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Korea: Asia's best kept secret

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Korea is Asia's best-kept secret—but not for long. In the wake of unrivaled economic growth, most people have chosen to not venture past Seoul, or they bypass the 'Land of the Morning Calm' altogether.

What gets bypassed is a safe and beautiful destination full of warm people, picturesque beaches, delicious food and ample green space. Almost anywhere in the country you are a short walk from a hiking trail, a Korean willing to walk you to the trailhead and an experience you'll never forget.



Korea is full of surprises. Beautiful scenery, friendly people and tasty food.

Recently, Korea has made strides to attract the bicycle tourist. The newly finished 1,200 miles of bike paths are a result of a government project that involved building a canal that would connect Seoul to Busan by water. It earned the former president, Lee Myung Bak the nickname "Bulldozer" and set off many a protest and petitions. The project was initially dreamed up to control flooding, revitalize four of Korea's major rivers and create more recreational areas for residents.

Today, one can bike from the northwest corner of Korea in Incheon to the southeast beach-town of Busan. There are also other trails splintering off from this path along the Han, Geum, Nakdong and Yeongsang rivers and still even more in the works. Currently Koreans are eagerly awaiting the path that hugs the east coast of the country and the path on Korea's "Hawaii"— Jeju Island.

Starting now you can book a bike tour in Korea though BikeToursDirect. The first tours we're offering there are run by BikeOasis, operating out of Seoul, South Korea and headed by Berkeley- and Harvard-educated Beom Seok Choi.

I spent a week cycling, eating and drinking my way through Korea with Beom-Seok and his crew at BikeOasis and had an unbelievable experience. I have lived in Korea for almost 5 years now and these guys were able to make me feel like I was seeing Korea again for the first time.

BikeOasis and Korea's bike paths have left a lasting impression on me — here's why:



Our group sets out from downtown Seoul to begin our week-long bike journey through Korea.

Amazing guides and customer service. Koreans are proud of their country and they generally want to leave you with a positive memory. BikeOasis took excellent care of us. Never did we need a map or phrasebook to navigate the trails or towns. In addition to having our cycling and cultural needs met, we had hot coffee waiting for us most mornings and our own personal chefs at the Korean BBQ restaurants. We even got to see a Psy-like karaoke rendition of "Gangnam Style" by one of our guides.

Car-free dedicated bike paths. In the 200+ miles I pedaled, probably 170 of them were on paths designated for pedestrians and cyclists. When we weren't on bike paths, we were on sidewalks or sleepy country roads. It was a dream come true to forget about the threat of vehicles and concentrate on the scenery.



Korea's bike paths offer a wide range of scenery: beautiful mountains, quiet rivers, breathtaking coast, and bustling farmland.

Beautiful scenery. I don't think anyone outside of Korea is aware of the beauty in the country. There are mountains, rivers, lakes and beaches that are breathtaking. Mist rises off the mountains on humid days, making you feel like you are cycling through an ancient work of art. Korea is green in the spring and summer and has the most vivid fall colors of almost any place I've been. Since the paths follow the major rivers, you're cycling through beautiful valleys almost the whole time. The itinerary we followed will be offered as a special [Fall Foliage Bike Tour](#) this October - you won't want to miss the vibrant autumn colors of the Korean peninsula!

Close to comforts. Though we often felt far removed from civilization, we were never too far from an ice cream stop or shelter. This made it easier on the cyclist to not have to worry about water, food or an emergency situation. We had a group member hurt her wrist late one morning on our trip. Our support vehicle picked her up, took her to the hospital and she was treated in time to meet us for lunch.



Cute coffeeshops can occasionally be found on the bike path.

Cultural experiences. Because these paths are close to towns, but also head out into the countryside, you get a nice variety of Korean culture. In Seoul you can ride through the beehive of activity with the millions of people who live there. In the country you can ride past the garlic and rice fields and wave to the farmers tending their fields. In the small towns you can sing in the karaoke rooms and then chat with locals (many speak English, but when they didn't, our guides usually joined us and translated). You can also stop in and see the sites and taste the local cuisine. Spicy chicken, duck soup, authentic bibimbap, Korean-style vegetables and famous Korean BBQ. It's also a culinary tour through a country as proud of their cuisine as Italy.

New Paths. Most paths are pristine and along them most of the facilities are brand new. Coffee shops, bathrooms, pot-hole free trails. Come on. Now is the time to go before the secret's out.

By BTD staffer Whit Altizer

Check out the [Fall Foliage Bike Tour](#) scheduled for October 2013 that will follow the itinerary Whit's group followed >

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