

Welcome to Běijīng

As the capital of the country set to dominate the 21st century, Běijīng is a city intoxicated by the spirit of change.

Food Heaven

Food is an obsession for the Chinese and the dazzling array of different dishes you'll encounter in Běijīng reflects the sheer 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. You'll swiftly succumb to the delights of eating Běijīng-style. Apart from what's on the local menu – succulent Peking duck, delicious dumplings, awesome hotpot – there's food from every corner of China in the capital. Whether you want to sample fiery Sīchuān dishes, the Central Asian-inspired Uighur cuisine or the delicate flavours of the southwest, there's a restaurant serving it here.

Imperial Delights

No other city in China can match the extraordinary historical panorama on display in Běijīng. At its heart is the magnificent Forbidden City, a royal palace on a scale that beggars belief. Běijīng is also home to sublime temples that aspire to cosmological perfection, while the city centre is criss-crossed by the enchanting *hútòng*, ancient alleyways that teem with life, as they did hundreds of years ago. As if that's not enough, the majestic Great Wall snakes its way across the hills north of town.

Architectural Ambition

The locals think they live at the centre of the world, and the jaw-dropping structures that line their streets are a very visible sign that Běijīng is not shy about proclaiming its status as China's capital. Some of the world's most innovative modern buildings have sprung up here over the last few years, as leading architects vie for the chance to make their mark on the new global powerhouse. Like the temples and palaces of the ancient past, and the vast and imposing socialist realist monuments of the 1950s, the latest additions are built on a scale that screams 'look at me'.

Acrobats & Artists

Běijīng isn't just the political capital of China – it's the cultural heart of the country too. The nation's top artists, writers, movie-makers and musicians converge here, making this *the* place to take the pulse of China's rapidly evolving cultural scene. With fine museums and galleries galore, as well as 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 entrance you, the capital has it and more.



Why I Love Běijīng

By Daniel McCrohan, Author

I love the food, the overabundance of restaurants, the lack of table manners and the cheap beer. I love eating outside in summer, then huddling around a hotpot in winter. I love drinking freshly ground Italian coffee in a Qing-dynasty courtyard. And I love the fact that I can cycle everywhere, even to the Great Wall! But most of all, I love the *hútòng* – their mishmash architecture, their *fēngshuǐ* design, their chess-playing elderly residents and their peaceful, village-in-a-city vibe. Běijīng has many remarkable qualities, but it's the *hútòng* that make this exceptional city so utterly loveable.

For more about our authors, see p304.