

Street treats

To get the best out of Seoul, step out of its restaurants and onto the roads

ELISABETH LEE

There's plenty to rave about when it comes to dining out in Seoul. From the delicate tastes of Jeolla-style royal cuisine to the succulent barbecued hanwoo (Korean beef), you are guaranteed to leave the South Korean capital fatter and happier than when you arrived.

On a recent visit there, I had every meal for the five-day trip staked out in advance. I had a lunch date at Jung Sik Dang for its sea urchin bibimbap and a dinner date at To Sok Chon for a bowl of its famous samgyetang (ginseng chicken soup). I was going to try oxtail soup, blood sausage stew, cold noodle soup, and there were at least two fried chicken restaurants I'd been told I couldn't miss.



Street food carts selling all kinds of fried, boiled and stewed delicacies. PHOTO BY KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION

But on the first night out, it became rapidly clear that my meticulous planning had been in vain. My hotel was tucked away in one of the back alleys of Jongno and just steps away from the front door were streets lined with dozens of busy, bustling street food carts. Tempted by the delicious smells and encouraged by the friendly hawkers, my travel partner and I managed to stuff ourselves silly as we wandered towards our dinner destination, rendering moot whatever plans we had for that night.

As it turns out, this wasn't a bad plan of attack. For every busy thoroughfare in Seoul, there's at least one alley filled with street food carts selling all kinds of fried, boiled, stewed, and most importantly, extremely tasty delicacies. For the rest of our trip, we took to expanding our culinary horizons in the various alleys and markets of Seoul — and here are our top five picks.

1. HODDEOK

So yummy we ate at least one every day, hoddeok was my favourite discovery on this trip. This is a simple flour pancake that is stuffed with nuts, cinnamon and brown sugar, and then deep fried until the sugar has caramelised and the pancake is crisp. It's sugary and sinful — but worth every calorie.

2. GAERANBBANG

Think of this as a deconstructed egg tart — a whole, unbeaten egg is plopped onto the middle of a light batter and cooked on a griddle until the outside is crispy and the yolk is hot but still molten. On a cool night, this is a warm snack that will comfort your tummy.

3. HOT DOGS

True, there's nothing exotic about a hot dog — but a double-fried, French fry-



The delicious French fry-encrusted hot dog.



Try the hoddeok, a deep-fried pancake stuffed with nuts, cinnamon and brown sugar.

PHOTOS BY ELISABETH LEE

GETTING THERE

Singapore Air, Korean Air and Asiana Air fly daily from Singapore to Seoul's Incheon International Airport.

To get from Incheon International Airport to downtown Seoul, take an AREX train to Seoul Station. The commuter train costs 3,850 won (\$4) and takes 53 minutes, and the express train costs 13,800 won and takes 43 minutes.

WHERE TO STAY

The Shilla Seoul is a luxurious, award-winning choice set in an unbeatable location in the heart of downtown Seoul. If you prefer a more authentic experience, try a few nights at the traditional Tea Guesthouse.

For those on a budget, love hotels are a great choice. A good choice is the Hotel Pop in Jongno — a love hotel chain that's so popular it's spawned two more outlets right next door (Pop II and III).

MUST-SEE/ MUST-DO

Highlights include the historic neighbourhood of Bukchon, where traditional "hanok" houses give way to splendid views over Gyeongbuk Palace and the Secret Garden. But Seoul really works its magic when you head outdoors — ride a cable car up to Namsan Park to walk along the ancient fortress walls that ring the city, or take a hike up to Mt Inwang, home to the city's most famous shamanist shrine.

encrusted hot dog? This Korean version has to be seen to be believed. A skewered wiener is dipped into a cornflour batter, covered in crinkle-cut French fries, then fried until crisp. Smother on some chilli sauce and ketchup and you have a winner in the street food stakes. And if that isn't enough, there are also bacon-wrapped sausages, cheese-stuffed hot dogs and more.

4. DDEOKBOKKI

This is something you won't find elsewhere — rice cakes, fishcake and spring onions are simmered in a spicy red pepper paste made from gojuchang. The chewy rice cakes are substantial and filling but the sauce is piquant and tasty, making ddeokbokki one of the most popular street snacks. Caution — your spice levels may vary!

5. SOONDAE

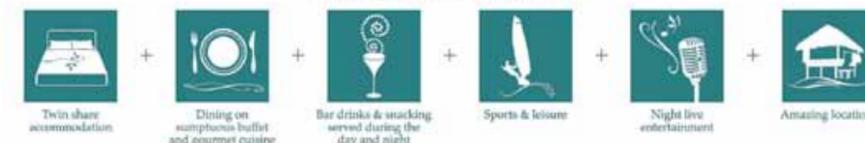
Take a walk on the wild side and try some soondae on your next trip. While blood sausage might not be to everyone's taste, it's a savoury and satisfying snack. Made from pork intestine that is stuffed with pork blood, rice vermicelli and lots of spices and seasoning, soondae is often served dipped in chilli salt — or even better, in ddeokbokki sauce.



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