

Your free pocket guide of **北京**
Beijing



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» **WHY VISIT BEIJING?**

- For the 2008 Olympics.
- To rent a bicycle and discover some of the latest preserved hutongs.
- To get into a vision of early morning Tai Chi practitioner at the 'divine' Temple of Heaven starting their day.
- For an un-expensive relaxing foot massage
- To see a Beijing opera in a typical Tea House.

**WHY VISIT BEIJING - AT A GLANCE - HISTORY - CLASSICS TO SEE - WHEN TO GO - VISA - TRANSPORTS - SHOPPING&MARKETS
EAT - DRINK - NIGHTLIFE - GREEN AREAS - OUTSIDE TRIPS - EVENTS - TO KNOW - USEFUL INFO - BOOKS&FILM**

» AT A GLANCE

With a population of 15 millions of people that live and gravitate around it, Beijing is China's second largest city after Shanghai. Whereas Shanghai and Hong Kong predominate in the economic field, Peking is widely recognized as the political, educational and cultural centre of the Country, with a jurisdiction over 18 districts and counties



Beijing history as the Empire Capital dates back to at least 938 a.C. Since that era, 5 dynasties, including the Ming's, have ruled the Empire until the collapse of the imperial regime and the formation of the Republic in 1911. After the turmoil of the last 2 centuries which caused a lot of sufferance to Chinese people (as the European military occupation, the Japanese invasion of WWII, the

civil war and the Cultural Revolution of 1966), China is now undergoing a recent intense urbanization and transformation welcoming foreigners as investors and tourists and giving local Chinese permission to set up their own businesses.

Beijing, that has lately understood the importance to preserve traditions and historic places like exquisite yellow-tiled temples, parks and traditional hutongs..., nowadays represents a fast-growing dynamic metropolis striving to get a western skyline. An unceasing raising of buildings, shopping malls, vast international hotels, intricate freeway system is probably what will impress you most. Together with some social progresses, this urban development has brought a multitude of "western" problems too: pollution, smog, traffic, frequent "power-saving" programs are just a few of them.

Some central Beijing districts: Haidian District (home of China's Silicon Valley -Zhongguancun- and 39 universities including Beijing, Tsinghua and Renmin Universities); Dongcheng District; Xicheng District; Chongwen District; Xuanwu District (8 traditional medicine); Chaoyang District – 798 Art District and flea

market district; Fengtai District; Shijingshan District.

» HISTORY

Beijing first served as the capital of a (more or less) united China in 1264 when Kublai Khan's victorious Mongol forces set up the city of Dadu (Great Capital) to rule their new empire, from a northern location closer to the Mongol homelands.

After the fall of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in 1368, the capital was moved back to Nanjing, but in 1403, the 3rd Ming emperor Zhu Di moved it to Beijing again and also gave the city its present name.

This was Beijing's golden era: the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven and many other Beijing landmarks were built at this time. Beijing remained the capital into the Qing era and into the revolutionary ferment of the early 1900s, but in the chaos following the abdication of the last Emperor, Beijing was beset by fighting warlords.

The Kuomintang thus moved the capital to Nanjing again in 1928, renaming Beijing as Beiping ("Northern Peace") to emphasize that it was no longer a capital. However, the Kuomintang was eventually defeated by the Communists, who in 1949 proclaimed the People's

Republic of China with its capital at Beijing.

THE NAME

Beijing literally means 'northern capital', a role it has played many times in China's long history and in line with the common east Asian tradition whereby capital cities are explicitly named as such. Another Chinese city similarly named is NanJing, meaning 'south capital'. At times in history, the capital was declared to be NanJing rather than BeiJing, according to whether the then current powerbase lay to the north or south of China. Emperor Wu was the first to declare the site of Beijing as the capital in 1057 BC. Subsequently, the city has gone by the names of Ji, ZhongDu, Dadu, then finally Beijing when the name was chosen by the Ming Dynasty Emperor ChengZu in 1421. Before 1949, Beijing was known as Peking by the Western world. Beijing was once again the capital only when Mao ZeDong declared the People's Republic of China on October 1st 1949.



» CLASSICS TO SEE

The 38 kilometre long Chang'An (Eternal Peace) boulevard that runs from east to west through central Beijing concentrates on state, political and economic affairs. The central areas around the Palace Museum (Forbidden City) and city gates as well as the lakes - ZhongNanHai, BeiHai and HouHai - have been designated as protected landmark districts that retain the features of Old Beijing. The Forbidden City at the centre is surrounded in concentric circles by the Inner City and Outer City. Citizens of higher social status were permitted to live closer to the center of the circles. Farther from the palace, and to its north and south, were the commoners, merchants, artisans and laborers.

A good place to start exploring the city is Tiananmen Square, where Mao Tse Tung declared the foundation of the People's Republic. Today, the Square is more closely identified with the suppression of the student-led pro-democracy protests of spring 1989. Another interesting experience that will let you feel a vibe of China's ancient traditions, is an early morning visit to one of Beijing's public parks.

This is when people indulge in their particular physical activities as Tai Chi, jogging, singing or even ballroom dancing.

Note: many tourist areas in Beijing are under renovation for the 2008 Olympics. For this reason some entrances are reduced for sights under renovation. Just be aware that prior to the Olympics there may be continued renovations.



Forbidden City, also known as the Palace Museum, is truly the spot to appreciate the might and grandeur of the Imperial Chinese court during the height of its power in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Get there when the gates open (around 8.30am) if you want to walk through the vast and spectacular courtyards in relative peace. Remember that this museum receives over 10 million visitors each year! Despite the transformation of the city around it, the Forbidden City remains mercifully relatively untouched. Only 2/5 area

of the palace is opened, but some places are under restorations and will be opened before 2008. Open daily all year. October 16th—April 15th 8:30am—4:30pm; Last Entry at 3:30pm; April 16th—October 15th 8:30am—5pm; Last Entry at 4pm. More info at: <http://www.dpm.org.cn>

Tiananmen Square, built by Mao to impress, is the largest square in the world. It is surrounded by Soviet-style monuments and government buildings, and houses Mao's mausoleum on the opposite side of the Forbidden City entrance. Every day at dawn and dusk many visitors (among them Chinese visiting their capital for the first time) indulge for the flag raising and lowering ceremony. The Tianmen Square remains an astounding place and a very eloquent witness of that infamous Spring 1989.



Temple of Heaven, located on south east of Qianmen and the Tiananmen Square, is not only a beautiful sight, but also the greenest public park of Beijing. Very popular with local residents practicing tai chi, dancing and other activities in the mornings and on weekends, the Temple of Heaven is home to many ancient trees, peaceful woods and amazing solitude (especially toward the West Gate). The temple itself was the site where the emperor prayed every year for good harvests and fair weather. It is easily reachable by public transports: buses 2, 7, 17, 20, 110, 120, 726, 803, 826 to the West Gate; or buses 35 and 106 to the North Gate. Park entrance ¥15; historical sights (like the temple) ¥35.



The Summer Palace lies 20 kilometers northwest of the center of Beijing. It is the largest imperial garden in existence in China. The whole Summer Palace covers an area of over 290 hectares including more than 3,000 buildings, such as halls, pavilions, towers and so on. The Summer Palace used to be called the Garden of Clear Ripples and is home to extensive gardens and ruins of palaces constructed by the Qing emperors. We suggest you explore the quieter places on the west bank and back hill areas where there are some secret ruins, caves, and other fun stuff. Summer Palace has two entrances: one is the East Palace Gate and the other is North Palace Gate. Most visitors enter the garden from the East Palace Gate. Admission fees: ¥ 35; cruise on Kunming Lake: ¥ 10

Winter Palace or Beihai is a good place to take a glance at Zhongnanhai, the heart of Communist China. The counter part of a beautiful white pagoda of 17th century and of a peaceful island in the middle of the park, is a skyline made up of giant Government buildings (PRC's Ministry of Defence and General Staff). Before you leave the park, visit some small but beautiful gardens on the north bank.

Yonghegong, also known as Lama Temple or Palace of Peace, was built by Chinese emperors who harboured a deep fascination for the Tibetan (Tantric) version of Buddhism. Over the years many Tibetan and Mongolian monks lived and taught here, and there are still monks in residence today. The temple is famous for its 18m statue of

Maitreya Buddha carved from a single piece of sandalwood.

Fragrant Hills, in the north-western corner of Beijing, is a good place for weekend outings and picnics. Formerly a Qing imperial garden, today Fragrant Hills makes an easy short climb in the suburbs of Beijing. It's also home to the Fragrant Hills Hotel, designed by I.M. Pei (Louvre Museum Pyramid). Take buses 331, 726 to the last stop. ¥10, students ¥5. From here, if you like green, have a visit to the Botanical Garden, next door.

Beijing Botanical Gardens, just steps away from the east gate of Fragrant Hill, offer acres of greenery and flowers for those tired of urban smog and traffic noise. Sir Johnston, teacher of the last emperor Puyi, had a villa in Cherry Glen, a silent and beautiful retreat in the Gardens. In the spring, the gardens hosts special exhibits of tulips, peach, plum blossoms and peonies. Buses 331, 726. ¥10, students ¥5.



The Hutong Villages of Beijing most represent the traditional housing of Chinese locals. Some of the streets in the Qianmen Hutong have a history of about 500 years, with unchanged street layouts. The Hutongs are the perfect place to get a glimpse of Chinese daily life. For these reasons, the Hutongs are considered very valuable and are a popular tourist attraction. Unfortunately, the majority of Hutongs have been demolished to make space for modern buildings. The Qianmen area, for example, is undergoing aggressive restoration and gentrification that will continue through 2010. As a result some of the streets are blocked by construction. Better see these typical Hutong Villages with rickshaws that can weave in and out of their narrow

Hutongs (< from the Mongolian hottog meaning “water well”) are narrow streets or alleys formed by lines of ‘siheyuan’, traditional courtyard residences.

Many neighbourhoods were formed by joining one siheyuan to another to form a hutong, and then joining one hutong to another. The word hutong is also used to refer to such neighbourhoods.

Following the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, many of the old hutongs were demolished and disappeared, replaced by the high rises and wide boulevards of today’s Beijing. Some of Beijing’s ancient hutongs still stand as more recently they have been designated as protected areas in an attempt to preserve this aspect of Chinese cultural history.



The hutongs in the vicinity of the Bell Tower and Shichahai Lake are especially well preserved and attracts many tourists.

798ArtZone is a part of the Chaoyang District and houses a thriving artist community, among 50-year old decommissioned military factory buildings of unique architectural style. It is often compared with New York’s Greenwich Village or SoHo, but faces impending destruction from the forces driving Beijing’s urban sprawl.

The Museum of History and the Museum of the Revolution is on the east side of Tiananmen square but until 2010 is undergoing renovation and will not be accessible until finished.

» WHEN TO GO

Beijing has a continental monsoon climate with clear-cut seasons. Best time to go is during Autumn with generous sunshine and fewer tourists are in town. Locals describe this short season as tiangao qishuang - literally “the sky is high and the air is fresh”. Spring is less pleasant - not many tourists but lots of wind and dust.



» VISA

As you probably know you need a Visa to get into the Chinese borders. L-visas for single or multiple entry for tourists are valid for 30 to 60 days. F-visas for business travel can be valid up to 6 months but may require the visitor to leave every 30 days. They are good for single, double or multiple entry. Those seeking business visas must obtain official invitation from a government office or a company authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

» TRANSPORTS

Following the economic reforms of Deng XiaoPing, the urban area of Beijing expanded greatly. The traffic network now consists of five concentric ring-roads (the outer three are expressways; the 6th Ring Road that is currently under construction), 28 radial roads (9 expressways), and underground and suburban railways that are being further developed to improve links from the centre with outlying areas and surrounding towns, plus several long distance railway routes and an international airport.

Public Bus and trolley Bus: you need to keep in mind some numbers. Buses Nos. 1-200 and trolley buses run in the city (1 yuan per person); buses Nos. 201-212 run at night; buses Nos. 300-599 go to the suburbs, charging according to the distance covered. Air conditioned buses starting with n. 8 are charged according to the distance covered. They usually run through the bustling streets. Buses starting with n. 6 go to the residential areas...and so on. (for details see www.bjbus.com).

Beijing Capital International Airport (010 645 63 604) is one

of China's major gateways. It is 28 km from the city centre, about 40 minutes' ride by car. Taxi costs about 100 yuan.

There are 4 **railways stations** in the city: Beijing Railway Station (ph. 5101 99 99), Beijing West (the largest; ph: 5182 6253), South (ph: 63030031) and North Railway stations. Passengers may buy train tickets from the ticket offices 10 days in advance or book by phone (ph. 010- 51827188 from 9am-9pm every day) or internet (www.036.com.cn) 5 to 11 days in advance.

There are 3 different types of taxi charges (1.2, 1.6, and 2 yuan per kilometer) and they are very convenient to explore the city. (Call the taxi centre: 010- 683 73399)

Subway: 4 lines criss-cross the city of Beijing . Line 1, Line 2, Line 13 and Batong line. The latter two are city rails. They run from 5am till approximately 10 or 11 in the night. Subway entrances feature a gray cement structure with a symbolized lamp box. A one-way ticket is about 3-5 yuan.

Bikes and bikes! As always we cannot avoid mentioning a healthy, environmentally friendly, convenient, economical, safe and fun means of travel transportation and recreation!

The bike! China truly is the 'Bicycle Kingdom', producing and using more bicycles than any other nation in the world. Cycling in China is a kind of life style for the Chinese people. Don't forget that in the traffic and in the narrow alleys of the Hutongs bikes are the best means to explore the city and is a super-individual way of transport by your own pace! Try companies like The Bicycle Kingdom to rent your own bike. (www.bicyclekingdom.com)

» SHOPPING & MARKETS

The opening up of Beijing to the West has had a profound impact on shopping. A wide range of consumer goods – both local and imported – are now available and there are many bargains to be found throughout the city. The main shopping area is around Wangfujing Dajie and XiDan, where there are a number of department stores, including the Beijing Department Store, which primarily caters for the Chinese market whilst ZhongGuanCun, often dubbed 'China's Silicon Valley', continues to be a centre for electronics and computer-related industries. Most shops are open daily 9am-8pm . There is no sales tax in China.

Flea Markets

• **Pan Jia Yuan Market**, also called the "dirt market" or the "weekend market," this is China's largest and possibly its most entertaining open-air flea market. Most people visit there at Saturdays and Sundays, and it is located near Pan Jia Yuan bridge, on the eastern third ring road. You can find antiques (for the majority fake varieties) and large sections of modern porcelain, jade, carved stone and wood, paintings, calligraphies, second-hand furniture, used books, maps, Tibetan goods, ethnic textiles, etc. If you are allergic to crowds avoid weekends. Bargaining's essential. (Chaoyang District, Dongsanhuan Panjiayuan, 18 Huaweili; bus: 28, 300, 368, 607, 730, 810, 907; stop at Panjiayuan Station; open Sunday to Saturday from 7am in summer and 8am in



Antiques

• **Liulichang:** This market is cram-med with ancient-style shops, reconstructed in a traditional way and stocking a bewildering array of antiques and curios there are no stoves anymore but all antique stores, selling Chinese painting, handicrafts, used books and other stuff.

This place was the most popular and fantastic place in old Peking, but was closed in the 1960s. Though it was re-opened in the mid 1980s, the original fantastic stores are state-owned, no longer attractive for local people. You can still find interesting things here. Note that antiques over 100 years old are marked with a red wax seal and an export licence must be issued in order to take them out of the country. In Chinese new year, there's a 15 day folk fair here. (get the subway and get off at Heping Men Station).

• **Liangmaqiao** Collector's market has been open for more than 10 years and specializes in ceramics, calligraphies, carpets, pieces of furniture from ming and Qing dynasties. (Chaoyang District, 27, Liangmaqiao Road; bus 413, 418, 419, 710, 757, 857, 090: stop at Anjialou Station)

-Gu Wan Cheng market is on the 3rd

ring road, just beyond Pan Jia Yuan market (see above). It's a 4 floor white building housing the more upmarket variety of Chinese antiques, with prices to match. There are fakes and low quality items...so be aware.

If you are looking for carpets you won't need to look too much: it is one of the strongest business in the Chinese Capital! For Tibetal originals have a look at Torana Gallery at the Kempinski Hotel.

Traditional Medicine

There is an abundance of traditional Chinese Medicines stores in Beijing. Most sell Chinese herbs, Wan, San, Gao, Dan and various formulated remedies. The materials chosen are top quality and they say the production process is closely



Try these 2 shops: Tongrentang, Deshoutang both in Xuanwu District in Zhushikou West Street, number 23 and 175.

Technology Items

• **Zhong Guan Cun** is a must!

You can find almost everything from speakers to computer parts at an astonishingly low price. It is located just a couple miles from Tsinghua University. Avoid vendors inviting in their shops. Remember that there is a lack of standards in these items and there's no 'return policy'. So at least don't pay too much. Regarding pirated CDs and DVDs, you can get them for not more than 5 to 10 Yuan. Although quality is not too high, at least make sure you are buying the English version! Ask for "yingwen".

Clothing

• If you wish to buy where Chinese buy, with the best prices, almost no need to bargain and a lot of genuine goods, try the clothing market in Xizhi Men, next to the Zoo. Once there look for the new giant building standing just in front and walk behind it.

• If you wish to buy silk then reach SanLiTun YaShou Market (58, Gongti Beilu) with good prices and not so popular among tourists as the Silk Street (8 East Xiushui Street Jianguo Men Wai Dajie).

• If you need very cheap items for your trip, see the leading Outdoor Gear Stores Sanfo located in different areas of the Beijing. (Try at Building 4, Entrance 5, Nancun, Madian. Take metro 2 to Zhishuitan; or bus 315, 344 or 345 to Madian. The store is located southside of Bei Sanhuan, west of Madian intersection. Or other departments at Jinzhiqiao Dasha, Guomen, Chaoyang District).

• **Xidan Market** (West of Tiananmen square): in the area around the subway station there are several large malls but there is also a market which is quite good!



Jewellery

• **Hong Qiao** is not far from the Temple of Heaven: it worth visiting for the state-run silk market but more especially for the pearl market in the opposite building.

We are mentioning this place just because we believe important to know several products and aspects of a culture, but we don't sustain any trade of corals, pearls, diamonds and all those products that increase slavery, poverty and natural environments deprivation! So think before you buy!

Shopping hints

- *Haggle is essential especially in touristy markets and shopping areas for common items*
- *Keep the "walking-away technique" as your last chance to get the lowest price!*
- *Exercise 'collective shopping': if you are with friends, try buying things at the same time. Vendors are 'obliged' to make discounts!*
- *Starting your bargain at least with 1/3 of the price...still sounds good.*
- *Credit cards are not so extensively accepted especially in markets and in the majority of shops but this situation is getting better as 2008 (Olympics year) approaches*

» EAT

The best way to eat good and cheap in Beijing is to enter one of the omnipresent restaurants where the locals are eating and pick a few different dishes from the menu. The main courses are very cheap so you don't have to worry too much to order different dishes and taste everything. Beijing offers excellent value dishes from all of China's eight regional styles of cuisine, not to mention Korean, Japanese and all manner of western dishes too for a less risky dinner! Especially considering that tipping is not practiced in China. Some of the cheapest and delicious meals can be had on the streets.



Here some typical dishes you can choose from:

For a "street snack" try Jiānbǐng guōzi, one of the most popular! It consists on a tasty pancake cooked with an egg on a griddle and a fried dough crisp. The whole thing is drizzled in scallions and a savoury sauce. Hot sauce is optional. It is something you can eat from morning till night.

Beijing is also known for its lamb hotpot (shuàn yáng ròu), which originally came from the Manchu people and emphasizes lamb over other meats. Like variations of hotpot from elsewhere in China and Japan, lamb hotpot is a cook-it-yourself affair in a steaming pot in the centre of the table. Unlike Sichuan hotpot, lamb hotpot features a savoury, non-spicy broth. If that's not exciting enough for you, you can also request a spicy broth (be aware that this is flaming red, filled with peppers, and not for the weak!). To play it safe and satisfy everyone, you can request yuānyáng for a pot divided down the middle, with spicy broth on one side and regular broth on the other.



Raw ingredients are purchased by the plate. In addition to lamb, beef, and seafood, this also includes a wide variety of vegetables, mushrooms, noodles, and tofu, so it's also perfectly possible to have vegetarian hotpot.

A dipping sauce, usually sesame, is served as well; you can add chilli, garlic, cilantro, etc, to customize your own sauce. While "raw" sounds dangerous, boiling the meat yourself is the best way to ensure that more risky meats like pork are fully cooked and free of germs. In the city centre, hotpot can run as much as ¥40-¥50 per person, but on the outskirts it can be found for as little as ¥10-¥25.



If you like lamb, be aware you can have it on kebabs (yángròu chuàn). Grilled on makeshift stands all around Beijing, you can have a sample of them from the late afternoon to late at night. Go to Wangfujing that has a "snack street" selling such mundane fare like lamb, chicken, and beef, but the brave can also sample silkworm, scorpion, and various organs all skewered on a stick and grilled to order. Yummie!

Beijing Roast Duck (běijīng kǎoyā) is a famous Beijing specialty and it is well served at many restaurants, but there are quite a few restaurants dedicated to the art of roasting the perfect duck. Expect to pay around ¥40 per whole duck at budget-range establishments, and ¥160-¥190 at high-end restaurants. Beijing duck is served with thin pancakes, plum sauce and slivers of scallions and cucumbers.

You dip the duck in the sauce and roll it up in the pancake with a few slivers of scallions and/or cucumbers. The end result is a mouth-watering combination of the cool crunchiness of the cucumber, the sharpness of the scallions, and the rich flavours of the duck.

And to finish, a winter treat! Candied haw berries (bīngtáng húlu) are a real season specialty dipped in sugar and sold on a stick. You can also find variations with oranges, grapes,

strawberries, and bananas, or dipped in crumbled peanuts as well as sugar. We recommend this sweet snack on winter time though as the haw berries are from the season's crop.



» DRINK

Tea, tea, and more tea! You can experience different ceremonies of tea at tea houses especially in the Qianman area south of Tiananmen. These can range in price, and some tea houses are really tourist traps whose main goal is to milk you of your money, so be careful. You can get a free tea demonstration at most Tenrenfu tea houses which are located throughout the city and at some malls.

Good coffee is hard to find in most

parts of China, although addicts have a place to retreat now that Starbucks has at least 50 spots in the capital, most situated around shopping malls and in commercial districts of the city.



The most popular Chinese beer, which is also quite good, is Qingdao. You can get it for 10-20 yuan or just 2-3 from a street vendor whilst the main beer brand of Beijing is Yanjing (10-15 yuan at restaurants, 2 yuan on the street).



Wine made in China are considered not drinkable by most foreigners, but it is also true that it's not their traditional drink...Just give them 10 years and they will come up with it too! If you really want to have some good wine, you can try Great Wall that is the most popular local brand, or get foreign products, such as those from the US, France, Italy, Australia, and Chile, but you will find them in more upper scale restaurants.

Looking for hard liquors? Try Bai jiu (white liquor) that comes in a large variety everywhere for very cheap prices and should be avoided if you want to have a clear mind for your visit on the next day. Mao Tai is one of the more famous brands but it is quite expensive.

» NIGHTLIFE

Nightlife in Beijing is kaleidoscopic - from dizzying acrobatics, martial arts displays and street theatre to delicate puppetry, outdoor ballroom dancing, the ubiquitous karaoke and trendy nightclubs. In addition, many shops in Beijing are open until 10pm and there are restaurants on every street, often with the choice of outdoor dining under red lanterns.

Beijing's new-found confidence on the world stage is best experienced

during an evening spent strolling through this wonderfully welcoming city that retains an intimacy one would find hard to match.

Many Chinese art forms date back centuries but most struggled to survive following the Communist revolution of 1949. Artists were organised into associations, which meant that the Party controlled every aspect, both creative and administrative. Travelling theatre, music and dance groups were created to take the Party message to the masses together with teams of projectionists showing reels of ideological films. Plays written before the 1950s, films with human interest and the Beijing Opera were suppressed and their creators persecuted until the end of the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s. Now many pre-Cultural Revolution art forms are performed regularly, as well as modern versions, which celebrate ancient and current culture, as well as ethnic differences.



In Beijing, that is now leading the country's cultural revival, some teahouses have recently reappeared showing a variety of Beijing Opera, martial arts and acrobatics and where you will be served delicious selections of tea and cakes. Although Western influences have been embraced to transform traditional Chinese art forms into contemporary pieces, it's still possible to get a taste of some traditional theatre, such as story-telling to musical accompaniment, magic shows and acrobatics daily at the Lao She Chaguan, 2nd Floor, (www.laosheteahouse.com), Da Wancha Building, 3 Qian Men Xi Jie (ph: (10) 6303 6830), and at the Tianqiao Happy Teahouse, 113 Tianqiao Nandajie (ph: (10) 6303 9013). Do not miss the spectacular traditional Chinese acrobatics, which have existed in China for two thousand years and cover anything from gymnastics and animal tricks to magic and juggling. The most popular venue is the Wan Sheng Theatre, Bei Wei Lu, just west of the Tianqiao Happy Teahouse (ph: (10) 6303 7449). (For tickets see: www.webtix.com.cn or call (10) 6592 8449 or 6594 9460). The best place to see the very popular Opera is at Zhengyici Theatre, a beautiful 17th century building, originally a Ming Dynasty temple, located a short walk from Heping

Men subway station. (220, Qian Men Xi He Yan Jie; ph: (10) 6303 3104).

» GREEN AREAS

Beihai Park the Central Park of Beijing, has an 800-year history as the royal garden of the Jin, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The park is grand with some beautiful plantings, a lake and paddleboats for rent by the hour (10 yuan). Visit at 6 am to see hundreds of people doing Tai Chi Chuan. (1, Wenjin St., Xicheng District; open daily 6am-9pm in summer, 6:3 am-9pm in winter; entrance: 0.50 yuan; ph: 6404-0610).



Coal Hill was formed from the soil excavated to create the moat around the Forbidden City. Located just north of the Forbidden City, the hill is now a park with the Ten Thousand Springs Pavilion at its summit. Nice flowers in season, good for strolling. Daily 5:30 am-9:30 pm in summer, 7 am-7:30 pm in winter. (0.33 yuan). Other green places: Beijing Jingshan Park or the Temple of Heaven (see Classics)

» OUTSIDE TRIPS

• **Great Wall of China:** amongst beautiful countryside is one of the tours that any travel agent will offer you. Some parts of the Great Wall are only an hour from central Beijing.

Be wary: do not go for organized tours to the Great Wall in the 100-150 Yuan range that are advertised by people handing out flyers around the Forbidden City (the real bus service to the Great Wall only costs 20 Yuan!). Also, the driver might just stop and set you off before your destination. Only pay afterwards!



• **Fragrant Hills Park** (Xiangshan Park) is a public park at the foot of the Western Mountains in the Haidian District, 28 kilometres (17 miles) northwest of Beijing. Fragrant Hills Park is recognized as one of the major tourist attractions in Beijing. When autumn arrives, the natural scenery in the park turns spectacular, with fiery red smoke tree leaves covering the mountain side. Every year, thousands of tourists ride the cable cars through the park to see the hills in autumn colours. The grand opening of the annual Red Leaf Festival of Beijing takes place there.



The Park was built in 1186 in the Jin Dynasty and consists of a natural pine and cypress forest, hills with maple trees, smoke trees and persimmon trees, as well as landscaped areas with traditional architecture and cultural relics. The name derives from the park's highest peak, Xianglu Feng (Incense Burner Peak), a 557 meters (1827 ft) hill with two large stones resembling incense burners at the top.

In 1745, Emperor Qianlong (1711 to 1799) ordered the addition of many new halls, pavilions and gardens and gave it a new name, Jingyi Garden (Garden of Tranquillity and Pleasure). Buildings in the complex have partially been burned down. Among the surviving treasures are a majestic glazed-tiled archway in front of the complex, a Tibetan style terrace and a glazed-tiled pagoda. Bells hung on the eaves of the pagoda chime in breeze.

» TO KNOW

- Air pollution could be a serious problem. If your throat and nose ache, we suggest you drink lots of the local green tea (hot) that will help you resist sickness from the bad air. Remember winter is the worst time to be there! It is advisable to purchase and drink several bottles of purified water a day.
- Potable water is available only at top hotels, so visitors should always ask to make sure.
- Prior to your trip, consult your doctor on immunizations you might need (e.g. tetanus, typhoid, cholera and hepatitis A and B) and about malaria suppressants if you're planning to go to rural areas. Bring all prescription and over-the-counter medicine you might require.
- Tipping is generally not expected in mainland China.
- Beijing is a very safe city. However, tourists are often preyed upon by cheats and touts. Be especially cautious in the inner city, around Tiananmen Square and on the tourist-crowded routes to the Great Wall.
- Do not follow any "students"

wanting to show you something. They are most likely scammers or semi-scammers. Tea sampling is another scam. It is free to sample tea for locals! Take care when offered a ride in a rickshaw. Make sure you know where you are going to be taken in advance, and agree a price in writing.

- Be wary of fake money: there are a lot of counterfeit bills in circulation.
- Most Internet news is not censored like CNN.com but BBC News, The New York Times and Wikipedia usually are. Use a tool like anonymouse.org to access.
- E-mail access through an Internet based email service is very helpful to have.

» USEFUL INFO

- Government: Communist state.
- Language: Mandarin
- Religion: Atheist
- Currency: RMB (Renminbi).
The basic unit of RMB is the yuan.
- Time zone: GMT/UTC plus 8 hours
- Telephone area code: 010
- Police: 110
- Fire Department: 119
- Ambulance and medical care: 120
- Tourist Hotline: 6513-0828
- Local directory assistance:
114 (Chinese);
2689-0114 (English)
- Intern.directory assistance: 100

In Beijing, most major credit cards are accepted at major hotels, restaurants and shops.

Visa Card Hotline: 10-800-110-2911
MasterCard Hotline: 10-800-110-7309
(only in certain provinces)

The voltage is 220 volts, 50 cycles. Come equipped with converters, because a wide variety of plug types are in use.

International Medical Center (IMC)

Room 106, Beijing Lufthansa Center
50 Liangmaqiao Lu, Chaoyang District
Tel: +86-10 6465-1561/1562/1563

Fax: +86-10 6465-1961

Location: next to the Kempinski Hotel and the Lufthansa Shopping Center, and a 10-min. walk from the Kunlun, Great Wall Sheraton, and the Landmark hotels

AEA International Hospital

Building C, BITIC Leasing Center
No. 1 Xingfu Sancun North Road
Chaoyang District, Beijing

Tel: +86-10 6462-9112

Fax: +86-10 6462-9111

Emergency Room

Tel: +86-10 6462-9100

Location: a 5-min. drive or 15 - to 20-min. walk from the Lufthansa Shopping Center, Kempinski Hotel, Great Wall Sheraton, Kunlun, and Zhaolong hotels

Beijing United Family Hospital

No. 2 Jiangtai Lu
Chaoyang District, Beijing 100016

Tel: +86-10 6433-3960

Fax: +86-10 6433-3963

Location: A 5-min. drive, or 15-min. walk, from the Holiday Inn Lido and Harbor Plaza hotels

SUGGESTED BOOKS

T. Terzani - Behind The Forbidden Door: Travels in Unknown China (1985)
Wang Shuo - Please Don't Call Me Human (1989)
Amy Tan - The Bonesetter's Daughter (2001)
Amy Tan - The Joy Luck Club (1989)
Zhang Xiangliang - Half of Man is Woman (1985)
Jung Chan - Wild Swans (1991)
Lu Xun - A Madman's Diary (1918)

SUGGESTED FILMS

Bernardo Bertolucci - The Last Emperor (1987)
Zhang Yang - Shower (1999)
Chen Kaige - Farewell My Concubine (1993)
Feng Xiao Gang - Sorry Baby (1999)
Zhang Yimou - Red Lantern (1991)
Zhang Yimou - Keep cool (1997)
Zhang Yimou - Not one less (1999)
Zhang Yimou - Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles (2005)
Gianni Amelio - La stella che non c'è (Ita; 2006)
Zhang Yuan - Little Red Flowers (2006)
Xiaoshuai Wang - Beijing bicycle (2001)

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS AND EVENTS

Jan. 1-2, New Year's Day
 End of Jan/Feb.: Chinese New Year
 March 8, International Women's Working Day
 Qing Ming first week of April
 May 1-2, International Labor Day
 May 4, Youth Day
 Tuen Ng (Dragon Boat) Festival June
 June 1, Children's Day
 July 1, Anniversary of the Founding of the Communist Party
 Aug. 1, Anniversary of the Founding of the People's Liberation Army
 Mid-Autumn Festival: September
 Oct. 1-2, National Day.

The Chinese New Year, which takes place either in late January or early February, is the most important festival of the year. The build-up to the festival is as frenzied as Christmas is in the West, with parties, gift exchanging and streets and houses decorated with lights. Most Chinese celebrate the start of the New Year with their families.

The Mid-Autumn Festival

in September or early October is celebrated by displaying lanterns in various shapes, such as animals, and by eating moon cakes made of ground lotus, sesame and egg.



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