

PHOTOS: CHAITALI PATEL



All Seoul

Seoul has many historic palaces, gardens and museums, like the Gyeongbokgung Palace complex (above), which houses relics from the Joseon Dynasty

SEOUL
SOUTH KOREA



GETTING THERE

You can take a Cathay Pacific, Emirates or Jet Airways flight to Seoul from Mumbai.

GETTING AROUND

You can use the buses, the subway and trains to go around Seoul and Korea.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The Dongdaemun Market is the largest market in South Korea. Myeongdong in downtown Seoul contains some of the city's top fashion boutiques. Nearby is the Namdaemun Market, which is the oldest and largest retail market in Seoul. Insadong is the cultural art market of Seoul. Visit <http://english.seoul.go.kr>.



The N Seoul Tower

The capital city of South Korea offers an intense experience – with people, food, the war-torn past and a hopeful future



SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

CHAITALI PATEL

I have had the opportunity to visit some magnificent cities over the last few years, but nothing has surprised me as much as Seoul, the capital of South Korea.

Considered to be one of the largest cities in the world, an astoundingly large percentage of South Korea's population lives in the capital city. The US army has one of its largest bases outside US territory in Seoul, given the proximity to North Korea.

South Korea has had its share of woes owing to years of war, but what is remarkable is how this nation has developed so rapidly since the war ended.

Maximum city

The Han River cuts through the city, but both parts are well connected by a grid of bridges and the underground network. Getting around is not difficult, but we did encounter some serious traffic during peak hours. Guidebooks and maps came in handy, as English is not widely spoken.

Flanked by mountains and located in the vicinity of the Bukhansan National Park, Seoul has a lot to offer for those looking to do some outdoor activities.

Eager to get a feel of the city and its people, we headed to Insadong on Christmas day, braving the sub zero temperatures and joined the locals as they walked up the main street in this antique-filled district. The mood was relaxed and the air was festive. We walked past shops selling traditional Celadon pottery, materials for calligraphy, Korean handicrafts like Hanji paper artefacts and numerous little trinkets. We stopped by a Korean candy stall and watched the men in white behind the counter enthrall prospective buyers with their stories and kkultarae, a candy made up of several strands of honey with a peanut filling.

Cuisine curry

While kkultarae is an acquired taste, Korean food is very suitable to the Indian palate. The most famous is the Korean barbecue. Restaurants have a stove in the middle of the table and depending on what is ordered, meat or chicken along with vegetables, spicy chilli sauce and other ingredients are



The sunset at Namsan Park. From the N Seoul Tower, the view of the lights that come on after the sun goes down, is simply magnificent.

tossed in and cooked right on your table. But whatever the main course, every meal begins with a generous helping of Kimchi — the most common of which is the pickled, fermented cabbage. Korean food portions are big and are usually meant to be shared by several people. More often than not, we had more food on the table than we could finish.

Traditional tea houses

Insadong is also well known for its numerous modern and traditional tea houses that line the main street,

and this is a perfect way to spend a cold winter afternoon. Served in beautiful Korean tea cups, you can choose from a wide array of teas, ranging from jujube and ginseng to simple jasmine tea.

To watch the sun set over the city and see thousands of sparkling lights that come on, we went to the N Seoul Tower — an icon of modern-day Seoul. The views from top are the best that one can get.

With nightfall, the streets of Seoul come alive. People flock to bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants. Whether you sample different kinds of cuisine or visit bars that cater to different tastes in music, you can spend the whole night partying. Hongik University area is popular amongst tourists and locals, and is constantly buzzing.

But the beauty of Seoul lies in how the traditional and modern coexist in perfect harmony. Along with the chic bars and designer labels, Seoul has many palaces, gardens and museums that one can spend hours in.

Chaitali is a reader of HT Pullouts and an avid traveller



Buyers look forward to some kkultarae at the candy shop



The famous Korean barbecue is cooked at the table in front of you