

Aewol-eup Town, Jeju Island

For Koreans, Jeju Island is great for leisure, rest or even school and business trips. Many of the nation's folk songs have lyrics on the island's natural charms. Loved both by Korean and foreign visitors, Jeju is both exotic and authentically Korean.

Because of its many activities and sights, several days are needed to fully experience the island. One recommended area to spend the end of the year is Aewol-eup Town on the island's western end.

Rich Historical Background

Whether one arrives on the island by air or sea, Yongduam Rock is close by. Because of its proximity to either the Jeju airport or seaport, the island landmark is frequented by visitors at either the start or end of their trips.

The rock's name is derived from the Korean word for "dragon," as it resembles a dragon's head. A folktale says a serpent long ago lived in the depths of waters around Yongdam-dong and wished to become a dragon for more than a millennium. Despite the elapsed time, the creature needed a jade bead to turn into a proper dragon. Unable to get its hands on jade, it was caught stealing one from a guardian spirit on the mountain (san-shin-ryeong). The spirit shot the serpent, whose body plunged into the ocean waters and got stuck in the form of a rock with its head poking out from the water's surface. The mythical tale adds a touch of mystique to the still structure of Yongduam in showing the appearance of a roaring serpent bristling in rage and despair.

Yongyeon Pond

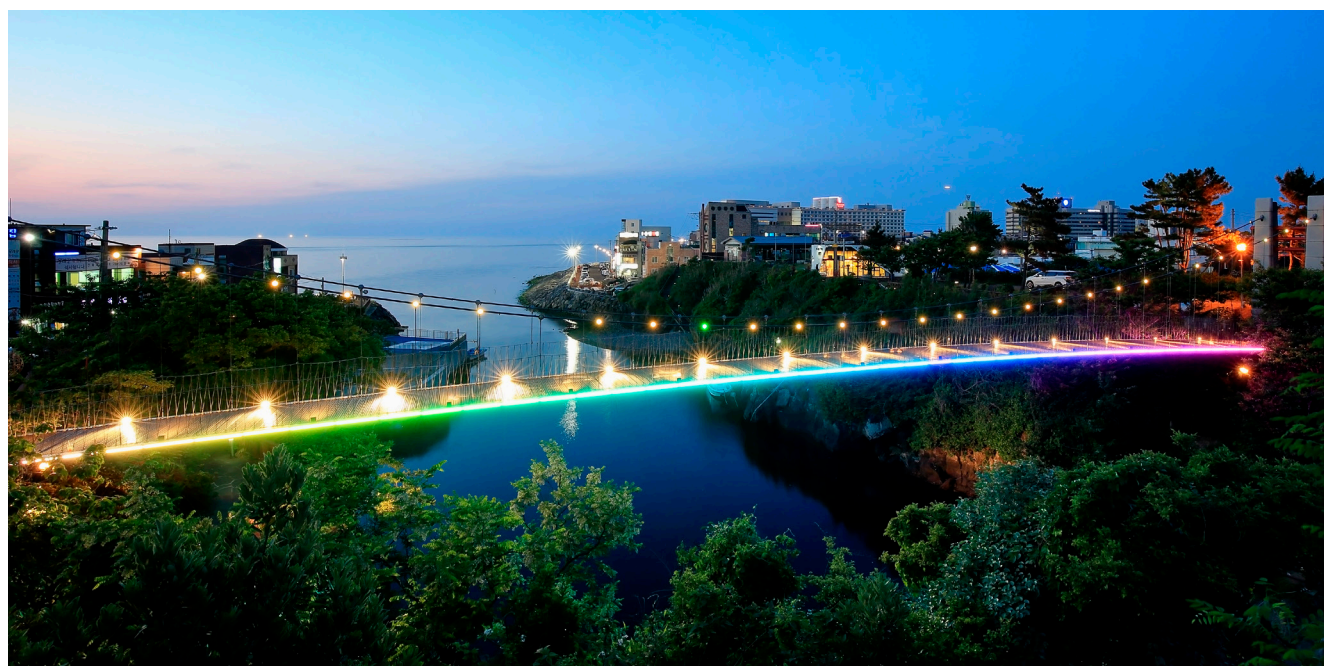
Past the rock's seaside walkway and 200 m eastward is Yongyeon (Dragon) Pond and Yongyeon Cloud Bridge. Named for its association with the legend of the

dragon's birthplace and playground, the pond forms the intersectional point of freshwater and saltwater. A rugged precipice 8 m tall is connected to the pond by the bridge. The hexagonal gazebo Yongyeon Temple flanks the bridge, where cultural exchanges are said to have flourished. The pond's waters are accented by fine hues of bluish turquoise, and the classic evergreen tree Sangnoksu further enhances the scenery.

Due to Jeju being an island and the lack of transportation infrastructure back in the era of the Joseon Dynasty, nobles were often exiled to this region.

A Joseon-era map shows the coastline in the Yongdam-dong neighborhood. One scene on the map features a bluish pond and a dragon-headed boulder, with the pond at its center and Yongduam Rock on the right-hand side. This document indicates how well-known and familiar both landmarks were to residents in ancient times.

The gradient-infused tint of the pond's stream and Sangnoksu's sheer greenery present a stunning sight for passersby and visitors. To preserve the spirit of Jeju's ancestors, Yongyeon On-board Musical Concert is held every summer. The bridge, especially when illuminated during radiant nighttime festivities, gives one the feeling of being a Joseon-era seonbi (noble or scholar) indulging in leisurely downtime.



Hallim Park

Hallimpark hosts a variety of flower-themed festivals year-round, in addition to greenery-infused facilities like Palm Tree Café and Dolhareubang Restaurant. Though widely divergent in their menu offerings, both the café and restaurant offer local delicacies (exotic palm tree and cacti extracts, tropical fruits, handmade chocolates at the café and Jeju pork and mackerel, as well as traditional local foods like pheasant broth noodles.



Sabyeol Oreum Volcanic Cone

Oreum is a colloquial Jeju term for volcanic cones or gradual slopes, two topographical features the island has plenty of. Formed by volcanic activity, these cones played an essential role in Jeju life as a key natural resource. Among Barimae, Nooeun and Geum oreum that densely fill the mountainous topography of western Jeju, Sabyeol Oreum is one of the best of its kind.

Sabyeol's name is derived from its lonesome stature resembling that of a saetbyeol (morning star). Being

near St. Isidore Ranch and its famed lone wangdda (out-cast) tree, the oreum now draws many visitors due to its accessibility. It takes around 30 minutes to climb to the top, which offers a view of western Jeju, beautiful beaches and Biyangdo Island. By dusk, the picturesque sunset draws tourists and locals alike.

A famous gala is held here around year's end, though not this year because of COVID-19. The Jeju Fire Festival, which has had 23 editions, signals the passing of the old year and preparation for the new. The fire comes from the agricultural custom of burning old grass to exterminate pests and form new plantations, an activity that occurred in late winter. The three-day event offers delectable snacks and meals throughout the day and impressive fire spectacles at night.

Handam Beach

This beach sports a walkway spanning the island's northwestern coastline to Gwakji Gwamul Beach. As part of the construction and maintenance by the Jeju provincial government, authorities placed the walkway in a way to retain the natural geological bends and shapes. This created a wonderful view of the island's westernmost coastline covering 1.2 km in length.

Welcoming visitors on the walkway are rocks shaped like a whale, cat, hippopotamus or other animals, with boulders and sculpted rocks adding to the view. In addition, restaurants and cafes add a nice touch to the scenery.

Though 2020 has been far from great, one can serenely collect his or her thoughts and indulge in calm reflection at Handam Beach.

Source: "Seeing Off 2020", KOREA (December 2020), Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS)