

# Deoksan-Witae Section

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## **1. About the Course**

The Deoksan-Witae section is about ten kilometers long and incorporates both flat and mountainous terrain.

The flat, even trail along the river will lead you to a point from which you can enjoy a view of the highest peak of Jirisan Mountain.

In addition, as you walk along this section, you will come across a historical site where the remains of a famous Confucian scholar rest. Also, you will visit an agricultural region producing dried persimmons, a snack favored by Koreans. The dried persimmon produced in this region is known for its excellent flavor.

Shall we embark on our journey now?

## **2. Deokcheonseowon and the Red Arrow Gate**

Deokcheonseowon is a Confucian academy established by disciples of Jo Sik after his death. He was one of the foremost Confucian scholars of Korea, and this academy was built to commemorate his achievements and virtues.

Can you see the Red Arrow Gate in front of the academy? Made of wood, this type of gate is more usually found in a Korean royal tomb or palace. Although the exact origin of this gate has not yet been determined, it signifies that this was a sacred place.

As you walk into the precincts, the building located directly in front of you is the main hall. Disciples of Jo Sik gathered here to conduct research and have discussions on a variety of academic fields. Buildings standing on both sides of the main hall were used as dormitory accommodation for the students.

## **3. Pavilion that Cleanses One's Mind**

There is a small pavilion that overlooks the river, where the students of this academy came to rest and gaze at the flowing river. The name of this pavilion means “a pavilion that cleanses one's mind.”

What could this mean? The mind isn't an object with a particular shape or form, so how can it be cleansed?

The word “cleanse” in this sense means “to clarify.” In other words, this is a place for reflection. You can reflect on faulty thoughts and actions and take the time to live a more righteous life.

Walking along Dulle-gil can also be seen as a method to cleanse and purify one's mind. You will be able to cleanse yourself in a natural environment and blow away the stresses and bad habits that accumulate while living a busy city life.

#### **4. Old Government Office Site**

Next to the Confucian academy, there is a high school.

Throughout the ages, people who have been passionate about intellectual and academic pursuits have designated this region as an area for learning and have established educational facilities.

The area is also called Won-ri, indicating that a Confucian academy was located in this village.

There was once a government office that had jurisdiction over this area. However, due to urbanization, administrative districts were reorganized and the government office has moved across the river. But up until that time, this region was a center for both education and administration.

#### **5. Deokcheongang River and Deoksan**

The stream flowing along the trail is called Deokcheon and the whole local area was referred to as Deoksan. The word "deok", common to the names for both water and land, means "benefit".

We can speculate why such a name has stuck in this way. Deoksan is the closest point from which one can see Cheonwangbong, the highest peak of Jirisan Mountain. According to an ancient oriental theory, the topography of a land can positively or negatively influence the lives of people nearby. This area was considered to have received beneficial energy from the mountain's highest peak, and to have both fertile land and a reliable water source. The people of this village believed the mountain to be the source of all good things, and named the village and the stream to express their gratitude.

#### **6. Bountiful Dried Persimmons**

Rice paddies fan out alongside the river. The local residents metaphorically refer to these plains as "the place where a Taoist maiden dropped her gold ring as she ascended to the Heavens", indicating how fertile the region is.

Furthermore, this is where Korea's famously flavorful dried persimmons are produced. Persimmons harvested in the autumn are wind dried as a local specialty.

Dried persimmons from this region are known for their high level of sweetness and delicate texture. Try these persimmons just once, and you will never forget the taste. This is because the persimmons from this area are dried naturally in the climate of Jirisan Mountain, rather than undergoing an artificial drying process. The natural process takes much effort, time, and expertise that can only be gained through many years of experience.

You can try the dried persimmons between December and the end of January. If you are visiting Deoksan area during winter, be sure to try this famous local delicacy.

### **7. Village Overflowing with Laughter**

Here, where the walls are adorned with pictures, is a simple but abundant village. People living in the area often describe this village as a place "where one arrives crying but leaves laughing."

The origin of the description comes from the fact that when someone first arrives at this village, they are disappointed by the hard life that this farming village seems to promise. However, when they leave, they are overcome with happiness from the bountiful life created by community spirit and affection among the villagers.

To outsiders, it might appear as just another small village located on the mountainside without much to offer, but the villagers are said to lead an easy life by helping one another. Maybe this is what is meant by the term "living a rich life."

### **8. The Last Scene of the Peasant Movement**

The zelkova tree standing at the entrance to the village is a sacred tree that acts as the guardian deity of the village. Since the olden days, the residents of this village have offered up honorary ceremonies annually to pray for the village's good fortune.

This village also still bears the scars from the peasant movement that took place in the late 19th century. The aim of the movement was to protest against the widespread corruption of government officials, and the movement spread nationwide before long. To suppress the uprising, the central government called in troops not only from the China's Qing Dynasty, but also from Japan. The peasants fought their last battle against the Japanese army in the area near this village, and hundreds of peasants were killed.

To this day, villagers hold a memorial service in front of the guardian tree to commemorate those who died in the peasant movement.

## **9. Fair Travel**

Here at the Jungtae Information Center, tourists and travelers are encouraged to sign a “Fair Travel” pledge. Although the term, “Fair Travel” might sound a bit grandiose, you can easily take part in it by following the four steps below.

1. Outline a travel plan yourself.
2. Use public transportation.
3. Do no harm to local residential environments.
4. Do not use disposable items, and make sure to take all trash with you.

Only a few basic guidelines must be followed in order to maintain the Dulle-gil and make sure it continues to survive. To promise and to practice these basic guidelines are the beginning of fair travel.

## **10. The Thieves of the Mountain Village**

If you follow the trail deeper along this valley, there are smaller villages located within the mountain. Some are still intact, but many have disappeared and only traces remain.

Like most mountainous areas, these villages pass down stories of thieves and their hideouts in the mountainous terrain. Located deep in the valley somewhere, it is said that the thieves prospered in some 3,300-square-meter of natural fortress.

The thieves didn't come into the deep mountains determined to become thieves but rather, people living a difficult and harsh life in the mountain turned to thievery. From the story of people turning to petty crime because of the hardships of life, we have some insight into how difficult it must have been for people to eke out a living in these mountain villages.

## **11. Story of a Hill**

That was quite a long hill, wasn't it? We must walk over this hill in order to reach the market on the other side. Since ancient times, local villagers have had to make the same trip over this hill to transport their goods to market and barter with others.

The hill forms the border between two districts named Hadong and Sancheong. From the top of hill, you can clearly see the distinct characteristics of each district. Sancheong is a typical mountain region while Hadong is a farming village where rice is the main crop.

If you look back toward Sancheong-gun, from where you came, you can see the grand mountain range and thick forest. In contrast, if you look towards Hadong-gun, where you are headed, you will see charming farming villages and rice paddies.

Although the hill isn't steep, it is amazing to see how it clearly divides the natural environment.