Slow & Happy in Cheongsando

Asia’s first Cittaslow draws tourists with its natural beauty

Cheongsan Island, officially known as Cheongsando, is located in Wando County, at the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. Part of the Dadohae Marine National Park, the 33.3 km² island was designated Asia’s first “slow city” in December of 2007 and is now a popular destination for local and foreign tourists. As its name implies, Cheongsando, which means “blue mountain island,” is dotted with low-rising mountains. It may not look very different from Korea’s numerous other islands, but stay long enough, and you can see the attractions of a “slow city” island.

A “slow city,” or Cittaslow, refers to local communities that pursue a slow but happy way of life by harmonizing the modern and the traditional, preserving nature, traditional food and culture and seeking sustainable development. Cheongsan Island is the first Cittaslow in Asia and was designated by the Italy-based Cittaslow Movement.

The area is best known as the backdrop of the Korean movie “Seopyeonje,” but the pristine and traditional local way of life and the natural environment are the island’s greatest assets. Cheongsan Island is also filled with unique charms that are just waiting to be discovered; every road, mountain and beach has its own beauty and story.

As for “Seopyeonje,” it was filmed at the island’s center, close to Docheong pier and an area with a great view. Not surprisingly, visitors flock there every weekend.

To get a panoramic view of the island, climb your way up to Beombawi, or Tiger Rocks, which sits on a cliff overlooking the ocean 2.5 km from Cheonggyeri village.

It’s a hard climb, but the view of the ocean and the cliffs of Maebong Mountain are definitely worth it.

The island’s terrain and landscape make it an ideal place to hike, and it takes more than a day to walk around the island. The hiking trails may get bumpy along the way, but the slow walk reveals the island’s countless charms.

A marine conservation area

Cheongsan Island also boasts a rich cultural heritage and diverse fish resources. Consistent efforts to preserve the marine ecosystem and marine biodiversity helped maintain the pristine environment. With endangered marine species, including various soft corals, inhabiting the island’s waters, Cheongsan Island was designated a marine conservation area in 2013.