Around the World – in Ansan

Home to a Multicultural Village Special Zone, Ansan offers diverse experiences and flavors

Think ‘foreign community’ and you probably land mentally in Itaewon, an area in Korea popular among foreigners. But the city of Ansan, in Gyeonggi Province, is home to more foreigners in Korea than any other city. In fact, one part of Ansan was officially designated a special multicultural zone in 2009. Here, you can see more foreigners than Koreans – and hear more foreign languages than Korean, too.

So how did this come to be? Well the influx of foreigners started in the late 1970s, when the Korean government established the Banwol Industrial Complex in Ansan to decentralize business. Small- and medium-sized businesses as well as factories were moved to the complex, which attracted foreign laborers. They rose rapidly in number and soon replaced Korean laborers, who preferred to avoid certain factory jobs. Today, Ansan has a foreign population of 70,000 and is called the “village without borders.”

Following the designation of the Multicultural Village Special Zone about six years ago, things began to change. Ansan welcomed a community service center for foreigners, street signs translated into English and Chinese and street decorations including a sign with the names of countries and arrows pointing in their direction.

A main attraction of the multicultural zone is the Ansan Multicultural Public Relations Learning Center, which showcases the culture and traditions of many countries. On exhibit are musical instruments, currencies, masks, a “Singing Bowl” from Nepal, a metal bowl with a wooden stick that helps with meditation and healing and more. The two-story facility also offers a multinational play experience program three times a day through which you can try traditional musical instruments, dresses and dances firsthand.

Of course, another popular part of the zone is the Multicultural Food Street, which is near Exit 2 of Ansan Station. Like other marketplaces in Korea, it is lined with vendors and stores. Unlike in other marketplaces, you can buy tropical fruits and international food ingredients hard to come by in Korea. Oh, and you can’t really bargain there, as most vendors barely speak Korean. Here, body language is universal.

As for the restaurants – you can choose from 170 that represent 15 countries. Chinese restaurants take the lead in number, followed by Vietnam, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nepal and Uzbekistan. One Uzbek restaurant offers favorites from the motherland including black tea, a stuffed bread called samsa, vegetable noodle soup and skewered mutton. A beloved Thai restaurant in the neighborhood is known for a shrimp soup called tom-yum-goong, a stir-fried rice noodle dish called pad thai, a green papaya salad and more.

So the next time you’re in the mood for an international experience, look no further than Ansan, a global city in every sense of the word.

For more information
Contact the Ansan Migrant Community Service Center at 031-481-3301.
To learn more about the Ansan Multicultural Public Relations Learning Center, call 031-481-3732.

Source: Korea Tourism Organization
http://english.visitkorea.or.kr