Robert Koehler

A native of Long Island, New York, Robert Koehler has lived in Korea since 1997. He works for Seoul-based publishing company Seoul Selection, where, among other things, he serves as editor-in-chief of the monthly travel magazine SEOUL. In addition to this guide book, he authored Seoul Selection Guides: SEOUL and co-authored the walking tour guide Seoul’s Historic Walks. Robert currently lives in Seoul’s Itaewon neighborhood with his wife Solongo. When he’s not writing or blogging (www.rjkoehler.com), he can often be found traveling about the Korean countryside photographing historic architecture.

With 5,000 years of history and culture packed into one very tight package, Korea is a fascinating travel destination that both companies and contracts favorably with its larger neighbors. From the pulsating streets of Seoul to the peaceful temples and gardens of the Korean countryside, Korea is a study in contrasts—steps forward are a study in contrasts—one foot in the future, the other firmly rooted in one of the world’s richest cultural heritages.

• Comprehensive and detailed descriptions of one of Asia’s most fascinating countries
• Beautiful photos bring alive Korea’s scenic charms
• Helpful tips ensure you make the most of your visit
• Detailed maps and transportation information help you get where you want to go
• History and culture notes provide background information and stories to enrich your traveling experience
• Information on “Off the Beaten Track” destinations for the adventurous traveler

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2. GYEONGJU (See p531)
   The Silla Kingdom’s ancient capital is an outdoor museum.

3. SUWON HWASEONG FORTRESS (See p202)
   Suwon’s old city walls utilize modern construction techniques and represent the height of the Joseon Renaissance.

4. GONGJU & BUYEO (See p359, 369)
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Korea’s biggest “treaty port” is home to a fascinating and exotic architectural heritage.

6 **DMZ** (See p192)
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Recently designated a wonder of nature, the volcanic island of Jejudo is a nature lover’s paradise.

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The craggy peaks of Mt. Seoraksan present Korea’s most dramatic mountain scenery, especially in autumn.

7 **DADOHAE MARITIME NATIONAL PARK** (See p483)
The countless islands of this park off Korea’s southwest coast require weeks to explore fully.

8 **SUNCHEONMAN BAY** (See p496)
The sunsets over this beautiful stretch of coastal wetland are well worth the visit.
The Korea Experience

(Almost) all trips to Korea begin with Seoul (p43), and it’s worth spending a couple of days in the dynamic political, cultural and economic heart of the country, exploring its historic palaces, taking in the sights, enjoying the nightlife and gaining an appreciation for the dramatic contrast between old and new of today’s Korea.

While in Seoul, be sure to take a day trip to the surreal “truce village” of Panmunjom at the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the dividing line between North and South Korea and the world’s last remaining Cold War frontier. Time permitting, make another day trip to the historic walled city of Suwon, whose 18th century fortifications mark the pinnacle of Joseon Dynasty science and engineering.

When you’re done with the Seoul area, take the scenic train trip to the East Sea town of Gangneung, passing through the rugged mountains of central Korea. From Gangneung, take a bus north to the port of Sokcho, the gateway to Seoraksan National Park, Korea’s most spectacular mountain park. It’s worth spending a day or two here exploring this picturesque region.

From Sokcho, take a bus down Korea’s beautiful East Sea coast to Gyeongju, the ancient capital of the Silla Dynasty, when classical Korean civilization reached its height. You could spend weeks here exploring its Buddhist temples, gardens and ruins, but plan on at least two days.

After Gyeongju, take the short bus ride to Busan, Korea’s second largest city and its busiest port. Busan’s dramatic location, wedged between the mountains and the sea, results in spectacular scenery, especially at night. A couple of days here should be enough to absorb the city’s distinctive sights, sounds and aromas.

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The Korea Experience
From Busan, either fly or take a ferry to the charming volcanic island of Jejudo, a land of endless natural beauty and a fascinating culture distinct from that of the mainland. End your trip to Korea relaxing on Jejudo’s beaches, climbing Mt. Hallasan or exploring one of the island’s many scenic coastal hiking paths.

Urban Korea

While in Seoul, wander around the neighborhoods of Myeong-dong, Dongdaemun, Hongdae and Gangnam, all of which pulsate with non-stop energy.

From Seoul, take the commuter train to the historic port city of Incheon, where you can sample the exotic charm of the old waterfront and Korea’s oldest Chinatown. To see the Korea of the future, also visit Incheon’s gleaming Songdo New City, an ambitious experiment in 21st century urban planning.

Daejeon, a high-tech city that is Korea’s answer to Silicon Valley. Be sure to visit Expo Park while you’re there. From Daejeon, take the express train to Gwangju, southwest Korea’s largest city, a growing cultural hub and home to some of Korea’s finest cuisine. Explore the restaurants and galleries but it’s also worth hiking Mt. Mudeungsan, Gwangju’s guardian mountain.

From Gwangju, take an express bus to Daegu, a vibrant commercial and industrial city in southeast Korea. The city’s Traditional Medicine Market and old missionary sites are fascinating, and thrill-seekers won’t want to miss 83 Tower’s SkyJump.

From Daegu, it’s just a short bus or train ride to the port of Busan, Korea’s second largest city. Soak up its bustling, sometimes chaotic and oddly cosmopolitan charms.