

# Demilitarized Zone Turned to Ecotourism Haven

Cheorwon, 88 kilometers away from Seoul, is a northeast border county not frequently visited by domestic or foreign tourists thanks to the prevailing tensions between the North and South Korea. However, South Korea has been taking steps to create a niche of its own and create an ecotourism haven right there where no one dares to come.



In May 2016, the Cheorwon county authorities together with environment and national defense ministries opened an ecotourism park along the southern part of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the four-kilometer-wide buffer zone bisecting the peninsula since the Korean War ended in 1953. The site named **DMZ Eco Peace Park** was officially launched on May 21 and is home to some rare types of flora and fauna as access to the civilians was banned for the last 60 years.

The first group of foreigners to visit the DMZ Eco Peace Park consisted of 32 business and government officials from 10 ASEAN countries who attended a three-day ecotourism workshop conducted by the intergovernmental ASEAN-Korea Center located in Seoul. Malaysia's deputy minister Mas Ermieyati said that DMZ Eco Peace Park provides a unique experience to visitors. Though the group of visitors had to pass many soldiers, barbed wire fences, and mine warning signs, the park was both quiet and peaceful.



The eco park has a wooden footbridge, which dates back to the Korean War days. The twisted and scanty footbridge with missing boards served as the drying rack for birds. A dilapidated rail bridge which serviced Mount Kumgang bound trains until about 70 years back is another attraction in the park. According to reports, the ecosystem in DMZ came back to its current status 60 years after the Korean War ended and it would take another 40 years for it to recover to the pre-war state.

A 40-minute drive takes visitors to a small village inhabited by only 360 residents. The Durumi Peace Eco Village has developed its own niche as far as the ecotourism industry is concerned. The village generates income through the sale of agricultural goods and by providing hands-on experience of

making rice cakes from scratch.



According to the officials managing the ecotourism program of the village, the income from the sale in 2015 was approximately 300 million won (or US\$257,000), up 100 million won compared to the previous year. An additional 200 million won was generated by way of accommodation fees. This in turn has led to the construction of another boarding house.

Date: 2016-07-11

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-ecotourism-park-in-the-dmz-attracts-visitors-article2716>