

# KOREA BIKE TOUR: FOOD & LODGING



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The distinctiveness of Korean cuisine helps to set the country apart from others in Asia. This is not so much the food itself but the way it is prepared, served and even eaten. A week's cycling tour is only enough to give a flavour of this but, like the food and the tour, it is best shared



Our group are fortunate enough to be treated to a wide variety of local and national dishes that are often prepared right in front of you, BBQ style or on a grill. Preparation and presentation are as important as consumption – there is an art to cooking the meat, or using the special meat scissors, that many take pride in, although thankfully the wait staff will step in as needed.

The rituals rival the food, which is both delicious and varied. My personal favourite is bibimbap, in which you mix together a number of ingredients presented to you with rice and a pepper sauce. Some dishes are spicier than others but most palates can be easily catered for. The main course is accompanied by several side dishes, which each come out separately in perfect proportions to share. Of course using your metal chopsticks – no wood, this isn't China or Japan.

No discussion of Korean food is complete without mentioning kimchi, the national dish – or rather dishes, as there are many ways to prepare it (an art in itself that can even involve a dedicated refrigerator!). Kimchi is fermented cabbage but somehow referring to it as such, seems to do it a disservice.

Although kimchi is served everywhere, and at all meals, it feels most at home in more traditional style restaurants where seating is on mats on a wooden floor around a low table. After a few times, this starts to feel more natural and even comfortable – despite the aches and pains of a cyclist's overexercised legs and taut muscles!

Accommodation at a temple stay, hanok (traditional Korean house) or pension is similar – you sleep on a mat or quilt on a wooden floor – just respect local custom and remember to take off your shoes before going indoors! However some modernism has crept into our hanok – several rooms have en suite bathrooms! The 'beds' are more comfortable than you'd imagine but after a long hot day in the saddle, sleep comes pretty easily.



You probably wouldn't want to spend every night on the floor, and we don't, so fortunately there are many excellent hotels that are well priced and in fact usually cheaper than the more traditional accommodation. However neither would you want to spend every night in a hotel which could be anywhere in the world, and which don't, as far as I could see, have any communal areas to socialize with your fellow travelers.

Variety is there in abundance in both food and accommodation and that is only part of why we travel. A week just gives me a taste of Korea but what an experience, and what better way to do it than on a bike!

***[The author was a guest of bikeOasis and the Korean Tourism Organization]***

**By: Bruce Robertson**