

Banggwang-Sandong Section

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1. About Banggwang-Sandong Section

As you walk across the fields of Gurye here you will pass mountain peaks and villages, and then before you know it you will come to a forest trail. The mountain villages are thick with old tales about groves of paulownia trees, ancient ancestral rites on Jirisan Mountain, and Qin Shi Huang, the emperor who united China for the first time in history and ordered the construction of the Great Wall of China.

In addition, you will come across the Gurye Arboretum, an ecological forest, and then join the flow of visitors up to the Artist Village.

2. The Village with Taverns

The valley with a stream flowing down to the village from Cheoneunsa Temple is so clear and cool that many visitors feel the urge to jump into the water in the summer.

With a name meaning ‘well-being’, this village is vital to the residents of surrounding villages who operate rest areas here. Pensions of various shapes and sizes have also sprung up in the center of the village. In particular, the ‘Hwangto Hanok Pension’ in the village is very popular, allowing patrons to enjoy a variety of agritourism programs and offering somewhere to rest up before they set off again.

The pension stands on a site which is said to have been home to an array of taverns until the 1930s. There was a line of breweries making alcohol, which were frequented by people from all levels of society. Contributing to the bustle of the area were the laborers who came here to log and sell timber from the thick forest behind nearby temple.

Even now, significant numbers of non-residents visit the area every year, such as seasonal holidaymakers and travelers along the Dulle-gil.

3. Groves of Paulownia Trees

As you follow the forest trail, you will come across groves of paulownia trees alongside the path. It is actually not easy to see large paulownia trees such as these in forests. Usually when these trees are 20~30 years old they are felled due to their wide range of uses. Timber from the paulownia tree has a soft quality, is resistant to both condensation and fire, and is strong while being light in weight. It doesn’t crack even when dried out, is resistant to worms, and has become a highly sought-after material for making furniture or instruments.

4. The Trail Past The Persimmon Field

The trail crosses an expansive persimmon orchard. Thanks to the owner of the land, visitors are permitted to enter and walk through the orchard.

There is even a bench here for you to take a break from walking. There actually aren't many private areas like this along the trail that have been made available for public access.

The Dulle-gil was originally developed as a means to connect neighboring villages, so its trails often run alongside rice paddies, fields, and orchards still in use by villagers. Occasionally unfortunate incidents have been reported where people walking along the trails have picked or damaged agricultural produce without permission while trespassing. In order to prevent these incidents, some residents have erected barbed wire fences to protect their produce, or have contacted the Dulle-gil Management Office requesting that the trails to the villages be made off-limits.

For the beauty and peace of the villages situated along the Dulle-gil, the everyday lives and livelihoods of village residents must be respected.

5. The Faceless Buddha Statue

While walking along the trail, you will come to a small stone Buddha statue where the mountain path starts to ascend just past the adjacent village's reservoir. For a very long time this area was known as 'the village with the Buddha statue', and it's said that there was a large temple here at one time. However, all that remains today is this Buddha statue and the wooden house protecting it.

The eyes, nose and mouth of the stone Buddha statue are barely distinguishable, as they have been touched by many hands over such a long period of time, ultimately leading to this defacement.

Although it is designated as a local cultural heritage, before the Dulle-gil was developed the statue had received no protection whatsoever. Now, a wooden building protects the statue, which was erected during the development of the trail.

Considering the huge area covered by Jirisan Mountain, there were once many unprotected cultural heritages such as this, but as the trail was constructed and assets rediscovered, they were protected by national, city or county provisions.

Nowadays, the Dulle-gil, which connects villages as well as the city to the country, is playing a protective role for these cultural heritages.

6. The Ritual Site in Jirisan Mountain

Stepping onto the new trail beside the asphalt path, an unexpected wide open clearing appears. As it is surrounded by bamboo trees, it can be easily overlooked, so you have to pay attention to your surroundings in order to find it.

Even though the area is abandoned now, this was once an important nationally protected site where rituals were conducted to the mountain deity of Jirisan during the 14th century. The mountain has long been deemed sacred, so rituals were held in places besides this, although this site is said to have been the largest.

In the week-long ritual, leaders and villagers from each region would come to participate in this big event. From the 13th century, similar rituals were enacted in various mountains to bring luck to both the individual and the nation since mountains were held sacred in Korea. But upon the establishment of a new dynasty in the 14th century, the tradition was abandoned in most of the areas.

However, at this spot on Jirisan, the ritual was still performed on the lunar New Year's Day.

Sadly, people were forced to stop holding such rituals under pressure from the Japanese colonial rulers and the area was abandoned and neglected until all that remained was a clearing overgrown with weeds.

7. Gurye Artist Village

As you enter Dangdong Village, you will be amazed by the unusual scenery spread out before you.

Hidden view from other villages in the mountain, creative modern buildings and sculptures stand in a line on the hills surrounding the village. Also known as the Artist Village, it is a gathering place for artists coming down from the city.

Each house is unique in its design. The buildings offer both residential space and work space, so they are both homes and working studios. Around 30 distinguished artists, including painters, architects, photographers and designers came here with their families, and personalized the buildings with their own

particular creative bent. The Artist Village reflects past and future, tradition and present in its unusual, unique scenery.

It's said that this place was attractive to artists due to the beautiful, inspiring scenery which stimulates the creative imagination.

In the long term, there are plans to build an art gallery with the support of the province, which will represent the artistic space of the Dulle-gil.

8. Pine Trees Protecting the Stone Tower

There is a huge pine tree blocking the road. At a glance, it appears to be a single tree, but if examined close enough, you will notice that it is actually ten pine trees entwined together. It's quite an unusual spectacle.

The harmony of these trees suggests a small forest in itself. If you enter the small forest of pine trees, there is a stone tower placed carefully in the middle. The tower is made entirely of stone, and is about the height of a tall person.

Why on earth there is a tower in the middle of pine trees? The tower functions like a raised altar for the rituals of the village. Until the 19th century, many rituals connected with folk beliefs were carried out, designed to ensure that the luck and fortune of the village did not run out. One such ritual was carried out nearby this stone tower.

9. The Herb of Eternal Youth

After walking for a while up a shade-less forest trail, you will finally be greeted with a hill rising up in front of you. As you walk up the hill, you will be able to see the picturesque scenery of the entire Jirisan Mountain area.

Although not part of the Dulle-gil, if you climb for about 20 minutes to the peak of the hill, you will also be able to see a huge ridge. This peak is named Jichobong, in reference to the medicinal herb called *jicho* growing there, which are often used in oriental medicine.

Owing to effects such as reducing fever, removing poison from wounds, and increasing immunity, it is deemed so effective as to be known as the panacea of home remedies.

A despot to rank alongside Emperor Nero of Rome, it's said that Emperor Qin Shi Huang of China dispatched government officials all over Korea and China in order to make the 'elixir of life', and those sent to Jirisan found this plant and offered it to the emperor.

Additionally, *jicho* has been used as a natural dye since long ago, and from the 6th century, the purple garments of top-ranking government officials were dyed using this plant.

10. Gurye Arboretum

If you take an interest in your surroundings as you walk along the forest trail, you'll discover the many varieties wild flowers here. The scenery of the mountain changes according to the season, with over 3,000 varieties of flowers and plants growing wild. Unfortunately, the biodiversity of plants is currently in a state of gradual decline.

The Gurye Arboretum was established in order to conserve the various types of flora of Jirisan Mountain. Alongside this, a wildlife ecology park is also in the process of being developed beyond Jichobong Peak. With these two places, the bio-diverse resources of the mountain will be conserved, making them of great ecological importance.

With the goal of being 'as close to nature as possible', expansion of the site is taking place even as we speak.

11. Village Guardian Tree

There is a huge zelkova tree in the middle of the village, and it's quite out of the ordinary. This is the sacred tree of this village, which acts as the village guardian deity.

The role of the tree is similar to that of the sacred trees referred in Greek mythology which were once thought to contain a spirit protecting the village. Once a year, villagers carry out a ritual in front of the tree to ensure the continued good fortune of the village. As the ceremony is one of the most sacred events in the village, the rule was that it must only be conducted after bathing. It was no exception in the freezing cold; people broke the ice on the water to take a cold bath.

However, with the passing of time, the tradition of the ritual has disappeared, remaining only in the memories of the older villagers. There is now a rest area situated below the tree, which is used as a

communal space for people to meet and socialize.

12. The Village with a Tower

The name of this village means ‘a village with a tower’, but the tower it refers to is not one that would necessarily come to mind.

Entering into the village, you can see an old, lopsided stone tower. It looks so flimsy that visitors are tempted to just dismiss it. However, the tower is an important symbol of the village to the people living here.

Long ago, it was knocked down by thieves, and in order to restore the tower the villagers re-built it with their bare hands, which explains its lop-sided appearance.

Villagers here have long had the tendency to be somewhat conservative, and this was a place well known for its tradition of not letting strangers enter without permission. The development of the Dulle-gil trail here too, was a challenging project that required patience and understanding. But, of course, nowadays the village has become friendly and one that greets tourists passing through with a smile.

13. The Spring Where the Dragon Lives

This area is famous for having the largest, highest quality hot spring in Asia. The water here is said to prevent aging and contain minerals which boost immunity and treat skin diseases. If you have a chance, please try it for yourself.

This place is connected to the legend of a dragon.

A long time ago, an old man appeared to a government official in his dream, asking him to save his three sons. The next morning, the official’s servant went to the valley to catch fish, and he came back with three carp. After looking at them, the official realized that the fish were the three sons that the old man had told him about in his dream. He ordered them to be released. That night, the old man appeared again in his dream, saying that he would grant a wish as a token of gratitude.

Thinking the dream to be strange, the next day the official went down to the spring and said that he wished to see a dragon. At that moment, the tail of a dragon became visible. Excited that his wish had come true, he said that he wished to see the dragon’s body, at which point the dragon revealed its back.

Now greedy, he requested to see the dragon's head. At that moment, the old man warned him that "it can be dangerous to be too greedy". But he ignored the warning and insisted to see the dragon's head. Just as he had wished, the dragon's head shot upwards out of the water, and overwhelmed by its enormous size, the official fell to the ground dead. The moral of the story is that 'excessive greed is the bringer of wrath'.