

Inwol-Geumgye Section

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1. About Inwol-Geumgye Section

In this section, we will be travelling along a variety of paths such as forest trails, paddy field trails and village paths.

This was the first section of Dulle-gil opened to the public, and along this section you will see some of the best of what this trail has to offer. Actually, if you're thinking only in terms of the scenery there are more impressive trails than this one. However, as you follow this trail passing villages on Jirisan Mountain, discover the traces left behind by the wise men of old Korea, and bump into other travelers, you will soon find that for clearing one's mind and lifting the spirits there is no better section than this one.

2. The Countryside 5-Day Market

In the Korean countryside there are markets known as 5-day markets. These markets, which open once every five days, can fill these normally tranquil village centers with bustling visitors and cars.

At the large 5-day market here in Inwol, you can enjoy scenes of many local people coming together here at the village center to buy and sell. Generally at 5-day markets, only people from the regional area come to buy and sell products, but the 5-day market at Inwol is slightly different. This area has for a long time been a major regional transportation hub and point of barter and exchange. Even today, this is still a large 5-day market that attracts people from many regions.

Here at the market they sell a variety of produce, from wild vegetables to all kinds of grains, and food products made fresh by local householders.

The most famous product at this market is pork from the native black pigs. Many people come down here from Seoul solely to purchase the pork raised in this area, known for its low fat content and tender flesh. Because the meat is roasted with the skin still on, its unique flavor is unparalleled. If you get the chance, we recommend that you enjoy the Jirisan black pork accompanied by the local, traditional alcoholic drink.

3. Inwol Information Center

Before heading out along the trail, we strongly suggest that you pop into the information center. At the Inwol Information Center, you can find books in English on the Jirisan environment and ecology, maps of Dulle-gil and information related to the signposts along the trail. They also sell simple souvenir items.

It's definitely worth popping in to take advantage of the complimentary iced green tea in summer and the warm, roasted sweet potatoes provided in the winter. Please keep in mind that the center is closed on Mondays.

After leaving the information center, you will be able to see a stream passing through the village. This is called Ramcheon, and this important river provides water necessary for agriculture and is therefore known as the lifeline of the Gurye region.

There is also a famous rock known as Jarabawi, or Turtle Rock. They say that if you go to the top of the bridge across the stream and look down at about 10 to 11 in the morning when the sun is rising high in the sky, you will be able to see a soft-shelled turtle climbing up the rock to rest. This is how the rock got its name. Taking a picture of the turtle climbing the rock is believed to bring good luck! When you pass the rock, don't forget to keep an eye out for the turtle.

4. The Rain-Calling Ritual

This village has existed as a gathering spot for people since long ago. While many of the surrounding villages vanished when their populations dropped, this village has almost uniquely managed to survive.

You can still see the old, traditional Korean lifestyle preserved here. Now only a small, quiet village, the area was home to an important army base during the Japanese invasion in the 16th century. The village itself is named after the army group that was stationed here.

Traditionally, the local villagers would perform rituals to pray for rain during a drought. The rituals were held in a variety of forms, both locally in villages as well as those performed for the whole country by the king. In farming regions where the local economy depended on rice paddy agriculture, there was nothing more feared than a drought. If rain did not come in the summer, the local people would fear a poor harvest and the women of the village would stand at the water's edge and wail in loud voices. They say that the wailing of the women would move the heavens to sympathy, and so after the ritual was completed rain would fall.

5. Suseongdae

If you follow the sound of water that can be heard through the pine trees, you will find a ravine that cuts through the pine forest. This place is known as Suseongdae, where the waters are so clear you can even see the floor of the stream.

While now it is a peaceful vista, in the past there was an observation post for a fortress here, and this was known as Suseongdae. No longer standing, this post was once so famous that its name was used as the name for this area and still is today.

There were once a number of small villages that were inhabited by local slash-and-burn farmers, but today the people that lived here have scattered and nothing of the village history remains. This area has attracted many visitors ever since its appearance as a travel destination on the popular television program '1 Night 2 Days'.

6. The Hill that Boats Cross

This forest path was once used by people in the region to travel to larger villages to buy and sell local produce. If you head up the forest path, before you know it, you will have an expansive view of the whole area.

They call this hill the 'hill that boats cross'. You might think it is very difficult to understand. According to old stories, long ago this area was a large lake and many boats operated here. People were able to cross back and forth across the lake in boats but now it has become a hill. The name, 'the hill that boats cross,' has stuck! But now, no matter how much you look around the area, it is almost impossible to imagine that there was once a lake here.

7. Jirisan Agricultural School

After you leave the forest path, you will see a village. The name of this village means "the deer's neck". This is because the shape of the mountain range resembles the neck of a deer.

At the entrance to the village, there is a great pine tree that was believed to be inhabited by a god that protected the village. This pine tree, which is so large that one cannot see the sky when standing below it, is this village's guardian tree. Every year people would perform the ritual to this tree, over 400 years old, to preserve the peace of the village.

If you pass the tree and walk down a bit, there is a brick house. This building is the Jirisan Agricultural School. This school teaches those who have relocated to the nearby farming region about agricultural life. This is because coming from the city life to the countryside to settle and live is not as easy as it might seem. If you leave the busy rat race of the city and come to the countryside, you will need to engage in

economic activities such as raising crops or livestock and learn to get along with the local people. Here they teach city people not just the necessary methods of agriculture but also the necessary mindset to live a life in the countryside.

8. Red-leaved Hornbeam Forest

In the middle of the road you should be able to see a single great tree reaching up toward the sky. Over 300 years old, here and there the bark is beginning to come off but you can see the sparkling in silver. This red-leaved hornbeam tree grew as part of the last stage of the forest's cycle of change.

Forests slowly change over time but in the end this change ceases when the forest aligns with the natural characteristics and climate of the environment. At first, grass and shrubs less than 2 meters tall grow, then gradually coniferous trees such as pines appear, and then the process continues with the emergence of broad-leafed varieties such as oaks and maple trees.

The forest around Dulle-gil is generally comprised of pine. While the mountain itself is quite large, due to the effects of war many of the trees suffered damage and their numbers are not particularly high. The fact that there is a red-leaved hornbeam tree here proves how old this forest is.

We invite you to enjoy the fresh air produced here by the grass to the coniferous trees, oaks, red-leaved hornbeams and others of the various trees that live here.

9. Small School, Small Village

If you follow the trail that stretches through the forest, you will find yet another village at the end. This place, known simply as 'Small Village' is a village where people from the city come to work together and live a self-sufficient lifestyle.

All of the twenty-odd houses of this village were built by the residents themselves, as were the roads between them. Here, according to building regulations, modern toilets cannot be incorporated. Modern toilet facilities require a lot of water and the construction of additional facilities such as septic tanks in order to work properly, and this is not an eco-friendly practice. Here at this village, they have chosen to dispose of human waste products through natural discharge techniques just like other animals that live at the mountain.

As for children's education, they also operate a place known simply as 'Small School'. They teach

children how to pitch in to help with the agricultural work and look after livestock on their own. As opposed to city schools which teach standard education for the purpose of passing exams, this school is where you can study how to live as one with nature.

10. Silsangsa, the Millennium Temple

Rising from the middle of the wide paddy fields by the small forest lies a Buddhist temple called Silsangsa. This was at one time the most important temple in the region. Over 1000 years old, the temple doesn't look particularly impressive from the outside. However the people of the local region regard the temple as more precious than any of the other temples in the region.

If usual temples seem like simply solemn religious facilities, this temple is a community center that has lived with the village people. While it was originally completely surrounded by forest, as the village people began to clear and till the land for rice farming, the temple became surrounded by the village and part of the village itself.

The temple also works with the local people, helping them to study eco-friendly agricultural techniques and educates children at the Small School. Perhaps this is why the local people revere this temple regardless of their own personal religious beliefs.

11. The Rice Paddies Carved from the Mountain

Over the flat, dirt path coming down from the mountain, there are a number of terraced paddies. These are fields that have been cut from the hillside to seem almost like steps. As there were so few flat plains in this area, the people cut into the mountain itself to make these fields for agriculture.

Because of the way these fields are laid out, machinery cannot be used here and therefore locals have to sow, tend and harvest the crops by hand. It means that paddy agriculture here is said to be five times more difficult than elsewhere.

At one time, this place was famous for having the highest yield in the region. However, as many young people fit for laborious work are leaving the area, more and more of these fields are being abandoned.

We highly recommend visiting this place just before the harvest in late September and early October.

12. The Pass Shaped like a Turtle's Back

We are now crossing the most difficult pass of the trail. It's called Deunggujae Pass, and the name of the pass means 'the pass shaped like a turtle's back'. It provides abundant shade thanks to the dense cover of pine and cedar trees. They say that the glow of the sunset at twilight and the starry vista at night are particularly beautiful here. This pass marked the boundary between two large regions in the southern part of Korea. So, long ago, when people wished to exchange or trade with the other region, they would use this road. Merchants from each region trading in goods would come and go, and young people marrying into a different region would leave their home village and take this road. Today it is only used as part of Dulle-gil.

13. The Village with a Royal Storehouse

Here at Changwon Village, there was a storehouse that was built by order of the king. At this storehouse, they stored grains, tea and medicinal products that were collected as tax from the surrounding villages. At the time, this area had many residents and a highly developed transport network but now it has become a quiet, rural village. If you go up the village hill you can see Cheonwangbong Peak of Jirisan Mountain. The fact that the highest peak of the mountain seems to be so close is a reminder of how far up the mountain this village is located. As the village is located halfway up the mountain, there is little available arable land and therefore, instead of rice farming, locals planted groves of walnut trees. They say that when the profits from walnut trees were high, every house in the village planted them and lived off the profits. If you are visiting in the early fall, when you're passing by the village take a look at the walnut tree blossoms that bloom over the village walls.

14. The Village with the Stepping Stone Bridge

Geumgye Village was once only a small village but after the development of Jirisan Dulle-gil many pension hotels were built to cater for visitors from the city. It is now a bustling town.

While there is now a bridge constructed using modern techniques, up until the time of the Korean War there was only a stepping stone bridge. Larger and more beautiful than similar stepping stone bridges elsewhere, it became a point of pride for the town. However, as the modernization of this country village began one by one the relics of old times began to disappear, and so the stepping stone bridge has been replaced.