

Gyeongbokgung

Gyeongbokgung (Korean: 경복궁; lit. Blessing Scenery Palace), also known as Gyeongbokgung Palace, was the main royal palace of the Joseon dynasty. Built in 1395, it is located in northern Seoul, South Korea. The largest of the Five Grand Palaces built by the Joseon dynasty, Gyeongbokgung served as the home of the royal family and the seat of government.

Gyeongbokgung continued to serve as the main palace of the Joseon dynasty until the premises were destroyed by fire during the Imjin War (1592–1598) and abandoned for two centuries. However, in the 19th century, all of the palace's 7,700 rooms were restored under the leadership of Prince Regent Heungseon during the reign of King Gojong. Some 500 buildings were restored on a site of over 40 hectares. The architectural principles of ancient Korea were incorporated into the tradition and appearance of the Joseon royal court.

In the early 20th century, much of the palace was systematically destroyed by Imperial Japan during its occupation of Korea. On January 21, 1963, it was designated as a cultural property. Since the 1990s, the walled palace complex is gradually being restored to its original form. It also houses the National Palace Museum and the National Folk Museum within the premises of the complex.

Overview

Gyeongbokgung Palace, located in north of Gwanghwamun Square, was built three years after the Joseon dynasty was founded and it served as its main palace. With the mountain Bugaksan behind it and the Street of Six Ministries (today's Sejongno) outside Gwanghwamun Gate, the main entrance to the palace, Gyeongbokgung was situated in the heart of the Korean capital city. It was steadily expanded before being reduced to ashes during the Japanese invasion of 1592.

For the next 273 years the palace grounds were left derelict until being rebuilt in 1867 under the leadership of Regent Heungseon Daewongun. The restoration was completed on a grand scale, with 330 buildings crowded together in a labyrinthine configuration. Within the palace walls were the Outer Court (ojeon), offices for the king and state officials, and the Inner Court (naejeon), which included living quarters for the royal family as well as gardens for leisure. Within its extensive precincts were other palaces, large and small, including Junggung (the Queen's residence) and Donggung (the Crown Prince's residence).

Due to its status as the symbol of national sovereignty, Gyeongbokgung was extensively damaged during the Japanese occupation of the early 20th century. In 1911, ownership of land at the palace was transferred to the Japanese Governor-

General. In 1915, on the pretext of holding an exhibition, more than 90% of the buildings were torn down. Following the exhibition, the Japanese leveled whatever still remained and built their colonial headquarters, the Government-General Building (1916–26), on the site. Only a handful of iconic structures survived, including the Throne Hall and Gyeonghoeru Pavilion.

Restoration efforts have been ongoing since 1990. The Government-General Building was removed in 1996 and Heungnyemun Gate (2001) and Gwanghwamun Gate (2006-2010) were reconstructed in their original locations and forms. Reconstructions of the Inner Court and Crown Prince's residence have also been completed.

The current total area is 415,800 square metres (4,476,000 sq ft).