

Korean traditional house



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The traditional Korean house is heated by warm air or warm water which passes through hollow spaces or pipes under the floor. There's nothing better than coming home to a warm floor on a cold day. That's one of the reasons Koreans don't wear shoes in the house.

In prehistoric times, people in the northern part of Korea lived in pit dwellings with straw roofs. In the south, they lived in houses built on stilts.

These early people's lives centered around a stone fire pit. Their houses faced southeast to catch the sun and block the cold winds.

In the mountains of central Korea, many people lived in nowa houses, wooden houses held together by mud and straw. Their roofs were made of thick wooden shingles, which were held down with heavy stones or logs. Nowa houses have no chimneys. The smoke from the fire hole, which is used for cooking and heats the floor of the main room, escapes through a hole in the roof above the kitchen.

This nowa house is located in the mountains of Kangwon Province. Nowa houses are rare today.

Not long ago thatched houses dotted the countryside throughout Korea. Today most thatched houses are found in "folk villages," living museums where traditional Korean culture is preserved.

Many thatched-roof houses have simple fences made of sticks or stones. The walls of the houses are made of mud mixed with straw. In the colder northern provinces, roofs are very thick and hang low over the house. In the

warmer southern part of Korea, roofs are thinner, and windows and porches are larger.

In the Choson Kingdom, which ruled Korea from 9 to 90, there was an elite class called the yangban. They held government positions and were respected for their learning.

Many yangban homes were whitewashed with brown trim and gray tile roofs. The yangban, and all commoners, were not allowed to use the bright decorations found on palaces and Buddhist temples.

Larger yangban homes were divided into three parts: the sarangbang, the men's sitting room; the anbang, inner quarters where women lived and worked; and the family shrine, home to the spirits of the family ancestors. Servants usually lived in rooms outside the main gate.

The sarangbang was used as the bedroom, study and sitting room for yangban men. Decorations and furniture were simple: just a few cushions, a small writing desk, a chest or bookshelf and simple wooden holders for paper and brushes.

The sarangbang was located between the front gate and the inner room, or anbang, where the women and girls of the household lived and worked.

The anbang, or inner room, was the women's place and center of the household. The floor was heated with the ondol under-floor heating system. The anbang was located toward the back of the house because women were supposed to stay away from the outside world. A well-bred woman was

expected to stay home and not see any men, except her husband and close relatives.