



China



China kept itself to itself for thousands of years, and foreigners still find it difficult to penetrate the inner depths of this fascinating and enigmatic country. There is a great deal to discover in this, the world's most populated country, with more than 1.3 billion citizens, and the third largest in the world territorially. What makes it attractive as a destination for Western tourists is its fascinating culture and valuable antiquities. Ruins and relics from Neolithic settlements and the dynastic reigns of the mighty emperors are there to behold, along with adventures along the legendary ancient trade routes, such as the Silk Road. The Forbidden Palace, Great Wall, and X'ian's Terracotta Army, are just some of the incredible attractions to be seen in this ancient Eastern empire.



Southwest Kunming © babasteve

The People's Republic of China has been under communist government since 1949, but is currently undergoing social and economic development. Emphasis is being placed on tourist facilities and infrastructure. China is opening the doors to its wealth of historical and cultural treasures and visitors are flooding in to be amazed and awed. Organised tours are still the favoured way to explore China, but independent travel is slowly becoming easier. The major cities, like Beijing and Shanghai, are modern metropolises offering fast food and glitzy stores alongside centuries-old historical buildings and traditional eating houses. Archaeological wonders vie with amazing architecture in the interior, while majestic mountains and remote monasteries crown the northern areas.

Basics

Time: Local time is GMT +8.

Electricity: Electrical current is 220 volts, 50Hz. Plug types vary but the two-pin flat blade and oblique three-pin flat blade plugs are common. Adapters are generally required.

Money: The currency used in China is the Renminbi Yuan (CNY). The Yuan is divided into 10 chiao/jiao or 100 fen. Make sure you exchange your leftover Yuan before returning home because this currency can be exchanged only within China's borders. Travellers cheques, preferably in US Dollars, and foreign cash can be exchanged in cities at the Bank of China. Banks are closed weekends. The larger hotels and the special 'Friendship Stores' designed for foreigners will accept most western currencies for purchases. Major credit cards are accepted in the main cities at various establishments, but outside the major cities acceptance is limited. ATMs are scarce outside the main cities.

Currency Exchange Rates				
CNY1.00	CNY5.00	CNY10.00	CNY100.00	CNY1,000.00
A\$ 0.19	A\$ 0.96	A\$ 1.91	A\$ 19.14	A\$ 191.42
C\$ 0.16	C\$ 0.82	C\$ 1.64	C\$ 16.37	C\$ 163.68
€ 0.10	€ 0.52	€ 1.05	€ 10.50	€ 104.99
NZ\$ 0.23	NZ\$ 1.17	NZ\$ 2.35	NZ\$ 23.48	NZ\$ 234.83
R 1.19	R 5.96	R 11.91	R 119.13	R 1,191.32
£ 0.09	£ 0.46	£ 0.92	£ 9.16	£ 91.62
US\$ 0.15	US\$ 0.73	US\$ 1.46	US\$ 14.61	US\$ 146.08

Note: These rates are not updated daily and should be used as a guideline only.

Language: The official language is Mandarin Chinese, but there are hundreds of local dialects.

Entry requirements for Americans: US nationals require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for UK nationals: UK nationals require a passport and visa for entry to China. Passports endorsed British National (Overseas) are not recognized and holders should carry a 'Returning Resident Permit' together with their Hong Kong ID.

Entry requirements for Canadians: Canadians require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for Australians: Australians require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for South Africans: South African nationals require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders: New Zealand nationals require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals: Irish nationals require a passport and visa for entry to China.

Passport/Visa Note: Visa not required if coming for a stay of six days only if arriving from Hong Kong or Macao in order to take a trip to Zhujian Delta in Guangdong Province. Persons holding an APEC Business Travel Card do not require a visa, provided that it is valid for travel to China. Travel to Tibet will also require a special Tibet Entry Permit. All documents necessary for further travel and sufficient funds to cover intended period of stay are required. Period of validity is stated on visas, and care should be taken when reading dates on visas for China as they are written in year/month/day format.

Health: A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers coming from infected areas. There is a risk of malaria throughout the low-lying areas of the country, and it is recommended that travellers to China seek medical advice before departure. A total of 18 human cases of avian influenza ('bird flu') have been reported from China since November 2005. Twelve of the cases were fatal. Travellers are unlikely to be affected by bird flu, but live animal markets and places where contact with live poultry is possible should be avoided. All poultry and egg dishes should also be thoroughly cooked. Outbreaks of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) are few and far between, although the last fatality was in 2008. Travellers are warned to remain vigilant against this viral disease. Japanese encephalitis has been responsible for the deaths of a number of people in the Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces in northern China, and rabies infects people every year, occasionally causing death. Outbreaks of dengue

fever occur. A variant of hand, foot and mouth disease, an intestinal virus has also been prevalent in 2008, with children being at particular risk. Altitude sickness can occur in the mountainous regions of Tibet, Qinghai, parts of Xinjiang, and western Sichuan. Outside city centres, visitors should only drink bottled water. Western-style medical centres with international staff are available in the major cities and usually accept credit cards. Health insurance is recommended.

Tipping: Tipping is not officially recognised, although the practice is becoming more common among travel guides, top-end restaurants, tour bus drivers and hotel staff. If wanting to tip leave a gratuity of 10%. Large hotels and restaurants often include a service charge in their bills, usually of about 10%.

Climate: China covers extensive territory and has a complex topography, therefore the weather differs from region to region. The southeast, below the Nanling Mountains, tends to be very wet with high temperatures all year round. In the central Yangtze and Huaihe River valleys there are four distinct seasons with very hot summers and extremely cold winters, and rain all year round. The dry north experiences a short but sunny summer, with long bitterly cold winters. The coast is humid and experiences monsoons during summer.

Safety: The Beijing Olympic Games run from 8-24 August 2008 and the Paralympic Games from 6-17 September 2008; travellers are advised that extra security measures will be in place before and during these events. China is generally safe, and there has been no evidence of a threat from global terrorism. Serious crime against foreigners is rare but does occur, particularly in isolated or sparsely populated areas. There has been an increase in the number of muggings and robberies at Beijing International Airport and the Jianguomenwai area of Beijing, as well as in Shenzhen, bordering Hong Kong. If trekking alone, including following parts of the Great Wall, it is advisable to leave an itinerary and expected time of return with a third party. Travellers should take extra care in street markets and at tourist sites, which attract thieves and pickpockets, and around the popular expat bar areas at night where lone foreigners have recently been attacked. Travellers should be cautious about using pedicabs in Beijing, as tourists have been mugged and demands for money made by pedicab drivers; women in particular have been targeted. Seasonal heavy rains and typhoons cause hundreds of deaths in China each year, particularly those areas bordering the Yangtze River in central, southern and western China. Demonstrations took place in Lhasa, Tibet, as well as in some Chinese provinces in protest against Chinese rule in Tibet; although the situation seems to have stabilised, visitors are advised to stay up to date on the latest situation before travel. On 12 May 2008 a massive earthquake resulted in more than 70,000 deaths, thousands of injuries and a general state of devastation in western China. All travel to Sichuan Province should be avoided for the time being.

Customs: The Chinese have three names, the first of which is their surname, or family name. As a result visitors should be prepared for hotels mistakenly reserving rooms under their first names. For clarity surnames may be underlined. When addressing Chinese people the surname should come first and official titles should be used. Chinese handshakes last longer than those in western countries, and in conversation it is customary to stand close together. Politeness in Western terms is foreign to them, and they rarely bother with pleasantries. All foreigners should carry ID at all times as spot checks are common and failure to show evidence in ID will result in a fine or detention.

Business: The Chinese are strict timekeepers and being late for a meeting is considered rude. When meeting people for the first time it is normal to shake hands and say 'ni hao', which means 'how are you'. Business cards are exchanged at the start of meetings in China and it is customary to have one side printed in Chinese and one in English. When giving or receiving business cards, or a gift, it is customary to hold it with both hands. Chinese consider gifts as an important show of courtesy. During a meal or reception your host is likely to offer a toast; you may be expected to offer him one in return. Business hours are 8am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday. A five-day week is more normal in larger cities. Workers take their lunch break between 12pm and 2pm and it is not unusual to find offices empty during this time.

Communications: The international access code for China is +86. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the United Kingdom). The city code for Beijing is (0)10. International Direct Dialling is available in most cities. Phone cards are widely available and calls can be made from post offices and hotels; phone booths on the streets are usually for local calls only. In hotels, local calls are generally free or will be charged only a nominal fee. Mobile phone networks are very advanced. Operators use GSM 900 networks and have roaming agreements with most non-North American international operators. Internet cafes are available in most main towns.

Duty Free: Travellers to China do not need to pay customs duty on 400 cigarettes (600 cigarettes if stay exceeds six months), two bottles of alcoholic beverages (not more than 0,75 litres per bottle), or four bottles if staying longer than six months. Perfume for personal use is allowed. Prohibited goods include arms and ammunition or printed material that conflicts with the public order or moral standards of the country. Also prohibited are radio transmitters and receivers, exposed but undeveloped film and fresh produce. Strict regulations apply to the import or export of antiquities, banned publications, and religious literature. All valuables must be declared on the forms provided.

BEIJING

The capital of the People's Republic of China, Beijing (formerly Peking) is a very modern and exceedingly busy city (nearly 14 million people call it home) with high-rise buildings, international hotels and sprawling suburbs. The city is abuzz and bristling with cranes on the skyline as construction projects give rise to new skyscrapers and modernisation proceeds apace. However, Beijing also encompasses numerous attractions of cultural and historical interest, of which some, such as the Great Wall, former Imperial palace (known as the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace and the remains of Peking Man at Zhoukoudian, are UNESCO-endorsed World Cultural Heritage Sites. Chinese history and culture fascinates Western visitors, and Beijing is the place to start exploring it. The city



Illustration: Getty Images / Robert McCoslin

abounds in imperial palaces, temples, mansions, gardens and tombs that epitomise classical Chinese architecture. It has 120 museums and more than 100 public gardens.

The first port of call for most visitors is the Forbidden City, which lies at the heart of Beijing with the rest of the city radiating out from it in a grid pattern. For five centuries this massive palace complex with 9,999 rooms functioned as the administrative centre of the country and home to a succession of emperors, who lived in luxurious isolation, surrounded by courtiers and retainers. The Palace overlooks the famous Tiananmen Square, site of so much political drama and dissent, the epitome of this capital city.

In preparing to host what they hoped were 'the best games in Olympic history', Beijing undertook many major renovations in 2008. Public transport was improved, environmental issues addressed and a general clean up of the city was ordered. The Chinese saw the games highlight its economic rise and emergence as a world power.

Attractions

Forbidden City

Lying at the centre of Beijing, the Forbidden City, called Gu Gong in Chinese, was the imperial palace during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It is the biggest and best preserved complex of ancient buildings in China, and the largest palace complex in the world. Construction of the palace complex began in 1407 and for 500 years this inner sanctum was off-limits to most of the world as the emperors lived in luxury, secluded from the masses, surrounded by their families, court officials, servants, eunuchs, concubines and other members of court. The Forbidden City and its centrepiece, the magnificent palace, have a permanent restoration squad, which continually works to keep the 800 buildings and 9,999 rooms inside the Forbidden City complex in top repair. The once Forbidden City is now open to all visitors.

Website: www.dpm.org.cn/english/default.asp; **Opening time:** Daily 8.30am to 4.30pm (1 November to 31 March); 8.30am to 5pm (1 April to 31 October); **Admission:** ¥60 (April to October); ¥40 (November to March)

Tiananmen Square

The famous square at the heart of Beijing, recently renovated, is still not much to look at, but it attracts curious tourists simply because it was the scene of so many historic events and is the largest city square in the world. In the ancient imperial days it was a gathering place and the site of government offices, but more modern history, particularly the 1989 massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators, has made it a site of great political significance. Major rallies took place in the square during the Cultural Revolution when Mao Tse Tung reviewed military parades up to a million strong. The square is surrounded by several monuments, some ancient and some modern, including the former gates to the Forbidden City, the Gate of Heavenly Peace and Qianmen (the front gate); the Chinese Revolution Museum; and the Mao Mausoleum where China's former leader lays preserved in state.

Great Wall

Several sections of the Great Wall of China, a man-made phenomenon that has become a symbol of Chinese civilisation, can be viewed in the Beijing area. In Yanqing county in northwest Beijing is the 600-year-old Badaling Fortification, representative of the Ming dynasty sections of the Great Wall. Other sections can be seen at Jinshanling, Mutianyu and Simatai. The Great Wall, 4,000 miles (6,350km) long, was built in stages from the 7th century BC onwards, snaking its way across the mountains and valleys of five provinces in northern China as a mammoth defence bulwark.

Summer Palace

The magnificent Summer Palace in northwest Beijing at Kunming Lake was built in 1750 by the Emperor Qianlong, and continued to be an imperial residence until the Empress Dowager Cixi died in 1908. The palace and stunning gardens are open to visitors, who enter through the East Palace gate, pass through a grand courtyard into the Hall of Benevolent Longevity, the Hall of Jade Ripples, and the Hall of Joyful Longevity. Empress Cixi's private theatre in the Garden of Moral Harmony is a must-see, as is the long corridor that skirts Kunming Lake's northern shoreline to reach the marble boat, an elaborate two-storey structure of finely carved stone and stained glass.

Transport: Buses 907, 375, 801, 808, 732, 394 or 718; **Opening time:** Daily 7am to 5pm (November to March), 6.30am to 6pm (April to October); **Admission:** ¥25 (November to March), ¥35 (April to October)

Zhoukoudian Cave

About 25 miles (40km) south of Beijing in the Fangshan District is the Zhoukoudian Cave, source of the largest collection of Homo erectus fossils from any single site in the world. The fossils recovered from Zhoukoudian represent about forty individuals. Most famous of these remains is a cranium element commonly known as the 'Peking Man', the world's earliest fire-using primitive man who lived between 200,000 and 700,000 years ago. German anatomist Franz Weidenreich studied the Peking Man remains in the 1930s and recognised 12 anatomical features that he believed Peking Man shared with modern Chinese, a milestone in the study of paleoanthropology. Visitors to the Zhoukoudian site on Dragon Bone Hill can view a comprehensive seven-room exhibition of fossils and artefacts depicting human evolution and the lifestyle of primitive man. Visitors can also enter the cave where the Peking Man cranium and other Homo erectus remains were found.

Admission: ¥20 (adults), concessions available

Chairman Mao Mausoleum

Although Chairman Mao Zedong requested to be cremated it was decided hours after his death in 1976, that he would be embalmed. Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China from 1945 until his death, it is said that after his death doctors reportedly pumped him so full of formaldehyde that his body swelled excessively. After draining the corpse and getting it back to a suitable state, they created a wax model of Mao Zedong, lest his body wouldn't recuperate. It is unknown today, which version of the Great Helmsman is on display at the Mausoleum at any given time. The Mausoleum itself was built in 1977, on the prior site of the Gate of China, the main gate of the Imperial City during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Address: South end of Tiananmen Square; **Admission:** Free

Beihai Park

A place of tranquillity and grand imperial beauty, the Beihai Park in Beijing is a peaceful natural haven after a long morning of busy sightseeing. One of the oldest and most authentically preserved imperial gardens in China, the history of Beihai Park extends over 1,000 years to the ancient Liao dynasty (916-1125AD). Built up through five dynasties, the park is an emblem of old world China and the ancient Chinese art of landscaped gardens with artificial hills, colourful pavilions and intricate temples, dominates. Kublai Khan lived in what is now the Round City of Beihai Park and the Tibetan style White Dagoba, built in 1651 on Jade Island (JiongHua), is a landmark for both Beihai Park and Beijing, having been constructed on the suggestion of a famous Tibetan Lama priest, NaomuHan.

Address: Wenjin Jie 1; **Transport:** Underground rail to Tiananmen Xi, then bus number 5; **Opening time:** Daily 6am to 9pm; **Admission:** ¥10, ¥20 on holidays

798 Space

Beijing's prominent art district is home to 798 Space, a former electronics factory, which built components for China's first atomic bomb and early satellites. Exhibiting the latest in contemporary Chinese art in its lofty space, 798 Space is a visual delight to any traveller. Besides the regular national and international exhibitions, there is also a film and video viewing area and a tempting gallery bookshop. The precinct itself is dotted with avant-garde statues, charming coffee shops and noodle bars, and a plethora of other wonderful art galleries to visit.

Address: 4 Jiuxianqiao Road, Dashanzi Art District, Chaoyang District; **Telephone:** (0)10 64376248; **Website:** www.798space.com; **Opening time:** Daily from 10.30am to 7.30pm everyday ; **Admission:** Free

Great Bell Temple

The Qing Temple is home to the Ancient Bell Museum (Gu Zhong Bowuguan) and is a must see for travellers en route to the Summer Palace. The temple, originally known as 'Awakened Life Temple', apparently wasn't experiencing enough 'awakening' and a 47-ton bell, with a height of 22.77 feet (6.94m) was transported to the temple on ice sleds in 1743. The bell is inscribed with Buddhist Mantras on both the inside and outside of the body and features over 227,000 characters in all. The bell was often chosen by the emperors to pray for rain and blessings for the people of China and was one of three projects that Emperor Yongle in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) commanded after re-establishing Beijing as the capital. The other two were the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven. The bell is considered as an auspicious article in the Chinese tradition and nowadays it is rung 108 times to begin the celebrations at grand ceremonies.

Address: Bei San Huan Xi Lu 31A; **Telephone:** (0)10 6255 0819; **Transport:** Bus routes: 361, 422, 425, 326. Metro: Da Zhong Si (1302, exit A); **Opening time:** Open Tuesday to Sunday from 8.30am to 4pm; **Admission:** ¥10; ¥12 to climb the Bell Tower

The Underground City

For more than 20 years, Beijing's Underground City, a bomb shelter just beneath the ancient capital's downtown area built in case of nuclear attack, has been virtually forgotten by Beijing locals, despite being infamous amongst foreigners since its official opening in 2000. A sign near the entrance announces this rarely visited attraction a 'human fairyland and underground paradise'. Aside from some rather odd recent additions, the Underground City features factories, stores, guesthouses, restaurants, hospitals, schools, theatres, reading-rooms, a roller-skating rink and many other curious features. Built from 1969 to 1979 by more than 300,000 local citizens including school children, The tunnels were initially built to accommodate all of Beijing's six million inhabitants upon completion. Winding for over 18 miles (30 km) and covering an area of 85 square kilometers from eight to eighteen meters under the surface, the underground City includes more than 1,000 anti-air raid structures.

Address: Xi Damochang Jie 64; **Telephone:** (0)10 6702 2657; **Transport:** Metro: Chongwen Men (209, exit D); **Opening time:** Open daily from 8.30am to 5pm; **Admission:** ¥20

Beijing Aquarium

Located within the Beijing Zoo, the Beijing Aquarium is the world's largest inland aquarium. It's an absolute must see with features such as an imaginative Amazon rainforest, complete with piranha, as well as an exquisite shark aquarium where the very brave can plunge into the tank with these infamous predators. Families flock to see the dolphin shows at 11am and 3pm and a boat from the canal south of the aquarium runs to the Summer Palace, giving visitors the opportunity to sightsee while en route to the attraction.

Address: Gaoliang Qiao Xiejie 18B; **Telephone:** (0)10 6217 6655; **Transport:** Bus 4 (from Qianmen); **Opening time:** 9am to 5.30pm (October to May); 9am to 6pm (June to September); **Admission:** ¥110 (adults), includes admission to Beijing Zoo; ¥60 (children)

The Beijing National Stadium

Also known as The Bird's Nest due to its appearance, this colossal stadium was the hub of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, hosting all of the track and field events as well the opening and closing ceremonies. The unique-looking steel support structures framing the stadium, weigh in at 110, 000 tons (99,790kg), making the stadium the largest steel structure in the world. A hotel and a shopping mall are planned within close proximity to the stadium to promote the venue as a site of future attraction. It is currently being prepared to host soccer games and, already, international bands are looking to the Bird's Nest as a performance space for the Beijing leg of their tours. The Water Cube, where all the swim events were held, is a stone's throw from the Bird's Nest and will be converted into a water park for the public to enjoy sometime in late 2009.

Address: Olympic Green, Beijing; **Website:** <http://www.beijingbirdnest.com/>

SHANGHAI

Shanghai, home to almost 12-million people, is China's largest city and is situated in the centre of the coastline where the Yangtze River flows through its delta into the East China Sea. The name of the city means 'on the sea', and most of the city (including Chongming Island) is only a few metres above sea level, criss-crossed by a maze of natural waterways of the Taihu drainage basin.

Shanghai is China's industrial and commercial capital. It is a busy seaport, and a science and technology centre, and has a vibrant business community. Visitors come to Shanghai not for its scenic beauty or history (the city is too young to have cultivated a classical heritage), but those who arrive on business can find plenty of off-duty entertainment and relaxation. Just walking the busy streets and soaking up the vibrant atmosphere is worthwhile, and there are some temples and gardens to visit along with an excellent museum.



The Bund, Shanghai

This great cosmopolitan metropolis has a colourful colonial background which had the edge rubbed off of it during half a century of Communist rule. It was the first Chinese coastal port to be opened to Western trade in 1843, resulting in an influx of British, French and American diplomats and business interests, each of which established their own independent enclaves. In the 1920s and 30s Shanghai was regarded as a glamorous and rather decadent 'in' place to visit. It all ended with World War II and the coming to power of the Communist party, but now, since the early 1990s a dramatic re-building programme has been underway which is aimed at putting Shanghai back on the map as a major international finance and trade centre - the planned World Financial Centre will be the world's tallest building when it is completed in 2008.

Attractions

The Bund

The picturesque Bund, Shanghai's waterfront promenade stretching for one mile (2km) along the bank of the Huangpu River, was once the most famous street in Asia, and is still renowned for its strip of Art Deco buildings. One of the grandest of these buildings, formerly the City Communist Party headquarters, is now the home of the Shanghai Pudong Development Bank. The wide riverfront promenade on the east bank of the river provides a captivating view of Shanghai, particularly at night. From the Bund visitors can take a river trip down the Huangpu to the mouth of the Yangtze. Boats leave regularly from the Shiliupu Pier south of the Bund and the trip takes about three hours.

Shanghai Museum

The new Shanghai Museum is situated on the People's Square, the political and cultural centre of Shanghai. The square itself boasts a giant musical fountain and some attractive green recreational areas where locals dance and fly kites. It is surrounded by the City Hall, an underground shopping centre and the Grand Shanghai Theatre. It is the Shanghai Museum, opened in 1996, however, that draws the most interest. The building is shaped like a giant bronze urn, and the museum contains a collection of 123,000 cultural artefacts in 21 categories. Chief among the museum's collections are bronze ware, ceramics, calligraphy and art works.

Address: 201 Renmin Avenue; **Telephone:** (0)21 6372 5300; **Website:** www.shanghaimuseum.net/en; **Transport:** Bus 46, 71, 123, 574; **Opening time:** Daily 9am to 5pm; **Admission:** Free

Yuyuan Gardens

The Yuyuan Gardens date back to 1559 to the Ming Dynasty, and are the best example of Chinese classical gardens in Shanghai. The relatively small gardens are laid out in an intricate design with pavilions, rockeries, ponds and a traditional theatre arranged in an ornate maze. The gardens are on Yuyuan Street in downtown Shanghai and can be reached via the Town God Temple Market, a warren of shops and stalls that is becoming increasingly popular as a tourist bazaar.

Hangzhou

Hangzhou, about 120 miles (190km) south of Shanghai, is one of China's designated seven famous ancient capital cities. It is also the provincial capital of Zhejiang province. Known for its scenic beauty it has been tagged 'Paradise on Earth'. Hangzhou touts two scenic resorts: the West Lake and another section encompassing the

Fuchun River and Thousand-Islet Lake. These resorts are dotted with 'willow pattern' scenes like weeping willows, peach trees, stone bridges, rockeries and painted pavilions, interspersed with ancient tombs, monasteries and temples.

XI'AN

In ancient times the city of Xi'an was a major crossroads on the trading routes from eastern China to central Asia, and the beginning point of the famed Silk Road; in recent years this 3,100 year old city that was once regarded to be on a par with Rome and Constantinople, has come back into its own as one of China's major tourist attractions. In 1974, on the city's eastern outskirts, archaeologists stumbled across a treasure trove: an army of terracotta warrior figurines in battle formation standing in underground vaults. Hailed as the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century, the terracotta warriors have brought visitors from around the world flocking to Xi'an to soak up its historical and cultural heritage, and perhaps embark on an adventure tour along the ancient silk caravan route.



Terracotta Army

Xi'an, in ancient times known as Chang'an, is situated in central China in the southern part of GuanZhong Plain in Shaanxi province, with the Qinling Mountains to the north and the Weihe River to the south.

Besides the terracotta warriors, the city has a great many historical relics of interest, having been the capital city of China through 12 dynasties during its thousands of years of development.

Attractions

Qin Terracotta Army Museum

A group of peasants digging a well north of Mount Lishan in Lintong county, about 18 miles (30km) from Xi'an, in 1974 unearthed fragments of a life-sized warrior figure. Because the site of the discovery was just one mile (2km) from the as yet unexcavated tomb of Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, who ruled between 246 and 210 BC, archaeologists grew excited. Further excavation revealed several timber-lined vaults filled with thousands of greatly detailed terracotta soldiers and their horses and chariots: an entire army assembled in position to follow Emperor Qin into eternity. The pits containing the army are now open to public viewing and thousands of visitors flock to gaze at the stunning array of figures with their vivid facial expressions. The Terracotta Army Museum consists of the original pit that was discovered in 1974, which has been enclosed within a hangar-like building to preserve the ranks of 6,000 soldiers found there. A second pit, containing 1,400 figures of cavalymen, horses and infantrymen, and 90 wooden chariots, is also part of the museum. Visitors can also see Qin's Mausoleum and view almost 100 sacrificial pits containing the skeletons of horses, complete with hay, that were buried with him as well as about 20 tombs holding the remains of his counsellors and retainers. The emperor's tomb itself is under a 249ft (76m) high mound that has not yet been excavated, but is believed, according to historical records, to have contained rare gems and other treasures.

Telephone: (0)29 8139 9001; **Transport:** Bus 306; **Opening time:** Daily 8am to 6pm; **Admission:** ¥90 (March to November); ¥65 (December to February)

Shaanxi Provincial History Museum

The graceful complex of buildings that constitute the Shaanxi Provincial History Museum in Xi'an's southern suburbs is built in the style of a Tang Dynasty pavilion, and is in itself worth seeing. The museum's exhibits, however, are even more breathtaking, consisting of 113,000 artefacts unearthed in the province and chronologically arranged in three exhibition halls. The exhibits cover the Han, Wei, Jin, North and South, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, as well as the prehistoric and bronze period.

Transport: Bus 5, 24, 27, 527 or 610; **Opening time:** Daily 9am to 5.30pm (15 November to February), 8.30am to 6pm (March to May, and 8 October to 14 November), 8.30am to 6.30pm (June to 7 October); **Admission:** ¥35

Banpo Village remains

On a 538 square foot (50,000 sq metre) site east of Xi'an city, on the bank of the Chanhe River, are the remains of the ancient settlement of Banpo, dating from about 5,000BC. The remains were discovered in 1953 by workers laying the foundations for a factory, and are the most complete example of an agricultural Neolithic settlement in the world. The site contains the ruins of more than 40 homes, 200 storage pots, a collection of pottery and tools, a pottery-making centre and more than 250 graves belonging to a matriarchal community of the Yangshao culture. There is an on-site museum, built in 1958, constructed over the excavation site with two smaller exhibition halls displaying the archaeological artefacts that have been unearthed at the site.

Transport: Bus 11 or 105; **Opening time:** Daily 8.30am to 5pm; **Admission:** ¥20

Huaqing Hot Springs

The hot springs about 22 miles (35km) east of Xi'an city, at the base of the Lishan Mountains, is where the ancient emperors bathed and relaxed in scenic surroundings. The spa has been operating since the days of the Tang Dynasty, and its warm (109°F/43°C) mineral waters, containing lime, sodium carbonate, and sodium sulphate, are still enjoyed by locals and visitors today. The waters are particularly recommended for the treatment of

dermatitis, rheumatism, arthritis and muscular pain. The ancient imperial bathing pools can be visited, including the Hibiscus pool, dating from 712AD, which has been restored and is open to the public. There is also a fascinating museum at the site containing building materials from the Tang Dynasty. Another attraction at the Springs is the Hovering Rainbow Bridge. This bridge reflects the sunset in such a way that it appears to be a rainbow.

Transport: Bus 306; **Opening time:** Daily 9am to 5pm; **Admission:** ¥70 (high season), otherwise ¥40

Great Mosque

Pride of China's Islamic community, of whom about 60,000 live in Xi'an city, is the Great Mosque near the Drum Tower in the Muslim residential area. Islam came to China along with Arab merchants and travellers in around 600AD. The Great Mosque in Xi'an is the best-preserved ancient mosque in China, having been built in 742AD during the Tang Dynasty. It is built in traditional Chinese style with platforms, pavilions and halls, and is rectangular in shape, divided inside into four courtyards. Visitors can explore the passages, courtyards and archways and admire the furniture and fittings, most of which date from the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The main prayer hall can accommodate 1,000 and its ceiling bears more than 600 classical scriptures in colourful relief.

Address: Huajue Lane; **Opening time:** Daily 8am to 7.30pm. Non-Muslims are not allowed entry during times of prayer or into the main prayer hall; **Admission:** ¥12

Airports

Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK)

Location: The airport is situated 17 miles (28km) north of Beijing.

Time: Local time is GMT +8.

Contacts: Tel: +86 (0)10 6457 1666.

Transfer between terminals: A shuttle bus service runs between the two terminals.

Getting to the city: Beijing's transport system was revamped for the 2008 Olympic Games. Shuttle buses run regularly to the city centre (about 45 minutes), Beijing Railway Station and major hotels. Metered taxis are also available, but it is recommended that passengers have their destination written in Chinese to avoid confusion. Travelling time to the city is about an hour.

Car rental: Car rental is available at the airport.

Airport Taxis: Taxis from Beijing Capital International Airport are metered and should be about US\$12 to most hotels but fees vary. Tips are not expected. The 17 miles (28km) should take about 40 minutes to drive. Avoid taxi drivers that approach customers and instead wait in the taxi line and insist on using the meter.

Facilities: There are several bureaux de change, a bank and ATMs, as well as telephones, tourist information, numerous shops and duty free, and a business centre with Internet access. A food corridor provides a range of eating and drinking options, while an entertainment centre offers everything from films to Chinese massage. Facilities for the disabled are good, but passengers should contact their airlines in advance for more information.

Parking: There is a multi-storey car park with ample capacity.

Departure Tax: ¥90 (international flights), ¥50 (domestic).

Website: www.en.bcia.com.cn

Shanghai Hong Qiao International Airport (SHA)

Location: The airport is situated eight miles (13km) southwest of central Shanghai.

Time: Local time is GMT +8.

Contacts: Tel: +86 (0)21 6268 8899.

Getting to the city: Taxis are available outside the airport. Public buses serve the airport linking to People's Square (#925A) and the main railway stations (#941). Departures are every 15 minutes from 6am to around 11pm. The fare is approximately RMB4. The bigger hotels offer shuttle bus services to and from the airport.

Car rental: Car rental is available. Tel: +86 (0)21 5114 2112 for more information.

Airport Taxis: Taxis are available outside the airport but finding the right one can be confusing without assistance. Taxi drivers usually do not speak English so it is best to indicate your destination on a map, or have it written down in Chinese. The meter should be turned on and the charge should not exceed RMB3 per kilometre.

Facilities: There are ATMs and currency exchange facilities, a post office, and duty-free shops. There is a shopping mall just outside the entrance to the airport. There are also a variety of food outlets, bars, an information counter and business centre.

Departure Tax: ¥90 (international flights), ¥50 (domestic).

Website: www.shairport.com/en/index.jsp

Pudong International Airport (PVG)

Location: The airport is situated 19 miles (30km) from central Shanghai.

Time: Local time is GMT +8.

Contacts: Tel: +86 (0)21 6834 1000.

Getting to the city: The airport is linked to Shanghai's metro with a new magnetic levitation train, the Maglev; the journey takes only eight minutes and costs ¥50. Taxis are available and usually the most convenient way to the city, but they are more expensive. Journeys take an hour to most downtown areas. Public buses are also available, but are only advised for hardened travellers. Many hotels meet their guests at the airport.

Car rental: There is a self-drive car hire service available during business hours, and Avis and Hertz have desks in Arrivals.

Airport Taxis: Metered taxis are available outside the airport terminal. Do not expect drivers to speak English. Use a map to indicate your destination. Rates are RM3.2 per kilometre; a surcharge is added for journeys between 11pm and 5am.

Facilities: Facilities at the airport include banks, ATMs and currency exchange, a post office, luggage storage, Business Centre and an Internet cafe. There are also several restaurants and shops, including duty free.

Departure Tax: ¥90 (international flights), ¥50 (domestic).

Website: www.shairport.com

China Climate and Weather

China covers extensive territory and has a complex topography, therefore the weather differs from region to region. The southeast, below the Nanling Mountains, tends to be very wet with high temperatures all year round. In the central Yangtze and Huaihe River valleys there are four distinct seasons with very hot summers and extremely cold winters, and rain all year round. The dry north experiences a short but sunny summer, with long bitterly cold winters. The coast is humid and experiences monsoons during summer.

The city of Beijing falls in the monsoon region, experiencing hot, wet summers and cold, dry winters. There are four very distinct seasons, with a wide temperature variation between winter (down to well below freezing) and summer, when the mercury hits the high spots. During the height of summer, July and August, Beijing is subject to sudden evening downpours of rain, so an umbrella comes in handy. Spring and autumn are relatively short seasons. Spring, between February and April, is characterised by warm and windy conditions. Autumn, between August and October, is regarded as the best season to visit because it brings blue skies, pleasantly mild temperatures and slight humidity.

Spring and autumn are the best months to visit Shanghai. The peak summer months (July and August) can be searingly hot with temperatures above 95°F (35°C) and 80 percent humidity. Most of Shanghai's rain also falls during this time. September and October can be windy, with the odd typhoon. In winter, evening temperatures often drop below zero (32°F).

Xi'an has a continental monsoon climate, with four separate seasons. Summers are usually hot and wet, and winters tend to be cold and dry. July to September is the wet season and the average yearly temperature is 56°F (13°C). Spring and autumn are favourite times to travel to Xi'an, though generally the weather is pleasant year round.

Tourism

China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), Beijing: +86 (0)10 6520 1114 or www.cnta.gov.cn/lyen/index.asp

China Embassies

Chinese Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 328 2500.

Chinese Embassy, London, United Kingdom: +44 (0)20 7299 4049.

Chinese Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 789 3434.

Chinese Embassy, Canberra, Australia: +61 (0)2 6273 4780.

Chinese Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 431 6500.

Chinese Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +353 (0)1 260 1119.

Chinese Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand: +64 (0)4 472 1382.

Foreign Embassies in China

United States Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 6532 3831.

British Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 8529 6600.

Canadian Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 6532 3536.

Australian Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 5140 4111.

South African Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 6532 0171.

Irish Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 6532 2691.

New Zealand Embassy, Beijing: +86 (0)10 6532 2731.

China Emergency Numbers

Emergencies: 110 (police); 120 (ambulance - Beijing)

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