

Sangnim Forest

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1. About the Course

Sangnim Forest was established around the 8th century during the Silla Dynasty, by a renowned scholar named Choe Chi-won when he was serving as a prefect of this region. The forest had not always been here but was man-made in order to prevent flood disaster, and is the first planted forest in Korea. It was also designated as Korea's Natural Monument No. 154 in 1962.

Currently, the forest spans an area of over 19,000 square meters. It is the size of two and a half soccer fields. With over 120 kinds of trees growing here, it is an enjoyable resting place and nature exploration area for both locals and visitors. Now, shall we enter the forest?

2. Trees Growing as One

When Choe Chi-won was appointed here, Hamyang experienced extensive flood damage every year. After much thought, he dammed the riverbed, diverted the course of the river and made a forest by planting trees all around the area. The inspiration was to use nature to block a natural disaster, and straightaway the forest was effective, sharply decreasing the damage caused by storms and floods.

Originally, the forest was known by a different name, but it came to be called Sangnim, meaning "upper forest," and Harim, meaning "lower forest." Later on private homes and a military base were built where the lower forest once was and now only the upper forest remains.

The most eye-catching thing at this forest is the trees at the entrance. The trees have different roots but grow together as one tree, touching one other's trunk. The two trees entwined together as one can be thought of as a symbol of the love shared by two lovers. There is a belief that if a couple promises their love to each other beneath this tree, it will last forever.

3. Hamhwaru, the Gateway to Hamyang

After strolling for a while in the forest, you will see Hamhwaru. This structure was the gate into Hamyang from the town wall in the south. It was a place for academic exchange during the Joseon Dynasty, and after it was almost demolished during the Japanese Colonial Period, it was moved to this location in 1932.

Looking at this two-level structure, you can see it is divided into three sections along the front, and two

sections form the sides. The columns on the first level have grooves gouged out of them, and it is said that dividing partitions used to be slotted into these grooves. They served as repositories for tools used when receiving and entertaining guests.

4. A Stone Buddha Made Beautiful Through Trials

Walking through the forest, you will see a heavily damaged stone Buddha. It was discovered in the 1950s by a stream in a village called Ieun-ri. At first glance, it appears to be a seated Buddha, but it is actually a standing Buddha.

There is a theory that this stone Buddha in Ieun-ri was originally located at a Buddhist temple called Mangasa that once stood nearby, and perhaps due to frequent flooding the statue was carried downstream to Ieun-ri. Though the torso, hands, and nose have been severely damaged, the long, drooping ears confirm that it is a Buddha. However, the bald head of this Buddha is a special feature, because normally the hair of Buddha is curly.

5. Enjoy the Arts, Saunjeong and Hwasujeong

There are many pavilions in Hamyang, and the two in this forest are called Saunjeong and Hwasujeong.

Saunjeong was built in 1906 to commemorate Choe Chi-won, and currently various literary events are held every year as a tribute to this gifted writer.

Hwasujeong was built in the late 1970s by the Yun Clan. It was built for an association, which aimed to promote fellowship among people with the same last name. Though this pavilion is not as old as the other one, it does have a spectacular view. You can see over 150 kinds of lotus flowers at the lotus farm, and also view a walking trail.

6. Enshrining 11 Historical Figures who Brought Honor to Hamyang

Perhaps because it is imbued with the spirit of Jirisan and Deogyusan Mountains, Hamyang has produced many outstanding figures. In addition to those who were born and raised here, there were also those who have come and brought honor to the region. You can see each of their faces at this historical figure park.

This park was built in 2001, and the busts of Choe Chi-won and eleven other historical figures are enshrined here. Among them is a scholar of the early Joseon Dynasty named Yang Gwan, who was known for his integrity. After completing his work in public office, the only possessions he owned were a book of poems, a stringed musical instrument, and one blanket. It is said that the king ordered his subjects to honor and emulate him.

7. With a Heart Solely for the People

In addition to the pavilions, Hamyang is also famous for its waterwheels thanks to the scholar Park Ji-won.

He was the representative scholar of practical studies during the 18th century. After he returned from traveling in Qing China, he wrote a travelogue and kept a record of the advanced culture and learning. He also wrote that one should actively accept a better way.

The conservative ruling class of the Joseon Dynasty was opposed to this book. However, he criticized their empty formalities and vanity, and was only concerned with ways that could make people live more comfortably. The waterwheel was one of those ways.

As you can see, the waterwheel is a machine that uses water power to mill grain. While he was in government, he put the waterwheel into practical use to help the people and improved the quality of their lives

8. Looking for Treasure

There is a legend that somewhere in this forest a golden hoe has been hidden. Shall we try looking for it?

When Choe Chi-won built the forest to prevent storm and flood damage, he brought trees down from the surrounding mountains. It is said that he used a golden hoe for this, and that he left the hoe hanging somewhere in the forest. Based on this legend, a bridge inscribed with the shape of the golden hoe has been built, and usually every year in the fall there is a cultural festival with a golden hoe-searching event. If you visit at the right time, make sure you participate in this fun activity.

Otters and mandarin ducks, both natural monuments, inhabit the forest, and this is another reason that this place is special.

There is another interesting legend. You won't find any snakes or vermin in this forest, because it is said that when Choe Chi-won was taking a walk with his mother, she was startled by a snake. He recited an incantation that scared away all the snakes and vermin and they haven't returned to this day!

9. Lotus in the Summer, Red Spider Lily in the Autumn

The lotus farm is the final stop at the forest. Sangdong Village at the forest was very famous for its lotus farms, so a large lotus farm complex was constructed around the forest. In the summer time, together with the forest, this is the most popular attraction in Hamyang. In this region where rice farming does not bring large profits, lotus leaves and roots supplement the income of the farmers of the region.

In addition to the lotus farm, red spider lily is also famous at the forest. Lotus flowers are beautiful in the summer, while red spider lily is beautiful in the autumn. The flower blooms in early autumn, and the leaves shoot after the flower falls. Also, the powder from its roots can be used as both an adhesive and preservative. Because the adhesive made of its roots can prevent moth damage for thousands of years, it is used to preserve temple artwork.