



Běijīng

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Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Great Wall Box House (p328)
- ➔ Jīngshān Garden Hotel (p316)
- ➔ Courtyard 7 (p317)
- ➔ Qiánmén Hostel (p314)
- ➔ Orchid (p316)

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Little Yúnnán (p319)
- ➔ Bǎihé Vegetarian Restaurant (p319)
- ➔ Dǎlǐ Courtyard (p319)
- ➔ Crescent Moon Muslim Restaurant (p318)
- ➔ Qiánmén Quánjūdè Roast Duck Restaurant (p318)

Why Go?

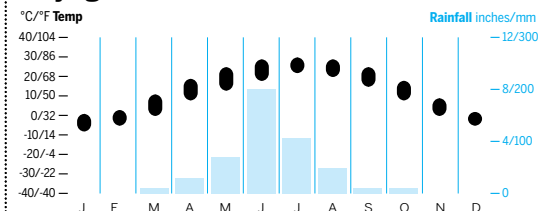
For weary Trans-Siberian travellers, Běijīng (北京) will feel like the figurative pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The 2008 Olympics were instrumental in transforming the Chinese capital, and perhaps for the first time since the Mongol invasion, Běijīng feels like a true international city, brimming with overseas business, cuisine of every kind, daring modern architecture and a thriving arts scene.

Despite its headlong rush into the future, though, the best of Běijīng lies in its links to the past. Magnificent historical sights such as the Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven Park, the Summer Palace and, of course, the Great Wall, will keep you busy for days. And ducking into the fast-disappearing *hùtòng* (narrow alleyway) neighbourhoods is a magical experience, and the best way to discover Běijīng at its most intimate.

Come evening, choose from a million or so drinking spots and shout '*gān bēi!*' (bottoms up!) as you toast the end (or beginning) of your epic cross-continental journey.

When to Go

Běijīng



May Warming up after the winter freeze. Windy, but usually dry and clear.

Oct–Nov gorgeously fresh after the scorching summer, with blue skies and fewer tourists.

Dec–Feb Dry as a bone and brutally cold, but the streets are pleasantly quiet.

MEDIA

Pick up the free monthly listings magazines *The Beijinger* (www.thebeijinger.com), *TimeOut* (www.timeoutbeijing.com) and *City Weekend* (www.cityweekend.com.cn) from expat bars and restaurants around the city. *China Daily* is the main English-language newspaper.

Běijīng Basic Costs

- ➔ Subway ticket: ¥2
- ➔ Taxi rate (first 3km): ¥13
- ➔ Hostel bed: ¥70 to ¥100
- ➔ Private room: ¥200 upwards
- ➔ Bowl of noodles: ¥10
- ➔ Local beer from a shop/bar: ¥4/20

Fast Facts

- ➔ Telephone code: ☎010
- ➔ Population: 20 million
- ➔ Time zone: Moscow +5

Getting Around

To/from the train station All three major train stations are connected to Běijīng's easy-to-use subway system.

To/from the airport The Airport Express (机场快轨; *jīchǎng kuàiguī*; 30 minutes; ¥25) links up with the subway system and is the easiest way to get into town. There are also various shuttle-bus routes (¥16 to ¥24). A taxi costs ¥80 to ¥100 – use the official taxi rank to avoid getting scammed.

CLIMATE & HOLIDAYS

Winter travel has its pros and cons. On the plus side, the city is relatively quiet and, if you're lucky the tree-lined *hútòng* (alleys) will be brushed with snow. On the downside it's glacial outside (dipping as low as -20°C).

In summer, temperatures can surge over 35°C, and heavy downpours are common. This is also peak season for domestic tourists, so the well-known sights are packed.

Air pollution can be very harsh in both summer and winter.

Spring (mid-April to mid-May) and autumn (October to early November) are the best times to visit, but avoid the national holidays in the first week of May and October.

Train Categories in China

Bullet Trains

- ➔ C (*chéngjī* 城际高速; 城际高速) ultra-high-speed express
- ➔ D (*dòngchē*; 动车, *héxiè hào*; 和谐号) high-speed express
- ➔ G (*gāotiě*; 高铁) high-speed

Ordinary Trains

- ➔ K (*kuàisù*; 快速) fast train
- ➔ T (*tèkuài*; 特快) express
- ➔ Z (*zhídá tèkuài*; 直达特快) direct express

Resources

- ➔ **Ctrip** (www.english.ctrip.com) Hotel and flight bookings.
- ➔ **China DIY Travel** (www.china-diy-travel.com) Train-ticket bookings.
- ➔ **Sinica Podcast** (www.popupchinese.com) Uncensored current-affairs podcast based in Běijīng.
- ➔ **Air Pollution** (www.aqicn.org/city/beijing) Real-time Air Quality Index (AQI) readings for Běijīng (and other cities).
- ➔ **MDBG** (www.mdbg.net) Online Chinese dictionary.
- ➔ **Běijīng Cream** (www.beijingcream.com) Lighthearted Běijīng-based blog covering China-wide current affairs.