

Unjoru-Gokjeonjae

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1. Omi Village

Omi is a small village nestled between Jirisan Mountain and Seomjingang River. According to *feng shui*, which is an Oriental system of geomancy, the location of this village is very auspicious.

In particular, there are three propitious spots in this village recognized by *feng shui* experts. Local legends say a Taoist maiden dropped her precious gold ring at the first propitious spot, and a golden tortoise lies buried in the clay at the second spot. Lastly, it is believed that five kinds of rare treasures can be found at the last spot.

Also, there is a saying that if you build your house here, you will lead a life of abundance and honor. So, in the past, it used to be a large village since many noble families moved to this area.

Unjoru, the grand house of a noble family, was built 200 years ago on the site where the Taoist maiden dropped her gold ring. The building still stands today, with Gokjeonjae, another traditional dwelling located nearby. Shall we take a look around?

2. Unjoru _1

The name Unjoru means ‘a house hidden like a bird in the clouds’, and it is located where the Taoist maiden in a local legend is supposed to have dropped her gold ring.

When the house was completed after seven years of a large-scale construction in 1776, the house owner gleefully exclaimed “The Heavens must have hidden this piece of land from others for all these years so it can be bestowed upon me!”

Originally, the name ‘Unjoru’ referred to its outer quarters where the owner would entertain guests, and is borrowed from a verse written by a famous Chinese poet.

The house also serves as a historical site where you can examine the actual Korean architectural style 200 years ago. The pillars of the building numbered over 100 when it was first built, but only two thirds of them remain today.

3. Unjoru_2

Arriving in front of Unjoru’s main gate, you will see a pond and a circular island in the middle of it. This island represents the three sacred mountains in the Korean Peninsula, including Jirisan Mountain. If you were to visit in the

summertime, the pond would be fully covered with lotus leaves.

Stepping inside the house, you have to pass through a tall gate. The gate was made deliberately with a roof higher than those of other houses as a display of power and authority.

Do you see the bone hanging on the door?

Although the bone currently here is from a horse, it's said that originally, the house owner caught a tiger and hung up one of its bones to commemorate the families' devotion to the king. However, the tiger is deemed a holy animal in Korea and it's believed that possessing tiger's bone will grant you a wish. Because of this, people would often secretly touch the bone as they were going past the gate, which is why the tiger bone was swapped for the horse bone that hangs here today.

4. Unjoru_3

Upon entering the main gate, you can see a comprehensive plan of the house that shows its structural arrangement. It includes not only the internal parts of the house, but also the river that flows nearby. This plan of the house you are seeing now is a copy of the original version.

Going further into the house, you will see the outer quarters which was the accommodation for guests who visited the house. Other buildings lining both sides of the outer quarters are the servant's quarters.

Look closely at the wooden floor of the outer quarters, and you will discover some of the incredible beauty of traditional Korean architecture.

5. Unjoru_4

The innermost building has a storeroom and kitchen, and it was designed to house women and children.

All of the rooms have a separate attic, and this design is unique to the traditional houses of this region. You can see an example of this architectural style in the building on the right side, where there is a small landing protruding out like a terrace.

Going through the outer quarters into the kitchen, you will see a round wooden pail, a little smaller than its accompanying square rice chest. If you observe the square cover on the bottom part of the wooden pail, you will see

some Chinese characters.

These characters mean ‘The rice chest is accessible to anyone who needs rice’. The chest was always kept full to the brim with rice, and poor people were welcome to take rice any time they were in need. It reveals the attitudes of Korean nobility in the past, when sharing and hospitality were highly valued.

6. Gokjeonjae_1

Gokjeonjae is another traditional Korean house in this village.

The most frequently observed part of this house is its outer wall. The stone wall surrounds the whole house like a ring, and it suggests that the house stands on the divine location where the Taoist maiden is supposed to have dropped her ring.

However, this house is not as old as Unjoru. It was built in 1929 and has been occupied by a local family since 1940.

The scale of the place is large, but thanks to a square design, it also feels comfortable and cozy.

You’re welcome to stay here at Gokjeonjae, and spending a night in one of Korea’s traditional houses would be a great experience for any visitor.

7. Gokjeonjae_2

If you look closely at the outer wall, you will see many bullet marks. This is because the high outer wall was used as a place of shelter for people and their livestock during the Korean War.

Another famous feature of this house is its garden. The garden has been featured many times in the Korean media. In particular, the focal point of the garden is the water from the pond flowing gently into the house garden, creating a sense of natural beauty.

Turning towards the back yard of the innermost building, there is a bamboo forest and a pleasant walking trail. It’s recommended that you take a leisurely stroll here to fully appreciate the environment.