

# Free Things to do in Seoul

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We all know vacations are brilliant – exploring new cities, trying new foods and having fun with the family are all things that create lasting, happy memories, and make us look forward to the next one. But we also know that vacations can be expensive, and if we're not careful that next one might be a while away! So it's always a good idea to research any new city and find out what activities and places are free for visitors – there are always some, and fortunately, Seoul has plenty! Our list of the best free things to do in Seoul includes:

- Palaces
- Traditional villages
- Fortress Walls
- War Memorial of Korea
- Chong Wa Dae
- Markets
- National Museum of Korea
- National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

## Palaces

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For a complete package of history, culture, architecture and splendid views, you can't go past Seoul's five major palaces, all built by the same ruling dynasty in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most people will head to Gyeongbokgung, the largest and most popular, which houses the Palace Museum and National Folk Museum as well as having some glorious gardens, ponds and pavilions to explore. The nearby [Changdeok Palace](#) has several

acres of grounds and is also a very popular tourist spot. Both are free to enter and explore, and are terrific places to rent a traditional hanbok because there are splendid backgrounds for photographs everywhere you look.

## Traditional hanok villages

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The palaces may give you a glimpse into Korean royal life and the whims of Joseon rulers, but if you want to see how regular Koreans have always lived then make sure you head for one of Seoul's picturesque hanok villages. A hanok is a traditional Korean house, made from natural elements such as wood, stone, clay and thatch, with pretty architectural details like carved pillars and curved roofs. There are several of these villages around the city, but one of the best to wander around is Bukchon Village, set on a hill between the two palaces. There's also Insadong Village right in the center of the city, where you'll find homes intermixed with traditional craft shops, hanbok retailers and cozy tea houses.

## Fortress Walls

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Circling the city and dotted at eight points with imposing and ornate gates are Seoul's ancient city walls, built in 1396 to protect its citizens from invasion and attack. Nowadays, they form a popular hiking route around the city, and the gates have been restored and are open for people to come and go freely – some even have access to the top, for those who want to climb up for a view. There are around eleven and a half miles in total, but you can just hike one section if you prefer – to the north, the walls snake through the woods and peaks of the Bukhansan Mountain National Park, and to the east they meet Mount Namsan, where you'll find the [N Seoul Tower](#).

## War Memorial of Korea

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If you're thinking of taking a tour to the Demilitarized Zone (and even if you're not) be sure to first visit the War Memorial of Korea on the northern banks of the Han River. Here you'll find an interesting and poignant exhibition on the Korean conflict, as well as information on the various periods of occupation throughout the country's history. For those who are into their machines and modes of transport there's an extensive outdoor collection of tanks and aircraft, as well as a fascinating and well-preserved example of a 16<sup>th</sup> century turtle warship.

## Cheong Wa Dae

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If you're ready to move on from monarchy and village life to modern Korean politics, you can join a tour of the former presidential residence, Cheong Wa Dae. Also known as the 'blue house' because of its glittering, blue-tiled roof, the South Korean presidential complex was retired in 2022 and opened to the public. Access is only permissible as part of a pre-booked tour, but they're free and run most days. During the tour, you'll get to see the old presidential residence as well as the grounds and gardens, which includes the Nokjiwon Garden, full of commemorative plants, and the Chilgung Shrine, dedicated to the mothers of past Joseon Kings.

## Markets

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If you want to throw yourself into the buzzing culture and day-to-day life of the Korean capital, then nothing beats exploring one of the city's lively street markets. Depending on what day it is, you're bound to find one somewhere, even in the middle of the night! The Dongdaemun Night Market, open till 3AM, is one of the best if you're after practical goods or souvenirs – on the other hand, if you're looking for somewhere to stroll along and just take in the atmosphere, then you can't go past the riverside markets in the Yeouido Han River Park. Depending on the weather, grab some steamed dumplings or an ice-cold bingsu and be entertained by musicians and street performers from all over the world!

## **National Museum of Korea**

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Not far from the War Memorial of Korea is the National Museum, which covers Korean art, religion and natural history from the paleolithic to the modern eras. Over several levels you'll find paintings, prehistoric tools, ceremonial artifacts and everything in between, and when you need a break you can relax in the constantly-evolving museum garden. There's a handy audio guide and several interactive exhibits, which makes this a good place to get an overview of Korean history – and a place to escape to if the weather outside is leaving anything to be desired!

## National Museum of Korean Contemporary History

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Picking up in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the National Museum of Korea leaves off, the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History explores the evolution of Korean life in the past few decades. There's a worthwhile exhibition on the Korean War, important political artifacts (such as the 1919 Korean Declaration of Independence) and an eye roll-inducing collection of old and obsolete mobile phones and video players. Young and old will find value here, and it's easy to get to, being just down the road from the Gyeongbokgung Palace.

## Feel free with Go City

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