

TRAVEL



J E J U I S L A N D

A K O R E A N C U L I N A R Y

A D V E N T U R E

From hand-caught shellfish to Gogigui Korean barbecue, Jeju Island off the coast of South Korea offers a wealth of delicious dining options amid breathtaking scenery

BY SIMON HARRINGTON



As undiscovered dining destinations go, you'll be hard-pushed to find a locale more impressive than Jeju Island. Located a one-hour flight south of mainland South Korea, this standalone province is famed throughout Asia for its pristine beaches, towering volcanic cones and World Heritage status that attract visitors from neighbouring Japan, China and Taiwan in their droves during the warm summer months. But the island's appeal stretches far beyond its winding coastline and towering mountains. To truly appreciate this picturesque and historic island, there's only one place to start, and that's with its food.

Varied, innovative and delicious, the culinary options available within the Jeju Province are characterised by the history and geography of the island itself. Traditional dishes, ranging from hand-caught saengseonhoe (raw fish) and spicy kimchi (cabbage) to chimek (fried chicken) and ha-jangguk (Korean soup), are inspired by the island's unique combination of fishing, farming and mountain villages, each of which contribute ingredients and recipes to the nation's dining heritage. This melting pot of culinary cultures is best experienced in the capital, Jeju City. A late-evening stroll down Shinjeju Baozen Street reveals a world of restaurants and street stalls, each tempting you with a dramatic foodie adventure.

2. SAENGSEONHOE

Jeju Island has an abundance of saengseonhoe restaurants with raw fish menus. These eateries are characterised by the giant street-side fish tanks out front, which store the seafood you're about to enjoy. In these restaurants, you'll find large groups sharing heaped platters of jarihoe (raw damselfish), jarimulhoe (raw sea bream), octopus, sea slug and cuttlefish. If you're feeling adventurous, try a South Korean delicacy: moving squid tentacles.



(2)



(1)

1. HAENYEO

Visit any coastal market, rocky enclave or no-frills seafront diner on Jeju and you're likely to stumble across the island's famous haenyeo. Literally translated as "sea women", the exclusively female profession of free diving for seafood has been a Jeju tradition since the 17th century. These resolute and iron-willed ladies – most of whom are over 50 years old – regularly dive down to 30 metres and can hold their breath for as long as three minutes. A typical harvest comprises octopus, abalone, sea urchins, oysters and conch; all served raw on the day of the catch.



(3)

3. CHIMEK

Combining the words "chicken" and "maekju" (the Korean word for "beer"), chimek restaurants are one of South Korea and Jeju Island's more recent culinary innovations, serving deep-fried chicken coated in a sweet or spicy sauce. Dating back to the 1960s, speciality chicken shops have become increasingly popular and can now be found all over the island. In fact, chimek is so popular in Korea that the city of Daegu held a festival in honour of the dish in 2012.

PHOTOS: KOREA.NET



(4)

4. HAEJANGGUK

Literally translating as “hangover soup”, haejangguk is one of South Korea’s most famous dishes, served at any traditional eatery worth its salt. The hearty broth is always delivered to the table boiling and typically consists of sliced meat (or meat on the bone), spring onions, assorted shellfish, cheoncho and various spices. Differing greatly between regions, Jeju’s iteration of the soup is characterised by its salty, full-bodied flavour.



(5)

6. HAEMUL PAJEON

Visit any bar, snooker hall or late-night diner on Jeju Island, and chances are they serve the seafood pancake known as haemul pajeon. Usually packed with green onions, mixed seafood and kimchi, the pancake-like snack is dense and flavoursome – perfect for sharing in a large group or between friends. With hundreds of variations on the traditional recipe, there’s no shortage of choice when it comes to this Korean-favourite.



(6)

7. SEONGGEGUK

Another Jeju Island classic, seonggeguk (sea urchin soup) makes use of locally-caught purple sea urchins, which boast a distinctive yellow flesh. For preparation, the mollusc is lightly parched with brown seaweed and sesame oil before being boiled with a breed of local abalone called onbunjagi. Sea urchin eggs are added to thicken the broth, giving the soup a rich consistency and taste.



(7)

5. GOGIGUI

Perhaps the most internationally recognised cuisine of South Korea, gogigui (meat roast) is the tradition of barbecuing meat at the dinner table, usually on a built-in stove or grill. The most popular version of this barbecue is bulgogi, in which thin slices of beef marinated in a blend of soy sauce, sugar, sesame oil, garlic and pepper are cooked at the table.

This is served in a crisp lettuce leaf with kimchi, vermicelli noodles, whole cloves of garlic, button mushrooms and an assortment of sweet and spicy sauces.