



KOREA
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5 Reasons to Explore Blue House and Surrounds

Cheong Wa Dae, or “The Blue House,” served as South Korea’s presidential residence and headquarters for 74 years. When the newly elected president relocated offices in May 2022, it was opened to the public. Since then, it has gradually been developed into a museum and cultural space.

For visitors, Cheong Wa Dae’s location in the centre of old Seoul also has plenty to offer, from hiking, galleries, museums, cafe streets, markets and palaces. Here are five travel themes that the Blue House and the surrounds offer.



Cheong Wa Dae (Blue House)

1. History & tradition

Hanok is a traditional Korean house made from wood, brick and stone. Bukchon Hanok Village is known for its concentration of these buildings. The buildings here are not facades. Aside from the few Hanoks converted to accommodations or tea houses, most are real houses where people reside.



Bukchon Hanok Village

After exploring Bukchon, check out the nearby National Folk Museum of Korea. The exhibition presents everyday life in Korea from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.



National Folk Museum of Korea

2. **Night scenery**

For a limited time in Spring and Autumn, two of Seoul's palaces will open for special night events - Gyeongbokgung Palace Starlight Tour and Changdeokgung Palace Moonlight Tour. The centuries-old palace buildings and gardens, once home to Joseon Dynasty kings and queens, are lit up, creating an atmosphere not felt during a daytime visit. Visitors can stroll the palace grounds and enjoy night markets and performances.

Due to the popularity of these special events, there is a daily capped capacity to ensure it isn't overcrowded. As eager locals often snap up tickets, a similar experience is offered at nearby Deoksugung Palace, open year-round until 9 pm with no pre-booking necessary.



Moonlight Tour of Changdeokgung Palace

3.

Gourmet

The old streets and narrow alleyways surrounding Cheong Wa Dae are home to restaurants and traditional markets that have been operating for decades. Seochon Sejong Village has a huge selection of eateries, from pubs to street food vendors to authentic local restaurants. It's a must-visit for a foodie tour of Seoul.



Seochon Village

Not far away is Tongin Market, a traditional market selling produce and small goods, but best known for its Dosirak (Lunchbox) Cafe. The cafe operates on a unique premise: you exchange your money for a plastic dosirak lunchbox and some traditional Korean coins. You can then use these coins to buy food from a wide variety of vendors in the market, filling up your dosirak container with your choices. You can purchase everything from japchae (glass noodle stir fry) to hobak jjuk (pumpkin rice porridge).



Tongin Market

Also nearby is the Samcheong-dong Cafe Street. This charming, green neighbourhood is home to some of Seoul's best coffee shops, plus boutique shops galore. The area is frequently visited by Korean couples.



Samcheong-dong Street

4. Galleries and exhibitions

A must-visit site for art lovers in Seoul is The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Korea's leading modern and contemporary art space.



The National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art

A lesser-known spot is the Zaha Museum. Located atop a hill in the nearby suburb of Buam-dong, the museum has great city views and offers a chance to explore works by young artists.



Zaha Museum

Walks

Newly refurbished Gwanghwamun Square reopened in 2022. The new space in the center of Seoul's administrative district was once between two busy roads. The renovation has seen a significant reduction of the road lanes. It has been transformed into a space for events and greenery. Check out the statue of King Sejong, who is renowned for inventing the Korean alphabet (Hangeul).



Gwanghwamun Square

For a different perspective of the area, you can hike up Bugaksan Mountain, which overlooks Cheong Wa Dae and Gyeongbokgung Palace. The mountain has sections of trail that were recently opened after decades of closure due to previous North Korea conflict.



Bugaksan Mountain