

Welcome to Běijīng

Inextricably linked to its glorious, notorious past, yet hurtling towards a power-charged future, Běijīng is as complex as it is compelling.

Mouth-watering

Food is an obsession for the Chinese and the dazzling array of dishes you'll encounter in Běijīng reflects the joy locals take in eating. Dining out is the main social activity; it's in restaurants that Beijingers hang out with friends, romance each other, hold family reunions and do business, and the variety of restaurants here is mesmerising. Local menus will have you salivating over succulent Peking duck, delicious dumplings and awesome noodles, but there's also food from every corner of China (and beyond). From fiery Sīchuānēse to Turkic-inspired Uighur cuisine, Běijīng's restaurants have it covered.

Antique

Few places on earth can match the extraordinary historical panorama on display in Běijīng. There are six Unesco World Heritage Sites in this city alone (just one less than the whole of Egypt). At its heart is the magnificent Forbidden City, a royal palace like no other. Běijīng is also home to sublime temples that aspire to cosmological perfection, while the city centre is criss-crossed by enchanting, ancient *hútòng* that teem with life today, as they did hundreds of years ago. And, to cap it all, the awe-inspiring Great Wall snakes its way across the hills north of town.

Eye-catching

It's not just the ancient architecture that wows tourists. Běijīng is also home to some of the world's most innovative modern buildings. The world's leading architects clamour for the chance to make their mark on this new global powerhouse, and jaw-dropping structures like the CCTV Building, Galaxy Soho, the NCPA concert hall and the Olympic Stadium are clear signs that Běijīng is not shy about proclaiming its status as China's capital. Like the temples and palaces of the ancient past, and the imposing socialist realist monuments of the 1950s, these latest additions are built on a scale that screams 'look at me!'

Culture Hub

The nation's top artists, writers, movie-makers and musicians converge in Běijīng, making it *the* place to take the pulse of China's rapidly evolving cultural scene. With top-class museums, galleries galore, and an increasing number of music venues, there's enough to keep you busy day and night. Běijīng is also the centre for the traditional Chinese performing arts. Whether it's the mystique of Peking opera, tumbling acrobats or the graceful lines of Chinese classical dance that entrances you, the capital has it and more.



Why I Love Běijīng

By Daniel McCrohan, Author

I love the food, the abundance of restaurants, the cheap beer and the lack of table manners. I love the *hútòng*, the parks and the taichi. I love drinking tea (proper tea; not Tetley), playing table tennis, flying kites, and being able to cycle everywhere, even to the Great Wall! Most of all, though, I love Běijīng's capacity to surprise. After a decade of living here, I still find something unexpected almost every day: a phrase I hadn't heard, a mannerism I hadn't noticed, a new shop, a new bar, or even, when I'm especially lucky, a long-abandoned temple I never knew existed.

For more about our authors, see p304.