

Attractions in Beijing

Forbidden City (Gu Gong) Entrance fee: 40-60 RMB Just to the north of Tiananmen square is the entrance to the Forbidden Palace. It covers a large area: roughly 900 metres by 600 metres, so expect to do a lot of walking. Over a period of 500 years it was the home of 24 different Chinese Emperors, starting in 1420. It is now one of the most visited tourist sites, not only in Beijing but in the world.

Tiananmen Square (Tian An Men Guang Chang)

Located in the centre of Beijing, the square was first built in 1417. The present day version has both traditional Chinese culture influences and modern soviet aspects. One of the biggest public squares in the world it has an area of over 400,000 square metres. Every day you can watch the Chinese flag being raised at sunrise by the PLA army and taken down at sunset. The square is often busy with Chinese tourists from the rest of China who come to Beijing on holiday. The north side of the square faces the 'Gate of Heavenly Peace' which is the entrance to the Forbidden Palace. To the west is the 'Great Hall of the People' which is a government meeting building of vast proportions. In the east is the 'Chinese National Museum'. In the south is the Mao Mausoleum. Completed in 1977, visitors are allowed a glimpse of Mao's preserved body. There is no charge, but you must pay to check in bags etc before entry. In the middle of the square is the Monument to the People's Heroes. This is dedicated to men and women who have lost their lives for China.

Summer Palace (Yi He Yuan) Entrance fee: 25-35 RMB. Expect half a day to explore. The name translates as 'Garden of Nurtured Harmony'. The Summer Palace is around 3km squared and is 15km north-west of central Beijing. Kunming Lake covers most of the palace and is man made. The soil that was dug out to make the lake was used to make another feature of the Summer Palace - Longevity Hill. The palace gardens contain examples of ancient Chinese arts, over 3000 structures, and harmonious landscaping. Initially built in 1750 the palace was subject to several attacks and was rebuilt in its present form in 1888. UNESCO added the Summer Palace to its World Heritage List under the grounds that it is an outstanding piece of artistic Chinese landscape design.

Temple of Heaven (Tian Tan) Entrance fee: 30-35 RMB. Location: A few kilometers south of Tiananmen Sq in central Beijing. The Temple of Heaven was built in 1420 under the same Emperor, Yongle, who was responsible for the Forbidden Palace. The Emperor would use the temple to make sacrifices to the Heavens in order to bring good harvests to China. The park covers nearly 3km squared and contains 3 main clusters of structures: Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests; Imperial Vault of Heaven; and the Earthly Mount. Temple of Heaven has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1998.

Great Wall of China (Chángchéng) You don't get much more famous than the Great Wall of China and it is as old as China itself. From as long ago as 500 BC the different kingdoms that now constitute China built walls to defend themselves. With the unification of China, in around 200 BC, the separate walls were linked together to protect against nomads in the north. Under the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644) the wall was improved with newer building materials. Today much of the wall has disappeared back into the ground from which it was built. The most notable remaining sites are listed below.

Badaling Entrance fee: 45 RMB. Here the wall has been heavily restored. There are impressive views, but this is one of the most touristy parts of the wall. Expect big crowds in the busy periods.

Mutianyu Entrance fee: 40 RMB. Less commercial than Badaling.

Juyongguan Entrance fee: 45 RMB. Heavily renovated, perhaps too much for some people. But is the closest section to Beijing.

Simatai Entrance fee: 40 RMB. Popular among the hostel crowd, this section feels pretty old and is falling apart in places. This makes for an exciting, if slightly dangerous, hike through its steep parts. Not massively commercialized, but still expect locals trying to get you to part with your cash.

Jinshanling Entrance fee: 40-50 RMB. One of the least developed sites (except for Huanghua). Not as exciting as Simatai, but can be the starting point of a 10km (4 hours) hike to Simatai.

Huanghua Entrance fee: 25 RMB. 65km north of Beijing. This area has not been restored and so is a good place to see the 'real' Great Wall.

HouHai

This is perhaps the coolest and most trendy entertainment area of Beijing, consisting of a cross of old Beijing and western style. There are many small bars, restaurants, and boutiques.

Other Attractions in and around Beijing:

Beijing's Hutongs

Lama Temple (Yonghe Gong)

Zhongshan Park (Zhongshan Gongyuan)

Beihai Park (Beihai Gongyuan)

Jingshan Park (Jingshan Gongyuan)

Ming City Wall Ruins Park (Ming Chengqiang Yizhi Gongyuan)

Fragrant Hills park (Xiangshan Gongyuan)

China Art Gallery (Zhongguo Meishuguan)

Bell and Drum Towers (Gulou & Zhonglou)

Imperial City Museum (Huang Cheng Yishuguan)

Beijing Underground City (Beijing Dixiacheng)

Natural History Museum (Ziran Bowuguan)

White Cloud Temple (Baiyun Guan)

Dongyue Temple (Dongyue Miao)

Ming Tombs

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