

Gyeongsangnam-do

경상남도



South Gyeongsang province is a study in contrasts. Travellers looking for big-city action are unlikely to go away disappointed as Busan is full of interesting restaurants, thousands of places to drink and enough cultural assets to fill a few days of exploring. It's the country's second-largest city and one of the world's busiest container ports, but Busan is not a high-energy Asian megacity. It is evolving into an interesting place thanks to a number of ongoing and proposed megaprojects. Chief among these is Lotte World 2, a 107-storey tower currently under construction in slightly dilapidated Nampodong.

The goal of turning Busan into Korea's movie capital took a great leap forward when the city government announced plans to build MGM Studio City, an amusement park with studio sets and a film academy in conjunction with US media giant Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. With the closure of the US military installation at Camp Hialeah, the city is left with a difficult question: what to do with a large, valuable tract of land that's 10 minutes on foot from Seomyeon?

While developers are busy rearranging the urban landscape, change comes slowly in the towns and fishing villages dotting the expansive countryside. Adventurous travellers willing to hop on a bus and explore will be rewarded with pristine islands, scenic mountains and lush rice paddies. While wandering the streets of a quiet village, don't be surprised if a local resident asks if you need help and then insists that you join his or her co-workers for dinner. Find yourself lost on the back roads? Stick your thumb out and you might be surprised to learn that hitchhiking works here. Few people speak English, but all you really need to succeed is a warm smile, patience and the ability to read body language.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shock your taste buds with Busan seafood specialities like raw fish at **Gwang-an beach** (p237)
- Go island-hopping off the coast of **Tong-yeong** (p242)
- Rejuvenate your body at **Hursimchung** (p231), one of the world's largest hot spas
- Explore **Jirisan** (p247), one of the best places to hike in Korea
- Take a stroll on the soft, white sand at **Sangju Beach** (p246)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 055

■ POPULATION: 7.9 MILLION

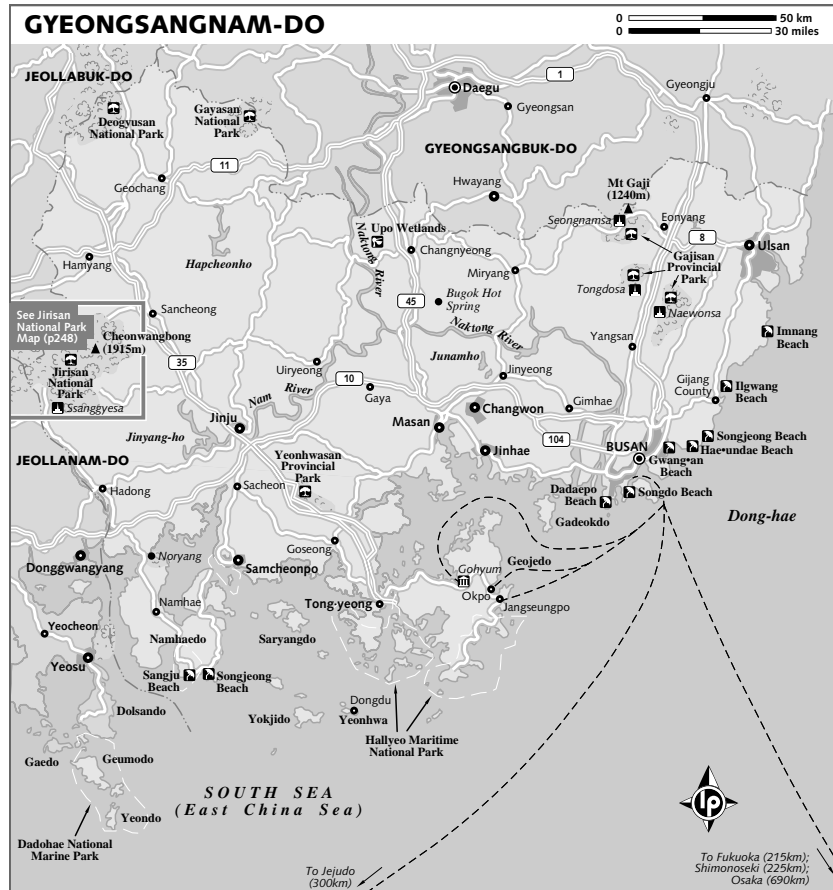
■ AREA: 10,500 SQ KM

History

South Gyeongsang province has a long history of warfare, though it's difficult to beat the *Imjin Waeran* for destruction, treachery and the birth of an icon. In 1592 the Japanese were eager to secure a land route to China. The Joseon government refused assistance, so the Japanese attacked. Led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the Japanese landed 160,000 troops at several places including Busan, Sangju Beach and Jinju, where the Koreans made a valiant yet unsuccessful stand against a superior enemy.

The war's star was Admiral Yi Sun-sin, a brilliant tactician credited with the development of the turtle ship, an ironclad vessel instrumental in harassing Japanese supply

lines. Despite his significant wartime contributions, Yi was arrested in 1597 for disobeying orders thanks to a clever ruse concocted by the Japanese, who were eager to see the good admiral removed from the war. With Yi behind bars, the Japanese launched a massive assault that destroyed all but 13 of Korea's 133 vessels. Shaken by the loss, the King released Yi and put him in charge of the tattered navy. In a classic case of size doesn't matter, the admiral destroyed or damaged 133 Japanese vessels. One year later, Yi defeated a Japanese armada near Namhae Island that cost the invaders 450 ships. It also cost Admiral Yi his life. In September of 1598, Hideyoshi died and the Japanese leadership lost its appetite for the war.



National & Provincial Parks

There are five national parks scattered across the province. On the western flank, Jirisan National Park is noted for serious climbs. Hallyeo National Maritime Park is a spectacular ocean playground encompassing coastal islands from Namhae to Geoje. Along the border separating South and North Gyeongsang provinces, Gayasan National Park is famous for Haeinsa, one of the country's most important temples (although it's located in South Gyeongsang province, access is easiest from Daegu p195). Tucked into the northwest corner of the province, Deogyusan National Park is where you'll find downhill skiers and snowboarders hitting the slopes at Muju Resort (p301).

There are two provincial parks: Yeonhwasan (40 minutes southeast of Jinju) and Gajisan (40 minutes north of Busan). Travellers looking for stimulating day trips from Busan should consider visiting Gajisan Provincial Park for terrific temples like Seongnamsa and a challenging hike up Mount Gaji (1240m).

Getting There & Around

Most train travellers stop at Busan station, a big glassy facility close to the city centre. Some inbound trains also stop at Gupo, a handy west-end terminal ideal for travellers who don't need to go downtown. Train travel in the rest of the province is possible, though schedules are not always convenient. For regional trips, the bus is a superior option with departures from Seobu and Dongbu bus terminals. By air, travellers land at Gimhae International Airport, about 30 minutes west of central Busan.

BUSAN 부산

‰ 051 / pop 3.6 million / 763 sq km

There's a noticeably absent cosmopolitan feel in this port city known for raw fish and a harsh dialect that people in Seoul sometimes find incomprehensible. Underneath the drab urban landscape created by an unimaginative use of concrete, quirky people jump the queue, shout while conversing and giggle at the sight of international travellers. Rough around the edges indeed, but like any rogue there's a charming side that begins to emerge once formal barriers have been dropped over dinner and drinks. Cultural mores prevent most people from initiating contact with foreigners. But if you take the first step, the level of kindness and generosity extended your way can be surprising.

Orientation

Busan is a sprawling coastal city tucked into the southeastern corner of the peninsula. The city's manufacturing centre and new container port are at the western end in Gangseo-gu (Map p230). Gimhae International Airport is further west, 27km from Busan's city centre. Agricultural and fishing communities continue to survive in Gijang County in the city's east end, though development pressures may bring significant changes over the next decade.

The heart of the city is concentrated in a band of north-south development running through the centre of Busan. Busy container ports dominate the southern coastline and around Nampodong, an ageing commercial district with a mishmash of back alleys. Two passenger ferry terminals, the immigration office and a community of draggletailed buildings that serve as a living museum of 40 years past are one subway stop north at Jungangdong. Further north, Line 1 and 2 of the subway intersect in Seomyeon (Map p233), the city centre packed with bars, restaurants and street vendors. Continue north on Line 1 (Map p232) to find Hurshimchung spa, Beomeosa temple and a trail leading to Geumjeong Mountain. Gwang-an and Hae-undae (Map p235) beaches are easy to reach on the eastern section of Line 2.

Information

EMERGENCY

Fire & rescue ‰ 119

Police ‰ 112

INTERNET RESOURCES

City government (<http://english.busan.go.kr>) For basic socio-economic and travel data.

Pusanweb (www.pusanweb.com) A site to find teaching employment and chronic kvetchers.

South Gyeongsang (<http://english.gsnd.net/default.jsp>) Learn about South Gyeongsang's sites and geography.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Dong-ui Medical Centre (Map p228; ‰ 850 8523)

Marie Kim is an RN who can help travellers. Take Line 1 to Yangjeong station; outside Exit 4, take local bus 8 or 8-1.

Dr Hyun (Map p228; ‰ 897 2283) For dental problems. His 2nd-floor office is near Line 2 Gaya station, Exit 2.

Dr Seo (Map p228; ‰ 755 0920) For general medical maladies. Dr Seo speaks English well. His clinic is at a major intersection beside a pharmacy in Milak-dong, 10 minutes on foot from Line 2 Gwang-an station, Exit 1. Turn right at the second corner and walk 600m.