

Luxury Travel: Korea

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I was pleased to realize Sharon Choi, my chic English-speaking guide, and I were not only similar in our tastes in fashion, but also our approach of shopping. She intuited I would be inspired by the gallery-lined Insa-dong shopping street and Ssamziegil, a tiny (by Seoul standards) shopping center inspired by artisan villages from earlier times. Sharon and I scored intricate hand-crafted silver earrings from nearby Gu Pil Seo (1F, 169-2, Gwanhun-Dong) and then wrapped up the day at hitting a small section of Doota (www.doota.com). We scored lovely linen tunics at They International and summer bottoms from [pa]:Plus for a mere \$25 U.S. per piece and one-off gladiator sandals from Ficca Design Studio that back in the U.S. have attracted its worth in compliments.



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Sharon also turned me on to The Story of Who and sister brand O'Hui, sunscreen products that are at once luxuriant and state-of-the-art. However, with Korea as a global capital of medi-spa and cosmetic surgery innovation, my other guides noted many visitors have come to Seoul for more permanent souvenirs. To give us a taste of the country's emerging beauty/cosmetic tourism segment, we were bee-lined soon after our arrival in Korea to Seoul's Anacni Center, widely acclaimed for its treatments and private label anti-aging skin care products for men and women. Though the center was elegantly appointed, the treatments were relaxing, simple and administered by calm, attentive practitioners—exactly what you'd want before or after an 11+ hour flight.

Though one cannot totally escape the siren call of Seoul's buffet of label heaven (or astonishingly civilized buffets, like Top Cloud, for that matter), Jeju-Do island offers a more laidback mode of upscale South Korean living. What's most memorable about the UNESCO Heritage-certified island, however, are its wide-open rural spaces, coastline and the intoxicating smell of jasmine and citrus. There are also many ways visitors can experience Love, Korean Style. As most Korean films shot on Jeju are romances, markers are placed on key shoot sites so newlyweds can create their own Kodak moments.



While Jeju's Lotte Resort puts travelers, honeymooning or otherwise, in the lap of over-the-top East-Meets-West luxury, The Shilla Resort offers a subdued spread of five-star glamour. The Hyatt is old school Hyatt (down to its airy 1970s trademark atrium) enlivened with 21st century services. Visitors, however, owe it to themselves to venture away from those plush resorts to experience rich cultural and natural highs—from Chung Gye Chang Stream, Chonjiyeon Waterfalls, the Yongmeori Coast, Yongsuam Rock and Seongsan Ilchulbong (Sunset Peak) to the O'Sulloc Tea Museum (the boutique stocked with gorgeously packaged teas and skin care products) and The Folk and Natural History Museum.

While Asia's major airports are famously spotless and amenity-filled, Seoul's Incheon Airport takes arrivals and departures to new heights of comfort and style. While duty free shops and couture boutiques line the terminals, a Korean cultural storefront anchors the complex. Reached your spending limit back in town? Spend your waiting time creating your own souvenirs based on traditional folk crafts or see a live performance of traditional music. On the upper level, there is a decorative arts museum and a tranquil deck with reclining chairs. Add to those nifty features a private shower room, an expansive kids playground and unlimited WiFi and Internet terminals, all free of charge. For small fees, a passenger can take her pre-travel pampering up another notch with a full-service spa and in-the-airport hotel that rents for about \$40 U.S. for six hours of total privacy.



South Korea's culture is a delicious blend of history and modernism. However, to fully appreciate its feast for the senses, like Dr. Moon and his team at the Anacli Clinic, you have to look below the surface to get a real sense of Korea's value on quality of life.

For more information, visit www.visitkorea.or.kr and www.koreanair.com.