

Peerless in Reaching for Sustainability: Jeju Island

Global region

East Asia

Domestic region

Jeju Island, South Korea

Internationally Designated Areas

Jeju Island UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

2002 (expanded 2018)

Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes

2007

Jeju Island UNESCO Global Geopark

2010

Five separate Ramsar Wetland designations

2006-2015

Jeju Island, a volcanic archipelago at the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, captivates with its dramatic landforms and scenery. It was not only the first MIDA in the world to receive the UNESCO Triple Crown, all three of UNESCO's natural science designations, it remains the only MIDA to possess all four major IDA designations due to its five Ramsar Sites.

Truly peerless, the island province has pioneered various forms of nature-based tourism to achieve a sustainable tourism model that benefits the local economy and environment.

Ecotourism under each IDA

Villagers take the lead in the Jeju Island Biosphere Reserve Ecotourism Activation Project, which trains locals in developing ecotourism activities and branding local products. Since the biosphere reserve was expanded in 2019, villages across the whole province are able to benefit from this specialised training to help conserve heritage and boost the local economy.

Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes was South Korea's first ever World Natural Heritage Site, and the Jeju World Heritage Office supports seven "World Heritage Villages" with training and funding to hold heritage-themed events throughout the year.

In 2010, Jeju gained the "Triple Crown" when it was designated a Global Geopark, and the "Global Geotrail Festival" at Suwolbong Peak, one of its Geosites, has helped to transform a sleepy fishing village into a bustling site of geotourism and local pride.

The islands Ramsar Wetlands, designated between 2005 and 2015, are no less active, particularly through the Ramsar Wetland City accreditation, which was secured in 2018 by Jocheon-eup county, which also includes a Biosphere Reserve, Geopark Geosites, and a World Heritage Site. Local villagers hold local events and markets at the Ramsar Wetland Centre to celebrate the immense value of the local wetland.

Jeju people have always been at the forefront of conservation on the island, and this is reflected in various community-led ecotourism initiatives under each IDA.

showcasing 13 representative geosites and five geotrails, including the celebrated Suwolbong Peak and its associated annual international festival. The island also protects five Ramsar Wetlands of International Significance, inscribed between 2005 and 2015. On a porous volcanic island where wetlands are rare, these woodland wetlands and crater lakes hold immense ecological and cultural importance.

Often described as a textbook of volcanology, the island displays nearly every stage and form of volcanogenesis. Dominated by majestic Mt. Hallasan, a 1,950 m shield volcano at its heart, Jeju is dotted with over 360 volcanic cones, or oreum, and features young, well-preserved landscapes including extensive lava tubes, columnar jointing, and unique volcanic woodlands known as gotjawal.

The reserve's core area centers on Mt. Hallasan National Park, extending down two river valleys to three islets. Surrounding mid-mountain areas of volcanic cones, woodlands, pastures, and tourism facilities form the buffer zone, while the transition zone encompasses coastal areas and urban settlements.

Sustainable tourism is central to Jeju's management. With the island heavily reliant on tourism, each IDA has developed initiatives that generate income while preserving culture, including the world-famous haenyeo women divers. The Biosphere Reserve Ecotourism Activation Project supports selected villages to create bespoke ecotourism activities. Complementary initiatives linked to the Geopark, World Heritage, and Ramsar sites challenge mass tourism models, ensuring that visitors experience Jeju's volcanic wonders and wetlands responsibly while supporting local communities.