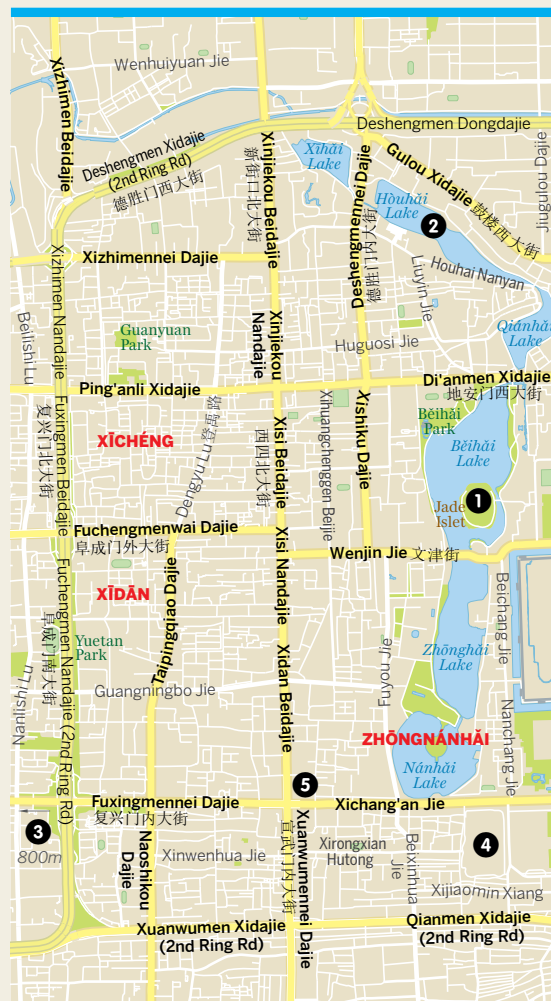


Běihǎi Park & Xīchéng North



Neighbourhood Top Five

- 1 Once reserved for emperors only, **Běihǎi Park** (p118) is one of the capital's most striking imperial parks. Dominated by its namesake lake, dotted with temples and with a fascinating, 1000-year-long history, it's one of the city's premier spots to escape the urban sprawl.
- 2 Sedate during the day, raucous at night, the **Hòuhǎi Lakes** (p120) are one of Běijīng's great playgrounds. They're also surrounded by some of the city's oldest and best-preserved *hútòng* (alleyways).
- 3 Spend a morning at the impressive **Capital Museum** (p124) to understand the evolution of this great city.
- 4 Enjoy a show at the **National Centre for the Performing Arts** (p128), or just stare open-mouthed at the building itself.
- 5 Shop like a Beijinger at **77th Street** (p129), Xidān's unique underground mall.

For more detail of this area see Map p294. ➔

Explore Běihǎi Park & Xīchéng North

Most of the Imperial City was in this part of Xīchéng (西城; literally 'West City'), lending it a regal grandeur that survives to this day. Less visited than Dōngchéng to the east, but equally impregnated with ancient temples and charming *hútòng* (narrow alleyways), it's one of the most worthwhile neighbourhoods to visit in all Běijīng.

Any tour has to start at the lakes that dominate the eastern part of the district. Take in Běihǎi Park first, perhaps spending an hour or more floating around its lake, before striking out through the park's north gate to take in the sights and *hútòng* scattered around Qiánhǎi, Hòuhǎi and Xīhǎi Lakes, collectively known as either 'Shíchàhǎi' or more commonly just 'Hòuhǎi'. Once night falls, eat at one of the many restaurants close to the lakes and then join the crowds promenading around them, stopping in for a drink at the many bars and cafes that line their shores.

A second day here is more or less an imperative. Head to Fuchengmennei Dajie, a street lined with lesser-known temples; the most impressive being Miàoyīng Temple White Dagoba. Then dive into the *hútòng* behind them. The district's best temple, though, is southwest of here: the Taoist White Cloud Temple, which can be combined with a visit to nearby Capital Museum, one of Běijīng's finest museums. Come evening, there's a wealth of venues in which to catch everything from jazz to classical music and Peking opera.

Local Life

- ➔ **Fly a Kite** Běihǎi Park is prime kite-flying territory. Visit Three Stone Kite Shop (p129) to kit yourself out.
- ➔ **Hútòng** The alleyways and lanes here are far less commercial and are a great introduction to Běijīng's tremendous street life. The *hútòng* by Rùndéli Food Market (p127) are fascinating, as are those behind Miàoyīng Temple White Dagoba (p120).
- ➔ **Ice Skating** When winter freezes the Hòuhǎi Lakes, join the Beijingers and strap on some skates.

Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Subway** Beihai North (Line 6) and Shichahai (Line 8) subway stations best serve Běihǎi Park and the Hòuhǎi Lakes, although you can also reach them from Line 2 (which circles the district) and Line 4 (which runs north-south). Line 1 cuts across the south of this district.
- ➔ **Bus** Bus 1 runs along Xichang'an Jie, Fuxingmennei Dajie and Fuxingmenwai Dajie, taking you to Capital Museum. Bus 22 takes you from Tiān'ānmén West to Xīdān and then north to Xīnjiēkǒu.

Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Come nightfall, the Hòuhǎi Lakes become a madhouse of milling crowds and bar touts trying to entice you into their overpriced bars. If you want to experience a night out drinking, Chinese style: dive in. If you'd rather avoid the wailing karaoke, slip down the *hútòng* that run off the lakeshore, where you'll find quieter bars and cafes. The lanes on the southwest side of Silver Ingot Bridge are a good place to start.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Royal Icehouse (p127)
- ➔ Kǎo Ròu Jì (p127)
- ➔ Le Petit Saigon (p127)

For reviews, see p126. ➔

Best Places for a Drink

- ➔ East Shore Jazz Café (p128)
- ➔ NBeer Pub (p128)
- ➔ Golden Sail Water Sports Club (p126)
- ➔ Tang Ren Teahouse (p128)

For reviews, see p128. ➔

Best Places for People-Watching

- ➔ Běihǎi Park (p118)
- ➔ Hòuhǎi Exercise Park (p125)
- ➔ Hòuhǎi Park (p125)

For reviews, see p120. ➔