

Seomjingang Bolle-gil

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1. Into the Past of Korea

This is Seomjingang Train Village, located only a ten-minute walk from Gokseong station, where you can take a ride aboard a rare steam locomotive. The train tracks are lined with movie sets reproducing streetscapes from Korea in the 1960s. If you are interested in Korea's past, you should definitely pay this place a visit.

The ticket booth for admittance to the Train Village is located in the Former Gokseong Station. A well-loved Korean movie, *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War*, viewed by more than ten million people, was filmed here and many of the extras used in the film were local people from Gokseong.

Movies are still filmed here from time to time, so if you are lucky, you might be able to catch a glimpse of a movie being made while you are in town. We hope that you enjoy the train ride and the beautiful scenery along the Seomjingang River.

2. One Thousand and Four, or an Angel

Here, along the beautiful rose-lined path is the One-thousand-and-four Rose Park. The park is home to three million blooms of one thousand and four varieties of roses from all over the world, including England, Germany and France. In Korean, the number 'one thousand four' is pronounced *cheonsa*, which also means "angel".

From May right through the year until the first snow, a vast number of rose varieties bloom in this park. Make sure you identify the nine special roses that are included in the World Federation of Rose Societies' Hall of Fame. The park contains not only many roses, but also the Seomjingang Natural Enemy Insectarium. In front of the hall, the symbol of the insectarium, a giant red beetle, signifies that you have come to the right place! The red beetle is actually used as a form of eco-friendly, biological pest control by many local farmers of this region. Instead of using potentially harmful pesticides to deter insects from their crops, the farmers release beetles, a natural enemy of the insects. It's not hard to see why the beetle was chosen as the symbol of the insectarium.

3. Deogyangseowon, Honoring Education and Virtue

This is Deogyangseowon, a Confucian academy built to commemorate a general whom many people in this area still regard with pride. He played an important role in the establishment of the ancient kingdom of Goryeo during the early 10th century. He was an especially talented strategist and his virtuous conduct has been remembered by generations of people. Did you notice any interesting pine trees on the way here? All the pine tree branches here bend towards the academy as though they are welcoming visitors.

If you visit during the summer, you will see a lotus garden in bloom. Rice wrapped and cooked in the huge lotus leaves is a delicacy. If you walk through the Red Arrow Gate, which is the main gate of the academy, you can look down over the whole of Gokseong, so it might be a pleasant place for you to take a rest.

4. Pedaling along the Riverbank on the Rail Bike

If you visit Korea, you will notice there are rail bikes at various locations throughout the country. The huge attraction of the rail bikes here at Seomjingang River is that you can pedal along by the side of the river.

Rail bikes run along the abandoned train tracks, where trains no longer travel, of course! The two- and four-seater rail bikes must be pedaled in order to move forward, and the activity is popular among couples and families.

There are two types of rail bikes available here. The ‘Circular Rail Bikes’ are located within the Train Village and they follow a short route, while the ‘Seomjingang Rail Bikes’ operate on a longer route which takes approximately 30~40 minutes to complete.

Even though you just have to pedal on the rails, there are a few safety rules to be aware of. Your speed should not exceed 15~20 km/hr and it is recommended that you keep a safe, minimum distance of ten meters away from the bike in front of you. No matter which rail bike you choose to ride, we hope you have a great time!

5. Rope Boat; No Wind or Oars Required

Have you heard of a ‘rope boat’? It’s a type of boat that doesn’t require a mast or poles to cross the river. All you need is a rope! This type of boat is propelled across the river by hauling on a length of rope anchored on the other bank, allowing passengers to enjoy the tranquility of the serene river.

In the olden days, there were many rope boats in operation on the Seomjingang River, but almost all of them have disappeared. The only remaining rope boat is at the Hogok Ferry. When the Seomjingang Dam was opened due to heavy rains in 2011, releasing a huge volume of water, the Hogok Ferry rope boat remained fast, despite even strong bridges being washed away.

The lone remaining rope boat here isn’t just a tourist attraction. There are still students who rely on this method of transportation to cross the river to attend school. This is an unusual attraction, so we hope you have enough time to take a ride on the rope boat.

6. Dugye Village

The name of this village, “Dugye”, indicates a village walled in by mountains on each side with a stream flowing along the valley in between them. The name describes the actual topographical features of the town.

Here, you can take part in a variety of activities. You can put on some comfortable clothes, tie a towel around your forehead and head out to the garden to dig up some vegetables, to make a waterway in the rice paddies, or to feed the cows.

At the entrance to the village, you will see traditional Korean totem poles, carved with comical expressions. Poles similar to these are a common sight in rural towns throughout Korea and they serve as landmarks, signposts, and guardian deities protecting the village.

7. Experiencing Rural Korea First Hand

This village has been designated as a rural experience village. Visitors here are welcome to participate in various rural activities. During spring you can pick wild, edible greens or catch marsh snails by the river. During fall you can pick ripe fruits, make your own tofu from soybeans, or prepare one of Korea’s traditional foods, such as rice cake covered with soybean powder. You can even take home some of grain you have harvested.

There are camping facilities in front of the village and you can also enjoy biking and hiking along the riverbank.

8. The Stars above Seomjingang River

For a good place to wrap up a day exploring the Seomjingang River at Gokseong, we highly recommend the Seomjingang Observatory. Unlike other observatories in Korea, this one is situated on flat land and is very conveniently located right by the river.

You can hear the excited voice of visitors as the domed ceiling of the observatory retracts, exposing the sky. Through the open ceiling, you will see a sky full of bright stars, unlike what you would see over the cities. We recommend that you watch the 30-minute video clip before you view the stars as it will greatly enhance your experience.

The Seomjingang Observatory is composed of a primary observation room equipped with a 600mm reflecting telescope constructed by the Korea Astronomy and Space Science Institute, an auxiliary observation room with various types of telescopes, a celestial projection room with an eight-meter circular dome screen, and an education facility with all sorts of information on display.

9. The Perfect Place for a Short Rest, Gajeong Station

If you take a ride on a steam locomotive at the Train Village where the Seomjingang Bolle-gil starts, then it will make a short stop here at Gajeong Station. The name “Bolle-gil” means that the scenery of this area is worth seeing. The rail bikes that operate from Chimgok Station and travel along the Seomjingang River route will terminate here.

The area is known for some of the most picturesque scenery along the river and there are many pensions located here for the numerous tourists that visit. One notable accommodation option is the Train Pension, which consists of an old train carriage converted into comfortable rooms, but there are many other options available including a log pension.

Once you get off the train at Gajeong Station, you can walk across the pedestrian bridge to Gajeong Village. Vehicles use the concrete bridge underneath the pedestrian bridge and during the warm summer months, it’s not hard to spot tourists enjoying the cool water flowing under the bridge.

10. Sim Cheong, a Daughter Renowned for Her Filial Piety

Sim Cheong Village is a traditional Korean house compound. However, the inside of this traditional house is so modern that staying here wouldn’t pose any discomfort.

Have you heard of Korea’s *pansori* by any chance? *Pansori* is part of Korea’s folk music tradition and consists of a singer and a drummer. To the beat of the drum, the singer entertains by telling a long story using song, dialogue, sounds and bodily gestures.

Here at Gokseong, the *pansori* performance “Song of Sim Cheong” has its roots. The story goes that Sim Cheong, the daughter of a blind man, wanted so badly to cure the blindness of her father that she offered herself as a sacrifice to the sea. In the sea, she receives help from the king of the ocean and not only becomes a beautiful queen, but is also reunited with her father. Overjoyed by the occasion, the blind man opens his eyes and miraculously regains his sight. This story of Sim Cheong, a model of filial piety, is so popular that any Korean person you ask is sure to know it. The original tale, set here in Gokseong, has been passed down through the generations.

As you take a walk around the village, you can stop by various places that feature in Sim Cheong’s story.