

# Inside Assia

SMALL GROUP TOUR

Majestic Korea

14 DAYS / 13 NIGHTS

SUPERIOR



# Tour overview

Majestic Korea is our first South Korea superior level Small Group Tour, built for travellers who want to see the highlights and then keep exploring. Meet expert artisans, explore rural regions and learn the stories behind Korea's oldest crafts – with premium accommodation throughout.

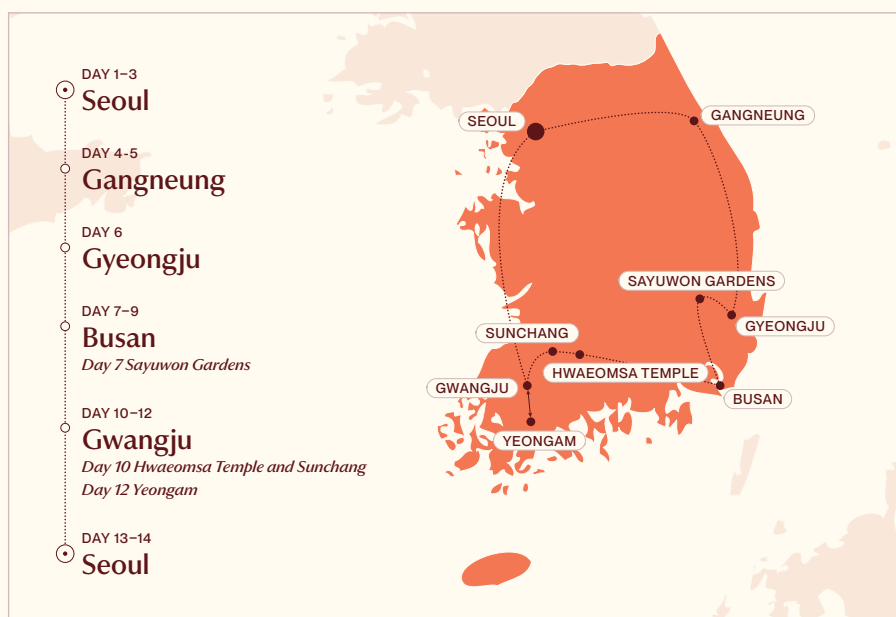
Starting in Seoul, you'll visit the classic Korea cities – Seoul, Gyeongju and Busan, but also Gangneung – a Korean favourite holiday spot that is lesser-known to international visitors. Out in the more rural reaches of Gwangju and Yeongam, you'll meet the custodians of Korean arts and tradition. The indigo dyer in Yeongam and the family making tea since the Japanese Occupation.

Going “deeper” shouldn't mean compromising on comfort, and you certainly won't on this tour. We've handpicked every stay, all well-located 4\* and 5\*, each with distinct touches – whether that's a rooftop pool or an amphitheatre.

As you'd come to expect in Korea, there's a blend of modern and traditional design. You'll visit a converted wire factory art space in Busan and walk between stone sculptures against a coastal background in Gangneung. But, there are the classics too. The ancient capital of Gyeongju and its UNESCO-listed Buddhist grottoes. The *hanok*-lined streets of Seoul.

Guided by your tour leader (Insider), you'll have access only a local could provide. They know the best times to visit palaces, where to grab a drink in Busan and are always ready to tell you a niche bit of local history.

Majestic Korea is about experiencing the highlights and beyond. Your Insider will open doors to the people, places and experiences you didn't know existed until now – they often end up being the stories you're still telling years later.



## Highlights

This tour goes to Sunchang, Gwangju and Yeongam – off the main Korea tourist route to visit more traditionally Korean, rural regions

Try your hand at pottery under the guidance of a master and indigo dyeing against a mountain backdrop

Explore Korea's cutting-edge art scene: from a former wire factory transformed into a creative space to the open-air sculptures of Haslla Art World, overlooking the East Sea

Visit the home of the country's first tea brand, set up during the Japanese Occupation and try their fermented tea in a traditional *hanok*

Walk through ancient history in Gyeongju – discover royal tombs, ancient temple sites and tranquil gardens, then see them beautifully illuminated at night

Explore the serene garden of Sayuwon, where world-class architecture and Korean art blend with nature. Have tea here with live traditional music

Plenty of Korean food! From authentic Korean Barbecue (KBBQ) to dinner in a Michelin-listed restaurant

## Superior tours

- Maximum 14 people per group
- Several entrance fees included
- Local professional guides in key destinations (in addition to your tour leader)
- Some private minibus transfers, where beneficial
- Four / five star accommodation
- En suite rooms in all locations
- Private airport transfers
- Breakfast every day plus several lunches and dinners
- Selected luggage forwarding included
- Solo travellers: a single room is available throughout on payment of a mandatory supplement

# Day by day

Many of our customers choose to arrive a day or two early to get over jet lag and start exploring early (if you're interested in a DMZ tour, for example, we can make that happen). Your Insider will be at the hotel the day the tour starts and will be happy to help and offer tips if you want to explore a bit before the group meets.



## Day 1 – Seoul

Landing at Seoul Incheon airport you'll be met by private vehicle and taken to your hotel. Your Insider will help you settle in, before an evening getting to know your group over welcome drinks. *Geonbae!*

## Day 2 – Seoul

Spend your second day exploring Seoul on foot with your Insider. Begin at Gyeongbok Palace, the primary palace of the Joseon dynasty, before continuing to the National Folk Museum – where you'll learn about traditional Korean life, from birthdays to funeral rites and from schooling to clothing. The guides here are experts at making it all make sense – sharing their own upbringing and experiences as part of the tour. Later, visit Rakkojae Culture Lounge for a traditional liquor experience.

Inside a beautifully preserved *hanok*, a Korean liquor sommelier will introduce you to five regional drinks and the stories and traditions behind them. You'll explore the narrow lanes of Bukchon Hanok Village and round off your first full day with a group welcome dinner. We've selected a local restaurant that focuses on seasonal, organic ingredients.

## Day 3 – Seoul

Today you'll meet with one of our Seoul Insiders, a fluent English speaker who travelled to Korea and loved it so much they've made it their home. They'll take you to the less obvious spots of Seoul, a mix of their favourite local haunts and alternative takes on the classics.

After working up an appetite you'll head off for an evening Korean style, beginning with KBBQ – Korean barbecue. Perched on stools, sharing a grill, with delicious dipping sauces and seemingly endless *banchan* dishes, you're in for a real feast. Sharing a meal is a key part of Korean culture, and your Insider will show you how to hold your chopsticks, and when to pour your neighbour's drink.

The night doesn't end there. Seoul is known for its trendy bar culture and tonight, you'll find out why. Your Insider will guide you to one of Seoul's newest, trending bars, where you'll meet your

mixologist for the evening. Make your own cocktail before sitting back, sipping your creation, and taking in Seoul by night.

## Day 4 – Gangneung

This morning you'll board the KTX high-speed train to the east coast, travelling luggage-free thanks to the included forwarding service. Known as the "City of Pine", Gangneung is the birthplace of Confucian scholar Yi I (Yulgok) and his mother Shin Saimdang, a renowned artist and poet. Today, Koreans come to Gangneung for modern art, sweeping beaches, and a generally slower, more relaxed break from Seoul.

First up, lunch at Chodang Tofu Village. Try its signature seawater tofu and spicy stew – take a peek into the kitchen, and you may catch a glimpse of the tofu being made fresh by hand. Later, explore ARTE Museum, an immersive digital art space featuring 18 installations that range from floor-to-ceiling waterfalls to gigantic tigers prowling past. Your evening is free to explore as you choose, strolling along Anmok Beach, relaxing in coffee shops and perhaps stopping at a local seafood restaurant for dinner.

## Day 5 – Gangneung

Start the day at Haslla Art World, a quirky creative space with contemporary artworks, a sculpture garden and a marionette collection overlooking the East Sea. After lunch, visit a distillery to learn about Korea's most iconic drink – soju. Crafted here since 1926 using the spring waters of the Daegwallyeong mountain pass, the distillery offers an insight into soju's history and production. You'll get to try several soju varieties and soju-based cocktails (with non-alcoholic options available), paired with Gangneung *anju* snacks, like seaweed crisps, bread and candied nuts.

## Day 6 – Gyeongju

Zip down the east coast by KTX high-speed train to Gyeongju, the heart of Korea's ancient history, known affectionately by locals as "the museum without walls". On arrival, meet your local guide for a visit of Bulguksa Temple and the Gyeongju National Museum, home to some of the country's most important cultural treasures – the 8th century Emile Bell, golden crowns and Buddhist artefacts excavated from the city's tombs. In the

evening, sit down for a traditional, fine-dining meal, set within a beautiful converted *hanok*. Recipes have been perfected and passed down through twelve generations. Afterwards, revisit the central historical sites by night, softly illuminated after dark.

## Day 7 – Sayuwon Gardens

After breakfast, spend the morning exploring the Daereungwon Tomb Complex, including the famous Cheonmachong, or “Tomb of the Heavenly Horse”. From here, travel by private coach to Sayuwon Gardens, a serene forest garden showcasing works by world-renowned architects and artists, including Álvaro Siza, Seung H-Sang and Choi Wook. More than a place to admire nature, Sayuwon invites you to slow down, take in the art and architecture as part of the natural surroundings, and perhaps stop for break on a bench under the quince trees. You’ll have lunch at the gardens, followed by tea accompanied by a live *gayageum* performance – a traditional stringed instrument. You’ll continue on to Busan for check-in.

## Day 8 – Busan

This morning, visit Busan’s seaside temple, Haedong Yonggungsa. Built in 1376, it’s considered one of the most beautiful temples in South Korea, with forested mountain paths and descending steep steps to dramatic coastal views. You’ll have time to explore the temple grounds, spotting statues of turtles and Buddhas along the way, before returning to the Haeundae area by private vehicle.

After lunch, head into central Busan for a docent-led tour of F1963, a former wire factory transformed into a vibrant cultural complex. You’ll explore the Hyundai Motorstudio and its exhibitions, with free time to wander the bamboo gardens, art library and cafe, where original factory elements have been repurposed into furniture and installations. In the evening, you’ll be treated to the chef’s signature dinner at the Park Hyatt Dining Room, with sweeping views over Busan Bay and the city, lit up at night.

## Day 9 – Busan

Today is free for you to explore Busan at your own pace. You might head west to visit Gamcheon Culture Village and the Jagalchi Fish Market (the biggest in South Korea), take the Haeundae Beach Train along the coast, or simply relax by the sea, dipping into beachside bars and restaurants. Alternatively, unwind Korean-style with a visit to Spa Land for a pampering session. Whatever you’re thinking, your Insider will offer their suggestions and help you make the most of your day.

## Day 10 – Gwangju

Leave Busan behind as you travel by private coach to Hwaeomsa Temple, a serene Buddhist site founded in the sixth century. Expanded over time and later rebuilt following

its destruction during the Japanese invasions of 1592, many of the temple’s present-day halls date from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century reconstructions. Set among wooded hills and far from the crowds, Hwaeomsa offers a deeply peaceful atmosphere, and it’s Insider, Brett’s favourite Korean temple.

After lunch nearby, continue on to Sunchang to meet master potter Kwon Un-Ju. With more than 35 years devoted to the ceramic arts, his work reflects the depth and refinement of Korean ceramic culture, blending traditional techniques with contemporary design. Here, you’ll roll up your sleeves and throw down on the pottery wheel under the guidance of a true master, with time to explore his workshop and share tea together. Kwon is keen to welcome tourists to the area and dispel the myth that countryside folk are old-fashioned. Later, transfer to Gwangju for check-in and a well-earned rest.

## Day 11 – Gwangju

Meet your local guide this morning for a tour of Gwangju, exploring the city’s modern political history and learning why it’s known as Korea’s “capital of democracy”. Visit the May 18 Memorial Park, dedicated to the Gwangju Uprising, before continuing to Yangnim-dong History and Culture Village. This historic neighbourhood tells the story of early modern Gwangju, where missionaries built churches, schools and hospitals.

Round out the tour with a visit to Penguin Village, once the site of a devastating fire, now a creative community space filled with repurposed art and local stories. The afternoon is free for you to explore at your own pace – perhaps hopping between the city’s cafes, browsing vintage stores or trying craft beers at one of the breweries that have emerged in recent years. Your Insider will point you in the right direction, whatever you decide to do.

## Day 12 – Day trip to Yeongam

You’ll journey with your Insider into rural Yeongam today. You’d be forgiven for not recognising the name, it doesn’t often make it on to tourist itineraries, but we think it’s one of the cultural cornerstones of rural Korea. Your first stop is at the base of Wolchulsan Mountain, where you’ll meet one of Korea’s masters of natural dyeing for a hands-on indigo experience. Working for over twenty years, Master Lee Hye-sook is dedicated to preserving traditional dyeing techniques using plants grown on site. During the workshop, you’ll learn her time-honoured methods and techniques for creating intricate patterns, with the mountain landscape providing a beautiful backdrop. There’s also time to explore the centre’s small exhibition showcasing textiles produced here.

We’ll have lunch at the centre’s *hanok* cafe, where dishes are made using local ingredients and thoughtful, low-waste practices. The centre plays an important role in the local community, supporting residents and reducing environmental impact by avoiding chemical processes.

In nearby Gangjin you'll visit the home of Korea's first tea brand, Baegunokpancha. Still run by the Lee family generations on, its story is closely tied to Korea's struggle for independence during years of occupation. Make fermented tea, wander through the surrounding tea fields, and finish with a tea tasting alongside traditional Korean sweets, served in a traditional *hanok*.

## Day 13 – Seoul

This morning, your Insider will help you forward luggage on to Seoul to make the journey smooth and hassle-free as you ride the KTX train back to the capital. Then, take time to unwind with an indulgent spa experience at Sulwhasoo Spa.

We've gone big for your final dinner, at Ryunique, a Michelin-recognised restaurant in the heart of Gangnam. Led by chef Ryu Tae-hwan, Ryunique focuses on modern Korean cuisine rooted in classical techniques and locally sourced, seasonal ingredients. Each beautifully presented course draws inspiration from an aspect of Korean culture, with thoughtful storytelling behind every dish.

Your final hotel is a real highlight: the Sofitel Ambassador Seoul. Overlooking the iconic Lotte World Tower and the peaceful waters of Seokchon Lake – it's the perfect setting to reflect on your time in Korea.

## Day 14 – Seoul

It's time to head home (or to the next leg of your adventure). You'll be picked up by private vehicle and taken to Seoul airport.

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## Want to extend your stay?

This Small Group Tour gives you the highlights, but there are plenty of easy additions to extend your trip.

If you're an outdoor adventurer, head out to South Korea's mountains, forest and temples at Seoraksan National Park. Or, for nature lovers, catch a flight to Jeju Island, a Korean holiday hot spot, defined by its volcanic landscapes, tea fields, coastal walks and plenty of beaches. And if you'd like to visit the infamous DMZ, marking the border between North and South Korea, we can arrange this for you – with an additional pre or post tour night.

We're always happy to arrange independent add-ons and extensions. Please speak with your travel consultant for more details.



# Where you'll stay

Please note: accommodation can sometimes change. We'll include final details in your Info-Pack, which we'll send you approximately four weeks before departure. If you'd like to know more, please speak to your travel consultant.

## ● SEOUL

### RYSE Autograph

Stay in the artsy neighbourhood of Hongdae – home of the hipster Hongik art college, where indie arts thrive and students hang out.

Rooms are suitably bright and bold, with contemporary Korean art dotted around the walls. Bathrobes are by designer fashion brand IISE, and you can visit the library, stocked with niche magazines and vinyls. With live music, cocktails and a restaurant menu designed by a Michelin-starred chef, it's a real treat to start your trip.

## ● GANGNEUNG

### Seamarq Hotel

Designed by the world-renowned architect Richard Meier, the Seamarq Hotel was primarily built for the 2018 Winter Olympics. Situated on a particularly beautiful stretch of beach famed for diving and seafood, it has a minimalist design with glass furnishings and large windows giving it a particularly modern, chic and contemporary feel. Along with its rooftop infinity swimming pool overlooking the ocean, heated for year-round use, there is also an indoor pool, spa, in-house fusion cuisine restaurant and even an amphitheatre for you to enjoy.

## ● GYEONGJU

### Lahan Select Gyeongju

Overlooking Bomun lake, Lahan Select Gyeongju has beautiful views and world-class service – a luxurious stay in Korea's historic capital. The guest rooms sport an understated decor of walnut browns and crisp whites and calming blues and open on to private balconies to enjoy the view. The hotel's facilities are extensive and include an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, relaxing spa, bookstore and cafe, kid's lounge, bowling alley and several different restaurants with western and Korean dining options offering magnificent views over Bomun Lake through floor-to-ceiling windows.

## ● BUSAN

### L7 Haeundae

A classy spot to rest your head, the L7 is set among the skyscrapers of the Haeundae district – with the beach on your doorstep, too. Whether you spend your time bar hopping and dining at some of the city's best restaurants in Haeundae, or you catch the subway to other districts – this hotel sets you in the thick of Busan's action.

## What's included

- ⊙ Your InsideAsia Tours Info-Pack
- ⊙ Private transfers to your arrival and departure flights
- ⊙ T-Monday card with 20,000KRW credit for city transport
- ⊙ Full time service from your expert InsideAsia Insider (tour leader)
- ⊙ 13 nights' accommodation
- ⊙ Breakfast every day, seven lunches and five dinners
- ⊙ Entrance fees for sights included on the tour and local transport at most destinations
- ⊙ Tickets to ARTE Museum and Haslla Art World
- ⊙ Traditional liquor tasting
- ⊙ Pottery wheel experience
- ⊙ Indigo dyeing experience
- ⊙ Cocktail making experience
- ⊙ Soju distillery experience
- ⊙ Fermented tea making
- ⊙ Docent tour of F1963
- ⊙ 2 days of private guiding in Seoul
- ⊙ Full day private guide in Gangneung
- ⊙ Transport in Busan
- ⊙ Full day private guide and transport in Gyeongju
- ⊙ Half day private guide in Gwangju
- ⊙ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout the trip
- ⊙ Luggage forwarding from Seoul to Gyeongju and from Gwangju to Seoul
- ⊙ Spa package at Sulhwassoo Spa

## Not included

- ⊗ International flights
- ⊗ Any local transport (subways, taxis, buses) unless covered by the included transport passes (see above)
- ⊗ Any entrances fees not included on the tour
- ⊗ Baggage handling and luggage forwarding, unless otherwise specified. You will be expected to carry your own luggage

# Where you'll stay

## ● GWANGJU

### Holiday Inn

Though it's the sixth-largest city in South Korea, Gwangju isn't a big tourist destination, so it makes sense that the standard of hospitality here isn't quite what it is in Seoul or Busan. The Holiday Inn is our top pick for a comfortable stay, with spotless and spacious rooms. Guest rooms come with a minibar, ironing facilities and modern bathrooms complete with electronic toilets. There's a pool, indoor baths, a gym and a sauna with restaurant options on-site offering a good selection of whiskeys and wines. With the only other high-end option in the city being the much older (and rather more threadbare) Ramada Plaza, we're confident the Holiday Inn is a more appealing choice your stay in Gwangju.

## ● SEOUL

### Sofitel

Sofitel is a real treat to round off your trip. A five-star hotel with an indoor pool, spa and high-quality rooms, it's our most luxury stay.

Aside from the quality of the rooms and services, we've chosen Sofitel Seoul for its location – right in the centre of Seoul's major business and shopping districts. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer views of Seokchon Lake (fringed with cherry blossoms in spring, red and orange leaves in autumn). Dining options are high-end, including a French-style café and a restaurant featuring guest artists, providing inspiration for the menu.



# Important tour information



## Fitness

### Activity rating: Active

This trip requires a moderate level of fitness. Activities will generally involve walking and being on your feet for most of the day.

## Dietary requirements

This tour will be challenging for those with any dietary requirements. Korean dining is communal. Most dishes are meat-based and are often shared with no option to order your own dish. If you have dietary requirements, you might feel you're missing out. We recommend speaking to us about more independent travel options.

## Policy on single rooms

Single rooms are guaranteed at all night stops on this tour through payment of a mandatory single supplement.

## Double rooms

In South Korea, twin rooms are very much the norm and there are far fewer double rooms available, which means we can't guarantee a double in every hotel on this tour. However, if you would prefer a double room, please ask your travel consultant. There's no guarantee, but we can try our best to secure one.

## Your tour leader - Insider

Our tours are led on the ground by a fluent English and Korean speaker, who knows the ins and outs of Korean culture, food and transport logistics. We call them Insiders. They hold the local knowledge that will make your trip smooth running and enjoyable. Your Insider travels with the group and stays at the same hotels as you, so please feel free to ask for help or advice at any time.

Your Insider is not a guide – so may not know every historical detail of every shrine, temple or palace. That said, they're available pretty much all day every day and will even be happy to accompany tour members out at night on occasion!

Please note, your Insider reserves the right to deny participation in an activity if they feel it's in the safety or best interest of you and/or any other members of the group. Similarly, dangerous weather conditions may lead to some activities being cancelled.

## Luggage

We highly recommend that you pack reasonably light to make your stay more enjoyable. Large suitcases could be an inconvenience as you'll have to carry your bags for short distances and some stations don't have escalators or lifts.

For ease of transit, we'll forward your luggage between Seoul and Gyeongju and then Gwangju and Seoul, so you'll be without your main baggage for two nights in Gangneung. You will need a small overnight bag (e.g. backpack) for this.

## Transport on tour

There's a mix of transport during the trip. Some transfers are by public transport, making use of South Korea's first-rate transport network. Where more convenient, some are via private transfer. This tour uses a mixture of trains, taxis, public buses, as well as private coaches for some transfers and sightseeing.

## International flights

This tour starts and finishes in Seoul for arrivals and departures at Seoul, Incheon. The included airport transfer to the first hotel is ONLY available from this airport.

## Check-in

Upon arrival, you'll probably be tired after a long international flight. Rooms at the Seoul hotel are only available from 3pm (and hotels in South Korea tend to be inflexible on this point.) If you have an early arrival, you can either book an extra night for any-time check-in, or the hotel will be happy to securely store your luggage for you while you go for a drink or explore the local area. Your Insider will be at your hotel the day the tour starts, so will be available for advice and assistance. We recommend booking at least one extra night to check in and relax before the tour begins.