

Title: Learning Korean History through Relics in Seoul

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My heart won't stop beating at the thought that I'll visit South Korea and learn about its culture. Twelve years ago when I was in elementary school, I fell in love with South Korea. The first time I got to take an interest in Korean history was in 2005 after watching the TV drama 'Dae Jang Geum.' That drama was the best Korean historical drama that I had ever seen.

I came to be obsessed with Korean history and in 2006 when I watched the TV drama 'Jumong,' my affection escalated even further. That's when I promised myself that I would visit South Korea someday and personally see for myself the traces of Jumong, who was the founder of Goguryeo Dynasty. I then went to watch other Korean historical dramas, including 'Ballad of Seodong,' 'Queen Seondeok,' 'King Sejong the Great,' 'Yi San,' 'Dong Yi,' 'Hwang Jin-i' and 'Empress Myeongseong.' In the process of watching these dramas, my desire to personally visit Korea and check out cultural relics and artifacts grew stronger.

If I get a chance to visit Korea, I would go to old palaces and any other travel destinations that have a traditional and folksy atmosphere.

My first destination, should I visit South Korea, would be Seoul. Located at the center of the Korean Peninsula, the capital city has a history of 600 years. Gyeongbok Palace, Deoksu Palace and Jongmyo Shrine are all in Seoul and thus you can check out the rise and fall of historical figures and Korea's history.

On my first day in Seoul, I would visit Gyeonghui Palace, which is where ten emperors of Joseon Dynasty took refuge. Then I'd head to Gyeongbok Palace, which is one of Joseon Dynasty's five major palaces and has a history of 500 years. Gyeongbok served as the main palace of Joseon kings and was built by King Taejo. The Geunjeongjeon, or Throne Hall, is the largest wooden structure and most magnificent in Gyeongbok Palace. It's where the king granted audience to his officials and where official events were held. I believe I'll be able to feel the splendid aura of the palace if I get to make a visit.

At the National Folk Museum inside the palace, you can check out exhibitions on traditional Korean life styles. Around 4,000 folk materials are on display in the museum and the museum is the only comprehensive museum of its sort in Korea.

In the afternoon, I'd visit Changdeok Palace and Deoksu Palace. Changdeok was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997 and was one of the locations where 'Dae Jang Geum' was shot. The palace's private garden, Biwon, has the best preserved traditional royal garden style.

In Deoksu Palace, there is the 'Seokjo-jeon, a western-style structure built. The palace also has a wide, ancient-looking garden that adds another peculiar beauty to the palace. In particular, a guard changing ceremony is held every day in front of Deoksu Palace, which is quite an attraction.

In the evening, I would head to Dongdaemun. As the nation's number one treasure, Dongdaemun is a big gate located east of Seoul and takes on the traditional form of structures often seen in the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty. Currently, the area around Dongdaemun is a large shopping district and is one

of Asia's largest wholesale markets. Given that most shops in Dongdaemun include both retail and wholesale stores, many shoppers flock to the area at nighttime. If you decide to lodge at an accommodation near Dongdaemun, you can also easily go to Myeongdong and you'd have easy access to public transportation.

On my second day in Seoul, I'd visit Jongmyo Shrine, which is a shrine dedicated to the memorial services for deceased kings and queens. The shrine's rituals and music are on the UNESCO's World Heritage List. Every May, royal ancestral rituals from the Joseon Dynasty are reenacted in the shrine. You can also check out the shrine's music in concerts at three p.m. every day.

In the afternoon, I'd head to the Bukchon Hanok Village. The village is located among Gyeongbok and Changdeok Palace as well as the Jongmyo Shrine. A number of traditional hanoks are gathered in the village and the streets in the village have retained their original form. The village is an attractive place that has a history of 600 years. In the evening, I would stay at one the hanoks and get to have the traditional hanok experience.

On my third day, I would visit Sungkyunkwan which produced people of talent during the Joseon Dynasty. Glimpses of what the life of students of the traditional educational institution would have been like were portrayed in the TV drama 'Sungkyunkwan Scandal.' The institution's main shrine is dedicated to Confucian sages. It is not open to the public but visitors can see the shrine from outside.

In the afternoon, I would head to N Tower and check out Seoul's view. I would be able to check out another aspect of the capital city. I would be impressed by

how traditional and modern architecture coexist. N Tower is often regarded to be one of the key places to visit in Seoul.

In the evening, I would visit the Korea House where Korea's traditional culture, arts, food and life styles are introduced to foreigners. You can try out Korean dishes while listening to traditional music and watching traditional weddings and folk games. At the theater inside the Korea House, traditional dance performances, concerts and mask plays go on stage. On weekends, visitors can watch traditional weddings.

Korea food is another key attraction. Some of the most representative dishes are hanjeongsik, or full-course Korean meal, naengmyeon, bulgogi, bibimbap served in stone bowl, samgyetang and kimchi.

I believe that by visiting historically significant places I will grow fonder of Korean history and traditional culture as well as discover what makes South Korea so attractive. I also have no doubt that I will forever remember the emotions I'd feel from learning more about Korean history and culture.