

Korea

Updates

- 2019-05-22: Added Gwangjang Market, animal cafes, LINE café, Yeouido Park, and Ikseondong
- 2017-10-28: Added Seoul Forest Park, Lotte Tower, Some Sevit by Banpo Bridge, COEX Mall, Dongdaemun Design Plaza, and ON River Station.
- 2014-03-18: Updates added from trip in May 2013
- This list first created in 2011 based on Study Abroad experience in Summer 2007

Shopping/Markets

- **Department stores:** pricing is about the same or more expensive than in the US, but most dept stores have an entire floor of food (kinda like a food court/supermarket, with both hot foods and grab-and-go foods like bakery items) underground. They're usually really good. I would recommend going to these department stores just for the food.
 - **Lotte Department Store:** Lotte is like the biggest company in Korea, the food court here is beautiful
 - After dinnertime they usually sell their baked items for a really good discount...great to buy some for breakfasts/snacks on the go the next day =)
- **Outdoor markets:** cheap shopping and cheap eats too!
 - **Namdaemun:** Typical Asian market, lots of good street food (they have ice cream cones that pile up to 33cm!), photo sticker booths, karaoke, etc
 - **Dongdaemun:** One of the largest markets in Asia, street malls, high-rise department stores, above ground, underground, cheap, expensive, street food, etc. This is Korea's nightlife! Definitely best place to get gifts. Doosan Tower is a great mall here.
 - **Pyeonghwa Clothing Market:** This is a very narrow alley of shops located in Dongdaemun, and consists of tons of ridiculously cheap clothes shopping. Like, men's dress shirts for \$8 (cheap quality, but it's practically disposable for that price). Also great place to get those cute Korean socks (like ones with bows or have some cute print or have ears). In Korea, couples like to get matching cute socks. =P
 - **Myungdong:** Most impressive and flashy market in Korea, lots of makeup and clothes shopping. This is where Japanese tourists all go because it feels and looks like Shibuya. Lots of outdoor street food as well!
- **Express Bus Terminal**
 - Super long subway station filled with cheap shopping and restaurants, located underneath the Express Bus Terminal station and extends in the direction of Gangnam. Can get super crowded! Good food courts too.
- **Yongsan**

- The biggest electronics market in Asia
- Really fancy/pretty mall located here
- The Yongsan subway station is also really cool, it's like a mall itself
- **Dragon Hill Spa** – one of the best spas/saunas (jjimjilban 찜질반) in Korea, located right next to the subway station. People often stay here overnight, and it's 6 stories of spa-related fun. Saunas of different temperatures (hot or cold), different types of water, indoor or outdoor, PC room for internet/gaming, movie room, massage room, haircut/manicure room, hammocks for city view at night, a bar, restaurant, snacks, lounge areas with TVs, swimming pools with waterfalls, sleeping rooms...it was like \$10 to spend 12 hours there, plus fees if you buy anything (a bowl of jjajangmyun noodles was \$3, facials \$1, for example).

Eating

- **Frozen yogurt:** tart frozen yogurt has its beginnings in Korea. The first Red Mango ever started in Korea, and another really good place is Iceberry (better than Red Mango, I think). Their cafes are super cute and colorful, and the presentation of yogurt is like 500x prettier than in the US.
- **Bingsu:** Shave(d) ice with tons of toppings, really elaborately done (similar to froyo and often includes some froyo on top). Iceberry in Sinchon serves this, also a place called Deliatti in E-dae. Another great place to get fancy shaved ice is Meal Top in Gangnam.
- **Gwangjang Market:** I'm not sure how I missed this amazing market with an even more amazing "food court", street food style when I first lived here. It came to my attention when Netflix did an episode on it for their Street Food special. Absolute must-visit, especially to that knife-cut noodle (kalguksu) place featured on the special. It was inspiring to see the woman who singlehandedly saved her family, overcame all odds, and became a successful stall in the market. Not to mention, her noodles and dumplings are delicious and cheap!! Also get kimbap and mung bean pancakes at other stalls while you're here.
- **Tteokbokki Town:** a street lined with restaurants specializing in ddeokbokki (rice cakes) casseroles (they cook in front of you in a wok), super awesome and yummy
 - However, my new favorite ddeokbokki restaurant is 먹쉬돈나 (Mukshidonna), which is located in Gangnam. They're better than the ones in Tteokbokki Town because they make an amazing crispy fried rice for you after you finish your meal in the same wok (right in front of you).
- **McDonald's:** McD's is always better in other countries, and Korea is no exception. Get the bulgogi burger!
- **Pizza:** pizza places here are like gourmet pizza restaurants...they're actual restaurants (not fast food) and have a lot of specialty pizzas (with sweet potato filled crusts!)
 - **Mr. Pizza**
 - **Pizza Hut**

- **Omuto Tomato:** a chain restaurant that specializes in different fusion omelettes filled with rice and stuff (they call it omurice). Super good. At the time the one in Hong-dae had the biggest selection.
- **Korean Cafes:** Korea has a recent trend towards themed cafes. Here's a few links to find the latest themed café crazes (google for more recent articles):
 - <http://cuteinkorea.com/category/places/cute-cafes/>
 - <http://seoulistic.com/what-to-do-in-korea/15-unique-and-interesting-theme-cafes-in-korea-2/>
 - There are dog cafes, cat cafes, Hello Kitty cafes (there's one in the airport, actually, and a Snoopy Cafe), nature cafes with real farm animals, camping cafes, etc.
 - I recommend:
 - ~~Dr. Fish Café 나무그늘~~ (in Myungdong): ~~have a drink & snack, then they'll wash your feet and have you place your feet in a little pool where tiny fish the size of anchovies start picking at the dead skin on your feet. It's a hilarious and very ticklish experience! You won't be able to stop laughing for 5 minutes. (CLOSED)~~
 - **Bau House Dog Café** (in Hongdae): have a drink and play with the cutest puppies and fluffy dogs!! This is my favorite dog café (we went to 3), and people can bring their own dogs in too. There are two sections of the café, one for small dogs and one for medium/large dogs. You can play in either. The small dogs are more likely to be lap dogs. :)
 - **Meerkat and Friends** (in Hongdae and Myungdong): this is my favorite animal café hands down. See and play with a variety of animals like meerkats, genetts, wallabies, foxes, raccoons, and cats. When I was there, there was an adorable baby wallaby! The trainers are friendly and very strict about the rules and cleanliness. They will definitely make sure you get all your photo opportunities with animals climbing on your head, etc!
 - **Bunny Café** (in Hongdae): Alice in Wonderland type of experience, very small and kind of dirty (poop on the ground), but the bunnies are super soft and cute. I would skip this one if you don't have time though. Definitely just do the shorter time period. Once you run out of food the bunnies won't be interested in you anymore.
 - **Nature Café** (in Hongdae): Regular café but has 2 sheep in a pen outside. Very cute. You don't have to actually stay here and buy a drink like the other cafes, but you can drop by for free if you want to just see the sheep.
 - **LINE Café** (multiple locations): Ridiculously cute shop with a café on the top floor. You just have to go to one to see what I mean.
- **Favorite Korean Foods:**
 - Bulgogi/Korean BBQ
 - Amazing place (should have multiple locations) called 새마을식당 (Saemaeul Shikdang) – definitely get the pork neck, it's the most amazing Korean BBQ I've ever had.

- Samgyeopsal (삼겹살, or Korean bacon wrapped in lettuce with rice)
- Kimchi jjigae (kimchi casserole soup)
- Samgyetang (chicken ginseng soup)
 - Most famous place (and really amazing) is Tosokchon (토속촌) near Gyeongbokgung Palace.
- Galbitang (beef ribs soup)
- Seolleongtang (설렁탕, beef bone noodle soup, looks like pho but different taste)
 - Awesome chain: 신선설농탕 (Shinseon Seolleongtang)
- Mapo tofu (waaaay spicier than the Chinese version)
- Jjajangmyun (slightly sweeter version of Chinese ziangmien)
- Soondubu (tofu soup)
- Nengmyun (cold noodles, great for hot days)
 - This is a really cheap and delicious place in the Insadong area: 삼대 불고기 누들스 (Samdae Bulgogi Noodles)
- Shikhae (cinnamon rice drink, aka Korean horchata)
- Shabu shabu (Japanese hot pot/self-grilled meats)
- Dakkalbi (BBQ chicken) – one good place for this is Jeil Chicken near Jongak Station
- Dolsoot bibimbap (Korean fried rice in cast iron bowl) – there’s a good place near Yonsei University
- Street food: ddeokbokki (spicy rice cakes), odeng (fish cakes), hoddeok (호떡, Korean pancake filled with sweet brown sugar/cinnamon syrup), kimbap (Korean sushi), mandu (dumplings...there are kimchi dumplings!)
 - ~~One of the more popular street stands for locals is in Gwanghwamun (Gongjo-gil 공조길 and Sejong no intersection) [no longer there in 2013]~~
- Ok there’s more, I just can’t remember them all now. ;)

Districts/Sightseeing

- **Sinchon**

- **Yonsei University area:** beautiful university (2nd best university in Korea), great college town, lots of good/relatively cheap eats
- Froyo places (Red Mango, Iceberry, Orange, Can-More, Yogurholic, Loveice, Milky Road)
- Bars: I think they call them “hof & soju”. I loved different flavored soju (yogurt soju!).
- Karaoke (noraebang): there’s the cheap karaoke places and there’s the “luxury” karaoke places (cleaner, leather couches, etc, free ice cream). They often give you free extra time too.
- ~~Doctor Fish Café: cute café that has packages where you can buy a dessert or lunch and then afterwards you get aromatherapy and dangle your feet in this pool where fish eat the dead skin off your feet...it tickles! =P [this has closed]~~
- Large department store (Grand Mart)

- By the subway station there's a really good dumpling (mandu) and kimbap shop called 즉석 생 만두 (Jeukseok Seng Mandu), it's a really small hole-in-the-wall, but I think it's across the street from the McD's (which btw, has bulgogi burgers)
- **E-dae**
 - **Ewha University area:** women's university across the street from Yonsei, lots of clothes/shoes/jewelry shopping in this area, lots of beauty/hair salons too
 - My favorite hoddeok stand is located here too, but that was in 2007 so might not be there anymore. Very common street food though!
- **Hong-dae**
 - **Hongik University area:** known for its clubbing and party life (there are Club Nights where \$15 gets you into all clubs), also a pretty artsy/fashionable shopping district. Lots of street shopping and you'll find all the Korean makeup and skincare brands here as well.
 - **Club Catchlight** is one of the more Americanized clubs
 - ~~Icebar Subzero~~ is here too — a 5°C bar where everything (from furniture to cups) is made of ice, they give you a coat and boots and gloves to wear in. If you can stay in there for 3 hrs you get your picture/name on an [ice] plaque on the wall. [I think this has closed too, couldn't find it in 2013]
 - **Trick Art Museum:** there should be a discount in one of the brochures at the airport, or check if you can find any discounts online. This is a fun museum where you basically go up to each exhibit and take pictures with it, and it makes you look like you're part of the exhibit. For example, take a picture of yourself getting handed a human-sized nigiri sushi by a chef. Or of yourself climbing bamboo, or talking to Obama on the phone.
- **Itaewon**
 - Very touristy area that all the Americans (especially army-related) people go to
 - If you don't have time to go here, you're not missing out on much
 - There's a very good and famous bakery here called **Passion5**, which many will find is worth a stop at.
- **Insadong** (MUST-SEE)
 - Cute/slightly touristy strip with lots of artsy shops, restaurants
 - There's a teahouse with a railroad track theme that was really good
 - English store names are not allowed so even Starbucks is spelled out in Korean
 - **Ssamzie Market** is a multi-story "mall" with lots of little artsy shops
 - Plenty of souvenirs
- **Ikseondong** (located near Insadong)
 - Old hanok village (traditional houses) converted into cute shops, cafes, and restaurants. Lively at night.
- **Samcheongdong** (삼청동)
 - More of a local place, not as touristy
 - Neighborhood full of art galleries, teahouses, cafes
 - Also a palace near here

- **Gwanghwamun** (MUST-SEE)
 - **Café imA**: delicious desserts in a very stylish café
 - **Wood & Brick**: pretty good restaurant for pizza and seafood salad
 - Gwanghwamun is a beautiful area with clean, wide streets, skyscrapers
 - The **Korea Tourism Organization** is here so you can pick up the latest Korea travel guidebook (free!). They might have these at the airport too.
 - Manmade river (**Cheonggyecheon**) and beautiful fountain – also really beautiful at night! Be sure the walk along the length of the river at night.
 - There a famous statue of King Sejong around here too if you start walking towards Gyeongbokgung Palace.
 - **Seoul Museum of History** (cheap entry, was 70 cents when I went)
- **Gangnam** (MUST-SEE)
 - The “Beverly Hills/Hollywood” of Korea – richer district, high fashion, the luxury karaoke places are more common here, bars/clubs
 - The Gangnam subway station is another underground shopping mall
 - **Apgujeong Rodeo Street** here is fashionable, trendsetting area, like Rodeo Drive in LA. It contains lots of super upscale department stores, shops, boutiques, restaurants, and the Galleria Department Store, which has the most expensive grocery store you’ll ever go to on the first floor.
 - Good cheap hair salon 사자헤어(Saja Hair) in Apgujeong
 - **Starfield COEX Mall**, containing CONvention centers, EXhibition halls and many malls, is an underground shopping mall containing an aquarium with a shark tunnel, a kimchi museum, and a 17-screen movie theater. Huge mall with everything you can imagine and especially great for a rainy day since it’s all indoors.
 - **ON River Station** – 3 story riverfront complex for restaurants and shopping, great views, especially at night. Great for dates. Has a floating banquet hall.
- **Gyeongbokgung** (경복궁)
 - The oldest palace of the Joseon Dynasty, built in 1394
 - Beautiful architecture, was probably my favorite palace
 - I would recommend renting hanbok (traditional Korean dress) from a shop across the street. Wearing hanbok gets you free admission to most palaces, but it’s also just fun and makes for awesome photos!
 - National Folk Museum of Korea located here
 - Next to the palace is the Blue House (Cheong Wa Dae – 청와대), where the President of Korea lives
 - There are a number of really cute cafes surrounding the palace.
- **Dongdaemun**
 - **Dongdaemun Market** and malls (mentioned in Shopping section)
 - **Dongdaemun Design Plaza** – egg-shaped structure with fun artsy shops
- **Sangyong National Museum of Korea**
 - 3rd largest museum in the world (at least in 2007)

- Beautiful architecture, plenty of exhibits with English mp3 audio guide
- **Han River**
 - Longest river in South Korea
 - Seoul alone has at least 27 bridges spanning it
 - I recommend seeing the **Banpo Bridge at night** – it lights up with rainbow colors and a fountain show! So romantic!
 - Arrive early before the fountain show to explore the nearby **Some Sevit**, three manmade circular islands with shopping and restaurants.
 - Really beautiful at night too
 - Rent a bike in **Yeouido Park** (it's super cheap, like \$3 for 2 hours or something?) and enjoy the views! Great impressive fountain area too. This is also the best park to see cherry blossoms if you're in the right season.
 - **63 Building**: one of the tallest buildings in S. Korea is along this river, tall gold building
 - Headquarters of insurance company and financial companies
 - 60th floor has world's tallest art gallery and observation deck
 - Other floors have restaurants, an aquarium, and IMAX theater
- **Namsang-gol Hanok Village (남산골 한옥마을)**
 - Explore an old Korean village
- **Namsan Tower**
 - Observation deck from where you can see all of Seoul. Leave locks of love/friendship here! This is where I got engaged!
 - Be sure to take the glass cable car up from the Namsan Cable Car Station. Beautiful at night, and there's a little light show on the tower.
- **Seoul Arts Center**
 - Performances held here
 - Also a nice water fountain show
- **NANTA**
 - The show I saw there was called "Cookin'!" and was a funny show, somewhat musical, similar to Stomp! or Blast! where they make music with kitchen utensils, garbage cans...
- **Lotte World**
 - Like Lotte's Disneyland? Has a huge amusement park inside, ice skating, shopping, and crazy restaurants fit for a king. Great for kids.
- **Lotte Tower**
 - Completed in 2017, beautiful 555-m building, with a stunning food court on the 31st floor you can go to for the views
- **DMZ Tour**
 - Area between North & South Korea created in 1953 after Korean War
 - **Imjingak Park** – Unification Bridge, Unification Pond, Peace Bell
 - **Dorasan Station** – the last train stop in South Korea, but symbolizes hope for reunification one day

- **Dorasan Observatory** – the northernmost place you can see North Korea and its Propaganda Village (a fake but beautiful village with modern condos, but nobody lives there, the gov't buses people in during the day to make it look busy, then buses them home at night). You can also see the North Korean flag...when they saw South Korea had a bigger flag, North Korea changed their flag to an even bigger one to compete. -__-
- **3rd Tunnel** – one of the 4 tunnels North Korea secretly built into South Korea as possible invasion routes. They give you hard hats and you can walk down into the tunnel. This is the closest you can get to North Korea.
- **Panmujeom in the Joint Security Area (JSA)**
- **Jeju Island**
 - The “Hawaii” of Korea, popular honeymoon destination
 - Lots of dramas/movies filmed here
 - Popular places to go:
 - O’sulloc Tea Museum
 - Spirited Garden (Bunjae Artpia) – first bonsai park in Korea
 - Mushroom farm – Jeju-do famous for yellow shiitake mushrooms and tangerines
 - Teddy Bear Museum
 - Jungmun Resort – beach resort
 - Mysterious Road – kinda like Mystery Spot in Santa Cruz
 - Sung-Eup Folk Village
 - Kimnyoung Beach – beautiful beach, clear water, white sand
 - Topland amusement park
 - Yongdu-am
 - Black pork is a unique delicacy in Jeju-do