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ot long ago, visitors might have described Beijing as inward-looking and conservative, but in a single generation China's capital has been transformed like no other city. Today the ancient gates of the battlements fronting the 3,000-year-old capital's precious cultural sites are

opened wide. The Chinese are wining and dining visitors like never before—and one very large transnational bash is about to unfold.

The number 8 is considered lucky in China, so at 8:08 p.m. on August 8, 2008, the Beijing Olympic Games kick off. Before the closing ceremony on August 24, about a half-million visitors from around the world are expected to hit town. Those who fly in with preconceived notions of a staid and insular China will be surprised.

The prosperity and cosmopolitan culture of cities like Beijing offer visitors a range of unique diversions: traditional excursions to historic sites dating back thousands of years, and more contemporary pleasures such as shopping, modern art collecting, and international-caliber wine and cuisine.

### History and Heritage

Chief among Beijing's places of historic interest are six major edifices designated by UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage sites. They are the Forbidden City, home to emperors of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911); Zhoukoudian, cave dwelling of the long-extinct "Peking Man"; the Summer Palace, a retreat for royals; the Temple of Heaven, where emperors paid homage to higher beings; the Ming Tombs; and, of course, the Great Wall.

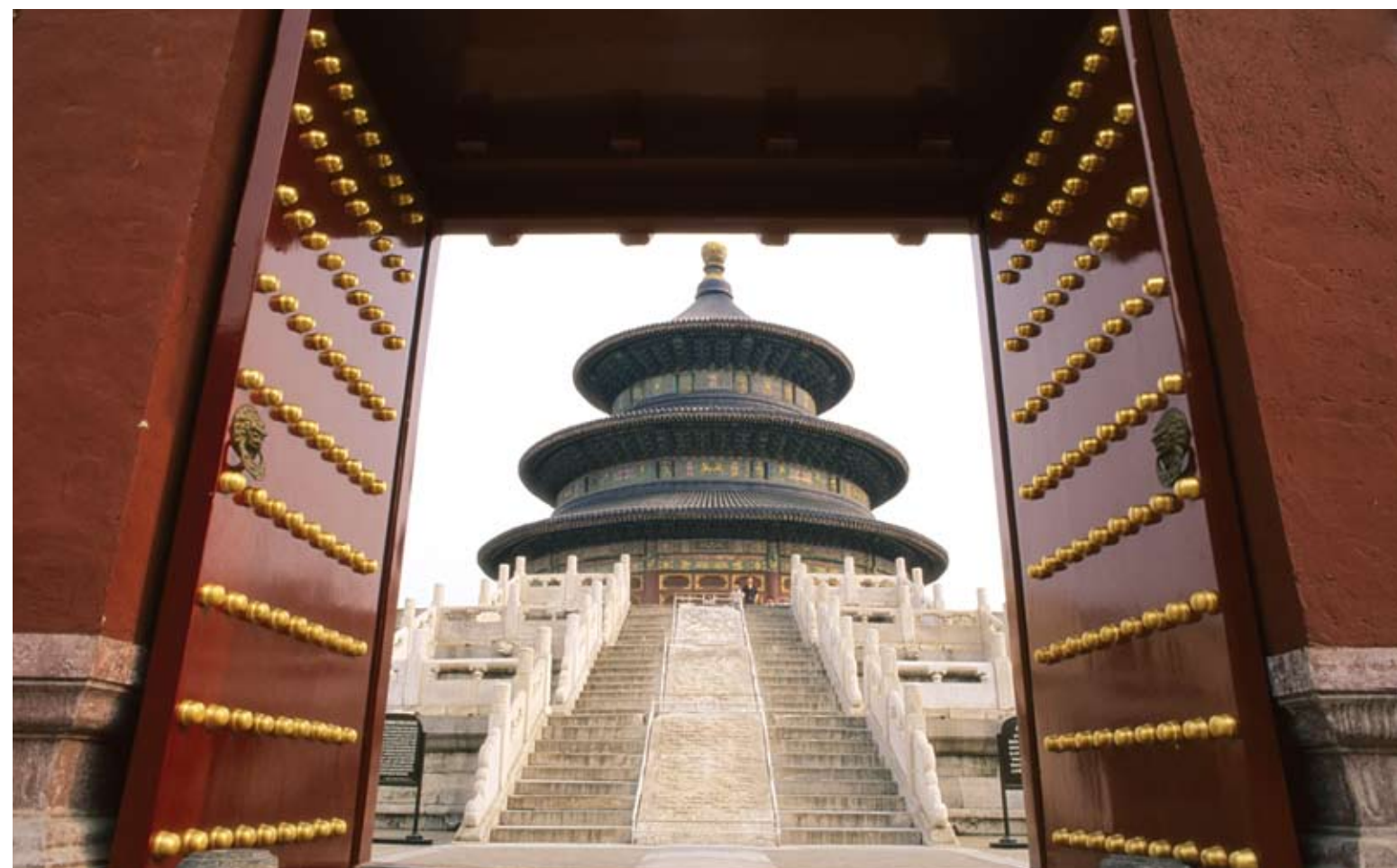
Standing high up on the Badaling section of the Great Wall, about 50 miles northwest of Beijing's center, you get a sense of the staggering task that was its construction. And you might also sense a little irony—that a fortification erected to keep the Mongol hordes at bay now serves to attract foreign hordes of a different sort.

Back in the heart of the city is another historic work of stone. Constructed in its present form in 1651, Tian'anmen is the world's largest public square. At its center is the Monument to the People's Heroes, and looking across that vast plain of stone you have a view of the Great Hall of the People, the National Museum of China and the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall. It can be intimidating for a Westerner, surrounded by these imposing structures and revered institutions—but all are quite welcoming to visitors, and fees are reasonable, about ¥7–36 (US\$1–5). Hours vary, so be sure to check while you're making your plans, and keep in mind that the National Museum is closed for renovations.

When you're ready for a break, just north of Tian'anmen Square and to the left of the Gate of Heavenly Peace is a more



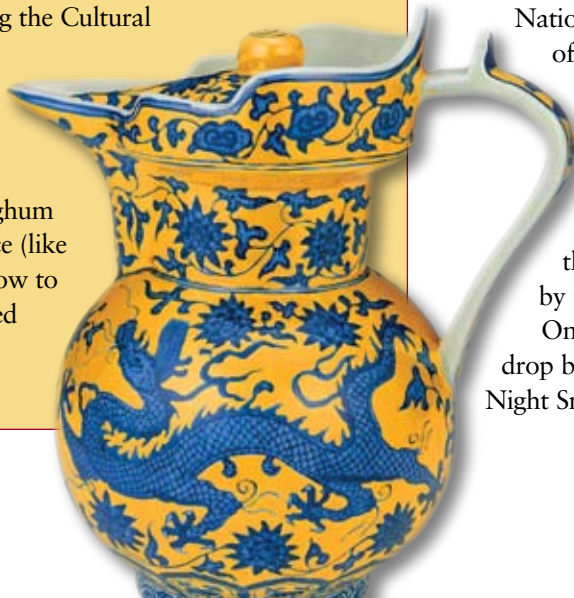
A golden dragon statue in Beijing (pages 20–21); a colorful performer at the Peking Opera (opposite page); a traveler contemplates the Great Wall; Beijing Oriental Plaza offers a modern shopping experience; the Temple of Heaven, where members of the Ming and Qing dynasties prayed for good harvests (this page, clockwise from top left).



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### Top 10 Must-Do's

- 1 **Opt for the Peking Opera**—The ornate Lao She Teahouse, a regular stop for visiting heads of state and other notables, is the place to take in an enchanting 30-minute performance.
- 2 **Taste some tea**—To take part in a traditional tea ceremony, try one of the larger, better-known establishments, such as Wuyutai (to avoid overpriced lesser versions).
- 3 **See artisans at work**—Stop by the Beijing Enamel Factory to observe the ancient process used to create cloisonné objects, and purchase some to take home.
- 4 **Go modern**—Cruise the 798 Art District, a revamped factory area, and see what Beijing's cutting-edge artists are up to.
- 5 **Stimulate your senses**—If your timing is right, a stroll through the Fragrant Hills (Xiangshan) Park brings on a burst of color and sweet odor when the maples turn red in autumn.
- 6 **Peer at a panda**—Have a look at these rare and revered creatures up close at the Beijing Zoo.
- 7 **Speak to your spirit**—A walk through the holy structure that is the Yonghegong Lama Temple culminates in a view of an 18-meter-tall Buddha carved from a single sandalwood tree.
- 8 **Take an art break**—Pause to consider the exterior aesthetics of Beijing's new, spaceship-like National Center for the Performing Arts, then enter the dome's extraordinary interior for an opera, concert or play.
- 9 **Purchase artifacts**—The Panjiayuan Flea Market still stocks original posters, books, badges and other paraphernalia conceived during the Cultural Revolution.
- 10 **Sample a sip**—China's mainstay liquor, *baijiu* (pronounced "by-joe"), is derived from sorghum and other grains. The price (like the quality) ranges from low to very high. Consult a trusted local, and use caution.



demure portal. Once inside Zhongshan Park, the sounds of the city fall away. During the Liao Dynasty (916–1125), this park was the site of Xingguosi (the Temple of National Revival).

Over the centuries, among the ornate gazebos and gardens, those privileged by blood, circumstance and political maneuvering relaxed or plotted. Afterward, they would follow the garden's carefully tended paths back home to their palace next door, the Forbidden City (also known as the Imperial Palace). Wrapped around nearly 9,000 rooms containing nearly 8 million square feet of interior space is a walled compound of 250 acres. In 1406, Zhu Di of the Ming Dynasty ordered the construction of the Forbidden City. In 14 short years (a blink, by Chinese standards), the job was done. The heavily fortified palace served as home and office to 24 emperors.

### Culture and Consumption

Another blast of history awaits visitors to the city's museums. Comprising 646,000 square feet of floor space spanning seven levels, the Capital Museum holds a vast array of exhibits evoking this city's history—from village settlement through the dynasties to modern-day Beijing. You'll look over collections of ancient stone, bronze, porcelain, calligraphy, paintings and sculptures. Also here are presentations of folk customs—which contrast with the museum's high-tech multimedia hall and state-of-the-art digital theater. The National Art Museum is a collection of 60,000 pieces ranging from ancient to modern, including watercolors and sculptures. And at the Central University for Nationalities is the Chinese Ethnic Museum, with more than 20,000 cultural relics created by China's 56 diverse ethnic groups. Once you've absorbed all you can, drop by the open-air Donghuamen Night Snack Market in the Wangfujing



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Commercial District. From the block-long lineup of food stalls, find hundreds of cold, roasted and grilled traditional foods. Delicacies include barbecued mutton shish kabobs, Sino-style grilled squid, wok-fried noodles, fried rice cakes and some even more unusual items—fried scorpions, anyone?

A retail experience of a uniquely Chinese sort awaits at three of Beijing's most robust shopping environments: the Panjiayuan Flea Market, Silk Alley and the Sanlitun Yashou Market. Great bargains can be had, such as tailor-made suits for less than ¥727 (US\$100) as well as cultural artifacts, including now quaint books, posters and medals conceived during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

### Divine Dining

Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) was renowned for her beauty, grace, political cunning—and her love of food. Hundreds of recipes were conceived to suit her palate, and many of those dishes are today served up at the Fangshan Restaurant on Qionghua Island, at the center of the lush Beihai Park in the shadow of the centuries-old White Pagoda. Beneath the antique chandeliers, you can sample dishes like

An ornately painted antique porcelain vase (opposite page); a young girl tries on imperial robes at the Forbidden City; whimsical steamed prawns at Fangshan Restaurant; a statue of the great philosopher stands at the Temple of Confucius (this page, clockwise from top left).

### WHERE TO STAY

- ▶ The Regent Beijing
  - ▶ Park Plaza Beijing Wangfujing
  - ▶ Park Plaza Beijing Science Park
  - ▶ Radisson SAS Hotel, Beijing
- For a FREE night's stay at these locations, redeem 25,000 to 90,000 Gold Points®. For more information on Carlson Hotels' global frequent guest program, visit [goldpointsplus.com](http://goldpointsplus.com).



# Beijing Basics

Before you visit China's exciting city on the move, check out this practical guide, with all the Web resources and information you need.



## TOUR STOPS

**Capital Museum** Xicheng District, (8610) 6337-0491, [capitalmuseum.org.cn/en](http://capitalmuseum.org.cn/en)

**Chinese Ethnic Museum** In National Olympic Park, Minzuyuan Road, Chaoyang District, (8610) 6206-3647

**Fangshan Restaurant** 1 Wenjing Jie, enter East Gate of Beihai Park, (8610) 6401-1879

**Forbidden City (Palace Museum)** North of Tian'anmen Square, (8610) 6513-2255, [dpm.org.cn](http://dpm.org.cn)

**Great Wall (Badaling Section)** Donggou Village, Badaling Town, Yanqing County, (8610) 6912-1235

**Lao She Teahouse (Peking Opera)** 3 Qianmenxi Dajie Street, (8610) 6303-6334, [laosheteahouse.com](http://laosheteahouse.com)

**Mao Zedong Memorial Hall** Immediately south of Tian'anmen Square, (8610) 6513-2277

**Ming Tombs** Jundushan, Changping County, (8610) 6076-1424

**National Art Museum** No. 1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng District, (8610) 6401-7076, [namoc.org](http://namoc.org)

**National Center for the Performing Arts** Chang'an Avenue, west of Tian'anmen Square, (8610) 6655-0000

**Summer Palace** Yiheyuan Lu and Kunminghu Lu, Haidian District, (8610) 6288-1144

**Temple of Heaven** Yongdingmen Dajie (South Gate), Chongwen District, (8610) 6702-8866

**Zhongshan Park** Immediately north of Tian'anmen Square, (8610) 6605-5431



## WEATHER

Beijing experiences cold and dry winters, hot and rainy summers, and brief but pleasant springs and falls. The rains are more frequent from June to August, also the hottest time of the year. May, September and October are the best months to visit. The average temperature during the coldest month, January, is -4.6 C (24 F), and the average temperature during the hottest month, July, is 26 C (79 F).



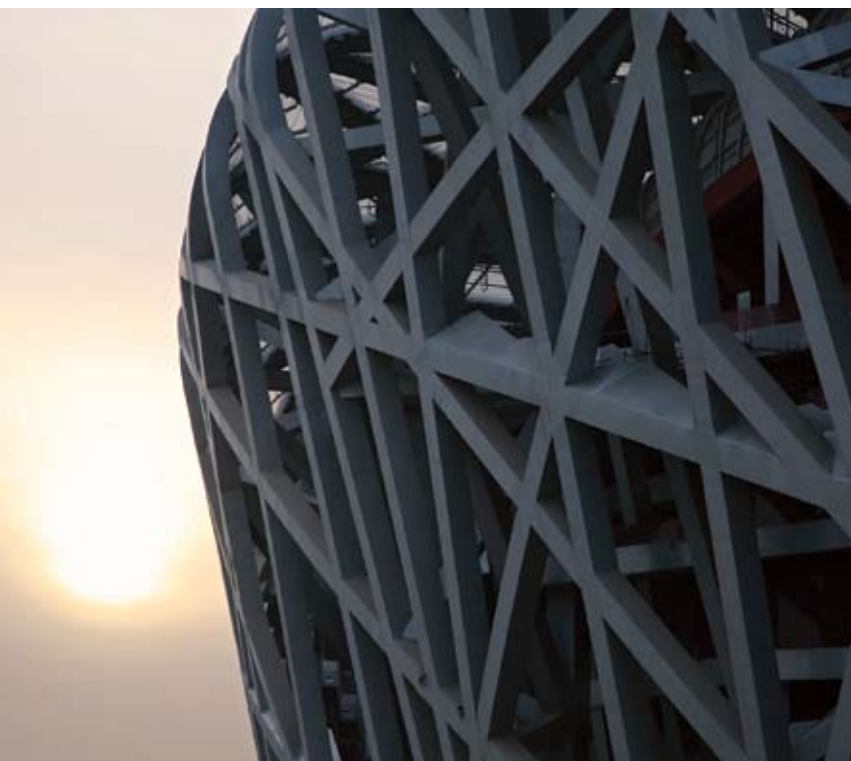
## PRACTICAL TIPS

- Upon exiting the arrivals terminal, ignore the roaming "cabbies." The queue for legitimate taxis may be long, but it moves fast; you'll save hundreds of yuan—and actually get to your hotel.
- Credit cards are becoming more common in China, but it's still a good idea to carry cash—preferably in denominations smaller than ¥100 bills. In attempting minor purchases, particularly from vendors and small shops, you may encounter reluctance to accept large notes.
- Bargain politely but firmly. Many vendors will start at a price five to 10 times higher than what they will accept. Start at 25 percent to 50 percent of the asking price for inexpensive items, and as little as 10 percent of the asking price for expensive items.



## WEB SITES

Beijing Olympic news/ticket info: [en.beijing2008.cn](http://en.beijing2008.cn)  
 News, culture, travel info: [china.org.cn](http://china.org.cn)  
 National news agency: [xinhuanet.com/english](http://xinhuanet.com/english)



Morning Tai Chi exercises, accented by bright spots of color; calligraphy brushes in various sizes and styles show artistry in the tools as well as the practice; the Beijing National Stadium, which will host the 2008 Olympic Games (this page, clockwise from top left); Beijing's Summer Palace (opposite page).

Camel's Paw in Green Scallion Sauce. But the hundreds of menu items, starting at ¥198 (US\$27), also include less exotic choices. And if your group is ready to really go royal, the Fangshan's famous "Man-Han" imperial-style banquet comprises a feast of 108 rarefied dishes for the price of ¥1,680 (US\$232).

After dinner, sample Beijing's night-life—fast catching up with international standards. In the Sanlitun Bar District in Chaoyang District, stylish clubs like China Doll, Babyface, Suzie Wong's and MIX keep busy with foreigners and locals mingling and dancing. For less bass-heavy socializing, a game of pool, a pint and a Western-style late-night snack, plenty of good ex-pat pubs are on hand. Notable among these are the 24-hour Goose and Duck Pub and Durty Nellie's.

Besides Sanlitun and Chaoyang, you might also want to go for a stroll or people-watch along Houhai Lake. Beneath the willow trees lining the pedestrian-friendly lanes, about 70 restaurants, clubs and small bars cast their neon upon the waters in welcoming, festive fashion.

*Beijing-based writer and photographer Lowell Bennett has traveled widely throughout the cities and hinterlands of China.*

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## While you're in China, visit ...

Expand your understanding of China by exploring these Pacific Coast cities. They're just a short train ride apart, yet they look and feel like two different worlds.

### Shanghai

King of the Yangtze River Delta, Shanghai is both ancient and modern. Beginning as a coastal fishing village centuries ago, Shanghai is now bursting with nearly 18 million citizens and is the largest city in China. This metropolis has a long history of trade and conflict that have made it a cultural melting pot.

Stroll along the Pudong District (right), China's financial and commercial center and home to some cutting-edge architecture such as the Oriental Pearl Tower. For a taste of history, visit the Shanghai Museum, which is rich with ancient Chinese artifacts. Feeling introspective? Make a stop at the Jade Buddha Temple—a calm oasis in a busy city. For two diverse shopping experiences, stroll along the ultramodern Nanjing Lu and visit the bustling Yu Yuan Bazaar.

**Where to Stay:** The Regent Shanghai, Radisson Plaza Xing Guo Hotel Shanghai, Radisson Hotel Shanghai New World, Radisson Hotel Pudong Century Park, Radisson Hotel Shanghai Hong Quan (opening in 2008)



### Hangzhou

Farther south along the country's Pacific Coast is Hangzhou, which currently holds the title of "Happiest City in China." Its pleasurable lifestyle and low cost of living may have earned Hangzhou the title, but it's the bridges, caves, islands, pagodas and legends that will make you want to come back.

With 1.8 million urban residents, Hangzhou may feel small compared with Shanghai, but it is one of the most beautiful cities in China. The premier attraction here is West Lake, the center of Hangzhou life and culture since the city was founded 2,200 years ago during the Qin Dynasty.

Other must-see sites include the Pagoda of Six Harmonies (right), which overlooks the Qiantang River and dates back to 970; the Jingci Temple, founded in 954 and featuring a massive bell; and the Hangzhou Botanical Garden, 568 acres of lush vegetation, pavilions and kiosks. Wherever you turn, there is something to delight your senses.

**Where to Stay:** Radisson Plaza Hotel Hangzhou

