

Ssanggyesa Temple

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1. Stone Gate

Welcome to Ssanggyesa Temple.

‘Ssanggye’ means ‘a stream that forks into two’, and the temple was named such after the twin streams that flowed along in front of it. The temple is also the home of traditional Korean Buddhist music and hymns.

The large boulder behind the building to the left of the parking lot is recognized as the ‘start’ of the temple so we will enter the temple from here. The red writing on the rocks indicates the name of the temple. It is said that, long ago, on orders from the king, a famous scholar inscribed these words with the point of his walking stick.

2. The First Entrance of the Temple

If you follow the path to the temple across the two waterways, you will see the temple’s entrance appear in front of you. It’s a splendid and colorful gate.

This temple was built in 722. At that time the temple was erected alongside the enshrinement of a fragment of skull from the remains of a great Chinese Buddhist saint, which was brought here by a monk. A story has been passed down that when the monk brought the bone here he couldn’t decide where to enshrine it, but the owner of the bone appeared to him in a dream and revealed the proper location to him.

3. Two Gates

Now you will pass more gateways on the way to the temple.

At the first gate that you come to, you will see two statues of boys, each representing the wisdom and truth of Buddha in addition to personal guards of Buddha. Their role is to compose and clear the mind of those visiting the temple.

The second gate is adorned with the Four Heavenly Kings that protect Buddha’s doctrine and guard the temple from all four directions. They permit Buddhist monks and temple visitors to concentrate on their retreat by driving evil spirits away from their minds, removing frustrations and calming anguish within.

These wooden statues are around one meter larger than those found in other temples, and their state of preservation is excellent. A fine example of 100-year-old Buddhist art, they are designated as regional

cultural heritages, in addition to the gate itself.

4. The Birthplace of Buddhist Music

If you pass through all the gates and enter the temple yard, you will see a two-story wooden building at the top of the front entrance steps. This is where *beompae*, one of the genres of Buddhist ritual music, was created and began to receive wide acclaim. It is also where the great masters of this genre of music received their education.

A characteristic of this Buddhist music is that, as one of the three traditional forms of Korean vocal music, it differs from Western music due to the absence of a defined rhythm. This is what makes it hard to learn the music. Many monks study the music as it is thought to be a part of the path to becoming a true Buddhist monk.

It's said that the monk who founded this temple learned Buddhist music in China, and changed its form to be more suited to Korean sensibilities.

5. Honoring the Monk

If you enter deeper into the temple grounds, you will see a large memorial stele towards the middle. The monument was erected to honor the achievements of the monk who created traditional Korean Buddhist music and hymns, and for this reason it is designated as Korea's National Treasure No. 47 in 1962. It is additionally the most important cultural heritage kept at the temple.

The writing on the stele is the work of a great Korean writer and poet from long ago. It has over 2,000 characters, and is regarded as the best epigraph in Korea.

6. Building of Enshrined Buddha

Now let's go and see the building where Buddha is enshrined.

A wooden Buddha statue is seated in the center of the building. A god on his left side guides people to the Buddhist heavens and another god on the right side heals people's diseases and offers salvation to those who pray.

It is worthwhile seeing this building for its splendid colors and beauty. The roof's shape and vivid hues,

along with the pillars and decorated interior walls are all worth taking in.

The delicate shape of the hands and feet of the various Buddha statues inside this hall is natural and genuine, while the expressions of the Buddha statues in particular are deemed by many to be very human-like and benevolent.

The fine colors and many characters portrayed in detail here in the Buddhist painting hanging on the walls will help you understand Buddhist art towards the end of the 18th century.

7. The Enshrined Skull Bone of a Chinese Monk

Let's head towards the building that houses the skull bone of a Chinese monk, mentioned before we entered the temple. From the building with the enshrined Buddha, let's head across the bridge over the valley and climb up the steep steps.

The area surrounding the temple was first developed when the temple was initially erected during the 8th century, and the area across the valley where we have just come from was developed a little later in the early 17th century. This compound includes two buildings where monks study and meditate: New monks study in one of the buildings, while resident monks meditate in the other. Entry to the area is restricted in the summer and winter because it's when the monks concentrate on their study and meditation the most.

If you look inside the building, you will see a seven-story stone pagoda, and the skull bone is kept inside it. The pagoda was originally erected in another temple but moved to this place. This is the only stone pagoda that's kept in a building.

On either side of this building are two other buildings where monks train and meditate. The buildings are famous even now for being the temple where several revered monks have practiced.

8. The Building Where Buddha's Doctrine Was Taught

In front of the building with the stone pagoda is another structure where the doctrine of Buddha was taught long ago.

Today, paintings such as that of Buddha giving his teachings and one depicting his life are housed here. The originals are stored in a museum, so the ones that you see now are replicas.

In front of this building, there is a famous spring. People have visited the temple from very long ago

because it was believed that drinking from the spring cured disease. It's thought that it's better for women to drink from the spring on the left and men from the spring on the right. If by any chance you're not feeling well, it is recommended that you try drinking from here.