Catching the Sunrise in Busan

A Metropolitan City Mixing Grandeur and Simplicity

At dawn, I walked along Busan’s Songjeong Beach. The sound of my feet kicking into sand was drowned out by the crashing of the waves. When the sun took its first peek of the day, everyone stopped in their tracks. The crimson sky tinted the color of the sea and soon filled the eyes of travelers in Busan.

168 Stairs
Neighborhood with a ‘Story’

Choryang-dong, a hillside neighborhood by the sea, exudes a unique atmosphere that cannot be felt in most other cities. Refugees who fled to Busan during the Korean War settled in this area as there was not enough space to accommodate them in the flatter parts of the city. The highlight of Choryang Ibagugil is the 168 Stairs, with a steep incline of 35-45 degrees. There are toy stores to visit and benches to rest on along the way. The stairs gained more popularity after a monorail opened in 2016: you can buy souvenirs such as stickers, maps, and handkerchiefs at the boarding platform. A sense of nostalgia is evident while one peers down from several observatories. Choryang Ibagu-gil, where “ibagu” literally means “story,” received the Good Place Award from the government in 2016.

Yeongdodaegyo Bridge
Korea’s Only Drawbridge

If you’re on the subway passing Nampo Station, you will hear the following announcement: “This station is Nampo Station, home to Korea’s only drawbridge.” While Busan is home to many amazing bridges, Yeongdodaegyo Bridge draws large crowds given its exclusive status. Every day at 2 p.m., people gather and cars stop to watch the drawbridge rise. For a few minutes, one side of the bridge lifts to an angle of 75 degrees. The seagulls painted on the asphalt appear to be soaring into the sky. Yeongdodaegyo Bridge, which has connected the city center to Yeongdogu since 1934, was designated as Busan City Monument No. 56 in 2006. It was closed in 2010 for refitting, but reopened in 2013, and rises up once a day. The lift mechanism is unique, even among drawbridges. As the country’s first and only drawbridge, Yeongdodaegyo Bridge holds great significance in the history of bridges in Korea.

Haemaru
Conquering Dalmaji-gil Road

Dalmaji-gil Road, famous for its splendid ocean views, is a great place for a walk if the mercury isn’t too low. Free parking is available at each observatory. The first observatory boasts a bird’s eye view of Haundae Beach and Gwangandaegyo Bridge. Walking further upslope leads to Haewoljeong Pavilion, which presents a picturesque view of the surroundings. If the sun has not set, head down to the beach and take the nostalgic railroad trail built on old railway tracks. Haemaru, lying toward the far end of Dalmaji-gil Road, is a prime spot for watching the sunrise and sunset. No need to rush to see the sunset as an equally beautiful view awaits when the city lights up.
Haedong Yonggungsa Temple
Burning Incense by the Beach
A stone path leads to a Buddhist temple overlooking the vast ocean, with the air here thick with the scent of pine and burning incense. Among temples in Busan, Yonggungsa Temple is the place to watch the earliest sunrise. Wait about two hours after the sunrise, however, to see just how photogenic the temple gets. Among the many statues, the most famous is the 10-meter Haesu Gwaneum Daebul (Seawater Great Goddess Buddha). The statue’s nose and belly have worn down over time because of the myth that a woman who touches both parts will bear a son. The altar is covered with candles each lit with its own hopes and wishes; Koreans often go there to pray for good grades for their children and health and prosperity for their families. Take an early morning walk and then stop for snacks at the popular fishcake stall near the entrance.

Oryukdo Island
Symbol of Busan Port
Oryukdo Island is located near the mouth of Busan Port, the largest port in Korea. “Oryukdo” literally means “five six island,” derived from how five or six islands appear depending on the tide. You can see the islands from shore, but a boat ride that takes you up close will leave you more impressed. Each island boasts majestic qualities like steep cliffs, wave-cut platforms, sea caves of various shapes and sizes, plants and animals largely untouched by humans, and of course, the surrounding blue waters. Many years ago, the area was eroded by waves and eventually separated from the mainland, resulting in the island. Oryukdo Lighthouse, which was first lit in 1937, continues to guide vessels at night. Thanks to advanced information and communications technologies, the lighthouse was fully automated in late 2018.

The Bay 101
Urban Nightscape for Romantics
Located at the entrance of Dongbaekseom Island, The Bay 101 faces Marine City, filled with skyscrapers as high as 80 stories. It is quiet by day, but bustles with activity at night. The Bay 101 attracts hordes of visitors thanks to its beautiful view of Marine City and the night lights reflecting off the water. Despite the cold weather, the deck is usually crowded with photography enthusiasts, couples and families. Like a mirror on a rainy day, the deck gives visitors the illusion of walking on water similar to Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia. A rainy day in Busan isn’t complete without a visit to The Bay 101. Enjoy delicious food and unique drinks there, and on warmer days, the outdoor terrace is the perfect spot to relax with loved ones.

Busan Tower
A Pleasant Walk Leading to Meokja Golmok Alley
Busan Tower, built in Yongdusan Park in 1973, is a symbol of Busan. The observatory, at a height of 120 meters, offers a panoramic view of attractions such as the bridges Yeongdodaegyo, Busandaegyo and Namhandaegyo, Busan Port, Jagalchi Market and Oryukdo Island. On a clear day, you can see as far out as Daemado Island. Busan Port and the surrounding areas are especially breathtaking at night. The two-floor observatory is said to have been modeled after the canopy of Dabotap Pagoda at Bulguksa Temple in Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province. To catch the main attractions while getting a taste of street food, begin at Yeongdodaegyo Bridge, head up Busan Tower and then drop by Meokja Golmok (Let’s Eat Alley) or Bupyeong Market. The tower is more colorful at night and worth a look even at a distance. The white body of the tower becomes adorned by media facades, and the photos you take will seem like they were shot in completely different places.