

# Namsa Yedamchon Village

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## **1. About the Course**

There are many beautiful villages in Korea, but Namsa Yedamchon Village is one of the most wonderful you can find. It is a charming place featuring many alleyways set between well preserved earth and stone walls, with Korean plum blossoms that bloom in the spring. The walls in this village are different from those of other regions. While most old walls in Korea reach only to head or shoulder height, the walls in this village are much higher. To protect the private lives of the ruling class, these walls were built higher in order that the inner courtyards could not be seen even by those on horseback. The walls surrounding properties that once belonged to the ruling class were mostly tiled earthen walls, unlike the common stone walls of a common house. The tiles capping the walls protected them from collapse when it rained. So, shall we have a look inside the village?

## **2. House of Yi Family, Where the Husband and Wife Trees Embrace**

The first place that we will visit in this village is the House of Yi Family. As you know, Yi is a common surname in Korea, similar to the names Smith or Johnson in the United States. This area is home to a branch of the Yi Clan that has its root here in this village. The house was built in the 1700s. However, within the complex there are also central buildings that were constructed in the 18th and 20th centuries. So, if you have a good look around, you can understand how Korean traditional housing styles changed over time.

At the entrance to the house, you'll see two trees that form an X shape. Though it makes it a bit awkward to pass through the road, this is reflective of the original design. As the two trees appear to be embracing, they are together called the Husband and Wife Trees. It's said that if a couple walks under these trees while holding hands, their love will last for a long time. If you came here with your partner, make sure you hold hands tight as you walk under the branches.

## **3. The Unfulfilled Love Between the Walls**

Now let's go to the House of Choe Family. As you may expect, Choe is also a relatively common surname in Korea. It's said that the alley leading to this house is one of the most beautiful in the village.

The house still contains traditional household items. Seeing these household items can help you imagine scenes from traditional Korean village life. The bolts on the front gate are shaped like a turtle. As the turtle lives for a very long time, the turtle's shape was used to symbolize the desire for a long and healthy life. There is also a very famous tree at this house. Roughly 230 years old, this Korean plum tree is said to

still produce many sweet-smelling plums in the summertime.

The walls here are also famous, thanks to an old story of unfulfilled love. Long ago, the son of the Choe family fell in love with the daughter of the neighboring Jeong family. They would use a break in the wall to meet secretly, but the parents of the Jeong family married their daughter off to another family and sent her to a place far away. The son of the Choe family, heartbroken and alone, spent his days crying under the walls and in the end abandoned his home to live on Jirisan Mountain.

#### **4. A Modern Korean House Made from Strong Zelkova Wood**

This modern Korean house built in the 1920s is an annex to a shrine. Built to honor the spirit of a scholar named Jeong Mong-ju who risked his own life out of loyalty to the king, the shrine was erected by the scholar's descendants. The timber used to build the foundations of this house is high quality zelkova wood. The entrance is also larger than that of other Korean houses. The ceiling is relatively high compared to earlier Korean houses, and there are many storage spaces such as lofts and cupboards. Glass is also used in the building. At the time glass was a new construction material, and its use distinguishes modern Korean houses. Here we can also find a maple tree more than 220 years old. This is a special tree which has leaves that are red in the spring, turn green in the summer only to turn red once again in the fall.

During the rice-growing months of July and August many local villagers ran out of rice and were forced to go without meals, but in those times the Jeong family who lived here would open their stores and share their rice with the local people.

#### **5. The Korean Plum and Persimmon Trees of the House of Ha Family**

This Korean plum tree of the House of Ha Family is one of the most famous trees in Korea. Estimated to be over 670 years old, it was planted by a scholar who lived here long ago. Sad to say, a few years ago the tree itself died after freezing in the winter cold, however thankfully the branches survived and wonderful plum flowers continue to blossom.

There is also another famous tree here, the persimmon tree. An ancestor of the Ha family, who occupied a position similar to prime minister during the Joseon Dynasty, planted this tree when he was only seven years old, so the tree is still protected today.

#### **6. Gwak Jong-seok, Who Feared for His Country Night and Day**

This historical site was built by the descendants of the man named Gwak Jong-seok as a memorial to him and his works. A Confucian scholar and activist for Korean independence during the Japanese Colonial Period, he laid the foundation for the Korean independence struggle. Always fearing for his country, he was imprisoned by the Japanese police for sending “letters appealing for Korean independence”. He passed away due to the after effects of prison hardships at the age of 74. While normally people erect a shrine to honor a deceased person, this place is known instead as a “house of writing”. This is because he was not merely a Confucian scholar but also an author who penned many books on a variety of subjects. This house was the first to be erected to honor his works as a scholar, and later more houses were erected to honor him around the country.

### **7. The Street of Old Walls and Waterwheels**

Do you see the well-planned alleyway leading up to the “house of writing” honoring Gwak Jong-seok? This road, which cuts through the center of the village, is known as “Yedamgil”. The name of this road literally means “old walls”.

The road begins at the waterwheel in front of the village. This waterwheel was built to memorialize the selection of this village as a ‘Countryside Tradition Theme Village’. Made up of shorter sections with individual names, such as the Road of Learning, Road of Self-Reliance, Road of Knowing Life and the Road of the Heart, this road reaches the center of the village. The road is altogether 3.5 kilometers in length, and at a gentle pace it is possible to walk its entirety in around one hour and 30 minutes. As this road was constructed to minimize any disturbance of the natural environment, you will enjoy the beautiful scenery as you walk along.

### **8. Isajae Shrine, where Yi Sun-sin Visited**

Isajae is a living space built to commemorate a famous general of Korean history. Passing through the main gate you have to walk through a private residence to get up to the shrine, but the people who live here pay no mind to passers-by so you can comfortably make your way past.

The shrine is a structure with a simple but profound beauty. The garden, replete with ponds, crepe myrtles and bamboo thickets, has a profound sense of harmony. From the top of the hill, you can take in the entire view of the village at once. It is also said that the famous Korean admiral Yi Sun-sin stopped here to pay his respects to the spirit of his departed mother, when he was following the army to the battlefield at a time when he had no government post. This was learned from records in his diary, and today a memorial

stone commemorating his visit has been erected at the entrance of the complex.

This has been the village of many stories, Namsa Yedamchon Village. This guide is now complete; we wish you happiness for the rest of your travels.