

# Forbidden City & Dōngchéng Central

## Neighbourhood Top Five

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

**2 Tiān'ānmén Square** (p62)  
Place yourself at the symbolic heart of the Chi-

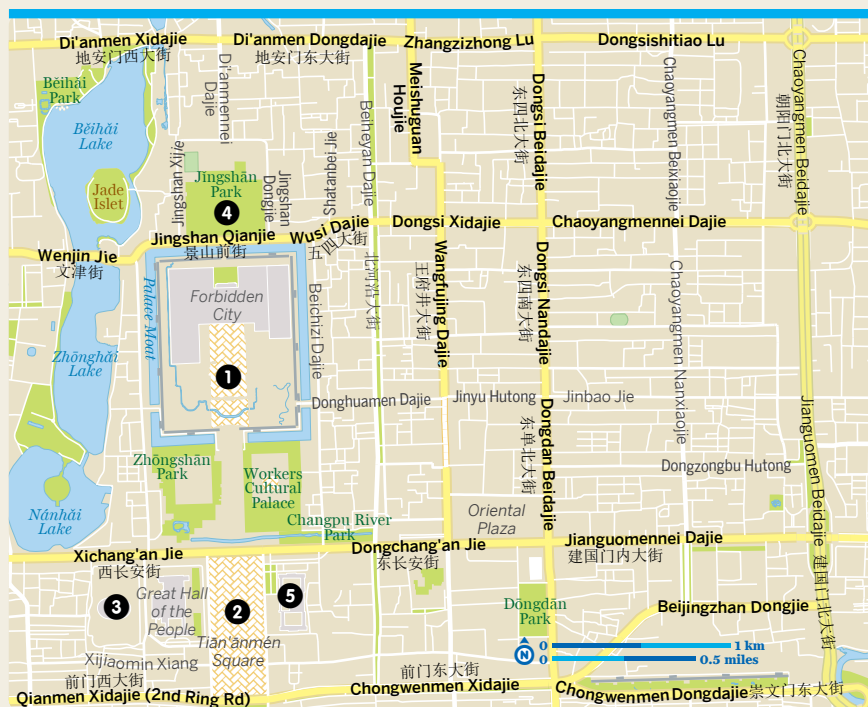
nese universe with a visit to this quintessential Běijīng sight.

**3 National Centre for the Performing Arts** (p69)  
Enjoy a show or just stare open-mouthed at the sci-fi architecture itself.

**4 Jǐngshān Park** (p68)  
Rise early to get the most

out of this area's wonderful imperial parks.

**5 National Museum of China** (p64)  
Peruse the galleries of the city's best museum with exquisite ceramics, calligraphy and artefacts.



For more detail of this area see Map p268 and p270 →

## 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, from where emperors ruled China for more than 500 years.

The *hútòng* (narrow 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 (p76) or Yuèbīn Fānguān (p74). The street-food markets near Wángfǔjīng (p76) 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 (p68) and Zhōngshān Park (p70) 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, middle-aged women who meet at public squares (although not Tiān'ānmén) early evening, for a spot of line dancing. St Joseph's Church square (p72) is popular.

## Getting There & Away

➔ **Subway** Tiān'anmen West, Tiān'anmen East, Wángfǔjīng and Dēngshíkǒu are all useful subway stations. Once the extension of Line 8 is complete, it will run south to the Chinese Museum of Art.

➔ **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 Dēshèngmén Gateway and Qiánmén, passing the Drum Tower, Jīngshān Park, the Forbidden City and Tiān'ānmén Sq. The **airport bus** (机场大巴; Jīchǎng Dàbā; Map p270; ☎010 6457 3891; Jinbao Jie; ☀9am-9pm; 🅡Line 5 to Dēngshíkǒu, exit C) departs from the Regent Hotel to all terminals of Capital Airport (¥24, every 30 minutes).

## Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Be very wary of rickshaw riders outside the north gate of the Forbidden City; they regularly trick tourists into paying over the odds (a common scam is saying 'three'. You think they mean 3 yuán. Later, they say they meant 300!). As a rough indicator, you shouldn't be paying much more than ¥20 per rickshaw to get from here to the Drum Tower or the Hòuhǎi Lakes.

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Little Yúnnán (p76)
- ➔ Crescent Moon Muslim Restaurant (p73)
- ➔ Zuǒ Lín Yòu Shè (p76)
- ➔ Temple Restaurant Bites (p77)
- ➔ Běijīng Dàdǒng Roast Duck Restaurant (p78)

For reviews, see p73. ➔

## Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Slow Boat Brewery Taproom (p78)
- ➔ Oasis Cafe (p78)
- ➔ Láijīnyǔxuān Teahouse (p78)
- ➔ What? Bar (p80)

For reviews, see p78. ➔

## Best Places for History

- ➔ Forbidden City (p54)
- ➔ National Museum of China (p64)
- ➔ Front Gate (Qiánmén) (p70)
- ➔ Gate of Heavenly Peace (p68)
- ➔ Workers Cultural Palace (p64)

For reviews, see p54. ➔