

# Namsan Hanok Village: A Unique Cultural Space in Central Seoul

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A new tourist attraction opened on Mt. Namsan in central Seoul on April 18, 1998. It is a village of restored *hanok*, Korean traditional houses. The three-year-long municipal undertaking to commemorate the 600th anniversary of Seoul's selection as Korea's capital city, has been completed, and the village is open to the public. Namsan village is expected to attract 200,000 tourists, both Koreans and foreigners.

The village is located on a site that encompasses about 8,000 square meters of land in Pil-dong, Chung-gu. The site, which used to be part of the Capital Garrison Command, was purchased by the city in 1989. According to historical municipal records, the site had been used by the national military training corps or by educational and publishing agencies since the reign of King Yǒngjo (r. 1724-1776) of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910). A military post since it was occupied by Japanese troops during the Tonghak farmers' rebellion in 1894 and most recently by municipal defense forces, it is now a space for Korean traditional culture.

One of the attractions of the village is its accessibility. The village's



traditional houses have a much different air about them than Seoul's royal palaces such as Kyōngbokkung and Tōksugung. Whereas at the palaces one can get a feel for Korea's traditional royal culture, the hanok village is where one can get a feel for how the *yangban* (aristocrats) and commoners lived. The village, however, has one disappointing feature: It includes only *kiwajip* (tiled-roof houses);

there is not one *ch'ogajip* (thatched-roof house), more commonly used by the lower classes.

A five-minute walk toward Namsan from the Chungmuro subway station is a traditional lofty gate. This is the main entrance to the village. Walking through the gate, one is overwhelmed by the view of the dense forests and rock formations on the mountainside, with Namsan Tower as a backdrop. Positioned peacefully on the left is a large pavilion with an artificial pond. Water is pumped into the pond via a 200-meter-long excavated gully west of the Capital Garrison Command. The pond seems a perfect place to while away an afternoon sailing a paper boat with one's children.

The five *kiwa* houses to the east of the pond are the village's main buildings. These houses were moved from various locations in Seoul and restored. They are furnished in such a way as to match the status of the owner, showing the lifestyle of the people of the Chosŏn Dynasty and thus making the village a living museum of cultural history.

The first building one comes to is the house of Yi Sūng-ōp, who was a Tobyōnsu, or head carpenter, during

the late Chosŏn period. Built in 1860, the house was originally located in Samgak-dong, Chung-gu. Of its original buildings, only the *anch'ae*, or women's quarters, and the *sarangch'ae*, or men's quarters, were moved to the village and restored. One can savor Korean tea and traditional confectioneries while enjoying the elegant lines and natural beauty of the house.

Facing Namsan is the house of Kim Ch'un-yŏng, who was an *owijang*, a junior military officer. Originally built at Samch'ŏng-dong, Chongno-gu, in 1890, the house has single-layered eaves, a style typical of commoner homes. Inside, one can watch exhibitions performed by spe-

cialists in such handicrafts as *kilssam*, a traditional dyeing technique; the making of *hanbok*, the Korean traditional dress; and *maedŭp*, the creation of ornamental knots.

Once known as one of the eight prominent houses of Seoul, the house of Pak Yŏng-ho originally comprised five separate buildings. Three buildings, however, were destroyed, and only the *sarangch'ae* and *pyŏldang* (annex) have been restored. With its kitchen and anbang facing in the same direction, the house is laid out in a style more common in the Kaesŏng area of P'yŏngan-do than in Seoul. The largest of the five restored homes, the Pak Yŏng-ho residence hosts two or three traditional wed-

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*The Namsan Hanok Village on the northern slope of Mt. Namsan*

In the large courtyard in front of the souvenir shop, various live performances of court music, *samulnori* (percussion music), traditional martial arts, and traditional drama are held.



LEE JOON HO

**The Namsan Hanok Village has quickly become a popular site for photographing traditional Korean scenes.**

ding ceremonies each week. On the weekend one can watch a traditional wedding here and enjoy music played on the *kayagŭm* (long 12-string zither) and *kŏmungo* (6-string zither).

At one house, the shrine and main complex form the shape of the Chinese character 元; this was the house of Yun Taek-yŏng, the father-in-law of King Sunjong (r. 1907-1910), the 27th and last king of Chosŏn. Originally located at Chegi-dong, Tongdaemun-gu, this residence was destroyed by fire in the turmoil of the nationwide civilian uprising on April 19, 1960. The house was designed to function as a place for performing ancestral rites. Lessons in traditional customs, the tea ceremony, and the etiquette of courteous conversation can be learned in the house.

Located near the pond is a house in the shape of a square. This was the childhood home of Queen Yunbi, Sunjŏnghyohwanghu, the queen consort of King Sunjong; she lived in the house until she was 13. After she was selected to be crown princess, the house was remodeled elaborately and is thus regarded as a house of the highest class. Originally located in Okin-dong, Chongno-gu, it will be used as a classroom for calligraphy and painting lessons and as a *sŏdang*, a traditional educational facility.

There is also a souvenir shop where one can buy various traditional handicrafts made by artisans. In the large courtyard in front of the shop, various live performances of court music, *samulnori* (percussion music), traditional martial arts, and traditional drama are held.

The nearby "time capsule plaza" was built in 1994 to commemorate the 600th anniversary of Seoul's selection as Korea's capital city. The plaza is located up the hill that leads from the



village toward Namsan. There, a statue shaped like a volcanic crater marks where the time capsule is buried. The time capsule, which holds 600 items of Seoul memorabilia, will be opened in the year 2394, when Seoul will celebrate its 1000th anniversary.

The 6,600-square-meter traditional garden that surrounds the village is another attraction. One can enjoy several pavilions and ponds as well as trees, flowers and grasses native to Korea. There are some 30,000 trees altogether, including apricot trees, flowering peach trees, wild pear trees and Chinese quince trees, which are endemic to Korea.

After spending an hour or two in the village, the traditional garden and the time capsule plaza, one will be imbued with the "fragrance of tradition." ♦



*The interior of a house complete with traditional furnishings (top); the house's study area (above)*