



# Beyond the Finish Line

PyeongChang's winning combination of cultural and recreational sites attracts all manner of visitors. BY ELYSE GLICKMAN

LONG VIEW:  
*Alpensia drop*

PHOTO: © ELYSE  
GLICKMAN

**SINCE ITS 2011 SELECTION** by the International Olympic Committee as the site for the 2018 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, the world set its sights on PyeongChang, South Korea. While some viewers were spellbound by the superhuman feats of world-class athletes, others were intrigued with global politics and celebrity sightings. And through it all, millions had a glimpse of a South Korea different from Seoul.

PyeongChang, whose 43,000 residents work in agriculture, is dubbed the “Alps of Korea.” It is 80 percent mountains, with the average elevation at approximately 2,300 feet above sea level. Gangneung, whose seaside communities have a similar misty character to those of the U.K. and U.S. northeastern coasts, hugs PyeongChang.

Understandably, both were popular among South Koreans long before the extensive renovations, construction projects and infrastructure improvements came along with the

Olympic hosting bid. Businesspeople come for golf and retreats during warmer months. Families head to Alpensia for skiing and other winter sports and to Gangneung for summer beach holidays. Like the U.S. East Coast, the South Korean counterpart also draws “leaf peepers” during peak fall foliage.

With all the elements added up, the region proves the perfect antidote for Seoul’s urban intensity as well as a multitasking, year-round destination for business travelers, families with kids and those combining business and family time. In fact, many of the newer and larger resorts actively promote their MICE and family activity programs and amenities in equal measure.

Though things quieted down since the last medals were handed out, cultural and recreational sites revered by generations of Koreans are now primed for discovery by foreign visitors.





Hiking, biking, golf and other activities amid lush temperate zone greenery are sure to reel in active travelers. Several stately temples, museums and heritage sites, meanwhile, will take non-Koreans on an exciting journey into a less familiar but fascinating sector of world history.

While a parent is in meetings or a conference, the rest of the family can enjoy a real East-meets-West exploration of science at the Charmsori Gramophone & Edison Science Museum. Exhibits show how Thomas Edison's ideas and inventions (850 on display) ushered the world into the modern era from a Korean perspective. The PyeongChang Olympic Promotion Hall, meanwhile, will continue operating free of charge. The action-packed space, enclosed in repurposed train containers, features virtual reality kiosks and a theater ride, an interactive hockey area and life-sized action figures flanked by comic book-inspired posters with behind-the-scenes details about Winter Olympics sports. Just outside, there's a playground with a stationary Korean bobsled. Animal lovers can visit the Daegwallyeong Sheep Farm, which features a hay-feeding experience with the sheep.

Kids — or adult corporate groups — who enjoy playing with their food can get an authentic taste of Korean culinary culture at the Jeonggangwon Korea Traditional Food Culture

Experience Center. The farmhouse-turned-museum and restaurant covers different Korean staple foods, agricultural items and kitchen tools. Cooking classes are available for 10 or more adults, as are luncheons where kids can prepare bibimbap. Chodang Dubu Village offers another all-ages food experience, expounding on the many uses of tofu made from locally sourced soybeans and water from the East Sea.

Visits to the region's historic palaces and temples require at least a full day so families can fully take in their beauty and history, and corporate groups can experience a truly meaningful retreat.

Ojukheon, one of Korea's oldest noble residences, was home to key historic figures Yulgok Yi-I (1536–1584) and his mother, Sin Saimdang, whose likenesses live on in South Korean currency. The main structure captures the splendor enjoyed by royals during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910), while its private museum showcases personal items, Buddhist artifacts and original artwork by some of the members of the Yulgok family who were talented artists. Seongyojang House, former domain of the Naebeon Lee (1703–1781) royal family, is another notable mansion, made up of several buildings, 12 gates, gardens and its own museum.

The Jeongseon Ararichon Folk Village preserves the

## KOREAN CULTURE:

*Korean Beef Village dining room (top left) and bulgogi (top right), Ojukheon (bottom left), and PyeongChang Olympic Center*

PHOTOS: © ELYSE GLICKMAN

## LODGING

### THE INTERCONTINENTAL ALPENSIA PYEONGCHANG RESORT

In advance of the Winter Olympics, the North American-style lodge property upgraded its meeting rooms and family-oriented amenities. It was one of the go-to resorts for NBC and other international media covering the Games.

325 Solbong-ro, Daegwal-nyeong-myeon, Pyeongchang-gun, Gangwon-do  
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### LOTTE RESORT SOKCHO

Upscale South Korean hotelier Lotte entered the pre-Olympic hotel race with the opening of this contemporary beachfront resort featuring beautiful meeting spaces, nice dining options and a definitively Asian approach to family luxury travel.

186 Daepohang-gil, Sokcho-si, Gangwon-do  
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### SEAMARQ HOTEL

One of the area's top-tier hotels boasts posh, airy suites and public areas and well-appointed meeting and family amenities. It is close to Heo Gyun and Heo Nanseolheon Memorial Park and other popular cultural spots.

2, 406 beon-gil, Hae-an-ro, Gangneung-si, Gangwon-do  
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## DINING

### L BARBECUE

This hidden gem serves up a deliciously fun take on American roadside joint fare, from its aromatic smokehouse to abundant platters of brisket, pulled pork, baby back ribs and side dishes to Korean Coke cans and a funky assortment of memorabilia.

333 Hanam-Gil,  
Gangneung, Gangwon-do  
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### PYEONGCHANG HANU CENTER (Korean Beef Village)

Diners select Korean beef in its small butcher shop and head upstairs to a reserved table, where a server lights the table grill and guests cook their meat to perfection. Enjoy excellent *bulgogi* (thin-sliced beef) and interesting condiments.

15 Daehwa3-Gil,  
Pyeongchang-gun,  
Gangwon-do  
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### WOW DAEGWALLYEONG HANWOO JINBU

This pick of discerning visitors during the Games ups the Korean barbecue experience with a Kobe beef-caliber selection of prime cuts. Its owner, Jean, a U.S. resident for several years, greets customers and is dedicated to serving local organic fare.

7 Kkachigol-gil, Jinbu-myeon,  
Pyeongchang-gun,  
Gangwon-do  
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ways of common people living during the Joseon Dynasty. In addition to permanent exhibits, the regularly scheduled hands-on activities and performances provide deeper immersion and insight into pre-20th-century Korean culture. While the temples and grounds of Woljeongsa, Hyundeoksa and Bohyunsu are popular daytrip destinations with colorful gardens, hiking and walking trails, extended temple stays are offered as the ultimate spiritual retreat based on traditional Korean Buddhist culture dating back 1,700 years.

As some prospective visitors will still bask in the Olympic afterglow, they will be happy to know Alpensia Ski Resort and other slopes will be open next winter. During the off-season, visitors can get a competitive skiers' perspective on Alpensia's grounds and its landmark ski jump tower. Views are literally breathtaking, especially when taken in from the monorail or the outdoor observation deck's Plexiglas floor. Less daring souls can enjoy the sights from the tower's coffee shop and indoor viewing areas. Inside Alpensia Stadium, the Korean Ski History Museum displays a fascinating mix of alpine gear, photographs and biographical information about Korean winter athletes.

After the conference, temple retreat or busy days of outdoor fun, Anmok Beach is the perfect place for leisurely strolls and people-watching along the adjacent Gangneung Coffee Street. Competing cafés beckon with steaming cups from artisanal coffee roasters as well as hot chocolate, tea and desserts. The stretch is also home to percolating coffee-related attractions ranging from an October coffee festival to a coffee museum and roastery.

Whether a group prefers outdoor adventure, includes devoted history buffs or wants to do a little of everything, PyeongChang is indeed a winning choice. It hits all the marks as a unique Asian travel experience at once new for Western visitors and yet warm and familiar with its emphasis on nature and a slower pace of life.



**SPIRITUAL RETREAT:**  
*Temple trails and park (above),  
and Woljeongsa interior (left)*

PHOTOS: © ELYSE GLICKMAN

## INFO TO GO

Most carriers coming from the United States, including Korean Air and Asiana Airlines, fly into Incheon Airport, 21 miles west of Seoul. The best way to travel to PyeongChang is to take ICN Express Train (adults, 9,000 won, or about \$8.50; children, 7,000 won, or about \$6.50) to Seoul's Central Station and then take KTX high-speed rail from Seoul to PyeongChang. Based on seat class, KTX adult fares range 16,700–27,600 won (about \$16–26) and children travel for 8,399–17,700 won (about \$8–17).