

Witae- Hadongho Lake Section

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1. About Witae-Hadongho Lake Section

The trail between Witae and Hadongho Lake extends for approximately 12 kilometers. While walking along the trail, you will learn about the lifestyles of the people who are living in the five small mountain villages located between the big and small hills. The green forest trail will lead you through the unforgettable scenery of a dense bamboo forest and eventually, to the vast Hadongho Lake at the end of the course.

So shall we set off?

2. The Sacred Tree of Witae Village

This tree that stands here overlooking the village is known as a sacred tree that acts as the village guardian deity. It has long been worshipped by villagers, and every single leaf is treated with care, even as the villagers go about their daily lives. According to local folktales, ills and misfortunes often befell people newly arrived in this village because they were not respectful towards this tree.

This sacred tree here is closely connected to agrarian folk beliefs in Korea, and ancestral ceremonies are still held here every year to pray for the peace and prosperity of the village.

3. The Silent Struggle for Existence

If you walk through the forest of Jirisan Mountain, you will sometimes come across trees that have fallen over. Most of the trees are not very thick, as any adult can wrap his arms around the trunk. While there still are many old, firmly rooted trees in the forest, there are those that were planted only about 50 years ago. These trees have grown upwards, but their trunks have remained only as thick as an adult's torso. Sadly, the reason for this is connected with atmospheric pollution. Pollution has reduced the amount of sunlight received by the area as a whole. In order to receive the requisite amount of light in the forest, each sapling strives to grow tall. As a result, the trees aren't strong or firmly rooted and the number that fall is increasing. Even as we speak, a silent struggle for existence is taking place in the forest.

4. The Site of a Lost Temple

This is a training camp operated by the World Kouksundo Federation. Kouksundo is a Korean traditional martial art, and it cultivates both the body and mind through meditation and breathing techniques. In action, it's similar to Taekwondo. Unfortunately, entry of visitors to the site is strictly prohibited, because

intense concentration is required to perform this martial art and hone skills.

The location is actually better known for the fact that there was once a huge Buddhist temple situated here. It was a very famous temple and was frequented by eminent monks and Confucian scholars.

However, the temple has vanished. There are various theories about what happened to the temple, for example, a big fire, pestilence, or that the doors were suddenly barred and the temple mysteriously severed itself from the world. There is no evidence to support any of these theories, so the question remains unanswered.

5. The Peaks of Jirisan Mountain

The peak, viewed from a distance, is known as Odaejusan. The name collectively refers to five peaks of the mountain including Cheonwangbong, Samsinbong, and Yeongsinbong.

Of these, Cheonwangbong is the most prominent peak, which is shaped as if it were propping up the sky itself. Formed of a large stone, the top of this peak is almost always shrouded in cloud, so it is difficult to make out its shape unless the weather is exceptionally fine.

From where you are now, it is not possible to see the peaks in entirety.

There is a side trail off the main Dulle-gil, and it will lead you to a viewing point where you can take in the splendor of all primary peaks at once.

6. A Village Bent Like A Bow

If you look at the terrain of this village from above, you will see that it takes the form of a bent bow. If you then follow the asphalt road further upwards, you will come to a mountain called Hwalchoksan, meaning 'an arrowhead mountain'. In the area surrounding the village, many landmarks or features have been given names with interesting meanings such as 'sword', or 'birthplace of a famous general'.

Why would a quiet mountain village such as this one have so many place names connected with war? The ancient founders of this village fled here into the mountains to seek refuge from the wars being waged on the Korean Peninsula. By naming landmarks around the village after weapons or great generals, it's clear that the villagers were desperately hoping that their village would withstand invasion from outsiders.

7. Yangiteo Pass

This is Yangiteo Pass, a part of the dominant mountain range that traverses the southern region of the Korean Peninsula. It is where the mountain range passes by Jirisan Mountain, so even before the Dulle-gil existed, it was a rest stop for hikers.

In ancient times, Koreans believed that great ridges are imbued with the energy of the land. So, names were attributed to the natural features of the landscape and rivers in accordance with the flow of energy from the mountain range. In order for the mountains and rivers to be deemed one living organism, they each have individual names. Traditional Korean beliefs respected the flow and energy of nature, and people endeavored to live harmoniously within their natural environment.

This pass, a rest stop for hikers climbing the mountain, has now also become a place for those walking along the Dulle-gil to stop and take a breather.

8. The Flower That Blooms Once Every 100 Years

Walking along the trail through the thick woods, you will abruptly arrive at a green bamboo grove. Bamboo groves are common in Hadong, but a bamboo grove that surprises us like this one is unusual in Korea.

Since long ago, bamboo has been grown in private homes because of its many practical uses. The roots were used medicinally, the young leaves were edible, and the stems were used for making bamboo ware. It was also used as a barrier to keep out marauding tigers that would sometimes come down from the mountains.

This useful bamboo plant only flowers once every 60~120 years. Once the flower falls, the plant begins to wither and die, so it seems to exhaust all of its nutrients to bloom only once in its lifetime. If you happen to see a bamboo flower you should take a picture of it, because the event is so very rare, occurring only once every 100 years.

9. The Legend of Beombawi Rock

There are a variety of folktales that have been passed down concerning this village. Of these, there is one relating to the huge rock that stands on the mountain behind the village, known to locals as Beombawi.

Long ago, a boy playing in the village stumbled across a huge serpent floating skywards, and shouted, “a snake is going up to the sky!” At that moment, the snake was suddenly sapped of energy, and fell

crashing back down to earth and died. It's said that a rock in the shape of a tiger was found at the very spot where the snake fell. In Korea, it is believed that if very old snakes ascend skywards, they become dragons possessing mystical powers. The snake in the story had the potential to become a dragon, but fell because it incurred the wrath of the heavens by ascending so hastily.

Maybe because it was bestowed with the energy of a dragon, since the village became famous for its powerful energy and the birthplace of many great generals.

10. The Beautiful Hadongho Lake

Hadongho Lake was completed in the middle of the 1990s. It is also known as Hadong Dam or Hadong Reservoir, because it is a lake by virtue of its shape, a dam by virtue of its size, and a reservoir by virtue of its purpose.

This artificial lake is eight times the size of a soccer field, and when the water levels are adjusted during the rainy season, it is responsible for supplying life-sustaining water to the farmland of around 60 villages. The lake also generates small amounts of hydroelectric power from the inflow of water, which is used to stabilize the electricity supply to surrounding farms.

Surrounded by mountains, Hadongho Lake is beautiful throughout the year, but it offers picturesque views particularly in the autumn when the sky is blue, leaves are tinted, and the sun glows.

If you observe the lake from the trail, you will sometimes see tree branches rising up from the water. The branches are from submerged trees that were growing here before the lake was constructed.