

# Forbidden City & Dōngchéng Central

## Neighbourhood Top Five

**1** Marvel at the might, splendour and sheer scale of the **Forbidden City** (p54), the world's largest palace complex and the place 24 consecutive emperors of China called home.

**2** Place yourself at the symbolic heart of the Chinese universe with a visit to

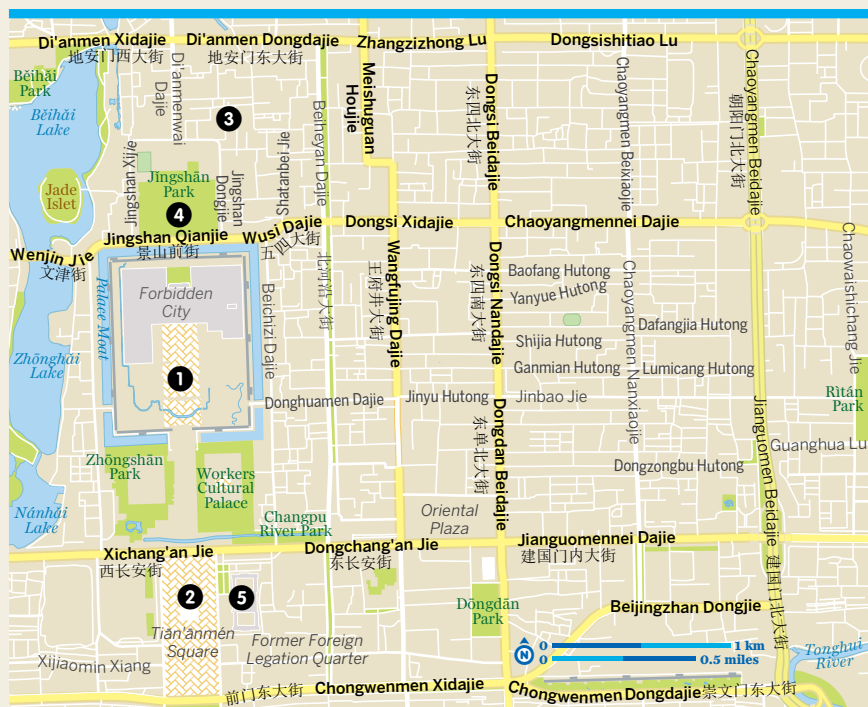
iconic **Tiān'ānmén Square** (p62).

**3** Explore the area's **imperial hùtòng** (p70) on our cycling tour of the historic alleyways surrounding the Forbidden City.

**4** Rise early to get the most out of this area's wonderful imperial parks;

**Jīngshān Park** (p65) is our favourite.

**5** Peruse some of the city's best museums and galleries. For starters, try the **National Museum of China** (p64).



For more detail of this area, see Maps on p284 and p286. ➔

## Explore Forbidden City & Dongchéng Central

The most historically significant part of Běijīng, Dōngchéng Central comprises much of what was once the Imperial City, at the heart of which lay the Forbidden City: emperors ruled China from here for more than 500 years.

The *hútòng* (alleyways) fanning out to the north and east of the Forbidden City were where the members of the imperial court once lived, and are fascinating places to explore on foot or by bicycle. You can even base yourself here by settling in to one of this area's charming courtyard hotels.

You'll need at least a couple of days to visit all the best sights in this history-rich neighbourhood; figure on half a day for the Forbidden City alone.

Food options are strong, with cuisine from across China well represented, as well as street markets and some of the capital's more unusual fine-dining establishments. Nightlife is relatively thin on the ground, though.

## Local Life

➔ **Food** Tuck into authentic Běijīng grub at Zuǒ Lín Yòu Shè (p71) or Yuèbīn Fànguǎn (p72). The street-food markets near Wángfǔjīng (p73) may be fun, but locals find them touristy and overpriced. Enjoy your barbecued skewers from a hole-in-the-wall *hútòng* joint instead; spot the red neon 串 sign, and you're good to go.

➔ **Parks** Jīngshān Park (p65) and Zhōngshān Park (p66) are two of Běijīng's most colourful – and locals, particularly the elderly, love to spend their mornings in them; dancing, singing and exercising with their friends. April and May are particularly popular as both parks burst into bloom during their annual flower fairs.

➔ **Formation Dancing** Join the legions of fitness-conscious ladies who meet at public squares (but not Tiān'ānmén) early evening, for a spot of line dancing. St Joseph's Church square (p67) is popular.

## Getting There & Away

➔ **Subway** Tian'anmen West, Tian'anmen East, Wangfujing and Dengshikou are all useful subway stations, and the handy Line 8 extension south to the Chinese Museum of Art should be up and running by the time you read this.

➔ **Bus** The very handy buses 专1 and 专2 do clockwise circuits of the Forbidden City, looping south to Qiánmén, via Tiān'ānmén Sq. Bus 5 runs between Déshèngmén Gateway and Qiánmén, passing the Drum Tower, Jingshan Park, the Forbidden City and Tiān'ānmén Sq.

## Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Be wary of rickshaw riders outside the north gate of the Forbidden City; they regularly trick tourists into paying over the odds (eg saying 'three' when they mean '300!'). As a rough indicator, you shouldn't be paying much more than ¥20 for a rickshaw from here to the Drum Tower or the Hòuhǎi Lakes.

## Best Places for History

- ➔ Forbidden City (p54)
- ➔ National Museum of China (p64)
- ➔ Front Gate (p66)
- ➔ Gate of Heavenly Peace (p65)
- ➔ Workers Cultural Palace (p65)
- ➔ Zhihuà Temple (p69)

For reviews, see p54. ➔

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Little Yúnnán (p73)
- ➔ Crescent Moon Muslim Restaurant (p71)
- ➔ Zuǒ Lín Yòu Shè (p71)
- ➔ Brian McKenna @ The Courtyard (p74)
- ➔ Temple Restaurant (p74)

For reviews, see p71. ➔

## Best Places to Shop

- ➔ Slow Lane (p77)
- ➔ Celadon Story (p76)
- ➔ Wangfujing Dajie (p76)
- ➔ Oriental Plaza (p76)
- ➔ Běijīng apm (p76)

For reviews, see p76. ➔