

Unbong-Inwol Section

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1. About Unbong-Inwol Section

The Unbong-Inwol Section you're about to explore is a trail, approximately 10 kilometers long. About halfway up the trail, you'll come across a small mountain village called Bijeon Village. From this point, you'll notice a subtle change in your surroundings.

The trail running between Unbong-eup and Bijeon Village is in an open plain with a moderate slope. So, you'll be able to see the northern ridges of the Jirisan Mountain. But the following trail between Bijeon Village and Inwol is rough, since it's a segment of an ancient byway which used to lead all the way up to Seoul.

Though located on the same side of the mountain, these two trails show striking differences.

2. Baraebong Festivals

All year round, there are festivals at Baraebong Peak.

In the spring, the mountain peak is covered with royal azalea, and it becomes a huge mountain garden. In fact, this peak has one of the biggest royal azalea colonies in Korea. When the flowers are in full bloom, the Royal Azalea Festival continues from the end of April to May. So don't miss out on the chance to see the festivities and take pictures of the flowers, and, of course, yourself.

In the summer, the mountain peak is filled with refreshing aroma of colorful herbs. Herb Valley, a special commercial district dedicated to herbs, holds the Namwon Herb Festival from the end of August to early September.

And let's not forget the winter festival!

Baraebong is covered with snow in the winter. So they hold the Snow Festival in every January to celebrate the snow white world. Thanks to the royal azalea, herbs, and snow, the whole place is in a festive mood all year long.

3. Old Mansion

You'll see an old traditional Korean house on the side of the Unbong Intersection. It may not look large, but it was once a large mansion.

It was owned by the wealthiest man in the city of Namwon, who flourished during the Japanese Colonial Period.

His land was so vast that it was nearly impossible to walk across the town without crossing his land. He was a friend and patron to many artists, so he often invited '*pansori*' singers to his parties. *Pansori* is like a Korean version of opera. Unbong eventually became the center of *pansori*, thanks to the patronage of rich people like him.

However, he went bankrupt shortly after the Japanese occupation, which ended in 1945, mainly because he was closely tied to the Japanese government. Today, only two buildings of his estate remain as the last remnant of the wealth and power he once held.

4. Monument with Chipped Corners

Two stone totem poles stand at the Seorim Park entrance, facing each other. They're traditional stone totem poles that Koreans used to have at their village entrance to ward off evil spirits.

Inside the park, there are stone monuments of various sizes and shapes. They were brought to this place about 10 years ago. You'll notice a large one with chipped corners. It's a testimony to a sad part of Korean history.

At the end of the 19th century, farmers suffered under the tyranny of corrupt government officials. The farmers in the Jirisan Mountain area were first to revolt, and the riot soon spread throughout the country. Fierce battles took place all over Jirisan Mountain despite the furious efforts of the government to contain the situation. When the riot finally calmed down, the officials commissioned this monument, to remind people of the incident. However, some of the farmers still had a lot of pent-up anger, so they destroyed the corners of the monument.

5. Turtle Rock

In front of the village stands a big rock with two Chinese characters engraved on the surface. It's read '*chobong*', meaning 'haystack'.

It was originally called 'Turtle Rock' because of its shape, but it also looks like a cow lying down. So the villagers changed its name to 'haystack' and engraved the new name on the rock in the 1970's. The villagers wanted to feed their cow well.

The villagers say that they've been having a good harvest every year ever since changing the name. Their wish for an abundant life came true.

6. Ramcheon, the Stream of Life

This stream is called Ramcheon, and it runs along the road and through Unbong.

Take a stroll along the stream, and you'll soon see that the village is largely composed of rice paddies and fields. In essence, it serves as a stream of life for the entire village. It's a source of abundance and relaxation not only for people,

but also for animals and plants as well.

The stream is also a natural habitat for otters, a near-extinct species. Around the stream, you'll find traces of the otters such as their excrement.

If you're really lucky, you'll have a rare opportunity to take pictures of the otters. So, you might want to take a closer look while passing through this place.

7. Song Heung-rok, the Pavarotti of Joseon

The word 'Bijeon' literally means 'in front of the monument'. So 'Bijeon Village' simply means 'a village that's in front of the monument'. Here, the monument refers to the one that was erected to commemorate a 14th century battle fought by the founder of the Joseon Dynasty.

Only fragments of the monument remain today, since it was destroyed during the Japanese Colonial Period. Nevertheless, it's still an important historical relic.

The black granite monument in front of you is a replica made in the 1950s. The original monument is right behind it, laid out in pieces for preservation.

This village is also famous for '*pansori*', a genre of Korean music similar to opera.

It's the hometown of Song Heung-rok, one of the most famous singers during the Joseon Period when the Korean opera was at its peak. In fact, he was so popular that the King invited him to sing in his palace.

He was hailed as the 'King of Music', and his style of music was established as a different genre of *pansori*. In short, he was like the 'Pavarotti of Joseon'.

During his time, many scholars visited this village to pay homage to the monument since it was one of the most important symbols of the Joseon Dynasty, and some of them even moved to this village. They were major sponsors of *pansori*, and that's why this village became the 'home to *pansori*'.

8. A Village Built by Soldiers

This was one of the '10 Main Roads' leading to Seoul from other regions. Both merchants and regional government officials took this road when they had business in the capital city.

The town in front of you is called Gunhwa Village. The name means a 'village built by soldiers'. In the 1960s, the entire village was swept away by a flood, so soldiers stationed around the area were ordered to rebuild it.

According to a local story, there used to be a shrine dedicated to a village deity who protected the villagers. It was a large heap of stones in front of a big tree. Passersby would place a stone on the top of the mound, bow, and pray for good luck. But the mound of stones was also swept away by the flood.

9. Natural Recreation Forest

Full of pine trees, this natural recreation forest is located below Deokdubong Peak in the northernmost part of Jirisan Mountain. In this resort, you'll find a hiking trail that leads all the way up to Deokdubong Peak.

Deokdubong Peak is the best viewpoint of the mountain, commanding a view of most major peaks. It's also where the sun rises first.

There are many Korean nut pine trees growing naturally in the ravine near the peak. Even in ancient times, Korean pine nuts were very popular in the neighboring countries. Along with ginseng, pine nuts have been one of the country's major exports since the ancient times, and they were exported to China and the western regions of China.

This forest has lots of small ravines with coniferous trees producing lots of phytoncide, so take a deep breath and bathe in the fresh air.

10. Moonlit Village

Many villages in Jirisan Mountain have had, and still have, names related to the moon. This is Wolpyeong Village, and its name means the 'first hill to come into view when the moon rises'.

Living in a village named after the moon, the villagers hold a big moon festival every year.

It's a traditional festival held on January 15 of the lunar calendar. In one event of the festival, people build a small pile of pine branches and bamboo sticks, with the pile facing east. After completing the pile, or the "Moon's Nest" as the villagers call it, villagers would gather around to hold a short ritual and then burn the branches while making wishes for the year.

Although most other villages in the mountain have abandoned the ritual following urbanization, this village still preserves the tradition. If you happen to be walking on the trail around Jirisan Mountain on the Lunar New Year's Day, you're welcome to stop by at this village and make wishes for a good year.