

Seoul Travel Guide

(Presented by The Korean Open/Westie Korea)

We are super excited to have so many visitors coming for the 2023 Korean Open, and we've heard a lot of you saying that you're hoping to stay for a few days before or after the event, head into the city, and explore! So with that in mind, we prepared a guide with a few of the most popular tourist destinations in Seoul, and some of our picks along with descriptions and tips. Keep an eye out for the different areas of Seoul while planning so you don't end up running all over the city too much! (It's a big city.)

Food is not included here, but luckily, the internet has you covered:

<https://www.willflyforfood.net/seoul-food-guide-25-must-eat-restaurants-in-seoul-south-korea/>

You can use this guide for ideas, but you can find lots of famous Korean dishes in basically every area.

Or ask us if you have food questions or restrictions!



Key:



Heejung's picks for top places that she thinks visitors to Korea will enjoy



Nadia's picks for visitors to Korea

Nearby

Other things to do in the area

Other

Other similar attractions

Locations: **(NC) = North Central** Includes Jongno-gu, Jung-gu, Dongdaemun-gu

(SE) = Southeast Includes Gangnam-gu, Songpa-gu

(W) = West Mapo-gu (Hongdae)

(N) = North

Top 3 Korean Traditional Destinations

No trip to Korea would be complete without experiencing some of the amazingly rich cultural heritage. Here are some places that are definitely worth checking out.

Gyeongbokgung Palace (NC)

Heejung's
Pick!

Open 9:00AM – 6:00PM (Last entry at 5:00)

*Closed on Tuesdays

Admission Fee (to enter the palace):

3,000 KRW/adults

1,500 KRW/children



The representative historical destination of Seoul built in 1395, Gyeongbokgung is the largest of the Five Grand Palaces built in the Joseon dynasty, making it the perfect place to go to experience Korea's rich history firsthand. You can also see the changing of the Royal Guard.

Heejung's Tip: There is an option to rent Hanbok (Korean traditional clothing) and wear it around the palace to take pictures and have a cool cultural experience. (It might be chilly in April though, so wear some warm clothing underneath!)

Nearby! Gyeongbokgung Palace is right next to Gwanghwamun Square, a plaza which has tons of museums, statues, and other fun places to visit. It has just been renovated and was reopened to the public late last year, so you'll be among the first to see its new look! We also recommend Bukchon Hanok Village for traditional Korean houses and great photo ops.

Other Palaces? Changdeokgung nearby is also a fun option because of its "Secret Garden". The weather seems to be warming up early this year, so you should be able to catch some blooms.

For more info or to reserve tours in English, Chinese, Japanese, etc. go to:

http://www.royalpalace.go.kr:8080/html/eng_gbg/main/main.jsp

For more info about the neighboring Gwanghwamun Area:

https://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=929909

<http://magazine.seoulselection.com/2013/01/28/museums-in-gwanghwamun/> (And museum info!)

Gwangjang Traditional Market (NC)



This market has been open for over 100 years and is a great place to experience Asian Market culture firsthand. Whether you want to shop or just try some amazing food & snacks, it is bound to be a unique experience.

(Open 9:00AM – 6:00PM, Food Street open ~11:00PM)

Nearby! The market is less than 20 minutes by public transportation from Gyeongbokgung & Gwanghwamun Square and is right next to Dongdaemun shopping area!

Other Markets? Noryangjin Fish Market is one of the most famous Traditional Markets in Seoul, so if you're more into seafood than snack food stands, check it out! For those coming from western countries, you'll have to be feeling a little adventurous with your food!

More info: <http://english.visitseoul.net/shopping/Gwangjang-Market /287>

Insadong (NC)

A must for those interested in traditional Korean art, Insadong is an incredible blend of traditional culture and some modern twists. There is one main road with alleys on each side, filled with galleries, traditional restaurants, teahouses, cafes, and more.



Nadia's Tip: Less gimmicky souvenirs than Myeongdong, this is a great place to buy gifts for family and friends! Go to the traditional tea houses to warm up and the very gimmicky ALIVE MUSEUM (similar to the Trick Eye Museum in Hongdae) for a good laugh and some funny pictures.

Nearby! Insadong is just a 15-minute walk from Gwanghwamun Square (or even quicker by taxi, bus or subway.)
The main road is called ***Insadong-gil*** (so plug that into Google Maps!)

Check out this super thorough guide made by a friend of mine for more info! It may be a bit outdated, as some places closed down during COVID, but it's still a good jumping off point:

<https://thesoulofseoul.net/2019/11/05/insadong-guide-seoul-korea/>

Top 3 Great Views of Seoul

Seoul is a huge city, which can be hard to appreciate while you're down in its busy streets. So why not head up somewhere higher, to one of these great observation points in and around Seoul?

N Seoul Tower (NC)

Observatory open: 11:00AM – 10:00PM Mon-Thu
11:00AM – 10:30PM Fri-Sun
(Entry possible up to 30 minutes before closing time)

Admission Fee (to enter the palace):
16,000 KRW/adults
12,000 KRW/children & Seniors (Ages 3-13, Over 65)
*There is a separate fee for the cable car.



N Seoul Tower (or Namsan Tower) sits atop Namsan Mountain right in the middle of Seoul! There is a cable car for a ride up with fantastic views of the city (although waiting times can be long at peak hours) or if you're not too worn out from the event, you can hike all the way up to the tower. It was originally a transmission tower, but now N Seoul Tower is a romantic hotspot, especially popular in Korea among couples as the perfect place to go for a date!

Heejung's Tip: Head here at night for a beautiful view, looking out over all the twinkling lights of the city!

Nearby! There are some restaurants here in the tower, but you pay for the view, so they can be a bit pricy. If you head down for some pork cutlet (donkatsu) on the mountainside or farther down into Myeongdong you can get a great meal at a more reasonable price.

Official Website: <http://www.nseoultower.co.kr/eng/index.asp>

Lotte World Tower (SE)



Located in Jamsil in Southeast Seoul (only a 10-minute subway ride from Gangnam) Lotte Tower's Observation Deck "Seoul Sky" offers amazing 360-degree views. At 554 meters, it is far and away the tallest building in Seoul and the 3rd tallest in East Asia. So, head up, dare your friends to go onto the "Magic" Sky Deck, have a cup of coffee in the clouds, and explore the various exhibitions.



Seoul Sky (observatory) Ticketing Hours:
Sun – Thurs 10:20AM – 9:00PM, Fri – Sat 10:20AM – 10:00PM
(Observatory closes 1 hour after last ticketing)

Price: 29,000 KRW/adult, 25,000KRW/child (Ages 3-13)
(There's a fast pass to skip the lines for 50,000won)

Nearby! The entrance is actually in the Lotte World Mall, a huge shopping mall with tons of shops, an aquarium, and even an adorable amusement park attached. You could easily spend a whole day in Jamsil!

Nadia's Tip: Make sure to check the weather before you come as the views will be better on a clear day. And on a nice day like that, when you're finished at the tower, head out for a walk around Seokchon Lake, right next door.

The official website has more info: <https://seoulsky.lotteworld.com/en/intro/intro.do>

Bukhansan Mountain (N)

This massive mountain (and national forest) is actually located just north of Seoul, but it's less than an hour outside of the main North Central Area. The shortest course (see a few recommended courses in the links below) takes about 3-hours round trip, so if you want to hit the mountain, you'll need to plan at least a half-day if not a full-day trip. But you will certainly be rewarded with AMAZING views! This is only recommended for our more adventurous visitors, and it is a pretty grueling workout. Make sure you dress appropriately!



Other Hikes? If you want to go for a bit of an easier hike or just a walk in nature, check out Cheonggyecheon Stream (near Gyeongbokgung Palace), one of the many Han River Parks, (Banpo and Yeouido are nice,) or head up to N Seoul Tower on foot!

Some short trail options: <https://www.koreatodo.com/bukhansan-national-park>
Some one-day hikes: <http://english.knps.or.kr/Experience/ParkList.aspx?MenuNum>

Top 6 Fun Non-Traditional Experiences

Korean people work hard, and when they're not working they like to have fun! So, here are some of the more random ways that Koreans and visitors alike can unwind in Korea. It was impossible to pick just 3, so here's DOUBLE the fun things to do!

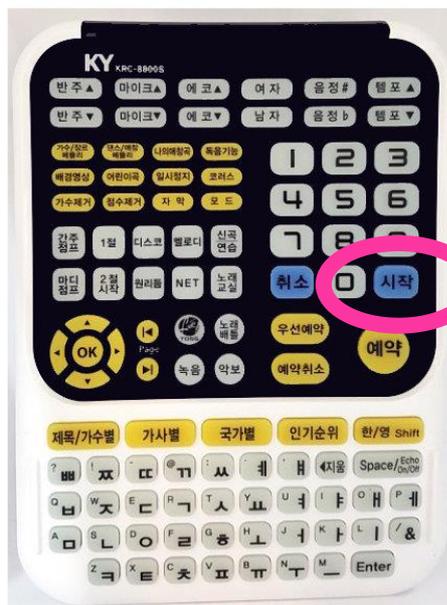
Noraebang (Singing Room)



Nadia's
Pick!

Noraebang is Korean karaoke. You get a private room with your friends and a HUGE book of music from all over the world. You can just enter the songs you want to sing and sing your heart out! Perfect for a last stop after a long day of sightseeing and a delicious Korean dinner! Even if you're not a singer, grab the tambourine, or just dance and cheer on your friends!

Nearby! There are noraebangs EVERYWHERE, so wherever you happen to be for the day, you'll have no trouble finding one. (Just find a sign that says 노래방!) But why not try a LUXURY noraebang with huge rooms and big windows. There are some great ones in Hongdae! (See "Shopping" below.)



Nadia's Tip: This fancy remote (left) can be intimidating for first time Noraebang-goers. But it's not so bad! Find the number of the song you want in the big book, enter it on the number pad and press 시작 (meaning start) and your music will play. OR why not head there with your new Korean friends? They can show you the ropes.

Start

Some singing rooms also have food and drinks, but those will be a little bit pricier, and it's popular in Korea to eat and drink first, and then come to Noraebang as a last stop at the end of the night.

Here's a link that includes the address of one of the popular Noraebangs in Hongdae!
<https://koreandramaland.com/listings/su-noraebang-luxury-hongdae/>

Other Rooms? Seoul is also famous for PC Rooms (where people go to play online games.) And there are Multi-bangs (multi-rooms) where you can sing like a Noraebang, but also play video games and do other things!

DDP (Dongdaemun Design Plaza) (NC)

Open 10:00AM –9:00PM

(*Closed Mondays, some exhibitions may close at 7:00PM)

Price: Varies

(Some exhibitions are free, while others may have an entrance fee)



See 'Shopping' below for what else to do in Dongdaemun.

DDP also stands for 'Dream, Design, and Play'. It holds various exhibitions, fashion shows, forums, conferences, and other domestic and international events. The building complex is divided into multiple buildings and is connected to Dongdaemun History and Culture Park for a perfect combination of the traditional and the contemporary. Designed by world-renowned architect Zaha Hadid, the building is famous delicate curves and bold shapes and a great place to get a unique picture.

Check out the website before you come to find which exhibits interest you or if there are any events happening: <https://ddp.or.kr/?menuno=340>

Or for more about what to actually do here, it's a bit dated, but most of it still stands: <https://thesoulofseoul.net/dongdaemun-design-plaza/>

Pet Cafes (W) (NC) (SE)



Hours and prices will vary but most cafes will be open from late morning until the evening and cost less than 10,000 KRW.

Asia is the home of animal cafes, and although these cafes are also gaining popularity in other countries as well, Seoul still has some of the best, most unique ones around! From classic dog and cat cafes to the more unique meerkat and parrot cafes, there is something for every animal lover. Just make sure you let the animals come to you, so you don't stress them out!

Here's a list with some of the best pet cafes in Seoul:

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/south-korea/articles/a-wild-tour-of-seouls-best-pet-cafes/>

Or if you want to stop by before social dance on Wednesday, here's a dog café near Westies':

<https://solidground-blog.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-walz-joypia-dog-cafe-in-gangnam.html>

Nadia's Tip: You can pick your favorite animal and search for a pet café, but for a unique experience, a meerkat café (like the ones in Hongdae or Myeongdong) are my personal favorite. Be warned, the meerkats will definitely try to burrow into your clothes, so it's best not to wear anything that they can pull apart with their cute little claws. The other animals here are also super precious.

Picture Museum (W) (NC)



Trick Eye Museum (Hongdae)
Hours 11:00AM – 7:00PM (last entry 6:00PM)
Price: 12,000 KRW/ Adults
9,000 KRW/Children

Alive Museum (Insadong)
Hours 11:00AM – 6:00PM (last entry 5:00PM)
Price: 12,000 KRW

This is not a destination for the camera shy, but in Asia, we love a good photo-op, so it's no surprise that Seoul is home to museums where you can become a part of the artwork! Just make sure you come with a few friends so you can take turns being photographers and models.

There are 2 big ones in Seoul:

Alive Museum: <http://en.alivemuseum.com/branch/insa>

Trick Eye Museum: <https://trickeye.com/seoul/en/Visit>

Nadia's Tip: There's an option to also go to the LOVE museum in Hongdae, but I think you can skip it. On the other hand, the Dynamic Maze at the Alive Museum is also pretty fun and quick if you have extra time, but not a must-do.

Escape Room (W)(SE)

Korea is not the home of Escape Rooms, but Seoul Escape Rooms are famous for their quality and fun! There are a lot around, but those made by Seoul Escape Room (See Link Below) in Hongdae all include English, so they're probably your safest best. Not to mention they're lots of fun! You have to reserve in advance, but it's easy to do on the website. Make sure to search the Hongdae branch, as other branches are outside of Seoul. (There used to be one in Gangnam, but it looks like they're renovating.)

Prices are anywhere from 48,000 – 160,000 KRW depending on the room and how many people.

Hours: ~10:00AM ~ Midnight but you have to reserve your time!

Seoul Escape Room website: <https://www.seoul-escape.com/>

Non-verbal Shows (W)(NC)

Dancing, martial arts, cooking, drumming, and more! These unique shows are accessible to everyone because they are expressed without any speaking, but they still tell amazing stories! You might even get called up on stage to be a part of the show!



Heejung's Tip: Why not head to a show at one of the Myeongdong theaters after a day of shopping and street food? Make sure to check showtimes online!

Prices range from 26,000 – 44,000 KRW

Many of the shows are seasonal, but it looks like Nanta is available:

<https://www.nanta.co.kr:452/en/show/detail.php?id=1>

Top 3 Shopping Destinations

Korea is also famous for its unique fashion and booming cosmetics industry (Korean skincare anyone?) Although Seoul Fashion week isn't till October, you can experience all the Korean fashion and shopping for yourself all over Seoul.

Myeongdong (NC)



If you don't like crowds, Myeongdong is not the place for you. Every day, tons of people flock to Myeongdong to buy Korean cosmetics, clothing, K-pop merch, and more. There is a combination of small shops and huge department stores. And don't miss the street food! Prices are set at all the main stores and retailers, but at some of the outdoor stands, haggling is possible.

Nearby! Myeongdong is right by N Seoul Tower, and also has performance theaters and pet cafes. It's also not far from the traditional district, so it's easy to hit a lot of destinations in a short time in the North Central part of Seoul!

Nadia's Tip: A lot of the salespeople will probably follow you around and ask if you need help/try to sell you more things. If you want some help, you can ask, but I think it's usually easier just to say "No, thanks." and enjoy your shopping experience.

Shopping guide: <https://preparetravelplans.com/myeongdong-shopping-street-guide/>

Other recommendations: <https://www.busytourist.com/things-to-do-in-myeongdong-seoul/>

Dongdaemun (NC)



While they do exist, Dongdaemun has less designer and international brands than Myeongdong. Instead, it has a more local feel. It's traditionally famous for its night market but shopping here is fun at any time of day!

Heejung's
Pick!

Nearby! DDP (mentioned above) is right across from the main shopping area, so it's definitely worth a visit. Or as a friend of mine mentions in her blog, "if there's someone in your shopping group that really isn't into the shopping, tell them to cook their heels at DDP."

Heejung's Tip: You get to see real Korean fashion trends here, and you get good quality clothing at a cheap price.

Shopping Guide: <https://blog.trazy.com/dongdaemun-shopping-tips/>

Gangnam (SE) & Hongdae (W)

Both Gangnam & Hongdae have tons of shops lining the major streets with (slightly) smaller crowds than Myeongdong. Not to mention that both areas have limitless options for great food and nightlife! Hongdae is a college town and Gangnam is a business district, but both are very popular as hotspots among young Korean adults as places to hang out, so there's tons to do. As far as shopping, the stores above ground are fine, but the underground shopping centers are the real place to get a good deal and get a unique shopping experience! Make sure to try the street snacks in Hongdae and get your photo doing the Gangnam Style Dance at Gangnam Square.

Nearby! Hongdae is an easy place to spend a full day, with lots of things to do besides shopping, like an Escape Room, Pet Café, Trick Eye Museum, Noraebang, or all of the above! If the weather's nice also check out Hongdae Mural Street.

Nadia's Tip: Hongdae is short for Hongik University. So, although people call the area Hongdae, if you take the subway or bus, the announcement/map might say Hongik University station, so don't get confused!

Nearby! Gangnam has lots to do on its own, but it's just a 10-minute subway ride away from Jamsil, so you can easily head to Lotte Tower on the same day. You'll also find Bongeunsa Temple and Seonjeongneung royal tombs nearby if you want a little traditional experience in the middle of the modern side of the city.



Nadia's
Pick!

Some Gangnam/East Seoul Blogs: <https://blog.trazy.com/things-to-do-in-gangnam/>
<https://afuncouple.com/gangnam/>

Some Hongdae Blogs: <https://dailytravelpill.com/things-to-do-hongdae-seoul/>
<https://preparetravelplans.com/hongdae-things-to-do/>

While it's not nearly extensive enough to cover all the amazing things to do in Seoul, those are some top picks for places to visit! It will be impossible to visit them all in a day or two, so make sure you look into distances and transportation options between locations. Seoul public transportation is amazing, so definitely look into getting a **transportation card** (called T-money or Cashbee cards) when you arrive. You can buy them at the airport, from any subway station kiosk, or at any convenience store. If you need help just ask!

Possible One-day Courses

[These are packed to the brim! So, you can pick and choose what you have time/energy for!]

North Central:

Gwanghwamun (Museums and Culture Square) > Gyeongbokgung (Hanbok Experience) >
Insadong (Souvenir Shopping, Tea House, Alive Museum) >

Choose:

Myeongdong (Street Food, Shopping, Show or Pet Café) > N Seoul Tower (Night views!) > Non-verbal show

OR

Dongdaemun (Shopping and Design Plaza) > Gwangjang Market > Noraebang

West (Hongdae):

Underground Shopping > Street Food > Trick Eye Museum > Meerkat Cafe > Mural Street > Luxury Noraebang

Southeast (Gangnam & Jamsil):

Seokchon Lake > Lotte Tower > Bongeunsa Temple or Seonjeongneung Tombs > Escape Room > Dog Cafe > Underground Shopping >

(if it's Wednesday), pre-party with Korean fried chicken followed by local social at Westies >

These are just some ideas for you. Feel free to pick and choose the things you want to try the most and make your own course. And don't worry if you miss out on some things this time around, we would love to have you back for the Korean Open in 2024! See you soon~

We will also be having a group tour on the Thursday before the event, which will include some of the more traditional sites, so keep your eyes peeled for details!

As always, feel free to email or Facebook us with questions (wcsinkorea@gmail.com).