Spotlight on Seorae Village

Move over Itaewon. Seorae Village is the place to go for international eats and more.

I was standing in line the other day at the Paris Croissant bakery in Seorae Village when I noticed the foreigner in front of me having trouble communicating with the cashier.

“Do you need help?” I asked in English. He looked at me blankly and muttered in French.

That is how French Seorae Village is.

Often called “Montmartre,” after the hilly French district, or “Petite France,” Seorae Village is located in Seoul’s Banpo 4-dong, about a 15-minute walk from the Express Bus Terminal. It is named after a stream in front of the village and best known for a 300-meter stretch lined with cafes, restaurants, wine bars, cute little shops and alley upon alley of more cafes, restaurants, wine bars and little shops.

Surrounding the village is a hilly and high-end residential area of villas, houses and apartments whose inhabitants include about 800 French people, or half the French population of Korea.

The origins of Seorae Village date back to the mid-1980s, when the Lycee Francais de Seoul, the only French international school in the city, moved there from Hannam-dong. With the movement of French people, many of them employees of French companies in Korea, came the sprouting of bakeries, restaurants and more.

Today Seorae Village isn’t just French. With Italian eateries, Japanese izakayas, Chinese restaurants, Korean restaurants and one of the most popular burger joints in Seoul, the village is a close second to Itaewon in international fare.

So what do people do there? They eat and drink, especially when they’re in the mood for brunch or wine. They shop for cheese, plants and vintage accessories. They stroll at the lovely Montmartre Park, take in some jazz at periodically held music festivals and participate in programs organized by the Seorae Global Village Center, like art classes and themed markets.

Most commonly, they pass the hours in open-air cafes, taking in the sun, the cars inching their way down the street and the occasional Frenchman walking home with a baguette sticking out of his bag.

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