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### Move Over, Seoul: Busan Is the Next Great South Korean City

December 1, 2015 by Carimé Lane



In the world's eyes, Seoul is practically synonymous with South Korea — but it's not the sole city (pardon our pun) worth visiting.

On the southern tip of the Korean peninsula, five hours southeast of Seoul, Busan is a hidden gem that boasts picturesque beaches, Buddhist temples, natural hot springs, and open-air fish markets. Here's your guide to the thoroughly metropolitan city punctuated by towering mountain ranges.



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**History & Culture:** Remnants of the Korean War abound from the crumbling concrete

outposts along the sea wall to the uneven streets — notable because Busan was one of the only places not invaded during the war, and so much of its infrastructure has not been modernized. Remember the fallen at the free-to-visit UN Memorial Cemetery, honoring UN soldiers from 16 countries, that also houses the Peace and Sculpture Parks where sculptures from the various nations are on display.

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For the culture hounds, the Beomeosa Temple, built in 678 during the Silla Dynasty, makes for a great education tour. But the site is perhaps best experienced through a two-day temple stay. For just 70,000 won (about \$60) per person, spend the night and engage in activities like a Buddhist tea ceremony, prayer bead making, meditation, and tours.

**To Market & the Mall:** Peruse the bustling Jagalchi fish market — Korea’s largest seafood market — where *ajummas* (the term used to refer to middle-aged or married women) hawk mackerel, sea squirts, and whale meat. For a bite, head to the nearby 60-year-old Gukje Market to sample the local speciality: *chungmu gimbap*, or rice, spicy radish, and boiled squid rolled in seaweed. Feeling adventurous? Try *sundae*, a sausage made from steamed cow intestines and stuffed with various other ingredients.

For the ultimate shop-until-you-drop experience, check out Shinsegae Centum City, the largest department store in the world and home to a range of brands from Burberry to DKNY. When you need a shopping break, rejuvenate at SpaLand, a posh Korean-style spa right in the mall. Here, visitors take birthday suit dips in multiple (single-sex) pools or relax in one of 13 themed saunas — including a “Roman sauna,” heated with radiant heat to imitate an ancient roman bath, and a traditional Finnish-style sauna. Entry is 15,000 won on weekdays and 18,000 won (\$15) on weekends and national holidays.

**Soak Up the Sun:** During the warmer months, relax under an umbrella while bikers and joggers wend along the 1.5 km white stretch of Haeundae Beach. (July through September is typically the hottest time in the city.) Don’t miss the chance to learn traditional games at the Folk Square on the beach — including *neoldduigi* (seesaw jumping), Korean wrestling, and *tuho* (arrow throwing) — or tour the underground aquarium featuring an underwater tunnel.

**Eat:** Korean BBQ restaurants where you cook your meat at your own tabletop grill are ubiquitous — as are places that serve *bibimbap*, a steaming rice dish that comes with vegetables, meat, egg, and spicy sauce. For Busan’s take on the savory pancake, visit *dongnae halmae pajeon*, where four generations have been serving rice flour pancakes stuffed with onions, seafood, and beef.

Sweet tooths must sample *patbingsu*, or shaved ice, often topped with sweet red beans, condensed milk, and rice cake. With base flavors ranging from tiramisu to green tea, the

popular dessert is available at many cafes.

**Stay:** Enjoy the picturesque view at Paradise Hotel Busan, where rooms overlook Haeundae Beach and range from 190,000 won to 280,000 won (\$160 to \$240) per night. Once you're settled, play a round at the 3D golf course or perfect your shot at the indoor golf range. Other amenities include a casino, a Sony PlayStation zone, and luxurious pool with a beachside view.

**Get There:** Fly into the Gimhae International Airport with a flight serviced by Japan Airlines, Korean Air, China Southern Airlines, Cathay Pacific, or American Airlines. Cruise lines like Princess Cruises and Royal Caribbean International also dock in Busan.



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