

Four-kilometer Cherry Blossom Road

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1. Hwagae Market

The trail we are walking along right now is considered one of the most beautiful roads in Korea. It's called the "Four Kilometers of Cherry Blossoms" in Korean. And at the starting point of this road, there is a famous marketplace, called Hwagae.

Situated at the junction of two large southern regions of Korea, Hwagae Market was a center for trade. In the olden days, it was considered one of the seven major marketplaces in Korea. It became very well-known among people of today, particularly because of a popular song and a novel.

The market used to be held every five days, and trade items were mostly fish and grains such as rice and barley were traded. Nowadays, the site is occupied by a permanent market, which is quite different from the original.

In this market, you can get a taste of Korea's folksy culinary traditions. With some stalls still selling traditional agricultural tools and knives, the market is a must-stop for tourists.

2. Four-kilometer Cherry Blossom Road

Every spring, the four-kilometer long road from the market to Ssanggyesa Temple is adorned with cherry blossoms in full bloom. During the cherry blossom season, local people as well as visitors from out of town come to enjoy the floral spectacle and the road enjoys the official designation: "Korea's beautiful road."

Strolling along the road with your loved one is said to bring happiness, and so the path is frequented by young lovers.

Since ancient times, this road has been famous because it was fabled to lead people to a utopian land which is believed to be in Jirisan Mountain. For this reason, the road has been one of the most sought-after destinations for scholars and writers. Many Buddhist monks take this road too, since it leads to the thousand-year-old Ssanggyesa Temple.

3. Tea Culture Center

If you are a fan of tea, then you should take a closer look at the Tea Culture Center.

If you follow the road lined with cherry blossoms, you will see a tea plantation in an open field. This is where tea

cultivation first began in Korea, about 1,300 years ago.

The Tea Culture Center was built here in 2008, in order to promote the exquisite quality of Korean tea. It offers various exhibitions showing how tea shoots develop into fully-grown leaves, as well as various stages of processing before being boiled into tea.

Additionally, the center's collection includes a wide range of displays that feature the history of tea and literary works on tea, as well as famous tea masters and farmers.

You are welcome to make and enjoy your own tea at the center.

4. The First Tea Plantation

Let's go outside the Tea Culture Center and head to the tea plantation.

This is the first tea plantation in Korea. Records say that the first person to bring tea plant seeds from China was mandated by the king to come and plant the seeds here in this place in 828 A.D. Following the introduction of tea, tea became very popular across the Korean Peninsula, particularly among Buddhist monks and believers.

As sunlight filters through heavy fog from the river, the diurnal temperature range here makes it perfect for growing tea in this region.

Thanks to the reported benefits of drinking tea, such as relieving fatigue and clearing the head, even the kings had his tea leaves ordered from this plantation.

5. A 1,000-year-old Tea Tree and Wild Tea Leaves

There is a 1,000-year-old tea tree past the tea plantation and an alley. Unlike other trees, tea trees generally don't grow tall. And that's the same even after a thousand years of growth. However, this particular tree is 4.15 meters tall and has a circumference of 57 centimeters, making it one of the largest among its kind.

This tree stands out among other tea trees in the region, since it's the oldest and tallest tea tree in Korea. Several years ago, it drew the attention of the media when 100 grams of leaves from this tree were sold for more than 10,000 US dollars.

All the tea leaves here in this plantation are cultivated in a wild, natural environment, without using any pesticide. The tea farmers here pick out the weeds and harvest tea leaves by hand. As a result, tea leaves from this plantation offer the finest aroma taste.

6. Tea-Tasting

There are many places around here where you can try various types of tea made from locally produced tea leaves. Along the cherry blossom road, there are arrays of over 150 tea shops and cafes. You'll find tea everywhere, because there are more than 2,000 families that make tea. Of course, all the tea leaves are hand-picked and hand-made.

Tea leaves are harvested from the end of April to the end of May. Experts say that leaves picked during the first five days of the harvest season are most tender, sweet, and smooth. They're also more expensive than the ones picked later.

In the olden days, tea was thought to have therapeutic effects, so people would drink tea with sugar as a cure for cold and flu. Today, just about everyone drinks tea. Statistics show that less people suffer from geriatric disease in tea-growing regions.