

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO BEIJING



INSIDE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION What to see, what not to miss, author highlights and more – everything you need to get started

BASICS Pre-departure tips and practical information

THE GUIDE Comprehensive, neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood guide to Beijing, with full-colour maps featuring all the listings, plus excursions further afield, including to the Great Wall, Tianjin and Chengde

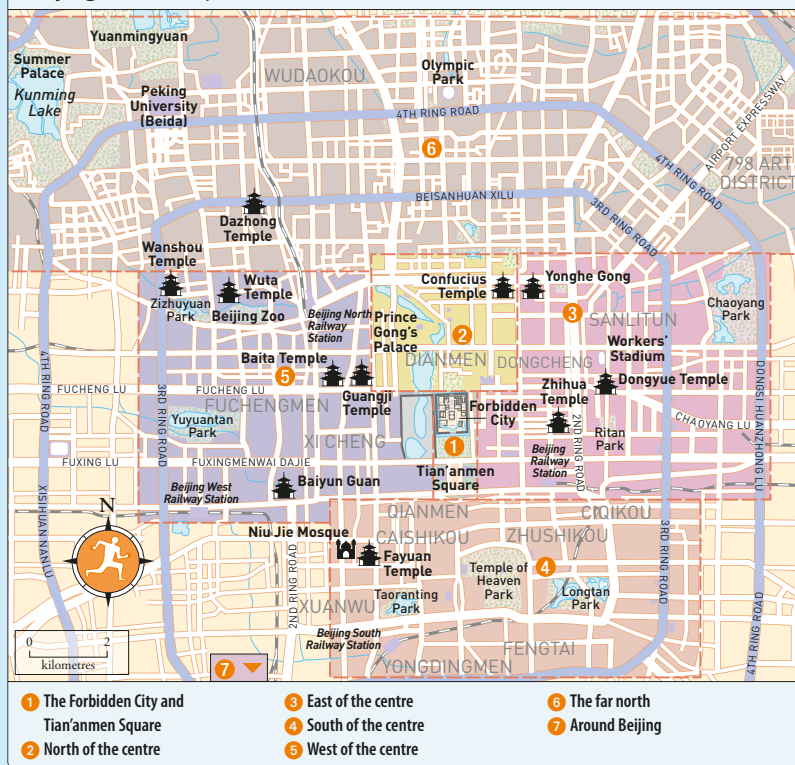
LISTINGS Where to sleep, eat, drink and shop, plus all the best clubs and theatres

CONTEXTS The city's history, and recommended books and films

MAP SECTION Detailed city plans, for easy navigation

We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the Guide with the ★ symbol

Beijing Guide chapters



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THE ROUGH GUIDE TO **BEIJING**

This sixth edition updated by
David Leffman





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Introduction to Beijing

As the capital of one of the world's most dynamic economies, the bold modernity of Beijing (北京, *běijīng*) should take nobody by surprise. And yet it's hard not to be overawed by the sheer dynamism of this brash, gaudy, elegant, charming, filthy and historic city: whether partying to punk in a club, admiring the bizarre modern architecture spiking the skyline, or pushing your way through the bustling, neon-soaked streets, Beijing is never, ever dull. Yet the city remains firmly rooted in the past: for the last seven hundred years, much of the drama of China's history has been played out here, a place that saw the emperors enthroned at the centre of the Chinese universe inside the Forbidden City, and later witnessed the chaos of the early communist years. Though Beijing has been transformed over the last two decades to such an extent that it is barely recognizable, it still remains – spiritually and geographically – the buzzing heart of the nation.

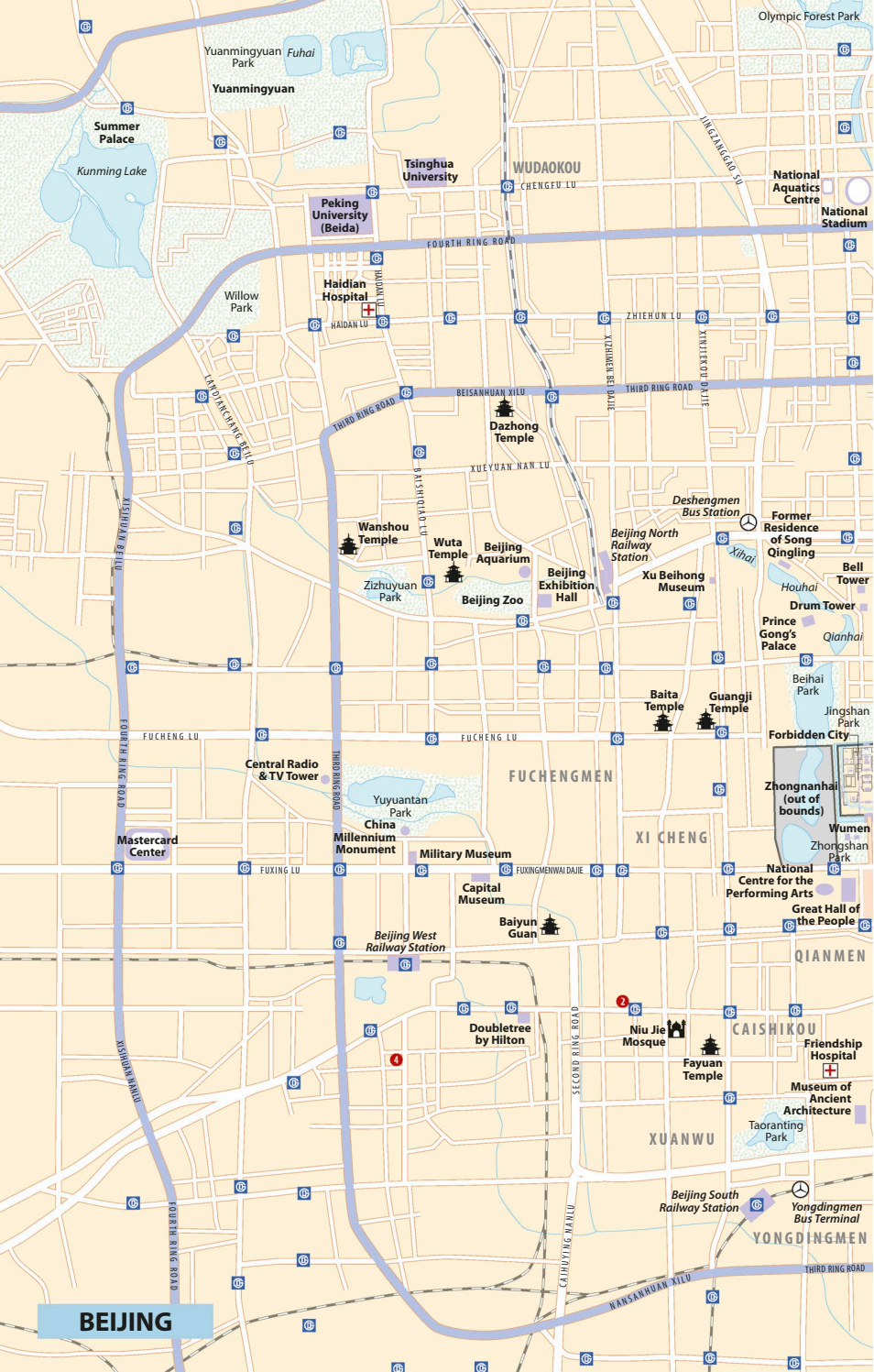
As the front line of China's constant reinterpretation of the notion of “**modernity**”, the city is on permanent fast forward when it comes to urban development, and is continually being ripped up and rebuilt – a factor responsible for the strange lack of cohesion between Beijing's various districts. The government, meanwhile, seems unable to modernize, remaining as paranoid as ever towards potential dissent – most obvious in all the media restrictions, and the multiple security barriers and bag checks around town – though outside the political arena just about anything goes these days. Students in the latest fashions while away their time in internet cafés, dropouts mosh in grunge clubs, and bohemians dream up boutiques over frappuccinos. Not everyone has benefited from the new prosperity, however: migrant day-labourers wait for work outside the stations, and homeless beggars, not long ago a rare sight, are now as common as in Western cities.

The first impression of Beijing, for both foreigners and visiting Chinese, is often of a bewildering **vastness**, not least in the sprawl of uniform apartment buildings in which

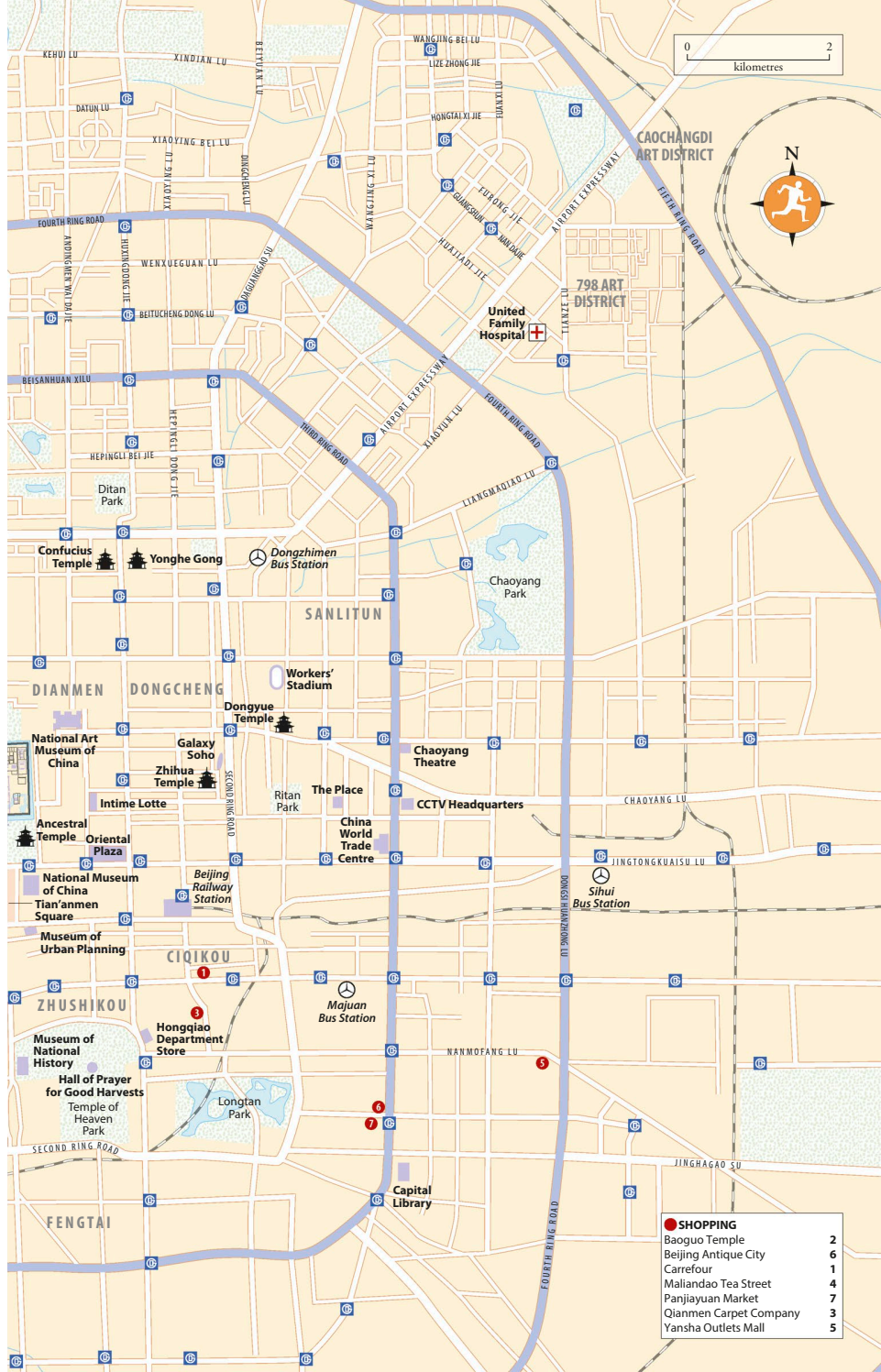
most of the city's 22 million-strong population are housed, and the eight-lane freeways that slice it up. It's a perception reinforced on closer acquaintance by the concrete desert of **Tian'anmen Square**, and the gargantuan buildings of the modern executive around it. The main tourist sights – the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace and the Great Wall – also impress with their scale, though more manageable grandeur is offered by the city's attractive temples, including the Tibetan-style Yonghe Gong, the Taoist Baiyun Guan, and the astonishing Temple of Heaven, once a centre for imperial rites.

With its sights, history and, importantly, delicious **food** (all of China's diverse cuisines can be enjoyed cheaply at the city's numerous restaurants and street stalls), Beijing is a place that almost everyone enjoys. But it's essentially a private city, one whose surface, though attractive, is difficult to penetrate. The city's history and unique character are in the **details**: to find and experience these, check out the little antiques markets; the local shopping districts; the smaller, quirkier sights; the city's twisted, grey stone alleyway **hutongs**; and the parks, where you'll see old men sitting with their caged songbirds. Take advantage, too, of the city's burgeoning bar scene and nightlife and see just how far the Chinese have gone down the road of what used to be deemed "spiritual pollution". Keep your eyes open, and you'll soon notice that westernization and the rise of a brash consumer society is not the only trend here. Just as marked is the revival of older **Chinese culture**, much of it outlawed during the more austere years of communist rule. Summer evenings see long strings of traditional kites rising up beyond the rooftops; the city's numerous parks are full of martial artists every morning; and there's a renewed interest in traditional music and opera for their own sake, rather than as tourist attractions.





BEIJING



0 2
kilometres



CHAOTANGDI
ART DISTRICT

798 ART
DISTRICT

United
Family
Hospital

SANLITUN

DIANMEN DONGCHENG

National Art
Museum of
China

Galaxy
Soho
Zhihua
Temple

Intime Lotte

Ancestral
Temple
Oriental
Plaza

National Museum
of China
Tian'anmen
Square

Museum of
Urban Planning

ZHUSHIKOU

Museum of
National
History
Hall of Prayer
for Good Harvests
Temple of
Heaven Park

FENGTAI

Workers'
Stadium

Dongyue
Temple

Ritan Park

The Place

China
World
Trade
Centre

Chaoyang
Theatre

CCTV Headquarters

CHAOTANGDI

JINGTONGKUISU LU

Sihui
Bus Station

Majuan
Bus Station

WANMOFANG LU

JINGRAGAO SU

Capital
Library

- SHOPPING
- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Baoguo Temple | 2 |
| Beijing Antique City | 6 |
| Carrefour | 4 |
| Maliandao Tea Street | 1 |
| Panjiayuan Market | 7 |
| Qianmen Carpet Company | 3 |
| Yansha Outlets Mall | 5 |



What to see

The absolute centre of China since the Ming dynasty, the wonderful **Forbidden City** remains Beijing's most popular sight – and rightly so. Immediately to its south is **Tian'anmen Square**, a bald expanse with a hairy history; sights on and around the square include the colossal National Museum and three grand city gates, as well as the corpse of Chairman Mao, lying pickled in his sombre mausoleum.

The wide area spreading north of the Forbidden City is one of the city's most pleasant quarters. First comes **Beihai Park**, the old imperial pleasure grounds, centred on a large lake. North again are two further lakes, **Qianhai** and **Houhai**, and the historic **Drum and Bell towers**, set in the heart of one of the city's most appealing *hutong* areas. The *hutongs* are tricky to navigate, but getting lost is part of the fun – nowhere else in Beijing is aimless rambling so amply rewarded. Many sights west of the lakes are remnants of the imperial past, when the area was home to princes, dukes and eunuchs. For a more contemporary side of Beijing, head east instead to the charming street of **Nanluogu Xiang**, one of Beijing's most fashionable areas – youngsters from all over the city come here to stroll and sup coffee, tourists (both foreign and domestic) go trinket mad, while expats tend to make a beeline for the craft breweries.

Further to the east is the **Yonghe Gong**, a spectacular Lamaist temple, which lies across the road from the wonderful **Confucius Temple** – less showy but just as rewarding as a window into traditional Chinese culture. The areas to the east and south are some of the most important pieces of Beijing's modern jigsaw – **Sanlitun**, the city's prime nightlife spot for the last two decades; the **CBD**, boasting high-rises aplenty and with plenty more

BEIJING ARCHITECTURE

Since the days of dynasty, Beijing has always been image-conscious – anxious to portray a particular face, both to its citizenry and to the world at large. It was during the Ming dynasty that the city took on much of its present shape, including the grid pattern still followed by many of the major streets. Some splendid buildings and complexes from this time remain, including the Forbidden City, Yonghe Gong, the Temple of Heaven and the Drum Tower. One of the world's most vaunted pieces of engineering also took shape at this time – the glorious Great Wall. Rather more humble, though forming an essential part of the city's fabric, were the traditional *hutong* houses that most Beijingers lived in. Though declining in number with each passing year, many of those you'll see today went up in **Qing** times.

Beijing took on an entirely different form during early **communist rule**. When Mao took over, he wanted the feudal city of the emperors transformed into a “forest of chimneys”; he got his wish, and the capital became an ugly industrial powerhouse of socialism. The best (or worst, depending upon your point of view) buildings from the Mao years are the Military Museum, the National Exhibition Hall, or any of the buildings on or around Tian'anmen Square. In the 1980s, when the Party embraced capitalism “with Chinese characteristics”, bland international-style office blocks were erected with a pagoda-shaped “silly hat” on the roof as a concession to local taste.

Modern Beijing, eager to express China's new global dominance, has undergone the kind of urban transformation usually only seen after a war. Esteemed architects from across the globe have been roped in for a series of *carte blanche* projects; the results have been hit and miss, but some have been astounding. The best include the fantastic venues built for the 2008 Olympics (the “Bird's Nest” and “Water Cube”), Paul Andreu's National Centre for the Performing Arts (the “Egg”); and Zaha Hadid's curvy, sci-fi-like Galaxy Soho, completed in 2013. Perhaps most striking of all, however, is the new CCTV state television headquarters (the “Twisted Doughnut”) by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, which appears to defy gravity with its intersecting Z-shaped towers.



CHINESE SCRIPT

Chinese characters are simplified images of what they represent, and their origins as pictograms can often still be seen, even though they have become highly abstract today. The earliest known examples of Chinese writing are predictions, which were cut into “oracle bones”; these were used for divination during the Shang dynasty, more than three thousand years ago, though the characters must have been in use long before, for these inscriptions already amount to a highly complex writing system. As the characters represent concepts, not sounds, written Chinese cuts through the problem of communication in a country with many different dialects. However, learning the writing system is ponderous, taking children an estimated two years longer than with an alphabet. Foreigners learning Mandarin use the modern **pinyin** transliteration system of accented Roman letters – used in this book – to help memorize the sounds (see p.194).

to come; and **Wangfujing**, with its array of places to shop. The best sight hereabouts is the little oasis of calm that is the **Ancient Observatory**, where Jesuit priests used to chart the movements of the heavens for the imperial court.

South of the Forbidden City you'll find **Qianmen Dajie**, an over-reconstructed shopping street, and the rather more intimate **Dazhailan** district. These feed down towards the magnificent **Temple of Heaven**, a superb specimen of Ming-dynasty design surrounded by pretty parkland. There's less to see west of the Forbidden City, but there are still a few sights worth visiting. These include a couple of charming temples; the **Military Museum**, monument to a fast-disappearing communist ethos; the modern **Capital Museum**; and the city **zoo** and **aquarium**.

In the far north of Beijing proper, you'll find three contrasting groups of sights. Furthest west, providing one of the most pleasant areas to escape from the city bustle, is the **Summer Palace**, centred around peaceful Kunming Lake; Yuanmingyuan, the “old”



Author picks

Our indefatigable author has explored every highway, byway and *hutong* of Beijing to bring you some unique travel experiences. Here are some of his personal favourites.

Hidden treasures Everyone knows about the Wall, the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven but to avoid the crowds head a little off the beaten track to the Confucius Temple (p.70), Ancient Observatory (p.74) and Baiyun Guan (p.87).

Get on your bike For all its high-octane development, Beijing remains a great cycling city (p.26). Wend your way through the *hutong* alleys around the Shicha lakes (p.60), cycle south to the Imperial Palace, past Mao's portrait, and pedal back up along the Forbidden City canal.

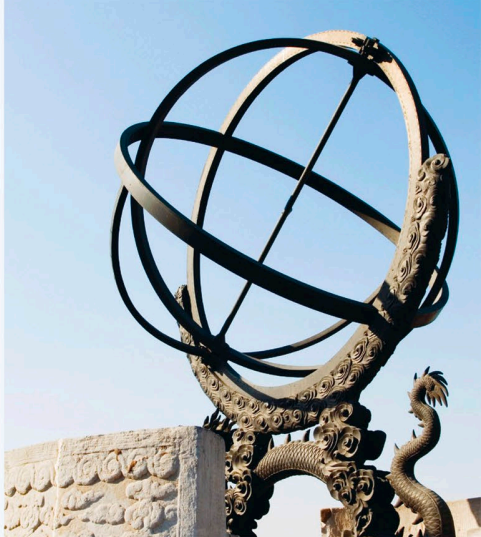
Contemporary art Beijing's prolific art scene is centred around the famed 798 Art District (p.102) but there are some good galleries closer to the city centre, such as the wonderful Red Gate Gallery (p.76).

Shopping Beijing's mix of earthy markets, boutique districts and super-modern mall complexes make it a fine place to shop (p.161): green tea, fans, seals and antiques are all popular souvenirs, and the city remains a highly affordable place for tailored clothing.

Courtyard living Though many *hutong* dwellings have fallen foul of the wrecking ball, a fair few remain, and it's quite possible to stay in one of many artfully redecorated courtyard houses (p.132).

Park life To de-stress from the city bustle, make for one of Beijing's principal parks – Ditan (p.72), Temple of Heaven (p.79) and Ritan (p.74). They're at their most attractive around sunrise and sunset, when you may see locals practising *tai ji*, dancing in formation, or doing the odd-looking "backwards walk".

Our author recommendations don't end here. We've flagged up our favourite places – a perfectly sited hotel, an atmospheric café, a special restaurant – throughout the guide, highlighted with the ★ symbol.



summer palace, lies nearby. East of here, past the university district, is the **Olympic Green**, home to some of the remaining venues from the spectacular 2008 Summer Games. East again, en route to the airport, is the fascinating **798 Art District**, centre of Beijing's burgeoning art scene.

Beijing's sprawling outskirts are a messy jumble of farmland, housing and industry, but out in the **Western Hills** you'll find semi-wild parkland, peaceful temples and the disturbing Eunuch Museum. Well outside the city – but an essential stop for many visitors and well within the scope of a day-trip – is the **Great Wall**, which winds over lonely ridges only a few hours' drive north of the capital, while for those with time to spare, the port city of **Tianjin**, and imperial pleasure complex of **Chengde** is easily accessible from the capital by train and bus.

When to go

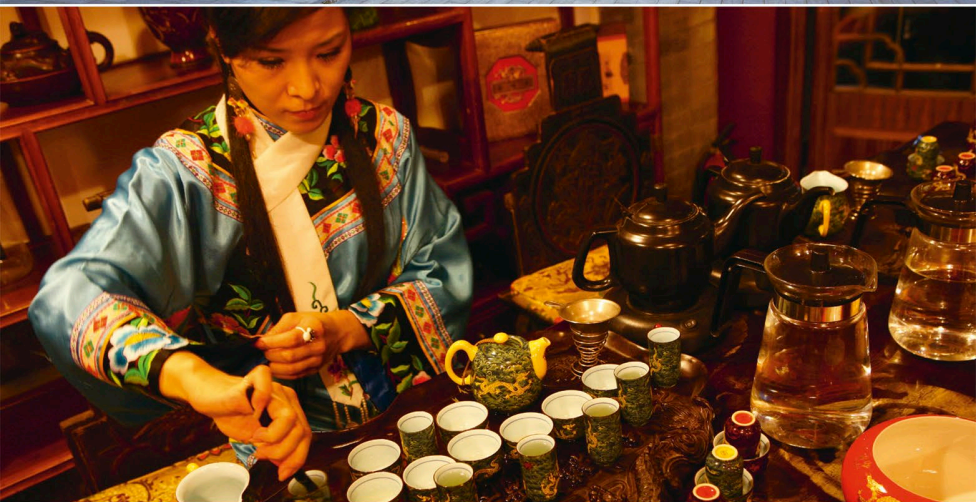
Beijing's year starts off mean. The long **winter** (November to March) sees temperatures plummet below freezing – sometimes as low as -20°C (-4°F) – and the winds that whip off the Mongolian plains feel like they're freezing your ears off. However, pack the right clothing and this can actually be an enjoyable time to visit, not least since crowds are thin even at the most popular sights. The run-up to **Chinese New Year** (falling in late January or early to mid-February) is a great time to be in the country: everyone is in festive mood and the city is bedecked with decorations. This isn't a good time to travel around, however, as much of the population is on the move, and transport systems become hopelessly overstretched. It's best to avoid Beijing during the first three days of the festival itself, as everyone is at home with family, and a lot of businesses and sights are closed.

The city's short **spring** (April and May) is a lovely season to visit Beijing – it's dry and comfortably warm at this time, though can be windy. Fortunately, the spring dust storms that once plagued the city have lessened of late, though they still occur. **Summer** itself (June to August) is muggy and hot, with temperatures topping 30°C (86°F); in high summer the city is ripe for dining alfresco, and beer consumption goes through the roof. July and August also see plenty of rainfall, though most of it deluges all at once and even then there's still a fair amount of sun.

Ultimately, when all's said and done, the best time to visit Beijing is in the **autumn** (September and October), when the weather is dry and clement. This is also the most likely time for Beijing's semi-mythical "blue-sky days", when air pollution is said to be at its lowest, to occur – the perfect time to climb up Jingshan and see the Forbidden City at its most beautiful.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL IN BEIJING

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Max/min (°C)	1/-10	4/-8	11/-1	21/7	27/13	31/18	31/21	30/20	26/14	20/6	9/-2	3/-8
Max/min (°F)	34/14	39/18	52/30	70/45	81/55	88/64	88/70	86/68	79/57	68/43	48/28	37/18
Rainfall (mm)	4	5	8	17	35	78	243	141	58	16	11	3



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things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything Beijing has to offer in one short trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows is a selective taste of the city's highlights: stunning temples, delicious food, artsy districts and fascinating excursions beyond the city. All entries have a page reference to take you straight into the Guide, where you can find out more.





2



3



4

1 FORBIDDEN CITY

Page 41

For five centuries centre of the Chinese universe and private pleasure ground of the emperor, this sumptuous palace complex ranks as the city's main attraction.

2 BEIJING OPERA

Page 158

Largely incomprehensible to foreigners, and many Chinese, but still a great spectacle.

3 PEKING DUCK

Page 139

You won't be eating the city's most famous dish every day (doing so would probably guarantee heart failure), but try it at least once, as it's supremely tasty.

4 MAO'S MAUSOLEUM

Page 51

Join the queue of awed peasants shuffling past the preserved corpse of the founder of modern China in his giant tomb, fronted by suitably bombastic socialist realist statuary.

5 GREAT WALL AT SIMATAI

Page 109

A dramatic and relatively crowd-free stretch of crumbly, vertiginous fortifications three hours from Beijing.



5

6 TEMPLE OF HEAVEN

Page 79

Set in the centre of an elegant park, this temple is often regarded as the zenith of Ming architecture.

7 A BEIJING BREAKFAST

See box, p.140

Start your day the local way: seek out some *jianbing* (a kind of savoury pancake), and wash it down with a pot of delicious Beijing yoghurt.

8 798 ART DISTRICT

Page 102

This huge complex of art galleries has become Ground Zero for the city's bohemians and fashionistas.

9 YONGHE GONG

Page 67

A lively, flamboyantly decorated Tibetan temple, where the air is often heady with incense smoke.

10 SUMMER PALACE

Page 96

Once the exclusive retreat of the emperors, this beautiful landscaped park, dotted with imperial buildings, is now open to all.

11 THE CBD

Page 73

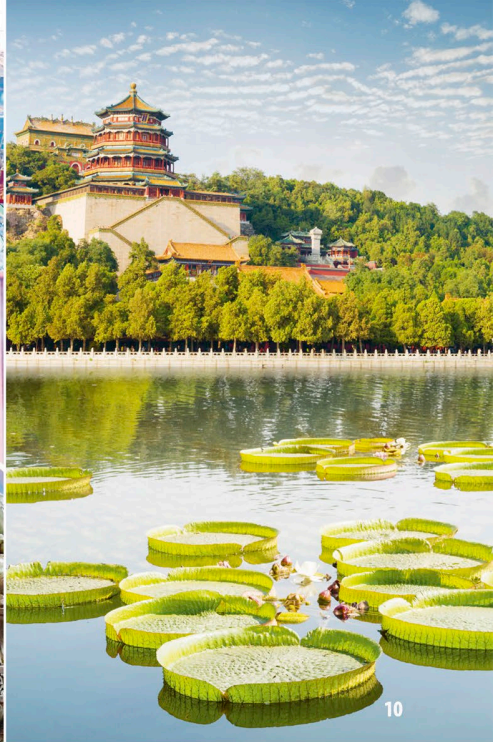
The heart of new Beijing, the Central Business District is essentially a playground for some of the world's foremost architects – most dramatically in the seemingly gravity-defying CCTV Headquarters.

12 NANLUOGU XIANG

Page 64

In vogue with local hipsters, this trendy *hutong* of restaurants and boutiques is the perfect spot for a stroll, snack and a coffee.







13

13 BAIYUN GUAN

Page 87

See China at prayer in this attractive and popular Taoist temple, where devotees play games such as throwing coins at the temple bell.

14 SANLITUN

Page 72

Famed as Beijing's main nightlife area, Sanlitun now also boasts a superb range of cosmopolitan places to eat, as well as impressively designed new shopping zones such as the Tai Koo Li complex.

15 AN EVENING BY THE TOWERS

Page 63

The famed Drum (pictured) and Bell towers are justly popular sights by day, though it's also worth popping by around sunset time, when the area takes on a notably more relaxed atmosphere.

16 HUTONGS

Pages 61 & 78

The maze of alleys and traditional courtyard buildings around Dazhalan or Houhai reveal the city's real, private face.

17 ACROBATICS

Page 159

The style may be vaudeville, but the stunts, performed by some of the world's greatest acrobats, are breathtaking.

18 NIGHTLIFE

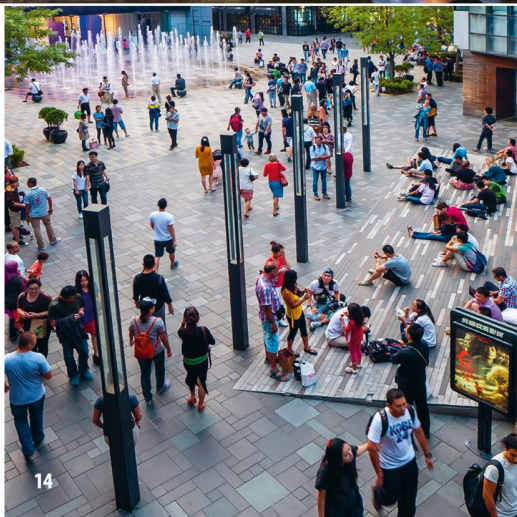
Page 151

Experience Beijing's cultural explosion by catching one of the new bands in a smoky bar, bopping with beautiful people in a club, or downing a craft beer at a bar.

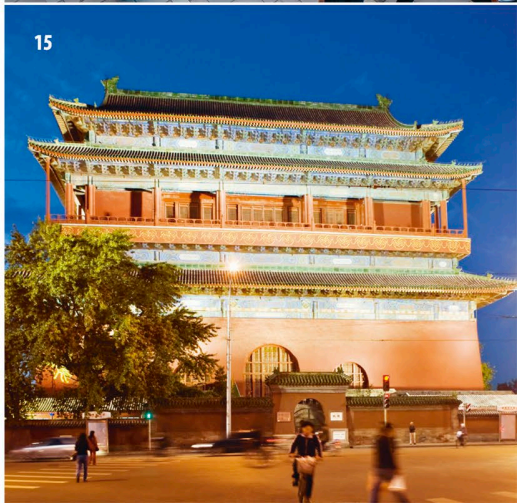
19 HOUHAI

Page 61

Houhai lake is the perfect setting for a boat ride or rooftop meal, and has a lively bar scene after dark.



14



15





BEIJING CYCLISTS

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Getting there

Beijing is China's main international transport hub – though nearby Tianjin offers a smaller-scale alternative – with plenty of inbound flights from European, American, Australian and Asian cities. You can also fly or catch trains from cities all over China, or even from faraway Moscow on the vaunted Trans-Siberian railways.

Airfares vary by season, with the highest fares from Easter to October and around Christmas, New Year and just before the Chinese New Year (which falls between late January and mid-February). Note also that flying at weekends is slightly more expensive; prices quoted below assume midweek travel.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

From the UK, there are **direct flights** to Beijing (10–11hr) from London Heathrow with Air China and British Airways, and from Manchester with Hainan Air; figure on a minimum of £460 return. There's also a twice-weekly direct flight from London Gatwick to Tianjin with Tianjin Airlines (17hr; £420).

Airlines offering **indirect flights** to Beijing from the UK, stopping off in the airline's hub city, include Ukraine International Airlines (UIA), KLM, China Southern and Emirates. These are a little cheaper than direct flights, with prices starting from around £350 in low season, rising to £700 in high season. Prices can be substantially higher from the Republic of Ireland; you may want to consider taking a cheap flight to London first.

Flights from the US and Canada

There's no shortage of **direct flights** to Beijing **from North America**; carriers include Air China, Air Canada and United Airlines. It takes around 13hr to reach Beijing **from the west coast**; add 7hr or more to this if you start **from the east coast** (including a stopover on the west coast en route). Some flights cross the North Pole, shaving a couple of hours off the flight time.

In low season, expect to pay US\$750–1200 from the west coast (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver), or US\$870–1400 from the east coast (New York, Montreal, Toronto). To get a good fare during high season it's important to buy your ticket as early as possible, in which case you probably won't pay more than US\$200 above low-season tariffs.

Flights from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa

You can fly **direct** to Beijing **from Melbourne or Sydney** with Air China and China Eastern Airlines (12hr; Aus\$950); otherwise there are a host of indirect options from all state capitals on other Chinese and southeast Asian carriers, which are often substantially cheaper (from Aus\$570).

From New Zealand, Air China are the only airline offering direct flights between Auckland and Beijing (12hr; NZ\$990); you'll save NZ\$100 flying via Guangzhou with China Southern (17hr).

There are **no direct flights** between **South Africa** and Beijing; balancing price and journey time, the best deal is probably with Cathay Pacific (17hr; ZAR7500), travelling via Hong Kong.

Organized tours

Tour operators generally include Beijing as one of a number of destinations in a tour of China. There are very cheap, off-season **flight-and-hotel packages** to Beijing, at prices that sometimes go as low as £600/€700/US\$1000. Since six or seven nights in a four-star hotel are included, you're effectively getting accommodation for free, considering the cost of the flight alone. Don't forget, though, that quoted prices in brochures usually refer to the low-season minimum, based on two people sharing – the cost for a single traveller in high season will always work out more expensive.

By train

The classic overland route to Beijing is **through Russia by train**. There are actually two rail lines

A BETTER KIND OF TRAVEL

At Rough Guides we are passionately committed to travel. We believe it helps us understand the world we live in and the people we share it with – and of course tourism is vital to many developing economies. But the scale of modern tourism has also damaged some places irreparably, and climate change is accelerated by most forms of transport, especially flying. All Rough Guides' flights are **carbon-offset**, and every year we donate money to a variety of environmental charities.