

BASKING IN BUSAN

Explore the city of sun's top 5 beaches

Written and photographed by Peter DeMarco

Crowds at Haeundae



The fun-loving seaside city of Busan comes to life in the summer and leaves visitors wanting to move here by the end of their stay. Find out why so many beach bums proudly call Busan home.

Breaking records at Haeundae

Billed as the country's largest vacation spot, Haeundae is the "Miami Beach" of Korea. It's the place where guys show off all their hard work in the gym, and bikini-clad Korean girls have no problem navigating the sandy beaches in stilettos. A screaming roar fills the air every time a big wave crashes on thousands of yellow-tube-wielding swimmers. Like climbing Mt. Baekdusan, something every Korean aspires to do before they die, spending a weekend on Haeundae is an unofficial right of passage. In fact, in 2008 Haeundae Beach set a Guinness World Record for most parasols: almost 8,000. Locals estimate that the number of umbrellas can reach as high as 12,000 in July and August. If you're in the mood for a mean plate of fish and chips while you're there, Geckos, located in the Palez de CZ next to the Paradise Hotel, will surely please your palate.

Getting there: Haeundae Station, Line 2, Exits 3 & 5
Sport: Volleyball in front of Paradise Hotel



Armpit-airing exercises at Gwangalli

WHERE TO STAY

Haeundae is filled with hotels for the beachgoer. Get a room with a terrace overlooking the beach at the Paradise Hotel (around 250,000 won, 051-749-2111) and then head down to the outdoor pool if the beach is too crowded. Just a few blocks back from the beach is the Big Apple Motel (from 40,000 to 60,000 won and up, 051-747-0199), but keep in mind that you can't check in before 5pm here. On Gwangalli Beach try the Park Hotel (60,000 won weekdays and 80,000 won weekends, 051-755-5010). This smaller hotel is just across the street from the beach and has nice views of the Gwangan Bridge.

MORE INFO

Tourist info and telephone interpretation: (051) 1330
 Busan official tourism site website: etour.busan.go.kr
 Busan city website: english.busan.go.kr
 Korea Pass Busan Tourism Card: Available in various denominations, this versatile pre-paid card offers many discounts and other benefits on accommodation, shopping, food and drink, and much more. For more information, contact Busan's Tourism Promotion Division on (051) 888-3504.
 Busan Haps (<http://busanhaps.com>) is the magazine for what's happening in Busan. Its website has a list of upcoming events, along with information on restaurants, bars, city landmarks and more.

GETTING THERE

Free shuttle bus: Visit Korea Committee runs a free daily shuttle bus service for foreigners from Seoul to Busan. The bus departs at 8am from in front of Donghwa duty free shop in central Seoul's Gwanghwamun area, arriving in Busan's downtown Seomyeon area at 2pm, and Paradise Hotel on Haeundae Beach at 2:30pm.
 For more info or to make a reservation, visit english.visitkoreayear.com.
 KTX: A much faster option is the high-speed KTX rail service that connects Seoul and Busan Stations in just over 2.5 hours. Adult tickets cost between 42,100 and 51,800 won, one way. See www.korail.com.

Gwangalli romance

Looking for the perfect place to take an evening stroll as ocean waves massage your bare feet? If Cupid lived in Busan he would tell you to head for Gwangalli Beach. Located just down the road from Haeundae, this beach is better known as the place to take your lover on a romantic date than for the quality of its sands. The Gwangan Bridge, lit up at night in a rainbow of colors, is one of Busan's most beautiful sights. Even better, every Friday and Saturday night during the summer, the street parallel to the beach throws the city's best block party. The police close down the road to traffic and the numerous bars and restaurants set up a makeshift terrace in street. Be sure to grab a drink at Thursday Party, Busan's most popular Korean-owned bar chain. For something a little more low key, sip a cappuccino at one of the many coffee shops along the strip.

Getting there: Gwangan Station, Line 2, Exit 5
Sports: Windsurfing, surfing, volleyball, kayaking

Songjeong beauty queen

Songjeong is arguably Busan's most beautiful beach. Since it is just outside the main part of the city, it tends to get fewer people. The sand and water also seem to be cleaner as a result. It doesn't have the glitz of five star hotels like Haeundae, but that is exactly what gives it its charm. Popular with families, surfers, and foreigners looking to escape the crowds of Haeundae, Songjeong is sure to put a smile on the face of the most avid sun worshiper. Take in the reggae vibes at Blowfish bar and restaurant while you are there, a favorite amongst the foreigner crowd.

Getting there: Haeundae Station, Line 2, Exit 1. Then take bus no. 100, 100-1, or 139 for about 20 min.
Sports: Surfing, windsurfing, kayaking



Songjeong: who/what ate all the surfers?



Mother and child, Songjeong



Fire in the sky over Dadaepo

A jeep pulling a trailer with a 4 wheeler on it is parked on the beach. The owner sets up a tent, canopy, and starts grilling *samgyeopsal*. The occasional jet roars overhead as its flight path takes it over the beach to land at Gimhae Airport. A group of friends lights a bonfire on the beach. At the western edge of the city, where the Nakdonggang River meets the sea, is Dadaepo. Although the water and beaches may be better elsewhere, Dadaepo has a kind of raw, out-of-the-way feel to it that is strangely enticing. But the number one reason why everyone comes here is to watch the sunset over the Nakdonggang River bay. Another big draw for locals is to see the world's largest flat fountain, as declared by the Guinness Book of World Records in 2010. The Dadaepo Sunset Fountain of Dreams (<http://fountain.saha.go.kr>) runs weekdays at 8pm and weekends at 8pm and 9pm. It's closed on Mondays and rainy days.

Getting there: Sinpyeong Station, Line 1, Exit 4. Then take bus no. 2, 11 or 338 for about 30 mins. A second and quicker option is to take express bus no. 1000 from Busan Station (stop opposite side of street in front of station), about 30 min.

Sports: Kitesurfing



Sunsets at Dadaepo (above and below)



Fountain frolics at Dadaepo

Day tripping to Ilgwang

If you are looking to get out of the city for the day, you can take a trip up to Ilgwang Beach. Located on a huge cove, this beach's biggest draw is that it's quieter and its waters are calmer than most others. Few Busanites make it out here and usually opt to stay in Busan, and rightfully so. Ilgwang has one major downfall; there is a nuclear power plant in clear view of the beach. However, if you have some extra time in Busan and are looking for a new beach to check out, Ilgwang makes for a pleasant daytrip. 🇰🇷

Getting there: Take the train up the coast towards Ulsan from Haeundae Station (40 minutes to one hour).

INSIDER'S TIP

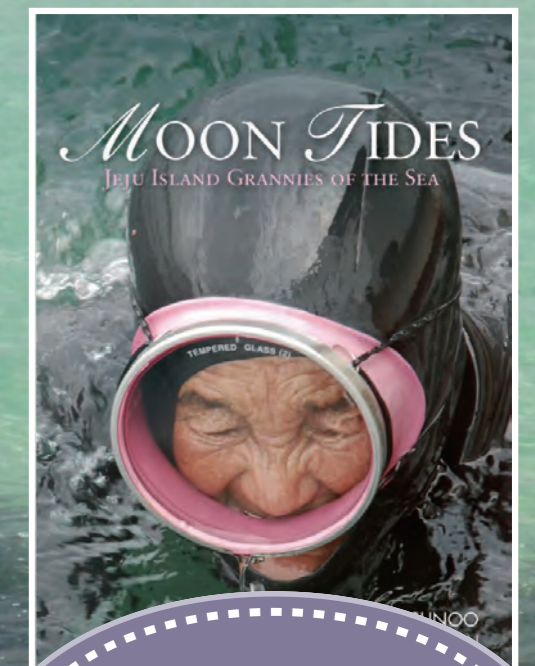
Looking to escape the summer crush? Finding an empty beach in a city of four million is like trying to order cheesecake at a Korean barbecue restaurant—it's just not going to happen. In the past Busan's official beach season ran from the first day of July to the last day of August. This year the folks at Busan City Hall decided to extend the season from the beginning of June until the end of September for Haeundae and Gwangalli beaches. However, Songjeong and Dadaepo will open in July and close at the end of August as usual. If you visit Busan in September and want to get away from the crowds, avoid Haeundae and Gwangalli.

Brenda Paik Sunoo
with Youngsook Han

MOON TIDES


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