



EYEWITNESS TRAVEL

# TOP 10

# SEOUL



THE 10 BEST OF EVERYTHING

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## ESSENTIAL TIPS

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A quick read of these tips will help you find everything you are looking for, quickly and efficiently.



### SEARCH

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### ENLARGE IMAGE

All images and maps can be zoomed into and viewed full screen once selected (double tap or use arrow depending on device)



### IMAGE GALLERY

All entries with this icon have an accompanying photo, simply click the link to view.



### GOOGLE MAPS

Never get lost with our handy Google map links, a wifi connection is advised to avoid roaming charges.

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# ESSENTIAL TIPS

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## INTERACTIVE MENUS

1 Museums 

2 Churches 

Navigate by using our interactive table of contents, click each link to be taken to that section. These appear at the beginning of each chapter.

## NAVIGATION

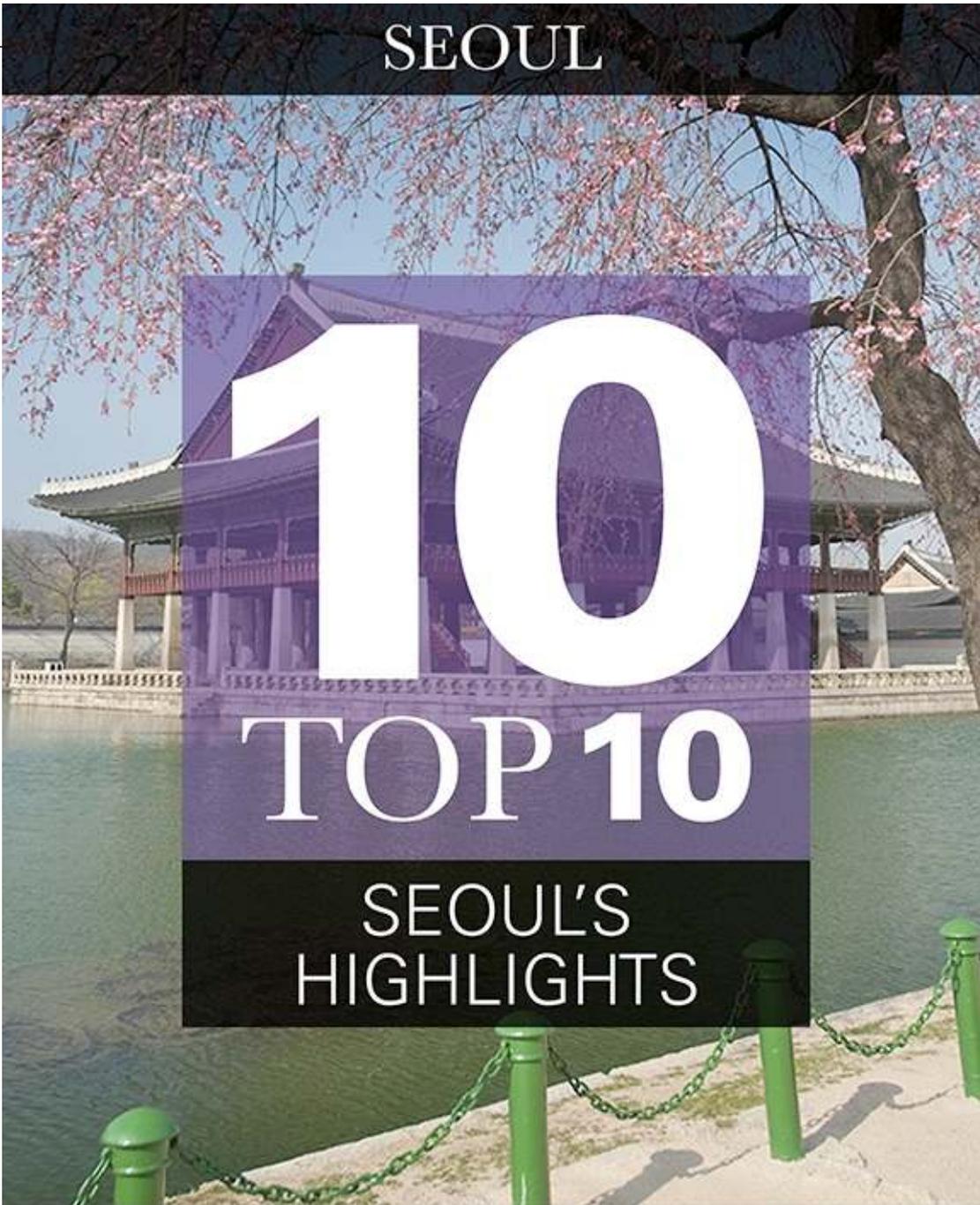
The best way to explore this guide is to begin at **Highlights**. This first chapter shows you, quite simply, the best sights in the destination. This is followed by: **Top 10 of Everything** – themed Top 10 lists that allow you to make the most of your time away; **Around Town** – must-see sights, area by area; **Streetsmart** – essential practical information; and the **Image Gallery** – A selection of great images that accompany many of the sight listings.

# INTRODUCING SEOUL



Although justly regarded as one of the world's most modern cities, Seoul has a wealth of historic sights. Its two oldest and most splendid palaces – Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung – date back to the turn of the 15th century as does Dongdaemun, Seoul's oldest existing city gate. The neighborhoods of Insadong, Bukchon, and Buamdong offer tantalizing hints of dynastic-era Korean life, while heading to the nearby city of Gwacheon will give you a break from the frenetic pace of the city.

SEOUL



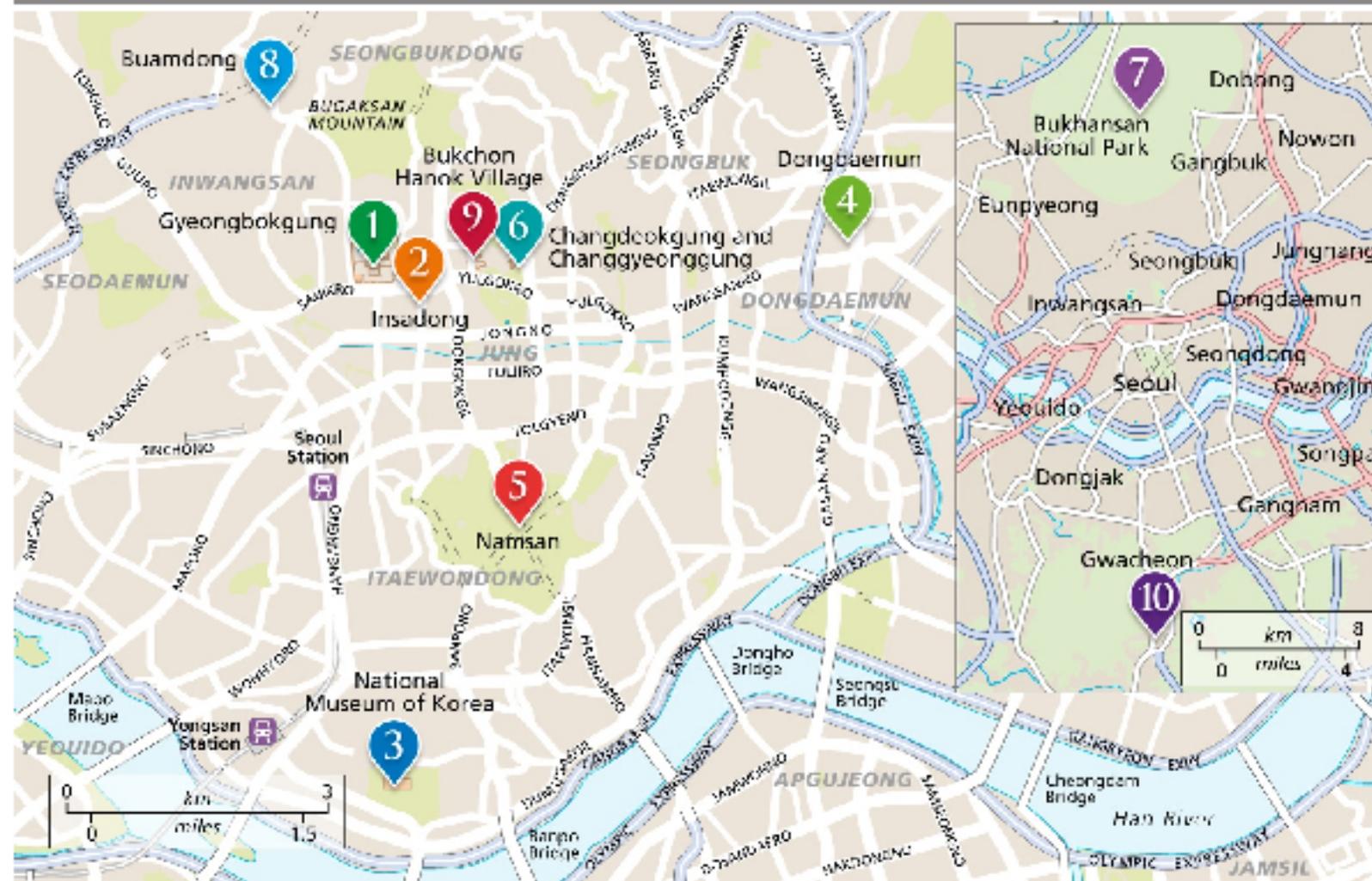
# 10

## TOP 10

SEOUL'S  
HIGHLIGHTS

THE MUST SEE SIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES

# SEOUL'S HIGHLIGHTS



- |    |   |   |
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# GYEONGBOKGUNG 경복궁

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Taejo, the first king of the Joseon dynasty, selected Seoul as his inaugural capital in 1392, and the construction of Gyeongbokgung – the “Palace of Shining Happiness” – was completed just two years later. This majestic structure has been of prime importance ever since, and served as the royal residence till 1910. The myriad wooden halls and gates dotting the complex are a riot of color, though in true Confucian style any opulence is balanced by nature – in this case, the pine-covered mountains which rise to its north.  161 Sajikro • 732 1931 • Open Mar–May, Sep & Oct: 9am–6pm; Jun–Aug: 9am–6:30pm; Nov–Feb: 9am–5pm; last adm 1 hour before closing • Closed Tue • Adm: ₩3,000 (adults), ₩1,500 (7–18 year-olds) • The palace is also accessible with the Integrated Palace [Ticket](#) • [www.royalpalace.go.kr](http://www.royalpalace.go.kr)

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. GWANGHWAMUN

This imposing southern gate is one of Seoul’s main landmarks. Destroyed and rebuilt several times through the ages, the current gate was unveiled in 2010, after four years of reconstruction.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 2. GYEONGHOERU

This pavilion was constructed in 1412, during the reign of King Taejong (1400–18), who hosted banquets and State meetings here. Located in the middle of a man-made lake, it is accessed via a stone bridge with ornately carved balustrades.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 3. THE FRONT COURTYARD

During the day, visitors buy tickets for the palace here. In the evening, it is perhaps Seoul’s best spot for viewing the sunset – the grand palace fading against the setting sun makes for a striking sight.

 [Google Map](#)

## 4. STONELAND

An assortment of sculptures – both traditional and contemporary in design – can be found just north of the National Palace Museum of Korea. This is a grassy area, ideal for picnicking.

 [View photo](#)

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## 5. GEUNJEONGJEON HALL

This huge two-tiered structure was the former throne room of the palace. Inside, a beautiful folding screen is placed behind the Joseon throne, featuring the sun, the moon, and five mountains painted onto a dark blue background.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 6. THE NORTHERN SECTOR

In this little-visited sector of the complex, many buildings which were destroyed in the Japanese occupation of Korea have been reconstructed. They exude a timeless air and are worth a visit.

 [Google Map](#)

## 7. GANGNYEONGJEON HALL

Constructed in 1395, Gangnyeongjeon Hall was used as a bed chamber by several Joseon kings. It was rebuilt in 1995 and redecorated with original dynastic furnishings.

 [Google Map](#)

## 8. PARUJEONG

One of the most distinctive buildings in the complex, this two-storied octagonal structure was built in 1888 and used as a library by King Gojong. Interestingly, its design is more suggestive of the Chinese Qing dynasty than Joseon-era Korea.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 9. NATIONAL FOLK MUSEUM

This museum has an assortment of original dynastic clothing, as well as hands-on displays that are popular with kids.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 10. NATIONAL PALACE MUSEUM OF KOREA

Over 40,000 artifacts from Seoul's five palaces, spanning the 500-year reign of the Joseon dynasty, are housed here. Look out for statues, scrolls, and fragments of the original palace woodwork.

 [Google Map](#)

## A Turbulent History

Given what it has been through, it is something of a miracle that Gyeongbokgung still stands. The first major issue was the disastrous fire of 1553, followed by the Japanese invasion of the 1590s which saw much of the palace razed to the ground. All but 10 buildings were destroyed during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–45), which was followed by the devastating Korean War. Major reconstruction has been underway since 1989, and half of the palace's buildings are already back in place.

 **Tip:** Free English-language tours are offered outside the Gwanghwamun ticket booth at 11am, 1:30pm, and 3:30pm every day.

 **Tip:** There is a quality restaurant within the National Palace Museum of Korea, and a small café inside the National Folk Museum. There are gift shops in both museums.

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# INSADONG



# INSADONG 인사동

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Seoul's most popular tourist district, and with good reason, Insadong is by far the most interesting and quintessentially Korean place in the city to shop or eat. Most of this area is made up of narrow, winding alleys known as golmok, which are a delight to wander about in. These lanes are filled to the brim with small charming galleries, restaurants, tearooms, and trinket shops, and some are even housed in traditional wooden hanok buildings.

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. INSA ART CENTER

The largest gallery in Insadong, this is also the most interesting – exhibitions change weekly.

 Insa Art Center • 29–23 Gwanhundong • 735 2655 • Open 10am–6:30pm Mon–Sat, 10:30am–6pm Sun • Adm

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 2. TAPGOL PARK

Named after a 15th-century relic – a stone pagoda from the Buddhist temple once located here – this park hosted a protest against Japanese occupation in 1919.

 [Google Map](#)

## 3. JOGYESA

Seoul's most prominent temple is the headquarters of the Jogye order, Korea's primary Buddhist sect. The main hall is a fantastic example of the country's colorful and immaculately painted temple decorations.  Jogyesa • Gyeongjildong 45 • 732 2183

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 4. YETCHATJIP

This tearoom's claim to fame are the dozen or so small birds that fly around it freely. The herbal infusions it offers are also excellent.  Yetchatjip • 2F 196–5 Gwanhundong • 722 5332 • Open 10am–11pm daily

 [Google Map](#)

## 5. BALWOO GONGYANG

The best of Seoul's vegetarian “temple food” restaurants, Balwoo Gongyang peers out over Jogyesa – the ideal setting. The food is good and dishes are served in the wooden bowls from which the restaurant takes its name.  Balwoo Gongyang • 71 Gyeongjildong • 2031 2081

## 6. UNHYEONGUNG

Seoul's unofficial sixth palace, Unhyeongung was denied the title as it was never occupied by a king. Though not as striking as the others, it is charming and has a tranquil atmosphere, making it worth a visit. **i** Unhyeongung • 114–10 Unnidong • 766 9090 • Open Nov–Mar: 9am–5:30pm Tue–Sun; Apr–Oct: 9am–6:30pm Tue–Sun • Adm

## 7. MIN'S CLUB

This splendid restaurant is housed in a 1920s hanok, which, though ancient-looking now, was quite innovative at that time. The luxurious interior makes a superb backdrop while sampling wines from the lengthy list. **i** Min's Club • Gyeongundong • 733 2966 • Open noon–10:30pm daily (orders noon–2:30pm & 6–9:30pm only)

## 8. STORY OF THE BLUE STAR

A local favorite, this tiny restaurant serves mountain food and interesting makgeolli infusions. The menu is written in Korean, in a calligraphic style, on the walls. **i** Story of the Blue Star • 734 3095 • Open noon–3pm & 6pm–10pm daily

## 9. SSAMZIEGIL

Popular with Korean youth and tourists, this handicrafts market is essentially a single path that spirals up through four floors. In addition to shops, the complex has a few good restaurants on the upper level. **i** Ssamziegil • 38 Gwanhundong • 736 0088 • Open 10am–8:30pm daily

## 10. SUNDAY VISITS

Traffic is barred from entering Insadonggil on Sundays, making it a good day to visit. In warmer months, you might even see a parade or a musical display here.

## Avoid-Horse Alley

Jongno, in the heart of Insadong, has been Seoul's most important road since ancient times. Aristocrats, known as yangban, would glide along the road on their horses and, as they passed, commoners were required to prostrate themselves before them. Eventually, thoroughfares hidden from yangban view were created. Pimatgol, a side-street just north of Jongno, and running parallel to it, literally translates to "avoid-horse alley."

 **Tip:** Insadong is least crowded just before sunset.

# INSADONG SOUVENIRS

## 1. ART SUPPLIES

Insadong's area has long been a favorite with local artists, and has dozens of art-supplies shops that cater to their needs. Apart from high-quality paints and paper, these shops also sell a range of excellent brushes.

 [View photo](#)

## 2. NAME CHOPS

Some art-supplies shops also sell name chops. Made from marble, jade, and other stones, these are still used across East Asia today in lieu of a signature. If requested, these can be inscribed with foreign names, in either Roman or Korean characters.

 [View photo](#)

## 3. TEA SETS

There is a tremendous range of tea sets in Insadong, and they are among the most popular purchases by visitors. Head to Insadonggil for the inexpensive ones, or to shops such as Yid Pottery 이도 도자기, Kwang Ju Yo, and the Korea Culture & Design Foundation for designer fare.

## 4. TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

The strikingly colorful hanbok is the national dress of Korea. Insadong has several tailors who can make this outfit, although commissioning one may be a little expensive. It's a better idea to check out one of the stores in the area selling contemporary styles; try Sami for wearable options.

 [View photo](#)

## 5. PENDANTS AND JEWELRY

Insadong is a great place for jewelry – a stroll around the bustling [Ssamziegil](#) complex will reveal a variety of shops selling styles from traditional to contemporary. Visitors should also look out for stores selling tiny silk pendants – these make attractive and inexpensive souvenirs.

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## 6. BUDDHIST REGALIA

The most important Buddhist temple in the city, **Jogyesa** lies on the western fringe of the Insadong area. There is a clutch of shops near the temple, selling traditional Buddhist paraphernalia. Although these are intended for the benefit of worshipers, the clothing, incense, and bronzeware is sure to interest visitors as well.

 [View photo](#)

## 7. HANDMADE PAPER

Koreans are proud of their local paper; known as hanji, it is usually made from mulberry leaves. You can buy entire rolls of this from the art-supplies shops, but non-artists will doubtless be more interested in items made with hanji – including lanterns, hand fans, calligraphic scrolls, and figurines.

 [View photo](#)

## 8. RICE CAKES

Rice cakes play an important role in the life of Koreans – they form part of many meals, and are used as table decorations during holidays and coming-of-age ceremonies. Bizeun **빛은** sells ready-to-eat rice cakes as well as takeaway souvenir packs, and the many rustic stores around Fraser Suites sell cheaper versions of the same.

## 9. PAINTINGS

Insadong is packed with art galleries, and a few places offer visitors the chance to purchase local art. While the basement of the **Ssamziegil** complex is a good place to go looking, most of the area's smaller, more independent galleries are also worth a visit.

 [View photo](#)

## 10. POTTERY

Korean pottery has been admired since the time of the Three Kingdoms, and is popular to this day. A couple of shops, located just north of the main Insadong area, are superb places for pottery shopping – Yido Pottery **이도 도자기** has a fantastic range of earthenware. Also definitely worth visiting, the smaller, classier Kwang Ju Yo **광주요** is down the road.

 [View photo](#)

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Korea's National Museum is, by far, the country's most important repository of historical artifacts. Once housed in the grounds of Gyeongbokgung palace, it moved in 2005 to a state-of-the-art facility on land previously owned by the American Army. A trove of treasures, it gives visitors a chronological tour through Korean history – from the Paleolithic to the Three Kingdoms period, and then through the Silla, Goryeo, and Joseon dynasties.  168–6 Yongsandong • 2077 9000 • Open 9am–6pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 9am–9pm Wed & Sat, 9am–7pm Sun • English-language hourly tours of the museum start at 10:30am and 2:30pm • [www.museum.go.kr](http://www.museum.go.kr)

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. COMB-PATTERN POTTERY

Dating back to 5,000 BC, these earthenware jars, decorated with a zigzag pattern, were used to store and carry food. These are among the earliest Korean archaeological finds.

## 2. SILLA JEWELRY

The Silla dynasty unified the Korean peninsula around 660. Their jewelry was similar to that of the Baekje dynasty, and is best exemplified by decorative crowns and earrings.

 [View photo](#)

## 3. BAEKJE ORNAMENTS

Kings of the Baekje dynasty (18 BC – AD 660) had a penchant for golden accessories in an Art Nouveau style. The headgear found inside the tomb of King Muryeong in [Gongju](#) is a good example.

## 4. TEN-LEVEL PAGODA

A gigantic Buddhist pagoda, first erected in 1348 during the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392), is the centerpiece of the museum.

 [View photo](#)

## 5. METAL TYPE

A Buddhist document, Jikji, printed in 1377, was the world's first book printed with movable type. The museum has pieces of the original metal type.

 [View photo](#)

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## 6. PENSIVE BODHISATTVA

Displayed in a room of its own on the third floor, this finely worked figurine is made of bronze and was cast in the early 7th century. It is one of the most-cherished items in the museum.

 [View photo](#)

## 7. JOSEON'S BASIC CODE OF LAWS

During the Joseon dynasty, Korean society became highly Confucian in nature. A series of documents showcases the rituals that were common in society at that time.

## 8. KIM HONG-DO'S GENRE PAINTINGS

Genre paintings by Kim Hong-do (1745–1806) are revered by museum curators. These simple illustrations perfectly evoke the clothing, gestures, and practices of the time.

 [View photo](#)

## 9. BUDDHIST PAINTINGS

The Buddhist painting room on the second floor has a series of elaborate and colorful Buddhist scrolls and folding screens from the Goryeo and Joseon periods.

## 10. DYNASTIC POTTERY

Dynastic-era pottery fills several halls on the museum's third floor. Korean artisans worked with porcelain and celadon, but some of their techniques remain a mystery even today.

 [View photo](#)

### The Many Names of Seoul

Seoul has had many names. Known as Wiryeseong under the Baekje kings (18 BC–AD 660), its name changed to Hanju in Silla times (660–918) and to Namgyeong under the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392). It was known as Hanseong, then Hanyang, under Joseon rule (1392–1910), and as Keijo under Japanese occupation (1910–45).

 **Tip:** Pick up pamphlets and leaflets from the information desk in the main lobby.

 **Tip:** The museum has several options for refreshment – there's a trendy café up the stairs from the main entrance, a tearoom at the opposite end of the first floor, a good restaurant overlooking the lake outside the museum, and a convenience store for snacks.

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# DONGDAEMUN



# DONGDAEMUN 동대문

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An elaborately painted, two-tiered structure that once marked the eastern perimeter of Seoul, Dongdaemun literally means “Great East Gate.” The city may have expanded but the gate, dating from 1398, is still here despite being wrecked by fire, restored, and rebuilt again in 1869. Today it represents an interesting mix of renovation and reconstruction. The gigantic market area that has developed around Dongdaemun is one of the most fascinating places in all of Korea.

 [Google Map](#)

## 1. DONGDAEMUN

This gigantic ornamental gate was known as Heunginjimun in the past. It now sits at the heart of the city district that goes by the same name.

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 2. DONGDAEMUN MARKET

To the south of the gate, you can see a series of high-rise malls. They sell inexpensive copies of branded goods and are extremely popular with locals and visitors alike.  Dongdaemun Market • Shops: Open 8am–6pm daily • Food Court: Open 7am–7pm daily

 [Google Map](#)

## 3. GWANGJANG MARKET

A shopping area, Gwangjang consists of two intersecting covered arcades, from which innumerable side-alleys and mini-alleys sprout. If you can bear the gritty atmosphere of the restaurants and stalls, they are fascinating places to eat in. The alleys are home to hundreds of fabric stores.  Gwangjang Market • Open 9am–6pm (opening hours may vary from store to store)

 [Google Map](#)  [View photo](#)

## 4. DONGDAEMUN DESIGN PLAZA

Located to the south of Dongdaemun gate, this urban development project, designed by architect Zaha Hadid, houses exhibition and performance spaces, and shopping, business and relaxation facilities, within its atypical shape.

## 5. DONGDAEMUN DESIGN PARK

Previously a baseball stadium, this landscaped area surrounding the Design Plaza has been developed into a cultural space.

## 6. RUSSIA TOWN

The area west of Dongdaemun Design Plaza has been given this name due to the Cyrillic signs on display there. However, most traders here are from Mongolia and Uzbekistan.

## 7. CITY WALLS

Seoul's giant gates were once portals through a fortress-like wall that encircled the city. There's a remodeled section stretching north of Dongdaemun – follow the quiet roads west to Naksan Park for lovely views of this stretch.

## 8. CHEONGGYECHEON

Starting just south of Gwanghwamun station, this stream runs for 5 miles (8 km) below street level. The path alongside is a delight for pedestrians.

## 9. LANTERN FESTIVAL

In recent years, Seoul has put on spectacular lantern festivals on Cheonggyecheon, featuring a mix of traditional designs and animal floats.  [Lantern Festival](#) • Held mid-May each year (dates may vary)

## 10. FURNITURE DISTRICT

Step outside Euljiro 4-ga subway station's south-facing exits and enter the city's furniture district, where dozens of shops sell nothing but home furnishings.

### Seoul Under Curfew

Today, Dongdaemun is bang in the center of the city, and the market around it buzzes with activity all day and night. However, during the dynastic era, Dongdaemun not only marked the far eastern edge of the city, but the area surrounding the gate was also shut at sundown at the tolling of a bell. This gave its name to Jongno (Bell Street), which lies west of the gate (for further details see [Avoid-Horse Alley](#)).

 **Tip:** There are a number of excellent restaurants in the area, including Woo Lae Oak and Samarkand. For a simpler meal, head to Gwangjang Market.

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