

Slow Clty Toji-gil

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1. Pyeongsari Park

Today, we are going to walk a course named after a spirited novel of Korea. It is titled *Toji* or ‘The Land’, and, along with Seomjingang River and Hwagae Market, it is often referred to as one of the three best things that represent the city of Hadong.

It is said that the writer of *Toji* visited this area, and its magnificent environment including Jirisan Mountain, Seomjingang River and wide open fields inspired her to write a saga story about the land. This novel spans across late 19th century, Japanese Colonial Period, to Korea’s independence in 1945, and it describes the struggles and strife of a woman who was obsessed with protecting her land. The main theme of this story partly shares a resemblance with *Gone with the Wind*.

The writer spent 26 years to complete this novel, and there are over 700 characters in the story. With this, you might be able to get a grasp of its scale. Now, it has been made into television series three times, translated and enjoyed in more than 20 countries worldwide. During this course, you will have a chance to visit some places featured in the novel.

OK, this course starts at this park. It seems quiet and peaceful with Seomjingang River and its sandy plain, and more recently, the river is dotted with beautiful camping spots. But it was a border area in ancient period, and there was a ferry along the river that served as an important military strategic point. Also, this area was the breadbasket of the Korean Peninsula, so there were frequent conflicts against the Japanese pirates who traveled upriver.

2. Dongjeongho Lake and Couple Pines

There is a serene lake right in the middle of the expansive field. The lake and nearby swamps provide a great natural habitat for many rare animals and plants. Also, the moon’s reflection over its still surface on starless nights is a scene to behold.

The wide field here has long been praised as the perfect place to farm. An old saying goes no one went hungry in this region because of the abundant harvest. This might be one of the grand scenes that inspired the writer of *Toji*.

Can you see the two pine trees standing out on the field? They are called “Couple Pines” because a loving married couple was buried together next to the trees. Also, it was where the main couple of the novel met each other in the story.

3. House of Choe Champan

This is the house of a high-ranking official, and one of the most important places mentioned in the novel. It is also the most popular place in this course.

Actually, this house was built in 2000 due to popular demand, based on the description in the novel. Other houses around it were added later to form a setting for television drama. These houses perfectly present the historical and cultural characteristics depicted in the novel. It is said that the writer herself was moved to see how similar they were to how she pictured them in her mind.

This house also provides diverse attractions for visitors, such as a literature hall, marketplace and experience center for *hanok*, or Korean traditional house. You can stay at *hanok* overnight, but reservations are a must.

4. Chwigallim Forest

There is a small forest next to a village up north. It's called Chwigallim, and it means "a forest where kingfishers sing at the water". The forest is filled with 500-year-old juniper trees and a pristine stream runs across the forest carrying the scent of the trees.

The forest celebrates a legendary man who lived in this region during the 12th century. He was originally an official serving the king at the palace, but he foresaw the collapse of the kingdom. He went into exile here with his family, teaching young students to prepare for the future. Indeed, a new dynasty came into reign, and the new king recognized his talent and wanted to hire him, bestowing an official post. But the man fled his home to avoid the emissary, and he secluded himself for the rest of his life. Later, a pavilion was built to commemorate this man, and the forest was named after the name of this pavilion. Unfortunately only the forest remains to this day.

The tower and monuments in the middle of the forest were built in 2008 in the memory of the anonymous fighters who died in battle against the Japanese colonial rule of Korea.

5. 11 Pine Trees

You will notice many odd-looking pine trees as you stroll down this path.

In particular, take a look at these trees. They may look like one large pine tree from afar, but they're actually a group of 11 pine trees standing in a close circle. They even have a communal name that means '11 Pine Trees Facing the Sky'. All trees in this group are over 150 years old.

A few minutes' walk from here, there is a pine tree that seems as if it is growing from between a rock.

Fascinated by this pine tree, the villagers dedicate a festival praying for peace to this tree every year. They believe the tree has stopped the landslide from reaching the village. This 600 year-old tree was designated as a national monument in 2008.

6. House of Jo Family

The last stop of this course is a traditional Korean house.

This house is also mentioned in the novel *Toji* and was built by a prestigious aristocratic family that produced many high-ranking officials. It was built over a period of 16 years and the descendants of this family is said to have accumulated wealth by trading with the Chinese. But as history ran its course, most of its buildings were destroyed and only a handful of the house remains intact. The storage at the far corner of the pond was used as a refrigerator often used to store kimchi. Their descendants still live in this house today, and they offer a guide to introduce the house upon request.

As you can see Hadong is an area filled with history and interesting stories. It has become a popular place to retire among city dwellers over time.