

# Beijing 北京

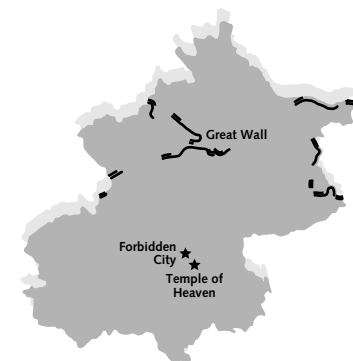
Capital of a land that has fired the global imagination, Beijing is the striking metropolitan core of a country with one of the world's oldest civilisations. It is also the start or finish of a trip along the Trans-Mongolian or the Trans-Manchurian lines, the Yin to Moscow's Yang.

Like its Russian counterpart, Beijing is a city of awesome – even frightening – scale. It's fascinating to compare Tiananmen Sq with Red Square, each complete with Mao's and Lenin's mausoleums, and match up the Forbidden City with the Kremlin. But pretty soon the similarities end and you're left with a dynamic modern city that stumps first-time visitors who arrive expecting to witness the last gasp of communist China. Beijing is intent on reinventing itself for the 2008 Olympics and the coming decades, evolving from an ancient city of low-rise, warrenlike neighbourhoods to a 21st-century icon, packed with skyscrapers, Prada-toting fashionistas and avant-garde artists.

Still, in this headlong rush into the future, history – an increasingly precious commodity – has not been totally condemned. Even with just a few days to spare before or after your train journey you'll discover that Beijing's environs harbour some of China's most stunning sights: the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, Temple of Heaven Park, the Lama Temple and the Great Wall, to name just a few. Yes, the crowds can be oppressive (as can the climate), but there are also lovely parks and appealing lakeside areas in which to relax. It's also a fantastic place to sample China's glorious food and an ideal launching pad for exploring the most populous nation on earth; grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *China* and get planning!

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Brave the crowds at the **Forbidden City** (p281), China's centre of power for over 500 years
- Rove through the ragged **hutong** (p286), Beijing's traditional alleyways
- Survey the spectacular achievement of the **Great Wall** (p292) outside town
- Admire the cosmic harmonies of the **Temple of Heaven** (p285)
- Feast on **Peking duck** (p288) and China's myriad other speciality foods



■ AREA CODE: 010

■ POPULATION: 13.8 MILLION

## HISTORY

Beijing – affectionately called Peking by diplomats, nostalgic journalists and wistful academics – seems to have ruled over China since time immemorial. In fact, Beijing (Northern Capital) emerged as the pre-eminent cultural and political force only with the 13th-century Mongol occupation of China, when Chinggis (Genghis) Khaan descended on the city. His grandson, Kublai Khaan (c 1216–94), renamed the city Khanbalik (Khan's town). From here, Kublai Khaan ruled the largest empire in world history.

Although the capital was moved for a brief period, Emperor Yongle (of the Ming dynasty) re-established Beijing as the capital in the 1400s and spent millions of taels of silver to refurbish the city. Yongle is known as the architect of modern Beijing, building the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, as well as developing the bustling commercial streets outside the inner city. The Qing dynasty expanded the construction of temples, palaces and pagodas.

In January 1949, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered the city. On 1 October of that year Mao Zedong proclaimed a 'People's Republic' to an audience of some 500,000 citizens in Tiananmen Sq.

Like the emperors before them, the communists significantly altered the face of the city to suit their own image. Whole city blocks were reduced to rubble to widen major boulevards. From 1950 to 1952, the city's magnificent outer walls were levelled in the interests of traffic circulation. Before the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s, Russian experts and technicians poured in, leaving their own Stalinesque touches.

The capitalist-style reforms of the past quarter of a century have transformed Beijing into a modern city, with skyscrapers, slick shopping malls and heaving flyovers. The once flat skyline is now spiked with vast apartment blocks and office buildings. Recent years have also seen a convincing beautification of Beijing: from a toneless and unkempt city to a greener, cleaner and more pleasant place, ready to host the world at the 2008 Olympics.

## ORIENTATION

With a total area of 16,800 sq km, Beijing municipality is roughly the size of Belgium. Don't panic, though, as it's also a city of very orderly design, built on one giant grid, with the Forbidden City at its centre.

Beijing Train Station, one block south of Jianguomenwai Dajie, is 3km southeast of the Forbidden City, and is accessible by the metro circle line. Jianguomenwai Dajie, the most important east–west avenue, running just south of the Forbidden City, has many hotels and facilities. The east–west line of the metro follows this major road.

Five ring roads circle the city centre in concentric rings. Beijing's Capital Airport is 27km from the city centre; see p291 for information on getting to and from the airport.

## Maps

English-language maps of Beijing can be bought at the airport, train station newspaper kiosks, and the Foreign Languages Bookstore. They can also be picked up for free at most big hotels and, for Y8, branches of the Beijing Tourist Information Center.

### WHEN TO GO

Autumn (September to early November) is the optimal season to visit Beijing as the weather is gorgeous – clear skies and breezy days – and fewer tourists are in town. In winter, tourists are also scarce and many hotels offer substantial discounts – but it's glacial outside (dipping as low as -20°C) and the northern winds cut like a knife through bean curd. Arid spring is OK, apart from the (worsening) sand clouds that sweep in from Inner Mongolia and the static electricity that discharges everywhere. From May onwards the mercury can surge well over 30°C, reaching over 40°C at the height of summer, which also sees heavy rainstorms late in the season. Maybe surprisingly, this is also considered the peak season, when hotels typically raise their rates and the Great Wall nearly collapses under the weight of marching tourists. Note that air pollution can be very harsh in both summer and winter (although Beijing is obliged to clean up its act for the 2008 Olympics).

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Foreign Languages Bookstore** (Wàiwén Shūdiàn; ☎ 6512 6911; 235 Wangfujing Dajie; ☑ Wangfujing) Has a reasonable selection of English-language novels, as well as travel books, including Lonely Planet titles, all on the 3rd floor.

**Xidan Bookshop** (Xidān Túshū Dàshā; ☎ 6607 8477; 17 Xichang'an Jie; ☑ Xidan) This vast bookshop has an extensive range of English-language titles.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 120)

**Fire** (☎ 119)

**Police** (☎ 110)

### Internet Access

Internet cafés have become harder to find in Beijing over the past few years. Many cheaper hotels and youth hostels provide Internet access at around Y10 per hour.

**Moko Coffee Bar** (Mòkè Wǎngbā; ☎ 6525 3712; 57 Dongsī Nandajie; per hr incl coffee upstairs/downstairs Y4/12; ☑ Jianguomennei Dajie) No English sign, but it's next to a chemist.

**Qian Yi Internet Café** (☎ 6705 1722; 3rd fl, Old Station Bldg; per hr Y20; ☎ 9am-midnight; ☑ Qianmen) Expensive, but well located.

**Yongning Internet Café** (Yǒngníng Wǎngbā; 71 Chaoyangmen Nanxiaojie; per hr Y2; ☑ Chaoyangmen) There are no English signs here; look for the Chinese characters 网吧.

### Media

Pick up the free monthly listings magazines **That's Beijing** (www.thatsbj.com) and **Time Out Beijing** from expat bars and restaurants in the Sanlitun and Qianhai Lake areas.

### Medical Services

Beijing has some of the best medical facilities and services in China. Note that it is much cheaper just to ask what medicines you need and then buy them at a pharmacy on the street rather than purchasing them on-site at an international clinic.

**Beijing International Medical Center** (☎ 6465 1561/2/3, emergencies ☎ 6465 1560; Suite 106-7, 1st fl, Lufthansa Center Youyi Shopping City, 50 Liangmaqiao Lu; ☎ 24hr; ☑ Dongzhimen) Medical, pharmacy, dental and counselling services; English-speaking staff.

**Beijing Union Medical Hospital** (Běijīng Xiéhé Yīyuàn; ☎ 6529 6114, emergencies ☎ 6529 5284; 53 Dongdan Beidajie; ☎ 24hr; ☑ Jianguomennei Dajie) Foreigners' and VIP wing in the back building.

## Money

Foreign currency and travellers cheques can be changed at large branches of the Bank of China, CITIC Industrial Bank, the airport and hotel moneychanging counters, and at several department stores (including the Friendship Store), as long as you have your passport.

There's a Bank of China ATM in the Capital Airport arrivals hall, and several others across the city.

**Bank of China** Lufthansa Center Youyi Shopping City (1st fl, Lufthansa Center Youyi Shopping City; ☑ Dongzhimen); Oriental Plaza (Oriental Plaza, cnr Wangfujing Dajie & Dongchang'an Jie; ☑ Wangfujing); Sundongan Plaza (☑ Wangfujing); The ATM at Sundongan Plaza is next to the main plaza entrance on Wangfujing Dajie.

## Post

There are convenient post offices in the CITIC building next to the Friendship Store and in the basement of the China World Trade Center. Large post offices are generally open 9am to 5pm daily.

**International Post Office** (Guóji Yóudiànjú; Jianguomen Beidajie; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat; ☑ Jianguomen)

## Tourist Information

**Beijing Tourism Hotline** (☎ 6513 0828; ☎ 24hr)

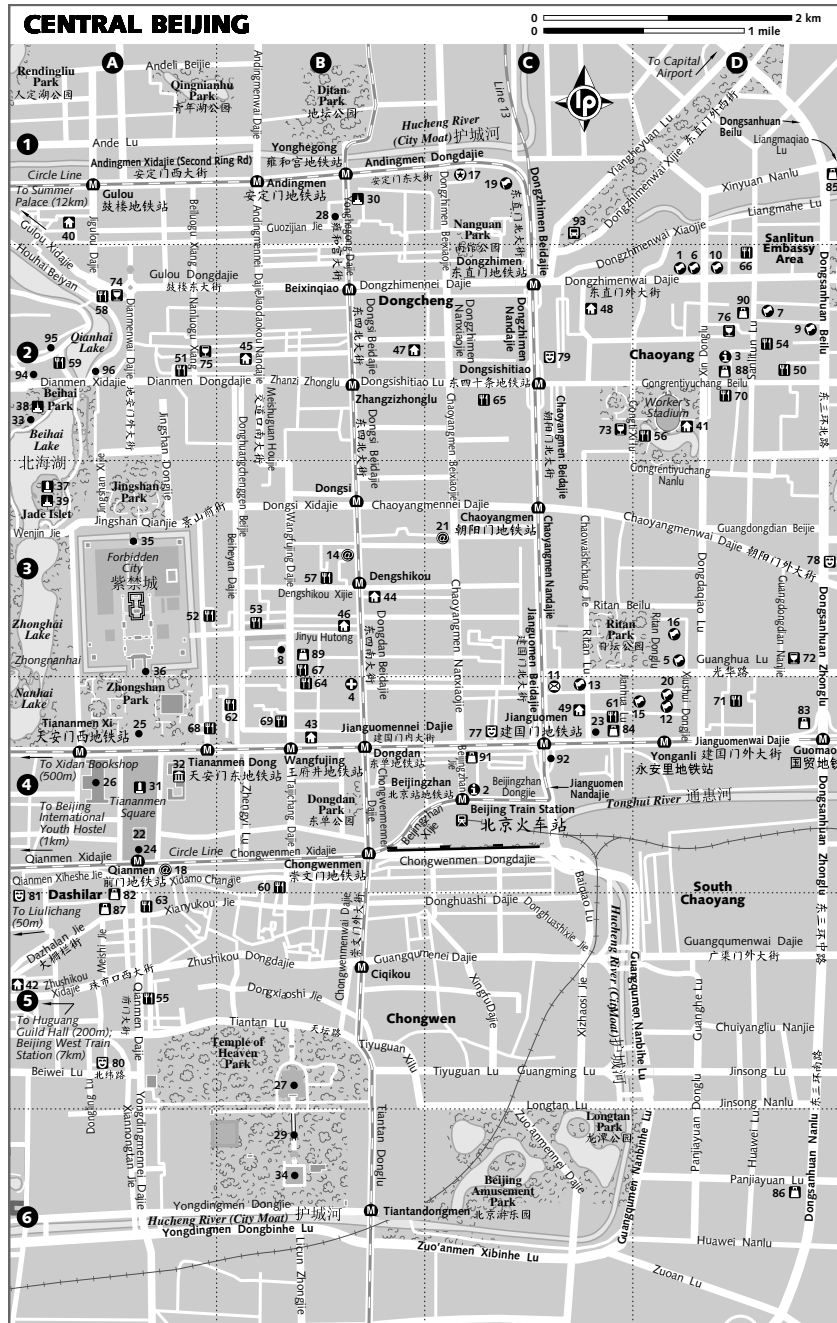
English-speaking operators available to answer questions and hear complaints.

**Beijing Tourist Information Center** (Běijīng Lǚyóu Zīxún Fúwù Zhōngxīn; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) airport (☎ 6459 8148); Beijingzhan (☎ 6528 8448; www.bjta.gov.cn; 16 Beijingzhan Jie; ☑ Beijingzhan); Chaoyang (☎ 6417 6627; 27 Sanlitun Beilu; ☑ Dongjishitiao) Beijingzhan is a one minute walk north of Beijing Train Station; Chaoyang is west of the Sanlitun Yashou Clothing Market.

## SIGHTS Forbidden City

The largest and best-preserved cluster of ancient buildings in China is the **Forbidden City** (Zijīn Chéng; ☎ 6513 2255; admission Y60; ☎ 8.30am-4pm May-Sep, 8.30am-3.30pm Oct-Apr; ☑ Tiananmen Xi or Tiananmen Dong). It was home to two dynasties of emperors, the Ming and the Qing, who rarely strayed from this pleasure dome, although it was off limits to everyone else (thus, the name).

Renting the cassette for the self-guided tour (available in several languages) is worth the extra Y40; the English version is narrated by one-time 007 Roger Moore. Tickets and cassette rental are available at



the Forbidden City's south gate, not to be confused with the Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) facing onto the square of the same name. Continue through Tiananmen and go northward until you can't proceed without paying. (The booth in the centre of the first plaza sells tickets to climb Tiananmen, *not* to the Forbidden City.)

The palace is huge (800 buildings, 9000 rooms) and under constant renovation. The main ceremonial buildings lie along the north-south axis in the centre. Despite its vast scale this area is frequently crowded; you may prefer to explore the courtyards and pavilions (and mini-museums within them) on either side of the main drag.

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- Beijing Union Medical Hospital 北京协和医院..... 4 B4
- British Embassy 英国大使馆..... 5 D3
- Canadian Embassy 加拿大大使馆..... 6 D2
- Dutch Embassy 荷兰大使馆..... 7 D2
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## Tiananmen Square & Around

The world's largest public square, **Tiananmen Sq** (M Tiananmen Xi, Tiananmen Dong or Qianmen) is a vast slab of paving stones at the heart of Beijing and a poignant epitaph to China's hapless democracy movement. It may be a grandiose, Maoist tourist trap, but there's more than enough space to stretch your legs and the view can be breathtaking, especially on a clear day and at nightfall.

Although the square is the symbolic centre of the Chinese universe, what you see today is a modern reconception by Mao to project the enormity of the Communist Party. His giant portrait still hangs over the **Gate of Heavenly Peace** (Tiānānmén; ☎ 6309 9386; admission Y15, bag storage Y2; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm) at the northern end of the square, flanked by the slogans 'Long Live the People's Republic of China' (left) and 'Long Live the Unity of the Peoples of the World' (right).

### BEIJING IN...

#### One Day

You'll need at least a morning to cover the **Forbidden City** (p281) and some of the nearby sights of **Tiananmen Sq** (above). Grab lunch at **Quanjudu Roast Duck Restaurant** (p289) or **Wangfujing Snack St** (p289), then jump in a taxi to the **Temple of Heaven** (opposite) or spend the afternoon exploring the *hutong* (narrow alleyways) close to mellow **Qianhai Lake**.

#### Two Days

Rise early the next day for a trip to the **Great Wall** (p292), and spend the evening enjoying a performance of **Chinese acrobatics** (p290) before rounding off the day wining and dining in Sanlitun.

#### Three Days

Follow the two-day itinerary above, and on your third day make an early morning visit to the **Lama Temple** (right) before browsing among the stalls and bric-a-brac shops of **Liulichang** (p291). In the afternoon, make an expedition to the **Summer Palace** (opposite). In the evening, dine at the **Courtyard** (p289), snack at **Donghuanmen Night Market** (p289) or spend the evening enjoying **Beijing opera** (p290) at one of the city's numerous theatres.

At the square's southern end, **Front Gate** (Qián Mén; ☎ 6525 3176; admission Y10; ☎ 8.30am-4pm; M Qianmen) is a remnant of the wall that guarded the ancient Inner City as early as the 15th century. It actually consists of two gates: the Arrow Tower to the south and the Main Gate to the north.

On the site of the old Outer Palace Gate, the **Monument to the People's Heroes** is a 36m obelisk that bears bas-relief depictions of key revolutionary events. Just behind this monument is **Chairman Mao's Mausoleum** (Máo Zhǔxí Jīniàntáng; ☎ 6513 2277; admission free, bag storage Y10; ☎ 8.30-11.30am Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Mon, Wed & Fri). Most Chinese continue to respect and revere this leader, who died in 1976, despite the atrocities carried out during his rule; expect long queues and only the briefest glimpse of the body. The official Party line is that Mao was 70% right and 30% wrong in his ruling. Appropriately, a visit to the 'Maosoleum' is about 70% solemnity and 30% absurdity, especially considering the well-stocked gift shop, which does a brisk trade in Chairman Mao thermometers and alarm clocks.

The National People's Congress, China's rubber-stamp legislature, sits on the western side of the square in the monolithic and intimidating **Great Hall of the People** (Rénmín Dàhuitáng; ☎ 6309 6668; admission Y20, bag storage Y2; ☎ 9am-3pm, closed when Congress is in session). Many of the lifeless halls are named after provinces and regions of China and decorated appropriately.

On the eastern side of the square, the **Museum of Chinese History** (Zhōngguó Lìshǐ Bówùguǎn; ☎ 6512 8986; admission Y30; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) and the **Museum of the Chinese Revolution** (Zhōngguó Géming Lìshǐ Bówùguǎn; ☎ 6512 8986; admission Y30; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sat) are clumped together in a sombre building, but served by individual ticket offices. From 1966 to 1978 the museums were closed so that history could be revised in the light of recent events, and the tradition continues today with frequent closures. Several halls of the Museum of Chinese History stage temporary art and culture exhibitions.

## North of the Forbidden City

### LAMA TEMPLE

This exquisite **temple** (Yōnghé Gōng; ☎ 6404 4499, ext 252; 28 Yonghegong Dajie; admission Y25, English audio guide Y20; ☎ 9am-4pm; M Yonghegong) is vast and riotously colourful. The five main halls and

10 exhibition rooms contain countless serene and smiling Buddhas, the most notable of which is the 18m-high statue of the **Maitreya Buddha** sculpted from a single piece of sandalwood.

The Lama Temple was once the official residence of Count Yin Zhen, who later became emperor and moved to the Forbidden City. In 1744 the buildings were converted into a lamasery. The temple somehow miraculously survived the Cultural Revolution and was 'restocked' with novice monks from Inner Mongolia in the 1980s. Today it is the most important Tibetan Buddhist temple in China (outside of Tibet itself).

### CONFUCIAN TEMPLE & IMPERIAL COLLEGE

Just a short distance down the *hutong* opposite the entrance to the Lama Temple is the **Confucian Temple and Imperial College** (Kǒng Miào & Guózǐjiàn; ☎ 8401 1977; 13 Guozijian Jie; admission Y10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm; M Yonghegong). The unkempt grounds and undisturbed peace are a pleasant contrast to just about every other sight in Beijing. The **steles** in the temple courtyard record the names of those successful in the civil service examinations (possibly the world's first) of the imperial court. The Imperial College was where the emperor annually expounded the Confucian classics to an audience of thousands of kneeling students and professors.

### BEIHAI PARK

A relaxing place for a stroll is **Beihai Park** (Bēihǎi Gōngyuǎn; ☎ 6407 1415; admission Y5, Jade Islet Y10; ☎ 6.30am-8pm, buildings open till 4pm; M Tiananmen Xi, then bus 5), northwest of the Forbidden City. There are four gates to the park, which is formed around Beihai Lake.

The site is associated with Kublai Khan's palace, the novel of Beijing before the creation of the Forbidden City. Dominating **Jade Islet** on the lake, the 36m-high **White Dagoba** was originally built in 1651 for a visit by the Dalai Lama, and was rebuilt in 1741. You can reach the dagoba through the **Yong'an Temple**, with its halls decorated with statues of Buddhist figures and past lamas, as well as a bamboo grove. The pretty **Xitian Fanjing** (Western Paradise) temple and the **Nine Dragon Screen**, a 5m-high and 27m-long wall of coloured glazed tiles, are also worth searching out within the park.

### JINGSHAN PARK

This **park** (Jingshān Gōngyuǎn; ☎ 6403 3225; admission Y2; ☎ 6am-9.30pm; M Tiananmen Xi, then bus 5) is worth visiting for its priceless views over the Forbidden City immediately to its south. Its central hill, shaped from the earth excavated to create the palace moat, supposedly protects the palace from the evil spirits – or dust storms – from the north (the billowing dust clouds in the spring have to be seen to be believed). Clamber to the top of this regal pleasure garden for a magnificent panorama of the capital.

### Summer Palace

The immense park of the **Summer Palace** (Yīhé Yuán; ☎ 6288 1144; 19 Xijian Gongmen; admission Y40-Y50, audio guides Y30; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) requires at least half a day of your time. Nowadays teeming with tour groups, this complex, dominated by **Kunming Lake**, was once a playground for the imperial court. Royalty came here to elude the summer heat that roasted the Forbidden City. Empress Dowager Cixi rebuilt the park in 1888 with money supposedly intended for the creation of a modern navy. (At least the empress restored the still-immobile marble boat for lakeside dining.)

The palace's main building is the **Hall of Benevolence and Longevity**, near the lake towards the eastern gate, which is where the emperor handled state affairs and received visitors. The 700m **Long Corridor** along the northern shore is decorated with mythical scenes. Visitors can also see exhibitions specific to the Empress Dowager Cixi, including her furniture and memorabilia. The park also contains several **temples** with elaborate artwork and good views of the lake, on which you can row a boat in summer and skate in winter.

The park is about 12km northwest of the city centre of Beijing; get there by taking the subway to Xizhimen station, then a mini-bus or bus 375.

### Temple of Heaven Park

China's finest example of Ming architecture is the **Temple of Heaven** (Tiāntán Gōngyuǎn; ☎ 6702 8866; Tiantan Donglu; admission low season Y10-30, high season Y15-35; ☎ park 6am-9pm, sights 8am-6pm; M Chongwenmen or Qianmen). This complex, set in a 267-hectare park, functioned as a stage for the solemn rites performed by the Son of Heaven, who came here to pray for good

harvests, seek divine clearance and atone for the sins of the people.

The design and position of the park, as well as the shape and colour of structures within, have symbolic significance for the ancient interplay between heaven and earth. The **Round Altar**, for example, possesses an obsessive symmetry revolving around the heavenly number nine (nine rings of stone, each ring composed of multiples of nine stones etc). The altar's most mystifying fea-

ture is its ability to amplify voices emanating from the centre of the upper terrace.

Just north of the Round Altar is the **Imperial Vault of Heaven**, which is surrounded by the **Echo Wall**. Sixty-five metres in diameter, the wall allows a whisper to travel clearly from one end to the other.

The crown of the whole complex is the **Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests**. Amazingly, this temple's wooden pillars support the ceiling without nails or cement!

## BEIJING'S HUTONG

Beijing's homely interior lies waiting to be discovered in the city's *hutong* (narrow alleyways). Crisscrossing east-west across the city, these alleyways link to create a huge, enchanting warren of one-storey, ramshackle dwellings and historic courtyard homes.

After Chinggis Khaan's army reduced Beijing to rubble, the city was redesigned with *hutong*. By the Qing dynasty there were over 2000 such passageways riddling the city, leaping to around 6000 by the 1950s; now the figure has dwindled again to around 2000, home to around a quarter of Beijing's residents. Marked with white plaques, historic homes are protected, but for many others a way of life is being ruthlessly bulldozed, at a rate of over 10,000 dwellings a year.

*Hutong* land is a hodgepodge of the old and the new, with Qing dynasty courtyards riddled with modern brick outhouses and socialist-era conversions, and cruelly overlooked by grim apartment blocks.

### Layout

Old walled *siheyuan* (courtyard homes) are the building blocks of this delightful world. Many are still lived in and hum with activity. From spring to autumn, men collect outside their gates, drinking beer, playing chess, smoking and chewing the fat. Inside, trees soar aloft, providing shade and a nesting ground for birds.

More venerable courtyards are fronted by large, thick, red doors, outside of which perch either a pair of Chinese lions or *bavoguvshi* (drum stones; two circular stones resembling drums, each on a small plinth and occasionally topped by a miniature lion or a small dragon head).

Foreigners have cottoned on to the charm of courtyards and have breached this very conservative bastion; however, many have been repelled by poor heating, no hot water, no cable TV, dodgy sanitation and no place to park the 4WD. Many *hutong* homes still lack toilets, explaining the multitude of malodorous public loos strung out along the alleyways. Other homes have been thoroughly modernised and sport varnished wood floors, fully fitted kitchens, a Jacuzzi and air-con.

*Hutong* nearly all run east-west to ensure that the main gate faces south, satisfying the requirements of feng shui. This south-facing aspect guarantees a lot of sunshine and protection from more negative forces from the north. This positioning also mirrors the layout of all Chinese temples, nourishing the Yang (the male and light aspect), while checking the Yin (the female and dark aspect). Little connecting alleyways that run north-south link the main alleys.

### Hutong Tour

The best way to see *hutong* is just to wander or cycle around the centre of Beijing, as the alleyways riddle the town within the Second Ring Rd. Otherwise, limit yourself to historic areas, such as around the Lusongyuan Hotel. Or you could do the pedicab tourist trip with the **Beijing Hutong Tour Co Ltd** (☎ 6615 9097; 🕒 8.50am & 1.50pm Nov-Apr, 8.50am & 6.50pm May-Oct), departing from a point 200m to the west of the north entrance of Beihai Park (p285). Any number of other pedicab tours infest the roads around Qianhai Lake – they will circle you like hyenas, baying '*hutong, hutong*'.

## SLEEPING

Beijing has a reasonably wide range of places to stay, from hostels to five-star luxury. The most atmospheric hotels are those built in the courtyards of the *hutong* neighbourhoods. All hotels are subject to a 10% to 15% service charge (on top of the prices quoted here), but many cheaper hotels don't bother to charge it.

### Budget

**Far East International Youth Hostel** (Yuāndōng Guóji Qingnián Lǚshè; ☎ 6301 8811, ext 3118; courtyard@elong.com; 113 Tieshuxie Jie; dm from ¥45; 🕒 Qianmen; 📶 📺) Based in a courtyard with loads of character, this pleasant hostel offers bike rental (per day ¥20), a kitchen, a laundry, a fine café-bar, a table tennis room, and a shop (selling Internet phonecards). Rooms come without TV, phone or shower. To get here head south on Nanxinhuo Jie. About 200m after you pass Liulichang you'll see a sign (in English) on the right-hand side of the street saying 'Far East Hotel'. Follow the *hutong* for about 50m.

**Beijing Gongti International Youth Hostel** (Běijīng Gōngtǐ Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 6552 4800; bih-yh@sohu.com; East Gate, Worker's Stadium; 2-/4-bed dm ¥70/50, s ¥100; 🕒 Dongshihitiao; 📶 📺) This clean and appealing hostel offers both excellent value and position. The dorm rooms (¥10 extra for nonmembers) are bright, clean and spacious, and come equipped with phone (incoming only), TV and radiator. Inquire about camping outside during the summer months. The hostel also has a bar, Chinese restaurant and a useful travellers' notice board.

**You Yi Youth Hostel** (Yōuyì Qīngnián Jiǔdiàn; ☎ 6417 2632; fax 6415 6866; 43 Beisanlitun Lu; dm/tw incl breakfast ¥70/180; 🕒 Dongshihitiao; 📶 📺) Smack in the middle of the Sanlitun bar district, this is a good choice if you wish to party (although a sign says 'Gambling, prostitution and drunkenness are strictly forbidden'). Twins (with phone, TV, radiator and air-con) are bright and spacious with large beds. The free laundry service is a nice touch.

**Eastern Morning Sun Youth Hostel** (Běijīng Dōngfāng Chéngguāng Qīngnián Lǚguān; ☎ 6528 4347; fl B4, Oriental Plaza, 8-16 Dongdangsanjiao; s/d/tr ¥80/120/180; 🕒 Wangfujing; 📶 📺) The central location makes up for its position four floors below ground level (memorise where the fire escape is!). Despite the sign outside, this is not a bona

fide Hostelling International member. Single rooms are simple and small; the better doubles have TV (no phone).

**Beijing Feiyang International Youth Hostel** (Běijīng Fēiyáng Qīngnián Lǚshè; ☎ 6315 1165; iyhf@yahoo.com.cn; No 10 Bldg, Changchun Jie Hou Jie, Xuanwumen Xidajie; 10-/5-bed dm ¥30/50, d 180; 🕒 Changchunjie; 📶 📺) All rooms have showers and air-con at this hostel near Changchunjie subway (take exit C from the station and head east past the McDonald's for around 150m). At hand are bicycles for hire, a washing machine, kitchen and tourist info.

### Midrange

**Haoyuan Guesthouse** (Hǎoyuán Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6512 5557; www.haoyuanhotel.com; 53 Shijia Hutong; d ¥468-572; 🕒 Dongdan; 📶 📺) This delightful Qing courtyard hotel has pleasant staff and a handful of tastefully finished rooms. Laid out with trees, the courtyard at the rear is gorgeous. There is a restaurant as well as bike rental and rates include breakfast.

**Red Capital Residence** (Xīnhóngzǐ Kèzhàn; ☎ 6402 7150; www.redcapitalclub.com.cn; 9 Dongsi Liutiao; d from US\$148; 🕒 Dongshihitiao) An unusual guesthouse heady with the nostalgia of a vanished age. The five rooms are decked out with stuff that wouldn't look out of place in a museum. For real class take a swing through town in the Red Flag limo, once the property of Mao's inner circle.

**Bamboo Garden Hotel** (Zhúyúán Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6403 2229; fax 6401 2633; 24 Xiaoshiqiao Hutong; s/d/ste ¥380/530/680; 🕒 Gulou; 📶) This cosy, intimate and tranquil courtyard hotel is in buildings dating back to the late Qing dynasty, while the gardens belonged to a eunuch from Empress Cixi's entourage. Rooms are tastefully decorated with reproduction Ming furniture and the abundant foliage is pleasant. Reception is through the gates on your left.

**Novotel Peace Hotel** (Běijīng Nuǒfùtè Héping Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6512 8833; fax 6512 6863; 3 Jinyu Hutong; d US\$80-110, ste US\$100-130; 🕒 Jianguomennei Dajie; 📶) This efficient and inviting refurbished hotel has a fresh and cosmopolitan touch and a fantastic central location. The cheaper rooms – not huge but perfectly scuffable – are in the older and more scuffed West Wing. Ask for promotional rates.

**Red House Hotel** (Rúixiù Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6416 7500; www.redhouse.com.cn; 10 Chunxiu Lu; s/d ¥300/400; 🕒 Dongzhimen; 📶 📺) Handy for Sanlitun, the

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Lusongyuan Hotel** (Lūsōngyuán Bīnguǎn; ☎ 6404 0436; 1syhotel@263.net; 22 Banchang Hutong; dm/s/d/ste US\$10/35/60/110; **M** Andingmen; 🚶 🚲 🚿) Built by a Mongolian general during the Qing dynasty, this courtyard hotel's location makes it an excellent base for exploring the city. For a double bedroom, book ahead as the hotel only has two (the other rooms all have two single beds). Pocket-sized singles come with pease-sized baths (albeit quite cute); dorms have three beds (with TV) and there is one suite. All rooms facing onto the courtyard are slightly more expensive. Bicycle rental (per day Y30) is available.

refurbished rooms here have cable TV. There are lockers, laundry facilities and breakfast is included. Also in the building are the Monkey Business office and the popular sports bar Club Football Center.

### Top End

**St Regis** (Běijīng Guójiǎ Jùlèbù Fāndiàn; ☎ 6460 6688; www.stregis.com/beijing; 21 Jianguomenwai Dajie; d from US\$340, ste US\$500-5300; **M** Jianguomen; 🚶 🚲 🚿) Top-notch elegance complemented by professionalism and a superb location make the St Regis a marvellous choice. The splendid foyer and an enticing complement of restaurants compound this hotel's undeniable allure.

**Grand Hyatt Beijing** (Běijīng Dōngfāng Jūnyuè Dàjǐutián; ☎ 8518 1234; www.hyatt.com; 1 Dongchang'an Jie; d from US\$320; **M** Wangfujing; 🚶 🚲 🚿) Bang in the midst of the Wangfujing shopping district this contemporary-designed and opulent hotel offers a great location and sizable rooms.

**China World Hotel** (Zhōngguó Dǎfāndiàn; ☎ 6505 2266; www.shangri-la.com; 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie; d US\$300-410; **M** Guomao; 🚶 🚲 🚿) Acres of marble greet guests at this five-star performer. Plus all your shopping and dining needs met at the China Word Trade Center. Full tariff rate includes airport transfer, laundry, dry-cleaning, breakfast and local phone calls.

### EATING

Some of your best memories of Beijing are likely to be those involving eating. The best areas to look for restaurants, cafés and bars

include Sanlitun and around Qianhai and Houhai Lakes. Unless stated otherwise in the review, restaurants and cafés are open from 11am to 11pm.

For upmarket dining, Beijing offers some exceptional restaurants that serve Chinese-influenced food with a modern twist. Reservations are necessary. Both Courtyard and Green T House also have small galleries where you can view some of Beijing's striking contemporary art.

Some of the best and cheapest places to sample local cuisine are the food stalls and local markets.

### Restaurants

**Gongdelin Vegetarian Restaurant** (Gōngdélín Sùcàiguǎn; ☎ 6511 2542; 158 Qianmen Dajie; meals Y25-40; **M** Qianmen) Restore your karma with dishes of mock meat that taste better than the real thing. Service is pedestrian and the décor strictly no-frills.

**Niúgē Jiǎozǐ** (☎ 6525 7472; 85 Dong'anmen Nanjiejie; meals Y15; **M** Tiananmen Dong) Dumpling fans should hasten to this pocket-sized restaurant which dishes up dozens of yummy varieties – there's no English menu, though, and no English sign either, but it's opposite the building with the sign on the roof saying 'Hualong Street'.

**Xiao Wang's Home Restaurant** (Xiǎowáng Fū; meals Y70) Guanghua Dongli (☎ 6594 3602; 2 Guanghua Dongli; **M** Yonganli); Sanlitun (☎ 6594 3602, 6591 3255; 4 Gongrentiyuchang Beilu; **M** Dongsishitiao) Treat yourself to home-style Beijing cuisine from this excellent restaurant with outdoor seating. Try one of the specials: fried hot and spicy Xinjiang-style chicken wings or deep-fried spareribs with pepper salt. The branch in the Sanlitun area is the classier of the two.

**Tiāndì Yǐjiā** (☎ 8511 5556; tiandicanynin@163.com; 140 Nanchizi Dajie; meals around Y300; **M** Tiananmen Dong) This refined Chinese courtyard-style restaurant is decked out with traditional furniture, water features and side rooms for snug hotpot dinners. Graze on Cantonese dim sum (served from 11am to 2pm and 5pm to 9.30pm).

**Bāguó Bùyí** (☎ 6400 8888; 89-3 Dianmen Dongdajiejie; dishes from Y8; **M** Zhangzizhonglu) Spicy Sichuan cuisine is served in a marvellous Chinese inn-style restaurant setting. There's a range of good-value dishes for Y8, including Chongqing hot pepper chicken and chilli fish slices.

**Green Tianshi Vegetarian Restaurant** (Lǜsè Tiānshǐ Sùcàiguǎn; ☎ 6524 2349; 57 Dengshikou Dajie; meals from Y50; **M** Dengshikou) This venerable vegetarian restaurant cooks up simulated meat dishes, presented in a relaxed and attractive environment. A handy picture menu helps with the ordering.

**Liquan Roast Duck Restaurant** (Lìquán Kǎoyādiàn; ☎ 6702 5681; 11 Beixiangfeng Hutong; roast duck Y68; **M** Qianmen) Book a table before arriving at this tiny, busy Peking duck restaurant buried away in a maze of hutong in east Qianmen. No medals for service but the duck is excellent.

**Kaorouji** (☎ 6404 2554; 14 Qianhai Dongyuan; meals Y55; **M** Gulou) An old standby overlooking lovely Qianhai Lake and serving delicious coriander-laced roast mutton (Y45) as well as a good range of other Muslim Uighur dishes.

**Courtyard** (Sīhéyuàn; ☎ 6526 8883; 95 Donghuamen Dajie; meals from Y200; 🕒 6-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sunday; **M** Tiananmen Dong) The view across to the Forbidden City is only surpassed by the cooking which is delicious. Sunday lunch is an affordable option at Y150 per person.

**Green T House** (☎ 6552 8310; 6 Gongti Xilu; meals from Y400; 🕒 6-10pm; **M** Dongsishitiao) A dining wonderland of fabulous furniture and inventive, beautifully presented dishes with poetic names.

**Red Capital Club** (☎ 6402 7150 weekdays, ☎ 8401 8886 evenings & weekends; 66 Dongsì Jiu Tiao; meals from Y200; **M** Dongsishitiao) This meticulously restored courtyard restaurant serves flavour-some dishes that each come with their own elaborate myth. Look for the red doors with no sign.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Quanjudé Roast Duck Restaurant** (Quànjudé Kǎoyādiàn; ☎ 6525 3310; 9 Shuafuyuan Hutong; half/whole duck Y84/168; **M** Wangfujing) You've not really visited Beijing unless you've scoffed the city's signature dish. Quanjudé has an impeccable pedigree (Mao ate here) and is a fine place to sample the Peking duck as well as more specialist dishes such as duck feet with mustard sauce, salted duck's liver or deep-fried duck heart. There's also a more famous and touristy branch at **Qianmen** (☎ 6511 2418; 32 Qianmen Dajie; **M** Qianmen).

**Makey Ame** (Mǎjǐ Āmī; ☎ 6506 9616; 2nd fl, A11 Xiushui Nanjiejie; dishes from Y20; **M** Jianguomen) Behind the Friendship Store, this is one of Beijing's few Tibetan restaurants, where you can sample boiled yak with chilli and tsampa (roasted barley meal). There's a comfy upper room decorated with a generous crop of Tibetan ornaments.

**Serve the People** (Wèi Rénmín Fúwù; ☎ 8454 4580; 1 Sanlitun Xiwujie; meals Y50; **M** Dongzhimen) This is Beijing's trendiest Thai restaurant; its warm décor, tom yam (spicy, lemongrass-flavoured soup) and other Thai dishes are deservedly popular.

**Taj Pavilion** (Tǎijiǎ Lóu Yīndù Cǎntīng; ☎ 6505 5866; 1st fl, West Wing, China World Trade Center; meals from Y100; **M** Guomao) Hankering for an Indian meal? The food and service here consistently get top marks.

**1001 Nights** (Yīqiānlǐngyī Yè; ☎ 6532 4050; Gongti Beilu; meals Y100; 🕒 11am-2am; **M** Dongsishitiao) Widely acknowledged as the best Middle Eastern restaurant in Beijing, this lively place also offers belly-dancing shows and late-night dining. Opposite Zhaolong Hotel.

### Cafés & Quick Eats

**Kosmo** (☎ 6657 0007; 5 Lotus Lane, Qianhai Xiyan; sandwich & drink Y30; **M** Gulou) Facing Qianhai Lake, this stylish contemporary café, serving organic and healthy food, is a standout among the trendy offerings of Lotus Lane – and not just because it donates some of its profits to Unicef.

**Downtown Café** (☎ 6415 2100; 26 Sanlitun Lu; meals Y70; **M** Dongsishitiao) This popular Western café hogs the lion's share of hungry expats on Sanlitun Lu. The menu delivers dependable European fair.

**Donghuamen Night Market** (Dōnghuāmén Yèshì; Dong'anmen Dajie; 🕒 3-10pm, closed Chinese New Year; **M** Dengshikou) A sight in itself is this bustling night market near Wangfujing Dajie. It's for tourists, so expect to pay around Y5 for a lamb kebab (much more than you would from a hutong vendor).

**Wangfujing Snack St** (Wángfūjīng Xiǎochījiē; west off Wangfujing Dajie; kebabs from Y3, dishes from Y5; **M** Wangfujing) Fronted by an ornate archway, here you'll find a good selection of small restaurants and stalls overhung with colourful banners and bursting with character and flavour. Try Xinjiang or Muslim Uighur cuisine such as lamb kebabs and flat bread.

**Food Court** (basement, Oriental Plaza, 1 Dongchang'an Jie; dishes from ¥10; **M** Wangfujing) If the outdoor stalls leave you nonplussed try this spacious, hygienic food court offering a world of Chinese cuisine, plus other Asian dishes. You can eat very well for around ¥20. Buy a card (¥5 deposit; cards come in denominations of ¥30, ¥50, ¥100, ¥200, ¥500 and ¥1000 units) at the kiosk at the entrance; credits are deducted with each dish ordered so you can pick and mix your plates from different outlets.

### Self-Catering

At Beijing's supermarkets you'll find everything you need for long train journeys. Some options:

**Lufthansa Center Youyi Shopping City** (Yànshā Yōuyī Shāngchǎng; 50 Liangmaqiao Lu; ☎ 10am-8pm; **M** Dongzhimen)

**Super 24** (Sanlitun Lu; ☎ 24hr; **M** Dongzhimen)

**Yansha Supermarket** (Yànshā Chāoshì; basement, Henderson Center, Jianguomennei Dajie; ☎ 10am-8pm; **M** Jianguomen)

### DRINKING

The hubs for expat drinking are Sanlitun and, increasingly, the streets around Qianhai and Houhai Lakes. Yandai Xijie – a small street just east of Silver Ingot Bridge – and Lotus Lane on the west side of Qianhai Lake are worth checking out. Most bars and clubs are open daily from about noon until the last customer leaves, unless otherwise specified.

**Pass By Bar** (Guòkè; ☎ 8403 8004; 108 Nanluogu Xiang; **M** Zhangzizhonglu) In a courtyard house, this traveller-friendly bar has a great atmosphere as well as a book exchange and decent food.

**Guangfuguan Greenhouse** (Guǎngfúguān de Wènrshì; ☎ 6400 3234; 36 Yandai Xijie; **M** Gulou) Sink those beers in a former Taoist temple with the religious statuary still gazing on.

**Tree** (Yīnbì de Shù; ☎ 6415 1954; www.treebeijing.com; 43 Bei Sanlitun Nan; **M** Dongsishitiao) Recently uprooted to a new location, the Tree has a cellar packed with Belgian brews. The beer garden opens from late spring, the menu's Mediterranean (pizzas around ¥70) and the interior's candlelit.

**Poachers Inn** (☎ 6417 2632, ext 8506; 43 Bei Sanlitun Lu; **M** Dongsishitiao) Party central at weekends, this long-running bar remains one of the most popular expat watering holes, with inflated prices and occasional live acts.

**Club Football Center** (☎ 6417 0497; Red House Hotel, 10b Chunxiu Jie; **M** Dongzhimen) A genuine British pub with wall-to-wall football trophies and memorabilia, live English Premiership action and a big sports screen. The food's OK, too.

**Destination** (☎ 6551 5138; www.bjdestination.com; 7 Gongti Xilu; cover incl 1 drink ¥20; **M** Dongsishitiao) Beijing's premier gay dance bar is a stylish, lively place with a mixed crowd. It hosts the occasional lesbian night.

A couple of upmarket hotel bars with soothing ambience and music are **Centro** (Xuànkù; ☎ 6561 8833, ext 6388; Kerry Center Hotel, 1 Guanghua Lu; ☎ 24hr; **M** Guomao) and **Red Moon Bar** (Dōngfāng Liàng; ☎ 8518 1234, ext 6366; Grand Hyatt Beijing, 1 Dongchang'an Jie; **M** Wangfujing).

### ENTERTAINMENT

#### Opera

Beijing opera (p52) is the most famous of the many forms of performance art on offer in the city. You can catch performances at the following theatres:

**Chang'an Grand Theatre** (Chángān Dàjùchǎng; ☎ 6510 1309; Chang'an Bldg, 7 Jianguomennei Dajie; tickets ¥40-150; ☎ performances 7.15pm; **M** Jianguomen)

**Huguang Guild Hall** (Hùguāng Huìguǎn; ☎ 6351 8284; 3 Hufang Lu; tickets ¥100-380; ☎ performances 7.15-9pm; **M** Hepingmen) Decorated in a similar fashion to the Zhengyici Theatre, with balconies surrounding the canopied stage, this theatre dates back to 1807.

**Zhengyici Theatre** (Zhèngyíci Jùchǎng; ☎ 6303 3104; 220 Xiheyuan Dajie; tickets from ¥50; ☎ performances 7.30-9pm; **M** Qianmen) Oldest wooden theatre in the country and the best place in the city to experience Beijing opera.

#### Acrobatics

**Chaoyang Theatre** (Cháoyáng Jùchǎng; ☎ 6507 2421; 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu; tickets ¥80; ☎ performances 7.30pm; **M** Chaoyangmen) The Chaoyang Theatre is the venue for visiting acrobatic troupes, who fill the stage with plate-spinning and hoop-jumping.

**Universal Theatre** (Heaven & Earth Theatre; Tiāndì Jùchǎng; ☎ 6416 0757/9893; 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie; tickets ¥60-200; ☎ performances 7.15pm; **M** Dongsishitiao) Around 100m north of Poly Plaza; come here to see young performers from the China Acrobatic Circus and the China National Acrobatic Troupe.

**Wan Sheng Theatre** (Wànshèng Jùchǎng; ☎ 6303 7449; Tianqiao; tickets ¥100-150; ☎ performances 7.15pm;

**M** Qianmen) West of the Temple of Heaven, this theatre offers one of Beijing's best acrobatic displays, performed by the Beijing Acrobatics Troupe.

### SHOPPING

'Let the People Shop' might as well be the new Party mantra. Whatever you want, from antiques to Versace, chances are you'll find it in Beijing. Get lucky and some pieces might even be genuine rather than fake! The best bargains include silk, cashmere and brand-name clothing (often fake). Pirated CDs and DVDs abound. While prices are fixed in the department stores, bargaining is expected – even encouraged – everywhere else.

Wangfujing Dajie is a lively shop-lined pedestrianised street, two blocks east of the Forbidden City. Its name, meaning 'Well of Princely Palaces', dates to the 15th century, when this area was the site of several royal palaces, long since destroyed to make way for the palaces of the people. The mammoth **Oriental Plaza** (Dōngfāng Guǎngchǎng; 1 Dongchang'an Jie; **M** Wangfujing) shopping mall anchors the southern end of the street, while elsewhere along it you'll find tea emporium **Ten Fu's Tea** (Tiānfú Míngchá; ☎ 6527 4613; www.tenfu.com; 88 Wangfujing Dajie; **M** Wangfujing).

**Dashilar** (**M** Qianmen), a colourful *hutong* off Qianmen Dajie, is a jumble of silk shops, tea and herbal medicine shops, theatres and restaurants. Also known as 'Silk Street', it is a hangover from when specialised products were sold in particular areas. Good places to buy silk near Dashilar are **Ruifuxiang** (☎ 6303 2808; 5 Dazhalan Jie) and the **Beijing Silk Store** (☎ 6301 6658; 5 Zhubaoshi, Qianmen Dajie).

Beijing's premier antique street is tree-lined **Liulichang** (**M** Hepingmen), west of Dashilar. Designed to look like an ancient Chinese village, it's a nice place to stroll even if you don't want to buy Chinese paintings, calligraphy materials, art books or ceramics.

**Pānjiāyuán** (☎ dawn-around 3pm Sat & Sun; **M** Guomao) Hands-down the best place to shop for arts, crafts and antiques – everything from Cultural Revolution memorabilia to Buddha heads – is the 'Dirt Market'. Come early and bargain hard. Located off Dongsanhuan Nanlu.

**Sanlitun Yashou Clothing Market** (Sānlitún Yāxiù Fúzhūāng Shìchǎng; 58 Gongrentiyuchang Beilu; **M** Dongsishitiao) Offering five floors of all the clothing you may need.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

#### Air

Beijing's **Capital Airport** (☎ 6459 9567 for international flights, 1689 6969 for domestic flights) has direct air connections to most major cities in the world and every major city in China. For more information about international flights to Beijing, see p319.

#### Train

Moscow, Ulaanbaatar and Harbin trains depart from and arrive at **Beijing Train Station** (Běijīng Huòchēzhàn; ☎ 6563 3262/3242; **M** Beijingzhan), southeast of the Forbidden City. **Beijing West Train Station** (Běijīng Xīzhàn; ☎ 6321 6253; **M** Junshibowuguan), near Lianhuachi Park, has trains for Hong Kong and Vietnam.

Avoid buying tickets in the main ticket hall at Beijing Train Station, as the crowds can be overwhelming. There's a **ticketing office for foreigners** (☎ 5.30-7.30am, 8am-6.30pm & 7-11pm) in the northwestern corner of the 1st floor, accessed through the soft seat waiting room. This is an excellent place to sit down and take a breather in the comfy armchairs provided. There's also a foreigners ticketing office on the 2nd floor of Beijing West Train Station (open 24 hours).

If you're having trouble getting a train ticket go to **BTG Travel & Tours** (☎ 6800 5588; A9 Fuwai Dajie; ☎ 8am-8pm; **M** Jianguomen) between the New Otani and Gloria Plaza Hotels; it has a desk dedicated to booking Trans-Mongolian/Trans-Manchurian trains, and can also (for a ¥100 fee) book Harbin to Manzhouli trains via the CITS office in Harbin.

### GETTING AROUND

#### To/From the Airport

The airport is 27km from the city centre. A service desk inside the airport terminal sells tickets for buses (¥16) into town. Buses leave every half-hour between 5.30am and 7pm, and include routes to Beijing Train Station, Xidan metro and the China Art Gallery north of Wangfujing Dajie. A taxi should cost only about ¥85 from the airport to the centre (including the ¥15 road toll).

A light-rail link from Capital Airport to Beijing is under construction, but is not due for completion until 2007.

#### Bicycle

To get around the city in true Beijing style, consider riding a bicycle, which can be rented

from many hotels, especially those in the budget range. **Universal Bicycle Rental Outlet** (Qianhai Lake; single/tandem bike per hr Y10/20, deposit Y500; ㊟ Gulou) has two outlets in the vicinity of Qianhai Lake.

### Public Transport

Given frequently appalling traffic the subway is a hassle-free way to get around the centre of Beijing, even though its current three lines limit its overall usefulness. It operates from 5am to 11pm and the fare is a flat Y3. Signs are in English and easy to understand. Stations are marked by a blue sign with the capital 'D'. Beijing Train Station is a stop on the circle subway line (Beijingzhan). The new Line 5 is due for completion in 2007.

### Taxi

Taxis are cheap and plentiful: the standard per-kilometre charge ranges from Y1.20 to Y2, with a Y10 minimum. Make sure your driver turns on the meter, especially coming from the airport or the train station. Most taxi drivers do not speak English (although some are learning in preparation for the 2008 Olympics!); it's best to have somebody write down your destination so you can show it to the driver.

## AROUND BEIJING

### GREAT WALL OF CHINA 长城

Stretching 7200km from the Bo Sea in the east to the Gobi Desert in the west, the Great Wall of China is truly a wonder, due to both its breathtaking beauty and its ancient architectural achievement. Several sections of the Great Wall, particularly at Badaling, have been recently revamped for the benefit of tourists. Also renovated but less toured are the sections at Simatai and Jinshanling.

### History

The 'original' construction of the Great Wall is credited to Emperor Qin Shihuang (221–207 BC), China's first sovereign emperor. He accomplished this feat by reconstructing and linking the ruins of older walls, which had been built by the vassal states under the Zhou dynasty in the 7th century BC. The result was a magnificent 4800km stretch

of wall, which was meant to keep out the marauding nomads in the north. The effort required hundreds of thousands of workers, many of them political prisoners. Over the course of 10 years, an estimated one million people died; legend has it that the bodies of deceased workers were among the building materials used.

By the collapse of the Qin, the Great Wall had already started to crumble due to years of neglect. Emperor Han Wu-Di once again undertook the task of rebuilding the existing wall, and extending it 480km further west into the Gobi Desert. During this period, the wall served mainly as an elevated highway, along which men and equipment could be transported across mountainous terrain. Furthermore, the Hans established a system of smoke signals, by which they could warn each other of enemy attacks. Thus, the wall protected traders and explorers who were travelling the ancient caravan routes between China and Europe.

The wall that you see today is largely a product of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The Ming wall was taller, longer and more ornate than any earlier incarnations. It was also stronger, due in part to the advanced brick technology the Ming workers used.

### Badaling 八达岭

Most visitors see the Great Wall at **Badaling** (Bādǎlíng Chángchéng; ㊟ 6912 1338/1423/1520; admission Y45; ㊟ 6am–10pm summer, 7am–6pm winter), 70km northwest of Beijing, at an elevation of 1000m. The section of masonry at Badaling was first built during the Ming dynasty, and was heavily restored in the 1950s and the 1980s. Punctuated with watchtowers, the 6m-wide wall is clad in brick, typical of the stonework employed by the Ming when they restored and expanded the fortification.

The surrounding scenery is raw and impressive and this is the place to come to see the wall snaking off over the undulating hills. Also come here for guard rails, souvenir stalls, a fairground feel and the companionship of squads of tourists surging over the ramparts. If you time your visit to coincide with a summer weekend, you won't be able to move against the wall of humanity on the battlements. Come during the week instead, and if possible, during the colder months when it's covered in snow.

Cable cars exist for the weary (round trip Y50), but don't take the slide (Y30) as it's a colossal waste of money.

Apart from the pristine battlements, you can be conveyed back into history via 15-minute films about the Great Wall at the **Great Wall Circle Vision Theatre** (admission Y25; ㊟ 9am–9.45pm), a 360-degree amphitheatre. The admission fee also gets you into the **China Great Wall Museum** (㊟ 9am–4pm).

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The cheapest and easiest way to get to Badaling is to take bus 919 from just north of the old gate of Deshengmen, about 500m east of the Jishuitan subway stop. Buses leave regularly from 5.30am. Ordinary buses take two hours and cost Y5, while the faster, nonstop luxury air-con buses take one hour and cost Y10. The last bus leaves Badaling for Beijing at 6.30pm.

**CITS** (㊟ 6515 8566), the Beijing Tourist Information Center, **Panda Tours** (㊟ 6525 8372; www.pandatourchina.com), big hotels and everyone else in the tourist business does a tour to Badaling. Watch out for high-price hotel tours (up to Y300 per person).

A taxi to the wall and back will cost a minimum of Y400 for an eight-hour hire with a maximum of four passengers.

### Mutianyu 慕田峪

The 2250m-long granite section of wall at **Mutianyu** (Mùtiányù; ㊟ 6162 6873; admission Y35; ㊟ 6.30am–5.30pm), 90km northeast of Beijing, was developed as a decoy alternative to Badaling and is, on the whole, a less commercial experience. Despite some motivated hawking and tourist clutter, the stretch of wall is notable for its numerous Ming dynasty guard towers and stirring views. The wall is also equipped with a **cable car** (round trip Y50; ㊟ 8.30am–4.30pm). October is the best month to visit, for the autumn colours of the trees that envelop the surrounding countryside.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

From **Dongzhimen long-distance bus station** (Dōngzhīmén Chángtǔ Qìchēzhàn; ㊟ 6467 4995) you can take either bus 916 (Y8, one hour) or 936 (Y5) to Huairou then change for a minibus to Mutianyu (Y25). Alternatively, the less frequent 916 branch line goes all the way from Dongzhimen to Mutianyu (Y15).

**Tour bus 6** (㊟ 6601 8285) runs to Mutianyu (Y50) from outside the South Cathedral at Xuanwumen, operating between 6.30am and 8.30am on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays from April to October.

### Juyongguan 居庸关

Originally constructed in the 5th century and rebuilt by the Ming, **Juyongguan** (Juyong Pass; ㊟ 6977 1665; admission Y40; ㊟ 6am–4pm) was considered one of the most strategically important sections of the Great Wall, only 50km northwest of Beijing. However, this section has been thoroughly renovated to the point where you don't feel as if you're walking on a part of history. Still, if you're in a hurry, it's the closest section of the wall to the city and is usually quiet. You can do the steep and somewhat strenuous circuit in under two hours.

Juyongguan is on the road to Badaling, so any of the buses for Badaling listed earlier will get you there (but tell the bus driver you want to be dropped off at Juyongguan Changcheng).

### Simatai 司马台

The stirring remains at **Simatai** (Sīmǎtái; ㊟ 6903 5025/5030; admission Y30; ㊟ 8am–5pm), 110km northeast of Beijing, make for a more exhilarating Great Wall experience. Built during the reign of Ming dynasty emperor Hongwu, the 19km stretch is marked by watchtowers, steep plunges and scrambling ascents.

Not for the faint-hearted, this rough section of the wall is very steep. A few slopes have a 70-degree incline and you need both hands free, so bring a day-pack to hold your camera and other essentials. The **cable car** (round trip Y50) could be an alternative to a sprained ankle. Take strong shoes with a good grip.

Simatai has some unusual features, such as 'obstacle-walls' – walls-within-walls used for defending against enemies who had already scaled the Great Wall. There's also a **toboggan ride** (Y30), and unfazed by the dizzying terrain, hawkers make an unavoidable appearance.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Direct minibuses depart from **Dongzhimen long-distance bus station** (㊟ 6467 4995) from 6am (Y20). Otherwise take a minibus from



Dongzhimen to Miyun (Y8, 1¼ hours) and change to a minibus to Simatai, or a taxi (round trip Y120).

**Weekend tour bus 12** (☎ 6601 8285) leaves from outside the South Cathedral at Xuanwumen for Simatai (Y50) between 6.30am and 8.30am Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. Backpacker hotels often run morning trips by **minibus** (not incl admission ticket Y60; ☎ 8.30am). A taxi from Beijing for the day costs about Y400.

### **Jinshanling** 金山岭

Though not as steep (and therefore not as impressive) as Simatai, the Great Wall at **Jinshanling** (Jīnshānlǐng Chángchéng; admission Y40), near the town of Gubeikou, has 24 watch-towers and is considerably less developed (and therefore much quieter) than any of the sites previously mentioned, despite undergoing some restoration work.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Jinshanling is that it's the starting point for a 10km hike to Simatai. It takes nearly four hours because the trail is steep and stony. Parts of the wall along the route are in a state of ruin, but it can be traversed without too much difficulty. Upon arrival at Simatai, however, you may have to buy another ticket.

You can do the walk in the opposite direction, but getting a ride back to Beijing from Simatai is easier than from Jinshanling. Of course, getting a ride should be no problem if you've made arrangements with your driver to pick you up (and didn't pay in advance).

To get to Jinshanling from **Dongzhimen long-distance bus station** (☎ 6467 4995), take a minibus to Miyun (Y8, 1¼ hours), then change to a minibus to Gubeikou, and get off at Bakeshiying (Y7).