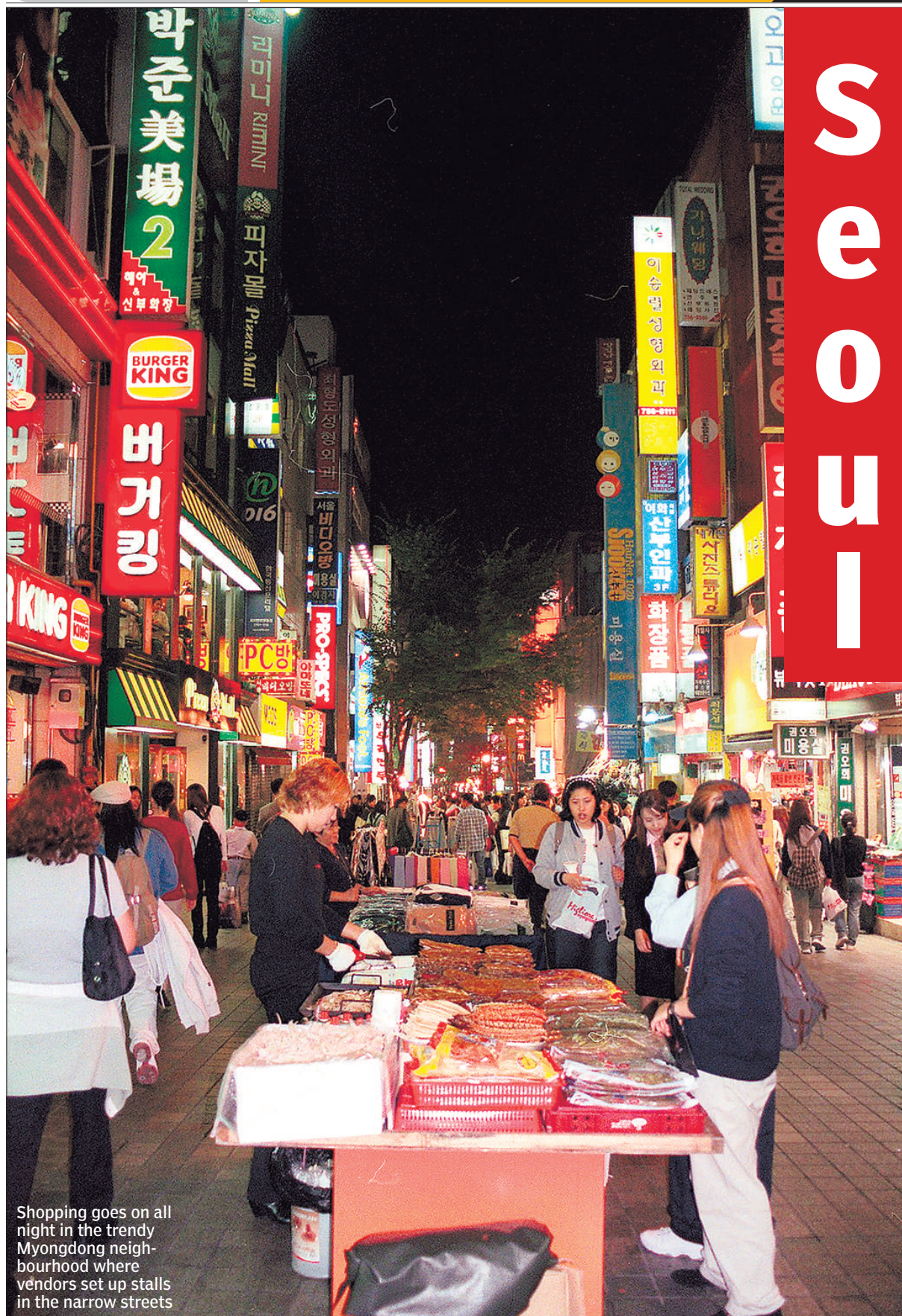


## Polar attraction



You will often feel dwarfed and humbled during this cruise to the Arctic wonderland  
P 13



Shopping goes on all night in the trendy Myongdong neighbourhood where vendors set up stalls in the narrow streets

# S e o u l



MAISIE  
WILHELM

This Asian capital has established itself as a serious fashion metropolis. And there's shopping for every budget

■ Maisie Wilhelm

# s h o p p i n g

**H**aving long struggled to assert itself in the shadow of its more popular sister Tokyo, Seoul is coming of age as a fashion destination in its own right. The proof is in the variety of shopping options no matter what your budget or your tastes.

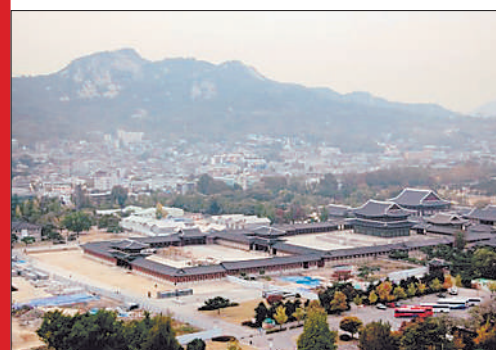
In various clusters around the city, you'll find distinct areas, which are frequented, by Koreans and visitors alike, such as Apgujeong, popular with a younger, artsy crowd, and next-door Cheongdam-dong, where more upscale boutiques and department stores draw crowds. Sinsa-dong, is slightly more touristy and trend-driven, and lively like Itaewon, where the locals go for a deal. Little known Samcheong-dam is the diamond in the rough, a picturesque village of one-of-a-kind boutiques tucked away behind the Blue Palace, one of Seoul's main attractions.

The streets of the smaller districts tend to be unnamed and many stores lack addresses, so your best bet is to tell a taxi driver your neighbourhood of choice and be sure to take along your sense of adventure.

### Feeling arty

Apgujeong, home to Korean shops that also carry a well-edited mix of Asian and western brands, is the epicentre for Seoul's many art and design lovers. Stores like 2 Sophie will sell American factory seconds from brands like Marc Jacobs or Diane von Furstenberg at excellent prices, alongside unique Korean clothing and accessory brands.

Continued on P 10



A view of the Blue Palace and Samcheongdong

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You can go to the very trendy Gorilla in Kitchen for the famous food, or simply to people watch (left)

Exhibits from the National Folk Museum (above left), which is located on the premises of the Gyeongbok Palace (above)

The Myeongdong market is a great place for bargains (right)



Continued from P 9

Cafes, sandwich shops, and myriad other restaurants provide ample options for having a quick bite or a more leisurely meal while you're in the area. One such restaurant doubles as one of the new and noteworthy gallery cafes popping up around the area. Seoul, designated 2010's World Design Capital, is known for its focus on design and architecture and Café Start (in neighbouring Sinsa-dong), is a perfect example of one of these new, well-designed hybrids.

Opened last year by a nationally celebrated Korean graphic designer, Café Start, a former residence-all poured concrete, squared white walls and aged parquet floors-now houses a restaurant and cafe spread over multiple levels. After lunch in one of the intimate but airy rooms, stop by the gallery space on the main level, which will house rotating exhibits.



Temples in Sinsadong

## Going high-end

Luxury boutiques have their place in Seoul, and the Hermès flagship in Cheongdam-dong is there to prove it. The Rena Dumas-designed store is a tourist attraction itself for admirers of architecture. But it's the newer store, Tom Greyhound Underground, tucked away down a side street near the pleasant Dosan Park which is where less mainstream high-fashion is sold in the stunning building designed by Yoon Lee. Be sure to people watch at the restaurant/day-spa Gorilla in the Kitchen ([www.gorillakitchen.co.kr](http://www.gorillakitchen.co.kr)).

New to town is 10 Corso Como (<http://www.10corsocomo.co.kr>), the third outpost of the well-known Italian boutique of the same name. Seoul's location, having opened March 2008 (after Milan and Tokyo) is significant in that it proves that this Asian capital continues to establish itself as a serious fashion metropolis.

You can spend hours inside the multilevel boutique as you browse its many closet-like clothing sections, not to mention the vast collection of coffee table books and house wares. Owner Carla Sozzani is known for her exquisite taste in clothing and jewellery, and with lines like Azzedine Alaïa taking pride of place in the store, this is evident.

Whereas 10 Corso Como may cater to more eclectic tastes, Boon the Shop (<http://www.boontheshop.com>), the longer established, high-end boutique in Cheongdam-dong, will satisfy the needs of those after a one-stop shop, stocked full with the crème de la crème of fashion.

Every major international label, from J. Mendel to Marni to Zac Posen is sold at this haven for big-spending fashion lovers. Minimalists will enjoy the quiet monastic-like atmosphere and can even rejuvenate in the ground floor cafe.

## Looking for bargains

For those budget-conscious visitors hoping for a more authentic shop-

ping experience there are two options. If you're excited by the prospect of brushing elbows (or tossing them) alongside Seoul residents, the best time to go to the nighttime market Namdeamun is 1 am, when the wholesalers start hawking their wares and haggling with pushy store owners. Even some locals are intimidated by the intense pursuit of a good bargain, but it's an adventure nonetheless.

Far from the harrowing market stalls and cheap clothing stores of Itaewon (where those seeking the midnight markets head), visit the Samsung family's art museum, the Leeum, for a remarkable collection of ancient Korean art as well as modern pieces by Twombly and Hirst.

## Take it slow

If leisurely strolling amid numerous bookstores, cafes and local boutiques is more your speed, head to the winding narrow streets up the sloping hill of Samcheong-dong. The area east of Gyeongbok Palace is little explored by tourists.

As one expatriate put it, "It's like Lonely Planet didn't write about it and so no one ever goes." For those who do go, it feels as if you are privy to the real Seoul, where art collectors stroll between galleries like Gallery Hyundai, and local fashion plates shop boutiques like Lamb (105 Sogyokdong, Jongnogu, Seoul), where only Korean designers are sold. Quaint, traditional Korean architecture makes for a lovely amble.

For nourishment, be sure to dine at Herb-Flower Season (113-3 Chongno-gu, Samcheong-dong), a small neighbourhood restaurant run by a botanist and his wife who grow many of the ingredients locally. Black sesame porridge comforts all the way down to your tired toes, which may need a bit of warming after walking around in the cool weather.

Maisie is a journalist living in New York City



Boon the Shop is a high-end boutique with something for all tastes

## SEOUL SOUTH KOREA



### • GETTING THERE

Several airlines have flights from Mumbai to Seoul, including Air India, Emirates and Korean Air. Average price for a round trip is about Rs 45,000.

### • GETTING AROUND

You can walk, or take the bus or a tram. If you're with at least two other people, then taxis will be cheaper for short trips. The cabs have a free interpretation system: just pick up the phone and talk to the operator for a translation from English. Writing your destination down will also help, as most Koreans understand written English better than spoken.