

Jangsu-eup History and Culture Tour

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1. Nongae Shrine

The audio guide that you're about to listen to will be introducing you to historical and cultural paths in the Jangsu area. The first of these is the birthplace of a woman named Nongae.

Nongae is the historical figure who gave her life during the massive Japanese invasion of Korea 400 years ago by grabbing a Japanese general and jumping off a cliff into the river below. This shrine was constructed to commemorate her. While the shrine was originally located in Seoul, it was moved here in 1974.

She was the concubine of the general in charge of the region during the war. When her husband was defeated in battle and committed suicide because of the shame he felt at the loss, she vowed to avenge him. That is one of the main reasons why she dressed up as a dancer to gain access to the feast for the victorious Japanese generals, grabbed one of the generals, and threw herself into the river with him.

Each year on her birthday, a ritual is held for her here, and at that time many people gather to remember her.

2. Portrait of Nongae and Her Memorial

Why don't you take a look inside the shrine?

Inside you will find a portrait of Nongae.

This picture was painted five years ago to replace the previous one. In the picture, she has a high forehead and arched eyebrows, and her clothing and hairpiece reflect thorough research into what was in fashion at the time.

During the research process, the artist also took into consideration the average skull shape and facial features of her female descendants living in the area who were in their twenties, the age of Nongae at the time of her death.

One particularly surprising aspect of the picture is that, no matter what angle you look at it from, she appears to be staring back at you. The painter was able to achieve this effect by painting the picture with very tiny dots applied one at a time.

On the right side of the shrine, you can see a stone monument for her that was built in 1846 by the

governor of the region.

3. The School for the Ruling Class

This is the school that once educated the ruling class of the region. Here they prepared for the state examination. In addition, they also held the rituals for people of great learning and moral character.

Not only is this building preserved today just as it was 600 years ago, but it also stores a variety of documents which are an invaluable resource for researching the history and culture of the region.

When you enter the school, you can see that it is divided into two different areas. One of these is the place where students studied and the other was where the rituals were held. In addition to book learning, the building was also a place for character development.

Surrounding the building can be seen some ginkgo trees, and ginkgos used to be planted near all of Korea's schools. The reason for this is that the Chinese scholar Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, used to teach his disciples underneath a ginkgo tree.

4. The Building Where Rituals Were Held for Saints of Old

The most famous place here is the building where the rituals were once held for holy men of the past. This building has been designated as an important cultural heritage. Among the 200 buildings remaining in Korea used for the same purpose, it is the oldest. It has been around for more than 600 years.

The pillars that support the roof are not inside the building but rather on the outside. Because of this architectural characteristic, the building is considered to have high historical and cultural value.

In addition, the name of the building on the front below the roof was written by the greatest calligrapher of that time, further increasing the structure's value.

The big stone slab in the front yard was discovered buried in the ground. This kind of fine road paving stone was once used in palace architecture. It adds to the aura of the place.

At this building, the rituals are held for 27 wise men from China and Korea including Confucius, the founder of Confucianism. Twice a year, a large ritual is held, and at such times many people come from around the country to honor the memory of these scholars.

5. The Person Who Risked His Life for the School

To the right of the school is an old stone memorial.

This monument was built in remembrance of Jeong Gyeong-son who did everything to protect this school from the invading Japanese army. During the late 16th century, the Japanese army was sweeping across the Korean Peninsula, pillaging and destroying as it moved. When the invaders reached this school, it is said that he stood his ground alone in front of the Japanese forces and stopped them from destroying the school.

Awed by the spirit of the man who was ready to lay down his life to protect his school, the Japanese soldiers could not enter the school. Instead, it's told that the Japanese general had a notice written that said, "Do not trespass since this is holy ground," and withdrew of his own accord.

Thanks to this man's courage, the school has been preserved in its original form as you see it today.

6. The Beautiful Pine Tree

When you reach Jangsu-gun Office, you will notice an extremely unusual yet beautiful pine tree standing in front of the building.

Estimated to be around 400 years old, this huge pine tree is a grand sight, measuring 9 meters tall and 3.22 meters in circumference.

Twisting upwards in a spiral, the tree is said to resemble a dragon twirling its body as it soars into the sky. Then there are the abundant branches at the crown of the tree, which stretch out on both sides like the horizon.

No one knows who planted the tree, but it has been lovingly tended by locals for centuries, and it has been designated as a natural monument.

7. Bangchon Park

Now it's time for you to walk through a park.

This park is connected to Hwang Hui, one of the most renowned civil officials in the early Joseon Period. He rose to the highest position, just below the king, and maintained this position for 18 years. He was highly regarded for his integrity and the strength of his convictions.

His family's roots were in this region, and when at one point he disagreed with the king about an issue related to the royal succession, he was banished here. This park was made by those who appreciated him all the more during his exile.

The bronze statue standing in the middle of the park shows us what he looked like.

8. Noha Forest

Do you remember the bronze statue of a man? You are coming to a forest where you will learn more about him.

This forest of old Zelkova and Chinese hackberry trees is said to have been planted by his father, because his mother had been here when she prayed that she might give birth to a great son. His father apparently started to plant the trees to protect the spot. I guess you could say that a great historical figure was born as a result of the mother's prayers and the father's work planting the trees.

While today the forest has been split into two areas by a road, the 600 years of history in the forest and the streams that flow through the area give it a lovely ambience.

9. Private School

You are now about to take a look at another school.

You could say that what you saw before was a public school authorized by the government. This school, however, was more like a private school where the local scholars continued their studies and revered the intellectual giants of the past.

Among the schools of this kind, this one was built to commemorate the great civil official, Hwang Hui. At one time, the school fell on hard times as government policy forced it to shut its doors. Later, though, it was restored, and today the areas for studying and for performing the ritual remain.

If you go up the narrow, steep stairs behind the educational building, you will find another shrine.

Even today, people who study Confucianism come here each year to offer the ancestral rites.

10. Taru Park and Taru Memorial

The last stop on this course is a park whose name means “shedding tears”.

The Jangsu region has been famous for its virtuous people. You have already met two of them, such as the woman who jumped with the Japanese general into the river and the man who singlehandedly protected his school from the Japanese army. Along with them, a man named Baek has been highly respected for his loyalty, and this park was established to commemorate him.

He was the servant of a certain household long ago. He and his master were on a journey and, as they were following a path that led along a cliff on the hill behind this park, a pheasant suddenly flew out of the woods. Startled by the bird, the horse that the master was riding reared up, and the master fell from his horse, rolled off the cliff, and plunged to his death in the river below. Overcome with guilt for not being able to protect his master, the servant bit his finger and used the blood to write the story about the pheasant and horse and, next to it, he left a phrase "shedding tears." After this, he leaped into the river after his master and ended his life.

A government official who heard this sad story had these memorial stones and the park built in their honor.

Of the two stones, the large one was built for the servant, while the smaller one was built for the master.