Eat, Visit, Enjoy

Stunning Seoraksan

Covered in foliage or snow, Seoraksan offers a scenic haven for those wanting to commune with nature.

Soaring above Korea’s picturesque east coast near the delightful seaside town of Sokcho are the majestic peaks of Seoraksan (Seorak Mountain).

With dozens of beautiful walking trails that can take you anywhere from an hour to 16 to trek, Seoraksan is perfect for both beginners and the most avid hikers.

While stunning year round, Seoraksan is most dramatic in the late fall, when the foliage is more colorful than the clothes adorning Korea’s beloved ajummas (middle-aged women) and the sky is as clear as the dozens of streams that meander through the mountain’s sweeping valleys. On fall hikes, it is an unwritten rule that all hikers be armed with a camera that can do the colors justice and enough kimbab (rice rolls) to keep you fueled.

After the first winter snows begin to fall, the crowds of hikers dissipate, but the mountain’s magnificence remains. Deep snow and icy winds certainly make the hike more difficult, but the reward for effort is significant, with the snowcapped peaks resembling the setting of a fantasy movie. Naturally, the hike takes a little longer in the winter, so it is recommended that longer hikes be completed over several days. The national park is dotted with heated public shelters so you can get a good night’s rest before continuing on your way in the morning. And in true Korean form, the convenient perks don’t stop there. Get to the peak and recharge your weary legs with coffee. Korean mountains have even been known to offer free Wi-Fi at the summit.

If mountain climbing simply isn’t your thing, then the sprawling valleys below still have much to offer. Alongside unspoiled streams is an abundance of local creatures. The Asian Black Bear has been known to call Seoraksan home, but do not fear, you are far more likely to run into the local chipmunks and squirrels who have become very friendly with passing tourists. If you follow one of these cute critters long enough, you are bound to come across Sinheungsa (Sinheung Temple) or one of the area’s dozens of waterfalls.

Sinheungsa was originally constructed about 1,400 years ago, but has been destroyed and reconstructed many times. Near the entrance to the temple, a giant Buddha statue dominates the landscape. Walk behind the statue and into a small door along a long stone wall and be transported back 1,000 years. The colors of the temple accentuate the surrounding landscape, making a visit to Sinheungsa a must.

Getting there

You can reach Seoraksan from the city of Sokcho via local buses (numbers 7 or 1 depart every 15 minutes from the Sokcho Intercity / Express Bus Terminals) and taxis. If you’re driving, you can park near the mountain entrance for a small fee. Also, Seoraksan’s well-trodden paths are inundated with little stores selling everything you could possibly need for your hike at very reasonable prices. Whether you’ve forgotten your hiking shoes or backscratcher, you are bound to find a little store that will help you out.

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