imjin River with various Korean war monuments and 'Freedom Bridge', a former railroad bridge connecting the two countries which is now barricaded.

Next, get a glimpse of North Korea from the Dora Observatory, from where you can see a fake town built to lure defectors.

Also visit The 3rd Infiltration Tunnel, DMZ Theatre and Tongil Chon, a farming community right next to the DMZ whose name means 'Unification Village'.

Return to Seoul for a final talk by Professor Jay Lewis his evening before dinner, followed by a farewell meal together as a group.

**Overnight:** [Amid Hotel Seoul or similar](#) | Meals: **B, L, D**

### Day 11 Tour Ends

Your journey with us will end today after breakfast. Those on our recommended flights will be transferred to Incheon International Airport for a day-time flight to London. Check-out will be at noon today for those who are departing later.

Numerous extensions can be added in Seoul or to nearby countries for those who would like more time to explore. Please enquire for ideas and costs.

## Trip Scholar

**Professor James B Lewis, Associate Professor of Korean History at the University of Oxford**  
Professor James B Lewis is Associate Professor of Korean History at the University of Oxford. His courses include an introduction to Korean history, Korean history through classical texts and methods in Koreanology. His particular research interests are the cultural, economic and social histories of premodern Korea and the history of Korean-Japanese relations prior to 1850. Editor, author and co-author of many books about the history of Korea, Professor Lewis is currently preparing a monograph on the economic history of Korea from 1400-1900 and translating the *Korin Teise*, an early 18th Century Japanese view of Korea and diplomatic relations with the Joseon Dynasty.

### Lectures during our tours

All our tours are accompanied by an academic 'trip scholar' as well as local guides. The local guide or guides provide the day-to-day guiding on our tours, whilst the trip lecturer will give regular lectures on his/her specialist subject throughout to provide an academic overview. Lectures/talks usually last 30-40 minutes including questions and answers (if applicable). These are generally held in the evenings before dinner and attendance is optional. We don't usually specify before travel which days the lectures will be given (for operational reasons) but guests can expect them roughly every other day as a minimum, with some lecturers giving some kind of talk or presentation more frequently

## Fitness Guideline

We have graded the fitness level required for participation in this tour as **Moderate**.

Most participants will be between the ages of 60 and 80, so we have designed the tour with this age group in mind when it comes to excursions. However, this is a busy itinerary with a number of hotel changes and a full schedule of sightseeing. There's limited free time during the tour, in order to make the most of having our trip scholar with us. You might like to consider arriving a day or two before the tour starts, if you have time, so the long-haul travel and/or jetlag don't hamper your enjoyment of the start of the tour. Those who get tired easily by international travel may find a private tour with more rest time built in would suit better.

There is quite a lot of city/site walking in the tour and although there are no very long or strenuous hikes, while sightseeing we might be 'on the go' for several hours at a time, standing to listen to the guide talk, and moving around a city or site on foot without breaks to sit down and rest. It is important that everyone is able to keep up with the group.

As a result, we feel that this group tour is not suitable for those who require walking aids to get around when out of the house, due to the need to keep up a moderate pace with the main group when out and about – we would recommend a private tour instead, where the pace can be tailored to match individual mobility requirements. Tour participants over 80 will be asked to provide a letter to confirm they will be fit enough to undertake this tour from their GP (we will provide details of the excursions and any points we feel they ought to be aware of).

Please contact us for more advice if you are at all concerned about whether this tour might be suitable for you.





## Extensions

We highly recommend adding 3-4 nights on the beautiful volcanic island of Jeju after the main tour, located off the southern coast of the Korean Peninsula. Fly from Seoul to Jeju City, and base yourself either in the city or on the coastal Jungmun area, to explore its beaches and fantastic geological spectacles, from waterfalls and mountains to lava tubes. Known for its scenic hiking, seafood, and beach life, Jeju makes a perfect addition to our tour which can be as active or relaxing as you'd like. **Recommended hotel:** Shilla Jeju

Other extensions on the island of Korea or in Japan, China or other neighbouring countries are also possible. Please contact [alice@templeworld.com](mailto:alice@templeworld.com) in our tailor-made team for advice or a quote on any private pre or post tour extensions.